

Principles of Literary Study

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Office hours: Thursdays 11:45–12:45 in MU 040A or by appt.

February 26, 2026. “Shiloh” and the speaker; some open forms.

the first paper: March 10, 10 p.m.

- ▶ write about one (1) poem
 - ▶ (with mention of others if you wish)
- ▶ 1500–1800 words (5–7ish pages)
 - ▶ more is okay, less is a problem
- ▶ introduction-exercise due March 4 at noon
 - ▶ explanation of exercise next time
- ▶ late policy
 - ▶ 0–48 hours late: max 3.0 (B+)
 - ▶ later: max 2.0 (C+)

what matters

- ▶ evidence
- ▶ motive
- ▶ argument
- ▶ evidence
- ▶ also evidence is important

poetry-analysis working methods

- ▶ try to notice everything
 - ▶ sound patterns (rhyme, alliteration, other kinds of echo)
 - ▶ meter or the absence thereof
 - ▶ line patterns, enjambment, end-stopping
 - ▶ diction: kinds of words, metaphors, other rhetorical figures
 - ▶ grammar: kinds of sentences, tense, mood, aspect...
 - ▶ larger structure (stanzas, sections)
 - ▶ relation to genre(s) (expectations, surprises)
 - ▶ implied speaker, implied addressee, implied situation
- ▶ sentence-by-sentence paraphrase
 - ▶ what does it even mean on the surface?
 - ▶ where is it hard to tell (and why?)
- ▶ then ask: what goes with what?
 - ▶ what goes against what?
 - ▶ what goes after what?
- ▶ and: how are form and theme related?

Melville, “Shiloh”

- ▶ Copy out Melville’s “Shiloh.” Notice everything.

speaker and occasion

The gruesome carnage was unprecedented: Of nearly 110,000 soldiers engaged from both sides 23,800 became casualties, 3,500 were killed outright. The human devastation was the greatest known on the American continent up to that date; more casualties than the Revolution, War of 1812 and Mexican War combined.

“The Battle of Shiloh,” American Battlefield Trust. As for “greatest known on the American continent up to that date,” consider whether Native deaths from disease, war, and displacement count as known “human devastation.”

- What responses does the speaker consider to the battle in his “Requiem”?

Foemen at morn, but friends at eve—
Fame or country least their care:
(What like a bullet can undeceive!)
But now thy lie low,
While over them the swallows skim,
And all is hushed at Shiloh.

II. 14–19.

- ▶ As a speech act, how does the parenthesis compare to what surrounds it?

Warner

Warner

1. Locate a *motive* and a *thesis* in Warner's essay.
2. Look for a place where he analyzes "Shiloh" to support his claims.

motive and thesis

- ▶ motive: textual problems and global ones
 - ▶ What is most interesting to me is a paradox in its redemptive language. (41)
 - ▶ I would like to know more about the genealogy of this abstraction, *violence*, and about its secular deployment. (45)
- ▶ thesis: small, large
 - ▶ The line, in short, encapsulates the dilemma of Northern liberal intellectuals. (42)
 - ▶ The point I want to make here is that neither violence nor redemption comes with uncontested valuations. (46)
 - ▶ I have tried to show here that the apparently simple act of naming violence...in fact mobilizes a complex structure of feeling, made possible by a vast historical background and a lot of textual condensation. (54)

example interpretation

The rhetorical exclamation is in parenthesis, I think, partly because it sits oddly against the picture of the innocent suffering that has preceded it. If any agent has injured these men, it can only be their own former state of deception—fame or country. (49)

the speaker again

The line itself lingers in parentheses, floating free of its scene. Its picture of subjectivity, apparently merely negative, is in reality mediated by the conventions of lyric, with its eternal, placeless, overheard speech. (51)

We should say that eloquence is *heard*; poetry is *overheard*. Eloquence supposes an audience; the peculiarity of poetry appears to us to lie in the poet's utter unconsciousness of a listener. Poetry is feeling confessing itself to itself, in moments of solitude, and embodying itself in symbols which are the nearest possible representations of the feeling in the exact shape in which it exists in the poet's mind.

John Stuart Mill, "Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties" [1833], in *Dissertations and Discussions: Political, Philosophical, and Historical* (London: Parker, 1859), 1.71.

open forms

- ▶ poems making their own rules
 - ▶ look for organizing principles within the poem
- ▶ doesn't mean no form at all
 - ▶ “Lycidas”: rhyme (also: series of speakers)
 - ▶ Ramanujan's tercets (more shortly)
 - ▶ geographic survey in “An Octopus”
 - ▶ the coastline-form of “Corsons Inlet”

example: octopodal form

Neatness of finish! Neatness of finish!
Relentless accuracy is the nature of this octopus
with its capacity for fact.

Moore, "An Octopus," 89.

Quoted descriptions of scenery and of animals, of which the source is not given, have been taken from government pamphlets on our national parks.

Moore, notes to "An Octopus," 107.

next

- ▶ Shahid, *Call Me Ishmael Tonight*, complete
 - ▶ learn about the form (*Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetics*, s.v. “ghazal”)
 - ▶ choose one poem to re-read carefully
 - ▶ some of you will be called on
 - ▶ just go with the flow
 - ▶ ...but I did write a bunch of notes:
andrewgoldstone.com/blog/shahid