

The Nineteenth Century Novel
Prof. Divya. A
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology – Madras

Lecture – 56
Discussion on Narrative Points of View

Hello everyone and welcome to this session. Today, we will be looking at narrative points of view in the three novels that you have discussed so far, Persuasion, A Tale of Two Cities and A Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. I shall begin with a brief introduction to what narrative points of view are. So narrative point of view, quite simply put, is the perspective the narrator uses to relate his or her story.

So it is the position that the narrator takes in his or her description of events in the narrative. So now broadly, as we all know, narrative points of view can be of three types; first person, second person and third person point of view. First person narrative point of view is where one of the characters in the novel is telling the story to the reader. So the trajectory of the story is seen by the reader through the character's eyes only.

So typically the novel, a first person narrative point of view employs the use of the first person pronoun 'I' or 'we' which is much rarer. Now this was a style that was quite common in the 19th Century and in 19th Century English Literature. Many famous novels have employed this point of view. For example, Jane Eyre by Charlotte Bronte and David Copperfield by Charles Dickens.

In Jane Eyre, Jane is a character in the novel, and she herself is narrating the story of her past and we see the story being narrated as it happened to Jane. So this is one example of how first person narrative works. One more important thing to note when it comes to a first person narrative point of view is the form of the epistolary novel, which is also very prevalent in 18th and 19th century English novel writing.

So an epistolary novel is a novel in which the narrative is created through letters written by one of the characters, especially the protagonist. Essentially, it is first person narration but is removed from the audience, that is the reader, and is instead addressed to some other character in the story itself. So it would essentially mean that the reader is some sort of a

voyeur into the events of the narrative or the story that is actually a correspondence between two other characters within the story.

One of the best examples for this would be, for an epistolary novelist, would be Samuel Richardson. He is most famous for his two epistolary novels named *Clarissa* and *Pamela*. At this point, it is important that we talk about narrative unreliability when it comes to the first person narrative style. Since the first person narrative style gives the reader a view into the story from the lens, from the eyes of the protagonist or one character, there is some degree of unreliability that comes into play here because we are looking at the story as told by the protagonist. And this means we are also subject to the biases, prejudices and inclinations of the person who is actually narrating the story. This means that first person narrative style is, in a way, more unreliable than some of the other points of view that we shall discuss shortly.

Moving on, we have the second person narrative point of view which is, as the name suggests, written from the point of view of the second person or you, the reader. So it is not a very common narrative technique. It was certainly not common back then in the 19th century, but a handful of writers in the contemporary times such as Junot Diaz use this technique quite frequently their writing, and they use this in order to create a connection between the reader and the story and bring the reader into the story, as it were.

Moving on, the third point of view and the most relevant point of view for us is the third person narrative point of view. Most works of literature even now employ this technique. Again, as the name suggests, the third person point of view is where the narrator is not a part of the actual story or its events, but is privy to or has access to all or some part of the events unfolding in the narrative.

So when the narrator is all knowing, or if the narrator knows everything from the beginning to the end of the plot of the novel, such a narrator is called the third person omniscient narrator. *A Tale of Two Cities* is one such novel that employs the third person omniscient narrative style. At this point, I would like to give you a few pointers on what third person omniscient narrative style is all about.

So the first thing about a third person omniscient style of narration is that the narrator knows the plot and where the trajectory of the plot is headed to. He or she knows the characters well

and describes them in great detail. And not only does the narrator describe the physical appearances of the characters, but the narrator also gives the audience or the readers a sneak peek into their consciousness as well.

Thirdly, there is a lot of objectivity and control that is wielded by this third person omniscient narrator, evidently because the narrator is all-knowing. And fourthly, the narrator tries to erase himself or herself from the narrative so that the story is presented in the most unbiased and very reliable manner as possible. So these are a few pointers about the third person omniscient style of narration.

But there is a different style of third person narrative point of view as well, which is called the third person limited style of narration. This is when the narrator sticks to one character in the plot, and we see the story unfold through the eyes of that one character, and this is why this point of view is called the third person limited point of view. And the best example for this narrative style is *Persuasion* by Jane Austen.

I shall now talk about *Persuasion* and narrative style in this novel in greater detail. So as has already been said, we have firstly, a third person narrator who is limited to Anne Elliot, and sticks to describing the story as Anne sees it. So when Anne is in Kellynch, we also, we the readers, we also see what happens in Kellynch. When Anne is at Bath, we see what happens in Bath and when Anne is at Lyme, we see what happens in Lyme.

