PSYCHOANALYSIS, SYMBOLIZATION, AND MCLUHAN: READING CONRAD’S *HEART OF DARKNESS*

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“Any invention or technology is an extension or self-amputation of our physical bodies…. By continuously embracing technologies, we relate ourselves to them as servomechanisms. That is why we must, to use them at all, serve these objects, these extensions of ourselves, as gods or minor religions.”

—McLuhan, *Understanding Media*

“Man has, as it were, become a kind of prosthetic god.”

—Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*

**Introduction: Mediating the Message, an Eye for an Ear**

It is a privilege to respond to Donald Carveth, whose work uniquely combines academic theory with the practical insights of an experienced psychoanalyst. To begin, I remind the reader that his essay was originally delivered as a public lecture, in the fullness of speech. If that medium is, in part, his message, what is lost in the shift to print are Carveth’s gestures, the significance of his pauses, and the seduction of his delivery. The reader’s relationship with the printed text is, then, at a distance from the more immediate tensions and critical openings of the spoken word, and of Carveth himself as he stood before us. It is difficult, in print, to convey the vicissitudes of embodied speech. As theorists like Marshall McLuhan and Walter J. Ong have remarked, in print we stumble upon the “dead letter,” as it were, and we are at pains to reanimate it, to make it meaningful in quite the same way.

In a discussion on the written word, McLuhan claims there is a “breach between the auditory and the visual experience” (*Understanding* 84). Thus, listening with the ear and reading with the eye are two different modes of
experiencing and understanding. McLuhan continues:

Only the phonetic alphabet makes such a sharp division in experience, giving to its user an eye for an ear, and freeing him from the tribal trance of resonating word magic and the web of kinship. (ibid.)

Thus, to do justice to Carveth’s message we must understand what is lost when we move from the ear to the eye. We lose the tribal trance, the resonating word magic, and the web of kinship that echo in speech and that are found at the heart of the psychoanalytic relation. (However, understanding this loss intellectually will by no means fully mitigate it). Finally, on yet another level, the medium of this Web-based text that you are reading further re-enacts, with no certain irony, the very death of which Carveth speaks—the death of the living Word, and its further discarnation, its further virtualization.

What I found striking about Carveth’s speech and, in a different way, his written essay, is precisely this question of death. Carveth does not speak of death as a singular event, but as a process—the process of suffering, of mortification, and of dying. If death is not captured by our myriad representations, he suggests, we will approach it (and it, us) through resonant word magic and the almost tribal relations that anchor our kinship and intimacy with others. It is therefore not sufficient to read Carveth in a purely academic or literate vein; instead, we are meant to find ourselves there, on the psychoanalytic couch, our existence thrown into question, face-to-face with ineluctable doom. It is for this reason, Carveth argues, that psychoanalysis shares in the cultural morality of Buddhism and the great religious traditions. It is not an exact science. It is instead a form of meditation whereby we might learn—finally—how to live and how to die. This struggle is what makes us human. If we are wounded by irremediable loss, marked by finitude, and destined each to die “in our own way,” as Freud once said, rather than close that wound, we are enjoined instead to suffer, to bear the open wound, and even to re-open it, to eviscerate ourselves by “putting everything into words.” For those who have ears to hear, we are called by Carveth’s words to our own “enlightening crucifixion,” to an “illuminating and emancipating castration,” to an “acceptance of lack, suffering, and death” (49).

In what follows, I do not contest Carveth’s claim that we must strive to speak and to symbolize our human being. I agree that symbolization does not allow a wholesale return to some Imaginary past, if such a thing exists. In other words, we are not meant to regress to our origins, to some preverbal state of being; we should not simply embrace some putatively primitive or tribal oral consciousness that is, ostensibly, at one with the world. Carveth is correct, this
is romanticism. Rather, here I take issue with the psychoanalytic medium itself, and particularly the alliance that Carveth would have us forge between psychoanalysis and religion. In my view, religion and psychoanalysis make strange bedfellows, to say the least. If, from the beginning, psychoanalytic discourse was correctly understood as a secularized form of religion, what reason is there for its desecularization today? Indeed, I see this movement toward religion as inescapably dangerous. The psychoanalyst does not and should not speak with religious authority; nor should he or she demand compliance through faith, as religion does—credo quia absurdum! Instead, the practise of psychoanalysis should involve a continuous soul-searching: it must vigilantly guard itself against operating as a religious power in people’s lives. Religion, in the name of God and Truth, tends to demetaphorize its claims in favour of Absolutes. Psychoanalysis, on the contrary, should promote new metaphors, new ways to live. In this light, we might happily call psychoanalysis a “civilizing” process—the work of love, pluralism, and difference. But from the religious perspective, “civilization” too soon becomes “salvation,” and the psychoanalyst, like the missionary, is too often unable to reflect upon and critique the hidden norms by which “civilization” and “salvation” would be achieved. Each ends up embracing an ethic in which the ends justify the means. If psychoanalysis is a moral endeavour in which we “continue to bleed,” I would like to know: in whose name? Has man become some kind of prosthetic god?

