Schulz’s Messianic Vision and its Mystical Undercurrents

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To the shadows
of mama, Devora, in Bergen Belsen,
brother, Moshe, on the fields of the Wolanowski camp,
and father, Josef, who survived Auschwitz, in Israel

‘Every deep worldview is mysticism’
— A. Schweitzer

The concept of messianism in Schulz’s work is fittingly presented by Józef, Schulz’s protagonist in the story ‘Genialna epoka’ (‘The Splendid Age’). Józef is contrasted to Szloma, a thief and a troublemaker recently released from prison. The exceptional atmosphere of the moment is tangible: it is Passover holiday, with its ‘scent of festive apartments and cinnamon’ (p. 130). Szloma felt ‘pure, unburdened, and new. The day received him…cleansed of sins, renewed, reconciled with the world’ (p. 129). This description is reminiscent of the state of man before the fall or of the state that is to come with the arrival of the Messiah and mankind’s return to its original state Only once during the year and reconciliation repeats. This process of cleansing, renewal, itself at the same time every year: ‘on the day he left prison, did Szloma feel so pure’ (p. 129), and he got out ‘on Passover itself, in the end of March or beginning of April’ (p. 128).

Space and time are unusual as well. The action takes place at Holy Trinity square (Plac Świętej Trójcy) at three o’clock in the afternoon. The square was ‘at that time empty and pure’; it ‘lay…like a new year that had not yet begun’; and ‘the silence of that three o’clock in the afternoon drew the pure white of chalk out of the buildings and spread it silently…all around the square…, extracting a reserve of whiteness from the great baroque façade of Holy Trinity’, which looks ‘like God’s enormous shirt falling from the sky’ (p. 129).

Neither is time ordinary: ‘Dusk…[is] still empty in its depth, futile and barren in its enormous expectation’ (p. 128). There is also talk of ‘days already great and perhaps too vast for this early season’ (p. 128). The day accepted Szloma into itself, ‘opened before him with a sigh the pure circles of its horizons, crowned with a quiet beauty’ (p. 129).

Thus extraordinariness is concentrated in the person of Szloma and around him. When he closes the door of the barbershop behind him, ‘the sky immediately entered into it, and all the little windows of that single-storied building’ (pp. 128–9). Szloma descended ‘the three wooden steps, refreshed and rejuvenated,…youthful despite his

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2 See for example the words of Jesus before he appeared as the Messiah: ‘Elijah will come and renew everything’ (Mat. 17: 11).
forty years (p. 128) and stood entirely alone on the edge of the great empty shell of the square…. [He] dared not violate with decision that perfect sphere of a day not wasted.’ And here in this extraordinary moment and in the state of this cosmos—Holy Trinity square—Szloma sneezed, and by this sneeze, which startled ‘doves on the police guardhouse’, ‘God let it be known…that Spring had arrived. This was a sign more certain than the return of the storks’ (p. 130).

Then the narrator, Józef, appears, and turns to Szloma: ‘Now we are alone in the entire market square, you and I’—and Szloma catches Józef’s words, answering: ‘I and you…how empty is the world today’. And Józef in turn replies: ‘We could divide it and name it anew—it lies so open, defenceless, and ownerless. On such a day the Messiah approaches the very edge of the horizon and looks from there at the world, and if he sees her so white, so quiet, with her azures and her reverie, it can happen that the boundary will get lost in his eyes…and, not knowing himself what he does, he will come down to earth. And in its reverie the earth will not even notice who has stepped down upon her roads, and people will waken from their afternoon nap and will remember nothing. All history will be as if obliterated and all will be as it was from time immemorial, before history began’ (p. 130).

The talk is thus of the anticipation of an eschatologic event; hence the mystical character of time and space. But Szloma remains indifferent, and his thoughts take an entirely different, banal direction (‘“Is Adela at home?” he asked with a smile’). Only his desire to see Józef’s drawings finally brings him to enter. But standing before them, he is dazzled and refers to the topic that had been set aside a while ago: ‘You could say…that the world passed through your hands in order to renew itself, in order to moult in them and shed its skin like a miraculous lizard. Oh, do you think that I would steal and commit thousands of insanities if the world were not so very worn out and impoverished, if things in it had not lost their gilding, the distant reflection of God’s hands? What can be done in such a world? How can one not despair, not lose heart, when everything is bolted fast, senselessly walled up and everywhere you just knock on the bricks as on the wall of a prison? Ach, Józef, you should have been born earlier (p. 131).³

Szloma, a thief, achieves the level of philosopher, unconsciously grasping Józef’s words to his mother and brother: ‘I’ve always told you that everything is blocked, walled up by tedium, not liberated’ (p. 123); like Józef, he leaves the impression of a person hemmed in—like a prisoner—in the world of history. This world has somehow lost its sense and cut itself off from him. Also like Józef he expresses a desire for the renewal of the world so that he can free himself from evil—that is, stop stealing, brawling, sinning. It also appears that he agrees with Józef that there was once, ages ago, ‘before history began’, a splendid age, an ideal world—one that was not walled up, not worn out; one that was rational, with ‘the radiance of God’s hands’ still on it. In any case he, too, finds in Józef’s drawings the possibility of the desired renewal. It seems that all is ready and awaits the realization of this renewal, that Szloma will help Józef, who calls to his relatives:”Can I cope with this flood alone, can I comprehend this del Must I, on my own, answer the millions of dazzling questions with which God is inundating me?’ (p. 123). Józef is not entirely sure of the aims of his calling, (‘As if something alien had used my inspiration for purposes unknown to me’ (p. 132)). But

³ It is worth noting that fragments of Józef’s and Szloma’s philosophizing have the same length and form (13 lines, similar sound and rhythm of the opening phrases).
Szloima had laid out these goals: the renewal and healing of a corrupted world so that he might free himself thereby from evil and sin.

However, at the decisive moment, when a deeply moved Józef shows Szloima the Authentic, he destroys everything, expressing doubts in the existence of a perfect world. In his opinion, ‘a foreign thread’ stole into the very act of creation, surprising God, causing him to leave off the task of creation; it was left unfinished and therefore imperfect.

‘So did the splendid age happen, or did it not? It’s difficult to answer. Yes and no. For there are things that cannot happen wholly and completely. They are too great to be contained in the event, and too magnificent. They just try to happen, they test the ground of reality to see whether it will carry them away’ (118–19).

Thus it is understandable that what we have here is a messianic motif with eschatological and gnostic elements: the stealing in of the ‘foreign thread’, particularly as it supposedly happened on the seventh day, when the God of the Bible already ‘rested…from all the work that He had done’ (Gen. 2: 2). However, Szloima loses interest in this matter in favour of Adela’s attire. Using the cynical pretext that he wants to liberate Józef from the power of flirtatious women, he vanishes, taking with him her dress, coral necklace, and shoes—objects whose power was demonstrated in Treatise on Mannequins.

Thus, just as a foreign thread stole into God’s work one stole into Józef’s work as well, interrupting the attempt to renew the world. The world therefore remains in its damaged state. The desire to flee from history, in this case to the beginning, ‘before history began’ (p. 130), was not fulfilled. But this very desire and the attempt to realize it points to a messianic vision of renewing the world, and therefore a religious vision, which already signals the cosmic time and space in Księga and Genialna epoka, and in their vocabulary, as it will demonstrated here.

The concept of ‘the Messiah’, and the messianic vision of ‘the Lord’s day’, ‘the last days’, ‘the new world’, etc. could be generated only within a culture possessing a concept of ‘history’ as a cause-and-effect process of events moving along linear time—a teleological process, distinguished by an all-powerful and omnipresent essence—God in monotheistic religion—Judaism in point of fact. ‘Judaism introduces a fundamental innovation. For Judaism time has a beginning and will have an end. God no longer appears in cosmic time…, but rather in irreversible historical time. Historical events take on here a new dimension, becoming theophany.’

‘The God of the Jewish people continually intervenes in history’; ‘The Hebrews were the first to discover the meaning of history as the epiphany of God.’ It was they who created the concept of ‘man’ as such and ‘humanity’ as a super-ethnic historical collectivity.

No less important is the fact that this history as divine epiphany functions in accordance with law, justice, and mercy, and thus also sin, punishment, and repentance. Even the Lord God, though omnipotent, must be guided by justice. Abraham reminds

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5 Ibid., 262.
6 Ibid., 263.
7 Compare E. Kahler, *The Meaning of History* (New York, 1968), 42: ‘The notion of man as such, as a supraethnic historical entity and of history as one, unique, coherent course of human development, originated with the Jews.’ See also: Gen. 11: 1: ‘Everyone on the earthe has the same language…’ and so on.
him in Sodom: ‘Shall not the judge of all the earth deal justly?’ (Gen. 18: 25). This is
also the source of the debate about divine justice in *The Book of Job* and the like.
In such a conception of the world, God and man, the latter is not thrown upon the whim of
fate (Judaism does not recognize this concept), or quarrels among gods, but is jointly
responsible for the creation of the historical process and the formation of his world; he is
rewarded or punished for his actions, for his participation in maintaining the
world/history in a proper state.

Judaism transferred the arena in which mankind meets God from nature to
history; man participates in the creation of history together with God, and therefore they
are both responsible, although the scope of this responsibility is not comparable. What
follows from this is not only the concept of punishment and reward for acts of evil and
good, but also a permanent desire to heal all damage to the world, a return to its original
ontological, divine, and therefore ideal state—for we are speaking of God, who is good,
as is his world.

This obligation is sanctioned in the Covenant between God and mankind as his
creation (Gen. 1: 28; 6: 18; 9: 12), with Israel as his chosen people (Gen. 15: 18)\(^8\) and
with the family of David as his chosen one (II Sam. 7: 11–16; Ps. 89: 4). The concept
of the Messiah (*Mashiach* in Hebrew) appears and develops against this background. It is
derived from the verb *mashoach* (to anoint)—to anoint a holy place or person. From this
arises the concept of the king as ‘the anointed of the Lord’—*Mashiach Adonai* (I Sam.
24: 7; 26: 11), the chosen one of God, responsible before God and his people for
maintaining justice and righteousness (the Torah), and not an incarnation of God on
earth, as was accepted in ancient mythologies and religions.

When the people of Israel sinned, they were punished and driven out of their
land. But because this is a disturbance in the divine plan, salvation must come—earthly,
national liberation and the return of Israel to its land. Salvation is of course to be in
keeping with the principles of the Covenant, and therefore the saviour must be of the
house of David, despite the fact that already in the Bible, the foreigner Cyrus, who
restored to the Israelites a certain form of independence, is called ‘Meshicho’ {Isa.45:1}—‘his Messiah’, the Messiah of the Lord.

In this way a shift occurred in the semantic concept of the Messiah: it was no
longer a ‘king/anointed one’, but was rather a ‘national saviour’ or redeemer. The
gospels also point to this. Jesus’ disciples ask him: ‘Lord, will you now rebuild the
kingdom for Israel?’ (Acts 1: 6), and after his crucifixion they lament: ‘We had thought
that he was to liberate Israel’ (Luke 24: 21). The concept of ‘the Messiah’ as the saviour
and restorer thus emerges from the situation in which the temple has been destroyed and
the people driven out—a situation requires repair that. According to Midrash (exegesis),
the Messiah was born on the day the temple was destroyed (Jerusalem Talmud: Berachot
2: 4).

