

THE PROPER APPROACH TO A POETIC TEXT

1. Write out the text on a separate sheet of paper. Mark off all the various poetic devices - image, sound, voice. Draw transition lines across the page, creating separate beats. Circle any "reality" words (truth / beauty / justice) for substitutions.
2. As far as possible, try to withhold your own interpretation from the text. So far you are not ready to "interpret" it -- remember that relaxation and familiarity with the form of the text are the most important things. LET THE TEXT TELL YOU.
3. DO THE TEXT ALONE, ALOUD, MANY MANY MANY TIMES.

This is the most important single step of all, and it cannot be done silently or intellectually. You must try to get the very rhythms of the text into your own bloodstream, all the sight and sound and sense values.

4. Get up and focus the text -- locate specific image areas outside yourself -- choose contact sources. If you are speaking the text to someone (primary focus), choose where that person is -- and if you refer to other image areas (secondary focus), choose where those areas will be.

Do this as you walk through the text, just as you would walk through the blocking of any ordinary play -- only remember that you are not yet acting.

5. AT LAST: begin to ask all the acting questions: what do I want, what are the obstacles to my getting what I want, what are my given circumstances, my physical life, &c &c &c.

In the words of the French poet Valery: "as the final nuance, ask about the meaning of the text."

Remember that the challenge of a poetic text is to say what you see and see what you say.



William Packard