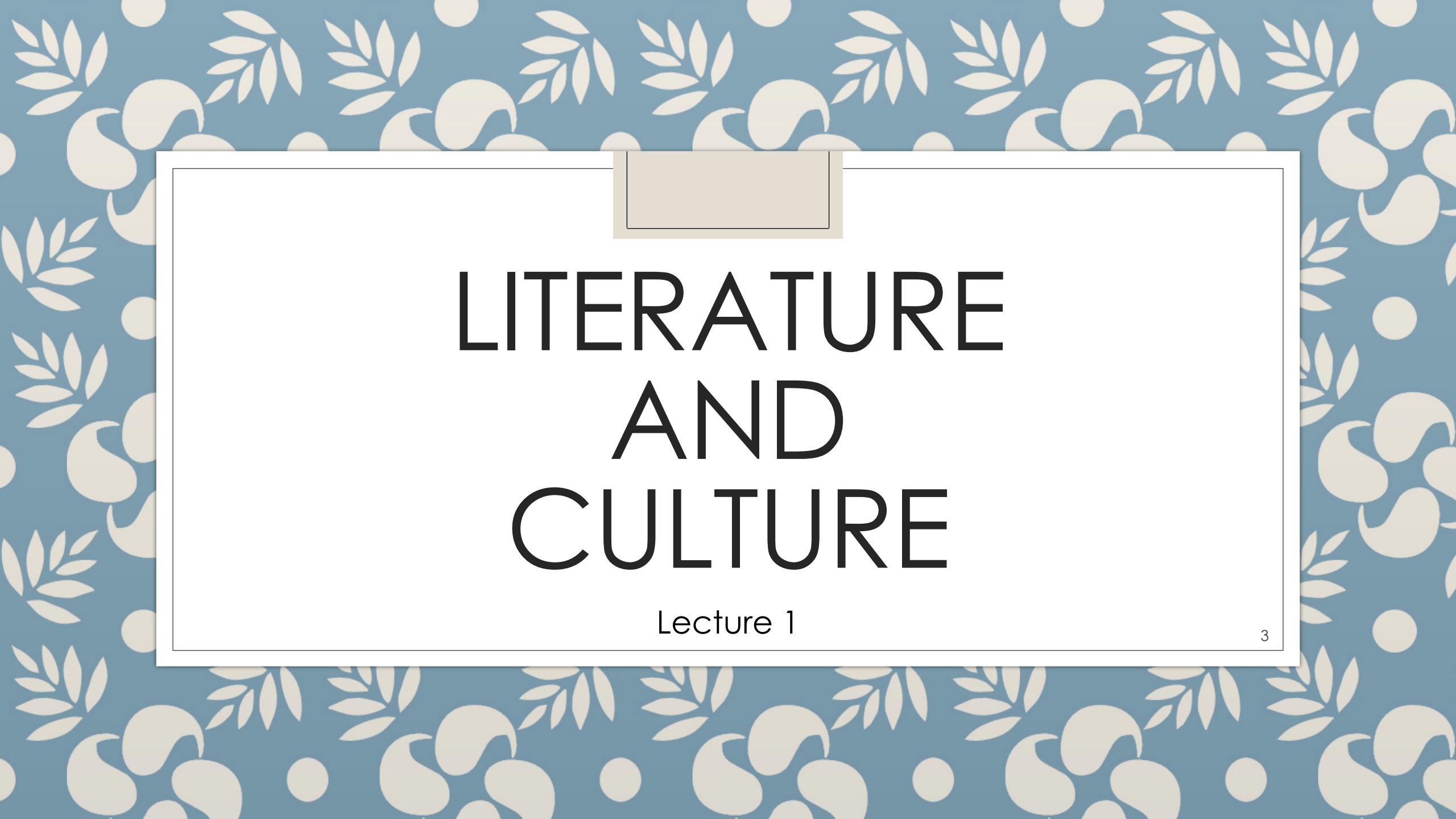


LITERATURE

Introduction to Human Sciences
IIIT Hyderabad
April 11, 2023
Nazia Akhtar

Agenda for this Module

- Lecture 1: Literature and Culture
- Lecture 2: Culture and Representation
- Lecture 3: What is a Classic?
- Lecture 4: Comparative Indian Literature



**LITERATURE
AND
CULTURE**

Lecture 1

Agenda for this Lecture

- Reflection, review: the what and why of the Human Sciences
- What is culture, and why do we need it?
- What is literature, and why do we need it?

The What and Why of Human Sciences

- Different scholars across different disciplines study **the human condition**.
- What is the human condition?
 - What does it mean to be human?
- The **object of inquiry is not something that is fully formed and complete**.

The What and Why of Human Sciences

- Important: not only the affective or individual aspect of human experience.
- Human beings **exist in history**, not outside it. We are historical subjects.
- Human beings are also **economic entities**, moving goods and commodities
- Humans are also **social bodies**, operating in human relationships, cultures, and institutions.

The What and Why of Human Sciences

- Human behaviour and **existence is also political**, both individually and collectively.
- There is a **conceptual understanding** of what is a human being. So we exist as an idea or a concept.

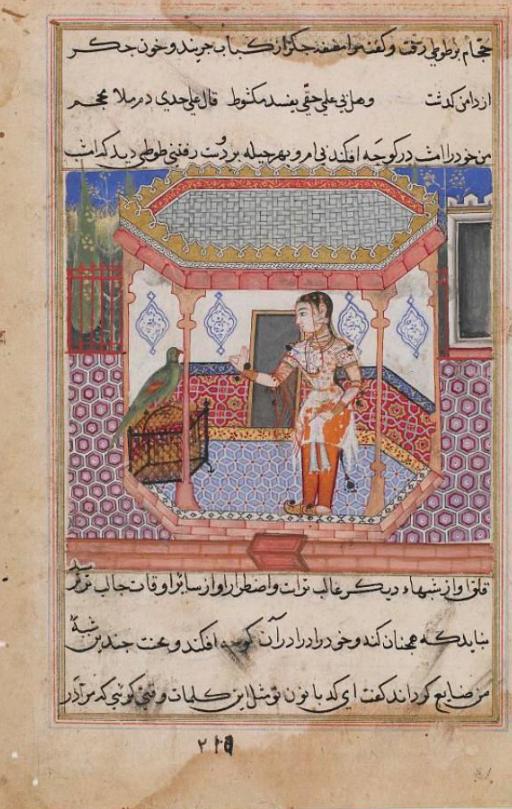
Humans also have creative urges and motivations and express these in different media → Literature and the Study of Culture

The What and Why of Human Sciences

- The Human Sciences study **the entirety of human experience.**
- There is also **no separation** between the object of inquiry and the Human Sciences.

than she expected; before she had drunk half the bottle, she found her head pressing against the ceiling, and she stooped to save her neck from being broken, and hastily put down the bottle, saying to herself "that's quite enough—I hope I shan't grow any more—I wish I hadn't drunk so much!"

"Alice! it was too late: she went on growing and growing, and very soon had to kneel down in another minute there was not room even for this, and she tried the effect of lying down, with one elbow against the door, and the other arm curled round her head. Still she went on growing, and as a last resource she put one arm out of the window, and one foot up the chimney, and said to herself "now I can do no more—what will become of me?"



Clockwise:

- Draft of Lewis Carroll's Alice's Adventures Under Ground
- 16th cent. Mughal manuscript of the Tales of the Parrot (Tutinama)
- Draft of Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway
- Lost chapter of Murasaki Shikibu's The Tale of Genji

What does Literature Study?

