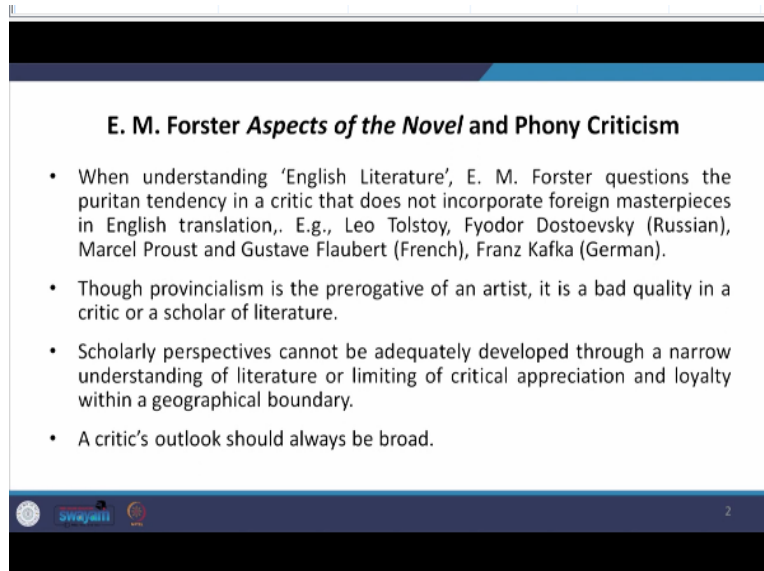


**Narrative Mode and Fiction**  
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**Indian Institute of Technology-Roorkee**

**Lecture-22**  
**Features of the Novel-I**

Good morning and welcome back to the lecture series on narrative modern fiction. Today we are going to start with a new module title features of the novels. So, we are look at the different features of the novel, the readership of novel; we are going to discuss more about criticism; the critic of novel. In the light of an important work contributed by E. M. Forster title aspects of the novel.

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**E. M. Forster *Aspects of the Novel* and Phony Criticism**

- When understanding 'English Literature', E. M. Forster questions the puritan tendency in a critic that does not incorporate foreign masterpieces in English translation,. E.g., Leo Tolstoy, Fyodor Dostoevsky (Russian), Marcel Proust and Gustave Flaubert (French), Franz Kafka (German).
- Though provincialism is the prerogative of an artist, it is a bad quality in a critic or a scholar of literature.
- Scholarly perspectives cannot be adequately developed through a narrow understanding of literature or limiting of critical appreciation and loyalty within a geographical boundary.
- A critic's outlook should always be broad.

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So, at the outset of these work aspects of the novel by E. M. Forster; Foster tries to understand what comprises English literature is English literature only the corpus of work that is written in English should English literature limit itself to works that are originally created in the English language or should it translate; should it transcend the bounds of language and also embrace masterpiece works that have been produced in other languages as well.

Here he is focusing mainly on European languages but this could be extended especially in postcolonial situation to actually emphasize the question that Forster is raising here and ask why should not Indian literature, why should not Afro-American or African literature, Caribbean literature be also part of English literature. This is an argument that English

literature; the English as a discipline, a field of study what comprises English literature has had to face.

And this is the beginning of a very important dialogue or a very valid question that Forster raises here, which later on makes the studies in English more inclusive, broader which also looks into the English works coming from the postcolonial countries. Here he is talking about works written in Russian and French or German. E. M. Forster questions the puritan tendency in any critic that does not incorporate foreign masterpieces in English translations.

So, he recognizes the importance of translation which could enrich any literary study so much. So, for example he is looking at works by Leo Tolstoy, Fyodor Dostoevsky, both in Russian then he is taking about Marcel Proust and Gustave Flaubert in French, Franz Kafka from Germany. So, their works are they are classics why should not the translated versions.

We understood and treated with the same status as English works within the purview of English literature. So, Forster goes on to say that provincialism is the prerogative of an artist, however it is a bad quality in a critic or a scholar of literature. A scholar or critic should have very expansive wide in horizon of thinking of understanding and a narrowed treatment of literature does not do much good to scholarship.

