

Twentieth-Century Fiction
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Lecture – 11
Heart of Darkness – Part 6

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me for a perfectly shameless prevaricator. At last he got angry, and, to conceal a movement of furious annoyance, he yawned. I rose. Then I noticed a small sketch in oils, on a panel, representing a woman, draped and blindfolded, carrying a lighted torch. The background was sombre—almost black. The movement of the woman was stately, and the effect of the torchlight on the face was sinister.

'It arrested me, and he stood by civilly, holding an empty half-pint champagne bottle (medical comforts) with the candle stuck in it. To my question he said Mr. Kurtz had painted this—in this very station more than a year ago—while waiting for means to go to his trading post. 'Tell me, pray,' said I, 'who is this Mr. Kurtz?'

'The chief of the Inner Station,' he answered in a short tone, looking away. 'Much obliged,' I said, laughing. 'And you are the brickmaker of the Central Station. Every one knows that.' He was silent for a while. 'He is a prodigy,' he said at last. 'He is an emissary of pity and science and



So, hello and welcome to this NPTEL course entitled Twentieth Century Fiction we were looking at Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness. So, from this lecture, we will move on to certain selected passages which we would examine in some details, because I think we have discussed already we discussed at length the cultural context of a novel, the narrative politics in a novel to a large extent. So, we are now moving into certain sections which are important and relevant for us for the purpose of examining the novel more clearly and more complexly.

Now, today we are going to move to who is probably the most important character in the novel Colonel Kurtz, who never really appears on novel except as some kind of a ghostly presence and the ghostly quality, the spectral quality about Kurtz is actually very very important. He is a shadowy figure in Heart of Darkness, he is never really fleshed out as a character, but that is part of the centerlessness in Heart of Darkness that the most important character or rather the entire novel is about Kurtz is about finding Kurtz, but

he never appears in the proper sense of the world he just appears in a very very translucent manner and then he disappears.

So, he appears and then he dies very very quickly, but the entire novel is about him. So, one can look at Kurtz less as a character and more as a symptom in *Heart of Darkness*. So, he is a symptom of imperialism, he is what you know what imperialism does to you as a white person. So, he becomes an example of symbolic symptom of imperialism and the excesses of imperialisms. So, he you know he embodies the excesses of imperialism, he is someone who has become the monster of imperialism.

But we are told constantly that he is a powerful agent too. He was somehow someone who was trained by Europe someone who was engineered by the entire imperial machinery of Europe, and then sent off to control the colonies. So, he is essentially the machine gone wrong, the machine turning rogue, so he is like a rogue agent that is the speciality in spy cinema, so the rogue quality in Kurtz the fact that he turns against the institution that had created him is important, and again that is very relevant to some of the geopolitical tensions we have in the world today.

So, as I keep telling you *Heart of Darkness* is very relevant, and very topical and very resonant with some of the geopolitical issues we have in the world today in the Middle East issues, Iraq issues, foreign policies of the white western world not least USA. So, *Heart of Darkness* is about that the complexity, the complications, that come the human complications, the political complications that arise when you know territorialize non-white space, where you territorialize space through military machinery through imperial machinery etcetera right.

So, Kurtz is a it could be read as a symptom could be read as a symptom of excess, but he is very much a shadowy spectral character, he is specter in *Heart of Darkness*, he is a ghost in *Heart of Darkness*, never really appears, but this entire novel is about him. So, he is a centre in *Heart of Darkness* who is also not a center right.

So, the shadowy quality, the spectral quality of the center in *Heart of Darkness*, it contributes to the centerlessness for the entire novel you know embodies in his narrative politics. Now, interestingly the first time there is a mention of Kurtz, he is mentioned in a very indirect way all right. And the first allusion to Kurtz, the first reference to Kurtz in

Heart of Darkness is through a painting, something that he had painted some time ago that Marlow spots on the wall and then that is the first reference to Colonel Kurtz.

