

Prompt: Upload the following **5-page essay** to the *Classes* server by **5pm on Friday, Sept. 19**.

Select **one of the two** following passages to produce a “close reading”—or targeted, textual analysis—of a work of literature. Make some detailed, formal observations (about syntax, style, meter, point of view, rhyme, etc.), and see if you can relate those details to one or more concepts or themes. What is happening in the passage? How is it working? Where exactly do things get complicated or confusing? You should engage the precise language of the passage as much as possible, but you may also move out of the passage (to another specific passage or to an observation about the work from which it derives.) How does your passage illuminate a specific insight about the rest of the text?

Feel free to consult the “Close Reading Tips” in the “Resources” folder in Classes.

Passage 1 from John Dryden’s “Mac Flecknoe” (Page 2239 in Norton)

Close to the walls which fair Augusta bind,
(The fair Augusta much to fears inclin'd) 65
An ancient fabric, rais'd t'inform the sight,
There stood of yore, and Barbican it hight:
A watch tower once; but now, so fate ordains,
Of all the pile an empty name remains.
From its old ruins brothel-houses rise, 70
Scenes of lewd loves, and of polluted joys.
Where their vast courts, the mother-strumpets keep,
And, undisturb'd by watch, in silence sleep.
Near these a nursery erects its head,
Where queens are form'd, and future heroes bred; 75
Where unfledg'd actors learn to laugh and cry,
Where infant punks their tender voices try,
And little Maximins the gods defy.
Great Fletcher never treads in buskins here,
Nor greater Jonson dares in socks appear; 80
But gentle Simkin just reception finds
Amidst this monument of vanish'd minds:
Pure clinches, the suburban muse affords;
And Panton waging harmless war with words.
Here Flecknoe, as a place to fame well known, 85
Ambitiously design'd his Shadwell's throne.
For ancient Decker prophesi'd long since,
That in this pile should reign a mighty prince,
Born for a scourge of wit, and flail of sense:
To whom true dullness should some Psyches owe, 90
But worlds of Misers from his pen should flow;
Humorists and hypocrites it should produce,
Whole Raymond families, and tribes of Bruce.

Passage 2 from Aphra Behn’s *Oroonoko: or, the Royal Slave* (Pages 2354-2355 in Norton)

He (grieved to death) yet pleased at her noble resolution, took her up and embracing her with all the passion and languishment of a dying lover, drew his knife to kill this treasure of his soul, this pleasure of his eyes; while tears trickled down his cheeks, hers were smiling with joy she should die by so noble a hand, and be sent in her own country (for that's their notion of the next world) by him she so tenderly loved and so truly adored in this; for wives have a respect for their husbands equal to what any other people pay a deity, and when a man finds any occasion to quit his wife, if he love her, she dies by his hand; if not, he sells her, or suffers some other to kill her. It being thus, you may believe the deed was soon resolved on; and 'tis not to be doubted but the parting, the eternal leave-taking of two such lovers, so greatly born, so sensible, so beautiful, so young, and so fond, must be very moving, as the relation of it was to me afterwards.

All that love could say in such cases being ended, and all the intermitting irresolutions being adjusted, the lovely, young, and adored victim lays herself down before the sacrifice; while he, with a hand resolved and a heart breaking within, gave the fatal stroke, first cutting her throat, and then severing her yet smiling face from that delicate body, pregnant as it was with fruits of tenderest love. As soon as he had done, he laid the body decently on leaves and flowers, of which he made a bed, and concealed it under the same coverlid of nature; only her face he left yet bare to look on. But when he found she was dead and past all retrieve, never more to bless him with her eyes and soft language, his grief swelled up to rage; he tore, he raved, he roared, like some monster of the wood, calling on the loved name of Imoinda.

Student 1,

Really nice work here. I thought “doubleness” was such an good choice of theme for the assigned passage, and you really made some significant connections within the text as a whole. I especially enjoyed your treatment of Behn’s double narrative in the scene of Imoinda’s death—the author’s mix of “sensational reporting and a crude abstract narrative” and her multiple annotations of Imoinda’s death (3). I thought this was really the anchor of your argument, and it was nice to frame it within the more metonymic moments that you point to: the name changes and the double corpse of Imoinda (once an “illusion”).

I have little to add here. You may have extended your argument regarding Oroonoko’s progressing dis-identification to the final death scene, as I suggest on page two, but the paper is thoughtfully and convincingly organized without it.

