

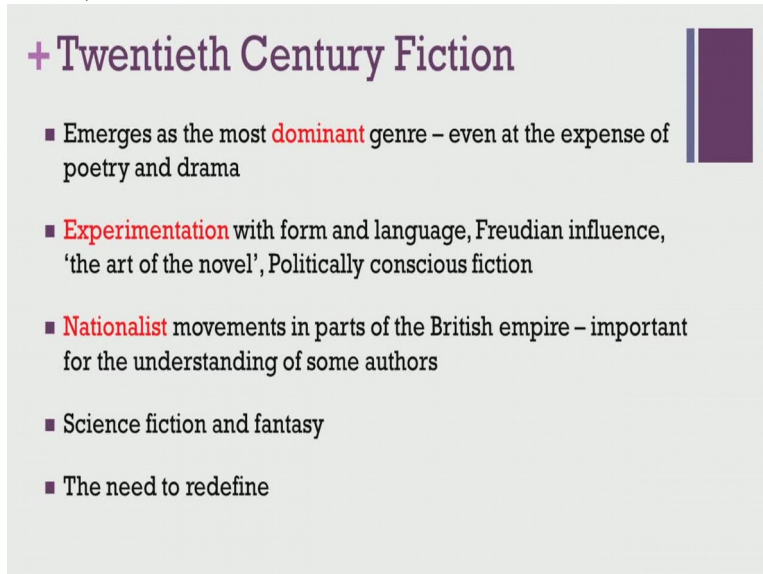
History of English Language and Literature
Professor Merin Simi Raj
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology Madras
Lecture No 24
Modernist Prose and Fiction

Hello everyone, I am happy to welcome you to today's lecture of the NPTEL, the History of English language and literature. We have now reached the last leg of our discussion on the Modernist age and the Modernist writings. Accordingly, we begin to look at the Modernist prose and fiction. When we talk about modernism, we have already given a very detailed and exhaustive introduction followed by certain discussions in particular genres and we have also highlighted right at the outset that it is a very difficult age in the sense of classification and also a number of productions have come out since the beginning of the 20th century making it all the more difficult to give a comprehensive list of all the publications which have been come out of the land of England.

And we have also noticed that due to the various shifting tendencies in art, literature and other forms of writing, there is a certain kind of difficulty in even identifying what exactly belongs to English literature and what exactly has been produced by non-English traditions. And given all these difficulties, when we begin our discussion on Modernist prose and fiction, we continue with our assertion of the limitation that it would be perhaps a difficult task to try and identify a linear narrative for the prose and fiction of the 20th century.

Accordingly as and when we begin our discussion, we shall be talking about only certain representative writers and certain representative modes of writing which is said to have characterised the early 20th-century fiction. And in today's lecture we shall be covering a very broad bridge from the beginning of the 20th-century till about mid-20th century. So in that sense, a discussion of about 4 decades is going to be collapsed into a single session.

(ReferSlide Time: 2:14)



+ Twentieth Century Fiction

- Emerges as the most **dominant** genre – even at the expense of poetry and drama
- **Experimentation** with form and language, Freudian influence, ‘the art of the novel’, Politically conscious fiction
- **Nationalist** movements in parts of the British empire – important for the understanding of some authors
- Science fiction and fantasy
- The need to redefine

20th-century fiction is particularly significant because during this period, we find fiction emerging as the most dominant genre even at the expense of poetry and drama. And this was the tendency that we began with messing from the 19th century onwards because there was a growing shift towards fiction and towards the reception of fiction compared to the other genres and this was also the time when the writers began to experiment rather vividly and widely.

And we do find them experimenting with form and language and there is a profound influence of various political theories from other disciplines. We find the Freudian influence being quite supreme in even dictating the plot structure and the thematic elements. And we also find a gradual emergence of an understanding of the art of the novel. This also is primarily important because a novel being a fairly young genre, there was no ancestor or a classical model in place.

So it became all the more imperative to develop a particular models which could suit this young modern genre. And we also find many of the writers resorting to write politically conscious fiction because that was also the time when they were lot of demands politically, socially and culturally to respond to the various things that were happening in and around society. And Britain being one of the leading colonial empires, it was also important to understand how the empire was faring in the beginning of the 20th century in order to understand certain kinds of literatures which were being produced.

And we noted earlier that the decline of British Empire had begun from the early 20th-century. This also haddemanded a particular understanding of various other nationalists forces at work

in order to appreciate a certain our kinds of literature which were emerging. And this was also the period because of the experimentation and because of the onslaught of various disciplinary forces. A lot of interest was getting generated in the elements of science, fiction and fantasy.

We also find the other forms of media adequately complementing and complement this new interest as well. And on the whole, we find the writers being forced into a constant need to redefine themselves and their writings and also we find novel undergoing a lot of transformation moving away from the conventional understandings that one had about the novel when it began to rise from the 18th century onwards. In order to keep up with this pace of new moves and movements which were happening in the area of prose and fiction, we find an unprecedented amount of generation of commentary and criticism as well.

And we find that this becomes all the more important because each voice in the Modernist period could be identified as being distinctly individual and there is also an impossibility to club them under common rubric terms. And this makes it all the more difficult to engage with particular text and we will also noted shortly how many other texts could not even be approached without the help of a critical commentary or without the help of a particular referencetext.

