

Twentieth Century Fiction
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Lecture – 07
Heart of Darkness – Part 2

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I



The Nellie, a cruising yawl, swung to her anchor without a flutter of the sails, and was at rest. The flood had made, the wind was nearly calm, and being bound down the river, the only thing for it was to come to and wait for the turn of the tide.

The sea-reach of the Thames stretched before us like the beginning of an interminable waterway. In the offing the sea and the sky were welded together without a joint, and in the luminous space the tanned sails of the barges drifting up with the tide seemed to stand still in red clusters of canvas sharply peaked, with gleams of varnished sprits. A haze rested on the low shores that ran out to sea in vanishing flatness. The air was dark above Gravesend, and farther back still seemed condensed into a mournful gloom, brood-



So, hello and welcome to this NPTEL course entitled Twentieth Century Fiction. We are reading Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness. So, in the very first lecture on this particular text we talked about the cultural background, the political background of this text out of which this novel emerges and we sort of discussed Conrad's location apropos of Imperialism and how this novel if it does not deconstruct, at least it problematizes some of the commonly assumed notions about imperialism at that time. And we also seen we also discussed how you know despite his political incorrectness or perhaps because its political incorrectness, this particular novel or novella you know is still relevant to the world.

We exist in the world exist today you know because of its political incorrectness, because of its very problematic entanglement between a certain political presupposition and the problem with that presupposition because in that in one sense Heart of Darkness isn't really decrying imperialism. It is not really saying imperialism was a bad thing, it is not really saying imperialism should not have happened at all, it is not that radical that in

that sense it is very much a conservative novel. It does belong to a conservative tradition of novel writing, but unlike the novels of Kipling for instance and unlike the novels of Rider Haggard at that point of time it does not really glamorize imperialism, does not really glorify imperialism at all. It just depicts to you the discomfort about imperialism that happens to man.

And of course the entire you know the entire enigma, the entire existential crisis, the entire psychological situation in the novel it all is all from a white man's lens in that since it is very racially inflected, no non-white person speaks in this novel. So, the entire narrative is depicted and delivered and dished out by a white man through a white imagination, but despite that the discomfort of imperialism is something which this novel dramatizes quite interestingly and that's the reason why it is a very relevant novel for us today especially given the current geopolitical situations that we encounter in a world we live in today.

So, in this lecture we will dive into the text we will start with the main text, we are going to see the opening of Heart of Darkness is interesting because like most great novels opening sets a tone for what is to follow and also it just little characterizes the narrator to a certain extent and we talked about how there are different kinds of narrators Heart of Darkness. There is one unnamed narrator someone who lives outside the narrative frame this almost 3rd person narrator and then we have the inset narrator Marlow the one who tells the real story about going to Congo and he is unreliable, he is nervous, he is decadent, he is failing in his narrative and he is the one that is really interesting. He is a character narrative.

So, he is someone he is someone who actually experienced what he is telling about, what he is talking about now and in one sense Heart of Darkness is basically an anti-novel. It is about the failure of you know putting an experience into a narrative. It is about a failure of narrativization in which sense in that sense it becomes a very experimental novel. It is a successful novel about the failure of narrativization. So, in that sense it's one of the early postmodern novels. If you want to consider that way, it does definitely have an unreliable narrator, it does definitely have someone who is nervous, someone who is not reliable, someone who is not omnipresent, someone who has no knowledge whatsoever, but even in retrospect of what happened right.

So, that in that sense the narrator character in *Heart of Darkness* is a postmodern narrator character. It is not a trickster character, he is not tricking you, he is not leading you down the garden path deliberately, but he himself does not quite know what had happened. So, he is struggling to tell you the story and that struggle to tell the story is something which *Heart of Darkness* dramatizes quite movingly quite compellingly you know in my mind ok. So, in that note let us look at the novel, let us look at how the novel begins. It's set in London, it's set in Thames in London, the river in London and the entire story takes place from that boat, there is a boat called Nellie in which you know the narrative begins.

So, and they are all sailing about 4 or 5 people over here they are all sailing in the Thames in a river in a in a boat called Nellie and in that setting, Marlow the narrator character he starts telling the story about what happened to him when he went to Congo. So, interestingly the two rivers are interesting contrasts of each other. One is the river of civilization quote unquote, the hype or the high tide of imperialism and the other river Congo is the other river like literally the other river is the alterity of the civilization. It is a non-civilized river, but essentially that is the river which feeds Thames which feeds Thames in terms of the mercantile commerce in the mercantile economy, but also the economy of civilization.

So, entire civilization as seen in London over here, it is dependent on what comes in from the Congo in that sense. So, there is a sense of shame and guilt about that as well in *Heart of Darkness*. So, the two rivers are very interestingly juxtaposed with each other, very increasingly contrasted with each other and if we remember we just finished Rabindranath Tagore's short story *The Postmaster* and even there we found that how natural signifiers natural markers are reflective of psychological situatedness.

