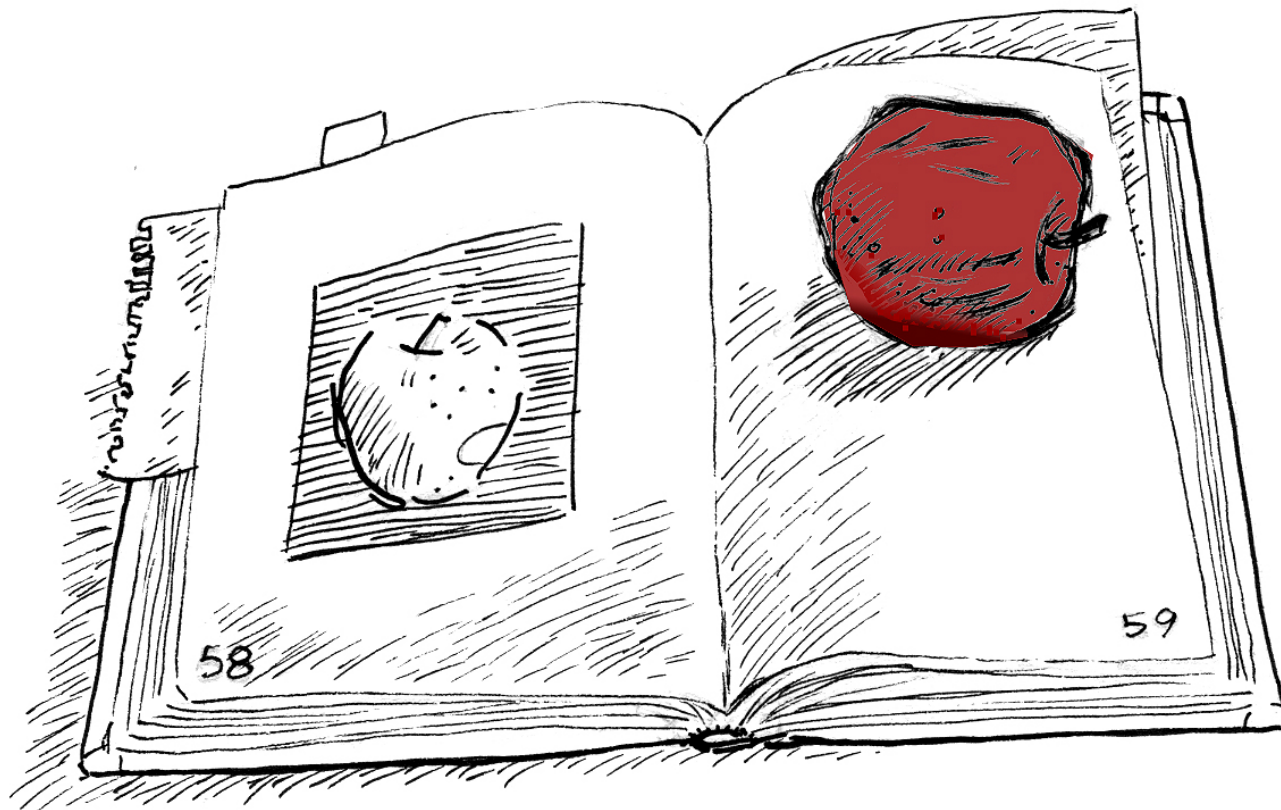


Introduction to Poetry



Process for Poetry Dissertations

Just like the short stories, it is important to give the poetry assignments
at least three readings.

The first reading should be for enjoyment, and for basic understanding of the surface “literal meaning.”

- Poetry tends to use language with more rhythmic patterns and sometimes is structured with stronger formulas.
- Because of the restrictions placed on verse, poetry obviously tends to be structured more like musical lyrics.
- Poetry by nature is intended to be read aloud.
- Poetry should cause you to reflect for a “deeper meaning.”
- Stewart A. Baker states that poetry is essentially communicating an experience. Or in his own words: ***A poem happens.***

Process for Poetry Dissertations

The second reading begin to associate deeper meanings of images and choice of specific words.

- Symbolic language is often used to create a secondary reference in these works.
- Poets also often make **allusions**, words which act as references to other writers, people, events, places, religious figures, mythologies.
- The second reading requires you to ask questions.
- Always speculate secondary meanings of the text.
- Some poems have obvious meanings. Others contain a hidden agenda.

The third reading establishes a higher state of critical analysis.

- Always consider the difference between the *denotation* of a supplied word and the possible *connotation* of the word.

Denotation vs. Connotation

A single word in the whole poem can be a crucial point of a secondary meaning.

The *denotation* and *connotation* carry different emphasis.

denotation: dictionary meanings

connotation: emotional, implied meanings

Example: **mother**—noun; 1. a female parent; one's female parent; 2. a mother-in-law, stepmother, or adoptive mother; 3. a term of address for a female parent or a woman having or regarded as having the status, or authority of a female parent. 4. the qualities characteristic of a mother, as maternal affection

Most people associate the dictionary meaning of the word to be based on a positive association: maternal feelings are usually associated with warmth, caring, nurturing emotions.

Process for Poetry Dissertations

However, Sylvia Plath implies a different meaning in her poem
“The Moon and the Yew Tree.”

One crucial stanza reads:

The moon is my mother. She is not sweet like Mary.
Her blue garments unloose small bats and owls.
How I would like to believe in tenderness—

When Plath uses the term ‘mother,’ the definition takes on a different, emotional meaning for her; thus, her own *connotation* of the word forces the reader to see an ironic twist on the expected *denotation* meaning of the word, which gives new meaning to the full text.