Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* presents a wilderness both external and internal: the literal surroundings of the African jungle, and the allegorical wilderness in man, from which the book’s title is derived. Conrad utilizes two characters to portray different approaches to this double standard of a wilderness and their subsequent consequences: Marlow’s approach is led by restraint, ultimately allowing him to escape it; however, Kurtz is not so lucky, meeting his end on a boat in the jungle. Marlow’s separation from the wilderness allows him to return, whereas Kurtz is consumed by it to the point where he cannot exist apart from it.

Marlow’s restraining approach to the wilderness allows him to remain detached from it. He does not succumb to the carnal, illogical side of it, and instead is able to stay practical. Though the men around him seek to kill one another just for the sake of killing, Marlow does not see the purpose in it. He is not immune to the urge; he desires to kill Kurtz on the bank of the river after he leaves the boat, but is able to reason through his feelings, realizing that killing Kurtz would lead to nothing. Marlow actively removes himself from both the literal and figurative wilderness, deliberately turning to his work. Though he hates fixing the boat’s leaking pipes, they become a welcomed distraction: he immerses himself in their repair so he does not have to deal with the physical surroundings of the jungle, and so he does not have to listen to Kurtz’s own descriptions of it. Whenever confronted with danger, Marlow finds himself craving reality. He treasures the book he finds in the Russian trader’s desolate, abandoned camp because it feels “real,” and when searching for Kurtz on the bank of the river and realizing he could die at any moment, he turns to the loud beating of his own heart, comforted by its “regularity.”

Whereas Marlow distances himself from the wilderness in its entirety, it is Kurtz’s active descent into the wild that leads to his demise. Marlow first becomes aware of Kurtz’s lack of restraint when he finds that the “knobs” on the fence posts are actually human heads, though Marlow himself says they serve no purpose. Kurtz is feared by Marlow, not because he holds complete control and command over the native people, but because he is no longer a man who Marlow can reason with, or who shares any of his values. The “rules” of society no longer apply to Kurtz—he is his own standard and his very existence is governed by his obsession with ivory. Kurtz threatens to shoot the Russian trader who nursed him back to health just because he had a small bit of ivory with him and tells him he would enjoy it, and that nobody could stop him. Kurtz is so consumed by his desire for ivory that he disregards his own health, crawling out of the boat and literally bringing himself back into the wilderness. Though Kurtz has a fiancée in Europe, he takes a “gorgeous apparition” of a native woman as mistress, fully leaving all notions of European society and his past life behind.

Though Marlow and Kurtz are subjected to both the physicality of the jungle and its effect on the inner heart of man, Marlow is able to remain separate from it, eventually returning home. He remarks that Kurtz is a great man to the manager, but the manager merely replies, “he was.” Any semblance of the former greatness of Kurtz vanishes as Kurtz himself is destroyed by the wilderness in all regards as his physical health declines with illness, and his own obsession with ivory and his plans lead him into despair. In his death, Kurtz realizes how the wilderness had led him to such a pathetic place, and acknowledges the harrowing fact that it could happen to anyone, screaming, “The horror! The horror!” as he dies. Even a year after returning to Europe, Marlow cannot bring himself to connect with his journey and continues to reject the darkness of the wilderness. He lies to Kurtz’s Intended by saying that her name was his last word, for not doing so would “have been too dark—too dark altogether…”
The journey “back to the earliest beginnings of the world” has a way of reducing man to his most primitive instincts, the dark compulsions that do not yield to a moral compass. In *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad, Marlow, in his voyage up the Congo, encounters many of the “devils” that, should he be tempted by them, would cause the darkness to consume him whole. Marlow’s triumph over the madness of his soul, the battle Kurtz lost, is a result of his own perception of darkness. He looks into himself and sees his capacity for human vices, but unlike the imperialists or even Kurtz up until his final utterance of horrifying self-awareness, Marlow does not cower from the blackness of his soul, the inner savagery he realizes exists not simply within the natives but within the white man. Instead, he boldly acknowledges it and harnesses this awareness as a means of warding off temptation and seeing the darkness that exists within others. Marlow is able to “draw back his hesitating foot” from the edge because he has allowed himself to witness the budding darkness within his own heart as well as the most gruesome manifestation of darkness, that which thrives within the heart of Kurtz.

