

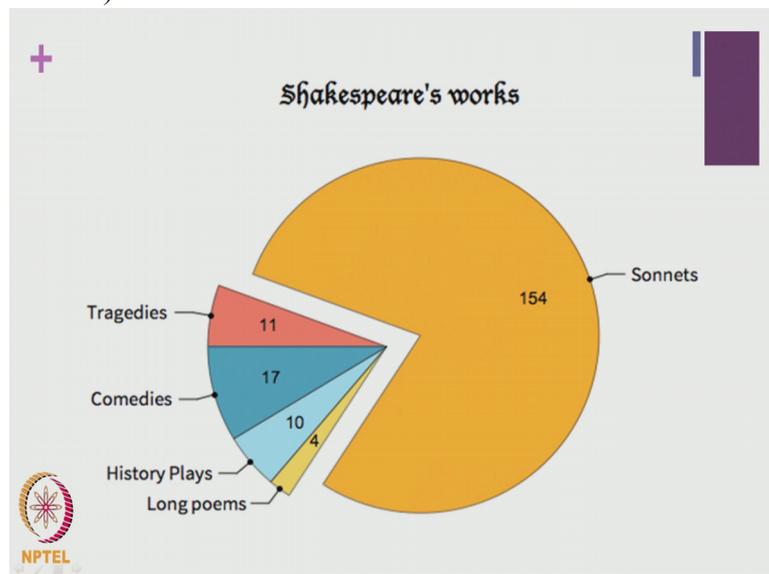
History of English Language and Literature
Prof. Dr. Merin Simi Raj
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Madras
Module Number 01 Lecture Number 6a
William Shakespeare: An Overview of his Drama

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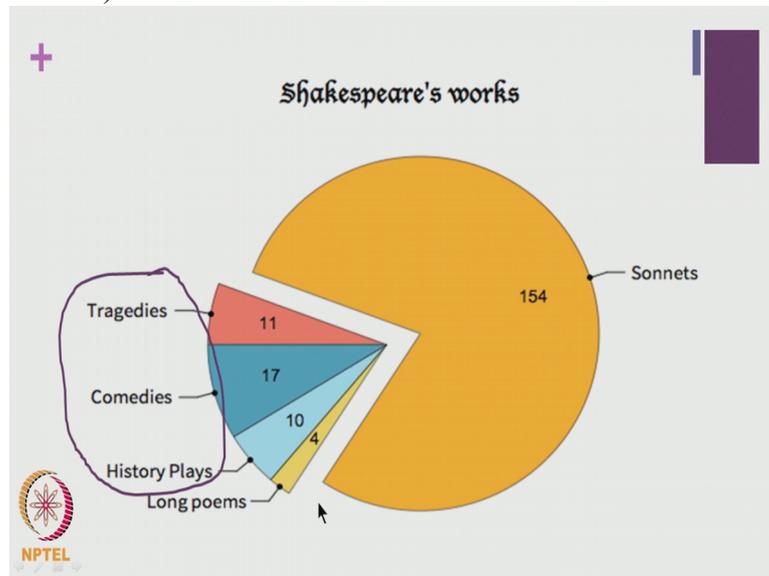
Good morning everyone. Welcome again to today's session on the course History of English Language and Literature. In the previous session we began looking at the greatest product of Elizabethan times, William Shakespeare. When we ended the previous lecture we had begun looking at the vast corpus of works that Shakespeare had produced. So if we try to draw your attention to that again, this is the kind of

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productions that Shakespeare had produced during his lifetime with 154 sonnets, 11 tragedies, 17 comedies, 10 historical plays and 4 long poems. However in today's session we will be

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taking a look at the tragedies, comedies and history plays as it has been generally classified by critics and historians for a very long time.

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And this is the set of plays that Shakespeare had produced and he, his plays are generally now divided into different genres and we now that, we now also know that for critical convenience, for historical convenience these classifications are quite necessary and it also gives a lot of structure to our discussion. And this is something

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Title	1755-56	1756-57	1757-58	1758-59	1759-60	1760-61	1761-62	1762-63	1763-64	1764-65	Total
Romeo and Juliet	16	15	9	17	10	15	10	10	7	9	118
Richard III	3	10	4	3	4	10	18	6	7	9	74
Hamlet	9	7	11	7	5	8	8	6	5	6	72
Cymbeline	0	0	0	7	0	0	16	7	11	6	47
King Lear	9	4	7	1	4	1	2	3	0	15	46
King Henry V	2	0	5	2	2	4	26	1	1	0	43
The Merry Wives of Windsor	7	5	4	4	5	2	6	2	4	3	42
Macbeth	5	7	6	2	2	3	4	5	3	4	41
The Tempest	4	0	18	5	0	5	2	4	2	1	41
2 King Henry IV	0	0	5	0	0	0	21	10	3	2	41
1 King Henry IV	5	4	4	5	5	5	2	3	4	3	40
Othello	2	7	4	4	2	5	3	1	4	5	37
Much Ado About Nothing	6	7	3	4	3	3	3	2	2	0	33
King Henry VIII	5	3	5	3	3	4	9	0	0	0	32
The Winter's Tale	13	2	1	0	0	0	6	0	0	2	24
The Merchant of Venice	3	3	2	4	3	5	1	0	1	1	23
All's Well That Ends Well	3	0	4	0	0	0	0	9	3	1	20
As You Like It	3	2	4	3	2	1	1	2	1	0	19
King John	0	0	1	0	0	9	6	0	0	1	17
Measure For Measure	0	6	3	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	13
Coriolanus	0	0	2	3	1	0	0	0	0	1	7
The Two Gentlemen of Verona	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	0	0	7
Antony and Cleopatra	0	0	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
Twelfth Night	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3
Julius Caesar	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
A Midsummer Night's Dream	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1

which is part of someone's study on the frequency of performance of Shakespeare's plays. This need not surprise us in any way because he was a man who dominated the London stage for 25 years and that was quite a feat, not just during those times but even today, even in terms of today's standards. And if