Unlike the previous centuries and unlike the previous literary periods where it was fairly easy to classify writers under particular groups, trends and movements, in the Modernist period, we do not find this sort of a classification happening at all. In fact, with a new kind of distinction coming into place between high art and low art, we also find writers deliberately trying to come out of these compartments which would rather classify them as one or the other.

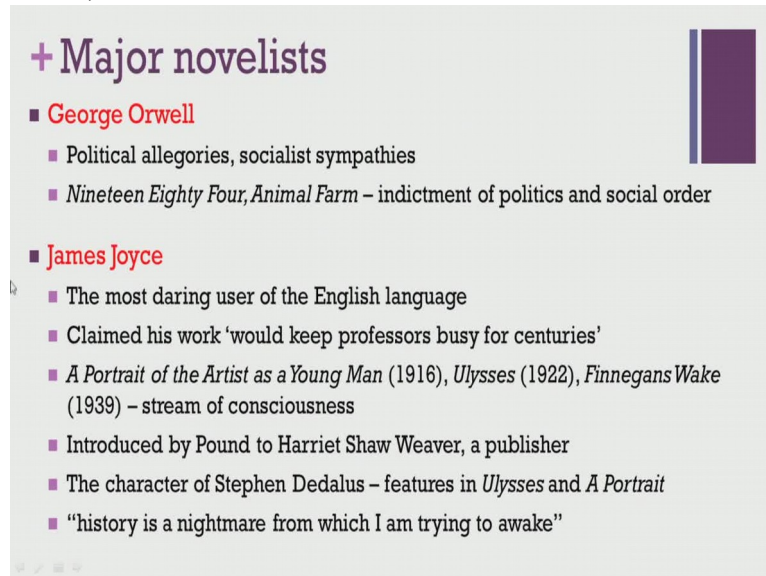
And as a byproduct of this new difficult kind of writing, we also find a lot of critical writings emerging and this age also could be seen as an age of critical writing. And we find the writers employing newer techniques in narration, particularly the stream of consciousness method and a fragmentary form of narration becomes all the more popular in the 20th-century modernist fiction.

Emergence of other kinds of media including cinema also complements these newer techniques and newer movements. We also find a different kinds of articulation of humour, glamour, escapist art and also about an art of propaganda. Keeping this in mind, we move on to look at the major novelist of the 20th-century. And here it is again important to state that we

have not arranged these works and the novelists in any particular order and they are not in the order of their popularity either.

We just look at certain representative figures who have shaped and reshaped the literature of the 20th century in one way or the other.

(ReferSlide Time: 6:52)



+ Major novelists

- **George Orwell**
 - Political allegories, socialist sympathies
 - *Nineteen Eighty Four*, *Animal Farm* – indictment of politics and social order
- **James Joyce**
 - The most daring user of the English language
 - Claimed his work 'would keep professors busy for centuries'
 - *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), *Ulysses* (1922), *Finnegans Wake* (1939) – stream of consciousness
 - Introduced by Pound to Harriet Shaw Weaver, a publisher
 - The character of Stephen Dedalus – features in *Ulysses* and *A Portrait*
 - "history is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake"

One of the important writers of this period is George Orwell who primarily responded to the political emergencies of those time and his works were mostly in the range of political allegories and commentaries and he also had a very evident socialist sympathy in his writings. His important works include *Nineteen Eighty Four*, a novel and *Animal Farm* which is also a novel. In both these works we find an indictment of politics and the social order.

Nineteen Eighty Four and *Animal farm* were particularly notable for their anti-Communist rhetoric which also sought to expose the various flaws that even a new emergent political system had. James Joyce was most notable for his daring use of the English language and he is one person who is said to have entirely revolutionised not just the narrative techniques in fiction but also the use of English language, moving away from all kinds of conventions and all forms ofset rigidities.

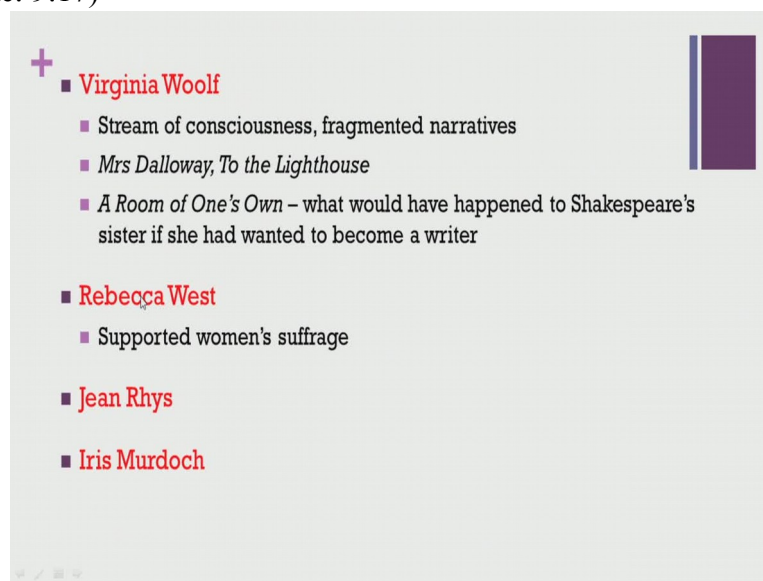
And in fact, he himself was quite aware of the difficult nature of his work that he claimed that his work would keep professors busy for centuries and accordingly weeven see an entire market for the secretary material of James Joyce flourishing across the world. And some of his important novels include *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* published in 1916 and *Ulysses* published in 1922. Both these works including *Finnegan's Wake* published in 1939,

used the technique of stream of consciousness and we find that he was trying to narrate the life of an ordinary person through an ordinary means.

