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FROM RENEGADE TO SACRED KING: HOW THE ENDING OF *APOCALYPSE NOW* WAS FILMED²

The paper discusses the process of filming the last section of *Apocalypse Now* (1979) directed by Francis Ford Coppola, with emphasis on major differences between the 1969 and 1975 scripts and the film itself, within the New Hollywood *auteur* context. Instead of ending in a macho manner with a devastating battle, the film features more fundamental anthropological patterns. Willard plays a more important role than Marlow in Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness*, Kurtz is more convincing and eloquent and towers as a titanic figure of the "sacred king" from Frazer's *The Golden Bough*. In the long process of shooting the final sequence, the director allowed Marlon Brando and Martin Sheen to improvise and thus bring the film plot to the essential ritual of sacrificing the king for the benefit of his people. The paper draws on film stills to demonstrate the techniques of film composition with an immediate pictorial meaning which surpass even the atmosphere of the novel.

Keywords: script versions, plot transpositions, sacred king, improvisation, graphic matches, graphic oppositions, mise-en-scène, fertility ritual, *Apocalypse Now*, *Heart of Darkness*

1. Introduction

The film *Apocalypse Now* was made in the period of Hollywood history known as New Hollywood, or the second golden age of Hollywood, which in its broader estimate spans the time between 1967 and 1982 – defined by such works as *Bonnie and Clyde* and *The Graduate* (both in 1967) on the one hand, and *One from the Heart* (1982) on the other, an enormously expensive flop which made the producers rethink the scope of directorial authority and had the return of control to the studios as its most relevant consequence (WIGLEY 2017: par. 19). The entire history of this film's conception, preparation, shooting and completion flows even out of bounds of the era which shook up so many standards of Classical Hollywood, like the hitherto carefully observed restrictions on violence, nudity, sex, profanity, drug and alcohol abuse. The New Hollywood directors did not shy away from demonstrating their skills in the application of *auteur* theory, nor did the actors of this period conceal their full immersion into the morally dubious characters

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– hence the products like *The Wild Bunch*, *Midnight Cowboy*, *The Godfather*, *Badlands*, *Taxi Driver*, *American Graffiti* and similar. However, the difficulty and complexity of the making of *Apocalypse Now* decidedly exceeds any motion picture project undertaken by Francis Ford Coppola's fellow-directors in this exuberant period of film history.

This American cinematic renaissance did not come about without any theoretical preparation, however, since it greatly benefited from the so-called *auteur* theory first launched in 1950s France, most notably by critics of the *Cahiers du cinéma* journal. According to André Bazin, a film director can be considered an *auteur* when his artistic, technical and thematic brilliance shines through his oeuvre unmistakably identifying any work as being by Renoir, Hitchcock, Welles and similar: “The *politique des auteurs* consists, in short, of choosing the personal factor in artistic creation as a standard of reference, and then assuming that it continues and even progresses front one film to the next” (BAZIN 2008: 25). In his exhaustive interpretation of Bazin's ideas, Andrew Sarris specifies a triad of requirements which those filmmakers have to meet: “The three premises of the *auteur* theory may be visualized as three concentric circles: the outer circle as technique; the middle circle, personal style; and the inner circle, interior meaning. The corresponding roles of the director may be designated as those of a technician, a stylist, and an *auteur*” (SARRIS 2008: 43). Coppola himself admitted in a 1975 interview, by which time he had achieved the status of the most popular Hollywood director, that the *auteur* theory was fine, as he had long fought for more directorial independence from the homogenising influence of the film studios, “but you have to exercise it in order to qualify, and the only way to qualify is by having earned the right to have control by turning out a series of incredibly good films. Some men have it and some men don't” (LEWIS 1997: 11).

Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness* was first serialised in 1899, then issued in book form in 1902, but it took decades until it dramatically rose in popularity, with the advent of psychologically based approaches to literature in the 1940s. The author was well aware of the power of symbolism, and he suffused this dense text with several layers of meaning, like political, colonial, race-based or mythological – given his use of the journey, probably the oldest topos in all of literature, the narrative can be interpreted as a journey into the self, a travel back into *primaeval* times, even a reverse birth. The climax of the plot occurs in the encounter of steamboat captain Marlow and ivory trader Kurtz in the deepest jungle, thousands of miles up the Congo River, when Marlow finally meets the man who had become an uncontrollable liability to the company, and simultaneously had turned into a deity of the indigenous tribe under his command. Kurtz embodies the trope of “The Man who would be King,” which centres on the fantasy that a certain white explorer (probably the first white man seen by the natives) becomes adopted as the indigenous leader, and that his word turns into the natives' moral code. The local tribespeople as a rule accept the white lord spontaneously, as he demonstrates hitherto unseen qualities, most often the ability to subject the surrounding hostile tribes to their dominion. Another colonial idea is that the local population is more submissive by nature since they have not developed much cunning, and also lack the aid of the cutting-edge weapons technology of Western provenance. This person, according to Kaori Nagai, finds himself looked up to as a protector, a champion, and sometimes as a god. Marlow, travelling up the Congo River, repeatedly hears ‘Mr Kurtz’ – his royal title in his kingdom – mentioned

and praised, to the extent that he feels ‘weary and irritable’ at the mere sound of the name (NAGAI 2009: 90).

