

Twentieth-Century Fiction
Prof. Avishek Parui
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Madras

Lecture - 29
Solid Objects - Part 3

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and looking at the lump of a mountain, as if in admiration, slipped it into his pocket. That impulse, too, may have been the impulse which leads a child to pick up one pebble on a path strewn with them, promising it a life of warmth and security upon the nursery mantelpiece, delighting in the sense of power and benignity which such an action confers, and believing that the heart of the stone leaps with joy when it sees itself chosen from a million like it, to enjoy this bliss instead of a life of cold and wet upon the high road. "It might so easily have been any other of the millions of stones, but it was I, I, I!"

Whether this thought or not was in John's mind, the lump of glass had its place upon the mantelpiece, where it stood heavy upon a little pile of bills and letters and served not only as an excellent paper-weight, but also as a natural stopping place for the young man's eyes when they wandered from his book. Looked at again and again half consciously by a mind thinking of something else, any object mixes itself so profoundly with the stuff of thought that it loses its actual form and recomposes itself a little differently in an ideal shape which haunts the brain when we least expect it. So John found himself attracted to the windows of curiosity shops when he was out walking, merely because he saw something which reminded him of the lump of glass. Anything, so long as it was an object of some kind, more or less round, perhaps with a dying flame deep sunk in its mass, anything—china, glass, amber, rock, marble—even the smooth oval

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So, hello and welcome to this NPTEL course entitled Twentieth Century Fiction. We were looking at Virginia Woolf's short story Solid Objects. So, we have already seen quite a bit of the story we have read it and we have seen and discussed some of the fundamental themes the story is dealing with.

So, just to very quickly summarize what we have discussed so far. So, this particular short story is about a transition from a mainstream narrative of productivity and promises and careers to a more interesting narrative, a more irrational narrative perhaps of fetish for broken objects, the fetish for solid objects, right. And this fetish obviously, is part of the irrational desire; but in a way it also becomes interestingly a mimicry of some sort of an original imperial fetish right and this is something we will talk about a bit today in this lecture.

Because when we see that, John who is the protagonist in this story, he suddenly departs from his career, a very promising career as a politician, he suddenly departs from there into becoming essentially a collector of broken objects. The entire fantasy about objects,

entire fantasy about picking up unknown objects in a way possessing them that could be seen as a mimicry of the original imperial fantasy which is also outdated now; which is obviously, something which does not work anymore in the context of this particular story. And because it does not work anymore, it is seen as irrational and bizarre and strange it is almost punished for having that fetish for having that fantasy, right. But it is very much a mimicry of the original imperial masculinist narrative and that is something which we should pay some attention to, ok.

So, and we will see how he becomes sort of irrationally drawn to his objects which do not have a name, which have sort of surpassed or cross or exhausted the use value, a functional value, right. So, these objects which are essentially post purpose objects, the post value objects, the post use objects and in that sense, they become like things. So, if you are using thing theory which I mentioned already Bill Brown and there are other people that you can read also. So, the entire idea of thing theory says that, you know the whole idea of thing is something which is not an object anymore.

In other words, we have something which is which cannot be, which cannot be a part of the normal or normative consumption production economy anymore, that is outside the consumption production economy, right. So, these objects which John finds himself attracted to outside the mainstream production consumption economy and he picks up these objects as some kind of a private fetish. But these are objects which are which should generally be considered to be useless by normal other people, quote unquote “normal normative” people.

So, the non-normative qualitative objects is exactly what makes them things over here, if you are using present day thing theory into them, ok. And this is something which we will see as we move on and we read, this should be on your screen. Anything so long as it was an object of some kind, more or less round, perhaps with a dying flame deep sunk in its mass, anything; china, glass, amber, rock, marble, even a smooth oval egg of a prehistoric bird would do. He took, also, to keep his eyes to keeping his eyes upon the ground, especially in the neighbourhood of wasteland where the household refuse is thrown away.

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egg of a prehistoric bird would do. He took, also, to keeping his eyes upon the ground, especially in the neighbourhood of waste land where the household refuse is thrown away. Such objects often occurred there—thrown away, of no use to anybody, shapeless, discarded. In a few months he had collected four or five specimens that took their place upon the mantelpiece. They were useful, too, for a man who is standing for Parliament upon the brink of a brilliant career has any number of papers to keep in order—addresses to constituents, declarations of policy, appeals for subscriptions, invitations to dinner, and so on.

One day, starting from his rooms in the Temple to catch a train in order to address his constituents, his eyes rested upon a remarkable object lying half-hidden in one of those little borders of grass which edge the bases of vast legal buildings. He could only touch it with the point of his stick through the railings; but he could see that it was a piece of china of the most remarkable shape, as nearly resembling a starfish as anything—shaped, or broken accidentally, into five irregular but unmistakable points. The colouring was mainly blue, but green stripes or spots of some kind overlaid the blue, and lines of crimson gave it a richness and lustre of the most attractive kind. John was determined to possess it; but the more he pushed, the further it receded. At length he was forced to go back to his rooms and improvise a wire ring attached to the end of a stick, with which.



