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GOING UP THAT RIVER: WATER SYMBOLISM IN CONRAD'S *HEART OF DARKNESS*²

This paper seeks to interpret the foundational Modernist novella *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad through a set of ideas existing in and arguably creating Modernism as it is known: the mythology of water as the fundamental but fickle fluid Other subsisting at the basic level of the world and giving life to it while constantly needing to be controlled and tamed by a superior civilizing force, which is a mesmerizing narrative that lends itself all too easily to colonialist abuses. This mythology of water has at its core the story of *katabasis/nekylia*, a symbolic night journey over water deriving from ancient imaginaries, leading into Hell and back. The journey begins with exile from the rational, stable civilized world, and descent into the irrational, chaotic, watery depths of the unconscious and prime matter. In this underwater Hades or Hell, the hero is confronted with the watery beast that is the basis of carnal life at whose hands he suffers a symbolic death, which leads to a rebirth. The beast is often a guardian of precious life-giving treasure, and the victorious hero is allowed to take the spoils with him back to the surface.

Keywords: *Heart of Darkness*, Joseph Conrad, colonialism, Modernism, myth/archetype, *katabasis/nekylia*

1. INTRODUCTION

The era of Modernism in the West arguably emerged owing to a fascinating amalgam of anthropological knowledge gained through colonial expansion, the impact of the Darwinian theory of evolution, and the development of Freudian and Jungian psychoanalysis, all of which seemed to dwell on the notion of excavating the deeper, darker truths that formed the basis of the world and humankind. These disturbing but vital and fundamental “others” – the material, the animalistic, the primitive, and the unconscious – were perceived as standing in opposition to the stable world of civilization and reason, and commonly associated with water.

Water is, of course, one of the most picturesque and widely used representations of prime matter, in any remotely dualistically informed myth, philosophy, and religion. One need only remember Plato's matrix of all being, depicted as the formless fluidity of primordial matter shaped by eternal Ideas, or Plotinus' usage of Plato's “bottomless sea of unlikeness” (*Pol.* 273d6-e1) to express the experience of the soul fallen into matter, the

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“mud of Hades” (TURNER, MAJERICIK 2000: 39). This powerful imaginary found its way into literature and art at times when various Platonisms were in vogue, most notably during the Renaissance and the Romantic period, and in Modernism it could be said to form a distinct mythology.³

The ancient-inspired Modernist mythology of water has at its core the story of *katabasis/nekylia*, a symbolic night journey over water leading into Hell and back – a transformative passage entailing the “destruction and rebirth of the self through an encounter with the absolute Other” (FALCONER 2007: 1) which Orpheus, Theseus, Jason, Heracles, Demeter, Odysseus, and Aeneas underwent (cf. CAMPBELL 1960, FRYE 1957, ELIADE 1965, FRAZER 1993).

Freud and to a much greater degree Jung – perhaps at times following Conrad – delineated the hero’s journey as a psychological adventure, commencing with his exile from the rational, stable civilized world, and descent into the irrational, chaotic, watery depths of the unconscious and prime matter. In this underwater Hades or Hell, the hero is confronted with the watery beast that is the basis of carnal life at whose hands he suffers a symbolic death, which leads to a “sea-change” or rebirth. The beast is often a guardian of precious life-giving treasure, and the victorious hero is allowed to take the spoils with him back to the surface (cf. FREUD 1940, 1941, 1942; JUNG 1978, 1984).

Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* is based on the journey from Kinshasa to Stanley Falls he participated in while doing service in the Belgian Congo. The expedition was undertaken to relieve the agent by the name of Georges-Antoine Klein who had fallen ill, and Klein died aboard the *Roi des Belges*, navigated by Conrad, on the way back (JEAN-AUBRY 1957: 170). In Conrad’s words, *Heart of Darkness* is “experience pushed a little (and only very little) beyond the actual facts of the case for the perfectly legitimate, I believe, purpose of bringing it home to the minds and bosoms of the readers” (CONRAD 1960: 6-7). Apart from making certain alterations to the story as it existed in his memory, Conrad also omitted all clear references to Africa, such as toponyms, that he had originally included in the manuscript. The effect of these modifications was to make the piece particularly universal and decidedly metaphorical (GUERARD 1958).

