

Elements of Literature and Creative Communication
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Lecture - 36
Narrative Techniques in Fiction

For all these reasons *in medias res* becomes an important narrative technique and as I said earlier, beginning with Homer to even the recent practitioners employ this literary technique for various purposes.

Well, if I begin like this, I am sure you would wonder if you have really missed anything that I might have said before or if it is some kind of an editing glitch that instead of beginning with the greetings by saying, “Hi, how are you? nice to see you welcome back again to our classes...” and all that. Now, all of a sudden what has happened here we began something in the middle. Is it an editing glitch, or did the teacher forget to introduce you to the topic, or did you miss anything, all these questions automatically pop in your head. This was done for a specific reason and the reason would be evident in the subsequent slides. Well, now forget all that you heard, come back to the beginning.

Hi, there welcome to see all of you in this 8th week and we are in lecture 36. If you can recall we have been discussing fiction and therefore, I can welcome you again to this ongoing discussion on fiction. In the last class, we were discussing types of fiction if you can quickly recall we discussed how fiction can be compared to a tree, the types of fiction can be called its branches and we identified the three branches. The three major branches of fiction as literary fiction, genre fiction, and mainstream fiction and within all of them we went on discussing subgenres of fiction.

Especially in genre fiction, we discussed science fiction, fantasy novel, romance, historical fiction, all varieties of fiction. So, in this class, we continue our discussion on fiction from a different perspective. So, having discussed fiction and types of fiction, in this class we are going to discuss techniques employed in fiction.

In other words, what we are going to share with you today is the secrets of the trade. When writers write their novel or short story or craft a play what kind of techniques do they employ. So, these are called tools of the trade, what are the tools that are required if you want to

succeed in this trade or if you want to identify the techniques used here. So, you can also call it some kind of secret, secrets of the trade called fiction.

Let us quickly look at some of the important techniques that novelists use; obviously, well it goes without saying that the list here is not exhaustive, it is just illustrative, it is just to pique your interest in this concept called narrative technique.

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What is a Narrative Technique?

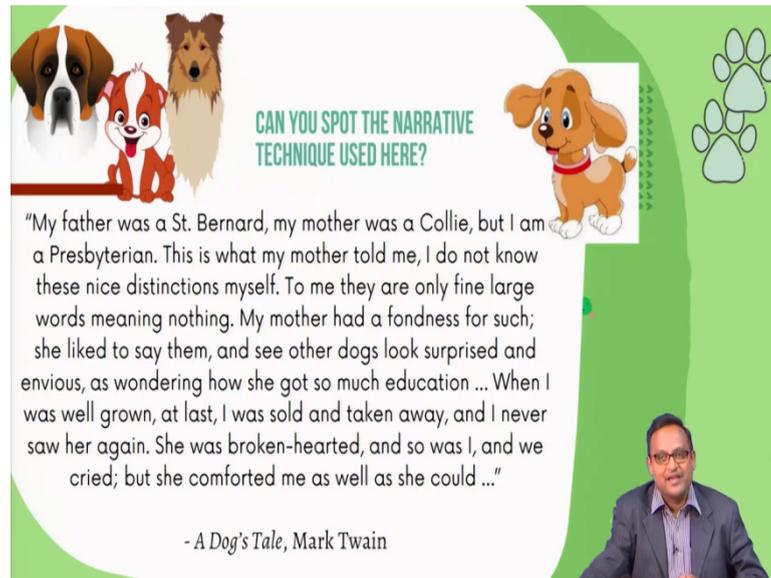
In today's class we are going to learn about some interesting narrative techniques used in fiction

- These are techniques used in the crafting of a narrative to convey information to the audience and, more specifically to build the storyline; usually to make it more complete, sophisticated, or entertaining.

The slide features a cartoon character on the left wearing a cap and reading a book. On the right, there is a framed illustration of a tree with yellow and purple leaves. In the bottom right corner, there is a small video inset of a man with glasses speaking.

So, generally speaking, narrative techniques are those kinds of devices that writers use in order to better their structure, in order to enhance the effectiveness of whatever they write, they make use of these narrative structures. The narrative techniques employed by writers have very many advantages to that, but one of the important advantages why writers use many of them is of course to build the storyline or to give it a kind of a turn, that they want to give it and also to make their fiction a little more sophisticated, innovative, experimental, and entertaining that is the reason why writer makes use of narrative techniques. So, what these narrative techniques are, we plan to discuss it today.

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CAN YOU SPOT THE NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE USED HERE?

"My father was a St. Bernard, my mother was a Collie, but I am a Presbyterian. This is what my mother told me, I do not know these nice distinctions myself. To me they are only fine large words meaning nothing. My mother had a fondness for such; she liked to say them, and see other dogs look surprised and envious, as wondering how she got so much education ... When I was well grown, at last, I was sold and taken away, and I never saw her again. She was broken-hearted, and so was I, and we cried; but she comforted me as well as she could ..."

