

The Nineteenth Century Novel
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Lecture - 29
Dickens' A Tale of Two Cities Book II: Chapters 15-18

Hello and welcome to Week 7's lectures. In today's session, we will be looking at the closing ideas of chapter 15, and then move on to the idea of knitting that is communicated so powerfully and ideologically by Madame Defarge. So those are the two concepts with which we begin today's session.

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The tribunal *'rough tribunal'*

"To be registered, as doomed to destruction"
"The château, and all the race."
Marquis's

"if madame my wife undertook to keep the register in her memory alone, she would not lose a word of it—not a syllable of it. Knitted, in her own stitches and her own symbols, it will always be as plain to her as the sun."
Knitting:

Now if you remember chapter 15, we have the mender of the roads offering a kind of testimony in front of a rough tribunal. That's how the third-person narrator calls Defarge and his three companions who are named as Jacques, and the mender of the roads is giving them a narrative of how this man, Gaspard is arrested, imprisoned and finally executed.

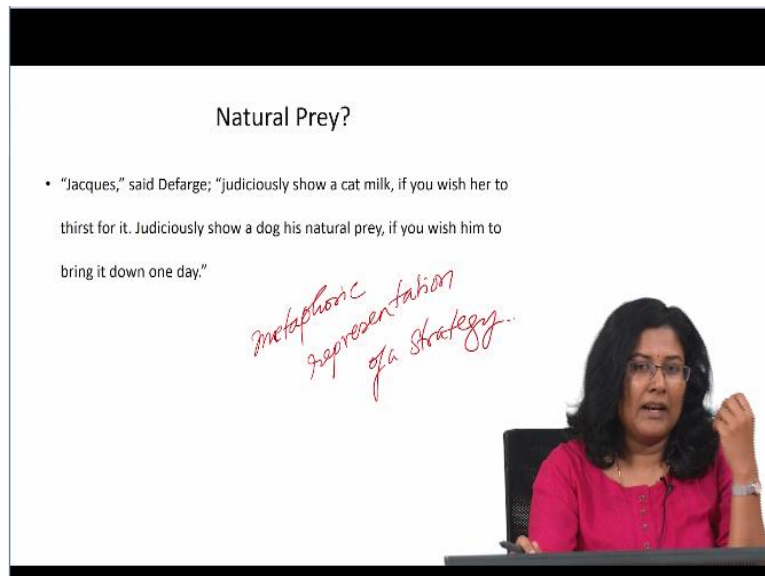
And once the rough tribunal hears this testimony, we are given to understand that the Marquis Evermonde who is behind the death of Gaspard is registered to be condemned to death when the regime changes in France. And that would change with the arrival of the French Revolution. So Marquis Evermonde is registered to be doomed to destruction, and not only the Marquis, because the Marquis' descendants would be condemned too, the entire chateau.

The people associated with the chateau in terms of the people who have served in the nobility and all the men who belonged to the race of the Marquis would be condemned by the tribunal. And their names are registered via knitting by Madame Defarge. And one of the men asks if Madame Defarge would remember the names of everybody who is condemned to be punished, and Mr. Defarge kind of defends his wife.

He says, "If madame my wife undertook to keep the register in her memory alone, she would not lose a word of it; not a syllable of, it in fact. Knitted, in her own stitches and her own symbols, it will always be as plain to her as the sun." So he says that, not even a single word a single syllable will be forgotten by my wife, even if she decides to retain all the names in her memory alone. But now that she is stitching it, then it would always be there plain to her as the sun.

So nobody can destroy the names that are knitted, stitched into her clothing material, and that clothing would not be any kind of ordinary outfit that could be worn, but in fact a shrouds, the cloth that would cover the dead bodies. So it is a very eerie, bizarre and macabre way of remembering people who will be executed when the government changes.

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Natural Prey?

- "Jacques," said Defarge; "judiciously show a cat milk, if you wish her to thirst for it. Judiciously show a dog his natural prey, if you wish him to bring it down one day."

metaphoric representation of a strategy.

The slide is presented in a video frame with a woman in a pink shirt in the bottom right corner.

