

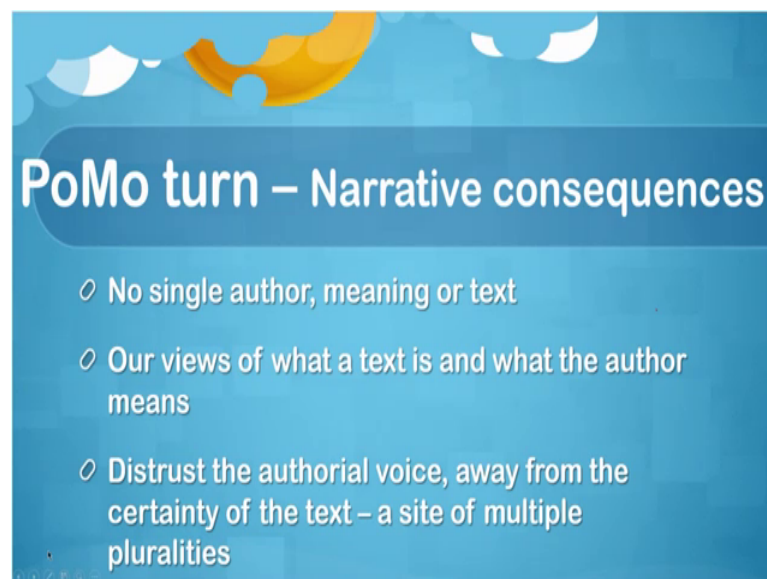
Postmodernism in Literature
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Lecture – 12
'Minor Literature' and Postmodern Narratives

Good morning and welcome to yet another session of the NPTEL course Postmodernism in Literature. Today's lecture is titled Minor Literature and Postmodern Narratives and this is also in continuation with our discussion of Deleuze and Guattari we which we started undertaking in the previous session. Postmodern narratives challenge the idea, the conventional idea of narratives.

It also encourages us to think beyond the commons in definitions and the traditional notions which are attributed to narratives and techniques and characteristics of narratives.

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And, consequently with the postmodern turn which is also a poststructuralist turn there are certain narrative consequences that are we engage with we deal with when we engage with particular kinds of texts and narratives such as there is there is no idea of a single author meaning or a text we have moved away from all of those definite limiting concepts and also it is radically challenged our views of what a text is and what the author means and this is something that we have already taken a look at right from the

beginning of a discussions related to postmodernism and more importantly we are also encouraged to discuss the authorial voice to move away from the certainty of the text which hitherto was understood to be as understood to be as a sight which offered closed definitive meanings on the contrary with this moving away from the authorial voice with this moving away from the certainty of the text what we have before us is the text as a site of multiple pluralities.

So, these are also some of the things that we have been discussing continuously throughout a range of discourse is a range of our critical frameworks within the gamut of postmodernism.

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In addition we also dealt with the fact that contrary to the conventional traditional expectations of a narrative some of the elements which were said to distort the meaning making process of the narratives have they have now come to be at the forefront of be a narrative process such as fragmentation, the ideas of freedom, simulation, contamination, and difference within in a textuality and in the textuality concepts it is rhizomes the move towards an anti totality process rather than a coherent process of unity.

So, we have began to notice that these are some of the elements which now dominate the narratives of particularly the postmodern writers of the contemporary such as Umberto Eco, John Barth, Thomas Pynchon, Milan Kundera, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, De Lillo, Rushdie, Graham Swift, Martin Amis to name a few.

So, while we deal with these are consequences the postmodern narrative consequences it is also important take a look at certain particular shifts that happened in this a process and with relation to theories of frameworks and new concepts which are being introduced.

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The slide features a blue background with a decorative top section containing stylized white and yellow shapes. The main title, 'Theory of Minor Literature', is centered in a white rounded rectangle. Below the title, a list of four bullet points is presented in white text. To the right of the text is a small image of the book cover for 'Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature' by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. The cover is white with the authors' names in red and black, and the title in black. The bottom part of the cover shows a sepia-toned illustration of a city street scene.

Theory of Minor Literature

- *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1975) – Deleuze and Guattari
- A new approach towards Kafka's works
- Discussions of subversion and politically significant literature
- A writing that contrasts with the 'major' literature – literary canon, great literary masters

So, in continuation with a discussion on Deleuze and Guattari here we also introduced a theory of minor literature in this context and theory of this theory of minor literature was put forward by Deleuze and Guattari in one of the books published in 1975 title Kafka toward a minor literature. The title being very self explanatory it is certainly about Kafka and about how they developed a theory of minor literature using the works of Kafka.

This in that sense posits a new approach towards Kafka's works and they also in the continuation with the most of their other works which rely on psychoanalysis and also on various aspects of politics they also engage with discussions of subversion and politically significant literature.

