

Twentieth-Century Fiction
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Lecture - 13
Heart of Darkness - Part 8

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er. I thought, 'By Jove! it's all over. We are too late; he has vanished—the gift has vanished, by means of some spear, arrow, or club. I will never hear that chap speak after all'—and my sorrow had a startling extravagance of emotion, even such as I had noticed in the howling sorrow of these savages in the bush. I couldn't have felt more of lonely desolation somehow, had I been robbed of a belief or had missed my destiny in life. ... Why do you sigh in this beastly way, somebody? Absurd? Well, absurd. Good Lord! mustn't a man ever—Here, give me some tobacco.' ...

There was a pause of profound stillness, then a match flared, and Marlow's lean face appeared, worn, hollow, with downward folds and dropped eyelids, with an aspect of concentrated attention; and as he took vigorous draws at his pipe, it seemed to retreat and advance out of the night in the regular flicker of tiny flame. The match went out.

'Absurd!' he cried. 'This is the worst of trying to tell. ... Here you all are, each moored with two good addresses, like a hulk with two anchors, a butcher round one corner, a policeman round another, excellent appetites, and temperature normal—you hear—normal from year's end to year's end. And you say, Absurd! Absurd be—exploded! Absurd! My dear boys, what can you expect from a man who out of sheer nervousness had just flung overboard a pair of new shoes! Now I think of it, it is amazing I did not shed tears. I am, upon the whole, proud of my fortitude. I was cut to the quick at the idea of having lost the inestimable privilege of



So, hello and welcome to this NPTEL course entitled Twentieth Century Fiction. We were looking at Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness. So, today we will have the penultimate lecture for this particular text, it is the second – last lecture. I will just windup with some of the issues which we have dealt with and discussed already. Now, one thing which keeps coming up a recurring motive, a recurring issue in Heart of Darkness is the entire politics of narration. And we see how Marlow in Heart of Darkness is, a nervous narrator, is almost neurotic in quality. And a story that he wants to convey to the European listeners, European interlocutors, and Thames is, something which happened to him in Congo, and does not quite have the narrative machinery on the narrative apparatus so to say to convey the sensation, to convey what really happened to him.

So, among other things, Heart of Darkness is the crisis in terms of the translation from an experience into a narrative, so that translation does not quite take place in Heart of Darkness. And Marlow is quite aware of his own inadequacy as a narrator of his own

absurdity as a narrator. And you know this section that we look at now we will find how he acknowledges his absurdity, acknowledges his inadequacy, at the same time he expresses his frustration as a very inadequate narrator. And this should be on your screen, where he says, absurd, he cried. This is the worst of trying to tell. Here you all are, each moored with two good addresses, like a hulk with two anchors, a butcher round one corner, a policeman round another, excellent appetites, and temperament, and temperature normal – you hear – normal from year's end to year's end. And you say, absurd, absurd be – exploded, absurd. My dear boys, what can you expect from a man who out of sheer nervousness had just flung overboard a pair of new shoes.

So, he is saying that you know it is very easy for you to judge morally, it is very easy for you to judge intellectually the story that I am telling you is absurd. But what can you expect from a man who is sheer out of sheer nervousness you know flung a pair of shoes overboard because he was so nervous, he was so unfamiliar with the surrounding around him. And if you remember the last lecture, we looked at the entire politics of delayed decoding, the entire politics of defamiliarization, wherein the environment around Marlow, the surroundings around Marlow, they change dramatically and drastically. And it does not quite know how to navigate you know with the environment around him.

And so what happens in that kind of condition is a crisis in embodiment. And by embodiment, I mean the neural as well as a discursive negotiation with the surrounding that is the working definition of embodiment in *Heart of Darkness*. It is a discursive maneuver that you are you are maneuvering with the discursive apparatus around you that includes language that includes politics that includes culture, all these are very discursive things, but at the same time there is also a very embedded neural quality about embodiment is how you neurally navigate with your surroundings. So, it has an embedded quality as well an extended quality right.

So, the extended quality is a discursive quality, the embedded quality is a neural quality. And it is a combination of both these qualities which inform embodiment in the first place. So, in a in a way this can be seen among other things as the crisis of embodiment in *Heart of Darkness* right. And that obviously, is part of the crisis and storytelling, this part of the you know the entire package of storytelling. Because story telling too is a form of embodiment, you putting your experience into a language, you are putting experience into a narrative and that too becomes an extended performance of your

experience, and that you know does not quite take, place does not quite take off does not quite become a smoothless and seamless affair in Heart of Darkness ok.

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the memory of that time itself lingers around me, impalpable, like a dying vibration of one immense jabber, silly, atrocious, sordid, savage, or simply mean, without any kind of sense. Voices, voices—even the girl herself—now—

He was silent for a long time.

