

**Narrative Mode and Fiction**  
**Prof. Sarbani Banerjee**  
**Department of Humanities and Social Sciences**  
**Indian Institute of Technology - Roorkee**

**Lecture - 26**  
**Features of the Novel - V**

Good morning and welcome back to the lecture series on narrative mode and fiction. So, we are discussing features of the novel and we are talking about the modern novel and this criticism we are going to talk about fantasy.

**(Refer Slide Time: 00:43)**

### Modern Novel and Criticism

- The essence of the modern novelist lies in not succeeding to achieve what they attempt – “trying to lay an egg and being told you have produced a paraboloid— more **curious than gratifying**” (at times at the cost of the death of the hen).
- But this is how modern novel is pursued. If a trajectory is set forth beforehand, the journey and struggle of the author becomes false/superficial.
- Relation between **artwork and its criticism through theorization**:
  - “Criticism, especially a critical course, can be **misleading**. However lofty its intentions and sound its method, its subject slides away from beneath it.”

The essence of the modern novelist lies in not succeeding to achieve what the attempt we are talking about EM Forster's work aspects of the novel. And Forster says that the aims and ambitions of the modern novelist are never quite straight in or out or never quite determined from beforehand. To quote Forster, he says, trying to lay an egg and being told you have produced a paraboloid more curious than gratifying.

That is how the experience of the modern novelist is. And sometimes this creation, this production of the paraboloid happens at the cost of the death of the hen. So here, when we talk about the death of the hen, we are reminded of (01:43) you know, proposition about the death of the author, we are actually entering into the realm of structuralism were in order for a modern work to happen in order for it to be read and interpreted.

And reinterpreted in various ways the author needs to die the logo centrist, the author's only meaning, dominant meaning has to go. So, this paraboloid that is created, something that the

author wants to create and something that is created instead, this entire experience is more curious, the author is also a seeker and, you know, pursuing the end along with the reader, and it is not a very gratifying process.

It contains the lack the human flaw that defines human existence or life. And the author has to go like I said, but this is how modern novel is pursued, the modern novel has no predetermined goal, you know, defined or conceived from beforehand. If a trajectory is set forth beforehand, the journey and struggle of the author becomes false or superficial. So the relation between the artwork and its criticism through theorization is also something that contains a gap between what the artwork is and how it is interpreted.

There can be no reconciliation, the 2 are always happening on 2 different planes. Here EM Foster will see a code criticism especially a critical course can be misleading, however lofty its intentions and sound, its method, its subject slides away from beneath it, unquote.

(Refer Slide Time: 03:55)

## Modern Novel and Criticism

- The critic might carry on in a significantly intelligent manner, but in regions which have nothing to do with anything they have read.
- “When we try to translate truth out of one sphere into another, whether from **life into books** or from **books into lectures**, something happens to truth, it **goes wrong**, not suddenly when it might be detected, but slowly.”
- Fiction always makes some sort of demand on the reader – **curiosity**, human feelings, **sense of value** for the characters, **intelligence** and **memory**.

So the critic might carry on in a significantly intelligent and intelligible manner, but in certain regions, which have nothing to do with anything that has been said by the author. So there are 2 ways of looking at this. One is like the post structuralists would say there is no such thing called the original meaning, or the author's intention, there is no way of going back to the author's intention.

There are only multiple derivative meanings that emerge through rereading of a text where every reader becomes a writer and there is no such thing as the author, the godlike author.

Now, on the other hand, EM Forster would say that a criticism can bloom it can evolve in its own essence, it can follow its own trajectory. It can be a very good piece of writing in its own.

But it can you know, take on or it can happen on a different plane altogether, which is different from the original work to quote Forster, when we try to translate truth out of one sphere into another, whether from life into books or from books into lectures. So, when we are actually moving from one plane of discussion to another, something happens to truth, it goes wrong, not suddenly, when it might be detected, but slowly, unquote.