And this is something which we have discussed already, but then just to recap a little bit before we move on to the next bit; the whole idea or the fact that he is inhabiting the wasteland, he is inhabiting rubbish heaps is something which is interesting over here. Because as I mentioned already waste as something which is a part of the production, process. So, waste is something which is produced and waste obviously, is post consumption. So, waste is something which becomes after the consumption process is complete right; when you consume something completely, then it becomes a waste.

Now, again he is inhabiting those sites, those spaces which are spaces of post consumption of post value, of post purpose; and he is picking up objects from there he is hoping to find similar objects over there in those places. So, essentially, he is becoming symbolically a rag picker and I think I may have mentioned this already the transition that he exhibits over here is from a bourgeoisie walker, a genteel walker, a gentleman walker with a walking stick to a rag picker with a stick, a picker's stick, right.

So, this stick symbolically makes this, has a strange, because you know it has this transition from a normal expensive presumably, expensive privileged walking stick to a stick which has a wire net attached to it just to facilitate the picking up of objects. So, he becomes from a flaneur to a rag picker; that transition is obviously, quite symbolic and quite spectacular in quality, ok.

Such objects often occurred there thrown away, of no use to anybody, shapeless, discarded. So, again the whole idea of discarded objects, so shapeless objects, so abandoned objects become important; because as we have mentioned already, the bigger narrative of abandon over here is that he abandons his political project. He and so politics be damned becomes a very ironically a prophetic statement in the story; where politics is essentially damned is abandoned, it is thrown away, it is discarded and it is something which he, you know does away with entirely.

In a few months he had collected four or five specimens that look that took their place upon the mantelpiece. They were useful too, for a man who is standing for Parliament upon the brink of a brilliant career has any number of papers to keep in order, addresses to constituents, declarations of policy, appeals for subscriptions, invitations to dinner and so on.

So, again there is almost a parodic significance over here, because the omniscient narrator is telling us that, you know those objects that John was picking up is perhaps purposeful are perhaps purposeful; because he obviously, has a lot of important papers, important documents that need paperweights on them. So, these objects which are picked up from a trash places, from waste spaces etcetera are useful in terms to keeping the other objects in order, the papers, important papers in order.

So, the mantelpiece becomes a very interesting space over here, where these non-functional objects are juxtaposed with the functional objects and the non-functional objects appear to have some kind of functionality only in so far as they are keeping the other functional objects in order.

But what we find in the story is gradually the entire mantelpiece becomes full of this quote unquote “non-functional” objects or things, discarded things, abandoned things, you know forgotten things, trash, waste and the functional objects disappear from the mantelpiece and that; obviously, is again very symbolic like the symbolic walking stick becoming the rag pickers instrument. The mantelpiece becoming something else from a functional space to a non-functional space; again, become symbolic of the transition that takes place in the story from being someone with a promising political career to a rag picker in a metropolis.

And this section which we will study today now is useful, it is very very helpful; because it is a very dramatic section and it is a very symbolic session as well and there is and this should be on your screen. One day starting from his rooms in the temple to catch a train in order to address his constituents, his eyes rested upon a remarkable object lying half hidden in one of those little borders of grass which edge the bases of vast legal buildings.

So, again as I may have mentioned, you know this curious juxtaposition between functional objects, functional buildings, mainstream meaningful sites and non-meaningful sites. So, he sees remarkable object half hidden. So, again it is very liminal in quality, it is hidden at the same time, it is also visible. So, it questions this combination of visibility and invisibility makes it half hidden, again very liminal in quality. And where is the object? On the little borders of grass which edge the bases of vast legal buildings.

So, again this is the temple, the temple is a place where they understand, where they practice and learn law. So, it is quite literally the site of lord, a site of the legal monument everything is classified and you know standardized and made meaningful and legislated, right. So, in that place he sees a little object half in the grass which grows in the borders of those buildings. So, literally no man's land between legal buildings - is where the object is lying; again, very very symbolic space, so as a no man's land between legal buildings, so that space becomes literally a non-legal space where the object is lying and he is obviously, going there to pick it up.

He could only touch it with a point of a stick through the railings. So, it is in the railings. So, it is literally like a barbed wire kind of a thing, barbed wire no man's land between two classified territories; he is trying to reach that no man's land with a stick, but he is failing to do it each time. And so, the walking stick becomes very symbolically inadequate to pick up that object. So, he is about to turn that into something else; the walking stick is about to become something else over here as we will see in a moment ok.

He can only touch it with a point of his stick through the railings; but he could see that it was a piece of china of the most remarkable shape, as nearly resembling a starfish as anything shaped, or broken accidentally, into five irregular but unmistakable points. So, again the brokenness is what appeals to him and that is exactly the point in the story. The

brokenness or the meaninglessness is what makes it so irresistible to him, in an unquote irrational way.

The colouring was mainly blue, but green stripes or spots of some kind overlaid the blue, and lines of crimson gave it a richness and lustre of the most attractive kind.

