

**Course Name: The Novel and Change**

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**Lecture 8**

Hello and welcome to this NPTEL course titled The Novel and Change. We are studying Jan Watt's The Rise of the Novel. We started with the discussion in the previous class, we looked at how the emergence of the novel as a narrative category, as a literary genre, is very closely correspondent with the, corresponding with the material conditions of his times, the cultural, political, philosophical, experiential condition of his times and how it is not an accident that, let me stop at this point, it is not an accident that the word novel also means newness. The word novel also means novelty about something new, something innovative in quality, right. In this particular session, which we will look at again, Ward's introductory chapter and the next session we move on to his reading of Robinson Crusoe specifically, we will spend some time in this session looking at how the sense of time also changes in the 17th and 18th centuries. Because when we talk about the quotidian quality of truth, the everyday experiential quality of truth, we also have to bear in mind that our sense of time has also changed, how the subject experiences time also changes, how the subject endures time also changes. There is a sense of the clock time, there is a sense of the slow movement of time, the ticking of the clock and how the beginning of clock time also begins to alter the subject's experiential understanding of reality, right and this is obviously connected to some of the scientific discourses, some of the philosophical discourses on time. So, page 23 of this introduction where Watt talks about the novels of Defoe in particular but also connecting it to the works of Isaac Newton, Thomas Locke, John Locke, sorry, in terms of how time and space and the association of memory begins to become important. It also helps us understand the reason why there is so much granularity in Robinson Crusoe, so much details in Robinson Crusoe, so much of slowness and thickening of time. So, time is really thick in Robinson Crusoe.

There is a sense of thickening of time with which we understand how he is building a fort, building a hut, building a plantation, how he is taking over, how this slow process of territorialization that takes place in Robinson Crusoe is very granular, very atomic, very immediate in quality and we talked about this in some details in the previous class as well. So, this should be on your screen now. So, this new emphasis in terms of what Newton is doing and you know Locke is doing is important to understand you know the reading of Robinson Crusoe. So, in page 203 what talks about the modern sense of time began to permeate many areas apart, the late 17th century witnessed the rise of a more objective study of history, a more informative, immediate study of history, and therefore of a deeper sense of the difference between the past and the present. So, there seems to be a big rupture between the past and the present, you know, this radical altered understanding of the present begins to become important. At the same time, Newton and Locke presented a new analysis of the temporal process. So, you know we have these big scientists coming in, the big philosophers coming in and it has had a profound impact on cultural imagination and material imagination etc. So, Newton and Locke presented a new analysis of the temporal process. It became a slower and more mechanical sense of duration. which was minutely enough discriminated to measure the falling of objects or the succession of thoughts in the mind, right. So again, this is a very, very important passage because with Newton and Locke and with Newton first there is passage of time. We can measure the fall of an object, we can measure and quantify it with gravity, the forces of gravity, the mechanical forces around which the mechanical fields around which every movement can be calibrated, right. And this calibration of movements, the orientation of movements, the measurements, the metrics around movement is something which begins to become accessible and available in popular discourses and popular cultural discourses, popular cultural vocabulary post-Newton. So, this is a very post-Newtonian time we are talking about where mechanics become important, movements, study of movements become important. the calibration of movements, the discrimination through which movements happen across different points can, you know, can be calibrated and this becomes very much part of the mainstream cultural vocabulary, right.

Likewise, Locke's idea of association of thoughts also become important in the sense of

thoughts in the mind, how they passage, how they pass from one thought to another thought, how they absorb information, absorb memory and how the absorbing of these things shapes further thoughts, how the past, present and future begin to become connected through mechanical associative processes. And again, we can see how the scientific and the philosophical understanding of time, space, action, body, corporeality, object, all begin to permeate the cultural mainstream vocabulary, so to speak. And this we can see the effect of it is immediately apparent in the descriptions, the very dense, granular descriptions of memory, body, corporeality, reality in Robinson Crusoe. So, these new emphases are reflected in the novels of Defoe. His fiction is a first which presents us with a picture of both of the individual life in its larger perspective as a historical process and in its closer view which shows the processes being acted out against the background of the most ephemeral thoughts and action. So, it is there is a two dimensionality about Robinson Crusoe. It is like imagine the x axis and the y axis you know you can go back to your class seven mathematics you find that when you begin to read graphs there is an x axis movement and a y axis movement. So, there is a sense of a horizontal movement in Robinson Crusoe. Obviously, Crusoe is very much a man of his times. Crusoe is very much a man of his historical, cultural and material conditions.