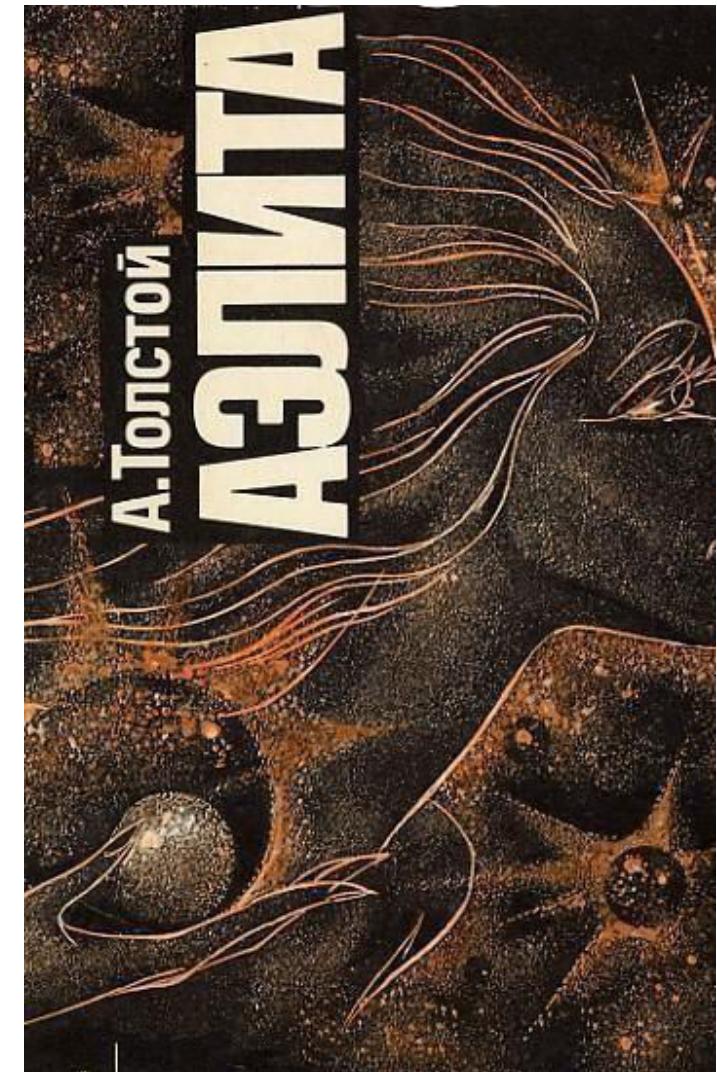
by the red-faced, button-faced Mrs. Pyn, whose hands were upon the always bright red, as they had been ston'd in the sun where the light hit flowers.

There were flowers; delphiniums, sweet peas; bunches of lilac, carnations, masses glaucous. There were roses; there were roses & roses. Ah yes. So she breathes in the earthly soft Garden smell; talking to Mrs. Pyn, who used her silk, a woman always come out when little boy, a companion the boy always when Mr. Dalloway came in; they sat him kind for kind she had been, year ago; kind she still was, standing there, looking old, now the year, turn of her head from side to side among the roses & roses, a nestling tuft of lilac, with her eye half closed, her pink, like fallen linen clean from a laundry laid in weekly tray, they looked; a dark & matted person, the red carnations, holding their head up, all the sweet peacock feathers, reading in the book, fingered violet, most white, pale, — and there were the tulips, — girls in muslin cloaks came out to pick rose petals, almost blue-black they, its delphiniums, its carnations, roses to look after the superb numbers day with its arambolia, was over, when every the declining moon between red & roses, when every flower — over carnations, roses, lilac, flowers whatever else flower went to run by such in the softy sunny beds, — yesterday under maga sun in the mucky beds, — here she loved the grey white moth, Meaning me! the purple cherry tree, the yellow every primrose! "Don't you get fearfully tired," she said to Mrs. Pyn. "When standing all day when Tja jet your holiday?"

What do literary scholars study?

- **Human creative expression**, usually in the form of writing.
- This is also called **Literature**.
- **Fiction allows us to imagine other worlds**, puts us into someone else's shoes, offers insights into experiences we will never directly access.

**What would life be like a thousand
years from now on another planet
when technology has reached its
zenith?**





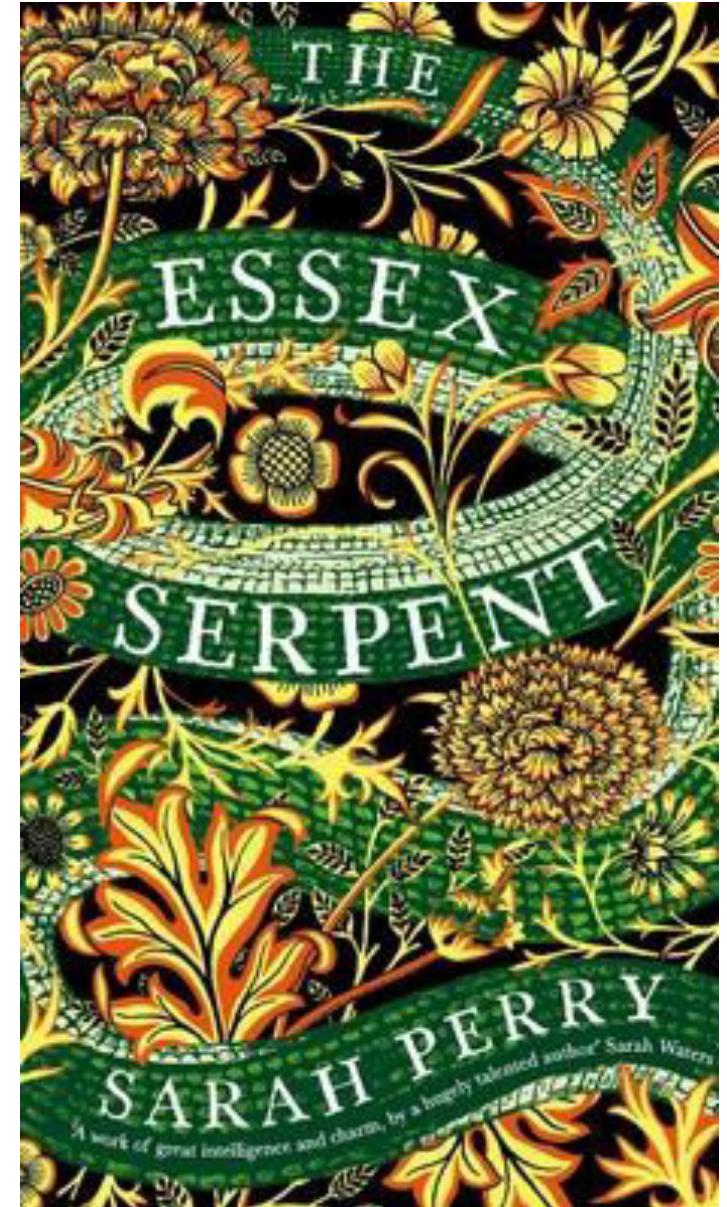
Father
may be an
elephant

and mother
only a small
basket,
but...

gogu
shyamala

How does a Dalit woman depict life? What are the images and metaphors in which she represents/interprets the world, and how do those of us who do not have access to her lived experience interpret these words and phrases?

**How did Victorian British
society react to a wandering
widowed woman of science
who did not believe in
“dragons”?**





**“pears, plums, black cherries:
for how long, when iron rods
are pointing at the sky?”**

- Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih



What was the pre-Partition definition of Punjabis ("Punjabi identity"), and who sang its songs?

What do literary scholars study?

