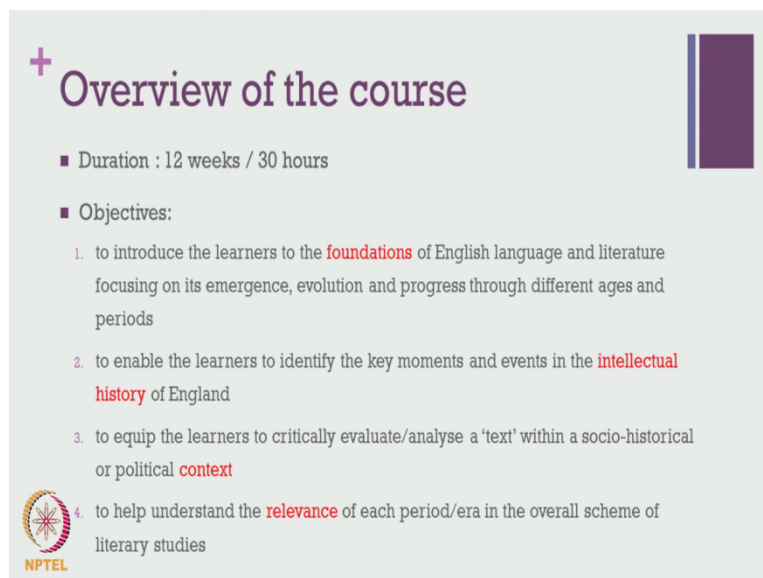


**History of English Language and Literature**  
**Professor Merin Simi Raj**  
**Department of Humanities and Social Sciences**  
**Indian Institute of Technology Madras**  
**Lecture 1**  
**Introduction: Literary History**


Hello everyone; let me welcome you all to the first lecture of the course The history of English language and literature. At the outset, this being the first session, it is very important to give an overview of the course. This course is spread over 12 weeks and we may have 30 hours of teaching involve in this and let me also introduce you to the objectives of this course so the intensions become clearer. The first objective is to introduce the learners to the foundations of English language and literature focusing on its emergence, evolution and progress through different ages and periods.

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**+ Overview of the course**

- Duration : 12 weeks / 30 hours
- Objectives:
  1. to introduce the learners to the **foundations** of English language and literature focusing on its emergence, evolution and progress through different ages and periods
  2. to enable the learners to identify the key moments and events in the **intellectual history** of England
  3. to equip the learners to critically evaluate/analyse a 'text' within a socio-historical or political **context**
  4. to help understand the **relevance** of each period/era in the overall scheme of literary studies

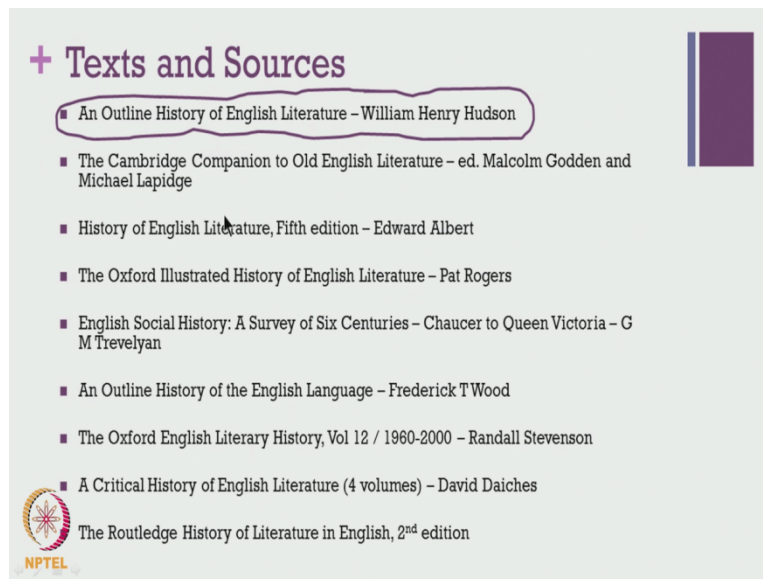
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The second one is to enable the learners to identify the key moments and events in the intellectual history of England. The third one is to equip the learners to critically evaluate or analyze a text within a socio-historical or political context. And the fourth one is to help understand the relevance of each period or era in overall scheme of literally studies. Here we find that some of the concepts become very important in underlying the objective of this course. In that sense we shall be focusing on four major elements, the foundations, and the intellectual history of the nation, the context and the relevance.

