

History of English Language and Literature
Prof. Dr. Merin Simi Raj
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Madras
Module Number 01 Lecture Number 6

William Shakespeare: The Man, the Dramatist and an Age

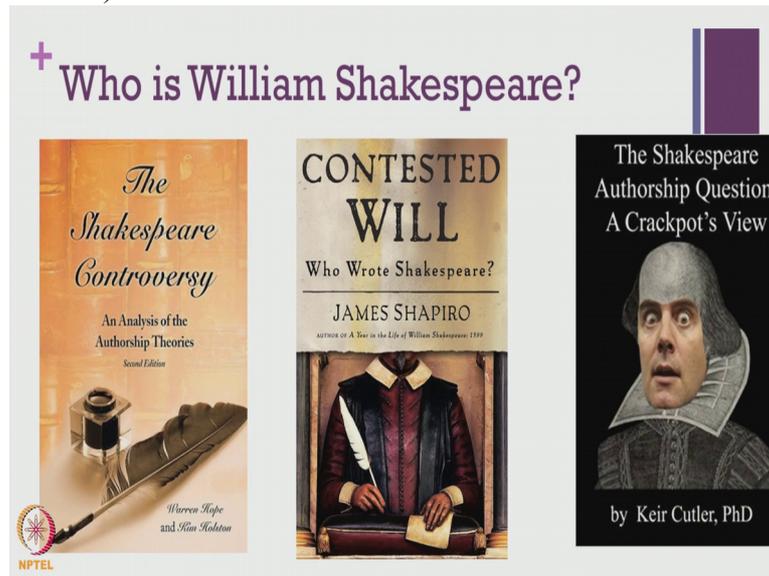
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Good morning everyone, welcome again to this course on English Language history and Literature, and today's session we begin talking about this perhaps this greatest figure not in Elizabethan literature itself but in world literature itself, William Shakespeare. Shakespeare is perhaps the best known literary writer of not just his period but also of the entire world literature. And in fact, many of you might know that even the ones who have got little inclination towards theatre, poetry or any kind of literary writing might have heard about Shakespeare. That's the kind of impact which he has had on not just on literature but also in world culture for the last few centuries and in fact when we begin talking about William Shakespeare, one of the first things that comes to our mind is who is William Shakespeare.

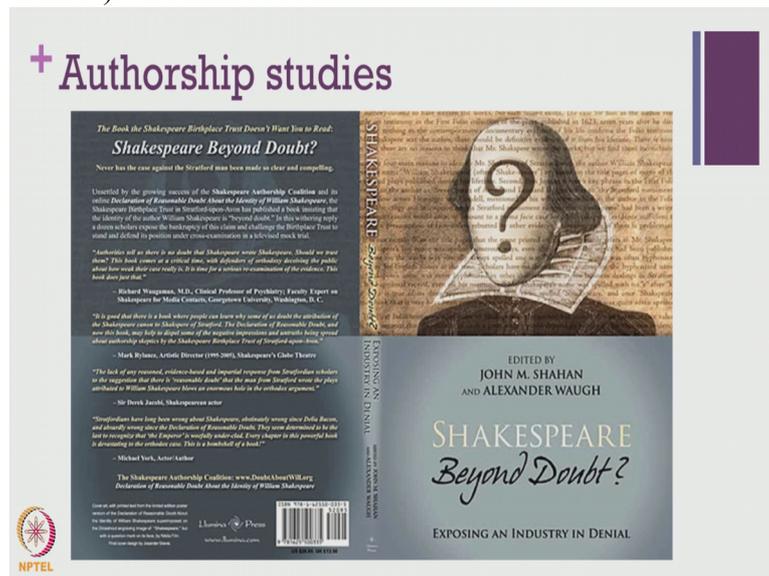
Let's begin with some very trivial details about this scholarship on Shakespeare. In fact there is lot of mystery on who really Shakespeare was and

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what kind of an author he was in the sense that the absence of historical records has made his personality, his corpus of writing quite mysterious in terms of actual authorship In fact a particular branch of study itself exists in English Literature studies known as authorship

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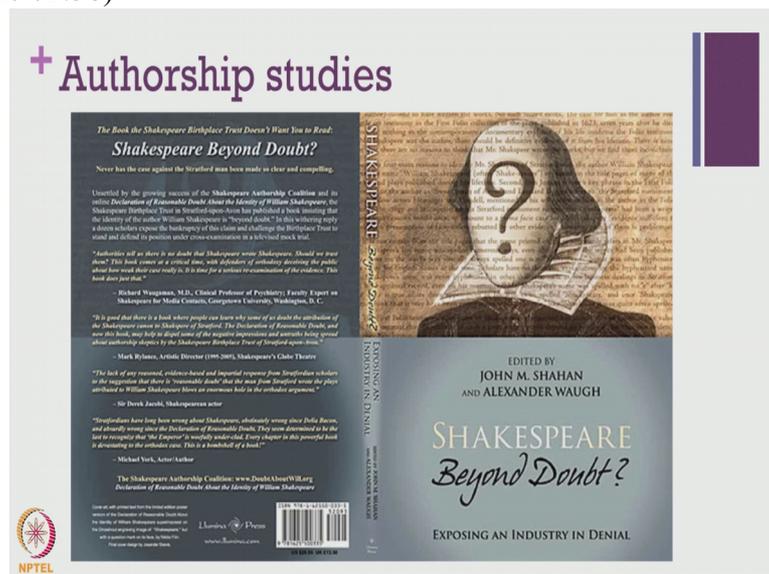
authorship studies which debates and deliberates upon

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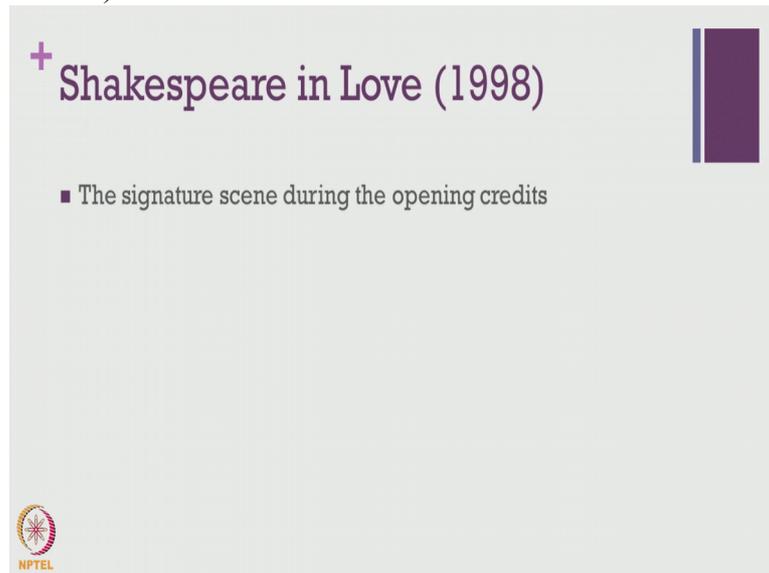
the actuality

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of Shakespeare writing whether Shakespeare actually wrote those plays or not In fact some of those concerns about the various disputes about authorship we also looked at in the previous session when we engaged with the university wits in general. So, that's about the debates about Shakespeare's authorship but in this lecture we move on with the assumption which most of the recent historians also share that Shakespeare himself actually wrote most of the, most of his plays. May be there were collaborations, maybe there were lost plays but nevertheless the man did exist and his dramatic genius is beyond question. So we move ahead with this assumption.

