

Mise en Abyme

in Works by Pablopavo (Paweł Sołtys)

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Blurred lines

Over the years *mise en abyme* has attracted a lot of scholarly attention as a literary phenomenon¹, which is reflected in the large body of literature devoted to it, and in many per-

¹ Even a brief literature review gives an idea of the importance of the topic. There is a consensus that it was Artur Sandauer who introduced this topic in Poland and elaborated on it in three texts, published in 1947, 1956, 1967, respectively: *Konstruktywny nihilizm* [Constructive nihilism], *O ewolucji sztuki narracyjnej w XX wieku* [On the evolution of narrative art in the 20th century] and *Samobójstwo Mitrydatesa* [Mithridates's suicide] (in the present work: Artur Sandauer, *Zebrane pisma krytyczne. T. 1, T. 2* [Collected critical essays], Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1981). Other scholars elaborate on this topic further, such as Michał Głowiński, „Powieść jako metodologia powieści” [Novel as a novel methodology], in: *Intertekstualność, groteska, parabola: szkice ogólne i interpretacje* [Intertextuality, grotesque, parable: general sketches and interpretations] (Kraków: Universitas, 2000), 122–154; Maria Podraza-Kwiatkowska, *U źródeł dwudziestowiecznego autotematyzmu: ze studiów nad poezją okresu Młodej Polski* [At the source of twentieth-century *mise en abyme*: studies in the poetry of Young Poland] (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1974); Aleksander Labuda, „O funkcjach narracji autotematycznej” [On the functions of autothematic narrative], *Literaria. Teoria literatury – Metodologia – Kultura – Humanistyka* [Literaria. Literary theory – Methodology – Culture – Humanities], 1970, 73–111; Ewa Szary-Matywiecka, „Autotematyzm” [*Mise en abyme*], in: *Słownik literatury polskiej XX wieku* [Dictionary of twentieth-century Polish literature] (Warszawa: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1995); Dariusz Brzostek, Anna Skubaczewska-Pniewska, Andrzej Stoff, *Poezja świadoma siebie: interpretacje wierszy autotematycznych* [Self-aware poetry: interpretations of autothematic poems] (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UMK, 2009); Bogumiła Kaniewska, „Metatekstowy sposób bycia” [Matatextual way of being], *Teksty Drugie: teoria literatury, krytyka, interpretacja* [literary theory, criticism, interpretation] 5, No 41 (1996): 20–33; Joanna Grądział-Wójcik, „Perpetuum mobile, czyli kilka uwag o autotematyzmie” [Perpetuum mobile, i.e. some remarks on *mise en abyme*], *Forum Poetyki* [Forum of Poetics] 2 (2015): 108–119; Andrzej Niewiadomski, *Światy z jawnych słów i kwiatów ukrytych: o refleksji metapoetyckiej w nowoczesnej poezji polskiej* [Worlds of lucid dreaming and hidden flowers: on metapoetic reflection in modern Polish poetry] (Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2010); Agnieszka Waligóra, ed., *Nowy autotematyzm? Meta-refleksja we współczesnej humanistyce* [New *mise en abyme*? Meta-reflection in modern humanities] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2021). It should be stressed that most scholarly disputes on *mise en abyme* focus on its presence in prose rather than in poetry.

spectives on how to conceptualize and understand this notion. The fact that it has several definitions makes it rather broad and vague, although scholars are trying to establish an appropriate framework for it. Joanna Grądział-Wójcik outlines how scholars approach this manifestation of self-reflected literature: considered narrowly, *mise en abyme* refers to texts highlighting the creative process behind them, but in a broader meaning, it applies to any text discussing the role of literature and authors, as well as poems and novels thematizing literary programs contained within them². Grądział-Wójcik points out to the fact that the field in question is broad:

Understood narrowly, autothematic texts focus on themselves, they are interested in their own language, reveal their own creative process. Understood broadly – these are texts discussing literature in general, their plot is set in a literary-artistic environment, with a poet or novelist presenting their literary program as the protagonist. Hence, there is *mise en abyme sensu largo* – “literature-thematism”, distancing itself from literature and its forms, traditions, and conventions, openly discussing literature, authors and culture, and *mise en abyme sensu stricto* – focusing on a given literary work or a text within text. Lines between *mise en abyme* and related notions, such as metatextuality, self-reflection, and intertextuality remain blurred³.

There is relatively little available literature on the question of *mise en abyme* in songs⁴, which is due to the fact that songs (or their textual layer, to be precise) are not often analyzed and interpreted from the perspective of literary studies (however, admittedly there are not that many songs which deserve such an approach). Nonetheless, despite the fact that *mise en abyme* in lyrics is a rich, interesting phenomenon, thus far it has not attracted the scholarly attention it deserves. Unfortunately, compiling a comprehensive list of the numerous, fascinating examples of autothematic devices, both historical and modern, is beyond the scope of the present paper, which focuses on lyrics in selected songs by just one author.

² Grądział-Wójcik, 113.

³ Grądział-Wójcik, 113.

