

Twentieth-Century Fiction
Prof. Avishek Parui
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Madras

Lecture - 14
Heart of Darkness - Part 9

(Refer Slide Time: 00:12)

mess of rust, filings, nuts, bolts, spanners, hammers, ratchet-drills—things I abominate, because I don't get on with them. I tended the little forge we fortunately had aboard; I toiled wearily in a wretched scrap-heap—unless I had the shakes too bad to stand.

'One evening coming in with a candle I was startled to hear him say a little tremulously, 'I am lying here in the dark waiting for death.' The light was within a foot of his eyes. I forced myself to murmur, 'Oh, nonsense!' and stood over him as if transfixed.

'Anything approaching the change that came over his features I have never seen before, and hope never to see again. Oh, I wasn't touched. I was fascinated. It was as though a veil had been rent. I saw on that ivory face the expression of sombre pride, of ruthless power, of craven terror—of an intense and hopeless despair. Did he live his life again in every detail of desire, temptation, and surrender during that supreme moment of complete knowledge? He cried in a whisper at some image, at some vision—he cried out twice, a cry that was no more than a breath: I

'The horror! The horror!'

'I blew the candle out and left the cabin. The pilgrims were dining in the mess-room, and I took my place opposite



So, hello and welcome to this NPTEL course entitled Twentieth Century Fiction, where we were looking at Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness. So, today will be the last lecture on this particular text and we look at two sections and compare and contrast the two sections in terms of how that informed the larger narrative that we talked about in the text the narrative of imperialism, exploitation, human greed and also alienation, commodification, and alienation the two symptoms which emerge out of merciless capitalism and merciless imperialism which is a context in this particular story, which is one of Belgian ivory imperialism in Congo as you know.

So, we are just looking at the section where Kurtz dies in Heart of Darkness. So, that section needs to be said in some detail in terms of what Kurtz says before he dies and what could that symbolically signify. Because you know a large part of this novel is about symbolic signification. There are not many literal things in this novel.

So, we are not really looking for a story over here, we are looking for symptoms, we are looking for psychological conditions, we are looking for emotional conditions. So, as a

result of which those of you who have read the entire novel would know it is a very difficult novel to read, it slows you down as a reader, it decelerates you, it defamiliarizes you. And as you mentioned already this idea of deceleration and defamiliarization are very deliberate narrated techniques used by Joseph Conrad in terms of looking at the cognitive condition which *Heart of Darkness* dramatizes, ok.

So, it is not really telling you a story in that sense it is an anti-story, it is an anti-novel. And a large part of Marlow's anxiety as a narrator is because he cannot put his experience into a story and he says that over and over again that it is impossible to tell to convert my experience into a narrative which would be meaningful to a European audience and that lack of meaningfulness, the slight absurdity, the danger of absurdity is something which lurks in the story all the time.

Now, let us look at Kurtz's dying scene, the scene in *Heart of Darkness* where Kurtz dies and what does he say right before he dies, in that one little line. It is sort of packed with lot of meanings and which is something which is which keeps coming up over and over again, in any reading of *Heart of Darkness* and also the different adaptations in *Heart of Darkness* as we have seen, ok.

So, and then this is where Marlow is talking about Kurtz and entire novel of course, is focalized through Marlow. So, we see the entire experience as focalized through Marlow's brain. Marlow is prism, Marlow is camera, the movie camera through which we see the story unfold in *Heart of Darkness*. So, this is what he says and this should be on your screen.

I saw on that ivory face the expression of somber pride of ruthless power of craven terror of an intense and hopeless despair. Did he live his life again in every detail of desire temptation and surrender during the supreme moment of complete knowledge? So, look at the contrast there is a series of contrasts going on over here. So, it has got power, it has got terror, it has got pride, all put together and it has also got hopeless despair. So, in that sense *Heart of Darkness* what it does to Kurtz is that it him them with power and in the process, it makes him hollow. So, the filling in of power is also a process of making you know hollow it is also process for liquidation of exhaustion, right.

So, power over here becomes very deceptive instrument, a very deceptive category over here which Kurtz embodies, it is a very paradoxical category. So, he becomes powerful,

but at the same time he is liquidated by power. His existential self-goes completely liquidated or you know is completely exhausted with the entire arrival invasion of power, ok.

So, did he live his life again in every detail of desire temptation and surrender during the supreme moment of complete knowledge? So, this entire knowledge the complete knowledge of imperialism the complete knowledge of his own self-as had not been consumed by imperialism is that supreme moment that the Kurtz embodies.

He cried in a whisper at some image, at some vision - he cried out twice, a cry there was no more than a breadth. And what was the cry? The horror, the horror. Now, that is a very often quoted line from Heart of Darkness, the horror the horror. And what does Kurtz mean by this? What does Kurtz signify when he says these things the horror the horror is obviously, the horror of imperialism as seen by someone who becomes the instrument of imperialism. Kurtz of course, is a perfect instrument of imperialism, but at the same time he becomes a threat because he becomes too perfect.

So, he completely appropriates and internalizes imperialism to the extent that he becomes ivory and you find how the ivory image is used over and over again to categorize Kurtz, right. So, he becomes a tool, he becomes a commodity, he becomes the instrument, he becomes the material that is signifier of imperialism over here, ok.

