

**History of English Language and Literature**  
**Professor Dr. Merin Simi Raj**  
**Department of Humanities & Social Sciences**  
**Indian Institute of Technology Madras**  
**Lecture 18**  
**Women writers in the Romantic age**

Hello and welcome again to the NPTL course the history of English Language and Literature, having discussed in detail the flourish that the romantic age had across genres and across classes it is important to see what the romantic age was doing to the women writers of the period. We noticed multiple times from the Renaissance times onwards that the canon was a little lopsided it only had male writers predominantly.

But however, from the renaissance period onwards we had also been taking notice of women writers who also made a mark in the literary canon but a long side at the end of discussion at every age we also had been taking a look at some of the women writers who were left out of the canon and whom the later historians do consider with notable important merit. In this lecture we try to identify some of the women writers of the romantic age who were left out of the canon, who were forgotten, or who had not been part of the major literary histories and major critical discussions.

(Refer Slide Time: 1:30)



The slide features a title 'The Canon of Romantic Period' in a purple serif font, preceded by a small purple plus sign. To the right of the title is a vertical purple bar. Below the title is a list of names, each preceded by a small purple square bullet point. The names are: 'An all-male preserve?', 'Mary Wollstonecraft', 'Frances Burney', 'Mary Shelley', 'Jane Austen', 'Maria Edgeworth', and 'Who else?'.

- An all-male preserve?
- Mary Wollstonecraft
- Frances Burney
- Mary Shelley
- Jane Austen
- Maria Edgeworth
- Who else?

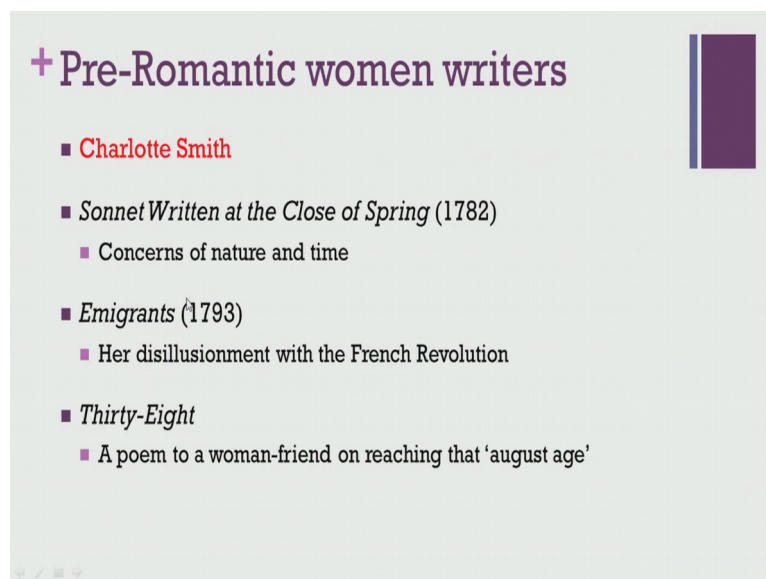
When we look at the canon of the romantic period we again surprisingly realise that it is an all-male preserve of course there were discussions that we had about Mary Wollstonecraft and her foundational role in the feminist writings of even the contemporary and the works of

Frances Burney which were much appreciated by even writers such as Johnson, Mary Shelley who had a envious literate in intellectual tradition and also enjoyed immense popularity through her work Frankenstein.

And of course Jane Austen who is considered as the four most women writer from the 19th century and Maria Edgeworth who inaugurated an entirely new kind of writing by focusing on the Irish regional novels but apart from these major writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Frances Burney, Mary Shelley, Jane Austen and Maria Edgeworth it is very difficult to come another women writer from the romantic period.

It is this question that leads us to a discussion and to an engagement with a variety of writers who also were writing during the romantic period. And one cannot talk about the revolutionary tendencies and also the newer experimental forms of writing of the romantic age unless one decides to come across not just genres and classes but also gender as well.