So, we had for instance if you remember the end of the story when the postmaster's coming back from the village back to Calcutta, sailing back to Calcutta everything around him seems to cry, everything around him seems to mourn the departure that he is doing from the other character Ratan and you know nature seems to be weeping it's swelling river, it is monsoon coming in, everything seems to be you know sad you know on the brink of sadness.

So, swelling were sadness. So, we saw there again how natural signifiers natural markers are reflective of emotional situations and we have similar settings here in *Heart of*

Darkness as well. So, take a look at the opening of *Heart of Darkness*. This should be on your screen now the *Nellie* a cruising yawl swung to her anchor without a flutter of the sails and was at rest the flood had made the wind was nearly calm and being bound down by the river. The only thing for it was to come to and wait for the turn of the tide. So, it begins with the image of stillness. We have *Nellie*, a cruising yawl, a boat like thing where the characters are floating on river Thames and we had seen, we are told that a flood had been made, the wind was calm and now it is just waiting for the turn of the tide really.

So, it is a moment of stillness between two tides. So, the very opening we have several conceptual things coming in. So, first of all the concept of fluidity is important over here that the *Nellie* the river the boat *Nellie* is flowing in the little river Thames. So, the sense of fluidity is very palpable that sense of liminality between two conditions between two tides stillness between two tides that has been captured here as well. So, we have these two categories at the very onset at the very outset of the novel dramatized and depicted to us the sea reach of the Thames stretched before us like the beginning of an interminable waterway.

So, again the interminable, the endlessness of the waterway it is part of fluidity, the fluidity of imagination, the fluidity of human consciousness and you know most of us who are even tangentially aware of modernism and modernist literature, this is very much the beginning of high modernism. We must have come by a term called stream of consciousness, right. It is a technique it was a term used by William James the brother of Henry James. William James is a philosopher, a psychologist philosopher, philosopher of the mind. He is increasingly relevant in the studies of Neuroscience today. So, just before I came to this lecture, I was looking at an interview by Ian McEwan who was talking about his new novel *The Nutshell* and there he is the novel is about an embryo in a woman's womb. The character is actually an embryo or the narrator is actually an embryo someone the child who is not yet born.

So, while talking about that novel McEwan describes, and alludes to Henry James. An entire idea of Henry James that every emotional movement in the mind it has a physical manifestation. In other words emotions and physicality are interlinked with each other intimately connected to each other so emotions are not really something in there. Emotions are very physical, there is a viscosity about emotions which is something that

Henry James theorized and what modern neuroscience corroborates. So, there is a bit of a digression, but I think it is helpful in that sense because what we see over here is an example of stream of consciousness. It is called literally a stream of consciousness.

So, they are actually in the stream an endless fluid stream of the river Thames, but it also unfolds into a stream of consciousness. So, again we see how the landscape and the mindscape are dialogic with each other in a very complex cognitive way. So, the interminable waterway quite literally becomes a stream of consciousness here in this novel the very outset of *Heart of Darkness*. In the offing the sea and sky were welded together without a joint. So, again look at the endlessness of nature around the sea and sky are welded together without a joint.

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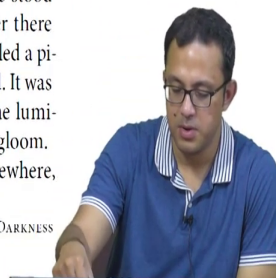
And in the luminous space the tanned sails of the barges drifting up with the tide seemed to stand still in red clusters of canvas sharply peaked, with gleams of varnished sprits. A haze rested on the low shores that ran out to sea in vanishing flatness. The air was dark above Gravesend, and farther back still seemed condensed into a mournful gloom, brooding motionless over the biggest, and the greatest, town on earth.

The Director of Companies was our captain and our host. We four affectionately watched his back as he stood in the bows looking to seaward. On the whole river there was nothing that looked half so nautical. He resembled a pilot, which to a seaman is trustworthiness personified. It was difficult to realize his work was not out there in the luminous estuary, but behind him, within the brooding gloom.

Between us there was, as I have already said somewhere,

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And in the luminous space the tanned sails to the barges drifting up with a chart with a tide seem to stand in red clusters seem to stand still in red clusters of canvas sharply peaked with gleams of varnish spritz.

So, again the whole idea of stillness and liminality and fluidity and endlessness, we have all these things coming in a very. They are also smuggled in as it were using natural material signifiers material markers. A haze rested on the low shores, that ran out to sea in rusting flatness in vanishing flatness, sorry the air was above the air was dark above Gravesend and further back still seemed condensed into a mournful gloom brooding motionless over the biggest and the greatest town on earth. So, you know this is a

description of London as you can see the biggest and greatest town on earth, but we see very quickly how the bigness and greatness of London are actually greatly dependent on the darkness which is imperialism.