2. AN INTERMINABLE WATERWAY: EXILE, BARBARISM, DESCENT

The two beginnings of the two narratives in *Heart of Darkness* are illustrative of the ambiguity of water. Amid the “serenity of still and exquisite brilliance”, while the “water shone pacifically” (CONRAD 1989: 28), the optimistic, progressivist, positivist main narrator extols the virtues of “the great knights-errant of the sea”, the colonizers: “they all had gone out on that stream, bearing the sword, and often the torch, messengers of the might within the land, bearers of a spark from the sacred fire” (CONRAD 1989: 29). Water is recognized as the conduit of “civilization” to the “primitive”, a contemporary justification for colonization. As the sun sets “a change” comes “over the waters”, the serenity becomes “less brilliant but more profound” (CONRAD 1989: 28), and Marlow offers a variation of the theme in a more somber note, pondering the displacement and exile felt

3 It is interesting to note at the outset that periods when various Platonic notions, especially those depicting matter as a dark Other needing to be shaped by a more spiritual and superior force, flourished in Western cultural expression, tended to coincide with periods of intense colonial expansion.

by colonizers in very old times, “when Romans first came here [and] light came out of this river since [...] But darkness was here yesterday. Imagine the feelings of a commander of a [...] trireme in the Mediterranean, ordered suddenly to the north [...] the very end of the world, a sea the colour of lead [...] going up this river [with] nothing but Thames water to drink.” (CONRAD 1989: 30)

As the contemporary center is banished to the margins, at least in this historical context, colonizers and civilizers of old are juxtaposed to those of contemporary Europe. Its glamorous but corrupt heart is Brussels, Marlow’s “whited sepulchre” (CONRAD 1989: 35) which is the term Jesus used to describe the hypocrisy of the scribes and the Pharisees, who “appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness” (Matthew 23:27). Once its duality is established, the fact that it is from Brussels that men are sent on commercial voyages, which are also described as humane civilizing missions, seems ironic, as does the circumstance that Marlow, sent on such a mission, appears to his aunt as “an emissary of light, something like a lower sort of apostle” (CONRAD 1989: 39). Kurtz’s civilizing intentions likewise cause him to be ambivalently described as “an emissary of pity, and science, and progress, and devil knows what else” (CONRAD 1989: 55). Both men seemingly belong to the already ominous-sounding “gang of virtue”, striving to “civilize” the “barbarians”.

Both are, in effect, sent on their mission by women, whom Marlow most commonly renders as naïve representatives of a shallow, oblivious, but also ill-omened civilization. Marlow obtains his post by having “set the women to work” (CONRAD 1989: 34), namely employing the influence of an aunt and her female acquaintance. The Intended encourages and eulogizes Kurtz’s intentions, and it is in order to marry her that he sets out to Africa to make his fortune. In the Brussels company office, ominously guarding the doorway, are two women knitting black wool. This likens them to the fates, and the old one additionally possesses traditional attributes of a witch, sporting silver-rimmed spectacles, with a cat in her lap, and a wart on her cheek. A comical parallel to this image of females as the entrance into the other world is the fact that the previous captain was killed in an argument over two black hens, necessitating Marlow’s employment. From the very beginning, whatever Marlow may say, women appear both as the superficially civilized and the sinisterly chthonic – or these aspects can be said to be intertwined from the start. This is apparent in Kurtz’s painting of “a woman, draped and blind-folded, carrying a lighted torch [...] the effect of the torch-light on the face was sinister” (CONRAD 1989: 54). Civilization is in this image, and contrary to Freud’s musings (cf. FREUD 1950), represented as a woman, the Intended, both oblivious and sinister. Though the men are ostensibly sent by the women to civilize the wilderness, the symbolic significance of this is in the fact that women in myth always seem to send the hero on a journey to Hell (LORD 1990: 58).