So, the image the particular line the horror the horror, becomes a moment of self-acknowledgement. He is acknowledging his own hollowness. He is acknowledging his own surrender to the power of imperialism, and he uses the word surrender quite ironically because he notionally is a powerful man, theoretically he is a white imperialist. He is a all powerful figure, but what he what he realizes through becoming powerful to the process of becoming powerful is that this process of power is actually something which actually annihilates him, something which consumes him, right.

So, when you consume power it consumes you back and that is the horror that Kurtz is talking about over here, the horror of hollowness, the horror of understanding, that entire life that he spent as a human being has been at a service of you know process of commodification, a process of exploitation, a process of merciless exploitation. And that is the image of horror. That is knowledge of horror that Kurtz is crying out over here.

So, interestingly *Heart of Darkness* is about enlightenment, but the enlightenment is one not of illumination is one of darkness. So, you get the knowledge of your darkness, you got the knowledge of your nothingness to a certain extent, right. And that paradoxically is what gives you the only redeemable meaning, about the life that you achieve actually know that you are nothing, that you are consumed by nothingness that becomes the only this sole redeeming figure in Kurtz.

The fact that he ends up actually knowing the horror of imperialism, he does not become a fool, he does not really live a life of a fool, he wakes up and realizes what is done is that of an act of horror because it is become an act of exploitation, but also one of self-consumption.

So, it has this sort of quasi cannibalistic quality imperialism in *Heart of Darkness*. It cannibalizes Kurtz, it makes him eat himself up, existentially and it also materially, so he becomes a lean eaten out man. So, there is this image of having been eaten out having been annihilated by power and that becomes the signifier of horror over here the fact of the knowledge of exploitation and knowledge of nothing less, knowledge of annihilation, self- annihilation that is what he cries out twice, the horror the horror.

I blew the candle and candle out and left the cabins. So, again it is very cinematic. So, if you look at the visual narrative in *Heart of Darkness*. It is very cinematic in quality. So, the Kurtz says it is the horror the horror and then he dies, that's his dying word and then immediately after Marlow blows the candle out and leaves the cabin.

(Refer Slide Time: 07:17)



the manager, who lifted his eyes to give me a questioning glance, which I successfully ignored. He leaned back, serene, with that peculiar smile of his sealing the unexpressed depths of his meanness. A continuous shower of small flies streamed upon the lamp, upon the cloth, upon our hands and faces. Suddenly the manager's boy put his insolent black head in the doorway, and said in a tone of scathing contempt:

'Mistah Kurtz—he dead.'

'All the pilgrims rushed out to see. I remained, and went on with my dinner. I believe I was considered brutally callous. However, I did not eat much. There was a lamp in there—light, don't you know—and outside it was so beastly, beastly dark. I went no more near the remarkable man who had pronounced a judgment upon the adventures of his soul on this earth. The voice was gone. What else had been there? But I am of course aware that next day the pilgrims buried something in a muddy hole.

'And then they very nearly buried me.

'However, as you see, I did not go to join Kurtz there and then. I did not. I remained to dream the nightmare out to the end, and to show my loyalty to Kurtz once more.



The pilgrims were dining in the mess room and I took my place opposite the manager who lifted his eyes to give me a questioning glance, which I successfully ignored. He leaned back, serene, with that peculiar smile of his sealing the unexpressed depth of his meanness. A continuous shower of small flies streamed upon the lamp, upon the cloth, upon our hands and faces. Suddenly, the manager's boy put his insolent black head in the doorway and said in a tone of scathing contempt. Mistah Kurtz, he dead.

Now, this particular line again is very loaded it is the only time a non-European speaks in Heart of Darkness you know an African speaks in Heart of Darkness. And; obviously, he speaks in very broken and stilted English, Mistah Kurtz, he dead. There is no verb there is no sense of sophistication. It is just conveying an image, it is conveying a message in very broken English and that is part of the a very racist rhetoric used by Marlow and of course, by Conrad in the context of his times to talk about the Africans and how the African appropriates English to convey a message.

So, Kurtz's just dying report comes to them through this manager's boy, you know who just puts his insolent black head. So, again if you look at the adjective insolent black head very racially loaded it's very racist, by modern standards the black head it's just an object who comes convey an image, convey a message that's it, there's not a degree of humanization, there is no degree of characterization given to that person. He just

becomes a very convenient and effective messenger an African messenger who comes and delivers a broken message with his insolent black head.

So, the degree of objectification and reduction is very important for us to understand. And of course, objectification or reification is a process that operates through reductions that is reduces certain things, as a very metonymic process where the entire body, the entire human being is converted into body and then entire body is converted into a small image. In this case it's an image of the head, the insolent black head who comes in and delivers the message and goes away, ok. So, that is the entire image of Kurtz dying.

And as you can see we have discussed already there is something very spectral about Kurtz, a very shady, very ghostly, very spectral about Kurtz it does not really very get fully fleshed out as a person we do not quite know the entire background of Kurtz we have very metonymic information about him. The father is half German, half Russian and the entire Europe went in the making of Kurtz which is to say he has becomes the European man, the European imperialist.

