

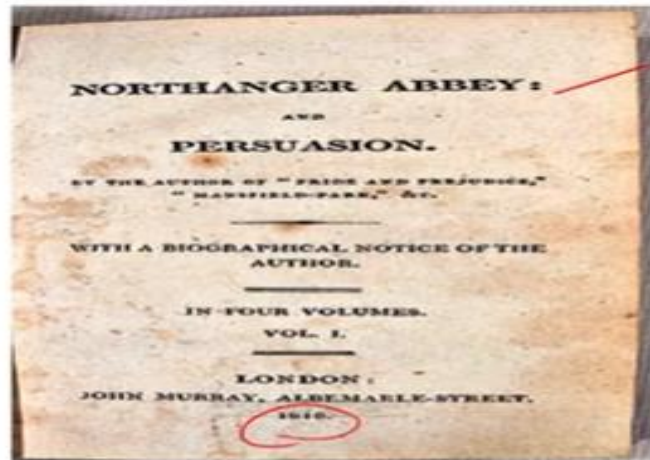
The Nineteenth Century Novel
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Module No # 04
Lecture No # 01C
Jane Austen's Persuasion Chapters 1-6

Hello and welcome to the session. In today's lecture I will talk about Jane Austen's Persuasion and I will do a close reading of the chapters and through that close reading I will try to connect elements of the novel with the larger ideological issues that were circulating in the 19th century.

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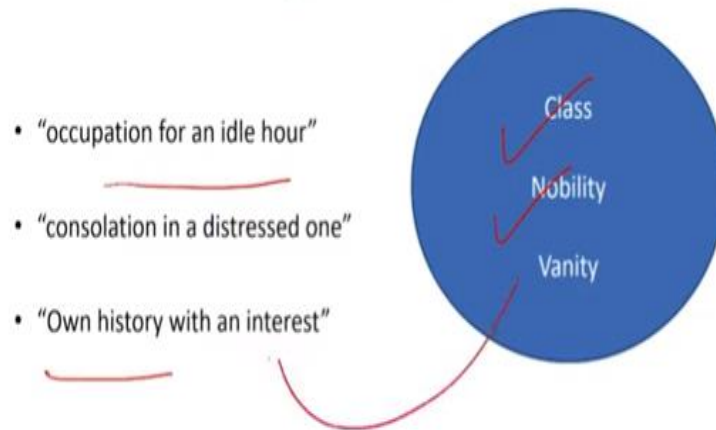
Title Page



This is the title page of Persuasion which was published with Northanger Abbey. So this came out in 1818, and as you can see that there is no mention of Jane Austen's name there on the title page.

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Baronetage



Now the book begins with a reference to another book which is called *Baronetage*, and this book is about a record of all the nobility and their descendants and heirs and who married whom. So this book contains a list of all the members of the nobility, and it is this book which fascinates Sir Walter Elliot and whenever he is a bit lost for time, whenever he is a bit preoccupied, whenever he is a bit worried, he would find occupation for an idle hour in this book called *Baronetage*.

And in fact even when he is distressed he would find consolation in this particular book about nobility. And the particular page that he is most interested in is his own history, which talks about his lineage and his heirs, his family, his daughters, and the man who is going to inherit his property. So this book is an indication of the position of Sir Walter Elliot's class position and it also reinforces the fact that he is from the nobility. And the other most significant point about this book is an indication of Sir Walter Elliot's vanity.

This book tells us that he is very vain because, as you can see that he is preoccupied with his own interest.

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Sir Walter Elliot

- "Vanity was the beginning and the end of Sir Walter Elliot's character; vanity of person and of situation." *Class position*
- "He considered the blessing of beauty as inferior only to the blessing of a baronetcy; and the Sir Walter Elliot, who united these gifts, was the constant object of his warmest respect and devotion."

And the narrator, the third person narrator very clearly spells out what kind of a man Sir Walter Elliot's was. "Vanity was the beginning and the end of Sir Walter Elliot's character; Vanity of person and of situation". So he was both vain about his personality as well as of his situation, his class position, which is that of a Baronet. So he is vain about these two things: his attractive figure as well as his high rank in society.

"He considered the blessing of beauty as inferior only to the blessing of a baronetcy; and the Sir Walter Elliot who united these gifts was the constant object of his warmest respect and devotion." So Sir Walter Elliot considered beauty to be only next in importance to the idea of a high position, and the person who combined both these merits was the object of his own admiration and fascination, and that person is he himself, so he is that kind of a vain man.

