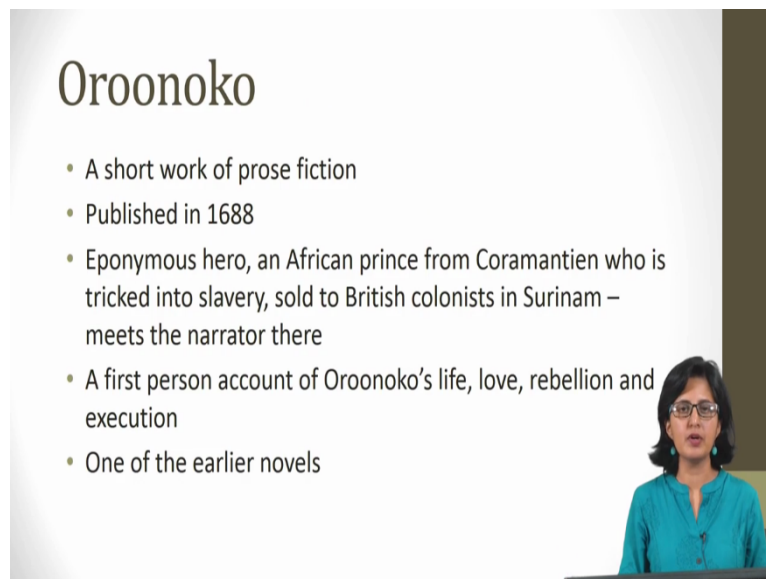


Introduction to World Literature
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Oroonoko - I
Oroonoko, or The Royal Slave by Aphra Behn

Hello and welcome to today's session. We are today looking at one of the 17th century works title Oroonoko which also has an alternate title or the Royal slave written by Aphra Behn.

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Oroonoko

- A short work of prose fiction
- Published in 1688
- Eponymous hero, an African prince from Coramantien who is tricked into slavery, sold to British colonists in Surinam – meets the narrator there
- A first person account of Oroonoko's life, love, rebellion and execution
- One of the earlier novels

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Oroonoko is considered as a short work of prose fiction more like a proto-novel type which is published in 1688 towards the end of the 17th century. This work has an Eponymous hero, an African prince from Coromantien who is tricked into slavery and then sold to British colonists in Surinam and it is there as per the text it is there in Surinam that he meets the narrator.

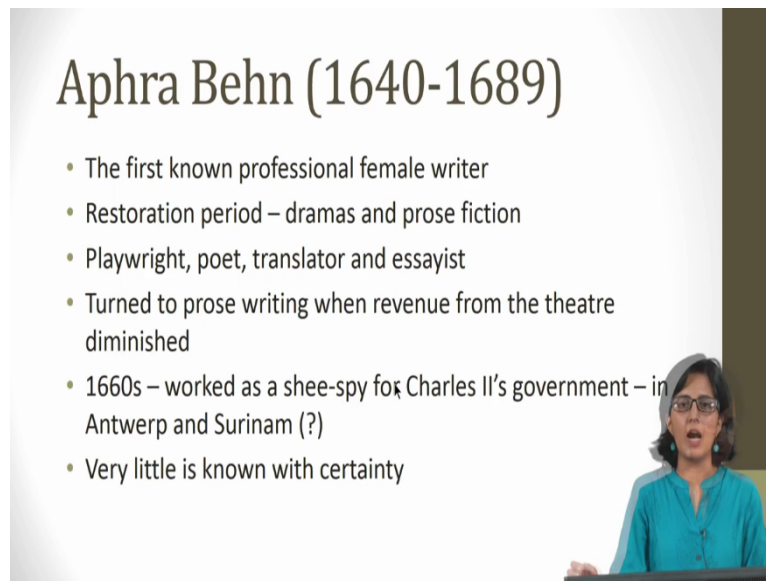
The narrator who happens to be the author Aphra Behn and this work is considered as extremely important in the history of English language and literature. Though this is a 17th-century text we find a lot of critique of colonialism in this. We know that as far as Britain is concerned Britain had reached the zenith of its colonial glory from the end of the 16th century onwards.