So, a piece of writing happens on its own. So, there are 2 things in classroom one could do, one is just read out from the book, and then experience the work firsthand. And so, there could be 10 different interpretations even when 10 people are reading a work together. The other is directly understanding the work through criticism, which is, however, you know, comprehensive, lucid and well written, the criticism or the critique is, it is definitely shifted, or moved away from the original work.

So, criticism or critique, or a lecture on any work is always happening, evolving on a different plane from the work itself. Fiction always makes some sort of demand on the reader, what are the demands that fiction could make? Curiosity, human feelings, such as happiness, pathos, sense of value for the characters. So, once we read, we move along the plot we feel for the character, we have certain values that we developed for the characters in the fiction, as well as intelligence and memory.

These are some of the, we could say sophisticated tools that are required of a reader of the modern fiction. Now, I am going to quote at length from EM Forster, what he sees regarding fantasy and prophecy.

**(Refer Slide Time: 07:24)**

## Fantasy and Prophecy

- “There is more in the novel than time or people or logic or any of their derivatives, more even than Fate. And by “more” I do not mean something that excludes these aspects nor something that includes them, embraces them. I mean something that **cuts across them like a bar of light**, that is intimately **connected with them at one place and patiently illumines all their problems**, and at another **place shoots over or through them** as if they did not exist. We shall give that bar of light two names, **fantasy and prophecy**” (74).
- Fantasy and prophecy in a novel reflect temporality, human behavior and causality in a new light that takes away their routine nature. Beyond the actions in the plot, the work becomes a fantastic or prophetic novel.

This is a new topic that he is introducing in the aspects of the novel. He says, he refers to or he introduces, he defines fantasy and prophecy as follows, I quote, there is more in the novel than time or people or logic or any of their derivatives, more even than fate. And by more, I do not mean something that excludes these aspects nor something that includes them embraces them.

I mean, something that cuts across them like a bar of light that is intimately connected with them at one place and patiently illumines all their problems and at another place shoots over or through them, as if they did not exist, we shall give that bar of light 2 names, fantasy and prophecy unquote. So, here we understand that just like the light in a room, fantasy and prophecy are not separately visible in any plot, but all the characters, the turn of events.

The way the plot, you know, churns out the way the plot is shaped, is illumined because of this all pervasive light in the room or in the plot, which is fantasy or prophecy. So the characters, the plots everything are shown, they come to picture, colored by tinted by and deeply enmeshed with the fantastic or the prophetic meaning the fantasy or the prophecy, do not, you know, exist as individual separate entities, everything else is seen in the light of these elements.

So fantasy and prophecy the novel reflect temporality, human behavior and causality in a new light that takes away their routine nature. So, there are 2 things the characters are illumined by or through the elements of the fantastic and the prophetic. And then the fantastic and the

prophetic element supersedes and becomes, you know, more than greater than the sum total of all the characters and all the events brought together.

The mundaneness the routineness the ordinariness is taken away because the fantastic or the prophetic is somewhere present in the storytelling. So, they influence characters and events, but they become more than they become bigger than and they encompass the entire cosmos, they make it fantastic. So, everything is shown in a new light, which takes away their ordinary or rookie nature beyond the actions in the plot, the work becomes a fantastic or a prophetic novel.

Regardless of or notwithstanding the events that are taking place, we understand that we are in the realm of the fantastic the reality is an upturned one it is a fantastic reality.

**(Refer Slide Time: 11:29)**

## Fantasy and Prophecy

- Fantasy asks of the reader to accept that the book is not real (unlike in naturalism) and test the reader's resilience in accepting what they cannot immediately relate with – will the reader withdraw their concession and stop reading, continue reading with a certain skeptical aloofness, or let herself be carried away with the flow of fantasy (requires giving up moral positions of believing/not, un/real).
- Fantasy entails taking off from the literal world and treating a work of art through its endless fictional possibilities.
- Being too comfortable in the literal world of realism/naturalism, the fantastic can thrill the reader, as well as choke her.

