

The Nineteenth Century Novel
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Lecture – 57
Discussion on Gender, Class and History

Hello and welcome to today's session. Today, we will be looking at all the three novels from the perspectives of class, gender and history. I start off the discussion on class in all the three novels. First, I will talk about Persuasion and how class is portrayed in Persuasion. Class, aristocracy and class questions is the prominent theme all throughout the novel Persuasion.

The domestic life led by Anne Elliot and her family is different from the domestic life that is led by the middle class characters in the novel, as well as the middle class protagonists in the other two novels that we discussed. The Elliots reside in a large property called the Kellynch property all by themselves, isolated from anybody who is not a part of their family. The only two people who receive partial inclusion in the family is Mr. Shepherd and his daughter Mrs. Clay.

Even in this case, we have to keep in mind that Mr. Shepherd is at the end of the day an employee of Sir Walter, and the relationship is not an informal one but a formal one of that of an employer and employee. Even Lady Russell who puts on the shoes of the mother for all the three girls is given very little regard, and anybody who gives her a little regard is Anne Elliot, and everybody else treats her very dismissively.

Sir Walter also exhibits constant contempt for anybody who is not a part of his aristocratic class. This is exemplified in his contempt for anybody who is belonging to the Navy. The Navy men receive his displeasure for their weathered appearance, but not just for that, it is also because of the class they belong to and the practice of meritocracy in the Navy.

The Navy practices are such that often middle class workers are placed above aristocratic members of the Navy, making the aristocratic members of the Navy subservient to the middle class superiors, and this does not find favour with Sir Walter. This is one way in which we can see Sir Walter's aristocratic haughtiness. This aristocratic haughtiness can also be seen in Sir Walter's pathetic admiration for Lady Darlymple just because of her noble blood.

And he is trying very hard to find favour with her and her family. It is ultimately Lady Darlymple's enquiry about Captain Wentworth and who he is that makes Sir Walter and Elizabeth consider, even consider who Captain Wentworth is, and before that they treated him very dismissively.

And this enquiry on the part of Lady Darlymple also lays testimony to the times where the middle class characters are rising up in power, whereas aristocratic people such as Sir Walter are falling down in power because there is a part in the novel where the narrator says that if Sir Walter and Elizabeth were staying in London instead of Bath, Lady Darlymple might not have been very pleased to be a part of their company, because they are not very reputable acquaintances anymore because they have fallen down in their wealth considerably. On the other hand, people like Captain Wentworth who are middle class are rising up in power and wealth and are being acknowledged by people such as, by people of noble blood such as Lady Darlymple.

In stark opposition to the domesticity of the Elliot's that we see in *Persuasion*, we can see the domesticity of the Harville's, of Captain Harville and Mrs. Harville. And Captain Benwick, though not a part of the Harville family, lives with them and is seen as a part of family and is included as part of the family for the reason that he was engaged with Captain Harville's sister Fanny Harville who has passed away.

And the Harville's also wholeheartedly make room for the Musgroves and Anne Elliot and everybody else when the party arrives in Lyme, and on the occasion of the accident. And we see a friendship and camaraderieship in their family and in their friendship, and in their friendship with Captain Wentworth that is beyond class considerations. And Sir Walter, it is true that Sir Walter considers aristocratic members with high regard, but Sir Walter has contempt even for his daughter Mary Musgrove because according to him she married below her class when she chose to marry Charles Musgrove. Ironically, Mary herself exhibits such class contempt for, in the case of the courtship between Henrietta and Charles Hayter, where she thinks of Charles Hayter as too poor an acquaintance and not good enough to be a match for Henrietta Musgrove.

And she is said to have too much Elliot pride throughout the novel. She always views herself as deserving some privileges and always feels that she is being ill-used. Now that I have talked about class consideration in the novel *Persuasion*, I would like to look at *A Tale of Two Cities* through the same lens. I would start with the question of domesticity in *A Tale of Two Cities* also.

Here, the main family, that is the Manettes, live in an apartment complex with a lot of other people who are strangers to them. And even in their immediate household, there are people like Mr. Lorry and Miss Pross who are welcomed into the family as a part of the Manette family even when there is no blood relation between them, which is unlike the case of the Elliots, and which is very similar to the case of how Captain Benwick is welcomed as a part of the Harville family.

And in *A Tale of Two Cities*, the class is a political and historical factor that is as good as absent in England while it is very prevalent in France. All characters in England are middle class characters or working class characters. There are no aristocratic characters from England, and we are informed of no account of class strife in England, but this is not so in France.