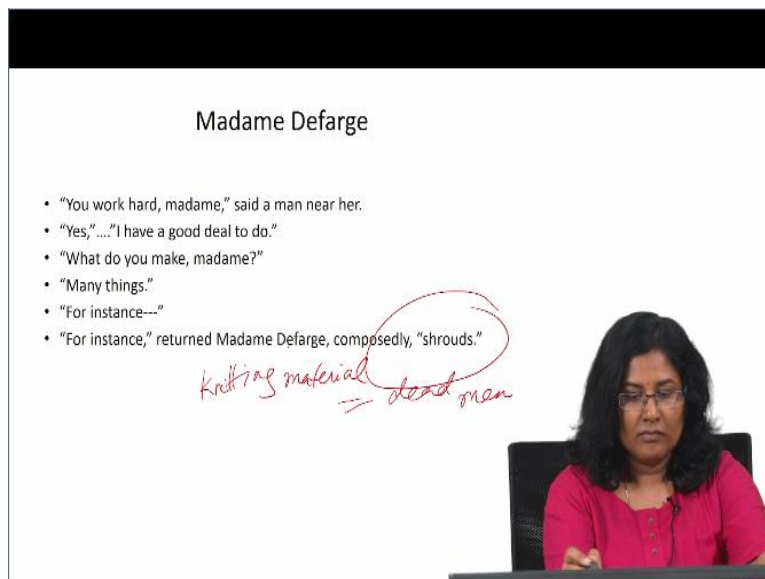
Now this mender of the roads would be brought by Defarge and his wife to Versailles in order for the mender of the roads to witness the procession of the King and the Queen and all the

nobility associated with them. And Jacques, one of the three men asks Defarge, would it be judicious to show him this procession, would it be proper for him to take a look at the aristocrats, maybe he would be dazzled by the display and not become a member of the group that wants to pull the aristocracy down.

So that is the reasonable worry of one of the Jacques. And then Defarge responds by saying Jacques, “Judiciously show a cat milk if you wish her to thirst for it. Judiciously show a dog his natural prey, if you wish him to bring it down one day.” So what Defarge here very metaphorically and sarcastically tells his companion is this, if you want a cat to long for milk, you got to display that milk to the cat, if you want a dog to hunt for his natural prey, his victims, you would have to show the dog its victims.

Therefore, if I want this mender of the roads to hunt down the aristocrats, I would have to show him the nobility first, so he has to thirst for his natural prey, so to speak. So it is a metaphoric representation of a strategy that we have here, and that strategy is to give the mender of the roads a good look at the people he is going to help bring down.

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Madame Defarge

- “You work hard, madame,” said a man near her.
- “Yes,”...“I have a good deal to do.”
- “What do you make, madame?”
- “Many things.”
- “For instance---”
- “For instance,” returned Madame Defarge, composedly, “shrouds.”

knitting material --- dead men

And when they go to Versailles, Madame Defarge, the mender of the roads and Defarge, and look at the procession of the aristocrats, one of the members of the crowd asks Madame, “You work hard,” and she says “Yes, have a good deal to do, I have a lot of work to do.” “What do you

make madame?” “Many things.” For example; and she says “I make shrouds.” So she says that I am knitting material that would cover the bodies of dead men. So she is indirectly pointing out to the man that she is condemning a set of people through her knitting.

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The Defarges and their companion

- “You are the fellow we want,” Defarge, in his ear; “you make these fools believe that it will last for ever. Then, they are the more insolent, and it is the nearer ended.”
- “And if you were shown a flock of birds, unable to fly, and were set upon them to strip them of their feathers for your own advantage, you would set upon the birds of the finest feathers; would you not?”

Handwritten annotations: aristocrats: (circled), Thought experiment, not a rhetorical question

And now, when the mender of the roads looks at this procession of the nobility, he is completely dazzled by the glamour of the aristocrats in terms of the luxury that they display, the clothing, the carriages and all kinds of accessories that they have in their possession and that they show to the crowds who come to look at them. And he cheers the aristocrats, he cheers the King and the Queen; and Defarge, and Defarge tells the mender of the roads that, “You are the fellow we want, you make these fools believe that it will last forever. Then, they are the more insolent, and it is the nearer ended.”

So it is a significant comment by Defarge because it kind of tells us how clever Defarge is, how much more shrewd he is than we understand him to be. He says that, you make these fools the aristocrats believe that their regime will last forever, because they will see only the cheering that you offer them, they will not see the resentment, the vengeance that is there in the minds of people like you.

So when they see all this happiness and excitement about you they will think that, you know, they will last forever, but then they will become more insolent, more rude, and harsh, and cruel

and condescending in their manners, and then such attitudes will bring their end, closer, quickly. And Madame Defarge says that, asks, in fact, she does not say she asks the mender of the roads, “And if you were shown a flock of birds, unable to fly, and were set upon them to strip them of their feathers for your own advantage, you would set upon the bird to the finest feathers; would you not?”

