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MAPPING THE FATHER

The Application of Greimassian Semiotics to Bruno Schulz's "Sklepy Cynamonowe"

1. Introduction

Fredric Jameson, in his Foreword to the English translation of Greimas' "On Meaning", states that "the Greimassian semiotics...[is], pragmatically, richly usable and full of practical development" (in Greimas 1987, xxii). How valid this statement is can be partly recognized in the following article. Its principal aim is to explore the conditions of discourse in Bruno Schulz's collection of short stories entitled "Sklepy Cynamonowe". For this purpose we will work with the semiotic theory developed by Algirdas Julien Greimas and apply it to the selected stories by Bruno Schulz: "Ptaki" and "Karakony". We will try to demonstrate how Schulz's fiction explores the elementary structures of signification proposed by Greimas, how it transgresses them and effectively subverts the apparent unity of the model. This will be demonstrated on the Father figure.

2. Theoretical Introduction

2.1. Semiotic Square

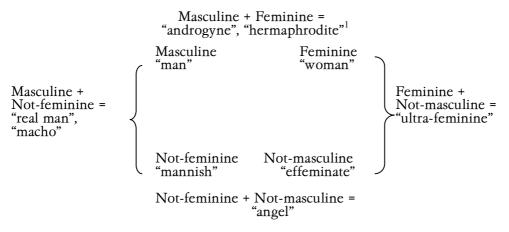
The semiotic square, which is a logical expression of any semantic category showing all possible relationships that define it, is a visual articulation of "the elementary structure of signification" (Bronwen and Ringham 2006, 6, 173f.). It is a modern version of a formalization known from Aristotelian and medieval logic, where it was called the square of oppositions (Nöth 1995, 318f.).

Complex term = S1 + S2 $Positive deixis= \begin{cases} S1 & S2 \\ Term 9 = S1 + (-S1) \\ Term 10 = S2 + (-S2) \\ -S2 & -S1 \\ Neutral term = -S2 + (-S1) \end{cases}$ Reutral term = -S2 + (-S1) S2 = S2 + (-S1)

Legend: S1 and S2 are contrary terms – S1 and -S1, S2 and -S2 are contradictory terms – S1 and (-S2), S2 and (-S1) are complementary terms. – The sign + marks the combination of two terms which create a compound term (*metaterm*). – The sign = marks the result of the combination.

According to Greimas, the four terms: S1, S2, -S1, -S2 inter-define each other (Greimas 1970, 163): "Starting from each of the four terms, by means of the two operations – the contradictory and the contrary – we can obtain the others" (Greimas 1987, 50). In languages and other semiotic systems, the object-terms alone do not carry signification and hence "it is at the level of the structures, and not at the level of the elements, that the elementary signifying units must be sought" (Greimas 1983, 20). "Language is not a system of signs but an assemblage [...] of structures of signification" (Greimas 1983, 3).

In order to gain a clearer picture of the semiotic square and the metaterms resulting from the syntheses of its four basic terms, a lucid example of the opposition of masculine vs. feminine proposed by Hébert will serve as a helpful illustration (Hébert 2006):



2. Semiotic square: masculine vs. feminine on the semantic level

2.2. Veridictory Square

The veridictory square, also called the square of veridiction, allows us to examine the dynamics of true/false evaluations in any semiotic act, particularly in a text. For reasons of clarity, the veridictory square will be considered as the opposition of 'being' (S1) vs. 'seeming' (S2) projected onto the semiotic square. One of its basic assumptions is that every interpretive doing is composed of the inextricable combination of being and seeming. This connection may either be identical or opposite and will be best illustrated with the help of an example. The policeman's seeming and being is identical when he is wearing his uniform, and it is opposite in the case of a criminal wearing a policeman's uniform as a disguise. A transformation can change both the seeming and the being, however, it does not necessarily have to be accompanied by a corresponding transforma-

¹ The words in quotation marks are the lexicalizations of the respective terms.

tion of the other variable. Thus it is possible that being may change without a change in seeming and the reverse. For instance, a policeman might become a criminal without any difference in seeming (cf. Hébert 2006).

3. Theoretical Assumptions

Before beginning the analysis of the two Schulz stories it seems necessary to make a series of theoretical assumptions, which will allow us to build a consistent line of argumentation and draw sound conclusions.

Firstly, the semiotic squares proposed in this paper describe a specific text and thus are only applicable to the highly idiosyncratic yet coherent universe of Schulz's writing. They do not aim at the status of universality for the extra-textual world.

Secondly, we assume that the worlds of "Sklepy Cynamonowe" and "Senatorium pod Klepsydra" constitute a coherent universe of Schulzian fiction. By this we affirm that both collections of short stories function according to the same consistent, undeviating and predictable rules. This can be postulated, according to Greimas, owing to the common textual isotopies recurring in the narrative (Greimas 1988, 9): the same unifying narrator, Józef; the same characters, Father Jakub, the Mother and the servant girl Adela; the same place, the house; and the same recurring motifs, the metamorphoses of Jakub. This recognizable network of thematic and linguistic categories allows us to make pertinent analogies with other short stories from the collections and draw valid comparisons between them.

Thirdly, we postulate that both "Ptaki" and "Karakony" constitute a representative sample of the totality of Schulz's fictional universe. We accept the hypothesis proposed by Greimas that any individual universe has its own semantic organization – of an abstract and figurative nature – and that an adequate description of either of these two organisations demands that we have a knowledge of the totality of the universe analyzed, or at least a representative sample, which, we claim, "Ptaki" and "Karakony" indeed are (Greimas 1988, 25).

Lastly, we assume that Greimas' semiotic system is logically coherent and thus we will not discuss its potential inconsistencies, controversies or inaccuracies. We will apply Greimassian semiotic theory exclusively according to its own rules, explore it under selected aspects and try to search for instances which might lead to the possible transgressions of this theory resulting from the singularity of Schulz's world.