France is turbulent and chaotic because of class related oppression. While the narrator is careful to criticize the aristocrats for oppressing the working class people and for forcing them to engage in revolution, the narrator also makes it a point to show his displeasure towards the path that the revolution has taken. Instead of class being done away with, what we see is a flipping of class where the power dynamics has changed, where the working class has risen in power with aristocrats have little or no power.

The worn out common man who is seen as climbing into the carriage of Monseigneur is an exemplification of the working class donning the role that was previously occupied by the aristocrats. However, as mentioned earlier, the negative aspects of class such as poverty and hunger and strife is as good as absent in England.

And England is highlighted as a place to which everybody runs to to seek refuge, such as Charles Darnay who goes to England to build a new life for himself, or like the French aristocrats who goes to England to run away from the revolution or to escape the revolution.

And all English characters are shown with a good side, even the spy John Barsad towards the end of the novel becomes a better character because he puts his life at stake sort of to help Sydney Carton.

And the only person - So England is essentially shown as a model to emulate, England is shown as a perfect domesticity model, and the only person who is outside of this perfect domesticity model in England is Mr. Stryver, who is constantly seen as shouldering into positions of power. For example, when the French aristocrats come to Tellson's Bank in England, he is even seen as shouldering into their company.

And he shows contempt for the Monseigneur, for the Marquis who we know is actually Charles Darnay for leaving his post. This is one of the faint indications that class considerations are after all not absent in England, though when we read the novel we get the feeling. Now I will talk about class considerations in Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde is very interesting because the novel represents the Victorian anxieties and fears of regression into the ways of the working class.

Hyde represents this degenerate working class that is engaging in crime, and Hyde is a manifestation of evil which is equated, and this evil is equated to the working class. In the setting of the novel, the well-groomed street and the posh street exists side by side with streets with poverty stricken streets and the hunger stricken streets, just like how the middle classes and the working classes exist side by side.

And Hyde is not given any narrative agency in the novel, and whatever we get to know of Hyde is through the lens of the other characters such as Mr. Utterson, and there is an essential othering of Hyde. There is an essential othering of Hyde or the working class that takes place through this kind of narration. And an animal imagery is also attributed to Hyde, and he is often referred to as ape-like.

But what the novel does is show that it is not only in the working class that evil exists, because evil essentially existed inside Dr. Jekyll itself who was not a member of the working class and who was a member of the middle class. And the novel destroys this façade of middle class superiority and working class inferiority, and evil, and the novel makes it a point to highlight the evil that is essentially in him and in middle class, and not essentially in the

working class or the other. With this I have come to an end on my discussion on class. Now Sruthi will talk about gender considerations in all the three novels.

Hello, everyone. I shall now begin with the theme of gender in relation to these three novels that we have discussed so far. I shall begin with the novel *Persuasion*. So *Persuasion* as a novel presents very interesting perspectives when it comes with the theme of gender.

Because we have a wide array of interesting female characters that do not fit into the trope of the ideal Victorian woman, which was a trope that was so widespread in 19th century English Literature. So in *Persuasion*, we have firstly a self-effacing and helpful Anne, a haughty but slightly insecure Elizabeth, a firm and financially independent Lady Russell, a vain and perhaps unmotherly Mary, and a good humored and adventurous Mr. Croft, and so on.

Clearly, none of these women quite fit into the trope of the flawless angel-like Victorian woman, and many instances in the novel also see some of the major female characters questioning existing gender roles and rules that women were expected to follow. A good example of this, if you all can recollect, would be the reaction of Mrs. Croft to Captain Wentworth's opinion that women should not be allowed on ships.

And Mrs. Croft is openly unaccepting of Captain Wentworth's argument, and she says that women are quite as capable of living their lives in water as is very tellingly captured by her statement, we none of us expect to be in smooth water at all times. Secondly, it is worth noting Anne's reaction on seeing Captain Wentworth return from the war with huge fortune, better looks and better social status.

While she is in a sense losing her bloom, this is captured by Anne's statement. "He is younger than I am, younger in feeling, if not in fact younger as a man. He will rally again and be happy with another." So clearly while it was a pressing need for women to get married as soon as possible, men were at liberty to take their time to get settled, make all the money, and still have reasonable prospects for marriage, because aging processes were viewed quite differently for men and women in the Victorian times.

So the extent to which marriage was essential for women in the 19th Century can also be captured by the two widowed characters in the novel, two widowed women in the novel, Mrs.

