

Poetry
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Lecture 2
Approaching Poetry

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Approaching Poetry



General approach: Simon Sinek
Linguistic Approach: Words and Sentences
Literary Approach: Form and Content
Rhetorical Approach: Poetic Devices
Metrical Approach: Rhyme, Rhythm, Meter
Critical Approaches: Ideologies



In the previous video we looked at the relevance of poetry and now we will examine the ways in which we can approach poetry or study poetry. Something interesting I have done here, normally it is not done in literary studies. We begin with one general approach. That is actually a managerial approach. Then, we move to our normal studies, the normal ways in which we look at poems.

Linguistic approach by looking at words and sentences; A literary approach by examining form and content; A rhetorical approach investigating the poetic devices used by poets. Then, Metrical approach looking at rhyme, rhythm, and meter. And lastly, we may go for this what is known as critical approaches, examining the critical ideologies of readers.

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How Do We Approach Poetry?



General Approach: Simon Sinek's Why, How, & What

Linguistic Approach: Words and sentences

Rhetorical Approach: Poetic Devices

Literary Approach: John Peck and Helen Vendler

Critical Approaches: Feminism, Deconstruction, etc.

An Example: Shakespeare's Sonnet 18



Our question is how do we approach poetry.? So, the general approach we have is from Simon Sinek's idea of why? How? and what.? When we look at a poem through a linguistic approach, we focus on words and sentences. When we come to rhetorical approach, we examine poetic devices. Literary approach helps us in examining the form and content.

Here I have used some ideas from two critics; one is called John Peck another is Helen Vendler. Both of them are well known critics. They have written lots of books and articles. They have given some ideas, based on which I thought we could approach poems. Then we have critical approaches from various points of view. For example, feminism or deconstruction or post colonialism or any kind of approach that we may think of. To put all of them together, we have an example from Shakespeare's sonnet. The Sonnet that we look at is Sonnet 18.

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Who is Simon Sinek? I came across this amazing man. He has given a Ted Talk called "Start with why? How great leaders inspire action."? This he gave in 2009 and it has become viral and lots of views we have. Who is he and what does he do?

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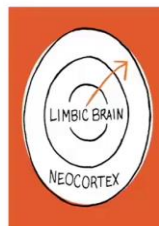
Simon Sinek's Golden Circle



Why – Believing

How – Doing

What – Knowing



He is actually a management consultant, an entrepreneur, a businessman, a motivational speaker. He has a concept called Golden Circle. And this Golden Circle is connected with our brain. The inner part and outer part: The outer part we have this idea/concept in your cortex and within the brain, we have the inside part- we have limbic brain. So, he connects these ideas of why? How?

What? to these three parts actually in the brain. Why is at the core, limbic brain where we have all kinds of feelings. This second question of 'How doing' is also connected with our feeling. And lastly what is connected with knowing that is out the outer circle. So, the inner circle and outer circle we have, what he believes is that we should be able to move from the inner circle to the outer circle not the other way. He uses his Golden Circle to explain why some companies are very successful, why some other companies not so successful.

So we believe that this kind of starting with the inner circle, starting with this question of why? that is why we began with this relevance of poetry - why do we have to study poetry? what is that? what is its relevance to us.? So, it ultimately, it is connected with our belief system. So, if our belief system is strong, then whatever we do we will come to know, and it will be very successful.

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Driving Questions



Set 1: Poets

Why do poets write their poems?

How do poets write their poems?

What poems do poets write?

Set 2: Readers

Why do readers read poems?

How do readers read poems?

What poems do readers read?



Simon Sinek's Golden Circle has given us two sets of questions: one for poets another for readers. For poets the questions are why do poets write their poems? How do poets write their poems? What poems do they write.? And for readers we have another set of questions. Why do readers like you and me? why do readers read poems? How do readers read poems? And what poems do readers read.? All of us do not read all poems. All of us do not read in the same way. All of us do not read poems. How? What? these questions are the driving questions for us to study points throughout the course.

