

Poetry
Professor. S. P. Dhanavel
Department of Humanities and Social Science,
Indian Institute of Technology, Madras
Lecture No. 12
Sir Philip Sidney

(Refer Slide Time: 0:15)

Historical Context



- His father Henry Sidney, Lord Deputy of Ireland three times, controlled Ireland successfully
- Sidney opposed Queen Elizabeth's French marriage
- Protestants supported the Dutch independence
- Led by Sidney's uncle Robert Dudley, the Earl of Leicester
- Sidney participated in the war against the Spanish in the Battle of Zutphen and was wounded
- He died on 17th October 1586 in the Netherlands
- His death and burial became a historical event



In this lecture, we will discuss Sir Philip Sidney, the Elizabethan sonneteer, who brought about dramatic change in the poetic scene. He was born in 1554 and died in 1586 in a battlefield. First, we will see the historical context and the literary context. Philip Sidney is considered to be the ideal Renaissance man, so we will see some of the qualities which made him the ideal Renaissance man. Sidney has written a number of other poems, but we will focus on “Astrophel and Stella,” the sonnet sequence which was published after his death.

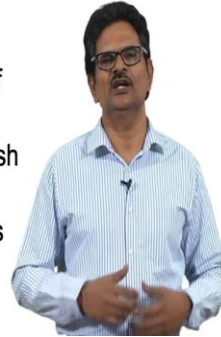
We will also select only two sonnets, Sonnet number 1 and 90. The titles are “Loving in truth, and fain in verse my Love to Show,” “Stella, think not that I by verse seek fame.” We will analyse these two poems and then show you some references.

(Refer Slide Time: 1:26)

Historical Context



- His father Henry Sidney, Lord Deputy of Ireland three times, controlled Ireland successfully
- Sidney opposed Queen Elizabeth's French marriage
- Protestants supported the Dutch independence
- Led by Sidney's uncle Robert Dudley, the Earl of Leicester
- Sidney participated in the war against the Spanish in the Battle of Zutphen and was wounded
- He died on 17th October 1586 in the Netherlands
- His death and burial became a historical event



What was a kind of historical context in which Philip Sidney lived and wrote his poems? Sidney's father, Henry Sidney, was the lord deputy of Ireland three times. He was able to control Ireland successfully and please the queen. At this time, Phillip Sidney, in his youthful enthusiasm for the Protestant cause, opposed the possible marriage between Queen Elizabeth and the French king. The king was considered to have Catholic leanings.

As a Protestant England of the time, Sidney also supported the Dutch independence led by his uncle, Robert Dudley, the earl of Leicester. The battle was fought. Sidney also participated in the war against the Spanish in the Battle of Zutphen, and in this battle he was wounded and after a few days, he died on 17th October 1586 in the Netherlands. His death and burial became a historical event. There are anecdotes about Sidney's father in law spending a lot of money on that day.

(Refer Slide Time: 2:56)

Literary Context

- Philip, Robert, and Mary Sidney: poets
- The Sidney Circle included Spenser, Raleigh, Greville, Daniel, Drayton
- **Mary Sidney** - Center of the Sidney circle at her Wilmot House
- A poet, translator, collaborator
- A great patron of poets
- Enabled publications of Philip's writings
- A strong Protestant voice
- George Puttenham's *The Art of English Poetry* (1589)



The literary context is also very interesting for us to see: Philip Sidney, Robert Sidney and Mary Sidney. They were all siblings and poets. In fact, there was a circle called “The Sidney Circle” which included Spenser, Raleigh, Greville, Daniel, Drayton. We will see the poems of Spenser, Daniel and Drayton in our course. Mary Sidney, the sister of Sidney, was the centre of the Sidney circle at her Wilmot House. She herself was a poet, translator and collaborator. She was a great patron of poets.

She enabled publications of many other writings of Philip Sidney after his death. And this group, particularly Mary Sidney, gave expression to this protestant voice, which was strong at that time. There was also an understanding of English poetry. What was it and where was it leading to? A critic like George Puttenham wrote this book, “The Art of English Poetry” and published it during this time.

