

# Aula 8

## NARRATIVE FOCUS

### **META**

To classify typologically the different narrative perspectives, or types of narrator.

### **OBJETIVO**

Ao final desta aula, espera-se que você seja capaz de:

To identify typologically different narrative perspectives, or types of narrator.

### **PRERREQUISITO**

Concept and classification of discursive genres and their relations with literary genres;

Notions about the narrative tradition, from the epic to the modern novel.

To read African short stories with a theoretical basis.

**Luiz Eduardo Oliveira**  
**José Augusto Batista dos Santos**

### INTRODUCTION

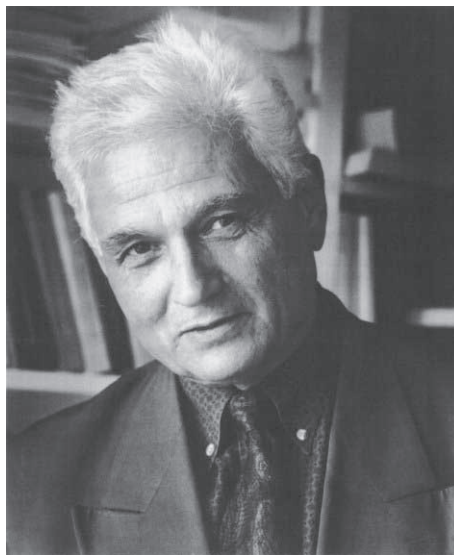
In this lesson, we are going to review some important categories concerning narrative focus, which will prove themselves very useful for the formation of a theoretical framework, by which one can come to a structural analysis of not only literary narratives but also of those from cinema or television. Thus, at its first section, we will briefly outline the relations between narrative and fiction, showing some of the best known theoretical positions on the subject, from Plato to some 20th century structuralists.

Next, we will provide a succinct definition of the typology proposed by Norman Friedman, as well as of his eight types of narrator, noting that such a typology, like any other, cannot have a prescriptive character, but only a didactic one, since many types can merge, in some works. We will try, as far as possible, to exemplify the types of narrator with works of Brazilian or foreign literature.

### NARRATIVE AND FICTION

We could say, in principle, that every narrative is fiction, since, by the very nature of language, which is never transparent to the point of objectively signifying what it represents, whenever we use words to narrate or describe something, we recreate in a certain way and reinvent the real, which in turn is always unreachable and supplementary, for, as Derrida observes, experience is always mediated by signs and symbols, and the referential is produced as an effect of such signs and symbols, or supplements (apud CULLER, 1999).

Jacques Derrida (El Biar, Algeria, 15 July 1930 - Paris, 8 October 2004) was an important French philosopher. Creator of the philosophical method called deconstruction. ([http://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacques\\_Derrida](http://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacques_Derrida))



Thus, “objective narrative,” with a sort of exemption or neutrality of the narrator, is a myth, for even when the storyteller interposes himself between his listeners or readers and fictional beings, these are made up of words, chosen and arranged in a set structured by someone - an implicit author (...), hidden and revealed by and in what he narrates” (LEITE, 1997).

Plato, in his *Republic*, distinguished imitation from narration. For the Greek philosopher, the sensible world in which we live is merely an imitation of the world of ideas. Thus, poetry, including all its genres, would be a second-order simulacrum. Therefore, it would be more appropriate for the honest and thoughtful man to narrate than imitate, for, by narrating the actions of a good man, he would try to express himself as if he were the man, not being ashamed of such imitation. When, on the contrary, he had to narrate the actions of an unworthy man, he would not allow himself to imitate him seriously. Aristotle, on the other hand, in reversing the Platonic judgment, preferred, for the epic, direct imitation to the narration of actions. For him, the poet should speak as little as possible on his own, imitating little or rarely, like Homer, who, after a short preamble, introduced characters so that they could speak for themselves (apud, 1997).

Unlike the epic, in which the narrator, along with his audience, stood at a distance from the narrated world, in a solemn tone, as a kind of mediator between the muses and their listeners, in the novel the narrator becomes intimate of the readers, who are brought nearer to the characters and facts by the narrator’s prosified narrative. Such proximity, which is shaped by various techniques and the characterization of time, space and language, gives us the illusion that we are before a person who directly exposes their thoughts, when in fact both the narrator and the reader are fictional beings. The illusion of truth, also called verisimilitude, is what will give coherence to the narrative, convincing the reader, through the conventions necessary to the fictional universe of the work, that everything the narrator tells is verisimilar, that is, similar to the truth.