- *A Dog's Tale*, Mark Twain

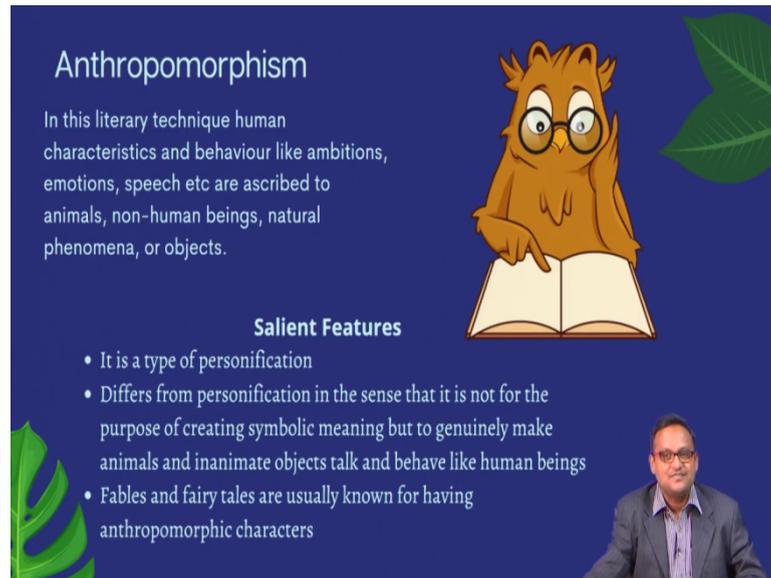
Before introducing you to the first narrative technique that we have in the class I want you to pause for a while and read the given passage here. This passage is from Mark Twain's 'A Dog's Tale' please read it, it is an excerpt from there, read this and see if you can spot any narrative technique used here.

"My father was a Saint Bernard, my mother was a Collie, but I am a Presbyterian. This is what my mother told me, I do not know these nice distinctions myself. To me, they are only fine large words meaning nothing.

My mother had a fondness for such; she liked to see them, and see other dogs look surprised and envious, as wondering how she got so much education. When I was well grown, at last, I was sold and taken away, and I never saw her again. She was broken-hearted and so was I and we cried, but she comforted me as well as she could..."

What kind of a narrative is used here? Obviously, you understand that this entire thing has been written from the perspective of a puppy probably, it is grown now it is no longer that small puppy that it used to be when all this began. So, it is recounting. So, the character here is not a human being, but a dog. So, what is the technique that a writer uses here?

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Anthropomorphism

In this literary technique human characteristics and behaviour like ambitions, emotions, speech etc are ascribed to animals, non-human beings, natural phenomena, or objects.

Salient Features

- It is a type of personification
- Differs from personification in the sense that it is not for the purpose of creating symbolic meaning but to genuinely make animals and inanimate objects talk and behave like human beings
- Fables and fairy tales are usually known for having anthropomorphic characters

The slide features a cartoon owl wearing glasses and reading a book. In the bottom right corner, there is a small inset image of a man with glasses, likely the presenter, against a blue background with green leaf-like shapes.

This is called anthropomorphism. Anthropomorphism, what does it mean? Well, here animals, non-human beings, whether it is an animal, whether it is a thing, whether it is a machine, whether it is a God, whatever it is, they are ascribed the qualities of human beings and they are made to behave like human beings, they are made to respond like human beings, they are made to speak like human beings.

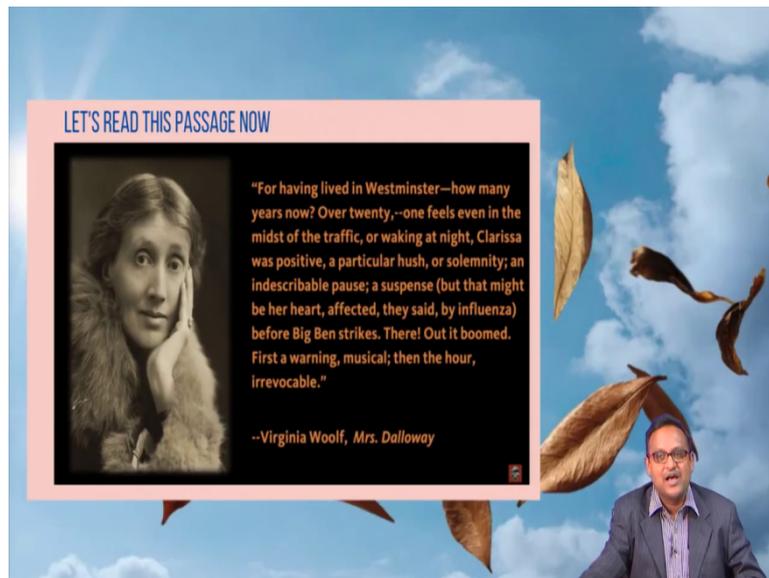
Well, you can find shades of personification here right, you are not wrong if you think it has some kind of shades or connections with personification, you can not altogether be wrong, but remember the subtle distinction between personification and anthropomorphism is this that in personification it is more symbolic, it is more symbolic they do not actually behave like that .