“Civilization” and Heart of Darkness

Traditionally, psychoanalysis is considered to be a “civilizing” process, a “work of culture” (Freud, qtd. in Carveth 44). By putting everything into words, the conscious forces of civilized rationality (logos) seek to contain and transform the destructive and irrational (alogos) forces that well up from the unconscious. This is a developmental model; as a mission, psychoanalysis is a progressive movement, and a constant battle against regressive forces that threaten at every juncture the symbolic accomplishments of individuals and civilizations. Carveth explains this progress through religious metaphors: “This entails progression from a kind of death-in-life to a life-in-death” (51).

Because there is a struggle between progress and recidivism, the human subject is internally divided. In Freudian parlance, we are each in a state of civil war against ourselves. This means that the language of “progression” and “regression” is not at all straightforward: the human subject is both at once. What will be considered “progress” for the unconscious or id amounts to a threatening “regression” for the ego. More precisely, “progress” for the
unconscious or id is determined by the pleasure principle: pleasure for the id amounts to the release of libidinal energies. But this “progress” is “regressive” and unpleasurable as far as the ego is concerned, because the ego is bound by the reality principle and thus threatened with destruction by the release of libidinal energies. Thus, “progress” for the ego means containing the unconscious libido—a “regression” and “repression” of unconscious drives (cf. Laplanche, who elaborates on this point). The schematic figure below demonstrates the ambivalence at the heart of the human subject.

![Schematic figure](image)

Civilizations are similarly divided from within. Indeed, in our globalized marketplace, what counts as “progress” for some too often comes at the expense of others who might not experience “developments” as unequivocally liberating and good. There is always what McLuhan calls a “dark atavistic side” to “progress” in the global village (“Playboy” 247). Freud understands such atavism as a primitive aggression that is the disavowed component of civilization: “It is always possible to bind together a considerable number of people in love, so long as there are other people left over to receive the manifestations of their aggressiveness” (Civilization 72). In other words, aggression is the necessary condition of love, death the condition of life.

Consider for a moment the gruesome image that Carveth offers us, of Colonel Kurtz in Francis Ford Coppola’s film, Apocalypse Now (1979). We are asked to recall the image of those severed heads impaled on rows of stakes. For
Carveth, the film is significant in part because it responds to a romantic 1960s counterculture whose innocence was shattered by the U.S. war in Vietnam. I agree, but unlike Carveth, I would hesitate to classify McLuhan’s “global village” as 1960s countercultural romanticism. When we read beyond his aphorisms, McLuhan is far too pessimistic for such sentimentalism. Although the film is about the Vietnam War, its storyline—severed heads and all—can be traced back to Joseph Conrad’s novella, Heart of Darkness, published in 1899. Conrad tells the story of bloody empire, of ruthless exploitation in colonial Africa, and of one man’s journey into this “heart of darkness.” From a psychoanalytic perspective, it is worthwhile returning to Conrad’s moment in history because it emerges during the birth of psychoanalysis itself. It was in this same year that Freud published his groundbreaking work, The Interpretation of Dreams. Confronted with the dreamwork of the patient, in which a latent, unconscious content is made manifest through speech, the analyst here endeavours to work backwards, to interpret the manifest content of the patient’s dreams and speech, and to understand the latency they express.

