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THE UNFATHOMABILITY OF CONRAD'S SHALLOW WATERS IN *FREYA OF THE SEVEN ISLES*: AN INTERTEXTUAL READING OF CONRAD'S STORY

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Abstract: The article is a comparative and intertextual study of two texts which are both grounded in the mythological motif of the Nordic goddess Freya, i.e. Joseph Conrad's 1912 short story entitled *Freya of the Seven Isles* and Leszek Prorok's 1977 play entitled *Freja – zimna bogini miłości.* As both authors exploit Freya's ambiguity as a goddess of love, fertility, death, war and revenge (also of conjugal love and promiscuity), they shed light on each other's nuances of meaning. It is Prorok's deliberate use of Conradian motifs (e.g. Freya, elopement, Wagnerian music, the colonial Seven Isles) in his play about the Nazi *Lebensborn* programme that exposes the full implications of this hitherto underrated story. This leads us to draw novel conclusions about the nature of the "illness" of Prorok's Freya (and the reasons for her unexpected death) as well as the role of colonial ideology in Conrad's story. Moreover, by means of a critical reading of Sylvère Monod's derisive article on "Freya of the Seven Isles" – together with an evocation of Faulkner's denegative style in his *Absalom, Absalom!* – the article disproves the allegations levelled by the French critic against Conrad's text (a lack of foreshadowing, an inconsistency of mood, bdelygmia, etc.), revealing instead its complex epistemological implications relating to the modernist intricacy of denegative stylistics, of which Conrad – and not Faulkner – appears to have been the real precursor.

Keywords: Joseph Conrad, Leszek Prorok, William Faulkner, mythological Freya, ambivalence, intertextuality

Joseph Conrad's 1912 short story entitled "Freya of the Seven Isles" and Leszek Prorok's 1977 drama entitled *Freja – zimna bogini miłości* (*Freya – the Cold Goddess of Love*)[1] share the mythological motif of Freya: the ambiguous Nordic goddess of love, desire and fertility as well as war, revenge and death – but also a paradoxical combination of conjugal devotion and promiscuity. A joint consideration of both texts also seems justifiable in view of another work by Prorok which bears an evocatively Conradian title – *Smuga blasku* (*The Radiance Line / The Radiant Line* [1982]; cf.

[1] This article was inspired by a paper entitled "Leszek Prorok as One of Conrad's Successors" delivered by prof. Wieslaw Ratajczak of the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań at the Conrad Conference "Poland and the Conrad Problem" organized by the Polish Conrad Society and the Joseph Conrad Centre at the Jagiellonian University on 28-29 September 2014.

Conrad's *The Shadow Line* [*Smuga cienia*]) – and his collection of critical essays entitled *Inicjacje conradowskie* (*Conradian Initiations* [1986]), in which he confesses to being totally immersed in Conradian inspirations (1987, 52-72, 122-154). That he knew Conrad's story well is proved by his own admission to having used some of its motifs – e.g. that of the white brig – in his fictional reconstruction of Conrad's biography in *Smuga blasku* (Prorok 1982, 145). Even so, the task undertaken in this article may seem both arduous and frustrating – if not altogether hopeless – as on the surface there appears to be hardly any connection between the two *Frey(j)as* – either in plot or message. What is more, neither text seems to have been perceived as being overly ambitious or to have received much critical attention, which does not make the proposed task any easier. Conrad himself tended to undervalue this particular work, calling it "a silly story" and describing it as "pretty rotten" in his letters to Edward Garnett (Davies 1990, 4/407; 1996, 5/128). On the other hand, in another letter to Garnett, he refused – in no uncertain terms – to replace the ending of the story with a "sunny" one in order to make it more marketable in the United States (Davies 1990, 4/469).

Quoting from the story's subtitle, the famous Conradian critic Sylvère Monod – whose vicious attack on *Freya of the Seven Isles* is briefly discussed below – ironically refers to it as being indeed "a tale of intellectually very shallow waters" (2006, 88). It remains to be seen whether Monod may not have embraced the writer's self-criticism too readily and taken some aspects of his story too literally, for there may be more to this story than meets the eye, especially in the light of a letter which he wrote to Richard Curle (24 April 1922):

> Didn't it ever occur to you, my dear Curle, that I knew what I was doing in leaving the facts … of my tales in the background? *Explicitness, my dear fellow, is fatal to the glamour of all artistic work, robbing it of all suggestiveness, destroying all illusion*. You seem to believe in literalness and explicitness, in facts and also in expression. Yet nothing is more clear than the utter insignificance of explicit statement and also its power to call attention away from things that matter in the region of art. […] (Davies 2005, 7/457; emphasis mine).

This article will therefore focus on how both Conrad's novella and Prorok's play are driven by the ambivalence of the mythological Freya, especially as regards the interdependence that exists between the (loosely understood) narration and epistemology. That both Conrad and Prorok appreciated this ambivalence while writing their respective texts can easily be proved by direct reference to the matter in both works. In Conrad's "Freya," while assaulting the girl, the villainous Dutch lieutenant Heemskirk "bawled angrily":

> "Come! You may *deceive* your father," … "but I am not to *be made a fool of*! Stop this infernal noise … Freya … Hey! You Scandinavian Goddess of Love! Do you hear? That's what you are – of love! But the heathen gods are only *devils in disguise*, and that's what you are, too! A deep little devil." (Conrad 1912, 216; emphases mine)

The ambiguity implied in this passage concerns the discrepancy between love and desire, which is likewise the key issue in Prorok's drama, although its eponymous adjective "*cold*" – used to qualify Freya's image as "*a goddess of love*" – by its very

definiteness and restrictiveness removes both the ambivalence and the apparently intended irony, for – as the title stands – the motif of Freya in Prorok's drama becomes literally applicable to the *Lebensborn* reproduction villa and its inmate Agnes before the latter meets Peter von Reskau, an SS officer who is sent to impregnate her there. However, the moment Peter falls in love with Agnes, this love becomes a form of defiance against Nazi ideology – defiance through real love, "which escaped the Führer's control [and] was [thus] regarded as the greatest rebel, the enemy of the German order" as well as "a dangerous intruder" on the pure biology of procreation (Prorok 1977, 29). Ironically, from the Nazi perspective this proves to be powerfully true when it is the memory of Peter's love that helps Agnes to survive the Ravensbrück concentration camp, where she is sent as a result of her unsuccessful elopement with Peter and where she is subjected to medical experiments, including sterilization. In Prorok's play Freya the Nordic goddess also appears tangibly as a sculpture in the courtyard of the villa named after her, where she is accompanied by the full array of her divine attributes (armour, cats and a stork) and duly provided with her own mythological story by the house matron Fraülein Kiekert. She is primarily meant to symbolize fertility in the service of the *Lebensborn* ideology of racial purity. Love – if any – is reserved for the Reich and the Führer.

The main purpose behind the present intertextual comparison of Conrad's novella and Prorok's play is to demonstrate how Conrad's deliberate use of the artistic device of narrative sidetracking – sanctioned by the ambivalent nature of the Scandinavian goddess, after whom Conrad's main character is named – has been either grossly misread or altogether ignored by his critics. This might reflect a larger phenomenon in Conrad criticism, which the author himself alludes to in the aforementioned letter to Curle, i.e. too literal a reading of his texts, perhaps as a result of the tangibility of his own sailing and colonial experiences and those of his protagonists, combined with the specificity of his geographical locations. However, when Prorok's drama is read intertextually against Conrad's story, it functions as a catalyst, unveiling some of the latter's covert implications.

In Conrad's novella the eponymous Freya is a resolute beauty, being a rational, cautious and independent young lady of the Archipelago who lives with her rather benign but weak and egotistic father, who is a widowed English (or Dutch) trader in the region and who aptly calls himself "Nelson (or Nielsen)", stubbornly maintaining this apparent national confusion for obscure reasons of safety. The story is brought to the reader partly by an outer narrator – a friend of the family who is himself a trader in the islands of the Archipelago and who participates in the events he is narrating – and is partly told by *proxy* in a "chatty letter" (Conrad 1912, 163) written by a friend to this very narrator after the latter loses touch with the protagonists. Portions of Chapter IV, however, closely resemble the Jamesian narrative method of psychological realism. Although Chapter V and part of Chapter VI seem to come from an omniscient narrator, their tone and focus resemble those of the the outer narrator, creating a justifiable suspicion that it is the latter who is in fact continuing the narration of those events which he did not witness directly but which in part he has read about in his friend's letter and in part has heard about from "old Nelson (or Nielsen)"

himself during the latter's brief visit to London following the tragic events of the story – events which he insists are related "in Freya's words" (Conrad 1912, 261). This multilayered, or – as some would have it – inconsistent narration of Conrad's story is one of its basic difficulties and has been the object of criticism.