⁴ There are very few studies devoted to this topic. Section “2. Ironiczni romantycy w kapturach” [Ironic romantics in hoodies] of chapter III “Hip-hopowe konwencje poetyckie” [Hip hop poetic conventions] in: Tomasz Florczyk, *Rap to nie zabawa już: obrzeża genologii, czyli gatunki literackie obecne w tekstach polskich twórców hip-hopowych* [Rap is no longer fun: outskirts of genology, i.e. literary genres in Polish hip-hop] (Częstochowa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Humanistyczno-Przyrodniczego im. Jana Długosza, 2020). This is a thorough attempt at applying literary studies to the analysis of (two) rap texts. However, it should be stressed that the question of *mise en abyme* in rap (in a close relationship with autobiographism understood in a specific way) is a rich topic which deserves scholarly attention. *Mise en abyme* in a song is discussed in Jerzy Wiśniewski, “Piosenka o piosence według Jerzego Wasowskiego i Jeremiego Przybory” [A song about a song according to Jerzy Wasowski and Jeremi Przybora], *Acta Universitatis Lodzianis. Folia Litteraria Polonica* 16 (b.d.): 92–109. There is also a chapter “A ja piszę i piszę..., czyli o wypowiedziach autotematycznych” [And I write and write... on autothematic texts], in: Piotr Derlatka, *Poeci piosenki* [Song poets] 1956–1989: Agnieszka Osiecka, Jeremi Przybora, Wojciech Młynarski i Jonasz Kofta (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2012), 27–61, and a paper by Grzegorz Piotrowski, „Teatr piosenki” [Theater of song], *Teksty Drugie: teoria literatury, krytyka, interpretacje* 4 (2014): 357–379. There are mentions in papers devoted to some broader issues (Kamil Dźwiniel, “Od sensu wiersza do sensu piosenki” [From the meaning of a poem to the meaning of a song], *Piosenka: rocznik kulturalny* [Song: a cultural yearly] [2015]: 17–23) or reviews (Paweł Tański, “Czyste ognisko nieustającego. «Piosenki kolonistów» Grzegorza Kaźmierczaka i Variete” [A clean bonfire of the incessant. «Colonists’ songs» by Grzegorz Kaźmierczak and Variete], *Piosenka: rocznik kulturalny* [Song. A cultural yearly] [2016]: 62–74).

Pablopavo is a songwriter⁵ born in 1978. His songs have an original style, rooted in reggae, raggamuffin, dub, dancehall (I list these genres here in order to highlight how far we are from traditionally understood sung poetry, the literary song, and other similar styles). Originally a soloist, he also performs with a band— since 2009 most often as Pablopavo i Ludziki. The songs analyzed and referred to here come from the following albums: *Telehon* (2009), *10 piosenek* [10 songs] (2011), *Głodne kawałki* [A song and dance] (2011), *Polor* [Polish] (2014), *Tylko* [Only] (2014), *Wir* [Whirl] (2015), *Ladinola* (2017), *Marginal* (2018), *Wszystkie nerwowe piosenki* [All the nervous songs] (2020)⁶. Writing under his real name (Paweł Sołtys), he is also an acclaimed author of fiction (collections of short stories *Mikrotyki*⁷ and *Nieradość*⁸ [Non-joy]) for which he received Nagroda Literacka Gdynia [Gdynia literary award], and was nominated to the “Nike” award, both in 2018. He lives in Warsaw, which is often manifested in his works, showing blurred lines between actors in artistic communication (author – narrator – protagonist).

This song is made of this

Piosenka ze śmieci [A song made of garbage] from *Telehon* is an excellent example of a metatextual device which uses an apparent reference to the structure of lyrics. The song reveals Pablopavo’s strong anti-aesthetic inclinations. The chorus plays a significant role here; it is not only an interval between two stanzas, but also the opening and closing of the song, introducing its theme and providing a framework for specific examples which comprise the lyrics:

And this song is made of this city of waste
Of garbage, rubble, debris of an accident
It is made of what is no longer needed
Of the forbidden, the discarded, the forgotten⁹.

The lyrics remind one of the so-called “poetry of garbage” – a term used by Artur Sandauer in reference to the work of Miron Białoszewski, another Warsaw poet¹⁰. Although in terms of poetics Pablopavo’s work has little in common with the linguistic garbage of Białoszewski’s poetry, when it comes to turpistic imaging, seeking inspiration outside classical aesthetics (especially in song), Pablopavo’s coherence is noteworthy.

⁵ I use the foreign term “songwriter” both because it is rather common in Polish and for want of a Polish equivalent (the same goes for the names of music genres).

⁶ All the lyrics cited here are based on the CD covers of the respective albums. In some cases typos and other minor editing errors had to be corrected.

⁷ Paweł Sołtys, *Mikrotyki* (Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2018).

⁸ Paweł Sołtys, *Nieradość* (Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2019).

