

The Nineteenth-Century Novel
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Lecture - 21
Dickens' A Tale of Two Cities Book II: Chapters 1-3

Hello and welcome back to the last section in week 5 lectures. Today, we will be looking closely at chapters 1 to 3 from book II of Dickens' A Tale of Two Cities.

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Tellson's

- This was no passive belief, but an active weapon which they flashed at more convenient places of business. Tellson's (they said) wanted to no elbow room, Tellson's wanted no light, Tellson's wanted no embellishment. Noakes and Co.'s might, or Snooks Brothers' might; but Tellson's, thank Heaven!

The slide features a video inset of Prof. Divya. A. in the bottom right corner, showing her from the chest up, wearing a patterned scarf and glasses, looking towards the left. The slide is framed by a thick black border at the top and bottom.

Book II begins with a solid description of Tellson's Bank. Tellson is an interesting establishment, in fact, it is symbolic of the British Government itself, and all things Britain in an institutional perspective. So a closer description of the eccentric aspects of Tellson is telling in terms of the qualities of British bureaucracy itself. So this narrator's opinions on Tellson's need to be looked at carefully.

“This was no passive belief, but an active weapon which they flashed at more convenient places of business. Tellson's (they said) wanted no elbow room, Tellson's wanted no light, Tellson's wanted no embellishment. Noakes and Co.'s might or Snooks Brothers' might, but Tellson's, thank Heaven!” The point of this narrative is to argue that Tellson's inconvenience is important, in fact, it is essential to its innate quality.

So they compare Tellson's Bank with other businesses such as Noakes and Co. or Snooks Brothers. So, in fact, this argument precludes any suggestion that Tellson should be reformed

or restructured or refurbished or reconstituted in such a way that it becomes convenient for the people who visit this bank. So Tellson is extremely inconvenient to move about, to carry business over, but it should not be changed.

And if you try to connect this symbolically to British bureaucracy, the message is that yes, British bureaucracy is terribly inconvenient. It is not at all comfortable for people to get their, you know, points across or get relief from the system, but it should not be or it would not be changed because that is its ideal character. So that is the message that this narrative is trying to get across and as the third-person narrator very ironically puts this point across.

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The slide features the title "Tellson's" at the top. Below it is a quote: "In this respect, the House was much on par with the Country, which did very often disinherit its sons for suggesting improvements in laws and customs that had long been highly objectionable, but were only the more respectable." The words "the House" and "the Country" are enclosed in red boxes, and a red line connects them. A red underline is also present under the word "more". In the bottom right corner of the slide, there is a video inset of a woman with dark hair and glasses, wearing a patterned scarf, sitting in a chair and speaking.

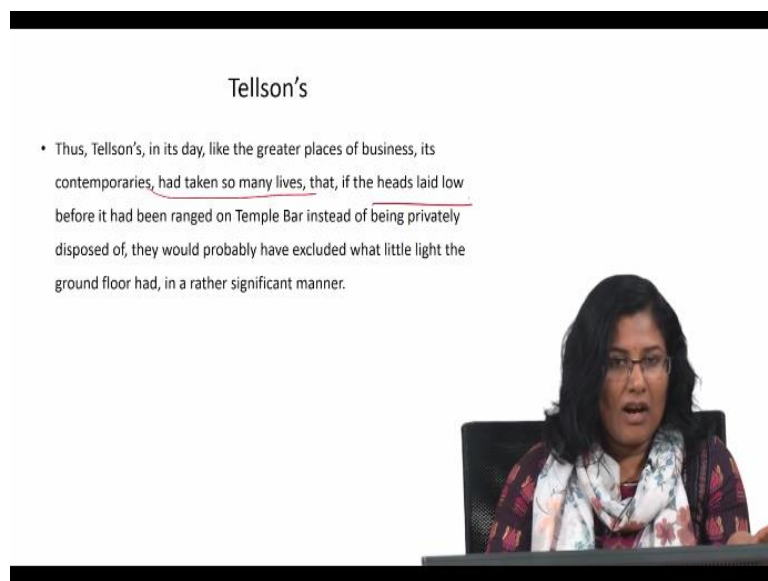
And in fact, the next excerpt that I am going to explain to you will very clearly make this association between Tellson's Bank and British Government, the way Britain runs its country. "In this respect, the House was much on par with the Country, which did very often disinherit its sons for suggesting improvements in laws and customs that had long been highly objectionable, but were only the more respectable."

