**An Examination of Nuance in Students' Literary Interpretive Writing**

by

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## DEDICATION

To language, without which this would not have been written.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To my family, whose love and support renew my every moment, deepening my roots and casting my branches skyward.

To each of you, I dedicate this work:

What threads of thought are woven in these seams
Spring forth from your wisdom; to you I owe:
With gentle touch you have planted the seeds
With warm sunlight you have nurtured my growth
Sparked a delving downward into the earth
As rich soil deepens these tender roots.
In breathing shape into its written birth
The imprints of your hands embalm these shoots,
The tendrils awakened by your spirit
Cascading their branches into the sky:
So am I ever sharpened by your wit
Elevated by your transcendent eye.
In tending this garden you give me wings
To learn from each of you is a blessing.

- by Ruth Li

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**ABSTRACT**

Students are expected to interpret the complexities and nuances of literary texts yet might struggle with interpreting texts in ways that are academically valued in literary studies. While linguistic studies that examine students' literary interpretive writing have mainly been situated in secondary contexts, there is a noticeable absence of scholarship on college students' literary interpretive writing. In this study, I investigate the ways in which students in two writing about literature classes, English 124 and English 298, engage in interpreting literary texts through close reading, as well as the ways their instructors evaluate their writing. By drawing on the Appraisal framework within Michael Halliday's theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), I more systematically recognize and describe the degree of nuance in students' writing, which I conceptualize as a recognition of the multiple possibilities, layers, and shades of significance in literary texts. In addition, by cross-analyzing student essays with course materials and interviews with instructors, and by revisiting students' essays following the interviews, I investigate the ways in which meanings in students' language choices correlate with valued practices of literary interpretation.

This analysis reveals that proficient student writers interpret the possible significances of literary language using expressions that expand the dialogic space (e.g., "At first glance, the word appears to be…In another sense, it could mean…"), attending to the details and nuances of literary language. Moreover, proficient writers calibrate the relatively superficial and deep layers of their interpretations by wielding softened expressions (e.g., "This *seemingly* simple word reveals the complexity of the relationship…"). Meanwhile, emerging writers often signal interpretation yet instead summarize the literary texts, reaching toward without fully realizing interpretations of literary significance. Through careful attention to language, I elucidate valued yet elusive qualities of writing, creating pathways toward supporting students with crafting more nuanced interpretations. I illustrate that a linguistic attention to writing can equip students and instructors with a more explicit, systematic metalinguistic awareness of the ways specific language choices create valued literary interpretive moves. I suggest that instructors can encourage students to attend closely to the ways writers' language choices create valued meanings in model essays and in students' own writing. In

delineating the language choices that construe nuance in students' essays, this study contributes an innovative framework that can guide further inquiry into students' writing in the disciplines, illuminating through a systematic approach abstract qualities of literary interpretation including *nuance*.

**CHAPTER 1**

**Introduction**

## 1.1 Introduction: addressing the challenge of supporting students to interpret literary texts

Many postsecondary students face challenges with interpreting literature in critical, deep, and nuanced ways (Sullivan, Tinberg, & Blau, 2017; Corrigan, 2019). Students, especially first-year students who may be new to or unfamiliar with academic discourses, are often expected to be able to interpret the complexities and nuances of literary texts, yet might struggle with developing ideas and expressing interpretations in ways that are academically valued in literary studies — for instance, with parsing the latent or ambiguous connotations of literary language, discerning the subtle shades or variations of meaning, or recognizing alternative interpretive possibilities.

Recent scholarship in writing studies has responded to the pedagogical challenges of teaching literature in the writing classroom; in particular, there has been a resurgence of interest in teaching reading, including the reading of literary texts. This shift toward offering a greater attention to reading is especially important to the aims of supporting students to think more deeply and critically about the texts they read (Sullivan, 2017; Blau, 2017). In addressing approaches to supporting students to interpret literature, Blau (2017) suggests engaging students in unpacking the language of literature by closely interpreting words and images in literary texts. Yet while the aim of supporting students' deep, nuanced reading, writing, and thinking about literary texts is a worthy one, a significant question arises in the ways we might be able to see such qualities in students' writing — that is, whether and how students' writing reflects deep, complex, or nuanced ways of thinking, and how we might support students to compose more nuanced interpretations by attending to the language of students' writing. For instance, in what ways might we discern "a writer's capacity to discover meaning with precision and clarity" (p. 275-276) or gauge students' "respect for multiple possibilities in interpreting texts and for the provisionality of every interpretation" (p. 273-274)? In what ways might students, using Blau's terms, convey a "close concentrated attention" or "tolerance for ambiguity" when interpreting literary texts?

While literary and writing studies scholar-practitioners have emphasized a close attention to the language of literary texts, I take the scholarship on the teaching of literature a step further by positing that a linguistic attention to students' writing about literature can elucidate the ways in which valued qualities of "subtlety and nuance" (Schilb, 2001) manifest themselves in the language of students' writing. In this study, I investigate students' language choices in literary interpretive writing, with an aim of fostering our capacities to support students' critical thinking and writing.

## 1.2 Building on linguistic studies of students' writing: addressing a gap in the scholarship on college students' literary interpretive writing

A systematic attention to the language-level features of students' writing across genres and disciplines has become more widespread in studies of stance and engagement (Aull & Lancaster, 2014; Aull, 2015; Lancaster, 2016), yet fewer studies have examined the linguistic patterns of students' writing about literature, perhaps reflecting a disciplinary separation and ongoing tension between the subfields of literary and writing studies as well as between linguistics and writing studies. As discussed further in the literature review chapter, existing studies that examine the linguistic features of students' literary interpretive writing have mainly been present in the field of applied linguistics and situated in the context of Australian secondary schooling (Christie & Macken-Horarik, 2009; Macken-Horarik, 2013; Rothery & Stenglin, 2005; Macken-Horarik & Morgan, 2011), yet there is a noticeable absence of scholarship on the linguistics of college students' literary interpretive writing in the U.S. context across the fields of literary studies, linguistics, and writing studies. In reanimating conversations between literary and writing studies, I bring together two separate areas of scholarship within writing studies — on the teaching of literature and linguistic features of student writing — to illuminate the language choices that construe valued yet abstract qualities of student writing including *nuance*, *subtlety*, and *complexity*.

## 1.3 Key terms and concepts

In the following section, I introduce the key terms that guide my study, including *nuance*.

### *1.3.1 Nuance in students' writing about literature*

In examining students' close reading essays, I investigate the construction of *nuance*, which I conceptualize as a recognition of the possibilities, layers, and shades of significance in literary texts. In recent scholarship on the teaching of literature, *nuance* emerges as a quality that literary scholar-practitioners value in students' writing. Schilb (2001)[1] notes that literature pedagogy's "chief goal" is "to strengthen students' willingness and ability to court subtlety and nuance" (p. 516), while Chick, Hassel, & Haynie (2009) seek to guide students to notice "the subtle nuances of textual complexity" and to "offer more original, nuanced readings of literature" (p. 415). Yet in concrete terms, what is meant by *nuance*, and how might such a quality manifest in students' writing? Importantly, given their slippery, elusive nature, qualities such as *nuance* may to students seem abstract or impressionistic, and such literary-specific qualities may elude students who may be new to literary studies. In supporting students to construct more nuanced interpretations, Chick, Hassel, & Haynie (2009) express "the need to make our values more explicit for students who are not yet experts" (p. 401). While Chick, Hassel, and Haynie propose pedagogical strategies for teaching literary interpretation, I articulate a need to more explicitly define what we mean by abstract qualities of *nuance*. As discussed in further detail in the following chapter, a close examination of students' writing samples can enable instructors to identify in more explicit ways the language choices that realize valued qualities of literary interpretation such as *nuance*.

## 1.4 Examining students' writing in English 124 and English 298

In this study, I have examined students' writing in English 124 (Academic Writing and Literature) – the first-year writing class with an emphasis on reading and writing in response to literature – and English 298 (Introduction to Literary Studies) – which offers an introduction to literary interpretation in the English major. I investigate students' writing in English 124 and 298 as these two classes share an emphasis on introducing students to close reading, one of the "foundational practices of interpretation" in the discipline of literary studies (English 298 general course description). English 124 and 298 can be conceived as classes that introduce students to the specific disciplinary practices of literary studies. In addition to reflecting the broader aims of encouraging students' critical thinking and writing abilities, English 124 can be conceived as a form

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[1] While Schilb (2001) and Regaignon (2009) offer pedagogical strategies, I focus this discussion on Chick Hassel, & Haynie's (2009) and Tinkle et al.'s (2013) studies of students' writing.

of disciplinary initiation: from a disciplinary perspective, students are situated in a literary-specific way of writing, reasoning, and arguing as they learn how to write like a literary scholar and grow into registers of language that are recognized by the literary studies community. Meanwhile, English 298 explicitly introduces students to the methods and approaches of literary interpretation, including the close reading of literary texts.

Selecting these two classes reflects the aim of the study: to support students to interpret literary texts in nuanced ways. That is, students enrolled in these introductory classes may be new to or unfamiliar with the practice of close reading, especially in a literary-specific context, and might struggle to realize valued qualities of interpretation in their writing. Situating this study within first-year writing about literature and introduction to literary studies illuminates comparative insights into students' interpretive writing within and across sections and classes: as illustrated in greater detail in the following chapters, English 124, a required first-year writing course, emphasizes an attention to the process of closely interpreting words and images in literature. Meanwhile, English 298, an optional course, encourages students to apply close reading skills as a scaffold that builds toward broader interpretations related to characterization and thematic development. As illustrated in the findings chapters, an examination of students' writing reveals distinctions between students' writing in English 124 and English 298.

## 1.5 Research questions

In this study, I have investigated the ways in which students in two writing about literature classes, English 124: Academic Writing and Literature and English 298: Introduction to Literary Studies, engage in interpreting literary texts in their close reading essays, as well as the ways their instructors evaluate their writing. By drawing on the Appraisal framework within Michael Halliday's theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), I more systematically recognize and describe the degree of nuance in students' writing, which I conceptualize as a recognition of the multiple possibilities, layers, and shades of significance in literary texts. In addition, by cross-analyzing student essays with course materials and interviews with instructors, I investigate the ways in which students' language choices correlate with valued practices of literary interpretation.

In seeking to understand the construction of nuance in students' writing about literature, I have situated my study in the following research questions. Question 1 is based on an analysis of

student writing samples and essay prompts, while questions 2 and 3 are based on a cross-analysis of student essays, interviews with instructors, and course materials.

1. In what ways do students' language choices realize literary interpretive moves (based on my analysis of Appraisal resources and essay prompts)?
    a. In what ways do students refine interpretations (using Attitudinal resources), invite or foreclose alternative possibilities of interpretation (using Engagement resources), and calibrate the strength of the Attitudes they infuse in their interpretations (using Graduation resources)?
    b. In what ways do students' literary interpretive moves relate to literary scholar-practitioners' expectations for literary interpretive writing as expressed in the scholarship on the teaching of literature?
    c. In what ways does this cross-analysis illustrate distinctions between the ways literary interpretations are realized in English 124 and in English 298?
2. In what ways do the linguistic patterns associated with Appraisal in students' writing correlate with the meanings realized in literary interpretation that instructors value in students' writing (based on a cross-analysis of writing samples, course materials, and conversations with instructors)?
    a. What qualities do instructors value in students' writing?
    b. In what ways do these qualities manifest in students' writing?
    c. In what ways does this cross-analysis illustrate distinctions between the ways literary interpretations are realized in English 124 and in English 298?
3. What pedagogical implications can we draw from the analysis of writing samples, course materials, and conversations with instructors?

In addressing the first question, I have studied the ways in which students' language choices realize literary interpretive moves based on my analysis of students' essays and instructors' essay prompts. I have analyzed students' essays using the Appraisal framework, which is characterized by the "negotiation of feeling" and with which interpersonal meanings are realized in writing (Hood & Martin, 2007, p. 741). Appraisal comprises resources of Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation. I examine the ways students refine interpretations using Attitudinal resources, invite or foreclose alternative possibilities of interpretation (using Engagement resources), and calibrate the strength of

the Attitudes they infuse in their interpretations (using Graduation resources). Investigating Attitudinal resources can elucidate the ways students interpret literary significances, analyzing Engagement resources can illuminate the ways students tease apart the multiple possible significances of literary language, and examining Graduation resources can expose the ways students delineate the subtle shades of significance in literary texts. In drawing connections between students' language choices and valued literary meanings, I delineate the ways students' literary interpretive moves relate to literary scholar-practitioners' expectations for literary interpretive writing as expressed in the scholarship on the teaching of literature. In addition, I identify the ways in which students' interpretations illustrate distinctions between the ways literary interpretations are realized in English 124 and in English 298.

In addressing the second question, I have cross-analyzed students' writing samples, instructors' comments on students' essays, and conversations with instructors to examine which meanings realized in literary interpretation instructors value in students' writing and the ways in which these qualities correlate with the findings from the linguistic analysis. For instance, an instructor might state in the criteria for a close reading essay that a student's interpretations should be "nuanced, surprising, and original," yet these qualities may be left unexplained and may not be exemplified by examples from student's writing. By cross-examining students' writing samples and instructors' evaluations of students' essays, I elucidate these ways such abstract qualities of *nuance* are realized in specific language choices. For instance, I draw connections between what an instructor describes in abstract terms as *multilayered meanings* and expressions in a student's essay that expand the dialogic space for alternative possible interpretations. By exposing the fine-grained elements of meaning that construe instructors' often impressionistic descriptions of students' writing, I illuminate valued yet elusive practices of literary interpretive writing.

In addressing the third question, I discuss pedagogical implications that we draw from the analysis of writing samples, course materials, and conversations with instructors. Based on the findings, I suggest strategies for supporting students to attend to the ways literary meanings are realized in writing; I also suggest ways instructors can refine their approaches to discussing writing expectations with students.

## 1.6 Chapter summaries

In this section, I offer an overview of the chapters to follow.

In Chapter 2, I review and synthesize the scholarship in the teaching of literature, writing studies scholarship on students' literary interpretive writing, and linguistic studies of students' writing about literature. I introduce the conceptual and theoretical frameworks guiding this study and articulate a need for a theory of language with which to investigate students' literary interpretive writing.

In Chapter 3, I explain the research design and methods of the study, including the data collection and analytic approach. In particular, I explain my process of collecting and analyzing student essays, course materials including syllabi and essay prompts, and interviews with the instructors.

In Chapter 4, I present findings based on the first research question, *In what ways do students' language choices realize literary interpretive moves?* Based on an analysis of student writing samples, I illustrate that student writers summarize literary texts using Affect (descriptions of what characters feel) and Judgment (descriptions of how characters convey moral and ethical judgments). Meanwhile, student writers interpret literary texts using Appreciation (interpretations of literary significance). Further distinctions can be seen in the ways students delve into deeper layers of significance: student writers interpret the multiple possibilities of literary language using Engagement resources that expand and contract the dialogic space (e.g., "This word could mean…") and calibrate the relatively superficial and deep layers of their interpretations by interweaving softening and intensifying Graduation ("e.g., "This *seemingly* simple word reveals the complexity of the relationship between the characters…").

In Chapter 5, I present findings based on the second research question, *In what ways do the linguistic patterns associated with Appraisal in students' writing correlate with the meanings realized in literary interpretation that instructors value in students' writing (based on a cross-analysis of writing samples, course materials, and conversations with instructors)?* I present the instructors' evaluations of students' essays as gleaned from my conversations with instructors; I then analyze the correlation between the linguistic analysis and instructors' evaluations of students' writing. I illustrate that my analysis of students' writing concorded with the instructors' perspectives. By drawing on course materials including essay prompts and criteria alongside instructors' evaluations, I situate the examination of students' writing sample within the pedagogical contexts.

In Chapter 6, I summarize the findings from both chapters. I discuss scholarly implications, revisiting the review of literature to show the contributions to the scholarly questions. I close by offering pedagogical implications based on the findings; in particular, I articulate a need for

instructors to develop a metalinguistic awareness of the ways students' language choices in writing create literary interpretive moves.

## 1.7 Significance and aims of the study

This dissertation seeks to elucidate the ways students' language choices do or do not correspond to instructors' expectations for literary interpretive writing, as well as the ways instructors notice and evaluate meanings realized in students' writing. Through a careful attention to students' writing, this study offers a means of more systematically and precisely pinpointing the ways students' language choices construe literary-specific meanings. The findings of this study contribute to the scholarship in the teaching of writing about literature. I illustrate that taking a systematic approach to investigating the students' writing based on Systemic Functional Linguistics can offer a salient lens and language that can inform instructors' teaching of literary interpretive writing. While writing instructors have long attended to students' language in writing — for instance, by commenting on essays or conversing with students — attending more systematically to the linguistics of written composition illuminates less immediately visible insights into the ways in which meanings needed for literary interpretation are made in language choices. For instance, drawing a connection between an openness to interpretive possibilities and expressions that expand the dialogic space renders visible valued qualities of interpretive writing. A linguistic analysis thus enables instructors to identify meanings in language choices that might lie beneath their conscious awareness or ability to articulate but that construe valued qualities of literary interpretive writing including *nuance* that might otherwise remain tacit or unarticulated. A linguistic lens elucidates the means by which abstract qualities such as *nuance* are realized in students' writing.

