

Course Name: The Novel and Change

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Lecture 3

So, hello and welcome to this NPTEL course titled Novel and Change. We'll continue reading Robinson Crusoe. So we already have had an introductory session on this novel. We'll just carry on from where we left off last time. So if you remember, we were talking about how the sea and the law were pitted against each other as, you know, something which is homely, something which is comforting, something which is nourishing, the law protective, as opposed to the transgressive quality of the sea, the seductive quality of the sea, and obviously Crusoe gives in to the seduction, right, and We can see how we talked about how the novel can be seen as some kind of a quasi caveat story. But at the same time, it's also a story about aspiration, a story about what can happen if you are willing to take the risk and if you just get lucky. So, we'll just continue from that point and move on. So, this should be on your screen. Page eight. My father, a wise and grave man, gave me serious and excellent counsel against what he foresaw was my design. So again, if you look at the adjectives, wise, grave, earlier we heard the word ancient, so almost very biblical terms, right? But also, you know, it implies or it is, it corresponds to an old-world order of a certain kind of morality, certain kind of conservative faith, conservative control over the family from which Crusoe wants to break away from. So, as I mentioned, there is this prodigal son narrative also going on in this particular point. called me one morning into his chamber where he was confined by the gout and exasperated very warmly with me upon this subject. Now, I would also like to pay some attention or draw some attention to the fact that the father who is ancient, who is grave, who is serious, is also confined by the gout. So, we have to take notice of symbols here very carefully.

So, it's a decaying world order, a decaying patriarch, a weakening patriarch which is obviously reflective of a weakening world order, confined by the gout. He is almost

paralyzed by a disease. He can't move. He is confined. So, there is this immobility about the ancient father against which the hypermobility of Crusoe is pitted. So, he is just getting pulled and pulled by the sea increasingly and he wants to be mobile and this is obviously in correspondence with the rising middle class of the early eighteenth century which is trying to very, very keen to try out the luck and in mercantile expeditions across the seas to different parts of the world. So, this is the point in the story where the two world orders meet. One confined by the gout, almost paralyzed by a diseased, decaying, decadent health condition. The other raring to go, raring to leave the home and try out his luck in very, very foreign, exotic places. He pressed me earnestly and in the most affectionate manner not to play the young man. So again, the prodigal son subtext comes back again. Not to play the young man. Not to precipitate myself into miseries which nature and the station of life I was born in seemed to have provided against. That I was under no necessity of seeking my bread. that he would do well for me, and endeavour to enter me fairly into the middle station of life, which he had just been recommending to me.

So, as you can see, there is this transgressive quality about Crusoe, which I've mentioned already. And the father figure over here is trying to press the fact that there's bread at home, there's a home, just stay within this particular structure. There's no necessity for you to leave everything and try out a luck. in very perilous conditions of the sea. So, it is very much a warning tale, a warning device, a warning scene over here. And as you saw in the last class, Crusoe was trained to be a lawyer, a man of the law, someone who would be staying within the territory of law, within the territory of legality, not transgressing the territory which is what he does. So, this is the ancient advice from a decaying old man representing a decaying old-world order, you know, trying to advise or exhort the next generation who is desperate to leave home. So, as I mentioned that this is also a very quickly changing culture, a very quickly changing cultural condition where the old order is suddenly giving way to an emerging new order where people can just leave there and take a ship, stay out to exotic places, you know, build plantations, build an island. take up a territory and quickly become rich in a way which would be unimaginable in previous times but it is also something which can quickly go wrong

which can quickly deteriorate into a worse perilous condition so this is a warning bit that Crusoe's father is giving him So that if I was not very easy and happy in the world, it must be my mere fate or fault that must hinder it. And that he should have nothing to answer for, having thus discharged his duty in warning me against measures which he knew would be to my hurt. So, it's like that point where the father says, well, if you still do it, it is on you, right, because do not tell me later that I did not warn you, do not tell me later that I did not caution you against the possibility of a perilous condition, right. So, this is your home, you have provisions of bread, you have provisions of food, security, stability, you have a stable home. So, do not go for a life of insecurity, do not go for a life of instability with the hope of becoming someone exponentially wealthier. you know, very, very, very quickly, right. So, don't go for quick money.