Another difficulty or apparent inconsistency relates to the tone of the story, which is a curious combination of comedy and tragedy, with little or no functional foreshadowing that might anticipate the latter. Consequently, the reader is largely caught unawares by the tragic turn of events at the end of the story, especially in view of the fact that they prove to be irremediable, notwithstanding the indisputable affection that has hitherto existed between the two lovers. For – as we are apparently made to understand – having been separated from Jasper Allen by the malevolence of his 'rival' Heemskirk, the despairing Freya dies of pneumonia, while the man she loves is driven mad by the sight of the brig that was to have been their home and their escape to freedom being spitefully and irretrievably run aground by the revengeful Dutch lieutenant, who accuses Jasper of involvement in the illegal arms trade and drives his mate Schultz to suicide. The question that therefore presents itself is whether it is Conrad who is being unconvincing, or whether it is his protagonists who are being inconsistent, or whether it might not all be the work of "a perfidious destiny [that] took advantage of a generous impulse" (Conrad 1912, 255), as the story seems to suggest more than once (though not too convincingly), for the failure of love in Conrad's novella does in fact seem to be caused by the dark human passions that lurk behind its most dramatic events.

The final difficulty of Conrad's "Freya" is directly related to the eponymous main character and the implications of her name in the context of the responsibility for the ultimate failure of their love. Is she really 'cold' like the Nazi "Freja" – the *Rassenlager* villa in the title of Prorok's drama – especially in the light of her own doubts (whose validity is questioned by her father on the grounds of ill health) as to whether she would have actually joined Jasper? And, if so, why is it that it is she and not the man she loves who pays the ultimate price for the failure of their love, being "overwrought" (Conrad 1912, 194), as the narrator speculates, by the realization that their plan to elope has come to nothing? Or is it rather Jasper who is cold, given his fixation with the *Bonito*, the white brig which he identifies with Freya to the point of not being able to distinguish between the two – especially when it is irretrievably grounded by his spiteful 'rival'? Such an interpretation might suggest itself on an intertextual reading of the texts, for in Prorok's play one of the inmates of the "Freya" villa on the Rhein mentions the male equivalent of the Scandinavian goddess Freya – her twin brother Freyir – as being "more important"[2] (Prorok 1977, 21) than his sister. Is it therefore Jasper Allen and not Freya who features as the cold god of love in Conrad's story? 'Coldness' here might in fact be a male attribute – all the more so because Freya "Nelson (or Nielsen)" may be seen as having been a victim of the empowered colonial patriarchy all along – a victim of those who are closest to her: her blind and unknowing father and her childishly exultant fiancé, or those who have appropriated

[2] All translations from Leszek Prorok's drama are by the author of this article.

her story – the narrator and his friend, the author of the letter – and, finally, a victim of the revengeful Dutchman Heemskirk, whose attempts to appropriate her body and whose ill-founded illusions of love destroy both her and the man she loves? All this may appear to be true unless the implied 'coldness' is an expression of Conrad's poetic device of sidetracking and denegation, which may have been taken at face value by Leszek Prorok (if indeed this is what inspired him), especially in view of Prorok's admission to having made his own free renderings of Conrad's motifs through loose associations, vague impressions and the fusion of characters rather than through specific borrowings, references and allusions (Prorok 1987, 144/5, 152/3). The most glaring example of Prorok's fusion of Conradian characters is his ludicrous construct of Charlie – Captain Conrad's fictional cat in *Smuga blasku* – with the name and the eyes of … Conrad's narrator Marlow (Prorok 1987, 152). Here one might add that despite Stefan Zabierowski's assertion (in his book entitled *W kręgu Conrada*) that Prorok's fictional biography of Conrad has received praise from the well-known Conradian scholar Adam Gillon (Zabierowski 2008, 197), one may wonder whether that is indeed what Gillon has in mind when he tells those readers who have yet to find the "true Conrad" in the author's own books that they should look for him in Prorok's *Smuga blasku* (Gillon 1986, 36).

Indeed, nothing about Conrad's story appears to be straightforward and consistent – and for this the author himself has been consistently censured by his critics. The most curious attack on the writer – one that is biting and derisive – has come from one of his most renowned critics, the recently deceased French scholar Sylvère Monod. In an article entitled "Heemskirk, the Dutch Lieutenant" which appeared in the 2006 autumn issue of *The Conradian*, Monod finds fault with Conrad "for piling up insulting epithets" referring to the villainous Heemskirk in a way that offers "quite a lesson in vocabulary" (2006, 85). He also blames Conrad for the foolishness of his protagonists, who keep referring to each other as "idiots" and "imbeciles" and yet persist in their follies, with the outer narrator acting as their cheerleader. Finally, Monod's objections concern the aura of "misplaced mirth" (2006, 86) and 'funniness' that pervades the story and which stands in stark contrast to its tragic ending.

The first charge raised by Monod can be dismissed on the aforementioned premise of Conrad's misappreciated narrative method of sidetracking. The critic's two other objections relate to the narrative voice and should therefore be addressed to the outer narrator rather than to the author, who has been all too often and all too readily identified with his narrators or his protagonists. What lies behind all three of Monod's ironic complaints about Conrad's "Freya", however, is – firstly – a disregard for the context in which expressions such as "an imbecile", "a perfect idiot" or "funny" appear; secondly, a downplaying of the role of irony and ambiguity in Conrad's text; and, finally, an overly literal reading of what is said in the story and the way it is said.

On closer analysis, Conrad's narrative method in the passage introducing the villainous Heemskirk – where each subsequent opinion negates the previous one – exactly resembles Faulkner's method of denegation, defined by François Pitavy as being more than a negation because it actually affirms what it negates (1989, 29). What becomes apparent in the light of Conrad's narration in "Freya", however, is that –

contrary to widely held critical opinion – the 'author's rights' for denegation should in fact belong to Conrad, not Faulkner.

In the following passage from the beginning of Chapter II of *Freya*, all the consecutive negations have been italicized in order to illustrate Conrad's application of the technique of denegation.

> For, pray, who was Heemskirk? You shall see at once *how unreasonable this dread* of Heemskirk… *Certainly*, his nature was *malevolent enough*. That was *obvious*, directly you heard him laugh. […] *But*, bless my soul! *if we were to* start at every *evil guffaw…we shouldn't be fit for anything but* the solitude of a desert, or the seclusion of a hermitage. And *even there* we should have to put up with *the unavoidable company of the devil*.
>
> *However*, *the devil* is *a considerable personage*, who…*has moved high up in the hierarchy* of Celestial Host; *but* in the *hierarchy* of mere earthly *Dutchmen*, Heemskirk, whose early days could *not* have been *very splendid,* was *merely* a naval officer …, of *no particular connections* […] but there were brains enough in it [his skull] to discover and *take advantage maliciously of poor old Nelson's nervousness* before everything that was invested with the merest shred of *authority*… (Conrad 1912, 176-177; emphases mine)

Conrad, or rather his narrator, puts considerable effort into at once being and not being explicit about the harmlessness / harmfulness of Heemskirk, so here the ambiguity is obviously intended rather than being contingent on or resulting from Conrad's ineptness or his narrator's diffidence or inconsistency. In comparison with Faulkner's complex use of denegation in the internal monologue type of narration, Conrad's application of this device here is still evidently experimental, off the cuff and odd as far as its frequency is concerned, i.e. being limited to the third-person outer narration as in the passage above. However, both writers use exactly the same array of denegating devices: qualifiers of certainty (*certainly, obvious*); conditional structures implying a high degree of implausibility (*if we were to…*), accompanied by Faulkner's favourite reductive qualifier "even" (*even there…*), appearing in recognizably Faulknerian contexts elsewhere in Conrad's story; generalizations to prove the impossibility of what eventually appears to be the truth of the matter; negative analogies or parallels (the devil v. Heemskirk); disproving what has just been cited as fact (*no particular connections* v. *authority*), etc. This specifies the sphere of affinity between the two modernists that has so far been largely intuited rather than pinpointed in Conrad-Faulkner criticism (cf. Branny 1997, 17-32).

