

# Apocalypse now essay



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For this project I have decided to study one of the greatest Vietnam War films of all time, 'Apocalypse Now'. The film was completed in 1979 after many problems with the production of the film. They ran into problems such as Martin Sheen having a heart attack as they were filming and great money problems with the film budget running over double what it should have been. It was a great strain and stress for Frances Ford Coppola who did the screenplay, the music and he was also the director, producer and the writer. It nearly cost him his marriage and everything he owned to fund the movie. In the end it was all worth it.

The awards that the film won are as follows: 1Academy awards (8 nominations) Vitorio Storaro won for best cinematography Walter Murch won for best sound Golden Globe Awards Frances Ford Coppola won for best director Robert Duvall won for best supporting actor British Academy of film and television arts awards Frances Ford Coppola won for best director Robert Duvall won for best supporting actor The film has also reached cult status. It is well known throughout the world and is classed as one of the greatest war movies of all time. "Although it can be classified as a war story, the films philosophical implications, which examine the horror and madness of war take it beyond the traditional war genre". Although there are many different concepts and aspects in this film to study I have chosen to study the madness that each character in the film goes through. Each of the main characters goes mad in their own way.

I will also study the connections of madness between the two main characters. The film is loosely based on the novel 'Heart of Darkness' which was written by Joseph Conrad in 1902. The film 'Apocalypse Now' is about

Captain Willard who is sent to kill Colonel Kurtz. The film is set in the Vietnam War. He has to travel down the Nung River with four other soldiers.

This is the basic storyline of the film. So much more happens in the three hour long film as well as everything that happens to Captain Willard and his crew. His journey has been described as “ a psychical journey, up a primitive river in the quest for a man whose discovery promises revelation, and as a metaphorical journey into the darkest recesses of the human mind”. This journey is what kills four people and sends them all mad in there own way.

No other film really goes into the depths of madness and war in this way. This is why the film is such a classic. Not everyone agrees with this. I read an article on the Internet about ‘ Apocalypse Now’ that I have included. 4(See Internet document) It is basically saying that the whole part of the film with Colonel Kilgore is inconsistent with the rest of the film and unnecessary. I don’t agree with this, as it’s a very important part of the film.

It shows another way in which war can drive a man crazy, which is one of the main themes of the film. It shows Colonel Kilgore as the insanely obsessed surfer. It also brings a little light relief to a very dark and bleak film. His scenes also show a lighter side to Captain Willard when he steals the surfboard.

It’s the only time you get to see the softer side of him. Frances Ford Coppola wanted to make a joke out of the war, which I will go into later. These scenes are perfect for that. If the scenes were so irrelevant and unnecessary why was it that Robert Duvall (Colonel Kilgore) won so many awards for it? I also disagree with the part about them getting the whole story wrong.

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They said that Captain Willard should go there to arrest Colonel Kurtz and not kill him. Also by saying that Captain Willard is just as bad as Colonel Kurtz. This is the film. What this person is describing is a completely different film.

The whole point of the film is Captain Willard becoming like Colonel Kurtz. Frances Ford Coppola may have taken the film from 'Heart of Darkness' so he wanted to keep most of the basic parts of the story the same. The person who wrote the article is missing the whole point of the film. There are six main characters in 'Apocalypse Now' that I will analyse in their own forms of madness.

Lance The first of the four members of the boat crew who takes Captain Willard down the river. He is a young man from Los Angeles. He was a well-known surfer before he was in the army. He takes drugs; he smokes dope and takes acid. This in turn leads to his madness. In one part of the film he covers himself in camouflage saying, "they are everywhere".

No one else thinks anything of it; they just put it down to the acid that he took. In reality there was people surrounding them, hiding in the trees on the bank of the river. He even knew this before Captain Willard did. Other effects that the acid has on him are that he thinks Vietnam is just like Disneyland. This might be the way that he tries to escape the war and the jungle in his head.