Like psychoanalysis, Conrad’s Heart of Darkness represents a kind of “talking cure”; but significantly, the novella is also about the impossibility—what Conrad calls the “vain attempt”—to put everything into words. Stylistically, it is a narration of a narration, the spoken word of Conrad’s narrator, Marlow, who recounts the story of his adventures in the Belgian Congo. In an early scene, Marlow says the following of Mr. Kurtz, who is an agent of the ivory trade:

He was just a word for me. I did not see the man in the name any more than you do. Do you see him? Do you see the story? Do you see anything? It seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream—making a vain attempt, because no relation of a dream can convey the dream-sensation, that commingling of absurdity, surprise, and bewilderment in a tremor of struggling revolt, that notion of being captured by the incredible which is of the very essence of dreams…. (50)

With these words, Marlow conjures an image of Kurtz—a man, we might say, who has by any account regressed to barbarism and savagery. Kurtz symbolizes an unconscious “heart of darkness,” the animus behind racism, colonialism, and empire-building. Kurtz is “just a word,” but he is not even that because the word (logos) is staggeringly meaningless (alogos). He is dreamlike; and like the unconscious, he exceeds his name, defies expression, and essentially thwarts the psychoanalytic enterprise of meaning-making. Marlow finds no salvation, no cure, in telling his story. And our pleasure in reading his account borders on
the sadistic; we are affected by the saying, by the very medium of the speech, the “content” of which McLuhan is correct to identify as “nonverbal” (Understanding 8). In the face of Marlow’s dream-sensations, his sense of absurdity, surprise, and bewilderment, Conrad’s reader, akin to the vain psychoanalyst, is charged with bringing (symbolic) order to the chaos that erupts from the unconscious in such speech. Marlow is not just describing Kurtz, but also a part of himself, a part of Conrad, and a part of each of us.

While the psychoanalyst strives to bring meaning to our spoken utterances and to distinguish them from tribal and savage noises, Conrad suggests that this translation is not always possible or even desirable. Although Conrad’s text is “literary,” Heart of Darkness has innumerable references to the oral, to sounds, and to disembodied voices—voices we are at pains to interpret in the fullness of “speech.” Here is Marlow describing Mr. Kurtz in a later passage:

A voice. He was very little more than a voice. And I heard—him—it—this voice—other voices—all of them were so little more than voices—and the memory of that time itself lingers around me, impalpable, like a dying vibration of one immense jabber, silly, atrocious, sordid, savage, or simply mean, without any kind of sense. Voices, voices…. (80)

Kurtz is pure id: “it” speaks, without our being able to identify him or it, his or its place. Kurtz is “him,” an objective “it,” a “voice,” “other voices”—all of them and yet none of them. It is the role of the psychoanalyst/reader to make sense of these dislocated and discarnate utterances, or in one sweeping gesture, to dismiss them as primitive and hence without meaning or value.

But what makes Mr. Kurtz a particularly horrific figure is not only the dislocated meaninglessness that he stands for and invokes. Worse, he acts in the name of God and Empire: Kurtz is both “salvation” and “civilization.” Hence, his vocal meaninglessness is suddenly assigned a meaning; his actions carry the imprimatur and authority of divine law, which makes almost every atrocity possible. If Mr. Kurtz’s voice is “without any kind of sense,” it is nevertheless not without terrible significance. Kurtz is a powerful, white, European man who represents God and country. It therefore matters very little what he says. The medium is the message—“the hidden environment of services” (McLuhan, “Living” 242)—because Kurtz is the embodiment of an unstoppable colonizing force, a nexus of globalizing technologies and attitudes. While Marlow says that Kurtz is dreamlike and speaks nonsense, Conrad invites the reader to see the colonial adventure itself as tribal and savage—far worse than the indigenous tribalism found in Africa, worse than what we would find in the
It is worse because it is allied with divine authority. It is worse because it mobilizes globalizing technologies and attitudes, soon normalized, invisible, and insidious. We cannot say, then, that Kurtz represents a wholesale regression to unconscious forces: the terror he unleashes is distinguished and made worse by the power vested in him by God, by King, and by country. Mr. Kurtz brings an entire technology to bear on the people of Africa. So if there is a “regression” here, ironically, it is one that is enabled only by the forward march of human “progress.” It is distinctly modern. Understanding Kurtz is thus much more complicated than submitting this “dreamwork” to psychoanalytic interpretation through a “talking cure.” Some horrors cannot be put into words.

If Mr. Kurtz represents what theorists like Ong and McLuhan might have meant by a “secondary orality,” or a neo-primitivism of sorts, Kurtz is surely the sinister side to such “progress.” He is nothing to celebrate. He is a warning to those, like us, who still hear the drums of war, a tribal beat, echoing from Washington and across the globe—a colonizing mission and imperialism that resonates remarkably with Conrad’s novella. When we hear these sounds today, we set them into our own historical context: we cannot help but recall the scarcely conceivable technologies of slavery and colonization, of Hiroshima, of Auschwitz, of the World Trade Center, of Abu Ghraib….