And, by engaging with Kafka and by positing Kafka's work as minor literature what they are doing is a process through which they begin to contrast a particular kind of writing against major literatures and what they refer to as major literatures the literatures which have been part of literary canon the literatures which have been written by supposedly greatly literary masters.

So, in that sense when he talks about minor literature he is also talking about the possibility of a different kind of literature which exists outside the gamut of canon outside the framework of dominant literary critical practices.

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The slide is titled "Arguments" in white text on a dark blue background. It features four bullet points in white text. Handwritten red annotations are present: a checkmark next to "minor", an arrow pointing to "foreign" with the words "native" and "familiar" written above it, the word "becoming" written below "process", and the word "product" written below "event".

- Great literature would be 'minor' ✓
- Because its language would be 'foreign', open, unfinalizable, creative and mutating
- It is about process rather than an event
- Revolutionary way of writing – beyond the realm of classic works and traditional literary criticism

These are some of the arguments that the Deleuze and Guattari put forward when they talk about minor literature. First of all great literature calling to them all great literature calling to them would be minor literature and here, it is important to know that they do not use the term minor as a derogatory term; while it is used as a term to talk about particular kinds of differences which are other otherwise not being included which otherwise not being considered central as part of canon or as part of dominant critical practices.

And, why is all great literature considered minor because they argue its language will be foreign, open, unfinalizable, creative and mutating and what do they mean by foreign? Foreign is needs to be understood as a contrasting term in connection with whatever that is not native and not familiar.

So, here is a celebration of a move away from the native away from the familiar to talk about language to talk about particular practices as being foreign and by consequence they also become open rather than closed unfinalizable rather than talking about certainties talking about unities incoherences and here they also refer to the process because the process is about becoming and the event is more about a product it also

begins to make sense in multiple ways. This is about a process this is about to becoming rather than engaging with a final product it is unfinishable and it is also more creative rather than limited to particular kinds of representations and expressions.

And, it would not be wrong to say that when Deleuze and Guattari talk about minor literature they are also celebrating a revolutionary kind a revolutionary way of writing which they think Kafka exemplified it also enables us to talk about literature, to talk about particular kinds of writings beyond the realm of classical works and traditional literary criticism.

So, here the postmodernist theories they begin to very radically affect the ways in which critical establishment works the ways in which critical practices have been employed they also provide leaving into not just a different kind of writing, but also do a different kind of reading and a different kind of critical practice to be in place.

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Majoritarian vs. minoritarian

- o ^{R80} A Thousand Plateaus - distinction between the majoritarian and minoritarian cultural practices
- o "Majoritarian is an opposition based on already established terms where the distinction relies on one privileged or dominant term"
- o Man and Woman - Man is privileged, therefore the opposition is majoritarian
 - o No norm or standard for 'woman' ← becoming NOT defining
- o The term 'Man' becomes 'expressive' rather than creative - we see a majoritarian impulse
- o If we think of woman as standard - it becomes majoritarian

In order to understand this in a better context we also need to be a little more familiar with one of their other works by Deleuze and Guattari: A Thousand Plateaus which was published in 1980; So, here they draw attention to the distinction between the majoritarian and minoritarian cultural practices though there is a work it does not likely refer to minor literature it becomes a quite important in understanding what they mean by minor literature and how they begin to define majoritarian and minoritarian practices. A Thousand Plateaus was one of the most influential works by Deleuze and Guattari and

it was written in a non-linear fashion, it was also considered as a major statement in the context of post structuralism and postmodernism.

As one of the commentators Deleuze and Guattari would put it majoritarian is an opposition based on already established terms where the distinction relies on one privileged or dominant term. So, this the complexity of the definitions attributed to majoritarian and minoritarian could be further simplified using the example of man and woman.

Man is used as a privileged term and therefore, the opposition the way in which the term woman is defined in opposition to man it is also in terms of the majoritarian impulse which is attributed to the term man, because there is a man is a by virtue of being defined in this context of being majoritarian or minoritarian man automatically the term man automatically assumes the position of a standard the position of a norm which does not exist for the term woman.

So, in that sense the term man becomes more expressive rather than creative. It becomes a norm, it becomes a standard in opposition to which the term woman needs to be talked about and we cannot say a woman can be again defined because the definitions has have already been set. The definitions have already been attributed to the term man and the woman can be talked about the woman can be the woman can be referred to only in opposition to this majoritarian impulse.