So the narrator very clearly points out that the Tellson's house, the Tellson's Bank, is akin to the British country, and the country as well as the bank by implication would disinherit, throw people out of its boundaries, out of its institution, if the people wanted any kind of change in its laws and customs, the way it run its business or the way the country was run by the bureaucracy.

So even if some of the laws were highly objectionable, not very convenient for the lifestyle of the people, they ought to be seen as respectable laws and people should not question them. So that is the point that Tellson's Bank and the British country by implication are trying to lay before the public, the people. So Tellson is an important structure, not only in the narrative mechanism of A Tale of Two Cities.

Tellson is endowed with a lot of symbolic, thematic, conceptual, ideological significance because Tellson comes to represent all things Britain, all things bureaucracy, especially from the British side.

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The slide features a woman with dark hair and glasses, wearing a patterned scarf, speaking from a chair. To her left is a white text box with a black border. The text box is titled 'Tellson's' and contains a bullet point with a quote from Charles Dickens's 'A Tale of Two Cities'. The quote is: 'Thus, Tellson's, in its day, like the greater places of business, its contemporaries, had taken so many lives, that, if the heads laid low before it had been ranged on Temple Bar instead of being privately disposed of, they would probably have excluded what little light the ground floor had, in a rather significant manner.'

“Thus, Tellson's in its day, like the greater place of business, its contemporaries, had taken so many lives, that if the heads laid low before it had been ranged on Temple Bar instead of being privately disposed of, they would probably have excluded what little light the ground floor had, in a rather significant manner.”

Okay. The context that we need to understand is that in those days, in late 18th century and in the 19th century, especially in the first half of it, executions were common, and people who committed grave crimes such as treason, had their heads cut off and they were displayed on pikes on the Temple Bar. I will show you what the Temple Bar is in a minute, but you need to understand that heads which were cut off were displayed so that people would, you know, see them and be warned not to commit heinous crimes.

So just as, you know, the British machinery got rid of people in a gruesome manner, Tellson's Bank too in its day had taken so many lives. People who were against its running, people who intervened in its running in awful ways were laid low, their heads were laid low, and in fact the narrator very grimly suggest that if the people's heads which had been cut off on the advice of Tellson's Bank were arranged neatly on the Temple Bar, they would block off the light that would come into the ground floor.

So many people were killed on the behest of Tellson. So that is the point that the narrator wants to get across to the reader. The bottom line is Tellson's Bank can be cruel too; people can be executed for severe crimes as well as for minor crimes in those days, especially in the late 18th century. So that is the point that the narrator wants to communicate to the readers.

And since Tellson's Bank is symbolic of British Government itself, this point is kind of very clearly given in this context.

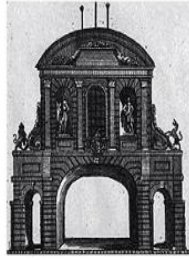
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So this is the Temple Bar. This illustration dates from the 1870s. But this is the gateway to the city of London. So that is what we need to understand. So using this as a gateway, people used to pass into the city of London. So it had a lot of importance, there was a grandeur to this arch, to this gateway. And as I said, the executed people's heads were displayed in the vicinity of this gateway so that the people were suitably terrified of the government.

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Temple Bar



"Tellson's Bank is usually identified as the real-life Child & Co.'s in Fleet Street, which leased rooms above Temple Bar as a storage space for its records (Sanders 35). Temple Bar was "a gate-way ... adjoining the Temple, between Fleet Street and the Strand" (Baedeker 155) erected by the architect Sir Christopher Wren in 1670"



Tellson's Bank is usually identified as the real-life Child and Co.'s in Fleet Street, which leased rooms above the Temple Bar as a storage space for its records. So according to Sanders the critic, Child and Co. is the inspiration for Tellson's Bank in *A Tale of Two Cities*. So he says that Dickens was inspired by the real-life Bank called Child and Co.'s which rented rooms near the Temple Bar, which is why the reference to the cut-off heads being, you know, useful to block off light into the ground floor becomes significant here.