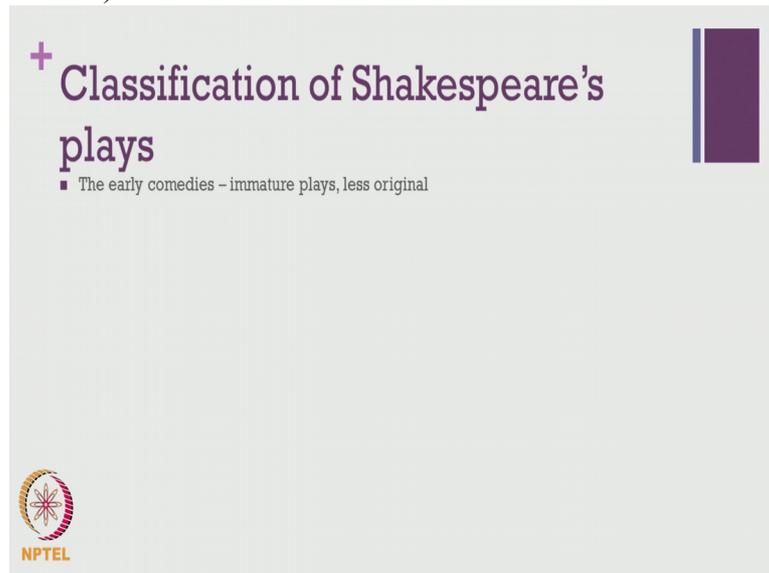
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Classification of Shakespeare's plays

we try to classify Shakespeare's plays the first set is

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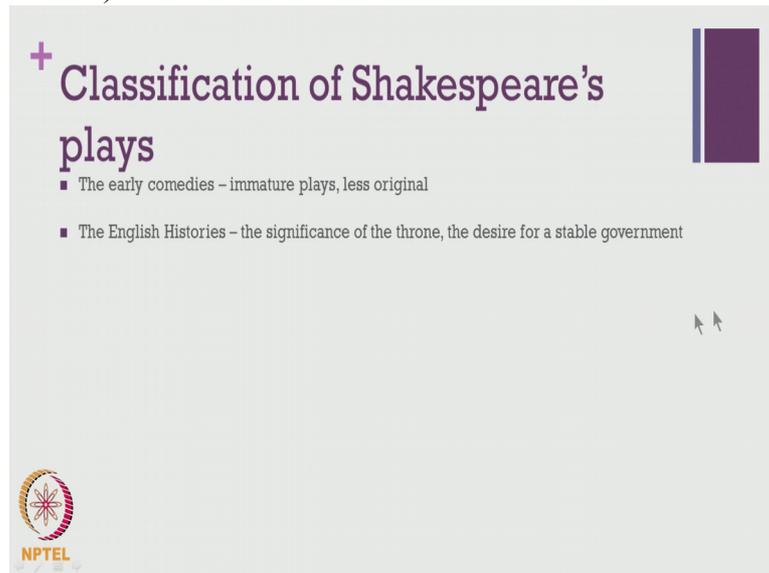
in fact his early comedies and they were generally set to be immature and less original and there is a lot of dispute about the storylines he picked up from here and there, from Italian comedies, from the earlier romances so on and so forth

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and they are generally seen as immature because plot structure is not very profound like the later ones but nevertheless they were hugely successful as well. And there are these

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English histories which display the significance of the throne and also desire for stable government. If we remember, when Shakespeare had entered the dramatic scene in London, Queen Elizabeth was reigning monarch and there were a lot of threats to her throne from the Catholic Church and also

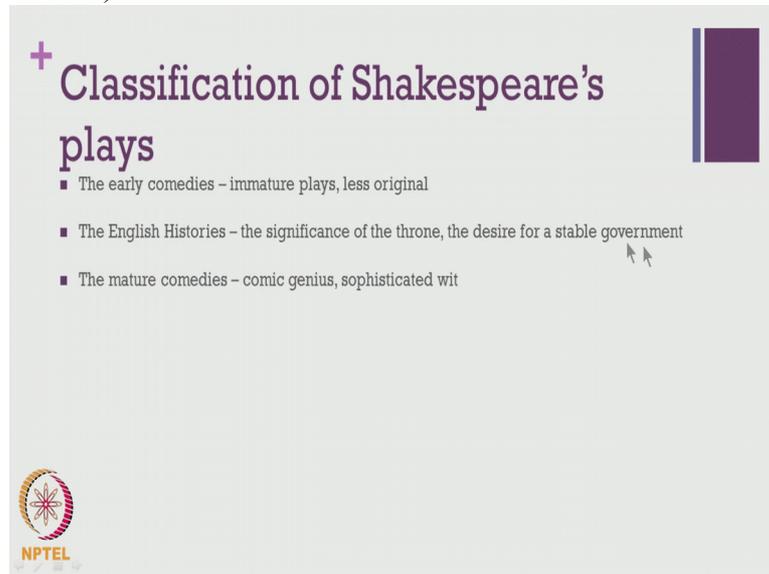
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from many of the other descendants of King Henry the VIII. So there was this ongoing tussle for power, there were different war-lords who were fighting with each other. There were also these different neighboring states who were trying to get into a marital alliance with Queen Elizabeth. So a lot of instability had overshadowed Queen Elizabeth's reign and there was a lot of uncertainty over political and economic affairs as well. So this gets reflected in many of

