Sarah Copland

6. 'It […] cannot do any harm to anyone whatsoever': Fictionality, Invention and Knowledge Creation in Global Nonfictions, Joseph Conrad's Prefaces and *Chance*

Abstract: *Chance* explores the intersection of two of novelist Joseph Conrad's life-long fascinations: fictional representations of nonfictional conversational storytelling and the relationship between truth, credibility and invention. The latter is also apparent throughout Conrad's prefaces, in which he works through long-held anxieties about the truthfulness and credibility of his representations and about critics' concerns on these fronts. To reconcile the relationship between invention and truth or credibility, he describes a process of constructing, via invention, fundamentally truthful and credible stories about real-world events and figures. In *Chance*, Conrad depicts a character narrator, Marlow, doing the same thing. There are, however, two salient differences between Marlow's and Conrad's undertakings: one is their distance from the events and figures they are telling about and telling to (Conrad very distant from them vs. Marlow literally living amidst them), and the other is the genre claims they make for their narratives (Conrad's literary fictions vs. Marlow's conversational nonfictions). Conrad depicts Marlow using invention (through fictionality and otherwise) to supplement the limitations of his knowledge about other people, their motivations and their relationships, so that he can narrate a credible and compelling nonfictional conversational tale for his narratee. But because Marlow lives amidst and communicates with the subjects of his tale and presents his communications as nonfictional, the knowledge he creates through invention is consequential for his own and others' involvement in the unfolding action. Failure to signal must have beens and hypotheticals as invention contributes to significant outcomes for the people with whom Marlow communicates in the told. Conrad thus qualifies his portrait of the affordances of invention for knowledge creation in global nonfictions with a cautionary note related to narrating situations like Marlow's: telling nonfictional conversational stories about and to our acquaintances.

Keywords: fictionality, invention, knowledge creation, truth, credibility, signaling, nonfictional conversational storytelling

Fictionality theory has been remarkably generative in the past decade or so, its decoupling of fictionality from generic fiction constituting a watershed moment

in rhetorical theory and narrative theory.[324] Specifically, reconceiving fictionality as 'a rhetorical resource available within communicative contexts of all sorts' means that the distinction between fictionality and factuality can be 'detached from, and [cut] across, any generic distinction between fiction and non-fiction'.[325] Consequently, generic classifications cease to be ontological distinctions and instead serve as indicators of 'which of these two modes is rhetorically dominant in the global communicative act'.[326] Among other interventions, the shift from an ontological to a rhetorical- or communication-based conception of fictionality enabled scholars to account for the presence and role of fictional discourse in global nonfictions and for the presence and role of nonfictional discourse in global fictions.[327]

In this chapter, working with fictionality as 'intentionally signalled, communicated invention',[328] I focus on the relationship between fictionality and invention. In doing so, I explore the potential and affordances of fictionality and the limitations and dangers of shifts among fictionality, ambiguously signalled communicated invention, and unsignalled communicated invention as forms of knowledge creation in global nonfictions. While fictionality can, of course, take many forms, I am interested in standard examples, such as what-if projections, thought experiments, hypotheses, hypotheticals, counterfactuals, speculations

324 See Richard Walsh, *The Rhetoric of Fictionality* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2007) for the first formulation of fictionality theory; Henrik Skov Nielsen, James Phelan and Richard Walsh, 'Ten Theses about Fictionality', *Narrative* 23/1 (2015), 61–73 for its elaboration and refinement; and Cindie Aaen Maagaard, Daniel Schäbler and Marianne Wolff Lundholt, eds., *Exploring Fictionality: Conceptions, Test Cases, Discussions* (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2020) for a representative sample of leading theorists' recent work.

325 Richard Walsh, 'Exploring Fictionality: Afterword', in *Exploring Fictionality: Conceptions, Test Cases, Discussions*, 213–238, 214.

326 Walsh, 'Exploring Fictionality', 214.

327 For the latter, since nonfictional discourse in global fictions has received less attention in fictionality studies, see James Phelan, 'Local Nonfictionality within Generic Fiction: Huntington's Disease in McEwan's *Saturday* and Genova's *Inside the O'Briens*', in Zara Dinnen and Robyn Warhol, eds., *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Narrative Theories* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 362–374.

328 Simona Zetterberg Gjerlevsen and Henrik Skov Nielsen, 'Distinguishing Fictionality', in Cindie Aaen Maagaard, Daniel Schäbler and Marianne Wolff Lundholt, eds., *Exploring Fictionality: Conceptions, Test Cases, Discussions* (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2020), 19–40, 23.

and other deviations from the actual within a globally nonfictional discourse.[329] While it would be fruitful to examine such examples of fictionality, and their potential for knowledge creation, in straightforwardly nonfictional discourses like legal testimony, medical narratives, memoirs or biographies, I turn, paradoxically, back to literary fiction and its paratexts: specifically to modernist writer Joseph Conrad's novel *Chance*[330] and his prefaces to the collected edition of his works.[331] In the prefaces, which offer globally nonfictional accounts of the genesis, composition and reception of his works, Conrad uses fictionality to create knowledge and theorizes invention as central to creating verisimilitude in fictional storytelling that is at times based on nonfictional events and people. *Chance*, like *Heart of Darkness*, *Lord Jim* and 'Youth', offers a fictional representation of nonfictional conversational storytelling. These texts depict an unnamed frame narrator recounting an oral tale that he heard from character narrator Charles Marlow, with most of the frame narrator's narration given over to direct quotation of Marlow's telling; the tale is nonfictional from the point of view of Marlow and the unnamed frame narrator because the incidents recounted really happened to Marlow and his acquaintances. In *Chance*, Marlow uses fictionality, ambiguously signalled communicated invention, and unsignalled communicated invention to create knowledge (specifically knowledge about human psychology, relationships and their attendant affective and ethical entanglements), making invention central to his storytelling about ostensibly nonfictional events and people. As I will demonstrate, Conrad's and Marlow's uses of invention in their ostensibly nonfictional storytelling have very different consequences based on three variables: the extent to which their fictionality shifts into ambiguously signalled or unsignalled communicated invention; their distances from the events they are referring to and figures they are communicating with; and the genre claims they make for their stories.

