

Course Name: The Novel and Change

Professor Name: Dr. Avishek Parui

Department Name: Department of Humanities and Social Sciences

Institute Name: IIT Madras

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Great Expectations - Part 4

So, hello and welcome to this mptr course titled the novel and change we'll continue reading Charles Dickens's Great Expectations we'll just start off where we left last time and in this particular session we will look at the contrast of the city and the country and how the contrast is embodied in the character of Joe Gargery, who happens to be the brother-in-law of Pip, and of course Pip, who moves increasingly into this very capitalist, cannibalistic world of London. And in the earlier session, if you remember, we talked about how this shift into London is also very closely corresponding to the shift in the nature of economy, the nature of fortune, the nature of wealth. Where we have this whole idea of a formalized banking, formalized money exchange, formalized, you know, share market and stocks. So these things were getting industrialized in very, very massive scale at this point of time. So the whole idea of remote capital or, you know, proxy capital or fictitious capital, so these things were becoming interestingly prevalent at that time. And Dickens's novel Great Expectations is, among other things, a novel about investments.

We discussed it already how in terms of how there is money investment, there is capital investment, there is cultural investments and how culture, capital, identity, masculinity, all these things seem to be very closely intertwined in very asymmetric ways. So, we will just start off from that point and we will look at how the character of Joe Gargery has been read in the Dickens scholarship and this should be on your screen. Joe Gargery is not a subject. As Kate Flint has shown, his role in the novel as the unquestionable embodiment of moral and social value depends on his having no complex inner life. Yet, I would argue that reading Joe as the unquestionable embodiment of moral and social value, much as we seem

to be encouraged to do so by the text, is not in fact what Dickens perhaps finally intends us to do. It has already been said that Joe's lack of subjectivity in the text clearly signals Dickens's intention to figure Johan the forge as representing settled pre-capitalist value. So, Johan is the, is someone who is a blacksmith who forges things out of metal, etc., iron. So, he is very much a pre-industrial, pre-capitalist, not pre-industrial, pre-capitalist industrialist, right.

So, there is a temporal shift, a temporal break from that kind of a mechanism of making money and the one in which Pip is increasingly shifting into the mechanism through which banks and share market and stock all are coming into being to create this massive economy of capital and also the economy of expectations which is what the novel is about. So the opposite term, so Joe stands opposite to the guarded and suspicious world of London where the moment you have idea of expectation it is also the idea of fear, the idea of anxiety, right, because when you expect something, you invest something into whether it is money or capital or social and cultural capital, there is always a fear of failure. which is associated with the investment. So expectation also generates a sense of anxiety. So, the economy of expectation is also simultaneously an economy of anxiety.

So, the London is a guarded and suspicious world where value is in a constant state of flux. So there is kinesis, there is uncertainty, there is contingency. So all these things are also characterizing and shaping and reshaping the world of expectations that is London. By contrast, Joe's value is non-transferable. There is something static about Joe's value. There is something static about the country. So again we have the city versus the country binary coming into being and Pip of course is someone who is shifting, vacillating between these two states of being. So the city and the country, they end up becoming not just topographical locations, they are also psychological locations, moral locations. So Joe's value is non-transferable. Excuse me. As he says himself, I am wrong in these clothes. I am wrong out of the forge, the kitchen or off the meshes. So he's very uncomfortable in coming outside of his clothes, the blacksmith's clothes, the clothes of a villager, the clothes of a country dweller, of the meshes. Joe's static identity in the novel, that of the village blacksmith, defines this immovable place, both geographical and social. There is no rise,

there's no sudden shift into the capital, there's no sudden shift into wealth. It's a very slow state process. And there is some solidity in that slowness, as opposed to which Pip's transition from a village boy to a capitalist is sudden and almost accidental and quite serendipitous. there is also this anxiety in the serendipity, this fear of failure, the paranoia, if you will. So At the end of the novel, Pip notices there was no change whatever in Joe. So, this changelessness in Joe is an important part of this characterization.