'I laid the ghost of his gifts at last with a lie,' he began, suddenly. 'Girl! What? Did I mention a girl? Oh, she is out of it—completely. They—the women, I mean—are out of it—should be out of it. We must help them to stay in that beautiful world of their own, lest ours gets worse. Oh, she had to be out of it. You should have heard the disinterred body of Mr. Kurtz saying, 'My Intended.' You would have perceived directly then how completely she was out of it. And the lofty frontal bone of Mr. Kurtz! They say the hair goes on growing sometimes, but this—ah—specimen, was impressively bald. The wilderness had patted him on the head, and, behold, it was like a ball—an ivory ball; it had caressed him, and—lo!—he had withered; it had taken him, loved him, embraced him, got into his veins, consumed his flesh, and sealed his soul to its own by the inconceivable ceremonies of some devilish initiation. He was its spoiled and pampered favourite. Ivory? I should think so. Heaps of it, stacks of it. The old mud shanty was bursting with it. You would think there was not a single tusk left either above or

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So, we see over here an interesting section is coming up and I am just going to spend a bit of time over examining unpacking this section, and this is about Kurtz's intended right. So, Kurtz essentially has, there are two female figures you know around Kurtz in Heart of Darkness, one is the European intended someone who he has promised to marry the fiancé who lives in Brussels European woman, the naive European woman, the naive consumer of imperialism so to say, and he also has a mistress who is African.

And again, if you look at the very racist and racially focalized description of these two female figures. So, Kurtz's intended is a very elegant monarch, Kurtz's intended is described as someone who is very elegant and feminine in a very beautiful, almost non-bodily way right, whereas the mistress who was African is exoticized and it's almost visceralised, I do not quite know if such a word exists, but it is all about the body. And so the body quality the embodied quality of the mistress, the African mistress is highlighted and is foregrounded is dramatized over and over again, and that becomes part of the exotic package, that becomes part of the exotic narrative which is invested in that description.

Whereas, with the intended who is European, who is white you know the main markers, or the markers of elegance, the markers of mourning, the markers of a non-embodied

non-sexual you know kind of descriptions, whereas the African mistress is obviously, hyper-sexualized and hyper-embodied and the description that Marlow offers is, and that betrays in a way the white focal point in *Heart of Darkness*, entire story is told from a very wide focal point. I mean albeit neurotic, albeit nervous, albeit an unreliable focal point, but it is still very white and male and privileged. And that white male privilege that that is very much part of the focalization in *Heart of Darkness*, the entire story is told through that particular focus point which is what we have to bear in mind all the time ok.

So, you know and this is in reference to the intended; my intended, you would have perceived directly then how completely she was out of it. And the lofty frontal bone of Mr. Kurtz, so again we saw how the physiognomic markers, you know which were supposedly reflective of degeneration, criminality, etcetera, were rampant in nineteenth century is very much there in *Heart of Darkness* if you remember the earlier scene where Marlow is about to set off from Europe he meets a doctor, and we had rather seen quite extensively, but it is worth reiterating it. How the doctor had talked about the frontal bone and how that becomes the mark of degeneration insanity, criminology, etcetera.

They say the hair goes on growing sometimes the hair goes on growing sometimes, but this specimen was impressively bald, the wilderness had patted him on the head, and, behold, it was like a ball – an ivory ball; it had caressed him, and – lo – he had withered; it had taken him, loved him, embraced him, got into his veins, consumed his flesh, and sealed his soul to its own by the very inconceivable ceremonies of some devilish initiations.

So, again if you look at the adjective devilish initiation, so the entire African setting is described as devilish over here which is to say anti-Christian, anti-white, anti-European, anti-civilization, but and that is a very, very racist – kind of a rhetoric which is or racially inflected rhetoric that is used by Marlow, and by extension by Conrad over here. But what is interesting for us to understand is how the entire experience of imperialism becomes a consuming experience, it consumes Kurtz.

And there is a quasi cannibalistic quality about his experience, it sort of eats him up in a way, it takes away his body, it just converts one into something else his head becomes bald and he becomes ivory. And this is a very symbolic transition, very symbolic morphing. So, whole, the body of Kurtz, been morphing into ivory becomes very

symbolic shift. So, anyway he becomes imperialism, so he completely over appropriates imperialism.

And this is part of the problem with Kurtz, the reason why he becomes a problem for the imperial machinery, it is not because he is an inadequate soldier, not because he is an inadequate imperialist, it is because he is a hyper-adequate imperialist. He does it too much, he over appropriates imperialism. And therein lies his monstrosity that becomes too perfect, he becomes too appropriate you know he becomes too much of a imperial specimen. So, he becomes the ivory in a way, and that is a very symbolic morphing, a very symbolic becoming a very symbolic performative process through which he becomes the ivory, which obviously, is a signifier of imperialism over here. So, that ivory ball Kurtz looking like an ivory ball is a very symbolic kind of definition and something which we must bear in mind in terms of the categorization of Kurtz how it is categorized ok.