I’m really looking forward to reading more of your work—something longer and more substantial—soon. Let me know if you have any questions about what I’ve written here or in the margins.

Grade: A

Best,
Gina

Student 2,

This paper has some promising moments for insightful close reading. I liked your attention to the

word “dart” on page three and your reading of Imoinda’s still smiling face. However, there are some structural and rhetorical issues that make your close readings difficult to connect within a sustainable, overarching argument.

I think the problem begins in the first paragraph when you identify “communication through one’s eyes” and “reliability of the narrator based on her female gender” as the two themes you will explore. You do not give an indication of how you find these two themes to be related in your reading. Establishing this connection early in your essay will make those transitional moments between paragraphs much smoother as you continue to build more detail into your argument. The introduction, whether it turns into a working thesis/argument or not, should layout the flow or order of your argument. So, if you want to start with the exposition of the unreliably narrator, list this first to show that you have thought about the organization of your essay.

Also, though you can assume that your reader will have read the work, you do need to provide specific textual evidence when you are preparing your argument or are making wider claims about the novel as a whole. For instance, on page one, you discuss how the use of parenthetical citations in the selected passage (the one that was assigned?) denote Behn’s “lack of power” as a women writer. This would be a good place for you to provide an example from the text or any contrasting passages so the your reader can orient herself within the world of the novel. Here, you could also outline, through passages like the one you point to regarding Behn’s “female pen” on page five, how the author sets herself up throughout the text as a specifically “unreliable female” writer. Be careful not to assume that your reader would have noticed this already or simply agrees with you.

Lastly, pay attention to the consistency of your tone. There are several moments in this essay where your rhetoric becomes a bit sarcastic, which can be awkward for your reader and also makes it seem like you are more interested in portraying distaste for the writer or novel than you are in analyzing the inner workings of the text. There were a ton of intriguing ideas here. Now we need to work on some close rigorous analysis of those ideas in relation to the text.

Please let me know if you have any questions about what I’ve written here or in the margins. I’m also available to speak during my office hours (Thursdays 11-1) or by appointment.

Grade: C

Best,
Gina

Student 3,

This paper does a nice job of remaining focused on the passage at hand while making important links to the political and literary relationships of the author, his “enemy,” and the contemporary English society as a whole. At first, I was nervous that you were bringing in too much contextual material from the Norton, but, in the end, you show how this context is essential for capturing the poetic nuance and satiric genius of Dryden. I also really loved your anchoring metaphor in the

“watchtower,” through which you navigated the historical, political, and literary levels of the mock epic.

For the next paper, I’d like you to focus on two things specifically: your introductory material (really the first two paragraphs or so) and diction. The introduction, whether it turns into a working thesis/argument or not, should layout the flow or order of your argument. I thought I had the order figured out in your first paragraph (why I numbered it), but then I wasn’t seeing clear distinctions in the body of the paper between the three separate pieces of your close reading (“blending of high and low culture, through allusion and symbolism,” “diction pertaining to debauchery and disease,” and “irony and disease imagery”). See my comment at the bottom of page three for instance. I actually think your concluding paragraph does a better job of crystallizing the moving parts of your argument: contrasting classical allusions with debauched culture to show both Shadwell’s artistic and political failure. What this tells me is that you write to think, which isn’t a bad thing at all. It just means that sometimes your main argument is the last thing to emerge. You’ll need to be sure to look back over the paper to make sure where you began is where you ended up. If not, revise where you began.

Also related to introductory material, I think this paper would have benefited from some more clearly defined terms. For instance, in the case of high vs. low culture, I wasn’t sure if you were conflating “classical heritage” with high culture (as you seem to be doing in paragraph two) throughout. Same goes for “mock epic.” I could tell that you know what it is, and it wasn’t that you were misemploying the term, but you would reference notions of the mock epic in a way that made it seem like it was something you wrote about previously (perhaps in the introduction), but you didn’t. I think this would have helped with generally organization as well.

Finally, focus on diction. I tried to mark specific moments throughout the paper, but, in general, I think your writing tended to be slightly *too* poetic or even colloquial. Also, be careful with repetitive phrasing (see “contrasting” in the final paragraph).

Please let me know if you have any questions about what I’ve written here or in the margins. I really enjoyed reading your work, and you have continued to be a great voice in class discussion. Keep up the good work.

Grade: B+

Best,
Gina