Against a background of monotheism, with its conception of collective humanity
and its encounters with other banished nations, the vision of liberation quickly takes on a
universal form. After ‘the last days’ or in the ‘end of days’, which signifies the end of the

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\(^8\) Therefore, knowing in advance of the bondage in Egypt, the Lord promises Abraham liberation from it (Gen. 15:
13–14)—which he ultimately delivers (Ex. 6: 4–5).
historical epoch, condemned by sin, and the beginning of the ‘new world’, cleansing and in its original state, ‘nations will beat their swords into ploughshares’ (Isa. 2: 4; Mic. 4: 3), war will end and ‘the wolf shall dwell with the lamb’ (Isa. 11: 6).

Along with the semantic changes in the concept of the Messiah, the face of the Messiah changes as well: it takes on human and mystical features against a background of apocalyptic elements. The Messiah appears as the ‘son of man’ in the ‘heavenly clouds’ {Dan. 7:13} or as a pauper on an ass (Zechar. 9: 9–10; Matt. 21: 5–9; John 12: 13–15). In one verse of the Talmud he ‘sits at the gates of the city. There among the suffering paupers’ (Sanhedrin 98a). The city here signifies Rome, the capital of Israel’s destroyers; from the beginning of the Middle Ages it is also the capital of hostile Christianity and thus the capital of evil. In a later, folk version of the story, he lives as an ordinary person, one of the thirty-six righteous men (Sanhedrin 97b), whose righteousness, unbeknownst to them, preserves the existence of the world.

Thus various conceptions of the Messiah arose, whether immanent, earthly, and most often with national and apocalyptic features, or transcendent, divine, and universal. All of these elements and threads, along with a series of others, have fused together in hundreds of treatises, stories, legends, prayers, and folk songs sung to children in the cradle, creating a rich, folk vision of the Messiah that lives on even today. The living messianic idea has so deeply permeated all of Jewry’s cultural and emotional life that it is impossible to imagine the existence of the Jews in the Diaspora—scattered, persecuted, murdered—without it.10

But the influence of bondage, exile, and diaspora was not limited exclusively to the concept of the Messiah. It also entered into the encounter with the economies and cultures of the invaders—the Persians, Greeks, and Romans—which also affected the laws and the thinking of Judaism. The biblical law that was suited to the realities of a tiny agrarian state with a monotheistic religion did not suit the market of empire or competition with one’s neighbours. The laws and ethical restrictions of the Torah did not bind the Greeks or Romans who had settled in Israel. Holy law is eternal and may not be repealed. However, it can be interpreted. Judaism had and continues to have no dogma. Thus a sanctioned interpretation by the sages, known as the ‘oral Torah’ (Torah she-be’al peh) soon began. According to tradition, the oral Torah was given to Moses together with the tablets of the Torah, the written Torah (Torah she-be-ktav), on Mount Sinai.11

The oral Torah developed in the course of the debates among the sages and was recorded in the codices of the Mishnah and the Talmuds. If the Mishnah is almost purely

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9 ‘The world’—olam in Hebrew—in the Bible means specifically time, eon, so that ‘new world’—olam hadash—means precisely ‘new age’ a return to the original, ideal, ‘splendid age’.

10 Schulz’s drawings demonstrate this as well. He returned to this subject many times, depicting the Messiah as a hasid met on the streets of Drohobycz. Debora Vogel noted the presence of the theme of ‘messianic days’ in Schulz’s drawings in her article ‘Bruno Schulz’ (Judisk Tidskrift (Stockholm) Nov. 1930 (no. 7), 225). The journal was edited by her uncle Mordechai (a.k.a. Marcus, Marek) Ehrenpreis, who was born in Lviv and was a well-known Hebrew author and Zionist; he became the chief rabbi of Sweden and eventually began to write in Swedish. Devora Vogel also resided in Sweden at the time.

11 ‘The Lord, may he be praised, showed Moses the subtleties of the Torah [meaning, the tablets] and the subtleties of those learned in the Bible, and the interpretation of scholars of the Bible [meaning, the oral Torah]’ (Megila 19b) 19b). ‘Even what the elder pupil presents to his teachers has already been told to Moses on Mount Sinai.’ (Jerusalmi, Peya [2:4]).
statutes and morals, the Talmuds contain also legends, exegesis, and even jokes told
during discussions. The majority of these sages, Pharisees, were rather liberal (in contrast
to the conservative Sadducees), and their interpretation was far from literal. Thus for
example according to a Talmudic legend, God brought Moses to the yeshiva of Rabbi
Akivah (beginning of the second century C.E.), a famous interpreter of the scriptures,
national leader and martyr, in order to listen to the discussion of His Torah. He did not
understand a word and ‘grew dim’; that is, he became confused. It was only when rabbi
Akivah responded to a student’s question about the sources of his interpretation by
answering that it was ‘based on the Torah of Moses from Sinai’ that he returned to his
senses (Menachot 29b).

That this legend corresponds to a certain reality is demonstrated by the words of
Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount: ‘Do not think that I have come to dissolve the law
[i.e., the Torah] or the prophets: I have come not to dissolve them, but to fulfil them’—
that is to interpret them like the sages. ‘For truly I say unto you: until heaven and earth
shall come to an end not one letter or one line will pass from the law until all that has to
happen has happened’ (Matthew 5: 17–18). And despite his negative opinion of the
Pharisees, as a result of their actual behaviour, departing from the demands of the
Scriptures, and of the oral Torah, he adds: ‘Scholars in the Scriptures and Pharisees have
settled in Moses’ capital. Therefore, everything that they have commanded you to
observe, observe and do’ (Mat. 23: 2–3). Like Moses, Jesus accepts the interpretation of
the sages as binding.

This type of interpretation opened the door to allegory and hermeneutics, and
made use also of philology or pseudophilology—incorporating Greek words or concepts
or, to a lesser degree, Latin ones. This interpretation was after all taking place ‘in the
presence’ of Greek philosophy, often in dialogue with Greek ideas and concepts.

Thus for example, it is in debating the Platonic concept of creation that the
Midrash interprets the first verse of the Torah: ‘In the beginning God created…’. ‘The
Torah says: I was an instrument of the Lord, may he be praised. Ordinarily in the world a
true-born king, building a palace, does not build it according to his own knowledge, but
must know plans and sketches, how to build rooms and corridors. Thus the Holy One,
may he be praised, absorbed in the Torah, created the world. The Torah says: “In the
beginning God created…”. The beginning is the Torah’ (Bereshit Rabba 1a).

These words recall those of Plato’s Timaeus on Demiurge: ‘If a creator has his
eyes fixed on that which is unchanging when he tries to realize its form and power, and
by this makes use of the pattern, then the result is a perfect and beautiful thing. But if he
has his eyes fixed on that which has come into being and he uses this pattern, then the
result is not beautiful’ (T. 28A).12 And further: ‘If that world is beautiful, and the creator
is good, then it stands to reason that he was using an eternal pattern’ (T. 29A). In fact
‘there are no perfect things’, because they pass with time. They have no ontological
existence outside of time; they are only fleeting copies of eternal and unchanging ideas.

Plato’s demiurge created according to an eternal, unchanging eidos. The God of
creation of biblical exegesis—the Haggadah or Midrash—created according to the
Torah, which existed before creation (B.R. 1 d). In deciding to create the world, God gave
himself over to contemplation of the Torah and created the world with the help of her
letters. Thus the early Judaic tradition of exegesis (Mishnah Avot III 14; B.R. 1 a ) sees

in the Torah, in its words and letters, mystical essences, the ‘demiurgical tools’ of divine creation. With his words (‘And God said’ (Gen. 1)) God created being in nothingness; he created the world. Thus we can say in the words of Schulz, that usually: ‘We consider the modern words to be the shadow of reality, its reflection. The opposite would be more correct: reality is the shadow of the word’ (Mityzacja rzeczywistości, 368). Creation was created with the help of words—the words of the Torah, which also served as a model.

The Platonic dialogue equates the Demiurge to a painter; Judaic exegesis does so as well, influenced by the Greek thought with which it carries on a debate about creation. In this way the Creator is presented as a painter who creates the world according to a sketch—that is, the Torah. And so we read in the Talmud (Berachot 10a): ‘veein tsur keeloheinu—veein tsaiar keeloheinu.’ The exegete, taking advantage of the connection between the consonantal roots of these two words (ts—r) (interprets the biblical verse (1 Sam II 2): ‘And there is no rock (tsur) like our God’—‘And there is no painter (tsaiar) like our God.’ This depiction of the Creator as a painter with eyes fixed on the ‘eternal model’, the Torah, in creating the world, enters into the Kabbalah, into mystical Judaic cosmogony, which at a certain moment connects itself also with a messianic vision.

Even in the Talmud, there were expressions of a desire for freedom that extended beyond pragmatic, national aspirations to liberation. This was an expression of utopian, eschatological desires—for the negation of kingdoms, of political power, and even for the disappearance of obligations and privileges. ‘With the arrival of the Messiah kingdoms will disappear from the earth’ (Midrash Zuta, Canticum A) proclaimed one of the sages; ‘The days of the Messiah will be without privileges and without obligation’ (Shabbat 151a) proclaim another. A verse of the Mishnah Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) expresses this desire even more strongly. Citing the biblical verse: ‘The tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tablets’ (Ex. 32:16), the interpreter makes a play on words, demanding: ‘do not read charut [‘graven’] but rather cheirut [‘freedom’], explaining: ‘for there is no freedom without study of the Torah’ (P A 6:2). The Christian says something similar, identifying the already invalidated Torah with the New Testament, which he calls ‘the perfect law of liberty’ (Epistle of St. James, 1:25;2:12).

The Midrash goes farther, interpreting charut–cheirut as ‘freedom from slavery, from the angel of death’ (Ex. R. 41). A kabbalist of the thirteenth century adds: ‘from the oppression and domination of that world, from all earthly matters and from every evil’ (Zohar, Mishpatim). That anarchistic-spiritual desire to conquer history, and the arena of human oppression, appears also in Hegelian and Marxist secular thought. The

13 In Hebrew, ‘ot’ (letter) means rather ‘sign’; this sense is not contained in the Latin ‘letter’.
14 Tsur is Hebrew for rock, power, support; hence Jesus’ words to Simon (Mat. 16:18): ‘You are Peter [Greek petrus=stone, rock], and upon this rock I shall build my church.’
15 It is worth noting that the concept of the ‘law of freedom’ also expresses the anarchistic-spiritual desire for freedom that was very strong in primitive Christianity. ‘Christ liberated us so that we could live in that freedom’ wrote Paul to the Galatians (5:1). And further: ‘creation itself will be liberated from the slavery of corruption and enter the praiseworthy freedom of God’s children (Romans 8:21). But as the leader, albeit spiritual, of a community that was organizing itself, he had to tame those desires, to refrain from realizing them, saying: ‘Everything is permitted to me, but not everything is useful. Everything is permitted to me, but I will not allow myself to be enslaved to anything’ (Corinthians 6:12). ‘Everything is permitted, but not everything is useful. Everything is permitted, but not everything is constructive’ (Corinthians 10:23). (This is reminiscent of the dialectic of the communists after they came to power.)
latter speaks of abolition of the state when the Marxist idea is realized, which indicates that this is a general human phenomenon, taking on, as it will be demonstrate, various forms of appearance. In the Kabbalah, as mentioned above, the messianic desire was woven into cosmogony.

