

Twentieth Century Fiction
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Lecture – 09
Heart of Darkness – Part 4

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'I flew around like mad to get ready, and before forty-eight hours I was crossing the Channel to show myself to my employers, and sign the contract. In a very few hours I arrived in a city that always makes me think of a whited sepulchre. Prejudice no doubt. I had no difficulty in finding the Company's offices. It was the biggest thing in the town, and everybody I met was full of it. They were going to run an over-sea empire, and make no end of coin by trade.

'A narrow and deserted street in deep shadow, high houses, innumerable windows with venetian blinds, a dead silence, grass sprouting right and left, immense double doors standing ponderously ajar. I slipped through one of these cracks, went up a swept and ungarnished staircase, as arid as a desert, and opened the first door I came to. Two women, one fat and the other slim, sat on straw-bottomed chairs, knitting black wool. The slim one got up and walked straight at me— still knitting with downcast eyes—and only just as I began to think of getting out of her way, as you would for a somnambulist, stood still, and looked up. Her dress was as plain as an umbrella-cover, and she turned round without a word and preceded me into a waiting-room. I gave my name, and looked about. Deal table in the middle, plain chairs all round the walls, on one end a large shining map, marked with all the colours of a rainbow. There was a vast amount of red—good to see at any time, because one knows that some real work is done in there, a deuce of a lot of blue, a little green, smears of orange, and, on the East



So, hello and welcome to this NPTEL course entitled Twentieth Century Fiction. We were looking at Joseph Conrad's novel Heart of Darkness. We have already started with the text we will look at a certain section today especially the section where Marlow goes and he gets interviewed by this mysterious Belgian company, which is to hire him to go to Congo for the ivory trade.

Now, the reason why I have selected the scene is we talk about the neurosis in the whole process, it becomes very automaton like process where a company hires someone. And then there is almost no human quality about this entire experience which is something which makes it interesting for us, looking at the entire machinery of imperialism.

Now, what that also is reflective of is the inhuman quality or the non-human quality of imperialism. It becomes almost an automatic process of exploitation an automatic process of operation, which is obviously evident in the way in which the hiring takes place in this particular section. So, and among other things this is also an important scene

because it touches upon some of the contemporary concerns in Europe, criminology for instance was a big thing you know the whole idea of degeneration was a big thing.

So, all these pseudo-medical philosophies pseudo-medical thesis around criminology, degeneration, those were becoming more and more systematized in the 19th century, late 19th century which is the era in which this novel is set. You know Marlow finds himself in a situation where the whole idea of going to Africa also poses a threat of degeneration, also poses a threat towards some kind of criminality, because obviously, as we all know today the whole idea of degeneration and criminality was always conferred on the other the non-European, specially the African and who was considered to be savage, you know violent animalistic etcetera.

So any proximity to the African wildness any proximity to the African you know native or the savage, it would always pose this threat of degeneration and criminality for the European. And, this section where Marlow gets hired and there's a sort of medical test done to him as well in terms of determining his fitness to go and work for the Belgian company. So, all that becomes part of a very complex cultural process, where the European the non-European other was exploited, but at same time he was feared the non-European space was exploited but at the same time feared for the possibility of degeneration and criminality.

So, criminology which was sort of a pseudo-scientific discourse around the time, where criminality was equated with the skull size or the size of the forehead with teeth, with skin color, of course, etcetera. So, we find how those characteristics were very heavily racialized, they are almost always non-white and also you know there is a degree of anti-semitic quality about criminals as well. So, you know for instance if you read Bram Stoker's Dracula, you find that you know the whole idea of equating criminality with the Jew was very rampant, and especially the way Dracula gets represented the physiognomy of Dracula for instance is very, very, stereotypically Jewish kind of a physiognomy I mean that was how the stereotypical projection of the Jew happened right.

So, this is this thing is interesting you know all these aspects. Now, the reason why this is important for us because what we see through all these discourses, pseudo-discourses this whole idea of the threat, the whole fear and panic of degeneration etcetera. You know how darkness which is to say ignorance or non-enlightenment and non-

illumination, a superstition for the matter it is very much part of the European phenomenon over here it is not really located in Africa, but this whole idea about the confusion about criminality, the racism around criminality, the very regressive idea of the degenerate etcetera.

And all that exhibits darkness, you know darkness in terms of lack of knowledge, in terms of confused knowledge or confusion in knowledge, which is interestingly located right in the heart of Europe, right in Brussels, which is the site of the imperial machinery where the imperial office is positioned where you know it sends all the emissaries or the agents of the empire you know down the Congo down Ganges down different parts of the world. But this is where the money comes back, this is where the capital grows, this is where the imperial capital happens and is operative.

So, to see darkness located there, to see pseudo knowledge located there, to see automatism located there is obviously, you know did remind of the fact, reflective of the fact that darkness is not really an anti or nonwhite phenomenon, darkness is very much part of the white civilization as well, white western civilization as well. Which connects this back to the very beginning of the novel if you remember Marlow had started the novel by saying this Jew which was in Thames - River Thames, the glorious river of civilization he said.

Well, this Jew had once upon a time been a heart of darkness, which is to say that you know the whole idea of darkness and light civilization and non-civilization, these are very mutable categories. And, these change all the time right and that is something which we come back to as we read this particular section.

So, I just dive into the text, and let us see how the very neurotic quality, the very automatic quality, the anxiety in the whole process is described and foregrounded, and dramatized in some details. And I quote this should be on your screen. A narrow and deserted street in deep shadow, high houses, innumerable windows with venetian blinds, a dead silence, grass sprouting right and left, immense double doors standing ponderously ajar. I slipped through one of those cracks, and went up a swept and un-garnished staircase, as arid as a desert, and opened the first door I came to.

So, it just seems like a very, very non-human, non-metropolis, non-metropolitan kind of a setting, it just seems like a desert, and it just seems like you know something of a

mirage, he just gets lost in a maze, something very primal about this particular setting. And also if you take a look at the language where he is saying, I slipped through one of the cracks, it is almost like a fall, falling into an abyss. So, moving up or navigating into the staircases that these venetian blinds very complex windows and those, it is like falling into an abyss falling down a crack into an abyss that is something which Marlow is experiencing over here. I am relaying it to its listeners. And open the first door I came to.