So, Deleuze and Guattari draw a our attention to this fact that once the term becomes more expressive rather than creative we see a majoritarian impulse operating in connection to that term in the same way if the term woman was considered more as a more in terms of no more in terms of a standard we could also see the majoritarian impulse operating in association with the term woman and this could be the same could be seen as being applicable to a number of other binary words such as black and white or good and bad there is a way in which a privileged word is being associated with certain majoritarian impulses and we also see the other binary term being defined in opposition to this privileged term.

In that sense it is also important to know that when we talk about a woman in this context as a linguistic aspect as a concept which language talks about there is only a

possibility of becoming a woman and not defining because the term has already been defined vis a vis the majoritarian impulse associated with the term man.

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Franz Kafka (1883-1924)

- *The Metamorphosis, The Trial, The Castle*
- Kafkaesque
- Born in a German speaking family while living in Prague – Jewish – hostile relation between those who speak German and Czech
- Kafka – considered German his mother tongue
- Culture, territory and the politics - Conflicts

And when we talk about minor literature and how Deleuze and Guattari have been theorizing minor literature with respect to the works of Kafka it is also important to understand who Kafka is. Kafka lived from 1883 to 1924, he is also considered as one of the early modernist writers. Some of his famous works include the metamorphosis in the trial and the castle which are all in examples of realism and also about existentialism which are exemplified in his most of his works.

And, there is even a term associated with the writings of Kafka Kafkaesque because Kafka essentially did not emit at any kind of writing, but he in turn a gave rise to a kind of writing which became a standard on it is own. Kafka's life and the choices that he made in terms of his writing a particularly interesting because he was born in a German speaking a family by living in Prague he was also Jewish origin which further complicated matters for him and he also lived in a province where there existed hostile relationships between those who speak German and those who to speak Czech and though Kafka was familiar and well versed in both these languages a Czech and German he considered German and his mother tongue and he wrote mostly in German.

So, his writing his identity which emerged through writing was fraught with in the conflicts which were part of culture territory and the political issues of those times. So, it

is in this context that we find Deleuze and Guattari developing a theory of a minor literature in connection with the writings of Kafka.

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So, what prompts Deleuze and Guattari to look at a Kafka's writings as minor literature because Kafka was a Czech and he was writing in the language that was not his own German and therefore, he was operating in the realm without standards and definitions. Here we notice that language also becomes a tool through which yardsticks standards and particular kinds of definitions and set opinions also emerge and here by moving away from certain kinds of expectations by possessing particular kinds of identities are not choosing to write in a way that would reflect that kind of identity Deleuze and Guattari argue kafka becomes the author of minor literature.

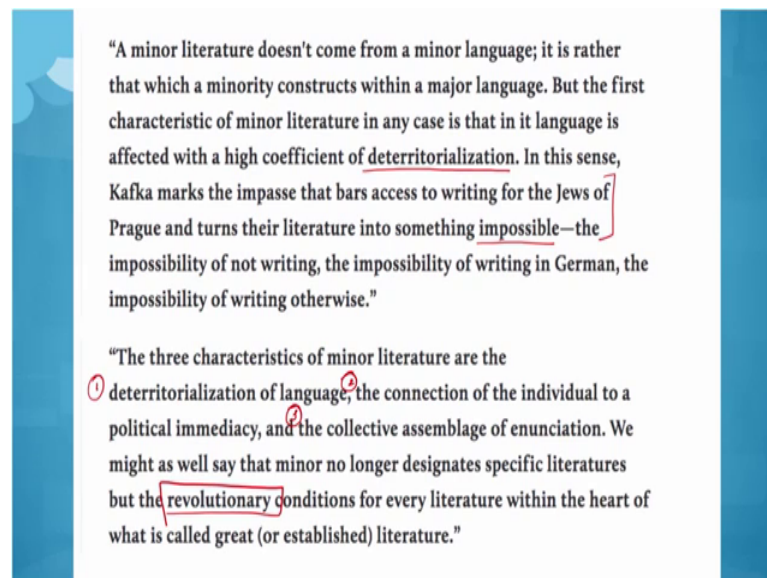
This is also because he displays a certain openness to change. He is he is embracing possibilities, he is engaging with the ideas of becoming rather than about a fixed fixed entities fixed identities and about and rather than being rather than continuing to be stuck with certain rigid a compartmentalized, rigid institutionalized ideas about ideas about language about identity and about the politics associated with it.

So, here by extension by using Kafka, Deleuze and Guattari are also leading us to believe that great literature emerges when one is open to change when one embraces the possibilities of becoming rather than sticking to the definitions the standards which are

have always already been there and Kafka is a particularly interesting example to take in this case because he wrote without a sense of the people or any fixed identity.

Instead he wrote about to world about a set of people who are yet to come who is somewhere in the future he about a set of people who were in the process of defining themselves rather than a people who always already had a kind of identity which they could own as their own.

