

## ESCAPE AND RETURN: REBIRTH THROUGH WATER IN "THE RIME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER" AND *A HISTORY OF THE WORLD IN 10½ CHAPTERS*

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**Abstract.** *This paper examines rebirth through water in Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and Barnes' A History of the World in 10½ Chapters. It attempts to illuminate the reasons for the differences in the treatment of the archetype between the two texts, mainly pertaining to the changing perspective on female fertility.*

**Key words:** *Rebirth, water, fertility, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," A History of the World in 10½ Chapters*

### 1. YE MUST BE BORN AGAIN

In the archetypal story Jung referred to as 'the night journey under the sea,' the hero is devoured by a sea monster, kills it and emerges from the water born anew, which is parallel to the dangerous but necessary venture of the Ego into the Unconscious. (Jung 1978: 106) The purpose of the descent into the perilous depths is usually to retrieve a precious life elixir or a hidden treasure, or to rescue a virgin. (Jung 1972: 344-345) Since these important items are almost invariably found in the sea, (Frye 1957: 218) two inseparable but distinct aspects of water, one life-threatening and the other life-furthering, are identifiable. Both are feminine and both can, according to Campbell, be traced back to the birth trauma, as 'every threshold passage [...] is comparable to a birth and has been ritually represented, practically everywhere, through an imagery of reentry into the womb.' (Campbell 1960: 61-62) The two aspects of water thus stem from the double vision of female fertility, nourishing and suffocating, as experienced in the birth trauma.

The life-threatening aspect of water, often personified in dragons, serpents and sea-beasts that imprison and/or devour young virgins can also figure as the exact opposite of raging female fertility. It can be an embodiment of sterility and impotence, in which case it carries masculine overtones. (Frye 1957: 168, 172, 215) This, however, appears to be a more recent development of the archetypal story, characteristic of the 'patriarchal era,'

(Graves 1967: 420-421) occurring when the feminine element is suppressed enough not to be viewed as threatening. (Hughes 1992: 18, 33, 41) Even in this context, the two aspects, though not deriving their strength from the same source, are inseparable, for the life-giving force cannot be liberated without a confrontation with the beast.

In the Christian myth, the rebirth through water archetype is very prominent. The flood story, in which the purging waters of death give way to the fertile waters of life when Noah's crew and cargo are urged to 'be fruitful and multiply,' is parallel with baptism, where 'the old man' is symbolically submerged into watery death, only to emerge as 'the new man'. The dove, an emblem of the Holy Spirit, figures both in the account of Christ's baptism and as Noah's dove, connecting the two stories. (Frye 1957: 225) The understanding of baptism as a descent into the abyss of Water to combat the sea monster is modeled on Christ's baptism in the Jordan where, according to Cyril of Jerusalem, He defeated Behemoth and fastened him down. (Eliade 1980: 58)

The most drastic and dramatic version of the story in Christianity is undoubtedly Christ's Crucifixion, Harrowing of Hell and Resurrection. The Son of God dies on the cross, allows Himself to be devoured by the monstrous infernal regions, conquers Hades and liberates Adam. On the third day, He rises from the dead with an immortal, transfigured body. Jonah's three days' sojourn in the whale is considered directly prophetic of Christ in the tomb. (Frye 1957: 215-217)

In both texts to be dealt with here, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters*, the theme of crossing the waters to be born again is unmistakably present, but it is handled very differently. It is only natural to expect differences between 'A Poet's Reverie' marking the outbreak of Romanticism and a piece of Postmodernist prose, but perhaps the history of the world might also be blamed for effecting a more than formal change during those two centuries. This would make the question of how and why they differ more significant and interesting.

