

Contemporary Literatures
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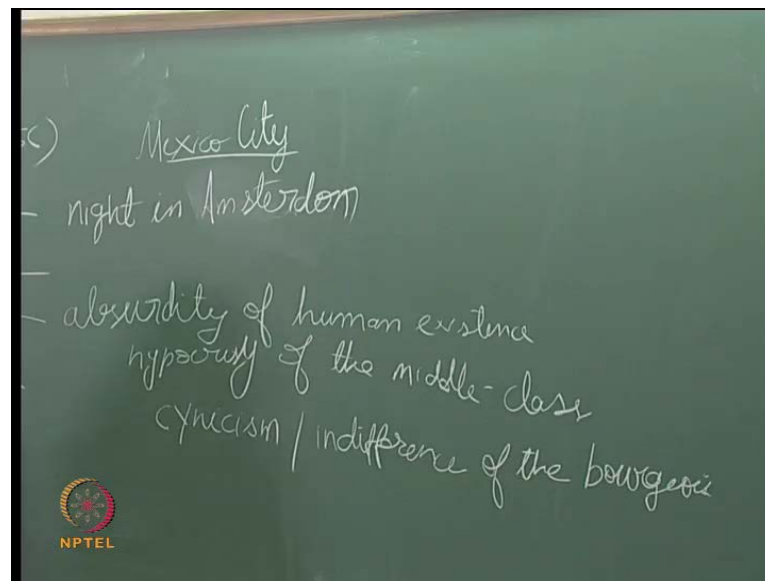
Module No. # 01

Lecture No. # 20

Albert Camus - The Fall Contd..

Good morning. We will continue with Albert Camus's *The Fall* novella, written in 1956. Four things that we must consider, the setting, the characters, the theme, the technique. Setting is a cold winter night in Amsterdam. The characters are having a conversation; first, in a bar, which is called México City in Amsterdam.

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The characters, Jean-Baptiste Clemence, he is the speaker; there is an unidentifiable, silent interlocutor, a listener; the theme is the absurdity of human existence; the hypocrisy of the middle class; the cynicism and indifference of the bourgeois; how they devote, how the middle class devotes its, their lives, to the pursuits of sensual pleasures and remain unconcerned with the larger issues of life, the larger themes of life. Their

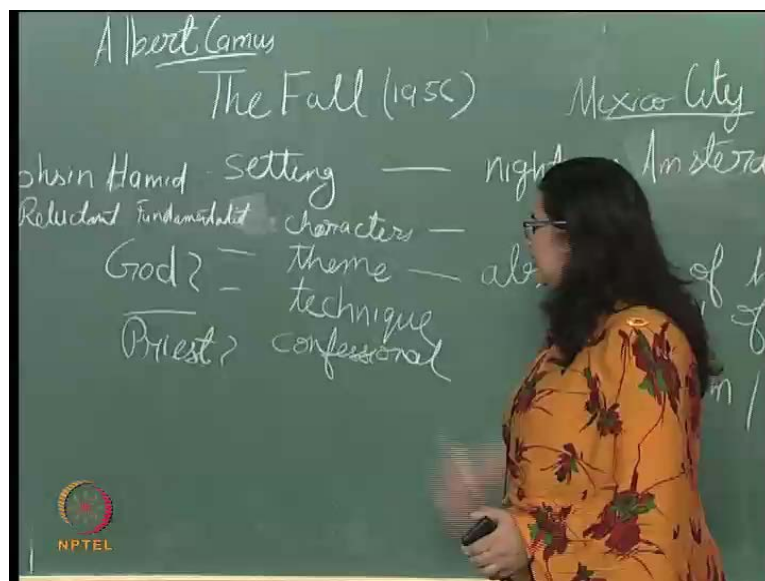
absolute refusal to except responsibilities, for the horrors of the holocaust, and the atrocities caused by the Nazis.

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So, their absolute refusal to accept responsibility, their living in denial, that is, those are the major concerns of The Fall. The technique, as we were talking is confessional; you have one speaker, going on talking about his life, his experience, his concerns, his social concerns, his moral concerns and you have a silent listener.

