

‘A different fabric’. The overt and the hidden in Joseph Conrad’s prefaces to his prose works*

MAREK PACUKIEWICZ

ORCID: 0000-0002-9420-1107

(University of Silesia in Katowice)

In his famous *A Familiar Preface* to the volume bearing no less perverse a title, *A Personal Record. Some Reminiscences*, Joseph Conrad declared as follows:

[...] powieściopisarz żyje w swym dziele. Tkwi w nim jako jedyna rzeczywistość wymyślonego świata, wśród urojonych rzeczy, wydarzeń i ludzi. Pisząc o nich, pisze jedynie o samym sobie. Ale to uzewnętrznienie się nie jest zupełne. Pisarz pozostaje do pewnego stopnia jakby za zasłoną, obecność jego jest raczej przeczuwana niż widzialna – niby ruchy i głos dochodzące zza ekranu powieści. W tych zapiskach zasłona ta nie istnieje¹.

(...) a novelist lives in his work. He stands there, the only reality in an invented world, among imaginary things, happenings, and people. Writing about them, he is only writing about himself. But the disclosure is not complete. He remains, to a certain extent, a figure behind the veil; a suspected rather than a seen presence – a movement and a voice behind the draperies of fiction. In these personal notes there is no such veil.¹

This guarantee granted by the author in the para-text of his autobiographic work puzzles the reader – as do several other similar statements that Conrad made on the margin of his other literary texts. Expecting the postulated truth of experience, a history of the life, a confession of the person, s/he all of a sudden receives a message so sophisticated, if not perfidious, that all those facts are literarily distilled and the end product of this process is hard to identify. Conrad, therefore, often had to defend himself against the objections of his readers who saw that a book he wrote

* First printed as “Inna tkanina”. Jawne i ukryte w przedmowach Josepha Conrada”, in: *Napis* issue XVII (2011), pp. 153-168.

1 J. Conrad, *A Familiar Preface*, in: *idem*, *A Personal Record. Some Reminiscences* (New York-London: 1912), p. 4; cf. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/687/687-h/687-h.htm#link2H_4_0001. [Polish version: J. Conrad, *Dziela* [Works], vol. XIII (Warsaw: 1972), p. 16. All Polish quotations after edition: J. Conrad, *Dziela*, vol. I-XXVII, ed. Z. Najder (Warsaw: 1972-1976)].

(i.e. *The Mirror of the Sea*) ‘was of a revealing character, but in some cases they thought that the revelation was not complete’.² The defensive arguments were mostly worded in his prefaces, where this author, expectedly, declared sincerity and immediacy over and over again: ‘this book written in perfect sincerity holds back nothing – unless the mere bodily presence of the writer’;³ and, ‘the following pages rest like a true confession of matters of fact which to a friendly and charitable person may convey the inner truth of almost a lifetime’.⁴

Conrad’s autobiographism poses considerable challenge to scholars exploring his works, and this not only due to the fact that this author’s ‘confessions’ are among the least reliable biographical sources. The very structure of Conrad’s texts penned is apparently astonishing: conventional at times, it is always digressive – to the extent that it comes off as a loose collection of anecdotes. The way *The Mirror of the Sea* and, particularly, *A Personal Record* are narrated is extremely precisely composed, or even purposefully complicated, whatever the appearances. This is why in his analysis of the latter book Stanisław Modrzewski finds that ‘the author, personally, vanishes in these reminiscences’,⁵ since the actual subject-matter of the volume in question is literature⁶ and its discovery by the author, accomplished through travelling to and visiting various cultural places, codes, and functions. If Conrad expresses his hope that from the reading of these pages (of his *Personal Record*) there may emerge at last ‘the vision of a personality’⁷, not only does it stand for an ‘image of a polarised or multipolar personality’⁸ but it also indicates that, apparently telling a story of himself, the writer in fact recounts the contexts that have shaped him as a person and as an author.

In their exploration of this author’s autobiographical texts, Conrad scholars tend to emphasise that a literary creation is the case here. Zdzisław Najder finds that although *A Familiar Preface* declares that there is ‘no drapery of fiction in these personal notes’, its author ‘wove a different fabric’ – namely, that of ‘his private

2 J. Conrad, *Author’s note* (1919), in: *idem, The Mirror of the Sea. Memories and Impressions* (Edinburgh-London: 1925), p. XI, cf. *Notes on My Books*: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/20150/20150-h/20150-h.htm>, also: https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Notes_on_My_Books/Mirror_of_the_Sea.

3 *Ibid.*

4 *Ibid.*, p. X.

5 S. Modrzewski, *Conrad a konwencje: autorska świadomość systemów a warsztat literacki pisarza* [Conrad and conventions: author’s awareness of systems and the writer’s literary workshop] (Gdańsk: 1992), p. 134.

6 See: *ibid.*, pp. 137-138.

7 J. Conrad, *A Familiar Preface*, p. 16; cf. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/687/687-h/687-h.htm#link2H_4_0001.

8 See: S. Modrzewski, *Conrad a konwencje...*, p. 138.

mythology'.⁹ Edward Said in his noted study *Joseph Conrad and the fiction of autobiography* argues that Conrad's autobiographical references are a 'combination of evasion with a seemingly artless candour in his autobiographical pronouncements'.¹⁰ Said stresses that Conrad's message is not only about fighting for oneself but also about an attempt at re-evaluating the notions of 'truth' or 'personality', at opening them toward ontology and dynamism of context. As for the title used by Said, the term 'fiction' does not mark a differentiation into what is true and what is false, but rather a creative process – one that, to my mind, ought to be perceived not in purely literary terms but also in cultural ones.

To address this issue, I should like to focus on Conrad's prefaces, which are quite specific quasi-autobiographical texts – in particular, the *Author's note* series written to be published in a complete edition of the writer's works. Together with a few earlier forewords, including the *Familiar Preface* and the equally famous preface to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* – they were published in 1921 as a separate volume entitled *Notes on My Books*. This shows that Conrad imbued his para-texts with an autonomous literary existence, thereby confirming – probably unconsciously – Søren Kierkegaard's argument that 'the preface is an altogether unique kind of literary production'.¹¹ Hence, those Conrad scholars who see the *Notes* as belonging to literary fiction, rather than a 'reality' – never being the writer's 'last word' or reliable information on his sources – are right.¹²

Looking at the studies tackling this problem, one is ready to endorse Anita Starosta's conclusion whereby the more Conrad in his *Notes* draws our attention away from himself as the author, redirecting it toward the issue of limits of cognition and language, the more obligated we find ourselves to demonstrate our awareness of what he is really hiding.¹³ One example is an interpretation (proposed by Christopher GoGwilt), of the problem of the writer's cultural identity based on a trifle textual item – the additional letter 'K' featured in the initials 'J.C.K' signing the *Familiar Preface* in the first edition of *A Personal Record* and reappearing in none of the later (re)editions. GoGwilt sees this gesture as an attempt to mediate between the writer's Polish and English name, accompanied by the fear of being

9 Z. Najder, *Conrad in perspective. Essays on art and fidelity* (Cambridge: 1997), p. 107 [Polish version: *idem, Sztuka i wierność. Szkice o twórczości Josepha Conrada*, transl. H. Najder (Opole: 2000)].