Other events that happen outside the purview of Anne Elliot are not disclosed, are not revealed to the reader, but if there is something that is very crucial to the plot that needs to be made knowledgeable to the reader, they are very interestingly made known to the reader through letters, as in the case of Mary's letter to Anne Elliot on Louisa's engagement to Captain Benwick.

So because now Anne also knows of Louisa's engagement, so does the reader know of her engagement to Benwick. Another way in which some crucial plot details are made known to the reader despite using the limited narrative style is through Anne overhearing conversations. So the protagonist Anne Elliot, she overhears this conversation between Wentworth and Louisa about Henrietta and her slightly vacillating love for Charles Hayter.

And we get to know of this because Anne overhears this conversation between Wentworth and Louisa, but not through a third person omniscient narrator. What is interesting here, however, is that the narrator not only has access to what Anne sees, but also what she thinks. So we get to know of Anne's prejudices and biases and we get a sneak peek into her consciousness.

So this is a very unique kind of technique that Austen is employing in this novel, which is something called free indirect discourse. So this allows Austen to sort of express the excitement and emotions of the protagonist without explicitly declaring it as the narrator. Thus, the lines between the narrator and the protagonist are sort of blurred because Austen flits between the consciousness of the narrator and Anne Elliot at different points of the novel.

One more interesting point to note with regard to *Persuasion* is that it has a distinct authorial voice. Even though the third person, this is third person narrative style, and technically the narrator is the invisible overseer of the events happening in the story, *Persuasion's* narrator has a very distinct authorial voice, that intrudes time and again giving her own comments and value judgments and opinions whenever the story permits.

So the narrator's treatment of Richard Musgrove or the comment on how young people if they take it into the heads to marry each other, nothing is going to stop them from marrying each other. These kinds of comments that we see made by the narrator is evidence for the distinct authorial voice that makes an appearance in this novel *Persuasion*. One must not however conflate the narrator's view with the author's view as such.

So but in the case of *Persuasion*, it may be the case that Austen was trying to articulate or voice her opinions regarding Victorian Society or social institution such as marriage through this tool of the narrator. And in this way she is trying to publicize her own views, but without having to face the consequences that she would have faced, had she articulated it directly people around her in her society. That is all I have to talk about *Persuasion* and the narrative point of view in *Persuasion*. Now Samantha will talk about narrative points of view in *A Tale of Two Cities*.

Hello, I will be talking about the narrative points of view in the novel *A Tale of Two Cities*. So the narrator in *A Tale of Two Cities* is a third person omniscient narrator, and is not attached to the consciousness of any particular character, constantly moving from character such as Darnay to Lorry to Carton, etc.

And as in the narrator initially starts off the novel following the consciousness or the footsteps of Lorry, and towards the end of the novel, we are in fact inside the consciousness of Sydney Carton. While the novel revolves around the patriarch Dr. Manette, we see that very little narrative space is attributed to him.

And what we see of him, or we hear of him, or what we experience as he is feeling is through the consciousness of other characters such as Lorry or Darnay. This could be seen as symbolic of the powerlessness that is attributed to Dr. Manette in larger part of the novel. Contrastingly, we have Lucie who is a major power wielding character in the sense that she always tends to and takes care of the other characters such as Dr. Manette or Sydney Carton.

But in spite of the power she wields in such a respect, even she is not given enough, she is not given a great amount of narrative space in the novel. And this is true of the other female characters in *A Tale of Two Cities* also, with relatively larger narrative space being given to Madame Defarge. Hence, it is possible to look at the novel, hence it is possible to look at the narration in the novel through such gendered lens.

And the third person omniscient narrator shifts to a first person narrator and enters the consciousness of Sydney Carton as a novel draws to a close, in the sense that the narrator says I see this happening or I see that happening, as if Carton himself is saying this, and there is probably an interesting reason as to why Dickens chose Carton's character while stepping into the shoes of a first person narrator.

Dickens acted in a play by Wilkie Collins called *Frozen Deep*, and he was inspired by the character he played in the *Frozen Deep*, and he fashioned the character of Sydney Carton along those lines while writing the novel *A Tale of Two Cities*. So Dickens probably had a personal attachment to the character Sydney Carton, and this could be a possible reason as to why he chose the character of Sydney Carton while stepping into the shoes of first person narrator.

The third person narrator is also a very opinionated narrator, and throughout the novel we get snippets of the narrator's point of view on the revolution and class related exploitation in France. As well as, we also get comical snippets about characters such as Mrs. Stryver. This, I feel, increases the familiarity of the reader with the narrator and draws the reader more into the novel.