It was based on verisimilitude that the first theory of narrative focus was elaborated, at the end of the nineteenth century, by Henry James, in the prefaces of his novels. For the American author, every narrative should have a unique point of view, and the narrator should appear as little as possible to avoid comments and digressions that distract the attention of the reader and give the impression that history tells itself, through a character who would be a sort of alter ego of the narrator.



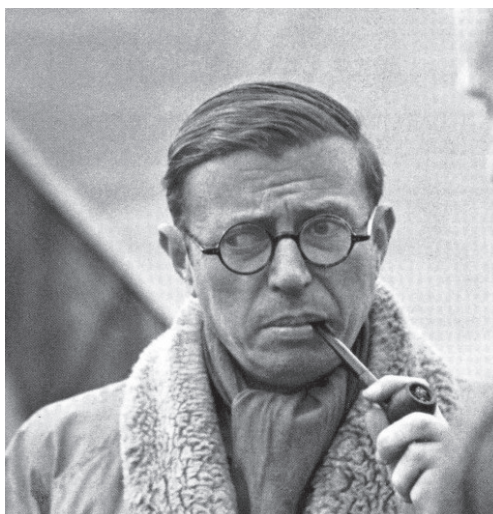
Henry James OM (New York, April 15, 1843 - February 28, 1916) was an American writer (naturalized British at the end of his life), author of some of the most important novels, short stories and literary criticisms of English language literature. ([http://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry\\_Jame](http://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Jame))

**Percy Lubbock** (1879-1965), in the same way, when using the distinction between narrating and showing, as well as between summary and scene, representing both distinctions, respectively, the mediation of the narrator or its lack with respect to what is narrated, or merely shown, defends the narrator's discretion, further radicalizing the position of Henry James, insofar as he presciently considers as art of fiction only the narratives in which the narrator in the third person appears rare and discreetly (apud LEITE, 1997, p. 13-15).

The normative character of the theory from the point of view proposed by James and Lubbock was soon criticized. E. Forster (1879-1970), for example, went so far as to claim that the change of point of view, or the existence of more than one point of view in a particular narrative, was fully legitimate, provided that the novelist achieved the result he wanted. Wayne Booth (1921-2005), for his part, will admit that there are several ways to tell a story, depending on the choice of the narrator, the values to be transmitted and the purposes to be achieved (see DAL FARRA, 1978).

Booth also created the category of "implicit author", which would be an image of the real author created by writing, since he betrays himself, as Dal Farra (1978, p. 20) says, in his choice of title, as well as in the election of signs and preference in a certain type of narrator, distribution of chapters, etc. Thus, it is not enough, in interpreting any narrative, to consider only the types of narrative focus, since only its articulation with the implicit author could lead us to the world view of the work.

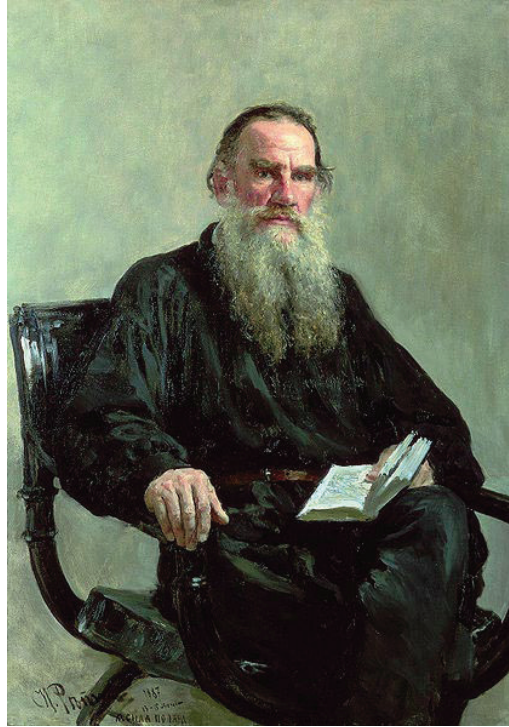
**Jean Pouillon** (1916-2002) was another theoretician who, based on a phenomenological vision of the world inspired by Sartre, proposed a theory of the visions of narrative articulated to the question of time. For the author, there would be three narrative possibilities: “vision from behind”, “vision with” and “vision from the outside”. In the first, the omniscient narrator knows everything about the characters’ lives and their destiny, as a kind of God. This is what happens in traditional novels of the 19th century, such as *War and Peace*, by Tolstoy. In the “vision with,” the narrator, usually in the first person, is limited to the knowledge he has about himself and about events, rather than having an overall view and absolute control over everything that happens in the fictional universe of the work. This is the classic case of Machado de Assis (1839-1908) in *Dom Casmurro*, in which the narrator is not sure of the adultery of his wife Capitu, as well as of the eighteenth-century epistolary novels and some twentieth-century narratives that use inner monologue and the flow of consciousness as a narrative technique. In the “vision from the outside,” the narrator has no knowledge of the characters’ inside, refusing to penetrate their thoughts, for he speaks as if he were an eyewitness positioned outside the story. This is what happens in some detective novels, such as those by Dashiell Hammet, and the French *nouveau roman* (1) (POUILLON, 1974).



