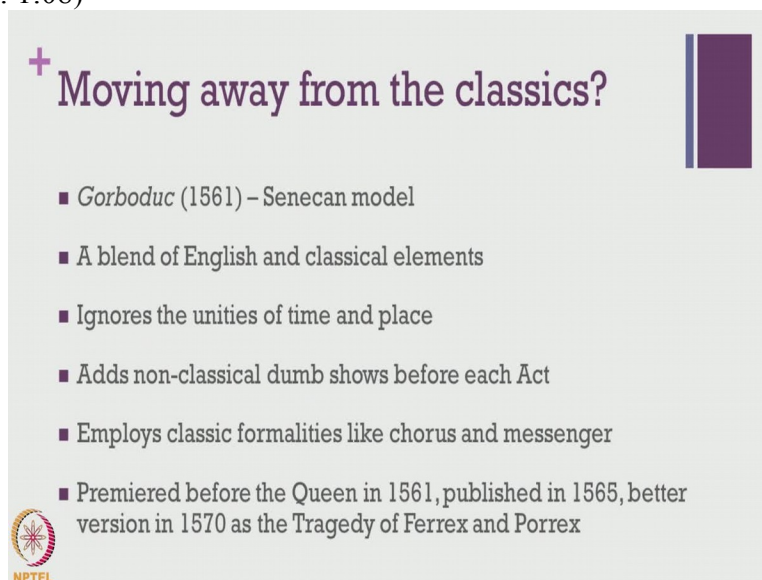


**History of English Language and Literature**  
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**Department of Humanities and Social Sciences**  
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**Lecture No 4c**  
**The emergence of Elizabeth 'Romantic' Drama**

Good morning and welcome to the course on history of English language and literature. In the previous session we took a look at the predecessors of Elizabethan drama, we also saw how drama had begun to evolve from the 11<sup>th</sup> century onwards through a series of different kinds of plays known as Mystery plays, Morality plays, Miracle plays and The Interludes. We also saw how the transition was quite gradual and also how all these changes kept in tune with the changing taste of the English people as well.


In today's session we will be taking a more detailed look at how all these changes led to the emergence of a romantic kind of drama in the English scene, especially during the Elizabethan period and let us begin by taking a look at a major momentous event that we noticed in the previous session which was the production and presentation of a tragedy named *Gorboduc*.

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**+ Moving away from the classics?**

- *Gorboduc* (1561) – Senecan model
- A blend of English and classical elements
- Ignores the unities of time and place
- Adds non-classical dumb shows before each Act
- Employs classic formalities like chorus and messenger
- Premiered before the Queen in 1561, published in 1565, better version in 1570 as the Tragedy of Ferrex and Porrex



We noticed that this was performed in front of the Queen in 1561 for the first time and this was authored by not Norton and Thomas Sackville. This had enjoyed a huge popularity and had ensured a wide audience in the English public during that time and there was also a sense by which the play Gorboduc had begun to move away from the classic theories and from the classic elements. So this was initially modeled alongside Senecan plays.

Seneca is being the first century Greek dramatists but at the same time the display of the Gorboduc begun to show a blend of English and classical elements. And to go into a bit of the details we begun this notice that the play Gorboduc had ignored the unity of time and place which was quite mandatory in the classical period and at the same time they had begun to add some non-classical dumb shows before each acts.

This kind of a frivolity was not acceptable in the classical tradition because a tragedy had to be in the tragic tone and tragic mood throughout and there was no relevance for including any kind of comic interludes but we find that Gorboduc had begun to challenge all those classical notions and this had in that sense the English play had begun to move away from the classical elements as well. But at the same time it was Senecan to the core in some of the aspects.

Certain formalities like chorus and messenger the introduction of the chorus the use of the messenger all of that remained the same and the structure of the play also remained along the Senecan morale. On the whole there was a blend of typical Senecan tragedy and also an introduction of the new nationalists taste which were coming into being.

