

The Nineteenth Century Novel
Prof. Divya. A
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology - Madras

Lecture – 31
Dickens' A Tale of Two Cities: Chapters 19-21

Hello and welcome to week 7's lectures. We are at the critical section in the novel, and that section is dealt with in Chapter 21 particularly, because the French revolution has finally descended in the country of France. So that would be the major thematic of Chapter 21, and we will begin with Chapter 19 for today which will deal with the impact of Darnay's revelation on the psyche of Doctor Manette.

And in this title slide I have the illustration which depicts Doctor Manette in his cell, the Bastille cell, it is a very interesting illustration by Hablot Knight Brown. The reason being, we do not actually see Doctor Manette in his Bastille cell. It is always reported, it is an embedded narrative that the readers get to envision through their reading, through the recounting by others but they do not actually see this character in the Bastille cell

So which is why this illustration is a powerful rendering of the isolation of this key patriarchal figure in the Tale of Two Cities.

(Refer Slide Time: 01:47)

Chapter 19: An Opinion

- "It is probable that there had long been a dread lurking in his mind; that those associations would be recalled—say, under certain circumstances—say, on a particular occasion. He tried to prepare himself in vain; perhaps the effort to prepare himself made him less able to bear it."

Chapter 19 is entitled An Opinion, and what is that opinion, will be discussed by key characters such as Doctor Manette and Mr Lorry. So if you remember in the previous chapter we had Doctor Manette suffer a major relapse in which he forgets his present and he goes back to his past days which he spent in the Bastille, and he tries to go back to the job of making shoes and this goes on for about nine days.

And on the 10th day to the great relief of Mr Lorry and Miss Pross, Doctor Manette is back, he is back to his senses, he is back to the present, he understands that he is no longer in the Bastille and that he is very much in Soho square in Britain where he is completely free. Free in a literal sense and unfree in a thematic sense because every now and then we see the influence of the Bastille creeping on his mind and affecting him in of several ways.

So once that relapse has, you know, subsided, once Doctor Manette is normal, Mr. Lorry brings him to the topic and they talk about it in an indirect way, in a subtle way, in a diplomatic manner, so that Doctor is not forcefully made to understand what had happened. And this is what Doctor Manette has to say about himself, it is very interesting that he refers to him as “he”, he refers to somebody else but actually he is talking about his own state of mind.

So that is the premise that we have in this particular slide. “It is probable that there had long been a dread lurking in his mind; that those associations would be recalled, say under certain circumstances, say on a particular occasion. He tried to prepare himself in vain, perhaps the effort to prepare himself had made him less able to bear it.” So the Doctor offers certain clues as to why he had gone off his usual frame of mind.

And he says that the man had been anticipating something, you know, threatening, he had been anticipating this dread, this fear had been lurking in his mind, and certain associations had brought it to the forefront, certain circumstances. And those circumstances are Darnay's revelation, and he says that even though the man tried to prepare himself, even, you know, even despite the preparation he is not able to bear himself, because the effort to prepare himself had exhausted him in some ways.

So it is very interesting that the two of them, Mr. Lorry and Doctor Manette, approach the idea in a very sensible, in a very logical manner, and they, and Doctor Manette is very clever, he is a shrewd man, he is an experienced man, he is able to disassociate himself from that scene and able to judge himself objectively. So he is trying to figure out the reasons behind his relapse, and he is very honest, he is trying to make sense of it himself by taking about it in a indirect manner.

(Refer Slide Time: 05:41)

An Opinion

- “He once yearned frightfully for that occupation, and it was so welcome when it came; no doubt it relieved his pain so much, by substituting the perplexity of the fingers for the perplexity of the brain, and by substituting, as he became more practised, the ingenuity of the hands, for the ingenuity of the mental torture; that he has never been able to bear the thought of putting it quite out of his reach....the idea that he might need that old employment, and not find it, gives him a sudden sense of terror, like that which one may fancy strikes to the heart of a lost child.”

And Mr. Lorry is wondering if the presence of the shoe making tools is affecting the Doctor. Perhaps the shoe making tools kind of tempt him away from his senses, and that is the assumption of Mr. Lorry, and he kind of suggest this idea to the Doctor, and this is what the Doctor has to say about the objects themselves.