Working with Conrad's prefaces and *Chance* to explore the relationship between fictionality and invention, and the potential and dangers of invention as a form of knowledge creation in global nonfictions, I also contribute to two long-standing debates in Conrad scholarship: one on Conrad's anxieties about the credibility and plausibility of his representations, and the other on the

329 Nielsen, Phelan and Walsh, 'Ten Theses about Fictionality', 62, 64.

330 Joseph Conrad, *Chance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). Published in serial form starting in 1912 and in book form in 1913 (UK) and 1914 (US).

331 Joseph Conrad, *Conrad's Prefaces to His Works* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1937). Published 1917–1920.

relationship between Conrad and Marlow. I tackle the former in the next section, and the latter towards the end of the chapter, where I take a rhetorical narrative theory-informed approach to character narration in *Chance*, drawing in particular on James Phelan's ideas about character narration as an art of indirection,[332] in order to distinguish Conrad's communication with his audience from Marlow's communication with his narratee. This distinction is essential to recognizing Conrad's use of Marlow's fictionality-rich narration to explore the limitations and dangers of shifts between fictionality and other forms of communicated invention in globally nonfictional conversational storytelling. In turn, distinguishing Conrad's communication from Marlow's communication enables us to ascertain the degree of what Phelan's rhetorical approach calls the interpretive, affective and ethical alignment between author and character narrator, in this case, Conrad and Marlow, vis-à-vis the storyworld's action and character-character relationships.

Fictionality as knowledge creation and invention, truth and credibility in Conrad's prefaces

Paratexts such as prefaces have played a central role in fictionality theory's development. By bringing together Conrad's prefaces and fiction, I supplement fictionality theory's current focus on paratexts' employment of fictionality to signal the accompanying texts' global status.[333] First, I analyse examples of intentionally signalled, communicated invention in the prefaces, demonstrating how Conrad

332 See James Phelan, *Living to Tell about It: A Rhetoric and Ethics of Character Narration* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2005).

333 Walsh regards paratexts as the sole determinants of a text's rhetorical dominant (in part because he opposes the idea of text-internal signals); though they embrace the possibility of text-internal signals, Gjerlevsen and Nielsen also regard the paratext as an important potential site for signaling fictionality. Louise Brix Jacobsen's taxonomy of text-paratext relations accommodates not only paratexts featuring local fictionality within a rhetorically dominant factuality (or vice versa) and paratexts in which some elements of the paratextual communication are fictive (or non-fictive) but others are not – which Genette's foundational, binary fictive/non-fictive model cannot accommodate – but also blurry cases that concurrently invoke fictive and non-fictive rhetorics to prevent readers from determining a dominant rhetoric. Such paratexts often accompany texts that are themselves undecidable. See Louise Brix Jacobsen, 'Paratext', in Lasse Gammelgaard, Stefan Iversen, Louise Brix Jacobsen, James Phelan, Richard Walsh, Henrik Zetterberg-Nielsen and Simona Zetterberg-Nielsen, eds., *Fictionality and Literature: Core Concepts Revisited* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2022).

uses them to create and communicate knowledge in a globally nonfictional discourse. Then, I situate these uses of fictionality in Conrad's broader theorization of invention, focusing on his investment in truth and his claims about invention as the means by which he makes the truth credible, even in fiction based on real people and events.

Although chapter seven of Walsh's seminal work *The Rhetoric of Fictionality* (2007) deals with both fictionality and prefaces and examines authors' conceits – often taken from their prefaces – about the discursive and representational authorities that underwrite their narrative creativity, in order to theorize an account of creativity rooted not in mimesis, verisimilitude or correspondence but in 'narrative rightness', Walsh never treats these conceits as examples of fictionality. I, on the other hand, do regard them as examples of fictionality, congruent with both leading definitions of fictionality, Walsh's own ('utterances functioning independent of directly informative relevance') and Gjerlevsen's and Nielsen's ('intentionally signaled, communicated invention'). To take one of the examples Walsh cites, there is, of course, no directly informative relevance to Walter Scott's description, in his prefaces to the Waverley novels, of a demon who 'seats himself on the feather of [his] pen when [he] begin[s] to write, and leads it astray from the purpose'.[334] Surely this is an utterance 'functioning independent of directly informative relevance' and an 'intentionally signaled, communicated invention': Scott uses fictionality to articulate the way the writing process derails his original intentions and takes him into unforeseen creative territory. (Even here I find myself using, for the rhetorical purpose of making my argument, the metaphors of redirected creative intentions as train derailment and literary subject matter as geographical terrain.)[335]

My attention to Conrad's use of fictionality as a rhetorical strategy in his prefaces, however, extends far beyond the conceits writers routinely use to describe their inspiration and composition practices in prefaces, media interviews and other paratexts.[336] In addition to such figures, Conrad uses fictionality to refer to

334 Walsh, *The Rhetoric of Fictionality*, 135.

335 I am struck by the omission of Conrad's prefaces from Walsh's case studies, but, as I demonstrate, Conrad's account of creativity *is* – unlike Walsh's other case studies – based on mimesis or verisimilitude *and* makes frequent use of fictionality.

