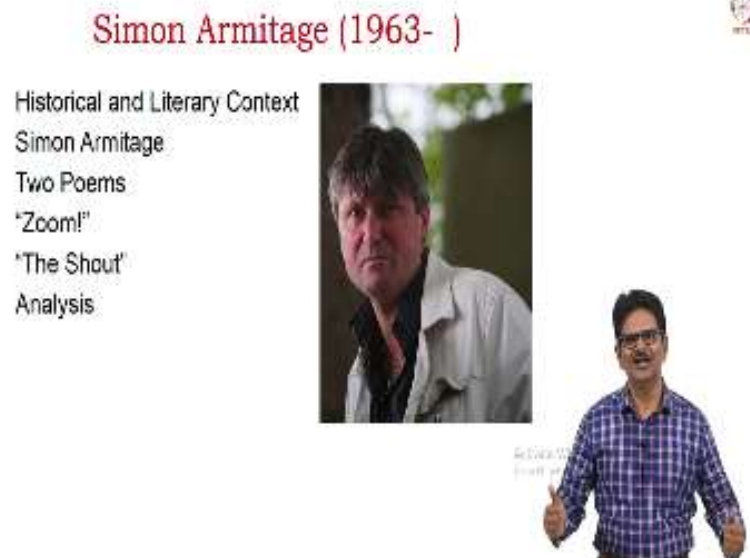


**Poetry**  
**Professor S. P. Dhanavel**  
**Department of Humanities and Social Sciences**  
**Indian Institute of Technology, Madras**  
**Lecture - 66**  
**Simon Armitage**

(Refer Slide Time: 00:14)

**Simon Armitage (1963- )**

Historical and Literary Context  
Simon Armitage  
Two Poems  
'Zoom!'  
'The Shout'  
Analysis



Hello friends. Let us discuss Simon Armitage and his poems that we have chosen for this lecture. First, we will see the historical and literary context, then see the life of Simon Armitage briefly. Then analyze two of his poems, two of his well-known poems “Zoom” and “The Shout.” And then, after our analysis, we will conclude our presentation.

(Refer Slide Time: 00:45)

**Historical Context**

- “so it’s probably Margaret Thatcher’s fault that I’m a poet.” – Armitage in an Interview
- Tony Blair, the Labor Prime Minister of England, 1997-2004
- Devolution of Powers for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in 1998
- Loss of the colonial outpost – Hong Kong – in 1999
- Brexit 2016/2020, Theresa May/ Boris Johnson
- Yorkshire: Industrial and Post-Industrial North
- Home to kitchen sink drama

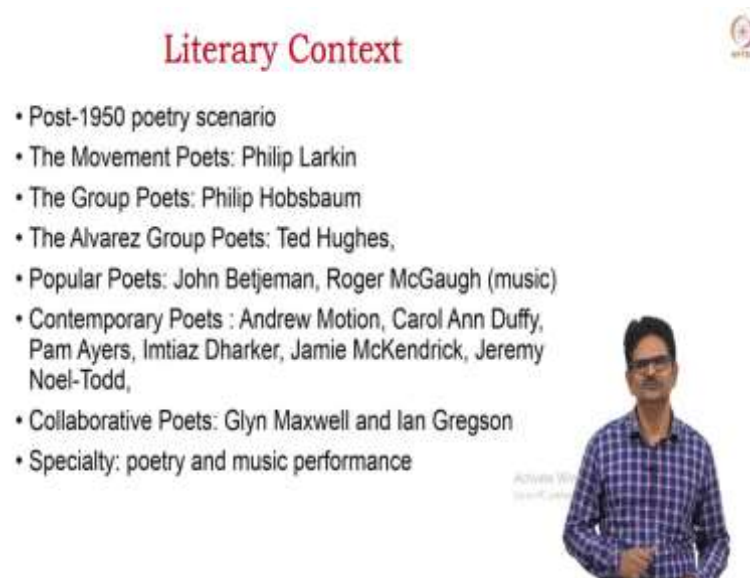


Let us see the historical context first. We start with a beautiful quotation from Armitage's interview, "So it is probably Margaret Thatcher's fault that I'm a poet." Armitage did not get a job and so, he started writing poems. That is how he mentions it. Tony Blair was a Labor Prime Minister of England from 1997 to 2004.