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+ Shakespeare in Love (1998)

- The signature scene during the opening credits

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And another interesting trivia about his personality, some of you might have noticed this opening scene in the movie Shakespeare in Love where he tries to put his signature in many different ways. Let's quickly take the look at the clip

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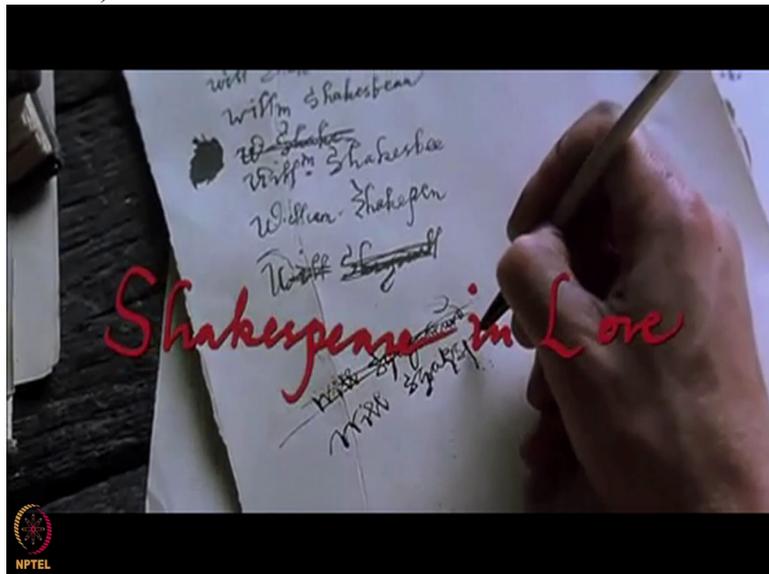
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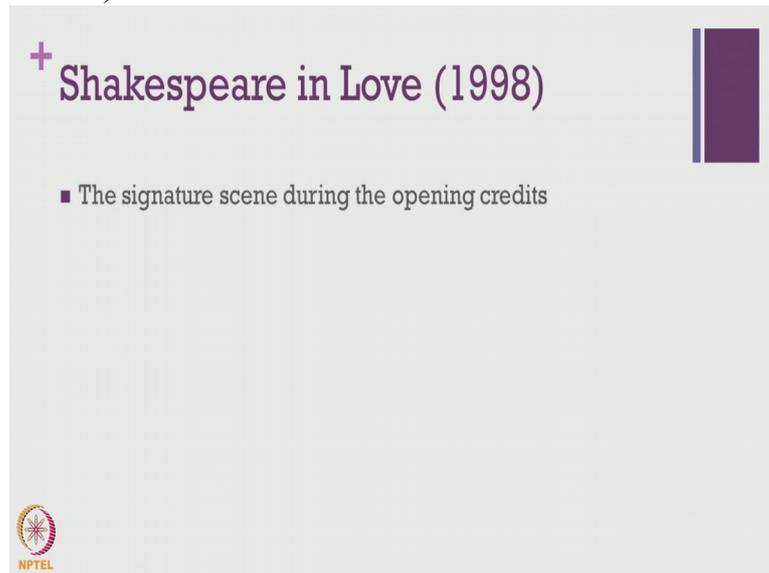


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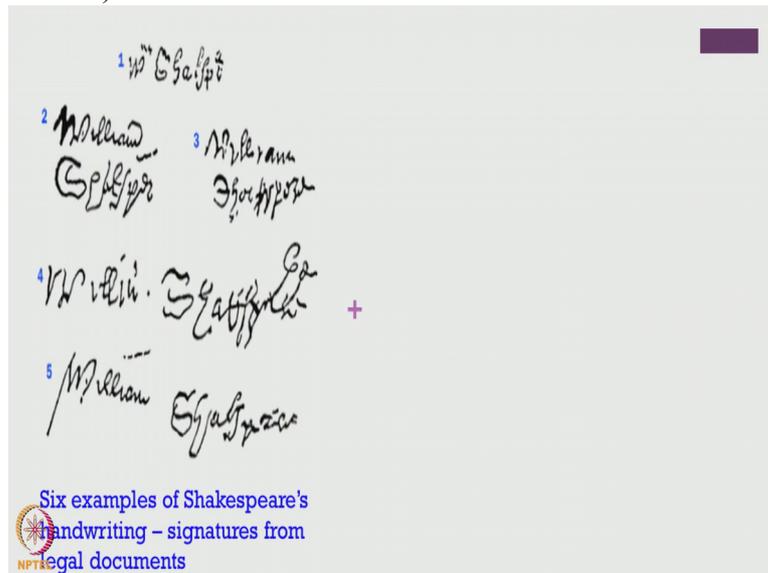
This detail in the movie is actually based,

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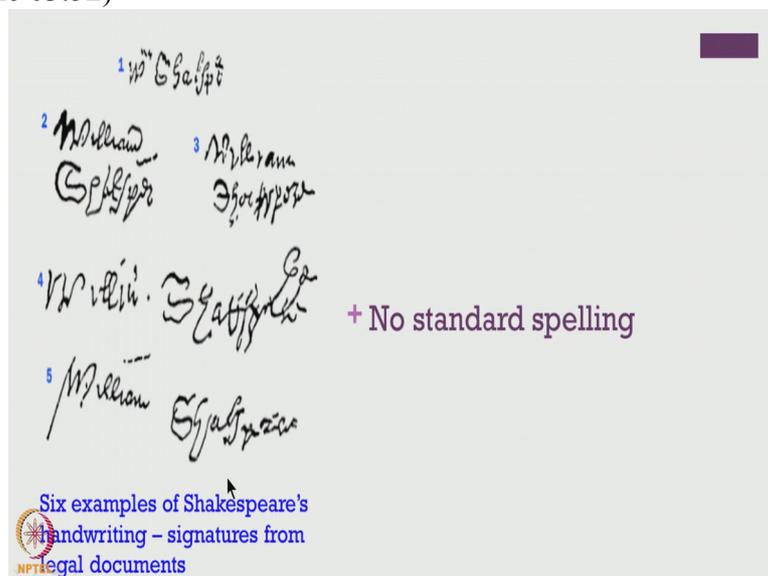
based on facts and that's very interesting, given the fact that the man who penned almost 37 plays and a number of sonnets and a few other un-credited and lost plays, maybe he had a problem in spelling his name correctly. So this is

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an instance of about six examples of Shakespeare's own hand writing which historians have recovered from signatures from legal documents. These were mostly contracts that he signed with that particular acting companies and the one is from his will and very interestingly this is

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no standard spelling that the linguistic experts and handwriting experts could discover from these varied kinds of signatures that Shakespeare is said to have used. So these are the different spellings that he himself had been using and even the veracity of these signatures

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1 W Shakspe
2 William Shaksper
3 William Shaksper
4 William Shakspeare
5 William Shakspeare

+ No standard spelling

1. Wilm Shackper
2. William Shakspear
3. WM Shakspea
4. William Shackspere
5. Wilm Shakspere
6. (by me) Shakspear

Six examples of Shakespeare's handwriting – signatures from legal documents

and whether Shakespeare himself actually signed them or whether he had another clerk doing all these jobs for him is not yet not clear but it is very interesting to note that during his own life, during his own lifetime,

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1 W Shakspe
2 William Shaksper
3 William Shaksper
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Six examples of Shakespeare's handwriting – signatures from legal documents

NEVER William Shakespeare

the standard spelling that we use, William Shakespeare was never used. He himself never had used it and we do not find any other records using his name with this spelling either. So in that sense,

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1. Willm Shackper

2. William Shakspear

3. William Shakspear

4. William Shackspere

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Six examples of Shakespeare's handwriting - signatures from NPT legal documents

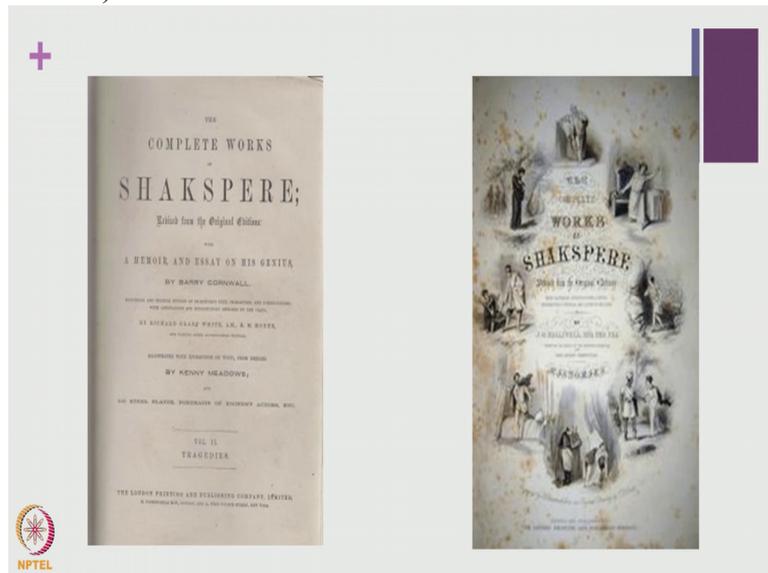
it was a very interesting and a very multi-faceted kind of life that he led so beyond these many trivialities about his life and many disputes about his life, in fact there are, but apart from these, many trivialities about his life and these many disputes about historical veracity, one needs to move on

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with the assumption that as we said earlier, Shakespeare did exist and also his drama is of supreme genius, not just during the Elizabethan times but in the world class literature itself. These are some of the instances of the earlier manuscripts available