(Refer Slide Time: 2:38)



The slide features a title '+ Pre-Romantic women writers' in purple. Below it, a list of works by Charlotte Smith is presented with red square bullet points. The first item is 'Charlotte Smith' in red text. The second item is 'Sonnet Written at the Close of Spring (1782)' with a sub-bullet 'Concerns of nature and time'. The third item is 'Emigrants (1793)' with a sub-bullet 'Her disillusionment with the French Revolution'. The fourth item is 'Thirty-Eight' with a sub-bullet 'A poem to a woman-friend on reaching that 'august age''. A vertical purple bar is on the right side of the slide.

- Charlotte Smith
- *Sonnet Written at the Close of Spring* (1782)
  - Concerns of nature and time
- *Emigrants* (1793)
  - Her disillusionment with the French Revolution
- *Thirty-Eight*
  - A poem to a woman-friend on reaching that 'august age'

Among the pre-romantic writers the important name which we had not yet come across is Charlotte Smith in 1782 she published *Sonnet Written at the Close of Spring*, it concern with nature and time and it also in that sense keeps in tune with the spirit of the romantic times. Her 1793 work the *Emigrants* was more political in mature it also articulated her disillusionment with the French Revolution. But however, it is useful to remember that politics was still considered as a male (( ))(3:09) for the same reason most of the leading women writers we do not find them engaging with the political affairs of the times nor do

they give any nor do they give any direct opinion about the major socio historical and political things which are happening in England or in Europe during those times.

(Refer Slide Time: 3:36)

The slide features a light green background with a purple vertical bar on the right. At the top left is a purple plus sign. The text is arranged in two columns. The left column is titled 'Smith, Thirty-Eight: To Mrs.H, 1791' and the right column is titled 'Lord Byron, Growing Old, 1819'. The text in each column is aligned to the left. At the bottom left of the slide, there are small navigation icons.

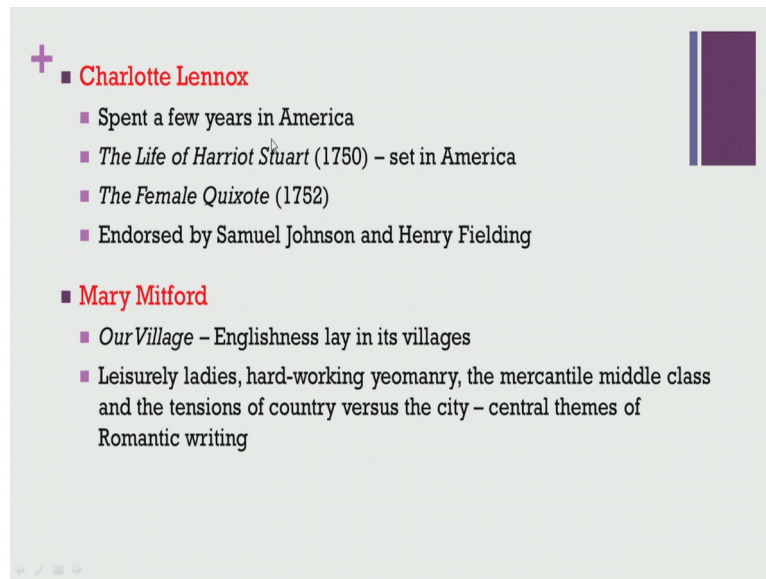
<p>With eye more steady, we engage To contemplate approaching age And life more justly estimate With firmer souls and stronger powers With reason, faith and friendship ours We'll not regret the stealing hours, That lead from thirty-e'n to forty-eight!</p>	<p>You've passed your youth not so unpleasantly And if you had it o'er again – 'twould pass – So thank your stars that matters are no worse</p>
---	---

Charlotte Smith's best known work is a poem titled Thirty-Eight; it was a poem to a woman friend of hers when she reached that August age of Thirty-Eight. At this juncture I also considered it quite interesting to draw a comparison between Smith's poem titled Thirty-Eight to Mrs. Edge with Lord Byron's 1819 poem Growing Old. In both of these poems and Lord Byron composed this poem when he reached the age of 30 and very interesting to see how both of these poets had almost similar thoughts when they reached a particular age which they thought was quite a turning point in their own life history.