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Many people have believed that, just conjured that, well, silent listener could as well be God, God himself; but, there is a question mark. Is he talking to God? Is he talking to a priest, during his confession? So, this technique, which is an improvement on the famous dramatic monologue, which was perfected by the Victorian poets likes Robert Browning and Tennyson. So, this is, as we were just talking about it, it just goes a step further from that technique. And, it has been used by several writers down the, over the, over the years. One important novelist is Mohsin Hamid, an Asian-American novelist, settled in New York, who wrote his *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, in almost the same manner, which is a confessional tone; adapting a confessional tone, where there is a silent listener, who just goes on listening to the speaker; the speaker goes on and on, about the life of a, a Muslim, in the present day New York, in present day America, especially, after the nine eleven tragedy. So, that is also written in the same, following the same technique, as *The Falls*.

We will continue, page 12. Holland is a dream, a dream of golden smoke; smokier by day, more gilded by night; and night and day, the dream is peopled with Lohengrins like these, dreamily riding their black bicycles, with high handle bars; funeral swans constantly drifting throughout the whole country; around the seas, along the canals, their heads in the copper colored clouds; they dream; they ride in circles; they pray, sleep-walking in the fogs gilded incense; they have ceased to be here; they have gone thousands of miles away. So, the essential indifference of the middle class Europeans, towards the atrocities of the times, of their times. So, they live like characters from a Wagnerian opera, that is the reference to Lohengrins; it is almost as if, they are living a life of opera.

The reality outside, does not matter to them; they live, as if they live in a, in a state of dream; in a state of denial, surrounded by the sensual pleasures, which Camus compares with, almost like a existing in hell; it is all smoke and gold. But I am letting myself go; I am pleading a case, forgive me; forgive me; have it vocation; also the desire to make you fully understand the city, and the heart of things; we are at the heart of things here; have you noticed that, Amsterdam's concentric canals resemble the circles of hell; this is a reference to Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, where he describes hell, as, as a concentric of circles. The middle class hell; of course, peopled with bad dreams; when one comes from the outside, as one gradually goes through the, those circles, life and hence, its crimes,

becomes denser, darker; and here we are, in the last circle, the circle of, you know that; by heaven, you become harder to classify; there is a response.

But we, the readers, are not told what that response is. It is almost like, whatever the, **the** listener says, it, it is muted for us; it is only for the ears of the speaker, Jean-Baptiste Clamence; we as, **as** readers, we are not privy to this conversation. That means, to, **to** the exchange, whatever comes from the speaker, the listener, we do not get to hear that. Ah, you know that, by heaven, sorry, by heaven, you have become harder to classify, but you understand that, why I can say that, to the center of things is here, although we stand at the tip of the continent. A sensitive man grasps such oddities; in any case, the newspaper readers and the fornicators can go farther; they come from the four corners of Europe and stop facing the England sea, on the drab strength; they listen to the foghorns, vainly try to make out the silhouettes of boats in the fog, then, turn back over the canals and go home through the rain, chilled to the bone, they come and ask, in on all languages for gin, at México city; that is where I wait for them.

So, this is interesting; these people, who come from all over Europe, they, **they** are cold; chilled to the bone; not just physically cold, but, emotionally, spiritually cold, as well; and all they do is, live a life of dreadful monotony, a life of denial, **ok**. A life, with very little, or absolutely no concern for others; and, that is where the writer, that is where the speaker, waits for them; till tomorrow then, (()) compatriot; that my dear fellow traveler; no, you will easily find your way now. I will leave you near this bridge; I never cross a bridge at night; it is because of a vow; suppose, after all, that someone should jump in the water; one of two things, either you follow suite, to fish him out, and in cold weather, that is taking a great risk; or you forsake him there, and to suppress a dive, sometimes, leaves one strangely aching; good night; what, those ladies behind those windows, dream monsieur, cheap dream; a trip to the indies; those persons perfume themselves with spices; you go in, they draw the curtains and the navigation begins; the Gods come down on to the naked bodies and the islands are set adrift; lost souls, crowned with the tousled hair of palm trees in the wind; try it; and, that is how the first chapter ends; very teasingly, what if somebody decides to end their lives, by jumping down the bridge into the river.