So, he is cracking up, he is going native, you know his degeneration into something which is you know a threat to the empire becomes a very dangerous degeneration because it shows that even the best of Europe, even the best European mind, even the finest specimen of European masculinity can become degenerate in the African wildness, right.

So, the African wilderness of course is very exotic, is very essentialized over here and is obviously, feminized. It is something which consumes the perfect white man, the perfect logical white man, even he is not you know impregnable against this kind of a seduction of the African wilderness, right. So, the entire rhetoric in Heart of Darkness becomes very racist in quality, it becomes very racially inflected because we have all the series of Africans who are completely dehumanized and only person who speaks is the person who comes in and points his insolent head and just delivers Mistah Kurtz he dead, right.

So, you know the whole idea of the African being reduced to a certain image a certain stereotype, a certain racist stereotype which is rampant in Heart of Darkness.

Now, the reason why I have a slight reservation in calling Heart of Darkness an out and out racist novel is that it is actually very ambivalent towards imperialism, right. So, it

does not really glorify imperialism at all and not just that it does not really glorify the white man. So, the white man in *Heart of Darkness* is someone who is a bit of an idiot he does not quite know what is happening, he is completely confused about you know what is around him politically cognitively. He just becomes an embodiment of confusion.

And you know he becomes an unknown, he becomes very small instrument in the entire machinery of imperialism, white imperialism. So, Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* is hardly a hero and Kurtz of course, is more of a hero, but then he becomes, the antihero in that sense because he becomes a threat, he becomes a danger, he becomes a degenerate in *Heart of Darkness* is something which is you know dramatized over and over again.

Now, the next scene which I am going to jump cut into in *Heart of Darkness* is the final scene where Marlow comes back to Belgium and goes to Kurtz's intended the fiancé of course. And interestingly if we take a look at the two female figures in *Heart of Darkness* Kurtz's mistress in Africa who is exotic, who is you know excessive, exotic and who is very bodied.

So, the entire characterization of the Kurtz's intended mistress in Africa is used through bodily markers ah you know is very very fleshy and mutable and hysteric. And in all these racist sexist stereotypes which are used she is hype she is hyper sexualized in her characterization in complete contrast to which we have the very very somber magnificent and very very withdrawn female figure of Kurtz's intended or fiancé who is obviously, the white woman ah who is very elegant who is mourning Kurtz's death using a proper mourning costumes. So, she comes dressed up as a mourner. She is very elegant and she has got all these very very stereotypically white elegant female markers which he used to characterize her.

Now, it actually gets more complex than that it does not really stay at the level of this blunt binary we will see in a moment how Conrad actually makes him more complex because when Marlow comes back to Belgium he is expected to deliver a report a posthumous report about Kurtz and the only report that he can deliver is that Kurtz died as the hero Kurtz died as a white hero, as a white man, who is very glorious in his quality and that is the only message that he can deliver to Kurtz's intended.

So, the point is he cannot tell Kurtz's intended what really transpired what really happened in African wilderness that Kurtz became degenerate that Kurtz became you

know a merciless mercenary you know who turned his back to the empire he was actually become a problem to the empire and who had to be essentially you know exterminated.

So, he cannot tell that report, he cannot give the authentic report to the European insider and interestingly the European insider happens to be Kurtz's intended the female figure. So, it actually becomes a broader narrative. What it actually shows us is that when the white man comes back from the you know the site of conflict he cannot deliver the authentic report, he cannot deliver the truthful report, he has to lie, he has to conform to the consumed narrative of glorification, civilization, heroism, etcetera.

And if you take a look at that little narrative it is something which is very correct geopolitically given the current tensions we have in a world today where you know when soldiers, for instance come back from certain sites of geopolitical conflict whether it is the middle east or the parts of the world, they are not expected, they are not allowed to actually tell what really transpired which is a horror of the world, the horror of exploitation, the horror of merciless exploitation.

So, in that sense the entire image of the soldier is one of heroism, is one of self-sacrifice, is one of commitment towards a greater goal whether the greater goal of fighting terrorism the greater goal is establishing in civilization etcetera. But the point is any site of conflict which has soldiers, which has human beings in it you know it also comes with a set of constraints, in the sense that soldiers cannot come back and tell what really happened. We can think of situations even closer to home where soldiers were sent back from the enemy camps they just become a symbolic instrument to goad on a particular narrative. So, a soldier cannot really speak, the soldiers are not allowed not given the agency to speak out, what really transpired to really tell what really transpired in that particular setting.

So, Marlow in that sense becomes one of the earliest figures in fiction of the man who comes back from the site of conflict, but cannot really tell what happened, what cannot really tell what really happened at the European insider who happens to be obviously, a woman a female figure, who can only consume the glorious narrative the heroic narrative the glamorous narrative about imperialism being a civilizing mission, ok. That is the

entire setting in which that particular scene takes place. Let us just go there and see how that you know is described in Heart of Darkness, ok.

(Refer Slide Time: 15:46)

I know, he asked, with a sudden flash of curiosity, 'what it was that had induced him to go out there?' 'Yes,' said I, and forthwith handed him the famous Report for publication, if he thought fit. He glanced through it hurriedly, mumbling all the time, judged 'it would do,' and took himself off with this plunder.