Charlotte Smith writes with eye more steady, we engage to contemplate approaching age and life more justly estimate with firmer souls and stronger powers with reason, faith and friendship ours we will not regret the stealing hours, that lead from thirty-eight to forty-eight. And Lord Byron's 1819 poem Growing Old reads thus you have passed your youth not so unpleasantly and if you had it o'er again – 'twould pass – so thank your stars that matters are no worse.

So we also notice that irrespective of the kind of canonical state as that these two poets enjoyed we do not find a marked similarity between their range, their versatility and their treatment of one particular theme such as age and growing old.

(Refer Slide Time: 4:55)

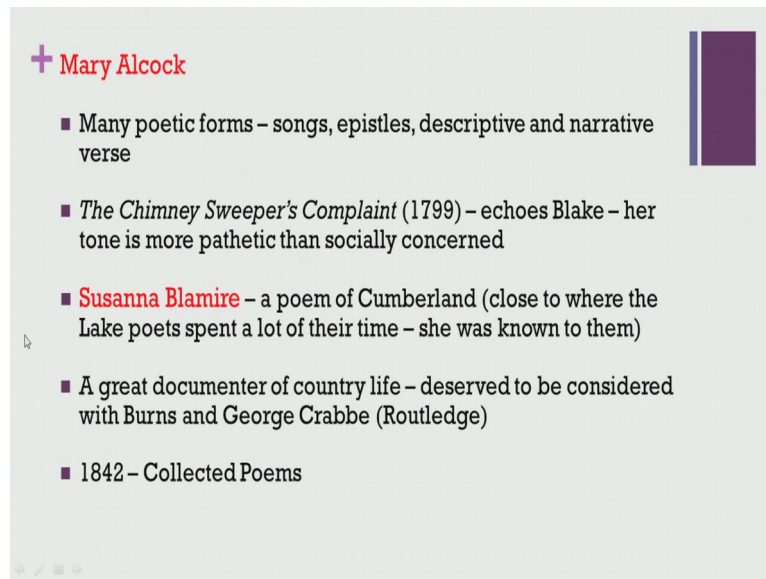


- **Charlotte Lennox**
  - Spent a few years in America
  - *The Life of Harriot Stuart* (1750) – set in America
  - *The Female Quixote* (1752)
  - Endorsed by Samuel Johnson and Henry Fielding
- **Mary Mitford**
  - *Our Village* – Englishness lay in its villages
  - Leisurely ladies, hard-working yeomanry, the mercantile middle class and the tensions of country versus the city – central themes of Romantic writing

Another important women writer in late 18th century was that of Charlotte Lennox she had spent a few years in America and that also had influence her writing immensely. So her 1750 work *The Life of Harriot Stuart* is set in America, she also had composed in 1752 *The Female Quixote*, Lennox works were interestingly endorsed by Samuel Johnson and Henry Fielding that ensured her some kind of acceptance during her lifetime but deliberately we do not find her being rated among the other important writers of the late 18th century.

The other writer who also signalled a transition from the end of the 18th century towards romantic concerns was Mary Mitford her poem *Our Village* focuses on the ways in which Englishness could be located in the villages of England and she also talks about the leisurely ladies, the hardworking yeomanry, the mercantile middle class and the tensions of the country life versus the city life and these instantly were also the major themes that framed the Romantic writing.

(Refer Slide Time: 5:52)



**+ Mary Alcock**

- Many poetic forms – songs, epistles, descriptive and narrative verse
- *The Chimney Sweeper's Complaint* (1799) – echoes Blake – her tone is more pathetic than socially concerned
- **Susanna Blamire** – a poem of Cumberland (close to where the Lake poets spent a lot of their time – she was known to them)
- A great documenter of country life – deserved to be considered with Burns and George Crabbe (Routledge)
- 1842 – Collected Poems

Mary Alcock was a writer who experimented with the wide range of genres she also wrote about many poetic forms songs, epistles, descriptive and narrative verse. However, her more significant work was a 1799 poem *The Chimney Sweeper's Complaint* in which she also had echoed a Blake. However, in comparison to Blake and other major poets of the period her tone is more pathetic than socially concerned.

