

# Heart of darkness-the contrast between light and dark essay sample



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In many literary works the author uses contrast to display the difference between good and evil. Most often this contrast is between light and dark images. Dark representing evil and light representing good. In Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, the author uses many different medians to display the contrast between good and evil. The different settings display the changing developments of the novel. From the civilized and what appears to be good Thames River to the uncivilized and seemingly evil Belgian Congo. Many different images in the novel elaborate on the author's view on the dark evils of imperialism and colonialism.

In the beginning of the novel, *Heart of Darkness*, the story takes place outside of London, England, on the Thames River. This is pictured to be a peaceful and civilized place. "The sky, without a speck, was a benign immensity of unstained light" (Conrad p16), further introduces the civilized Thames to be bright, pure, and good. As Marlow's journey continues, he later discovers the darkness, or evil, that is represented by the mysterious and unknown dangers of the jungle environment. While Marlow is in the beginning of his journey throughout the Belgian Congo, his route, the river, is observed as "Flames glided in the river pursuing, overtaking" (Conrad p20). The river is displayed as a river of fire, similar to the rivers of fire in the depths of hell. Man views hell as being synonymous with evil, as does Conrad. He uses this as a device to foreshadow the upcoming events in which the Marlow is about to endure.

As the story moves deeper into the jungle, the obscurity and unknown of the jungle begin to set in. "The long stretches of the waterway ran on, deserted, into the gloom of over-shadowed distances." The darkness of the over-

shadowed distances foreshadows the upcoming events in the novel. While the characters proceed up the river the certainty of their future becomes bleaker. Furthermore, as Kurtz is taking his last breaths and on the brink of death, reference to the river is made once again "The brown current ran swiftly out of the heart of darkness" (Conrad p109). The dark color of brown is used to express the true demise of an evil man. The brown river flowing outward also displays the symbol of the evil leaving Kurtz' body. When Marlow returns to Europe, it is depicted again as a bright and good setting "like three luminous and bedraped columns. The bent gilt legs and backs of the furniture shone in indistinct curves" (Conrad p118). This continued reference to light is made to symbolize to the reader the beauty and absence of evil.

As the story unfolds the news that the previous Captain's death is revealed, he was murdered by natives because of a squabble about "two black hens" (Conrad p23). Other than the fact that he was killed over "two black hens" (Conrad p23) there is another interesting point to bring out. The news comes with the revelation that natives killed him. This leaves the reader with the idea that the natives are savage and uncivilized. This is also an event that foreshadows what Marlow will be facing, a world of savages and uncivilized people who will kill each other over hens. The absence of light is used to display the harshness of the jungle. It is also used when describing the victims of the jungle's dangers. "Black shapes crouched, lay, sat between the trees leaning against the trunks, clinging to the earth, half coming out, half effaced within the dim light, in all the attitudes of pain, abandonment, and despair." (Conrad p34)

This is an observation of the cruelty and evil the jungle can, and will, endure onto those who attempt to penetrate it. In the beginning of Marlow's journey, he is stopped at an office of the company that owns the steamboat, the one that Marlow will captain throughout the Congo. Located on the wall is "A large shining map, marked with all the colors of a rainbow" (Conrad 25).

Marlow observes this as a positive and fascinating object. The bright colorful map is made to depict a positive mood, shadowing Marlow of the true evils that he will encounter in the savage and evil jungle. At the time when Marlow encounters Kurtz, Marlow is dumbfounded by the actions of his almost colleague. In describing the greed and other evils in Kurtz, Marlow asks himself "Powers of darkness claimed him for their own?" (Conrad p84)

To the reader this is a direct and blunt question. This immensely displays the use of dark and dark images throughout the novel; this is done to further enhance the feeling of astonishment in the reader. During the last scene of the novel, Marlow is parting ways with Kurtz' now widowed wife. He has just told her of her husband's death and lied to her by stating that Kurtz' last words were that of her name, this creates a somber mood and is depicted through the environment around them. "The offing was barred by a black bank of clouds" (Conrad 123). The dark clouds are a symbol of death and evil. Death in by which, Kurtz' passing, and the evil's surrounding the death of this wicked man.

Similar to the novel Heart of Darkness, the archetypal approach of the battle between light, or good, and dark, being evil, is commonly known in the literary world. This contrast is used to display the importance of the subject.

In Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness, Kurtz and Marlow, the author uses <https://assignbuster.com/heart-of-darkness-the-contrast-between-light-and-dark-essay-sample/>

many different medians to display the contrast between good and evil. The plot involves Marlow's battle between choosing to conform to society, the good side, or choosing to take what seems to be the easy way in rebelling towards society and taking over Kurtz' ivory trading post. The scattered dark images of death are used to foreshadow upcoming events, as well as create the mood for the reader. Contrasting to the dark and evil images are those of light, which blind the reader of the atrocities in which modern man is ignorant towards Without the continuing display of such contrast the plot would be direly effected, the novel, left without a story.