At this time powers were given to Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland to have their own assemblies, to have their own parliaments, of course under this larger administration of UK. And this was a time when Britain lost its, the last colonial post-Hong Kong in 1999. We also have political developments with Brexit which started in 2016 and just recently ended in 2020. Started by Theresa May and ended by Boris Johnson.

We have Yorkshire which is a part of England located in the north and that north is completely industrialized. And this is in contrast to south which is not that much industrialized. This northern part is the home to kitchen sink drama and many other pop cultures, which have come into Britain.

(Refer Slide Time: 02:25)



**Literary Context**

- Post-1950 poetry scenario
- The Movement Poets: Philip Larkin
- The Group Poets: Philip Hobsbaum
- The Alvarez Group Poets: Ted Hughes,
- Popular Poets: John Betjeman, Roger McGaugh (music)
- Contemporary Poets : Andrew Motion, Carol Ann Duffy, Pam Ayers, Imtiaz Dharker, Jamie McKendrick, Jeremy Noel-Todd,
- Collaborative Poets: Glyn Maxwell and Ian Gregson
- Speciality: poetry and music performance

Armitage W  
David Gifford

Now, let us see the poetry scenario in the literary context. We are dealing with Simon Armitage who was born in the second part of 20th century. So we will see the post-1950 poetic scenario. We have the movement poets through Philip Larkin, then the group poets by Philip Hobsbaum, and then we have Alvarez group poets through Ted Hughes. And then, we have popular poets like John Betjeman and Roger McGaugh. We also have many contemporary poets like Andrew Motion, Carol Ann Duffy, Pam Ayers, Imtiaz Dharker with some Indian connection, and then we have Jamie McKendrick. And lastly, Jeremy Noel


Todd. At this time, we also have some poets who work collaboratively, particularly with Simon Armitage, that is, one is Glyn Maxwell another is Ian Gregson.

We also have some special feature of poetry at this time. Poetry and music came together in performances. Remember, our discussion on Liverpool poets, we have one here Roger McGaugh. And in the same way, Simon Armitage also participates in a rock band and sings and performs his poetry.

(Refer Slide Time: 03:52)

**Simon Armitage**

- Current poet laureate after Carol Ann Duffy in 2019
- A student of geography and social work
- A poet of the North like Ted Hughes; Yorkshire poets
- After four volumes, pursued poetry for the sake of poetry.
- Professor of Poetry at Oxford, Leeds, Sheffield, etc.
- A poet who participates in different kinds of creative activities in radio, TV, film, music bands, trekking, travel, and yet finds time to write poems about several issues facing humanity, including the environment and class differences
- A translator of Middle English poems and Greek Drama
- Famous for "Zoom!" and "The Shout"



Let us see Simon Armitage. He is a current poet laureate of England after Carol Ann Duffy in 2019. He is basically a student of geography and social work. Then he became a poet of the North like Ted Hughes both are Yorkshire poets.

He first published four volumes of poetry and then left his own job as a probation officer to pursue poetry for the sake of poetry. Later on, after his growth as a poet, he was appointed as professor of poetry at Oxford, Leeds, and Sheffield universities. He is a poet who participates in different kinds of creative activities in different media like radio, TV, film, music bands, even trekking, travel, and yet he finds time to write poems about several issues facing humanity, including the environment and social class differences.

He is also a keen translator of Middle English poems and Greek drama. He has translated Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. We have two famous poems from Simon Armitage, they are 'Zoom' and 'Shout.'

(Refer Slide Time: 05:15)

## The Alphabetical Inspiration



### Armitage on the power of the letters of the alphabet

"I was [...] suddenly becoming alert to the idea that there are **only twenty-six letters** in the alphabet, just black shapes against a white background, but if you can put them in **the right order**, then you can make incredible things happen in somebody else's head, in complete silence, across hundreds of miles, across thousands of years. That struck me there and then as **an act of primitive magic**. I still feel that sometimes when I encounter very powerful work.

