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**The Role of Women in Joseph Conrad's
Heart of Darkness
Master thesis**

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Affirmation

I hereby confirm that I have elaborated on this work independently and stated all the sources that I have used.

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ABSTRAKT

SABOLOVÁ, Terézia: *Úloha žien v diele Josepha Conrada Heart of Darkness*–
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Táto diplomová práca skúma zobrazenie a postavenie žien v románe *Srdce temnoty* od Josepha Conrada a zameriava sa na porovnanie ženských postáv v románe s rolami viktoriánskych žien v spoločnosti. Pomocou skúmania vyobrazenia ženských postáv v Conradovom románe, vrátane Kurtzovej snúbenky, africkej milenky a iných významných ženských postáv, sa práca snaží odhaliť, do akej miery sa autorovo zobrazenie žien zhoduje s tradičnými rolami a očakávaniami, ktoré sú kladené na ženy vo Viktoriánskom období. Výskum využíva kvalitatívne metódy, ako aj dôkladné čítanie a porovnávanie a analyzuje zobrazenie žien v románe v rámci viktoriánskeho obdobia. V teoretickej časti práce sa zaoberáme charakteristikou a vlastnosťami, ktoré boli typické pre viktoriánske ženy, popisujeme ich postavenie v spoločnosti, v manželstve a v rodine. Práca sa venuje aj popísaniu nerovnosti žien v patriarchálnej viktoriánskej spoločnosti. Ďalšou podstatnou súčasťou práce je stručný popis literárneho obdobia, v ktorom Joseph Conrad tvoril a priblíženie jeho života. Výsledky tejto práce prispievajú už k existujúcemu výskumu týkajúceho sa autorových diel a viktoriánskej literatúry a odhaľujú symboly ženských postáv v diele *Srdce temnoty*. Výskum, ktorým sa táto práca zaoberá, prináša náhľady do širšieho kultúrneho vnímania, ktoré opisuje postavenie žien a očakávania, ktoré sú na ne kladené vo viktoriánskom období.

Kľúčové slová: úloha žien, *Srdce temnoty*, Viktoriánske ženy, Joseph Conrad

ABSTRACT

SABOLOVÁ, Terézia: *The Role of Women in Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness*. –University of Economics in Bratislava. Faculty of Applied Languages; Department of intercultural communication. – Supervisor on the final thesis: PaedDr. Žaneta Pavlíková, PhD. – Bratislava: FAJ EU, 2023, 71 p.

This thesis explores the depiction and characterization of women in Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness*, with a specific focus on comparing their roles to those of Victorian women in society. By examining Conrad's portrayal of female characters in the novel, including the European Intended, the African mistress, and other significant female figures, this study aims to shed light on the extent to which Conrad's representation aligns with the traditional roles and expectations of women in the Victorian era. The research employs qualitative methods, including close reading and comparative analysis, to analyse the novel's depiction of women and contextualize it within the broader societal framework of the Victorian period. The study delves into the characteristics and attributes ascribed to Victorian women, including their involvement in domestic spheres, marital expectations, and the limitations placed upon them within the patriarchal society. Through a meticulous examination of Conrad's portrayal of women in *Heart of Darkness*, this thesis highlights how the female characters both conform to and challenge the typical roles ascribed to Victorian women. By exploring themes of power, agency, and societal expectations, the analysis seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the representation of women in the novel and its connection to the prevailing norms of the Victorian era. The findings of this thesis contribute to the existing body of scholarship on Joseph Conrad's works, shedding light on the complex and evolving depiction of women in *Heart of Darkness*. By examining the interplay between Conrad's artistic choices and the social context of the Victorian period, this research offers insights into the broader cultural narratives surrounding gender roles and expectations during that time.

Keywords: role of women, *Heart of Darkness*, Victorian women, Joseph Conrad

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Introduction

Throughout history, literature has served as a reflection of society, providing a lens through which we can examine societal norms, values, and the roles assigned to different individuals. One era that has captured the imagination of readers and scholars alike is the Victorian period, characterized by its rigid social structures, colonial endeavours, and evolving gender dynamics. Joseph Conrad, a prominent writer of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, navigated this era with his thought-provoking works that explored the depths of human nature and the complexities of society. In particular, his renowned novella *Heart of Darkness* beckons us into the depths of the human psyche while also inviting us to scrutinize the role of women within its narrative. Through a comparative analysis of Conrad's female characters in various works and an examination of the prevailing Victorian ideals, this thesis aims to shed light on the nuanced portrayal of women in *Heart of Darkness* and explore their place within the broader context of Victorian society.

The Victorian period, spanning from the mid-19th to the early 20th century, was a time of significant social, political, and economic change. The era was characterized by the expansion of the British Empire and its colonial endeavours, as well as the industrial revolution that brought about profound transformations in society. This era witnessed a shifting power dynamic, with Britain exerting its influence across the globe and becoming the world's leading imperial power.

Amidst these changes, Victorian society adhered to strict social hierarchies and deeply entrenched gender roles. The concept of separate spheres was prevalent, emphasizing the division of public and private domains. Men were expected to engage in the public sphere of work, politics, and business, while women were confined to the private sphere of home and family, with their primary roles revolving around domestic duties and the nurturing of children. The Victorian era also saw the rise of feminist movements and the fight for women's rights. Women began to challenge societal norms and advocate for greater autonomy, education, and opportunities outside the domestic sphere.

Victorian literature, as a reflection of society, mirrored these prevailing ideals and restrictions. Victorian literature often portrayed women as idealized and virtuous figures, epitomizing notions of femininity, purity, and domesticity. These literary works reinforced societal expectations and provided a means to navigate and examine the complexities of the era's social dynamics. Literature, encompassing a wide range of genres, experienced

remarkable growth during the era. One of the most significant developments was the rise of the novel as a dominant form of literary expression. The novel, with its expansive scope and ability to capture the intricacies of human experience, became a favoured medium for Victorian writers to explore and dissect societal issues. Victorian literature exhibited various distinctive features that reflected the concerns and aspirations of the time. Realism, for instance, was a prevalent literary movement that sought to depict everyday life with accuracy and detail. Additionally, it is important to highlight other features of Victorian literature such as moralism, idealism, and the presence of contradictory faiths and ideas. These aspects further shaped the literary landscape, providing a moral framework and exploring the complexities of human values, aspirations, and belief systems.

Moreover, the emergence of early modernism in literature marked a shift towards experimental forms of storytelling and a departure from traditional narrative structures. This period witnessed a heightened exploration of human psychology, subjective perspectives, and the fragmentation of narratives. It was an era of artistic exploration and intellectual inquiry, challenging established conventions and pushing the boundaries of literary expression. Within this dynamic literary landscape, Joseph Conrad emerged as a distinctive voice. His works defied easy categorization, blending elements of realism, modernism, and psychological introspection. Conrad's narratives grappled with complex moral and philosophical questions, delving into the depths of human nature and the often-unsettling truths that lie beneath the surface.

The second chapter of this thesis explores the life and background of Joseph Conrad, a renowned author whose experiences as a mariner and exposure to diverse cultures greatly influenced his literary works. By examining Conrad's personal journey, multicultural upbringing, and encounters with the realities of colonialism, this chapter aims to shed light on the profound impact these factors had on his portrayal of female characters and their roles within his narratives.

The thesis delves into an analysis of the role of women in Joseph Conrad's works, with a particular focus on the portrayal of women in *Heart of Darkness*. This exploration aims to unravel the complexities of their roles, and societal significance within Conrad's narratives. Drawing comparisons with the ideals and expectations of Victorian women, this analysis provides valuable insights into the evolving representation of women in literature and their relationship to the broader social and cultural context of the time. By examining Conrad's

nuanced depictions of female characters, their struggles, and their relationships with power and society, we aim to contribute to a deeper understanding of the multifaceted role of women in Conrad's works and their resonance within the Victorian era.

1 Victorian Era

Joseph Conrad's literary works emerged during the Victorian Era in England, and a comprehensive understanding of his works, particularly the role of women within them, necessitates a deep comprehension of the societal context of that time. This chapter delves into the intricacies of the Victorian period, exploring its historical backdrop, technological advancements, political landscape, religious influences, and social hierarchies. By delving into these aspects, we aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the historical milieu within which Conrad's works were conceived.

1.1 Victorian Period and Society

The Victorian era is named after Queen Victoria, who reigned over the United Kingdom from 1837 to 1901. Shepherd (2001) wrote in her article about Victorian era, that it was a time of significant social, economic, and technological change in Britain, and the period is characterized by a strong sense of morality, propriety, and social hierarchy. Victorian society is associated with strong gender roles, family values, social hierarchy, and patriarchy. In terms of technological development, many new inventions were made in the Victorian Era. Their impact on society was significant and far-reaching, and they continue to shape our lives and the world around us today. Specifically, steam-powered everything from trains and ships to factories and mills, revolutionizing transportation, and industry. There were wide inventions in communication, e. g. the telegraph, which transformed the way people communicated, enabling businesses to communicate more efficiently, and connecting people across vast distances. Another important invention of communication was the telephone. It was invented in 1876 by Alexander Graham Bell. It allowed people to communicate with each other in real-time, making long-distance communication much easier. Thomas Elva Edison is known as a Victorian inventor. He invented a lightbulb in 1879, the Phonograph for listening to reproduced music, the Kinetograph, the type of movie camera, and the Kinetoscope, which served to watch moving pictures. (Freeberg, 2013) All of these inventions are significant for humanity to this day.

The Victorian era was a time of significant political change and upheaval in Britain. At the beginning of the era, Britain was still a constitutional monarchy, with the monarch serving as the head of state but with limited powers. However, the period also saw the emergence of a more democratic and participatory political system, as well as significant social and economic reforms. The two major political parties of the time were the Conservatives and the Liberals. The Conservatives tended to represent the interests of the

landed gentry and the aristocracy, while the Liberals were more representative of the rising middle class. One of the major political issues of the time was the question of parliamentary reform. Many people believed that the existing electoral system was corrupt and unrepresentative, and there were calls for greater representation and voting rights for the working class. In 1832, the Reform Act was passed, which extended voting rights to some middle-class members and redistributed parliamentary seats to reflect population changes more fairly. This was followed by further reform acts in 1867 and 1884, which further expanded voting rights and representation. An important political issue was the question of Irish home rule. The Irish had long been subject to British rule, and there were growing calls for greater autonomy and self-rule. The issue came to a head in 1886 when the Liberal Party under William Gladstone introduced a home rule bill, which was ultimately defeated. The Victorian era was also marked by several significant social and economic reforms, including the establishment of a system of public education, introducing of labour laws and protections for workers, and expanding the welfare state. These reforms were driven by a combination of humanitarian concerns and a desire to maintain social stability in the face of growing social and economic inequality. According to Shepherd (2001), Victorians were enthusiastic about geographical exploration, opening up Africa and Asia to the West, but they were troubled by the intractable situation in Ireland as we already mentioned. At sea, British supremacy remained almost unquestioned throughout the century.

In the Victorian era, there was a growing interest in the question of the existence of God, particularly as new scientific theories and discoveries challenged traditional religious beliefs. The theory of evolution, in particular, was a major source of controversy, as it called into question the biblical account of creation and challenged traditional religious beliefs about the origins of life and humanity. Many Victorian intellectuals and thinkers, including Charles Darwin, Thomas Huxley, and John Stuart Mill, were deeply engaged in debates about the existence of God and the role of religion in society. Some argued that science and reason offered a more reliable and objective means of understanding the world than religion, while others defended traditional religious beliefs and argued that faith was essential to moral and spiritual life. (Moss, 2001) Generally speaking, religion played an important role in Victorian society, shaping the values, beliefs, and practices of individuals and communities throughout the era. The Church of England remained the dominant religious institution in Victorian Britain, and it continued to exert a powerful influence over social and cultural life. However, the era also saw the rise of non-conformist religious movements,

including Methodism, Congregationalism, and Baptism, which challenged the dominance of the Anglican Church and offered alternative forms of worship and religious practice. The Victorian era was also marked by a growing interest in spiritualism, mysticism, and esoteric practices. Many people were drawn to the idea of communicating with the dead, and spiritualist circles became popular throughout Britain. The Victorian era was also marked by a growing interest in spirituality and mysticism, as many people sought new forms of religious expression that were more personal and individualistic. Some turned to Eastern religions or esoteric practices, while others embraced new religious movements that offered alternative forms of worship and spiritual practice. The era also saw the emergence of new religious movements, such as Theosophy, which blended elements of Eastern spirituality and Western occultism. In addition to these religious developments, the Victorian era also saw significant social and cultural changes, including the emergence of new scientific theories and the rise of secularism. These changes challenged traditional religious beliefs and practices, and many people began to question the authority of religious institutions.

The Victorian era was characterized by a rigid social hierarchy that was based on class, wealth, and status. At the top of the hierarchy was the aristocracy, which held the highest social rank and enjoyed immense wealth and privilege. Below the aristocracy was the upper-middle class, made up of wealthy businessmen, professionals, and landowners, who enjoyed considerable wealth and social prestige. The middle class, made up of small business owners, tradespeople, and skilled workers, occupied a lower rung on the social ladder, while the working class, who were primarily employed in manual labour, held the lowest social rank. Women and children also occupied a subordinate position within Victorian society, with women being expected to conform to strict gender roles and children being treated as dependents and apprentices. Social status was closely linked to education, occupation, and lifestyle, with those who held higher positions in society typically being better educated, more cultured, and more refined in their tastes and habits. Wealth and property were also key markers of social status, with those who owned land, property, and other forms of wealth occupying a higher social position than those who did not. The social hierarchy of the Victorian era was enforced through a complex system of etiquette and social norms, which governed behaviour and social interaction at all levels of society. These norms emphasized decorum, propriety, and respect for social hierarchy, and were enforced through a variety of social sanctions, including ostracism and exclusion from social events. The people from the lower classes usually worked for the ones from the higher class. Despite the

rigidity of the social hierarchy, however, there were also opportunities for social mobility and advancement, particularly for those who were able to acquire wealth or achieve success in their chosen field. The Victorian era saw the rise of a new middle class, as well as the emergence of new opportunities for women and working-class individuals to achieve greater social and economic status.

This era was marked by a significant expansion of European colonialism, including the colonization and exploitation of African peoples and territories. European powers, including Britain, France, and Belgium, established colonies throughout Africa, often through violent means, and exploited the natural resources and labour of African peoples for their economic gain. Many Africans were forced into labour plantations, mines, and other industries, often under harsh and inhumane conditions. They were subject to discrimination and exploitation and had limited access to education, healthcare, and legal protections. In addition to colonialism, the Victorian era was also marked by the rise of scientific racism, which sought to justify European imperialism and colonialism by promoting the idea that European peoples were biologically superior to other races. This racist ideology was used to justify the oppression and exploitation of African peoples and other colonized peoples and had a significant impact on global politics and culture in the decades that followed. Despite these injustices, however, there were also several social reformers and activists who worked to challenge colonialism and promote greater social and economic justice for African peoples and other colonized populations. These activists played a key role in shaping the anti-colonial and anti-racist movements that emerged in the 20th century and helped to lay the groundwork for the modern struggle for social and economic justice.