Susanna Blamire was a poet who was best known for the location in which she spent most of her times that was a Cumberland and many of the Lake poets including Wordsworth and Coleridge spent lot of their time in Cumberland but however inspite of this commonality that Susanna Blamire shared with these major male poets she was not known to them. Susanna Blamire was also a great documenter of country life and Routledge history of English literature notes that she deserves to be considered with Burns and George Crabbe two of the leading figures of the Romantic Movement.

In 1842 Susanna Blamire also published her collected poems which however were not considered of much worth by most of the critics of those times.

(Refer Slide Time: 7:03)



- **Clara Reeve**
  - A novelist
  - *An Argument in Favour of the Natural Equality of Both the Sexes* – 1765
  
- **Anna Laetitia Barbauld**
  - Inspired by the American Declaration of Independence and the French Revolution
  - Long delays in getting her work published
  - *The Rights of Woman* - “Make treacherous Man, thy subject, not thy friend”
    - Wr.1795, pub.1825
  - Very industrious – edited 50 volumes of *The British Novelists* (1810)
  - *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* (1812) – a poem in heroic couplet – one of the first texts to foresee the decline of Britain’s wealth and power and the increasing prosperity of America

Clara Reeve was a novelist of the period and her most important work was not a novel but a (7:09) title *An Argument in Favour of the Natural Equality of Both Sexes* this was published in 1765 and we also see that not just Mary Wollstonecraft but many of these writers these lesser known forgotten writers also had laid the foundation to the feminist movement which was to reach its maturity and ripening only in the 20th century.

Anna Laetitia Barbauld was one of the significant women writers of this period she was immensely influenced by the American Declaration of Independence and also the French Revolution. In that sense in her we also find one of the indicators that women were also equally influenced by the political affairs of the period and they were also equally enthralled by the new ideas that the French Revolution had provided.

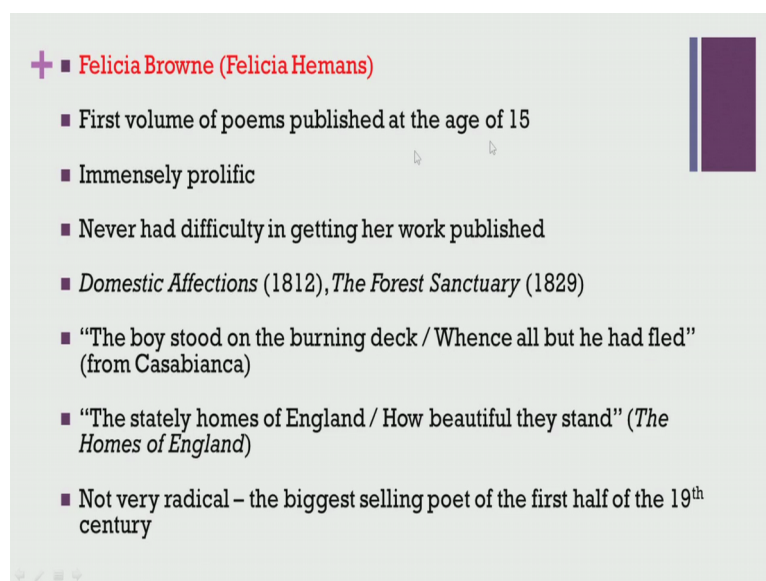
However, not surprisingly her work also met with long delays before it could get her published. One of her important works was titled *The Rights of Woman* in this she makes a very bold statement *Make treacherous Man, thy subject, not thy friend* and due to the many feminist ideas that she spoke about and due to the bold treatment of the gender problem of those times her work though written in 1795 could not be published until 1825.

It is important the news were to recall that many women writers of those times face this difficulty in getting their work published, though in a way the literary world and the artistic world was getting more open and more accessible to the to women in general there was a certain distancing and a certain aloofness that they felt when it came to meeting actual success or (8:46) good literary benefit.