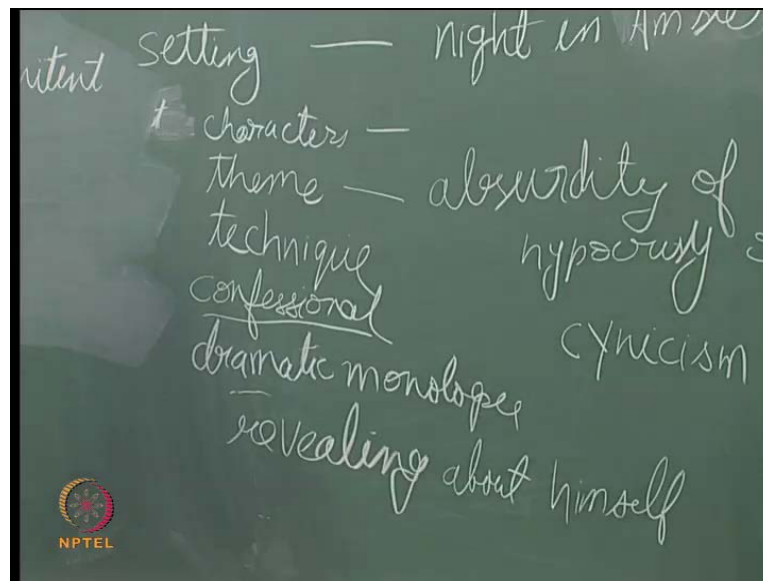
You are left only with two options; either you have to jump in the cold water, to rescue them, or just walk away; both are not very comfortable; you see, when you jump in the

cold water, you inconvenience yourself; if you do not jump, and then, you are burdened with some sort of guilt. And, the narrator, obviously, does not want to be saddled with either of the two choices. This is again a very existentialist point of view, although, Camus always denied being an existentialist, in the conventional sense, in the Sartrean sense; but many people, regard him as one of the key philosophers of the existentialist movement of the philosophy.

We will continue with the second chapter. What is a judge penitent? Now, this is a very interesting, a judge; he calls himself, a judge-penitent. You know what a judge is; a judge is someone, who judges others; conventionally speaking, traditionally speaking; you have a court of law, where a judge decides; he presides over cases, and gives his verdict, **ok**. So, a judge is somebody, who is appointed to pass on judgment, on somebody. Penitent, however, is somebody who has sinned, who has done some wrong. So, judge, that is his identity; judge hyphen penitent. So, he does not have a singular, or a unique identity; he is a combination of the two; he is a, he is a judge, as well as a penitent; he has sinned, as well as judged others for sinning; I intrigued you with that little matter; now, what is judge-penitent and the listener, finds it, finds it very interesting; very intriguing.

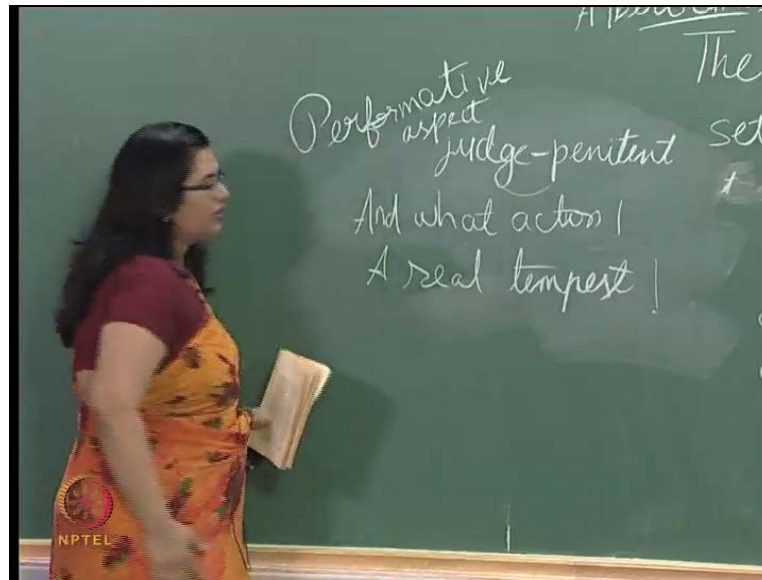
I meant no harm by it, believe me, and I can explain myself more clearly; in a manner of speaking, it is really one of my official duties; but first, I must set-forth, a certain number of facts, that will help you to understand my story. A few years ago, I was a lawyer in Paris. So, gradually, as we were talking about the theme, sorry, the technique, confessional, dramatic monologue; gradually, you find the speaker, revealing about himself; a self revelation is at the core of any dramatic monologue.