And we also find him focusing more on the mundane events which were happening in the protagonist's life rather than anything extraordinary that he wanted to highlight. And he said that his writing career was also launched by his dropout and we already noted how Pound was influential in defining and shaping the career of many of the modernist writers. It was Pound who introduced James Joyce to Harriet Shaw Weaver, a publisher in England.

In his novels, in Joyce's novels, we find a very significant thing particularly when we talk about this character features in 2 of his works, in *Ulysses* and in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Stephen Dedalus. He is seen as a representative of the modernist age who echoes the many fragmentary sentiments and the many crises that the modernist man was undergoing. He is also said to have famously made this statement, history is a nightmare from which I am trying to wake.

(Refer Slide Time: 9:17)

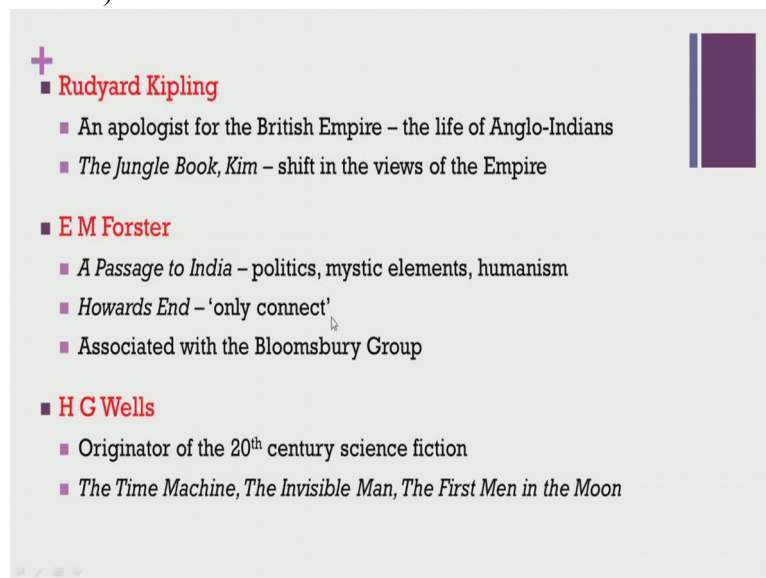


Virginia Woolf whom we notably mentioned in the context of certain feminist rhetoric and the feminist responses, she was a noted feminist writer and a noted fictionwriter of the 20th century. She was also a member of the Bloomsbury group as we have noted earlier. She was the one who in certain ways one could say perfected the stream of consciousness, a technique and used to fragment narratives in her fictional works throughout. 2 of her important works were *Mrs Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse*.

In Mrs Dalloway, we also find her employing similar techniques that Joyce used and we find her talking about one day in the life of a Mrs Dalloway and focusing on everyday details in the life of this particular character, Mrs Dalloway. *A Room of One's Own* is not a fictional piece of work. It is in fact an articulation of what would happen to Shakespeare's Sister if she had wanted to become a writer. And that is an affection of a certain feminist sentiments and also an imaginative retelling of what the life of a woman writer was in the 19th century and how lack of one's own space, one's own in command, one's own different resources had severely hampered the growth of a woman writer across centuries.

Rebecca West was a writer who supported the women's suffrage movement and here we also find many of these writers trying to practice a certain kind of writing which also went alongside with their political and social agendas that they had. Jean Rhys is a writer whom we have already taken a look at. When we spoke about Victorian fiction, she was the one who gave a retelling of Jane Eyre's novel and Iris Murdoch is a writer who continues to be popularly consumed even in the contemporary.

(Refer Slide Time: 11:10)



- **Rudyard Kipling**
 - An apologist for the British Empire – the life of Anglo-Indians
 - *The Jungle Book, Kim* – shift in the views of the Empire
- **E M Forster**
 - *A Passage to India* – politics, mystic elements, humanism
 - *Howards End* – 'only connect'
 - Associated with the Bloomsbury Group
- **H G Wells**
 - Originator of the 20th century science fiction
 - *The Time Machine, The Invisible Man, The First Men in the Moon*

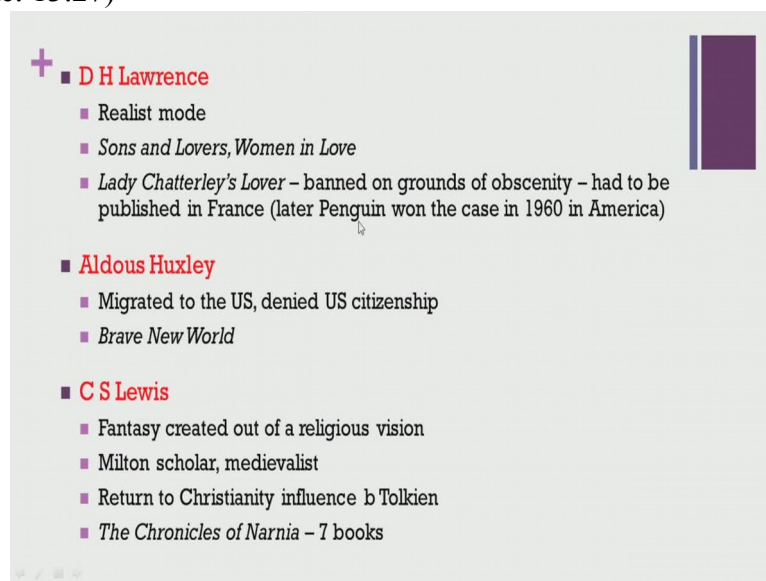
Rudyard Kipling is best known as an apologist for the British Empire. He had portrayed the life of the Anglo Indians in a very detailed manner. Some of his famous books continue to be bestsellers even today such as the Jungle book and Kim. In fact, in his works, we can very clearly see the shifting attitudes towards the views about the empire because though he began with a very apologetic tone defining the British Empire in multiple ways, we also see his attitude and his views changing as and when the mode of the governments also began to change from the early 20th-century onwards.