In Part II, Marlow is troubled by conflicting emotions, both this kinship he feels toward the natives as well as his revulsion toward their barbaric behavior, but in making sense of these two opposing ideas, Marlow recognizes the savagery innate not simply to the natives, as the imperialists are predisposed to believe, but to the white man as well. Marlow comments that these savages “[are] not inhuman,” but he does not sympathize with their humanity. Instead, it is their wild nature, their animalistic tendencies, with which he identifies. Unlike the white imperialists, Marlow’s acknowledgment of this mutual savagery, this primal darkness that connects his heart to the hearts of the natives, is ultimately what preserves his soul’s moral integrity and keeps whatever light he still holds within. The imperialists who choose not to witness this bond or who see this bond but would rather escape it through lavish clothes, such as with the accountant, or through this superiority they assume over the natives, are those who fall prey to the darkness. They cannot civilize the savages when their own souls are uncivilized, and they cannot claim to be the superior human when they have become less human than the race they have oppressed. Marlow saves his own humanity from this moral decay in accepting the savagery as something inherent to his being. He can escape the darkness because he sees it coming.

It is not until he peers into Kurtz’s heart of darkness, this composition of man’s most primal desires taken to their extremities, that Marlow is able to truly see the edge Kurtz “had stepped over” and reel himself back in. He observes Kurtz initially as being insane, but he soon realizes this insanity exists, not within Kurtz’s mind, but within his soul. Marlow is able to perceive his capacity for sin in comparing himself to the natives, but Kurtz fails to make this connection and leaves himself vulnerable to the darkness. He travels into this prehistoric land with this blind objective to civilize its inhabitants, neglecting to see it is his self-righteous, superior behavior, his hunger for power and glory, that guides him there. These dark tendencies in his heart mutate into uncontrollable greed, into a kind of savagery far removed from that of the natives. Kurtz “[makes] that last stride” and plunges into darkness, and Marlow, witnessing this suicide of Kurtz’s own humanity, recognizes how close he himself has come to the edge and takes a step back. “The horror!” of it all to Kurtz is that he could not see this blackness until he dies, that only when breathing his final
breath is he forced to look into himself and face the darkness in his heart, the darkness Marlow sees within himself before even approaching the same edge Kurtz steps off.

Marlow and Kurtz respond extremely differently to what they encounter in the heart of darkness. The heart of darkness, literally representing the center of the wild African jungle, but also symbolic for the depth and darkness of the human heart, changes the lives of both men; however, Marlow is able to escape through his own awareness and pragmatic attitude. On the contrary, Kurtz is idealistic, with too many aspirations to live up to that he can never fulfill. Marlow is able to go into the heart of darkness and return while Kurtz could neither survive nor return because of his ability to eliminate greediness and to think logically, despite the squalid conditions he finds himself in.

As soon as Marlow begins telling his story to the sailors on the Nellie, it is clear he is an intelligent man. He is viewed by his peers as experienced and challenges them to think of Imperialism as a barbaric ideal, which is an opinion most sailors are unfamiliar with or indifferent to. Marlow’s critique of the doctor’s research attempts proves him to be a logical thinker and his consciousness of his mental transformation once in Africa proves him to be aware of himself. This practical, logical way of thinking allows Marlow to survive when temptations, or “devils,” surround him, namely greed. Unlike Marlow, Kurtz cannot fight these “devils” due to an idealistic outlook and desire obtain as much ivory as possible, and as great of a reputation as possible. Kurtz becomes so consumed by these desires that he can think of nothing else. Even with his health rapidly declining he worries about his reputation and forces Marlow to tell him he will uphold a respectable reputation after his death.