So, he was a spoiled and pampered favorite. So, there is a prodigal son narrative about Kurtz as well. So, he is a son, who goes prodigal; he is a son who goes haywire; he is a son who goes you know becomes monstrous. And a monstrosity, of course is part of the hyper appropriation, the fact that he is hyper appropriated to the colonial specimens, the colonial markers, the imperial markers, and therein lies a problem, therein lies a monstrosity, therein lies the entire cannibalistic quality about Kurtz. So, the whole idea of being the spoiled son, the pampered son, the prodigal son of imperialism, it becomes you know the departure from a Christian narrative right.

Ivory? I should think so. Heaps of it, stacks of it. The old mud shanty was bursting with it. So, again an overabundance of ivory and a hyper visibility of the imperial signifier and that becomes a problem for imperialism. So, there is no it is very naked, it is very explicit. It is nothing at all which is even trying to efface the greed the exploitation, the lust for power, the lust for imperial machinery over here, it is very much foregrounded, it is very much in your face and that becomes a problem.

So, again just to repeat myself. The problem with Kurtz, monstrosity of Kurtz lies in his hyper-appropriation of imperialism, lies on his hyper-appropriation of the imperial signifier of ivory, and his very symbolic shift into ivory. The fact that it becomes ivory is very symbolic of that hyper-appropriation that he lets go of his human qualities he

effaces, he hollows out as a human being, and he becomes the ivory becomes the material the material marker for imperialism in this particular case ok.

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below the ground in the whole country. 'Mostly fossil,' the manager had remarked, disparagingly. It was no more fossil than I am; but they call it fossil when it is dug up. It appears these niggers do bury the tusks sometimes— but evidently they couldn't bury this parcel deep enough to save the gifted Mr. Kurtz from his fate. We filled the steamboat with it, and had to pile a lot on the deck. Thus he could see and enjoy as long as he could see, because the appreciation of this favour had remained with him to the last. You should have heard him say, 'My ivory.' Oh, yes, I heard him. 'My Intended, my ivory, my station, my river, my—' everything belonged to him. It made me hold my breath in expectation of hearing the wilderness burst into a prodigious peal of laughter that would shake the fixed stars in their places. Everything belonged to him— but that was a trifle. The thing was to know what he belonged to, how many powers of darkness claimed him for their own. That was the reflection that made you creepy all over. It was impossible—it was not good for one either—trying to imagine. He had taken a high seat amongst the devils of the land— I mean literally. You can't understand. How could you?— with solid pavement under your feet, surrounded by kind neighbours ready to cheer you or to fall on you, stepping delicately between the butcher and the policeman, in the holy terror of scandal and gallows and lunatic asylums—how can you imagine what particular region of the first ages a man's untrammelled feet may take him into by the way of solitude—utter



You would think there was not a single tusk left either above or below on ground in the whole country right. So, everything around Kurtz have been taken over, everything have been appropriated ok.

And now the next session that I should want to spend some time with today time on today is when Kurtz becomes this possessor, he becomes this little autocratic possessor, the proprietor of everything around him, so since the ownership that he has and not just on material things, but also on human beings right. And what this does in a very symbolic macro level is among other things; Heart of Darkness too is an example of the horrors that come with hyper-reification or hyper-commodification right and that is something that I am going to spend some time with today.

What is hyper-commodification, what is hyper-reification? So, reification or commodification is a process through which an object becomes a commodity right. In other words, an object becomes something which can be sold and purchased, and comes with a price tag, and enters the you know purchased consumed economy right or purchase and sell economy. So, that transition from an object into a commodity, the transition from being a natural object into an economic object is what the process of the commodification or reification all about.

Now, *Heart of Darkness* in a sense is about hyper-reification everything becomes more than a commodity, it just everything literally becomes commodity from ivory to the land, to the territory to human beings, every object, every human being, every entity becomes commodity in *Heart of Darkness* and that becomes a problem right. So, the problem in *Heart of Darkness* is that it shows all foregrounds the excesses of imperialism right, and that becomes part of the crisis of *Heart of Darkness*, the crisis comes from excess.

And the same thing happens in Marlow's story because there is so much to tell, there is so much to put in there is so much to pack in into the narrative that he does not know how to navigate with it, he does not quite know how to structure it, he does not quite know how to put that into a sequence or linearity. And therein lies the crisis in narration in *Heart of Darkness*. So, there too there is a problem about excess right. So, the unreliability, the inadequacy in *Heart of Darkness*, they all stem from a sense of excess ok.

So, we can see now Kurtz he goes on marking everything as his territory, marking everything as his property as his commodity. So, my ivory, oh, yes, I heard him. My intended, my ivory, my station, my river, my – everything belonged to him. So, this entire territorialization, this entire ownership, this absolute ownership on everything around him, so that makes Kurtz into a monster that makes Kurtz into some kind of imperial monster right.

So, again as I just mentioned, the problem with Kurtz is his hyper appropriation of the colonial imperial narrative that everything must be done clinically, mercilessly and absolutely right. So, there is no human element left at all. So, he almost becomes an imperial zombie, an imperial Frankensteinian monster, which goes too perfect, which goes too sublime to the point of monstrosity right.

