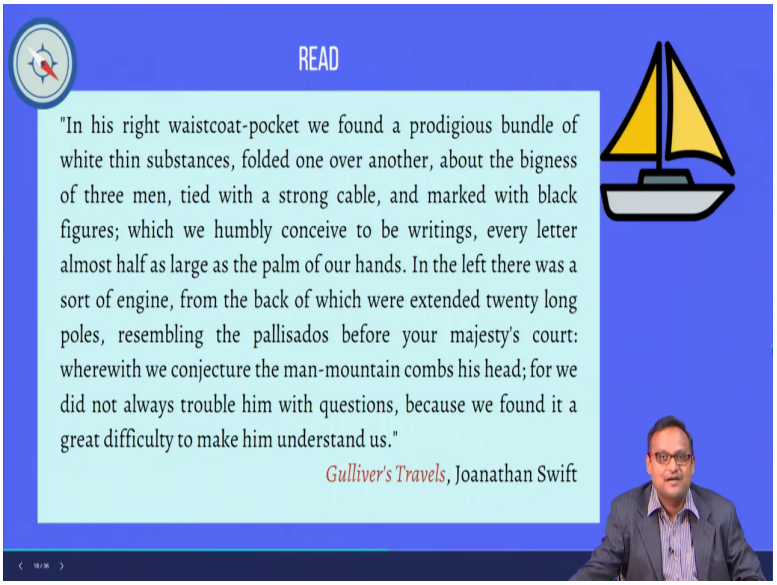
Elements of Literature and Creative Communication
Prof. H S Komalesha
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur

Lecture - 37
Narrative Techniques in Fiction (Contd.)

Hi, welcome again to our ongoing discussion on Narrative Techniques in Fiction as I said these are Tools of the Trade. So, of course, the express concern behind these classes is to acquaint you with some of these techniques that, you can spot in the novels you read course, that is the express concern. But, if there is an ulterior motive for these classes, of course in a very positive sense; if tomorrow any of you wish to pick up your pen and start writing the novels, then at least a cursory understanding of these techniques should help you in fact they should give you a kind of kick start to start your own novels, that is always. I would like to think big on all your behalf, I am more ambitious for all of you. So, I am sure these techniques that you are going to pick up in these classes might definitely help you; if not in writing novels, at least in your term papers, at least in your office reports that you plan to write or in your know any of the things that you write they might help you in extraordinary ways, you do not know when they help you.

Let us continue our discussion of these narrative techniques, we are in lecture 37.

(Refer Slide Time: 01:42)



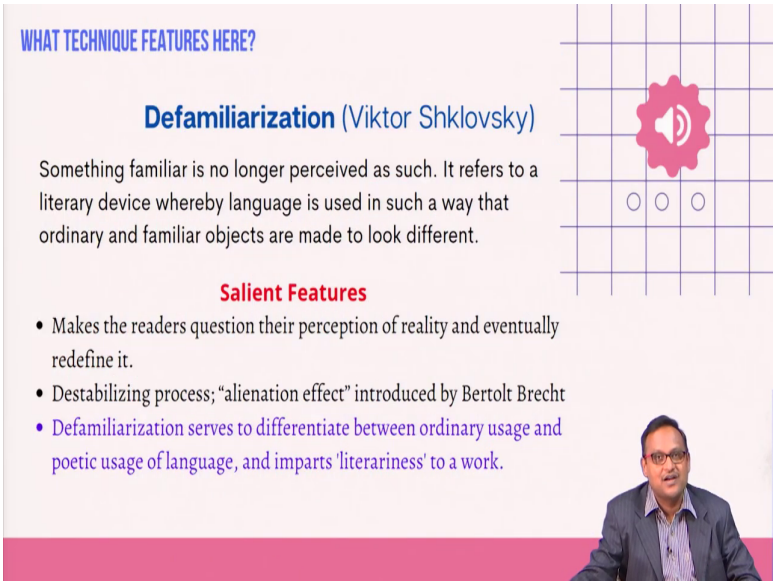
Now, I have a very interesting paragraph or a passage here; like we have been doing, please read this and see if you can spot anything unusual here or if you can even detect a technique. If not the exact word at least, if you can find out what is happening here; you have that is something remarkable:

"In his right waistcoat pocket, we found a prodigious bundle of white thin substances, folded one over another, about the bigness of three men, tied with a strong cable and marked with black figures; which we humbly conceive to be writings, every letter almost half as large as the palm of our hands. In the left there was a sort of engine, from the back of which was extended twenty long poles, resembling the palisades before your majesty's court; wherewith we conjecture the man-mountain combs his head; for we did not always trouble him with questions, because we found it a great difficulty to make him understand us."

