

## ЛІТЕРАТУРОЗНАВСТВО

УДК 821.111-31.09»18/19»Д.Конрад

### ANALYTICAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND A CLOSE READING OF JOSEPH CONRAD'S FICTION

**Olha Bandrovska**

*Ivan Franko National University in Lviv  
1, Universytetska St., Lviv, 79000, Ukraine  
obandrovska@gmail.com*

The purpose of this paper is to identify a research subject and methodological tasks of literary anthropology. A concept of “analytical anthropology” introduced by the Russian philosopher V. Podорога is shown as a creative one in analyzing a literary text. The opening paragraph in Joseph Conrad’s novel *Almayer’s Folly* is examined under the assumptions of literary anthropology.

*Keywords:* literary anthropology, Conrad, *Almayer’s Folly*, voice.

#### **Preliminaries**

(1) It is a commonplace that literary criticism is always partial and selective even when a literary critic deals not with a particular literary theory but combines the ideas of two or more critical approaches. As David Lodge writes, “critical methods do not compete with each other as methods – they complement each other. <...> There is no satisfactory total account of a work of literature except the work itself that presents all its meanings in the most significant and assimilable form” (Lodge, 1971, p. 63).

An analytical anthropology is not an exception. Anthropological analysis may be regarded as a form of close reading focusing on a human condition and its artistic realization in the works of fiction. Furthermore, it produces good results in combination with hermeneutic and phenomenological approaches in decoding the author’s worldview, ideological preferences, hopes, and achievements which already belong to the world archive (taking into account that meanings are influenced by cultural conventions which are also permanently developing and changing across centuries).

(2) The Anthropological turn is one of a number of the cultural “turns” declared in philosophical knowledge of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – Cartesian, linguistic, and so on. What makes it an issue of current interest? Michel Foucault argued that “a man is an invention of recent date”, “perhaps nearing its end”, and that “man is neither the oldest nor the most constant problem that has been posed for human knowledge” (Foucault, 1989, pp. 421–422). Why does his philosophical metaphor of “the death of the Subject” remain so important nowadays? Instead of trying to formulate an abstract philosophical answer let us look at the medical diagram of the human body. “What percentage of the human body is currently replaceable with prosthetics when 3D bio printing allows to print artificial bones, ears, kidneys and other human organs?”, and “How close are we to a 3-D-human-heart?”

– these questions have been recently articulated. The human essence is changing fast before our eyes. Cyborgs, cybermen, biological robots, Darth Vaders and other characters of science fiction gradually become part of the physical world. Benefits in technological development and medicine as well as corresponding ethical problems make man's being the center of the humanities, reinforcing the role of literary studies.

### 1. Analytical anthropology in literary studies

A technique of anthropological analysis enables specialists of literature to regard fictional works from objective and impartial point of view. The Russian philosopher Valerij Podoroga<sup>1</sup> interprets literary works as documents of the unique anthropological experience:

"One may imagine an observation report of customs and habits of the natives, written by an anthropologist who got into a mysterious and alien world, for instance, of Polynesian islands. He knows neither the language, nor the rules of communication. Thus, he finds himself in the role of a pure observer – at first, he describes what he is watching without any understanding. Studying what has been watched needs a considerable period of time, and understanding may appear false since it is limited to representation, the language and ideas of the observer who belongs to the other cultural medium. <...> Consequently, the literary anthropologist should solve the paradox of the observer: to perfect techniques of observation trusting neither himself nor his reliable informants, to forget for a while that this novel is written by "Dostoevsky" or "Tolstoy", to regard it as a document, an archive, a collection, to remember that its construction, a setting of its artistic components and the meaning they may contain are of primary concern" (Podoroga, 2006, p. 15).

It is important that the researcher should abandon illusions about an interactive communication with another epoch. His interest is ability of the artistic work to be in different time for itself, where it does not have a contemporary reader and an author who doeth his will, and yet it does not cease to radiate like the prominence, semantic flashes intersecting the paths of oblivion" (Podoroga, 2006, p. 13).

One of the most complex issues at large is specifying methodological tasks and procedures of literary anthropology. Expanded inquiry of man into the works of fiction may include the following research perspectives:

- (1) problems of physicality, natural/cultural body and bodily practices;
- (2) reconstruction of the human psyche – intellect, consciousness, memory, feelings, emotions;
- (3) identity: the relationship between "I" and the "Other", literary constructions of gender, national, civilizational identity;
- (4) problems of socialization and patterns of everyday life;
- (5) cultural universals – work, religion, love, play.

### 2. Voice in the opening paragraph of the novel *Almayer's Folly* by Joseph Conrad (Chapter I): a case study

*'Kaspar! Makan!' The well-known shrill voice startled Almayer from his dream of splendid future into the unpleasant realities of the present hour. An unpleasant voice too. He had heard it for many years, and with every year he liked it less. No matter; there would be an end to all this soon* (Conrad, 2006a, Ch. I).