By elucidating the language choices that create qualities of nuance in students' writing, I strive to support students and instructors with developing more explicit understandings of the ways language construes valued meanings in writing. The linguistic findings of this study can inform instructors' approaches to teaching and responding to students' writing, enabling instructors to refine their language for discussing their expectations for literary interpretive writing with students in ways that are more precise, explicit, and identifiable. For instance, a linguistic understanding of students' writing could guide instructors in crafting more explicit expectations for students' essays and in responding to students' writing in more concrete, systematic ways. Such an awareness of the ways language creates meaning could likewise sharpen students' consciousness of qualities of writing

including *nuance* that may to students seem abstract or impressionistic. By attending to their own and others' language choices in writing, students can refine their understanding of what constitutes a nuanced interpretation and how to craft an interpretation in ways that instructors value. In addition to offering instructors a new perspective of writing, this study thus offers students a new way of thinking about their language choices in writing, illuminating insights into the ways meanings needed for literary interpretation are made in specific language choices.

My pedagogical aims in this study are thus to render the often abstract, elusive qualities of literary interpretations more apparent and accessible to novice student writers and their instructors. In equipping instructors with more concrete understandings of literary writing expectations and the ways these expectations manifest in students' essays, my goals are to create avenues toward supporting students with crafting more nuanced literary interpretations. Specifically, by revealing distinctions between proficient and emergent student writing within each class level, I illustrate ways instructors can guide emergent student writers with interpreting literature in proficient ways. In addition, by revealing distinctions between students' writing in English 124 and English 298, I illuminate implications for supporting relatively novice student writers with progressing toward more advanced levels of literary interpretation. More broadly, the findings cast light on disciplinary ways of knowing and writing in literary studies, exposing valued yet implicit ways of constructing knowledge. Ultimately, by rendering tacit writing expectations more transparent and knowable, this project creates pathways toward more equitable, accessible approaches to writing pedagogy and assessment.

# CHAPTER 2
## Theoretical Perspectives/Literature Review

**Introduction**

In this chapter, I bring together theoretical perspectives and scholarship from the fields of literary, linguistic, and writing studies to develop an argument for my study of literary interpretive writing. In particular, I synthesize studies by literary scholar-practitioners on the teaching of literature, scholarship in writing studies on students' writing about literature, and linguistic studies of students' writing about literature. While pedagogical studies on the teaching of literature have not included systematic examinations of students' writing, this body of research reveals the qualities that are valued in college-level literary interpretive writing, including *nuance*, *complexity*, and *subtlety*. Wolfe (2003) identifies the "shared value of complexity" in literary interpretation, while Schilb (2001) notes that literature pedagogy's "chief goal" is "to strengthen students' willingness and ability to court subtlety and nuance" (p. 516). Meanwhile, Chick, Hassel, & Haynie (2009) seek to guide students to notice "the subtle nuances of textual complexity" and to "offer more original, nuanced readings of literature" (p. 415).

In addition to *nuance*, the notions of *complexity* and *subtlety* likewise play a fundamental role in literary interpretation: as Fahnestock & Secor (1991) write, literary scholarship operates under the assumption that "literature is complex and that to understand it requires patient unraveling, translating, decoding, interpreting, and analyzing. Meaning is never obvious or simple" (p. 89). As Fahnestock & Secor describe, the notion of *complexity* suggests a continual process of "unraveling" successive layers of meaning and expression in literary texts, in disentangling the threads of significance that unfurl from literary language. Similarly, Wolfe (2003) identifies the "shared value of complexity" in literary interpretation (p. 407). While I acknowledge the centrality of *complexity* as a concept underlying literary interpretation, I focus on *nuance* in part due to my interest in investigating the ways students discern subtle shades of significance in literary texts and in part due to the difficulty of locating *complexity* in students' writing — whether in the syntax, style, or substance of an

essay. Meanwhile, I conceptualize *subtlety* as integrated with *nuance*, as illustrated by Schilb's phrasing "subtlety and nuance" as well as Chick, Hassel, & Haynie's phrasing "subtle nuances;" *subtlety* can be characterized as the delicate, precise distinctions of meaning and expression, and thus intertwined with *nuance*, perhaps as an adjectival refinement of the quality of *nuance*.

Importantly, these studies expose the challenges students face with interpreting literature in nuanced ways, for instance, with teasing apart the possible connotations of literary language or with recognizing the multiple layers of significance in literary texts. Yet from this set of studies, it is less clear how qualities of *nuance* are realized in students' own writing. In aiming to render explicit literary-specific writing expectations that are often tacit in nature, I argue that literary scholar-practitioners need more systematic ways to investigate students' literary interpretive writing.

I then review scholarship in writing studies on students' writing about literature. This strand of scholarship reveals common literary interpretive moves that can be identified in students' writing, for example, the move in which a writer relates an instance of literary language to a larger significance, or the move in which a writer unearths the superficial and deeper significances of a literary work. While these literary interpretive moves inform my analysis of students' writing, I contend that focusing only on these broader moves may elide the complexities of students' interpretations. In extending the existing writing studies scholarship on students' literary interpretive writing, I propose that a more detailed linguistic analysis of meaning in students' language choices can bring to light the often elusive qualities of nuance that are valued in literary interpretation.

Finally, I consider linguistic studies of students' literary interpretive writing, which illuminate valued qualities of students' writing from a linguistic perspective. While this strand of scholarship reveals the ways students' language choices create valued meanings in writing, these studies are mainly situated in secondary school public examination contexts, which may constrain opportunities for the development and revision of ideas. In interrogating a lacuna in the linguistic scholarship on college students' writing about literature, I investigate college students' literary interpretive writing to elucidate the more delicate degrees of expression that construe nuance in college-level writing, in order to relate these to the qualities that are valued and the moves that they construct.

In the section that closes this chapter, I introduce the guiding concept of nuance based on this review of the literature and introduce a need for a theory of language with which to investigate the ways students create nuanced interpretations in their language choices. In operationalizing this study, I will show that attending systematically to the ways students construct literary interpretations

by applying Halliday's theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics can illuminate how abstract qualities of *nuance* are realized in students' literary interpretive writing.

## 2.1 Scholarship on the teaching of literature

Students, especially those who may be new to literary studies, may struggle with interpreting literature in nuanced ways that attend to multiple layers of meaning. What is more, many students face more foundational challenges with shifting from summarizing to interpreting literary texts; students might struggle with developing an ability to parse literary language and instead restate or paraphrase what happens in a literary text. As Regaignon (2009) writes, "one of the great difficulties undergraduates face in making the transition from high school to college-level writing is moving from observation to insight and interpretation" (p. 122). Regaignon laments encounters with students' essays that include "long blocks of summary with quotations sprinkled in" (p. 121) and shares pedagogical approaches to teaching students to develop a "close attention to the text and a willingness to generate ideas from it" (p. 124). While Regaignon offers teaching strategies but does not discuss examples of students' writing, Tinkle et al.'s (2013) study on teaching close reading skills in an undergraduate literature course integrates analysis of students' writing samples to investigate the challenges of supporting students in the shift from summarizing to interpreting literary texts. In addressing the questions "How do students learn to read closely and to write effective analyses of complex texts? And can students substantially improve their close reading skills in a large lecture class?" (p. 506), Tinkle et al. examined the effect of pedagogical methods including lectures, discussions, quizzes, and feedback on students' progress in composing nuanced literary interpretations. Importantly, the authors point out that "a significant majority of students arrived in the class reading at a relatively superficial level: they do not generally exhibit analytical thinking, nor do they notice detail and subtlety or track multiple meanings as they read" (p. 516). Supporting students to progress from "relatively superficial" to "analytical thinking" thus emerges as a central challenge of writing pedagogy. As the authors describe, their pedagogical approach to supporting students to develop their literary interpretive skills — including "defining and modeling close reading" and offering "opportunities to practice the skills of critical reading and writing" — enabled students to realize "new and more complex interpretations of the material" (p. 526).

Tinkle et al.'s study is especially useful for my study as the evaluations of example student essays offers an initial, high-level means of evaluating students' close reading essays and

distinguishing between proficient and emerging student writing. Yet in a few instances in the authors' evaluations of students' writing, it is less clear which specific instances in the essays "show an awareness of layers of meaning" or disentangle "tensions among formal features of language;" elucidating specific examples of proficient student writing, including the ways particular language choices create valued literary interpretive meanings, can support students with crafting more nuanced interpretations. While the commentaries from Tinkle et al.'s qualitative evaluations of students' essays do refer to lines and passages from the essays, in extending the methods employed in this study, I would more explicitly investigate the ways students' specific language choices construe qualities of nuance. For instance, in response to a student's essay, the authors write,

> "This response demonstrates thoughtful attention to detail at the level of word choice and is well supported with specific, convincing textual evidence… It contains a specific thesis, reveals an understanding of complexity, and demonstrates an intimacy with the text that can only be achieved through careful reading." (p. 521)

> Quoted paragraph from the student's essay: "Although these lines are prose, Shakespeare makes use of internal rhyme, rhyme approximations, and repetition. In Goneril's lines, 'Changes' approximately rhymes with 'age is', 'observation' approximates rhyme with 'hath not been', 'most' shares assonance with 'grossly,' and 'he' rhymes with the 'ly' of 'grossly' as well. As Regan responds, she rhymes ''tis' with 'is', and 'infirmity,' 'he,' and 'slenderly' rhyme with 'he' and 'grossly' from Goneril's line. Regan also repeats the words "his age" calling back to Goneril's lines. Even when the two are speaking in prose in a manner that distinguishes their sound from the other characters, they use rhyme similarly, continue each other's rhymes, and repeat not only their own sounds but one another's. At least part of the difficulty distinguishing between Goneril and Regan can be explained by the inseparable nature of their speech." (p. 520-521)

In this example, I might seek to elucidate more precisely which of the student's language choices in particular illustrate these evaluations ("demonstrates thoughtful attention to detail at the level of word choice," "reveals an understanding of complexity, and demonstrates an intimacy with the text that can only be achieved through careful reading"). For instance, does the line "At least part of the difficulty distinguishing between Goneril and Regan can be explained by the inseparable nature of their speech" "reveal an understanding of complexity," and if so, how? In this instance, we might note the way the phrase "the inseparable nature of their speech" highlights the conflation or interchangeability of Goneril and Regan, which in turn illuminates the complexity of significance. By attending systematically to meaning in students' language choices, literary scholar-practitioners can more precisely pinpoint which moments in the students' essays illustrate valued disciplinary moves and thus illuminate to students explicit, concrete ways of constructing nuanced interpretations in their own writing. In addition to supporting students with crafting more nuanced literary

interpretations, such a linguistic analysis could likewise support instructors with progressing beyond impressionistic evaluations of students' writing (e.g., "multilayered meanings," "tensions among formal features of language") toward more descriptive evaluations based on identifiable language choices. Developing a more systematic approach to examining literary interpretive writing can render our expectations for literary interpretation more concrete, explicit, and generalizable across contexts of teaching writing about literature.

In resonance with Tinkle et al.'s aims for students' literary interpretations to "show an awareness of layers of meaning," Chick, Hassel, & Haynie's (2009) pedagogical study focuses specifically on supporting students to recognize multilayered meanings in literary texts. Chick, Hassel, and Haynie write, "many students have learned to offer flat, reductive readings;" for instance, the authors observe that students read Theodore Roethke's poem "My Papa's Waltz" "dualistically," yet the poem "immediately defies [these dualisms] in its ambivalence" (p. 404). Chick, Hassel, and Haynie thus "respond to the challenge of teaching students to acknowledge and appreciate complexity through (and beyond) literary texts" (p. 400-401). In particular, the authors pose the questions "What can we do to encourage students to offer interpretations of literature that show an awareness of multiple levels of meaning? How do we guide students to see language as multivalent?" (p. 402). By employing a lesson study approach — which constitutes class observations followed by an analysis of the observations — Chick, Hassel, and Haynie found that approximately half of the students "(thirty-seven of sixty-five) initially interpreted the poem ["My Papa's Waltz"] either as expressing the speaker's loving, nostalgic memories of his father or as remembering abuse;" in particular, the authors note that these initial "readings were cursory and impressionistic, offered without textual evidence" (p. 406). In supporting students to construct multilayered interpretations, Chick, Hassel, and Haynie asked students to annotate their interpretations of the poem using overhead transparencies; the students noted one possible interpretation using one transparency, then overlaid another possible interpretation using another transparency, which offered "a visual representation of the poem's layers of meaning and complexity" (p. 405). In addition, the authors immersed students in small group discussions in which they were able to "engage with, complicate, and add depth to their initial, flattened-out responses" (p. 411). The authors note that following the lesson's activities, twenty-one students responded in their written reflections "that the exercise did indeed develop some reading for complexity," which in turn improved students' interpretive writing (p. 412).

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While this study offers a useful pedagogical framework for teaching multilayered interpretations, the pedagogical implications that the authors raise in relation to enhancing students' metalinguistic awareness of valued literary interpretive moves carry even more relevance to my study of students' language choices in writing. As Chick, Hassel, and Haynie write, students' "comments that invoke contradictory parts of the poem without using the terms *ambiguity* or *tension* suggest that something more thoughtful may be occurring within these students, but they lack the language to articulate it" (p. 417). While Chick, Hassel, and Haynie are not suggesting that students employ the terms explicitly in their writing, the authors do seek to encourage students to construct interpretations that recognize the complexities and tensions of significance. Chick, Hassel, and Haynie cite Graff and Birkenstein's conjecture that students may "grasp what [some of the] sophisticated moves [of a discipline mean,] but they often [have] trouble putting these concepts into practice in their own writing" (2006, x–xi). In rendering literary interpretive moves explicit to students, Chick, Hassel, and Haynie offer "templates for articulating a text's ambiguities, complexities, and multilayered meanings" (p. 418). These templates include:

> "On a literal level, the passage denotes _____, but it also figuratively invokes _____ and _____, as is suggested in other parts of the text that refer to _____."

> "On one level, _____ means _____. On another level, though, it also means _____." (p. 418)

While these templates offer useful initial scaffolds for supporting students to construct multilayered interpretations, the stark separation between the literal and the figurative or between the "levels" of meaning in a text may position students in ways that are not focused on instances of subtlety or indeterminacy in a literary text, which, in its simultaneity, its immanence, its ambivalence, may elude or even defy definition. Even the layers of significance themselves percolate into one another, shifting or coalescing in a continual state of flux: in interpreting literature, it is necessary to discern the fluidity of significance. Paradoxically, despite Chick, Hassel, and Haynie's aims to capture in these templates the ways multiple meanings "coexist in a multidimensional understanding of the text" (p. 418), I suggest that templates, in their very nature as static and bounded entities, cannot fully model the shifting complexities, ambiguities, or multiplicities immanent in a literary text. In echoing Chick, Hassel, and Haynie's efforts to render "our teaching moves…more deliberate, less intuitive" (p. 419), I contend that students need more precise ways of understanding the fluid, multidimensional, complex nature of literary interpretation. A linguistic attention to literary interpretive writing can offer students "the language to articulate" valued yet elusive qualities such as "ambiguity or tension" (p. 417). In particular, a linguistic analysis can elucidate more delicate degrees

of nuance in students' interpretations, including a recognition of the subtle shades of complexity, ambiguity, or tension in a literary text, than a template can afford. For instance, a writer might tease apart the multiple connotations of literary language and signal the layers of their own interpretations by interweaving expressions that expand and contract the dialogic space (e.g., "[A word] can mean... yet could **also** mean..."), thus interpreting the "details and nuances of language" (Tinkle et al., 2013, p. 516). In this instance, *nuance* is realized in the finer language choices in students' writing, choices that are not available in a more general template. By making explicit the ways valued yet abstract literary interpretive moves such as *nuance* are realized in finer aspects of language that might escape a writer's conscious awareness, literary scholar-practitioners can support students with "putting these concepts [of interpretation] into practice in their own writing" (Graff & Birkenstein, 2006, x–xi), rendering literary interpretive writing articulable and actionable.

## 2.2 Scholarship in writing studies on students' literary interpretive writing

In resonance with Chick, Hassel, and Haynie's templates for constructing literary interpretations, writing studies scholarship on students' literary interpretive writing likewise elucidates valued interpretive moves through qualitative and quantitative examinations of student writing samples. While relatively few writing studies scholars have examined students' literary interpretive writing, perhaps reflecting ongoing tensions between the subfields of literary and writing studies, several scholars — including Herrington (1988), Fahnestock & Secor (1991), Wilder (2002), Wolfe (2003), Wilder & Wolfe (2009), and Wilder & Wolfe (2016) — have made valuable contributions to our understandings of the ways in which students craft literary interpretations.