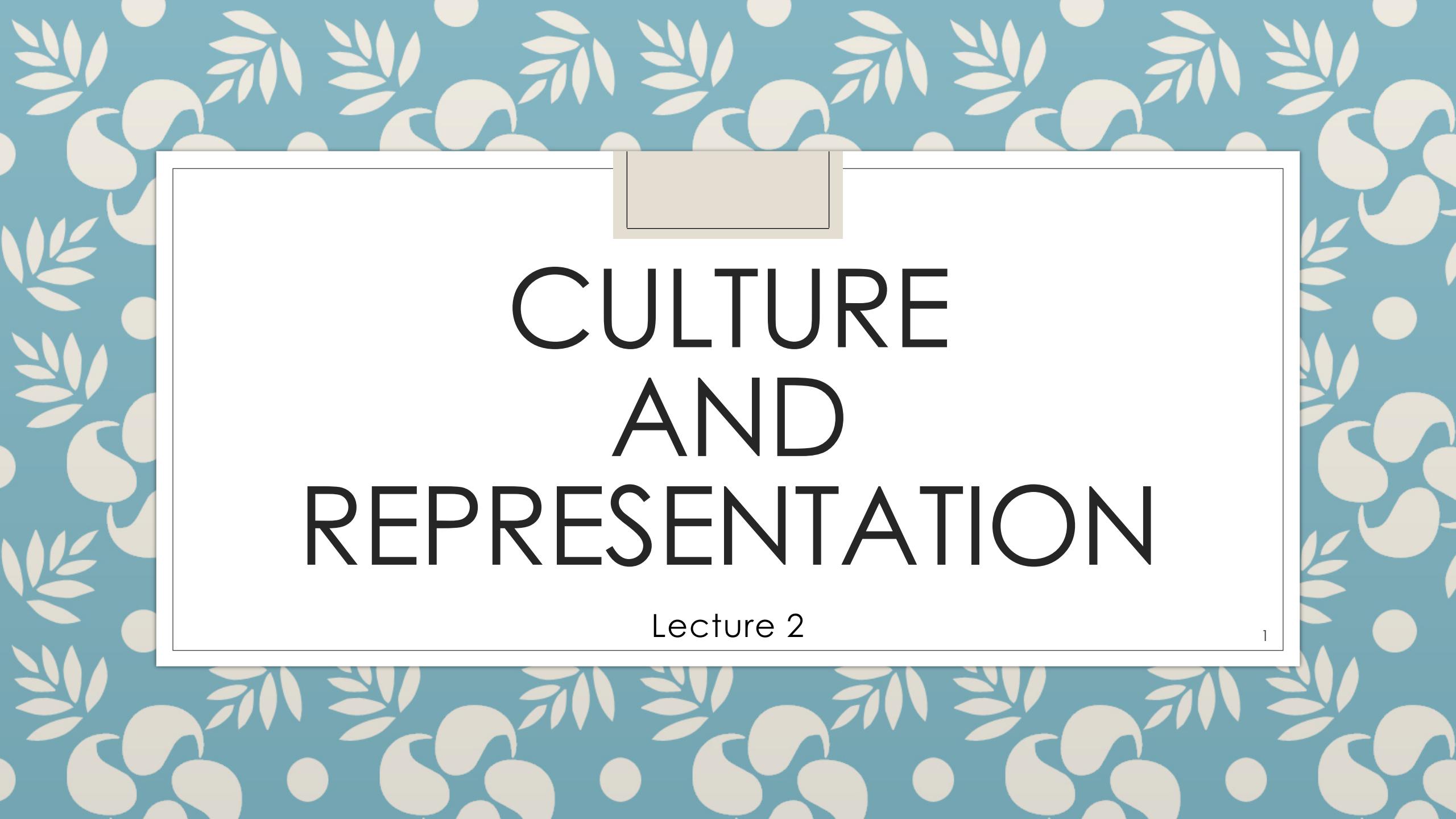
- Literature **voices/expresses (represents) the human condition.**
- There are **other imaginations** of the human experience apart from ours: some around us, some distant from us.
- Again, **continuity** between the object of inquiry and society.

What do literary scholars study?

- As literary scholars, we **think critically, interpretively, creatively, imaginatively**
 - What is written? How is it written? What are the different ways in which it can be read? What are its possibilities?
 - Put questions to fiction and interpret it to examine the human condition
- **The Human Sciences give us the training, conceptual framework, and language to think about “us” and “others”**

What is Culture?

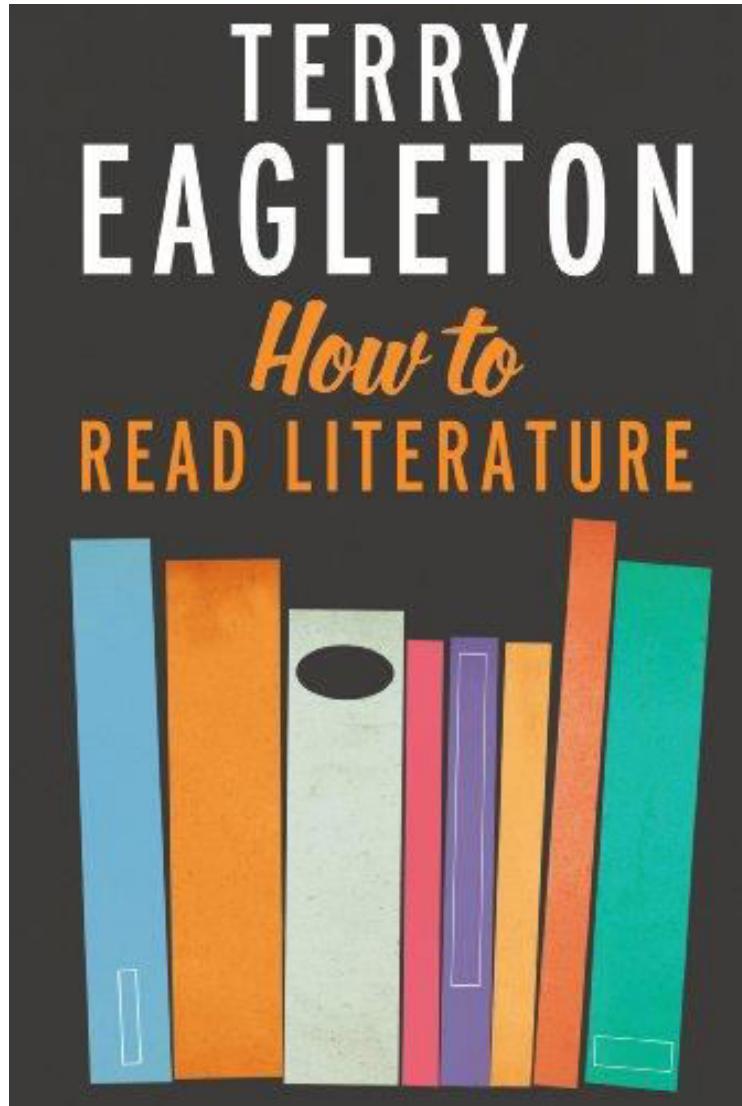
- Different but related meanings of the word “culture.”
 - **cultural practice and production**
 - the **relationship between human experience, everyday life, social relations, and power**
- Culture is **constantly** produced and reproduced.
- All cultural productions and artefacts must be read as emerging from a particular context (social, historical, political)
- They either challenge or reproduce/endorse existing worldview.



