

## **Week 1:**

### **Genre: Memoir/Essays/ Creative Nonfiction writing:**

## **The Narrator**

## **Voice and Style**

The narrator is the nucleus of any piece of writing (fiction/nonfiction) and the axis around which the narrative/story revolves, and the other elements are all analyzed/perceived through the narrator's lens.

*The persona of the author as the narrator is bound to be reflected in the pages.*

*An author can have many facets to him/her: artist, friend, philosopher, guide, observer or spectator*

*For each of these facets, the voice/expressions are bound to be unique and different.*

*In memoir writing/personal essays, the author chooses one/two facet(s) which best define him at that point and reveals that in the pages.*

**Take for example these opening lines from the essay 'Portrait Of My Body' by Philip Lopate (same name for the book of personal essays):**

**"I am a man who tilts. When I am sitting, my head slants to the right; when walking, the upper part of my body reaches forward to catch a sneak preview from the street. On one way or the other, I seem to be off-center—or**

**‘uncentered’, to use the jargon of holism. My lousy posture, a tendency to slump or put myself into lazy, contorted misalignments, undoubtedly contributes to lower back pain. For a while, I correct my bad habits, do morning exercises, sit straight, breathe deeply, but always an inner demon that insists on approaching the world askew perpendicularly.”**

**What’s his role here apparently?**

***A philosopher, or observer***

***Closely watching the peculiar quirks, the twists and turns of his own body parts.***

**The voice is:**

***Crisp, yet detailed, analytical***

***Intimate, yet maintaining an objective stance***

***Brutally honest, almost scathing***

***Portrays a universal truth about the human anatomy***

**Another essay, a family memoir, ‘Mastering The Art Of French Cooking’, by award-winning author E.J. Levy starts like this:**

**“I have no photograph of my mother cooking, but when I recall my childhood, this is how I picture her: standing in the kitchen of our suburban ranch house, a blue-and-white-checked terry-cloth apron tied at her waist, her lovely head bent over a recipe, a hiss of frying butter, a smell of onions and broth, and open like a hymnal on the counter beside her, a copy of Julia Child’s ‘Mastering the Art of French Cooking’.**

**The book’s cover is delicately patterned like wallpaper—white with miniature red fleurs-de-lis and tiny teal stars—the title and the author’s names modestly scripted in a rectangular frame no larger than a recipe card: a model of feminine self-effacement.**

**This unassuming book was my mother’s most reliable companion throughout my childhood, and from the table laid with a blue cotton cloth, not yet set with flatware and plates and glasses of ice water, not yet laid with bowls of broccoli**

spears, boeuf bourguignon, potatoes sautéed in butter, I observed her as she sought in its pages an elusive balance between the bitter and sweet.”

*Essay about:*

*Memories, childhood cuisines, family ties and interpersonal relationship, all in reference to Julia Child, the celebrated chef*

*Role of the author as the narrator here is:*

*That of an observer and critic of her family’s cultural past*

*She records in details the minute features of her mother cooking, the kitchen of her childhood memories, the sensory details of the house etc.*

*The voice is:*

*Detailed, analytical, most importantly: sensory*

*Intimate and woven with feelings*

*Maintaining the balance between subjective and objective interpretation*

*Portrays a universal truth about family ties through memories/detailed exploration, use of cultural tidbits*

## **The Person, the ‘I’ in Creative Nonfiction Writing**

**Joan Didion, the famous essayist, nonfiction writer once quoted:**

*“No matter how dutifully we record what we see around us, the common denominator of all we see is always, transparently, shamelessly, the impeccable ‘I.’”*

**Creative Nonfiction: functions subjectively (like fiction and painting).**

**Personal ‘I’: the medium through the observations, details of the world is filtered.**

***Creative challenge: How would you frame the experience effectively?***

***Reconstruction of an immediate truth with a subjective lens, with the 'I'.***

***How would you frame your essay?***

***Joan Didion in her essay 'Goodbye to All That', writes in the first paragraph:***

***"I would stay in New York, I told him, just six months, and I could see the Brooklyn Bridge from my window. As it turned out, the bridge was the Triborough, and I stayed eight years." (page 263-264: Tell It Slant: anthology)***

***How does the personal 'I' or the self, work in this essay?***

- ***Framing the essay: Through nostalgic perspective/through a retrospective view***
- ***Reconstructs the moments of her time in NY***
- ***Recreates the narrative from the POV of a young woman new to the city***
- ***Giving sensory details***
- ***A snapshot of NY, as a faithful reconstruction of the city***
- ***Shaped the narrative/her experience through her particular voice and vision.***
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**Questions:**

***Is it a hardcore realist's vision?***

***What does the nostalgic voice do to the narrative?***

***How is her observation of the world in this part of the essay?***

**Final analysis:**

***In both creative nonfiction and painting, as in photography, our outer worlds are shaped by our artistic consciousness/intuition.***

***The writing will reflect the inner sensibility of the writer***

*(This is the 'Autobiographical Act')—recreating your past, your sense of self.*

*Here is where the challenge lies:*

*Memory v/s imagination*

*What are real memories?*

*What do we do with recreating our memories and personal experiences?*

*The private becomes public (forging connections and metaphors)*

*The narrator who is the 'I' in the pages: yourself*

*The 'I' would exist in the text as a character: two distinct selves*