Shakespeare's plays and a general desire for a more stable, political economy is also seen in place. And at later stage we find his mature comedies

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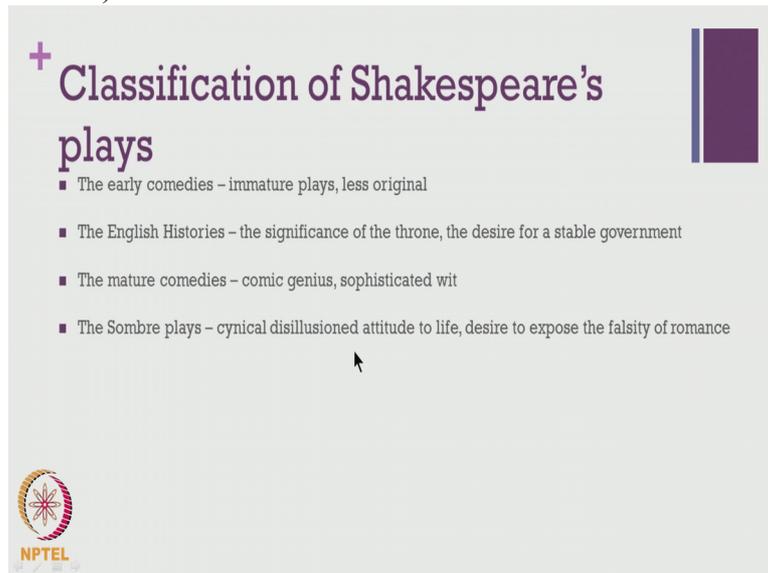
in place where his comic genius is displayed In fact he was considered, he is still being considered, as one of the most profound humorist that the English literature has ever produced.

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And his wit was considered quite sophisticated, though he had included some kind of slapstick comedy to cater to the groundlings as well. And there were sober plays of a later period which reflected a cynical and

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+ Classification of Shakespeare's plays

- The early comedies – immature plays, less original
- The English Histories – the significance of the throne, the desire for a stable government
- The mature comedies – comic genius, sophisticated wit
- The Sombre plays – cynical disillusioned attitude to life, desire to expose the falsity of romance

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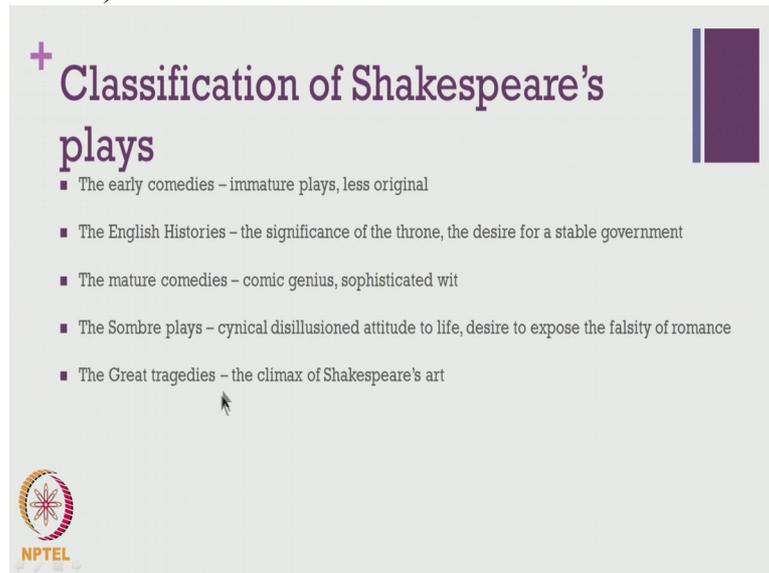
disillusioned attitude to life and also there was a desire to expose the falsity of romance. This is in stark contrast to the earlier kinds of romantic plays where love had

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taken a profound form, in forms of theme, in the forms of plot structure so on and so forth. And they were there is also a stage of great tragedies.

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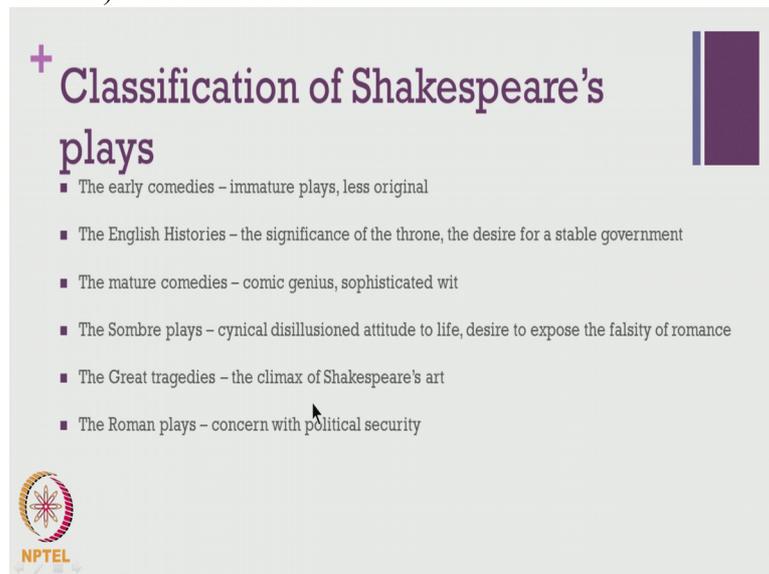
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- The Great tragedies – the climax of Shakespeare's art