10 E. Said, *Joseph Conrad and the fiction of autobiography* (Cambridge, Mass.: 1966), pp. 10-11.

11 S. Kierkegaard, *Prefaces. Light reading for people in various estates, according to time and opportunity by Nicolaus Notabene* (Princeton: 2016) [from the opening paragraph (marked V6)].

12 See: A. Starosta, "Conrad's 'Author's notes': Between text and reader", in: *Yearbook of Conrad Studies (Poland)* 2007, vol. III (Cracow: 2008), p. 33.

13 *Ibid.*

accused of 'Slavicity', which he criticises in his 1919 *Author's note* to the said volume.¹⁴ Lastly, Leszek Prorok, who in his research pursued in Poland is probably the only one to have stressed the necessity to discuss separately the *Author's notes* and recognised their textual autonomy, identifies them as heralding the self-reference and self-reflexivity bias in Conrad's novels and sheds light on the relation between 'creation and reality'.¹⁵ These propositions assume that the prefaces, however sophisticatedly, do contain some element of the reality.

Demanding that Conrad's prefaces be approached as 'pure' literary texts entails considerable problems. The writer himself, in quite a textbook – if not ostentatious – manner, shaped his para-texts into an autobiographical commentary designed as a pact with the reader.¹⁶ In his *Notes* as well as earlier forewords, devised as artistic manifestos of a specific sort, Conrad emphasises with astonishing frequency that the facts and inspirations behind the respective prose texts are rooted not only in the reality but also in his personal experiences. How illusory this clue is, has been attested by the writer's biographers. Z. Najder finds that most of the *Author's notes* are 'in a tone of conversational confessions regarding the work's origin. A pleasant reading, they do not have to be much trusted since their author places a bet on anecdotal vividness and creation of autobiographical legends that would smooth out his life as a sailor and man-of-letters, rather than on the account's credibility'. Hence, the 'mythical character' of a vast amount of this content.¹⁷

Biographers tend to agree that in his para-texts, Conrad camouflages himself rather than takes the reader behind-the-scenes of his literary strategies. However, they often emphasise that he thereby lays, in a way, a snare for himself: Roger Tennant finds, for instance, that referring to 'actual' facts, this author explains his reasons as if he indeed were accused of hiding the truth.¹⁸ Zdzisław Najder argues that at least with one of his novels, the less successful *The Arrow of Gold*, its author tried, in a note written later, to obscure 'the infertility and impersonality of this book (...) with a mist of alleged autobiographism and emotional sincerity (...) But, such artificially created sentimental myths must have deepened the sense of

14 See: C. GoGwilt, *The invention of the West: Joseph Conrad and the double-mapping of Europe and Empire* (Stanford: 1995), pp. 130-49.

15 L. Prorok, *Inicjacje Conradowskie* [Conrad initiations] (Cracow: 1987), pp. 66-69.

16 Cf. G. Genette, *Palimpsests: literature in the second degree*, transl. from the French Ch. Newman and C. Doubinski (Lincoln-London, Nebraska: 1997), *passim* at p. 128.

17 Z. Najder, *Życie Conrada-Korzeniowskiego* [The life of Conrad-Korzeniowski], vol. II (Lublin: 2006), p. 303. Referring to Jocelyn Baines' defence of Conrad against the 'accusations of pathological lying', Najder stresses that the author had the right to be a mythomaniac.

18 R. Tennant, *Joseph Conrad. A biography* (London: 1981), p. 227.

inner emptiness'.¹⁹ In parallel, the scholar strongly stresses that Conrad opposed biographism in literary criticism, recalling his critique of a literal, biography-related interpretation of his *Youth*. On the other hand, the author of *Lord Jim* often provoked such readings through his foreword notes. So, why should have Conrad created such para-texts, all the same?

In this context, the delimitative function of Conrad's prefaces poses a related research problem in itself. This element of literary editorial framework,²⁰ usually referred to as a 'threshold',²¹ 'border strip',²² or 'bridge',²³ suggests a 'dialectics of the inside and the outside'; as a result, such 'mediatorial model of preface' implies a 'simple pattern as follows: non-literary reality – preface – literary work's world'. In fact, however, it frequently means recognition of the preface's 'external judgment'.²⁴ The statement that 'the scholarly reflection reproduces (...) the paradoxical nature of preface, the will to be *inside* and *beyond*, to stress and simultaneously efface the differences between the fiction world and real life', by Wojciech Hamerski,²⁵ is pretty apt. Thus, since Yuri Lotman states that 'We need only begin to examine the frame as a kind of independent text in order from the [painting's – M. P.] canvas to disappear from the field of our artistic vision; it ends up on the other side of the boundary',²⁶ the question is worth asking of whether Conrad's prefaces also might be named a 'different fabric' (similarly to his recollection texts)? It is not about challenging the 'frame(work)' character of these prefaces (though their related literary

19 Z. Najder, *Życie Conrada-Korzeniowskiego*, vol. II, p. 314.

20 See: R. Ociecek, "O różnych aspektach badań literackiej ramy wydawniczej w książkach dawnych" [On various aspects of research into the literary publishing framework in old books], in: *eadem*, *O literackiej ramie wydawniczej w książkach dawnych* [About the literary publishing frame in old books] (Katowice: 1990). (I am indebted to Teresa Banaś-Korniak, PhD, for drawing my attention to the abovementioned term.)

21 A. Dziadek, "Przypisy Aleksandra Wata w tomie 'Ciemne świecیدło'" [Aleksander Wat's footnotes in the volume 'Dark Shining'], in: *Przedmowa w książce dawnej i współczesnej* [Preface in an old and contemporary book], ed. R. Ociecek, with contributions from R. Ryba, (Katowice: 2002), p. 205.

22 M. Stanisz, "Przeszłość i przyszłość 'prefacjologii' literackiej. Przegląd zagadnień, perspektywy badawcze" [The past and the future of literary 'prefaceology'. Review of issues, research perspectives], in: *Romantyczne przemowy i przedmowy* [Romantic speeches and prefaces], eds J. Lyszczyna and M. Bąk (Katowice: 2010), p. 13.

23 E. Kasperski, "Parateksty zamiast przedmów. Zarys poetyki paratekstów w twórczości Norwida" [Paratexts instead of prefaces. An outline of the poetics of paratexts in Norwid's works], in: *Romantyczne przemowy i przedmowy*, p. 115.

24 W. Hamerski, "Zmylić trop 'zawczasu, raz jeszcze i raz na zawsze'? Przedmowy do powieści współczesnych Józefa Ignacego Kraszewskiego" [Confuse the track 'in advance, again and again'? Prefaces to contemporary novels by Józef Ignacy Kraszewski], in: *Romantyczne przemowy i przedmowy*, p. 260.

25 *Ibid.*, s. 261.

