## ELIT 46B

J. Pesano

# Analytical Literary Response

***Assignment:***

In order to develop and appreciate the keen awareness of narrative/poetic forms, themes, images, literary styles/movements, and historical contexts, you will be asked to write 2 detailed analyses; each one must focus on one quote of your choice from that section’s reading.

* The quote can be selected from any part of a reading assigned previous to the last written response, and it can be as short as one line or as long as an entire paragraph.
* The focus of your analysis should be on the (literary) details of the quote (tone, voice, images, irony) and/or the narrative form as a whole (narrator, characterization, conflict).
* Consider how form, style, structure, themes, and voice reflect the literary period.
* **Most importantly your analysis should focus very closely on the details of the quote (unpack the quote), and then it can make larger connections to the text as a whole (or related texts), course themes, literary histories, and/or personal reactions.**

***Requirements:***

1. 2 page typed, double spaced analysis of at least 1 quote (with author’s name and page number using MLA format). Quote should be at the top of the page with the analysis following.
2. You will write 2 responses throughout the quarter corresponding with the assigned readings, literary movements, and themes covered in the course. Each response is worth 10% of your total grade for the quarter. These responses are in lieu of a long formal essay.
3. Late submissions will lose points for every class they are late.

# Example Analytical Literary Response

ELIT 46B British Literature

Analytical Literary Response Grading Rubric

***Content:***

1. Literary Analysis: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ out of 50 points

Does the analysis focus on the details of the quote and make larger connections to the whole work?

Does the analysis consider the cultural context and the literary period?

Is the information insightful, looking beyond the obvious?

Does it probe the topic in depth or just stay on the surface?

2. Development: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ out of 25 points

A. Is there enough information and evidence to support analysis?

# B. Is the analysis comprehensive and thorough, examining all parts of the quote that are relevant?

C. Are the ideas explained clearly with lots of detail?

***Structure:***

3. Language /Organization \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ out of 25 points

A. Is the analysis clear and easy to understand?

B. Is there clear coherence and organization of ideas?

# C. Are the grammar rules, usage, punctuation, spelling, and form all used with knowledge and competence?

# D. Is there advanced and creative use of diction and syntax?

# E. Is the tone consistent and compelling?

Total \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ out of 100 points

Jane Doe

Elit 46B

January 24, 2012

Literary Response #1

Meanwhile the South rising with dabbled wings,

A sable cloud athwart the welkin flings,

That swilled more liquor than it could contain,

And, like a drunkard, gives it up again (Swift 2303).

Much as Dryden did in *MacFlecknoe*, Jonathan Swift’s poem *A Description of a City Shower* uses iambic pentameter couplets, the style of heroic verse, to ironically present a non-epic occurrence – a rainstorm – and to examine the way such a mundane and ordinary thing affects the citizens of London.

The poem moves in like a storm. It begins with a description of the way rain announces its imminence, and the way a person in tune with nature will know, from the behavior of a cat, or their own aching bones, that foul weather is coming. Swift may well be suggesting metaphorically that people need to be aware of signs pointing to approaching disaster in all areas of their lives. From *A Modest Proposal* and *Gulliver’s Travels*, we know that he felt a strong need to illustrate the potentially catastrophic outcome of a person’s, or a society’s indifference to the world around them.

The beginning of the second stanza, quoted above, brings the first drops of rain. The words that Swift uses are so evocative, you can feel the gloomy chill and the initial smattering of droplets beginning to fall. As poetic as his words are, though, it cannot be escaped that the comparisons he draws are anything but beautiful; he likens the coming rain to a drunkard who has overindulged and is now urinating or vomiting up the excess. This incongruous turn on classic pastoral poetry serves to satirize not just how ridiculous the pastorals could be, presenting romanticized images of happy maidens and love-struck shepherds frolicking in flower covered meadows (when in reality the life of a country dweller was back breakingly difficult and cruel), but also the dangers (something pastorals encouraged) of confusing image and reality

By using the high style of heroic verse to describe the foul and disgusting realities of city life in London, Swift also brings attention to the corruption and dishonesty that ran rampant throughout the English government and monarchy. This is Swift’s way of saying that just because something appears to be honorable and principled, the reality can be anything but, and one must look at the reality of the situation, and not be swayed or misled by its presentations.

It’s important to examine the words Swift uses in creating the imagery in the quote above. The first line describes the southern sky, but he gives it life and menacing character of its own with the emphasis on dark spotted, predatory wings. The threatening mood deepens in the next line, as he describes the approaching clouds as “sable.” This is an excellent example of Swift’s linguistic skill, as “sable” coul have several subtle connotations. The animal is dark brown to black in color, so it could certainly be a simple description of the color of a dark rain cloud. But sable are also aggressive little animals, so it adds a threatening element to the clouds. Note, also, that sable was considered royal fur, something that would be used in the finest robes of a monarch, especially in the prized black color, which was considered to be heraldic in nature. Finally, the word “sables” was commonly used in the Middle Ages to refer to mourning garments. Is Swift cunningly using these words to indicate an imminent threat to the people from their own monarchy?

Lines three and four, comparing the storm to a drunkard, can be read as an indication of Swift’s intent to portray London not as a sentimentalized fairyland, but as a living, breathing city, with all the implied bodily fluids and waste products that such a being would create. He goes to great pains to avoid whitewashing the reality of the living conditions, and through this, he paints an evocative portrait of the class struggles and inequality of wealth that plagued the nation. Some Londoners have washing to hurriedly pull off the line, while the poet we meet is “needy,” his only coat filthy on his back. The young lawyer tries to stay dry, but gives up and calls a coach. Swift shows us that the rain can bring together disparate camps , telling us of the Tories and Whigs banding together to “save their wigs” from the rain that is now pouring down on the city. In specifying, though, that this cooperation is merely between “acquaintances underneath a shed,” Swift is telling us that these rainy-day connections are fleeting, and once the threat has passed, these politicians will be at each other’s throats once again.

Jonathan Swift clearly has a rather pessimistic view of humanity, one in which the classes do no mix for long, and accident of birth is the deciding factor in whether one rides in a carriage or walks barefoot through filth, but I like to think there was a bit of optimistic affection in Swift’s heart when he wrote this. There is a bit of Lillipution charm to the poem, one can imagine the narrator as a Gulliver-sized man looking down on a miniaturized London, her tiny inhabitants scurrying pell-mell in the rain. As he notes in the poem, the Tories were at that time triumphant, and Swift was a dedicated Tory, so perhaps he felt that a political rainstorm had occurred and washed away the old guard. It’s equally possible, of course, that the author is telling his readers that temporary shelter from the ongoing religious and political whiplash is the best they can hope for, and that another deluge will be hot on the heels of this one.

The poem finishes with its sole triplets, three lines describing a rushing convergence of filth, accumulated from all corners of the city and meeting at Holborn Bridge. With that final image – uniquely rhymed, utterly unpleasant, delightfully vile – Swift reminds us that whether King or beggar, whether seamstress or lawyer or penniless poet, all are the same in the end.