Thus I was left at last with a slim packet of letters and the girl's portrait. She struck me as beautiful— I mean she had a beautiful expression. I know that the sunlight can be made to lie, too, yet one felt that no manipulation of light and pose could have conveyed the delicate shade of truthfulness upon those features. She seemed ready to listen without mental reservation, without suspicion, without a thought for herself. I concluded I would go and give her back her portrait and those letters myself. Curiosity? Yes; and also some other feeling perhaps. All that had been Kurtz's had passed out of my hands: his soul, his body, his station, his plans, his ivory, his career. There remained only his memory and his Intended— and I wanted to give that up, too, to the past, in a way— to surrender personally all that remained of him with me to that oblivion which is the last word of our common fate. I don't defend myself. I had no clear perception of what it was I really wanted. Perhaps it was an impulse of unconscious loyalty, or the fulfilment of one of those ironic necessities that lurk in the facts of hu-



So, this is the image of Kurtz's intended. This is the image that you know when Marlow meets Kurtz's fiancé in Belgium, in Brussels presumably. This is what you know the entire scene is described as. And you know she and this is the description that should be on the screen at the moment.

She struck me as beautiful, I mean she had a beautiful expression. I know that sunlight can be made to lie too, yet one felt there is no manipulation of light and pose could be conveyed could have conveyed the delicate shade of truthfulness upon those features. She seemed ready to listen without mental reservation, without suspicion, without a thought for herself. I concluded that I would go and give her back the portrait of those letters myself. So, look at the way in which you know Kurtz's intended is described using markers of beauty, restraint, discipline, elegance etcetera in complete contrast to the excessive markers that were used to describe Kurtz's African mistress, ok.

(Refer Slide Time: 16:43)

man existence. I don't know. I can't tell. But I went.

'I thought his memory was like the other memories of the dead that accumulate in every man's life—a vague impress on the brain of shadows that had fallen on it in their swift and final passage; but before the high and ponderous door, between the tall houses of a street as still and decorous as a well-kept alley in a cemetery, I had a vision of him on the stretcher, opening his mouth voraciously, as if to devour all the earth with all its mankind. He lived then before me; he lived as much as he had ever lived—a shadow insatiable of splendid appearances, of frightful realities; a shadow darker than the shadow of the night, and draped nobly in the folds of a gorgeous eloquence. The vision seemed to enter the house with me—the stretcher, the phantom-bearers, the wild crowd of obedient worshippers, the gloom of the forests, the glitter of the reach between the murky bends, the beat of the drum, regular and muffled like the beating of a heart—the heart of a conquering darkness. It was a moment of triumph for the wilderness, an invading and vengeful rush which, it seemed to me, I would have to keep back alone for the salvation of another soul. And the memory of what I had heard him say afar there, with the horned shapes



So, that binary is interestingly conveyed over here, ok.

(Refer Slide Time: 16:48)

hogany door on the first floor, and while I waited he seemed to stare at me out of the glassy panel— stare with that wide and immense stare embracing, condemning, loathing all the universe. I seemed to hear the whispered cry, 'The horror! The horror!'

'The dusk was falling. I had to wait in a lofty drawing-room with three long windows from floor to ceiling that were like three luminous and bedraped columns. The bent gilt legs and backs of the furniture shone in indistinct curves. The tall marble fireplace had a cold and monumental whiteness. A grand piano stood massively in a corner; with dark gleams on the flat surfaces like a sombre and polished sarcophagus. A high door opened—closed. I rose.

'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. She took both my hands in hers and murmured, 'I had heard you were coming.' I noticed she was not very young—I mean not girlish. She had a mature capacity for fidelity, for belief, for suffering. The room seemed to have grown darker, as if all the sad light of the cloudy evening had taken refuge on her forehead. This fair hair,



And now if you take a look at the very performative quality of mourning that takes place in Heart of Darkness when she appears, she turns up before Marlow dressed as a mourner, a very elegant mourner. It is very elegiac and very elegant.

Before that just take a look at some of the material signifiers in Heart of Darkness just before and this is the image of Marlow waiting for the fiancée to come, presumably in her house and you know and she is just looking around and seeing what is around him,

and this is what is around him and it should be on your screen. The dusk was falling. I had to wait in a lofty drawing room with three long windows from floor to ceiling that were like three luminous and bedraped columns. The bent gilt legs and backs of the furniture shown an indistinct curves. The tall marble fireplace had a cold and monumental whiteness. A grand piano stood massively in a corner; with dark gleams on a flat surfaces like a sombre and polished sarcophagus. A high door opened, closed. I rose.

So, you know the whole idea of the polish a sarcophagus and before that a grand piano and before that a marble fireplace are very European signifiers of nobility, are very solid European bourgeoisie that kind of a setting, right. So, you know it is like very privileged markers of wealth, markers of privilege markers of whiteness for that matter. And that is an all-white space and all these markers are also very white which is a complete contrast to the delayed decoding that Marlow experienced in Africa in Congo.