336 Such figures are pervasive in Conrad's prefaces, especially seafaring metaphors for writing. While many figures have a nautical basis, others take on the themes of the non-seafaring works to which they refer, such as the metaphor for the chemical reaction of creative ingredients for *The Secret Agent*, a novel about a plot to blow up the Greenwich Observatory (Conrad, *Conrad's Prefaces to His Works,* 108).

the sources of his characters and the tales in general, and, as I will demonstrate, these examples of fictionality are key elements in his broader theorization of invention's relationship to truth and credibility.

Discussions of sources are common in retrospective prefaces for a collected edition of an author's works, and they are especially apparent in Conrad's prefaces because his critics (then and now) are preoccupied by the question of his sources, especially the idea that his personal experiences and familial and cultural backgrounds might account for his works' subjects and themes.[337] Knowing the expectations of the genre and his critics' preoccupation, Conrad responds directly in his prefaces, sometimes via factual discourse, refuting critics' assumptions or responding to their commentary, but often via the rhetorical resource of fictionality. He refers to some characters as though he interacted with them in the real world or as though they crossed an invisible boundary between the real world and the world of fiction. Lord Jim 'pass[es] by' '[o]ne sunny morning in the commonplace surroundings of an eastern roadstead',[338] and the man who inspired *Victory*'s Axel Hurst drifts out of Conrad's life and into the tale.[339] Conrad refers to his fictional characters' lives beyond the timeframe depicted in his works, reporting on what the characters from *Nostromo*, for example, are doing now.[340] For the sources of his tales in general, Conrad typically includes publicly available texts and private correspondence or conversation, along with real-world people he met or read about, but such discussions often also employ fictionality: he includes fictional character Don José Avellanos's book *History of Fifty Years of Misrule* as one of his sources for *Nostromo*.[341]

It is, of course, only possible to ascertain the communicative purpose (and informative relevance) of these statements in relation to Conrad's sources and creative process if we regard them as examples of fictionality. No scholar would, for example, upon reading that Avellanos's book was a source for *Nostromo*, undertake an archival search for it. Likewise, no scholar would, upon reading that

337 Conrad responded in his prefaces to critics' preoccupation with tracing the sources of his work in his personal history, but this preoccupation continues even in subsequent scholarship. For the most salient example from Conrad's lifetime, see H. L. Mencken, 'Joseph Conrad', in *A Book of Prefaces* (Garden City: Garden City Publishing Company, 1917), 11–64. For a more recent and comprehensive approach, see Thomas C. Moser, 'Conrad, Ford, and the Sources of *Chance*', *Conradiana* 7/3 (1976), 207–224.

338 Conrad, *Conrad's Prefaces to His Works*, 67.

339 Conrad, *Conrad's Prefaces to His Works*, 163.

340 Conrad, *Conrad's Prefaces to His Works*, 89–93.

341 Conrad, *Conrad's Prefaces to His Works*, 88.

Conrad escaped his first love (upon whom *Nostromo*'s Antonia was modelled) by making a trip to the fictional Sulaco,[342] search archival records for proof of Conrad's travel there. As a rhetorical resource, then, fictionality allows Conrad to adhere to the conventions of the genre and respond to his critics, disclosing information about his sources, while also communicating the limits of his knowledge on this front and gently satirizing the expectation that he know and share everything about his creative process.[343]

Notably, Conrad's use of invention-based fictionality to create knowledge, and to signal the limits of his knowledge, is part of his broader theorization of invention's centrality to truthful, credible representation in fiction based on real people and events. As I have demonstrated, Conrad's defense of the truthfulness of his representations most often centres on sharing – directly or through fictionality – the sources or inspirations for his works' characters and/or incidents, but he typically turns his defense of the factuality or actuality of his representations into a defense of their credibility: that his characters and plots possess the appearance or impression of truth.[344] Perhaps paradoxically, considering his

342 Conrad, *Conrad's Prefaces to His Works*, 92.

343 I concur with Vivienne Rundle's assessment that '[b]y blurring the distinctions between real and historical characters (and between biographical and implied author), Conrad undermines the boundaries separating fiction from fact, story from history' (Vivienne Rundle, 'Defining Frames: The Prefaces of Henry James and Joseph Conrad', *Henry James Review* 16/1 (1995), 66–92, 80), but I depart from her ontological conception of the distinction between fact and fiction. See also Anita Starosta's similarly ontological conception, that '[t]he Notes are not of the "real" world but belong, rather, to the fictions' (Anita Starosta, 'Conrad's "Author's Notes": Between Text and Reader', *Yearbook of Conrad Studies* 3 (2007), 31–40, 33).

344 He is clearly concerned about criticism of the credibility of his representations. He mentions, for example, some critics' response to *Lord Jim*'s 'narrative form', which they said was 'not […] very credible' because 'no man could have been expected to talk all that time, and other men to listen so long' (Conrad, *Conrad's Prefaces to His Works*, 65). He refers gratefully to critics who have found his representations believable, such as the critic who praised Vladimir in *The Secret Agent* for being '"not only possible in detail but quite right in essentials"', the French critics who maintained that he captured 'the spirit of the whole epoch' in 'The Duel', and the Russian critics who praised his 'clearness of […] vision and the correctness of […] [his] judgment' in his representation of Russian affairs in *Under Western Eyes* (Conrad, *Conrad's Prefaces to His Works*, 110, 119, 123). As early as 1917, Mencken noted Conrad's efforts to create credibility: 'he is wholly convincing: that the men and women he sets into his scene show ineluctably vivid and persuasive personality; that the theories he brings forward to account for their acts are intelligible; that the effects of those acts, upon actors and