And as I pointed out just now, Temple Bar was a gateway adjoining the temple between Fleet Street and the Strand and it was erected by the architect Sir Christopher Wren in 1670. It is a very important structural facade in that period.

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The Crunchers

Jerry Cruncher

Mrs Cruncher

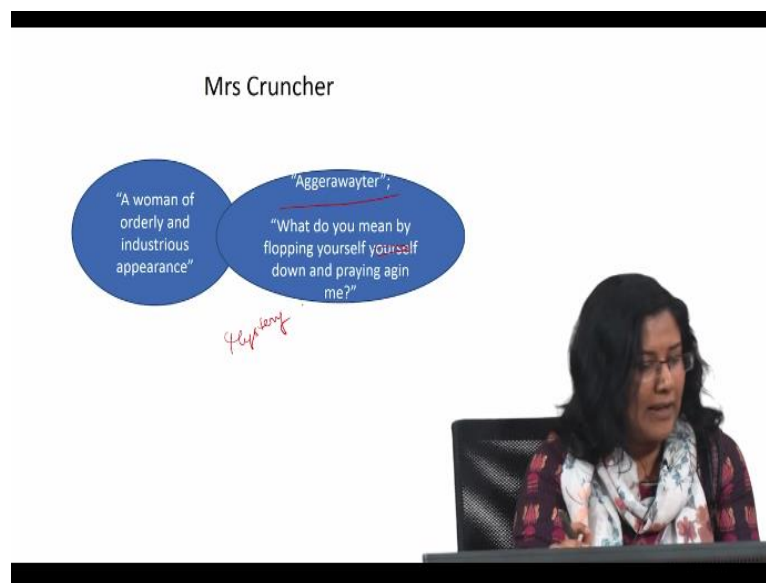
Their Son



Now that we have seen the importance of Tellson's Bank in a symbolic manner, we now move on to the Crunchers. The illustration here shows you Mr. Jerry Cruncher, this is Jerry Cruncher, and this is Jerry's son. The Crunchers are an important family in the novel, it consists of Jerry Cruncher, Mrs. Cruncher and their son. And Jerry and his son are found in their usual posts outside Tellson's Bank.

And Jerry is an odd job man, he is an errand man, he runs errands for Tellson's Bank. And in his absence the son does the father's job. So that is the context for The Crunchers.

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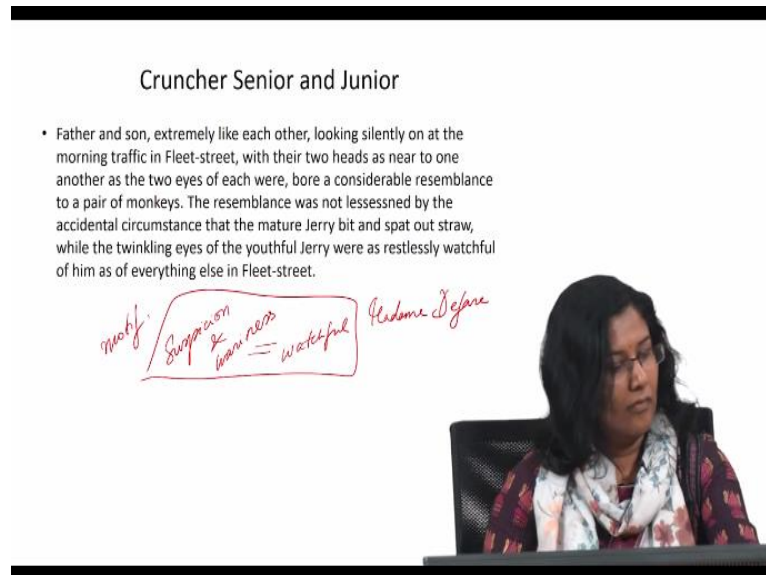


Who is Mrs. Cruncher? She is a woman of orderly and industrious appearance and it is very interesting that we do not get an illustration of Mrs. Cruncher. So far in the several illustrations that I have seen of A Tale of Two Cities, I do not think there is an illustration that depicts Mrs. Cruncher, and she is a much wronged woman. Both Mr. Cruncher and the young Cruncher his son, harass the mother, harass the woman of the household, and she is notoriously called as Aggerawayter by the husband, by Mr. Cruncher, by Jerry Cruncher. And he is always already unhappy with Mrs. Cruncher, and the reason is that he believes that she prays against the man, he thinks that she prays against Jerry Cruncher, and that has a negative impact on his profession. And this is the question that he frequently asks her. What do you mean by flopping yourself down and praying against me?