Neither does it do justice to literature. So, a mark of provincialism usually is present in any literary piece. However, that should not be brought into one's criticism or critic of understanding literature. So, that should be brought to us once a critic of literature or artwork. Scholarly perspectives cannot be adequately developed through a narrow understanding of literature or through limitation of critical appreciation and thereby loyalty within a geographical boundary.

So, literary work, artistic work, transcends all geographical, historical, political, ideological boundaries. That is how a critic is also born. So, he is starting aspects of the novel through a commentary on the expectations that are associated with a good critic. He is trying to identify the phony critic, the inferior critic who does not do much justice to a work of literature. So, a critic's outlook should always be broadened, much widened as widened as possible.

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**Aspects of the Novel: Phony Criticism**

- However, unlike the critic, the novelist has a right of the created object and provincialism can be his/her prerogative.
- E.g. Important works such as *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe have a provincial position, but they are timeless.
- A good critic masters a subject comprehensively, is not limited only to the core criticism but also has some abutting knowledge.
- With a wide-ranging view of the subject and related topics, he can attempt understanding the topic across time and space, by looking at the different influences.

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Unlike the critic Forster here notes that the novelist or the artist has the right of provincialism to an extent and they can create their work, they created object could have a certain marks of the local reality which the artist inhabits. For example important works such as *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe have Stark provincial qualities. They hold a provincial position but then they are also timeless.

So, a good critic masters a subject comprehensively, he is not limited only to the core criticism but also has some aborting knowledge. So, with a wide-ranging view of the subject and associated topics a good critic can attempt understanding the topic across time and space by looking at the different influences. So, a literature might or an artwork might emerge from a very narrow down position posited by the writer or the artist.

But a treatment or study or examination of the artwork entails cognizance of and awareness of the context from which the work has churned out. So, as a critic we cannot, as a scholar we cannot really block ourselves only to a historical period or a geographical area. We have to understand the abating influences, all kinds of adaptations, receptions, the literary transactions that were going on all the possible factors that might have gone into writing a masterpiece, a piece of artwork. So, here Forster is talking about what constitutes phony criticism?

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**Aspects of the Novel: Phony Criticism**

- Phony criticism is characterized by the quick desire to classify an artwork as before, during or after a historical period or movement, or trying to contain works in terms of specific branches of enquiry or trend, thus delimiting the possibility of other dimensions of such works – naming and freezing of a text as only something and not doubting about its other prospects.
- It also involves making definitive and close-ended references and comparisons to authors and artworks.
- Bad critics quickly refer to books without tediously reading them end to end.

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Phony criticism is characterized by the quick desire a kind of haste or rash towards classifying any artwork in terms of before, during or after a historical period or movement or trying to even contain works in terms of specific branches of inquiry or trend which in a way delimits the possibility of other dimensions of such works. Beat which delimits the possibility of other dimensions of such works.

So, when we try to categorize a text or freeze its possibilities only in terms of a historical period we are not doubting about its other prospects. So, when we call let us say a poet or a writer as a Renaissance writer, a romantic poet are there also a betting influences, are there also influences that are not as dominant but which have all the same gone into the making of the artwork.

When we tag something only in terms of one given period or one given movement we are perhaps ignoring the other factors and in a way limit the possibility of the author, the possibility of cross-cultural influences. Let us say that the author might be facing or maybe the fact that the author was not influenced by external history at all. This is also something that Forster explores.

