

Bodies of Water in *Heart of Darkness* and *In the Skin of a Lion*

It was the work of the first day to create water (Genesis 1:2), and the work of the second day to divide it (Gen. 1:6). Water is created before light, and before there is form, and it unites heaven and earth. The creation of a firmament that separates ‘the waters from the waters’ (Gen. 1:6) is the separation of earth from the heavens, and precedes the formation of land (Gen. 1:9) and the appearance of flora (Gen. 1:11) and fauna (Gen. 1:20). And though it is the source from which all life originates, water is also God’s weapon of choice when He seeks to destroy all that has come into being (Gen. 7:17-22).

There is no more symbolic element than water. By virtue of its seeming simplicity and ubiquity it is taken up as a powerful talisman by artists spanning centuries, and put to any number of purposes. Gaston Bachelard argues that this is due in large part to its neutrality. In its original state water ‘offers itself as a natural symbol of purity’ (Bachelard 133), but is adaptable to endless metaphor and symbolic usage by virtue of an unparalleled aptitude for synthesis.

As Bachelard puts it, water ‘assimilates so many substances... sugar and salt, with equal facility’ (93). This leaves water susceptible to having its meaning co-opted by surrounding elements and actors, so that though it retains its symbolic power in and of itself, its qualities may differ widely dependent on circumstance.

Joseph Conrad employs an image in the early part of *Heart of Darkness* that depicts the dilemma. Faced with a map in a shop window, Charlie Marlow notes how the ‘blank spaces on the earth’ (11)¹ of his boyhood maps have become filled in ‘with rivers and lakes and names’ (12), and is ‘charmed’ (12) by

¹ All page references for *Heart of Darkness* refer to the Norton edition of 1988.

a river which he describes as ‘resembling an immense snake uncoiled’ (12). The image is Edenic—recalling an untouched land marked on the map only by bodies of water—and simultaneously undermined by the image of the river as a snake, which brings with it implications of corruption.

Himself a sailor, much of Joseph Conrad’s literary work is concerned with the sea and those who travel it. If *Heart of Darkness* is marked out not only by its popularity but also, according to Ian Watt, its status as ‘not only the first but also the only symbolic work by Conrad’ (Conrad 1988, ix-x), we should expect that the writer considered ‘unchallengeable among English writers on the sea’ (Kemp 196) would make supreme use of the most symbolic of all elements.

In Conrad’s novel, his protagonist is inextricably bound up with water. Marlow is the embodiment of Conrad’s assertion that ‘[w]ater is friendly to man.... And of all the elements this is the one to which men have always been prone to trust themselves’ (from *The Mirror of the Sea* (1905), quoted in Conrad 1988, 201).

The venue in which his story is relayed to the narrator is the swollen Thames leading out to the boundless sea: an ‘interminable waterway’ (7), and it is told to men who feel between them ‘the bond of the sea’ (7). Conrad makes clear the notion that for these men ‘home is always with them—the ship—and so is their country—the sea’ (9). Marlow is drawn to Africa by the river—‘fascinating—deadly—like a snake’ (14)—and when he gets there it is to be his mode of transport and his guide. Indeed, all of Marlow’s hardships follow his failing to heed the water’s warning to him as he arrives in Africa and finds the coast ‘bordered by dangerous surf, as if Nature herself had tried to warn off intruders; in and out of rivers, streams of death in life’ (17). At the sight of a French gunship

shelling the coast seemingly without purpose, Marlow feels 'a touch of insanity' (17) and must turn to 'the voice of the surf... like the speech of a brother. It was something natural, that had its reason, that had a meaning' (17).