EM Foster is another writer who was also a resident of India for quite sometime and he is also in that since quite significant in laying the foundations of early Indian fictional English as well and his work, *A Passage to India* is perhaps the best-known of those times and in this, he engages with multiple elements such as politics, mystical elements and humanism. In his *Howards End*, he uses the famous phrase to talk about the east and the west, only connect.

And he was also associated with the Bloomsbury group and that sense, he could also be seen as someone who acted as a bridge between the British writings and also the writings produced from the Commonwealth nations. HG Wells could be identified as the creator of the 20th-century science fiction and his famous works, *The Time Machine*, *The Invisible Man* and *The First Men in the Moon*, they continue to fascinate readers even in the contemporary.

And this is also the time when many of the writers were trying to experiment with art and science and also to bring in an element of imagination even to matters related to science.

(ReferSlide Time: 13:27)



- **D H Lawrence**
 - Realist mode
 - *Sons and Lovers, Women in Love*
 - *Lady Chatterley's Lover* – banned on grounds of obscenity – had to be published in France (later Penguin won the case in 1960 in America)
- **Aldous Huxley**
 - Migrated to the US, denied US citizenship
 - *Brave New World*
- **C S Lewis**
 - Fantasy created out of a religious vision
 - Milton scholar, medievalist
 - Return to Christianity influence b Tolkien
 - *The Chronicles of Narnia* – 7 books

DH Lawrence wrote in a very realist mode and in that sense, he could be seen as a very distinct form of narrator in the 20th-century. But at the same time, the kind of techniques that he employed, it was very modernist and he was someone who was profoundly influenced by Freud's theory and also about the socio-political theories which were common in the 20th-century.

We find this getting replicated a very directly in his novels such as *Sons and lovers* and *Women in Love* and we find him exploring various psychological tendencies specially related

to relationships, sexuality and the relationships between men and women. One of his novels, *Lady Chatterley's lover*, it was quite infamous because it was alleged that it contained a lot of obscenity which could be threatening the moral fabric of the 20th-century England and it was also banned for a while and in fact, it had to be published in France because of this censorship that existed in England.

And instead, it was only much later in 1960 that Penguin won a case that too in America in order to secure the rights to publish *Lady Chatterley's lover*. And in that sense, this was also, 20th-century was also a period which was that not lacking in any kind of controversy of this kind. Aldous Huxley was a writer who migrated to the US but he was denied US citizenship and in that sense, his life was also quite controversial and interesting. And he also composed his best-known work, *Brave New World*.

This also is considered as a kind of a commentary on the early 20th-century, it also talks about the various ways in which the world was changing through the various things which were happening particularly the worst, the political movements and the shifting scenario in terms of culture, society, the idea of the individual, the forms of relationships, so on and so forth. CS Lewis was a writer who was admired equally by children and by adults. In fact he was one of those rare writers who could bring in the elements of fantasy and religious vision together in his fictional mode.

And he was a Milton scholar and a medievalist and we do find all of these rare combinations coming at play in his fictional works. And in fact, it is also said that he was significantly influenced by GR Tolkien particularly Tolkien had influenced his *Return to Christianity* which also led to the publication of his supreme masterpiece, the series known as *The Chronicles of Narnia*. As we know, it comprises of 7 books entirely and it also had brought together the elements of Christianity in the form of telling a fantasy.

And as we know, the *Chronicles of Narnia*, it remains as one of the most important and the most popular series of children's books and it has also been adapted into various forms including cinema. Here we also see that the popularity of a particular genre or a particular kind of writing, does not really talk about the popularity of one particular moment or a one particular influence. But it rather a holistic phenomena and we see this happening in multiple cases with different writers and it is very difficult to classify all of them under one single umbrella of any particular kind of modernism.

(Refer Slide Time: 16:19)

- + ■ **J R R Tolkein**
 - Greek and Finnish mythologies, the Bible, Old English writings
 - Lectured specifically on *Beowulf*
 - *The Lord of the Rings*
 - Auden's criticism in 1954 – 'escapist reading'
- **William Golding**
 - 21 rejections – *The Lord of the Flies*
 - **Graham Greene**
 - Mental anguish, flawed characters
 - The Whiskey priest of *The Power and the Glory*

JRR Tolkien who influenced the shifting tendencies of writings about fantasy and about the newer forms of imagination, he was interested a lot in Greek and Finnish mythologies. He was also supremely inspired by the Bible and old English writing. And here, we find that though the modernist period was characterised by the rejection of many of the things which were happening in the old order, there were also a set of writers like these who continued to be impressed and fascinated by whatever was a part of the old order.

