

WHAT BRUNO DREW

Dear Bruno,

I know you—I feel as if I know you—and so I'll call you by your proper name.

I know you, since you have reformed my eyesight. I know you, for you muster an enticingly unkempt defense, in prose, of poetic powers.

I know you by your mind's eye, struggling and imperative.

In my opinion, what you do is draw—in writing. You use the words to draw with. What a brilliant whim. Such an independent and inspired venture will yet undress our eyes.

Don't read. Just see.

You burst the borders of a subject, then go live in it. Your sentences give home to the sense of one sense brimming with the next. The light of language holds the heat, then blazes up. This is Bruno Schulz.

Bruno, you are lavish.

I read during unlavish days. I pine for smolder.

We have our minimalisms. We have our journalisms. We have our postmodernisms. We have our capitalisms. We have our successes, mostly smallish. We have so many of these disingenuisms. But we don't yet have the sense to see with.

To sense things lavishly is to feel them, without the mind. To sense them is to make the mind feel—once, again. To sense them is to feel them, then, with the mind.

You did. You kindled.

Your black-and-white drawings tell another story, charred and wily. There, little men bow, cramped, before the silent heave of doorway women. I think of Klimt, Balthus, Goya.

You wrote: "The knot the soul got itself tied up in is not a false one that comes undone when you pull the ends."

I read during unlavish nights. I plot for seethe.

You seethe, and smolder, because the words give sense back to you. The cut and streak and smudge and flow of things, the bumptious billowing syllables, seize the writer.

Lucky you.

Facts, a few:

You submit a short story to a magazine for consideration in 1940, when you are forty-eight years old. The editors tell you, "We don't need any more Prousts."

In 1977, three of your short stories are published in the *New Yorker*.

To please the Stalinists occupying your small town of Drohobycz in Poland, you accept an assignment to paint a harvest scene. The bosses call you back, demanding that you repair it. They complain that the farm girls in it were left barefoot. So you shoe them.

Thirty-five years after your death, Cynthia Ozick calls you "one of the most original literary imaginations of modern Europe."

For the Gestapo officer who offers you protection, you paint his young son's room with fairytale fresco tableaux. Of the tableaux, a young helper on the scene will later recall:

The characters of kings, knights, squires had the completely "un-Aryan" features of the faces of people among whom Schulz lived at the time. Their similarity to the emaciated and tortured faces that Schulz had captured in memory was extraordinary. Here these tormented people—transported through Schulz's imagination from the world of tragic reality—found for themselves in paintings brilliant richness and pride, as kings on thrones in sable furs, with golden crowns on their heads....

In return for your tableaux, "your" Gestapo officer gives you food.

From the career rival of "your" Gestapo officer, who hates yours, you receive two mortal gunshot wounds on November 19, 1942. You had planned that day to escape to Warsaw.

In 1992, a Polish stamp is issued in your honor, bearing the likeness of your face against a background of mustard yellow. Your face: tidy, straining, skeptical.

The Jewish cemetery was destroyed in Drohobycz.

We'll never find you.

Your prose, a poetry, begat itself as letters. Your fiction first took form in longish postscripts, fitted in at the ends of your letters.

Well, yes, that would interest me.

From your letter to Tadeusz Breza of December 2, 1934: "I am immensely pleased that we shall meet."

From your letter to him: "I need an ally."

Love,
Me