In fact tragedies are considered to be Shakespeare's foremost and supremest works and we also find that this is the kind of work in which we find Shakespeare's art and dramatic technique reaching its climax. And here is

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- The Great tragedies – the climax of Shakespeare's art
- The Roman plays – concern with political security



set of plays which are generally designated as Roman plays, mostly historical in nature as well And here also he expresses a concern for political security through a discussion of the earlier rulers of, earlier Roman rulers, of earlier Roman authorities.

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- The Sombre plays – cynical disillusioned attitude to life, desire to expose the falsity of romance
- The Great tragedies – the climax of Shakespeare's art
- The Roman plays – concern with political security
- The Last plays – Mellowed maturity



And most of his plays, of the later years, they display a sense of mellowed maturity mainly because of the kind of things that had befallen his life, we in the last session we heard about the many kinds of misfortunes, personal misfortunes that had befallen him towards the end of his life and a lot of deaths which had happened so may be this had, led him as a person towards a more mellowed mature personality.

Apart from

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+ Four periods

- Phase I: 1588-93
- Phase II: 1594-1600
- Phase III: 1601-1608
- Phase IV: 1608-1612

Lived and wrote under two monarchs – Elizabeth I and James I

A chronological record of Shakespeare's intellectual and artistic history

this thematic classification, critics generally divide Shakespeare's plays into four major periods. The first phase is from 1588 to 93, second from 1594 to 1600, third from 1601 to 1608 and phase four from 1608 to 1612. Here you can also note that politically also this can

be classified into two, because he lived and wrote under two different monarchs, Elizabeth the First and James the First and he, in that sense, he can be classified along with Chaucer because if you remember, Chaucer was the one who had a rare distinction of having lived and written under

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three different monarchs; the first two phases were under Queen Elizabeth's rule and the second two phases could be broadly classified as being under James First rule. So if this way, if we do chronological survey of Shakespeare's plays, some of the critics are also of the opinion that one can unearth the intellectual and

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+ Four periods

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artistic history of the personality of Shakespeare However still there is a lot of debate about whether his own personality, whether his own domestic life, whether his own private life etc get featured in any of his dramas or not. So keeping that

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+ Phase I: 1588-1593

- Experimental work
- Revision of old plays - three parts of *Henry VI*, *Titus Andronicus*
- Influence of Lyly - *Love's Labour's Lost*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*
- Marlowe's influence - chronicle drama - *Richard III*
- Youthful tragedy - *Romeo and Juliet*
 - Superficial, no depth of thought or characterization, immature art
- Stiffness of blank verse
- Outstanding technical features

aside, let's move on to the first phase from 1588 to 1593, this is the time when he had arrived in London and also if you remember, in the previous session we also noted that by 1592, he is a quite a force to reckon with. He had risen to such an importance that he had begun to even merit abuse from one of the university wits, Robert Greene. So this is the stage which could be generally understood as experimental in nature and we find him attempting a revision of many old plays. In fact the earlier plays, the first, the three parts of Henry the Sixth, Titus Andronicus they are all seen as revision of plays which had already been prevalent in the Elizabethan times. And it is at this stage that we find profound influence of John

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Lyly on him and most of his earlier comedies are reflections of John Lyly's influence on his personality and as well as his dramatic technique and we also

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find Marlowe's influence in this early stage, especially the drama, *Richard the Third*. The play *Romeo and Juliet* deserves the special mention at this point because if you remember the chart which I showed at the outset of this session which showed the frequency of plays of Shakespeare's times, it showed that *Romeo and Juliet* had topped the chart. So this is considered as one of his most successful plays ever and this youthful tragedy however is considered with the critics as having no depth of thought or characterization and superficial in nature and seen as immature. Nevertheless it continues to be staged in different forms; it has been remade in different, into different movies and different languages, so in that sense it

continues to be one of his most popular plays ever. And we also find that his, the use of blank verse in his earliest stage, in the first stage was a more stiff and it was not free as it was supposed to be. And in spite of the many limitations that Shakespeare's dramatic techniques could have had; in fact there is hardly any confusion about the outstanding technical features that he used in his stage and this is what made Shakespeare hugely successful right from his early times because the people who were used to a more or less a monotonous kind of stage techniques were getting used to many different innovative things when Shakespeare arrived.

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In the second phase

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+ Phase II: 1594-1600

- Great comedies and Chronicle plays
- *Richard II, King John, The Merchant of Venice, Henry IV, Henry V, The Taming of the Shrew, The Merry Wives of Windsor, Much Ado About Nothing, As You Like It, Twelfth Night*
- Independent work
- Massive in quality, more profound
- Deep characterization, penetrative humour
- Blank verse - free and flexible

which lasted from 1594 to 1600, this period-is seen as quite massive and quite profound not just in terms of quantity but also in terms of quality. And this is the time when he produced all

those great comedies with sophisticated humor and wit and also had staged a number of chronological plays. Some of the plays of this period include Richard the Second, King John, The Merchant of Venice, Henry the Fourth, Henry the Fifth, The Taming of the Shrew, The Merry Wives of Windsor, Much Ado about Nothing, As you like it, and Twelfth Night. In fact there is this interesting trivia about the production of As You like It and Twelfth Night. In fact, Shakespeare had this habit of not naming his plays well in advance. In fact if you look at the title of, most of his plays

