### Narrative Mode and Fiction Prof. Sarbani Banerjee Department of Humanities and Social Sciences Indian Institute of Technology – Roorkee

### Lecture – 34 The Modern Novel-III

Good morning and welcome back to the lecture series on Narrative Mode and Fiction. So, we are discussing from our previous lecture novel the Modern Novel, the symptoms of the Modern Novel. What as an impetus to the Modern Novel, the largest social situations.

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## Novel as a Means of Questioning Existence

- Like Kundera, Kafka finds problem with psychological realism, which replaces action with the interior, core self as the definition of the human essence.
- Kafka is not interested in the internal motivations that determine man's behavior. He rather asks: What possibilities remain for man in a world where the external determinants have become so overpowering that internal impulses no longer carry any weight?" (26)
- Kundera in Unbearable Lightness of Being "the novel [after Kafka] is not the author's confession; it is the investigation of human life in the trap that the world has become."
- Marx and Weber also saw two different kinds of traps developing in the modern world.



The larger social happenings that lead to the formation of the modern novel. So, we are talking about the novel as a means of questioning fundamental existence of the human kind. So, like Milan Kundera, France Kafka, finds a problem in psychological realism. We were discussing, how psychological realism gives away too much of details about the characters in a novel?

So, a psychological realism replaces action with the interior cores self. It brings the within entirely without that is the desire to dissect and do before the reader all the details, all the complexities of the novel characters. It is a way of displaying everything about a character beyond which nothing is left to the readers imagination. Nothing is left to be explode. So, it replaces action with the interior core self, as the definition of the human essence.

So, psychological realism has a way has a tendency to transcribe everything about a character the intention of the character, the possibilities of the character to his or her actions as though actions can be mirror to one's self. Now, both Milan Kundera and France Kafka are not very happy with this, this style of writing the psychological realism. Kafka is not interested in the internal motivations that determine human behaviour.

He would rather ask what possibility is remain for man in a world where the external determinants have become all too overpowering. So, overpowering that internal impulses no longer carry any weight they do not mean anything anymore. So, in Kundera's unbearable lightness of being Kundera poses the following question. The novel after Kafka is not the author's confession.

It is the investigation of human life in the trap that the world has become. So, novel tries to express this dilemma that the world is passing through Kafka. So, both Karl Marx and Max Weber saw two different kinds of traps developing in the modern world two traps that are symptomatic of the modern world.

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# Novel as a Means of Questioning Existence

- For Marx, the existential problem can be inadequately summed up in the phrases
  "commodity fetishism" and the "alienation of labour" (among others). For Weber, the
  prison house of bureaucracy or technocracy brought about by the need of the rising
  nation-states for ever more specialized labour is symptomatic of existential crisis.
- Kundera refers to 1914 as the beginning of the (late?) modern "trap": the trap of
  globalization, the trap of history that is not made by humans, but by some impersonal
  force in another part of the globe, history that seems to lack human agency, but
  which sees all of humanity as the objects of its power.
- After the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, all existential questions are no longer merely individual, but possess historical and political dimensions.



For Marx the existential problem can be inadequately summed up in the phrases community fetishism and the alienation of labour among others. So, when you are talking about community fetishism, we are referring to commoditization of everything. So, after a point human qualities also become commodities. And then research commodity, to an extent where the intrinsic human values, human possibilities are diminished to a great extent.

And then alienation of labour where humans are turned to one part of their body. So, the human is reduced to the labouring hand this symbol of hand keeps coming back the rough one of hand of the labour keeps coming back in Madame Bovary again and again. So, even Flaubert was exploring this question when he wrote Madame Bovary. Forever the prison house of bureaucracy or technocracy brought about with the need of the rising nation-states.

Forever more specialized labour is a symptomatic of the human existential crisis. Kundera refers to 1914 as the beginning of the modern trap that is with the First World War. The trap of globalization, the trap of history which is not made by humans which is beyond humans, in which imposes itself on humans rather. And such a history is formed by some impersonal forces in another part of the globe, maybe.

