

**The Nineteenth-Century Novel**  
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**Lecture – 14**  
**Persuasion, Volume II, Chapters 19-24**

Hello and welcome back to week 4's lecture and today we are looking at the final stages of the novel. And we are in chapters 19 to 24.

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Anne's engagement?

Mrs Smith

"I want you to talk about me to Mr Elliot. ...He can be of essential service to me; and if you would have the goodness, my dear Miss Elliot, to make it an object to yourself, of course it is done."

1) positive friendly character Mrs Smith  
2) aspects of Anne's wish  
Manipulate the relationship of Mr. Elliot & Anne

Let us talk about Anne's engagement, and there is a lot of speculations swirling about in Bath about the man she is going to marry. And many of them think that it is Mr. Elliot, not Captain Wentworth, even though in the previous lecture, we saw that Anne is realizing that Captain Wentworth is in love with her, and she is quite pleased by that realization. But the quite, the opposite is what is happening in the city of Bath, in terms of people's talk with regard to Anne and Mr. Elliot.

And one of persons who embody this kind of understanding is Mrs. Smith. Mrs. Smith, as you remember, is an old friend of Anne Elliot, and she lives or stays in Westgate Buildings and Anne visits her whenever she could to give her company. Mrs. Smith is ailing, and she is badly in need of company. And when Anne goes to visit Mrs. Smith, she asks her, Mrs. Smith asks her about this man, Mr. Elliot. And she says, "I want you to talk about me to Mr. Elliot. He can be of

essential service to me, and if you would have the goodness, my dear Miss Elliot, to make it an object to yourself, of course it is done.”

So something very exciting is happening in this scene between Mrs. Smith and Anne Elliot. Anne is innocently going to Mrs. Smith in order to be very kindly towards this friend of hers who is in difficult circumstances.

So Anne is being very polite and friendly here, and even charitable in the sense that she is offering her company to this friend of hers from the past. So that is what Anne is doing, but Mrs. Smith has an agenda. Mrs. Smith has an agenda to fulfil in this visit that Anne offers. So what is that? And that is about Mr. Elliot, and she says that he can be of essential service to me.

And she thinks that Anne, because she thinks that Anne is going to marry Mr. Elliot, if Anne talks to Mr. Elliot about Mrs. Smith, Mr. Elliot very gallantly, very gentleman-like because he would want to do favours the woman he is going to marry, would very generously, very quickly and promptly help Mrs. Smith in getting this request fulfilled. And that is what Mrs. Smith wants. So she is somehow manipulating, or desires to manipulate, the relationship between Elliot and Anne. So this is somehow surprising to Anne Elliot.

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• “Mr Elliot has sense to understand the value of such a woman. Your peace will not be shipwrecked as mine has been. You are safe in all worldly matters and safe in his character. He will not be led astray; he will not be misled by others to his ruin.”

*naval metaphor*  
*Mrs. Smith's domestic happiness*  
*future happiness of Anne with Elliot*

And Anne tells Mrs. Smith that no such engagement is at all likely. It will never happen between

the two of them. So when Anne convinces Mrs. Smith, after a lot of time, Mrs. Smith realizes that she has made a misjudgement. She has calculated wrongly and come up with this request. And then she offers the history of Mr. Elliot, which she knows from her past, because Mr. Elliot is also connected with her life in the past.

And she says that, “Mr. Elliot has the sense to understand the value of such a woman. Your peace will not be shipwrecked as mine has been. You are safe in all worldly matters, and safe in his character. He will not be led astray. He will not be misled by others to his ruin.” This excerpt is significant because this excerpt tells us that Mrs. Smith will be benefitted, that is the word to use, will be profited if Anne marries Mr. Elliot, and Anne will also be not the loser according to Mrs. Smith.

And she says that Mr. Elliot is a sensible man. He values you. He knows the value of such a woman as you. Your peace will not be shipwrecked. It is a very interesting statement. And look at the metaphor that has been used by Mrs. Smith, it is a naval metaphor. And she says that if you marry him, your happiness, your domestic happiness, will not be destroyed as my domestic happiness had been in my marriage, through my husband.

And she kind of compares her past, Mrs. Smith's domestic happiness, which is no longer present, with the future happiness of Anne. So she employs that naval metaphor which is, which crops up at interesting moments in the story, and she says that you are safe in all worldly matters, in terms of finances, in terms of material goods. You will be secure in the hands of Mr. Elliot.