Jean-Paul Charles Aymard Sartre (Paris, June 21, 1905 - Paris, April 15, 1980) was a French existentialist philosopher of the early twentieth century. He used to say existence came before essence. Thus, in existentialism (beginning with Kierkegaard, 1813-1855 - or even before with Blaise Pascal, 1623-1662 or St. Augustine 354-430), the role of philosophy is reversed. ([http://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean-Paul\\_Sartre](http://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean-Paul_Sartre))

Lev Tolstoy or Leo Tolstoy, Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy (in Russian Лев Николаевич Толстой) (9 September 1828 - 20 November 1910) was a Russian writer and essayist very influential in literature and politics in his country.

([http://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liev\\_Tolst%C3%B3i](http://pt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liev_Tolst%C3%B3i))



Samuel Dashiell Hammett (May 27, 1894-January 10, 1961) was an American author. He wrote detective novels and short stories.



It is also worth mentioning the structural analysis of the narrative, as proposed by Roland Barthes (1915-1980) and Todorov (1939-). The first, in his Introduction to Structural Analysis of Narrative, distinguishes the structure of stories on three levels: the level of functions, where the plot or fable is found, as well as the characterizing elements of the characters,

narrative time and space; the level of actions, where the characters are found as agents, that is, conductive threads of certain nuclei of functions; and the level of narration, which integrates the two previous ones, and a narrative in third person, as Leite observes (1997, p.23), serves as a mere disguise for the first.

Todorov, in turn, relies on linguist Émile Benveniste to make a distinction between discourse, which would be personal, once inscribed in the domain of “I-you”, and history, which would be impersonal, inscribed in the domain of “he”. Thus, he makes a list of the signs that directly designate the process of enunciation - pronouns, adverb, tense, etc. -, then he goes on to analyze the “evaluative discourse” through which the process of enunciation invades the whole statement.

Now we should move on to know the most usual types of storytellers in the Western narrative tradition, especially those who settled upon the rise of the novel, verifying the technical and formal procedures used for this purpose, so that we may have a theoretical framework capable of providing subsidies for the analysis and interpretation of the constitutive elements of modern and contemporary narratives. Such a framework can be used not only for the analysis of literary works, but also for other narrative mediums, such as the cinema, soap operas, etc. However, it is worth saying that any kind of typification is relevant insofar as it is didactic, since, in many cases, it is only possible to classify the predominant elements. There are works that have a variety of types, or that subvert or transform them, by merging or depurating.

### Types of narrator

The typology proposed by Norman Friedman (apud LEITE, 1997) is very functional for the analysis and interpretation of narratives.

According to this author, there are basically eight types of narrator:

1) Omniscient intruder: this is the most traditional type of narrator since the birth of the novel, still in the eighteenth century. Usually in the third person, he has full control over the story and the past and future of the characters, reserving the right to comment and judge their thoughts and attitudes, sometimes as real essays attached to the plot. This is what happens in *Memória de um sargento de milícias* (1852-53), by Manuel Antonio de Almeida (1831-1861), as well as in the novels of Balzac (1799-1850).

2) Omniscient neutral: from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, with the vogue of Realism-Naturalism, associated with the rise and consolidation of positivism in science, emerged a new type of

narrator who refused to freely penetrate the thinking of the characters, appearing as little as possible, as if he were a scientist looking for biological or social explanations of the true case studies that his stories purported to be. So, he supposed himself to be objective and neutral, hiding behind the characters who reflected his views. A good example can be found in *O cortiço* (1890), by Aluísio de Azevedo (1857-1913). It is worth mentioning that, even in the Realism-Naturalism, writers like Machado de Assis did not give up on intrusive omniscience, using this technique to question not only the behavior of the characters but also the narrative structure itself and the notion of verisimilitude.

