Literary Criticism (From Plato to Leavis)
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Samuel Johnson's Preface to Shakespeare
(Session4)

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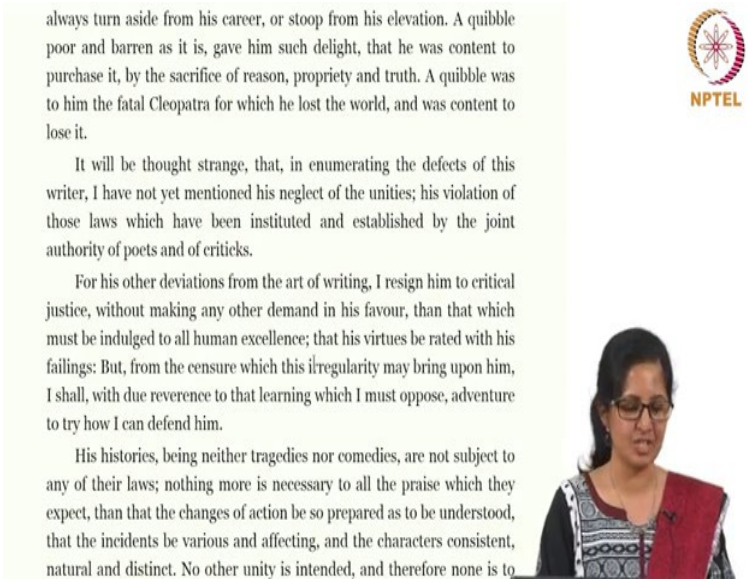

Hello, and welcome to today's session. We now come to the next section of Johnson's *Preface to Shakespeare.* In this section he attempts to defend Shakespeare's violation of unities. This is how he begins to enter this discussion.

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"I shall with due reverence to that learning which I must oppose adventure to try how I can defend him." It is a very clear statement of how he proposes to defend Shakespeare's

violation of unities which was seen as a gross violation during the neoclassical times, following upon the classical conventions. And this is also a stellar instance of how Johnson is willing to take the midway, though his bias is towards classical learning, very evident in some of his other works.

So this is how the significance of this work needs to be situated. Johnson is clearly one of the earliest critics to have an opinion of himself, an English critic to have an opinion of himself, about the idea of unities which was originally allegedly popularized by Aristotle notions. So Sidney, one of the earliest critics of the English critical tradition, he was a strong supporter, a strong defender of the unities. And we find that later, Dryden also is in strong favor of Sidney's opinions. Pope never seems to have an opinion of his own, but we have no reason to believe that Pope had any intent to go against the idea of unities.

But in Johnson, we find a fine balance; he has managed to strike a fine balance which is at work in this particular piece of writing. So we find that he is concerned only about the unity of action. Johnson is concerned only about the unity of action, which he thinks is exemplified very well in Shakespeare's plays, almost all of his plays. And he says that the unity of time and place that is something which could be discarded, this is not relevant. And he goes on to pursue this line of argument and to showcase this, to illustrate this, through a series of instances, to prove that once the unity of action is preserved, the rest is taken care of. It is really not important to stick to the unity of time and place.

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So, he begins by telling us that, in his other works, he has well enough preserved the unity of action. “He has not indeed an intrigue regularly perplexed and regularly unravelled, he does not endeavor to hide his design only to discover it, for this is seldom the order of real events and Shakespeare is a poet of nature. But his plan has commonly what Aristotle requires, a beginning, a middle, and an end, one event is concatenated with another, and the conclusion follows by easy consequence.”

So there is a unity of action which is preserved in Shakespeare's plays, and that is enough to defend his violation of the unities of time and place.

“To the unities of time and place he has shown no regard and perhaps a nearer view of the principles on which they stand, will diminish their value.” So this is also the purpose of this writing, in the first half he tries to defend Shakespeare. And in the process of defending the violation of unities, he is also trying to show us how the principles of unities, particularly the one which focuses on time and place, it needs to be seen in a diminished sense and with diminished value.

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time upon the stage; but the general system makes gradual advances, and the end of the play is the end of expectation.

To the unities of time and place he has shewn no regard, and perhaps a nearer view of the principles on which they stand will diminish their value, and withdraw from them the veneration which, from the time of Corneille, they have very generally received by discovering that they have given more trouble to the poet, than pleasure to the auditor.

The necessity of observing the unities of time and place arises from the supposed necessity of making the drama credible. The criticks hold it impossible, that an action of months or years can be possibly believed to pass in three hours; or that the spectator can suppose himself to sit in the theatre, while ambassadors go and return between distant kings, while armies are levied and towns besieged, while an exile wanders and returns, or till he whom they saw courting his mistress, shall lament the untimely fall of his son. The mind revolts from evident falsehood, and fiction loses its force when it departs from the resemblance of reality.

From the narrow limitation of time necessarily arises the contraction of place. The spectator, who knows that he saw the first act at Alexandria, cannot suppose that he sees the next at Rome, at a distance to which not

“The necessity of observing the unities of time and place arises from the supposed necessity of making the drama credible”. Here we also find a very practical approach that Johnson puts forward to understand the rationale behind the idea of these unities in the first place. And he also goes on to tell us. “The mind revolts from evident falsehood and fiction loses its force when it departs from the resemblance of reality.” So, if the aim is to induce credibility, if the

aim is to show how credible, how realistic these portrayals are, then the unities of time and place do not really contribute to this idea.

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He says, “From the narrow limitation of time”, now it is seen as a very narrow thing, something which needs to be seen in the context of a diminished value, “From the narrow limitation of time necessarily arises the contraction of place. The spectator, who knows that he saw the first act at Alexandria cannot suppose, that he sees the next at Rome at a distance to which not the dragons of Medea could in so a short time have transported him. He knows with certainty that he has not changed his place, and he knows that place cannot change itself; that what was a house cannot become a plain, that what was Thebes can never be Persepolis.” So, this is the fundamental idea about time and place, about seeing, about imagining that this place could be something else altogether.

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Now, he is pushing this argument further, “Such is the triumphant language with which a critic exults over the misery of an irregular poet and exults commonly without resistance or reply.” And he says, if the reader, the audience is capable of believing that the first hour is in Alexandria, if the audience or the reader is capable of believing that something is happening on stage, then he says, “Surely he that imagines this, may imagine more”.

This has been rearticulated in more sophisticated and more refined terms during the Romantic times as we would also shortly see about the “willing suspension of disbelief”. Coleridge talks about the willing suspension of disbelief, the reader’s ability, the audience's ability to imagine that this is now Alexandria and the next is Rome and also trying to imagine that the audience is living during the days of Antony and Cleopatra. This imagination, this possibility is the willing suspension of disbelief.

Here, we find that without entirely being a Romantic, by staying rooted in the neoclassical traditions, we see that Johnson is able to push this line of argument further. If he can imagine, if the audience can imagine that he is in Alexandria, he might imagine that he is in Rome as well. So the unity of time and place, he finds, is founded on already flawed premises. Because in the first place itself, the audience is encouraged to imagine that the stage is something else altogether, is encouraged to imagine that he is already living during certain other times, which is not his contemporary times.

So this is already founded on very flawed premises. “There is no reason why a mind thus wandering in extasy should count the clock or why an hour should not be a century in that

calenture of the brains that can make the stage a field." If the stage can become a field or a battleground, then even time need not be limited. If a mind is capable of wandering in this extasy, it should be possible for the same mind to reorient the clock hours. There is no need, there is no reason to count the clock or why an hour should not be a century. So this is the possibility of the mind, this is the infinite possibility of the faculty of imagination that Johnson is using, in support of his argument in favor of the violation of unities that Shakespeare has already done.

