

## Teaching with Technology Project

Jonathan Burton

This document includes the following components:

- 1) Reflections on the project
- 2) The course syllabus including a detailed description of the assignment
- 3) An example of the social annotation component
- 4) An example of a problem paper (from the same student)
- 5) The completed grading rubric (for the same student)

The social annotation and problem paper assignment that I created with the assistance of a DigLibArts Teaching with Technology grant is a three-part exercise designed to improve students' close reading skills. In English the term "close reading" refers to the practice of identifying and explicating textual detail in order to shed light on the text as a whole. Close reading is almost always a mandatory component of papers in English classes because it is a skill that we want students to be able to take into their encounters with all kinds of texts in the world.

In student papers, I have found that students do not offer sustained close readings. Instead, they tend to do one of two things: either they quote from the text only within sections of essays where they are summarizing the plot, in which case they do not explain the significance of details; or they analyze a single detail without connecting it to other moments within the text. By creating a venue for social annotation (i.e., a digital space where students offer multiple responses to a single passage and are exposed to other students' responses), they would be encouraged to develop more sustained close readings. Using Google Drive for social annotations made what would have otherwise been very difficult logistically into an exciting and expeditious project.

The mechanics of the assignment are described at length in the syllabus so I will be brief here: First, each student in the first group had to select and transcribe a passage and then write four annotations explicating details within that passage. For the next class, a second group of students read through the passages and annotations of the first group and added four annotations of their own. These annotations were supposed to remark on details not treated by the author, offer an alternative reading and/or connect the passage and the first student's observations to a passage in the next section of the novel. Finally, for the next meeting, the first students had to synthesize all of the comments on one of the passages (it need not be their own) into a short essay. Each student in the class went through each part of the cycle twice. Thus a student selected, transcribed and began annotating a passage twice; s/he added annotations to other students' passages twice; and s/he wrote papers synthesizing the comments twice.

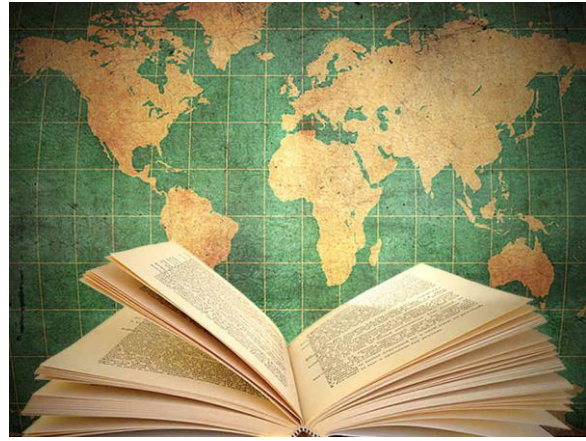
One obvious and immediate benefit of this assignment is that it meant that students could not get away with skipping the reading. A second was that at least eight students came to every class meeting not only having completed the reading but also having developed ideas about the reading and about other students' ideas. A third benefit was that the papers students wrote—especially in their second time through the cycle—tended to offer a much deeper analysis than I have seen from students at the same level previously, and considered multiple interpretations. In the future, I will encourage students to actually cite their classmates' commentary to ensure a more consistent consideration of other interpretations.

# English 270:

## Transcultural Literature

**Instructor:** Dr. Jonathan Burton,  
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Office Hours: TR 2-3:30, MW 9-11 and by appointment in Hoover 107.



Under what heading do you place a book by a Nigerian woman who lives in the United States and writes about Africans who live in America, Britain and Nigeria? Is this African literature? American Literature? British Literature? World Literature? Is her protagonist an African American, an American-African, or something else entirely? Our conventional categories simply do not do justice to transcultural complexities of contemporary literature and life. Designed in response to student demand for classes treating books by non-Anglo-American authors, this class examines literature in an increasingly interconnected world where geographic and national boundaries have become inadequate to categorize literary works. The focus of our discussions will be on globalization, mobility, cosmopolitanism and flexible citizenship in the works of award-winning contemporary authors. And as we develop our skills as close readers of literary works, we will simultaneously train ourselves as critical readers of our own transcultural experience. This course fulfills the CUL 6 (Crosscultural) requirement of the LIBED program.