And then he says, and this should be on a screen, when Marlow says then I noticed a small sketch in oils, on a panel representing a woman, a draped and blindfolded, carrying a lighted torch. The background was somber – almost black. The movement of the woman was stately, and the effect of the torch light on the face was sinister. So, if you look at the adjectives interestingly you know sinister obviously, is what stands out as the end is something evil and dark about that face, but also stately and somber, almost black. So, it is lot of sepulchral spectral quality about this painting, and that spectrality in the painting anticipates this spectrality that is embodied by Kurtz eventually in the novel.

So, we see Kurtz first as through a representation made by him right, so that is an interesting way to represent something through another representation. So, the first piece of categorization about Kurtz in Heart of Darkness is through a painting, is focalized through an artwork that he had presumably drawn some time ago. So, the whole idea of you know drawing a woman carrying a lighted torch, but also being blindfolded, so that that has an ambivalence to it as well.

So, the lighted torch traditionally and so the typically symbolizes progress, enlightenment, knowledge, etcetera, but at the same time we also see that the woman who was carrying the torch is draped and blindfolded. So, there is a degree of blindness about that knowledge. And this is what I mean when I this is what I meant when I said at the very beginning of Heart of Darkness that enlightenment in Heart of Darkness is a negative enlightenment, the illumination is a negative illumination.

So, the only knowledge that you get in Heart of Darkness is that of you know non-illumination, instead of darkness right. So, the only knowledge is dark knowledge. So, the lighted torch becomes a symbol of knowledge, but at the same time the person embodying that knowledge is blindfolded. So, there is a degree blindness and darkness about the knowledge which is important for us to understand.

And like I said if you look at the adjectives closely, the movement was stately, and the effect of the torch light on her face was sinister. It is something almost cinematic about this particular image. If we look at the visual politics, there is a lot of light and half light that is played over here, and the photo play is important because the photo play generates

this this spectral sinister effect over here right. So, in that sense, this particular painting is very symbolic, because a – it represents Kurtz, and b – it represents entire ambivalence around imperialism. So, the whole mission of imperialism as is popularly consumed as being a civilizing mission has been an enlightening mission that very figure of enlightenment of civilization is blindfolded over here.

So, the blindness and the insight, they come together, and it creates a blindness of insight. So, the only insight that you get in Heart of Darkness is one of darkness, is one of blindness which is something which is represented by this figure who was ironically and appropriately, not ironically, appropriately sketched by Colonel Kurtz who is perhaps the most perfect example of the symptom of imperialism. What does imperialism do to you existentially the almost pathological quality of imperialism in a way that consumes you as person it consumes you existentially right.

So, we talked about the slightly cannibalistic quality of imperialism as well that it eats you up ok. So, the painting is important, it is a very very political painting as well as hope we have established by now. It arrested me, and he stood by civilly, holding an empty half-pint champagne bottle medical comforts with a candle stuck in it. To my question he said Mr. Kurtz had painted this – in this very station more than a year ago – while waiting for means to go to his trading post.

So, the first reference of Kurtz over here. And then you know Marlow says tell me pray, said I, who is this Mr. Kurtz? So, Marlow as you know Marlow keeps hearing about Kurtz all the time through different figures, but now the first real description of Kurtz appears in in Heart of Darkness over here.

So, we are told that Marlow was; obviously relaying the information to us. And the relay of information is important, because it sort of replicates to a some extent, the relay of information in colonial signposts where information would sort of come you know through telecommunication, so, telegrams, telephones you know through different kinds of signposts. So, that too had a relay system, they had sort of a conveyor belt relay system which is the way we consume information as well as readers in Heart of Darkness. So, tell me pray, said I, who is this mister Kurtz?

The chief of the Inner Station, he answered in a short tone, looking away. Much obliged, I said, laughing. And you are the brick maker of the central station. Everyone knows that.