(Refer Slide Time: 4:35)

The Renaissance Man



- Sir Philip Sidney – a unique personality
- The Renaissance Man/ The Universal Man
Leon Battista Alberti (1404–1472)
“A man can do all things if he will.”
- A scholar, a soldier, a poet, a courtier, a patron
- Sidney died a martyr's death in the battlefield.
- 200 elegies were written on his death



There is no renaissance without the Renaissance Man, and there is no Renaissance man without Sir Philip Sidney. He was a unique personality. This idea of the whole Renaissance man or the universal man was conceived, thought about, gave expression to by Leon Battista Alberti in one phrase: “A man can do all things if he will.” Let me repeat. A man can do all things, if he will. That focus on will, human will, to operate, to work, to achieve, to achieve perfection, to achieve mastery in literature, in culture, in war, in everything, in technology, science, everything that was happening at that time, unbounded energy of man is possible to explore and realize, if only the human being could emphasize and use his or her will.

The man or woman who could use the willpower could express himself or herself in so many ways as a scholar, as a soldier, as a poet, as a courtier, as a patron in so many different ways. All these facets can be found in Sir Philip Sidney. He died a martyr's death in the battlefield. Almost 200 elegies were written on his death. Unimaginable for us today.

(Refer Slide Time: 6:21)

Sidney: An Apology for poetry



- Sidney's *An Apology for poetry* (1595)
- The foremost of all arts
- Poetry was a "passport" to all writers, including philosophers and historiographers
- All of them had "some feeling of poetry"
 - "the great communicator"
 - "the encourager of learning"
- Essential to join the exclusive club of "learned nations"



Not only did Sidney write poems, he also defended poetry in an essay. That is called "The Defence of Poetry." This was also published after his death only. According to Sidney, "poetry is a foremost of all arts." He considered poetry to be a passport to all writers, including philosophers, and historiographers. All other writers whoever have gone before, all of them, according to Sidney, had some feeling of poetry. In fact, all of them wrote poetry. In some way or the other.

For us, what is interesting about Sidney's Defence of Poetry is, that poetry could be the great communicator. And also, poetry could be the encourager of learning. Those of us, who are interested in this communicative aspect of poetry should pay attention to this and read the defence of poetry again and draw some lessons, how we could help ourselves and others to develop communication skills and become a great communicator.

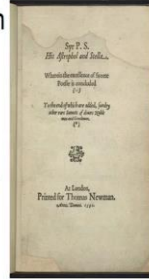
Further, Sidney said it was essential to join the exclusive club of learned Nations. Without poetry, there is no membership in the Club of Learned Nations. Today, we talk about United Nations. We want to become a member of United Nations or certain exclusive clubs. There are certain qualifications. And in the context of Sidney's writing or Sidney's day to join the Club of Learned nations, that nation must produce poetry and that nation must respect poets and promote poetry.

(Refer Slide Time: 8:21)

Astrophel and Stella (1591)



- The first sonnet sequence in English
- Published posthumously in 1591
- Circulated in manuscript among Sidney's friends
- Widely popular and instrumental for the sonnet sequence
- 108 sonnets and 11 songs
 - Astrophil (star lover): Sidney
 - Stella (star): Lady Penelope Rich
 - Greek Astrophel and Latin Stella



Let us see what this Astrophel and Stella is. This was published in 1591 after Sidney's death. It is the first sonnet sequence in English. Before its publication, it was circulated in manuscript form among Sidney's own friends. It was widely popular among the poets of Elizabethan period, and it was instrumental for coming out with this great event in Elizabethan poetry called the sonnet sequence. Sidney wrote 108 Sonnets and 11 songs, and these were put together in this volume Astrophel and Stella.

Astrophel is the star lover, that is a meaning, actually. This E-L and I-L, they are used interchangeably that is Sidney. Stella, who is the beloved addressed in the poem is a star. And a historical person is referred to in this context, that is, Lady Penelope Rich. In fact, the Sidney family and Penelope family, they wanted to arrange for the marriage of Sidney and Penelope, but somehow it did not materialize. But then Sidney felt some love for this lady though he could not marry her, he wrote these poems, sonnets expressing his love for this lady Penelope, who married somebody else.

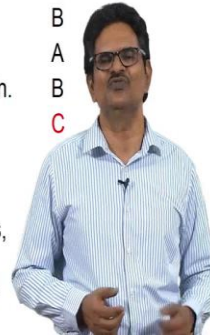
Here, we find something interesting, two languages are brought together in the name itself. Astrophel is Greek, Stella is Latin. These two languages the poet was attempting to bring together, but they remain separate.

