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Between ‘Written’ and ‘Dictated’ (An Example of Sienkiewicz’s Archive)

Abstract

Henryk Sienkiewicz is known as one of the most important Polish writers of the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. The study of his work can be complemented by analyzing his extensive correspondence (*Listy*, a collection of Sienkiewicz letters, alone has 14 volumes) or his notes. Particularly noteworthy are the rough drafts of his literary works. The library of the Ossoliński National Institute has recently bought another collection – Sienkiewicz’s archive hitherto kept by one of the writer’s descendants. This archive includes a considerable collection of manuscripts, rough drafts, and documents written in the handwriting of Sienkiewicz’s wife. It also contains evident fragments of drafts of doubtful authorship: written by the writer’s wife, however presumably dictated by Henryk Sienkiewicz. In this article, the author seeks to demonstrate the importance of this part of the archive for all research on Sienkiewicz’s heritage. She also tries to determine the authorship of one of the rough drafts.

Słowa kluczowe: Henryk Sienkiewicz, wiek XIX, archiwa, żona pisarza, Maria Babska

Keywords: Henryk Sienkiewicz, 19th century, archives, writer’s wife, Maria Babska

As I develop my interest in the legacy of Henryk Sienkiewicz, I am still looking in detail at subsequent parts of the manuscripts by both the writer and his relatives. For the critics of the genesis of the text, Sienkiewicz is quite a rewarding writer, as he left behind a considerable amount of sketches of manuscripts and everyday life. Library collections contain many volumes of Sien-

kiewicz's rough copies and manuscripts, which are invaluable to genetic critics in their attempts to learn more about the writer himself, as well as studying and reconstructing his writing process. Archives include rough copies of his literary texts (including almost all novels and many short stories), as well as personal notes and jottings. The writer's preserved and mostly published letters are also a significant collection of primary sources. At the archives, we are still working on the letters to the writer, which contain a great deal of information about him, provide excellent contexts, and facilitate the reconstruction of his writing process.

Thus far, few of Sienkiewicz's short stories have been coherently compiled from a genetic perspective. These attempts have shown undeniably that the materials found in Sienkiewicz's archives are very suitable for genetic studies. Finding the key to the creation of subsequent short stories is not only fun but also necessary in the research on the writer's texts and late 19th century culture.

Years after the writer's death, Julian Krzyżanowski said: "Sienkiewicz is still writing."¹ He was referring to the discovery of a file of correspondence that was considered missing and that is now extremely helpful in the study of Sienkiewicz's writing process. However, as libraries have acquired more rough copies and notes by the author of the *Trilogy* in recent years, this statement may take on a new significance. It becomes closer to what Contant said in the context of genetic studies: "The author is not dead, but has become an idea with *n* variables, the more complex that he has reappeared in the manuscripts. Research can gain much, provided it does not ignore them."² This ever-expanding primary dossier contributes to a more detailed picture of the writing process of individual literary works (we keep finding new fragments of rough copies and notes). It also casts new light on the people cooperating with Sienkiewicz, as well as the creative abilities of the writer. It involves previously unknown letters, a large collection of drawings, and records regarding the writer's immediate environment.

Such a collection that adds to the primary documents – in particular in the context of the genetics of biography and autobiography – is "Henryk Sienkiewicz's Archive", stored at the Ossoliński National Institute in Wrocław, which was supplemented with 35 files in 2018. The library received the collection from Bartłomiej Sienkiewicz, the writer's great-grandson. It is a non-homogeneous set containing both priceless original and secondary materials. All of them are a fascinating accumulation useful in studies on text genetics. A num-

¹ "Sienkiewicz wciąż jeszcze pisze...", a sketch written in Warsaw on 14.06.1973; J. Krzyżanowski, *Pokłosie Sienkiewiczowskie*, Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy 1973, p. 718.

² M. Contant, *L'Auteur et le manuscrit*, Puf (Perspectives critiques) 1991, quote from: P.-M. de Biasi, *Genetyka tekstów*, transl. F. Kwiatek, M. Prussak, Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich PAN 2015.

ber of files include rough copies, notes and drawings made by the writer. They provide us with facts covering Sienkiewicz as a writer, his writing techniques, and habits. They confirm what we knew before and add new information. A folder of Sienkiewicz's drawings stored in the archive points to the writer's diverse skills, which lead him to be numbered among the European artists who believed literature and art were one. The collection also includes formerly unknown letters by the writer to people of culture who mattered in the 19th century, including Stanisław Witkiewicz.³ The Ossoliński archive also holds many materials belonging to Sienkiewicz's relatives: his wife, children and parents-in-law.