Smith and Mrs. Clay. So while Mrs. Smith suffers from extreme poverty and needs a man to do the paperwork for her so that her money from overseas might return to her, Mrs. Clay does everything in her power to get married to a man of considerable wealth or fortune so that she can sail through the troubles of her widowhood.

So marriage or dependence on men becomes the sole way for women to sustain during this period. Interestingly, Lady Russell is financially well off, and she is not expected to marry a second time by society, which shows that money was the deciding factor in whether or not a woman could have her own way. Men of good fortune however needed to marry to keep their homes running, and Victorian society would not be surprised if wealthy widowers married a second time.

One more notable incident is that of Mary's refusal to stay back at home to nurse her sick child. So Mary does not see why Charles should not stay back, Charles being her husband. She does not see why Charles Musgrove should not stay back to nurse her sick child instead, at which point rather interestingly Anne pipes in and argues with Mary saying that nursing is not really a man's province. So this shows how Anne herself is of the belief that men are not really suited to the job of nursing children, and she thinks that Charles Musgrove could not possibly look after the sick child just because he was a man.

Just as we have talked about gender roles, it is also important for us to talk about the concept of the idea of Victorian masculinity. So Victorian society placed a premium on the idea of chivalry, and men were expected to be gallant and chivalrous and they could never compromise any issue if it was an issue of honour. So this was why Captain Wentworth almost had to marry Louisa Musgrove even if he did not want to, because society in Lyme had seen them courting each other and it would have been an issue of honour if Wentworth refused to marry Louisa.

And there is evidence in the novel that points to Captain Wentworth's almost agreeing to marry Louisa, except for the timely intervention by Captain Benwick who proposes to Louisa. Moving on, Admiral Croft is also another good example of a chivalric Victorian type. So when Anne is walking alone on the roads of Bath, Admiral Croft comes across Anne and he asks her, "can I go anywhere for you or with you?"

So this question that Admiral Croft poses to Anne is very much in keeping with who Admiral Croft is portrayed to be overall in the novel, as a very gallant, chivalrous Victorian Englishman. Of course, no discussion on gender is complete with respect to *Persuasion* if we do not mention the heated exchange between Captain Harville and Anne on who loves longest, man or woman.

So while Captain Harville argues that all books talk about the inconstancy of women's love, Anne refutes this argument of Harville by saying that since all of literature was dominated by men, she cannot and will not allow books to prove anything. So here Austen is perhaps trying to bring to light the imbalance in literature, the gender imbalance in literature, and she is perhaps trying to directly correlate this to the gender inequality in the society of the Victorian period.

Now we shall look at how gender issues play out in the second novel, *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens. A talk of the theme of gender in *A Tale of Two Cities* must begin with the central female character Lucie Manette. So Lucie is referred to as the delicate golden thread that binds the family together at various points in the novel, and thus she is shown as always in need of protection, be it from Carton, Darnay or even her own father Alexandre Manette.

So she is the ideal Victorian type. She is meek, gentle, angelic and almost self-effacing, and this is quite unlike the female characters that we encounter in Austen's novel *Persuasion*. So Lucie Manette is also the redeemer of many of the male characters in the novel. She nurses her father back to health. She gives Carton a new lease of life and promises to be on his side at all times.

And she also waits patiently for Darnay to come out of prison and be freed, all the while trying her best to maintain her calm and composure and run the family. So she is thus the very conventional Victorian female figure because she is the angel figure with the power of grating redemption to people around her, especially men around her.

Although, she is the thread that is central to the family, what is interesting here and perhaps unsettling is that she is almost invisible in terms of the manifestation of, or development of her character in the plot of the story. So as discussed in one of the earlier videos on narrative

points of view, although we get to have an insider's view of Sydney Carton, Cruncher or even Darnay's thoughts and feelings, we get to know very little of what actually goes on in Lucie Manette's mind.

We get to know very little of what her consciousness is all about. So here again, her role as the self-effacing, unobtrusive, ideal Victorian woman comes into play. This is also very interesting in that the novel is actually not set in Victorian times, but is set about three decades earlier. So the question that one can reflect upon here is perhaps the possible motives behind Dickens creating a Victorian female in a novel that is actually set in Pre-Victorian times.

Moving on, the character of Madame Defarge is very interesting here. She is another important female character in the novel, and we see that she sort of acts as a foil to Lucie Manette. She is fierce, authoritative and vengeful and she stops nothing to fulfill her objective. She is in fact referred to as the tigress at different points of the novel. So she has great control over her husband, and in fact she guides him and pulls him out of periods of doubt and lack of faith in the success of the French revolution.