This is again from Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*. Jonathan Swift was one of the early practitioners of the novel of the I mean the genre of the novel and therefore, becomes a very important figure for us even historically. Now, do you think I mean can you spot what are these objects that; obviously this is an encounter - Gulliver's travels, please think of it how Gulliver, especially in this context Gulliver travels and reaches the shore and then to his utter dismay he finds people, these are called Lilliputians very tiny ones. So, something like each of them may be about let us say about 10 inches or 15 inches something like that, very small Lilliputian creatures. So, when they are trying to search for this person, in fact for them the normal human being like you and me is a giant; because, so 10 of them or 20 of them have to be put together in order to make them look as tall as us right or much more than that. So, for us, I mean for them this guy is like a huge giant. So, when they try to search for him, they find in his right pocket or waist pocket a book. So, that is something that they are not very familiar with, in that culture they are not very familiar with it, and that is how look at how they describe it. All that they are describing in this passage, are describing two things; one is a book a pocket notebook probably that he has, and the other one is a comb that he uses, in fact combing the hair. Look how they describe these things as if we found a prodigious bundle of white thin substances fold folded one over another, about the bigness of three men, tied with a strong cable and marked with black figures. And each letter is as big as a palm or much more than that, every letter is almost half as large as the palm of our hands; obviously, it looks quite strange to them. What is ordinary for us is a book or a pocketbook, look how these characters are describing and there is another one. Then in the left, there was a sort of

engine, from the back of which was extended twenty long poles resembling palisades before your majesty's court; wherewith we conjecture that the man-mountain combs his head, he combs his head using this, look how a comb is described. So, using unfamiliar words, unfamiliar language; in fact, the purpose here is, of course, to create some kind of a distance between what we know as a pocketbook and what these guys, the Lilliputians discover as the pocketbook, this technique is called defamiliarization.

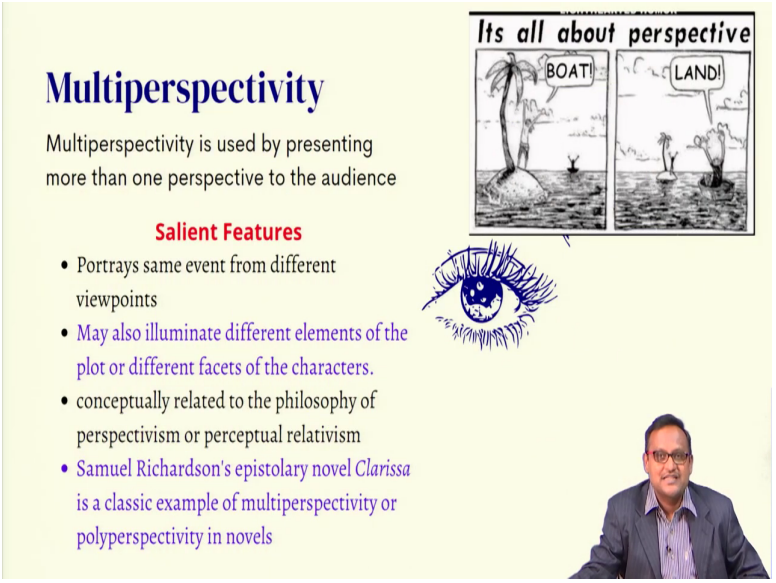
(Refer Slide Time: 06:15)



This technique is called defamiliarization. As a literary technique, of course, this name although Jonathan Swift wrote that much earlier, it was in the 1920s and the 30s that the Russian formalist critic Viktor Shklovsky calls this technique defamiliarization. So, you cannot say that the invention, the technique was invented in the 19th century, it got its name in the 1920s that is all, right. It got its name in the 1920s and 30s, otherwise, this technique has been used in literature since time immemorial. And in fact, one of the formalist critics goes on to say that, the very purpose of literature and art is to defamiliarize. So, what does defamiliarization mean? It simply means to make the familiar things look unfamiliar. What is the purpose behind that; most of the time we take things for granted. In fact, for us the moment we say book, we do not even scratch our head and try to think what it is; because we have taken books for granted because we have been in touch with books for quite some time. So, in order for the writer to create some kind of distance between what you already know as a book and what these Lilliputians are discovering as a book; the writer uses a different language, different phrases, different metaphors, different symbols so that even an ordinary

substance like a pocketbook or even a comb looks and sounds something strange to us. So, we are made to look at this object, we are made to look at these objects from a fresh perspective; that is the reason why one of the well known formalist critics says that the objective of all art and literature is to help us look at things from a fresh perspective. So, in that sense entire literature, all art is a defamiliarized event, it is a defamiliarized phenomenon, right. So, and as I said one of the reasons why writers use this technique is to destabilize what we already know, that is the reason why defamiliarization. So, it happens using different vocabulary, different choices of words, different descriptions for the known things and so, that is defamiliarization for us. In fact, similarly, you find a parallel to this when Bertolt Brecht, of course, we discuss Brecht in an exhaustive way or in a little more detailed way when in subsequent weeks, especially when we come to discuss drama and theatre. So, if there is a kind of equivalent in drama for defamiliarization, it is an alienation effect. For Bertolt Brecht believed that his theatre was meant to create alienate the audience from what they already know so that they can look at things from a fresh perspective. So, the alienation effect is a dramatic counterpart of defamiliarization in the novel. I am sure you found that very interesting now. As an activity what you can do, is see if you can describe a tree from a fresh perspective using a different set of words or a child or any object; maybe be a chair, maybe be a table that you keep your books on and write. See if you can try to describe it in a different way and see the impact it creates when you read it, that is something that you can begin doing, right yeah.

