

Course Name: The Novel and Change

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Lecture 7

Hello and welcome to this NPTEL course titled Novel and Change. We just finished reading Robinson Crusoe as a literary text so this particular session and the subsequent ones we will spend some time looking at the cultural context from which this novel emerged because one of the key things we are doing in this course is tying or connecting the text and the context because you are looking at how each of the novels you are studying is not just a piece of fiction, not just a piece of literary imagination, but as a very complex representation of the cultural conditions, the material conditions of its times, which is why they become such interesting vehicles, symbolically, figuratively, metaphorically, realistically, fictionally, such symbolic vehicles in terms of representing what was happening at that time, the epochal changes, the material changes, the cultural changes, the moral changes, etc. Right. So each text that we study, we followed up by some sessions. So we look at the cultural context which produced a text like that. So we look at some scholarship on that culture, scholarship on that particular time, the moment of political time, moment of cultural time and that will give us a more nuanced understanding of the literary text.

It will also help us interpret the text more better, more fully perhaps. So this particular session we will look at Jan Ward's very foundational work really, The Rise of the Novel, where he talks about some of the earliest novelists in English literature, including Daniel Defoe, but also other people like Samuel Richardson, etc. But obviously we stick to Defoe here because we just finished reading Robinson Crusoe. And the reason why this is a very important book for us, The Rise of the Novel, because it talks about how the novel as a literary genre, the novel as a literary form, begins to get, you know, emergence, emerges, so it begins to become important as a product really at a certain time in human history, at

a certain point of material changes happening at that particular, you know, climate, cultural climate.

It is not a coincidence really that a novel begins to become important at that time. It is not an accident. There is a reason, there are some very solid material reasons, cultural reasons, discursive diachronic reasons which see this change happening, which see the rise of a novel. Now, obviously a novel comes after certain traditions. We might argue that it comes after the epic, it comes after lyrical poetry, it comes after the ballad. It comes after certain forms of theatre and it begins to become a very important, powerful vehicle of literary representation, cultural artefact and what have you. And the whole point, the reason why we're studying this particular book, *The Rise of Novel*, is because you're looking at again the connection between the text and the context. Why is *Robinson Crusoe* important for us? Not just purely as a literary text, of course it's a great literary text, but also as a very important representation of the culture of the time, in terms of the story it tells us, in terms of the strategies of narration it espouses, because both the matter and the manner are important when you study a literary text. The matter in terms of what is being told, what is the story, what's the plot and who are the characters, but also the manner of narration, the stylistic strategies, the narrative strategies, the aesthetic strategies with which the matter is communicated because sometimes we find that the choice of narrative strategy, the choice of narrative design also reflects very complexly to cultural conditions, to cultural priorities, cultural biases, shall we say. So, a large part of what we will do in this course is look at how each text that we study connects to the cultural biases of these times, connects to the cultural proclivities of these times, connects to the dominant cultural networks and discursive strategies and ideologies and different kinds of narratives and moral maps of the time etc. But also, how the novel also carries, it's a bit of a condensed capsule of its time. But at the same time, it also carries the fault lines, you know, the breaks, the liminal territories, the gaps, the fissures, shall we say, between the otherwise very monolithic, the otherwise very homogeneous kind of world it's trying to produce. And of course, some of the novels are more subversive in quality, some of the novels are more overtly political in quality, counter-cultural in quality. But even a novel which is quite consolidatory in terms of being very faithful, very loyal to the dominant culture of its times, even there you find

there are certain moments of fizzle, certain moments of liminality, which helps us really understand, which help us really understand, you know, the cultural times, the cultural epoch more complexly. So the rise in a novel as what studies it and what we will also look at in some details here in this session and the next ones as well is also a very interesting study of how a certain literary genre or a sub-genre begins to become the most important mouthpiece of its times, begins to become the most important vehicle of its cultural epoch in terms of the zeitgeist, in terms of the momentum, the cultural material momentum that is happening at that time.

And of course we are looking at 17th, 18th centuries where the rise of the mercantile class begins to become important. The traders, the merchants go out on the ships initially for trade in other places of the world and then of course it becomes more and more militarized in quality. There's protection, there's army, there are these soldiers traveling with the traders in order to protect the capital. But this is a moment in time in European history where capital begins to flow, where capital begins to accumulate and travel across different parts of the globe. And this is the time in which a novel emerges as a very important literary form of representation. So, I mean, Watt's text is very, very useful because it gives us a very interesting picture of not just, like I said, not just what is happening in the novels in terms of plot and But also the strategies of narration, realism, he spends a lot of time talking about realism in terms of why does literary realism become important, why does it become the go-to option for these novelists and of course it is breaking away from some earlier styles in narration as well. How does it become a very convenient tool to communicate? what is going on, at the same time being very, very complicit to the cultural, financial, mercantile, political ambitions of its time, how realism, what is overarching totalitarian strategies and narration begins to become the important vehicle through which the flow of capital, the kinesis of capital can be communicated and most complexly and most comprehensively. Now we will spend some time, I mean if you look at the contents of this book which should be on the screen, it is very self-explanatory. So we have realism of the novel form, the reading public and the rise of the novel. So that is also very important because the novel is very much a product, a market product and there has to be a readership

for it so that people are reading it which is why it is becoming a popular form of communication, a popular form of storytelling.

