

# Heart of darkness reflection

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



To Live or to Die As stated by Professor Rosenthal, characters are not people, and they are apart of an author's bag of tricks to make a point. I believe the author of Heart of Darkness, Joseph Conrad, used that character Kurtz as a symbol to represent savagery. Savagery can be defined as an uncontrolled, fierce and hostile individual. I believe there is a certain degree of darkness/savagery that lies within every being, but it does not always emerge, and if so can prevail to the point of ultimate destruction, that is Mr. Kurtz. We come to know and form our opinions about him by reading the story chapter-by-chapter, narrated by the character, Marlow. To fully understand Kurtz' representation it's crucial to first know what the author's symbolic intentions were when creating the character, and analyze how the narrator's attitude towards Kurtz changes throughout the story. I believe Conrad created Kurtz to make a point to the readers that he is a representation of savagery. Its one thing to just read the word, knowing what it means, or to just say something is savage without a meaningful justification. Reading Heart of Darkness really gives a great depiction of what savagery really is. Conrad used Kurtz to trail us as readers along, unraveling all the mysteries that Kurtz portrays. Not only do I think Conrad connected Kurtz with savagery but with corruption, exploitation, and hypocrisy as well. Towards the end of the book, one is really able to grasp the connection between savagery and Kurtz in many ways, but it wasn't until the journey continued throughout the story do we realize that. The narrator, Marlow is always open-minded about Kurtz at first, and then he sees the events going on and eventually sees how savage his character really is. In the beginning of his journey, Marlow hears nothing but good things about Kurtz. He envies

him, he thinks he is this extraordinary man that he strives to be like and would hope to be able to finally meet one day. Then, as time goes on, he reaches camp and things unfold. Once he reaches Kurtz, he sees all the decapitated heads, and the natives following Kurtz like he is some sort of God like figure. The law and order that Marlow thought existed in the tribe was no longer there. At this time in the book, we realize the significance of what his aunt told him before he left for this journey. Marlow meets with her, and she talked about “ weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways” (10). I definitely think is an example of foreshadowing that we one could have noticed early on in the book. She knew that inhuman beings are inside that jungle, the major one being Kurtz. As stated earlier, we initially think Kurtz is this poetic, refined, artistic man... all attributes, I feel, that are similar to imperialistic ones, comparable to a leader or dictator of some sort. He is charismatic and convincing (hence all of the natives succeeding him). In a way, his character is comparable to that of the Victorian Era. Conrad wrote this book during that period, so it’s easy to say that was a great inspiration for him. Many themes of the Victorian Era were exploitation, corruption, hypocrisy and more... many qualities I see in the Congo from Marlow’s description. In that Era, there was economic and industrial progress, and like any society, thoughts of self-deception, loneliness and isolation were paramount...there was corruption, prostitution and more. Kurtz was an example of man testing extreme situations. It’s important for one to have a sense of place, and it’s hard not to be pessimistic when in a situation like one that Kurtz was in. When one is in this place of bedlam, one chooses to make something of it and either survive, or fail; it becomes a

matter of life or death. Kurtz took the roll of a dictator in this environment and although he did it through savage, corrupt like ways, he had no choice. Initially reading, I thought Kurtz went from this prestige figure, to this crazy absurd man and had no idea why he was such a superior tyrant in the Congo, but after really thinking about the circumstances I realized... desperate times call for desperate measures; Kurtz did what he had to do and became something that he had no power to stop from thriving. After completing the book, I believe Kurtz is loosing his mind while being in the Congo, being away from civilization. The longer Kurtz is in that kind of chaos, the more he loses his sanity. It's not good for anyone to be in a situation where all structure is lost. One thing we don't know from reading *The Heart of Darkness*, is whether or not Kurtz has always been like this or if its been hidden and Africa is to blame for the out bringing of this Hyde like character. As readers, we are not aware of the ways that Kurtz lived by. We know he has a woman in his life, but do we know the kind of relationship he upholds with her, or anyone else by that means? Kurtz is a mystery that we try and piece together. Reading this made me think a lot of about real life, relative to everyday people. Does everyone have an alter ego, and are some more refined than others at keeping it in? I feel that everyone has his or her own place of darkness. At some point in life, everyone goes through an abstruse phase, Kurtz' being in the Congo. If I was stranded in an unknown place with no friends or family, completely on my own, I don't know how I would make it. Kurtz is in that same situation; he made it work, and although he has become this savage like character, its how he's surviving in the Congo. This is the point where Conrad is doing a great job at making the readers really

think about how Mr. Kurtz should be portrayed. This leads us to Kurtz' final quote before he passes, " The horror, the horror" (64). Before Kurtz let out his last words, Marlow asks himself, " Did he live his life again in every details of desire, temptation, and surrender during that supreme moment of complete knowledge? " (64). I feel as though Conrad never specifies the true meaning of Kurtz' final words for its up to us as the interpreters to really think about what it means. Marlow gives some sort of guidance as what direction to think about, but I don't really know if I could pin point the true significance. Going back to whether or not the Congo made Kurtz turn into the man he was or not is still the question. Did he belt his closing utterance because he thought of the horror that was going on around him, or was it who he has become after being in such a horrific place for so long? I truly love the fact that Conrad really makes use of this character in every way possible to get us to think of Kurtz, and I think that's what made him such an outstanding writer. He's able to embody what savagery represents by having these thoughts cross our minds as we read throughout this book.