

Unit 4: The Literature of the Nineteenth Century

Semester 3 - Weeks: 9 to 13

Section 1: British Literature

Unit 4: The Literature of the Victorian Age

Time allotted: 5 sessions

Weekly Workload : 1 hour 30 mn

Description:

This unit is composed of two different texts belonging to the same period historically but with different tendencies. They were both written during the nineteenth century, so through the analysis, references to the historical background become key elements. The first text *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen marks the shift from the Romantic movement to Realism. The second text *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens is a reflection of social realism, the most accurate movement to depict life in the nineteenth century England.

Objectives:

1. A thorough understanding of Realism as a literary movement and social realism as a concept in particular.
2. The importance of realism as a movement in reflecting the industrial lifestyle of the nineteenth century.
3. Exploration of the social problems of the nineteenth century London and the role of the realist author as a social reformer

Pre-requisites: A reading of the novels *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen and *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens. The students must also be aware of the historical background of the period (the Victorian Age).

A good knowledge of the principles of the enlightenment is also required.

Lesson Plan

Lecture 5: *Pride and Prejudice*

- A study of the general ideas and themes of the novel *Pride and Prejudice*.
- Analysis of different excerpts from the novel *Pride and Prejudice* discussing merely social standards, the condition of women, marriage, and judgement.
- Discussion of the romantic aspects and the realist aspects in the novel
- **Lecture 6: Realism in Great Britain**
- Overview of the realist movement and basic principles.
- Study of the concept of Social Realism
- Overview of the most famous works and authors as well as their themes
- **Lecture 7: *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens**
- Study of the general themes and ideas of the novel *Hard Times*.
- Analysis of the characters of Mr Gradgrind and Sissy Jupe from different excerpts.

- Discussion of the setting represented in the city of Coketown "city of red brick"
- Discussion of the symbols, references, and author's style
- analysis and discussion of the basic themes and intended meaning

Lecture 1: *Pride and Prejudice*

Jane Austen born 16 December 1775 and died on 18 July 1817 was an English novelist known for her sensitive novels about the British middle class and gentry. Her works explore British social values related to women, merely their definition of marriage as the only financial security to women in the nineteenth century England. Her style includes social commentary, irony, and realism. Her novels are part of the transition from romanticism to nineteenth century realism. She published her works first anonymously because of the difficulty of women to engage in the public sphere. It is also reported that the period witnessed a gender bias against women in publishing which obliged female authors to use male names to get the publishers to notice their works. Some of her works are the following: *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814), *Emma* (1815), *Persuasion* (1817).

Pride and Prejudice, Analysis

Written in 1813, *Pride and Prejudice* is a Romantic novel of manners. It uses humor, comedy, and emotion to tackle social standards and expectations as well as sensitive matters. It discusses the Bennet family and their big dilemma of finding husbands to their daughters. It opens with an ironic statement saying "it is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife" which has become an iconic line in modern culture. The use of the free indirect style permits the author to mock her society in the voice of her narrator, showing the absurd motivations of the women of the nineteenth century and their conception of marriage. The novel is told in the third person point of view in a way as to allow the author to show different situations and interfere in the voice of the narrator to add personal commentary on the social phenomena under discussion.

Yet, in its ironic style, the novel touches an important issue in the nineteenth century society, which is the position of women (among other themes). Even though the position of women is not the main issue in the novel, their appearances and their status do shape one important part of its plot. The definition of marriage and its approach as the only financial security in the novel originates from the fact that women were deprived of heritage and the only escape for them was marriage. Practicing science was considered harmful to women, whilst young men could still go to college, all the females had to leave school after the age of fourteen, leaving them thus with a lot of spare time and good energy. Jobs were not acceptable for women as well, the only job that was considered decent for a woman was the position of governess.

The novel shows the five Bennet daughters, each in her own character and personality. Jane being the eldest and the most beautiful was her mother's favourite. She is kind, polite, and smart. She meets Mr Bingley, a man of a large fortune who becomes the prey of all the women of the neighbourhood. Jane and Mr Bingley fall in love with each other but are faced by Mr Darcy who thinks that Jane was trying to use Mr Bingley and attempts to separate them to protect his friend before he falls in love with her younger sister Elizabeth. Elizabeth Bennet, often referred to as Lizzy was her father's favourite. She is the most intelligent of the five Bennet daughters and represents an obstacle to her mother who wants her to marry her cousin who is meant to inherit the entire Bennet estate. Elizabeth is the protagonist of the novel. Along with Mr Darcy, both characters embody the representations of pride and of prejudice in the novel.