Two women, one fat and the other slim, sat on straw-bottomed chairs, knitting black wool. So, again this whole idea two women sitting silently, and knitting black wool is a very classical image of fate, fate being a woman who knits wool, wool being the obviously, the passages of time just sort of you know knitting and un-knitting wool at the same time, so your knitting and un-knitting time at same time, so fate becomes an entanglement of time and destiny.

So, it is a very classical Greek image of women you know knitting wool becoming an agents of destiny, agents of time, agents of fate. And that the classical kind of imagery is used and reused over here in a modern setting which is obviously, modern Brussels, the capital of Belgium where Marlow finds himself about to be interviewed ok.

Sitting and knitting black wool. The slim one got up and walked straight at me – still knitting with downcast eyes – and only just as I began to think of getting out of her way, as you would for a somnambulist, stood still and looked up. So, again look at the wordlessness of the whole process, the emotionlessness the whole process, she just walks up to Marlow, still knitting the wool, and only when Marlow has begun to think that maybe she is sleep walking, she is a somnambulist, and he is about to move away from her direction, she looks up at that moment.

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I arrived in a city that always makes me think of a white sepulchre. Prejudice no doubt. I had no difficulty in finding the Company's offices. It was the biggest thing in the town, and everybody I met was full of it. They were going to run an over-sea empire, and make no end of coin by trade.

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Her dress was as plain as an umbrella-cover, and she turned round without a word and preceded me into a waiting-room. So, again the wordlessness is important which is part of the neurosis over here, it has an automaton like quality, it is like a machine he is actually in the heart of the imperial machine at the moment. And there is no need for any word, there is no need for any human intimacy, there is no need for any human touch, there is no human quality about it at all. So, it is like walking into a bunch of automata as it was. So, all these people are figures of automata, they are automatic figures who are just propelling entire machinery forward, and Marlow finds himself in a company in these automata ok.

So, she preceded me into a waiting-room. I gave my name, and looked about. Deal table in the middle, plain chairs all around the walls, on one end a large shining map, marked with all the colors of rainbow. There was a vast amount of red – good to see at any time, because one knows some real work is done in there, a deuce of a lot of blue, a little green, smears of orange, and, on the East Coast, a purple patch, to show that where the jolly pioneers of progress drink the jolly-lager beer right.

So, again look at the divisions over here. Each color corresponds to something, there is a color of exploitations, color of merriment, and quite clearly each color denotes a country's location or the spaces or territorialize location in the entire colonial process.

So, there is a patch which draws the colonial machinery, there is another patch which you know supplies merriment, there is another patch which gets abused etcetera.

So, all patches correspond to certain you know geopolitical positions at that point of time, certain cultural positions, and certain economic positions at that point of time. So, this mapping is quite literally a mapping of privilege that Marlow is witnessing. So, he is looking at a map a real map a patch of different colors, and each color corresponds to a position of privilege, whether it is privilege or underprivilege, one is exploiting or exploited a territory, and that that is determining its location in that map.

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into any of these. I was going into the yellow. Dead in the centre. And the river was there—fascinating—deadly—like a snake. Ough! A door opened, ya white-haired secretarial head, but wearing a compassionate expression, appeared, and a skinny forefinger beckoned me into the sanctuary. Its light was dim, and a heavy writing-desk squatted in the middle. From behind that structure came out an impression of pale plumpness in a frock-coat. The great man himself. He was five feet six, I should judge, and had his grip on the handle-end of ever so many millions. He shook hands, I fancy, murmured vaguely, was satisfied with my French. BON VOYAGE.

'In about forty-five seconds I found myself again in the waiting-room with the compassionate secretary, who, full of desolation and sympathy, made me sign some document. I believe I undertook amongst other things not to disclose any trade secrets. Well, I am not going to.

'I began to feel slightly uneasy. You know I am not used to such ceremonies, and there was something ominous in the atmosphere. It was just as though I had been let into some conspiracy—I don't know—something not quite right; and I was glad to get out. In the outer room the two women knitted black wool feverishly. People were arriving, and the younger one was walking back and forth introducing them. The old one sat on her chair. Her flat cloth slippers were



However, I was not going into any of these. I was going into the yellow. Dead in the centre. And the river was there – fascinating – deadly – like a snake. Again the primal quality is important over here, in the river Congo of course, as it is getting mentioned over here. And Marlow looks at it for the first time and thinks of some kind of a serpentine presence; it is almost like a biblical snake which is about to seduce him into this heart of darkness right. Fascinating – deadly like a snake.

Ough, a door opened, ya white-haired secretarial head, but wearing a compassionate expression, appeared, and a skinny forefinger beckoned me into the sanctuary. So, again the wordlessness is important over here, a white head appears, and he is beckoned by a finger you know into a sanctuary or the meeting room presumably. Its light was dim, and a heavy-writing desk squatted in the middle. From behind the structure came out an

impression of a pale plumpness in a frock-coat. So, again there is a female presence in this room, and she is a secretary taking down notes maybe.

The great man himself. So, the great man – the owner, presumably the executive officer in this company, this colonial company, he was five feet six, I should judge, and had his grip on a on a handle-end of ever so many millions. He shook hands, I fancy, murmured vaguely, was satisfied with my French. BON VOYAGE. So, again this great man meets him, and again there is no human quality at all, there is no emotive communication at all, it is a very matter of fact a businesslike communication. And it is almost as if he is being scanned for fitness. So, the only thing he is fit for this voyage, because his French was satisfactory and he wishes Marlow good luck.

In about forty-five seconds I found myself again in the waiting-room with a compassionate secretary, who, full of desolation and sympathy, made me sign some document. I believe I undertook amongst other things not to disclose any trade secrets. Well, I am not going to. So, again this is coming back into present time. So, Marlow is saying well I had to sign some disclosure forms non-disclosure forms, where I had to sort of make an oath, make a promise in writing that I would not disclose any trade secrets of the company. Well, and he says I am not going to tell you, and it is restricted now either right. So, again the whole cutting back and across time is important, the two different kinds of narratives at play over here right.

