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**Bianca Looks from above the Book:
Readings on the Margin
of Bruno Schulz's Ex-Libris
for Stanisław Weingarten**

ABSTRACT

The bookplate which Bruno Schulz designed in 1919 for his friend, Stanisław Weingarten, anticipates the motifs of his later literary work: a book, the Book, a collection of books reflecting the collector's preferences but dependent on the laws undermining the notions of authorship and ownership. Standing on the margin of the artistic and literary scene, Pierrot/Schulz acknowledges the relatedness of his and Weingarten's "private" vision with the recurrent, universal themes of world art and literature. The scene designed for the emblem of Weingarten's library demonstrates Schulz's awareness that the pleasure of discovering spaces of textual cross-fertilizations belongs to the realm of discoveries made by "standard" narratives of psychoanalysis. The scene also demonstrates Schulz's readiness to imaginatively play with that awareness.

The essay traces correspondences between the elements of the 1919 Pierrot ex-libris and the books from Weingarten's collection which, with time, included and gave privileged position to the works of Bruno Schulz. Among the authors referred to are Rainer Maria Rilke, Alfred Kubin, and Jules Laforgue (in the critical appreciation of Jan Szarota).

ABSTRACT

131 In “Spring” Bianca lifts her eyes from the book. There is a saddening measure of compulsiveness about her doing so every delightful time Joseph sees her. Looking from over the book, Bianca always “acknowledges and returns” Joseph’s “ardent greeting,” “replies” to his “deep bow.” “Quick” and “penetrating,” in its precision teasingly otherworldly, Bianca’s look from above the book satisfies Joseph’s desire to “ask something with [his] eyes.” In the last section of “Spring” when he sits down by her bed to begin “the report,” Joseph finds it irritating that Bianca should not stop reading, to which her later comment on Joseph’s “ridiculous” sense of mission and her eyes narrowing down “in a paroxysm of delight” provide a mirroring, self-ironic reply. On that very night Bianca is seen “lifting her eyes from the book” to make “a quick, perfunctory, but astonishingly apt decision.” Joseph watches her sign his papers, while she, complying with the rule of reciprocity, “watches [him] with slight irony as [he] countersign[s] them” (*Sanatorium* 71).

As Bianca, by simply raising her eyes, lets Joseph know “that she knows all [his] thoughts,” she knows also that the question he asks himself, “What is she gazing at with attention, with such thoughtfulness?” means also “What book is she reading?” It is a ridiculous question, since Bianca, princess and daughter of a washerwoman, may be reading *any* book at that fleeting, privileged moment—a short uplifting look returned from where?—when Joseph imagines it “soaring” and “screaming like the phoenix, all its pages aflame” (10), a moment for which he will love it “ever after,” although or because it becomes lost, subject to his quixotic, belated but refreshing, missions on the margins of spring nights. In other words, as readers of “Spring” have long observed to their satisfaction, Bianca’s eroticism may seem bookish, but in reality it comes directly from the Book. When Joseph explains that the nature of spring will become “clear” and “legible” only to “an attentive reader of the Book,” he refers the reader back to his own raising his eyes from the text of “The Book” he is reading and writing:

any true reader—and this story is addressed to him—will understand me anyway when I look him straight in the eye and try to communicate my meaning. A short, sharp look or a light clasp of the hand will stir him into awareness, and he will blink in rapture at the brilliance of the Book. (1)

Bianca’s villa is in an “extraterritorial area,” the night on which Joseph enters it is “extramarginal,” the text Bianca reads is extratextual. With every attentive reading of “Spring,” following Bianca’s attentive look answering Joseph’s, we sign up for a new journey down into the subterranean,

timeless and boundless, vaults of spring, there to welcome with delight and greet with a deep bow familiar texts, “everything we have ever read, all the stories we have heard and those we have not heard before but have been dreaming since childhood.” They are texts from the official, canonical history of literature pointing, in allusions, approximations, cross-references, towards their “nameless forerunners . . . dark texts written for the drama of evening clouds,” and, further still, towards “unwritten books, books—eternal pretenders” (43–44). Among the literary “whisperings” and “persuasions” in section XVI of “Spring” one recognizes, interwoven with the text of Goethe’s “Der Erlkönig,” the lines of Rilke’s “A Man Reading”:

I've read long now. Since this afternoon,
with its rain rushing, lay against the windows.
I'd become oblivious to the wind outside:
my book was hard.
I gazed into its lines as into faces
whose looks grow dark from deep reflection,
and around my reading the hours built up.
.....
And when now I lift my eyes from the book
nothing will seem alien, everything great.
There outside exists, what here inside I live,
And here and there the whole of things is boundless
save that I interweave still more with it
when my gaze shapes itself to objects
and to the grave simplicity of masses,—
then the earth grows out beyond itself.
It seems to encompass the entire sky:
the first star is like the last house. (209)

In “Spring,” “distant worlds come within reach” (51), and in “Autumn”:
“Man’s house becomes like the stable of Bethlehem . . .” (*Letters* 218).

Were one to take the meandering “process” of reading spring dusk “literally” and through “unclear associations” follow words to their etymological roots, the kinship of Bianca (*księżniczka*) and *książka* (the book she is reading) should not go unobserved. Or perhaps, as Joseph also proposes, one should venture to penetrate the dark mysteries of spring with the help of “a textbook of psychology,” a potential, potent fragment of the Book revealed in Rudolph’s stamp album, “a compendium of knowledge about everything human” corresponding to that single look of Bianca’s which lets the reader know that she “knows everything that there is to know” (*Sanatorium* 39). Such imaginative, interpretative spaces evoke an uncanny feeling, a mixture of excitement and sadness, of having been visited before, not un-

like that experienced by Joseph on approaching “the other side” of Bianca’s villa at the end of the story. In the reader’s memory this is already a return to “the other side” from an earlier passage in which Joseph’s descending, bifurcating road of literary associations ends with “the Mothers” (*Sanatorium* 43). Will Bianca raise her eyes then from over Kubin’s *Die andere Seite* (Georg Müller’s 1909 edition), where on arriving at some remote Asian location of Patera’s Dream Realm the traveler sees the house he could swear he has seen before and on the wall of the hotel room meets the familiar gaze of Maximilian, the emperor of Mexico? Does not Bianca know the text of Rilke’s “Erlebnis” (the 1919 issue of *Insel-Almanach*), where a visitor taking a stroll in the Duino gardens with a book in his hand leans against a tree and experiences “die andere seite der Natur,” the formulation of the phrase itself giving him, as it sometimes happens in dreams, a sense of saddened pleasure since it aptly expresses the clarity of envisioning and understanding what is always being returned to?

Schulz’s reader does not forget the nightly wanderings in apparently “familiar” districts of “Cinnamon Shops.” There, too, Joseph penetrates dark interiors, magnificently furnished and full of mirrors, to approach finally the school headmaster’s private apartment and imagine seeing his daughter, Bianca’s earlier, younger version: “She might lift her eyes [‘from the book’; perhaps the English translator got impatient with it] to mine—black, Sybilline, quiet eyes, the gaze of which none could hold” (*The Street* 88). The headmaster’s daughter returns Joseph’s gaze and the text shapes itself into a dreamy vision reminiscent of the landscapes in “A Man Reading”—the inner and the outer coalescing and expanding into “an immense dome,” an all-encompassing “heavenly geography.”

A sign of desire and inquiry, of momentary recognitions of inter-relations, connections, symmetries, self-mirrorings, of the pleasure and melancholy these communicate, of compulsive re-visits, of discoveries in the dynamics of perspective repeatedly narrowing down and expanding—a look from over a book links Schulz’s prose to his graphic work. One of the signs of which Schulz wrote that they inspiringly imprison the artist’s imagination, it is present in both and allows each to be read and viewed in terms of their mutual correspondences. The graphic form of ex-libris, by its definition as it were, embodies such familial bonds. Standing in a marginal position of servitude to the book and to its owner, it demonstrates also a privileged, elevating function of a mark which points symbolically to a kind of intimacy between the two, and to the possibility of their share in a system of relationships within a larger context—building up a collection of books. Ideally, such a collection rejects completion. Ideally, the gaze of the artist designing the graphic emblem of the collection meets the gaze of its owner from one of the books, the one that she/he possesses, the one that she/he is

not in possession of, the one that has not yet been written. An ex-libris condenses into a miniature composition the idea of dissemination and speaks of the desire to return to some mythical, primal unity. It is a visual, fixed and traveling, seal of companionship, ownership and mission, welcoming fresh additions to the library in the sense that Walter Benjamin gave it:

