

The Nineteenth Century Novel
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Lecture - 28

Dickens' A Tale of Two Cities Book II: Chapters 13-15 (Continued)

Hello and welcome back to week 7's lectures. In today's session, we will be looking at the impact of Jerry Cruncher's job on his son, and we will also look at how a past event catches up with the present.

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The Honest Tradesman

Jerry watches the men dig and bring the coffin to the surface; runs home in terror

“He had a strong idea that the coffin he had seen was running after him; and pictured as hopping on behind him, bolt upright, upon its narrow end, always on the point of overtaking him and hopping on at his side—perhaps taking his arm—it was a pursuer to shun.”

The slide features a video inset of a woman with dark hair and glasses, wearing a red and white striped top, speaking. The text on the slide is presented in blue callout boxes against a white background.

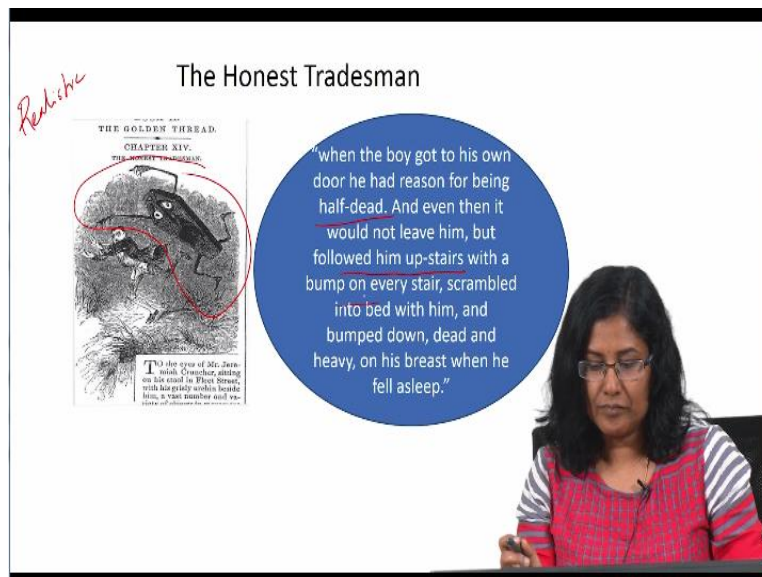
This chapter is, The Honest Tradesman, and in this chapter we have seen in the previous session that Jerry has found out the secret about his father, he realizes that his father is a man who is not terribly honest in his night trade, which involves digging up dead bodies. So Jerry watches the men dig and bring the coffin to the surface, and then once he realizes the nature of the job that they are doing, he just runs home in terror.

And as he is running home, this is what he feels in his mind. “He had a strong idea that the coffin he had seen was running after him; and pictured as hopping on behind him, bolt upright, upon its narrow end, always on the point of overtaking him and hopping on at his side - perhaps taking his arm - it was a pursuer to shun.” So this is a boy, a child in fact. And we need to remember

that context for young Cruncher, and as soon as he has seen the incident at the churchyard and he is running, he thinks that the coffin that his father has dug up is running after him.

The coffin is kind of chasing him, and he imagines the coffin literally chasing him down the streets, and sometimes even overtaking him, and sometimes trying to take his arm, and he thinks that it is a really horrifying pursuer and he wants to shun that. And I will show you an illustration of this particular fancy or fantasy that young Cruncher has in his mind.

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Look at the coffin trying to chase Jerry Cruncher, and this is a figment of young Cruncher's imagination portrayed there in that illustration and in the narrative. So this coffin chases him till his home and even up the stairs, and even up to his bed where he falls down and tries to sleep. "When the boy got to his own door he had reason for being half dead. And even then it would not leave him, but followed him upstairs with a bump on every stair, scrambled into bed with him, and bumped down dead and heavy, on his breast when he fell asleep."