The Victorian era is also known for child labour, which was very common at that time. There was a baby boom, which significantly increased the number of children in the population and logically lead to the employment of children. Children were working in factories, mines, and other industrial settings usually as chimney sweepers, coal miners, farm workers, or domestic servants. Women and children especially had the worst working conditions. The workers in mines had the most horrible working conditions. They were expected to work 12 to 18 hours a day, in mines with poor ventilation and rats. These caused respiratory problems and other diseases. Many working-class people lived in crowded, unsanitary conditions, and worked long hours in dangerous and exhausting jobs. Working-class people often had limited access to education and healthcare and lived with few legal protections or labour rights. They were also subject to discrimination and prejudice based on

their social class, which limited their opportunities for social and economic advancement. Alcoholism and the use of drugs were popular during that time as a kind of coping mechanism to deal with the hard life they lived. As we already mentioned, child labour was a particularly pressing issue during the Victorian era. Children as young as six or seven years old were often put to work in factories, mines, and other dangerous jobs, where they were subjected to long hours, harsh conditions, and physical abuse. Many children were injured or killed on the job, and their education and social development were severely limited by their work. In response to these conditions, several social reformers and activists emerged during the Victorian era, calling for greater protections for working-class people and children. These reformers advocated for better working conditions, higher wages, and greater access to education and healthcare, and played a key role in shaping the modern labour movement and social welfare system. From the acts which it is well to mention we have selected, The Factory Act of 1833, which limited the age of working children and the number of hours they could work. Then The Mines Act of 1842, introduced new safety regulations for miners and prohibited the work of women and children in mines. Later, in 1848, The Public Health Act introduced new regulations and standards for public health, including measures to improve sanitation, prevent disease, and promote hygiene. The last one we are going to mention is The Education Act of 1870. This act introduced compulsory education for children aged 5-12 and established a system of public schools to provide education to all children, regardless of social class or background. All of these acts represented important steps forward in the struggle for social and economic justice during the Victorian era and are the building blocks for today's working conditions.

Another children-related issue that is needed to describe is called bastardy. It is a term that labels children, whose fathers left all of the care and support on their mothers. This was a common phenomenon caused by brutal poverty and unstable marriages. The Parliament decided to develop the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, which forced women and their children without fathers to join workhouses. Entering workhouses ruined the reputation of the women and their children. However, there were some women who appreciated the law and joined the workhouses, because it would secure food, clothes, and schooling for them.

As the population grew, so did the crime rate. In 1829 they came up with the Metropolitan Police Act, which was one of the earliest uniformed police forces. In the beginning, the police had no authority, but that changed during the following years. The

police officers could arrest street musicians, and troublesome people, board vessels, they could enter gambling houses, patrol fairs, and carry out searches and seizures. As we previously mentioned the hierarchy in Victorian society, some authors even list the so-called 'criminal class.' The people from the upper class consider the poorest people living in filthiness as members of the criminal class. The idea of the criminal social class was also mentioned and popularized by authors like Charles Dickens in his *Oliver Twist* and others. Moreover, people became to panic when hearing about Jack the Ripper, who was very often mentioned in the newspapers. Jack the Ripper was a vicious killer, who murdered at least 5 prostitutes working in West London. The identity of the killer has never been traced, and so his name is associated with various legends and stories that were attractive to read.

1.2 Women in the Victorian Era

Women in Victorian society were subject to strict social norms and expectations, which varied depending on their class and social status. During the Victorian era, gender roles were rigorously divided between both genders. Women's roles were largely limited to the domestic sphere, and they were expected to fulfil the duties of wives, mothers, and caretakers. This chapter describes the role of women in the Victorian era, their rights, level of education, clothing, and rules that they had to follow. Women were seen as "half dolls, half angels" in the Victorian era. It is a common characteristic of how society perceived women at the time. Victorian women were considered angels for several reasons. Experts explain this as due to the so-called disappearance of God and scepticism about religion. People at the time believed that the outside of the home was evil and Victorian women spent most of their time at home, which is the second reason why women are considered to be angelic. The third reason is connected with Victorian art. Angels were painted as women figures. The last reason is associated with Goethe's play *Faust*, in which he mentions that women attract men's minds to unearthly things. (Nsaidzedze, 2017) On the one hand, women were often idealized and romanticized as pure, innocent, and angelic beings, especially in literature, art, and popular culture. At the same time, however, women have often been objectified and reduced to their physical appearance, especially in the context of fashion and beauty norms. Women were expected to embody these ideals and were often judged strictly if they broke down to meet these impossible standards.

1.2.1 Gender roles, separate spheres

During the Victorian era, gender roles were strictly defined and largely based on the idea of so-called separate spheres. The idea of separate spheres is based on the belief that

men's sphere was public and women's sphere was private or at home. (Nsaidzedze, 2017) Men were expected to be the breadwinners and the heads of households, while women were expected to be submissive, nurturing, and focused on domestic duties. Men were expected to provide finance for the family and make important decisions. They were taking the role of authority and they should be treated with respect. Men were seen as leaders. They should not express their emotions and had to be strong. Women, on the other hand, were expected to prioritize their roles as wives, mothers, and caretakers. They were expected to be modest, submissive, obedient, and focused on family and household. Their education was limited, and they were expected to fully depend on their husbands, to follow the man and submit to him, they were discouraged from pursuing careers or activities outside of the home. Victorian women were generally discouraged from expressing political opinions or engaging in political activism. It was believed that women's primary role was in the home and that they should not involve themselves in the public sphere or political affairs. Women's participation in politics was limited by several factors, including their lack of access to education and political power, as well as societal norms that discouraged women from speaking out or challenging authority. Women were not allowed to vote or hold political office, and their voices were often ignored or dismissed by male politicians and leaders.

1.2.2 Women and Work

The first assumption about Victorian women is that they did not work. This comes from the fact that most of the privileged women stayed at home, but a lot of women from the lower class had to work. Women did not only work in domestic areas as servants or cleaning ladies, but they also work in washhouses, retail trades, textile mills, and similar factories. (Mitchell, 2008) They usually made clothes and needles in factories. This work requires smaller fingers and precise working habits, which were more common for the female gender. However, working in mills was unacceptable for women, especially if she was married. Generally speaking, women were not forced to work by society, but for economic reasons. While middle and upper-class women were expected to focus on their domestic duties, working-class women had to work to support themselves and their families. Women faced poor working conditions, low wages, and long working hours. Women's work was often seen as inferior to men's work, and women were paid significantly less than men for doing the same job. Additionally, married women were often fired from their jobs or prevented from working altogether, as employers believed that their primary duty was to their families. Despite these challenges, some women were able to gain employment in

skilled professions such as teaching, nursing, or secretarial work. However, these opportunities were often limited to unmarried women or widows, and women in these professions were still subject to gender-based discrimination and lower pay than their male counterparts. As teachers, they could only educate young females, not boys. On the contrary, some women from higher social classes wanted to work, because they wanted to fill their empty lives with something meaningful, but from society's point of view, they could not. A job that was acceptable to Victorian women was a governess. As the work was supervised by the head of the family and the governess was devoted to the upbringing of the children, the work fulfilled the values of Victorian society. (Demir, 2015)

1.2.3 Single Victorian Women

What is interesting, during that time, there were a large number of single ladies. There are several explanations for this. Firstly, the expectation of women to marry and have children often led to a shortage of eligible partners, particularly for women who were considered to be past the typical age of marriage. Women who were not able to find a suitable partner or who chose not to marry for personal reasons were often referred to as "spinsters" or "old maids," and were subject to social stigma and discrimination. Secondly, the Victorian era saw significant improvements in healthcare and hygiene, which led to a decline in deaths and an increase in life expectancy. This meant that women were living longer and often outlived their husbands, leaving them widowed and unmarried. Thirdly, the Victorian era was a time of significant social and economic change, with many new opportunities for women to pursue education, employment, and other activities outside of the home. This led to a growing number of women who chose to remain single to pursue their interests and goals. Some of them became teachers, and writers, or devoted themselves to charity work. However, the societal pressure to marry and have children often made it difficult for single women to fully participate in society and achieve the same level of respect and recognition as their married counterparts. They were often seen as failures.

1.2.4 Marriage and Sex

Victorian women felt pressure to marry. However, dating was not that easy during that time. Men and women were expected to follow a strict set of rules and social conventions. The most important feature of Victorian courtship is respectability. This means that future couples had to maintain a certain level of courtesy and morality. These rules lead to the fact that single women and single men were never left alone, they were always chaperoned on their dates and were expected to avoid any behaviour that could be seen as

scandalous or immoral. After the young woman finished her education, she was prepared to get married, which meant she could enter social life, and go to a ball, party, or dinner. In the second half of the century, dating became easier thanks to emancipation through sports. Women could finally roller skate, play tennis, cricket, and golf, and later even bicycle. While playing sports, women were unescorted, and it made flirting easier. (Perkin, 1993) When it comes to choosing a partner, for the upper class, the most important factor in choosing the right husband for their daughter was wealth. They consider the social status of the person and money rather than the attractiveness of the person or affection. For middle-class women, important were the interests and religion of the person. Victorian women were often judged by their beauty, social status, and ability to manage a household. Couples were expected to date to find a suitable partner for marriage, and there was often a great deal of pressure on both men and women to settle down and start families. To court a woman, a man would need permission from her father or male guardian, who would then act as a chaperone during their dates. Men were expected to be always respectful and gentlemanly and were often judged by their ability to provide for a wife and family. On the other hand, women were expected to be modest, reserved, and focused on finding a suitable husband.

Marriage was a highly significant event during the Victorian era and was often seen as the ultimate goal of courtship. Couples were expected to get married to start a family and build a household. In terms of the marriage ceremony, the most acceptable form was at the church. In fact, getting married in a church was seen as a sign of respectability and social status, and was often preferred by couples who could afford it. Marriages in the church were formal ceremonies and they look similar to nowadays church weddings. The bride was wearing a white dress and the groom was wearing a formal suit. The actual ceremony itself required a priest or other religious figure to perform the vows and blessings. After the ceremony, couples often celebrated with a wedding breakfast or reception, which could be held at different venues depending on their social status and financial means. These events were often highly anticipated and well attended and may have included a variety of traditional customs and rituals as nowadays.

The idealized picture of marriage was the marriage of Queen Victoria and her husband, Prince Albert. Although in their case their marriage did not fit the idea of a typical Victorian marriage, people admired them. Their gender roles were reversed. Prince Albert was the one that took care of the children and household, and Victoria was the authority and the head of the family. (Phegley, 2012)

In the Victorian era, there was a great emphasis on sexual purity and morality, especially for women. It was generally expected that women would remain virgins until marriage, and any suggestion that a woman had engaged in sexual activity before marriage could be considered a major scandal. (Perkin, 1993) Women who were found to have lost their virginity before marriage could face serious social consequences, including exclusion from the community and loss of marriage prospects to respectable men. In some cases, women who were perceived as sexually immoral may even have been forced into prostitution or other forms of exploitation. Women who engaged in sexual activities outside marriage, especially those who engaged in prostitution as a means of livelihood, were referred to by the term fallen women. This term "fallen" implied that these women had strayed from the moral path and committed a grave sin by engaging in sexual activity outside of marriage. (Barnhill, 2005)

Men, on the other hand, were often subject to different norms when it came to sexual behaviour. Although men were still generally expected to abstain from sex until marriage, greater leniency and permissiveness were often applied to men who engaged in sexual activities before marriage.

As it was previously mentioned, some women have been forced into prostitution simply on suspicion of sexual intercourse outside marriage. Prostitution was a major social problem in the Victorian era and was the subject of intense debate and controversy. It was widespread in Victorian cities, especially in areas with large numbers of working-class men. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the Victorian period is characterized by a strict moral code and an emphasis on sexual purity, especially for women. As a result, prostitution was seen as a major threat to public morality and was viewed with disgust and disapproval by many members of society. Despite these attitudes, prostitution was a thriving industry at the time and many women had to engage in it as a means of supporting themselves and their families. Many of these women came from poor backgrounds or were widows and had few other options to earn a living. In the Victorian era, attempts were made to regulate prostitution when the Contagious Diseases Acts were passed in the 1860s. These laws aimed to control the spread of sexually transmitted diseases among soldiers and sailors and required women suspected of prostitution to undergo regular medical examinations and treatment. (Hiersche, 2014) Which was very beneficial from a health point of view, but in practical life, these laws were seen as very controversial and were criticized by many for promoting the sexual exploitation of women and violating their civil liberties. The laws were eventually

repealed in the 1880s, but prostitution remained a major social problem throughout the Victorian era.

1.2.5 Education

In the Victorian era, women's education was limited and mostly focused on domestic skills rather than academic subjects. Girls from the middle and upper classes were usually educated at home by governesses or tutors and were taught subjects such as music, drawing, and needlework, how to look after the home, along with some basic literacy and numeracy. Formal education for women after the primary level of education was uncommon and unwanted by a patriarchal society, so women were often excluded from universities and other institutions of higher education. (Demir, 2015) However, there were some attempts to expand educational freedom for women, particularly by women's rights activists and educators who recognized the importance of education for women's civil and financial empowerment.

According to Demir (2015), Men did not even try to talk to them about politics, art, business, and science. A woman was expected to be a graceful and decorative housewife who keep the home clean and cozy and prepare food for her husband and children.

1.2.6 Fashion

Women were expected to wear modest and appropriate, decent clothes. The ideal Victorian silhouette was characterized by a narrow waist, full skirt, and rounded bust, i.e., the hourglass figure, and was achieved with the help of corsets, petticoats, and various other undergarments. The corsets are typical for Victorian women. They were used to make the waist look smaller, but they were painful and could break ribs. The petticoats were skirts that go under the dress or skirts. They added volume to the skirts or dresses. Another typical clothing item for women was crinolines, which were made from wood or sometimes steel. They were very heavy, and it was difficult to sit while wearing them, but they made the bell shape of skirt or dress that most of the women wanted to achieve. They were impractical though. A bustle is another piece of clothing that goes under the skirt. It was made to make the bottom of the women look larger. Women's dresses were usually made of rich and heavy fabrics such as silk, velvet, and brocade, and were often decorated with intricate embroidery, lace, and other embellishments. Sleeves were usually long and narrow, and necklines were high, with collars and ruffles. Dresses were often multi-layered, with overskirts and underskirts, and various other elements that added to the overall volume and complexity of the wear. In addition to dresses and skirts, women wore a variety of accessories including

hats, gloves, and jewellery. Young women and girls loved to wear hats decorated with flowers, bows, feathers, stuffed birds, and sometimes even veils. The hats were usually layered, and the most common fabric that they were made from were velvet, satin, tulle, or cotton. Among the headdresses often worn in the Victorian period are bonnets. The bonnets are basically hats with the front of the brim removed and usually tied under the chin. They were usually decorated with feathers, pieces of coloured latkes, flowers, and also birds. Another decorative, but at the same time a practical piece of jewellery was fans. There were many kinds of fans, made from wood or paper, with different designs, embroideries, or paintings. As for shoes, women wore narrow boots to make their feet look tiny and appealing. It was very common for both genders to wear gloves. Gloves, that were worn on formal occasions were longer, usually, they cover the whole arm, and they were made from kid leather. Informal gloves, worn daily, were short, wrist length, and were usually laced. There was a rule for ladies to wear gloves on every occasion and they could only remove them while eating. Although the women wore head coverings, which usually served only for decoration, they also practically carried parasols which served as a shade. They were laced too. (Fatema, 2018) Although Victorian fashion is often associated with restrictive and impractical clothing worn by women, it is important to note that there was also considerable variety and innovation in women's clothing during this period. Fashion was an important means of self-expression and status, and women were often able to adapt and modify their clothing to suit their personal preferences and circumstances. In addition, the clothes worn by women varied across different classes, regions, and cultures, reflecting the diverse and complex nature of Victorian society.