I am not exaggerating when I say that to a true collector, the acquisition of an old book is its rebirth. This is the childlike element which in a collector mingles with the element of old age. For children can accomplish the renewal of existence in a hundred unending ways. . . . To renew the old world—that is the collector’s deepest desire when he is driven to acquire new things. (*Illuminations* 211)

134 | Bruno Schulz designed two bookplates for Stanisław Weingarten, his friend, a businessman, an art and book collector. They were “commissioned” by Weingarten insofar as the pictorial components and the stylistic features they shared represented Schulz’s own intimate, artistic “mission” which Weingarten understood, identified with, and the indications and confirmations of which both discovered in the books they chose to read. The bookplates date from approximately the same time. My interest is in the Pierrot ex-libris from 1919 (the date is given in the left bottom part of the design next to the front legs of the Pegasus). A version of the bookplate appeared in Stanisław Weingarten’s catalogue of books illustrated by Bruno Schulz. In the ex-libris Pierrot stands on the margin of the theatrical stage in full sight of the ensuing scene:



(from a private collection)

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The composition of Weingarten's ex-libris demonstrates features of Schulz's idiosyncratic style, while relying heavily on the symbolic reputation of its canonized, if not clichéd, components. The classicist contours of its top and bottom parts seem to deliberately give the design the appearance of some antique piece of furniture (possibly expressing the tastes of the same epoch as Patera's collection). Set in contrast, though equally familiar, are indications of movement: the slightly bent knees of Pierrot in his "hesitant" readiness to step forward or step back, the procession of the dwarfed human figures in the background, the fleeting poise and the black cloud-like hair of the woman, who, once she disappears behind the curtain on the right side (from the spectator's perspective), will perhaps not surprise Pierrot by making her appearance from behind the curtain on the left side to dance across or be swept away from the stage back again. These gestures and movements communicate a sense of repetitiveness which is visually strengthened by the recurrence of striped patterns on Pierrot's costume and of circular patterns on the folds of the curtain, in the pelvic cavities of the skeleton and the coils of the serpent. Repetitiveness, or rather the inexhaustibility of a single motif "assigned" to the artist is, of course, a trademark of Schulz's work, literary and graphic. It comes from and leads back to unending discoveries (spanning old age and childhood) in correspondences between one's own mythology and some general mythology, the realization that no book one ever reads and no work of art one ever sees is read or seen "accidentally," as they all somehow "belong to" the collection, both private and universal. Unsurprisingly, among Weingarten's books with Schulz's mark of ownership on them stands Thomas Mann's "Tonio Kröger": this young man has just come back from Denmark to revisit his home, which is now a public library and, there, on being asked whether he needs a catalogue to the book collection, answers from over one of the books that he knows his way around very well. According to Schulz's reading of his own work for Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, the most rewarding adventure in the discovery of kinship with Mann's work, perhaps prompting the author of *Heimkehr* to send his manuscript to Zurich, was Schulz's reading of *Joseph and His Brothers*, where "Mann shows that beneath all human events, when the chaff of time and individual variation is blown away, certain primeval patterns, 'stories' are found, by which these events re-form in great repeating pulses" (*Letters* 114). Had Schulz and Weingarten had a chance to read of Adrian Leverkühn's father's "devouring drop," an experimental though well-practiced manipulation in the physics of absorption not irrelevant to the psychology of authorship and ownership, they would have recognized the text as theirs. The last entry in Weingarten's catalogue came with the year 1939.

References to repetitiveness in Schulz's work are numerous and they appear in the most powerful and moving fragments of his prose. It is still

with great pleasure that the reader follows the old pensioner's look over the linear divisions of the small town architecture towards the bright gap of the school square, where in the "hiatus of time opened onto a yellow and wilting eternity, beech logs have been sawed since Noah's day, with the same patriarchal and eternal movements, the same strokes and the same bent backs" (*Sanatorium* 162); or, the little dog's (Nemrod's) instinctive recognition that whatever he was experiencing, in spite of its appearance of novelty, was "something which had existed before—many times before—an infinite number of times before" (*The Street* 66); or, the memory of father, loaded with books, on his way to the shop on the street level of the building:

How many other fathers have grown forever into the facades of houses at five o'clock in the morning, while on the last step of the staircase? How many fathers have thus become the concierges of their own gateways, flatly sculpted into the embrasure with the hand on the door handle and a face dissolved into parallel and blissful furrows, over which the fingers of their sons would wander, later, reminiscing about their parent, now incorporated forever into the universal smile of the house front? (*The Street* 98)

In such passages, the phoenix-like hearts of Schulz's poetic prose, the tropes of repetition evoke a sense of momentary returns to homely spaces.

