

The Nineteenth Century Novel
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Lecture – 33
Dickens' A Tale of Two Cities Book II: Chapters 22 – 24

Hello and welcome to our lectures for week eight, and in today's lecture we are going to see how the French Revolution is in the ascendancy, and its ideological significance which is that the cruelty of the French revolution, even though it begins with legitimate progression, kind of begins to mirror the cruelty of the aristocracy. So we are shown a picture of the revolutionary France which is as harsh and as cruel as the aristocracy which was reigning the previous regime in France.

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Chapter 22: The Sea Still Rises

- Madame Defarge, with her arms folded, sat in the morning light and heat, contemplating the wine-shop and the street. In both, there were several knots of loungers, squalid and miserable, but now with a manifest sense of power enthroned on their distress. The raggedest nightcap, awry on the wretchedest head, had this crooked significance in it: "I know how hard it has grown for me, the wearer of this to support life in myself; but do you know how easy it has grown for me, the wearer of this, to destroy life in you."

This chapter is entitled chapter 22, and is titled as The Sea Still Rises. So if you remember the previous chapter, it was titled The Sea Rises, and in this chapter there is a continuation of the French revolutionary movement. And this chapter begins with Madame Defarge taking a look at the scene that is unfolding in front of her, and let us see what exactly is this scene.

“Madame Defarge, with her arms folded, sat in the morning light and heat, contemplating the wine shop and the street. In both, there were several knots of loungers, squalid and miserable, but now with a manifest sense of power enthroned on their distress. The raggedest nightcap, awry on

the wretchedest head, had this crooked significance in it: 'I know how hard it has grown for me; the wearer of this to support life in myself; but do you know how easy it has grown for me, the wearer of this to destroy life in you.'"

So this is a fantastic paragraph to give the readers a sense that nothing much has changed in France in terms of the economic status of the people. But what exactly has changed is the sense of power that has become invested in these poor people. So let us look at some of the words that indicate that. So there is a, look at this phrase, there is a manifest sense of power enthroned, so they are kingly almost in their power, even though their situation is distressful. The economic poverty has not changed a wee bit, but they are invested with a lot of power to injure the other person. So this is what the narrator says the raggedest nightcap, the poorest man on the street has grown very powerful, and he seems to say that I am not able to support life adequately in me, but I am capable of destroying life in you.

So the poor have a kind of wrested the power to attack and maim, just as the aristocrats when they were in power were attacking and maiming the people who were beneath them. The only difference here is that the aristocracy were extremely wealthy, whereas that is not the case with these revolutionary mob.

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Old Foulon

- Counsellor of State to Louis XVI
- What will the people do?
- "The people may eat grass."



Now we have given a specific instance with regard to a particular character from the old regime who is now being punished by the revolutionary mob, and this particular figure is called Old Foulon. He was the Counsellor of State to King Louis the XVI, and Dickens draws his source for this particular narrative about Old Foulon from Carlyle's French Revolution written in the 1830s. So this is the exchange that becomes very popular in history, as well as in cultural, you know, milieu, with regard to the revolutionary France. "What will the people do?" And he is supposed to have replied, "The people may eat grass". So it is a cruel, unsympathetic, harsh remark of Old Foulon when he was asked for advice about the status of the people. So now the time has come for him to pay for the crimes and his hard heartedness towards the people. Let us see how it comes about.

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Old Foulon

- "He feared us so much—and with reason—that he caused himself to be represented as dead, and had a grand mock-funeral. But they have found him alive, hiding in the country, and have brought him in. I have seen him but now, on his way to the Hotel de Ville, a prisoner. I have said that he had reason to fear us. Say all! Had he reason?"

Defarge is the one who is speaking these lines, and he has come to this neighbourhood St Antoine in Paris, and he is telling his supporters that Old Foulon who pretended to be dead, in fact Old Foulon gives out the news that he is dead and then there is a mock funeral for Old Foulon, and that kind of lulls the people into believing that he is no more. But then, Defarge finds out that that is not the truth and Old Foulon is still alive and he has been taken by the Jacques.

And this is what he says. "He feared us so much, and with reason, that he caused himself to be represented as dead, and had a grand mock funeral. But they have found him alive, hiding in the

country, and have brought him in. I have seen him but now, on his way to the Hotel de Ville, a prisoner. I have said that he had reason to fear us. Say all! Had he reason?"