2. The Film Plot(s)

This intercivilisational topos of an audacious white man deified by the natives in some part of the colonised world lends itself to a number of possible reworkings in the later ages, and due to its mythical narrative potential, is not only limited to the literary domain. Perhaps one of the most famous examples of intermedial adaptation in the 20th century occurs in the cinematographic version of Conrad’s novel entitled *Apocalypse Now* (1979), despite their seemingly incompatible differences in the respective plots’ geographic location, historical context and cultural references, apart from the necessary generic discrepancies between the novelistic and film arts.

The film’s plot is relatively straightforward regarding the transposition of the basic events from the novel: in 1969, Captain Benjamin Willard’s commanding officers give him a top secret assignment to assassinate Colonel Walter Kurtz, saying that he has gone insane in the jungle, succumbing to the temptation of life with the natives and losing any trace of moral conduct. He travels with a four-crew patrol boat up the fictional Nung River from South Vietnam to Cambodia, Kurtz’s base of operations. During his journey up the river, Willard seems to be going deeper into the chasm of human madness. His crew struggles to retain some sanity on the boat, which takes enemy fire (and arrows) on several occasions. When they finally arrive at Kurtz’s fortification, they find hundreds of fiercely loyal Montagnards hostile to every other armed force on the territory. Kurtz has surrounded himself with ritual powers in a miniature kingdom where briefings are held with corpses lying and hanging within arm’s length. Willard is helpless to resist being taken prisoner, and when his torture (preparation for the succession ritual) is over, Kurtz lectures him on the meaninglessness of imperial morality, power, conquest, hypocrisy of war and on the darkness a consummate warrior finds within himself. Unlike in the novel, the new king here murders the old one so as to ensure the tribe’s prosperity. In *Heart of Darkness*, Kurtz dies on the boat on the return journey down the Congo, uttering: “The horror! The horror!” (CONRAD 2000: 2010) The Colonel repeats the same words, but he is dying in his own “temple” after being butchered by Willard, which stands out as one of the major points of dissimilarity in the two works. In order to gain a better understanding of the divergent path the *Apocalypse Now* screenplay took in the long production, we first need to lay out its own development from its nascent stages and follow it through until the film’s release.

George Milius studied at the University of Southern California Film School in the 1960s, a pre-eminently important institution for many aspiring New Hollywood filmmakers, where he took on a challenge posed by his professor Irwin Blacker. He told them “exotic Hollywood stories, including one about how many filmmakers had tried to do *Heart of Darkness* – most notably Orson Welles – but that nobody had been able to lick it. I had read the book when I was seventeen and had loved it” (MILIUS 2017: par. 8). In late 1969 Warner Bros. bought the script by John Milius, with Francis Ford Coppola slated to produce and George Lucas to direct. They planned an affordable 16mm film for \$2 or \$3

million, to be shot in San Francisco, Louisiana and Thailand. Lucas became too preoccupied with his first feature-length films, *American Graffiti* (1971) and *THX 1138* (1973), and even more so with the preparation for *Star Wars* (1977), which opened the way for Coppola to direct the project, only after completing the first two parts of *The Godfather* (1972 and 1974). All in all, the script went through ten versions between its inception in 1969 and the film's release in 1979 (PELAN 2019: par. 2), and the version completed several months before shooting is most commonly labelled "Third Draft Screenplay," dated December 3, 1975. Even this text is noticeably different from the narrative and dialogues that make up the film screened at the Cannes Film Festival in May 1979. As thoroughly invented by Milius, these set pieces occur in the 1969 script and in different versions of the film, and have nothing to do with Conrad's hypotext:

- 1) the Wagner soundtracked helicopter assault on a coastal village,
- 2) the encounter with a tiger in the jungle,
- 3) the Playboy Playmates' performance to hundreds of sex-starved soldiers,
- 4) the acid nightmare of the Do Lung Bridge segment,
- 5) the reappearance of the Playmates, stranded without fuel at a Medevac station, as would feature in the longer *Redux* version of the film,
- 6) as featured in both the *Redux* and *Final Cut* versions of the film, the visit to the French plantation that emerges from the mists as if lost in time (GAZI 2022: par. 4)