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head, but wearing a compassionate expression, appeared, and a skinny forefinger beckoned me into the sanctuary. Its light was dim, and a heavy writing-desk squatted in the middle. From behind that structure came out an impression of pale plumpness in a frock-coat. The great man himself. He was five feet six, I should judge, and had his grip on the handle-end of ever so many millions. He shook hands, I fancy, murmured vaguely, was satisfied with my French. BON VOYAGE.

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I began to feel slightly uneasy; so this neurosis is beginning to make its presence felt the anxiety is making its presence felt. You know I am not used to such ceremonies, and there was something ominous in the atmosphere. It was just as though I had been let into some conspiracy – I do not know – something not quite right; and I was glad to get out. So, again this is the beginning of the ambivalence that Marlow experiences throughout his imperial experience.

He is about to feel that something is not quite right; something is not quite you know correct in the whole process. And you know he is saying that it is almost as if he has been led into some conspiracy, something quite nefarious, something evil is about to take place, but he does not quite know what I cannot put a finger on it, and define it as such. And this ambivalence, this cynicism, this uncertainty is something which informs Marlow throughout the entire narrative, and he becomes almost a very nervous neurotic narrator.

So, he carries a neurosis with him wherever he goes that gets obviously, compounded and accentuated in the Congo, but when even he comes back to London and even when is telling a story now he is still being a very, very neurotic narrator right. He does not know quite what happened, he is cognitively very confused, and his narration is very, very neurotic and unreliable in the same in same degree. So, he begins to feel uneasy, it is almost like a you know physical problem for him, and he wants to get out.

In the outer room the two women knitted black wool feverishly. Again the word feverish is important, because what it does it just creates a claustrophobia around the entire atmosphere, it becomes very neurotic, claustrophobic condition, whereby you know the whole idea of this becomes unhealthy, unhygienic, and women who are very feverish, the almost frenzied presences, and the knitting wool feverishly, and very very feverishly. People were arriving, and the younger one was walking back and forth introducing them.

The old one sat on a chair. Her flat cloth slippers were propped up on a foot-warmer, and a rat and a cat reposed on her lap. So, again the presence of this feline animal the cat on a lap while she is knitting wool, again this sort of suggests something of a classical image of fate of whimsy of fancy etcetera. And obviously, this sole idea of time and faith become important over here. She wore a starched white affair on her head, had a wart on

her cheek, and silver-rimmed spectacles hung on the tip of her nose. She glanced at me above the glasses.

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indifferent placidity of that look troubled me. Two youths with foolish and cheery countenances were being piloted over, and she threw at them the same quick glance of unconcerned wisdom. She seemed to know all about them and about me, too. An eerie feeling came over me. She seemed uncanny and fateful. Often far away there I thought of these two, guarding the door of Darkness, knitting black wool as for a warm pall, one introducing, introducing continuously to the unknown, the other scrutinizing the cheery and foolish faces with unconcerned old eyes. AVE! Old knitter of black wool. MORITURI TE SALUTANT. Not many of those she looked at ever saw her again—not half, by a long way.

“There was yet a visit to the doctor. ‘A simple formality,’ assured me the secretary, with an air of taking an immense part in all my sorrows. Accordingly a young chap wearing his hat over the left eyebrow, some clerk I suppose—there must have been clerks in the business, though the house was as still as a house in a city of the dead—came from somewhere up-stairs, and led me forth. He was shabby and careless, with inkstains on the sleeves of his jacket, and his cravat was large and billowy, under a chin shaped like the toe of an old boot. It was a little too early for the doctor, so I proposed a drink, and thereupon he developed a vein of joviality. As we sat over our vermouths he glorified the



The swift and indifferent placidity of that look troubled me. So, there is almost like a clinical scan like quality about the gaze, it is very swift and very indifferent, there is no human connect and that is something I keep telling throughout this particular session that the nonhuman quality about this entire process of recruitment is obviously connected with the inhuman quality of exploitation the colonial exploitation. So, the nonhuman and inhuman are connected categories over here. They are connected categories in the sense that you know the politics of exploitation depends on a nonhuman clinical quality over here which Marlow is experiencing for the first time.

Two youths with foolish and cheery countenances were being piloted over, and she threw at them the same quick glance of unconcerned wisdom. Again the indifference is obviously very palpable, unconcerned wisdom. She seemed to know all about them and about me, too. There is an all-pervading gaze something which is seen through Marlow's appearances, like a penetrating quality about him. An eerie feeling came over me. She seemed uncanny and fateful. Often far away there I thought of these two guarding the door of Darkness, knitting black wool as for a warm pall, one introducing, introducing continuously to the unknown, and the other scrutinizing the cheery and foolish faces with

unconcerned old eyes. AVE, Old knitter of black wool. MORITURI TE SALUTANT. Not many of those she looked at ever saw her again – not half, by a long way.

So, MORITURI TE SALUTANT is like welcome of the death all right, a welcome to the land of the death. So, again there is a classical quality, but it is almost like in going into the netherworld. And interestingly we find that how the netherworld in Heart of Darkness is not necessarily always about going to a non-Europe space, because this happens to be right at the heart of the European metropolis.

This is Brussels, this is where the colonial machinery is located in a very privileged position. But even going in this particular office is like walking into a heart of darkness, just like walking into the dead land, the nether land, the land of Hades in classical mythology, where you have to be shipped into it. And once you get into it, everything around you is very dense and claustrophobic, and uncanny. The word uncanny keeps coming up over and over again.

And the word Darkness comes there to people agents who are guarding the door of darkness. So, the moment he entered the door he crossed with the threshold and he entered the heart of darkness. So, again and this again goes back to the beginning of the novel where Marlow saying that even London was once upon a time the Heart of darkness. So, the whole idea of darkness gets sort of more problematic over here because it is not necessarily about Africa, about Congo, about what happens in there, it is also about what is close to home, it is what is always close to what he can commonly consumed as enlightenment, logic, and knowledge, you know reason, rationality etcetera.