And you will also be secure in his character, in the sense that he will not be cheated by anybody. He will not be misled by anybody just as my husband was misled by someone. So we will know who that person is quite shortly. So the first half of this excerpt is Mrs. Smith's argument to convince to go ahead with the relationship with Mr. Elliot. She is trying to influence Anne as Lady Russell tried previously.

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Mrs Smith on Mr Elliot

*Sir Walter Elliot family*      *between and you your relationship with Elliot*

- "One hates to be officious, to be giving bad impressions, making mischief. Even the smooth surface of family-union seems worth preserving, though there may be nothing durable beneath."

"real character"  
*for Elliot*

"Oh! He is black at heart, hollow and black!"



And then, Mrs. Smith realizes that no matter what arguments that she puts forth, Anne Elliot is not going to be influence by her words at all in this regard. And as I said a short while ago, Mrs. Smith offers greater details, finer point about Mr. Elliot's relationship with her family in the past. And she says that, "I hate to be officious, I hate to be interfering and to be giving bad impressions, making mischief. Even the smooth surface of family union seems worth preserving, though there may be nothing durable beneath."

Let me first look at the first excerpt there, and I will come to the other points on the slide. And she says here, Mrs. Smith says here, I do not want to give a lot of bad impression about Mr. Elliot. I hate to make mischief. I do not want to create problems between you and your relationship with Elliot.

And here, this you also includes the Elliot family, that is Sir Walter and Elizabeth. So she thinks that if she intervenes, there will be a rupture between the Elliots, Sir Walter, Elizabeth and Anne, and Mr. Elliot. And she does not want to do that. That is what her claim is. And this is the philosophy behind the claim. Even the smooth surface of family union seems worth preserving, though there may be nothing durable beneath.

So there is a lot of metaphor here employed by Mrs. Smith, and that metaphor seems to be drawing on this idea of durable cloth perhaps, because we are talking about surface and depth,

and surface and quality, and she says that the family union needs to be preserved, the smooth surface in a family relationships need to be maintained, even though there is not a lot of content there, nothing of durable material is inside.

So even though it is empty, the relationship is empty, the relationship with Mr. Elliot is empty, it is better to have a relationship with him than not have anything at all, not have any connection at all. So after having said this, ironically, Mrs. Smith goes on to talk about his real character, the real character of Mr. Elliot. And she says that, “Oh! He is black at heart, hollow and black.”

He is empty, completely empty of all human emotions, and his heart is black. So we do get a sudden negative, harsh description of Mr. Elliot. And you might want to compare this with the previous slide where I talked about Mrs. Smith's opinions about his character. She says that you can be safe in his character, and very shortly she says that he is black at heart, hollow and black.

So there is a lot of complexity to the arguments of Mrs. Smith. That is to be understood, plain and clearly. She is very subtle and sophisticated about her opinions regarding Mr. Elliot and his relationship with Anne and the others. And she knows something about his past which will give a different picture of him, a picture that is quite contrasting to his reputation at Bath now.

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Narratives of Resolution

Mrs Smith

Mr Elliot's behaviour towards the Smiths

Mr Elliot's attitude towards the Kellynch family

*Financial issue*

So we do get a very brief flashback about Mr. Elliot in the form of Mrs. Smith reading out his

letters. All those information tells us that Mr. Elliot behaved callously towards the Smiths. He has been the one who is primarily responsible for the financial ruin, financial ruin of the Smiths. And there is a sense that Mr. and Mrs. Smith have innocently followed his example in living a really lavish lifestyle.

And there is also a sense that at that moment, Mr. Elliot was not very rich, but it was the Smiths who were richer than him, and they have taken him under their fold, and everybody had lived a lavish, almost degenerate lifestyle in the past, which leads to financial ruin for the Smiths. It was at this point of time when Elliot was having a degenerate lifestyle that he talks ill about the Kellynch family.

He has declared in the past that he did not want to have any connections with the Elliots of the Kellynch Hall, and that he did not respect the heritage, the house that is going to come to him eventually. So he has been very flippant towards the reputation of the Elliots, then in the past, and Mrs. Smith has evidence of all this negative behaviour of Mr. Elliot from the past. And she shares that information with Anne Elliot. And Anne is shocked to say the least, and this kind of gives her a new perspective on Mr. Elliot.

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She says that he has neglected those he led into ruin. He has neglected Mrs. and Mr. Smith, whom he had led into financial bankruptcy. And we also later come to know that Mr. Smith dies

quite soon. And in his tragic loss, we do not get to see Mr. Elliot offer some kind of support or sympathy to Mr. Smith's widow. And Mrs. Smith also offers this important information that he held the honour of the Elliot family as cheap as dirt.