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Linguistic Approach



A poem takes shape in a language.
Language is made up of words.
Poetic language: **special use of words.**
Words thus specially used create poetic diction.
Diction distinguishes poets and their poetry.
Medieval, Elizabethan, Metaphysical,
Neoclassical, Romantic, Victorian,
Modern, American, Feminist, and Indian



From this general approach, this is a kind of framework. We go to our conventional ground where we have a linguistic approach. This is important, this is basic because your poem takes shape in a language. What is language? If not a group of words. What do poets do with language.? Poets use, we can call it 'poetic language.' What is the poetic language? It is a special kind of use of words. They do it differently from what every normal human being does. That is figurative language you can call it, metaphorical language you can call it or a poetic language.

When words are thus used specially by poets, they create what is known as poetic diction : A group of words or the kind of words expected in poetry. And when a poet creates some kind of diction for himself or when a group of poets creates a diction for themselves, they distinguish themselves from other poets, other kinds of poems.

So historically if you look at medieval poetry, you will find that, that it is different from what did we have in the Elizabethan poetry or what we have in Metaphysical Poetry or Neoclassical Poetry or Romantic Poetry, Victorian Poetry, Modern, American, Feminist Poetry or Indian poetry or any kind of poetry you can identify. And the diction is a key factor which differentiates one kind of poetry or one school of poetry from another.

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Literary Approach



Poetic language conveys feelings and thoughts.

Special language, common emotions and ideas.

Feelings => tone, mood, and atmosphere

Ideas => the subject matter

Forms => poetic conventions

Poems are like zipped files.

We have to extract the meanings from them.

Not just one reading but many readings **despite the
problem of meaning and representation.**



Next, we look at this idea of literary approach. What is this literary approach? Literature has its own conventions. Within literature poetry has its own conventions further. Poetic language conveys feelings and thoughts through a special language and whatever they convey they are all common emotions and ideas. When we come to feelings, we see that they create a tone, a mood or an atmosphere in a poem. When these feelings are expressed, they manifest themselves in some ideas, that is why the subject matter of the poem we have and these feelings and ideas are expressed through certain forms, say sonnet or stanza. We have certain poetic conventions including the linguistic devices or poetic devices. For me poems are like zipped files. So, what we do? We have to extract the meanings from them. Not just one reading but many readings may be required despite the problem of meaning and representation.

Today if you read about literature, literary criticism and theory and all that you will find that meaning is problematic, representation is problematic. Then what do we do? In spite of all these we continue to read poems, understand them and express our own views about them.

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Sources of Meaning



Reading practices depend upon cultural beliefs.

Extrinsic and intrinsic approaches

M H Abrams's "Orientation of Critical Theories"

Four Factors: Author-Text-Reader-World

Where is the "meaning"?

Poems are everywhere.

Meanings are also everywhere.

We create and recreate meanings to suit our needs,
deeds and moods.

A sense of balance is required.



What is a source of meaning or what are the sources of meaning? We create meaning by reading. Reading practices depend on our own cultural beliefs. So, the same poems that I read will give a different meaning for me and for you. Broadly we have two approaches: extrinsic and intrinsic. And these ideas are beautifully brought out by a critic M H Abram's in his essay "Orientation of Critical Theories." There he talks about four factors which contribute meaning: Author, Text, Reader and the World.

Where is the meaning? Is the meaning in the author or in the text? In the reader or in the whole world? Generally, people agree poems are everywhere, meanings are also everywhere. Then what do we do? We create, we recreate meanings to suit our own needs, our own actions, our own moods. If you are happy you will find happy meaning. If you are unhappy you will find unhappy meaning. That is, it. You have the ability to see what you want to see and see and find some support. However, we have to remember that we need to maintain a sense of balance that is good for normal reading.

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An Oppositional Approach



The **aim**: to help readers make sense of poetry.