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lying half-hidden in one of those little borders of grass which edge the bases of vast legal buildings. He could only touch it with the point of his stick through the railings; but he could see that it was a piece of china of the most remarkable shape, as nearly resembling a starfish as anything—shaped, or broken accidentally, into five irregular but unmistakable points. The colouring was mainly blue, but green stripes or spots of some kind overlaid the blue, and lines of crimson gave it a richness and lustre of the most attractive kind. John was determined to possess it; but the more he pushed, the further it receded. At length he was forced to go back to his rooms and improvise a wire ring attached to the end of a stick, with which, by dint of great care and skill, he finally drew the piece of china within reach of his hands. As he seized hold of it he exclaimed in triumph. At that moment the clock struck. It was out of the question that he should keep his appointment. The meeting was held without him. But how had the piece of china been broken into this remarkable shape? A careful examination put it beyond doubt that the star shape was accidental, which made it all the more strange, and it seemed unlikely that there should be another such in existence. Set at the opposite end of the mantelpiece from the lump of glass that had been dug from the sand, it looked like a creature from another world—freakish and fantastic as a harlequin. It seemed to be pironetting through space, winking light like a fitful star. The contrast



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John was determined to possess it; but the more he pushed, the further it receded. At length he was forced to go back to his rooms and improvise a wire ring attached to the end of the stick, with which, by dint of great care and skill, he finally, drew the piece of china within reach of his hands.

So, again the fact that he attached the wire ring to the stick symbolically makes it a ragpicker's instrument; the stick becomes no more a gentleman's instrument, but a ragpicker's instrument. And he is now able to retrieve or get; not retrieve, but get the broken object which he was desiring for that he was attracted to, ok.

As he seized hold of it he exclaimed in triumph. So, it is like a personal victory. So, again this is very very fetishistic in quality is you know; he is drawn to it in an irrational desire, in an irrational fantasy and now that he has got it he is almost exclaiming in triumph. At that moment the clock struck. So, very very symbolic again.

So, as you can see that the space that he is inhabiting now is between the legal buildings. So, it is literally the no man's land; literally and symbolically the no man's land. Also,

the time in which he is going there, that is outside the clock time; so you know it literally becomes a space-time outside to space time narrative, the normative narrative of space-time. So, it is quite literally the space-time outside the normative narrative.

Now, the moment he gets the object, the clock, the standard clock the clock time begins to chime which is say that he is sort of, brought back in clock time, standardized time, legal time, classified time right; however, that also reminds him that he has failed to make his appointment, that he will fail to go there, he will not show up in time.

It was out of the question that he should keep his appointment. So, the appointment, the important functional appointment is now lost; it is not something that he can keep anymore. So, again it becomes a symbolic thing, that appointment is abandoned in other words.

The meeting was held without him, but now he had the piece of china. But how had the piece of china had been broken into this remarkable shape? So, again look at the curiosity in his mind now. So, the fact that he has missed the meeting with his constituents is the last thing he is thinking about at the moment. Instead what is keeping him busy, what is making him obsessed is his desire to know how this particular China was broken into this remarkable shape, five different shapes, irregular shapes.

A careful examination put it beyond doubt that the star shape was accidental, which made it all the more strange, and it seemed unlikely that there should be another such in existence. So, this very curious strange star ship like shape of this particular object was accidental, it is like an accident it broke in a particular way; and hence this is a unique kind of a thing, you cannot device it, you cannot really carve it out as it were, it had to be broken in a particular way, it had to be caused through an accident. So, it is a fall out of an accident which makes it very very unique in quality.

Set at the opposite end of the mantelpiece from the lump of glass that had been dug from the sand, it looked like a creature from another world, freakish and fantastic as a harlequin. So, again these words are very important - freakish, fantastic, harlequin. Now as I mentioned a little while ago; one can read this entire obsession with objects and to possess objects, as some kind of a mimicry, you know a repetitive mimicry of the original imperial fantasy of possessing exotic objects.

Now, that original masculinist imperial fantasy is obviously, a thing of the past here because of the setting of the story. So, that is very conveniently parodied and mimicked and it becomes a bizarre fetish, a bizarre irrational desire; but what it does entire story in that sense, what it does it becomes a critique of this masculinist aspiration towards possession, this masculinist obsession for possession for territorialization, for picking up land masses. So, you know these objects which are like land masses, little pieces of land, little pieces of matter; they become the miniaturized versions of the little islands that were you know taken over during colonialism, the islands, the spaces, the vast landmasses which were taken over during imperialism.

So, you know there is this mimicry of the original imperial narrative, the mimicry of the original imperial fantasy which is at play here as well, right. So, because this is a mimicry, it almost sometimes has a comic effect, a dark comic effect; because that fantasy, that desire, that fetish is now a thing of the past now to replicate it in the context of this time where the story is written, it almost always yields or generates a comic effect which is something which we will see.

But as you can see, looking at the object looking at the lump that he is staring at and feeling like, it is a freakish and fantastic thing like a harlequin; a harlequin obviously is a mimic artist you know, it is an act of mimicry which obviously, underlines the mimicry quality of the story as well. But freakish and fantastic these are again, it is almost a rhetoric of imperialism, the rhetoric of the original imperial narrative where everything outside of the ken of European imagination, everything outside the ken of the white male imagination becomes freakish and fantastic by default.