And you know it is Congo feeding Thames that is what happens in Heart of Darkness and we saw and this is what mentioned already in my opening lecture on Heart of Darkness we see that the Heart of Darkness is not really out there in Africa, it is not really out there in a Congo it is actually in there in here in a site of civilization is also actually the Heart of Darkness, right. So, the biggest greatest town on earth it has a tone has a tone of irony to it has a ring of irony to it which gets more accentuated as we move on in this novel. So, at this moment we have the experience of London over here. You know the whole idea of Thames, the whole idea of endlessness of Thames which is just blending onto the sky which is potentially endless and then there is a mournful gloom brooding motionless of the biggest and the greatest town on earth.

So, we see this one little line over here that should say a lot of things. So, in one hand we have the positive markers or markers of positivity biggest greatest on earth. You know we have all these positive lovely epithets biggest greatest town, but we also see how the biggest greatest town is surrounded and pervaded or blanketed in a way by a mournful gloom brooding motionless. So, we have this decadence coming over the biggest greatest on earth and therein lies the complexity about imperialism in Heart of Darkness and in one hand there is a celebration of imperialism.

This very conservative sanctioning of imperialism by Conrad who was essentially a conservative writer and acknowledging London as a biggest greatest town on the earth, but also we see how the biggest greatest town on earth also contains a very mournful gloom, the blanket of mournfulness a blanket of bleakness as it were which is part of the biggest and greatest package.

So, we have this ambivalence which is coming in and that is the a very important word in Heart of Darkness - ambivalence which literally means I mean sometimes we talk about ambivalence as confusion, we talk about ambivalence as synonymous with confusion, but actually there is bit of a difference between ambivalence and confusion. I mean ambivalence is ability to contain two valences together at any given point of time. So,

ambi is two valence is values. So both values existing simultaneously. They are to situate simultaneously that is what ambivalence essentially means.

So, there is an ambivalent attitude towards imperialism which we see now in the Heart of Darkness and we see how that ambivalence is. Sort of communicated to us using very natural signifiers and just like we saw Tagore use similar signifiers while actually talking about the human mind and human emotions in the short story Postmaster which we finished before we began this ok.

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many years and many virtues, the only cushion on deck, and was lying on the only rug. The Accountant had brought out already a box of dominoes, and was toying architecturally with the bones. Marlow sat cross-legged right aft, leaning against the mizzen-mast. He had sunken cheeks, a yellow complexion, a straight back, an ascetic aspect, and, with his arms dropped, the palms of hands outwards, resembled an idol. The director, satisfied the anchor had good hold, made his way aft and sat down amongst us. We exchanged a few words lazily. Afterwards there was silence on board the yacht. For some reason or other we did not begin that game of dominoes. We felt meditative, and fit for nothing but placid staring. The day was ending in a serenity of still and exquisite brilliance. The water shone pacifically; the sky, without a speck, was a benign immensity of unstained light; the very mist on the Essex marsh was like a gauzy and radiant fabric, hung from the wooded rises inland, and draping the low shores in diaphanous folds. Only the gloom to the west, brooding over the upper reaches, became more sombre every minute, as if angered by the ap-



So, now we have the description of characters here and there and we will just move on a bit. Now if we come to this bit of the novel where we should be on your screen where the character is describing Marlow and the physical description of Marlow is important where he is a storyteller in Heart of Darkness and he becomes a decadent sad storyteller, the inadequate storyteller.

So, to say and that is what Marlow is in Heart of Darkness and how does he first appear in a novel is an important image ok. Marlow sat cross legged right aft, leaning against the mizzen mast. He had sunken cheeks, a yellow complexion, a straight back an ascetic aspect and with his arms dropped the palms of hands outward resembled an idol, ok. So, the whole idea of idol, the very sad prophet, very sad god something sad godlike about Marlow. So, he had sunken cheeks. So, you know we see immediately he embodies decadence, he embodies a sense of enervation, exhaustion, he had sunken cheeks, a

yellow complexion. So, again the paleness, jaundiced complexion is something which is you know very immediately visible in Marlow straight back in ascetic aspect. It is not really an earthly man; it is not really someone who was supposedly with a family.

So, there is something there is something ascetic, something detached about him from earthly activities. With his arms dropped, the palms of hands outwards resembled an idol. So, again though what idol is important and we will come back to it later and find towards the end of the novel, Marlow is compared to Buddha. So he has enlightenment, but then of course the whole irony in that statement is his enlightenment is not one of positivity, is not one of brightness, is not one of illumination. His enlightenment is actually one of darkness. So, the only enlightenment available to Marlow, the only enlightenment available to him is one of darkness and knowledge is one of darkness is not one of illuminations is not one of vastness or bigness.