<sup>1</sup> In my opinion, Valerij Podoroga is one of the most significant contemporary philosophers and intellectuals of Russia. He established the Department of Analytic Anthropology at the Institute of Philosophy, the Russian Academy of Sciences. In his essays on Russian and European literature (Proust, Kafka, Dostoevsky) Podoroga demonstrated the techniques of anthropological analysis and their flexibility in applying them to literary texts according to the formula: a unique author – a specific field of research.

The first lines of the novel introduce the concept of voice which belongs to a psychomimetic<sup>1</sup> framework of the novel. Generally speaking, a voice serves as an identifier of a literary character as far as it is a universal distinguishing marker in the characterization of human individuality – feelings, inner emotions, thoughts and actions. In other words, the voice in a literary work conveys what happens in human consciousness, and also it implies the procedure of decoding it by the narrator and literary character(s).

The word combinations “the well-known shrill voice”, “unpleasant voice”, hereinafter, “Mrs. Almayer’s high-pitched tones” identify Mrs. Almayer, one of the three major characters of “Almayer’s Folly”.

Actually, every principle character in the novel gets his/her specific voice: Mr. Almayer’s voice is “an unsteady, dispassionate, expressionless, grating, pleading”; Nina’s voice is “low, soft”, “the voice of the new-born impulses”; Dain has got “a gloomy tone in his voice”, “the refreshing sound of his voice”; Lakamba speaks in “the bass voice”, and Babalatchi’s voice sounds “squeaky”, sometimes “ending in a loud shout”.

One may add that voices and the way they sound in fiction can describe the author’s attitude to culture, gender, his epoch, and nation. In Conrad’s novel there are “men’s voices”, “women’s voices”, “the warbling of soft, feminine voices”, “the sound of European voices”, “a long and piercing shriek <...> the murmurs of the crowd and the voices of his informants”, “the thousand faint voices of the near forest”, “the voice of nature speaking through the faint noises of the great forest”.

The other important function of the “voice” in the first paragraph of the novel is a communicative one. Voice means the voice of the Other, it always contains some meaning, and as a result an ability to communicate. “Kaspar! Makan!” sounds a psycho intrusion in Almayer’s consciousness, that is, in the consciousness of the Other. The words “The well-known shrill voice startled Almayer from...” connect the inner “I” of Mr. Almayer to the dialogue with Mrs. Almayer: a rather peculiar form of a literary dialogue between the two «characters» – Mrs. Almayer’s external “I” and Mr. Almayer’s internal “I”.

What is the voice of Mrs. Almyers talking about human identity? As A.M. Robertson aptly notes, it is enunciating “the failure of the patriarchs. ‘Kaspar, makan! – the very first words of the very first novel – summon such a miscreant to dinner” (Roberts, 1993, p. 79). This straightforward statement needs clarifying, as the anthropologists state that “one of the characteristics of ‘Malay’ society presently singled out is bilateralism” (Milner, 2009, p. 188). It means that Malay married women being endowed with considerable freedom, and are allowed to divorce – “to break the tie and conclude another afterward” (Milner, 2009, p. 190). The author of the novel seems to know it very well since his heroine ‘had retained enough of conventional teaching to understand well that according to white men’s laws she was going to be Almayer’s companion and not his slave’ (Conrad, 2006a, Ch. 2).

It is also worthy of notice that in shrill sounds of her voice the male first name Kaspar, popular in Western and Central Europe, is followed by the Malay word ‘makan’ which means ‘to eat, to dinner’. It is immediately obvious that the female character belongs to the Malay ethnic group, thus, the complexity of gender relations is duplicated by civilizational identity. In this way, the author introduces two aspects of identity – gender and civilizational ones.

---

<sup>1</sup> The word ‘psychomimetic’, in our case, is not used in its medical definition (producing the effects as hallucinations or delusions), it introduces an extension of aesthetic meaning of mimesis.

The voices of the characters betray their attitude to one another, Mrs. Almayer's "shrill" intonations are confronted by Mr. Almayer's inner discourse: "An unpleasant voice too. <...> No matter; there would be an end to all this soon".

As a result, in the first lines the syntagmatic relations of voices unfold the paradigmatic framework of the novel: antagonism between Almayer and his Malayan wife at the individual level ("while swearing fidelity, he was concocting plans for getting rid of the pretty Malay girl in a more or less distant future" (Conrad, 2006a, Ch. II), as well as the issues of race relations, West European colonialism and imperialism may be reduced to the discussion of a capacity for dialogue. The author reveals dialogical variables of interpersonal and intercultural communication as versions of the same capacity for dialogue. And his final judgment on this issue is declared by Nina, the daughter of Mr. Almayer:

**No two human beings understand each other. They can understand but their own voices. You wanted me to dream your dreams, to see your own visions – the visions of life amongst the white faces of those who cast me out from their midst in angry contempt. But while you spoke I listened to the voice of my own self...** (Conrad, 2006a, Ch. XI)

Significantly, the concluding remark concerns the "narrative voice" in the opening paragraph. It is introduced by third person omniscient narrator (taking into account all the uneasiness of the term): "*The well-known shrill voice startled Almayer from his dream of splendid future into the unpleasant realities of the present hour. ... He had heard it for many years, and with every year he liked it less*".

