

**Twentieth-Century Fiction**  
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**Lecture – 10**  
**Heart of Darkness – Part 5**

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along a blue sea whose glitter was blurred by a creeping mist. The sun was fierce, the land seemed to glisten and drip with steam. Here and there greyish-whitish specks showed up clustered inside the white surf, with a flag flying above them perhaps. Settlements some centuries old, and still no bigger than pinheads on the untouched expanse of their background. We pounded along, stopped, landed soldiers; went on, landed custom-house clerks to levy toll in what looked like a God-forsaken wilderness, with a tin shed and a flag-pole lost in it; landed more soldiers—to take care of the custom-house clerks, presumably. Some, I heard, got drowned in the surf; but whether they did or not, nobody seemed particularly to care. They were just flung out there, and on we went. Every day the coast looked the same, as though we had not moved; but we passed various places—



So, hello and welcome to this NPTEL course entitled Twentieth Century Fiction. We were looking at Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness. We had a few lectures on this already. So, we will just dive into the section that we are aiming to cover today in this lecture. Now, if you remember when I stopped in the previous lecture I mentioned a particular term which I thought I would pick on and just you know expand on in subsequent lectures and that term was delay decoding. So, we talked about how delayed decoding is a very important narrative technique used by Conrad.

So, what is delayed decoding? So, delayed decoding is that the instrument of narration through which the senses appear first, the senses are foregrounded and the object comes much later. The object which creates the senses, object which creates impressions, the object comes much later, the object is decoded much later and hence the whole idea of delayed decoding.

So, for instance there is a section in Heart of Darkness which we will see and spend some time on where Conrad Marlow who is traveling down Congo, he feels himself

completely bombarded by certain things. You know it is pricking on the skin and it's attacking him and he does not quite know what the things up, but he gets the impression, the senses, the sense of fear, the sense of you know the tactile sense of being touched with something alien that appears over and over again and that is foregrounded with very dense descriptions. And, only much later we find out that the objects which are actually causing that are arrows right, arrows that you know are being shot at Marlow and his streamer.

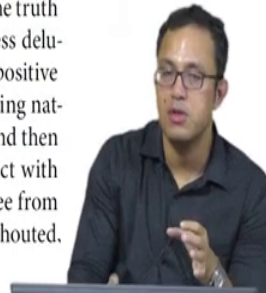
So, the object comes much later, it is decoded much later and the impressions and the senses they come much before much earlier and only through by navigating through the senses do we reach the object eventually. So, the whole idea of delayed decoding on Conrad's narrative style is very important and it is very important style because it talks about it describes or it foregrounds the density of objects, the density of sensory experience, the opacity or rather the translucence of impressions.

So, what I mean by translucence is the liminal category between transparent and opaque. It is something that we know as well as do not know. So, you know this degree of unknowability about experience that Conrad excels in terms of you know incorporating that into his narrative style and we see how this becomes very quickly political and racial in quality as well because you know at the end of the day what is happening here is the white man is going to a non-white space where everything is alien to him and the whole idea of invading and terrorizing the non-white space comes with a fear and anxiety of not knowing what is around you all the time.

So, you know the whole idea of going to a space of alterity or a different space is important because the difference is foregrounded, the difference is dramatized with the whole idea of delayed decoding right. We do not quite know what the objects are we do not quite know how things shape up around us because this is a politically and racially and culturally different space. And, so, the whole idea of being politically and culturally and materially other informs the whole existential awareness of otherness right and that is part of the unknowability which informs delayed decoding ok.

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and on we went. Every day the coast looked the same, as though we had not moved; but we passed various places—trading places—with names like Gran' Bassam, Little Popo; names that seemed to belong to some sordid farce acted in front of a sinister back-cloth. The idleness of a passenger, my isolation amongst all these men with whom I had no point of contact, the oily and languid sea, the uniform sombreness of the coast, seemed to keep me away from the truth of things, within the toil of a mournful and senseless delusion. The voice of the surf heard now and then was a positive pleasure, like the speech of a brother. It was something natural, that had its reason, that had a meaning. Now and then a boat from the shore gave one a momentary contact with reality. It was paddled by black fellows. You could see from afar the white of their eyeballs glistening. They shouted.