4. "Ptaki" (Birds)

4.1. Textual Organisation: Spatial Segmentation

The vertical division of space in Schulz is an important bearer of mean-

ing. The first spatial division is already accentuated in the introductory two paragraphs of "Ptaki": in the first passage there is a description of the outside world and afterwards, in the first sentence of the second paragraph, there immediately follows the reference to the house: "Ojciec nie wychodził już z domu" / "Father had stopped going out of the house" (my translation; SC 16/46)². This simple opposition introduces the first division of the space, outside vs. house, and allows us to oppose the first paragraph to the following ones. The second spatial partition takes place inside the house and is constituted by three vertical categories: high, nothigh and low which are the derivatives of the binary opposition high vs. low.

The semiotic square below depicts the vertical division of the space both on the semantic level and the syntactic³ one concerning the tactical temporality, that is, the linear sequencing of semantic units (Hébert 2006). It shows how, together with the unfolding of the narrative, the spaces occupied change and how the figures are connected with relevant spaces marking them axiologically as well.



3. Semiotic square: high vs. low on the syntactic and semantic level

The narrative starts with a description of the outside world with its prevalent figurative isotopy of /high/ S1. /High/ is also associated with the birds, the Father (who is repairing the house up on the ladder) and with the attic – the space where Jakub feels well ("czuł się dobrze"; SC 16/46)⁴ and where he is far away from "the worries of daily life". Throughout the main part of the short story our attention is concentrated on the Father's actions and thus on the sphere of the /high/. What constitutes -S1 on the syntactic level is the intervention of Adela, the Anti-subject of the Father, who is associated with /not-high/ as she belongs neither to the /high/

² Celina Wieniewska translates this as: "Father had stopped going out", where "the house" is indeed implied in the expression. However for the purpose of the clarity of argumentation we decided to add this element. Quotes in the Polish original refer to "Sklepy Cynamonowe and Senatorium pod Klepsydra" (Schulz 2000b, henceforth SC respectively SK). Pages numbers of the translations (unless otherwise indicated) are by Wieniewska and refer respectively to Schulz 1977 and Schulz 1989. The original versions of the other short stories cited in this essay come from Schulz 2000b.

³ For the purposes of clarification, it must be noted that, according to Greimas, syntax is the sequencing of semantic values. Thus the syntactic type of the semiotic square is distinguished by changes in the successive positions of objects over time. Hence temporality is involved. The semiotic square may be used on a semantic ('static', 'a-temporal') level or a syntactic ('dynamic', temporal) level (Hébert 2006).

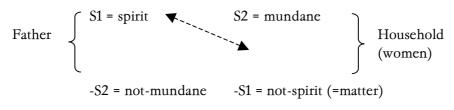
Wieniewska translates this phrase as: "he felt perfectly happy" (SC 16/46).

sphere of the Father nor to the /low/ sphere of the Mother. It is also Adela who can move freely between the upstairs /high/ of the Father and downstairs /low/ S2 of the Mother. After the confrontation with the servant girl the Father is "coming downstairs": "człowiek złamany, król-banita, który stracił tron i królowanie"/ "a broken man, an exiled king who had lost his throne and his kingdom" (S2; SC 18/50) to where the Mother is located.

The isotopy of /high/ is richly elaborated in the text in descriptions and enumerations of the rooftops, attic, ladder, ceiling, birds. The /low/ is barely mentioned and can be deduced through the Mother, who is associated with the downstairs and is placed in explicit opposition to the Father. Jakub tends to perform his actions in the upper regions of the house, like repairing the counterweights of the hanging lamps, whereas the Mother stands downstairs and tries to bring him down to talk about daily matters (paragraph 2). It should be pointed out that, curiously enough, the linear unfolding of the text overlaps with the semantic level of the narrative.

4.2. Semantic Semiotic Square: the Spirit vs. the Mundane

The main semantic binary opposition in the short story "Ptaki" is constituted between the 'spirit' and the 'mundane'. This relation can be represented graphically together with its relevant contradictory terms and their deixes on the semantic level of the semiotic square:



4. Semiotic square: spirit vs. the mundane on the semantic level

4.2.1. The Four Constitutive Terms

The concept of the 'spirit' is marked by three main categories in "Ptaki", which are tightly interconnected with each other: the strong isotopy of /high/, the birds and the relation to the Father. The spatial segmentation of the house analysed in point 4.1 links the Father inextricably to the isotopy of /high/. The birds, which are placed in the attic (/high/) together with the Father, are thus connected to those two categories. Owing to the spiritual nature of the Father and their strong interconnection, all of these elements point unequivocally towards the principle of the spirit.

The spiritual nature of Jakub is accentuated by the narrator alluding to him as an artist: "Zwyczajem malarzy posługiwał się drabiną, jak ogromnymi szczudłami i czuł się dobrze w tej ptasiej perspektywie, w pobliżu malowanego nieba, arabesek i ptaków sufitu"/ "Following the custom of painters, he used a ladder as enormous stilts and he felt good in that bird's eye perspective close to the painted sky, arabesques and birds painted on the ceiling" (my translation, SC 16)⁵. Referring to the Father as an artist is again directly evoked after two paragraphs: "Była to początkowo namiętność myśliwego i artysty zarazem"/ "To begin with, it was the passion of the huntsman and the artist rolled into one" (SC 17/47). Hence Jakub belongs to the realm of the spirit and accentuates its importance, which is in stark but passive opposition to the world of the mundane. Yet a much more enlivened battle takes place between the 'spirit' and the 'non-spirit'.

The term to which a similar amount of attention has been devoted in the short story as to S1 is -S1, not-spirit. Following Greimas in the "procedure of naming" (Greimas 1987, 129f.) we can substitute the term 'notspirit' with 'matter'. This concept is highly important in Schulz and richly elaborated in his oeuvre – not only on the manifestation level, in the form of sensual metaphors and matter-related expressions, but also on the deep level⁶. In "Ptaki" and the other stories of "Sklepy Cynamonowe", the embodiment of matter is the attractive servant girl Adela. Owing to the beauty of her young body she has "almost limitless power" over the Father. She is the image of energy, fertility and latent eroticism (Dompkowski 1999, 126).

