

Course Name: The Novel and Change

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Week – 06

Lecture 27

Great Expectations - Part 6

So, hello and welcome to this NPTEL course titled The Novel and Change. We will conclude the reading of Charles Dickens's Great Expectations with this session. So just to sum up very quickly what we've done so far in the last couple of sessions, we looked at the power of remote capital, the whole idea of capital operating remotely from elsewhere, which obviously complicates the entire paradigm of centre and margin, because you have Magwitch who is technically a convict operating from New South Wales, Australia. And from there, he's remotely controlling the capital in terms of building or buying a gentleman in London. So we saw how the last session that the whole masculinity of Pip, the construct of masculinity that he's pushed to becoming, is actually bought rather than made. So, he is essentially purchased by Magwitch who funds him from elsewhere. So, the flow of capital which can operate through proxy, which can operate through remote service, which can operate through different kinds of newly formalized institutions is obviously a very important part in the story, in the entire narrative. And it is really interesting to see how we spoke about this in last session, how the whole idea of space and time, how space and time get compressed, decelerated, expanded, accelerated, depending on different situational conditions, situational coordinates. So, for example, the countryside is a different kind of space. It's more expansive.

It's a different kind of time where there's more time, more decelerated. There's more leisure in the countryside, whereas the city of London is a sort of monstrous metropolis. where everything operates through kinases and contagion. And we spoke about how there seems to be a very interesting parallel to be made, a comparison and contrast to be made between

Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. Again, the whole fear of contagion, the fear of unchecked capital, the flow of unchecked capital, and how capital can operate through proxy, how capital can operate remotely from the outside. So, in *Dracula* for instance the Count is an exotic outsider and yet he has a power of capital to create a lot of changes or intervene in the inside of England. So we see that happening similarly with Magwitch as well. So Magwitch is this exiled convict. At the same time he also has an agency, he acquires the agency through accident, through procurement of capital through which he can remotely control the capital from the outside. Now, in this session, which is the final session on Dickens's novel, we will look at the ending of *Great Expectation* as it were, it has sort of two different endings, if you know the history of the book. So, Dickens wrote one ending in terms of bringing Pip back into Satis's house, the countryside, whereas the published ending, it says Pip goes away somewhere else, you know, in a dark underbelly, in a darker underbelly of the capital. He's making money, working for a company and he's just plummeting into this sort of carnivorous, cannibalistic world of unchecked capitalism. So essentially, it's a death plunge that Pip has in the end. But we look at how despite the differences in the two endings there is some similarity as well in terms of how the whole aspirational masculinity which is embodied by Pip which is closely corresponding with the social, political, discursive, cultural changes get played out you know all this you know the entire economy of aspiration and aspirations and expectations gets played out and again we talked about how the very ontology of expectation in the novel it has a psychological element to it as you're expecting something but at the same time it is also related to the whole idea of the banker's investment right you invest something with the expectation of greatness a great expectation I mean you can sort of bring it to a very interesting and superfluous and superficial banking vocabulary in terms of looking at the expectation of return.

So I am investing into a future with the expectation of return. So that is also a very interesting subplot in the novel. And it is no accident that there is so many references to the bank, there are so many references to money, to finance and new forms of you know financial institutions and Also, how we read this with some details, in some details in our last couple of sessions, the whole idea of monstrosity, which appears to emerge through

old life. He and Estella merely looked sadly enough on one another. So there's no clear indication that Pip and Estella reunite. They look at each other, they happen to meet, but you know there is no clarity in the plot in terms of whether they come together, whether they find companionship with each other. They just look at each other, that's where the novel ends. And the present exerts no curative power over the past, right? So despite the two different endings, so I talked about how eventually the one that got published, it seems to offer a more sentimental ending. It seems to offer some kind of redemption, but there is no curative quality to it. So it's not like Dickens is saying, well, Pip's gone back to his old countryside and everything is nice and hunky-dory again. It is definitely not the case, right? So there is a damage which is already done. There is a brokenness that he carries with him all the time so no amount of going back to his original landscape no amount of attempting to recover all time can actually cure the damage done to pip mentally psychologically as well as socially in both endings though pip lives in exile working abroad in the east for Clarriker and Co.