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So, he was a lawyer in Paris, and indeed, a rather well known lawyer. So, he was a very successful lawyer. Of course, I did not tell you my real name; I used to specialize in noble cases; the widow and orphan, as the saying goes; I do not know why, because there are widows who cheat, and orphans who are quite savage; yet, it was enough for me to sniff, the slightest scent of victim, on a defendant, for me to swing into action; and, what action; a real tempest; my heart was on my sleeve. You really might have thought, that justice slept with me every night; I am sure, you would have admired the accuracy of my tone, the appropriateness of my emotion, the persuasion and warmth, the restrained indignation of my speeches, before the court. Nature has favored me as to my physique, and the noble attitude comes effortlessly; furthermore, I was buoyed up by two sincere feelings; the satisfaction of being on the right side of the bar, and an instinctive scorn for judges, in general; that scorn, after all, was not, perhaps, so instinctive; I know now, that it had its reasons; but seen from the outside, it appears to be more like a passion.

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Now, consider the way he describes himself; and, what action, look at the language, and, what action; a real tempest; as a lawyer, he was able to raise quite a storm, and he was able to perform. So, there is, this is also a very intriguing commentary on the performative aspect of human life, of any profession. We are all performers; nature has bestowed upon him, many bounties; for example, he says, he has, he was, he was blessed with a good physique; he had a very persuasive tone. He could use a persuasive tone; he had a grand demeanor; he was, overall, an extremely impressive personality; and, he used it to the hilt; as a lawyer, he could perform well, to perfection, inside a court; and, that is how he became popular and successful. So, it is also, the innate duplicity, the innate mendacity of human character, that Camus is talking about; we all put on a mask; we all perform, all the time.

I could not understand, however, how a man, could set himself up, to perform such a surprising function; I accepted the fact because I saw it, but rather, as I accepted locusts. This is another biblical allusion, acceptance of locusts around us; with this difference that, the invasions of those **orthoptera** never brought me **a sew**, whereas, I earned my living by carry on, carrying on dialogues with people I scorned. So, he hated judges; that is what he says; but still, he, **he** treats them like locusts, pests; but still he carry, he made his living; a very successful, very impressive living, by conversing, by carrying on dialogue, with people he hated. But after all, I was on the right side; that was enough to assure my piece of conscience; the feeling of the law, the satisfaction of being right, the

joy of self esteem, (()) are powerful incentives, to keep up, keep us upright, or make us move forward; on the other hand, if you deprive men of them, you transform them into dogs, frothing with rage.

How many crimes committed, merely because, their authors could not endure being wrong; I once knew a businessman, who had a perfect wife, admired by all; and yet, he deceived her; that man was literally enraged, to be in the wrong, to be cut off from receiving, or granting himself a certificate of virtue. The more virtues his wife displayed, the more vexed he became; eventually, living in the wrong, became unbearable to him. What do you think he did then? He gave up deceiving her? Not at all; he killed her. That is how, I came to have dealing with him. So, this is an exploration of the, you know, distorted human psychic. One always resents people, who are more virtuous than they are; and this man, has a wife, who accepted her husband's faults, his indiscretions, his adulteries, and all, with a smile; she never questioned him, and he hated her all the more for that; and, what did he do, he ends up murdering her, and the case, comes to Jean-Batiste Clamence.

My situation was more enviable; not only did I run a no risk of joining the criminal camp, in particular, I had no chance of killing my wife, being a bachelor; but, I even took up their defense, on the sole condition that, they should be noble murders; just as others are noble savages, the very manner in which I conducted that defense, gave me great satisfaction. So, that is how, he defended the accused people; that is, this was a crime of passion; those were, those murders happened, or were done, because, the murderer was in, you know, it is crime of passion; in a fit of some kind of righteous rage, he killed those people; otherwise, at heart, he is a noble person, and that became his defense. I was truly above reproach, in my professional life. So, he was extremely self satisfied, personally, as well as professionally; I never accepted a bribe, as it goes without saying, nor again, did I ever stoop to any shady proceedings; and this is even rarer, I never deigned to flatter any journalist, to get him on my side, nor any civil servant, whose friendship might be useful to me; I even had the luck to see the Legion of Honor offered to me, two or three times, and, to be able to refuse it, with a discreet dignity.

See, people usually remember, those who refuse great honors; people, if someone refuses Nobel Prize, or some, any other award of excellence, they are more remembered, than people, who actually receive the prize, the much coveted prize. So, that is a, in refusal

also, what he is trying to be, is to becoming more significant, more visible. So, there is an inner contradiction in the character of John Paul, Jean-Batiste Clamence; and, that is what Camus is intrigued about; the hypocrisy of human nature, refusing an award, so that, they become more popular; in which I found my true reward; finally, I never charge the poor and never boasted of it. But, you can already imagine my satisfaction; I enjoyed my own nature to the fullest, and we all know that, therein lies happiness; although, to soothe one another mutually, we occasionally pretend to condemn such joys, a selfishness; at least, I enjoyed that part of my nature, which reacted so appropriately, to the widow and the orphan, that eventually, through exercise, it came to dominate my whole life; his whole life is a lie.