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To quote it will be useful to go through a very brief excerpt from Deleuze and Guattari's work where they talk about minor literature. A minor literature does not come from a minor language it is rather that which are minority constructs within a major language, but the first characteristic of minor literature in any case is that in it language is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization. In this sense a Kafka marks the impasse that bars access to writing from the Jews of Prague and turns the literature into something impossible - the impossibility of not writing, the impossibility of writing in German, the impossibility of writing otherwise.

The three characteristics of minor literature are the deterritorialization of language the connection of the individual to a political immediacy and the collective assemblage of enunciation. We might as well say that minor no longer designate specific literatures by the revolutionary conditions for every literature within the heart of what is called great or established literature. Here, it is it is important to draw your attention to certain very

specific aspects that Deleuze and Guattari talk about minor needs to be understood in the context that is defamiliarize to us in a context that defines the common sense conventional meanings that are attributed to the term minor. Here minor does not refer to a minor language and minor does not refer to a community which is hierarchically placed in a minority status.

On the contrary it is about a revolutionary kind of writing as they put forward and it also has particular characteristics the first one of deterritorialization of language , the connection of the individual to a certain political immediacy and also the collective assemblage of enunciation. So, in Kafka's writing we find all of the three elements coming together and this is a particularly noticeable as Deleuze and Guattari themselves talk about the impossibility of writing to the Jews in Prague how Kafka turns a literature into something impossible.

So, here he is actually using languages which are always already available and using the same set of language the same kind of language and the existing system of politics into a possibility which would help him to produce something entirely new, entirely revolutionary and there Deleuze and Guattari believe, rest the possibility of new literatures emerging, great literature emerging which are also minor in nature.

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The slide features a blue background with a decorative header containing a yellow sun and white clouds. The title 'The idea of 'Minor'' is centered in a dark blue rounded rectangle. Below the title is a list of six bullet points, each starting with a small circle icon.

- ◊ Not a pejorative term
- ◊ A term for icon of difference, of process, of becoming
- ◊ Stands for freedom from oppressive norms and standards, from fixed definitions.
- ◊ The literature that does not conform to role models or stereotypes
- ◊ Rejects definitions, open to difference
- ◊ Thrives on defiance and subversion and resists totality of any kind

So, this idea of minor it is not a pejorative term, it is not used as a derogatory term instead it emerges as a term for an icon for icon of a difference of process and of

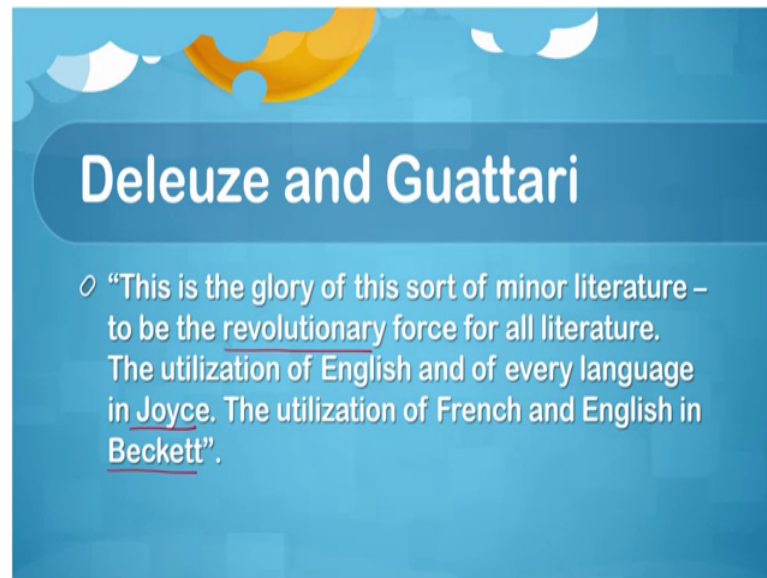
becoming. So, we need to move away from the conventional the traditional definitions which are attributed to minor and as opposed to the as opposed to literatures and artists and writers being a major and on the contrary we need to approach the term minor in a peculiar sense because according to Deleuze and Guattari the also the term also stands for freedom from oppressive norms in standard and freedom from fixed definitions and this incidentally is the crux of postmodern postmodern writing, postmodern approaches.

And, when they talk about minor literature they are also talking about a kind of literature which does not conform to role models or stereotypes something which moves away from the set standards, something that moves away from the demands of dominant critical practices.

It is also kind of literature which rejects all kinds of definitions that exist as a commonplace and also open to defiance and this kind of literature Deleuze and Guattari argue and through the examples from kafka this kind of literature they argue it thrives on defiance and subversion and resist the truth resist totality of any kind and this incidentally is also some of the things that we have been talking about right from the beginning in connection with discussions related to postmodernism.