You attribute the quality, but they do not behave like that. It is to achieve some kind of imagery, but here these animals, these machines, these characters they are attributed the qualities of the human being as a result of this you can look at the picture. here is a bird that is reading a book. It is the quality of human beings whereas, here even when you watch Tom and Jerry it is again a perfect example of anthropomorphism, they start mimicking human beings in a perfect way.

So, this technique is called anthropomorphism. So, it is a type of personification, but an extended version of personification, while personification is limited to its imagery and figurative language here it is literal, they talk like human beings, they speak like human

beings, behave like human beings. Our *Panchatantra Tales* are filled with this kind of literary devices techniques used by the writer. So, generally speaking, fables and fairy tales are very well known for making use of anthropomorphic characters. So, it is again a literary technique when it suits you probably you too can use it.

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So, now that you have learnt one major literary technique that novelists use or fiction writers use. See, here is another one, of course, Virginia Woolf, needs no introduction to you because you are already introduced to her in several of our classes. See this is her well-known work. It is an excerpt from there, it is a short passage taken from her novel called *Mrs Dalloway*.

“For having lived in Westminster - how many years now? Over twenty, one feels even in the midst of the traffic or waking at night. Clarissa was positive, a particular hush a solemnity; an indescribable pause; a suspense, but that might be her heart right, affected, they said by influenza before Big Ben strikes. There Out it boomed. First a warning, musical; then the hour; irrevocable.”

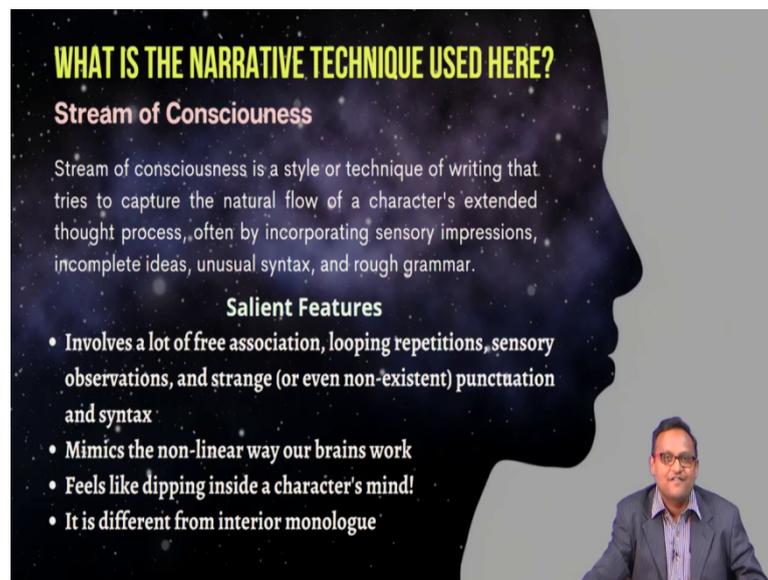
Well, if you look at it what is happening here is generally it is said that in a particular paragraph is all about a single idea, but now look here how from words, in fact, it is not even a sentence .

The idea is shifting from phrase to phrase, this is how our mind works because our mind does not work in a very linear way. In fact, if there is a part that you can ascribe to the way the

human mind behaves, it is absolute jigsaw. It can go in any random fashion like if you have seen Toro Toro right if you have been in any exhibition, if you have sat on Toro Toro how it moves in any random fashion something like that. This is how our mind works.

So, mimicking this random nature of the mind, a writer also puts forth various images, various thought processes that run in the mind of a character, and how there is no consistency here. You can note the lack of consistency and how it keeps shifting from one idea to another.

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WHAT IS THE NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE USED HERE?

Stream of Consciousness

Stream of consciousness is a style or technique of writing that tries to capture the natural flow of a character's extended thought process, often by incorporating sensory impressions, incomplete ideas, unusual syntax, and rough grammar.

Salient Features

- Involves a lot of free association, looping repetitions, sensory observations, and strange (or even non-existent) punctuation and syntax
- Mimics the non-linear way our brains work
- Feels like dipping inside a character's mind!
- It is different from interior monologue

This technique that Virginia Woolf uses here is called stream of consciousness. In fact, a remarkable modernist literary technique, it is not that writers before them did not use, but this literary device or literary technique came to be popularized especially in the 1920s by James Joyce in his a seminal book called *Ulysses*.