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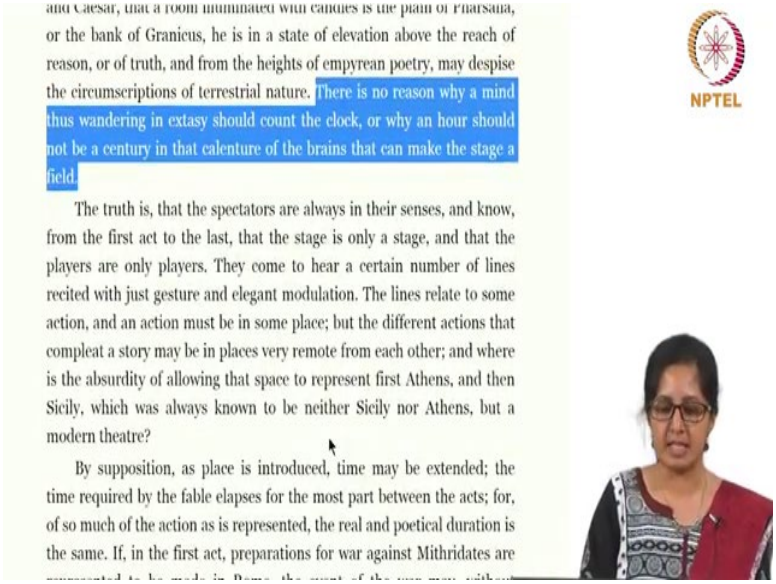

"The truth is that the spectators are always in their senses, and know from the first act to the last that the stage is only a stage, and that the players are only players. They come to hear a certain number of lines recited with just gesture and elegant modulation". Here he again, reiterates this in a more clear way. "The lines relate to some action and an action must be in someplace; but the different actions that complete a story maybe in places very remote from each other" That is how narratives and stories operate in life as well. "And where is the absurdity of allowing that space to represent first Athens and then Sicily, which was always known to be neither Sicily nor Athens, but a modern theater?"

So if the stage can transform in the audience's mind into Sicily or Rome, it might as well transform into Alexandria or Athens; it really does not make much of a difference once this faculty of imagination, this faculty of the willing suspension of disbelief is at work. And in the same supposition, by this same argument, he says the idea of time also may be extended.

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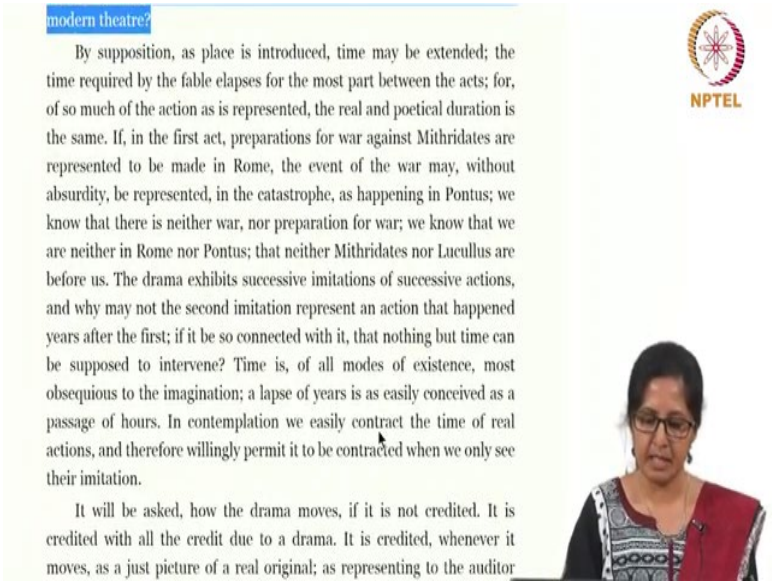

And he also says, "Time is of all modes of existence, most obsequious to the imagination; a lapse of years is as easily conceived as a passage of hours." And also, when one is talking about historical drama, when one is talking about historical fiction, there is no way in which you can maintain the unity of time while doing proper justice to the enactment over there, to the performance or the rendition over there, because we know that events in history did not necessarily happen within a day. So he also thinks that being sticklers to unity of time and place, it is also quite rigid, it is also quite absurd in many ways.

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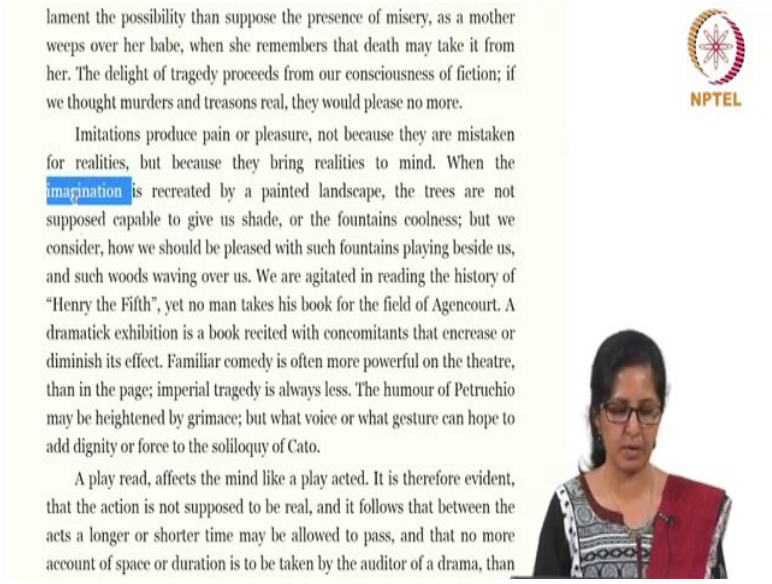

And he is using this term imagination in a very interesting way over here, "When the imagination is recreated by painted landscape, the trees are not supposed capable to give us shade or the fountains coolness, but we consider how we should be pleased with such fountains playing beside us and such woods waving over us." It is entirely about the faculty of imagination at work. And that can also encourage us to disregard these unities which were seen as extremely important factors when one is composing or analyzing a work of drama.

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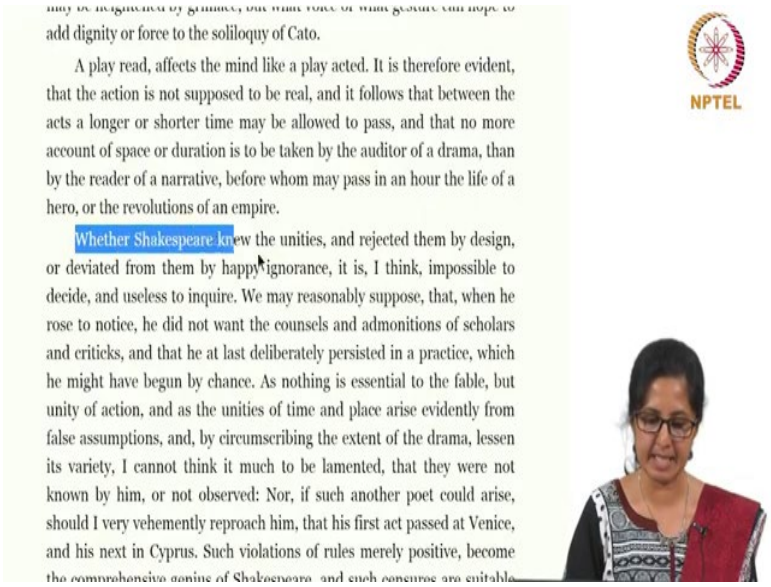

Here is something again very practical that Johnson puts forward. "Whether Shakespeare knew the unities and rejected them by design, or deviated from them by happy ignorance, it is, I think, impossible to decide and useless to inquire." So it is not going into the biographical mode of criticism in a useless way. It is actually using the historical framework and the biographical framework to take things forward, in order to make compelling overarching arguments about the genre and about the principles which govern it. And that is something very interesting that Johnson does throughout this work by staying rooted in the neoclassical tradition and using approaches which are closely related to biographical as well as historical approaches.

