**Three General Categories for the Renaissance Lyric**

**courtesy of Prof. Harold Toliver**

**I. Elizabethan (especially the sonneteers):**

**A. subject matter:**

1. conventional, even stereotypical; emphasizes typical or traditional

passions or experiences.

2. depicts an artificial, fictional world of human action or emotion,

often pastoral, always courtly.

3. represents the world generally in tableaux in which the human or

natural world is presented for its picturesque effects.

**B. technique:**

1. formal--careful workmanship, ingenious use of the sonnet form.

2. personal emotion subordinate to expression of conventional

situations/feelings.

3. hyperbolic--enhances or exaggerates natural or human features.

**Sidney--an Elizabethan poet:**

1. conventional in tone.

2. picturesque in expression.

3. amplifies or expands a single theme through a variety of evocative

comparisons.

4. composes orderly, symmetrical, and often predictable poetic

arguments.

5. employs highly emotive diction that valorizes hyperbole and

oxymoron.

6. imagery--conventional medieval courtly comparisons, classical

mythology, neoplatonism.

**II. Neoclassical--Cavalier:**

**A. subject matter:**

1. social, public; emphasizes the qualities that people have in common.

2. depicts basic human types, events, and emotions.

3. represents a static, orderly, hierarchical world in which human and

natural entities are presented in their most permanent aspects.

**B. technique:**

1. formal--careful workmanship, traditional forms--ode, elegy, satire,

panegyric.

2. emotional content subordinate to larger poetic purpose, whether

graceful compliment (Cavalier lyric) or profound meditation (an ode).

3. objective--gathers materials dispassionately from observation of

surroundings.

**Jonson--a neoclassicist (not in the Italianate/Petrarchan sense of**

**Elizabethan poets):**

1. impersonal in tone.

2. clear and straightforward in expression.

3. plentiful use of symmetry--balance, antithesis, parallel sentence

structures.

4. closed forms, with definite beginning and end (the closed couplet).

5. plain in style--unequivocal, restrained in feeling, moderate in diction.

6. optimistic: emphasizes *this* world and all its attributes.

7. imagery--employs classical types and mythology, Petrarchanisms,

pastoral, etc.

8. employs all classical genres--epigram, satire, elegy, ode.

**III. Metaphysical:**

**A. subject matter:**

1. individual and idiosyncratic--emphasizes qualities that differ from the

norm, both in worldview and poetic expression.

2. plays upon the medieval doctrine of correspondences, in which

humans and their passions and experiences can be compared

insightfully to anything in the animate or inanimate worlds.

3. represents a world of hidden resemblances and affinities, in which the

human and natural worlds are seen in their most transient and

dynamic aspects.

**B. technique:**

1. informal, colloquial expression embodied in experimental verse forms

that imitate or stress the speaker’s act of passion or meditation.

2. passionate in tone, though emotion is conveyed in very intellectual or

intellected (look up the difference) arguments and comparisons.

3. subjective, almost private in its materials--gathers its imagery from

obscure associations or from theology, natural philosophy, and

arcane sciences.

**Donne--a metaphysical poet:**

1. personal, introspective in tone.

2. myopic, muddy, enigmatic, obscure in meaning and image.

3. makes often excessive use of witty devices such as paradox and irony.

4. uses forms that mirror immediate passion or thought, and distorts conventional

forms to fit an individual conception.

5. argumentative, rhetorical, and dramatic in style, often displaying real intensity

of feeling; flamboyant or unusual in diction.

6. pessimistic--emphasizes the inconstancy and mutability of this world while

constantly referring to a spiritual or transcendent realm.

7. imagery--employs typology, emblems, biblical commentary, alchemy, hermeti-

cism, mysticism, neoplatonism.

**Note: The categories listed above reduce each poet to his most obvious and consistent attributes; they do not encompass every kind of poetic performance each poet might enact. Milton and Shakespeare both encompass and defy any attempt at categorization.**