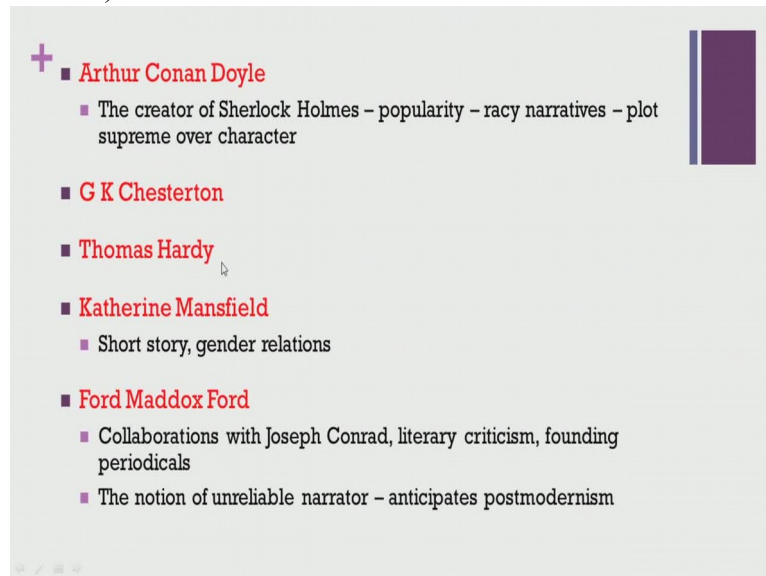
So in that sense, we also find a certain kind of continuity getting built into the modernist writings as well. In fact, Tolkien was a writer of whom we mentioned right at the beginning of one of our introductory lectures because he was particularly significant for his lecture on *Beowulf* and he was very important in bringing back the significance of this old English text. And his most important and the best remembered work which has also been adapted into a very cinematic form is *The Lord of the Rings*.

And however, some of the writers such as WH Auden, he was severely critical about the kind of writing that Tolkien was practising. In 1954, Auden has famously referred to Tolkien's writings as being escapist reading. William Golding, a significant writer of the 20th-century had to face about 21 rejections before he could get his best-known work, *The Lord of the Flies* published. That is also considered as one of the bestsellers of the 20th century.

Graham Green was another writer who had to engage with this dilemma of being attracted to religion in the modernist times. In fact, because of the mental anguish that he himself had to undergo through these very contrasting and diverse interests that he had, we find him very

finely portraying flawed characters. One fine example is the portrayal of his character, Whiskey priest in the novel, *The Power and the Glory*.

(ReferSlide Time: 18:14)



Arthur Conan Doyle as we know is best known as the creator of Sherlock Holmes. He enjoyed supreme popularity during from the 20th-century onwards, it continues to be popular for the racy narratives that it had. In fact, this is one instance when we also find plot becoming supreme over character. If you are familiar with any of Arthur Conan Doyle's work and also the narratives about Sherlock Holmes, you would also know that it is more about the movement of the plot than about the specificities of any particular character.

G.K. Chesterton and Thomas Hardy, they continue writing from the late (18:47) period onwards and some of them classify them as early modernists as well. Katherine Mansfield was an important writer of the early 20th-century and she had engaged mostly with short fiction and also spoke about gender relations in her work. Ford Maddox Ford had collaborations with those of contract and also had produced a number of works by way of literary criticism. He also had founded fee periodicals in the modernist period.

In fact, he was the one who popularised the notion of the unreliable narrator. In that sense we could also see that he was one person who almost anticipated post-modernism.

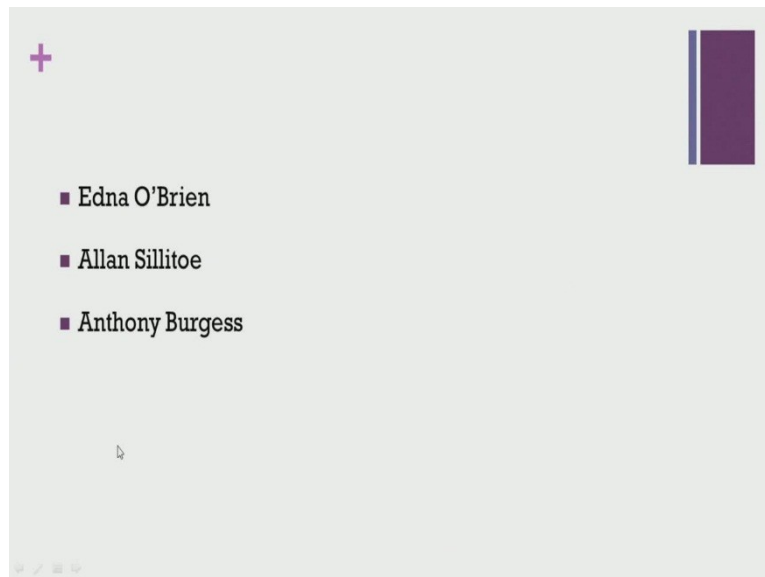
(ReferSlide Time: 19:25)



Radclyffe Hall has been in the news for right and wrong kinds of reasons. In fact, he was known as the 1st major homosexual writer. He was put on trial for obscenity thereafter. And in fact, his works were considered as a danger to the nation for a while and it also talks about the many limiting tendencies and the many limiting politics within which the writers and the entire establishment was supposed to function. And his known work is *The Well of Loneliness*.