So, you know if you remember *Frankenstein*, the monstrosity in that story is about a sublimity, it is so sublime, it is so super human, therein lies the monstrosity, and the same happens with Kurtz over here as well ok. So, you know my ivory, my station, my intended, my river everything belongs to him and that is something which is you know the hyper-commodification, the hyper-appropriation you know it is something that is part of the horror in *Heart of Darkness*, and interestingly and appropriately enough the final words of Kurtz is the horror the horror right. So, you know again the whole idea of the

horror becomes part of the and the entire existential problem in Heart of Darkness that everything is consumed, everything is sort of cannibalistic in quality ok.

And then of course, Marlow comes back to his cynical self where he sort of almost condescendingly looking at his listeners, and say well how could you understand this horror, because you were so secured in a European establishment you were so secured in your lovely little neighborhoods. And this is what he says how could you? – with solid pavements under your feet, surrounded by kind neighbors ready to cheer you or to fall on you, stepping delicately between the butcher and the policeman, in the holy terror of scandal and gallows and lunatic asylums – how can you imagine what particular region of the first ages a man's untrammelled feet may take him into the way of solitude.

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these niggers do bury the tusks sometimes— but evidently they couldn't bury this parcel deep enough to save the gifted Mr. Kurtz from his fate. We filled the steamboat with it, and had to pile a lot on the deck. Thus he could see and enjoy as long as he could see, because the appreciation of this favour had remained with him to the last. You should have heard him say, 'My ivory.' Oh, yes, I heard him. 'My Intended, my ivory, my station, my river, my—' everything belonged to him. It made me hold my breath in expectation of hearing the wilderness burst into a prodigious peal of laughter that would shake the fixed stars in their places. Everything belonged to him— but that was a trifle. The thing was to know what he belonged to, how many powers of darkness claimed him for their own. That was the reflection that made you creepy all over. It was impossible—it was not good for one either—trying to imagine. He had taken a high seat amongst the devils of the land— I mean literally. You can't understand. How could you?— with solid pavement under your feet, surrounded by kind neighbours ready to cheer you or to fall on you, stepping delicately between the butcher and the policeman, in the holy terror of scandal and gallows and lunatic asylums—how can you imagine what particular region of the first ages a man's untrammelled feet may take him into by the way of solitude—utter solitude without a policeman— by the way of silence—utter silence, where no warning voice of a kind neighbour can be



Utter solitude without a policeman by the way of silence, utter silence, where no warning voice of a kind neighbor can be heard whispering of public opinion.

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heard whispering of public opinion? These little things make all the great difference. When they are gone you must fall back upon your own innate strength, upon your own capacity for faithfulness. Of course you may be too much of a fool to go wrong—too dull even to know you are being assaulted by the powers of darkness. I take it, no fool ever made a bargain for his soul with the devil; the fool is too much of a fool, or the devil too much of a devil—I don't know which. Or you may be such a thunderingly exalted creature as to be altogether deaf and blind to anything but heavenly sights and sounds. Then the earth for you is only a standing place—and whether to be like this is your loss or your gain I won't pretend to say. But most of us are neither one nor the other. The earth for us is a place to live in, where we must put up with sights, with sounds, with smells, too, by Jove!—breathe dead hippo, so to speak, and not be contaminated. And there, don't you see? Your strength comes in, the faith in your ability for the digging of unostentatious holes to bury the stuff in—your power of devotion, not to yourself, but to an obscure, back-breaking business. And that's difficult enough. Mind, I am not trying to excuse or even explain—I am trying to account to myself for—for—Mr. Kurtz—for the shade of Mr. Kurtz. This initiated wraith



So, the entire question of silence becomes interesting over here, because what silence is obviously, is a whole it is almost giving you a diagram of defamiliarization, everything is defamiliarized, and therein lies a silence. The silence stems from an inscrutability, the unknowability in Heart of Darkness, he cannot know anything, he cannot find out, you cannot navigate your way into knowledge right. So, the entire navigation of knowledge that that is interrupted almost permanently in Heart of Darkness right.

And therein lies the problem, therein lies the inscrutability, therein lies the silence there in lies the horror of the silence over here. So, Marlow is being very cynical and condescending and so looking down upon us European listeners, is how can you possibly imagine or grasp this knowledge, or grasp this idea, because you know you cannot you cannot possibly think or envisage a situation where everything around you is unfamiliar, defamiliarized and inscrutable, and all you have is silence.