One other fierce female character is Miss Pross. She is Lucie's chaperone, and she is fiercely protective of Lucie and is presented as the primary contender of Madame Defarge. It is interesting that Lucie is still under the protection of someone who unhesitatingly puts her life at stake in order to protect her. And of course there are class dynamics at play here which also are very important, but what is to be noted in terms of gender is that Dickens highlights Miss Pross's femininity when he characterizes her quality of selfless service without jealousy as a trait found only in women, especially women of the class that Miss Pross belongs to.

The chivalric masculinity of Carton, Darnay, and Manette, and even Lorry when it comes to Lucie is quite interesting. Again, all of these men in Lucie's life make it a point to try and protect Lucie from danger. Lorry dissuades Stryver from pestering Lucie, Carton gives up his life for a life Lucie loves, for Charles Darnay, and Manette does everything in his capacity to free Darnay from the prison in France. So this shows how even in *A Tale of Two Cities* the idea of chivalric masculinity comes into play.

Finally, we must also talk about the incident of sexual assault against the girl, against Madame Defarge's sister, by the Marquis Evremonde. Just because the Marquis fancied her and had the power to get what he wanted by way of his class status, he could violate this woman from the lower class who had no power whatsoever against him. But in addition to being an issue of class, this also becomes a pressing issues of gender.

So this girl Madame Defarge's sister, she stands as a symbol for many other woman in the Victorian period who were being subjected to similar sufferings by the upper class, all the while being situated in a very hostile, very masculine, very aggressive world. So the twin brothers brutally assault the woman who happens to be Madame Defarge's sister. And we can actually say that perhaps the reason behind Madame Defarge's lust for revenge, her fierceness and perhaps her unwomanliness is a direct result of her sister being wronged.

Now we shall move on to the aspect of gender in *A Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. So in connection to this novella, what strikes the reader immediately is the fact that there is a prominent lack of female characters in the novella. The only existing female characters are the maid who recounts her experience of Sir Danvers' death, and a few servants of Dr. Jekyll. These are the only female characters that we come across in this novel. And they are all somehow characterized as being very emotional, very hysterical, and romantically given, and they are somehow dismissed and are considered irrelevant to the major part of the story.

So why Stevenson chose to exclude women out of his novella is something that is often debated upon, and no one has been able to place a finger on the precise reason, but perhaps bringing in women who would have the power of redeeming men in the story and bringing in a female character who would act as a moral bedrock would have unnecessarily complicated the plot of the novella. And this is perhaps why Stevenson chose not to have female characters in his novel at all.

Moving on, one might have come across the most prominent binary in western thinking, the binary of nature versus culture. Often in the 19th century, women were thought to represent the nature part of this binary that I am referring to, that is, women were thought of as being wild, uncontrollable and emotional, while men were considered to embody the culture part of the binary.

They were considered to be rational, logical, controlled, and very civilized. Clearly, the maid who witnesses Carew's death and faints, the cook who begins to sob outside Jekyll's laboratory and many other instances in the novel where women are described to be hysterical and emotional show how this conventional binary of nature and culture is incorporated into this novel by Stevenson.

So the women are emotional and hysterical, while the men such as Utterson, Enfield, Lanyon and even Dr. Jekyll are, at least on the outside, portrayed as cold, calculating and very logical men. More interestingly, Jekyll and Hyde themselves represent opposing masculinities in a way. So Hyde exhibits certain characteristics that are commonly attributed to women. He is wild, he cannot control his impulses, and he lacks his steely morality that an upper class Victorian English man would have had.

So he is considered somehow to be less of a man, primarily because of these wild tendencies of his, which can be correlated to the nature part of the binary that we just discussed. Noticeably, there is no idea of a chivalric masculinity making an appearance in this novel, and this perhaps embodies the overall mood of the novel which is very dark.

Also because this novel was written towards the end of the 19th century, we can see a clear shift in the kind of themes explored in this novel as opposed to the previous novels that we have read. One more important thing to note is that the streets of Soho where most of the events in this novella happen. Soho was not an upper class neighborhood at all, but as we know, the idea of chivalry was a very upper class concept, and there are class dynamics to it which means that chivalry does not really have a place in a neighborhood ill repute such as Soho.