(Roensch and Weedon, 2017: 25)



In one of his interviews, he tells us how he got into poetry. He was a student in college, he would not attend classes very attentively. But then, one day when poetry was discussed, he woke up suddenly and listened to words and he recalls this power of poetry and speak about this inspiration to his interviewers Roensch and Weedon,

“I was suddenly becoming alert to the idea that there are only 26 letters in the alphabet, just black shapes against a white background but if you can put them in the right order, then you can make incredible things happen in somebody else’s head”

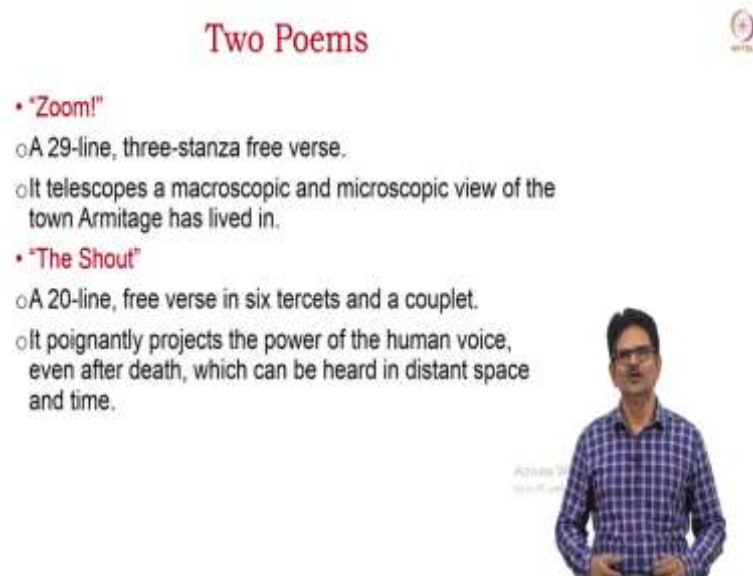
as it happened in the case of Simon Armitage in the class.

“in complete silence, across hundreds of miles, across thousands of years that struck me there and then as an act of primitive magic. I still feel that sometimes when I encounter very powerful work”

Words are magic, words have a great power. This is what Simon Armitage shares with us. I too, when I was a student thought about these 26 letters. In India, students have difficulty in learning English or they say they have difficulty with learning English. But I asked myself how can a language with just 26 letters be so difficult for us to learn. My own mother tongue has 247 letters which I learned effortlessly, why is this 26 letters are problematic for me or with any other learner in our country.


And here, we can see, Simon Armitage born in England having English as a mother tongue. He got this inspiration to write poetry, although he did not have any poetry background. His father was less than middle-class working person and he comes from a middle-class family. And he got this inspiration and he has come to this level of writing poems and becoming a popular poet among the people.

(Refer Slide Time: 07:27)



**Two Poems**

- **"Zoom!"**
  - A 29-line, three-stanza free verse.
  - It telescopes a macroscopic and microscopic view of the town Armitage has lived in.
- **"The Shout"**
  - A 20-line, free verse in six tercets and a couplet.
  - It poignantly projects the power of the human voice, even after death, which can be heard in distant space and time.



We have two poems, one is 'Zoom.' It is a 29-line 3-stanza free verse. It telescopes a macroscopic and microscopic view of the town Armitage has lived in. And the next poem, 'The Shout' is a 20-line free verse in 6 tercets and a couplet at the end. It poignantly projects the power of the human voice even after death which can be heard in distant space and time. And this second poem, The Shout has some relevance to the interview except that we discussed.

(Refer Slide Time: 08:06)

## “Zoom!” - I



It begins as a house, an end terrace  
in this case  
but it will not stop there. Soon it is  
an avenue  
which cambers arrogantly past the Mechanics' Institute, 5

[the view covers the main road, the four commercial  
banks, a daily newspaper, and a football team]



‘Zoom,’ again we are not able to quote the entire poem. We will have some extracts and then some summaries of the omitted passages. For the original poem, please go to Poetry Foundation or to our text. Let us begin.

“It begins as a house, an end-terrace  
in this case  
but it will not stop there. Soon it is  
an avenue  
which cambers arrogantly past the Mechanics’ institute.” 5

Then the view, the telescopic view, the view covers a main road, the four commercial banks, a daily newspaper, and a football team, and then pushes off to another direction.

(Refer Slide Time: 08:47)

## “Zoom!” - II



[The view goes beyond view]

city, nation, 15

hemisphere, universe, hammering out in all directions  
until suddenly,

mercifully, it is drawn aside through the eye  
of a black hole

[and reaches a nearby galaxy becoming smaller  
than a billiard ball but heavier than Saturn]



[Then the view goes beyond view]

city, nation,

hemisphere, universe, hammering out in all directions

until suddenly

mercifully it is drawn aside through the eye

of a black hole

[and reaches a nearby galaxy becoming smaller

than a billiard ball but heavier than Saturn.]