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fall back upon your own innate strength, upon your own capacity for faithfulness. Of course you may be too much of a fool to go wrong—too dull even to know you are being assaulted by the powers of darkness. I take it, no fool ever made a bargain for his soul with the devil; the fool is too much of a fool, or the devil too much of a devil—I don't know which. Or you may be such a thunderingly exalted creature as to be altogether deaf and blind to anything but heavenly sights and sounds. Then the earth for you is only a standing place—and whether to be like this is your loss or your gain I won't pretend to say. But most of us are neither one nor the other. The earth for us is a place to live in, where we must put up with sights, with sounds, with smells, too, by Jove!—breathe dead hippo, so to speak, and not be contaminated. And there, don't you see? Your strength comes in, the faith in your ability for the digging of unostentatious holes to bury the stuff in—your power of devotion, not to yourself, but to an obscure, back-breaking business. And that's difficult enough. Mind, I am not trying to excuse or even explain—I am trying to account to myself for—Mr. Kurtz—for the shade of Mr. Kurtz. This initiated wraith from the back of Nowhere honoured me with its amazing confidence before it vanished altogether. This was because it could speak English to me. The original Kurtz had been educated partly in England, and—as he was good enough to say himself—his sympathies were in the right place. His mother was half-English, his father was half-French. All



Now, the next action is I am going to spend some time with today is the construct of Kurtz, what is Kurtz, who is Kurtz, how did he come into being, what is the background of Kurtz, because you know there is hardly any characterization done on Kurtz, we only see Kurtz through the effects produced by him right. So, in that sense there is a spectrality about his characterization, it is almost like a ghostly spectral quality which informs his characterization. Now, who is he, where did he come from? So, his mother was half-English, this should be on your screen. His mother was half-English, his father was half-French.

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Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz; and by and by I learned that, most appropriately, the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs had entrusted him with the making of a report, for its future guidance. And he had written it, too. I've seen it. I've read it. It was eloquent, vibrating with eloquence, but too high-strung, I think. Seventeen pages of close writing he had found time for! But this must have been before his—let us say—nerves, went wrong, and caused him to preside at certain midnight dances ending with unspeakable rites, which—as far as I reluctantly gathered from what I heard at various times—were offered up to him—do you understand?—to Mr. Kurtz himself. But it was a beautiful piece of writing. The opening paragraph, however, in the light of later information, strikes me now as ominous. He began with the argument that we whites, from the point of development we had arrived at, 'must necessarily appear to them [savages] in the nature of supernatural beings— we approach them with the might of a deity,' and so on, and so on. 'By the simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded,' etc., etc. From that point he soared and took me with him. The peroration was magnificent, though difficult to remember, you know. It gave me the notion of an exotic Immensity



All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz ok. So, you know this is a very symbolic description, mother was half-English, father was half-French you know half-English, half-French and all Europe combining together. So, Kurtz becomes the European man, the symbolic European man, the symbolic imperial European man, who is sent to the empire you know sent by the French by the English. So, he is the entire European imperialism put together. So, he in a way becomes the embodiment of European imperialism. And in that sense, he is also a symptom of the pathological symptom of European imperialism, what happens with the excesses of European imperialism, and that is something you know Kurtz embodies to a large extent ok.

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position of a method. It was very simple, and at the end of that moving appeal to every altruistic sentiment it blazed at you, luminous and terrifying, like a flash of lightning in a serene sky: 'Exterminate all the brutes!' The curious part was that he had apparently forgotten all about that valuable postscriptum, because, later on, when he in a sense came to himself, he repeatedly entreated me to take good care of 'my pamphlet' (he called it), as it was sure to have in the future a good influence upon his career. I had full information about all these things, and, besides, as it turned out, I was to have the care of his memory. I've done enough for it to give me the indisputable right to lay it, if I choose, for an everlasting rest in the dust-bin of progress, amongst all the sweepings and, figuratively speaking, all the dead cats of civilization. But then, you see, I can't choose. He won't be forgotten. Whatever he was, he was not common. He had the power to charm or frighten rudimentary souls into an aggravated witch-dance in his honour; he could also fill the small souls of the pilgrims with bitter misgivings: he had one devoted friend at least, and he had conquered one soul in the world that was neither rudimentary nor tainted with self-seeking. No; I can't forget him, though I am not prepared to affirm the fellow was exactly worth the life we lost



Now, the other section that I am going to spend some time with a little, little phrase over here which is important for us is a report that Kurtz had written about the suppression of savages in the Congo which is a report he was supposed to submit. And what was the report that Kurtz had written, it is just one little sentence or even just a normal sentence or half a sentence a phrase perhaps, and what was it exterminate all the brutes right.

So, exterminate, kill everyone, kill all the brutes, kill all the brutes. Now, the whole idea the brutes is important over here. So, what does brutes, what, what does Kurtz mean by brutes. So, does he mean the normal racial or racist understanding of brutes as Africans, kill all the Africans, make a genocide, kill away all the Africans, or is it more complicated than that is it more metaphorical than that is he talking about the brutes as in

the barbarity which comes out of European imperialism the barbarity which comes out of the white European imperialism. So, that is the ambivalence in Heart of Darkness that is the ambivalence in the report over here. It is not quite clear.

The literal reading of it will be to kill away all the Africans, take away the territory, take away the ivory, take away the water, take away all the resources by exterminating all the brutes that is the racist hyper-imperial understanding of the message over here. The more metaphoric message, the more problematic and perhaps self-reflexive message should be you know exterminate all the brutality inside you.