So as in when we progress in each session you may also notice that most of the discussions will be highlighting these four major aspects, which would also form and refine the

understanding of literary history in general. And before we move on it is also important to take a look at the various texts and sources that have shall be informing our understanding of the history of England and the history of literature in during this course. So this is a range of text from which we have drawn our material from the course will be focusing including the material which is available from most of the major literary histories which is been written from the early twentieth century onwards.

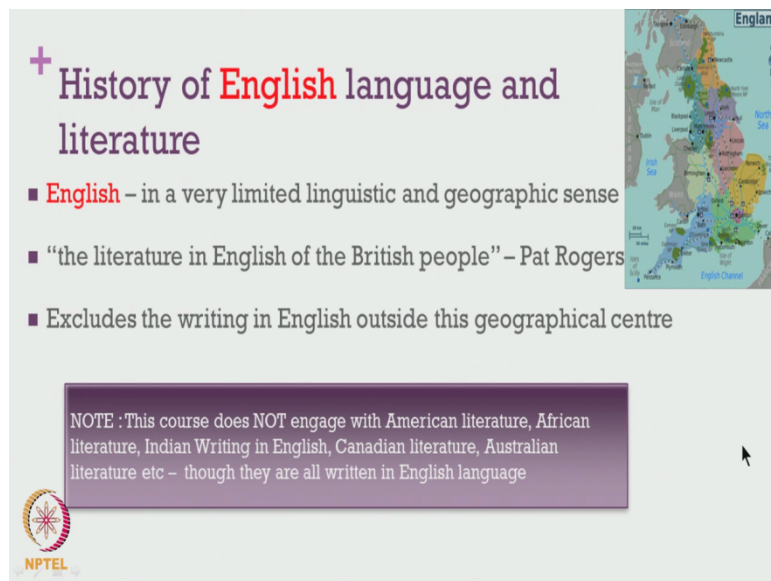
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In that sense we shall be highlighting a couple of text over here, the first one being the outline history of English literature by William Henry Hudson, we should be following this book in order to get a framework of our understanding of history and the details that Hudson does not talk about will be supplemented through our reading of the other text and lot of other events which Hudson does not talk about, the social political context that are not mentioned in detail then Hudson shall all be referred from the other text.

And in that sense the illustrated history of English literature by Pat Rogers, this is also supreme importance because he gives the fairly balanced account of literary and non-literary events of the period quite simultaneously. And here we also see that G.M. Trevelyan's work, the English social history a survey of six centuries it is very important to locate our understanding of the socio-political context specially in the earlier centuries when English literature and even the nation of England was getting framed.


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**+ History of English language and literature**

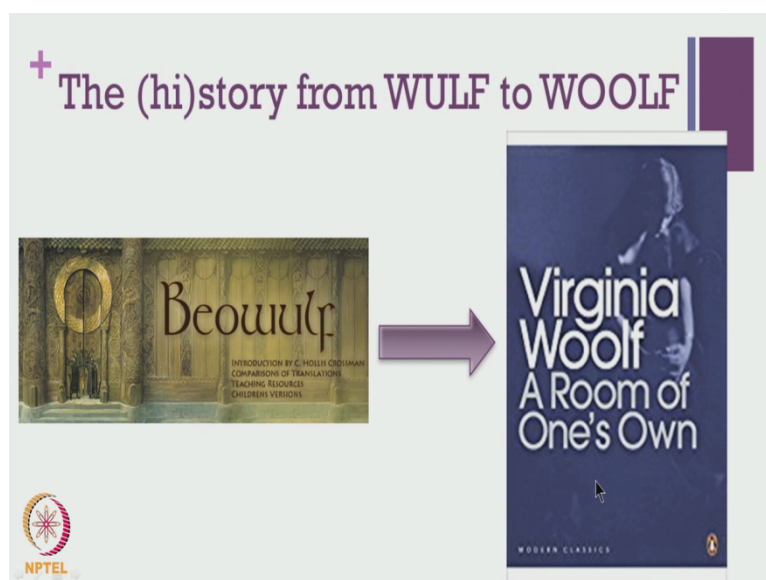
- **English** – in a very limited linguistic and geographic sense
- “the literature in English of the British people” – Pat Rogers
- Excludes the writing in English outside this geographical centre

