

# Light and Dark in Heart of Darkness

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## Light and Dark in Heart of Darkness

The brightest of lights can obscure vision while darkness can contain truths: one must not be distracted by the sheen of light, which conceals the deeper reality present in darkness. Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness* illustrates this idea with the use of several symbols. White [Europeans](#) are used as symbols of self-deception, and objects with an alabaster quality are symbols of barriers to inner truth. Black is the foil of white; it represents the inner truth beneath the white surface reality. White people and objects represent the exterior reality that obscures the deeper truth present in darkness.

The Europeans in the novel represent those who hide from the truth within them and within reality. In Conrad's novel, most Europeans are portrayed as self-deceptive; they use societal customs to obscure the darkness and [emptiness](#) present within their souls. The chief accountant exemplifies the self-deceptive European. Marlow gives his impression of the accountant in this [excerpt](#), "I took him [the accountant] for a sort of vision. I saw a high starched collar, white cuffs, a light alpaca jacket... He was amazing" (Conrad 84). The accountant later stated, "The groans of this sick person distract my attention [from his work]" (Conrad 85). The accountant is so centered on maintaining a proper European

image and European work ethic that he impressed Marlow, but the accountant showed no compassion for his fellow man. The accountant's appearance belied the darkness in his soul. Similar to the accountant, the General Manager maintained an aura of white civilization to hide the emptiness and darkness that existed beneath his white surface. The manager paid proper ...

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...ists within every human soul. Conrad used the contrasting images of white and black to illustrate his view that evil exists within us all. Light, which relates to civilization and its practices, helps to control and hide the dark truth within us, but that black truth of human nature will always remain.

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