So the only enlightenment, the only truth available to Marlow, the only true embodiment of Marlow through his prophetic and godlike quality is that of darkness. And now we are told that we felt meditative and fit for nothing, but placid staring. So, again the whole idea of still staring is important. There is a degree of meditateness meditative quality over here which is important. We felt meditative and fit for nothing, but placid staring the day was ending in a serenity of still and exquisite brilliance. So, again ambivalence serenity of still and exquisite brilliance right. So, there is this degree of decadence the day was ending.

So, the twilight quality is important. Twilight is literally the threshold quality between day and night. The threshold time a temporal marker between day and night that is what twilight is and we have a similar kind of setting over here. The water is shown, specifically the sky without a speck was a benign immensity of unstained light, a very mist from the Essex marsh was like a gauzy and radiant fabric hung from the wooded rises inland.

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sembled an idol. The director, satisfied the anchor had good hold, made his way aft and sat down amongst us. We exchanged a few words lazily. Afterwards there was silence on board the yacht. For some reason or other we did not begin that game of dominoes. We felt meditative, and fit for nothing but placid staring. The day was ending in a serenity of still and exquisite brilliance. The water shone pacifically; the sky, without a speck, was a benign immensity of unstained light; the very mist on the Essex marsh was like a gauzy and radiant fabric, hung from the wooded rises inland, and draping the low shores in diaphanous folds. Only the gloom to the west, brooding over the upper reaches, became more sombre every minute, as if angered by the approach of the sun.

And at last, in its curved and imperceptible fall, the sun sank low, and from glowing white changed to a dull red without rays and without heat, as if about to go out suddenly, stricken to death by the touch of that gloom brooding

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And draping the low shores in diaphanous folds. Only the gloom to the west brooding over the upper reaches became more sombre every minute as if angered by the approach of the sun. So, again we see how the ambivalence is situated and dramatized over here.

So, on the one hand a positivity benign immensity you know completely untouched, illumination radiant, fabric etcetera as all these phrases are important markers of positivity, but then we also have the gloom of the west brooding over the upper reaches becoming became more sombre every minute. So, the sombre quality, the brooding quality or the gloom like quality that becomes very interestingly juxtaposed and entangled with any markers of positivity and radiance we saw just in a sentence before.

So, we have this ambivalence coming in and dramatized very interestingly over here. And at last in its curved and imperceptible fold, the sun sank low and from glowing white changed to a dull red without rays, without heat as if about to go out suddenly stricken to death, by the touch of the gloom brooding.

So, we have again the sense of dead, the image of death coming and the sun setting and it is very symbolic if you remember if you pay attention to what is actually being told to us and between the lines and is open to interpretation as well, the very image of the sun setting you know it becomes obviously a natural phenomenon, a cosmic phenomenon if you will, but also it is a very symbolic political phenomenon because you know the image of the sun was very stereotypically used with the entire narrative of the British

empire as you know and a very popular pompous and arrogant saying the sun never sets on the British empire, it's just an endless empire an endless stretch of geopolitical glory and which was described which is allegorize in a way by the non-setting sun, but over here we have the image of the setting sun. The sun is actually setting and that became that that becomes very quickly and symbolically an image of the empire coming to an end an image of the empire exhausting itself out, right.

So, it almost becomes the thermodynamic image of exhaustion and we can connect it very quickly to the image of exhaustion and experience of exhaustion that is embodied by Marlow as we just seen you know very appearance of Marlow the first time he appears in the novel. He appears as someone who is elevated there is a god like quality about him. He is a sad tired god, a sad exhausted god right and that exhaustion and sadness becomes markers become markers of his embodiment throughout the novel along with nervousness and a sense of a traumatic reawakening which he embodies all the time.

Now the image of the setting sun is important and you know we should pay some attention to it as a very symbolic image the setting sun which is obviously telling you something about the empire about the entire consumption of the glorious empire you know the commonly consumed idea of the empire as a glorious endless enterprise.

But that is coming to an end that is actually symbolically being challenged and subverted and sort of undercut to a certain extent by the image of the setting sun and of course, the gloom brooding right.

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over a crowd of men.

Forthwith a change came over the waters, and the serenity became less brilliant but more profound. The old river in its broad reach rested unruffled at the decline of day, after ages of good service done to the race that peopled its banks, spread out in the tranquil dignity of a waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth. We looked at the venerable stream not in the vivid flush of a short day that comes and departs for ever, but in the august light of abiding memories. And indeed nothing is easier for a man who has, as the phrase goes, 'followed the sea' with reverence and affection, that to evoke the great spirit of the past upon the lower reaches of the Thames. The tidal current runs to and fro in its unceasing service, crowded with memories of men and ships it had borne to the rest of home or to the battles of the sea. It had known and served all the men of whom the nation is proud, from Sir Francis Drake to Sir John Franklin, knights all, titled and untitled—the great knights-errant of the sea. It had borne all the ships whose names are like jewels flashing in the night of time from the GOLIARD HUND



And then immediately we are given a change. Again it is important to understand how the natural markers of change basically corresponding with the markers in the mind. Forthwith, forthwith a change came over the waters and the serenity became less brilliant, but more profound. So, then look at this shift from brilliant to profound. Profound obviously over here it is suggestive of a degree of sombre like quality, the old river in its broad reach rested unruffled at the decline of day. The word decline is important. The decline of day after ages of good service done to the race that peopled its banks spread out in its tranquil dignity of a waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth.