And of course, he's representing a certain era, a certain way of life, a certain kind of cultural construct that Dickens wants us to notice, as opposed to the one that Pip happens to embody in due course of the novel. Neither do we see Joe ever taking money for his wares. We merely see him sticking to the old work. And the forge itself becomes symbolic of value unaffected by the fluctuations of the market. So, the forge, the place where Joe the blacksmith works, beats iron and metal into other things, that seems to be the site of a pre-capitalist industrial labour, a pre-capitalist agon of production, which is very different from the production-consumption economy that Pip is embodying with all his associated anxiety. Jeff Nunukoa has discussed the effect on Victorian fiction of midnight and century anxieties provoked by the speeding up of exchange and commercial imperialism. So there is a sudden kinesis which was pumped into the modern economy and suddenly there was this possibility of becoming suddenly rich, suddenly wealthy. But of course, the suddenness of acquiring wealth also comes with this possibility of precarity. And we discussed in the previous few classes, if you remember, how does interplay of possibility and precarity is constantly going as some kind of a subplot, a driver of the plot, if you will, in Dickinson's great expectations. And the same happens with Pip in the end.

And there is multiple reference points in the novel where investments are coming for a better future through expectations, through capital, through cultural acquiring or appropriation. Also associated with the fear that investments could go wrong or their investments come from rogue sources, right. So the idea of the rogue capitalist is also there and obviously embodied by language. The quote-unquote convict who settles in Australia and becomes a wealthy man in the end. So, there is a certain degree of dehumanization of capital if you will. So, capital has a flow of its own. It does not require human intervention

all the time. It can just pick and choose any human and then just move on to the next person, right. unending flow of capital and among other things Great Expectations may also be read as some kind of a cautionary tale of unchecked capital or unregulated capital. What happens when capital is just left to run on a speed in terms of using and then abusing people. What happens to the human subject, human subjectivity, human agency in this age of unbridled capitalism, unchecked capitalism. So he suggests that Solomon Gill's, so this is the Dickens critic Nuno Qua who suggests that Solomon Gill's shop in Dombey and Son, another very famous Dickens novel was conceived by Dickens as a sanctuary from the activity of capitalized exchange. So Dickens also promotes in certain sense of a safe haven from the unchecked capital. So there is the old shops, the old village, the old blacksmith site which seem to be immune or unaffected by this contagious kinesis of capital that is otherwise infecting quote unquote infecting the world especially the metropolitan modernity of London. Although he also argues that Dickens is unable to sustain it as such, George's forge is just such another fantasy of the transcendence of the economy.

So, there is a sort of fantastic site, a site of fantasy which seemed to be immune from the infection of the capital. The novel does sustain it precisely because it remains a fantasy. So this is a paradox over here. The only reason why Joe's, the village blacksmith's site, the forge is sustained as a sanctuary in the novel is because it is a fantasy. It is not so much a real place because as this essay is arguing, we never really see any real money. We never really see any real exchange of production and consumption taking place. It just becomes some kind of a symbolic fantasy site. And Pip cannot return. So the novel never asks us to believe in London and the village on the marshes at the same time. So, the two cannot be simultaneous. So, the village and the city cannot be simultaneous. We have to sacrifice one for the other. And Pip, of course, cannot return to the original, shall we say, pre-lapsarian site of labour, which is pre-capitalist in quality. So, capital in this particular novel, it seems to have some kind of biblical reference as well. So, it's like... after the fall. So infected by the capitalist by like let us say in a very biblical way is being infected by the forbidden fruit. So once you take a bite into the forbidden fruit, the only way forward is downwards, right. So there is a prelapsarian idyllic quality about Joe, about the you know the site of his forge, of the blacksmith's work, but then that is also not so much a real site as much

symbolic fantasy site to which Pip can never return. Jay Clayton, another Dickens scholar, in a recent article has written helpfully that *Great Expectations* is a palimpsest of different cultural periods.