(Refer Slide Time: 10:17)



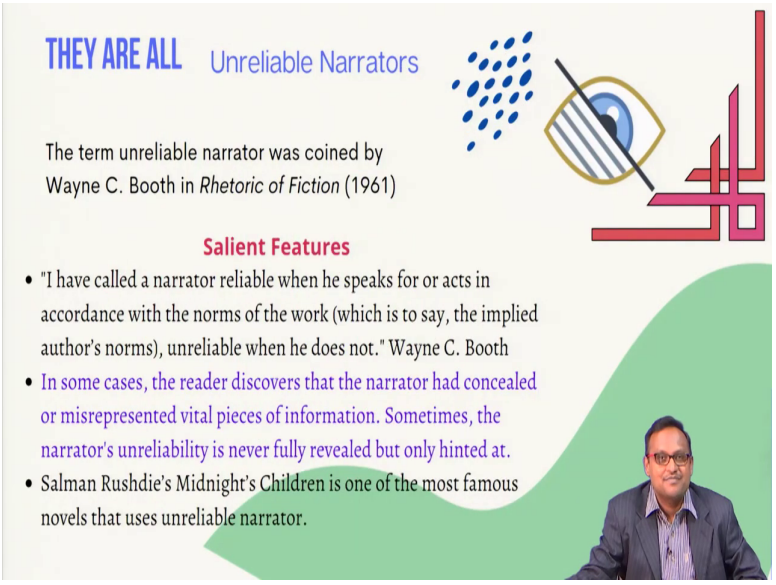
So, from defamiliarization, let us go to a multiperspective. In order to better understand this particular technique, rather than a passage I have given you here, I have given here a cartoon. Now, look at this in the cartoon just above me, there is a guy in the first picture when I mean in the guy who shouts boat; he has been stranded on the so-called tiny island, I do not know whether you can call that an island, a patch of landmass floating somewhere in amidst water. So, he says boat, because for him boat becomes a symbol of a lifeboat; the boat becomes a lifeboat for him becomes a symbol of hope because he has been stranded here, whereas for the other guy. Now, look at it, the other guy who is in the boat when he looks at that small patch of land, landmass floating in the water; he finds its land, he exclaims it as land how, it is about perspective right, it is about perspective, so multiperspectivity is something similar. So, here the writer presents a particular fact or the writer presents something from multiple perspectives. So, when a particular character; if it is a character A when he or she watches something, how do they find it? And when character B watches it, how does this character find the same thing in a different way, and how does it happen when the third character watches it and describes it? So, this becomes a very important thing and again symbolically speaking, entire literature does that because the very purpose of literature as we discussed right in our first week is to offer us fresh perspectives so that we can look at the world from a renewed interest. We can reengage our interest in life when we look at life through the lens of literature. So, here writer uses it, in fact, to describe something from multiple perspectives; that is why it is called multiperspectivity, or it is also called polyperspectivity. And in fact, in order to bring out different facets of the same character; let us say for instance there is a protagonist who has certain complex characteristic traits. So, how does a friend of the protagonist describe the protagonist? How does the enemy of the protagonist describe the protagonist? How does an acquaintance of the protagonist describe the protagonist? So, all of them, these perspectives offer they complement each other's perspectives and together; when we read their perspectives together, we get a complete picture of the character we are reading. So, it is I mean philosophically speaking it is related to a concept called perceptual relativism or perspectivism; so that when we combine all our perspectives, we would be able to club all of them together and then get a holistic perspective. Remember we had even narrated a story related to an elephant; how somebody who touches the trunk of an elephant calls it a snake blind man. A group of blind men and elephants, that story was called a group of blind men and elephants. A person who touches the trunk feels the elephant is like a snake, somebody who touches the ear considers it is like a fan, somebody who touches the tusk considers the elephant to be like a spear, somebody who I mean who touches the trunk looks I mean

considers elephant to be a wall. Somebody who touches the tail considers it to be something else and unless we club all these perspectives, we would not be able to get a complete picture of the elephant, right. Similarly, multiperspectivity helps us construct a complete picture. So, Samuel Richardson in his novel *Clarissa* offers multiperspectivity. In his remarkable work *Anthills of Savannah*, you find Chinua Achebe employing this particular strategy. So, these are various strategies, of course, perspective has to do with the eye; that is the reason why you have an eye there, but instead of one eye, it is multiplied by several eyes. So, that you get a picture of multiperspectivity.