CULTURE AND REPRESENTATION

Lecture 2

READING 1:



**Chapter 1,
“Openings”**

“The most common mistake students of literature make is to go straight for what the poem or novel says, setting aside the way that it says it. To read like this is to set aside the ‘literariness’ of the work – the fact that it is a poem or play or novel, rather than an account of the incidence of soil erosion in Nebraska. Literary works are pieces of rhetoric as well as reports. They demand a peculiarly vigilant kind of reading, one which is alert to tone, mood, pace, genre, syntax, grammar, texture, rhythm, narrative structure, punctuation, ambiguity – in fact to everything that comes under the heading of ‘form’” (2).

“Part of what we mean by a ‘literary’ work is one in which what is said is to be taken in terms of how it is said. It is the kind of writing in which the content is inseparable from the language in which it is presented. Language is constitutive of the reality or experience, rather than simply a vehicle for it” (3).

Review

- Proper object of inquiry (= study) in HS is the human
- What does it mean to be human (... in the age of AI!)
- Continuity between HS as an academic area and human society
 - The HS student/researcher/teacher is implicated/embedded/emerges from human society → no division or distance

Review

- As literary scholars, we think critically, interpretively, creatively, imaginatively about literary texts
- The meaning of a literary text – the truth it contains about human experience – is incomplete without the reader.
 - Each reader comes to a text from their own location as an individual, idea, and social-historical-political-economic entity.
 - Each reader invests a text with meaning.
 - The strength of an interpretation depends on what is made available/possible by a text.

Haiku – Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih

“fresh green leaves
an orange tree – white atop
my head, also fresh.”

Broken Love – Hoshang Merchant

Is like an intercepted message

It is a feather swirling emptily
in a dusty trough

It is the sun's broken yolk
at evening

It is this empty room
where I write this poem.



The Two Fridas (1939)
Frida Kahlo
Oil on Canvas
Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City

Review

- Literature (fiction) is one manifestation of Culture
- Two related definitions of culture
- Culture is constantly produced and reproduced
- All cultural productions and artefacts must be read as emerging from a particular context (social, historical, political, economic).
- Or: culture is everywhere. It permeates everything and is implicated in reproducing or challenging existing worldview.
- Culture and power mutually construct and reconstruct each other.

Review

- So while aesthetics are an important aspect of the study of cultural artefacts, alone they fall short.



Untitled (1969)
Vasudev S. Gaitonde
Sold for USD 110,000
2005

Untitled (1979)
VS. Gaitonde
Sold for USD 3 million
2013





Birth (1955)

FN Souza

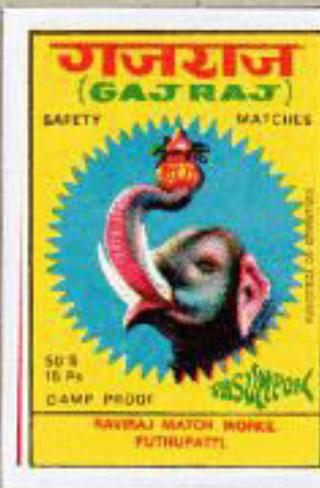
Sold in 2015 for USD 4 million



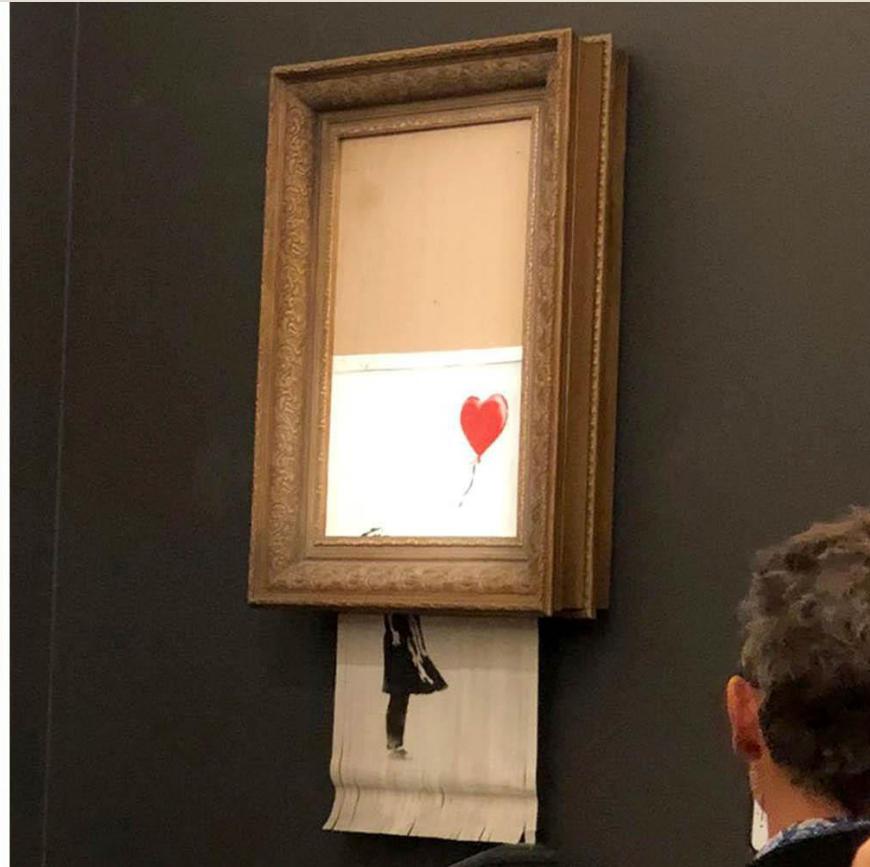


Arts vs. Crafts

- Separation between body and mind, the useful and beautiful
- People who make useful things and people who make/contemplate beautiful things are separated
- The theoretical and the beautiful are suspended away from the concrete and the useful
 - High culture vs. Low culture
 - Arts vs. (handi)crafts/Artist vs. artisan/individual (lone) genius vs. communal activity







Pop Culture

- Popular art incorporates references to advertisements, mass-produced goods, comic books etc. It represents a challenge to “fine art” through the use of irony.

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WHAT IS A CLASSIC?

