***Literature and Data***

*Presentation Preparation Example*

Helen Vendler, “Troubling the Tradition”

Argument

Yeats experimented with the sonnet form consistently throughout his life in order both to explore its capacity for emotional expression and to "[make] it Irish." That experimentation broadly consisted of lengthening and contracting the 14-line template, combining alternate rhyme schemes, and syntactically recasting the quatrain or octave-sestet structure. Although some of these poems are not immediately legible as sonnets, they are most profitably interpreted against the backdrop of its continental European and Elizabethan English tradition. The poems' formal modulations carry political and historical implications, as well as emotional and perspectival ones.

Structure

Vendler supports her claims by proceeding chronologically through Yeats' poems and connecting them to biographical and historical concerns. In addition to interpreting each poem, Vendler draws a narrative arc of Yeat's poetic maturation over decades.

Themes & Other Problems Raised

Irish Nationalism

Pastoral vs. Apocalyptic

Vendler's visual diagrams of poetic syntax

Questions

What does the sonnet tradition consist of?

Do we agree that these "modified sonnets" should be read with reference to the sonnet form at all? Why?

When is it useful to interpret poems by drawing from the poet's biography?