And we find that there are a lot of way in which the spirit of colonialism is celebrated in a number of English text but contrary to those text Oroonoko is one text that who written by a

female author where a strong critique of colonialism can be found where a strong current against the value system and against the social fabric of England can be found there.

Oroonoko this proto-novel is a first person account of Oroonoko's life, love, rebellion and execution. And this is also considered as one of the earlier novels though the form per se may look a little different when we look at it from the contemporary.

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Aphra Behn (1640-1689)

- The first known professional female writer
- Restoration period – dramas and prose fiction
- Playwright, poet, translator and essayist
- Turned to prose writing when revenue from the theatre diminished
- 1660s – worked as a spy for Charles II's government – in Antwerp and Surinam (?)
- Very little is known with certainty

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Aphra Behn is a first known professional female writer who lived from 1640 to 1689. The dates we do not have, too many certain details about her date of birth or the other personal details it's all by way of conjecture that some dates have been found by historians. She lived during the Restoration period.

And during that period she wrote dramas and prose extensively and if you're familiar with the story of the English literature you also know that during the Restoration period plays were extremely popular it was one of the easiest means to get livelihood as far as writers and artists were concerned and the Restoration period happens after a 40 year break in English history where theatre was shut down where there were no forms of entertainment that was the puritan rule.

And during this time, during these Restoration phase that Aphra Behn gains significance invisibility. She could be considered as a playwright, a poor translator and an essayist all found in one. It's interesting that she turned to prose writing when revenue from the theatre diminished and she also had started her career as a dramatist in the first place because she

was not really being taken care of well by this Terrence in spite of being a spy for Charles II government.

It's a very very interesting projectory that we find in her career in her life given that she was a woman who was leading a life in the 17th-century. In the 1660's there is enough evidence to show that she worked as a she spy for Charles II government in Antwerp the Surinam historians suspect but very little is known with certainty about her life that is also enough evidence to show that she was married to a Dutch man for a while who also is supposed to have died during one of the plaques.

But we find her leading an extremely individualistic life very successful life given that the society of those times was more male centric and there was hardly any place for women in those public spaces whether it is be anything related to art or whether it is related to war and spy work and we find it is in such a male centric society that Aphra Behn manages to carve out a space for herself.

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- July 1666 – Anglo-Dutch war – sent to Antwerp, Belgium as an intelligence agent
- Asrea, code name
- Left to fend for herself – like many other agents of Charles II
- Imprisoned for dept
- Turned to writing as a means of earning a living

In July 1666 it is said that during the Anglo Dutch War she was sent to Antwerp in Belgium as an intelligence agent and she had to stay there, she was required to stay there till the end of the year till December. And Asrea was the codename that she used as an agent and it is very interesting to read about these accounts and to know what a fascinating life she led in the 17th century.

And how different our articulations where as an artist but however in spite of this in incredible spectacular very different kind of (())(5:29) that she undertook she was left to fend