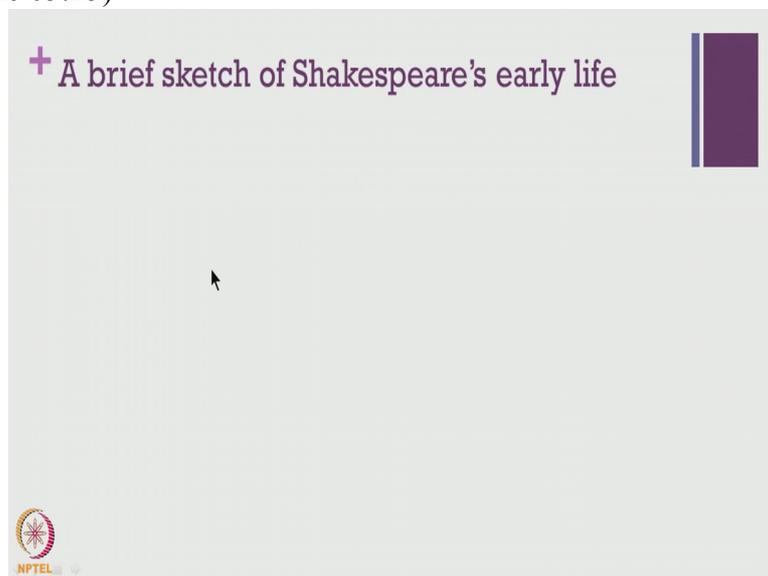
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which were published posthumously after his death and we do not find using the spelling that we contemporarily use.

So moving on

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from there, we need to take a brief; we need to take a brief look at his early life and in fact

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+ A brief sketch of Shakespeare's early life

- No actual records of birth and early childhood
 - b. 23 April 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon – based on Church records
 - Son of an alderman, one of 8 children

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Shakespeare is said to have been born on twenty third April 1564 and I use the phrase, said to have, quite advisedly because there are no actual records of his birth available. And there are church records of baptism so in that sense it is assumed that may be he was born in and around twenty third April in Stratford-upon-Avon. He was born as a son of an alderman so his childhood may not have been that difficult. He was one of the eight children of his father and he is said to have hailed from a fairly well-to-do family in that sense so maybe he also, this is

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"The Birth Place" in Stratford

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the birthplace which is now a center of tourist attraction in London and he is also said to have

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with the hope of making it big in theatre, making it big in writing without having had the university education So Ben Jonson, one of his contemporaries later wrote about him. He knew

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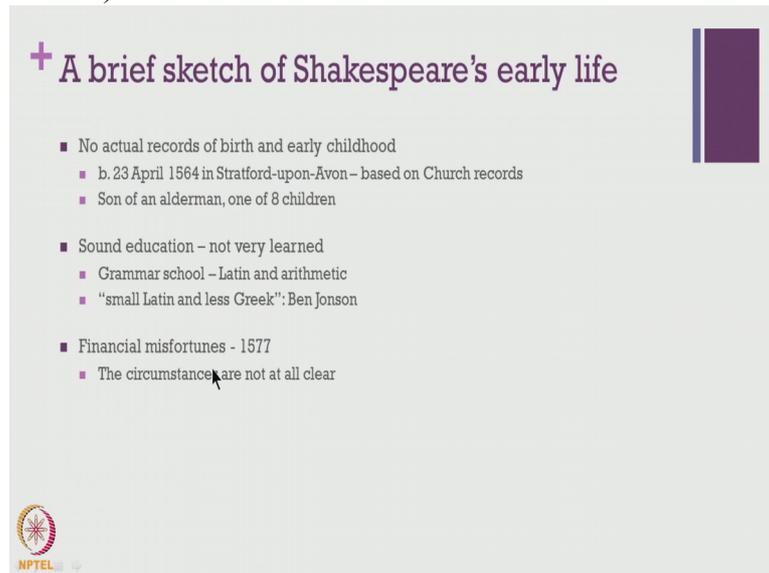
A presentation slide with a light grey background and a purple vertical bar on the right side. The title is '+ A brief sketch of Shakespeare's early life' in purple. Below the title are two main bullet points in dark purple, each with three sub-bullets in a lighter purple. The sub-bullets under the second main point are indented. A mouse cursor is pointing at the text 'small Latin and less Greek'. In the bottom left corner, there is a small circular logo with a sun-like symbol and the text 'NPTEL' below it.

+ A brief sketch of Shakespeare's early life

- No actual records of birth and early childhood
 - b. 23 April 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon – based on Church records
 - Son of an alderman, one of 8 children
- Sound education – not very learned
 - Grammar school – Latin and arithmetic
 - "small Latin and less Greek": Ben Jonson

small Latin and less Greek So this is how he was looked down upon by some of his more learned contemporaries but ironical fact remains that he became more famous and more achieved in terms of his literary merit and his dramatic craft at a later point of time.

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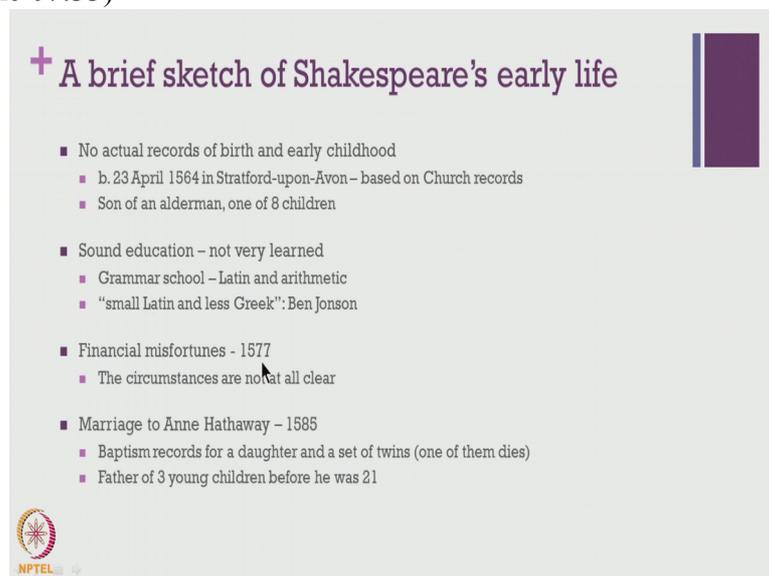
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 - “small Latin and less Greek”: Ben Jonson
- Financial misfortunes - 1577
 - The circumstances are not at all clear

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And we get to know financial misfortunes had overtaken his family. This was around 1577 but one does not know the real nature of the misfortunes and the circumstances in which his childhood was faced but following that perhaps

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- Marriage to Anne Hathaway – 1585
 - Baptism records for a daughter and a set of twins (one of them dies)
 - Father of 3 young children before he was 21

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it was not an easy time for him. There are also some records which prove that he got married to Anne Hathaway in 1585. There are no actual marriage records but one knows about this marriage due to some available records from the church and there is a, there is a record of baptism of a daughter and set of twins and one of them who also dies a little later and strangely enough, by the time Shakespeare was of 21 years, he had already fathered three children. So it was not a easy life to begin with. He had a lot of financial misfortunes and he was not really making it big in the small town of Stratford and we find him

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 - Father of 3 young children before he was 21
- 1587 – left for London (convicted of poaching?)



leaving for London in 1587 and reason for taking off to London is not really known and some of the historians feel that he was going to be arrested for poaching in somebody else's property. So one is not too sure whether he fled Stratford for

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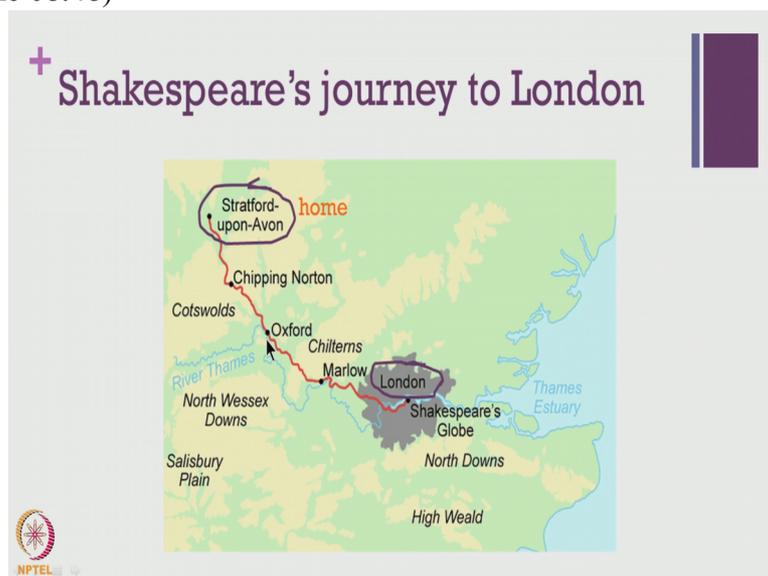
London in order to escape an impending arrest or whether he decided to deliberately move to London to pursue more fortunes over there So if we try and record