26 J. Lotman, *The structure of the artistic text*, transl. from the Russian by R. Vroon, Series Michigan Slavic Contributions, no. 7 (Ann Arbor-Michigan: 1977), p. 201, chap. 8: "The composition of the verbal work of art. The frame", p. 209.

texts initially functioned without them); rather than that, it is to allow the option that the frame and the painting might have been woven of similar material. This leads us to the need investigate the ontology of these prefaces, as they are 'the venue where diverse discourses come across one another'.²⁷

Conrad's *Author's notes* often refer to the experience underlying to literary texts, mostly pointing to its astonishing and unusual aspects. As for the novella *The Idiots*, its author declares that it is 'an obviously derivative piece of work' (thus referring to the influence of French prose), 'the suggestion' of which 'was not mental but visual: the actual idiots'.²⁸ This apparently banal statement shows that the forms in which experience informs a writer's knowledge and techniques are far from obvious. After all, as represented by Conrad, experience is normally already processed, in one way or another. This is why Captain MacWhirr in the novella *Typhoon* is a 'genuine' figure whilst also being 'the product of twenty years of life. My own life',²⁹ as the author declares. The issue of 'authenticism' and 'facts' reappears in the prefacial notes, the experience being represented, in this context, each time in a somewhat different way. The novella *Heart of Darkness* is 'experience pushed a little (and only very little) beyond the actual facts of the case', so that 'that sombre theme be given a sinister resonance, a tonality of its own, a continued vibration'.³⁰ It goes as far as to say that this 'very little push' is among the leading themes recurring in the prefaces concerned.

On the other hand, Conrad compensates for this slight disparity by introducing his literary characters into his own life. The point is not merely to identify their prototypes within his personal experience: apparently referring to sources, Conrad begins to weave another story, as if parallel to the literary narratives. These fragments refer to the description of the meeting with Almayer from *A Personal Record*, and rank among the most beautiful passages in the *Notes*:

[Jim] nie jest owocem chłodnych spekulacji myślowych. Nie jest również wytworem północnych mgieł. Ujrzałem raz słonecznym rankiem, jak szedł wśród zwykłego otoczenia wschodniej przystani – wzruszający, wymowny, tajemniczy... i niemy. Tak

[Jim] is not the product of coldly perverted thinking. He's not a figure of Northern Mists either. One sunny morning, in the commonplace surroundings of an Eastern roadstead, I saw his form pass by – appealing – significant – under a cloud – perfectly

27 M. Stanisławski, "Przeszłość i przyszłość...", p. 14. I refer to 'discourse' here strictly in the sense given to the term by Michel Foucault – a concept that assumes a relationship between the literary work and reality through the 'function of the author'. (This concept is referred to below as well.)

28 J. Conrad, *Tales of Unrest* (1898), cf. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/20150/20150-h/20150-h.htm>, also https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Notes_on_My_Books.

29 J. Conrad, *Author's note to Typhoon and Other Stories* (1919), cf. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/20150/20150-h/20150-h.htm>, also <https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Typhoon>.

30 J. Conrad, *Author's note to Youth* (1917), cf. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/5658/5658-h/5658-h.htm#link2H_4_0001.

właśnie być powinno. A do mnie już należało – z całym zrozumieniem, do jakiego byłem zdolny – znaleźć odpowiednie słowa dla wyrażenia jego istoty. Był to „jeden z nas”³¹.

silent. Which is as it should be. It was for me, with all the sympathy of which I was capable, to seek fit words for his meaning. He was 'one of us'.³¹

This passage is extremely moving, especially in the context of the story of a romantic talkative who at the end 'passes away under a cloud (...) excessively romantic'³². Here, he appears in front of us, or rather, the author, who has to make a slight shift again, find the appropriate words – silent, in full sunlight. This is not the only intertextual play embarked on by Conrad in his prefacial notes. The archetype of Willems from his second novel, *An Outcast of the Islands*, was introduced to him by the title character of his narrative debut, but the author weaves his story in the note to *An Outcast* in a manner that deceptively resembles the narratives of the two novels. Where the experience ends and literature begins, or the other way round, is hard to resolve:

Człowiek, który zasugerował mi postać Willemsa nie był sam w sobie interesujący. Ten pozbawiony zaufania, nielubiany, wyniszczony Europejczyk wzbudził moje zainteresowanie swoją dziwną, niepewną i niezwykłą pozycją. Osada ukryta w sercu puszczy, w górze posępnej rzeki, gdzie z białych statków docierał tylko nasz, niechętnie tolerowała jego obecność. [...] Jedyne wyraźne stwierdzenie, jakie mogłem kiedykolwiek wyciągnąć, to że on właśnie „wprowadził na rzekę Arabów”. [...] Spotkałem Willemsa na pierwszym obiedzie właśnie u Almayera. [...] przez cały wieczór odważył się na jedno tylko odezwanie, którego nie zrozumiałem, bo miał kiepską dykcję, jak człowiek, który zapomniał mówić. Byłem chyba jedyną osobą, która podchwyciła ów dźwięk. Willems spieszył się. Niebawem odszedł ostentacyjnie, nie zauważony – zapewne w puszczy. Jej ogrom był tuż, niespełna trzysta jardów od wrandy, gotów do pochłonięcia wszystkiego³³.

The man who suggested Willems to me was not particularly interesting in himself. My interest was aroused by his dependent position, his strange, dubious status of a mistrusted, disliked, worn-out European living on the reluctant toleration of that Settlement hidden in the heart of the forest-land, up that sombre stream which our ship was the only white men's ship to visit. (...) The only definite statement I could extract from anybody was that it was he who had 'brought the Arabs into the river.' (...) the very first time we dined with Almayer there was Willems sitting at table with us (...) In the course of the whole evening he ventured one single remark which I didn't catch because his articulation was imperfect, as of a man who had forgotten how to speak. I was the only person who seemed aware of the sound. Willems subsided. Presently he retired, pointedly unnoticed – into the forest maybe? Its immensity was there, within three hundred yards of the verandah, ready to swallow up anything.³³

Let us note that here, we deal with something more than yet another character, along with Lord Jim, on whose behalf the author speaks. This figure is, we are told, not-quite-interesting. Why, then, should Willems be worth a story told by Conrad?

31 J. Conrad, *Author's note to Lord Jim* (1917), cf. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/5658/5658-h/5658-h.htm#link2H_4_0001 [Polish version: J. Conrad, *Dziela*, vol. V, p. 9].

32 J. Conrad, *Lord Jim* (1899-1900), cf. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/5658/5658-h/5658-h.htm#link2H_4_0001 [Polish version: J. Conrad, *Dziela*, vol. V, p. 439].

33 J. Conrad, *Author's note to An Outcast of the Islands* (1919); cf. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/638/638-h/638-h.htm#link2H_4_0001, also https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Notes_on_My_Books/An_Outcast_of_the_Islands [Polish version: J. Conrad, *Dziela*, vol. II, p. 9-10].

Due to his unattractiveness it is the context that strikes our attention: not only the renown that surrounds him but also his 'position', or even the vastness of the forest where he disappears. It is the quest for him that, in a way, was to lead to the creation of a novel, we are told.