Kurtz succumbs to the wild pull and temptation of the jungle. He ironically views the natives there as barbaric and aims to “civilize” them, but partakes in activities far more barbaric than the natives do. He sees the natives as his possessions, the ivory as belonging to him and the jungle as his own land, but does not understand that the jungle is much more powerful than he is. As a white European in an uncivilized land, he is faulty in believing his power is greater than that of the wilderness. For this reason, he cannot survive, becomes sick and cannot return from the heart of darkness. The jungle physically makes Kurtz a sick man, but also distorts him mentally, causing him to feel a righteousness that eventually leads to his downfall. Marlow, on the other hand, acknowledges the jungle’s power. He notes the immenseness of the trees, the intensity of the heat and the interminable length of the river, which allows him to remain aware of his own transformation and mental state. In anticipation of mental distress, Marlow turns to work because it provides him with something to focus on other than his grotesque surroundings. Marlow goes into his job only for the opportunity to travel and work, not to obtain fortune, fame or to fix the uncivilized communities he encounters. Because of his lack of true ambition, Marlow feels no need to give in the way Kurtz does. Marlow admires the ambition of others, like the accountant in his pristine clothing and Kurtz with his ideas and aspirations, but admits to having none of this ambition himself. Ultimately, this ambition - a “devil” and a form of greed - is what causes Kurtz’s death. Marlow’s lack of ambition saves him and allows him to return from the heart of darkness, both physically and mentally.
In Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, both Marlow and Kurtz are different from the rest of their world in that they are both able to recognize the darkness in the heart of man. What differentiates the two, however, are their responses to this awareness. As a result of both their predispositions an their preconceived notions of civilization and the wild, Marlow is able to restrain himself from stepping into the precipice of this darkness, yet Kurtz sees no way out and dives headlong into it.

The title phrase “heart of darkness” refers to several ideas within the book. The most important and most central definition refers to the same heart of darkness that consumed Kurtz and occupied Marlow’s fascination: mankind’s heart of darkness. More specifically, it is the innate capacity, and indeed desire, within all men for greed, destruction, and evil. Throughout both of their exploits, Kurtz and Marlow see this darkness under the guise of civilization. They see the greed of the ivory traders, the violence against the natives, and the absurd follies of European behavior, all under the pretense of commerce and the superiority of Western civilization. Yet, in the wild, the façade of civilization is removed, and the heart of darkness can be plainly revealed in the actions of the Europeans. So exists an ironic dichotomy: civilization, despite its intentions for building upon the greatest qualities of man, actually allows man’s heart of darkness to flourish under cover; yet, in the face of the terrifying, uncontrollable wilderness that mirrors man’s darkness, the darkness is plainly exposed – and not even embraced by the primitive natives. It is this realization that Kurtz and Marlow come to, but with completely different responses.

Initially, Kurtz is a champion of the false intentions of civilization, firmly believing in the idealistic view of helping the natives’ “plight” by bringing them civilization and modernization, while creating a glorious empire of trade. His naïve dreams are crushed when he arrives in the wilderness. He sees man’s heart of darkness exposed, and the guise of civilization that he once clung to crumbles before him. He completely loses faith in it, and turns to the only path he sees left – embracing the darkness within himself. As Marlow describes, the sanity of his soul is destroyed and becomes a constant torment to him, as he begins his tyrannical reign over the natives as a deity. He could not escape the darkness because the loss of his faith and hope in civilization was too great to bear.

Marlow, conversely, has no such affinity for civilization. He sees the Western absurdities of civilization for what they are, even before his journey ends. His skeptical and realistic analysis of his world helps him see this. When his journey fully reveals man’s heart of darkness to him, it is not a tremendous “horror”, as it is to Kurtz – rather, it is a clarification and reinforced articulation of an idea Marlow had been grappling with before his journey began. After he returns, he shows brief anger at the vanity of the institutions of civilization around him; but in his narration, he looks back on them slightly regretfully. He surmises that, while civilization may contain a deep darkness within, there is nothing he can do to change it, short of turning into the monster that Kurtz became.

Kurtz’s time spent in the jungle led to his eventual corruption. It was there that he was infested with the flabby devil of greed that transmuted into madness. Marlow, on the other hand, was able to return from the heart of darkness. He did not spend much time, relative to Kurtz, with the weak eyed devil down in Africa. His cognitive abilities and
critical thinking skills allowed him to recognize the Europeans around him as immoral and was able to successfully avoid their darkness from diffusing into his heart and mind.

Kurtz's inability to survive the darkness was a result of his weakly principled character. The leadership roles he held with both the native and with the company mutated into greed. Kurtz did anything to make a profit; he searched the land for weeks on end and even threatened the Russian, his one real friend in Africa, for a small bit of ivory that he received as a gift from a native chief. Even after the Russian nursed Kurtz from illness to health twice, Kurtz had no problem with putting the Russian's life on the line for a tiny, symbolic piece of ivory. Kurtz's evil tendencies led to his descent into madness. He absorbed the native culture around him and embraced it without restraint. He allowed his house to be in a state of ruin and put shrunken heads on spikes around his dwelling. His stepping "over the edge" further entrapped him in the spiral of darkness from which he never was able to escape.