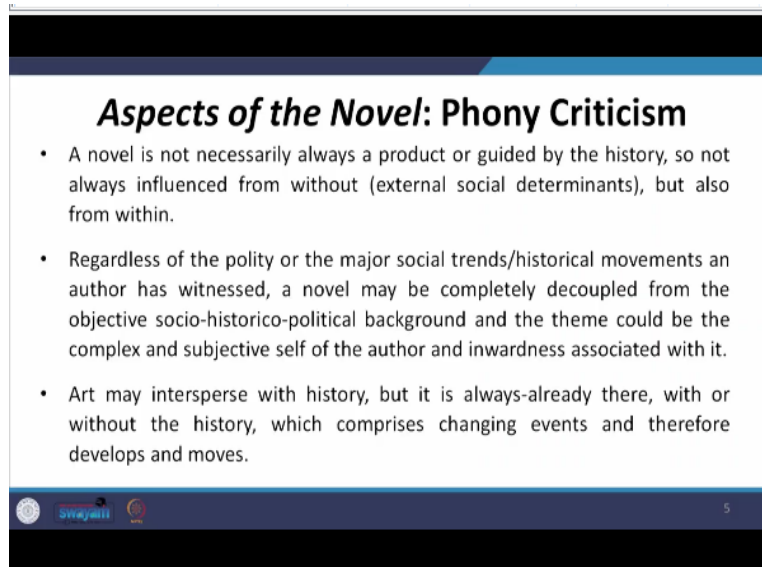
So, when we tag and freeze a work in terms of a particular trend or a historical movement it involves such a treatment or such a criticism or critic involves making a definitive and close ended references and the comparisons between authors and artworks is thereby very, very limited, very, very narrowed down. So, bad critics quickly refer to books without tediously reading them end to end.

That is all also a sign of being a phony critic where the one wants to arrive at a conclusion without really penetrating the work as much as one should without reading it properly. A novel is not necessarily always a product or guided by the history. So, it could be influenced by external social determinants such as political movements, social movements. Yet also generate from within.

So, the expansive world of human psyche cannot be ignored. There are very many great works that have got nothing to do with their contemporary society; they are in fact choosing an aloof position with respect to the social goings on. They have their own internal dynamics; one is reminded of *Madame Bovary* one need not go further than *Madame Bovary* to understand how work can build through its own logic without any temporal marker whatsoever throughout the work.

However, we also do see that flow air is influenced by several movements. This is art for us seek a bit of romantic movement, formalism. But so there are social influences but then a work can be treated as autonomous and a cosmos in its own right beyond what is going on in the society.

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***Aspects of the Novel: Phony Criticism***

- A novel is not necessarily always a product or guided by the history, so not always influenced from without (external social determinants), but also from within.
- Regardless of the polity or the major social trends/historical movements an author has witnessed, a novel may be completely decoupled from the objective socio-historico-political background and the theme could be the complex and subjective self of the author and inwardness associated with it.
- Art may intersperse with history, but it is always-already there, with or without the history, which comprises changing events and therefore develops and moves.

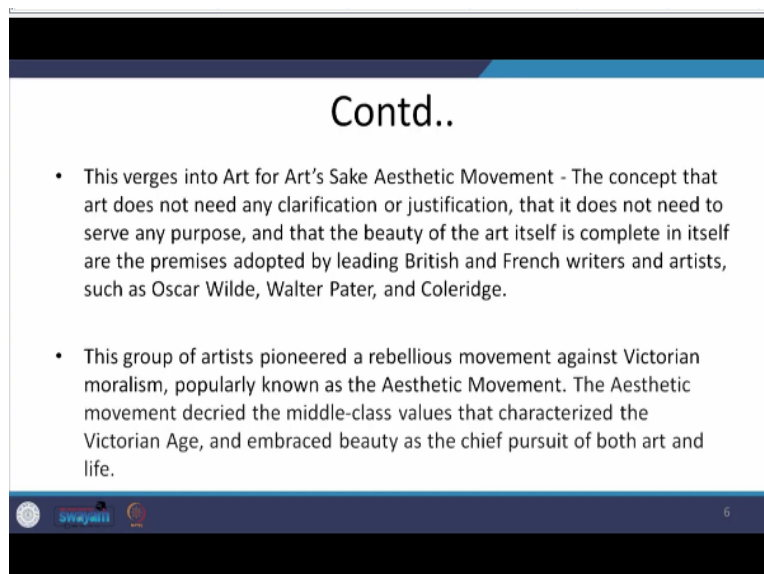
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So, regardless of the polity or the major social trends or historical movements and author has witnessed, an artwork, a novel may be completely decoupled from the objective socio-historical political background. Such that the theme could be the complex and subjective self of the author and the inwardness the journey on the inner that is associated

with it. So, art may intersperse with history many times it does it is a commentary on the history, it is influenced and inspired by contemporary or older historical episodes or happenings.