So, the section that is on your screen at the moment this is where Marlow is sailing on to Congo on the steamer and then this is what he says and this should be on your screen. Every day the coast looked the same, as though we had not moved; but we passed various places – trading places – with names such as Gran' Bassam, Little Popo; names that seemed to belong to some sordid farce acted in front of a sinister back-cloth right.

So, the passing of different petty places little petty ports but it seems Marlow that they are not moving at all, there is a degree of stillness and immobility about the whole experience in a boat, it does not seem to move at all, but you are passing on different places that with very strange names. And, we take a look at the politics of naming Gran Bassam and Little Popo these obviously, are ad hoc names given by European companies and sometimes the logic the rationale behind these names might be ludicrous.

So, you know the whole idea, the whole farcicality of naming those places with European names is something which Marlow experiences very early on in his encounter with imperialism. The whole politics of naming places, the whole politics of giving names to places which otherwise are unknown and they are like I said the rationale behind naming those places might be ludicrous that is at certain points might be a product grown in that particular place, it might be a company name of a company official who acts in that particular place. These are the rationales that inform namings of such places which are often ridiculous in quality ok.

The idleness of the passenger, my isolation amongst all these men with whom I had no point of contact, seemed to keep me away from the truth of things. So, again the whole idea of being away from the truth of things is important because that is what I mean when I mention the term the density of experience, the density of experientiality right you know every experience in Conrad is very dense in quality and that is reflected in the density of descriptions. So, if you know by now you should be knowing that Heart of Darkness is very dense novel to read.

So, if you read the novels more of a novella than a novel it is barely 90 pages long, but it will take you a lot of time to read it because it is not a novel that you can quickly consume you know it is not that kind of a novel. It is a novel which will test your patience, is novel which will test your reading ability because of the density of descriptions; it is very dense ontologically very dense, you know narratively it is very dense etcetera.

So, the whole idea of being away from the truth of things that Marlow is experiencing, and that gets extended or spilled over even to the readerly experience. When reading Heart of Darkness, we do not quite know what is happening all the time. So, we too like Marlow we are away from the truth of things. So, although this is a retrospective narration Marlow obviously, knows the truth now, but the way he is re-narrating it you know narration of Heart of Darkness is also an act of re-experiencing.

So, he is giving you the flavor or the first an experience in that sense the experience that he first had when he went to Congo, he is not telling you what it is now exactly because; obviously, he knows the things now because he has been through it. But, he is making us the readers going through the same experience, the same experience pattern that he went through as well ok. So, the whole idea of being away from the truth of things is important over here. So, even as a narrator, even as a reader you are experiencing the whole factor being away from the truth of things ok.

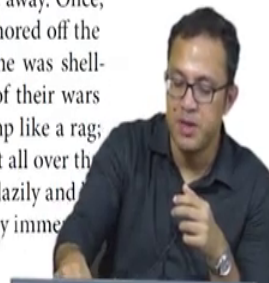
Within a toil of a mournful and senseless delusion; delusion about meaning of things, delusion about the whole you know idea of imperialism etcetera. The voice of the surf heard now and then was a positive pleasure, like the speech of a brother. It is natural that had its reason that had a meaning. Now and then the boat from the shore gave one a momentary contact with reality. So, the whole idea of reality and meaningfulness

become a luxury to Marlow because you know they stranded middle of nowhere, you know is they almost feel as they are not moving at all in the middle of nowhere, in its endless fluidity of the sea.

So, the surf the surf heard every now and then, you know when the waves are breaking the surf heard is generated every now and then the visibility of the surf heard is a you know nourishing break is something which gives some meaning. And, every time a boat comes in from the shore gives you a momentary contact with reality which we otherwise you know do not have in the middle of this vast ocean that Marlow was stranded in a streamer ok.