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between the china so vivid and alert, and the glass so mute and contemplative, fascinated him, and wondering and amazed he asked himself how the two came to exist in the same world, let alone to stand upon the same narrow strip of marble in the same room. The question remained unanswered.

He now began to haunt the places which are most prolific of broken china, such as pieces of waste land between railway lines, sites of demolished houses, and commons in the neighbourhood of London. But china is seldom thrown from a great height; it is one of the rarest of human actions. You have to find in conjunction a very high house, and a woman of such reckless impulse and passionate prejudice that she flings her jar or pot straight from the window without thought of who is below. Broken china was to be found in plenty, but broken in some trifling domestic accident, without purpose or character. Nevertheless, he was often astonished as he came to go into the question more deeply, by the immense variety of shapes to be found in London alone, and there was still more cause for wonder and speculation in the differences of qualities and designs. The finest specimens he would bring home and place upon his mantelpiece, where, however, their duty was more and more of an ornamental nature, since papers needing a weight to keep them down became scarcer and scarcer.



It seemed to be pirouetting through space, winking light like a fitful star. The contrast between the China so vivid and alert, and the glass so mute and contemplative, fascinated him, and wondering and amazed he asked himself how the two came to exist in the same world, let alone to stand upon the same narrow strip of marble in the same room. The question remained unanswered.

So, again look at the way in which the two objects are contrasted with each other in the man's mind. Now the interesting thing over here for us to understand is that, the objects obviously do not speak, the objects are spoken to, the objects are spoken for. So, all these attributes that is given to the objects, that one is very vivid and alert and the other is mute and contemplative; but these are his readings or his projections onto these two objects, it is like picking up in a very crude, vulgar, imperialist sense, picking up quote unquote "natives" from two different parts of the colony and contrasting them.

One is virile, aggressive you know dominant, the other is submissive docile and passive. So, it is like two imperial, you know objects which are gazed at that, which are being gazed at in a mantelpiece. And now the mantelpiece becomes over here an imperial space as well; because what we see very quickly and very clearly this mantelpiece becomes a museumized space, where different objects which are strange and freakish and outlandish and fantastic are put together and displayed right and that becomes almost like a museum space, a very symbolic miniaturized museum.

Now, the whole idea of the museum was; obviously, part of the imperial fantasy, that you you pick up all these exotic objects from different parts of the world and put together into this massive voyeuristic you know slideshow, where you come and pay and consume it visually, it obviously becomes part of the consumption economy. And now what makes it complicated is; obviously, the entire idea the entire, the criterion to enter a museum is strangeness, right. The criterion to enter a museum is uncanniness. So, quite literally the museum becomes a space, where the uncanny gets domesticated, where the uncanny becomes subjugated and standardized and is displayed and consumed in a very mainstream way, right.

So, you look at strange things in a museum, you look at the entire idea of the imperial museum is to have a gallery on display; sometimes very voyeuristic, offering a very voyeuristic gaze at very very exotic objects and this erotic quality about the museum is shown in that sense, you look at things which are exotic, erotic in quality, which appeal to you.

Now, we have this mantelpiece over here becoming some kind of a quasi-museum space as you can see, ok. And now we find this fetish becomes very very prominent, the fetish becomes very very rampant in John's mind. He now began to haunt the places which are most prolific of broken china, such as pieces of waste land between railway lines. Again, look at the between quality of the spaces, between railway lines; sites of demolished houses, again abandoned houses, demolished houses and commons in the neighbourhood of London.

But china is seldom thrown from a great height; it is one of those rarest of human actions. You have to find in conjunction a very high house, and a woman of such reckless impulse and passionate prejudice that she flings her jar or pot straight from the window without thought of who is below.

Now, again this is interesting; because look at the focalization at work over here; the narrator the gaze, the contemplative mind, the thinking mind is obviously, very very male and white male. So, it is assumed immediately that a person that drops the object from the top must be a woman and obviously, a reckless woman at that. Probably possibly a hysterical woman right; someone who drops you know vases of China from the top from a great height, flings, jars, a pot straight from the window, right.

So, broken china was to be found in plenty, but broken in some trifling domestic accident, without purpose or character. Nevertheless, he was often astonished as he came to go into the question more deeply, by the immense variety of shapes to be found in London alone, and there was still more cause for wonder and speculation in the differences of qualities and designs.

So, you know this entire idea, the entire fetish with broken objects that he is beginning to grow and not just objects which are abandoned, objects which are broken in a particular way; and the brokenness of each object gives it gives them a special a unique kind of a design, a unique kind of a shape. So, the design and shape and meaning that he has in his mind is irrational private meaning that he has in his mind, emerges out of the brokenness of objects and that is something that we should pay some attention to.

