University of Chitral
JOURNAL OF LINGUISTICS AND LITERATURE
CrossMark
ISSN INTERNATIONAL STANDARD SERIAL NUMBER
P 2617-3611
e 2663-1512
Crossref

Journal homepage: https://jll.uoch.edu.pk/index.php/jll

Navigating the Unconscious: The Symbolic Significance of Travel in *Heart of Darkness*

[1]Muhammad Yousaf Khan, [2]Nasir Jamal Khattak

[1] Assistant Professor of English, Department of Humanities, COMSATS University Islamabad, Attock
[2] Dept of English & Applied Linguistics, University of Peshawar

Article Info

*Corresponding author: (M. Y. Khan)
Corresponding Author email
usafmarwat@gmail.com

Keywords:
Heart of Darkness,
Marlow,
Travel,
Jung,
Archetypes,
Persona,
Shadow

Abstract

Travel is an intrinsic aspect of human existence. From the first explorations of new territories to modern-day secular travels, the act of moving across spaces shapes individuals and societies. This paper looks into the theme of travel in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* from the point of view of Jungian analytical psychology. It focuses on the impact of travel on the protagonist, Marlow. Drawing on Jungian concepts such as the unconscious, archetypes, active imagination, and synchronicity, we study the symbolic layers of Marlow's journey. We also touch on the historical evolution of travel, modern perspectives on secular travels, and the spiritual dimension of inner journeys. Marlow's expedition through the Congo River highlights the intricate interplay between the inner and outer realities emphasizing the broader human quest for self-discovery and growth.

Introduction

The multifaceted nature of travel has long captivated human imagination and intellect, serving as a significant theme across various domains, including literature, psychology, and history. Travel can be broadly categorized into physical and psychological journeys, each playing its crucial role in personal and intellectual development. Physical travel refers to the act of moving from one geographical location to another, while psychological travel involves mental journeys through intellectual debates, literature, movies, and moments of epiphany where individuals gain sudden, profound insights into their lives and the world around them. These moments of clarity often lead to significant personal transformations, as seen, for example, in the character of Gloucester in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, who, despite his physical blindness, experiences a powerful realization of his errors and moral shortcomings. Thus he turns down a helping hand while he walks: “I have no way, and therefore want no eyes;/I stumbled when I saw” (4.1.18–19). Gloucester experiences moments of epiphany and remorse upon discovering the true nature of his sons. He exclaims: “O my follies! then Edgar was abused./Kind gods, forgive me that, and prosper him (King Lear 3.7.90–91)!” Such epiphanies highlight the importance of introspection and self-awareness in personal development. In the same manner classic works such as *Gulliver's Travels, A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Rime of Ancient Mariner*, and *Heart of Darkness* depict characters embarking on journeys that lead to significant personal transformations. These journeys not only entertain but also offer readers insights into the human condition, exploring themes of identity, morality, and the complexity of the human psyche. For instance, Marlow's journey into the African jungle in *Heart of Darkness* is both a physical expedition and a profound psychological exploration of the darkness within the human soul, employing the inner most realities through the depiction of outer realities in a synchronistic manner. We accompany Marlow and we see in us and ours what we did not do before. Both types of travel contribute to the expansion of one's horizons, fostering growth, understanding, and a more profound self-awareness.

Analytical psychology, particularly the concepts introduced by Carl Jung, offers valuable insights into the phenomenon of travel. Key Jungian concepts such as archetypes, shadow, and unconscious provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the inner journeys individuals undertake, and are crucial for understanding the psychological aspects of journeying per se. Jung posits that the unconscious mind is a significant source of psychic energy and that dreams serve as a means of communication between the conscious and the unconscious, facilitating psychological growth and individuation. Archetypes, which are inherent psychic structures, play a vital role in this process. The hero, the trickster, and the wise-old man archetypes, for instance, are particularly relevant to the theme

of travel, as they represent different facets of the human journey. The interplay of these archetypes, often through synchronicity or meaningful coincidences, lead to the creation and activation of another archetype which further leads to significant expansions of the consciousness and self-awareness (Pearson 27-9).