So fantasy asks of the reader to accept that the book is not real in the naturalist or realist sense and thereby it tests the reader's resilience in accepting what they cannot immediately relate or identify with. So, when the reader go along with the plot, will the reader withdraw their concession and stop reading or continue reading with a certain degree of skepticism or skeptical aloofness or will the reader let himself or herself be carried away with the flow of fantasy.

Which is you know, which, in the third event, or in the third instance, the reader is required to actually give up on moral positions of believing or not believing or give up on the parameters of real and unreal, unlearn the conditions and parameters of real and unreal that they have

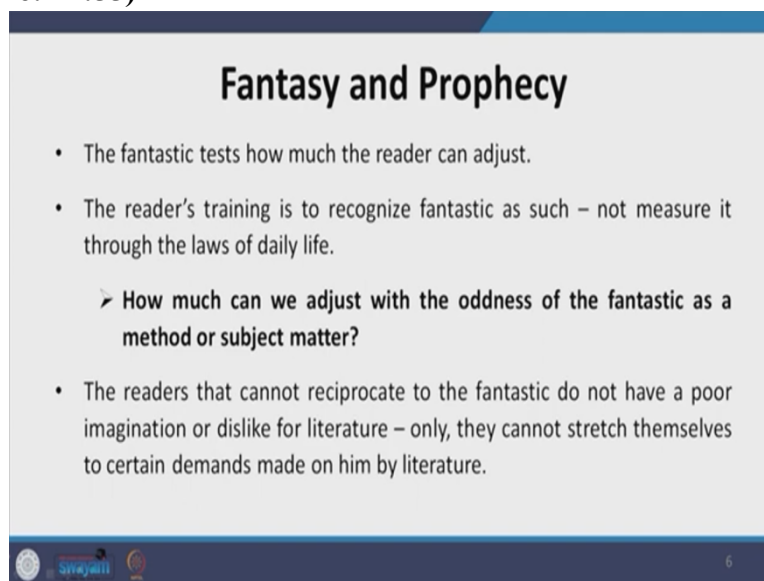
grown up with even the traditional expectations of the reader from the novel need to be revisited. And drastically, radically, you know, altered refashioned.

So readership, expectations of the reader, sense of times, sense of space, sense of what is true and untrue or not true, natural supernatural, everything is revisited and reshuffled, the meanings are drastically shifted in works of fantasy and prophecy, especially when we are talking about fantasy this holds true. Fantasy entails taking off from the literal world and treating a work of art, through its endless fiction and possibilities.

So some possibilities that might not work within the realm of within so some, you know, possibilities that might not work in everyday life could happen within the space of fiction, and how far is the reader ready to go along with the author and the author's, you know, fantastic imagination in writing and participate in this journey that makes one a successful or feel reader or not so successful reader of the fantasy genre.

So being too comfortable in the literal world of realism or naturalism once we are very ensconced, very comfortable with the parameters that have been set by realism and naturalism, the fantastic can have several you know, impact on the reader it could thrill the reader or conversely it could choke her. So, the fantastic basically tests how much the reader can adjust with the alternate meanings alternate realities.

**(Refer Slide Time: 14:55)**



### Fantasy and Prophecy

- The fantastic tests how much the reader can adjust.
- The reader's training is to recognize fantastic as such – not measure it through the laws of daily life.
  - **How much can we adjust with the oddness of the fantastic as a method or subject matter?**
- The readers that cannot reciprocate to the fantastic do not have a poor imagination or dislike for literature – only, they cannot stretch themselves to certain demands made on him by literature.

The reader is training is to recognize the fantastic as such not to judge it, not measure it through the laws of daily life. So, how much can we adjust with the oddness of the fantastic

as a method or a subject matter. How much are we willing to kind of go with the flow, the readers that cannot reciprocate to the fantastic do not have a full imagination or a basic dislike for literature in general.

Rather, they simply cannot stretch themselves to certain demands that are being made on the reader by literature. So, literature has expanded itself, or alter itself shifted itself to accommodate the fantastic now, it is for the reader to shuffle or revisit his or her position and assumptions and expectations.