Another way in which the reader is drawn into the novel is by the use of first person and present tense in the scene where Lorry and party is fleeing France. The narrator steps into the shoes of a first person narrator and we see the narrator as being one among the party in the carriage. And while narrating, the narrator uses the pronoun 'us', asking questions whether anybody is following us.

He is no longer third person, and the narrator also uses present tense in this instance. This first person narrator thus draws in the reader. The reader also suddenly becomes very attentive because up until then, we see a third person narrator, and thus the tension and apprehension of the reader, I feel is heightened. And the narrator, who was up until then outside of the novel in terms of narrative voice enters it, and becomes one among the party, and the narrator himself experiences the fears and apprehensions of the party.

Hence, it is as if the third person omniscient narrator is no longer omniscient, and has no idea of what is about to happen and is as clueless as the readers and the characters in the novel, which helps, I feel, which helps in a great extent in heightening the apprehension of the reader.

It is also to be noted that letters constitutes a good part of the narrative space in A Tale of Two Cities and a lot of crucial information is revealed through letters. The narrator uses previously written, thought to be lost letters or buried secrets to reveal major plot line such as Dr. Manette's prison life and the reasons for the same. Also because the narrative is third person omniscient, we see simultaneous narration in terms of space.

For example, we simultaneously see Carton's experience in the prison while he is fooling everybody by donning the role of Charles Darnay, and at the same time we also see what Lorry and party is going through. The narrator is changing from third person to first person

and he is also changing from one space to another space simultaneously, and this is possible because the narrator is a third person omniscient narrator.

We see very little of this in novels such as *Persuasion*, where the narrator follows the footsteps of Anne and we see little beyond the purview of Anne. With this I have come to the end of my discussion on narrative voice in *A Tale of Two Cities*. Now Swati will talk about the narrative voice in the third novel.

I will be talking about narrative points of view in *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. In this novella, the story develops through Mr. Utterson's point of view, through what he sees and experiences. He plays the detective, and tries to uncover the mystery surrounding his friend Dr. Jekyll. Like *Persuasion*, the narrator here is a third person limited narrator and only knows what Utterson knows. The story follows Utterson and events are narrated as Utterson sees them, except in the last two chapters which are letters written by Dr. Lanyon and Dr. Jekyll.

The audience therefore sees the story through Utterson's eyes, and the reader only knows what Utterson knows, and the reader finds out about events as Utterson finds out about them. This helps create the suspense and mystery in the novella. And because we see the story through Utterson, the first chapter tries to establish him as a trustworthy character and ensures that the reader is well acquainted with him.

The use of a third person narrator here provides us with more information than Utterson as a first person narrator would have presented. It is important to establish Utterson as a reliable character because only then will the reader understand the horror of the story and the discovery about Dr. Jekyll. Throughout the novella, Utterson represents the reader, and this is especially true in the last chapters which are Jekyll and Lanyon's narrative.

It is significant to note here that we never see Utterson's point of view. We never find out about his reaction to the letters or about the events that follow that final reveal. This is important because we can argue that the reader's reaction reflects Utterson's reaction, and therefore he is the lens through which of the reader experiences the story. With that, we have come to an end to this discussion on narrative points of view. I will begin with *Persuasion*.

(Refer Slide Time: 20:05)

Persuasion

Free
Indirect
Discourse

- Narrative point of view seemed to shift
- Sir Walter, Elizabeth Elliot, Lady Russell, Mr Shepherd
- Anne's point of view is gradually arrived at

The first thing that we need to know about the narrative point of view in this novel is that it is free indirect discourse. What do we mean by free indirect discourse? We have a third person narrator, but we also have this third person narrator in the minds of certain characters so that it becomes difficult for us to distinguish the narrator's point of view and the character's point of view. The two seem to be blended together in the statements that we see in the novel.

I will give you some examples, but let me take this slowly one by one. So at the beginning of Persuasion, especially the beginning, say from first, second and third chapters, the narrative point of view seem to shift. It shifts from one character to another. It begins, the third person narrative begins, seems to begin in the minds of Sir Walter Elliot and then it moves on the Elizabeth Elliot's point of view, right?

And then Lady Russell, her views on how this family should retrench, and then it moves on to Mr. Shepherd's viewpoint as well. So we see a lot of shifting consciousness at the beginning of Persuasion, and then gradually we see the narrative coming to settle upon Anne. So she is gradually arrived at. And then, the narrator seems to stick to her consciousness for the majority of the novel, though there are pockets of consciousness of others that we see now and then.