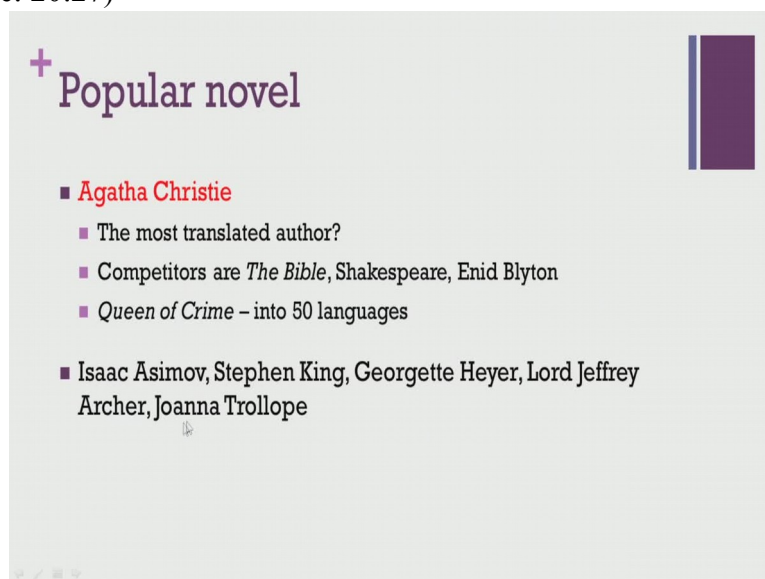
Lawrence Durrell is famous for his work, *The Alexandria Quartet* and Paul Scott wrote *The Raj Quartet* which was a narrative of the last days of the British Empire in India. Kingsley Amis was more popular for his Campus novels. We also find this genre becoming popular as the decades progressed.

(ReferSlide Time: 20:13)



The other known writers were Edna O'Brien, Alan Sillitoe and Anthony Burgess and we shall now be looking at particular writers and particular works because the modernist, the range and the scope of modernist fiction is quite big on the scope of a single lecture.

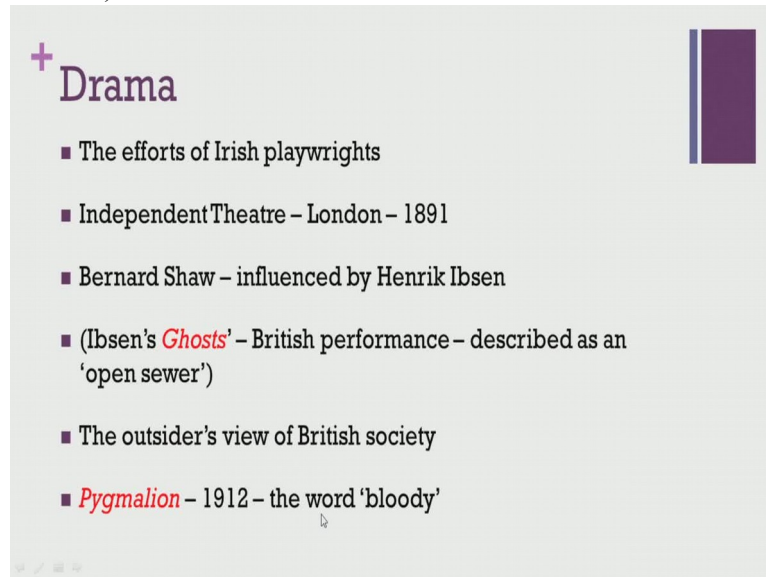
(ReferSlide Time: 20:27)



This was also the time of popular novels such as the novels produced by Agatha Christie. In fact Agatha Christie also holds the distinction of being one of the most translated author in the world. In fact, her competitors are The Bible, Shakespeare and Enid Blyton. And it was quite a rare feat that Queen of Crime was translated into about 50 languages. The other popular writers of the 20th-century include Isaac Asimov who also wrote a lot of science fiction, Stefan King, Georgette Heyer, Jeffrey Archer and Joanna Trollope.

Here we also see a distinction between the kind of modernist writers who focused on a certain high art and also a certain set of writers who focused mostly on producing what could be popularly consumed by almost every kind of reader. Though this was the age of fiction mostly, we do find certain kind of drama also becoming popular.

(ReferSlide Time: 21:54)