insistence on the truth of his tales and his equation of truth with credibility, Conrad makes it clear that *invention* is what enables him to make truth credible. He admits that he changed the fates of characters based on real-world people (such as Lena in *Victory*, modeled on a girl in a French café),[345] applied the fate of one ship to another,[346] 'fastened onto […] [one character] many words heard on other men's lips' (such as Axel Heyst in *Victory*),[347] and in general represented 'experience pushed a little […] beyond the actual facts of the case for the perfectly legitimate […] purpose of bringing it home to the minds and bosoms of the readers'.[348] He also describes the changes he made to the historical incident upon which *The Secret Agent* is based to make it more credible. He does not regard these inventions and changes to source material as lies or dishonesty, a charge he is quite concerned about, as he insists that the 'essentials' of his fiction are 'true' (that he is opposed to the 'sustained invention of a really telling lie',[349] that it 'bored […] [him] too much to make believe',[350] and that make believe would be 'dishonest'[351]).

Conrad thus theorizes invention as the primary means by which he achieves his central goal as a fiction writer: making the truth credible. At the same time, the rhetorical strategy of fictionality that Conrad deploys in his prefaces – in order to communicate the limitations of his knowledge of his sources and the impossibility of full disclosure, which the genre and his critics expect of him – has, at its core, invention: intentionally signalled, communicated *invention*. Invention, then, is at the heart of the fictional stories Conrad tells, even though they are based on real-world people and events, and at the heart of the nonfictional but fictionality-rich stories he tells *about* the stories he tells, his accounts of his works' inspiration, composition and reception. I thus read Conrad's nonfictional prefaces as grappling theoretically, through the employment of a rhetoric

immediate spectators alike, are such as might be reasonably expected to issue; that the final impression is one of searching and indubitable veracity' (Mencken, *A Book of Prefaces*, 46). See Edward Garnett, 'Introductory Essay', in *Conrad's Prefaces to His Works* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1937), 1–34 for a similar assessment of Conrad's life-like representations.

345 Conrad, *Conrad's Prefaces to His Works*, 168–170.
346 Conrad, *Conrad's Prefaces to His Works*, 117.
347 Conrad, *Conrad's Prefaces to His Works*, 164.
348 Conrad, *Conrad's Prefaces to His Works*, 73.
349 Conrad, *Conrad's Prefaces to His Works*, 59.
350 Conrad, *Conrad's Prefaces to His Works*, 110.
351 Conrad, *Conrad's Prefaces to His Works*, 181.

of fictionality, with the concept at the core of fictionality: invention. In *Chance*, Conrad offers us a fictional representation of another nonfictional genre, nonfictional conversational storytelling, in which the narrator uses fictionality (intentionally signalled, communicated invention) to create knowledge, and invention to make the truth credible – but with very different outcomes from those apparent in Conrad's prefaces, based on three variables: Marlow's shifts between fictionality and other forms of communicated invention; the genre claims Marlow makes for his tale (non-fiction) in relation to those Conrad makes for his novels (fiction); and the distance Marlow has from the events he is recounting and the people he is addressing (very little) in relation to Conrad's distance (much greater).

Contextualizing fictionality and invention in *Chance*'s representation of nonfictional conversational storytelling

In *Chance*, Marlow uses fictionality for knowledge creation, just as Conrad does in the prefaces, and invention for credibility, just as Conrad theorizes in the prefaces, but the outcomes differ, based on the three aforementioned variables. In the next section, I analyse Marlow's fictionality and invention, which he uses to make the characters and events of his nonfictional (from the point of view of Marlow, his narratee and the other characters) oral tale's insights into human psychology, relationships and their attendant affective and ethical entanglements more true, more credible and more clear.[352] In this section, I contextualize my analysis of fictionality and invention in *Chance* in the novel's complex narrative structure and its narrators' and narratees' self-conscious reflections on the tellings, particularly focusing on sources and credibility, seeing as these preoccupations are also apparent in Conrad's prefaces, where fictionality and invention are similarly used to create knowledge and credibility, respectively.

Chance's narrative structure entails an unnamed frame narrator reporting a tale he heard from two sources, his friend Marlow and their new acquaintance Charles Powell. The last twelve of the novel's thirteen chapters consist almost entirely of Marlow's monologue, quoted by the unnamed narrator who serves

352 John Attridge notes the novel's 'explicit preoccupation with probability and motivation' and its 'systematic and obtrusive verisimilitude', which he regards as a form of ethos, 'an appeal to the reader's trust' (John Attridge, "'The Yellow-Dog Thing": Joseph Conrad, Verisimilitude, and Professionalism', *ELH* 77 (2010), 267–296, 269, 270, 271), but I supplement this account by foregrounding the role fictionality plays in Marlow's and Conrad's generations of ethos and storytelling capacities.

as Marlow's narratee and who periodically interrupts Marlow. Marlow knows the story of destitute and desperate young Flora de Barral, her imprisoned (and later released) criminal-financier father, her eventual husband naval Captain Roderick Anthony, her friends the Fynes (through whom she meets Anthony) and young Powell (second officer on Anthony's ship after Anthony's marriage to Flora) from conversations with the Fynes and Flora during his temporary residency near the Fynes' home and from his blossoming friendship with Powell, which permits him to reconnect with Flora later in life. Marlow's twelve-chapter monologue itself consists of extended quoted dialogue, reproducing what the other characters told him, seeing as he was not present for most of the events he relates. Likewise, the novel's first chapter is made up mostly of Powell's monologue, which includes extended quoted dialogue and is quoted by the unnamed narrator.