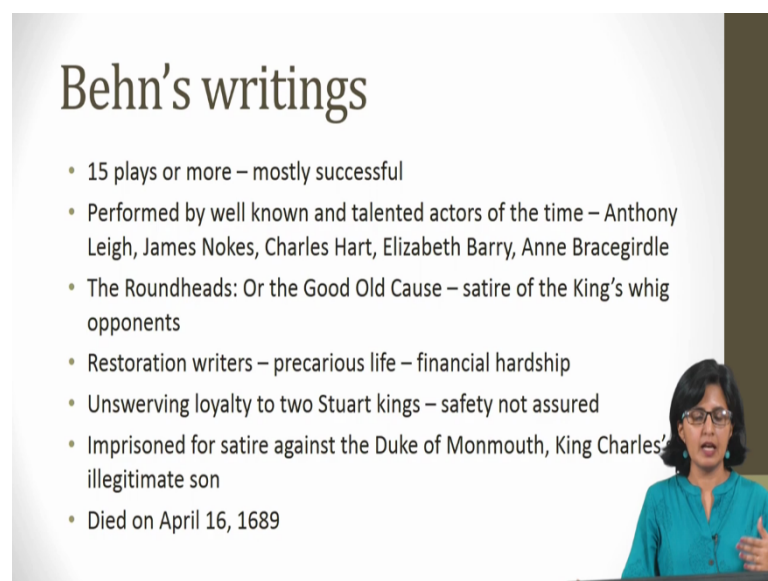
for herself. And in fact was the fate of many other agents of Charles II if you know your English history you would also know that it was a turbulent. A very interesting period in English history where we also find the equation between the Parliament and the ground the Parliament and the monarch radically changing.

And a lot of political changes coming into being totally redefining and reshaping the way in which British history gets to be shaped. And during this period when she returns from Antwerp it's also significant note that she gets imprisoned for dept. She hardly gets paid for any of the work that he did like many other agents. And said that some member from the the Royal Council she they tried to rescue her out of the dept and she is out of imprisonment but however when she turns to writing as a means of earning a living and he therefore is now considered as a first female writer could make a career out of writing.

And this is extremely significant that he is not writing as a means of self-expression, she was not riding as in order to offer a counter narrative in the male centric society she was writing as a professional and that makes it all the more different. That makes Oroonoko go special work to talk about in the context of our literature that it marked the beginning of woman's professional journey as a writer.

And is in this context that we shall be looking at Oroonoko and evaluating its historical significance not just in England but also in the larger context of world literature in the context of the traditions that writers both male and female had ser in place.

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Behn's writings

- 15 plays or more – mostly successful
- Performed by well known and talented actors of the time – Anthony Leigh, James Nokes, Charles Hart, Elizabeth Barry, Anne Bracegirdle
- The Roundheads: Or the Good Old Cause – satire of the King's whig opponents
- Restoration writers – precarious life – financial hardship
- Unswerving loyalty to two Stuart kings – safety not assured
- Imprisoned for satire against the Duke of Monmouth, King Charles' illegitimate son
- Died on April 16, 1689

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If we take a look at Behn's writings, she wrote prolifically. It's said that she wrote 15 plays or even more is no exact number which is available because some of the works which do not bear her name are also attributed to her and most of her plays were very very successful. And if you're familiar with the scene of Restoration drama, it is mostly Restoration comedy that the body kind of comedy that Charles II courtiers preferred.

It's in such a setting and that is inked, it's from such a social context that Behn emerges as a very different kind of an artist doing practicing the kind of politics that she believed in and manifesting that in her writings in a very powerful way and her plays were also noted the performance by well-known and talented actors of the time and Anthony Leigh, James Nokes, Charles Hart, Elizabeth Barry and Anne Bracegirdle were some of the famous actors of those times to also act in most of Behn's place that also added to the appeal of her works being staged.

During her time when most writers were trying to avoid getting into any kind of political trouble were trying to stay away from the center of political affairs we find Behn taking the lead and she is not holding back anything when she is doing a satire "Roundheads: or the good old cause" is one of the satire is targeting the Kings Whig opponents. And it's important to know that during the duration time the writers had led a very precarious life.

They have ran into many trouble with the rulers of those times if they had any political controversy brewing about their careers or about their lives. It could ruin their career and even their life and so we find most of them staying away from any serious matters and are just focusing on some mindless comedy, mostly focusing on man woman relationship and trying to make it as body as possible.

If you recall the way Henry Hudson the history of English language and literature when he talks about this section on Restoration comedy, he makes this point that it is not even worth our time to spend time discussing the Restoration drama because it is not really worth it at all. We find Aphra Behn emerging as a very different kind of an artist during this time with a conviction.