Well, he did not have a clue cognitively speaking of what was around him whether it was arrows coming at him or it was river Congo whether it was he was even attacked by people he had no clue. And now contrast that to the very solid material markers he welds and privilege that Marlow is experiencing over here. And now we have seen in which Kurtz's intended comes and you know gets a report from Marlow about you know Kurtz dying and then the question she would ask him is what were his dying words and this something which would become very dramatic.

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. She took both my hands in hers and murmured, 'I had heard that you were coming,' I noticed she was not very young, I mean not girlish. She had a mature capacity for fidelity for belief for suffering. The room seemed to have grown darker, as if the sad light of the cloudy evening had taken refuge on her forehead.

(Refer Slide Time: 19:15)

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 alone know how to mourn for him as he deserves.' But while we were still shaking hands, such a look of awful desolation came upon her face that I perceived she was one of those creatures that are not the playthings of Time. For her he had died only yesterday. And, by Jove! the impression was so powerful that for me, too, he seemed to have died only yesterday—nay, this very minute. I saw her and him in the same instant of time—his death and her sorrow—I saw her sorrow in the very moment of his death. Do you understand? I saw them together—I heard them together. She had said, with a deep catch of the breath, 'I have survived' while my strained ears seemed to hear distinctly, mingled with her tone of despairing regret, the summing up whisper of his eternal condemnation. I asked myself what I was doing there, with a sensation of panic in my heart as though I had blundered into a place of cruel and absurd mysteries not fit for a human being to behold. She motioned me to a chair. We sat



This fair hair, this pale visage, these pure brows, 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 alone knew know how to mourn for him as he deserved. So, there is a degree of pride about the mourning over here. It has been more than a year, but we are told that she is still mourning for him because it seems to be the elegant romantic thing to do, ok.

(Refer Slide Time: 19:45)

ing hands, such a look of awful desolation came upon her face that I perceived she was one of those creatures that are not the playthings of Time. For her he had died only yesterday. And, by Jove! the impression was so powerful that for me, too, he seemed to have died only yesterday—nay, this very minute. I saw her and him in the same instant of time—his death and her sorrow—I saw her sorrow in the very moment of his death. Do you understand? I saw them together—I heard them together. She had said, with a deep catch of the breath, 'I have survived' while my strained ears seemed to hear distinctly, mingled with her tone of despairing regret, the summing up whisper of his eternal condemnation. I asked myself what I was doing there, with a sensation of panic in my heart as though I had blundered into a place of cruel and absurd mysteries not fit for a human being to behold. She motioned me to a chair. We sat down. I laid the packet gently on the little table, and she put her hand over it. ... 'You knew him well,' she murmured, after a moment of mourning silence.

'Intimacy grows quickly out there,' I said. 'I knew him as well as it is possible for one man to know another.'

'And you admired him,' she said. 'It was impossible to know him and not to admire him. Was it?'



But now the questions that Marlow is subjected to become very very interesting, and she tells Marlow and this should be on the screen. You knew him well she murmured after a moment of mourning silence. Intimacy grows quickly out there. I said, I knew him as well as is possible for one man to know another. And you admired him. She said, it was impossible to know him and not to admire him. Was it?

(Refer Slide Time: 20:05)

'He was a remarkable man,' I said, unsteadily. Then before the appealing fixity of her gaze, that seemed to watch for more words on my lips, I went on, 'It was impossible not to—'

'Love him,' she finished eagerly, silencing me into an appalled dumbness. 'How true! how true! But when you think that no one knew him so well as I! I had all his noble confidence. I knew him best.'

'You knew him best,' I repeated. And perhaps she did. But with every word spoken the room was growing darker, and only her forehead, smooth and white, remained illumined by the inextinguishable light of belief and love.

'You were his friend,' she went on. 'His friend,' she repeated, a little louder. 'You must have been, if he had given you this, and sent you to me. I feel I can speak to you—and oh! I must speak. I want you—you who have heard his last words—to know I have been worthy of him. ... It is not pride. ... Yes! I am proud to know I understood him better than any one on earth—he told me so himself. And since his mother died I have had no one—no one—to—to—'

'I listened. The darkness deepened. I was not even sure whether he had given me the right bundle. I rather suspect



He was a remarkable man. And look at the rhetorical quality of the question. It is impossible to know him and not admire him. Was it? So, the answer is embedded in the question already and that is that is the part of the entire narrative over here. Marlow does not have an option to say no. Marlow does not have an option or the agency to give the authentic report. He cannot really say to her that Kurtz was a merciless mercenary. Kurtz was an exploiter he cannot say that. He has to conform to the narrative that a white man, in the colony, in the empire in the wilderness of empire, must be a glamorous hero, must be someone worth admiration.

This is the only narrative available to him as a as a reporter of the empire, as a report of the horrors in the empire and therein lies the Heart of Darkness, therein lies the darkness in the Heart of Darkness. The fact that he cannot convey the real knowledge he cannot convey the real experience to the European insider, ok.

He was a remarkable man, I said, unsteadily. Then before the appealing fixity of her gaze, that seemed to watch for more words on my lips, I went on, 'It was impossible not

to, 'love him,' she finished eagerly, silencing me into an appalled dumbness. So, again look at the way in which the narrative is already constructed, right. So, she already knows she has already said the narrator that it is impossible not to love him.