Yet, Conrad by all means (how hypocritically!) tries to protect the sources of his inspirations against the influence of literary techniques. In the note to *Youth: A Narrative and Two Other Stories*, the author pronounces the following apology of one of his best-known characters:

przypuszczano, że jest zręcznym parawanem, niczym więcej niż chwytem, „udawaczem”, opiekuńczym duchem, podszeptującym „demonem”. Na mnie zaś padło podejrzenie, iż obmyśliłem plan, aby nim zawiądnąć. Tak nie było. Nic sobie z góry nie układałem. Z człowiekiem nazwiskiem Marlow zeszedliśmy się zupełnie przypadkowo, tak jak zawiera się znajomości w miejscach kuracyjnych – znajomości, które czasem dojrzewają do przyjaźni³⁴.

he was supposed to be all sorts of things: a clever screen, a mere device, a 'personator,' a familiar spirit, a whispering 'dæmon.' I myself have been suspected of a meditated plan for his capture. That is not so. I made no plans. The man Marlow and I came together in the casual manner of those health-resort acquaintances which sometimes ripen into friendships.³⁴

Paradoxically enough, it is not the writer who hosts in the world of his novel the characters he has created: it is them who receive and engage him in their own countries, sharing with him their emotions and affections – as is the case with the *Nostramo* characters:

Jeśli chodzi o ich własne dzieje, czy to Arystokracji, czy Ludu, mężczyzn czy kobiet, Latynosów czy Anglosasów, bandytów czy polityków, to usiłowałem nakreślić je ręką tak chłodną, jak mi na to pozwalał żar własnych, ścierających się wzruszeń. W gruncie rzeczy są to także dzieje ich starć. [...] Wyznaję, że ta epoka jest dla mnie epoką trwałych przyjaźni i niezapomnianej gościnności³⁵.

As to their own histories I have tried to set them down, Aristocracy and People, men and women, Latin and Anglo-Saxon, bandit and politician, with as cool a hand as was possible in the heat and clash of my own conflicting emotions. And after all this is also the story of their conflicts. (...) I confess that, for me, that time is the time of firm friendships and unforgotten hospitalities.³⁵

Let us note that out of these fragments there emerges a perverse vision of literature as an experience that is never focused on just one element or person but communicates to us certain comprehensive contextual constructs. Apparently, the touch of a cultural experience was slightly shifted into the domain of literature in

34 J. Conrad, *Author's note to Heart of Darkness* (1917), cf. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/abs/heart-of-darkness/authors-note-1917/06ABA8A47B3EA70A79C186CE8156C5F2>; also, cf. *Notes on My Books*: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/20150/20150-h/20150-h.htm#YOUTH> [Polish version: J. Conrad, *Dziela*, vol. VI, p. 7-8].

35 J. Conrad, *Author's note to Nostramo. A Tale of the Seaboard* (1917), cf. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2021/2021-h/2021-h.htm#link2H_4_0001; also *Notes on My Books*: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/20150/20150-h/20150-h.htm> [Polish version: J. Conrad, *Dziela*, vol. VIII, p. 11].

order to render the latter more 'natural', but in fact, this manoeuvre demonstrates that literature is not hermetic.

What is astonishing, in spite of his considerable attachment to experience, Conrad essentially speaks quite offhandedly. He would tend to emphasise that inspiration is attributable to chance 'At the crucial moment of my indecision Flora de Barral passed before me, but so swiftly that I failed at first to get hold of her'.³⁶ No less frequently, including in Conrad's nonchalant utterances, marks of his extensive inspirations are identifiable: 'Of *The Informer* and *An Anarchist* I will say next to nothing. The pedigree of these tales is hopelessly complicated and not worth disentangling at this distance of time.'³⁷ All the same, among the inspirations behind the other short stories of the *Set of Six*, the author mentions 'a direct narrative',³⁸ along with a 'ten-line paragraph in a small provincial paper published in the South of France'.³⁹ One should agree with Robert Hampson's claim that eclecticism of the source material used by Conrad reminds him of his contemporary evolutionistic anthropology.⁴⁰ Let us bear in mind, though, that Conrad in parallel displays the cognitive process, taking into account the standpoints, the extensiveness of a context concentrating in the subject, which is characteristic, in turn, of the modern field anthropology as pursued by Bronisław Malinowski. The writer often approaches his own experience ironically, emphasising the need to seek for inspiration elsewhere:

Charakter wiadomości, sugestii i napomknień, którymi posługiwałem się w moich literackich fikcjach, wynikał bezpośrednio z okoliczności mojego rzeczywistego życia. Czerpałem z doświadczeń innych osób, z którymi się zetknąłem, i to tylko przelotnie, raczej niż z osobistych przeżyć, bo samo moje życie w gruncie rzeczy wcale nie było obfite w przygody⁴¹.

The nature of the knowledge, suggestions or hints used in my imaginative work has depended directly on the conditions of my active life. It depended more on contacts, and very slight contacts at that, than on actual experience; because my life as a matter of fact was far from being adventurous in itself.⁴¹

The conviction that the author is merely a 'lens' that focuses diverse contexts and discourses in his experience is expressed by Conrad very often in a variety

36 J. Conrad, *Author's note to Chance* (1920), cf. *Notes on My Books*: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/20150/20150-h/20150-h.htm>, also https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Notes_on_My_Books.

37 J. Conrad, *Author's note to A Set of Six* (1920), cf. *Notes on My Books*: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2305/2305-h/2305-h.htm>.

38 *Ibid.*

39 *Ibid.*

40 R. Hampson, "Frazer, Conrad and the 'pruth of primitive passion'", in: *Sir James Frazer and the literary imagination. Essays in affinity and influence*, ed. R. Fraser, (Houndmills-Basingstoke-Hampshire-London: 1990), p. 175.

41 J. Conrad, *Author's note to Within the Tides* (1920), cf. *Notes on My Books*: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/20150/20150-h/20150-h.htm>, also https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Notes_on_My_Books [Polish version: J. Conrad, *Dziela*, vol. XVII, p. 7].

of ways. For instance: ‘Notwithstanding their autobiographical form the above two stories [i.e., *A Smile of Fortune* and *The Secret Sharer*] are not the record of personal experience. Their quality, such as it is, depends on something larger if less precise: on the character, vision and sentiment of the first twenty independent years of my life.’⁴² This particular pronouncement is more than a naive remark that he transferred his maritime and ‘life’ experience into his narratives. We can also find the conviction there that a certain behavioural model can be distilled out of the experience of a high cultural context where ‘most of the information either exists in the physical context or is internalized in the individual, that is, most of the information is already reflected, and only a few of the information is clearly conveyed in a coded way’.⁴³ It happens every so often that an internalised ‘high context’, though difficult to precisely define, is an important point of reference to Conrad.⁴⁴

Essentially, the ‘distillation’ process is extremely difficult for a writer. This is how Conrad describes the complicated process of constructing the plot of the *The Secret Agent: A Simple Tale*: initially, in a talk with his acquaintance, he reportedly heard a comment on the sister of an assassin from Greenwich Park; then, he happened to read, in some book on bomb attacks in London, a brief note on an interior minister’s behind-the-scenes statement on terrorism, which, in turn, activated a series of associations – the revolution in South America, a ‘vision of an enormous town presented itself, of a monstrous town’.⁴⁵ On the one hand, the crystallisation process meant for Conrad a ‘mental change’ (more specifically, ‘change in my imagination, in my vision and in my mental attitude’),⁴⁶ whereas on the other he eschews his own experience: ‘I had to fight hard to keep at arms-length the memories of my solitary and nocturnal walks all over London in my early days’.⁴⁷ Apparently, a writer should be aware of cultural codes stratifying inside him as well as those that surround him. As a result, the question of proportions becomes fundamental for the author: ‘T h i s book is t h a t story, reduced to manageable

42 J. Conrad, *Author’s note to Twixt Land and Sea* (1920), cf. *Notes on My Books*: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/20150/20150-h/20150-h.htm>, also https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Notes_on_My_Books.