The beginning of this journey is in the realization that the stability of civilization and reason is fragile, and this is in Conrad’s world achieved via an introduction to the “primitive”. This is explicitly stated in his *Outpost of Progress*, the story that served as a sort of “germ” for the subsequent development of the theme in the *Heart of Darkness* (SHERRY 1973: 129):⁴

4 From Conrad’s letter to William Blackwood of 31 December 1898: “The title I am thinking of is ‘The Heart of Darkness’ but the narrative is not gloomy. The criminality of inefficiency and pure selfishness when

“Few men realise that their life, the very essence of their character, their capabilities and their audacities, are only the expression of their belief in the safety of their surroundings [...] But the contact with pure unmitigated savagery, with primitive nature and primitive man, brings sudden and profound trouble into the heart” (CONRAD 1898: 124-163).

The action also takes place in a heart of darkness, a primitive nothingness, where the “river seemed to come from nowhere and flow nowhither. It flowed through a void” (CONRAD 1898: 131). The white characters think of themselves as the seed of a future civilization, but when they accept the ivory their Black workers were sold for, they feel that “something from within them was gone, something that worked for their safety, and had kept the wilderness from interfering with their hearts” (CONRAD 1898: 151). The disintegration of civilized rules exposes the inherent hollowness of their humanity and their story ends in a murder-suicide. Wilderness causes an inevitable decay of civilizational norms, a dissolution of individual personality, and a consequent descent into the irrational.

The journey up the Congo in the *Heart of Darkness* is likewise a descent into an irrational wilderness – as a passage often critiqued for its racist imagery (ACHEBE 2016: 17) attests to:

“The steamer toiled along slowly on the edge of a black and incomprehensible frenzy. The prehistoric man was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us – who could tell? We were cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings; we glided past like phantoms, wondering and secretly appalled, as sane men would be before an enthusiastic outbreak in a madhouse” (CONRAD 1898: 68-69).

Water is a conduit to the unconscious, closely associated both in Conrad and in Freud with the primitive stages of humanity, for “the mind of man is capable of anything – because everything is in it, all the past as well as all the future” (CONRAD 1898: 69). Marlow’s mission to retrieve the vagabond Kurtz is parallel to the scenario of the ego sent by the superego on a quest to find, know, and set right the id. The superego expects the ego to report back, and hence Marlow pays his respects to Kurtz’s Intended, the epitome of civilized, oblivious superficiality (STALLMAN 1955: 161).

Water is repeatedly presented as the conduit of “civilization”, taking its emissaries to the “barbarians”, but it in effect acts as an all-encompassing leveler of humankind, uniting all. The universal “interminable waterway” connects London with its own barbarous beginnings, as the darkening Thames reminds Marlow that “this also [...] has been one of the dark places of the earth” (CONRAD 1898: 29). The use of a present tense here is not coincidental.

3. AN IMMENSE SNAKE UNCOILED: BASIS, BODY, WOMAN

Connection with the primitive is achieved by a water journey back in time in terms of human evolution, but it also takes Marlow backwards through the evolution of

tackling the civilizing work in Africa is a justifiable idea. [...] It is a story as much as my *Outpost of Progress* was but, so to speak ‘takes in’ more – is a little wider – is less concentrated upon individuals” (Sherry, 1973, p. 129).

all life, to the primordial earth: “Going up that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world” (CONRAD 1989: 66). Primordial flora and fauna are both expressed and experienced through water. Marlow sees the shore as “a rolling wave of plants” and hears a “burst of mighty splashes” from afar, “as though an ichthyosaurus had been taking a bath of glitter in the great river” (CONRAD 1989: 61). Water leads to and represents the fundamental beginnings of life.

Water also leads to and represents the fundamental *essence* of life. Fascinated by the blank spaces on the maps, young Marlow especially desires to explore “the biggest, the most blank”. After it is filled with “rivers, and lakes, and names”, it captures his fancy even more, as “there was in it one river especially, a mighty big river, that you could see on the map, resembling an immense snake uncoiled, with its head in the sea, its body at rest curving afar over a vast country, and its tail lost in the depths of the land”. The snake can be read as the mythical cosmic serpent, the watery center and basis of life, but also the embodiment of chthonic horror (cf. CAMPBELL 1960, FRYE 1957, ELIADE 1965, FRAZER 1993). Marlow explains his ultimate decision to visit the heart of darkness with the simple: “The snake had charmed me” (CONRAD 1989: 33).