It is a very realistic scene, and Dickens captures the imagination of a traumatized child in this particular scene. And look at the way the child does not stop being frightened until he falls asleep. He thinks that the coffin has come to his door, and the boy is almost half dead because he has been running so fast, and the coffin follows him upstairs every step, and there in fact a bump that is imagined by Jerry Cruncher.

So the coffin bumps up and up and then suddenly Cruncher, young Cruncher goes to his bed and then he falls asleep. So that is when the coffin leaves him, and that is when Jerry Cruncher is able to forget, when he is asleep.

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The Honest Tradesman

- "what's a Resurrection man?"
- ...How should I know?
- ...he's a tradesman."
- "what's is goods, father?" asked the brisk Young Jerry.
- "His goods," said Mr Cruncher, after turning it over in his mind, "is a branch of Scientific goods."
- "Persons' bodies, ain't it, father?" asked the lively boy.
- "I believe it is something of that sort," said Mr Cruncher.

And finally the next day, the boy, the child, has a conversation with his father in daylight as they are going to their work at the Tellson's. And the boy very innocently asks "What is a Resurrection man?" To his father, and the father says "How should I know?" But then he says, "He is a tradesman." He is a trader. He is a businessman, and the boy very innocently and provokingly asks "What is his goods, father?"

What is the nature of the material that he trades in, asks the brisk young Jerry, he is brisk now, he was terrified last night, but now in daylight he is very brisk. "His goods," said Mr. Cruncher, after turning it over in his mind, "is a branch of scientific goods." It is very clever answer on the part of the father, he says that the job of a resurrection man is to trade in scientific goods, and the son says very bluntly, "Persons' bodies, it is dead bodies, ain't it, father?" asked the lively boy.

The boy is having fun at his father's expense, and the father just gives in and says "I believe it is something of that sort," Yes, yes of course, that the kind of work that I do. I trade in people's bodies. So Mr. Cruncher gives in. The answer, this particular answer of Mr. Cruncher is very

interesting because Jerry Cruncher sells dead bodies to doctors. That is why Jerry Cruncher after returning from Roger Cly's funeral procession, stops to meet his medical adviser, he stops to meet a doctor, because he has made an arrangement with the doctor that he will bring a body, a dead body soon enough. So that is the context.

Now we are able to piece certain clues from the text and form a narrative with regard to Mr. Cruncher. And the scene ends with the boy promising his father that he will also take up that line of trade once he grows up, and the father is delighted. And we also need to realize that the mother, Mr. Cruncher's wife, whom he calls Aggerawayter, knows that Mr. Cruncher deals with dead bodies, and which is why she is constantly praying to protect her husband's, you know future. Mr. Cruncher does not want her to do that, he thinks that that kind of praying will affect his business.

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Chapter 15: Knitting

The mender of the roads is brought to the wine-shop

Offers his testimony about the assassin's secret ride, and later his punishment by hanging at the fountain

Madame Defarge

Gaspard

the child was crushed to death

Now we come to chapter 15, which is called Knitting. It is a very interesting title, because Knitting constantly reminds us of Madame Defarge. And the question, the mysterious question that we have thought about is what exactly is she knitting, why is she constantly busy. Now in this chapter, the mender of the roads is brought to the wine shop.

I hope you remember who the mender of the roads is, because in the previous session we did see this fellow who was questioned by the Marquis, Marquis Evremonde, the uncle of Charles

Darnay. If you remember this Marquis is the one who crushed to death a very young child when he is rushing home in his horse-drawn carriage, and the mender of the roads is questioned by the Marquis.

Because the mender of the roads is staring at or staring at his carriage, and then when he is questioned he reveals that he saw someone hiding on the underside of the carriage. Now this is the man who is brought by Defarge to his wine shop. In fact, what he does is, he brings the mender of the road and three Jacques, three men who are called Jacques, up to the wine shop garret and that is the place where they meet and talk.

