

Heart of darkness – meaning behind kurtz’s last words essay sample

[Life](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Darkness resides in everyone, whether people want to admit it or not.

Sometimes the evil is subtle, like hidden abuse while other times it is beyond obvious, like genocide. Whether it is subtle or known, that darkness will eat away at a person's soul. Kurtz was an intelligent person and respected back home. What happened? He gave into the darkness and unleashed it upon the natives in Africa. In Heart of Darkness, Joseph Conrad uses Kurtz's last words as a recognition of life choices and a proclamation of insight to the consequences of releasing the darkness within. On the surface Kurtz's last words, "The horror! The horror!" (Conrad, 69), can be accredited to Kurtz reliving his life before he dies. Some people use the saying 'my life flashed before my eyes' after being in a near death experience. Since Kurtz was dying, it is likely he saw a replay of his life. Why would Kurtz be horrified about that? According to his intended, "[H]is goodness shown in every act..." (Conrad, 76), so what did Kurtz have to worry about?

Kurtz worried about the goodness of his actions. Could it be the goodness his intended had mentioned was shown in the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs where his eloquent words teemed with sympathy for the natives? However, Kurtz erased any goodness when he wrote "Exterminate all the brutes" (Conrad, 50) at the end. Therefore it can be assumed that whatever goodness Kurtz had before his job in Africa, it was gone now. In fact, as Kurtz saw his life go by him once more, what he saw horrified him. Everybody in Heart of Darkness views the natives as savage, inferior creatures and they are perhaps demeaned the most by Kurtz. At the Outer and Central Station the blacks were physically beaten and starved. Marlow describes them as "[B]undles of acute angles" (Conrad, 17), and they

looked like they were “ in some picture of a massacre or a pestilence” (Conrad, 17).

The Europeans did not care about the natives and acted accordingly. They physically brutalized the natives and were indifferent to whether or not the natives died. Kurtz was no different. He demeaned the natives just as much but in a different way. Much like a cult, Kurtz gathered the natives, poisoning their minds. The Russian explains to Marlow that the natives had such a great reverence to Kurtz that “ They would crawl...” (Conrad, 58) to him. Yes, like some worshipping rite, the natives demeaned themselves by approaching Kurtz on their hands and knees. It was not just the ‘ common’ native people either, but the great chiefs as well.

Kurtz was an idol to be praised, a leader to be obeyed, and a dictator to rule. He subdued his enemy, the ‘ rebels,’ by sticking their heads outside his window. Marlow comments, “ They would have been more impressive, those heads on the stakes, if their faces had not been turned to the house” (Conrad, 57). Why would Kurtz do that? The heads did not face the landscape warning people off, but towards the house so Kurtz could see the lifeless faces staring at him. It is possible that he did so to remind himself of the guilt of murdering people, but that is highly unlikely. No, instead of a reminder of guilt, those faces were a reminder of triumph. Kurtz had done it; he subdued the ‘ rebels’ that kept him from getting ivory. Not only did he subdue the ‘ rebels’, but he also captured the hearts of the other natives. They loved him so much that they attacked a steamer just so Kurtz would not leave. However, like a true cult, the natives were simply following Kurtz’s

orders. It is learned from the Russian that “[I]t was Kurtz who ordered the attack to be made of the steamer” (Conrad, 63). Upon his actual departure the natives saw him off sorrowfully.

The irony though is that Kurtz did not want to leave the Inner Station as well. Why did he not want to leave? Kurtz did not want to leave because darkness consumed him. Darkness filled Kurtz’s soul to the point where Marlow comments, “[H]is soul was mad” (Conrad, 66). Silence and solitude caused Kurtz to become mad, though he had plenty of company. His native lover is described as “[S]avage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent...” (Conrad, 60). Maybe that is the reason why he went mad. He had company to be sure, but savage company. He had no cultured or civilized people to discuss matters with or somebody who came from the same background to swap stories with. Kurtz was left utterly alone in his thoughts, which caused him to become filled with darkness. The darkness is in everyone; however, Kurtz lacked the restraint to keep it shackled inside of him. It is possibly that lack of restraint that scared Kurtz the most as he watched his life go by him. He relived every moment as saw the man he had morphed into. Kurtz had become a man who killed unashamedly, threatened everyone, and whose only goal was to find ivory. As Marlow puts it “ To speak plainly, he raided the country” (Conrad, 55).

Ivory was his mistress, tempting and taunting him to continue in his dark path. All of the vile deeds, he did in the name of ivory. His lack of restraint destroyed him, and that is what he saw before he died a broken, despicable, and mad man. Now that is what he saw as his life flashed before him, but

some can say that what he saw was something much deeper. Kurtz was a sinner, an unrepentant sinner. Therefore it is not that much of a stretch to say Kurtz saw that he was going to hell. Hell is described by many as a fiery pit from which there is no escape. It is where a person will live in eternal torment for the deeds they committed on earth. Sister Faustina was a person who saw hell in a vision. She claims that “ Each soul undergoes terrible and indescribable sufferings, related to the manner in which it has sinned” (Bibleprobe. com). Now Kurtz’s last words make a little more sense.

His cry, “ The horror! The horror!” (Conrad, 69), can be understood as him realizing his consequences for his actions. Due to his cruel and unjust treatment of the natives, and for allowing the darkness in his soul out his soul shall be in Hell for all eternity. It is in Hell where Kurtz receives the ultimate punishment, an eternity of suffering and despair. To conclude, Joseph Conrad has Kurtz’s last words in Heart of Darkness be a declaration of the consequences of unleashing the darkness within. The evil that spread in Kurtz’s soul was all consuming. It was the perfect mixture of subtle and obvious. However, due to his lack of restraint, Kurtz died a troubled and condemned man. He may have seen his life flash before him, but he also viewed his punishment. Eternity in Hell is his punishment, for it is filled with unimaginable horror.