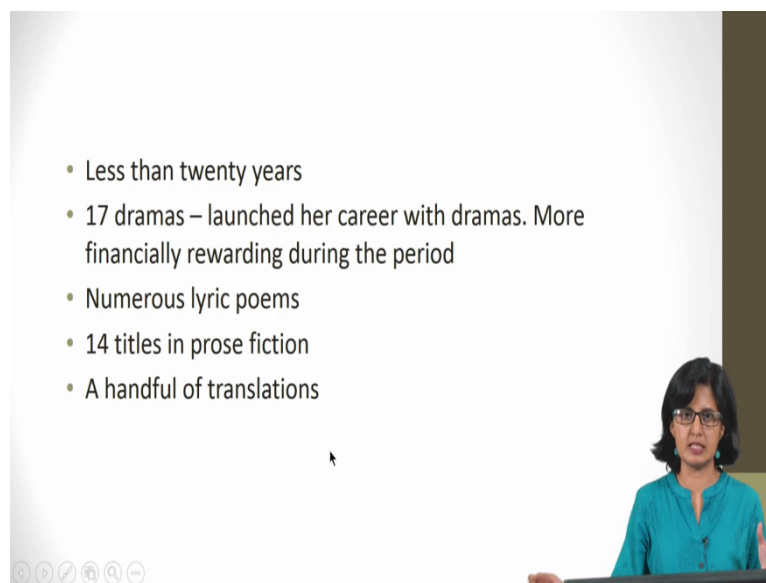
And where some kind of powerful stance that is hard not to notice most of her works. So Behn also did face this right or falling into financial hardship if she did not draw the line, she did not always managed to place the ones who were supposed to be please. So we find her

however leading a tough life because she had of her unswerving loyalty to two Stuart kings but still her safety is not assured.

In fact even after having got the heater persuasion from King Charles for being a spy and an excellent one (())(11:01) Antwerp and possibly in Surinam. We find they are getting imprisoned for satire against the Duke of Monmouth who is also the king of Charles II illegitimate son. So as you know King Charles II court was well-known for the kind of promiscuous activities that the king himself was indulging in and it was being seen as the most in working to do than.

And he also had a lot of illegitimate children and we know the kind of politics and the kind of the political drama which was happening at the background. So we find the taking a stance when she is trying to write about these things and expose these things before the public. We find her coming across as a very fearless woman. She died on April 16, 1689.

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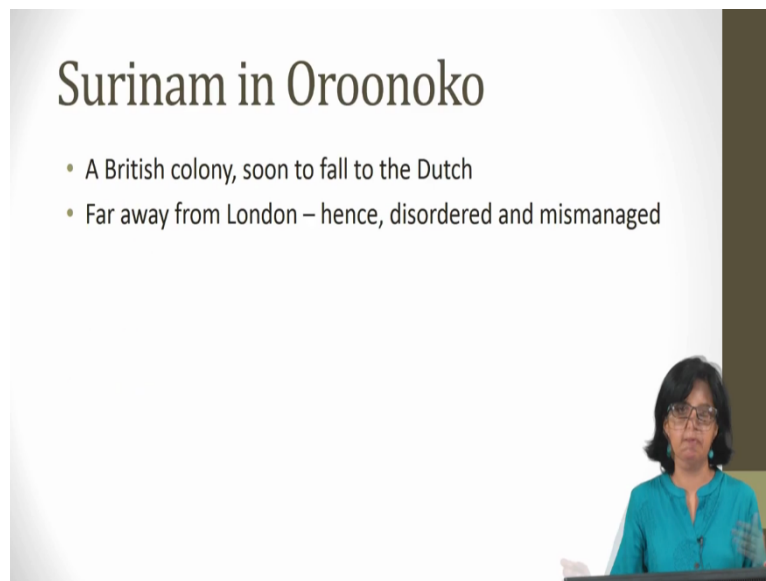
- Less than twenty years
- 17 dramas – launched her career with dramas. More financially rewarding during the period
- Numerous lyric poems
- 14 titles in prose fiction
- A handful of translations