### **Course Goals:** Students will be able to . . .

- ✓ Engage with make comparisons and contrasts between the works we read
- ✓ Evaluate the categories that we create to organize literary works
- ✓ Develop focused arguments about literary works based on close reading
- ✓ Articulate the value and/or shortcomings of transcultural modes of thinking
- ✓ Describe complex literature in a way that is accessible to non-expert readers
- ✓ Entertain multiple perspectives and interpretations while recognizing the limits each

### **Required Texts**

The Enchantress of Florence (2008) by Salman Rushdie (winner of the Booker Prize)

Small Island (2004) by Angela Levy (winner of the Whitbread Prize)

Dictée (1982) by Theresa Hak Kyung Cha (winner of NEA Fellowship)

My Name is Red (1998) by Orhan Pamuk (winner of the Nobel Prize)

Netherland (2008) by Joseph O'Neill (winner of PEN/Faulkner Award)

Americanah (2013) by Chimamanda Adichie (NY Times 10 Best Books of 2013)

## Assignments and Grading

The amount of reading assigned for this class is substantial (roughly 180 pages/week) so most of the written work comprises shorter pieces focused on the development of rich close reading skills. The final project, however, asks you to synthesize your reading and thinking over the course of the semester and provides an opportunity to think through the notion and enterprise of transcultural literature.

4 x Transcription and Annotation Exercises	20 points
2 x 1200-word Problem Papers	40 points
8-10 page Publisher's Newsletter Project	30 points
<u>Participation</u>	<u>10 points</u>
	100 points

## Assignment Calendar

### Week 1: What is Transcultural Literature?

1/30 Introduction

### Week 2: *The Enchantress of Florence*

2/4 1-126

2/6 127-74

### Week 3: *The Enchantress of Florence*

2/11 174-282; Group A: Transcribe and Annotate

2/13 283-349; Group B: Add to Group A Annotations

### Week 4: *Small Island*

2/18 1-89; Group B: Transcribe and Annotate

2/20 90-150; Group C: Add to Group B Annotations

**Group A: Upload 1200 word Problem Paper on Enchantress to Moodle**

### Week 5: *Small Island*

2/25 151-247; Group C: Transcribe and Annotate

2/27 248-302; Group A: Add to Group C Annotations

**Group B: Upload 1200 word Problem Paper on Small Island to Moodle**

**Week 6: *Small Island***

3/4 303-393; Group A: Transcribe and Annotate

3/6 394-439; Group B: Add to Group A Annotations

**Group C: Upload 1200 word Problem Paper on Small Island to Moodle**

**Week 7: *Dictée***

3/11 1-100;

3/13 101-79; **Group A: Upload 1200 word Problem Paper on Small Island to Moodle**

**Week 8: *My Name is Red***

3/25 1-106; Group B: Transcribe and Annotate

3/27 107-65; Group C: Add to Group B Annotations

**Week 9: *My Name is Red***

4/1 165-263; Group C Transcribe and Annotate

4/3 263-324; Group A: Add to Group C Annotations

**Group B: Upload 1200 word Problem Paper on My Name is Red to Moodle**

**Week 10: *My Name is Red***

4/8 324-413

4/10 **Group C: Upload 1200 word Problem Paper on My Name is Red to Moodle**

**Week 11: *Netherland***

4/15 1-100

4/17 101-79

**Week 12: *Netherland***

4/22 131-219

4/24 220-56

**Week 13: *Americanah***

4/29 Chapters 1-15

5/1 Chapters 16-23

**Week 14: *Americanah***

5/6 Chapters 24-43

5/8 Chapters 44-55

5/12 **Final Project Due**

## Attendance

Attendance will be taken at the beginning of every class. You are granted two absences during the course of the semester. For each absence beyond the second, you will be penalized 4% of your final grade. If you arrive after I take attendance, you are responsible for informing me of your presence at the end of class. Three tardies will be counted as an absence. Students with **perfect attendance records** will have 4% added to their final grades. In the event of a class cancellation, students will be notified via email.

## Participation

The quality of this class is dependent on your informed participation. I expect you to complete assignments before class and to make regular contributions to class discussions and exercises. A student who makes at least one contribution per class meeting can expect to earn all 20 participation points.

## Learning Environment

Whittier College is committed to social justice. I support that commitment and expect to maintain a positive learning environment based upon open communication, mutual respect and non-discrimination. Any suggestion as to how to further such a positive and open environment in this class will be appreciated and given serious consideration. If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me and make appropriate arrangements with Disability Services.