And that garret is very interesting because that is the garret where Dr. Manette was found at the beginning of the novel. That is the haven that Dr. Manette was in until Mr. Lorry and his daughter rescued him and brought him back to Britain. So that was the context for the mender of the roads. And this mender of the roads offers his testimony about the assassin's secret ride, the assassin who ended up killing the Marquis in his own bed, and later his punishment by hanging at the fountain.

So this assassin is later arrested by the authorities and was punished by hanging at the fountain, the fountain where the child died, remember, that is a very interesting spot. The child was crushed to death by the side of the fountain, and it is at this very fountain his father, child's father also is executed, Gaspard is the name of the father if you remember the story and if you are reading the novel closely.

I do advise you to read the novel very closely, because it is very rich in incidents as well as in symbolic value. So it is at this fountain the authorities erect or set up a kind of a big scaffold, and they hang him and, you know, the dead body's shadow falls on the fountain.

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- "all the village whispers by the fountain; all the village sleeps; all the village dreams of that unhappy one, within the locks and bars of the prison on the crag, and never to come out of it, except to perish. ...There I see him, high up, behind the bars of a lofty iron cage, bloody and dusty as last night, looking through. He has no hand free, to wave to me; I dare not call to him; he regards me like a dead man."



And this is what the mender of the road says about the incident in which Gaspard was killed by the state. "All the village whispers by the fountain; all the village sleeps; all the village dreams of that unhappy one, within the locks and bars of the prison on the crag, and never to come out of it, except to perish. There I see him high up, behind the bars of a lofty iron cage, bloody and dusty as last night, looking through. He has no hand free to wave to me; I dare not call to him, he regards me like a dead man." So this man, the assassin Gaspard the father of the dead child is arrested by the authorities and they put him in a prison on top of a crag; on top of a mountain, and village is able to see this unhappy one. This man standing by the window of his prison.

And he cannot wave to anybody because his hands are tied up, and this man knows that he is already a dead man; he knows that he is going to die. Lots of people know that they are dead men, and he is one among them, and we constantly get images of prisoners and prisons. So prison become a running theme; the idea that people are constantly imprisoned either literally or symbolically is a kind of a recurrent theme of this particular novel.

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Rough tribunal

- Defarge and the three glanced darkly at one another. The looks of all of them were dark, repressed, and revengeful, as they listened to the countryman's story; the manner of all of them, while it was secret, was authoritative too. They had the air of a rough tribunal.

Tribunal
Defarge + three
Jacques



“Defarge and the three glanced darkly at one another. The looks of all of them were dark, repressed, and revengeful, as they listen to the countryman's story; the manner of all of them, while it was secret, was authoritative too. They had the air of a rough tribunal.” The scene in the wine shop garrett is again very rich in terms of its symbolic value, the reason being; the men led by Defarge, Defarge and the three Jacques, they become somehow representative of a tribunal that is judging the attitude, the behavior of the state, which kills this countryman, which killed Gaspard by executing him at the fountain.

And they kind of used the countryman's story; the mender of the road story, as a kind of a witness against the state which is being judged by this rough tribunal. So it is a very important scene in that regard as everybody somehow, everybody being Defarge and the others, have an air of authority too, they had a power to condemn the state, and they literally have that power by the end of the novel.

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The hanging by the fountain

"How can the women and children draw water! Who can gossip of an evening under that shadow!...When I left the village, Monday evening as the sun was going to bed, and looked back from the hill, the shadow struck across the church, across the mill, across the prison—seemed to strike across the earth, messieurs, to where the sky rests upon it!"

Shadow-chase

coffin chase



And this is the word of the mender of the roads, and this is what he has to say after the man is executed by the state for assassinating Marquis Evremonde. And he says, “How can the women and children draw water! Who can gossip of an evening under that shadow! When I left the village Monday evening as the Sun was going to bed, and looked back from the hill, the shadow struck across the church, across the mill, across the prison, seemed to strike across the earth, messieurs, to where the sky rests upon it.!”