The sanctioning of the oral Torah, and then the hermeneutics of the Haggadah and Midrash, made possible the mystical–philosophical–cosmogonic speculation of the kabbalah, leading eventually even to the verge of heresy. In seeking the liberation of the world and humankind from evil, the kabbalists (at least beginning with the classical kabbalah of Provence in the thirteenth century), did not go forward with history to ‘the final days’, ‘the end of days’ or the apocalyptic messianism, but returned instead to Bereshit—to the beginning of creation, to the primitive ‘prehistoric epoch’, or as Józef put it, to the time ‘before history began’ (p. 130), when the world was still pure, emerging from the hands of the Creator. They believed their calling—and the calling of humankind in general—is to restitute the corrupted world, to return it to the state of “full” spiritual perfection, as if to the ontological originality of the times of the sixdays of creation. Such a renewal, a return of the world to wholeness, will also bring humankind’s liberation from all evil, force, obligation, and even from law—for law will be superfluous, together with the abolition of history and the return to the ‘splendid age’ of the beginning.

The cause of this kabbalah was thus a universal cause, the cause of man as an individual, the cause of the his liberation and renewal, and not ‘congealed mythology of peoples and histories’, to use the words that Schulz himself used in a letter to Tuwim (417). A true national moment, of apocalyptic messianic thought, the cause of liberating the Jewish people, appears first in the Lurianic kabbalah under the influence of the shock of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492. But even here the national question is only one of the aspects of the phenomenon. The expulsion of the Jewish people, with all its reality, is also a symbol of the state of humankind in the world, of the world itself, and even of God. Luria became convinced of this through a new ‘observation’ of the act of creation.

According to the kabbalah—not without the influence of neo-Platonist philosophy—the creation occurred through a certain form of the spiritual emanation of God, through creative powers in various aspects or hypostases (Sefirot) emerging from the hidden God (Deus obscundis), the Ein-sof (the infinite), which is also identified with the Torah. As mentioned above, in desiring to create, God became absorbed in the Torah and its words and letters, and taking on a mytho-creative form, he proceeded to

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16 Thus proclaimed for example Eugeniusz B. Paszukanis, the director of the department of law at the Communist Academy and author of the famous theory that ‘The phenomenon of law belongs entirely…to the historical manifestations of the epoch of production of commodities’; therefore, ‘in communist society, the law, like the state,…must wither away. The very existence of law, even Soviet law, indicates that we are dealing with a transition period.’ In communist society, ‘mutual relations between people…will not be mediated by juridical categories’ (L. Kolakowski, Główne nurtu marksizmu. Powstanie–rozwój–rozpad (Paris, 1978),vol.iii. 57–8. Kolakowski also points to messianic elements in the work of Karol Korsch: the abolition of science, state, law, money, family, ethics, religion, etc. (ibid., 318), and of Ernst Bloch—particularly his book Geist der Utopie (1918). On the ninetieth anniversary of his birth G.Cholem published a characteristic article in the weekly Der Spiegel (7 July 1975, 110–114) entitled ‘Wohnt Gott im Herzen eines Atheisten? Zu Ernst Blochs 90 Geburtstag

create. But this is not the Torah of revelation, the written Torah, but the Torah kedumah—the original, primeval Torah, spiritual, metaphysical, transcendental and undefined. The tradition of the existence of the oral Torah in a sense made possible the existence of the transcendental primeval Torah as well—paired with the hidden God, whom no human eye—not even that of Moses—has ever seen, ‘for man may not see me, that he may live’ (Ex. 33: 20). The tablets of the Torah of revelation were inscribed on both sides (Ex. 32: 15), and according to a Talmudic exegete ‘white fire was inscribed in black fire’ (Yerushalmi, Shkalim, 6 a ; Sota, 8c). For the kabbalist, the letters of white fire were invisible, metaphysical, not limited and not limiting the letters of the transcendental primeval Torah (kedumah). But the letters of black fire were visible, and thus had a limited and limiting form. These were the letters of the Torah of revelation, the Bible, containing laws, obligations, and prohibitions. The relationship of the latter to the former is like that of flame to fire; that is, the Bible is secondary to the metaphysical primeval Torah, the Book-Authentic, which is, to use Schulz’s language, full of ‘the immeasurability of the transcendent’. It is precisely that original Torah—the Authentic—that God used as a model for creation, and that contained ‘sketches of the worlds’ (tsiyur haolamot).

According to one version the metaphysical letters did not want to take on the form of physical letters, to willingly transform themselves into limiting laws and obligations, into the material, corrupt world. But how and where did that corruption begin, if God created the world from his spirit, brought it forth from himself, complete and pure? This matter is troublesome for neo-Platonists, theologists, and mystics—both Jewish and Christian. According to Plotyn: ‘One is perfect, for it seeks nothing else and needs nothing; it overflowed to some extent, and its overflow brought about something else.’ Hypostases arose from it unintentionally: ‘That which is after the First, is out of necessity, and thus a remainder, it is thus material possessing nothing of Good.’ From the assertion that hypostases are degrees of degradation, it follows that the material world is degraded reality. But in the degraded reality of the earthly, material world, there remains a certain harmony—an echo of heavenly harmony but the best possible in the material world. Evil is not a real existence, but the absence of good and the necessary ingredient of the harmony of opposites in the cosmos, which as a whole is good. More accurately, evil is only an illusion in the face of the perfect whole.

This theodicy is typical for the Greek-pagan who is unfamiliar with the conception of restitution. It was a model for many philosophers, including Leibniz. Christian and Jewish theologists also accept the thesis of the illusory character of evil, which is the absence of good, adding the cause of sin and ruin. But the Christian as an individual can achieve a return to the original, pure state thanks to redemption through Christ, despite the fact that the world is still corrupt. The Jew, however, cannot achieve it

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18 In the Christian tradition this view of creation is evident in the gospel of St. John: ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the word was with God, and God was the Word’; here we see a reflection of the views of Philo of Alexandria, who identified the transcendental Torah with divine Sophia (see Filon Aleksandryjski, ‘O stworzeniu świata’ in his Pisma, vol. I (Warszawa, 1986). The echo of this gospel is evident in Schulz’s words in Mityzacja rzeczywistości: ‘Old cosmogonies expressed the maxim that in the beginning was the word’ (365), and ‘reality is the shadow of the word.’ (368).
20 Ibid. 1, VIII, 7. [Vol.1,p 130]
Judaism does not recognize the concept of salvation ['

odkupienie'], but recognizes rather redemption ['

zbawienie'] through human acts of forgiveness, reconciliation, goodness, on both the individual and the communal level, and the arrival of the Messiah, who has not yet come. All of this is to take place in the public sphere. The return of the world to its original, ontological, ‘pure’ state is thus a human matter, although of course the help of God is needed here. This is a postulate of man, for corruption comes not from God, but from the created world. Kabbalists took upon themselves to return to the world and to humankind complete purity, to raise him to the heights of ideal spiritual life. With the achievement of this task—that is, with the return of the world to its original, pure state, the laws and obligations of the Torah of revelation will be superfluous. Spiritual freedom will be absolute—like ‘the freedom of God’s children’ of the New Testament.

But the shock of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain led to a new vision of the causes of evil. The kabbalist rabbi Isaac Luria, known as Ha-ari, came to the seemingly gnostic, nearly heretical conclusion, that corruption did not come about in the created world, but rather in the Heavens, with God, as the result of a catastrophe at the time of the creation. The Lurianic kabbalah states that when the Infinite God (the Ein-Sof), hidden in his highest attribute (deus absconditus), decided to bring forth the world of creation from his infiniteness through the Sefirot (hypostases), he contracted in order to make room for creation. Into this empty created space, the Sefirot began to radiate in pairs that sustained the world through their interaction. At a certain moment the excess of this divine radiation, in creating light, led to the ‘shattering of the vessels’ (shevirat hakeilim) serving creation. The shards of these shattered vessels, falling to the bottom of the world, incorporate in themselves the forces of evil and darkness, subjugating the divine light of the ‘six days of creation’. Thus nothing in the world, not even certain aspects of God, such as the Shechinah, is ‘complete’ or ‘pure’; everything is in a state of exile. The state of the nation of Israel is a magnified symbol of the state of the world, of humankind, and even of God the creator. The Shechinah in exile symbolizes the state of exile of Israel, the world, humankind, and the God of creation. In the words of Szloma we could say that God ‘felt…an alien element in his hands and, horrified, drew his hand back from the world’ (133).

This myth of cosmic catastrophe, characteristic of Lurianic Kabbalah, was very widespread in Jewish folk culture and penetrated deep into the spiritual life of the Jewish nation; it became a living element, a stimulus to the conscious striving for restitution. But if this happened during creation, then in the words of the narrator of Schulz’s Ksiega,(Book) we could ask ‘What is the splendid age and when was it?’ (118). And further: ‘Did the splendid age occur or did it not occur? It is difficult to say. Yes and no. For there are things that completely, utterly, cannot happen. They are too great to be contained in happening, and too magnificent. They only try to happen, they test the ground of reality, to see if it can bear them. And they soon withdraw, fearing to lose their integrality in the deformity of realization’ (118–19).

These are failed ‘attempts at incarnation’, failed attempts to renew the ‘splendid age’. ‘But’ says Schulz’s narrator, ‘in a certain sense it is contained whole and integral in
each of its deformed and fragmentary incarnations…. It was, and nothing will take away from us that certainty, that luminous taste that we still have on our tongues… (119).

The gnostic, knowing of the eternal character of the evil that is embedded in the world, turns from corporeal reality and acquires knowledge (gnosis) in order to return to God. The Lurianic kabbalist, who knows of the catastrophe of ‘the shattering of the vessels’, of the power of evil, does not accept corruption as a definitive fact and does not run from that world, but awaits its restitution. Humankind must accomplish this restitution with divine help, or the other way around, God must accomplish it, but not without the ‘help’ of humankind. As it is mentioned above, Judaism demands responsibility of humankind, jointly with God, for the creation of the world of history. The kabbalists seemingly added here joint responsibility for the cosmos, for the cleansing of evil from it, and thereby also for the removal of the ‘walls’ of laws and obligations from it. Humankind’s calling to complete the repair—the tikkun—is emphasized again and again.

Thus proclaimed for example rabbi Moshe Cordovero (1522 – 1570), who was known as the Ramak and considered the Spinoza of the Kabbalah, that: ‘Unification on high is entirely dependent on man’22, on his behaviour and actions, on his achievement of moral perfection. And rabbi Mendel of Kosów (1768–1825) expressed it in the typical maxim of a tsadik: ‘The Messiah is delaying his appearance: for today, too, we are still as we were yesterday.’

For even if the ‘splendid age’ never was, the plan for a perfect world existed in ‘The Book’ of the pre-Torah. It is as if the kabbalists were saying: ‘It was, and nothing can take that certainty, that luminous flavour, away from us’ (119), and the longing for that lost heaven, in truth only hypothetical, produced a myth-creating philosophical articulation that painted a renewed, perfect world.