⁹ “A ta piosenka jest zrobiona z tego miasta odpadków / Ze śmieci, gruzów, kawałków pozostałych po wypadku / A ta piosenka jest zrobiona z tego, co już niepotrzebne / Z opuszczonego, wyrzuconego, zapomnianego bezwiednie.”

¹⁰ Artur Sandauer, „Poezja rupieci. (Rzecz o Mironie Białoszewskim)” [Poetry of garbage. (On Miron Białoszewski)], in: *Zebrane pisma krytyczne. T. 1* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1981), 365–398.

The description of the apparent “material” of the song leads to a characterization of a highly imperfect reality. The expression “this song is made” first of all highlights an everyday aspect of life, and secondly, it foreshadows what is about to happen in terms of literature, what is apparently being described. Ultimately it is the description of “subparts” that becomes the content of the song. The seemingly defined form (material) becomes the proper, single message. The autothematic device is a concept which makes the description of a vision of reality more attractive by making it more complex. Additionally, *mise en abyme* is also suggested here by phrases opening each line: “The first stanza is made of words which [...]”¹¹, “The second stanza is made of what [...]”¹², “The third one is made of words which [...]”¹³. Each part is based on a different experience; the first one uses what one could hear in the street (and in this particular case – what we do not hear in the reality beyond the text):

[...] of words which MPs and councilmen
 Throw out of their speeches, for they would be too close to the truth
 Of meaningful grunts, when cameras are off
 Of unspoken toasts behind closed doors
 Here are all the swearwords which do not make it on screen¹⁴.

The lyrical I thus brings to life what normally stays outside of social circulation in our everyday practice (and undeservedly so). Materializing words (and later – personifying them: “Words holy fools”¹⁵), sounds, and gestures reminds us of their existence; it also reproaches those who marginalize them. The message of the song consists of a record of the elements constructing it, which is essentially what the autothematic device is about here.

The second part describes what we can see (at some point – also what we can smell), but would rather not; what should not exist in public:

The second stanza is made of what the city has consumed
 Of crumbs, foil, cigarette buds tossed on the ground
 It smells of nicotine and greenish meat
 It smells of a diver searching for aluminum in a dumpster
 Of pieces of a wall unit thrown away in the dark
 Because it did not match Ikea furniture¹⁶

¹¹“Pierwsza zwrotka jest ze słów, które [...]”.

¹²“Druga zwrotka jest z tego, co [...]”.

¹³“Trzecia jest ze słów, które [...]”.

¹⁴“[...] ze słów, które posłowie i radni / Wyrzucają z przemówień, bo byłyby niebezpiecznie blisko prawdy / Z chrząknięć znaczących, kiedy kamery gasną / Z niewypowiedzianych, zakulisowych toastów / Tu są wszystkie przekleństwa, które nie wchodzą na wizję.”

¹⁵“Słowa jurodiwe słowa święte głupki”.

¹⁶“Druga zwrotka jest z tego, co to miasto nie przeżre / Z okruchów, folii i petów rzuconych na zebkę / Pachnie nikotyną i zielonkawym mięsem / Wonią nurka, który w śmietniku za aluminium węszy / Z kawałków meblów wywieszonych po ciemku / Bo przy meblach z Ikei była nie na miejscu.”

Although this stanza is the most literal realization of the song's title, the objects described here hide real people's drama, pettiness, bad social characteristics.

The third stanza is predominantly based on emotions, using different senses and experiences. Its lines create a reality, again replacing a description of a given reality with a description of the linguistic and semiotic matter:

The third stanza is made of words which are worn out after years
 Of "I love you" said to the girl who married your brother
 Of a quickly fading smile, of a traffic cop
 When he skillfully hides a two-hundred banknote in his pocket
 Of gunshots that killed forgotten heroes of this city¹⁷

The hopeless atmosphere is completed by a stylistic device which makes a clear punch line impossible. This can be observed in the last two lines of the final stanza:

Out of meetings at the rotunda, which gave no results
 No money was made, or a date ended quickly¹⁸

Piosenka ze śmieci is just one example of an autothematic title; in fact all genre expressions which point out to the fact that we are dealing with a form of art (in this case – a song) should be considered as such¹⁹. *Dancingowa piosenka miłosna* [A dancing love song], *Wszystkie nerwowe piosenki* [All nervous songs], *To jest piosenka o różnych rzeczach* [This is a song about various things], as well as *Głodne kawałki* [A song and dance] or *Kołysanka* [Lullaby] are some more examples of such expressions. Such titles highlight the distance between the content, realization, and genre conventions. The song *Kołysanka* from *Tylko* is an example; the initial declaration "My lullaby is made of *lubuski gin*"²⁰ introduces us to a wobbly story, which lacks a regular rhythm, peace and harmony – features we would normally expect from a lullaby. In the course of the text the story materializes itself, subjectifying the genre; in lieu of a lullaby "about something / someone", the lullaby itself becomes the protagonist in a song dedicated to fear and sadness.