## Policies Concerning Assignments

1. Students will receive an assignment sheet and grading rubric for each of the major assignments, and a rubric for the shorter assignments.
2. **Assignments submitted after the due date class meeting** will be subject to a penalty of one full grade beginning from the end of class on the day of submission and compounding with each 24-hour period that passes. Late submissions should be made by email and will be accepted no later than 72 hours after the due date. After 3 days the assignment will be assigned 0 points.
3. All assignments are to be **typed** in 12-point font, double-spaced with 1" margins.
4. All assignments are to be **proofread** for coherence and grammar.
5. Assignments may be revised and resubmitted provided the original fulfilled all the assignment requirements and was turned in on time. Students wishing to revise an assignment must first consult with the professor. **Revised papers must have all changes tracked** to make precisely apparent the extent and substance of your revisions. You should **aim for at least 30% new or radically overhauled material**.

## **Transcription and Annotation Exercises & Problem Papers**

The class will be divided into three groups (A, B and C) and students in each group will complete and submit Transcription and Annotation Exercises, as well as Problem Papers derived from those exercises, according to the schedule for their specific group.

Transcription and Annotation Exercises will feature a social annotation component where students will collaboratively develop close reading notes using Google Drive. Collaboration is intended to push you beyond your initial and individual observations, so that you ultimately produce papers featuring richer, more nuanced arguments about the texts that we read.

### **[The next three paragraphs refer to those places on the syllabus that ask you to “Transcribe and Annotate”]**

The first step in this process is selecting a passage (anywhere from a paragraph to half a page) from the reading assigned for that date. You will want to find a passage that is rich in figurative language, curious in form or otherwise abundant in detail; a passage with one interesting image or detail will not be productive since your task will be to think through the effects of all of those details. Why are they included? What are they doing?

Once you have located your passage, open up the folder assigned for your week in Google Drive, create a document within that folder and transcribe the passage word-for-word.

Next, annotate four sections from your passage. You can begin by placing your cursor next to a pertinent word or phrase and clicking on the “Comment” button at the top right of the screen. Within the comment cell that appears, write 2-4 sentences explaining the effects and significance of the details that interest you. Find three more places within the passage and annotate them similarly, making connections between them and other moments in the text if you wish.

### **[This paragraph refers to those places on the syllabus that ask you to “Add to another group’s annotations”]**

On two occasions you will add annotations to another group’s annotations. Here you are required to add four remarks of your own, either about details not treated already or offering alternative readings in response to the annotations made by your classmates. You may add all four of your annotations to any one of the previously uploaded passages, or you can divide them between two different passages. Keep in mind here that the point of this exercise is to help your classmates to produce richer, more nuanced readings, not to belittle or condemn the work of others.

**[The remainder of this section refers to those places on the syllabus  
that ask you to produce a "Problem Paper"]**

On two occasions you will draw on the transcription and annotation exercises (your own, or your classmates') to produce a succinct (three-page) paper.

**How to write a very good problem paper:**

A problem paper is a succinct essay that asks a question of a text and then resolves that question through a persuasive argument. The question identifies a problem, something that is clearly full of significance but not directly explained: *Why is the whale in Moby Dick white? To what ends does the Wife of Bath include so many biblical references in her tale? Why are so many elements in the Enchantress of Florence doubled? Why does Theresa Cha begin Dictée with a translation exercise? What are the effects of giving narrative voice to inanimate objects such as a gold coin in My Name is Red?* The argument proceeds by using evidence within the text to contextualize the problem and answer the question posed.