So it is again a thought experiment. And she asks, if you are given the opportunity to destroy birds who cannot fly, you would destroy them, wouldn't you? And it is not a rhetorical question, it is a real question to which she demands an answer, and the mender of the road says, “Yes, I would set upon these birds and tear them to pieces.” And these birds are a figurative reference to the aristocrats.

In fact, in this Tale of Two Cities, we see Dickens constantly refer to the aristocrats as a set of birds who are displaying their plumage, their beautiful plumage, and there is a close association figuratively between plumage and the accessories, the luxurious trinkets with which the aristocrats, the nobility, adorned their person. So this is a very easy simile, an easy metaphor that Dickens picks up on and exploits to his advantage in a Tale of Two Cities.

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The slide is titled "Chapter 16: Still Knitting". It features a blue oval containing the text "New Spy at Saint Antoine; John Barsad". To the right of this oval is a larger blue oval containing a quote: "generally rather handsome visage...nose acquiline, but not straight, having peculiar inclination towards the left cheek; expression, therefore, sinister". Below these ovals are handwritten notes in red ink: "Spy" in a box, "Darnay" in a box, and "Fleagues Evermore". A woman with glasses and a pink top is visible in the bottom right corner of the slide, gesturing with her hands.

Now Chapter 16 is titled Still Knitting. So Madame Defarge continues to knit, which means she is continuing to make a list of people whom she is condemning to death when the status quo

changes. And the scene is Saint Antoine, the couple Defarges have gone to Versailles with their visitor the mender of the roads, and once they have seen the procession of the nobility they send the mender of the roads back to his place, and they return to their home at Saint Antoine to the wine shop.

And on their way back they get news that there is a new spy posted at the neighborhood of Saint Antoine, and his name is John Barsad. And who is Barsad? If you remember the trial scene that we discussed in one of our earlier sessions, he is the spy. In fact, he is the man who condemned Darnay to be a spy, and for which accusation Darnay was arrested and put on trial and finally Darnay was acquitted because there was not sufficient evidence to prove his identity. So that is the context for John Barsad.

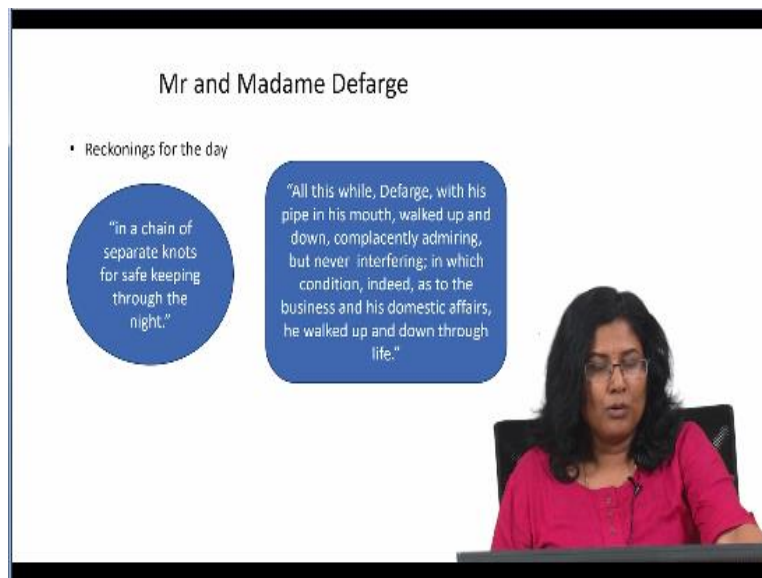
He is a professional spy. Now what kind of a man is he? This is the physical description that we get through Defarge, and this is what he says, this is what he has heard from his informer, that this spy John Barsad is generally rather handsome, he has a handsome face, handsome visage, visage means face, his nose aquiline but not straight, having peculiar inclination towards the left cheek; expression, therefore sinister.

So he is handsome, his nose is aquiline but then it is not straight, perhaps his nose has been broken because of a fight; since his nose is turned towards the left cheek, his face has a sinister expression, and this is what we know about his physical appearance. What is interesting about this physical description of Barsad is his, you know, association with one other character, at least he is evoking one other character through the description that we have in the narrative, and that other character is Marquis Evremonde.

