

Questions for the Analysis of Poetry

1. What is the role played by the speaker? (i. e. is s/he a lover, lamenter, prophet, critic, simply the narrator, etc.)
2. What is the subject matter? Are there any themes you noticed in other poems studied? Are they treated the same or are there noticeable differences?
3. How would you characterize the language? Are there any unfamiliar words or expressions? Can you guess their meanings in context? (Look up any unfamiliar words in the dictionary/OED.)
4. What observations can you make about the syntax? (syntax is the way in which words are arranged to form phrases, clauses, and sentences.)
5. What are the images? Allusions? What is the tone?
6. What is distinctive about the style and/or metrical patterns? Compare/contrast with other poems studied.

The Nature of Meter

1. How does it contribute to rhythm? (Think of the ballad; what does adding an extra foot do?)
2. How does it contribute to tone?
3. It provides a ritual frame (like a picture frame) to enclose experience.
4. Association with certain kinds of statements and feelings (light as in limeric; lofty as in epic).
5. Look at the sonnets: what does it mean to be Petrarchan/Italian or Shakesperean/English?
6. When you discuss meter (in a paper) discuss it only insofar as it is relevant to your interpretation and thesis. Don't make sweeping generalizations.

Figurative Language

1. Does not merely embellish or decorate a thought. Figurative statements help to express what someone means more precisely than the literal statement.
2. Figurative language should communicate an experience, evoke images -- perhaps make the abstract appear more concrete.