It has its roots in the society in facts. However, it is always already there; art does not need the support of history to brace itself to, it can stand on its own feet with or without history because history comprises changing events and history develops and moves in a way history progresses. Art is on the other hand always already there regardless of history with or without history.

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- This verges into Art for Art's Sake Aesthetic Movement - The concept that art does not need any clarification or justification, that it does not need to serve any purpose, and that the beauty of the art itself is complete in itself are the premises adopted by leading British and French writers and artists, such as Oscar Wilde, Walter Pater, and Coleridge.
- This group of artists pioneered a rebellious movement against Victorian moralism, popularly known as the Aesthetic Movement. The Aesthetic movement decried the middle-class values that characterized the Victorian Age, and embraced beauty as the chief pursuit of both art and life.

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So, this one could say what Forster is saying art as an autonomous entity, art having all its possibility within its own cosmos within its own, it is a hole in itself. This verges into art for art sake aesthetic movement too. It could be seen as corroborating the lord poor lot or art for art sake movement. A concept that art does not need any clarification or justification from history or society of politics that it does not need to serve any non-literary purpose.

And that the beauty of the art itself is complete in itself and these are the premises of Lalitpur art which were adopted by leading British and French writers and artists such as Oscar Wilde, Walter Pater and Coleridge. So, these artists pioneered a rebellious movement against Victorian moralism, the middle class mediocre values that characterize the Victorian age which these artists actually decried, which these artists went on to question thereby embracing beauty as the chief pursuit of both art and life.

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**Aspects of the Novel: Phony Criticism**

- The historical perspective is an important tool in deciphering the minds of the writers, and it also shapes the characters that draw on different schools, influences and fashions. These external factors keep changing themselves across generations.
- Although it is not a healthy academic approach to tag authors with periods at once, the meanings of behavior and expressions of certain emotions – victimization and humor – are presented differently from one social context to another.
- The technique of conversations colors and is colored by the larger surroundings.

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So, coming back to aspects of the novel E. M. Forster notes that the historical perspective is an important tool in deciphering the minds of the writers and it also shapes the characters that draw on different schools. So, the different movements various social happenings cannot be ignored altogether, these influences, these trends, these fashions leave many a times, a deep mark on artworks which go on to become timeless.

They want to become masterpiece and canons. This external factor because the society is flowing it is not stagnant; these external factors keep changing themselves across generations. Although it is not a healthy academic approach to tag authors with periods all at once. The meanings of certain literary behaviour, certain literary expressions, certain manifestation of emotions; it could be victimization or humour.

All these are presented very differently from one social context to another. So, the way the characters walk, talk, emote, love, hate, fight, also do draw on greatly based on what is happening in the largest social reality. So, the technique of conversations colours the larger surroundings just like they are coloured by the larger surroundings, they speak to the context, the literature does not really happen in vacuum.

But it could also stand on its own feet, be an autonomous entity, art could also generate from within the labour of writing that Flubber for example is talking about has got nothing to do with the external determinants, it is a writing happening from within the space of the work within this piece of art and it is not cognizant of anything else, it struggles to move therefore.

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## ***Aspects of the Novel: Phony Criticism***

- Forster: "Literary tradition is the borderland lying between literature and history, and the well-equipped critic will spend much time there and enrich his judgment accordingly" – to feel at ease in such crossroads, the critic needs to be well read.
- To be able to locate a literary work within a chronological continuum without tying it to discrete historical events, there should be a knowledge of the spectrum of abutting historical and literary events.
- According to T. S. Eliot, a good critic is functional in preserving a tradition, seeing literature holistically through its rich exchanges with the bordering forces. In "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919), Eliot famously says, "A poet "is not likely to know what is to be done unless he lives in what is not merely the present, but the present moment of the past (ie. How the past bears on the present/dialogizes with it), unless he is conscious, not of what is dead, but of what is already living."