“He once yearned frightfully for that occupation, and it was so welcome when it came, no doubt it relieve his pain so much by substituting the perplexity of the fingers for the perplexity of the brain, and by substituting, as he became more practiced, the ingenuity of the hands for the ingenuity of the mental torture, that he has never been able to bear the thought of putting it out quite after this reach. The idea that he might need that old employment and not find it gives him a sudden sense of terror like that which one may fancy strikes to the heart of a lost child.”

So much, you know, understanding and emotion are intertwined in this narrative about the shoe making tools that the Doctor has possessed since his days in the Bastille. And he says that, you

know, I longed for this occupation, the occupation of shoemaking when I was in the Bastille. Because it was a massive substitution for the confusion that I suffered.

So somehow the perplexity of the fingers, the dexterity required on the part of the hand in order to make those shoes are important for the Doctor, because that dexterity would make him forget the complexity, the perplexity of the brain. So it is a useful occupation that way because it is a significant distraction, because if he focuses on the tortures that he is undergoing in the Bastille by his imprisonment, he has been imprisoned in secret, nobody knows about his status, he undergoes no trial, nothing of that kind which would judge his crime. When he comes to terms with all these contexts, he would have gone insane, he would have been massively tortured by that reality. Therefore the shoemaking occupation becomes a kind of a friendly distraction, a kind of a soothing occupation, and he says that he had not been able to bear the thought, even the thought of putting it out of reach, you know, is very difficult.

Because there is always this fear that one day perhaps, he would need this old employment, and when he needs it if he is not able to grasp it, if he is not able to reach it, he would be struck by a sense of terror, and that terror is akin to the terror that a child undergoes when it is lost. So it is a very emotional confession, and the metaphor of a lost child is also important because Dickens is quite good at capturing the intensity of the emotions, the nature of the child's psyche in much of his fiction. And it is also very interesting that Doctor Manette compares his experience to a lost child because we have a child who was also killed by the Marquis early on in the Tale of Two Cities. So there are lots of children being harmed, maimed, killed, literally and metaphorically by the aristocracy.

(Refer Slide Time: 10:00)

The Accomplices



Now Mr. Lorry through this discussion about the shoe making materials is finally successful in eliciting Doctor Manette's agreement to destroy the shoe making materials, because he is convinced and he is able also to convince the Doctor, that somehow the presence of the tools are somehow tempting the Doctor into giving into that old occupation of his when he was in the Bastille. So the Doctor agrees to the destruction of the shoemaking materials when he is away, he says that do it, but do it when I am away.

So Mr. Lorry and Miss Pross undertake to carry out this important task when Doctor Manette leaves to join the honeymooning couple Lucie and Charles Darnay in the countryside, and this illustration captures that act undertaken by the two loyalists. One is Mr. Lorry and other is Miss. Pross, and the bench is hacked to pieces, it is chopped and kind of buried in the garden, and some of it are burnt in the domestic fire too.

So it is very interesting if you think about the ways in which the bench is destroyed and kind of buried, you know, literally buried, and there is also this idea that things that are buried will also come up again in this novel particularly. And it is also important to note that Dickens wanted to name this novel as "Buried Alive", it is a metaphorical phrase that captures several things and people that are suppressed, and which somehow come to the present, come up to the surface to haunt the present, to kind of take vengeance on the present

So those metaphorical associations are there, but to come back to this illustration in terms of the way it is depicted and in terms of the way it is narrated in the novel, the third person narrator informs us these two people behave in mysterious ways. They behave as if they are guilty of some kind of crime, whereas we know that Miss Pross and Mr. Lorry are completely blameless.

So even though they are blameless, when they do undertake, when they do perform certain actions which are destructive in nature, they feel somehow culpable. And that once again proves the innocence and the straightforwardness of the characters of Miss. Pross and Mr. Lorry. And if you think about how these things are disposed of, firstly by being buried in the garden and secondly by being burnt in the kitchen fire.

These manner in which they are taken care of is also very symbolic because if you think about the French revolution which is kind of a descending on the French nation, even at this moment when they are carrying out these destructive activities in the home of the Manettes, these actions somehow mirror the action of, say, Defarge and his companions, when they pull down the Bastille, when they destroyed the Bastille and set fire to it.