But at the same time, the descriptions in Robinson Crusoe are also vertical. It is also going inside his mind. There is also this long, long drawn-out associative framework, the associative economy, the affective associative economy through which his thought processes are described and delineated and illustrated. So, there is this movement across time, this movement across objects, movement across different materials. There is also movement which is more vertical in quality in terms of we get to see the very episodic understanding of time, the very experiential, personal, corporeal, individual understanding of time. And these two understandings of time are connected to each other. the collective understanding of time in terms of how he is using dates and journals to mark the movement of time. At the same time, his very very affective, experiential, physical, sensual understanding of time through which he is experiencing reality. So these two you know vectors of time, these two axes of time are connected in very complex ways. And it is not an accident at all because as we just mentioned that there is also a time in which the

Newtonian understanding of mechanics of movement, the Newtonian understanding of the mechanics of calibrated movement, the fields of gravity, the fields of movement the forces of actions and reactions, the thermodynamics with which movements begin to happen and the lock-in understanding of association, of affective association of thought processes are beginning to shape mainstream cultural vocabulary.

And obviously, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* is very much blocked into that vocabulary, right, which is what we see throughout the novel, the granularity of the novel, the atomic quality of the novel, almost the thermodynamic quality of the novel through which movements happen. It is true that time scales of his novels are sometimes both contradictory in themselves and inconsistent with the pretended historical setting. But the mere fact that such objections arise is surely a tribute to the way the characters are felt by the readers to be rooted in the temporal dimension, right. So, there is sometimes this conflict that we see, the temporal conflict which we see in *Robinson Crusoe*. in the sense that, you know, sometimes the historical setting seems to be, you know, entirely made up, entirely contrived in quality. But at the same time, there is also the sense of, I mean, this contradiction itself is a complexity, itself is something which is a tribute to the complex categorization and the complex calibration of reality that *Crusoe* offers through his characters. And the temporality, the temporal positionality, the temporal dimensionality of Defoe's, in Defoe's novels, particularly *Robinson Crusoe*, we find this very interesting tension, very productive tension, shall we say, between the very individualistic, very rooted, very corporeal, very granular sense of time and space. And, you know, in the backdrop of which we have this, you know, normal uniform movement of time and space, which is more calendar-like in quality, which is more overarching in quality. We obviously could not think of making such objections seriously to Sidney's *Arcadia* or the *Pilgrim's Progress*. Now the very fact that we are talking about *Robinson Crusoe* like this is a testimony to his complexity because you know look at something before *Robinson Crusoe*, something like Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* or John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, we find no conflict, we find no contradiction in time and space and movement and body and subject over there, it is all very uniform, right.

But its bitemporality, the multidimensionality of time, the multidimensionality of space that we find in Robinson Crusoe and other Daniel Defoe's work is itself something of an intellectual debate. It generates an intellectual energy, an intellectual debate around it, which we find missing in the literary works preceding it. There is not enough evidence of the reality of time for any sense of discrepancies to be possible. Defoe does give us such evidence. At his best, he convinces us completely that his narrative is occurring at a particular place, at a particular time. So, there is this quasi-historical quality of his setting. He gives us some kind of historical time. This is England of 17th century. Crusoe is born in York and he goes to Brazil. There are all these different geographical recognisable real factors, real coordinates that he is offering every now and then. So, his narrative seems to occur at a particular place and at a particular time. And our memory of his novels consists largely of these vividly realized moments in the lives of his characters, moments which are loosely strung together to form a convincing biographical perspective. So, right, you know, it is almost a very superficial structure, you know, with which we can recognize, well, this is happening in, you know, recognizable reality in Brazil and England and Germany. that all these geographical places mentioned, these different temporal references with which we have a verisimilitude of reality, almost a caricature of reality so to speak. We have a sense of personal identity subsisting through duration and yet being changed by the flow of experience. So this is a John Locke bit that comes in Robinson Crusoe as well as in other Defoe's novels where there is this bedrock of recognisable reality but at the same time, there is this ebb and flow of reality which is very mutable in quality, very kinetic in quality. And that kinesis, that mutability is created by experience, is created by the affective flow, the affective waves that the characters go through. Again, you can go back to the presence of Newton and John Locke in terms of understanding why this is so important, how the novel becomes in a way a fictional representation of the thermodynamics of Newton, a fictional representation of the associative quality, the empiricism of John Locke, right.