1. Think small. Think interesting. Think enjoyable to argue.
2. Ensure that you are finding a PROBLEM in the text rather than making an observation. Structure your paper as an articulation and resolution of the problem. For example, it's not enough to assert that Victor Frankenstein and his monster have many traits in common and that makes the world complicated; everyone knows that already. What is valuable, though, is to formulate an argument that accounts for this intertwining. What does the author accomplish in making monstrousness a shared category? Why might she do so?
3. Always bear in mind that you are presenting a convincing ARGUMENT, not simply making remarks about things that are interesting. The text should be used to supply evidence. Quote from it in to back up your assertions. If it helps, think of your paper as a court case: you want to persuade your audience. Don't hide contradictory evidence -- react to it, show how your argument explains it.
4. Remember that you have just three TYPED, DOUBLE SPACED pages to make your argument. Every word is precious. Omit anything that is too general, and say as much as possible with as few words as possible. A thesis sentence like "Levy employs many themes to make interesting points" says nothing at all. A sentence like "Levy embodies in *Small Island's* Queenie the contradictory impulses of social camaraderie and imperial anxiety" will make your reader want to know more.
5. ANALYZE, DO NOT SUMMARIZE. If you are simply retelling the story, you are not writing a critical paper. Your reader knows the plot already and does not require a rehash.
6. Keep a formal tone. Take your writing seriously. Proofread assiduously. What you have to say about the text is important, and will be graded seriously.

Jodha's sisters, her fellow wives, resented her. How could the mighty emperor prefer the company of a woman who did not exist? When he was gone, at least, she ought to absent herself as well; she had no business to hang around with the actually existing. She should disappear like the apparition she was, should slide into a mirror or a shadow and be lost. That she did not, the living queen concluded, was the sort of solecism one had to expect from an imaginary being. How could she have been brought up at all? She was an untutored figment, and deserved to be ignored.

The emperor had put her together, they fumed, by stealing bits of them all. He said she was the daughter of the prince of Jodhpur. She was not! That was another queen, and she was not the Maharajah's daughter, but the sister. The emperor also believed his fictitious beloved was the mother of his firstborn son, his long-awaited first born son, conceived because of the blessing of some saint, that very saint beside whose hilltop hovel this victory city had been built. But she was not Prince Salim's mother, as Prince Salim's real mother, Rajkumari Hira Kunwari, known as Mariamuz-Zamani, daughter of Raja Bihar Mal of Amer, of the Clan Kachhwaha, grievingly told anybody who would listen. So: the limitless beauty of the imaginary queen came from one consort, her Hindu religion from another, and her uncountable wealth from yet a third. Her temperament, however, was Akbar's own creation. No real

**Comment [1]:** I like Rushdie's moments of blurring fantasy and reality. He even seems to act like she needs a real way to disappear, despite being imaginary. Imaginary things don't exist in the first place, so to disappear they wouldn't need a mirror or shadow. Even if you assume that a real person in this world can disappear that way, a made up woman shouldn't need to.

**Comment [2]:** There is a distinct hatred here for Jodha by the other wives. It is obvious, as explained later in the passage. However, the wives ignore the fact that Jodha is a powerful woman and possible ally. Why do they do this. While she is resented for her lack of realness, the women choose to ignore solidarity in order to whine in jealousy. This is an instance where the women could have power, but instead choose to submit themselves to the control of a man, even when they have the possible opportunity to make an impact on him. .

**Comment [3]:** I found this interesting because it tells me the obvious, nobody is perfect. The only way Akbar was able to create perfection was by combining characteristics taken from the other queens. Then I thought about how Akbar wanted his kingdom to be great and perfect. I felt like this is kind of telling us how he can make that possible, which is by gathering or joining people together because they all have a part of them that contributes to perfection. So, if people were to get together and work together then would that not create a great and perfect kingdom?

**Comment [4]:** I believe that this perfection that is spoken of is not literal perfection, it is what is perfection to Akbar. Akbar created her to fit perfectly with him, and to make him happy. This is shown by later passages, when Jodha frets at the King for being gone so long, only because she thinks the king does not like a submissive women. The fact that Jodha exists shows me something slightly different. This conveys that attaining a great and perfect empire is impossible, just as attaining a perfect women who always pleases a man is impossible ( shown by the way that he is not pleased by the way that she acts when he returns).

**Comment [5]:** Once again an instance in the novel where a man holds power over a woman in order to control her. He effectively changes the identity of his other wives in order to make his own perfect one.

**Comment [6]:** I found this interesting, too. He already has everything he wants in a woman except the perfect temperament. Even if the traits are spread out among several women, he can just pick and choose which trait he wants at the moment. It seems like he has at least five real wives (if I'm counting right), so between them, there should be enough attention and availability to satisfy even the most demanding man. Why can't he be happy with what he has?



woman was ever like that, so perfectly attentive, so undemanding, so endlessly available. She was an impossibility, a fantasy of perfection. They feared her, knowing that, being impossible, she was irresistible, and that's why the king loved her best... They never spoke her name. Jodha, Jodhabai. The words never crossed their lips. She wandered the palace quarter alone. She was a lonely shadow glimpsed through latticed stone screens. She was a cloth blown by the breeze. At night she stood under the little cupola on the top story of the Panch Mahal and scanned the horizon for the return of the king who made her real. (46).