To conclude, this novella is, as we all know, this novella is something that focuses on internal human struggle, but is this internal human struggle something that is male specific? Is there a possibility of conceiving a woman undergoing this same inner conflict? A woman with the dual personality. Would she have been received as well as Jekyll and Hyde did by the late Victorians. So these are some questions you can all perhaps think about as we end this discussion on gender in the three novels that we have read so far. Now Swati will talk about the aspect of history in these three novels.

I will be talking about historical events in relation to these three novels. To begin with, *Persuasion*, like Austen's other works, is filled with descriptions of the social life of the people in late 18th century England. In *Persuasion*, there are not many direct references to historical events, but the economic and political climate of the time is reflected in the events of the story. *Persuasion* is set in the early 1800s against the historical background of the Napoleonic Wars.

The story begins in the summer of 1814, which is around the same time that a decade long conflict between England and France had ceased, and an era of peace had begun. It is at this point that the narrative of *Persuasion* begins, and we see that officers from the Navy have returned to England, and are looking for homes to settle in and wives to settle with before they might have to prepare for another war.

The narrative ends around 1815, when there is once again a threat of war. This coming war is mentioned in the last chapter of the book after Anne and Captain Wentworth have become engaged. This mention of the war serves to indicate the impact of the war and the naval profession on families, on marriage, and on domesticity.

There are no mentions of war in the novel, but there is an air of change, especially in relation to the position of the aristocratic class as well as the professional classes, and this reflects the impact of war on the public. *Persuasion* is also set in the time that follows the French Revolution. However, there is no mention of the revolution or of the situation that followed it.

This could be because the author chose not to write about the revolution because she and her family were possibly affected by it. It can also be seen as a choice made by the author to focus on the private and domestic lives of the characters, especially of the women, and to focus on their preoccupations and aspirations. For the women that Austen wrote about, the main concern was to get married, because that was the only way that they could secure a social and financial standing, so that is what dominates the story.

The Navy plays a huge role in the novel, even though the wars are not mentioned. The Navy is seen as a profession to be respected, and the reverence that the characters in the novel have for the Navy reflects the esteem that the Navy was held in during Austen's time. And this

esteem for the Navy was because Britain was in the middle of wars against both America and France. And so the Navy was seen as a defender of British interests and it represented Britain as a whole.

Next I will talk about *A Tale of Two Cities*. This novel by Dickens is often described as a historical novel, and we see that there is a romantic plot within the historical plot. The romantic plot involves the Darnay-Manette family, and the historical plot is the French Revolution.

Published in 1859, Dickens wrote about the lives of people during the time of the revolution, and he describes the despair and poverty of the common people in France, the grave and suspicious atmosphere in England, as well as the violence and terror of the revolution itself. In order to make the novel historically accurate, Dickens turned to Thomas Carlyle's work, *the French Revolution: A History*.

He borrows heavily from this work in his description of the real life events during the revolution. He uses the revolution to move the plot of the novel, in some sense, and describes real life events like the storming of the Bastille, the reign of terror, and the September Massacres. So although it is not a comprehensive account, it is a compressed account of the revolution, and Dickens chooses to highlight those events that he could use to affect the romantic plot within the novel.

At the time that the novel was set in, England was quite stable compared to France. However, the revolution in France was creating a fear in the British people, especially the higher classes, that the revolutionary spirit in France would spread and threaten their peace. So although the book was written in 1859, Dickens was very effective in using the French Revolution as a background for his story, and his interpretation has strongly influenced British views on national identity and political legitimacy.

Now moving onto *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, Stevenson wrote the novella in the Victorian era which was a time of economic and industrial change as well as scientific discovery in England. As a result of the industrial revolution, there was a class divide and a divide between the poor and wealthy.

There was also a rural-urban divide, where the urban city was seen as a dark and untrustworthy place. Additionally, there was also significant scientific discovery at this point, like the theories put forth by Charles Darwin. In Darwin's works, *The Descent of Man* and *On the Origin of Species*, he contradicted the idea of man being God's creation, and stated that man evolved from a lower species.

This greatly captured the public imagination, and people were now afraid of regressing into something subhuman. And this created a fear of the uncivilized, of the savage. His theories also led to the questioning of long held religious beliefs. The novella tapped into these anxieties and fears of the people regarding science and the limits of scientific experimentation, and what would happen if one went too far like Jekyll did.

The novella also reflects the Victorian obsession with morality, respectability and reputation, and the Victorian fear that men who appeared respectable were harbouring dark, undesirable secrets. So hopefully these details help us understand the characters and the motivations of the authors as well as the impact that the novels had. So this has been a discussion on class,

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