So, it's a several-layer, it's a multi-layered depiction of a very fast-changing society where the movement, the economic movement, the gender movement, the social movements all intertwine in very complex ways. Raymond Williams has pointed out that no era is ever characterized by a single ideology and he has proposed dividing cultural beliefs along temporal lines into the residual, dominant and emergent. So these are three different and very helpful classifications. There is a residual era in which the old classical conventional orthodox sites lie. Dominant is the one which is still governing as the most hegemonic way in which cultural exchanges and identity formations and iterations are taking place and emergent is the possibility of newness as the new things which are about to emerge. So, there is an anticipatory quality about the emergent as well. So the residual, the dominant and the emergent. In this reading, the world of Joe's forge is residual. The world of Pip's London is dominant or emergent. So Joe's forge or the blacksmith site that he has in a village is a residual layer, but we also see how that layer is very quickly becoming obsolete, very quickly becoming a thing of the past, a site of the past, some kind of a memory archive and just goes back and some kind of nostalgia looking back into some kind of idealic past. Whereas the present and the future seem to be London, you know, the world of stock exchanges and banks and trade and all the rest of it. So the new capitalist is about to be born. Yet, the idealization of George Forge as both simultaneous with and divided from the urban environment is crucial to a novel, which takes the idea of place and displacement as one of his central themes. So, as we have discussed already, *The Great Expectations* is among other things a story about alienation, a story about getting out of the root you know in a sense of becoming rootlessness which is connected to a sense of uncertainty, contingency, anxiety which in turn is connected to the emergent flow of the remote capital, the proxy capital, the fictitious capital.

So, money that you don't own money that is floating around you, money that you partake of, money that you are a sharer of. So, the whole idea of shareholder comes into being,

where no one really owns the money, really. And so, even if it is your money, you invest it in something else and it becomes someone else's money. So, the money becomes a very intersectional kinetic activity. So, from being an ontic quality, money here becomes a performative quality, becomes a fluid quality, a kinetic quality, right. That distinction, that transition is important because it also underscores the identity transitions that take place in the novel. David Harvey identifies one of the contradictions produced by capitalism and globalization when he says, and there's a quote, the identity of space was reaffirmed in the midst of the growing abstractions of space. So on the one hand, there is this massive abstraction of space with globalization. All space can come together in sort of interchangeable ways. But at the same time, this pull of putting everything together, this galvanizing pull where all spaces come together, also creates simultaneously and you know paradoxically the production of unique spaces, the production of spaces you know where identity formations, identity iterations are very, very heavily invested right. So, we have this identity space, the localized space running parallel and simultaneously to the idea of a globalized fluid space. So the global and the local, the fluid and the iterative they come and connect together in very, very intersectional ways. As space was increasingly conquered by new technologies, you can think of the telegram, the telephone, the typewriter, you know, the gramophone and obviously later with new forms of technology and the action of capital became more and more attenuated. and remote in its effects, a corrective value was increasingly attributed to the particularity of space, right. So, there seems to be some kind of a, you know, knee-jerk defense reaction against this fear of over abstraction, right.

So, suddenly there was this idea of possessing space or conquering space or identifying space or attributing space with particularities. So, simultaneously with the idea of the globalized space, of space as an act of globality, we also have a space as an act of particularity and the global and the particular are connected in very, very interesting corrective as well as intersectional and supplementary ways. In *Great Expectations*, Dickens dramatizes this contradiction by his contrast of the particular and the local space of the village, which belongs to Pip, with the alienating and alarming spaces of London, right. So, there is this idyllic free space, nature space of Pip in the village, contrasted with this sort of cannibalistic, you know, very consumerist and dark space of London, where

everyone is alienated from everyone else, right. So, it is alienating and alarming space, a precarity of peril, etc. Ours was a marsh country, declares Pip with a confident possessiveness of tone. So, it is our space, the village was our village and it was a marsh country. So, we seem to know the space, whereas in London the space seems to know us, right, it is the other way around. Pip has intimate knowledge of this country, remembering even in the dark that a beacon by which the sailors steered was an ugly thing when you were near it and always able to find its way across the marshes. I knew them well and could have found my way on a far darker night.

