

JOSEPH CONRAD AND ALEXANDER FREDRO. INSPIRATIONS AND PARALLELS IN THE LIGHT OF THE SUBJECT MATTER OF FREDRO'S *TRZY PO TRZY*

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Abstract: The similarities between the works of Alexander Fredro and Joseph Conrad beg the question of the extent to which a comparative interpretation can be made. However, before this question can be answered, we must first redefine the concept of the comic for the purpose of making such a comparison. The aim of this article is to show both authors in a new light as (unwitting?) deconstructors of the traditional concept of the comic (which for Fredro was still associated with that of Molière) and as creators of a new, existential concept of the comic that is tied up with human existence and that can be understood as being heightened by the tragic. An excellent example of this is provided by Fredro's memoirs of the Napoleonic campaign entitled *Trzy po trzy* (*Tittle-Tattle*), which – thanks to the testimony of Aniela Zagórska – we know Conrad read in 1922. The manner of Fredro's narration – which he himself likens to playing with a shuttlecock – in time proves to be that of a particular literary commemoration, i.e. bearing witness. Identified thus as a component of human existence, the comic serves to provide an escape from the “trauma of death”. A similar evolution can be traced in the style of Marlow's narration in Conrad's *Youth* and *Heart of Darkness*. Like the narrator of Fredro's memoirs, Marlow makes the transition from “feat” to “testimony”.

Keywords: Joseph Conrad, Alexander Fredro, feat of memory, feat of testimony, the comic, the tragic, existentialism, narration, symbolizations of narration, *Trzy po trzy*, *Youth*, *Heart of Darkness*.

Śmieszność u Fredry. Na dnie jej tkwi przeświadczenie, że właściwie
jest pięknem i jasnością. Poprzez śmiech przeczute uprawnienie
śmiechu – radość prawdy.

Fredro's laughter. At bottom it is quite convinced
of its beauty and clarity. Through laughter one senses laughter's prerogative
– the joy of truth.

St. Brzozowski, *Filozofia romantyzmu polskiego*¹

¹ S. Brzozowski. “Filozofia romantyzmu polskiego” [In:] *Idem. Kultura i życie. Zagadnienia sztuki i twórczości. W walce o światopogląd*. Warszawa 1973, pp. 393-394.

INTRODUCTION

Although the parallel between Alexander Fredro and Joseph Conrad now has a bibliography of its own, the research done so far has yet to provide satisfactory explanations of certain issues. This has in part been due to the very limited scope of individual contributions dealing with the similarities that exist between the two authors. The aim of the present article is therefore to examine the parallel by highlighting certain problems and also to examine the equally important question of Fredro being a possible source of inspiration for Conrad. It is the comic that defines the common ground between them – their understanding of this aesthetic category, the way they used it in their writing and, above all, its highly universal character. I shall therefore not be examining linguistic manifestations of humour in the work of Conrad and Fredro (which have been analysed by scholars such as Mieczysław Inglot and Andrzej Zgorzelski)² or reflections of comic effects in language – “remote associations, juggling with words and the modulation of their meanings, provoking sudden shifts of thought and emotions that bring relief by releasing tension.”³

The assumption that the comic is heightened by the tragic would seem to be justified by (among other things) a comparative analysis of the black humour of Fredro’s memoirs entitled *Trzy po trzy* (*Tittle-Tattle*) and Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. Comparisons such as these can throw new light on the concept of comic cohesion as proposed by (among others) Jerzy Ziomek, according to whom “a precondition for the existence of the comic is a lack of ethical impediments.”⁴ Such an understanding of the comic – as an existential attitude that is not encompassed and is at most indicated by the linguistically represented world – is one that I find more congenial. However, I have resisted the temptation to present Conrad and Fredro as ‘philosophers of black humour’. Instead, I draw a parallel between Conrad and Fredro in the light of the latter’s *Trzy po trzy* and several works written by Conrad in the periods 1896-1900 (looking for parallels proper; this is the more significant period, including as it does *Heart of Darkness* and the earlier story *Youth*) and 1923-1924 (looking for possible inspirations).

The basis for the comparison of *Trzy po trzy* and *Youth* is a shared poetic of reminiscence and concepts of time and memory that are rooted in the comic aspect of existence. All these elements – theories of time and memory, reminiscences, the “privatized” and the “exclusive” – are components of the similar attitudes of the narrators of both works, their view of the category of truth and their suspension (or balancing) between the urge to show off and the need to ‘testify’. The comparison of *Trzy po trzy* and *Heart of Darkness* aims to show that the comic in Fredro’s work is a ‘testimony’ of a special kind. Its content is nothing but the overcoming of a state of

² Cf. M. Inglot. *Komedie Aleksandra Fredry*. Wrocław 1978; A. Zgorzelski. “*Pojedynek jako nowela humorystyczna*” [In:] *Idem. O nowelach Conrada. Interpretacje*. Gdańsk 1984, p. 27.

³ S. Sierotwiński. “*Komizm*” [In:] *Idem. Słownik terminów literackich. Teoria i nauki pomocnicze literatury*. Wrocław 1966, p. 128.

⁴ Jerzy Ziomek. “*Komizm – spójność teorii i teoria spójności*” [In:] *Idem. Powinowactwa literatury*. Warszawa 1980, p. 351.

“paralysis induced by the fear of death”, as described in Fredro’s final appeal, which he addresses to “happy people”: “Remember the forms of happiness [that you have enjoyed]” (XIII 209).⁵ The comic thus understood is at one and the same time a definitive act of control over the urge to show off (which dominates the way Marlow tells his story in *Youth*).

Wit Tarnawski is also of the opinion that the central element linking Fredro’s way of telling a story with that of Conrad is the experience of time. However, he does not compare *Trzy po trzy* with *Youth* or any other of Conrad’s stories. Following in the footsteps of other scholars, he takes up the standard, albeit usually unfortunate comparison with Conrad’s volume entitled *Some Reminiscences*.⁶ In both cases (i.e. in Fredro’s *Trzy po trzy* and Conrad’s *Some Reminiscences*) the experience of time is part of the nature of the story itself and not – as one might expect – an element which organizes the whole of the represented world in a rational way. Rather, it is an irrational element which precludes an orderly frame of reference and obviously disorganizes the whole represented world. As Wit Tarnawski observes: “All the elements of Conrad’s artistic manner – the characteristic way in which he plays with time, the way he continually does the rounds of selected themes, his free and easy storytelling manner, the whole imperious blitheness and offhandedness of the narrative – are also to be found in Fredro’s memoirs.”⁷ Wit Tarnawski also notes that a similar treatment of time is to be found in Antoni Malczewski’s pessimistic poem entitled *Maria*, which

⁵ All quotations from *Trzy po trzy* are given with reference to Stanisław Pigoń’s edition of Fredro’s collected works: A. Fredro. *Trzy po trzy*. Ed. K. Czajkowska [In:] *Idem. Pisma wszystkie. Proza*. Ed. K. Czajkowska and S. Pigoń with an introduction by K. Wyka. Warszawa: PIW, 1968, vol. XIII, pp. 67-217. Quotations from Conrad’s *Młodość (Youth)* and *Jądro ciemności (Heart of Darkness)* are given with reference to Zdzisław Najder’s Polish edition of the collected works: J. Conrad. *Młodość i inne opowiadania*. Transl. A. Zagórska, Ed. Z. Najder. Warszawa: PIW, 1972 (*Dziela* vol. 6), pp. 11-55 (*Młodość*), 57-180 (*Jądro ciemności*).

