

The Nineteenth-Century Novel
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Lecture - 06
Persuasion, Chapter 7 - 12

Hello and welcome back. In this week's lecture, we will look at chapters 7 to 12 of Austen's Persuasion and see how the events of these chapters tell us a lot more about the society in which this novel was written.

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Accident



We have an accident in the novel and it is related to the eldest son of Mary Musgrove. The boy has a fall and this illustration shows you that fall and the boy is being carried into the cottage, and we have the younger son following behind.

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Anne

• "It was an afternoon of distress, and Anne had every thing to do at once; the apothecary to send for, the father to have pursued and informed, the mother to support and keep from hysterics, the servants to control, the youngest child to banish, and the poor suffering one to attend and soothe; besides sending, as soon as she recollected it, proper notice to the other house, which brought her an accession rather of frightened, enquiring companions, than of very useful assistants."

utility / useful



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This paragraph once again tells us the confusion that Anne had to deal with as soon as she realized that the child is hurt, it was an afternoon of distress tells you about the intensity of this situation swirling inside the cottage and Anne, this one woman, had to deal with a whole array of people and things that she had to sort out in relation to this accident. She had to send for the doctor, she had to send a message to the father who had gone out probably to hunt.

So the word pursued is very very interesting in that context. He is hunting and therefore somebody has to chase him up, to follow him up quickly, and tell him about the accident that his son had. And the mother to support and keep from hysterics; the mother being Mary Musgrove of course and she becomes hysterical as soon as she sees that her son is hurt. So she had to be supported by Anne, comforted as well.

And then the servants had to be controlled too, the servants they had to be managed, to be directed as to their particular jobs; the youngest child to banish so that the youngest child does

not bother either the boy who is hurt or the mother whom he might annoy. And the poor suffering one to attend and soothe and she had to take care of the hurt boy too, to comfort him and soothe him. And again she had to remember to send a message to the Great House too. The in-laws of Mary Musgrove, they had to be informed about that accident, and proper notice you know, notice that was appropriate, correct and precise to that house had to be sent too.

So Anne had a whole lot of things to do and nobody seems to be assisting her. If you look at this excerpt you can see that from the mother to the servants to the younger boy to the other people, nobody seems to be giving support to Anne. And once that notice has gone to the Great House, that brings, that message brings an accession, a steady number of frightened, enquiring companions, and they were not very useful. So the important element in this excerpt is the idea once again of utility, being useful.

And Anne is very very useful in this situation. She is the one anchor in the chaos that is enveloping her and this household; these frightened enquiring companions are young girls, educated girls, modern girls but at the same time they too do not seem to know what to do in this afternoon of distress, and that tells us that education alone is not helpful in offering that steady measured quality of mind; there is something else: a sensibility, an attitude, that would bring a lot of, you know, equanimity and confidence to the person who has that, you know, inclination.

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Charles Musgrove

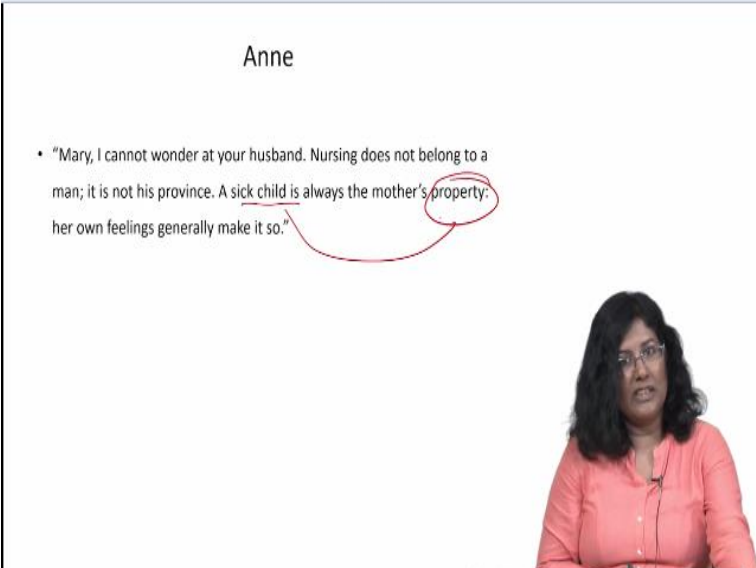
- "The child was to be kept in a bed and amused as quietly as possible; but what was there for a father to do? This was quite a female case, and it would be highly absurd in him, who could be of no use at home to shut himself up"