1.2.7 Feminism

Victorian women didn't have many rights. Under the law, they could not own property, vote, have higher education or sue for divorce or ask to have custody of their children. According to Nsaidzedze (2017), women were considered to be the property of their men. After marriage, all of the bride's property is owned by the husband. Another part of life that women did not influence was sexual activity. The woman's body was also the property of her husband. It was strictly a given in society that if the husband desired a sexual act, the wife could not say no or resist, which meant that women were often raped. Their role was to fulfil the man's desires. Also, a proper wife had to be frigid and not desire sex. Women that had a sexual desire were seen as immoral. However, people believed that men were losing their strength if they had too much sex, so in order to keep their strength, they had to

limit their sexual activities. Another problem was the already mentioned prostitution, which was also not protected by any law. This implies that there were many spheres where women did not have rights and change was needed.

Literature, feminist groups, and protests have contributed greatly to improving the position of women in society. An important author associated with feminism in the Victorian era is Margaret Fuller, who wrote a book called *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, in which she pointed out that women should have equal rights as men. Margaret Fuller herself was an educated woman and she is described as America's first feminist. After her book, other great writers joined her, like Charlotte Bronte with the first feminist novel *Jane Eyre* and Elisabeth Barrett Browning with the first feminist poem *Aurora Leigh*. According to Nsaidzedze (2017), the publication of John Stuart Mill's *On the Subjection of Women* was the most important feminist essay that sparked Victorian feminism. In 1948 and 1949 the first universities for women were established, namely Queen's College in London and Bedford College. After that, many other publications contributed to the higher education of women. In 1870 Education Act was passed, which allowed women to serve on School Boards.

Another important act was the Contagious Diseases Act which was already mentioned. This act help women that were working in the sex industry if they catch any disease while providing their services. However, because of the bad reputation of this act was repealed in 1886.

In 1848 took place Seneca Falls Convention in the United States which was the first women's rights convention in history. Then later, in 1850, there was the first National Women's Rights Convention in Worcester, Massachusetts. One year later, Harriet Taylor published *The Enfranchisement of Women*, and a suffrage petition for the right to vote was presented to the House of Lords by her husband, J. S. Mill. In 1852 a judge ruled that a husband could not force his wife to live with him. Then in 1857 came the Matrimonial Causes Act, which ruled that a woman can file for divorce if her husband has committed adultery, but also if he has been a rapist and can get custody of the children. Another important improvement was the Married Women's Property Act of 1870 a law passed by the British Parliament which allowed married women in England and Wales to own property in their own right for the first time. It enabled married women to own and control their property, including any earnings, inheritances, or gifts. It also allowed them to sue and be sued in their name, and to enter into contracts independently. The most significant act came in 1918 called the Voting Act, which allowed women over 30 to vote. (Nsaidzedze, 2017)

1.3 Victorian Literature

Victorian literature refers to the literary period during the reign of Queen Victoria in England. Romanticism has a strong influence on Victorian literature as her predecessor. The literature strongly reflects that time's changing social, political, and cultural landscape. One can notice by reading works of Victorian authors, that they have 4 key characteristics:

1. Realism: During this era, literature sought to represent real, everyday life with the reflection of everyday struggles and situations. It was a strong instrument for social progress. It brought ideas like emancipation, improve human rights and especially women's rights, child labour, and the conditions of workers.
2. Moralism: This literature was often refused by moral rules and values. Writers sought to explore responsibility, duty, and morality in general and many works put emphasis on hard work, self-discipline, unselfishness, and personal responsibility.
3. Idealism: The writers were dignified ideal lifestyle, which was represented by love, justice, truth, and brotherhood.
4. Contradictory faiths and ideas: Victorian era is characterized by technological improvements and hand in hand with this comes also ideas about the place of humans in the universe and the idea of evolution. (Wani and Sharma, 2020)

However, man can notice some other characteristics that are common in Victorian literature. It is typical to find social and political criticisms in works from the Victorian era, many authors used their work to critique the injustices of society, like Dickens or Elizabeth Gaskell. Authors often focus on individuals who are successful because of their hard work and dedication and determination. Many works from this era reflect romantic sensibility with an emphasis on emotions, passions, and imagination.

Themes that are often mentioned in Victorian literary works include Racism, Evolution and degeneration, Love and marriage, Catholicism, Fascism and socialism, War and betrayal, Imperialism and the decline of the empire, Crime and hypocrisy, Social climbing and social classes, Women's rights, Homosexuality, and Psychology. (Moss, 2001)

Victorian literature encompasses a wide range of genres including novels, poetry, drama, and non-fiction. However, the novel is arguably the most significant genre of Victorian literature, and many of the best-known works of the period are novels. During the first half of the 19th century, Englishmen began to read novels voraciously. During Romanticism, women writers such as Mrs. Radcliffe, Fanny Burney, Maria Edgeworth, and

Jane Austen introduced the genre of the novel, which was mainly read by wealthy, leisured, literate middle-class readers. The Victorian novel is characterized by its length, complexity, and attention to detail, and often tried to portray the social reality of the time. The novels are also often structured in a serialized format, with regular instalments published in magazines or newspapers. In general, the novel is characterized by its attention to detail, its focus on social and political issues, its vivid characters, and its intricate plots. It is a complex and diverse genre that reflects the changing cultural and political landscape of the time. These works often explore themes of class, gender, morality, and social justice, and they are known for their vivid characters, intricate plots, and detailed descriptions of everyday life. The most well-known novelists include Dickens, Thackeray, and Hardy, but among the important novelists of this period are also Bronte sisters - Charlotte Bronte, Emily Bronte, and Anne Bronte, then George Eliot, Samuel Butler, and George Meredith. Novelists of the first half of the century identified with their times and shared a particular atmosphere of ideas, feelings, and beliefs. They accepted the idea of progress without much questioning and they presented the idea of Protestantism. Novelists that wrote later were sceptical towards religion mainly because of technological progress. After the publications after the publications of Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology* and later *On the Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man* by Charles Darwin, people started to question Protestantism and some of them prefer personal religions. (Wani and Sharma, 2020)

While speaking about novels, many different types of novels were written during the Victorian period, reflecting the diversity of literary interests and social issues of the time. Here are some of the major types of Victorian novels:

1. Social novels: These novels were focused on the social and political issues of the day, and often criticize or expose injustices and inequalities in society. They reflect the harsh life people used to live during that time, speaking of harsh working conditions, diseases, dirt, poor healthcare, extreme working hours, etc. Examples of this kind of novel include Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* and Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*.

2. Sensation novels: These novels were characterized by their melodramatic plots and focus on suspense and intrigue. They often featured sensational events, such as murder or betrayal, fraud, and false identity, and explored themes of morality and the consequences of one's actions. Examples include Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* and Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*.

3. Realistic novels: These novels were characterized by their attention to realistic detail and their focus on ordinary, everyday life. They often explored themes of family, love, and social class, and were often set in rural or urban communities. Examples include George Eliot's *Middlemarch* and Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*.

4. Gothic novels: These were characterized by their dark, supernatural themes and focus on the mysterious and the unknown. They often featured haunted houses, ghosts, and other eerie elements, and explored themes of fear, terror, and the subconscious mind. They showed that these supernatural powers could possess ordinary people. Examples include Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*.

5. Historical novels: These novels were set in the past and often explored historical events or figures. They were often used as a way to explore contemporary issues through the lens of history. Examples include Charles Kingsley's *Westward Ho!* and Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*.

Drama was an important part of Victorian literature, although it was not as popular as the novel during this period. The Victorian drama was characterized by its focus on social issues, realism, and moral themes. Many plays were written for the popular theatre and reflected the changing tastes and interests of the Victorian audience. Among the most famous Victorian playwrights are Oscar Wilde, George Bernard Shaw, and Arthur Wing Pinero. These writers used drama to explore themes of social class, gender, and morality, and their works often critiqued or challenged social norms and expectations as was typical during Victorian times. One of the most prominent forms of Victorian drama was melodrama, which was characterized by exaggerated emotions, sensational plot twists, and an emphasis on moral themes. Melodramas often featured explicit villains and heroes and were frequently used as a way of exploring issues of justice and morality. Wilde was one of the most famous and controversial playwrights of the Victorian era. His plays, including *The Importance of Being Earnest* and *An Ideal Husband*, are known for their wit, social satire, and exploration of Victorian society. George Bernard Shaw was a playwright, critic, and political activist whose works, including *Pygmalion* and *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, are known for their social commentary and critique of Victorian society. Pinero's plays are known for their witty dialogue, social satire, and psychological insight. He was particularly interested in exploring the lives of the upper and middle classes, and many of his plays focus on the struggles and aspirations of these groups. Arthur Wing Pinero's most famous works include *The Magistrate*, *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, and *Trelawny of the Wells*. His plays were known

for their complex characters, their exploration of social issues, and their use of intricate plotting and surprise endings.

Last, but not least, Victorian poetry produced also great poets namely Tennyson, Browning, and Arnold. Alfred Lord Tennyson was one of the most famous and influential poets of the Victorian period, and his works continue to be widely read and studied today. Tennyson's poetry is known for its musicality, vivid imagery, and exploration of love, loss, and mortality themes. His works often combine a sense of nostalgia for a simpler, more idyllic past with a recognition of the challenges and complexities of the present. Many of his poems are also marked by deep spiritual and philosophical insight and a belief in the power of human imagination and creativity. Among Tennyson's best-known works are *The Lady of Shalott*, *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, and *In Memoriam A.H.H.* The latter work, written as a tribute to his friend Arthur Henry Hallam, is considered one of the greatest elegies in the English language and explores themes of grief, loss, and the possibility of spiritual renewal. Robert Browning and his wife Elizabeth Barrett Browning were also both influential poets of the Victorian era. Robert Browning's poetry is known for its complex psychological insights, its use of dramatic monologue, and its interest in exploring a person's hidden motivations and desires. Some of Robert Browning's most famous works include *My Last Duchess*, *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*, and *Fra Lippo Lippi*. His use of the dramatic monologue, which allows the reader to enter a particular character's mind, was a significant innovation in poetry. Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poetry is known for its emotional intensity, exploration of political and social issues, and use of classical and biblical imagery. One of her famous works is called *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, which contains some of the most famous love poems in the English language, and *Aurora Leigh*, an epic poem that explores issues of gender, class, and social justice. Matthew Arnold was another important Victorian poet and cultural critic. Arnold's poetry is known for its elegance, and wit, and for dealing with issues of cultural and moral decline. He has dealt deeply with the impact of industrialization and modernization on society, and many of his poems reflect a sense of nostalgia for a simpler, more pastoral past. Some of Arnold's most famous works include *Dover Beach*, *The Scholar Gypsy*, and *Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse*. His poetry often combines a sense of personal melancholy with a broader critique of society and culture, and the use of classical allusions and imagery is a typical feature of his style. In addition to his poetry, Arnold was also a well-known cultural critic and essayist. His essays on education,

literature, and culture were widely read and influential in his time, and he is often credited with shaping the modern discipline of literary criticism.

1.4 Early Modernism

Joseph Conrad's literary works straddle the realms of both Victorian literature and early modernism, as his career unfolded during a transitional period between these two eras. His extensive body of work reflects influences from both literary styles and thematic elements prevalent in Victorian literature and the emerging early modernist movement. In his early writings, such as *Almayer's Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands*, Conrad embraced the conventions of Victorian literature, showcasing themes of adventure, exploration, and the allure of exotic settings. However, as Conrad's career progressed, his writing began to embody the shifting sensibilities of early modernism. Notably, works like *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim* delve into themes of alienation, disillusionment, and moral ambiguity, hallmarks of the early modernist period. Thus, it is imperative to provide a brief characterization of early modernism to fully appreciate the evolution and complexity of Conrad's literary contributions.

Early modernism is a literary and artistic movement that emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, characterized by a break from traditional forms and styles of art and literature. It serves as a rebellion act of authors against the norms. It allowed writers to experiment with their stories, to use non-linear or fragmented narratives, stream-of-consciousness techniques, and other innovative techniques to represent the complexities of the modern world. One of the main aims of modernism was to emphasize the experience and emotions of individuals. Writers that were part of the modernist movement are Franz Kafka, D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, T.S. Eliot, Gertrude Stein, Samuel Beckett, Ezra Pound, Ernest Hemingway, Joseph Conrad, and others. (MasterClass, 2021)

Modernism has two different characteristics that are specific to this movement. Here are the most noticeable ones:

1. **Experimentation:** As we already mentioned previously, modernism is known for trying new things and experimenting. They used new forms and structures. Using of fragmented narratives, stream-of-consciousness, absurdism, blended imagery, and themes are techniques that describe modernism the best.

2. **Individualism:** Modernists focused on the inner world and individualism of the human, rather than on society as a whole. They often describe the process of dealing with external problems of the individual and the way characters adapt to changing world. They

describe the circumstances the characters are living in and how the situation of an individual can change.

3. Free verse: Many modernist writers use free verse rather than consistent rhyme schemes, metrical patterns, or musical forms. Also from this, it is evident that modernists reject traditional forms of writing.

4. Multiple perspectives: Writers used first-person perspective with multiple characters to emphasize individualism. It also increases the depth of the story and presents a variety of different, subjective viewpoints of characters.

5. Criticism of traditional values and institutions: Especially early modernist writers and artists castigate traditional institutions and values like family life, religion, and politics and they try to create new forms of identity.

6. Symbolism: Of course, symbols were used even before modernism. However, modernists tend to use a lot of symbols and left blanks for their readers to increase imagination.

7. Absurdity: It reflects the sense of confusion, dislocation, and disillusionment that many artists and writers experienced in the wake of the two world wars and the rapid social and technological changes of the 20th century.

8. Formalism: It brings more creativity to works, writers used foreign languages, and they invented their own words. Formalist writers were interested in the ways that language could be used to create new meanings and experiences.

Many significant early modernist writers and artists were instrumental in shaping the movement in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. James Joyce, an Irish writer, was one of them. His novels *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, are considered groundbreaking works of modernist literature for their experimental style and stream-of-consciousness narrative technique. Another important writer, T.E. Eliot, an American-British poet, published *The Waste Land*. This poem is one of the most famous and influential poems of the modernist era, which uses fragmented structure and multiple voices to explore the breakdown of traditional values and structures. Important female writer, Virginia Woolf is also a member of the early modernist. Her novels *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*, are known for their exploration of the inner lives of characters and use of the stream-of-consciousness technique. Part of the movement was also a Czech writer, Franz Kafka, known for his surrealist and often absurd works, such as *The Trial* and *The Metamorphosis*, which explore themes of alienation and the breakdown of individual identity. Last, but not least, Joseph

Conrad, whose novels such as *Heart of Darkness*, *Lord Jim*, and *Nostromo*, explore themes of alienation, the breakdown of traditional values and structures, and the impact of colonialism on individuals and societies.

