KAREN FOLEY: The Arts Hub was an online interactive event. And you're about to watch a session from that. But I wanted to explain to you how it all worked.

You're about to see the video stream of the studio. But our audience participated online through chat and through interactive widgets. And those ideas were fed through into the studio from the social media desk. Of course because you're watching it on catch up, you won't be able to do those activities. But I do hope that you enjoy the discussion that follows.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Welcome back to the Arts Hub. I hope you've all made it through our break of the livestream and refreshed your screens. As you know, this event is all about the arts, celebrating things that make us really happy as a lot of looking at course choice and various modules, what to study next, et cetera.

So hopefully you're using the watch and engage button, for those of you who have recently joined us. If you aren't, you can come back in and connect using that. And there you'll see lots of interactive tools that you can tell us where you are, what you're studying, how you're feeling, et cetera. And those are very useful to know. And we'll show you those a little bit later in the session as well. And you can also chat and ask any questions.

And in our next session, I'm joined by Alex Tickell. And we're looking at English literature. So we had a lot of creative writing students out there before. This is your chance to ask any questions. Just pop them in the chat box or send them to us at studenthub@open.ac.uk, or #ArtsHub16. Send us your questions and we can get them sorted hopefully.

Well welcome Alex. Thank you for joining me today. So we're here to talk about your module for English literature. And I noticed that you bought a lot of sources of books with you. So I wanted to find out a little bit about that I specialise in contemporary writing, in particular world literature. So can you tell us about that?

ALEX TICKELL: Yes. This level two module, reading and studying literature, really the thing it does very well is to conceptualise and introduce global aspects of English. So one of the interesting aspects of how the course was designed was that we really wanted to include American literature. We wanted to include some literature that dealt with the experience of empire. We wanted to

include some literature in translation.

So we're doing all that. And that relates, to some extent, to what I do, which is much more contemporary work. But yes, that's how my interests feed into this, feed into this module.

KAREN FOLEY: Wonderful, thank you. Well can we talk about the module in terms of how it's structured? What's in it, and what are students going to enjoy most about it?

ALEX TICKELL: A230 is incredibly rich. And really it does give students really excellent introduction to the study of literature. It's structured across 400 years. So it's a huge period of time. And it develops from those rather isolated experiences of literature that students have in level one. So at level one, say, on a module like A100, students are getting some really interesting text. They're studying Renaissance drama with *Doctor Faustus.* They're looking at short stories, global short stories. And they're looking at poetry as well.

So people do get a good introduction at level one. But in level two, the discipline really opens out and they get a sense of the scope and complexity of literary development, and literary criticism as well, ways to read literature, ways to interact with it. The number of genres and types of literature increases as well.

So students get to study everything from early travel narratives, fictionalised travel narratives, to short stories. They get to look at a 19th century novel for the first time, which they don't do.

KAREN FOLEY: So these are some of the sources that you're using are they?

ALEX TICKELL: Exactly, yeah. These are some of the set texts for the course.

KAREN FOLEY: And so would students then buy these in addition to-- because you've got the module books as well.

ALEX TICKELL: That's exactly right. Some of these books-- well, these books are the actual set texts. This one isn't.

KAREN FOLEY: Show them up like this.

ALEX TICKELL: Students should purchase them before the course starts. But there are also, as is fairly usual with Open University modules, there are very well-designed course module books which have readings in them and indicate particular areas of primary text that students might want to focus

on.

KAREN FOLEY: So how is it structured? There are three module books and various sources, and you've mentioned that this spans a period of 400 years. Is it structured temporally then?

ALEX TICKELL: It is. And to some extent, it's structured by theme as well. So what happens is in the first module book, this covers the Renaissance and the long 18th century, and really looks at Renaissance drama, and also the experience of global encounters and travel during this period, during the Restoration period.

So in this module, we're looking at things like, topics like love and death in the Renaissance, really kind of meaty stuff to start off people's interest in the course. And then we move on to some very early examples of the novel and early examples of fictionalised travel writing. So really, the students are covering a huge amount in that first stage. But they're also covering very, very key areas of the development in English literature.

The second module book-- this is the second part of the course-- another two periods for students to cover. This is the romantics and Victorians. This part of the course covers literature that students will already be possibly familiar with. Students will be familiar with Renaissance drama, but in this part of the course, we have romantic poetry-- Wordsworth, Shelley. And then we go on to Victorian literature.

In this part of the course, we also have interesting transitional writers like De Quincey, Thomas De Quincey, who's a kind of commentator on the romantics. And then we have writers like Emily Bronte, who again, very, very familiar to some students. *Wuthering Heights*, a key canonical text, a text of the canon, one of these primary kind of works that people come back to again and again.

And then we have some very interesting late Victorian narratives in this part of the module as well. We have a short work by Robert Louis Stevenson about the South Seas and about empire. And we also have a Conan Doyle detective fiction for this part of the course as well.

So the module doesn't just span or cover works that people might think of as kind of high cultural or very, very difficult or intimidating. There are also things in here like the start of genre fiction, the start of detective narratives, which is fascinating to kind of have those alongside more established works.