**(Refer Slide Time: 16:06)**

## Fantasy and Prophecy

- Sometimes the reader does not object but is left with a dissatisfied feeling.
- Fantasy and prophesy illumine objects with much more vividness than a commonplace perspective ever can.
- Both fantasy and prophecy are bound by a sense of mythology, yet the gods in each are different from the other – they differ in how humans interact with the larger supra-/trans-human forces that lie beyond the human world.
- Fantasy's gods come as suggestion, not confrontation. They are less grand. There could be the fantastic in little everyday things; fantasy derives its charm from improvisation/ inventiveness. It brings in the other-worldly affairs, but not in an expressed or grand manner.

So, sometimes the reader does not object, the introduction of the fantastic elements in a work, but they are left a little dissatisfied after the reading, because they could not go with the flow of the writing, they have suspected the plausibility of such a plot, because all along they have been reading a work of fantasy through the prism of through the criteria set by realism or naturalism.

And that is not the way to go about it. Fantasy and prophesy illumine objects with much more vividness than any commonplace a mundane perspective ever could. So both fantasy and prophecy are bound by a sense of mythology. And yet, we would see that the gods in each of them are very different from the other. They differ in how humans interact with larger supra or trans-human forces that lie beyond the human world. Fantasy's gods come as a suggestion and they do not confront the ordinariness or the ordinary existence.

They are less grand. So fantasy's gods are almost part and parcel of our everyday being everyday existence, there could be the fantastic in little everyday things. Fantasy derives its charm, from improvisation, spontaneity, inventiveness. So there is no concept of the grand or the great god the one god there are just demigods. So fantasy brings in the other worldly affairs. And yet these other worldly affairs the supra natural do not confront as they are not happening in an expressed or grand manner.

**(Refer Slide Time: 18:39)**

## Fantasy and Prophecy

- Hermes, the god of luck, fertility, of thieves, rule fantasy. He is the cleverest of all gods.
  - So, could one suggest that fantasy is about the dexterity of the author's mind that touches on the ordinary like a fairy – more so like a trickster?
- Fantasy questions "the totality of our knowledge of what our culture regards as real", and its aim is to allow the author opportunities for satire through revisiting traditionally accepted parameters of reality.
- In Freudian criticism, "fantasy", as a literary phenomenon, is a neat record of an imaginary achievement – "the fulfillment of a wish, a correction of unsatisfied reality"

So EM Forster would know that Hermes who is the god of luck, fertility are thieves rule fantasy. So when we talk of God, we talk of morality, we talk of sin, and all the superlative qualities that need to be achieved. So God is the concentrate of all the superlative qualities, but how about a god of thieves? That topsy-turvy is the entire assumption with which the entire assumption, or assumptions that we take to the meaning of God.

So a God that could give us luck, fertility and also the craft of theft. That kind of God rules fantasy, he is the cleverest of all gods. So, could one suggest that fantasy is about the dexterity, the skill of the author's mind that touches on the ordinary the everydayness, like a fairy or a clever elf. It could be a norm or more like a shape shifting trickster, a God that is very protean very shape shifting a very clever you know presence in the plot, which is like a quicksilver almost.

So fantasy questions the totality of our knowledge of what our culture regards as real, could there be a totality of knowledge or can we constantly play around with it could we introduce something new so that the totality that we hit her to had gets unsettled and needs to



accommodate new meanings, new things, fantasy is constantly challenging, confronting, and contesting with that kind of totality of knowledge or meaning, and its aim is to allow the author opportunities for satire, through revisiting, traditionally accepted parameters of reality.

In Freudian criticism fantasy as a literary phenomenon is a neat record of an imaginary achievement, fulfillment of a wish a correction of unsatisfied reality.

