

Literary Theory and Literary Criticism
Prof. Aysha Iqbal
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Madras

Lecture – 4
Key Terms and Concepts-3

(Refer Slide Time: 00:17)



What is a closure? In classic films we often come across the card, the end blazoned across the screen. This suggests a clear cut ending, that the movie has finally ended and we are told that there is a sense of closure, problems have been resolved and balance has been restored. Now, traditionally, works of fiction too had an ending. Now, before I get further into this, let me introduce you or let me take you to some of the classic endings of great novels, great works of fiction.

(Refer Slide Time: 01:11)

Emma by Jane Austen

The wedding was very much like other weddings, where the parties have no taste for finery or parade; and Mrs. Elton, from the particulars detailed by her husband, thought it all extremely shabby, and very inferior to her own.—"Very little white satin, very few lace veils; a most pitiful business!—Selina would stare when she heard of it."—But, in spite of these deficiencies, the wishes, the hopes, the confidence, the predictions of the small band of true friends who witnessed the ceremony, were fully answered in the perfect happiness of the union.

So, let me focus your attention to Emma by Jane Austen and how it ends. I am reading out a passage from Emma by Jane Austen and concluding lines. The wedding was very much like other weddings, where the parties have no taste for finery or parade. And Mrs. Elton, from the particulars detailed by her husband, thought it all extremely shabby and very inferior to her own. Very little white satin, very few lace veils, a most pitiful business. Selina would stare when she heard of it. But in spite of these deficiencies, the wishes, the hopes, the confidence, the predictions of the small band of true friends who witnessed the ceremony, were fully answered in the perfect happiness of the union. So, this is the way the novel ends. There is a closure and we are told that the marriage ended in a happy union despite whatever the naysayers would conclude.

(Refer Slide Time: 03:09)

The Age of Innocence

He sat for a long time on the bench in the thickening dusk, his eyes never turning from the balcony. At length a light shone through the windows, and a moment later a man-servant came out on the balcony, drew up the awnings, and closed the shutters. At that, as if it had been the signal he waited for, Newland Archer got up slowly and walked back alone to his hotel.

Another great ending by, from this novel by Edith Wharton and her novel, *The Age of Innocence*. So, please take a look at how Edith Wharton concludes the age of innocence. The reference is to the hero Newland Archer, who has been separated from the woman he loves for several years, rather a couple of decades. Now, he is well into his old age and this is how it ends.

He sat for a long time on the bench in the thickening dusk, his eyes never turning from the balcony. At length, a light shone through the windows and a moment later, a man-servant came out on the balcony, drew up the awnings and close the shutters. At that, as if it had been the signal he waited for, Newland Archer got up slowly and walked back alone to his hotel.

So, the idea suggested is, that Newland Archer and the women he loves, Madame Olenska, Countess Olenska, they never reunite and he ends up being lonely. He ends up lonely and goes back without her; returns to America without her.

(Refer Slide Time: 04:23)

A Tale of Two Cities

- "It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known."

Famous lines and famous sentences with which we find some novels ending. So, this is how A Tale of Two Cities by Charles Dickens, this is how it ends.

It is a far, far better thing that I do than I have never done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known.

Classic lines by Sydney Carton, the anti-hero, yet the hero.

And one famous line from George Eliot's Middlemarch. Every limit is a beginning as well an ending. And this is how, this is one of the concluding lines from the last chapter of George Eliot's Middlemarch, every limit is a beginning as well as an ending.

So, what I am trying to suggest is the notion of ending has been discussed at length, has been always there at the back of minds of writers though not immensely theorized, but is something to look into, something to consider what is a closure? So, endings are important to us.

The question, that we should be asking, that why, why do we want our narratives to have endings. As we have just seen from some of these examples, that great novels had certain concluding remarks. They had a sense of final closure, a definite ending. So, why were these endings so important to us?

(Refer Slide Time: 06:16)

Frank Kermode in *The Sense of an Ending*

Our novels do likewise. Biology and cultural adaptation require it; the End is a fact of life and a fact of the imagination, working out from the middle, the human crisis. As the theologians say, we 'live from the End,' even if the world should be endless. We need ends (1967)

So, the theorist Frank Kermode, while discussing endings and this is what he says in his classic, *The Sense of an Ending* by Frank Kermode. So, please pay attention to this, these lines by Frank Kermode.