Another avatar of the monster from the watery abyss is the steamer retrieved from the bottom of the big river. The steamer looks “like a carcass of some big river animal” from which issues the “smell of mud, of primeval mud” (CONRAD 1989: 56). It is later referred to as “the river-demon” (CONRAD 1989: 108). Nature is another primordial beast in the heart of darkness, and the earth there does not have “the shackled form of a conquered monster” (CONRAD 1989: 69) that Europeans are accustomed to. Men are also reduced to animals in the wilderness. One of the dying African men is shown crawling on all fours towards the river to drink, anticipating Kurtz’s similar predicament, making the two men mirror each other.

The African people, referred to as “raw matter” (CONRAD 1989: 43), are often, appropriately for that, depicted in watery language. At one instance, “streams of human beings [...] were poured into the clearing” (CONRAD 1989: 99). At another, the crowd is said to have “flowed out of the woods again, filled the clearing, covered the slope with a mass of naked, breathing, quivering, bronze bodies” (CONRAD 1989: 108). The metaphorical language of water serves here to accentuate the carnality of African people, depicted here as “primitive” (YAKUBU 2020), per customary colonialist Othering (BOEHMER 2005: 76; CLARKE, SCORGIE-PORTER 2017: 27), which is arguably based upon Platonic forms of dualism. There is also, however, a distinct fraternal bond that Marlow feels with the African rowers who remind him of the surf – an instance of water serving as a symbol of unity. While Marlow’s discourse certainly reflects and illustrates the prevalent prejudice of the time, it is difficult to surmise to what extent this can be ascribed to Conrad as well – and there appears to be an attempt at deconstruction whenever a strong binary asserts itself in the narrative.

Described, again in watery terms, as “an eddy in the mass of human bodies”, the “barbarous, superb woman” (CONRAD 1989: 109) that mysteriously commands the heart of darkness – and Kurtz’s heart – makes her first appearance. She is shown “stretching bare brown arms over the glitter of the infernal stream, the stream of darkness” (CONRAD 1989: 120) and “the colossal body of the fecund and mysterious life” seems

to look at her, as though it is “looking at the image of its own tenebrous and passionate soul” (CONRAD 1989: 101). The “barbarous” woman and the fertile, wild life coalesce in Conrad’s mystery of water. Leavis argues that “Conrad’s ‘inscrutable’ [...] associates with Woman as it does with the wilderness”. He substantiates this by quoting from Conrad’s *The Arrow of Gold*: “Woman and the sea revealed themselves to me together, as it were: two mistresses of life’s values. The illimitable greatness of the one, the unfathomable seduction of the other” (LEAVIS 1962: 201).

This vision of the feminine as powerful, wild, and mysterious challenges the explicit dismissal of women by Marlow in the novel noted by many. Straus would, for instance, have it that “Marlow presents a world distinctly split into male and female realms – the first harbouring the possibility of ‘truth’ and the second dedicated to the maintenance of delusion”. The “barbarous, superb woman” disproves that women are fully reduced to superficial, naïve, oblivious puppets of civilization in the novel, and Straus (JORDAN 1987: 123-137) concedes that Marlow’s journey is a “penetration into a female wilderness”. She could perhaps even be seen as one of the portents of African agency often neglected by critics (WESLEY 2015). This appears to be yet another facile binary promptly deconstructed by Conrad, it seems, and in direct opposition to his own narrator’s overt opinions.

Water is not only the basis of *organic life*, but is the prime matter of *all* there is, including land, as can be seen in the cited reference to the “depths of the land”. Land itself seems indistinguishable from water as the ship sails along “the *formless* coast bordered by dangerous surf, as if Nature herself had tried to ward off intruders; in and out of rivers, streams of death in life, whose *banks were rotting into mud*, whose *waters, thickened into slime*, invaded the contorted mangroves, that seemed to writhe at us” (CONRAD 1989: 41).⁵ Water is the basis of all, animate and inanimate.