The bdelygmia used to describe the Dutch lieutenant throughout the story – an aspect of Conrad's text that Monod finds not only objectionable, but downright ridiculous – by its sheer intensity and its application to one and the same character clearly suggests that it has a specific purpose and is not merely a case of the author or the narrator belabouring the point. It may function as the repetition of a significant detail in a short story and thus operate as a legitimate poetic device. It is surely the role of a critic to identify such poetic devices rather than complain about them.

If Monod deplores the lack of foreshadowing in Conrad's story, it is present here in the form of those piled-up deprecating adjectives, for it is precisely Heemskirk himself who brings tragedy into the world of Conrad's *Freya* and into Freya's own life. The denegative method used by Conrad to introduce the villain, illustrated by the

above passage, prepares the reader to see the ominous parade under the guise of harmlessness and the comic give way to tragedy, thus providing the allegedly missing element of foreshadowing. This is further confirmed by the clearly intended contrast in appearance between Freya, her father and Jasper – all three of whom are tall, fair-haired and blue-eyed – and Heemskirk, who is so fat "that he seemed to be a creature capable of inflating itself", with brown cheeks, black eyes, black hair and a hooked nose (Conrad 1912, 182). Interestingly, it is "old Nelson (or Nielsen)" and Freya – whose Dutch origins are questioned – as well as the Englishman Jasper Allen who look more Dutch than the Dutch lieutenant, whose 'Dutchness' therefore has to be specified by name. Remarking on this contrast, the outer narrator "remembers[s] the impression of something funny and ill-omened" (Conrad 1912, 183), as if he is in denial of the alleged inconsistency in the tone of the story and the supposed lack of foreshadowing.

Another possible reason for the great number of negative epithets used to describe Heemskirk – the principal villain of "Freya of the Seven Isles" – could be the exact opposite of what has frequently been suggested by the critics (Monod included), i.e. that it reflects Conrad's apparent dislike of Dutch colonists, whom he thus attempts to discredit. This perspective might prove a point that has already been made in this article – i.e. that Conrad is frequently taken far too literally. Oddly enough, quite apart from his non-Dutch features (black hair, black eyes, hooked nose), Heemskirk is described by Conrad's narrator as being not at all typical of the Dutch colonists: "I don't mean to say that Heemskirk was a typical Dutch naval officer. I have seen enough of them not to fall into that absurd mistake" (Conrad 1912, 177). Although what follows is a mere description of his external appearance, which is at odds with his Dutchness, it obviously suggests more than what it says, the implications being highly ironic, whichever way they are interpreted: 1. NO, Heemskirk may indeed not look Dutch, but he acts like a typical Dutch colonizer; 2. in stressing the non-Dutch appearance and the atypicality of Heemskirk, Conrad may be implying that the Dutch colonizers are by no means the worst, or at least are not the only colonizers around, this being an allusion to the Spanish presence in the region; or 3. NO, Heemskirk is NOT typical at all – he is much worse than all the other colonizers put together, for he uses his official position to settle personal matters, treating his professional rivals with a ruthlessness that is commensurate with his role as a colonizer.

As regards "foolishness" or "folly" in Conrad's story, Sylvère Monod associates these with the blindness of its characters, suggesting that "the young couple … accumulate silly acts and attitudes" (2006, 87). Taken out of context, as is the case in Monod's article, silliness such as that which the critic has in mind would indeed look foolish. However, even a perfunctory glance at the passages in which the 'foolishness' appears reveals the significance of the context for its proper interpretation. And indeed, every time a deprecating word such as "imbecile" or "idiot" is used about Jasper – either by Freya or the narrator – it is a term of endearment suitably accompanied by an adjective or an adverb that implies tenderness and warmth of feeling on the part of the speaker. In fact, as the narrator explains at one point, it was their (his and Freya's) "habit to speak abusively about Jasper" (Conrad 1912, 180) in order to

show their common affection for him. Thus, commenting on one of the risky feats undertaken by Jasper "just to save twenty minutes or so in meeting [Freya]", the narrator says "with feeling": "Isn't he a fool?", with which opinion Freya "agreed warmly … with … the dimple of a smile on her cheek", calling him a "[p]erfect idiot" (Conrad 1912, 169). At another point, exchanging confidences with the narrator, who sympathizes with the couple, Jasper tells him "with a touchingly imbecile exultation" that Freya's hair is so long that "she could … sit on [it]" (Conrad 1912, 166). All the instances of foolishness to which Monod so derisively objects therefore function as manifestations of affection between the two lovers and are either expressed reciprocally between the two of them or spoken by one of them in confidences exchanged with the narrator.

The same is true of words such as "funny" or "funnily", which are used by the narrator to express his sympathetic and endearing surprise at the promptness and spontaneity with which Freya and Jasper forgive each other and forget their little mutual 'transgressions', despite their occasional more or less playful protestations. This naturally only serves to confirm the depth of their affection rather than – as Monod claims – to signal "misplaced mirth" and "a blind disregard of dangerous realities … [which] is a major facet of their foolishness" (Monod 2006, 86). Thus, it is ultimately the context in which the allegedly objectionable words appear that resolves the controversy, depending on the particular situation on which they are meant to comment and / or the emotional and psychological disposition of the narrator who utters them, as is the case after Jasper's risky off-the-cuff maneuvering of his precious brig between "two disgusting old jagged reefs" (Conrad 1912, 169) so that he can be with Freya sooner, which makes her want to punish him with her absence:

> When I explained to him that he was to be deprived of Miss Freya's presence for a whole hour, "just to teach him," he […] flung himself into a chair, and tried to talk to me about his trip. But the *funny* thing was that the fellow actually suffered. I could see it. His voice failed him, and he sat there dumb, looking at the door with the face of a man in pain. Fact … And the next still *funnier* thing was that the girl calmly walked out of her room in less than ten minutes (Conrad 1912, 170; italics mine)

Both words – *funny* and *funnier* – are here obviously used in the meaning of "strange, difficult to explain or understand" although perhaps also with a note of amusement and not – as Monod would have it – in the primary meaning of "amusing, making you laugh" (*Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary*). Monod's misinterpretation may also be linguistically conditioned by his being French, although he objects to the general aura of mirth that reigns in the story up until the actual tragedy that is triggered by Heemskirk's grounding of the *Bonito*. Could it be that Monod fails to recognize Conrad's novel artistic device – subsequently widely employed by Faulkner – of expressing presence by absence (i.e. reverse foreshadowing) or could it be that he underestimates Conrad's own – or, for that matter, his narrator's – sense of humour? Indeed, could it be that Monod himself lacks a sense of humour? Or could it be that he simply fails to appreciate "the irony of fate … [that] wears the as-

pect of cruel and savage jesting" (Conrad 1912, 256), as the narrator spells out at one point?

To further address the charge of the allegedly excessive mirth of the novella, one must not forget that the story is told, as has been indicated, by narrators who are once, twice or even thrice removed. The "amusement" of the outer narrator, as established above, is therefore partly a matter of his own disposition in finding the relationship between Freya and Jasper eye-opening as regards its depth of affection and spontaneity – and / or perhaps of the narrator's lack of any previous experience of love in his own life. Moreover, the actual mirth in the story accompanies and follows the comic scene of the thrashing that Freya administers to Heemskirk when he attempts to assault her sexually. As she does not tell the story to her father until she is on her sickbed, its subsequent recounting by the latter to the outer narrator "*in Freya's words*" (emphasis mine) means exactly *that* – the father recounts the story complete with Freya's (and her maid Antonia's) gleeful reactions to the frustrated and battered looks of the scoundrel who has attempted to rape her under her own roof in "old Nelson's (or Nielsen's)" brief absence. Part of the comic aspect of this otherwise dramatic scene results from Heemskirk's fury and pain in consequence of the assault as well as from the fact that it is taken by the unknowing and gullible "Nelson (or Nielsen)" for his guest's … agonizing toothache, which evokes his genuine compassion for Heemskirk and not his horror at having his hospitality abused. Thus the only people who are amused by the upshot of the incident are Freya and her maid, but it is not so much their amusement and derision that matter as the culprit's resentment of it, which leads to the eventual separation of the two lovers through his act of revenge, resulting in Freya's death and Jasper's apparent madness. But this is perhaps where the gist of the matter lies, explaining the relevance of mirth in Conrad's story, where it seems to be a function of the seemingly missing foreshadowing, Conrad's alleged inconsistency in building up the atmosphere of the story as well as his sidetracking method of narration, with mirth becoming a tragic force rather than a comic one.