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tone, looking away. 'Much obliged,' I said, laughing. 'And you are the brickmaker of the Central Station. Every one knows that.' He was silent for a while. 'He is a prodigy,' he said at last. 'He is an emissary of pity and science and progress, and devil knows what else. We want,' he began to declaim suddenly, 'for the guidance of the cause intrusted to us by Europe, so to speak, higher intelligence, wide sympathies, a singleness of purpose.' 'Who says that?' I asked. 'Lots of them,' he replied. 'Some even write that; and so HE comes here, a special being, as you ought to know.' 'Why ought I to know?' I interrupted, really surprised. He paid no attention. 'Yes. Today he is chief of the best station, next year he will be assistant-manager, two years more and ... but I dare-say you know what he will be in two years' time. You are of the new gang—the gang of virtue. The same people

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Now, before I move any further, I just want to spend a bit of time talking about and sort of unpacking this one sentence a chief of Inner Station. Now, literally and physically, the Inner Station would be the most innermost signposts of the empire and this is; obviously, the Belgian empire the Belgian colony in Congo, and Kurtz happens to be the controller or the master of the Inner Station, the inner most station is something which is inhabited and controlled by Kurtz. But we can also do a psychological reading of this, and there are lots of very complex and sophisticated and elegant psychoanalytic readings of Heart of Darkness which one very tempting reading out of that would be to look at it as the innermost subconscious of imperialisms.

So, if we look at the entire machinery of imperialism through a psychological structure, Kurtz inhabits the innermost psychological structure of imperialism which is the darkest structure, the most guilty structure, the most ambivalent structure, the most complex structure. So, the chief of the Inner station can be read in either way, it could be the physical reading the literal reading of the master of the innermost colonial station which controls the colonial machinery of Congo, and more temptingly and perhaps more psychologically it could also be the innermost subconscious that is inhabited by Kurtz right.

So, in that Freudian psychoanalytic reading Kurtz becomes the the id so to say of imperialism you know this id, ego, superego thing, and also he becomes the innermost

layer of that subconscious that is controlling imperialism. So, you know presumably he is the darkest point of imperialism. Yeah and you know Marlow, obviously, responds to this in a flippant way, and says and you are the brick maker of the Central Station. Everyone knows that. He was silent for a while. He is a prodigy he said at last. He is an emissary of pity and science and progress, and devil knows what else.

We want, he began to declaim suddenly, for the guidance of the cause entrusted to us by Europe, so to speak, higher intelligence, wide sympathies, a singleness of purpose right. So, the whole idea of Kurtz being I mean we have already seen he is a bit of painter as well, but then he is also described as being an emissary of science and progress. But then also notice the way in which this presumably positive epithet of series of epithets of you know very very positive epithets, pity science and progress, is also described, it also continued by this phrase and devil knows what else, which is obviously a very dark sinister kind of a way to describe something devil knows what else.

So, he is a prodigy. He is an enlightened person; he is a genius. He is an embodiment of pity and science and progress, but devil knows what else. So, you know science pity progress, are normally Christian qualities according to this you know Eurocentric enlightenment logic, but the whole allusion to the devil over here complicates that narrative to a certain extent. We want for the guidance of the cause entrusted to us by Europe, so to speak, higher intelligence, wide sympathies, a singleness of purpose. Who says that? I asked.

Lots of them, he replied. Some even write that; so HE comes here, a special being, and as you ought to know. Why ought I to know? I interrupted, really surprised. He paid no attention. Yes. Today he is a chief of the best station, next year he will be an assistant-manager, two years more and, but I dare-say you know what he will be in two year's time. You are the new gang – the gang of virtue.

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who sent him specially also recommended you. Oh, don't say no. I've my own eyes to trust.' Light dawned upon me. My dear aunt's influential acquaintances were producing an unexpected effect upon that young man. I nearly burst into a laugh. 'Do you read the Company's confidential correspondence?' I asked. He hadn't a word to say. It was great fun. 'When Mr. Kurtz,' I continued, severely, 'is General Manager, you won't have the opportunity.'