So, the familiarity of the space, the familiar coordinates, the beacon light, you know the other kinds of references across the marshlands despite the darkness. So again the sense of familiarity, the sense of kinship is established over here. References to our country and our clerk and our village and our own marsh mist establish Pip's sense of belonging both to the place and to the community of the village through the sense of community, solidarity, kinship which are established and underscored and foregrounded by this kind of a description. By contrast, London is represented as images of violence. Smithfield, the first place Pip experiences, and significantly a huge market, is a shameful place, being all a smear with filth and fat and blood and foam. Newgate prison, what is condemned prison is, was horrible and gave me a sickening idea of London. And Barnard's Inn reminds Pip of a flat, bearing ground, where he nearly beheaded himself on a window that came down like the guillotine. So, guillotine, of course, is a product of the French Revolution. It is an instrument, the iconic instrument of the French Revolution which is also associated with torture, with violence, with mutilation, with brutality, right. Now the same metaphors of the guillotine and the blood and the violence they all come back in this very dense description of a very perilous landscape of London where there is always this possibility of precarity, always the possibility of being robbed or being murdered or being cheated or being looted right. Whereas we have this idyllic pastoral prelapsarian space of the country where nothing really changes you know nature is very slow and dense and life-giving with London this cannibalistic capitalist world is a land of perilous misadventures right. So this contrast is very interesting but at the same time what we see is a localization of spaces and the identity attributes around the spaces. The spaces almost assume a character-like quality

in the novel, which we see, you know, happening in London. Now, along with space, what we also see is a sense of time.

So, the way the time is acted out or played out in a country is dramatically different from the way the same time is played out in a city. So, we have the sense of fast kinesis in the city as opposed to the slowness and the static quality and the unchangeable quality and the stability of the village. So the city, the metropolis of London, it thrives as an industry of instability, an industry of insecurity, an industry of investments, which are associated with insecurity and instability. Whereas we have the prelude here in England, the English countryside, which is a world of stability and slow change. So, we have that contrast played out. Not just true metaphors of spatiality, true metaphors of space or spatial identities, but also, unsurprisingly and appropriately, true metaphors of time, of temporal identities. And we see that from a quotation in the novel. Only a few days after he has left his village, Pip thinks, and this is a quotation from the novel. On a moderate computation, it was many months that Sunday since I had left Joe and Biddy. The space interposed between myself and them partook of that expansion, and our moans were any distance off. That I could have been at an old church in my old church-going clothes On the very last Sunday that ever was, seemed a combination of impossibilities, geographical and social, solar and lunar. So look at how the cosmic metaphors brought in. But the sense of distance between the country and the city is measured in metaphors which are, you know, interstellar in quality, which are cosmic in quality. Such is the difference, such is the dramatic difference between these two states of being. So, as I mentioned already, the city and the country over here, they correspond to not just geographical location but also psychosocial location, right, and the psychological locatedness or situatedness, of the village and the country are measured, the sort of immeasurable distance between the two are measured using this geographical and you know interstellar and cosmic coordinates such as solar and lunar as you can see over here. That obviously tells us about a psychological distance and a sense of alienation that Pip is going through as a very, very you know complex subject in a very complex city. Both time and space have expanded between Pip and his old life. Although Dickens seems to be asking us to judge Pip morally wrong for thinking of Joe and Biddy as remote and so far away, at the same time, the novel reinforces the enormous distance

between the London streets so crowded with people and so brilliantly lighted and the poor old kitchen at home, right? So the whole idea of the kitchen at home and the brilliantly illuminated roads in London, that again gives us a very, very good sense and dramatic sense of the distance between the two. So Pip's self-blame in the text for his neglect of home is mitigated by the novel's structural insistence on the remote relation of the two.