The term S2 is occupied by the mundane, as in Schulz it is in sharp contrast to the spirit. The vertical opposition of /high/ vs. /low/ analyzed in point 4.1 can be superimposed onto this semiotic square according to the rule of homologation. The /high/ is a metaphor for the distance to the practical side of life. By breeding new strange creatures Jakub populates the mundane with colour and thus distances himself from the realm of greyness (Stala 1995, 135). The /low/, as has already been pointed out, is the sphere of the Mother, of boredom, colourlessness and inertia of the

⁵ Wieniewska's translation is inaccurate. She writes: "Following the custom of house painters, he used a pair of steps as enormous stilts and he felt perfectly happy in that bird's eye perspective close to the sky, leaves and birds painted on the ceiling" (SC 16/46). Wieniewska undercuts a serious ambiguity connected with the word "malarz". In Polish this word has a double meaning: a painter as an artist and also as a house painter, understood in one way or the other depending on the context. In this contextual relationship: together with the arabesques and painted birds on the ceiling, the meaning tends toward the former connotation.

⁶ Matter is theoretically one of the key concepts in Schulz's fiction. See: "Manekiny" (SC 19-23), "Traktat o Manekinach" (SC 23-31), "Bruno Schulz do St.I. Witkiewicza" (Schulz 2000a, 18-21).

"yellow days of winter" (SC 15/45). She is the epitome of daily life, the banality of existence, the spokesperson for common sense and a practical approach towards life (Jarzębski 1992, 121); thus she is located in the term S2 mundane. There is a constant passive struggle between the inspired creative spirit of Jakub and the stifling mundaneness and inertia of the Mother. Matter and the mundane create the realm of the household, which is practically the kingdom of women on the negative deixis.

The realm of not-mundane (-S2) belongs to the Father as well. Here we can include the strange birds that Jakub breeds, his metamorphosis and the colours he introduces into the not-colourful house. All these extraordinary elements enliven the stale atmosphere of the household and introduce excitement, magic and vivid imagination into the realm of greyness and boredom. The world of the spirit and not-mundane, which in the eyes of Józef is made from colourful creatures, thrilling secrets, experiments and adventures, is the world of the Father.

4.2.2. The Main Antagonism: Spirit vs. Matter

The main antagonism in "Ptaki" is located between Adela and the Father – matter and spirit. Adela tries to extinguish the spiritual aspirations of the Father (Odachowska-Zielińska 1982, 79). As Odachowska-Zielińska rightly observes, Jakub suspects that the power of a woman lies in her biology, in her primordiality, in her reproductive power (79). He tries to possess the mysterious power of creation similar to that of women and of God. He succeeds in that he creates a diversified colourful flock of birds, "ślepe pączki życia pękały do światła, napełniały się pokoje kolorowym pogwarem, migotliwym świergotem swych nowych mieszkanców"/ "blind buds of life were bursting open towards the light, they were filling the rooms with colourful murmur, with glimmering twitter of its new inhabitants" (my translation, SC 17); it is also his triumph over the mundane, winter boredom, sleepiness and inertia of the world of the Mother⁷.

Yet Jakub's victory is only a temporary state because Adela intervenes. On this line of tension, between the Father and the servant girl, there can be only one winner, one position of truth. For the purpose of this analysis, the Aristotelian logical definitions of the contradictory and the contrary may serve as a fitting analogy in explaining why the term *matter* is located in the position of -S1 rather than S2 as might also be expected.

According to the Aristotelian definition of the contrary, the terms S1 and S2 cannot be simultaneously true but both can be false (Bucher 1998,

⁷ This is confirmed in the story "Manekiny": "Dziś dopiero rozumiem samotne bohaterstwo, z jakim sam jeden wydał on wojne bezbrzeżnemu żywiołowi nudy"/ "Only now do I understand the lonely hero who alone had waged war against the fathomless, elemental boredom" (SC 19/51 "Manekiny" / "Tailors' Dummies").

175). The two terms, though opposites, presuppose each other. They are also complementary, united by a common denominator. This relation seems to be comparatively peaceful. There is no immediate struggle implied in the relationship between those terms by one of the two having to be true. Analogically to this definition, the spirit and the mundane, in Schulz personified by the Father and the Mother respectively, can both be false at the same time, in the sense that it is possible that neither of them has to win in a potential power struggle. This thesis is supported in "Ptaki" by the lack of fierce confrontation between the figure of the Father and the Mother.

A different case is observed between the contradictory terms. There, according to Aristotelian logic, both terms cannot be true or both cannot be false at the same time (Bucher 1998, 175): one of them has to be true, that is, one has to win. In Schulz, this is exactly the case between the spiritual principle of the Father and the material element of Adela. The struggle between the contradictory terms as such is already implied in its very definition and, in Schulz, it is expressed in the fact that the confrontation between the two figures is inevitable. One of them must win and in the majority of cases in the collection of Schulz's short stories, the winner is Adela.

4.2.3. Matter as the Exploding 'Third Term'

The line of tension between matter and the spirit is not as clear or as simple as one would hope. The Father does not occupy merely the realm of the spirit and not-mundane. He also belongs to the sphere of matter as he is fascinated by it and powerless against its expressions. He worships the female body, wishes to possess its ability to create matter and aims at "zbratać się z materią"/ "fusing with matter".

As a result of these desires, what is happening in Schulz on the line of the tension matter-spirit is the unification of the two terms and creation of the category which transgresses them both – the term in position 9. The ecstatic category is thus produced, which is not a peaceful synthesis of antithetical terms. It arises as a result of one term of the opposition having absorbed the energy of its opposite and spiralled towards the superlative power – more material than matter. This is the point of excrescence, when the qualities overspill their boundaries and produce an ecstatic effect. In Schulz, this 'third term', this outgrowth of matter, is epitomized in language, in the overabundance of matter-related metaphors which attack the reader with their sensuality. It is also manifested in the Father's constant metamorphoses, where the borders of objects, the frames of matter are transgressed, resulting in the uncontrollable proliferation of shapes and colours that follows.