Conversely, Marlow was able to return from the heart of darkness. His strong and logical mind allowed him to think deeply about his situations and the people around him. He was able to recognize the evils inside many of the white men around him. He saw the sins of imperialism everywhere, from pilgrims firing upon natives for amusement to putting them in chain gangs and performing hard labor. By acknowledging the devil of imperialism and seeing it inside so many men, Marlow was able to avoid becoming like those men. Marlow was able to maintain a degree of separation from these evils. He, unlike Kurtz, had restraint. He never took advantage of or killed any natives, and he also avoided embracing the native culture. In Part II, he did not join in any native frenzy and nor did he really accept the cannibals' culture of eating other humans. In short, Kurtz was taken by greed and thrown into madness and the unending vortex of evil. Marlow, however, was careful to avoid becoming like other white men in Africa and was able to circumvent falling over the edge into darkness.

In Joseph Conrad's vivid novel, *Heart of Darkness*, the prehistoric wilderness consumes the soul and causes madness. Kurtz and Marlow both enter the forests of Africa at different times and for different reasons, but only one was able to survive and return. Kurtz's hunger for power and adoration, drive to civilize and lead the natives, and inability to exercise restraint in his ideas caused him to go into the heart of darkness and never leave; however, Marlow's pragmatism, un-invested vision, and detachment from his surroundings allowed him to survive and return.

An imposter, Marlow enters the heart of darkness with no belief in civilization or the trappings of culture, unlike Kurtz, who is an idealist with very prominent European ideals. When conversing with the Russian, Marlow comments that the Russian's devotion to Kurtz, "...appeared to be about the most dangerous thing in every way [the Russian] had come upon so far," (Conrad 99). Kurtz's mind opening ideas and stories had vacuumed the Russian into a state of dark, deep devotion. The natives are also obsessed with Kurtz and adore him endlessly. Kurtz wanted people to act this way towards him; he needed power and leadership to carry out his idealistic vision. Marlow on the other hand, does not look for power nor does he care about vision. Thus, Marlow is able to survive because he has not fallen to the diseases of greed and power like Kurtz.
Kurtz had lost his sanity because of entering the heart of darkness and succumbed to the pull from the wilderness, stepping over the edge and going too far in to find his way out. Marlow says that he had gone mad as well, but knew restraint and was able to compose himself. He had not given in to the dark temptations of the jungle. Kurtz had given into this evil, conducting ominous, insane behavior, such as posting “rebel” heads atop a fence surrounding the station. Kurtz’s idealism led to greed and barbarism, which led to his plundering ways as he went through villages and ransacked them with his native “army”. By entering the heart of darkness, Kurtz became the heart of darkness. Upon realization of this he yells, “The horror! The horror!” lines that Marlow is deeply touched by. Marlow had always been aware of this fact, but could think of no way to describe its darkness. His understanding that the effect of the African wilderness is a great horror allowed him to practice restraint and realize darkness was there before it entered his soul.

Both Kurtz and Marlow entered the African jungle, but only Marlow could see its evil. Marlow was able to survive and return because of his ability to detach himself from the darkness and stay pragmatic on his journey deeper into the forest. The darkness had seeped into the heart of Kurtz, who was greedy, self righteous, and powerful, thus causing his demise.

In Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow’s self – awareness and ability to exercise restraint separates him from the self – righteous and overbearing Kurtz. Marlow’s intentions for embarking on a journey that is so long and complex is only for one purpose: to find Kurtz. Along this grueling journey on the border of the wilderness, Conrad compares the wilderness to the heart of darkness to reveal that within all men lies darkness: an evil temptation that can consume all of mankind. Understanding and realizing this darkness, the wilderness becomes Marlow’s hell and Kurtz’s heaven, as both struggle to fight their way out but only one survives.