Themes

The themes that are discussed in the novel include Prejudice, social appearances, social standards, and class inequalities. These themes are represented in each of the characters. Mr Darcy and Elizabeth represent prejudices and self worth. The two characters mid-judge each other from the beginning of the novel. Mr Darcy's words about Elizabeth and her sisters irritate her which leads her to have a very negative

opinion of him for a long time, which is her expression of pride. The two characters switch roles as the narration develops, Mr Darcy shows pride towards Elizabeth and her family multiple times, he thinks that they are not a good match for Mr Bingley as they originate from a different social class, yet, as he learns that Mr Wickham was trying to seduce Elizabeth he rushes to protect her from him, despite her anger, Elizabeth expresses her thankfulness to his deed. The most prevalent theme in the novel is that of love. Elizabeth and Mr Darcy discover their love for each other little by little as they meet in different incidents. Mr Darcy attempts to propose to Elizabeth once but he formulates his demand so badly that she is offended and rejects him out of pride. She expects him to renew the proposal but he is retained by his pride and does not renew the proposal until the end of the novel, after Lady Catherine's visit.

The theme of class difference is depicted in the character and bothering behaviours of Lady Catherine, who is presented in the novel as **antagonist**. She is judgmental and elitist, which makes her disrespect Elizabeth and her entire family during her visit to the Bennet residency. She starts by devaluing their porch, the garden, the living room, which Mrs Bennet attempts to justify. This latter asserts her position as mediocre and futile in the eyes of Lady Catherine, which shows her weak personality. Lady Catherine offends Elizabeth by attacking her on the basis that the gossip of Mr Darcy's proposal to Elizabeth was demeaning to him. Unlike Mrs Bennet, Elizabeth shows character and a strong identity by responding to Lady Catherine.

One more theme is that of marriage, depicted in Mrs Bennet and the Lucas family. From the beginning of the narrative, Mrs Bennet gets excited for the news of the arrival of the rich Mr Bingley to the neighborhood and obliges her husband to visit him for the purpose of introducing their daughters. The ironic statement that opens the novel, which states that a rich man is in want of a wife seems to be the opinion of an entire neighbourhood, for which the inhabitants had also made the acquaintance of Mr Bingley for their daughters. This theme is approached with Sarcasm and irony, which are depicted in the character of Mr Bennet, who teases his wife because of her "mean understanding".

***Pride and Prejudice* as a Romantic Novel**

The novel represents the shift from Romanticism to Realism and includes the principles of both movements. While it depicts all the details per se, the novel shows depth of characterization and concerns itself with the middle class individual. It also emphasizes sensitivity over rationality and explores extreme emotions in the different relationships depicted in the narrative. The characters also find escape in nature every

Character Analysis

1. **Elizabeth Bennet:** The second Bennet daughter, she is the protagonist of the narration. She is smart and independent. In the beginning she is judgmental to Mr Darcy and holds a negative opinion of him, yet, her character develops through the narrative as she discovers different truths about many people that surrounded her and which made her feelings and thoughts about Mr Darcy grow and mature. She is thus a round character.
2. **Mr. Darcy:** He is a main character. He shares the themes of pride and of prejudice with Elizabeth as the two judge and act condescendingly towards each other. His character experiences alteration too. He shows a mysterious character in the beginning of someone that is self-righteous and arrogant. His character shows more complexity and emotion as he falls in love with Elizabeth and attempts to understand his feelings. He is a round character too.
3. **Jane Bennet:** A main character, she is the eldest of the Bennet daughters. She is beautiful and sweet-natured. She represents a contrast to Elizabeth's character in her quietness and calm character.
4. **Mr. Bingley:** Main character, he loves Jane and decides to marry but is interrupted by Mr Darcy's prejudice. He marries Jane at the end of the novel
5. **Mrs. Bennet:** Main character. The mother of the Bennet daughters, she is excited about marriage and gossiping and new. She is described as nervous and limited, she never understands her husband's humour. She is a flat character that stands for the

social practices that Jane Austen criticizes in the novel, merely society's definition of marriage.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Zimmerman, Everett. "Pride and Prejudice in Pride and Prejudice." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, vol. 23, no. 1, 1968, pp. 64–73. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2932317>. Accessed 15 Jan. 2024.

Assignment

Write an essay where you analyse the following excerpt.

