

The Nineteenth-Century Novel
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Lecture – 12
Persuasion, Volume II, Chapters 13 - 18

Hello and welcome back. This is a continuation of week 3's lecture, and we are looking at chapters 13 to 18. So we will continue looking at some of the way in which the courtship plots change their nature, and what are the significances of that change.

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Captain Benwick and Louisa

- Captain Benwick's "surprise" engagement to Louisa
- Mrs Harville says her husband feels a good deal on his poor sister's account; but however, Louisa is a great favourite with both.

Mary's letter to Anne

Let us look at Captain Benwick and Louisa. So these are 2 characters who come together at Lyme Regis. And if you remember Louisa, she is one of the Musgrove girls, and she has had a serious accident at the cob in Lyme Regis, and she is recovering at the home of the Harvilles. And suddenly, we get to hear about her engagement to Captain Benwick, and if you remember again, Captain Benwick is the man who is down in the depths of despair apparently, because he has lost his fiancée who is the sister of Captain Harville. So Captain Benwick is emotionally recovering at the Harville home, and Louisa is physically recovering after her fall at the cob. So these two people because of their circumstances, because of the fact that both of them are kind of recuperating from some kind of loss, is the fact that kind of brings them together.

And we come to know about this engagement, this surprise engagement, through Mary's letter to Anne Elliot. And Mary if you remember is very, very unhappy about that kind of match between Benwick and Louisa. She thinks that a Musgrove girl should kind of go for a partner

who is superior than Captain Benwick. So Mrs. Harville says that her husband feels a good deal on his poor sister's account, but however, Louisa is a great favourite with both. And this is an excerpt from Mary's letter, and look at the way the feelings of Captain Harville is communicated by Mary. It is an indirect communication of Captain Harville's dissatisfaction with this surprise engagement between Captain Benwick and Louisa. She says that, Mary says that, Mrs. Harville says that her husband is a little bit upset, so it is kind of removed, twice removed, the feelings of Captain Harville is twice removed here, and that kind of dampens the effect of the intensity of the emotion. But, even though he is dissatisfied, even though Captain Harville is dissatisfied, it is very clear that, even to Mary, that Louisa is a great favourite with both Mr and Mrs Harville, so they would be happy because of that fact.

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Captain Benwick and Anne

- "And that is the end, you see, of Captain Benwick's being supposed to be an admirer of yours."

1) Elliot pride - happy - Anne x Cpt Benwick
2) mean? sibling rivalry

And Mary further adds that "And that is the end, you see, of Captain Benwick's being supposed to be an admirer of yours," so it is kind of a stinging comment about the potential romance that is supposed to happen between Captain Benwick. See, it has not come to any purposeful end and because Captain Benwick is going to marry Louisa. So we can see that there is a kind of a slight nastiness about Mary Musgrove here about the future of Anne Elliot.

And we can kind of interpret it in two ways. Firstly, we can see that Mary has this Elliot pride and that is exhibited at several points in the narrative, so since she has that Elliot pride she is happy that Anne hasn't married Captain Benwick, that is one interpretation. Two; naturally slightly mean towards Anne Elliot, which is why she seems to be happy about the fact that Anne is not going to be married soon.

So, we can also kind of sense a sibling rivalry there, perhaps a rivalry that kind of puts Mary ahead of Anne Elliot in the, in terms of the marriage dynamics.

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The Crofts in Bath

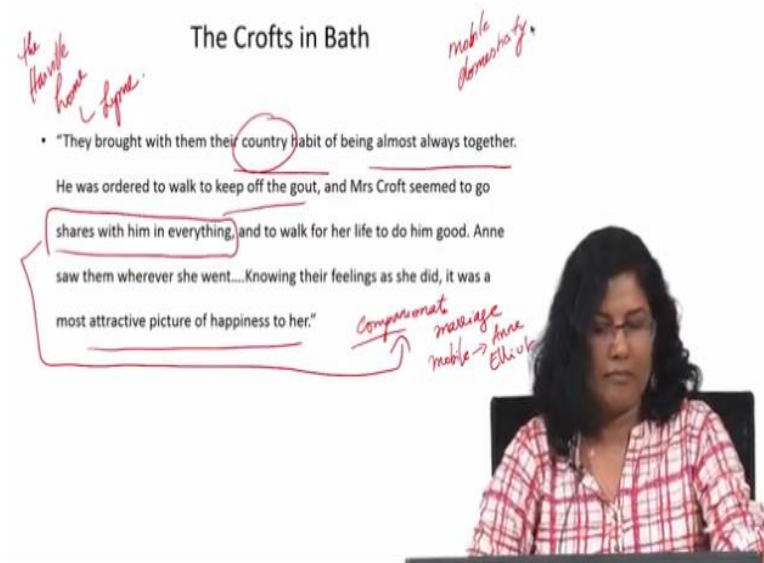
the family habit

mobile domesticity

- "They brought with them their country habit of being almost always together.