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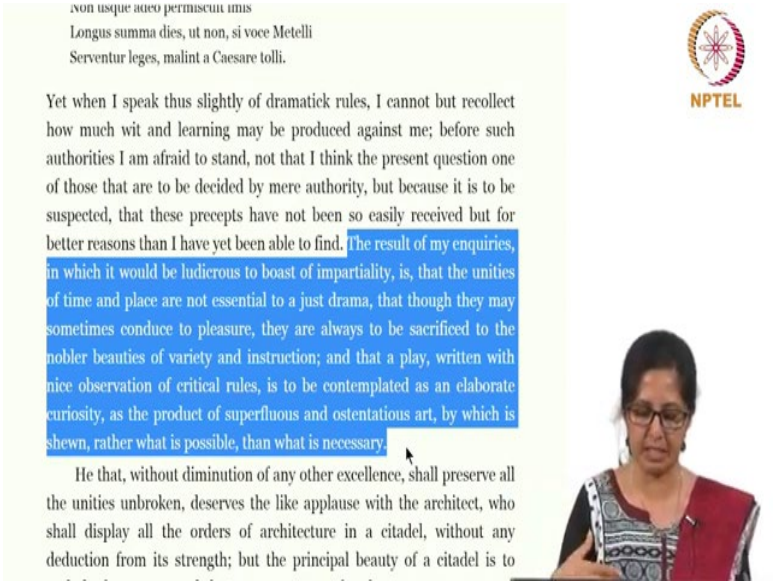

And now he is also responding to the obsession with this preservation of unities and he thinks, “They are always to be sacrificed to the nobler beauties of variety and instruction; and that a play written with nice observation of critical rules is to be contemplated as an elaborate curiosity, as the product of superfluous and ostentatious art, by which is shown rather what is possible, than what is necessary.”

Of course, if you stick to these rules, you might get something, a product which is very superfluous, very ostentatious, and it can be contemplated as an elaborate curiosity. But it will not have the desired effect that perhaps Shakespeare's plays had on his audience as well as on the posterity.

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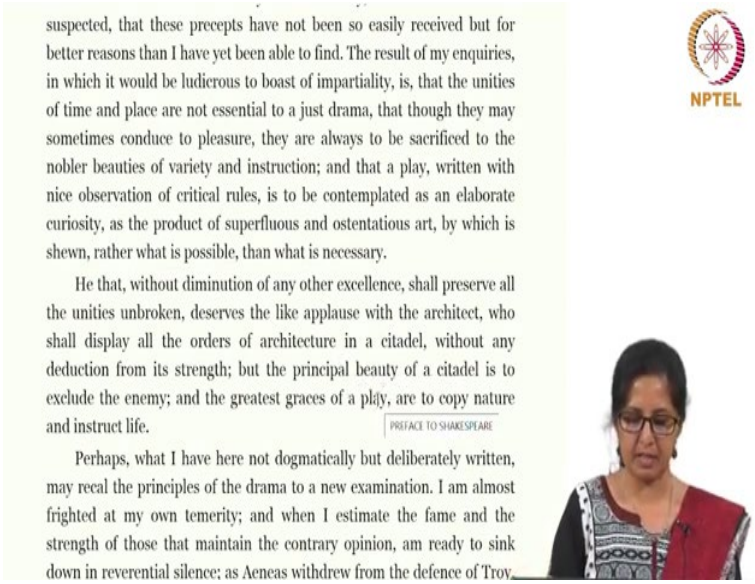

And he is giving this comparison of the architect who is making a citadel. The principal beauty of a citadel is to exclude the enemies, there is a function associated with every product, whether it is an art form or a certain kind of exercise at work, in this case, the construction of a citadel. So, "The principal beauty of a citadel is to exclude the enemy and the greatest graces of a play, are to copy nature and instruct life". So one should not miss the end by focusing on certain minor things. So he is also trying to tell us not to lose sight of the larger picture by being concerned with such micro things.

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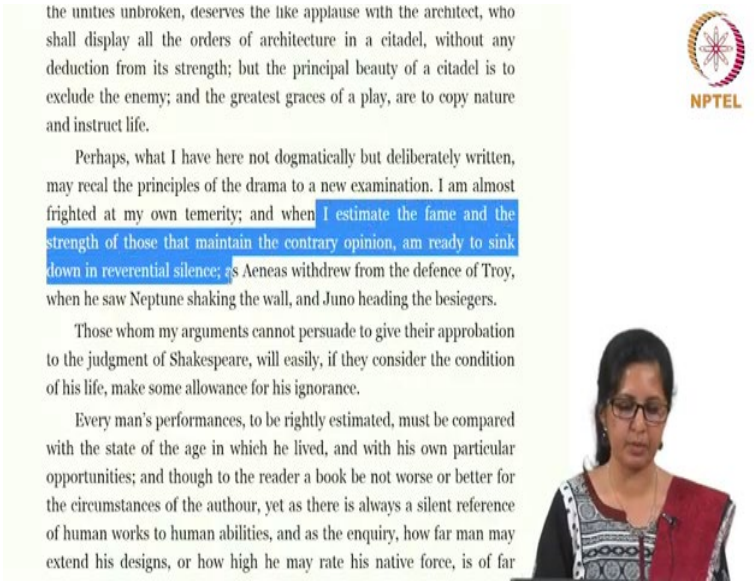

And he is also a bit skeptical in going against the grain of the popular opinion. He says, “I am ready to sink down in reverential silence”. “Those, whom my arguments cannot persuade to give their approbation to the judgment of Shakespeare, will easily, if they consider the condition of his life, make some allowance for his ignorance”. So he is willing to pursue this argument in many ways. First, he is trying to show how one could disregard these unities because they are not really contributing or their absence is not really hampering, the process of emergence of fine drama. But if these arguments are not persuasive enough, he is saying, consider the ignorance with which Shakespeare wrote this and he is willing to go to any length, in that sense, in order to defend Shakespeare's violation of unities.

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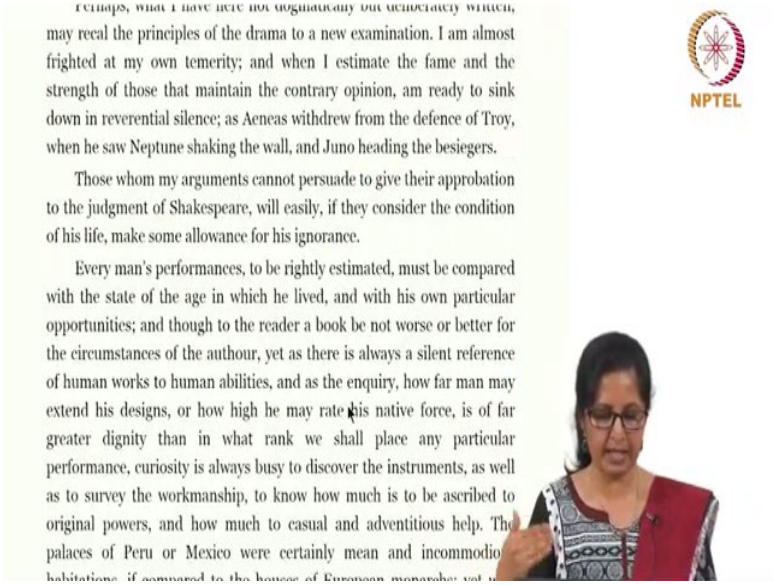

And he is now taking into account the proper historical approach, as we can see, a biographical historical approach where Shakespeare is going to be evaluated in the context of the age in which he lived and with his own particular opportunities. “And though to the reader a book be not worse or better for the circumstances of the author, yet as there is always a silent reference of human works to human abilities, and as the enquiry, how far man may extend his designs, or how high he may rate his native force”…and he goes on. So he is trying to give a historical sketch of Shakespeare's life and trying to compare that with the artistic production that he had, and then he is asking the informed reader to evaluate Shakespeare's undermining of the unities.