(Refer Slide Time: 15:07)

From multiperspectivity, let us go to learn another very interesting literary technique. So, here is a rhetorical question, a rhetorical question. What is common in Nelly of *Wuthering Heights*; Humbert Humbert of *Lolita*; Salem Sinai of *Midnight's Children*; Tony Webster of *Sense of an Ending*, and Pi Patel of *The Life of Pi*? All of them are remarkable novels, be it *Wuthering Heights*, *Lolita* by Nabokov, *Midnight's Children* by Rushdie, *Sense of an Ending,* and probably another book winner, *Life of Pi* too. What is common in all these characters? I mean if you have read them or watched the movies, do you think you can find out what it is?

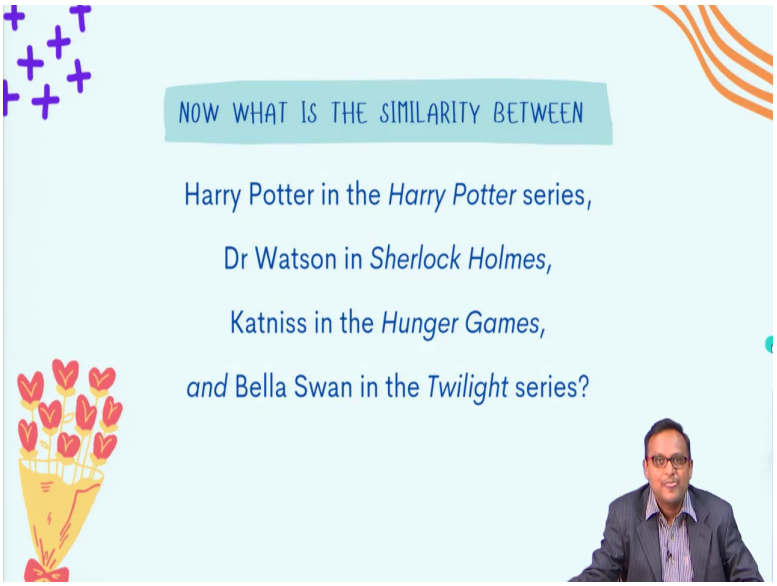
(Refer Slide Time: 15:59)



Well all of them are unreliable narrators; they are the protagonists, they narrate events, through them the story is propelled, the plot is furthered using those characters there. But when you come towards the end of the novel; you realize that all of them are unreliable narrators, because you cannot rely on them. So, they say something and you tend to believe it, as a reader you tend to believe it; unfortunately towards the end, you realize what you came to gather from those characters was not really a true picture, there was something more to it and therefore, you have been deceived in trusting them. So, unreliable narrators are characters used in a novel and most of the time they mislead the readers. And this misleading may be deliberate because; because of the mental capabilities of the narrator, they may not be able to offer us a perspective, solid perspective that can lead us towards truth. Let us say for instance if it is a child narrator, obviously a child narrator; we may not be able to trust a child narrator, though throughout the novel we tend to look at things from a child narrator's point of view. Because the child is not equipped to understand an adult world; so whatever the child narrates, we may not be able to trust it, therefore it becomes an essential tool. On the other hand, if there is a character who is a con person, who is a con man or a con woman, whose profession is to cheat as a character; well they deliberately cheat the reader as well, so that they want to project themselves as to all good, all wonderful and things like that. But only when they are caught, do we realize that; we were trapped in their narrative and that is the reason why.

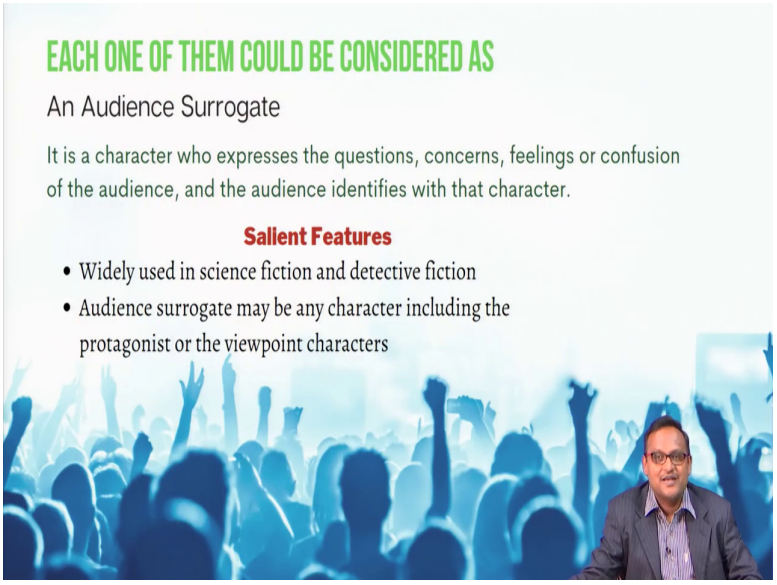
So, if you can recall there is an extraordinary movie, *The Usual Suspects*, you understand what we mean by the unreliable narratives, you cannot trust these narratives. Or if there is a character who is mentally challenged, obviously their perception of reality is different; but until they are mentally challenged, you tend to believe everything they say, right. So, you cannot rely on them, for various reasons they hoodwink the readers and of course, I mean this helps the novelist to further the plot in a particular direction. So, it is a deliberate strategy that writers employ. So, their narrators cannot be trusted, that is why they are called unreliable narrators. And this particular term is by the 1960s critic Wayne Booth; he uses this term for the first time in Rhetoric Fiction. The technique is old, but probably the term that we have given to this is a new one yeah.