So, Forster says literary tradition is the borderland lying between literature and history and the well-equipped critic will spend much time there and enrich his judgment accordingly. So, a good criticism emerged or let us say good critic, a good critic emerges a good commentary, a good review of literature or intervention of an artwork, a literary work can only arrive through appealing to the crossroads.

And so the critic in other words needs to be very well read. In order to comment on a given piece of literary work one has to be cognizant of the literary tradition to be able to locate a literary work within a chronological continuum without tying it directly to one discrete historical event or a couple of events. There has to be knowledge of the spectrum of abetting historical and literary events.

So, maybe during the romantic period someone is writing and he is at once the romantic poet but might be like I already said earlier there are some other influences too which are comparatively dormant. But they are present in the writing all the same. So, according to T.S Eliot a good critic is functional in preserving a tradition and sees literature holistically through its rich exchanges with the bordering forces.

This is precisely what the school of new criticism also talks. The fact that we do not need to we do not have to look into the biographies of authors, it suffices for works to talk to each other, to speak to each other and works to speak to each other, they do not hang in the vacuum, they belong to a literary tradition where the influence could be future bound as well as past bound.



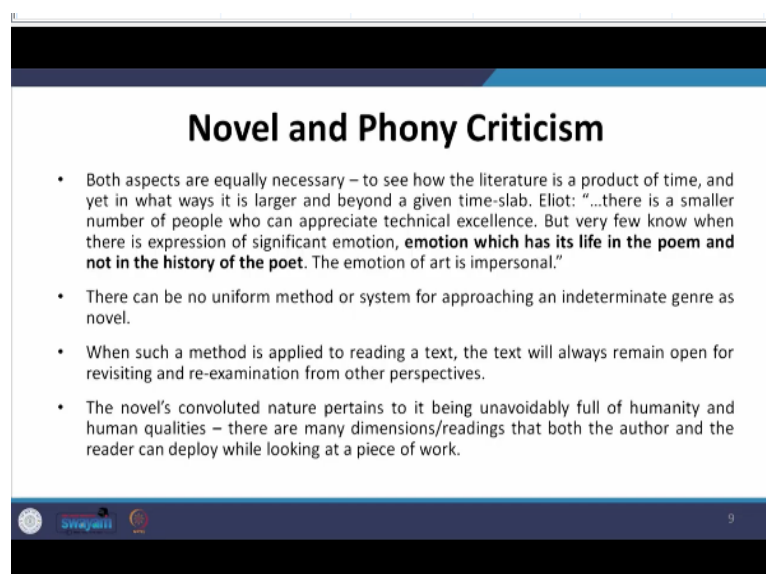
So, very interestingly we see this is an idea that (( )) (21:23) actually puts forward the fact that reading a later author an author like Kafka that came much later might enhance our understanding of an earlier author such as Robert Frost. So, literary works are like constellations and they happen through this crisscross of or through belonging to this lattice or network of influences adaptations, receptions that happens widely.

And so many great works have been created as a result of this cross literary dialects these cross-cultural influences. So, a critic should not only stick to a movement and juxtapose a literature only to one factor but have a wider perspective understanding what all have gone into the making of a great work T. S. Eliot in tradition in the individual talent. For example Eliot famously says a poet is not likely to know what is to be done unless he lives in what is not merely the present but the present moment of the past.

In other words he is emphasizing how the past bears on the present or how the past dialogizes with the present. So, not looking at a work by Cold reads as it would be understood at the time when he wrote it or one decade after it was written. But in the contemporary time the literary work also has its own journey, across generations, across different audience, different readers coming with different with the baggage of different horizon of expectations.

So, how does the work dialogize with different histories and different geographies? Its own history emerges through these very many dialects.

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**Novel and Phony Criticism**

- Both aspects are equally necessary – to see how the literature is a product of time, and yet in what ways it is larger and beyond a given time-slab. Eliot: "...there is a smaller number of people who can appreciate technical excellence. But very few know when there is expression of significant emotion, **emotion which has its life in the poem and not in the history of the poet.** The emotion of art is impersonal."
- There can be no uniform method or system for approaching an indeterminate genre as novel.
- When such a method is applied to reading a text, the text will always remain open for revisiting and re-examination from other perspectives.
- The novel's convoluted nature pertains to it being unavoidably full of humanity and human qualities – there are many dimensions/readings that both the author and the reader can deploy while looking at a piece of work.