Both the 1969 and 1975 scripts begin in a manner that stands far apart from the legendary superimposition of a helicopter's rotor on a ceiling fan in Willard's room in Saigon actually opening the 1979 film – they present a brutal, merciless ambush by a US army unit against the Vietnamese soldiers. The later version even includes several framing scenes in Marina del Rey in Los Angeles where Willard is reminiscing about the horrors of war now as a civilian, but they were absent from the first screenplay and from the screened film. The main events up to the crew's arrival at Kurtz's compound are almost all included in the scripts, with some rearrangements of the order: helicopter squadron commander Colonel Kharnage appears before the Playboy bunnies' show to the soldiers in the 1969 version, but in the 1975 script Willard and the crew first witness the Playboy performance,³ and then meet Colonel Kilgore in an already destroyed village. In the 1969 script, they reach the French plantation and proceed to the Do Lung outpost, but it is reversed in the 1975 script; in both versions, they steal Kharnage/Kilgore's surfing board, they face the tiger in the jungle, Willard intermittently reads Kurtz's dossier, they get under enemy attack from the shore, the US helicopters attack with "The Ride of the Valkyries" blaring on the loudspeakers, and there is a lot of napalm used immediately after the squadron raid on the village. The filming process protracted from March 1976 to May 1977, and apart from the fact that the 1969 script was written by Milius, and the 1975 script by Milius and Coppola, Willard's voiceover narration is for the largest part the work of Michael Herr, who was hired for the job by the director in 1978, on the heels of the success of his Vietnam war correspondence *Dispatches* (1977).

³ The Playmates fit in well with the absurdity and emptiness of the Vietnam War, since their lewdly sexual dancing only provokes chaos among the all-male crowd and perverts the idea of a fertility ritual. The ritual with a true purpose will take place outside the circle of Western civilisation – in Kurtz's very compound.

What differs the most across the two scripts and the film is the sequence of events in Kurtz's jungle compound far behind the official theatre of war, and it merits closer attention as an illustration of the complex process of harmonising several layers of adaptation – the coloniser going mad in the jungle, the narrative's transposition from the Congo to the Vietnam War, the loss even of the semblance of the "Enlightenment" project, the intrusion of drug and rock'n'roll culture into the invading army's personnel, and the anthropological lessons learned by the main character from the insane Kurtz. In the 1969 script, Kurtz presciently tells Willard that he knows what his mission is all about, and takes the boatmen prisoner temporarily. He goes on to explain his conversion to Willard, because he has learned the value of Far Eastern patience and contentment with whatever poverty they need to suffer. In several instances Kurtz professes their undeviating obedience to God's will and the readiness to meet the apocalypse. Willard has succumbed to his fanaticism so much that he does not assassinate him although Kurtz offers him the opportunity. Instead, he joins the Colonel in the final battle against the Viet Cong, who are described as "the despoiling forces of evil" (MILIUS 1969: 121). Kurtz's "warriors of heaven" engage in "the twilight of the gods" (MILIUS 1969: 121). A slaughter ensues in which many Kurtz's men delight and scream, using every weapon at their disposal in the enemy's charge, from bayonets to napalm. At his last stand, Kurtz wields his rifle as a club, like "David Crockett at the Alamo" (MILIUS 1969: 128). He disappears in the smoke of an explosion, and soon the battle is over, seemingly won by the Montagnards. When US helicopters arrive to help them, Willard is the first to fire all his ammunition at them, "laughing maniacally," inciting the other comrades to do the same, as he has clearly lost the final shreds of allegiance to his superiors and found his true self in the jungle. The early commentator William Hagen thoughtfully claims: "Coppola was quite dissatisfied with the conception of Willard in the original script. Although Milius claims that his script was not political, Coppola saw the whole thing as a 'political comic strip' up to and including the end" (HAGEN 1981: 49).

In the 1975 version of the narrative, Clean dies before the patrol boat arrives at the French plantation; when they get close to Kurtz's base, Chief is killed by a spear in an attack. In the compound itself, they face hundreds of Montagnards with painted bodies and faces standing on canoes. Moonby, a black Australian deserter, speaks highly of Kurtz: "That man has enlarged my mind" (MILIUS and COPPOLA 1975: 112). The leader, tall and powerful, but very ill from a stomach wound, wearing only remnants of a US uniform and a loincloth, is expecting them among rebels' shrunken heads stuck on poles. The previously sent assassin, Captain Colby, also supports Kurtz's grand plan to repel the Vietnamese forces. Kurtz sees through Willard's ruse and he soon convinces him to change sides, to the utter amazement of patrolmen Chef and Lance. In the headquarters, the wounded Kurtz talks to Willard about the futility of war, and yet he announces the beautiful air strike that night, because "Total war [...] It's beautiful [...] Trust me" (MILIUS and COPPOLA 1975: 125). The Colonel adamantly plans on imitating a god by calling in a napalm attack on the "savages" while Kurtz's men are admiring the transformed Willard and even bow before him. Utter destruction follows in a battle of napalm, molten metal and thousands of screaming soldiers, and in one moment, having fired all the bullets, Kurtz crawls into the jungle on all fours, only to be picked up by Willard and put into the

