## Twentieth-Century Fiction Prof. Avishek Parui Department of Humanities and Social Science Indian Institute of Technology, Madras

## Lecture - 33 Mrs. Dalloway – Part 4

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There was nobody. Her words faded. So a rocket fades. Its sparks, having grazed their way into the night, surrender to it, dark descends, pours over the outlines of houses and towers; bleak hillsides soften and fall in. But though they are gone, the night is full of them; robbed of colour, blank of windows, they exist more ponderously, give out what the frank daylight fails to transmit — the trouble and suspense of things conglomerated there in the darkness; huddled together in the darkness; reft of the relief which dawn brings when, washing the walls white and grey, spotting each window-pane, lifting the mist from the fields, showing the red-brown cows peacefully grazing, all is once more decked out to the eye; exists again. I am alone; I am alone! she cried, by the fountain in Regent's Park (staring at the Indian and his cross), as perhaps at midnight, when all boundaries are lost, the country reverts to its ancient shape, as the Romans saw it, lying cloudy, when they landed, and the hills had no names and rivers wound they knew not where — such was her darkness;



So, hello and welcome to this NPTEL course entitled Twentieth Century Fiction. We were looking at Virginia Woolf's novel Mrs. Dalloway. So, we just carry on from the point that we left last time.

So, we talked about how Rezia's alienations, the wife of Septimus, Rezia's alienation is sort of doubly present, doubly experienced because first of all she is Italian and so she finds herself completely alienated and cut off from London. And secondly obviously, linguistically culturally she finds completely alienated, and she is also with a medically ill-husband, who is essentially alienated as well because of his trauma which he is suffering and experiencing all the time, which makes him, which makes it impossible for him to connect to the rhythms of civilian life and that disconnect also spills over into her. So, that makes her doubly alienated.

So, the loneliness of Rezia is something which is not quite talked about as often as it should be in this particular novel, but something that we should pay special attention to. In what way is she alienated? In what ways is she alienated? And how is the alienation

actually more complex than those of Septimus or Mrs. Dalloway? So, we just carry on from this point.

There was nobody this should be on your screen. There was nobody. Her words faded. So, a rocket fades. Its sparks, having grazed their way into the night, surrender to it, dark descends, pours over the outlines of houses and towers; bleak hillsides soften and fall it fall in. But though they are gone, the night is full of them; robbed of colour, blank of windows, they exist more ponderously, give out what the frank daylight fails to transmit. The trouble and suspense of things conglomerated there in the darkness; huddled together in the darkness; reft of the relief which dawn brings when, washing the walls white and grey, spotting each window-pane, lifting the mist air from the fields, showing the red-brown cows peacefully grazing, all is all is once more decked out to the eyes; exists again.

So, what we see in this particular passage is the very interesting juxtaposition of loneliness and normalcy. So, everything looks very normal, but then the whole idea of the rocket descending, and fading away is important because we see the use of military metaphors to describe the crisis of communication in his novel, which obviously, goes to show how the war pervades the post-war London life and also how war pervades the language of post-war London.

So, every banal description or every domestic description, every commonplace description is peppered with military metaphors, so the rocket comes in as a metaphor over here, rockets are some something which comes, creates a lot of spark and then fades away. So, in the same way words fade away, communication fades away.

So, there is no, the complete crisis of communication is seen as a bit of collapse over here. And that collapse is very carefully juxtaposed to the seemingly ok, the seemingly functional signifiers like the cow grazing, everything just moving on you know the cows peacefully grazing, you know the windowpanes lifting up in the morning. So, all these things which are seemingly functional actually makes a dysfunctionality more accentuated, right. So, it is not a complete dysfunctionality. The dysfunctionality is surrounded by these signifiers of functionality which make it even more dark even more stark as a contrast.

I am alone; I am alone, she cried, by the fountain in Regent's Park staring at the Indian and his cross, and perhaps at midnight, when all boundaries are lost, the country reverts to its ancient shape as the Romans saw it, lying cloudy, when they landed, and the hills had no names and rivers wound they knew not where, such was her darkness.