The **principle**: a sense of opposition in the poem.

Steps in reading poems:

1. Identify the key opposition in the poem
2. Examine the details making up the theme
3. Check the progress of the poem
4. See how the poem ends
5. Summarize the sense of the poem and the writer



When we read poems, we would like to take this approach called oppositional approach. Every poem has some kind of sense of opposition tension within it. So, the aim of our reading poetry is to help readers make sense of poetry. Some kind of understanding we have to have. How do we make sense of the poem that we read? We can do it very well by locating certain kinds of oppositions within the poem: Light and dark, love and hate, life and death. These are some common oppositions, binaries we have in almost every kind of poem. So, when we read poems, we can follow these steps. First, we can identify the key opposition in the poem. There may be many, but one may be stronger than the other. Then we can examine the details which contribute to the maintaining building and maintaining of this opposition in the poem. Then we can check how the poem progresses towards the end. And how finally the poem ends.

At last we can summarize what we feel about the poem and the writer in a few words. So we begin with the beginning and go to the end through some kind of progression, thinking about the kind of opposition that we have noticed. And then we form an overall impression of the poet.

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Rhetorical Approach



A poem is a rhetorically constructed art form to create an effect on the audience.

Rhetorical strategies include the poetic devices:

Figures of **Speech, Thought, and Sound**

metaphor, simile, epic simile, synecdoche, metonymy, personification, conceit, symbol, irony, paradox, pun, oxymoron
hyperbole, litotes, rhetorical question
parallelism, antithesis, zeugma, chiasmus
syncope, apostrophe, alliteration, assonance



The next stage for us is to adopt this rhetorical approach. We have to remember that your poem is a rhetorically constructed art form to create an effect on the audience. That is exactly rhetoric to persuade the people through the use of words, to have some effect on them. So, these rhetorical strategies are many. And here are some, these are generally called poetic devices and within these poetic devices, we have three of them. These are clearly distinguished in certain text and some we do not have clarity. I have tried to put them in some kind of order for you.

Figures of speech, figures of thought and figures of sound. Under this category of speech, we have metaphor, simile, epic simile, synecdoche, metonymy, personification, conceit, symbol, irony, paradox, pun, oxymoron, hyperbole, litotes and rhetorical question. Under this category of figure of thought we have parallelism, antithesis, zeugma, chiasmus. And lastly, the sound, we have syncope, apostrophe, alliteration, assonance. These are not as I said earlier clearly distinguished in some text. But in some, some attempts have been made. I have tried to maintain some kind of difference among them.

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Then we can think about the music of poetry. When we want to understand how the poem is musical, we have to look at the metrical form, the meter, the foot that is followed. Every poem has a meter. It is called a measure. In English, we have this Iambic pentameter. This is a base meter and there will be different kinds of variations. The meter is varied to contribute the rhythm. That is where we have this up and down movement or flow of sound. There are certain other sound effects as well. Rhyme is dominant, certain words will be repeated, certain ideas will be repeated, certain sounds will be repeated; There we have this alliteration; And then we have assonance. If these terms are a little technical, please wait, we will come to them, we will give examples for them. We will define them. All sound effects add to the music of the poem. We will look at them in another lecture on the music of poetry.

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Critical Approaches



Exclusion and inclusion of ideologies in reading.
Language, the medium, is a social construction.
It embeds structures of beliefs about the world.

Critical reading positions:

biographical, historical, political, social,
textual, structuralist, poststructuralist,
psychoanalytical, feminist, postcolonial, new
historicist, intertextual, intersectional, close
and distant readings

The reader is a *producer* and *consumer* of meaning



We come to the last section of approaching poetry: Critical Approaches. We have many critical approaches and when we look at critical approaches two points we have to note: one exclusion and inclusion. Whenever you have one particular kind of reading you include certain ideological understanding of life or philosophy of life, you exclude another kind of ideology or philosophy of life or outlook on life. So, what is this exclusion and inclusion? And how does it decide our own approach to poetry? is all that we have to ask ourselves.

