

## The Poem as Life by Helen Vendler

Poems have their origins in life, especially in the formal or informal ceremonies that occur at crucial moments or phases in a single private life--birth, adolescence, marriage, death--or at public moments when we collectively commemorate a war, a religious feast, a holiday. Equally, poems show life lived in a spatial environment, whether immediate (one's house, one's region) or cosmic (the world, the galaxy); they also show seasonal or ritual moments of time. The first questions to ask of any poem are What piece of life, private or public, is the poem concerned with? and Where and when is this life being lived?

In Brief: What to Notice About A Poem (In addition of course to the structural elements of the poem)

1. What piece of life: **public** or **private life** ( a disappointment in love, the death of a parent, an absence from a friend, crisis of personal confidence, a moment of fear) is the poem about?

- The situation of the speaker?
- The setting of the life lived in the poem?
- Phases of private life (life events, etc.)
- Public rituals, moments (in nature and time)
- Poems spring from *DISEQUILIBRIUM*.
- Under what circumstances would I say this??

2. Ways to describe poems-- there are many ways to describe poems. As new sorts of poems are invented, we come up with new descriptions. Some of the descriptions you should know: Narrative Poetry-- Narrative Poetry tells a story.

3. A Lyric poem, on the other hand, may contain a tiny germ of a story-- say a man's regret that a love affair is ending, BUT THE POEM DWELLS LESS ON THE PLOT ON THE MAN'S FEELING DESPAIR; GRIEF, RESENTMENT, AND SO ON.)

Narrative and Lyric poems sometimes overlap, because most narrative poems include feeling and reflection as well as plot, and most lyric poems have an implied plot of sorts.

Lyric Poems identified by Content

The Love Poem

The Aubade .... a dawn poem in which one of the lovers is waked by the sun;

The Nocturne... A Night scene

The Pastoral.. a Poem spoken By A Shepherd

The elegy ( A Poem Mourning a Death)

The Prayer

The Sea Poem