The stories ‘Księga’ (The Book) and ‘Genialna Epoka’ (The Splendid Age) are connected to this philosophical tradition by the fact that the myth of the renewal of the world, or the creation of a regenerated world, appear in them. It is not coincidental that the story ‘Traktat o manekinach’ (Treatis on Tailors’ Dummies) has a subtitle: ‘The Second Book of Genesis’. We are dealing here with a ‘secondary creation’, connected in these stories with the arrival of the Messiah, and which, according to the Kabbalah, symbolizes the ‘renewal of the world’. The character of the ‘Book-Authentic’ (Księga-Autentyk) likewise points to kabbalistic threads. It is characterized by ‘the immeasurability of the transcendent’, ‘the incalculable splendour’; it existed ‘somewhere at the dawn of childhood; at the first light of life the horizon brightened from her gentle light’ (105); ‘This was very long ago. Mother was not yet there’ (106). The Book thus overtook the mother; nevertheless Józef knows of her earlier existence and her countenance: ‘the horizon brightened from her gentle light’, which recalls the light of ‘the six days of creation’, the symbol of the great light, of the brilliance (Zohar). According to Isaiah (30: 26): ‘…and the light of the sun shall become sevenfold, like the light of the seven days, when the Lord will bind up the wounds of His people…’. According to the Zohar, that light became ‘hidden from the wicked of that world’, and

21 Julian the Apostate referred to a certain gnostic myth, which proclaimed: ‘That never happened, it is however eternally real.’ (Quoted in G. Quispel, Gnoza, transl. B. Kita (Warszawa, 1988),p 97.
the Lord will kindle it again with the arrival of the Messiah, with the renewal of the perfect world.

The foundation of Schulz’s art is that ‘our most sober concepts and definitions are distant offshoots of myths’, that ‘there is not a fragment of any of our ideas that did not derive from mythology, a mythology that has been transformed, crippled, remoulded’, that ultimately ‘all poetry is mythologizing, striving for the recreation of myths of the world; the mythologization of the world is not yet finished’, and so on (366–7).

When we understand this credo, which is repeated in various of his statements about art, we have to agree, that we are dealing here with myth and its representative features.

The narrator himself informs the reader of the use of substitution and representation: ‘The phenomenon of representation and substitution of existence is taking place here. An event can be small and simple in terms of its provenance and its own resources, but even so…a higher existence endeavours to express itself in it and shines fiercely in it’ (119). The ‘higher existence’ in this case is the ‘splendid age’, whose ‘allusions, those earthly approximations’ (119) ‘we will then gather,’as Jozef, the narrator promises us. It is worth noting that the ‘phenomenon of representation and substitution of existence’ is widespread in all mystical literature, including Jewish. For the kabbalists even the Bible without the transcendental Torah deeply latent within it is ‘empty’, and contains substituted events and phenomena, in contrast to the transcendental Torah, the Pre-Torah, which manifests the glory of the Lord (Ex. 24: 17), which was hidden even to Moses, ‘for man may not see me and live’ (Ex. 33: 20).

Schulz’s ‘Księga’ also contains allusions to the latter: we find there the ‘immeasurability of the transcendent’, and the Book itself is ‘full of glory’; compared to it the Bible is only a ‘contaminated apocrypha, a thousandth copy, a badly done forgery’ (108). This is also the source of the Father’s negative attitude towards the Book, his striving for its negation: ‘In fact only books exist. The Book is a myth in which we believe in our youth, but with the passage of time it stops being taken seriously’ (108).

The generation of the positivists (the generation of the Father) believed in education, science, and rationalism, and denied all mysticism. Even the great Jewish historian Graetz, who had overcome positivism, from his position of spiritual enlightenment, considered Kabbalah to be deception, or, in the best case, self-deception by its creators. Kabbalah, like Hasidism, was hated in enlightened circles and seen as primitive and anti-intellectual. This approach changed only at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. Schulz’s Jozef already thinks differently:

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23 For example, the Zohar says: ‘And he who says that the stories of the Torah speak only of themselves, let him breathe his last. For if this is so, then this is not the sublime Torah, the Torah of truth.’ Did God have nothing to make the Torah out of, ‘that He collected the prattle of ordinary people?’ The Torah of revelation is ‘the nut’, but the nut is not the shell, but the inside.’ (Mishnat haZohar, ed. I. Tishby (Jerusalem, 1961) Vol 2. p 368. See also Gershom G. Cholem: The Meaning of the Tora in Jewish Mysticism’ in: On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism n.y 1965 pp.32-86. Rabbi Nachman of Bractlaw, the leading writer of Hasidic stories, made similar statements.

24 See H. Graetz, Volkstumliche Geschichte der Juden, vol. 2, 6th edn p.477, 477. Among the small group of people who changed their approach to Jewish mysticism we should mention Adolf Jellinek, who published Beiträge zur Geschichte der Kabbala, vols. i–ii, in Lipsk as early as 1852. A year later he published a Hebrew-language book of kabbalistic texts, with a section in German: Auswahl kabbalistischer Mystik (Leipzig, 1853). A less important author who nevertheless should be mentioned because it is possible that he was one of Schulz’s sources is Dr Marcus Ehrenpreis, the above-mentioned uncle of Debora Vogel; his 1895 doctorate was titled ‘Die Entwicklung der Emanationslehre in der Kabbala des XIII Jahrhunderts’ (Frankfurt am Main), and the foreword begins with the declaration that his work ‘opens the next sphere of study of the existence of Kabbalah and the history of its
'At the time I already had other opinions; I knew that the Book was a postulate, that it was an assignment. I felt the burden of a great mission on my shoulders’ (108). Even the external state of the Book: ‘a scrap, in a sad state’, ‘its unofficial addition, a rear annex full of trash and odds and ends’ (110), did not darken his eye and spirit.

Others, blinded by education, impoverished by the sin of progress and industry (111–12), by the ‘charlatan-grumblers’ (114), by the anthroposophy-taming of people (114–15), and so on, immersed in the world of commerce of the Street of the Crocodile (in mysticism the crocodile symbolizes Egypt, black magic, impulse, impurity, and thus evil), could not appreciate the Book. It is no surprise therefore that Józef felt lonely. Schulz was writing about something similar to Tadeusz Breza: ‘I need a companion. I need the closeness of a kindred person. I long for some guarantee of the internal world, whose existence I postulate. Just to carry it in my own faith, to lift it despite everything by the force of my humility, is a labour and torment of Atlas. At times it seems to me that with this strenuous gesture of lifting I carry nothing on my shoulders…. I need an associate in these exploratory undertakings.’25 But Józef, despite his loneliness, appreciated the Book—if only as a youth not yet accustomed to compromises, if only as a chosen one exalted by wisdom, like his biblical prototype.26 Thus he believed in it, and knew when he found it that ‘This was the Authentic, the sacred original, although deeply humiliated and degraded’ (115). So it is understandable that he hid the scrap of paper deep in the drawer and that it seemed to him to be ‘the aurora’ put down to sleep, ‘which constantly re-lit itself from within…and did not want to die out’ (115). The light of creation, that is of the Higher Torah (‘Eliona’), of the Pre-Torah (‘Kedumah’), ‘lit up the world from one end to the other’. And being the light of ‘the Book’, it is ontologically, eternally, and unchangingly, ‘closed only to the wicked of that world’, hidden in ‘the Book’, ‘the Authentic’, ‘the Sacred Original’.

So it is not surprising that Józef says: ‘I have become indifferent to all books!’ (115). For ‘ordinary books are like meteors. Each of them has only a while…’ (115), and

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development’. In his work he notes the hitherto negative attitude toward the Kabbalah and the fact that it was considered ‘dark’, and stresses that Adolf Jellinek was ‘almost the only scholar who in his serious and objective studies attempts to take up the problems of the Kabbalah’. This pronouncement was repeated by Gershon Sholem, who referred to Jellinek as ‘one of the small band of nineteenth century Jewish scholars who probed deeper into the problem of Jewish mysticism’ (G. Sholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism (New York, 1965),p.164). As if symbolically, in a letter of 6 August 1895 written in Skole to Micha Josef Berdyczewski, the famous Hebrew-writer and close friend of Jerzy Żulawski from their years of study in Brno, Ehrenpreis recalls the end of the revisions of that doctorate. He was in Skole with his fiancee and sisters, that is with the Deborah Vogel’s mother. Her 21 May 1938 letter to Shulz, first published by Jerzy Ficowski, begins: ‘The scenery of this letter is…Skole—the road from Skole to Chorostowiec…’ (B. Schulz, Księga listów, ed. J. Ficowski (Kraków, 1975 p.170). Sadly, occupied as he was with politics, literature, and his work as a rabbi, Ehrenpreis did not continue his work on the Kabbalah, as he had intended to, but his interest in Jewish mysticism and Hasidism did not end. In 1933 he fulfilled his dreams and set out from the village of Jaremcze in the eastern Carpathians in the footsteps of the Ba’al Shem Tov with Stanisław Vincenza and his Swiss friend Hans Zbinden. Earlier, during that visit to Poland he stayed with family in Lwów. Deborah Vogel stayed with Ehrenpreis in Stockholm in 1930, and it was there that he published (and probably translated) her article on Schulz the painter. Therefore we could consider the possibility that Schulz took his inspiration also from Ehrenpreis.

25 B. Schulz, Księga listów, 26.

26 The name ‘Józef’ in Hebrew ‘Josef’, means ‘more’, ‘additionally’; the biblical Joseph was wiser than his brothers and was a ‘master of dreams’, as they liked to call him in their jealousy (Gen. 37: 19). Later he did in fact interpret the dreams of Pharaoh (Ex. 41). His father called him ‘the crown of his brothers’ (‘nzir echav’) (Gn. 49: 26; Dt. 32:16).
they soon turn to ash. And even in this state ‘with bitter resignation we sometimes wander through those cold pages…, their dead words’ (116). Books, perhaps also including the Bible, are just ‘dead words’. Only the mystical unveiling of the higher, true, ontological content will lead to liberation from dead words, will lead to cheiruit (freedom) from the engraved lettering, and thus lead to the Authentic—free of all limitations, eternally alive.

It is surely not an exaggeration to say that Józef seemingly referred to the exegetes of the Kabbalah when he said, remembering, moment of ascent returns to its old source. This means that the book diminishes and the ‘The exegetes of the Book assert that all books strive towards the Book. they live only a borrowed life, which at the Authentic increases’ (116). And only the fear of fatiguing the reader keeps Józef from ‘teaching the Doctrine’; he contents himself with the remark that ‘the Authentic lives and grows’ (116). The earthly existence of books changes over time; they make their appearance, they become deformed, and in the end they disappear. The Book on the other hand has an existence that is eternal, ontological, pure, and full.

Anna Csillag, the ‘apostle of hairiness’ (110) and Magda Wang, with her tight décolletage, whose ‘specialty is to break the strongest character’ and who laughs at masculine resoluteness and principle’ (114) are representatives of mythological evil—of Eros, embodied in such figures as Eve, Delilah, or Adela. Assisted in the twentieth century by commercial advertising, these women arrive, are fleetingly present, and disappear. ‘When we next open our scrap of paper, who knows where Anna Csillag and her followers will be’ (116). But the Book is unchanging. It is an idea, a logos, a map of a full and pure world, an ideal called to restitution, to renewal. Therefore ‘we return to the Authentic’ and in principle we can say together with Józef: ‘But we never let it go’. Somewhere deep in our souls we are always striving towards it, for it is always alive. It develops during reading and ‘has boundaries open on all sides to all fluctuations and currents’ (117–18), like the pre-Torah in the conception of the mystic-Kabbalists, which exists under the Torah of the Bible and always demands symbolic interpretation. In fact, in Judaism all Torah is open to interpretation and exegesis—as presented above. However, there are differences: the Torah of the tablets is open to juridical interpretation and legendary or ethical exegesis. But the pre-Torah, or the Book, is ‘open to all fluctuations and currents’ and ‘develops during reading’.