'He blew the candle out suddenly, and we went outside. The moon had risen. Black figures strolled about listlessly, pouring water on the glow, whence proceeded a sound of hissing; steam ascended in the moonlight, the beaten nigger groaned somewhere. 'What a row the brute makes!' said the indefatigable man with the moustaches, appearing near us. 'Serve him right. Transgression—punishment—bang! Pitiless, pitiless. That's the only way. This will prevent all conflagrations for the future. I was just telling the manager ...' He noticed my companion, and became crestfallen all at once. 'Nat is bad, but' he said, with a kind of exultant boast,



The same people who sent him specially also recommended you. Oh, do not say no. I have seen my own eyes to trust. So, and Marlow becomes part of the continuity of this narrative. So, he you know this person is telling him that the same people who sent Kurtz sent you. So, you are part of the virtue narrative of imperialism, right you are part of the value narrative, the value added narrative of imperialism which looks at imperialism as a noble value added virtuous mission ok.

Light dawned upon me. My aunt's, my dear aunt's influential acquaintances were producing an unexpected effect upon a young man. I nearly burst into a laugh. Do you read the Company's confidential correspondence? I asked. He hadn't a word to say. It was great fun. When Mr. Kurtz, I continued, severely, is a General Manager, you will not have the opportunity ok.

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the indefatigable man with the moustaches, appearing near us. 'Serve him right. Transgression—punishment—bang! Pitiless, pitiless. That's the only way. This will prevent all conflagrations for the future. I was just telling the manager ...' He noticed my companion, and became crestfallen all at once. 'Not in bed yet,' he said, with a kind of servile heartiness; 'it's so natural. Ha! Danger—agitation.' He vanished. I went on to the riverside, and the other followed me. I heard a scathing murmur at my ear, 'Heap of muffs—go to.' The pilgrims could be seen in knots gesticulating, discussing. Several had still their staves in their hands. I verily believe they took these sticks to bed with them. Beyond the fence the forest stood up spectrally in the moonlight, and through that dim stir, through the faint sounds of that lamentable courtyard, the silence of the land went home to one's very heart—its mystery, its greatness, the amazing reality of its

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Now, the first you know the whole idea of Kurtz being the emissary of Europe or the emissary of European enlightenment and imperialism is interesting over here. Because when we get to see Kurtz, when we get closer to Kurtz, we never get to see him, but we get closer and closer to Kurtz, and obviously, it is very cinematic the whole thing it is almost like Marlow's moving in with a movie camera, and then describing everything around us without knowing what it is. So, it is like movie camera recording everything without interpreting anything, because he is a very bad interpreter as we have seen already, he is a very unreliable narrator.

He does not quite know what is happening around him. He just records everything and relays it back to us. So, in that sense Heart of Darkness is a really cinematic narrative. And as I mentioned to you before in one of our earlier lectures about this text that there is lot of films made on Heart of Darkness, the most famous among which will be Francis Ford Coppola's apocalypse now which is about the Vietnam War. And you know this American agent with who goes rogue the best American agent played in the film by Marlon Brando, he is called Kurtz, and the novelist in that film as well.

And he is the person who is assassinated in the end, because he becomes a problem for the entire machinery which had created him in the first place historically. And again, the whole idea of the white imperial machinery are creating an agent who then turns rogue, who then becomes a problem for that machinery, and has to be you know disposed off -

that is a very familiar narrative today as well in different geopolitical settings that we see today.

So, you know the whole politics of terrorism, the whole politics of geopolitical territorialization it often has these kind of markers you know the whole idea of creating an agent the best agent who was trained by the white imperialism machinery, and then turns against the machinery, and then becomes the problem classified as the terrorist etcetera.

So, in that sense, *Heart of Darkness*, it is one of the early it seems to anticipate some of the current geopolitical tensions that we experience today in an increasing globalized world ok.

Now, ah let us move on, and see you know take a look at the entire atmosphere in *Heart of Darkness* and how the entire atmosphere is described to us you know in very you know visceral terms. And now we see this whole idea of the fence, beyond the fence this should be on the screen. Beyond the fence the forest stood up spectrally in the moonlight, and through that dim stir, through the faint sounds of that lamentable courtyard, the silence of the land went home to one's a very heart – its mystery, its greatness.