In an early study of an undergraduate English literature course, Herrington (1988) investigated the purposes or "functions of learning" in an English literature class required of English majors; "functions of learning" include, for instance, "exploring ideas" and "demonstrating knowledge" (p. 133). One potential function of learning — "to perform the relevant collective activities of a discipline" (Toulmin, 1972, p. 133) — is particularly relevant to my focus on the discipline-specific nature of literary interpretation. By analyzing data from classroom observations, interviews, and an analysis of writing samples — a triangulated approach on which Wilder's (2002) study of literary topoi builds — Herrington examined "how a teacher by her words and actions in class influences the specific interpretive approaches students use in their papers" (134). Herrington selected student participants with varying levels of experiences who ranged "from average to

superior based on exam results and observations of participation in class discussions." The professor's responses to a questionnaire revealed that she wished for students to learn "how to read like English majors;" she aimed to encourage students' efforts in "exploring and shaping the writer's own ideas" (p. 140). By analyzing students' writing samples, Herrington found that relatively successful essays presented focused claims and explored relationships between meaning and effect, addressing questions including "why," "how," and "so what;" by contrast, less successful essays examined "what" the theme was or analyzed many devices on a more superficial level (p. 150). As Herrington explains, more successful essays tended to examine relationships between technique and theme, answering "how" questions, for instance, "How does the change in narrative point of view in the story affect our experience of reading the story?" (p. 147).

Herrington inductively categorized the essays based on the type of claim and based on Purves and Rippere's (1968) classification scheme "Elements of Writing about a Literary Work," which includes four categories: personal reaction, interpretation of meaning, interpretation of technique. Based on this classification scheme, Herrington identified the following types of claims:

**Types of claims**:

1. Personal reaction:
   "Thus far in the story, Ned's description of the ship have done two things to me: fascinated me and angered me."

2. Interpretation of meaning:
   "There is, however, an important distinction to be made between Keats's habitual handling of physical indulgence and his handling of it in the poem. Here, he is writing about the process of feeling as opposed to merely describing his sensation."

3. Interpretation of technique, e.g., language, form, tone, or literary-rhetorical devices:
   "Through the use of strong ironies, the sufferings take on the qualities of religious rites."

4. Evaluation: a "claim about the evocativeness or affective power of the work," "a technique in this specific work," or "evaluating the author and the nature of the author's corpus":
   "The fervor of Ferguson's passions lends intense power to the story."

5. Comment on a critical approach:
   "This deviation [in point of view] serves as a major instrument by which the story can be interpreted and by which the story works." (p. 148-150)

Based on the samples collected (423 total papers), Herrington found 294 examples of "interpretive" claims of meaning and technique and 6 "personal reactions," 35 "evaluations," and 4 "comments on

a critical approach" (p. 151) As Herrington explains, a majority of claims (65%) were based on interpretation rather than on general evaluation or reader response. Considering the focus of undergraduate literature classes on the interpretation of literary texts, it is not surprising that essays that presented interpretations received higher scores than those that presented personal reactions or responses.

Herrington's identification of the types of claims that students integrate into their writing is especially valuable for my study. In paraphrasing what Herrington refers to as "interpretation of technique," e.g., language, form, tone, or literary-rhetorical devices, I identify a central literary interpretive move in which students relate a specific instance of literary language to one or more significances; for instance, in the example sentence above, the phrase "through the use of strong ironies" can be identified as a specific instance of literary language, while the phrase "the sufferings take on the qualities of religious rites" can be identified as a significance. While it is useful to identify the larger interpretive moves in students' essays, as discussed in the section above, valued qualities such as *nuance* may be construed in more delicate language choices, for instance, in the way a writer entertains the connotative intricacies of literary language by integrating expressions that alternately expand and contract the dialogic space. Student writers might, for instance, calibrate the relatively superficial and deep layers of their interpretations using softening expressions such as "seemingly" or "what seems to be the case is later revealed to be..." A detailed linguistic analysis of meaning in students' language choices, then, can bring to light these often tacit, impressionistic qualities that are valued in literary interpretation.

In building on Herrington's methods, Wilder (2002) triangulated verbal and written data from class observations, analyses of student writing samples, and students' responses to questionnaires to investigate whether literary topoi are taught in the classroom and addressed in classroom discourse, and whether students recognize and use literary topoi in their writing. By quantitatively and qualitatively analyzing students' essays for the integration of literary topoi, Wilder found that topoi do appear in students' writing and in classroom discourse and "that students adept at recognizing literary values and discourse conventions were more successful" in the class (p. 175). The set of literary topoi that Wilder identifies, including *appearance/reality*, *ubiquity*, *paradox*, and *paradigm*, is drawn from Fahnestock & Secor's (1991) earlier scholarship on the rhetoric of literary criticism in which the authors identify *appearance/reality* as "a dualism, the perception of two entities: one more immediate, the other latent; one on the surface, the other deep; one obvious, the other the object of search" (p. 85). Fahnestock and Secor write, "The very notion of appearance versus reality

translates immediately into images of a surface with something underneath, of solids that can be probed, of layers that can be peeled away to reveal deeper layers" (p. 85-86). In seeking beyond surfaces, a reader "peels away" the veneer, exhuming depths beneath. While identifying topoi in students' writing can offer a framework through which to understand common literary conventions, the existing set of topoi — *appearance/reality*, *ubiquity*, *paradox*, *social justice*, *context*, and *mistaken critic* — may limit the range or scope of possibilities that researchers can investigate in students' interpretations. In addition, while topoi are often identified at the level of the paragraph, passage, or entire essay, a question arises as to the ways in which topoi might manifest in students' finer language choices: for instance, in what ways might we be able to discern the presence of the *appearance/reality* topos in students' writing — through phrases such as "at first glance" or "upon a closer examination"? In extending studies of literary topoi, I examine a wider range of possible interpretations that emerge from students' writing based on a close attention to their language choices.

Wilder and Wolfe's (2016) illustrative examples of *surface* or *depth* readings in students' literary interpretive writing more closely reflect my aims of delineating the specific elements of language within the literary interpretive moves in students' essays. In drawing on the notions of *surface* or *depth* conceptualized by Fahnestock and Secor, Wilder and Wolfe offer several strategies for supporting students to construct literary interpretations, suggesting that students "link a surface reading (or a literal line from the text) to a concept, an idea, or a thought that is not explicitly stated in the text, that is, a layer of meaning beneath the surface reading" and "contrast a simplistic reading of the text with a deeper, more complex reading." As Wilder and Wolfe explain, phrases such as *appears*, *at first*, *may*, and *seems* are words that characterize a surface reading, while "transitional words showing contrast — e.g., "however" and "while" — then introduce the more complex reading that will guide the thesis of the essay." For instance, the line 'At first 'Morning Song' seems to be a loving tribute to motherhood' can be interpreted as a surface reading that is then juxtaposed with a deeper reading:

> "At first 'Morning Song' seems to be a loving tribute to motherhood." (surface reading)

> "However, a closer reading suggests that the speaker is significantly troubled by the baby." (depth reading)

These *surface* or *depth* readings that Wilder and Wolfe identify illuminate initial ways of conceptualizing students' literary interpretive writing. Yet whereas Wilder and Wolfe share pedagogical strategies for supporting students' writing, I bring a scholarly attention to students' writing. While I agree with Wilder and Wolfe's acknowledgement that "students struggle mightily

when instructors do not make their assumptions about reading and writing explicit," and while I share their aim to "demystify these often tacit goals, values, and expectations by explicitly teaching students…how to use awareness of [literary] features to craft an interpretive argument," examining samples of students' writing from a scholarly perspective — beyond offering pedagogical strategies — could illuminate a multiplicity of metaphors beyond *surface* or *depth*. As illustrated by the analysis of students' essays in the following chapters, the multilayered intricacies of literary significance may emerge less by means of extremities and more by means of a gradual obscuring and manifesting of perceptions and realities (e.g., "what *seems* to be... is later revealed to be..."). As Corrigan (2017) writes in a review of Wilder and Wolfe's book, "the process of literary analysis requires readers to hold an open mind toward multiple possible interpretations and to argue for one interpretation and then another, aware that no single one is *the* interpretation but that multiple different interpretations may be meaningful" (553). In echoing Corrigan's contention that in presenting this strategy, "Wolfe and Wilder touch on but do not fully unpack considering multiple possible interpretations, asking questions, and posing interpretive problems," I seek to respond to Corrigan's call to "carry their project forward…by naming and finding ways to teach these kinds of vital but less visible strategies" for supporting students to construct literary interpretations (p. 553). As illustrated in the following chapters, these "vital but less visible strategies" encompass the extent to which writers construct an openness to interpretive possibilities using language choices that invite or foreclose discursive space. By looking more closely into students' writing using a linguistic approach, we can complicate our understandings of what constitutes *nuanced* interpretations.

## 2.3 Scholarship in linguistics that examines students' writing about literature

While the scholarship in literary and writing studies reviewed above are mainly pedagogical in nature and identify common literary interpretive moves, the linguistic studies of students' literary interpretive writing reviewed below elucidate the ways students' finer language choices construe valued literary meanings. The strand of linguistics scholarship that examines students' writing about literature — including studies by Rothery & Stenglin (2005), Christie & Macken-Horarik (2007), Macken-Horarik & Morgan (2011), and Macken-Horarik (2013) — offer a productive starting point for investigating the delicate degrees of expression that construe nuance. Yet these studies are situated in secondary school contexts in Australia; significantly, as noted above in Chapter 1, I have not identified linguistic studies that focus on college students' writing about literature. In the

following, I review Rothery & Stenglin's (2005) and Christie & Macken-Horarik's (2007) studies of the linguistic features of Australian secondary students' responses to public examination prompts, as these studies offer models I build on.

### 2.3.1 Extending a study of Appraisal in students' writing

Based on my interest in elucidating the finer degrees of nuance in students' writing, I aim to build on Rothery & Stenglin's (2005) analysis of Appraisal resources in students' literary interpretive writing. In examining a "typical excellent response" to a public examination prompt, Rothery and Stenglin examined the relative distribution of the Appraisal resources in the response as a way of identifying the kinds of meanings — Affect, Judgment, or Appreciation — that appear in students' literary interpretations. The authors found that the response predominantly presents Judgment resources, which may reflect the focus of the Australian secondary school curriculum on ethical values. Similarly, Christie & Macken-Horarik (2007) found that students' responses to examination prompts primarily include resources of Affect and Judgment, reflecting an emphasis on developing an "emotional sensitivity to characters' feelings and ethical judgement of their behaviour" (p. 178). In extending these studies situated in a secondary school examination context to a college curricular context, one might find that excellent interpretations at the college level might appraise qualities such as *nuance*, which could indicate more resources of Appreciation — with which writers interpret the quality or significance of a text — than Affect or Judgment — with which writers evaluate or describe feelings or behaviors. In other words, while resources of Affect and Judgment might be found in personal or affective responses to literature that are taught in primary and secondary school, resources of Appreciation might more commonly be identified in critical interpretations that are encouraged in postsecondary settings.

As relevant to my interests in discerning the ways in which students use language to intensify or soften their interpretations and calibrate the strength of their claims, Rothery and Stenglin found that intensified expressions appeared many times in students' writing (e.g., "cathartic potential," "hypocrisy," "lust," "ambition," "powerful characterization," "infinitely evil"), which the authors posit could reflect the sense that "conviction" lends a strength to one's literary interpretive argument and enables the argument to seem "natural" (p. 233, p. 242). Interestingly, it seems that the relative degree of depth, power, or intensity of an Attitude expressed about a text lends these very qualities — of strength, depth, or power — to the argument; for instance, in a line such as "This is done via

the powerful characterization of infinitely evil characters such as the Cardinal and Ferdinand," words such as "powerful" and "infinitely" enhances the story's power and in turn lends strength to the writer's own interpretation (p. 228). While I acknowledge Rothery and Stenglin's notion that intensified claims lend a sense of strength and "conviction" to an argument, I illustrate in the following chapters that overstated or inflated claims such as "infinitely evil" might work against the expression of *nuance* in interpretive writing. For instance, language that lessens the force or softens the focus of a claim (e.g., "*less* so," "*subtly* undermines") might paradoxically be more convincing than an intensified claim in the sense that qualified ideas can construe a more nuanced recognition of the subtle degrees and variations of literary significance (e.g., "could simultaneously connote," "*might* be interpreted as"). In what ways the impulse to strengthen the significance or impact of one's claims — to explain why one's argument matters to an academic audience — interacts with the expectation to qualify, nuance, or complicate their extent becomes an important issue to examine. In extending Rothery and Stenglin's study to college-level literary interpretive writing, I expose the finer degrees by which intensified or softened expressions can lend a greater or lesser quality of nuance to writers' interpretations.

### 2.3.2 Extending a study of abstraction in students' writing

In addition, I seek to draw on Christie & Macken-Horarik's (2007) analysis of abstraction in Australian secondary school writing as I investigate the ways in which students employ noun phrases to convey abstract concepts and themes. Christie and Macken-Horarik examined a corpus of 10 A-range responses to a text examination prompt with a focus on the linguistic development of students' writing in literary interpretation. As Christie and Macken-Horarik write, one key characteristic of literary interpretive writing is "the control of symbolic abstraction," in which writers condense the concrete details of a text into abstract concepts that are often expressed as noun phrases; for instance, in one line from a student writer's essay below, the phrase "the separation between the two lifestyles" is expressed as a noun phrase that encapsulates the theme of separation:

> "The separation between the two lifestyles, that of the lonely, selfish old woman, and the hardworking mother is the essence of the story."

In this line, by transforming the adjective "separate" into its noun form, "separation," the writer transforms a concrete observation — that the two lifestyles are "separate" — into an abstracted notion of "separation," which could serve as an interpretive theme. This strategy of condensing or

distilling ideas into abstract concepts that express the "overarching significance of the text" can be identified in an examination of college-level literary interpretive writing as well; for instance, phrases such as "sense of empathy" or "repetition of language and imagery referring to blindness" express in condensed form the themes of empathy and blindness, concepts that can then be discussed further in the essay. Yet while I agree with Christie and Macken-Horarik's finding that condensing ideas into abstract conceptions can enable writers to transform concrete states of being into interpretive themes, I contend that the overuse of noun phrases can cause writing to become overly complicated or difficult to understand. As Christie and Macken-Horarik point out, students sometimes overreach as they develop the ability to condense and abstract ideas; the authors conceptualize this challenge as a developmental issue in which students may integrate language choices that reach beyond the register in which they write. In particular, encouraging the distillation of ideas into noun form may lead student writers to employ a "formal" or technical academic register with which they might not be comfortable. A measured or moderate incorporation of abstract noun phrases could be useful in certain interpretive moves that signal literary themes, for instance, in the noun phrase "the separation between the two lifestyles" cited above. In recognizing the tensions inherent in the use of noun phrases, I investigate the ways in which writers learn to construct compositions that balance the expectation to write with clarity and concreteness with the expectation to construct nuanced interpretations that are often symbolic or abstract in nature. As my analysis of students' writing illustrates, students in an upper-level literature course more frequently present interpretations using condensed noun phrases than do students in a first-year writing about literature course; such a distinction is reflected in the emphasis in the upper-level course on the interpretation of broader literary themes beyond specific word choices or passages in literary text. In extending Christie and Macken-Horarik's study to college-level writing, I discern the variety of ways in which writers employ language, including by condensing ideas in abstract form, as a way to construe the intricate, complex dimensions of literary significance.

### 2.3.3 Scholarship on instructors' discursive consciousness of students' writing

As I seek to situate my analysis of students' writing within the context of instructors' evaluations, I conclude by reviewing Lancaster's (2016) study of instructors' discursive consciousness of students' writing as I am interested in exposing the extent to which instructors are aware of students' language choices in their writing. Lancaster notes that instructors might have a

tacit awareness of what constitutes successful writing in their field, knowledge that is "acquired largely organically, i.e., through immersion in community practices" (p. 120). Yet Lancaster acknowledges that "it is challenging, if not impossible, for writers to articulate the full range of their discursive goals and judgments:" "while faculty in the disciplines may 'know it when they see it' with regard to successful student writing in their fields, many have trouble explaining what it is they're seeing." That is, while the effects of specific language choices may lie within instructors' *practical consciousness*, or "what actors know (believe) about social conditions, including the conditions of their own actions, but cannot express discursively" (Giddens, 1984, p. 375), such choices might lie below their *discursive consciousness*, which is "what actors are able to say, or to give verbal expression to, about social conditions, including especially the conditions of their own actions" (p. 374). In responding to this pedagogical challenge of supporting instructor's explicit awareness of the ways in which language choices create valued meanings in writing, Lancaster employs the method of the discourse-based interview, which can expose participants' practical consciousness of language choices that may lie beneath their discursive consciousness. In combining discourse-based interviews with corpus linguistic techniques, Lancaster seeks to discern the extent to which instructors are "consciously aware" of the linguistic patterns of students' writing.