Water is often associated or identified with *darkness* in the novel, and then viewed as the *heart* and essence of the universe. Conrad excluded in the final version of the *Heart of Darkness* the following description from the opening Thames scene of the original manuscript: “A big steamer came down all a long blaze of light like a town viewed from the sea bound to the uttermost ends of the earth [...] And the earth suddenly seemed shrunk to the size of a pea spinning on the heart of an immense darkness” (RASKIN 1967: 32). Raskin notes that the boat in question is a steamer, “like a town”, which is “a symbol of an industrial and mechanized society”. The light of the mighty steamer is lost in the darkness of the mightier water, and this is paralleled in the juxtaposition of the earth and a cosmic darkness, which he takes to mean that “evil is embodied in the physical nature of the universe” (RASKIN 1967: 32-33). Although this passage proves that implications of the “heart of darkness” in the novel are meant to be cosmic rather than merely political or personal, accusing Conrad of Manicheism might be going too far. “Darkness” represents a variety of concepts in the text, and can by no means be easily equated with evil. One of its possible meanings can be said, however, to be a hollowness at the core of the material world, and the material world would seem to present an irresistible temptation to those whose hearts share the same hollowness – and who, it should also be noted, almost invariably tend to be of European descent in Conrad’s world. This may then lead to actual evil,

⁵ Emphases mine.

which in Conrad's world always resides in persons, not matter itself.

4. THE FARTHEST POINT OF NAVIGATION: HELL, DESERT, DEATH

There is, however, something undeniably ominous at the very basis of the material world in Conrad's universe, and it is again both reached and represented by water. Marlow, looking at the map in the Brussels office, ruminates on how he is to go "Dead in the centre. And the river was there – fascinating – deadly – like a snake" (CONRAD 1989: 36). The lake Kurtz discovers at the very heart of darkness is the nether point of his moral journey and the cause of his ultimate downfall, as the local tribe worships him as a deity and fulfills his increasingly atrocious desires. He ends up living there almost exclusively near his end. The direction of the journey Marlow undertakes is also explicitly downward, as Kurtz, the chief of the Inner Station, is said to be "in the true ivory-country", at "the very bottom of there" (CONRAD 1989: 47), and its nether point is Marlow's meeting with Kurtz: "I went up that river to the place where I first met the poor chap. It was the farthest point of navigation and the culminating point of my experience" (CONRAD 1989: 32). There is an equation between the lowermost and the innermost as Marlow's destination from the very beginning, and both are positioned at the center. Marlow feels, even before he leaves the safety of Europe, as though "instead of going to the centre of a continent, I were about to set off for the centre of the earth" (CONRAD 1989: 39).

The center of the earth is, of course, the conventional location for Hell. Feder notes that Conrad "employs the imagery and symbolism of the traditional voyage into Hades", but also creates "an image of hell credible to modern man". She further claims that Conrad fashioned his *Heart of Darkness* on Book VI of Virgil's *Aeneid*, in which Aeneas' descent into Hell, as part of his initiation for the role of leader of the Roman people, is described. Aeneas' guide is the Sibyl, who "hides truth in darkness" (*obscuris vera involvens*), which, Feder pronounces, Conrad does as well, while leading Marlow through his created Hell (STALLMAN 1955: 162). Evans, on the other hand, contends that Conrad used Dante's *Inferno* as the basis of his work, and gives its detailed comparison with the *Heart of Darkness* (STALLMAN 1955: 172).

No literary influences are, naturally, necessary for a motif so universal as the descent into Hades or Hell, and Conrad's underworld is both Hades and Hell. Kurtz's state, at least in the final days of his life, must clearly indicate to Marlow that he is in Hades, as Kurtz is plainly no longer truly among the living. He is referred to as a "disinterred body" (CONRAD 1989: 84), an "atrocious phantom", an "apparition", (CONRAD 1989: 99) a "Shadow", a "wandering and tormented thing" (CONRAD 1989: 107), and described as "long, pale, indistinct, like a vapour exhaled by the earth" (CONRAD 1989: 106). But Kurtz also belongs in Hell as a demon. He is a deity to the natives and thus conveniently, in missionary-speak, said to have "taken a high seat amongst the devils of the land" (CONRAD 1989: 85). In this faculty, he presides "at certain midnight dances ending with unspeakable rites" (CONRAD 1989: 86), which complete the infernal atmosphere.