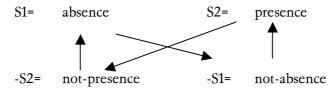
Fredric Jameson, in his Forward to Greimas' "On Meaning", argues that the "negation of the negation" (which is the term -S2) is "the place of novelty and of paradoxical emergence" (in Greimas 1987, xvi). In our semiotic square the term in position 9 is this exploding category. It is exactly the bursting synthesis of contradictory terms that detonates the square and is the force of "the great leap" (xvi). It is manifested in Schulz both on the discursive and on the abstract level. In his analyses, Jameson takes into account between four and eight out of ten Greimassian categories and, as he admits himself, one "should also feel free to bricolate all this [...] simply to steal the pieces that interest or fascinate us" (viii). In our analysis we have concentrated on one of the two less explored categories because this is where Schulz's fiction leads us. Although the syntheses of the contradictories are categories much less commonly encountered in semiotic acts, in the Schulzian universe they are, paradoxically, constantly recurrent. This demonstrates the necessity to reformulate and restructure the models of signification in order to fully account for the Schulzian universe.

5. "Karakony" (Cockroaches)

5.1. Syntactic Semiotic Square: Absence vs. Presence

Before beginning with the analysis of "Karakony", it seems necessary to make a few theoretical assumptions that will allow us to examine the story from a different point of view. Firstly, we will consider the story as a totality without a story time, with respect only to what Greimas calls tactical temporality⁸. Thus we will not make a distinction, from a temporal point of view, between the episode where the Father transforms into a cockroach and the rest of the narrative. Secondly, while treating the text as a linear succession of semantic units, we will focus on the aspect of the presence/absence of the Father and try to map it in the syntactic and the semantic versions of the semiotic square.

To begin, the transformation of the Father into the condor and a cockroach on the discursive level of the story can be effectively mirrored in the syntactic version of the semiotic square:



5. Semiotic square: absence vs. presence on the syntactic level

⁸ Tactical temporality is defined as "the linear sequencing of semantic units, for example, from one sentence to the next" (see Hébert 2006).

The term S1, which constitutes 'absence', can be located at the very beginning of the narrative, when Józef claims that the Father is absent from the house: "Ojca już wówczas nie było" / "Father was then no more with us" (SC 53/111). Following this statement we move to the description of the stuffed condor and the narrator's question to the Mother concerning the dead bird: "prawda, że to jest on?"/ "it is he, isn't it?" (SC 54/113). This question leads us to the Father's 'not-absence', that is, -S1 on the semiotic square. As the following step in the unfolding of the narrative we are told the story of the Father, who transforms into a cockroach and thus is 'present' in the narrative, which is the position S2. The Father then fully transforms into a cockroach and escapes, hiding in the house, which moves us to the category of 'not-presence' (-S2). The term -S2 is underscored by the phrase "wyrzekliśmy się ojca"/ "we renounced the Father" (my translation, SC 55)⁹, which deliberately removes the Father from the presence and, as a result, makes him 'not-present'. At the end of the narrative the Mother claims that the Father is a commercial traveller and that he "czasem w nocy przyjeżdża do domu, ażeby przed świtem jeszcze dalej odjechać"/ "sometimes comes home at night and goes away again before dawn" (SC 55/116), thus returning us to the term S1 = 'absence'.

5.2 Veridictory square for "Ojca już wówczas nie było"

Even in the simplest linguistic utterances we can determine, according to Greimas, the embedded opposition that is inherent in a text (Felluga 2002). In the case of "Karakony", the sentence "Ojca już wówczas nie bylo" is the point of departure for the following analysis.

For the purpose of the graphic intelligibility of the veridictory square the phrase "Ojca już wówczas nie było" is substituted with the equivalent form "Father is gone". In this investigation we will again focus on tactical temporality and consider narrative temporality when necessary. The operation carried out below is one of homologation, that is, of a simple superimposition of two instances, the Mother and Józef, onto the veridictory square¹⁰.

5.2.1. The Structure of the Veridictory Square

According to Józef, the narrator, at:

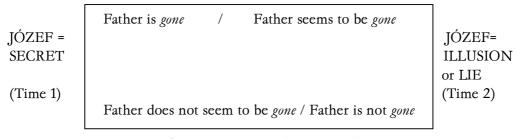
Time 1 (the beginning of the narrative, before Father's incident with cockroaches),

Time 2 (the end of the narrative, after the incident with cockroaches).

⁹ The translation Wieniewska provides, "we gave up Father for lost" (SC 55/115), is inaccurate. ¹⁰ For further elaboration on homologation, see Greimas (1987, 125f., 132-135).

Greimassian Semiotics and Bruno Schulz's "Sklepy Cynamonowe"

MOTHER = TRUTH (Time 2 & 1)



MOTHER = FALSE (Time 2 & 1)

6. Veridictory square: "Ojca już wówczas nie było"

JÓZEF = SECRET (Time 1): At the beginning of "Karakony" the narrator claims that Father is *gone* ("Ojca już wówczas nie było"). The exact phrasing he uses is highly ambiguous. We do not know if the Father is away or dead. The narrator tells us that "the rooms on the upper floor had been tied up" (SC 53/111), rented to a lady telephone operator and only the stuffed condor remained after the Father. This leads the reader to conclude, considering the repeatedly mentioned weak constitution of Jakub, that the Father is probably dead¹¹. In the course of the story the ambivalence of this phrasing is effectively exploited by Schulz and proves to be crucial for our interpretation. It confirms the status of the Father as the locus of ambiguity on the abstract level and mirrors his ambivalence on the manifestation structure. Józef claims that the Father does not seem to be gone (away or dead) because he is in the living room in the form of a stuffed condor. We do not know which 'gone' he means. Józef is in the position of SECRET at Time 1.