As is relevant to my study, Lancaster examines a student's linguistic expressions of stance, or how writers position their claims using language, as well as an instructor's evaluations of the student's writing. Importantly, Lancaster characterizes stance choices as "hidden" language choices, or those that might occur beneath the surface of instructors' and students' discursive consciousness. As Lancaster suggests, while qualities related to assertiveness are within the instructors' discursive consciousness, qualities related to nuance might lie below her discursive consciousness.[2] It is significant that instructors, like students, might not necessarily recognize the language choices that underlie their perhaps impressionistic evaluations of qualities such as nuance. As illustrated by Lancaster's study, neither the student nor the instructor seemed to be aware of the ways in which

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[2] As Lancaster posits, neither Richard nor his instructor, Maria, were conscious of their use of these nuancing words until they examined corpus findings and read scholarship on stance. Yet it may be the case that Maria conceptualizes Engagement resources that enable writers to consider alternative perspectives as features that construct assertiveness in establishing arguments. In such a case, Maria's notion of what it means to be assertive in philosophical writing may allow space for these expressions of nuance, and the language of "hedging" and "uncertainty" may not adequately describe these resources of expansion, which enable the construction of nuanced arguments. If so, Maria's talk and writing might not reflect an inconsistency between his discursive and practical consciousness, but rather, an inconsistency between the ways in which the participant and researcher are referring to words such as "assertive" or "measured."

relatively understated stances construe qualities that are valued in philosophical argumentation, including an openness to alternative perspectives. In exposing the gap between the explicit talk and the implicit "doing" of writing in philosophy, Lancaster found that the qualities of caution associated with expanding Engagement resources "appeared to run below [the instructor's] discursive consciousness but are of potential pedagogical value" (p. 132). In extending Lancaster's findings to an analysis of literary interpretation, I aim to illuminate the means by which instructors recognize and evaluate characteristics in students' writing — whether by implicit, tacit understandings of valued qualities of literary interpretation or more explicitly based on students' language choices.

Following Lancaster, I expose the patterns of students' language use that might lie beneath the surface of instructors' conscious awareness; for instance, an instructor might articulate that they value an openness to multiple possibilities of interpretation in literary interpretive writing; the instructor might evaluate more highly essays that invite spaces for alternative interpretive possibilities using expressions such as "it might be the case that…" or "another meaning of the word could be…," yet the instructor might not be fully aware that they may be associating "openness to multiple possibilities of interpretations" with expressions that expand the dialogic space. In this sense, elucidating the patterns of language that construe impressionistic qualities such as "openness to interpretive possibilities" could render visible the elusive qualities that characterize academically valued literary interpretive writing, which could in turn inform pedagogical approaches to supporting students to interpret texts in critical, deep, and nuanced ways.

In addition, Lancaster's study exposes a need to investigate the metalanguage (Schleppegrell, 2013) instructors employ when teaching literary interpretive writing. Lancaster conjectures that Richard's greater ability to write in discursively valued ways in philosophy than in English could indicate that while Richard received an explicit structure or metalanguage for writing in philosophy, he was not offered such guidance for literary analysis, which Lancaster posits could reflect the notion that instructors of English might perceive explicit guidelines and scaffolds such as literary topoi as constraining creativity. Lancaster explains, "Without an accompanying metalanguage for discussing and pointing to these qualities in texts, however, they were not elevated into his immediate discursive consciousness" (p. 138). While Lancaster focused his analysis on Richard's writing in philosophy, the extent to which Richard wields discursively valued language choices in English literature remains an open question. In addition, while Lancaster interviewed the philosophy instructor, the extent to which the English instructor is aware of the ways in which the valued

qualities of literary interpretation manifest in students' language choices remains open to further examination. In extending Lancaster's study, then, a space emerges for further investigation into students' writing about literature as mediated by instructors' expectations, an aim that can be realized through my study.

## 2.4 Summary and takeaways

From this review of the scholarship, a need arises to more precisely pinpoint the ways in which nuanced literary interpretations are constructed through fine-grained language choices. A linguistic attention to writing can elucidate those facets of literary interpretation — the abstract, the impressionistic, the tacit — that may elude student writers who are new to this disciplinary practice. As I explain in further detail in the following section, the theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics, particularly the Appraisal framework, which comprises resources of Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation, contributes a precise, systematic lens through which to investigate the finer qualities of nuance in students' writing.

## 2.5 Conceptual and theoretical frameworks

In the following section, I introduce the conceptual and theoretical frameworks guiding this study. I begin by introducing *close reading*, the form of literary interpretation that students undertake in the essays I examine. I synthesize expectations for students' literary interpretive writing from recent scholarship in the teaching of literature to present the guiding concept of *nuance*, which I conceptualize as a recognition of the multiple possibilities, layers, and shades of significance in a literary text. In addition, in operationalizing my study of nuance in students' literary interpretive writing, I articulate the need for a theory of language through which to investigate the ways student writers construct nuanced interpretations. By applying resources of Appraisal, including Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation, which offer a way of relating language choices with literary interpretive meanings, I examine *nuance* in students' writing based on specific language choices in students' essays and the literary interpretive meanings these language choices create. This study thus brings to light the intimate interplay of language and meaning: to disentangle language is to trace the mechanisms by which we construct knowledge.

### 2.5.1 Literary interpretation: a focus on close reading

As illustrated in the scholarship in the teaching of literature, the work of literary interpretation "address[es] questions of interpretation, meaning, and significance" in literary texts (Heinert & Chick, 2017, p. 324). As Heinert and Chick continue, undergraduate literature courses emphasize the interpretation of "meanings explored through close and contextualized readings" (p. 324). In their study of students' writing in an undergraduate literature course, Tinkle et al. describe close reading as "the most fundamental aspect of literary study" (506). As Tinkle et al. continue, a close reading "demonstrates how these features work together to create and enhance meaning" and "involves a number of related skills: first, the ability to identify textual details that have significant interpretive implications, and then the marshaling of disciplinary terminology and an understanding of genre to develop an original argument about how, what, and why a text means" (p. 507). As Tinkle et al. illustrate in examples of students' writing, disciplinary terminology could encompass specific literary elements such as allusion, synesthesia, tone, and other features of literary language.

As illustrated in the scholarship in the teaching of literature, closely reading literary language entails noticing and *unpacking* — closely examining and teasing apart — specific elements in a particular passage (typically no longer than a page of a literary text) to glean their significances. *Unpacking* is a "common disciplinary metaphor" (Heinert & Chick, 2017, p. 327) that "connotes opening up something, sifting out what's inside, and exploring the contents" (Chick, 2009, p. 43). By unpacking literary language, we can glean insights into its deeper significances, reaching beyond the surfaces into the depths of textual significance; for instance, we might notice the way the word "toad" in Thomas Hardy's novel *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* conjures a revolting image or discern the way the phrase "settled quiet" in William Wordsworth's poem "Old Man Traveling" simultaneously evokes movement/stillness and sound/silence. By closely reading literary language, students are expected to interpret the broader literary significances that emerge from specific words, phrases, and images. In this sense, to closely read literature is to tease apart the smaller elements of language in literary texts to discern their significances, or, as Ryan expresses, to "fuse a universal idea and a concrete example" (p. 23), merging the singular with the universal.

### 2.5.2 Building on Tinkle et al.'s rubric for evaluating students' close reading essays

In delineating literary scholar-instructors' expectations for students' literary interpretations in close reading, I draw on Tinkle et al.'s rubric for evaluating students' close reading essays:

| Grading Standards | The rubric is intended to designate levels of actual student achievement and help to measure improvement over the course of the term. |
| --- | --- |
| 0 | • Nonresponsive to the question (e.g., addresses a fragment or an unrelated original poem) |
| 1 | • Relies on summary or paraphrase rather than analysis<br>• Tends to use impressionistic descriptions<br>• Contains overly generalized conclusions |
| 2 | • Mixes analysis with summary<br>• Notices some details but is more likely to deliver impressionistic conclusions than analysis<br>• Contains some overly generalized points<br>• Attempts to use literary terminology and engage with formal features (such as poetic devices, meter, and others) but may err in doing so |
| 3 | • Develops good analysis connecting literary details to specific conclusions<br>• Occasionally offers overly general or impressionistic remarks<br>• Is attentive to details and nuances of language<br>• Shows occasional errors in use of literary terminology and identification of formal features<br>• May perceive relation of passage to larger structure and theme of work |
| 4 | • Offers good if not fully developed analysis of details and nuances of language<br>• Pays good attention to details and nuances of formal features<br>• Demonstrates good sense of literary evidence<br>• Uses terminology correctly for the most part, though minor errors may appear<br>• May tie reading of passage to larger context of work at hand and other works |
| 5 | • Contains analytical originality and specificity<br>• Pays excellent attention to details and nuances of formal features<br>• Demonstrates evidence for cogent conclusions<br>• Shows awareness of layers of meaning and tensions among formal features of language<br>• Ties reading of passage to larger themes and tendencies of work at hand and/or to other works |

*Table 2.1. Close reading grading rubric from Tinkle et al., 2013, p. 512*

As Tinkle et al. write, the authors "developed a rubric that encompasses the major trends we observed in the responses and emphasizes the skills we consider essential for performing successful close readings;" the authors continue, "the rubric is intended, first, to designate levels of actual student achievement and, second, to allow us to measure improvement over the course of the term"

(p. 511). As shown in the rubric, responses scoring 0 or 1 present "summary or paraphrase rather than analysis," responses scoring 2 "contain some analytical elements," and responses scoring at least 3 present "at least a baseline of good analysis and detailed evidence" (p. 512).

As illustrated in the rubric, a central distinction emerges between 'summary' and 'interpretation': while novice student writers often summarize or paraphrase *what* happens in a text – the surface-level actions or behaviors – literary instructors encourage students to delve into the underlying layers of signification, illustrating "how and why they read a particular work in a particular way" (Heinert & Chick, 2017, p. 326). To illustrate an example of summary, I present an example student excerpt that Tinkle et al. designated as achieving a score of 1 out of 5, along with Tinkle et al.'s evaluations of the excerpt:

> "Starting with the first line of Chaucer's General Prologue, I can immediately tell that we are being given background information of the time that the story is being told. 'Whan in April with his showres soote' leads me to believe that we are in April and there are rain showers, so it is definitely spring time." (Tinkle et al., p. 514)

As Tinkle et al. describe, the student presents a summary of what happens in Chaucer's Prologue: "Here the student might be attempting what resembles an analytic move with the phrases 'I can immediately tell' and 'leads me to believe,' but the response does not get past plot summary" (p. 514). An examination of this excerpt the way the student summarizes the text: in the phrase "we are in April and there are rain showers, so it is definitely spring time," the student describes what happens in the plot of the Prologue: it is April and it is spring time. While the phrases "I can immediately tell" and "leads me to believe" might signal interpretation, the "response does not get past plot summary," or a description of what happens in the text. Yet in close literary interpretation, students are expected to progress beyond retelling events in a story toward closely interpreting the thematic significances of specific words or images in literature; an implication thus emerges to support this student to shift from summary to interpretation.

While in the above example, the student summarizes Chaucer's Prologue, an examination of students' essays that *interpret* the intricacies of literary language and significance can illustrate the ways students achieve the meanings that are valued by literary scholar-instructors. As illustrated in the rubric criteria, the descriptions of the essays scoring a 5 out of 5 are especially relevant to my examination of nuance in students' writing: as described in the criteria, essays scoring a 5 "pay excellent attention to details and nuances of formal features" and "show awareness of layers of meaning and tensions among formal features of language." To clarify what constitutes a nuanced

literary interpretation as delineated in the rubric, I present an example student excerpt that Tinkle et al. designated as achieving a score of 5, along with Tinkle et al.'s evaluations of the excerpt:

> Excerpt from a student's essay scoring a 5:
>
> "The imagery of the first four lines, such as the fresh spring rains piercing 'droughte . . . to the roote' gives readers a sense of regeneration and renewed purity. However, there also seems to be a subtle note of sexuality in line four, ' . . . engendred is the flowr.' Flower was a word used to describe virginity, while engender (according to the *OED*), could have been used (at the time) to mean, '[o]f the male parent: To beget' or '[t]o copulate, have sexual intercourse.'" (Tinkle et al., p. 514)

In evaluating this excerpt, Tinkle et al. write, "This response shows an awareness of layers of meaning and presents persuasive evidence for its conclusions at the level of word analysis" (p. 516). While Tinkle et al.'s evaluation does not cite specific examples from this excerpt that illustrate these qualities, including "an awareness of layers of meaning," I offer a detailed examination of the excerpt below. In the first few lines of the excerpt, the student observes the way the "imagery" of the "fresh spring rains… gives readers a sense of regeneration and renewed purity;" that is, the imagery evokes a sense of rebirth. Yet in the following line of the excerpt, the student interprets another possible layer of meaning that emerges from the imagery: "However, there also seems to be a subtle note of sexuality in line four, ' . . . engendred is the flowr.'" In this line, the student unearths a "subtle note of sexuality" in the word "engendred." As the student conveys, the literary language could simultaneously signify purity — "a sense of regeneration and renewed purity" — and sexuality. By unpacking these perhaps competing or contradictory connotations of purity and sexuality that arise from the imagery in the Prologue, the student notices the "details and nuances" of literary language (p. 512).


### 2.5.3 Conception of nuance in students' literary interpretive writing

As illustrated by the review of the scholarship in the teaching of literature, literary scholar-instructors encourage students to attend to the "details and nuances" of literary language (Tinkle et al., p. 512); *nuance* thus emerges as a valued quality of literary interpretation. In developing a conception of nuance in students' literary interpretive writing, I focus on and expand Tinkle et al.'s criteria for an essay scoring a 5 out of 5, with especial attention to the following criteria:

- "Pays excellent attention to details and nuances of formal features
- Shows awareness of layers of meaning and tensions among formal features of language"

In further delineating the finer facets of meaning that constitute *nuance*, I conceptualize *nuance* in students' close reading essays as a recognition of the multiple possibilities, layers, and shades of significance immanent in the language of a literary text. I describe each aspect in greater detail in the section below:

**Possibilities:** First, I conceptualize *nuance* as a recognition of the multiple possibilities of literary language: the notion of *possibilities* is illustrated in Regaignon's (2009) sense that literary texts "contain more possibilities than those which appear at first reading, or first glance" (p. 124), while the notion of multiplicity is seen in Heinert & Chick's (2017) conception of "perspective" in literary interpretation, that is, "recognizing that there are multiple ways of looking at the text" (p. 326). As one illustration of a way a student might notice the multiplicities of meaning in literary language, in the student example from Tinkle et al. above, the student unpacks the multiple possible connotations of the word "Zephyrus," which could simultaneously personify wind and serve as an allusion to Greek mythology:

> "In line five, the speaker talks of 'Zephyrus' blowing his sweet breath, thus personifying wind, creating a mystical or fairy-tale like atmosphere. However, the use of 'Zephyrus' is also an allusion to Greek mythology, which seems somewhat out of place in a tale concerning a Christian pilgrimage."

By disentangling alternative possible connotations of the word "Zephyrus," the student thus interprets the "multiplicity and ambiguity of meanings" (Heinert & Chick) that emerge from the literary language. In relation to the student's own language choices, the student's "however" signals the insufficiency of the "wind/fairy tale/mystical" interpretation and introduces an additional, alternative ("also") interpretation.

**Layers:** In further delineating *nuance*, it is important to note that the multiple possible significances of literary language exist on a spectrum from the superficial to the deep: that the meanings emerging from a literary text may be superficial or literal in sense, or deep or profound in their implications. For instance, in the example student interpretation below, the student draws a contrast between a surface reading and a depth reading of the homophone "he/art" in Dekker's play: "On the surface, she is playfully questioning if these two hunters can really lose their prey while hunting. However, Rose's question can also be interpreted as her subtly asking Hammon if he can really fall in love with her that quickly. The second meaning is further exposed...". In this example, the student interprets an initial, superficial reading of the homophone using the phrase "on the surface" before presenting a deeper reading using the words "however" and "also," exposing an

underlying layer of significance beneath the surface reading. In addition to *possibilities*, I thus conceptualize *nuance* as a discernment of the deeper *layers* of significance that emerge from literature.

**Shades:** In a related sense, I likewise conceptualize *nuance* as a recognition of the subtle *shades* of significance in literary language. As one illustration of a way a student might interpret the subtle shades of significance in literary language, in the example from Tinkle et al., the student discerns the way there "seems to be a subtle note of sexuality" in the word "engendred" ("However, there also seems to be a subtle note of sexuality in line four, '. . . engendred is the flowr.'"). In this instance, the student discerns the way a "subtle" shade of sexuality might be exposed upon a closer examination of particular words and phrases in the literary text, such as the word "engendred," which carries a sense of generation and fertility. In examining students' writing, I am looking for the ways students notice such subtle shades of meaning in the language of literary texts they interpret, as illustrated in Chick, Hassel, & Haynie's (2009) guidance for students to notice "the subtle nuances of textual complexity" and to "offer more original, nuanced readings of literature" (p. 415).

In Table 2.2 that follows, I conceptualize *nuance* in the following interrelated ways in relation to recent scholarship on the teaching of literary interpretation. While the scope of scholarship on the teaching of literature is broad, I focus in this section on the subset of pedagogical studies on the teaching of close literary interpretation in introductory writing about literature courses. My rationale for selecting this smaller subset of the scholarship in this area is that these studies discuss literary scholar-practitioners' expectations for students' literary interpretive writing and reveal valued qualities of literary interpretation including *nuance*.