Postmodernism also like minor literature is a move away from any attempt to bring in sense of totality any attempt to bring in coherence, any conscious attempt to stick to a pattern, stick to particular kinds of definitions. On the contrary it encourages the moving away from all kinds of patterns all kinds of coherences all sorts of systems which encouraged the building of a unity.

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To co Deleuze and Guattari again this is the glory of this sort of minor literature to be the revolutionary force for all literature. The utilization of English and of every language enjoys the utilization of French and English and Beckett. So, they also draw our attention to the fact that Kafka is not and certainly not the only example that we can use to talk about minor literature we can also talk about Joyce about Beckett we are also are the leading modernist figures of the early twentieth century.

And, the key word here is again revolution any kind of literature which has a possibility of revolution not just in terms of the content, but in terms of the language which is being used in terms of the defiance that in this place against the existing dominant critical practices, it has the possibility it has the potential to become minor literature.

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So, what are the implications of this kind of your reading Deleuze and Guattari it may be possible to say that they enable us to recognize Kafka's social position as a marginalized author and incidentally this happens through the medium of language that he uses through a problematization of the language of his choice which he uses for his creative expression and because Kafka is identified here as a Czech Jew who wrote in German which was not a very acceptable thing which is not a very familiar thing either and here as Raman Selden leading a theorist or would put it.

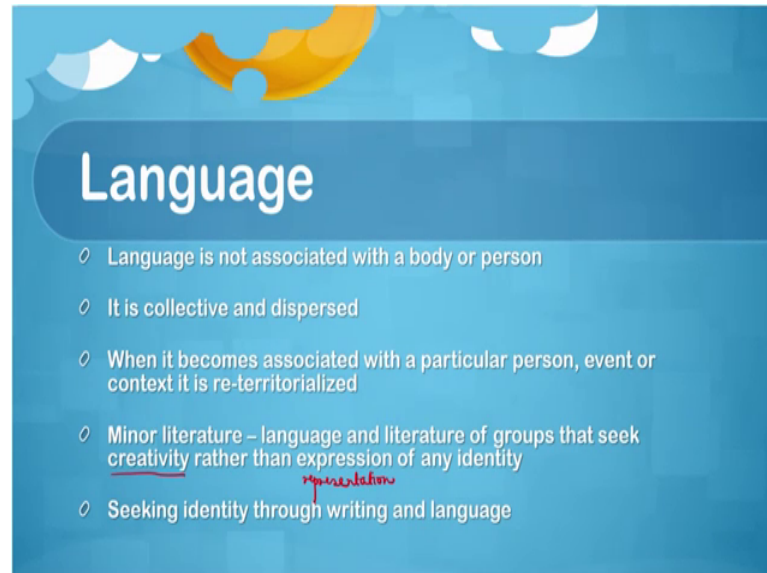
We are being introduced to a Kafka as a nonconformist innovatory and interrogative as opposed to a majoritarian literature which aims to represent a given world and to match established models.

So, here some of the key words are very important a majority of the literature vis-a-vis minor literature it is it aims to represent, but Kafka's literature or Beckett's or Joyce's literature which you can easily fall into the category of minor literature according to Deleuze and Guattari they do not propose to represent particular identities they do not propose to represent particular kinds of groups particular kinds of social fabric or particular kinds of concepts.

On the contrary they exist as nonconformist introa innovative and interrogative and they also try to be creative. They also try to move away from the existing identities rather than representing them and for the same reason when they use language in particular ways

that also becomes a revolutionary way through which they reject existing identities and existing forms of practices of writing.

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And, and here significantly we use of language as a critical tool as a demarcatory of force that also happens in a very postmodernist way and we have also seen how language plays a very significant role in the poststructuralist thinking in the postmodernist thinking, how language has ceased to be a given and how it also becomes a definite unique kind of a tool in the in the format of postmodern thinking.

So, here when Deleuze and Guattari talk about minor literature and how Kafka dissociative himself from a certain kinds of identity by a particular kind of use of language; language in that sense over here, is not associated with a body or person. On the contrary it becomes it emerges as a collective and dispersed identity and when it becomes associated with a person they also remind us when language becomes associated with particular person event or a context it is reterritorialized. So, what Kafka or Joyce or Beckett does with language is a kind of deterritorialization.