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sang; their bodies streamed with perspiration; they had faces like grotesque masks—these chaps; but they had bone, muscle, a wild vitality, an intense energy of movement, that was as natural and true as the surf along their coast. They wanted no excuse for being there. They were a great comfort to look at. For a time I would feel I belonged still to a world of straightforward facts; but the feeling would not last long. Something would turn up to scare it away. Once, I remember, we came upon a man-of-war anchored off the coast. There wasn't even a shed there, and she was shelling the bush. It appears the French had one of their wars going on thereabouts. Her ensign dropped limp like a rag; the muzzles of the long six-inch guns stuck out all over the low hull; the greasy, slimy swell swung her up lazily and her down, swaying her thin masts. In the empty imme



So, and then he goes on to say, For a time I would feel I belonged still to a world of straightforward facts; but the feeling would not last long. So, this whole idea of moving away from straightforward facts is important and that is actually commentary on the whole novel so to say because this is a novel which does not really deal with straightforward facts anymore right because you know it is a departure from facts, it is a departure from reality, palpable reality, tangible reality, it's you know it is an entrance into a world of meanings where you know meanings are always produced and reproduced and de-produced right. So, it is about de-production of meanings to a large extent right.

So, it is a long way from the straightforward facts and then this whole departure from straightforward facts is important because what that tells us is that straightforward facts is an overt a cultural constructs to a large extent. Those come from a certain cultural setting, those come from a certain meaning, landscape meaningful landscapes, when you take away the landscape and take away the materiality or the meaningful landscape when you are in the middle of nowhere those facts do not matter at all, those facts cease to have any meaning whatsoever.

So, in a nutshell what Marlow tells us and what we get the sense of a get over here is the very interesting entanglement between material reality and experientiality. The way you experience things depends on a material reality around you. So, the reality around you is something that is familiar to you, something that you can navigate with then the whole idea of meaning production and meaning consumption becomes easier and quicker and more linear in quality.

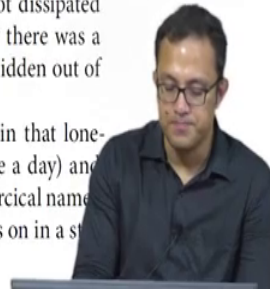
However, if the material reality around you changes that for instance it does over here in Marlow in the case of Marlow where he is in the middle of nowhere when all he says sees around is an endless fluidity of the sea. Then obviously, your whole sense of meaning your whole grasp of meaning changes as well quite dramatically, then you do not quite know how to deal with what is around you all the time.

So, something would turn up to scare it away. Once, I remember, we came upon a man-of-war anchored off the coast. So, this is a very important section this reason why I am spending some time with it today.

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her down, swaying her thin masts. In the empty immensity of earth, sky, and water, there she was, incomprehensible, firing into a continent. Pop, would go one of the six-inch guns; a small flame would dart and vanish, a little white smoke would disappear, a tiny projectile would give a feeble screech—and nothing happened. Nothing could happen. There was a touch of insanity in the proceeding, a sense of lugubrious drollery in the sight; and it was not dissipated by somebody on board assuring me earnestly there was a camp of natives—he called them enemies!—hidden out of sight somewhere.

‘We gave her her letters (I heard the men in that lonely ship were dying of fever at the rate of three a day) and went on. We called at some more places with farcical names where the merry dance of death and trade goes on in a ship.



A man-of-war is a shooting vessel. You know it is one of those vessels it is like an artillery machine, it is a gun machine it is a big gun which was used presumably by the French at some point of time when they tried to attack this particular landscape. It appears the French had one of their wars going on thereabouts. Her ensign dropped limp like a rag; the muzzles of the long six-inch guns stuck out all over the low hull; the greasy, slimy swell swung upon her lazily and let her down, swaying her thin masts. So, this is a description of a machine but also look at the way in which how the machine is humanized as a female figure.

So, the man-of-war is basically a machine gun. It was a French machine gun which was left abandoned supposedly because the French had some war in that region and then moved on and for some reason that particular ammunition got left behind. It was you know abandoned as an abandoned ammunition, but then the way it's described over here as almost humanized right and this is interesting because what is actually telling us is that this is a situation this is a cultural climate where everything is commodified everything becomes the machine.