NOTE : This course does NOT engage with American literature, African literature, Indian Writing in English, Canadian literature, Australian literature etc – though they are all written in English language

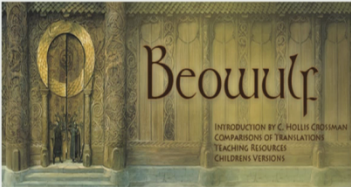


So overall this is how the course is going to be structured with the objectives in place and also drawing from variety of sources which talk about the history of language and literature. And the oversight itself is very important to make this distinction and to make you aware of what exactly we mean when we talk about English language and literature. English in this course is going to be used in a very limited linguistic and geographic sense as Pat Rogers would put it, this is going to be the literature in English of the British people.


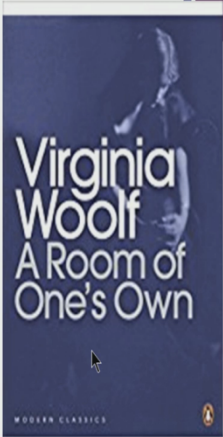
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**+ The (hi)story from WULF to WOOLF**



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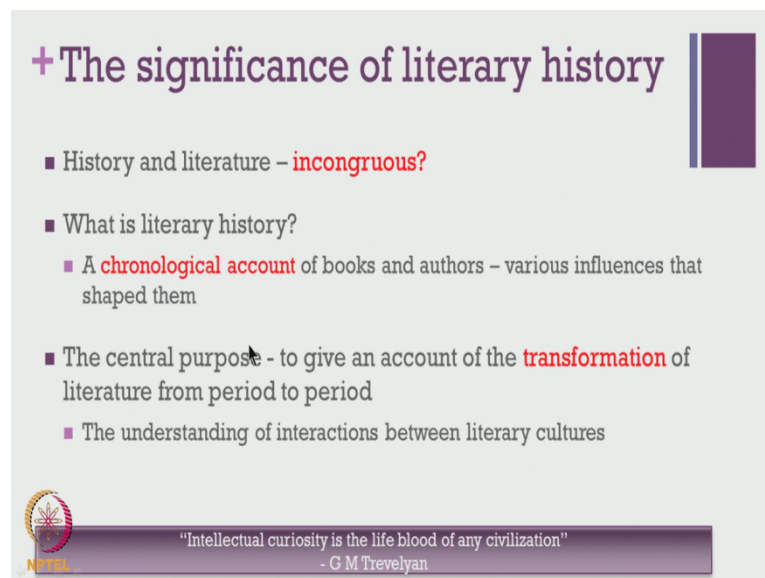


So we shall not be talking about the literature written English outside this geographical center, also it is every important to highlight at the oversight that this course does not engage with these other kinds of writings available in English like American literature, African

literature, Indian writing in English, Canadian literature so on and so forth. So this is going to be a discussion on the English literature produced from the island of England. And now about the period that this course covers, this is going to be a history from wulf to woolf, wulf being the first the first available text written in old English Beowulf and woolf being Virginia wolf the modernist writer. So in a sense this connection is very important to this course because we shall be looking at a range of text from the earlier times onwards like text like Beowulf which do not even have a proper author like the author is anonymous.


And from then onwards we shall be moving to the modern and postmodern period when even the women writers begin to acclaim a space themselves in the space of literature and the in terms of publications, in terms of publishing, in terms of dissemination of works so on and so forth. So this connection and this range is very important for us to understand right at the outset so that it will kind of set the tone for the course in the beginning. And what is the significance of literary history? Why did the earlier historians G.M. Trevelyan, he understands literary history as the project of the intellectual curiosity of a set of people and he even opined that intellectual curiosity is a life blood of any civilization.