43 E.T. Hall, *Beyond culture* (Garden City-New York: 1976), pp. 35-36. This American anthropologist takes into account, in this case, primarily the proxemic interaction, which however translates into internalised models of behaviour, attitudes, values, and reactions, all forming the basis of a condensed vision of the marine/naval ‘us’ as constantly (re)presented by Conrad.

44 See: M. Pacukiewicz, *Dyskurs antropologiczny w pisarstwie Josepha Conrada* [Anthropological discourse in the writings of Joseph Conrad] (Cracow: 2008), section entitled “The fiction of culture. A touch of the Antipodes”.

45 J. Conrad, *Author’s note to The Secret Agent* (1920), cf. *Notes on My Books*: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/20150/20150-h/20150-h.htm> also https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Notes_on_My_Books.

46 *Ibid.*

47 *Ibid.*

proportions'⁴⁸ – along the other constituents of Conrad's writing method. The latter is another important subject of his prefaces, and is approached by this author in no less puckish a way.

Conrad's attitude to literature is partly explained in the following excerpt from his preface to *Gaspar Ruiz* (one of the less prominent prefaces, not included in the book edition of *Notes on My Books*):

Nowela *Gaspar Ruiz* nie jest oparta, jak *Młodość*, na osobistym doświadczeniu. Jest naprawdę literaturą, co nie znaczy, że została po prostu zmyślona, ale prawdziwie wyobrażona na podstawie napomknień o wypadkach, które rzeczywiście miały miejsce, i o ludziach, którzy rzeczywiście w tym czasie, w tej okolicy i w tych specyficznych warunkach żyli⁴⁹.

The story *Gaspar Ruiz* is not a piece of personal experience like *Youth*. It is truly fiction, by which I do not mean that it is merely invented, but that it is truly imagined from hints of things that have really happened and of people that have really existed at that time, in that locality and under those special conditions of life.⁴⁹

This means that Conrad finds the context of a novel more important than its individual elements. Hence, though the Nigger of the 'Narcissus' crew was, as we can read, 'in my watch', we learn that 'in the book he is nothing; he is merely the centre of the ship's collective psychology and the pivot of the action'.⁵⁰ Moreover, 'the true idea' of this context, resulting from the appropriate transformation, is of primary importance in this case. Although in his prefaces the writer approaches the issue of experience with ironical distance (the more he highlights it, the more 'literary' it becomes), he usually speaks of the literary method in a serious tone, especially in two early prefaces – to *The Nigger* and *A Personal Record*, both of these prefaces often viewed as his artistic manifestos.

It's famous Conrad's observation that art ought to be a 'single-minded attempt to render the highest kind of justice to the visible universe, by bringing to light the truth, manifold and one, underlying its every aspect'.⁵¹ The writer is to make us 'see', which is related to his belief that his imagination has primarily to be based on the senses, while his texts must not be merely a 'manufactured article, the fabrication of minds insensitive to the intimate delicacies of our relation to the dead

48 *Ibid.*

49 J. Conrad, *Author's note to Gaspar Ruiz*; see: *idem, Youth and Gaspar Ruiz* (London-Toronto: 1920), p. 167, cf. <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015048717071&view=1up&seq=173> [Polish version: J. Conrad, *Dziela*, vol. XXV, p. 110].

50 J. Conrad, *To my readers in America in Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*. (1914), cf. *Notes on My Books*: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/20150/20150-h/20150-h.htm>, also https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Notes_on_My_Books.

51 J. Conrad, *Preface to The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* (1897), cf. *Notes on My Books*: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/20150/20150-h/20150-h.htm>, also https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Notes_on_My_Books.

and to the living, in their countless multitudes'.⁵² Hence, a creative artist makes us sensitive to the aspect of diachrony, whereas his role is also to incite in us, a sense of cultural community, or solidarity,⁵³ based on a cultural synchrony. As Anita Starosta aptly observes, Conrad wants such a community to emerge through the text, on the grounds 'of the old, old words, worn thin, defaced by ages of careless usage'.⁵⁴ It is words, as uncertain as they are, that are the only form to express our experience; hence, as she puts it, 'Conrad demands that we read his work instead of looking underneath of it'⁵⁵. Let us emphasise that solidarity in this respect is perceived by the writer as a sort of transmission of cultural heritage: 'binds men to each other, which binds together all humanity – the dead to the living and the living to the unborn'.⁵⁶

Let us bear in mind that in the famous *A Familiar Preface*, Conrad associates a good art of writing with the idea of 'full possession of myself which is the first condition of good service',⁵⁷ and with the notion of 'Fidelity', being one of 'a few very simple ideas' that the (temporal) world rests on.⁵⁸ Quite a lot has been written about this declaration, particularly in the context of ethics. Let us add, however, that the famous 'Fidelity' concept is contrasted with a 'revolutionary spirit' which, which its 'hard, absolute optimism', basically 'frees one from all scruples as regards ideas'.⁵⁹ This warning describes Conrad's writing strategy in even clearer and more precise terms:

W [...] sprawie życia i sztuki „Jak” ważniejsze jest dla naszego szczęścia niż „Dlaczego”. [...] Sposób także coś znaczy. Sposób, w jaki człowiek się śmieje, płacze, ironizuje, oburza czy zapala, wypowiada swą opinię – i nawet kocha. Sposób postępowania, który niby rysy i wyraz ludzkiej twarzy – odbija wewnętrzną prawdę dla tych, co umieją patrzeć na swoich bliźnich⁶⁰.

(...) in this matter of life and art it is not the Why that matters so much to our happiness as the How. (...) There is the manner. The manner in laughter, in tears, in irony, in indignations and enthusiasms, in judgments – and even in love. The manner in which, as in the features and character of a human face, the inner truth is foreshadowed for those who know how to look at their kind.⁶⁰

52 J. Conrad, *Author's note to The shadow-line* (1920), cf. *Notes on My Books*: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/20150/20150-h/20150-h.htm>, also https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Notes_on_My_Books.

53 J. Conrad, *Preface to The Nigger of the Narcissus* (1897), cf. *Notes on My Books*: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/20150/20150-h/20150-h.htm>, also https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Notes_on_My_Books.