(Refer Slide Time: 18:59)



Now, continuing our discussion of similarities of the characters; now what is common in Harry Potter of the *Harry Potter series*, Dr Watson of the *Sherlock Holmes series*, and again Katniss in the *Hunger Games series* and Bella Swan in the *Twilight Series*? In fact, all of them are series, book series and of course, they have also been turned into wonderful movies. So, if you have watched these movies or read the novels, can you spot the similarity across these characters Harry Potter, Watson, Katniss and Bella Swan? Well, if you can spot it then; that means you have got the literary technique correctly.

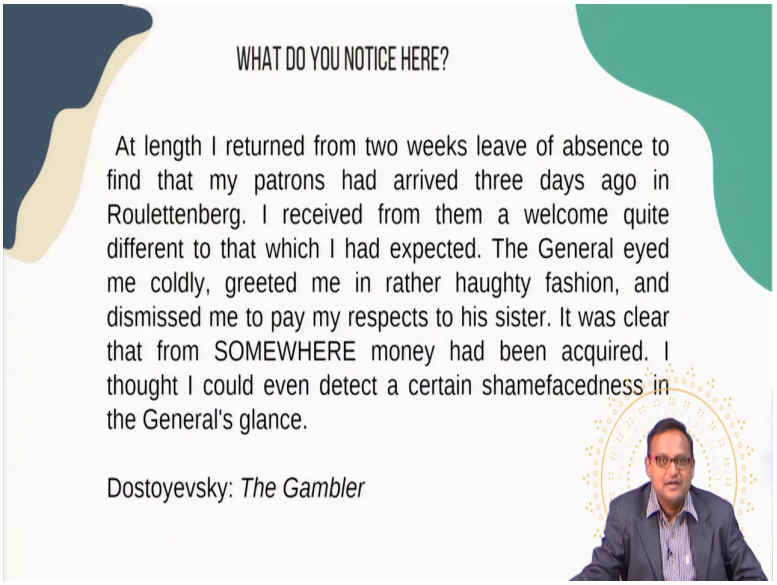
(Refer Slide Time: 19:43)



All of them are called 'audience surrogate'. These characters are called audience surrogates; of course, it is a literary technique related to an element of fiction called characters. We learnt in the previous class, in one of our previous classes, we learnt various elements of fiction. So, these techniques are linked to some of the elements. So, there are some techniques that are related to the plot, there are some techniques that are related to the character, and there are some techniques that are related to the style. So, this particular technique, literary technique or fictional technique is linked to an element of fiction called characters. The first one was an unreliable character, an unreliable narrator; this one is called an audience surrogate. What do we mean by audience surrogate? Here one of the characters in that fictional work expresses questions, concerns, feelings, and emotions to the audience in such a way that; in fact, these are my questions, let us say for instance when Harry asks very naively, what is let us say, how does Horcrux. What do you mean by Horcrux? Harry does not know it is not that Harry does not know; in fact, Harry represents when the word Horcrux is used for the first time, obviously as a reader you and I do not know what a Horcrux is. So, instead, we cannot ask that question. So, instead of us, Harry on our behalf; Harry asks another character who knows what a Horcrux is and that character explains to Harry what it is. So, in other words, Harry raises the question that we ideally raise in Deathly Hallows, for instance, Harry does not know what the Deathly Hallows are, and then one of Harry's friends has to explain. So, the questions and the doubts that we have as a reader, these things are represented by a character; that character asks our doubts, asks our concerns and expresses our sentiments and

gets the answer. So, these are called audience surrogates. So, they do the job of an audience when they perform that particular trick, that is why it is called an audience surrogate. Generally, this technique is used in science fiction and especially in detective fiction; because here in order for the detective to explain on what basis he or she has solved the mystery, I mean those detectives need a surrogate audience. So, the surrogate audience could be one of the assistants of the detective or it could be a confidante of the detective. So, it could be anybody, right. So, that is what is called an audience surrogate, this is something that we can keep in mind. And this literary technique is related to character; the element in fiction is related to the element of character.

(Refer Slide Time: 23:00)



Now, here is another beautiful literary technique that we are going to learn and this excerpt is from Dostoevsky's not so well known work called *The Gambler*. Of course, when we say Dostoevsky, you must have heard of *Brother Karamazov* or *The Idiot*. *The Gambler* is not so very well known, but interesting nevertheless. Now, read this:

"At length I returned from two weeks leave of absence to, in fact the novel begins like this the novel begins in this way, at length I returned from two weeks leave of absence to find that my patrons had arrived three days ago in Roulettenberg. I received from them a welcome quite different to that which I had expected. The General eyed me coldly, who is this General and why does he eye him so coldly. Greeted me in rather haughty fashion and dismissed me to pay my respects to his sister. It was clear that from somewhere money had been acquired.