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Shakespeare's journey to London from Stratford-upon-Avon this is the kind of journey that he had undertaken so

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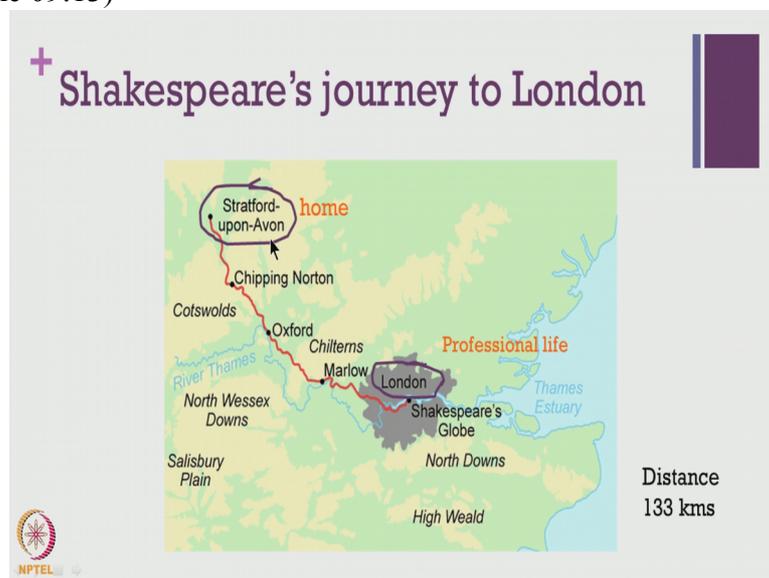
for a very long time we

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realize that when Shakespeare began to make it big in London he used to almost shift between Stratford and London and some historians even feel that he led a double kind of a life. Because he was a very successful professional in London and but his home front always continues to be based in Stratford. And if we talk about this journey

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in terms of distance it is only 133 kilometers which might sound quite simple

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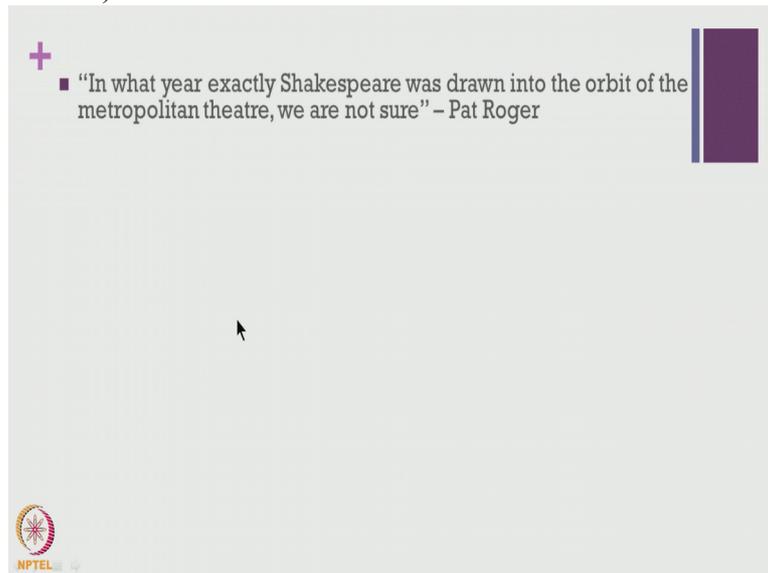
today but during those days, as Pat Rogers, the historian puts it, it was the journey of several days unless

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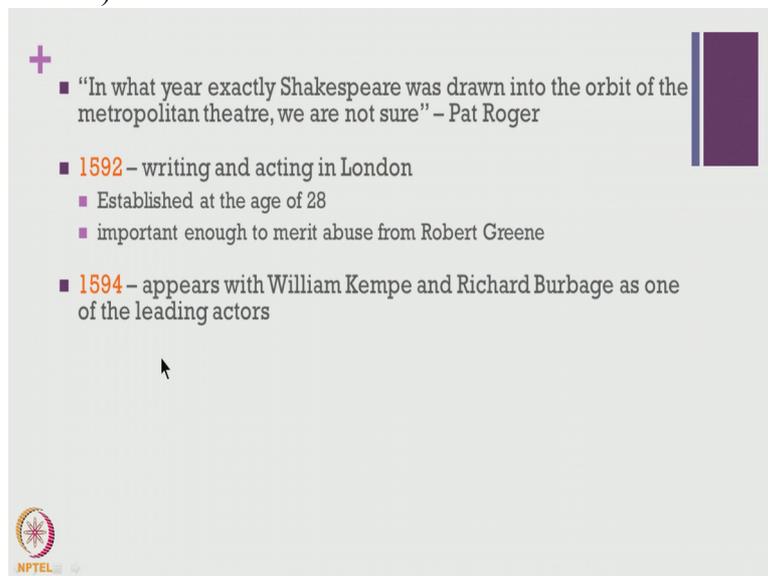
you were rich and extravagant enough to hire post horses. So we do not have any historical records to show that Shakespeare's family had moved to London but perhaps he used to commute up and down, one is not too sure about the domestic details. So in that sense he was a contemporary of the university wits as well about whose families also we have, we do not know much about. Another thing is that

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one is not too sure about the exact year in which Shakespeare arrived in London, the exact year in which he started participating in theatrical activities, so on and so forth. Pat Rogers says in what year exactly Shakespeare was drawn into the orbit of metropolitan theatre we are not sure. So we begin discussing his dramatic

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his dramatic career with this uncertainty but there is enough evidence that by 1592, he was writing and acting in London and he was fairly established and fairly well-known in London circles by the time he was at the age of 28. And we also recalled in the discussion of university wits that there was this Robert Greene who had written quite unkindly about the arrival of a new fellow in the London dramatic circles. So this is perhaps, there is a conjecture that that this is perhaps Shakespeare so in 1592 at the age of 28, he was important

enough to merit abuse from a famous playwright of the period, Robert Greene. And by 1594, he was one of the leading actors in London and there is enough evidence to show that he was, he had appeared

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with William Kempe and Richard Burbage who were two of the major actors of those period. In fact it is really said, generally said that during the Elizabethan times, many of them used to flock these theatres to watch their favorite actors in stage and in such a, within such a setting, for some person like Shakespeare to make it really big in terms of acting abilities, in terms of his writing skills, in terms of his dramatic technique that was quite an achievement. And by 1595 we know that

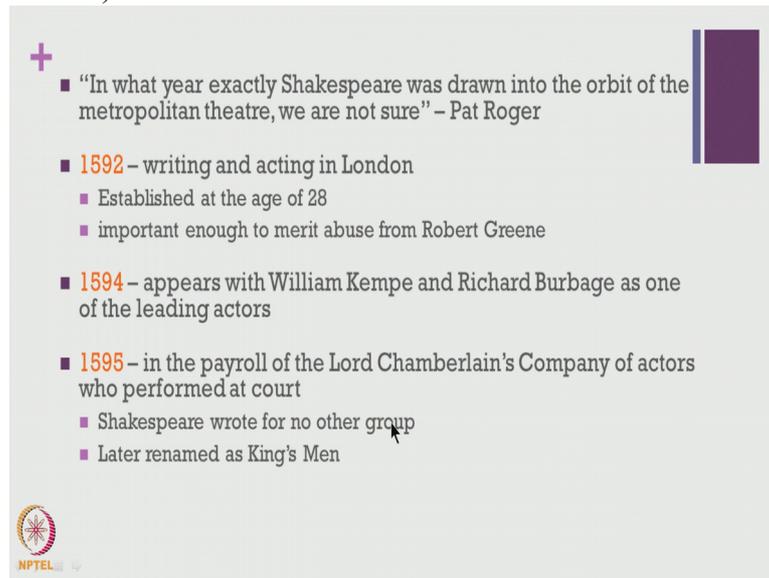
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- “In what year exactly Shakespeare was drawn into the orbit of the metropolitan theatre, we are not sure” – Pat Roger
- **1592** – writing and acting in London
 - Established at the age of 28
 - important enough to merit abuse from Robert Greene
- **1594** – appears with William Kempe and Richard Burbage as one of the leading actors
- **1595** – in the payroll of the Lord Chamberlain's Company of actors who performed at court

he was in the payroll of Lord Chamberlain's Company of actors and this was in fact the most respectable and most coveted company in Elizabethan times and they had the rare distinction of performing within the court. There is even evidence that Shakespeare himself had performed in front of the Queen herself a couple of times. So Lord Chamberlain's Company was the most

