

## Analysis of poetry – a guide.

### Reading poetry involves asking the usual 'wh-questions':

- **What** is the poem about?
- **Who** is the speaker?
- **Whom** does the speaker address?
- **When** (at which time)?
- **Where** are we?
- **How** (involves analysis, see below)
- **Why** (involves interpretation – author's attitude, see below)

### The speaker/ the lyrical 'I':

- Is there a visible 'I' or 'we' in the poem?
- If so, who is he/she? : (Age, social background, gender, personality)
- Is the speaker addressing someone in particular?
- If so, whom?

### The Form:

#### Structure and composition

- Does the poem have a regular division into stanzas ?
- ... or is it in the form of *free verse*, i.e. varying length of the stanzas ?

Rhythm:

- Does the poem have a regular, steady and schematic rhythm? (*Metrical rhythm*)
- Or is the rhythmical pattern alternating with a 'natural flow'? (*Free rhythm*)

Rhyme:

- Do the lines rhyme? If so, how? (regular rhyme, irregular rhyme?)
- Some examples of regular rhyme:
  - aabb:** Last night I had an awful *dream*  
I woke up with a with a *scream*  
I dreamt I saw myself all *dead*  
and woke up bathed in *sweat*
  - abba:** Last night I had an awful *dream*  
I woke up bathed in pools of *sweat*  
I dreamt I saw myself all *dead*  
And woke up with an anxious *scream*
  - abab:** Last night I had an awful *dream*  
I saw myself all *dead*  
I woke up with an anxious *scream*  
and bathed in pools of *sweat*

some other rhymes:

- Alliteration:* a. consonance (konsonant rim) : I *d*reamt a *d*ream of *d*eath  
b. assonance (vokalrim): I *dreamt* of *deat*h and *wet* the bed

**Language:**

- Is there a dominant use of certain word classes? (adjectives, nouns, verbs etc.)  
(I suggest you make a table similar to the one below, and plot in the numbers)

<b>Nouns</b>	<b>Adjectives</b>	<b>verbs</b>	<b>stanza #</b>
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- If so, which? – And to what effect?

**A rule of thumb (tommelfingerregel)**

Adjectives usually emphasise emotions/mood

Verbs usually emphasise action.

Nouns *can* emphasise the feeling of being shown pictures (emphasis on "things")

## Style:

- Is there a characteristic use of the expressive possibilities of language?

A few examples:

Paradox: contradictions such as 'icy fire', 'glowing darkness' (dk: larmende stilhed)

Repetition: lines beginning with the same word.

Repetition of certain words or word classes

## Imagery: (billedsprog)

- Does the poem create many pictures?
- If so, how?
  - through *symbols*? (something concrete which represents something abstract)
  - through *metaphors*? (a 'picture' which connects 2 different subjects and thereby creates a new meaning)  
e. g. *den danske sang er en ung blond pige*
  - through *personifications*: Something abstract given human qualities:  
e. g. Death (*manden med leen*)

## Time and Place (setting):

- At which time does the poem take place – and where are we?
- Is there a time span (tidsrum)?
- Are there any changes of time and/or place in the poem?
- Is the poem organised chronologically (in a logical time sequence)?
- -or are there sudden jumps in time and/or place?

## **Mood:**

- Does the poem have a certain atmosphere or mood? (happy, sad, anxious etc.)?
- How is that mood created? (by adjectives?, irregular rhyme?, sudden breaks etc. etc.?)
- Does the mood change during the poem?
- If so, what is the effect of the change?

## **Tension:**

- Does the poem have a climax?
- If so, where is it? - And how does the poet build up to that climax?
- Does the poem have an anti-climax? (i.e. a build-up to a climax which is never realised)
- If so, where is it? - And what effect does it have on you, the reader?

## **Theme(s):**

- Does the poem tell a story or describe a situation, mood or .....?
- What is the poem's title and how can you connect it to the poem ?
- Is there a theme, i.e. what does the poem focus on?
  - And how does it show? (e.g. many repetitions, *italics*, keywords etc.)

**A rule of thumb:** Repetitions usually indicate importance – perhaps a main theme

## **Interpretation: So what does this really mean?**

- What is the poem's main theme?
- The main message/effect of the poem: What does the speaker want to tell us about that theme? (NB: the speaker/or poet may not want to tell us anything specific, but may , for example, aim only at effect.
- What is your opinion of the poem? (substantiate your answers)

## **Perspectives**

**NB: Before you move to this level, it is – of course - a MUST that you have made an analysis and interpretation of the poem!**

- Here you can – to a CERTAIN extent – move beyond the text and connect it to its **Context:** the time at which it is written and to our context: The time at which you read it.
- The poet's background (knowledge of other poems by the same poet)
- Comparisons to other poetry/literature concerning a similar theme or problem
- Social and/or historical circumstances.
- The poem in our context: Its relevance today.  
Its relevance to you.