Because there is this big reading class which is emerging, the mercantile class who can relate to the novel in terms of the contents, in terms of the travelling, in terms of the exotic locales etc. But at the same time, it is the same mercantile class which is also feeding the plot of the novel to a large extent. right. So the families of the merchants, the families that are new secular merchants you know are beginning to be the reading public of this novel. And of course we have an entire chapter in Robinson Crusoe which is what we look at in great details and unsurprisingly it is titled Individualism and the Novel. So how this journey of the one man, how the story of the one man, the story of survival, the story of salvation, the story of success uh begins to become very symbolic it almost becomes a kind of a meta text if you will of the rise of the capital and the obviously the body of crucial the body of the capitalist which uh captures the capital which consolidates the capital and which obviously protects the capital so the whole story becomes some kind of a story about the kindnesses of the capital now um We will spend a little bit of time at the beginning looking at you know what's idea of realism and what is realism and how is realism important when you look at novel and he is obviously giving a very diachronic study of realism. You know he is historicizing realism in a way that how it comes after certain narrative traditions and how it is quite radical in its own right because it is obviously breaking away from so many other kinds of traditions which preceded it but at the same time it is also very, very complicit to the kind of content that it is trying to communicate. So the rise of the capital, the flow of the capital, the success of the capital, etc. So how the totalitarian technique of realism, how the omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent narrator and one might also say omnitemporal narrator, one who can sort of look at the whole point of space and time from almost a God gaze, how becomes the most convenient strategy of narration, you know, especially when you are talking about the flow of the capital, when the rise of the capital is happening. So we will look at how you know, realism emerges in terms of a narrative strategy, in terms of a literary form of representation.

But what does, very interestingly, this shall be on the screen, is he looks at a relationship between realism and a new nature of truth, the new ontology of truth, shall we say. And this kind of a truth that he talks about is more secular in quality, is more immediate in quality, is more corporeal in quality in many ways, right. And this is a truth which is very empirical, empiricist, some might say, which is a little bit different from empirical, but it comes from a position of experience. So whatever you can psychologically experience, whatever you can corporeal experience becomes a truth. which is a very different kind of truth from, let's say, divine truth, let's say something which is told to you as a subject which you follow blindly. But realism corresponds more closely to the experiential truth, embodied truth, right, a truth which is acquired through embodied engagements, a truth which is acquired through experiential engagements in space and time. And that is what modern realism is all about as far as what study of the same. Now, of course, we saw while looking at Robinson Crusoe how this very interesting collusion between a very Christian vocabulary and the realistic experiential corporeal vocabulary is sometimes seamless and sometimes very uneasy. For instance, when Crusoe is talking about bookkeeping, when Crusoe is talking about how he is maintaining the profit, maintaining the capital, He often, you know, draws on a very Christian vocabulary, almost a biblical vocabulary of bookkeeping or someone who is becoming this very, very, you know, clever craftsman, so to speak, right. But at the same time, the content of that, of those passages are very secular in quality. It is about making money, it is about maintaining money, it is about maintaining capital and so on and so forth.

Now on your screen there is a passage where Watt talks about modern realism and he connects it back to the Enlightenment philosophers such as René Descartes and John Locke and the philosophers of empiricism, associationism and so on and so forth. So philosophers who formed the Enlightenment of Western Europe so to speak where there is more reliance, there is more priority, there is more privilege given to Truth which is experiential in quality, truth which is rational in quality, truth which is more embodied in quality rather than looking at truth from a very, very divine position of supplication, a divine position of prayers and you know grunting of certain divine flavors and favors. Instead of that we have a truth which is more experiential, more immediate in quality and the immediacy of truth

is important over here because even in Defoe's novel we find that there is a very almost a very granular quality about Crusoe's experience. He goes bit by bit. He collects experience in space and time. There's a daily passage that he talks about. There's a very slow passage of time in a very granular way, very detailed way, with which he acquires the position of truth, which informs his storytelling. So rather than looking at truth from a divine metaphysical condition, The truth in modern realism is a more empirical position, a more quotidian position and the quotidian quality is very important. There is just everydayness, almost a very boring everydayness in Robinson Crusoe where he gives you, like I said, a very granular description of the day-to-day affairs in the island. That is exactly the classic case of realism, the way that Watt defines it as well. So modern realism and this should be on the screen, I am just reading out the passage, Modern realism, of course, begins from the position that truth can be discovered by the individual through his senses. So this is the empiricism bit that we talk about, how truth can be experientially acquired through the senses, truth as an experience, you know, from the body, through the body, through the senses, very individually, in a very atomic, quotidian, individual level. It has its origins in Decartes and Locke, two big philosophers in Enlightenment, René Decartes and John Locke, and received its first full formulation by Thomas Reid in the middle of the 18th century.