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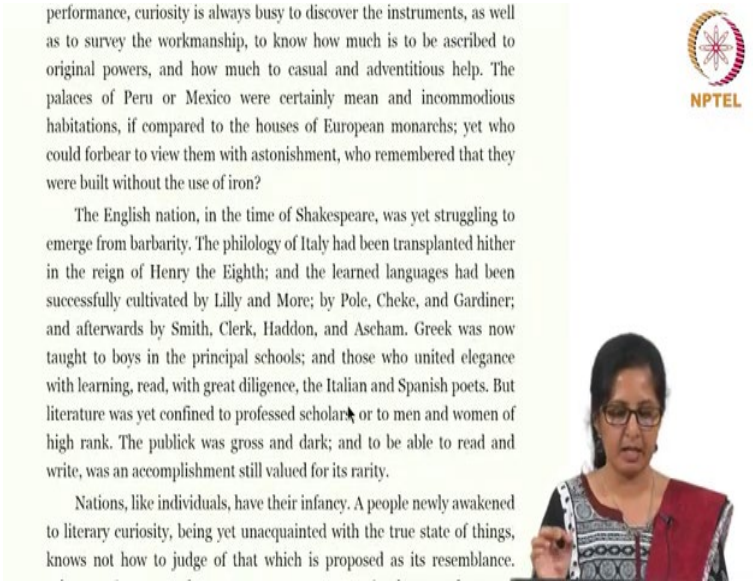

First he tells us about what is the background of the English nation during the time of Shakespeare. “The English nation at the time of Shakespeare was yet struggling to emerge from barbarity”. So this is also seen as a move, Shakespeare is being credited with the literary move, this transition from barbarity to sophisticated civilization.

“The philology of Italy had been transplanted hither in the reign of Henry the Eighth; and the learned languages had been successfully cultivated by Lilly and More; by Pole, Cheke and Gardiner. And afterwards by Smith, Clerk, Haddon and Ascham”. So there is a sense of literary history that we get over here. “Greek was now taught to boys in the principal schools; and those who united elegance with learning, read with great diligence, the Italian and Spanish poets.” We are talking about the Renaissance, the influence of Renaissance in England.

“But literature was yet confined to professed scholars or to men and women of high rank. The public was gross and dark, and to be able to read and write was an accomplishment still valued for its rarity.” Now he is making a case for Shakespeare's ignorance. And we know that he was one of those writers who never went to university and he wrote amidst the time when university wits were reigning high in the English theatrical scene. He is drawing our attention to the infant stage of England as a nation. And then he is talking about how these works, these dramatic instances that Shakespeare produced, they were also borrowed heavily from the European traditions, from different other repertoires of stories that existed in Europe, in contemporary England during that point of time.

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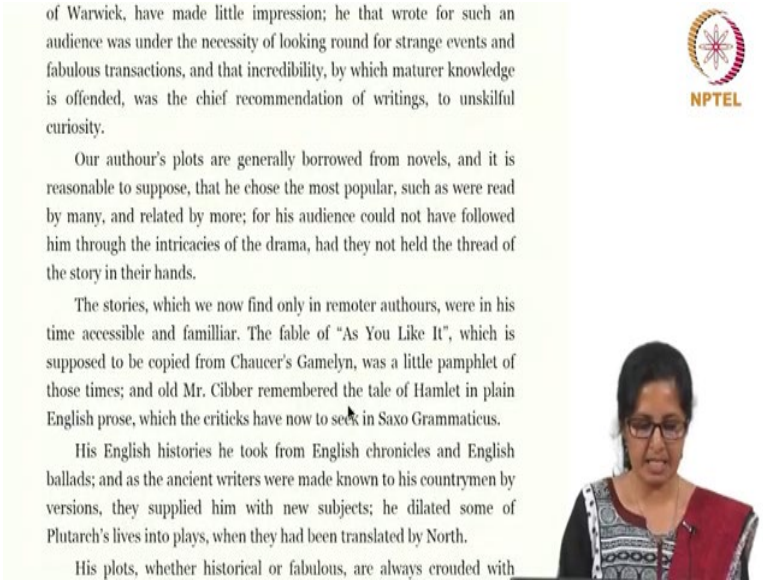

"His English histories he took from English Chronicles and English ballads; and as the ancient writers were made known to his countrymen by versions, they supplied him with new subjects; he dilated some of Plutarch lives into plays when they had been translated by North." You can read this extensively to see the different kinds of examples that he gives to showcase how Shakespeare had borrowed extensively from different traditions. And he is also making a case for these multiple traditions interacting together, and which he also thinks may have contributed to the violation of unities, may have prompted him to very inadvertently decide towards the discarding of these unities.

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And he tells us how, because of the complex nature of his plots, his plays were always crowded by incidents. And how the shows and bustle with which the plays abound have the same original. So he is talking about the kind of complex narratives that he produced and how that perhaps would have required a different kind of a treatment which also resulted in the violation of the classical principles.

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And this is a very interesting analogy he gives. “The work of a correct and regular writer is a garden accurately formed and diligently planted, varied with shades, and scented with flowers; the composition of Shakespeare is a forest”. So he is comparing Shakespeare's writing to that of the growth in the wilderness, to that of a forest, unlike a trimmed controlled growth within a garden. So it is also a very positive thing in favor of Shakespeare's works and it allows him to do anything which seems fit, which he deems fit, within the framework of his works.

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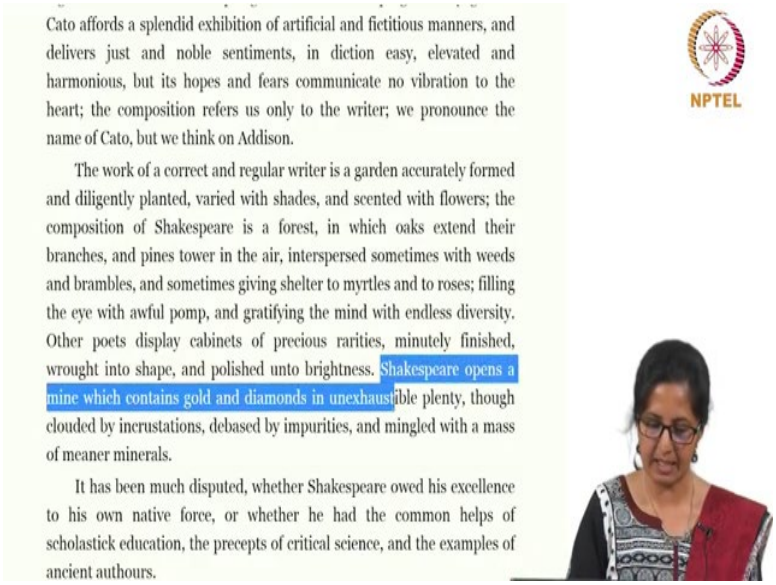

"Shakespeare opens a mine which contains gold and diamonds in unexhaustible plenty, though clouded by incrustations, debased by impurities and mingled with a mass of meaner minerals". This is how he goes on to justify and even romanticize the ignorance that Shakespeare had, "the ignorance" that supposedly Shakespeare had when it came to the composition of his plays, when it came to his complete disregard for the many classical principles, including the unities.