Lecture 3

Review

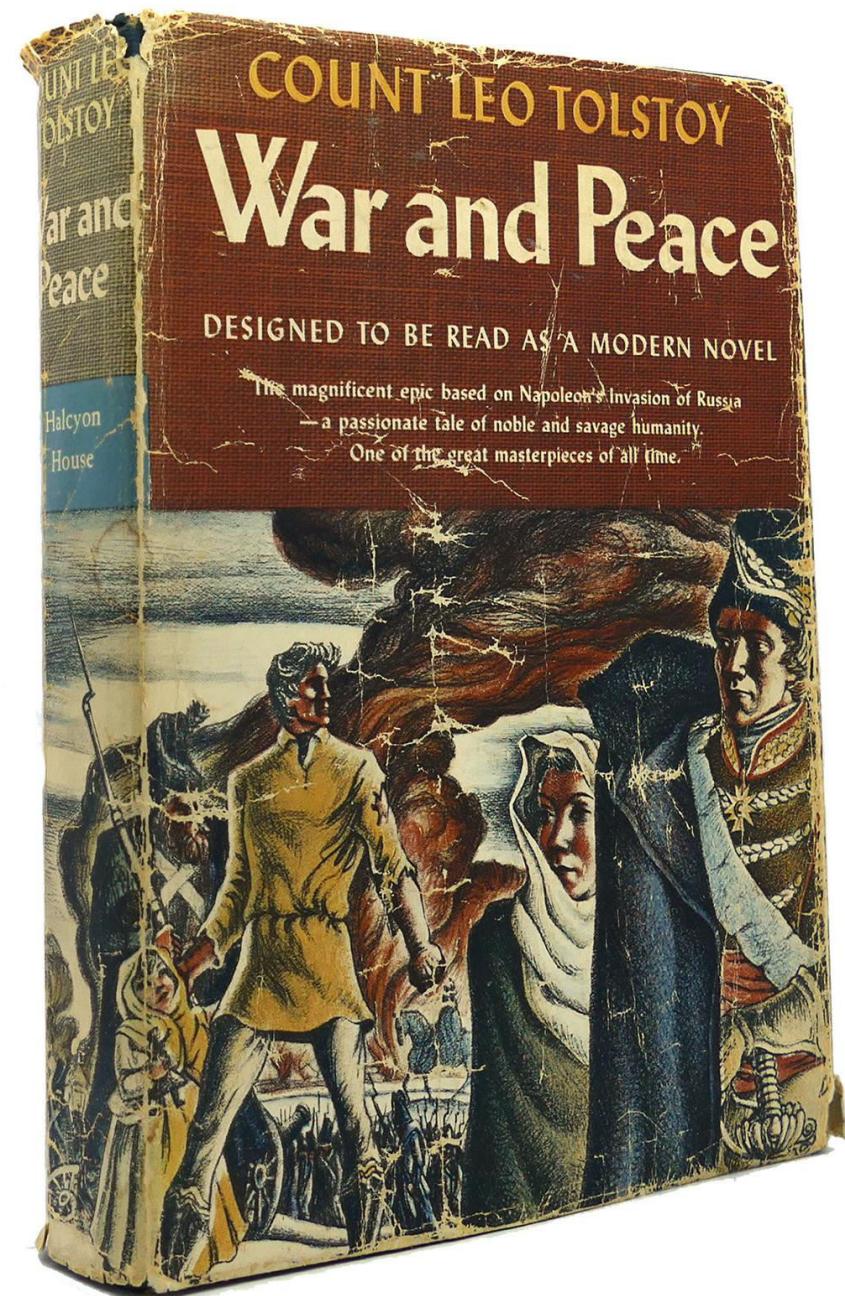
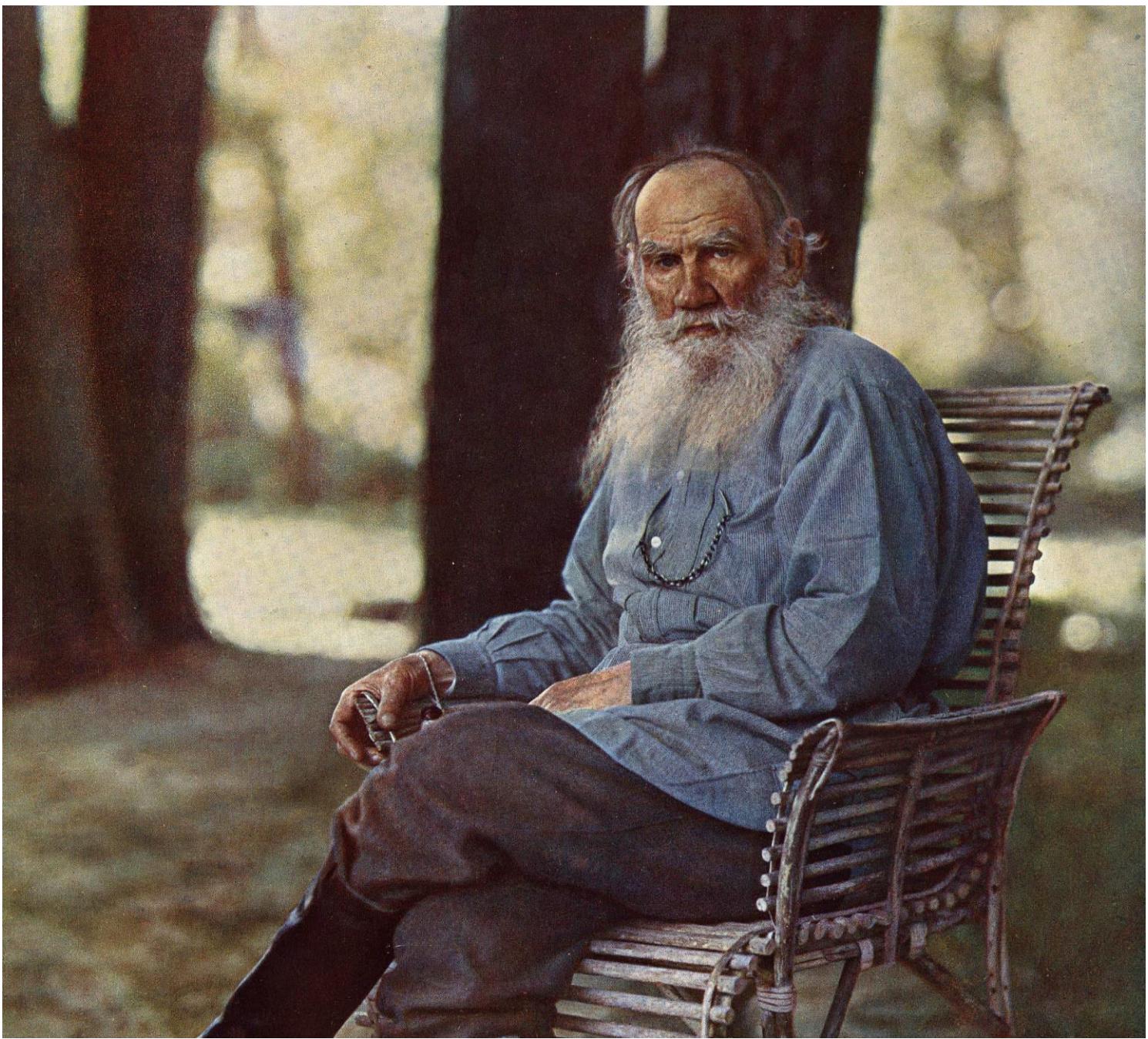
- Art (Artist)/ (Handi)crafts (Artisan) / Popular Art (Performer)
- High Culture vs. Low Culture
- Highest truth becomes a luxury
- This impoverishes both
- Disciplinary split between skills and theory also has to do with colonial modernity