3) The “I” as a witness: here the narrator has his point of view limited to his own person, that is, to the circumstances of his position in history, since he bases his comments on what he has seen or heard. Not being a protagonist, this narrator shares with the reader his doubts and assumptions regarding the intrigue of the plot. The classic example is *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1892) by Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930), whose story is told by Watson, assistant to the legendary detective. Probably Doyle was inspired by Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Stolen Letter” (1809-1849) - for many the inventor of the detective genre -, narrated by the friend of the detective Auguste Dupin, who, together with the reader, tries to deduce his detective friend’s reasoning.

4) Narrator-protagonist: as the terminology of this type suggests, it is a narrator who tells his own story, thus limiting the narrative focus to his point of view. The reader, therefore, may doubt certain ambiguous positions of the narrator, since he is free to interpret them according to the data at his disposal - the internal elements of the work. This is what happens in *Dom Casmurro*, by Machado de Assis, and *Grande Sertão: veredas* (1956), by Guimarães Rosa (1908-1967).

5) Multiple selective omniscience: the impression one has of this type of narrative is that there is no narrator, because the story flows directly from the characters, either through dialogues or through indirect free speech. He differs so much from neutral omniscience as it reflects the perceptions and feelings of the characters, as well as intrusive omniscience, which comments and judges such perceptions and feelings. An example of this type of narrative is *Vidas Secas* (1938), by Graciliano Ramos (1892-1953), a novel in which the dreams and frustrations of the characters, including the dog Baleia, appear in a fragmentary way, through indirect free speech.

6) Selective Omniscience: this type is similar to the previous one, but reduced to a single character, which becomes the central angle through which thoughts and perceptions are being shown to the reader by



free indirect speech. See, for example, some of the novels by Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) and Clarice Lispector (1929-1977).

7) Dramatic mode: more common in the story than in the novel, this narrative type submerges the narrator, who sometimes only punctuates the dialogues of the characters. This technique was used extensively by the American composers during the first half of the twentieth century, many of them screenwriters, and can be found in many short stories by Dorothy Parker (1893-1967) and Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961).

8) Camera: this type serves to frame certain narratives that build their stories through fragmentary and nonlinear flashes of some scenes. Here, the influence of cinema is undeniable, not only from a narrative point of view, but also in terms of vocabulary, for some narrators, such as that of *Project for a Revolution in New York* (1970), by Robbe-Grillet's (1922-2008) wrote as if they were sketching scenes to be filmed.



READ THE SHORT STORY BELOW VERY CAREFULLY

THE DIVINE PREGNANCY IN A TWELVE-YEAR-OLD  
WOMAN

by Sagnik Datta

'The Divine Pregnancy in a Twelve-Year-Old Woman' won the 2018 Commonwealth Short Story Prize for Asia.

[Read more about the Prize here.](#)

One day in March, just before dawn, our whole village woke up from a dream in which we had been visited by God. When we spoke to each other in the morning, we found certain differences in our accounts.

For some of us, God was an old man. He had a bald head and a ridged face, and was dressed in a gown of fine gold silk with broad sleeves. Some saw Him as a set of flaming eyes with long masculine eyelashes suspended in air. For some, God was just a drop of light flickering

in the wind of the table fan. For Isaac, the science teacher, God was invisible, but had the voice of a woodcutter.

Nevertheless, what He told everyone was more or less the same. He praised our village for its abundance of trees and birds, its efficient drainage system which didn't let the streets flood even in monsoons, its thriving fish market where you could get everything from shallow-water sharks to puti, and above all, the utter simplicity and peacefulness of our lives. He believed it was the ideal place for a child to grow up, safe from the useless complexities and violence that plagued the rest of the world. And so He had, a few nights back, bestowed one woman among us with His honor. He was letting us in on this information so that we gave her no trouble later for conceiving out of wedlock.

The brave and curious among us had asked Him the woman's name. God, like always, had remained elusive.

'All I can say right now,' He had said, 'is that she is a virgin.'

Now, in spite of all the overwhelming evidence, there were a few among us who doubted the legitimacy of this dream. The most vocal of them was Isaac, who had long been rumored an atheist.

Sure, he said, he'd had the dream like everyone else, but that did not mean we should take it at face value without considering other possibilities first.

What other possibilities?

Isaac wasn't sure, but said we shouldn't rule out indigestion, since it was known to cause nightmares in the summer.