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And now he is further romanticizing Shakespeare's lack of formal learning. "There has always prevailed a tradition, that Shakespeare wanted learning", that he lacked learning, "that

he had no regular education, nor much skill in the dead languages. Johnson, his friend affirms." This is Ben Johnson. "He had small Latin and no Greek"; "who besides that he had no imaginable temptation to falsehood, wrote at a time when the character and acquisitions of Shakespeare were known to multitudes. His evidence ought therefore to decide the controversy, unless some testimony of equal force could be opposed". So he is drawing from many contemporary opinions, including that of Ben Johnson, to show the genius which was fraught within this ignorance. The genius that was locked, that was allowed to bloom within this lack of, within this want of, formal education.

And he also goes on to illustrate this with a series of examples, a series of instances from Shakespeare's works. We will not be going to the details of this in this lecture, you can of course, read through this to get a hang of the kind of examples that he gives.

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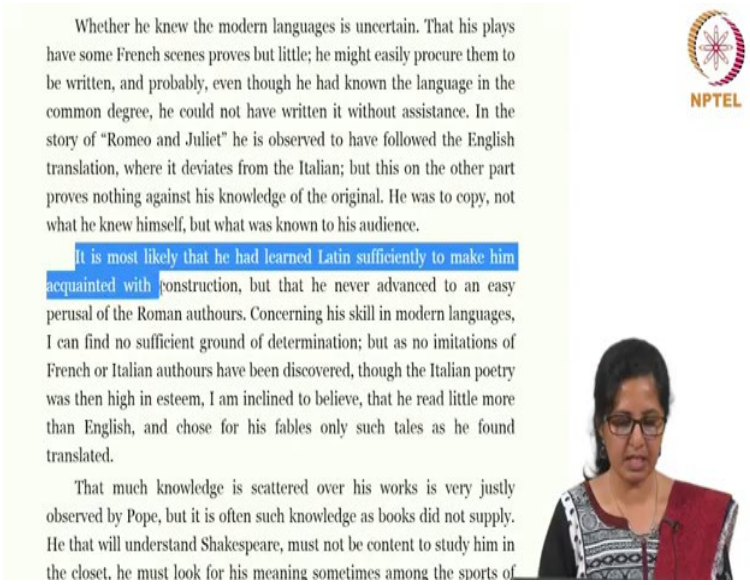

"It is most likely that he learned Latin sufficiently to make him acquainted with construction, but that he never advanced to an easy perusal of the Roman authors". "I am inclined to believe that he read little more than English, and chose for his fables only such tales as he found translated". So here is a man who has been working with a lot of limitations, who did not have access to the kind of refined languages, the kind of literary languages that were in circulation during his time, and still he produced the finest drama that English public has ever seen. And this lack of knowledge, this ignorance is in fact now being transformed into something which works in favor of Shakespeare's plays. And it also helps Johnson to defend his violation of the unities in a better light.

Here is a man who wrote purely out of genius and did not really rely on what has been taught. And he is not someone who was taught to do plays like the university wits but he has done this entirely out of his own imagination, out of his own creative faculty. And this product needs to be respected for whatever it is because it has outlived the century, it has stood the test of time and it will be quite absurd to say that the play is lacking, because the unities of time and place are not there.

And in this creative faculty, in this creative outburst of untrained kind of dramatic output, we find that the unity of action is intact, that has not been violated. It is perfect when we analyze it in terms of the Aristotelian principles or in terms of maybe the commonsensical way in which plays have been appreciated during that time. And from this stage, in the course of defending Shakespeare's violation, the gross violation of the unities, Johnson is also elevating him to a status of the Savior, the Redeemer of the terrible stage in which the English literary stage was.

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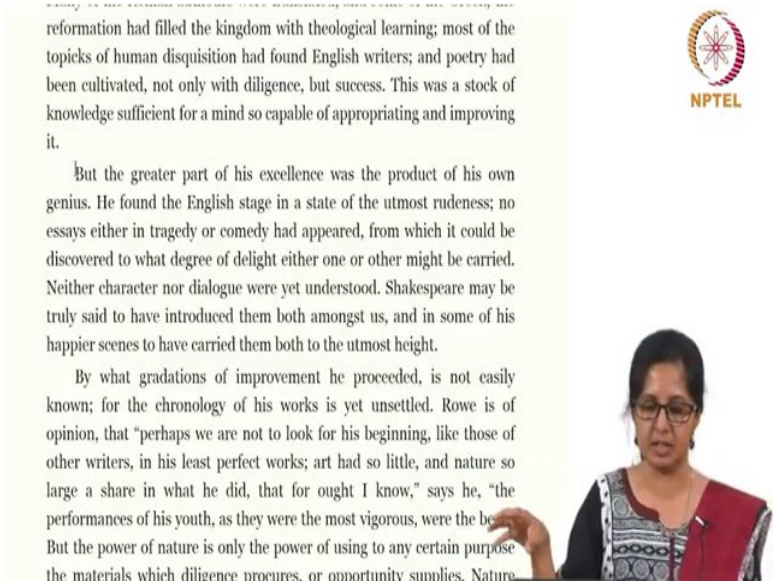

"The greater part of his excellence was a product of his own genius. He found the English stage in a state of the utmost rudeness". So the English nation was in a state of barbarity, he first says, and this is a literary move, this is a dramatic move which also shifted the nation towards a more civilized, refined kind of creative genius. And here, he is further saying, "Shakespeare found the English stage in a state of the utmost rudeness; no essays either in tragedy or comedy had appeared from which it could be discovered to what degree of delight either one or other might be carried. Neither character nor dialogue were yet understood."

There were no critical principles formed yet, there was hardly an English tradition in place as far as drama was concerned.

“Shakespeare may be truly said to have introduced them both amongst us, and in some of his happier scenes to have carried them both to the utmost heights”. So here is a man who found the English stage in a terrible condition and he has redeemed it. He is someone who laid down the principles of English drama. And to say that he violated the unities would again be very absurd, Johnson is trying to remind us.

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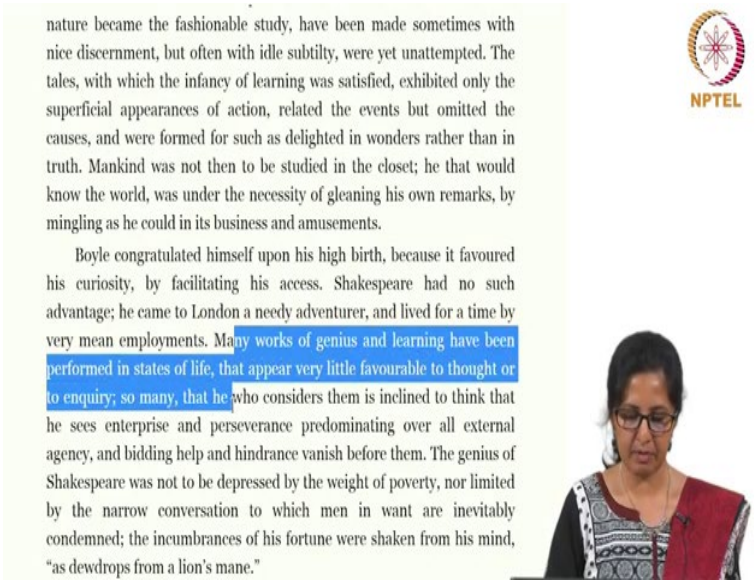

There are some biographical details also, Johnson gives, to aid, to support these arguments that he is making. “Shakespeare had no such advantage”. He was not of high birth; “he came to London a needy adventure and lived for a time by very mean employments. Many works of genius and learning have been performed in states of life that appear very little favorable to thought or inquiry.