So, conversely every machine becomes humanized as well right. So, this whole borderline between what is human and what is non-human, what is a machine, what is an organic reality, the borderlines blur away very quickly because we find the French you know machine gun over here, the man-of-war over here is almost an pathetic gaze

Marlow has on it right. It is almost like Marlow feels for its abandoned condition Marlow feels for its alienation the fact that it does not have any meaning anymore and that seems to have some kind of resonance with the way he is experiencing reality as well as an outsider as an Englishman who is in the middle of nowhere now.

So, he feels abandoned as well, he feels alienated as well, he feels exhausted of meaning as well just like the French ammunition over here, the abandoned ammunition over here. So, that man machine empathy over here is very interesting it is something that Heart of Darkness does touch upon every now and then ok. And, then see how this French ammunition just abandoned would still I mean obviously, it is dysfunctional, but every now and then it will pop up and fire something you know because no one bothered to stop it, no one bothered to terminate it really.

So, it is an abandoned machine gun which will pop up and give empty fires every now and then and this is a description that is coming up for you and this should be on your screen. In the empty immensity of earth, sky, and water, there she was, incomprehensible firing into a continent. So, you know it just continued to fire you know emptily, endlessly, meaninglessly, and purposelessly. So, you know the whole purposelessness of the firing mechanism over here becomes very symbolic signifier of the purposelessness of imperialism to a large extent right.

Pop, would one go would go one of the six-inch guns; a small flame would dart and vanish, a little white smoke would disappear, a tiny projectile would give a feeble screech – and nothing happened. So, again this particular sentence is very important; pop would go one of the six-inch guns. So, again one of the guns would go pop out every now and then, you know a small flame would dart and vanish.

So, you know it just continued to fire just continued to do little function in a very dysfunctional way and it is something very Sisyphean about this whole exercise something completely purposeless about this whole exercise meaningless about this whole exercise, why is the obvious question, why the necessity to fire. A little white smoke would disappear, a tiny projectile would give a feeble screech – and nothing happened you know this last bit is important over here nothing happened following sentence nothing could happen right.



So, the sense of nothingness is important. So, what is produced out of this image, what is produced out of this operation was nothingness right. So, the whole idea the whole French man of arm over here, the whole French machine gun the abandoned ammunition over here it becomes a symbol of the production of nothingness right. Well quite literally in quite symbolically it becomes a production of nothingness, an endless production and reproduction of nothingness.

And, that in a way according to Marlow sums up imperialism that you know in the end it is actually about nothingness, it is about man's greed, is about man's exploitation, it is about all the vices that man is capable of, but then at the end it is about nothingness, it is about something very nihilistic something very negative and sort of consuming cannibalistic about imperialism that Marlow would describe.

But, this first image the first signifier of nothingness, the first signifier of purposelessness, the first symbol of purposelessness in Heart of Darkness is important for us to understand that is why we spend some time over here. You know the long machine guns which are there in the French ammunition which was abandoned, it had some meaning at some point of time in history, but now time has moved on, had left it behind with no sense of purpose. And, all it does every now and then it is pop up little guns, pop up little fires and it keeps firing into the continent, it does not kill anything, it does not serve any purpose but just keeps firing over and over again ad infinitum.

And, this ad infinitum quality is precise what makes it is so nihilistic in quality, it makes it so negative in quality right. So, nothing happened nothing could happen. It is almost like a Beckettian ring about it. So those of you who have read Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot would know this is a phrase which keeps coming up nothing happened or nothing happens twice nothing happens over and over again. So, what actually means is nothingness is produced. So, you know the whole idea of happening is reduced to a nothingness. So, nothingness is happening all the time.

And, then Marlow goes on to say there is a touch of insanity in the proceeding, a sense of lugubrious drollery in the sight ok. Look at the way Conrad Marlow and Conrad they are very dense in the descriptions there is a density in the words there is a degree of difficulty in description which is important for us to recognize and part of the difficulty is connected to another term which I will spend some time with today. It is related to

delayed decoding, but it is also a little different and that is a term called defamiliarization.