**Terrorism and the Global Village**

In his many works, McLuhan has a great deal to say about this, our, global situation. If at times he dares to hope for “a Pentecostal condition of universal understanding and unity” (*Understanding* 80), his prognosis is terribly bleak because in the electric age our technologies are now suddenly “total and inclusive” (ibid. 57). He warns us that all technology and information can be weaponized (ibid. 344). In a late interview from December 1977, he does claim that in the electric age we are “going back into the bicameral mind, which is tribal, collective, without any individual consciousness” (“Violence” 265). But he is hardly optimistic: “When people get close together,” he says, “they get more and more savage” (ibid.). For this reason, the global village must be the home of the critic, and not the techno-optimist: “Village people,” he says, “aren’t that much in love with each other. The global village is a place of… very arduous interfaces and very abrasive situations” (ibid.). These situations naturally breed violence and terrorism because “Terrorists [and] hijackers… are people minus identity. They are determined to make it somehow, to get [media] coverage, to get noticed” (ibid. 266). The terrorist is without fixed identity, “like an exposed spider squatting in a thrumming web” (*Global Village* 94), but
this, McLuhan suggests, is the fate of each of us in the electric age.\footnote{Although it is a mistake, it is common for critics to take McLuhan’s “global village” as a “cheery” place—to use W. J. T. Mitchell’s word.} With uncanny premonition, he prophesizes: “The satellite will distribute terrorist paranoia around the world in living color to match each accelerating disruptive event” (ibid. 115). Today, to be somebody is to be on TV. In the face of this kind of identity politics, psychoanalysis ought to offer a less savage form of differentiation and individuation; its symbolization ought to keep us from submerging into the kind of “mass man” or collectivity of which McLuhan is highly critical. And this is precisely why, contrary to Carveth, psychoanalysis ought not to be allied with religion.

In today’s geopolitics, “salvation” and “civilization” are already too deeply integrated; the last thing we need is a psychoanalysis that would do the same. In the name of God and country, the world’s greatest “democratic” nations still sell us fundamentalism and Imaginary identity through a regression to pre-critical belongingness, a fantasy form of primary narcissism—“United We Stand.” Patriots march in the name of Empire, on a civilizing mission, to bring democracy and “freedom” to the world—as President George W. Bush says, “God’s gift to mankind” (Bush, “President Says”). And so while I am certain this brand of seduction is not what Donald Carveth has in mind when he allies psychoanalysis with religious morality, I would like to pause here to consider the dark atavistic side of such an alliance, its promise and its risks. Is there something that inherently distinguishes psychoanalysis from the abuse of religious power with which it is here allied?\footnote{Or, stronger still, upon which it is founded? I am thinking, too, of Jacques Lacan, when he writes that the moral law is necessary—the law provides the prohibition that allows for symbolization. In Lacan’s colourful imagery, the law is an “all-terrain vehicle” that is the means to transgression: “If the paths of jouissance have something in them that dies out, that tends to make them impassable [i.e., unsymbolizable—SJM], prohibition, if I may say so, becomes its all-terrain vehicle, its half-track truck, that gets it out of the circuitous routes that lead man back in a roundabout way toward the rut of a short and well-trodden satisfaction” (Lacan, Ethics 177; cf. also 195).} After all, if we are inducted into a symbolic order (religious or civilizational or psychoanalytic), must there not be room for critique and for certain progressive forms of resistance? We cannot afford to remain entranced and “blind to the character of this medium.”

Above, I spoke of the seduction of words—the tribal trance, the resonating word magic, and the web of kinship they carry in their wake. The good clinician seduces us, but so too does the good scholar and the good teacher, like McLuhan, whose words will also open for us a shared world, a new world, a vision of the world as it is and—more importantly—as it might
be. This is to share with others our human finitude, our wounds, and our sickness unto death, even as we recognize that our efforts to symbolize are never fully accomplished. Here again, the medium is the message, and Carveth is correct when he says that one must speak: that one speaks is more important than what one says. He cites McLuhan, “the ‘content’ of any medium is always another medium,” and that medium, we might say, is the content of yet another, and so on.\(^3\) This ensures that each word, each medium, opens a gap “for the light to get in,” for further signification, for critique, and perhaps for a politics of resistance. It ensures that meaning is mobile and alive. It ensures that a vital distinction separates words and things, because we are not gods—our words, however violent, do not to bring into being that which we name. According to McLuhan, our media operate as rhetorical tropes—through the figures of metaphor, simile, metonymy, and synecdoche, they open up what he calls a “resonant interval,” a space of ambiguity which is inherently relational and meaning-making.