I thought I could even detect a certain shamefacedness in the General's glance."

So, you do not know when the novel begins in this way, you do not know who is the I and why did he have to leave the station and who are his patrons; because generally speaking when you read a work of art, especially drama or fiction a play or fiction, it is we have already I mean learnt the Freytag pyramid, there is an exposition some things are explained in a proper way, introduced if there is a back story, everything has been introduced. And the rising action, there is a climax the falling action and then a resolution to the problem. So, here I mean when we open the first page, this is how the novel begins; you do not know who is the character here, what is the background just abruptly in the middle. The novel begins in a very abrupt way. So, rather than a beginning introduction to the General; which money they are talking about, why is there a lack of bonhomie between them something like this. Instead of all that, we find the novel beginning in a very abrupt way, this is called in 'medias res'.

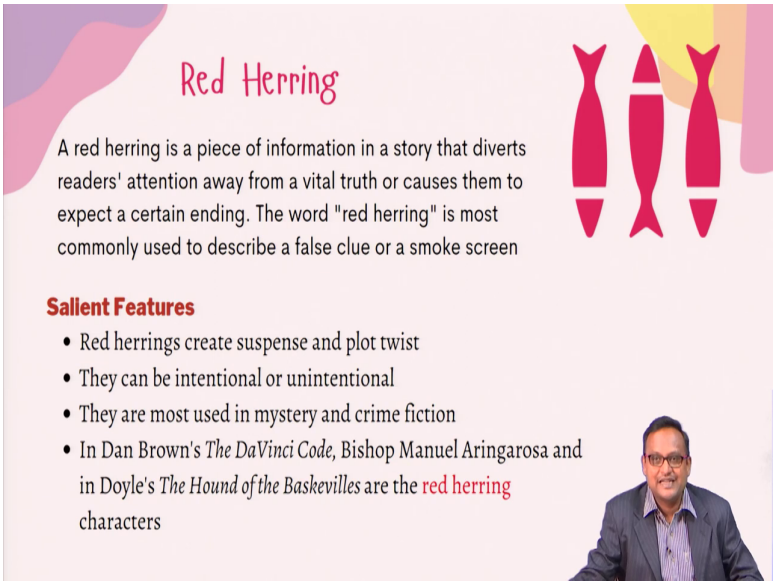
(Refer Slide Time: 25:29)

In fact, if you can recall, we began the last class in such an abrupt way and I said, I would discuss that technique subsequently and this is the technique. So, when a novelist begins abruptly, that technique is called ''in medias res''. And as I said at the beginning of the last class, I sounded quite abrupt and I said when I sounded that way probably, you must have felt, you must have missed something or there must be an editing glitch or something like that, right. Of course, this technique is used by a novelist or anybody who uses it to draw your attention. So, the moment the first page offers you a mystery, you tend to solve it; you

want to see what you have missed right, that is the technique that the writer uses. And in Latin 'in medias res' means, it begins in the middle; in the middle of the plot, in the middle of things, means 'in medias res' in Latin means in the middle of things.

So, here the usual the five stages in which the novel or the fiction is stretched and developed that we studied in the Freytag model, it is been skipped for dramatic reasons and the novel begins somewhere in the middle abruptly. In fact, this technique is as old as Homer, because Homer uses this technique in his *Odyssey*; it begins with the *Odyssey* does not begin anywhere, in fact, it begins with Ulysses recounting what happened and all that. So, it is as old as Homer. And as opposed to 'in medias res', we have a technique called ab ovo; it is an opposite technique, that means from the egg. So, that means our regular conventional novels when we read it; start from the beginning, they are introduced they introduce us to a character, the background, the setting, equations with other characters and all that, it happens in a very progressive way, right. So, that kind of a conventional traditional beginning is called ab ovo; from the egg, in Latin ab ovo means from the egg, like from the beginning, from the scratch. So, as opposed to that you have 'in medias res' and somewhere it begins in the middle abruptly.

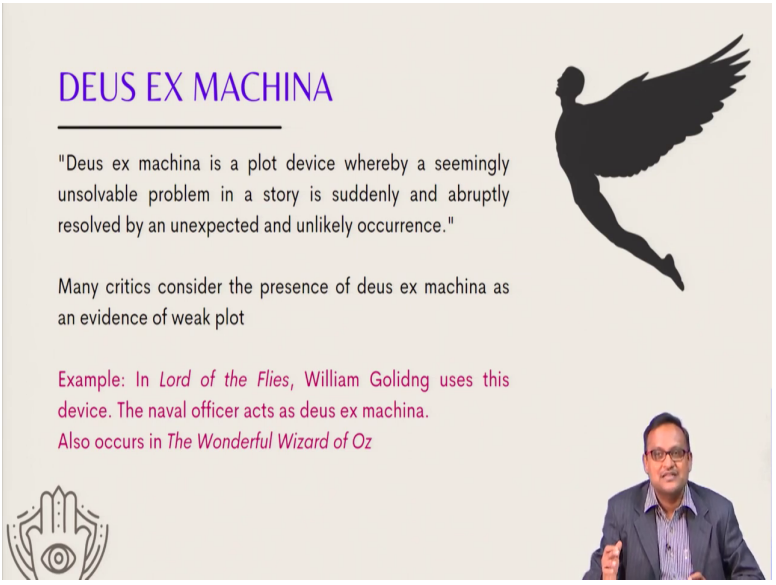
(Refer Slide Time: 28:11)