To respond to the related (and already cited) charge made by Monod concerning the protagonists' "disregard of danger", one must defend the lovers on the grounds that their carefully planned elopement is meant to anticipate danger and is engineered in such a way as to minimize any risk, which also explains why Freya "punishes" Jasper for his unnecessary daring in the passage quoted above. This 'engineering' of their future life together, along with their eagerness to anticipate, minimize and eliminate the dangers posed by the elopement, places Conrad's story on a par with Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady*, where the writer deconventionalizes his main character by placing all the attributes of success in her hands, and yet being unable to prevent her failure, which is caused – as in Conrad's novella – by dark human passions (Osmond's greed and Mme Merle's cunning) rather than fate or any particular fault or moral deficiency in the character herself.

Thus Conrad's *Freya of the Seven Isles* seems to be an aesthetic Jamesian experiment rather than a morality play, which is why – being caught unawares – Conrad critics may have found it confusing (on various levels) and also inconclusive. Set in a distant Archipelago outside of the convention-and-manner-oriented world of

Western civilization, the love story of Freya and Jasper promises well, which may explain the story's prevailing atmosphere of mirth and optimism, which critics like Monod find so difficult to stomach. Moreover, the success of the love story seems to be ensured by the fact that Conrad has removed all the obstacles which normally have to be reckoned with under such circumstances. Thus, the problem of familial consent is resolved by removing the family altogether, with the mother in her grave and only an inept and naïve father around, who firmly believes in his daughter's sensibleness even though – by his own standards – she shows herself to be lacking in this quality. Even if the elopement actually took place – which it does not – all the possibilities concerning the father's reaction have been taken into account, as have been the remedies anticipated by the "sensible" Freya, i.e. their future life, their abode and Jasper's occupation, which will be able to provide for the two of them through the highly aesthetic and luxurious modernization of his beautiful brig – appropriately called the *Bonito*. With Jasper's propensity for taking risks now under Freya's control, the only possible difficulty – her being under age – is removed by her insistence on their waiting until her 21st birthday. Even when she is unexpectedly assaulted by Heemskirk, with no chance of being protected either by her absent father or by her lover, she remains resolute and daring, unlike a conventional heroine who would have succumbed to horror and tears. What is more, in true 'Freya' style she retaliates physically like a man, knocking her attacker down both in body and in spirit, as if she were a knight, acting in her own defense and in the defense of her maid. Not only do both women emerge victorious from the confrontation, but they are also amused by the villain's downtrodden looks and his hasty retreat. And not only does Freta withhold the news of the attack from her father and her lover, but she also fails to protest against her father's fabrication of the story of Heemskirk's presumptive toothache – apparently in order to play down the episode so as not to upset her father on the eve of their planned elopement. And yet, as in James's novel, the consequences of the evil human passions, here taking the form of Heemskirk's lust and vindictiveness, are eventually visited on the lovers, either directly (Jasper) or indirectly (Freya).

Surprisingly, the ending of Conrad's story seems akin to that of *The Portrait of a Lady*, with the transcendental heroine emerging perhaps not victorious, yet undefeated, in accordance with R. W. Emerson's assertion in his 1842 essay entitled "Transcendentalist": "You think me the child of my circumstances: I make my circumstance" (Emerson 1957, 195), which Porier dubs "my own misery" (1960, 35). She thus remains consistent in her choices, despite the misery they cause her, although by human standards she may be perceived as being ultimately a victim of that consistency. Like James's heroine, that of Conrad is also referred to by the author as being "self-reliant" (Conrad 1912, 199) and does not triumph, as she dies – allegedly as a result of the misery that the separation of the lovers brings about. And yet she remains undefeated 'in body' by her assailant and 'in spirit' by her father, who finally and quite ironically – thanks to the outer narrator – discovers what love means by dismissing the iconic notion of sensibleness being an enemy of love as well as ultimately revealing his own love for his daughter to the reader and the outer narrator when, against all the odds, he puts the blame for her confusion concerning her love

for Jasper entirely on her sickness. Thus, as in Faulkner, the epistemological doubts of the main character in Conrad's story are verified against the knowledge of those around her, i.e. other characters / narrators who provide or attempt to provide answers, discovering truths about themselves in the process. The truth about Freya and her love for Jasper then – ultimately filtered through Jasper himself, her father and the narrator – is that in fact she dies for and of that love, regardless of the particular illness she may have been suffering from, be it pneumonia or anaemia. In the manner of Isabel Archer, she also falls victim to self-doubt about her own consistency in following her beloved into married life: "'Perhaps' … 'perhaps it is true. Yes! I would never allow him any power over me" (Conrad 1912, 262). Freya's self-doubt – or "inconsistency", as Monod would have it (2006, 86) – reflects back on the self-disparaging words that she utters in her illness, but whose validity is questioned by her father, a man who is otherwise intransigent in his attitudes and opinions. We may therefore actually mistrust Freya's consistency in thinking disparagingly about her own inconsistency, which – let us note in passing – is a recognizably Faulknerian modernist narrative device for asserting absence by presence, and / or vice versa, in order to convey the idea of the epistemological impossibility of ever arriving at the truth of the matter. Moreover, if she were to be counted among Conrad's self-deceivers according to Jeremy Hawthorn's typology – which, it might be noted, concentrates almost exclusively on Conrad's male figures – Freya would feature as "the single intelligence in a self-landscape that is full of potential knowledge – knowledge that can be looked for or repressed" (Hawthorn 2005, 216). In Freya's case this would be the knowledge of her own consistency or lack of consistency.

As regards Jasper, the reason he gives for his separation from Freya (during a chance meeting with "old Nelson (or Nielsen)" after the latter is discharged from hospital) is, oddly enough, exactly the same as the one given by Freya, i.e. that the day his brig ran aground, he discovered that he "had no power over her" (Conrad 1912, 262) – literally, meaning the *Bonito* (as in English all ships are female) and also figuratively, meaning Freya. Moreover, he accuses Freya of preventing him from being a man by treating him like "a happy child" who is in love and making him believe that he is such a child. Oddly enough, she addresses him as "kid": "If I had been a man I would have carried her off, but she made a child … of me" (Conrad 1912, 262). What is striking in this exchange of accusations is that Jasper blames Freya for the same thing for which she blames herself. This should make things easier, but it does not, as both think about their relationship in terms of "power" over the person they love instead of love for and of that person, which should exclude the notion of "power" altogether – unless "power" is here understood as the foregoing of one's own importance for the sake of the love of another (which should, however, be reciprocal). in Prorok's *Freja*, the issue of love and power re-emerges in the very literal sense of the enforced reproduction of exemplars of the pure master race for the preservation of its power over what are perceived as the world's racial and genetic inferiors.

