

# Heart of darkness questions

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



In the beginning of the novel, Marlow's comparison of the barbarian darkness on the northern fringes of the Roman Empire and the Belgian Congo, the dark heart of Africa, are examples of foreshadowing. Towards the beginning, Marlow is imagining what it must have been like for a Roman conqueror to travel through the jungle and all of the obstacles and hardships that would've been put in his way. Harsh weather, disease, and death being only a few of what he'd be forced to deal with.

The idea of the Roman having a fascination of abomination, or an allure to evil, later shows itself in Kurtz after such a long amount of time in the Congo. An example of irony would be the consistent depiction of Africa as a dark and gloomy place, while in reality the Europeans are responsible for starting violence and the natives only start to contribute when they feel the need to fight back.

The three main characters – Marlow, Kurtz, and the Intended – represent distinct points of view on the nature of the world and the meaning of life. Kurtz had fallen victim to the power of the jungle, and while he was the most open minded and optimistic, he became the most dark and evil. He was able to follow through with his dream and work to create a civilized Africa, however, through time, his surroundings molded him into a barbarian himself. As his life is nearing its end, Kurtz becomes hopeless as he reflects back on his own experiences, shown when he exclaims, The horror! The horror!. Marlow acts as the middle ground. While he is somewhat affected by the darkness of the Congo, he tries to not let it get the best of him. While Marlow is excited to go on his adventure and to meet Kurtz, he keeps in mind the dangers that may come with it and how it may affect him negatively. The

Intended represents purity and has the most positive outlook on life. She doesn't have the same experiences as Marlow and Kurtz, which keeps her positive and unaware of the danger and negativity in life. They are mutually exclusive in that even though Marlow is trying to avoid the darkness, he wants to get closer to Kurtz. And while the Intended is pure and light, she holds Kurtz, the most evil of the three, on a high pedestal.

The jungle changes both Marlow and Kurtz internally, as suggested by the doctor during Marlow's examination. While Marlow was very eager to travel to the Congo, the journey makes him aware of the heart of darkness in humanity. His travels show him that everyone has an innate sense to do wrong, some will ignore this while others will act on it and do evil. When he returns home he's unbothered by what others would consider problems as he has seen true evil in action. He's angered by those who find daily life difficult and relates everything back to his experience in the Congo.

Marlow's opinion of Kurtz in the beginning was based off of others' opinions and he became interested in Kurtz without meeting him. Before his time in the Congo, Kurtz was a generous mind and noble heart, according to his fiancée. After being in the Congo, Kurtz acquired an enormous amount of greed for ivory, doing whatever he could to gain more profit off of it. When the natives realized they were being taken advantage of, they saw Kurtz as their enemy. Internally, Kurtz changed so much so that those who he had an alliance with began to despise him and the very thing he wanted to destroy, barbarism, was what he became himself.

The Intended backs Marlow's belief that women are naive and innocent as she doesn't see Kurtz for who he truly is. She's unaware that after his time in the Congo he himself has turned into a barbarian, the exact thing he wanted to get rid of. She puts him in a higher position as she believes he's a wonderful man, however cannot see what he has become. The African woman on the shore has the power to influence workers with her presence and beauty, which shows that women are a powerful source in men's lives. While women may seem pure and naive, they have the power to control, influence, and persuade men. The two women knitting at the Company headquarters use dark wool to foreshadow Marlow's time in the Congo and the dangers that he will face, as well as the darkness in his heart that he will try to avoid. Marlow's aunt represents a connection to his work and is one of few women that he believes is worthy of respect. The novel's ongoing theme of women is one of purity and innocence. While women are influential to men and their lives, many are oblivious to reality and the harshness of the world.

The pilgrims that Marlow meets and travels with are greedy and their full intention is to earn as much profit as possible. Their travels had nothing to do with friendships or relationships and they didn't feel the need to help each other in times of need, for example when Marlow's steamer broke down. As stated, They intrigued and slandered and hated each other, meaning they didn't care about each other and if someone got in their way of money, they would have no problem turning on each other. The pilgrims also carry out barbaric acts, shown in their treatment towards the hippopotamus, and they see the natives as less than human. Without hesitation they open fire on the

natives because they believe they should be treated like animals. They treat no one with respect because they only want the profit of the ivory and the glory for themselves.

Marlow's description of the helmsman proves that he is capable to see natives as fellow human beings, instead of seeing them as animals, like the pilgrims and other Europeans see them as. Marlow compliments his physique and work ethic and even goes as far as to forming a bond with him, which is shown when Marlow shows remorse for him when he dies. As the helmsman is hit and wounded, Marlow finally realizes that he will somewhat miss having him to work with and feels bad that he has passed. He even goes as far as giving him a short service by ceremonially leaving him in the river. This act proves that, while the darkness of what he's seen in the Congo may have altered him internally, Marlow has the ability to show compassion to those outside of his race in a time and place where most Europeans did not.

The Russian at the Inner Station is a foil to Kurtz in most aspects. Kurtz is a strong-willed, ambitious man with a yearn to reach excellence. He's assertive and persuasive in that he's able to make the natives believe he was a god and create an alliance with them. However, as time passes he becomes exceedingly greedy for ivory and slowly goes insane and haggard. The darkness of the Congo, and his own being, change him internally into an image of death. On the other hand, the Russian is a young man, dressed in colorful patched clothing resembling a harlequin. He's lively and is more of a follower than a leader, being described as a disciple. These characters add

meaning to the story by showing two completely opposite beings and how they behave and interact with others, as well as their outlook on life.

Kurtz's dying words, 'The horror! The horror!' depict how Kurtz viewed his own life. The reader can assume that at this moment Kurtz's life is flashing before his eyes and he's realizing the true horror that has happened around him and was caused by him. He recalls the horrible darkness of the world and the reality that he's lived. He might also regret the evil he has done and wished he had been more pure and innocent himself.