In this realm of the demonic, water becomes its direct opposite. Marlow aptly notes, not coincidentally, that "you lost your way on that river as you would in a *desert*"

(CONRAD 1989: 66).⁶ No longer the source of life, water now poses a threat. Drownings and possible drownings are mentioned often enough in the text, but even more compelling is the overall sinister atmosphere surrounding the great river.

There seems to be a dichotomy between the sea and fresh water, detrimental to the latter, that is particular to Conrad, a true seafarer. While in Africa, he wrote a letter to Madame Poradowska, complaining of the Congo, the people, the fevers, the dysentery, and, most interestingly, feeling “homesick for the sea” (JEAN-AUBRY 1957: 172). This is not to suggest that Conrad’s sea is not in fact more perilous, terrifying, and deadly, but it is overtly so. Fresh water can, however, be far more sinister, like the lake in the heart of darkness, the devious, treacherous river, or the rapids that seem to Marlow to intensify the atmosphere of the Inferno in the shade where the spent workers are left to die.

Submerged in this aquatic Hell, Marlow suffers a ritual death: “it seemed to me as if I also were buried in a vast grave full of unspeakable secrets” (CONRAD 1989: 103). Via his association with Kurtz, he is also “numbered with the dead” (CONRAD 1989: 110) by the pilgrims. His death becomes more than symbolic when he almost succumbs to an illness consequent to his journey. But Marlow does not really have to die, because Kurtz has done that for him. In Marlow’s words, Kurtz “had stepped over the edge, while I had been permitted to draw back my hesitating foot” (CONRAD 1989: 113).

5. A PRECIOUS TRICKLE OF IVORY: TREASURE, SEA-CHANGE, KNOWLEDGE

Conrad, commenting on the origins of the *Heart of Darkness*, remarked that “it is well known that curious men go prying into all sorts of places (where they have no business) and come out of them with all kinds of spoil. This story, and one other, not in this volume, are all the spoil I brought out from the centre of Africa, where, really, I had no sort of business” (CONRAD 1960: 7-8). Treasure is in the novel viewed both as coming from the depths of the earth and expressed in terms of water. The mission of the Eldorado Exploring Expedition is to “tear treasure out of the bowels of the land” (CONRAD 1989: 61). The ivory Kurtz obtains is mostly fossil, and thus torn out of the bowels of the land as well, but it is also described in fluid terms as “a precious trickle of ivory” (CONRAD 1989: 46).

Marlow, who likewise has no business in the heart of darkness, is allowed to bring out little spoil from there. What he salvages from the depths is Kurtz. In Freudian terms, the ego descends into the depths of the unconscious to find, know, and redeem the id. Kurtz’s condition is emblematic of dwelling in the unconscious or a return to the pre-conscious state. He has regressed in all aspects of evolutionary development, both ontogenetic and phylogenetic. Returning to the animalistic, he is seen crawling on all fours. When Marlow carries him, he notices that Kurtz is “not much heavier than a child” (CONRAD 1989: 108). The most striking is his regression into the primitive. From his “noble” intentions to “civilize” the natives, Kurtz degrades into such a state of “barbarism” that to Marlow “pure, uncomplicated savagery was a positive relief” (CONRAD 1989: 99).

Kurtz proves impossible to save. Taken from the heart of darkness, he promptly

⁶ Emphasis mine.

dies, and the knowledge of his life and death is Marlow's only real spoil. Not much can be communicated back to the Intended, and Marlow finds he cannot bring himself to tell her his dying words: "The horror! The horror!" Instead, he tells her that Kurtz's last utterance was – her name. Little communication is possible between the id and the superego, the extremes of "barbarism" and "civilization". Both imagined binary extremes are equally dead. Kurtz is a living corpse, and the Intended is deathly too. Her dwelling in the "whitened sepulchre" of Brussels itself resembles a cemetery, and she is referred to as a "Shade". As her name, the only one we are given, is the Intended, and as it is Kurtz's civilizing ideas and good intentions that lead to the true horror, perhaps Marlow does not really lie, and *she is the true horror of this universe*. The novel can thus be said to deconstruct the civilized/primitive dichotomy just as it was still being constructed in order to justify colonization, and cast an especially dark shade on ideas of "civilizing missions". They are perhaps to be seen as the true horror.