Schulz sees catastrophes and falls, looming inevitably, but, like in Mann's "Prologue: A Descent Into Hell," they are provisional, repeatedly acted out rather than definitively immobilized. There are "downcast eyes" and there is a self-ironic "smile." A crowding group of naked men and women might have come onto the back stage of Weingarten's ex-libris out of numerous versions of human final catastrophes celebrated also, among those in the art albums from his collection, by the right panel of Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights*, especially the fragment where postures of damnation are related to depictions of musical instruments (the ex-libris testifies to the presence of many books on music in Weingarten's library). There is a round, fish-like mouth sucking in the hands of the kneeling female figure. In front of that figure is a man in a fetal position, turned towards the right side of the stage (from the spectator's position again), like everyone else in the procession, including the woman whose mirrored, enlarged counterpart appears center-stage, the heads of both tilted backwards. This is Pierrot's/Weingarten's/Schulz's look from over a catalogue of texts on the dance of life and death, the marriage of the tomb and the womb, the temptation to see in a scene of degradation and damnation a scene of Bacchanalia.

The embryonic man seems to have arrived at the end of the journey, to be back home again. The perils of the dark background with all its deathly whisperings are left behind, all the fish-like rounded mouths of the demons of the night (on a closer look there may be more than one, or, is it a demon branching out into a thousand-mouthed colony of polyps?) have sunk into the marine darkness and at the cliff-like edge there is a gap of light. Somewhat distant from the rest of the group, the curling man will not be pushed over the edge, nor will he take a voluntary leap down into the abyss. It is not man's final catastrophe. He will rise instead, straighten up and take his place back again on the left side of the stage. What will he see when he lifts his eyes from over the edge of the cliff? Endless variations of the same scene. It is the vision which anticipates the arrival of the stellar "Cyclist" in "The Comet," where under a "pitchblack night" dwarfed figures, like in Bosch's painting, form "living chains," as well as the vision which opens up before the old pensioner on his way back to his childhood:

Like in Rembrandt's etchings one could see on such days under that streak of brightness distant microscopically focused regions, which, never seen before, were now rising from above the horizon below that bright crevice of the sky, flooded with the bright-pale and panicked light, emerging [the Polish word "wynurzone" brings a closer association with the imagery of marine depth and of the depth of a dream which, despite its novelty, is "like in Rembrandt's etchings"—a multiple-copied, returning dream] from another epoch and another time, like the promised land revealed, but for a brief moment, to the longing peoples. (*Proza* 378, translation mine)

This is clearly Schulz's messianic vision appearing earlier in "The Age of Genius" and, earlier still, in the version of Weingarten's ex-libris from the catalogue of his books: Pierrot/Schulz stands on a book and looks from behind the stage column at some "discolored and watery" horizons with sketchily delineated processions of wanderers coming down and ascending the hills. The beginning is the end is the beginning. Messianic perspectives open up with any new born child and any new-born child speaks of the coming of the Messiah, just as any book, including Schulz's at its phoenix-like moments, speaks of the presence of the Book.

There is, however, something about the simplicity and the linearity in Schulz's depictions of the fetus, the skeleton, the arm, the procession of bent human figures, which brings distant recollections of charts once hung on the walls of school classrooms, presenting, with an almost pornographic indiscretion, parts of human anatomy, or sequenced stages in evolutionary change. Despite its allusiveness, its dependence on "cultural"

rather than “natural” orders, the knowledge which Schulz’s ex-libris seems to communicate would not make it entirely out of place in biology book-cases. The school may owe its prestige to teachers of literature, of art, of religion (including the cabbalists), but the Headmaster is, perhaps, a biology teacher. When years later, in 1936, Witold Gombrowicz “attacked” him with the opinion of “the doctor’s wife from Wilcza Street,” Schulz rejected its directness but could not ignore it; in a kind of Tonio Kröger saddened gesture, he simply extended the procession on the evolutionary chart with the figure of an “avant-garde,” “truly vital” artist as a representative of “belligerent biology,” “conquering biology” (*Letters* 120). What troubles the viewers of Schulz’s ex-libris for Weingarten today, what after almost a hundred years they still find truly provocative, is the “biological” vitality of the hand tightly clenched around the body of the woman and its relationship to Pierrot’s open hand promising a “light clasp” of understanding.