So as to why he thinks that she is praying against the man, the husband, is something that will be revealed as the novel progresses. So at this point, it is a bit of a mystery as to why the husband is constantly harassing, assaulting, scolding his wife and his chief complaint against

the woman is that she prays against him, and he does not want her to pray at all. And in fact, he puts his own son as a guard in order to prevent his own mother from praying. So flopping here means just, you know, getting on one's knees and praying.

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Cruncher Senior and Junior

- Father and son, extremely like each other, looking silently on at the morning traffic in Fleet-street, with their two heads as near to one another as the two eyes of each were, bore a considerable resemblance to a pair of monkeys. The resemblance was not lessened by the accidental circumstance that the mature Jerry bit and spat out straw, while the twinkling eyes of the youthful Jerry were as restlessly watchful of him as of everything else in Fleet-street.

monkey: Suspicion & watchfulness = watchful Madame Defarge

“Father and son, extremely like each other, looking silently on at the morning traffic in Fleet-Street with their two heads as near to one another as the two eyes of each were, bore a considerable resemblance to a pair of monkeys. The resemblance was not lessened by the accidental circumstance that the mature Jerry bit and spat out straw, while the twinkling eyes of the youthful Jerry were as restlessly watchful of him as of everything else in Fleet-Street.”

So the important aspects of these two characters are, firstly, they are always in front of Tellson’s Bank, and they are always looking silently at the traffic in Fleet-Street. So they are some kind of witnesses, and nothing can escape their eye, that is one thing. And secondly, they are extremely like one another. In fact, the narrator says that they even resemble, both of them resemble a pair of monkeys, it is difficult to tell one monkey from another.

And thirdly, the mature Jerry, that is Jerry the senior, constantly bites and spits out straw and whereas the youthful Jerry, the young Jerry Cruncher is like his father, very restless and always watchful. And this is interesting because we have other characters who are also restlessly watchful and who are they? The first figure that comes to mind is Madame Defarge.

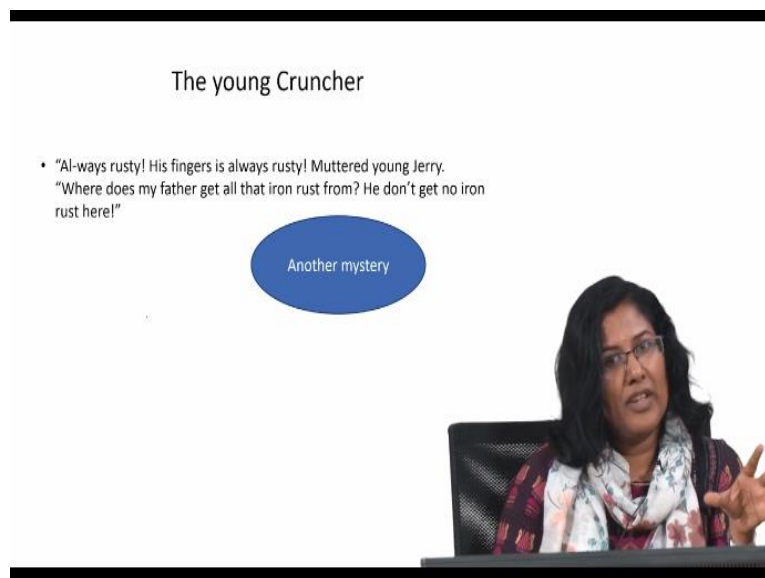
In fact, the phrase that is oft repeated in the early sections of the book about Madame Defarge is that she constantly knitted and did not see anything but the reverse is the truth there. She

knits and she is constantly observant. So nothing can also escape the eyes of Madame Defarge. And in fact the entire novel, if you look closely, is about being extremely watchful of the people around someone.