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And her active literary career was for just about 20 years, in fact less than 20 years. So in this period it is, if you take inventory of her work, it is about 17 dramas. She launched her career with dramas because dramas were financially more rewarding during the period and she also earns this title being a professional. She wrote a number of lyric poems. There are 14 titles in prose fiction and a handful of translations as well.

She was a very well read woman who could write prolifically and also bring together a range of artistic skills and present them in an effective way.

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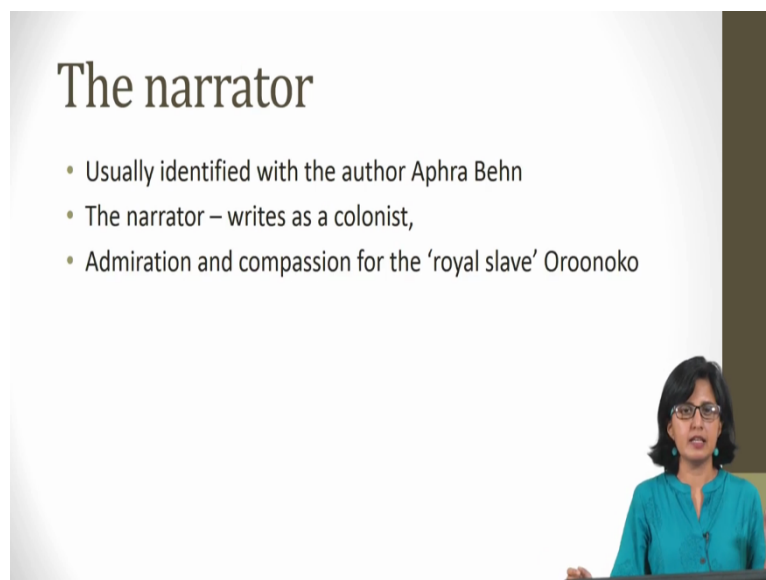


Surinam in Oroonoko

- A British colony, soon to fall to the Dutch
- Far away from London – hence, disordered and mismanaged

Oroonoko, this fiction Oroonoko is set in Surinam and Suriname was a British colony, it was soon to fall to the Dutch. Unlike the many other colonies that Britain had then Suriname was far away from London and hence it was disordered and mismanaged this is an information which is handy to keep in mind that it should be useful when we take a closer look at the text later.

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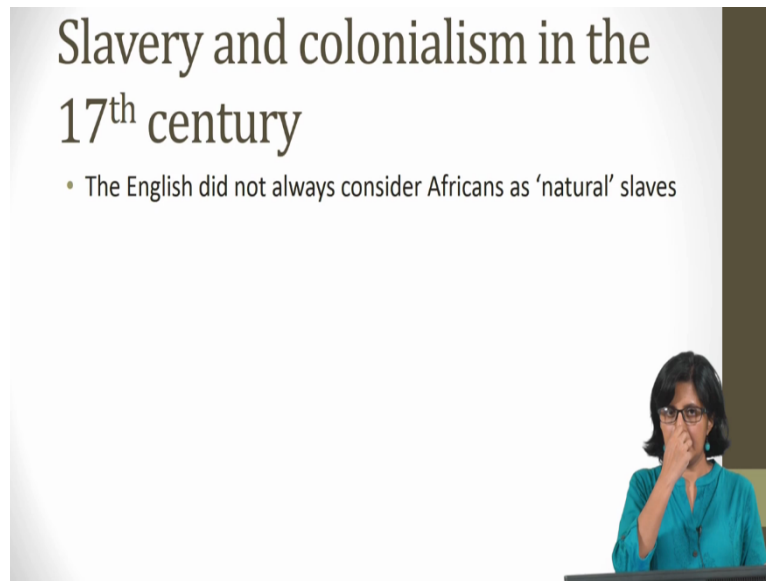