So, as you can see at various points of time, this father-son exchange, this father-son conflict have been quite symbolic of cultural shifts, quite symbolic of, you know, the quick changing of certain cultural conditions where certain new professions suddenly become visible, certain new professions suddenly, you know, enter the market and some old world orders, some old trade orders begin to give way. to these new conditions of making money. And there is always this moment where the old patriarch, the old male reprimands the young man who then transgresses the territory and becomes something else. So the Crusoe father seen over here is very much symbolic of the cultural shift, material, you know, mercantile shift happening in Western Europe at that point of time, early 18th century. So, in a word, that as he would do very kind things for me if I would stay and settle at home as directed, so he would not have so much hand in my misfortunes as to give me any encouragement to go away. So, he says, you know, if you abide by what I'm saying, I'll take care of you. So, this is the classic old patriarch saying, follow the father's law. If you follow the father's law, you'll be taken care of. If you do not follow the father's law, then you are on your own. So, onus is on you. And to close all, he told me I had my elder brother for an example, to whom he had used the same earnest persuasions to keep going keep from going into the Low Country wars, but could not prevail, his young desires prompting him to run into the army where he was killed.

So we get to hear, a very interesting aside almost. The Crusoe had a brother, an older brother who went and joined an army, went and joined a war presumably as a mercenary against his father's will, one of the low country wars. I mean it could be Italy; it could be any of the southern European countries. where there's a battle going on and he just joined the battle, joined the war, presumably as a mercenary soldier against the wishes of his father and he got killed. So, he stands as a testimony to what can go wrong, a cautionary tale, a very, very glaring cautionary tale, something which is used to warn the subsequent brothers not to replicate it. And though he said he would not cease to pray for me, yet he would venture to say to me that if I did take this foolish step, God would not bless me, and I would have leisure hereafter to reflect upon having neglected his counsel, where there might be none to assist in my recovery. So, this is very much a tale saying that you are on a road to damnation. So, I will pray for you as a father, but it might be one step too many for God to be on your side. So, if you leave home, you leave God. If you go to the sea, you leave behind morality, you leave behind Christianity, you leave behind old Christian council. Now, This fear of the sea is very common across cultures, as you know, that if you take a boat and go to the sea, you leave your home, you leave your homely atmosphere, you leave a territory, you leave a moral territory and there is always this danger that you become someone else, you become a different identity which cannot correspond anymore to your family identity, to your cultural identity etc. The perilous pull of this theme into transforming a human subject to something else morally is you know something very common across cultures, not just in England, right. So the sea over here becomes this big seduction against which the father figure is trying to caution the son you know and obviously the vocabulary here is very, very Christian, very religious in many ways. I was sincerely affected with this discourse as indeed, who could be otherwise? So, Crusoe initially is very affected by his father's counsel and he says, well, it seems to be an absolute certainty that I should listen to my father.

And also, the other example given of the older brother who died while going to fight in the war is also given to Crusoe and that becomes part of the cautionary tale. And I resolved not to think of going abroad anymore, but to settle at home according to my father's desire. So, for a brief point of time, Crusoe thought, well, I'm not going to do it.

I'm going to stay where I am. I'm going to follow my father's counsel and stay at home. But alas, a few days wore it all off. And in short, to prevent any of my father's further importunities in a few weeks after I resolved to run quite away from him. So the classy prodigal son story begins to emerge over here. So, the pull of the sea is too strong. The seduction is too strong. So, he decides to disregard his father's ancient wise counsel and just takes a plunge and decides to run away. However, I did not act so hastily neither, as my first heat of resolution prompted. So, his first impulse was to just run away without telling anyone. I took my mother at the time when I thought her a little pleasanter than ordinary and told her that my thoughts were so entirely bent upon seeing the world that I should never settle to anything with resolution enough to go through with it. And my father had better give me his consent than force me to go without it. So this is very filmy in some sense, you know. It's like a hero of the story, trying to do something his father doesn't approve of, run away somewhere, very filmy, as you can imagine. So he goes to his mother, plays his affectionate son to her and says, well, you persuade my father to give me his blessings or else I'll have to go anyway. Now, what's interesting is here, the whole idea of seeing the world, Now, you have to understand, again, this is how a novel can be seen as reflective of the cultural condition of its time. The world becomes more and more recognizable. The world becomes more and more known to people over here, right, in terms of globes being formed, atlases being formed, in terms of maps being formed. This is also the heyday of map making because people are going out of the countries, exploring new countries, discovering new sea routes, discovering new land masses, putting that on a map. So, the ontology of the world begins to emerge in a way that we know it today, right? So, the idea of the mappable world, the idea of the known world, the territorial world begins to emerge in early 18th century. More and more traders leave home, they find out more trading routes, they find out more sea routes, they find out more territories, so more names began to emerge etc. But it is also a sense of mystery. It is also a sense of what is not yet known, right. So, because you begin to know certain things, there is a seduction towards what is not yet known because the knowing process, the knowledge process, the cartographic knowledge process is not complete, right. So, seeing the world over here is also an illusion, a reference. to the culture of cartography which has begun to happen in early 18th century map making processes, right. Different