Marlow's journey is characterised by the competing metaphors of the snake swallowing him (towards Kurtz) and the river pushing him out (towards his 'home': the sea). Having ignored the warning at the coast Marlow find that the river has claimed what was to be his transport. Repairs to the vessel take months, stranding Marlow amid the 'dance of death and trade', carried out in 'a still and earthy atmosphere as of an overheated catacomb' (17). The inclusion of the adjective 'earthy' is pointed, marking this as other than Marlow's natural environment. Separated from the water (both the sea, as he is now inland, and the river which he is unable to travel) Marlow begins to lose himself amid the broken machines, ineffectual industrial activity and meaningless abuse of the land and its people (which he sarcastically terms 'The work!' (20)).

The passage of the novel that finds Marlow landlocked at the Company station is characterised by tragi-comic meaninglessness. The abandoned materials, the purposeless digging of holes, the brick-maker rendered impotent through lack of materials, and the inexplicable impossibility of attaining 'rivets, by Heaven! Rivets' (30) has a Beckettian futility apparent to Marlow and the reader alike. Trapped amid it all Marlow falls into something like a depression and resolves to say 'Hang!—and let things slide' (33).

Once the vessel is repaired the going is slow and beset on all sides by dangers. Moving upriver is likened to 'travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world' (35), and as well as moving quite literally against the flow of the river, Marlow moves against its will, his progress hampered by waters 'treacherous and

shallow' (39) and leaking steam-pipes. Conversely, we witness the peristaltic motion of the snake's swallowing: Marlow has the impression that the wilderness 'opened before us and closed behind, as if the forest had stepped leisurely across the water to bar the way for our return' (37).

The river is never cooperative in Marlow's journey towards Kurtz and into 'the heart of darkness' (37). Even as an accomplished sailor Marlow remarks that '[y]ou lost your way on that river as you would in a desert', and floated about blindly 'till you thought yourself bewitched and cut off for ever from everything you had known' (35). Marlow's unfamiliarity with the water here, to the extent that he likens it to an expanse of desert (to common thinking its direct opposite) is resultant of a mixture of things. He is still failing to interpret correctly the river's warnings to him about the unnatural direction of his progress: he is moving back in time, and towards darkness, both of which the living water finds abhorrent. Secondly, we see here the beginning of the water itself being effectively 'charmed' by being stilled and mixed with darkness.

Though he commonly refrains from notions of 'imaginary matter' (Bachelard 101), Gaston Bachelard sustains his thesis on water's peerless facility for combination by introducing the idea that 'night' (or, for our purpose, darkness) is another material with which water might mix. This is particularly the case, he suggests, where it is unmoving. Whereas 'running water, gushing water, is primitively *living water*. It is this life that remains attached to its substance which accomplishes the purification' (141). Water that is still and lifeless therefore can be more easily contaminated. Thus, '[i]n many narratives, accursed places have at their center a lake of shadows and horror' (101). This lake is indeed present in *Heart of Darkness*, situated some small distance from

Kurtz's camp, and is prefigured in these moments of stillness on the journey upriver, which Marlow says 'did not in the least resemble a peace' (Conrad 36). He describes it as 'the stillness of an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention' (36), and though the sentence has been criticised as circuitous and obfuscatory it gets at the incomprehensibility of what Marlow finds he is faced with. This darkness-contaminated water is the Nietzschean abyss, which whilst you stare into it 'looked at you with a vengeful aspect' (36).

Marlow is forced to face something on the river, his journey becoming as much a 'journey within' (per Albert Guerard²) as a physical voyage. Here we come across the idea of the river as allegorical spectrum. As we have seen, Conrad introduces the idea of the river as a chronological spectrum, with the journey upriver depicted as a movement back in time. We can also read the river's length as representative of other things: darkness (at its origin) to light; or as a figuring of the range of human experience.