So we look at the history of Gorboduc. It was first premiere before the Queen in 1561. This was again published in a proper format in 1565 but there were lots of mistakes and lots of errors from the production and a better version appeared in 1570. It was retitled as The Tragedy of Ferrex and Porrex.

So the influence in popularity of Gorboduc was in such a way that even after it was staged into decades, the popularity continued and people were quite keen to read about the play, quite keen to get copies of the play, so on and so forth. So however Gorboduc also saw that a new kind of drama, a new kind of romantic drama was getting initiated into the English public.


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## + 'English' Drama

*Dilemma and confusion after the production of Gorboduc (1561)*

- Classical tradition vs. National taste
  - Faithful imitation of ancient models – cramping conditions of the Senecan style (translations of Seneca – 1581 – 10 tragedies in a single edition)
- Triumph of the national taste
  - Catered to the amusement of the miscellaneous unscholarly public
  - Cared for exciting plots and vigorous action than the finer details of art
  - A variety of experiments
  - The support of patrons
- Free tradition of the popular stage - away from the restrictive classical principles
  - The use of stage tricks and magic

Waning popularity of mystery plays,  
Catholic themes



So soon after the production of *Gorboduc* we find that there is some dilemma and confusion about what could be the right kind of dramatic practices to be followed in England and we also noticed in some of the previous sessions that whether it is in terms of religion, politics, morality, economy whatever it be, English people had begun to develop their own sense of everything their own idea of all kinds of practices.

This begins to get reflected in the literary practices and dramatic practices of that period as well. So we find a tussle between the classical dramatic tradition as well as the emergent national taste and in that sense we find that the faithful imitation of the ancient model, some of the plays like *Gorboduc* or perhaps even many are the tragedies especially, they had forced themselves to cramp into this Senecan style and also try and display the free spirit of the Elizabethan times.

And we also need to talk a little bit of about Senecan at this point of time because you know we will be coming back time and again to the Senecan model later especially when we begin to discuss the Elizabethan tragedy in particular. Seneca was a very influential figure in Elizabethan times so much so that all of his 10 tragedies together they were published together in a single addition in 1581 and this had become hugely popular among the aspiring dramatist and also common people found it very interesting to refer to Senecan to see whether the, how the contemporary Elizabethan dramatists were either sticking to the principle of Seneca or how they were departing from the principles of Seneca.

So in that sense tussle had begun to emerge between the classical tradition and the emergent national taste but however we find that over the decade the national taste triumphs over all other alien influences and this is not to say that the Senecan influence had begun to completely disappear. We do find it coming back now and again especially in the case of tragedy. And what do I mean when I say a national taste? This had a few characteristic features and first of all the plays which had begun to emerge after Gorboduc, after this confusion and after this dilemma of whether to go back to the classical or stick to the native tradition, we find that most of the plays began to cater to the amusement of the miscellaneous unscholarly public.

This is very important because until then art and any kinds of relative amusement was primarily meant for a court audience or for a scholarly public but here we find that drama brings art closer to the common man, away from the control of the church and away from the graces of the court. And we also find there is an influence of the patrons who began to flourish during this time. Most of the dramatic productions become possible only when the patrons fund them properly or the patrons give them assistants to stage the plays in particular ways.

