

Heart of Darkness Literary Device

Writer: Joseph Conrad | Generated: Jan 26, 2026

Figures of Speech

- **Irony:** Irony appears when the reality is the opposite of what is claimed. Example: Europeans say they are bringing “civilization” and “light” to Africa. But instead of progress, they bring slavery, cruelty, and destruction. The irony shows the gap between noble words and brutal actions.
- **Symbolism (Symbols):** In the novel, objects, places, and people carry deeper meanings. Conrad uses symbolism to show imperialism, human greed, and moral decay.
- **The Congo River:** Symbol of Mystery and the Unknown. The river is the path Marlow takes into the heart of Africa. It is winding, endless, and dark. It represents both a real journey and a symbolic descent into the human soul’s darkness.
- **The “White Sepulchre”:** Symbol of Hypocrisy. Marlow calls Brussels by this name. The city looks clean and bright on the outside, but inside it hides greed and death. It symbolizes Europe’s false mask of civilization.
- **Ivory:** Symbol of Greed and Corruption. Ivory is the reason Europeans come to Africa. It represents wealth and beauty, but in the novel it also represents greed, exploitation, and moral corruption. Kurtz’s downfall is tied to his endless hunger for ivory.
- **Kurtz’s Last Words (“The horror! The horror!”):** Symbol of Truth and Self-Realization. These words show Kurtz’s final understanding of the empire’s cruelty and his own moral collapse. They symbolize the horror of human nature when left unchecked.
- **The African Mistress:** Symbol of Power and the Wild. She is adorned with ornaments, strong, and mysterious. She represents Africa itself—powerful, attractive, but feared by Europeans.
- **Darkness:** Symbol of Evil and Ignorance. Darkness in the novel is not only the African jungle but also the inner corruption of human beings. It represents greed, moral blindness, and the collapse of civilization.

Moral Lessons from Heart of Darkness

- Greed and power destroy human values.

- Civilization without truth becomes cruelty.
- Darkness lives inside every human heart.
- Lies may comfort, but they hide reality.
- Imperialism brings death, not progress.

LxNotes