

Elements of Literature and Creative Communication
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Lecture - 34
Fiction and its Branches

Hello there, welcome to the 7th week of our course Elements of Literature and Creative Communication. We are discussing Fiction this week and we would be continuing our discussion of fiction even next week. If you can quickly recall we began our discussion by defining fiction and afterward we went on to discuss various elements of fiction. In fact, in the last class if you can quickly recall we began with a discussion on plot, character, theme, style, tone, setting, and how all of them constitute fiction as such.

In other words, you can look at these elements as building blocks. What are elements of fiction? Well, of course, as we discussed you can consider them as some kind of building blocks that together constitute fiction. And when we discussed the plot, we discussed how a plot can be looked at, studied, and analyzed from Freytag's pyramid point of view. And we have also discussed different types of characters, how in characters you have flat characters, round characters, static characters, dynamic characters, etc.

And when it comes to theme, style, tone, how it reveals the idiosyncratic features of the novel. And when it comes to theme how it discusses the overall vision of the writer, the philosophical tenets that underlie any work of art and all these things. Well in this class we are going to look at fiction and its branches.

Now, of course, the moment you looked at this title you understood that figure of speech is involved here. Because we are comparing fiction to a tree, but it is not a direct comparison it is an indirect comparison therefore, it becomes a metaphor. So, if fiction becomes a metaphor then various types of fiction become branches of the tree called fiction. That is why we call it fiction and its branches.

Well of course, I do not need to explain the concept of types of fiction because the moment we make use of this metaphor of branches and tree then you understood what this business of fiction and different types of fiction is all about. Because branches per se are not fiction or

branches per se are not the tree. So, what is tree in that sense? Well, it is a sum total of the branches, the roots, the trunk, and everything.

Similarly, for fiction, elements of fiction constitute fiction, and types of fiction also define fiction that is the reason why we have used this metaphor: fiction and its branches.

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Now, let us quickly recall in order to understand the concept of types of fiction what are the varieties, when we say types we mean varieties. You can quickly recall different novels that you have read. I am sure you must have read some novels or the other be it in English or in your own language.

So, now quickly recall the different novels that you have read and think about variations in them. When I say variations it is not necessarily or not just in terms of subject and its theme. Obviously, every novel is different from the other novel, because it has a unique subject or unique treatment of the subject and all that. You can also recall it in terms of its style and structure because each novel has its own distinct style and it has its own unique structure.

So, when we say types of fiction these types of fiction have got to do with these distinct styles and structures. So, with this background let us go ahead and discuss the variations in fiction and the reasons behind.

Types of fiction can be broadly called genres of fiction. We have already discussed the concept of genre and form during our discussion on poetry or maybe a little before that. So, let us quickly recall those concepts here as well.

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Broadly speaking, fiction can be classified into three broad genres. So, the first can be called literary fiction; literary fiction is generally considered serious fiction, these writers are highbrow writers and they discuss the philosophy of life and they present the truths that they have discovered in the form of fiction in a detailed way.

So, that is literary fiction, that is why we have a Tolstoy there, and then we have genre fiction which is also called popular fiction. In fact, many of you have read literary fiction, but more than literary fiction, many of you may have read genre fiction or popular fiction.

Generally, these novels belonging to this category are available in airports or in railway stations, or in bookstands. So, you immediately pick and by the time your bus comes or when you are waiting for your train to arrive then you read it. all that is popular fiction.

And then you have mainstream fiction. It is not technically speaking, not a very distinct genre. But, when genre fiction and literary fiction grow out of their boundaries and reach the collective consciousness of the society, that is when we call it mainstream fiction. In other words, mainstream fiction could be from genre fiction or even literary fiction.

So, this is something we are going to discuss in a little more detailed manner in our subsequent slides but to begin with, these are the broad categories of fiction.

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WHAT IS A GENRE?

"A category of artistic, musical, or literary composition characterized by a particular style, form, or content."

Story (Action) + Plot + Character + Setting = Genre
(serves as blueprints for many fiction styles)

Genres assist in shaping the characters and the story which in turn determines the plot and the setting

Generic markers --- Book length, characters, settings, themes, viewpoints and narratives

Within genres, there are frequently sub-genres and overlaps. Genres also often cross their boundaries and one work might be tagged under several genres at once.