So, we have now very clear images of exhaustion and termination coming in. So, that degree of termination or the terminator like quality is important over here at the end of the earth. So, it is almost like the river is coming to an end and which is contrasted with the endlessness with vision with which the novel began, really and you know we are also told that the decline of the day. Again a very important phrase decline of the day is also a decline of the river. I mean the river had served many men, has done a great service to a race of people, that peopled its banks through different points of time, but now it is coming to an exhausting end and the sense of exhaustion and ending is something which keeps coming back is like a recursive marker in this narrative over here. We looked at the venerable stream not in the vivid flush of the short day that comes and departs forever.

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tion, that to evoke the great spirit of the past upon the lower reaches of the Thames. The tidal current runs to and fro in its unceasing service, crowded with memories of men and ships it had borne to the rest of home or to the battles of the sea. It had known and served all the men of whom the nation is proud, from Sir Francis Drake to Sir John Franklin, knights all, titled and untitled—the great knights-errant of the sea. It had borne all the ships whose names are like jewels flashing in the night of time, from the GOLDEN HIND returning with her rotund flanks full of treasure, to be visited by the Queen's Highness and thus pass out of the gigantic tale, to the EREBUS and TERROR, bound on other conquests—and that never returned. It had known the ships and the men. They had sailed from Deptford, from Greenwich, from Erith—the adventurers and the settlers; kings' ships and the ships of men on 'Change; captains, admirals, the dark 'interlopers' of the Eastern trade, and the commissioned 'generals' of East India fleets. Hunters for gold



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But in the August light of abiding memories the August light of abiding memory is important over here. What is this August light of abiding memories and that is quite literally a stream of consciousness, that is quite literally the state of mind and you know what we see in Heart of Darkness is how the mind and the landscape, the mindscape of the landscape that ceases to be different categories at different points of time they sort of blend with each other and oftentimes what is described as natural signifiers are actually being used to talk about the mind, talk about the mood, to talk about emotional situatedness of the character at that point of time and indeed nothing is easier for a man who has, as the phrase goes followed the sea with reverence and affection that to evoke the great spirit of the past upon the lower reaches of the Thames.

So, again the whole idea following the sea being and a follow a fluidity or someone who has spent an entire lifetime being fluid and liminal and now you know the whole idea of looking at the river Thames becomes, it's like a Deja vu of your life it's like a retelling of what you experience of life as a sea man, the tidal currents runs to and fro in an unceasing service in its unceasing service crowded with memories of men and ships it had borne to the rest of home or to the battles of the sea. So, again we have the river Thames over here it becomes like a it ceases to be a natural physical river, it actually becomes a stream of consciousness which contains the endlessness of historical time, right.

So, there is a different kind of human historical time and very soon we have markers of human history coming in the different people, the different figures mentioned are historical figures over here and they become markers of certain kind of civilizations that certain activity which the Thames has witnessed over periods of time. Look at the markers, look at the figures mentioned or alluded to in this particular section, ok. It had known and served all the men of whom the nation is proud from Sir Francis Drake to Sir John Franklin Knights, all titled and untitled the great knights errant of the sea. So, two characters over here Francis Drake and Sir John Franklin the two mentioned characters over here again they are interesting characters because both of them are titled as knights Sir Francis Drake and Sir John Franklin, but we know Sir Francis Drake was also essentially a pirate.

So, the very thin border line, the very blurring border line between being a pirate and being a national hero is something which is alluded to over here because you know on one hand he looted other ships especially Spanish ships and Francis Drake at that time the sea was controlled by the English and Spanish armada and it was a great competition as you would know about controlling the sea. So, the Spanish also extended empire. They also expanded the empire in other directions and English in some other direction, but essentially those are the rival you know and of course the Dutch as well the Portuguese as well, but you know Francis Drake becomes a national hero for England because all the amount of money, amount of wealth he looted from other ships which is there was a reason why he was knighted in the first place.

So, again the very thin line between a shameful illegal activity of looting or being a pirate and that of national glory that of becoming a knight is depicted over here. With that image to that illusion to one figure Francis Drake the it was described as a great knights errant of the sea. It had borne all the ships whose names are like jewels flashing the night of time from the Golden Hind returning with her rotund flanks full of treasure to be visited by the Queen's highness and thus passed out of a gigantic tail to the Erebus and Terror bound on the other conquest that never returned.