MOTHER = FALSE (Time 2): At the end of the narrative the Mother speaks about the Father and seems to be using the meaning dead for gone and thus implies that the Father is not gone (dead) and does not seem to be gone (dead) as he is travelling on business and comes back home only at night to leave again at early dawn. This places her in the veridictory square in the position of FALSE. She claims that the Father is gone (away) and seems to be gone (away) on business. That is how we obtain MOTHER in the position of TRUTH at Time 2.

JÓZEF = ILLUSION or LIE (Time 2): At the end of "Karakony" the narrator claims that Father is not gone (away or dead) because he is sure

¹¹ It is worth noting that if we read the stories in "Sklepy cynamonowe" linearly, the reader's reaction to interpret the Father as being dead is most immediate. After having read "Sklepy Cynamonowe" and "Senatorium pod Klepsydrą" we realize that death does not exist in Bruno Schulz's universe. Nevertheless, despite this panoramic knowledge of Bruno Schulz's œuvre it is absolutely essential to extract this ambiguity from "Karakony".

("jestem pewny" SC 55/116) that Father is the condor, even though the Mother claims that Jakub is away ("seems to be gone"), a statement left uncommented upon by the narrator. What is more, the Mother claims that the narrator "should know" ("przecież wiesz..."/emphatic¹² "you know" SC 55/116) that he is away as Józef cannot/does not see the Father when he sometimes comes back home late at night. Thus the Father 'visibly' "seems to be gone". The phrase "przecież wiesz" together with "mówiłam ci już przecież"/emphatic¹³ "I have told you already" (SC 55/116) introduce an additional tinge of doubt about Józef's reliability. It seems as if he knew something more but did not reveal this to the reader or maybe claimed the untruth deliberately, which would confirm his placement in the above veridictory square at the position of LIE.

MOTHER = TRUTH AND FALSE (Time 1): The Mother is positioned at Time 1 at the intersection of three concepts: Father is not gone + Father seems to be gone + Father does not seem to be gone, which possibility is not accounted for in the Greimassian veridictory square. When the narrator asks the Mother if the Father is the stuffed condor (which is also a direct reference to the preceding story "Ptaki") she "zmieszała się bardzo i spuściła oczy" / "became embarrassed and cast down her eyes" (SC 54/113). From her reaction ("panic") the narrator concludes that the Father is not gone (away or dead) although he seems to be gone (away or dead) as the Mother spreads "plotki i kłamstwa" / "lies and gossips" (SC 54/113) about it. However, the Mother acknowledges the possibility of Father's transformation into an animal by explicitly referring to the situation when the Father became a cockroach. She implies therefore that the Father does not seem to be gone (away or dead) after all.

5.2.2. The Reliability Status: Józef vs. the Mother

The veridictory square is a highly subtle structure when applied to Bruno Schulz's story. The immediate conclusion that forces itself on the reader is that Bruno Schulz's fiction escapes the logical structures of the Greimassian model. It is not an argument against the applicability of the model as such but rather important evidence of the exceptional nature of this Polish writer's fiction. The limits of Aristotelian logic and the clear-cut judgements of Truth/Falsehood/Secret/Illusion do not fully capture the highly idiosyncratic logic of Schulz's oeuvre. It successfully escapes those logical frames and leads us to surprising discoveries: the Mother takes both the position of Truth and that of Falsehood. As a result, she creates a new category not accounted for in the veridictory square and thus trans-

 ¹² My necessary addition to Wieniewska's translation.
¹³ Again, a necessary addition to Wieniewska's translation.

gresses the structure. The narrator, for his part, occupies the positions of Illusion/Lie and Secret, which is surprising because his potential unreliability is not blatantly demonstrated in the story.

The reliability status of both speaking subjects is a complex question. In the course of the story we do not have any irrefutable reasons not to believe the narrator. His potential unreliability is only subtly hinted at. It is Józef who constitutes the reference trajectory, therefore it is he whom we must trust, and thus believe to be in the position of Truth. However, Józef's reliability is subtly questioned by the text.

On the discursive level, where the readers are guided by Józef, we are led to doubt the reliability of the Mother's statements. The observing subject depicts the Mother's reactions as ones that in his eyes expose her: she panics, she is embarrassed, tries to flirt with her son and coddle him as though he were a stranger. But at the same time we are confronted, on the deep level, with uncertainty about the veracity of the narrator's assertions because he is in the positions of Lie and Secret. The Mother's emphatic concluding remarks, "wiesz przecież"/emphatic "you know", "mówiłam Ci przecież"/emphatic "I have told you already" cast a shadow of doubt onto Józef and make the reader suspect that perhaps he might be withholding a secret from us.

Nevertheless, it must be emphasized that neither the Mother nor Józef are exposed as fully unreliable. All four versions of the Father's existence depicted in the story – the potential death, the transformation into a cockroach, the metamorphosis into a condor and the work as a commercial traveller – are neither unequivocally confirmed nor refuted in the end. The two speaking subjects are made equally reliable and unreliable in "Karakony". It seems as if reality proliferated in Schulz's universe and together with the different versions of the Father's existence the alternative worlds came suddenly into being and started functioning simultaneously side by side (cf. Stala 1995, 237). The logic of non-exclusion of the simultaneous contradictory concepts finds its full application in this universe.