Our novels do likewise. He is talking about endings. Biology and cultural adaptation require it. The end is a fact of life and a fact of the imagination, working out from the middle, the human crisis. As the theologians say, we live from the end even if the world should be endless. We need ends.

So, what is being discussed? The necessity, the need for having endings. This is somehow ingrained in us to look for definite endings in films and in, in any other text.

Aristotle who we often go back to in poetics, Aristotle tells us, that a plot should have a beginning, a middle and an end. So, you must have sense, that majority of fiction comprises three components: exposition, complication and resolution. There is always exposition, some kind of a turmoil or complication and then how it is all resolved at the end. So, resolution is needed in, in a text, at least in a classic traditional text.

Just consider, how our bigger stories also lead us to a definite conclusion. So, for example, *The Bible*. So, you have the genesis, that is, the exposition; you have complications in the form of apocalypse and you have your resolution in the form of last judgement. Likewise, in Karl Marx's *Das Kapital*, you have the exposition as in primitive

society, you have the conflict as in revolution and you have the resolution in the forms of utopia. So, the idea is, even our narratives or the grand narratives have stories to tell and they have great endings. Associated with whatever we are talking the concept of closure.

(Refer Slide Time: 09:39)



There is another concept, that I would like to introduce you to is the, is that of fin de siècle. It is a French word meaning, the end of century. Fin de siècle, the end of the century, it is a literary movement. This literary movement is also called the decadence movement. The major names associated with this movement are Aubrey Beardsley, Oscar Wilde, Thomas Gautier and Charles Baudelaire.

The movement emphasize the autonomy of art, the need for sensationalism, melodrama and art for art's sake. So, these are important concepts, that you should remember, when we, when we would be discussing aestheticism and symbolism later on in the course. So, the decadent, the so called writers of the decadence movement were preoccupied with a sense of decay, envy, ruin and despair and therefore, the term fin de siècle, end of century. So, that was then and what is the situation now?

Now, most often we do not find the word the end coming on a movie screen. It hardly happens. So, why, why is it happening? Why are not we having the sense of closure? A definite ending? The idea is, that modern writers, also writers of fiction, they had started playing with the narrative closure, the concept of narrative closure.

For example, in his *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, John Fowles gives us two endings, two alternative endings. So, it does not end with one definite ending, but we are choose to or we are free to select the way we would like to interpret the novel by selecting any one of the given endings, any one of the two endings, that we are given. Similarly, Umberto Eco in his *The Name of the Rose* constantly promises a closure, but then keeps on delaying and denying it. So, this is the way in which writers play with the sense of closure. They deny us the ending and that sort of adds to the narrative pleasure, the way, the reading pleasure of the readers.

So, here I would also suggest, that you read Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* and see how it ends. It is a very interesting way of observing how contemporary writers are playing around with the concept of closure.

(Refer Slide Time: 13:32)

Assignment

- Jane Eyre by Charlotte Bronte
- Middlemarch by George Eliot
- Great Expectations by Charles Dickens
- Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen
- Frankenstein by Mary Shelley
- The Sun also rises by Ernest Hemingway

Now, at this point I would like you to pay attention to this particular assignment and please take a look at the questions and this is your assignment. I would like you to post this assignment by the given deadline and the question is, give us the endings, the closures of these novels of these particular texts.

So, I will read out the titles. Jane Eyre by Charlotte Bronte, Middlemarch by George Eliot, Great Expectations by Charles Dickens, Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen, Frankenstein by Mary Shelley, The Sun also Rises by Ernest Hemingway.

I will repeat the question. You are required to tell us how these novels end; how these novels attain a sense of closure. In other words, to be more specific, I am asking you to give me the last few lines, the last couple of lines of these novels. Tell us and later on we will talk whether there is a definite sense of closure or not in these works.

(Refer Slide Time: 15:01)

Post Modernism

So, let me take you to another literary concept, that is, postmodernism. Now, postmodernist literature embodies a case against realism and encourages the dialogic as opposed to the monologic closure in a variety of ways. This anti-realist revolt is intended to function as a dissenting art that challenges the unreliability of realism. So, that, that is postmodernism is all about. It is like a case against realism.

Now, it is a term, postmodernism is a term often used to refer to changes, development and tendencies, which have taken or are taking place in literature, art, music, architecture, philosophy and other arts, especially since the late 50s and early 60s. Although many people, all would also tell us, that exactly the movement started from the 40s onward; however. So, that is what we generally agree as, that the movement started, we started seeing the signs of change from the 40s onwards.