Now why are they similar? They are similar because both of them are very, very handsome. And even though they are handsome, they are also very sinister. So this duality is represented in their faces, and that is what is interesting thematically in terms of A Tale of Two Cities, because this novel talks about twinning, dual aspects, embodying strikingly different meanings, but they are contained in the same entity.

The Tale of Two Cities are about two cities but within the same novel we do get two extremes being embodied in this novel, and sometimes even the same unit would contain two divergent aspects. So all these elements are contained even in an individual like John Barsad who seems physically very attractive but then there is also the element of the sinister in his, in his person. So dual attitudes, dual aspects are there in the same person.

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The image shows a presentation slide titled "Mr and Madame Defarge". The slide content includes a bullet point "Reckonings for the day" followed by two blue callout boxes. The first box contains the text: "in a chain of separate knots for safe keeping through the night." The second box contains a longer quote: "All this while, Defarge, with his pipe in his mouth, walked up and down, complacently admiring, but never interfering; in which condition, indeed, as to the business and his domestic affairs, he walked up and down through life." In the foreground, a woman with dark hair and glasses, wearing a pink top, is seated and looking towards the camera.

Now what does Madame Defarge do when she comes back from her outing? She takes account of the Reckonings that the shop has collected for the day. And how does she, how does she kind of safeguard, the money that she has received? What she does is she puts the coins in separate knots, and that is the way she would keep it safely in the handkerchief. And this is what the narrator says, the narrator says that the money is kept “in a chain of separate knots for safe keeping through the night.”

So even though the wine shop keeper and his wife are favorably inclined towards the, towards the poorer neighbors, and they do expect some kind of robbery, therefore they want to keep the money safely and this is the method that they adopt. And what does Defarge do while Madame Defarge, you know, collects the money? “All this while, Defarge, with his pipe in his mouth, walked up and down, complacently admiring, but never interfering; in which condition indeed as to the business and his domestic affairs, he walked up and down through life.”

So while the wife keeps the reckonings for the day in her own fashion, Defarge is witnessing his wife's movements as he walks up and down, and he is full of admiration for his wife, he does not interfere. He does not interfere neither in the business or in the domestic affairs, and this is how he has led his life. And whom does this evoke in our minds when we read this passage, it evokes several characters, for example Dr. Manette who was full of admiration for his daughter Lucie.

It also brings to mind Charles Darnay who was also full of admiration for his wife Lucie, the way in which she conducts her domestic affairs. Lucie is able to do so much for everybody; she is able to manage the household so beautifully that she is here, there, everywhere; and nobody seems to miss her even though she is married and has a family. So we are able to kind of see a parallel between Madame Defarge and Lucie Manette in the way they manage the environment around them.

So the women here are very, very capable; but the difference between the two arises when we think about the ends that they have in their minds. For Lucie, the end is in domestic happiness, whereas for Madame Defarge it is something else; it is not purely private; it is in fact entirely public. Her aspirations lie in the public sphere, even though we are not fully aware what exactly she wants out of her role that she plays, yet, at least yet.

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Madame Defarge

Perceives the "depression" of Defarge

"We shall not see the triumph"

forceful

Optimistic

"Nothing that we do, is done in vain. I believe, with all my soul, that we shall see the triumph. But even if not, even if I knew certainly not, show me the neck of an aristocrat and tyrant, and still I would—"

forceful

Now, Madame Defarge is also not blind to the emotions that is running through her husband at this moment in the novel because she is able to perceive the depression in Defarge, she realizes that he is upset. And when she questions him about it, Defarge says that “we shall not see the triumph”, and the meaning is, he says that, we shall not see the triumph of the French Revolution, perhaps it will not come in our generation.

And Madame Defarge is quick to respond by saying that, “Nothing that we do, is done in vain. I believe, with all my soul that we shall see the triumph. But even if not, even if I knew certainly not, show me the neck of an aristocrat and tyrant, and still I would.” So the wife is very, very optimistic here. She says that, whatever we do, the kind of contributions that we offer is not going to go in vain.

There will be some utility for what we do, and even if the revolution does not come, she says that even if the day, the glorious day is not here yet in our time, show me an aristocrat and tyrant and I would still attack him, that is the implication, that is the hidden meaning, but that is not completed in that excerpt, and Madame Defarge does not complete because the husband knows what the wife would do if she meets with an aristocrat and tyrant and there is enough opportunity for her to attack him.