Now, what is defamiliarization? Defamiliarization is a term is a technique through which the world that is familiar to you is dramatically defamiliarized right. So, the way it is described, the way it appears, the way it is experienced it generates a sense of alienation, a sense of cognitive alienation. As a result of which the familiar world the familiar furniture of meanings around you that changes to an extent that it becomes completely different and alienated like. For instance, that the furniture around you it could be you know literally a furniture, it could be a piece of chair, it could be a wooden desk, but it could also be more symbolic things.

Now, the way it is described the way it is experienced by the subject it generates a sense of alienation, it generates a sense of meaninglessness, it generates a sense of dissonance cognitive dissonance and that dissonance is important and that is what de-familiarization is all about right, it is a world which is defamiliarized before you. So, we have a machine gun over here which should be a very familiar object to someone like Marlow who has traveled so far so much so extensively. But, the way the machine gun appears, the way the ammunition appears over here you know it is so defamiliarizing, it is about purposelessness, is about meaninglessness, it is about alienation. So, it becomes the production of nothingness and likewise and by extension that becomes a production of defamiliarization and there is a dual category almost over here, these are interconnected categories ok.

So, there is a touch of insanity in the proceeding insanity madness, there is a degree of nothingness, madness, irrationality and you know this is a very important point because imperialism took pride in the fact that this is about the European man's rational enterprise, this is about the expansionist enterprise of enlightenment, rationalism etcetera, but Marlow is taking a look at the dark underbelly of imperialism. He is taking too close a look to know that this is you know rational, this is actually highly irrational.

And, the irrationality of Heart of Darkness, irrationality of imperialism is something which Heart of Darkness keeps foregrounding over and over again. And, that is something which is described which is reflected in the description, the lugubrious drollery in a sight. So, it is drollery, the drudgery, the laborious quality of the whole

enterprise and it just pops up again and then it you know keeps firing and then goes back to sleep and then wakes up and fires again into an empty, dead, dark continent, which does not respond to the fire at all.

And, this is what I meant by the whole idea of Sisyphean quality. It is like a purposeless quality. Sisyphean of course, is reference to the myth of Sisyphus who was consigned to keep pushing up a stone as most of you would know keep pushing up a stone on top of a hill and the moment the stone would reach at the top of the hill it would roll down and this is how Sisyphus was doomed to keep pushing it forever right. So, it becomes a symbol of you know existential purposelessness and this is what we have over here as well ok.

It was not dissipated by somebody on board assuring me earnestly there was a camp of natives, he called them enemies hidden out of sight somewhere. So, the whole point is you know it is still there because presumably there are some enemies somewhere, but no one quite can see them there are invisible enemies and invisibility is part of the meaninglessness, you know the whole pointlessness of places which you know supposedly are controlled without any inhabitants becomes very clear to Marlow.

And, then he goes on to say – We called at some more places with farcical names. You know the word farce is appears twice already in a very closed space of time and when a writer like Conrad who is so diligent, who is so careful with language, he is repeating a particular term repeating a particular word a particular adjective we need to pay some attention to it. Now, what is farcical, what is the quality of a farce? So, the relationship in farce and tragedy is important because tragedy has some grandeur to it, tragedy has some depth to it, tragedy has some a degree of you know profundity to it.

Farce is basically exhausted tragedy, farce is liquidated tragedy; tragedy which has been liquidated of profundity which has been exhausted of it and there is a subtly comic quality about farce. There is a dark comic quality about farce which can be morbid humor, which can be gallows humor, which is definitely grotesque humor and sometimes you know quite morbid in that sense as well, but definitely dark humor right. So, farce is a combination of tragedy and shallow comedy right, depthless comedy and he combined these two categories together and it produced farce. So, it is a very complex cognitive category farce.

So, when Marlow says that you know there are places with farcical names what he is actually telling us is he stopped seeing through the complete irrationality of imperialism where it is not really a tragic enterprise, it is a tragic it was a darkly comic enterprise because it is so irrational in quality, it is so meaningless in quality ok. So, we called it some more places with farcical names where the merry dance of death and trade goes on. I mean look at the lovely phrase dance of death; the merry dance of death and trade goes on.

