

Title: Nihilistic Fulfilling: Matter in the Poetic Cosmogony of Bruno Schulz

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One of the major themes of Bruno Schulz's *The Cinnamon Shops* is the narrator's effort to grasp the moment the world of his hometown emerges out of primordial chaos. This paper interprets Schulz's prose precisely as a poetic version of cosmogony and focuses on examining his images of originary substance. In *The Cinnamon Shops* these images fluctuate between the formlessness and inertia of a Neoplatonic or even Manichean concept of matter, on the one hand, and the Aristotelian excess of potentialities, on the other hand. The discussion of this dualism of imagery is in a way a commentary on the oxymoron "nihilistic fulfiller" that Witold Gombrowicz once used sketching the portrait of Schulz (Gombrowicz, 8).

The interpretative strategy proposed here allows us to establish an analytical connection between the images of matter and the perspective of a child used by the narrator in *The Cinnamon Shops*. By "regressing" into childhood the narrator defamiliarizes the world of his hometown, and then, acting like the Demiurge, recreates it out of defamiliarized objects (turned into sheer potentiality). Seeing this poetic project through Neoplatonic associations also echoes the process of Coleridgean Primary Imagination, thereby identifying another item in Schulz's actual and imaginary library constructed by his readers and commentators. The reading proposed here recalls Romanticism as an important context of Schulz's art, often forgotten in recent interpretative efforts.

Witold Gombrowicz, *Diary*, vol. 3. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993.