## 2. MERRILY DID WE DROP

When the Mariner and his shipmates set sail, an ominous mood instantly sets in and it becomes clear that this is to be no routine journey:

The ship was cheered, the harbour cleared,  
Merrily did we *drop*  
Below the kirk, *below* the hill,  
Below the lighthouse top. (AM 21-24)<sup>1</sup>

Already deprived of names, titles, positions in society, occupations and defined commercial goals for embarking, the crew sail in an unmistakably *downward* direction, further divesting them of the secure confines of religion, common sense, and reason. This is also a descent in geographical terms, as the ship is driven by a storm below the Equator and towards the South Pole. It is here, in the land of ice, in the 'subliminal' regions of the Earth, that the Mariner commits the 'hellish thing' that will prove to be his *felix culpa*.

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<sup>1</sup> "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", ln. 21-24, in Ernest Hartley Coleridge (ed.), *The Poems of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, OUP, London, 1961, p. 187. Emphases mine.

The killing of the Albatross is a deeply significant act. Robert Penn Warren sees in the fact that the dead bird replaces the crucifix around the Mariner's neck proof of 'a symbolic transference from Christ to the slain creature of God' (Boulger (ed.) 1969: 27-28) and this can be further substantiated by arguing that the murder weapon did not *have* to be a *cross*-bow if this were not the case and Coleridge's own divulgence that the Ancient Mariner was in his mind 'the everlasting Wandering Jew.' (Watters 1971: 61) The exact sin of the Jew doomed to await the Second Coming differs, but all versions of the legend agree that it was directed personally at Christ during His Passion.

The crucifixion of Christ, as the ultimate sin of mankind in which all are implicated, is paradoxically also necessary for salvation. By actively performing the killing and being the only person aware of its enormity, the Mariner creates for himself the possibility of being transformed from a mere murderer to a priest who slays the Lamb of God in the Eucharist. This is, unfortunately for him, not an automatic, instantaneous transformation. Condemned to Life-in-Death, the Mariner will probably have to do penance until some time around Doomsday.

His rebirth begins with a reentry into the womb. 'Bursting' into the stagnant waters of the 'silent sea,' the crew confront the innermost depths of feminine Matter. It is not a pretty picture:

The very deep did rot: O Christ!  
That ever this should be!  
Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs  
Upon the slimy sea.  
  
About, about, in reel and rout  
The death-fires danced at night;  
The water, like a witch's oils,  
Burnt green, and blue and white. (AM 123-130)

The Mariner faces the ambivalent character of the slimy sea creatures, simultaneously signifying, according to Maud Bodkin, 'objectionable animal tendencies' and 'germs of new possible life,' and must accept them in order to start 'a renewal of life.' (Lodge (ed.) 1972: 200)

This he cannot accomplish unaided. His help comes from the holy Mother, through some of Her essential attributes. The light of the Moon, likened to Mary because it gently reflects the fierce rays of the Sun, just as She assuages the judgment of Her Son, (Warner 1978: 159-262) allows the Mariner to view the water snakes with a merciful eye:<sup>2</sup>

O happy living things! no tongue  
Their beauty might declare:  
A spring of love gushed from my heart,  
And I blessed them unaware (AM 282-285)

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<sup>2</sup> Rather than claiming, like Warren does, that 'the good events take place under the aegis of the moon, the bad events under that of the sun' (Boulger (ed.) 1969: 29), it might be more accurate to notice that spontaneously emotional acts, be they cruelty (like the killing of the Albatross) or mercy (like the blessing of the water-snakes), are performed in the moonlight, whereas sunlight seems to be more congenial a climate for acts of judgment (like the crew's justification of the killing, the Mariner's condemnation of the water-snakes and his being sentenced to Life-in-Death).

She then sends him rain, traditionally another of Her attributes and a symbol of grace, life and purification. With the approach of the wind, emblematic of the Holy Spirit, the Mariner's baptismal scene is complete.

### 3. ESCAPE AND RETURN

The central image in *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters*, constituting the main theme of three chapters but alluded to consistently, if somewhat artificially, in every chapter, is the Flood. Noah's voyage across the purging waters as representative of new beginnings is duly recognized, but only in order to be persistently undermined throughout the book, along with the very idea of new beginnings.