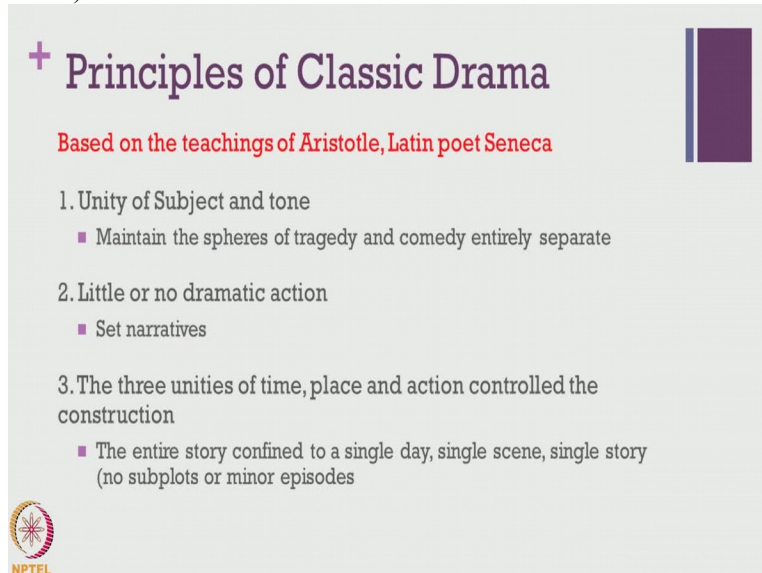
And here we find that most of the patrons as well as the dramatists including the common people who are watching the plays, they began to care more for the exiting and vigorous plots and action rather than going into the finer details of actions or the principles of drama which we would begin to see a little later and this also gave the dramatists and the actors a lot of freedom to experiment with different formats, different kinds of scenes, different ways of shifting between the emotions, so on and so forth.

At this point it is useful to remember that the Senecan model or the ancient classical model did not allow any kind of shift in tone or any kind of shift in emotions. One had to stick to the same kind of emotions throughout the stages of the play, all of these things get challenged and we find that the English national taste triumphing over the classical traditions and we also find that the stage becomes freer and less restrictive which allows a presence of lot of new tricks, magic etc into the dramatic plots.

And these sort of spectacles were not encouraged in the classical tradition. In that sense it becomes quite an important feature of the Elizabethan times itself. At the same time we begin to notice that biggest of the overbearing influence of the protestants theme, the catholic theme as

well as the popularity of the Mystery plays begin to wane away during this period and we do not find English public going back at any point of time to the model of the Mystery plays or the Miracle plays. We only see an advancement of the Morality plays as we began to notice in the last session.


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**+ Principles of Classic Drama**

Based on the teachings of Aristotle, Latin poet Seneca

1. Unity of Subject and tone
  - Maintain the spheres of tragedy and comedy entirely separate
2. Little or no dramatic action
  - Set narratives
3. The three unities of time, place and action controlled the construction
  - The entire story confined to a single day, single scene, single story (no subplots or minor episodes)



And at this point it also becomes important to take a closer look at what exactly the principles of classic drama were. And the principle of the classic drama were loosely based on the teaching of the Aristotle and also on the Latin poet the first century dramatist and poet Seneca. So there were three elements which would which would constitute the principles of classic drama.

First one being the unity of the subject in tone and this essentially meant that this fears of tragedy and comedy being maintained entirely separate as we noticed multiple times in the beginning of the lecture itself that a tragedy should constitute only tragic elements according to the classical tradition and the comedy should only constitute comic elements.

And a mix of both was not considered acceptable in the classical tradition of drama and secondly there was little or no dramatic action in this stage. In the sense there was a war scene or a battle going on, there would be a voice over which would describe the scene, no kind of action was shown on onstage. So basically it was a set of narratives one after the other and no kind of action was allowed.

This was understood, it was generally understood that any kind of overt action on stage would take away the purity and the sanctity of the play in general. So this when the Elizabethan come to encounter different kinds of actions and different kinds of plot structures, they also began to find this a little too boring to begin with and the third one is the unities of time, place and action.

So the entire plot and the entire theme was constructed in such a way that the unities of time, place and action were never disturbed. In that sense the entire story was always set on a single day. It was based in a single scene and there was only a single story line without any sub-plots or minor episodes which meant that any kind of events which were taking place outside this unity of time, place and action was either just briefly mentioned by way of narrative or it was included into the dialogue of the various characters present on stage.