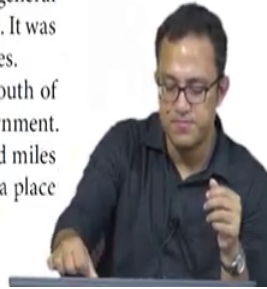
So, the dance macabre quality about these things because this all destruction happening over here, the people getting killed, the people getting exploited, there are lands getting ravished because of you know industrialization or imperialism. So, the dance of death which is again there is a degree of carnivalesque about it. So, it is like almost like destruction which is so absolutely destructive, that it is almost conic in quality, there is no there is nothing you can salvage out of it right.

So that destruction that death that goes hand in hand with trade. So, the quality of trade in imperialism it has a carnivalesque quality to it, it has a grotesque quality to it, it is so greedy that is grotesque in quality right. So, there is a cannibalistic grotesque quality about imperial trade which Marlow was emphasizing over here and Conrad of course, he is trying to project that as an image of imperialism there is a grotesque carnivalesque cannibalistic quality about trade imperial trade because it is never disconnected with death, it is never distanced from death. It is always about death; it is always about destructions about always about merry dance of death, the dance macabre as technically we would call it ok.

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and earthy atmosphere as of an overheated catacomb; all along the formless coast bordered by dangerous surf, as if Nature herself had tried to ward off intruders; in and out of rivers, streams of death in life, whose banks were rotting into mud, whose waters, thickened into slime, invaded the contorted mangroves, that seemed to writhe at us in the extremity of an impotent despair. Nowhere did we stop long enough to get a particularized impression, but the general sense of vague and oppressive wonder grew upon me. It was like a weary pilgrimage amongst hints for nightmares.

'It was upward of thirty days before I saw the mouth of the big river. We anchored off the seat of the government. But my work would not begin till some two hundred miles farther on. So as soon as I could I made a start for a place thirty miles higher up.



So, the merry dance of death and trade goes on and is still an earthly atmosphere as of an overheated catacomb. So, the whole idea of the tomb quality, the sepulcher quality is important over here. It is always about deadness, it is something sepulchral, something coffin-like in quality and a coffin-like quality it dramatizes the image of deadness, the intensity of deadness over here.

All along the formless coast bordered by dangerous surf, as if Nature herself had tried to ward off intruders; in and out of rivers, streams of death in life, whose banks were rotting into mud, whose waters, thickened into slime, invaded the contorted mangroves that seem to writhe at us in the extremity of an impotent despair. So, you know this particular passage again very dense, very difficult and full of very difficult words writhe, thickened with slime, rotting into mud, contorted mangroves. So, we find that what Marlow is trying to describe is a density of death over here.

And, it all ends with a very important phrase impotent despair. Now, what is impotent? Something which does not have any you know purpose, something which is just completely you know powerless in quality right. Impotent despair is a despair that you can do nothing about right; it is a despair that is completely exhausting in quality. There is no nothing to be salvaged from the despair, there is no action to be generated from that despair.

And, that is important thing over here and that is again connected to the whole idea the Sisyphean quality in Heart of Darkness about Marlow's experience in Heart of Darkness as someone who knows it, who sees it all, who sees imperialism as a dark destructive dangerous and greedy exploitive thing, but nothing can be done about it right. So, impotent despair becomes an absolute annihilation of agency so to say; is a complete you know decline and annihilation of agency, systematic annihilation of agency, the agency goes away from the whole idea of imperialism. So, once you are inside as an imperialist there is nothing you can do to salvage or redeem any pride, any glory, any heroism at all.

Nowhere did we stop long enough to get a particularized impression, but the general sense of vague and oppressive wonder grew upon me. Again, a very important phrase oppressive wonder, so, the whole idea of bewilderment, the whole idea of astonishment over here is not one of romanticized astonishment not one of romanticized you know wonder or fascination, but it is something very oppressive about it, something very hard and difficult and oppressive about this whole exercise over here and at the same time it is very fake.

So, do not quite know what is oppressing him and do not quite know what is bothering and torturing you, but at the same time that oppressive wonder grows in you organically. It sort of eats you up and this is what I mean when I say this is cannibalistic quality of imperialism. It eats you up as an activity as an existential activity. It was like a weary pilgrimage amongst hints of nightmares amongst hints for nightmares. So, you know it becomes a grotesque pilgrimage; it becomes a grotesque parody of the romantic quest for meaning, a romantic quest for the holy grail, for any kind of redemptive quality.