⁶ The first comparison was carried out by Waclaw Borowy, who questioned the assessment of Fredro’s memoirs that had been made by Eugeniusz Kucharski in an article published in the “Pamiętnik Literacki” magazine in 1924/1925. Kucharski was of the opinion that “this continual deviation and breaking of threads only to return to them later distracts the reader’s attention, leaving him with the unpleasant impression that the author is playing a game of cat and mouse with him.” In Fredro’s defence, Borowy cited Conrad’s *Notes on Life and Letters* as being the main literary parallel for Fredro’s memoirs: “[Borowy] showed that Conrad had structured his memoirs in the manner of Fredro, i.e. using the eighteenth-century technique of Laurence Sterne” – K. Czajkowska, “Wstęp” [In:] A. Fredro. *Trzy po trzy*. Ed. K. Czajkowska. Warszawa 1987, p. 20. Borowy also draws attention to what he sees as the similar psychological circumstances in which the two authors worked: “Here we are dealing with shyness and a fear of exceeding one’s own measure. The inner touchiness of both Fredro and Conrad would not allow them to talk about themselves in any other mode than that of humour coupled with a lack of continuity” – W. Borowy. “Fredro i Conrad. Z tajemnic sztuki pisarskiej”. *Tygodnik Wileński* 1925, № 16. Where Borowy only saw a parallel, later scholars have seen actual inspiration: “Scholars forget that it was only in about 1922 that Conrad was able to read Fredro’s memoirs. He sent his impressions to Aniela Zagórska in a letter dated 27th January of that year, while *Some reminiscences* was first serialized in the years 1908-1909” – S. Zabierowski. *Conrad a Fredro* [In:] *Idem. Conrad w Polsce. Wybrane problemy analizy recepcji*. Gdańsk 1971, p. 154.

⁷ W. Tarnawski. “Conrad a Fredro” [In:] *Idem. Conrad. Człowiek – pisarz – Polak*. London 1972, p. 212.

he describes as “the equivalent of Conrad’s manner in poetry”.⁸ Both these works therefore foreshadow Conrad’s attitude to time in *Some Reminiscences*.

TRZY PO TRZY AND POSSIBLE INSPIRATIONS FOR CONRAD

Thanks to the testimony of Aniela Zagórska, we know that Conrad first read *Trzy po trzy* in 1922 or thereabouts – i.e. at a date which seems surprisingly late. Fredro’s memoirs therefore could not in any way have inspired him when he wrote *Youth* and *Heart of Darkness*, which both date from 1899. Nor could they have been an inspiration for the autobiographical volume entitled *Some reminiscences*, which was written in the years 1908-1909 – or, for that matter, *The Duel*, which has a Napoleonic theme (a unique occurrence in Conrad’s fiction) and which – though published together with five other stories in 1908 – bubbles with narrative humour that is characteristic of the manner of Fredro.

Although Conrad’s letter to Zagórska informing her that he had been reading Fredro’s memoirs bears the date 27th January 1922,⁹ one wonders why he had suddenly begun to take a greater interest in Napoleonic themes – especially after 1920 – as this could not have been a consequence of reading the memoirs. However, it would seem that the memoirs did exert an influence on Conrad’s current literary explorations, intensifying them and even shaping them to a certain extent.

The Conrads’ first ‘holiday on the Continent’ since their eventful visit to Poland in 1914 was planned for the beginning of 1921 and was to take them to Corsica. On a purely literary plane, the expedition was to have provided stimulation for work on a novel with a Napoleonic subject¹⁰ (*Suspense: a Napoleonic novel*). According to John Stape, Conrad made at least four visits to the house where Napoleon was born and – after he had completed his research – his secretary Miss Hallowes came to Ajaccio, bringing a portable typewriter with her.¹¹

A list of the books which Conrad then borrowed from the local library in Ajaccio has been made by Gérard Jean-Aubry: the *Mémorial de Sainte Hélène* by Gourgard, *Napoléon* by Stendhal, *Napoléon à l’île d’Elbe* by Pellet, *Napoléon, roi de l’île d’Elbe* by Gruyer, Rapp’s *Mémoires* and *Paris sous Napoléon* by Lanzac de Laborie.¹² Given such an impressive reading list, there can be no doubt that in the last years of his life – from the beginning of the 1920s – Conrad was bent on creating a kind of modern Napoleonic saga:

⁸ W. Tarnawski. “Conrad a Malczewski” [In:] *Idem. Conrad..., ed. cit.*, p. 211.

⁹ Cf. *Polskie zaplecze Josepha Conrada – Korzeniowskiego. Dokumenty rodzinne, listy, wspomnienia*. Ed. Z. Najder and J. Skolik, Lublin: Wydawnictwo Gaudium, 2006, vol. II, pp. 140-41.

¹⁰ J. Stape. *The Several Lives of Joseph Conrad*. London: Heinemann, 2007, p. 236.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² G. Jean-Aubry. *The Sea Dreamer. A Definitive Biography of Joseph Conrad*. Transl. H. Sebba. New York: Doubleday, 1957, pp. 279-80.