Historically, travel has been an integral part of human existence, from the earliest travels motivated by basic survival needs to the voyages of exploration and the development of new technologies that facilitate global connectivity (Buchanan 2024). The journey of Odysseus in Homer's *Odyssey* symbolizes the trials and tribulations individuals face in their quest for knowledge and self-discovery (Lloyd). Similarly, the sacred journeys of pilgrims and missionaries during the Dark Ages reflect the spiritual dimension of travel, emphasizing the quest for faith and spiritual fulfillment. These historical perspectives underscore the timeless nature of travel as a catalyst for personal and intellectual growth.

Thus, this intricate relationship between physical and psychological travel highlights the transformative power of journeys in shaping human life, character, and personality. Whether through the literal movement across landscapes or the metaphorical journeys of the mind, travel enriches one's understanding of the world and oneself, fostering growth, empathy, and a deeper appreciation of life's complexities.

Literature Review

Travel has been, and continues to be, a topic of discussion and analysis in Jungian analytical psychology. Mary Esther Harding, an American Jungian analyst, explores the psychological dimensions of travel in her book *Journey into Self.* She applies Jungian concepts to John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, interpreting it as a spiritual journey that mirrors the process of individuation. She asserts that the "seventeenth century story…deals directly with the inner experience of the deeper layers of the unconscious which is typically human" (Harding, 7). Harding argues that Bunyan's protagonist's inner quest, driven by active imagination, represents a step-by-step progression towards personal development. This journey involves encounters with various archetypal figures and challenges, symbolizing the trials and tribulations faced by individuals on their path to self-discovery. She further says that the expected outcomes of this inner journey may or may not be realized, and that the "attainment [of quest's objectives] is thought of as the climax and fulfillment of life's efforts… As this is an inner journey, these factors must be taken as representing personifications or projections of something from within…the psyche" (Harding, 4).

In modern travel literature, there is a noticeable scarcity of depth which psychological analyses of secular travel experience. Joseph Lander, however, highlights the psychological motivations behind contemporary travel such as the desire for escape from hard life at home; yearning for seeking identification with another country; obsession with reputation and fashion; the quest of glamour; and the need for personal transformation. Lander asserts that travel compels the superego to relax, allowing id impulses to surface and be expressed freely. A person's recollections of the journey are influenced by their biases and desires (614). These motivations often reflect the underlying psychological impulses and needs, suggesting that travel can serve as a means of self-exploration and growth.

George Santayana views travel as a means to escape routine and experience the hardships that sharpen the edge of life. At times, he asserts, to invigorate life and encounter challenges, one needs to retreat into open solitude, embrace aimlessness, and take a break from moral constraints by taking pure risks (8). Pico Iyer likens travel to falling in love, emphasizing its potential to transform the mind and keep individuals alert and receptive to new experiences. He says, "We are mindful, receptive, undimmed by familiarity and ready to be transformed. That is why the best trips, like the best love affair, never really end" (9).

Dreams and the unconscious mind play a crucial role in understanding the psychological aspects of travel. Jungian analysts Edward C. Whitmont and Sylvia Brinton Perera, in their joint work *Dreams: A Portal to the Source,* assert that dreams enhance learning and aid in individual development by synthesizing experiences into meaningful images. They believe that dreaming is a clear and intentional process that combines experiences into meaningful and creative images. This helps with learning and supports personal growth (1). Similarly, archetypes, which emerge from the unconscious through dreams and fantasies, guide individuals on their journeys.

Carol Pearson sums up the significance of archetypes and journeys saying that our journey is supported by inner guides, or archetypes, each representing a distinct mode of existence. These guides impart valuable lessons and oversee various stages of our life journey (5-6). She outlines key archetypes that assist individuals on their life journeys, emphasizing that these inner guides help navigate the challenges and transformations encountered during travel. Furthermore, she says that archetypes are a source of our strength in dealing with the challenges life brings our way. They not only assist us in overcoming challenges but also contribute to our efforts to become productive citizens and morally upright individuals. Furthermore, they guide us in expressing our true selves, transforming our lives, and achieving freedom and joy. (29).

