

Heart of darkness critical essay

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Often statements have multiple interpretations depending on different perspectives. In the novel *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad makes the reader use their own knowledge to create themes and emotions. Consistently the theme of the horrific reality is mentioned throughout the novel in several aspects. Joseph's character Kurtz cries out, "The horror! The horror" (Conrad 86) during his last moments, however there is no obvious meaning and leaves the reader to realize how ambiguities of the quote.

The horror that Kurtz is referring to is the guilt he and Marlow feel, the disappointment of dying and the fear of the darkness. Emotional feelings tend to have the effect of guilt when something does not point in a positive direction. Many people make a wrong decision that forces them to feel guilty. Joseph Conrad's idea to show the feeling of guilt through his characters experience working in the Congo. The character Kurtz is very good at what he brings to the Company, however near his time of death he reflects on the inequality that is displayed towards the natives of the Congo.

Marlow is unaware of the job that he receives because the life he lives at home is opposite to the life he endures in the Congo and his first impression, "While I stood horror-struck, one of these creatures rose to his hands and knees, and went off on all-fours towards the river to drink" (Conrad 20). This quote explains that Marlow witnesses a different type of behaviour by being in a different society and naturally feels guilty about all of the aspects developed countries take advantage of.

Both Marlow and Kurtz know that what they are doing is unfair to the natives and the land but they also know that it is their duty to obey the rules of the Company. Authority is a key component of the emotions that the 'civilized'

and the natives are meant to experience, “ It was an affirmation, a moral victory paid for by innumerable defeats, by abominable terrors, by abominable satisfactions. But it was a victory” (Conrad 88). The quote refers to some positive aspects of the Congo as well as some negative points, especially Marlow mentioning the terrors, which then turn to guilt throughout the journey.

Many people end up with a guilty feeling about their life because of a previous defeat they are not content with. Most people have expectations in life that they want to accomplish before they die. The character Kurtz in the novel is a respected man because of what he brings to the Company although while he is moments until his death he looks back on his life and realizes his true destiny. Before Marlow meets Kurtz, the manager says, “ He will be somebody in the Administration before long. They, above - the Council of Europe, you know - mean him to be” (Conrad 23).

The Company has great plans for Kurtz because he is the best at what he does and that is sending in ivory. In the early 1800s, the largest resources in the Congo were ivory and rubber (King Leopold II and the Congo). Marlow feels Kurtz’s pain as he cries out because everything that Kurtz ever accomplished is about to come crashing down and cut his life expectancies short, “ All that had been Kurtz’s had been passed out of my hands; his soul, his body, his plans, his ivory, his career” (Conrad 91).

The previous quote states that in Marlow’s eyes there is a disappointing end to Kurtz’s life because of the expectations that not only to Kurtz himself, the expectations the Company had for Kurtz but also the ones that England had for him. Conrad’s character Kurtz expresses to the reader that the

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remarkable man has reached his limits but is not happy with the end result of his death and not perfect life later on. By spending time in a new environment the ability to change the lifestyle that a person has increases. Sometimes moving from one destination to a new destination will change a person's way of living.

Conrad's main characters Kurtz and Marlow set off to leave their own society and they enter the reality of darkness in the Congo. Coming from a more developed country than the Congo and having to adapt to the changes is difficult to do for Joseph Conrad's characters. The fear for Marlow of turning crazy after spending time in a completely different place is high because he knows the reason he got the job in the Congo was due to the death of Fresleven. The previous captain had been said to be the nicest creature ever (Conrad) which shocked Marlow to discover what Fresleven had turned into, "...

He whacked the old nigger mercilessly, while a big crowd of his people watched him, thunderstruck... The people had vanished. Mad terror had scattered them... " (Conrad 10). After a couple years of Fresleven being away from his home, the change that happens is that he is no longer the gentle man he started out to be. Kurtz cries out his last words of the horror he is experiencing, the ambiguity of what he means is flashing back to the way he is changing from his civilized-self to a weaker savage-like person which is a horrific change for Kurtz.

Marlow experiences the horror through himself and also through Kurtz of the Congo, "... A shadow insatiable of splendid appearances, of frightful realities; a shadow darker than the shadow of night... " (Conrad 91). The previous

quote refers to the Congo in general and goes back to the title of the novel itself. The frightening realities of changing a person they once were and becoming different but not in a completely positive way. Fear on the surface reality differs greatly from the underneath reality that is unknown until experienced thoroughly.

Some statements are left ambiguous to allow people to use their knowledge to create perspectives. Joseph Conrad reminds the reader of one of the main themes within the novel and that is the fear of reality. There are several ambiguous views to the fear within the Congo such as the guilt Kurtz and Marlow feel, the disappointment of not accomplishing everything expected in life and the horror of the darkness. Conrad makes the reader imagine the endless possibilities of emotions on the horror in the Heart of Darkness.