

# [Heart of disease and starvation, lying confusedly](https://assignbuster.com/heart-of-disease-and-starvation-lying-confusedly/)

Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad In Joseph Conrad’s novel, ‘ Heart ofDarkness’, the term “ darkness” can be related to a few differentmeanings. Conrad uses this term in various ways to characterize social, political and psychological affairs in order to help the reader get a feel ofhis attitudes towards things, such as colonialism, Africa, and civilization. Thefirst impression of the word “ darkness” in relations to this novelthat I understood was its reference to racism. This, I got from the way Conradwrites about the White people and how they treated the natives (Black), inAfrica. During the colonization of Africa, forced ideals of a race that thoughtof themselves as more superior than those who occupied that land before themexisted.

This is demonstrated as Conrad writes about how the Whites completelydominate the Blacks in Africa. A significant passage from the novel illustratingthis point is when Marlow describes, ” Black shapes crouched, lay…Thework was going on..

. this was the place where some of the helpers had withdrawnto die…

they were nothing earthly now, nothing but black shadows of disease andstarvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom” (34-35). The nativeswere not “ helpers”, but slaves who were forced to work till physicalexhaustion under the orders of the White colonist. To further support the ideaof racism as seen in this novel, consider the description that Marlow givesabout an incident he encounters, “ And whiles I had to look after the savagewho was a fireman..

. to look at him was as edifying as seeing a dog in a parodyof breeches and a feather hat, walking on his hind-legs…he was useful becausehe had been instructed” (63-64). From this, Conrad acknowledges thatalthough the natives take on some White Lai 2 characteristics, they are stillseen as inferior. In that passage, the fireman is seen as a joke.

Not as a man, but a “ dog in breeches”. Therefore, no matter how educated or similarin appearance the Blacks become, they are still seen as being beneath theWhites. The natives are not given any personal traits or uniqueness unless theypossess a similarity to the Whites. Even then we see no glimpse of humanity intheir characters through Conrad’s writing. From racism, the idea of civilizationis brought about in terms of “ darkness”. Conrad uses the contrast oflight and dark with relation to the civilized and the uncivilized.

The light ofcourse, represents civilization or the civilized side of the world and the dark, more importantly represents the uncivilized or savage side of the world. Fromthe passages quoted earlier, when Marlow calls the workers “ black shadowsof disease and starvation” (35), Conrad is reinforcing the idea that Blacksand the dark images they project are uncivilized and they are nothing to bewishing for. However, through Conrad’s reiteration of Marlow’s experience, therewas an interesting aspect of the slaves seen. The reality is that these Blacksare what created the civilized life for the Whites. The Blacks are being used bythe civilized, in turn making them uncivilized.

But, the fact remains that theWhites may be considered the savages for working these Blacks to death. However, as ironic as it may seem, their view was that the natives were there to beconquered. All in all, Conrad writes about civilization versus savagery.

Throughthe novel, he implies that the setting of laws and codes that would encouragemen to achieve higher standards is what creates civilization. It prevents menfrom reverting back to their darker tendencies. Civilization, however, must belearned. London itself, in the book is a symbol of enlightenment, was once” one of the darker places of the earth” before the Romans forcedcivilization upon Lai 3 them (18).

While society seems to restrain these savagelifestyles, it does not get rid of them. These primitive tendencies will alwaysbe like a black cloth lurking in the background. The possibility of revertingback to savagery is seen in Kurtz. When Marlow meets Kurtz, he finds a man thathas totally thrown off the restraints of civilization and has de-evolved into aprimitive state. Marlow and Kurtz are two opposite examples of the humancondition.

Kurtz represents what every man will become if left to his ownnatural desires without a protective civilized environment. Marlow representsthe civilized soul that has not been drawn back into savagery by a dark, alienated jungle. This darkness that Conrad writes about can also mean thewilderness in which the