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when suddenly, as if a shelf were shot forth and she stood on it, she said how she was his wife, married years ago in Milan, his wife, and would never, never tell that he was mad! Turning, the shelf fell; down, down she dropped. For he was gone, she thought — gone, as he threatened, to kill himself — to throw himself under a cart! But no; there he was; still sitting alone on the seat, in his shabby overcoat, his legs crossed, staring, talking aloud.

Men must not cut down trees. There is a God. (He noted such revelations on the backs of envelopes.) Change the world. No one kills from hatred. Make it known (he wrote it down). He waited. He listened. A sparrow perched on the railing opposite chirped Septimus, Septimus, four or five times over and went on, drawing its notes out, to sing freshly and piereingly in Greek words how there is no crime and, joined by another sparrow, they sang in voices prolonged and piereing in Greek words, from trees in the meadow of life beyond a river where the dead walk, how there



It is interesting how the whole idea of looking at England, at the time when the Romans came in is something which we found even in Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness which we did in this course. So, the whole idea of taking London back to a time before its imperial glory, before its modernity and seeing as a barbaric place of darkness when the Romans discovered and you know brought quote unquote "civilization" to it.

It is something which is obviously, it does various things, but first of all it shows us, it reflects that you know every civilization has been constructed at some points historically, every civilization comes from an era of darkness so to speak, right. Almost the whole idea of darkness is very politically motivated, it is very politically contingent. I mean who defines what darkness is, who defines if something is dark or not, right. So, these questions are laid bare before us.

So, today London is obviously, blossoming as an imperial city, but now we are also taken back to a time where you know in the historically London was a place which was discovered by another set of imperialists, the Romans at that point of time, right. And it

almost has a mystic prehistoric quality about that description which is something which we find even in Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad, right.

Now, interestingly that darkness, that impregnable darkness, that inscrutable darkness is something which is compared to her darkness, right. So, you know it is like everything is so mysterious, everything does not have to any light in it. There is no rationale, there is no reason behind the darkness which makes it even more inscrutable, and impregnable, as a condition, as a cognitive condition, right. So, such was her darkness.

So, you can see how Rezia's existential darkness has been compared to the quote unquote prehistoric darkness of London, the pre-imperial prehistoric darkness of London where no western light of civilization had arrived, right. So, the whole idea of the western light of course is politically motivated and culturally constructed and consumed. So, the whole idea of western civilization is seen as turned more synonymous to civilization per say, right. So, that lack of civilization, that pre-civilization London is something which is compared to her darkness at this point of time.

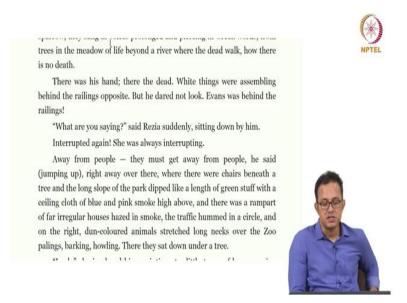
Such was her darkness; when suddenly, as if a shelf were shot forth and she stood on it, she said how she was his wife, married years ago in Milan, his wife, and would never, never tell that he was mad. Turning, the shelf fell; down, down she dropped. For he was gone, she thought – gone, as he threatened, to kill himself - to throw himself under a cart. But no; there he was; still sitting alone on the seat, in his shabby overcoat, his legs crossed, staring, talking aloud, right.

So, this whole idea of this madman talking aloud in the busy metropolis becomes a very graphic symbol a very graphic image of PTSD or the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder experienced by the war veteran who comes back from the war, but he is unable to connect himself to any level to the metropolis. So, he keeps talking to himself because he is the only person who understands himself, who understands his condition and he ends up being a very un-understood man, a very misunderstood man, an unaccommodated man. And his lack of accommodation, this alienation is something which is physical of course, but also it is quite the cultural and existential, he cannot connect to anything which was going around him.

So, the post-war London rhythms do not touch him at all, those ripples do not touch him at all. So, he is still transported, he is still fixed in the trauma of the war. He has not, in

other words moved on temporally or spatially or spatiotemporally, he is still fixated to the trauma which is the trench trauma that he has experienced as a war veteran. Now, come back to London post-war, he is unable to move on, he is unable to make connections, he is unable to recognize ah any cultural, functionality that London is exhibiting at this point of time, ok.