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**Conceptualizing nuance based on scholarship on the teaching of literary interpretation**

*Nuance* in close literary interpretation conceptualized as…

… a continual process of refining one's interpretations
- illustrates Corrigan's (2019) aim for students' "words to have more complexity, more nuance, more insight, more depth, more critical and creative thought, more attention to the details of the text and to the contexts in which those details exist" (p. 3)

… a recognition of the multiple, ambiguous *possibilities* of literary language
- illustrates Heinert & Chick's (2017) conception of "perspective" in literary interpretation, that is, "recognizing that there are multiple ways of looking at the text" (p. 326)
- illustrates Heinert & Chick's (2017) notion of the "appreciation of the multiplicity and ambiguity of meanings that results from repeated close readings of a text" (p. 327)

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|---|
| - illustrates Corrigan's (2019) idea that "meaning is open to further unfolding over time and in new contexts, when a text is read from additional perspectives or when readers attend anew to previously neglected aspects of a text" (p. 8)<br>- illustrates Heinert & Chick's (2017) claim that "the process of unpacking can be explained as" "a horizontal move" in which writers "expand outward into the multiple connotations and contexts of the text" (p. 127)<br><br>… a recognition of the multiple *layers* of significance, ranging from the superficial to the deep<br>    - illustrates Regaignon's (2009) sense that literary texts "contain more possibilities than those which appear at first reading, or first glance" (p. 124)<br>    - illustrates Heinert & Chick's (2017) claim that "the process of unpacking can also be explained as a vertical… move: starting with the specific language at the surface of the text, the reader delves downward" (p. 127)<br><br>… a recognition of the subtle *shades* or variations of textual significance<br>    - illustrates Schilb's (2001) ideas that literature pedagogy's "chief goal" is "to strengthen students' willingness and ability to court subtlety and nuance" (p. 516)<br>    - illustrates Chick, Hassel, & Haynie's (2009) guidance for students to notice "the subtle nuances of textual complexity" and to "offer more original, nuanced readings of literature" (p. 415)<br>    - illustrates Tinkle et al.'s (2013) observation that proficient student writing is "attentive to details and nuances of language" (p. 512) and "notice[s] detail and subtlety" in literary texts (p. 516) |

*Table 2.2. Conceptualizing nuance based on scholarship on the teaching of literary interpretation*

As illustrated, I am identifying the language resources students draw on when crafting literary interpretations. Identifying the specific language resources that construe *nuance* can support instructors in talking with students about the meanings that are expected in literary interpretation. In this study, I examine students' interpretations and describe the ways students' essays approximate and move toward qualities valued in literary interpretation, including nuance.

## 2.6 Theoretical and analytical orientation

In showing how writers move toward nuance in literary interpretation, I apply the theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to identify the emergent and proficient ways students draw on language resources to show their developing sense of nuance.

### 2.6.1 Introduction to the theory of systemic functional linguistics

Halliday and Hasan (1985) introduce semiotics as "the study of sign systems" and establish language as one of the systems of meaning that make up a culture (p. 3). Language is conceptualized

as a social process, in the intertwined interplay of text and context – or the "environment in which the text unfolds" – as one influences and is inseparable from the other (p. 5). As the authors write, "contexts precede texts" and "the situation is prior to the discourse that relates to it," in the sense that situations give rise to discourse, and texts arise from contexts. In the theory of systemic functional linguistics, context can be conceptualized at two levels: first, as the context of situation, or the immediate environment of the text, and second, as the context of culture, or the broader, underlying cultural background, history, and significance. Within the context of situation, SFL recognizes the variables *field* – what is happening in the text, *tenor* – the interactions of the interlocutors, and *mode* – the role the language plays in the discourse. These variables are realized at the level of language, where field is realized by the *experiential* function – the representation of the real world in language, tenor by the *interpersonal* function – the interactions between writers and readers, speakers and listeners, and the expression of their attitudes and perspectives; and mode by the *textual* function – the ways meaning unfolds across a text. Halliday and Hasan explain that "these strands of meaning are interwoven in the fabric of the discourse… we do not separate the different parts; rather, we look at the whole thing simultaneously from a number of different angles, each perspective contributing to the total interpretation" (p. 23). In other words, language is "'multifunctional," the aspects of meaning coexisting simultaneously. "Text" is conceived as a unit of functional meaning, as simultaneously a product and a process, as an "object" of study that has been formed and an "instance" in the process of continual formation (p. 11). More broadly, Systemic Functional Linguistics offers a theory of the systems of language and meaning in which language serves different functions, as language constructs meaning within social contexts. In this study, I draw on the theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics as the theory offers tools for constructing claims about language choices in systematic ways beyond personal or impressionistic responses. Beyond an impressionistic analysis of students' writing, an analysis based on language as a constellation of systems can offer instructors new ways of reading students' interpretations and offer students new insights into the ways interpretive meanings can be constructed in language choices that realize those meanings in ways instructors value. Applying the theory and tools of SFL to studying students' writing thus enables the construction of scholarly claims that relate language to its meanings in social contexts.

### 2.6.2 SFL Appraisal framework

In examining the ways students reach toward nuanced meanings in their writing, I apply the Appraisal framework within SFL, which is characterized by the "negotiation of feeling" (Hood & Martin, 2007, p. 741). Appraisal encompasses *Attitude* (a student writer's evaluations of a text, comprising *Affect* – the ways students describe what characters feel, *Judgment* – the ways students describe characters' moral judgments and behaviors, and *Appreciation* – the ways students interpret literary significance), *Engagement* (resources that expand and contract discursive space), and *Graduation* (the force and focus of Attitudes). The Appraisal framework offers a means of more systematically recognizing and describing the meanings needed for literary interpretation as realized in students' language choices.

In the following section, I delineate in greater detail the ways an analysis of Attitude (Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation), Engagement, and Graduation can render visible the ways students summarize and interpret literary texts:

| |
|---|
| **Summarizing literary texts**:<br>- Students summarize literary texts by drawing on resources of Affect and Judgment<br><br>**Interpreting literary texts**:<br>- Students interpret literary significances and themes by drawing on resources of Appreciation<br><br>   - **Interpreting the nuances of literary language and significance**: Students interpret the multiple possibilities, subtle shades, and deeper layers of significance by drawing on Engagement and Graduation |

*Table 2.3. Relating Appraisal resources with summary and interpretation*

Students summarize literary texts by drawing on resources of Affect and Judgment:

**Affect**: Students describe what characters feel using Affect; for example, in a line from a student's essay, the student writes, "the prospect of Lacy marrying down is causing Lincoln a lot of distress and grief." In this line, the student describes the way Lincoln feels ("distress and grief") by drawing on Affect. In this example, the student summarizes what happens in Thomas Dekker's play "The Shoemaker's Holiday" at this moment: a character is experiencing "distress and grief." Yet literary scholar-instructors encourage students to progress beyond retelling the events in a story toward interpreting the larger literary themes and significance.

**Judgment**: In addition, students draw on resources of Judgment to describe the ways characters convey moral judgments of other characters. For example, in the line "By not marrying above her class, Rose would be free of the harsh judgement of society on the couple for marrying out of line," a student describes the way society would convey a "harsh judgement" of Rose if she

were to marry above her social class. In this example, the student summarizes what would happen in the play if Rose, a lower-class woman, were to marry Lacy, a higher-class gentleman. As in the example of Affect above, a pedagogical implication arises: a need to support students to reach beyond summarizing events in a story toward interpreting larger significances and possibilities for interpretation.

Appreciation: By contrast, students interpret literary significances and themes by drawing on resources of Appreciation. For example, in the line "The phrase 'unheard of contradictions' showcases the patterns' impulsiveness and wildness," a student introduces an interpretation of the way the descriptions of the wallpaper in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" illustrate a larger literary significance: "impulsiveness and wildness." In this example, the student relates a specific element of literary language with a larger significance, thus constructing an interpretation of literary significance. By integrating Appreciation resources including "showcase," the student signals the richness of meaning that emerges from the story, thus recognizing its complexity in a positive sense. In this sense, Appreciation resources such as "showcase" can be identified as literary metalanguage, or words and phrases that explicitly signal literary-specific meanings. By attending to the precise nature of a student writer's interpretations as expressed using Appreciation resources, scholars can discern the ways a student signals literary interpretive moves.

Further distinctions can be drawn across the essays that interpret literary texts: beyond interpreting a single significance in a text, students are encouraged to interpret the multiple possibilities, deeper layers, and subtle shades of literary significance, thus achieving literary scholar-instructors' expectations of *nuance*. Students interpret the multiple layers of literary significance by drawing on Engagement resources that open up and close down spaces for alternative possibilities of interpretation alongside Graduation resources that calibrate the superficial and deeper layers of significance.

Engagement: Students tease apart the multiple possible significances of literary language by drawing on Engagement expressions that expand and contract the dialogic space for alternative perspectives. For example, in the line "At first glance, the word appears to be a synonym for 'rapid' or 'quick'… In another sense, it could mean that he is too impulsive or inattentive to listen to her," the student unpacks the multiple possible significances of the word "fast" in the play. As another illustration, a student signals a contrast between the connotations of "calamity" using the contracting Engagement expression "yet" ("Yet when Victor's usage of 'calamity' is juxtaposed to Hamlet's, it becomes clear that 'calamity' also means 'an event or circumstance causing loss or misery'"). By

examining the ways a writer unpacks the connotations of literary language using *Engagement* resources, scholars can investigate the ways students demonstrate Chick, Hassel, and Haynie's (2009) guidance to discern the presence of "multilayered" meanings in a literary text (p. 415).

**Graduation**: In addition, students unearth the relatively superficial and deeper layers of significance by drawing on Graduation resources that soften and intensify the strength of the Attitudes infused into the interpretation. For instance, in the line "The symbols, although *seemingly* absent, **actually** create present time,[3] a writer parses the simultaneity of absence and presence in Philip Larkin's poem "Disintegration," unraveling their shifting, intermingled layers by integrating the softened "seemingly" alongside the intensified "actually." In this line, the writer juxtaposes a layer of perception — the "seemingly absent" — superimposed upon the "actually…present." These intricate layers of perception and reality that emerge from the literary text are thus construed in the writer's own intricate language choices. By investigating the meanings created by language choices including intensified and softened Graduation resources, scholars can elucidate the ways in which a student unearths multiple layers of significance in a literary text.

**Interweaving Appreciation, Engagement, and Graduation**: As illustrated in the following chapters, student writers interpret the intricacies of literary significance by interweaving Appreciation, Engagement, and Graduation. For instance, in the line "This *seemingly* simple word reveals the complexity of the relationship between the characters," the writer signals the significance of their own interpretation by integrating Appreciation resources (e.g., "reveals," "complexity") while calibrating the layers of the seeming and the actual by employing softened Graduation (e.g., "*seemingly*"). I thus conceptualize Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation as intimately intertwined and inseparable in enabling students to create nuanced interpretations in literary interpretive writing.

## 2.7 Pedagogical implications

In reinterpreting literary scholar-practitioners' expectations for literary interpretation in linguistic terms, I reveal the ways in which a linguistic analysis can enable instructors to more sharply discern levels of student writing, including distinctions between student writing that interprets in literary texts and student writing that summarizes literary texts without realizing interpretations of

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[3] From literary critic Tatjana Despotovic's analysis of Philip Larkin's poem "Disintegration."

literary language. Equipped with a linguistic understanding of students' writing, instructors can more precisely pinpoint instances in which students summarize literary texts by describing what happens in a scene using Affect and Judgment as well as moments in which students interpret the significance of specific elements of literary language using Appreciation. In addition, instructors can guide students in recognizing the ways students construct multilayered interpretations that open spaces for alternative possibilities using Engagement and calibrate the layers of their interpretations using Graduation. Such a systematic attention to students' own writing can help students understand what constitutes summary and interpretation. Considering the intimately interwoven linkages between the reading of literary texts and the writing of essays that interpret literary texts, a closer attention to language can enable instructors to support students with discerning the subtleties and nuances of language in literary texts as well as in students' own writing. In turn, an attention to language can offer instructors a means of more explicitly recognizing the ways language creates meanings in students' literary interpretive writing, thus creating pathways toward more systematic approaches to establishing more precise writing expectations and evaluating students' writing based on meanings in specific language choices.

# CHAPTER 3
## Research Design and Methods

### Introduction

In this study, I investigate the ways in which students in two writing about literature classes, English 124 and English 298, engage in interpreting literary texts through close reading, as well as the ways their instructors evaluate their writing. By drawing on the Appraisal framework within Michael Halliday's theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), I more systematically recognize and describe the degree of nuance in students' writing, which I conceptualize as a recognition of the multiple possibilities, layers, and shades of significance in literary texts. In addition, by cross-analyzing student essays with course materials and interviews with instructors, and by revisiting students' essays following the interviews, I investigate the ways in which meanings in students' language choices correlate with valued practices of literary interpretation.

In this chapter, I delineate the research questions and context of the study; detail the process of data collection and selection, including the collection of student essays and the conversations with instructors; and describe the approach to the analysis of essays, interviews, and course materials.

### 3.1 Research questions

As presented earlier in Chapter 1, research question 1 is based on an analysis of student writing samples, while research questions 2 and 3 are based on a cross-analysis of student essays, interviews with instructors, and course materials.

1. In what ways do students' language choices realize literary interpretive moves (based on my analysis of Appraisal resources and essay prompts)?
   - In what ways do students refine interpretations (using Attitudinal resources), invite or foreclose alternative possibilities of interpretation (using Engagement resources), and calibrate the strength of the Attitudes they infuse in their interpretations (using Graduation resources)?

- In what ways do students' literary interpretive moves relate to literary scholar-practitioners' expectations for literary interpretive writing as expressed in the scholarship on the teaching of literature?
- In what ways do students' interpretations illustrate distinctions between the ways literary interpretations are realized in English 124 and in English 298?

2. In what ways do the linguistic patterns associated with Appraisal in students' writing correlate with the meanings realized in literary interpretation that instructors value in students' writing (based on a cross-analysis of writing samples, course materials, and conversations with instructors)?

    a. What qualities do instructors value in students' writing?

    b. In what ways do these qualities manifest in students' writing?

    c. In what ways does this cross-analysis illustrate distinctions between the ways literary interpretations are realized in English 124 and in English 298?

3. What pedagogical implications can we draw from the analysis of writing samples, course materials, and conversations with instructors?

| Research questions | Data collected | Analytic steps |
|---|---|---|
| In what ways do students' language choices realize literary interpretive moves (based on an analysis of Appraisal resources)?<br><br>a. In what ways do students refine interpretations (using Attitudinal resources), invite or foreclose alternative possibilities of interpretation (using Engagement resources), and calibrate the strength of the Attitudes they infuse in their interpretations (using Graduation resources)? | Collected essays from two sections of English 124 and two sections of English 298:<br>    - English 124 section 1: 15 essays<br>    - English 124 section 2: 17 essays<br>    - English 298 section 1:<br>    - English 298 section 2: | Selected 6 essays from each section for analysis, including:<br>    - 3 essays that present literary interpretive moves relating language with significance<br>    - 3 essays that present summaries or descriptions<br><br>Analyzed the linguistic features in the body paragraphs in each essay based on the Appraisal framework |
| b. In what ways do students' literary interpretive moves relate to literary scholar-practitioners' expectations for literary interpretive writing as expressed in the scholarship on the teaching of literature? | Reviewed the scholarship on the teaching of literature | Cross-analyzed the students' literary interpretive moves and the scholarship on the teaching of literature |
| c. In what ways do students' interpretations illustrate distinctions between the ways literary interpretations are realized in English 124 and in English 298? | Collected essays from two sections of English 124 and two sections of English 298 | Comparatively analyzed the essays from English 124 and English 298 |
| In what ways do the linguistic patterns associated with Appraisal in students' writing correlate with the meanings realized in literary interpretation that instructors value in students' writing (based on a cross-analysis of writing samples, course materials, and conversations with instructors)? | Collected course syllabi and assignment guidelines and criteria<br><br>Interviewed instructors to determine their evaluations of students' essays | Cross-analyzed the essays, course materials, and interview responses |

| a. What qualities do instructors value in students' writing?<br><br>b. In what ways do these qualities manifest in students' writing?<br><br>c. In what ways does this cross-analysis illustrate distinctions between the ways literary interpretations are realized in English 124 and in English 298? | | |

*Table 3.1. Cross-reference of research questions, data collection, and analytic approach*

## 3.2 Research context

In this study, I examine writing samples composed by students in English 124 (Academic Writing and Literature) — the first-year writing class with an emphasis on reading and writing in response to literature — and English 298 (Introduction to Literary Studies) — which offers an introduction to literary interpretation in the English major. In situating this study in these two classes, I seek to discern more nuanced distinctions between the ways close reading is conceptualized and enacted in each course. Considering that English 124 is a required class for students across majors whereas English 298 is a class specifically designed for prospective English majors, students' writing across the two classes may reveal differences in writerly experience as well as development. In addition, as English 124 is required while English 298 is optional, there may be a difference in the levels of students' commitment and motivation in taking each course.