Another issue that requires further comment along the lines suggested earlier in this article is "old Nelson's (or Nielsen's)" narration in the presence of the outer nar-

rator towards the end of the story, which is unmistakably Faulknerian in its structure and its implications, the best point of reference again being Rosa's narration in *Absalom, Absalom!* The way Freya's father constantly undermines the validity and the epistemological truth of what he is reporting clearly suggests the Conradian provenance of the so-called Faulknerian style. The aim – as in Faulkner's text – is to establish the truth of the matter, which in this case means to determine exactly why Freya and Jasper's love came to nought, even though they seemed to have loved each other so much and had made plans for their future life together. The denegative style of the passage, which makes it hard, if not impossible to arrive at the truth, remains in keeping with what would seem to be the intended ambiguity of Conrad's text, this being convergent with the ambivalence of the mythological prototype of Conrad's Freya. Unlike the previously discussed denegative passage, which refers to Heemskirk's external appearance as related to his character, the passage which follows is linked to the theme of the story and its ambiguous ending, although it may be claimed that the final comment made by the outer narrator does solve the issue of whether Freya's self-doubt concerning her ability to have followed Jasper is to be trusted – provided, of course, that we can trust the narrator. The passage begins with "old Nelson (or Nielsen)" telling the narrator of his chance meeting with the bedraggled Jasper:

> "If you had seen him you would have understood at once *how impossible* it was for Freya *to have ever loved that man* […] Well, well. I don't say. *She might have – something.* She was lonely, you know. *But really to go away with him!* Never! Madness. *She was too sensible* … […]
> And *what sort of husband would he have made*, anyhow, for a sensible girl like Freya? Why, *even my little property I could not have left them.* The Dutch authorities would never have allowed an Englishman to settle there." […]
> "So you see," he continued, "*she never really cared for him. Much too sensible.* I took her away to Hong Kong. Change of climate, they said. […]
> She would lie quiet and then say: 'I wonder?' […] '*I've been really a coward,*' she would tell me. "*You know, sick people, they say things*." '*I've been conceited, headstrong, capricious. I sought my own gratification. I was selfish or afraid.*' … "*But sick people, you know, they say anything*. And once, after lying silent almost all day, she said: 'Yes; *perhaps, when the day came I would not have gone. Perhaps! I don't know*,' she cried. […]
> *"So you see,"* he went on in a murmur. "*Very ill. Very ill indeed.* Pneumonia. Very sudden" […]
> "*You see yourself*," he began again in a downcast manner. *"She could not have really* … […]
> *There could never have been a question of love for my Freya – such a sensible girl –"* (Conrad 1912, 261-264; emphases mine)

The above passage is a classic example of 'Faulknerian' denegation, which should actually be referred to as Conradian if one compares it with a passage from Rosa Coldfield's narrative section in *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936) concerning her love (or lack it) for Charles Bon:

> *...(I did not love him; how could I? I had never even heard his voice,...) ...I who had learned nothing of love, not even parents' love – ... became not mistress, not beloved, but more than even love; I became all polymath love's androgynous advocate. [...] And even if I was spying, it was not jealousy, because I did not love him. (How could I have, when I had never seen him?)*

> *And even if I did, not as women love, ... If it was love (and I still say, How could it be?) ... Because I asked nothing of him, ... And more than that: I gave him nothing which is the sum of loving [...] yet who did not do it because I should have had to say 'Don't talk to me of love but let me tell you, who know already more of love than you will ever know or need.'* (Faulkner 1990, 117-119; italics original).

In both passages each affirmative statement is denied by its negation a few lines further on, to become again revoked and then once more denied. And, as the mathematical rule of logic has it, the negation of a negation signifies an affirmation: the truth in both Faulkner and Conrad is *love*, despite the continual denials of "old Nelson (or Nielsen)" and – following in his wake – those of Conrad critics who have entertained doubts about the fact that *love* does not exclude sensibleness and vice versa. In Conrad's story both truths are confirmed by the outer narrator in the course of the conversation quoted above, when he voices his "anguish of pity" at "the thought of the poor girl, vanquished in the struggle with three men's absurdities, and coming at last to doubt her own self" (Conrad 1912, 263-264), thus indicating that the responsibility for that vanquishing lies with the colonial patriarchy rather than with the girl herself.

To the reader and critic – lost in the jungle of Conrad's denegation and sidetracking – this diagnosis by the outer narrator comes as a relief, for if there is no doubt about the "absurdities" of Heemskirk or even "old Nelson (or Nielsen)", the behaviour of Jasper – who is otherwise an active and determined man, as the narrator asserts all along – does appear to be irrational when he refuses to take action in order to win Freya back and thus save their love. The reason he gives to "old Nelson, (or Nielsen)", concerning the issue of love and power, seems for once to have been properly diagnosed by the father when he tells Freya: "the only thing he loved was his brig" (Conrad 1912, 262). On the other hand, what "old Nelson (or Nielsen)" takes as referring to the brig might easily have also referred to Freya, as both she and the brig are inscribed in the single pronoun *she* used by Jasper, as we have seen. Moreover, on hearing Jasper's words quoted by her father, Freya responds as if it was indeed her that Jasper had in mind. However, the way in which she looks for reasons that might explain the failure of their love in her own capriciousness, egotism and cowardice removes the validity of her own apprehensions that she might not have been prepared to "allow him … power over [herself]" as on her own admission she does what she fears she would have been unable to do, i.e. she is ready to cede those features of her personality for the sake of the man she loves and the preservation of their love.

A factor that might allow Jasper the benefit of the doubt (and be more convincing, being more rational and more consistent as an explanation for his giving up the fight than his alleged "madness" or lack of power over Freya) is his realization that he has been deprived of the strength and will to act by the fact that Freya treats him as a "happy child", which also dulls his alertness to danger. Wiesław Krajka counts Jasper Allen among those Conrad seafarers whose ability to act is impaired by "extreme dreaminess coupled with naivety" (1988, 220; translation mine). On the other hand, his behaviour might suggest that rather than succumbing to weakness and helplessness (Krajka 1988, 220) or lacking steadfastness in his love for Freya, he is simply angry with himself for

not behaving like a man by taking matters into his own hands so as to forestall the risk of delaying the elopement. Hence "old Nelson's (or Nielsen's)" diagnosis of Jasper (his love for the brig) may have been as mistaken as his way of thinking about his own daughter (her being too sensible to love anybody), which would then come as no surprise. of the two possibilities that present themselves as a result of his conversation with Jasper, Freya's father naturally embraces the one that incriminates the fiancé (the *Bonito*) rather than his daughter (Jasper's alleged emasculation).

The outer narrator, who seems to be right about the reasons for Freya's death – as what can be better proof of real love than dying for it or of it – refrains from commenting directly on the reasons Jasper gives for his behaviour during his meeting with Freya's father and merely repeats those cited by the twice removed narrator in his letter to the outer narrator: "He had waited for two years in a perfectly intoxicated confidence for a day that now would never come to a man disarmed for life by the loss of the brig, and, it seemed to him, made unfit for love to which he had no foothold to offer" (Conrad 1912, 253-254). The supposition of the twice removed narrator finds its confirmation, albeit not literally so, in the declaration which Freya makes to Jasper when he is ready "to carry her off" – if only she "sigh[s] lightly her consent" (Conrad 1912, 209) – as they are being observed by the lustful and angry Heemskirk on the eve of the latter's assault on the girl. Although emotionally stirred by Jasper's determination, she composes herself and replies:

> "No one could carry me off. Not even you. I am not the sort of girl that gets carried off. […] "I've promised you – … – and I shall come of my own free will. *You shall wait for me on board.* […] – and then I shall be carried off. But *it will be no man who will carry me off – it will be the brig, your brig, our brig…*" (Conrad 1912, 210; emphases mine)

Had she agreed to Jasper's intuitive off-the-cuff declaration instead of procrastinating, they would have saved their love and each other. Whether spoken in earnest or as the manifestation of a momentary caprice, Freya's words make her as self-reliant a heroine as James's Isabel Archer in refusing to be "carried off" by a man and "mak[ing her] circumstance", "[her] own misery". During her illness she admits to her father that she has been capricious and selfish, no doubt remembering her declaration to Jasper and revoking it in the name of true love, which is by definition a safeguard of mutual respect and freedom *to* rather than *from*. However, Jasper is no longer within hearing range, so he despairs of the loss of the ship's deck on which Freya might come to join him "of [her] own free will". Thus, Freya eventually repents for failing to keep a balance between her independence and her love, in which respect she is a match for her fiancé, who fails to keep such a balance between his respect for her right to that independence and his faith in true love beyond the deck of the *Bonito*.

