

## Rereading *Heart of Darkness*

Daniel R. Schwarz, Cornell University

"Mistah Kurtz, he dead"

I.

We prefer games with rules,  
red and black pieces, even  
mazes and conundrums,  
rather than uncontrollable, unseen  
darkness lurking within.  
When we had hoped  
to find mere banality,  
discovery of inexplicable  
terrifying evil and mindless  
violence frightens;  
We don't want to deal  
with severed heads  
or the stench of  
buried hippo  
--real or metaphoric.

II.

An idealist armed  
with values of his culture,  
Kurtz reverts to racism, savagery.  
Indifferent to elephants, humans.  
his one-minded quest for ivory  
is cursed with ferocious  
accumulating impulse.  
Is "The horror! The horror!"

HR

The Humanities Review  
Volume 9, Issue 1  
Spring 2011 PP 116.  
St. John's University

**Daniel Schwarz**  
is Frederic J. Whiton  
Professor of English  
Literature and Stephen  
H. Weiss Presidential  
Fellow at Cornell  
University, where he  
has taught since 1968.  
In 1998 he received  
Cornell's College of  
Arts and Sciences  
Russell award for  
distinguished teaching  
and has published  
numerous of works,  
including *In Defense  
of Reading: Teaching  
Literature in the  
Twenty-First Century.*

his moment of self-recognition,  
or the cry of a dying  
megalomaniac whose hopes  
are checkmated.

III.

Fascinated, hypnotized  
by Kurtz as an alternative  
to imperialistic pawns,  
does not Marlow go  
ashore for a howl and a dance?  
When Kurtz escapes, Marlow stalks  
him in the jungle as if he were his prey  
before confronting the danger in himself,  
rediscovering moral track he almost lost.  
Like Gulliver, he returns shadowed, checked,  
yet enlightened by experience.  
We readers, too.