He is not really a soldier and doesn't belong in the war at all. As the film goes on he becomes further and further away from his crew and his mind. When his crew mate Mr Clean gets shot and dies he is more bothered about the

dog that he stole earlier from a Vietnam woman. He has all his priorities wrong. He is the only member of the crew that survives. At the end of the film he doesn't go with Captain Willard to kill Colonel Kurtz but stays with the Montagnards.

This is the native tribe that is lead by Colonel Kurtz. Lance smiles as they take away Captain Willard and he then joins in with their rituals with the bull slaughter. In the end he is taken away by Captain Willard. His madness is mostly drug related.

ChefChef is the most volatile character on the boat that likes to shout a lot when things go wrong. He can't really handle what's going on around him. This is especially shown when he is walking through the jungle thinking its safe, looking for mangos and a tiger jumps out on him. He starts screaming and shouting about the tiger and how he shouldn't be here (Vietnam). He also starts talking to himself " Never get off the boat". He never understood the mission and never asked.

When he finds out what the mission is he is shocked. He expects something like a bridge being blown up to help the American army. He didn't expect that they were all sent to kill one of their own men. This again sends him crazy and he start shouting and screaming all over again.

Early on in the film Captain Willard refers to chef as " screwed too tight for Vietnam, probably screwed to tight for New Orleans". Read about the film Saving Private RyanChef can't handle the war or the mission and turns to dope as a refuge. Mr Clean From the many books I have read about ' Apocalypse Now', none of them have really gone into any depths about the <https://assignbuster.com/apocalypse-now-essay/>

character of Mr Clean. Mr Clean was the third member on the boat and the youngest at seventeen. He was described as “ Cannon fodder for this war. Rock ‘ n’ rollers with one foot in the grave”.

He was another soldier that didn't belong in the war. He was also very naive. When the crew were searching the boat, he opened fire with no good reason and killed two people. He was doing this with his sunglasses on and by the look of his face he was having fun and no real regrets about killing innocent people. Mr Clean was too young, too naive and too stoned to understand the war and the horrors that surrounded it. We do find that his team thought highly of him.

The scene when he was killed is a very moving one because he is lying there shot and his mother is talking on a tape in the background saying, “ Stay out of the way of the bullets”. He was also the only character to have a proper funeral. Chief is the captain of the boat and the one who drives it. You could argue that he is the sanest person in the whole film. He doesn't do drugs, he even passes up the chance of having sex with playboy bunnies.

He is very serious throughout the film and doesn't let up once. He is compassionate as he tries to save the Vietnamese woman aboard the Sampan boat but Captain Willard kills her to save time. Chief doesn't like Captain Willard or the mission but follows his orders because he is the only real soldier aboard the boat. He only really shows his hatred for Captain Willard once when he is impaled by a spear and tries to pull Captain Willard on the spear as he died.

Kilgore Kilgore has one of the most insane personalities in the film. This is nothing to do with drugs or alcohol nor has the war or jungle got to him. Throughout the film its very dark, violent and sometimes depressing. Kilgore and his scenes provide some comic relief.

He is the commanding officer of the cavalry, which is part of the U. S Army. He has been described as “ Kilgore regards himself as the incarnation of the cavalry spirit, chomping on his cigar, tossing aside his Stetson and yellow scarf at the prospect of surfing under enemy fire”. He has some strange ideas about the war and how to win it. This includes playing ‘ The Ride of the Valkyries’ in the helicopters to scare the Vietnamese before they bomb and kill them. There is also his obsession with surfing.

He would only take Captain Willard to the mouth of the Nung River because he found out the surfing there was excellent. He is also obsessed with Lance, as he is a well-known surfer. Kilgore gets his men to go surfing while there is still fighting going on because in his opinion it’s safe. Kilgores madness and insanity goes further when he is talking to his men and Captain Willard and bombs and shots are going off all around them. Captain Willard and Kilgores men are ducking and diving, but Kilgore just stands there, talking about the war and doesn’t flinch once. He is not scared of being shot or bombed because he is the type of person that has no fear of death.