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Sir Walter Elliot



C.E.Brock's
watercolour
illustration

"Charles Edmund Brock (1870 –
1938) : English painter, line artist and
book illustrator"

And this is the illustration of Sir Walter Elliot by C. E. Brock's and it is a water color illustration and this is the biographical detail of Charles Edmund Brock, and he was an English painter, line artist and book illustrator. And if you look at the small note there which says "Few women could think more of their personal appearance than he did." So this is a quotation from the novel and that tells you the kind of man Sir Walter Elliot is and how much importance he places on his personal appearance.

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Dysfunctional Families

- Can you list the dysfunctional families evident in the first three chapters?
- Sir Walter's family
- Lady Russell's family

Now here is quick question for you: In terms of the dysfunctional families that you can see referred to in the beginning of the novel, how many can you list? I can easily tell you that Sir Walter's family is also a dysfunctional family, and another dysfunctional family could be Lady

Russell's. Even though she is widow, she does not have any children, she does not remarry, she does not seem to have any close relatives.

So you can see that that family is also very incomplete and Sir Walter family is again slightly dysfunctional, and you would see in what way that is quite shortly.

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Mrs Clay's family

- Daughter of Mr Shepherd ... "returned home ...with the additional burden of two children"
- Separated from her husband
- "unprosperous marriage"

Dysfunctional family

Now we have another figure who is introduced at the beginning of the novel, which who is Mrs. Clay, and she is the daughter of Mr. Shepherd who has returned home with the additional burden of two children. So Mrs. Clay has been separated from her husband and she has come home after an unprosperous marriage, and she is spending time with Elizabeth Elliot who is the eldest daughter of Sir Walter Elliot.

So you can see that once again there is another dysfunctional family in Mrs. Clay who has come home with her two children, who is seen as a burden by the society, which is what the third person narrator communicates in this particular narrative about Mrs. Clay. So already you can get a sense that there are three dysfunctional families. The first one is Sir Walter Elliot who is a widower and who has three daughters, and then we can sense that Lady Russell who spends quite a bit of time in association with the Elliot family.

She also seems to be slightly dysfunctional in that she does not have any family at all, I mean she is the representative of her family in fact. And then we have Mrs. Clay. The narrators says that

“She was a clever young woman, who understood the art of pleasing – the art of pleasing at least at Kellynch Hall; and who had made herself so acceptable to Ms. Elliot as to have been already staying there more than once.”

So Mrs. Clay spends quite a bit of time at Kellynch Hall which is the family estate of the Elliots. So there is a big country estate at the heart of this novel and that is Kellynch hall, and in this Kellynch hall we have in residence the Elliots. Sir Walter Elliot, and then we have Elizabeth Elliot and Anne Elliot, Mary Musgrove has been married off to a neighboring squire's son. So she is not in residence but the Elliots, the majority of them live at Kellynch Hall. And we have Mrs. Clay spending quite a bit of time as the companion of the eldest Miss. Elliot.

And the narrator very subtly tells us that she knows the art of the pleasing. Mrs. Clay knows the art of pleasing. So we need to ask this question, whom does she please? She obviously pleases Elizabeth Elliot, but whom else does she please. And the narrative also tells us that she is a clever young woman. So she is single right now and she is very clever and she has attached herself to this rich family, at least a family which is of high status if not exactly rich. We will come to the financial aspect of the Elliots quite shortly.

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Elizabeth Elliot

- Disappointment
- “She had had a disappointment...which that book, and especially the history of her own family, must ever present the remembrance of.

No marriage
recorded

The book reminds
her of her
disappointment

Now Elizabeth Elliot is introduced by the narrator and the narrator says that she had had a disappointment, which that book and especially the history of her own family must ever present the remembrance of. The book that is referred to here is the Baronetage that the father is quite

fascinated by, and the narrator says that the book is a constant reminder of a particular disappointment, and that disappointment is disappointment in love.

So why is she disappointed? She has not found a man to marry, a man suitable for her to marry, and the book does not record her marriage. This is one thing, but more than that there is a specific disappointment in the sense that since Sir Walter Elliot does not have a male heir, the country estate is entailed to another relative who is called William Elliot. So William Elliot was encouraged to be, you know, fascinated by Elizabeth Elliot, you know, the family wanted them to marry especially Sir Walter Elliot and Elizabeth Elliot wanted William Elliot to be interested in this eldest daughter of the Kellynch family, but then he disappoints her. He does not marry Elizabeth Elliot, in fact he marries another woman, a rich woman, but from a very inferior social position. So whenever she looks at this history, she can see that there is no record of her own marriage, and more than that she can see the name of the man whom she was supposed to marry, whom she intended to marry but again he also disappointed her.