So, all these categories the sides of civilization as it were, they too, are almost embedded with darkness over here. You know classical category is important, the classical mythology over here is important; because this is quite literally I am moving into Hades in netherworld right. And Marlow has experience of moving into an uncanny space where everyone can see through everyone and no words are spoken, there is no human compassion, there is no human connect, everything is like very wordless and automatic in quality. And that obviously, becomes a machinery of colonialism with which the entire idea of imperialism is operative.

And now we come to this very sort of social Darwinist medical knowledge or medical politics over here which is important for us to revisit because you know what is

interesting is how the whole idea of racism the whole idea of imperialism was sort of sanctioned to a large extent by medical science, contemporary medical science which proved it is quote unquote empirically that a European brain was superior to the non-European brain. Because European skull size was different than the non-European skull size, so all the physiognomic makers of skull size, the shape of the forehead, the shape of the teeth etcetera, so all these became makers of some innate cerebral qualities innate faculty innate you know mental situations like violence, civilization, you know domesticity, rationality etcetera.

So, all these were equated or marked, with some material markers, some physiognomic markers over here. And the doctor over here is obviously, here to determine Marlow's fitness for the whole program. And by fitness he is going to measure his skull size. He is going to you know ask about any degeneration the family any madness any insanity in the family etcetera. So, again the panic of degeneration, the panic of criminality is very much palpable over here. And a doctor is obviously, asking the social Darwinist questions about genetics, I mean this is not genetics, but heredity diseases, insanity, etcetera.

And because you know there is also this idea that this is a person Marlow is about to go to the Congo to Africa. So, he is going to go very very close to what degeneration is commonly consumed as a nonwhite space the other space etcetera. So, it makes sense quote, unquote for the company to determine his medical fitness for the whole program, again very very social Darwinist quality.

There was yet a visit to the doctor. A simple formality, assured me the secretary, with an air of taking an immense part in all my sorrows. Accordingly, a young chap wearing his hat over the left eyebrow, some clerk I suppose – there must have been clerks in the business, though the house was still as a house in a city of the dead – came from somewhere up-stairs, and led me forth.

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As we sat over our vermouths, he glorified the Company’s business, and by and by I expressed casually my surprise at him not getting out there. So, you know he talks about the Company’s business in very very positive terms so Marlow asks him the obvious question, that how come you are not there, why are you not there in the you know heart of the empire where the empire really is. He became very cool and collected all at once. I am not such a fool as I look, quoth Plato to his disciples, he said sententiously emptied his glass with resolution and we rose right.

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his glass with great resolution, and we rose.

'The old doctor felt my pulse, evidently thinking of something else the while. 'Good, good for there,' he mumbled, and then with a certain eagerness asked me whether I would let him measure my head. Rather surprised, I said Yes, when he produced a thing like calipers and got the dimensions back and front and every way, taking notes carefully. He was an unshaven little man in a threadbare coat like a gaberdine, with his feet in slippers, and I thought him a harmless fool. 'I always ask leave, in the interests of science, to measure the crania of those going out there,' he said. 'And when they come back, too?' I asked. 'Oh, I never see them,' he remarked; 'and, moreover, the changes take place inside, you know.' He smiled, as if at some quiet joke. 'So you are going out there. Famous. Interesting, too.' He gave me a searching glance, and made another note. 'Ever any madness in your family?' he asked, in a matter-of-fact tone. I felt very annoyed. 'Is that question in the interests of science, too?' 'It would be,' he said, without taking notice of my irritation, 'interesting for science to watch the mental changes of individuals, on the spot, but ...' 'Are you an alienist?' I interrupted. 'Every doctor should be—a little,' answered that original, imperturbably. 'I have a little theory which you messieurs who go out there must help me to prove. This is my share in the advantages my country shall reap from the possession of such a magnificent dependency. The messieurs! I have to thank. Besides my assistants, but



So, again look at the abruptness of this particular sentence, when he gets more and more candid with Marlow, he talks about how positive the Company's policies were, and then Marlow at some time at some point innocuously asks him why if he is so convinced about the company, how come you are not there in the Congo, how come you are not there in Africa when making profit for the company at which point his tone changes completely and very dramatically. And he says I am not as fool as I look to be right, and he finishes his drinks, and he rose, he gets up.

So, again there is something very clinical and sinister about this entire episode. And this is something which pervades the whole scene, the sinister, grey, mysterious quality about this whole enterprise of colonialism. And there is a translucent quality about it as well, that Marlow, sort of cannot see through entirely, but he sees himself being seen through completely. So, he is like surrounded by machines; he is surrounded by all this gaze that very metonymically looks at him in terms of his fitness, in terms of his you know mental health, and in terms of his ability to control the empire etcetera. But, he himself has very little idea, very vague idea of his surroundings right.

And again this is something which will continue in the Congo, even when he is sailing down the Congo he will have very little idea of what is going around him and that is something which we will look at in some details when we come to that point. But even here while supposedly the heart of civilization, the heart of knowledge, illumination,

etcetera, he finds it very difficult to grasp his reality to find meaning to navigate meaning with what surround him that is something which he keeps coming up against throughout the story.

And now her goes to the doctor. The old doctor felt my pulse, evidently thinking of something else the while. Good, good for there, he mumbled, and then with a certain eagerness asked me whether I would let him measure my head. Again, this is a very was a very common practice among criminologists up on a time.

This whole idea of equating madness with a skull size, over the violence with skull size etcetera, because all these empirical markers, these metonymic markers where you know rampantly consumed as sort of accurate knowledge, and you know there was a theory of racism, a theory of European superiority which is published, and consumed palpably which empirically proved and argued that you know the European was less prone to violence, less prone to insanity, less prone to murder than a non-European.

So, again this whole idea, this whole combination of statistics and biology or this bio-politics of medical knowledge is something that we see at very close quarters from very close quarters over here, which obviously, accentuates or corroborates what is historically true, the collusion between biomedicine and imperialism, the collusion between a medicine and imperialism which produced the whole idea bio-capital or biomedicine. Where medicine becomes racialized, medicine becomes motivated by ideology, medicine becomes politically and racially informed, and in that sense it produces theories and theses which will accentuate certain kind of racist ideology, or certain kind of a political foreign policy ideology at work. This is about the measure of Marlow's head.