The slide features a word cloud of fiction genres including Mystery, Western, Horror, Fantasy, and Sci-Fi. To the right is an illustration of a hanging plant in a wire basket with a pink and white striped pot. In the bottom right corner is a small video feed of a man with glasses and a light-colored shirt.

Now, let us quickly recall our discussion or distinction between form and genre. In the very 1st week or probably in the 2nd week we discussed the difference between form and genre and we said that in order to understand this concept better, we brought in the metaphor of a building, the architecture of the building can be called form and the interior design of that building can be called genre.

So, the architecture of the outer structure of the building can be called form, and the interior design of that particular building can be called genre. However, Webster dictionary defines genre as a category. A category of the artistic, musical, or literary composition, of course, depending on whether it is a musical album or if it is a movie or if it is a novel, or if it is literature, you have genres everywhere. Therefore basically genres deal with categories characterized by a particular style or form or content; that is a very broad definition of genre.

It is a category in other words genre means a category. In other words, how do we understand the genre in a little better way, well in order for you to understand the genre please remember there is a story, there is a plot and there is character and there is a setting. The locale, the geographical locale, the time in which it is set, all of them together constitute the genre.

In other words, in order to understand which genre the novel that you are reading belongs to or the fiction that you are reading belongs to you will have to analyze it in terms of its structure.

When I say structure setting, character, plot, and action story, so you get genre. And genre markers are the length of the work you are dealing with or the type of the character, settings, themes including viewpoints and narratives they also determine genre. So, these are some things that we can keep in mind.

But, let us go ahead with a disclaimer here, these are not again you know exclusive categories sometimes within these genres you can find overlapping of different genres. So, there are subgenres because in each genre there are subgenres and sometimes writers can do different permutations and combinations therefore, within a broad genre they can insert a subgenre belonging to another genre and create a new type.

But, what is the predominant genre is something that we can identify and within that, some variations are definitely possible, they are called subgenres these are somethings that we can keep in mind.

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Why do genres matter?

Genres cater to the expectations of the readers. We purchase particular novels because we have previously appreciated similar stories. There is also a sense of community and belonging among readers who prefer similar genres.

Writers also take advantage of this because generic boundaries serve as models for storytelling. Genres mirror societal trends and evolve as writers push the envelope.

The slide features a light green background. On the right, a stylized tree has four books as its leaves: a red book with a heart, a white book with a speech bubble, a yellow book with a lightbulb, and a blue book with a smiley face. In the bottom right corner, there is a small video inset of a man with glasses and a light blue shirt, who appears to be the speaker.

These are not absolute when we say genres, they are not absolute categories. They just help us in understanding the broad style of the work that you are reading. Why do genres matter?

Of course, genres matter because they help readers understand better because a work of fiction belongs to a particular genre.

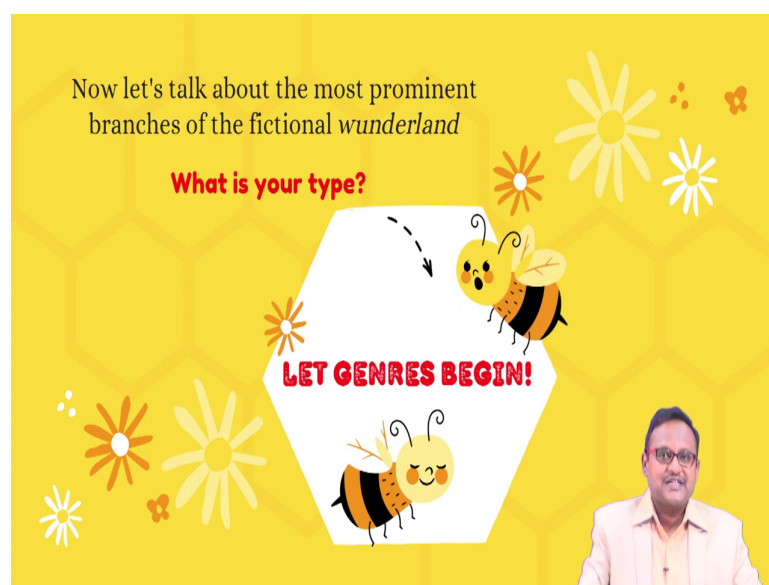
Then it has certain features, it has certain elements, it has certain types of stories, and it has a certain set of characters. And if you already like that particular type of novel then you can go and buy them.