So, again look at the liminality, look at the ambivalence over here. The Golden Hind is a historical ship which returned with full of treasure alright. Of course treasure here means colonial booty. I mean it just came back with having looted different colonies, it exploits of the colonies right and that that booty that exploited you know entire wealth of

exploited ornaments and things and treasure that was welcomed and embraced by the Queen. So, essentially we see how what has been hinted at is a very degree of insinuation over here is that how National treasure amassed by England through the different colonial conquests were actually looted and exploited treasure that came back from certain ships which were then marked which then became figures and metaphors of national glory and of course, there are other ships as well like Erebus and Terror which went off to other conquests, but never returned.

So, again we have this juxtaposition of glory and death of shame and heroism which constantly runs throughout side by side without ceasing to be together. It had known the ships and the men. They sailed from Deptford from Greenwich from Erith – the adventurers and settlers King's ships and ships of men on change captains, admirals, the dark interlopers of the Eastern trade and the commissioned generals of East India fleets. Again the commissioned Generals of East India fleets look at the way in how in which the word generals and the word interlopers are put within quotes. So, again we have a sense of tradesmen slash pirate slash national heroes all put together right. So, East India fleets as you know the East India company ruled India for the first 100 years before the Queen took over.

So, what started off as a mercantile activity very quickly became a military activity and then become a political activity of control right, but then what we are told over here is very you know ambivalently how these ships and these fleets and these figures were worshippers, heroes. They are essentially you know pirates were essentially tradesmen who wanted to exploit the different ships of different other countries of different other colonies across the world and that's how British colonials began in the first place.

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or pursuers of fame, they all had gone out on that stream, bearing the sword, and often the torch, messengers of the might within the land, bearers of a spark from the sacred fire. What greatness had not floated on the ebb of that river into the mystery of an unknown earth! ... The dreams of men, the seed of commonwealths, the germs of empires.

The sun set; the dusk fell on the stream, and lights began to appear along the shore. The Chapman light-house, a three-legged thing erect on a mud-flat, shone strongly. Lights of ships moved in the fairway—a great stir of lights going up and going down. And farther west on the upper reaches the place of the monstrous town was still marked ominously on the sky, a brooding gloom in sunshine, a lurid glare under the stars.

'And this also,' said Marlow suddenly, 'has been one of the dark places of the earth.'

He was the only man of us who still 'followed the sea.' The worst that could be said of him was that he did not represent his class. He was a seaman, but he was a wanderer, too. while most seamen lead, if one may so express it, a



Hunters for gold or pursuers of fame, they all had gone out on that stream bearing the sword and often the torch, the messengers of the might within the land bearers of a spark from the sacred fires. So, again all these lovely images of glory and heroism and very masculinist enterprise if you can see the entire idea of imperialism is a very masculinist activity. What greatness had not floated from that on that ebb of that river into the mystery of the unknown earth, the dreams of men and the seeds of commonwealth, the germs of empires.

So, again if we take a look at the last sentence over here, it does tell you a lot of things, the dreams of men, the seeds of commonwealths, the germs of empire. So, that is this is a river which has seen which has witnessed you know the birth of empires and the beginning of empires and. So, how the empires began and this very masculinist, heroic, narrative, noble narrative about building an empire dreaming of empire creating an empire all started from that river Thames. So, you know the river in this particular passage it ceases to be a natural river. It becomes the marker of time, it becomes the consciousness, becomes a stream which contains different points of historical time and what is being said over and over again is an empire as a glorious you know lovely activity which brought in wealth, which brought in glory, which brought in national pride etcetera.

But the ambivalence is always there and look at the very next line which sort of conveys what we are discussing already. The sunset look at the finality in that new phrase of sunset, the dusk fell on the stream and lights began to appear along the shore. So, you know the very beginning, the very line before that the very sentence before that contains the image of the river as one of glorification as one of heroism as one of illumination as one of expansive you know activity something which is forward looking, something which is glorified and heroic etcetera and the very next line, the very first phrase the sunset right. So, again the sun over here becomes a symbolic sun. It is a sun which constantly is alluded to as that which never sets in British empire. So, you know it's the beginning of the empire's end.

So, to say that the image of exhaustion comes in over here along with image exhaustion comes the image ambivalence, image of acknowledgment of failure to a great extent. And the lights began to appear along the shore. The chapman lighthouse, a three-legged thing erect on a mud flat shown strongly lights of ships moved in a fair way, a great store of lights going open going down and further west on the upper reaches the place of the monstrous town was still marked ominously on the sky a brooding gloom in sunshine a lurid glare under the stars. So, again look at the adjectives are interesting over here monstrous town ominously you know again, it is the marker of something about to come to an end, a marker or something negative. What happened a brooding gloom it almost has a ghost like quality, it almost has a sepulchral quality to it, right.