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So, and now we have the first reference to Evans in this passage. Now, Evans is someone who is presumably Septimus' friend who had died in the war. Now, Evans is a very important spectral presence in Mrs. Dalloway, right. So, he is someone who is there as some kind of a shadowy ghostly figure. He represents the everyman who died in the war, but also more specifically he also represents the relationship that you know Septimus may have developed during the war.

And there is a lot of war scholarship which tells us how in that very claustrophobic space of the trench, they also develop along with the dread and phobia and the trauma, they also develop this need for mutual intimacy when the soldiers among the soldiers and that intimacy in the trenches, that intimacy in the very close spaces could often spill over, could often extend into erotic intimacy into sexual relationships which are never quite spelled out.

So, in this novel is never quite clear whether Evans and Septimus had a sexual relationship - and maybe they did, but this whole idea of Evans as someone who is

conjured up over and over again by Septimus, and of course, Septimus suffers from what we call survivor's guilt, the fact that he survived the war and Evans did not, all that bring comes together to accentuate the complexity of the relationship. It could be erotic, it could be existential, it is definitely very deeply emotional and that emotionality of the relationship is something which is underlined over and over again.

So, in other words the intimacy that Septimus had with Evans, something which he has lost forever now with the death of Evans, and along with that what is also lost is Septimus's ability to be intimate, Septimus's ability to be understood to be loved to express empathy, right. So, this empathy-less-ness is something which Mrs. Dalloway is entirely all about, no one understands anyone in Mrs. Dalloway, and this lack of understanding, this lack of empathy is something which makes the war in this particular novel such a traumatic novel, right. So, this a novel about trauma, novel about a post-war trauma, London, which looks very functional, which looks full of velocity, vehicles of velocity are there, there are omni buses, trains, there is metros, there is all these things are moving very fast and quickly seemingly speaking.

But beneath all that sheen of violence what we actually get is a very deep-seated trauma, this inability to move on and his inability to move on is something which transfix people, especially Septimus who comes back from the war as a trauma victim, someone who cannot move on, someone who finds this velocity intimidating, someone who finds the velocity alienating, at many levels. And of course, the medical scene makes it more tyrannical the medical scene refuses to see Septimus as anyone who suffers from anything, and we are told repeatedly that Mr. Holmes, that Dr. Holmes and it is interesting how Woolf chooses his name, Dr. Holmes because you know he represents the obvious allusion to this hyper-masculine rationalist self who seems to know everything and deduct everything etcetera.

Now, he seems to say or he decides to say to Septimus so to speak, that nothing is really the matter with him and that is something which is conveyed to Rezia, something which Rezia is almost increasing getting convinced about, right. And this idea that there is nothing is wrong with him, he needs to introspect less, he needs you know be less narcissistic is something which is told to war veterans over and over again. Because empirically speaking, materially speaking, somatically speaking, there is nothing wrong with them there is no bodily injury, but that was the whole point. The trauma was

actually deep seated, the trauma was in the subconscious, and hence we have these visions of dead soldiers which are haunting them all the time, ok.

And so, the whole allusion to Evans is interesting and this should be on your screen. There was his hand; there the dead. White things were assembling behind the railings opposite. But he dared not look. Evans was behind the railings. So, this is a classic PTSD trigger, a post-traumatic stress disorder trigger because what he sees across the rail is the normal people, living people, city people, moving people, but what he sees actually amongst all this living and moving and functional people are dead soldiers, people who died with him, the dead comrades and obviously, that hallucination that image evokes guilt in his mind that image evokes trauma in his mind. But also completely shakes him for any kind of connect to the reality around him.

In other words, Septimus over here he inhabits a different order of reality he inhabits a different order of embodiment which is not in-sync with the normative order of reality around him. The normative order is something else. He lives in different bubble altogether, and the two orders of space time are completely out of sync. Septimus is among other things as someone who is completely out of sync, someone who is completely incompatible with the rhythms, with very compulsive rhythms of a post-war metropolis, ok.

"What are you saying?" said Rezia suddenly, sitting down by him.