So, Marlow cannot even complete his sentences he does not even have the agency to complete his sentence. So, he says it was impossible not to and then she fills in by saying love him, right.

So, you know Kurtz must be lovable. Kurtz must be admirable. Kurtz must be someone worthy of reveration, worthy of worship all the time and it is very important for the purpose for the broader narrative of the empire, that a white man must always be worthy of admiration because he is that is his job as a white man, he is civilizing them.

So, what this particular scene reveals very interestingly is the lack of agency suffered by Marlow. He cannot really tell or allowed to tell what really happened to him before he finishes the sentence a adjectives are filled in for him by the intended of Kurtz, ok.

How true, how true. But when you think that no one knew him so well as I, I had all his noble confidence I knew him best, ok.

(Refer Slide Time: 22:15)

'And of all this,' she went on mournfully, 'of all his promise, and of all his greatness, of his generous mind, of his noble heart, nothing remains—nothing but a memory. You and I—'

'We shall always remember him,' I said hastily.

'No!' she cried. 'It is impossible that all this should be lost— that such a life should be sacrificed to leave nothing—but sorrow. You know what vast plans he had. I knew of them, too—I could not perhaps understand—but others knew of them. Something must remain. His words, at least, have not died.'

'His words will remain,' I said.

'And his example,' she whispered to herself. 'Men looked up to him— his goodness shone in every act. His example—'

'True,' I said; 'his example, too. Yes, his example. I forgot that.'

'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.'

'She put out her arms as if after a retreating figure, stretching them back and with clasped pale hands across the fading and narrow sheen of the window. Never see him!'



And now the real question comes when she asks Marlow, you know the question that you know what was his dying words, ok. And this is what she asked him. It is impossible that all this should be lost that such a life should be sacrificed to leave nothing, but

sorrow. You know what vast plans he had. I knew of them, too. I could not perhaps understand, but others knew of them.

So, again look at the sexism over here the embedded innate internalized sexism that a white man knows things that a woman cannot. He had great plans, grand plans, that I as a woman have no access too. But then I understand how great he is that is the entire narrative dished out over here.

I could not perhaps understand, but others knew of him, something must remain his words at least have not died. His words will remain, I said. Of course, Marlow means the words that he heard the horror the horror and as a dramatic irony over here at play, we know Marlow knows, but she does not know. But the more sinister thing is she does not want to know. She wants to know the consumed truth, she wants to know the commonly consumed truth which is Kurtz must be a hero, Kurtz must be a romantic hero, Kurtz must be the perfect agent of the empire, right. So, no other interpretation, no other narrative is allowed, ok, right.

(Refer Slide Time: 23:30)

every way worthy of his life.'
'And I was not with him,' she murmured. My anger subsided before a feeling of infinite pity.
'Everything that could be done—' I mumbled.
'Ah, but I believed in him more than any one on earth—more than his own mother, more than—himself. He needed me! Me! I would have treasured every sigh, every word, every sign, every glance.'
'I felt like a chill grip on my chest. 'Don't,' I said, in a muffled voice.
'Forgive me. I—I have mourned so long in silence—in silence.... You were with him—to the last? I think of his loneliness. Nobody near to understand him as I would have understood. Perhaps no one to hear. ...'
'To the very end,' I said, shakily. 'I heard his very last words....' I stopped in a fright.
'Repeat them,' she murmured in a heart-broken tone. 'I want—I want—something—something—to—to live with.'
'I was on the point of crying at her, 'Don't you hear them?' The dusk was repeating them in a persistent whisper all around us, in a whisper that seemed to swell menacingly like the first whisper of a rising wind. 'The horror! The horror!'
'His last word—to live with,' she insisted. 'Don't you understand I loved him—I loved him—I loved him!'
'I pulled myself together and spoke slowly.



And this is the this is you know question, the dramatic question that the intended asked Marlow. I heard Marlow says I heard his very last words I stopped in a fright. So, look at the neurotic quality of Marlow over here, he is very neurotic. He stopped in a fright, I heard his very last words. And of course, we know the last word, so the horror the horror.

And that is what is freezing him he cannot even re-experience it was so horrifying for him.

Repeat them she murmured in a heartbroken tone. I want, I want something, something to live with. So, she wants to latch on to the commonly consumed narrative of the romantic hero, the romantic white man who died in the non-white space. So, she wants Marlow to repeat the words. I was on a point of crying at her. Do you not hear them? The dusk was repeating them in a persistent whisper all around us, in a whisper that seemed to swell menacingly like the first whisper of a rising world. 'The horror, the horror! That was the dying word and everything around him the atmosphere around him was screaming that to Marlow. He was re-experiencing that the entire experience of hearing the words the horror the horror.

His last words, his last word to live with, she insisted. Don't you understand, I loved him, I loved him, I loved him. Look at the performative quality over here the performative quality of mourning and the very stereotypical romantic narrative, I loved him, I loved him, I loved him there is a crescendo to it, there is a climatic quality to it. And it is like she is telling Marlow what to say and Marlow does not have any other option apart from saying what she wants to hear.

