

Marlow's reaction to the death of Kurtz

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



Based on a close reading of the conclusion to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, explain Marlow's reaction to the death of Kurtz. Several dramatic shifts in perspective characterise Marlow's changing reaction to the death of Kurtz in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. This changing or evolving perspective is ignited once Marlow returns to Belgium and begins to interact with the people who knew Kurtz prior to his derangement resulting from his savage experience in the Congo jungle; this eventually culminates in the meeting between Marlow and Kurtz's Intended. It is through this meeting with the Intended that Marlow truly begins to appreciate the gross paradox between what Western ideals consider civilised and uncivilised, allowing him to fully comprehend his mixed feelings toward Kurtz and the dark experience he was witness to in the Congo Jungle. It isn't until Marlow has been restored to health by his Aunt in Belgium that he fully begins to contemplate Kurtz' existence. Close friends and relatives of Kurtz visit Marlow and offer a largely idealised version of their personal memories of the man Kurtz. These memories contrast dramatically with Marlow's own darker recollections of the Kurtz he encountered in the jungle. This causes Marlow to question the authenticity of his own recollections of the Congo experience. Yet despite this conundrum, Kurtz plagues Marlow's consciousness, and in a sense, his actions in the Congo haunt Marlow's memories, forcing him to re-evaluate his opinions about Western society's imperialistic ideology and morality. However, Marlow remains loyal to the memory of Kurtz to the very end despite witnessing his atrocious behaviour in the Congo. His lie to Kurtz's Intended about the utterance of her name as Kurtz' final words, as opposed to the more ambiguous truth of "the horror, the horror" (Norton, 2010) allows the

positive and idealistic memory of Kurtz by those who knew him to be kept alive. Furthermore, it allows the idealism which characterises the Western world to remain intact, as Marlow is not capable of laying bare the confronting reality of the destruction man is capable of unleashing when placed in a setting which is free from restriction. The reader is left struggling to fathom the reasoning behind Marlow's decision to withhold the truth of the abhorrent reality Kurtz had become. The novella, despite often being ambiguous, does offer some possible explanations for Marlow's deceit. Perhaps the most plausible however, lies not so much in that Marlow thinks the truth is far too dark to reveal, but more so because he shares a solidarity with Kurtz which was born out of the experience they shared in the jungle. In the final pages of the book, Marlow speaks of Kurtz as a "remarkable man" (Norton, 2011) because he had something to say in his final moments; "he had summed-up, he had judged" (Norton, 2011). Marlow believes that Kurtz's dying breath was filled with a startling enlightenment into the horror of his own actions. It is possible that Kurtz, in his dying moments, is appalled by his own savagery. Marlow, himself having teetered on the symbolic edge that bridges sanity or civility, and insanity or savagery, in the end is capable of understanding how Kurtz was transformed by Imperialistic greed into becoming a being capable of committing such abominable acts of atrocity. It is through this solidarity that Marlow is able to appreciate how remarkable a being Kurtz truly was, despite experiencing feelings of repulsion for the man.