As depicted by the woodworm in "The Stowaway," Noah's Ark can no longer be seen as a symbol of rebirth, as all ties between the Ark and rebirth are systematically severed: 'You presumably grasped that the 'Ark' was more than just a single ship? It was the name we gave to the whole flotilla (you could hardly expect to cram the entire animal kingdom into something a mere three hundred cubits long).' (Barnes 2005: 5) The Ark, then, is not ark-shaped. Its Latin appellation, *arca*, encompasses the denotations of Noah's Ark, the Ark of the Covenant and Christ's Tomb, all of which share the same form. Suggesting death by its shape (that of a coffin) and resurrection by its contents (the potential of all life on Earth), the Biblical Ark signifies rebirth. A flotilla consisting of eight ordinary ships simply does not. The woodworm goes on to assert that 'the raven always maintained that *he* found the olive tree; that *he* brought a leaf from it back to the Ark; but that Noah decided it was 'more appropriate' to say that the dove had discovered it.' (Barnes 2005: 30)<sup>3</sup> Removing the dove from the woodworm's account of the Flood effectively eliminates its link with baptism.

Further illustrative of the notion that there can be no transformation or even the mildest change for the better in the history of the world is Noah's newly established link, via their shared nickname ('the Admiral'), with Christopher Columbus. 'Discovering' the New World and with it the noble, generous and unspoilt Arawaks, Columbus only manages to introduce Old World greed and cruelty into the territory under his command and eventually completely eradicate the tribe. Similarly, though entrusted with the task of establishing a new-and-improved world after the Flood, the woodworm's Noah seems to organize everything he touches on the principles of gluttony, drunkenness, vanity and cruelty, causing many species to become extinct.

The disappearance of certain animals with symbolic significance during the Voyage can be seen as grimly ironic in the same vein. The salted behemoth, left over at the end of the journey because the voracious Noah family desired a more varied diet, is mentioned in the Talmud as the main dish at the feast for the righteous in the next world. The griffon, done in for being a crossbreed, and the unicorn, casseroleed out of jealousy, are both traditional symbols of Christ.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The raven is the first to find dry land in the Babylonian version of the flood myth, as recorded in Tablet XI of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*.

<sup>4</sup> The griffon or 'lion-eagle' is a simultaneously landbound and flying creature, as Christ is both human and divine. The unicorn can only be tamed and captured by a virgin, as Mary was the only one able to 'lure' the Second Person of the Trinity into the created world.

The demise of the simurgh is perhaps the most telling of all. As the phoenix of Iranian folklore, the simurgh burns and rises from the ashes every 1700 years, but what makes it even more ideally representative of the journey of spiritual rebirth is its probably most celebrated depiction in art, that by the Iranian Sufi poet Farid al-Din Attar (cca. 1130 - cca. 1230) in his *Mantic Uttair (The Conference of the Birds)*. A group of birds desiring a king set out to find the mythical Simorgh. One by one, they drop out, unable to endure the difficulties of the journey, until there are only *thirty birds* ('si morgh' in Persian) left, gazing at their reflection in a lake. (Vitray-Meyerovitch 1978: 62-63)

It is not only the most interesting animals that seem destined to be wiped out, but those most agreeable among the humans as well, like the laughing, perfumed female crew of Ham's pleasure boat and Noah's youngest son, the fun-loving Varadi. In fact, during the Voyage, the flotilla is halved, and that, according to the woodworm, is the better half gone. If the disembarkation on Ararat can be seen as a new beginning for the world, it is a sad start indeed.

It is, however, seen as the starting point of history in the chapters dealing with expeditions to the mountain. In "The Mountain," Amanda Fergusson wishes to intercede for the soul of her deceased father on Ararat and is informed by an Armenian priest that

the mountain towards which they were heading had never been ascended and, moreover, never would be. [...] The mountain before them was the birthplace of mankind; and he referred the ladies, while excusing himself with an ingratiating laugh for mentioning an indelicate subject, to the authority of Our Saviour's words to Nicodemus, where it is stated that a man cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born once more. (Barnes 2005: 183)

Ararat is here seen as the womb of humanity, but a return to it for rebirth is claimed to be impossible, and this view is supported by a Biblical paraphrase. This is, however, how the passage referred to actually appears in the Bible:

1 There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews:  
2 The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. 3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. 4 Nicodemus saith unto him: How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? 5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water, and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. (KJV John 3: 1-7)

Not only does Christ not deny the possibility of rebirth, He urges it as crucial for salvation.