Let me introduce you to two other concepts associated with postmodernism. These are disarticulation and fracture. So, disarticulation and fracture are the ways postmodernists take to go beyond modernism. Postmodernism, as we all know, are also suspicious of anything that is considered rational. One of the key features of postmodernism is

undecidability. So, undecidability suggests the impossibility of deciding between two or more competing interpretations. This involves celebration of multiplicity, heterogeneity and differences.

Postmodernism also includes apocryphal history. So, in postmodernist thought, history is just a narrative. It is a slave to its myths, metaphors and stereotypes. An apocryphal history contradicts the official history by either supplementing the public record or by displacing the official history altogether, the purpose why does it do this. So, the idea is or the purpose is to demystify and reinterpret the traditional version of the past.

Postmodernist narratives also or often have a Chinese box structure. Now, what do you understand by Chinese box multiple layers, multiple boxes, something coming out of something else? So, Chinese box structure is simplistically put, a skewed narrative, a distorted narrative, which is a subject to abrupt shifts and transformations and ambiguous as to its boundaries. A Chinese box structure suspends normal categories of time and space, social and rational kit categories, which are built-up in everyday architecture behaviour to become rational or quite literally, impossible to figure out. So, that is what a Chinese box structure is, quite literally impossible to figure out.

A very important concept, which is associated with postmodernist thought is that of deconstruction. So, the routes of deconstruction can be found in Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory of language. Deconstructionists hold the view, that truth itself is always relative to the different stand points thus denying final definitions or truths. The term was introduced by the French philosopher, Jacques Derrida and points to the fact, that the relationship of language to reality is not given or even reliable since all language systems are inherently unreliable cultural constructs.

Derrida also talks about the false logocentric dependence on language as the mirror of nature. He interrogates the western tradition, which in his belief had falsely supposed, that the relationship between language and world was well founded and reliable.

Science fiction and fantasy framework is something else that a postmodernist often resort to... So, science fiction and fantasy, how do the postmodernists use it? They use it by creating new ideas about truth and in this way, by creating new ideas about truth, science fiction and fantasy literature have become vehicles for the postmodern condition. For

example, consider work such as Philip K Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* and Thomas Pynchon's *V*, which debate the nature of truth and reality.

(Refer Slide Time: 22:24)

The Politics of Postmodernism

For Linda Hutcheon, "Postmodernism manifests itself in many fields of cultural endeavor— architecture, literature, photography, film, painting, video, dance, music, and elsewhere. In general terms it takes the form of self-conscious, self-contradictory, self-undermining statement." (Hutcheon, 1).

Like many other concepts, philosophical concepts and debates, postmodernism is also amorphous by nature and not very easy to define. I will, theoretically I will introduce you to Linda Hutcheon and her book, *The Politics of Postmodernism*.

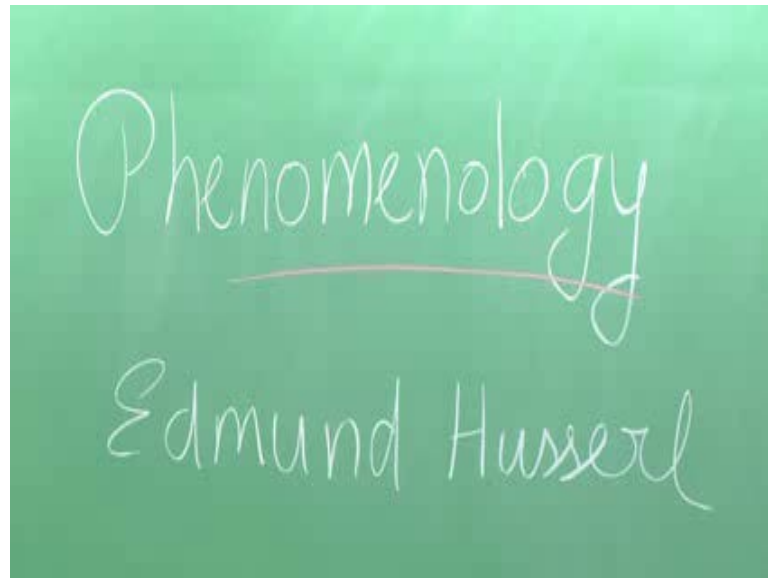
So, this is what Linda Hutcheon has to say about the concept. For Linda Hutcheon, postmodernism manifests itself in many fields of cultural endeavour, architecture literature, photography, film, painting, video, dance, music and elsewhere. In general terms, it takes the form of self-conscious, self-contradictory, self-undermining statement. So, three terms you should know, self-undermining, self-conscious and self-contradictory.