From Chapter 36

If Elizabeth, when Mr. Darcy gave her the letter, did not expect it to contain a renewal of his offers, she had formed no expectation at all of its contents. But such as they were, it may be well supposed how eagerly she went through them, and what a contrariety of emotion they excited. Her feelings as she read were scarcely to be defined. With amazement did she first understand that he believed any apology to be in his power; and steadfastly was she persuaded that he could have no explanation to give, which a just sense of shame would not conceal. With a strong prejudice against everything he might say, she began his account of what had happened at Netherfield. She read, with an eagerness which hardly left her power of comprehension, and from impatience of knowing what the next sentence might bring, was incapable of attending to the sense of the one before her eyes. His belief of her sister's insensibility, she instantly resolved to be false, and his account of the real, the worst objections to the match, made her too angry to have any wish of doing him justice. He expressed no regret for what he had done which satisfied her; his style was not penitent, but haughty. It was all pride and insolence.

But when this subject was succeeded by his account of Mr. Wickham, when she read with somewhat clearer attention, a relation of events, which, if true, must overthrow every cherished opinion of his worth, and which bore so alarming an affinity to his own history of himself, her feelings were yet more acutely painful and more difficult of definition. Astonishment, apprehension, and even horror, oppressed her. She wished to discredit it entirely, repeatedly exclaiming, "This must be false! This cannot be! This must be the grossest falsehood!"—and when she had gone through the whole letter, though scarcely knowing anything of the last page or two, put it hastily away, protesting that she would not regard it, that she would never look at it again.

From Chapter 56

the door was thrown open and their visitor entered. It was [Lady Catherine de Bourgh](#).

They were of course all intending to be surprised; but their astonishment was beyond their expectation; and on the part of [Mrs. Bennet](#) and [Kitty](#), though she was perfectly unknown to them, even inferior to what [Elizabeth](#) felt. "I hope you are well, [Miss Bennet](#). That lady, I suppose, is [your mother](#)." [Elizabeth](#) replied very concisely that she was. "And that I suppose is [one of your sisters](#)." "Yes, madam," said [Mrs. Bennet](#), delighted to speak to a [Lady](#)

Catherine. "She is my youngest girl but one. My youngest of all is lately married, and my eldest is somewhere about the grounds, walking with a young man who, I believe, will soon become a part of the family." "You have a very small park here," returned *Lady Catherine* after a short silence. "It is nothing in comparison of Rosings, my lady, I dare say; but I assure you it is much larger than Sir William Lucas's." "This must be a most inconvenient sitting room for the evening, in summer; the windows are full west." *Mrs. Bennet* assured her that they never sat there after dinner

... "You can be at no loss, Miss Bennet, to understand the reason of my journey hither. Your own heart, your own conscience, must tell you why I come." Elizabeth looked with unaffected astonishment. "Indeed, you are mistaken, Madam. I have not been at all able to account for the honour of seeing you here." "Miss Bennet," replied her ladyship, in an angry tone, "you ought to know, that I am not to be trifled with. But however insincere you may choose to be, you shall not find me so. My character has ever been celebrated for its sincerity and frankness, and in a cause of such moment as this, I shall certainly not depart from it. A report of a most alarming nature reached me two days ago. I was told that not only your sister was on the point of being most advantageously married, but that you, that Miss Elizabeth Bennet, would, in all likelihood, be soon afterwards united to my nephew, my own nephew, Mr. Darcy. Though I know it must be a scandalous falsehood, though I would not injure him so much as to suppose the truth of it possible, I instantly resolved on setting off for this place, that I might make my sentiments known to you."

"If you believed it impossible to be true," said Elizabeth, colouring with astonishment and disdain, "I wonder you took the trouble of coming so far. What could your ladyship propose by it?" "At once to insist upon having such a report universally contradicted." "Your coming to Longbourn, to see me and my family," said Elizabeth coolly, "will be rather a confirmation of it; if, indeed, such a report is in existence." "If! Do you then pretend to be ignorant of it? Has it not been industriously circulated by yourselves? Do you not know that such a report is spread abroad?" "I never heard that it was." "And can you likewise declare, that there is no foundation for it?" "I do not pretend to possess equal frankness with your ladyship. You may ask questions which I shall not choose to answer." "This is not to be borne. Miss Bennet, I insist on being satisfied. Has he, has my nephew, made you an offer of marriage?"

"Your ladyship has declared it to be impossible.", "It ought to be so; it must be so, while he retains the use of his reason. But your arts and allurements may, in a moment of infatuation, have made him forget what he owes to himself and to all his family. You may have drawn him in.", "If I have, I shall be the last person to confess it."

"Miss Bennet, ...Let me be rightly understood. This match, to which you have the presumption to aspire, can never take place. No, never. Mr. Darcy is engaged to my daughter. Now what have you to say?" "Only this; that if he is so, you can have no reason to suppose he will make an offer to me."