This could perhaps be interpreted as an ironic suggestion that religion, which has become 'wimpishly workaday, or terminally crazy, or merely businesslike,' (Barnes 2005: 295) can no longer offer the possibility of rebirth and even prevents it. However, it would impose too great a suspension of disbelief on the reader to be obliged to accept that a young, zealous Protestant and a priest agree upon a misquotation of the Bible that so bla-

tantly opposes such a basic doctrine of Christianity as baptism. This is perhaps more a case of going a bit too far to prove there is no such thing as rebirth.<sup>5</sup>

Amanda finds no new life on Ararat. She finds death, and it is her skeleton that Spike Tiggler discovers and mistakes for Noah's in his search for the Ark in "Project Ararat." Spike is a lapsed Baptist who, in a modern version of the sea journey, lands on the Moon and there experiences a nearly instantaneous conversion when God Himself instructs him to find Noah's Ark. He returns to his hometown and delivers a fundraising speech for his Project Ararat:

And then he came to the bit about every man's life being a process of escape and return, escape and return like the waters in the Pasquotank River [...]; and explained how you always came back to the things and places you'd started from. Like he'd left Wadesville years before, and now he was back; like he'd been a regular attendee at the Church of Holy Water all through his childhood, had later strayed from the path of the Lord, but had now returned to it [...] and [...] it seemed to him that it was time after all these years to go looking for where we came from, and that he planned to mount an expedition to recover what could be found of Noah's Ark. (Barnes 2005: 319)

A long, obsessive search yielding no results drives home the point that Spike's conversion is futile and that escape from oneself and return to one's source are equally unattainable.

It may be worthwhile to compare Spike's story with that of James Irwin, on whom Spike's character is based. Irwin, like Spike, was an Apollo astronaut who walked on the Moon and who also tried to find Noah's Ark. Unlike Spike, Irwin did not experience a dramatic conversion on the Moon – just 'the power of God as [he had] never felt it before.' His organization, High Flight, mounted two unsuccessful expeditions in search of the Ark in the eighties, but these apparently formed only part of Irwin's religious activism. The organization mainly concerns itself with managing religious retreats and tours to the Holy Land.<sup>6</sup> By insisting on the lunar conversion, God's explicit directive and Spike's frantic but futile efforts to obey it, Barnes emphasizes the fruitlessness and falseness of the transformation, making Spike appear the 'fruitcake' Irwin seems not to have been.

Charlie in "Upstream!" seems to escape his old self by returning to a more innocent point in history when he shoots a film by a lost river with a lost tribe of Indians. Influenced by their purity, honesty and simplicity, he regrets his infidelity and violence and envisages a wholesome family life in the country with his girlfriend. However, when the Indians drown his fellow-actor on their southward voyage up the river, for no intelligible reason, and he discovers his girlfriend has left him, Charlie's transformation turns out to have been as false as the imagined 'innocence' of the Indians.

In "The Survivor," Kathleen Ferris escapes the dry-land world facing an atomic crisis caused by 'men in dark-grey suits and striped ties up there in the north,' and 'returns' to the sea: 'Abandon ship, that was the old cry. Now it's abandon land. There's danger everywhere, but more on land. We all crawled out of the sea once, didn't we? Maybe that was a mistake. Now we're going back to it.' (Barnes 2005: 112-113) Noah-like, she sets sail southward in a boat with a couple of cats, Paul and Linda, intent on establishing a better new world after the impending nuclear catastrophe. Allowing her boat to be guided

<sup>5</sup> Or, perhaps, a case of not even taking a peep at the Bible before misquoting it.