(Refer Slide Time: 21:07)

## Fantasy and Prophecy

- James McConkey: "Fantasy is a device by which the writer achieves the creation of a backdrop **distinct from phenomenal reality**, a mythology suitable to contain [the author's] own values."
- Construed far from its ordinary meaning, Forster understands prophecy as a **literary technique** that serves neither as an agent of "foretelling the future" nor as "an **appeal for righteousness**."
- Rather, it is a **music-like quality**, "an **ascent in the novelist's voice**"; its **theme is "the universe, or something universal"**, and it could rest on "any of the faiths that have haunted humanity – Christianity, Buddhism, dualism, Satanism."

So according to James McConkey, I quote McConkey fantasy is a device by which the writer achieves the creation of a backdrop distinct from phenomenal reality, a mythology is suitable to contain the author's own values, unquote. So on the one hand, we have some pre existing values on which they are like the meta values, the grand values on which entire community entire society as agreed upon and then the author is imposing his own set of values to, you know, play with the pre existing ones.

From that kind of an interaction or contestation fantasy turns out, construed far from its ordinary meaning EM Forster understands prophecy, on the other hand, is a literary technique which serves neither as an agent of foretelling, foretelling of the future, nor as an appeal for righteousness. So when EM Forster is using prophecy, prophecy is not synonymous with foretelling of future or having any hint or inkling of righteousness.

Rather, what EM Forster would say is that prophecy is a music like quality, an ascent in the novelists voice its theme is the universe or something universal. So, once the prophetic is introduced to a plot, the pitch or the tonality of narration changes, it goes on to a different

plane, only to come back to the ordinary, there is a music like quality that is introduced to narration by virtue of prophecy.

And such prophecy, as Forster understands, could rest on as he says, I quote him any of the fates that have haunted humanity, Christianity, Buddhism, Dualism, Satanism, and so forth so unquote.

(Refer Slide Time: 23:28)

## Fantasy and Prophecy

- Wilfred Stone: Forster's notion of prophecy "realize the spirit embedded in [the phenomenal world], the effect of which "argues the **compatibility of human and absolute values**, and provides **meeting-places** for the dualisms of **his esthetics and his art.**"

Further, Wilfred Stone notes that Forster's notion of prophecy realize the spirit embedded in the phenomenal world, the effect of which, to quote, Stone argues the compatibility of human and absolute values and provides meeting places for the dualisms of his aesthetics and his art, unquote.

(Refer Slide Time: 23:52)

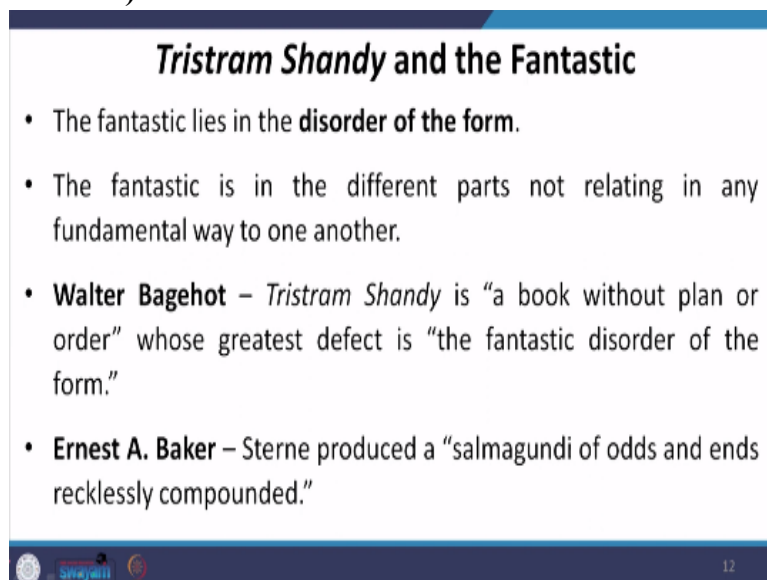
## *Tristram Shandy* and the Fantastic

- *Tristram Shandy* by Sterne comprises a '**hodgepodge**' of **digressions** (leading to **labyrinths**), **afterthoughts**, **delays**, apologies.
- Critics question if it is a complete work (often read as unfinished).
- While Sterne planned to produce multiple volumes, later critics see a careful pattern in his madness and recklessly compounded writing.
- Questions of **form and structural unity** cannot be brought to the understanding of Tristram. In the fragmented narrative, very little of Tristram's life is narrated.