I am going to set to work to deal with Napoleon's influence on the western Mediterranean: two volumes with notes, appendices and statistical tables. And this is to be a novel. I have an idea I shall never finish it. This notion is not unwelcome to me. There will always be idiots to say: he aimed so high that it killed him. A fine epitaph!¹³

Conrad's pessimism proved to be fully justified. As Jean-Aubry relates, after publishing *The Rover* – which was a spin-off from his work on the Napoleonic novel *Suspense* (set in the first years of the Consulate) – Conrad as a writer was finished.¹⁴ According to the somewhat severe verdict of John Stape, *Suspense* was “a sad, better forgotten, ending to his career”.¹⁵ The Napoleonic saga which Conrad had worked on for the last four years of his life was written in prose that was “almost consistently flabby and mechanical” and which “suffered greatly from having been dictated”.¹⁶ The long time he had spent writing the novel – with an interruption for work on *The Rover* – had proved to be “fatal to any sense of plot”.¹⁷

Defending *Suspense* against the harsh criticism which has been meted out to it by Conrad's biographers, Zdzisław Najder observes that – despite its lack of success as a work of fiction –

Suspense does, in fact, concern itself with a very vast array of psychological, historical, political and cultural problems; in this it is comparable only to *Nostromo* and possibly to *Under Western Eyes*. These problems include Napoleon as the animator of powerful national and social movements; the contrast between the civilizations of England, France and Italy; the sociocultural changes in Europe after the French Revolution; Italy's strivings for national independence; the love between half-siblings. The novel was very ambitious and this must have made Conrad's inability to write even more excruciating: “It's like a chase in a nightmare,” he wrote, “weird and exhausting.”¹⁸

In contemporary accounts of Conrad's life during this period there is nothing that would cast doubt on the possibility that Fredro's memoirs might have been a source of inspiration for *Suspense*. However, as Conrad was unable to complete the project, it is difficult to determine the real extent of this inspiration as regards the overall structure of the work, which was still fragmentary when the author died.

FREDRO AND MARLOW: THE TALE AS A DRAMA OF TRUTH

The edition of Fredro's memoirs which Conrad possessed was in all probability that of 1917. Were he to have read the introduction by Adam Grzymała-Siedlecki, he would undoubtedly have been struck by the assertion that “there is probably no other

¹³ I quote from: *Ibid.*, pp. 277-78 (excerpt from a letter to A. Gide).

¹⁴ “*The Rover* was the off-shoot of *Suspense*, as “Karain” was of *The Rescue* and “Gaspar Ruiz” of *Nostromo*” – *Ibid.*, p. 281.

¹⁵ J. Stape. *The Several Lives of Joseph Conrad*, ed. cit., p. 240.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 247.

¹⁸ Z. Najder. *Joseph Conrad. A Life*. Transl. H. Najder. New York: Camden House, 2007, p. 567.

writer of note among us who is so utterly rooted in Polish instincts.”¹⁹ Indeed, Conrad might have found this ‘unadulterated Polishness’ of Fredro just as intriguing as his anti-Bonapartism. Remembering Marlow’s way of speaking – especially in *Youth* – he would surely have noted with great interest the sheer perfection of Fredro’s style, which Wiktor Weintraub described as being “casual, colloquial and easy”.²⁰ Adam Grzymała-Siedlecki’s own description of this style – which Conrad might well have read in the introduction – is as follows:

All the ease, ability and unpretentiousness of the Polish nature – the gift, the impetus which rewards work and effort, the clarity, the radiance, the fertile profusion and a crystallization of the soul that gives off a fresh fragrance like that of fields of ripening rye – [...] is reflected a hundredfold in Fredro’s work, binding it to the soul of previous generations.²¹

The superlatives used by Grzymała-Siedlecki and Weintraub to describe Fredro’s ‘ease of narration’ are not entirely justified. Dorota Siwicka – one of the first scholars to analyse the memoirs – draws attention to the importance of not overlooking Fredro’s technique of placing the dialectic of truth and falsehood at the centre of the world of values instead of presenting truth and falsehood as separate, albeit opposite categories. Comparing this with the world of Conradian values, Siwicka discovers that the position of the narrator in Fredro’s memoirs is exactly the same as the predicament in which Conrad’s Marlow finds himself, as the drama of truth is expressed in the very mode of the narration, which is in fact a carefully hidden ‘cost’ of the nobleman’s tale. Since – as Siwicka observes – “it is the personality of the narrator that makes a good tale”²² and “the living presence of individuality is no guarantee of truth, but merely puts a gloss on it”,²³ Marlow’s tale in *Youth* can be viewed in the same light: “the man’s facial expression, gestures, stature and his conviction that he has won the confidence of his listener – this entire game which is part and parcel of the art of narration makes the lie perfect.”²⁴

The possibility that Conrad, while reading Fredro’s memoirs, could have recognized the narrator’s drama of truth – cast in practically the same mould as that of Marlow – is about the same as the likelihood that he might have been inspired by Fredro’s preoccupation with Napoleon. What Weintraub somewhat loosely describes as a “casual, colloquial and easy” style²⁵ would in the case of Fredro seem to have been part of an ambitious literary project – espoused by Conrad just as much as by Fredro – whose aim was the existential or psycho-existential reinterpretation of the whole genre of the *gawęda* or Polish nobleman’s tale. As Siwicka observes, “All that

¹⁹ A. Grzymała-Siedlecki. “Przedmowa do *Trzy po trzy Aleksandra Fredry*” [In:] *Idem. Ludzie i dzieła*. Sel. A. Okońska. Introd. J. Krzyżanowski. Kraków 1967, p. 350.

²⁰ W. Weintraub. “Alexander Fredro and his antiromantic memoirs”. *American Slavic and East European Review* 1953, Vol. XII, № 4, p. 547.

²¹ A. Grzymała-Siedlecki, *ed. cit.*, p. 350.

²² D. Siwicka. “Oko w oko z trzy po trzy”. *Teksty Drugie* 1993, z. 2 (20), p. 10.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ W. Weintraub, *ed. cit.*, p. 547.

soldiers of the Napoleonic Wars can do is tell their tales”,²⁶ which means “blending an individual point of view, acting and falsehood” with “the vibrancy of a living person”.²⁷ Seen in this light, “Fredro’s memoirs are a truthful account which raises questions about the truth and the account itself.”²⁸

The same psychologically motivated and psychologically plausible process of narration can be found in the inner experiences of Marlow, i.e. in “the inner experiences of the narrator” and not in the inner experiences of someone who has taken part in past events – unless the concept of event is equated with the current “event of telling a tale” (taking place in the literary present), which is to be found not only in *Youth*, but also in Conrad’s later stories featuring Marlow, i.e. *Heart of Darkness* and *Chance*. By the same token, we could say that “not only soldiers of the Napoleonic Wars know how to tell a tale”, adding that not much credence ought to be given to their tales, as they are no more than “dialectic fairy tales”. Equally untrustworthy are “soldiers of spiritual wars” such as Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*, who journeys to the heart of the Black Continent in order to tame the darkness. His predicament is of the same nature as that of those who took part in the Napoleonic Wars. It is a drama of truth and a drama of narration – the drama of an individual and the drama of words which lie hidden within him and which cannot be revealed because they defy expression.