5.3. The Uncertainty of Death

The ambivalence about the Father's state is not brought about by the purely linguistic vagueness of a single phrase, "Ojca już wówczas nie było". This ambiguity is repeatedly alluded to, as with the following phrasing in the second paragraph: "Miałem ukryty żal do matki za łatwość, z jaką przeszła do porządku dziennego nad *stratą ojca*" / "I was nursing a hidden grievance against my Mother for the ease with which she had

recovered from *Father's loss*" (my translation and emphasis; SC 53)¹⁴, which again leaves us uncertain about the exact meaning of the expression in this context. A couple of lines below we read "Nawet na uczciwa, obywatelką *śmierć* nie zasłużył sobie" / "He could not even earn an honest citizen's *death*" (SC 53/112), which rather strongly implies his passing away. But this, in turn, is subverted by the subsequent phrase: "wszystko u niego musiało być dziwaczne i *wątpliwe*" / "everything about him had to be odd and *dubious*" (SC 53/112). In the next paragraph we read again: "W tym rzadko odwiedzanym, paradnym pokoju panował od czasu *zniknięcia ojca* wzorowy porządek" / "In this rarely visited, sumptuous room, reigned perfect order since *Father's disappearance*" (my translation and emphasis, SC 53)¹⁵. As a result, we are led to interpret unequivocally, in this particular phrase, that the Father is away rather than dead. The sequence of such contradictory hints and suggestions in "Karakony" highlights the Father's ambiguous status even more.

It is this ambivalence of the short sentence "Ojca już wówczas nie było" at the beginning of "Karakony" and the constant reappearance of this ambiguity that opens the significant cleft upon which Schulz's fiction is constructed. As in "Ptaki", the Father seems to be the source of ambivalence and disorder. In the Greimassian semiotic system he is the origin of alternative logical possibilities and this tendency seems to be a symptomatic and inherent feature of the Schulzian universe.

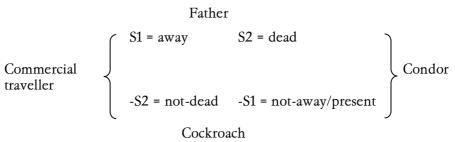
5.4. Semantic Semiotic Square: Away vs. Dead

The semantic and axiological opposition of life vs. death, which can be found in any semantic micro-universe (in Greimas 1988, xvi), is subverted and substituted in Schulz by the opposition of away vs. dead. Although the question of the Father being alive might seem to be implied in his being away it is not exactly the ingrained opposition around which the entire narrative of "Karakony" revolves. The 'presence' of the Father

¹⁴ Unfortunately, Wieniewska's translation undercuts this significant ambiguity by phrasing it in the following manner: "I had a hidden resentment against my Mother for the ease with which she had recovered from *Father's death*" (SC 53/112). In Polish there is a very subtle but undeniable nuance attached to the word *strata* in comparison to a word very similar in use and appearance, *utrata*. Whereas the word *strata* carries the load of uncertainty as to whether the loss is permanent or only temporary, the word *utrata* would be explicitly associated with a lasting loss. The former term is also a hypernym for the latter. Thus the phrase *nad utrata ojca* would unambiguously mean: "Father's death" whereas *nad strata ojca* heavily tends towards a similar meaning but leaves a little room for doubt as well. In my translation I have tried to come closest to the original meaning of the phrase.

¹⁵ Here, again, the unambiguous coherency of Wieniewska's translation is preserved: "In that rarely visited, festive room exemplary order had reigned since *Father's death.*" (SC 53/112)

is precisely not expressed in his being alive, as is the case of the present though dead condor. The binary opposition focuses rather on the distance of the Father from the narrator. Thus we can deduce three distances: 1) close: the Father being constantly in the living room in the form of a condor (dead and present); 2) middle: the Father hiding somewhere in the house, almost disappearing from the sight of the household in the form of a cockroach (not-dead and not-away); 3) far: the Father being far away as a commercial traveller and coming back occasionally when no one apart from the Mother can see him (not-dead and away).



7. Semiotic square: away vs. dead on the semantic level

The distinction between the present and not-away in the position of -S1 being made here is based on a difference in the level of the intensity of being. The condor is present in the room, tangible and visible, whereas the cockroach is not-away – it is felt to be somewhere in the house together with his 'tribe' but not immediately visible to the household in the form of one particular cockroach that could be designated as the Father. This distinction is based on the relation of the terms present vs. not-away on the semantic level of the elementary structure of signification and not on the syntactic level, as was the case in the semiotic square absence vs. presence in point 5.1. It is an important clarification to make, as the semantic transference of the 'cockroach' to the category not-away might seem to be an internal contradiction. This is, however, not the case. The difference is subtle but significant.

Greimas claims that the terms in the semiotic squares cannot be considered separately but must always be examined in relations (Greimas 1983, 19). When analyzing "Karakony" in point 5.1 we created a semiotic square based only on the unfolding of the narrative. At the beginning of the story, the absence of the Father is explicitly indicated by the narrator, only to be contradicted by the condor in the living room, marking the Father's not-absence. Then the Father's presence in the narrative is marked by the story of his disgust of cockroaches. In direct opposition to this presence follows his transformation into the cockroach and its hiding in the house, which stands for the Father's not-presence. That is how we ar-

rive at assigning the 'cockroach' to not-present on the syntactic level of the elementary structure of signification in point 5.1.

In the present case, that is, in the opposition away vs. dead, the relation is constituted between the single, visibly present condor and the cockroach, which is undistinguishable among many others of its species but sensed by the household. This stratification of the intensity of being, the distinction in present vs. not-away, cannot be properly accounted for in the semiotic square. Therefore, both terms are assigned to the same position in the elementary structure of signification¹⁶.