Because the more you travel in this particular experience more exhausted you get out of redemption. The more you realize there is it is completely impossible it is irredeemable to a large extent and that irredeemable quality grows upon you as you go as you travel further right. So, that becomes important part of experiencing it all you know the whole idea of imperialism ok.

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'I had my passage on a little sea-going steamer. Her captain was a Swede, and knowing me for a seaman, invited me on the bridge. He was a young man, lean, fair, and morose, with lanky hair and a shuffling gait. As we left the miserable little wharf, he tossed his head contemptuously at the shore. 'Been living there?' he asked. I said, 'Yes.' 'Fine lot these government chaps—are they not?' he went on, speaking English with great precision and considerable bitterness. 'It is funny what some people will do for a few francs a month. I wonder what becomes of that kind when it goes upcountry?' I said to him I expected to see that soon. 'So-o-o!' he exclaimed. He shuffled athwart, keeping one eye ahead vigilantly. 'Don't be too sure,' he continued. 'The other day I took up a man who hanged himself on the road. He was a



So, and then we have another character who is introduced over here, to Marlow a seaman a captain of a particular steamer who was a Swedish person and this is Marlow's experience with that person. Her captain was a Swede and knowing me for a seaman invited me on the bridge. He was a young man, lean, fair and morose; so again, the morose depressed the depressed quality is important.

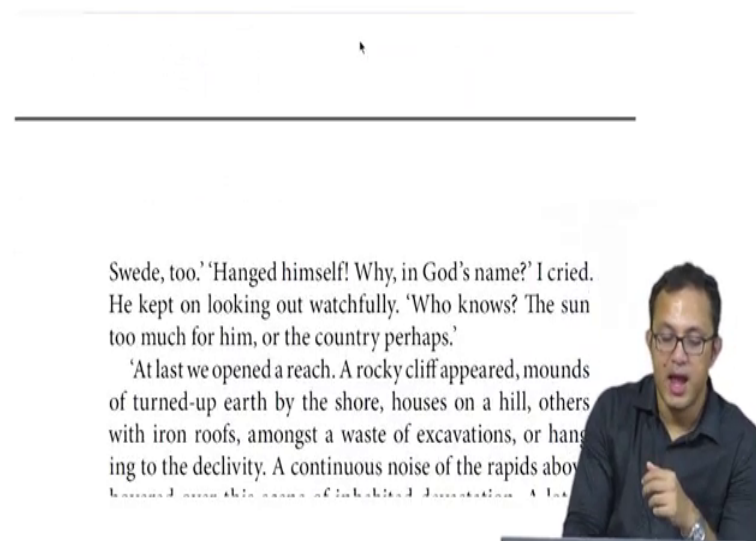
It is almost something melancholic about a whole experience over here and I use the word melancholic in a Freudian sense because melancholia is a special kind of sadness. Some of you would know that when Freud talks about melancholia and mourning together melancholia is that sadness which is generated or accompanied with a sense of the loss of the ego. You lose your sense of self esteem is that sadness which takes away your self esteem, it takes away an irredeemable quality that you have as an ego as a person as a subject.

So, melancholia is essentially about the exhausting away of the subject's worth or the subject's value to itself. So, you know it is a production of valuelessness, there is a production of worthlessness. So, melancholia is about the production of worthlessness which is accompanied by sadness. So, sadness and worthlessness put together is what melancholia is in a Freudian the classical Freudian sense and we have that sense of melancholia very palpably present here as well in Heart of Darkness.

Young man lean, fair and morose with lanky hair and shuffling gait – so, something very unhealthy, something very decadent, something very unhygienic about this particular person, about all the people in Heart of Darkness, something very sepulchral or macabre or death like about them.

As we left the miserable little wharf, he tossed his head contemptuously at the shore. Been living there? He asked, I said, Yes. Fine lot these government chaps – are they not? He went on, speaking English with great precision and considerable bitterness. It is funny what some people will do for a few francs a month. I wonder what becomes of that kind when it goes upcountry. I said to him I expected to see that soon. So-o-o, he exclaimed. He shuffled athwart, keeping one eye ahead vigilantly. Do not be too sure, he continued. The other day I took up a man who hanged himself on the road. He was a Swede too.