A significant portion of the archive is related to the writer's wife, Maria Sienkiewiczowa *née* Babska. The story of Maria and Henryk requires a more thorough and detailed study (which is a task for the future). Thus far, the most important things we know are as follows: Maria *née* Babska was the writer's third wife. He had intended to marry her as early as 1888, but for some reason he changed his mind, and as a result Maria joined the Monastery of the Canonesses of the Holy Spirit in Warsaw, and Sienkiewicz entered into a failed marriage with Maria Wołodkiewiczówna. However, emotional incidents and the turmoil of life led to Maria and Henryk's marriage 16 years later, on 5 May 1904. Sienkiewicz's archive contains records related to the writer's third (and last) wife, which can be divided into four periods:

1. The Babski family's papers: a large collection of letters, written also by Maria's ancestors. Apart from that, there are numerous documents on the Babskis' genealogy, starting from the 17th century.
2. Maria's maidenhood: her adolescent book of friendship, letters exchanged with Sienkiewicz and his sister Helena.
3. Marriage with Sienkiewicz: letters presenting the Sienkiewicz family's everyday life and the couple's significant political involvement. There are also four sheets from a diary dated 1910 (so written during Henryk Sienkiewicz's lifetime).
4. Papers written after the writer's death: mainly Maria Babska's letters thanking those who helped her with the writer's funeral.

These materials will surely be helpful while working on Maria Babska's family biography, and will enrich our knowledge about her education and artistic skills. This last aspect is of key importance, because a separate section (which we shall provisionally refer to as the fifth) of this archive is made up of rough copies of literary works written down by Maria Babska. However, we have reason to believe that most of them (and perhaps all) were copied from Sienkiewicz's manuscripts or dictated by him.

³ A. Kuniczuk-Trzciniowicz, *Henryk Sienkiewicz's Unknown Letters to Stanisław Witkiewicz: Testimonies of friendship and Witnesses to Happiness*, "Pamiętnik Literacki" 2020, no. 4, pp. 149–159.

The girl writes

The collections of the Ossolineum and the National Museum in Kielce contain books of friendship of Maria Sienkiewiczowa, at that time the teenage Babska. The first is probably from 1872, and the second from the period between 1879–1890. They include drawings, sketches, watercolours, and entries made by others. Her adolescent books of friendship were mainly written to preserve the memories of her meetings with various people. They might also have been gifts for others, such as the one stored in the Ossolineum which was probably a gift from the young girl to her grandmother, Aleksandra Dmochowska. There are no signs of her own original ideas in the writings. There are also no traces of a private diary, which might imply the level of Babska's writing skills. Her youthful activities mostly focused on collecting, rewriting, and making sure that house guests left mementos. Her preferences were completely different from the activities of Sienkiewicz's first wife, who kept a private diary⁴ already as a teenager (like a number of girls at that time) and in the following years tried to write literary works and critique literature. I emphasise the presence of this library collection, because it suggests that the young Maria had no interest in writing literary texts, which might be of some importance in future research.

The wife rewrites

In the book *Ciała Sienkiewicza* (*Sienkiewicz's Bodies*), Ryszard Koziółek mentioned "the writer's weakening hand": "The concern for his hand is connected to the fear for Sienkiewicz's health and future as a writer."⁵ The thesis that the ageing Sienkiewicz was not strong enough to write down his own ideas seems well-grounded and corroborated by the writer's correspondence, where he said straightforwardly that some of his rough copies (in particular of letters) were rewritten by a copyist and only then sent to publishers and printing houses. This was not unusual. If such practice is used on the final stage of writing, it does not impede the reconstruction of the entire writing process. This group includes the manuscripts stored in Sienkiewicz's archive that are attributed to Maria Babska and that are undoubtedly Sienkiewicz's texts. *Bajka* (*The Fairy Tale*) is a known published text; the version copied by his wife has the same wording, the manuscript bears no signs of deletions or alterations, so it can be

⁴ Cf. *Dziennik Maryi S.*, compiled and footnoted by R. Kotowski, Kielce: Muzeum Narodowe 2017. Maria Sienkiewiczowa née Szetkiewicz, who died prematurely of TB, was also the author of press articles, and the writer himself spoke of her writing skills.