Anna Laetitia Barbauld was considered as a very industrious writer she edited almost 50 volumes of *The British Novelist* in 1810 and a poem titled 1811 published in 1812 was written in the heroic couplet form and this instantly it does have much political value as well because it was one of the first texts to foresee the decline of Britain's wealth and power in increasing prosperity of America.

So this was quite important texts during those times but however due to the lopsided vane which the canon is framed and the particular text of foreground we do not find Barbauld's texts getting the kind of attention that it really deserved.

(Refer Slide Time: 9:34)



- **Felicia Browne (Felicia Hemans)**
- First volume of poems published at the age of 15
- Immensely prolific
- Never had difficulty in getting her work published
- *Domestic Affections* (1812), *The Forest Sanctuary* (1829)
- "The boy stood on the burning deck / Whence all but he had fled" (from *Casabianca*)
- "The stately homes of England / How beautiful they stand" (*The Homes of England*)
- Not very radical – the biggest selling poet of the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century

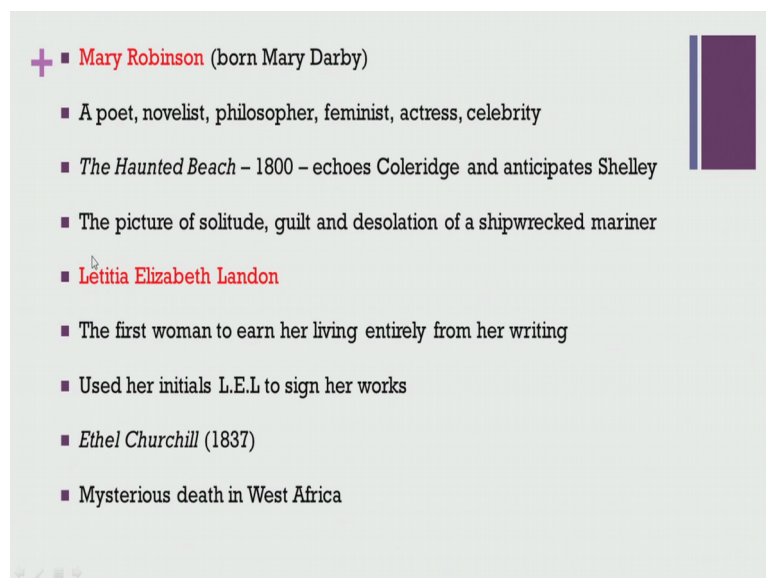
Felicia Browne who is also known as Felicia Hemans she published her first volume of poems at the age of 15. And she was immensely prolific writer and she compared to many other women writers she did not face much difficulty in getting her work published. In 1812 she published *Domestic Affections* and the *Forest Sanctuary* in 1829 but she is most famous for her a poem *Casabianca* which also has this extremely famous opening line the boy stood on the burning deck / Whence all but he had fled.

This was a discussion about one of the recent happenings of those times where a particular boy he could not lead the deck of a burning ship because his father the captain had not given him the orders. So this was also a political controversy of those times it also the incident also had evoked multiple and varying responses and for a Felicia Browne to capitalize on the popularity of this event was quite appropriate.

And Casabianca remains one of the most discussed text of those times and instantly this opening line was also much quoted in various other context as well but though she was a little unconventional in some of her works we do find her confirming to the dominant conventions of those times particular as we find her writing in the homes of England The stately homes of England / How beautiful they stand may be it was for the same reason that she did not encounter much difficulty in getting her work published because they were not really challenging the status (11:08) or going against any of the dominant conventions.

She was not very radical in any of her articulations and she was also considered as one of the biggest selling poets of the first half of the 19th century.