This last is problematic in that whilst we can safely place Kurtz at one end of the spectrum—a madman subsumed by darkness—what are we to oppose him with? Conrad's depiction of Kurtz's wilderness as 'damp earth... impenetrable night' (62) is certainly in stark opposition to his characterisation of Europe as a 'whited sepulchre' (13), but which is preferable: a darkness which is richly alive or a dead, blank whiteness? The Company, as representatives of the 'civilised' world, take up their place substantially further down the river and down the spectrum from Kurtz, but to regard their maladroitness and disastrous effect on the land and its people as preferable is not palatable to the reader either. And where are we to place Marlow on this spectrum? As he moves further

² Guerard's essay 'The Journey Within' is reprinted in Conrad 1988, 243-50.

towards Kurtz he certainly finds himself affected by the darkness too ('I had turned to the wilderness' (62)), but not irredeemably, as is the case with Kurtz.

The model of the river as spectrum is further complicated by passages that confuse its geography and emphasise its separateness. In his other Congo story—'An Outpost of Progress'—Conrad writes that the 'river seemed to come from nowhere and flow nowhither. It flowed through a void' (Moore 22); whilst he does not go quite as far in *Heart of Darkness* we cannot ignore Marlow's impression that at times all that seemed real was the steamer and 'a misty strip of water perhaps two feet broad' and that '[t]he rest of the world was nowhere.... Just nowhere. Gone, disappeared' (41). This makes difficult any clear conception of the river's physical length as a linear spectrum.

Fred Solinger provides a possible resolution by arguing that for Marlow the river represents a 'liminal space' within which he undergoes a kind of transformation. For Solinger, the liminal space is 'marked by disorientation', an 'other place' which has 'few or none of the attributes of the past' (Solinger 62). In Marlowe's case we can say both that he is in uncharted Africa instead of Europe, but more potently that he has been separated from his *true* home—the sea—by environmental conditions he does not understand and which seem to him like 'a desert' in which he is 'bewitched and cut off for ever from everything [he] had known' (35). Here Marlow is faced with some truths about darkneses inherent in human nature that he is challenged to accept. There is every chance that he will emerge on the other side as another Kurtz, surrendering himself to the wilderness and to his own impulses. Instead Marlow differentiates himself from Kurtz by saying that '[Kurtz] had made the last stride, he had stepped over the edge, while I had been permitted to draw back my hesitating foot' (Conrad 69).

This is not to say that Marlow is unchanged by his experience, for that is not the case³, only that something ‘permitted’ him not to be swallowed up by the darkness as Kurtz had been. The difference between Marlow and Kurtz is that whilst the former, as I have shown, is strongly affiliated in the text with water, the latter is a man of earth and fire. On first sight, Marlow thinks him an ‘image of death carved out of old ivory’, and is struck by ‘the fire of his eyes’ (59). Referring to a distinction made by Sophia Antonovna in Conrad’s *Under Western Eyes*, Albert Guerard says that Kurtz ‘burns whilst the others rot’ (Conrad 1988, 243). He is drawn ‘towards the gleam of fires’ (Conrad 65), and is depicted as being ‘hollow at the core’ (58). It is this void which he seeks to fill by opening his mouth in ‘a weirdly voracious aspect as though he had wanted to swallow all the air, all the earth, all the men before him’ (59) – but, notably, not the water.

In making assessment of Kurtz’s decline, Marlow says that his soul ‘had looked within itself and, by Heavens I tell you, it had gone mad’ (65). Here we see the return of the image of the Nietzschean abyss, which is mirrored by Kurtz’s choice to live away from the flowing river in the ‘villages on the lake’ (56). This lake, to which he brought ‘thunder and lightning’ (56), is Conrad’s rendering of Bachelard’s ‘lake of shadows and horror’. By virtue of its relative stillness it has been tainted by the surrounding darkness (or ‘night’ as Bachelard prefers), and in this way it mirror’s Kurtz’s poisoned soul.