Another great theorist Fredric Jameson in his book, *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, he talks about how postmodernism leads to erosion of the distinction between high and low culture and how it leads to the incorporation of material from other texts or how it often encourages the incorporation of material from other texts.

According to Jameson, postmodernism also leads to breaking down of boundaries between different genres of writing. For Jameson, postmodernist writers or artists cannot invent new perspectives and new modes of expression, instead they operate as ((Refer

Time: 24:04)). They recycle previous works and styles. And Jameson also famously gives us the notion of pastiche, which reads as a parody, that has lost its sense of humour.

(Refer Slide Time: 24:24)

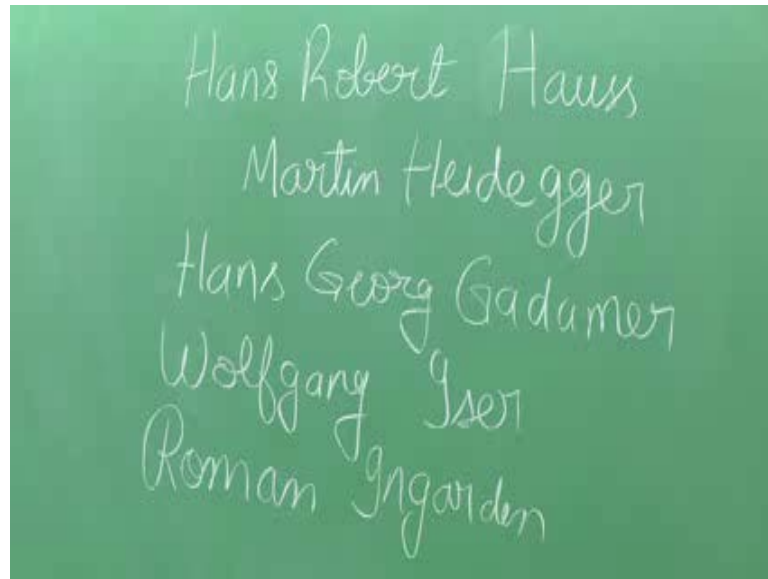


The next concept is phenomenology, a very important term that is often used in literary theory. It is derived from the Greek word phenomena, which means things appearing or things as they appear and logos, that we all know what is meant by logos, that is, knowledge.

Now, this is a method of philosophical enquiry, which lays a stress on the perceiver's central role in determining, meaning, I will repeat the perceiver attains centrality. He acquires the central position in determining, in fixing meaning of something. It is based on the works of Edmund Husserl, the German thinker. For Husserl the improper aim of philosophical enquiry is not the objects in the world that are perceivable through the senses, but rather a priory contents of our consciousness.

Thus, this system, this method of phenomenological studies, it demands a close exploration of intellectual processes, mental processes. The implication here is, that an individual mind is the centre and origin of meaning of any sort. The mind determines the perceivers mind determines meaning.

(Refer Slide Time: 26:13)



The influence of phenomenological approach has been widespread. It was later developed by writers, thinkers, philosophers such as Hans Robert Hauss, Martin Heidegger, Hans Georg Gadamer, Wolfgang Iser and Roman Ingarden. These are the names, that we will be coming across very frequently in this course and as applied to literary theory, phenomenology is most evident in the reader response criticism.

(Refer Slide Time: 26:39)

- Abrams, M.H & Harpham, Geoffrey. A Handbook of Literary Terms. Cengage Learning, 2009
- Belsey, Catherine. Poststructuralism: A Very Short Introduction. Oxford: OUP, 2002.
- Bloom, Harold. The Western Canon: The Books and Schools of the Ages. London: MacMillan, 1995.
- Calvino, Italo. If On a Winter's Night a Traveller. Florida: Harcourt Press, 1981.
- Culler, Jonathan. The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction. London & Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981.
- Eco, Umberto. The Name of the Rose. London: Minerva , 1983.
- -----On Literature. London: Vintage, 2006.
- -----, Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language. London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984.
- Wolfrey, Julians et al. Key Concepts in Literary Theory. UBC: University of British Columbia Press, 2001.

And here are a few references, please take a good look of look at it and make a note.