Marlow obtains knowledge of Kurtz as his only treasure. Kurtz's soul, being alone in the wilderness, "looked within itself" and went "mad", and Marlow is the next that has to go "through the ordeal of looking into it" (CONRAD 1989: 108). Kurtz is the only among the "hollow white men" to achieve "true knowledge of himself" (MOSER 1957: 24), which, in Feder's words, means that he "has been man enough to face the hell within him" (STALLMAN 1955: 169). In Jungian terms, Kurtz is Marlow's, and every "civilized" man's, Shadow. Meeting with the Shadow is confronting our own inner darkness, which always means shock, though it is the crucial prerequisite of every renewal of the spirit (JUNG 1978: 18). "The 'death by water' will appear first as a real spiritual death", Drew asserts, but she insists that Marlow achieves regeneration through it (DREW 1953: 92). Kurtz is devoured by the sea-beast of the Jungian unconscious (JUNG 1978: 184-185), whereas Marlow descends into it but manages to sail through.

In Conrad's *Lord Jim*, Stein offers a theory of rebirth through water: "One thing alone can us from being ourselves cure", and that is "in the destructive element immerse".

"A man that is born falls into a dream like a man who falls into the sea. If he tries to climb out into the air as inexperienced people endeavour to do, he drowns [...] The way is to the destructive element submit yourself, and with the exertions of your hands and feet in the water make the deep, deep sea keep you up" (CONRAD 1994: 162-164).

In Conrad's or Stein's terms, both Kurtz and Marlow are immersed in the destructive element that dissolves the persona and cures from "being ourselves", but Kurtz drowns, whereas Marlow makes the sea keep him up, notwithstanding his consequent illness of body and darkness of mind. Conrad himself never fully recovered from the Congo, neither physically nor mentally, but he is reported to have said: "Before the Congo, I was just a mere animal" (JEAN-AUBRY 1957: 175). This suggests that the descent into the heart of darkness can, in Conrad's world, be viewed as a transforming, regenerative, humanizing experience, however unpleasant its consequences may be.

6. WATCH THE STEERING: RESTRAINT, NAVIGATION, WORK

Another spoil Marlow retrieves from the heart of darkness is his knowledge of the importance of what he terms "restraint". After narrating the steamer's passage by the

howling, dancing natives, Marlow asks his audience:

“You wonder I didn’t go ashore for a howl and a dance? Well, no – I didn’t. Fine sentiments, you say? Fine sentiments, be hanged! I had no time. [...] I had to watch the steering, and circumvent those snags” (CONRAD 1989: 69-70).

The recipe for controlling “savage” impulses is rendered in terms of sailing and thus controlling the waters. The African fireman in charge of the water boiler on the steamer likewise has no time for “clapping his hands and stamping his feet” because he is “hard at work” (CONRAD 1989: 70). Juxtaposed to this image of a sailor at work is that of the helmsman, who, having had “no restraint, no restraint”, is appropriately tipped overboard after his death, where the “current snatched him as though he had been a wisp of grass” (CONRAD 1989: 88). The book on sailing Marlow finds, *An Inquiry into some Points of Seamanship*, gives him solace as “something unmistakably real” in an unreal world, expressing “an honest concern for the right way of going to work” (CONRAD 1989: 71). Work is what gives one a solid footing in a fluid world.

Appropriately, Marlow never imagines Kurtz as “doing”, but as “discoursing”. His devious eloquence, “the pulsating stream of light, or the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness” (CONRAD 1989: 83) is expressed in terms of water, as he allows the fluidity of language to dissolve the restraints of common morality. Marlow, on the other hand, is restrained in all situations, and goes against the current of the river, probing carefully “trying to find the channel” while navigating. He behaves like a seasoned sailor when controlling the waters of language as well:

“While Kurtz allows nothing to check the flow of his phrases, the current of his dreams, Marlow interrupts himself constantly, to question the appropriateness of a word, to revise an image, to reject an entire interpretation” (McCLURE 1977: 311-315).

Narrating a story is akin to sailing a ship – to be done well, both necessitate restraint.