So we need to be nuanced in our understanding of the kind of narrative point of view that we see in Persuasion. We do have free indirect discourse, we do have a third person narrative which can be limited, but we do have other viewpoints.

(Refer Slide Time: 21:50)

So we can also see, further examples are there on the slide for you. “Sir Walter was not very wise. Sir Walter must ever have the precedence.” So we have the narrator looking at the world through Sir Walter’s eyes here, right? So we have the narrator judging as well as offering the lens of Sir Walter at this moment in the novel. And I have another example for you here, “and no sooner had such an end been reached,” the end about that tenancy agreement, “than Anne left the room. A few months more, and he, perhaps, may be walking here.” So who is thinking these thoughts? That is the big question. Is it Anne who is thinking these thoughts, or is it the narrator who is speculating about the presence of Wentworth.

(Refer Slide Time: 23:44)

Persuasion

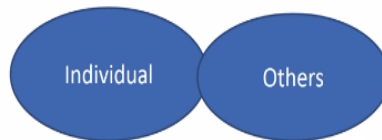
- His profession qualified him, his disposition led him, to talk; and 'That was in the year six; 'That happened before I went to sea in the year six; occurred in the course of the first evening they spent together: and though his voice did not falter, and though she had no reason to suppose his eye wandering towards her while he spoke, Anne felt the utter impossibility, from her knowledge of his mind, that he could be unvisited by remembrance any more than herself. There must be the same immediate association of thought, though she was very far from conceiving it to be of equal pain.

And then we have another example that I would offer as homework for you, you can look at this chunk of text and see where does the narrator’s point of view begin, where does it end, and where does Anne’s point of view begin. So it can be a challenging exercise to work with.

(Refer Slide Time: 24:03)

Persuasion

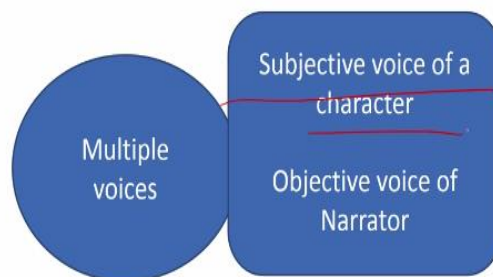
- Shifting points of view
- Anne's point of view



So to wrap up, Persuasion has shifting points of view especially at the beginning, and gradually we settle on Anne's consciousness. So we do have an individual's perspective, that is what third person limited does, right? Few individuals are chosen for attention, but we also have other viewpoints. So we have a balancing act being performed by the narrator, by the author.

(Refer Slide Time: 24:31)

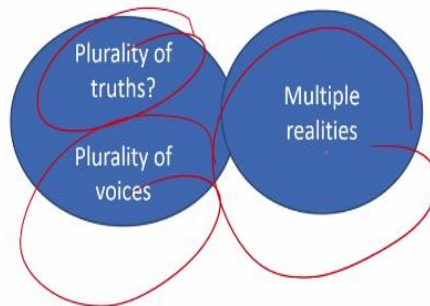
Persuasion



So we do have multiple voices, we do not just have a subjective voice of a character such as Anne, even though that seems to dominate the second half of the novel. We also have the objective voice of the narrator making comments about romance and success in romance and courtship and other things towards the close of it, but we do always have multiple voices and that is very significant.

(Refer Slide Time: 24:54)

Persuasion



Why is it significant? Multiple voices mean plurality of truth, plurality of voices, and plurality of realities. So there is just not one reality, just not one truth, truths are multiple.

(Refer Slide Time: 25:09)

Persuasion

- Evaluating others' point of view
- "Informed judgments"
- Managing one's social Environment

So why do we have those? Because only when we have multiple voices we can evaluate others' point of view, and we can make informed judgments. And why do we need to make informed judgments? Because that is how we negotiate or manage our social environment and that is what Anne does in Persuasion. She kind of negotiates through several opinions on what is domestic happiness and finally arrives at one particular kind of happiness with Wentworth, right?

(Refer Slide Time: 25:38)

A Tale of Two Cities

- Book and the Author
- "throughout its execution, it has had complete possession of me"
- "I have so far verified what is done and suffered in these pages, as that I have certainly done and suffered it all myself."

Now, a brief note on A Tale of Two Cities, this is a novel where the author has a close relationship with the book, and Samantha made a mention of the reference to the Frozen Deep in which Dickens also acted as one of the central characters, right? So he has a close association with this particular history that he is dwelling on, which is the French revolution, and he did a lot of research.

