Excerpts from *Heart of Darkness*

**excerpt #1 (page 3)**

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

**excerpt #2 (page 5)**

He [Marlow] was the only man of us who still “followed the sea.” The worst that could be said of him was that he did not represent his class. He was a seaman, but he was a wanderer, too, while most seamen lead, if one may so express it, a sedentary life. Their minds are of the stay-at-home order, and their home is always with them – the ship; and so is their country – the sea. One ship is very much like another, and the sea is always the same. In the immutability of their surroundings the foreign shores, the foreign faces, the changing immensity of life, glide past, veiled not by a sense of mystery but by a slightly disdainful ignorance; for there is nothing mysterious to a seaman unless it be the sea itself, which is the mistress of his existence and as inscrutable as destiny. For the rest, after his hours of work, a casual stroll or a casual spree on shore suffices to unfold for him the secret of a whole continent, and generally he finds the secret not worth knowing. The yarns of seamen have a direct simplicity, the whole meaning of which lies within the shell of a cracked nut. But Marlow was not typical (if his propensity to spin yarns be excepted), and to him the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine.

**excerpt #3 (page 27)**

Do you see the story? Do you see anything? It seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream - making a vain attempt, because no relation of a dream can convey the dream-sensation, that commingling of absurdity, surprise, and bewilderment in a tremor of struggling revolt, that notion of being captured by the incredible which is the very essence of dreams. . . . No, it is impossible; it is impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of one’s existence - that which makes its truth, its meaning - its subtle and penetrating essence. It is impossible. We live, as we dream - alone. . . .”

**excerpt #4 (pages 60-61, 67) [The African woman]**

. . . 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 knees, 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 tusks upon her. She was savage and superb, wild-eyed and magnificent: there was something ominous and stately in her deliberate progress. . . . 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. . . . 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 in a shadowy embrace. . . . Only the barbarous and superb woman did not so much as flinch and stretched tragically her bare arms after us over the somber and glittering river.

**excerpt #5 (pages 72-76) [the Intended]**

She struck me as beautiful - I mean she had a beautiful expression. I know that the sunlight can be made to lie too, yet one felt that no manipulation of light and pose could have conveyed the delicate shade of truthfulness upon those features. She seems ready to listen without mental reservation, without suspicion, without a thought for herself. . . . She came forward all in black with a pale head, floating towards me in the dusk. She was in mourning. . . she seemed as though she would remember and mourn for ever. She took both my hands in hers and murmured, ‘I had heard you were coming.’ I noticed she was not very young - I mean not girlish. She had a mature capacity for fidelity, for belief, for suffering. . . . This fair hair, this pale visage, this pure brow, seemed surrounded by an ashy halo from which the dark eyes looked out at me. Their glance was guileless, profound, confident, and trustful. . . . Her fair hair seemed to catch all the remaining light in a glimmer of gold. . . . She put out her arms, as if after a retreating figure, stretching them black and with clasped pale hands across the fading and narrow sheen of the window.

**excerpt #6 (page 13) [the Wilderness]**

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 with white surf, ran straight, like a ruled line, far far away along a blue sea whose glitter was blurred by a creeping mist. The sun was fierce, the land seemed to glisten and rip with steam.

**excerpt #7 (pages 9-10, 73-74) [Brussels]**

[the Company’s offices]

. . . the biggest thing in town. . . . A narrow and deserted street in deep shadow, high houses, innumberable windows with venetian blinds, a dead silence, grass sprouting between the stones, imposing carriage archways right and left, immense double doors standing ponderously ajar. . . a swept and ungarnished staircase, arid as a desert. . . Deal table in the middle, plain chairs all around the walls. . . . beckoned me into the sanctuary. Its light was dim and a heavy writing-desk squatted in the middle. . . . there was something ominous in the atmosphere.

**[The Intended’s Home]**

. . . the high and ponderous door, between the tall houses of a street as still and decorous as a well-kept alley in a cemetery. . . . mahogany door . . . glassy panel. . . I had to wait in a lofty drawing room with three long windows from floor to ceiling that were like three luminous and bedraped columns. The bent gilt legs and backs of the furniture shone in indistinct curves. The tall marble fireplace had a cold and monumental whiteness. A grand piano stood massively in a corner with dark gleams on the flat surfaces like a somber and polished sarcophagus.