‘Genialna epoka’ is thus a kind of ‘Secondary Book of Genesis’27, a return to primordial times: its scenery is truly full of allusions to biblical events. Renewal, condemnation, ‘the pillar of fire’—we find all of these in the Bible. There is ‘thunder and lightning and a thick cloud upon the mountain’ (Ex. 19: 16), there ‘Mount Sinai was covered in smoke, for the Lord had come down upon it in fire (Ex. 19: 18), and He came down so that Israel would renew itself, would accept the Torah. But man sins, and then comes the flood, the cleansing and renewal after sin, and Noah’s ark with the animals. ‘Did they wait for me to name them?’ (125) asks Józef, like a second Adam (‘Then Adam gave names to all the cattle and to the birds’ (Gen. 2:20)). And Józef goes on: ‘Then I understood what I had to do…. I drew in great haste…. Oh, those luminous drawings, shooting up seemingly from someone else’s hand… (123). This is a kind of re-creation of the ‘end of days’ in order to renew the world, for ‘everything is blocked,

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27 See ‘Traktat o manekinach, albo Wtóra Księga Rodzaju’, which begins with the words ‘Demiurgos—said father—did not have a monopoly on creation. Creation is the privilege of all souls.’
walled up by boredom, not freed. And now look, what an outpouring, what a blossoming of everything, what bliss…” (123). Józef does this alone. He has no help, like the Lord or like Adam (‘But for Adam no help was found’ (Gen. 2: 20)). Also the timing of this creative activity and the expectation of the arrival of the Messiah are important - the action takes place close to the Jewish holiday of Passover.

We are speaking here of the renewal of the world—imitatio dei—and this takes place only at a certain moment: the end of the year is ‘the end of the world’ and the new year is its renewal. ‘The new year converges with the first day of creation…. With every new new year the cosmogony is renewed, and with this action time, too, comes into being, regenerates itself, and begins anew. The cosmogonic myth is thus the model for all creation….28 For the mystic ‘life cannot be repaired; it can only be re-created by the symbolic renewal of the cosmogony, for the cosmogony is the model for all creation’.29 ‘For the religious person of archaic cultures…a “new” time could come into being with each new year—a “pure” and “sacred” time, for it was not yet worn out.’30 In general, the religious person strives periodically towards the archetype, towards ‘pure’ states, and the tendency towards the return to the first moment, to the repetition of what happened ‘at the beginning’, originates in this effort.31 He needs this return to the archetype because according to ‘the primitive conception of ontology’, objects or actions become real only to the extent that they imitate or repeat the archetype. In this way reality is achieved only through repetition or participation: any thing without a model is ‘nonsensical’, which means that it has no reality.32 As Eliade himself indicates, to the modern psychologist this looks like a desire to return to childhood, ‘a refusal to accept responsibility for authentic and historical existence, a yearning for a ‘heavenly’ situation precisely because it was an embryonic situation, insufficiently distinguished from nature’.33

And Schulz expressed just that sentiment in his letter to Plesniewicz:‘The kind of art that I’m particular about is precisely a regression, a return to childhood. If it were possible to retard development, to reach a second childhood by some kind of circuitous road, to once against have its plenitude and boundlessness, it would be a realization of the “splendid age”, of the “messianic times” that all mythologies prophesy and pledge to us. My ideal is to “mature” into childhood. Only then would there be true maturity.’(424)

But this is not an expression of individual infantilism; rather it is an expression of the universal human longing for liberation from history, as indicated above. The real and natural longing pushes mankind to dream of freeing itself from the burden of history, of liberating itself from social ‘blocking’ and ‘walling up’, of a return to ‘the beginning’. Therefore ‘man will periodically strive to regain that beginning time. That ritualistic re-actualization of ‘that time’, the first epiphany of reality, is at the foundation of every sacral calendar: the holiday is not a ‘commemoration’ of a mythical (and therefore religious) event—it is its re-actualization’.34 And further: ‘During the holiday the sacral dimension of life is recovered in full, the holiness of human existence as a work of God

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28 Eliade, Sacrum, mit, historia, 125.
29 Ibid., 108.
30 Ibid., 102.
31 M. Eliade, Religia, literatura i komunizm, transl. A. Zagajewski (London, 1990), 19.
32 M. Eliade, Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return (New York, 1959), 34.
33 Eliade, Sacrum, mit, historia, 115.
34 Ibid., 106.
is experienced. Through the rest of time mankind is subject to forgetting about what is most important.\textsuperscript{35}

There is a particular holiday—the New Year—on which one returns to the beginning, to the creation, and it is not through ‘commemoration’, but through ‘happening’. ‘Longing for the beginning is thus a religious longing. Mankind desires...also to live in a new light, pure and powerful, such as came out of the hands of the creator.’ And further: ‘That pre-situation does not belong to historical order, cannot be placed in a chronology; we are speaking here of mythical anteriority, of the time of beginnings, about what happened on earth “in the beginning”, \textit{in principio}.\textsuperscript{36} It app’ears as though Schulz was referring to this concept of re-creation in ‘Genialna epoka’, mindful of course of the existence of historical time: distributed, divided up, shared out.... Can it be that time was too narrow for all of the ‘Ordinary facts are arranged in time, strung across its span as on a string. There they have their antecedents and their consequences.... But what to do with events that came too late, when all of time was already events? Can it happen that all places in time were sold out?’ (120)

It turns out, however, that the ‘free time’ that the narrator needed was found in the end in ‘the parallel strands of time in double-track time..., offshoots of time’ (121), unusual to be sure, ‘slightly illegal it is true, and problematic, but when one is carrying such contraband...such a supernumerary event impossible to classify, one cannot be overly particular’ (121). The narrator was forced to ‘develop such an offshoot at some point in history’ (121), and as it turns out, not coincidentally, that point comes during the Jewish Pessah.

Because Pessah is at once: a holiday of the new year, a holiday of the liberation from Egypt, and the arrival of the expected Messiah, who is to bring the ultimate eschatological liberation of the Jewish people, and of all humanity, put an end to history, and return the ‘splendid age’—original, pure, free of all laws, blockages, and walls. Pessah begins on the fourteenth of Nisan according to the lunar Jewish calendar, and therefore on the full moon, and it lasts for a week. According to the European calendar it comes ‘at the end of March or the beginning of April’, when Szloma got out of prison (128). The month of Nisan is the first month (Esth 3: 7), and therefore the month of ‘first fruits’ in the Sumerian, Acadian, and Aramaic languages. The Hebrew word \textit{nitsan} whose connection to Nisan has not been proven, appears only once in the Bible, in the Song of Songs (2: 12)\textsuperscript{37}; it means buds, blossoming, flowers, and is thus connected with spring, with the beginning of the year.

The Lord says (Ex. 12: 2): ‘This month will be for you the beginning of months, it will be for you the first among the months of the year.’ In the Talmud, according to rabbi Jehoshua: ‘In Nisan the world was created, for it was said (Gen. 1: 12): “And the earth brought forth vegetation”’ (Rosh Hashanah 11a). On the first day of that month the waters of the flood began to dry up (Gen. 8:13). In the Bible this month is called ‘Aviv’ (in the transcription of Indo-European languages, ‘Abib’), which means :bud, fresh,unripe ears of corn —and thus springtime—and is used in the living Hebrew

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 112–13.
\item \textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 114.
\item \textsuperscript{37} ‘The blossoms have appeared in the land, the time of singing has come and the cooing of the ring-doves is heard in our land.’
\end{itemize}
language.\textsuperscript{38} But it is also connected with the liberation from slavery in Egypt. ‘Today you go out,’\textsuperscript{39} in the month of Abib’ (Gen. 13: 4); ‘for in the month of Abib you went forth from Egypt’ (Ex. 23: 15), which does not nullify the elements of nature: ‘feast’, ‘harvest’, ‘first fruits’ (Ex. 23: 16). This moment becomes a living memory of the people: ‘Observe the month of Abib…for it was in the month of Abib that the Lord your God brought you out of Egypt’ (Deut. 16: 1); ‘For seven days you shall eat…unleavened bread, the bread of affliction, so that you may remember the day of your departure from Egypt all the days of your life’ (Deut. 16: 3).

Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki), the most respected traditional commentator of the scriptures, interprets the verse ‘That night was for the Lord a vigil to bring them out of the land of Egypt’ (Ex. 12: 42) in this way: ‘It was on that night that the Holy One, praised be He, said to Abraham: “On that night I deliver your sons from Egypt’, referring to the words of the Lord at the time of the act of covenant: “…your seed shall be in a foreign land, and they shall subjugate them in slavery, and oppress them…, and then they will go out from there’ (Gen. 15: 13–14).’ Thus the night of Pessah is also the night of the covenant that obligates the Lord to liberate Israel from Egypt. And because it is necessary to remember this slavery and salvation ‘all the days of our lives’, Egypt has become a symbol of slavery, and Pessah a symbol of liberation and redemption. Thus was created myth, which is outside of time, an eternal present referring to the situation throughout all times, and thus through the arrival of the Messiah. It could be demonstrated here that Pessah was already a holiday of waiting for the arrival of the Messiah during the period of the second temple.

Rabbi Jehoshua, who said in a commentary that ‘The world was created in Nisan’, says also: ‘In Nisan they were liberated…in Nisan they will be liberated’ (Rosh Hashanah 11a). And the Midrash interprets the verse ‘Az yashir Moshe’ (Ex. 15: 1) not in the accepted manner according to the grammar of biblical language: ‘Then Moses began to sing’, but literally, in the future tense: ‘Then Moses will begin to sing’, for the miracle at the Red Sea is an archetype of the future, final liberation, which will come with the arrival of the Messiah.\textsuperscript{40}

In his essay ‘Figura’, Erich Auerbach points to this form of interpretation—in categories of prophetism of the future—in various literatures, and particularly in that of the Church fathers. A certain event prefigures another, even one that was until now unexpected, which may be more important or of deeper significance.\textsuperscript{41} Another Midrash connects the arrival of the Messiah with springtime through the interpretation of verses from the ‘Song of Songs’: ‘The voice of my beloved, here he

\textsuperscript{38} Similarly in Indo-European languages: ‘wiosna’ (‘Spring’) comes from ‘vasanta’, cf. the Sanskrit vas = ‘to light’, ‘joyful’; the German ‘Frühling’ from ‘früh’, meaning ‘early’ or ‘first’; the English ‘Spring’ also means ‘to jump’, ‘to gush’, ‘to sprout’, or ‘source-beginning’ as etymological dictionaries indicate. We should add that the Hebrew ‘shana’ (‘year’) also means ‘repetition’.

\textsuperscript{39} ‘On the Easter holiday itself…Szloma, son of Tobiasz, came out of prison’ (128). ‘Only once a year, on the day he left prison, did Szloma feel so pure, unburdened, and new’ ((129).