So we, something like a camera and it moves from one place to another and after covering some of the local locations, it moves on to hemisphere, universe, hammering out in all directions but suddenly, it comes back after reaching the black hole.

Simon Armitage is an interesting poet, an excellent poet. We have highlighted that through the red color we have; hemisphere, universe, hammering out in all directions until suddenly, within one line we have multisyllabic words or polysyllabic words each having 3 syllables hemisphere, universe, hammering directions suddenly, all of them come together. This is something strange by which our poet achieves some poetic effect.

(Refer Slide Time: 10:09)

## “Zoom!” - III



[the speaker says that the people bother him to know what the object was]

and ask “What is this, this that is **so small** 25  
and **so very smooth**  
but whose mass is greater than the ringed planet?”  
It's just words  
I assure them. But they will not have it. 30



Next, the speaker of the poem says that the people bother him to know what the object was. What is this Zooming or what is that object it tries to capture? People ask him, so he answers.

“and ask, “What is this, this that **is so small**  
and **so very smooth**  
but whose mass is greater than the ringed planet?”  
It is just words  
I assure them but they will not have it.”

When the poet or the speaker says it is just words ringed planet, heavier planet. This heavy and light difference, it is not there, it does not matter but people do not believe him.



(Refer Slide Time: 10:49)



### Thematic Contrast

- Zoom in and Zoom out
- Camera Lens and the Human Eye
- Territory and Space
- Houses and streets to planets and black hole
- Centrifugal and centripetal
- **Microcosm and Macrocosm**
- Words and Worlds/Things
- Arrogance and Humility
- Left and Right
- **Inclusion and Exclusion – commerce, media, sports**
- **See and Show vs Unsee and Hide**



We have the thematic contrast between zoom in and zoom out; camera lens and the human eye; territory and space, that is, the earth and then the extra-terrestrial space; houses, streets on the ground to planets and black hole in space; centrifugal movement and centripetal movement; we have microcosm and macrocosm; words and the worlds or things; arrogance and humility; left and right; inclusion and exclusion; commerce, media, sports, these are included and many other things are excluded.

That is why we have highlighted this and also, we want to see the contrast between see and show and then, unsee and hide; if you do not see, you simply hide, you do not bring it to the public view.

(Refer Slide Time: 11:45)



### Poetic Devices

- **Metaphor:** of zooming in and out in the title
- **Metaphor:** of watching and recording
- **Metaphor:** the mechanical coverage of places, people, and objects far and near
- **Personification:** cambers arrogantly (5)
- **Consonance:** a town with all four major clearing banks (9)
- **Alli/Conso:** pushing for promotion (11)
- **Alli/Conso:** hemisphere, universe, hammering (16)
- **Alliteration & Consonance:** smaller and smoother (21)
- **Alliteration:** billiard ball but (22); stop me in the street (23)
- **Alli/Conso/Asso:** so small and so very smooth (25-26)



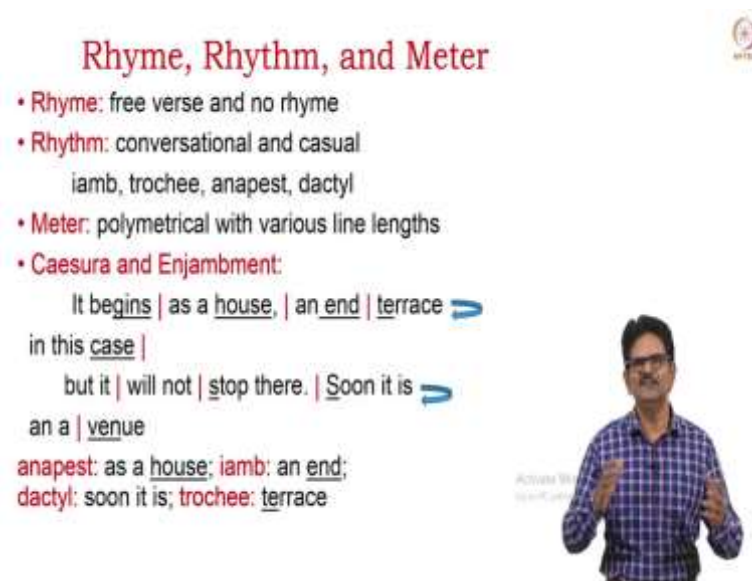
Several poetic devices are found in this poem. Metaphor of zooming in and zooming out that is found in the title itself. Then we have this metaphor of watching and recording through this lens. Then we have this metaphor of the mechanical coverage of places, people, and objects far and near.