He did not respect the Kellynch family at all. So when she is talking about Mr. Elliot, his character, she is also contrasting that or juxtaposing that opinion with Mr. Elliot's opinion about the Kellynch family. So while there is a lot of fact behind Mrs. Smith's narrative, we also need to realize that Mrs. Smith is important in two respects. One, she is helpful in removing Mr. Elliot as a potential suitor to Anne Elliot.

She is the one who does that job. So she plays a catalytic role I would say. Mrs. Smith is the catalyst that removes Mr. Elliot from the running for the job or the position of Anne Elliot's husband. So in that regard, Mrs. Smith plays a narrative function here. Austen wants the readers to know that even if there is no Captain Wentworth, Mr. Elliot is not a suitable man to be married to her heroine, Anne Elliot.

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The slide is titled "Mr Elliot's letter" and contains the following text: "my first visit to Kellynch will be with a surveyor, to tell me how to bring it with best advantage to the hammer. The baronet, nevertheless, is not unlikely to marry again; he is quite fool enough. If he does, however, they will leave me in peace, which may be a decent equivalent for the reversion."

Handwritten annotations in red ink include:

- A box around the word "Anne" in the text, with an arrow pointing to it from the word "value" written next to it.
- The words "Kellynch Hall" written above "Kellynch".
- The words "Surveyor's value" written below "surveyor" and "value" written below "value".
- A list of points: "1) Evidence", "2) Pro Elliot X Anne", and "3) Hypocrisy".

A woman with glasses and a plaid shirt is visible in the bottom right corner of the slide, appearing to be presenting.

Mrs. Smith offers Mr. Elliot's letter as evidence to prove this point that he is really the scoundrel that she makes him out to be. And this is an excerpt from Mr. Elliot's letter. "My first visit to Kellynch will be with a surveyor, to tell me how to bring it with best advantage to the hammer. The baronet, nevertheless, is not unlikely to marry again; he is quite fool enough. If he does,

however, they will leave me in peace, which may be a decent equivalent for the reversion.”

So we can clearly see here that Mr. Elliot does not care too much about Kellynch Hall. Kellynch Hall is that big family estate that is passed down from one Elliot to another, and it has a lot of symbolic value. In this excerpt, Mr. Elliot does not value it at all, but we know that Anne values it.

Here, in contrast, we get Mr. Elliot talking really disrespectfully about that house, and he says that if I get that house, my first job would be to sell it. I would bring it to the hammer, which means I would sell it. And he says that or, if the baronet who is a fool gets married again, then I would be saved the trouble of dealing with the house, because if the baronet marries and has a son, the house will pass on to that son instead of coming to me. So that will sort it.

So this letter is functioning as evidence, tangible evidence against the personality of Mr. Elliot. And number two, it is also proving to the readers that Mr. Elliot is not the right man to get married to Anne. And further, we are shown how hypocritical that Mr. Elliot is.

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Mrs Smith on Mr Elliot

- "Now you are to understand that time had worked a very material change in Mr Elliot's opinions as to the value of a baronetcy. Upon all points of blood and connexion he is a completely altered man. Having long had as much money as he could spend, nothing to wish for on the side of avarice or indulgence, he has been gradually learning to pin his happiness upon the consequence he is heir to."

*family ties = changed man*

Now, Mrs. Smith is also very clever in the sense that she charts a change in Mr. Elliot. She tells Anne that, “Now you are to understand that time had worked a very material change in Mr. Elliot's opinions as to the value of a baronetcy. Upon all points of blood and connection, he is a



completely altered man. Having long had as much money as he could spend, nothing to wish for on the side of avarice or indulgence, he has been gradually learning to pin his happiness upon the consequence he is heir to.”

So far, Mrs. Smith's narrative about Mr. Elliot's past tells us that he is one who does not value the Elliot property, the symbolic value of Kellynch Hall. So that is what Mrs. Smith has communicated to Anne and to the readers about Mr. Elliot. Now, she very subtly points out that Mr. Elliot is a changed man. He is not what he was before, and she says that now he understands the importance of blood and connection, the importance of family ties.

So since he has realized this, he is an altered man, a changed man. And though he is very wealthy, he is keen on having a title that would give a lot of respect in society. So he has had money for so long, and now he wants a lot of dignity associated with the nobility. We do not get a very static character in Mr. Elliot. We get a rounded character who is constantly changing his personality in order to suit the times perhaps, in order to suit his best interest.