Needless to say, Conrad's narrative has been profoundly studied in literary criticism of the recent decades. However, it seems that literary anthropology can change the way we think about characters, narrators, and other constructs of the narrative. For instance, a literary critic may ask a question: what does this particular narrative voice tell us about the "implied author", or how does it present a "real"/ biographical author Joseph Conrad? A literary anthropologist can answer that the shrill tone of the female voice would sound natural for a listener who belongs to the same cultural community, and it may appear unnatural for a stranger. Of course, this statement is to be confirmed by other examples<sup>1</sup>.

More broadly, according to the anthropological mindset, sonic experience can be regarded as an element of both individual and cultural experience of a person: "We all have ears, but we listen differently as a result of our culture, professions, education – and our language, since not all words dealing with sound are even translatable" (Sonic Experience. A Guide to Everyday Sounds ). Cultural/regional sound codes may differ in sound rhythms, meanings, functions and intensity. Therefore, constructing the implied author's identity the readers may presume that the narrator (as a tool of the implied author) is a stranger in Malay community; consequently, the real author plays the role of an observer-ethnographer<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> A soundscape of Sambir and its surroundings is "loud" enough: "They took up the cry shrilly, and it travelled so from house to house, dying away in the distance. (Ch. VII), "The murmur of men's voices and the shrill cries of women reached him quite distinctly now" (Ch. VII), "the distant cries of greeting at the other end of the settlement" (Ch. VIII), "the shrill bickerings of Bulangi's wives" (Ch. VIII).

<sup>2</sup> Both his life experience and works of the writer confirm that the sound comfort for him is associated with lower sound registers and silence; in "Personal Record" he writes about being "familiar with long silences" (A Familiar Preface). The notion "silence" should also be considered in the analysis of soundscapes of literary works.

### Conclusion

Tightly saturating the novel with voices, whispers, murmurs Conrad searches for new opportunities to expand a language model of fiction. The experiments with the voice as a bodily excess, “the flesh of the soul, its ineradicable materiality, by which the soul can never be rid of the body” (Dolar, 2006, p. 71) can be viewed as a hallmark of modernist writing, and as a challenge aimed at the artistic rediscovery of the human condition (as was intricately evidenced in Joyce’s works).

At the same time, the sensory world of Conrad’s novels is not limited by voice descriptions. It is also permeated by visual and haptic perception. Do these images of vision and touch correspond to Victorian patterns or a modernist mode of representation? This issue is the next logical step in anthropological inquiry of Conrad’s writings.

”My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel – it is, before all, to make you see. That – and no more, and it is everything”, – Conrad declared in the Preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus* two years after his debut novel (Conrad, 2006b). It seems he succeeded.

### References

- Conrad, J. (2006a). *Almayer’s Folly*. (D. Price, Ed.) Retrieved from <http://www.gutenberg.org>
- Conrad, J. (2006b). *The Nigger Of The "Narcissus"*. Retrieved from <https://www.gutenberg.org>
- Dolar, M. A. (2006). *A Voice and Nothing More*. Short Curcuits.
- Foucault, M. (1989). *Order of Things: an Archaeology of thje Human Sciences*. London, NY: Routledge.
- Lodge, D. (1971). *The Novelist at Crossroad and Other Essays on Fiction and Criticism*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Milner, A. (2009). *The Malays*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Podoroga, V. (2006). *Mimesis. Materialy po analiticheskoy antropologii literatury (Mimesis. Materials on the analytical anthropology of literature)* (Vol. 1). Moscow: Logos.
- Roberts, A. M. (1993). *Conrad and Gender*. Rodopi.
- Sonic Experience. A Guide to Everyday Sounds. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://xenopraxis.net>

## АНАЛІТИЧНА АНТРОПОЛОГІЯ ТА УВАЖНЕ ЧИТАННЯ ПРОЗИ ДЖОЗЕФА КОНРАДА

Ольга Бандровська

*Львівський національний університет імені Івана Франка  
вул. Університетська 1, Львів, 79000, Україна  
obandrovska@gmail.com*

Метою даної роботи є визначення предмета дослідження та методологічних завдань літературної антропології. Показано, що поняття “аналітична антропологія”, запропоноване російським філософом В. Подорогою, є продуктивним для аналізу художнього тексту. Положення літературної антропології розглянуто на прикладі першого параграфу роману Джозефа Конрада “Примха Олмейєра”.

*Ключові слова:* літературна антропологія, Конрад, “Примха Олмейєра”, голос.