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**+ The significance of literary history**

- History and literature – **incongruous?**
- What is literary history?
  - A **chronological account** of books and authors – various influences that shaped them
- The central purpose – to give an account of the **transformation** of literature from period to period
  - The understanding of interactions between literary cultures

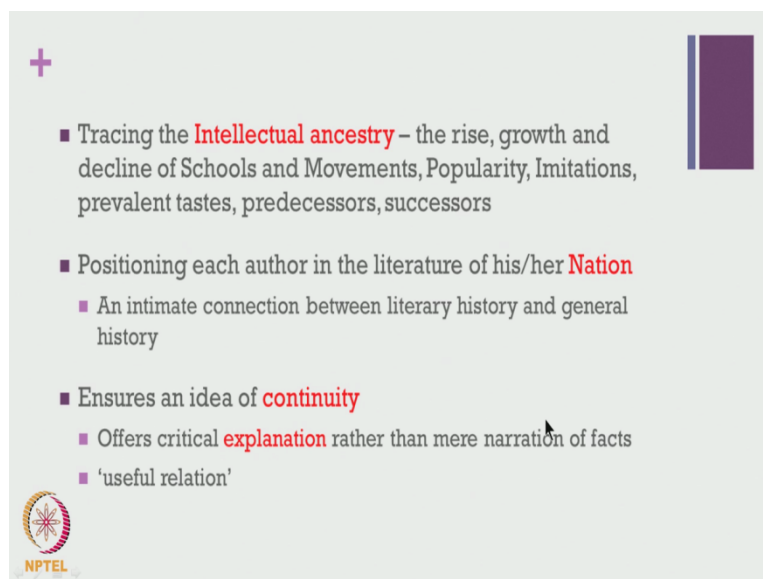
 "Intellectual curiosity is the life blood of any civilization"  
- G M Trevelyan

Keeping this in mind, it is also important to figure out whether some of us find this connection between a history and literature a little incongruous. A but let me assure you at the beginning itself that this is not a incongruous relationship that literature and history shares, but it is a more organic and more interconnected relationship. So in that sense what is literary history? If you go for a very simple definition and see chronological account of books and authors talking about various influences that shaped them.

And some of these influences could also be shaping each other and also highlighting the ways in which language and literature history and literature continue to inform each other. And what is a central purpose of any literary history, it is perhaps to give an account of the transformation of the literature from period to period because when we talk about the chronological account, there is an inherent understanding that literature, there is an inherent understanding that we are talking about a sequential order of literary and non-literary events from one set of a events to the other.

So in that sense the transformation and the connection between these different literatures, these different cultures also become a supremely important. So this is also with this with this inherent understanding that there are solid interactions between different literary cultures and also that becomes very important in our understanding of the past and also in the shaping of what lies ahead. In that sense, we shall be tracing the intellectual ancestry of a particular literature, which also means we shall be tracing the intellectual ancestry of a particular community or even a particular nation.

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- Tracing the **Intellectual ancestry** – the rise, growth and decline of Schools and Movements, Popularity, Imitations, prevalent tastes, predecessors, successors
- Positioning each author in the literature of his/her **Nation**
  - An intimate connection between literary history and general history
- Ensures an idea of **continuity**
  - Offers critical **explanation** rather than mere narration of facts
  - 'useful relation'

So what do I mean by intellectual ancestry? This could be perhaps a sequential understanding of the risen growth of various movements whereas schools of thoughts and ideas. It could also mean a various kinds of imitations that are reflection of the popularity of particular kinds of writing, it could also be the prevalent tastes of a particular community or province and it can be the discussion of a predecessors and successors and the relationship between them.

So this intellectual ancestry is very important not just for understanding of a literary history, but also for our understanding of a nation in general. So it would be useful to remember that the origin of literary history in fact, is also very connected to the origins of the nation state itself. And in the literary history we will begin to also note and highlight this fact that each author and each kind of writing is in fact, a position within the location of the nation. So we would begin to see how there is an intimate connection between literary history and the general history and how one goes on to inform the other. So in that sense, the shape of literary history is also quite connected with the shaping of a nation in particular.

And the other important feature is that literary history is based on an idea of continuity and this continuity is very important because when one moves from one school of thought to the other or from literary age to the other or even from a one kind of authority to the other, there is a sense of continuity which is built in and a literary history tries to highlight this connection and even while we are trying to highlight this connection, it is useful to remember that the modern literary history is quite unlike the earlier kinds of prototypes of literary histories available which could include chronicles, catalogs so on and so forth. The earlier catalogs and chronicles perhaps merely narrated the facts, but in the later modern histories we have not merely a narration of facts, but also a sense of a critical explanation available which would also give a rationale for the continuity which is built into this structure of literary histories.