The good analyst learns to take patients’ words, their gestures, their symptoms, and reads them critically, disclosing what McLuhan would call the hidden ground of their meaning. The good analyst is “an acoustic mirror” (cf. Silverman). And of course, it is not just the analyst who does this mirroring, but also the friend, the lover, and the neighbour. Finally, we academics in the humanities perform the same kind of analysis in a cultural context, socially, and politically. This calls for a constant vigilance, to read symptoms and their hidden meanings. Here, it is no surprise that in our new world order, thinkers like Freud and McLuhan have fallen out of favour. Why? Because they teach us how to ask disturbing questions—questions many would rather not hear, in universities that blindly ally themselves with corporatism and profit.\(^4\) Now, perhaps more than ever, we must raise disturbing questions, we must cultivate the art of criticism and of speech, if we are to learn how to live and how to die. Such an art would take place in the resonant interval and encourage a proliferation of readings; it would invent new forms or even a new lexicon by which to read and critically expose the hidden ground of our contemporary life. “Without the artist’s intervention,” McLuhan writes, “man merely adapts to his technologies and becomes their servo-mechanism. He worships the Idols of the Tribe, of the Cave, and of the Market” (Laws 98).

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\(^3\) This need not lead to a postmodern nihilism, but to an odyssey of human symbolization, of humanization. It is in this spirit that McLuhan claims that all words are metaphors (Laws 120), or that “all media are active metaphors” (Understanding 57).

\(^4\) Ironically, the University of Toronto’s published mission statement is to encourage academics “to raise deeply disturbing questions and provocative challenges to the cherished beliefs of society at large and of the university itself” (Statement of Institutional Purpose; emphasis mine).
Conclusion: A Call for Metaphorization—Not Religion

If Freud’s view on the human subject could be put into words, it would stand in opposition to Carveth’s biblical epigraph, and it would read something like this: “In the beginning was the id (αλογος).” The work of analysis, for Freud as for Carveth, presumes a progression: Wo es war, soll Ich werden—where id was, there ego shall be or shall become. Analysis, like culture, is the work of domesticating unconscious impulses. But how this is done is paramount: the medium is the message.

Carveth tells us that the “talking cure” works through the magic of words, namely, their power to bind (Freud: binden) unconscious drives through Eros and against Thanatos, against the death drive that threatens always to unbind these impulses (entbinden) and release a destructive and aggressive maelstrom. In Freud’s words:

civilization is a process in the service of Eros, whose purpose is to combine single human individuals, and after that families, then races, peoples and nations, into one great unity, the unity of mankind…. But man’s natural aggressive instinct, the hostility of each against all and of all against each, opposes this programme of civilization. This aggressive instinct is the derivative and the main representative of the death instinct which we have found alongside of Eros and which shares world-dominion with it. (Civilization 81–82)

In other words, Eros and Thanatos are not so distant cousins. The word can also be bound aggressively, through sadism. “In sadism,” Freud writes, “long since known to us as a component instinct of sexuality, we should have before us a particularly strong alloy of this kind between trends of love and the destructive instinct” (ibid. 78). I therefore fear that the word can serve as just another avenue for the release of destructive impulses. I remain sceptical of the saving power of words. Carveth is less sceptical: “When the desire to sever heads is put into words, it is less likely to be put into action” (45). Is this true? Cannot these words also incite us to violent action, which is why psychoanalysis remains a moral enterprise, ready to judge the meaning of words? In this light, if it is to judge, psychoanalysis must be a religion, that is, it must assume a transcendent, metaphysical position by which to render its judgement, by which to civilize, and save. This scares me, I must confess.

As I mentioned above, in Heart of Darkness, Conrad’s Marlow argues that much cannot be, and perhaps ought not to be put into words; and yet he struggles all the same. Significantly, the novella as a whole renders this
failure—or perhaps it is a refusal?—into words, thematizing the failure itself, which becomes emblematic. I would suggest that the reader may find a subtle salvation in Conrad. Not for his answers, of course, because he turns our eyes only to further questions; he writes of world-destruction, of violence, hatred, greed, and empire, but in so doing, makes for us a world by turning our imaginations toward something more liveable. This is what art does: it makes possible.

