British Literature Lecture 01-02

The Types or Genres of Literature we will cover will include:

- Short Stories
- Excerpts from Novels
- Excerpts from Biographies
- Autobiographies
- Sermons
- Diaries
- Plays
- Newspaper Editorials
- Poems
- Histories
- Hymns
- Political Essays

Brief Introduction to Elements of Literature

- Character
- Point of View
- Setting
- Structure / Plot
- Conflict
- Theme
- Moral Tone
- Worldview of the Author

Worldview of the Author

- Worldview of Author is the sum-total of what the author believes about truth and the meaning of life.

Author

- Beliefs
- Experiences
- Genetics

One-Way Communication
From Author To Reader →

Reader

- Beliefs
- Experiences
- Genetics

Typically in Communication, we have two-way communication. But with reading, we - as the Reader - do not get to respond to the author. So it's one-way communication.

- The author's worldview influences every aspect of what he or she writes
- And then our very own personal worldview influences how we understand the author
- Therefore, understanding worldview is important!

Active Reading versus Passive Reading

- An active reader is one who is in the habit of asking questions while he/she reads! :-D

A Brief Overview of British Literary Periods

- Old English (Anglo-Saxon) Period (450–1066)
- Middle English Period (1066–1485)
- The Renaissance (1485–1660)
    - Civil War & Interregnum (1642-1660)
    - Restoration Period (1660-1688)
- The Neoclassical Period (1600–1789) Enlightenment / Age of Reason
- The Romantic Period (1789–1832)
- The Victorian Period (1832–1901)
- Modern Period (1901-1945)
    - Edwardian Period (1901-1914)
    - Georgian Period (1910-1936)
- Contemporary Period (1945-present)

UNIT ONE – The Middle Ages (449-1485)

The Middle Ages - (500-1500)

- Once referred to as the "Dark Ages" - roughly from end of Roman Empire in 476 to sack of Constantinople in 1453
- In England - End of Roman era to the end of the War of the Roses in 1485

History of Early England is all about invasions – Roman & Germanic!

1 - The Celts and Romans (Prehistory to AD 449)

Roman   - Julius Caesar (55-54 BC)

                       - Claudius (AD 43) / Hadrian and Hadrian's Wall

                       - King Arthur legends from Romano-British Celtic warriors resisting Germanic tribe occupation

2 - Anglo-Saxon Britain (449-1066)
- Germanic Anglo-Saxons (449)
- **Christianity** arrives in Britannia via Augustine (597) and other missionaries
- Ecclesiastical Latin influences English (Angle-ish)
- Scandinavian "The Danes" (787 first arrive / 850 conquest begins)
- Alfred the Great (849-899)
- Canute's Scandinavian Empire in 1016
- Norman (1066)

3 - High Middle Ages (1066-1300)

4 - Late Middle Ages (1300-1485)

From the Anglo-Saxon Period

Beowulf – Old English (First written down around 1000 AD)

An **epic poem** is a long, narrative poem that celebrates heroic deeds and events that are significant to the culture of the poet.
- Many ancient writers used epic poetry to tell tales of intense adventures and heroic feats.
- Some of the most famous literary masterpieces in the world were written in the form of epic poetry.
- Epic poems were particularly common in the ancient world because they were ideal for expressing stories **orally**. Public performances were given by "scops" or bards.
- These works continue to be well regarded today.
- Many students read famous examples of epic poetry, such as *Gilgamesh* and *The Iliad*.
- Epics are DIDACTIC – They are meant to instruct.
- They elevate a culture's highest virtues, creating a model to emulate.

Six Elements of The Epic:
1. *Plot centers around a Hero of Unbelievable Stature.* The HERO is a figure of imposing stature, of national or international importance, and of great historical or legendary significance. The epic hero completes what everyone only attempts. In ancient epics, the hero often is either partially divine or at least protected by a god or God.
2. *Involves deeds of superhuman strength and valor.* The action consists of deeds of great valor or requiring superhuman courage. The epic hero accomplishes feats no real human could.
3. *Vast Setting.* The SETTING is vast in scope, covering great nations, the world, or the universe. The action spans not only geographical but also often cosmological space: across land, sea, into the underworld, or thru space or time etc.
4. *Involves supernatural and-or otherworldly forces.* Supernatural forces—gods, angels, and demons--interest themselves in the action and intervene from time to time. (Gods, demons, angels, time/space travel, cheating death etc.)
5. *Sustained elevation of style.* A style of sustained elevation and grand simplicity is used. Overwritten. Overly formal, highly stylized (poetry, lyricism/singing, exaggeration)
6. *Poet remains objective and omniscient.* The epic poet recounts the deeds of his heroes with objectivity. The narrator sees and knows all and presents all perspectives.