So there is a kind of a symbolic association between this illustration and the events that are going to happen quite soon in France. So we do have a sense of foreshadowing here, and once again this is a very important thematic concept that we need to keep in mind which is that there is a contrast between, there is a fight, an ideological fight that is going on between British domesticity and the French state, which is overshadowed by the aristocracy.

So somehow symbolically the French people are being taken to task by the British middle class with the help of the British working class here represented by Miss. Pross.

(Refer Slide Time: 14:58)

"Doctor Manette's 'Old Companion'"

Harry Furniss, 1910



We have another illustration, and this one is done by Harry Furniss for the 1910 edition. Doctor Manette's old companion is destroyed, old companion is a reference to the shoemaking materials. And then again the same, you know, demeanour, body language is captured by Harry Furniss in this illustration too. They are scared, they are frightened at what they are doing. So even though it is a normal activity, an activity that will protect their friend, they feel somehow, you know, culpable, they act like criminals and they want to carry out their jobs in secrecy.

(Refer Slide Time: 15:45)

"The Murder"

- On the night of the day on which he left the house, Mr Lorry went into his room with a chopper, saw, chisel, and hammer, attended by Miss Pross carrying a light. There, with closed doors, and in a mysterious and guilty manner, Mr Lorry hacked the shoemaker's bench to pieces, while Miss Pross held the candle as if she were assisting at a murder—for which, indeed, in her grimness, she was no unsuitable figure.

Now this is the description of that event. We did see the illustrations, now I am going to talk about the narration that we have in the novel. "On the night of the day on which he left the house, Mr Lorry went into his room with a chopper, saw, chisel and hammer, attended by Miss

Pross carrying a light. There, with closed doors, and in a mysterious and guilty manner, Mr. Lorry hacked the shoemaker's bench to pieces, while Miss Pross held a candle as if she was assisting at a murder; for which indeed in her grimness she was no unsuitable figure.”

So we can clearly see that the narrator is comparing the destruction of the shoemaker's bench and other objects to a murder that is being committed. So it is a very interesting comparison because, and also a logical comparison, because the shoemaking material is referred to as an old companion. So if they are destroying an old companion, that they are indeed committing murder. So it is a logical metaphor that is being employed by Dickens here.

And even though Mr. Lorry is the one who is indeed committing this act, it is Miss Pross who assists in this job, and she seems to be a perfect companion to Mr. Lorry in this activity because Miss Pross does look grim on a regular day, and today she looks grimmer than ever, and she is a suitable figure to carry out this act. And further associations if you want to elicit with regard to this except are the idea that in the French revolution, murders would be committed, and this particular scene also is a foreshadowing of several murders that will happen during the regime change.

(Refer Slide Time: 17:59)

An Opinion

- “The burning of the body (previously reduced to pieces convenient for the purpose) was commenced without delay in the kitchen fire; and the tools, shoes, and leather, were buried in the garden. So wicked do destruction and secrecy appear to honest minds, that Mr Lorry and Miss Pross, while engaged in the commission of their deed and in the removal of its traces, almost felt, and almost looked, like accomplices in a horrible crime.”

This narration is a continuation of the activity that is going on in terms of the destruction of the shoemaking material. “The burning of the body (previously reduced to pieces convenient for the

purpose) was commenced without delay in the kitchen fire, and the tools, shoes and leather were buried in the garden. So wicked do destruction and secrecy appear to honest minds, that Mr. Lorry and Miss Pross, while engaged in the commission of their deed and in the removal of its traces, almost felt and almost look like accomplices in a horrible crime.”

So Dickens is continuing with the metaphor of the shoemaking material as an old companion, therefore once the companion is destroyed, once the shoemaker's bench is destroyed, it has been reduced to pieces, that is what the narrator says, convenient pieces so that it could be burnt in the kitchen fire, and the tools, shoes and leather which cannot be burnt are buried in the garden.

So once again the idea that the kitchen fire, or the domestic hearth, we can we can kind of assume that symbolically it means the domestic hearth, is somehow taking into itself the disturbing aspects of the French state, in other words, the Bastille. So in the kitchen fire goes objects associated with the Bastille. So again, as I said a minute ago, there is a kind of an ideological struggle that is happening between English domesticity on the one hand and the French revolution on the other, and or the French state on the, on the other, and the French state is somehow broken up into convenient pieces metaphorically, through the figure of the shoemaking material and burned in the kitchen fire. So that is one way that we can interpret the scene thematically.