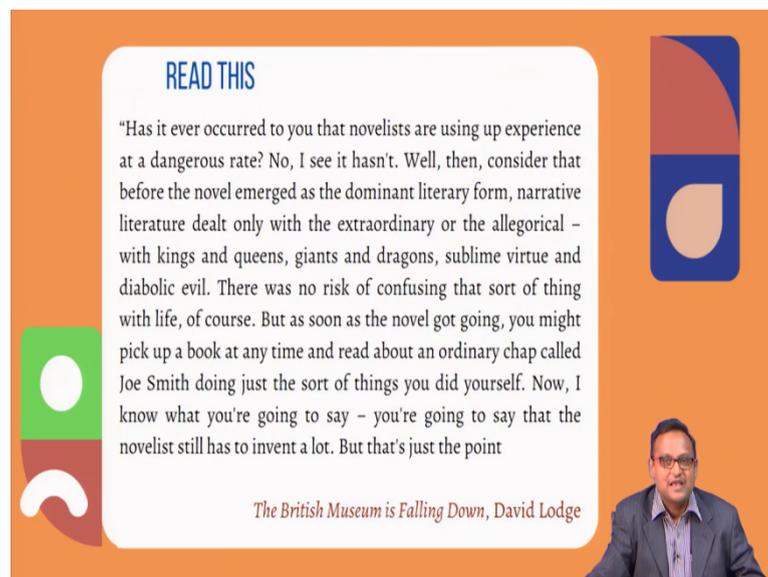
And later most of these modernist writers pick up this strategy and in order to delineate some kind of non-linear incoherent action, incoherent mental action that happens in all of us they make use of this technique of stream of consciousness.

So, some of the salient features here include a free association as you can see the idea jumps from one to the other, and looping repetition is in fact, after a couple of sentences you are made to come back to the original sentence. Then you go away, you deviate from there, lot of deviations and coming back and more than that there is a very dense sensory observation and unrelated non-existent punctuations are also used.

Some kind of strange words, strange unconventional punctuation, and as I said this technique mimics the non-linear way our brains function. In fact, commenting on this, one of the critics says that in the stream of consciousness you find the character's mind dripping like after you take a bath after you take a shower when you come out like water keeps dripping out of your hair, ideas and thoughts keep dripping out of the character's mind, that is the reason why we use it.

Of course, it has some kind of connections with the interior monologue that is especially found in plays, but it is certainly different, but for time being we can say that it talks about the way our brain works, the way the mind jumps from topic to topic and things like that this is stream of consciousness.

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READ THIS

“Has it ever occurred to you that novelists are using up experience at a dangerous rate? No, I see it hasn't. Well, then, consider that before the novel emerged as the dominant literary form, narrative literature dealt only with the extraordinary or the allegorical – with kings and queens, giants and dragons, sublime virtue and diabolic evil. There was no risk of confusing that sort of thing with life, of course. But as soon as the novel got going, you might pick up a book at any time and read about an ordinary chap called Joe Smith doing just the sort of things you did yourself. Now, I know what you're going to say – you're going to say that the novelist still has to invent a lot. But that's just the point

The British Museum is Falling Down, David Lodge

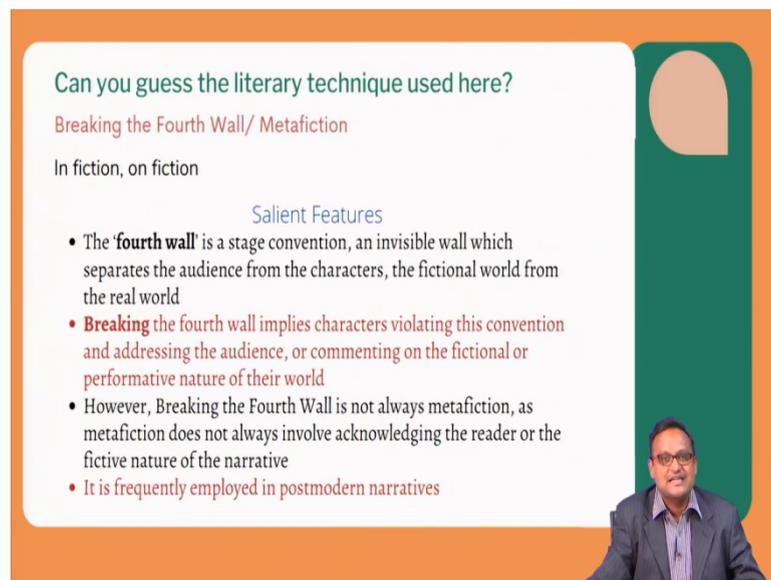
Now, from the stream of consciousness, let us go to the third technique. Now please read this and see if you can spot any technique here. It is an excerpt from David Lodge's novel called *The British Museum in Falling Down*, of course, again you are familiar with David Lodge, recall he is one of the pioneers of campus fiction, and he is one of the major novelists to have popularized campus fiction.

“Has it ever occurred to you that novelists are using up experience at a dangerous rate? No, I see it hasn't. Well, then, consider that before the novel emerged as the dominant literary form, narrative literature dealt only with the extraordinary or the allegorical - with kings and queens, giants and dragons, sublime virtue, and diabolic evil. There was no risk of confusing

that sort of thing. Now, I know what you are going to say you are going to say that the novelist still has to invent a lot, but that is just the point.”