<sup>6</sup> [www.arlingtoncemetery.net/jbirwin.htm](http://www.arlingtoncemetery.net/jbirwin.htm) [15/ 02/ 2009]

by the winds, she reaches an island, where the happy feline couple begin to 'be fruitful and multiply.' It becomes clear much earlier, however, that she is in fact tied to a bed in a mental institution after having been found unconscious in a boat with a couple of emaciated cats. Her attempt to escape the world of 'men in grey suits' has only imprisoned her in a world of men in white coats. Any regeneration she hopes to have effected through her maritime adventure is purely illusory.

Franklin Hughes in "The Visitors," on the other hand, does not want any transformation to take place: 'In fact, Franklin hated the IRA, just as he hated any political group which interfered, or might interfere, with the fulltime job of being Franklin Hughes.' (Barnes 2005: 59) His classical cruises attracting a classical clientele tune in nicely with the desired inviolability of his cherished persona. The irruption of terrorists into Franklin's world causes no change in him, despite the ordeal he endures because of the difficult dilemma imposed on him.

Similarly, there can be no transformation for Lawrence Beesley in the first of "Three Simple Stories." Having once preserved himself from sinking with the Titanic, possibly by masquerading as a woman, he is not allowed to undergo the experience even in symbolic terms. Disguising himself in period costume and infiltrating the extras on the set of *A Night to Remember*, he is discovered and made to disembark.

The myth of Jonah is explored in the second story in terms of death, return to the womb and resurrection:

What is it about Jonah's escapade that transfixes us? Is it the moment of swallowing, the oscillation between danger and salvation, when we imagine ourselves miraculously rescued from the peril of drowning only to be cast into the peril of being eaten alive? Is it the three days and three nights in the whale's belly, that image of enclosure, smothering, live burial? (Once, taking the night train from London to Paris, I found myself in the locked sleeping compartment of a locked coach in a locked hold beneath the waterline on a cross-channel ferry; I didn't think of Jonah at the time, but perhaps my panic was related to his. And is a more textbook fear involved: does the image of pulsing blubber set off some terror of being transported back to the womb?) Or are we most struck by the third element in the story, the deliverance, the proof that there is salvation and justice after our purgatorial incarceration? Like Jonah, we are all storm-tossed by the seas of life, undergo apparent death and certain burial, but then attain a blinding resurrection as the car-ferry doors swing open and we are delivered back into the light and into a recognition of God's love. Is this why the myth swims through our memory? (Barnes 2005: 212)

The narrator then substantiates the Jonah story by quoting the case of the sailor James Bartley, who was allegedly swallowed by a sperm whale off the Falkland Islands in 1891: 'Many people (including me) believe the myth of Bartley, just as millions have believed the myth of Jonah. [...] For Jonah now read Bartley. [...] Myth will become reality, however sceptical we might be.' (Barnes 2005: 215) The irony is here turned against the credulous narrator, for the James Bartley story demonstrably *is* just an urban legend.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Cf. <http://www.truthorfiction.com/rumors/n/newjonah.htm> [15/02/2009]

In the third story, the liner *St Louis* leaves Nazi Germany with 915 Jews seeking asylum, but is forced to wander the seas for 40 days before it can land. This is reminiscent both of the crossing of the Red Sea, traditionally linked with baptism, as the Jews cross the waters and are liberated from Egyptian slavery, and their wandering through the desert for 40 years before they reach the Promised Land. Both associations appear cruelly ironic when the passengers are finally allowed to disembark and not only do not find the Promised Land in the countries deigning to accept them, but in many are not even guaranteed freedom from virtual slavery.

The seemingly non-committal Géricault, in "Shipwreck," paints the raft of the *Medusa* at a moment of apparent ambiguity as regards salvation, when the *Argus* is spotted by the castaways as a speck on the horizon. A closer look, however, reveals that this is in fact the first, tantalizingly ineffectual, of the two sightings of the ship. It does not signify much that 'in reality' salvation does eventually come, for it comes only to a decimated crew that has resorted to urine-drinking, cannibalism, and throwing the moribund overboard.