2 Background and Experience of Joseph Conrad

Before delving into the analysis of *Heart of Darkness* as an independent novella, it is essential to examine the life, background, experiences, and worldviews of the author Joseph Conrad himself. While the personal lives of authors may not always have a profound impact on their works, this is not the case with Joseph Conrad. His literary creations are deeply influenced by his personal experiences as a seaman, his Polish heritage, and his unique understanding of the human psyche and the world around him. Thus, it becomes crucial to explore his life and the environments that shaped his perspectives.

2.1 Joseph Conrad – A Polish Man

Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski, the true name of Joseph Conrad, was born on 3 December 1857 in Berdyczew, a Polish town that was part of the Russian Empire, nowadays called Berdychiv in the northern part of Ukraine. He was an only child. His father, Apollo Nałęcz Korzeniowski, and his wife Ewelina Bobrowska were both of landed families. His father was also an important Polish poet, patriot, and translator. He translated works of Shakespeare and also French literature. At the same time, he was also an activist, he was active in regaining the independence of Poland from Russia. They were forced to move a lot because of his father's political beliefs. They lived in cities like Warsaw, then Vologda, Russia, and later Chernihiv, Ukraine. His mother died there of tuberculosis. Conrad was home-schooled by his father, who introduced him to literature. He enjoyed reading Polish Romantic poetry. This has a significant influence on his writings as *Almayer's Folly*. Later, Conrad and his father moved again to the Austrian part of Poland, then to Krakow. After a few months of living there, Conrad's father Apollo died of tuberculosis, like his mother. Conrad was orphaned by the age of 11. His uncle, Tadeusz Bobrowski, took care of him afterward. However, his uncle was concerned with the boy's education and health issues. Conrad had poor health, probably because of the lifestyle his parents had and there is no evidence about him getting a formal education. As a consequence of that, Bobrowski imagined him being a sailor businessman. As a matter of fact, at the age of 13 Conrad revealed his intention to be a seaman. At the age of 16, Bobrowski sent Conrad to Marseilles, France, where they planned his merchant navy carrier. Even though Conrad was home-schooled, he was fluent in French, he was able to understand some Latin, German, and Greek, and he was pretty good at geography and history. During his stay in Marseille, Conrad had a rich social life, which also influenced his finances. He met there a guy, named Dominique Cervoni, who was an inspiration for some of Conrad's characters in the novella *Nostromo*. Later his

marine career was interrupted by the Russian consulate, which put Conrad in financial distress, and he attempted suicide. 20 years old Conrad shot himself in the chest with a revolver. After that, he received financial help from his uncle. Then he started to learn English and became fluent. After four years in the French marine, Conrad became part of the British merchant marine where he served for 15 years. He gradually worked his way up from the lower positions to the higher ones, until he became captain. He spends over 10 years as a mariner. Many of the characters in Conrad's work are based on people that he met or heard about during these 10 years and most of his stories are inspired by that time. Later, in 1890, Conrad visited his uncle in Poland while he was waiting to proceed to the Belgian Congo. The Belgian company and of course Congo River inspired the novella *Heart of Darkness*. After less than a year, Conrad left Africa and returned to the British sailors.

When he was 36 years old, he left the Navy mainly because of his health but partly also because he wanted to begin his writing career. He anglicized his name from Konrad to Conrad. and published his first novella called *Almayer's Folly* from the year 1885, so just a year after he gave up the marine. Conrad discussed his works with Edward Garnett, a literary critic, who gave him feedback. He was concerned about Conrad's level of English and what will readers say about unusual sentence structure. Despite this, he advised Conrad to publish his first works. The novella *Almayer's Folly* and also his second work, *An Outcast of Islands* 1886, created this image of Conrad as a romantic teller of tales placed in exotic places, which frustrated him for the rest of his career. These two novels are considered to be part of Victorian literature because they both have exotic settings, and there is a focus on adventure and exploration. His later works, like *Heart of Darkness* or *Lord Jim*, are part of early modernism because of features like multiple narrators, non-linear narrative structures, and psychological complexity. The main part of Conrad's works was first published in newspapers, like *The Fortnightly Review*, *North American Review*, and *The English Review*, but also illustrated newspapers like *The Illustrated London News*, etc.

In 1886 Conrad got married to Jessie George, with whom he had 2 sons, Borys and John. Jessie George was a working-class girl 16 years younger than Conrad. Some of his friends even said that she helps him make a successful career as a writer and that she served as an inspiration too.

Conrad was also concerned with politics, just like his father was. This fact is proven also in his works like *Nostromo* and *Almayer's Folly*. Conrad even wrote a political essay with the title *Autocracy and War* in which he wrote about Russo-Japanese War and warn

against Prussia, which he saw as a future enemy. Conrad was not a fan of democracy as a political regime, he thought that democracy offered possibilities for weaknesses in human nature. He never voted in the British national election, although he had British citizenship and could vote.

He died on 3 August 1924 the age of 67, in Bishopsbourne, Kent, England.

3 Aims and Methodology

3.1 Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach to analyse the role of women in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, with a particular emphasis on the portrayal and representation of female characters. Qualitative research allows for an in-depth exploration and interpretation of the nuances, themes, and symbolism within the novel, providing valuable insights into the role and significance of women in Conrad's narrative. Additionally, a comparative approach will be utilized to juxtapose the portrayal of women in *Heart of Darkness* with the societal expectations and roles of women in Victorian society. This comparative analysis will draw upon historical sources, literary criticism, and scholarly works on Victorian gender norms to provide a broader context for understanding Conrad's portrayal of women.

The primary data source for this study is Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. In addition to the primary data, an extensive range of secondary sources will be consulted. Critical essays, scholarly articles, and academic texts from diverse disciplinary perspectives will be scrutinized to establish a comprehensive contextualization and theoretical framework. These sources, specifically centred on the Victorian era, Victorian literature, Early modernism, and the writer's biography and background, contribute to a multifaceted understanding of the role of women in Victorian society. A thorough reading and analysis of the novel will be conducted, focusing specifically on the development and portrayal of female characters, including the Intended and the African woman. Carefully selected quotations and pertinent passages will be documented to support the analysis, shedding light on the role, and interactions of these characters. The data analysis process will involve an examination and interpretation of the primary data. Selected quotations and passages will be closely analysed to identify the role and representation of women in *Heart of Darkness*.

3.2 Aims

The primary aim of this thesis is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the role of women in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and compare it with the portrayal of women in Victorian society. By exploring the representation of women in Conrad's novel and examining the socio-cultural context of the Victorian era, this study aims to shed light on the complex dynamics and societal expectations surrounding women during that period. This aim was set to establish connections and contrasts between the representation of women in Conrad's novel and the prevailing societal norms of the Victorian era. By analysing

similarities and differences, this research seeks to uncover Conrad's engagement with or departure from the societal conventions of his time.

3.3 Hypothesis

This subchapter presents the hypothesis that guides the analysis of the role of women in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* concerning the role of women in Victorian society. The hypothesis proposes that the portrayal of women in Conrad's novel aligns with the societal expectations and constraints placed upon women during the Victorian period. This hypothesis will be examined and tested through a thorough analysis of the novel, drawing upon both textual evidence and an understanding of the historical context.

The hypothesis statement for this research is as follows:

“The portrayal of the role of women in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* corresponds to the role of women in society in the Victorian period.”

Through an examination of female characters, their agency, and their interactions with male characters, this study aims to demonstrate that Conrad's depiction of women in *Heart of Darkness* reflects the prevailing societal norms, gender roles, and power dynamics of the Victorian era.

4 Analysis

4.1 Role of women in Joseph Conrad's writings

Generally speaking, women play side characters in most of Joseph Conrad's works. They are usually not the main characters. However, the depiction of women differs within the novels. In some of them, they are described and meet the expectations of typical Victorian women. On the other hand, some novels have strong, independent female characters. In this chapter, we are going to take a closer look at several of Joseph Conrad's novels and the women that are part of them.

Within the literary field of Joseph Conrad, women predominantly assume supporting roles rather than occupying the central spotlight as main characters. Nevertheless, the portrayal of women exhibits notable variations across his diverse body of work. In certain novels, women are depicted in a manner that aligns with the social expectations and conventions of Victorian women, conforming to the established norms of femininity prevalent during that era. Conversely, Conrad's works also showcase the presence of strong, independent female characters who defy traditional gender roles. The significance of these divergent portrayals merits closer examination, prompting a comprehensive exploration of selected novels by Joseph Conrad and their respective female characters. Through an accurate analysis of these literary works, this chapter aims to unravel the representation of women within Conrad's narrative framework, delving into the complexities that emerge from both conforming to and challenging the typical Victorian woman. By engaging with these diverse depictions, we can gain a richer understanding of the multifaceted roles that women assume in Conrad's literary work.

4.1.1 *Almayer's Folly*

Joseph Conrad's first novel, *Almayer's Folly*, published in 1895, has two important female characters, who are in certain ways depicted as typical Victorian women. The story is about the life of a Dutch trader called Kaspar Almayer. It takes place in the 19th century on the east coast of Borneo. Almayer is married to the main female character of the story and her name is Mem. From the beginning of the story, Almayer is initially infatuated with Mem, viewing her as an exotic prize and a symbol of his success abroad, because Mem is mixed race, she is half Malay and half English. Mem is described as a beautiful and gentle woman. However, Almayer's view gradually changes in the story and he is increasingly disappointed with Mem, feeling that she cannot fulfil his expectations and desires. He sees her as an obstacle to his ambitions, especially the desire to achieve wealth and status in

European colonial society. Mem tries to find happiness within her marriage, but she cannot escape her limited gender roles and race. Mem embodies the struggles women face in patriarchal societies, especially those that exist on the periphery due to their mixed heritage. Mem's experiences and her relationship with Almayer contribute to the overarching themes of disillusionment and the search for identity within a colonial framework. Almayer and Mem have a daughter together named Nina, which is the second important female character in this story. Nina and Mem are depicted as a Eurasian mixed race representing the intersection of European and indigenous cultures. Their presence serves as a symbol of the clash between different worlds and the complexity of identity in a colonial environment. Throughout the novel, Nina struggles with her sense of belonging and her strained relationship with her father. Almayer's relationship with his daughter Nina is also tense. While he initially adores Nina, hoping that she will be a source of pride and recognition for him, his attitude changes as she grows older. Almayer initially becomes irritated with Nina's mixed heritage, seeing it as an obstacle to her acceptance in a European-dominated society. He wants her to marry a wealthy European suitor, but he forgets about Nina's own desires and wishes. In the storyline, we read that Almayer is obsessed with finding a legendary river of gold in the interior of Borneo, which he believes will make him rich and famous. This has a bad impact on his family, and he struggles to find balance between his work and his family. Mem and Nina grow increasingly distant from him. Important themes of this novel are colonialism, racism, and the damaging effects of greed and obsession. From female characters, Mem and her daughter Nina, we learned about the problems of mixed-raced people and their struggles to find their place in society even when they are discriminated against.

4.1.2 An Outcast of the Islands

The second novel that Conrad has written is a bit different. In *An Outcast of the Islands*, written in 1896, the main female character that is mentioned in the story is called Aissa and she has a major role in the novel. She is the wife of Peter Willems, the novel's protagonist. Aissa is described as a strong and independent woman that challenges the gender roles of the Victorian period. The only thing that these women, Mem from *Almayer's Folly* and Aissa had in common is their mixed-raced backgrounds. Aissa is also half Malay and half Arab. Aissa is sold as a slave by her father, but she eventually escapes and becomes a powerful force in the community. She is intelligent and determined to survive in a world that is hostile towards her. Aissa is capable of self-defence and can stand up for herself in

situations where she is oppressed or in danger. The story begins with Willems, a former official of a trading company who has been banished to a remote island as punishment for unethical acts and betrayal of his employer. There, Willems finds himself isolated and despised by the European community. However, Willems' life changes when he encounters Almayer, a charismatic and manipulative Malayan leader. Almayer promises Willems redemption and success if he works with him. Willems is drawn into Almayer's influence and becomes entangled in his political and personal plans. During Almayer's influence, he meets Aissa, whom he marries as his wife. Aissa's immense devotion and the complexity of their relationship complicate Willems' journey. As the story unfolds, Willems struggles with his own ambitions, moral choices, and conflicting loyalties between the European colonial world and indigenous society. The novel captures the psychological chaos that Willem experiences, his struggle with explosive actions, but also when he faces the consequences of his betrayals. In this novella, Joseph Conrad deepens his exploration of the human psyche, cultural conflicts, and the corrupting effects of power and ambition, which are central themes not only in *An Outcast of the Islands* but also in *Heart of Darkness*.

The depiction of Aissa does not fit the description of a typical Victorian woman. Aissa as a woman, calls gender roles of the Victorian era into question by acting like a man, hunting, and fighting and she serves as an image of female empowerment. However, at the same time, she is a devoted wife, she stays loyal and committed to her husband Willems throughout the whole story.

4.1.3 Nostromo

Nostromo is the title of the novel written in 1904. The plot is situated in the fictional South American country of Costaguana, in which political upheaval, economic exploitation, and social unrest are currently taking place. The novels also deal with the theme of imperialism, revolution, and the great influence of power. The plot of the story revolves around the character of Nostromo, an Italian who is a sailor by profession and works in the busy port city of Sulaco. He likes his work and is very experienced and reliable. Known for his bravery, loyalty, and resourcefulness, Nostromo becomes involved in the political and economic intrigues that shape Costaguana's destiny. The plot of the story begins with a description of the Costaguana silver industry mines, controlled by foreign interests, and the description of threats from revolutionaries and local insurgencies. Charles Gould, an Englishman who owns a mine called San Tomé, is trying to protect his wealth and maintain stability in the region. Nostromo becomes a central figure in these events as it is tasked with

protecting a valuable cargo of silver. The story interlaces the personal journeys of different individuals, including Nostromo, Charles Gould, and other residents of Sulaco. Nostromo is tasked with guarding a priceless silver mine owned by Englishman Charles Gould, known as King Sulaco. Nostromo accepts the challenge as a means of raising his status, but when he fails to receive the rich benefits he was promised, he becomes embittered and avariciously corrupt.

In Conrad's later work, we can find female characters that are described as stronger and have more important roles than women in the *Heart of Darkness* or his first novel, *Almayer's Folly*. A great example of a strong female character in *Nostromo* would be Antonia Avellanos. Antonia represents the only female character in the story who has the ability to act and be independent. She is the wife of the rich and powerful silver mine owner, Don Vincent Avellanos, but she is not defined only by her husband or her social status. Antonia is described as rational, purposeful, and self-reliant and she has her own ideas and motivations. These character features usually describe Victorian men, but in this case, Antonia is presented as a man in certain ways. As it was not customary for women to be interested in politics at the time, they were led not to be, believing that politics belonged to men, Antonia is different from traditional Victorian women. Her involvement in politics is primarily driven by the desire to protect her family's interests and maintain a position of power. Antonia plays a key role in the political and social turmoil that take place in the fictional South American country of Costaguana. Throughout the story, she shows herself to be a shrewd political player who can manipulate events to her advantage and is not afraid to take risks or use her own resources to achieve her goals. She fights gender stereotypes, in which women were expected to be subordinate to men.

In the story, we also meet another female character, Linda, who is the daughter of Antonia, but have a different role than her mother. Linda is the main character in the romantic subplot of the novel. She is depicted as an innocent girl, who falls in love with Decoud, who is an enthusiastic idealist and revolutionist. Linda's character symbolizes the hopes and dreams of young people that seek the transformation of society for the better. Even though it could seem that she is depicted as a traditional Victorian woman the opposite is true. She gets involved with the revolutionary actions of Decoud and like her mother, she is also active in the political turmoil. Conrad's impersonation of Linda demonstrates a more progressive representation of women, and the ability to engage in political and social affairs.