The child was to be kept in a bed and amused as quietly as possible; but what was there for a father to do? This was quite a female case, and it would be highly absurd in him who could be of no use at home to shut himself up. This is the claim, the declaration of Charles Musgrove, the father of that wounded boy, and he says that I am not going to be of any use within the home, I would rather be doing something else; I am not going to be of great help in this situation.

What was there for a father to do? This idea of nursing somebody is quite a female case. And it would be ridiculous for a man, for the father to be around near the; a sick bed; and since he is not going to be of any use why should I, you know, why should he stay here, shutting himself up and this is what Charles Musgrove tells his wife. And the context for this claim is that there is a dinner at the great house already arranged and he wants to go there because he would get to meet Wentworth and he does not want to miss that opportunity; and he gives the wife this particular opinion in terms of the father's role in a sick room.

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Anne

- "Mary, I cannot wonder at your husband. Nursing does not belong to a man; it is not his province. A sick child is always the mother's property; her own feelings generally make it so."

And Anne agrees with Charles Musgrove, the father of that boy who has had a bad fall. She says, "Mary, I cannot wonder at your husband. Nursing does not belong to a man; it is not his province. A sick child is always the mother's property; her own feelings generally make it so." She tells her sister that, I am not surprised as Charles. His opinion is not a shock to me; nursing is the job of a woman and especially the job of a mother. The sick child becomes a property, a thing for the mother to take care of.

And it is the mother's own feelings that makes this job particularly her own; so why are you worried about your husband's desire to leave the house and go to dinner at his parents' place where there is a special guest. And Musgrove, Mary Musgrove is not very happy with this idea of the husband leaving her behind.

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Anne and the little Charles

- "You, who have not a mother's feelings, are a great deal the properest person. You can make little Charles do anything; he always minds you at a word."

Nursing - mother's job
Hard, unable to enforce discipline

And she says to Anne, "You, who have not a mother's feelings, are a great deal the properest person. You can make little Charles do anything; he always minds you at a word." The implication is Anne, you stay here at Uppercross cottage, whereas I go with my husband to dinner at his parents' place. And she has this reasoning to offer to Anne Eliot, her sister. She says; since you are not the boy's mother you are capable of handling the boy and all the problems without becoming emotionally involved in any distress that he might be in.

So you are the right person to take care of this sick boy of mine. And further this little boy will agree to do whatever you want him to do. He obeys you, unlike me, unlike, you know, me whom he does not obey. And he says; and she says that he always minds you at a word; just a word is enough for him to do what is asked of him.

This comment of Mary Musgrove is very interesting on several levels. Number one, she disproves Anne who earlier said that, "Nursing is a mother's job." She says that since the mother

is so emotionally involved with the child, she can't be the right person to take care of that sick child; so she rejects Anne's claim with an alternative proposition, with an alternative reasoning.

She also says that the child does not listen to me, the child is disobedient to the mother, whereas the child listens to you. And what is the implication of that statement? The implication is that Mary is unable to enforce discipline with her child. She is unable to control, manage and guide her own child and that is significant; because it tells us something about the household; it tells us that there is a dysfunctionality in the household, in the Uppercross cottage home. She; the woman who is at the heart of that home is always sick or imagines herself to be sick, which is Mary, and she constantly squabbles with her husband number two, and she cannot manage her own children. So all these details tell us that something is deeply wrong with the nature of the domesticity in Uppercross cottage and Anne Eliot is able to see that. And Anne; Anne Eliot does do her part in managing this household, because she has the time and the leisure and the inclination to do that. And somehow she seems to be pasting over the fractures in the home of her sister Mary Musgrove.