Pip is clearly figured as having crossed a boundary. So that sense of transgression is also there, you know crossing a boundary which you see happening in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* as well and in fact this particular essay will bring back *Frankenstein* in a very heavy way towards the end and we'll spend some time on it as we move along. It is important to look at the comparable transgressions taking place in Shelley's novel and Dickens's novel here. So crossing that boundary and stepping into this consumerist capitalist world from which there is no return. So, Pip is clearly having figured as having crossed the boundary when he leaves the village for the first time. With a strong heave and a sob, I broke into tears. It was by the finger post at the end of the village and I laid my hand upon it. So, the finger post at the end becomes the iconic boundary, the perimeter that he is about to leave now and there is no coming back. He knows this is a one-way traffic. Once he leaves, he cannot un-leave, he cannot come back. Psychologically, he is gone, he is alienated. And the sense of alienation begins from this point. So, very appropriately, there is this cry, there is tears, there is sobbing at this point. And also, notice the tactility in the image. He touches the finger post for one last time, connecting to it in a very tactile way his past, which has now become, already become, you know, a thing of a thing which is gone forever, right? So, it's not part of him anymore. even at the end of the book, as when Pip is again banished to the fallen capitalist world, Joe and Biddy are represented as so circumscribed by the village that they are only able to accompany Pip as far as the finger post before they say goodbye. So, the finger post seems to be that permitted perimeter, right, beyond which the country folks should not cross, right, symbolically they should not cross, right. So, Joe and Biddy The typical slow, stable country folk, you know, the peaceful country folk, they seem to be abiding or conforming to the code, the territorial code over there, which is why they can only accompany Pip very symbolically till the thing appears and then he can come back and say goodbye and come back. They will not cross

it. You know, that will become an act of, symbolically an act of transgression, which Pip has already done, which is why he is, you know, punitively banished into the fallen capitalist world. The hermetic division between the two places in a novel is structurally essential to Dickens's project of figuring modernization and its consequence, alienation.

So, looking again how very classic Marxist terms come back in the novel, alienation, the whole idea of fetishizing the commodity, the massive and increasing industrialization of the commodity also creates a sense of psychological alienation in the sense that the producer is removed from the product or even the consumer. Pip over here, he doesn't produce anything. He is a consumer as we saw in the last class. But he is also removed or alienated from what he is consuming. So a sense of alienation is both material as well as symbolic, affective and profoundly psychological. So, modernization and its consequence, alienation. And thus, the simple concepts of blame and fault become very difficult to apply to the displaced pit. So, the whole idea of blaming and falling, they become very complex attributes. So, we cannot really have a unilateral idea of blame and fault over here. Dickens. in *Great Expectations* and other later novels repeatedly questions the possibility of moral agency for individuals in a modern world of deferral and transferable values, right. So, again this is a very important line, the whole idea of deferred values or transferable values. So, values which can be transferred over just like share market and stock. You can buy in transfer stock is not really your wealth because you can transfer it to someone else. There is a proxy quality about the newly emergent capital of the trade and the stock markets and the share market and the industrialization of labor and all the rest of it, right. So, what happens to moral agency in this very, very cannibalistic cosmetic world of capitalism where the whole idea of value is only defined through deferral, through derridden kind of way, defined through you know distance, defined through difference, defined through transfer right.

So again, the sense of ownership. The ontology of ownership begins to get reconfigured because no one really owns anything. The money is fluid, the money is invested into possibilities in the future. So, it is sort of anticipatory wealth that is being created over here. The entire idea of the capital and the wealth and identity emerging from the capital becomes sort of engines of anticipation, engines of investment and again like all forms of

investment is also the possibility of peril, the possibility of precarity and a novel never loses sight of that you know great expectations is also among other things the engagement with the complexity of failure, engagement with the complexity of crisis right so that again becomes an important motive in a novel we stop at this point today and we'll continue the discussion in a subsequent session. Thank you for your attention.