

In Joseph Conrad's novella, *Heart of Darkness*, the representation of women is extremely limited. Conrad's portrayals are extreme stereotypes meant to depict the entire female gender. Through these extreme stereotypes, Conrad is able to illustrate his themes of darkness and brutality. Joseph Conrad depicts only three main women in his novel: the aunt of Marlow, as well as the mistress and his fiancée. These roles though limited in their descriptions, are meant to represent the commonly perceived (as well as extremely stereotypical) positions of women in society, i.e.: the mother, the whore and the dutiful Lady/virgin. Conrad describes the aunt as a "dear and enthusiastic soul...ready to do anything, anything for [Marlow]," (pg. 34). The mistress is described as "savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent; there was something ominous and stately in her deliberate progress," (pg. 101). While in contrast, Kurtz's fiancée is described as ready to listen without mental reservation, without suspicion, without a thought for herself," (pg. 115). These characters are all extremes, stereotypical in nature and limited, illustrating Conrad's portrait's of brutality, violence, death and darkness of the unconquered world. Since navigation and exploration was all done by men these themes are apart of the male realm, and thus can only be understood or is meant to be inclusive by men. As a result, through these extreme characters of the women, it is understood that women this brutality would never have occurred if it had been written about women, because these women do not have and are not capable of these feelings and characteristics. All of the women in Conrad's novella are depicted in an unthreatening manner, easily dominated and controlled by men. These representations allow the central themes to be illustrated for the author, showing that they are of male phenomena.