⁵ R. Koziółek, *Ciała Sienkiewicza. Studia o płci i przemocy*, Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego 2010, p. 409.

considered definitive. Two other documents have the same status: *W sprawie reformy szkolnej* (*On the School Reform*) and the typescript of Horace's songs translation with a handwritten list of songs added by the writer's wife. The authorship of those texts is undeniable; the traces of their writing process can be found in the writer's letters as well as texts published during his lifetime. Moreover, the text on school reform bears a title handwritten by Sienkiewicz himself.

The manuscripts, together with Babska's entire correspondence, give researchers a good picture of the handwriting and its meanderings. It is a major experience, since the woman's writing was quite manneristic, with a number of similar letters. When reading Babska's manuscripts containing her husband's texts – i.e. the most meticulous – we have the opportunity to take a closer look at the characteristics of those similarities. A comparison of the manuscripts with printed versions of the literary works has been the basis for our further research. The collection of correspondence poses more difficulties to the reader – official letters were written neatly, but their contents often have no counterpart to confirm. Thus, this type of correspondence expands the reader's knowledge and increases the capability of reading the rough copies, just like private letters, which demonstrate the author's messy writing and graphic nonchalance. Moreover, it says more about her individual writing style. All of these written texts prepare the ground for critical analysis of the rough copy contained in the fifth part of the archive.

The wife creates (?)

Among the materials in Sienkiewicz's archive attributed to Maria Babska, the most interesting is a fragment of a rough copy of an unknown literary text. It is a single A4 sheet folded in half, with writing on both pages, without page numbers or a title. There is no signature. It must have been stored in unsuitable conditions; there are numerous traces of moisture, as well as mould on the sepia-coloured paperboard sheet. Many deletions and lack of cohesion point to the fact that it was a rough draft in which the author probed for the shape of the text, and perhaps even a record of fragments that were later to become a fully-fledged novel.

What seems to be of interest in the rough copy from the point of view of genetic criticism? Certainly, we are dealing with leaves containing text written by Babska's hand. All of the characteristics of her handwriting demonstrated in the aforementioned writings are also reflected in this rough copy. However, no known writings by Maria include any literary texts of her own. The writer's third wife's private letters also do not give away her inclinations to become a writer or literary critic. Obviously, this casts a shadow of doubt on the text's authorship, but does not preclude it. However, when studying the rough copy,

the characteristics of the word choice, and the subject matter, we should consider whether it might have been an attempt to commit to paper a literary text dictated by Sienkiewicz. After all, it is definitely a fragment of a literary work, with deletions and incoherences; therefore, we can hypothesise that we are dealing with a record of one of the initial writing stages, a literary text in its making.

Barely legible handwriting, at some points indicating great hurry, is another argument in favour of dictation by a person who had no clear concept. Deletions of words that were already written down also support this idea, and the inconsistent shape of letters, changes of letter size and ink colour imply that the writing party was subject to some pressure.

The manuscript, deposited in the Ossolineum, requires thorough analysis and in-depth research. At this point, it is worth making some assumptions that will be elaborated on in the future. Starting from the hints according to which the analysed rough copy was most probably conceived by Sienkiewicz, we must point to the writer's typical manner of narration, clearly visible mainly in his short stories. For example, the writer concentrated on presenting the general atmosphere and characteristic elements of the land's topography, providing more details on the general atmosphere and the subject matter in subsequent fragments, and finally portraying the protagonist in action. Such a pattern was probably also devised for the rough copy. The first notes speak of the topography of a village, and the following inform the subject. The final fragments of the preserved draft refer to one of the main female characters going through a hard time and seeking help in a nearby manor house and church. However, it is not only the text pattern that suggests the author of the rough copy was Sienkiewicz. For a reader who is familiar with many literary works by Sienkiewicz, from the very beginning, the text seems to be written in his style:

The sun descended in the west. The sun rays illuminated the branches of dark alder trees gilded the sharp [reeds] in the marshland and kindling [among] them fiery [blazes] [...]. The night [came] quietly, heavy dew shrouded the [mossy] and [X] trees and flowers [and] [all of] nature was slowly sinking into the arms of soothing sleep. ↑Peace and quiet also fell on the village of [X] Zachayki]. The huts scattered on both sides of the road glowed white in the twilight.⁶

⁶ *Henryk Sienkiewicz's Archive. Papers of ~Maria Sienkiewiczowa née Babska. Pages from a 1910 diary, prose, copies of translations of Horace's songs and letters from various people*, ref. no. Akc. 190/18. A fragment of the rough copy from this collection shall be hereinafter put in square brackets and referred to as: Fragment of a rough copy of uncertain authorship (FRCUA) with a page number. I quote the rough copy *in extenso*, without modernising the spelling. Square brackets contain uncertain readings, and the [X] sign marks words so far undeciphered. The ↑ sign stands for superimposition.

This is the first paragraph of the recovered rough copy. The clear focus on nature and building the atmosphere based on how it functions is an established feature of Sienkiewicz's writing. Similar fragments can be found in his early short story *Sielanka*:

In the evening when the sun had sunk behind the pine woods, the conversation at the garble, and twittering on the birch, grew quiet gradually. [...] at last [everything] was silent. Darkness fell from heaven to the earth; the cottage, the cherry-trees, and the birch grew dull in outline, mingled together, were concealed in and covered with mist, which rose from the lake.

Around the plain, as far as the eye could see, extended a wall of dark pines and thicket. This wall was broken in one place, and, going to a distance in the form of a corridor, widened more and more. In the corridor and the widening the waves of the lake stammered, and washed the edge of the plain. The lake was long, for the other end of it was almost lost in the distance, and through a haze, as it were, one could see a red roof with a tower standing at the other side of a little church, and a dark strip of forest which shut out the horizon not far beyond the church.⁷

The characteristic writing style reappears in *The Lighthouse Keeper*:

That same evening, when the sun had descended on the other side of the isthmus, and a day of sunshine was followed by a night without twilight, the new keeper was in his place evidently, for the lighthouse was casting its bright rays on the water as usual. The night was perfectly calm, silent, genuinely tropical, filled with a transparent haze, forming around the moon a great colored rainbow with soft, unbroken edges; the sea was moving only because the tide raised it.⁸

However, it is hard to prejudge who the author of the rough copy was even based on several texts with a similar style, especially that similar texts could have also been written by other 19th century writers. The doubt as to whether the author of the text was actually the person who physically left their handwriting on the paper is also based on other assumptions. One of them is the subject matter of this study. Sienkiewicz wrote many texts on the history of Poland, and discussed key political issues. One of the short stories, in fact known from several rough copies, with a large archive of primary documents, takes place during the January Uprising. Therefore, the said rough copy might

⁷ H. Sienkiewicz, *Sielanka, and Other Stories*, transl. J. Curtin, Boston: Little 1899, p. 5. The translation contains an erroneous passage. It should read: "[...] one could see a red roof, a tower of a little church standing on the other side [...]".

⁸ H. Sienkiewicz, *The Lighthouse Keeper of Aspinwall* [in:] *idem, Sielanka, and Other Stories...*, p. 444.

have been a natural follow-up to the short story *We mgle (In the Mist)*, since the preserved fragments indicate that it was supposed to refer to the persecution of Uniates in Podlasie. The repressions were a direct consequence of the January Uprising.

In addition, although the handwriting is not attributable to Sienkiewicz, it indicates a few characteristics of the writer's working style. Among them is the attention to detail in the word order (e.g.: "You could hear barking dogs, shouting soldiers, lamenting women and children" [word order changed to: "children and women"]; "The steward called some women to the manor house" [word order changed to: "the steward called to the manor house some women"]) and deletions of entire sentences in order to use them in almost the same form further in the text. On page 2 *recto*, there is the following deleted fragment: "~~Zacharowa, whose husband was the most defiant and left after such severe flogging that he was unable to climb the cart on his own~~" [2r]. It returns two paragraphs later in the following version: "Zacharowa, whose husband was the most defiant and left after the most severe flogging, would go to the manor house even after the Green Week to ask the great lady to write a letter" [2r]. The author of the rough copy is also good at the local dialect, folk culture, and history of the land where the plot is set. In this case, it is most probably Podlasie, where Sienkiewicz grew up.