Interrupted again. She was always interrupting. And the word interruption is important because as I mentioned already Septimus is what we might describe as someone exhibiting interrupted embodiment. His sense of embodiment, his sense of language, his sense of recognition, his sense of cognition, his sense of physicality, his sense of ego everything has got interrupted and that interruption is obviously very politically produced because you know part of the interruption is also because of lack of understanding. He is not understood by the medical practitioners. He is not understood by the civilians around him, and they all refuse see him as a war hero, there is a sense of shame that he inhabits, he embodies with his trauma and all that comes together, come together to interrupt his embodiment and that is something which we find about Septimus quite pervasively, ok.

Away from people - they must get away from people, he said jumping up. So, he is very very jumpy. He is a pack of, he is a nervous wreck, he is a bunch of nerves. He is always jumpy, he is always edgy, he always wants to get away from people, he is obviously very anti-social now and he finds it difficult almost impossible to socialize with people, to connect to people at any level.

So, away from people - they must get away from people, he said jumping up, right away from over there, where there are chairs beneath a tree and a long slope of the park dipped like a length of green stuff with a ceiling cloth of blue and pink smoke high above, and there was a rampart of far irregular houses hazed in smoke, the traffic hummed in a circle, and on the right dun-coloured animals stretched long necks over the Zoo palings, barking, howling. There they sat down under a tree.

So, again look at the signifiers of seeming functionality - the zoo, the people getting in the houses which are in order, there are cars which are moving, but amidst all this functionality, amidst all this superficiality or functionality, we have this deep-seated dysfunctionality which is inhabited and embodied by Septimus, ok.

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on the right, dun-colbured animals stretched long necks over the Zoo palings, barking, howling. There they sat down under a tree.

"Look," she implored him, pointing at a little troop of boys carrying cricket stumps, and one shuffled, spun round on his heel and shuffled, as if he were acting a clown at the music hall.

"Look," she implored him, for Dr. Holmes had told her to make him notice real things, go to a music hall, play cricket — that was the very game, Dr. Holmes said, a nice out-of-door game, the very game for her husband.

"Look," she repeated.

Look the unseen bade him, the voice which now communicated with him who was the greatest of mankind, Septimus, lately taken from life to death, the Lord who had come to renew society, who lay like a coverlet, a snow blanket smitten only by the sun, for ever unwasted, suffering for ever, the scapegoat, the eternal sufferer, but he did not want it, he moaned,



And then of course, we have this entire effort made by Rezia to make Septimus look at things, right. Look outside of himself because that's what the doctor had told her, make him look outside of himself because he had gone to the doctors. like Holmes and Bradshaw, he suffers some morbid over-introspection. He suffers from morbid

narcissistic and neurotic over introspection. That is something which must be gotten rid of, according to the doctors. He must be seen to, must be asked to look out of himself and this idea of looking out is important because that it presumably will make him more social, right, and that sociality is important for Septimus to reestablish himself as a social person, as a connected person to the rhythms of modern life.

"Look," she implored him, pointing at a little troop of boys carrying cricket stumps, and one shuffled, spun round on his heel and shuffled, as if he were acting a clown at the music hall. So, this is a very interesting image a group of boys are walking with cricket stumps. So, cricket is obviously, a very male imperial sport at this point of time. However, within this cricket team that is being seen over here one of the guys spins around with his heel and shuffles as if he were acting as a clown at the music hall.

So, again look at the very complex masculinity at play. We have a group of boys presumably headed for a cricket match, coming back from a cricket match, they had cricket kit with them and inside that cricket arrangement we have someone acting like a clown which is obviously, undercutting; the entire cricket masculinity that is being presumably presented by this image collectively speaking.

"Look," she implored him, for Dr. Holmes had told her to make him notice real things, to go to the music hall, play cricket, that was a very that was a great game, Dr. Holmes said, a nice out-of-door game, the very game for her husband.

Again, so look at the cricket, the metaphor of cricket is important over here. Cricket is an imperial sport, cricket is a manly sport, cricket is a collective sport, it will give you a team spirit, it will give you manliness, it is obviously an extension of the imperial legacy as all of you would know, it was a classic imperial game and as something which was introduced in the colonies. So, cricket is advocated and prescribed for Septimus over here as a collective manly sport which will reengineer back, him back into the normative order of masculinity, right. So, that is an important metaphor at work.