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**+ What is literary history?**

- A chronological account of books and authors - various influences that shaped them
- The central purpose - to give an account of the transformation of literature from period to period - to mark out the causes which have combined to produce it

Diagram: Social, historical, political, economic events ↔ Influence of individuals, culture, ideals, moral tendencies of the society

■ Intimate connection between literary history and general history

■ Positioning each author in the literature of his/her NATION

■ Tracing the **Intellectual ancestry** - the rise, growth and decline of Schools and Movements, Popularity, Imitations, prevalent tastes, predecessors, successors → LITERARY TRADITION

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"Autobiography of a Nation"

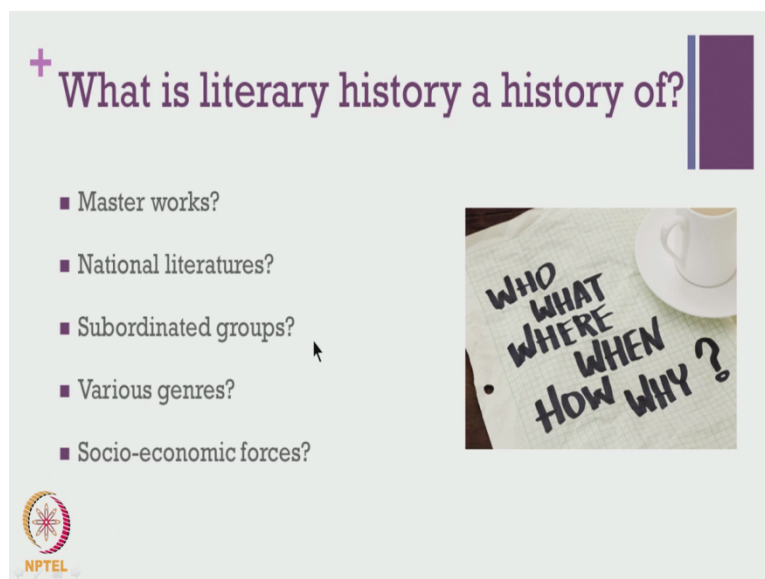
A relatively modern invention (earlier - catalogues, chronicles)

And this continuity we may often know that it is not always organic, it is also at time we find that historians at a later point have a forcefully ensured a kind of continuities so that

particular literary traditions live on, particular canonical structures do not get disturbed, there could be many reasons of this some of which we shall be looking at a later point. So to sum up our exactly literary history, it is a chronological account of books and authors and about the various influences that shaped them, the influences could be socio-historical, political, or economic and it could also be combined with the influence of individuals, cultures, ideas, morals, tendencies of the society so on and so forth.

There is a connection between literary history and general history, the nation is also of a supreme importance in this. In that sense when we are looking at the literary history of a nation we should also be looking at the autobiography of a nation and also focusing on the literary traditions that have emerged. With this understanding, we move on to ask this very pertinent question, what is literary history a history of? We all know that the literary history is of a particular nation a particular community and perhaps a particular set of writing which have not brought together, but if we try to narrow it down a little further does it include only the history of master works?

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+ What is literary history a history of?

- Master works?
- National literatures?
- Subordinated groups?
- Various genres?
- Socio-economic forces?

WHO  
WHAT  
WHERE  
WHEN  
HOW  
WHY ?

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Or is only about national literatures or does it also include the subordinated groups? Do we talk about various genres and the hierarchy which are built in? And how do we position the various socio-economic forces. These many-many questions and former understanding of literary histories in general and some of these questions will also help us to critically evaluate the literary history which has been received from one generation to the other.



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As in when we discuss this, let me also highlight a few ways in which we shall be talking about literary history and the various aspects that define it throughout this course. Though in the postmodern era we celebrate the death of the author in the understanding of the literary history the positioning of the author is of supreme importance. For example, when we begin to talk about the particular author, we may begin to talk about certain well maintained details including his birth, family, person name, the occupation when he died the kind of wealth the kind of status of wealth that he enjoyed, his friends and the associates and also moving on to the other various life events that had perhaps a defined, not just this personal career but also his writing career.