So, a history that does not allow humans as free agents. So, we see that history, such a history in the modern times, seems to lag the human agency and it sees all of humanity as the objects of it is power. So, after the born of the 20th century, all existential questions are no longer merely pertaining to the individual but they possess historical and political dimensions. Coming back to the novel, what is happening to the novelist form? Will it reform against this backdrop?

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# Time and Temporality

- Novel is unconfined, travels over different historical and geographical time spaces. But its core spirit lies in metamorphosing into the understanding and acceptance that the human conditions of existence are flawed and limited
- So novel's oxygen is expansive meanings of social life and human existence, and the capability to think outside of biased interpretations
- The life-force of novel lies in the spirit of synthesis between opposite categories (rational and irrational, narrative and contemplative etc.), which lends it its complex structure
- Novel plays a role in countering the humanist dream of a unified history, and thereby in challenging reductionist forces.



Novel is essentially about being unconfined traveling over different historical and geographical time spaces. So, change and experimentation are the two major elements that define the novel. But it is core spirit the core spirit of the novel lies in metamorphosing into

the understanding and acceptance that the human conditions of existence are flawed and limited.

So, novels oxygen is expansive meanings of social life and human existence. And the capability to think outside of biased interpretations. The life force of novel lies in the spirit of synthesis between opposite categories. It could be between rational and irrational narrative and contemplative, all of which lend genre it is complex structure. So, novel plays a role in countering the humanist dream.

The humanist dream of a unified human kind of a unified history, unified way of rational thinking, scientific thinking, all of which humanism uphold. Novel is a comeback on that and novel challenges any sort of reductionist forces.

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# Time and Temporality

- Kundera- if the novel is to go on progressing, it must do so only by "discovering the undiscovered" in human life, something that is entirely at odds with a technological and technocratic understanding of progress.
- The novel's progress cannot be wedded to any understanding of social progress, for the latter is univocal, while the former revels in ambiguity and celebrates contradiction. Kundera affirms the former, with "the depreciated legacy of Cervantes" (20).



So, Milan Kundera notes that if the novel is to go on progressing as a literary genre, it must do so only by discovering the undiscovered, inhuman life, something that is entirely at odds with the technological and technocratic understanding of progress. So, the novels progress cannot be married to any understanding of social progress such a marriage would be a fiasco.

The novel's progress and social progress in the traditional sense of the term do not gel well. Because the social progress is it refers to a univocality moving in the same direction. The humanity turned into a clone and moving in the same direction and unthinking population. So, on the other hand, the novels progress revels celebrates, ambiguity, it celebrates contradiction aporia.

So, Kundera affirms the novels progress with the depreciated legacy of Cervantes and his quintessential work Don Quixote.

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# Temporality The essence of the modern as represented in temporality entails condensation of the length of the novel, so all of it can be seen at once. The reader should be able to remember the beginning when she reaches the end. This is done through skipping or skimming on details – ellipsis. Ellipsis is a great way to not drift away from the larger theme In a society of speed where the memory is crammed by too many information at a great frequency, its limitations should be taken into consideration by the novelist The intricacy of modern existence is well captured when the reader is able to see end to end – brevity facilitates going to the heart of a problem at once

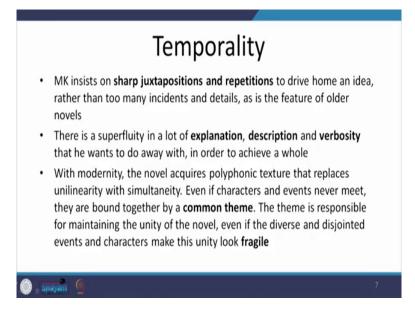
So, the essence of the modern, as represented in temporality, entails condensation of the length of the novel. Because the concept of time changes in the modern period and further so in the postmodern period. So, there is a need to see all of it at once. The reader should be able to remember the beginning when she reaches the end. This is done this can be done through skipping or skimming too much of details.

