

Opposition of Black and White in Heart of Darkness

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The Opposition of Black and White in Heart of Darkness

In Heart of Darkness Joseph Conrad explores the psychological “heart of darkness” within all of humanity. The text looks at the European societies false illumination of civilization, of which obscures the internal darkness, in relation to the psychological environment in which human’s are placed. Conrad sets up the opposition of black and white to display the superficial pretense of light in the European society, and the true heart of darkness which is present within all of humanity.

From the start of [Marlow](#)’s journey into the African Congo it is apparent that he is a product of the colonialist European society, which is where the first oppositions of black and white evolve. Marlow understands the premise behind colonialism, but is unprepared for the savagery and the wilderness of the heart of darkness. This is most apparent when Marlow encounters the “[grove](#) of death”, where many natives are sick and dying, yet Marlow, although confronted, is unable to deal with this foreign situation. He encounters a young boy with a piece of white European yarn around his neck. In this instance white is usually associated with purity, and innocence, yet Conrad challenges many of these assumptions, with the white piece of [thread](#) used as a symbol of the evil of colonialist

practices. The white thread remains a constant reminder which forms a contrast to the black child, it looks out of place and artificial, and thus, is symbolic of the colonialist practices. Marlow responds to the situation with questions - "Why? Where did he get it?" (27) - showed that he had not yet come into an understanding of the effects of imperialism on the wilderness. This is further emphasized when he giv...

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...e false "light" of the European society.

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