So, this is what I meant so you know Pip despite the ending that Dickens eventually published the published ending also tells us that Pip is actually plummeting into you know the dark underbelly of the capital is working for some company called Clarriker and Co. in the east, right. So there is sort of mysterious quality about the ending as well. It does not really define or does not really tell us with any degree of clear information where exactly is the company located, right. And he is working as a partner in the house. So, obviously he has got some position there which is presumably making him some money. Although I must not leave it to be supposed that we were ever a great house or that we made mints of money. So there is also this idea of, you know, the exhaustion of capital, the exhaustion of the capitalist. So it's not like he's making a lot of money. It's not like he's a billionaire. He is working very hard for a company in the East as a partner. But there is no amount of succor which comes with enormous amount of wealth. So that is definitely not the case. We were not in a grand way of business, but we had a good name and worked for our profits and did very well. So it's not anything grand, it's not anything colossal, but they just made enough money and they made a respectable margin of profit. We worked for a profit and we did very well. So it was a profit making company, but it is not really a grand company of multinational scales. That is not definitely the case over here. So, but he's

found a footing. as it were, he's a partner, he has some position in the house, in the company house, and he is working in a company which makes reasonable amount of money, right, and that reasonable bit is important.

So he's very much a run-of-the-mill capitalist, really. He's not really a grand capitalist. He's not really the Great Gatsby figure, and we talked about Great Gatsby in earlier class as well. So, he's just... a bit of an old Saran, you know, if you know the phrase, an old Saran. So he's one of the many small, mid-sized capitalists working in the East, quote-unquote East. So Pip works for his profits, deliberately issuing superfluity or excess. Having released the monster of capitalism in his text, Dickens now seems anxious to control and circumscribe its power. So there again, we come back to the idea of monstrosity and there is a reading to be done which says that, well, having unleashed the effects of monstrosity, having unleashed the effects of unchecked capital with endless energy, excessive force, excessive vigor, there seems to be some kind of an anxiety on the part of the writer to give you a picture of controlled capital, to give you a picture of capital which is not excessive in quality, not really path-breaking, not really boundary-breaking. So a capital which is working under certain limits, under certain rules and parameters. And that sense of boundedness is important over here because there is a clear indication in the novel that Pip is working for a company which is making marginal profits, enough to get by, but nothing excessive, nothing ornate, nothing outside the ordinary, nothing extraordinary or, you know, excessive in quality. So, there is that, you know, checked capital which seems to be the situation over here. There is a sense of, well, there is capital, there is money to be made, there is a company that Pip is working in in the East, he has a partnership with the House.

It is not really the Dracula kind of money. It is not really the Magwitch kind of money. So there seems to be some kind of an ending that Dickens is offering where Pip is doomed, yes, because he doesn't come back to the prelapsarian past. He doesn't come back to the agrarian past. He doesn't come back to the, the Joe kind of labour where there is just the stillness and solidity of fixed place. He is in the sort of fluid, infinite flux of the capitalist engine but the amount of money that he is making is not something excessive, is not

something embarrassingly big. So there is some degree of anxiety to rein in as it were the flow of the capital as embodied by Pip. The Great Expectations is a novel which, as Kate Flint has put it, calls into question how one may understand the processes of history themselves, right. So the mechanisms of history, the processes of history. So how does one sort of look at, examine and calibrate the processes of history through which identities are made, unmade and remade. Now we see that there are a lot of identities made, unmade, remade in this particular novel and of course all these are happening because different forces of history, different forces of social formation are at play, sometimes undercutting each other, sometimes complimenting each other, sometimes supplementing each other, sometimes, you know, obviously attacking each other. This entire complex ecosystem of social, cultural forces is what is making and unmaking and remaking identities, especially the masculine identities in this novel, right. So, there is a meta quality in Great Expectations as well in the sense that a novel allows us a glimpse and insight, an interpretative insight through which we can see the forces of culture, the forces of you know social formation at play. So, but the interesting thing is of course the expectation bit and that is something which we must remind ourselves of. So, yes, we understand the process of history, how those get played and the extent to which it is possible to play an active part in the shaping of one's own or society's future.

