

That is the central theme in Cyprian Ekwensi's *Survive the Peace* set at a time which was probably more crucial to life in the former Biafran territory than the thirty months of the Nigerian Civil War. The daily happenings in the war-affected areas—rumors and rapes, panic and fear, looting and shooting—from the day Federal troops capture the Biafran Airport to a few weeks after, form the major focus of the novel. The various attitudes of the losing soldiers who discard their Biafran uniforms and the grief of thousands of refugees who take to the roads give the true picture of "the whole of Biafra in flight" (p. 24). The causes of death for Biafran soldiers and civilians were predictable while hostilities lasted—enemy bullets, air raids, starvation, etc. But civilians and former soldiers alike are subjected to other fatal risks in the weeks following the end of the shooting war when "every move was an event of great significance, a mysterious threat to safety" (p. 88). Federal troops loot and comb every corner with all kinds of weapons to find and rape young girls and women. It "was a time of lawless and violent acts, when a man's life could be wasted in some trivial encounter over a worthless matter" (p. 80). And as Pa Ukoha says, rape is "the price of defeat. You surrender your women" (p. 30).

Ekwensi's avowed interest, as a writer, in "the values or non-values in our society"—as he once stated in an interview given to the *Voice of America*—is given up, it would appear, to humor local readership. There is a compromise of the values of the Igbos as a people. In their culture the "surrender of your women" is not "a worthless matter." It is an indignity, a humiliation. That it can occur only in the context of an army of occupation ought to have been made clear by an artist committed to social values.

It is difficult for a reader who is familiar with the background to the novel to ignore the author's tacit attitude of pleasing a section of his immediate audience. One would not, for example, take as serious a historical view of Kole Omotoso's *The Combat* as one would of Ekwensi's *Survive the Peace*. Firstly, Omotoso's form—the allegory—gives him more liberty with the historical sense of the Civil War. And again, Omotoso lacks Ekwensi's firsthand experience of the psychological, economic, social, and moral aspects of the conflict.

There is more fact than fiction in *Survive the Peace*. Although the simplistic presentation of what the author calls "Ibo optimism" (p. 70) may be seen as an exercise of the writer's prerogative, this work lacks the historical perspective that one would naturally expect in a realistic war novel. Incidents which are the communal experience of war-affected areas are not given any imaginative treatment. Ekwensi's book takes an explicit materialistic view of the war. The "attack" business woman, Gladys, who crosses into the Nigerian side to sell "her trade articles . . . had no deep interest in the causes of the war or its outcome . . ." (p. 83); nor unfortunately, has any other character in the story. In other words, the war has no deep significance for the characters. They have learned and lost nothing. Apart from the conventional denunciation of wars as senseless, the glaring facts on which the fiction is created do not suggest any critical evaluation of issues.

Paul O. Iheakaram

BRUNO SCHULZ

The Street of Crocodiles

Translated from the Polish by
Celina Wieniewska
New York: Penguin Books, 1977.

Bruno Schulz is unknown to English-speaking readers; his only work to be translated into English is this one, which was originally published in Poland, in 1934, as *Cinnamon Shops*. His oeuvre is quite small, consisting of this and one other collection of "short stories," *Sanatorium under the Sign of the Hourglass*; a novella, *The Comet*; and a translation of Kafka's *The Trial*. Schulz, a Jew, lived and worked in Drohobych, his native city in southeastern Poland, until 1942, when he was murdered by the Nazis. Drohobych is as central to Schulz's work as Dublin is to James Joyce's; the author knows his city thoroughly, intimately, and in his fiction, it becomes a universe in microcosm, a setting in which the tragicomedy of human existence is enacted. Schulz calls *The Street of Crocodiles* an "autobiographical novel

. . . an autobiography—or rather, a genealogy—of the spirit”; it is, perhaps more objectively, a series of vignettes, some almost complete short stories, which have the same characters, the same setting, and a common theme. The author’s striking and unusual perspective provides a strong sense of unity throughout the work.

Perhaps the most remarkable element of this fiction lies in Schulz’s almost total subjectivity. His range of intellectual interests, however, embraces science and the scientific preoccupation with “form.” The narrator’s father is, in fact, a mad scientist who experiments with rare birds, expounds upon the nature of matter to an audience of two seamstresses, his housekeeper, and his son; and, finally, influenced by the concerns of his age, constructs a laboratory for experiments with electricity. He even creates a monster, or automaton, by stripping his brother—the obliging Uncle Edward—of his personality. Yet, for Schulz, form is not an absolute; it is merely our imposition upon matter, a creation of the subjective self. The world of “reality,” of form, is one which we continually re-create—walking down the Street of Crocodiles, says the narrator, “one has the impression that it is only the small section immediately before us that falls into the expected pointillistic picture of a city thoroughfare, while on either side, the improvised masquerade is already disintegrating and, unable to endure, crumbles behind us into plaster and sawdust.” This nearly solipsistic view is the basis for a thirteenth month, rooms and even people that disappear and sometimes reappear, and the metamorphoses of the narrator’s father into a cockroach or a condor. “Reality,” says the narrator, “is as thin as paper and betrays with all its cracks its imitative character.”