From here let us go to another important literary technique, it is called a red herring; again this technique is employed extensively in suspense thrillers and detective fiction and all that.

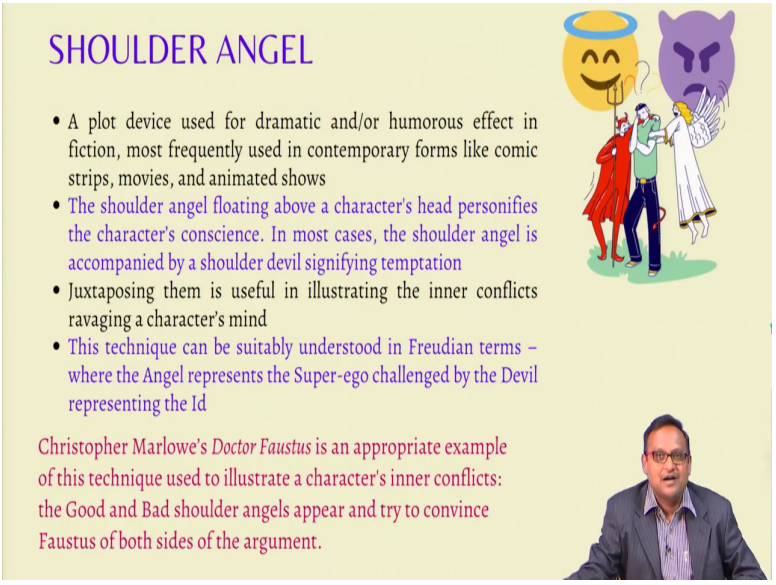
A red herring is generally a false clue or a smokescreen. I mean what do we mean by that? Supposing throughout the narrative, the narrative has been built in such a way that especially; now think of a crime novel, think of detective fiction. So, throughout almost if the novel has 100 pages; the first 80 pages the novel almost goes on giving us hints that probably character A is the culprit, he is the one who committed this murder, he is the thief who has stolen the Kohinoor diamond and things like that. Whereas only in the last 10 pages, do we realize that that is not actual, that is actually an innocent character and you were misled there, the real culprit is elsewhere. So, it is called a misdirect, it is called a misdirect. So, red herring means a misdirect; a writer deliberately uses this technique, so that he or she wants to draw our attention away from the real person, away from the real event. So, when we are introduced to the real person or the real event, the shock value is retained, and the dramatic impact is retained. So, in order to create a dramatic impact, a writer makes use of red herring; red herring is a technique whereby readers' attention is being diverted away from the vital truth, it is been diverted away from the vital truth. Like when in Harry Potter, because we have been discussing Harry Potter; I mean I discuss that because that is something that you may have read or even watched those series of movies, that is the reason why I use it. So, almost for the first few books, we are made to believe that Professor Snape is one of the villains; actually, it turns out later, maybe in after book 4 or 5, that he is one of the good guys there. But throughout the series, at least the first few books we are made to believe that Professor Snape is one of the bad guys there; whereas it is only later that we come to know that he is one of the benefactors of Harry, rather than doing him harm. He does not even wish him harm, in fact, he is one of his caretakers of Harry. So, the novelist introduces this particular element of Professor Snape at the right stage; in order to pique our curiosity and retain the element of suspense, it is been used. So, some of the well-known works are Dan Brown’s The DaVinci Code; of course, we discussed this novel, especially in the context of discussing types of fiction, you can recall that. So, these are some well-known works.

(Refer Slide Time: 31:21)



