

Hum 110: Reading Lyric Poetry

Steps People Take When Reading a Lyric Poem:

1. Read the poem aloud without stopping. If you don't know a word, circle it but keep going.
2. Paraphrase the poem. I usually do this next to each stanza in the margins to make sure I am noticing how the argument builds. At the end summarize what the overall argument or message was. What is the poet trying to convince you is true or worth believing?
3. Look up any unknown words in the OED. Look up any unknown allusions in the Oxford Classical Dictionary or a comparable companion to classical literature.
4. Diction: characterize the type of language. Is battle language used, romantic, animal, high, low, etc. How does the type of language relate to the argument?
5. Speaker: who is speaking and to whom? Characterize the speaker.
6. Figures of Speech: put a * or mark by figures of speech (similes, metaphors, implied metaphors--see below). Spend time listing the associations of the things being compared. What do we learn from the comparison?
7. Theme: drawing on the type of language used and the argument of the poem, do you see it related to any themes we have discussed so far in class? How does the presentation of those themes differ from previous works we have read? Can you make sense of the changes using historical or cultural information?
8. Form and Meter: is the poem in a particular form or meter? (e.g. sapphics or dactylic hexameter--see below)
9. Genre: based on the information on the other side of this sheet, take a stab at in what genre your lyric poem was written. Give your reasons for your choice. What is the cultural context and purpose of this genre? How does the poem achieve these goals?

Figures of Speech:

Oh, my love is like a red, red rose.	<i>Simile</i>
Oh, my love resembles a red, red rose.	<i>Simile</i>
Oh, my love is redder than a rose.	<i>Simile</i>
Oh, my love is a red, red rose.	<i>Metaphor</i>
Oh, my love has red petals and sharp thorns.	<i>Implied Metaphor</i>
Oh, I placed my love into a long-stem vase And I bandaged my bleeding thumb	<i>Implied Metaphor</i>

(X.J. Kennedy's *An Introduction to Poetry*, 6th ed. Boston: Little, Brown & Co.: 85.)

Form & Meter:

1. Dactylic Hexameter: The classical or heroic line of the epic based on six dactylic feet with spondees substituted, and always ending S ww/ SS (where S=strong, and w= weak). A dactyl is a three syllable metrical foot consisting of S ww; a spondee is a two syllable foot consisting of SS. Dactyls are the same rhythm as a waltz: **1 2 3 / 1 2 3 / 1 2 3 / 1 2 3...** (if this doesn't make a lot of sense, don't sweat it, I will explain it later).
2. Sapphics: The verse stanza primarily used by Sappho and Catullus. It has a complicated rhythmic structure, but is easily recognized by its four line stanzas in which the first three lines are long and the last one is short.

Lyric Genres:

Please note that this information is taken from Nathalia King's quite wonderful home page at the following address: <http://homer.reed.edu/lyric.html>. She provides lots of other information about lyrics.

1. Hymn

Sung to the accompaniment of a lyre by a chorus standing around the altar. As the paian to Apollo and dithyramb to Dionysus were developed, the hymn became limited to worship of other gods.

2. Prosodion

Prosodia were "...chorals of supplication or thanksgiving, sung to the music of the flute in solemn processions to the temples or altars of the gods....The prosodia naturally formed the introductory part of the festival--while the approach was made to the temple or while the sacred offerings were brought to the altar." In the liturgy of a festival, the prosodion was followed by a hyporchematic song, after which came a hymn.

3. Paian

The paian was choral, accompanied by the lyre or flute. The term at first meant a song devoted to the worship of Apollo, then came to be used in other contexts. "It is as a song of thanksgiving and praise...that the paian is best attested in ancient literature. It was pre-eminently a song of joy....Apollo enjoined that the paian should be sung in the springtime at Delphi."

4. Dithyramb

In the classical period, this choral song was one of the events in competition at the Dionysia festival in Athens. It may have its origins in the spontaneous song "of the reveller at the komos, when he is smitten in his soul by wine's thunder". "The dithyrambic dance, in which numerous figures were employed, was called the tyrbasia, and was lively and enthusiastic, often wild and extravagant." At first both dedicated to and relating the story of Dionysos, the dithyramb eventually came to concern other heroic subjects. Choral from the time of Arion, subject of competition at the Dionysia festival in Athens. Gradually solos were introduced, then dialogue between a single actor and the chorus leader. This led eventually to the development of tragedy.

5. Enkomion

A praise poem in honor of men, as opposed to the hymn which was for the gods.

6. Epinikion

A praise poem sung by a chorus in honor of a victor in an athletic contest. "The common form of accompaniment seems to have been a combination of wind and stringed instruments. Sometimes several kitharas were employed, but it is not probable that more than one flute took part in the accompaniment."

7. Skolion

Song sung by the guests at a banquet.

8. Erotikon

Love poetry--sacred, profane, or both.

9. Hymenaios

"Nuptial songs were sung on three occasions in connection with these ceremonies: at the wedding banquet, during the procession, and before the bridal chamber...hymenaios is the generic term that covers all three parts of the ceremony."

10. Threnos

Threnoi were funeral laments; examples of from the Homeric age can be found in the Iliad. "The artistic threnos was a choral song unattended by the responsive lamentations and monodies that formed a part of the Homeric lament." The chorus wore black, and "a stately dance augmented the solemnity of the occasion. The balanced grouping in strophe, antistrophe, and (possibly) epode, gave an effect of calmness and dignity.... The flute was invariably used to accompany the words, which were sung either in a low or in a high key."