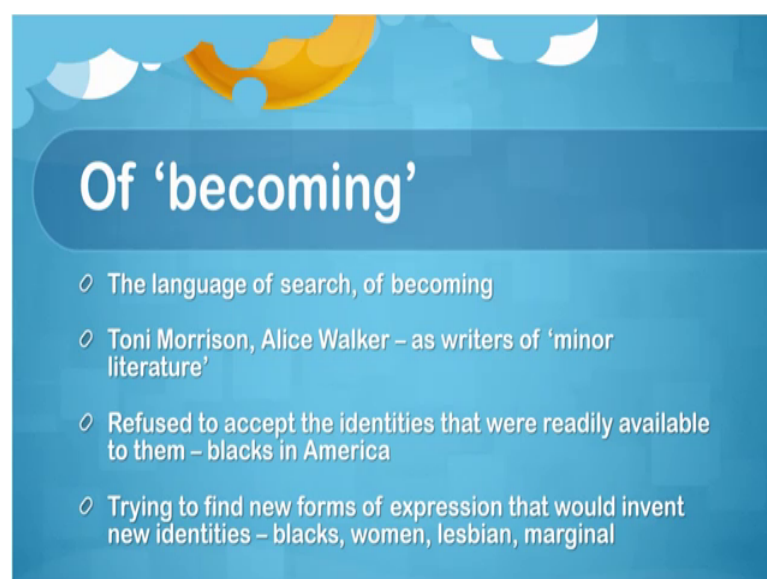
So, when language is not associated with the body, with an identity, a particular person, a kind of deterritorialization happens that is also a concept that Deleuze and Guattari discussed extensively in some of their works and in the contrary I repeat when language is again associated with a person, a particular event or with the context it is reterritorialized.

So, here the play of language it is again a very typical thing in the postmodern period display of language becomes a determinant force not just in identifying particular kinds of literature , but also it has a potential to identify how a literature becomes revolutionary, innovative or how it moves away from the dominant critical practices.

So, in that context minor literature also gets identified and defined as a kind of a language and literature of groups that seek creativity rather than expression of any identity. So, here creativity is demarcated as a very unique and distinct thing vis-à-vis expression or representation and here you also lies a revolutionary potential inherent in minor literatures and the writings as it is of Kafka Joyce and Beckett and here language also becomes a tool, a force through which one can also seek identity through the process of writing.

And, here in fact, one needs to make a distinction between the it identities which have always preexisted and the identities the new identities which need to be forged minor literatures occurred in the context of certain kinds of identities which are not given certain kind of identities which do not preexist on the contrary minor literatures exist in the context of communities of identities that also have the need to forge a new identity, forge a new sense of community and a new sense of meaning because they are also defying all kinds of constructs of the dominant societal, linguistic and ideological norms.

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Of 'becoming'

- The language of search, of becoming
- Toni Morrison, Alice Walker – as writers of 'minor literature'
- Refused to accept the identities that were readily available to them – blacks in America
- Trying to find new forms of expression that would invent new identities – blacks, women, lesbian, marginal

And, in that sense language also here focuses on the aspect of becoming rather than merely expressing or representing. So, language also becomes a language of such and this is also exemplified in the works of Toni Morrison and Alice Walker because they could also be considered as writers of minor literature. This is also a parallel that along the leading commentators of theory Promod Nayar draws extensively and builds upon it and he talks about how Toni Morrison and Alice Walker they refuse to accept the identities that were readily available to them as blacks in America.

But, on the contrary they move away from these readily available identities, these readily available subject positions and they try to find new forms of expression that would invent new identities. For example, we know the kind of things a Toni Morrison and Alice Walker engaged with they engaged with the identities of not just a blacks, but also about identities which were part of a women about a lesbians about other marginalized communities and identities.

So, in that sense the language which minor literature uses it becomes a language of becoming, the language of search, the language of inventing a language of becoming a new identity rather than expressing or representing of preexisting and already existing, identity or a position.

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Forging new identities

- Aboriginal writers in Australia and Canada
- The turn to oral traditions and storytelling formats – the search for a form that can invent new identities rather than simply accept ready-made ones
- To see 'black', 'aboriginal' or 'woman' not as a fixed identity but as a process, a series of negotiations with other identities
- Nothing proper, no standard identity, nothing pre-given