So *Tristram Shandy* is a work of fantasy. We would like to discuss now how *Tristram Shandy* by Sterne holds the fantastic element. This work by Sterne, comprises a hodgepodge of digressions which leads to labyrinths, afterthoughts delays and apologies. Critics have often questioned if *Tristram Shandy* is a complete work, it is often read popularly read as unfinished. Wilfred Stone planned to produce multiple volumes. Later critics see a careful pattern in his madness.

And this recklessly compounded writing questions of form and structural unity cannot be brought to the understanding of *Tristram* or rather cannot adequately understand or, you know, encompass the meanings the ambitions of the author in the fragmented narrative very little of *Tristram's* life is narrated.

**(Refer Slide Time: 25:06)**



***Tristram Shandy* and the Fantastic**

- The fantastic lies in the **disorder of the form**.
- The fantastic is in the different parts not relating in any fundamental way to one another.
- **Walter Bagehot** – *Tristram Shandy* is “a book without plan or order” whose greatest defect is “the fantastic disorder of the form.”
- **Ernest A. Baker** – Sterne produced a “salmagundi of odds and ends recklessly compounded.”

swayam 12

So the fantastic *Tristram Shandy* lies in the order of the form. The fantastic is in the different parts that are not relating in any fundamental way to one another. A critic like Walter Bagehot would say that just *Tristram Shandy* is to quote Bagehot a book without plan or order whose greatest defect is I quote again, the fantastic disorder of the form. To quote a critic like Walter Bagehot *Tristram Shandy* is I quote, a book without plan or order unquote, whose greatest defect is I quote again, the fantastic disorder of the form unquote.

Again, Ernest Baker says that Sterne produced I quote Baker salmagundi of odds and ends recklessly compounded unquote.

**(Refer Slide Time: 26:02)**

## *Tristram Shandy* and the Fantastic

- *Tristram Shandy* was published in five parts over a period of more than seven years. Some of the later parts contain materials that Sterne could not have known when he began to write, which points to the work's unplanned composition. Some later critics, however, suggest that large parts of the work has been planned with more care than Sterne's public attitude would suggest.
- John Traugott observes the "ontological vast abrupt, the **abysm between ideas and reality**" in the novel. *Tristram Shandy* has less to do with the **epistemological** question of how accurately our **ideas reflect reality** than with the ethical one of how our ideas affect our ability to bear reality.



So *Tristram Shandy* was published in 5 parts over a period of more than 7 years. Some of the later parts contain materials that Sterne could not have known at the time when he began to write this work, the first volume or the first part and this points to the work's unplanned composition. Some later critics, however, suggest that large parts of the work has been planned with more care than Sterne's public attitude would actually suggest.

This is something I have mentioned before also, the work like the later critics see a careful pattern through this recklessness and madness that has been posited by or the mad position, the position of the mad author that you know, Sterne assumes posits through writing *Tristram Shandy*, John Traugott observes that I quote Traugott, ontological vast, abrupt, the abysm between ideas and reality unquote, is present in this novel by Sterne.

*Tristram Shandy* has less to do with the epistemological question of how accurately our ideas reflect reality than with the ethical question of how our ideas affect our ability to bear to face up to or come in terms with reality.

**(Refer Slide Time: 27:47)**

## *Tristram Shandy* and the Fantastic

- Throughout *Tristram Shandy*, Sterne projects a spontaneous writing which is least inhibited by plan or form. Sterne is preoccupied with the instability of language and linguistic embarrassment, drawing attention to the blank spaces of the curses, where any name could be asserted. Playing with names also show in the chain of mistakes that lead to Tristram's christening. Sterne's subversion of literary form reappears through his black-page trick, which cannot be justly reproduced in reprints. Similarly, he inserts his Preface midway through Volume III, and delays his Dedication till chapter vii of Volume I.
- Sterne subverts reason to persuade the moral grounds of his reader to reconcile with the eccentricities of the Shandy world. Life's "secret springs" and "hidden resources" enables the mind to bear the overwhelming forces of reality - "fenc[ing] against" the minor evils of daily living (referring to the myriad misfortunes that have befallen Tristram), and add "something to this Fragment of Life."