And the earlier comment which we saw in the previous session which tells the reader that despite all the squabbling; despite all the troubles; despite all the complainings, they seem to be a happy couple. Now when we think about all these details, we again want to question that statement of Anne Eliot and ask again, are these two happy in their homes?

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Charles and Mary Musgrove

- "They were gone, she hoped, to be happy however oddly constructed such happiness might seem"

Can they pass for a "happy couple?"

*dinner party
→
Capt Wentworth*

lopsidedness

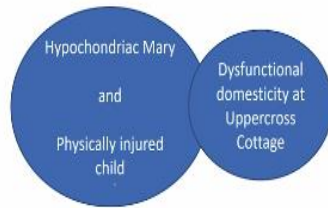
And once they leave the cottage; once Charles and Mary Musgrove leave the cottage, leave their sick boy in the hands of Anne Eliot, Anne has this comment to make: "They were gone, she hoped, to be happy however oddly constructed such happiness might seem." The phrase "oddly constructed" is significant to me because it is very clear-cut that their kind of happiness is not what Anne thinks is the right kind of happiness.

It is oddly constructed; there is a lopsidedness to the nature of the domesticity of the Uppercross cottage, and Anne who does not want to openly state that this family is not very happy instead has this phrase to describe its quality; the oddly constructed happiness seems to be what she has to describe the nature of the state of affairs in the Musgrove home of the Uppercross cottage. So again, I say earlier asked, can they pass for a happy couple?

And where does their happiness come from? That is also another question. Their happiness comes from a dinner party in this context, a dinner party where they would get to meet Captain Wentworth; a new visitor to this village Uppercross, so they are fascinated by the novelty, the novelty of the stranger who has come; who has come to reside; who has come to pay a visit to his sister's family at Kellynch hall.

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The Musgroves



So to kind of sum up the nature of the Musgroves, you know, we realized as I said that she is a hypochondriac, and that physically injured child is an indication that things are not well in that particular family. So the physically injured child becomes a symbol, the sick child at home becomes a symbol, a sick child who is left behind with an aunt, you know becomes a symbol that this family passes on its responsibility to another figure, a relative, in order to run its own family in its own domesticity. So we clearly see that there is a lot of dysfunctionality at Uppercross cottage.

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Difference between Frederick and Anne

- "No: the years which had destroyed her youth and bloom had only given him a more glowing, manly, open look, in no respect lessening his personal advantages. She had seen the same Frederick Wentworth."

Anne
lost her bloom.

Wentworth



Now we get to see a great more detail that is offered by the third person narrator about Wentworth. And we see that there is a comparison made between Wentworth and Frederick;

between Wentworth and Anne Eliot. The narrator says that, no: the years which had destroyed her youth and bloom had only given him a more glowing, manly, open look, in no respect lessening his personal advantages. She had seen the same Frederick Wentworth.

So this is the description that we get of the hero, the male protagonist of this novel. So it has been like 8 years; 8 years had passed since the; since Anne and the readers see him apparently. So the years which had destroyed her youth and bloom had only given him a more glowing manly open look; so she is not affected by the past, he is not affected by the passing of time; however, he is; and he is blooming. So there is a massive difference Anne Eliot appearance and Wentworth's appearance.

And it is really strange because Wentworth spends a lot of time on the seas, and Anne has a more you know, stable residence at Kellynch Hall. Despite that fact, Wentworth is blooming and glowing whereas Anne has lost her bloom. So the broken engagement does not seem to have an impact on him. And I want also to pay attention to that open look and we can compare this descriptive characteristic with his sister's characteristic which is also very open and frank.