So everybody is watchful, Madame Defarge, Defarge Jacques and then we have the Crunchers being very wary as well, especially Cruncher senior and junior. We have the junior being very watchful of the senior. The junior spying on the senior, his own father and the junior being very watchful and wary of the mother, his own mother. So eyes are constantly looking at things and people and recording them so that they would come in handy elsewhere at some other point of time.

So that again is another thematic point that we need to keep in mind. There is an air of suspicion and wariness about people. Therefore, they are constantly watchful. So this becomes a kind of a motif in the novel.

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The young Cruncher

- "Al-ways rusty! His fingers is always rusty! Muttered young Jerry.
'Where does my father get all that iron rust from? He don't get no iron rust here!"

Another mystery

The slide features a white background with a black border. The title 'The young Cruncher' is centered at the top. Below it is a bulleted quote. A blue oval with the text 'Another mystery' is positioned below the quote. In the bottom right corner, there is a video inset of a woman with glasses and a patterned scarf, sitting in a black chair and gesturing with her hands.

Now more about the young Cruncher, the young Cruncher as I said is watchful of his own father and he observes that the father's fingers are always rusty. So this is what he says, "al-ways rusty. His fingers is al-ways rusty!" muttered young Jerry. 'Where does my father get all that iron rust from? He don't get no iron rust here.'" So the primary job of the father is to sit on a stool in front of Tellson's Bank and wait to be summoned.

That is his primary job. And the son who is by his side in order to assist him observes that his father's fingers are rusty, and he assumes that the rust comes from obviously iron, and he

wonders where is the iron bars from which his hands are getting rusty, there is no iron bars around. So there is another mystery that is being kind of created in the assumption of young Cruncher, and that mystery will be revealed towards the close of the novel.

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Chapter II; A Sight

- Old Bailey
- "... the Old Bailey was famous as a kind of deadly inn-yard, from which pale travellers set out continually, in cars and coaches, on a violent passage into the other world: traversing some two miles and a half of public street and road, and shaming few good citizens, if any."

Britain & France *evokes = scene* *foreshadowing*

Now let us look at chapter 2 of Book II, it is titled A Sight, and what is the sight that is significant here. The setting for this chapter is Old Bailey. Old Bailey is a kind of a court as well as it has a jail attached to it, and Old Bailey was famous as a kind of deadly inn-yard from which pale travelers set out continually in carts and coaches, on a violent passage into the other world, traversing some two miles and a half of public street and road and shaming few good citizens if any.

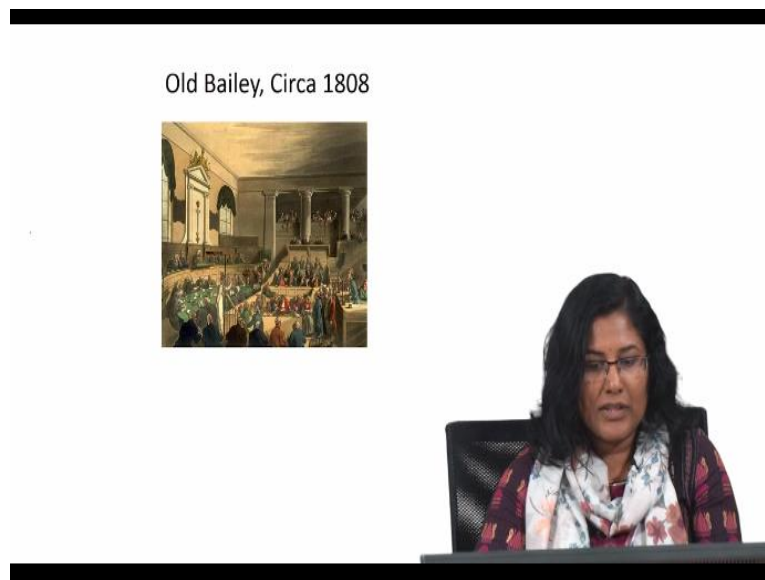
This is a wonderful description of the final passage of some people. And Old Bailey sent out these people to die because Old Bailey condemned all these people who are usually treated as criminals. And the narrator says that once these travelers, once these people came out of Old Bailey, they traveled in coaches and carts and they ended up, you know, die. And on the way to their death in jail by execution, by hanging, they shamed few good citizens if they found any.