Captain Willard Captain Willard goes more insane than any other character in the film. We first see him in the hotel room. Here we see an insane man already. He is jumping about, smashing things up.

This is due to boredom. He doesn't know what he wants from the war.

12 "When I am in the jungle, I want to be home. When I am home I can't think of anything else but being back in the jungle".

Being in the hotel room is like a limbo for him and he hates it. Throughout the journey he doesn't really speak to any of the crew unless it's to do with where he wants the boat taking. He doesn't open up to anyone and doesn't make any friends. He spends all his spare time of the journey studying Kurtz. He studies his records and his history. Captain Willard is trying to understand what it is that sent Kurtz over the edge of sanity.

The more he studies him, the more he understands why he did what he did. He begins to have some kind of connection with Kurtz. He understands what Kurtz went through and what he is going through. He feels that he is going through the same journey that Kurtz went through.

Not necessarily the psychical journey, but the mental and emotional journey he is going through. Even though the madness begins to take over him he doesn't forget his mission and what he has to do. When he gets to the camp he starts to think that Kurtz is as mad as the army made out. He says to himself " Everything I saw told me Kurtz has gone insane" and " He has broken away from himself".

4 In the end Captain Willard is as bad as Kurtz, he kills people for no good reason such as the Vietnamese woman in the boat. In the end he kills Kurtz not because he was ordered to but because he is putting him out of his misery. Colonel Kurtz We first hear from Kurtz near the beginning, when the generals play the tape of him. Here we hear an insane man talking. The



army wanted him because he killed four Vietnamese double agents without being told and starts to fight the war in his own way. The American army didn't like this and sent Captain Willard to kill him.

He is a very powerful character in the film even though he isn't in it very long. His views and actions intimidate Captain Willard. He manages to get to him without doing anything. When we meet him we barely get to see his face, only shadows. This is more likely to be because they want shroud him in mystery in the film. He is very calm for an insane man.

He only loses his temper once and that's when he throws something at the photojournalist to shut him up. Kurtz likes to talk in riddles. He says things like " You are an errand boy sent by grocery clerks". What he says to Captain Willard affects him that much that he almost starts to side with him. Captain Willard doesn't turn into a native or abandon the army but he does agree with him. This is shown when he says, " They were going to make me a major for this and I wasn't even part of their fucking army anymore".

Kurtz is a symbol of what madness really is. The way he looks, the way he talks, the way he lives all points to the insanity that he has become. He passes on his beliefs to Captain Willard before he talks him into killing him. He talks him into killing him because he is sick of the war and he doesn't want his family, especially his son, to see him as the monster that he has been branded by the army. Kurtz knows what he did was right but he also knows that no one else would see it that way.

All the characters in the boat were young, impressionable people. None of them were soldiers and none of them belonged in the war. With everything

they went through it wasn't surprising that they all went mad in their own way. They can't handle the war or cope with the jungle.

With Captain Willard it was the army's fault he went insane. They should have known that it could have happened as it happened before when another soldier went insane because of the same mission. With Kurtz being such a powerful man able to manipulate people without even knowing it, Captain Willard had no chance. The madness of war was not the only concept in this film. From watching 'Apocalypse Now' a few times other concepts came to me.

Francis Ford Coppola seems to want to make a mockery out of America in the war. This is shown by what the soldiers are doing most of the time. They are water skiing, surfing, playing American football, getting drunk and doing drugs. This shows how unprofessional America was in the war and probably why they lost. This is also shown when the man from the French plantation says; "You are fighting the biggest nothing in history". Francis Ford Coppola was very brave to make this film as nothing before like it had been tried.

He mixed a Vietnam War film with the horror and madness genre. Other Vietnam War films have been excellent such as 'Full Metal Jacket' and 'Platoon' but none really touched on the depths of madness in the way that 'Apocalypse Now' did.