

Critical Analysis: A Three Step Process

1. **Literal Level - characterized by a concern with facts or the primary meaning of an expression.**

- a. Read through the work, including the title. (Poetry should be read aloud.)
- b. Reread or scan the work, stopping to look up any unfamiliar or unusually used words.
- c. Paraphrase the literal meaning of the work. Consider the following questions:
 - i. Who is speaking? To whom?
 - ii. Who are the characters, and what are their most obvious character traits?
 - iii. What is the setting?
 - iv. What are the obvious events of the plot?

****DO NOT INTERPRET OR ANALYZE AT THIS STEP!**

2. **Divergent Level - related to movement in different directions from a common point.**

- a. Group words, phrases, lines that seem to evoke a similar image. Underline key words.
- b. Brainstorm or cluster: images (word pictures), connotations (word feelings) evoked by these grouped and underlines words, phrases and figures of speech (simile, metaphor, personification), symbol (something that stands for something else), and allusions (figures of speech that refer to some famous event or figure).
- c. List any repetition of words, phrases, or images. In poetry, look for repetition of sounds, rhythm, rhyme, alliteration, unusual capitalization, punctuation, word order or spelling. List any ideas such repetitions or stylistic conventions suggest. Are there any deviations from patterns or ideas that are being established? Why?

3. **Convergent Level - related to movement together and unification in a common point, interest or focus.**

- a. Establish possible patterns of thought, message, meaning or purpose for some word/phrase group or stanza.
- b. Collect, synthesize, summarize the message from the above (3a) word groups or stanzas that CONVERGE to create a unifying message for the whole work.
- c. From your analysis (all previous steps) state the conflict(s) (the opposition of one force against another) that is evident in this work. Then write at least one theme statement (the message or moral in the work) or resolution suggested by each conflict.

“Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening”

-Robert Frost

Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village, though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

"The End Of The Innocence" -Don Henley lyrics

Remember when the days were long
And rolled beneath a deep blue sky
Didn't have a care in the world
With mommy and daddy standin' by
But "happily ever after" fails
And we've been poisoned by these fairy tales
The lawyers dwell on small details
Since daddy had to fly

But I know a place where we can go
That's still untouched by men
We'll sit and watch the clouds roll by
And the tall grass wave in the wind
You can lay your head back on the ground
And let your hair fall all around me
Offer up your best defense
But this is the end
This is the end of the innocence

O' beautiful, for spacious skies
But now those skies are threatening
They're beating plowshares into swords
For this tired old man that we elected king
Armchair warriors often fail
And we've been poisoned by these fairy tales
The lawyers clean up all details
Since daddy had to lie

But I know a place where we can go
And wash away this sin
We'll sit and watch the clouds roll by
And the tall grass wave in the wind
Just lay your head back on the ground
And let your hair spill all around me
Offer up your best defense
But this is the end
This is the end of the innocence

Who knows how long this will last
Now we've come so far, so fast
But, somewhere back there in the dust
That same small town in each of us
I need to remember this
So baby give me just one kiss
And let me take a long last look
Before we say goodbye

Just lay your head back on the ground
And let your hair fall all around me
Offer up your best defense
But this is the end
This is the end of the innocence

"Wreck On The Highway" - Bruce Springsteen lyrics

Last night I was out driving
Coming home at the end of the working day
I was riding alone through the drizzling rain
On a deserted stretch of a county two-lane
When I came upon a wreck on the highway

There was blood and glass all over
And there was nobody there but me
As the rain tumbled down hard and cold
I seen a young man lying by the side of the road
He cried Mister, won't you help me please

An ambulance finally came and took him to Riverside
I watched as they drove him away
And I thought of a girlfriend or a young wife
And a state trooper knocking in the middle of the night
To say your baby died in a wreck on the highway

Sometimes I sit up in the darkness
And I watch my baby as she sleeps
Then I climb in bed and I hold her tight
I just lay there awake in the middle of the night
Thinking 'bout the wreck on the highway

“Lot’s Wife” - Kristine Bailey (b. 1951)

