

Reading Poems in Their Own Terms

THE WORLD IN THE TEXT – Subject, Setting, Point of View

What ‘world’ does the poem conjure? Where are we and what are we looking at? What is its setting, or scene? What is the subject? Who is the speaker, and speaking from what point of view and attitude towards the subject? Where is our attention focused and how does it situate us as readers/listeners? What other perspectives are given to us, and how and by whom?

THE WORLD OF THE TEXT—Structure, prosody (elements of structure, line lengths, line breaks, rhythm and rhyme patterns (music), word choices and images

How is the poem ‘built’ (structured), and how does its architecture and music develop and advance its subject? What devices does the poem use as it proceeds to build interest, tension, attention around its subject (e.g., stanzas, free form, enjambment, varying rhythm and rhyme)? What words and images has the poet chosen to develop the theme and create an environment for the subject?

THE WORLD IN FRONT OF OR BEYOND THE TEXT— Vision, World View

What vision of the world … or of the human or of God … does the poem project? What kinds of theological work does the poem do? What does this poem challenge us to see, understand, recognize, accept or affirm (or refuse!), etc.? Is this poem offering a form of biblical or theological commentary? What meaning(s) does it hold for us?