So, she becomes a very you know interesting symbol of the European insider who consumes the normative narrative of imperialism being the white man's civilizing mission, being the white man's glorifying mission, being the white man's heroic mission. Anything apart from that will not do for her, ok. So, I loved him, I loved him, I loved him is reaching a crescendo and it's pushing Marlow towards telling you know what she wants to hear and of course, she being a European insider over here.

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...before a feeling of infinite pity.
'Everything that could be done—' I mumbled.
'Ah, but I believed in him more than any one on earth—
more than his own mother, more than—himself. He needed
me! Me! I would have treasured every sigh, every word, ev-
ery sign, every glance.'
'I felt like a chill grip on my chest. 'Don't,' I said, in a
muffled voice.
'Forgive me. I—I have mourned so long in silence—in
silence.... You were with him—to the last? I think of his
loneliness. Nobody near to understand him as I would have
understood. Perhaps no one to hear. ...'
'To the very end,' I said, shakily. 'I heard his very last
words....' I stopped in a fright.
'Repeat them,' she murmured in a heart-broken tone. 'I
want—I want—something—something—to—to live with.'
'I was on the point of crying at her, 'Don't you hear them?'
The dusk was repeating them in a persistent whisper all
around us, in a whisper that seemed to swell menacingly
like the first whisper of a rising wind. 'The horror! The hor-
ror!'
'His last word—to live with,' she insisted. 'Don't you un-
derstand I loved him—I loved him—I loved him!'
'I pulled myself together and spoke slowly.
'The last word he pronounced was—your name.'

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170



I pulled myself together and spoke slowly. The last word he pronounced was, your name, right. So, this is a romantic report, the posthumous romantic report that Marlow is forced to deliver to Kurtz's intended, right. But there's a double irony over here as I am sure you know you would understand by now.

The fact that Kurtz actually said the horror the horror and Marlow cannot say that to the European insider, therein lies the horror. So, when Marlow says to Kurtz's intended the last words he died with was a romantic word your name and he died with your name. In that sense he is actually, right because she is a horror and what Kurtz may have meant along with many things among other things is the misinformation consumed by the European insider, the misinformation that is you know forcibly consumed by the European insider about imperialism, about imperialism being a grand noble romantic thing.

So, in that sense her name or the symptom that she stands for or the symbolic significance that she embodies is the horror that Kurtz had died with. So, in that sense it is actually is a truthful report, but of course, that is lost in her because she is forcibly consuming, excuse me the romantic report that she wants to consume.

So, it is a very complex narrative at play over here Kurtz had died with the words the horror the horror which is about the hollowness of imperialism the hollowness a cannibalistic quality of imperialism, and the effect it has on the white man as makes him

a beast, makes him mercenary, makes him an instrument, completely dehumanizes him and the knowledge of dehumanization that is a horror in Heart of Darkness. And when Marlow comes back to Brussels, he is forced to tell a romantic report and give a romantic report to Kurtz's elegant mourner, elegant fiancée and he cannot tell anything apart from you know what she wants to hear which is you know he died with your name on his lips which is a very romantic report about you know the nobleman dying with the you know word of the with the name of the loved one who was insider over here.

But the macro narrative over here is interesting because that is part of the horror when her name becomes the horror because she stands for the horror, she stands for the misinformation, she stands for the complete ignorance, about imperialism. The very forcible and very consumed ignorance, a very happily consumed ignorance about imperialism, that imperialism was a noble thing a romantic thing etcetera. So, her complete disengagement her complete refusal to engage with the reality of imperialism is part of the horror in Heart of Darkness, ok. So, that is something that I just wanted to spend some time with, ok.

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'I heard a light sigh and then my heart stood still, stopped dead short by an exulting and terrible cry, by the cry of inconceivable triumph and of unspeakable pain. 'I knew it—I was sure!' ... She knew. She was sure. I heard her weeping; she had hidden her face in her hands. It seemed to me that the house would collapse before I could escape, that the heavens would fall upon my head. But nothing happened. The heavens do not fall for such a trifle. Would they have fallen, I wonder, if I had rendered Kurtz that justice which was his due? Hadn't he said he wanted only justice? But I couldn't. I could not tell her. It would have been too dark—too dark altogether....'

Marlow ceased, and sat apart, indistinct and silent, in the pose of a meditating Buddha. Nobody moved for a time. 'We have lost the first of the ebb,' said the Director suddenly. I raised my head. The offing was barred by a black bank of clouds, and the tranquil waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth flowed sombre under an overcast sky—seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness.



And that is the end of the novel. But just before it ends you know Marlow goes on to say that she knew she was sure, right. So, the script is ready beforehand, the script is predestined, it's pre-scripted, Marlow has no agency whatsoever in terms of telling what really transpired. He can only deliver the report which is already there, the report about

the white man's glory, the report of the white man's heroism that is the only report available to him as a narrator in *Heart of Darkness*.

So, this becomes obviously, part of the narrative crisis in *Heart of Darkness* and you can see how hopefully by now how the narrative crisis and the existential crisis in *Heart of Darkness* are linked to each other. The fact that Marlow cannot tell the story. He is not allowed to tell the story and even if he does want to tell the story he cannot really have the narrative frame to tell people what really happened. And that narrative crisis the fact that he has to lie the Kurtz's intended, he has to misinform the European insider and also because you know even if he wants to inform he does not have the narrative structure to tell what really happened that narrative crisis makes him neurotic, right.