But the view that the external world is real and that our senses give us a true report of it obviously does not in itself throw much light on literary realism, since almost everyone in all ages has in one way or another been forced to some such conclusion about the external world. by his own experience, literature has always been to some extent exposed to the same epistemological naivete. Further, the distinctive tenets of realist epistemology and the controversies associated with them are for the most part much too specialized in nature to have much bearing on literature. What is important to the novel in philosophical realism is much less specific. It is rather the general temper of realist thought, the methods of investigation it has used and the kinds of problems it has raised. So, if you look at the three words over here which are important, temper, method and problems, right. So what is the temper over here, what is the tone, what is the attitude through which the story has been told, what is the method of investigation, the epistemological quality, the investigative

quality of realism and of course we can map it back to Robinson Crusoe in terms of how he investigates Ireland and how realism and cartography very closely connected because you know the granular quality of realism and the bit by bit process through which he begins to get a sense of the map of the island connected to each other in very organic temporal ways as well. And of course, the kind of problems it raises, right, what are the problems which are posed by realism, created by realism. Now interestingly what goes on to say the general temper of philosophical realism has been critical, anti-traditional and innovating because it is coming from a certain position earlier and it is departing from the position. So realism at the time in which Crusoe is writing is actually quite innovative, quite radical in quality because it is departing away from a different version of truth, a very different version of truth seeking. And instead what it is offering here like I mentioned is a very granular, embodied, experiential, quotidian quality of truth where the character is navigating through a space, navigating through space and time in order to acquire a sense of truth about the world, grappling with the world so to speak. Its method has been the study of the particulars of experience by the individual investigator, who ideally at least is free from the body of past assumptions and traditional beliefs, and it has given a peculiar importance to semantics.

But the problem of the nature of the correspondence between words and reality, right. So between words and reality. So again what you say, what you use as language and how it connects to the immediate reality is something which realism talks about in great details and that is something which you see in Robinson Crusoe as well. So it seems to offer a very secular view of the world, a very material view of the world, very secular, material, sometimes vulgar view of the world, whereas a lot of importance given to the object, a lot of importance given to the product, the commodity and so on and so forth. So you know from the divinity to the commodity we have this transition happening in true realism. Now interestingly in Robinson Crusoe there seems to be some kind of an ambivalence about this as well because there is a lot of divinity in the language, a lot of divinity in terms of the vocabulary of Crusoe. But at the same time that language is more plucked into describing the commodity. So the divinity commodity entanglement of Robinson Crusoe is quite uneasy sometimes and sometimes it almost has a comical effect because you know Crusoe

talks about bookkeeping, he talks about making money, he talks about gold coins but he tries to disguise it, tries to masquerade as if he is speaking from a Christian position, he is speaking from a very religious quasi-spiritual position. So the divinity commodity entanglement is is there you know in very very high degrees by high intensity contrast as well as connection in Robinson Crusoe. All of these features of philosophical realism have analogies to distinctive features of the novel form analogies which draw attention to the characteristic kind of correspondence between life and literature which is obtained in prose fiction since the novels of Defoe and Richardson. Defoe and Richardson are two big novelists discussed in this book and of course we will stick to Defoe alone but what is interesting is this phrase correspondence between life and literature and again we are looking at literature not just as an outpouring of spirituality but something which connects to lived reality. something which connects to the very, very experiential, quotidian quality of reality and its everydayness, a slow passage of time, etc. The very sensory reality which can be communicated through realism.