While Lot, the conscience of a nation,
struggles with the Lord,
she struggles with the housework.
The City of Sin is where
she raises the children.
Ba'al or Adonai--
Whoever is God--
the bread must still be made
and the doorsill swept.
The Lord may kill the children tomorrow,
but today they must be bathed and fed.
Well and good to condemn your neighbors' religion,
but weren't they there
when the baby was born,
and when the well collapsed?
While her husband communes with God,
she tucks the children into bed.
In the morning, when he tells her of the judgment,
[that is, God's decision to destroy the city]
she puts down the lamp she is cleaning
and calmly begins to pack.
In between bundling up the children
and deciding what will go,
she runs for a moment
to say goodbye to the herd,
gently patting each soft head
with tears in her eyes for the animals that will not understand.
She smiles blindly to the woman
who held her hand at childbed.
It is easy for eyes that have always turned to heaven
not to look back;
those who have been--by necessity--drawn to earth
cannot forget that life is lived from day to day.
Good, to a God, and good in human terms
are two different things.
On the breast of the hill, she chooses to be human,
and turns, in farewell--
and never regrets
the sacrifice.

The story of the pious Lot, and the destruction of the wicked city of Sodom is told in the Old Testament, in Genesis 19: 1-28. Briefly, Lot sheltered two angels, in the form of men, visited him in Sodom. The townspeople sought to rape the angels, and the city was marked for destruction, but the angels warned Lot’s family and urged them to flee and not look back. Lot’s wife, however, looked back and was turned into a pillar of salt.

"September 1, 1939" - W.H. Auden

I sit in one of the dives
On Fifty-second Street
Uncertain and afraid
As the clever hopes expire
Of a low dishonest decade:
Waves of anger and fear
Circulate over the bright
And darkened lands of the earth,
Obsessing our private lives;
The unmentionable odour of death
Offends the September night.

Accurate scholarship can
Unearth the whole offence
From Luther until now
That has driven a culture mad,
Find what occurred at Linz,
What huge imago made
A psychopathic god:
I and the public know
What all schoolchildren learn,
Those to whom evil is done
Do evil in return.

Exiled Thucydides knew
All that a speech can say
About Democracy,
And what dictators do,
The elderly rubbish they talk
To an apathetic grave;
Analysed all in his book,
The enlightenment driven away,
The habit-forming pain,
Mismanagement and grief:
We must suffer them all again.

Into this neutral air
Where blind skyscrapers use
Their full height to proclaim
The strength of Collective Man,
Each language pours its vain
Competitive excuse:
But who can live for long
In an euphoric dream;
Out of the mirror they stare,
Imperialism's face
And the international wrong.

Faces along the bar
Cling to their average day:
The lights must never go out,
The music must always play,
All the conventions conspire
To make this fort assume
The furniture of home;
Lest we should see where we are,
Lost in a haunted wood,
Children afraid of the night
Who have never been happy or
good.

The windiest militant trash
Important Persons shout
Is not so crude as our wish:
What mad Nijinsky wrote
About Diaghilev
Is true of the normal heart;
For the error bred in the bone
Of each woman and each man
Craves what it cannot have,
Not universal love
But to be loved alone.

From the conservative dark
Into the ethical life
The dense commuters come,
Repeating their morning vow;
"I will be true to the wife,
I'll concentrate more on my
work,"
And helpless governors wake
To resume their compulsory game:
Who can release them now,
Who can reach the deaf,
Who can speak for the dumb?

All I have is a voice
To undo the folded lie,
The romantic lie in the brain
Of the sensual man-in-the-street
And the lie of Authority
Whose buildings grope the sky:
There is no such thing as the State
And no one exists alone;
Hunger allows no choice
To the citizen or the police;
We must love one another or die.

Defenceless under the night
Our world in stupor lies;
Yet, dotted everywhere,
Ironic points of light
Flash out wherever the Just
Exchange their messages:
May I, composed like them
Of Eros and of dust,
Beleaguered by the same
Negation and despair,
Show an affirming flame.

“The Second Coming”

-William Butler Yeats

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

"I Am A Rock"

-Paul Simon and Art Garfunkle

A winter's day
In a deep and dark December
I am alone
Gazing from my window
To the streets below
On a freshly fallen, silent shroud of snow
I am a rock
I am an island

I've built walls
A fortress, steep and mighty
That none may penetrate
I have no need of friendship
Friendship causes pain.
It's laughter and it's loving I disdain.
I am a rock
I am an island

Don't talk of love
Well, I've heard the words before
It's sleeping in my memory
And I won't disturb the slumber
Of feelings that have died
If I never loved, I never would have cried
I am a rock
I am an island

I have my books
And my poetry to protect me
I am shielded in my armor
Hiding in my room
Safe within my womb
I touch no one and no one touches me
I am a rock
I am an island

And a rock feels no pain
And an island never cries