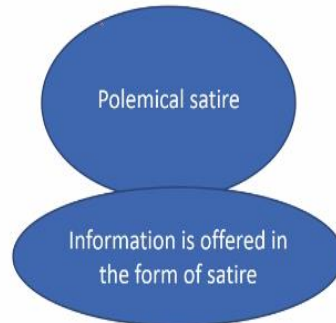
And he also read up quite intensely Carlyle's the French Revolution, and in the introduction to this novel Dickens says that "throughout its execution, it has had complete possession of me." Throughout its writing, throughout my production of it, I have been completely possessed by the story. And he says that I have so far verified what is done and suffered in these pages. He seems to enact, you know, the roles of certain characters in these novels, as that I have certainly done and suffered it all myself.

It feels as if Dickens has gone through that particular period, turbulent period of history. So there is a close association between the text and the author here.

(Refer Slide Time: 26:47)

A Tale of Two Cities

- Third person omniscient narrator
- Historical
- Satirical



And as the TAs have mentioned, this is third person omniscient narrator, and the tone is, you know, historical obviously, but is also very satirical. There is a lot of satire, polemical satire. So even if Dickens is offering information, he is informing this in a very dry satirical manner, right? So we need to make a note of that.

(Refer Slide Time: 27:11)

A Tale of Two Cities

- "Monsieur Defarge ... feigned not to notice the two strangers" (1.5)
 - "among a quantity of books and papers, littered out for the purpose"
 - Narrator is aware of the thought process of the character
-

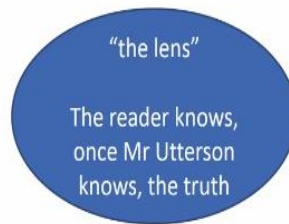
And let me offer some examples about the knowledge of the narrator. For instance, "Monsieur Defarge feigned not to notice the two strangers", feigned, Defarge pretends not to notice. Which means the narrator knows that Defarge is pretending, so he is inside the mind of Defarge. And then there is another reference about "a quantity of books and papers, littered out for the purpose" and this is Stryver littering out his table of papers so that Lorry will come in and think that he is busy with business and not worried about Lucy's, you know,

decision. So all this pretence is seen through by the narrator here, and which is very important. So the thought process of the characters is known by this omniscient narrator.

(Refer Slide Time: 28:00)

R.L.Stevenson *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*

- Third person narrative
- Point of view of Mr Utterson, the lawyer

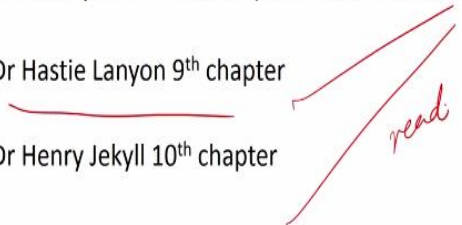


Now let us quickly look at R.L. Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. We do have a third person narrator, and this narrator, third person narrator, sticks for the greater part of the novel with this figure Mr. Utterson who is the lawyer. So Mr. Utterson is the lens as Swati pointed out. The readers kind of identify with, trust, you know, take the hand of Mr. Utterson as he takes them through this kind of mystery story that we have in this particular novella.

And the reader knows once Mr. Utterson knows the truth of the story. So as soon as he knows we will know, until then we do not know, which is why there is a detective air to this story as well.

(Refer Slide Time: 28:44)

The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde

- An third-person narrator (focused on Utterson) 8 chapters
 - Dr Hastie Lanyon 9th chapter
 - Dr Henry Jekyll 10th chapter
- 

So as I said, the first eight chapters have a third person narrator focused on Utterson's consciousness. We do get a glimpse of the worries, anxieties of this lawyer and he is extremely worried that his friend is being blackmailed by Mr. Hyde and he has nightmares about that. So in that moment, we do get a very intense glimpse into his thought process, but by the ninth chapter, we have the narrative of Hastie Lanyon. It is a first person narrative, it is a letter that he writes and that is finally read out by Utterson quite late into the novel.

And finally, we have the letter of Dr. Henry Jekyll in the tenth chapter, the final chapter, and that is also read by Utterson. So these letters are read after these characters are dead and gone, and as the TAs have pointed out, the first person narrative kind of creates as immediacy and intimacy with the reader and the reveal that they make has a big blow on the reader as well as on the reader's outside of the pages of these novellas.

I hope that gives you a sense of the various points of view employed in these texts in the 19th

c
e
n
t
u
r
y
.

T
h
a
n