Marlow’s self – awareness leads him to live a life of knowledge and skepticism, which serves to protect him as he enters the heart of darkness. As Marlow continues his journey to find Kurtz, he is constantly overwhelmed with the truths he finds out but accepts them for what they are; he doesn’t try to change the contradictions. For example, as Marlow hears more horrific and outrageous stories about what Kurtz has done to the native people, Marlow continues to admire Kurtz. However, upon hearing this news, Marlow raises a sense of skepticism about what people are admiring Kurtz for because Kurtz’s actions don’t do any good to anyone but himself. Ultimately, Marlow’s awareness that he does not belong in the heart of darkness is what saves him because accepting his place as an outsider allows him to stay detached from the temptations of the darkness within one man’s soul.

Metaphorically “stepping over the edge,” Kurtz is reeled in by the temptations of the darkest desires of the “wilderness” and essentially surrenders his soul and body to the “wilderness.” Comparing the vast wilderness to the darkness present deep down in one man’s soul is the basis of Kurtz’s character as he spreads the darkness to all. Throughout his time with the natives, Kurtz lost his way and was over – powered by his desire to conquer and claim everything. Referring to everything as “my” darkness, leaving his sanity
vanished. His dying words, “The horror! The horror!” symbolizes Kurtz’s realization (that was too late) that darkness is present in all of man and can take over everything. Unfortunately, Kurtz was, metaphorically speaking, too far “over the edge” to turn back because he was filled with self – righteousness and greed that he lost sight of restraint; Kurtz was so blinded by his greed that his own soul couldn’t fight the darkness. Marlow’s ability to comprehend, assess, and apply the things he saw saved him from the darkest desires of man because he still had the sanity to fight it. Unable to exercise the same level of restraint, Kurtz gave into his darks shams and was eventually lost forever; the heart of darkness had won.

Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness explores the immoral tendencies of all humans. Marlow provides contrast to Mr. Kurtz, who is led directly to his own suffering and death as a result of allowing many dark human qualities to penetrate deep into his heart to a point of no return. Marlow, on the other hand, has the ability to be perceptive and to recognize the darkness of his surroundings, which permits him to distance himself and then ultimately escape the heart of darkness in the African jungle as well as not allowing himself to be consumed by total evil.

Marlow and Kurtz as white European men both naturally judge the natives as people beneath themselves, however, Marlow engages in thoughts that raise an awareness of some unexpected bond between himself and the Africans. Kurtz suffers under the white man’s burden and believes that civilization and culture were generous gifts that the Europeans possessed and could bring to Africa. Marlow was never interested in the imperialism aspect; rather, he wanted an adventure and he wanted a job. Marlow notices similarities between himself and the natives. He believes that the cannibals have restraint against their starvation—a quality that both primitive and civilized people could possess. Marlow thinks that his helmsman is a “fine chap” and then Marlow misses him dearly when he is killed. Unlike the unfazed accountant, Marlow is repulsed by the poor treatment that the natives are receiving at the station. He notes the irony of the accountant’s statement “I just needed some fresh air.” Marlow notices the level of self-righteousness among the Europeans. Kurtz, however, pays no attention to the natives’ well-beings. He sees the natives as a roadblock keeping him from his precious ivory. Thus, Kurtz kills and tortures whoever stands in his way and ensures that no one tries to stop him, such as when he displays the heads on the stakes. Marlow knows that he is on a higher intellectual level than the natives, however, he is able to see them in a different light, unlike the Europeans with whom he is working.

Since his childhood, Marlow has wanted an adventure, which he receives on his journey up the river. Kurtz, however, has an objective and an agenda—he wants to profits from the ivory. This greed brings him into the jungle and escalates once his success begins. Marlow states that Kurtz has a deficiency of something that cannot be found under his magnificent eloquence. Marlow knows that Kurtz’s desire for greed will never be quenched because evil has taken over his soul. Kurtz has gone too far to return; his darkness has spread. Marlow mentions restraint again in Part 3 and claims that Kurtz has non and he is hollow at the core. This, in comparison to Marlow’s claim that the cannibals do have restraint, proposes the idea that the Europeans, more specifically Kurtz, are the savages, rather than the natives who are so often portrayed as animalistic. Restraint is the dominant quality—without it, humans fall too far into evil. Kurtz was never satisfied with his wealth—his greed brought him to the jungle and then pushed him into the controlling and manipulative heart of darkness, which eventually killed him. Marlow uses his work as a distraction and at times it serves as restraint because it halts his emotional investment in the journey.