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they, they are not very dramatic. The title is most often based on, based on the name of the main character or it could be something like a Twelfth Night. In fact on, about the play Twelfth Night, it was in fact staged on the twelfth night after Christmas which marked the grand finale of all Christmas celebrations in Elizabethan England. So Shakespeare had a special play which he wanted to stage on that particular day and just before the play was going to be staged, the actors and the others who were part of it realized that the play was not named. So they, it seems apparently as the anecdote goes, apparently they went and asked Shakespeare how to name it and he said Twelfth Night. We know that this was the casual way in which he named most of his plays just like the way in which he entered the London dramatic scene in a very casual way, in a rather friendless way, without having planned anything or structured anything in terms of education, in case of dramatic technique so on and so forth we find that his plays were also staged, and his plays were also staged and his plays were also named and staged in a way which was which was quite unconventional during that time. But in spite of that we find he was achieving success in all his work and by this time, by the time

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+ Phase II: 1594-1600

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he reaches the second phase we also find his work becoming more independent in nature and from this time onwards it is very difficult to trace particular influences or particular kinds of borrowings he does from different works. And this is also the time when he begins to explore characters in an in-depth analysis and his humor also takes on a different level altogether. It is more penetrative, it is more satirical though he always takes good care not to offend the monarch or whoever is in power. And by this time, his blank verse is no more stiff. It's free and flexible as well.

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+ Phase III: 1601-1608

- Great tragedies and Bitter comedies
- Peak of his career, supreme masterpieces
- Darker side of human experience, destructive passions, sins and weaknesses of men
- *Julius Caesar, Hamlet, All's Well that End's Well, Measure for Measure, Troilus and Cressida, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth, Antony and Cleopatra, Coriolanus, Timon of Athens*

And this prepares him for the third stage from 1601 to 1608 and this is the time of his great tragedies and bitter comedies and many feel that this is the time when he engages in a lot of philosophical discussions throughout his play and this is considered as the time when he also

reached the peak of his career. And all the supreme masterpieces, the great tragedies were produced during this time and he also had begun to show a flair for exploring the darker side of human experience and also his plays look at destructive emotions, sins and weaknesses of men. So

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there is a gradual transformation that we see in his dramatic career from early mindless comedies towards a more profound exploration of life itself. So these are some of the plays

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+ Phase III: 1601-1608

- Great tragedies and Bitter comedies
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of his time, Julius Caesar, Hamlet, All's well that Ends well, Measure for Measure, Troilus and Cressida, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth, Anthony and Cleopatra, Coriolanus and Timon of Athens. So with this phase four, he in fact you know, after this we do not find any profound productions

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coming from his side And his phase

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+ Phase IV: 1608-1612

- Later comedies, Dramatic romances
- Tender and gracious tone
- decline of Shakespeare's dramatic powers
- Careless construction, unsatisfactory characterisation
- *Cymbeline, The Tempest, The Winter's Tale*
- *Pericles* - incomplete
- *Henry VIII* - completed by Fletcher

four is fairly uneventful in terms of his dramatic career. It's from 1608 to 1612. And it is his stage of later comedies and dramatic romances and some of them have even named these dramatic romances of the later times as tragic comedies because there is a mix of both that we find in most of his plays of the later times; and this, some of the critics even feel that there is decline of, steady decline of Shakespeare's steady dramatic powers. It could be due to many reasons. It could be due to the domestic problems that he had, the grief of the four deaths that continuously happened in his family, one does not really know the reason and it is also said that the, the fire which burnt down the Globe Theatre

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during one of his performances of Henry the Eighth, may be that also may have shaken him up a bit emotionally and financially as well. And this period, especially the final phase we find that most of his plays were attacked for callous construction, the characterization was

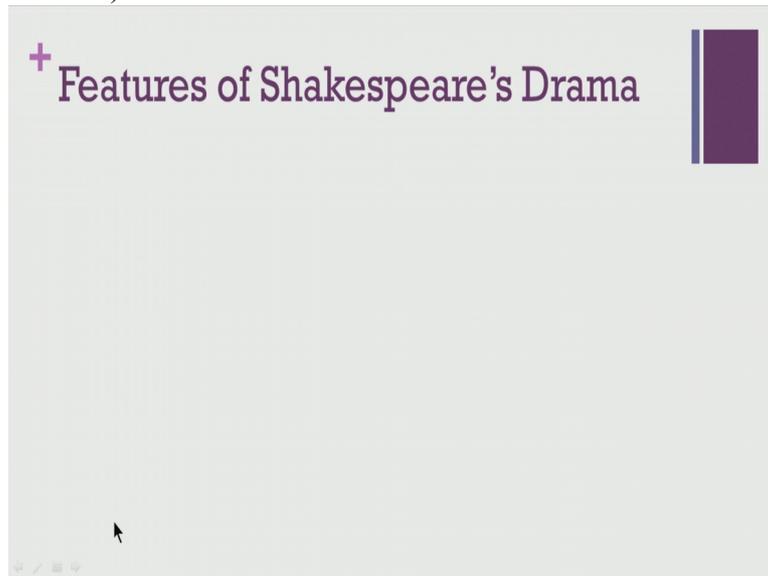
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quite unsatisfactory, so we find an expression of these things in works such as Cymbeline, The Tempest and The Winter's Tale and towards the end there is one play that he had left incomplete, Pericles and another one Henry the Eighth was completed by Fletcher, another contemporary of him after a later point. In fact Fletcher is the one who takes over most of the things that Shakespeare was doing in his company soon after his death.