I introduce the narrative structure in such detail because Marlow draws considerable attention to, and attempts to justify, his extended verbatim reports of dialogue and other people's narration, along with other matters pertaining to his construction of the tale and its chronology, as well as his sources. For Conrad and for us, the novel's global rhetoric is fictionality, but for Marlow and his anonymous narratee (the frame narrator), and for the frame narrator and his anonymous narratee, the tellings are global nonfictions: factual accounts of events that really happened to people they know or know of. Extended verbatim report of dialogue is a signpost of fictionality for Conrad and his authorial audience, one that we have naturalized or conventionalized.[353] But for Marlow and his narratee, reporting a tale that is, to them, nonfictional, extended verbatim report of dialogue requires explanation in order to be credible. Consequently, they repeatedly draw attention to it and justify it. Marlow, for example, anticipates and defuses concern about how a much older Powell could remember events and conversations in such detail: 'This would account for his remembering so much of it

353 Nielsen adds extended verbatim report of dialogue to a range of other features of first-person narration that constitute 'transgressions of the limits to what a narrative-I would be able to narrate': 'a quantity of details [...] that [...] would be impossible for any real person to remember', along with 'a very long series of monologues, dialogues, descriptions, and recollections of previous thoughts that part ways with the model of traditional autobiography, which first-person narrative is often assumed to have as its ideal'. See Henrik Skov Nielsen, 'The Impersonal Voice in First-Person Narrative Fiction', *Narrative* 12/2 (2004), 133–150, 135–136. These features are signposts of fictionality that we have naturalized or conventionalized to such an extent that we scarcely register them when we encounter them in fiction.

with considerable vividness'. Where the recollections might strain credibility to a breaking point, Marlow makes concessions: after his long report of what Fyne said he and Captain Anthony discussed in London, Marlow concedes, 'That was the general sense of his remarks, not his exact words'. Likewise, after recounting the conversation that transpired between Flora and her father upon his release from prison, Marlow acknowledges, 'Something like that. Not the very words perhaps but such was the general sense of her overwhelming argument—the argument of refuge'.[354]

Through Marlow (and to some extent through the narratee), Conrad draws attention to extended verbatim report of dialogue as a signpost of fictionality, in effect de-naturalizing it and making Marlow's construction of his tale at times even more central to the reader's attention than the characters and events in the tale itself. Conrad scholar Martin Ray takes Marlow's remark to his narratee, '[t]he means don't concern you except in so far as they belong to the story', as gospel, concluding that Marlow is not as involved in the creation of the tale as he was in Conrad's earlier Marlow novels,[355] but Marlow in fact spends considerable time detailing 'the means', so clearly the means do belong to the story to a significant extent.[356] Marlow's remark, in fact, occurs just as he yet again interrupts his telling to justify the credibility of his means – in this case his source for information about Flora's married life on board the ship with Captain Anthony and her father – to his narratee, before once again minimizing these reflections on the means: 'I have now seen our Powell many times under the most favourable conditions—and besides I came upon a most unexpected source of information …. But never mind that'.[357] Marlow also reflects on his construction of the tale to shore up its credibility, interrupting 'the current of his narrative' to explain that he is incorporating what he learned subsequently to create a more comprehensible chronology.[358] He forecloses any possible concern about the apparent discrepancy between the relatively short time he conversed with Flora in London

354 Conrad, *Chance,* 211, 186, 270.

355 See Martin Ray, 'Introduction', in Joseph Conrad, *Chance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), xi–xii, xix.

356 Paul Wake, on the other hand, finds Marlow's claim disingenuous and scholars' agreement with Marlow evaluative, either criticizing or praising the elaborate structure of the telling. See Paul Wake, *Conrad's Marlow: Narrative and Death in Youth, Heart of Darkness, Lord Jim and Chance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 104–105.

357 Conrad, *Chance*, 242.

358 Conrad, *Chance*, 84.

and the extensive information he obtained from and shared with her, pointing out that the account seems long only because he has interposed his own comments throughout.[359]

Far more common than these meta-commentaries on the extended verbatim recounting of dialogue or the means of the telling in general are Marlow's efforts – which mirror Conrad's in the prefaces – to prove the truth of his tale by disclosing his sources. As I will demonstrate in the following section, Marlow uses fictionality – and ambiguously signalled and unsignalled communicated invention – extensively in service of this preoccupation with truth and sources. Marlow and his narratee share this preoccupation, which plays a significant role in their assessments of the truth and credibility of the tellings. When Marlow reports that Fyne passed on the news that Flora 'bolted with […] [his] wife's brother, Captain Anthony', Marlow adds that he asked Fyne '[i]s it a suspicion or does she actually say that …?' seeing as '[t]hey didn't [actually] go together'.[360] The narratee is likewise concerned with Marlow's sources, asking him at one point, 'How do you know all this?' to which Marlow replies, 'You shall see by and by'.[361] The narratee also presses Marlow for a fuller explanation of whether the naïve Powell could possibly be the source of insights Marlow is sharing about events only Powell witnessed, or whether Marlow himself developed the insights on the basis of what Powell told him.[362] When Marlow acts as narratee for Powell's narration, he follows the same line of questioning, asking him whether he talked to Flora a lot when she and her father were on board, as the information he is sharing is quite comprehensive.[363]

In *Chance*, Marlow thus draws considerable attention to, and attempts to justify, his extended verbatim reports of dialogue and other people's narration, along with other matters pertaining to his construction of the nonfictional tale and its chronology, as well as his sources. Within this context of self-conscious narration and preoccupation with credibility and sources, Marlow uses fictionality for knowledge creation and invention for credibility, just as Conrad does in his prefaces, but with very different outcomes.

359 Conrad, *Chance*, 173.
360 Conrad, *Chance*, 51–52.
361 Conrad, *Chance*, 198.
362 Conrad, *Chance*, 212.
363 Conrad, *Chance*, 134.