(Refer Slide Time: 10:27)

Sonnet 1



Loving in truth, and fain in verse my love to show, A
That she dear she might take some pleasure of my pain, B
Pleasure might cause her read, reading might make her know, A
Knowledge might pity win, and pity grace obtain, B
5. I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe: A
Studying inventions fine, her wits to entertain, B
Oft turning others' leaves, to see if thence would flow A
Some fresh and fruitful showers upon my sunburned brain. B
But words came halting forth, wanting invention's stay; C
10. Invention, Nature's child, fled stepdame Study's blows;
And others' feet still seemed but strangers in my way.
Thus, great with child to speak, and helpless in my throes,
Biting my truant pen, beating myself for spite:
"Fool," said my Muse to me, "look in thy heart, and write."



Let us see, Sonnet 1 now.

Loving in truth, and fain in verse my love to show, A
That she dear she might take some pleasure of my pain, B
Pleasure might cause her read, reading might make her know, A
Knowledge might be pity win, and pity grace obtain, B
5. I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe: A
Studying Inventions fine, her wits to entertain, B
Oft turning others leaves, to see if thence would flow, A
Some fresh and fruitful showers upon my sunburned brain. B
But words came halting forth, wanting invention's stay; C
10. Invention, Nature's child, fled stepdame Study's blows; D
And others' feet still seemed but strangers in my way. C

Thus, great with child to speak, and helpless in my throes, D
 Biting my truant pen, beating myself for spite: E
 “Fool,” said my Muse to me, “look in thy heart, and write.” E

The rhyme scheme we have given here. AB, AB, AB, AB, CD, CD and EE. This is not completely Petrarchan; this is not completely Shakespearean; every poet of that day, they try to bring about some kind of variation in their own form.

(Refer Slide Time: 11:45)

Thematic Contrast



- The first sonnet in *Astrophil and Stella*
- Love and Death
- Invention and Study
- Writing and Reading
- Loving in truth and expressing in poetry
- Expression of pain for the pleasure of the beloved
- Unsuccessful attempt at reading other poets and techniques for writing poetry and expression of love
- Laborious like a woman with a childbirth and Muse's suggestion to look into the speaker's heart



When we look into their dramatic contrast in this poem, in the first sonnet in *Astrophel and Stella*, we see love on one hand, death on another. We also see invention, that is, originality and study that is imitation. Poets write on their own from their own imagination, that is invention; study, that is poet study the poets of others and then borrow ideas or images from others and write poetry. Particularly sonnet is a kind of poem that encouraged imitation of Petrarch and other poets. In this poem also, we have a contrast between writing and reading. The poet writes, the lady love reads, and there is a very interesting relationship between reading and writing. Writing is written for the sake of reading. And when read, some kind of expectation is there, some recognition, some appreciation is also there, that is brought out well in this poem. Loving in truth and expressing in poetry is what the poet does, but then the poet also feels some pain.

And he does not mind the pain that he may experience for the pleasure of the beloved. The poet's attempt is unsuccessful in reading other poets. He is not able to borrow ideas from others for writing poetry to express his love.

And what he experiences is suffering like a woman giving birth to a child. This pain of childbirth, he feels because he is not able to find the right expression to admire, to appreciate the beauty of the lady. And when the lady, that is, the muse finds him suffering like this, the Muse tells him, suggest to him, look into your heart and write, then you will be able to write good poetry or great poetry.

(Refer Slide Time: 13:56)

Poetic Devices

- **Metaphor:** Painting with words
- **Synecdoche:** Turning other's leaves
- **Metaphor:** flow, shower, Nature's child
- **Personification:** Nature and Study
- **Pun:** feet – poetic feet and poet's feet
- **Metaphor:** Poet-lover – a pregnant woman
- **Metaphor/Personification:** Truant pen
- Predominantly metaphorical; Rich in images
- **Alliteration:** fresh and fruitful;
still seemed but strangers



We have a number of poetic devices used by the poet in this sonnet. It starts from metaphor. We have arranged them in that particular order: Painting with words. Synecdoche: turning others' leaves. That is the leaves of pages manuscript to read the poems of others. Metaphor: flow, shower, Nature's child. Personification: nature, invention, study and all that. They are personified. Pun we have in feet; 'feet' is, the feet of others, other poets, the feet of writing that is poetry.