So, what is the writer doing here? In fact, it looks like a stream of consciousness, but there is a variation here, of course, the novelist is talking about whatever comes to the mind of the character, protagonist, but rather than doing it alone he is addressing the audience here. Now look at the frequent use of you. In fact, you has been scattered all over this short passage.

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Can you guess the literary technique used here?

Breaking the Fourth Wall/ Metafiction

In fiction, on fiction

Salient Features

- The **'fourth wall'** is a stage convention, an invisible wall which separates the audience from the characters, the fictional world from the real world
- **Breaking the fourth wall** implies characters violating this convention and addressing the audience, or commenting on the fictional or performative nature of their world
- However, Breaking the Fourth Wall is not always metafiction, as metafiction does not always involve acknowledging the reader or the fictive nature of the narrative
- It is frequently employed in postmodern narratives

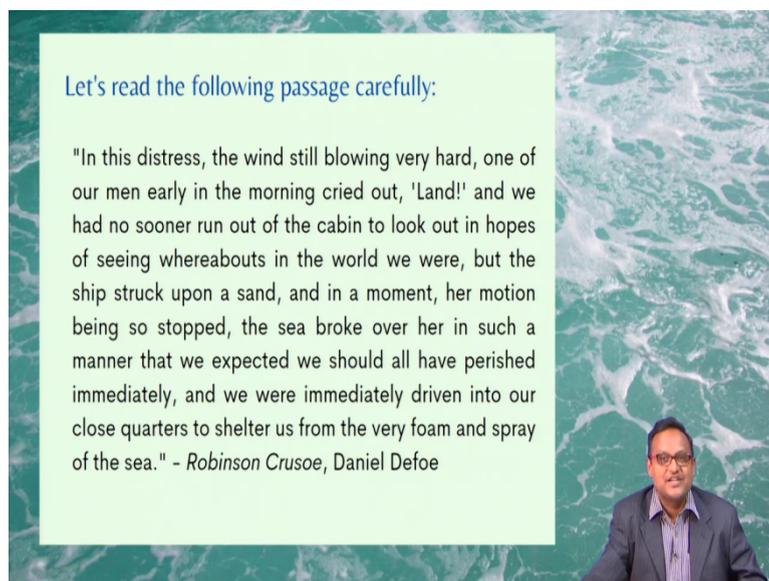
So, this kind of technique is called Breaking the Fourth Wall, this kind of technique is called breaking the fourth wall following the convention of a theatre. In fact, theatre is supposed to have three walls and the fourth wall is called the audience. Now, imagine how a stage is built; on the stage there is one wall, the second wall, and there is one wall at the back right. Now there is no fourth wall; it is the audience that acts as the fourth wall.

So, here you break that barrier and it is called breaking the fourth wall, in the drama they do not generally address you, so here in the novel, you find the novelist or the protagonist addressing the reader directly that is why it is called the fourth wall following the convention of a stage. And as you said, the protagonist here breaks that wall; that is the reason why it is called breaking the fourth wall which is a literary technique.

Why does a writer do that? Of course, it is an experimental form in order to involve the audience, in order to involve the readers all the more even into the creative process it is like

turning the reader also into a character. When the reader holds his or her book in their hand they also become a part of the character, when the novelist or the protagonist addresses them as you and you do this here, you do that there. So, it is a way of involving the audience and it is also to take them into confidence and confide in them rather than a confidante character; here the reader becomes a confidante character. So, these are the advantage that is why the writer makes use of this particular technique called the fourth wall or breaking the fourth wall.

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Let's read the following passage carefully:

"In this distress, the wind still blowing very hard, one of our men early in the morning cried out, 'Land!' and we had no sooner run out of the cabin to look out in hopes of seeing whereabouts in the world we were, but the ship struck upon a sand, and in a moment, her motion being so stopped, the sea broke over her in such a manner that we expected we should all have perished immediately, and we were immediately driven into our close quarters to shelter us from the very foam and spray of the sea." - *Robinson Crusoe*, Daniel Defoe

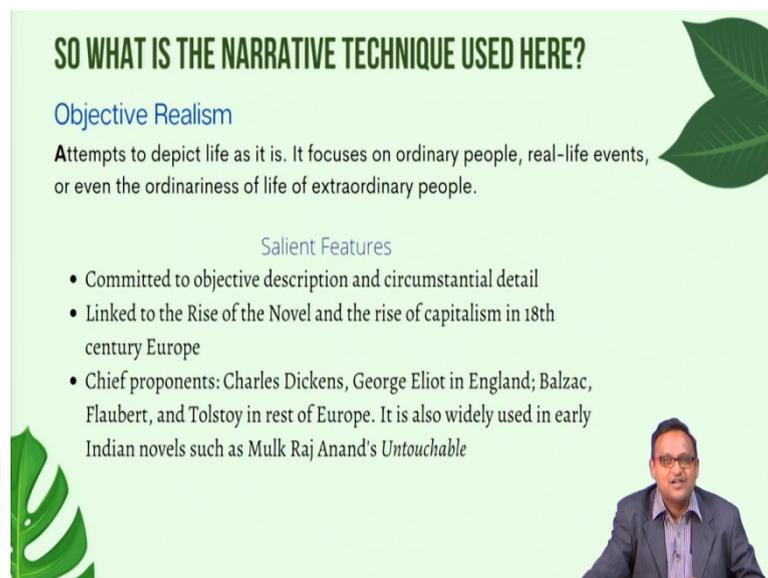
Now, let us go to another technique, and here is a brilliant passage please read this.