So in that sense there was no way in which the within the classical tradition there was no way in which the plot could move across centuries or across different time time frames. It had to stick to these three unities.

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**+ Romantic Drama**

1. The free use of variety in theme and tone – blending comic, tragic elements
2. Drama of action - Employs both action and narrative – everything that happens is represented on the stage
3. Repudiates the three unities – the story can extend over months/years, allowing change of scenes, introducing subplots, minor episodes

*Emergence of the 'romantic' form of drama - achievement of Shakespeare's immediate predecessors*

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But when it comes to romantic drama we find that the drama began to challenge all these classical principles which were in place until then. So this also encouraged a lot of free use of variety in theme and in tone and we find the Elizabethan play rights blending in the comic and tragic elements together.

Later we will begin to see how even in Shakespeare's plays even in a tragedy there was always some room made for the comic interlude. So even within a comedy there were serious moments they were very austere things getting talked about. So this blending had taken away the monotony of the classical tradition. The action the employment of action was a very significant thing in the Elizabethan drama.

We find that Elizabethan drama began to employ both action and narrative but there was always a predominance of action over narrative and everything that happen was always represented in some form or the other in the stage and they also ensured that the narrative which had predominated in the classical tradition had completely been replaced by proper action which was happening on stage.

This had given a freer expression to the dramatist. it also had encouraged the audience to participate in a more active way in the place which have been staged. And thirdly with three unities were not taken seriously at all by the Elizabethan playwrights. In fact they began to come up with story lines that would extent over months or years, the change of seasons or even the complete change of scenery could be incorporated.

They introduced sub-plots, minor episodes and all of that into the story line. So it became a more exciting and more experimental kind of drama which had begun to emerge and due to this there was this possibility of variety which could be introduced on stage and its interesting to note that some of the times when there was a change of scene in plays either it could be in order to represent a forest a small plant could be kept on stage.

So in many ways they began to experiment and also every single action which was take which was part of the story was incorporated into the stage practices as well. And here we find that this is the time when the romantic form of drama began to properly emerge in the Elizabethan times and this is in fact considered as an achievement of Shakespeare's predecessors. In that way the predecessors had made a little easier for Shakespeare to begin practicing Elizabethan romantic drama without having any direct challenge from the ancient classical models.

And in this context it is useful to remember that there were a set of dramatists known as the universe duets about whom we will be taking a look at one of their latest sessions. The university

which were the ones who began to bring about a theatrical and practical change in the emergence of English dramatic drama.

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The slide is titled "Features of Elizabethan Drama" and includes the following content:

- **Comedies**
  - Italian or Latin sources
  - Mostly congratulatory works in praise of a patron or monarch
  - Main theme - love and its tribulations (as seen in Shakespeare's plays)
- **History Plays and chronicles**
- **Tragedies**
  - Senecan model
  - melodramatic, emotional speeches, stage spectacles
  - The darker side of human characters, melancholic aspect of human life in general
- **A general interest in politics and history**

A callout box on the right side of the slide contains the text: "The Bible - not the only source of dramatic plots".

The NPTEL logo is located in the bottom left corner of the slide.

And to take a further look at the features at Elizabethan drama, there were basically four kinds of drama not necessary in terms of generic division but there were four kinds of drama which were prevalent during those times - comedies, history plays and chronicles tragedies and also plays which showed a general interest in politics and the history of the times.

The comedies were mostly from Italian or Latin sources and since the queen or the monarch was the reigning supreme power during those times and also the plays were heavily funded by the patrons were mostly the courtiers the most of the plays had a congratulatory nature, they were it in praise of the patrons or the ruling monarch. So we do find a lot of references to the ruling class in most of the plays which were getting produced during that time and also we find that love and tribulations began to emerge as a major theme during those time.