\textsuperscript{40} Mekhilta d’rabbi Ishmael, ed.S. Horovitz and A Rabin (Jerusalem, 1960),p 116.

\textsuperscript{41} ‘Figural prophecy implies the interpretation of one worldly event through another, the first signifies the second, the second fulfills the first. Both remain historical events; yet both, looked at in this way, have something provisional and incomplete about them, they point to one another and both point to something in the future, something still to come which will be the actual, real and definitive event… Thus history, with all its concrete force, remains for ever a figure, cloaked and needful of interpretation (E. Auerbach, Scenes from the Drama of European Literature (New York, 1959),p.58.
comes’ (Song of Songs 2: 8). The Messiah, as he arrives, says to Israel ‘in this month you will be freed…the rain is passed and gone’ (Song of Songs 2: 11)—which refers to the enslavement of peoples. ‘Flowers have appeared in the land, the time of singing has come’ (song of Songs 2: 12)—the time of the liberation of Israel has come…, the time has come for Edom [the kingdom of evil] to disappear, the time has come for the revelation of the kingdom of heaven..., and to listen to the voice of the dove—it is the voice of the King-Messiah, who calls and says: “Arise, my sweetheart, my beauty, come away” (Song of Songs 2: 10’ Canticum Rabba, 98b).

Often these interpretations were not literary; they were related to the political reality, to the expectation of national liberation. The New Testament also bears witness to this, when after the crucifixion of Christ the disciples lament: ‘We had thought that he would liberate Israel’ (Luke 24: 21). The appearance of Jesus as the Messiah is connected with Pessah as well. Revealing himself to be the Messiah, he proclaimed to his disciples that he ‘must go to Jerusalem, suffer many things… be killed, and be raised again the third day. (Mat. 16: 21). After six days, in the presence of three disciples, Jesus undergoes a transfiguration, becoming like Moses descending from Mount Sinai with the tablets (Ex. 34: 29)—‘with his face radiant as the sun and his garments…luminous’ (Mat. 17: 1–2). Moses and Elijah appeared ‘and talked with him’. Asked by his disciples about Elijah, he answers: ‘Elijah will come and renew everything’ (Mat. 17: 11). According to the words of the prophet Malachi, Elijah will appear before the ‘day of the Lord’ (Mal. 3:23), meaning that he will announce the arrival of the Messiah, the end of the ‘old world’, and the beginning of the ‘new world’—a new ‘splendid age’ (see also Mat. 11: 14; Mark 9: 11; Luke 1: 17; John 1: 21). And Moses, descending from Mount Sinai with the tablets, is a ‘new man’ before the ‘renewal’ of Israel, but he is brought down however by the sin of the golden calf. As the liberator from Egypt, he is also a Messiah or prototype Messiah. The Midrash says (Bereshit Rabba 30: 8): ‘Moses was prepared to be the saviour’, that is, the embodiment of the Messiah; and a certain sage adds: ‘he saw a new world’. Moses, Abraham (thanks to the covenant), Elijah, who ‘will renew everything’, and even like Jesus himself—all are renewers. Every Messiah is a renewer.

Therefore, believing that he is the Messiah, people address Jesus as the ‘son of David’. Entering Jerusalem, he rides on an ass (Mat. 21: 5; John 12: 15) in order to fulfil the prophecy of messianic liberation (Zech. 9: 9). With palm branches in hand, the crowd calls: ‘Hosanna to the son of David’, ‘Blessed be he who is coming in the name of the Lord’ (Ps. 118: 26)—a verse from the paschal liturgy of the temple, recited even today as part of the Passover prayers.

Likewise, the last supper was truly a ‘paschal supper’ (Mat. 26: 17)—the seder pessah that is still celebrated today. During the seder, the Haggadah is read—the mythological and legendary story of the exodus from Egypt: ‘Pessah is the time of our freedom, a remembrance of the exodus from Egypt’, which must be repeated through ‘all the days of your life, in order to prepare for the days of the Messiah’. Thus Jesus went to Jerusalem to appear as the Messiah at the appropriate time—Pessah.

The Passover holiday is thus a holiday of liberation in Judaism; it is the time of the arrival of the Messiah and a time of renewal. Therefore, on the Saturday before the holiday, the ‘great sabbath’, the Torah reading ends with the words of Malachi: ‘Lo, I will send the prophet Elijah before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord’
During the paschal supper ‘Elijah’s cup’ stands on the table, and at a certain moment the door is opened for Elijah to come in and announce the coming of the Messiah.

During the meal, time ceases to be linear and historical and becomes the sacral time of eternal return, mythical time; it returns to the experience of liberation, in expectation of liberation ‘now’. As Eliade remarks, ‘Sacral time is always a time of returning…. It is ontological time…. ever the same.’ Among the hasidim there were those—such as the followers of rabbi Nachman of Braclaw—who believed that the tsadik ‘was Moses and Messiah in one person’. Others who were more modest prepared for his arrival on the eve of Pessah by packing a bag with matzah and wine and a walking stick, so as to be ready to follow the Messiah the moment he appeared, like their ancestors in Egypt. The kabbalists, including for example rabbi Moshe Kordovero, believed that Pessah belonged to the sefirot (hypostases). Hesed (love) is the basis for the love of God, and is necessary for redemption and the return of the world to its original wholeness, to the splendid age.

These then are the elements that fuse liberation and renewal, which are the contents of the Jewish Pessah: national liberation and the renewal of nature, the world, and mankind. Nature and history meet and merge in sacred, primordial time—not to enter once again into the cycle of unchanging nature, but rather using the ‘splendid age’ as a model to continue ascheton—life without damage. What is expressed here is the

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42 Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 49. The above-mentioned Dr Marcus Ehrenpreis, who was the uncle of Debona Vogel and was born in Lwów in 1869, described the seder ceremony as follows: ‘Who can forget the rites of the Passover night, in the homes of our fathers, the seder table full of dishes…and the mystical goblet filled for the prophet Elijah, and the peculiar drawings of the Passover Haggadah, and the intoxicating songs sung in unison by the whole family, with father leading. Father sat like the High Priest…at the head of the table, dressed in his white kittel, a silver belt around his hips and cap embroidered with gold on his head. All sadness, all bitterness and hate disappears. Hopefulness lights his brow. Behold the king in his kingdom.’ (See also note 23). Schulz’s impressions of the seder can be gleaned from his story ‘Wiosna’ (an excerpt published in *Kamena*, 10 (1935) was not included in the final version of the work probably because—as Jerzy Ficowski writes—‘The paschal aura the Judaic-biblical ceremonial props did not suit the entirety of the work, the novel ‘Wiosna’. (J. Ficowski, *Okolice sklepów cynamonowych* (Kraków, 1986), 67. The fragment is reproduced there as well.).)


44 ‘The greatness of his faith in the arrival of the Messiah was known to all. And he always reminded his servant Michael Glazer, of blessed memory, to wake him right away if he heard voices coming from the town during the night, for a voice calling in the holy language is the voice of the Messiah. Every paschal evening he put a handful of matzah, a flask of wine, and a cup into a basket. He fastened it to his walking stick and threw it over his shoulder, ready to share its contents with the people around him. Then he stood by the window and listened for the sound of the horn—the horn of the Messiah.

Once just before his death he said: “Lord almighty! You know the truth, that I am an honest man of this world and you know my thoughts, that they are true. May your name be praised! It is my virtue, oh Lord almighty, that I have never lied. The more so I will not now lie, and so I am telling the truth now, oh Lord almighty! If Moses, the son of Chana, knew that he would go grey waiting, but that the Messiah would not come, he surely could not bear it. But you, oh Lord all-powerful, hooted at him day after day until the poor thing went completely grey. How could you, Lord, hoot at the old man that way?! Therefore I beg you, Lord of all the world, let the Messiah appear now. I desire this not for my own good, but for Your Glory, for thus will Your Name be honoured by many. I forgo my personal good and forgive those who have condemned me, but I am ready to serve as a sacrifice for the good of Israel, may I thus be worthy of lying at the feet of the tsadik. And I desire only this—that the Messiah should appear! And you know, Almighty, that I have in mind only Your glory and I sacrifice my soul on the altar of Your honour.” He said this and gave up the ghost. May his righteousness and merit come to our defence and that of all Israel, Amen.’ (Dov Ber Eherman, *Pe-er veakhovod*, 2nd edn., (Tel-Aviv, 1973), 211; (first pub. Munkacs, 1911). The reference is to rabbi Moshe Teitelbaum (1759–1841), who was born in Przemyśl and became the rabbi of Ujhely in Slovakia, and who was known for his work *Yismach Moshe* (Lwów, 1848–1861).
expectation of the absolute, an aspiration to freedom and perfection, and also to human liberation—as expressed in various mythologies. Schulz’s ‘Messiah’ is thus ‘the last Messiah’ in the line of messiah-renewers that began with Moses and continues through Jesus and through the Messiah expected in traditional Judaism.

The half-religious, half-mythological character of these stories requires a certain special configuration in space and time and also in the names of the characters involved. In myths and rituals every activity, like every fact or even name, should be appropriate and selected carefully in relation to the mythical world. And as indicated above, in myth, reality is achieved only through repetition or participation: every thing without a model is ‘nonsensical’, which means that it has no reality and is therefore incompatible with myth. In myth, in sacrum, everything must be ‘sensible’.

This is the origin of Schulz’s constant repetition of concepts like ‘pure’, ‘worn out’, ‘new’ (or ‘whiteness’), ‘full’ or ‘empty’, ‘luminous’, ‘brilliance’, and so on. The use of the number three derives from this as well: ‘Holy Trinity Square’, ‘at three o’clock’, ‘he went down three wooden stairs’. Szloma’s age is also important: ‘youthful despite his forty years’. The existence of this square, this hour, this age or even this name has absolutely no significance in the reality of Drohobycz. What is important is their functionality in the world of the story, the sacral world.

The number three, as is well known, is considered a particularly select number, as a symbol of abundance, synthesis—and thus of newness. Parents and child: thesis, antithesis, synthesis. It is no surprise that three is the basis of various systems and ideas in many cultures and religions. The triad appears in Hinduism (Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva), in Egypt (Isis, Osiris, Horus), in Mesopotamia, and so on. In Pythagorean philosophy it symbolizes the primeval and plenitude, the beginning of reality, is the primordial source of the universe. In the Bible it figures in the very process of creation, which in fact took place over six days divided into two parts—for on the third day the waters divided and land appeared, and the earth began to put forth vegetation. It was also only on that third day that God declared twice that what he had done ‘was good’ (Gen. 1: 10, 1: 12).

Of course, in monotheistic religions, three cannot be the number of gods, so it becomes the number of the fathers and mothers (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; Sarah, Rebbecca, and Rachel). It also appears in the story of Noah, who was a righteous man and beyond reproach (Gen. 5: 9). Noah fathered three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth (Gen. 5: 10), and through them, after the flood, all humankind (Gen 9: 19). The measurements of Noah’s Ark are based on a triad (Gen. 6: 15); likewise the entire flood and the age of Noah are based on the number three. The ritual of the covenant of Abraham also rests on it (Gen. 15: 9); ‘On the third month after going out’ from Egypt the Israelites came to ‘the Sinai desert’ (Ex. 19: 1) and all of the ritual around Mount Sinai is based on this number. In the second part of ‘Genialna epoka’, where there are phrases such as ‘pillar of fire’, ‘I appeared in wrath’, ‘the chimneys were smoking’ and ‘it billowed with glistening steam’ allude to this chapter of the Torah.