At this point one might attempt to look for some of the missing links in the author's choice of his heroine's name. Like the mythological divinity, Conrad's Freya is symbolic of love, war and death. At the same time, her story can be associated with two other attributes of the Scandinavian goddess: desire and revenge, which in fact belong to Heemskirk, who prevents the realization of the goddess's other two qualities in Freya's life: conjugal devotion and fertility, which in turn implies a third, i.e. promiscu-

ity. On the other hand, the way in which the narrator of the story perceives Freya as "a sort of Lady of the Isles" and "the kind of girl one remembers" (Conrad 1912, 165) may create an impression of what Heemskirk may have taken for fact but which in reality was only a colonial male's projection of his own power and lust. This is clearly visible in Heemskirk's revengeful thoughts when he gloats over the possibility of wiping all Freya's kisses and embraces from Jasper's memory – all the more so as the text implies a considerable intimacy between Freya and her beloved every time they see each other, with the narrator acting as their accomplice, always being ready to engage the routinely uninformed and undiscerning father so as to clear the way for the lovers. Indeed, according to Monod, "Freya" seems to be "one of the very few Conrad stories in which desirability in women and desire in men are depicted convincingly" (2006, 89) – a view which runs counter to earlier interpretations of the story as romantic to the point of being operatic (cf. Baines 1986, 450-453). Monod's perspective is both confirmed and overturned by Jeremy Hawthorn, who in his recent book entitled *Sexuality and the Erotic in the Fiction of Joseph Conrad* proposes an even more advanced contention: that if readers do not recognize "sexual innuendos" in Conrad this is because – unlike Joyce's readers – they do not expect to find them there and not at all because such innuendos are lacking (2007, 154). To prove his point, Hawthorn quotes from a number of Conradian texts, including "Freya". Furthermore, he draws a parallel in Conrad's fiction between "sexual desire and lust" on the one hand and "being in someone's power or […] having power over another person" on the other (2007, 155). This not only establishes Heemskirk as an agent of power, but also confirms the intimate nature of the relationship between the two lovers if, as has been discussed above, they refer to their love precisely in terms of the give-and-take of power.

What remains puzzling, however, is the apparent irrelevance in the case of Conrad's Freya of one of the most obvious associations that the name of the Scandinavian goddess evokes, i.e. fertility – another (though perhaps not so obvious) being conjugality. One of the ways of interpreting this 'missing link' is to highlight what Freya and Jasper miss as a result of Heemskirk's vile revenge. Another interpretation, however, particularly as regards the matter of fertility, is oxymoronic and again places Conrad on a par with Faulkner, for here Conrad may be applying what is considered to be the Faulknerian assertion of presence by absence. What if Freya died of love in a sense that was different from sheer misery? What if she was pregnant and miscarried, given that her father appears to be so confused about what she actually died of – pneumonia or anaemia – all the more so as the latter bears no relation to the former whatsoever but may easily be associated with miscarriage and an actual 'death out of love', as the outer narrator seems to suggest? Or why did they travel to Hong Kong – of all places – for its salubrious air when there must have been plenty of it in the Archipelago. And if, as the narrator says at the beginning of the story, Freya was generally speaking a 'healthy' girl – which, let us note in passing, is a curious observation to make in the initial description of a young girl's looks and one which, when appearing in a short story, must certainly have been made quite deliberately.Did she die after having an abortion? The fact is that her father is definitely trying to hide something from the outer narrator by suggesting widely and wildly

different reasons for Freya's unexpected illness and death. Such an interpretation would seem to be all the more plausible as, in addition to the previously cited "pneumonia" and "anaemia" which "old Nelson (Nielsen)" stammers out when pressed by the narrator, he suddenly gives two other reasons – "low state" and, very tellingly stopping himself in mid-sentence, "the inflammation of the …". Both these conditions are widely associated with childbearing:

> *There could never have been a question of love for my Freya – such a sensible girl –*
> "Man!" I cried, rising upon him wrathfully, "*don't you see that she died of it?*"
> He got up, too. "*No! No!*" he stammered, as if angry. "The doctors. *Pneumonia. Low state. The inflammation of the* … They told me. Pneu-"
> He did not finish the word. It ended in a sob. […] with a low, heartrending cry: "*And I thought that she was so sensible!*" (Conrad 1912, 264; emphases mine)

All this might explain "old Nelson's (Nielsen's)" desperate final admission of personal defeat, for it is his daughter's lack of sensibleness, after all, that is the most common understanding of the term. This would also solve the issue of conjugality – the other missing attribute of the mythological Freya in Conrad's heroine – for, although formally not married or part of a family unit, the lovers may have become so through Freya's pregnancy, despite Jasper's tragic ignorance of the fact. "Old Nelson (or Nielsen)" probably intends to inform Jasper about this, but – mistaking his despair over the loss of Freya for madness and his fixation with the brig – gives up the idea. In view of the above, however, Jasper may have been right in thinking that he had no power over Freya in the sense that he was eventually excluded from the main decision concerning them both. Basically, however, it was through his own lack of faith in the power of love, because this is the only way in which these two words – 'power' and 'love' – can be legitimately combined.

The interpretation given above of "old Nelson's (or Nielsen's)" narration also suggests itself through an intertextual reading of Conrad's story in the light of a certain detail in Prorok's play: a Nazi official who – jeering at the main character (Agnes) when the eloping couple are intercepted at the station – begins to wonder if she might be pregnant with the child of her Aryan lover, which would have been an ironic fulfilment of the Nazi *Lebensborn* programme in which she has been forced to take part as an unwilling guinea pig at the "Freja" procreation villa. If this indeed were the case, Peter – like Jasper – would not have known about the baby, which would then have been lost to both parents as part of the Führer's grand design.

An altogether different issue related to the main thesis of this article – narration and epistemology – concerns the degree of knowledge that the outer narrator possesses concerning facts. If Freya has indeed died of love in the very literal sense of the word and the narrator is unaware of this, his final comment seems to be spectacular in its self-directed irony, considering his dual function as a narrator who ought to be knowledgeable and a person who for once is worse informed than the habitually uninformed or misinformed "old Nelson (or Nielsen)", whose ignorance in the matters of life the narrator has been deriding all along. Another possibility – provided the former is true – is that the outer narrator intuits what Freya's father takes such

pains to hide, in which case it is the outer narrator's eye-opening role as regards the truth of the matter (rather than the father's) that we would be speaking of here.

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The issues of ambivalence, missing links and the relationship between power and love raised in Conrad's novella bring us to the second text under consideration – Leszek Prorok's play entitled *Freja – zimna bogini miłości* (*Freya – the Cold Goddess of Love*) – in which the convergence of all three spells sexual abuse and gynaecological experiments parading under the guise of the patriotic reproduction of pure Nordic genes, all of which is unexpectedly confronted with true love before giving way to sterilization and attempts at racial extermination in Nazi concentration camps.

The play mostly comprises a dramatized monologue made by the key protagonist Agnieszka Sielska – or Agnes, as she comes to be called after being sent as a forced labourer to Nazi Germany (in 1941) at the age of seventeen. Her monologue, which takes place in a Polish hospital in the 1970s, is occasionally interrupted by her two interviewers: the Polish Dr Kulicz and his German counterpart Dr Hassbach, who are working together to establish the objective facts concerning her detention at the Buchenwald and Ravensbrück concentration camps, with a view to qualifying her for compensation as a victim of gynaecological experiments and sterilization. The intermittent dialogues are flashbacks featuring minor characters connected with Agnes's war drama, whose voices are heard coming from wartime loudspeakers.

What justifies an intertextual consideration of Prorok's play against Conrad's story in the light of the former's essays entitled *Inicjacje conradowskie* is – apart from the common motif of the mythological goddess – the convergence of a number of other details, i.e. the lovers' thwarted plan to elope; their geographical (Seven Isles) or physical (the "Freja" villa) isolation; the loss of the fiancé; and the villain who implies the heroine's promiscuity (cf. Heemeskirk v. the "Freja" procreation villa). However, apart from the above analogies, an intertextual consideration of both texts is also bound to include their paradoxical disparities regarding the issues of life and fertility: the latter accompanied by death in Conrad's story and the former associated with sterility in Prorok's drama.

The extent to which either of the two – the villa OR Agnes – revokes the Nordic goddess should be clear from the subtitle of the play – "cold" – which, however, in reality creates an opposition between the two. Whereas the villa promotes loveless reproduction, Agnes – though initially forced to participate in the process and subsequently sterilized after an unsuccessful elopement – is in fact emotionally reminiscent of her mythological prototype in that she survives the traumas of war thanks to the memory of love. It is her very refusal to die and to succumb to the loveless *Lebensborn* biology that makes her Freya-like. Faithful to the man she loves despite being forced into promiscuity, she is a symbol of desire and fertility in both senses: undesirable fertility as an anonymous *Lebensborn* mother and desirable fertility as a potential wife who has been forever rendered "cold" by sterilization. But has she indeed been rendered "cold" in more than just the biological sense of the word?