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- **1595** – in the payroll of the Lord Chamberlain's Company of actors who performed at court
 - Shakespeare wrote for no other group
 - Later renamed as King's Men

NPTEL

well-known and Shakespeare, once he had been part of Chamberlain's Company, we note that he had not performed or he had not written for any other company after that and the same company was renamed as King's Men after James the First takes over as the king of, king of England. So we also get to know about which we shall be

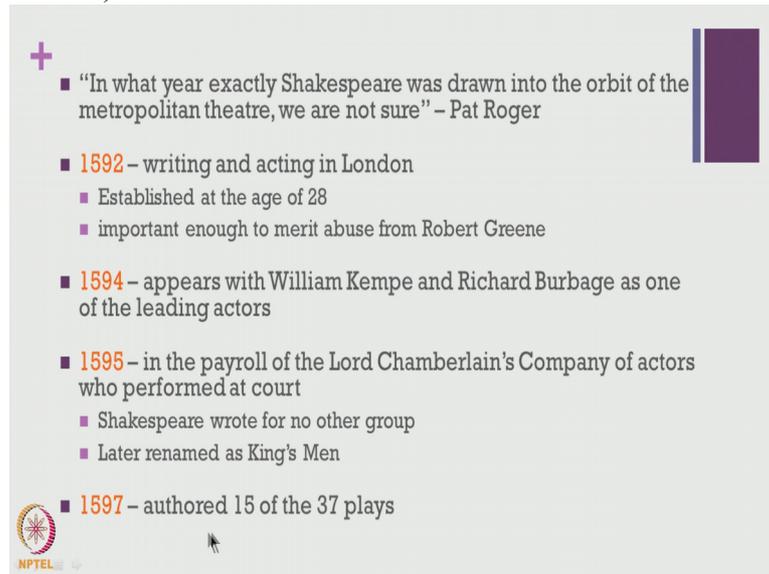
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seeing in detail a little as well, we get to know that the theatre companies, their performances and everything continued to be at the mercy of the government, the monarch, the town councilors, so on and so forth. Many of these details we shall be coming back to when we look at Elizabethan theatre in detail.

By 1597 there is evidence to show that

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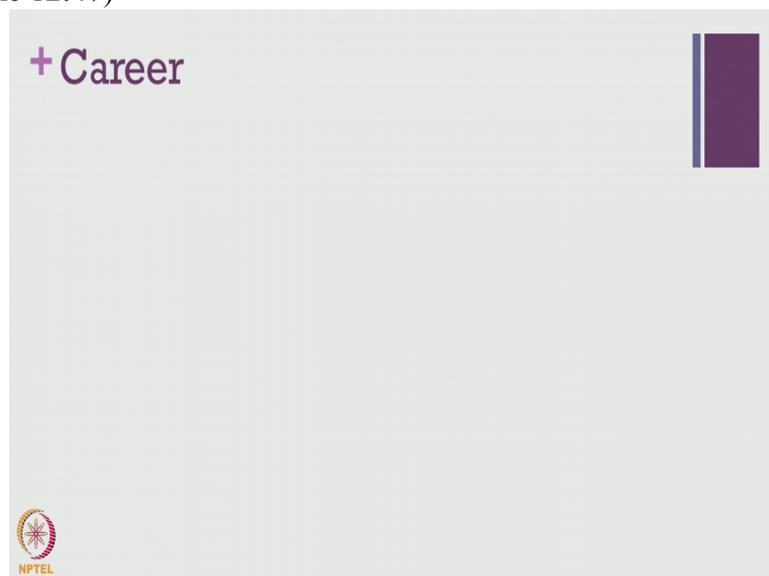
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 - Shakespeare wrote for no other group
 - Later renamed as King’s Men
- 1597 – authored 15 of the 37 plays

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he had already authored 15 of the 37 plays and that is quite a tremendous achievement for someone who had arrived in London with very little fortune

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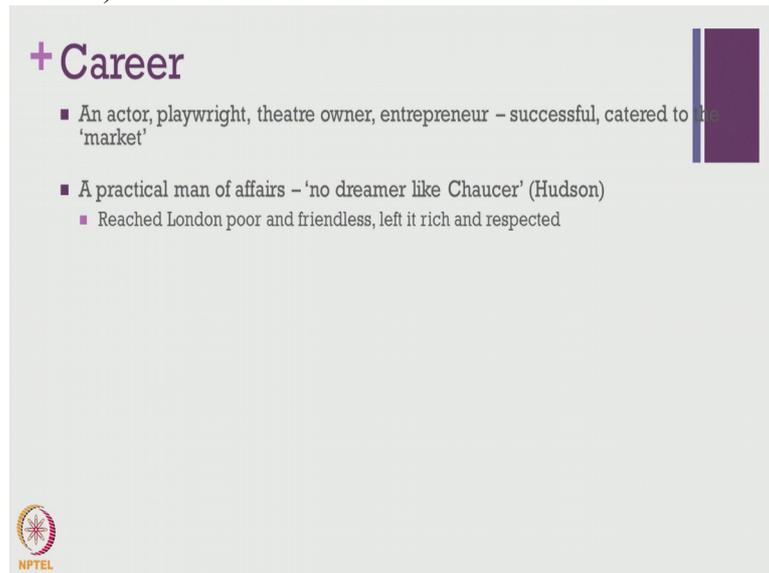


+ Career

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or very little prospects.

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+ Career

- An actor, playwright, theatre owner, entrepreneur – successful, catered to the 'market'
- A practical man of affairs – 'no dreamer like Chaucer' (Hudson)
 - Reached London poor and friendless, left it rich and respected

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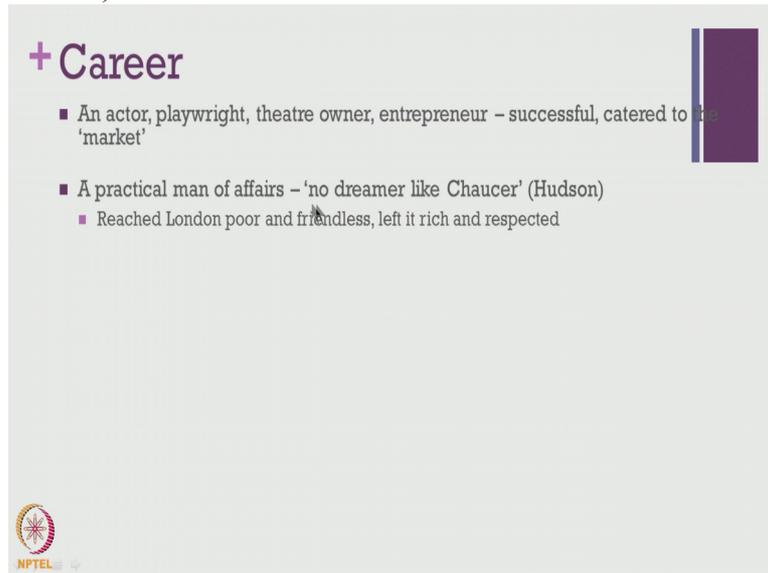
If we survey his career in more detail, if we try to describe Shakespeare, he was not just a dramatist. He was not just a playwright. He was not just an actor. He was many things put together. In fact, he was a theatre owner, he was an entrepreneur, he is considered as a very successful businessman who knew the market sense and who could cater to what the market wanted. So in that sense he is perhaps one of the first playwrights who realized the, the kind of success that one could reap out of theatre and literature in the more financial and revenue based

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terms so we can even call him as one of the, one of the dramatists who could come up with box-office hits one after the other and so in that sense, Hudson in fact refers to him as a practical man of affairs and he compares