**Comment [7]:** I find it interesting that a good temperament of a woman can only be created by a man. This shows the way that men looked at women during this time, as nothing more than sex objects that were to be "put up" with. Jodha is the only woman in the book thus far who a man (Akbar) can spend copious amounts of time with and even listen to her ideas, but she was created in the mind of a man.

**Comment [8]:** This part of the passage emphasizes the place of the woman in the time period Rushdie has chosen to write about. Jodha is the perfect wife because she possesses impossible qualities; she is everything a powerful man wants. Consequently, the "perfect woman" is shown to the reader. In this case if Jodha is the perfect woman, then the valued characteristics of women are beauty, religion, wealth, and submissiveness.

**Comment [9]:** I find it interesting how she was made seem like the perfect wife, but at the end she turned into what she really is, nothing. She was easily replaced by Qara Koz. Of course, Akbar brought both of them into reality. However, Jodha and Qara Koz weren't exactly the same they had a couple of difference. Even though that may be true, beauty was still the major factor that made them seem perfect.

**Comment [10]:** I think it's interesting that Rushdie again places so much focus on names. It's strange to me that the real queens feel like they can regain some of their own power by refusing to use the imaginary queen's name. If she's imaginary, why does it matter? She's a figment of the king's imagination, if the real queens just forgot about the whole thing, rather than obsessing over Jodha, then she wouldn't exist except in the king's mind. It feels like the petty, mean games of children, instead of the proper behavior for a queen.

**Comment [11]:** I find the imagery here interesting. The use of the shadow suggests that Jodha is lurking and suspicious, something supported by the other women. However, she is then described as a "cloth" waiting for her creating. This implies that her realness is not as concrete as the wives make it. Ultimately she is not fully real and must rely on her creator in order to survive, being submissive and perfect.

**Comment [12]:** Does she really need her creator to "survive"? I wonder if all the other people that consider her somewhat real would be enough to keep the fantasy alive. I don't think the sister wives would stop hating her just because their husband was dead. I think their resentment, as well as the people that discuss her and paint her, would be enough to keep her "real."

Katie Clendening

### The Symbolic Meaning of the Use of Fog

There is a prevalent theme in Salmon Rushdie's *The Enchantress of Florence* of reinvention of self and identity; many characters go by different names, personas, and faces depending on their location. An example of this theme in transformative identity is evident in Argalia. By focusing on the scene of Argalia's literal abandonment and loss of identity, the symbolic use of the heavy, white fog can be explained.

The use of the thick white fog in this section of the book serves to identify the death of Argalia's self and consequent rebirth. Rushdie specifically signifies this death by capitalizing "Death" within the passage on page 173. While it is uncertain whether or not he will survive, it is nearly guaranteed that there will either be death of life, identity, or both. Along with this symbol, his surroundings are described as beginning "to feel like ancient fables. This blind floating was the universe entire" because "there was only the whiteness of the fog," in order to emphasize the erasure of Argalia's identity. (Rushdie 173). The complete whiteness of the fog is a blank slate; it is pure and waiting to be moved or rearranged. This renewal of self, portrayed through the whiteness and completeness of the fog serves as a metaphor for Argalia's plight as well as a foreshadowing of his later transformation. It is in this moment that Argalia loses his identity as the "little storyteller" and becomes a shell of a human waiting to be refilled with a new identity (173). Argalia is engulfed until all that exists is the fog; he is powerless against the work of Mother Nature as well as the loss of his identity. Similarly, his defenselessness against the unyielding fog foreshadows his defenselessness against the Ottomans and ultimately the creation of his new destiny and self.

Essentially, Argalia becomes merely a human body; he has no soul, no biography, no meaning. Rushdie describes his character as nothing but “an entity stripped of name, of meaning, of the whole of life except a temporarily beating heart” (173). He is erased into nothing but a vessel that can be filled up; a body with no soul. The natural scene represents this. It is empty, white, and filled with death, much like Argalia is as he sits in the boat. He is erased by the fog as he is swallowed up inside of it, revealing the inevitability of his transformation. There is no power he can assert over nature, nor any story he can tell to get out of its grasp. He has only a slight chance against being lost in the overwhelming and dense surroundings. Argalia no longer has control over his fate, but instead is controlled by the hands of Mother Nature.