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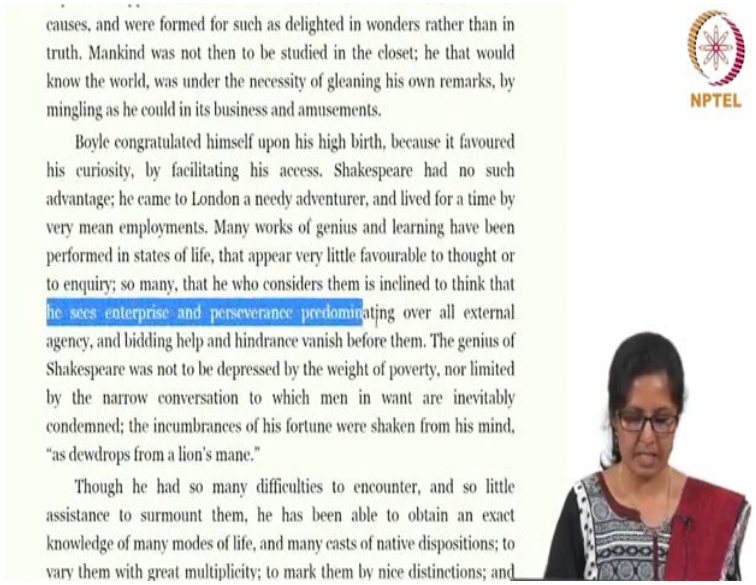

So many, that he who considers them is inclined to think that he sees enterprise and perseverance predominating over all external agency."

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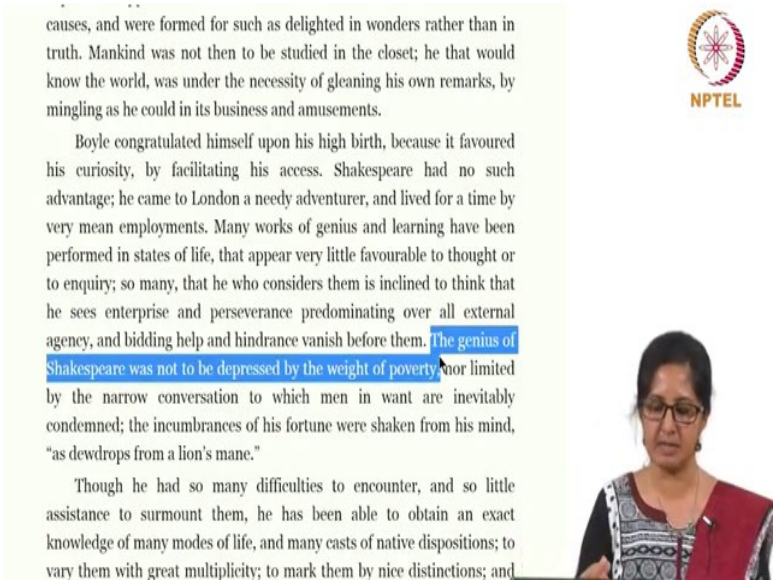

So this is again, a way in which he continues to highlight the genius of Shakespeare that his genius was not to be depressed by the weight of poverty. So here is a man who came to London, quite friendless and penniless. And he goes on to become the greatest dramatist that that century has ever seen. And in terms of wealth, in terms of fame, he has become what no man of his age could achieve.

So, these are the many difficulties, these are the different kinds of ignorance within which Johnson likes to situate Shakespeare because that also works to his advantage in terms of him moving out of the traditional frameworks, of him moving out of the kind of readings which were available during that time and this also, surmounts to highlight the true genius that Shakespeare had. And in this entire piece, especially towards the end, we find that Johnson is more invested in defending Shakespeare's genius more than anything else. In the process of defending the violation of the unities, he ends up defending Shakespeare's genius which really works very well to cementing his literary reputation for the many decades and centuries to come.

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capricious and casual. Shakespeare, whether life or nature be his subject, shews plainly, that he has seen with his own eyes; he gives the image which he receives, not weakened or distorted by the intervention of any other mind; the ignorant feel his representations to be just, and the learned see that they are compleat.

Perhaps it would not be easy to find any authour, except Homer, who invented so much as Shakespeare, who so much advanced the studies which he cultivated, or effused so much novelty upon his age or country. The form, the characters, the language, and the shows of the English drama are his. "He seems," says Dennis, "to have been the very original of our English tragical harmony, that is, the harmony of blank verse, diversified often by dissyllable and trissyllable terminations. For the diversity distinguishes it from heroick harmony, and by bringing it nearer to common use makes it more proper to gain attention, and more fit for action and dialogue. Such verse we make when we are writing prose; we make such verse in common conversation."

I know not whether this praise is rigorously just. The dissyllable termination, which the critick rightly appropriates to the drama, is to be found, though, I think, not in Gorboduc which is confessedly before our authour; yet in Hieronnymo, of which the date is not certain, but which

Now, here is a very classic comparison with Homer. "Perhaps it would not be easy to find any author except Homer, who invented so much as Shakespeare, who so much advanced the studies which he cultivated or effused so much novelty upon his age or country". So if you evaluate Shakespeare's contributions, the violation of unities, it becomes something which can easily be overlooked. It is not even a thing to engage with. And this is what he is trying to tell some of the contemporary critics who have been highlighting this out of proportion, who have been focusing more on the violation of unities, entirely ignoring the overall contribution, the milestones, the iconic achievements that Shakespeare had in terms of his dramatic output.

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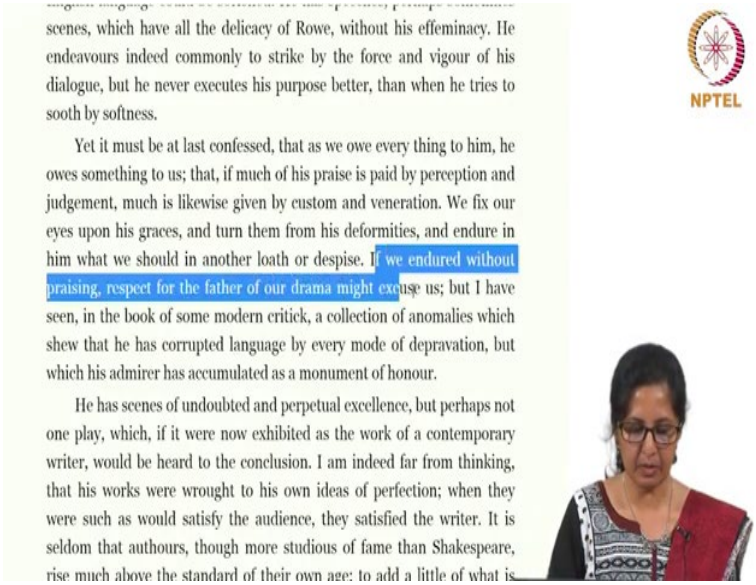

And now again we find that Johnson is actually responding to many criticisms of the contemporary, here is one instance, "If we endured without praising, respect for the father of our drama might excuse us, but I have seen in the book of some modern critic, a collection of anomalies, which show that he has corrupted language by every mode of depravation". He reinvented language as we know, he used it according to his whims and fancy, and he has contributed immensely to the development of vocabulary through the emergence of newer kinds of usages.

"But which his admirer has accumulated as a monument of honor". So what a certain critic has seen as lack in terms of language, as corruption in terms of language, Johnson finds that as a monument of honor. He refers to himself as this admirer, who has accumulated a monument of honor. So almost everything which has been, almost all the charges which have been leveled against Shakespeare, they are all turned around in such a way that they all look like different masterpieces produced by the same author, different contributions to language, literature, performance and the overall culture. Look at the way in which he has even situated, Johnson has even situated Shakespeare as someone who contributed to the transition of a barbaric nation into something more refined, more sophisticated.

