Reading poetry is an exacting recreation, perhaps the most exacting that we engage in, for it constantly strains our analytical faculty and our memory of cultural facts. Poetry exploits language to the verge of incomprehensibility and levies upon the whole record of humanity's acts and thoughts. Nevertheless, the poet's object is not to tantalize or mystify; his/hers is a calculated symbolic act which requires considerable learning and mastery of language in addition to creative imagination. The poet studies the content of experience and, whether intentionally or not, casts new light on great commonplaces. The poem is a symbolic structure, the verbal equivalent of the thought and feeling of experience. It is usually meaningful on a literal level, but its verbal signs do not stand in a one-to-one relation to reality.

Good poetry demands perceptive reading. A useful approach, especially for the novice, is formal explication (literally, an "unfolding"), which systematically shows what a poem is and how it works. Explication is an analytical way of looking at poetry and a (relatively) objective way of talking about it. It forces a close and detailed reading of a poem and, for lyric poetry in particular, may produce what seems to be a line-by-line analysis.

Therefore, your assignment is to write a formal explication of one of the poems found on the course website for Week 5.

Your explication should be 4 to 5 pages in length and written in essay form. It must be wordprocessed, double-spaced, and conform to MLA style. You are also required to select two sequential lines from the poem you choose and scan those lines to the best of your ability.

Like any academic essay, this one should have an introduction which contains a clear thesis, a series of “body” paragraphs which develop the central idea clearly and fully, and a conclusion which summarizes the argument, acknowledges the significance of the issue, and, perhaps, reveals the broader implications. It should also be well written in terms of grammar, punctuation, and syntax. All these factors will be considered by me when determining the final grade for your essay.

Please note: no secondary critical sources are to be used for this assignment. It should be your interpretation of the poem, no one else's.

The links for analyzing poetry, poetic terms and devices, and rhyme schemes should prove very helpful for this assignment.