And there is no lessening of his personal advantages whereas Anne as I said had lost her bloom. Whereas she thinks that she had seen the same Frederick Wentworth that she had seen 8 years ago; Wentworth has a completely different opinion about Anne's appearance. And here we need to question the logic because early on when and the novel began, we kind of got the opinion of Sir Walter Elliot about the men of the Navy whom he thinks lose their physical attractiveness because of the nature of their profession which entails them to travel quite a bit.

So that seems to be the reality and it is borne out by the fact that Mrs. Croft has also lost her attractiveness because she is also constantly traveling with her husband in ships. So we have the claim of Sir Walter kind of proved by the appearance of Mrs. Croft. But in the case of Captain Wentworth, the hero of the novel; we do not see the impact of the Navy and the nature of his profession, his travel on the seas, have any impact on his physical appearance.

It is as if he is immune, as if he is immune to the vicissitudes of the climate and the nature of his profession. However, Anne is, even though she lives a very closed life in that she does not travel much, she has lost her bloom. And according to the narrator the implication is that because of her broken engagement, she kind of broke her heart and therefore it had a bad impact on her physical attractiveness.

And Wentworth retains his charm because the narrator, the author makes him retain it; he is that fairytale-like hero who is not affected by any external calamity or external, you know a factor. So there is an imbalance in terms of the hero and the heroine, the male and the female protagonist, in terms of their appearances. And this is a novel where appearance is made much of. And by extrapolation we can also realize and kind of sense that this is a society which places a lot of onus on, a lot of emphasis on, the appearances of people.

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Captain Wentworth's grievance against Anne

- "She had used him ill, deserted and disappointed him; and worse, she had shewn a feebleness of character in doing so, which his own decided, confident temper could not endure. She had given him up to oblige others. It had been the effect of over-persuasion. It had been weakness and timidity." (Chapter 7)

Free Indirect Discourse.



So this is the context for Wentworth's irritation, annoyance, displeasure, coldness towards Anne Elliot. She had used him ill, deserted and disappointed him; and worse, she had shown a feebleness of character in doing so, which his own decided, confident temper could not endure. She had given him up to oblige others. It had been the effect of over-persuasion. It had been weakness and timidity.

The narrator channels the feelings, opinions, displeasures of Captain Wentworth. So we have an example of Free Indirect Discourse here. She had used him ill; Anne Elliott had used him ill. She had deserted him, and disappointed him by breaking that engagement; and worse, she had shown a feebleness of character. Her character is shown as being very weak very faint-hearted because she had, you know, allowed somebody to persuade her to break the engagement to him, and he can contrast his own confident temper, character against her weakness of character.

And he is really angry that she had placed the opinion of somebody else about his own desires in doing so. So he says that she had given him up to oblige, to acquiesce to others and we know who that other is quite shortly. And that idea of being persuaded, Anne's being persuaded by somebody is hateful to him and had been the weakness; it had been weakness and timidity; so he dislikes those qualities in Anne.

And he contained; he kind of retains that anger, resentment against her all these years, and when he returns to Kellynch and Uppercross and when he comes across Anne, he makes her feel that he still holds onto that resentment, he does not have any warmth of attitude towards Anne Elliott.

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Captain Wentworth's Claims

- "ready to fall in love"
- "either of the Musgrove girls"
- "any pleasing girl who came in his way excepting Anne Elliot"
(Chapter 7)

"A strong mind,
with sweetness of
manner"



So he wants to let her know that he is ready to fall in love, he wants Anne to feel the pain of his behavior, his desire, which is to kind of fall in love with any woman who will have him, anybody who is you know, eligible. So he is; and somebody else in the novel tells that he is ready to

marry either of the Musgrove girls, and any pleasing girl who came in his way excepting Anne Elliott would be acceptable to Captain Wentworth.

And what does he want in a girl, in a suitable girl? He wants a strong mind and sweetness of manner and he believes that Anne Elliot does not have both of these, because she showed weakness of character in being persuaded against marrying him. Thank you for watching. I will

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