So there are plenty of disappointments for Elizabeth Elliot in terms of the book and whenever she sees the book open in her home she just closes it with a slight annoyance.

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Mr Elliot

- Studied law
- "extremely agreeable"
- "Instead of pushing his fortune in the line marked out for the heir of the house of Elliot, he had purchased independence by uniting himself to a rich woman of inferior birth."

Handwritten notes: Pleasant, seeking, commerce

Now who is this William Elliot? He is usually referred to as Mr. Elliot in the book, and he has studied the law. He is extremely agreeable, he is very pleasant to be with, that is what the narrator mentions and that is what was perceived of him at the beginning. But instead of pushing

his fortune in the line marked out for the heir of the house of Elliot, he had purchased independence by uniting himself to a rich woman of inferior birth.

So the Elliot family marks out a line for Mr. Elliot to follow, a path for Mr. Elliot to follow, but then he deviates from that path and marries another woman, a social inferior and she happens to be rich too. So this is what brings the disappointment for Elizabeth Elliot and Sir Walter Elliot and you can look at the metaphor of commerce there in this particular excerpt. "Purchased", metaphor of commerce, buying and selling and then instead of pushing his fortune, instead of seeking his luck, he is supposed to seek his luck in a literal sense as well as in a figurative sense with this particular family, he has gone astray.

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Mr Elliot

- "spoken most disrespectfully of them all, most slightly and contemptuously of the very blood he belonged to, and the honours which were hereafter to be his own. This could not be pardoned."

baronet
line

While not tending to the Elliot family need and demand is an offence, is of an unpleasant nature, what he does which really pushes him outside of the fold of the Elliot family is this. He has spoken most disrespectfully of them all, most slightly and contemptuously of the very blood he belonged to, and the honours which were hereafter to be his own. This could not be pardoned.

So Mr. Elliot disappoints because he does not marry Elizabeth Elliot, he marries a socially inferior woman who is also rich. That is one disappointment. But that disappointment could have been borne by the Elliot family if he had not attacked the dignity of the family name. And he has spoken most disrespectfully of them all, of all the Elliots, he has insulted them, he has been contemptuous of the very blood, the baronet blood and the honours which were hereafter to be

his own. What exactly are the honors? That is, he is going to acquire the property of Kellynch Hall he is going to be the master of it. The property is entailed to him.

So after the death of Sir Walter Elliot the property will pass on to Mr. Elliot. So he has even spoken contemptuously of the heritage he is going to receive at some point. So this insult to the family name could not be pardoned by the Elliots of the Kellynch Hall.

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Anne's "Place"

- What are the details that suggest her inferior/marginalized place among her society?
- no longer "pretty" ... "bloom had vanished early" *lost her beauty*
- "even in its height, her father had found little to admire in her, (so totally different were her delicate features and mild dark eyes from his own...)"

Now the narrator introduces a very important character, a character with whom the entire plot is fascinated by. In fact entire story is about the fortunes of this young woman called Anne Elliot. Why is she introduced so late in the novel? And that in itself is very interesting and that tells us something about the kind of attitude the rest of the family have towards Anne Elliot. She does not seem to be very important in the scheme things for this particular Kellynch family.

Now the question is this. What are details that suggest her inferior/ marginalized place among her society? She is not often talked about by Sir Walter Elliot or by Elizabeth Elliot, both of whom at the moment the novel begins are interested in Mrs. Clay and in her company. The other very direct point that the narrator raises is this. Anne Elliot is no longer pretty, her bloom had vanished early. She has lost her beauty quite early on. And we will know why she has lost her bloom so early in a short while.

Even in its height, even when she was most pretty, even she was most beautiful, her father had found little to admire in her. So totally different were her delicate features and mild dark eyes from his own. So he does not like her so much even when she was very attractive, and the narrator offers a reason for this. The narrator says that she was completely different from her father in appearance. Her delicate features and mild dark eyes were not the heritage of her father.

In fact we can assume that she resembles her mother more. So we can also tell that this probably reason that he does not find her most attractive or find her very beautiful, that she is not a mirror image of himself. She does not resemble him.

