As a European who has long been indoctrinated into the world of imperialism, Marlow’s first interaction with the natives in Conrad’s novel, *The Heart of Darkness* (1902), shows his early disdainful response to these savages, and yet it also illustrates the beginning of his changing opinion of these so-called “animals.”

Early in the excerpt, when Marlow first encounters the chained natives, Conrad’s disdainful and detached diction reflects his earlier racist upbringing. For example, he refers to the natives as animals with the tattered cloth they wore around their waists as dangling behind them “like tails,” and he comments that they were nothing more than “raw matter.” His European mindset sees them as not-quite-human—merely as things or unformed “matter” not worthy of pity. He cannot help but categorize them in such a way because if he did view them as humans he would be forced to change his long-lived beliefs. Further on, we see a slight shift in his attitude toward them when his diction becomes more reflective and he says that he has witnessed many “devils” in his time and yet the devil that caused these natives to be chained together was a most “rapacious” and “insidious” devil. He is beginning to see that these are human being and they true devil isn’t in the fact that they are different than he is, but is found in the greed and inhumane treatment that the Europeans are forcing upon the Congolese. It is in these comments that we can see that Marlow is beginning to change his mind about imperialism.

The details that Marlow provides also portray the “six black men” as less than human. In the short fourth paragraph, he notices their “dilated nostrils [quivering]” and their “breasts [panting] together.” These six chained men are not truly human in Marlow’s eyes—they are beasts of burden fit only for carrying loads of earth for the more superior white man. As Marlow pauses, he begins to realize that these are not beasts—they are men and he admits that he is just as responsible for their treatment as the men who tightened those chains. Marlow tells his companions on the Nellie, “I was also a part of the great cause of these right and just proceedings.” Although he still views the natives as “other” he is beginning to see the true affects of imperialism.