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that moving appeal to every altruistic sentiment it blazed at you, luminous and terrifying, like a flash of lightning in a serene sky: 'Exterminate all the brutes!' The curious part was that he had apparently forgotten all about that valuable postscriptum, because, later on, when he in a sense came to himself, he repeatedly entreated me to take good care of 'my pamphlet' (he called it), as it was sure to have in the future a good influence upon his career. I had full information about all these things, and, besides, as it turned out, I was to have the care of his memory. I've done enough for it to give me the indisputable right to lay it, if I choose, for an everlasting rest in the dust-bin of progress, amongst all the sweepings and, figuratively speaking, all the dead cats of civilization. But then, you see, I can't choose. He won't be forgotten. Whatever he was, he was not common. He had the power to charm or frighten rudimentary souls into an aggravated witch-dance in his honour; he could also fill the small souls of the pilgrims with bitter misgivings; he had one devoted friend at least, and he had conquered one soul in the world that was neither rudimentary nor tainted with self-seeking. No; I can't forget him, though I am not prepared to affirm the fellow was exactly worth the life we lost in getting to him. I missed my late helmsman awfully— I missed him even while his body was still lying in the pilot-house. Perhaps you will think it passing strange this regret for a savage who was no more account than a grain of sand in a black Sahara. Well, don't you see, he had done some-



So, both readings are equally valid, and we don't quite know which one to go with and therein lies the ambivalence in Heart of Darkness ok.

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had been a very second-rate helmsman while alive, but now he was dead he might have become a first-class temptation, and possibly cause some startling trouble. Besides, I was anxious to take the wheel, the man in pink pyjamas showing himself a hopeless duffer at the business.

"This I did directly the simple funeral was over. We were going half-speed, keeping right in the middle of the stream, and I listened to the talk about me. They had given up Kurtz, they had given up the station; Kurtz was dead, and the station had been burnt—and so on—and so on. The red-haired pilgrim was beside himself with the thought that at least this poor Kurtz had been properly avenged. 'Say! We must have made a glorious slaughter of them in the bush. Eh? What do you think? Say?' He positively danced, the bloodthirsty little gingery beggar. And he had nearly fainted when he saw the wounded man! I could not help saying, 'You made a glorious lot of smoke, anyhow.' I had seen, from the way the tops of the bushes rustled and flew, that almost all the shots had gone too high. You can't hit anything unless you take aim and fire from the shoulder; but these chaps fired from the hip with their eyes shut. The retreat, I maintained—and I was right—was caused by the screeching of the steam whistle. Upon this they forgot Kurtz, and began to howl at me with indignant protests.

"The manager stood by the wheel murmuring confidentially about the necessity of getting well away down the river before dark at all events, when I saw in the distance



And now we will come to the end of Kurtz, we come to the point where Kurtz's end comes. And again, the whole idea of Kurtz's dying the whole process the whole description of Kurtz's dying is done in a very spectral way right. So, it is very shadowy its very spectral we do not quite know how he dies we just know that he is decaying away he embodies decadence which stems out of excess, which emerges out of excess. So, there is a decadence of imperialism which is coming out of a pathological excess, it is almost like a medical problem right, and therein lies the decadence, therein lies the death of Kurtz. So, it is a very symbolic kind of death as well ok.

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about me. These special recommendations were turning up again. The volume of tone he emitted without effort, almost without the trouble of moving his lips, amazed me. A voice! a voice! It was grave, profound, vibrating, while the man did not seem capable of a whisper. However, he had enough strength in him—factitious no doubt—to very nearly make an end of us, as you shall hear directly.

"The manager appeared silently in the doorway; I stepped out at once and he drew the curtain after me. The Russian, eyed curiously by the pilgrims, was staring at the shore. I followed the direction of his glance.

"Dark human shapes could be made out in the distance, flitting indistinctly against the gloomy border of the forest, and near the river two bronze figures, leaning on tall spears, stood in the sunlight under fantastic head-dresses of spotted skins, warlike and still in statuesque repose. And from right to left along the lighted shore moved a wild and gorgeous apparition of a woman.

"She walked with measured steps, draped in striped and fringed cloths, treading the earth proudly, with a slight jingle and flash of barbarous ornaments. She carried her head high; her hair was done in the shape of a helmet; she had brass leggings to the knee, brass wire gauntlets to the elbow, a crimson spot on her tawny cheek, innumerable necklaces of glass beads on her neck; bizarre things, charms, gifts of witch-men, that hung about her, glittered and trembled at every step. She must have had the value of several elephant



So, next we come to the point where you know following Kurtz's death or the entire ceremony around Kurtz's death we see for the first time, a very spectral figure of Kurtz's you know the African mistress, African woman, who obviously is not given a voice, and that is a very symbolic absence as well. The absence of voice - no African speaks in Heart of Darkness entire story is told from a white male perspective which obviously, makes it very racially problematic, but at the same time we are also aware that we are looking at Heart of Darkness today, the reason why it is relevant today is precisely because of its political incorrectness, and in that sense it is very honest normal about imperialism. It does not try to be politically correct, does not give voices to people who did not have voices historically at that point of time ok.

