

Mastering Literary Analysis

Class 7 - Close Reading: Lyric Poetry

Readings:

- "Definition of a Horse from *Hard Times*"
- "Lyric Poetry Selections"
- "Essay Structure: Intros and Conclusions"
- Review this handout from Lesson 4: "Basic Essay Brainstorming and Outlining"
- Review this handout from Lesson 1: "Example MLA Formatting"
- *Optional extra reading*: If you are up for a challenge and have some extra time, read through the essay by Louise Cowan on lyric

Pre-Class Assignment (be sure to do this after you read through the lesson):

- As usual, bring to class three questions: a first level question, a second level question, and a third level question.
- Read through the selections of lyric poetry carefully, re-reading and trying to be as attentive as you can. Try to experience each poem—how does each poem *feel* to you? You will probably need to reread most of them as you go. After you finish reading all of them, choose a few to study with particular attention and understanding.
- NOTE FOR NEXT WEEK: We will begin *Pride and Prejudice* next week. Many of you probably already have a copy at home, but you are strongly encouraged to purchase (if you have not already) the Dover Thrift Edition of this novel. It is very inexpensive and will ensure that the entire class has the same pagination; this will make in-class discussion *significantly* easier in many ways. If you have not already purchased a copy, please consider this an assignment: <https://tinyurl.com/44474926>

Lesson/Discussion:

- **What is poetry?** This may seem like an odd time to ask this question, at the end of our poetry unit, but sometimes definitions are best understood *after* we experience the thing itself.
 - In Dickens' novel *Hard Times*, there is a famous scene in which Mr. Gradgrind asks one of his students, Sissy Jupe, to define a horse and rejects her answer. You read this brief scene for class today. **What is Dickens' point and how does it relate to the following definition of poetry?**
- In his guide to poetry, *Sound and Sense*, Lawrence Perrine defines poetry as "a kind of language that says more and says it more intensely than does ordinary language."
 - Perrine continues that there are two common mistakes people make in initially approaching poetry: 1) expecting moral instruction, 2) expecting that poetry will always seem beautiful.
 - Instead, he argues, that **the purpose of poetic language** "is not to tell us *about* experience but to allow us imaginatively to *participate* in it. It is a means of allowing us, through the imagination, to live more fully, more deeply, more richly, and with greater awareness. It can do this in two ways: by *broadening* our experience—that is, by making us acquainted with a range of experience with

which, in the ordinary course of events, we might have no contact--or by *deepening* our experience--that is, by making us feel more poignantly and more understandingly the everyday experiences all of us have."

- **A few more helpful terms for reading and understanding poetry:**
 - **Diction** → word choice
 - Two kinds of meaning are denotation & connotation:
 - **denotation** - the literal or primary meaning of a word
 - **connotation** - the emotional content of a word in addition to its literal or primary meaning
 - Example: "childlike" vs "childish" → both mean (denotatively) "like a child," but their connotative meanings are *very* different. If someone calls something "childlike," it's probably intended as a compliment; the word refers to positive child qualities. If someone calls something "childish," however, the meaning is negative.
 - **Caesura** - the pause in the middle of a line
 - **Enjambment** - when the phrase of a line spills into the next line
 - When you find cases of caesura and/or enjambment, pay attention to how the poet is using these devices to control the speed of the poem and the way the poem sounds.
 - **Can you find an example of a word from one of the poems you read which illustrates the importance of knowing both the denotative and connotative meaning of a word? Can you find an example of a caesura? Of enjambment? To what effect does the poet use caesura and enjambment?**
- **Some helpful questions to ask about any poem (from Perrine's *Sound and Sense*)**
 - ***But first!* Always read a poem aloud at least twice—experience before analysis.**
 1. Who is the speaker? What kind of person is the speaker?
 2. Is there an identifiable audience for the speaker? What can we know about him/her/it/them?
 3. What is the occasion?
 4. What is the setting in time (hour, season, century, and so on)?
 5. What is the setting in place (indoors or out, city or country, land or sea, region, nation, hemisphere)?
 6. What is the central purpose of the poem?
 7. State the central idea or theme of the poem in a sentence.
 8. What is the tone of the poem? How is it achieved?
 9. Outline the poem so as to show its structure and development, or
 10. Summarize the events of the poem.
 11. Paraphrase the poem.
 12. Discuss the diction of the poem. Point out words that are particularly well-chosen and explain why.
 13. Discuss the imagery of the poem. What kinds of imagery are used? Is there a structure of imagery?
 14. Point out examples of metaphor, simile, personification, and metonymy, and explain their appropriateness.
 15. Point out and explain any symbols. If the poem is allegorical, explain the allegory.**

16. Point out and explain examples of paradox,* overstatement, understatement, and irony. What is their function?
17. Point out and explain any allusions. What is their function?
18. Point out significant examples of sound repetition and explain their function.
19. What is the meter of the poem? Does the poem break the meter at any point? What effect does this create?
20. Copy the poem and scan it.
21. Discuss the adaption of the sound of a poem to its sense (its meaning).
22. Describe the form or pattern of the poem.
23. Criticize and evaluate the poem. (Notice that this comes at the very end of the list.)

* **Allegory** - a kind of symbolism in which images correlate one-to-one with concepts outside of the text to illustrate (usually) some kind of spiritual or moral message. Examples of allegory: *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* has elements of allegory as Aslan represents Christ and Edmund represents sinful humanity. *Pilgrim's Progress* is a famous Christian allegory in which the Pilgrim's journey represents the various stages of Christian life. The parables of Christ work on an allegorical level as the characters correspond to spiritual states and truths.

****Paradox** - A statement which contradicts itself, which must be true and untrue at the same time. Examples:

"I must be cruel to be kind" (Hamlet).

"Nobody goes to the lake anymore—it's too crowded." Obviously this statement is self-contradictory—if no one goes there, how is it crowded? What the speaker means by "nobody" is "none of our friends."

Further resources:

- *Sound and Sense* by Lawrence Perrine

Post-Class Assignment:

- This week, you will write a full essay on one of the poems you read over the last three classes. You may also choose to write on *two* poems (but no more) which speak to the same theme or respond to one another in some way. This essay should be 3-5 pages in length. If you are struggling, *please* choose a poem that was discussed thoroughly in class and use your notes to write the essay. **Your prompt is simply this: "What is this poem really about and how does the form of the poem—its meter, enjambment, sound, word-choice, allusions, etc.—reflect that meaning?"**
 - This will be a full essay, meaning it will have a complete introduction, at least three body paragraphs (remember that there is no particular magic in three, and many good essays need four or more), and a complete conclusion.
 - You will submit a final copy of your essay *and* an outline. The outline you submit should be whatever "final" form your outline takes—remembering that outlines are meant to change, live, and breathe as you write so that an outline should evolve during the drafting process.