The Truth Is Out There, Do We Wish To Know? Essay, Research Paper

The Heart of Darkness

The search for truth and knowledge consumes us all at some point in our lives, but we don’t always find what we are looking for in Truth. We wish it to be definitive, but more than that, we search for it with the strong belief that we will find it and be pleased, pleasantly enlightened, and will live better lives for it. In Heart of Darkness, it is shown that this is seldom true.

Kurtz was destroyed by the truth he discovered about himself and the world he lived in. He had known and believed a “white” truth about the world he knew. His white truth was one of civilized, genteel ideas and actions. Living amongst the privileged few, the artists, musicians, orators, and other cultured people, he knew nothing of the dark depths of the human heart. When confronted with those horrible realities, he was forced to learn the “black” truth about life and people. His mind couldn’t comprehend the truths he had to accept; it was totally contradicting to what he knew, and so he crumbled, selling his soul to sit among demons and devils. He was hollow inside, had no sense of moral or social responsibility, and the black truth he discovered ate away and destroyed him. He regressed to savage behaviors he had previously repressed and let the darkness fill the cold void within him. Because he knew so much blackness, he was unable to live in society again. He crossed over and relinquished all ties to the civilized world, for he had lived the white truths to an extreme, so did he live the black truths.

Kurtz showed what happens when the white truths and lies of society are taken away. Kurtz lived and found sustenance in that reality, when it vanished and was replaced by another, darker world, he folded. In our society, we live by restraint. For Kurtz in Africa, all the restraints were removed and he was allowed to have as much candy as he wished, even before dinner. This proved to be too much for him, he went to an extreme and was destroyed by the excesses he craved, the very excesses that drove him to the top of the tribes and peoples he conquered. When the superficiality of society was erased, made null and void, it had to be replaced with the brutality of the wild. Kurtz was unable to deal with this, his mind had been devoted to society for too long. After quickly rising to the top by using fear and adoration, he was destroyed by the excesses he attained.

Marlow sought truth, he was disgusted by the pieces of blackness he glimpsed through the manager’s waste and senseless cruelty. He didn’t know white truth to the extent Kurtz did, neither did he live the black truth. He merely observed, and what he saw deeply disturbed him. He only saw the blackness fully in Kurtz, however, and only slightly within himself. He seemed to be merely an observer, but in watching the decline of Kurtz, he saw the power of the black truth. The reason he was able to resist it, though, was that he had basic integrity. Kurtz lacked that, and so fell into the deep abyss of corruption in his heart. Marlow went to the edge, looked down, but was able to retreat. Kurtz realized his black truth, Marlow only saw his wild and savage potential. They were light and dark sides of the same coin; Kurtz was what Marlow might have become, and Marlow what Kurtz might have been.

Kurtz’s Intended knew only the white truth about him, while his black Mistress knew only his blackness. Each loved him for what they knew, and each would have been destroyed by the other’s knowledge. When Marlow lied to Kurtz’s Intended, he allowed her to keep her delusions about him, he let her continue to believe her white truths about him. This let her begin healing, and it showed Marlow a new depth within himself, a depth that might have gone unrealized without experiencing the blackness of Africa.

Kurtz’s Intended and his Mistress had no desire to know the truth, they were satisfied with what they knew. Kurtz’s Intended desperately felt she needed to know his last words, but the truth would have totally devastated her. Marlow told her a lie, but one she had to know.

Kurtz’s painting of the blindfolded lightbearer told volumes about the nature of the world and of Kurtz. He knew what he was getting into, knew all that was going on around him in the ivory business and in the African world. Perhaps it showed that, until his journey into Africa, he didn’t wholly comprehend the darkness within the ivory business, and within life itself. Mostly, it seemed to show that we end up destroying what we profess to enlighten; because we go about our lives with blindfolds on, we are unable to accomplish the noble dreams we aspire to. We all see only what we want to see, and by refusing to accept the realities of our lives, we destroy what we wish most to preserve.

Throughout the story, we catch glimpses of the savageness both in nature and in man. It seems, though, that the darkness in man, while always present, must have outside wildness to spur its awakening. It can be likened to a dormant volcano, harmless while sleeping, but, once awakened, vicious, fiery, and powerful. The search for truth oftentimes yields not the pleasant enlightenment expected and desired, but the wildness necessary to bring out the brutality and inhumanity in us all.