So, again look at this spectrality, the word spectral is actually given to us over here, the ghostly quality you know and by spectral obviously, what is meant is an ambivalent location between the real and the unreal. So, spectrality somewhere in between it is a liminal landscape between the real and the unreal. So, again even the landscape is liminal in quality, even the landscape is you know ambivalent in quality, and an ambivalence is something which is atmospheric over here ok. Its mystery, its greatness, the amazing reality of its concealed life.

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concealed life. The hurt nigger moaned feebly somewhere near by, and then fetched a deep sigh that made me mend my pace away from there. I felt a hand introducing itself under my arm. 'My dear sir,' said the fellow, 'I don't want to be misunderstood, and especially by you, who will see Mr. Kurtz long before I can have that pleasure. I wouldn't like him to get a false idea of my disposition....'

'I let him run on, this papier-mache Mephistopheles, and it seemed to me that if I tried I could poke my forefinger through him, and would find nothing inside but a little loose dirt, maybe. He, don't you see, had been planning to be assistant-manager by and by under the present man, and I could see that the coming of that Kurtz had upset them both not a little. He talked precipitately, and I did not try to stop him. I had my shoulders against the wreck of my steamer, hauled up on the slope like a carcass of some big river animal. The smell of mud, of primeval mud, by Jove! was in my nostrils, the high stillness of primeval forest was before my eyes: there were chinv natches on the black creek



The hurt nigger moaned feebly somewhere nearby. So, again the word nigger appears in Heart of Darkness is obviously, a banned word today. And this is what I mean when I said in the beginning of this novel that the reason why this is such an important relevant novel to us today is perhaps precisely because of its political incorrectness. It does not want to conceal, its political incorrectness.

So, it is very politically incorrect, it is quite racist with its descriptions of the nonwhite person, almost no nonwhite person speaks in Heart of Darkness even the landscape is exoticized, and then everything is focalized through a white man's lens through a white man's perspective, all that is there. But that actually contributes to the ambivalence generated by Heart of Darkness, it does not glamorize imperialism, it does not make imperialism to heroic enterprise.

It does ask some very deep and dark questions about the nature and quality of imperialism as a machinery; and it takes away the entire glamour, the noble glamour or the virtual glamour out of imperialism, and experiences that as a very exploitative machinery, as an exploitative enterprise you know just looks at it the way it really is historically ok.

So, in the whole idea of this person preparing Marlow for Kurtz is interesting because Kurtz as I mentioned never really appears in Heart of Darkness. He is talked about all the time, he is very much a third person presence, and the person talked about and that

actually informs the spectrality he never it appears directly. Now, interestingly Marlow describes this particular person as some kind of an accountant that he is talking to him. I let him run on, this papier-mache Mephistopheles something like a paper man, something mannequinish about his person. And this mannequin like quality about this person's is important. It seemed to me that if tried I could poke my forefinger through him, and would find nothing inside but a little loose dirt maybe ok.

And this is if you remember the point in which we stopped in the last lecture, we talked about the hollowness in Heart of Darkness, you know the centerlessness of Heart of Darkness, is part of the hollowness. And that hollowness informs even the characters, so you know this particular person you know this accountant person, he goes on and relentlessly talking about Kurtz and then Marlow has a feeling. That if I poke my finger into his body, he will just crumble and fall, because there is no center holding him.

And again that is part of centerlessness in Heart of Darkness that we see all the time nothing but a little loose dirt maybe. He, do not you see, had been planning to be assistant-manager by and under this present man, and I could see that coming that the coming of that Kurtz had upset him both not a little.

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loose dirt, maybe. He, don't you see, had been planning to be assistant-manager by and by under the present man, and I could see that the coming of that Kurtz had upset them both not a little. He talked precipitately, and I did not try to stop him. I had my shoulders against the wreck of my steamer, hauled up on the slope like a carcass of some big river animal. The smell of mud, of primeval mud, by Jove! was in my nostrils, the high stillness of primeval forest was before my eyes; there were shiny patches on the black creek. The moon had spread over everything a thin layer of silver— over the rank grass, over the mud, upon the wall of matted vegetation standing higher than the wall of a temple, over the great river I could see through a sombre gap glittering, glittering, as it flowed broadly by without a murmur. All this was great, expectant, mute, while the man jabbered about himself. I wondered whether the stillness on the face of the immensity looking at us two were meant as an appeal or as a menace. What were we who had strayed in here? Could we handle that dumb thing, or would it handle us?



