

How to Read & Evaluate a Poetry Collection

Some Helpful Questions to Ask of a Book of Poems

1. How do these poems work?

As you watch the poet put the elements of craft into play, what stylistic traits seem to dominate? (tone, diction, image, metaphor, sound, rhythm, open/closed form, myth, symbol, etc.)

2. What kind of poems are these?

What sort of aesthetic theory has the poet put into play? What genre of verse is this poet striving to make? (traditional forms/subjects, experimental techniques/forms?)

3. How does this poet's style &/or subject matter interact with the various movements of contemporary poetry?

Do you recognize influences or tendencies that you can trace to the dominant schools? (Beat, Deep Image, Confessional, Feminist, Regional)

4. What subjects preoccupy the poet?

*What themes emerge from the poems? (i. e., What subjects tend to dominate the poet's thought? What is the poet saying *about* those subjects?)*

5. How do these poems make a coherent book?

Are the poems divided into sections? If so, how do the poems appear to be grouped? If the poems are not divided, how do they appear to be ordered? (What organizational principle seems to inform the structure of the collection?)

6. So what?

Now that you have examined the collection as an informed and engaged reader, what do you think of the book? (Be honest and open about your reactions, both analytical and intuitive.)