What strikes the viewer or reader of the play is the fact that until she is pressed by her German interviewer Dr Hassbach to fill in some of the missing logical gaps in her story, Agnieszka (Agnes) refrains from mentioning the central episode of her life – her only love and its tragic end – in the chain of events that ultimately sends her to the concentration camps. It is paradoxically much easier for her to give an account of her "cold" love in the "Freja" villa than to talk about her only true love. We do not have the impression that this is because these events are too traumatic for her to speak about. Instead, she may be trying to protect the memory of what is the most painful but also the most precious thing in her life by removing it from the hideous context of war. Ironically, however, the breaking of her initial silence about her love for a Nazi officer who gives up his uniform, his military career and ultimately (and almost certainly) his life for her, may be potentially counterproductive with regard to her qualifying for war compensation as a victim of Nazi medical experiments – a consideration that is never explicitly formulated in the play. It is these facts that make her the very opposite of what the title of Prorok's play suggests, i.e. the "cold" goddess of love.

Another form of her defiance of the play's subtitle is the way she reacts to being sent to a concentration camp, not to mention her actual physical and mental survival of its atrocities. As she confesses, "I wouldn't have survived all that if it hadn't been for the fact that I came to Ravensbrück as if befogged, and so immune to the horrors of the camp" (Prorok 1977, 34). Although she has been sent there as a direct consequence of her unsuccessful elopement, it is obviously not that which she has in mind, but the "love which [she] didn't need to question although this feeling transcended the borders delineated for the programme of the rich villa on the Rhein" (Prorok 1977, 21). This transcendent power of love to keep life going – this, if one may say so, transcendent spiritual fertility – seems to be the precise affinity between the main character of Prorok's play and her mythological prototype, as if in ironic defiance of the eugenically prescribed biological fertility enforced by the *Lebensborn* programme.

Whether intended or intuited, the intertextual role that Prorok's drama plays in relation to Conrad's story leads one to discover that it is this precise lack of the transcendent power of love in the latter text that makes it seem inconclusive and even more tragic than the former, given Freya's death, Jasper's Od-like disappearance and – judging by the way in which he is perceived by Freya's father – his possible transformation into a monster-like mythological figure as a result of his refusal to see or recover Freya.

Compared with Conrad's story, Prorok's play is, naturally, less complex and more obvious, especially as a dramatic piece. However, for a play it contains relatively few dramatizations of the events presented, all the rest being relegated to monologized interviews and dramatized flashbacks suspended in the virtual reality of 'loud-speaking' voices. We can therefore legitimately regard narration as lying at the heart of this drama and thus speak of the related missing links or silences, although most are inconsequential and thus perhaps – unlike in Conrad's novella – a result of the play's inadequacies rather than its merits. These open ends concern the following: 1. Agnes's

hypothetical pregnancy, which is never confirmed but is voiced as a sarcastic supposition by the *Oberstandartenführer* who detains the lovers after their elopement at the station; 2. the reason why Agnes initially stops short of admitting exactly why she was sent to the concentration camps but then changes her mind, despite the lack of any overt pressure to do so; 3. the fate of Peter von Reskau – although, given the circumstances, his sudden disappearance without trace hardly requires explanation and remains in keeping with the fate of the mythological Freya's husband Od; 4. the reasons for the failure of their elopement, for – although Peter orders beer at the station and thereby attracts attention – their names appear to have been known to the SS Gendarmerie who are on duty there even before Peter is able to pay for the beer.

Considering these issues intertextually against the analogical motifs in Conrad's story helps to answer some questions, for in his choices Prorok most of the time goes against the grain of Conrad's story. Thus, whereas Conrad's Freya seems to be overcautious – much to Jasper's annoyance – in Prorok's play it is the apparently trivial detail of the lack of any such caution during the lovers' elopement (ordering beer) that brings about their interception and eventual tragic separation through Peter's certain death and Agnes's transfer to a concentration camp and her subsequent sterilization. On the other hand, unlike in Prorok's play, where, because of the war, even if it is planned, the elopement can be nothing but an impromptu affair, the carefully planned elopement of Conrad's protagonists is thwarted by delay and eventually comes to nothing, which leads to Freya's death and the benumbing of Jasper's spirit. In terms of its risks, dangers and potential consequences, the love between Agnes and Peter (resulting in their unsuccessful elopement) can hardly be compared with that of Freya and Jasper. And yet it is the former that seems to have triumphed, undermining the very essence of the criminal system that it was supposed to condone and confirm – i.e. the Nazi ideological goal of exterminating racially inferior races in the name of the Aryan purity of the Germanic peoples – for it is the spirit of that love that triumphs, even if it is physically and biologically doomed.

This brings us to the last but by no means least important link between the two texts, i.e. the issue of the mythological Freya's Nordic provenance – a fact that is made use of by both writers and, contrary to expectations, not for entirely disparate reasons. While the significance of Freya's Nordic associations for a drama about the Nazi ideology of racial purity hardly requires explanation, it certainly comes as a surprise in Conrad's novella, which is set in the then Dutch-controlled East Indian territory of Poeloe Toedjoeh, which translates literally as Seven Isles (van Marle 2005, 127). This is the point where intertextuality begins to work reciprocally, shedding new light on the text written earlier, making overt what has hitherto remained covert, i.e. the importance of the issue of race in Conrad's story and the story of Freya and Jasper's love, not just in the sense of the European or white man's supremacy in the colonies, but in that of the primacy of the Dutch, even over other WASP colonists such as the English, to say nothing of the darker-skinned Spaniards – a point that Conrad's text makes on more than one occasion. It is, however, only in the context of Prorok's drama that one begins to appreciate the significance of the problem for the

story of the love between Freya and Jasper, which would probably require a separate article for it to be examined at greater length.

As well as constantly harping on "old Nelson's (or Nielsen's)" fear of the Dutch, whom Freya's father invariably suspects of deceitfulness, a lack of "geniality" (178), "tak[ing] offence" and "start[ing] trouble" (Conrad 1912, 222), the outer narrator – who is himself deceitful towards the reader in being dismissive of "old Nelson's (or Nielsen's) 'irrational' fears which, ironically, eventually prove to have been well founded – also (as has been indicated earlier) repeatedly remarks on the sharp contrast between the Nordic looks of Freya, her father and Jasper on the one hand and the non-Nordic appearance of the Dutch lieutenant on the other. As likely as not, these details will normally escape or be dismissed by the reader of Conrad's story – with the active encouragement of the narrator – but this is not possible in the case of an intertextual consideration of Conrad's text against Prorok's play. "Old Nelson's (Nielsen's)" prophetic apprehensions voiced at the very beginning of the story – though dismissed by the generally dismissive outer narrator – constitute the strongest foreshadowing of the tragedy that will befall his daughter: he was "[v]ery mistrustful indeed. The Dutch, in his view, were capable of 'playing an ugly trick on a man' who had the misfortune to displease them" (Conrad 1912, 164).

Quite apart from the fact that – as has been indicated by Krajka and others – in his role of loyal British subject Conrad tended to be more critical of colonists from other countries – i.e. the Dutch, the Portuguese and the Belgians (1988, 34) – in *Freya* it is the Dutch – led by the evil Heemskirk on board his gunboat the *Neptun* – who defend the Archipelago against illegal trade and piracy, be it Spanish, native or British. As explained by Willem F. J. Mörzer Bruyns (based on the 1870s Wolterbeek Muller archive),

> Spanish sovereignty over the Sulu Islands was disputed by the Dutch, and the pirates used the Spanish-Dutch controversy to their advantage.
>
> Another political concern of the Dutch was the Sultanate of Sarawak, to the north, under British protection. In the recent past the Royal Navy had shown interest in the part of Borneo that was under Dutch control [Sherry, 1971: 125-126] (Bruyns 2005, 135).

It is in this colonial power game that Freya, Jasper and "old Nelson (or Nielsen)" are caught up. Notwithstanding the pretentions of Freya's father to Dutchness, all of them are English and are confronted with Dutch supremacy in a region controlled by a representative of that supremacy – Heemskirk – who makes this supremacy felt via his sexual assault on Freya, his accusations of illegal arms trading levelled against Jasper, his revengeful grounding of the *Bonito*, his abuse of Nelson's hospitality and, generally speaking, his bullying of Freya's father about her acquaintance with somebody as 'suspect' as Jasper Allen.