4.1.4 Victory

This novel was published in 1915. The plot of this novel revolves around the main character Axel Heyst as he withdraws from the world and seeks solitude on a remote island called Samburan. Heyst's isolation is broken when he meets Lena, a young woman who is being mistreated by her opportunistic and rude guardian, Mr. Jones. Heyst finds Lena attractive and feels the need to protect her. He wants to save her and they run away together to the island of Samburan. Lena and Heyst start a humble life and build their companionship. However, Mr. Jones is trying to find them and traces them. Lena's and Heyst's life are interrupted when Mr. Jones and Ricardo, Jones's henchman, find them on the islands and seek revenge aim is to exploit Heyst's wealth. During their revenge, several tragic events unfold, and these events lead to multiple deaths of characters. At the end of the novel, the characters struggle with their own faults, and the consequences of their actions, motivations, and thoughts and they face the results of their decisions. Conrad explores the depths of human nature and reveals the flaws of the characters, their vulnerabilities, and their desires. The story shows characters dealing with their moral dilemmas and decisions that shape their lives. The ending of the story leaves room for different interpretations and brings us to think about life.

Lena's character does not fit the description of a typical Victorian woman. Her circumstances and the decisions, that she makes throughout the story challenge the Victorian perception of women's positions especially traits of passiveness and submissiveness. Lena proves that women can have freedom and independence by escaping the oppressive control of Mr. Jones. She takes an active role in her search for her own freedom and autonomy, opposing the expectation that was placed on her. She refuses to be a victim and be described by it. She is determined to strive for a better life and at the same time, she withstands every misery and copes with challenging circumstances. She is displayed as a strong woman. Lena's character is not limited to an innocent, angelic depiction. We are getting to know her true feelings. Throughout the novel, she experiences a wide range of different emotions, that were not common to experience in Victorian literature, especially when talking about female characters. These emotions include fears, vulnerability, desire for freedom, love, and deep connection with another person. This emotional depth that we get to know as we read the novel gives Lena complexity and realism. Her character challenges traditional Victorian gender roles. Lena defies social expectations. She shows a willingness to engage in unconventional relationships and make decisions based on her own desires and needs. She

is not submissive; she tries to make decisions according to herself and according to what will be a good decision for her as an independent woman. This depiction of women is very different from the traditional values of the Victorian era and the belief that women should take care of their husbands and children and leave decision-making to men. Conrad's portrayal of women in *Victory* offers a departure from traditional Victorian stereotypes and provides a more nuanced representation of women in literature.

4.1.5 *The Rescue*

The last, but not least novel we are going to analyse is titled *The Rescue* and it was published in 1920. It is the third novel in Conrad's trilogy set in the Malay Archipelago, preceded by two already mentioned novels, *Almayer's Folly* and *An Outcast of the Islands*. The novel opens with Tom Lingard meeting Edith Travers, a young woman kidnapped by the pirate Captain Lingard. Tom, determined to save her, assembles a group of loyal followers and sets out on a dangerous journey to rescue Edith from the pirate. Along the way, Tom and his companions stand in front of many challenges, including traitorous territory, meets with hostile tribes, and the unstable nature of the sea. The story deals with colonialism, cultural clashes, and the moral dilemmas the characters face. We get to know the motivations and past decisions of Tom Lingard and we follow him on his search for meaning in the world. In the story, Conrad uses vivid descriptions of nature, he combines the elements of adventure, and human romance, but also with psychological introspection. In this novel, we can find a lot of characteristic features that are typical of Early modernism.

The central female character in *The Rescue* is named Edith Travers. She is portrayed as a vulnerable character who finds herself in a dangerous situation, as she is kidnapped. However, she also displays inner strength and resistance, which can be seen as she deals with hard circumstances. Her position in the novel is significant because it revolves around the efforts of Tom and his companions to rescue her. As for the character of Lena from *Victory*, Edith has similar emotions that are described in detail like fear, vulnerability, and uncertainty. As the story goes, we learn about her love life, and how she finds Tom attractive, but still stays loyal to her husband. Her loyalty is an important feature of her character and shows that she is a really strong woman and even when she feels strong emotions toward another man, she still respects and stays with her husband. When speaking about Conrad's works, often feature strong male protagonists. However, the character of Edith is very complex and stands out compared to Conrad's other novels. Never before has he described inner conflict in a female character as he did in *The Rescue*. This moral dilemma that Edith

has to deal with is depicted in much detail and Edith plays the most important role in the novel.

4.2 Plot of the Heart of Darkness

The novel was first published in 1899 in Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine and then later, in 1902, it was published as a whole book. It is a story about Charles Marlow, a sailor who recounts his journey up the Congo River in Africa to an audience of his fellow sailors on a boat anchored in the Thames River in London. Marlow speaks with other seamen and tells them a story from his life. Marlow is hired by a Belgian trading company to travel upriver to find a man named Kurtz, who has been rumoured to have gone insane and taken control of a remote and valuable ivory trading station. With this intention, to pick up Kurtz and take him back, he starts his journey to Africa. He travels to the company's Central Station, where he was supposed to pick up his steamboat. However, as he arrives there, he found out that the boat has sunk, and it needs to be repaired. While he is waiting for his boat to function again, he overhears the conversation between the Central station manager and his uncle about the man that he was supposed to take back to Europe. They speak about Kurtz's weird behaviour and Marlow finds out that the manager hopes that Kurtz will be dead by the time Marlow gets there. Finally, the steamboat is fixed and Marlow, along with the manager and other travellers heads up the boat. On their way to the Inner station, there are attacked by the natives. As Marlow journeys deeper into the African jungle, he witnesses the brutal exploitation of African people and resources by the European colonizers and becomes increasingly obsessed with finding Kurtz. When Marlow finally reaches Kurtz's station, Kurtz exchanges his ideas with Marlow, and he finds that Kurtz has indeed gone mad and become a tyrannical figure. Kurtz is revered by the local African people as a god-like figure and has amassed a huge amount of ivory through violence and coercion. Marlow's goal was to bring him back to civilization and hold him accountable for his actions. His interaction with Kurtz, however, leads him to question the values and beliefs that underlie European colonialism and the way it dehumanized both the colonized. Marlow is horrified by what he sees but also fascinated by Kurtz's personal charm and his intelligence. As Marlow prepares to take Kurtz back downriver, Kurtz becomes gravely ill and dies on the boat. After he died, Marlow protects Kurtz's reputation and his personal papers. Marlow returns to Europe and visits Kurtz's fiancée to deliver a message from Kurtz. He gives her his personal papers and she asked him about his last words. Marlow lies and tells her that the last thing Kurtz has said was her name. However, Kurtz's last words were "The horror!

The horror!'. The novella ends with Marlow reflecting on his experiences in Africa and the darkness that exists within all human beings.

4.3 Controversy of the Heart of Darkness

As one delves into the novel and contemplates its contextual significance and portrayal of various situations, it becomes evident that *Heart of Darkness* is open to diverse interpretations. Given its thematic exploration of imperialism, racism, and the complex nature of humanity, interlaced within the narrative of an agonizing expedition up the Congo River in Africa, the novel has collocated with a reputation for being inherently controversial. The thought-provoking themes and the morally ambiguous nature of the story have led to differing viewpoints and discussions among readers, contributing to its enduring legacy as a work that elicits both admiration and critical scrutiny.

One of the main sources of controversy surrounding the book *Heart of Darkness* is the portrayal of African people and cultures. One point of view could be that the novel reinforces racist stereotypes and presents Africans as primitive, savage, and uncivilized. The story's narrator, a European colonialist, describes African characters in derogatory terms, and the book has been accused of perpetuating a colonial view of Africa and its people. However, from our point of view, Conrad probably wanted to present the people as they truly were in Victorian society, to be more accurate, to show that most European people actually pictured African people like this. The story is based on Conrad's journey to Congo and we believe that he was not a racist, he simply wanted to point out that the society was racist towards African people. Despite our interpretation, the whiteness of the Europeans represented civilization, and the darkness of Africa was portrayed as savagery, which could be interpreted as racist, and it is important to look at the problem from both sides. European people at that time were racist towards African people and the novel shows it in the way people react and act towards them.

Another source of controversy surrounding the novel is its depiction of imperialism and the brutality of European colonialism. The book exposes the horrific exploitation of African people and resources by European colonizers, but one can argue that the novel is too sympathetic to the colonizers and fails to fully condemn their actions. In other words, we may claim that Conrad did not directly point out that colonization is evil and that it is inhumane. We could assume that the colonizers are not criticized enough in the story. Colonization is not directly identified as evil, but it can be also understood from the other perspective. While reading the book, the reader can read between the lines and can come to

the conclusion that the way the colonizers treated the African people, with that superficiality and condescension as they treated them, was evil. Considering the depiction of Kurtz as a character in the novel, we think it is obvious to see and understand that his actions toward African people were atrocious and that he lost his humanity. And Marlow, as a sailor and as a friend of Kurtz, tried to bring him back, to show him that the way he is acting is wicked.

In addition, the language and the complex structure of the narratives that are used in the book are also analysed and the subject of debate. Some readers have criticized the novel for its use of dense, convoluted prose, while others have found it to be a powerful and effective means of conveying the complexity and darkness of the human psyche.

The controversy is also connected with the depiction of women. The book features only a few female characters, and they are largely absent from the main narrative. When they do appear, they are often presented in stereotypical or one-dimensional roles, as we already mentioned. As an example, Kurtz's African mistress is portrayed as a sexualized, exoticized figure, while Kurtz's fiancée back in Europe is presented as a pure and innocent idealized figure. Personally, we agree with this critical view of the depiction of women in the work, but we understand that probably the author's true intention was to portray women in the light in which they were perceived at the time and that Conrad's treatment of women reflects the limitations of his perspective and the cultural norms of the era in which he wrote.

In 1917, the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe published an essay "An image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness'", in which he described Conrad as a racist and stated that the *Heart of Darkness* cannot be considered a work of art because the novel celebrates the exploitation of the African people. Achebe says that Conrad describes the African population as just parts of the human body and claims that he degrades and dehumanizes them in the story. This essay sparked a debate on this subject, and whether Conrad's work *Heart of Darkness* really is racist. Achebe's critics claim that he does not distinguish between the main character of the story, namely Marlow, and the author himself, Joseph Conrad. They refer to the fact that Conrad was Polish and came from an oppressed state that had fought for its independence for many years and that he had experienced first-hand the exploitation of its citizens. Of course, from our point of view, these facts are incomparable, because to compare slavery with the history of the Poles is very simplistic, but on a simpler level we understand how the idea was meant. Conrad only wanted to portray society in the light in which it actually was and not to present his own views, which means that he was truly sympathetic towards exploit of African civilization.

All in all, we firmly believe that the criticism directed towards Conrad and his novel, *Heart of Darkness*, often stems from a misinterpretation of its narrative and underlying ideas. It is essential to approach the novel within the framework of its historical context, acknowledging the complexities of the era in which it was written. However, this does not negate the importance of engaging in thoughtful discussions and reflections on history, encouraging critical thinking, and deriving valuable lessons from the past. By embracing both historical context and critical examination, we can appreciate the varied nature of *Heart of Darkness* and the broader conversations it provokes about society, human nature, and the enduring power of literature.

4.4 Women characters in *Heart of Darkness*

Female characters in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* play a limited role mainly as symbols or metaphors but have little agency or individuality. They do not have names, they are referred to as man's possessives, like Kurtz's intended, Marlow's aunt, and others. Their positions in the novel are not purposeful, they do not change the plot of the story and we can even consider, that the women in the story are invisible. Readers have to really focus to find a female character in the story. The most prominent female character is Kurtz's intended, who is portrayed as a passive, idealized figure representing civilization and morality. At the end of the novel, she speaks about Kurtz, and she is shown to be heartbroken by the death of Kurtz. She is one of the minor female characters who has a direct voice in the story. Other women are mentioned briefly, such as Marlow's aunt or the African women who are referred to as mere objects, reinforcing the colonialist attitudes of the male characters.

Kurtz's African mistress and European intended, which we already mentioned, are similar in the way that they are both depicted as symbols rather than fully developed characters. However, they are used as different symbols, they highlight different aspects of Kurtz's character and themes of colonialism, and imperialism and they show the contrast between so-called the civilized and uncivilized world. Kurtz's African mistress is depicted as a dehumanized object, serving to reinforce the theme of colonial exploitation and the brutalizing effects of imperialism. She is reduced to mere possession of Kurtz, representing the brutal and oppressive aspects of European imperialism in Africa. She represents the brutalizing effects of imperialism and the dehumanizing impact that colonialism can have on the colonized people. By depicting her as a mere possession of Kurtz, Conrad highlights the oppressive attitudes of colonial domination and racism.

On the other hand, Kurtz's European intended is portrayed as a passive, idealized figure representing civilization and morality. She is described as a refined, young, and beautiful woman of European descent who is engaged to Kurtz. She has a social status. She represents the values of Western civilization and is depicted as innocent and virtuous. She is unaware of Kurtz's true nature and the atrocities he has committed in the Congo, further emphasizing the gap between Western ideals and the reality of colonial violence. She serves as a contrast to Kurtz's brutal behaviour and the darkness of the Congo. She symbolizes the remnants of Kurtz's humanity and his past life in civilization. The fact that Kurtz has left her behind, as well as his declining physical and moral state, highlights the brutalizing effects of imperialism and the darkness of the Congo. The image of Kurtz's intended serves as a contrast to the violence, exploitation, and corruption that Kurtz has come to embody in the Congo. She symbolizes the ideals that Kurtz has left behind and represents what he could have been if he would not be consumed by the darkness of the Congo.

Kurtz's African mistress is not described in much detail. She is mentioned briefly by Marlow as one of Kurtz's possessions in the Congo. The African mistress is depicted as a dehumanized object. Like other African women in the novel, she is objectified and reflects the attitudes of colonial domination and racism. This depiction highlights the disturbing and oppressive aspects of European imperialism in Africa. She does not have any power or influence over the events of the story. Instead, she is described as "*a piece of ivory*" or a "*savage woman*" who is subservient to Kurtz.

Marlow's aunt is depicted as a strong-willed and determined woman, which is a contrast to the passive and idealized figures of women in the novel and to societal attitudes towards women in the Victorian era. She is a symbol of European values and contrasts with the corruption of the Congo. She is also portrayed as being aware of the brutal realities of colonial exploitation but chooses to ignore them for the sake of maintaining the illusion of Western superiority and morality. She is a character who helps to initiate Marlow's journey to the Congo by securing him a job as a steamboat captain. Despite the societal attitudes towards women in the Victorian era, Marlow's aunt is portrayed as a woman who takes charge and has agency. She is described as having a passionate conviction in her belief that Marlow should go to the Congo, and she uses her influence to secure the position for him. She is depicted as a contrast to the passive and idealized figures of Kurtz's European intended and the dehumanized African women in the Congo.