Knowledge creation and the dangers of shifts between fictionality and ambiguously signalled or unsignalled communicated invention in nonfictional conversational storytelling

In this section, I examine Marlow's use of invention[364] to create knowledge of the psychology and relationships of the tale's key figures, moving from cases of intentionally signalled, communicated invention (fictionality) through cases of ambiguously signalled and unsignalled communicated invention. As I move through these cases, I consider the (deleterious) consequences of these shifts between fictionality and other forms of invention for Marlow's communications in the told, as character narrators who narrate as the action is unfolding are uniquely positioned: their tellings can impact their communications and actions not only in the telling, but also in the told.

Most often, Marlow's use of invention takes the form of fictionality, that is, intentionally signalled, communicated hypotheticals, speculations, what ifs, must have beens and imagined scenarios: for example, a counterfactual to offer insight into the Shipping Master's motives, which Marlow believes malicious rather than altruistic;[365] an imagined scenario of the Fynes' first meeting, replete with phrases like 'most likely', 'probably' and 'I imagine';[366] speculation about what Fyne is saying to Captain Anthony in the London hotel, replete with questions, 'Was he […]?', 'Had he […]?', 'Or was he perhaps […]?', 'How was it […]?'[367] – and similar speculations about what Anthony's arrival at the Fynes' cottage must have been like for Flora[368] and about why Anthony waited for Flora's father to come on board before meeting him.[369]

When Marlow uses fictionality as a rhetorical strategy to generate knowledge about other people's psychology and relationships, he sometimes presses his narratee for assent to the plausibility of the invention. For example, he speculates

364 While Conrad scholars have not used fictionality theory to explain Marlow's rhetorical strategies, Ray does point out that 'Marlow's task […] is […] to assemble facts, to reach and convey a reflective and philosophic understanding of Flora, based on *his imaginative interpretation* of the often indirect knowledge which he receives about her' (Ray, 'Introduction', xii, italics added).

365 Conrad, *Chance*, 22.

366 Conrad, *Chance*, 31–32.

367 Conrad, *Chance*, 154–155.

368 Conrad, *Chance*, 155.

369 Conrad, *Chance*, 260.

about the conversation between Flora's governess and her co-conspirator: 'And we may conjecture what we like. I have no difficulty in imagining that the woman—of forty, and the chief of the enterprise—must have raged at large. And perhaps the other did not rage enough.'[370] Marlow is keen to obtain his narratee's assent to the credibility of his conjectures: he asks, 'Don't you see it—eh …' and the narratee reports, 'I was struck by the absolute verisimilitude of this suggestion. But we were always tilting at each other. I saw an opening and pushed my uncandid thrust. "You have a ghastly imagination"'.[371] Following speculations about what Captain Anthony thought about how his sister treated him, signalled by phrases like '[i]t is possible', 'it may be', 'perhaps' and 'must have', Marlow asks his narratee, 'Don't you think that I have hit on the psychology of the situation?'[372]

At times, though, Marlow undertakes the same operation (speculations, hypotheticals, must have beens, etc.) with the same motive (to generate knowledge of human psychology and relationships) without clearly signalling that what he is intentionally communicating is invented. In other words, he reports things he could not possibly know, yet they are not clearly flagged as invention or accompanied by commentary or justification. Such inventions are at times relatively brief and inconsequential: for example, what Flora's scheming governess and the butler said to each other as de Barral's fate was sealed, or what the governess and her co-conspirator said to each other when the latter returned with a cashed cheque, appropriating whatever remained of de Barral's fortune. On the one hand, we might say that these inventions are relatively close to other flagged inventions, so perhaps the signalling could be taken to encompass large swaths of the reporting. Problematically, however, Marlow references his sources and the 'facts' in between periodic explicit signals of his invention, so it is at times impossible to tell where his signalling begins or ends and thus which material his narratee is supposed to take as intentionally signalled, communicated invention. At best, the signalling is ambiguous.

At other times, however, such inventions cannot even be described as ambiguously signalled. These inventions are extended and much more consequential as they pertain to the motivations and behaviours of major players in the narrative at critical moments in their lives: what Captain Anthony thought – conveyed by Marlow in extensive free indirect style – after Fyne met with him to persuade him against marrying Flora,[373] what Anthony thought in the ten days leading up

370 Conrad, *Chance*, 80.
371 Conrad, *Chance*, 80.
372 Conrad, *Chance*, 120–121.
373 Conrad, *Chance*, 247.

to his marriage to Flora[374] and during his perambulations after their visit to the registry office,[375] and what Anthony felt and assumed about Flora, in the midst of their strife on board, including his contemplation of suicide.[376] It is difficult to imagine even the most attentive narratee regarding these reports about other people's psychology and relationships as invention because so much of the telling features explicit discussion of sources, overt signalling of invention and requests for assent to the plausibility of the invention. Indeed, as I have already demonstrated, Conrad depicts the narratee asking Marlow whether he is sharing what Powell told him or developing the insights himself, so the narratee's failure to ask anything at these junctures surely indicates his reading of Marlow's unsignalled inventions as facts.