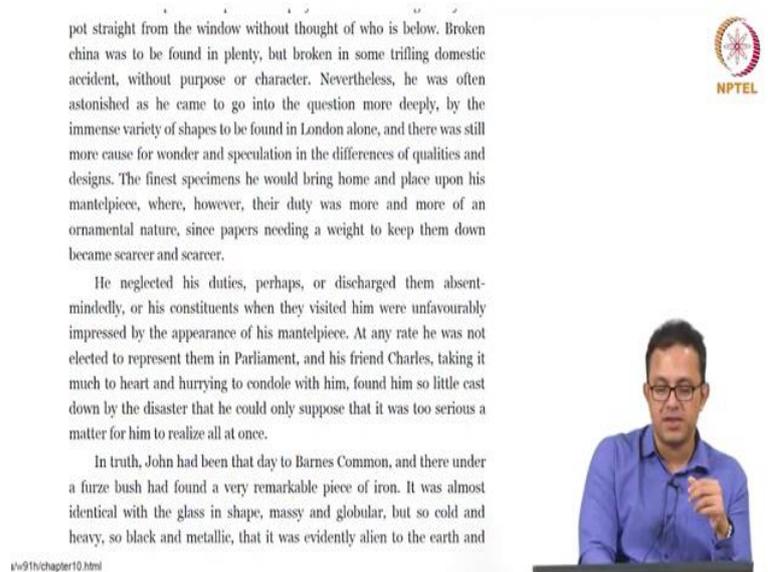
The finest specimens he would bring home and place upon his mantelpiece, were, however, the duty was more and more of an ornamental nature, since papers needing a weight to keep them down became scarcer and scarcer. So, again look at the shift of signifiers over here; the papers which are required, the papers which wanted to be kept down with heavy weight with paper weights, they became lesser and lesser and they became less and more are more you know infrequent in that sense; because he stopped getting invitations, stopped being he was not being taken very seriously.

So, all his subscriptions, invitations, you know office orders, documents which were there in his mantelpiece before; they began to disappear, because obviously, he is not keeping them, he is not really keen on his political ambitions anymore. And he rather he moves towards his personal fetish for broken objects. Again, the brokenness being the key ontological condition, which attracts him, that forms his fetish in that sense, right.

So, again this very symbolic, again this story is interesting because you need to look at the entire idea of things in the story objects in the story, materials in the story and how the shift in materials, the shift in the signifiers in materials; they become reflective in that sense of the shift to the human condition, the human state. And this is something which we found throughout modernism, ever since we started off with this first story, the Postmaster by Tagore; we found even there materials and nature they sort of correspond to the human mind and they are dialogic and reflective, of the states of human mind, which is something we find here as well.

We get this whole idea, that papers which needed a weight became more and more scarce in quality; because you know he was taking less and less seriously.

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pot straight from the window without thought of who is below. Broken china was to be found in plenty, but broken in some trifling domestic accident, without purpose or character. Nevertheless, he was often astonished as he came to go into the question more deeply, by the immense variety of shapes to be found in London alone, and there was still more cause for wonder and speculation in the differences of qualities and designs. The finest specimens he would bring home and place upon his mantelpiece, where, however, their duty was more and more of an ornamental nature, since papers needing a weight to keep them down became scarcer and scarcer.

He neglected his duties, perhaps, or discharged them absent-mindedly, or his constituents when they visited him were unfavourably impressed by the appearance of his mantelpiece. At any rate he was not elected to represent them in Parliament, and his friend Charles, taking it much to heart and hurrying to condole with him, found him so little cast down by the disaster that he could only suppose that it was too serious a matter for him to realize all at once.

In truth, John had been that day to Barnes Common, and there under a furze bush had found a very remarkable piece of iron. It was almost identical with the glass in shape, massy and globular, but so cold and heavy, so black and metallic, that it was evidently alien to the earth and

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And there is this list of you know itemized list of things which he is neglecting. He neglected his duties, perhaps or discharged them absent mindedly, or his constituents when they visited him were unfavourably impressed by the appearance of his mantelpiece.

So, you know the mantelpiece becomes an awkward sight over there, because in a way that houses trash, that houses the broken objects, and houses the discarded abandoned objects; it is not really a meaningful museum in that sense, it becomes a meaningless museum.

But again, like I said this becomes a mimicry of the original imperial museum, where this whole obsession with objects and exotic objects were you know displayed spectacularly; right that becomes a miniaturization, his mantelpiece becomes parodic miniaturization, a mimicry of the original imperial museum, imperial object, space.

At any rate he was not elected to represent them in parliament, and his friend Charles, taking it much to heart that and hurrying to condole with him, found him so little cast down by the disaster that he could only suppose that it was too serious a matter for him to realize all at once. So, we have now come to the towards the end of the story, we are

told very quickly that his political ambitions, his political career is over all, but over; he did not get elected to the parliament, because he started neglecting his duties, he started being negligent towards his political responsibilities, he did not answer his constituents favourably, his constituents were unimpressed with him. So, his political career was over and Charles his friend began to get worried about him. So, he wanted to come and condole him, right.

But the funny thing is, the strange thing is he found that; you know John was so little cast down, he was hardly depressed, he was hardly worried, he looked hardly worried. So, Charles thought on his behalf that, you know maybe you know this is too much of shock for him; it still has not it still has not sunk in his mind right, still has not he still has not processed it, the entire you know the fact that his career is over.

In truth John had been that day to Barnes Common, and there under a furze bush had found a very remarkable piece of iron. It was almost identical with the glass in shape, massy and globular, but so cold and heavy, so black and metallic, that it was evidently alien to the earth and had its origin in one of the dead stars or was itself the cinder of a moon.

