

"heart of darkness" and its journeys

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In *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad creates an allegory, an archetypal story of journeys: through hell, back in time and to the core of the psyche- the heart of darkness. Conrad's character, Marlow, experiences not only a physical journey " deep within the heart of Africa" and in to the uncivilized Congo, but an archetypal journey of three different levels (Finston and White). In one of his journeys, Marlow descends into deeper levels of Dante's Hell. As part of the journey, Marlow describes his fascination with a map of Africa and how " it had become a place of darkness" to him (Conrad 43). Marlow also describes the map to contain a large river " an immense snake uncoiled, with its head in the sea" (Conrad 43).

His description of the snake relates to the serpent in the Bible that coincides with the Devil. The snake also represents man's descent into darkness and Hell because of its head's placement at the threshold of the continent. The allusion to Dante's *Inferno* continues as Marlow journeys to Brussels, he describes the city as a white sepulchre. The city's description becomes a first hand example to tombs and death that are vital to the image of Hell. As Marlow goes to his meeting in the fogged city, he sees two women " knitting black wool" (Conrad 46). The portrayal of the women knitting directly relates to the Fates that are so often portrayed in Mythology and Dante's telling of Hell.

The furthering description of Hell is portrayed in Marlow's journey on the boats, the boats parallel to Charion and his delivery of the spirits to Hades. Perhaps the greatest example of descent into Hell comes to the readers as Marlow's description of some of the characters. Kurtz' description in the novel is that of " a vapour exhaled by the earth... misty and silent" (Conrad

119). Marlow's journey back in time takes him to Primitive Earth as he explores farther regions of the jungle. Marlow describes the jungle and river as ageless, large, and almost primitive. The primitive character of the natural world not only explores the age of the Earth, but delves deeper into the idea that nature is superior to the civilized world and that it outstands what civilization thrusts upon it.

Conrad's description of Earth's primitiveness exceeds to the characters that have been tainted by the Jungle as well. Kurtz's description at the end of the novel compares him to be just as primitive and savage as the natives that inhabit the Congo. Marlow feels himself getting possessed as he "had turned to the wilderness" and experienced the true primitive makeup of nature and its inhabitants. Like the physician said, the jungle finds its way into every man without a level head. Although the journey through time focuses mostly on the Jungle, in the beginning of the novel Marlow makes reference to how "the Romans first came here, nineteen hundred years ago- the other day" (Conrad 40).

Marlow's statement employs the idea that civilization is quite insignificant in time compared to the vast age of the Earth in its true natural form. The journey into one's inner self, or psyche, seems to constantly be tested throughout the novel. After his journey, and at the beginning of the novel, Marlow has reached a sense of enlightenment and self knowledge that the reader discovers the cause for in the novel. Throughout the novel, Marlow struggles with the idea of his true self and the ability to keep the darkness in the jungle from inflicting him. By keeping the evil from inhabiting him and eventually becoming a Buddha figure, Marlow represents an "exploration of <https://assignbuster.com/heart-of-darkness-and-its-journeys/>

the hidden self and therefore of man's capacity for evil" (Feder 280). With his journey of self truth, Marlow also discovers the evil in those around him and that they possess no restraint or moral capability to withstand the pressures employed in order for self discovery.

With the case of Fresleven it becomes apparent that the man had no inner soul and was thus unable to find his true self, and eventually this led to his perishing. Without the ability to discover one's self, man inevitably deteriorates. In these journeys, Conrad portrays to the readers several levels of which to properly analyze man's purpose and truth.