But we have to understand that language is a basic medium, main primary medium by which we understand poetry. So, what in common understanding that we have all now is language is a social construction. Language is constructed, conventional, traditional. It has no intrinsic value in itself. We all agree that this is it. And then we go ahead with that.

This kind of constructed, socially constructed language embeds or has in itself certain structures of beliefs about the world. So based on these various belief systems, we have many different critical reading positions. If we believe in the author's life, we go for biographical approach. If we believe in history, we go for this historical approach. Similarly, we have political reading, social reading, textual reading, structuralist readings, poststructuralist readings, psychoanalytical reading, feminist reading, within feminism you have many.

Similarly, we go for postcolonial on new historicist reading. We also have something called intertextual reading and something more interesting, intersectional reading: Locating the agency



or the subjectivity of the reader and many other things. And we have one famous reading called close reading, we will follow it. And recently we have got something called distant readings. We cannot read all poems; we cannot read all text. Then how do we have some opinion about all poems or all texts? That is where we go for these distant readings.

Essentially every reader is a producer and consumer of meanings. Producer, we produce, and we also consume. But this producer of meaning is somewhat less because all of us do not critically read poems we rather tend to consume meanings by the language that we use.

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Shakespeare's Sonnet 18

| | |
|---|---|
| Shall I compare <u>thee</u> to a <u>summer's day</u> ? | A |
| Thou art more lovely and more temperate: | B |
| Rough winds do shake the darling buds of <u>May</u> , | A |
| And <u>summer's lease</u> hath all too short a date; | B |
| Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines, | C |
| And often is his gold complexion dim'd; | D |
| And every <u>fair</u> from <u>fair</u> sometime declines, | C |
| By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd; | D |
| But <u>thy eternal summer</u> shall not fade, | E |
| Nor lose possession of that <u>fair</u> thou ow'st; | F |
| Nor shall <u>death</u> brag thou wander'st in his shade, | E |
| When in <u>eternal lines</u> to time thou grow'st: | F |
| <u>So long/ as men/ can breathe/ or eyes/ can see,</u> | G |
| <u>So long/ lives this,/ and this/ gives life/ to thee.</u> | G |



Here we have this example from Shakespeare's Sonnet 18. It is a very well-known poem.

“Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?

Thou art more lovely and more temperate:

Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,

And summer's lease hath all too short a date;

Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,

And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;

And every fair from fair sometime declines,

By chance or nature's changing course untrimm'd;
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st;
Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st:

So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee”.

This is a poem that Shakespeare wrote for his friend.

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Approaching the Sonnet

- Form:** Sonnet – 14 lines
- Structure:** three quatrains and a couplet
- Development:** Question and Answer
- Metaphor:** summer's day, sun
- Hyperbole:** death shall not brag
- Themes:** Friendship, transience, death, eternity, poetry
- Contrast:** light and dark; life and death
- Argument:** As long as poetry lives, you will live.
- Rhyme:** ABAB, CDCD, EFEF, GG
- Meter:** iambic pentameter
- Ideology:** construction of masculinity



How do we approach this poem, this Sonnet? Sonnet is a poetic convention: it has 14 lines and it has a structure. Earlier we looked at Petrarchan Sonnet and here we have Shakespearean Sonnet. We have variation of that conventional form. Here we have three quatrains, that is four lines each and then one couplet two lines at the end. The whole poem is developed in the form of a question and an answer. The question is “shall I compare thee to a summer's day”? If I compare what are the limitations? Then the answer is the comparison does not favour you, so in my poetry you will live. The metaphor that is used in this poem is summer's day and sun. This temporality, time,

time passes, time changes, time changes and death play a very crucial role. That is where this poetic device called hyperbole: some kind of exaggeration.