As has been emphasized by Jeremy Hawthorn in his book on sexuality and the erotic in Conrad's fiction, if

> the cultural configurations which were available as models to Conrad all involved significant structural divisions between the empowered and the disempowered, … the erotic in Conrad's fiction models, or mimics, larger social relationships characterized by inequalities of power.

> […] But if in the world of Conrad's fiction power excites male desire, it also destroys relationships (2007, 155).

In Conrad's story this convergence of colonial power and lust finds its expression – as the author says – in the Dutch lieutenant "appropriating Freya to himself in his thoughts" (Conrad 1912, 204). And to think that such a modern expression was used a hundred years ago! In just the same way, one might add, as the Nazi officers in Prorok's play exercise their power over the disempowered Nordic-looking girls from Holland (Jo), Norway (Brigit and Selma) and Poland (Agnes), harnessing their male desires to the service of the Third Reich, which sought to proliferate the Aryan race. The respective heroines' perfect Nordic looks are highlighted in both texts: Heemskirk calls Freya a Scandinavian goddess and Jasper refers to his Freya's golden hair being long enough for her to sit on, while Frau Kiekert uses the expression *Rheingold* to refer to Agnes's golden braid, harping on about how it saved her from a concentration camp.

As indicated in a recent study entitled *Dzieci Hitlera. Losy urodzonych w Lebensborn* (*Hitler's Children. The fate of those born as a result of the Lebensborn programme*), the *Lebensborn* project was – apart from Auschwitz – Himmler's favourite idea for reversing the process of the degeneration of the Germanic peoples – many of whose representatives were no longer blue-eyed and fair-haired – by using the purest genetic material to be found – in Norway in particular, but also in Belgium, Luxemburg and France (Schmitz-Köster & Vankann 2014, 355), as well as among the enslaved Slavonic nations, i.e. the Poles and the Ukrainians. In Conrad's story, by contrast, all three Britons – Freya, Jasper and "old Nelson (or Nielsen)" – answer to the description of the ideal Nordic look, being "tall, fair, and blue-eyed", while Heemskirk – "the swarthy, arrogant, black-haired Dutchman … shorter nearly by a head" – looks like "a grotesque specimen of mankind from some other planet" (Conrad 1912, 182). Thus, in spite of his Dutch origins, which ought to make him more Nordic than Nelson or Jasper, it is Heemskirk who looks like a genetic degeneration of that racial ideal. In fact, his weirdness and odiousness, as we know, extends beyond his physiognomy to the sphere of morality. Hence, rather than being a mere manifestation of his dislike of the Dutch, Conrad's accumulation of disparaging epithets applied to Heemskirk can also be perceived as being an ironic reversal of the nineteenth-century racial (and racist) ideal of a European colonizer.

In the light of the above, Heemskirk's "appropriat[ion]" of Freya might extend beyond basic male lust and cover all the features that the Dutch lieutenant finds desirable as a North European colonist but lacks himself: height, blue eyes and fair hair. Let us note that all of these, if deprived of their metaphorical value, may imply covert procreational purposes, especially if considered in the light of Robin Truth Goodman's article on Conrad's *Chance*, which touches on lesbianism in the colonial context, where "it poses the threat of restricted reproduction of ('white') imperial subjects" (1998, 86). As such, Heemskirk's desire mentally colonizes its object – i.e. Freya – who thus becomes disempowered by virtue of his colonial authority and her very gender (in place of race) and is turned into an imperial instrument of reproduction – indeed, very much like Agnes, though under a less conspicuous banner and with the

right to keep her children and the duty to bring them up. Not only is she to condone the system – again, very much in the manner of the *Lebensborn* model – but she is also to enhance "imperial expansion, settlement and rule" (Goodman 1998, 94) – an ideology which is reminiscent of the Nazi philosophy of *Lebensraum.* As Anna Davin points out, "policymakers and administrators, like positive eugenics, elevated motherhood as a 'matter of Imperial importance'" (qtd. in Goodman 1998, 94); moreover, a 1909 article on women's education in the *Eugenics Review* proclaimed motherhood as an obligation "as much imperial as domestic and social" (Davin, qtd. in Goodman 1998, 94). Accordingly, it was women who were blamed for the rising infant mortality rate in Britain at the beginning of the twentieth century on the grounds that "[t]he maintenance of empire would be best based upon the power of a white population, proportionate in numbers, vigour and cohesion to the vast territories which the British democracies in the Mother Country and the colonies control" (J.L. Gavin, qtd. in Davin 1978, 10). In this context, as Goodman emphasizes, "[t]he certainty of the colonizer's reproductive legacy through the domestic control of his women would, at least provisionally, ensure a symbolic economy, the certain dissemination of his authority, heritage, and name" (1998, 120). Heemskirk's sexual assault on Freya and his later revenge on both her and Jasper therefore has at least three dimensions: racial, reproductive and imperial.

Curiously enough, apart from the overt motif of the Nordic ideal of beauty and the more or less covert ideal of the related purity of race which appear to be common to both texts, in Conrad's novella the Malay Archipelago resounds to the strains of Wagner's music in no lesser measure than the Nazi *Lebensborn* villa in Prorok's play. This may come as no surprise, considering the presence of *leitmotifs* related to Norse mythology in Wagner's music, i.e. *Valkyrie* (1856) and *The Rheingold* (1854) of *The Ring of the Nibelung* cycle. However, in Prorok's play Wagner apparently and quite predictably functions as an inseparable and rather cliché attribute of Nazi ideology, as he was Hitler's favourite composer and an iconic figure in the Third Reich. Moreover, the play contains numerous veiled references to particular operas and musical dramas composed by Wagner: Agnes's astounding Aryan golden braid, which saves her from extermination and qualifies her to become a 'privileged' inmate of the *Freja* villa, earns itself the distinctly Wagnerian-sounding nickname of "the Rheingold"; also, when caught at the station, Agnes and Peter are ironically referred to as "our" Tristan and Isolde (Prorok 1977, 23) – the title of another opera by Wagner (1864). To match this, the curious presence of Wagner's tunes in Conrad's story may also be linked to at least one of the composer's famous operatic works, i.e. *The Flying Dutchman* (1843), which would then establish *the* Dutchman of the story – i.e. Heemskirk – in the position of his legendary prototype (cf. Millington 2014, 295). For his vengeance on the two lovers he is condemned to the unmitigable punishment of being for ever haunted by his insatiable lust for Freya Nelson and her Nordic attributes. In this connection we may note that – for the discerning reader – Conrad's mention of the "fierce" Wagner tunes struck by Freya on her piano at the beginning of the story – in Jasper's "stock still" presence – constitutes a perfect foreshadowing of the ending of the story, complete with Freya's demise brought on by despair,

Jasper's emotional paralysis, Heemskirk's 'Flying Dutchman' fate and even the grounding of the *Bonito* – for, while the notes are still echoing over the Isles, the narrator observes "the brig … surg[ing] at her cables within a hundred yards of nasty, shiny, black rock-heads", commenting on what he sees with a telling "Ugh!" (Conrad 1912, 168).

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In conclusion, one may say that in the case of Conrad's protagonists – who unlike those of Prorok do not have to function within the enslaving and destructive political system of Nazi Germany and so are theoretically freer and more predisposed to triumph – it is the spirit that seems to founder. Power and love are not something outside of them, institutionally enforced by a perverse and criminal ideology, but depend on their individual capacity to 'give and take' – to willingly cede power in the name of love – and also on proper communication. However, one must not underestimate the surreptitious nature of the colonial system in which they are caught up, as it is a destructive factor in their relationship – a factor whose role they fail to recognize and which thus catches them unawares, despite the fact that they take all manner of precautions. An intertextual reading of these two texts – Conrad's *Freya of the Seven Isles* and Prorok's *Freja – zimna bogini miłości* (*Freya – the Cold Goddess of Love*) – leads one to conclude that notwithstanding the traumatic context of the Second World War, it is the latter work that carries a more positive message, which – given Conrad's skepticism as a man and as a writer – may not come as a surprise. However, there can be no doubt that Conrad's story has much greater aesthetic and literary appeal, despite attempts to detract from its artistic merit.

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