

Apocalyptic Themes

Confrontation with Evil, Interconnectedness

Willard's confrontation with Kurtz is a confrontation with the evil and ambiguity within himself: Willard: "I was going to the worst place in the world and I didn't even know it yet. Weeks away and hundreds of miles up a river that snaked through the war like a main circuit cable - plugged straight into Kurtz. It was no accident that I got to be the caretaker of Colonel Walter E. Kurtz's memory - anymore than being back in Saigon was an accident. There is no way to tell his story without telling my own. And if his story really is a confession, then so is mine."

Kurtz: "It's impossible for words to describe what is necessary to those who do not know what horror means. Horror. Horror has a face, and you must make a friend of horror. Horror and moral terror are your friends. If they are not, then they are enemies to be feared. They are truly enemies."

Despair

"The whole movie is a journey toward Willard's understanding of how Kurtz, one of the Army's best soldiers, penetrated the reality of war to such a depth that he could not look any longer without madness and despair." (Roger Ebert, Chicago Sun Times Review)

Fear

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Journey

Willard's journey into the jungle and confrontation with Kurtz.

Judgment

Kurtz: "I've seen the horrors, horrors that you've seen. But you have no right to call me a murderer. You have a right to kill me, you have a right to do that, but you have no right to judge me."

Moral Ambiguity/Difficulty Discerning Evil

Kurtz: "Then I realized they were stronger than we. They have the strength, the strength to do that. If I had 10 divisions of those men, then our troubles here would be over very quickly. You have to have men who are moral and at the same time who are able to utilize their primordial instincts to kill without feeling, without passion, without judgment."

Scapegoat

Willard: "Everybody wanted me to do it, him most of all. I felt like he was up there, waiting for me to take the pain away. He just wanted to go out like a soldier, standing up, not like some poor, wasted, rag-assed renegade. Even the jungle wanted him dead, and that's who he really took his orders from anyway."

Truth/Truthfulness

Willard: "It's a way we had over here with living with ourselves. We cut 'em in half with a machine gun and give 'em a Band-Aid. It was a lie. And the more I saw them, the more I hated lies."