Metaphor is also found in the connection between poet lover, comparing himself with a pregnant woman giving birth to a child with great difficulty. We also have metaphor and personification combined in truant pen. Pen, that does not want to write. That has a lot of difficulties. The whole

poem is predominantly metaphorical. It is rich in images. And it also has alliteration, fresh and fruitful; still seemed but strangers.

(Refer Slide Time: 15:08)

Structure, Rhyme, Meter



Rhyme: abab abab cdcd ee

Lines: 6 feet

Meter: **iambic hexameter [Alexandrine]**

Loving | in | truth, | and | fain | in | verse | my | love | to | show, |
That | she | dear | she | might | take | some | pleasure | of | my | pain, |



The meter of this poem is very interesting to see. It is called iambic hexameter. When we look into the structure rhyme and meter of this poem, we find that the rhyme scheme is like this: AB, AB, AB, AB, CD, CD and EE. There are 6 feet in each line. So, every line has 6 feet. And so, the meter of this poem is called Iambic Hexameter. It has a special name called Alexandrine. And we have indicated the 6 feet through a line in between words:

Loving | in | truth, | and | fain | in | verse | my | love | to | show |

That | she | dear | she | might | take | some | pleasure | of | my | pain |

(Refer Slide Time: 16:00)

Overall Impression



- The speaker genuinely loves the lady he writes about.
- He converts the pain of his love into poetry so that she would respond to his love.
- She may read his poem and appreciate his love and writing and thus give her attention to him.
- A courtier admires the beauty of his lady to receive her attention. He does this by imitation of other writers.
- The speaker regrets his mistake of imitation.
- The lady tells him to look into his heart and write.
- His alexandrine lines indicate that he writes originally.



The overall impression that we have from this poem is, that the speaker genuinely loves the lady he writes about. He converts the pain of his love into poetry, so that, she would respond to his love by reading his poem. She may read his poem and also appreciate his love and writing. And thus, give her attention to him in the course of time. Normally a courtier admires the beauty of his lady love to receive her attention. He does this by imitating other writers; this speaker regrets the mistake of his own failed imitation. At this time, the lady, that is a muse tells him, ‘look into your heart and write.’

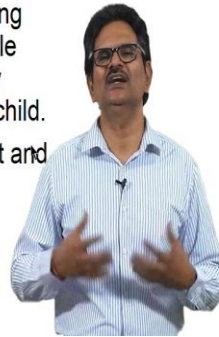
So, the last lines that we have, the Alexandrine lines indicate that he, that is, Sidney writes originally. Mostly sonnets are written in 5 feet. And here this usage of Alexandrine, especially is something special to indicate his own originality.

(Refer Slide Time: 17:15)

Critical Approaches



- A rhetorical critique of rhetorical devices
- What is the connection between seduction of women and rhetorical language?
- Construction of subjectivities in terms of mothering
Appropriating the labor pain of a mother by a male writer to express his love for a woman to actually suffer the throes when she would give birth to a child.
- How does language construct the self of the poet and the beloved?



A few ideas can be thought about when it comes to approaching this poem. This is a poem about writing a poem by reading other poets or writing from his own heart. Therefore, some readers have found this to be a rhetorical critique of rhetorical devices. We can ask questions like, what is the connection between seduction of women and rhetorical language? Any sonnet dealing with love attempts to get the attention of the lady, that means, tries to get the hand of the lady. And so, some persuasive effort is there. To persuade the lady, the writer normally uses rhetorical language normally borrowed from classical poets.

By using the rhetorical language, the poets attempt at construction of subjectivities in terms of mothering. In this case, Sidney appropriates a labour pain of your mother by a male writer. That is Sidney to express his love for a woman to actually suffer the throes when she would give birth to a child. It is a very interesting case of pain: mothering, writing poetry. That is the kind of connection we find in this poem. We can also ask this question how does language construct the self of the poet and the beloved? That is, the words, sentence structures with the metaphorical images or rhetorical devices. How do all these go into building up the self of the poet and also the self of the beloved? for them to come together or to celebrate their love for each other

(Refer Slide Time: 19:10)

Sonnet 90

Stella, think not that I by verse seek fame, A
Who seek, who hope, who love, who live but thee; B
Thine eyes my pride, thy lips my history; B
If thou praise not, all other praise is shame. A
5. Nor so ambitious am I, as to frame A
A nest for my young praise in laurel tree: B
In truth I swear, I wish not there should be B
Graved in mine epitaph a Poet's name: A
Nay if I would, could I just title make, C
10. That any laud to me thereof should grow, D
Without my plumes from others' wings I take. C
For nothing from my wit or will doth flow, D
Since all my words thy beauty doth endite, E
And love doth hold my hand, and makes me write. E