The narrator

- Usually identified with the author Aphra Behn
- The narrator – writes as a colonist,
- Admiration and compassion for the 'royal slave' Oroonoko

And the narrator of this novel is usually identified with the author Aphra Behn. The narrator writes as a colonist and at the same time the narrator has admiration and compassion for the Royals slave Oroonoko. So that's a premise and that is what defines the overall framework of this work as well.

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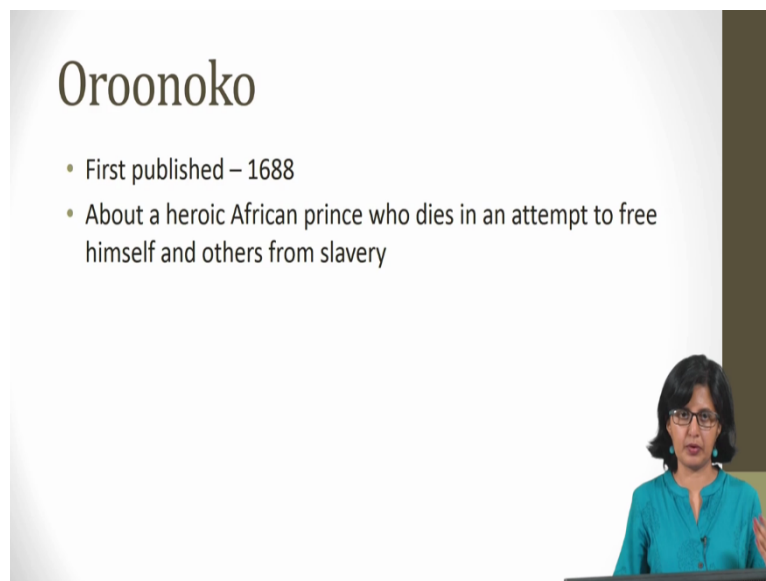


Slavery and colonialism in the 17th century

- The English did not always consider Africans as 'natural' slaves

And talking about slavery and colonialism in the 17th century. The English did not always consider Africans as natural slaves and it is something again to be kept in the back of our mind when we start reading and analyzing the text Oroonoko.

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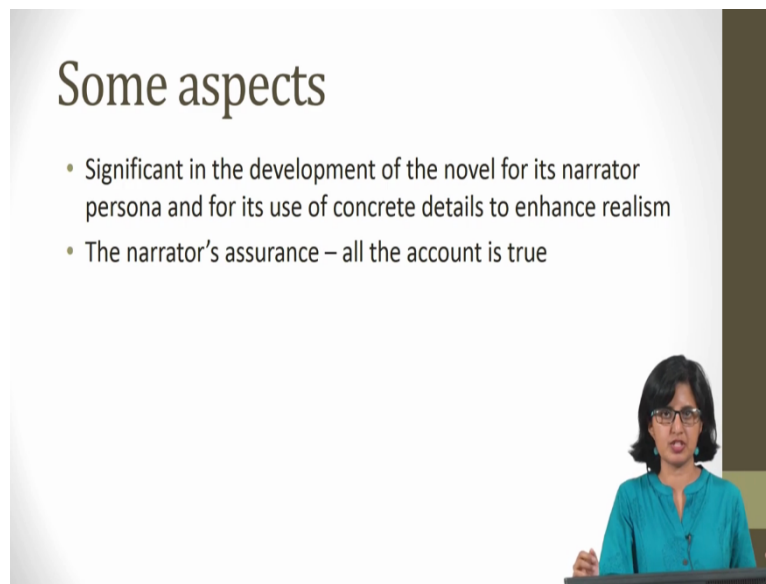


Oroonoko

- First published – 1688
- About a heroic African prince who dies in an attempt to free himself and others from slavery

Oroonoko was first published in 1688. It is just of a heroic African prince and he dies in an attempt to free himself and others from slavery. So more than the framework more than the outline of this novel what is more interesting are the details that go into this. And the prospect is that, across as being very very fresh and before we take a detailed look at this, let's take a look at some of the significant aspects of this work makes it significant in the context of literary tradition and literary history.