This was so preposterous that the school headmaster threatened to smack him right on his nose. Was this a joke? How could he think of such a thing? Could indigestion explain how all of us had the same dream? Did all of us have indigestion?

The more serious among us considered the implications of this announcement. Why was God sending His child to earth? Was he to found a new religion? But why? Was there something wrong in the current one?

Our village headman told us it was useless for us to contemplate such questions, for not even he knew the answers.

The village was also rife with speculations about the mystery woman. Men contemplated aloud in the market and in the palm wine joints, peering at each other through the bottles. Women talked at the edge of the pond and through the windows in their kitchens. One afternoon, the milkman's wife was so engrossed in such a conversation that she burnt a batch of fish.

The prerequisite of virginity eliminated several who were doubtless worthy, but our village had no shortage of virgin women of childbearing

age. Many of us suspected Nadia. She was twenty-two and applied kohl to her eyes and prayed to God daily. Her husband had died on the day of her wedding when she was fourteen, and she had been shunned since then. Nadia, however, strongly denied the pregnancy. We also heard a rumor that she wasn't a virgin either.

Within a month, however, all speculation came to rest. It was Usha. We knew she was the one because her body started glowing.

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Usha was twelve. She had big eyes, a potato-shaped head, long unoiled hair, and stick-like arms.

She lived in a thatched hut at the east end of the village, sixty feet from the pond. Her mother had died at the age of fifteen while giving birth to her. Her father had been the village's foremost drunkard, before he disappeared around two months back. Since then she'd been living alone, eating god-knows-what.

There was no reason to doubt that she was a virgin and was carrying the child of God. But Isaac, that scoundrel, was not convinced. He floated the obscene demand that the doctor check Usha for her virginity, for he believed a virgin conception was absolutely impossible.

Everyone completely dismissed this, and our village headman said this just showed how thoughtless and immoral these atheists were, for only an atheist could have asked for such a thing.

Usha herself, however, did not seem too enthusiastic about the pregnancy. She had always been of the active type, and was quite efficient at climbing trees. It was a familiar sight for us: Usha sitting on a high branch fifteen feet from the ground, legs dangling, spitting out litchi seeds. She was also an expert swimmer and could hold her breath underwater for more than two minutes. Nevertheless, in the months preceding this miracle, we had seen her come out of the pond with her wet frock sticking to her growing body, and we all knew she would turn into a woman some day.

But now that she was pregnant, certain things were no longer allowed. She could no longer climb trees, nor fill herself with papayas and litchis and wild berries. The concept of being pregnant clearly confused her as well, as she asked many questions about the process, from how giving birth actually felt, whether the pain was worse than the bite of a wood-ant, to whether she could still sleep on her stomach, for she had always slept on her stomach since she could remember.

Women from the neighborhood cooked nice fragrant meals, and brought them for her in covered pots. Usha did not seem too fond

of them. She did not eat much and remained thin. A kind-hearted neighbor was one day trying to feed her some goat-milk kheer, but Usha kept moving her face and playing with a white kitten in the courtyard. The woman finally grew irritated and kicked the kitten out. When Usha tried to protest, the woman jabbed a spoonful in her mouth.

Usha's news must have spread because soon we started receiving visitors. They came not only from the nearby villages, but from all over the country. Some of them had trekked through the mountains up north for eleven days, and some had canoed from a distant island in the ocean, and they claimed that the ocean had fishes far larger than ours, the size of coconut leaves.

All of them wanted to see Usha, but our headman had strictly forbidden outsiders from visiting her house, mentioning that she needed rest, although for a certain fee, they were allowed to see her house from a distance. They could sometimes spot Usha if she was then sitting outside in the sun. They were surprised to find that she was, indeed, glowing.

At first, we were very welcoming of these new people, offering them tea and fried fish, letting them sleep on mats on our verandahs. They, however, showed no signs of leaving, saying they would stay here till the birth, and maybe even longer. Some even said they wanted to see the child grow up. Soon, there were so many that the high school grounds were opened for them, and there the new people set up tents and camped. When even more people came, we put our rice fields up for rent. The newcomers had to rent our pumps to remove water from the fields before camping there.

By May there were so many new people that the price of fish in our markets rose twofold. People were unhappy. We decided to stop the influx. On our headman's order, we fixed a sign at the village entrance that said we were not accepting any more visitors, unless they made a generous contribution to the village funds.