Carveth’s message is much the same, though not quite. Similar to Conrad’s rhetoric, Carveth enjoins us to suffer an “emancipating castration,” an “enlightening crucifixion,” and to accept “our lack, suffering, and death” (49). But what distinguishes Carveth, the psychoanalyst, from Conrad’s art of darkness is religion. At what point does the psychoanalyst’s art, like Conrad’s, cease to be a metaphor and assume the authority of God and King and country? In whose name, and by what Word (Logos), am I enjoined to suffer? And according to whose terms shall I be redeemed? Does this suffering betray a sadistic pleasure? Today, the civilizing mission of psychoanalysis must itself be interpreted in a global context—much as Conrad does, rhetorically—to ask precisely how far, to what corners of the earth, this secular religion should extend. I agree with Carveth that what is said is less significant than the saying itself; but perhaps more significant still is how it is said, in whose name, and for what purpose. The ethical psychoanalyst must ensure somehow that his or her work is not merely another act of colonization, another “noble” act of savagery.

Like the religious person, the psychoanalyst is ever tempted by fundamentalism. Refuse the psychoanalytic discourse, and you are damned, a “fugitive from guilt” (Carveth 52), a fugitive from the law, which, despite its promise of redemption, remains all-too-human in its implementation. I fear that “religions of the Book” (Judaism, Islam, Christianity), like Carveth’s psychoanalysis, suffer under the burden of their Absolutes: if believers accept their laws as universal, are they not committed to the binaries of good/evil and saved/damned—not as human inventions, but as divine Truth? And no “talking cure” will save the fundamentalist: these are not simply unconscious, preverbal drives that need to be “put into words” and civilized. Instead, the rhetoric of “civilization” and “salvation” invisibly and insidiously informs fundamentalism. What the fundamentalist has learned has come through words, words informed by religious ideology, mobilized by globalizing technologies and attitudes. To pervert a biblical metaphor, for the fundamentalist these words “become flesh,” they become naturalized, they work backwards, take root in

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5 Buddhism ought to be distinguished here because it is not a theology; some might argue that it is more a philosophy than a religion.
and inform unconscious forces that now seem to glimmer with the pre-emptive and justificatory aura of Destiny, Truth, Life. Like Mr. Kurtz, the religious psychoanalyst, the zealot, seems beholden to a fundamentalism that is more dangerous that any unconscious regression because these unconscious forces are technologized, the self-legitimizing instruments of religious authority and meaning. The religious psychoanalyst who refuses to hear this criticism might dismiss my position as “paranoid-schizoid” or “depressive” (Carveth 52), according to the hermetic logic and authority of psychoanalysis, that self-appointed final arbiter of my unconscious—a prosthetic god. But we must stop short of these sado-masochistic pleasures: it is the veil of just this impenetrable logic that has shrouded and justified so much evil, in the name of God, King, and country.

In his conclusion Carveth cites Northrop Frye, who understands the Bible as a “tissue of metaphors from beginning to end” (Frye qtd. in Carveth 52). Here we might have found some hope for the limits of religious Absolutes through the vicissitudes of metaphor. However, Carveth retreats by quickly qualifying Frye’s insight about metaphors: “but metaphors and myths…, properly decoded, contain profound existential, ethical, psychological, and social truth” (Carveth 52; emphasis mine). Who, we might ask, is qualified to “properly decode” these metaphors and myths, to render them into some kind of “truth”? Through decoding, they will no longer be metaphors, for the definition of a metaphor, as Conrad illustrates so well and on so many levels, is that which must be voiced but which cannot in its entirety be made explicit. The meaning of a metaphor is always another metaphor. This, then, is the meaning of “the medium is the message”: metaphor, from the Greek meta pherein, means to carry across or transport. And in McLuhan’s words, “Each form of transport not only carries, but translates and transforms, the sender, the receiver, and the message” (Understanding 90). Elsewhere, he writes, “each of man’s artefacts is in fact a kind of word, a metaphor that translates experience from one form into another” (Laws 3). The metaphor bridges while at the same time opening up the play of a resonant interval between literal and figurative meanings. While fundamentalism collapses the interval, literalizing and fixing some meaning as Truth, the metaphor bridges without collapsing because there is no way to distinguish the literal from the figurative except by paying heed to the larger rhetorical context which is never static. Thus, a truly emancipatory project will not fetishize a “code,” but will revel in the plurality and difference that metaphors reveal. The metaphor refuses identification, refuses the collapse of word and thing, of meaning and truth—precisely the gap, the morbid suffering, or “enlightening crucifixion” that psychoanalysis demands, according to Carveth, but one that it dare not submit to itself.
Works Cited