Marlow’s restraint means controlling, but not conquering the watery wilderness. A manuscript passage deleted from the published versions of *Heart of Darkness* states that comprehension of an alien world can only be achieved “by conquest – or by surrender” (McCLURE 1977: 319). McClure claims that “Marlow, committed to an ethos of self-restraint, wishes neither to dominate the Africans nor to surrender to their ways” (McCLURE 1977: 319-320). True restraint instead means taming the waters by sailing, or riding the river-demon, making the deep sea keep one up.

Kurtz “lacked restraint in the gratification of his various lusts” because “there was something wanting in him” which could not be found “under his magnificent eloquence”. Consequently, “the wilderness had found him out” and “echoed loudly within him because he was hollow at the core” (CONRAD 1989: 97). Water as the wilderness, the primitive, and prime matter, though not intrinsically evil, is ultimately hollow at the core, and presents a temptation to those who are likewise hollow at the core. Kurtz strives to fill his hollowness by indulging his insatiable appetites, and seems to Marlow finally to be “opening his mouth voraciously, as if to devour all the earth with all its mankind” (CONRAD 1989: 116).

Kurtz thus fails the specifically Conradian trial by water, fully expounded in Conrad’s *Lord Jim*. Jim becomes first mate of a ship “without ever having been tested by

those events of the sea that show in the light of day the inner worth of a man” (CONRAD 1994: 14), and when the trial does come, he fails, and spends the rest of the novel in an attempt to redeem himself, succeeding finally only in death. Kurtz surrenders to the destructive element, having tried to conquer it. Marlow, the true sailor, manages to control the waters.

Water in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* serves most ostensibly as the conduit of civilization, but is really a vessel for the unity of mankind, and a link between the “civilized” and the “primitive”. Both the civilized and the primitive worlds, land and water, are seen as ambiguous, dubious, and potentially dead, and Conrad seems to be already deconstructing this binary in its colonialist heyday.

Contact with water brings doubts as to the stability of reason and civilization. The descent into water, or rather going up the river Congo, equals the return to the roots of humanity, all life, and the earth. Water represents the carnality of mankind and particularly womankind, the basis of all life, and prime matter, but it is also the chthonic nature of matter, darkness, Hell, and death. Symbolic death by water offers the possibility of rebirth, and Conrad links it with a “trial by water” motif that is peculiar to his vision of the world. The treasure found in watery depths is the knowledge of oneself and of the necessity of controlling the passions by restraint and taming the waters by sailing – both of which coalesce in the act of narrating.

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UZVODNO TOM REKOM: SIMBOLIKA VODE U KONRADOVOM *SRCU TAME*

Rezime

Kako pokazuje komparativna analiza, voda u Konradovom *Srcu tame* je najčešće prikazana kao element koji povezuje čovečanstvo, ujedinjujući "civilizovano" i "primitivno". Može se reći da Konrad na ovaj način unapred dekonstruiše ovu binarnu opoziciju koja je dugo služila za opravdavanja kolonijalizma. Ovo je posebno vidljivo u laži koju narator izgovara – a koja se može protumačiti i kao simbolički istinita – da je poslednja Kercova reč (u zbilji "užas") bila ime Kercove izabranice, koja ga je na neki način i poslala u misiju "civilizovanja".

U romanu svaki susret sa vodom dovodi u sumnju stabilnost razuma. Plovidba uz reku Kongo, koja u mitskom smislu predstavlja silazak u vodene dubine, istovremeno je i povratak korenima čovečanstva, života i same zemlje. Voda predstavlja s jedne strane telesnost čoveka (posebno žene), osnovu života i primordijalnu materiju, a sa druge strane htonsku prirodu nepatvorene stvari, Had, pakao i smrt. Simbolička smrt kroz vodu pruža mogućnost transformacije, a Konrad je povezuje sa sopstvenim motivom "iskušenja vodom". Blago koje se može naći u vodenim dubinama je samospoznaja i kontrola nad strastima kroz uzdržavanje i rad tokom plovidbe – a oba se stapaju u pripovedačkom činu.

Ključne reči: Srce tame, Džozef Konrad, kolonijalizam, modernizam, mit/arhetip, katabasis/ne-kyia

