

MESSIAH. BRUNO SCHULZ

radio play based on the drama by Małgorzata Sikorska-Miszczuk

adapted and directed by Jerzy Machowski

The radio play "Messiah. Bruno Schulz" is an adaptation of Małgorzata Sikorska-Miszczuk's drama of the same title. The text concerns the person of Bruno Schulz, an outstanding Polish writer, and his legendary lost novel "Messiah."

Schulz was born and lived in Drohobych. During World War II he found himself in the local ghetto. There he worked under orders from Gestapo commander Felix Landau. In 1942, he was shot by another Gestapo officer, Karl Gunther, and buried in a mass grave, which has not been identified to this day. All of his manuscripts from the occupation were lost, including his novel "Messiah," about which the only thing we know is the fact that the artist was working on it. After the war, Drohobych was located in the Soviet Union, and today lies in western Ukraine. For decades after Schulz's death, the search for the lost manuscript was impossible. Our radio play tells the story of the hardships and hopelessness of this search.

The story unfolds in three settings: historical-metaphysical (Bruno Schulz and Felix Landau), historical-documentary (Jerzy Ficowski, Alex Schulz and Ambassador Oberg) and contemporary (the Author, Madam Undersecretary, the Expert and episodic characters). These settings intermingle at times. The entire radio play is presented in the convention of a radio documentary, and the listeners are guided by the Author, who not only takes part in some of the events, but also comments on them.

The radio play begins with a scene in a Lviv taxicab. The Author and Madam Undersecretary of the Ministry of Culture ask a Ukrainian driver to take them to Shevchenko Street in Drohobych. The cab driver makes fun of the female passengers: it turns out that they are not the first people from Poland to ask him to drive to the place where Bruno Schulz died. While driving, the Author records the introduction to her documentary - she talks about the fact that many years have passed since the writer's death and that it is difficult to find traces of him and his work. And yet, she undertakes a search for something that can connect us, contemporaries, with the remote past.

We move to the historical-metaphysical setting: Bruno Schulz stands with his hands raised in the air facing a German man aiming at him. We hear his inner monologue, in which Schulz asks God to give him some more life - so that he can complete his magnum opus, "Messiah".

Then we hear a monologue by Felix Landau, who relates how he met and hired the imprisoned artist in the ghetto. He believes that he took care of him. At the same time, he confesses that he enjoyed shooting from his balcony at Jews who "didn't make an effort" at work.

Both of the above monologues are accompanied by the ticking of the clock, which now suddenly stops. Again we hear Schulz's voice thanking God for stopping time. He promises that the work he is going to create will be great.

We return to the contemporary setting. The Author, with her voice recorder on, goes to a meeting at the Ministry of Culture, where she receives an offer from Madam Undersecretary to participate in the "Messiah.pl" project. As a specialist in the works of Schulz, she is to undertake a search for his lost novel "Messiah." The Ministry will finance her trip to Drohobych. She will be accompanied on the trip by Madam Undersecretary and the Expert from the special services. Although the project seems not very serious and doomed to failure, the Author accepts the proposal.

We move to the historical-documentary setting. We hear a series of telephone conversations between people who were involved in Schulz's history and works in the post-war era. First, the writer's nephew Alex Schulz, who lives in California, receives a phone call from a mysterious man from Lviv. The man, in an amusing mix of Ukrainian, Polish and English, tells him about Schulz's manuscripts, which he claims to possess. Alex Schulz calls Jerzy Ficowski, a Warsaw poet and researcher of the artist's work from Drohobych, and shares the message from the mysterious caller. Ficowski promises to issue an expert report on the aforementioned manuscripts and confirm whether they really belonged to Schulz. Soon Ficowski receives another phone call - an unfamiliar female voice informs him of the death of Alex, who left no leads on the man from Lviv.

We move to the historical-metaphysical setting. We hear the recording of the creative ordeal of Schulz working on "Messiah". The writer destroys sheets of paper with the finished text, which he considered imperfect. He obsessively cleans the room, claiming that in a mundane mess he cannot create a great work.

We return to the contemporary setting. The Author and Madam Undersecretary get out of the cab in Drohobych. At the site of Schulz's death, they meet the Expert from the secret service. He hands Madam Undersecretary a prayer wheel and tells her to pray for the success of the "Messiah.pl" project. He himself begins to interrogate a little wall standing there, which is the only "witness" to the writer's death that has survived to our time. The Author watches this absurd scene with embarrassment.