We have this personification in cambers arrogantly; the zooming camera cambers arrogantly. Moves, bends, turns left, right arrogantly. This arrogance is attributed to the camera. We have consonance in a town with all four major clearing banks. La sound we have, then ra sound we have in consonance.

Then we have alliteration and consonance in, pushing for promotion. Push and pro, that is, pa is alliteration and sha is consonance. We have again alliteration and consonance in hemisphere and hammering; ha and ma. Then we have this alliteration and consonance in smaller and smoother; sa, ma. Then we have alliteration in billiard, ball, but. And then stop me in the street.

We also have alliteration, consonance, assonance in so small and so very smooth. No wonder we have so many alliterations and assonances because Simon Armitage is a poet who reads middle English and he claims and many others have said Yorkshire language dialect is close to middle English.

(Refer Slide Time: 13:30)



**Rhyme, Rhythm, and Meter**

- **Rhyme:** free verse and no rhyme
- **Rhythm:** conversational and casual  
iamb, trochee, anapest, dactyl
- **Meter:** polymetrical with various line lengths
- **Caesura and Enjambment:**  
It begins | as a house, | an end | terrace ➤  
in this case |  
but it | will not | stop there. | Soon it is ➤  
an a | venue

**anapest:** as a house; **iamb:** an end;  
**dactyl:** soon it is; **trochee:** terrace

Aravind V.  
IITM

Let us see the rhyme, rhythm, and meter in this poem. This is a free-verse poem and so, we do not have much rhyme but we have conversational and casual rhythm that is found in iambic, trochaic, and anapestic or dactylic rhythms.

We have polymetrical system in this poem because many metrical patterns are found because of the various line lengths. We have caesura and enjambment in the passage that we have quoted.

“It begins as a house, an end terrace  
in this case  
but it will not stop there. Soon it is  
an avenue.”

We have given the examples for this, anapest as a house, iamb - an end; dactyl - soon it is; trochee - terrace.

(Refer Slide Time: 14:19)

### Overall Impression

- "Zoom!" is Armitage's poetic vision of the late 20<sup>th</sup> c.
- It shows a trip through the commercial town to a galaxy with a black hole and then drops us down in a queue at a supermarket, the center of our consumerist culture.
- The telescopic view curves along arrogantly, indicating a class-divided insight into the society of our times.
- While the view turns left, it leaves out the Mechanics' Institute, but marks banks, a daily, and a football team.
- The key word "Oblivious" comments on how all our national and global boundaries get out of hands.
- The reality is that we are back at the supermarket consuming and being consumed by market forces.
- Ordinary people do not believe the poet's explanations.



Let us see the overall impression. Zoom is Armitage's poetic vision of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. It shows a trip through the commercial town to a galaxy with a black hole and then drops us down in a queue at a supermarket, the center of our consumerist culture today. The telescopic view curves along arrogantly indicating a class divided inside into the society of our times. While the view turns left, it leaves out the mechanics institute but marks banks, a daily newspaper, and a football team.

The keyword "Oblivious" comments on how all our national and global boundaries get out of hands. The reality is that we are back at the supermarket consuming and being consumed by market forces. Ordinary people do not believe the poet's explanations but this is what the poet can give.

(Refer Slide Time: 15:20)


**“The Shout”**

We went out  
into the school yard together, me and the boy  
whose name and face

I don't remember. We were testing the range  
of the human voice:

[The speaker then describes the test of one boy shouting and another raising his hand to respond that he has heard the voice.]

5



Let us move on to the second poem, ‘The Shout’ that we have chosen for our discussion . We have omitted some lines from this poem.

“We went out  
into the schoolyard together, me and the boy  
whose name and face  
I don't remember. We were testing the range  
of the human voice.”

This is a very interesting poem about the human voice, how much we can shout, how much of distance somebody can hear us.

The speaker then describes a test of one boy shouting and the another boy raising his hand to respond that he has heard the voice. It is actually based on his own school experience when they conducted some kind of scientific experiment about the distance to which our voice can be heard.