Consequently, he is wiped clean of his past and future and transformed into an entirely foreign person. This is supported by Argalia’s attempt to comfort himself by trying to “tell himself stories to keep his spirits up... then after a further time all the stories faded away as well and he was left... a lonely human soul drifting vaguely into the white” (173). The stories he tries to tell himself are his anchor to his identity and past. Similar to Niccoló Vespucci’s time in the dungeons, “he felt his story slipping away from him... He had no story. There was no story. He was not a man” (89). Without a story to recognize himself, Argalia has no identity. With no history, he has no self and will be engulfed by the fog as it erases everything that he is. The emptiness of the environment represents Argalia’s loss of self by outwardly portraying his inward emptiness of story and history.

The fog also becomes an important symbol of Argalia’s abandonment and complete exclusion from human connection. Not only has he been abandoned by his parents, but he also finds himself abandoned by his only other human connection. His calls on the horn go unanswered, indicating that he is truly alone. It is at this point that it is clear that he has been left

for dead as a sacrifice for the others to escape. Even with his stories and sweet talking, he is in the end “no more than that gob of sputum, bobbing for an instant on the waves before he drowned” to the Admiral and his companions. Consequently, the “mute and lethal” qualities of the world overcome with fog serve to prove that Argalia’s complete disconnection to the living is undeniable. Figuratively he is already dead, although he is still alive bobbing on the boat. However, he is nothing more than a bodily fluid and is dehumanized by his circumstances and surroundings.

As a whole this section of the novel serves to illuminate an overarching concept that follows mainly Argalia’s character, but in some cases can be applied to others accordingly such as Akbar or Vespucci; this idea of Rushdie’s implies that there is a loneliness of the human spirit caused by the confusion and uncertainty of life. Once again this fog can be used to signify confusion. However, instead of being applied on simply a personal level with Argalia, it also addresses the entirety human condition. By using Argalia as an example, it is implied that the human experience is both lonely and confusing due to the struggle between the individual self against the entirety of life. Argalia’s loss of bearings in the complete blankness of the fog represents the confusion of the human condition when faced with something larger and more powerful than the individual.

The use of environment as a metaphor is a consistent strategy used by Rushdie throughout the novel. In the instance revolving Argalia’s abandonment and subsequent loss of self, the environment serves as a means to portray his inward erasure of self outwardly. By utilizing such a metaphor, it is clear that Argalia’s self will cease to be, as well as using this circumstance to highlight the general confusion of the human condition. It is an important tool

that is not only used for setting the scene, but also to highlight and foreshadow an important element: loss and replacement of identity.

English 270: Transcultural Literature  
Annotation Exercises and Problem Paper Rubric

Name: Katie

Part I. Transcription and Annotation

2 / 2 points for selection of a richly detailed passage that is accurately transcribed

4 / 4 points for four clear and insightful annotations explaining the effects of details within the passage and/or for making logical connections to other moments in the text, explaining the significance of such connections, why they matter and how they reward our attention. (No points are awarded for annotations that simply summarize the plot or paraphrase the passage.)

Part II. Annotating a peer's work

3.5 / 4 points for four annotations that help a classmate to deepen his/her analysis by either (1) drawing attention to the significance of additional details that have not been discussed; (2) offering replies to earlier annotations that suggest more nuanced or alternative readings; or (3) discussing the significance of passages in our subsequent reading that extend or complicate the original student's point.

Part III. Problem Paper

5 / 5 points for identifying a problem within the text and setting up a thesis-based argument to resolve that question

10 / 10 points for careful close reading of textual details drawn in part from the annotation exercises and incorporated fluidly into your prose. Properly cited evidence must be limited to crucial keywords or phrases (not lengthy block quotes) whose significance fortifies your argument. Quotations should NOT simply summarize a plot point.

5 / 5 points for clarity, organization, and mechanics.

29.5 / 30 Total

What I'd like to see you work on improving...

In your problem paper I'd like to see you develop a bit further how the emblematic moment you are focused on gives us insights into a larger theme. Then cite other instances across the text.