He talked precipitately, and I did not try to stop him. I had my shoulders against the wreck of my steamer, hauled up on a slope like a carcass of some big river animal. The smell of mud, of primeval mud, by Jove was in my nostrils, the still the high stillness of

the primeval forest was before my eyes; there were shiny patches on the black creek. So, again look at the immobility, the immutable quality of the forest around Marlow. And again this atmospheric ambivalence about the forest, he does not quite know what things are he cannot quite create a cognitive landscape around him. So, it is like a non-cognitive, a precognitive landscape run Marlow, he doesn't quite know what the things are right.

And the river interestingly is described in a very mystical terms in very psychological terms. So, the landscape in Heart of Darkness is very obviously, is very exoticized is entirely done through white man's eyes, it takes away the reality of the Congo landscape, it takes away the reality of the African landscape. But at the same time there is a degree of psychologization about this landscape, and this law of psychological investment in this landscape which makes it more mystical or cryptic cognitively cryptic you know to a large extent ok.

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I felt how big, how confoundedly big, was that thing that couldn't talk, and perhaps was deaf as well. What was in there? I could see a little ivory coming out from there, and I had heard Mr. Kurtz was in there. I had heard enough about it, too— God knows! Yet somehow it didn't bring any image with it— no more than if I had been told an angel or a fiend was in there. I believed it in the same way one of you might believe there are inhabitants in the planet Mars. I knew once a Scotch sailmaker who was certain, dead sure, there were people in Mars. If you asked him for some idea how they looked and behaved, he would get shy and mutter something about 'walking on all-fours.' If you as much as smiled, he would—though a man of sixty— offer to fight you. I would not have gone so far as to fight for Kurtz, but I went for him near enough to a lie. You know I hate, detest, and can't bear a lie, not because I am straighter than the rest of us, but simply because it appalls me. There is a taint of death, a flavour of mortality in lies— which is exactly



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you. I would not have gone so far as to fight for Kurtz, but I went for him near enough to a lie. You know I hate, detest, and can't bear a lie, not because I am straighter than the rest of us, but simply because it appalls me. There is a taint of death, a flavour of mortality in lies— which is exactly what I hate and detest in the world— what I want to forget. It makes me miserable and sick, like biting something rotten would do. Temperament, I suppose. Well, I went near enough to it by letting the young fool there believe anything he liked to imagine as to my influence in Europe. I became in an instant as much of a pretence as the rest of the bewitched pilgrims. This simply because I had a notion it somehow would be of help to that Kurtz whom at the time I did not see—you understand. He was just a word for me. I did not see the man in the name any more than you do. Do you see him? Do you see the story? Do you see anything?

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So, and then he moves on and this particular passage which we will see at the moment, he talks about Kurtz all the time. And then this degree of frustration about Marlow is well in terms of grappling with who Kurtz is right, and that frustration is spilled over outside the narrative frame as well, in the sense that it comes to us as well that we as readers too are getting frustrated, we want to know, we want to have more information on Kurtz; we want to have more centered information on Kurtz. We do not get that. And among other things Heart of Darkness is essentially about the absence of information, is about the annihilation of information, and that is a very important thing because the entire machinery of imperialism relied on information right.

So, it was an informative machinery, it was an information economy which had to be generated in order that for imperialism to flourish and prosper. But then this entire annihilation of information, entire crisis of information, is part of the crisis of imperialism in Heart of Darkness. So, we do not get any information at all. Even as readers we keep looking at we keep looking at Marlow to supply us more data about Kurtz and no data comes.