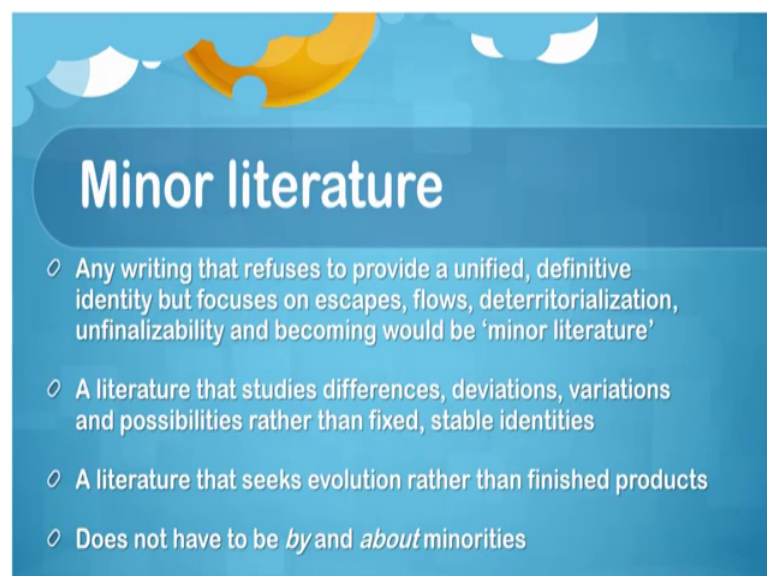
So, when we talk about forging new identities there are also other examples that come to our mind for example, the aboriginal writers in Australia and the Canada they also turn to

certain oral traditions and storytelling formats in search of a form that can invent new identities rather than simply accept or represent the readymade ones, because there is a need to look beyond the fixed categorizations, a need to look beyond access beyond the existing identities which are also which are also part of certain cultural constructs also part of certain social hierarchical systems which of been inherent in the societies.

So, it is important to see say categories it is a black, aboriginal or a woman and not as fixed identities, but as a process, a process of becoming as a series of negotiations with other identities rather than seeing them as fixed negotiable category categories.

So, here we also draw a parallel with all the discussions that we have been having about how postmodernism encourages a certain unfinalizability of meaning, how it is more open rather than closed, how it is open to the forging of new possibilities rather than to the a fixation of limiting categories and in that sense we also in that sense when we talk about minor literature it is also about reiterating the fact that there is nothing proper there is no standard identity and nothing is pre given everything is in the process of becoming and even the moment you stop this process the moment you put a brake on this process of becoming, it also ceases to be open it also ceases to engage with the possibility of forging new identities.

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Minor literature

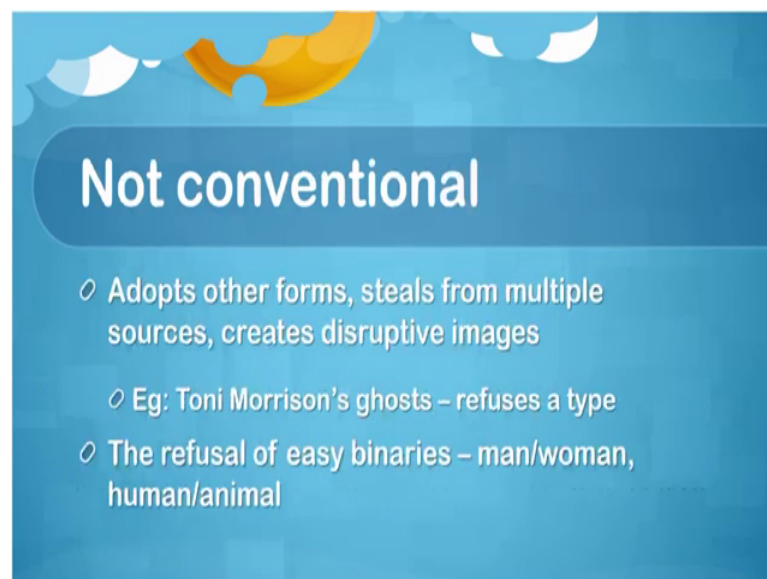
- Any writing that refuses to provide a unified, definitive identity but focuses on escapes, flows, deterritorialization, unfinalizability and becoming would be 'minor literature'
- A literature that studies differences, deviations, variations and possibilities rather than fixed, stable identities
- A literature that seeks evolution rather than finished products
- Does not have to be *by* and *about* minorities

So, to sum up minor literature is any writing that refuses to provide a unified a definitive identity on the contrary it focuses on escapes, on flows, on deterritorialization, on the

processes of unfinalizability and becoming and minor literature is also a kind of literature that studies differences deviations variations and possibilities rather than fixed stable identities and this as Deleuze and Guattari would tell us it could be it is exemplified in the works of Kafka Joyce Beckett and the Alice and minor literature is also a literature that seeks evolution rather than finished products. So, the focus on becoming rather than representation becomes all the more important.