For his part Kurtz misunderstands his own relationship with the river. In his choice to live apart from it and be drawn to ‘the gleam of fires’ (65) he has forsaken its purifying properties, but (perhaps owing to his deluded

³ Solinger provides ample analysis of the differences in Marlow pre and post Africa, the exact nature of which are surplus to requirement for my purpose.

megalomania, and perhaps his fear of what the river symbolises) he goes further and seeks to claim dominion over the river. Both the reader and Marlow see this in the way he talks: “My Intended, my ivory, my station, my river, my...”

everything belonged to him’ (49). Marking the river’s terminus at the camp there are heads on sticks positioned to face inland. They can serve no other purpose than to prop up Kurtz’s delusion that all things—the people, the ivory, and even the river—flow towards him.

In fact Conrad places him at the extreme end of the river to serve a different symbolism. As they near the camp, one of the final obstacles Marlow and his crew must navigate is a series of sandbanks in the middle of the river ‘seen just under the water exactly as a man’s backbone’ (44-45). We might think this another instance of snake imagery, but as Conrad is very specific about it being a ‘*man’s backbone*’ it couples in the mind a few pages later with the description of Kurtz as ‘very little more than a voice’ (48), with the description of Kurtz as skeletal, and of course the heads on sticks, to invite us to see the river as part of a body. And though Kurtz seeks to refute the river’s claim on him, turning to darkness and toward the fires, referring to it as a possession, and attempting to fill the hollowness within him with ivory and ‘all the air, all the earth, all the men before him’ (59), the river does not so easily give up Kurtz.

In his role as an emissary of water it is Marlow’s fate to reclaim Kurtz for the river. Ultimately he comes to Kurtz as he crawls towards a ‘fiend-like’ figure waving his arms above a fire (64), and though the man is weakened and defeated Marlow marvels at how he has ‘kicked himself loose of the earth... kicked the very earth to pieces’ (65). Kurtz’s destiny, it seems, is either the fire he crawls towards or water, as represented by Marlow. As Marlow prepares to take Kurtz

away from the darkness Conrad gives us the reaction of the people who had come to follow him. Led by the 'barbarous and superb woman' (67) they come down to 'the very brink of the stream' (66) but no further. They cry out, and Kurtz looks back with 'fiery, longing eyes' (66), but afloat on the river he is already separated from them. Marlowe reports that the woman 'stretched tragically her bare arms after us over the somber and glittering river' (67), but she dares not wade in. To the people of this wilderness the boat is a 'fierce river-demon beating the water' (66), and it (and the river) has claimed Kurtz irretrievably.

That Kurtz dies soon after he is removed from the darkness is testament to his having 'made the last stride...[and] stepped over the edge' (69). Ultimately, the result of his liminal experience (per Solinger) is that he is too changed by the darkness to survive being removed from it. For Marlow it is somewhat different: having been 'permitted to draw back [his] hesitating foot' (69), he survives being swallowed by the snake, and as he begins to make his way back towards his 'home'—the sea—he finds that the river runs 'swiftly out of the heart of darkness bearing us down towards the sea with twice the speed of our upward progress' (67). He is not, however, unchanged by his experience. He retains a haunting impression of Kurtz and of 'a shadow darker than the shadow of the night', all of which 'seem[s] to enter the house with [him]' (72). As Bachelard suggests, Marlow, the man of water, has been altered by proximity to darkness, and though rescued by the river having carried him away from it he is not entirely purified.

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The protagonist of Michael Ondaatje's novel *In the Skin of a Lion* is also a man of water. Many of the defining incidents of Patrick Lewis's narrative take place on or

around water, and Ondaatje uses the element symbolically throughout the book in colouring Patrick's character.

The formative moments of Patrick's childhood that Ondaatje gives us take place on rivers: the first frozen and the second in full flow. In the episode that sees Patrick and his father Hazen rescue a cow that has fallen through the ice the river is portrayed as an obstacle and a threat. The two struggle against its numbing cold to pass a rope under the animal, and even once the cow is free Patrick reports his father 'frantically trying to get water out of his ears and off his eyes before it freezes' (Ondaatje 12). This is in contrast to the sunlit passages a little later when spring arrives and the same two are working together driving logs on the fast flowing river. They accomplish their task here with relative ease: there is a sense of how at home they are when we are told that Patrick 'dove into the ribbed water and swam among the logs', and that when the dynamite is ignited his habit is 'like his father not even turning around to watch' (17). Despite their differences the incidents are linked thematically in that water provides Patrick with a venue for bonding experiences with his father and with his home.