(Refer Slide Time: 16:09)

**The Shout**

[The testing of shouting and responding continues as much as they can but the speaker extends the test beyond time and space, revealing the voice of the past]

He left town, went on to be twenty years dead  
with a gunshot hole  
in the roof of his mouth, in Western Australia.

Boy with the name and face I don't remember,  
you can stop shouting now, I can still hear you. 20



That testing of shouting and responding continues as much as they can but the speaker extends the test beyond time and space revealing the voice of the past. Let us continue the poem.

“He left town, went on to be twenty years dead  
with a gunshot hole  
in roof of mouth, in Western Australia.  
Boy with the name and face I don't remember,  
you can stop shouting now, I can still hear you.” 20

The poet says I can still hear you, it is more than 20 years now, the boy is not here in England, he went to Western Australia and also committed suicide by shooting himself but that voice, the poet is able to still hear.

Boy with the name and face I do not remember, we can see some kind of inversion in this I do not remember the boy with the name and face. But still, nameless boy, faceless boy whose voice is heard by the poet. It happens to us as well, how many people we remember just through the voices that we had listened to.

(Refer Slide Time: 17:22)

## Thematic Contrast



- Poetry and Science/Technology
  - Silence and Speech
  - Past and Present
  - Child and Adult
  - Remembering and Forgetting
  - Life and Death
  - Peace and Violence
  - Near and Far
- We may forget the words of a name and the image of a face but certain emotional experiences of the past are the veins and bones of our life.



We have the thematic contrast between poetry and science and technology. The context is scientific experimentation of how much the voice can travel; in distance how much it can be heard. We have silence and speech, past and present, child and adult, remembering and forgetting; how much a voice we can remember or forget. Life and death, peace and violence, near and far. We may forget the words of a name and the image of a face but certain emotional experiences of the past are the veins and bones of our life. We are made up of such emotional experiences from our past. Remember Duffy saying ‘the origin of poetry is childhood.’

(Refer Slide Time: 18:09)

## Poetic Devices



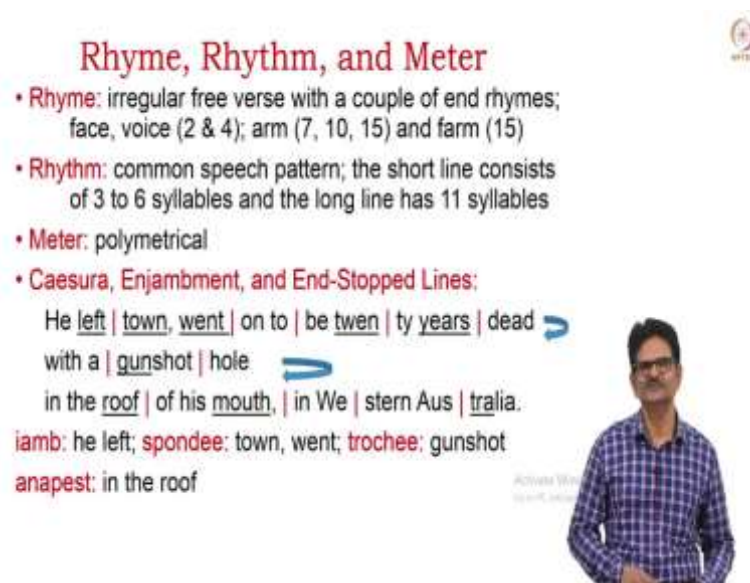
- **Assonance & Consonance:** We went out (1)
- **Assonance:** name and face (3, 19)
- **Assonance and Consonance:**  
he yelled from the end of the road (12)
- **Alliteration:** from the foot of the hill (13)
- **Alliteration:** Fretwell's Farm (14)
- **Assonance & Consonance:**  
He left town, went on to be twenty years dead (16)
- **Alliteration & Hyperbole:** voice from the past  
You can stop shouting now, I can still hear you (20)
- **Repetition:** I don't remember (4, 19)
- **Line arrangements:** alternation of long and short lines  
and the last two long lines



There are a number of poetic devices in this poem, assonance and consonance ‘We went out;’ assonance ‘name and face.’ Assonance and consonance in ‘he yelled from the end of the road.’ Then alliteration ‘from the foot of the hill.’ Alliteration again in ‘Fretwell’s Farm.’ Assonance and consonance in ‘he left town went on to be twenty years dead.’