kinds of maps were built. Everyone was making their own maps. It was, it wasn't really standardized or uniform at that point of time. But at the same time what this also means is there are bits of the world which are not known yet. So, there's this undiscovered islands, undiscovered spaces which are pulling the human subjects to go in there and test their fortune, right. So again, you come back to the domestic space and he's talking to his mother in one of her better moods, as we know, and basically persuading her to persuade the father so that he gives his blessings. I was now 18 years old, which is too late to go apprentice to a trade or clerk to an attorney. that I was sure if I did, I should never serve out my time and I should certainly run away from my master before my time was out and go to sea. So, he says well internally, psychologically, emotionally, mentally I have already taken my decision that I will not go for an internship anywhere, I will not go for becoming an apprentice to a merchant anywhere. I'm 18, I'm already too late to become an apprentice and spend more time. And even if I were to sign up to be an apprentice, I will most definitely run away and go to sea. So, I may as well leave now. So, you may as well talk to my father and give me your collective parental blessings. And if she would speak to my father and let me go, but one voyage abroad, if I came home again and did not like it, I would go no more. And I would promise by a double diligence to recover the time I had lost. So it's like saying, give me one chance to explore the world.

Give me one chance to see the world. And I promise if I come back and I don't like it, I will do as you please. So a classic intergenerational tension over here, which is also reflective of the cultural tension happening around that time. There are these emerging new professions, these emerging new ways to make money. which are also based out of adventure. But, you know, there is old world order, which hasn't quite disappeared yet. So, there's constant tension and constant conflict going on between the different old orders, which are represented in a very intergenerational domestic discourse. This put my mother into a great passion. She told me she knew it would be to no purpose to speak to my father upon any such subject, that he knew too well what was my interest to give his consent to anything so much from my herd, and that she wondered how I could think of any such thing after such a discourse as I had with my father. and such kind and tender expressions as she knew my father had used to me and that in short if I would ruin myself

there was no help for me so again the damnation metaphor comes in if you want to ruin yourself going against your parents wishes then you're damned there's no possibility of redemption for you anymore there's no help for me again almost a very biblical Christian vocabulary that I might depend I should never have the consent to it.

So, no matter what happens they would never give the consent on a road which is almost certain according to them to cause damnation to the son and again the dead son becomes some kind of a spectral figure over here the son who died the early son who died in a war which again he went to fight without a consent of his parents. That for her for her part, she would not have so much hand in my destruction. And I should never have to say that my mother was willing, my father was not. So, the parents put up a joint front. And again, this is an old-world order trying to hold on to the new world order which is emerging over here. But the conflict is all too visible. And we find out later that, you know, mother refused to go persuade, but then gave a report to Crusoe's father. And then they decided that it is a damned thing anyway. The damnation is inevitable. And the line appears, that boy might be happy if you stay at home. But if he goes abroad, he'll be the miserblest wretch that was ever born. I can give no consent to it. So, the crucial father is almost sure that the moment he leaves home, he'll be miserable. And he, in his right mind, as a responsible parent, would never consent to it. Now, what follows here? is one year of dull work and Crusoe tries you know to find out different things he can do but you know he does not, nothing else works out and he leaves ultimately for the sea and we find out later on that he leaves without asking God's blessings or his father's without any consideration of circumstances or consequences and the exact time the exact date is also known to us because again this appears to be some kind of a memoir. But what is also interesting and the interesting thing about classic realism is that it gives you a representation of reality, it gives you a story where the character or the narrator seems to know exactly what was happening around that time. So, there is absolutely no unreliability, no uncertainty about the narration which is obviously a fantasy because real world, real life is not certain. Real life is full of uncertainties. We have no idea what happened in a certain point of time except our subjective understanding of it. We have no idea what is happening at this point of time except what we own through our senses. But classic realism seems to be a very

interesting strategy of narration, a strategy of storytelling which seems to know exactly what happens before, now and after and also there is a spatial quality to it.