Whether miniaturized, “repressed” into the back stage, or telescopically enlarged, moved to the foreground, the woman in Weingarten’s ex-libris is dancing rather than being tormented; whether supported by the twisted bodies of idolaters or in the grip of the huge arm, she is here disquietingly comfortable. The line of the central, gracefully pliable body fits the contour of the rigid, clawed hand emerging from the dark. The dance-like motion belongs to some well-rehearsed program; the woman with a girlish, sweet and innocent countenance will act out her role with an artful and disciplined precision as many times as the arm moves across the length of the stage. Behind Pierrot in his conventional role of voyeuristic aloofness—and behind the Harlequin looking over the shoulder of Stanisław Weingarten reading a book in an illustration to his library catalogue—is Bruno Schulz. Moving lightly with the precision of a tool in the grip of the fiendish, animalistic hand, the woman from Weingarten’s ex-libris answers Pierrot’s gaze while it answers Schulz’s gaze at his own hand drawing, obediently and provocatively, in the iron grip of the hand which will make him return, again and again, in many variations, to the few key images ascribed to him in his early childhood. The gaze does put the woman in the position of biological servitude. Does Pierrot, the belated representative of “belligerent biology,” intend to step forward and liberate the woman? The catalogue of Weingarten’s library will one day include—with an entry in its owner’s disciplined handwriting on a pencil-lined page of the “S” section—Schulz’s “Spring,” a story of the calligraphic and stellar Bianca:

Every day at the same time, accompanied by her governess, Bianca could be seen walking in the park. What can I say about Bianca, how can I describe her? I only know that she is marvelously true to herself, that she fulfils her program completely. My heart tight with pleasure, I notice

again and again how with every step, light as a dancer, she enters into her being and how with each movement she unconsciously hits the target. Her walk is ordinary, without excessive grace, but its simplicity is touching, and my heart fills with gladness that Bianca can be herself so simply, without any strain of artifice. (*Sanatorium* 39)

Bianca is not Adela's opposite. The house maid may actually be her mother. Leaning over Adela's arm, Joseph becomes awakened to the power of her eroticism and to the powers of his Book. But in the question which he asks Adela: "Where did you find the book?" the Book associated with Adela's body is already reduced to a book, *any* book with a small letter but still in the service of the Book, just as Adela's body is now *any* female body in the service of some superior "biological" Law. It is his gaze, which she catches so quickly and so understandingly (knows instinctively?), that Adela, anticipating Joseph's bending over Bianca's bed, ridicules. How many boys, future fathers, have experienced such blatant rebuffs to their desire to mystify their first, and subsequent, sexual arousals? "You silly boy. . . . It has been lying here all the time; we tear a few pages from it every day" (*Sanatorium* 5).

Among the many texts which the woman from Weingarten's ex-libris may be raising her eyes from to meet Pierrot's gaze are fragments of Jan Szarota's *Współczesna Poezja Francuska: 1880–1914* [*Contemporary French Poetry: 1880–1914*] (Lwów, 1917). Stylistically revealing little affinity with Joseph's "fragments of rainbow," they seem to "fit," to "belong" nevertheless. In the section devoted to the discussion of Jules Laforgue's work, Szarota translates passages from *Moralités légendaires* in which the poet views himself as a Messiah and "nature's Benjamin," understanding everything, ready to "impregnate" everything. Referring to Schopenhauer and Hartmann as possible sources, Szarota traces the evolution of Laforgue's Pierrot. He is a "pessimist" "drunk with Nothingness" and a dandy putting on pontifical robes to assist in an imaginary wedding night by the marital bed, a mock-priest in a paper-made chasuble celebrating a mass on an improvised altar. And when the woman he flirts with leans towards him "willingly," he whispers to her "Let us not be so insistent":