Here is the second sonnet now, Sonnet 90. It goes like this:

“Stella, think not that I by verse seek fame, A
Who seek, who hope, who love, who live but thee, B
Thine eyes my pride, thy lips my history; B
If thou praise not, all other praise is shame. A
5. Nor so ambitious am I, as to frame A
A nest for my young praise in laurel tree: B
In truth I swear, I wish not there should be B
Graved in mine epitaph a Poet's name: A
Nay if I would, could I just title make, C
10. That any laud to me thereof should grow, D
Without my plumes from others' wings I take. C

For nothing from my wit or will doth flow,	D
Since all my words thy beauty doth endite,	E
And love doth hold my hand, and makes me write.	E

The rhyme scheme also is given here AB, BA, AB, BA, CD, DC, DE, E. From the first poem we can see some variation in this. That is how poets emphasize their originality.

(Refer Slide Time: 20:23)

Thematic Development and Contrast



- **Beginning:** What for does the poet write his verse?
Not for fame but for praise from his lady
- **Middle:** What kind of person is the poet?
Not ambitious to get an epitaph in his grave
- **Problem:** No borrowing from other poets
Nothing original from the poet
- **End/Resolution:** Who/ what writes the poem?
Love/Stella writes the poem with his hand.
- **Contrast:** Seek praise - give praise/ laud-endite
- **Contrast:** Imitate and create/ write and read



Let us look into the thematic development by contrast. How does a poem begin? At the beginning, we have a question like this to think about: what for does the poet write his verse? He gives answer: not for fame, but for praise from his lady love. He wants recognition from his lady love. And in the middle, how does the poem progress? He describes himself what kind of person is a poet or what kind of poet is he? That is the question that we have. He gives us the answer, not an ambitious poet to get an epitaph in his grave. He does not want to call himself a poet when he dies without any kind of recognition from his lady. What is a problem that the poet goes through? He is not able to borrow from other poets. He does not get anything original from other poets. He does not get anything original from himself. Then how does he write his poem? How does the poem resolve? Then, who writes a poem? or what writes a poem? is the question that we have. The answer is, it is love, the emotion of love that writes a poem or Stella, who embodies

that love, actually felt by the poet for her which writes a poem with the poet's hand or the speaker's hand. Stella, the muse writes sonnet with the hand of the speaker, that is the poet.

So, we have the contrast between seeking praise and giving praise. This seeking praise and giving praise: these two are closely interconnected with a poet writing for some kind of laurel from others. This endite is actually about writing. We write and get laurels from the society. We also have the contrast between imitation and creation; original writing and imitated writing. We also have the contrast between writing and reading.

(Refer Slide Time: 22:35)

Structure, Rhyme and Rhythm



Rhyme: abba abba cdc dee

Rhythm: Caesura, end stop, enjambment

1. Stella, think not that I by verse seek fame,
2. Who seek, who hope, who love, who live but thee;
3. Thine eyes my pride, thy lips my history;
4. If thou praise not, all other praise is shame.
5. Nor so ambitious am I, as to frame
6. A nest for my young praise in laurel tree:



Let us examine the structure, rhyme and rhythm in this poem. The rhyme scheme goes like this: abba abba cdc and dee. That tells us that we have the octave and the sestet. The rhythm is indicated by the caesura, the end stop, and enjambment in the lines that we have here for you.

1. “Stella, think not that I by verse seek fame,”
2. Who seek, who hope, who love, who live but thee:
3. Thine eyes my pride, thy lips my history;
4. If thou praise not, all other praise is shame.
5. Nor so ambitious am I, as to frame

6. A nest for my young praise in laurel tree.

You can see the kind of commas after Stella, comma after fame, seek fame, and then the emphasis on who, who, who, who and variation like this we have all these lines. We have this run on line in as to fame your nest for my young praise in Laurel Tree. The poet does not himself want to have any fame without any recognition from Stella.

(Refer Slide Time: 24:03)

Overall Impression

- The speaker writes his poem about the beauty of the lady not from his own talent or by study of other poets but from the inspiration of his lady love.
- Though he writes the poem, he is not the author as Stella dictates the poem.
- He does not appreciate or laurel from others or even the name of poet on his grave.
- He wants his love to admire his poetry as it is an admiration of her beauty.
- The speaker attempts collapse the poet and the muse into his writing to suggest immortality for both from each other.