Lady Catherine hesitated for a moment, and then replied,

"The engagement between them is of a peculiar kind. From their infancy, they have been intended for each other. It was the favourite wish of his mother, as well as of her's. While in their cradles, we planned the union: and now, at the moment when the wishes of both sisters would be accomplished in their marriage, to be prevented by a young woman of inferior birth, of no importance in the world, and wholly unallied to the family! Do you pay no regard to the wishes of his friends? To his tacit engagement with Miss De Bourgh? Are you lost to every feeling of propriety and delicacy? Have you not heard me say that from his earliest hours he was destined for his cousin?"

“Yes, and I had heard it before. But what is that to me? If there is no other objection to my marrying your nephew, I shall certainly not be kept from it by knowing that his mother and aunt wished him to marry Miss De Bourgh. You both did as much as you could in planning the marriage. Its completion depended on others. If Mr. Darcy is neither by honour nor inclination confined to his cousin, why is not he to make another choice? And if I am that choice, why may not I accept him?”

“Because honour, decorum, prudence, nay, interest, forbid it. Yes, Miss Bennet, interest; for do not expect to be noticed by his family or friends, if you wilfully act against the inclinations of all. You will be censured, slighted, and despised, by every one connected with him. Your alliance will be a disgrace; your name will never even be mentioned by any of us.”

“These are heavy misfortunes,” replied Elizabeth. “But the wife of Mr. Darcy must have such extraordinary sources of happiness necessarily attached to her situation, that she could, upon the whole, have no cause to repine.”

“Obstinate, headstrong girl! I am ashamed of you! Is this your gratitude for my attentions to you last spring? Is nothing due to me on that score? Let us sit down. You are to understand, Miss Bennet, that I came here with the determined resolution of carrying my purpose; nor will I be dissuaded from it. I have not been used to submit to any person's whims. I have not been in the habit of brooking disappointment.”

“That will make your ladyship's situation at present more pitiable; but it will have no effect on me.”

“I will not be interrupted. Hear me in silence. My daughter and my nephew are formed for each other. They are descended, on the maternal side, from the same noble line; and, on the father's, from respectable, honourable, and ancient -- though untitled -- families. Their fortune on both sides is splendid. They are destined for each other by the voice of every member of their respective houses; and what is to divide them? The upstart pretensions of a young woman without family, connections, or fortune. Is this to be endured! But it must not, shall not be. If you were sensible of your own good, you would not wish to quit the sphere in which you have been brought up.”

“In marrying your nephew, I should not consider myself as quitting that sphere. He is a gentleman; I am a gentleman's daughter; so far we are equal.”

“True. You are a gentleman's daughter. But who was your mother? Who are your uncles and aunts? Do not imagine me ignorant of their condition.”

“Whatever my connections may be,” said Elizabeth, “if your nephew does not object to them, they can be nothing to you.”

“Tell me once for all, are you engaged to him?”

Though Elizabeth would not, for the mere purpose of obliging Lady Catherine, have answered this question, she could not but say, after a moment's deliberation,

“I am not.”

Lady Catherine seemed pleased.

“And will you promise me, never to enter into such an engagement?”

“I will make no promise of the kind.”

“Miss Bennet I am shocked and astonished. I expected to find a more reasonable young woman. But do not deceive yourself into a belief that I will ever recede. I shall not go away till you have given me the assurance I require.”

“And I certainly never shall give it. I am not to be intimidated into anything so wholly unreasonable. Your ladyship wants Mr. Darcy to marry your daughter; but would my giving you the wished-for promise make their marriage at all more probable? Supposing him to be attached to me, would my refusing to accept his hand make him wish to bestow it on his cousin? Allow me to say, Lady Catherine, that the arguments with which you have supported this extraordinary application have been as frivolous as the application was ill-judged. You have widely mistaken my character, if you think I can be worked on by such persuasions as these. How far your nephew might approve of your interference in his affairs, I cannot tell; but you have certainly no right to concern yourself in mine. I must beg, therefore, to be importuned no farther on the subject.”

“Not so hasty, if you please. I have by no means done. To all the objections I have already urged, I have still another to add. I am no stranger to the particulars of your youngest sister's infamous elopement. I know it all; that the young man's marrying her was a patched-up business, at the expence of your father and uncles. And is such a girl to be my nephew's sister? Is her husband, is the son of his late father's steward, to be his brother? Heaven and earth! -- of what are you thinking? Are the shades of Pemberley to be thus polluted?”

“You can now have nothing farther to say,” she resentfully answered. “You have insulted me in every possible method. I must beg to return to the house.”