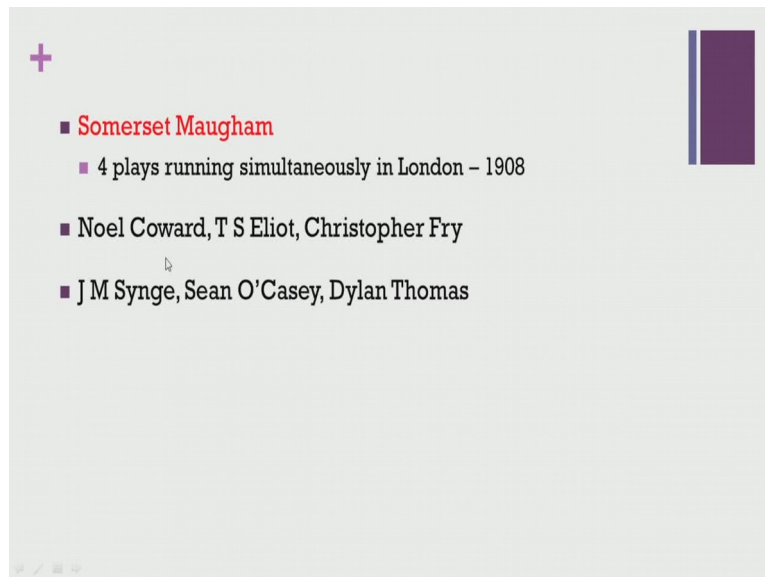
+ Drama

- The efforts of Irish playwrights
- Independent Theatre – London – 1891
- Bernard Shaw – influenced by Henrik Ibsen
- (Ibsen's *Ghosts* – British performance – described as an 'open sewer')
- The outsider's view of British society
- *Pygmalion* – 1912 – the word 'bloody'

It was mostly the effort of the Irish playwrights in the British scene. In fact we find a lot of Irish plays getting translated and being staged in London.

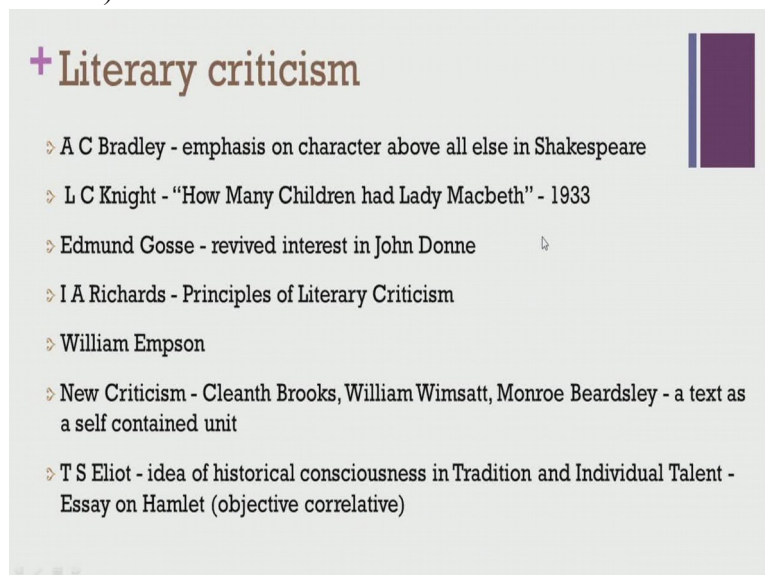
Bernard Shaw in fact was immensely influenced by Henrik Ibsen who was an Irish playwright. We also find Ibsen's *Ghosts* being performed in Britain and also drawing a lot of criticism because it was even described as an open sewer. We also find a certain playwrights giving an outsider's view of the British society as we would see in Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* published in 1912. In fact it was also controversial because he is said to have used the term, *Bloody* which was not found acceptable in any respectable society.

(ReferSlide Time: 22:04)



Somerset Maugham who is a writer of a lot of humorous plays and humorous prose, he had at one point of time particularly in the year 1908, almost 4 plays running simultaneously in London. So here we also notice that though the dominant genre was fiction, we do not find the drama or the play going activity completely going out of fashion in London. The other important dramatists were Noel Coward who was a very popular playwrights throughout his lifetime, TS Eliot, some of his works we have already taken a look at, Christopher Fry, JM Synge, Sean O'Casey and Dylan Thomas.

(ReferSlide Time: 22:42)

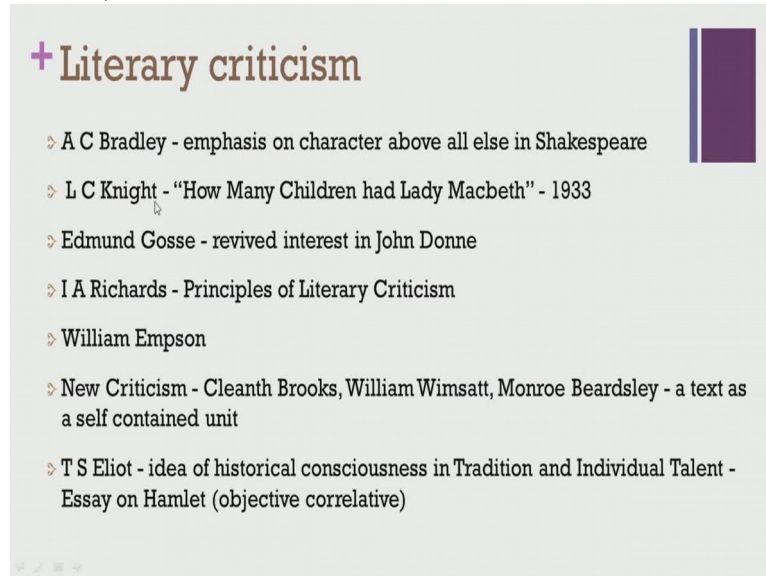


In terms of non-fiction, as we noted in the beginning, this was an age of literary criticism as well and this was also the period when criticism itself began to emerge as a distinctive respectable genre and we find various writers such as Elliott and Pound coming out with their

manifestoes and also responding to the various critical needs of those time. And we also find that many of the poems, many of the anthologies had prefaces and forewords which also served as critical statements and manifestoes.