In *Chance* Marlow’s drama of truth acquires yet another dimension – the deepest and most sophisticated as far as the human condition is concerned. It is the drama of humanity – a variation on the drama of fate. Here too Conrad might have noticed the illusory similarity of his own model of narration to that used by Fredro in his memoirs. As Marek Bieńczyk observes, in the memoirs “style prevails over metaphysics”,²⁹ meaning that the form of the entire work – which Bieńczyk describes as being “jagged, fragmentary and irregular” – “corresponds to Fredro’s awareness of the contingency of existence” and his “construal of the world, history and existence as a chaotic collection of fragments.”³⁰

The same can be said of *Chance*, as Conrad’s style “prevails over metaphysics”. From being a drama of truth (illustrated in *Youth* and *Heart of Darkness*), the drama of narration is transformed into a drama of human fate. The narrator – Fredro as well as Marlow – becomes its personification as a character: “the conductor of terrestrial existence, the demiurge of contingency who transforms it into chaos, tearing it to shreds.”³¹ Readings of Fredro’s memoirs as a Conradian “game of chance” played with the aid of the “book of fate” began to appear after the publication of an interpretation made by Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz³² and can help us to understand the fa-

²⁶ D. Siwicka, *ed. cit.*, p. 18.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ M. Bieńczyk. “Kapitan dziecko Saturna (O *Trzy po trzy* Fredry)” [In:] *Idem. Oczy Dürera. O melancholii romantycznej*. Warszawa 2002, p. 69.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² J.M. Rymkiewicz. *Aleksander Fredro jest w złym humorze*. Warszawa 1977, pp. 90-93.

mous shuttlecock analogy used by the narrator of the memoirs to describe his apparently incoherent and impetuous narrative technique:

I shall tell what happened, because in tittle-tattling I have no other purpose than to play – as a child plays with a shuttlecock – with reminiscences of former times, skipping from one image to another in the moneybox of memories amassed by practically all of us. (XIII 73)

As I have indicated in my introduction, the category of the comic requires many additional interpretations, including reinterpretation in the spirit of heightened tragedy, which is particularly relevant in this case. Seen in this light, Fredro's shuttlecock game in the memoirs turns out to be first and foremost a game in which the author plays with visions of the truth and – ultimately – with the book of human "fortunes". "Having laughed at us and at our ways / They'll just pop us into a bag, as they do with puppets."³³ – these lines from Kochanowski's epigram *On the human condition* admirably sum up the situation of the narrator of Fredro's memoirs – with the proviso that we substitute Fredro the author for the "mocking" gods. The author's laughter is accompanied by the inner experience of tragic responsibility – an experience which is strictly metaphysical, being born of his feelings about a chosen idea of order. Laughter and the experience of the tragic are both sublimated by the comic and it is at precisely this stage that "style prevails over metaphysics" by "lending a background to the naked truth" and "showering it with flowers of fantasy", which would seem to be indispensable – as Fredro argues – if one wishes to "sing of the 'fateful anger of Achilles'" (XIII 73-74).

The substitution of Fredro's "flower of fantasy" for the idea of order can easily be equated with the basic indicator or formula of the comic, which is – according to Aleksandra Okopień-Sławińska – "the revelation of some obvious pointlessness, nonsensicality, absurdity or anomaly".³⁴ a similar kind of 'substitution' can easily be detected in *Youth*. Marlow's tale – like that of Fredro – is affected by a particular kind of narrative anomaly. Recounting the time he spent as second mate on the *Judea*, Marlow displays amazing powers of recollection. In the course of a leisurely narration he talks about things that happened twenty years ago, giving the ship's sailing time to within an hour or two and her time in port to within a day or two. As far as the main character's inordinately long memory is concerned, the reader's sense of time is dulled by the very act of narration. In its awe-inspiring precision, Marlow's memory is a kind of magical, perfectly woven improvisation.

³³ J. Kochanowski. "O żywocie ludzkim" [In:] *Idem. Dzieła polskie*. Ed. J. Krzyżanowski. Warszawa 1967, vol. I, p. 142.

³⁴ A. Okopień-Sławińska. "Komizm" [In:] *Słownik terminów literackich*. Ed. J. Sławiński. Wrocław 1988, p. 230.

THE “FEAT OF MEMORY” AND THE “TESTIMONY OF MEMORY” IN FREDRO’S MEMOIRS

The metaphors “feat of memory” and “testimony of memory” become clearer when they are seen in the context of the Conradian world from which they are derived.³⁵ In the Polish nobleman’s tale (or *gawęda*) the transition from the “feat” phase to that of “testimony” would seem to be the most commonly used model for the evolution of the narrator’s stance. Moreover, as a typically existential model (which is also psychologically plausible) it can be used to interpret monumental novels such as Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu*. Indeed, the parallel between Fredro and Proust has been drawn – albeit very cautiously – by Wojciech Natanson:

Of course I am not comparing Fredro’s memoirs with *À la recherche du temps perdu*. What interests me is the functioning of that peculiar mechanism which we call the human memory. Proust reversed the course of events and (as Camus remarked) assigned the role of the present to the past. He did so by associating a certain taste or smell with events which had long sunk into oblivion and which were suddenly recalled by means of those associations. Fredro does something similar. A coat lost during the campaign in Saxony, parlour games in Lublin, the trauma caused by the execution of a negligent corporal, a picture of Napoleon mounted on a horse – all bring back the memory of a whole chain of events.³⁶

Cast as a series of reminiscences, the reflections of the narrator in Fredro’s *Trzy po trzy* – like those in Proust’s monumental novel and those in Conrad’s *Youth* – are based on a ground-breaking understanding of the concept of memory as a sequence of actions undertaken in order to “creatively symbolise human experience”.³⁷ This kind of ‘symbolisation’ acquires a real dimension only thanks to the maturity of the narrator – a maturity gained by passing from the phase of the “feat of memory” to that of the “testimony of memory” or – to use the terminology of Freudian psychoanalysis – from the phase of the *id* to that of the *superego*. Conrad provides us with the clearest illustration of this kind of transition: the transition is made by Marlow, while the turning points of the process are Marlow as the *id* (in *Youth*), Marlow as the *ego* (in *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim*) and finally Marlow as the *superego* (in *Chance*).³⁸

³⁵ “Youth is a feat of memory” – says Conrad in the 1917 preface to *Youth*. By analogy, one could say of *Heart of Darkness* that it is “a testimony of memory” and indeed, many critics share this approach to the interpretation of the novella. Cf. E. Łoch. “*Jądro ciemności* Conrada a polski modernizm” [In:] *Modernizm a literatury narodowe*. Ed. E. Łoch. Lublin 1999.