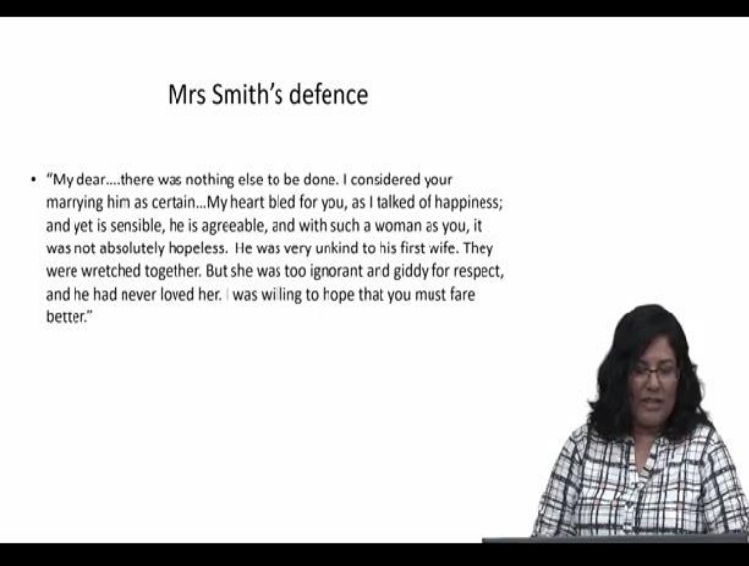
So Mr. Elliot started out as a man who was only keen on enjoying himself and becoming rich. And now, once he has become rich, he now wants the status of a baronet, and he wants to become the heir to Sir Walter Elliot. And therefore, Mrs. Smith says that Anne is safe in his character if she is desirous of marrying him. So this narrative of Mr. Elliot is one of the fascinating character portraits that we get in Austen's *Persuasion*.

So we can also understand that his courting of Anne is not utterly born out of selfish reasons, he could be genuinely in love with her. And we can also understand that he can easily marry Elizabeth Elliot if he had wanted. Elizabeth is keen on marrying him too. So even if he marries Elizabeth Elliot, he will still get the house. So his choice of Anne tells us that this is out of unselfish motives, and we need to acknowledge that too. Which is why I suggest that his character portrait is quite complex in that regard.

It is not a one-dimensional picture that Austen portrays. And Mrs. Smith is also aware of that complexity to his personality. But one thing is very clear, Austen wants to tell the readers that

this man because of his past is not to be trusted with, and he is a man who cannot be trusted because he is partial towards the privileges enjoyed by the aristocracy.

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The slide features a title "Mrs Smith's defence" at the top. Below it is a bullet point with a quote: "My dear...there was nothing else to be done. I considered your marrying him as certain...My heart bled for you, as I talked of happiness; and yet is sensible, he is agreeable, and with such a woman as you, it was not absolutely hopeless. He was very unkind to his first wife. They were wretched together. But she was too ignorant and giddy for respect, and he had never loved her. I was willing to hope that you must fare better." In the bottom right corner of the slide, there is a small video inset showing a woman with dark hair and glasses, wearing a plaid shirt, looking down.

And Anne is also very clever. She catches out Mrs. Smith, especially in this point which is, Mrs. Smith had recommended Mr. Elliot to Anne even after knowing that this man is a terrible hypocrite, that this man has had a dark past, that this man had helped ruin Mrs. Smith's and Mr. Smith's lives. So with that information at hand, how could she recommend Mr. Elliot to Anne? So that is the question. And this is Mrs. Smith's defence.

This is what she says, "My dear. There was nothing else to be done. I considered your marrying him as certain. My heart bled for you, as I talked of happiness, and yet is sensible, he is agreeable, and with such a woman as you, it was not absolutely hopeless. He was very unkind to his first wife. They were wretched together. But she was too ignorant and giddy for respect, and he had never loved her. I was willing to hope that you must fare better."

So these are the set of arguments that Mrs. Smith comes up with in order to protect herself. She says that I was absolutely certain that you are going to marry him. So I just gave you all the positive points about Mr. Elliot. But while I was giving you the positive points, I was also very unhappy. I was bleeding on the inside. And I think we need to take that with a pinch of salt here.

Maybe there is an element of hypocrisy to Mrs. Smith too. And further, she says that his first wife was a giddy, superficial woman. Therefore, it is not very surprising that he did not respect her and that they had a terrible time. But you are a sensible woman. You are a superior woman. And Mrs. Smith says that of course, he has changed quite a lot and therefore, it is not in a far stretch to imagine you being happy with him. So with all these complex set of arguments, Mrs. Smith very cleverly defends herself to Anne Elliot. Thank you for watching. I will continue in

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