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Oroonoko may not come across as a well formed round work of fiction when we look at it today but this work was very significant in the development of the novel, for its narrator persona and also for its use of concrete details to enhance realism. It's important to keep in mind that Aphra Behn is writing Oroonoko who at a time when realism had not begun to be talked about as a prominent trend.

Or realism had not begun to be identified as one of the most useful narrative's and it is during this time that this novel presents the narration in a very realistic form and at the outset of the novel as we will see in one of the later sessions when we take a look at the novel. There is an effort being made from the author to present the narrator and also to show that this is an authentic kind of narration.

At this effort that Aphra Behn as an author and as the narrator of the story takes is very very important because the aspect of realism brings the satire hard-hitting back home and there is also an assurance that we get from the narrator at the beginning of the story that all the account is true. There is no reason to suspect that whether some of the accounts are falsified or not and there is an attempt, very strong attempt made at the beginning to convince a reader that this is true.

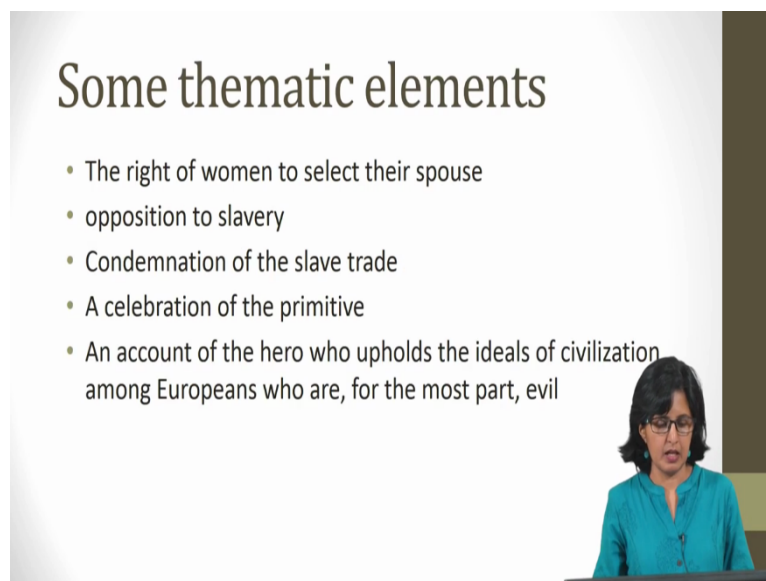
I'm thinking about the veracity of the accounts given that Aphra Behn had spent some time in Surinam working as a spy we also begin to wonder whether some of the details are from her own life, whether she herself had witnessed some of the details that she talks about in this work.

And this makes it significantly for many reasons because men were seen as the ones experiencing adventure. Men were seen as the ones who travel to different places and bring back their experience and articulate in artistic forms, publish and circulate in book forms. Here we find woman who is not writing about the inside but on the other hand she is talking about the outside to which very few women have access to.

She is talking about that world outside which is predominantly male centric which is otherwise not accessible for a lot women like her but for whatsoever reason the access that she finds, the experience is that she has in that big bad world out there, she successfully translates it into fiction. And what is interesting about this narration also that when we look at the narrator, when we look at the tone, the details and the register that the narrator uses, one does not feel that gender plays a significant role.

We find that she is able to narrate this experience with as much authenticity as many other male travelers and male travelogue writers and male adventurers of those times had possessed.