Likewise, the New Testament is based on the number three—and not only in the motif of the Holy Trinity, which is called upon to maintain itself through the concept of the Triune God in the framework of monotheism. Jesus is presented as ‘the son of David,
the son of Abraham’ (Mat. 1: 1). The first to join him are the brothers Simon (Peter) and Andrew, making a trio, and then the brothers James and John—again a trio (Mat. 4: 18, 21). Jesus proclaims to his disciples that he will be killed and three days later rise again (Mat. 16: 21; Luke 9: 22; 24: 7). The transfiguration occurs before Peter, John, and James ‘after six days’ and Moses and Elijah appear above (Mat. 17: 112; Luke 9: 28–36).

What all of these situations and people have in common is renewal. Noah renews the world after the flood; Abraham renews humanity through monotheism; Moses renews through the tablets, and—as the situation of prefiguration signals—as a prototype of the Messiah; Elijah heralds the Messiah; and Jesus as the Messiah-Saviour arises from the dead. Certain ancient Easter homilies included the words: ‘He [Christ] descended to Hell for three days in order to redeem all mankind in its human entirety, mankind, which lived before the Law, which lived under the Law, and which lived thanks to it. Perhaps he stayed there three days also to fully revive what lived: soul, spirit, and body.’

This brings us to Szloma’s age; he is described as ‘youthful despite his forty years’ (128). In the Bible, the number forty prefigures change and renewal. The story of the flood is based on the number forty: the rain lasts forty days and forty nights, the waters cover the earth for forty days and forty nights. This marks ‘the end of the world’ at least for that time, before the renewal (Gen. 7: 4, 12, 17). And the waters dried up (the new world appeared) on the first day of the first month, the month of Nisan. The Israelites spent forty years in the desert (Ex. 16: 35, Deut. 29: 4). Moses ‘was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights and fasted in order to receive the tablets that would change the world (Ex. 24: 18; Deut. 9: 9). Elijah goes to meet with the Lord on Mount Horeb for forty days and forty nights (1 Kings 19: 8) Jonah warns Nineveh—the second Babylon, a symbol of evil—that only forty days remain until its destruction unless it begins to atone and return to the Lord. Atonement—renewal—saves the city in the end (for the God of the Bible wants not destruction, but renewal and a return to good (John 3: 4–10).

After his baptism (his renewal), Jesus was tempted by the Devil in the desert for forty days and forty nights (Mat. 4: 1–11; Mark 1: 12–13; Luke 4: 1-13). He fasted and overcame the evil. The Church fathers Irineus and Tertullian see in this a repetition of the experiences of Adam and Israel in the desert. The fact that Jesus did not fall is connected directly to the renewal of Noah. Three days before Pessah (Mat. 26: 2), after leaving the Temple—about which he prophesies that ‘no stone will be left upon another’ (Mat. 24: 2)—Jesus proclaims: ‘As it was in the days of Noah, so will it be with the arrival of the Son of Man. For just as in the time before the flood they ate and drank and married…and they did not know that the flood was coming…so, too, will be the arrival of the Son of Man’ (Mat. 24: 37–40).

Szloma, at forty years old, is also called to experience suffering and eventually redemption, just like Moses or Jesus. Therefore, probably, the narrator also reveals that ‘doves on the police guardhouse took flight’ (130), that Holy Trinity Square is for him ‘pure…as the new year that has yet to begin’ (129), that Szloma feels ‘pure, unburdened, and new’, and that the day receives him ‘cleansed of sins, renewed, reconciled with the world’ (129). In the wind there is the scent of ‘festive apartments and cinnamon’, and Szloma’s sneeze is a sign that ‘Spring has come’ (130).
There is an analogy here to the dove that brought the sign of the end of the flood and the beginning of the ‘new world’ on the first day of Nisan, the first month (Gen. 8: 13), and also to the appearance of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove when Jesus—baptised and renewed—emerges from the water and God names him ‘my beloved Son’ (Mat. 3: 16–17; Mar. 1: 10; Luke 3: 21–2).

Szloma’s name also requires interpretation. He can be considered ‘the son of David’, the Messiah of the Judaic tradition, with whom Jesus identifies in the New Testament. When he rides into Jerusalem on an ass, the people call out to him: ‘Hosanna to the Son of David’ (Mat. 21: 9), which means: ‘Lord, help the Son of David in his cause of salvation’. And if Szloma is probably the ‘son of David’, then this would suggest that Tobias is Moses. 48

Tobias is one of the six (2 x 3) names of Moses appearing in the Midrash; its Hebrew form is Tuvia, meaning ‘God’s goodness’. According to Talmudic legend, Moses’ mother gave birth to him with no pain, for the curse of Eve after the sin and the fall (Gen. 3: 16) did not relate to her. Therefore he was born ‘pure’, and his mother, seeing that he was ‘good’, hid him for three months (Ex. 2: 2). Rabbi Meir interprets the name ‘Tov’ as ‘that he is good’. Rabbi Jehuda says: ‘Tuvia [Tobias] his name’ (Sota 12a). According to Midrash, ‘there is no generation in which there is not one person like Moses’ (Gen. Rabba 56: 7), which means a potential Messiah. The Book of Splendour, the Zohar, proclaims that ‘Moses was as Adam’ before the fall—pure. Thus all the details are deliberately chosen, probably, so that they would be in keeping with the myth of repeated creation and redemption. Every ritual must be performed absolutely in accordance with certain rules in order to be successful. It turns out, however, that in spite of such precise performance, Eros once again leads to a fall: the material conquers the spiritual, evil triumphs over good, and the world becomes damaged and cannot be renewed. Szloma turns out to be more like king Szlomo (Solomon), a womanizer who squanders his father’s ‘treasure’ than like ‘the Son of David’.

Thus we have arrived at a second negative motif accompanying the messianic motif in Jewish messianic myths from the Middle Ages: the motif of the Messiah’s downfall because of Eros. In the Old Testament eroticism does not have the same colouration that it has in Christianity. In the Old Testament, Eros was a human function, blessed by God. The Lord commands Adam and Eve: ‘Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and master it’ (Gen. 1: 28). Of course, like all others, sexual relations must take place in the framework of laws and customs, but these are rather liberal. The original sin in the Old Testament is rather intellectual: it is ‘eating from the tree of knowledge’ which leads to the loss of ‘fullness’ (tamim in Hebrew: ‘whole’, ‘full’, ‘just’, ‘naïve’). A later biblical personage, Kohelet, not making light of knowledge, nevertheless remarks: ‘Increasing knowledge increases suffering’ (Eccl. 1: 18).

Only under the influence of Persian and Greek culture did there begin to be a negative attitude towards eroticism and towards the body. A conflict arose between the material world and the spiritual one, with the latter being raised at the cost of the body—

48 The existence of Gorgoniusz Tobiasz’s pharmacy in Drohobycz (see Ficowski, Okolice sklepów cynamonowych, 13) does not preclude the use of the name for artistic purposes. Quite the opposite: it might encourage Schulz to use it.
which was understood as the source of sin. Even then, the main currents of Judaic thought did not see in the body and in Eros something ‘lesser’. The concept of the ‘Evil Will (yetser haraḥ), which arose at that time, did not refer to sex, but to the inclination to do evil; it concerns only those sexual relations that take place outside the bounds of law, and not the sexual urge as such. The great sage, leader of the uprising against the Romans and martyr, Rabbi Akiva (c.50 - c.e.135), that is, after the crucifixion of Jesus— said , that it was permitted to divorce if ‘one meets another more beautiful’ (Gitin 90a). The majority of the sages present Eve in a favourable light, like Adam himself, who, according to Midrash (Pirke d’rabbi Eliezer, 12), when he awoke and saw Eve standing before him, ‘at once embraced her and kissed her, saying, she will be called woman’ (Gen. 2: 23).

In Christianity, as in an other Jewish sect, the sect of Qumran, the attitude towards eroticism is different: it is identified with evil and sin. Jesus forbids not just adultery, but also ‘adultery of the heart’. One must gouge out the offending eye to save oneself from the fires of Hell (Mat. 5: 28–9). This approach did not influence Jews living in Muslim countries, including Spain. In those countries there was a blossoming of the erotic lyricism, even of such philosopher-poets as Ibn-Gabirol (Avicebron) or rabbi Yehudah ha-Levi, who is considered the greatest national poet of Jewry. Both wrote liturgical texts still used in services today, but also erotica. The Hebrew erotic lyric there (the Jarchas e.g.) anticipated the Spanish. Living in Italy, after being expelled from Spain at the end of the fifteenth century, Jehuda Abarbanel achieved fame throughout Europe as Leone Ebreo, thanks to his book Dialoghi di Amore.

But in north-eastern France and western Germany, under the influence of the asceticism of Christian mystics, the attitude towards eroticism changes and becomes negative. Eros was considered the cause of mankind’s downfall. Over time, this approach would become universal. Against this background there arose the legend of rabbi Josef de la Reyne, a kabbalist who wanted to call the Messiah with the help of magic, but was unsuccessful. This legend takes on a literary form in the seventeenth century, and here the motif of downfall due to eroticism appears. The story became very popular” it was published in its Hebrew original and in more than thirty Yidish translations. Four or five editions appeared in Poland at the beginning of the 20th century. The story took on the form of a legend or a myth in which Eros prevents the arrival of the Messiah.

This motif also entered into hasidic tales. According to the version recorded by the hasidic poet Jiri Langer, it appears that rabbi Aron of Belz, who was thought to be

49 The translation of the word ‘woman’ as ‘married woman’ is the product of Catholic Church doctrine.
50 J. Langer, 9 bram do tajemnic chasydów (Kraków, 1988), 64–5:
‘Though small, Belz is ancient and renowned. Before the pious reb Sholem became rabbi of Belz, the Messiah himself served in that office there! In every generation there lives one Messiah. He lives a reclusive life and no one knows of his existence. Perhaps he does not appear to the world because of our faults. But in those times the whole world knew that there was a Messiah, that he lived in Belz, and that his name was Aron. The Devil was the only one who was not glad. He could not reconcile himself to the thought that he had to say farewell to ruling the world and hand over the sceptre to some Messiah. So the Devil took on the form of a woman, a woman of extraordinary beauty and unparalleled wisdom. And in this guise he took to the road. He went from town to town and wherever he went, he entered into scholarly disputes with leading rabbis. No one guessed who this highly educated woman could be. But her arguments defeated every scholar who entered into debate with her. Her fame spread throughout the world. Reb Aron the Messiah also wanted to debate with this miraculous woman. Oy and vey! It’s too bad that you couldn’t see it! That war of words between the Messiah and the Devil! It’s a miracle that they didn’t burn each other up with the fire of their breath. With wisdom and wit they jousted and pummeled each other into powder. In the end the
the Messiah, also surrendered to the Devil when he appeared to him as a beautiful woman fluent in the scriptures. Thus Eros is sin that leads to downfall.