Rather surprised, I said, I said, Yes, when he when he produced a thing like the calipers and got the dimensions back and front of the and every way, taking notes carefully. He was an unshaven little man in the threadbare coat like a gabardine, with his feet in slippers, and I though him a harmless fool. I always ask leave, in the interests of science, to measure the crania of those going out there, he said. And when they come back, too, I asked. Oh, I never see them, he remarked; and, moreover the changes take place inside you know.

So, again this ominous quality of a one-way traffic right, you just go to Congo you never come back it takes away your life it takes away your existential being it takes away your sanity, your rationality etcetera. So, he says the doctor says, I have never seen anyone who has come back from the Congo. So, I always measure the crania of the people about to leave for the sake of science, because he is again making an equation between a certain kind of a physiognomy, and a certain kind of a propensity right. A propensity for adventure, danger, which can very quickly connect to the propensity towards degeneration, as we will see ok.

He smiled, as if at some quiet joke. So, you are going out there. Famous. Interesting, too. He gave me a searching glance, and made another note. Ever any madness in your family, so again this becomes a series of hereditary questions about Marlow's train and family is this any madness or not. He asked in a in a matter of-fact tone. I felt very annoyed. Is that a question in the interests of science, too? It would be, he said, without taking notice of my irritation, interesting for science to watch the mental changes of individuals, on the spot. So, again this whole idea of changing in the brain becomes interesting.

Are you an alienist? I interrupted. Every doctor should be – a little. So, again alienist is this belongs to a particular science of knowledge, which is again a very complex mixture of some pseudo spiritual thing, at the same time some pseudo medical thing which is rampant at that time along with criminology, along with degeneration panic in late nineteenth century. I have a little theory which you messieurs who go out there must help me to prove. This is my share of the advantages of my the my country shall reap from the possession of such a magnificent dependency.

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and then with a certain eagerness asked me whether I would let him measure my head. Rather surprised, I said Yes, when he produced a thing like calipers and got the dimensions back and front and every way, taking notes carefully. He was an unshaven little man in a threadbare coat like a gaberdine, with his feet in slippers, and I thought him a harmless fool. 'I always ask leave, in the interests of science, to measure the crania of those going out there,' he said. 'And when they come back, too?' I asked. 'Oh, I never see them,' he remarked; 'and, moreover, the changes take place inside, you know.' He smiled, as if at some quiet joke. 'So you are going out there. Famous. Interesting, too.' He gave me a searching glance, and made another note. 'Ever any madness in your family?' he asked, in a matter-of-fact tone. I felt very annoyed. 'Is that question in the interests of science, too?' 'It would be,' he said, without taking notice of my irritation, 'interesting for science to watch the mental changes of individuals, on the spot, but ...' 'Are you an alienist?' I interrupted. 'Every doctor should be—a little,' answered that original, imperturbably. 'I have a little theory which you messieurs who go out there must help me to prove. This is my share in the advantages my country shall reap from the possession of such a magnificent dependency. The mere wealth I leave to others. Pardon my questions, but you are the first Englishman coming under my observation ...' I hastened to assure him I was not in the least typical.

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HEART OF DARKNESS



The mere wealth I leave to others. Pardon my questions, but you are the first Englishman coming under my observation. I hastened to assure him that I was not in the least typical.

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'If I were,' said I, 'I wouldn't be talking like this with you.' 'What you say is rather profound, and probably erroneous,' he said, with a laugh. 'Avoid irritation more than exposure to the sun. Adieu. How do you English say, eh? Good-bye. Ah! Good-bye. Adieu. In the tropics one must before everything keep calm.' ... He lifted a warning forefinger. ... 'DU CALME, DU CALME. ADIEU.'

'One thing more remained to do—say good-bye to my excellent aunt. I found her triumphant. I had a cup of tea—the last decent cup of tea for many days—and in a room that most soothingly looked just as you would expect a lady's drawing-room to look, we had a long quiet chat by the fireside. In the course of these confidences it became quite plain to me I had been represented to the wife of the high dignitary, and goodness knows to how many more people besides, as an exceptional and gifted creature—a piece of good fortune for the Company—a man you don't get hold of every day. Good heavens! and I was going to take charge of a two-penny-half-penny river-steamboat with a penny whistle attached! It appeared, however, I was also one of the Workers, with a capital—you know. Something like an emissary of light, something like a lower sort of apostle. There had been a lot of such rot let loose in print and talk just about that time, and the excellent woman, living right in the rush of all that humbug, got carried off her feet. She



If I were you, said I, I would not be, I would not be talking like this with you. What you say is rather profound, and probably erroneous, he said with a laugh. Avoid irritation more than exposure to the sun. Adieu. How do you English say, eh? Good-bye. Good-bye. Adieu. In the tropic's one must be before everything keep calm. He lifted a warning finger. DU CALME DU CALME. ADIEU.

So, again all these voices, all these voicelessnesses, wordlessness, all these come together to create this one machinery of imperialism in which Marlow finds himself. It is almost like a heart of a machine, the belly of a machine, which is about to churn him out, and classify him as an agent of the empire. And right before his he is coming out of this, he sees this doctor who is taking all kinds of pseudo-scientific interests in him in terms of his propensity, towards degeneration propensity, towards madness etcetera. He is already almost mad because he is going to Africa and that is the common assumption over here right.

So, again look at the collusion between medicine and colonialism, between medicine and economy over here, which is obviously, creating this bio capital. So, this doctor becomes a very symbolic presence over here. He is voicing contemporary concerns with insanity, panic, degeneration etcetera which was obviously, quite heavily racialized in quality.

One more thing remained to do to – say good-bye to my excellent aunt. I found her triumphant. So, again the aunt is a person who made this contact for Marlow, and you know you know and he goes to see his aunt, where she is the only presence in this entire novel who has some kind of a female assertion, has some kind of a female voice right, everyone else in this entire novel all of the females in this novel are all either spoken to, either spoken to or spoken about as in the case of Kurtz's intended and, his you know African mistress. But the aunt in Marlow he seems to have aunt of Marlow, he suggests some kind of an assertive agency over here.