While the specific assignments vary across sections, a close reading essay is often assigned as the initial assignment in each class; in this sense, close reading serves as an introduction to the class as a whole as well as to the broader practices of literary interpretation. The essay assignments taught across each course progress from the simple to the complex and sophisticated; such a progression is reflected in the sequence of analytic approaches or methodologies taught in writing and literature courses; for instance, the English 124 essay sequence begins with a close reading essay followed by an analytic argument, then a comparative analysis essay in which one text serves as a "lens" for

interpreting the other, and concludes with a research-based revision in which outside scholarly sources are incorporated into the analysis. Similarly, in English 298, the essay sequence encompasses assignments that progress in task complexity, for instance, beginning with a close reading essay, followed by a critical response paper and then a research paper.

| English 124 Course Description | English 298 Course Description |
| --- | --- |
| This class is about writing and academic inquiry, with a special emphasis on literature. Good arguments stem from good questions, and academic essays allow writers to write their way toward answers, toward figuring out what they think. In this writing-intensive course, students focus on the creation of complex, analytic, well-supported arguments addressing questions that matter in academic contexts. The course also hones students' critical thinking and reading skills. Working closely with their peers and the instructor, students develop their essays through workshops and extensive revision and editing. Readings cover a variety of genres and often serve as models or prompts for assigned essays; the specific questions students pursue in essays are guided by their own interests.<br><br>**The Specific Goals of English 125 and English 124**<br><br>In the English Department Writing Program, our overall learning goals for students in English 125 (Writing and Academic Inquiry) and English 124 (Academic Writing and Literature) are as follows:<br><br>1. To cultivate practices of inquiry and empathy that enable us to ask genuine questions, engage thoughtfully and rigorously with a wide range of perspectives, and create complex, analytic, well-supported arguments that matter in academic contexts and beyond.<br>2. To read, summarize, analyze, and synthesize complex texts purposefully in order to generate and support writing. | English 298 introduces students to the discipline of literary study.<br><br>There are three key learning objectives of this course:<br>1. Develop an understanding of foundational practices of interpretation, including the practice of "close reading" (that is, analysis focused on how words and other verbal cues build specific and nuanced meaning in a text), a facility in reading across a variety of genres (such as, for example, fiction, poetry, graphic novel, film), and an ability to use a range of key analytical categories (such as, for example, form, audience, media/mediation, metaphor).<br>2. Become aware of distinct scholarly methods and critical approaches used in literary study and become attentive to the way that they yield different interpretations. This class will help you understand how an interpretation emerges from choices about method or approach, and how a single text can sustain many interpretations depending on those choices.<br>3. Develop your abilities both to write and to speak about literature, as well as develop your skills as a writer in general. Complex literary texts offer a rich and challenging site for honing techniques of explanation, persuasion, and reasoning. The capacity of literature to sustain multiple interpretations also makes it an ideal forum for the collaborative intellectual project of class discussion and for sharpening your skills in oral self-presentation. |

| | |
|---|---|
| 3. To analyze the genres and rhetorical strategies that writers use to address particular audiences for various purposes and in various contexts.<br>4. To develop flexible strategies for revising, editing, and proofreading writing of varying lengths.<br>5. To develop strategies for self-assessment, goal-setting, and reflection on the process of writing. | Interpersonal communication, debate, and consensus-building are essential skills far beyond the university classroom. Important writing and speaking skills you will practice include:<br>○ how to develop a question or topic about a literary text that will lead to a strong argument<br>○ how to cast an interpretation as an argument<br>○ how to use textual evidence and literary analysis effectively<br>○ how to articulate the stakes of your argument to your audience<br>○ how to present your ideas orally and respond to ideas presented by others. |
| **English 124 sample assignment sequence**<br>- Close reading essay<br>- Analytic argument essay<br>- Comparative analysis essay<br>- Research-based revision essay | **English 298 sample assignment sequence**<br>- Close reading essay<br>- Critical response paper<br>- Research paper |

*Table 3.2. English 124 and English 298 course descriptions and assignment sequences*

### 3.3 Data collection and selection process

In collecting student essays, I reached out to instructors who have taught English 124 and English 298 during the past two years (2018-2020). These included 42 English 124 instructors, 15 English 298 instructors, and two instructors who have taught both English 124 and 298, for a total of 59 instructors. In these initial emails, I asked instructors to share a class set of anonymized students' close reading essays (final drafts) from early in the semester of an English 124/298 class that they taught in a previous or current year, as well as their syllabus, the assignment prompt or guidelines, and any criteria or rubrics used. In response to my requests, I received four sets of English 124 essays and two sets of English 298 essays.

### *3.3.1 Selection of essays for analysis*

I selected for analysis two sets of English 124 essays from sections taught by Margo[4] and Alex, who are both Ph.D. candidates in English language and literature. I also selected for analysis two sets of English 298 essays from sections taught by Walter[5] and Selene, who are both full professors of English.

As I only received two sets of English 298 essays, I incorporated both sets of English 298 essays into my analysis. In selecting two sets of essays for analysis among the four sets of English 124 essays, I followed several criteria: first, in noting the focus of close reading on the analysis of literary language, I selected essay sets in which students interpret the language, imagery, tone, or other details and situate the interpretations in one or more passages in the text. In reading the essays, I found that two sets of English 124 essays (from Margo's and Alex's sections) present interpretations of literary language, and I chose to analyze these two sets and select these two instructors as participants. The other two sets reflect an emphasis on character and theme analysis, which may progress beyond the scope of close reading.

I selected six essays for analysis from each class set of essays (24 essays total). In selecting essays for analysis, I chose three essays that I deemed proficient and three that I deemed less proficient based on my own knowledge and experience in literary interpretation as well as my review of the scholarship in the teaching of writing, which revealed characteristics that are valued by literary scholar-practitioners, such as the interpretations of the subtle shades of literary language and significance, as well as qualities that are less valued, such as summaries of literary texts. Examining essays from more and less proficient student writers illuminates the ways valued literary interpretive moves are realized in students' writing as well as the challenges that students face with constructing literary interpretations. Studying essays from a range of student writers thus elucidates salient distinctions across student writing and enables the development of pedagogical implications for supporting students with crafting more nuanced interpretations.

For my prospectus pilot analysis, I analyzed three essays from the first set of English 124 essays (Margo's section); in the dissertation, I incorporate discussion of these three essays as well as three others from this set. For the pilot analysis I conducted over the summer, I asked Margo to send essays with letter grades included (A- and B-range essays), so I was able to more clearly identify

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[4] Margo is okay with using her real name, while Alex is a pseudonym.

[5] Walter is okay with using his real name, while Selene is a pseudonym.

which essays were evaluated as "proficient" and "emergent." During the prospectus defense, my committee members mentioned the various issues that might arise from discussing grades, so beginning in the fall, I asked instructors to send essays with the grades removed. I am thus not aware of the grades earned by the English 124 section 2 (Alex) or the English 298 essays. Even so, I found that the instructors' evaluations as expressed during the interviews concorded with my own judgments of the essays that I gleaned from my initial pre-interview coding analysis: for instance, after I had coded six essays from each set and prior to the interviews, Margo and Alex shared Google Docs that contained selections from essays that they evaluated as "proficient" and "emergent." Of the six essays that Margo identified for analysis, I had selected for analysis two of the same essays and reached similar judgments, and of the seven essays that Alex identified, I had identified and evaluated similarly four of these essays. Moreover, for six of these essays, the instructors identified the same lines and paragraphs as the ones I had selected for analysis, which indicates that my initial judgments intersected with the instructors' evaluations, and illustrates that certain characteristics of "proficient" and "emergent" close readings can be commonly identified by different evaluators. While neither of the English 298 instructors, Walter and Selene, were able to identify examples of "proficient" and "emergent" close readings prior to our interview, I was able to screen share excerpts from students' essays that I had identified for analysis and discussion.

In addition to the student essays, I collected syllabi and assignment prompts from each instructor; these course materials informed and contextualized my analysis of the student essays.

### 3.3.2 Development and conduction of interviews

In contextualizing the study within relevant pedagogical contexts, I situate the analysis of students' essays within conversations with instructors. I conducted one hour-long interview on Zoom with each instructor in winter 2021. I shared semi-structured questions with the instructors in advance to help instructors prepare for the interviews. The interview questions are below:

1. How would you define or describe 'close reading' as a skill in literary interpretation? How do you conceptualize 'close reading'?

2. Why do you teach close reading? What is the value, if any, of close reading?

3. *(based on specific essays)* In these essays, which (if any) particular words, phrases, lines, or passages would you identify as examples of excellent close readings?

4. *(based on specific essays)* Which words, phrases, lines, or passages would you identify as examples that are lacking in the qualities you are looking for in a close reading essay?

5. *(based on specific essays)* Why does this particular instance stand out to you as an excellent or lacking example of close reading?

In seeking to discover how the instructors conceptualize or value close reading and determine their Attitudes toward close reading, I began the interviews with the questions 'How would you define or describe 'close reading' as a skill in literary interpretation? How do you conceptualize 'close reading'?' and 'Why do you teach close reading? What is the value, if any, of close reading?'

In addition to these more general questions, I asked instructors to identify in advance specific words, phrases, lines, or passages from their students' essays that they evaluated as excellent close readings as well as examples that they evaluated as struggling or lacking in the qualities they are looking for in a close reading essay. I asked the instructors to select from the full set of essays that were shared with me to ensure that my initial observations would not influence what the instructors chose to discuss in the essays. By posing open-ended questions that aim to discern instructors' evaluations, I sought to expose salient language choices that might lie below instructors' conscious discursive awareness — that is, what they are able to articulate about the effects of a given language choice.

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Essays collected: 6 essays from each class section, 24 essays total

- English 124 section 1: 6 essays
- English 124 section 2: 6 essays
- English 298 section 1: 6 essays
- English 298 section 2: 6 essays

Interviews conducted: 4 interviews, one with each instructor

- English 124 section 1: interview with Margo
- English 124 section 2: interview with Alex
- English 298 section 1: interview with Walter
- English 298 section 2: interview with Selene

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*Table 3.3. Summary of data collected*

### 3.3.3 Analytic approach

*Introduction to the Appraisal framework within SFL*

In operationalizing my analysis of students' writing about literature, I apply the Appraisal framework within SFL, which characterizes the "negotiation of feeling" (Hood & Martin, 2007, p. 741) in the construction of meaning in writing. The Appraisal framework describes three systems through which we negotiate interpersonal meaning: **Attitude** (a writer's evaluations of a text, comprising *Affect* – evaluations of emotional responses, *Judgment* – evaluations of moral and ethical behavior, and *Appreciation* – evaluations of quality and significance); **Graduation** (the force and focus of Attitudes, which enable writers to express the degrees of their commitment to their claims); and **Engagement** (including resources that expand and contract discursive space for alternative perspectives).

By identifying the ways in which writers draw on resources of Attitude, especially Appreciation, we can discern the ways writers interpret the significance of literary texts (e.g., "It is significant she describes the pattern with this"). By identifying the ways in which writers draw on resources of Engagement, we can elucidate the ways writers tease apart the multiple layers of significance in literary language (e.g., "This word could mean"). By examining the ways in which writers draw on resources of Graduation, we can illuminate the ways writers calibrate the subtle shades of meaning in literary texts (e.g., "What is *seemingly*…is revealed to be…"). Each of these resources of Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation function in conjunction with each other to create meaning: for instance, in the line "However, 'fast' can **also** carry another meaning", a student writer interprets the multiple connotations of the word "fast" by interweaving resources of Appreciation, with which the writer interprets the significance of the literary language ("carry another meaning"); Engagement, with which the writer signals the possibility of alternative meanings ("can"); and Graduation, with which the writer calibrates an additional layer of meaning ("**also**"). The resources of Appraisal are therefore "multifunctional" (Halliday), operating in simultaneous and intersecting ways.

*Approach to the analysis of student essays*

I coded each line from each essay based on the Appraisal framework. In my pilot analysis, I observed that qualities of 'nuance' can especially be seen in the Graduation and Engagement resources, with which writers invite subtle possibilities and shades of significance; that is, finer distinctions among the essays can be seen in the relative openness to interpretive possibilities, using

Engagement, and the calibration of the strength of the Attitudes infused into the interpretations, using Graduation. While my analysis of the more subtle distinctions in students' writing primarily focuses on Engagement and Graduation, I found it useful to code for each of the Appraisal subsystems, as students construct essays by interweaving multiple, intersecting Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation resources. One example of a coded sentence from an essay is illustrated in Table 3.4 below:

**Coding Key**:

**Attitude**:

- Affect: express feelings to build up empathy or suspense
- Judgment: make moral judgments of people's behavior
- Appreciation: assess the quality of objects such as literary or artistic works

**Graduation:**

- **intensity (force) and sharpness (focus) of Attitudes (in bold)**: **incredibly** angry
- *lessened force and softened focus in italics*: *probably* good

**Engagement**:

- Engagement resources that expand the dialogic space in <u>underline</u>
- Engagement resources that contract the dialogic space in box

(Humphrey, p. 101-102, 106)

| Source of the Appraisal | Target of the Appraisal | Instantiation | Appraisal code | Subcategory |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| the narrator of the story<br><br>the student writer | the color of the wallpaper<br><br>feelings of the narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" | "When describing the color of the wallpaper the narrator says it is 'repellant,' 'revolting,' 'unclean,' and 'sickly' (43). These indicate the feelings of disgust the narrator associates with the wallpaper." | Appreciation<br><br>Affect<br><br>Engagement | +composition: complexity: intricate<br><br>-happiness: antipathy: abhor<br><br>heteroglossic: expanding |

*Table 3.4. Example coded line from a student's essay*

For each clause or constituent element of an essay (typically a sentence), I coded:

- the **source** of the interpretation — typically the writer, though sometimes, in the case of a quoted passage, the author of the literary text

- the **target** to which the interpretation is directed — in this case, the narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper"

- the **instantiation**, or the line from the student's essay or the literary text

- the **Appraisal code** (Attitude, Engagement, or Graduation)

- the **subcategory**, or the more specific categorization of the language choice (e.g., whether an expression is 'expanding' or 'contracting')

For instance, a writer interprets the significance of the wallpaper in Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper":

"When describing the color of the wallpaper the narrator says it is 'repellant,' 'revolting,' 'unclean,' and 'sickly' (43). These indicate the feelings of disgust the narrator associates with the wallpaper."

The writer interprets the literary language ('repellant,' 'revolting,' 'unclean,' 'sickly') as having significance ("indicate the feelings of disgust the narrator associates with the wallpaper"). I found

that relating literary language with significance is a common interpretive move that can be identified across the essays. By identifying this move, I began to address the research question "In what ways do students' language choices realize literary interpretive moves?"

I coded this line as *Appreciation: composition: complexity: intricate* as the writer interprets the intricate complexities of literary language. Yet this line can also be coded as *Affect*: the writer notices the narrator's "feelings of disgust." Thus, I doubly coded this line as *Appreciation* and *Affect*: this writer interprets literary significance (*Appreciation*) by recognizing the *Affect* of the narrator in the narrator's negative emotional response to the wallpaper. The writer recognizes that the meaning of the passage arises from the emotion, understanding the way literature reveals insight into the human condition.

In addition, I coded the verb "indicates" as *Engagement: heteroglossic: expanding*. By using the word "indicates," the writer invites spaces for other interpretations because "indicates" is not fully committed to the interpretation (as opposed to a word such as "demonstrates"). An Appraisal analysis thus illuminates the ways writers interpret literary significance using *Appreciation* while calibrating their degrees of commitment to their interpretations using *Engagement*. By coding individual language choices, I began to address the question "In what ways do students refine interpretations (using Attitudinal resources), invite or foreclose alternative possibilities of interpretation (using Engagement resources), and calibrate the strength of the Attitudes they infuse in their interpretations (using Graduation resources)?"

After coding each paragraph, I organized the codes into emerging themes. For instance, I noted the theme 'inviting spaces for interpretive possibilities (using expanding expressions)' and included an example line from a student's essay: "These indicate the feelings of disgust the narrator associates with the wallpaper." These initial themes, as well as my annotations on language choices in individual essays, guided the interviews with the instructors.

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Interpreting the significance of literary texts using Appreciation (+composition: complexity: intricate)

Subthemes: Interpreting the multiple possible significances of literary texts using Appreciation Engagement, and Graduation

Codes:

- word connotations (relate an instance of literary language to a particular meaning)

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- Ex.: "The Oxford English Dictionary explains that one of the possible definitions of pray is "To ask earnestly, beseech (God, a person, etc.) to do something, or that something may be done"

- multilayered meanings ("details and nuances of language" [Tinkle et al., 2013], subtle shades of meaning)
  - Ex.: "In another sense, it could mean that he is too impulsive or inattentive to listen to her"

- layers: appearance/reality
  - Ex.: "This seemingly simple word reveals both the complexity of the relationship…"

- broader interpretive statement
  - Ex.: "The informal interaction between these two characters reaffirms that Firk seems unaffected by Margery's new status, further emphasizing the confusing nature of class relations in the play."

