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## Binary Oppositions in Heart of Darkness

In Heart of Darkness, Joseph Conrad used a series of reversed traditional binary oppositions to convey the theme that every man has his own heart of darkness that is simply masked by the superficial light of civilization.

The novella focused primarily on the adventurer Charlie [Marlow](#)'s journey into the African Congo, but dealt with larger themes. Marlow was from Europe and understood the basic premises of imperialism, but was unprepared for the world he encountered in the wilderness. The world of the African jungle did not abide, at that time, by the same laws with which Marlow had been raised. There was an inherent savagery in the jungle that he had not previously encountered and for which he was unprepared. This is first apparent when Marlow encountered the shaded death grove early on in his journeys. Marlow saw the natives suffering immensely for what seemed to be nothing - their work seemed for naught - but he did not speak up or stop his trek. This is also the first time that the reader gets a glimpse of the broader [binary](#) oppositions within the text. Marlow glanced at one of

the dying natives, one with a piece of white European yarn tied around his neck. In the area that is the Outer Station, the white Europeans had the natives - and vicariously the jungle nature, as the natives became symbols for the land surrounding each station - in a stranglehold. In this case, the color white, usually associated with purity or goodness, became a symbol for the evil that was imperialist colonialism. The black of the native's skin, bearing the color often associated with evil and inner darkness, is a stark contrast to the white of the yarn. The fact that Marlow responded with q...

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... oppositions, it becomes clear that it is only through the pretense of civilization that mankind is able to resist the internal darkness inherent in its nature. However, the intensity of civilized behavior is directly related to the physical and moral environment in which humans are placed, and is therefore unstable. Through Kurtz and Marlow, and their underlying binary oppositions, Joseph [Conrad](#) proved that every man has a heart of darkness that is often obscured by the false illumination of a civilized society.

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