I had a cup of tea – the last decent cup of tea for many days, very again very very English – and in a room that most soothingly looked just as you would expect a lady's drawing room to look, we had a long quiet chat by the fireside. In the course of these confidences it became quite plain to me that I had been represented to the wife of the high dignitary, and goodness knows to how many more people besides, as an exceptional and gifted creature – a piece of good fortune for the Company – a man you do not get hold of every day.

So, again this whole idea of him becoming an asset to the company he learned. So, this is something this is the way he has been projected to the company. And also look at the way in which this is how the human commodification takes place, he is an asset of the company, he is an instrument a tool to the company which will reap them lots of

benefits, reap them lots of profit which manufacture privileges for them that is how he has been presented to the company as a commodity, as a very useful commodity.

Good heavens, and I was going to change I was going to take charge of the two-penny-half-penny river-steamboat with a penny whistle attached. So, he is going to be in charge of this very shabby, little steamboat with a very shabby crew and a little whistle.

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'One thing more remained to do—say good-bye to my excellent aunt. I found her triumphant. I had a cup of tea—the last decent cup of tea for many days—and in a room that most soothingly looked just as you would expect a lady's drawing-room to look, we had a long quiet chat by the fireside. In the course of these confidences it became quite plain to me I had been represented to the wife of the high dignitary, and goodness knows to how many more people besides, as an exceptional and gifted creature—a piece of good fortune for the Company—a man you don't get hold of every day. Good heavens! and I was going to take charge of a two-penny-half-penny river-steamboat with a penny whistle attached! It appeared, however, I was also one of the Workers, with a capital— you know. Something like an emissary of light, something like a lower sort of apostle. There had been a lot of such rot let loose in print and talk just about that time, and the excellent woman, living right in the rush of all that humbug, got carried off her feet. She talked about 'weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways,' till, upon my word, she made me quite uncomfortable. I ventured to hint that the Company was run for profit.

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It appeared, however, I was also one of the Workers with a capital – you know. Something like an emissary of light. Again the worker with capital W is important, because he is an agent of the empire. And the agent obviously, is a very loaded word. And look at the way in which the agent is dressed up and described. He is an emissary of knowledge, illumination, civilization, etcetera that is how imperialism cloaked itself right.

And even Kurtz is seen as someone later in the novel as a finest agent of the empire, the finest agent of Europe he embodies the highest point of civilization, the highest point of illumination, the highest point of knowledge etcetera, so that is how the entire machinery of imperialisms is dressed up. So, the agents sent as emissaries to the dark places of civilization to cure them, to civilize them, to uplift them etcetera right. Something like an emissary of light, something like a lower sort of apostle. Again very biblical quality about the entire description, it is important for us.

There had been such a lot of rot let loose in print and talk just about that time, and the excellent woman, living right in the rush of all that humbug, got carried off her feet. And this is where the cynicism of Marlow comes in and he realizes this all this is rubbish, the whole idea of the imperial agent has been the emissary of light, emissary of education the emissary of civilization was just circulated in print media and consumed uncritically by all the people. And my aunt Marlow says, my aunt is someone who is very unquestionably consumed, and she is a believer in that narrative of imperialism being a civilizing mission as an emissary of light etcetera. So, she got carried off her feet.

She talked about those about weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways, till, upon my word, she may be quite uncomfortable, I ventured to hint that a company was run for profit. So, again this is a very clear incongruity in terms of narratives in terms of perspectives over here. And again, this is quite gendered as well, and this is something we will come back at the end of the novel as well. Marlow's aunt seems to be a consumer of the knowledge of the belief that imperialism was a noble thing, it is a very Christian thing, it is a very biblical thing, the white agents are going out there to rescue the horrid people, from their horrid ways etcetera.

And the all this talk about imperialism being a civilizing mission, imperialism being a emissary like quality, imperialism being a you know educational mission an educational enterprise makes Marlow uncomfortable. Because he has already seen the Heart of darkness to a little extent to a you know significant extent when he goes through the Brussels office that is where you are seen while the entire machinery of imperialism works.

And he knows for a fact that you know this is a company just out there to make profit, and he is trying to hint that to his aunt, that all that talk about all that humbug, all that rubbish that rigmarole about imperialism being a civilizing mission, about educational mission, about an enlightening mission, it is quite opposite to the fact that it is also a profit making mission. The company runs in profit which is to say that is quite mercenary in quality, it is more it is more mercenary and less missionary in quality.

And it is probably got more to do with profit making for the white company for the white European company than for the upliftment of the poor African souls, which is the narrative that is consumed by the aunt over here. And the same kind of consumption

operates at the end of Heart of Darkness, when for instance when you will do that more in more details when we come to that section, but suffice it to say when Marlow comes back from the colonies, when he is about to give the report about Kurtz to his intended as a person who is supposed to marry.

He cannot tell her that she he had a mistress in Africa, he cannot tell her that imperialism was about the horror, he cannot tell her there are dying words of Kurtz by the horror the horror. So, when he is asked by Kurtz's intended what were his dying words, all he can say that you, your name was dying word. So, he has to lie, he has to misinform, the insider in imperialism. So, all these women over here, Marlow's aunt, and Kurtz's intended they are classically situated as the misinformed the naive consumers of imperialism.

So, they are obviously, they are getting the benefits of imperialism, but at the same time they are naively consuming imperialism as a different kind of narrative as a civilizational narrative, as an educational narrative etcetera. And Marlow's cynicism is palpable at the very beginning even before he goes to the Heart of Darkness, even before he goes to Congo, he already knows this is a Heart of Darkness.

He already knows that you know any glorious understanding of imperialism is probably a wrong thing, it is not a glorious enterprise at all, it is a very inglorious enterprise. And a inglorious quality of imperialism is something which heart of darkness constantly foregrounds and describes. So, he ventured to hint that the company was run for profit. So, it is not really about a noble mission at all, it is a profit making machinery, and he is trying to tell the aunt that.