Once again, hearkening back on what the psychological realism does? Trying to detail too much, giving too much of description leaving nothing for the reader's imagination. So, Kundera proposes ellipsis. Ellipsis as a great way to not drift away from the overarching theme that binds the novel together. So, in a society of speed which describes the modern society, we have the memory, the human memory crammed by too many information at a great frequency.

So, information we are bombarded with information coming from all directions at a great frequency. We are subsumed by information simulated dissimulated, versions of the same facts as that. We do not know what fact is it is the age of post truth? So, we see that memory has, it is limitations we are we tend to forget. There is a tenancy to will fully and involuntarily forget there is an amnesia that pervades not only individual but the society.

So, the memories limitations in such a society which is supersaturated with information from different directions, ought to be taken into consideration by the novelist. The intricacy of modern existence is well captured when the reader is able to see end to end the meaning of the entire novel comes to the reader at once. Brevity facilitates going to the heart of the problem at once.

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So, there is a Milan Kundera insists on sharp juxtapositions and repetitions which enable driving home the main idea, rather than harping too much digressing too much through incidents. And details which are features of older novels, so older novels, are characterized by too many information too many incidents and details. There is a superfluity in a lot of explanation in a lot of description and verbosity, something that a modern novel wants to forsake.

And so, Kundera wants to do away with so much of details as a way of achieving the whole, the novelist whole. With modernity the novel acquires a polyphonic texture that replaces unilinearity with simultaneity. We have already discussed stream of consciousness and internal monologue. So, even characters and events never meet in the entire. In the course of the entire narrative, they are bound together by a common theme.

This theme is responsible for maintaining the unity of the novel, even if the diverse and disjointed events and characters make this unity look apparently fragile.

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### Milan Kundera: The Art of the Novel

- Different characters and incidents are meant to dialogize with this common theme that also gives them a coherence – "the [selfsame] thing reflected in three [separate] mirrors"
- Like in a polyphonic musical composition, a polyphonic novel requires equality of voices so no voice dominates and makes another feel like it is ancillary or an accompaniment. A dominant plot that relegates other plots to margins is a failing on the part of a novel, according to MK. At the same time, each subplot should be indispensable to the completion of the whole – they should all go back to a single question and theme again and again



So, different characters and incidents are meant to dialogize with this common theme. So, even though characters do not meet each other and events are apparently disjointed. Each of these characters and incidents are nevertheless speaking to the common theme that also gives the novel it is coherence. Kundera would call this as the selfsame thing reflected in three separate mirrors.

So, when we compare the novel with music like a polyphonic musical composition, a polyphonic novel requires equality of voices. So that no voice dominates and makes another feel like it is ancillary or an accompaniment. A dominant plot that relegates other plots to margins is a failing on the part of a novels. The modern novel levels out different plots and so there is no hierarchy and we do not one plot does not emerge.

One plot does not emerge as overpowering or overbearing over other subplots. So, all plots are manifestations, reflections of the same theme which is at the heart of the novel. So, at the same time, each subplot should be indispensable to the completion of the whole. So, if we take away one subplot then the provision is somewhere lost. The organic wholeness falls apart somewhere.

All these subplots should go back to a single question and a theme which holds centre a novel together which props up the entire novel together. And this theme should be visited and revisited again and again according to Milan Kundera.

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# Milan Kundera: The Art of the Novel

- Immanual Kant famously appropriates the term "architectonics" in Critique of Pure Reason as a metaphor, distinguishing between "technical unity" and "architectonic unity." A unity achieved architectonically "originates from an idea" (Kant, 1985, p. 655). However, unity achieved without architectonics, one merely conforming technically to the requirements of a form, is more limited.
- Bakhtin "Art and Answerability": An [artistic] whole is called "mechanical" when its constituent elements are united only in space and time by some external connections and are not imbued with internal unity of meaning. The parts of such a whole are contiguous and touch each other, but in themselves, they remain alien to each other. Architectonic unity refers to a poetic unity rather than a technical continuation among the different strands or plots



Immanual Kant famously appropriates the term architectonics and critic of pure reason as a metaphor which distinguishes a technical unity and architectonic unity. So, unity that is achieved architectonically originates from an idea. So, here we are talking about an internal organic unity, something that is not imposed from outside something that does not look fake. Now, unity achieved without architectonics in other words the technical unity is more extrinsic.

