Poetry Study Material

The process of analyzing

1. Read the poem twice before you begin marking anything.
2. Choose several colors, and mark your passage by each technique listed below.
3. **When you have marked the poem, read it again.** Look for patterns within each technique and between techniques. Annotate your poem. As a whole, how does each technique progress through the piece?

Beginning your analysis

Open your analysis by 1) explaining the major meanings of the poem, 2) explaining the poet's purpose and intent for this particular poem. Your analysis then addresses 3) **how** the poet achieves that purpose and intent – the poet's techniques.

Poet techniques:

I. **Diction**

Diction is word choice. Look at individual words and consider why the author chooses to use them. Look for patterns among the choices. Consider the following:

1. Denotation: dictionary definition; literal definition; multiple definitions?
2. Connotation: suggestions, associations, emotional overtones (house vs. home), positive or negative connotations?
3. Levels of diction:
    i. High= formal, elevated, sophisticated
    ii. Neutral= standard language and vocabulary
    iii. Low= informal
4. Abstract: language denoting ideas, concepts, emotions that are intangible (incredible, inconceivable)
5. Concrete: specific words describing physical conditions or qualities (soft, furry, hands wet from tears)
6. slang: informal situation- changes, comes and goes over the years
7. colloquial expressions = non-standard, usually in conversational speech or dialogue
8. dialect: non-standard with its own vocabulary and grammatical features, often revealing economic or social class or geographical location
9. jargon: characteristic of a particular trade, such as nautical jargon, IB jargon, etc.

Again, you must address the *effect* of the author's use of specific diction.

II. **Imagery**

Imagery is description that appeals to the reader's sense of sight, sound, smell, taste, or touch. Look for individual uses of imagery as well as *patterns* within and among the imagery. What is the effect of the imagery?

1. visual
2. touch
3. sound
4. taste
5. smell
6 Other types of imagery: religious?; nature?; youth?
    Contrasting/complementary imagery?   (Is there a predominant or recurring type?)

You *must* address the *effect* of the author's choices of this imagery.

III. **Figurative Language**

Figurative language is writing or speech NOT meant to be interpreted literally, and is used to paint vivid word pictures, to make writing emotionally intense and concentrated, and to state ideas in new and unusual ways.

A. Figurative Language

1. metaphor
2. simile
3. personification
4. paradox
5. hyperbole
6. metonymy
7. synecdoche
8. apostrophe
9. antithesis
10. other (oxymoron, pun, irony, allusion, understatement, etc.)

Sound devices:

1. alliteration
2. assonance
3. consonance
4. onomatopoeia
5. other (euphony, cacophony, etc.)

Remember, it is not enough to point out the examples of figurative language; you must address the *effect* of each of the poet's uses of these literary features.

IV.   Syntax

Syntax is always discussed in a supportive role; that is, it is always presented as a way the poet reinforces ideas or meaning first established with figurative language or diction or imagery. Syntax should not be discussed as a separate element; it is only discussed in conjunction with what is established by another element.

1. Consider the types of sentences (notice end punctuation)
    i.   Declarative
    ii. Imperative
    iii. Exclamatory
    iv. Interrogative (rhetorical questions?)
2. Consider the structure
    i.   Telegraphic (less than 5 words
    ii. Short (about 5 -10 words)
    iii. Medium (about 18 words)
    iv. Long and involved (30 or more words)
    More specifically, consider the following specific structures and consider _why_ the author uses them. What is the _effect_? How does the manipulation of syntax contribute to meaning?
    v.   loose sentence
    vi.   periodic sentence
    vii. balanced or parallel sentence
    viii. convoluted structure
    ix.   centered structure
    x.   freight train
    xi.   adverbial, or dependent clause opener
    xii. verb before subject/ inverted word order
    xiii. appositive
    xiv. rhetorical question

xv. form follows content

Advanced techniques include the following:

xvi. **anaphora**: repetition of the same word or groups of words at the beginning of successive clauses

"We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing-grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills." – Churchill

xvii. **chiasmus**: sentence structure where the arrangement of the second clause is reversal of the first clause

Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country." - John F. Kennedy

xvii. **polysyndeton**: deliberate use of many conjunctions for special emphasis

"I will visit you with my soldiers and my guns and my tanks and my aircraft and my spirit."

xviii. **asyndeton**: deliberate omission of conjunctions in a series of related clauses

"I came, I saw, I conquered." -Julius Caesar

V. <u>Technical Aspects</u>

These include the aspects particular to poetry:

1. Who is the speaker?
2. What is the point of view?
3. Determine the stanzas
4. Mark the rhyme
5. Scan lines for the rhythm and meter
6. Consider the kind of poem (narrative, dramatic, lyric, etc.?)
7. Is the poem a standard form (sonnet, villanelle, etc.?)

You must address how the structure and technical aspects contribute to meaning, or how they support the meaning established through the other elements.

VI. <u>Tone</u>

Using your handouts of specific tone words, what is the overall tone of the passage?

Remember diction is a primary determinate of tone.

What mood or atmosphere is created by the poet's use of language? What is the *effect* of this tone?

<u>Concluding your analysis</u>

Finally, find a way to conclude your analysis, perhaps with summarizing the overall effect of the poem or addressing the main purposes or main significance of the poem. Remember the purpose of analysis is to determine the overall intent of the poet, and analyze the techniques the poet uses to achieve that intent.

<u>Poetry Study Material</u>

John Ciardi has stated, "A poem is a formal structure in which many elements operate at the same time. In analysis, each element must be discussed separately. By nature, analysis is plodding at best...Analysis is never in any sense a substitution for the poem. The best thing any analysis can do is to prepare the reader to enter the poem more perceptively. By isolating for special consideration, some of the many simultaneous elements of the poem, analysis makes them more visible in one sense and less interesting in another. It is up to the reader, once the analysis is complete, to re-read the poem in a way that will restore the simultaneity and therefore the liveliness and interest of the poetic structure. The only reason for taking a poem apart is that it may then be put back together again more richly." (How Does a Poem Mean?)

I.Poetic Terminology

1. Caesura: a grammatical pause or break in a line of poetry (like a question mark), usually near the middle of the line. A caesura is usually dictated by sense or natural speech rhythm rather than by metrics.

2.Enjambment: is the continuation of a sentence or clause over a line-break.

3.Foot: a measure or unit of rhythm consisting of a definite pattern of accented and unaccented syllables. The accent (/) marks accented syllables; the breve (u) marks unaccented syllables.

4.Scansion: distinguishing the metrical feet in a poem; dividing into rhythmic feet.
5.Shift (volta): the turn or the point of dramatic change within a poem.
6.Stanza: a group of verses forming a division of a poem; a paragraph of poetry.

<u>II.Meter</u>: regular rhythm in poetry.
1.Iambic: u / - an iamb is a foot of two syllables, the first unaccented and the second accented.

        u /   u /   u /

    Examples: again, today, within

2.Trocahaic: /u – a trochee is a foot of two syllables, the first accented and the second unaccented (the reverse of an iamb).

      / u   / u   / u

    Examples: fondly, Monday, drama

3.Dactyllic: /uu – a dactyl is a foot of three syllables, the first accented and the last two unaccented.

      /uu   / u u   / uu

    Examples: merrily, happiness, beautiful

4.Anapestic:uu/ - an anapest is the reverse of a dactyl; it's three syllables with the first two unaccented and the last syllable accented.

      u u /

    Examples: understand,

5.Spondee: // - a spondee is a foot of two syllables, both accented.(Most compound words are spondees.)

      /   /   / /   / /

    Examples: lampshade, lipstick, handstand

<u>III. Verse</u> in a single line of poetry, - the number of feet in a line:

One foot in a line of poetry= monometer	five feet in one line= pentameter
Two feet in a line= dimeter	six feet in a line =hexameter
Three feet in a line= trimeter	seven feet in a line = heptameter
Four feet in a line = tetrameter	eight feet in a line =octameter

2.Stanza forms – a group of verses combined according to a definite pattern:

Couplet = a two line stanza	sestet = a six line stanza
Triplet = a three line stanza	septet = a seven line stanza
Quatrain = a four line stanza	octave = an eight line stanza
Quintet (or cinquain) = a five line stanza	Spenserian = nine or more lines