This passage is also important because it evokes another kind of scene towards the end of the novel, when French revolution has happened, and during the Reign of Terror, lots of people were condemned by the Republican Court. And these passengers, these travelers traveled in tumbrils towards the scaffold where they were executed, and while they travel some of them also shamed, you know, a few good citizens if there were any.

So this is a kind of a foreshadowing of things to come during the Reign of Terror too. Another very interesting parallel is that this is what happened in Britain and this is what is going to happen in France too. So both the countries are almost mirror images of one another and this kind of duality is what is indicated at the beginning of A Tale of Two Cities which began as it was the best of times, it was the worst of times.

So that kind of extremes are, you know, proved here in the way incidents happen, in the way events unfolded. And this is especially important because of the kind of traveling that pale travelers, travelers who were condemned to die, moved out of courts and, you know, travelled towards the scaffold where they were guillotined in front and here they were executed in Britain.

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And here I have an illustration of a trial scene in Old Bailey, and the date for that is early 19th century there. And we are going to see the trial of one very important character called Charles Darnay. He is one of the heroes of this book and he will be on trial because he is accused of being a spy against the British Government.

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Entertainment

- "For, people then paid to see the play at the Old Bailey, just as they paid to see the play in Bedlam—only the former entertainment was much the dearer."

Handwritten notes in red:
- *drama* (circled)
- *more expensive*
- *lunatic asylum*



“For people then paid to see the play at the Old Bailey just as they paid to see the play in Bedlam. Only the former entertainment was much the dearer.” So the narrator says that this trial scene and scenes such as these are actually entertainments for people. In fact, they went there to enjoy themselves. In fact, they even used to pay to see the play. In fact, the trial became a play, a drama, a theatrical entertainment, and the people paid to get in to enjoy all these dramatic entertainments.

And the narrator says that the Old Bailey is as entertaining as the events in the Bedlam, the lunatic asylum, and in fact after comparing the two Old Bailey and Bedlam, the narrator says that Old Bailey was more expensive, much the dearer, more expensive than the scenes that people paid to watch in Bedlam, the lunatic asylum. So what is the thematic point that such comparisons, you know, offer to the reader?

The point that the narrator wants to communicate is that people forgot about moralities, in fact all they wanted out of all these structures of government was entertainment and enjoyment, and they forgot about the rights and wrongs of an issue. So that is what is sort of communicated in such comparison, such extreme comparisons that the narrator was aiming at here. And the other question that needs to be asked is that why are they seeking such entertainments, why are they not worried about the rights and wrongs of an issue?

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Charles Darnay

- "Had he stood in peril of a less horrible sentence—had there been a chance of any one of its savage details being spared—by just so much would he have lost in his fascination. The form that was to be doomed to be so shamefully mangled, was the sight; the immortal creature that was to be so butchered and torn asunder, yielded the sensation. Whatever gloss the various spectators put upon the interest, according to their several arts and powers of self-deceit, the interest was, at the root of it, Ogreish."

Ogreish = monsters, cruel
crowd = ogres .i
Ward = mob



Now let us come to Charles Darnay. Charles Darnay as I said is a man who is accused by the British Government, by a man called John Barsad to be particular, of spying against the British Government for the French Government. So this is the context for Charles Darnay. And there is a big crowd in Old Bailey, and everybody is fascinated by this man because he is very handsome, and this handsome man is going to die a gruesome death and that is the fascination for the people.

If the death was less gruesome, they would not be this fascinated. So that is the context. The narrator says that, "Had he stood in peril of a less horrible sentence, had there been a chance of any one of its savage details being spared, by so much would he have lost in his fascination. The form that was to be doomed to be so shamefully mangled was the sight. The immortal creature that was to be so butchered and torn asunder yielded the sensation. Whatever gloss the various spectators put upon the interest according to the several arts and powers of self-deceit, the interest was at the root of it, Ogreish."

It is a very interesting paragraph and easily lends to a lot of close reading, and the first point is quite clear, the point that I suggested just now that the people are extremely fascinated, because his death is going to be savage, it is going to be horrible and he is going to be hung, drawn and quartered. His hands and legs are going to be chopped off and his intestines are going to be taken out while he is still alive. So all these horrible, you know, acts are going to be committed on his body and quite soon, and that is the fascination.