54 *Ibid.*

55 A. Starosta, "Conrad's 'Author's Notes'...", p. 37.

56 J. Conrad, *Preface to The Nigger of the Narcissus* (1897), cf. https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Notes_on_My_Books, also *Notes on My Books*: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/20150/20150-h/20150-h.htm>.

57 J. Conrad, *A Familiar Preface*, p. 10, cf. *Notes on My Books*: https://www.gutenberg.org/files/687/687-h/687-h.htm#link2H_4_0001.

58 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

59 *Ibid.*

60 *Ibid.*, p. 13-14 [Polish version: J. Conrad, *Dziela*, vol. XIII, p. 22].

In spite of the frequent claims, Conrad never distributes some great truths; instead, he focuses on things concrete – so subtle and nuanced that, in order to clarify or specify them, he refers to proxemics. Consequently, the writer's task is shown as an extremely difficult one: literature is a form of translation, but if too literal, translation would be devoid of 'reservations and qualifications which give it its fair form'⁶¹. The point is to find the appropriate tone of the word; the appropriate word may at times be found among the 'wreckage',⁶² Conrad observes.

I think that Conradian irony can be more precisely (though concisely) defined at this point, as to the form it assumes in *Author's notes*. This author is capable of adroit shifts between experience and literature: wherever we would expect 'the truth of reality', we receive literary narratives – and, wherever we come across a writing strategy, or 'literature', it is the senses and things specific that take prevalence, which makes us stray across some unknown land. Thus, Conrad's irony appears as 'the permanent parabasis of the allegory of tropes',⁶³ which in this particular case employs tropes of experience. Wherever we expect an obvious route, we receive the thicket of a context amidst which we are to look for an always-tough path – bearing in mind that, in Conrad's opinion, truth not only is the one-and-only but also multipronged. This parabasis unveils the third aspect between the oppositions in the dilemma, 'literature, or reality?': namely, culture and participation in culture. This comes out quite clearly when we encounter Conrad, who, as a rule, shuns biographism, primarily exposing the *a u t h o r* (the man) when referring to his literary strategy. It strengthens our belief that all the measures taken by this author in his prefaces do not boil down to an idle intertextual hide-and-seek with his readers.

As it might seem, Conrad quite frequently reduces a work, almost literally, to author-the-man – as in the simple, ostentatious declaration: 'even the most artful writers will give himself (and his morality) away in about every third sentence'.⁶⁴ This leads the writer to differentiate between a thinker who deals with notions and ideas, a scholar immersed in the world of facts, and an artist: 'Confronted by the same enigmatical spectacle the artist descends within himself, and in that lonely region of stress and strife, if he be deserving and fortunate, he finds the terms of

61 J. Conrad, *Author's note to Within the Tides* (1920), cf. *Notes on My Books*: https://www.gutenberg.org/files/687/687-h/687-h.htm#link2H_4_0001.

62 J. Conrad, *A Familiar Preface*, p. 2, cf. *Notes on My Books*: https://www.gutenberg.org/files/687/687-h/687-h.htm#link2H_4_0001.

63 See: P. de Man, "The concept of irony", in: *idem, Aesthetic ideology*, ed. and with an introduction by A. Warminski (Minneapolis-London, Minnesota: 1996), p. 179.

64 J. Conrad, *Author's note to Chance* (1920), cf. *Notes on My Books*: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/20150/20150-h/20150-h.htm>, also https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Notes_on_My_Books.

his appeal'.⁶⁵ The rationale behind such 'descending within oneself' is to find within oneself a pity toward the world and to create 'the moral, the emotional atmosphere of the place and time'.⁶⁶ The author's experience tends in this respect to be subjected not so much to a selection as to a refinement: 'if it be true that every novel contains an element of autobiography – and this can hardly be denied, since the creator can only express himself in his creation – then there are some of us [i.e. the writers] to whom an open display of sentiment is repugnant'.⁶⁷ In this way, the author's presence in his books becomes problematised: 'The subject of this book I have been carrying about with me for many years, not so much a possession of my memory as an inherent part of myself'.⁶⁸ This meaningful statement combines general truths with man's multifaceted existence.

What is this 'inherent part of oneself' – focusing, like a lens, on the context and distracting one's attention from the author's 'physical presence'? Anita Starosta aptly postulates that the concept of 'author function' be applied to Conrad's prefaces/author's notes. According to Michel Foucault, one should not definitely opt for the 'real author' or 'fictitious speaker', for 'The author function is linked to the juridical and institutional system that encompasses, determines and articulates the universe of discourses'.⁶⁹ The author is, thus a certain instance created within the text and according to its rules, which accumulates and agglomerates the most essential contextual elements. In this particular case, however, the context is primarily epistemological, one in which culture is limited to, or identified with, a discourse. Consequently, we ought to look into the text itself, whereas the autonomy of literature is replaced in this case with the autonomy of discourse. At this point, an invariant proposition of Ewa Kosowska is worth reminding:

Dzieło literackie nie naśladuje rzeczywistości, ale prezentuje własny świat przedstawiony, na podobieństwo rapsodu „zszywany” przez twórcę ze znanych kawałków rzeczywistości pozatekstowej i strzępów literatury.

Dzisiaj ten proceder nazywamy chętniej intertekstualnością, wskazując raczej na podobieństwa for-

Rather than imitating reality, a literary work presents its own portrayed reality, which, like a rhapsody, is 'sewn up' by the creative artist from the known pieces of off-text reality and shreds of literature.

Today, we are inclined to call this procedure 'intertextuality', pointing basically to formal-and-linguis-

65 J. Conrad, *Preface to The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* (1897), cf. *Notes on My Books*: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/20150/20150-h/20150-h.htm>, also https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Notes_on_My_Books.

66 *Ibid.*

67 J. Conrad, *A Familiar Preface*, p. 8, cf. https://www.gutenberg.org/files/687/687-h/687-h.htm#link2H_4_0001.

68 J. Conrad, [Preface to] *The Arrow of Gold* (1920); cf. *Conrad between the lines: Documents in a life*, eds G.M. Moore, A. Simmons, and J.H. Stape (2000), Series *The Conradian*, vol. 25:2, p. 198.

69 See: M. Foucault, "What is an author?" [*Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?*], in: *The Foucault reader*, ed. P. Rabinow (Harmondsworth: 1984), p. 113.

malno-językowe literackich zapożyczeń niż na obecne w dziełach ślady treściowo-kulturowych inwariantów⁷⁰.

tic similarities of literary borrowings, at the expense of the traces of material-and-cultural invariants present in the works.⁷⁰

The project of cultural literary anthropology proposed by E. Kosowska applies methods of cultural anthropology in analysis of literary text as a product of culture. Rather than reconstructing a 'background', the point here is to try and point in a literary text to certain cultural models or patterns and their mechanisms – that is, accumulation, transmission, and transformation.

After all, in his prefaces Conrad prevents us from reducing his texts to literature alone. In his introduction to the volume significantly entitled *Notes on Life and Letters*, he announces outright that he 'shall (...) come to déshabillé in public',⁷¹ which suggests a distinction between the overt and the hidden. However, the former series shown shifts between 'life' and 'letters' prevent their obvious affiliation with either category. In de Man's view, autobiographical writing 'veils a de-facement of the mind of which it is itself the cause';⁷² what appears in the 'clearances' is a cultural context that creates both the face being 'veiled' and the fabric. This enables us to understand why all those 'confessions' and 'confidences', 'revelations' or 'disclosures' announced by Conrad, though so promising, actually incite no scandal.