And in terms of the other section in the excerpt here, that Mr. Lorry and Miss Pross almost felt and looked like, you know, criminals, who are committing a horrible crime, it once again establishes their innocence, their purity, their goodness of heart. And even though they are engaging in something that is very important to protect the homely, to protect the family and home of their friend, they do, you know, look scared because they are not used to such, you know, activities, underhand activities, even though they are legitimate acts.

(Refer Slide Time: 21:08)

Chapter 20: A Plea

- “Well! If you could endure to have such a worthless fellow, and a fellow of such indifferent reputation, coming and going at odd times, I should ask that I might be permitted to come and go as a privileged person here; that I might be regarded as an useless (and I would add, if it were not for the resemblance I detected between you and me), an unornamental piece of furniture, tolerated for its old service, and taken no notice of. I doubt if I should abuse the permission. It is a hundred to one if I should avail myself of it four times in a year. It would satisfy me, I dare say, to know that I had it.”

Now chapter 20 is titled A Plea. Who is pleading here, and what is the plea? The man who was pleading here is Charles Darnay, and the plea is his request to be admitted to the home of the Manettes especially, you know, the home of Charles Darnay and Lucie Manette. So he is making a request to the husband of Lucie here. So Charles Darnay has come back with Lucie after the honeymoon, and Sydney Carton is, you know making a request to be admitted to the home of Lucie and her family, and he is making this request not to the father but to Charles Darnay.

So Sydney says “If you could endure to have such a worthless fellow, and a fellow of such indifferent reputation coming and going at odd times, I should ask that I might be permitted to come and go as a privileged person here; that I might be regarded as an useless (and I would add, if it were not for the resemblance I detected between you and me) and unornamental piece of furniture, tolerated for its old service and taken no notice of. I doubt if I should abuse the permission. It is a hundred to one if I should avail myself of it four times in a year. It would satisfy me, I dare say, to know that I had it.”

So again we see a very emotional side to Sydney Carton, and Sydney Carton is begging Charles Darnay not to prevent him from visiting this home which he admires greatly. So he says that if you can put up with an worthless fellow like me, a fellow who does not have a good reputation, if you can kind of bear my coming and going at odd times I would be very grateful. He says that

please consider me as a privileged person here, and you can almost think of me as an useless object, a useless unornamental piece of furniture.

But then he remembers that he is, you know, resembling Charles Darnay, and he says that, you know, since we resemble one another I would not say that I am unhandsome. So please tolerate me for my old service, and take notice of me, and I will not abuse the permission. That is his promise, that is the promise of Sydney Carton. So even though I have an indifferent reputation, a reckless reputation, I will not abuse your hospitality, if you would permit me to come and go as a privileged person.

And he says that it is a hundred to one that I should make myself, you know, if I should avail myself of this permission. I might not come even several times, I might just come four times in a year, but this, you know, this privilege, the liberty that I have of visiting you would make me very happy. And Charles Darnay does give him the permission and Sydney is satisfied.

So in this except, we do see thematically the desire to belong on the part of an individual, the desire to belong to an ideal domesticity even as a guest. And Sydney Carton is a loner, Sydney Carton does not have a family, and he wants to belong at least marginally, peripherally to Lucie's home, and that is what he seeks in this, you know, permission that he asks of Darnay.

(Refer Slide Time: 25:11)

Lucie's Plea



And once Sydney Carton leaves, they talk about him. And Charles Darnay thinks that Sydney's problem is a problem of carelessness and recklessness, and it's very interesting that Darnay buys Sydney's words, Darnay accepts the version of Sydney Carton, he does not kind of probe beneath the surface that Sydney Carton projects to the people around him. And he does really think that he is extremely careless and reckless.

And when Lucie hears about these comments of Darnay about Sydney, she is not very happy, and when they retire for the night she begs him to be very generous with Sydney Carton always, and very lenient on his faults when he is not by. In other words, do not condemn him, even when he is not around, please be generous with him always. So Lucie pleads for Sydney Carton to her husband.