And it is something that merely confirms technically to the requirements of a form. It is a more mechanical form of unity coming from without. And so such a notion of unity is more limited. Bakhtin art and answerability says that an artistic whole is called mechanical when it is constituent elements are united only in space and time by some external connections. And there are not I mean they are not imbued with internal unity of meaning.

The parts of such a whole are contiguous and touch one another but in themselves they remain alien to each other. On the other hand architectonic unity refers to a poetic unity. There is a poetic blue which is harder which is natural. And so, there is a kind of natural continuation rather than a technical continuation among the different strands or the different plots within a novel.

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# Woolf's To the LightHouse

- In To the Lighthouse, the author dismisses the popular notion of a universal time being the governing force, controlling individual's actions and not decelerating for anybody.
- On the contrary, time exists within individuals and the characters are capable of slowing down the time. This slowed-down concept of time has remarkable consequences, both on readers' perception of the novel and on the novel structure itself.
- To the Lighthouse explores time at every scale, tracking the intricate thoughts and impressions within a single lived second while also meditating on the infinity of geologic time, stretching back into the past and forward into the future beyond the span of human knowledge



Come back to Virginia Woolf's to the lighthouse you see that in this novel to the lighthouse, the author dismisses the popular notion of a universal time. A time, a universal physical time that acts as a governing force, controlling individuals, actions and not decelerating or accelerating for anybody. Contrarily, Woolf shows in her novel the time exists within individuals.

So, individual times for individuals and the characters are capable of slowing down or piecing up the time. The slowed down concept of time has remarkable consequences, both on readers, perception of the novel and on the novel structure itself. So, this greatly also draws on what is happening in science in the modern period? So, we have Einstein's theory of relativity where everything becomes relative values.

Human values way of looking at the world become relative. So, with the theory of relativity in science, we emerge with a cacophony with layers. And this could go on to comment on the questions of or the categories of race, ethnicity, ways of being ways of different religions, different world views. So that is the kind of discordance a happy discordance that one is looking at in modernity.

The loss of concordance the loss of an ugly synchrony is a kind of relief to the modern period more so in the postmodern period. So, we see that to the lighthouse for explores time at every scale. Tracking the intricate thoughts and impressions within a single lived second while also meditating on the infinity of a geological time. It stretches back into the past only to move forward into the future beyond the span of human knowledge.

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# To The Lighthouse

- In the novel, Part 1, The Window, and Part 2, The Lighthouse, occur almost in "real time," as the action described takes place within a period more or less equivalent to the period of time it takes to read the section
- To the Lighthouse ultimately demonstrates the inadequacy of clock time to
  measure human experience: life is not felt, as Woolf shows, through orderly
  and chronological progression of seconds. Instead, one minute seems to
  drag on an eternity while the next two decades speed by. An individual at
  one second is aware of a human lifespan as a long, luxurious stretch, and at
  the next second perceives it to be an infinitesimal fraction of Earth's much
  more enduring existence. Memories return in the present and live on,
  sometimes seeming never to have passed.



This novel part one the window and part two the lighthouse occur almost in real time. As action described, takes place within a period more or less equivalent to the period of the time that the reader takes to read the action. To the lighthouse ultimately demonstrates the inadequacy of the physical clock time to measure human experiences to understand the human psyche, how it functions?

So, life is not felt as wolf shows through orderly and chronological progression of second, second by second. Instead, one minute seems to drag on an eternity while the next two decades speed by that is how the internal universe or the internal concept of time inside the human psyche functions. An individual at one second is aware of a human lifespan as a long luxurious stretch.

And at the next second perceives it to be an infinite similar fraction of Earth's more enduring existence. So, memories return in the present and they live on, sometimes seeming, never to have passed. So, memory is sometimes we just move to ahead in time. And sometimes we carry the bird and the baggage of memory which never seems to go away.