Women in the European capital are depicted as passive figures, similar to Kurtz's European intended. They are portrayed as idealized and confined to traditional gender roles and are not given agency or shown to have any meaningful influence on the events of the novel. On the contrary, they are also aware of the events happening in the Congo and serve as a sort of reception for the men returning from their colonial exploits. They are portrayed as being the first to greet the returning men and as playing a role in maintaining the image of colonial exploitation as a civilizing mission. These women are characterized as being complicit in the colonial exploitation taking place in the Congo, reinforcing the idea that the brutalizing effects of imperialism were not limited to the colonies themselves but were also present in the European capitals. They are not given agency or shown to have any meaningful influence over the events of the novel, strengthening the idea of traditional Victorian gender roles and the limitations placed on women during that period.

There is a sharp contrast between the women in the European capital and Kurtz's European intended in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. While the women in the European capital are portrayed as being informed about the events taking place in the Congo, Kurtz's European intended is depicted as being ignorant of the brutal realities of colonial exploitation.

4.5 Comparative Analysis of the Role of Women in Heart of Darkness

The role of women in *Heart of Darkness* is in some ways similar to the depiction of Victorian women and at the same time it can be perceived as a bit different from the typical position of women in society.

As the novel begins, the first woman, that we meet in the novel is Marlow's aunt, who is helping him to get the job. Marlow describes her as "*a dear enthusiastic soul*" (Conrad, 1902, p. 12)¹. However, shortly before mentioning asking her for help, he said:

„Then, would you believe it? I tried the women. I, Charlie Marlow, set the women to work—to get a job. Heavens!“ (Conrad, 1902, p.12)²

This shows his position towards women. He describes them as incompetent and also as the very last option a person can try. However, she gets him the job, because she knows the wife of someone prominent, in a higher position, which displays that women were influential in their friend circles, especially between other women.

¹CONRAD, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness* [online]. 1902, p. 128. Available at: https://www.ibiblio.org/ebooks/Conrad/Heart_Darkness.pdf

²CONRAD, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness* [online]. 1902, p. 128. Available at: https://www.ibiblio.org/ebooks/Conrad/Heart_Darkness.pdf

The second time, women are mentioned in the story, are the women in the Capital. When Marlow enters the room, they are both still knitting black wool. They seem ignorant, but one of them stood and walked Marlow to the waiting rooms. Later, when he was leaving the company offices, he described them again. He said that more people kept coming in and they kept ignorantly knitting the wool, the slimmer one would get up, escort people away to the waiting room and ask them their names. Marlow described the older one in more detail because she aroused strange feelings in him:

“She seemed to know all about them and about me, too. An eerie feeling came over me. She seemed uncanny and fateful.” (Conrad, 1902, p.15) ³

These words also contradict the idea of Victorian women being unaware and innocent, because these women in Capital, as we already mentioned, were aware of the situation in Africa. However, as true Victorian women, they knew their roles and willingly ignored the situation going on in Africa, even though they knew about it. They just did their work as if they had nothing to do with the exploitation of African people.

Later in the story (Conrad, 1902, p.18)⁴, Marlow describes the world of women:

“It’s queer how out of touch with truth women are. They live in a world of their own, and there has never been anything like it and never can be. It is too beautiful altogether, and if they were to set it up it would go to pieces before the first sunset. Some confounded fact we men have been living contentedly with ever since the day of creation would start up and knock the whole thing over.”

From this quotation, we can see that Conrad is indeed describing the world of Victorian women as innocent, pure, and carefree, i.e., as it was for women of the upper classes during that time. On page 78, he again describes women in a similar way:

“They, the women, I mean, are out of it, should be out of it. We must help them to stay in that beautiful world of their own, lest ours gets worse. Oh, she had to be out of it.” ⁵

He said this while describing the relationship between Kurtz and his Intended. Kurtz wanted to protect her innocence and, as we already mentioned, she is used as a symbol of the morality and humanity of Kurtz. During the Victorian era, it was believed that women were supposed to be left from certain conversations, because of the patriarchal view of

³CONRAD, Joseph. Heart of Darkness [online]. 1902, p. 128. Available at: https://www.ibiblio.org/ebooks/Conrad/Heart_Darkness.pdf

⁴CONRAD, Joseph. Heart of Darkness [online]. 1902, p. 128. Available at: https://www.ibiblio.org/ebooks/Conrad/Heart_Darkness.pdf

⁵CONRAD, Joseph. Heart of Darkness [online]. 1902, p. 128. Available at: https://www.ibiblio.org/ebooks/Conrad/Heart_Darkness.pdf

society and the man being the leader. Men were supposed to protect women's innocence and worldview.

On page 79, there is a statement that suggests that Kurtz describes everything he owns as subjects, as possessives:

*"My Intended, my ivory, my station, my river, my—everything belonged to him."*⁶

Here, not only the power of Kurtz and his influence but also his relationship with the people are shown. He puts his own Intended on the same pedestal as material things. From the perspective of the reader of the novella, it can even be deduced that in this story, not only Kurtz's Intended appears as his property, but also his African mistress, whom we meet later in the story. The term his ivory may refer to his African mistress.

Continuing with reading, we are getting to know the African woman we mentioned in the previous paragraph, who has a close relationship with Kurtz. Marlow describes her as follows:

"And from right to left along the lighted shore moved a wild and gorgeous apparition of a woman. She walked with measured steps, draped in striped and fringed cloths, treading the earth proudly, with a slight jingle and flash of barbarous ornaments. She carried her head high; her hair was done in the shape of a helmet; she had brass leggings to the knee, brass wire gauntlets to the elbow, a crimson spot on her tawny cheek, innumerable necklaces of glass beads on her neck; bizarre things, charms, gifts of witch-men, that hung about her, glittered and trembled at every step. She must have had the value of several elephant tusks upon her." (Conrad, 1902, p.100)⁷

From this description we can notice that Marlow describes her as a beautiful, stunning person, and it way she carries herself when she walks with elegance and that she is wearing typical African jewelry and clothes, that are valuable in the same time we also find words such as *"barbarous ornaments"* and *"bizarre things"*, which indicate that although the woman was beautiful, she was still an African woman, which depicted something inferior to European civilization. With these words, Marlow seems to be contradicting himself, or trying to convince himself that he cannot consider her a graceful and beautiful lady, just because she is African. However, the way she walks gives the impression that she was self-

⁶CONRAD, Joseph. Heart of Darkness [online]. 1902, p. 128. Available at: https://www.ibiblio.org/ebooks/Conrad/Heart_Darkness.pdf

⁷CONRAD, Joseph. Heart of Darkness [online]. 1902, p. 128. Available at: https://www.ibiblio.org/ebooks/Conrad/Heart_Darkness.pdf

aware and powerful as if she could talk a man into doing what she wants with her beauty and seduction. The depiction of her continues:

“She was savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent; there was something ominous and stately in her deliberate progress. And in the hush that had fallen suddenly upon the whole sorrowful land, the immense wilderness, the colossal body of the fecund and mysterious life seemed to look at her, pensive, as though it had been looking at the image of its own tenebrous and passionate soul.” (Conrad, 1902, p.100)⁸

There it is obvious, the biggest contrast in her description. Marlow says that the mistress was “*savage and superb*”, so she looked marvellous but was primitive as a human being. This statement could be interpreted as racist because Conrad wrote, that African women are primitive and simple only based on the stereotype that all African people are uncivilized. Especially while speaking about the female gender in the Victorian era, they were considered to be beautiful creatures, but nothing else. Based on this, Marlow’s African mistress is characterized as a typical African Victorian woman. Her appearance is characterized by beauty and grace, but her origin and gender do not allow her to be independent and free.

The scene carries on, she walks towards Marlow and his companions, she gives them silent long eye contact, and then walks away. All of her actions are elegant and for a minute it looks like the man is scared of her and just waits for what she is going to do next. When is far away from them, Marlow’s companion tells him, that he knows her:

“I have been risking my life every day for the last fortnight to keep her out of the house. She got in one day and kicked up a row about those miserable rags I picked up in the storeroom to mend my clothes with. I wasn’t decent. At least it must have been that, for she talked like a fury to Kurtz for an hour, pointing at me now and then. I don’t understand the dialect of this tribe. Luckily for me, I fancy Kurtz felt too ill that day to care, or there would have been mischief.”(Conrad, 1902, p. 101)⁹

This state points out that since the woman was complaining to Kurtz, they had a close relationship and probably knew each other well. The story continues with the description of the last moments of Kurtz's life and his death. This African woman, Kurtz’s mistress, is present even before and during Kurt’s death. On page 111, we encounter her again:

⁸CONRAD, Joseph. Heart of Darkness [online]. 1902, p. 128. Available at: https://www.ibiblio.org/ebooks/Conrad/Heart_Darkness.pdf

⁹CONRAD, Joseph. Heart of Darkness [online]. 1902, p. 128. Available at: https://www.ibiblio.org/ebooks/Conrad/Heart_Darkness.pdf

*„There was an eddy in the mass of human bodies, and the woman with helmeted head and tawny cheeks rushed out to the very brink of the stream. She put out her hands, shouted something and all that wild mob took up the shout in a roaring chorus of articulated, rapid, breathless utterance.“*¹⁰

This scene is different from others. The African mistress is here described as a powerful woman, who changed the situation just with her words and gesture and the wilderness listens to her. It challenges the classical view of Victorian women. Marlow asks Kurtz if he understands what is happening, but Kurtz only smiles, which can be from the reader's perspective interpreted as Kurtz having a close relationship with this African woman. Their relationship can be interpreted in different ways, because nowhere in the story is it specifically said if they had anything together. Their relationship is a mystery. Maybe they were just friends, but from these various situations we read about her, we deduced that she was Kurtz's lover. However, she is not a developed character, and we know very little about her. This scene, which she is part of, can be interpreted to serve as a symbol, and we believe that her character was just symbolic. She shows the beauty of Africa and what it has to offer but at the same time the cruel true face of colonization.

Last, but not least, we are meeting with Kurtz Intended. Marlow decided to give her Kurtz's letters and the picture of her, that he had in Congo. Marlow describes her as beautiful, but he only saw her in that portrait. He was really curious to meet her. Their meet-up is described as follows:

“She came forward, all in black, with a pale head, floating towards me in the dusk. She was in mourning. It was more than a year since his death, more than a year since the news came; she seemed as though she would remember and mourn forever.“ (Conrad, 1902, p. 122)¹¹

She is described as a grieving woman, who was still deeply in love with Kurtz and feels a deep sadness about his death. It can be seen here how much she was faithful to him and always thought of him. This attitude is typical for women in the Victorian era, to be dedicated to their husbands and even though she was not officially his wife, only his intended, she fulfilled her role according to society's expectations. Marlow describes also her appearance:

¹⁰CONRAD, Joseph. Heart of Darkness [online]. 1902, p. 128. Available at: https://www.ibiblio.org/ebooks/Conrad/Heart_Darkness.pdf

¹¹CONRAD, Joseph. Heart of Darkness [online]. 1902, p. 128. Available at: https://www.ibiblio.org/ebooks/Conrad/Heart_Darkness.pdf

"I noticed she was not very young—I mean not girlish. She had a mature capacity for fidelity, for belief, for suffering." a bit later he continues: *"This fair hair, this pale visage, this pure brow, seemed surrounded by an ashy halo from which the dark eyes looked out at me. Their glance was guileless, profound, confident, and trustful. She carried her sorrowful head as though she were proud of that sorrow, as though she would say, 'I—I alone know how to mourn for him as he deserves.'"* (Conrad, 1902, 122)¹²

From these words, we can tell that the death of her fiancé destroyed her. She was not only sad inside, but also outside, and with this sadness, she wanted to prove what an important and respected person Kurtz was and that he deserves proper mourning for him. In this, we see the typical innocence and devotion of Victorian women and their love for their husbands. When Marlow saw her sadness and grief, he thinks: *"For her, he had died only yesterday."* (Conrad, 1902, p. 123)¹³ With each subsequent description, Marlow proves that Kurtz's Intended love was extreme and unwavering, even after his death. Then she starts to speak with Marlow and asks questions about his death:

"'And you admired him,' she said. 'It was impossible to know him and not to admire him. Was it?'", and then Marlow agrees with her and tries to create a new sentence starting with *„It was impossible not to..“*, but she cut in his words and add *„ ‘Love him’ .“*, and then she continues further: *„ ‘But when you think that no one knew him so well as I! I had all his noble confidence. I knew him best.’"* (Conrad, 1902, p. 124)¹⁴

These strong words, that she had said even when she did not spend the last years of his life with him in Congo and did not know anything about his job, his mistress in Africa, or anything that he did there, she still believes that she knows him the best. She was loyal and devoted to him throughout his mission in the Congo and even after his death. He was her dream man; she respected and loved him above everything else. She speaks further about her feelings toward him:

" ‘What a loss to me—to us!’—she corrected herself with beautiful generosity; then added in a murmur, ‘To the world. I have been very happy—very fortunate—very proud,’

¹²CONRAD, Joseph. Heart of Darkness [online]. 1902, p. 128. Available at: https://www.ibiblio.org/ebooks/Conrad/Heart_Darkness.pdf

¹³CONRAD, Joseph. Heart of Darkness [online]. 1902, p. 128. Available at: https://www.ibiblio.org/ebooks/Conrad/Heart_Darkness.pdf

¹⁴CONRAD, Joseph. Heart of Darkness [online]. 1902, p. 128. Available at: https://www.ibiblio.org/ebooks/Conrad/Heart_Darkness.pdf

she went on. 'Too fortunate. Too happy for a little while. And now I am unhappy for—for life.'"(Conrad, 1902, p. 125)¹⁵

She dedicated all of her life to him, to spend it with him and now when he is dead she thinks she does not deserve to feel happy again because he was her happiness. And after that, she continues:

"'But I do not. I cannot—I cannot believe—not yet. I cannot believe that I shall never see him again, that nobody will see him again, never, never, never.'" (Conrad, 1902, p. 126)¹⁶

She still believes that he was an important man in this world and people should remember him because of the things he accomplished. She can't imagine not seeing him anymore and the thought hurts her. Here, Conrad depicts the strong love a woman is capable of and the bond between a man and a woman. To maintain such strong feelings for someone who lived on the other side of the world and is even dead for more than one year speaks to the strong character of Kurtz's Intended and heightens the reader's belief in her devotion towards him. Marlow and Kurtz's Intended speaks about him more and more and she describes him as the most precious man in the whole world. She wants to know Kurtz's last words and Marlow does not want to hurt her more, so he lies and said to her, that Kurtz's last words were her name. Kurtz's Intended is depicted as this pure, innocent, loving female, who sacrifices the rest of her life to mourn her fiancé who died.

In general, if we look at all the mentioned female characters, the similarities that we noticed between the role of women in Victorian society and the novel Heart of Darkness are that women in the novel were often portrayed as passive and idealized figures as in the Victorian era. Women in the Victorian age were often confined to traditional gender roles and were expected to be virtuous, modest, and submissive. During that time, they were often expected to fulfil traditional gender roles and were not expected to be involved in political or social issues. Even some political inquiry would be considered presumptuous. Both in Heart of Darkness and in Victorian society, women were often seen as inferior to men and were denied equal opportunities and rights.