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Anne

- "no present down to Anne as had been the yearly custom."
- "Anne ...never seemed considered by others as having any interest in the question"

*Place/Position
in the Elliot
family.*

Now the family is in straitened circumstances. There are financial trouble looming for the family. They have to cut down their expenses. They have to do away with some of the luxuries that they have been quite used to. So what do they think? What are their plans to cut down of their financial expenses? Number one is they have planned not to bring any present down to Anne, has had been the yearly custom when they returned from London back to the countryside where they have their estate the Kellynch Hall.

So they decide that they are going to do with that gift for Anne. And Anne is never considered by others as having any interest in the question. So I will explain what that statement means. Anne is never invited to offer her own comments about the financial situation in which the family finds

itself. Her opinions does not matter she is not asked to contribute as to the strategies to manage the family's finances.

So she is literally and metaphorically marginalized in the family. So these details tell you something about Anne's place/ position in the family.

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Anne

- "Anne with an elegance of mind and sweetness of character, which must have placed her high with any people of real understanding, was nobody with either father or sister; her word had no weight, her convenience was always to give way—she was only Anne."

However the third person narrator states that "Anne with an elegance of mind and sweetness of character, which must have placed her high with any people of real understanding, was nobody with either father or sister; her word had no weight, her convenience was always to give way. She was only Anne." This excerpt about Anne Elliot is very popular in Persuasion. This is a much quoted excerpt in the novel.

And while the narrator is appreciating Anne in terms of her elegance, in terms of her superiority of mind, we can also sense that the narrator is criticizing the inferiority of mind of the father Elliot and the daughter Elizabeth Elliot for ignoring her, for marginalizing her. So if you look at the excerpt quite closely we can see that Anne is, has a sweet disposition. She is elegant of mind. And at the same time the narrator tells us that the father or sister, and the father or sister is obviously Sir Walter Elliot or Elizabeth Elliot, they are people of no real understanding.

So that is also recorded by the third person narrator in this particular excerpt. The word of Anne had no weight with the father or sister. Her convenience was always to give precedence, give

way, literally make way and metaphorically give precedence to the others in the family. She was only Anne. She does not matter. So this excerpt, this narrative, praises Anne as well as criticizes the others for not appreciating Anne Elliot.

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Lady Russell

- “She had a cultivated mind, and was, generally speaking, rational and consistent; but she had prejudices on the side of ancestry; she had a value for rank and consequence, which blinded her a little to the faults of those who possessed them.”

The narrator now introduces another very significant character, a very important character who has played an influential role in Anne's past, and that character is Lady Russell. “She had a cultivated mind, and was, generally speaking, rational and consistent; but she had prejudices on the side of ancestry; she had a value for rank and consequence, which blinded her a little to the faults and those who possessed them.”

So this excerpt describes the nature of Lady Russell. And the narrator says that she had a cultivated mind, a sophisticated mind, and she was generally speaking, on the whole quite rational and consistent in her behavior. But she was prejudiced towards the nobility, people of high rank, and she was also therefore blinded to the faults of such people who belonged to the higher ranks in society. So she was partial towards family of rank. So that is her fault.

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Kellynch Hall

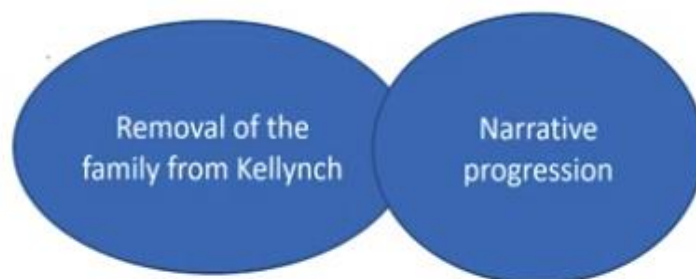
- Ancestral family home of the Elliots
- Sir Walter fails as the head of the household
- Financial mismanagement and extravagance

Now as I mentioned before the Kellynch Hall is the ancestral family home of the Elliots. The property has been handed down to the next heir, the next Elliot heir, and at the moment when the novel begins we can sense that Sir Walter has failed as the head of the household in the sense that he is not able to manage the finances of the family.

So there is a lot of financial mismanagement and extravagance on the part of the Elliot family who are now occupying the Kellynch Hall. And as a result, they have to do something to mend matters.