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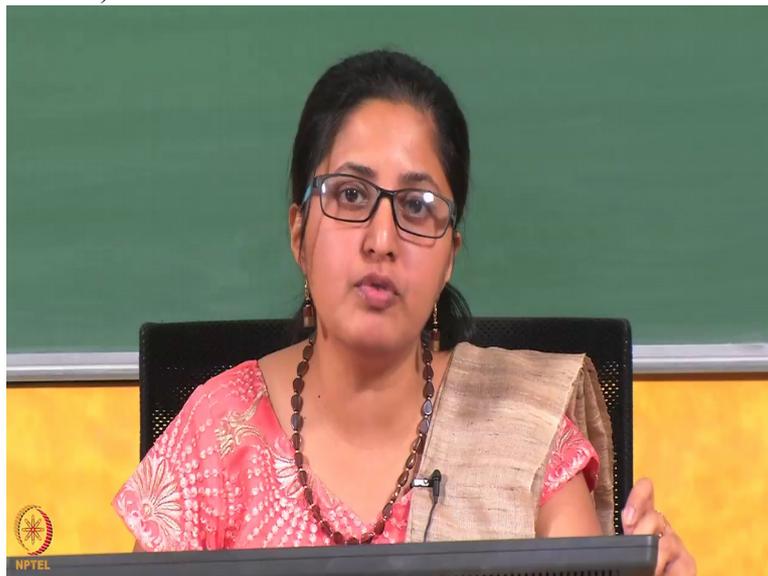
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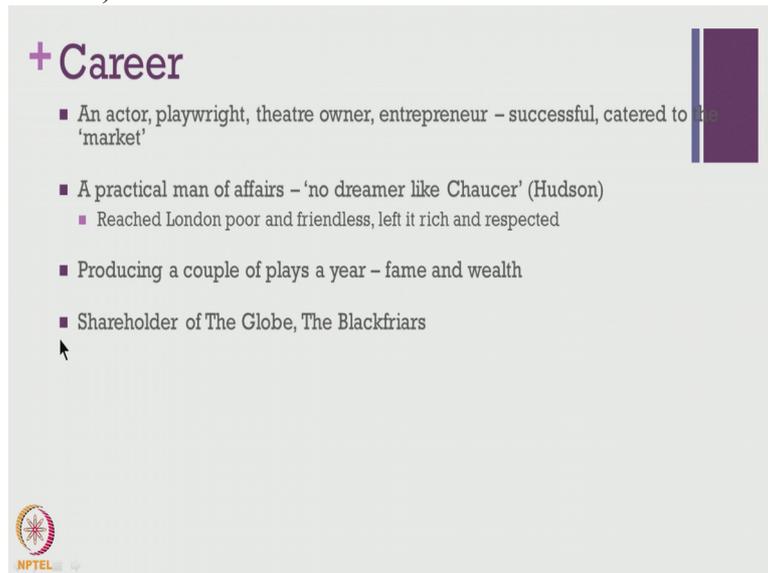
Shakespeare with that of, he compares Shakespeare's genius with that of Chaucer and he says he was no dreamer like Chaucer. And this is proved by the fact

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that Shakespeare reached London poor and friendless but by the time he left London he was rich and he was respected and now we know England in fact owes much of its popularity, much of its cultural heritage to this singular figure, William Shakespeare. And his output was prolific. In fact he was; he was the object

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+ Career

- An actor, playwright, theatre owner, entrepreneur – successful, catered to the 'market'
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 - Reached London poor and friendless, left it rich and respected
- Producing a couple of plays a year – fame and wealth
- Shareholder of The Globe, The Blackfriars

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of envy of most of his contemporaries because he was producing almost a couple of plays a year and all of them were quite successful as well. So in contemporary terms we think of a movie director who is coming up with at least two successful nationwide hits and that also, if he repeats

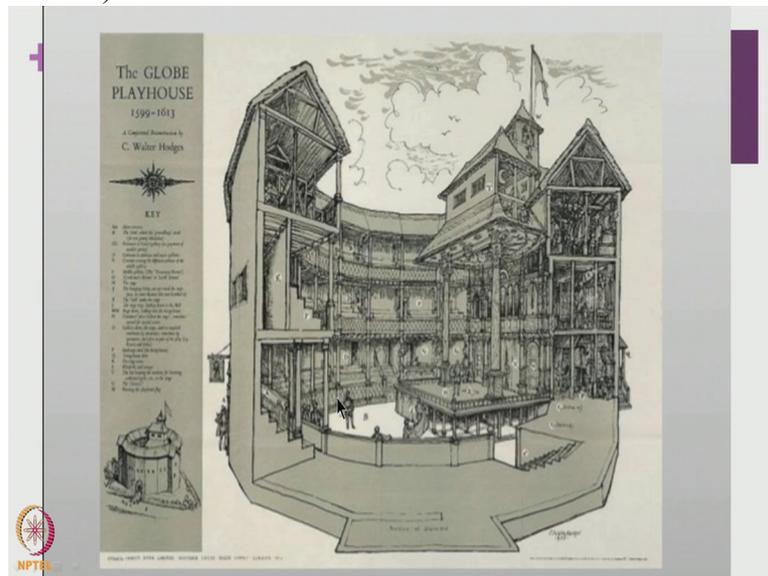
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this success, he or she repeats this success one after the other in for many consecutive years that is quite an achievement. So this is what Shakespeare had. He achieved literary merits through this. He achieved the Court's favor. He was popular and he was making a lot of money. So by the time he begins to be quite an established figure in London, we know that he had amassed a lot of wealth and he had become extremely famous in London circles. And we find him coming up as a very smart entrepreneur and a shrewd businessman as well. As soon

as he realized the kind of revenues that these theatres were turning out, we find him becoming the shareholder of the two, shareholder of two very important theatre companies, playhouses of the period, the Globe and Blackfriars. So this is how the structure

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of the Globe looked like when we, we can already see that this is quite a massive structure. It is very elaborate. In fact it is quite elaborate than the playhouses of today so we will be looking at all of these technical features in detail when we talk about Elizabethan drama.

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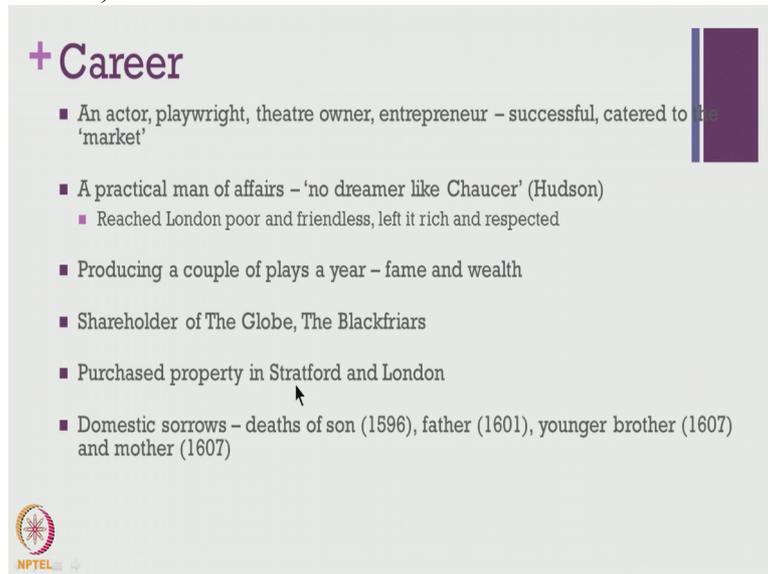
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- Producing a couple of plays a year – fame and wealth
- Shareholder of The Globe, the Blackfriars
- Purchased property in Stratford and London

So there is also evidence to show that he purchased property in Stratford and London and in that sense, he is also one of the earliest figures in, London to realize the potential of real estate dealing. So we find him investing heavily in property and also you know he could

identify and also, he had an eye for this market, eye for business so we find him becoming extremely successful and extremely famous even during his lifetime.