The chief danger of shifts among fictionality, ambiguously signalled communicated invention and unsignalled communicated invention lies in the combination of the genre claim Marlow makes for his tale (nonfiction) and his proximity to the figures in it (acquaintances in whose lives he continues to play a role). As a character narrator, Marlow uses fictionality not only in his telling, but also in his communications in the told, in the action itself, where the deleterious consequences of his shifts among fictionality, ambiguously signalled communicated invention and unsignalled communicated invention are most apparent. He offers inventions – some of which take the form of fictionality (intentionally communicated, signalled must have beens, speculations and hypotheticals) – about Flora's and Anthony's psychological motivations and interpersonal relationships to his acquaintances in the action itself, so that they, like Marlow and the narratee, can navigate the ethical tangles they are involved in. But some of these communicated inventions in the told are not signalled, just like some of the communicated inventions in the telling. The most notable instance of such unsignalled invention in the told has a significant impact on the unfolding action, highlighting the dangers of shifts between fictionality and other forms of invention in global nonfiction and further calling into question the critical commonplace that *Chance* is the Marlow novel in whose action Marlow is least involved.[377]

374 Conrad, *Chance*, 252–253.

375 Conrad, *Chance*, 257–258.

376 Conrad, *Chance*, 293–294.

377 Ray, for example, claims that Marlow's 'role in *Chance* is much more passive than on his earlier appearances; he tells us little of his own life and he intervenes in the affairs of Flora much less than he did with Lord Jim' (Ray, 'Introduction', xi-xii). Even Wake, who considers the intersection of narration (telling) and story (told) in *Chance*, does

Conrad's communication to his audience thus includes this representation of Marlow's lack of signalling of his use of invention and its outcome, in the told. This representation constitutes a critical qualification of the celebratory portrait Marlow offers invention in his reflections. Invention, Marlow believes, helps him get to the truth of the matter – but, as Conrad shows us, the truth of the matter is obfuscated, and matters are in fact made worse, when Marlow occasionally shifts from fictionality to other forms of invention in his knowledge-creation endeavour. When Marlow learns from the Fynes that Flora is missing and has had an immensely difficult life, he realizes that when he encountered her earlier on the precipice of a quarry, she was likely not being reckless, as he had assumed at the time, but was attempting suicide. He therefore mentions the quarry as a place the Fynes should search for Flora. After a night of searching, the Fynes learn via a letter from Flora that she has fled with her new acquaintance, Captain Anthony, Mrs Fyne's brother. Marlow formulates a range of hypotheses about Flora's past, present and future actions and motivations, some of which he shares with the Fynes as intentionally signalled, communicated hypotheses (fictionality) but others he presents without signalling them as invention, even though they are as invented as his straightforward uses of fictionality are: that he saved her from a suicide attempt, for example. When Fyne seeks Marlow's advice about Mrs Fyne's request that he go to London to intercede with Anthony, which Fyne does not want to do, Marlow recourses to his own hypotheses to convince Fyne to capitulate. Some of these hypotheses are not signalled as inventions: unlike Marlow's ambiguously signalled or unsignalled communicated inventions in the telling (like his free indirect style-rich account of Anthony's thoughts) these inventions could not be identified as inventions even by the most attentive narratees. Having convinced Fyne to go to London, Marlow offers to accompany him and tells him, 'you are doing what's right since it pleases a lady [Mrs Fyne] and cannot do any harm to anybody whatsoever'.[378]

In fact, the harm done by Fyne's intercession in London is significant. While awaiting Fyne outside Anthony's hotel, Marlow encounters Flora, who forces him to admit that he 'put that notion [of checking the quarry in case she had made another suicide attempt there] into their heads':[379] 'I told them that you were making up your mind and I came along just then. I told them that you were

not consider the impact of Marlow's communications in the told on his own and other people's actions.

378 Conrad, *Chance*, 144.

379 Conrad, *Chance*, 151.

saved by me. My shout checked you'.[380] Flora reports that she had abandoned her suicide attempt before Marlow appeared on the scene because she feared that the Fynes' dog might leap after her and come to harm. Even as Flora tells Marlow this, adding that by the following day she had abandoned her ideas about suicide because she 'remembered what [she] should never have forgotten',[381] Marlow does not understand that she is referring to her father, who has no one else in the world to turn to, and instead continues to act – and encourage others to act – on the basis of a must have been or hypothetical about the reason she abandoned her suicide attempt. She must have remembered 'a vague notion that suicide is a legal crime; words of old moralists and preachers which remain in the air and help to form all the authorized moral conventions'.[382]

The damage has been done: Marlow's unsignalled communicated invention that he saved Flora's life is one of the factors that leads to Fyne's intercession in London, an intercession Marlow believes 'cannot do any harm to anybody whatsoever'.[383] Instead, based on what Fyne tells him, and based on his own insecurities, Anthony is once and for all convinced that Flora does not love him and is instead repulsed by him; as Anthony retreats into himself, he only further alienates Flora, who believes, based on the treatment she faced at the hands of her governess, that no one could possibly love her. The more one retreats, the more the other retreats, in a vicious cycle that culminates in complete estrangement.

When Marlow cannot explain how and why Flora and Anthony became so estranged, he admits to his narratee: 'I must confess at once that it was Flora de Barral whom I suspected. In this world as at present organized women are the suspected half of the population. There are good reasons for that'.[384] This phrasing signals the invention (speculation), but Marlow is yet again wrong, and at the earlier, far more critical juncture in the story, the one that exacerbated the initial tension between Flora and Anthony, Marlow offered no such signals of invention. Indeed, he fails to see, even now, that he played a significant role in their estrangement: their latent insecurities about being unworthy of love achieve full-blown manifestation thanks to Fyne's interference, which Marlow encouraged on the basis of his unsignalled must have beens and hypotheticals. Furthermore, Flora's preoccupation with her father's happiness and her responsibility for him,

380 Conrad, *Chance*, 151.
381 Conrad, *Chance*, 154.
382 Conrad, *Chance*, 161.
383 Conrad, *Chance*, 144.
384 Conrad, *Chance*, 243.

which she had tried to signal to Marlow as the thing she should never have forgotten, is something Marlow overlooked entirely and thus failed to counsel her about. He is so preoccupied with his own must have beens and hypotheticals that he ignores the entirely predictable outcome that the fiercely proud de Barral would try to drive a wedge between his daughter and the man whose charity he resents, only exacerbating their estrangement and eventually resulting in de Barral's (failed) attempt to murder Anthony (after which de Barral commits suicide). Marlow fails to reflect on his shifts between fictionality and other uses of invention, all stemming from the same operation (speculation, hypotheticals, must have beens, etc.) with the same motives (to generate knowledge of human behaviour, motivations and relationships), and to appreciate the impact of his rhetorical strategies on his own actions and the actions of his interlocutors. His failures are, of course, not solely responsible for the outcomes Flora, Anthony and de Barral face, but there is no denying their contributions or Conrad's decision to depict them.