So this narrative in brief gives us the context for Old Foulon, and as I said, he had represented as being dead to the public and then there was a grant mock funeral for his death, but now he has been imprisoned and he is taken to Hotel de Ville, the place he is going to be tried for his crimes. And Defarge says that Old Foulon does have a reason to fear us, and he kind of offers this question to the crowd, and he kind of whips the crowd into a fury

So and the mob agrees that yes, he had a reason to fear the crowd. And this idea of mock funeral is very interesting because we did see a funeral in England for Roger Cly, and once you read the novel that you will come to understand that that was indeed a mock funeral too. So the idea of pretence is a significant theme that is running through the entire strata of society, and across the two nations, be it England or France.

The same modes are adopted by the people to escape repression, escape being found out, and escape being revealed for what they are. So pretends and mysterious origins are associated with this theme that we have being developed in the context of Old Foulon. Okay, so Defarge is also being very theatrical here, and he knows how to whip up the crowd which is already very resentful of the aristocracy.

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The Sea Still Rises

- "Patriots!" said Defarge, in a determined voice, "are we ready?"
- Instantly Madame Defarge's knife was in her girdle; the drum was beating in the streets, as if it and a drummer had flown together by magic; and The Vengeance, uttering terrific shrieks, and flinging her arms about her head like all the forty Furies at once, was tearing from house to house, rousing the women.

Now the crowd is ready, and it is listening to Defarge and he asks are we ready? Are we ready to go in pursuit of Old Foulon who is going to be tried in Hotel de Ville? And the people are very ready, and instantly "Madame Defarge's knife was in her girdle; the drum was beating in the streets, as if it and a drummer had flown together by magic; and the Vengeance, uttering terrific shrieks and flinging her arms about her head like all the forty Furies at once, was tearing from house to house, rousing the women."

So Defarge is rousing the men into following him and take up new action, and his wife, his counterpart Madame Defarge instantly picks up a knife and kind of keeps it in her girdle, and then her companion the Vengeance comes to the streets uttering terrific shrieks, she is hysterical, she is also flinging her arms about like the Furies, the classic Furies.

And she is also a provoking the women into joining the crowd, she is encouraging them to join the crowd, and the crowd is heading towards hotel de Ville. So this crowd scene also resembles the crowd scene, I would call as the Parisian crowd scene, is resembling the crowd scene in relation to the funeral of Roger Cly. So there is a kind of a hysteria that is running through both the crowd scenes, and the crowd is violent in both cases. So the violence of the crowd is something that Dickens feared.

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“Blind frenzy”

- “Then a score of others ran into the midst of these, beating their breasts, tearing their hair, and screaming, Foulon alive! Foulon who told the starving people they might eat grass! Foulon who told my old father that he might eat grass, when I had no bread to give him! Foulon who told my baby to suck grass, when these breasts were dry with want!....
- Give us the blood of Foulon, Give us the head of Foulon, Give us the heart of Foulon, Give us the body and soul of Foulon, Rend Foulon to pieces, and dig him into the ground, that grass may grow from him!”

So this is how they behave when they are whipped up into a blind frenzy, and the people hate Old Foulon, they have a lot of resentment against him, and they remember that Old Foulon asked the starving people to eat grass. “Foulon who told my old father that he might eat grass, when I had no bread to give him! Foulon who told my baby to suck grass, when these breasts were dry with want.”

So Foulon's comment comes in the context of extreme poverty, extreme dearth, and there is so much want in the countryside that his comment is very unsympathetic and callous in such a context. And therefore the people do not forget his comments now when they have the power to retaliate. So what do they say? They say “give us the blood of Foulon, give us the head of Foulon, give us the heart of Foulon, give us the body and soul of Foulon, rend Foulon to pieces and dig him into the ground, that grass may grow from him.”

So even before Foulon is given a trial, even before he is judged, the people do judge him and find him guilty, and they want him to be punished in the most cruellest fashion. And this is what they want, they want the blood, they want the head, they want the heart, they want the body and soul, and they want to bury him on the ground, in the ground that grass may grow from him.

So it is very ironic that he asked the people to eat grass, because that is what he will turn into when the power has come to the people.