In "The Dream," it is the failure of even death itself to effect the slightest change in humans that makes the democratic, consumerist Heaven appear a lot more like Hell, causing everyone to choose eventually to 'die off':

[T]he people who ask for death earliest [...] want an eternity of sex, beer, drugs, fast cars – that sort of thing. They can't believe their good luck at first, and then, a few hundred years later, they can't believe their bad luck. That's the sort of people they are, they realize. They're stuck with being themselves. Millennia after millennia of being themselves. They tend to die off soonest. [...] You can't become someone else without stopping being who you are. Nobody can bear that. (Barnes 2005: 369, 372)

The thematic unity of the novel can be said to rely on the persistent imagery of crossing the waters and the insistence that no regeneration can be achieved by it. Why does the Ancient Mariner find rebirth through water and why does it seem to elude Barnes' characters? To answer this, it might be helpful to take a closer look at what elements are at play in the two texts.

#### 4. WATER, WATER, EVERY WHERE, NOR ANY DROP TO DRINK

In the Mariner's world, the situation seems to be relatively clear. Two main elements are discernible here and may be termed 'land' and 'water.' 'Land' is the safe, stable domain of the kirk, the hill, the lighthouse and the marriage-feast. 'Water' can further be divided into its two aspects, one life-threatening and the other life-furthering, as poignantly illustrated in the lines 'Water, water, every where, / Nor any drop to drink.' (AM 121-122) The former, mainly identifiable with salt water, includes such manifestations as 'slimy things,' 'death-fires' and 'witch's oils,' while the latter, associable with drinkable water, is revealed in the rejuvenating rain and grace sent by Mary. Both seem to be feminine and are clearly inseparable. The Mariner must bless the water-snakes before the rain can fall, but the 'spring of love' cannot 'gush' from his heart towards the slimy creatures without a prior influx of grace. The two aspects of water thus seem to be doubly interlocked.



Land offers no danger, but no regeneration either. The Mariner must escape the confines of rational, masculine civilization, allow himself to be dissolved and revived in the feminine, primordial waters, and only then return restored to 'civilized' life. Or, rather, having once escaped the womb, he must return to it for rebirth to become fully human in the quotidian world. However it is perceived, the correlation between the elements of land and water is not one of radical opposition. They are complementary. The return to the harbor is as necessary a stage of the Mariner's journey as his setting out to sea.

This is not to say that his return is unproblematic. It is difficult to imagine the Mariner, who inspires dread in the Wedding-Guest, cheerfully walking amongst 'Old men, and babes, and loving friends / And youths and maidens gay,' (AM 608-609) and George Whalley correctly notes that this is 'an impersonal picture, pregnant with the sense of isolation.' (Coburn (ed.) 1967: 39) Coleridge himself felt that the poem had 'too much' moral, (Jones and Tydeman (eds.) 1973: 30) and the false ring in the portrayal of the Mariner safely tucked into institutional worship may have contributed to this feeling.

Interestingly enough, it appears to be twice refuted in the imagery. Two traditional symbols of the Church are undermined in the narrative even as the Mariner is ostensibly advertising church-going. The ship, emblematic of the Church as it safely carries the faithful, Ark-like, over the dangerous waters of this life, sinks like lead after all its crew die. The marriage-feast, possibly the most recurrent representation of the Kingdom of God and its earthly manifestation, the Church, as the meeting point of Christ the Bridegroom and His Bride, the faithful, is dismissed by the Mariner, and the 'Bridegroom' from line 5 becomes just the 'bridegroom' in line 621 as the Wedding-Guest turns from his door. He becomes a 'sadder and a wiser man' as he realizes that he too might have to set out on this lonely and dangerous journey soon.

Coleridge censored after 1798 the Mariner's complaint that 'Christ would take no pity on / My soul in agony,' (Coburn (ed.) 1967: 40-41) evading the acknowledgment that this ultimate feeling of perdition and abandonment is the *conditio sine qua non* of true spiritual regeneration, paradoxically simultaneously true with *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. (Jung 1972: 85) Apparently, he seems to have sided with the latter dictum. Knowing theoretically that the return to the harbor is the logical final step for the Mariner, he could not wholeheartedly paint it, perhaps because he was personally still very much lost at sea.