On the village foundation day, a huge ceremony and feast was organized in the honor of Usha and God's child, in the square in front of the fish market. Almost four hundred people were to be fed; the cooks had started mashing spices and cleaning small sharks since dawn, and were heating up oil in giant woks when the ceremony began.

The ceremony was presided over by the headman. He was almost blind from his cataract, but still insisted he could see more clearly than anyone else. He lit the earthen lamp, and in his speech, which lasted seven minutes, reminded us of the time when he, as the oldest man in our village, had blessed Usha at her naming ceremony. Thus,

according to the chain of authority, it was through him that God must have come to know of her.

After him spoke other distinguished elders of our village, including the milkman. All of them praised Usha for her piety and good fortune. They said they could not believe how she, who not so long ago had been a little girl climbing trees and diving into the pond, could now be the chosen bearer of the child of God. Nevertheless, they were extremely proud of her, and would extend to her all the support she needed for raising the child.

Finally, it was Usha's turn to speak. When she climbed up on the stage in the middle of the marketplace, still in her yellow frilled frock, we found her so mesmerizing that we could no longer smell all the spices being fried. Her unearthly golden glow was radiating all around her, even from her unkempt hair and protruding ribs, which we could spot underneath her frock. Her divine presence made us cold and we stared at her with utmost reverence.

'Thank you everyone,' she said, 'but I don't want the baby.'

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What did she mean? Did she ...? Will she ...?

Our headman asked her the question directly.

Yes, Usha answered, she was indeed thinking of an abortion.

What! This was absurd! Who gave her such an idea? Why couldn't she have the baby? Was she afraid? Was she afraid because of what had happened to her mother? But surely that was silly! This was God's child we were speaking of! Usha said that it did not make any difference.

Why had she not told God that night that she did not want to keep it? Surely then God would not have put the child in her, for there were several others who would have been thrilled to receive it.

Usha said she didn't remember what had happened that night. She was asleep. It was a dream. Everything was fuzzy.

Even then, why was she making this so complicated? Just go ahead and have the baby. Women do it all the time!

Usha started walking away.

What audacity! What made her think she knew what was right for her? She was only twelve! Had she studied the religious texts? Did she know what toll an abortion had on the eternal soul?

Later that day, no one was surprised when Isaac supported her wish for abortion. Usha was small and thin, he said, and some might even call her malnourished, and this pregnancy would be a life risk. He

added that the consent of a twelve-year-old would not hold up in a court of law.

‘Therefore,’ he reasoned, ‘this God of yours is nothing less than a rapist and a pedophile.’

This was too much! We circled him outside the school in front of his students, and one of us (it could have been the milkman) punched him on his nose. Before we left him, we threatened that if he made any such comment in the future, we would cut his hair off and hang him from the banyan tree.

We wondered whether there was any fire to Usha’s threat. Did she even know how it was done? The village doctor had already said he wouldn’t do it under any circumstance. Could she run away? Could she be so foolish as to drink rat poison? Climb a tree and jump from it? Jab one of her sticks up into her womb?

The headman instructed us to remove all sharp objects from Usha’s hut, and keep her there under constant surveillance. For reasons of privacy, it was decided that there would only be women watching her. One woman would remain with Usha in the room at all times. The participating women were assigned daily shifts of four hours each, and a compensation scheme was drawn up which would provide them a weekly ration of rice, pulses, coconut oil and eggs.

The headman warned the women that this job was more important than anything else they have ever done, and letting her out of sight, even for one moment, could have consequences of magnitudes they could not even comprehend.

It was also his idea to show her the example of Moni, who had given birth at the age of eleven. We sent her to talk to Usha to tell her how happy she was with her now three-year-old son, and how he had been the best thing to have ever happened to her life. Moni later complained that Usha had been very rude to her, refusing to speak when she was there, and just when she had stood up to leave, Usha had turned to face her and had asked her to shut the door once she was out.

Everything seemed to be going well, till the morning we came to know that Usha was gone. She had escaped during a change of guard. Both the women responsible for the fiasco were subsequently engaged in a heated argument on the verandah of her house, and soon it almost escalated to a fist fight. The headman reached the place and informed the women that if anything bad were to happen to the child, both of them would be slowly roasted in hell, and the fumes from the spices would make them sneeze, forever.

A search was organized, and more than half of us spread out among all the neighboring villages. Finally, a little after noon, we received the

news. She was in a village five miles away where she had gone for an abortion. The quack there, however, had known about the news of God's child, and had identified Usha by the somber glow of her body. He had kept the two of them waiting till we came to retrieve her.