He only entertains himself and takes his leave at the right time, as he is all too familiar with the back stage affairs of this sentimental comedy, and with the hand of the great Stage Manager, although he hides himself so well behind. He knows that the woman, the traveling salesman [?] of the Unconscious, makes her enticing gestures to draw the man into her laboratory to ensure the continuity of the human species. (*Współczesna* 193, translation mine)

140 Pretending to be lured into the “biological” trap, Pierrot walks away bowing gently. But then he also begins to openly resist the instinctual mechanisms behind the woman’s facial expressions and poses, to rebel against her being a slave to “the Unconscious” and a tool of “Mammy Nature.” Using Pierrot’s costume, Laforgue completes his [and the woman’s] evolutionary path exclaiming to her: “We are brothers!” (201). “Downcast eyes and a smile” might have been Schulz’s comment on the crudity of the critical apparatus and the critic’s failure to share Pierrot’s ironic, distancing smile. Apart from all the differences in aesthetic sensitivity, there is, of course, a significant time gap between Szarota’s text, first written in 1912, and Schulz’s reading of the “unconscious” in Maria Kuncewicz’s *Cudzoziemka* [*The Foreigner*] from 1936. The sublimation of the tools of the psychoanalytical method and perhaps skepticism about its adequacy for literary analysis accompanied the changes in the position of the woman and the way she was being looked at. While it gains so much in the depth of critical insight, Schulz’s celebration of Róża’s independence and vitality does not, however, entirely oppose Szarota’s perspective; while it gestures towards some mysterious (Kafkaesque) “supreme tribunal,” it depends much more on the “psychological laboratory” than on “eschatological theater” (*Letters* 92). Róża is still “a perfect instrument of the beauty of life,” a self-contained object of desire, a phoenix-like creature, a book on its flight to the Book. She does not open her arms, but it takes her single smile to make all arms open to her. Róża’s secret, Schulz writes, “lies precisely in her self-sufficiency and independence from the environment.” She needs no one; like Bianca, “she is beginning and end and absolute center.” All she needs to exist, then, is the artist’s gaze from the margin, imagining her to be a perfect reader of his work as a messianic vision of “substantiality and fullness of being” (92–93), annihilating all disparities between nature and culture, a woman and a man, the inner and the outer. But, if Róża is “beautiful” because she is “everything,” she can also be “beautiful” because she is “Nothing.” It is a dangerous vision, as Pierrot from Weingarten’s ex-libris understands. In the catalogue of books it is a distance of only a few lines from the aesthetically balanced *Salome* by Oscar Wilde to the pornographically simplistic *Geschlecht und Character* by Otto Weininger, the woman dancing and the woman “under the sway of the phallus.”

The hand upholding/moving the woman’s leg in Weingarten’s ex-libris (much more sinewy and biological, much less symbolic than the diabolical hand clutching the woman in Bosch’s *Garden of Earthly Delights*) is the same hand that helps a male figure raise a gigantic phallus, for the woman to rest comfortably on, in Schulz’s ex-libris eroticis for Maksymilian Goldstein from 1920. On the opposite side, a grinning skeleton in a kind

of pontifical robe is looking from above the book. In Kubin's *Die andere Seite*, undoubtedly an inspiring book for Schulz also because it testified to the common, "dark" sources of graphic and literary expression, the final apocalyptic vision includes a scene in which the American's body cannot contain the vitality of the gigantic phallus. It begins to live its own independent life, assumes the shape of a colossal snake and then shrivels and disappears into one of the subterranean corridors of the Dream Realm. Following it, the narrator's gaze penetrates the earth and catches sight of a thousand-armed polyp reaching underneath all the houses. A few pages later, the narrator sees Patera's body, curled up, strikingly small and delicate, its face turned downward to the ground.