patrol boat. Soon he speaks his last words, from Conrad's novel: "The horror, the horror," and expires. The men on the boat fire at the approaching US helicopters, the scene fades in, and Willard is now finishing his tale in Marina del Rey. Years later, he visits Kurtz's widow in California and avoids telling her the truth; like Marlow, he lies that Kurtz's last words were addressed to her.

3. Meeting the Cinematic Kurtz

This brings us to the cinematographic iteration of the encounter between Willard and Kurtz, which differs fundamentally in certain key aspects of Willard's obedience and determination from both screenplays: on the day of the boat's arrival, the still absent Kurtz orders that Willard should be rolled into mud and tied up, before getting an audience with him in the temple used as headquarters. Kurtz weighs much more than in the book or the scripts, not bearing too much resemblance to the character described as gaunt, and in the film he is suffering from malaria, at least Willard surmises so. Their conversation takes place in an almost complete darkness, and Kurtz performs what appear to be ritual ablations of his shaved head, with his face head-on only a few times in the scene. Unlike in the scripts, he does not consider Willard a fellow-assassin, but "an errand boy, sent by the clerks from the grocery store to collect the bill" (*APOCALYPSE NOW* 1:53:47–1:54:01), so he has him tied in a bamboo cage. The American photojournalist intimates that Kurtz has some plans for Willard as soon as he left him alive, and that Willard could give to the world a satisfactory explanation of the Colonel's grand project. In the rainy night, a war-painted Kurtz comes to Willard, tied to a fence, and throws Chef's severed head in his lap to test his mental strength. Willard then spends days in the Colonel's direct presence, absorbing his lessons and having moral qualms whether to terminate him or not. He also reads T.S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men" out loud, an action not included in either script – perhaps Kurtz identifies with Eliot's spokesman, who will forever stay in the limbo of inefficacy, "barred even from crossing the river immediately into death's kingdom of Hell" (GILLIS 1961: 467). The cinematic Kurtz delivers a long, poignant speech on horror and moral terror as the necessary friends of man – if not, they turn into his enemies. He tells a gut-wrenching story of how his former US Army unit inoculated children in a village for polio, but the enemy came in and hacked off every single vaccinated arm. He wept in shock, but also realised that such men killed without feeling, passion or judgement, and with ten divisions of those soldiers he would win the war easily. Willard understands that Kurtz wants to be ritually murdered, to go like a soldier, so he sneaks back into the temple with a war-painted face, liquidates a guard and massacres Kurtz with a large machete. Simultaneously, the Montagnards sacrifice a water buffalo, chopping the animal to pieces. The Colonel's last words remain the same as in Conrad and the 1975 script. All the tribespeople bow before the new leader, who drops the weapon, carries Kurtz's writings, takes Lance with him, and departs downstream on the patrol boat. Kurtz is left dead in the temple, and Willard turns off the radio, not calling in an air strike. The film abstains from showing a spectacularly massive final battle and ends on a far less destructive note than the scripts specify.

It is evident that the final sequence's tone and actions come visibly closer to Conrad's original than to either script considered, and that even the 1975 text shows dozens of discrepancies when set against the film version, whose principal photography was fin-

ished in May 1977. Obviously the filming process demanded changes on a daily basis, especially in the last part, which required events more sublime than a half-crazed Willard who bonds together with Kurtz and fights with all his strength against the Vietnamese, but also fires at American helicopters soon afterwards. The subsequently added voiceover narration makes possible, according to Brooks Riley, “a far more meaningful character interaction between Kurtz and Willard, as in the Conrad novel, long before the two meet face to face. Through it, we are privy to Willard’s changing attitudes toward Kurtz and the consequent changes in himself” (RILEY 2012: par. 12). Like in *Heart of Darkness*, Willard, as narrator, has prepared the audience for Kurtz so much that the Colonel requires very few words of introduction. Even before he reaches the Inner Station, Marlow has listened to so many reports or hearsay about Kurtz that a spectral identity rises in his imagination:

“The wilderness had patted him on the head, and, behold, it was like a ball – an ivory ball; it had caressed him, and – lo! – he had withered; it had taken him, loved him, embraced him, got into his veins, consumed his flesh, and sealed his soul to its own by the inconceivable ceremonies of some devilish initiation. He was its spoiled and pampered favourite. Ivory? I should think so. Heaps of it, stacks of it” (CONRAD 2000: 1993–94).