Marlow draws the conclusion that no matter if a person is part of a civilized society or a primitive society, neither serves as an indication of humanity. The natives, as Marlow noticed, possessed many human qualities— restraint, grief, sorrow—even though they lived in the wilderness. The accountant and Kurtz are both puppets of evil forces and their wealth, intellectual capacity and fine clothing were merely disguises over their barbaric tendencies and actions.
As a powerful man who is on a mission to do whatever it takes to collect ivory, Kurtz becomes consumed in the jungle. The wilderness where Kurtz does his business represents a heart of darkness, where one’s heart and soul are tested, and Kurtz is unable to escape its grasp. Marlow, however, travels deep into the wilderness, but is able to survive the trip by not establishing such a tight connection with the evils of the wilderness. Kurtz’s developed and intricate experiences gathering ivory in the jungle, along with his contribution to the horrors of the wilderness, keep him from both returning and surviving. Meanwhile, Marlow’s outside position as someone who sees evil but does not create it allows him to return alive.

Marlow’s awareness of his position as an outsider in the wilderness prevents him from developing the type of connection with the jungle that Kurtz has developed by being caught up in its heart of darkness. Even as Marlow sees severed heads of slaves attached to posts, he remains detached from this evil, realizing that he is simply an imposter in this land. When Marlow falls ill and comes close to death, he finds that he has no words to say. His lack of ability to summarize his thoughts demonstrates the idea that Marlow never feels truly connected to what he witnesses in the wilderness. Kurtz, however, is able to summarize his experiences in the jungle, simply saying, “The horror! The horror!” Kurtz’s simple yet telling phrase shows just how connected he has become with the heart of darkness. Kurtz’s soul has been tested. Even though he feels guilty for his ruthless methods of doing business, he can never let go of his position in the jungle, where he can live by his own rules. The heart of darkness has established an unbreakable grip on Kurtz that Marlow is able to avoid.

Kurtz’s idealistic approach to the wilderness leads him to greed, while Marlow’s approach is simple and concrete, without involving leadership or creation of evil. Kurtz comes to the jungle wanting to extend his ideals to the native civilization. He knows that the has escaped European civilization, where he is just like everyone else, and now lives in a land where he can use the natives to get what he wants: ivory. This greed drives Kurtz to perform acts of evil, which is seen clearly by his use of slaves’s heads as decorations. Once Kurtz contributes and creates this evil, he has become part of the heart of darkness, and he can never return. Even for Kurtz, it would be impossible to leave a place where he has done so much wrong and to then continue living his life. The regret and the guilt would be too heavy. Marlow’s reasoning for his trip to the wilderness is simple, very different from Kurtz’s desires. Marlow just wants to find Kurtz. Even though Marlow’s eyes are introduced to unspeakable acts of evil, to the exploitation of native people, and to the horrors of slavery, he is able to live with himself knowing that he has taken no part in creating this evil. His lack of leadership on this particular voyage saves his life because, as Kurtz has demonstrated, anyone who leads and contributes to the evil will not make it back alive. The concrete simplicity of Marlow’s trip to the jungle prevents him from ever becoming a creator of darkness, and it is this idea that allows Marlow to not only survive, but to return to Europe and continue living his life.

The Heart of Darkness, by Joseph Conrad, expands on the idea that every man's soul has dark desires for greed and dominance. He develops two characters, one who succumbs to the darkness of his soul and the other who is able to resist. Marlow survives the heart of darkness, the evils of his soul, while Kurtz could neither ignore or survive it, eventually allowing it to consume his life.
Marlow's skepticism on European society allows him to maintain his sanity in the dangers of the jungle as well as the cruel temptations of his soul. But Kurtz, due to his strong belief in civilization, drowns within his own evil indulgences of his heart.

Marlow is completely aware that he is an "imposter." After seeing the natural, uncivilized life of the natives in the jungles of unconquered lands, his normal, overly civilized lifestyle seems pathetic. He becomes embarrassed and disgusted with the frivolous activities, priorities, and living conditions his society partakes in. Marlow "resents the sight of people hurrying through the streets...to dream their insignificant and silly dreams" (page 155-156). Due to his skeptical criticizing view of his own life, it is clear that he has no interest in the imperialistic values of the typical European. While he still acts as an agent to Imperialism, he is not consumed by the conquering of the natives and changing the society of the jungle, or "heart of darkness." Marlow does not have the intense desire for greed and power, although it is within his soul waiting for him to make use of it. He is able to resist, unlike many other Europeans who find their wasteful, pointless way of life better than how the natives live. Conquering and becoming rich are all the typical European sees, but Marlow simply observes, taking note of all the disgusting images he notices not only in the heart of darkness, but also in his own society.