Differences that can be noticed include that the novel's depiction of African women is particularly dehumanizing, representing them as mere objects. Its contrasts with the more

¹⁵CONRAD, Joseph. Heart of Darkness [online]. 1902, p. 128. Available at: https://www.ibiblio.org/ebooks/Conrad/Heart_Darkness.pdf

¹⁶CONRAD, Joseph. Heart of Darkness [online]. 1902, p. 128. Available at: https://www.ibiblio.org/ebooks/Conrad/Heart_Darkness.pdf

nuanced view of women in Victorian society, where African women were largely invisible and not given a voice. However, from our analysis we see, that the African mistress had some kind of power over the wilderness and even over Kurtz as a man. Another difference is that Conrad's portrayal of Kurtz's European intended serves to highlight the brutalizing effects of imperialism, whereas, in Victorian society, women were generally not associated with colonial exploitation.

Another important fact to be noted is that the author did not name the female characters. As it was already mentioned, some female characters in the novel represent symbols, ideas, or concepts such as civilization, purification, or the oppressive impact of colonialism rather than individual human beings. By not giving names to the women in the novel, Conrad may have been wanting to emphasize that they serve as a representative of broader ideas. The female characters in the novel are not fully developed and we knew only a little about them. The African mistress is described as merely a mysterious creature and the Intended serves as a symbol of innocence, pureness, and devotion. Also, from the point of view of the age, of the Victorian era, women were not seen as significant contributors to society, and perhaps this fact led Conrad to the idea that he would not name women in the book. Women are usually described by the adjective of a man (Kurtz's intended) or by their location (women in Capital). That points to the patriarchy of the time and the position of women during that time.

4.6 Findings and conclusion

When examining Joseph Conrad's works objectively, one cannot help but notice the stark contrasts that exist within his literary repertoire. Many of his works revolve around recurring themes that are interconnected. These themes include colonialism, seafaring, moral dilemmas, and the intricate psychological journeys of his characters. Notably, Conrad's portrayal of women varies across his works, encompassing both strong and emancipated female characters as well as those who conform to the societal expectations of Victorian women. Conrad skilfully intertwines typical feminine traits with elements of resilience, the pursuit of personal freedom, and engagement in political spheres. Through his portrayal of women, Conrad presents characters who, to a certain extent, conform to Victorian stereotypes, while also defying traditional gender roles.

In *Almayer's Folly*, Mem can be viewed as more representative of Victorian ideals. She prioritizes her familial obligations, supports her husband's ambitions, and conforms to societal norms. Her loyalty, self-sacrifice, and dedication to her family align with the

traditional Victorian ideals of domesticity and submission. On the other hand, Nina introduces a contrasting perspective that reflects the changing social dynamics and evolving aspirations of women during that era. Her desire for autonomy, her questioning of her father's aspirations, and her inclination toward self-determination showcase a more progressive outlook.

When we speak about *An Outcast of the Islands*, we encounter Assia, a character who defies the typical gender roles assigned to Victorian women. Assia is portrayed as an independent and strong-willed woman, capable of self-defence and assertiveness. Her character challenges the notion of Victorian women as passive and subservient, showcasing resilience and self-reliance in the face of adversity.

In *Nostromo*, we are introduced to Antonia and her daughter Linda. Both women exhibit a keen interest in politics, a departure from the traditional spheres assigned to Victorian women. Their engagement in political matters reveals a desire for agency and participation in public life, a departure from the notion of women's limited role within the domestic realm.

Victory introduces us to Lena, a woman who takes her freedom into her own hands. Lena defies societal expectations and asserts her independence, navigating her path and making choices that are not typical for women of the time. Her character challenges the prescribed roles and limitations placed upon women, presenting a more unconventional and empowered portrayal.

Finally, we encounter Edith in *The Rescue*, a character who embodies a mix of both traditional Victorian traits and independent agency. While Edith demonstrates loyalty and adherence to societal norms, she also engages in a love affair, showcasing a complex interplay between her desires and societal expectations. Her character represents the tensions and contradictions within the Victorian ideal of womanhood.

To fully appreciate Conrad's works, it is essential to consider the historical context in which they were written, specifically the Victorian era. During this time, it was uncommon for women to express interest in politics or strive for personal freedom in the face of oppression. However, it is worth noting that even when women in Conrad's works escape oppressive circumstances, they often find themselves falling in love with a man to whom they remain devoted and loyal. This portrayal aligns with the typical expectations placed on Victorian women, as they were expected to give themselves fully and exhibit unwavering faithfulness to their husbands, submitting to their authority.

Based on the analysis conducted, it can be concluded that *Heart of Darkness* does not prominently display feminist themes compared to other works by Joseph Conrad. Female characters in the novella are often portrayed in peripheral roles, akin to shadows in the narrative. However, it is worth noting that among these characters, Kurtz's Intended stands out as a relatively more developed figure, albeit still serving as a symbolic representation. Notably, she possesses the longest direct speech among the female characters depicted in the story. In comparison to the aforementioned female characters, it becomes evident that the European Intended shares a common trait with many of Conrad's female characters, namely unwavering loyalty towards their male counterparts. However, distinct from the other female characters, she is depicted in a wholly stereotypical and quintessentially Victorian manner. Innocent, passive, devoted, and unwaveringly faithful, she exemplifies the traditional ideals of Victorian womanhood, placing her future husband at the pinnacle of her affections. Regarding Kurtz's African mistress, her character remains largely undeveloped, serving primarily as a symbolic representation of colonialism. Nonetheless, even in her limited appearances, we catch glimpses of her defiance and inherent power within the Congo. The African people pay heed to her, and her beauty exerts a certain sway over Kurtz. However, it is important to note that her presence in the story is scarce, requiring readers to read between the lines to grasp her role. Conrad deliberately leaves room for individual interpretation, allowing readers to form their own opinions regarding her relationship with Kurtz.

5 Discussion and recommendations

Throughout his writing career, Conrad demonstrated a keen sensitivity to the cultural and historical context of the Victorian era. As such, it is essential to contextualize the portrayal of women within the social expectations and norms imposed on women during that period. By analysing the selected novels, we aim to uncover whether Conrad's depiction of women in *Heart of Darkness* adheres to the stereotypical Victorian notions of femininity, or if it diverges from those established ideals.

In this discussion, we engage in a comparative analysis of the selected novels, examining the characteristics, agency, and roles of the female characters portrayed. We explore how these portrayals align with or challenge the traditional Victorian concept of womanhood. Additionally, we consider the broader context, including Conrad's own experiences, beliefs, and the literary movements of the time, which may have influenced his representation of women. By critically evaluating the role of women in *Heart of Darkness* and comparing it to Conrad's other works, this discussion aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of Conrad's treatment of gender and provide insights into the complexities of his portrayal of women within the Victorian context.

One of the key findings of the research is the portrayal of women in *Heart of Darkness* as typical Victorian women. The novel presents various female characters who embody the social expectations and limitations placed upon women during the Victorian era. For instance, Marlow's aunt, who assists him in securing his job, represents the well-intentioned but limited understanding of the realities in the Congo. Similarly, the women in the capital who are associated with the Company feign ignorance about the happenings in the Congo, creating a guise of detachment and disinterest. Their behaviour suggests a deliberate distancing from the brutalities of colonization as if it does not concern or affect them directly. This ignorance is reflective of the common norms of the time, where women were often shielded from harsh realities and expected to maintain a sense of innocence and naivety. The African mistress, though briefly described, holds a certain degree of power over Kurtz due to her beauty. She symbolizes the charm and fascination that the African continent holds for the colonizers. While her character serves as a symbolic representation of colonization, her limited agency within the narrative highlights the subordinate position of African women during that time. Moreover, the European intended, who appears towards the end of the story, she shows unwavering loyalty to Kurtz, representing the innocence and strong commitment often expected from Victorian women. Her portrayal reflects the belief that

women should be faithful and devoted to their husbands, even when faced with difficult situations. These findings show that Conrad's depiction of women in *Heart of Darkness* corresponds to the beliefs about women in the Victorian era. It also reveals the unequal power dynamics and limited freedom experienced by women in various situations in the novel.

The findings of this research have significant implications because they help us understand how women are portrayed in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and how this connects to the Victorian era. By studying the roles and characteristics of female characters in the novel, we gain insights into the expectations, and limitations that influenced women's lives in that period. This contributes to our understanding of Victorian literature, gender roles, and how women are depicted in stories. The research contributes to the study of literature and gender by highlighting the ongoing impact of Victorian ideals. Additionally, it encourages more discussions and analysis in the field of feminist literary criticism.

Even though this study offers valuable insights, it has some limitations worth considering. We focused specifically on selected Conrad's novel and how it reflects Victorian norms, so the findings may not apply as broadly to other writings or time periods. Our analysis mainly relied on the text itself, and future research could benefit from including other sources like historical documents or critical interpretations. To fully understand how women are portrayed in Joseph Conrad's works, we would recommend studying each of his novels. This way, we could explore a wide variety of female characters throughout all of his writings and discover any common themes or patterns that emerge. This comprehensive approach would provide deeper insights into Conrad's depiction of women and their roles in his literary works. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to explore a wider range of literature from the Victorian era and examine how women are portrayed in different genres or by other authors. Incorporating additional research methods, such as studying readers' responses or conducting interviews, could provide further perspectives on women's representation in Conrad's works.

6 Conclusion

In the realm of literature, the exploration of gender roles and the depiction of women have long been subjects of critical analysis. Joseph Conrad, a prominent writer of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, delves into these themes in his iconic novella, *Heart of Darkness*. Throughout the pages of his work, Conrad invites readers to examine the role of women within the context of the Victorian era, a time marked by rigid societal expectations and evolving notions of femininity. As our investigation draws to a close, we now reflect upon the insights gained, the nuances uncovered, and the implications of Conrad's portrayal of women in *Heart of Darkness*.

This thesis has explored the role of women in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and analysed their depiction within the context of Victorian society. Through an in-depth examination of female characters such as the European Intended, Kurtz's African mistress, women in the Capitol, Marlow's aunt, and female characters of other selected works of Conrad, we have sought to shed light on their representation and the underlying societal expectations of women during the Victorian era.

To fully comprehend the portrayal of women in *Heart of Darkness*, it was essential to delve into the multifaceted mosaic of the Victorian era and its societal norms. The Victorian era, characterized by its rigid social structures and prevailing ideals of femininity, provided the settings against which Joseph Conrad creates his narrative. By examining the societal expectations, gender roles, and prevailing attitudes towards women during this era, we gained valuable insights into Conrad's representation of female characters in his work. Moreover, delving into the realms of Victorian literature and early modernism, and exploring the life and experiences of Joseph Conrad himself, enhanced our understanding of the intricate interplay between art and society, and how it shaped the depiction of women in *Heart of Darkness*.

In our research, our aim was to investigate the portrayal of women in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and to compare it with the role of women in Victorian society. To achieve this, we formulated the hypothesis that the portrayal of the role of women in *Heart of Darkness* corresponds to the role of women in society during the Victorian period. Through a comparative analysis of Conrad's novel, supported by a thorough exploration of the historical context, Victorian literature, and the experiences of women in that era, we have critically examined the representation of women in *Heart of Darkness*.

During the course of my research, we employed qualitative research methods and comparative analysis to examine the role of women in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. The qualitative research approach allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the textual representations of female characters, delving into their behaviours, actions, and interactions within the narrative. This method facilitated a better understanding of the various dimensions of women's roles in the novel. Additionally, we employed comparative analysis to contextualize the portrayal of women in *Heart of Darkness* within the broader framework of Victorian society. By drawing comparisons with expectations of Victorian society, we gained insights into the similarities and differences in the depiction of female characters in *Heart of Darkness* and Victorian women, highlighting the specificities of their roles. The combination of qualitative research and comparative analysis enabled a comprehensive examination of the role of women in *Heart of Darkness* and their comparison with the representation of women in Victorian society. This methodological approach ensured a thorough exploration of the subject matter and supported the validity and reliability of the conclusions drawn from our research.

Our findings support the hypothesis that the portrayal of women in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* aligns with the role of women in Victorian society. Through our analysis, we have observed that the female characters in the novel exhibit characteristics and behaviours that align with the expectations placed upon Victorian women. They are depicted as embodying the virtues of femininity, displaying qualities such as passivity, devotion, and loyalty to their male counterparts. These portrayals reinforce the societal norms and expectations of the Victorian era, reflecting the prevailing attitudes towards women during that time. The European Intended, in particular, emerges as one of the quintessential Victorian women among all the selected novels. Her depiction embodies the traditional attributes and values expected of women during the Victorian era, such as innocence, passivity, devotion, and abiding loyalty to her husband. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the other female characters in *Heart of Darkness* also suit to deal with the representation of the Victorian woman. However, they are consigned to the periphery of the narrative, lacking development, and serving primarily as symbolic representations. Their roles are often interlaced with themes of colonization, passiveness, and submission.

However, it is important to note that our analysis of other selected novels by Joseph Conrad revealed a divergence from this pattern. In novels such as *Almayer's Folly*, *An Outcast of the Islands*, *Nostromo*, *Victory*, and *The Rescue* the portrayal of women deviates

from the typical Victorian stereotypes. These female characters challenge traditional gender roles, showcasing independence, political engagement, and the pursuit of personal freedom. Therefore, while our findings confirm the alignment between the portrayal of women in *Heart of Darkness* and Victorian society, we can observe a difference in the roles of Victorian women and female characters in Conrad's other selected works mentioned in the thesis.

By explaining the portrayal of women in *Heart of Darkness* as representative of typical Victorian women and emphasizing their secondary and symbolic roles, this thesis adds to the existing knowledge of Joseph Conrad's works and contributes to a deeper understanding of gender roles and social norms common during the Victorian period and its depiction in Joseph Conrad's works. This research highlights how Victorian ideals and norms continue to shape literature, emphasizes the importance of considering multiple perspectives, and encourages further exploration in feminist literary criticism. By questioning the ideal depiction of genders in Victorian society this study adds to discussions about how women are shown and how much control they have in the novels.

7 Resumé

Už od dávna slúžila literatúra ako odraz spoločnosti a poskytovala nám pohľad do spoločenských noriem, hodnôt a úloh, ktoré jednotlivci zohrávali. Jedna z historických ér, ktorá zaujala pozornosť mnohých čitateľov a vzdelancov je Viktoriánke obdobie. Táto éra sa vyznačuje prísnyimi spoločenskými štruktúrami, kolonizáciou, technologickým posunom a striktnými rodovými očakávaniami. Joseph Conrad, významný spisovateľ konca 19. a začiatku 20. storočia, prispel k tejto dobe svojimi dielami, ktoré skúmali hĺbku ľudskej povahy a zložitosť spoločnosti. Najmä jeho slávny román *Srdce temnoty* nás láka do hlbín ľudskej psychiky a zároveň nás pozýva preskúmať úlohu žien v jej príbehu. Prostredníctvom komparatívnej analýzy ženských postáv v rôznych Conradových dielach a skúmania prevládajúcich viktoriánskych ideálov je cieľ tejto práce objasniť zobrazenie žien v diele *Srdce temnoty* a preskúmať ich miesto v širšom kontexte viktoriánskej spoločnosti.

Viktoriánske obdobie, ktoré trvalo od polovice 19. do začiatku 20. storočia, bolo obdobím významných spoločenských, politických, technologických a ekonomických zmien. Obdobie bolo charakterizované expanziou Britského impéria a jeho koloniálnym úsilím, ako aj priemyselnou revolúciou, ktorá priniesla obrovské zmeny v spoločnosti. Táto éra bola svedkom meniacej sa dynamiky moci, keď Británia uplatnila svoj vplyv po celom svete a stala sa vedúcou svetovou imperiálnou mocnosťou.