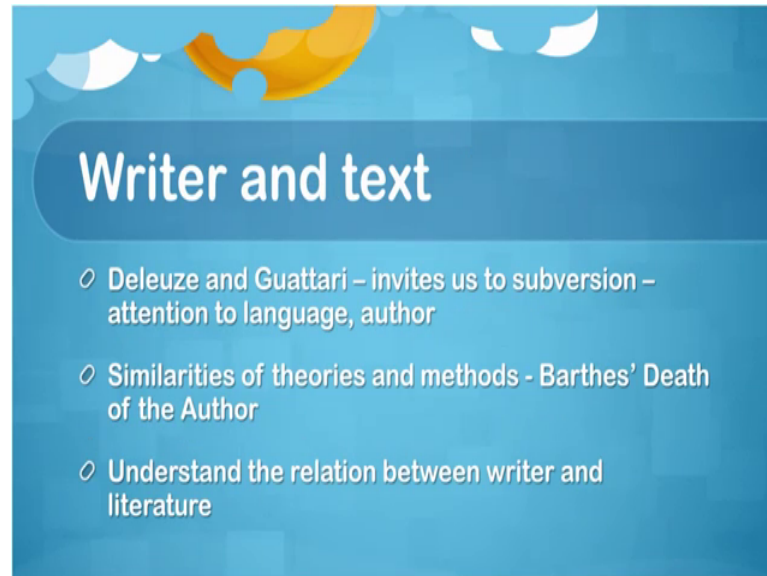
And, it is it is also important to keep in mind that minor literature is not always about minorities and it need not be and it is it need not have to be by or about minorities it is certainly minor the term needs to be understood in a very different input and that continues to be the crux of for the theory of minor literature and how it connects with the postmodern narrative techniques.

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And, also it is a move away from being conventional because it adopts other forms it steals from multiple sources it creates disruptive images again Toni Morrisons example about how in her depiction of goals she refuses to attributor type to them and minor literatures also about moving away from the conventional easy binaries of say man woman human animal or even about constant related to beauty about good and evil and this refusal is at the crux of the emergence of the possibility of minor literature.

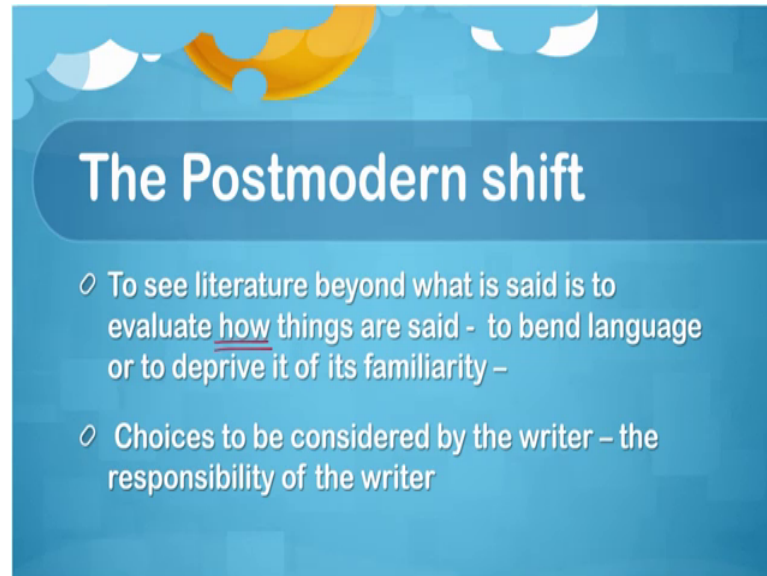
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As and when we begin to line up this lecture it is also important to reiterate the connection between writer and text which the postmodernist approach has repeatedly tried to disrupt. And Deleuze and Guattari are also inviting us to this process of subversion by paying a code to close attention to language and to author. Here and we also note a lot of similarities with that of a Barthe's Death of the Author, in terms of the theories and methods have adopted by both Barthe as well as Deleuze and Guattari.

And, Barthe's text just as Death of the Author or even Foucault's What is an Author, the way in which it helps us to understand the relation between writer and literature is further complicated, is further problematized by Deleuze and Guattari's engagement to with minor literature and how the language plays a role in subverting particular kinds of identities and particular kinds of writings.

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And, this is where we also look at the postmodern shift which is inherent in this theory of minor literature because it encourages us to see literature beyond what is said and to evaluate how things are set and also to bend language to deprive of its familiarity to move away consciously from the familiarity from the trap of familiarity that language entails and these choices Deleuze and Guattari just like Barthe does reminds us that it is also part of the choices which are to be considered by the writer because the writer also has an inherent responsibility to move away from the familiar or to deterritorialize a language in the way that Deleuze and Guattari talk about the ideas of minor literature.

So, here we come to the end of today's session maybe you also reiterate they need to talk about these existing dialogues across the postmodern writers across the postmodern theories and frameworks because they all lead us to the possibilities of innovative changes to the possibilities of newer identities, to the possibilities of moving away from the fixed, from the constructed identities and from the constructed forms of reading a text.

So, with this we wind up today's session. Thank you for listening and I look forward to seeing you in the next session.