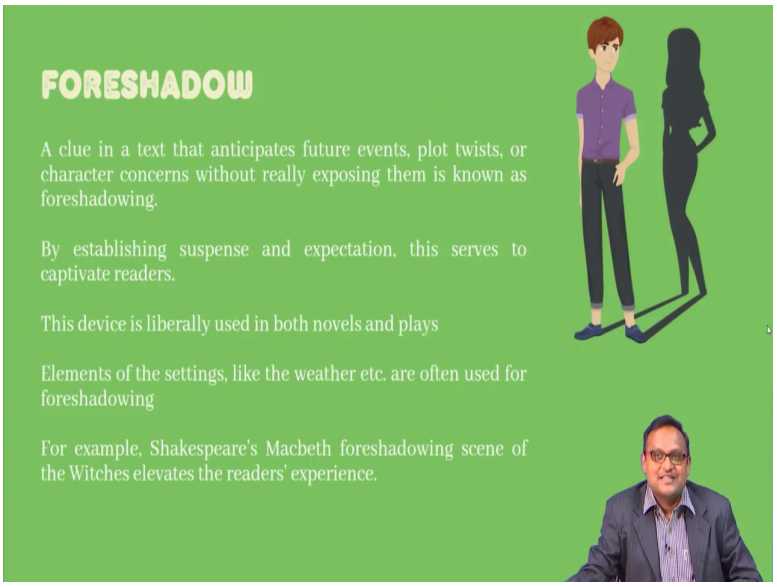
Let us from red herring, let us go to learn another very important literary technique, it is called Deus ex machina. Again the Latin phrase- 'Deus ex Machina, means here it is a literary technique related to the plot right; like and red herring to is a literary technique related to the plot, like the unreliable narrator is a technique related to character. So, this particular Deus ex machina is related to the plot. So, here when a problem has been there, for a long time there is the novelist who is unable to solve this problem, then all of a sudden. So, this problem solves automatically on its own, maybe there is a divine intervention; in fact, it is it means in Latin it means a divine intervention, a divine intervention. So, it is again, this particular it is based on theatre. So, towards the end, in fact in if you have watched any old or if you have watched any plays, kind of old plays; then you realize that God, the machine of the God was brought down from above as if to solve the problem. You may also find this device in movies, old movies and all that, so based on that particular technique. So, all of a sudden with divine intervention, the problem has been solved something like that. So, a well-known example of this is William Golding's *The Lord of Flies*. So, here he makes use of it and even in the *Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, the writer makes use of this particular device, these are some things that we can keep in mind.

(Refer Slide Time: 32:12)



We have one more and probably with that we can wind up. This is called a shoulder angel another literary technique. Well of course, in traditional movies you may have seen, if there are if the character is in a dilemma if the character is unable to decide where to go, whether to go this side, whether to go here; you find two angels, one a good angel, another not so good angel or a bad angel. So, they appear on both sides of the shoulder and one keeps advising him to do good things, the other keeps advising him to do bad things and finally, the character is in a fix on what to do and how to do it. So, this is again a literary technique. In fact, in order to inform the reader of the dual sides or the duality of the decision involved or the duality of the plot there or to discuss the pros and cons of something; the novelist makes use of this particular technique called shoulder angel, shoulder angel. And of course, we have Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* making use of this particular device in a very significant way, this particular thing in a very significant way. Well, do you think you can go for one more technique, another small one let us learn that and probably then we can wind up this class.

(Refer Slide Time: 34:37)



This is another very interesting one, this is called foreshadowing. This is a technique used in detective fiction, thrillers, suspense thrillers and all that. Here this foreshadowing is again a technique related to the plot. So, sometimes what happens, before the actual event is revealed or unfolded; characters keep on throwing hints about it. Let us say for instance I mean if you if I can give you an example. So, here are two characters talking in the college. Now, it is a campus fiction, let us say it is a campus fiction and in the first hour of the class there are, these two characters are sitting and discussing, oh you do not know what is going to happen tonight. And the other character asks, what is going to happen; oh did not you hear it from her, no, I did not hear it from anybody. You do not know, tonight just watch; during dinner time, there is going to be such an extraordinary fight you cannot even imagine, you will never have seen it in your life. A fight during dinner really, between whom; you wait and watch, it is going to be very gory, macabre the dialogue ends there. So, what the, what is this character doing here? The character is foreshadowing another event that is about to happen maybe after a page, maybe after a chapter or maybe after another part. So, this is another way of building your curiosity, building your tension, making you sit up and see, what is happening what is going to happen; it is to pique your interest and to build suspense, the writer makes use of a technique called foreshadowing. There are plenty of techniques like this, hardly we have discussed 15 or so or 20, not more than that maybe. But of course, there are as many writers are, each writer can invent a technique. But these are some familiar ones, some predominant ones that you can identify. And as we have been saying, the purpose behind introducing all

these various facets of fiction, elements of fiction, types of fiction and now narrative techniques used in fiction is to equip your own understanding of fiction from multiple angles, from multiple perspectives. So, when you pick up a work of art when you start reading a work of fiction; you would be able to understand it and appreciate it all the more and you would be able to relate to what is happening there. And see if possible try to learn a couple of things from there and maybe apply them in our own life I am sure you find all these things very very interesting, ok. So, now, that we have explored fiction from all these perspectives, beginning with the definition of fiction and defiance of those, defiance to those definitions, experimentations, various elements of fiction and types of fiction and now techniques of fiction. Now, let us go to the next class, straightaway let us pick a novel; let us pick at least a short novel, we have already announced it right in the last class, I said we would take up George Orwell's *Animal Farm* for a discussion and see how what all we have learnt in these classes, how many of them can we apply there and let us discuss that novel, let us critically explore that novel and learn to appreciate in a little more refined way ok. Until then take care; we will see you in the next class with *Animal Farm* by George Orwell.