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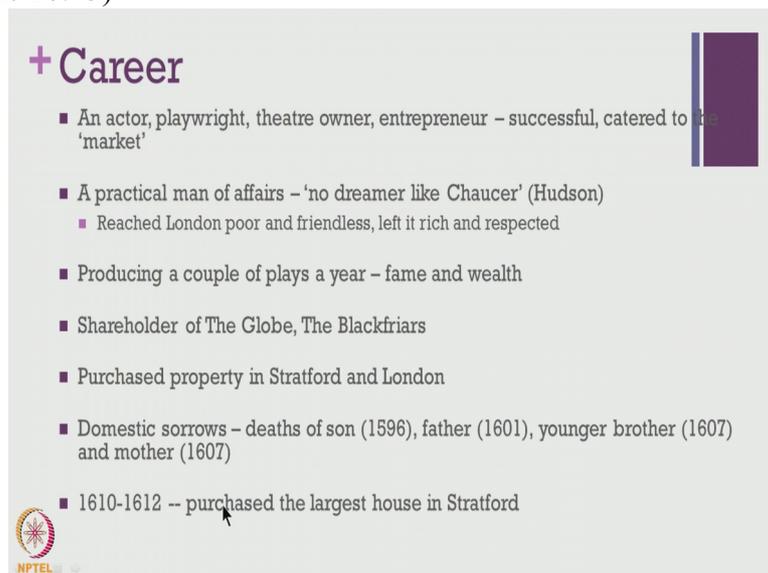
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- Shareholder of The Globe, The Blackfriars
- Purchased property in Stratford and London
- Domestic sorrows – deaths of son (1596), father (1601), younger brother (1607) and mother (1607)

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But this, his life was not just a bed of roses. We find a lot of domestic tragedies hitting him one after the other. He is, in fact his dramatic career is also marred by continuous deaths in his family. His son dies initially followed by his father, his younger brother Edmond who was also an actor in London and his mother also dies in 1607 and this had a major impact in his career and his personal life in general.

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- Domestic sorrows – deaths of son (1596), father (1601), younger brother (1607) and mother (1607)
- 1610-1612 -- purchased the largest house in Stratford

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By 1610, we find him quietly retiring back to Stratford-upon-Avon and when he goes back to

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Stratford if you remember earlier when he had left for London he had to almost flee London because he, there was an impending arrest perhaps or maybe he was running away from the misfortunes that had fallen him and his family. But when he goes back as a, goes back to London to retire and spend some quiet time over there, he is the richest man over there. We find him purchasing the largest house in Stratford

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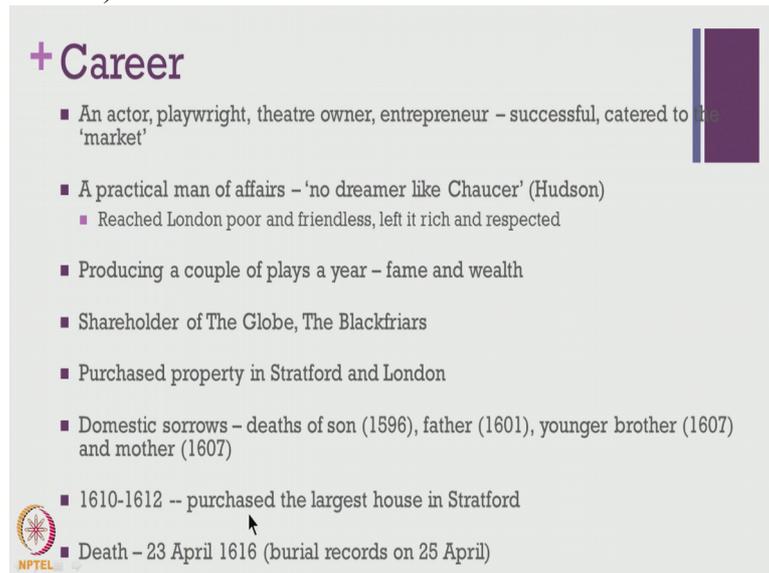
+ Career

- An actor, playwright, theatre owner, entrepreneur – successful, catered to the 'market'
- A practical man of affairs – 'no dreamer like Chaucer' (Hudson)
 - Reached London poor and friendless, left it rich and respected
- Producing a couple of plays a year – fame and wealth
- Shareholder of The Globe, The Blackfriars
- Purchased property in Stratford and London
- Domestic sorrows – deaths of son (1596), father (1601), younger brother (1607) and mother (1607)
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and settling over there And just like

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+ Career

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- A practical man of affairs – 'no dreamer like Chaucer' (Hudson)
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- 1610-1612 -- purchased the largest house in Stratford
- Death – 23 April 1616 (burial records on 25 April)

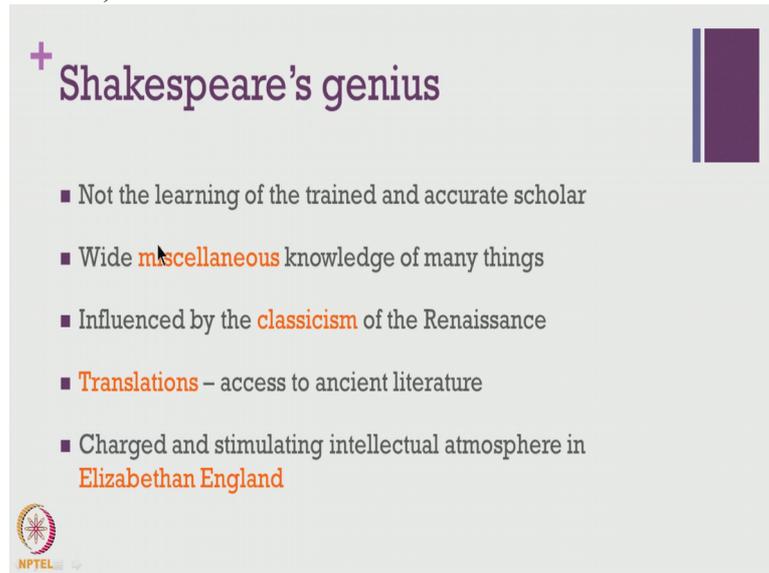
his entire life was clouded in mystery in certain ways; his death is also a quite mysterious. He is said to have again died on twenty third April 1616 which happens to be the documented birthday of William Shakespeare as well. This is again a conjecture because there are burial records which show that he was buried on twenty fifth April so given the conventions of the day, the burial is to happen two days after death. So there is

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conjecture that he was born on twenty third April and he died on twenty third April as well. And talking about Shakespeare's genius, it was, there was no way in which one could compare him to his contemporaries because he had no university education and he was not, he did not have the kind of background that many of the others, other literary writers of those period had. And his learning

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+ Shakespeare's genius

- Not the learning of the trained and accurate scholar
- Wide **miscellaneous** knowledge of many things
- Influenced by the **classicism** of the Renaissance
- **Translations** – access to ancient literature
- Charged and stimulating intellectual atmosphere in **Elizabethan England**

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and his craft, it was not the reflection of the trained and accurate scholar. In fact we find him gathering knowledge, gathering life material from different sources and it is a very miscellaneous assortment of different kind of experiences we find at a later point, and at the same time he was not free from the influences of his times his plays reflect a very strong influence of the classicism of the Renaissance period and also we get to know that he had access to lot of ancient, Greek and Roman literature through translations and some of the plays are, they also seem to be have been borrowed from certain other languages so

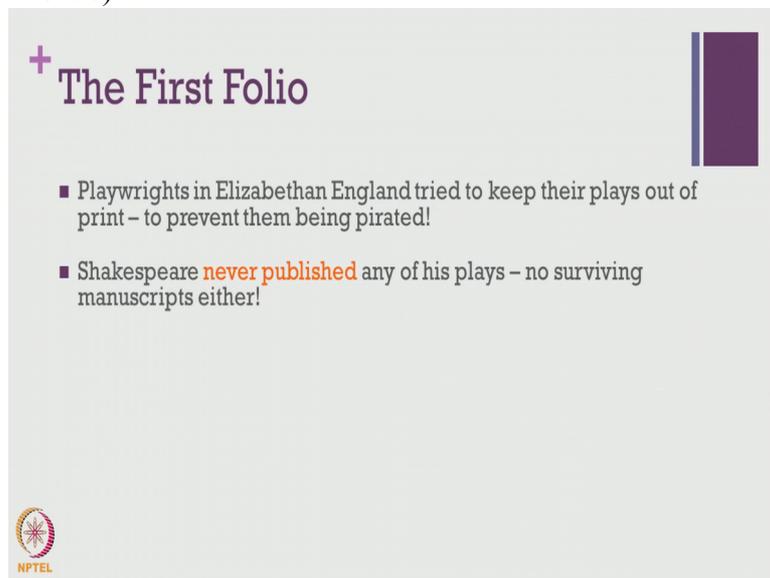
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he was trying to keep himself abreast with the latest happenings and the knowledgeable things of the times. And last but not the least, one cannot ignore the influence that Elizabethan England had on him because we have noted multiple times that this was a

charged and a, it was charged and stimulated atmosphere in London during those times; so he was influenced by all of these things collectively and it is very difficult to pinpoint what exactly turned this man into a, quite an exemplary figure of those times. And interestingly, though he had performed many plays in London, though he was quite famous, he had taken a name as an actor, as a playwright, as a poet so on and so forth, he himself did not take any kind of effort to get anything published. This, some of them feel perhaps, being a successful playwright himself, being a successful person who was putting plays on stage, maybe he was weary of

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+ The First Folio

- Playwrights in Elizabethan England tried to keep their plays out of print – to prevent them being pirated!
- Shakespeare **never published** any of his plays – no surviving manuscripts either!