Contrasting immensely, Kurtz believes in civilization and the Imperialist ideology. Kurtz, exposed to the same situations and desires as Marlow, becomes consumed by the darkness of his soul within the jungle. Due to this strong belief and desire for ivory and power, Kurtz tricks himself into thinking he is doing good. Kurtz thinks he is educating the natives and his fellow agents, and becoming open with the jungle. But, in reality, Kurtz is letting the wilderness turn his soul mad, caving into all the evils of the soul. All that is left of his "weary brain [is] haunted by shadowy images- images of wealth and fame..." (page 152). Due to this inability to look away from the evils of his soul, his heart of darkness, and his intense belief in society, Kurtz could not resist the temptations. The temptations to conquer lands and people, obtain the wealth and reputation of being successful were too strong. Both Marlow and Kurtz were presented with the same desires, but Marlow did not see much value in those evils, while Kurtz overwhelmed himself with the darkness of the soul.

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In Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, the main character Marlow is able to fight off the influence of the jungle, while the character Kurtz is consumed by it. Kurtz descends into the “heart of darkness” and dies in Africa due to the clarity with which he views himself and the world. Marlow, meanwhile, has a more unsure and muddled perspective that enables his return to civilization.

Kurtz’s purity of vision fosters a sense of idealism that ultimately leads to his downfall. He has “grand plans” of bringing civilization to Africa. This ambition is what leads to him
becoming the Company’s top producer of ivory. At one point after his death, Marlow calls Kurtz remarkable because he had “something to say.” Kurtz had dreams – dreams that extended not just to himself but to all of humanity. Kurtz is shattered when his plans fall apart and he is forcibly removed from Africa. Marlow reasons that Kurtz “only wanted justice” – the justice that all people, even natives, could experience culture. However, when he failed to accomplish this goal and fell into barbarism, he became a part of the jungle, unable to be removed. Marlow, in contrast, does not have Kurtz’s idealist spirit. He is in the Congo for himself and his job. Marlow’s initial desire to go on the journey through Africa was to have an adventure, to explore the part of the map that was uncharted when he was young. He had no illusions of helping others, and was therefore able to leave Africa unscathed except for his altered mindset.

Moreover, Kurtz’s lack of restraint in accomplishing his goals, caused by the unambiguous way in which he views himself, pushes him into darkness. Because Kurtz always views himself as justified, and therefore superior to others, he is able to commit heinous acts. He raids African village, raining death and destruction down on the natives in pursuit of ivory. He threatens the Russian, who appears to be his only link to the outside world, for hoarding a lot of his own ivory. These actions mark Kurtz as a man who “stepped over the edge into a heart of darkness.” Once he pushes himself so far into barbaric tendencies, he cannot retreat from them. He is forever affected, and incapable of returning to civilization. Marlow, in contrast, is “hesitant to go over the edge.” He does not have the clear sense of himself that Kurtz does, and therefore stays planted firmly in civilization.

Furthermore, Kurtz’s inability to live with contradiction, and his need to be his pure self, leaves him stranded in Africa. Marlow can be an “imposter” and live with it – he can carry out the orders of the reprehensible men in the Company who enslave and kill natives. He can lie to Kurtz’s “Intended” and tell her that Kurtz’s last words were her name. Finally, he can be involved with the Europeans and the civilized but still consider Kurtz “remarkable.” Kurtz, on the other hand, must be himself – he cannot be detached or masquerade as another person. This is why he wears so many hats – a journalist, a musician, a “Company man” – he pursues what makes him happy. Kurtz is a man who believes firmly in himself, without any sense of ambiguity.

Kurtz cannot go back to civilization because he recognizes the darkness in himself and everyone else. His last words “The horror! The horror!” perfectly articulate how he feels about his own heart having seen it for what it is. Marlow does not have the same strong sense of self, and therefore couldn’t have accomplished this. This is why Kurtz must die – he has seen what men should never see and that which is the root of all pain – human darkness.