The basic opposition of away vs. dead is also effectively dismantled in the course of "Sklepy cynamonowe" and "Senatorium pod Klepsydra" because it becomes clear that definitive death does not really exist in the Schulzian universe. 'Death' turns into an empty word, a signifier with a meaning that is constantly being deferred. We can read in the last story of "Senatorium pod Klepsydrą": "W tym czasie ojciec mój umarł był już definitywnie. Umierał wielokrotnie, zawsze jeszcze nie doszczętnie, zawsze z pewnymi zastrzeżeniami, które zmuszały do rewizji tego faktu" (SK 187 "Ostatnia ucieczka ojca") / "At that time, my father was definitely dead. He had been dying a number of times, always not completely, always with some reservations that forced us to revise this fact" (my translation). Even when the Mother cooked the Father at the end of "Ostatnia ucieczka ojca" (when he metamorphosed into a crab) and served him on a plate, it did not prevent him from escaping from the house, leaving one leg behind. The Father is not able to die - or perhaps is not allowed to die and the signified of the word dead seems to be paradoxically transferred onto and merged with the signifier away, creating a new semantic unit of its own, a third category. This 'third term' is again a concept, which is over-intensified, as it is expressed in its extreme version: by spreading on the whole collection of Schulz's stories. Together with the final disappearance of the Father the whole collection of the stories, "Sklepy Cynamonowe" and "Senatorium pod Klepsydra", end permanently - there are no more stories to follow. The outside into which the Father disappears seems to devour him and together with him the Fiction - the away and the dead fused and disrupted the Fiction.

¹⁶ There is another instance of the Father's presence on the symbolic level noted by the critics: the peacock's feathers "full of mischief when no longer watched". In Christian belief they are considered to be the symbol of immortality, eternity and happy afterlife. Placed on the male's tail they symbolize a guardian or watchful protector. Bukwalt puts forward a thesis that the element of bird's colourfulness points to the constant, hidden presence of the Father in the space of the mythical House. For further elaboration, see Bukwalt (2003, 81), Cirlot (1962, 239) and Kopaliński (1990, 305f.).

6. Semantic Semiotic Square: Margin vs. Centre

In "Karakony", the narrator claims with bitterness towards his Mother, "Nigdy go nie kochała - myślałem - a ponieważ ojciec nie był zakorzeniony w sercu żadnej kobiety, przeto nie mógł też wróść w żadną realność i unosił się wiecznie na peryferiach życia, w półrealnych regionach, na krawędziach rzeczywistości" / "She had never loved him, I thought, and as Father had not been rooted in any woman's heart, he could not merge with any reality and was therefore condemned to float eternally on the periphery of life, in half-real regions, on the margins of existence" (SC 53/112). Józef blames his Mother for not loving the Father and thus making it impossible for him to lead a normal life, die an "honest citizen's death", stay strongly ingrained in a reality, which, we may conclude, he himself defines as the 'centre'. The lack of woman's love made the Father remain forever on the 'margins' of that reality. This evaluative statement of the narrator undervalues the borders of reality, considering the halfreal realm to which the Father was "condemned" as distant, inaccessible and foreign and thus attaching it to the realm of dysphoria.

Although Józef often openly sides with the centre, which is expressed, for example, by his usage of the collective first person plural, we (the household), and, at times, his rationalisations, it is not the centre that he is genuinely interested in. The centre represented by the Mother and Adela, who are inside the house, does not hold the necessary creative fascination for Józef. In the story entitled "Księga" he recalls the wonderful, enchanting times of his early childhood, alone with his Father and the Original Book of Books (Księga). It was a time full of magic, vivid colours, when "w tapetach pączkowały uśmiechy, wykluwały się oczy, koziołkowały figle" (SK 72 "Księga") / "in the wallpaper smiles were budding, eyes hatched, somersaults turned playfully" (my translation). Then, suddenly, this earthly paradise comes to a sad end – the Mother appears, bribes young Józef with love and caresses and takes him away from the miraculous universe of the Father into her mundane world, where Józef has remained ever since.

To było bardzo dawno. *Matki jeszcze wówczas nie było*. Spędzałem dni sam na sam z ojcem w naszym wielkim wówczas, jak świat, pokoju... Potem przyszła matka i wczesna ta, jasna idylla skończyła się. Uwiedziony pieszczotami matki, zapomniałem o ojcu, życie moje potoczyło się, nowym odmiennym torem, bez świąt i bez cudów (SK 71-72 "Księga").

This was a very long time ago. *My mother had not appeared yet.* I spent my days alone with my father in our room, which at that time was as large as the world ... Then the mother came, and this early, bright idyll came to an end. Seduced by my mother's caresses, I forgot my father, and my life began to run along a new and different track with no holidays and no miracles. (My translation and emphasis.)

It is highly intriguing that the Polish phrase "Matki jeszcze wówczas nie było" is extremely similar in structure and wording to the ambivalent phrase discussed above: "Ojca już wówczas nie było". This expression is striking because it means that the Mother did not yet exist and the first person and the origin of the narrator's existence was his Father¹⁷. If we consider Józef the artist¹⁸ this is exactly the case – the Father is the only source and inspiration of Józef's imagination and the Mother is not considered part of the realm of creation, the high sphere, which is the domain of the Father.

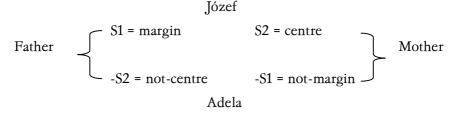
Throughout both "Ptaki" and "Karakony" we constantly encounter ambiguous reference evaluations of the Father. On the one hand, he is the other artist, the kindred spirit of the narrator, who epitomizes magic, colour and the spirit. Yet on the other hand, he is indirectly associated with the unexplored and black outside, he is darkly unfathomable, eccentric and in possession of uncanny secrets, which Józef does not wish to reveal to the reader.

The Mother, as was pointed out above, belongs to the grey and mundane area connected with the worries of daily life and thus holds little or no interest for the narrator. This characteristic is compellingly mirrored in the fact that hardly any space is devoted to her person in the stories. The Father, in contrast to the Mother, is the pivotal figure in the whole series of Schulz's short stories, as he is their main hero and driving force. Once he disappears, never to return, in the last story of the volume "Senatorium pod Klepsydrą", the narrative comes effectively to an end - the story finishes and the whole collection of Schulz's short stories with it. Hence we can conclude that the margin is paradoxically centralized, as it is the most vital and absolutely indispensable element in the creation of Bruno Schulz's fiction. Thus the values of centre and margin are reversed and their meaning subverted. Now it is the margin that is of paramount importance and the centre, in its turn, is insignificant, paradoxically marginalized. Although Józef often favours the centre in his direct discourse, we can observe that he sides on the deep level with the margin.