So, it helps us in deciding what we like and then accordingly we can go and read similar works. So, writers also take advantage of genre because sometimes they define a market, and sometimes a genre also helps the writer in creating a certain template. Let us say for instance there is a genre called historical fiction, when we say historical fiction, it already creates a certain template for the writer.

So; that means, you have to think of a story that belongs to a king, either a fictitious king or a historical king, in fact, generally it is a historical king. It is not history, but what you are writing about let us say for instance you want to write about Ashoka the king Ashoka.

So, you have to do research on where Ashoka lived, the kind of geographical conditions, the style of his administration, the way he dressed, the way he spoke, and all that. So, historical fiction has already provided a rough template for the writer to begin working on. That is why they also help writers in extraordinary ways.

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So, now, let us go, and in case you are already familiar with different types of you know fiction different genres of fiction, you can just identify what is your favorite type.

So, let us go ahead without wasting much time let us go ahead and discuss different genres.

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As I said there are umpteen genres of fiction. In fact, more than 50 or 60 genres of fiction, and again even that 50 or 60 is not exhaustive they are just illustrative. So, the major genres are mystery, romance, fantasy, thriller, science fiction, and all these things. Within them, you can see different permutations and combinations.

Like a periodic table, we have compiled various subgenres in each of these main genres. Let us say for instance in fantasy you have an urban fantasy, historical fantasy, you have a contemporary fantasy, comic fantasy. Similarly, in science fiction you have dystopian fiction, utopian fiction, military science fiction, and cyberpunk of them.

And in romance you have paranormal romance, you have contemporary romance, you have historical romance. So, all of them are called subcategories. We are going to discuss a few prominent categories of fiction in the subsequent slides.

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Realistic Fiction

SALIENT FEATURES AND EXAMPLES:

- A fictional story which has believable events and characteristics that could actually happen in people's lives; stories resemble real life, and fictional characters within these stories react similarly to real people
- Although it can take place in a real setting, and may have allusions to science or history, it is not based on history or science
- Dickens's *Hard Times*, Premchand's *Godan*, Chetan Bhagat's *Five Point Someone*

Let us begin our discussion of types of fiction with realistic fiction. So, this is one of the predominant types of fiction that we get to read. How do you identify realistic fiction? Realistic fiction again is set in believable locations. In fact, it is not set in any kind of unbelievable setting.

In fact, the setting let us say it can be in Kolkata, it can be in Delhi, it can be in Bangalore, it can be in Mysore, so these are the realistic settings. Generally in the contemporary times, you know maybe in the recent past or contemporary times that is the setting, and here you and I can easily identify the characters because they resemble us.

In fact, in a particular kind of a situation or an event, these characters behave exactly the way you and I behave. In other words, their ability to respond to certain events is much similar to our ability to respond to those events. So, in other words, you and I can find a perfect replica of ourselves in realistic fiction.

So, there is no scope for us not to disbelieve anything here because as I said when you read most of the time you may wonder, it may be your story or my story it may be our story something like that. So, some of the popular works that belong to this category include Dickens's *Hard Times*, even *Oliver Twist* for that matter or Premchand's *Godan*, or U. R. Ananthmurthy *Samskara* or even Chetan Bhagat's *Five Point Someone*.

Of course, this particular Chetan Bhagat's *Five Point Someone* accommodates several genres within it, but at one level you can also call it a realistic fiction. And later I will tell you the other genres it belongs to then you can identify to which broad genre this particular work belongs. So, these are the salient features that you know through which you and I can identify realistic fiction.