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Hôtel de Ville

- Armed men and women flocked out of the Quarter so fast... They were all by that time choking the Hall of Examination where this old man, ugly and wicked, was, and overflowing into the adjacent open spaces and streets. The Defarges, husband and wife, The Vengeance, and Jacques Three, were in the first press, and at no great distance from him in the Hall.

So this is the place, Hotel de Ville is the place where Foulon it is going to be examined, and look at the state of that place. It is flooded with these numerous people who are kind of clogging the place and the streets leading out of it. So there is a mass of people waiting to see him tried and killed. So this is what the narrator says. "Armed men and women flocked out of the quarter so fast ... They were all by the time choking the Hall of Examination where this old man, ugly and wicked, was, and overflowing into the adjacent open spaces and streets. The Defarges, husband and wife, the Vengeance, and Jacques three, were in the first press and at no great distance from him in the Hall."

So as I said, the entire place becomes a sea of people. Look at the word used by the narrator, choking, choking the hall of examination, the people are kind of kind of, you know, strangling the air out of that place, they are choking the place. And this is the place where this old man who is ugly and wicked, and just because he is old we cannot forget his wickedness, that is what the narrator is implying here. So this old man, this ugly and wicked man is being judged in this place and in the first row to witness his trial is the Defarges and The Vengeance and Jacques Three. So these are the key set of people who will come to form a clique by themselves.

And they will be associated closely with the Republic and the other trials that are going to be stage for the benefit of the revolutionary state.

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The Trial of Foulon



How does Madam Defarge behave at the trial scene of old Foulon? “Madame put her knife under her arm, and clapped her hands as at a play.” So she behaves as if she is watching some kind of theatrical performance, and I am interested in the idea of theatre here, because early on we saw that Defarge was addressing the crowd and whipping it into a blind fury, and he is behaving as a character in a stage play, and Madame Defarge here now acts as an audience for a play that is being enacted.

So the idea of theatre is key in terms of the ideological discourses running through the play. So the change of regime itself becomes a kind of a bloody spectacle, literally, for everybody to witness and enjoy. And that does happen in the context of the peasantry, who are so deprived that the only enjoyment that they get is through this kind of blood and gore that, you know, kind of litters the stage of the revolution.

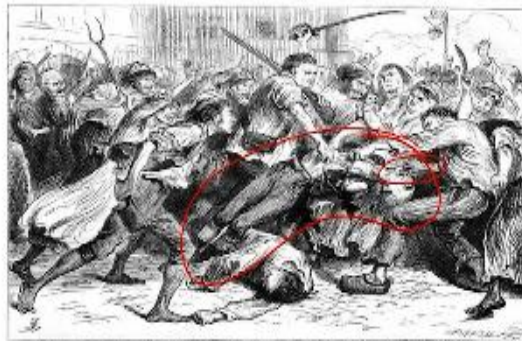
And further, in terms of the trial of Old Foulon, Madame Defarge kind of comes to occupy the centre stage. It is as if she is the one who is the centre of attention instead of Old Foulon because everybody is looking at the facial expressions, the body language of this particular woman. And her expressions are watched and communicated by the others to others who are outside of the hall of examination, and her, you know, reactions are seen as the cue with which the other people follow and imitate her actions.

So this is what the narrator says about Defarge, Madame Defarge. “Madame Defarge's frequent expressions of impatience were taken up with marvellous quickness, at a distance the more readily because certain men who had by some wonderful agility climbed up the external architecture to look in from the windows, knew Madame Defarge well, and acted as a telegraph between her and the crowd outside the building.” So look at the way that the people become the telegraph, and the source of information becomes Madame Defarge, and what she communicates is impatience. And her impatience is transferred to the people who also become impatient at the way in which the trial is slowly proceeding.

So again the key figure here is Madame Defarge and she will continue to rise in importance until she will kind of side-line her husband himself.

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Dragged, and struck at, and stifled by bunches of grass and straw that were thrust into his face by hundreds of hands” by Fred Barnard. 1870s.



Now this is what happens after the trial is over at hotel de Ville. Look at Old Foulon being dragged outside by the public, the French public. He is dragged, struck at, stifled by bunches of grass, look at the man who is stuffing grass into his face, and not only him, several people, hundreds of hands try to do that. This is an illustration by Fred Barnard in the 1870s. There is a lot of bloodthirst in the faces of the people. Everybody is kind of looking at this figure whom they enjoy torturing. A handful of grass here too.