³⁶ W. Natanson. “Epopeja napoleońska” [In:] *Idem. Sekrety Fredrowskie*. Warszawa 1984, pp. 37-38.

³⁷ Michał Masłowski defines the concept of horizontal transcendence in the same words. It would seem that this kind of creative work also encompasses the act of remembering, interpreting it as a particular spiritual effort. – M. Masłowski. “Transcendencja pozioma. Zachowania, obrazy, koncepty” [In:] *Idem. Etyka i metafizyka. Perspektywa transcendencji poziomej we współczesnej kulturze polskiej*. Warszawa 2011, p. 23.

³⁸ On the comic in the context of psychoanalysis (as the result of tension between the *id*, *ego* and *superego*) see Ziomek: “The idea that the comic is often connected with the contravention of prohibitions is quite plausible. The only question is whether the mechanism of these prohibitions is that of the relation between the *id*, *ego* and *superego* and whether the explanation of how the comic arises also explains the essence of the comic.” – J. Ziomek, *ed. cit.*, p. 324. In the present article – unlike Ziomek – I suggest that

Eugenia Łoch observes that with the passage of time, Marlow's memory – as well as being the memory of an individual – also acquires an existential, family and historical dimension.³⁹ The protagonist of *Heart of Darkness* feels empowered to state that “The mind of man is capable of anything – because everything is in it, all the past as well as all the future.”⁴⁰ *Youth*, *Heart of Darkness*, *Lord Jim* and *Chance* taken together allow us to trace the complex and subtle process whereby Marlow himself becomes aware of the uniqueness of his own experience of remembering.

Although in Fredro's memoirs many parts of this process are barely discernible, there is a definite evolution in the narrator's attitude to the idea of memory. It is connected with the peculiar ontology which is to be found in the memoirs – an ontology that might be described as the ontology of the ‘horizontal world’ (to use a term borrowed from theological anthropology).⁴¹ I hasten to add that here this ‘horizontalness’ has nothing to do with the attitudes of the subject (‘horizontal transcendence’ being seen by theological anthropologists as a state in which “the subject transcends himself in acts of will and cognition”⁴², while ‘vertical transcendence’ is a state in which the subject “determines himself”).⁴³ Horizontalness can be a feature of the world itself and is certainly a way of structuring the world with the aid of one's imagination. The concept of human memory, together with those phenomena and activities that are dependent on it – recollections and recollecting; tales and telling – can in the cases of both Fredro and Conrad be seen as belonging to horizontal and post-Romantic transcendence, i.e. to a universe not having a vertical centre – which here might have been the Romantic transcendental method (Kant) or history and the philosophy of history (Hegel).

In Fredro's memoirs and in Conrad's *Youth* the ‘horizontal universe’ is consolidated by the comic – by cheerful and ironic wit. The question of cheerfulness in Conrad's fiction – meaning a certain brand of humour – has yet to be satisfactorily investigated. Somewhat more has been done to investigate cheerfulness in Fredro's works. Alessandro Serpieri has described *Youth* as “the cheerful fruit of a stormy period”, stressing the significance of the lack of a tragic dénouement, which encourages Marlow to use a lot of humour and narrative gusto: “This adventure does not have a tragic ending and the tone of the story is based on the detached irony and pathos with which Marlow – now a mature person – views the illusions of his youth.”⁴⁴

a comic effect can result either from the domination of the *ego* by the *id* or from the domination of the *id* by the *superego*.

³⁹ E. Łoch, *ed. cit.*, p. 88.

⁴⁰ J. Conrad. *Heart of Darkness*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973, p. 52.

⁴¹ K. Wojtyła. “Transcendencja osoby w czynie” [In:] *Idem. Osoba i czyn oraz inne studia antropologiczne*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo Towarzystwa Naukowego KUL, 2000, s. 151-228 (III. *Osobowa struktura samostanowienia* and IV. *Samostanowienie a spełnienie*).

⁴² J. Kupczak. *Transcendencja i transcendentalność w teologicznej antropologii Karla Rahnera i Jana Pawła II*. [online, accessed: 25.01.2014], http://upjp2.edu.pl/download/czytelnia/kupczak_transcendencja.pdf.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ A. Serpieri. “Znaczenie opowiadania *Młodość* we wczesnej twórczości Conrada”. Transl. H. Kralowa [In:] *Conrad w oczach krytyki światowej*. Ed. Z. Najder. Warszawa 1974, pp. 448-449.

Cheerfulness – meaning the cheerfulness of people, events and cheerfulness of spirit – lies outside the comic and the tragic, though perhaps it would be better to say that it lies between the two and at an equal distance from both, as it reflects a state of golden equilibrium. Being merely a harbinger of the comic, it is not part of a comic or tragic perception of the world. It consolidates the ‘horizontal universe’, keeping a balance between the comic and the tragic. Serpieri has drawn attention to this aspect of cheerfulness in *Youth*, which sets it apart from Conrad’s “tragic masterpieces” of the years 1896-1900 and also *Nostromo* of 1904:

It is as it were an ‘exemplum’ – a story which is not so much dramatic as paradigmatic and not so much tragic as elegiac, being the surprisingly (well-nigh) cheerful fruit of a stormy period – the same period which produced *The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’*, *An Outpost of Progress*, *Heart of Darkness*, *Lord Jim* and *Nostromo* – the tragic masterpieces of the first period of Conrad’s writing.⁴⁵

As an artistic component of his writing, cheerfulness held a fascination for Conrad right up to the end of his life, when he was working on *Suspense*. It was his story entitled *The Duel* which – as Andrzej Zgorzelski has observed – established the Conradian version of ‘historical cheerfulness’, meaning a cheerful story with a clear and exuberant approach to history. The similarity with Fredro’s memoirs does not end there, as Conrad’s story is set in the realities of the Napoleonic era. The narrator – who is very much in the mould of Marlow – weaves his story with cheerful, ironic wit. As Zgorzelski remarks:

[...] despite the gory subject of war and duelling, both characters come out of the escapade unscathed. The portrayal of the madcap Napoleonic campaign is relieved by the final sections describing idyllic life with his family in the countryside. The story closes with the birth of D’Hubert’s son and his happy laughter on recalling his ridiculous adversary and the absurdity of the duel which ultimately helped him to become sure of the affection of the girl he loved.⁴⁶

This account of the final scenes of *The Duel* shows us how the narrator constructs his tale. The narration is a sort of slide show revealing successive events in the plot. However, the rate at which these ‘slides’ would normally be shown has been considerably accelerated. In the whirl of events, portraits, humour and flashes of wit, Conrad’s portrayal of the Napoleonic war is superseded by a parallel private war of clowns, though – for all that – it retains its liveliness and speed. The pace of military events is conveyed well enough, but the roar of cannons has been replaced with “exploding”, “burgeoning” and “expanding” comic situations – situations that are cheerful, absurd and insane. The ‘vertical universe’ of Napoleon’s odyssey has given way to the ‘horizontal universe’ of a comic odyssey. The same ‘reallocation of literary resources’ takes place in Fredro’s memoirs, where the “frenzied whirl of events” is best illustrated – as Krystyna Czajkowska remarks – by “Fredro’s galloping through the Łazienki park on an English mare”:

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ A. Zgorzelski, *ed. cit.*, p. 43.