So we see a fierce side to Madame Defarge for the first time. We have never seen her talk this much. We always see her stand very silently knitting, but for the first time, we do hear her talk, we do hear her optimism, we do hear her vehemence against the aristocrats spelled out here for the first time in this chapter.

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Madame Defarge's Perception

- "it is your weakness that you sometimes need to see your victim and your opportunity, to sustain you. Sustain yourself without that. When the time comes, let loose a tiger and a devil; but wait for the time with the tiger and the devil chained—not shown—yet always ready."

Macbeth



Now we also get to see Madame Defarge's understanding of her husband's psyche. And here she somehow also reminds us of Lady Macbeth in Macbeth the play by Shakespeare. The way Macbeth taunts and encourages and admires her husband is paralleled in Madame Defarge's analysis of her husband's psyche. She says, "it is your weakness that you sometimes need to see your victim and your opportunity to sustain you. Sustain yourself without that, when the time comes, let loose a tiger and the devil; but wait for the time with the tiger and the devil chained; not shown; yet always ready." So this is again very, very Shakespearean here. So those who have read Macbeth would be able to understand the intertextuality here, especially words such as sustain and keep the devil and tiger chained, you know, be ready but do not show that you want to attack.

So all these are cues that that perhaps Dickens kind of was inspired from that tragic play. So coming to this Tale of Two Cities, in this particular moment in the novel when the husband and wife are talking in the middle of the night in their home, she says that, I know what your problem is Defarge, you need to see your victim, you want to see the victim in front of you, and you have to have an opportunity to sustain you to give you strength.

And she says that, sustain yourself, keep yourself strong without the victim and the opportunity in front of you. You need to be ready, you need to have the strength of a tiger and the devil in you, but keep those strengths chained. Do not show those strengths to the outside world, keep

them chained, don't show them but always keep them ready. So look at the reference to a tiger and a devil, very fierce, both of them. One is an element of the supernatural, so all these kind of combined forces should be ready within you to attack. So that is what Madame Defarge offers as an analysis and an inspiration to her husband.

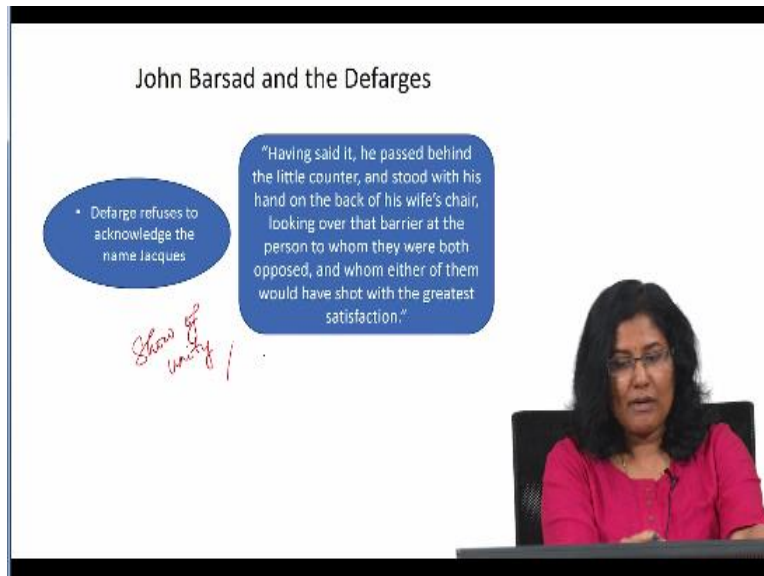
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The spy who is expected by the Defarges comes to the wine shop. The man is very, very sophisticated and suave. Barsad tries to act like a customer, he flatters, but Madame Defarge tries to resist the flattery and also kind of offers repartee, offers ironical replies to John Barsad. And when the spy tries to quiz her in such a way that kind of will elicit some important information she resists, Madame Defarge is too clever by half and so she does not give him any information.

And she says, "All we think, here, is how to live. That is the subject that we think of, and it gives us from morning to night, enough to think about, without embarrassing our heads concerning others. I think for others? No, no." So she indirectly tells him that, I am not a woman, I am not a person who was working against the government; I am not working for the benefit of the people in this neighborhood, in this country, I do not have time for others. I think of my business from morning to night and that in itself is enough to keep me occupied the whole day. So I do not worry about others.