- literary metalanguage (e.g., "ambiguous," "complexity," "significant")
  - Ex.: "Dekker introduces scene ten by using ambiguous adjectives to showcase the interesting power dynamic between Margery and the shoemakers"

Summarizing literary texts using Affect and Judgment

Codes:

- descriptions of characters' actions
  - Ex.: "Lacy was charged with leading the army in the war between England and France, however, he disguises himself as a shoemaker to avoid going to the war and has another man take his place."
- recognitions of characters' emotional states

Ex.: "Longing for similar affection, the Creature tries to approach the De Lacey family but is rejected by them because of his horrid appearance."

*Table 3.5. Emerging themes from the linguistic analysis of student writing samples*


**Analysis of syllabi and essay prompts and criteria**

To contextualize the analysis of student writing samples in instructors' pedagogical goals and expectations for students' writing, I analyzed the syllabi and close reading essay prompts each instructor shared. In reviewing the materials, I noticed that the syllabi discussed the 1) specific course themes each instructor had designed the course to focus on (e.g., literature of the workplace, the literature of environmental catastrophe), 2) general course goals based on the department's

generic course goals, as presented in the table earlier in this chapter, and 3) a list of reading and writing assignments along with the course schedules. Meanwhile, I found that the essay prompts established specific writing guidelines and criteria. While I had originally planned to closely analyze the syllabi, I chose instead to conduct a genre analysis of the essay prompts, as the guidelines revealed specific writing expectations related to literary interpretation. In analyzing the essay prompts, I annotated each prompt with an attention to the metalanguage – the language used to describe the literary-specific writing expectations – that each instructor employs in relating the guidelines and instructions. Based on these initial annotations, I organized the criteria into three main categories: *claims/argument*, *structure/organization*, and *significance*. In revealing the instructors' expectations for students' writing, my examination of the essay prompts thus informed my initial analysis of the writing samples as well as the subsequent analysis of interviews and cross-analysis of writing samples, course materials, and interviews.

### Analysis of interviews

I transcribed the interviews based on the Zoom transcription and audio and video recordings; I had asked the instructors for permission to record the interviews. As we had discussed each interview question in turn, and as the conversation often diverged in directions beyond the initial questions, I coded each interview transcript without separating section by question. I coded the interview transcripts for emerging themes using grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2007), in other words, based on the ideas and language in instructors' responses. My own background as an English literature major, my experiences teaching high school and college writing about courses including English 124, my analysis of the course materials, and my review of the scholarship in the teaching of literature together shaped my analysis of the qualities or characteristics of literary interpretation that instructors value in students' writing. For instance, my own experiences as well as my review of literature led me to identify that literary studies instructors value a recognition of the multiple possible significances of literary language; this knowledge informed my initial analysis of students' writing samples and was later confirmed by my conversations with instructors. My prior knowledge and review of the theory and scholarship in close literary interpretation thus offered a relevant starting point for this interview analysis.

Themes that emerged from the interview with the first English 124 instructor, Margo, include *a close attention to details*, *writers' choices*, and *multiple meanings*. Based on these emerging themes, I

revisited the students' essays to identify instances where students pay close attention to textual details as a way of drawing out multiple layers of significance. I also considered the ways the instructors' descriptions of qualities in students' writing, such as *multiple meanings*, *ambiguity*, *subjectivity*, and *assembling of meaning*, could be identified in specific language choices in the students' essays. In this way, I placed the essays in conversation with the interview responses with an aim of rendering visible the often abstract qualities of literary interpretation.

While speaking with the instructors, I found that our conversation sometimes departed from the questions I had asked; the English 298 instructors, for instance, spoke at length about the history of curriculum development related to the teaching of literature in the department. My initial codes thus evolved with each interview to encompass the new themes that emerged from the conversations, and the categories broadened to the topics that instructors brought up during the interviews. As can be seen in the table below, which is illustrative of the themes that emerged from the interview analysis, the scope of the interview themes is broad, encompassing descriptions of close reading, evaluations of students' writing, discussions of pedagogical strategies for teaching close reading, and background on the English department's curricular focus on close reading:

**Descriptions of close reading**:
- Close reading as a close attention to details that facilitates interpretation
    - Ex.: *details*, *elements of language*, *words*, *phrases*, *techniques*

- The affordances of close reading as a way of discovering deeper meanings, themes, significances, connections, and patterns in a literary text
    - Ex.: *digging deeper*, *signify something as a whole in a passage*

**Evaluations of students' writing**:
- Evaluations of students' writing that attends closely to specific literary elements (e.g., words, images, tones) in interpreting significances

- Evaluations of students' writing that delves into deeper layers of meaning in a literary text (e.g., deeper understandings beyond the surface level, multiple connotations of a word)

- Evaluations of students' writing that summarizes or describes the plot or characters in a literary text

- Evaluations of students' writing that signals or reaches toward interpretation without fully realizing close interpretations of language and significance

**Pedagogical strategies for teaching close reading**:
- Pedagogical approaches/strategies for teaching close reading (e.g., annotating a passage as a class)

**Background information and other miscellaneous anecdotes**:

- Background/context on the English department's curricular focus on close reading or departures from this focus

- Miscellaneous anecdotes related to scholarly and pedagogical trends in literary criticism

*Table 3.6. Emerging themes from the interviews with instructors*

In analyzing the interviews in preparation for writing the chapters, I went to moments where the focus was on the instructors' evaluations of students' writing. While the scope of topics covered in the interviews was broad, as illustrated by the emerging themes, I aimed to maintain a focus on the cross-examination of the linguistic analysis and the instructors' evaluations, with an aim of elucidating valued yet abstract qualities of literary interpretation; therefore, I selected excerpts from the interviews in which the instructors commented on specific selections from the students' essays that they or I had identified as proficient and emerging examples of close reading, as well as instances in which the instructors commented on specific language choices in the students' essays that I asked them to evaluate. The instructors' discussions of pedagogical approaches to the teaching close reading and sharing of background information on the curricular history of the department offered useful contextual insights that guided my analyses. Meanwhile, the portions of the interviews that appear in the chapters are relatively focused on instructors' responses to specific moments in the students' essays; I focused on these portions as they illuminate the categories of qualities that instructors value in students' literary interpretations.

### Cross-analysis of essays, course materials, and interview responses

By cross-analyzing the writing samples, conversations with instructors, and course materials, I discovered how the language choices in the essays correlate with the instructors' evaluations of students' writing. Speaking with the instructors enabled me to construct more nuanced insights into the ways students interpret literary texts. For instance, I initially noted the way a student interpreted the multiple, ambiguous possibilities of a word in a short story, yet the instructor expressed that the connotations that the student explored might not make sense in the historical context of the story. Based on the instructor's perspective, I complicated my analysis by noting the importance of situating the interpretations in relevant literary meanings; for instance, I noted that it is important for students to generate interpretations that would resonate with the historical period in which the texts

were written. In this sense, the range of potential interpretations is not infinite, but rather constrained by and dependent on the context from which a work of literature emerged. By contextualizing the analyses within the instructors' evaluations, I identified subtle distinctions between language choices that create more and less nuanced literary interpretations. I thus began to address the research question "In what ways do the linguistic patterns associated with Appraisal in students' writing correlate with the meanings realized in literary interpretation that instructors value in students' writing (based on a cross-analysis of writing samples, course materials, and conversations with instructors)?" Moreover, I was able to begin crafting pedagogical implications: by examining students' writing in relation to the instructors' evaluations, I identified areas for continued growth in students' writing and suggested instances in which instructors could support students with progressing from summarizing to interpreting literary texts. In addition, by rendering explicit the ways instructors' expectations for students' writing are realized in specific language choices, I was able to offer suggestions for crafting essay guidelines and evaluating students' writing in more concrete ways.

# CHAPTER 4

## Students' Interpretations of Literary Significance

**Introduction**

Emily Dickinson's poem "I dwell in possibility" illuminates the ways we and our students might interpret a literary text: with an openness to its possibilities. While closely reading literary language, we dwell in possibility: lingering over a word or phrase, parsing its possible meanings, unearthing unexpected insights into its implications. While crafting interpretive essays, students are expected to recognize multiple possible significances, to consider the nuances and complexities of literary language (Chick 2009; Regaignon 2009; Heinert and Chick, 2017). To interpret literature is to unearth further layers of significance, as the singular unfolds into the multiple, as insights unravel beneath and beyond the text, in the porous boundaries between the imagined and the real. Yet students might struggle with interpreting literature in ways that are valued by the literary studies community; attending to students' language choices in writing can render legible valued characteristics of literary interpretive writing such as *nuance* and *complexity*.

In this chapter, I address the research question:

1. In what ways do students' language choices realize literary interpretive moves (based on an analysis of Appraisal resources)?

   - In what ways do students refine interpretations (using Attitudinal resources), invite or foreclose alternative possibilities of interpretation (using Engagement resources), and calibrate the strength of the Attitudes they infuse in their interpretations (using Graduation resources)?

   - In what ways do students' literary interpretive moves relate to literary scholar-practitioners' expectations for literary interpretive writing as expressed in the scholarship on the teaching of literature?

   - In what ways do students' essays illustrate distinctions between the ways literary interpretations are realized in English 124 and in English 298?

In this chapter, I examine students' close reading essays from two sections of English 124 and two sections of English 298 alongside course materials including essay prompts and criteria. First, I analyze the essay prompts in order to situate my examinations of student writing in the instructors' expectations and criteria for students' literary interpretations. Then, I analyze the students' writing samples by applying the Appraisal framework, addressing the question "In what ways do students' language choices realize literary interpretive moves (based on an analysis of Appraisal resources)?". This examination illustrates distinctions between proficient and emergent student writing within each class as well as revealing distinctions between students' interpretations in English 124 and English 298.

In addressing the first sub-question "In what ways do students refine interpretations (using Attitudinal resources), invite or foreclose alternative possibilities of interpretation (using Engagement resources), and calibrate the strength of the Attitudes they infuse in their interpretations (using Graduation resources)?", I examine the ways students draw on Appraisal resources in their writing. In relation to the ways students draw on Attitudinal resources (Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation), I show the ways students summarize literary texts using Affect and Judgment and interpret literary texts using Appreciation. In addition, I find that students tease apart the multiple possible significances of literary language using Engagement expressions that expand the dialogic space, attending to the details and nuances of literary language. Moreover, students calibrate the relatively superficial and deep layers of their interpretations using Graduation resources that intensify and soften the strength of the Attitudes infused into their interpretations. This sub-set of essays that present multilayered interpretations illustrates my conception of *nuance* as a recognition of the multiple possibilities, layers, and shades of significance in literary language. Through careful attention to students' language, I illustrate the ways in which students construct nuanced interpretations in college-level literary interpretive writing.

In addressing the second sub-question "In what ways do students' literary interpretive moves relate to literary scholar-practitioners' expectations for literary interpretive writing as expressed in the scholarship on the teaching of literature?", I include pedagogical connections between the scholarship on the teaching of literature and the findings of the linguistic analysis, then draw implications from this connection that are the focus of the pedagogical implications in the discussion chapter.

In addressing the third sub-question "In what ways do students' essays illustrate distinctions between the ways literary interpretations are realized in English 124 and in English 298?", I present

commonalities and distinctions between students' writing in English 124 and English 298. In relation to the commonalities, a summary/interpretation framework can be identified in both the English 124 and English 298 essays; the analysis suggests that summary is realized in similar ways across these class levels. In relation to the distinctions between students' writing in English 124 and English 298, I find that the students in both classes show similar diversity in whether they are doing the kind of analytic work that instructors value (that is, there is a diversity of expertise in analysis at both levels), but in the upper-level class, the essays do show that students generally have moved from interpreting specific elements to engaging with broader interpretations of characterization and theme; so are engaged in more advanced interpretive work. I close the chapter by considering the implications of this finding in relation to the distinctions between English 124 to English 298.

## 4.1 Analysis of essay prompts

In this section, I present findings about the relationship between the instructors' essay prompts and the scholarship on the teaching of literature. I begin with an analysis of essay prompts in relation to the research literature in order to situate my study of students' writing within literary scholar-instructors' expectations for students' writing. While I had intended to begin with an analysis of the course syllabi, I found that the syllabi primarily introduce the specific course themes followed by a more generic course description statement based on the English department's course goals, a reading and assignment schedule, and class expectations. As the essay prompts delineate the specific literary interpretive writing expectations, I focus my analysis on these assignment guidelines and criteria.

For reference, the course themes are:

**English 124 Section 1:** Working Hard or Hardly Working? Literature of the Workplace

**English 124 Section 2:** (Un)doing Normal

**English 298 Section 1:** The Literature of Ecological Catastrophe

**English 298 Section 2:** Human Identity

### 4.1.1 English 124 essay prompts

I begin by analyzing the language and structure of each instructor's close reading essay prompt. Margo's prompt (English 124 section 1) states:

| English 124 Section 1 Essay Prompt (Margo) | Key Metalanguage |
|---|---|
| "Begin with evidence. I recommend beginning with a section of the text that seemed particularly interesting to you. Ideally this would be the passage you've annotated in class but it does not need to be. Consider how this passage relates to the whole, and make your motivation for focusing in on this particular point explicit. "Unpack" minute details of the text, such as word choice, imagery, sentence structure, etc. | evidence

passage relates to the whole

unpack details: word choice, imagery, sentence structure, etc.

focus on a smaller aspect of the text |
| Don't try to address everything in the text! I'd much rather you say a lot about a little than a little about a lot. Thus, be careful about generalizing: all claims/interpretation/analysis/conclusions should come logically from something you've pointed out in the text. Make the connections between what the text says and what you're saying about it clear. | claims/interpretation/analysis/conclusions

connections between text and interpretation

claims/interpretation/analysis/conclusions

observation
evidence and analysis |
| Once you have written the close reading part, introduce and conclude your paper by finding some sort of observation that your evidence and analysis leads to. Since we have not yet discussed writing a thesis and making an argument, this will not be the primary focus of this paper, however, I would like your analysis to at least gesture toward a claim. By this I mean that your close reading should point to some sort of tentative conclusion about some aspect of the text. Your claim could be only about one passage, | gesture toward a claim

claims should follow from evidence |

| or the whole text, but it should follow from your evidence (your evidence should not just be examples of a thing that you've pointed out in your claim)." | |
| --- | --- |

*Table 4.1. Margo's essay prompt*

By closely examining the central concepts instructors raise in the prompt, I identified the metalanguage, or language the instructors use to refer to literary-specific writing expectations. An understanding of instructors' metalanguage is relevant to my analysis as it illuminates valued criteria and qualities that instructors look for in students' writing. As seen in the guidelines, key metalanguage or terms related to academic writing that are mentioned include *evidence*, *details*, *claims*, *analysis*, *interpretation*, *argument*, and *conclusion*. These terms hold significance for the way I focus in my analysis on the ways students interpret specific elements of literary language – the "evidence" of an interpretation – and relate these elements with larger significance. In relating these terms with an Appraisal analysis, I illustrate the ways an analysis of Appreciation can elucidate the ways students incorporate evidence and construct interpretations. For instance, the subcode *Appreciation: composition: complexity: intricate* can elucidate the ways students interpret the significance of a literary work (*Appreciation*); more specifically, the ways students parse the construction of language, or its composition (*composition*); even more specifically, the ways students expose the intricacies of literary language, unearthing the ways specific words, images, or tones illustrate complex, layered significances (*complexity: intricate*). An analysis of Appreciation can render visible what it means to *interpret evidence* including *details* – specific elements of literary language – and connect the evidence with an *interpretation* of literary significance. For instance, in analyzing the following line from a student's essay, "This seemingly simple word reveals the complexity of the relationship between the characters," I would examine the ways the student relates the *details* of *evidence* (a "seemingly simple word") with an *interpretation* of literary significance ("reveals the complexity of the relationship between the characters") by drawing on Appreciation: the word "complexity" signals the interpretation of literary significance. In a broader sense, this sentence develops an observational *claim* related to the ways the literary language reveals insights into the character dynamics in the play. By examining students' writing using Appraisal, I thus elucidate the ways *evidence*, *details*, and *claims* are constructed in meanings in students' specific language choices.

The guideline to focus on the "details and specifics" of a particular section of a text illustrates the emphasis of close reading on the parsing of language and technique. In addition, the instructions to "'unpack' minute details of the text, such as word choice, imagery, sentence structure, etc." and to "consider how this passage relates to the whole" illustrate Herrington's observations about examples from students' writing that connect literary language with broader meanings. Margo's emphasis on unpacking details likewise illustrates Tinkle et al.'s (2013) observation that proficient student writing is "attentive to details and nuances of language" (p. 512) and "notice[s] detail and subtlety" in literary texts (p. 516). While Margo emphasizes that "argument" is not "the primary focus" of a close reading essay, she encourages students to "gesture toward an observational claim" and "point to some sort of tentative conclusion about some aspect of the text;" the emphasis is placed on beginning with evidence and connecting an analysis of the evidence to a claim. This analysis of the assignment thus shapes my approach to examining the essays: Margo's emphasis on a careful attention to "details of the text, such as word choice, imagery, sentence structure, etc." shapes my focus on examining the ways students closely interpret literary language in their essays; Margo's emphasis on encouraging students to "gesture toward an observational claim" as opposed to constructing a full-fledged "argument" likewise influences my relatively greater focus on the ways students interpret specific literary elements within the essays from Margo's section.