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Campus Fiction

- Action of the novel is set in and around the campus of a college/university/institute.
- It can be traced back to the early 1950s
- Student-teacher equations; campus love; academic life; learning ambitions and impediments; student politics; faction rivalry

Mary McCarthy - *The Groves of Academe* (1952)
J. M. Coetzee - *Disgrace* (1999; Booker Prize)
David Lodge - *Campus Trilogy* (1975-89):
Changing Places; *Small World*; *Nice Work*
Chetan Bhagat - *Five Point Someone: What Not to Do at IIT*

From realistic fiction let us go to campus fiction. In fact, campus fiction is again a subgenre in realistic fiction.

So, campus fiction can also be called sometimes a campus novel or college novel, or even a university novel, it is called by several names. And here the setting is restricted to an academic unit, so it is something like a college or an academic institute like IITs, IIMs, or any universities or any of these academic unit are the settings. That is a defining feature.

And by virtue of that, you can identify the characters. If it is set on an academic campus then the character should be students, academic staff, when we say academic staff principal, professors, and hierarchies there and the relationship between student factions, student wars, and student habits. And even here romance is also part of it, it is called campus romance.

So, love that takes place here, love triangles all of them form the crux of campus fiction. Now you understand the moment you decide the setting the locale how your choice of characters is restricted, your choice of stories restricted, and all these things. So, here you can discuss the

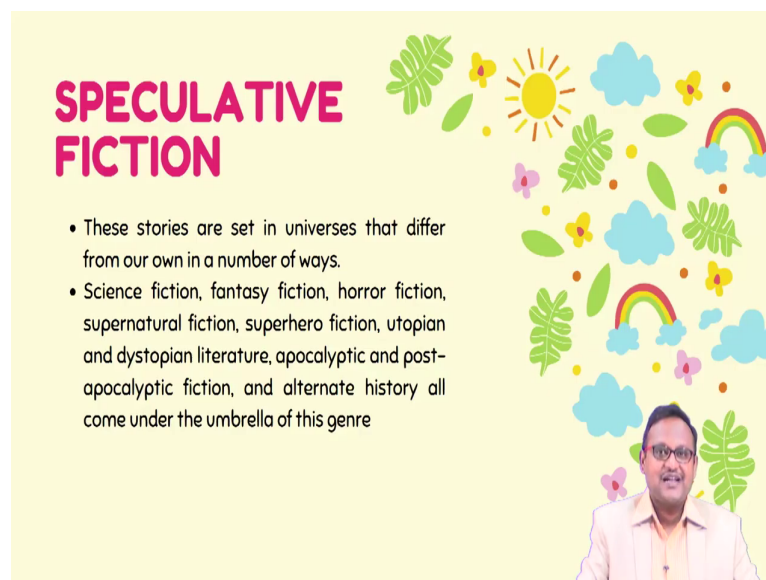
student-teacher relationship or some kind of illicit affairs that take place here, campus love all of them or including learning ambitions of students and what are some of the academic impediments a student faces and how he or she overcomes that all of them form the crux of campus fiction.

Of course, you can see that beautiful image, really we wish you know our campus life were to be as studious as this guy is trying to make it. It is said that 1952 marks the beginning of campus fiction especially Mary McCarthy's *The Groves of Academe* set in the United States is supposed to be the genre inaugurating work of campus fiction.

But of course, you have some notable names J. M. Coetzee who is a major Nobel laureate South-African Nobel laureate. And especially his work *Disgrace* published in 1999, it also won the Booker Prize. An exemplary campus fiction, but David Lodge an English professor teaching at the University of Birmingham popularized this particular genre of fiction. In fact, he has a Campus trilogy written between 1975 and 89.

So, here he explores the multiple facets of campus fiction, he is also a well-known theorist on campus fiction. And again we come across Chetan Bhagat's *Five Point Someone*, in fact, the subtitle of the work is: what not to do at IIT. In fact, the entire fiction is set in the backdrop of IIT, therefore, you can also call it campus fiction.

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SPECULATIVE FICTION

- These stories are set in universes that differ from our own in a number of ways.
- Science fiction, fantasy fiction, horror fiction, supernatural fiction, superhero fiction, utopian and dystopian literature, apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fiction, and alternate history all come under the umbrella of this genre

The slide features a light yellow background with a decorative border of colorful flowers, leaves, and rainbows on the right side. A small photograph of a man with glasses and a light-colored shirt is positioned in the bottom right corner.