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Some thematic elements

- The right of women to select their spouse
- opposition to slavery
- Condemnation of the slave trade
- A celebration of the primitive
- An account of the hero who upholds the ideals of civilization among Europeans who are, for the most part, evil

And looking at some of the thematic element also makes this text stand out. in Oroonoko we find Aphra Behn's politics at work in the most visible way. And in this she underscores the right of women to select their spouses and this goes very much against the value system, the Society constraints of the 17th century England where women were still considered as a property of men.

Decisions were always made for them and remember not really allowed act as agents. Agency was totally denied to them in various ways in terms of education, in terms of career choices, in terms of choosing a partner, in terms of even having their rights over one's own body. So she underscores in this novel Oroonoko we find Aphra Behn underscoring the right of women to select their spouse.

She also makes her opposition to slavery known very very evident and during a time when it is seen most natural thing to employ slaves to get their work done and this we find as a trend being very prominent across the various nations who are in the rat race for colonies in Europe.

And Behn in fact takes a very prominent, a very controversial kind of a political stance when she is articulating her opposition to slavery. She also condemns the slave trade which was seen as the one of the most profitable ways in which colonialism would grow. It's also seen as one of the ways through which the colonies get to prosper, the colonies get to benefit from the colonial advancements.

So what Aphra Behn is doing is calling (())(19:35) by saying that regardless of the kind of revenue that is getting generated through these colonial practices. It is very very important and ethical also to articulate and to put on record the opposition to slavery and also a condemnation of slave drive. And as we know one of the earliest impetus as far as the colonial ambitions were concerned it was a white men's burden.

The white man whether the Englishman or the European man it was considered that it was their responsibility to go out into the wild into the uncivilized and to make them more civilized and more respectable and to give them the religion, the education, the civilization, the advancements and the foundations that the Western world had benefited from. So the underlining assumption was that the primitive had to be rescued and to be brought into civilization which by extension obviously meant the Western civilization.

We find Aphra Behn (())(20:39) that and we know that it is pretty much a commonsensical kind of a thing in the post-Orientalist in the postcolonial world but for someone to think like this in the 17th-century that was remarkable, it was very incredible and take a look at the story in detail you will also realize that there is a celebration of the primitive and there is no hierarchical way in which she privileges the Western civilization. She privileges the Western system of education or the Western value system over the primitive.

On the other hand she finds in the primitive something to be celebrated, something to be appreciated and acknowledged. So in Oroonoko we have an account of a hero who upholds the ideals of civilization, Europeans who are the most part evil and this is an important point to pay attention to as we wrap up today's discussion.

Oroonoko as a novel stands out today as a 17th-century text for various reasons. One is sent by offers professional female writer and secondly this is about a protagonist who left to uphold the ideals of civilization. I repeat this to upholds the ideals of civilization among Europeans who are for the most part evil and this is certainly a very controversial thing and of course a very bold thing to say in the 17th-century.

And by the 19 century, late 19th and early 20th century we know that some of the articulation start there in the public space. There are a lot of political thinkers and philosophers talking about it. There are statesmen debating these in different ways but in the 17th-century when England is still proud of its status as the Empire on which the sun never sets. We find Oroonoko making a statement by arguing that, by putting for the idea that the ideals upheld by the Europeans may not always be the right ones.

Maybe there is another way to look at the Colonial practice, maybe there is another way to look at the hierarchy which is in place which colonials also brings in and this is something which predates the many discourses on colonialism. And to my mind the significance of Oroonoko also rests mostly in this that it had the potential to talk about many things before time and also place it within a context even before the time had really arrived for it.

So in the following section we shall try to take a look at some of the excerpts from Oroonoko and we also will try to show how this text stands out as a classic in world literature and how it helped redefine the paradigms within which colonialism and civilization and the clash between the primitive and Western. The primitive and a sophisticated where understood in the 17th-century. I thank you for listening and I look forward to see you in the next session.