So, the doctor actually asks him to play cricket because cricket will also be reestablishing, reengineering him into the desirable model of masculinity in the normative order of masculinity which of which he is fallen off from, and so he has become dysfunctional and incompatible with that normative order of masculinity. So, the

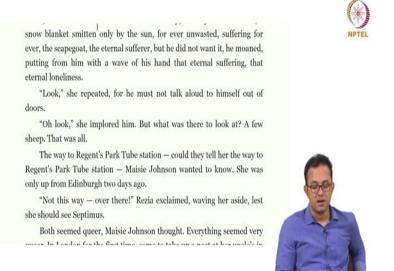
whole idea is to make him normative again, is to make him compatible again, through this whole idea of the cricketing man the cricketing manly man, ok.

"Look," she repeated.

So, he she keeps telling him to look, and obviously the implication is he does not look. He is not concerned with anything outside that of himself which is making him more and more quote unquote "pathological" according to the doctors. The fact that he refuses to see anything outside of himself because he cannot see anything outside of himself because he is so full of trauma, he is so submerged in trauma, he is so ununderstood and so he is so living his trauma reliving reexperiencing his trauma all the time, that it is completely impossible for him to look outside of himself into any objective order of reality, right.

So, he is, in other words he is inhabiting a different order of reality which is obviously, hallucinatory, which is imaginative, which is completely traumatophilic, it is a traumatic landscape of reality that Septimus is inhabiting, right. And he refuses to step out of that reality, step out of that landscape and look at things as they are functioning around him at a very superficial level, ok.

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Look the unseen bade him. So, again Rezia is the unseen, the unheard, the unseen - her loneliness, her loneliness is actually more accentuated as I may have mentioned already.

So, we have different orders of loneliness at crisscross with each other, right. So, look, the unseen bade him, the voice which now communicated with him who was the greatest of mankind, Septimus, lately taken from life to death, the Lord who came to renew society, who lay like a coverlet, a snow blanket smitten only by the sun, forever unwasted, suffering forever, the scapegoat, the eternal sufferer, but did not want to, he moaned, putting from him with a wave of his hand the eternal suffering, that eternal loneliness.

So, again the whole idea of Septimus being the archetypal lonely man is interesting because he represents that lonely man who returns from somewhere and he is never understood subsequently. We saw the figure in Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness. We see that in Romantic poetry as well especially in Coleridge's poem, the Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner, the ancient mariner comes back from a very complex situation, existential situation and he cannot tell the story to anyone else. So, this whole archetype of this ununderstood storyteller is important in literature and Septimus obviously is part of that legacy, ok.

"Look," she repeated, for he must not talk aloud to himself out of doors. So, he must not be seen talking to himself in the public because that would be seen as a marker of insanity, a marker of irrationality, a marker of madness according to Dr. Holmes and Bradshaw.

"Oh look," she implored him. But what was there to look at? A few sheep. That was all. The way to Regent's Park Tube station, could they tell her the way to Regent's Park Tube station - Maisie Johnson wanted to know. She was only up from Edinburg two years ago, two days ago.

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queer. In London for the first time, come to take up a post at her uncle's in Leadenhall Street, and now walking through Regent's Park in the morning, this couple on the chairs gave her quite a turn; the young woman seeming foreign, the man looking queer; so that should she be very old she would still remember and make it jangle again among her memories how she had walked through Regent's Park on a fine summer's morning fifty years ago. For she was only nineteen and had got her way at last, to come to London; and now how queer it was, this couple she had asked the way of, and the girl started and jerked her hand, and the man - he seemed awfully odd; quarrelling, perhaps; parting for ever, perhaps; something was up, she knew; and now all these people (for she returned to the Broad Walk), the stone basins, the prim flowers, the old men and women, invalids most of them in Bath chairs - all seemed, after Edinburgh, so queer. And Maisie Johnson, as she joined that gently trudging, vaguely gazing, breeze-kissed company - squirrels perching and preening, sparrow fountains fluttering for crumbs, does busy with the railines, busy with each other, while the



"Not this way - over there," Rezia exclaimed, waving her aside, lest she should see Septimus.

Both seemed queer, Maisie Johnson thought, everything seems very queer. In London for the first time, come to take up a post at her uncle's in Leadenhall Street, and now walking through Regent's Park in the morning, this couple on the chairs gave her quite a turn; the young woman seeming foreign, the man looking queer, so that she should be very old, she should still remember and make it jangle and again among more memories how she had walked to Regent's Park on a fine summer's morning fifty years ago.