He was ordered to walk to keep off the gout, and Mrs Croft seemed to go shares with him in everything, and to walk for her life to do him good. Anne saw them wherever she went...Knowing their feelings as she did, it was a most attractive picture of happiness to her."

Companionate marriage
mobile → Anne Elliot



Now, the Crofts are in Bath, and what happens when their presence is seen in Bath, you know, the third person narrator says that they brought with them their country habit of being almost always together. He was ordered to walk to keep off the gout, and Mrs. Croft seemed to go shares with him in everything, and to walk for her life to do him good. Anne saw them whenever she went. Knowing their feelings as she did, it was a most attractive picture of happiness to her.

This is again a very important excerpt in the entire novel, and there are several things here which capture the companionate marriage ideal through these figures. So how is this embodied in the characters of Admiral Croft and Mrs. Croft? Firstly, Anne points out that they have this country habit of being almost always together, they are always seen together, they do things jointly, they are unison in terms of some of their perspectives about what is good for them.

And it is also very interesting here to note that she calls this habit the country habit, it is not a town habit, it is the country habit that kind of makes couple to walk together, be seen together. So it's slightly not very modern in some sense, but it also is very charming and which reflects that, you know, companionate, egalitarian relationships that Anne really admires. So what is the immediate context for their being together, it is this.

Admiral Croft has the gout, he is physically ill, and he has been asked to walk quite a bit to keep off this illness, gout, and Mrs. Croft joins him in all these walking expeditions. And Anne points out that Mrs. Croft goes shares with him in everything, and this is a companionate marriage ideal. And if you look at the first half of the novel in the first volume, we have seen Mrs. Croft directing, redirecting the gig in order to avoid an accident when they are travelling.

And that shows that A, Mrs. Croft is willing to take the initiative to protect themselves and B, Mr. Croft; Admiral Croft is willing to let his wife intervene in order to protect their family physically and in every other way. So to go shares with him in everything points to a nature of equality between them in this couple, and Anne sees them everywhere she goes, that is very interesting, wherever she goes to in Bath, there, Mr. and Mrs. Croft are there. Which means that again they are very mobile.

And who else is mobile? If, you know, if they are seen then the person who is seeing them is also going a lot of places, and that is Anne Elliott too, is also very mobile. And what is the analysis that Anne, you know, draws through their presence? It is this. She thinks that this is a very attractive couple, because they do present a picture of happiness, to her at least, and if you kind of go back to the earlier sections, in fact to the middle section before the end of volume 1, we get a similar phrasing.

Can you guess where? Actually, this phrase is also attached to the description of life within the Harville home in Lyme. So, when Anne sees that the husband, Captain Harville, is very, very proactive in bringing a lot of comfort and kind of, you know, managing the household furnishing, so that the family is safe and protected and comfortable and entertained, she thinks that that kind of home is very, very attractive.

And a similar notion of attractiveness is presented through this couple, Mr. and Mrs. Croft. When they walk together in Bath, they seem to carry the picture of happiness with them, they are embodiments of that attractive picture of happiness, so it is a mobile domesticity that she sees in terms of the Crofts.

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Anne and Admiral Croft



Now Anne meets Mr. Croft at a street in Bath once, and this time Admiral Croft is without the wife because she has had a minor discomfort in her feet because of her intense walking with her husband and therefore, she is at home and Mr. Croft is taking his walk all by himself and he is caught by something very interesting at a shop window. So he stands there looking at it, that is what the illustration suggests there.

And Anne goes up to him and talks to him, and they talk about an illustration of a ship. In fact, Mr. Croft calls it a leaking board, it is so small that it cannot, you know, accommodate a good number of sailors, and he says that it is not sea worthy. Why is this interesting, why is this illustration interesting, it is an illustration of an illustration, isn't it? We know that Croft is looking at a picture of a boat which is not, you know, perfect, which is not sound if it wants to travel in the seas, and that is very symbolic, I would think

It is symbolic because not all ships are sea worthy, and in this novel, ships are representations of domesticity too. Why I make this assumption? Because if you look at the novel, especially in the context of Captain Harville, his home is called as shipshape, it is almost as if he is in the waters, he is almost as if he has his home ownership on the sea, so there is a very close association between ships and domesticity.

