

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER WHEN READING EACH POEM

A: Content (what Ransom calls the 'logical core' of the poem)

- 1) Paraphrase the poem as it develops *step by step*.
 - i) What form does this development take? Does the poem consist in a logical argument? An attempt to persuade? A description?
- 2) Summarise the main theme(s) of the poem in one sentence or less.
- 3) Is there an identifiable voice in the poem (the 'persona')? If so, who is speaking?
 - i) What is the tone adopted by this voice?
- 4) Is the speaker / persona in the poem the poet? If so, what does the poem reveal about the poet?
- 5) Does the poem provide any clues as to the identity of the audience addressed by the speaker?
 - i) What effect is the poem designed to have upon the reader? Is the poem designed to appeal to the reader's intellect, or his / her emotions, or both?

B: Form (what Ransom called the 'local texture' of the poem)

1. What is the *rhyme scheme* of the poem, if any?
2. Does the poem have an identifiable *metre / rhythm*?
3. Does the poem have a particular *stanzaic* structure?
4. Does the poem belong to an identifiable *kind* of poetry?
 - i) Is it a lyric poem as opposed to an epic poem?
 - ii) If so, what *genre* of lyric poem is it? A sonnet? An ode?
 - iii) What are the characteristics of the genre in question? (If necessary, look up this information.)
5. Discuss the *diction* of the poem by examining the *imagery* employed by the poet: identify examples of *metaphor*, *simile*, *metonymy*, *personification*, if any, and show how these contribute to the meaning of the poem which you discussed above in section A.
6. Identify examples of *paradox*, *hyperbole*, *litotes*, *irony*, *allusions*, etc., if any, and show how these contribute to the meaning of the poem which you discussed above in section A.
7. Does the poem contain any examples of *symbolism*? If so, what is the meaning of the symbols you have identified? To what end are symbols used here?
8. Identify examples of *alliteration* and *assonance* in the poem, if any, and show how these contribute to the meaning of the poem which you discussed above in section A.
9. Has an in-depth appreciation of the form of the poem arising from your answers to questions 1 to 8 in section B altered in any way your views on the meaning of the poem which you put forward in section A?
10. Is a discussion of the form of a poem separable from that of the content of a poem and vice versa?

Sources You May Wish to Consult

- 1) John Crowe Ransom "Criticism as Pure Speculation" (in Charles Kaplan, ed. Criticism: the Major Statements): 'logical core' and 'local texture.'
- 2) Aristotle Poetics (can also be found in Charles Kaplan, ed. Criticism: the Major Statements): the three basic kinds of poetry: lyric, epic and dramatic.
- 3) Alastair Fowler Kinds of Literature: what is a literary genre?
- 4) Bert Bach et al., eds. The Liberating Form: definitions of the various genres.
- 5) M. H Abrams Glossary of Literary Terms *passim*