KAREN FOLEY: And so many of these are just brilliant reads within their own rights. But of course then you're

combining it with all of these other aspects in terms of looking at history and culture and all the things that I guess are embedding these. OK, and the final one.

ALEX TICKELL: The final one is the 20th century. As you can see here, the cover picture is of immigrants, which is intentional because this part of the course deals with the modernist city. So the modern city as it develops from about 1880, 1890, as a place where people arrive, where people from elsewhere come and generate a new kind of literary form.

So we have people like James Joyce at the start of this module. James Joyce's *Dubliners* is a set text. And Joyce is actually writing about Dublin in that collection of short stories from Europe. He's already left Dublin by that time, but he's kind of using his own recollections of Dublin as a city to think about what Dublin meant for him and possibly why he left, what his reasons were.

Then we have the Harlem Renaissance. We have New York poets. We have African American poets in this section. We have a work by Langston Hughes and Claude McKay. So we have a very, very interesting, fascinating window onto that kind of period of intense creativity in Jazz Age New York in Harlem.

And then we move on, in the last part of this module text, to think about immigration and contemporary literature as a literature which deals with the 20th century as a period of transition and disconnection in a way. So we have a work by Sebald here, *The Emigrants.* And this is a text that deals with the German experience of the postwar period and the idea of reconciling oneself with the loss of a Jewish community in Germany. Similarly, we have other texts in this last section that deal with a kind of postmodern weariness or disillusionment with the city and with the experience of emigration.

KAREN FOLEY: I wonder if that's whetted the appetite-- it certainly whetted my appetite. HJ and Rachel, I know there are questions as well on the social media desk. How it all going? What's everyone saying?

HJ: It's going well. Well, we're discussing lots of different modules because there's so many good ones to study. But Sylvia is particularly interested in this module whether we'll be covering Shakespeare. We've been talking about Shakespeare quite a bit here today, and apparently he is a bit naughty. But yes, do we cover anything about Shakespeare in this material?

ALEX TICKELL: We do. We do cover Shakespeare. We cover *Othello* at the start of this module. And part of

the thematics of love and death in the Renaissance with *The Duchess of Malfi* and *Othello* is that we have a kind of thematic connection running between those two texts. And we're looking at questions of tragedy as generated by love across racial difference or class difference.

So in *The Duchess of Malfi*, the duchess falls in love with her servant, and it leads to a kind of a terrible, terrible sort of response from her brother. And in this text as well, we have that whole theme, that kind of intricate theme of jealousy and deception and a kind of tragic misrecognition of love that we get in *Othello*, which is such a fantastic play.

KAREN FOLEY: Yeah, no absolutely. Richard Brown was here earlier talking about some of Shakespeare's more racy sonnets. I think that's what Sylvia's referring to then as well. But of course I mean *Othello* and a lot of these have massive issues that I think that first, on face value, people don't necessarily get to grips with. So how do they then start unpicking some of these when they're actually studying the module?

ALEX TICKELL: Well on the module, they will be directed towards aspects of these texts by their tutors and in forums and as part of the kind of learning process. And in the assessment, the assessments are very clearly designed so that students start off with particular areas of these texts or particular passages, and then unpack them through looking at a one paragraph or, say, a sonnet embedded in something else, or a certain aspect of the structure of a piece of literature. So that's one way in which students come to grips with this kind of slightly more complex, level two engagement with literary texts and literary forms.

Alongside that, this molecule is designed so that each stage of each period, each historical period, also involves discussion of a critical concept that is key to literary analysis. So in one section it will be the author. In another section it will be the reader. In another section it will be context. And those are all things that students need to kind of start to theorise a little bit more seriously as they go into level two.

KAREN FOLEY: Because you have these themes, and you've mentioned race. But there's also others on there, subjectivity and identity. How do you use those themes then to, I don't know, interrogate these texts?

ALEX TICKELL: Well really we're setting up echoes between different texts. We're looking at comparative historical experiences. We're seeing how forms, such as the novel evolve out of other forms. So say we take one of these texts such as-- this is a really fascinating work that comes in the

first part of the module, Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko.* It's one of the earliest novels, really, although it's actually a fictionalised piece of travel writing.

Aphra Behn was possibly one of the earliest women to earn a living out of writing. And she had a very kind of interesting and changeable life. She travelled to Suriname. And she was a spy for the king in Europe. And she also was a writer.

And this work is a fictionalised account of a slave who was taken from West Africa to the New World, and then enters into a kind of slave-- or leads a slave rebellion. And it's also a love story. It's also a kind of thwarted love story.

But it's a book that speaks directly to the kind of 18th century, the Restoration experience of going to the New World, of exploiting the New World, and also encountering new people in the New World, and the process, the whole process of Atlantic trade and slave trade, which fueled the economy in Europe at that time. So it's saying something about how Europeans looked at Africa and envisaged Africans. And it has an African prince as the kind of main protagonist.