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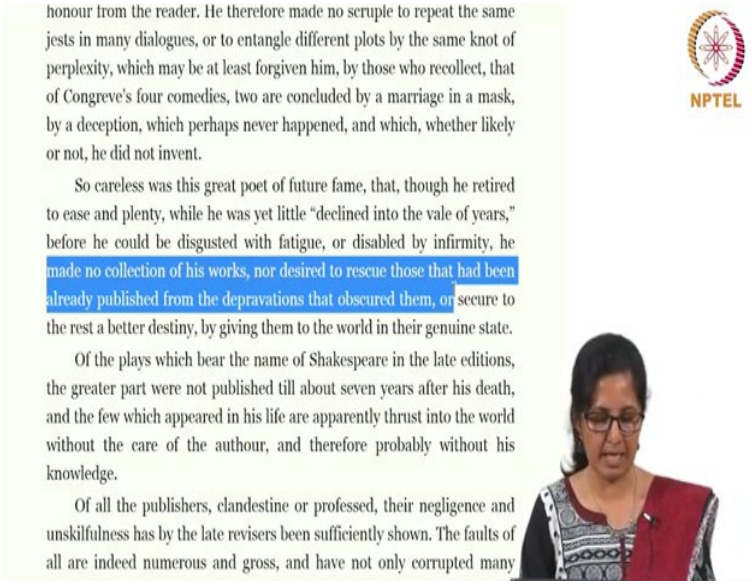

And he is also talking about the kind of integrity that Shakespeare had, the commitment that he had, towards the present, towards the times in which he was living. “So careless was this great poet of future fame that though he retired to ease and plenty, while he was yet “little declined into the vale of years”, before he could be disgusted with fatigue or disabled by infirmity, he made no collection of his works, nor desired to rescue those that had been already published from the depravation that obscured them, or secure to the rest a better destiny by giving them to the world in their genuine state”. So this carelessness is again, another way in which Johnson talks about the genius, infinite genius that he thinks Shakespeare had possessed. There was no active effort made from this author to compile any of his works during his lifetime.

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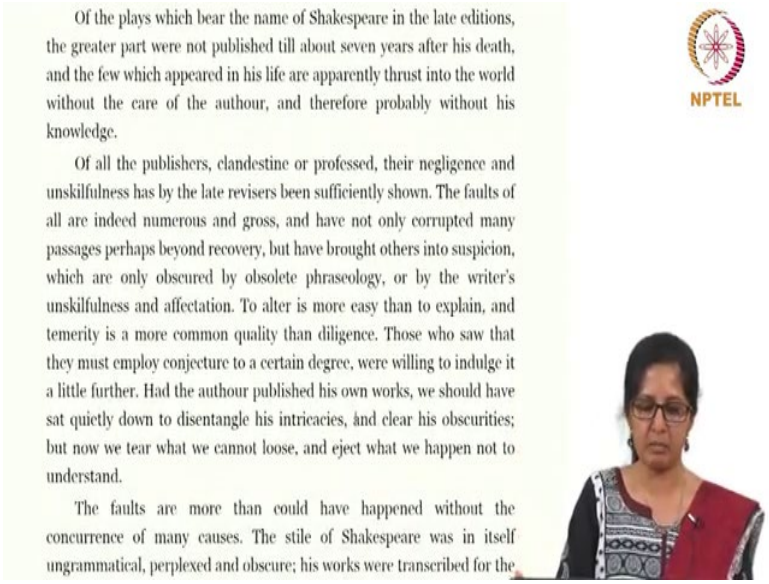

And he talks about the First Folio which came out seven years after his death, then, “Of all the publishers clandestine or professed, their negligence and unskillfulness by the late revisers has sufficiently been shown”. Herein lies the significance of this preface and this edition that Johnson is trying to bring out. He is trying to clear out the anomalies and bring out an edition which is more fruitful, useful for the posterity, something which is hopefully without the inconsistencies and without the corruptions that the other editions had.

He refers to some of the earlier editions in this and he also tells us how his own edition will be a significant departure from those and how that would contribute immensely to the works of, to the reputation of Shakespeare in restoring some of his works and restoring some of the lines and giving to posterity a great gift that would help them understand the literary genius that Shakespeare had possessed. The detailed notes that he gives to his own edition and the many comments that he makes about his own edition, we will skip those sections and move to the final part of the discussion.

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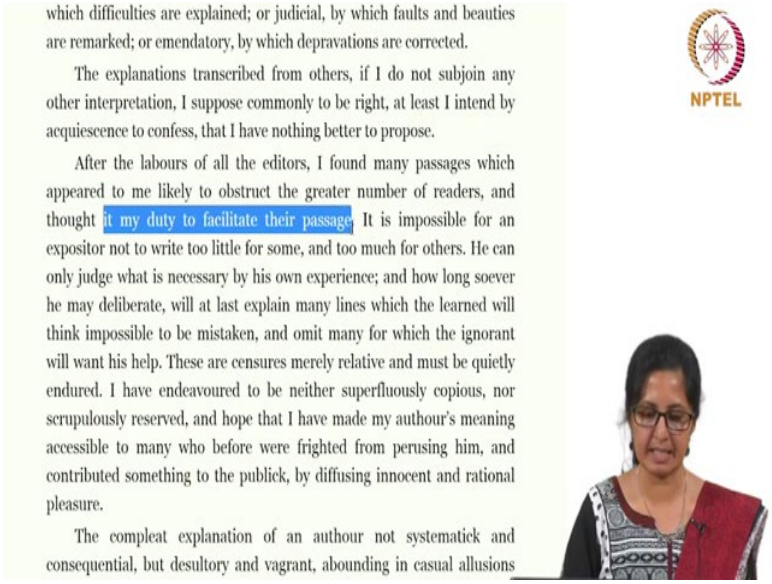

"After the labors of all the editors," which he has explicated in the passages above, "I found many passages which appear to me likely to obstruct the greater number of readers and thought it my duty to facilitate their passage". So this is indeed a great contribution that Johnson is making to posterity, to cement the literary reputation of Shakespeare because the other volumes, the other editors, they have not done justice, in spite of the hard labor that they had put in. He is not being dismissive of them, he is acknowledging the fine contribution that all of them made at different stages of time. And he is also realizing the need to pitch in at this point of time because there is a problem of these corrupted editions and there is also a growing instance of a lot of critics trying to find problems with Shakespeare's works, with his genius, you know, trying to nitpick and show how he has gone wrong in the use of language or in his dramatic exercise. So this is indeed a remarkable moment, an iconic moment in literary history where one critic steps in, he pitches in with his fine, refined critical faculty to rescue a writer who once had fame and he ensures that the writer, the artist who had outlived his century, continues to live forever for posterity and that his works are made available in an uncorrupted form as well.

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Johnson also tells us about the kind of criticism that he has tried to practice in this and to give one example, "Such criticism I have attempted to practice where any passage appeared inextricably perplexed, have endeavored discover how it may be recalled to sense with least violence. But my first labor is always to turn the old text on every side and try if there be any interstice through which light can find its way". So, he has done, he is outlining the kind of work that has gone into these editions; whenever possible, he has got hold of the older versions and he has tried to get into the skin of the text and to give us this text in the most original form as possible, as available.