¹⁷"Trzecia zwrotka jest ze słów, które zużyły się w latach / Z „kocham Cię” do dziewczyny, co wyszła za brata / Z uśmiechu, co znika szybko, policjanta z drogówki / Kiedy wyuczonym ruchem chowa do kielni dwie stówki / Ze strzałów, co zabiły zapomnianych bohaterów miasta."

¹⁸"Ze spotkań pod rotundą, z których nic nigdy nie wyszło / Nikt nie zarobił, albo randka skończyła się szybko."

¹⁹Grzegorz Piotrowski opposes such an understanding of *mise en abyme*, explaining that "Because I understand this notion narrowly, I do not consider songs which highlight singing in general (*Śpiewam pod gołym niebem* [I sing in the open air], name their genre (*Piosenka o mojej Warszawie* [A song about my Warsaw], or signal the characterization of their genre as a pretext or in a pseudo-poetic way (*Nie wierzę piosence* [I do not believe a song] as autothematic (Piotrowski, „Teatr piosenki” [Song theater], 364–365). All such titles ("A song about...") used consciously are quite clearly autothematic, introducing some distance to the genre with irony or auto-irony. Translating such a game into literature or (more broadly) culture, it is enough to imagine analogous titles from literature, film, etc., such as: "A novel about...", "A short story about...", "A film about...", "A play about...", "A picture showing..."

²⁰"Moja kołysanka jest z lubuskiego ginu".

Without you I would just be bluntly silent

Introductions to albums, in which the author explains their contents, are another example of *mise en abyme* in Pablopavo's works. *Intro to Telehom* resembles a "song theater" in which subsequent parts of a show are explained. Songs which open other albums are also made to sound unpretentiously anachronistic: *Rozpoczęcie* [Opening] (*10 piosenek*), *Wstęp* [Introduction] (*Wir*), *Marginal Intro* (*Marginal*). Each displays a slightly different form and scale of *mise en abyme*; however, they all share a clear intention to introduce the material which follows them, creating a compositional opening.

Another interesting example of *mise en abyme* can be found in the song *10 piosenek* [10 songs], which is tenth on the list of 12 songs comprising the album under the same title. The discrepancy between the number of songs and the title can be explained with the presence of the autothematic *Rozpoczęcie* [Opening] and the final *Ballada o Okrzei* [Ballad of Okrzeja] – the latter is a traditional street ballad, which has been performed (among others) by Stanisław Grzesiuk; Pablopavo defined it as "kowerniekower"²¹ [covernoncover].

In the song *10 piosenek*, *mise en abyme* concerns the whole album, but it is also a jocular self-commentary, and (more generally) an ironic description of the relationship between the artist and his audience. The lyrics list predict reasons why each song on the album may fail – with the song also being part of this album. Although *10 piosenek* is clearly pessimistic, the tone is softened by its humorous form. Here are the problems listed in the song:

The first song will be consumed by taxes [...]
 The second one will be collected by the infallible social insurance [...]
 The third one will be taken by illegal copying [...]
 The fourth one will not be accepted by radio stations / because someone used the wrong word [...]
 The fifth song will be killed by distribution [...]
 The sixth is just mediocre [...]
 The seventh song will be carried away in a plastic bag / by a black wind which came for me [...]
 The eighth will be confiscated by the reggae police / or the city guard of real hip-hop
 The ninth will flow down Karowa to the river / with another barrel like urban sewage [...]²²

As each verse develops, various unpleasant situations are revealed in which the author finds himself. Numbers three and eight are significant, as this is where the lyrical I deals with difficult audiences. Illegal copying refers to copying CDs without observing copyrights; the song was written at a time when artists fought to educate their fans that illegal copying deprived

²¹"Kower" is a jocular Polish version of the word *cover*.

²²"Po pierwszej piosenkę przyjdzie skarbówka [...] Po drugą się zgłosi ZUS niezawodny [...] Po trzecią przyjdą darmowe łapki [...] Czwarta piosenka przepadnie w radio / boś użył dwa słowa, których nie warto [...] Piątą piosenkę załatwi dystrybucja [...] Szósta była marna sama po prostu [...] Siódmą porwie na plastikowej torbie / czarny wiatr, który przyleciał po mnie [...] Ósmą zawinie reggae policja / albo straż miejska prawdziwego hip-hopu [...] Dziewiąta spłynie Karową do rzeki / z kolejną lufą jak miasta ścieki [...]"

them of income²³. The lyrical I uses irony here, personifying a dishonest fan whose demands of the artist unmask him as a primitive individual who *de facto* limits the artist's freedom. In the stanza devoted to the eighth song, "the reggae police" and "the city guard of real hip hop" are two ironic expressions for uncritical fans of these two music genres restricted by limitations imposed by the two subcultures; Pablopavo has often been accused of commercialization and diverging from "proper" music genres.

The final, tenth song is the theme of the last stanza:

The tenth one I am giving to you with no regrets,
I am a question, you are the answer
For there would be no song
Without you I would just be bluntly silent²⁴.