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# The Novel as Meditative Interrogation

- The key words concerning the kinds of novels that Kundera is arguing against are "description" and "illustration"—novels that merely represent society or history to itself.
- What he is advocating for, however, is something far more active, as he sees the novelist as an explorer, as a practitioner of "meditative interrogation (interrogative meditation)"(31).
- Kundera tells us in *Unbearable Lightness of Being* that asking questions is like taking a scalpel to the totalitarian veil of kitsch that pervades the modern world, kitsch that protects both the unthinking masses and those in power, who like their masses to be as unthinking as possible.



So, the key words concerning the modern novel that Kundera is arguing against our description and illustration. So that is the archaic model of a novel writing with too much description and illustration novels that merely represent a society or history to itself. It is a very self-referential exercise anyway. So, what Kundera is advocating for is something far more active? As you see is a novelist as an explorer as a practitioner of a meditative, interrogation or interrogative meditation.

Kundera tells us in unbearable lightness of being that asking questions is like taking a scalpel to the totalitarian vein of a kitsch that where is the modern world. Kitsch that protects both the unthinking masses and those in power who like their muscles to be as unthinking as possible. So, asking a question is like appearing of scraping of that veil of that state of unthinkingness which is kitsch.

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# The Art of the Novel

- According to Kundera, novel dies in any sort of totalitarian regime where there can be no longer any self-discovery and conquest of being (eg. his novels The Book of Laughter and Forgetting, The Joke, Unbearable Lightness of Being) criticize Communist Russia.
- So novel does not belong to a society and people that are looking for glib and quick responses to the
  questions posed by life. In other words, the novel is not lived up to its full capacity in a society that does
  not explore meanings in all their complexity → Kundera's novel 'Slowness' the bond of slowness
  with memory, speed with forgetting. 'Dancer' syndrome an outwardly driven life without
  introspection
- Novel cannot become through existing only in one given moment, as if there is no tomorrow. The
  essence of the novel lies in reflecting the future through speaking to the past. So it should come across
  as a continuous and comprehensive work
- Because the trend of the world is to make a progress through the "forgetting of being" (forgetting of the past leads to a fragmented existence), such an idea of progress counteracts the flourishing of the novel's world.
- Novel is not about disjuncture from past styles of thought, but grows because of and through them.



So, according to Kundera novel dies in any sort of a totalitarian regime where there can be no longer any self-discovery and conquest of being. He is constantly referring to this in his books, such as the book of laughter and forgetting the joke, unbearable, likeness of being very constantly criticizes the communist Russia. So, novel does not belong to a society and a people who are looking for glib and quick responses to the questions that are posed by life.

So, novel is not, in other words up to it is full capacity. What the novel as a form can give to a society unless the society is ready to explore all meanings in all their complexity. So now, Kundera's novels known as the slowness talks about the bond of slowness with memory and the bond of speed with forgetting. And Kundera is also referring to the dancer syndrome. What has become of the modern society?

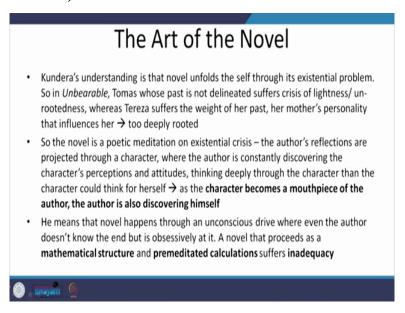
How humans have emerged as modern subjects where we are constantly dancing in front of an invisible audience. And it is an outwardly driven life without any introspection we constantly seek affirmation from without not from within. So, novel cannot become through existing only in one given moment as if there is no tomorrow. The essence of the novel lies in reflecting the future through speaking to this past.

So, there is this connectivity also the novel is not hanging in the vaccum. The entire tradition of novel should come across as continuous and a comprehensive work. Although, the later novels differ from the earlier project style earlier archaic styles of writing. There is still a dialogue where the dialogue is not cut off. So, the because the trend of the world is to make a progress through the forgetting of being forgetting of the past.