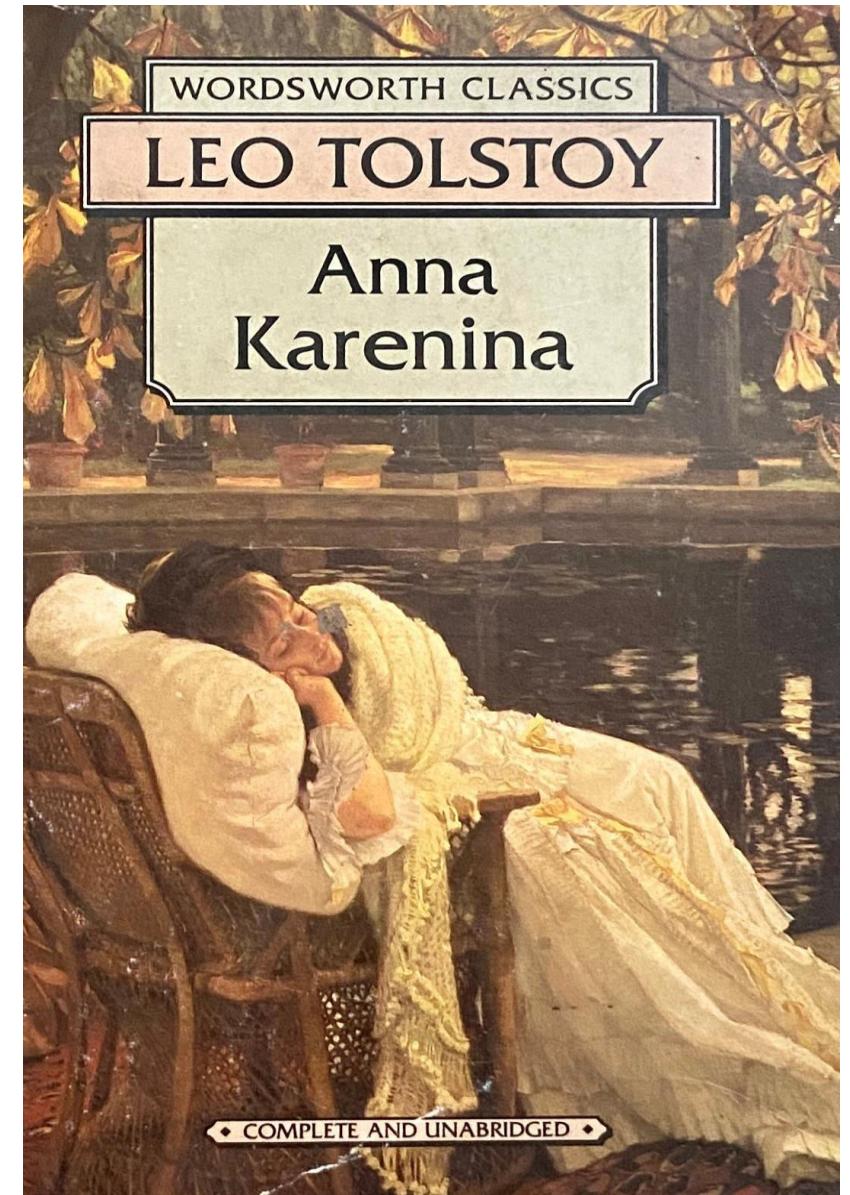
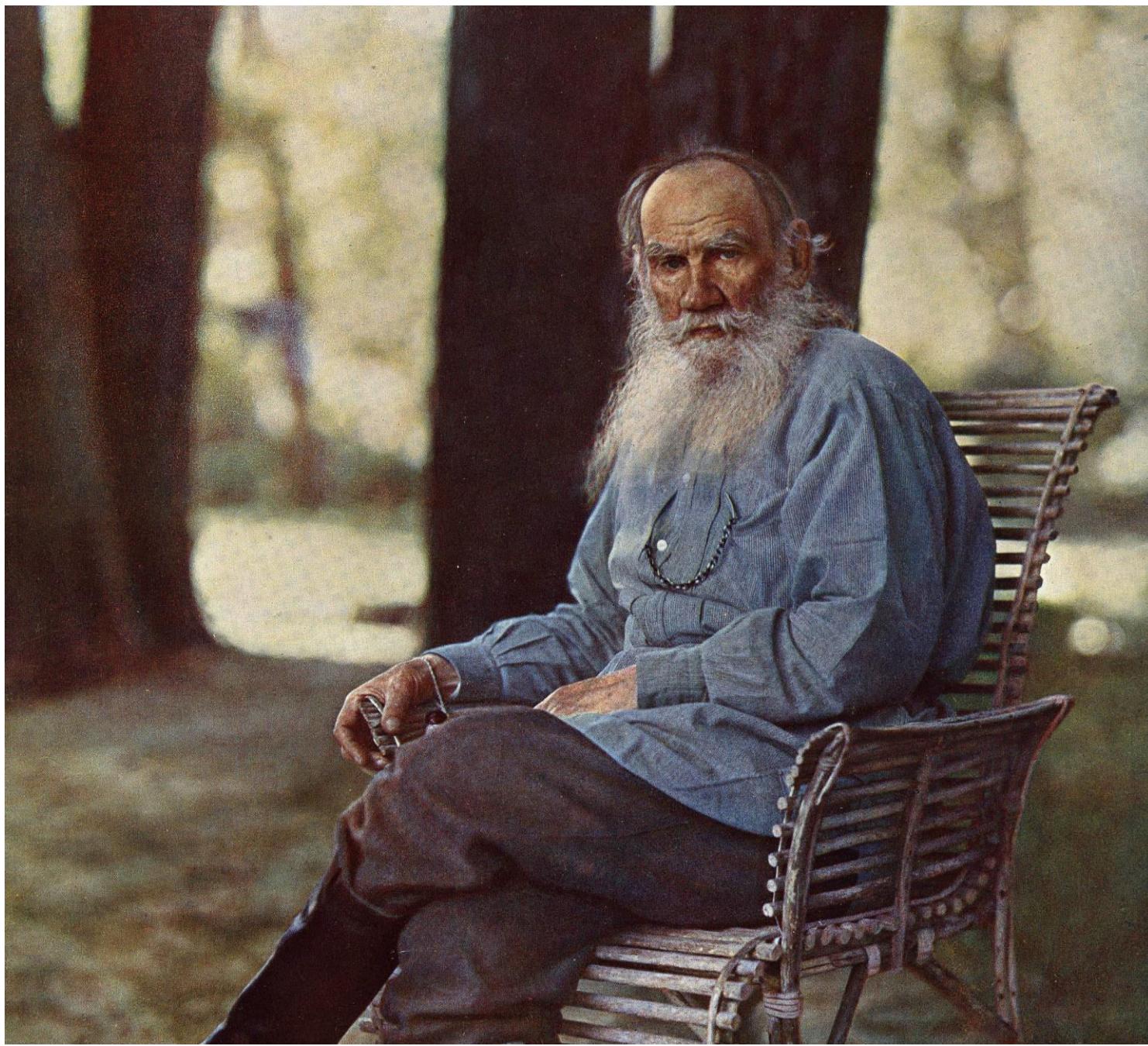
Classic and Canon

- What is a classic?
 - intrinsic value independent of other considerations

THE PLAYS
OF
SHAKESPEARE.