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'You forget, dear Charlie, that the labourer is worthy of his hire,' she said, brightly. It's queer how out of touch with truth women are. They live in a world of their own, and there has never been anything like it, and never can be. It is too beautiful altogether, and if they were to set it up it would go to pieces before the first sunset. Some confounded fact we men have been living contentedly with ever since the day of creation would start up and knock the whole thing over.

'After this I got embraced, told to wear flannel, be sure to write often, and so on—and I left. In the street—I don't know why—a queer feeling came to me that I was an imposter. Odd thing that I, who used to clear out for any part of the world at twenty-four hours' notice, with less thought than most men give to the crossing of a street, had a moment—I won't say of hesitation, but of startled pause, before this commonplace affair. The best way I can explain it to you is by saying that, for a second or two, I felt as though, instead of going to the centre of a continent, I were about to set off for the centre of the earth.

'I left in a French steamer, and she called in every blamed port they have out there, for, as far as I could see, the sole purpose of landing soldiers and custom-house officers. I watched the coast. Watching a coast as it slips by the ship is like thinking about an enigma. There it is before you—smiling, frowning, inviting, grand, mean, insipid, or savage.



You forget, dear Charlie, that a labourer is worthy of his hire, she said, brightly. It is queer how out of touch with truth women are. So, again look at the gendered quality of truth over here, it is almost sexist in quality that women are out of touch with truth, because they are misinformed by the men who are running the empires.

So, the men come back from the colonies and they misinform the women, they lie to the women and that is how the women keep naively consuming the narrative of imperialism as a worthy mission, as a noble mission. They live in a world of their own, and there has been never been anything like it, and never can be. It is too beautiful altogether, and if they were to set it up it would go to pieces before the first sunset.

Some confounded fact we men have been living contentedly with ever since the day of creation would start up and knock the whole thing over. So, it is a very misogynistic take and the woman's position in heart of darkness, but this is also the way the woman was misinformed and this that kind of a cultural setting, where they became the naive consumers of imperialism being a civilizing mission, imperialism being a Christian mission, etcetera. So, any refutation to that would according to Marlow would completely unsettle their little beautiful world, bubble world of nobility and Christianity, etcetera right.

So, this is how imperialism is dressed up, this is how imperialism manufactured and re-described itself through all these lovely little beautiful clothes. Quite refuting the quite

disguising the fact, quiet effacing the fact that was actually a profitmaking enterprise and naked mercantile enterprise so a naked mercantile quality about imperialism is disguised and what gets foregrounded and what gets consumed by these misinformed insiders like Marlow's aunt is a Christian mission, is a noble mission, is a civilizing mission and that becomes and that is a cynical perspective that Marlow is taking at the moment.

After this I got embraced, told to wear flannel, be sure to write often, and so on – and I left. In the street – I do not know, In the street – I do not know why – a queer feeling came to me that I was an impostor. So, again this becomes a very important point where he is he knows he is about to pretend something big, he is about to carry on a magnificent pretension, a spectacular sham which is imperialism right.

So, he is about to become an agent in the spectacular sham, he is about to pretend something he is not. So, the feeling of being an imposter comes to him and this is what connects him to the hollowness of his knowledge. You know, at the end we will talk about how the only enlightenment that he gets is negative enlightenment, he is paradoxically a seer paradoxically sees a profit, because he realizes how hollow this entire knowledge is whereas people like his aunt, people like Kurtz's intended, they keep consuming the glory of the imperialism; where he knows for a fact that there is no glory at all, and it is awareness of hollowness is what makes him substantial as a profit ironically.

So, the only knowledge available is knowledge of nothingness, the only knowledge available is a knowledge of darkness, only enlightenment available is a knowledge of anti-enlightenment and that is what heart of darkness is all about. So, his whole position of being an impostor comes to him it sort of makes them uneasy. Odd thing that I, who used to clear out for any part of the world at twenty-four hours' notice, with less thought than most men give to crossing the street, had a moment – I would not say of hesitation, but of startled pause, before this commonplace affair.

So, before that he was an adventurer, he would just go out and travel to parts of the world, but for the first time he is he is working for a colonial company and that is what is making him a bit uneasy. The best way I can explain it to you is by saying that, for a second or two, I felt as though, instead of going to the centre of a continent, I were about to set off to the centre of the earth.

So, again this is the underworld image comes up again, he is about to think that he is about to go on to the underworld instead of the centre of the continent of Africa, he is about to go somewhere very dark, somewhere where you know no illumination reaches.

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his life, she said, originally, it's queer how out of touch with truth women are. They live in a world of their own, and there has never been anything like it, and never can be. It is too beautiful altogether, and if they were to set it up it would go to pieces before the first sunset. Some confounded fact we men have been living contentedly with ever since the day of creation would start up and knock the whole thing over.

'After this I got embraced, told to wear flannel, be sure to write often, and so on—and I left. In the street—I don't know why—a queer feeling came to me that I was an imposter. Odd thing that I, who used to clear out for any part of the world at twenty-four hours' notice, with less thought than most men give to the crossing of a street, had a moment—I won't say of hesitation, but of startled pause, before this commonplace affair. The best way I can explain it to you is by saying that, for a second or two, I felt as though, instead of going to the centre of a continent, I were about to set off for the centre of the earth.

'I left in a French steamer, and she called in every blamed port they have out there, for, as far as I could see, the sole purpose of landing soldiers and custom-house officers. I watched the coast. Watching a coast as it slips by the ship is like thinking about an enigma. There it is before you—smiling, frowning, inviting, grand, mean, insipid, or savage, and always mute with an air of whispering, 'Come and find out.' This one was almost featureless, as if still in the making, with an aspect of monotonous grimness. The edge of a colossal jungle, so dark-green as to be almost black, fringed



I left in a French steamer, and she called in every blamed a port they have out there, as far as far as I could see, the sole purpose of landing soldiers and custom-house officers. So, it was a old French steamer who keep kept picking up picking up all kinds of customs officers and soldiers. I watch the coast. Watching a coast as it slips by the ship is like thinking about an enigma.

