

**The Nineteenth-Century Novel**  
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**Lecture - 16**  
**Persuasion, Volume II, Chapter 19 to 24**

Hello and welcome to this final session that will do a close reading of the closing chapters of Persuasion. Now, Anne and Captain Wentworth are in agreement, they are very much in love, and they want to get married. And they are not bothered about what their social circle will have to say. Now let us look at the first figure of interest in this context, Sir Walter Elliot. If you remember from the novel, eight and half years ago, Sir Walter rejected the engagement of his daughter Anne with Captain Wentworth. Now, he has to meet the same prospect. His daughter is once again going to marry the same man. So what are his responses? Of course, quite a lot has changed over the course of that lengthy period of nearly nine years.

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Sir Walter

- “he was very much struck by his personal claims, and felt that his superiority of appearance might be not unfairly balanced against her superiority of rank; and all this, assisted by his well-sounding name, enabled Sir Walter at last to prepare his pen, with a very good grace, for the insertion of the marriage in the volume of honour.”

*an aristocracy*  
*Book of Baronets*  
*Capt. Wentworth*



Now let us read this excerpt about Sir Walter's response. “He was very much struck by his personal claims, and felt that his superiority of appearance might not be unfairly balanced against her superiority of rank; and all this assisted by his well-sounding name, enabled Sir Walter at last to prepare his pen, with a very good grace, for the insertion of the marriage in the volume of honour.”

Now Sir Walter is slightly conflicted, but then he sorts of comes to accept this relationship for several reasons. Firstly, the personal claims of Wentworth is high. If you remember once

again the novel, Captain Wentworth is a highly attractive gentlemen. He is extremely charming in his behavior to everybody around him. So he has a lot of personal attractiveness. And Sir Walter, if you know the novel really well, is a man who is quite attracted to people with a lot of good personalities.

He is a vain man. Sir Walter Elliot is a vain man, and he loves people who look good. So Captain Wentworth looks good, and at the same time, we should not forget that Captain Wentworth is extremely rich. He is a wealthy man. Therefore, a combination of these could be the reason for Sir Walter to accept this relationship between his daughter and Captain Wentworth.

So he feels that Captain Wentworth can offer his superiority of appearance against the superiority of rank offered by Anne Elliot. Anne Elliot is a Baronet's daughter. Therefore, the two of them are somehow equal in the sense that this man has a lot of superiority of appearance. And of course the sound of the name Wentworth itself is attractive to Sir Walter Elliot.

And all these things about Sir Walter's understandings tell us that he is a man who is led by superficial attractions. Things such as names and personal attractiveness and wealth. So all these are attractive to Sir Walter Elliot. So finally he takes up his pen, and he decides to enter the marriage in the book of Baronets. Remember, this is the book with which the novel began.

Sir Walter opens that big book of books, the Baronetage, and then he reads his history. And he does it whenever he is unhappy or whenever he is conflicted. So Anne is going to get her entry in that history, and that is a significant moment because that is a book about Baronets, isn't it. And in that book Captain Wentworth is going to figure, his name is going to be entered in that book, which means symbolically Captain Wentworth is entering the aristocracy. It is a very symbolic thing to be associated with a Baronet.

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## Lady Russell

- “There was nothing less for Lady Russell to do, than to admit that she had been pretty completely wrong, and to take up a new set of opinions and of hopes.”

*meritocracy / aristocracy*



Now we have seen Sir Walter's reaction. Let us look Lady Russell. Lady Russell is also a figure who was against this relationship between Anne and Captain Wentworth eight and half years ago, and we also realized that she is not happy this time around too, because if you remember, she was pushing the relationship between Anne and Mr. Elliot to come to fruition.