This is in stark contrast with the Senecan model because most of the Senecan plays were had focused on war and elements of horror within it. So from that there is a drastic move towards the final emotions of human life and we find in the Shakespeare plays in general that love is a major theme that writes throughout most of his plays at different phase and there were lot of interest in history plays and chronicles and these history plays and chronicles were also a way in which



English public could turn back and look at their glorious past and also get to know about the life of the kings and other rulers from the period of the Norman conquest onwards.

If we survey the works of Shakespeare relate to point we would also know that the history plays form a major corpus of his works as well and the tragedies were mostly based on the Senecan model, they were also melodramatic and they had incorporated a lot of emotional speeches in that. The stage spectacle were also quite incredible and in that sense though the tragedies try to fit themselves into the Senecan models, they moved away in terms of these elaborate stage shows and the elaborate the kinds of spectacle as well.

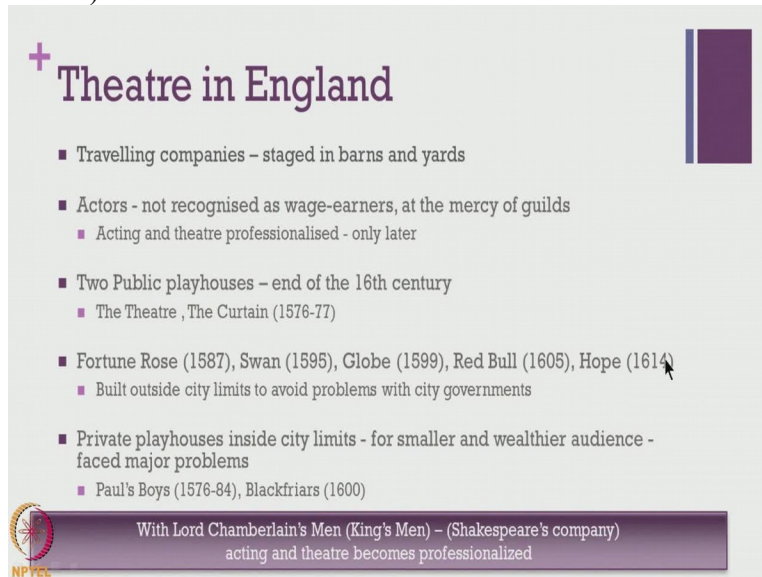
And most of these tragedies also try to showcase the darker side of human character. If you remember in the last session we took a look at the Morality plays which had begun to personify the abstract characters and also talk about the various ways in which human life is being constituted. So we find this getting advanced in many ways in the tragedies of the Elizabethan period.

There were lot of discussions, lot of deliberations about melancholic aspect of human life in general which we see in the Elizabethan drama in general. And most of these place were not distant from what was happening in contemporary Elizabethan life. So there is a general interest in politics and history which gets shown throughout the Elizabethan period. We find this not just in drama but also in the other forms of writings which we would be taking a look at later on.

And in these through this through these plays as they began to reflect the contemporary life and also the state of politics and state of history in general, this also becomes a tool for the historians to later on to look at how artists and other common people were responding to be these affairs of the state in a many different ways. And at this point it is also useful to remember that by this time Bible ceases to be the only source of dramatic plot.

They also borrowed heavily from other languages, other traditions and also there is during this time that we begin to see the idea of original plays and original story lines coming into being. So the by this time we noticed that the control of the church completely goes away and also the theme, the moral structure and everything related to human life moved away drastically from the theological frame work.

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**Theatre in England**

- Travelling companies – staged in barns and yards
- Actors - not recognised as wage-earners, at the mercy of guilds
  - Acting and theatre professionalised - only later
- Two Public playhouses – end of the 16th century
  - The Theatre, The Curtain (1576-77)
- Fortune Rose (1587), Swan (1595), Globe (1599), Red Bull (1605), Hope (1614)
  - Built outside city limits to avoid problems with city governments
- Private playhouses inside city limits - for smaller and wealthier audience - faced major problems
  - Paul's Boys (1576-84), Blackfriars (1600)

With Lord Chamberlain's Men (King's Men) – (Shakespeare's company)  
acting and theatre becomes professionalized

So as we begin to sum up its important to see how the theatre in England had begun to emerge and had begun to evolve at this point of time. We had begun to notice how performances were staged initially within the church and then they moved towards the the outside of the cathedral and gradually the shift is towards the towns square and then there are also these travelling pageants who begin to perform within the boxes which were installed within moving vehicles.