In this way we see Patrick linked with water early in the novel through action, but the association is far deeper; throughout the narrative Ondaatje refers to Patrick in language that calls on water metaphors. The opening sentence of the section entitled 'The Searcher' sets up Patrick's status as an immigrant to Toronto by saying that to him the city was 'land after years at sea' (53). With another character this might bare the same meaning as an oasis after years in the desert, but for Patrick it is a sign that he is out of place; he is accustomed to the country, and the 'highway of river' (53) that characterised Bellrock in his eyes. Earlier in the novel we have seen that Patrick associates himself most strongly

with his childhood home by way of its river. When the sight of people skating on the frozen surface awes him he thinks of it as '*his shore, his river*' [emphasis Ondaatje's] (21). This is not intended in the possessive manner in which Kurtz speaks of '*my river*' (Conrad 1988, 49); Patrick's response to the sight of the skaters is not to feel that they have invaded his space, but rather that his horizon has been broadened, and his world expanded by the advent of a new sight on his most hallowed territory. And Patrick is not alone in associating himself with the river. Following the confrontation between Patrick and Ambrose Small, the woman between them—Clara—sits '*looking at Patrick's river*' (100), thereby tacitly admitting an allegiance that will take the rest of the novel to come to fruition.

The catalogue of associations between Patrick and water is virtually endless: the creation of the spirit painting Clara and Alice make of him as he sleeps is like '*pulling something out of a river*' (76); Alice tells him '*[l]ike water, you can be easily harnessed Patrick. That's dangerous*' (122); Patrick's relationship with the young girl Hana is at one point phrased as '*if she had been badly scalded and so would approach all water tentatively for fear it was boiling*' (137), et cetera. Ondaatje constantly reaffirms the connection in his choice of language, and by plunging Patrick into water repeatedly in the novel, from the childhood episodes already mentioned, to the incident with Ambrose Small (where submergence in the river saves Patrick from being burned alive), to the climactic scenes at the Victoria Park Waterworks.

This last is the novel's climax in that it brings Patrick into confrontation with Rowland Harris, who also has a powerful connection with water, though one very different to Patrick's. Upon introduction we are told that '*[w]ater was*

Harris's great passion' (29), and the novel is roughly bookended by scenes situated about his two most spectacular creations as Commissioner of Public Works: the Bloor Street Viaduct and the water treatment plant sometimes referred to (somewhat ironically) as the Palace of Purification.

Of the waterworks' conception we are told '[n]o one else was interested in water at this time. Harris imagined a palace for it' (110). It is connected in Harris's mind with the viaduct as part of a 'dream he'd had about water' (110), in which Toronto's water infrastructure is reimagined as an extension of Harris's body. 'Harris was building it for himself' (110) we are told. 'Harris saw the new building as a human body' (220), and he pictures himself '[s]wallowing the water one-and-a-quarter miles away, bringing it back into his body, and spitting it out clean' (111). In this way Harris, like Kurtz, misunderstands his relationship with the water around him, and by extension his relationship with the labour force that has made his imagined water infrastructure manifest. A degree of megalomania has allowed him to convince himself that both are under his control, to be utilised without consequence. Thus, whilst he is not as poisoned or irredeemable as Kurtz, there is nevertheless complaint to be made against him of 'unsound method' (Conrad 61).