141 In Schulz's 1919 ex-libris, the arm holding a woman is a phallic hand and it acknowledges Schulz's debt to and share in a long (male) literary and graphic tradition in which the space of textual or visual cross-fertilizations is also the space of incestuous relationships. The motion of the woman's body, the backwards tilt of her head, draw a circular image. The woman who gives birth opens the path to death. Performing her assigned role, she offers a seductive embrace which is lustful, polyp-like and maternal because the embrace answers the look of Pierrot who imagines himself to be a lover, a child, a sucked-in body. Schulz's Pierrot, like his depictions of catastrophes, celebrates rather than resists or represses the dependence of the artistic vision on "dark foundations." In a sense, the woman's open arms welcome his sincerity. Pierrot, a prompter on the margin of the stage, raises his hand to his mouth to whisper the lines of the incestuous text of veneration onto the stage; well-acquainted with the play, the viewers can imaginatively draw lines of correspondences between this secretive hand, the woman's body rounding along the phallic arm, the protruding elbows and bony testicles of the skeletal death (the least aesthetic prop on the theatrical stage), and the open, unsecretive mouth of the serpent, hissing and coiling (decoratively but also pornographically). The reader of Schulz's literary texts remembers now Joseph, who years later, in "Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass" (having established his position in the world of letters), orders a pornographic book from a bookstore next to his father's store, which is also his home. Instead, he gets a gigantic folding telescope, "with great refractive power and many other virtues" (*Sanatorium* 123). Father looks from over his spectacles, irritated but understanding. Joseph puts his head into the chamber of the apparatus and in the telescopic field of vision recognizes the maid walking along one of the dark corridors of the Sanatorium carrying a tray. She seems to return Joseph's look and she smiles. But what is it she is carrying on the tray? Joseph does not risk taking a closer look. In one of the following scenes, however, he sees in the dark corridor a familiar figure of a woman:

It is not a nurse. I know who it is. "Mother!" I exclaim, in a voice trembling with excitement, and my mother turns her face to me and looks at me for a moment with a pleading smile. Where am I? What is happening here? What maze ["matnia" in Polish; no wonder the English translator gets lost so often] have I become entangled in? (133)

To learn from his father is the purpose of his visit to the Sanatorium, and when he first enters its aquarium-like, "inky deep" reality, Joseph looks inquiringly at Jacob sleeping, his face "somewhere on a distant shore," and then he falls asleep himself, the son and the father sharing the same "eternal" dream. Some "watery" clues to their experience may be looked for again in the cosmic, provincial and universal, repeated catastrophe in "The Comet." In a scene paralleling that from "Sanatorium Under the Sign of the Hourglass," when the procession of dwarfed figures retreats, father seeks refuge at home, puts his head into the chimney shaft, makes himself dreamily comfortable, narrows his eyes in bliss, adjusts the screw of the micrometer, and lets the narrowed field of vision extend into stellar vistas. Jacob watches the "moon's brother" on its way back to "mother Earth." It then turns into a brain, "blissfully smiling in its sleep," like father himself. Letters of captions as in a cross-cut preparation become discernible. In the brain father recognizes the contours of the fetus bathing "in the light waters of amnion" (*The Street* 158). Is he coming back again to the edge of the cliff from the 1919 Pierrot ex-libris? Schulz's illustration of the "Z" letter in Weingarten's book catalogue shows a bespectacled, fatherly figure in a cubistic library, leaning against piles of books and placing his feet on them. The familiar figure is looking through the magnifying glass at some tiny, darkened object in his hands while from above the letter "Z" the elongated, phallic shape of the telescope penetrates an oval shaped space. What a maze of corridors with books and works of art, exchanging looks, whispering to themselves, dreaming their dream of the promised text they all come from and lead back to. The more secretive the gesture of Pierrot's hand, the more open his invitation to the readers. How many of them have already been tempted to raise their eyes from any of Schulz's literary and graphic works exclaiming: "I know." There is little doubt that the serpent's hiss is meant to be a sobering hiss. The serpent is a dragon is an umbilical cord is a snake with "a stuck-out tongue" (*Letters* 113). With its body winding into many coils, surrounding the name of the owner and supporting the winged horse of its designer, it conventionally points to still new books in a growing collection—new entanglements, new garlands. Father may be right: the Book is a myth and there are only books. After all, the ex-libris holds no mystery other than the desire to never give up seeing

mystery in what is always a simple story, as simple as Bianca's, or as a melody which death plays on its primitive fiddle. The viewers may step back now with the words of Laforgue's Pierrot from "Encore un livre": "J'ai fait mon temps, je déguerpis / Vers l'inclusive Sinécure!" (*Poésies* 211). Saying this, they are already back in.

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