**Kalidasa,
Meghduuta**



Pahari Painting

Guler School

c. 1800, Lahore Museum

G I T A N J A L I

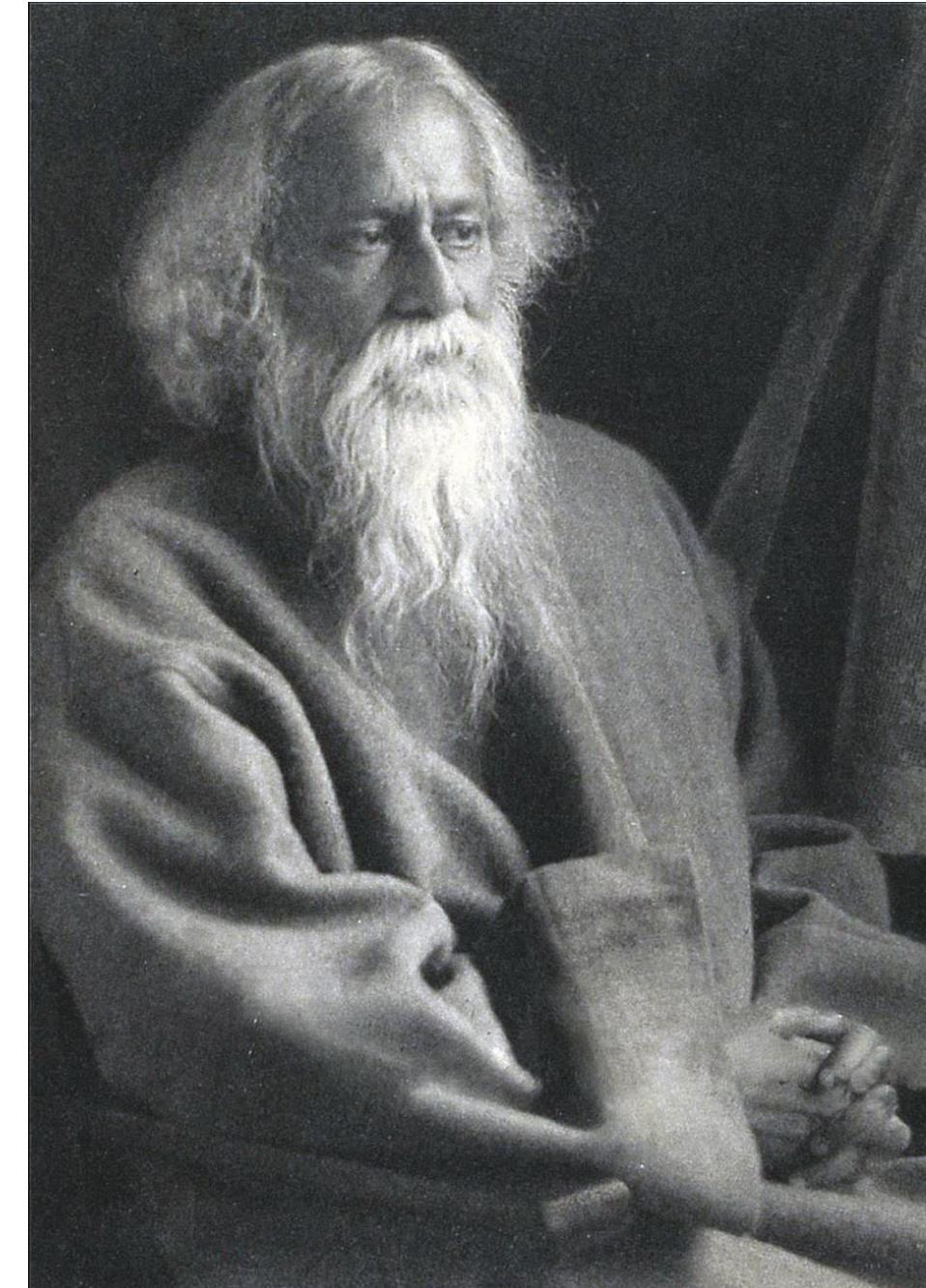
(SONG OFFERINGS)

BY

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

A COLLECTION OF PROSE TRANSLATIONS
MADE BY THE AUTHOR FROM
THE ORIGINAL BENGALI

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
W. B. YEATS



Classic and Canon

- What makes a classic a classic?
- Is it its internal qualities or are we trained to consider them thus?
- The written text, as a manifestation of culture, is embedded in social and historical processes.
- The place of “classics” is established in the context and values of a particular age.
- Nothing is above the scholar’s critical lens. Everything must be subjected to the same scrutiny.

What makes a classic a classic?

- Representation
- Language
- Context of contemporary production, consumption, circulation, distribution
- Example: ancient Greek plays



Pronomos Vase (c. 400 BCE)
Museo Archeologico Nazionale di
Napoli

What makes a classic a classic?

- Status of drama in Shakespeare's time



Canon

- How is a canon formed?
 - English literature departments and the colonial project
- Literature as a field (discipline/domain) of study is created to execute the ends of the colonial project

Macaulay's Minute on Education (1835)

"I have no knowledge of either Sanscrit or Arabic. But I have done what I could to form a correct estimate of their value. I have read translations of the most celebrated Arabic and Sanscrit works. I have conversed, both here and at home, with men distinguished by their proficiency in the Eastern tongues. I am quite ready to take the oriental learning at the valuation of the orientalists themselves. I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia. The intrinsic superiority of the Western literature is indeed fully admitted by those members of the committee who support the oriental plan of education."

"How then stands the case? We have to educate a people who cannot at present be educated by means of their mother-tongue. We must teach them some foreign language. The claims of our own language it is hardly necessary to recapitulate. It stands pre-eminent even among the languages of the West. It abounds with works of imagination not inferior to the noblest which Greece has bequeathed to us, -- with models of every species of eloquence, -- with historical composition, which, considered merely as narratives, have seldom been surpassed, and which, considered as vehicles of ethical and political instruction, have never been equaled -- with just and lively representations of human life and human nature, -- with the most profound speculations on metaphysics, morals, government, jurisprudence, trade, -- with full and correct information respecting every experimental science which tends to preserve the health, to increase the comfort, or to expand the intellect of man ..."

“... Whoever knows that language has ready access to all the vast intellectual wealth which all the wisest nations of the earth have created and hoarded in the course of ninety generations. It may safely be said that the literature now extant in that language is of greater value than all the literature which three hundred years ago was extant in all the languages of the world together. Nor is this all. In India, English is the language spoken by the ruling class. It is spoken by the higher class of natives at the seats of Government. It is likely to become the language of commerce throughout the seas of the East. It is the language of two great European communities which are rising, the one in the south of Africa, the other in Australia, -- communities which are every year becoming more important and more closely connected with our Indian empire. Whether we look at the intrinsic value of our literature, or at the particular situation of this country, we shall see the strongest reason to think that, of all foreign tongues, the English tongue is that which would be the most useful to our native subjects.”

“[I]t is impossible for us, with our limited means, to attempt to educate the body of the people. We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern, -- a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect.”

English Literature in India

- Departments of English Literature were established in India by the British
- Western creative texts serve to endorse, legitimize, and strengthen colonial rule (Shakespeare, the Romantic poets, Yeats, Kipling, Verne)

Suggested Reading: Gauri Viswanathan, *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (1990)

Historical Context

- Indian Independence Struggle: Dadabhai Naoroji, formation of the Indian National Congress (1885)
- Several moves and capitulations by the Crown, small political concessions
- Demand for Home Rule (1916-1918)
- Freedom and its actors are constructed in the image of the texts and contexts of Europe
- Ideals of liberty, equality, fraternity

An Argument for Independence

- Indian men who are highly educated and well-trained in the European context
- Searching for great Indian texts to defeat the self-serving narrative of the British
- How to Build a Canon:
 - what we understand today as literature
 - what we understand today to be middle-class values
- Literacy becomes a mark of this value-system and acquires moral status, respectability
- But writing/reading is not the only medium for literary knowledge and culture
- “Other” forms of literature and education anchored in the oral and the performative



Guernica (1955), tapestry based on Pablo Picasso's Guernica (1937) by Jacqueline de la Baume Dürrbach, René Dürrbach

Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?

- Picasso's *Guernica* had to be covered because it reveals the truth of war, an inconvenient fact on the eve of the Iraq War (2003).
- Culture can be dangerous because it speaks truth to power.
- In order to be able to understand the full implications and significance of culture, we need to examine it using an interdisciplinary lens, in its material context.

“—Try to be one of us, repeated Davin. In your heart you are an Irishman but your pride is too powerful.

—My ancestors threw off their language and took another, Stephen said. They allowed a handful of foreigners to subject them. Do you fancy I am going to pay in my own life and person debts they made? What for?

—For our freedom, said Davin.

—No honourable and sincere man, said Stephen, has given up to you his life and his youth and his affections from the days of Tone to those of Parnell but you sold him to the enemy or failed him in need or reviled him and left him for another. And you invite me to be one of you. I'd see you damned first.

—They died for their ideals, Stevie, said Davin. Our day will come yet, believe me.

Stephen, following his own thought, was silent for an instant.

—The soul is born, he said vaguely, first in those moments I told you of. It has a slow and dark birth, more mysterious than the birth of the body. When the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets.

Davin knocked the ashes from his pipe.

—Too deep for me, Stevie, he said. But a man's country comes first. Ireland first, Stevie. You can be a poet or mystic after.