And the implication is that not all naval domesticities are strong, there are some naval domesticities that can be weak too, and that implication is communicated through this illustration. And there are references to sailors who are not very upright, and that reference is

made by Mr. Croft. You know, crafty sailors, sailors who are not upright would kind of create weak domesticities, that is the reading.

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Anne and Admiral Croft

- "Can I go anywhere for you, or with you? Can I be of any use?"
- Anne queries about the state of Captain Wentworth:
- "I hope his letter does not breathe the spirit of an ill-used man."

productive

Choices democratic spirit

Engagement between Capt Benwick & Louisa



And when, when Anne and Admiral Croft talked to one another at that point in time, at that street when Admiral Croft is looking at that illustration, he asks Anne, "Can I go anyway for you or with you, can I be of any use?" And that statement is very interesting. If you look at that statement, it is full of choices for Anne. What are the choices? First is, can I go anywhere for you, can I be of some service to you, can I carry out an errand for you, that is the first choice.

Or can I go with you, can we go together, can I accompany you, that is the second choice. And we see that democratic spirit in Admiral Croft that is very, very welcoming too and in a subconscious level. And he says that can I be of use to you once, again embodying this idea that naval men are largely very utilitarian, very useful, very productive. So that concept is also brought forth here.

And Anne, she wants to know something about Captain Wentworth, and she tries to elicit some information from Admiral Croft slightly, cleverly. And she says that I hope his letter does not breathe the spirit of an ill-used man, and here she is hinting at the engagement between Captain Benwick and Louisa, so she wants to know if he has been upset because of this engagement, and she wants to know the state of affairs of his heart, which is why she puts this loaded question.


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Croft on Wentworth

- Frederick is not a man to whine and complain; he has too much spirit for that. If the girl likes another man better, it is very fit she should have him."

democratic spirit
Louisa

"does not give the least fling at Benwick" or seemed to have cared for "this Miss (what's her name?)"



And what is their response? And he says that "Frederick is not a man to whine and complain; he has too much spirit for that. If the girl likes another man better, it is very fit she should have him." So this is what Croft thinks about his relative Wentworth, he says that he is not going to complain, he is not a man who can complain, he is not a man who likes to complain, he is not a man who whines, he says that he has too much of the spirit, he is too egoistic for that.

And if some girl likes another man better than, you know, himself, it is only very appropriate that she should have him. Once again, we see that, you know, that democratic spirit, especially in the context of this statement. And this spirit is very revealing of Admiral Croft than it is of Wentworth here. And he says that, Croft says that he does not give the least fling at Benwick, he is not at all bothered by Captain Benwick for marrying, for, you know, proposing to Louisa.


And he further states that, Croft further states that he does not seem to have cared for this Miss. And it is very important that Croft is not able to remember the name of Louisa here, if this character is very, very interesting or significant, Croft would have remembered her name. That is the implication here, and he asks Anne what is her name. So the fact that he is at a loss for her name is significant about the role and nature of Louisa Musgrove in terms of the Crofts.

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Wentworth's courtship

- "Poor Frederick!...Now he must begin all over again with somebody else. I think we must get him to Bath....Here are pretty girls enough, I am sure. It would be of no use to go to Uppercross again, for that other Miss Musgrove, I find, is bespoke by her cousin, the young parson. Do you not think, Miss Elliot, we had better try to get him to Bath?"

Uppercross = X courtship trajectory = Novel
Anne Elliot?



Now, this is Admiral Croft's summary of Wentworth's state of affairs in terms of his courtship. And he says that "Poor Frederick! Now, he must begin all over again with somebody else, I think we must get him to Bath, here are pretty girls enough, I am sure. It would be of no use to go to Uppercross again, or that other Musgrove, I find, is bespoke by her cousin the young Parson. Do you not think, Miss Elliot, we had better try to get him to Bath?"

So, the options for Wentworth seem to be very limited outside of Bath, that is what Admiral Croft very innocently reveals to us. He says that at Uppercross, Wentworth is not going to meet with any potential, you know, female in order to court, so in terms of the courtship trajectory, it is a dead end. So we do not have to go there, or in other words Wentworth does not have to go there.