The task of confronting Harris falls, of course, to Patrick in his role as water emissary. His motivations, however, are complicated at this point by the death of Alice. The accident which sees fire claim Alice, just as it had claimed Hazen Lewis, is perhaps the novel's greatest source of unrest for Patrick. In death there is 'a moat around her' (164)—a fitting water-metaphor for separation—and we witness Patrick turning towards acts of destruction motivated by his anger at her loss. Fittingly this takes the form of arson, a violent and fiery pursuit

out of character for the man of water. When the act is committed he walks 'from the fire towards the water' (168), and is taken by it to a form of isolation in the Garden of the Blind. It is in this strange landscape, populated with numerous fountains, that Patrick receives the advice 'Don't resent your life' (170) from the blind Elizabeth. But it is advice he is not fully ready to fully accept.

He swims from the Garden of the Blind, and becomes 'part of the evening water' (171), but his feelings are still confused. This is Patrick's own liminal space, which fulfills Solinger's condition of otherness when Patrick 'feels removed from any context of the world' (171-2). Within this space he is faced with the task of self-assessment just as Marlow is, and Patrick's response is equally equivocated. His choice to mount an assault on Harris's water-treatment facility sees Patrick moving against water for the first time. Until this point we have seen him effortlessly moving through it to assist his father and saved by it from Ambrose Small's Molotov cocktail, but in swimming up the facility's intake pipe he moves slowly against the water, and suffers for doing so. As for Marlow in moving up the river, progress is slow and fraught. Patrick is forced to abandon his equipment; his fear that the water will turn still (and give him up) so that he moves 'only at human speed' is 'greater than the fear of no light' (230). Moving against his own nature, Patrick struggles and acts recklessly, injuring himself on his way towards Harris.

The meeting of Patrick and Harris, like that of Marlow and Kurtz, is characterised by the protagonist feeling somewhat 'hypnotized by [a] calm voice' that 'spoke out of the darkness' (Ondaatje 236). Patrick sees himself, by virtue of representing the immigrant work force of the city that built Harris's fantastic

'palace' of water only to be forgotten by him, as acting true to his nature, but Ondaatje is careful to show that water does nothing to assist Patrick in his assault on Harris's facility, as his motivations are impure.

Accordingly, how are we to read Patrick's failure to go through with the destruction of the waterworks? It might seem an unsatisfactory conclusion for Harris to go unpunished, but he has at least been confronted regarding his misconceived ideas about his relationship with the workforce (and by extension the city's water), and ultimately it would be unfitting for Patrick Lewis, the man of water, to again employ fire in the cause of destruction; this would indicate that he has strayed further (perhaps irredeemably) from his nature. One possible way of resolving the scene is offered by Robert David Stacey in his essay 'A Political Aesthetic...', which makes the case for Ondaatje's novel as a form of 'covert pastoral' (Stacey 441). Stacey's contention is that the aborted revolutionary act is not a failure, and not authentically 'tragic' in that it allows for Patrick's reunion with Clara, for the narrative to be passed on (to Hana), and for a 'pastoral' ending:

[U]nassuming, intimate, neither auspicious nor inauspicious, but signaling that shift in perspective or change of consciousness that seems to underlie the mode's insistence on fellow-feeling and human sympathy.

(467)

In this reading it is Patrick's return to his true elemental nature that is the catalyst for an ending symbolising community. This certainly fits with Ondaatje's employment of water metaphors throughout the novel. As well as those defining Patrick's character there are multiple passages such as the Finns skating together on the frozen lake (21), those already discussed wherein Patrick bonds with Hazen, and Caravaggio's time spent at the lake, where he looks 'over the body of water as if it were human' and reflects on the possibility of

'companionship' (188). '[W]ater is benign' (203), we discover. In the final analysis men as different as Patrick Lewis and Ambrose Small are connected by 'the same river' (95), and it is the truth of this—even if it isn't explicitly understood by Patrick within the frame of the text—which saves Patrick from taking drastic action in opposition of his elemental nature. Like Marlow he is 'permitted to draw back [his] hesitating foot' (Conrad 69), and in doing so makes possible an ending which, as Stacey terms it, reinforces a 'structure of social harmonization' (Stacey 466).