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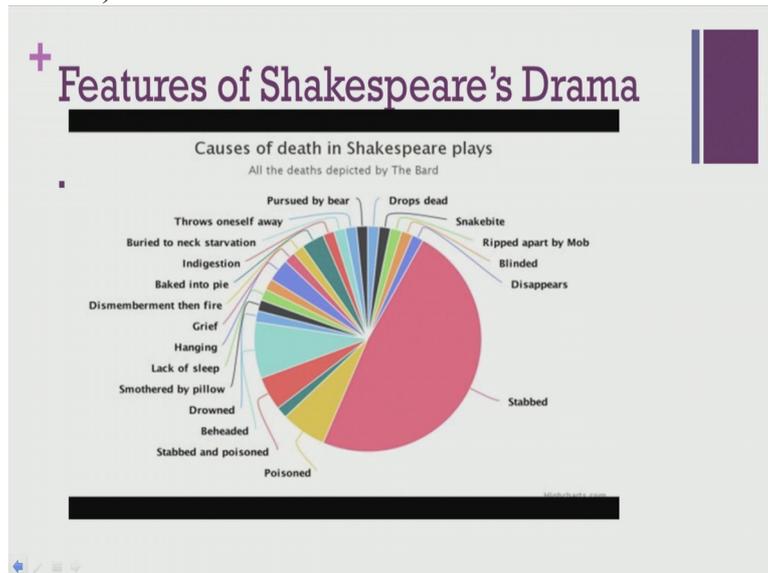
And what were the significant features of Shakespeare's drama? We find that

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his work was spread over four phases. This lasted for about 25 years which is almost a life career for a successful person. So we need to compile a few features from all of these phases together to understand the, the kind of drama that Shakespeare produced in general. And needless to say, it was of an astonishing variety, range and versatility

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and in fact this is based on one of the studies done on the different kind of deaths that Shakespeare brought to the stage and this was found as quite interesting during the Elizabethan times because they were looking for any kind of innovation, any kind of difference so we find that unlike the, unlike most of the other tragedies which had only one or two kinds of death, we find him exploring in a variety of ways even when it comes to the ending of a person. So, moving on

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+ Features Of Shakespeare's Drama

- Astonishing variety, range and versatility
- Free from dogmatism – Objective outlook
- Vitality of characterisation – 'alive' characters, more complete
- Eg: the human side of monarchs
- Excellent command over language – vocabulary of 15000 words (Milton's half that number)

we also find that his works were quite free from dogmatism which was prevalent during those times especially due to the, due to the various moral forces that operated within the society. We also find him displaying an objective outlook towards society

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and life in general; perhaps it's the influence of general Elizabethan spirit or the influence of Italian humanism. And his characterization was considered very lively. He had

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rare distinction of producing, bringing characters alive on stage In fact, his characters were also considered as more round and they were never flat. In fact this is exemplarily shown in the way he showed the characters of monarchs on stage. In fact, if we do a survey of many of his characters who were either Roman rulers or English kings, we find that they were not devoid

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of any weakness In fact his tragedy is based upon this single flaw that an otherwise flawless perfect character of heroic nature had. So in that sense his plays were very interesting because they did not have larger than life figures. The figures were closer to life with real emotions and real weaknesses. And he had an excellent command over language. This goes without saying.

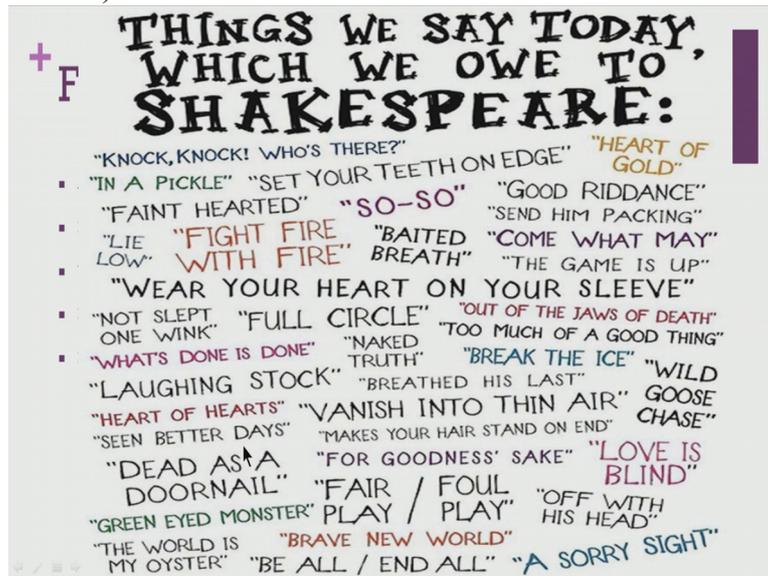
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May be we will spend another lecture looking at the ways in which Shakespeare's language influenced and overturned many linguistic features. His vocabulary is said to have been in the range of 15000 and it is said Milton had only half that number to his credit. And in fact

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many of the phrases and many of the words that we use today, we use it unknowingly that it is all from Shakespeare's plays. In fact, even some very common terms as we can see over here like naked truth or expressions such as love is blind, for goodness sake, a brave new world, green-eyed monster all of those have been invented and innovated by Shakespeare in many of his plays. So the language in fact owes a lot to Shakespeare and there is a way in which linguistics have even classified the language

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in a different way from Shakespeare's time onwards And his play in fact was written with a mix of prose and verse, verse we already noted it was mostly in blank verse.