How can we say that death cannot boast of its own ability to make people die or kill people or subject to death, subject to time? Who can escape time and death? But our poet Shakespeare claims that he can immortalize his friend in his poem. That is where we have this idea of theme or what is this main idea in this poem. It is all about friendship and it is about eternal friendship. And this, this eternal friendship is fixed against the idea of transience, time changing time, death, eternal time and also poetry.

The contrast, the opposition that we have in this poem is between light and dark- summer's day, and then life and death. The friend is young now. As he grows, he will have to face death. So, life and death both are contrasted. The poet makes his argument: since you cannot live in time, since you have to face the consequences of the changing time, I immortalize you in my poetry. That is why he says, "As long as my poetry lives you will live in my poem".

He has used this ABAB, CDCD, EFEF and GG rhyme pattern. And this is common to Shakespearean sonnets and as in many other English poems, we have this iambic pentameter. When we want to look at some ideological underpinning in this poem, you can see, what is this masculinity? Shakespeare was a man and he wrote this poem for a man; young man. This is again a variation from the Petrarchan Sonnet convention.

Petrarchan sonnets were written for women, praising their beauty of women. Of course, in conventional language. But in the case of Shakespeare, he changed the convention. He included a young man in his Sonnet. He was trying to construct some kind of masculinity or masculine idea of what a human being is and connected this with this concept of eternal life.

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Summary



General Approach: Simon Sinek's Why, How & What

Linguistic Approach: Words and Sentences

Literary Approach: Form and Content

Rhetorical Approach: Poetic Devices

Metrical Approach: Rhyme, Rhythm, Meter

Critical Approaches: Ideologies



In this presentation what we have looked at is, the way in which we can approach a poem, how do we study poems. To study poems, the best I believe is to ask these questions: why do we study this poem? How do we study this poem? What poem do we study? At these general frameworks, it will be always there in all our studies or all our readings, in all our activities throughout this course. Why? How what? If you believe in what we do, then how we do will take care of itself, similarly what we do will take care of itself.

So I believe in poetry and I hope those of you have joined this course, I do believe you have belief in poetry and you will take care of yourself and the course will be wonderful for you. If we follow this linguistic approach that is the way in which words and sentences have been used in a poem. If we study them closely, we can learn some idea of the poem. Then if we add some literary conventions like this form and content, we can learn a little more.

When we want to understand the content or the theme, if we focus on this opposition between two ideas, we can easily understand what is there in the poem. And to examine the effect, the poet has on the reader we have to examine rhetorical devices or poetic devices as we call them figures of speech, figures of thoughts and figures of sound. This will help us.

And this is the figures of sound, actually take us to the next point about metrical approach. There is some rhyme, there is some Rhythm, there is some music, there is some flow which we can appreciate if you know certain conventions in creating music, this Meter or Rhythm we will be able to understand. One meter that we have so far seen is this Iambic pentameter. That is normally used in English poetry. We will have variations; we will look at them one after another. Whenever we have the chance to look at them.

Lastly, we have many approaches; many critical approaches; these are called critical because they ask questions, fundamental questions. What is language? What is man? What is poetry? What is this underlying idea in this? What does the poet say this? What does he represent? What does he advance? We have so many questions. These questions when we prove them seriously, we get into this idea called ideologies.

Some kind of consciousness, some kind of understanding: Do we know them all? That is where this notion of criticality or critical approach; knowing what we do or what somebody has done, what is the ulterior motive? Is there anything that guides us without our own knowledge.? So, we have to examine deeply, we have to probe deeply, so that we can understand the ideological effect, some poem are literary texts that may have on us.

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References



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- Vendler, Helen. 1994. "Shakespeare's Sonnets: Reading for Difference," *Bulletin of the Academy of Arts and Sciences*, 47 (6): 33-50



We have some references for every lecture. All these ideas are based on some of these lectures. Please do watch. And if possible, refer to some of them and help yourself with more and more of understanding of poetry. Thank you.