Where empirical reality, the philosophy of empirical reality, the philosophy of experiential reality begins to become important, where reality becomes a changing motion, a process, not a product, a thing which entails becoming, unbecoming and rebecoming depending on the kind of experiential affective associations that the subject is going through. So, it is a

process of going through, going through time, going through experiences, going through spaces. At the same time there is this thermodynamic emotion, the scientific metrics, oriented study of motion that we find in the wake of Newtonian physics. So, it is a very complex temporal cultural condition and Robinson Crusoe obviously is a novel which corresponds very closely to that kind of a condition. Now, if we skip a little bit and come to page 29 of the novel, which is, you know, talking about how realism begins to become important and why we should look at, you know, literary representation, the realistic literary representation with which this kind of a view of the world, this kind of an experiential view of the world becomes important. On the one hand, and this is in page 26, Defoe and Richardson make an uncompromising application of the realist point of view in language and prose structure and thereby forfeit other literary values. On the other hand, Fielding stylistic virtues tend to interfere with its technique as a novelist, because a patent selectiveness of vision destroys our beliefs in the reality of report, or at least diverts our attention from the content of the report to the skill of the reporter. There would seem to be some inherent contradiction between the ancient and the abiding literary values. and the distinctive narrative technique of the novel. Now, in other words, what is interesting over here is to understand that the novel is a bed of contradictions. A novel is something which is very, very new, hence the whole idea of novelty, which is associated with the novels. Now, the reason why it is important for us to understand it is because it is coming from a certain literary tradition which is pastoral in quality, which is idyllic in quality, which is perhaps, you know, it is plucked into the lyrical ballad, it is plucked into the, you know, the morality theatre, the morality play, etc. It has a certain kind of moral, epistemological framework that is breaking away from, but is also retaining it to a certain extent. So, there is this very contradictory quality of time, space, morality, action, intervention and a body in the novel. And that is exactly what makes it so interesting, especially if you do a historical study of the novel, which Watt is offering here.

Now this is a bit that we will end with in this particular session, the idea of formal realism and you know from this in a subsequent class we will move on to directly Watt's reading of Robinson Crusoe, how it is very, very interestingly located in the protestant work ethic of his times etc. But before that we need to spend a little bit of time talking about formal

realism. What is formal realism and what is it doing in Robinson Crusoe as a narrative strategy, almost as a character so to speak, it is so important. narrative method and this should be on the screen the narrative method whereby the novel embodies this circumstantial view of life the pre-experiential circumstantial episodic view of life may be called its formal realism so the form of narration is you know the realism the realism method the realistic method formal because of the term realism does not here refer to any special literary doctrine or purpose, but only to a set of narrative procedures, which are so commonly found together in the novel and so rarely in other literary genres that they may be regarded as typical of the form itself. So, it's very unique to the novel, right, this idea of the formal method of realism, which is very, very associative, episodic, experiential, corporeal in quality, hence the formal bit in the novel. not something which you find in other literary genres. Right, formal realism, in fact, is the narrative embodiment of a premise that Defoe and Richardson accepted very literally, but which is implicit in the novel form in general, the premise of primary convention that a novel is a full and authentic report of human experience, and is therefore under an obligation to satisfy its readers with such details of the story as the individuality of the actors concerned. So again, this accounts for the granularity. It must give a lot of information. It must feed the reader's appetite for information, the reader's appetite for data, appetite for granular data.

And again, we have to understand this a reader's perspective too. This is the time when the readers begin to be more interested in the material world. This is the time when the reader is more interested in the objects rather than the metaphysical concepts outside the object. Reader wants to know what objects are and what is the value of the object, what is the price of the object, what is the market value of the object. So, all these very, very vulgar material details are very, very interesting in the novel. So, it must keep feeding the reader's curiosity, it must keep feeding the reader's appetite for information especially in relation to objects and commodities and different forms of action oriented, object-oriented behavior. So, the relationship between action and object becomes very important in the novel and of course the value of action, the value of objects the currency around which objects and actions may be located, this becomes very important and that begins to whet the reader's appetite to get more information in that direction. So, these details become important. It's very granular

and dense details become very important. So, it is under an obligation to satisfy its reader with such details of the story as the individuality of the actors concerned.