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+ Features Of Shakespeare's Drama

- Prose – common vehicle for comic scenes, serious tragedies
- Strong and unconventional women characters – not the typical weak, dependent women of the Elizabethan drama- Questions the stereotypes(though not always)
- Issues of patriarchy, woman's role in marriage, woman's intellect and abilities – as discussed in *As you Like It*, *Twelfth Night*

There was a free and secular expression of blank verse and prose was used as vehicle for serious tragedies and also for comic scenes and this mixture had very important purpose to serve as well. If he had written his entire play in verse, he would not have been able to cater to a larger set of audience. But verse was mostly seen as quotely, it was seen as scholarly, and it needed some

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kind of a merit to even understand and appreciate but prose was the language of the common man. So his plays were structured in such a way that it could cater to the interests of both the commoners as well as the people of learned and scholarly background. And there is lot of debate about the way his women characters have been portrayed. For

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some time there was this general appreciation of Shakespeare's characterization of women that he had strong and un-conventional characters and it was not the typical dependent weak women of Elizabethan drama and he is also said to have questioned certain types of stereotypes, though not always, there are different debates especially in the contemporary feminist studies we do find that many studies have begun to look at the patriarchal side

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of the Bard and critiquing the ways in which he had been talking about gender, he had been representing women so on and so forth. But at the same time, there are characters such as Lady Macbeth who were not portrayed in drama or any kind of literary art until then. And he did

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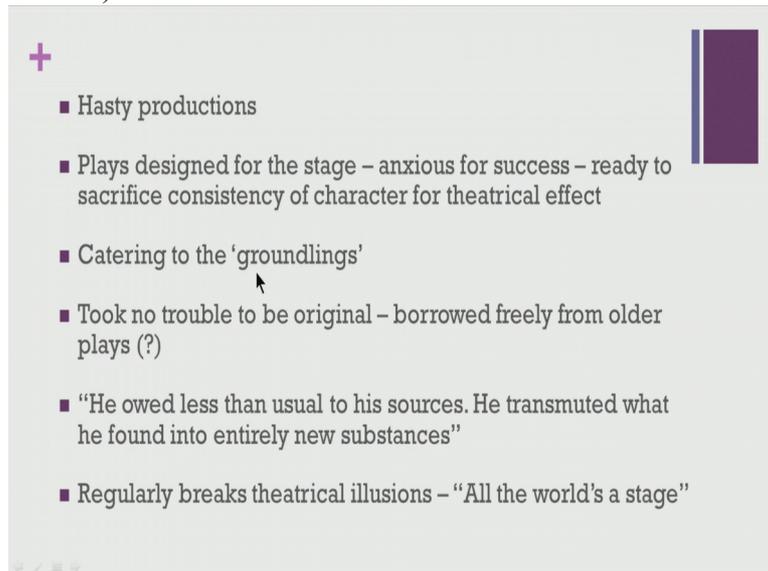
engage in, though in minor ways with issues of patriarchy, women's role in marriage, women's intellect and abilities, so on and so forth and some detailed discussion we would also find in plays such as *As you Like it* and *Twelfth Night*, however keeping these various debates and controversies apart he is said to have been explored human emotions

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and human lives in many varied ways and many myriad ways than the others, the others of his times could do. And some of the critics of Shakespeare's plays

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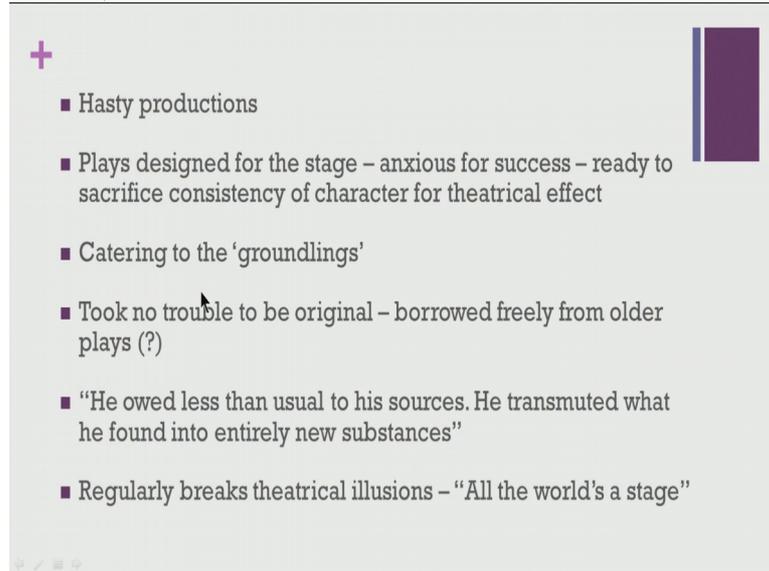
include that they were hasty productions because as we noted in the earlier session, he was quite often in a hurry to stage the plays. He did not even have time to write down the script or name them properly and execute them but they were hasty productions because the plays were so much in demand and he wanted to make use of this popularity while it was still there. And the plays were in fact immensely designed for stage, which is why the positive side of this being his plays are even now adapted into different kinds of movies;