Historical and metaphysical setting. Schulz's creative ordeal continues. The artist is looking for inspiration, but he keeps getting distracted by mundane things - be it a minor relative running into the room or the writer's caring sister, or the wind blowing in the open window.

The contemporary setting intermingles with the historical one - time curves, and the Author, Madam Undersecretary and the Expert meet Gestapo commander Felix Landau in Drohobych. The man shoots at them from a balcony, and having missed, invites them to join him. It turns out that the German is reluctant to talk about Schulz, instead he has been waiting for a long time for someone willing to write down, record and preferably film his own story. He believes that the plot of Amon Goeth in Steven Spielberg's "Schindler's List" is a poor plagiarism of his biography, and wants the visiting Poles to make a better film. The Author seems to be interested in Landau's story, but Madam Undersecretary does not agree that the Ministry of Culture should finance a documentary about the Gestapo officer. She tears up the Author's notes, and Landau disappears.

Historical and metaphysical setting. Schulz weaves a metaphor of human life as a book, and compares the writer who creates it to God. The destruction of unsuccessful manuscripts resembles thousands of people vanishing out of the world.

Historical and documentary setting. Ficowski's telephone conversation with Oberg, the Swedish ambassador to Warsaw. The latter implies that he knows something about the "Messiah" manuscript hidden in the Soviet KGB archives, but does not give specifics, citing diplomatic protocol. Then Oberg and Ficowski listen to the radio together. They find the waves of a Moscow radio station. They hear a departing train and a military choir singing "Kalinka." The Soviet Union has fallen. A free Ukraine has been established. One can go to Drohobych. Oberg admits that he has lost his position as ambassador, but still refuses to share his knowledge of Schulz's manuscript. Soon Ficowski receives a phone call with the news of Oberg's death.

Contemporary setting. Alone, the Author decides to use the prayer wheel from the Expert, trying to establish a metaphysical connection with Schulz. She asks him questions about "Messiah" and the last days of the writer's life.

Historical and metaphysical setting. Schulz reports on the day of his planned escape from the ghetto. He wants to leave Drohobych to finish "Messiah." He goes to buy bread for the road. On the street, he meets Gunther, who points a gun at him. Schulz sees his impending death as a correction made by the God-writer in the book of his life.

Historical-documentary setting. Two simple Drohobych residents stand over a bonfire made of garbage. The husband asks his woman about the papers she is throwing into the fire.

The wife replies that she found some notes in an abandoned Jewish house and that she burns them for entertainment.

Contemporary setting. Madam Undersecretary in Drohobych is talking to a Ukrainian librarian. She speaks Polish, he speaks Ukrainian. Communication is further hampered by the fact that the librarian gives the impression of being insane. He claims to have found "Messiah" and, having read it, to have gone crazy. Madam Undersecretary cannot extract any more information from the madman.

The Expert reports on his visit to the Drohobych bazaar, where he accidentally met a Polish-speaking old woman. This one accosted him herself and began to recite "Messiah" from memory. Suddenly she fell silent and slumped to the ground. She died before the Expert had time to ask her anything.

The Author sums up the trip to Drohobych as successful after all. She reports that she found the title card of "Messiah".

Finally, we return to the historical and metaphysical setting. Schulz repeats his first monologue, this time more desperately. He begs God to give him life. Finally, the clock, that stopped at the beginning, starts ticking again. Gunther reloads his gun. Schulz calls out: "Don't shoot!"

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adaptation and direction - Jerzy Machowski

audio production - Zdzisław Wasilewski

cooperation - Mariusz Woroniewski

music - Lena Michajłow

production - PAPAHEMA Theater

performing:

Bruno Schulz - Dariusz Siastacz

Author - Helena Radzikowska

Madam Undersecretary - Paulina Moś

Landau, Drohobych Man - Paweł Rutkowski

Ficowski, Expert - Mateusz Trzmiel

Alex Schulz, Ambassador Oberg- Lukasz Borkowski

Sister, Telephone, Wind, Drohobych Woman, Old Woman - Magdalena Oldziejewska

Cab Driver, Man from Lviv, Madman - Jerzy Machowski