So, there is the idea of, you know, how does one understand the role that an individual or some social forces can play in shaping the future? So there is an expectation bit, right? So the anticipation, the investment, the expectations, how do those things get played out in terms of the futuristic investment, the futuristic quality of these forces, right? And in this, Great Expectations resembles the earlier little Dorrit Dickens in his later work, is concerned to figure the ways in which the subjectivity is constantly distorted by an aggressive and divisive modern culture. So the aggressive, cannibalistic, divisive quality of modern culture, how does it attack subjectivity? How does that shape? So almost an assault in subjectivity because if you look at Pip, the way he is de-rooted from his countryside and sort of brought into London and again in London he gets a sense of shame in finding out that the real investor into his individuality or gentlemanliness is someone from a criminal background. So, again there is a sense of de-routing happening over there

as well. So, there is this constant bombardment which can sometimes become an assault on a stable sense of the subject, a stable sense of subjectivity, right. So, the stability of the subject is assaulted in great expectations to different kinds of social, cultural, political and financial forces at play.

So Pip's engagement in such a society forces him paradoxically into a passive role in Great Expectations. Again passivity seems to be the biggest trait in subjectivity over here because you know he is just a numbed consumer, constantly bombarded, constantly assaulted, constantly attacked by the different forces of finance, different forces of culture. So that creates a sense of passivity in Great Expectations. The struggle and conflict of the late work is a struggle and conflict of the self-seeking expression in history, which, as Edward Said has said, is both more inclusive and more dynamic than ever before. So this is the really interesting thing about capitalism. And as Edward Said mentions it, at some level, capitalism is the most inclusive format. You know, it is accommodative. It can take everything, everyone into account, whoever has a merit. Whoever has the innovation is invited to contribute to the ecosystem. At the same time, it is also governed by dynamism. It never stops for anyone. It never stops for any individual, any organization. It keeps moving forward. So this progressive dynamic quality of capitalism is also what creates the assault on the subject, right. So there is the absorption of the subject. The subject, the meritorious, hardworking, laborious, innovative subject is you know absorbed into the capital, the flow of the capital and the same flow of the capital then assaults the subject through its dynamic forces at play.

So, there is that constant pull going on over here. Ultimately, the monster of capitalism engulfs both Magwitch and Pip. both inventor and invented. So both the producer and the product, they are engulfed and absorbed by the monstrosity of capital, making the maintenance of a stable individual identity a perilous project in a world of endlessly transferable value. value is not stable, the value is endlessly plastic, endlessly transferable and this endlessly transferable quality of value obviously takes away the stability of the subject. The subject becomes the vanishing subject, the unstable subject, the insecure subject. So among other things Great Expectations is also a story about the interplay of

investment and insecurity. So the moment investment comes into being, there is a seeking of security that comes. But again, like any form of investment, which is futuristic in quality, anticipatory in quality, there is always a sense of insecurity, always a possibility of precarity. So even if you use a very banking metaphor, money metaphor. Any investment that we see also carries the possibility of no return, a possibility of a catastrophic crisis, right? You know, a plummet, a crash. Again, the vocabulary is very violent, as you know. So any form of investment carries the interplay of possibility and precarity of building and as well as peril, right. So, there is this constant idea of the peril, the constant spectral quality of the peril, you know, is obviously a big part in *Great Expectations*, which is why both the inventor and the invented, both the possibility and the peril are enmeshed together, entangled together in very asymmetric ways. So, among other things, *Great Expectations* is a novel about change.

It's a novel where change happens both psychologically as well as socially and it is one of the most important novels in my mind to study the relationship between literature and change, between literature, fiction, novel and different forms of social political, cultural and financial changes and how those external conditions, external ecology of change shape and reshape the core subjectivity of the human subject, of the living, feeling, embodied subject. So embodiment, lived reality, the affective understanding of reality always began to change and get reconfigured with the very dynamic forces of capitalism which are at work. So with that we end the reading of Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*. I hope we have offered you some idea in terms of how the novel can be situated or should be situated in terms of how it connects to the broader social, cultural, financial changes happening around that time and how those changes affect and reconfigure the very abstract notions, the otherwise abstract notions of individuality, agency, masculinity, etc. So, with this we move on to the next novel that we studied together with *Great Expectations* which is *Heart of Darkness*, I may have mentioned already. But we will see also how a very dialogic relationship between Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness* and Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* and how Frankenstein, the spectral presence of Frankenstein keeps getting invested into almost all readings of these two novels. We saw in *Great Expectations* how there are many references, sometimes direct, sometimes indirect allusions to Frankenstein.

And we also see how the same gets played out in different interpretative strategies that we use to read Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, which will begin in subsequent sessions. Thank you for your attention.