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publishing his plays There was this risk of piracy because , because drama was getting increasingly competitive in England so everyone had to make sure that their plays remain their own and they were not pirated by someone else so may be for this reason Shakespeare did not actively try to bring out any kind of publication in his name but there is also this other assumption that he was too busy staging plays one after the other, preparing the actors and putting the plays on stage that he did not really have the time to sit down and have a proper script. There are lots of anecdotes about how casually

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he used to name his plays, how casually he used to frame his script, so this man had his eye only on the stage and not on the literary thing that would go into the pages. So in that sense, he had never published anything and there are no surviving manuscripts in his own name which is quite ironical and quite strange given the kind of success, popularity and fame that he achieved at a later point. So how do we access his plays? So some of his friends, two of them in particular, they had come out with a collection much after his death. This was known as the First Folio. This is in fact, for all Shakespeare scholars and all Shakespeare lovers, this is a very important document because we do not have any other kind of access to the

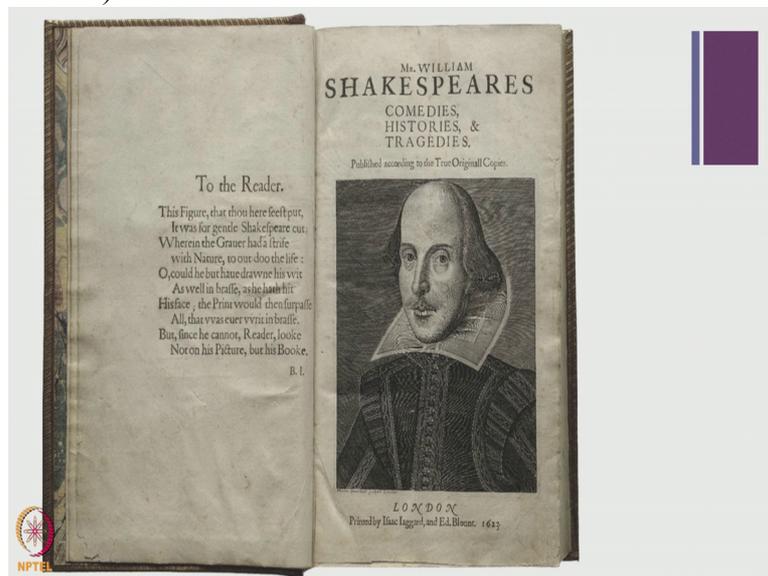
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A slide titled "The First Folio" with a purple plus sign icon. The slide contains a list of bullet points. The first bullet point states that playwrights in Elizabethan England tried to keep their plays out of print to prevent piracy. The second bullet point states that Shakespeare never published any of his plays, and no surviving manuscripts exist. The third bullet point identifies the first collection as "The First Folio", a very important document. The fourth bullet point names John Hemminge and Henry Condell as the compilers in 1623, noting that their originality is unknown and that they were friends and actors. The fifth bullet point states that 233 copies survive out of the 750 printed. An NPTEL logo is in the bottom left corner.

plays of Shakespeare apart from the fact that they were staged at some point in London So John Hemminge and Henry Condell, they were good friends of Shakespeare, they were also

actors and they were part of King's Men for a very long time so they knew Shakespeare very well and had been a part of most of his dramatic adventures, so they brought together in 1623 a collection known as the First Folio and one does not know about how original all of these plays were, whether they had to, they had amended their plays, they had brought about some changes because they had, it was all based on the, partly from memory, partly from the plays which were still being staged so let's not go into those details which is, which is clearly beyond the scope of our discussion and it is said that in the contemporary only 233 copies of the 750 original First Folios are now available. Rest of them were perhaps lost or some even feel that they could be available in someone's private collections. So this is how

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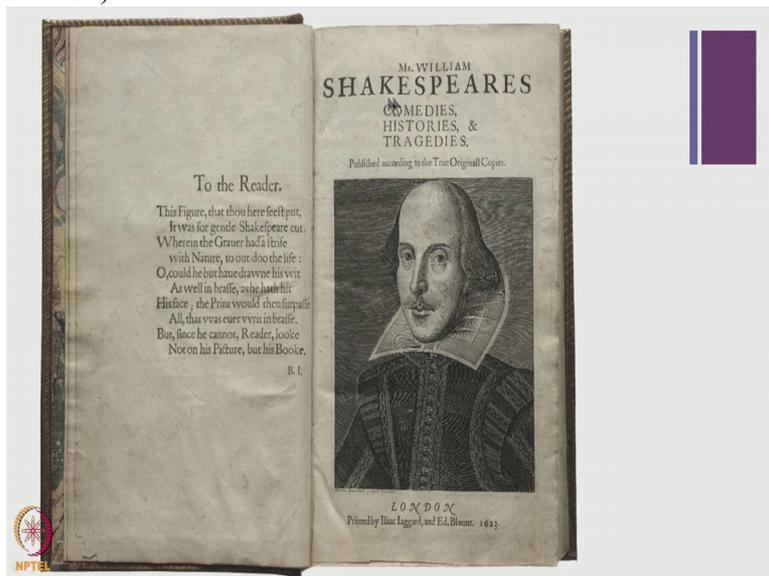
the First Folio, the first

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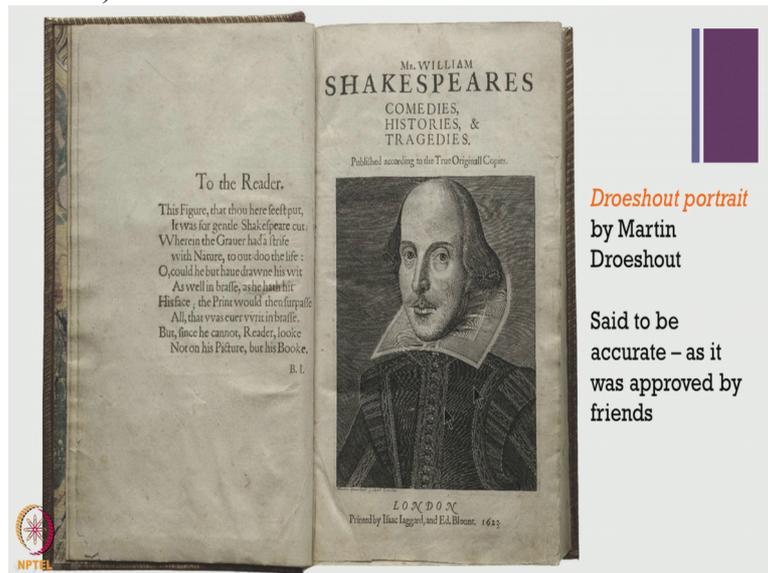
page of the Folio looked like. If you look at the title

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it's Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories, Tragedies Interestingly this is how this scholarly discussion on Shakespeare's works have been framed as well. It talks about these three major different genres and this folio in that sense has been a major scholarly framework as well in all the other kinds of discussion on Shakespeare to follow. And this

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portrait of Shakespeare that we find over here, that is known as the Droeshout portrait because it was made by Martin Droeshout, and this is one of the two portraits which, this in fact is one of the two accurate portraits of Shakespeare which is available till date and the other one being the, his bust which is erected in, near his graveyard. And this one is said to be accurate because the assumption that his friends had brought it out and perhaps they could, may be they had found it closer to real life than many other portraits of that time. So this is the most accurate and the most trustworthy portrait of Shakespeare as we have it today and but at the same time, if you just google Shakespeare's name you will find that there are different versions and different kinds of portraits which are available.

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So if we talk about this vast corpus of Shakespeare's works; in, in span of twenty four years, this is what he had come out with. He has two narrative poems to his credit, 154 sonnets, 37 plays so this is quite a big achievement and some of them feel that there are also a few lost plays. There are a couple of incomplete ones, there are certain plays with Shakespeare collaborated with certain others and were not documented so this is really a vast corpus of work and many historians feel that this is the greatest single body of work available in literature. To embark upon a discussion on Shakespeare's work we need to devote an entire lecture for that and which is precisely what we are going to do in the next lecture. So with this we come to the end of this session.

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Thank you for listening and see you in the next class