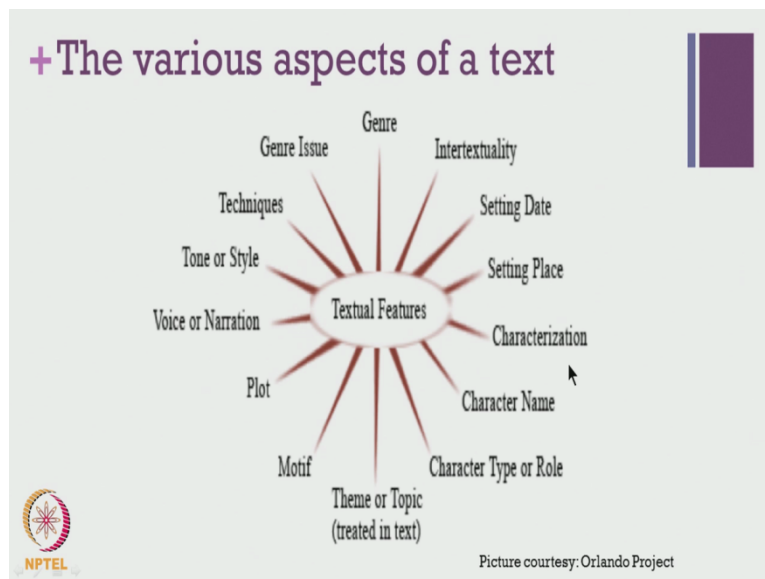
And we shall also be perhaps and one shall also perhaps begin to talk about some of the very important things that become central to our understanding of literary history itself like cultural formation which went on to shape the author, the politics of the (12:15) which influence the author, or maybe even things like leisure and society which when instrumental in making in determining particular writing careers. So here we begin to know that some of these aspects could be entirely personal like their friends and the associates one shared or the family into which one is born, the kind of the wealth status that one's family had so on and so forth.

But there are also these things like the cultural formations, the politics of the period, the societal formations, etcetera, which could perhaps be shared by more than one author. So this becomes important in assigning sub groups of our each author or even identifying particular



forms of writing that emerged in a society in a particular age so on and so forth. So this is perhaps one of the ways in which we begin to locate the author within the literary history. And there are also various aspects of a text that needs to be covered, so when we talk about a text it could be a book, it could be a performance, it could be any kind of cultural or artistic production.

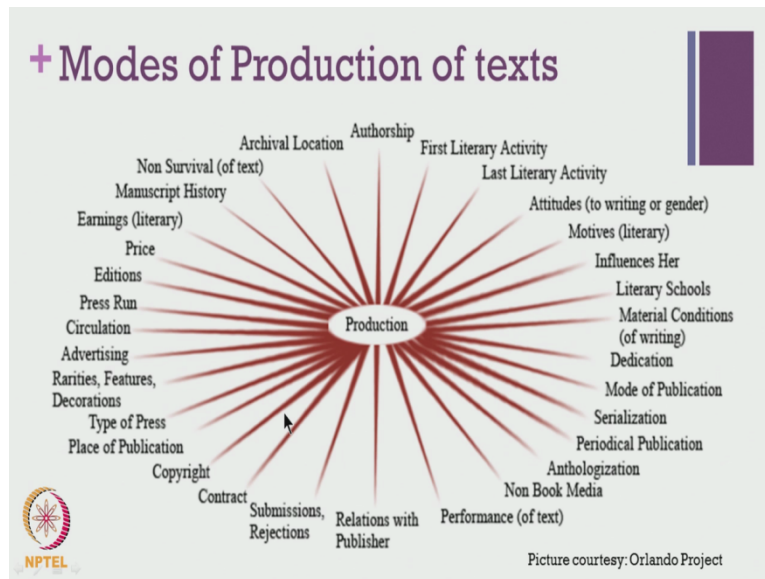
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So when we look at the text and try to locate it within the literary history, we shall be looking at (13:23) of these aspect which could include issues related to genre, the date and place of publication or perhaps the kind of characterization that it involve, the voice or narration in the text so on and so forth. And all of these become important in not just narrating where the text belongs to, but also in critically evaluating and critically seeing the connection between various literary traditions and also in locating the predecessor and successor of particular kinds of writing. And this is another interesting aspect, when we talk about library history, we shall also be talking about the reception of not just authors and text but also of ideas.