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had its origin in one of the dead stars or was itself the cinder of a moon. It weighed his pocket down; it weighed the mantelpiece down; it radiated cold. And yet the meteorite stood upon the same ledge with the lump of glass and the star-shaped china.

As his eyes passed from one to another, the determination to possess objects that even surpassed these tormented the young man. He devoted himself more and more resolutely to the search. If he had not been consumed by ambition and convinced that one day some newly-discovered rubbish heap would reward him, the disappointments he had suffered, let alone the fatigue and derision, would have made him give up the pursuit. Provided with a bag and a long stick fitted with an adaptable hook, he ransacked all deposits of earth; raked beneath matted tangles of scrub; searched all alleys and spaces between walls where he had learned to expect to find objects of this kind thrown away. As his standard became higher and his taste more severe the disappointments were innumerable, but always some gleam of hope, some piece of china or glass curiously marked or broken lured him on. Day after day passed. He was no longer young. His career—that is his political career—was a thing of the past. People gave up visiting him. He was too silent to be worth asking to dinner. He never talked to anyone about his serious ambitions; their lack of understanding was apparent in their behaviour.



So, he found a little piece of iron which is like almost you know celestial in quality; you know it may have come from some part of an asteroid, you know, but then this is something which is completely fascinated him and that is what is consuming in his

imagination at the moment. It weighed his pocket down, it weighed the mantelpiece down, it radiated cold. And yet the meteorite stood upon the same ledge with the lump of glass and the star-shaped China.

So, again the whole mantelpiece ledge now becomes full of these broken objects, discarded objects, abandoned objects; and now we get this almost meteorite, this little piece little fragment from a meteor apparently. As his eyes passed from one to another, the determination to possess objects that even surpassed those, these tormented the young man. So, the fact the moment, he looked at these objects, the determination, the fetish, the desire, the fantasy to possess more objects began to consume him, tormented him. He devoted himself more and more resolutely to the search.

If he had not been consumed by ambition and convinced that one day some newly discovered rubbish heap would reward him, the disappointments he has suffered, let alone the fatigue and derision, would have made him give up the pursuit. So, now, we find that you know, the entire energy is spent now picking up objects and obviously, along the way he is humiliated, insulted, mocked at etcetera; but what keeps him going is a fact that, he thinks that he is going to pick up some really important object, you know the fact that he will discover something from some rubbish heap.

Provided with the bag and a long stick fitted with an adaptable hook; now he becomes the perfect ragpicker. So, he goes with a bag and with a stick and a hook, adaptable hook. He ransacked all deposits of earth; raked beneath matted tangles of scrub searched all alleys and spaces between walls where he had learned to expect to find objects of this kind thrown away.

So, he becomes, he begins to inhabit all the spaces, discarded spaces, abandoned spaces, decimated buildings, abandoned buildings etcetera; why he is thinking of picking up objects of this kind. As his standards became higher and his taste more severe the disappointments were innumerable, but always some gleam of hope, some piece of china or glass curiously marked or broken lured him on.

So, the whole idea of broken objects that is what lures him on, right. So, you know the disappointments are massive, the derisions are massive, the mockery is massive; but what keeps him going essentially is the fact that, he is driven towards picking up objects, collecting objects which are you know of a certain variety of brokenness.

Day after day passed. He was no longer young. His career that is his political career was a thing of the past. His political career is over; he does not have any more political career anymore. People give up visiting him. He was too silent to be worth asking to dinner. He never talked to anyone about his serious ambitions; the lack of understanding was apparent in their behaviour.

So, the whole idea and this is something you can, those of you who remember, the James Joyce short story which we did, Araby; we find that you know it has this very interesting inversion of the values in a valueless world. So, the whole way from Mangan's sister in that story was the only serious thing to do when everything else around him; the adult world around him became child's play.

It's an inversion of the erotic world and the adult world, so the private erotic fantasy world that becomes the only meaningful world, appears the only meaningful world worth waiting for; whereas, everything else the uncle coming back, the school teachers admonishing him for not doing his homework all these become child's play.

Now, similarly there is some kind of an irrational inversion here as well, quote unquote "irrational" inversion, you know his political career, his mockeries of his constituents; the fact that his ambition was over, all his important political decisions and narratives which he had subscribed before were all done and dusted, all this did not matter to him at all, right.

So, his only serious ambition his only worthy ambition in his mind, only noble ambition in his mind was to go and keep picking more and more broken objects, discarded objects, which would then feed his fantasy of collecting and gathering and having this fetish towards brokenness, right. And obviously, he failed to connect to other people, he failed to socialize, he failed to establish any empathetic relationship with his friends or fellow constituents.

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consumed by ambition and convinced that one day some newly-discovered rubbish heap would reward him, the disappointments he had suffered, let alone the fatigue and derision, would have made him give up the pursuit. Provided with a bag and a long stick fitted with an adaptable hook, he ransacked all deposits of earth; raked beneath matted tangles of scrub; searched all alleys and spaces between walls where he had learned to expect to find objects of this kind thrown away. As his standard became higher and his taste more severe the disappointments were innumerable, but always some gleam of hope, some piece of china or glass curiously marked or broken lured him on. Day after day passed. He was no longer young. His career—that is his political career—was a thing of the past. People gave up visiting him. He was too silent to be worth asking to dinner. He never talked to anyone about his serious ambitions; their lack of understanding was apparent in their behaviour.