(Refer Slide Time: 11:20)



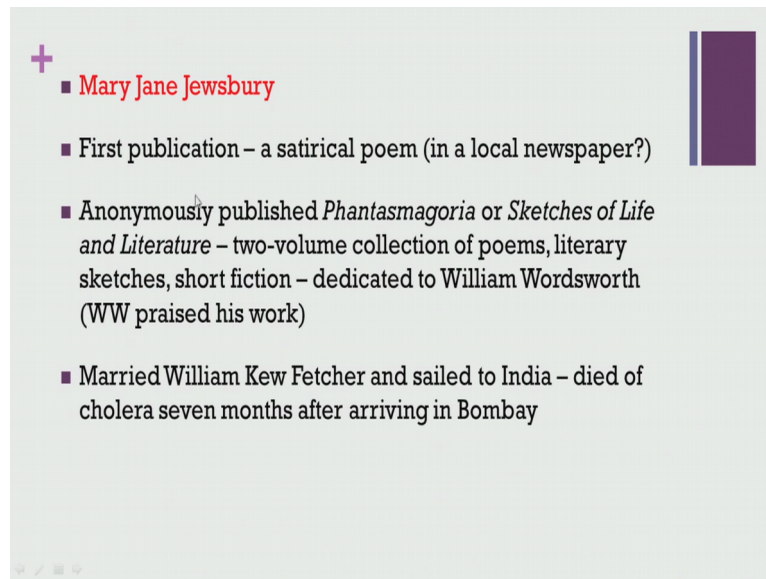
- **Mary Robinson** (born Mary Darby)
- A poet, novelist, philosopher, feminist, actress, celebrity
- *The Haunted Beach* – 1800 – echoes Coleridge and anticipates Shelley
- The picture of solitude, guilt and desolation of a shipwrecked mariner
- **Letitia Elizabeth Landon**
- The first woman to earn her living entirely from her writing
- Used her initials L.E.L to sign her works
- *Ethel Churchill* (1837)
- Mysterious death in West Africa

Mary Robinson who was born Mary Darby she also had many things to her credit she was a poet, a novelist, a philosopher, a feminist, an actress and also a celebrity in the early 19th century. In her work *The Haunted Beach* published in 1800 we find her echoing Coleridge and she also anticipates Shelley. In that sense she even be considered as a bridge which connected the early romantic poets with the later younger revolutionary poets. In her work we find the picture of solitude, guilt and desolation of a shipwrecked mariner. So it is in this sense we find her echoing Coleridge and his work as well.

Letitia Elizabeth Landon who used her initials to write L.E.L she was the first woman writer to earn her living entirely from her writing. Her most important work was published in 1837 as *Ethel Churchill* she however, unfortunately met with a mysterious death when she was in West Africa.



(Refer Slide Time: 12:20)

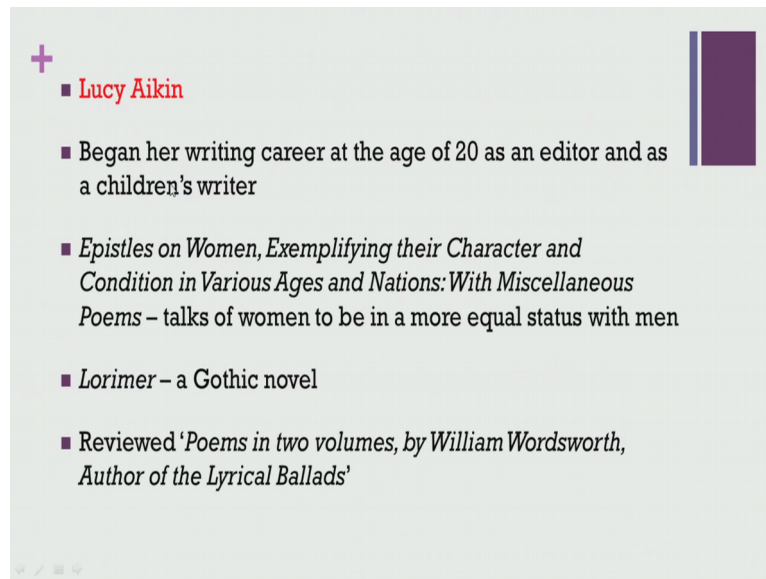


- **Mary Jane Jewsbury**
- First publication – a satirical poem (in a local newspaper?)
- Anonymously published *Phantasmagoria or Sketches of Life and Literature* – two-volume collection of poems, literary sketches, short fiction – dedicated to William Wordsworth (WW praised his work)
- Married William Kew Fetcher and sailed to India – died of cholera seven months after arriving in Bombay