In that sense, we shall be talking about a particular authors best known work or the kind of influences that this author or a text had on other things and maybe about their recognition value and even about the penalties that one incurred for writing a particular kind of thing when we later begin to talk about sensor ship of getting into a longer head with the authority of each period when we shall be talking about the various penalties as well and also about some of the works which get destructed either due to a natural calamity or even due to another political or socio economic force, so these are the various aspects that we shall be looking at.

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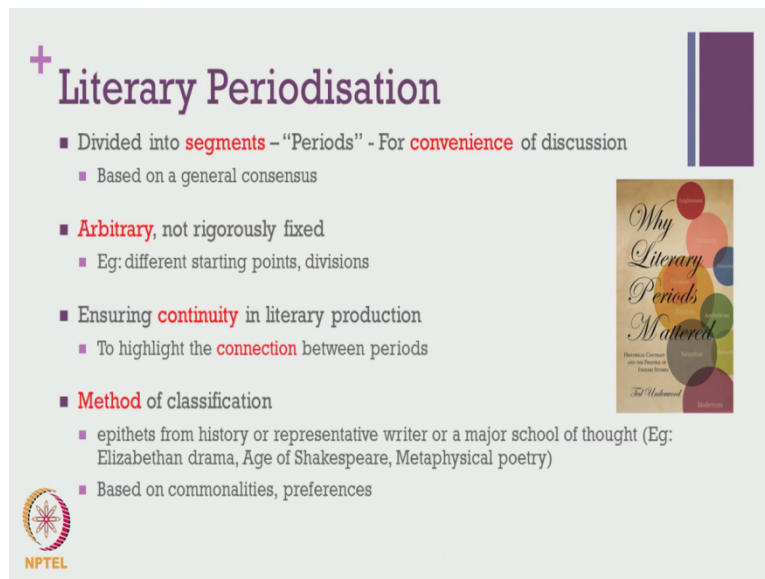
And we shall also be looking at the various modes of the production of text, this is very important in our understanding, it could include details of authorship, about the attitudes and motives, it could be literary and non-literary and the mode of publication, the submissions and rejections at a particular text or an author or an idea incurred during its lifetime, the rarities, features, decorations of that involved that is part of production, the manuscript history specially with the regard to the earlier text from the old English and early middle English period, this becomes important in understanding how our text had been disseminated over a period of time even before the advent of printing.

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So these are the various aspects which we need to keep in mind when we talk about literary histories and the particular connections to authors, to text, to nations, to communities, to identities, so on and so forth. So in the recent decades in fact, there is surge of works on literary histories and general which could be refer to on the whole, literary history studies these are some of the seminal text that have begun to inform our ways to understanding literary histories and also calling for a rewriting of the existing literary histories.


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**+ Literary Periodisation**

- Divided into **segments** – “Periods” - For **convenience** of discussion
  - Based on a general consensus
- **Arbitrary**, not rigorously fixed
  - Eg: different starting points, divisions
- Ensuring **continuity** in literary production
  - To highlight the **connection** between periods
- **Method** of classification
  - epithets from history or representative writer or a major school of thought (Eg: Elizabethan drama, Age of Shakespeare, Metaphysical poetry)
  - Based on commonalities, preferences





Now we come to another important aspect of literary histories, which is literary periodization. So as when we progress through this course, we may begin to know that our discussion is conveniently based on particular literary periods or literary ages. So why are these segments brought into place, this division and the segments which are loosely termed as periods, it is primarily for the convenience of discussion because it would be easier to a club a set of authors or set of writings or particular modes of production into different segments and periods.

