

## Suggestions for Looking at Poetry Critically

Before looking at the poem critically, as with other genres of writing, a good starting place is always to identify

- \* what you liked
- \* what stayed with you
- \* what was strong

A poem does not need to address every single one of the points below to be a successful piece. Some poems don't rhyme nor should they. The points are simply a guide for ways to look at a poem that may be helpful in revision. But please know that *poetry is meant to be read out loud*. It's akin to a musical form, so it's important to hear how it sounds in order to fully grasp what a poem is trying to say, what its tone is, what its intention is.

Here are some things to consider when evaluating a poem:

- 1—What is its emotional impact? Does it have educational value? Entertainment value?
- 2—What is its message? Does it have a profound concept and/or unforgettable punch lines? Does the ending add to the poem's impact?
- 3—How is the poem organized. What is its structure? Does the structure fit what this poem is trying to do/say?
- 4—Poetry, when done well, does not waste words. It makes each word, each syllable count for meaning/sound/effect. It is not redundant and uses adjectives and adverbs sparingly, if at all. Prepositions are carefully chosen and also sparingly used. So .... is there an "economy" of language, words?
- 5—If it is written in rhyme, do the rhymes fit, not just with each other, but with the flow and intended nuance of meaning and verse demands. Rhyme and rhythm are connected. When read out loud, is the poem sing-songy like a nursery rhyme, or does it sound more fitting as a serious piece?
- 6—Do the sounds of the words create the mood sought in the poem. Is there a pleasing repetition of sounds, either in syllables or by repeating whole words or phrases?
- 7—Does the form of the poem—its shape on paper, ie long vs. short lines, breaks in verses, use of white space ... suit the poem? Keep in mind that white space and punctuation usually indicate pauses.
- 8—Does the word choice create the best nuance of meaning? Do the words flow naturally to create the proper tempo for the subject matter?

9—Are the word groupings and phrases original, fresh? Is there an interesting use of figurative language—metaphors, similes, personification and such? Does the poet use sensory details that help bring life to the subject and assist the reader in *sensing* (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching) what is being written about?