The narrator says that if there is one less of savagery, you know, that would be perpetrated on him, the fascination would be reduced. So the greater the savagery, the more the fascination. So that is very clear, and the second point is also that he is a beautiful sight. He is a wonderful sight to look at. And the fact that it is this handsome man who is going to be butchered is more attractive to the audience.

And the narrator says that whatever the motives of the audience, the crowd to be there in Old Bailey, the basic, you know, interest is Ogreish, the people are like ogres. And ogres are monsters, right, that is the meaning of ogres. And ogres are cruel, ogres are, you know, extremely selfish and they kind of commit lots of monstrous acts, they kill people. So here Dickens is trying to compare the crowd to ogres, and that is very interesting.

Dickens is always very wary of the mob. That is what he calls the public, the mob. The crowd cannot be trusted. The crowd can be easily swayed. The crowd does not have a reasonable, you know, sense of mind. The crowd is always, you know, selfish and the crowd always wants entertainment and the crowd can be easily changeable. So here the crowded Old Bailey is Ogreish according to the third person narrator here.

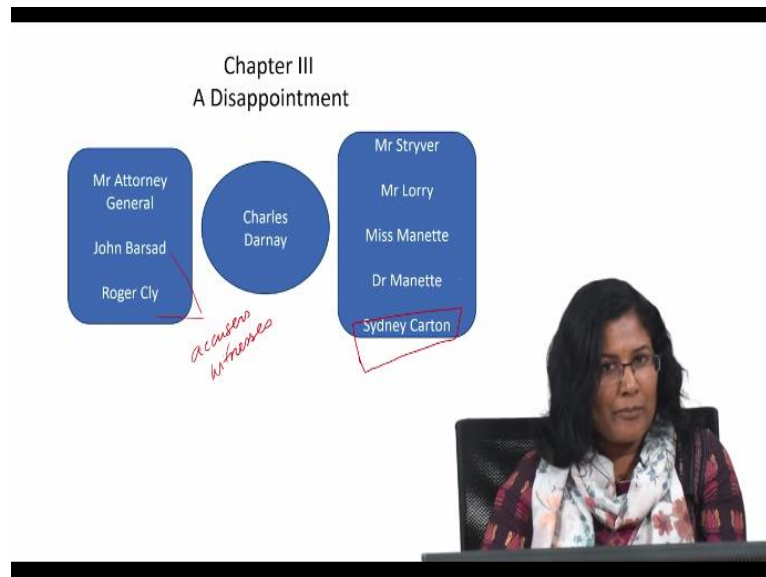
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So this is Darnay's crime. Darnay is supposed to have committed the grave crime of treason against the British crown, and he is thought of as a French spy who has offered information about British armies which are going to, you know, attack the French, which are going to attack the American soldiers during the war against Britain. So this is the context for Darnay's crime and that is why he has been called for trial at Old Bailey.

And John Barsad and his friend are the ones who are accusing him of being a French spy. Charles Darnay is a Frenchman by origin, by descent, but he is living in Britain. He is a tutor. He teaches in Britain.

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Chapter 3, A disappointment, and I have put on the slides two sets of people, one against Charles Darnay, the others are for Charles Danny. The first list here Mr. Attorney General, John Barsad, Roger Cly, want to see Charles Darnay dead in a gruesome manner. Barsad and Roger Cly are the accusers. They are the witnesses who claimed that Charles Darnay is a French spy, and the Attorney General is the one who is arguing for the government to put Charles Darnay to death.

And Mr. Stryver is Charles Darnay's advocate here, the solicitor here. Mr. Lorry of course is the banker. We have met him before. Miss Manette is the daughter of Dr. Manette and we have one new character called Sydney Carton, more of him shortly. To just jog your memory, if you remember in the previous lecture, I told you that Miss Manette went to France and with the assistance of Mr. Lorry managed to recover Dr. Manette from an attic in the wine shop in Paris from Saint Antoine, a place in Paris.

And they brought Dr. Manette back to Britain. So that is the context for Miss Manette and Dr. Manette and this is the scene that is set up in this chapter called A Disappointment. Thank

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