These would not be the memoirs of a great writer of comedies – who was able to portray human characters and situations with a realism shot through with such splendid humour – if this text too did not light up here and there with humour of the same kind, verging at times on irony. An example of such a passage is a description of Fredro's own appearance in 1809: "A navy blue, single-breasted half length frock coat fastened with flat metal buttons. A broadsword swung over my back, hanging from a black shoulder strap. A head of red hair and stuck on the head a folding hat known as a *claque*, with an enormous white bow ... That's what I looked like, that's me to a T [...]" And what about the description of a game of blind man's buff (in the parlour room of the wife of General Kamieniecki) which ends with a long disquisition on the word 'trousers' and a quotation from ... Boileau. Then there is Fredro galloping on an English mare through the Łazienki and Solec parks in the direction of Wilanów, to say nothing of countless anecdotes on subjects such as the army doctor Larrey de Tamor, the French parish priest from Perthes or his colleagues on the general staff. And then we have Fredro's laconic statement that all he got for his heroism during the campaign was "What? – a few reminiscences, two crosses and gout."⁴⁷

There are no manifestations of 'vertical transcendence' in Fredro's memoirs – nor can one be created. In the 'horizontal universe' a person's tasks are dictated by a game which he (or she) does not and cannot understand, while his fate is the 'game' which he plays – a game which is a live parody of that eternal game which in the memoirs is depicted under the guise of various metonyms: the shuttlecock game, blind man's buff, throwing dice, tittle-tattle or "skipping from one image to another":

History is a game whose rules we do not know and whose higher meanings – if there are any – we cannot fathom. We do not even know who is playing this game. It is certainly not God, for in Fredro's memoirs neither God nor Satan meddle in matters of this world. Things happen by themselves, as it were, being a series of unexplained coincidences whose effects are in the final analysis directed against us. History is a fate that brings neither gravity nor heroism. In his memoirs Fredro has downgraded it to a game of dice or blind man's buff. Typically, Fredro ends these serious reflections on a force that brings death in its wake by using the transparent metaphor of life as a game of blind man's buff in which a person gropes in the dark, catching hold of whatever he comes upon, be it a prize or a booby prize.⁴⁸

Although this assessment by Dorota Siwicka best conveys the tragicomic nature of Fredro's 'horizontal universe', it is incomplete. It is true that the 'horizontal universe' in Fredro's memoirs is based on a telling reduction of historical truth to an existential game and on the elimination of the concepts of drama, heroism and rational argument. It would not be amiss to say that it is a sort of carnivalization of the story's represented world in the style of *Gargantua et Pantagruel* by Rabelais – something which we can also see in Conrad's story *Youth*. As Siwicka observes, "Napoleonic soldiers can only tell stories" – "only" being the operative word.

Apart from the "feat of memory", there is also the "testimony of memory", which can find its appropriate expression only thanks to its strength. Fredro's narrator discovers this as he weaves his tale – as does Fredro the author. History and memory would seem to have been "downgraded to a game of dice" solely in order to restore

⁴⁷ K. Czajkowska, *ed. cit.*, pp. 13-14.

⁴⁸ D. Siwicka. "Napoleon tyłem odwrócony" [In:] *Księga w dwusetną rocznicę urodzin Aleksandra Fredry*. Ed. J. Kolbuszewski. Wrocław 1994, p. 225.

them as new kinds of values having different modes of existence and meaning. In *Heart of Darkness* the narrator Marlow renews himself in the same way, transcending and ultimately prevailing over his identity in *Youth*.

Seen in this light, Fredro's memoirs appear to be an intellectual project of a special kind whose aim is to explore the possibilities of "horizontal transcendence" as well as broadening the author's axiology. As we have seen, this 'transcending' takes place between the two poles of human memory: the "feat of memory" and the "testimony of memory". Fredro's "shuttlecock game" may be a metaphor for the "feat of memory", symbolising as it does the true toil – confined to the ritual of a game – of continually maintaining a minimum of consciousness and not overstepping its boundaries – the boundaries of the 'horizontal universe' – or, to use Freudian terminology, of keeping to the level of the *id*.

At the end of the memoirs the state of minimal consciousness is ultimately transcended by means of an invocation, which is the very same tool used by Conrad in order to transcend. Whereas Marlow invokes Youth, Fredro invokes Time. In both cases, the real intention behind the narration turns out to be the same, i.e. to give "testimony" – to sacrifice function for the sake of superfunction, to sacrifice the *id* for the *superego* or, putting it another way, to use the capabilities of the "feat of memory" in order to achieve a kind of memorative fullness and in many cases also to commemorate the events of the past.⁴⁹ In both stories the ultimate, metaphysical goal of the narration is to erect a "church of narration" and indeed – in Fredro's case – to replace the "Hydra of memories" with an "Ark" in order to forget about his journey into the "heart of darkness" and to free his memory of the horrors that he and his generation had witnessed during the Napoleonic campaign and the defeat of 1812.

At this juncture we must note the divergences between Conrad and Fredro and the different characters of their poetics. Only Fredro's invocation allows us to see the drama of his narration and the failure of his memory. The metaphors which signal

⁴⁹ Although commemoration requires a proper determination of the characteristics of what is to be commemorated, only Fredro fulfils this requirement. His narration in the memoirs serves as a crowning argument to expose and discredit false convictions – and in this case those on the subject of Bonapartism: "The whole of Fredro's literary effort is directed towards showing that Bonaparte's greatness is the product of a myth which – like a magnifying mirror – has turned him into a giant. The author does everything he can to diminish this greatness, depriving it of its dramatic impact and its divine dimension and – in the process – topples history from its pedestal." – D. Siwicka, *ed. cit.*, p. 225.