And so it kind of lays the groundwork for then, something later on, such as the New York poems, the Harlem Renaissance poems, say, in this part of the module, where suddenly we're thinking about race in a different context. We're thinking about how the Harlem Renaissance was actually a product of African Americans deciding that other places in America might be really too dangerous for them, and that it would be a much more positive for African American artists and writers who were trying to escape the lynchings in the South and the terrible Jim Crow laws that were going on in other parts of America, and moved to New York where they were in an environment where there was still racism, but there was also a kind of creative energy and a buzz and an ability to express themselves.

So that kind of topic of race and identity, it kind of runs through those different texts, I suppose. And that's one example. But we could pick others. The idea of the romantic poet as a kind of figure that we recognise is very, very central to this module. So the notion we have of what a poet is and what we expect a poet to be, a kind of romantic, solitary figure, maybe a rebel, maybe somebody in tune with their emotions and the countryside or the natural world, that comes out very clearly as a kind of construct in the Romantic period. The Romantic period invents that figure of the poet.

And then we get that kind of developing, and very interestingly, being taken up again in later

works during the 19th century, such as *Wuthering Heights*, where Heathcliff is really a kind of transplanted Romantic figure in a later 19th century novel. He's in a form that is a kind of a realist form that is going to be taken up by people like Dickens and George Eliot later on. But actually at this point, it's still looking back to Byron and the figure of the outsider rebel who is kind of such an attractive figure in that novel, and such a figure of kind of emotional turbulence.

And yet the 19th century novel lives into a different stage and does different things after that. So we see those kind of continuities happening across these texts.

KAREN FOLEY: That all sounds brilliant. I mean, the texts and all the history, absolutely brilliant. I can imagine that would appeal to so many people. But I can't get away from thinking, there's a big pile of books here. And I can split those quite easily into things I would like to read and things I would not like to read. And there is this issue of text. And you've mention that sometimes you will be directed to a certain piece of text, for example. But obviously that text needs to be read in context.

Now what would you say to students who think, oh, I don't really fancy reading this, that, or the other? Where is some of the beauty in reading things like this that are drawing inspiration for another purpose, considering that these are effectively beautiful pieces of writing? Where is the difference in terms of how we're studying them as an artefact and the beauty that they have as a piece of art?

ALEX TICKELL: Yeah, this is something that a lot of students talk about when they first study literature. A common response to studying literary books is to say if we study them too much, we ruin them. We murder to dissect. And actually I think that's a kind of-- that's almost a feeling that comes from your gut in that sometimes, if something strikes you very, very strongly, you don't really want to articulate it, or it's difficult to articulate something if it kind of moves you in a very deep way. It's almost as though by articulating it you're kind of ruining or you're debasing it or something like that.

But actually, I wouldn't be doing this job, and I wouldn't be kind of writing about literature if I didn't think that was slightly false. Because I think if we can put texts in context, if we can learn more about what the author was doing at the time, if we can start to think about literary form, the way in which novels and poems work as constructs in language, and the things that they draw upon, the ideas that they're trying to convey, then that obviously will kind of deepen our

understanding of them. And we can still love them and kind of enjoy them, and we can still kind of step back occasionally and say, oh, I really like that because it moves me and it's fantastic. And you can tell your friends about that part of the book or how great it was.

But you can also have this supplementary knowledge. And you can also kind of think about books in different ways. And you can kind of bring different things to them. So they're not closed things and they're not-- I think books are more resilient than that in a way. They're not such fragile things that you can really damage them by analysing them.

KAREN FOLEY: Wonderful. Well that's such a comprehensive overview of the module in terms of how we're studying it and what we're doing. Thank you Alex for talking us through that.

I wanted to talk a little bit about what inspired you. And I'm just conscious that we've done a lot of that in terms of putting I guess your interests in terms of how you put this into the module. And I wanted to end by asking you, what the best thing really about English literature is for you?

ALEX TICKELL: Two things I think. First of all, if you study-- if you're interested in English literature and you keep a kind of interest in fiction and forms of nonfiction and writing with you, then you are kind of, in a sense, you are never alone, because you are always able to be in a dialogue with somebody else from another period in time or another place. And you are able to access this incredible range of different experiences, and this incredible variety of ways of looking at the world. So that's what creative writing literature does. It tries to show you the world as much as it tells you about the world.

And for me, because I specialise in South Asian postcolonial literature and colonial history and African literature, I suppose the thing that literature has given me is a kind of whole window onto different cultures beyond Europe. And those cultures have their own languages and their own literatures, but the English novel is such a kind of expansive and colonising form in a way through its history and through its kind of value as a kind of global piece, a lingua franca kind of text, that it's able to really give us a very, very international sense of different cultures, different ways of life.

KAREN FOLEY: Wonderful, thank you very much Alex for talking us through that. We now are going to have two videos in our short break, the first of which is studying English literature. And the second is on women's writers.

So we will be back very soon. And I will then be talking about early modern Europe with Gemma and Debbie from the history department. So I'll see you very soon.

[MUSIC PLAYING]