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it is possible to adapt Shakespeare's plays in different kinds of stages. It is primarily because Shakespeare designed his plays for the stage. He was not concerned of the literary nuances but he was more concerned about how the play would appear when it was staged over there. And though, may be this was the reflection of his anxiety for success, but we do find that

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- Hasty productions
- Plays designed for the stage – anxious for success – ready to sacrifice consistency of character for theatrical effect
- Catering to the ‘groundlings’
- Took no trouble to be original – borrowed freely from older plays (?)
- “He owed less than usual to his sources. He transmuted what he found into entirely new substances”
- Regularly breaks theatrical illusions – “All the world’s a stage”

it did produce a lot of theatrical effect. So in certain case, we even find him willing to sacrifice some inconsistencies and there are also lot of instances of anachronism in Shakespeare's plays but in spite of that

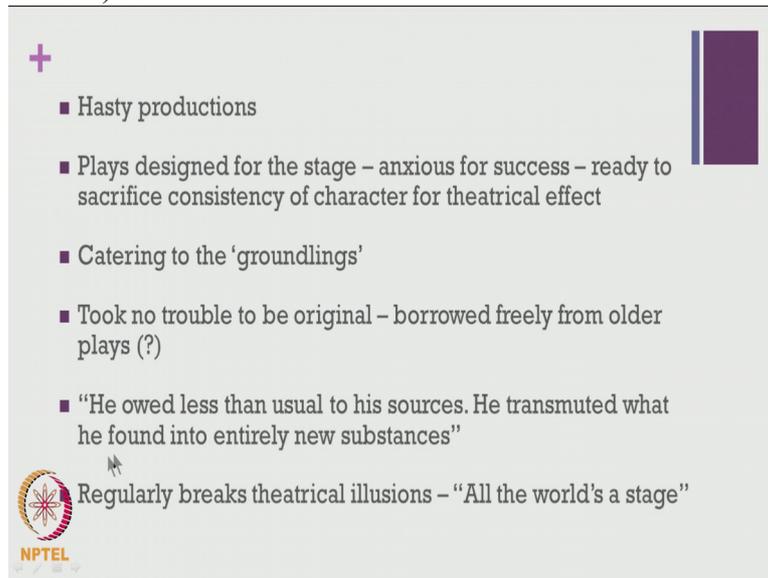
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we find that the theatrical effect continues to be of supreme nature. And he always included some scenes to cater to the groundlings. The groundlings were the one who had to pay just a penny to watch the drama and they had to be, they were not given particular seats. They had to sit on the ground and watch the play. So he was catering to the groundlings as well because they ensured that the drama was hugely popular. So he had always included some body scene, some comic slapstick scenes to cater to their interest and also bring drama closer to their own lives. And about the originality of Shakespeare's play, there are lot of debates and

controversies and even authorship studies about the same and some feel that especially the earlier historians and critics like Hudson, they are of the opinion that he took no trouble to be original and that he borrowed freely from older plays and other sources without acknowledging them in any way. But this is not, this is not a view shared by all the critics and all the historians

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Regularly breaks theatrical illusions – “All the world’s a stage”

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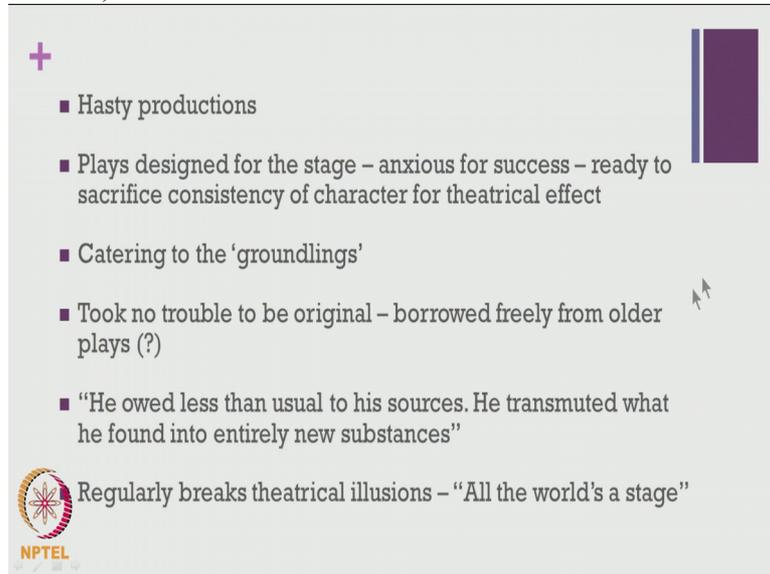
and Pat Rogers is of the opinion that he owed less than usual to his sources and he transmuted what he found into entirely new substances. So apart from these varied ways what stands as a true testimony to his craft and his technique is that he continues to be celebrated even

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after centuries He is perhaps the most widely read and most widely known literary artist and his, his plays are perhaps the most staged worldwide even in the contemporary and it is usually said about him that he was the one

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Regularly breaks theatrical illusions – “All the world’s a stage”

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who took a lot of pleasure of breaking theatrical illusions In fact, his famous phrase from one of his plays, all the world’s a stage is an expression and reflection of this belief that he had. This also reminds us that the we need to take a closer look at Elizabethan theater to understand how theater was

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not just an artistic construct but it was also a social construct and the political construct of the times. So in the next session we will be looking, taking a detailed look at how Elizabethan theater was being framed, the physical structure of it, how it contributed to the revenue of the

times and how it became an important symbol of Elizabethan times and later on the English times in general. So with this we wind up today's lecture. Thank you for listening and see you in the next class.