Fredro's commemoration is carried out from the perspective of certain obligations placed upon the narrator, i.e. from the perspective of the *superego* (discrediting Napoleon – establishing the sphere of testimony – narrating). By contrast, Conradian commemoration – despite the fact that Marlow is fully aware of the way in which human convictions and the freedom of imagination are influenced by myths – is based on the maintenance of a sphere of mythical narrative, a refusal to be dominated by the optic of obligation imposed by the *superego* and an insistence on remaining within the sphere of the *id* (not discrediting the myths of youth – maintaining the power of the "feat" – talking): "Marlow knows that the story he tells is a myth – the myth of youth which lies buried under a thousand defeats and denials – but he also knows that this myth, being a symbol of the Romantic imagination – which, though not defunct, has been discredited by the realities of life – still fires the intellect and draws cries of admiration" – A. Serpieri, *ed. cit.*, p. 449. On commemoration as a feature of the "Romantic imagination" see: K. Trybuś. *Przełom romantyczny i przemiany paradygmatu pamięci* [In:] *Idem. Pamięć romantyzmu. Studia nie tylko z przeszłości*. Poznań 2011, pp. 22-27.

this moment of his confession are the “tangled knot” in his heart (a metaphor for memory) and the “blushing at recollections”:

O Time! Cruel god that you are, you engrave the stigma of bitter suffering deeper and deeper, seemingly multiplying the torments of the soul as you shut away traces of delight and happiness, obscuring them and squeezing them into a barely noticeable dot. How well I remember the nights I spent in the snows of Moscow! How I remember almost ever pace of my horse as it was pushed into the icy waters of the Berezina River. How I remember the misery of captivity! How the memory of the first alms I received there still makes me blush to the roots of my hair. But the memory of charming moments – moments of blissful daydreaming, hope, enthusiasm, freedom, youthful existence and happiness – lies like a tangled knot in my heart and cannot muster the strength to find its expression in words [...].⁵⁰

The drama of words which we find in Fredro’s memoirs cannot exist in Conrad’s *Youth*. Marlow’s superhuman memory gives rise to the “nuptials of language” and a “feast of words”. In the story, Conrad rarely exceeds the bounds of the “feat” and merely hints at the possibility of “transcendence”. Unlike Fredro, he does not analyse disruptions of speech or possible failures of memory, for in *Youth* memory easily encompasses everything that has taken place within the bounds of time. Conrad does this quite consciously. It is only in *Heart of Darkness* that he deals with the problem of disruptions of speech and the ways in which they may be overcome.

HEART OF DARKNESS IN THE LIGHT OF THE COMIC IN FREDRO’S TRZY PO TRZY

Searching for the sphere of Conradian darkness in Fredro’s work is no easy task. Conrad’s darkness and Marlow’s darkness are closely tied to individual experience, which in Conrad’s case would seem to have been his time spent in exile in Vologda and Chernihiv and in Marlow’s case the expedition to the heart of the Belgian Congo. Fredro’s darkness is the experience of his generation – the defeated generation of 1812, among whom were Molski, Morawski, Tymowski, Reklewski, the Brodziński brothers and Malczewski.⁵¹ Of prime importance is – to use Danuta Zawadzka’s expression – the “muddying of the stream at the spring”, after which it “murkily flows to its outlet”.⁵² This muddying is present in Fredro’s memoirs – in which the author is

⁵⁰ Krzysztof Trybuś comments on this passage thus: “Fredro’s testimonies of memory destroy not only the great Romantic myth of Napoleon’s person, smashing its heroic edifice, but also the myth of the old Romantic who keeps alive memory and the ‘inspired word’. In Fredro’s memoirs memory – including blissful memory – ‘lies like a tangled knot in my heart and cannot muster the strength to find its expression in words.’” – K. Trybuś, *Pamięć romantyzmu...*, ed. cit., p. 102. On the subject of Bonapartism in Fredro’s memoirs see: also: B. Zakrzewski. “O napoleonizmie Fredry”. *Pamiętnik Literacki* 1977, z. 2, pp. 3-20.

⁵¹ D. Zawadzka. “Czy istniało pokolenie „starych ułanów”?” [In:] *Idem. Pokolenie klęski 1812 roku: O Antonim Malczewskim i odludkach*. Warszawa 2000, p. 157.

⁵² *Ibid.*

stylized as an “old codger” – and Malczewski’s “weariness” in *Maria*.⁵³ The experience of Napoleonic veterans

differs from the experience of the generation of national bards (of the time of the November Uprising) in that it was the physical experience of eye-witnesses who for the most part were still “moody and mixed-up” teenagers. As a result, they were never given the opportunity to betray the ideals of their youth themselves, [...] for they witnessed the perversion and debasement of these ideals “at the spring” itself. Having been deprived of youth’s driving force [...] they seemed to be old and “autumnal” to themselves, being weary of being asleep for the whole of their lives. They were old in a functional sense, without the appropriate certificate of baptism.⁵⁴

Jacek Kolbuszewski, who has written a study entitled *Śmierć u Fredry* (*Death in the works of Fredro*) disagrees with Zawadzka, observing that although – like Malczewski – Fredro experienced darkness (understood by Kolbuszewski as “being traumatised by death”), he freed himself of it, thus setting himself apart from other members of the generation of defeat. His path is that of Marlow, just as Malczewski’s path would seem to be that of Kurtz (though only in relation to the matter of thanatocentrism, i.e. his preoccupation with death). In the context of this parallel Malczewski’s *Maria* is the literary equivalent of Kurtz’s final words: “The horror! The horror!” As Zawadzka observes:

It was a time when Fredro came face to face with death in all its horror, having witnessed the crime of genocide and the feeling of mortal trepidation during the battle of Leipzig. The scale of this experience went far beyond the eschatological visions of Romantic literature, which was fascinated by death. In fact, Fredro deserves our admiration not so much for having avoided being killed as for having avoided being “traumatised by death” and thus suffering the psychological effects of such experiences.⁵⁵

We may now ask how Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* – which was serialized in “Blackwood’s Magazine” from February 1899 – might, if not illuminate, then at least throw more light on Fredro’s memoirs, the core of which was written in the years 1844-1846. Our justification for posing such a question is that we are comparing literary contexts. Fredro’s memoirs can be read as a disquisition on his philosophy of the comic. By reading the memoirs in the light of Conrad’s works we can see the momentous nature of Fredro’s analysis, which proposes a concept of memory that is not unlike that of “memory as testimony”. It would seem that Fredro saw his theory of the comic – which in the memoirs is based on his own theory of happiness – as a way of freeing oneself from the ‘heart of darkness’. In Conrad’s universe the counterpart of happiness – which in Fredro’s universe is the supreme and irreducible value that allows us to survive – is dignity. It is only thanks to dignity that Marlow is able to return from the *mare tenebrum*.