Let us look into some of the poetic devices used by the poet. We find alliteration in Stella and seek; who love, who live. We find assonance in a variety of words like this: I, by: thine eyes my pride; would, could. The device of Hyperbaton, that is inversion is found in this line: think not that I by verse seek fame. By verse, can come at the end normally. We have a number of repetitions like seek is repeated twice, who is repeated 4 times, praise is repeated 3 times. Probably these seeking/ asking this question of who praising the result of praise, the source of praise, the purpose of praise may all come together to highlight the repetition of these words.

We have a beautiful metaphor in the context of framing a nest for my young praise in Laurel Tree. The young poet may get praises from others. But he does not care for such praises from others. He can get praises from others by borrowing the plumes and wings of other poets. He does not want to rest on the laurels of other poets. We also find one understatement in litotes: For nothing from my wit or will doth flow.

Next, we have hyperbole. That is exaggeration. It is the poet who writes, you know. But the poet exaggerates that, it is Stella who takes the pen from the hand of the poet and writes. We have a pun on endite or indict, it means to compose or to inscribe and also to accuse. So, these different meanings are brought into play in this pun with one word indict. On the whole, we find the speaker writes his poem about the beauty of the lady, not from his own talent or by the study of other poets, but from the inspiration of his lady love.

Though he writes a poem, he is not the author as Stella dictates a poem. He does not receive appreciation from others or he does not care for a name at the end of his life in his grave. He wants to have love and admiration from his lady love for his poetry. The Speaker attempts to collapse the poet and the muse into his writing to suggest immortality for both the poet and the Muse, that is his lady love from each other for each other.

(Refer Slide Time: 27:08)

Critical Approaches

- The poem is as much about love as it is about the purpose and process of writing the poem.
- It generates a number of questions about authorship and origin of ideas for original poetry.
- Who is the author?
- What is the author?
- What are the roles of language and poetic tradition?
- How does imagination operate?
- How is creativity a paradoxical process imagining and writing collaboratively?
- Is all writing then collaborative?



We can think about approaching the poem with some critical questions. It is a poem about love. It is also a poem about the purpose and process of writing the poem. Hence, it generates a number of questions about authorship and origin of ideas for original poetry. The questions are who is the author? Or what is the author? What are the roles of language and poetic tradition? How does actually imagination operate? How is creativity a paradoxical process of imagining and writing collaboratively? Then it leads us to another question is all writing, then collaborative writing. We have writers coming together and writing that is collaborative writing. But in this

case, the muse also can collaborate with the poet to write poetry. That is something very interesting to think about.

(Refer Slide Time: 28:15)

Summary



- Historical Context: active political family
- Literary Context: active literary family
- The Renaissance Man: exemplary representative
- *Astrophel and Stella* (1591): first sonnet sequence
 - 1: "Loving in truth, and fain in verse my love to show"
Writing and reading for & by the beloved
 - 90: "Stella, think not that I by verse seek fame"
Authorship and Recognition
- Analysis



In all, we have seen Sir Philip Sidney. In this lecture, we looked into the active political family in the context of Sidney's own life. We found an active literary family in the literary context. We noticed that Sidney is an exemplary representative of the Renaissance man. One sample of his life is this lover and this lover role is known to us through his sonnet sequence *Astrophel and Stella*. It is the first sonnet sequence in English poetry.

We examine two poems: "Loving in truth, and fain in verse my love to show." This poem is about writing and also reading for and by the beloved. The second poem is "Stella, think not that I by verse seek fame." This poem also deals with authorship and the notion of recognition for authorship. The analysis of these two poems convey a dimension of Elizabethan poetry through Philip Sidney.

(Refer Slide Time: 29:40)

References



- Alexander, G. 2017. "Loving and Reading in Sidney," *Studies in Philology*, 114 (1): 39-66.
- Brodwin, L. L. 1969. "The Structure of Sidney's 'Astrophel and Stella,'" *Modern Philology*, 67(1): 25-40.
- Döring, T. 2013. "Beginning to Spell: Sidney's Astrophil and Stella and the Crux of Protestant Poetics," *Poetica*, 45(1/2): 67-84.



We have a few references. If possible, please look into them. Thank you.