“In this distress, the wind still blowing very hard, one of our men early in the morning cried out, ‘Land’ and we had no sooner run out of the cabin to look out in hopes of seeing whereabouts in the world we were. But the ship struck upon sand, and in a moment, her motion being so stopped, the sea broke over her in such a manner that we expected we should have all perished immediately, and we were immediately driven into our close quarters to shelter us from the very foam and spray of the sea.”

Of course, this is you will have noticed a very longish sentence. The entire passage is one single sentence here and this is from one of the early English novels. We have to remember *Daniel Defoe* is one of the early practitioners of novels. So, *Robinson Crusoe* also is one of the early novels we have already discussed that in our earlier classes right in a previous class. So, this is from there.

So, that is the reason why language is slightly not simple, in other words, it makes use of a lot of longish complex sentence structures, but forget the structure of language here, now look at the content, look at how what it is describing. So, if you can see probably here some people are sailing in the sea and they have been starved of land for many days and the moment somebody spots a patch of land or if they think they have spotted a patch of land how all of them get excited. So, you may think it is nothing unusual here; well that is the point here.

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SO WHAT IS THE NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE USED HERE?

Objective Realism

Attempts to depict life as it is. It focuses on ordinary people, real-life events, or even the ordinariness of life of extraordinary people.

Salient Features

- Committed to objective description and circumstantial detail
- Linked to the Rise of the Novel and the rise of capitalism in 18th century Europe
- Chief proponents: Charles Dickens, George Eliot in England; Balzac, Flaubert, and Tolstoy in rest of Europe. It is also widely used in early Indian novels such as Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*

It is called objective realism. In fact, objective realism is where it is like realist fiction. In fact, objective realism is a technique that is used in realist fiction that is a type of fiction that we discussed in the previous class, you can recall that. So, in this, the technique is used in order to depict life as it is. That is the reason why it focuses on ordinary people, real-life events, and even the so-called ordinariness of the extraordinary people that is the reason why it uses it.

Therefore, whenever a character watches it, the character goes on explaining all the detail, all the circumstantial details are presented as vividly and as sensorily, in as enriching as possible. And generally, this technique is connected with the Rise of the Novel and especially with the rise of capitalism in 18th century Europe. Of course, that is when you can trace the origins of the novel to that particular time period.

So, some of the important writers who exemplify this technique are Charles Dickens and George Eliot in England and have their European counterparts in Tolstoy, Flaubert, and Balzac. So, they exemplify objective realism and of course, it is also used widely in early Indian novels such as Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* or *Swami and his Friends* by R.K. Narayan and others objective realists. To explain in a detailed manner, in as objective manner as possible what you see, what a character sees is objective realism.

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READ

“Man corrupt everything, say Shug. He on your box of grits, in your head, and all over the radio. He try to make you think he everywhere. Soon as you think he everywhere, you think he God. But he ain’t. Whenever you trying to pray, and man plop himself on the other end of it, tell him to git lost, say Shug. Conjure up the flowers, wind, water, a big rock.”

Colour Purple, Alice Walker

From objective realism let us go to learn one more literary technique and here we take an excerpt from Alice Walker's *Colour Purple*. Please read this passage and see if you can spot anything unusual..

“Man corrupt everything, say Shug. He on your box of grits, in your head, and all over the radio. He try to make you think he everywhere. Soon as you think he everywhere, you think he god. But he ain’t. Whenever you trying to pray and man plop himself on the other end of it, tell him to get lost, say Shug. Conjure up the flowers, wind, water, a big rock.”

Now, what do you notice here; obviously, if you did not know our classes well, you would have immediately jumped up or raised your hand and said this passage is filled with a lot of grammatical errors right. Now, look, “Man corrupt everything, say Shug, He on your box of grits, in your head... ,” all these things may look like as if somebody has made a lot of grammatical errors. And if you put it in MS Word probably the entire passage would be in one big red line right, but that is not true, it is an excerpt from the novel *Colour Purple*.

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NOW WHAT IS THE TECHNIQUE USED IN THIS?

Colloquialism

Alice Walker uses Colloquialism here, an informal and conversational language to establish the narrative's geographical setting and realism of the characters and their predicaments

Salient Features

- Distinct dialects or linguistic varieties spoken in specific locations are the basis of colloquialisms.
- Colloquialism may include: local proverbs, idioms and profanities, regional words or phrases, non-mainstream grammar or syntax
- Inventing colloquialisms is a tool for delivering information about an imaginary world's culture and society and making it feel real in genre fictions like sci-fi or fantasy. It is also a powerful tool in realistic fiction .