That is what, we have to understand. Why he did, why he performed, all this acts of charity, saving the, helping the widows and the orphans; not because he actually cared about them; because, he wants to create an impression that, he is a very good person, a very selfless person; but was he? **He**, Camus tells us that, actually, Jean-Baptiste Clamence is an example of a smug, hypocritical middle class, which has no compassion for the downtrodden; but why they want to help, is in order to earn their gratitude, to earn the gratitude of those, they claim to help, **ok**. So, in a way, they project themselves as the ultimate in nobility, in sacrifice, in charity; but they are not what they pretend to be. So, it is an attack on the middle class hypocrisy and mendacity.

For instance, I love to help blind people cross streets; now, this is another example of, trying to come across, as a selfless human being, a, **a** person with great social responsibility; from as far away as I could see a cane hesitating on the edge of a pavement; a typical scenario of a blind man, trying to cross a road; I would rush forward, sometimes, only a second ahead of another charitable hand, already outstretched, snatch the blind person from any solicitude, but mine, and lead him gently, but firmly, over the pedestrian crossing, amidst the hazards of the traffic, towards the quiet haven, of the other pavement, where we would separate with a mutual emotion. In the same way, I always enjoy telling people, the way in the street, giving a light, lending her hand with heavy barrows, pushing a stranded car, buying a paper from the salvation army girl, or flowers from the old woman peddler, though I knew, she stole them from the Montparnasse cemetery; I also like, and this is harder to say, I like to give alms; a very Christian friend of mine admitted that, one's initial feeling of seeing a beggar approach

one's house is unpleasant; well, with me, it was worst; I used to exult; but, let us say no more about it.

So, all the traditional acts of generosity, and charity, he would love to, he would love to do; he would love to participate in the buying a newspaper, from an old, from a young child; buying flowers from an old woman; he does not really need flowers, but he would, you know, claim to help the old lady and bought the flowers from her; giving alms to the beggars, helping people across the street, giving them a hand, while pushing, while, with heavy barrows, trying to help people in pushing their stranded cars; all these acts of generosity, all these acts of charity, towards fellow human beings, they were performed, not out of any inner feeling of goodness, but, in order to elicit gratitude, from people and this, according to Camus, is a very inauthentic characteristic.

Lets us speak, rather, of my courtesy; it was famous, and yet beyond question. So, he is a good performer; that is what he has been telling us, from the beginning; he performs well, before the, before the judge; he performs well before strangers; all kinds of people can come and approach him, and ask for favors and he will do that; and, it, **it** would make him feel, extremely important. And then, his courtesy, his famous courtesy; it was famous, and yet, beyond question; indeed, good manners provided me with great delights; if I had the luck, on certain mornings, to give up my seat in the bus, or the underground, to someone who, obviously, deserved it; to pick up some object, an old lady had dropped, and return it to her with a smile, I knew well, or merely to forfeit my taxi to someone in a greater hurry than I; it was a red letter day.

I even rejoiced, I must admit, on those days, when, because the public transport was on a strike, I had a chance to load into my car, at the bus stops, some of the unfortunate fellow citizens, unable to get home; so, small acts of charity, small acts of kindness, he would do, and it would make him feel extremely good about himself; it would make him feel morally superior, to other people. Giving my, giving up my seat in the theater, to allow a couple to sit together; lifting a girls' suitcases on to the rack, in a train, these were all deeds I performed, more often than others, because, I paid more attention to the opportunities, and was better able to relish the pleasures they gave. So, this inborn, this innate hypocrisy, which is common to all; this is not just John Paul, Jean-Baptiste Clamence that is being talked about; it is also the people of our society.

They, most of us, would indulge, in such kind gestures of kindness; but when it comes to addressing the larger concerns, we are silent; and, that is what bothers Camus; it is not, helping a girl in lifting her suitcase, or helping a blind man cross a street; it is also how you, how well you are connected to people, and what lacks in Jean-Baptiste Clamence's character is, his inability to actually, inability to get connected to people; that is what is lacking in his character ; we will continue, thank you.