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And when Defarge comes into the shop, he is addressed as Jacques by John Barsad. And if you remember, Jacques is the common term given to all the revolutionaries who are trying to overturn the government, and Defarge does not acknowledge that name at all. He says, my name is Ernest Defarge.

And having said that, having said it, the name, “he passed behind the little counter, and stood with his hand on the back of his wife's chair, looking over the barrier at the person to whom they were both opposed, and whom either of them would have shot with the greatest satisfaction.” So Defarge comes in when the wife is having a conversation with this spy, and he refuses to acknowledge the name. He is very, you know cautious at this point of time.

And even though earlier in the narrative there was one point in the novel, he does say that his name is Jacques, but now he is very cautious and then he goes up behind the little counter and stands, in fact behind the wife's chair with his hand at the back of the chair. And he looks over the counter at the man, and for the third person narrator who, from whose point of view we see the scene, we get to understand that these two people would have easily shot to death, this particular man the spy who is taunting them with questions, and that becomes very apparent.

But now they have kept the tiger and the devil chained, just as the wife had advised the husband the night before. They are very cautious, they are playing it very carefully here. And what is


interesting here again is that there is a show of unity. Look at the way the man goes and stands behind his wife, in fact he draws sustenance from Madame Defarge's presence.

So she is a stronger, you know pillar between the two of them, so he kind of takes sustenance from her presence and united, they kind of stand against this man who has come to gather some information against them so that he can offer it to the government and have them arrested.

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Barsad's information

- "Yes, Miss Manette is going to be married. But not to an Englishman; to one who, like herself, is French by birth. And speaking of Gaspard (ah, poor Gaspard! It was cruel, cruel!), it is a curious thing that she is going to marry the nephew of Monsieur the Marquis, for whom Gaspard was exalted to that height of so many feet; in other words, the present Marquis. But he lives unknown in England, he is no Marquis there; he is Mr Charles Darnay. D'Aulnais is the name of his mother's family."



When Barsad does not get any kind of information that would be helpful to him, what he does is he himself offers a bit of crucial news to the two of them here, the Defarges, hoping that this information that he offers them would provoke them to say something, you know, emotionally, and that information might be, you know useful for Barsad to condemn them.

So this is his strategy, and he says, "Yes, Miss Manette is going to be married, but not to an Englishman; to one who, like herself, is French by birth. And speaking of Gaspard, ah, poor Gaspard! It was cruel, cruel! It is a curious thing that she is going to marry the nephew of Monsieur the Marquis, for whom Gaspard was exalted to that height of so many feet; in other words, the present Marquis. But he lives unknown in England, he is no Marquis there; he is Mr. Charles Darnay. D'Aulnais is the name of his mother's family." So there is a lot of information in this excerpt, and this piece of news does shock the Defarges. Even though they do not show it quite obviously, at least not Madame Defarge.

So what does Barsad offer here, Barsad knows that Defarge was a servant to Dr. Manette in his past life in France, and therefore he would be interested in news about Dr. Manette and his daughter because he was the one who did give secure, you know, haven, a refuge to Dr. Manette once he was released from the Bastille.

So he knows the context of the relationship between Defarge and Dr. Manette and therefore, he gives this piece of news about the daughter who is going to be married not to an Englishman, but to a Frenchman and not any Frenchman, but the nephew of the Marquis Evremonde for whom Gaspard was executed. Gaspard, if you remember was hanged at the fountain.

And he says that, it is such a shame; it is a pity, that Lucie Manette is going to be married to a relative, a nephew of the Marquis, whom we all hate because he was responsible for the death of Gaspard's child as well as Gaspard who was executed in such a cruel fashion. And look at the way he ironically puts it. Gaspard was hanged at the scaffold by the side of the mountain, and look at the way he puts it.

He says that, he was exalted, lifted to a great height of so many feet. It is not exultation; it is a kind of a horrific death that Gaspard suffered. So he is kind of heightening the emotion by putting it in such a provocative manner. So Barsad is also very clever here, he is strategizing with his words, he is offering information in a particular manner intensely here, so to be precise and he is hoping that intense emotion will draw some kind of reaction from his audience, the Defarges.

And he also offers them this piece of news that the man Lucie offers is the nephew to the Marquis and his name in England is Charles Darnay, but he is also an Evremonde. But Charles has kind of adopted his mother's name which is slightly modified, so he draws his name from this particular term D'Aulnais which is the name of his mother's family, so he has completely avoided his father's family name which is Evremonde and that is the name which he uses to go

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