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So, poet has to live in the present moment of the past, how the past work lives? Lives on in the present unless he is conscious not of what is dead but of what is already living. So, past work is not really dead, it lives as a different avatar through possibly an alternate reading in the present moment. So, both aspects according to E. M. Forster are equally necessary to see how the literature is a productive time.

And yet in what ways literacy could also be larger and beyond a given time slab. So, as Eliot puts it here yet again there is a smaller number of people who can appreciate technical excellence, but very few know when there is expression of significant emotion which has his life in the poem and not in the history of the poet. The emotion of art is impersonal. So, this is to say that literary work does not always speak to the life of the author; it in many cases, in most cases speaks to other literary works.

So, literally world is a cosmos in its own, outside of the lives of the authors that have made it. So, there can be no uniform method or system for approaching an indeterminate genre such as novel. When such a method is deployed or applied towards reading a text, the text will always remain open for revisiting and re-examination from other perspectives. So, whenever we are trying to write a commentary, a prologue on what a novel should be novel as a genre with its typical traits of experimentation tends to outgrow any such definitions and give birth to yet a new avatar.

So, the novel is convoluted nature, complicated nature pertains to it being unavoidably full of humanity and human qualities. There are many dimensions or readings that both the author and the reader can deploy towards looking at a piece of work which all could be good readings, correct readings and which all add to the layers they add to the value of the work.

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## Story of a Novel

- Forster is trying to understand through different readership what it is that readers look for in a novel.
- He gives different examples of readers –
  - one whose mind is not trained for reading a novel, and can vaguely understand that such a work tells a story;
  - one that has the material opportunity but no patience or dedication for a genre like novel, and is too rash in filtering the story out of the art, literary aesthetics and musicality, as s/he is not equipped with appreciation for the artistic qualities;

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So, Forster here is trying to understand through different readership what it is that readers look for in a novel and here he is giving different examples of readers. Readers that come with their own baggage of expectations, their own training, their own background. So according to E. M. Forster there is one type of reader whose mind is not trained for reading a novel and such a reader can vaguely understand that all this work is trying to do is probably just tell a story nothing beyond that.

Then there is a second type of reader that has the material opportunity but not the discipline or the training, not the patience or dedication that is expected of a novel's reader for a genre like novel and so such a reader is too rash to impatient in filtering the story out of the art, many a times we have heard people saying so what is the story of the film. So, what is the story of the novel?

They are too impatient to go through the stylistic devices, appreciate the literary devices, artistic devices that have that within which the story remains hidden, the story is the bare skeleton but then the plot makes up the novel actually they are not interested. This type of reader we see are not interested in the plot in the literary aesthetics and let us say the musicality of a piece of work.

Because they are not equipped with appreciation for the artistic qualities. So, there are certain sophistications that the reader of the novel also ought to pick up, otherwise they would not quite get what the author originally intended to impart.

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**Story of a Novel**

➤ finally, the reader that understands that story is the highest aspect in a novel, but seeks other qualities, such as musicality in the tone of the narration and multiple perspectives for narrating stories.

- According to Forster, the story has arbitrary beginning and end, and forms the backbone of the novel. The art of storytelling is very ancient.
- However, when separated from other literary aesthetics of the narrative, a genre such as the novel cannot stand only on the edifice of the story.

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So and then finally according to E. M. Forster there is this yet another set of reader that understands the story is the highest aspect in a novel, but they seek other qualities such as musicality, such as they are looking at the symbols, the metaphors, the simile, the language, the irony, they are playing with time and temporality the tone of narration as well as the multiple perspectives that go into narrating.

The stories they are not only interested in the bare skeleton that the story is but also interested in the plot, how the story has been treated in time, are they flashback, are we moving back and forth in time, is it a simple chronological progression. So, such a reader is able to discern all these factors. According to E. M. Forster the story has arbitrary beginning and end and forms the backbone of the novel.