The analogy between the novel’s and the film’s Kurtz lies in their exceptional skill in the respective trades – the former is the Company’s finest ivory collector, and the latter is one of the most skilled officers in all of the US Special Forces, a thoroughbred warrior. He could have been overwhelmed by the fusion of his own military leadership with the fanatical loyalty of the motley group of Montagnards, who hailed from all the warring sides and made up an isolated commune in the dense forest. The surroundings themselves seem to exert an intuitive supernatural power onto the boat crew in both cases. In Conrad the boat’s approach is likened to a beetle’s crawling:

“For me it crawled towards Kurtz – exclusively; but when the steam-pipes started leaking we crawled very slow. The reaches opened before us and closed behind, as if the forest had stepped leisurely across the water to bar the way for our return. We penetrated deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness. It was very quiet there” (CONRAD 2000: 1983).

Willard’s voiceover in the 1975 script follows this motif in a rhetorical fashion as closely as possible in the screenwriting medium: “We moved deeper and deeper into the jungle. It was very quiet there. It was like wandering on a prehistoric planet, an unknown world... where the men thought they crawled to, I don’t know. For me, we crawled toward Kurtz – exclusively” (MILIUS and COPPOLA 1975: 101).

4. The Process of Filming the Finale

The section of the film set in Kurtz’s compound lasts for about 40 minutes, counting from the patrol boat’s arrival to its departure down the river, and it roughly corresponds to the third of the three parts of Conrad’s novel; in the fiction, they first meet a deranged Russian trader delighted by Kurtz’s ideas and dominance in the jungle, who occupies a not insignificant portion of the text, perhaps influencing Marlow to adopt some principles of loyalty to the forest overlord. His cinematic counterpart, the US photojournalist (Dennis Hopper), is allotted even more time while he explains the Colonel’s grand

vision: “We are all his children...” (*APOCALYPSE NOW* 1:42:49–1:42:56) and quoting Kipling and Eliot randomly. He opposes the claims that Kurtz is insane, despite a number of heads and corpses lying strewn on the ground, and during Willard’s test, he tells him that Kurtz has plans for him (1:55:16–1:55:18), which does not happen in the Russian’s discourse in *Heart of Darkness*. The journalist also talks about the Colonel’s dialectics, the either-or principle (2:02:10–2:02:32), implying that he does not live by the percentage (perhaps even truer of Conrad’s Kurtz after establishing himself as a god to the indigenous people and severing his ties to the financial world). It all hints at the probability that Coppola’s version of Marlow will have an even more momentous task to accomplish in his particular narrative. The motivational mechanism makes sense, but we need to bear in mind the troublesome history of the shooting of this film, and the almost endless series of mishaps that befell Coppola’s crew, like multiple refusals of the preferred actors to take part, the recasting of Harvey Keitel, the delays, the cost overruns, the typhoon that destroyed an entire set, and the unpredictability of superstar Marlon Brando.

Hired for a hefty check of \$3.5 million for four weeks’ shooting, Brando arrived on set unprepared – about 90 pounds overweight, an appearance impossible for a jungle-starved dying man, also unfamiliar with the novel, and quite adamant to keep his hair on. Since it was impossible to find a fitting uniform for a man of that weight, the director and the cinematographer (Vittorio Storaro) decided to shoot him from the waist up, almost always in a dark shadow, while he was wearing loosely-fitting black pajamas. Coppola thought that Kurtz should be played exactly as Conrad had depicted him. Brando disagreed, thinking that such a person would be out of place in a contemporary film. They analysed the role for days on end, “trying to determine what sort of individual the Colonel was, how he was driven around the bend, what made him tick” (KANFER 2008: 354). Moreover, it turned out that Brando had actually not read the novel, but after a few days’ persuasion by the director, he appeared with a clean-shaven head looking more like the novel character, confessing that he had lied to Coppola about his reading. Storaro assisted in the lighting aspect and created an additional black shadow in the inoculation speech where Brando was in a protracted close-up shot for several minutes; the cinematographer said of the technique and its effect: “It’s me in front of the camera, creating the black shadow so that bits of him can emerge, like truth emerging from matter” (KANFER 2008: 355). The encounter of Marlow and Kurtz does not manifest such a high level of obedience to the god-king of the tribe, as Kurtz is carried on a stretcher to the boat and is in poor health:

“His covering had fallen off, and his body emerged from it pitiful and appalling as from a winding-sheet. I could see the cage of his ribs all astir, the bones of his arm waving. It was as though an animated image of death carved out of old ivory had been shaking its hand with menaces at a motionless crowd of men made of dark and glittering bronze” (CONRAD 2000: 2002).