Počas týchto zmien sa viktoriánska spoločnosť držala prísneho hierarchického usporiadania spoločnosti a hlboko zakorenených rodových rolí. Prevládal koncept oddelených sfér, ktorý kládol dôraz na rozdelenie verejnej a súkromnej sféry. Od mužov sa očakávalo, že sa zapoja do verejnej sféry práce, politiky a podnikania, zatiaľ čo ženy boli obmedzené na súkromnú sféru domova a rodiny. Ženské primárne úlohy sa týkali domácich povinností a starostlivosti o deti. Viktoriánska éra tiež zaznamenala vzostup feministických hnutí a boj za práva žien. Ženy začali spochybňovať spoločenské normy a obhajovať rovnoprávnosť, možnosti vzdelávania, volebné právo a snažili sa svoje postavenie posunúť zo súkromnej, domácej.

Viktoriánska literatúra ako odraz spoločnosti odzrkadľovala prevládajúce ideály a hodnoty. Často zobrazovala ženy ako idealizované a cnostné postavy, ktoré stelesňovali predstavy o ženskosti, nevinnosti a rodinnej pohody. Tieto literárne diela posilnili spoločenské očakávania a poskytli prostriedky na navigáciu a skúmanie zložitosti sociálnej dynamiky éry. Viktoriánska literatúra, ktorá v tom čase zahŕňala veľké množstvo rôznych žánrov, zaznamenala počas éry pozoruhodný rast. Jedným z najvýznamnejších pokrokov bol

vzostup románu ako dominantnej formy literárneho vyjadrenia. Román so svojim rozsiahlym rozsahom a schopnosťou zachytiť zložitú ľudskú skúsenosť sa stal jedným z obľúbených žánrov pre viktoriánskych spisovateľov na skúmanie a prípadnú kritiku spoločenských problémov. Viktoriánska literatúra je charakterizovaná typickými črtami, ktoré odrážali obavy a túžby doby. Realizmus bol napríklad prevládajúcim literárnym hnutím, ktoré sa snažilo zobrazovať každodenný život s presnosťou a detailmi. Okrem tohto existujú ešte ďalšie dôležité črty, ako je moralizmus, idealizmus a prítomnosť protichodných presvedčení a myšlienok. Tieto aspekty ďalej formovali literárnu tvárnosť éry, poskytovali morálny rámec a skúmali zložitú hodnotového rebríčka a túžby jednotlivcov.

Joseph Conrad tvoril na prelome dvoch literárnych období. Na začiatku 20. storočia vznikli začiatky nového literárneho obdobia. S nástupom skorého modernizmu v literatúre nastal posun k experimentovaniu a odklonu od tradičných štruktúr rozprávania príbehu. Pre toto obdobie bolo typické hlbšie skúmať ľudskú psychiku, subjektívne prežívanie a viacerých rozprávačov. Bola to éra, ktorá spochybňovala doteraz používané konvencie a posúvala hranice literatúry. Joseph Conrad sa v tejto dynamicky meniacej dobe ukázal ako jeden z významných predstaviteľov. Jeho diela sa vzpierali jednoduchšej kategorizácii, miešali prvky realizmu, modernizmu a psychologickému pozorovaniu. Conradove rozprávania zápasili so zložitými morálnymi a filozofickými otázkami, ponorili sa do hĺb ľudskej povahy a často rozoberajú znepokojujúce črty jednotlivcov, ktoré sa ukrývajú pod povrchom.

Druhá kapitola tejto práce sa zaoberá životom a pôvodom Josepha Conrada. Jeho tvorbu dôrazne ovplyvnili vlastné skúsenosti na mori a časté stretávanie sa s rôznymi kultúrami. Autor bol poľského pôvodu a vyrastal vo veľmi turbulentnej dobe, kedy Poľsko bolo pod nadvládou rôznych mocností. Po strate vlastných rodičov a zlomení poľskej nezávislosti sa Conrad presťahoval do Francúzska a pridal sa k námorníctvu. Jeho skúsenosti na mori slúžili ako inšpirácia pri písaní románov. Svoje literárne diela písal v angličtine, ktorú sa naučil počas svojho pobytu vo Veľkej Británii. Skúmaním Conradovej osobnej cesty, multikultúrnej výchovy a stretnutí s realitou kolonializmu sa táto kapitola zameriava na objasnenie silného vplyvu týchto faktorov na jeho stvárnenie ženských postáv a ich úloh v rámci jeho príbehov.

Tretia kapitola práce vysvetľuje metodológiu, ciele a hypotézu práce. Práca kombinuje kvalitatívne a kvantitatívne výskumné metódy. Výskum práce bol realizovaný pomocou analýzy a porovnávania. Hlavným cieľom práce bolo rozanalyzovať zobrazenie

ženských postáv v diele a porovnať ich rolu s ich postavením vo Viktoriánskej spoločnosti. Za účelom splnenia cieľu sme si stanovili hypotézu, ktorá znela nasledovne: Zobrazenie úlohy žien v diele *Srdce temnoty* od Josepha Conrada zodpovedá úlohe žien v spoločnosti vo viktoriánskom období.

Štvrtá kapitola práce predkladá rozbor diela *Srdce temnoty* ale aj iných vybraných diel od Josepha Conrada. V prvých podkapitolách sme rozobrali 5 Conradových diel, ktoré obsahujú významné ženské postavy. V jeho prvom románe s názvom *Almayer's Folly* vystupujú dve výnimočné ženske postavy, Mem a Nina. Obidve majú multikultúrny pôvod, ktorý má následky na ich životy. Mem je matkou Niny, a symbolizuje materinskú lásku, obetavosť a túži po lepšom živote svojej rodiny. Nina naopak túži po slobode, láske a dobrodružstve. Nina je vyobrazená ako mladá, krásna žena, ktorá zvädza boje s kolonializmom a ťažkosťami, ktoré prináša jej malajský pôvod.

V druhom románe, ktorý napísal Joseph Conrad s názvom *An Outcast of the Islands* vystupuje Aissia, ktorá je popísaná ako nezávislá, sebavedomá a odvážna žena. Aissia sa vyznačuje svojou nezávislosťou myslenia a odmietaním podriadenosti tradičným spoločenským normám. Jej postava reprezentuje slobodného ducha, odvahu a odpor voči predsudkom a obmedzeniam, ktoré jej spoločnosť kladie. Vášnivo túži dosiahnuť osobné šťastie aj napriek prekážkam. Jej vlastnosti sú v kontraste s vlastnosťami, ktoré boli typické pre Viktoriánske ženy.

V románe s názvom *Nostromo*, ktorý je tretím bližšie charakterizovaným Conradovým dielom, sa stretávame s nezvyčajne vyobrazenou ženskou postavou, Antoniou. Antonia sa odlišuje od typických viktoriánskych žien hlavne v tom, že sa aktívne zapája do verejného života a politických udalostí. Jej postava sa angažuje v politických konfliktoch a bojoch o moc v meste, v ktorom žije. Antonia odmieta svoju pasívnu rolu v spoločnosti, presadzuje svoje názory a je schopná čeliť prekážkam. Tým vzdoruje spoločenským očakávaniam a nespĺňa očakávania kladené na Viktoriánske ženy.

Ďalším románom, ktorého sa podrobnejšie venujeme je *Victory*. V ňom vystupuje zaujímavá ženská postava, Lena, ktorá odhaľuje, že ženy nie sú iba obmedzené na tradičné viktoriánske ideály, ale majú tiež túžbu a právo na svoje vlastné šťastie a slobodu vo svojom živote. Jej postavu by sa dalo charakterizovať ako nezávislú, silnú, a záhadnú. Potrebné je aj spomenúť, že Lena sa nebojí riskovať aby dosiahla svoje ciele. Príbeh je prepletaný jej romantickým vzťahom, ktorý je plný vášne ale aj komplikácií.

Posledným románom, ktorý je popísaný v práci je *The Rescue*. V tomto príbehu spoznávame odvážnu manželku Edith, ktorá sa vydá zachrániť svojho manžela. Počas cesty sa však zamiluje do iného muža, no aj napriek tomu, že zvädza boj, zostane verná a oddaná svojmu manželovi. Jej hlavnou starosťou je ochrana a zachovanie jej manželského zväzku a tým prispieva k umocneniu presvedčenia, že prvoradá je manželstvo a rodina. Conrad jej postavou zdôrazňuje typickú rolu ženského pohlavia vo Viktoriánskom období.

Nasledujúca podkapitola práce sa zaoberá popisom deja diela *Srdce temnoty*. Príbeh popisuje cestu a zážitky hlavnej postavy Marlowa, ktorý cestuje riekou Kongo, aby našiel tajomného obchodníka menom Kurtz. Počas svojej cesty Marlow zažíva brutalitu kolonializmu na vlastnej koži. Keď sa konečne spoznáva so známym a váženým obchodníkom, zisťuje, že je to síce silný ale nemorálny muž. Príbeh sa zaoberá temnotou ľudskej povahy a kontrastami medzi civilizáciou a takzvanou divočinou.

Román *Srdce temnoty* môže byť pre niektorých čitateľov považovaný za kontroverzný. Táto kontroverzia je opodstatnená pre svoje zobrazenie kolonializmu, rasizmu, jazyku používaného v diele a morálneho úpadku. Kritici poukazujú hlavne na rasistické zobrazenie Afrického obyvateľstva, na stereotypné obrazy a jazyk, ktoré Conrad používa. Conrad ich opisuje ako primitívnych a divokých, čo môže byť považované za podporu koloniálnej propagandy a znevažovanie afrických domorodých kultúr. Kľúčovým však je, čítať dielo v historickom a spoločenskom kontexte Viktoriánskej doby a takisto upriamenie pozornosti na autorov pôvod.

V nasledujúcich podkapitolách sa venuje charakterizácii a analýze ženských postáv v diele *Srdce temnoty*. V románe sú ženské postavy spomenuté len okrajovo a majú skôr symbolickú rolu. Nemajú ani svoje vlastné mená a väčšinou sú popísané prívlastkom, ako napríklad Marlowa teta, Kurtzova snúbenica, ženy v Spoločnosti a pod. Nezohrávajú dôležitú úlohu v románe a niekedy sú dokonca nenápadné. Prvú ženskú postavu, ktorú v diele stretávame je Marlowova teta, ktorá mu pomocou svojich známostí dohodí prácu v Kongu. Je zobrazená aká silná a odhodlaná žena, ktorá sa snaží pomôcť svojmu synovcovi. Marlow sa vďaka nej dostane do Spoločnosti, kde sa stretáva s dvoma ženami. Tie sú zobrazené ako prvé, ktorí vítajú vracajúcich sa a odchádzajúcich mužov z Konga a majú za úlohu udržiavať obraz koloniálneho vykorisťovania ako civilizačnej misie. Sú teda spolupáchateľkami koloniálneho vykorisťovania, ale v rámci svojej rodovej role, sa tvária, že nevedia o zverstvách, ktoré sa v Afrike dejú. Najvýraznejšou ženskou postavou je Kurtzova snúbenica, ktorú spoznávame na konci románu. Je zobrazená ako pasívna,

idealizovaná postava, predstavujúca civilizáciu a morálku. Je to kultivovaná, mladá a krásna žena európskeho pôvodu, ktorá má spoločenské postavenie a zastupuje hodnoty európskej civilizácie. Jej oddanosť, láska a smútok sú silnými obrazmi Viktoriánskych žien. Jej postava symbolizuje ideály Viktoriánskych žien. Kurtzova snúbenica ho milovala do krajnosti a je ochotná smútiť za ním do konca svojho života. Ďalšou ženskou postavou v diele *Srdce temnoty* je Kurtzova africká milienka. Marlow ju spomína len stručne ako Kurtzove vlastníctvo v Kongu. Africká milienka je zobrazená ako objekt zbavený ľudskej dôstojnosti. V diele je popísaná ako kus slonoviny alebo ako divoká žena.

Naše zistenia podporujú hypotézu, že zobrazenie žien v diele *Srdce temnoty* od Josepha Conrada sa zhoduje s rolou žien vo viktoriánskej spoločnosti. Našou analýzou sme pozorovali, že ženské postavy v románe prejavujú vlastnosti a správanie, ktoré sú v súlade s očakávaniami kladenými na viktoriánske ženy. Postavy sú zobrazené ako typické viktoriánske ženy, s vlastnosťami ako pasivita, oddanosť a vernosť svojim mužským partnerom. Tieto zobrazenia posilňujú spoločenské normy a očakávania viktoriánskej éry a odrážajú prevládajúce očakávania na ženy v tom čase. Kurtzova snúbenica sa javí ako jedna z najtypickejších viktoriánskych ženských postáv zo všetkých vybraných románov od Josepha Conrada. Jej zobrazenie zahŕňa tradičné vlastnosti a hodnoty, ktoré sa od žien očakávali počas viktoriánskej éry, ako napríklad nevinnosť, pasivita, oddanosť a vernosť manželovi. Ostatné ženské postavy v diele sú často vyčlenené na okraj dejovej línie, majú nedostatočný vývoj a slúžia predovšetkým ako symboly. Ich role sú často prepojené s témami kolonizácie, pasivity a podriadenosti.

Výsledky tejto štúdie majú významné dôsledky, pretože nám pomáhajú porozumieť, ako sú ženy zobrazované v diere *Srdce temnoty* od Josepha Conrada a ako sú tieto zobrazenia prepojené s viktoriánskou érou. Skúmaním rolí a charakteristík ženských postáv v románe získavame poznatky o očakávaniach a obmedzeniach, ktoré ovplyvňovali životy žien v tomto období. Toto prispieva k všeobecnému porozumeniu viktoriánskej literatúry, rodových rolí a spôsobov, akými sú ženy zobrazované v príbehoch. Táto štúdia prispieva k skúmaniu literatúry a tým, že zdôrazňuje vplyv viktoriánskych ideálov na zobrazenie žien.

Aj keď táto štúdia poskytuje cenné poznatky, v podkapitole diskusia a odporúčania sme zhrnuli zopár podstatných bodov na ďalší výskum. Tým, že sme sa sústredili hlavne na konkrétne diela od Conrada, nevieme poskytnúť všeobecnejší pohľad na zobrazenie žien vo viktoriánskej literatúre. Naš výskum sa špecializoval na samotné dielo, tým pádom by sa budúci výskum mohol rozšíriť o ďalšie zdroje, ako napríklad o historické dokumenty alebo

už uverejnené kritické eseje. Na celkové porozumenie zobrazenia žien v Conradových dielach by sme odporúčali prečítanie a rozanalyzovanie všetkých Conradových diel. Týmto dlhším výskumom by sme dospeli k širokému spektru ženských postáv, ktoré sa vyskytujú v Conradových dielach a objaviť prípadné rozdiely v zobrazení žien. Okrem toho by bolo prospešné preskúmať širšiu škálu literatúry z viktoriánskej éry a skúmať, ako sú ženy vyobrazované v rôznych žánroch naprieč rôznymi autormi. Začlenenie ďalších výskumných metód, ako sú rozhovory s čitateľmi alebo uskutočnenie dotazníka, ktorý by sa zameriaval na interpretáciu diela čitateľmi, by mohlo poskytnúť ďalšie pohľady na zobrazenie žien v Conradových dielach.

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