Addressing this thread, I should like to recall the differentiation into the 'overt' and the 'covert' aspect of culture, as once proposed by the American anthropologist Ralph Linton, an exponent of configurationism. The overt culture includes material phenomena, resulting from production or fabrication, and kinetic ones, being types of behaviour making use of the element of movement. The covert culture is, in turn, formed of psychological elements, including 'knowledge, attitudes and values shared by the members of a society'.⁷³ Covert elements form the basis of a cultural attitude-value system; 'Once established in the individual, such systems operate automatically, and for the most part, below the level of consciousness'.⁷⁴ Reconstructing a covert culture is an extremely difficult task, since it is not given on a straight-away basis; hence, at the end of the day, the scholar has to create its

70 E. Kosowska, "Kulturowa antropologia literatury. Wprowadzenie" [Cultural anthropology of literature. Introduction], in: *Antropologia kultury – antropologia literatury. Na tropach koligacji* [Cultural anthropology – literary anthropology. On the trail of affinity], eds E. Kosowska, A. Gomółka, and E. Jaworski (Katowice: 2007), p. 22.

71 J. Conrad, *Author's note to Notes on Life and Letters* (1920), cf. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1143/1143-h/1143-h.htm>, also https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Notes_on_My_Books.

72 P. de Man, "Autobiography as de-facement", in: *idem, The rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: 1984), p. 81.

73 R. Linton, *The cultural background of personality* (New York-Michigan: 1945), p. 38.

74 *Ibid.*, p. 115.

constructs. Paradoxically, however, the sphere in question is hidden to researchers rather than cultural participants; it is, therefore, an autonomous and fully-fledged, rather than marginal, part of culture.

We have clearly seen that Conrad in his notes clearly targets the context, even though he exposes its unclear, tough, and complex nature, whilst at the same time strongly highlighting the author, a living man, as the one who supplies certain aspects of (processed) experience. Paradoxically enough, the creative artist expresses himself in his works, so that any ‘unusual experience (...) be set by me before the reader vividly’.⁷⁵ As a brief complementary remark on Conrad’s strategy, he never astounds the reader with a subjectivised reality, nor does he make up a literary confabulation on the subject. Instead, he simply endeavours to show certain aspects of patterns of covert culture he has found in himself – or, at least, draw the reader’s attention to what we could name a ‘covert culture’ from the standpoint of cultural anthropology. And it is a culture that forms the canvas of a ‘different fabric’ prepared by Conrad. Such models, or patterns, can only be found in the man, the author, who becomes a function of culture. Hence, Conrad’s prefaces are not so much instances of self-aggrandisement but rather an attempt at creating constructs to possibly precisely define certain cultural spheres that influence the subject and, as it were, crystallise in it. This is how the ‘internal truth’ ought to be understood: as a ‘product of life’, and outcome of participation in culture, and an attempt to translate its high and hidden context, in an idiomatic fashion, into the language of literature.

As for Conrad, the problem seems complicated as no prevalent cultural context that is the author’s point-of-reference is difficult to identify. Instead, in his works we come across an attempt to merge several cultural and existential strata, such as Polishness and Englishness, maritime service and the art of writing. This is what Conrad himself declares, though the issue is apparently much more complex. This writer imposes on himself certain cultural entreties, trying to effectuate certain logical mediations between them; for instance, the Englishness and Polishness are additionally intermediated by the differentiation between the naval service and the writer’s craft. This enables to specify the cultural mechanism of Conrad’s mythology. According to anthropologists, mythological thinking is not an act of self-creation/self-aggrandisement or confabulation: rather than that, it is a peculiar logical tool through which the coexistence of contradicting cultural elements is explainable. As Claude Lévi-Strauss explains, ‘When faced with a particular prob-

75 J. Conrad, *Author’s Note to Typhoon and Other Stories* (1919), cf. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/20150/20150-h/20150-h.htm>, also <https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Typhoon>.

lem, mythic thought sees it as parallel to others. It uses several codes at once'.⁷⁶ The autobiographical myth of literary fiction created in Conrad's prefaces juxtaposes the opposing categories of 'fiction' and 'life' in order to demonstrate that they are intermediated by diverse spheres of cultural activity, which even if hard to translate 'directly' – inform the subject in a specific fashion, form and shape it (him).⁷⁷ The function of mythological logic is identifiable in the synchronic structure of the prefaces and in the perspective of change in the diachronic context of a model of literary fiction.

As to the former aspect, Yuri Lotman's distinction between two aspects of artistic text is worth recalling: 'we can distinguish two aspects of plot (and more broadly, narration). One can be called mythological – when the text models an entire universe; the other, which reflects some episode in reality, may be called the story [*fabulnyj*] aspect'.⁷⁸ Conrad's prefaces attempt at expressing specific pieces of reality, through reevaluating the constructs of ideal models of the covert culture, whilst his fiction texts primarily expose the description of 'episodes' – the 'overt' cultural plot/narration. Founded upon a mythological mechanism, the author's notes show a condensed model of the world, or universe, through the prism of an individual's consciousness.

In terms of historical perspective, let us emphasise that Conrad's notes express a thorough turn in the way the function of a preface or foreword was understood. We might say that in his early books, the role of a preface was mainly that of communication between the author and the reader, or, manifestation of artistic and cultural attitudes; some had an advertising or educational function.⁷⁹ Thus, prefaces created an 'obscuring effect': they act as 'messages "in lieu of" the work, anticipating its meanings'⁸⁰. Within this model, the preface can be approached as representing the reality, on the one hand, and the literary work, on the other. However, an alteration in this respect is observable in the modern epistemological model.

76 C. Lévi-Strauss and D. Eribon, *Conversations with Claude Lévi-Strauss*, transl. from the French P. Wissing (Chicago: 1991), p. 140.

77 At this point, it needs to be resolutely stressed that in Conrad's writing, mythological thinking manifests itself in the expression rather than the content – in contrast to, e.g., the Polish Romanticist poet Juliusz Słowacki (cf. A. Ziętek-Ptak, "Tragik czy ironista? Krecja autorskiego mitu w listach dedykacyjnych do 'Balladyny' i 'Lilli Wenedy'" [Tragedian or ironist? Creation of an original myth in dedication letters to 'Balladyna' and 'Lilla Weneda'], in: *Romantyczne przemowy i przedmowy*).

78 J. Lotman, *The structure of the artistic text*, p. 211.

79 This generalised opinion is based on the study on early and modern book prefaces: *Przedmowa w książce dawnej i współczesnej* (I am grateful to Marzena Walińska, PhD, for recommending this book to me and for suggesting a historical research perspective in my approach.)