So, and then we have the figure, the woman coming in and this should be on your screen. Dark human shapes could be made out in the distance, flitting indistinctly against the gloomy border of the forest, and near the river two bronze figures, leaning on tall spears, stood in the sunlight under fantastic head-dresses of spotted skins, warlike and still in statuesque repose. And from right to left along the lighted shore moved a wild and gorgeous apparition of a woman. So, again look at the adjectives over here wild and gorgeous.

So, again it is wild as in exotic, gorgeous as in hyper-sexualized apparition of a woman. And the word apparition is interesting, because she is not really human being with flesh and blood, she is more of a spectral figure, an exotic, hyper-sexualized spectra and that hyper-sexuality that you know the spectrality something which is very much part of the categorization of the African woman over here. Because remember the African woman is doubly marginalized a – racially, and b in terms of a sexuality in terms of a gendered location. And therein lies the political the politically problematic characterization in Heart of Darkness.

But take a look at how the woman appears now. She walked with measured steps, draped in striped and fringed clothes, treading the earth proudly, with a slight jingle and flash of barbarous ornaments. So, again barbarous ornaments, again these are like anti-civilization, markers of anti-civilization. She carried her head high; her hair was done in a shape of a helmet; she had brass leggings to the knee, brass wire gauntlets to the elbow, a crimson spot on a tawny cheek, innumerable necklaces of glass beads on her neck;

bizarre things, charms, gifts of witch-men that hung about her, glittered and trembled at every step.

So, again everything belongs to witch-men is something wizardry happening over here there something dark magical, or darkly magical about her appearance which is obviously very exoticized, and you know the whole idea is to essentialize the African woman over here, essentialize through sexual markers, racial markers, bodily markers etcetera. And everything that she is wearing become pointers to some kind of a dark magic, some kind of an evil magic you know that Marlow doesn't quite know right.

So, the whole idea of not knowing becomes immediately dark in Heart of Darkness right. So, darkness over here becomes a marker of ignorance, marker of mystery over here. And all that in mystery, magic, darkness they are obviously, politically constructed from a European male perspective, and that is something which we must bear in mind all the time ok.

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WITHOUT THE SOUND OF MOVING HIS LIPS, AMUSED ME. A VOICE: a voice! It was grave, profound, vibrating, while the man did not seem capable of a whisper. However, he had enough strength in him— factitious no doubt—to very nearly make an end of us, as you shall hear directly.

"The manager appeared silently in the doorway; I stepped out at once and he drew the curtain after me. The Russian, eyed curiously by the pilgrims, was staring at the shore. I followed the direction of his glance.

"Dark human shapes could be made out in the distance, flitting indistinctly against the gloomy border of the forest, and near the river two bronze figures, leaning on tall spears, stood in the sunlight under fantastic head-dresses of spotted skins, warlike and still in statuesque repose. And from right to left along the lighted shore moved a wild and gorgeous apparition of a woman.

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And then look at the description over here, look at the adjectives; she was savage and superb wild eyed and magnificent.

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her deliberate progress. And in the hush that had fallen suddenly upon the whole sorrowful land, the immense wilderness, the colossal body of the fecund and mysterious life seemed to look at her, pensive, as though it had been looking at the image of its own tenebrous and passionate soul. 'She came abreast of the steamer, stood still, and faced us. Her long shadow fell to the water's edge. Her face had a tragic and fierce aspect of wild sorrow and of dumb pain mingled with the fear of some struggling, half-shaped resolve. She stood looking at us without a stir, and like the wilderness itself, with an air of brooding over an inscrutable purpose. A whole minute passed, and then she made a step forward. There was a low jingle, a glint of yellow metal, a sway of fringed draperies, and she stopped as if her heart had failed her. The young fellow by my side growled. The pilgrims murmured at my back. She looked at us all as if her life had depended upon the unswerving steadiness of her glance. Suddenly she opened her bared arms and threw them up rigid above her head, as though in an uncontrollable desire to touch the sky, and at the same time the swift shadows darted out on the earth, swept around on the river, gathering the steamer into a shadowy embrace. A formidable silence hung over the scene.



There was something ominous and stately in the deliberate progress. And in the hush that had fallen suddenly upon the whole sorrowful land, the immense wilderness, the colossal body of the fecund and mysterious life seemed to look at her, pensive, as though it had been looking at the image of its own tenebrous and passionate soul. So, savage and superb and something magical there is something savage about her.

So, you know both the adjectives, and all the adjectives over here are actually adjectives of excess, or hyper-abundance, overabundance, and it is beyond something, it is beyond the European reason, it is beyond the European logic, it is beyond the rational frame, and that sends the characterization the description of the mistress, the African mistress in Heart of Darkness is very politically problematic. Because you know this has been looked at from a white male perspective the entire lens is very white very male and therein lies the hyper-sexualized, mysterious, cryptic characterization of Kurtz's in a mistress over here.