She thinks that if Anne married Mr. Elliot, she would get Kellynch Hall, and if Anne marries Captain Wentworth then she would get nothing. So that is the subtext to Lady Russell's desire for Anne to marry Elliot, but that does not happen, that comes to nothing, and now Lady Russell has to accommodate herself to this new relation, Captain Wentworth. And the third person narrator very ironically tells us that, “there is nothing less for Lady Russell to do than to admit that she has been pretty completely wrong, and to take up a new set of opinions and of hopes.”

So Lady Russell has to start from scratch. She has to begin all over again. She has to start liking Captain Wentworth, she has to admit that she had been pretty completely wrong. Not just wrong, but pretty completely wrong about Captain Wentworth, and she has to take up a new set of opinions, set of hopes, and this new set of opinion is very symbolic because it implies that, you know, modernity is entering the society in the figure of the rising middle class; and then meritocracy is becoming more important than aristocracy. So every word in that context of Captain Wentworth is interesting and significant because of its association with new ideology.

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## Mary Musgrove on Anne

- “She had something to suffer, when they came into contact again, in seeing Anne restored to the rights of seniority, and the mistress of a very pretty landaulette; but she had a future to look forward to, of powerful consolation. Anne had no Uppercross Hall before her, no landed estate, no headship of a family; and if they could but keep Captain Wentworth from being made a baronet, she would not change situations with Anne.”

mobile ← Carriage → No Big House = No Kellynch Hall



Now let us look at what Mary Musgrove has to say about Anne's marriage to Captain Wentworth. “She had something to suffer, when they came into contact again, in seeing Anne restored to the rights of seniority, and a mistress of a very pretty landaulette; but she had a future to look forward to, of powerful consolation. Anne had no Uppercross Hall before her, no landed estate, no headship of a family, and if they could but keep Captain Wentworth from being made a baronet, she would not change situations with Anne.”

So for Mary Musgrove, there are positives as well as negatives here. What are the positives? By positives the implication is that the things that would offer Mary consolation, happiness, okay. So what are the happiness that Mary Musgrove can derive from Anne's marriage to Captain Wentworth? It is a negative kind of happiness, you got remember. Firstly, Anne had no estate, no big house to be a mistress of, no Kellynch Hall, no place like Uppercross Hall either, the home of the older Musgroves.

So Anne is not going to get a big house, so that is going to make Mary happy. And number two, Anne is not going to get a headship of a family, she is not going to be the head of a particular noble lineage. So that also going to make her happy. And number three, if Captain Wentworth can be prevented from becoming a Baronet, Mary would not change places with Anne. She would not wish if she had been Anne Elliot.

So these are the three things which make Mary Musgrove happy about Anne's marriage, and these things are negative happiness to be precise. So what are the other things that she loses, Mary loses on Anne marriage. Mary loses the rights of seniority, because once Anne is

married, Anne would get preference followed by Mary Musgrove, because Mary is the youngest daughter of the Elliots.

And Anne is also going to become the mistress of a pretty carriage called landaulette, and that is something that Mary does not have. So instead of a house, instead of a house, Anne gets a sleek carriage. It is something like today's Porsche car, something of that kind. So instead of a big traditional household, she gets a carriage. And what is the implication of that carriage, the implication is that Anne and Wentworth would be very, very mobile.

That they would travel, that they would move about, that they would setup homes in several places. So that is the implication; that they would not be tied to one particular big house and one particular set of traditions and values, which have the tendency to make its inhabitants narrow minded and selfish, as we can see in the case of Sir Walter and even Mr. and Mrs. Musgrove to a certain extent, and in the case of Charles Musgrove too.

So mobility is associated with modernity and open mindedness and more egalitarian kinds of relationships, and that is what Anne is going to get as a marriage gift from Captain Wentworth.

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## Mrs Clay

- "She has abilities, however, as well as affections; and it is now a doubtful point whether his cunning, or hers, may finally carry the day; whether, after preventing her from being the wife of Sir Walter, he may not be wheedled and caressed at last into making her the wife of Sir William."



