

## Heart of Darkness Madness Essay

The delusion of Kurtz from Heart of Darkness consists of his own wanting. Without any checks in the wilderness, Kurtz's true self is revealed. Kurtz's original goal was to be a successful person gathering Ivory from the Congo. Kurtz likely did not intend for it to go as far as it did; however, it did go that far. Kurtz had become a god to the people of the nearby tribe, and when a man has the power of a god, it corrupts him. Marlow states that in these surroundings a man, "must meet that truth with his own stuff - with his own inborn strength. Principles won't do." Kurtz may have had the best principles in the world, but in the jungle, he had to rely on his own internal checks.

The way that Kurtz's madness is shown is by the way he treats the natives from the area he is collecting Ivory in. Kurtz establishes his dominance by murdering members of the tribe and using their heads as decoration. He then uses his new control to tell the people to do whatever he says. The people of the tribe start to worship him to the point of hurting Marlow and the people on Marlow's boat whenever they approach the area. The people have developed a devout love of Kurtz and they do all that they can to protect their leader.

As his time in the Congo went on, Kurtz's checks seemed to deplete. By the time the audience met Kurtz, he was fully descended into madness. Kurtz had decorated his dwelling with skulls on pikes and had used his powers to control seemingly every aspect of the life of the tribe. As Marlow is trying to get Kurtz to leave behind the culture he had cultivated, Marlow describes Kurtz's soul as "mad" saying, "Being alone in the wilderness it had looked within itself, and, by

heavens! I tell you it had gone mad.” The use of the pronoun “it” here instead of “he” furthers the idea that Kurtz had lost all sense of self and all self-regulation. He could no longer be called a man.

Kurtz’s madness might be judged reasonable by his surroundings. Kurtz was in a jungle, and to succeed in his mission, he saw it necessary to stoop to the level of madness that he had seen in the natural world. Many of the tribes in the book are described as cannibalistic or uncivilized, when Kurtz encounters the culture of the tribe that he conquers, he is probably very confused. He had never seen a culture like that, and his first instinct was to take control of the situation.

Kurtz’s madness might also be judged reasonable by the type of mission that he was on. He was not going to the Congo to learn and observe, he was going to the Congo to use slave labor to harvest Ivory. The madness in the act of making another man your slave also added to the madness that Kurtz experienced in his surroundings. This relates to the madness in the story as a whole, and in the historical setting of the book. When King Leopold of Belgium purchased the Congo, he set off to make a profit off of the people and the natural resources. The madness in this type of colonization and the way that many of the native people were treated is the same madness that appears in Kurtz.

In the work as a whole, the madness is used to make the reader examine themselves and explore how the madness would affect them, “the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside.” This statement is at the beginning of the novel, and it allows the reader to

process the book with the knowledge that they will get out of the book whatever they put into it. The wording and excess use of adjectives makes the reader feel like they are in a jungle themselves, and the tedious pace of the book forces the reader into the position of madness that the characters in the book are in.

The work as a whole also examines how madness affects different people differently. When faced with madness some people will try to get rid of their competition so that they can have an advantage, some people may try to apply checks to themselves and regulate their appearance, and some people may succumb to the madness and give into every worldly desire that they possess. As the reader encounters these characters, they are forced to come to terms with what character they might resemble the most.