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Hanged himself! Why, in God's name? I cried. He kept on looking out watchfully. Who knows? The sun too much for him, or the country perhaps.

Now, I stop at this point today, but you know I spend some time with this passage. So, we have two white men you know comparing the horror stories over here. So, we have this Swedish person telling Marlow that if you go further up this country, if you go further up this Heart of Darkness quote unquote Heart of Darkness, you find that you go more insane that you do things you will experience things, believe in things which are



completely quote unquote irrational and that can make you mad, that can drive you to death and we have an example of someone who actually you know hung himself you know so, someone who killed himself presumably out of morbid despair.

Now, this is the reason why *Heart of Darkness* is such a topical novel today because we find that this kind of a wide experience of despair, meaninglessness, you know delusion or melancholia in the sense of worthlessness that you get out of sadness; it is something which you get a lot in Iraq war novels. So, for instance there is a large literature emerging out of the American Iraq war, so, if you look at the Iraq war novels the people who went the American soldiers who went to Iraq when they came back as very famous novel called the *Yellow Birds* by Kevin Powers I think.

If you read that novel it is about the PTSD veteran who came comes back from the Iraq war, and he does not quite know how to tell the story, he does not quite know how to situate his own subject apropos the horrors he has experienced. And, *Heart of Darkness* in that sense is one of the earliest novels about the horrors of the white man, who goes on a greedy mission, who goes on an exploitative mission he goes on his ravaging mission of imperialism.

And, in the process he gets completely consumed up. This is something cannibalistic about the whole enterprise which eats him up existentially. And, then we have all these white man talking to each other very depressed, very delusional you know almost mad some suicidal and essentially hollowed out and this is one image that I will stop at this lecture I will continue in the next lectures.

But, in the sense of hollowness in *Heart of Darkness* is something which is very important and that is something which you find in many Iraq war novels, American – Iraq war novels. When the white man, the white veterans come back from the Iraq war, the white soldiers come back from the Iraq war, they carry on they extend the sense of hollowness which is essentially an exhausted ego. The ego gets completely exhausted completely liquidated completely shut down in that sense.

And, interestingly enough when T S Eliot in one of his very famous poem called *Hollow Men* which is one of the greatest works in modernist literature, in modernist poetry we would not do that because we did fiction, we did novels and prose but, you know it is worthwhile reading it. But, the point is the point that I am trying to make is in that

particular poem the hollow men he begins with an epitaph and the epitaph is from Heart of Darkness which is, Mister Kurtz, he dead; the reference to mister Kurtz from Heart of Darkness.

So, Heart of Darkness Conrad's Heart of Darkness becomes the allegory of hollowness for modernism, it becomes an archetype of a hollowness and fiction for later modernist works. Someone like T S Eliot to quote it, to cite it, to refer to it as the ur-text so to say about hollowness is a very important thing. So, you know Heart of Darkness you know you find all this unnamed, melancholic characters, the melancholic white men that talk to each other, compare the horror stories, I mean show the scars to each other so to say.

They are very interestingly dialogic with some of the recent literature on Iraq some of the new recent literature on the Middle East written by you know people who either traveled or fought the wars or people who you know fictionalized it in a different kind of frame. But, essentially about melancholy about hollowness is about realizing that the mission the political mission whether it is a war against terrorism or imperialism whatever is essentially a greedy, exploitative, cannibalistic enterprise.

And, this awareness of cannibalism this knowledge of cannibalism is something which literally and existentially eats him up. As a result the emerges hollow people who either kill themselves, they commit suicide or get killed existentially in a sense that they come back permanently enervated, permanently exhausted, permanently paranoid and permanently living that horror in modern parlance we call them PTSD – Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. So, they are permanently PTSD veterans. So, this is what I mean when I say a lot of Iraq war literature deals with this kind of theme as well. So, I stop at this point today. We will continue with this on next lectures.

Thank you for your attention.