So, the degree of deadness ghost-like thing you know, spectral things. So, spectrality is very evident in this very opening of Heart of Darkness. It has got specters coming in shadows coming in, specters coming in, specters of heroism, specters of glorification, but also specters which are pointing towards something which is about to happen right. So, the spectrality at the opening of Heart of Darkness is something which we must pay attention to a lurid glance under the stars ok. So, the word lurid is important over here and then we have the first line spoken by Marlow and first time spoken by any person in the narrative as it were and this also said Marlow suddenly has been one of the dark places of the earth.

Now, this particular line is important because what it shows is the entire interchangeability of light and darkness and this is what I mentioned, this is what I meant when I mentioned that what we see as we read this particular novel is how the Heart of

Darkness is not really out there. It is not really the exotic other's place of Africa which is Congo the Heart of Darkness is actually situated what is commonly consumed as a site of civilization which is Thames, London, Brussels and the white places, the white markers or the markers of the white supremacy or the markers of white civilizational supremacy right. Those actually are the Heart of Darkness as it emerges in a novel. Now what Marlow says over here is interesting. He says that no place there has been no place on history of the earth which has never been a dark place a Heart of Darkness.

So, this also what appears to be the site of civilization, what appears to be the site of supremacy, the site of civilizational supremacy and expansionist enterprise has been one of the dark places of the earth right. So, the darkness over here as it takes many you know intonation, it's physical darkness natural darkness, but also metaphysical darkness also, existential darkness also, political darkness also civilizational darkness. All these different kinds of different orders of darkness come in here to depict what is being said over here. He was the only man of us who still followed the sea alright.

So, again the whole idea following the sea is important. So, these are bunch of people who presumably have lived all their life in the sea you know all in different capacities, but Marlow is the only person who still follows the sea, he still goes out in voyages and again the whole idea of journeying over here becomes very psychological. So, it is a journey which is geographical political physical natural, but also emotional inward looking right. So, the conquest in Heart of Darkness is also an inquest it's a looking inside ok. The worst that could be said about him or of him was that he did not represent his class. Again, the class of sea man, the class of sailor Marlow did not represent the class, he represented something else. It is very different brooding kind of man and that is not something which you come to see about a sailor because a common perception about a sailor a stereotypical perception of a sailor the way it is consumed someone who is very earthly someone who swears a lot.

So, again the whole idea of swearing like a sailor it is almost a proverb and, but Marlow is not like that Marlow is a brooding introspective character and that introspective quality is important for us to highlight, for you to remember.

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Lights of ships moved in the railway—a great sun of lights going up and going down. And farther west on the upper reaches the place of the monstrous town was still marked ominously on the sky, a brooding gloom in sunshine, a lurid glare under the stars.

‘And this also,’ said Marlow suddenly, ‘has been one of the dark places of the earth.’

He was the only man of us who still ‘followed the sea.’ The worst that could be said of him was that he did not represent his class. He was a seaman, but he was a wanderer, too, while most seamen lead, if one may so express it, a sedentary life. Their minds are of the stay-at-home order, and their home is always with them—the ship; and so is their country—the sea. One ship is very much like another, and the sea is always the same. In the immutability of their surroundings the foreign shores, the foreign faces, the changing immensity of life, glide past, veiled not by a sense of mystery but by a slightly disdainful ignorance; for there is nothing mysterious to a seaman unless it be the sea itself, which is the mistress of his existence and as inscrutable as



He was a seaman, but he was a wanderer too, while most seaman led if one may so express it a sedentary life. So, the whole idea of someone who was a wanderer right. So, wandering a journey person someone is journeying all the time it takes about different capacity, it takes about a different existential quality if someone who is journeying all the time in the mind.

So, the journey becomes a mind journey, a mindful journey an existential traveling and that is something which is highlighted over here over and over again, their minds are of the stay-at-home order and the home is always with them the ship and so is their country the sea. One ship is very much like another and seems always the same in the immutability of the surroundings the foreign shores, the foreign faces, the changing immensity of life glide past veiled not by a sense of mystery, but by slightly disdainful ignorance for there is nothing mysterious to a seaman unless it will be the sea itself which is a mistress of his existence and as inscrutable as destiny.

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Destiny. For the rest, after his hours of work, a casual stroll or a casual spree on shore suffices to unfold for him the secret of a whole continent, and generally he finds the secret not worth knowing. The yarns of seamen have a direct simplicity, the whole meaning of which lies within the shell of a cracked nut. But Marlow was not typical (if his propensity to spin yarns be excepted), and to him the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine.