And this is what he says over here. I had a notion it somehow would be of help to that Kurtz whom at that time I did not see – you understand. He was just a word for me. So, Kurtz was just a word for me that is what Marlow says. I did not see the man in the name any more than you do. Do you see him? Do you see the story? Do you see anything?

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It seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream—making a vain attempt, because no relation of a dream can convey the dream-sensation, that commingling of absurdity, surprise, and bewilderment in a tremor of struggling revolt, that notion of being captured by the incredible which is of the very essence of dreams....'

He was silent for a while.

'... No, it is impossible; it is impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one's existence—that which makes its truth, its meaning—its subtle and penetrating essence. It is impossible. We live, as we dream—alone. ...'

He paused again as if reflecting, then added:

'Of course in this you fellows see more than I could then. You see me, whom you know. ...'

It had become so pitch dark that we listeners could hardly see one another. For a long time already he sitting apart



It seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream – making a vain attempt, because no relation of a dream can convey the dream-sensation, that commingling of absurdity, surprise, and bewilderment in the tremor of a struggling revolt, that notion of being captured by the incredible which is of the very essence of dreams.

So, and then he goes on, and says he was silent for a while. No, it is impossible; it was impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one's existence – that which makes it makes its truth, its meaning – its subtle and penetrating essence. It is impossible. We live, as we dream – alone.

So, I stop at this point today, but I'll just go back and unpack this a bit. And just to give you a reference if you want a more complex understanding of what is happening here, and this might be beyond the scope of this particular course. But if you are interested I have a paper a published paper in Heart of Darkness, if you Google me up, it will appear and you can download it for free. It is actually called, Do you see the story?

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I felt how big, how confoundedly big, was that thing that couldn't talk, and perhaps was deaf as well. What was in there? I could see a little ivory coming out from there, and I had heard Mr. Kurtz was in there. I had heard enough about it, too— God knows! Yet somehow it didn't bring any image with it— no more than if I had been told an angel or a fiend was in there. I believed it in the same way one of you might believe there are inhabitants in the planet Mars. I knew once a Scotch sailmaker who was certain, dead sure, there were people in Mars. If you asked him for some idea how they looked and behaved, he would get shy and mutter something about 'walking on all-fours.' If you as much as smiled, he would—though a man of sixty— offer to fight you. I would not have gone so far as to fight for Kurtz, but I went for him near enough to a lie. You know I hate, detest,

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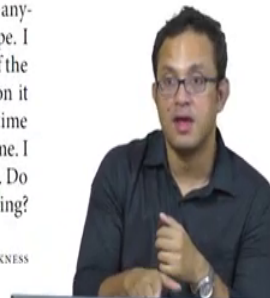


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HEART OF DARKNESS



So, I take that title by quoting Marlow which is from the previous page, you know this, Do you see the story? Do you see anything? You know that last line of this page on your screen now. So, if you just type my name Avishek Parui in Google and Heart of Darkness, this should show up. And in that paper I argue that the entire novel Heart of Darkness is about narrative crisis, we just talked about information crisis, there is no information at all available. But it is also about narrative crisis; Marlow does not quite know how to put his experience into a story, and that narrative crisis almost becomes

medical condition in *Heart of Darkness*, the fact that I cannot tell you the story, I cannot tell you what happened to me in Congo.

I have experienced it, it affected me deeply, it impacted me deeply existentially changed me forever. But when I have come back to tell the story, I cannot tell you the story, because I cannot put that experience into a narrative. And his inability to place experience into a narrative is part of the crisis in *Heart of Darkness*, is part of the information crisis that we see is in as well. We do not have enough information to generate a narrative out of this experience.

So, we can just experience it, we can absorb the experience, we can consume the experience, but we cannot convert that into a narrative in *Heart of Darkness* that is part of the problems. So, if you want to read more about this in more complex cognitive theoretical terms, you can look it up, you can look up my paper, just type, just go to Google, type my name Avishek Parui and write *Heart of Darkness*, it should show up its title, *Do you see the Story?* And I think in the title paper is existential and cognitive crisis in *Heart of Darkness*. And still if you do not find it, you can write in the forum, and my TAs can get back to you, and we can upload it in the forum if need be, but it should be available online, you can download it. I have made it free everyone to access it ok.