And living the present, as though it is a piece of time hanging over so which actually leads to a fragmented existence. Such an idea of social progress counteracts the flourishing of the novels world. Like I already said a few moments back, how the novels problems counteracts the idea of the traditional idea of social progress? Novel is not about disjuncture from past styles of thought.

But it grows precisely because of and through these styles of thought, how much ever it may want to differ or deny those, those, those styles of writing?

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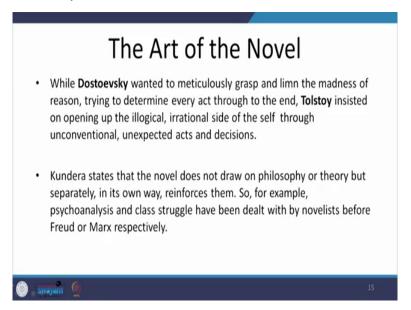


So, Kundera's understanding is that novel unfolds. The self through it is existential problem, looking at his work, unbearable, likeness of being Tomas. The male protagonist has a past that is not delineated and he suffers a crisis of lightness unrootedness where is his counterpart Tereza suffers the weight of her past for her mother's personality is so overbearing it constantly comes back to influence.

Her influence she is too deeply rooted. So, novel is about a poetic, meditation (()) (26:07) ways of understanding this crisis. The author's reflections are projected through a character where the author is constantly discovering the character's perceptions and attitudes. Thinking deeply through the character than the character could think for themselves. So, as a character becomes a mouthpiece of the author through the character.

The author is also discovering himself or herself constantly. Novel as a self-discovery mechanism novel as a mechanism that enables self-discovery further marvellous. So, Kundera mean that novel happens to an unconscious drive even the author does not know the end. What it would lead to? But is obsessively at it a novel that proceeds in the form of a mathematical structure where everything is premeditated and calculated suffers some form of inadequacy and mediocrity.

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So, when Dostoevsky wanted to meticulously grasp and limn this madness of reason trying to determine every act through to the end, trying to give reasons for every act of his characters. We see a Tolstoy insisted on opening up the illogical the irrational side of the self through unconventional, unexpected acts and decisions. Kundera states that the novel does not draw on philosophy or theory but separately in it is own way.

A novel establishes novel suggests some of these philosophies and theories. So, to give an example, psychoanalysis and class struggle have been dealt with by many novelists even before Freud and Marx respectively theorized them.

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# The Art of the Novel

- The essence of modern world captured in the novel include a sense of radical divestment and a lack of apodictic or clear-cut message. The novel takes on the complex world, not seriously, but through playfulness, irony and hypothetical situations.
- Rather than giving a clear statement of thought, a novelist involves in games of paradoxes and contradictions. Dogmatic reflection is exchanged with suggestions, propositions – the story or art overrides any thesis
- When a central idea is novelized, the conviction is taken from it; instead, play and hypotheses is added. That is the transition from the voice of the politician, the philosopher to the voice of the novelist. Any idea is not the ultimate, playing with it, understanding it in all its complexity is more important → author plays with the idea, which is further played around with by the reader.



So, the essence of the modern world captured in the novel include a sense of radical divestment and a lack of apodictic or clear-cut message. The modern novel takes on a complex world not seriously but through playfulness, irony and hypothetical situations. Rather than giving a clear statement of thought a novelist involves in games of paradoxes and contradictions.

So, dogmatic reflections are constantly averted and exchanged with indirect suggestions. Propositions. And this is where a story, an art is constantly overriding, any form of thesis or presupposition. So, when a central idea is novelized, the conviction is taken out of it. The reader may or may not believe the novelist. Instead, there is play and hypothesis added in the novel. The novelist stone of sharing an idea unfolding an idea or a world view a philosophy.

So, this is a transition from the voice of the politician, the philosopher to that of the voice of the novelist. This is where the difference lies. There is no thesis there is only hypothesis. Any idea cannot be ultimate in a novel in a modern novel only playing with it understanding it in all it is complexity with all it is layers and nuances is more important in a modern novel. So, author plays with the idea which is farther played around with Bible reader. I would like to stop here today and we will discuss more in our next lecture. Thank you.