Mary Jane Jewsbury's first publication was in a local newspaper it was a satirical poem and she has also set anonymously published *Phantasmagoria or Sketches of Life and Literature*, it was a two volume collection of poems literary sketches and short fiction, it was also dedicated to William Wordsworth who also published her work immensely. So we do find that the women writers being forced to have the patronage the literary patronage of more popular writers of those times and we also find that this also gave them much advantage and gave them much mileage over the other writers.

Mary Jewsbury also a married William Kew Fetcher and then she sailed to India and we also find that she died of cholera seven months after arriving in Bombay. So we do find her becoming a victim of the colonial expirations of those times.

(Refer Slide Time: 13:10)



- **Lucy Aikin**
- Began her writing career at the age of 20 as an editor and as a children's writer
- *Epistles on Women, Exemplifying their Character and Condition in Various Ages and Nations: With Miscellaneous Poems* – talks of women to be in a more equal status with men
- *Lorimer* – a Gothic novel
- Reviewed 'Poems in two volumes, by William Wordsworth, Author of the Lyrical Ballads'

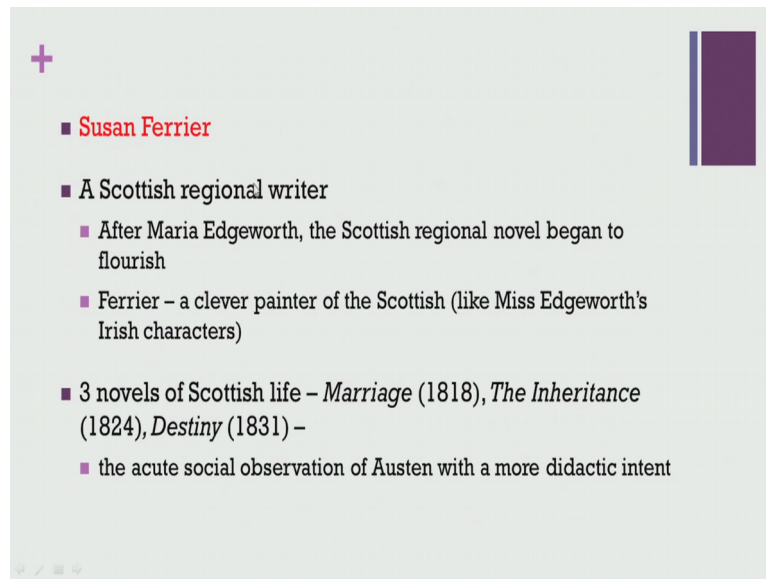
Lucy Aikin was a women writer who began her writing carrier at the age of 20, she was initially working as an editor and also as a children's writer. It is useful to recall as there is a point that most of these women writers earned their living by writing books for children because women and children were becoming avid consumers of new kinds of fiction that was getting popularized in the 19th century.

And it was generally considered as a inferior genre compared to the other more majestic genres of poetry and the forms of writing. So it was usually considered appropriate that women were more suited to write these works and as a result most of the children's books of the early 19th century were all written by women. Her important work includes *Epistles on Women, Exemplifying their Character and Condition in Various Ages and Nations with Miscellaneous Poems* and in this one she also exhibits a feminist strain of thought because she talks about women to be in more equal status with men.

*Lorimer* is a work by Aikin which was also considered as a Gothic novel and here we find that the women were willing to experiment in all forms of writing they were not limited to a particular genre or a particular form. The same kind of revolutionary spirit and the experimental nature that characterizes most of the major writers of the romantic period could be found in the writings of these lesser known women as well.

She was also famous for the for her review on *Lyrical Ballads* titled *Poems in two volumes, by William Wordsworth, Author of the Lyrical Ballads* and this also had appeared in one of the leading periodicals of that day.