Atmospheric description of the impact of the killing that the state affected on this particular man called Gaspard, and the way they affected it they say, he says that, he was hanged at the fountain, and the fountain was somehow implicated in that death, the shadow falls on the fountain. And it becomes difficult for the women and children to draw water from the fountain with the shadow on it, it becomes very difficult to go near the water, the water is almost stained by that death.

And he says that, it becomes difficult for the village women to stand by the fountain and gossip with that shadow falling over them, the shadow of the dead man who died for assassinating the Marquis, because the Marquis killed his own son, and he says that the shadow is kind of lengthening and lengthening so much that the man is able to see the shadow, strike across the church, across the mill, across the prison, the shadows is kind of lengthening out of proportion.

And it is a fantastical scene, it can be compared to the chase that the coffin gives two young cruncher. And this shadow almost seems to chase the mender of the roads as he is moving away from the village, past the church, past the mill, past the prison, the shadow seems to follow him and fall upon him, in fact it seems to fall across the entire earth to where the sky rest upon it. So again a very imaginative scene rendered by Dickens to capture the intensity of the wrongs committed by the state against an individual.

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The tribunal

"To be registered, as doomed to destruction"
"The chateau, and all the race."

"if madame my wife undertook to keep the register in her memory alone, she would not lose a word of it—not a syllable of it. Knitted, in her own stitches and her own symbols, it will always be as plain to her as the sun."

hit list
Tribunal of the people.

And it is very significant that this kind of condemnation or, you know, against the state on the part of the people is recorded. And it is recorded in a very interesting manner, and that is by Madame Defarge through her knitting. So the purpose of the knitting becomes very, very clear; she knits the names of those whom the tribunal formed by the people are going to condemn and put to death. So it is a hit list basically.

The knitting is a hit list of all the people who are going to be killed by the tribunal of the people, of the French Revolution. And Madame Defarge registers the name of the Marquis and all his descendants to destruction. She records the name of all the people who are associated with that noble lineage, the chateau and all the race, all the descendants till this particular day, and is kind of recorded to be killed.

And Defarge says, “If madame my wife undertook to keep the register in her memory alone, she would not lose a word of it; not a syllable of it. Knitted, in her own stitches and in her own symbols, it will always be as plain to her as the sun.” So there is a question on the part of the Jacques as to whether Madame Defarge would be able to retain all the names of the people that are to be eliminated once the regime changes.


And Defarge says that, she will not forget a word, it will all be plain as the sun to her. If she has knitted in her register, if there is no way that she can forget it or misremember it, it will all be clear to her, as the sun is to everybody. And even if she just remembers everything in her mind alone, even then she will be able to recall every single name that she has put into her memory. So he completely trusts the authority of his wife.

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Natural Prey?

- “Jacques,” said Defarge; “judiciously show a cat milk, if you wish her to thirst for it. Judiciously show a dog his natural prey, if you wish him to bring it down one day.”

mender of the roads → *Show nobility*



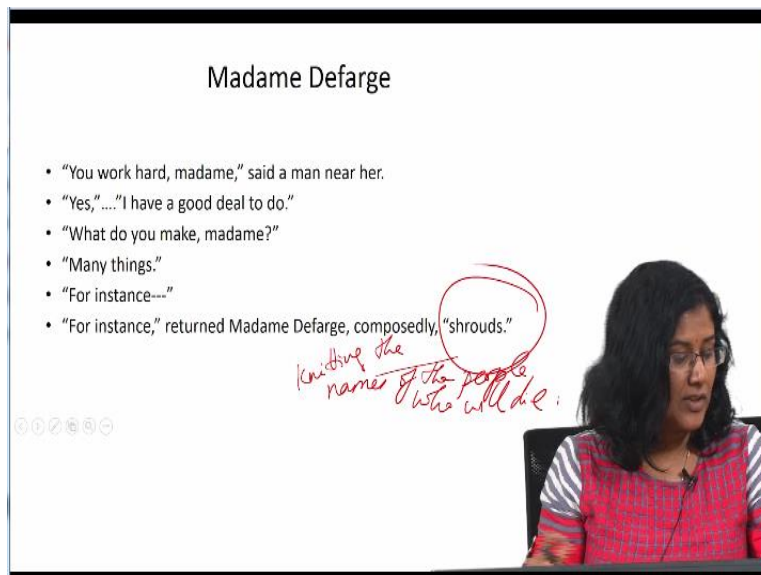
“Jacques,” said Defarge; “judiciously show a cat milk, if you wish her to thirst for it. Judiciously show a dog his natural prey, if you wish him to bring it one day.” So the very interesting remark made by Defarge and it is made in the context of the proposed visit to the city where a mender of the roads will be shown the procession, the nobility's procession as they take the air as they as they go about; looking at all the audience.

