

## A Pattern of Analysis

Please be reminded that literary explication--that is, what you are being asked to provide in many Klausuren as well as in research papers that combine close reading of both primary and secondary sources--is essentially analytical in nature. Analytical writing traditionally requires the writer to present a clear and precise thesis at the end of the introduction and to develop, or illustrate, that thesis through a series of paragraphs that *explain in detail* how the writer arrived at the thesis. Such explanatory, or explicative, paragraphs tend to follow fairly predictable patterns in the presentation and substantiation of ideas. That is, it is often possible to break down, or map, the steps that an author takes in writing the analytical paragraph. I will provide you with one such "map" in this handout.

Successful authors intuitively follow such organizational methods precisely because they know that exacting readers demand them. Readers want you not only to assert but to support; they want you not only to support but to explain the significance of your support. They demand, in addition, that you constantly keep your overall purpose in mind and that you remind them of the significance of your details as they relate to that overall purpose. They want, finally, not only to hear your opinion but also to see your reasoning abilities and test them against their own. They do not want to have to exert any energy of their own to be able to follow the progression of your ideas or to make sense of details left unexplained or assertions left unsupported. The work is yours.

Although you may find exceptions, the paragraphs in most literary explications tend to be written according to the four-point pattern of analysis outlined below. This pattern may be recognizable in a series of paragraphs, or it may be recognizable in an individual paragraph. I am not presenting here "the only way to write a paragraph." Rather, I am attempting to provide you with a blueprint that accurately delineates what I have observed as the most common and most successful organizational method of literary scholars explicating a text. It is easily observable, too, that student writers who leave out one or more of the steps below, or add an irrelevant one, are often criticized for writing "poor" paragraphs--or, worse, no paragraphs at all.

The best thing you can do to enhance your analytical intuition is to begin reading--and analyzing--the methods of professional writers writing about literature. Then you can test the guidelines I outline below to see whether you note other tendencies.

1. Inference (sometimes called "assertion," "main idea," "topic sentence")
2. Elaboration/further clarification of inference (if necessary)
3. Supporting detail/quotations, clearly connected to the idea just presented. Sometimes this connection is provided by repetition of key words from the preceding sentences; sometimes it is provided with transitional expressions such as "for example"; sometimes direct quotations are incorporated into the author's continuing explanation of the topic sentence as support. When the supplying of detail to support an inference threatens to make the paragraph unwieldy, it is a good idea to begin a new paragraph with a topic sentence that indicates that you are continuing along your present lines of argumentation. Something like "Similarly, Hawthorne clearly intended the name *Faith* to be interpreted on more than one level" does not shift the reader to a major sub-point but indicates that you are continuing a discussion of the symbolism of names in "Young Goodman Brown" and that this paragraph will concern itself particularly with the name *Faith*.

4. Re-emphasis of main idea. Sometimes authors will leave out this last step, judging that the preceding examples, intermixed with discussion and explanation, suffice to round out the point being made in the paragraph. An attempt at re-emphasizing or restating your point, however, should somehow be made.

A brief check of any literary periodical that specializes in presenting explanations should provide you with sufficient working models of this type of organizational method. Examine these two selections and try to map out on your own the different parts of these paragraphs. I found these in about three minutes. (Whether you are familiar with the works being discussed in these examples is of no matter. Note primarily the organization of elements.)

#### Example 1

Very near the conclusion of each of the first three books of *Paterson*, Williams approaches but finally rejects the comforting possibility that a benevolent, heavenly redeemer might exist to order the past and bring certainty to the present. Near the end of Book I, looking for "a simple thought," the poet drives out to the country "where the convent of the Little Sisters of / St. Ann pretends a mystery" (38). And in Book II, which is structured around Klaus Ehren's sermon on the mountain, Paterson abandons the unheeded offer of Christian salvation, as "Le / pauvre petit ministre, swinging his arms, drowns / under the indifferent fragrance of the bass-wood / trees" (82). Finally, in Book III, which in terms of narrative voice and theme is the most Biblically inspired book in *Paterson*, "la capella di S. Rosso" evokes "images of arms and knees / hung on nails" that no longer have "meaning" (145). The only god that can be discovered in *Paterson* is the indifferent river that washes away our illusions of spiritual certainty--the dream of a heaven of disposition. Any "replica" of hope that the poet can create in this world must be laid out "beside the sliding water" (145) of the Passaic, where the poem can share both the permanence of location and the persistence of change.

--Augustus M. Kolich, from "W.C. Williams' *Paterson* and the Poetry of Uncertainty"

#### Example 2

That this break from society, whether brief or permanent, is a necessity for the Self is again implied in the twenty-six page "Contest of Bards," the final poem of *Mind Breaths*. After a long, tumultuous meeting between the Bard and a "boy," the main topic of which is "the ancient unearthly Beauty" (MB 101), the Bard's final words to the "boy" point to this ultimate necessary separation between World and Inner Self: "Hearts beating thru the world's Mills & Wires . . . Careful to respect *our* Heart, mindful of Beauty's slow working *Calm Machine*" (MB 117; emphasis added). And finally the poem ends with another declaration of the discovery of the inner Self as the only worthy goal, the only non-chaotic permanence: "Shining thru railroad windows on new-revealed faces, our own inner forms!" (MB 118). Thus the major thematic pronouncement of *Mind Breaths* is one which encourages nourishment of and communion with the inner Self, an inner "form," and which would, as well, suggest that involvement with the tragedies of society is only a hindrance to achieving that inner peace, which is, since all else is "hopeless," the only achievable goal left.

--Jim Digginson, "From Society to Self: Ginsberg's Inward Turn in *Mind Breaths*"