So, this is very interesting relationship between narrative and neurosis in *Heart of Darkness*, as I am sure some of you can do further research on and the article of mine that I mentioned in one of the lectures today actually deals with it. So, if you want to read it do Google me up, it should be available against my name especially my academia.edu accounts I have uploaded it. So, you can download it from there and read it if you want too. It deals exactly with this relationship between narrative and neuroses in *Heart of Darkness*, ok.

So, and then Marlow goes on to say that you know could I have said her told her the truth, but I could not, I could not tell her. It would have been too dark, too dark altogether, right. So, again I must misinform the European insider because otherwise they cannot consume they cannot they cannot handle so much darkness. So, European whiteness must be retained and the whiteness of course is a big lie, it is a big sham as all of you would know over here.

And that is the whole point of *Heart of Darkness*. It just it exposes entire whiteness, a constructed whiteness as a big sham a spectacular sham, right. So, it would be impossible to tell Kurtz's intended what really happened what were his dying words because it would have been too dark, too dark altogether that can really crush the entire construct of imperialism has been the white man's civilizing mission.

And this cynicism, this darkness in *Heart of Darkness* is exactly what makes it a very complex text despite its racism, despite its reductionism, despite its rampant racism where the non-Europeans are described over here they are completely dehumanized not

given a voice. But despite all that the cynicism and the discomfort that it dramatizes about imperialism is what makes it a very important novel very relevant novel about us today.

And finally, one little image which stands out Marlow ceased and sat apart indistinct and silent in the pose of a meditating Buddha. So, again with if you remember the final the initial image there is a there is an image of a bronze Buddha with which Marlow was described and again the Buddha image comes back the pose of meditating Buddha. So, he is a messiah, he is a wise man over here. But the interesting thing is his enlightenment is not one of illumination, his enlightenment is one of darkness and more complexly he cannot convey the darkness, he cannot really tell what the darkness is all about.

So, he in a sense is a flawed messiah, is a flawed prophet, he is an impotent prophet, is not really a Buddha in that sense he just becomes a caricature of Buddha. He just becomes a caricature of the all-seeing all-wise prophet. He is not really that, he poses like that and that is the important word over here in the pose of meditating Buddha.

So, he is just a really shallow mimicry of the prophet. He knows the knowledge, he has a knowledge, he has epiphany, but he does not have the instrument to convey it. He does not have the power to convey and therein lies a powerlessness of Marlow as a prophet. He is a very powerless prophet in that sense. He knows the evil of imperialism, he knows the sham of white imperialism, but he cannot convey it completely and that makes Heart of Darkness a very complex novel

This inability to convey a very problematic politically problematic and existentially problematic experience.

Nobody moved for a time. We have lost the first of the ebb, said the director suddenly. I raised my head. The offing was barred by the blank by the black bank of clouds and the tranquil waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth flowed somber under the overcast sky, seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness.

So, that the final atmospheric condition of Heart of Darkness it sort of connects Thames with the Congo in that sense you know the two rivers symbolically merge with each other. So, the white river, the river of civilization, the river of enlightenment, the river of

trade it actually becomes the river at the heart of immense darkness. So, in that sense in the Thames and Congo merge into each other very symbolically.

So, with that we come to the end of the novel. As you can see it is a very complex novel and as I keep mentioning it is one of the novels which keeps getting relevance you know it has a renewed relevance in the world we live in today, especially in the geopolitical tensions and crises that we have in the world today where you know you are not allowed to say what really happened to you. Just, you are just allowed to misinform that is the only information available to you and the information that you gather you cannot really tell under narrative you cannot put under narrative you cannot really tell about what happened to you in a particular set of conflict.

So, this entire compulsory misinformation that the Heart of Darkness dramatizes at the end or the lie, the political lie in Heart of Darkness about imperialism being a glorious enterprise, being a romantic enterprise whereas, actually you know exposing imperialism as a sham as an exploitation that dichotomy is very politically significant especially in the world today.

The difference between what is reported and what is actually you know experienced is something which we see over and over again in different geopolitical settings in the world that we see today you know globally in terms of crisis in terms of conflict Heart of Darkness remains a novel in fiction as a work fiction. But it becomes very topical and relevant especially in relation this kind of crisis narratives that we can consume globally in a world we live in today.

So, with that we come to the end of Heart of Darkness and I hope you have got some interesting points all of it, interesting thoughts all of it, and I have just been a bit careful in terms of giving you some ideas which might inform your research on this novel it is one of the novels which are researched on endlessly, it just opens up to all kinds of interpretations.

It's Modernist, it's late-Victorian, in a very you know post-colonial in that sense as well and also it is a novel about you know conflict. It is a novel about man's negotiation with conflict, nervous negotiation with conflict and it's a very interesting novel about conflict and narrative; how do you put a narrative to a conflict and the difficulty and the you know the impossibility of narrating the conflict and the almost illegality of it you know.

It is not legally allowed to you to tell what happened in a particular side of conflict that becomes part of the human crisis in Heart of Darkness which as I mentioned is very interesting and relevant to the world we live in today.

Thank you for your attention.