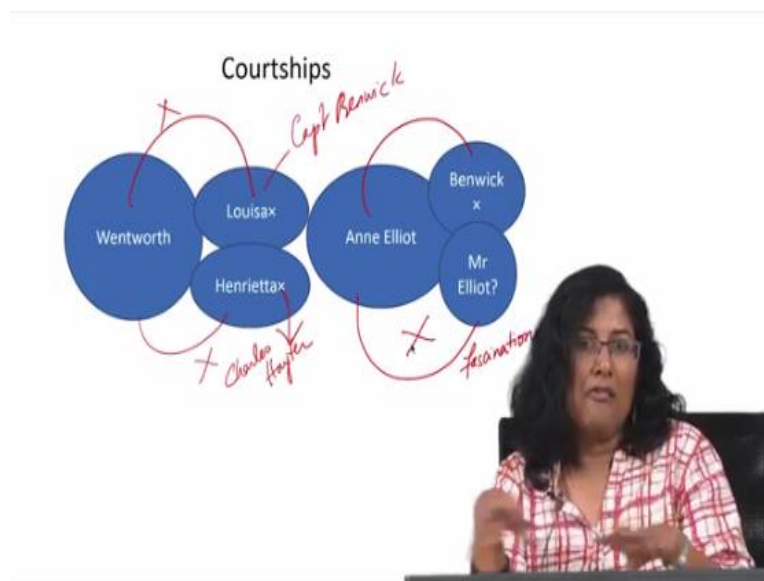
And the novel also does not return to Uppercross again, so it is a dead end there, and he says that that other girl Henrietta is also bespoke, is engaged to her cousin Hayter, so it is a no-go clearly at Uppercross. And again it is very interesting that he is not able to remember Henrietta's name, and he says that "that other Musgrove girl" which implies that they are interchangeable. One Musgrove girl is the same as the other Musgrove girl, they are not very distinctive personalities.

Both of them are kind of superficial, fluffy girls as one critic would call them. So, he thinks that it is better to bring Wentworth to Bath where there are a lot of pretty girls and he can start courting one of them all over again. That is the fact, the implication is that Admiral Croft is perhaps not counting Anne Elliot as one of the pretty girls. Is she one among them? It does not

seem that way from the way he talks to Anne. But we do not know, it is a speculation, it is a reasonable speculation to have.

And in this statement is also very interesting that he has to start all over again, his courtship plots have failed in one way or another, and he has to begin a new plot. And that plot will regenerate the narrative which seems to be at a dead end at this point of time, with Henrietta tied up with Hayter, Louisa Musgrove with, you know, Captain Benwick, and Captain Wentworth does not seem to have anybody else at this point of time.

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So, let us kind of summarize the courtship, you know, trajectories that have been weaved so far. And as I mentioned, Captain Wentworth's trajectory with Louisa fails because Louisa goes for Captain Benwick, and this trajectory has been keeping the readers in suspense so far because we have been anticipating his kind of potential marriage to Louisa, and that kind of, you know, deconstructs after the surprise engagement announced by them.

And we already know that Wentworth cannot go for Henrietta, because Henrietta is already engaged to Charles Hayter, or in other words there has been an understanding between Henrietta and Charles Hayter who are cousins. So, the two courtship trajectories fall at different stages, and that novel is coming to a critical situation where there is apparently no, you know, potential figure of romantic interest for Wentworth. That is the case with him.

In terms of Anne Elliot, there has been talk about a potential romance between and Benwick. That does not take off because you know even though Anne expects a visit from him, even

though Lady expects a, Lady Russell expects a visit from Captain Benwick in order for him to come and court Anne Elliot, that does not take off and the interest shifts to Mr. Elliot for Anne. And even though, Anne is fascinated by Mr. Elliot in some way, that fascination does not push her into you know, fantasizing, at least a fantasizing about marriage with Mr. Elliot.

She thinks he is not a good life partner, even if Captain Wentworth is, you know, not going to marry her at all. So she is not going to settle for Mr. Elliot even at the worst case scenario. So she has already made up her mind before she gets the second, you know, proposal from Captain Wentworth. So at this moment in the novel, all these courtship choices are, you know, failing for the two central characters Wentworth and Anne.

So, who are the characters who are left out? That is Anne and Wentworth. And what else can they do; they have to start courting one another. Thank you for watching, I will continue in the

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