The identity of the addressee of this stanza remains unknown. Is it a love confession? This underdetermination allows the opening of yet another interpretative context. Anyone able to identify with the lyrical I can think that they are the addressee – someone who understands that expectations of an artist are wrong, as opposed to the subculture "militia"²⁵.

Ladinola, a song from the 2017 album under the same title, is another one which directly addresses the listener. It opens the album and it thus can effectively function as an introduction. The euphonic title – a neologism – is also a melodious chorus, and together with the musical layer it co-creates an atmosphere of unpretentious entertainment, which is reflected in the lyrics. The lyrical I first points out potential situations of reception, forming a thread of understanding between them:

and if you are listening to this on a bus
look out of the window, look at people
and if you are listening to it at a party, which I hope you are,
dance with the most bored girl
and if you are a girl, than obviously – *vice versa*
[...]
and if you are cycling
[...]

²³The heated argument between Kazik Staszewski and his fans over this issue is probably the best known example. Grabaz (Krzysztof Grabowski, leader of two bands – Pidzama Porno and Strachy na Lachy) wrote a song entitled *I Can't Get No Gratification* about this problem around the same time when Pablopavo wrote his *10 piosenek*. However, the rise of streaming services has solved it to a large extent. Additionally, CDs have lost their market significance, and musicians mostly make money performing live.

²⁴"Dziesiątą bez żalu oddaję Tobie, / ja jestem pytanie Ty jesteś odpowiedź, / bo nie byłoby piosenki żadnej / bez Ciebie bym tylko milczał dosadnie."

²⁵Autobiographism constitutes an important element in the works of Pablopavo, mostly as a background for considerations regarding artistic work – his own, in terms of a given genre, the world of pop culture, and other artistic phenomena. However, this topic is beyond the scope of this paper.

and if nothing, nothing sticks together in your life
 I hope at least these sounds will
 [...] ²⁶

The next stanza contains clear autobiographical signals which facilitate an even more direct relationship:

and if you are roughly my age
 drink a toast to Otokar Balcy
 and if those are not your first *Ludziki*
 then you know that I inflect the word *palce* [fingers] wrong²⁷.

Here the author discards his mask and addresses the audience as a specific, relatable individual, who was born in the 1970s and watched animated movies made by a Bielsko-Biała studio [*Ludziki*]. Otokar Balcy was the sound operator for them – everyone who grew up in the 1970s knows his characteristic sound. The improper inflection of the word *palce* is another autothematic game – it is an intentional inflectional error which appears in almost every album by Pablopavo.

Ladinola was preceded by two albums which were considered more serious and poetic than entertaining (*Tylko* and *Wir*). Perhaps he wanted to challenge this trend by releasing an album which was much lighter, highlighting this direction in the declaration which appears in the lyrics:

and if I am to be a bit honest
 music is fun, but everyone likes a different kind²⁸.

This is a clear signal which also serves as an ironic self-commentary regarding the significance of writing songs and audiences' expectations of artists.

The eighth song in *Ladinola* is yet another interesting example of *mise en abyme*. This time reflection is inspired by a concert, i.e. another important aspect of being a musician – we should bear in mind that songs involve not just lyrics and music, but also performing live, in front of an audience, which creates an opportunity for a meeting and mutual impact of the energy of the artist and of the audience. A concert hall is a meeting place for people's lives, thoughts, emotions, all focused around the artist and their work. This is the theme of the song about

²⁶“a jeśli słuchasz tego teraz w autobusie / popatrz przez okno, albo popatrz na ludzi / a jeśli słuchasz, czego życzę, na imprezie / zatańcz z dziewczyną, która się najbardziej nudzi / a jeśli jesteś dziewczyną to wiadomo, na odwrót [...] / a jeśli jedziesz sobie na rowerze [...] / a jeśli nic, nic się nie klei / niech się lepią chociaż do ciebie te dźwięki [...]”

²⁷“a jeśli jesteś mój rocznik mniej więcej / wychył kieliszek za Otokara Balcy / a jeśli to nie pierwsze tve Ludziki / to wiesz, że robię błędy w odmianie palcy.”

²⁸“a jeśli w ogóle mam być odrobinę szczerzy / muzyka to rozrywka tylko każdy inną lubi.”

creating an ambiguous network of connections between the lyrical I of the text and its protagonists. The nature of this relationship is revealed at the very beginning:

I am this guy who came for my concert
but they called and he is gone²⁹.

Such a multiplication of the identity of the lyrical I leads to presenting different characters in the text (including non-human ones). The following line continues: “I am that girl who came here for him / and is looking around”³⁰. Thanks to such snapshots we learn about human emotions, experiences that – though ambiguous due to their brevity – are clear enough to allow us to imagine mini psychological portraits of the protagonists and their lives. Later in the text the lyrical I impersonates different people, appearing as two characters: one describes himself in the first person (“I am a sly guy sneering at the bar”³¹), and one is described in the third person (“He is checking his phone to see if he has any missed calls / No, no matter how hard he looks”³²); he is “a guy standing on the side of the scene”³³, who “is droning one song after another / somewhat ashamed that he knows them by heart / he is in his forties, with cigarettes and his fist in his pocket”³⁴. Interestingly, he also personifies phenomena: “I am a flash of the barmaid’s cleavage / Blinding a husband / Ordering a mojito for his wife”³⁵. The wife “is thinking about the little one / Whether she is already asleep / Whether her grandmother’s hands still feel like a mother’s hands / An iron, a washing machine, a knife”³⁶.