And the Jacques questions, is it a good idea to kind of show him around, show him the nobility and he replies by saying that, if you want a cat to thirst for milk you have to show the milk to the

cat, and just like that if you want a dog to attack some prey you have to give a sight of it to the dog, and like that if you want this mender of the roads to attack the nobility, then you have to show the nobility to him.

So you have to show it to him, which is why I am going to take him to the city of Versailles, I am going to show him the palace, I am going to show you the show him the procession of all these noble men and women so that he will thirst for their blood.

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The slide is titled "Madame Defarge" and contains the following text:

- "You work hard, madame," said a man near her.
- "Yes," I have a good deal to do."
- "What do you make, madame?"
- "Many things."
- "For instance--"
- "For instance," returned Madame Defarge, composedly, "shrouds."

Handwritten red text on the slide reads: "knitting the names of the people who will die". A red circle highlights the word "shrouds" in the last bullet point. In the bottom right corner, a woman with glasses and a red and white striped shirt is visible, looking at the slide.

And then as they visit the palace and all the other spots from which they take a good look at the procession of the men, one of the men in the crowd asks Madame Defarge, "You work hard, madame," said a man near her. "Yes, I have a good deal to do." "What do you make, madame?" "Many things." For instance;" "For instance," return Madame Defarge, composedly, "shrouds." Very eerie scene, a disturbing scene.

Because Madame Defarge is standing in a crowd, and even in that crowd she is knitting. She is looking at the procession of nobility and she is knitting, and the man next to her asks her what do you make? And she says, I make many things. And he wants her to specify, and so he says for instance, for example and she says shrouds. She says I am knitting shrouds. In fact, she is knitting the names of the men, of the people who will die when the time comes.

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The Defarges and their companion

- "You are the fellow we want," Defarge, in his ear; "you make these fools believe that it will last for ever. Then, they are the more insolent, and it is the nearer ended."

and will come soon.

- "And if you were shown a flock of birds, unable to fly, and were set upon them to strip them of their feathers for your own advantage, you would set upon the birds of the finest feathers; would you not?"

Madame Defarge

↳ aristocrats.



So the Defarges and their companion have this exchange with the, in terms of the mender of the roads. They say, "You are the fellow we want," Defarge, in his ear; "you make these fools believe that it will last forever. Then, they are the more insolent, and it is the nearer ended." So the mender of the roads when he sees this procession of noble men and women he is highly excited, he cheers for them, and Defarge tells him, it is good that you cheer for them.

Because your reaction will make them believe that they will last forever; their regime will last forever. Therefore, this belief will make them overconfident, and once they become overconfident the end will come soon. It is a very interesting psychological premise that Defarge offers in terms of the mender of the roads, and he is asked, the mender of the roads is asked, if you were shown a flock of birds.

And it is Madame Defarge who asked this question. "If you were shown a flock of birds, unable to fly, and were set upon them to strip them of their feathers for your own advantage, you were set upon the birds of the finest feathers, would you not?" And it is a symbolic question that she asks, and the answer to this question on the part of the mender of the roads is yes, I will. So the question is, will you destroy a set of birds if you were given the opportunity?

And she asked, will you set upon the birds of the finest feathers, and the birds the finest feathers

a

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