For she was only nineteen and had got her way at last, to come to London; and now how queer it was, this couple she had asked the way of, and the girl started and jerked a hand, and the man he seemed awfully odd; quarrelling, perhaps; parting forever, perhaps something was up, she knew; and now all these people should return to the Broad Walk, the stone basins, the prim flowers, the old men and women, invalids most of them in Bath chairs - all seemed, after Elisa Edinburgh, so queer.

Now, see the word queer comes back almost five times, and it can mean a whole host of things obviously, it means strange, but you can also take up modern homo-erotic overtones. It can be a reference to Septimus covert homosexuality that he displayed towards Evans, that is not spelled out though and the word queer and that kind of

parlance was introduced much later, that took up that currency much later, it was not there at that point of time.

But the whole point is that looking at learning from different perspectives. We have this Scottish woman, Maisie Johnson comes from Edinburgh for her London is an aspirational space, a space for aspiration, a space for possibilities, a space for new openings and now she runs across this very queer couple. The girl looks very foreign now who is, Rezia is Italian, she looks like an outsider to London and a man looks so queer, the man looks so outdated and then she comes across old men and woman invalids most of them in bath corners and bath chairs.

So, again, the whole idea of looking at London as a group of people who are invalid and old that obviously, shows the post-war demography in order. So, this is a London, where there is no able-bodied young men left. The able-bodied young men are either dead, or mad, or bruised to a point beyond recognition. So, all we have are mad young man and disabled old men. Because that is what the war did to the demography of London to a large extent.

So, looking at London this particular episode and Maisie Johnson is a seemingly unimportant character, but what she offers in this episode is a new look at London, a new perspective of London, coming from Scotland, coming from Edinburgh and London obviously to her is a space for aspiration, a space for triumph, a space for new openings, a space for victory. This will open up new things for her. But she finds London quite queer at this point of time. And the word queer is repeated five times over and over again which obviously tells you something, ok.

stone basins, the primit flowers, the old men and women, invalids most of them in Bath chairs — all seemed, after Edinburgh, so queer. And Maisie Johnson, as she joined that gently trudging, vaguely gazing, breeze-kissed company — squirrels perching and preening, sparrow fountains fluttering for crumbs, dogs busy with the railings, busy with each other, while the soft warm air washed over them and lent to the fixed unsurprised gaze with which they received life something whimsical and mollified — Maisie Johnson positively felt she must cry Oh! (for that young man on the seat had given her quite a turn. Something was up, she knew.)

Horror! horror! she wanted to cry. (She had left her people; they had warned her what would happen.)

Why hadn't she stayed at home? she cried, twisting the knob of the iron railing.

That girl, thought Mrs. Dempster (who saved crusts for the squirrels and often ate her lunch in Regent's Park), don't know a thing yet; and





Maisie Johnson positively felt she must cry Oh; for the young man on the seat had given her quite a turn. Something was up, she knew. So, there is something about Septimus over here which is slightly zombie like in quality, there is something undead about him, dead as well as undead.

So, he inhabits that liminal space within deadness and life, and that is something which shakes Maisie Johnson who is coming to London as a naive Scottish woman and she sees London, she had this idea of London as this opening space, as a wonderful space, as an aspirational space and suddenly she finds it completely claustrophobic and almost traumatized, almost started to the point of trauma. And this is where the point that she you know she says: Horror, horror, she wanted to cry. She had left her people; they had warned her what would happen.

So, again the whole idea of coming to London against the warning, despite the warning of her Scottish relatives is something which is horrifying him at this point of time. And the recognition why she had not stayed at home, she cried, twisting the knob of the iron railings. So, this regret of coming to London, why she had not stayed at home is something that she is regretting.

So, again London over here becomes very complex space for aspiration, regret, mourning, and trauma and this very seemingly unimportant character this Scottish young woman, 19-year-old Maisie Johnson come to London with possibilities and aspirations

and getting decimated at so many levels looking at the post-war people is something that we must take into account as a very graphic image of violence, mourning and trauma.

So, I stop at this point today. We will continue with this text in the next lecture.

Thank you for your attention.