However equivocal some of them may be, all the elements in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" are undeniably connected. The masculine, rational, civilized land and the feminine, irrational, chaotic water, though contrasted, are both necessary stages of the same journey. Both death and regeneration come from the water, the two aspects of which are inseparable. All the elements conspire harmoniously towards the rebirth of the Mariner, although this is not always clear or particularly pleasant to him.

## 5. LOVE WON'T CHANGE THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD

The situation is nowhere nearly as clear or character-friendly in *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters*. Land, water, feminine and masculine elements all figure in it, but their correlations and respective characteristics seem to depend upon the two main warring forces – 'the history of the world' and 'love.'

'The history of the world' is oppressively masculine. When associated with land, it is the element of institutionalized civilization, populated with the men in grey suits and

similar authoritarian figures, like God and Noah. God serves as 'a really oppressive role-model' (Barnes 2005: 24) for Noah, a 'puffed-up patriarch' who turns the Ark into a prison ship, while the animals keep quiet because 'they're not going to rock the boat, are they?' (Barnes 2005: 4) History is repressive and limiting at best. At its worst, connected with water, it is dangerous, chaotic, and irrational, as the men in grey suits get to play with nuclear weapons, Noah is 'a crazy greybeard who beats you round the head with his gopher-wood stave, and might pitch you overboard at any moment,' (Barnes 2005: 278) and as for God, 'you never can tell with paranoid schizophrenics.' (Barnes 2005: 210) Terrorists hijacking the *Santa Euphemia* at sea and crazed mutineers attempting to destroy the raft of the Medusa also figure in this perilous, life-threatening, masculine aspect of water.

'Love' is benignly feminine, and, when linked to land, represents a safe haven from history, likened, however ironically, to 'an ark on which two may escape the Flood.' (Barnes 2005: 278) Connected with water, it is a source of life and purification, implying a return to nature. Amanda's bottled snow and Spike's uphill stream as illustrations are cute, but banal and insignificant. Charlie's contact with the lost river and the lost Indian tribe awakens in him a wish for a life in the country with 'a squawking infant,' but this is a short-lived development. His brief desire for offspring points towards the most prominent manifestation of this munificent, life-furthering, feminine aspect of water, and that is female fertility. Kath, intent on going back to nature and supporting procreation, at least among her cats, is representative of it. The kittens are, however, only a figment of Kath's 'fabulating' imagination, and all she eventually achieves is nearly starving the poor felines to death.

History and love are radically opposed. The two aspects of water are thus also opposed, not linked. Its life-threatening, 'historical,' masculine aspect is merely dangerous, and this danger is in no way meaningful or necessary, but simply to be avoided. The life-furthering, 'loving,' feminine aspect is utterly benevolent, but also utterly impotent. No regeneration can be possible under these circumstances. Female fertility has been defeated by male science and is no longer threatening, but can also no longer offer the possibility of rebirth. Kath is the embodiment of this state of affairs. When she denounces '[b]its of rubber and tubes to squeeze and pills to swallow,' (Barnes 2005: 116) it is already too late. She is 38, childless, and tied by the men in white coats to a bed in a mental institution.

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## **BEKSTVO I POVRATAK: PONOVRNO ROĐENJE KROZ VODU U "STAROM MORNARU" I ISTORIJI SVETA U 10½ POGLAVLJA**

**Danica Igrutinović**

*Ovaj rad istražuje ponovno rođenje kroz vodu u Kolridžovom "Starom mornaru" i Barnsovoj Istoriji sveta u 10½ poglavlja. Pokušava da rasvetli uzroke za različit pristup ovom arhetipu prisutan u ova dva teksta, koji se uglavnom pripisuje različitom pogledu na žensku plodnost.*

Ključne reči: *Preporod, voda, plodnost, "Stari mornar," Istorija sveta u 10½ poglavlja*