So, to put the previous three categories together:
A couplet of iambic pentameter looks like: u/u/u/u/u/   (Two lines of iambs 5 iambs.)
               u/u/u/u/u/
A tercet of dactylic tetrameter looks like: /uu/uu/uu/uu   (Three lines of 4 dactyls.)
               /uu/uu/uu/uu
               /uu/uu/uu/uu
A quatrain of trochaic hexameter looks like: /u/u/u/u/u/u   (Four lines of 6 trochees.)
               /u/u/u/u/u/u
               /u/u/u/u/u/u
               /u/u/u/u/u/u

<u>IV.Verse Form (Rhyme)</u> – as part of scansion is the determining of the rhyme scheme. This, in turn, determines the verse form.

Verse form: the sound at the end of the first line is labeled <u>a</u>: all other matching final rhymes in the stanza are called <u>a</u>. The second rhyme sound is labeled <u>b</u>, and the third rhyme sound is labeled <u>c</u>, and so on. This gives a simple and convenient method of describing the rhyme of any poem.
1.Blank verse: consists of unrhymed iambic pentameter. u/u/u/u/u/ (5 iambs unrhymed). It is most commonly used for longer, dignified poems (and often in Shakespeare.)
2.Free verse: is rhythmical but does not follow any set pattern of rhyme or length of line.

V.Divisions of poetry

1.Dramatic poetry: the poet lets the characters speak their own words without comment or explanation; use of dialogue.

2.Lyric poetry: poetry in which the poet expresses his/her own emotions, aspirations, moods, and thoughts.

      1.Ode: the most dignified lyric form, dealing progressively with one lofty theme; an elevated style.

      2.Elegy:a formal expression of emotions at the death of a loved one

      3.Pastoral:a reflective poem upon nature

      4.Dirge:a funeral hymn

      5.Song: simple lyrics

3. Narrative poetry: the poet tells the story as though she/he had been a spectator

      1.Epic: a long narrative poem, treating a theme or action in heroic style; the hero often embodies the highest qualities of a nation.

      2.Ballad: a short narrative poem, usually romantic, often using colloquial diction, conversation, and usually includes a refrain.

      3.Tale: a brief narrative poem.

4. Other classifications

      1.Limerick: a nonsense poem of five lines, of which line s1,2, and 5 rhyme (a), and lines 3 and 4 also rhyme (b).

      2.Sonnet: a verse form consisting of 14 lines, typically iambic pentameter, and usually treating a single emotion, sentiment, or reflection. Either contains an octave and a sestet, or three quatrains and a rhyming couplet.

            Italian sonnet: abba abba cde cde **OR** abba abba cdcd cd

            English sonnet: abab cdcd efef gg

            Spenserian sonnet: abab bcbc cdcd ee

      (Please see the sonnet handout.)

VI. Figures of Speech

1. Alliteration: a sound device; the repetition of the initial letter or sound in two or more closely associated words or stressed syllables. Example: The moans of the monkeys make me smile.

2. Antithesis: things which are contrasted or opposed; using the same grammatical form.
Examples: 1) the black dress and the white shirt 2) loving arms and hitting hands

3. Apostrophe: a figure of speech in which someone (usually absent) or some abstract quality, or a non-existent personage is directly addressed as though present.
Example: Oh love, why have you betrayed me?

4. Assonance: repeated vowel sounds within words
Examples: 1) bright and line 2) around the house 3)

5. Consonance: repeated consonant sounds within words; repetition of consonant sounds preceded by different vowel sounds.　　　Examples: 1) same and home 2) mellow and towel 3) sandy and tundra

6. Hyperbole: a deliberate exaggeration for effect.
Examples: 1) oceans of blood 2) a flood of tears 3) I could eat a horse.

7. Imagery: language which appeals to any of the five sense- sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell.

8. Metonymy: substituting an object closely associated with the word for the word itself.
Examples: The crown said "let them eat cake." ("Crown" is substituted for "queen.")
　　　　　The life spilled from his open wound. ("Life" is substituted for "blood.")