Like I said it is the bare skeleton, the art of storytelling itself is very ancient. However, when separated from other literary aesthetics of the narrative a genre such as the novel cannot stand only on the edifice of the story. Novel entails far more experimentation that a linear plainly told story could give. Novel looks for literary tools and devices that which makes it a modern genre, a modern literary form.

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## Story of a Novel

- How the story is woven into the narrative determines how modern the work is.
- Narratives of each period caters to the needs/refers to the existence of the contemporary humanity.
- For instance, in its early form stories catered to the demands of suspense and excitement, which are the needs of the primitive reader.
- A simple lifestyle not infested by urbanity and social complexity is reflected in such forms of storytelling.

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So, how the story is woven into the narrative determines how modern the work is. If the story is simplistically told without playing much with time and temporality, it might not be as modern because much experimentation has not gone into it. Narratives of each period caters to the needs or refers to the existence of the contemporary humanity. For instance, in its early form stories catered to the demands of suspense and excitement something that is very visceral.

So, humans tell they arrive at modernity till they become modern enough derive some form of visceral pleasure, we could say some kind of pathological joy out of storytelling and story reading, listening to story, the factor of excitement and suspense something that rivets you at once is very much there in the primitive reader. This is someone that E. M. Forster would call as a primitive reader.

So, a simple lifestyle that is not infested by urbanity and social complexity is reflected in such forms of storytelling which barely and directly appeals to the adrenaline to excitement.

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## Story and Time

- The novel and the novelist's success depended on how long they could sustain the simpleton reader's interest (a reader that has no keenness for finer, complex problem) –
  - e.g., Scheherazade procrastinating her fate through using the tool of suspense while telling stories to her husband, the king.
- For an unsophisticated/primitive reader/audience, the storyteller needs to use exquisite descriptions, vivid delineation of characters and creative plot to reign on their untrained minds.

So, the novel and the novelist's success perhaps depend on how long they can sustain the simpleton reader's interest. For example a reader that has no keenness, no inclination for finer, complex problems that challenge their mental faculties, their intellectual faculties. Here Forster is giving the example of Scheherazade in the thousand and one nights Arabian Knights or Persian Knights.

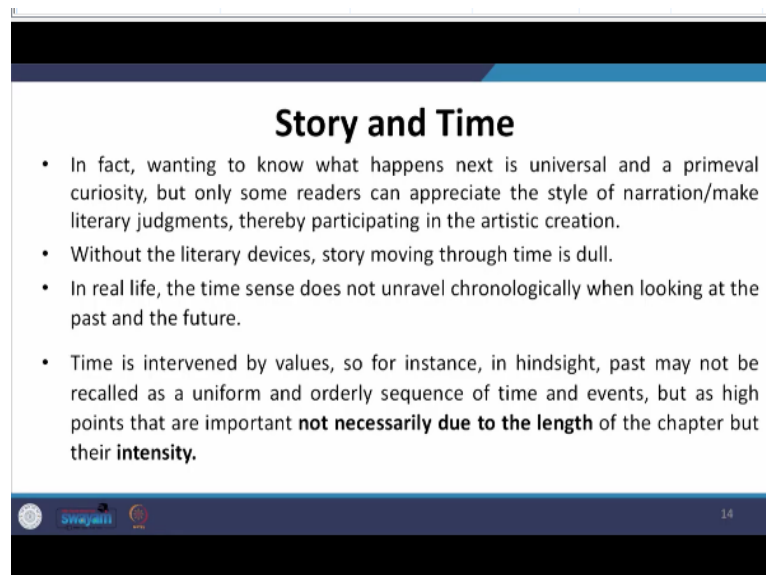
Scheherazade we know is procrastinating her feet through using the tool of suspense while telling stories to her husband the king. Now the king is an inferior reader or listener. He is unsophisticated a primitive reader or audience according to E. M. Forster and so the storyteller needs to use the tool of excitement, the tool of suspense and he is constantly wanting to know what next, what next not interested in the art that goes into the making.