So, this bit when he is and this is almost like a frustrating agonized articulation by Marlow when he sort of admits that it seems to me, I am telling you a dream, it seems to me that you know you are not getting you are not getting what I am telling you, I cannot put that into narrative. It is impossible to put my story into a narrative, put my experience into a story sorry, and then he acknowledges it. So, this entire admission of inadequacy, the entire acknowledgement of inadequacy something which is very important in *Heart of Darkness*.

So, in that sense it is, it is a very modernist novel, it is about stream of consciousness, it is about the mind is everything is about the mind, the landscape becomes a mindscape, etcetera, etcetera. But also in many senses it is also one of the earlier postmodernist novels, because it gives you a very good example of unreliable narration, and the unreliability is something which is struggled with in *Heart of Darkness*.

That Marlow himself knows that he as a narrator is very unreliable and very inadequate, but the only difference between this novel and let us say a Salman Rushdie novel, let us

say *Midnight's Children* which too has an unreliable narrative by the way. The only difference is attitudinal there is a difference in attitude. So, in *Heart of Darkness* Marlow seems to mourn the fact that he cannot tell the story. He seems to mourn the fact that he is an unreliable narrator there is a degree of lament and mourning that takes place along with the admission of unreliability.

But when we come to *Midnight's Children* when it comes to someone like Saleem Sinai which is create which is a character created by Salman Rushdie. In Salman Rushdie's novel *Midnight's Children* that unreliability is celebrated, it is not lamented, it is celebrated. So, that centerlessness which we see in *Heart of Darkness* which is a problem which is a crisis in *Heart of Darkness* that becomes a privilege in *Midnight's Children*. And that is the only difference between the classic post modernist texts like *Midnight's Children*, and an anticipating post modernist text and anticipatory post modernist text such as *Heart of Darkness*.

So, the attitudinal difference is what makes you know the two novels different you know despite the structural similarities and functional similarities in the narrative ok. So, he is admitting over here, the absurdity of the story. And he is telling you he is telling the readers as well as the listeners over here. It seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream, making a vain attempt, it is like a Sisyphean effort, no matter how hard I try, I cannot tell you what exactly took place, what exactly I experienced in *Heart of Darkness*, because no relation of a dream can convey the dream sensation.

So, this whole inability to convert a sensation into a narrative is what is admitted over here that commingling of absurdity, surprise, and bewilderment in a tremor of struggling revolt, that notion of being captured by the incredible which is at a very essence of dream. So, it is a combination of absurdity, surprise, bewilderment. So, how can you put that commingling, how can you put that entanglement into a logical realist narrative right.

So, again among other things, *Heart of Darkness* is also a novel about the crisis of classic realism as a narrative style right. So, it is almost like telling you classic realism is breaking up as a narrative style, and we need a new style to tell stories ok. So, in that sense it is quite metafictional as well. So, here is a classic realist novel about the crisis of classic realism that it has a narrative technique, it is inadequate to tell stories about

dreams, about psychological situations, which have to account for absurdity, and bewilderment.

And then he ends by saying it is impossible. So, this is an admission of failure, it is impossible. It is impossible to convey the live sensation of an any given epoch of one's existence – that which makes its truth, its meaning – its subtle and penetrating essence. It is impossible. We live, as we dream – alone right. So, again you know this is about the alienation of the storyteller, the loneliness of the storyteller, and Heart of Darkness in a sense is about the loneliness of the storyteller.

So, he comes back as a storyteller you know he wants to tell a story of what happened to him in Congo, his experience of suffering his bewilderment, his absurdity that he consumed, but he cannot put that into a narrative and that becomes part of the narrative problem, but also it almost becomes an existential problem. So, again look at the way in which storytelling and existential locations are you know entangled with each other in Heart of Darkness. So, I stop at this point today, and move on to a different passage in lectures to come.

Thank you for your attention.