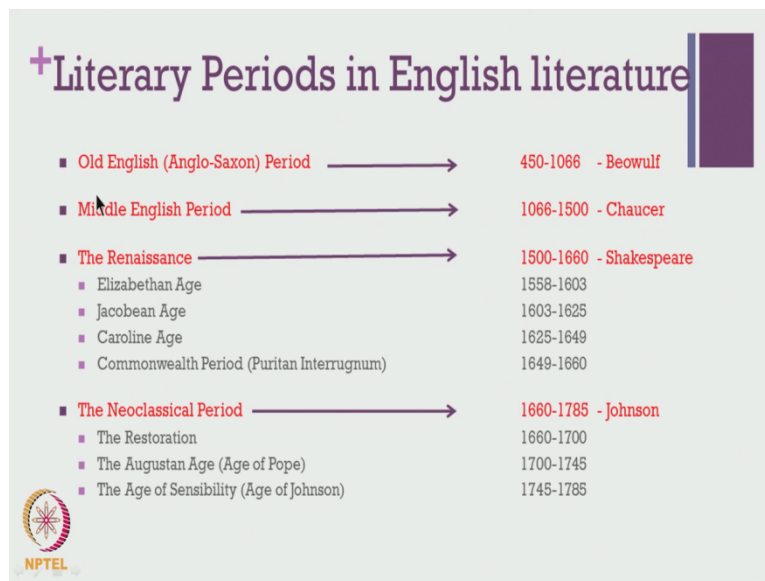
And this periodization is also based on a general consensus so that all of us know what we are talking about, it is easier to refer to an age and immediately image of the age will come to everyone’s mind that makes the discussion livelier and also the understanding is also enhanced. And a curious fact about this aspect of periodization is that these are not rigorously fixed at all, they are more less arbitrary and in that sense we find many historians and many critics even arguing about the different starting points for example, if one could talk about the origins of English literature there are few historians who argue that it should begin maybe Anglo Saxon period.

There are few who identify Beowulf as the first literary text in English, but there are also a set of historians who argue that English literature cannot have any other starting point than that of Chaucer. So in that sense there is a certain arbitrariness which allows a lot of flexibility and which also allows literary history to remain as fascinating and as interesting as ever. And the periodization is also important to ensure a sense of continuity which would enable us to understand how one period a seamlessly emerged from the other or it will also help us to highlight the connections between these different periods which are seemingly very different.

But also the understanding of the transition will allow us to be aware of the various common factors and the various connections which are built into this structure. And the method of classification into different periods or different segments that could also be either arbitrary or it could be based on certain factors and some of the times we find that the classification based on epithets from a history like one could have the terms like Elizabethan age or Jacobean age or we could even classify this age loosely based on the most prominent writer of the period like Chaucer's age or the age of Shakespeare or the age of Johnson.

And it could also be based on a major school of thought like metaphysical poetry or at later point a modernist writing, post-modernist affection so on and so forth. So this also this is certain arbitrariness involved in it, and it also be based on certain commonalities and certain dominant preferences. So this kind of arbitrariness built into it and a lack of rigid structures has also lead to the emergence of various kinds of classification and various kinds of periodization, but this is the loosely they the periodization which is followed in most of the dominant works on literary history.

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In this course also we will more or less taking this form of periodization and highlighting the problematization as in when they are required. And in that sense we shall be going through, in that sense we shall be beginning with the old English period through middle English period, then the features of renaissance, moving on to the neoclassical period and highlighting the romantic period through the Victorian age and then moving on to the modern and the postmodern period.

We will also see here that set of authors which seems to be more representative and more dominant compare to the others, but however I would like to highlight in this point that our discussion will not be limited to these authors who are being highlighted, but these names are been given here to show the connection and show the chronological order in which the discussion would be loosely based on. This might lead us to also assume that the understanding of literary history is quite simple in the sense that the chronological account seem to be quite clear, there is a linear kind of an understanding from Beowulf to Chaucer, from Chaucer to Shakespeare, from Shakespeare to Milton, from Milton to Wordsworth, from Wordsworth to Tennyson so on and so forth.

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But the interesting thing is that this is not so linear. We shall not just be talking about as we had highlighted, we shall not just be talking about the various authors and the various works that they produced, but this is going to be plethora of things that come into the discussion, we should be talking about past sense of tradition, about artistic forms, about various genres, about print culture, about the standpoints, about the political opinions, which inform the understanding of a text, about native traditions, about the heritages, about literary reputations, so there is a there is a vast range of topics that will inform our understanding of this seemingly linear discussion from Beowulf till the modern times.

So with this introduction, we begin to wind up the first lecture, so I also assume that you got a clear understanding of what literary history is and how we would be going about this course using literary history as a central framework. And as we move on we will begin to look at how origins are being created, how various forms of transitions are being enabled and in between our discussions of the literary and nonliterary features we shall also be talking about how language continues to evolve through all of these ages and how language continues to be influenced by the various aspects of literatures, socio political and cultural issues so on and so forth. So with this we come to the end of this lecture, thank you for listening and see in the next session.