Our paper shows the symbolic significance of travel in *Heart of Darkness* in how Conrad uses it as a tool to help Marlow learn that there is always more to things than what we know about them. Thus Marlow encounters the unknown and the unfamiliar about others and himself. In doing so Conrad involves his reader too in this journey to learn how humans, human life, and reality are way too complex. That the readers grow with Marlow or characters like him in other pieces through the physical, emotional, and psychological movements, displacements and travels per se. The ups and downs the characters face bring out from the unconscious new behaviors, new attitudes, and new actions that they did not display or show prior to the physical or psychological travels. Thus individuals who embark on their journeys experience not only external landscapes but also the dark and unknown sides of their life. All this in turn helps them achieve a higher level of consciousness and understanding of themselves, of life and that of others.

Research Methodology

In our study, we aim at exploring the psychological implications of Marlow's travel, in Joseph Conrad's novel, *Heart of Darkness* from a Jungian point of view. We look at the central metaphor of travel as a means to connecting with the unconscious. Through a close textual analysis of the novel we focus on how Marlow's travel helps him see Africa differently than how he sees it in Europe and that in doing so he develops a better understanding of himself and that of others. We invoke Jungian terms to explain the attitudes and behaviors of the major characters with the local people.

Discussion

Heart of Darkness is a travelogue centered on the protagonist, Christopher Marlow, who embarks on his "sea travel"[i] after being appointed as the captain of a steamboat navigating the Congo River. His journey eventually takes him deep into the Dark Continent. The people he encounters there unsettle him with their bizarre and irrational behavior. He witnesses barbarity and savagery inflicted on the locals by the Europeans. The latter have no regard for the health, food, or physical wellbeing of the workers. Most of the times, they are involved in meaningless and non-productive activities as if the idea is to make them work no matter what. Juxtaposed with these are the Europeans who are healthy and immaculately dressed wearing "Starched collars, white cuffs, a light alpaca jacket, snowy trousers, a clean necktie, and varnished boots. No hat. Hair parted, brushed, oiled, under a green-lined parasol held in a big white hand. He was amazing, and had a penholder behind his ear" (Conrad 18).[ii]

The Accountant of the Company is indifferent to the ill health and suffering of both the white and black workers. Marlow witnesses the exploitation of the blacks and the massive wastage of resources by the white Europeans. Among others, Marlow also first hears of Kurtz who has the reputation of bringing "as much ivory as all the others [stations] put together" (Conrad 19). After a ten-day stay at the Outer Station, Marlow goes to the Central Station "with a caravan of sixty men, for a two-hundred-miles tramp" (Conrad 19). There he learns that his steamboat has been damaged. The station's Manager had set out "two days before in a sudden hurry up the river" (Conrad 21) and when he is back, he does not offer any help with the repair of the boat which prolongs Marlow's stay for months. This incomprehensible delay perplexes Marlow as he is supposed to lead a caravan of ivory-hunting pilgrims into the interior. The Manager explains to him that he had to leave him Mr. Kurtz, was seriously ill. During his stay there, Marlow senses how all of them are involved in intrigues and conspiracies against one another including their chief, Kurtz. After waiting and toiling for "some months" (Conrad 21), Marlow embarks on his strenuous and unpredictable journey up the Congo, penetrating "deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness" (Conrad 35). Marlow learns about Kurtz the signs and symbols there that he is not as much worthy of respect as he initially thought he was. Kurtz lives in a hut surrounded by a fence made of posts topped with human skulls. He is a degenerate both physically and psychologically who has no regard from human life or dignity. In one of the stations Marlow finds a note warning him to move cautiously ahead. The note says, "Wood for you. Hurry up. Approach cautiously" (Conrad 37). He also meets a Russian there who "looked like a harlequin" (Conrad 52) more than a sailor. The natives, Kurtz followers, attack them because they do not want Marlow to take Kurtz away. Marlow also gets to see Kurtz' mistress, "a wild and gorgeous apparition of a woman" (Conrad 60). Even though Kurtz is in poor health and frail, he secretly leaves his cabin at night to approach the dancing and chanting Africans. Marlow ventures ashore and manages to retrieve Kurtz after a hazardous and tense pursuit. One evening, with the awareness that his end is near, Kurtz gives Marlow valuable documents to deliver to his fiancée, who resides in London. Before his death, Kurtz' last words are, "The horror! The horror" (Conrad 69)! Upon meeting Kurtz' fiancé in London, Marlow tells her that Kurtz' last words was her name so she has fond memories of Kurtz. Marlow does not tell her about any of the heinous deeds Kurtz did there.