The particulars of the times and places of their actions, details which are presented through a more largely referential use of language that is commonly in other literary forms. So, what is referential use of language? Where language can occupy or inhabit multiple semantic registers. It can be something and mean something else. It can refer to something else. It is a self-reflexivity about language in the novel. The slipperiness of language, the fluidity, the energy of language through which it can spread across objects convert objects into metaphors and demetaphorize it, bring it back into the object form etc. In other words, this endless energy of language, the ebb and flow of language through which different forms of referentiality may be generated. In other words, language in a novel creates an economy of referentiality, an economy of reference points, an economy of affect across the reference points, an economy of value across the reference points, right. So affect, value, commodity, price, objects always begin to become a very important, very dense, very granular in the world of the novel, in the very secular world of the novel. Now, just to wind up, formal realism is, of course, like the rules of evidence, only a convention. So, you know, it's a rule of evidence. It's based on circumstantial evidence. It's based on, you know, episodic evidence, so to speak, epistemic evidence, what we can acquire through knowledge, acquire through experience, acquire through an episodic understanding. of the atomic reality around us and therefore is there no reason there is no reason why the report on human life which is presented by it should be in fact any truer than those uh presented through the very different conventions of other literary genres. So, I mean, it pretends to be realistic, it pretends to have a certain narrative method, but then Watt, Ian Watt is very responsibly cautioning us as well, is that we should not be too seduced by the realism of the novel because, you know, we should not think that this is a special or unique way or a better way. I mean, it is unique in some sense, but it is not a better way to give us a sense of reality, right. Very convention of narration, every convention of representation has its own method of encoding and representation. And the novel has just its own method as well. Now, this is the important bit with which we will end with today. The novel's air of total authenticity, and I want to remember this phrase, total authenticity, the air of total

authenticity, or we can replace the word air with illusion or fantasy, the fantasy of total authenticity, the fantasy, the illusion of total authenticity, indeed does tend to authorize confusion on this point.

And the tendency of some realists and naturalists to forget that the accurate transcription of actuality does not necessarily produce a work of any real truth or enduring literary value is no doubt partly responsible for the rather widespread distaste of realism and all its works which is current today. So now, what brings us back to today and we'll end with this point but I'll just spend a couple more minutes talking about this because this work, *The Rise of Novel* is very much a historical work. But obviously, what is writing from a much later position is a 20th century, late 20th century work. And this is a time in which genres like magic realism, genres like absurd theater, genres like other kinds of realistic tradition, hyper-realism are beginning to happen. So, what is also locating it back to the present and saying that there is this hubris about realism, shall we say, the false arrogance about realism that it gives you the illusion of total authenticity, right. Now, it must not, we must not forget the fact that the classic former realism method is just another method of narration, just another method of experiencing and narrating and encoding reality, right. But the fact that some novelists and naturalists, some realists, some naturalists tend to create this very arrogant air of total authenticity with a granularity of description, with a density of description, with a quotidian atomic way of narrating truth that there seems to be some kind of a hubris which puts some readers off. which antagonizes certain readers, which alienates certain other readers, which is why former realism, according to what earned time in its writing, has suffered a bit of a setback, shall we say, in the reader's imagination, the reader's reception today. So, there seems to be this very widespread, this taste of realism and all his works which is current today. So today being the time in which Ian Watt is writing *The Rise of the Novel*. So, he is giving us some kind of a genesis point of formal realism, how formal realism begins to become an important player. In the rise of a novel as a narrative strategy, as a narrative instrument, shall we say. It creates a sense of quotidian quality of truth, an atomic quality of truth, which is also connected, you can dial it back in a certain sense, what is happening philosophically, scientifically, culturally around the time in a post-Newtonian sense of thermodynamics of movement and a post-Lockean

understanding of the associative nature of truth. And the novel is very much plucked into that kind of a cultural epoch. But at the same time, the hubris of classic realism, that it gives you a sense of total authenticity or shall we say totalitarian authenticity, there is nothing beyond this former realistic method, that is also one of the reasons why this method of narration has alienated many readers across time, right. So this is the beginning point and end point of classic realism that Watt is offering us.

So we stop at this point today because in the subsequent class we will move on towards direct engagement with Robinson Crusoe, the novel, because he talks about Daniel Defoe peripherally in the introduction. He obviously mentions, you know, Defoe as a major writer and the tradition of classic realism, but it's a chapter exclusively given or employed to understand Robinson Crusoe as a novel, how it connects to the historical, cultural, mercantile, economic condition of his times and how we must read Robinson Crusoe as a novel about the white man's story of possibility, the fantasy of possibility, shall we speak, and how the whole idea of the rise of the common man, the rise of the white man, The rise of the ordinary human subject in the field of capitalism, in a cultural capitalism also offers some kind of a fantasy story of territorialization, total control and also the acquirement, the procurement of capital or potentially endless capital. and how the flow of capital and the flow of formal realism as a narrative strategy, as a narrative technique are very organically connected to each other in terms of how the employment occurs, in terms of how the priorities occur and in terms of how the biases occur as well. So we will deal with all those in the subsequent classes. Thank you for your attention.