(Refer Slide Time: 14:48)



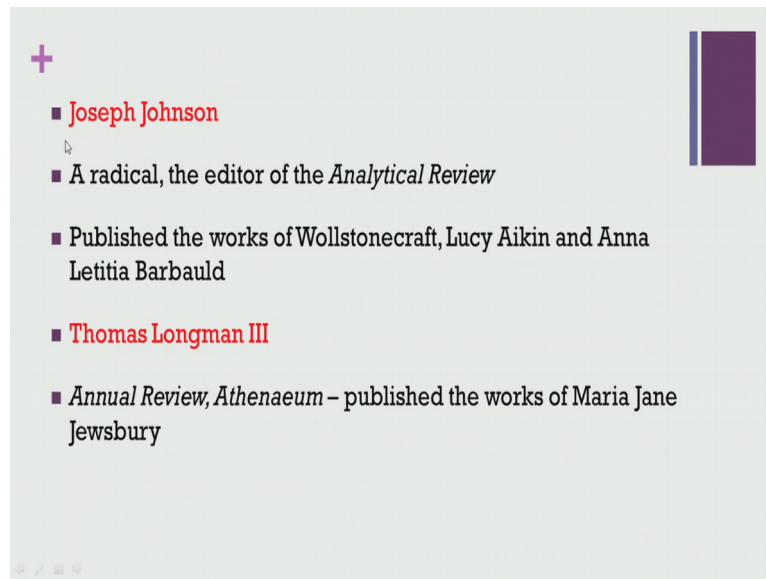
- Susan Ferrier
- A Scottish regional writer
  - After Maria Edgeworth, the Scottish regional novel began to flourish
  - Ferrier – a clever painter of the Scottish (like Miss Edgeworth's Irish characters)
- 3 novels of Scottish life – *Marriage* (1818), *The Inheritance* (1824), *Destiny* (1831) –
  - the acute social observation of Austen with a more didactic intent

Susan Ferrier rises to fame as a Scottish regional writer and this is also the time when Maria Edgeworth's Irish regional novel was getting immensely popular in England and along with Walter Scott, Susan Ferrier was also a writer who decided to write about the Scottish regional life. So Ferrier was also a very clever painter of the Scottish life just like Maria Edgeworth had presented the Irish characters.

Ferrier's 3 novels talk about the Scottish life *Marriage* published in 1818, *The Inheritance* in 1824 and *Destiny* in 1831. But however, when we talk about the canonical mainstream literary history it is quite unfortunate that Walter Scott gets all the credit and all the fame for talking about the Scottish life and all the other writers who were perhaps only partially famous during their own lifetimes all those writers get hugely eclipsed and they never got even the kind of attention that they deserved.

And being a woman added more to this neglect and this forgetfulness and we do not find Susan Ferrier being mentioned at all throughout the discussion on Scottish regional novel which is heavily overshadowed by Walter Scott. In these 3 novels of Scottish life Susan Ferrier exhibits an acute powerful social observation and however, this quality which she says to have inherited from Austen it is also papered by more didactic intent this is also one of the reasons that did not ensure much popularity for Ferrier's writings.

(Refer Slide Time: 16:25)



AS we begin to wrap up our discussion on the women writers of the 19th century it is important to highlight the role played by these two figures Joseph Johnson and Thomas Longman the Third when we talk about history one should not forget the many facilitators which made it possible for various kind of writers and their writing to be foregrounded at particular points of time.

Joseph Johnson is a radical figure whom we encountered even during our discussion of Mary Wollstonecraft, Johnson was the editor of the *Analytical Review* and he was the one who encouraged and initiated the publication of the works of Wollstonecraft, Lucy Aikin and Anna Laetitia Barbauld.

Thomas Longman Third was associated with *Annual Review, Athenaeum* to leading periodicals of those times and he was the one who initiated and supported the publication of the works of Maria Jane Jewsbury. So we find that there are these many unseen heroes in literary history whose role also need to be foregrounded and celebrated with much mirth and much delight. So with this positive note we wind up todays lecture, thank you for listening and I look forward to seeing you in the next session.