Conrad’s Kurtz manages to get off the boat during a night’s rest, and he probably serves as the model for his namesake in the 1975 script to do the same at the end of the battle. Fortunately, Coppola had enough instinct to exclude that part from the completed film and give the Colonel a more honourable death. In the novel, his death is an objective cor-

relative of numerous narrative strands which imply regression (spatial, temporal, anthropological) and showcase his bestiality, whereas in the film Kurtz dies a far more dignified death, along the lines of the ancient sacrifice of the sacred king, who embodies the dying and reviving god of vegetation. Apart from Eliot's poetry, there are additional modernist motifs with the power to influence the plot: Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* (1920) and James George Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (abridged 1922) do not function as mere props, but as Kurtz's motivation to induct Willard into the ritual as the sacrificer.

In Chapter 24, "The Killing of the Divine King," Frazer writes about the imminent death of a god-man, who is just an incarnation of a more powerful deity. Since the course of nature depends on this semideity's life and health, the tribe should avoid catastrophes in the best way possible. They adhere to this logic: "The man-god must be killed as soon as he shows symptoms that his powers are beginning to fail, and his soul must be transferred to a vigorous successor before it has been seriously impaired by the threatened decay" (FRAZER 1993: 265). While the ruler's soul is still relatively strong, it should continue living in a more powerful man's body, and the natural world thus would not fall into chaos and decay. Much of the anxious commotion among Kurtz's tribespeople in *Heart of Darkness* can be explained through this general rule, and the following site-specific observation contextualises the fiction in reality: "The people of Congo believed, as we have seen, that if their pontiff, the Chitomé, were to die a natural death, the world would perish, and the earth, which he alone sustained by his power and merit, would immediately be annihilated" (FRAZER 1993: 266). In Weston's study, the old Fisher King has been made impotent through a thigh wound, and the questing knight needs to ask him the right question; one part of the quest includes the terrible temptations in the Chapel Perilous, not unlike Kurtz's Cambodian compound. This tradition, in an extension of Frazer, also rests on the myths of dying and reviving gods of vegetation from the Near East (WESTON 1993: 109). In Conrad's fiction, a woman whose aspect is "wild and gorgeous," (CONRAD 2000: 2003) adorned with various items of brass and glass, performs a mute farewell to Kurtz; she is probably the consort of the sacred king now being taken away from the tribe.

Conrad's Kurtz speaks only on a few occasions, and when he does, he is the throes of a consuming illness, so he utters disjointed sentences about the ivory, his great plans and the hate he feels for the manager, but he is not nearly as eloquent as Milius and Coppola's character. The brevity of his allotted time is efficiently compensated through the interaction of Marlow and the "pilgrims" on deck, and the Russian harlequin who adores Kurtz and interprets him for Marlow. Obviously the idea of the demigod's sacrifice, together with Brando's towering presence, shifted the length of screen time in the Colonel's favour. Milius' planned ending was not to Coppola's liking, being too macho and without a credible moral resolution; he decided to take it back to *Heart of Darkness* and mate the script with the novel and whatever happened to him [Coppola] in the jungle (*HEARTS OF DARKNESS* 27:30–28:13). Perhaps the director's own emotions integrated into the film give it a higher level of immediacy and make up an additional level of reference when compared to Conrad's text. After the May 1976 typhoon forced them to take a break, Coppola realised that he could not use the Milius script for the ending because it did not express his own ideas (*HEARTS OF DARKNESS* 33:40–33:51). Having hit so

many obstacles with Brando's lack of preparation and frequent ignorance of some other principal actors of the scene's meaning and structure, he decided to "film irrationally for the next three weeks [...] if I did improvisations with Marlon Brando and Martin Sheen, would I at that time have more magical and telling moments than if I just closed down for three weeks and write a structure that they'd then act?" (*HEARTS OF DARKNESS* 1:21:05–1:21:30) He opted for improvisation, and the inoculation speech was pieced together from an almost endless series of Brando's monologues, often without any textual relation to the script, by editor Richard Marks' admission: "I don't think there was ever a clear-cut answer. Not that Francis didn't write an ending; he wrote them, but they weren't necessarily the ones that were filmed, and the ones that were filmed were changed a thousand times in the cutting room" (LOBRUTTO 1991: 184). Although almost nothing went according to plan in the shooting of the film's finale, the crew successfully inched closer to the primordial ritual which eclipses even the palpable foreboding of Conrad's fiction. Wishing to achieve the exhilarating episodes of Milius and the psychological dimension of Conrad's Marlow, Coppola tirelessly altered the scenes on a daily basis in collaboration with the actor who had the virtual veto over the role. They worked out the character, almost in front of the cameras. Coppola rescripted some scenes after viewing the footage of those very scenes (HAGEN 1981: 51).