He leaned back in his chair now and watched Charles lift the stones on the mantelpiece a dozen times and put them down emphatically to mark what he was saying about the conduct of the Government, without once noticing their existence.

"What was the truth of it, John?" asked Charles suddenly, turning and facing him. "What made you give it up like that all in a second?"

"I've not given it up," John replied.

"But you've not the ghost of a chance now," said Charles roughly.



He leaned back in his chair now and watched Charles lift the stones from the mantelpiece a dozen times and put them down emphatically to mark what he was saying about the conduct of the Government, without once noticing their existence, right. So obviously, Charles and John are having a conversation, but the drifting about Charles is talking about the conduct, of the Government; but he John notices that Charles is talking to him by picking up the stones, but not really noticing them, because those are worth not worth noticing by Charles, which by Charles' imagination, because Charles at this point is an important serious politician.

He is talking about policies and narratives and government decisions, etcetera. So, all these objects in a mantelpiece that he sees, which belongs to John which obviously, John picked up from different trash bins in different parts of abandoned spaces in London; those objects do not appeal to him at all, he is picking them up indiscriminately, randomly, while talking about more quote unquote serious things, right.

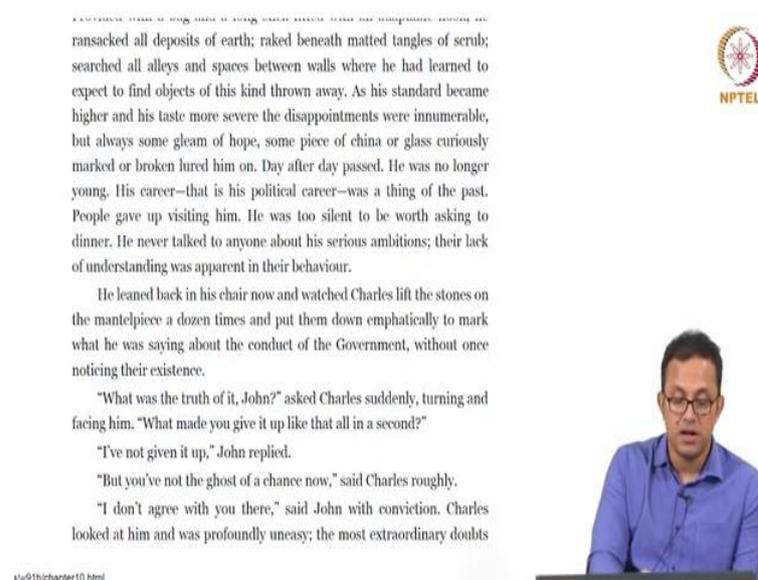
What was the truth of it, John? Asked Charles suddenly, turning and facing him. What made you give it up all up on the all that in a second? Right so, now, he asks this direct blunt question, why did you give up a political career; you had it, you on the brink of getting elected, what made you give up everything in one go.

I have not given it up, John replied now, obviously, they are they are talking in cross purposes over here. There is some dramatic irony that is at play, because we the audience

know, one of them knows the truth; but obviously, they are at complete confusion with each other in terms of what they are saying and what they are responding to. Because Charles is asking John why did he give up on a project. Now what he does not know is that, John now has a different project and his project is to collect broken objects to find the perfect pieces which were formed together one museum, one spectacular in area, one spectacular space of broken objects which form his fetish that is his only ambition.

So, he has not given up on that ambition; he still goes to broken spaces, he still goes to abandoned spaces, he still goes to wasteland and he keeps driving himself all the, all the time there. So, his entire career, his entire ambition is not driven towards that and obviously, Charles does not know it; Charles is asking why did you give up the ambition, to which John responds, I have not given it up, John replied.

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ransacked all deposits of earth; raked beneath matted tangles of scrub; searched all alleys and spaces between walls where he had learned to expect to find objects of this kind thrown away. As his standard became higher and his taste more severe the disappointments were innumerable, but always some gleam of hope, some piece of china or glass curiously marked or broken lured him on. Day after day passed. He was no longer young. His career—that is his political career—was a thing of the past. People gave up visiting him. He was too silent to be worth asking to dinner. He never talked to anyone about his serious ambitions; their lack of understanding was apparent in their behaviour.

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“What was the truth of it, John?” asked Charles suddenly, turning and facing him. “What made you give it up like that all in a second?”

“I’ve not given it up,” John replied.

“But you’ve not the ghost of a chance now,” said Charles roughly.

“I don’t agree with you there,” said John with conviction. Charles looked at him and was profoundly uneasy; the most extraordinary doubts

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But if not, you have not got a ghost of a chance now, said Charles roughly. You know you have given up, I mean no one takes you seriously, you know your political career is all over; there is no seriousness left in your political profile, you do not have a chance any more. I do not agree with you there, said John with conviction. So, again this conviction comes from something else, because he is focused entirely on something else, nothing to do with politics at all; he is obviously, talking about collecting objects, picking up broken objects that is his conviction at play. So, he says I do not agree with you there, said John with conviction. Charles looked at him and was profoundly uneasy.