Conclusion: What Conrad's fictional story teaches us about nonfictional conversational storytelling

Chance explores the intersection of two of Conrad's life-long fascinations: fictional representations of nonfictional conversational storytelling and the relationship between truth, credibility and invention. The latter is also apparent throughout the prefaces, where Conrad works through long-held anxieties about the truthfulness and credibility of his representations and about critics' concerns on these fronts. He tries to reconcile the relationship between invention and truth or credibility, describing a process of taking events and figures from his life or history and constructing, via invention, fundamentally truthful and credible stories about them. In *Chance*, Conrad depicts a character narrator doing much the same thing. There are, however, two salient differences between Marlow's and Conrad's undertakings: one difference is their distance from the events and figures they are telling about and telling to (Conrad very distant from them vs. Marlow literally living amidst them), and the other is the genre claims they make for their stories (Conrad's literary fictions vs. Marlow's conversational nonfictions).

Conrad depicts Marlow using invention (through fictionality and otherwise) to supplement the limitations of his knowledge about other people, their motivations, and their relationships, so that he can narrate a credible and compelling nonfictional conversational tale for his narratee. But because Marlow lives amidst and communicates with the subjects of his tale and presents his communications

as nonfictional, the knowledge he creates through invention is consequential for his own and others' involvement in the unfolding action. Failure to signal must have beens and hypotheticals *as invention* contributes to significant outcomes for the people with whom Marlow communicates in the told. The limitations on what people know of each other's hearts and minds are clearly at the centre of this novel, as are the ways in which they supplement these limitations with invention to create knowledge – and the ways in which they do and do not signal to each other what they are doing, with significant outcomes. Conrad thus qualifies his portrait of the affordances of invention for knowledge creation in global nonfictions with a cautionary note related to narrating situations like Marlow's: telling nonfictional conversational stories about and to our acquaintances.

Analysing *Chance* through the lens of fictionality theory thus illuminates Marlow's communicated inventions in his telling and in the told, signalled, ambiguously signalled and unsignalled — and illuminates the consequences of these inventions in the told. This new reading of the novel puts Marlow far more at the centre of the action than Conrad scholars have believed him to be and regards Marlow's encouragement of Powell to pursue a relationship with Flora in their early middle age as not the first but the second time he has intervened in Flora's romantic life. This new reading of *Chance* also contributes to key debates in Conrad scholarship about the degree of interpretive, affective and ethical alignment between Conrad and Marlow: Conrad depicts Marlow's use of invention as an inevitable part of nonfictional conversational storytelling, but inevitable does not mean unproblematic or harmless, and authorial attention to the harm signals at least some misalignment between author and character narrator.[385]

Ray points out that the unnamed frame narrator of *Chance*, who acts as Marlow's narratee, was depicted in the original serialized version of *Chance* as a novelist 'preoccupied with the literary mediation of the experiences which Marlow conveys to him'. Ray speculates that Conrad removed from the book version all references to the frame narrator as a novelist because 'this was an excessive and unfruitful complication'.[386] Without hazarding a guess as to the reason for Conrad's revision, I can certainly comment on the effect: the absence of any information about the unnamed narrator's medium, occasion and purpose for

385 In *Conrad's Marlow: Narrative and Death in Youth, Heart of Darkness, Lord Jim and Chance*, Wake argues that Marlow's misogynistic statements, along with critical and questioning interruptions by his narratee, also indicate that Marlow is not simply a mouthpiece for Conrad.

386 Ray, 'Introduction', xv.

narration keeps the reader's focus on Marlow's conversational storytelling. This focus entails attention to the two salient differences between Marlow's communication and Conrad's – living amidst or entirely apart from the people they are telling about and telling to, and constructing a nonfictional conversational tale or a literary fiction – and to the impact of these differences on Conrad's portrait of invention's potential for knowledge creation.

Conrad's often-quoted declaration from his memoir *A Personal Record* is relevant here: 'And what is a novel if not a conviction of our fellow men's existence, strong enough to take upon itself a form of imagined life clearer than reality and whose accumulated verisimilitude of selected episodes puts to shame the pride of documentary history?'.[387] My pairing of *Chance* and the prefaces prompts a further question: where does nonfictional conversational storytelling fit? Verisimilitude is as important in nonfictional conversational storytelling as it is in the novel, but ethical responsibility to those we tell about and tell to is as important, perhaps even more important, than it is in documentary history, where there is likely greater spatiotemporal separation between teller, told and addressee. Conrad's fictional representations of the affordances and dangers of invention as a form of knowledge creation in nonfictional conversational storytelling illuminate his fascination with and anxieties about this question. Nonfictional conversational storytelling about our lives and our acquaintances' lives can be beneficial for our self-understanding, wellbeing and social literacy, and fictionality and invention can play important roles in creating knowledge in order to tell stories that achieve these aims. But, as Conrad showed us nearly a century before the rise of fictionality theory, that's not the whole story.

387 Joseph Conrad, *A Personal Record* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 27–28.