Heroic Virtues
- Fortitude – assails opposing forces with unwavering strength and courage
- Prudence – practical wisdom; wisely avoiding reckless or rash acts
- Loyalty – mutual respect and commitment
- Generosity and mercy – sharing praise, honor, and resources

Common devices or conventions employed by most epic poets:

1. The poet opens by stating his **THEME**.
2. The poet invokes a **MUSE** to inspire and instruct him. The poet prays to the Muse to provide divine inspiration to tell the great story.
3. The poet opens his narrative **IN MEDIAS RES**—in the middle of things—giving the necessary exposition in later portions of the epic.
4. The poet includes **GENEALOGIES AND CATALOGUES** of warriors, ships, armies are given. These long lists of objects, places, and people place the finite action of the epic within a broader, universal context. Often, the poet is also paying homage to the ancestors of audience members.
5. Main characters give **EXTENDED FORMAL SPEECHES.**
6. The poet makes frequent use of the **EPIC SIMILE.**
7. The poet makes heavy use of **REPETITION** or stock phrases.
8. The poet presents the **HEROIC IDEALS** such as courage, honor, sacrifice, patriotism, and kindness.
9. An epic gives a clear picture of the social and cultural patterns of the contemporary life.

Epic Examples:

- *The Epic of Gilgamesh*
- *Both The Hebrew Scriptures and The New Testament*
- *The Iliad and The Odyssey*
- *Beowulf*
- *King Arthur and the Knights of Round Table*
- *Dante's Inferno*

- *The Lord of the Rings*
- *Most Superhero Series (Superman, Batman...)*
- *The James Bond Series*
- *Star Wars, Star Trek, Battlestar Galactica*

Key Literary Features of Beowulf

- *Stock epithets* – an adjective or descriptive phrase that adds to the quality of our understanding of the person or thing mentioned. It could be a phrase used to describe or rename a noun they precede, pointing out special traits. (Beowulf has epithets such as "the Geatish Hero" and "Lord of the Seamen." Grendel is "bone-crusher," "blood gusher," "the Almighty's enemy," "sin-stained demon," and "human killer." The sword is "blood worm," "icicle of blood," etc. Warriors are "destroyers of eagle's hunger.")
- *Kenning* – metaphor using compound expression; combining words to make a new expression that substitutes for a noun (such as 'whale road' for sea or 'battle sweat' for blood)
  Beowulf is a kenning for bear = 'Bee Hunter.'
- *Litotes* – affirmation of something by denying its contrary ('He was not unmindful of his duty' meaning that he was careful of his duty) ('She is not one who neglects to turn in any assignment' meaning she turns in all her assignments.)
- *Alliterative verse* – a stylistic form of verse used in Old Norse and Anglo-Saxon poetry. After Norman conquest, alliterative verse was replaced by rhyme and other poetic forms. Alfred Lord Tennyson in *Idylls of the King* and JRR Tolkien in parts of the *Lord of the Rings* used alliterative verse for impact. Each line of the poem has at least 4 stressed syllables of alliterative words.

Anglo-Saxon Chronicle

- The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is a collection of annals in Old English, chronicling the history of the Anglo-Saxons.
- The original manuscript of the Chronicle was created late in the 9th century, probably in Wessex, during the reign of Alfred the Great (ruled 871–899).
- Multiple copies were made of that one original and then distributed to monasteries across England, where they were independently updated. In one case, the Chronicle was still being actively updated in 1154.
- Almost all of the material in the Chronicle is in the form of annals, by year.
- The earliest annals are dated at 60 BC (the annals' date for Caesar's invasions of Britain).
- Historical material continues up to the year in which the chronicle was written in the 9th century, at which point contemporary records begin. These manuscripts collectively are known as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.*