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A Haunted House, and other short stories, by Virginia Woolf - chapter10

possessed him; he had a queer sense that they were talking about different things. He looked round to find some relief for his horrible depression, but the disorderly appearance of the room depressed him still further. What was that stick, and the old carpet bag hanging against the wall? And then those stones? Looking at John, something fixed and distant in his expression alarmed him. He knew only too well that his mere appearance upon a platform was out of the question.

"Pretty stones," he said as cheerfully as he could; and saying that he had an appointment to keep, he left John—for ever.



The most extraordinary doubts possessed him; he had a queer sense that they were talking about different things. So, now, this becomes obvious to Charles, maybe he is asking a different set of questions and John is responding having a different set of things in mind. He looked round to find some relief for his horrible depression, but the disorderly appearance of the room depressed him even further. So, the word disorderly is interesting, because it becomes the architecture of irrationality that John is exhibiting, right.

So, entire weird museum as such, where everything is like disorderly and broken and incommensurable with each other that becomes uneasy for Charles; because Charles is obviously, the mainstream, I think the consumer of mainstream progressive or progress driven narrative. But whereas you know John over here is sort of trying to fall back upon some kind of a strange narrative, the uncanny narrative of broken objects. So, there is this horrible depression that he is experiencing and looking at the disorderly appearance depresses him even further.

What was that stick, and the long carpet bag that hanging against the wall? So, again the stick and a carpet bag which are traditionally the rag picker's instruments; they are staring at him, they are hanging in the wall and that disturbs him even further, you know Charles gets more disturbed. And then these stones? Looking at John, something fixed

and distant in his expression alarmed him. He knew only too well that his mere appearance upon a platform was out of the question.

So, you know there is a spectral quality about John, he is already dead politically, the very appearance on his on a platform and a political platform was out of question entirely; because John obviously, does not have it anymore, he is driven towards something else that he Charles does not quite understand. There is something uncanny, strange, almost supernatural about him which is beginning to make him uncomfortable, perhaps a little scared also. Pretty stones, he said as cheerfully as he could; and saying that he had an appointment to keep, he left John forever.

See the final image is also one of abandon, he abandoned John forever, right. So, you know everything is abandoned, the John's political career is abandoned by himself, Charles abandons John and John obviously, creates a fetish or forms a fetish out of collecting abandoned objects. So, in that sense the iron, the title of the story is very very ironic in quality solid objects; nothing solid about it, they are broken objects.

And out of those broken objects, John is trying to form a fetish and like he said that irrational desire to collect broken objects becomes in a way a mockery or a mimicry of the original imperial fantasy of collecting precious stones, of grabbing lands, of possessing exotic objects or territorializing unknown territories. So, there is little shards of glass, little piece of lump that he carries, little landmasses are obviously, miniaturized versions of their original and big land masses; that imperial imagination and fantasy projected themselves to.

So, this story could be seen interestingly as a reputation or a deflated reputation, a mimicry of the original imperial narrative, the masculinist narrative of possession, ownership, fetish, greed etcetera; only this is relocated in a different time with that you know that original imperial moment is gone and this is post first world war and you know we have this entire idea of broken objects otherwise. So, instead of the imperial objects we have broken objects; so John becomes in a way strangely collusive to an original imperial fantasy which obviously, does not work anymore. So, he has a shift from the gentlemen to the ragpicker, which is a very symbolic shift which takes place in the story.

So, as you can see this is a very bizarre irrational story; but what this bizarre irrational quality in the story does, it becomes a very interesting critique of the politics and culture of consumption in modernity, right. So, John's obsession with objects becomes a commentary on the irrational obsession of objects and materiality in modernity; which is also an extension of the original imperial fantasy about objects. And, we had these imperial moments in the story as well and this idea of this dark woman driven by slaves, this idea of you know some exotic objects somewhere as a precious stone out of an Elizabethan treasure box, etcetera.

So, all these are like a very very standard signifiers of imperial fantasy, imperial loot, imperial you know exploration, right. And that kind of an imperial imagination is extended in John's embodiment here as well, only in a grotesque parodic form. So, this story is obviously, about human consciousness, is about human thought processes; but also it gives the very very queer and very interesting and uncomfortable idea of masculinity, white British, post imperial masculinity as it begins to crack up.

So, this is a very interesting story for those of you interested in masculinity studies and also thing theory; as I mentioned because what happens in the story is, the thingness of objects, the post value, the post purpose quality of objects those are the things that get foregrounded and you know those are the things that get talked about actually. And that obviously, you know is an exhaustion of functionality, an exhaustion of significance that is at play over here; because you know these are objects which are you know, these exhausted their object status and that becomes an irrational desire of possession for this particular white male imagination, which makes it very interesting retelling as well as a mimicry of an original imperial narrative of possession and fantasy and fetish.

So, with that we end this short story *Solid Objects*; go back and read it again. If you have any questions, please forward those in the online forum that we have and we'll be happy to engage with them in due course of time. So, with that we finish this and we move on to a new text which would start at the next lecture.

Thank you for your attention.