Two of them? Who else was with her? Was it ...?

Yes it was. It was Isaac. No one knew how he had managed to communicate with her and planned this, but we were not very curious to find out. Usha was taken back home on a van rickshaw. We caught Isaac and gave him a preliminary beating there before dragging him to our village, where he was given a very thorough treatment. The women were especially vicious, pulling out most of his hair, and the milkman's wife broke his nose with a brick.

After we were tired, we shaved off his leftover hair and blackened his face with coal tar. When we were tying him to the back of the donkey, we did not know if he was alive or dead. The donkey was let loose, and the children followed the two for more than a mile, throwing pebbles at the donkey to make it run faster, but then had to return since it was getting dark, and no one, of course, wanted to pass by the bamboo grove when it was dark.

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Usha's surveillance was now stricter, with two women guarding her at all times.

It seemed like Usha had resigned to her fate; she did not speak at all. She followed orders. She did not move around, ate whatever she was given, and lay down on her cot whenever she was told to, but often spent the nights without sleep. But she was gaining health, and we could now clearly see a halo behind her head, which, like her breasts and stomach, grew larger each passing week. At just the tender age of twelve she had transformed into the most glorious picture of motherhood. Granted, there were a few complications, for she felt constantly dizzy and weak, and fainted once while sitting to defecate, but the doctor said it was just anemia and high blood pressure, which was common in young pregnancies and nothing to be concerned about.

Four months later, to celebrate the approaching birth, a festival was organized. People from all over the district came, and the artists among us made a lot of money selling poorly drawn portraits of Usha. We also sold many items of questionable authenticity, like Usha's half-eaten guavas, strands of her hair, and one person even sold her milk teeth, which he claimed he had dug out of a mouse hole in the ground near her hut.

We also performed a play. It was written by the headman himself. He wanted to play the role of God, but had to be dissuaded since he kept bumping into other actors, and one time he fell off the rehearsal stage. The play, nevertheless, went very well, and on all three nights there was no standing space on the ground, and the men had to lift the children on their shoulders.

It was a three-act play. In the first act, God came to Usha (played by Nadia), and Usha accepted Him. The second act showed Usha having doubts, but she was visited by an angelic old blind man, who restored her faith. The third act showed Usha having the child. The baby was played by a plastic doll into which a lightbulb had been inserted. On the first night, the baby grew so hot that the actor playing the doctor dropped it, leading to chaos in the audience.

Despite our multiple requests, Usha herself did not come to see the play. However, the day after the festival ended, she expressed the desire to go for a swim. The request was relayed to our headman, who, after consultation with the doctor, allowed it, saying it was actually a good exercise for a pregnant mother, and she should have, in fact, done it regularly.

Six women escorted Usha to the pond. She took a dip and did not come back up. There was so much panic that the wails of the women could be heard from the market. Boys converged in and jumped into the pond. Their initial searches were failures. Finally it was one of the Das twins who brought Usha back. He had only been able to locate her because he had spotted her halo in the deep waters, about a hundred feet from the banks.

Usha had been underwater for more than six minutes, but miraculously, she only seemed a little short of breath. She did not answer any questions and went straight to her house.

We had no doubt that she had done this deliberately to kill the child. What a heartless brute! We wondered why God had chosen such an ungrateful girl for his plan. Nevertheless, we believed that this episode must have shown her that neither we, nor the divine being above, would let her out so easily.

That afternoon, a meeting was called in the square. The headman decreed that from then on there should always be three sets of eyes watching her, and one of them had to be male, since the women had failed them twice already. We could not take any more chances.

This new surveillance system proved to be quite effective, since no other breeches occurred till the morning of Monday, when Usha went into labor.

As soon as we heard it, we rushed to her hut, and someone went to call the doctor. The birth was slow and arduous, but it was not like



she was howling in pain the entire time. Most of us went home for meals, but there always remained a vigilant group outside the door.

The baby came out on Tuesday evening, after Usha had been in labor for thirty-two hours. It was premature, and the doctor said the girl was unlikely to survive very long.

The girl?

‘Yes,’ the doctor said, ‘it’s not a boy.’

All of this, and at the end, we had a girl! Surely God’s child could not have been a girl. This was completely irrational!

We now suspected this entire thing must have been an elaborate ruse. In the months preceding the miracle, Usha had been living alone, unguarded. And so the father could have been anyone. We thought of names. Perhaps, perhaps the father was Isaac! Or maybe it was her own father, before he disappeared! Or maybe a supernatural entity was indeed involved, but it was not God but the Devil. Yes, that would explain so much.