So, realism as a method gives you the epistemic, the narrative apparatus, shall we say, with which the sensory, quotidian quality of life may be described, may be encoded, may be articulated, which is what we see happening in a very dramatic way in Robinson Crusoe's novel. Next, we come to the bit where what talks about the novel. So, what is it about the novel which makes it uniquely amenable, uniquely suited to realism and especially the time in which the novel begins to emerge, which is also time of the rising merchant class, the rising mercantile class. And this should be on your screen. The novel is a form of literature which most fully reflects this individualistic and innovating reorientation. So there's this definite reorientation happening with the novel, where the focus is more on the immediate reality at hand, the immediate experience at hand, the bits and pieces, the cotidian, the atomic quality of life. And again, the atomic quality of life is rampant in Robinson Crusoe, where there is very dense, almost boring description of the nails and the hammers and the tongs and the wood and the planks with which he is describing in very granular details the way he is building a house, the way he is becoming a farmer, the way he is you know experiencing different kinds of emotions. The granularity is very important and that is exactly what realism is aiming to do right and that is the innovating reorientation that

realism is offering as a narrative strategy, as a narrative design. Previous literature, literary forms had reflected the general tendency of their cultures to make conformity to traditional practice and the major tests of truth. So there was this conformity to the overarching principle of truth which is more collective in quality, more epic in quality in the sense that it is not so much about an individual but also about a culture, about a commodity etc. Whereas with realism, the most immediately innovative bit about realism is the primacy of the individual, the primacy of the subject, the suffering subject, the enduring subject, the successful subject etc. right, the experiential subject, the sentient subject.

So, sentience becomes a very important factor in realism, the factor of feelings, the feeling subject and which is why René Decartes gets so many mentions. in Jan Ward's novel, the whole idea of the thinking man, the suffering man, the enduring man, etc. And I use the word man quite deliberately because most of the suffering subjects, most of the successful subjects in this point of time are men, white male subjects, as we saw very, very spectacularly in Robinson Crusoe. Right, so the plots of classical and Renaissance epic, for example, were based on past history of fables. So again, very collective quality, very metaphorical in quality, is plucked into a collective imagination, is plucked into a collective experience, is plucked into some kind of an overarching meta experience of a community, etc. And the merits of the author's treatment were just largely according to a view of literary decorum. derived from the accepted morals in the genre. So the merits of the author, whether it is good or bad, were mostly done in terms of how it conformed, whether it conformed or not to the collective imagination, to the collective moral imagination, the collective moral modes, moral templates, and whether they adhered to it or departed from it. That was how it was calibrated in terms of its greatness. This literary traditionalism was first and most fully challenged by the novel. So, the novel becomes some kind of a subversive genre or sub-genre, if you will, which begins to really radically challenge, radically alter the sense of reality, the sense of experience, the sense of narration, the sense of storytelling in various ways. whose primary criterion was truth to individual experience. So again, this is a big departure that novel is making.

So, from our collective experience, from our communal experience, from our cultural experience the novel begins to focus more on the individual experience, the daily,

quotidian, sensory, experiential experience, experiential idea of you know reality, the bit by bit, the atomic sense of reality, the atomic feeling of reality. So, freedom becomes important. the granularity of reality becomes important, the individuality of reality becomes important. So that is the big departure that a novel is making. I am sure you are beginning to understand why this is important culturally as well, why this is important diachronically and historically as well, because this is also the time where the individual could make it big. This is also the time where the individual from any background, if they were lucky, if they were adventurous, if they were hardworking enough, could rise very quickly in a social ladder. It does not really have to be rooted through royalty. It does not really have to be rooted through some aristocratic, predetermined, privileged framework. If you have the capital, if you have the appetite for capital, if you have the appetite for work, then capital begins to become an open market, so to speak. And anyone who has an appetite for work, anyone who has an appetite for ambitions can acquire capital and can rise it, can make it to the top by rising. It begins to become this time in human history in Western Europe where the novel comes from as studied by Ian Watt. This begins to become the story of the individual man.

This begins to become the time, the cultural climate, the epoch of the individual man for the first time really where the individual man, the everyman could become someone, could become a superman of sorts through this very dramatic rise of the capital, the free-flowing capital is offering to all human subjects, right. So it is not a coincidence that the narrative priorities, the narrative tendencies, the narrative bias is also more oriented towards the individual, also more oriented towards the individual granular reality of sorts, right. primary criterion of was truth to individual experience, individual experience which is always unique and therefore new, sort of radicality, the newness of experience. The novel is thus the logical literary vehicle of a culture which in the last few centuries has set an unprecedented value and originality on the novel and is therefore well named. So it is not a coincidence that the word novel also means new. So, novelty for example means new. So what points out you know very cleverly, very intelligently, very smartly I should say how the genre and the adjective are connected to each other and it is not an accident that the connection is so organic, so deep seated, so embedded in quality. That a novel is also about

newness, about novelty. Hence the word novel bears in itself, carries in itself the implications of newness, the implications of innovations, the implications of new forms of reality which is more oriented towards individuality. which is more oriented towards granularity, which is more oriented towards experientiality, right? So this is the cultural bedrock, the cultural material condition from which the novel begins to emerge. So we stop at this point today and we continue this diachronic discussion of the novel apropos of Robinson Crusoe in connection to the cultural material context of his times in the subsequent classes. Thank you for your attention.