There it is before you – smiling, frowning, inviting, grand, mean, insipid, or savage, and always mute with an air of whispering, Come and find out. So, this enigmatic quality about this whole enterprise begins to make its presence felt in every receding kind of a threshold. This one was almost featureless, as if still in the making, with an aspect of monotonous grimness.

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along a blue sea whose glitter was blurred by a creeping mist. The sun was fierce, the land seemed to glisten and drip with steam. Here and there greyish-whitish specks showed up clustered inside the white surf, with a flag flying above them perhaps. Settlements some centuries old, and still no bigger than pinheads on the untouched expanse of their background. We pounded along, stopped, landed soldiers; went on, landed custom-house clerks to levy toll in what looked like a God-forsaken wilderness, with a tin shed and a flag-pole lost in it; landed more soldiers—to take care of the custom-house clerks, presumably. Some, I heard, got drowned in the surf; but whether they did or not, nobody seemed particularly to care. They were just flung out there, and on we went. Every day the coast looked the same, as though we had not moved; but we passed various places—trading places—with names like Gran' Bassam, Little Popo; names that seemed to belong to some sordid farce acted in front of a sinister back-cloth. The idleness of a passenger, my isolation amongst all these men with whom I had no point of contact, the oily and languid sea, the uniform sombreness of the coast, seemed to keep me away from the truth of things, within the toil of a mournful and senseless delusion. The voice of the surf heard now and then was a positive pleasure, like the speech of a brother. It was something natural, that had its reason, that had a meaning. Now and then a boat from the shore gave one a momentary contact with reality. It was paddled by black fellows. You could see from



The edge of a colossal jungle, so dark-green that to be almost black, fringed with white surf, ran straight, like a ruled line, far, far away along a blue sea whose glitter was blurred by creeping mist. The sun was fierce, the land seemed to glisten and drip with stream. Here and there grayish-whitish specks showed up clustered inside the white surf, with a flag flying above them perhaps.

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So, again look at the monotony in the entire thing, it is about soldiers and customs-house officers soldiers protecting customs house officers and customs-house officers stationed because of soldiers. So, it is like a complete the absurdity the whole enterprise begins to make its presence felt, the meaninglessness the mechanical way in which this journey begins. It is something which is described in great details, and the whole idea the god forsaken wilderness becomes important, it is like an abandoned thing. You know, it is exhausted it's abandoned; it is it's completely liquidated it is like a shutdown of spiritual sustenance and that is how that is why it is travelling.

Some, I heard, got drowned in the surf; but whether they did or not, nobody seemed particularly to care. So, it is a great massive spectacular indifference to any human concern, to any human emotion is what determines or characterizes this entire machinery of imperialism something which Marlow experienced right at the heart of Brussels office, no one seemed to care with anyone right.

And it is complete carelessness, this complete indifference to any human concern is what marks like I said, the whole profitmaking enterprise in imperialism which ironically, he is never really realizes someone like Marlow's aunt; who still thinks of imperialism as a grand noble Christian enterprise and his company as being an emissary of knowledge an emissary of enlightenment, etcetera.

They were just flung out there, and on we went. Every day the coast looked the same, as though we had not moved. So, again this immobility is important over here, it seems as if he is not moving at all; there is this stationary claustrophobic quality about the enterprise, he is just moving on without realizing it is moving, it is just stuck in some limbo and that limbo quality is important for Marlow over here, ok.

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showed up clustered inside the white surt, with a flag flying above them perhaps. Settlements some centuries old, and still no bigger than pinheads on the untouched expanse of their background. We pounded along, stopped, landed soldiers; went on, landed custom-house clerks to levy toll in what looked like a God-forsaken wilderness, with a tin shed and a flag-pole lost in it; landed more soldiers—to take care of the custom-house clerks, presumably. Some, I heard, got drowned in the surf; but whether they did or not, nobody seemed particularly to care. They were just flung out there, and on we went. Every day the coast looked the same, as though we had not moved; but we passed various places—trading places—with names like Gran' Bassam, Little Popo; names that seemed to belong to some sordid farce acted in front of a sinister back-cloth. The idleness of a passenger, my isolation amongst all these men with whom I had no point of contact, the oily and languid sea, the uniform somberness of the coast, seemed to keep me away from the truth of things, within the toil of a mournful and senseless delusion. The voice of the surf heard now and then was a positive pleasure, like the speech of a brother. It was something natural, that had its reason, that had a meaning. Now and then a boat from the shore gave one a momentary contact with reality. It was paddled by black fellows. You could see from afar the white of their eyeballs glistening. They shouted,



And the last bit is important, the idleness of a passenger, my isolation amongst all these white men all these men with whom I had no point of contact, the oily and languid sea, the uniform somberness of the coast, seemed to keep me away from the truth of things, within the toil of a mournful and senseless delusion. So, all these words are important the

senseless delusions, it is almost like a delusion is travelling into a delusion into a dream and his idle is completely alienated.

So, this is obviously, the beginning of Marlow's alienation, he is completely alienated from the product and this is very classic Marxist kind of an alienation, where the laborer is completely unconnected disconnected from the end product which is the ivory in this particular case. So, he gets more and more physically, existentially, spiritually, alienated and he feels to be in a limbo state moving into an underworld.

And the last bit is important, the toil of a mournful and senseless delusion and a sea around is an oily languid sea. So, again it becomes a very very toxic natural presence around him, it is not a soothing nature, it is not a calming nature, it is a toxic nature one which has certain cannibalistic quality about it. And obviously, this is projection of his own mind it is not nothing do with a sea as such, but a projection of his own mind which is getting more and more consumed by the alienation, more and more consumed by despair or consumed with the knowledge of his own pretension that is something which Heart of Darkness will keep foregrounding as we move on.

So, we stop at this point today and we will move on and see how it connects to Marlow's larger sense of alienation, and how that becomes an existence of horror an experience of horror which is encountered by Marlow and uttered by Kurtz. And how that gets reported, or misreported at the end of the novel when Marlow comes back to Brussels, and reports about Kurtz's death to his intended and that is something we will talk about in great details as we move on. So, I stop at this point today and we will move on and I will see you in the next lecture.

Thank you for your attention.