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Kellynch Hall



And what are the possible solutions and the best solutions seems to be to remove the family from Kellynch Hall. They have to quit the family home and move house. They have to move to a difference place of residence, either within the country or outside of the countryside. And this is what sets the ball rolling in terms of narrative progression. So they seems to be a stalemate and this move of the Elliot family from the family estate will bring in fresh impetus to the plot and it will take the plot to places and introduce more characters, which will create complications and resolutions in terms of Anne's life.

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Kellynch Hall

- Class rigidity
- "Kellynch Hall has a respectability in itself which cannot be affected by these reductions" (Chapter 2)

Lady Russell!

What does the Kellynch Hall symbolize? The Kellynch hall symbolizes class rigidity. In fact the narrator says that Kellynch Hall has a respectability in itself which cannot be affected by these reductions. If you want to pinpoint and find out whose consciousness is this particular statement from, it is from Lady Russell who has been called in to help the family in terms of working out a plan which will stem the financial problems.

And Lady Russell has a list of strategies to cut down the expenses of the family, and she has, you know, received the suggestions from Anne Elliot too. So she is very friendly with Anne, and she has asked Anne to help her in forming a list of suggestions to manage the family finances. And therefore, it is her consciousness which has this comment to make. She says that Kellynch Hall has a respectability, that there is a lot of dignity to this hall, to this home, to this country estate, which cannot be affected by these reductions of expenses. It cannot be effected by the reduction

of a couple of servants, a couple of carriages, and a couple of dinner parties. So the Hall will not lose its respectability even if you reduce its budget.

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Kellynch Hall

- “Sir Walter’s identity is inseparable from his title, from his crest, above all from Kellynch-Hall; he is identified with the apparatus and accoutrements that encompass him” (Nina Auerbach)

Kellynch Hall = Sir Walter Elliot

Nina Auerbach, a very famous critic, suggests that Sir Walter identity is inseparable from his title, from its crest, above all from Kellynch Hall. He is identified with the apparatus and accoutrements that encompass him. This criticism is very interesting because it does offer an interesting comparison.

Nina Auerbach suggests that Kellynch Hall represents, symbolizes, stands for Sir Walter Elliot himself. That is the point that she is trying to get across when she says that he is identified with the apparatus and accoutrements that encompass him. He is inseparable from the title, from his crest, from the symbolic image, and above all from the Hall. So he is kind of, you know, intermingled with the hall itself, his identity is inseparable from it.

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Sir Walter Elliot on the Navy

- “First, as being the means of bringing persons of obscure birth into undue distinction, and raising men to honours which their fathers and grandfathers never dreamt of; and secondly as it cuts up a man’s youth and vigour most horribly; a sailor grows old sooner than any other man.”

Sir Walter Elliot comments on the Navy. Why? Because the Navy or men from the Navy are introduced in the novel as being interested in becoming tenants of Sir Walter Elliot. So finally the family has decided to let the hall and move to a different place. And who are the potential tenants? And Mr. Shepherd, the advocate, who helps Lady Russell in bringing down the family expenses suggest that, you know, the Navy has rich men who could easily occupy and maintain the dignity of Kellynch Hall.

But Sir Walter Elliot is prejudiced against the navy, naval men, and this is the reason for that. “First, as being the means of bringing persons of obscure birth into undue distinction, and raising men to honors which their fathers and grandfathers never dreamt of; and secondly as it cuts up a man’s youth and vigour most horribly; a sailor grows old sooner than any man. So there are two reasons for Sir Walter to not like the navy. Number one, he believes that the navy will raise the importance of inferior people.

So persons of obscure birth, socially inferior men, would be raised to distinction in the Navy. The Navy offers that kind of possibility, there is social mobility, social climbing that has been made possible in this profession, and therefore he does not like it. Number two, he says that the navy is bad for a man’s youth. Men will easily lose their personal attractiveness if they spend quite a bit of time in this profession.

He says that a sailor grows old sooner than any other man. So this is his opinion, men whose fathers and grandfather were from really lower positions in society will reach really high positions in society, especially perhaps in terms of fortune, and they will become unattractive if they are in the profession for a long time. This comment is very very ironic, because we will see that a sailor does not grow very unattractive. In fact the hero of this novel, Fredrick Wentworth, who has spent quite a bit of time in the naval profession, retains his physical attractiveness throughout, all along, and he somehow rejects this claim of Sir Walter Elliot.

However, one other objection that Walter Elliot had to the navy that it will raise men to honours which their fathers and grandfathers never dreamt of, that is proved true because Fredrick Wentworth is from a socially inferior position, but he has gained a lot of distinction by his personal merit and labour. Thank you for watching I will continue in the next session.