9. Metaphor: an implied comparison between two unlike thins; saying one thing is actually another.
Example: The man was a human tree.

10. Onomatopoeia: words whose pronunciation sounds like their meaning.
Examples: 1) buzz of bees 2) splat   3)boom

11. Oxymoron: a seeming contradiction in terms (usually just two words).
Examples: 1) freezing fire   2)jumbo shrimp

12. Paradox: a full statement that seems self-contradictory or absurd, but is actually true.
Examples: 1) We spend money to make money.

13. Personification: endows animals ideas, abstractions and inanimate object with human characteristics. Ex: 1)time's hands

14. Pathetic fallacy: personification applied to nature. Example: The sun smiled down on me.

15. Simile: a direct comparison of two unlike things using like or as.　　Example: The man was as tall as a tree.

16. Synecdoche: using a part of something to signify the whole.
Example: Ten thousand eyes were watching him. ("Eyes" are substituted for "people".)
　　　　　The hand pulled the trigger of the gun. ("Hand" is substituted for the person.)

IV. FIGURES OF SPEECH (TROPES, FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE): Not the literal truth.

A. *Metaphor & simile:* comparison of unlike things. *Tenor* (subject, often an abstraction) and *vehicle* (thing to which the tenor is compared, often an image) (I. A. Richards). *Implied metaphor* ("My love has red petals and sharp thorns"). *Extended metaphor* (Donne, "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning" compass comparison). *Mixed metaphor* (see "I am Woman"). *Dead metaphor* (daybreak, nightfall) .Tenor and vehicle are usually on different levels, in a "vertical" relation

B. *Metonymy:* Name of a thing substituted for that of a thing closely associated. ("The White House announced..." "Heavy hangs the head that wears the crown.") *Synecdoche:* Substituting part of thing for thing itself. ("I want your hand in marriage"). Things are on the same level, in a "horizontal" relation. *Transferred epithet:* where a characteristic of a thing is attributed to a thing closely associated with it. ("Drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds." "Her startled skates slid out from under her...")

C. *Personification* ("The wind whistled." "Time, that is intolerant of the brave and innocent). *Apostrophe:* Calling on or addressing someone or something not ordinarily spoken to. ("Feet, don't fail me now." "How do you like your blue-eyed boy, Mister Death?")

D. *Allusion:* An indirect reference to some cultural or historical item. ("I've chopped down a few cherry trees in my time." "This was his Rubicon.")

E. *Hyperbole, overstatement.* ("I've told you a million times.").
Litotes, understatement. British. (A fatal wound that "smarts a bit". "One could do worse than be a swinger of birches.")

F. *Paradox:* A superficially or literally impossible or self-contradictory statement. ("Nature imitates art." The poorest man I ever knew was the richest man by far." Milton, dreaming he can see dead wife: "But oh, as to embrace me she inclined,/ I waked, she fled, and day brought back my night.") An *oxymoron* is an apparently self-contradictory phrase, such as "cruel kindness." Some say "military intelligence" is an oxymoron.

G. *Pun: Paranomasia.* (In Shakespeare's sonnets: "Still thou hast thy Will." In a poem by X. J. Kennedy: "She could have stolen from his arms / Except that there was nothing left / To steal...")

H. *Irony:* At its most basic, meaning the opposite of what is said. "I really loved that two-hour exam." Sarcasm might be said to be a particularly strong form of irony. Irony can be a tone governing an entire poem (in which case the reader is meant to draw different conclusions from and react differently to what is presented in the poem than might literally be expected. In Browning's dramatic monologue "My Last Duchess" we slowly gather that the speaker is a moral monster, and that we should react against all of his expressed opinions and values. Irony need not be verbal: it can inhere in a situation. If the audience of a play knows important facts that the characters do not, then we say the situation shows *dramatic irony.*

I. *Parallelism:* when the lines or sections of a poem begin (or end) with similar or identical phrases (as in some parts of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*), that is called parallelism. It usually evokes the Bible, which frequently uses that rhetorical structure.

J. *Antithesis:* Arraying opposite or contrasting ideas or phrases near one another. Pope's line, "And wretches hang that jury-men may dine," is an example.