The true meaning of Fredro’s concept of the comic lies hidden in his own particular existential understanding of the concept of happiness. The aim of the effort to

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ J. Kolbuszewski. “Śmierć u Fredry” [In:] *Księga w dwusetną rocznicę urodzin Aleksandra Fredry*, ed. cit., p. 279.

symbolize human experience – the aim of ‘horizontal transcendence’ – is to ‘grasp’ the equation of happiness and describe its essence. When this happens, the comic signals the act of ‘grasping’ – a sudden lighting up as the effort of the symbolization of a happy moment is completed and the symbol of human happiness is materialized. The contriving of the coming into being of a comic moment – as also the moment itself – deserves to be remembered and commemorated, which is why in Fredro’s memoirs it is the happy whom the narrator entrusts with the task of remembering. In the words of Fredro, happiness is a dream. If, when dreaming, we dream consciously, then we dream as the *superego* – not the *id* – and are able to make a smooth transition between dreaming and wakefulness – between memory and existence. This pleasure, which could be seen as a perpetuation of the form of happiness outside time, lies at the very source of the comic in Fredro’s work, originating in the author’s protest against thanatocentrism, whose most telling expression is the metaphor of the ‘heart of darkness’ and its emanations. The comic, happiness and memory – concepts which in the world of Fredro’s values are the result of a fundamentally sophisticated intellectualization of experiences – are meant to be an infallible antidote to death.

It may well be, therefore, that – by invoking the appropriate Conradian context – we could read all of Fredro’s other works as literature which transcends the Polish ‘literature of defeat’ (the prime example of which is Malczewski’s *Maria*). If this were so, it would be an exceptional phenomenon in the world of Polish literature, being not only a local achievement in the writing of successful comedies, but also a more universal achievement in being literature of ‘optimistic transition’ – the literature which leads Marlow from darkness towards light. Writing his memoirs, Fredro – like Conrad writing *Youth* – would in this light appear to extol what Michał Paweł Markowski today refers to as “sunshine, possibility and joy”.⁵⁶

Such a view of Fredro’s writing would in turn allow us to see his comedies as being similar to morality plays. Each of Fredro’s plots could therefore be treated as a separate parable, while only a whole collection (or rather constellation) of these parables would make it possible to achieve a state of ‘optimistic transition’. Fredro has combined the ‘power’ of comedies and morality plays, thus enhancing the effect of the work on its readers and also allowing it to be read in depth as a hermeneutic text. His comedy entitled *Śluby panięskie* (*Maidens’ Vows*) can therefore be interpreted as a morality play on the subject of happiness, while *Zemsta* (*Revenge*) can be read as a morality play on the subject of dealing with a crisis within the “interpersonal church” (to use Gombrowicz’s terminology) or even as a kind of secular or family psychomachy. Such a reading of literature was favoured by Conrad himself, who in his collection of essays entitled *Notes on Life and Letters* saw it as the ultimate escape from the ‘heart of darkness’.

⁵⁶ “Wychodzę z Palazzo Reale, ciepły jęzor oblizuje mi delikatnie twarz, za chwilę wszystko zacznie się jeszcze raz, od nowa. Nic jeszcze nie zostało przesądzone na zawsze. Dużo radości wokół” – M.P. Markowski. “Słońce, możliwość, radość” [In:] *Idem. Słońce, możliwość, radość*. Wołowiec: Wydawnictwo Czarne, 2010, p. 96.

CONCLUSION

The nature of the ties that link the writings of Joseph Conrad and those of Alexander Fredro cannot be established without making certain reservations, for it is one thing to draw parallels between Fredro's memoirs and Conrad's *Youth* and *Heart of Darkness*, but quite another to suggest that Conrad may indeed have been inspired by the memoirs during the last few years of his life – and in particular from 1922, when he was working on his great Napoleonic novel entitled *Suspense*. We have no testimony or other evidence to suggest that Fredro's 'Polish nobleman's tale' about Napoleon – being a "personal creation" that was "intimately bound up with everyday life" and "party to personal and domestic matters"⁵⁷ – could have served as a stylization model for Conrad's *Suspense*. It is also difficult to determine whether Conrad could have made any use of such inspiration in his writing, as his form as an author was then in decline.

However, certain parallels could suggest that Fredro's memoirs might well have exerted an extremely strong influence on Conrad, who – like Fredro – clearly understood the art of narration as a drama of truth. Conrad makes Marlow the priest of this drama, entrusting him with the task of erecting a "church of narration" and honing the dynamics, architecture and layout of the actual process of storytelling. What Fredro wrote into the structure of one whole set of Napoleonic memoirs would seem to have been divided up by Conrad into three separate segments – *Youth*, *Heart of Darkness* and *Chance* – which taken together form one whole. It cannot be ruled out that in the drama of truth played out by the narrator of Fredro's memoirs – in the psychomachy hidden under the masks of "ease of narration", the shuttlecock game and blind man's buff – Conrad saw the prototype of the psychomachy of Marlow, especially in *Youth* and *Heart of Darkness*. This, no doubt, is how Conrad would have interpreted Fredro's lightness of style and where he would have seen the price that Fredro paid for the peculiar "historical cheerfulness" of the memoirs that forms part of the work's ontology.

Fredro's storytelling, like that of Conrad, also encompasses the drama of memory. It is a consequence of the drama of truth, together with which it constitutes the narrator's unique *experimentum crucis*. The result is that – like Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* – the storyteller falls down and – if he wishes to pick himself up – must once again find his way back into the horizontal universe in order to regain the capability of horizontal transcendence. Finally, he must prevail over his identity as an exponent of "feat" in order to become an exponent of "testimony". Quite unexpectedly, this transcendence of the narrator's own capability of self-identification is primarily made possible by Fredro's theory of the comic, which had its origins in the author's desire to escape from a world that was "traumatised by death", i.e. by the experience of defeat in the year 1812, which found its fullest expression in Malczewski's thanatocentric *Maria*. Here the paths of storyteller and clown – which had hitherto run separately in Fredro's rich literary output – come together. The

⁵⁷ B. Zakrzewski, *ed. cit.*, p. 15.

clown's smile is required – literally – for the storyteller to be able to pick himself up again. In this way, the comic can be written into the storytelling and can acquire the characteristics of a narration, discourse, personal outlook and philosophy. And this is obviously a Conradian feature, for at this point the smiles of Fredro and Marlow are linked by one cycle and broaden out into one circle.

Translated by R. E. Pyplacz

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