—Do you know what Ireland is? asked Stephen with cold violence. Ireland is the old sow that eats her farrow."

James Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916)

***“Why, you know Sir Thomas’s means will be rather
straitened, if the Antigua estate is to make such poor
returns!”***

- Jane Austen, Mansfield Park (1814)



COMPARATIVE INDIAN LITERATURE

Lecture 4

Review

- What are classics and canons?
- The construction of the canon of literature in India



Reading 2

“Saving the Life that is
Your Own:
The Importance of
Models in the Artist’s Life”
(1983)



WHAT IS COMPARATIVE LITERATURE?

Where is Waris Shah?

“When a daughter of the fabled Punjab wept
he gave tongue to her silent grief.
Today a million daughters weep
but where is Waris Shah
to give voice to their woes ?
Arise, O friend of the distressed!
See the plight of your Punjab.
Corpses lie strewn in the pastures
and the Chenab has turned crimson.”



Where is Waris Shah?

“Where shall we seek another Waris Shah ?
Today I implore Waris Shah
to speak up from his grave
and turn over a page of the Book of Love.”

Waris Shah as metonym for Punjabis





Arif Rahman Chughtai, Chughtai Museum, Lahore

Who is Waris Shah?

- “Shabih-e-Musannif Waris Shah” – “Portrait of the Writer Waris Shah”
- 1722-1798, Sufi poet, considered first contemporary Punjabi poet
- Composed *Heer Ranjha*, a tragic romance
- Sufi poetry:
 - Allegorical: love that transcends everything, earthly love and divine love
 - Social critique: Heer and Ranjha’s love across caste and class as a challenge to social hierarchy and order, ubiquitous symbol of love across all bounds.
- Shared, common heritage of Punjab; impact on Punjabi; documentation of Punjabi culture and society

What is Comparative Literature?

“Everywhere there is connection, everywhere there is illustration. No single event, no single literature is adequately comprehended except in relation to other events, to other literatures.”

- Matthew Arnold, 1857

- Scholars who study CompLit do not always start with it. Instead, they come to it wanting to escape the constraints of a single subject area (Bassnett 1).
- Sometimes scholars are intrigued by what appear to be similarities between texts or authors from different cultural contexts.

Is Comparative Literature just good old common sense, facilitated by the easy availability and exchange of books through international marketing and publicity, the availability of translations, the internet?

- An extremely fraught discipline/“The Crisis of Comparative Literature”
 - What is the object of study in comparative literature?
 - How can comparison be the object of anything?
 - If individual literatures have a canon, what might a comparative canon be?
 - How does the comparatist select what to compare?
 - Is comparative literature a discipline?
 - Or is it simply a field of study? (Bassnett 2)

Various Theories and Definitions

1. There is a **concrete body of literature** whose study should be termed “Comparative Literature” (19th cent. French scholars)
2. Some scholars have thought that it involves the **study of more than one literature**, maybe borrowing from scientific methodological process, “in which comparing (or contrasting) served as a means of confirming a hypothesis” (Bassnett 12).
 - Study of development and mutations of themes and literary ideas across literatures – “no study more arid” (Croce, qtd in Bassnett 2)

“the comparative history of literature is history understood in its true sense as a complete explanation of the literary work, encompassed in all its relationships, disposed in the composite whole of universal literary history (where else could it ever be placed?), seen in those connections and preparations that are its raison d’être” (qtd in Bassnett 3; emphasis added).

Various Theories and Definitions

- **Study of influence** of one culture over another, as evinced from literary texts (themes, characters, ideas, language): Byron (1819) and Philaréte Chasles (1835):
 - **Influence as borrowing** – “international literary harmony” (13) → specializations that others benefit from
 - **Influence as appropriation/theft** → relationship between national identity and cultural inheritance
- **Linguistic proficiency** important for Comparative Literature, which “asks for a widening of perspectives, a suppression of local and provincial sentiments, not easy to achieve” (qtd in Bassnett 4): René Wellek (1903-1995) and Austin Warren (1899-1986) in *Theory of Literature* (1949).
- African, Caribbean, and Asian scholars have **criticized the refusal of western academia** to accept implications of *their* work and methods. – “alternate schools of thought” (Bassnett 6-7)
 - Nation (nationhood → national literature) as singular; civilization (“India” → South Asian literature?) as plural (“common civilizational ethos” (256)).

Various Theories and Definitions

3. Is Comparative Literature actually Translation Studies or Cultural Studies? Why does Comparative Literature treat these as sub-disciplines? Is it, in fact, a sub-discipline of Translation Studies?

- Josef Jungmann (1840s; Czech National Revival): role of language and translation in influence → origin less important than what happens in process of translation → “enhancement,” “extending range of the language and of the emergent literature” (14)

Various Theories and Definitions

- “Literature is one; as art and humanity are one” (Wellek, qtd in Bassnett 4).
- Comparative Literature “represents more than an academic discipline. It is an overall view of literature, of the world of letters, a humanistic ecology, a literary Weltanschauung, a vision of the cultural universe, inclusive and comprehensive” (François Jost, qtd in Bassnett 4).

World Literature

- Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1835):
“Weltliteratur”
- Translation, circulation, reception, poetry as universal;
national literature out, world literature in.
- Rabindranath Tagore (1905):
“Vishva-sahitya”

“For once we need to see literature as embracing all of humanity ... All I have wanted to say is that just as the world is not merely the sum of your plough field, plus his ploughfield – because to know the world that way is only to know it with a yokel-like parochialism – similarly world literature is not merely the sum of your writings, plus my writing, plus his writings. We generally see literature in this limited, provincial manner. To free oneself of that regional narrowness and resolve to see the universal being in world literature, to apprehend such totality in every writer’s work, and to see its interconnectedness with every man’s attempt at self-expression – that is the objective we need to pledge ourselves to.”

Rabindranath Tagore, translated by Rijula Das and Makarand Paranjape

Comparative Literature in India

- By late 19th cent. in Europe, departments and journals
- Jadavpur University, 1956
- Ganesh Devy (1950 -) (1987):
 - Rise of Comparative Literature in India → rise of modern nationalism → “used to assert national cultural identity” (qtd in Bassnett 5).

“Indian Literature”

- It is **not productive to form a category** called “Indian Literature,” given the sheer diversity, quantity, and variety of our languages and literary traditions. Any such attempt will automatically be exclusionary.
 - We cannot theorize about a unified, coherent Indian literature by constructing its history in terms of “adjacent but discrete” (Ahmad 243) literary histories. **It cannot be the “sum of its regional constituent parts”** (244).
- There have been attempts to address “cross-fertilization” of genres and themes, but only through idealization and the construction of canon.
- **Lots of talk and celebration of “Indian Literature,”** very little real comparative work. Most work in context of discrete, individual literatures.
- Result: **critical lack of information and conceptual knowledge about inter-development of and mutual influences between different language and literary traditions.**
- Today, individual languages are clearly demarcated. So translation is needed to connect linguistic and literary universes. **State of translations between Indian languages is bad.** Individual initiative; little institutionalization.

Towards an “Indian” Literature

- **The challenge:** analytical (not merely chronological) history of Indian and South Asian culture is virtually non-existent.
- **The recommended approach:** studying literature along with anthropology, history, economics etc, i.e. all the Human Sciences, to arrive at a wholesome understanding of “Indian Literature.”

Some Sobering Thoughts

- Canon Construction is also Comparative Literature
- Cultural Colonialism is also Comparative Literature, though never acknowledged as such

End-Semester Exam

Section A: Psychology

Section B: Literature

Section C: All six modules

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