So, from campus fiction let us go ahead and see other major types of fiction. So, again speculative fiction is a very broad genre of fiction and within speculative fiction, you have some minor genres or subgenres. Here generally speaking, in speculative fiction, the stories are set in parallel universes. They are not set in our universe there are parallel planets and parallel universes.

And sometimes it is not even a scientific universe or scientific planet that you and I know of it is pure fantasy. So, here the writer beautifully creates a new cosmos, the writer creates a new cosmos, new types of characters, new animals, new people, a new type of people sy having with three eyes, people with one eye, people with no ears at all, people with tails. All of these are possible in speculative fiction that is why they are called speculative fiction.

Some of the predominant subgenres of speculative fiction can be science fiction, fantasy fiction, horror fiction, gothic fiction, dystopian literature, apocalyptic, post-apocalyptic all the all of which come under speculative fiction.

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Historical Fiction

→ These fictional stories are set against historically accurate backdrops. Fictionalized versions of important historical figures or lives of fictional people in historical settings are depicted.

It is very important to distinguish between history (even proposed history) and historical fiction. Historical fiction is only historical so far its backdrop is considered.

E.g. Salman Rushdie - *Midnight's Children*; Shashi Tharoor - *The Great Indian Novel*; Amitav Ghosh - *The Hungry Tide*

The slide features a cartoon illustration of a knight in a red tunic and black surcoat, holding a red shield and a sword. In the bottom right corner, there is a small video inset showing a man with glasses and a light-colored shirt.

Now, let us go and take a quick look at other subtypes of speculative fiction. In historical fiction, as we discussed at the beginning of this class, in historical fiction the setting is in the past. And generally, it revolves around a historical personality that you and I are familiar with, but it is not history.

Please remember when you read a historical work you cannot come back and say that the character did exactly as he or she did in that novel that you have read. It is a speculative work though that character existed in history, this novel or this fiction takes creative freedom and presents various scenarios.

So that is not history. So, you cannot look for historical accuracy here. Just the background, the template is historical, and therefore, it is not history as such. So, it is a fictionalized version of various historical figures or various historical events.

Say for instance based on Indian independence there is plenty of historical fiction that has come based on the character of Aurangzeb, many novels have come. Especially based on the heroic adventures or the heroic feet of Shivaji. Many novels have come even on Ashoka.

So, you can understand, broadly speaking what these historical novels do. Some of the important or well-known works that belong to this genre can be *Midnight's Children*. Again as I said this is not the only genre that you can find writers have the capacity to do a lot of mix and match and create very many things.

Therefore, you can find shades of historical fiction in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, you can also consider Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* as a work of magic realism because there are a lot of elements of magic realism there. It can also be considered literary fiction, so all of them are possible.

But, you know because of its setting and locale it can also be read as a historical work, and then you have Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel*. Again it can be read as a political satire that has a detailed and rich and riveting contemporary historical background.

And here Shashi Tharoor goes a little a step ahead and intertwines elements from the Mahabharata with elements from our freedom struggle and creates *The Great Indian Novel*.

In fact, *The Great Indian Novel* has echoes of the *Mahabharata*, it has echoes of our story of Independence, India's struggle for independence, and all of them. Similarly Amitav Ghosh's *Hungry Tide* too. So, these are some well-known works that you can say share the features of historical fiction.

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Science Fiction (Sci-fi)

→ Any story set in the future, the past, or other dimensions falls under this genre.

Futuristic Science and advanced technical concepts are featured in the novel. space-travel; time-travel; parallel planet; extra-terrestrial life; alien visit

The plot should be established by the setting.
There are numerous sub-genres of science fiction like Apocalyptic, Alien invasion, Tech noir, Diesel punk, Cyberpunk, even Feminist Sci-fi

E.g. *Frankenstein* - Mary Shelley, *The Diary of a Space Traveller and other Professor Shonku stories* by Satyajit Ray, *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury;
Movies: *Interstellar*; *Avatar*; *Upside Down* (2012)

From historical fiction, let us go ahead and take a look at science fiction. This too is a part of speculative fiction. In science fiction what happens, depending on futuristic science and advances in technological concepts or advances in physics, you develop a story and present it to the audience.