So, when you use this kind of language, the technique is called colloquialism. Colloquialism is basically a linguistic technique, in the way you construct your sentences, in the way you use language, in the way you employ words and structures it is called colloquialism. Especially many third world country writers make use of it. In fact, if you can recall some of the poems that you have read of Nissim Ezekiel, you can say it is a colloquialism.

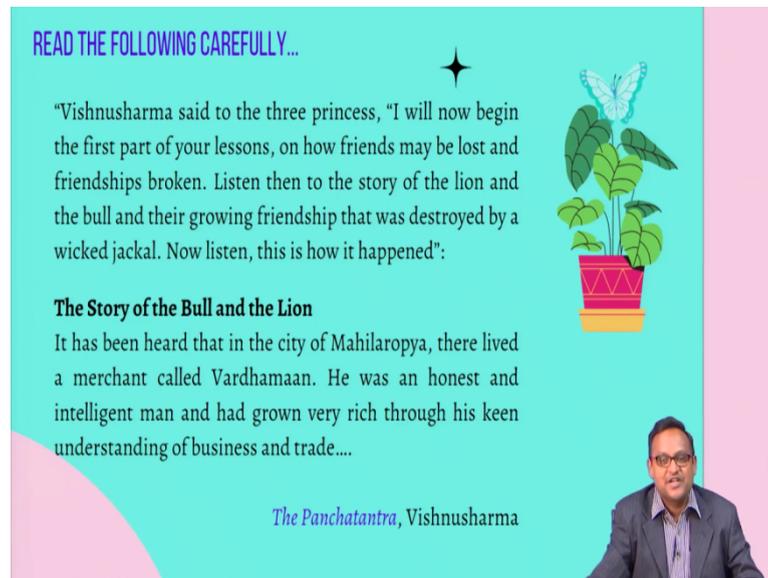
Indian English poems or even if you read Chinua Achebe for instance *Things Fall Apart* you may find colloquialism. Even Tony Morrison to a certain extent, but not to the extent you find Alice Walker using here. So, it is called colloquialism, what does it do here, the use of language in the novel closely mimics the use of the language of the people which it represents, supposing it is about an African American community, this is how they use the language.

Therefore it is more informal and conversational and in order to bring out an authentic flair and flavour of the character, they mimic the language used in a particular geographical setting in a realistic fashion as possible, this is called colloquialism. How do you identify this technique, by the use of distinct dialects and linguistic varieties used there and when you say colloquialism, it is reflected in the proverbs that the characters use idioms, especially profanities, when they curse, when they scold each other.

So, it is replete with regional words, cuss words, so, that is the reason why it makes use of non-mainstream grammar and non-mainstream or unconventional syntax and things like that.

So, especially when used in a realist fiction it becomes very powerful, because it is capable of evoking a character's setting in as authentic a way as possible, you feel as if you are listening to that character in flesh and blood when a writer uses this technique in his or her novels.

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READ THE FOLLOWING CAREFULLY...

“Vishnusharma said to the three princess, “I will now begin the first part of your lessons, on how friends may be lost and friendships broken. Listen then to the story of the lion and the bull and their growing friendship that was destroyed by a wicked jackal. Now listen, this is how it happened”:

The Story of the Bull and the Lion

It has been heard that in the city of Mahilaropya, there lived a merchant called Vardhamaan. He was an honest and intelligent man and had grown very rich through his keen understanding of business and trade....

The Panchatantra, Vishnusharma

The slide also features a decorative illustration of a green plant in a pink pot with a blue butterfly above it, and a small video inset of a man in a suit in the bottom right corner.

From colloquialism, let us check one more literary device and this particular device is employed in one of the early works the *Panchatantra*. I am sure all of you have read some stories of the *Panchatantra* if not read you will have heard it from someone or the other.

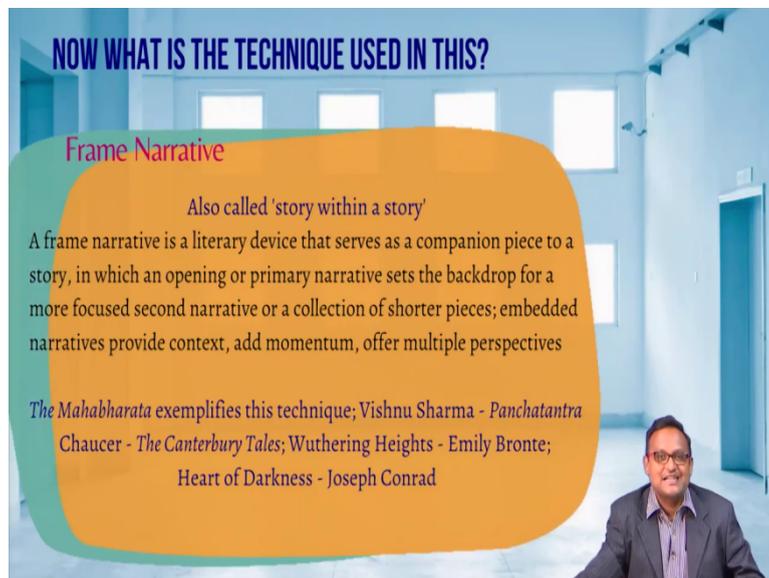
So, read this passage or excerpt. It is from Panchatantra,