80 M. Stanis, "Przeszłość i przyszłość...", p. 18.

In Foucault's opinion, the transition between the classical and the modern age, that is in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was mostly based on a crisis of representation, the latter proving no more capable of determining the common way of being of things and cognition, for "The being of what is represented falls outside representation itself".⁸¹ As a result, the dualism became exposed with increasing intensity, the abyss between the poles being filled not by representation anymore but by interpretation that refers to more and more distant and hidden points-of-reference. This is quite apparent in Kierkegaard's postulate to separate the preface and the book concerned, which was targeted against Hegel's prefaces – that ideal incarnation of systemic representation. Should the prologue become the entire book, the question of how it relates to the book is to be rejected, Kierkegaard observes.⁸²

The modern age tries to make use of the phenomenon of oscillation between the work and any beyond-the-work. Thus, rather than merely describing, complementing, and introducing the work, the preface primarily poses questions related to the work and keeps the oscillation up. What is the background of its interpretative potential, then? Foucault observes that three counter-sciences have appeared around the humanities: ethnology, psychoanalysis, and linguistics have deepened the knowledge of man, searching though the human being's outer and inner person – the areas of culture, the psyche, and language.⁸³ Conrad's prefaces/notes offer us exactly these three novel interpretive paths, indicating them in a subtle and ironical manner. It is them that inspire digressions causing severance between the foreword and the work whilst implying their parallel and paradoxical rapprochement by means of their surrounding context expressed in a mythomorphic intermediation.

*Translated by Tristan Korecki,
verified by Jerzy Giebułtowski*

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Antropologia kultury – antropologia literatury. Na tropach koligacji, red. E. Kosowska, A. Gomóła, E. Jaworski, Katowice 2007.

Conrad between the lines: Documents in a life, red. G.M. Moore, A. Simmons, and J.H. Stape, "The Conradian", vol. 25, 2000.

81 M. Foucault, *Słowa i rzeczy. Archeologia nauk humanistycznych*, vol. II, transl. from the French T. Komendant (Gdańsk 2005), p. 36 [*idem, The order of things. An archaeology of the human sciences* (London: 1970), p. 252].

82 S. Kierkegaard, *Prefaces...*, [from the opening paragraph (marked V6)].

83 Cf. M. Foucault. *Słowa i rzeczy...*, p. 208-213.

- Conrad J., *A Personal Record. Some Reminiscences*, New York-London 1912, też: https://www.gutenberg.org/files/687/687-h/687-h.htm#link2H_4_0001.
- Conrad J., *A Set of Six*, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2305/2305-h/2305-h.htm>
- Conrad J., *An Outcast of the Islands*, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/638/638-h/638-h.htm#link2H_4_0001.
- Conrad J., *Lord Jim*, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/5658/5658-h/5658-h.htm>.
- Conrad J., *Nostromo. A Tale of the Seaboard*, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2021/2021-h/2021-h.htm#link2H_4_0001.
- Conrad J., *Heart of Darkness*, red. O. Knowles, A. H. Simmons, Cambridge 2018.
- Conrad J., *The Mirror of the Sea. Memories and Impressions*, Edinburgh-London 1925.
- Conrad J., *Youth and Gaspar Ruiz*, London-Toronto 1920, też: <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015048717071&view=1up&seq=173>.
- De Man P., *Aesthetic ideology*, ed. and introduction by A. Warminski, Minneapolis- London, Minnesota 1996.
- De Man P., *The rhetoric of Romanticism*, New York 1984.
- Foucault M., *The order of things. An archaeology of the human sciences*, London 1970.
- Foucault M., *Słowa i rzeczy. Archeologia nauk humanistycznych*, tłum. T. Komendant, Gdańsk 2005.
- Genette G., *Palimpsests: literature in the second degree*, transl. Ch. Newman and C. Doubinski, Lincoln-London, Nebraska 1997,
- GoGwilt C., *The invention of the West: Joseph Conrad and the double-mapping of Europe and Empire*, Stanford 1995.
- Hall E.T., *Beyond culture*, Garden City-New York 1976.
- Kierkegaard S., *Prefaces. Light reading for people in various estates, according to time and opportunity by Nicolaus Notabene*, Princeton 2016.
- Lévi-Strauss C., Eribon D., *Conversations with Claude Lévi-Strauss*, transl. P. Wissing, Chicago 1991.
- Linton R., *The cultural background of personality*, New York-Michigan 1945.
- Lotman J., *The structure of the artistic text*, transl. by R. Vroon, Ann Arbor-Michigan 1977
- Modern essays*, wyb. Ch. Morley, New York 1921.
- Modrzewski S., *Conrad a konwencje: autorska świadomość systemów a warsztat literacki pisarza*, Gdańsk 1992.
- Najder Z., *Conrad in perspective. Essays on art and fidelity*, Cambridge 1997.
- Najder Z., *Życie Conrada-Korzeniowskiego*, Lublin 2006.
- Ocieczek R., *O literackiej ramie wydawniczej w książkach dawnych*, Katowice 1990.
- Pacukiewicz M., *Dyskurs antropologiczny w pisarstwie Josepha Conrada*, Kraków 2008.
- Prorok L., *Inicjacje Conradowskie*, Kraków 1987.
- Przedmowa w książce dawnej i współczesnej*, red. R. Ocieczek przy wsp. R. Ryby, Katowice 2002.
- Romantyczne przemowy i przedmowy*, red. J. Lyszczyna i M. Bąk, Katowice 2010.
- Said E., *Joseph Conrad and the fiction of autobiography*, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1966.
- Sir James Frazer and the literary imagination. Essays in affinity and influence*, ed. R. Fraser, Houndmills-Basingstoke-Hampshire-London 1990.

Starosta A., *Conrad's Author's notes: Between text and reader*, "Yearbook of Conrad Studies" (Poland) 2007, vol. III, Kraków 2008.

Tennant R., *Joseph Conrad. A biography*, London 1981.

The Foucault reader, ed. P. Rabinow, Harmondsworth 1984.

ABSTRACT

In *A Familiar Preface* to the 'autobiographical' volume *A Personal Record. Some Reminiscences*, Joseph Conrad provides that, in this work, there is no 'veil' separating the reader from the author. Despite this declaration, Conrad's 'memories' goes beyond autobiography and you can risk the thesis that all 'autobiographical' texts are rather telling – in the idiomatic way – not about a man but cultural contexts, which formed him. Conrad's paratexts (the famous preface to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*, mentioned *A Familiar Preface* and *Author's notes* written by Conrad for subsequent volumes of his works in the period 1917-1920) make an even greater problem of interpretation. They contain not only the artistic statements, but also a surprising 'autobiographical' reference and 'guidance' of interpretation – that really explains very little and seem to talk about something else. It is difficult to treat Conrad's paratexts as autobiographical texts (though they often pretend to be); in turn proposal of seeing in them 'author function' in the classic form, indicated by Michel Foucault, also appears to be incomplete, because these paratexts simultaneously create author and his cultural context and literary craftsmanship. It seems, therefore, that Conrad considered his paratexts (especially *Author's notes*) as a separate literary genre, in accordance with the instructions of Kierkegaard.

KEYWORDS: preface, autobiography, Conrad Joseph (1857-1924), paratext, romantic irony