And there could be many ways of reading a thousand and one nights, we could also see some great postmodern qualities in we could treat it as one of the first postmodern artwork where meaning is constantly differed and language is playing as a way of deferring death. So, in a very Chris Stevenson's I am reminded of Julia Kristeva who says that language is a fetish, it is always slipping in terms of any final meaning, slipping away not giving away the final meaning.

Because the final meaning in the end is death, we are reminded of that in Scheherazade story within story structure, but then we also have a not well trained reader for the king who once only the suspense and so E. M. Forster would see that for an unsophisticated audience, there has to be the aid of exquisite descriptions, they need props because they are not very

imaginative people. As such they need vivid delineation of characters and creative plot in order to reign on their untrained minds.

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**Story and Time**

- In fact, wanting to know what happens next is universal and a primeval curiosity, but only some readers can appreciate the style of narration/make literary judgments, thereby participating in the artistic creation.
- Without the literary devices, story moving through time is dull.
- In real life, the time sense does not unravel chronologically when looking at the past and the future.
- Time is intervened by values, so for instance, in hindsight, past may not be recalled as a uniform and orderly sequence of time and events, but as high points that are important **not necessarily due to the length** of the chapter but their **intensity**.

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So, in fact, wanting to know what happens next is the it is the most natural and the most universal and primeval curiosity, the child's curiosity almost but only some readers can appreciate the style of narration or they can make literary judgments; thereby participating in the artistic creation, thereby engaging with or responding to the finer ambitions to the higher or the more refined ambitions that have gone into the making of the artwork.

Without the literary devices the story simply traveling or moving through time would be dull. In real life, the time sense does not unravel chronologically when looking at the past and the future. Time is rather intervened by values; so for instance, in hindsight past may not be recalled as a uniform and orderly sequence of time and events. We do not recall everything equally; our memory does not register everything equally about the past.

The past exists in terms of certain high points that are important and not necessarily due to the length of that event or that chapter in the past, but more because of the intensity. How long has a mundane event been maybe too long, but shall be remembered for many years down the line; probably not. How intense has a short incident been probably twins two intense. So, shall we remember such a thing more likely to remember. So, duration of time does not matter as much as intensity does.

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## Story and Time

- Memory writings, streams of consciousness, the artist's treatment of time in creating the art do not conform to the meta-concept of standardized time.
- Life at the level of the everyday is divided by **mundane activities** that abide by the regulated and **calendrical concepts of a universal time** as an entirety; and as a **life of values** that understand time in terms of the **impact/power of an event**.
- Could we say that **the regulated concept of time demands our acts and thoughts as a part of the macro-social system**, whereas the **life of values intercepts with our distinctive Self**?

So, memory writings, streams of consciousness. These are all experimentations happening within the genre of novel, the artists treatment of time in creating the art do not conform to the meta concept of standardized calendrical time or time of the standard time in which the standard clock divides the day and night. Life at the level of the everyday is divided in terms of mundane activities that abide by the regulated and calendrical concepts of universal time.

So, there are certain repetitive acts, certain unthinking act, certain mechanics technical automated aspects of our daily activities which are regulated in terms of calendrical concepts of a universal time. The time that exists as an entirety for everyone and then there is also life as values that understand time in terms of its impact its power on a certain chapter of life on a certain incident or event from life. So, time as linearity time as calendrical and time as intensity time as value the latter is obviously the more personalized time.

And this is something we find being explored so much in Virginia wolf streams of consciousness. So, could we say that the regulated concept of time demands our acts and thoughts as a part of the macro-social system as the social being, the professional being that we are the professional entity that we are where we let us say enter and exit a workplace with everyone.

So, its calendrical time regulates us as operating within the macro-social system; whereas the life of values which is more personalized which is more customized and made according to an individual that is something that treatment or approach to time and temporality intercepts



with our distinctive self it makes and unmakes our distinctive self, it interacts with our individuality this is something we could also try to understand and ask.

With this I would like to stop our lecture here today and let us meet again with another round of discussions on the same topic. Thank you.