“Vishnusharma said to the three princesses, “I will now begin the first part of your lessons, on how friends may be lost and friendships broken. Listen then to the story of the lion and the bull and their growing friendship that was destroyed by a wicked jackal. Now, listen, this is how it happened”

Then the story of the bull and the lion begins, “It has been heard in the city of Mahilaropya there lived a merchant called Vardhamaan. It was, he was an honest and intelligent man and had grown very rich through his keen understanding of business and trade that is how it grows.” Now, what is happening here, of course, you can see that the first paragraph is not connected with the second paragraph here, but then they are connected in a very tenuous link. He says listen to the story that I have got to say, that itself is a story.

What Vishnusharma tells the three princess, that it itself is a story, but it acts as a frame and within that frame, another story unfolds, the story of Sanjevuka, the bull and the lion.

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So, this kind of literary technique is called a frame narrative. So, popularly it is also called a ‘story within a story.’ If you can recall our Mahabharata exemplifies this particular technique because it said the entire *Mahabharata* is recounted as a kind of a flashback during Janamejaya’s Sarpa Satra, the snake sacrifice, again you are familiar with that story as well we have discussed it in the context of Arun Kolatkar. So, when Janamejaya is performing the snake sacrifice yajna that is when of course, the entire *Mahabharata* has been recounted in a flashback way. So, the story of Sarpa Satra acts as a frame within which a major narrative of the *Mahabharata* unfolds that is why it is called a ‘story within a story.’

Most of the time it happens, because in order to draw our attention towards what happened earlier, this is used. In fact, it is one of the most preferred literary devices used in folk tales and especially in the Indian cases of the epics and novels, the early novels. And some of its contemporary practitioners include Joseph Conrad in *Heart of Darkness*, Emily Bronte in *Wuthering Heights*, and of course, Chaucer too uses this a frame narrative in *The Canterbury Tales*, a story within a story.

So, these are some important literary narratives that we have picked up in this class today and of course, even in the next class, we are going to discuss literary techniques.

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Now let's look at Vishnu Sharma's *Panchatantra* (Five Treatises), arguably the first ever written-down work for children and adolescents, which is also a great example of frame narrative

There are 5 sections in *Panchatantra*, namely, Mitra Bheda, Mitra Labha, Kakolukiyam, Labdhapranasham, and Apariksitakarakam.

- Each part contains a main story as the frame story having the same name as the section. Thereafter each section has several moral fables focusing on various aspects or possible manifestations of the same concern.

For example, some stories within the 2nd treatise, 'Mitrasmprapti' (Gaining of Friends) are: Mitrasmprapti, The Crow-Rat Discourse, Meeting a New Friend, The Hermit and the Mouse, The Rescue of a Deer. The Hunter and the Greedy Jackal, etc. and all talk about how true friends are gained in various walks of life.



There are some more of course, and before we wind it up what you can see is how it happens. In fact, the entire *Panchatantra* has been narrated. *Panchatantra* is five tales or five treatises. 5 books and each book or each part begins with the frame narrative and out of that frame narrative, the series of tales emerge from there. So, that is how *Panchatantra* has been structured in a very beautiful way.

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18th century manuscript of Panchatantra

Illustrated "Elephants and Hares", a story from Kakolukiyam

एक युष्मासेराषेरदेहे आर आनेपेरोनाही युष्माकधम्येहे आर वे
प्रमाकू आनप्रकासजयोहे तबगजराजकरपकेबोले अनजनेआ
एहे अबनाबेगौ तब युष्माकहतेहे हमारीसहायकुंचंडमाजुचेव
अरोवरआएहे तबगजराजकुकीअबतुमआयकेअनोमकरो
खुंकरितेरात्रिनेई तबगजराजकुअरोवरलेजाय चंडमाकोदर
सनकरायो आरचंडमाकोप्रतिबिबपोनीमेहालेहे युष्माकहतेहे
यहचंडमातुमपररोअकरतहे तुमप्रनामकरीबमाकरावो तब

॥ सुभार देअरोवर लखीकोनीपोवन आवे युष्मा सुष्माको दारो आओ देने लखीनेनमा कीनेनर पीननयो ॥



And here is an excerpt from an 18th-century illustration of *Panchatantra*, it is an 18th-century manuscript. So, just out of historical curiosity and for an elegant reason, we

have used it here. So, I am sure in this class we have picked up at least six to eight narrative techniques, maybe a little more than that. So, let us continue our discussion of this, I am sure you are finding this activity and this class a very interesting. Let us pick up this discussion in the next class.