When the rough copy is completely deciphered and thoroughly analysed, we will surely be able to point to other elements of the artist's style, speaking for or against Henryk Sienkiewicz's authorship. In general, it seems characteristic of him to use single deletions and superimpositions, and have a coherent idea of individual fragments. However, the whole rough copy does not appear to be uniform. In a way, it consists of three parts that are interrelated but are not a direct continuum.

We may also attempt to establish the time the text was written, although we must bear in mind this could easily be invalidated. In this attempt, we can use the dates related to the documents included in the file as well as to the writer's life and other texts. The *terminus a quo* would be his marriage with Babska, and the *terminus ad quem* – his death. So we could be looking at some time between 1904–1916. In that period, Sienkiewicz published the manifesto *W sprawie reformy szkolnej (On the School Reform; 1905)* and the aforementioned short story *We mgle (In the Mist; 1908)*. In 1912, Babska rewrote *Bajka (The Fairy Tale)*. In the meantime, the writer's wife started to write her diary (1910) that has survived to this day. In a way, all these texts demonstrate Sienkiewicz's involvement in the politics and the defence of Polishness (including the parabolic *Bajka (The Fairy Tale)*). Hence, the rough copy might have been written in the same period, which would explain why it was found in the same file – a large and significant part of Sienkiewicz's archive. Upon the publication of *We mgle (In the Mist)*, the writer started working on the modern novel *Whirlpools*, and some fragments were extremely difficult for him

to write. Perhaps, his tiredness or dealing with a long text requiring him to concentrate drew Sienkiewicz away from the idea of a Uniate novel (or short story). He dictated his general ideas to his wife in order to use them in the years to come. Unfortunately, these are merely speculations, because currently we do not have any "avant-textes" that would confirm or deny such a scenario and consequently the authorship of the rough copy in question.

Summary

Henryk Sienkiewicz and his literature are an important element of Polish culture, encouraging scholars to extend the context of research on his heritage. The accumulation of a number of rough copies of literary texts in a single archive, and the supplementing of them with avant-textes has a positive influence on the status of studies on the writer's works and life. Sienkiewicz was one of those writers who composed their text while writing it. He transposed many elements from the pre-writing stage to the entirely verbal sphere. He left behind few sketches and plans of literary works. Upon a closer look at the writer's dossier, we can see that in his letters, he often shares what he is going to write about, or asks for books and documents that are to help him in the process, in particular during the drafting of historical texts. In the writer's old house, there are books with handwritten notes, souvenirs he collected during his journeys, and paintings. Letters contain a lot of details on the galleries and cities he visited. Libraries store his business cards and publishing contracts. All this, together with rough copies of his literary works, make up an interesting collection of primary documents. In combination with the final manuscripts, they allow us to form a laboratory of research on Sienkiewicz's work.

Considering his absolutely fascinating personal life, which can hardly be separated from the writing process (which is proven in the writer's correspondence), it is worth adding to the research new materials on the friends of the author of *The Teutonic Knights*. Therefore, the files on Maria Sienkiewiczowa *née* Babska are very useful and engaging to those interested in Sienkiewicz, and it seems almost necessary to establish the full profile and role of the writer's last wife. Hence the idea to expand the research on primary documents and take into account the notes and materials related to Maria Babska. Even a preliminary reconnaissance shows that we can learn a lot from them about Maria and her famous husband. Moreover, discovering the writer's hitherto unknown literary work or notes is of key importance. In the case of such a highly characteristic artist as Sienkiewicz, new discoveries are particularly exciting, so researchers are challenged to establish the authorship and collect as many primary documents as possible. Although her attempts at writing a diary and a book of friendship, as well as her correspondence style, raise questions about the writing skills of Maria Sienkiewiczowa *née* Babska,

at present we also have no evidence to definitively confirm the authorship of the said fragment. Therefore, in the hope of finding more primary documents, we must temporarily accept the tentative status of the rough copy.

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