¹⁷ This is an interesting inversion of early childhood as seen from a psychoanalytical perspective, where it is the Father who suddenly appears and takes the child away from the warm and magical world of the Mother (Freud 1989, 26-28).

¹⁸ For further elaboration of Józef the artist see Dompkowski (1999, 123-134). We assume, following Dompkowski, that "Joseph... is the young Schulz" merely in the sense that he is a writer himself (Dompkowski 1999, 123). Unfortunately, due to the scope of this essay, we are not able to present the full line of argumentation that would lead us to this assumption. Therefore, we must satisfy ourselves with the mere premise. However, it is important to note that we represent the opposite view to Dompkowski; namely, we underline the importance of the Father to the narrator's artistic development and deemphasize the significance of the Mother in this respect.

We can effectively visualize the relation of the four fictional characters to the margin vs. centre opposition with the help of the semiotic square on the semantic level:



8. Semiotic square: margin vs. centre on the semantic level

In the position of S1 is the margin. S1 is, according to Fredric Jameson, the favoured term on the semantic level out of the two contrary terms in the binary opposition (in Greimas 1987, xv). Considering what we have just established regarding the relation between the margin and the centre, it is necessary to place the margin in this more significant position. Together with the negation of its negation, that is -S2 not-centre, they create the spiritual realm of the Father. The synthesis of S1 with the term -S2 intensifies the difference between the Father's magical kingdom and the Mother's sphere of the mundane. The Mother not only represents the unimportant and uninteresting centre S2 that is the greyness and colour-lessness of daily life, but also, by being in direct opposition to the Father and his universe, emphasizes the priority of the margin.

Józef belongs to both spheres, the centre and the margin, and therefore he is placed in the position of the complex term. He is the speaker for the household, at times together with the household, distancing himself from the Father in his comments, he enjoys the safety of the house. But he is also the artist, just as Jakub is, the one who belongs to the higher sphere of creation. It is Józef who sees the outside and describes it, who marks where the centre and where the margin are, unites the two and reverses their values. He subverts the system and turns it inside out.

Adela, on the other hand, is the one who does not belong to either sphere. She does not definitely belong to the high sphere of the Father (S1) nor to the low sphere of the Mother (S2). Adela is too corporeal to belong to the spiritual world. Owing to the sexual appeal of her young body, she is also extremely powerful. She is able to destroy the Father's creation without his active resistance and without repercussions. Her attitude almost mocks the high sphere of the Father. On the other hand, she is not subdued and insipid, as the realm of the Mother would expect her to be, with all its stifling boredom and sleepiness. The servant girl is the messenger between the two worlds, yet she effectively escapes them both; we must therefore place her in the position of the neutral term in the semiotic square.

With this and the other semiotic squares discussed above we were able to map the Father and the other characters of the stories on the abstract level. The binary oppositions, such as margin vs. centre, away vs. dead, spirit vs. the mundane, have been undone and displaced by Schulz. It is important to note that these structures were not entirely destroyed (leaving a monism where only marginality remains) but rather situated otherwise, against each other and, as result, underwent a change in their values.

7. Conclusion

As the analysis in this essay has established, Schulzian fiction fails to be contained by Greimassian semiotic models. The text exceeds the analytical structures, which search to reduce it with principles originating in Aristotelian logic. The Father proves to be the locus of ambiguity on the abstract level; the over-intensified third terms, matter and away, burst open their relevant semiotic squares and overspill their signification in the whole of Schulz's fiction; the basic semantic and axiological opposition between alive and dead is substituted and effectively dismantled; the mother holds an unusual position in the veridictory square not accounted for in its structure.

As we observed, Bruno Schulz's fiction effectively subverts the theory and the logical system upon which the theory is built and shows how much richer in logical possibilities the Schulzian cosmos is. Schulz shows us in his fiction that other unexplored logical paths are also possible: ones that combine the seemingly not combinable. They function according to the logic of non-exclusion where contradictory truths can exist alongside each other simultaneously.

One might accuse Greimassian semiotic theory of impoverishing simplification in dealing with cultural objects, of inventing the similarity between wholly disparate texts and actively 'saming' things that are in themselves neither similar nor different. As with other structuralist theories the similarity is generated using the theory's own tools. The model itself comes first and subsequently projects its own structure and assumptions on the entity it claims to be analysing objectively. The model of analysis is, as a result, producing the object which should have been analyzed in the first place (Currie 2004, 16).

Yet there is also a different aspect of this view, which is paradoxically helpful in dealing with Schulz. The Greimassian elementary structure of signification is, curiously enough, a more than suitable means of capturing the singularity of Schulz's fiction. Although the reader can already sense the Schulzian uniqueness on the manifestation level, expressed in the rich sensual language, where matter, intensity and proliferation dominate,

it is only on the abstract level that we can exactly pinpoint the instances of transgression. This exactitude of comparison and the precision of analysis, enabled by the Greimassian models, guarantee the validity of the unique status of Schulz's fiction.

Owing to attentiveness to the smallest details we were able to detect cracks and fissures which opened up the Greimassian model to a far more general effect, that of destabilisation. As we could observe, even the most simple statement could be the source of fissure, deforming the limits of the structure.

We can observe in Schulz a visible disjunction from the centre, the priority of the periphery, constant linguistic proliferation, dissemination and dispersion. Despite this subversive orientation he builds his fiction, paradoxically, on the "reader's act of faith" in what he is narrating. As Iribarne claims, Schulz reinvents the world anew through poetry (Iribarne 1999, 74). Yet, in order to be able to appreciate this world properly, the reader needs to forget the rules of his own universe and plunge without reservations into Schulz's cosmos. This act of unquestioned belief in what Schulz narrates reveals to the reader the possibilities of alternative and simultaneous versions of worlds that exist alongside each other and that can work to transgress those ideological limits imposed on the reader by the epoch in which he or she lives¹⁹.

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