Marlow's journey in *Heart of Darkness* is the journey of every individual. Though Marlow represents a nineteenth-century Englishman from the middle class, he is a symbol for all of us from outside Africa. Even though the immediate audience of *Heart of Darkness* is the white European, whom Conrad wants to show their dark face, the

non-European reader is part of the extended audience too. Marlow observing and living in the atmosphere of oppression and exploitation of the Africans is a study or examination of its own deeds. His experience helps him see himself, Europe and the Europeans from a different perspective—a subject becomes the object of its own scrutiny. And with Marlow the readers too look inward and do a sort of soul searching and thus become conscious of the dark side of human existence and life. In this way Marlow's journey to the Congo is not just a plain travel from one geographic point to another, it is journey through the human unconscious where the bright and dark sides reside.

In the guided tour that Marlow gives his readers of Africa in general and of the Congo in particular we get to see and reflect on the excesses the Europeans commit against the locals. We get a firsthand experience of what the Europeans do to Africa and the Africans. The former pursue their economic and political interest in utter disregard of human life, their property, and culture. It is important to note here that the Europeans in Africa or for that matter any other oppressor will not do some of the things in Europe or their own country which they unscrupulously commit against their fellow humans in the Congo or elsewhere. They perform their task or duty that their respective companies, employers, or governments assign them. In their conscious effort the employees or representatives want to shine and do their job the best way they can. They want to come up to the expectations attached with the role they have to play. In the process they end up looking at the end, and not the means of what they do. While achieving goals is important, the means we use to achieve them are not unimportant either. The blind pursuit of the former makes people become what Jung (1970) calls "one-sided… [and get] stuck in blind alleys" (159). This behavior leads to self-centeredness which blinds us to rights, interests, lives, and properties of others. And that is where greed, lust, oppression, and exploitation seep into our approach to life and ooze out in the horrible things we do against our fellow humans.

It is important to note that while we live up to the expectations and standards of our social, professional, and political roles and shine in our respective capacity, we also create a parallel dark side that Jung calls the shadow, as opposed to the bright side of our personality that he calls the persona. The former is the face that gives us social acceptability; the latter the side we hide from people.[iii] Marlow's knowledge of the Europeans like Kurtz and others in Africa before his travel to the Congo was based on the persona Europe and Europeans wear in their own countries. What they do to Africa and the Africans is what they hide from everyone. Marlow's travel from Europe, the White Continent, to Africa is a travel from the conscious to the unconscious as the shadow is a content of the unconscious. That is, Marlow's travel to the Congo is a travel to the unconscious where he interacts with the dark side of Europe and the Europeans. He moves from the known and the familiar to the unknown and the unfamiliar. During the course of this journey, he comes to know what he had never known about Europe and European and about what the latter do in and to Africa and the Africans. He is faced with the ugliness, the oppression, and the barbarity Europeans inflict upon the locals. His journey shows him the face of Europe and the Europeans that he had never seen or known. It helps him see both Europe and Africa from a different perspective. While Europe and the Europeans appear to be all neat and clean, they have their dark side. Similarly, Africa and the Africans are rich in culture and wealth symbolized by ivory and all that the Europeans seek. A trade of sorts based on mutual respect for the locals and their culture and vice versa will allow Europe and the Europeans to have what they seek. In the process, Africa and Africans will get what they lack. The lack of consciousness on part of the Africans allows the Europeans to subject them to inhuman treatment in their efforts to get ivory and other natural resources from Africa. The overdeveloped consciousness, on part of the European in the blind pursuit of the roles their companies and countries assign them, makes them turn their back to the humans and humanity in Africa. The result is the oppression and exploitation of one or the other.