It is again a beautiful poem where we have different elements coming together in assonance and consonance. We have again, alliteration and hyperbole, that is, voice from the past, ‘You can stop shouting now I can still hear you.’ Even though it is 20 years over, he can still hear that voice. Repetition we find in ‘I don’t remember; he repeatedly says that but he still remembers the voice. Then we have distinct line arrangements in this poem. Alteration of long and short lines and the last two lines alone are somewhat similar in length.

(Refer Slide Time: 19:22)



**Rhyme, Rhythm, and Meter**

- **Rhyme:** irregular free verse with a couple of end rhymes; face, voice (2 & 4); arm (7, 10, 15) and farm (15)
- **Rhythm:** common speech pattern; the short line consists of 3 to 6 syllables and the long line has 11 syllables
- **Meter:** polymetrical
- **Caesura, Enjambment, and End-Stopped Lines:**  
 He left | town, went | on to | be twen | ty years | dead >  
 with a | gunshot | hole >  
 in the roof | of his mouth, | in We | stern Aus | tralia.

**iamb:** he left; **spondee:** town, went; **trochee:** gunshot  
**anapest:** in the roof

Let us see the rhyme, rhythm, and meter in this poem. This is an irregular verse with a couple of end rhymes. We have face and voice, and then we have arm and farm. We have common speech rhythm in this poem. The short line consists of 3 to 6 syllables and the long line has 11 syllables.

Again, the meter of the poem is polymetrical. Caesura, enjambment, and end-stopped lines we have in the extract quoted here,

“He left town, went on to be twen ty years dead

with a gunshot hole


in the roof of his mouth, in We stern Aus tralia.”

We have examples for iamb - he left; spondee - town went; trochee - gunshot; then anapest - in the roof.

(Refer Slide Time: 20:15)

**Overall Impression**

- "The Shout" is a poignant poem of a childhood memory about a science experiment in school about testing the range of human voice.
- Though the speaker does not remember the name and face of the boy who went to Australia but shot himself in his mouth and died, he seems to suffer from some guilty feeling about the boy's voice which he hears even now.
- The time of twenty years and the distance between continents cannot prevent the voice being heard.
- This is an allegorical poem of **testing** the human voice with full of assonance, consonance, alliteration, and repetition.



Let us see the overall impression of this poem now. 'The Shout' is a poignant poem of a childhood memory about a science experiment in school that the boys conducted for testing the range of human voice. Though the speaker does not remember the name and face of the boy who went to Australia and shot himself in his mouth and died, the poet seems to suffer from some guilty feeling about the boy's voice which he hears even now.

The time of 20 years and the distance between continents cannot prevent the voice being heard. This is an allegorical poem of testing the human voice with full of assonance, consonance, alliteration, and repetition. The human voice will be heard, will continue to be heard.



(Refer Slide Time: 21:05)

## Summary



- Historical and Literary Context
- Simon Armitage
- Two Poems
- "Zoom!"
- "The Shout"
- Analysis
- "This misfortune you find is of your own manufacture."  
- Simon Armitage's *The Death of King Arthur*



Here we have the summary. We saw the historical and literary context in which Simon Armitage wrote his poems. We looked into two specific poems Zoom and The Shout, both are very interesting poems. They bring in elements of science into these poems, one, using a camera giving us a macroscopic and microscopic view; and another, conducting a scientific experiment about the range of human voice.

We have a quotation from this writer, Simon Armitage. This is actually his translation of The Death of King Arthur, "This misfortune you find is of your own manufacture." This is a beautiful line which has lot of wisdom in it. Enjoy. Further, let us see the references.

(Refer Slide Time: 22:02)

## References



- Hélie, Claire. 2010. "It's my voice; that's how I speak: The Rhythms of Northern English in the Poetry of Simon Armitage," *Études britanniques contemporaines* 39: 1-10.  
<http://journals.openedition.org/ebc/2817>
- Roensch, Rob., and Weedon, Quinn Carpenter. 2017. "Swimming through Bricks': A Conversation with Simon Armitage," *World Literature Today*, 91 (5): 24-29
- Thain, Marion. 2001. "An 'Uncomfortable Intersection': The Meeting of Contemporary Urban and Rural Environments in the Poetry of Simon Armitage," *Worldviews*, 5 (1): 58-79.



Thank you.