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Though the majority of my analysis has focused on characters' relationship with water, and other symbolic uses of the element *within* the texts, we might also see a water analogy in a narrative technique employed in both novels.

Ian Watt's analysis of *Heart of Darkness* contains the concept of 'delayed decoding'. Marlow's narration, Watt notes, is often given as simultaneous with an event, despite the fact that at the point of telling the story the events are some way in the past. Marlow's manner of telling the tale relays his impressions in such a way as to render his lack of understanding in the moment, with clarity only resolving after the fact. As Watt puts it:

The text gives a chronological sequence of momentary sensations in the protagonist's mind; and the reader finds it quite natural that there should be a delay before Marlow's brain finally decodes his impressions into their cause
(Moore 177)

We might consider the example of Marlow reporting seeing his poleman 'stretch himself flat on the deck without even taking the trouble to haul his pole in' (Conrad 45). Marlow relays this with disbelief, and only later situates it within the context of the boat being attacked by arrows.

Albert Guerard associates this technique with ‘the ebb and flow of Marlow’s narrative’ (Cox 57), likening it to the tidal motion of the river moving in and out of the land. The allegory is apposite, and may be extended to include the narrative’s jumping ahead to a greater extent in positioning some of the action of Kurtz’s camp before Marlow reaches it (Conrad 48), and then pulling back to tell of the arrival (59). This breaking of the narrative’s linearity, and the manner in which it falls back on itself is another example of ebb and flow.

Ondaatje employs the same technique in various episodes of *In the Skin of a Lion*. Though not a first-person narrative, the effect is absolutely the same when Ondaatje writes that ‘[w]ater from the eaves dribbles onto Patrick’s coat’ and then proceeds to reveal over the next couple of sentences Patrick’s further impressions, culminating as ‘[h]e smells and feels kerosene pour across his shoulders’ (94). It is present too in Patrick’s learning many years after the fact that the people he had seen skating on the river of his childhood (21) were Finnish loggers (151). It is interesting—but far from surprising—that both of these examples are also associated with water.

There is also a distinct impression of ebb and flow in Patrick’s wish for the ability to ‘relive those days when Alice was with him’. He sees this as ‘those few pages of a book we go back and forth over’, or, reintroducing the water metaphor, ‘one of those underground pools where we can sit still’ (148). Even as he wishes for this however, Patrick is resigned to its futility. It is the purity of moving water that is in his nature, and to not flow forward is an impossibility for him.

That Conrad and Ondaatje both choose to link their protagonist inextricably with water is in some ways unsurprising. Whilst it is the most potently symbolic of the

elements, Bachelard is correct in identifying its inclination toward synthesis, and this changeable nature makes for brilliantly dynamic narrative material.

The differences between the two narratives however, are perhaps ultimately more interesting than the similarities. Where Marlow fulfills his role as water's emissary in reclaiming Kurtz from the darkness, Patrick does not complete his self-assigned role by destroying Harris's facility. But which, in the final analysis, is the failure and which the success? The result of Marlow's liminal experience on the river leaves him forever tainted by darkness, where Patrick emerges from his purified, rewarded with a return to the onrushing waters of human companionship.

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Appendix: A Note on other Elements in *In the Skin of a Lion*

In researching this paper the author found Ondaatje's text to be extraordinarily elemental. Though it does not fit his purpose here, there is fruitful examination to be made of several other characters' association with elements. Nicholas Temelcoff (a 'man comfortable among ovens' (149)) is connected on numerous occasions with imagery of fire; Alice's late husband Cato is repeatedly associated with ice (both his birth (151) and death (156) take place surrounded by it, and his relationship with Alice is characterised by winter (150)); and perhaps the strongest connection of all is between the thief Caravaggio and darkness (or 'night' per Bachelard): see for example his conversation at 201.