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The End of Foulon by Harry Furniss. 1910.



The end of Foulon is an illustration by Harry Furniss for the 1910 edition of a Tale of Two Cities. Again, there are several hands holding bunches of grass, and Foulon is tied up and dragged and pulled in several directions by the angry mob. And we have a hysterically happy woman here, this is most likely to be the Vengeance, or it could even be, and here is Madame Defarge who also has her hand on Old Foulon.

(Refer Slide Time: 18:32)

The Hanging of Foulon

- “Once, he went aloft, and the rope broke, and they caught him shrieking; twice, he went loft, and the rope broke, and they caught him shrieking then the rope was merciful, and held him, and his head was soon upon a pike, with grass enough in the mouth for all Saint Antoine to dance at the sight of.”

So finally they hang him. What they do is they string him up. “Once he went aloft, and the rope broke, and they caught him shrieking, twice he went loft, and the rope broke, and they caught him shrieking then the rope was merciful, and held him, and his head was soon upon a pike, with grass enough in the mouth for all Saint Antoine to dance at the sight of.”

The World of Saint Antoine

- “Scanty and insufficient suppers those, and innocent of meat, as most other sauce to wretched bread. Yet, human fellowship infused some nourishment into the flinty viands, and struck some sparks of cheerfulness out of them. Fathers and mothers who had had their full share in the worst of the day, played gently with their meagre children; and lovers, with such a world around them and before them, loved and hoped.”

So what is the world of Saint Antoine like? There is not much change as I said in terms of the quality of life of the people. This narrative here on the slide tells us about the kind of food that they ate, and what they did what the people did after they came back from such scenes of gory murder. “Scanty and insufficient suppers those, and innocent of meat, as most other sauce to wretched bread. Yet, Humans fellowship infused some nourishment into the flinty viands, and struck some sparks of cheerfulness out of them. Fathers and mothers who had their full share in the worst of the day play gently with their meagre children, and lovers with such a world around them and before them, loved and hoped.”

So they did not have big dinners or suppers once the French revolution has happened, they had insufficient and scanty, very less food. And they did not eat meat, and their bread were wretched and they had no great sauce to eat the bread with. But despite this lack of proper meals, what they did have was human fellowship, and that gave nourishment to the food that they ate together, and that human fellowship also gave them some sparks of cheerfulness. Some sparks, not, you know, cheerfulness all around but there was a element of that.

And fathers and mothers after they came back from such cruel acts such as the killing of Old Foulon, played gently with their meagre children, you know, puny children, starving children and even lovers after coming back from such glory acts kind of found time to, you know, enjoy

themselves, so and hoped for better things to come to them. So this is the state of affairs in the days of the revolution.

(Refer Slide Time: 23:10)

Chapter 23-Fire Rises

- “Far and wide lay a ruined country, yielding nothing but desolation. Every green leaf, every blade of grass and blade of grain, was as shrivelled and poor as the miserable people. Everything was bowed down, dejected, oppressed, and broken. Habitations, fences, domesticated animals, men, women, children, and the soil that bore them—all worn out.”

Now chapter 23 is about the fires that were burning across the nation, and where did these fires erupt? And the beginning of this chapter once again tells that the countryside was not being nourished. The countryside still starved, there was nothing to live on, the people were miserable, the people were unhappy, and everything was worn out, exhausted. Exhaustion is the word that underlies much of the ideas that is communicated in this particular excerpt.

“Far and wide lay a ruined country, yielding nothing but desolation. Every green leaf, every blade of grass and blade of grain was as shrivelled and poor as the miserable people. Everything was bowed down, dejected, oppressed and broken. Habitations, fences, domesticated animals men, women, children, and the soil that bore them - all worn out.” So what is the message that Dickens wants to convey?

The revolution brings no change at all. Look at the kind of words that he uses, desolation, shrivelled, the people are shrivelled, their arms are shrivelled, their hands are shrivelled, the trees are shrivelled, and there is poverty, misery and everything is depressed and oppressed. So again, as I said, nothing much has changed for the people, no change for the better, and everybody is worn out.