Now let us look at Mrs. Clay. What is the status of Mrs. Clay at the end of the novel? The narrator says that, "She has abilities, however, as well as affections; and now it is now a doubtful point whether his cunning, or hers, may finally carry the day; whether, after preventing her from being the wife of Sir Walter, he may not be wheedled and caressed at last

into making her the wife of Sir William.”

So at the end of the novel, the narrator very ironically tells us that she has been prevented from marrying Sir Walter, but we do not know whether she would be prevented from marrying Mr. Elliot himself. And, you know, she says that we cannot put it past Mrs. Clay who is very, very cunning, and she has a lot of abilities and affections, and she may perhaps wheedled and caress Mr. Elliot into making her his wife, and eventually that would imply that she would become Lady Elliot, and her child may inherit the Hall. All these are possibilities, speculations, reasonable assumptions that we can make because of the characteristics of Mrs. Clay. So this is the final word about Mrs. Clay on the part of the narrator.

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## Mrs Smith

- Mrs Smith's enjoyments were not spoiled by this improvement of income, with some improvement of health, and the acquisition of such friends to be often with, for her cheerfulness and mental alacrity did not fail her; and while these prime supplies of good remained, she might have bid defiance even to greater accessions of worldly prosperity.

*Capt. Wentworth*  
*Anne Elliot*



Finally, Mrs. Smith. What is the status of Mrs. Smith at the end of the novel? Mrs. Smith has recovered physically as well as financially, and the narrator says that her enjoyments were not spoiled by this improvement of income, with some improvement of health, and the acquisition of such friends to be often with, for her cheerfulness and mental alacrity did not fail her, and while these prime supplies of good remained, she might have bid defiance even to greater accessions of worldly prosperity.”

So she has recovered her income. How does that happen? It happens because of the interventions of captain Wentworth. And why does he intervene? It is because Anne Elliot puts in a good word about Mrs. Smith, which is why Captain Wentworth very gallantly intervenes and gets Mrs. Smith's property which has been entangled because of the

difficulties that she faced after the death of her husband.

So, Mrs. Smith has risen financially, and the narrator tells us that despite the fact that her finances have improved, it does not mean that her spirits have dampened. She is also in very good health and in very good spirits, and she is still friendly to be with, and she is continually cheerful and she is sharp mentally despite the fact that she is financially comfortable. So there is this assumption that if you are rich, then the implication is that you won't be very sociable, but that does not happen in the case of Mrs. Smith, and Mrs. Smith continues to be very friendly to Anne Elliot.

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## Anne

- She gloried in being a sailor's wife, but she must pay the tax of quick alarm for belonging to that profession which is, if possible, more distinguished in its domestic virtues than in its national importance.



Now what about Anne Elliot herself? Anne is supremely happy in her marriage to Captain Wentworth. The narrator says that, “She gloried in being a sailor’s wife, but she must pay the tax of quick alarm for belonging to that profession which is, if possible, more distinguished in its domestic virtues than in its national importance.” There are several things here, all very significant. One is, look at the way it has been put. She gloried in being a sailor’s wife.

We got to remember that Captain Wentworth is not a mere sailor, he is a Captain. A very wealthy captain. And she is excited and happy and proud about that fact, but there is a downside to this happiness, which is that she must constantly be terrified of the possibility of danger, that he would meet on the high seas and that is the dowry that a sailor’s wife or a Captain's wife will get because of the nature of that profession.

And it is also stated here that the navy is important in its domestic virtues than in its national

service. Perhaps ironically put, it implies that it is better for the men to be at home rather than at sea. So Austen is being very, very ironic, and she is taking a perhaps a dig at the navy, and there is this implication that perhaps the naval men would be better for the women if they had stayed on the land instead of being at sea.

So this is a very positive way to end the novel, and there is a lot of emphasis on private sphere rather than the public sphere. And that public sphere implies warfare, and a lot of conflicts with other nations, and all those conflicts will not be present, will not happen if the naval men had stayed at home, if the navy did not go to war with other nations. Thank you

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