Towards the end there is another example of *mise en abyme* concerning performing live, used in order to create an atmosphere of subtle eroticism, a game of senses and omnipresent musicality:

I am the bass which flows through the hall like a wave
Crushing against hips and stomachs
I wash away heartbeats and yelled whispers
And return to the stage like blues left at the bottom of a bottle³⁷.

The psychological complexity of the relationships in the song is completed in the final stanza. It is about a kid who is scared of the crowd; importantly, the lyrical I knows that this

²⁹“Jestem tym chłopakiem który przyszedł na mój koncert / Ale zadzwonili i poszedł już gdzieś.”

³⁰“Jestem tą dziewczyną co przyszła tu dla niego i / Rozgląda się”.

³¹“Jestem cwaniakiem szydzącym przy barze”.

³²“Sprawdza w telefonie czy są nieodebrane / Nie ma, choćby jeszcze mocniej patrzył”.

³³“facetem, stojącym z boku sceny”.

³⁴“cedzi przez zęby za tekstem tekst / Trochę mu wstyd, że zna wszystko na pamięć / jest po czterdziestce, w kieszeni ma fajki i piść”.

³⁵“Jestem błyskiem dekoltu barmanki / Od którego ślepnie mąż / Biorący dla żony mojito”.

³⁶“myśli o małej / Czy zasnęła już / Czy ręce babki są jeszcze matczyne / Żelazko, pralka, nóż”.

³⁷“Jestem basem, który płynie po sali jak fala / Opływam każde biodra i każdy brzuch / Lepiej bicie serc i wykrzyczane szepty / Wracam na scenę jak niedopity blues.”

memory “will come back unexpectedly / in fifteen years, awakened by a shot of rum”³⁸. The performing artist who is the *alter ego* of the author of the song, is also an omniscient narrator: his story about a concert and identifying himself with his audience is something more than just *mise en abyme*: it is a confession of closeness, compassion, evanescent unity which happens during a concert – a magical event for the artist, which is not necessarily always the case for all audience members.

I deal with words like a bull in a sentence shop

Pablopavo as a songwriter is an artist. As a multi-code work, a song reduces the role of the lexical layer in favor of other means of expression. Nonetheless, it is a fertile land which offers a variety of attitudes towards the meaning and form of the text in terms of constructing a song as a lexical-musical work (which are just two elementary systems of signs). In the case of Pablopavo, the linguistic layer is obviously significant. The song *Strzępia* [Toothing] from the album *Wir* can be considered a programmatic statement in this regard.

The song is a reflection upon the creative act, with language as the central theme: Pablopavo is concerned with ways of thinking about language (in this case – in a song) rather than a creative moment. I have chosen to cite the entire text here, due to the fact that it is not commonly available, and in order to avoid misunderstanding regarding the need to paraphrase or interpret any fragment outside of its immediate context:

I am wasting my breath³⁹
 dashes above *ń* and *ć*
 feel as if they were written
 in blood

I am wasting my breath
 given to me in good faith
 I believe in language foolishly
 like fools believe in dreams

I carry, bit by bit
 what I like and what I do not like
 I disembowel in secrecy
 wo- and -rds

for y- for -ou
 for lalala
 for I have nothing more
 and I will not have anything more

³⁸“wróci niespodziewanie / za piętnaście lat, przez wypity rum”.

³⁹The idiom used in Polish literally means “I am shredding my tongue” [PZ].

It is mocking me
matter-of-factly⁴⁰

it is the same thing
that glows by itself

it rolls
it shreds
wears down
and

it slips on full stops
before it breaks into nothing

better is better
into a bit better nothing
I am pushing as if into myself
nothing into nothing edge-to-edge

I cut into half
drudgery and I put together a pattern
I am worried whether your ear
will put up with it

I deal with words
like a bull in a sentence shop
I track and hide away our life
in a frame of music notes

I am playing myself here
I am playing myself among one hundred
grams of anagrams
of being here with you

for y- for -ou
fo lalala
for I have nothing more
and I will not have anything more.⁴¹

⁴⁰The idiom used in Polish literally means “in a cool (i.e. cold) way”

⁴¹“strzępię język / kreski znad eń i znad ci / bryzgają jak krople / krwi // strzępię język w dobrej / wierze dany mi / w język wierzę głupio / jak głupcy w sny // niosę potroszę / co mi się zda lub nie zda / chyłkiem patroszę / i sło i wa // dla cie dla bie / dla lalala / bo nic więcej nie mam / i nie będę miał // drwi ze mnie / na chłodno drwi / to samo / co samo się tli // się toczy / się strzępi / się ściera / i // na kropkach się ślizga / nim pęknie na nic // lepiej to lepiej / na nieco porządniejsze nic / wciskam jak siebie / nic w nic na styk // kroję na dwoje / znoje i klecę deseń / boję się czy twoje / ucho to zniesie // robię w słowach / jak słoń w składzie zdań / tropię i kitram nasze życie / wśród nut ram // gram siebie tu / gram siebie wśród stu / gramów anagramów / bycia z tobą tu // dla cie dla bie / dla lalala / bo nic więcej nie mam / i nie będę miał.”