So, it is a form of spatio-temporal control through which storytelling happens and as I mentioned it is no accident that it becomes the favourite device, the favourite narrative device during the emergence of capitalism. So, the 1st of September, 1651, I went on board a ship bound for London. Never any young adventurous misfortunes, I believe, began sooner or continued longer than mine. Now, next part, we will look at the shipwreck, which we will study in a subsequent class. But suffice it to say that, you know, the introduction of the story before the shipwreck happens and as you can see, Right after he leaves home, the next chapter is titled The Shipwreck because you know the whole idea of the catastrophe, the whole idea of what happens, the punitive condition that takes place when he disobeys his parents is spectacularly evident, right. So, the shipwreck becomes almost like a sin for transgression. It becomes a price he has to pay for being transgressive in quality. Just to wrap up this session, what we find is this very biblical Christian vocabulary which is used over here is actually corresponding to this the conflict between capitalism and the old-world order, slightly feudal, slightly mercantile, domestically mercantile, inland mercantile world order. where this new pull of capitalism, this new pull of the sea corresponds to a more exotic adventure, a more accelerated, a more amplified version of growth and improvement and you know financial prosperity, right. So there is a sense of movement that happens in Crusoe throughout the adventure story. And as I mentioned It emerges from one of those epochs in human history where there is a very drastic and abrupt departure from an old-world order to a new old order. That can sometimes happen with the arrival of new technology, that can sometimes happen with the world of a new political momentum which can create new possibilities of living, new possibilities of making money, new possibilities of a profession. which suddenly become, you know, very, very rampant and very amplified and very popular in quality and which suddenly renders redundant and almost useless the erstwhile professions, the earlier professions in many ways. So there's this constant pull we can see between earlier form of life and a newer form of life and also what the new form of life represents in Crusoe in this particular story is this constant interplay of

possibility and precarity of the you know the possibility of becoming prosperous and rich and wealthy and suddenly climbing up the social ladder but also they can come at huge costs you know the shipwrecks and people dying human causality and so on and so forth now I will end with this. Robinson Crusoe has been read through many lenses. There is a post-colonial lens, there is a gender lens, there is this cultural Marxism lens and we will take a look at all these things separately and also collectively and interconnectedly because obviously you know a complex literary work should not be seen only through a certain kind of a perspective but we need to bring in as many perspectives as possible. but the core thing that we will do, the most important thing which we will do with this novel and also for all the novels is how this novel speaks to that particular culture, right, how it reflects back on that particular cultural material condition from which it emerges and how it helps us understand the particular cultural condition. Again, the emphasis on change because the title of the course is Novel and Change. So how is this novel reflective of social changes, cultural changes? Now, the changes over here are quite accelerated, the changes over here are quite abrupt, sometimes accidental, sometimes systemic. And what does it do to the human psyche? What does it do to human emotion? What does it do to human morality? How the moral map changes? with new forms of cartographic classifications.

How the cultural map changes with new forms of cartographic classifications. When a real cartographic map begins to be reoriented and reconfigured, what does it do to the old moral map, right? The relationship between morality and cartography is interesting over here, right. And how the sea over here becomes some kind of a site, some kind of a fluid vessel through which, you know, the old model order can disappear and a new model order can reappear. And obviously that brings a lot of anxiety and misgiving to certain sections of people, certain sections of human subjects. who want to hold on to the old order. But at the same time, to see this massive pull, almost irresistible in quality, a pull towards a new world, a pull towards a newfound land, a pull towards new forms of knowledge, which obviously comes with political, financial, mercantile implications, right. So, the entire story, the entire novel should be seen as something which is very closely corresponding to these changing coordinates of culture, materiality and morality.

So, I think it's a really interesting novel and it's perhaps one of the most appropriate novels to start a course which looks at relationship between novel as a fictional form, novel as a literary form and how it reflects and speaks to and dialogic with the diachronic cultural changes in which it is nested, in which it is situated. So we'll continue with this in subsequent class. Thank you for your attention.