We will illustrate the representative power of the film medium in the last sequence of *Apocalypse Now* through some visual examples of the dynamic between Willard and Kurtz, the old demigod and the young demigod in this myth-suffused process. In the replacement of the old king with the new, certain cinematic techniques convey considerably more meaning through their spectacular quality and exhibit an advantage of showing over telling, even if the storyteller is a writer of Conrad's stature. During the first conversation of Willard and Kurtz, the latter remains in the deep shadow for a conspicuously long amount of time, with his mysterious voice filling the *mise-en-scène*, only to emerge frontally at the end, like a tiger ready to pounce on his prey:



Fig. 1. Kurtz as part of the darkness (1:50:29)



Fig. 2. Kurtz's ablution (1:51:43)



Fig. 3. Kurtz emerges frontally (1:53:45)

Besides the frightening black colour, whose intended meaning was the depth of human unconsciousness (BURUM and PIZELLO 2017: par. 10), some details are worth noting, like the mildly symmetrical opposition between Kurtz's head and Willard's shadow in Fig.2, as the announcement of the replacement to come. We witness the visually presented bond of the two men through the Jungian concept of the Shadow, and Coppola also suggests a totemic identification between hunter and prey – a connection developed dramatically by intercutting his murder with the ritualistic slaughter of the water buffalo (KINDER 1980: 18).

The strange relation between them becomes more explicit when they face each other in the rain, while Willard is being prepared for the ensuing task (Fig. 4 and 5). Their heads are shown in close-up, and the faces are covered in “masks” made of mud and war paint respectively, implying a sort of double identity of both:

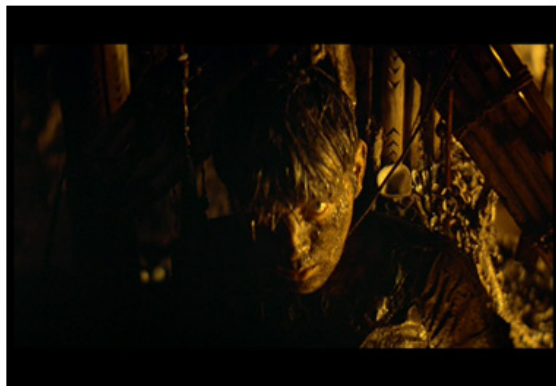


Fig. 4. Willard tied to a cage (1:58:10)



Fig. 5. Kurtz facing Willard (1:58:19)

Such frequent close-ups of the protagonists' heads deepen the confrontational and perennial implications of the society where the sacred king rules by strict, even inhumane means; Marsha Kinder observes "the chain of head images that run through the film. The decapitated heads are part of the original story, but they are intensified visually through direct presentation and dramatically by making one of the victims a companion of Willard's" (KINDER 1980: 17). There is a series of dissolving shots while Willard is recovering from the test, and they can signal Kurtz's eventual departure; the numerous stone idols pictorially indicate Kurtz's function and the camera then continues with close-ups on Willard as successor. This is a pair of shots just before Kurtz starts reading the emblematic poem "The Hollow Men":

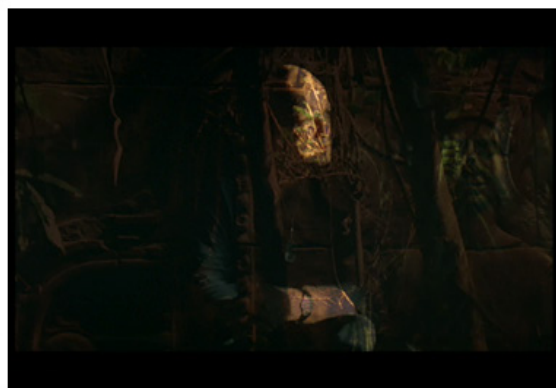


Fig. 6. Kurtz dissolving (2:00:49)

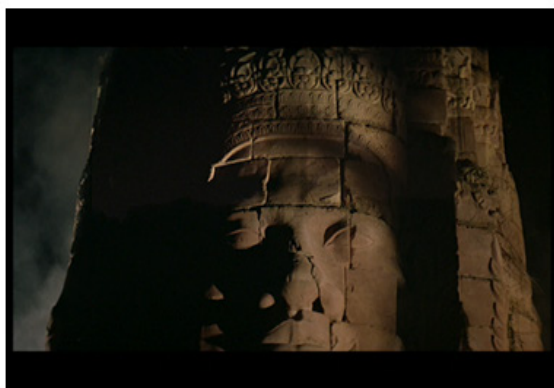


Fig. 7. An idol appearing (2:01:38)