The titular expression “strzępię” (I shred) has linguistic sources. The Polish phrase “shredding one’s tongue” means “wasting one’s breath”, talking too much. In the song the phrase can be understood literally, which leads to biological associations, resulting in an image of diacritics as drops of blood. The tongue has a double meaning: as an organ used for talking, and as a communication system, i.e. language. Associations with New Wave conceptualizations of this theme are unavoidable (*Język, to dzikie mięso* [Tongue, this wild meat] by Ryszard Krynicki can serve as the clearest example). The initial metaphor leads to more linguistic games: breaking words into smaller units, intentionally organizing the text in such a way as to use short words, homophony (which is an example of linguistic overorganization), transformed idiomatic expressions. Language motivates playing with sounds, which inspires a similar chase of senses and meanings, alliterations, anaphors, and other stylistic devices (*lepiej – lepiej; w słowach – słoń w składzie; gram – gram – gramów anagramów*). The title and opening verse are clearly based on alliteration (“ę”). Additionally, the lyrics do not really resemble what one would expect from a song; they are written in a way which highlights the *stricte* literary senses, using enjambments, the length of verses and arbitrariness of pauses. Pablopavo mixes poetic language with colloquial, everyday expressions (*na styk* [edge-to-edge], *kitram* [I hide away] – the latter is a part of a longer, alliterative passage based on “r”, which consists of two strophoids and a rhyme).

Contamination of meanings in “I am wasting my breath / given to me in good faith / I believe in language foolishly / like fools believe in dreams”⁴² is an important confession of faith (we should bear in mind that we are dealing with a song in which language is just one of codes, and not necessarily the primary one), but also a manifestation of evanescence, the unreality of matter. The text comes to the fore, it is a self-commentary regarding creative work, and – more broadly – the artist’s attitude to the world and art. It is a confession of helplessness in the face of the language matter in communication. One could say that this song is a reflection on the philosophy of language, the impossibility of expressing oneself fully and reaching true understanding between two speakers. At the same time it is also about hoping that this attempt at describing life and incorporating it into the evanescent form of song is not in vain. The fact that the song focuses so much on the addressee stands out; the lyrical I addresses the message at the recipient, confessing faith and significance of who the addressee of those broken words and evanescent traces of senses is.

I am the hero of this story

Paweł Sołtys clearly separates his work as a songwriter (Pablopavo) from his work as an author, which he publishes under his real name. The present paper focuses on the former, and so the latter is mentioned only in order to complete the picture of the author, for whom *mise en abyme* is an important creative strategy. In *Nieradość*, a collection of short stories, there is a short story entitled *Opowiadanie*⁴³ (Short story) (sic!), narrated by... its protagonist, as we learn in the opening sentence:

I am the hero of this story, and I am looking around nervously.⁴⁴

⁴²“strzępię język w dobrej wierze / w dobrej wierze dany mi / w język wierzę głupio / jak głupcy w sny”.

⁴³Sołtys, *Nieradość*, 40.

⁴⁴“Jestem bohaterem tego opowiadania i rozglądam się nerwowo.”

Later in the text we learn more about the situation of this unusually self-aware literary character who does not like the life imposed on him by the author. His sense of unreadiness manifests itself, as he answers himself while in the process of creation. For example:

I feel that this seemingly omnipotent someone is about to throw me into a whirlpool of so-called adventures, which is the last thing I want.⁴⁵

This protagonist does not know yet whether he will have to do something heroic or grotesque, he is unwilling to play his role, excusing himself with bad weather. However, in fact the author here is only seemingly omnipotent. The protagonist has his own identity, but he is being overpowered by the author. We are witnessing his creation process in real time:

I do not have any eye or hair color yet, but I already know too much, somewhere in this mind off-screen my unfulfilled love and random death are being invented.

