

Character Analysis of KURTZ in Heart of Darkness

Kurtz is the most important figure in *Heart of Darkness*. Joseph Conrad reveals little about him through the action in the book. We are introduced to this enigmatic character through various events and other persons. His role is a series of images constructed by others.

Kurtz's mother was half-English and his father was half-French. Educated partly in England and partly in other countries, he was a great genius. Conrad presented him as an efficient agent, a painter, a journalist, a musician, a great conversationalist and a great man who could win over the heart of natives. The International Society for the suppression of the Savage Customs had entrusted him with the making of the report, for his future guidance, which when prepared was very eloquent. Almost every person shares a good and sometimes high opinion about Kurtz as he has affected all their lives differently. His cousin tells Marlow that Kurtz was a great musician and humanitarian and concludes him as a genius. The Belgian journalist offers another image of Kurtz. He refers him as a brilliant politician and leader. Kurtz's Intended saw him as a loving, devoted and caring person. She obviously had no idea that he was having an affair with a native woman in Africa.

It has been rightly said,

Mr. Kurtz- so sensitive, so civilized-who at the savage centre of the jungle; sees into the darkness of himself, and dies.

It is difficult to distinguish how Kurtz who seems so insular and isolated from the rest of the society was able to connect with so many persons. The reason behind this may be, he did not really let anyone know him truly. He let people see what they wanted to.

In Heart of Darkness, Kurtz is first introduced by the accountant of the Company. As soon as Marlow arrives, the accountant informs him that he (Marlow) would meet Kurtz when he goes into the interior of the country. According to the accountant, Mr. Kurtz is a ***first class agent*** of the Company adding also that ***he is a very remarkable man.***

The brick-maker expresses high opinion about Kurtz. He says,

Mr. Kurtz is a prodigy and an emissary of pity of science of progress and devil knows of what else.

Further, he tells Marlow that men like Mr. Kurtz are needed for the enlightenment of such dark countries as the Congo, for he is the man of high intelligence, wide sympathies and singleness of purpose. He also expects Kurtz to become the assistant manager of the best station of the Company.

Kurtz had come to the dark country with high aspirations and ideals. His stay here was a sort of test of his personality- the test of lofty ideals against the dark powers of the wilderness. In this test Kurtz failed. Besides betraying the humanity in him, he also betrayed the natives and reduced them to poverty and subservience; deprived them of their dignity and will. However, he himself reduced to be a hollow man. Kurtz degradation may largely be attributed to his utter lack of restraint. Also, at the inner station he is deprived of the support and restraint of his society. In this wilderness, there is nothing to prevent him. However, there is no doubt that he was a daring person. Unlike the agents who rejected the challenge of the dark wilderness, Kurtz went to the extreme in his exploration.

He came to Congo to explore the area, but soon his aim was to collect ivory. This brings forth his greediness. Though one can notice Kurtz was not without moral awareness. He remains conscious of his cold-blooded exploitation towards the natives. Their treatment of him almost as a deity gave him pleasure but this was followed by his intensifying moral awareness. Thus, Kurtz can be seen as a white man who is conscious of his sinister aspect, though he himself falls prey to the odious primitivism. If Kurtz has fallen he has fallen from a considerable height and Marlow finds in his fall a sign of superiority. He feels that Kurtz possesses, ***an inextinguishable gift of noble and lofty expression.***

The last words 'the horror! the horror!' uttered by Kurtz before his death comes as a final judgement of the adventures that his soul has gone through on the earth. But Marlow feels that these words express some sort of belief. They show candour and conviction and may be interpreted as an affirmation and a moral victory over all the innumerable defeats of Kurtz in his life.

Therefore, Kurtz is a symbolic figure who represents White man's greed and commercial mentality. He can also be seen as a symbol of hypocrisy of civilizing the African savages. He also represents the European men's love of power and a thirst to rule over the backward classes of the globe even at the cost of basic principles of humanity.