And there were also a lot of polemical and argumentative writings about race, class, empire and gender, particularly the role of women. We also find a lot of inferential writings being produce from various disciplines such as philosophy, psychoanalysis and anthropology. This is also the time when Freud supremely emerged amongst all of them as the writer who altered the course, content and politics of the 20th-century literature and arts.

(ReferSlide Time: 23:36)



+ Literary criticism

- ▷ A C Bradley - emphasis on character above all else in Shakespeare
- ▷ L C Knight - "How Many Children had Lady Macbeth" - 1933
- ▷ Edmund Gosse - revived interest in John Donne
- ▷ I A Richards - Principles of Literary Criticism
- ▷ William Empson
- ▷ New Criticism - Cleanth Brooks, William Wimsatt, Monroe Beardsley - a text as a self contained unit
- ▷ T S Eliot - idea of historical consciousness in Tradition and Individual Talent - Essay on Hamlet (objective correlative)

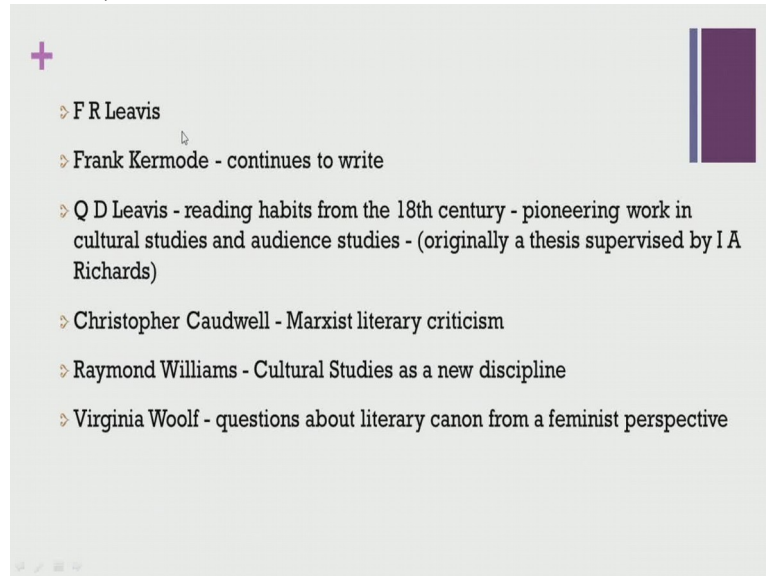
In terms of literary criticism, some of the names deserve a special mention such as AC Bradley who emphasised a character above all else in Shakespeare. In fact, AC Bradley is considered as the one who gave a lot of critical attention to Shakespeare's works and also laid the foundations of all kinds of works to follow on the plays of Shakespeare. LC Knight is particularly remembered for his essay 'How Many Children had Lady Macbeth', published in 1933. This is also the time when a closer attention was being given to particular kinds of texts and modes of writing.

Edmund Gosse, he revived an interest in John Donne was one of the metaphysical poets. IA Richards wrote the Principles of Literary Criticism. It continues to be considered as the foundational and a beginner's text in the practice of criticism. William Empson was another critic who began to give more practical advice on how to engage literary criticism. There was also the emergence of one form of criticism known as New criticism.

The practitioners, the major practitioners being Cleanth Brooks, William Wimsatt and Monroe Boardsley. Infact, the new critics began to consider a text as a self-contained unit and not dependent on any other factor. During our discussion on the modernist poetry itself we noted how most of the modernist poets had their own theory of poetry and their own theories of portico articulation.

TS Eliot is particularly remembered in that aspect. He had spoken about the idea of historical consciousness in his essay, Tradition and Individual Talent. And in his essay on Hamlet, he also popularised the idea of objective co-relator.

(ReferSlide Time: 25:10)



FR Leavis is one of the writers who laid a foundation to modernist literary criticism and he is also considered as one of the fathers of modern literary criticism and in that sense, he continues to be a must taught literary critic as well. And Frank Kermode is a critic who continues to write on various aspects of literature and culture. And QD Leavis, he spoke about the reading habits from the 18th-century and did a pioneering work in cultural studies and audience studies.

In fact, QD Leavis' work was originally a thesis supervised by IA Richards and now we know that this sort of studies are more common and is more accepted in the academy as well. Christopher Caudwell popularised what is now known as Marxist criticism. In that sense, we also find the political theories of Marx finding its way into literature and its understanding as well. And Raymond Williams had played a very important role in elevating cultural studies as a new disciplines.

And we now we also know that there are courses being taught under this new discipline and it also has given a new form of understanding to the various literary texts that are extinct. And there were also a lot of writers themselves who laid the foundation to newer forms of critical thinking, the most important one being Virginia Woolf who questioned the notions about literary canon from a feminist perspective.

If we go and we could perhaps identify a few more names and a few more ways in which the modernist writers and the modernist practices continued but however, we wind up though we did had an understanding that this is not a comprehensive understanding of the modernist

fiction and modernist literature. There could be much more which could be clubbed under the newer techniques and newer forms of writing.

But however, given the limited scope and canvas of this particular course, we wrap up our discussion on modernist literature and modernist fiction with this session. And I also encourage you to read more about similar movements and similar tendencies to get a holistic understanding of what exactly modernist literature is. But however I do hope that this lecture has done justice to this course and I hope to be able to meet you in the final session that follows. Thank you for listening and that is all we have for today's lecture.