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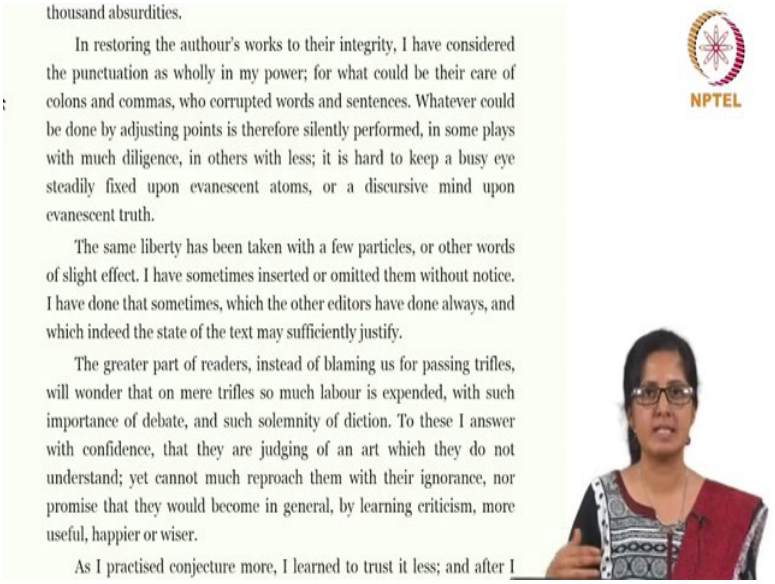

And he also tells us the liberties, some of the liberties that he has taken with the text, with the versions that are available before him. “The same liberty has been taken with a few particles or other words of slight effect. I have sometimes inserted or omitted them without notice. I have done that sometimes which the other editors have done always, and which indeed the state of the text may sufficiently justify”. So he has done a few things, he has made a few alterations all of which he thinks, is towards doing justice to the works of this great genius.

Johnson is very conscious to the critical eyes which are all around him. And he knows that this work will open up a lot of controversies and his opinions and his version will be received with a lot of skepticism by those critics whose judgments he has also been questioning.

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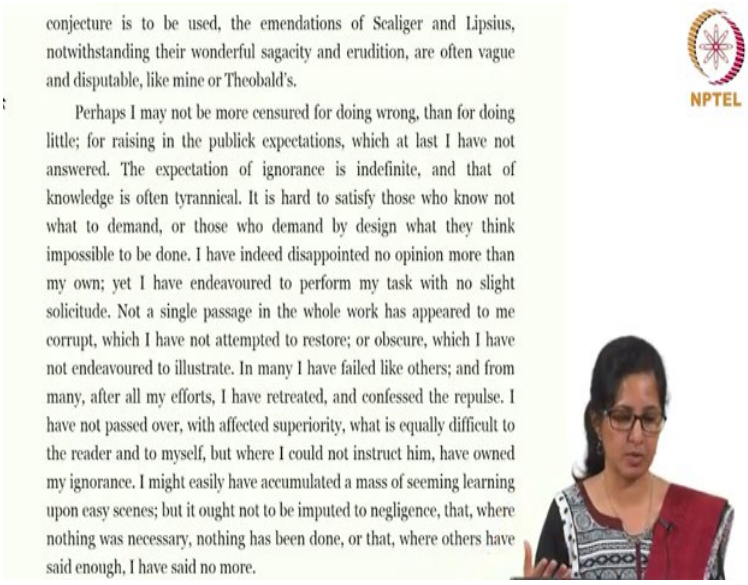

So he says, “Perhaps I may not be more censured for doing wrong than for doing little; for raising in the public expectations, which at last, I have not answered. The expectation of ignorance is indefinite, and that of knowledge is often tyrannical. It is hard to satisfy those who know not what to demand or those who demand by design, what they think impossible to be done.” He is also talking about the practical viability of certain kinds of critical as well as artistic exercises.

I have indeed disappointed no opinion more than my own; yet I have endeavored to perform my task with no solicitude. Not a single passage in the whole work has appeared to me corrupt, which I have not attempted to restore; or obscure, which I have not endeavored to illustrate”. So in his opinion, he has done whatever best he could, in terms of the historical accuracy, in terms of redeeming the text, in terms of correcting the inconsistencies. And now,

he says it is up to the reader to figure that out. But he is also very conscious about certain kinds of opinions, he always already says he may not pay much attention to those. He is also telling us about the notes, the extensive notes that he has provided wherever he could and how that would be useful, that would aid the process of reading and understanding.

So now we move on to the final sections, where he talks about the need to revise, the need that arose in the first place to deliver Shakespeare in a revised way, a different version of Shakespeare altogether. Here he is also being attentive to the ways in which language has changed over the decades, over the centuries.

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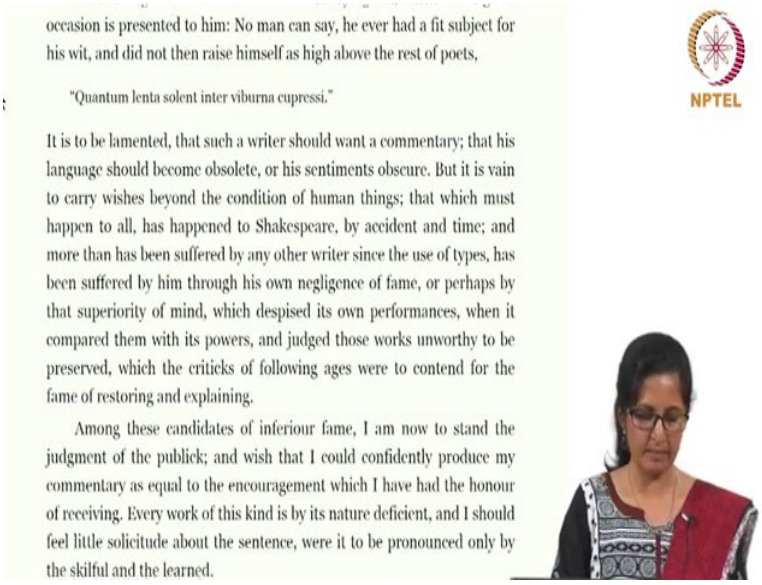

"It is to be lamented, that such a writer should want a commentary; that his language should become obsolete, or his sentiments obscure. But it is vain to carry wishes beyond the condition of human things; that which must happen to all, has happened to Shakespeare, by accident and time". He is talking about the fate of all artists, they may outlive their century, but there are also certain kinds of revisions and certain kinds of commentaries and notes which become necessary for understanding them for what they were worth.

"And more than has been suffered by any other writer since the use of types, has been suffered by him through his own negligence of fame, or perhaps by that superiority of mind, which despised its own performances, when it compared them with its powers, and judged those works unworthy to be preserved, which the critics of the following ages were to contend for the fame of restoring and explaining". So partly, the problem lies with the author

too in not taking sufficient care to preserve those elements of performances, of writings for posterity. And now he submits this work for the public scrutiny.

“I am now to stand the judgment of the public, and wish that I could confidently produce my commentary as equal to the encouragement, which I have had the honor of receiving. Every work of this kind is by its nature deficient and I should feel little solicitude about the sentence were it to be pronounced only by the skillful and the learned”. He is very open to constructive criticism as he tells us towards the end. But he is also very skeptical about the opinions which will be generated by the ignorant, the ones who are not very well informed about this subject, about this area.

And here we fine that within the neoclassical tradition, he is also able to tease out the difference between informed criticism and public opinion. And when he talks about public opinion, he certainly has in mind, scholarly judgments and scholarly interventions from people who are also familiar with the kind of scholarship that surrounds this. And that also tells us a lot about the kind of criticism which had come to emerge during that time and we wrap up this session.

And I encourage you to go back to this work and read through this in its entirety to understand how Johnson had contributed to reviving the literary reputation of Shakespeare. And also to see some of the important critical yardsticks and principles that had evolved during the time of neoclassical literary criticism. And also to understand the different principles that had emerged during the time of the neoclassical age. So with this, we wrap up for today. I thank you for listening. Thank you for your attention. I look forward to seeing you in the next session.