Therefore, though it may not be possible right now but looking at the way our science is progressing, our technology is developing, maybe this is possible one day that is a kind of a distant resemblance to reality.

So, here the plot or the setting is sometimes on a different planet, it can be in a different universe, or here in this universe, the physical laws that govern our universe may be twisted. Let us say for instance there is a beautiful movie called *Upside Down*. In fact, the picture that I have taken is from that particular movie.

As you can see, this is set on a planet that has dual gravity. So, now, and again there is an element of romance here, so you can as well call it Sci-fi romance. So, how does a person who belongs to the downward realm reach the upward realm and falls in love with a girl there? And how it poses a lot of challenges, even gravitational challenges and challenges in terms of defying authority and all that and how they overcome, so it is a brilliant novel.

So, again it makes use of the cutting of the edge advances in science, and based on some kind of scientific possibility, it is not that type of science that exists now. But, when it comes to

settings it makes use of our scientific knowledge, our advances in technology, and therefore, weaves its plot around them, so these are some works.

So, well-known works are Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and *The Diary of Space Traveller* and other *Professor Shanku* stories, especially by Satyajit Ray in the Indian context. And all of them and you have *Fahrenheit 451* by Bradbury Ray Bradbury.

So, these are some very well-known novels, and when it comes to movies you have, Christopher Nolan's *Interstellar*. It is said that the entire movie was shot on a budget that exceeded India's budget for *Chandrayaan*.

And you have *Avatar* which won several international awards, Oscars too, probably more than 5 Oscars something like 7 Oscars. If you have seen the movie, you can see how it is set on a different planet and how it has its own creatures, how it has different types of people and how there is a kind of interaction between people of our world and people of their world, the consequence of that. Beautifully visually enriching masterpieces, all of them.

So, maybe in order to understand some of these concepts better, I also bring in examples from the movies. Because a movie is also a type of fiction, it is cellular fiction, if the novel is verbal fiction, the movie is cellular fiction that makes use of audiovisual elements. Therefore, in order to better understand our categories, I bring in concepts from there.

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Fantasy

- In contrast to sci-fi, which deals with universes or future times, these stories focus on kingdoms.
- World creation is an integral element of fantasy novels/stories. These books are replete with mythic creatures, otherworldly magic and thoughts.
- They sometimes use historical settings such as the Middle Ages as inspiration.

E.g. *The Lord of the Rings* - J R R Tolkien; *Harry Potter Novels* - J K Rowling; *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* - C S Lewis

So, from science Sci-fi let us go ahead and discuss another kind of speculative fiction, fantasy. Fantasy is probably one of the most favorite genres of literature for many of us because of the very rich setting it presents.

Sci-fi and fantasy novels belong to speculative fiction, but as opposed to Sci-fi which deals with universes or future times, here these stories focus on different kingdoms. Therefore, they may happen very much within our realm, but in a different dimension within our world something like that.

So, here it is as I said it is a rich tapestry of characters, rich tapestry of sound, settings, and all of them. So, it is like a parallel cosmos. Some of the well-known examples are the *Harry Potter* series. Now, look what happens here, in fact, the Harry Potter world is tucked very much within our world. Because you can enter the world of Harry Potter through some particular platform that exists on our own platform.

So, therefore, you can say this world is tucked just behind our world or it is between the spaces, something like that. Other well-known examples include *The Lord of Rings* and even C S Lewis *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*.

All of them are novels, they have also been turned into extraordinary visually enriching movies. Sometimes they also make use of historical settings, but of course, here they do not resemble any historical personality, just the setting is a bit historical, especially of the middle ages.

When you look at *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* the setting is the middle ages and some kingdoms, but these kings may not resemble any kings that you and I know of in modern history. So, these are some possible things that we can keep in mind. The moment we say fantasy you have mythic creatures, otherworldly beings, magical beings, magical thoughts all of them. So, that is the reason why let us say for instance when you say Unicorn, the moment you come across a Unicorn you should know that you are reading a work that belongs to fantasy. So, these are some well-known types. Let us continue our discussion of types of fiction or genres of fiction in the next class. Until then take care.