

Some Remarks on Poetry

In general one can say that poetry is characterised by an intimate relationship of sound and meaning. Poems very often are based on a certain rhythmical pattern.

Good poetry appeals to the listener's or reader's sense of beauty which captures him for certain magical elements that can never be fully explained.

His task in interpreting poetry is to grasp the author's mood and intention by understanding both his / her elevated thoughts and deep feelings. Little helpers are the poet's use of rhythm, rhyme (if there is any), sound, and language / style.

How to approach a poem

1. Read a poem more than twice before setting out to analyse it according to the following questions:
2. What sort of poem is it: descriptive, narrative, reflective?
3. Who is speaking? Some lyrical I or the poet himself?
4. Who is addressed?
5. What kind of situation is presented?
6. What are motifs / what is the theme of the poem?
7. What is the poet's main intention?
8. Can you describe the relationship between the title of the poem and its subject?
9. What is the prevailing atmosphere?
10. What is the predominant tone of the poem?

Useful Expressions for Interpretation

1. The poem consists of / comprises three stanzas.
The first stanza is composed of four lines / The number of lines varies greatly.
The poem has a rather complex / simple sentence structure.
It can be divided into ... parts. / It is not divided into stanzas.
In the ... part of the poem, the sentence is not complete.
The usual word order has been changed because ...
The phrase ... links the ... stanza to the next one.
There is a break between the ... and the ... stanza.
The different stanzas are unequal in length.
The lines vary in length, they have between ... and ... syllables.
2. The subject of the poem is ... / It deals with ... / treats the theme of ...
The person speaking is ... / seems to be ...
The motif of ... appears for the first time in stanza ...
The poet addresses ... / His (main) intention is to ...
The poet narrates ... / describes ... / depicts ... / develops the idea of ... /
He / She reflects on ... / expresses ...

3. The author's tone reveals his attitude towards ... / indicates .../ suggests ... / implies ...
 The tone in the poem is critical / ironical / melancholy / humorous / matter-of-fact / enthusiastic / detached / sad ...
 Therefore the general mood of the poem is rather ...
 The repetition of the word ... adds to ... / helps to ... / contributes to convey a feeling of ...
 The poet does not use the proper word ..., he uses a euphemistic expression instead.
 The words the poet uses are mainly taken from the word field of .../ the areas of ...
 Generally speaking, the vocabulary is colloquial / simple / elevated / abstract / obsolete / concrete / difficult to understand / vague / ambiguous
 The author uses different levels of speech.
 Mainly the poet uses words from everyday language.
 He / She uses / employs / accumulates adjectives / nouns / verbs which ...
 In that poem it is verbs which predominate.
4. What the poet's intention probably was: appeal to the reader's imagination / emotions / sense of beauty / stir the reader's social concern / sympathy for .../ compassion with
 The poet conveys his message to the reader / listener by ...
 The poet gives his opinion on ... in an indirect way.
 The poem has a highly symbolic meaning, namely ...
 The poem is not supposed to be taken literally.
5. The style of the poem is simple / complex / vivid / elaborate / pompous / ornate
 These features are quite typical / characteristic of ...
 The form of the poem corresponds perfectly with its contents.
 The poet uses various stylistic devices / stylistic means among which ... are predominant.
 His / Her style is rich in images / Imagery plays an important role in his / her poetry.
 In line four there is an example of parallelism / personification / there is an allusion to ... / a contrast between ... and ...
 The statements in lines ... and ... form / constitute a parallelism / a contrast / a paradox / an antithesis.
 In this poem the author uses run-on lines in order to achieve ... / create ...
 Enjambement appears / occurs in stanza three.
 The phrase ... repeated in the second stanza constitutes a sort of refrain.
 The repetition of the word ... underlines / emphasises / stresses / expresses / suggests
 This idea is taken up again in stanza three.
 There is a complete change in the syntactical structure between the ... and the ... stanza.
 The ... is a symbol of / stands for / is supposed to be taken as a symbol of / represents / symbolises / The poet associates ... with ... / connects ... with ...the idea of ...
 The metaphor used in line ... appeals to the reader's sense of ...
 The second stanza contains an enumeration / The poet enumerates ...
 There are a lot of puns / plays upon words in stanza four.
 In this sentences, the poet makes use of onomatopoeia / personification / anaphora / inversion.

6. The first stanza consists of six lines.
 Each stanza contains two tercets / a quatrain / a rhyming couplet.
 Mainly the lines have twelve syllables.
 The poem is written in / made up of iambic pentameters / free verse.
 The poem is made up of iambs / anapaests / dactyls / trochees.
 The author does not stick to any regular rhyme scheme.
 The poem is based on / written in regular stanzas rhyming aa bb cc / rhyme scheme is
 In the second stanza the rhyme scheme / metrical pattern is regular / irregular.
 In the first stanza the words ... and ... do not rhyme at all.
 In the ... stanza there is an eye-rhyme.
 In the preceding / the following stanza ...
 The first lines of each stanza are identical / the same.
 In order to avoid monotony the poet ...
 There is an absolute absence of punctuation in this modern poem.#

Short Historical Survey of British Poetry

Medieval Period (-1500)

Geoffrey Chaucer, William Langland

The Elizabethan Age (-1600)

William Shakespeare, Edmund Spenser

The Age of John Donne and John Milton (1600-1670)

Metaphysical Poets, Puritan Poets

Classicism / The Augustan Age (1670-1770)

Alexander Pope, John Dryden

Romanticism (1770-1850)

William Wordsworth, William Blake, Robert Burns, Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Lord Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, John Keats

Victorianism / The Victorian Age (1830-1900)

Alfred Lord Tennyson, Robert Browning

Modernism (-1950)

William Butler Yeats, Robert Frost, Ezra Pound

Contemporary Poetry

Dylan Thomas, Philip Larkin

Short Historical Survey of American Poetry

The 19th Century

Edgar Allan Poe, Walt Whitman

The 20th Century Until 1950

Robert Frost, T.S. Eliot

Contemporary Poetry (1950 -)

E.E. Cummings, Langston Hughes