Usha continued bleeding even after the baby was delivered. In fact, she bled so much that the blood soon flowed outside her room and down the steps into the courtyard. It would have reached the pond had we not started mopping it up; men with their lungis and shirts, women with their saris. But there seemed to be no end of it, and we wondered how her little body could have held so much blood. After an hour we were tired, and had to call for shovels to dig a moat.

The doctor couldn’t stop the bleeding and Usha was dead by midnight. It was all over, and for nothing. The visitors in the high school field and the rice fields packed their belongings and left in the next two days. Three of them came back, but only because they believed they had left something on the fields and needed to search for it. On Friday, it rained heavily in the evening. The streets didn’t flood, but our rice fields filled with water.

The baby’s now with Nadia. It’s still alive, but it has difficulty breathing at nights. We don’t hope for it to stay for long. Let’s see.

‘The Divine Pregnancy in a Twelve-Year-Old Woman’ was first published by Granta magazine in July 2018.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sagnik Datta

Sagnik Datta is from Siliguri, India. He has an MFA in Creative Writing from University of Texas at Austin, and a degree in Engineering Physics from Indian Institute of Technology Delhi (although he’s not sure where he has kept it). He’s currently working on a novel.

Fonte: <https://www.addastories.org/divine-pregnancy-twelve-year->

old-woman/

Based on the content of the story you have just read, and taking into account the previous classes about narrative structure, answer the questions below:

- 1) What is the main theme of the tale, in your opinion? Explain yourself.
- 2) How is the story narrated?
- 3) Who are the characters of the story and what is their importance?
- 4) Is there any moral of the story? How could you explain that?

### COMENTARIO SOBRE AS ATIVIDADES

Esta atividade tem por finalidade principal fazer com que você construa uma síntese dos principais conteúdos desta aula e do curso, desenvolvendo o senso interpretativo e o senso crítico. Antes de fazer esta atividade, no entanto, o tutor deverá aproveitar-se da experiência de leitura dos alunos, através de fóruns ou de chats, buscando ver que tipo de narrativa eles mais lêem, com o intuito de, a partir de tais informações, discutir as questões levantadas pelo texto com base nas narrativas por eles lidas (ou assistidas, no caso dos filmes).

### CONCLUSION

The different ways of narrating a story, in one form or another, are always related to worldviews, which, in turn, share the values and (pre) concepts of the socio-historical contexts in which they are constituted. As we saw in the previous lesson, the scientific and technological advances of the modern world have modified old conceptions about space and time, as well as traditional notions of reality and fiction, interfering in the modes of representing the world.

In this way, narrative resources such as mental analysis, inner monologue or the flow of consciousness, in addition to the aforementioned free indirect discourse, cannot be conceived as mere technical artifice, but as literary inscriptions of changes in social structures.

The mental analysis represents the deepening in the psychic processes of the personages, but indirectly, through an omniscient narrator, in third person, that, after exposing, or describing, a certain scene, comments and analyzes it, judging it. Such a narrative attitude is part of a world in which the representative power of words is still believed, as if it were objectively possible to say what the characters think.



## RESUMO

In this lesson, we have seen that the relationship between narrative and fiction is very intimate and almost inseparable, since, by the very nature of language, whenever we narrate or even describe something, in a certain way we recreate or reinvent reality, which in turn is always unreachable and supplementary. Thus, we have learned that narrative objectivity is nothing more than a myth. Next, we have seen some of the best known theoretical positions on issues related to narrative focus, from Plato and Aristotle to some twentieth-century structuralists such as Todorov and Roland Barthes, as well as the importance of some notions such as “implied author,” for the interpretation of the socio-historical or ideological aspects of the narratives.

Finally, we have briefly touched on the main features of the typology proposed by Norman Friedman, in order to provide an adequate theoretical tool for the identification of the most common types of narrators in Western literature. We try to show, however, that no typology can be prescriptive, given the authors’ freedom to innovate, subvert or simply merge existing types.

## GLOSSÁRIO

**(1) Nouveau roman:** it is a type of 1950s French novel that diverged from classical literary genres. Émile Henriot coined the term in an article in the popular French newspaper *Le Monde* on May 22, 1957[1] to describe certain writers who experimented with style in each novel, creating an essentially new style each time (fonte: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nouveau\\_roman](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nouveau_roman)).



## PRÓXIMA AULA

The Literary Tale