And if you take a look at the end of Heart of Darkness which we will in the next lecture, if you contrast this description of this African woman where the intended the white European intended the white European fiancé, who is overdressed in the clothes of a mourner, and all the markers in her appearance are elegant markers, the markers of elegance, the markers of mourning, the markers of magnificence. It is nothing salvage

about it, it is nothing wild about it, it is nothing magical about her, but when it comes to Kurtz's mistress African mistress is wild, is magical, is savage right.

And all that in form come together put together to create a sense of excess to create a sense of almost mysterious, cryptic characterization which you do not quite know and everything has been talked about and described through a very white male lens ok. So, and of course, we know that you know no one speaks in Heart of Darkness, no non-white person speaks in Heart of Darkness except this one cry, this one shout, this one wail that you know this Kurtz's African mistress does, and this is something that is described over here in some details.

Suddenly she opened her bared arms and threw them up rigid above her head, as though in an uncontrollable desire to touch the sky, and at the same time the swift shadows darted out on the earth, swept around on the river, gathering the steamer into a shadowy embrace. A formidable silence hung over the scene. So, I mean look at the atmospheric description look at the mysterious description, something brooding something ghostly, something spectral about the entire movement in this particular woman.

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suddenly upon the whole sorrowful land, the immense wilderness, the colossal body of the fecund and mysterious life seemed to look at her, pensive, as though it had been looking at the image of its own tenebrous and passionate soul.

'She came abreast of the steamer, stood still, and faced us. Her long shadow fell to the water's edge. Her face had a tragic and fierce aspect of wild sorrow and of dumb pain mingled with the fear of some struggling, half-shaped resolve. She stood looking at us without a stir, and like the wilderness itself, with an air of brooding over an inscrutable purpose. A whole minute passed, and then she made a step forward. There was a low jingle, a glint of yellow metal, a sway of fringed draperies, and she stopped as if her heart had failed her. The young fellow by my side growled. The pilgrims murmured at my back. She looked at us all as if her life had depended upon the unswerving steadiness of her glance. Suddenly she opened her bared arms and threw them up rigid above her head, as though in an uncontrollable desire to touch the sky, and at the same time the swift shadows darted out on the earth, swept around on the river, gathering the steamer into a shadowy embrace. A formidable silence hung over the scene.

'She turned away slowly, walked on, following the bank, and passed into the bushes to the left. Once only her eyes gleamed back at us in the dusk of the thickets before she disappeared.

'If she had offered to come aboard I really think I would



She turned away slowly walked on following the bank, and passed into the bushes to the left. Only once her eyes gleamed back at us in the dusk of the thickets before she disappeared right. So, this is the entire description in Heart of Darkness about the female figure, the only African the only non-white person who gets some description in Heart of

Darkness is someone Kurtz's intended, Kurtz's African mistress who comes and embodies this mystery that is Africa embodies the atmospheric quality around Marlow that he does not quite navigate, does not quite know and she embodies the defamiliarization the mysterious exotic defamiliarization.

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'I have been risking my life every day for the last fortnight to keep her out of the house. She got in one day and kicked up a row about those miserable rags I picked up in the store-room to mend my clothes with. I wasn't decent. At least it must have been that, for she talked like a fury to Kurtz for an hour, pointing at me now and then. I don't understand the dialect of this tribe. Luckily for me, I fancy Kurtz felt too ill that day to care, or there would have been mischief. I don't understand.... No—it's too much for me. Ah, well, it's all over now.'

'At this moment I heard Kurtz's deep voice behind the curtain: 'Save me!—save the ivory, you mean. Don't tell me. Save ME! Why, I've had to save you. You are interrupting my plans now. Sick! Sick! Not so sick as you would like to believe. Never mind. I'll carry my ideas out yet—I will return. I'll show you what can be done. You with your little peddling notions—you are interfering with me. I will return. I....'

'The manager came out. He did me the honour to take me under the arm and lead me aside. 'He is very low, very low,' he said. He considered it necessary to sigh, but neglected to be consistently sorrowful. 'We have done all we could for him—haven't we? But there is no disguising the fact, Mr.



And in the entire characterization the entire figure the entire you know package that is given over here around this particular figure, particular character is that of excess is that of abundance, hyper-abundance is that of magic is that of darkness right. So, these are the markers that are used to describe her. And obviously, these are politically problematic, these are sexually problematic, you know gender-wise she is sort of essentialized as a excessive African woman who is part of nature.

So, this entire connection with nature, the abundance of nature, the endlessness of nature, the mystery of nature is something which is embodied by the Kurtz's African mistress over here, compared to which the white mistress, the white intended, the white fiancé in Brussels is perfectly domestic and docile white woman who is an elegant mourner.

So, two female figures in Heart of Darkness they are very symbolically you know they represent two different kinds of culture, two different kinds of you know perspective both are looked at by the white male, but you know one is domestic and docile and knowable, and other is non-domestic, wild, savage, and splendid, and magical, and you

know that is something which we must bear in mind when we look at the characterization in Heart of Darkness.

So, we stop at this point today. And in the next lecture, we will wind up with the text, and look at the ending in Heart of Darkness which is quite symbolic and existential as well which is something which we will cover in the final lecture in the next session.

Thank you for your attention.