His only hope to avoid such a dramatic fate is the author giving up on his work; perhaps he will “put the story away in the bottom drawer”⁴⁶. The line between the world of the protagonist and the reality is blurred. The protagonist is aware of it through sounds (such as crackling) from outside. This inspires reflections regarding the conflict between those two worlds, how much the author’s world can disrupt the fictional world, such as his focus, isolation, sacrifice. Kind surroundings (“([Rzeczywistość] Pozornie zatroskana: a może coś wam doradzić, coś dodać, czegoś uszczknąć” [Seemingly worried reality: maybe you would like me to advise you, add something, take something away?”), “warmth and light” are enemies of creativity:

For this world this is only death. The night, myself, the moon, even the dog – all will fade away into whiteness.⁴⁷

The whiteness of a sheet of paper, of course. The existence of the protagonist is characterized by absurd contradictions, which perversely make it resemble real life. The only thing which manifests its literary character is the language, so characteristic for Pablopavo’s works – imperfect, rebellious, but omnipotent:

So you can only listen carefully, in spite of fear, you can wait for what is going to happen, recite fate like the Rosary, be unsurprised by anything, even get yourself killed so that the story can survive. You can only watch how infinitives construct your neighborhood, it is dawn already, and it is bringing the first voices. Still clumsy, still not used to sound, to being.⁴⁸

⁴⁵“Czuję, że ten pozornie wszechwładny ktoś zaraz rzuci mnie w wir tak zwanych przygód, a to ostatnia rzecz, jakiej pragnę.”

⁴⁶“odłóż kartki z tym wszystkim do najniższej z szuflad”.

⁴⁷“Dla tego świata tu to tylko śmierć. Noc się rozwieje, ja, księżyc i pies nawet – wszyscy w biel.”

⁴⁸“Więc tylko nasłuchiwać, choć strach, czekać na wypadki, odmawiać fatum jak różaniec, niczemu się nie dziwić, nawet dać się zamordować, żeby opowieść przetrwała. Patrzyć, jak bezokoliczniki budują okolicę, bo to już świt, ze świtem idą pierwsze głosy. Jeszcze wypowiedane nieporadnie, jeszcze wprawiające się w brzmienie, w bycie.”

These are the circumstances in which the protagonist-narrator exists. He is telling us how the story about him is being created – judging by his self-awareness, this story is popular, perhaps even sensational, but this is only the background. In the case of *Opowiadanie* the true tension stems from the creative process, bringing worlds and characters to life in which one of them became a superior being – the narrator.

In search of sense

Sandauer considered *mise en abyme* to be “a vicious circle of nothingness”⁴⁹, “a message which communicates nothing, a thought which has no content outside of itself”⁵⁰. Such claims have been discussed by literary scholars and by literature itself many times, offering numerous interesting realizations, which led to the development of intellectually and cognitively attractive forms. Examples outside of literature also show that *mise en abyme* provides broad opportunities for expression when it is not a goal in itself. Paradoxically – in spite of concerns regarding exhausting culture and convention – *mise en abyme* seems to be leading to a search for the sense of creation, and more broadly, to the sense of existing in a world full of the absurd. In the face of a crisis of values, a loss of faith in truthfulness, Sołtys tries to find motivation, consider circumstances, test the situation of his own work critically, he asks himself and others about the sense of creativity.

The song is not just entertainment, it transgresses the limitations imposed by numerous codes, striving for consciously created literariness in its textual sphere. Used skillfully, *mise en abyme* becomes an attractive device, which helps to intellectualize the message, creating interesting tensions based on irony, self-irony, highlighting some distance towards the creative matter. Considerations regarding the creative process and the form of a given work result from a higher level of reflection. Both the author’s self-awareness and faith in the addressee – their willingness and ability to participate in such a game, demanding openness and an intellectual effort – become significant. In a world where art is not a subject of common interest, obscured by materialism, worldly problems, politics, considerations regarding art, creativity, the creative process itself are all examples of abstract thinking, and as such deserve special attention.

In Pablopavo’s works language gains subjectivity, which is rarely seen in songs; a story becomes the protagonist, telling it – a theme, struggling with form – an important problem. *Mise en abyme* is an attempt at distancing oneself from the artificiality of Form, with the aim of realizing this artificiality and the conventionality of communication. Metareflection is an element of irony, an attempt at defending oneself against naïve engagement in the world of described reality. It is in perfect harmony with statement distance (audible also in the phonic

⁴⁹Artur Sandauer, „Konstruktywny nihilizm”, in: *Zebrane pisma krytyczne. T. 1* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1981), 537–554.

⁵⁰Artur Sandauer, „Samobójstwo Mitrydatesa”, in: *Zebrane pisma krytyczne. T. 2*, 1981, 504.

realization), assuming emotionlessness over emotionality. As an important part of disillusion supported by subtle humor and intellectualized poetics of form, *mise en abyme* becomes an attempt at saving authenticity and constructing a higher-level understanding with the addressee who is aware of these conventions.

translated by Paulina Zagórska

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ABSTRACT:

The paper is devoted to the works of Pablopavo, a song artist for whom *mise en abyme* is an important means of expression. Although the term has been recognized in literature studies for decades, it has rarely been considered an important element of song lyrics. The paper discusses numerous examples which illustrate different ways in which Pablopavo uses *mise en abyme*, creating attractive paraliterary constructions, breaking the genre limitations of songs, directing the message towards literariness. *Mise en abyme* becomes a device which allows him to construct an understanding with the addressee which goes beyond entertainment. Distance from the form, irony, comicality help make the message authentic, situating the very process of communication, based mostly on language, at the center.

Pablopav

LITERARINESS

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