This is how it happens with Szloma as well. Eros appears here through ‘the phenomenon of representation and the substitution of being’ (119), or through a woman’s attire: ‘Adela’s shoes, dress, beads’ (133). This is the same ‘stuck-out shoe of Adela’ which trembled lightly and glittered like a snake’s tongue’ and before which ‘father…sank to his knees’ (37). Eros conquered the spirit, idea, and vision of redemption. The world remained in a damaged state, not renewed, despite the fact that Szloma himself wanted it to happen; he was called to help with restitution. Szloma fell short and the renewal was not fulfilled. It looks as though the world of history was convicted and sentenced to eternity: evil will rule life—just as certain religions and thinkers—awaiting the end of the world precisely because this will rid it of evil—have proclaimed.

As Eliade indicates, the eternal return, from the grace of karma, the law of universal causality, is also assumed in Hindu thought. On the other hand, time is equal to cosmic illusion (maja), ‘so that the eternal return to existence meant continuation in the boundlessness of suffering and bondage. For…the religious and philosophical elite, the only hope was the negation of karma, and not a return to existence.’

Greek philosophy expressed similar thoughts in its discussion of the disintegration of the world and the consequent recovery of its previous form—‘on the principle of one law and unchanging alternatives’. A similar idea is present in the German-Scandinavian tradition. The ragna rok, a universal conflagration, is the same as the ‘fate of the gods’ or the ‘twilight of the gods’, the end of the world, after which there will be a new creation.

Eliade believes that the appearance of this idea in cultures so distant in time and place, which are nevertheless branches of the Indo-Aryan tree, points to the ‘Indo-Aryan structure of this myth’, its lack of cosmic content, its longing for a return to nothingness. Similarly in gnostic thought: ‘When gnosis is revealed to all pneumatics, the process of history will end: then, at the end of times, the visible world will plunge into nothingness, consumed by the fire of the conflagration of the world.’

There is an echo of this idea in European thought in our century as well, although it does not reach as far as consistent acosmism. Thinkers are content with the return to the pre-human state, at the edge of animalism or even before it. This is how it is, for example, with Gottfried Benn and Mircea Eliade.

In his ‘Diary of an Emigrant’ Eliade expresses a distinct dislike of history and

woman asked a question that even the Messiah could not answer. “I will tell you when we are alone”, she said. “It’s a big secret. No one can know it but us.” Not knowing who he had before him, the Messiah ordered everyone present to leave the room. Even a child was not allowed to remain. Because it was such a lofty secret! Only after the doors had closed behind the last guest did the Messiah realize his mistake. In the heat of the debate he had forgotten the words of the pious scholars of the Talmud, who forbid us to be alone with a woman we don’t know even for a moment. Too late. The holy mission of the Messiah was profaned and his earthly road came to an end. It was the sixth day of the month of Tishri. The Devil celebrated his victory. And for this reason we must still wait for our salvation. A long time yet, perhaps very long.’

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51 Eliade, Sacrum, mit, historia, 128.
52 Ibid., 129.
54 Quispel, Gnoza, 135.
Christianity. In one instance, he unintentionally and spontaneously goes so far as to express a desire to return to a state of animalism, which he identifies with freedom. Rummaging in ‘Dionysian’ documents, he feels peculiar call: ‘to eat raw flesh, animal flesh, which has been hunted, caught, and rent with nails. Are we not speaking here of a regression to the archaic, perhaps even pre-human state? The stage of beasts of prey? This fall to the level of beasts can be an incredibly creative physical and spiritual shock to the system. The feeling of freedom: one is no longer a person, no longer subject to laws and prohibitions. And perhaps even more: one experiences the primordial phase, discovers a world that had been considered lost, plunging into a “time” of existence that is purely zoological, a “time” that was considered lost. Dionysian ecstasies: to discover the time before the World, when ‘time’ was only presence, without beginning or end (this is more or less is how I imagine the ‘experience of time’ in animals)\(^{55}\)

In rejecting all postulates of art as expressing a social or cultural state, Benn also rejects history, for history is accidental, and thus unforeseeable, and unsuitable for art. He asks rhetorically: ‘Do the times speak with us, or do we speak with them?’\(^{56}\) ‘How is it with the historical process?’\(^{57}\) And he asserts: ‘…the poet anticipates all this, shifts the perspective of his origin and responsibility to the point where all systems of logic end…, he implodes and sinks deep within himself, even reaching those regions of which …Levy-Bruhl remarks: “Logical thinking…does not provide…equivalents for those elements that have been eliminated…. Logical thinking can never fully become a successor to pre-logical mentality”, for “that mentality is deeper and has travelled farther…. The spirit strives for something deeper than recognition, for something that fullness and perfection gives it—and thus to those regions where primeval sphinxes have their place in totality, where thinking…enters into the dark circle of organic interest, the unequivocal character of genesis, the polyphemism of creation. Where it exists as a regularity of urges and an intensity of vegetative processes, where it acts promiscuously by incest, polyandry, and crucifixion; where it is naturalistically like the ocean…’,\(^{58}\)

Of course there are no nations or races there—and therefore we are dealing with a community of human symbols, not with their ‘migration’. ‘The soul, developing, forms itself backwards…. Acheron flooded Olympus…. I, freed from pressures… the pure I…, acausal, empirical a priori, reach beyond myself, make a sacrilegious attack to the rear’ behind the screen of Mai: *To En Kai Pan* (one and everything).

But it is not only the poet or the soul that pulls us back—it is also the world: ‘The day will come when volcanoes will overflow with a lava of fertile sediment, and the oceans will flood the dried-out swamps—a beautiful day of nature’s repentance when on the ice floe two oil lamps will begin again to battle with fishing sticks over the form of a seal, a day of return to creation, when they will anoint wooden mouths and those who put on masks with hooked beaks will make sacrifice with the howl of a totemic beast.’\(^{59}\)

Tuhs the desire to be rid of history and culture and the desire to return to the beginning, understood as a vegetative state, half bestial, is expressed in both cases. We find connections here to acosmic Indo-Aryan thought, as Eliade himself indicated.

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57 Ibid., 27.
58 Ibid., 28–9.
59 Ibid., 30.
Likewise modern existentialism displays certain features connecting it to that tradition: ‘De-sacralized time is presented as uncertain and transitory, leading inevitably to death.’\textsuperscript{60} And the famous scholar R. H. Blyth summed it up in one sentence: ‘Judaism is yea-saying, Buddhism is nay-saying.’\textsuperscript{61}

To be sure, there is also the thinking of Nietzsche (and following him, with some modification, Camus), who approves of the world despite its degeneration, without any desire to repair it. This thinking approves of the world as it is because, as they say, ‘my kingdom is from there’, earthly, there is no other. This ‘kingdom was not created according to some metaphysical model, some ‘Book’, and it awaits no salvation or repair of the consequences of the downfall. The world is an incomplete existence, and its essence is nihilism. Nietzsche’s Ubermensch or Camus’ Prometheus strive to create some meaning, some valour, through a hopeless rebellion. The heroism of protest itself ennobles the human essence, but nothing more. The world must continue to exist in its nihilism.

The only thinking that considers the world and everything in it sacred, created according to the spiritual plan of the Book, is Judaic thought, with its Christian offshoot. According to this thinking, it is mankind who damaged the world and who must therefore seek its redemption, not await its destruction, in order to be rid of ‘the suffering of history’, or to slip away to heaven in the footsteps of gnosis or mysticism. In Judaism, ‘messianism succeeds in carrying out the eschatological valorisation of time: the future is to regenerate time, which means it will restore its original purity and fullness. In illo tempore it is located not only at the beginning, but also at the end of time.’\textsuperscript{62} It is not important that this is a variant of ‘yearly regeneration of the cosmos through the repetition of the act of creation’.\textsuperscript{63} This is a new quality, which stops above all ‘the possibility…of endless repetition. When the Messiah comes, the world will be saved once and for all, and history will cease to exist. In this sense it is possible to speak not only of the eschatological valorisation of the future final day, but also of ‘redemption’, which will supersede historical time. History is no longer an endlessly repeating cycle, as primitive peoples imagined it (act of creation, depletion, destruction, yearly recreation of the cosmos), but is rather ‘a sequence of negative or positive theophanies, each of which has its own value’.\textsuperscript{64}

Schulz’s ‘Messiah’, as it appears against the background of the conceptions of the world presented here, is thus in a sense a kind of continuation of Jewish messianic thought. To be sure, concepts similar to those of Benn or Eliade appear in Schulz, but from the point of view of the ultimate goal, they bring out a fundamental difference between them—similar to the difference between Judaism and the pagan religions. Thus for example the ‘common’ dream of regression turns out to be diametrically different. In the latter it is a matter of regression to the animal state, but in the case of Judaism it is a matter of return to the ‘splendid epoch’. The situation is similar in the cases of time, law, and prohibitions. And it is the same, too, with the negation of positivism or the interpretation of Hegelian history. ‘Positivism is the religion of times that did not know

\textsuperscript{60} Eliade, Sacrum, mit, historia, 131.
\textsuperscript{62} Eliade, Sacrum, mit, historia, 264.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 265.
greatness’—says Schulz.65 ‘What is history? Who has penetrated the mystery of its grace, the secret of its favours?’66 These views are similar to Benn’s, but they lead ultimately to an entirely different goal. Benn’s lead to pre-human nature, while Schulz’s lead to the realization of the messianic vision, to spiritual renewal, to redemption. This is a postulate of Jewish messianism, and particularly the messianism of classical Kabbalah. In the understanding of these kabbalists, redemption will appear as a manifestation of something deep, spiritual; as a spiritual revolution unveiling the mystical, ontological contents of the Spiritual Torah—its original, true meaning.

Messianism is the hope of overcoming the degeneration of the world; in every form it is a hope for the renewal of Existence and for the return of ontological perfection to it, as well as for the redemption of mankind in history by raising him to spiritual, sacral heights, in the framework of society, in the human, earthly framework. This idea occupies a central place in Judaic thought.

Judaism knows no dogmas. But when Maimonides, the ‘great eagle’, defined the thirteen articles of faith, which are practically dogmas, the only one relating to history was the dogma of the coming of the Messiah. To be sure, he was speaking here of the national Messiah, who would free the Jewish people from bondage; but in the popular conception he always had a spiritual and universal significance as well. And so the observant Jews repeats after Maimonides in his daily prayers: ‘I believe with unshakeable faith in the coming of the Messiah. And though he is delayed, I will await him every day until he comes.’

Judaism does not accept a condemned world, but neither does it run from it. It believes in its renewal and in the redemption of humankind. Therefore it is not surprising that, as Tadeusz Borowski described it, ‘on their way to the gas the Jews sang in Hebrew a stirring song, which no one could understand’.67 What they sang was indeed ‘Ani ma’amin…’, ‘I believe… in the coming of the Messiah’. Schulz knew that hope, and perhaps that song as well. Even in his childhood, he drew the figure of the Messiah, of the messianic days. This was the subject of his story ‘The Messiah’, which he worked on in the ghetto during the war. People who heard him read fragments of the story say that there was in it ‘discussion of how the word spread from mouth to mouth that the Messiah was coming and that he was already just thirty kilometres from Drohobycz’.68

But the German murderer barred his way.

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65 B. Schulz, Listy, fragmenty, wspomnienia o pisarzu, ed. J. Ficowski (Kraków, 1984), 38.
66 Ibid., 40.
67 T. Borowski, Opowiadania wybrane (Warsaw, 1971), 314.
68 See J. Ficowski, Regiony wielkiej herezji. Szkice o życiu i twórczości Brunona Schulza (Kraków, 1975), 267.