And she assures him that he is capable of good things, gentle things and even magnanimous things. And in these words of Lucie again there is a foreshadowing of the sacrifices that Sydney Carton would make in order to protect Lucie and the people who are dear to her. So that is what is significant in this particular context because Lucie is able to assess the real worth of Sydney Carton, and Sydney Carton is, you know, delighted and pleased and, you know, comforted to know that Lucie is able to know his real heart and desires.

(Refer Slide Time: 27:10)

Chapter 21: Echoing Footsteps

- "Ever busily winding the golden thread that bound them all together, weaving the service of her happy influence through the tissue of all their lives, and making it predominate nowhere, Lucie heard in the echoes of years none but friendly and soothing sounds."



Equal share of
affection

Now we come to chapter 21, the crucial chapter, which is entitled Echoing Footsteps, and the title echoes another chapter in this novel, the chapter early on in a Tale of Two Cities when we were in Soho square, and Lucie Manette was talking about the footsteps that she hears when she is all by herself in her home, and she thinks that these footsteps are the footsteps of the people who are coming into her life.

And if you remember Sydney Carton would say, do not worry I would take them into my life, and the symbolic interpretation is that whoever comes to harm you and your family, I would take care of them. I would offer myself in order to protect you. So there is an echo of that chapter in this particular title. So footsteps are associated with the crowd, especially the French revolutionary crowd.

“Ever busily winding the golden thread that bound them all together, weaving the service of her happy influence through the tissue of all their lives and making it predominate nowhere, Lucie heard in the echoes of ears not but friendly and soothing sounds.” So this chapter begins very quietly, the narrator is talking about the golden thread that Lucie Manette weaves around the members of her family.

And the narrator says that she had a friendly and soothing influence on everybody in the family, and she did not let her affection pre dominate in one particular area, or with one particular member of the family. So there was a kind of an equality of affection that was spread by the central female Lucie Manette in her home, and she is the tissue, the important connection that brought everybody together in that home. So she is literally like the angel in the home.

(Refer Slide Time: 29:39)

Lucie's home

Sanctified
home

- Thus, the rustling of an Angel's wings got blended with the other echoes, and they were not wholly of the earth, but had in them that breath of Heaven. Sighs of the winds that blew over a little garden tomb were mingled with them also, and both were audible to Lucie, in a hushed murmur—like the breathing of a summer sea asleep upon a sandy shore—as the little Lucie, comically studious at the task of the morning, or dressing a doll at her mother's footstool, chattered in the tongues of the Two Cities that were blended in her life.

Dual
identity

And the narrator further offers us a lot of details about the way the home was run, and the way the home was kind of constructed at Soho Square. The narrator says that “the rustling of an angel's wings got blended with the other echoes, and they were not wholly of the earth, but had in them that breath of heaven. Sighs of the winds that blew over a little garden tomb where mingled with them also, and both were audible to Lucie in a hushed murmur - like the breathing of a summer sea asleep upon a sandy shore - as the little Lucie, comically studious at the task of the morning, or dressing a doll at her mother's footstool, chattered in the tongues of the two cities that were blended in her life.”

So this is a picture of a sanctified home. I am suggesting this particular term to describe the house of Lucie, because look at the words that are used, the rustling of an angel's wings, so the, you know, there was this benediction of the angel on this home of Lucie, and in fact the winds about the home were not wholly of the earth, but had in them the touch of heaven, the breath of heaven. So it is a kind of an edenic scene that we have at Soho square, and we are also told that Lucie has two children, little Lucie, a girl, and a boy who was born after little Lucie, but who dies, who is taken away by heaven

And even though his death does affect the family, but they all recover from the tragedy because they are aware that it is God himself who has taken away this boy from them. So everything is peaceful, as peaceful as the breathing of a summer sea asleep upon a sandy shore. So it is very

quiet, the sea, the life is like a sea which is sleeping upon a sandy shore, and we have little Lucie, the little child, the girl of Lucie playing comically, you know, she is playing dress up with her doll at her mother's footstool while her mother gets ready, and these, and the girl talks in the tongues of the two cities, she talks both French and English. She talks French because her parents are French and she talks in English because she has an English home, she is in England and she is brought up by the nanny, you know, Miss Pross. So two aspects of these two cities are blended in her life.

And again even little Lucie is given that dual identity, she is able to communicate in two

l
a
n
g
u
a
g
e
s
.

T
h
a
n
k

y
o
u

f
o
r

w