Perhaps the deepest anthropological moment in the film, Kurtz's explanation why he turned away from Western civilisation, received the suitable context of utter darkness around the speaker's figure, when only parts of his face and straying gaze illuminate the blackness:



Fig. 8. Kurtz speaking about his conversion (2:05:13)

As the moment of the old man-god's demise is getting closer, the shots connecting Kurtz and Willard are in ever closer proximity; soon we can see the fusion of two sacrificial offerings, which proves that in the vegetation rituals both animal and royal blood ultimately play the same role of fertilisation (Fig. 9):



Fig. 9. Kurtz and the water buffalo (2:09:18)

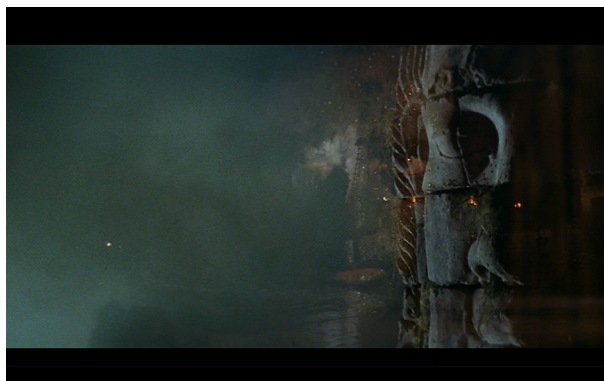


Fig. 10. Willard (centre) dissolves into an idol (2:20:17)

5. Conclusion

When the new sacred king ascends the throne, all the Montagnards kneel before him, but he immediately departs with a confused Lance, after an act in which not only the two of them, but the entire tribe and the land with them have experienced a rebirth, the renewal of powers. This timeless deification gives the film a more fundamental and meaningful conclusion than the novel has to offer; instead of ending “with a whimper,” like *Heart of Darkness*, the film bridges epochs by drawing parallels between Vietnam War participants and the ancient ritual of sacrificing a divine king for the tribe’s survival. Although Coppola did not plan this ending at the outset, through an extremely arduous process of numerous takes and improvisations, he might intuitively have reached the conclusion that holds the deepest meaning of the community’s eternal life through the death and resurrection of the demigod. The film would never have fulfilled this momentous anthropological potential if the intuition of the frenzied director and the stubbornness of his superstar had not deviated from Milius’ original script and creatively combined into a virtuoso return to the spirit of Conrad’s original narrative.

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Sergej L. Macura

OD ODMETNIKA DO SVETOG KRALJA:
KAKO JE SNIMLJEN ZAVRŠETAK APOKALIPSE DANAS

Rezime

Rad polazi od osnovnih kontekstualnih napomena o uticaju autorske teorije na Frensisu Forda Kopolu tokom perioda tzv. Novog Holivuda i snimanja filma *Apokalipsa danas* (1979). Topos koji baštini od Konradovog romana *Srce tame* (1899) zasniva se na došljaku koji postaje neupitni kralj plemena urođenika, s tim da u filmu postoje drugi brojni slojevi značenja i dešavanja, kao što su Vijetnamski rat, surferska i hipi kultura, drogiranje i razne ispraznosti postmodernog doba. Dok je pukovnik Kerc u prvom scenariju iz 1969. godine otišao u divljinu diveći se dalekoistočnoj trpeljivosti, u konačnoj verziji filma odluku je donio kad je ugledao hrpu odsječenih dječjih ruku samo zato što su primili zapadnu vakcinu. Kapetan Vilard ima važniju ulogu nego Marlou u Konradovom romanu, a Kerc je ubjedljiviji i elokventniji i izrasta u titansku figuru „svetog kralja“ iz Frejzerove *Zlatne grane*. Režiser je u dugom procesu snimanja završne sekvence dozvolio Marlonu Brandu i Martinu Šinu da improvizuju i tako dovedu radnju filma do suštinskog obreda žrtvovanja kralja zarad boljitka njegovog naroda, što sižejno transformiše glavne junake

u eksponente milenijumima stare paradigme božanskog kralja. U radu se na fotogramima prikazuju tehnike filmske kompozicije koje odišu neposrednim slikovnim značenjem i nadmašuju čak i atmosferu Konradovog romana.

Ključne riječi: verzije scenarija, transpozicije, sveti kralj, improvizacija, grafička poklapanja, grafička suprotstavljanja, mizanscen, ritual plodnosti, *Apokalipsa danas*, *Srce tame*