The narrator’s father, who dominates these vignettes by the force of his personality, is described as a “terrible Demiurge”—and not only in the sense that he has created his son, but also in the construction of a universe which the boy, to a great extent, shares. But father has no monopoly on demiurgy. He explains in his “Treatise on Tailors’ Dummies” that Everyman is a Demiurge, for “matter is the most passive and most defenseless essence in cosmos. Anyone can mold it and shape it; it obeys everybody.” And father the hero, father the mad, raging prophet who tries to defend his universe

against the social inertia of boredom, is an especially vulnerable creator. We see him, again and again, standing alone amid the wreckage and dust of his creations, unloved and therefore rootless, without human connections. The housekeeper, Adela, has discovered father’s weakness and can exert almost complete control over him. She destroys his first experiment and he lives in fear of her. Adela, like father, is a scientist, but she is no dilettante; she is the scientist *par excellence*—she has only to point her finger and worlds begin to crumble.

Matter is formless, malleable to the will, but it is not without qualities of its own. The atmosphere of the narrator’s world is one of morbid—and somewhat malevolent—fecundity; matter threatens constantly to break out of the imperfect prisons by which we would enclose it. The city, the narrator’s house, the people who are his acquaintances, friends, relatives—all are imbued with an oppressive sexual fermentation. It is not only from the Street of Crocodiles that we detect the “lazy licentious smell of sin.” Even the rolls of fabric in father’s shop multiply when they escape their form. Aunt Agatha and Touya, the idiot girl, are creatures almost bursting from their own exaggerated fertility. The world is a stage of our devising, with its shifting, unstable props and lights, with lives which signify nothing—the narrator’s father wishes for “less matter, more form.” But neither matter nor life will be contained, and time will not be contained, even by father’s desperate attempts at science and art. Technology, which has given man a belief in “progress,” is only a cheap trick, producing items which are coarse and vulgar. It is its own “self-parody.” Man’s control of his world is not substantial, for as the narrator notes, “it was not man who had broken into the laboratory of nature, but nature that had drawn him into its machinations, achieving through his experiments its own obscure aims.” Technology becomes a new myth for “human ants,” and is symbolized by the velocipede. It produces for them a new constellation in the heavens called “THE CYCLIST.”

In the “second Genesis” outlined by the narrator’s father in his capacity as poet and artist, human creations are brought to life “for one gesture, for one word alone.” He tells his audience, “we shall give them, for example, only one profile, one hand, one leg, the one limb needed for their

role." This, of course, is exactly the sort of thing which writers of fiction must do, and the way in which we must view Touya, Aunt Agatha and Emil, the sales clerks on the Street of Crocodiles, Uncle Charles, Uncle Edward, and others. Even the narrator's father and Adela are second Genesis people, products of the artist's imagination, brought to life for a particular role. Indeed, says Schulz, our lives are fictions. They consist of disconnected and meaningless events and are filled with cardboard people. Any tenuous order and meaning which we find exist only in the mind of the viewer. It is exactly this point of view which gives Schulz's work its extraordinary power and depth, and it will not be long, I predict, before he is recognized as one of the important writers of our time.

Richard E. Mezo

MARTIN SWALES

The German Novelle

Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977. Pp. XII, 229.

Besides introductory chapters on "The Novelle as Historical Genre" and "The Theory of the Novelle," the book contains detailed interpretations of: Goethe: *Novelle*; Chamisso: *Peter Schlemihl*; Büchner: *Lenz*; Grillparzer: *Der arme Spielmann*; Süfter: *Granu*; Keller: *Die drei gerechten Kammacher*; Meyer: *Das Leiden eines Knaben*. Four of these seven interpretations have appeared in periodicals and yearbooks.

On the dust jacket, Theodore Ziolkowski is quoted as saying: "Existing studies of the *Novelle*, Germany's principal contribution to nineteenth-century literature, tend to be either normative or historical. Swales boldly reconciles these conflicting approaches by showing that the leading theories of the *Novelle* reflect the exigencies of nineteenth-century society as consistently as its most representative texts. This book is utterly original."

Ziolkowski's enthusiasm must have been meant for the publisher. There have been so many studies of the nineteenth-century German *Novelle*—from every point of view imaginable—that it would be ludicrous to expect, at this time, new revelations of importance. Not that originality in the field would be out of the question; the scope of the investigation could be enlarged—to include *Novellen* never analyzed before: works by authors who are not usually mentioned in histories of literature, stories which appeared in newspapers and periodicals and were not collected in book form, stories which were addressed to groups of readers who would not have known the names of the seven authors mentioned above.

Professor Swales is perfectly at home in the limited field of his investigation. Carefully he evaluates the massive secondary literature, tends to lean toward one view here and another view there, makes his own point from time to time—he is a knowledgeable, reliable, and solid guide. There is nothing risky and nothing sensational in the book—nothing which is not well argued; in most cases one agrees, in some cases one thinks that other arguments carry just as much conviction. Altogether, this book will take its place among the dozen or so best studies in a field which has been ploughed intensively and often before and—no doubt—will continue to be ploughed regularly in the future.

Ingrid Schuster

ALISON WINTON

Proust's Additions: The Making of A la recherche du temps perdu
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977. 2 vols. Pp. 393+209.
£18.50.

In 1962, a veritable treasure trove of documents relating to Proust was deposited in the Bibliothèque Nationale, an event which revolutionized Proust scholarship. Research since then has concentrated on the revelations this material brought concerning the complicated genesis of the