So drama in general in terms of performance, in terms of stage it goes through all of these stages and by the time we reached the Elizabethan period we noticed that there are these travelling companies who are emerging mostly funded by their trade guilds and merchants and they also staged their shows in barns and yards. So there is a way in which art comes closer to the common man and it is no longer part of the church or part of the court as we have reiterated many times.

And at this time it is an interesting fact remains that actors were not recognized as a professional during those times. In fact they were mostly at the mercy of their guilds, in fact it was the trade guilds who were funding many of these stage shows and also they were at mercy of their patrons. It is for a long time in fact in England it continues to be in the same way. So that the actors were their lives were quite uncertain.

They had to be at the mercy whoever were funding their lives and their stage performances, so they also had to stick to certain kinds of certain kinds of they also had to show political and economic affiliation to whoever was in power and whoever was funding them and only much

later we begin to see that acting and the performances they begin to be commercialize at a later stage as well

And we find that Britain also England in general they begin to feel the need for these permanent playhouses rather than the travelling stages or the travelling companies. So initially two playhouses begin to be erected, this is by the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. They were known as the theater and the curtain. This is roughly around the time 1576-77.

So if you remember in the last session we noted that there was at one point an Edict which came into play which ruled that none of the playhouses could be housed within the city of London, so they had to move outside the city of London to prevent various socio-political issues. One of them being the spread of the plague, there was also this issue of discipline which had to be taken care of.

So the city council the town council in general felt that if these playhouses were put up inside the city it would led to a lot of law and order problem. So in order to prevent that most of the play house initially were set up outside the city limits and we find that series of playhouses come into being during this times. There is Fortune Rose in 1587, Swan 1591, Globe in 1599, Red Bull in 1605 and Hope in 1614 and all of these are playhouses they were funded heavily by the patrons.

The actors were not getting a proper wage for what they were doing but their general livelihood was taken care of these by these patrons and they also owned many of their land and the the play houses which were being put up there and all of these theaters were built outside the city limits and in order to avoid any kind of tussle with the ruling council.

There were also private playhouses inside the city limits but this did not cater to a general public, this was only for a smaller and wealthier audience and also because of the class differences that existed during that time. There was always a group of high class, wealthy audience who did not want to mingle with the low class commoners. So some of the patrons had even set up a few select playhouses within the city but on and off they ran into major problems with the city council because of the law and order issue because the people were thronging over there to get an entry into these playhouses as well.

So these some of these private playhouse include Paul's Boys which was prevalent from 1576-84 and Blackfriars which had a very short life in the 1600. So this is how the scene of the playhouses were like and at this juncture it is very useful to remember that one of the playhouse companies known The Lord Chamberlains Men which later begun to be known as the Kings Men, this was in fact Shakespeare's company which initially began to make theatre and acting as a mode of professional kind of an activity.

So in this session we have already noted how various socio-politico elements had also come into being to aid the emergence of Elizabethan romantic drama. So this was an very important phase in history of England in general because from this time onwards we do not find Elizabethan we do not find English drama going back to the standards of the classical drama. On and off there is an influence, there is a revival of the classical elements but otherwise we find that a proper, native English tradition gets institutionalized from this point of time onwards.

In the following sessions we will be taking a closer look at who the major playwrights of the period was. Who the major Elizabethan playwrights was, the most important one being Shakespeare. We will also be looking at how all of those influences together began to project Elizabethan times as the golden period in literature not just in England but also in terms of world literature. This is all we have for this lecture. Thank you for listening.