Thus for Marlow his travel from England to the Congo is a journey of sorts into his dark side. He experiences and learns what he had not known or experienced before. As such, his journey serves as a vehicle for his personal growth, intellectual expansion, and self-discovery. On the face of it, he travels from England to the Congo, but parallel to his physical movement is his psychological travel into his unconscious. But no matter how rewarding the travel is for him in seeing the other side of Europe and Africa, staying conscious and admitting to the dark side he has is not easy. At times due to our own social limitations or obligations we end up doing or stating things other than how they actually are. That is why he lies to Kurtz' fiancé about Kurtz' last words when he meets her in London upon his return from Africa.

In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow's journey up the Congo River is both a physical and psychological expedition, revealing the complexities of human nature and the potential for corruption in the absence of societal constraints and consciousness of our dark sides. Marlow learns through his firsthand experience that power, greed, and corruption drive humans to commit ugliest deeds against their fellow humans under one or another pretext. His encounters with various characters and situations illustrate the universal aspects of human experience, emphasizing the importance of self-knowledge and the integration of the shadow or dark self for achieving a balanced and realistic perspective of life around us. Looking at Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* from this point of view helps us understand how the apparent

physical movements from one point to another help us face the unknown and the unfamiliar. That is to say *Heart of Darkness* underscores the transformative power of travel in expanding human understanding and fostering self-awareness by allowing us a peek into the dark crevices of the proverbial heart.

Conclusion

Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* uses travel as a dominant metaphor and takes Marlow and in Marlow the reader too on a voyage of the human unconscious. Marlow's travel symbolizes every individual's journey into their unconscious confronting the unknown aspects of their personality and the dark secrets of their lives. His experiences highlight the consistent essence of human nature, regardless of the background. The narrative illustrates how moral corruption and the abuse of power emerge in the absence of societal laws and consciousness of the shadow.

[i] We use the words, "travel," "journey," "voyage," to denote displacement from one geographical location to the next. In order to avoid monotony, and to put variety into the text, we use them interchangeably.

[ii] Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2006). All subsequent references are to this edition, and are parenthetically incorporated into the text of this paper by the word, "Conrad" followed by page number.

[iii] According to Jungian psychology, shadow is an archetype of the personal unconscious. It is the repository of all the repressed emotions and traits of which we are ashamed in the conscious world. The Persona, on the other hand, is the face, the mask we consciously wear. Jung emphasizes the need of realizing the shadow in our lives, which is rather difficult and the is always inhibited by the persona. For details see "C.G Jung, *Man and his Symbols*, (New York: Dell Publishing, 1964), p. 171. For further immediate reading of all Jungian terms see Daryl Sharp, *Jung Lexicon*, accessed on July 07, 2024 from <http://www.psychceu.com/jung/sharplexicon.html> (1991).

Works Cited

Buchanan, R. Angus (2024, May 27). "History of Technology." *Encyclopedia Britannica. https://www.britannica.com/technology/history-of-technology*

Conrad, J. (2006). *Heart of Darkness: Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Contexts, Criticism* (4th Edition). New York: W.W. Norton.

Harding, M. E. (1956). *Journey into Self*. New York: Longmans, Green and Co.

Iyer, P. (2000). "Why we Travel" Pico Iyer Journeys. http://picoiyerjourneys.com/2000/03/18

Jung, C. G., and R. F. C. Hull. *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990.

------. (1970). "Aion: Phenomenology of the Self," *The Portable Jung*. Ed. Joseph Campbell. New York: Penguin Books.

------. (1940). *The Psychology of the Child Archetype. Collected Works of C. G. Jung* Vol.9, Pt. 1. Bollingen Series. Princeton University Press, 1969.

------. (1964). *Man and his Symbols*. New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group.

Lander, J. (1955). Some hypotheses on the psychology of travel, by M. Farber [Review]. *The Psychoanalytic Review*, XLI, 1954. *Psychoanalytic Quarterly*, 24, 614.

Lloyd, J. (2013, June 19). "Homer." *World History Encyclopedia*. Retrieved from https://www.worldhistory.org/homer/

Pearson, C. (1991). *Awakening the Heroes within: Twelve Archetypes to Help us Find Ourselves and Transform our World*. New York: Harper Court.

Santayana, G. (1964). "The Philosophy of Travel," *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, *40* (1), Pp. 1-10.

Whitmont, E. C., & Perera, S. B. (1998). *Dreams, a Portal to the Source: A Clinical Guide for Therapists*. New York, NY: Routledge.