His remark did not seem at all surprising. It was just like Marlow. It was accepted in silence. No one took the trouble to grunt even; and presently he said, very slow—"I was thinking of very old times, when the Portuguese first



For the rest, after his hours of work a casual stroll or a casual spree on shore suffices to unfold for him a secret of a whole continent and generally he finds the secret not worth knowing. The yarns of seamen have a direct simplicity the whole meaning of which lies within the shell of a cracked nut, but Marlow was not typical.

Now, before I come to this section and it is a very complex thing with which I will end, but you know what is being said about seamen is that you know people who are traveled by the sea all the time, they their stories become interchangeable. So, everywhere they go they do not really travel. It is just the physical thing and all they do sometimes is get a stroll and take a look at walk and in that little walk they seem to they appear to pick up everything that its worth knowing about the place.

So, the yarns of seamen or the stories of seamen, the stories that seamen tell to each other and also to other people have a directness have a direct simplicity about them. It is about adventures perhaps is about people, it is about otherness etcetera, but the whole meaning of which lies within the shell of a cracked nut and it is a very important metaphor, a very interesting metaphor of a storytelling, quality of a storytelling activity.

So, the entire activity of storytelling lies within a shell of a crack nut. So, it is just one shell inside a crack nut. So it's easier to grasp, it is easy to consume, it is easy to possess, it is easy to lay your hands to and understand. So, there is nothing inscrutable it is nothing non-understandable about seamen stories, about adventure, about glory that

about danger that about exotic things etcetera. So, you know it is the commonly grasped knowledge of travelers where the entire idea of story is within a cracked nut. So, the nut is cracked and the seed is inside the nut. So, it is graspable that is consumable, it is holdable, it is possessable and that is something which is commonly characteristic of seamen stories, but contrast that to Marlow's stories and this is where it gets interesting what kind of stories does Marlow dish out, but Marlow was not typical right.

So, you know he was not a typical seaman; he was a very different kind of a seaman. His stories were different. How so? if his propensity to spin yarns be accepted, you know that is the only common habit of a seamen that he had propensity to tell stories, he had a propensity to tell what happened to him to spin yarns to spin out stories. The only that was only commonality his you know inclination to tell stories, but as that is the only thing that that was where it ended with that was a commonality ended there with that the similarity ended with that now everything apart from Marlow everything about Marlow was different was exceptional, right.

So, his stories were different, the way he told his stories were very different and how so we will find out now and to him the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel, but outside, enveloping the tail which brought it out only as a globe brings out the highs in the likeness that one of those misty hals that sometimes are made visible, by a spectral illumination of moonshine. The word spectral I have already used it, but then this is what Conrad is also giving you is that that just corresponds, it corroborates our reading so far but what we are told essentially over here is for Marlow and from Marlow stories and the meaning does not lie inside the story, is outside the story right. It is like a concentric circle, it is like a halo misty halo.

So it is not really tangible, it is not really palpable, it is not something you can touch and possess and occupy and interpret and understand immediately. So, there is a degree of spectrality, there is a degree of mystery, a degree of unending quality about Marlow's stories. There is no kernel inside, there is no center of the story, but it has got eccentric circles, it has got concentric circles right and this centerlessness of Marlow's stories is something which is very important for us and that sets a tone for what is to follow in how Heart of Darkness right. So, I will just wind up over here stop here for this particular lecture this, but just to very quickly summarize this particular section because very important section that tells us the quality of Marlow's storytelling, the nature of

Marlow's storytelling essentially now what is that that he was an untypical storyteller an untypical seaman storyteller, ok.

So, his story is a very untypical. It has got going nothing to do it the way normally normal adventure stories are told and this is sort of almost metafictional because we just see how Conrad's stories are very unlike let us say Rider Haggard stories or Rudyard Kipling stories are not really adventure tales. They are actually anti adventure tales they are about decadence, they are about existential confusion, they are about cognitive confusion and Marlow who is essentially the character inside the Conrad character inside this particular story, but please remember Conrad too was a traveler. He traveled extensively across the world around that time of imperialism, but we are told that Marlow's stories do not really have a center inside, they are centerless, they are like they have rings, spectral rings around the stories and the meaning does not lie inside, but outside.

So, they are almost slipping away and the slipperiness of meaning the centerlessness of meaning is something which is described by this phrase a spectral illumination and moonshine, right. So, it is not really sunshine, it's not really a centered thing, it's not really a kernel in which the seed that you can grasp in front of meaning of there is no such thing in Marlow's stories, but we have instead is a sense of unending spectrality of endless spectrality which categorises his stories and this is what categorises Heart of Darkness as well.

So, from this point we start reading the novel extensively in certain selected passages and we find how this quality of centerlessness of slipperiness of not having any inside, there is no interiority at all. This degree of hollowness about a story and that is something which pervades the entire novel Heart of Darkness which we will cover in lectures to come. So, I will stop at this point today. I will continue with this in the next lectures.

Thank you for your attention. [noise]