

Analyzing Poetry

Introduction

Analyzing poetry sounds difficult, but it isn't hard if you take it one piece at a time. We're going to break it down step by step and see what we can discover about our poem. We'll do this with two goals in mind. Our first goal is just to enjoy the poem. Remember that most of the time, poets wrote poems so people would enjoy them. Don't get so stressed about figuring them out that you forget to enjoy them. Our second goal is to analyze them so we can discover what the poet is trying to say to us and learn about how he or she communicated those ideas. That will help us enjoy the poem even more and learn how to write poems that communicate our ideas to others.

Step One:

Read the poem thoughtfully and carefully out loud. Then read it silently to yourself. Are there any words of which you aren't sure of the meaning? Write them down.

Step Two:

What do you think the words mean from their context in the poem? Write down your thoughts and then look them up in a dictionary. Revise or expand their definitions based on what you learn.

Step Three:

What is the title of the poem? Is it obvious how it relates to what the poem is about? If not, what do you think the title might be referring to?

Step Four:

What is the setting? Where does the poem take place? What details do you notice about the setting?

Step Five:

What perspective or point of view is the poem written from? Is it something the speaker experienced? Is it something that happened in the past? Is it happening now or is it something that might happen in the future?

Step Six:

What words or phrases are repeated?

Why do you think the poet did this?

Old and New Year Ditties

by Christina Georgina Rossetti

New Year met me somewhat sad:
Old Year leaves me tired,
Stripped of favourite things I had
Balked of much desired:
Yet farther on my road to-day
God willing, farther on my way.

New Year coming on apace
What have you to give me?
Bring you scathe, or bring you grace,
Face me with an honest face;
You shall not deceive me:
Be it good or ill, be it what you will,
It needs shall help me on my road,
My rugged way to heaven, please God.

Watch with me, men, women, and children dear,
You whom I love, for whom I hope and fear,
Watch with me this last vigil of the year.
Some hug their business, some their pleasure-scheme;
Some seize the vacant hour to sleep or dream;
Heart locked in heart some kneel and watch apart.

Watch with me blessed spirits, who delight
All through the holy night to walk in white,
Or take your ease after the long-drawn fight.
I know not if they watch with me: I know
They count this eve of resurrection slow,
And cry, 'How long?' with urgent utterance strong.

Watch with me Jesus, in my loneliness:
Though others say me nay, yet say Thou yes;
Though others pass me by, stop Thou to bless.
Yea, Thou dost stop with me this vigil night;
To-night of pain, to-morrow of delight:
I, Love, am Thine; Thou, Lord my God, art mine.

Passing away, saith the World, passing away:
Chances, beauty and youth sapped day by day:
Thy life never continueth in one stay.
Is the eye waxen dim, is the dark hair changing to grey
That hath won neither laurel nor bay?
I shall clothe myself in Spring and bud in May:
Thou, root-stricken, shalt not rebuild thy decay
On my bosom for aye.
Then I answered: Yea.

Passing away, saith my Soul, passing away:
With its burden of fear and hope, of labour and play;
Hearken what the past doth witness and say:
Rust in thy gold, a moth is in thine array,
A canker is in thy bud, thy leaf must decay.
At midnight, at cockcrow, at morning, one certain day
Lo, the Bridegroom shall come and shall not delay:
Watch thou and pray.
Then I answered: Yea.

Passing away, saith my God, passing away:
Winter passeth after the long delay:
New grapes on the vine, new figs on the tender spray,
Turtle calleth turtle in Heaven's May.
Though I tarry wait for Me, trust Me, watch and pray:
Arise, come away, night is past and lo it is day,
My love, My sister, My spouse, thou shalt hear Me say.
Then I answered: Yea.

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