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Chapter 23: Fire Rises



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This illustration shows us the mender of the roads as well as a strange figure. This is the mender of the roads, and this is a man whom we have met before, he was the one who offered testimony to the rough tribunal about old Gaspard. So that is the context for the mender of the roads, and this is a Jacques, a member of the revolutionary group, and he has come to this particular village with a specific purpose. And that purpose is somehow foreshadowed in his pipe which he is smoking there very obviously, so we can kind of sense a foreshadowing in this activity of his.

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Chapter 23: Fire Rises

- When the village had taken its poor supper, it did not creep to bed, as it usually did, but came out of doors again, and remained there. A curious contagion of whispering was upon it, and also, when it gathered together at the fountain in the dark, another curious contagion of looking expectantly at the sky in one direction only. Monsieur Gabelle, chief functionary of the place, became uneasy; went out on his housetop alone, and looked in that direction too; glanced down from behind his chimneys at the darkening faces by the fountain below, and sent word to the sacristan who kept the keys of the church, that there might be need to ring the tocsin by-and-by.

Now the Fire Rises, and let us see what exactly is happening to the key country house in this particular village. “When the village had taken its poor supper, it did not creep to bed as it

usually did, but came out of doors again and remained there. A curious contagion of whispering was upon it, and also, when it gathered together at the fountain in the dark, another curious contagion of looking expectantly at the sky in one direction only. Monsieur Gabelle, chief functionary of the place, became uneasy, went out on his housetop alone, and looked in the direction too; glanced down from behind his chimneys at the darkening faces by the fountain below, and sent word to the sacristan who kept the keys of the church, that there might be need to ring the tocsin by and by.”

So this village is an important space in this novel because this is the place where the child dies. And Marquis Evremonde is the reason behind the death of that child, untimely death. And this is the place where Gaspard is also hung by the state, and that hanging is somehow a warning to the people not to commit such gory murders against people who are important and close to the state. Now this village, if you look at that excerpt there, the entire village is treated as one single man who has had his, his poor supper, and he does not creep to bed as he usually does.

So the village is like a man that stays awake, and it is looking at a particular place, and look at the way the narrator describes the rumour that is spreading among the people. He calls it the contagion, as if it is a nasty disease that is spreading. So the rumour is termed as, or the whispering is termed as a contagion, and everybody is looking expectantly at one particular direction, and Monsieur Gabelle, Gabelle is the one who is the tax collector for the noble lord of that particular village, so he is also looking in the same direction, and he realizes that he has to do something, and he sends word to the man who keeps the keys of the church that there might be a need to ring the alarm bells soon. So something dangerous is going to happen. What is that?

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Fire Rises

- “Presently, the château began to make itself strangely visible by some light of its own, as though it were growing luminous. Then, a flickering played behind the architecture of the front, picking out transparent places, and showing where balustrades, arches, and windows were. Then it soared higher, and grew broader and brighter. Soon, from a score of the great windows, flames burst forth, and the stone faces awakened, stared out of fire.”

The chateau or the palace, the big country estate of Marquis Evremonde, who is no more, is going to be burnt. And it does burn, the fire rises. And we realized that the man who was talking to the mender of the roads, who was trying to get directions from the mender of the roads as to how to reach the particular village and that chateau, is the one who is behind the fire that he sets to the chateau.

“Presently the chateau began to make itself strangely visible by some light of its own, as though it were growing luminous. Then, a flickering played behind the architecture of the front, picking out transparent places, and showing where balustrades, arches and windows were. Then it soared higher and grew broader and brighter. Soon, from a score of the great windows, flames burst forth, and the stone faces awakened, stared out of fire.”

So clearly, very slowly the fire builds inside this big chateau, big palace, and look at the way it is mildly described. At points, we do not know what exactly is happening, and then we realized yes, there is a big fire that is burning within the chateau, and soon it becomes very transparent, everybody is able to notice and the fire source higher. It is growing higher and higher and flames are bursting forth from the windows.

And the stone faces, the sculptures that were decorating the chateau, the palace-like architecture seems seem to stare out of the fire, it is as if the faces of the sculptures are staring, glaring and

they are burning as well. So it is literal and a symbolic act of destruction of the aristocracy.

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