Throughout *Tristram Shandy*, Sterne projects spontaneous writing, which is least inhibited by plan or form. Sterne is preoccupied with the instability, the unsettledness of language as well as the linguistic embarrassment which draws attention to the blank spaces of the curses where the curses have been used. And these blank spaces suggest that any name could be asserted. Playing with the names is something that also shows in the chain of mistakes that lead to Tristram's christening.

Sterne's subversion of literary form reappears through his black page trick, critics call it the black page trick something that cannot be justly reproduced through or reproduced in reprints. Similarly, Sterne inserts his preface the preface of this novel, somewhere midway through volume 3, and even the dedication is delayed till chapter 7 of the first volume. So Sterne subverts, reason and rationality and pursues the moral grounds of his reader to reconcile with the eccentricities or the oddities of the Shandy world.

So in order that is how the fantastic is read, in order for the reader to be able to understand or get into the cosmos offered by *Tristram Shandy* they have to shed behind they have to unlearn some of the social conventions that they have grown up observing and learning. Life's secret springs are mentioned as well as the hidden resources. The secret springs and hidden resources enable the mind to bear the or cope up with the overwhelming forces of reality, what reality demands of us how reality imposes itself on us.

Fencing against the minor evils of daily living. And this refers to the myriad misfortunes that have befallen Tristram, and they add something to this fragment of life.

(Refer Slide Time: 30:34)

## *Tristram Shandy* and the Fantastic

- Sartorial metaphors illustrate the characters' never-ending struggles to shield themselves from external evils. E.g. The novel speaks of **buttoning and unbuttoning vexations**.
- Critics comment that *Tristram Shandy* is more a comedy than a satire on the human situation; its incidental satire makes its doctrine of sympathy artistically necessary. Sterne's work of comedy is as salutary to the life force as it is deadly to the reason.



So, throughout *Tristram Shandy*, there are sartorial metaphors that illustrate the character's never ending struggles to shield themselves from external evils it could be the reality. For example, the novel keeps mentioning and talking about buttoning and unbuttoning vexations, which is comic, and they have a satirical undertone as well. So critics comment *Tristram Shandy* is more comedy than a satire on the human situation.

Its incidental satire makes its doctrine of sympathy, artistically necessary that kind of satire, which is necessary to drive the comedy well. Sterne's work of comedy is as salutary to the life force it celebrates the life force, as it is deadly to any premise of reason and rationality.

(Refer Slide Time: 31:39)

## *Tristram Shandy* and the Fantastic

- E.M. Forster – *Tristram Shandy* is a fantasy in which a fantastic god called Muddle renders everyday life chaotic. Sterne adapts Swift's technique in conjuring a chaotic world, where reason functions to alienate and confuse.
- The appeal of the fantastic is **personal**, the reader can either accept the supernatural or not, but the fantastic **may not be engaged** adequately if approached only through a **universal critical apparatus**.



EM Forster says the *Tristram Shandy* is a fantastic work. It is a fantasy in which a fantastic God called Muddle renders everyday life chaotic. Sterne adapts Jonathan Swift's technique in

conjuring a chaotic world where reason functions only to alienate and confuse. One is disoriented through reason only through shunning reason and rationality can one be oriented back into the Shandy world, the world of fantasy. So shunning reason becomes one of the premises.

For reading Sterne's work, the appeal of the fantastic is personal. So the reader can either accept the supernatural or not accept it, but the fantastic may not be engaged adequately, if one approaches it only through a universal critical apparatus. With this, I am going to stop today's lecture here and let us meet in another lecture with another round of discussions. Thank you.