Meanwhile, Alex's prompt (English 124 section 2) states:

| English 124 Section 2 Essay Prompt (Alex) | Key Metalanguage |
|---|---|
| "Choose one of the short stories from our first unit (by Cather, Ellison, or Gilman). Select a relatively short passage from this text that you've determined to be complex, confusing, dense, moving, meaningful, and/or in need of unpacking. The passage you choose can be as short as a few sentences, or as long as a medium-length paragraph, but should in no case exceed a page (250 words). As you draft your essay, you will close-read this passage and formulate your own interpretation of it in relation to the short story as a whole and the ideas addressed therein. Your argument may, but need not, address the theme "(un)doing normal" that has organized our course readings. | short passage<br>focus on complexity<br><br><br>close reading in relation to the text as a whole<br><br><br>course theme: "(un)doing normal" |
| **Grading Criteria** The main components of my grading criteria are: **thesis/argument, evidence/analysis, organization, purpose, audience,** and **style/conventions**. You will be assigned a letter grade for each of these categories, which will be used to determine your overall paper grade. | |
| ● **Thesis/Argument (30%):** You can make any argument you like about these passages or objects. Keep in mind that **the best theses, especially in short papers, are specific rather than general, surprising rather than obvious**. Be sure that your thesis is argumentative, not merely descriptive, and that your paper stays focused on this argument. The best arguments will also be surprising and the result of deep analytical thinking: they will force the reader to consider something in an unfamiliar light, challenge common-sense readings, or reveal some unobvious truth about the object of investigation. | argument<br><br>specific<br>surprising<br>argumentative<br>focused<br><br>emphasis on challenging "common-sense readings" and revealing surprising readings |
| ● **Evidence/Analysis (30%):** Through close-reading, you will **cull evidence from the small details of the passage and determine how these details fit together to create meaning.** Consider all the elements at work in your object and think about all the choices that went into the creation of the object as well as what intentions might have been behind those choices. If you're doing passage analysis, you might ask questions like: Why does the author use this particular word here and not another? What imagery does the author evoke and why? How is the tone of this passage constituted and why is it significant? **Your goal here is to reveal how complex this passage is**, to unpack and analyze the details that make it complex, to articulate an argument about how we should interpret the passage given these complexities and how it contributes to what the object as a whole is saying about a particular concept. | interpret evidence from the details, consider how the details create meaning<br><br>elements<br>choices<br>intentions<br><br>word choices, imagery, tone |

| | |
|---|---|
| ● **Organization (15%):** A well-organized paper is one that *develops* an argument as it progresses, with each new point building from what came before. Rather than presenting separate and disconnected points, an organized paper makes sure that all elements of the argument are tied together. Each paragraph should make a single, distinct point that is clearly articulated at the outset of the paragraph. It should also be clear from the transitions between paragraphs how a new point is building on what came before. Only a brief introduction and conclusion are necessary for this paper. | emphasis on complexity, relating the details to the whole text<br><br>develops and builds an argument<br><br><br>elements of the argument are tied together<br>distinct points<br><br>new point in each paragraph |
| ● **Purpose (10%):** Make sure you ***explicitly address the "so what?" question*** in your paper—that is, the stakes or the significance of your argument. This should ideally be addressed in the paper's introduction. The stakes of your paper need not be extremely broad, but should answer the following questions: Why does it matter that we interpret this object or passage in this way? Why should we care? What does your analysis reveal that we wouldn't otherwise be able to see? You might explicitly address your paper's driving questions as one way of introducing your "so what." | "so what": significance<br><br><br><br>emphasis on why the interpretation matters, what is revealed |
| ● **Audience (10%):** ***The audience for this essay will consist of your peers in this class***. If you've chosen a passage from something we've all read, you can assume that the context is self-evident and you don't need to give much background information. If you've chosen an outside object, you might need to set the stage a bit to give your readers this contextual information. Please make this contextualization succinct, as description is not argument, and keep in mind that, because you will need to provide more background information, your paper might need to be closer to the upper end of the word limit if you choose an outside object. | audience: peers<br><br>assumption that readers are familiar with the text |
| ● **Style/Conventions (5%):** Follow MLA formatting and parenthetical citation style, including a Works Cited page. Be sure to thoroughly proofread your essay for spelling and grammar errors that might detract from meaning or rhetorical impact. Pay attention to the rhetorical impact of your word choice, sentence structure, and other elements of your writing style." | MLA formatting<br><br><br>rhetorical impact of language choices |

*Table 4.2. Alex's essay prompt*

Alex's essay prompt is similar to Margo's in its guidance for students to closely read specific details such as word choices, imagery, and tone in relation to the text as a whole, to "cull evidence from the small details of the passage and determine how these details fit together to create meaning." While Margo does not present a list of criteria, Alex's criteria are differentiated into components: thesis/argument, evidence/analysis, organization, purpose, audience, and style/conventions. In contrast with Margo, who encourages students to "gesture toward" an observational claim, Alex expects students to articulate an *argument* — one that is specific and surprising, that challenges "common-sense readings" and reveals an "unobvious truth" about the text. The discrepancies between the instructors' assignments carry implications for my approach to the analysis of students' essays; while in my analysis of the essays from both sections, I examine the ways students attend closely to the details of literary language, in analyzing the essays from Alex's section, I also place attention on the ways students construct an argument. I thus draw a distinction between close reading itself — the process of parsing the details of language and forming observations — and the construction of an argument, which may constitute a stage of writing beyond close reading in and of itself. Even so, I affirm both instructors' emphases on supporting students to relate the interpretations of literary language to its significances, and I focus my analysis of students' essays on the shared emphasis across both sections on the unpacking of literary language.

In the criteria for *evidence/analysis*, Alex places emphasis on interpreting a text's *complexity*, elaborated as "confusing, dense, moving, meaningful, and/or in need of unpacking;" this focus on complexity is reflected in Wolfe's (2003) identification of the "shared value of complexity" in literary interpretation (p. 407). In the criteria for *organization*, Alex instructs students to develop and build an argument that progresses over the course of the essay. In the criteria for *purpose*, Alex asks students to explicitly articulate the "so what" or significance of the argument — an emphasis on why the interpretation matters and what is revealed. Alex further delineates the criteria of *audience* — an awareness of the reader's familiarity with the text — and an attention to the "rhetorical impact" of one's own language choices, including "word choice, sentence structure, and other elements of [their] writing style." This focus on "rhetorical impact" is reflected in Corrigan's (2019) aim for students' language choices "to have more complexity, more nuance, more insight, more depth, more critical and creative thought, more attention to the details of the text and to the contexts in which those details exist" (p. 3). In relation to my study, the idea of the "rhetorical impact" of students' writerly choices is especially relevant to my interests in examining the ways students construct interpretations using specific language choices; as illustrated in the following chapters, my analysis

reveals the ways students' language choices carry greater effects in construing the "complexity" and "nuance" of an interpretation.

### 4.1.2 English 298 essay prompts

Walter's English 298 section 1 prompt states:

| English 298 Section 1 Essay Prompt (Walter)[6] | Key Metalanguage |
|---|---|
| "Your essay should make frequent and detailed reference to the text or film you're discussing. Avoid generalizing comments like: "Sophocles's (or Shakespeare's) greatness is evident in everything he writes about." Also avoid claims like: "no one has previously noticed." On the other hand, if you don't like something in one of the texts, it's fine to say so, as long as you obey the standard rule: provide argument and evidence in support of your position. You may of course write on topics and passages that we've discussed in class, but if so your paper should focus on matters that we didn't address or addressed only in passing. | frequent and detailed reference to the text<br><br>avoid generalizing comments<br><br><br><br><br><br>argument and evidence |
| 1. Choose a passage—a speech, a relatively short dialogue, a brief piece of narrative—and discuss its significance. | short passage |
|    1. Your essay should consider formal matters. These include prose vs verse (rhymed or unrhymed), word choice (imagery, metaphor, etc.), repetition, sentence structure and its relation to verse line (if the passage is in poetry), and, of course substance (theme, development of plot and character, and so on). This is not | formal matters<br>prose vs verse (rhymed or unrhymed), word choice (imagery, metaphor, etc.), repetition, sentence structure<br><br><br><br><br>theme, development of plot and character |

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[6] Note: while Walter's prompt enumerates additional topics students could discuss in their essays — including plot development, characterization, setting, and thematic emphasis — I extract the first topic, which is focused on a close reading of a passage. Similarly, in the analysis of students' essays, I have focused my examination on essays that interpret the literary language in a particular passage.

| | |
|---|---|
| a complete list of possibilities, but neither is it a list of required elements. In other words, don't write sentences such as: "There's a lot of alliteration"—unless you have something to say about the alliteration. On the other hand, you should have something to say about some formal features of the passage you choose. | should have something to say about some formal features of the passage |
| 2. You should also locate your passage in its immediate context. How does it follow from, contrast with, anticipate the passages or scenes on either side of it? | locate the passage in its immediate context |
| 3. And you should also consider the significance of your chosen passage in the context of the play as a whole. What does it add? How would things be different if it didn't exist, or if it proceeded in another fashion? | significance of the passage in relation to the work as a whole |

*Table 4.3. Walter's essay prompt*

Walter's prompt is similar to Margo's and Alex's in its guidance for students to interpret a short passage and to relate particular instances of literary language — "prose vs verse (rhymed or unrhymed), word choice (imagery, metaphor, etc.), repetition, sentence structure" — to their larger significances "in the context of the play as a whole." Like Margo, Walter recommends that students "avoid generalizing comments" (e.g., "Sophocles's (or Shakespeare's) greatness is evident in everything he writes about") and instead focus on specific "formal features" of the text. At the same time, Walter reminds students that they "should have something to say about some formal features of the passage," that is, not simply to note that "There's a lot of alliteration" but to interpret the literary elements in relation to meanings and significances. Walter additionally instructs students to "locate [their] passage in its immediate context" — to consider the question "How does it follow from, contrast with, anticipate the passages or scenes on either side of it?" In this way, Walter's guidelines illustrate Corrigan's (2019) aim for students' writing to demonstrate an "attention to the details of the text and to the contexts in which those details exist" (p. 3), in this case, to consider the passage in relation to its "immediate context" in the text. In relation to my study, I attend closely to

the ways students interpret specific instances of literary language within the context of the text – for instance, the unfolding plot, the character relationships, and the larger themes; in ensuring that my examinations are situated in an accurate understanding of students' interpretations and of the literary texts, I likewise strive to familiarize myself with the plot and themes of the texts students interpret in their essays.

Finally, Selene's English 298 section 2 essay prompt states:

| English 298 Section 2 Essay Prompt (Selene) | Key Metalanguage |
|---|---|
| Review the tips for literary analysis in Wolfe and Wilder (Modules) and read through the "Overview of Strategies" and "Questions to Help you Dig Deeper" in that excerpt for topics and approaches. In sum, a literary analysis has to have a major interpretive claim that is debatable—not everyone will agree with it—but not outlandish. While claims can be creative, they should not come out of a blatant misreading of the text. The main claim has to be supported with textual evidence, analysis, and argument.  The topic has to be significant and interesting (not one that makes the reader go "so what?"). As indicated by the surface/depth and "digging" analogies that Wolfe and Wilder use, one of the challenges of literary analysis is to probe deep beneath the surface of the text, to find something beyond the obvious, to tease out more profound implications, to raise to the surface hidden or subtle patterns or meanings of words, images, and any other literary aspect we have discussed, in order to enrich the textual meaning. | Wolfe and Wilder<br><br><br><br>major interpretive claim that is debatable<br><br><br><br>claim supported with textual evidence, analysis, and argument<br><br><br>significant ("so what")<br>surface/depth<br><br>probe<br><br>beyond the obvious, profound implications<br><br>hidden or subtle patterns or meanings of words, images |
| We will use the metaphor of the microscope for close reading. Imagine focusing the lens on one particular area of the text. It could be what a character said at one point, a description of a setting, a shift in plot or point of view, a specific theme. What do you notice there that you can unpack in more detail in order to reveal a fuller meaning or a deeper appreciation of the text? Draw out the significance of those details for the reader and offer a fresh or unusual | microscope: focus lens<br><br><br>dialogue, setting description, a shift in plot or point of view, a specific theme<br><br>unpack in more detail, fuller meaning, deeper appreciation<br>significance of details |

| | |
|---|---|
| perspective (caution: remember that you can't go completely wild). Obviously, you will need to read (and even reread) attentively and scrupulously, noting exactly what the text says. But you won't be simply summarizing it. Instead, you will keep peeling the layers off to reveal the nuggets of insight you find nestled in that scene, that dialogue, that image. You may certainly draw upon other readings for comparison or contrast but keep a laser focus on the main claim (your central argument), so you don't end up merely listing or summarizing obvious points or skimming over one text and another.  Go deep rather than broad, so try and limit the number of examples you are using (for textual evidence) in order to explore each example in more detail. Sometimes, even a single page or an exchange of dialogue or a tightly related series of images can provide grounds to make a large enough claim for this paper (and remember that you do need a claim that pertains to the text at large even if you are doing it through a limited number of specific details). One or more of the tools of literary analysis we have consulted so far may be engaged, but choose one particular focused topic.<br><br>Consult the Study Guide and recall our discussions. Go over your notes. Ask questions—but remember to answer them in prewriting!  Reread the text and mark a passage or page (or two) that you think deserves deeper scrutiny and reveals a particular insight that lights up the text. I won't provide specific prompts now but do look at the prompts in the Canvas Posts if you're short of ideas.  You may develop a previous post, <u>but do not repeat what you have already submitted for a grade</u>. | fresh or unusual perspective<br><br>read attentively<br><br>beyond simply summarizing<br>peeling the layers<br><br><br>laser focus on the main claim<br><br><br><br>deep rather than broad<br><br>explore each example in more detail |

*Table 4.4. Selene's essay prompt*

As do the other three instructors, Selene asks students to "unpack in more detail" specific literary

elements including dialogue, setting description, "a shift in plot or point of view, or a specific

theme" and to "draw out the significance of those details" in order to achieve a "fuller meaning"

and "deeper appreciation" of the text. Like the other instructors, Selene instructs students to focus on a particular aspect of the text – to "go deep rather than broad" and to "limit the number of examples" discussed and "explore each example in more detail." In relation to my literary framework of *nuance*, Selene's guidance for students to uncover "hidden or subtle patterns or meanings of words" illustrates Chick, Hassel, & Haynie's (2009) encouragement for students to notice "the subtle nuances of textual complexity" and to "offer more original, nuanced readings of literature" (p. 415). Meanwhile, Selene's image of "peeling the layers off" is reflected in Heinert & Chick's (2017) claim that "the process of unpacking can also be explained as both a vertical and a horizontal move: starting with the specific language at the surface of the text, the reader delves downward and then outward into the multiple connotations and contexts of the text" (p. 127).

Interestingly, Selene guides students to consider Wolfe and Wilder's strategy of surface/depth reading: "to probe deep beneath the surface of the text, to find something beyond the obvious, to tease out more profound implications." The notion of discovering "something beyond the obvious" recalls Alex's guidance for students "to consider something in an unfamiliar light, challenge common-sense readings, or reveal some unobvious truth about the object of investigation." Like Alex, Selene encourages students to "offer a fresh or unusual perspective" into the text. Another parallel between Alex's and Selene's prompts is the emphasis on *argument*: Selene instructs students to develop a "major interpretive claim that is debatable" and "supported with textual evidence, analysis, and argument." In relation to the pedagogical implications that emerge from the study, the commonalities and discrepancies between the instructors' conceptions of close reading carry broader implications for how we teach students to craft essays in response to literary texts, including whether we encourage students to attend closely to the details of literary language as an exercise in itself or support students to construct an argument. In juxtaposing the instructors' conceptions, I posit that introducing students to the language of "argument" early on in a course sequence can cultivate students' capacities to articulate their own claims and the stakes of those claims to a literary studies audience; at the same time, I acknowledge the efficacy of engaging students in the "process of interpretation" as an initial step toward argumentation, a concept that is then introduced in later essay assignments. In my own examinations of students' writing, I strive to balance focusing on the way students interpret specific literary elements and discerning the larger arguments that students construct in their essays: an analysis of the Attitudinal resources, especially Appreciation – interpretations of the significance of literary texts – can elucidate the ways students develop "interpretive claims" in their essays; for instance, in the following line from a student's

essay, "Shelley seems to suggest that nature, both literally and figuratively, has asserted its power over humanity," a student draws on Appreciation of the author's craft to develop an interpretive claim related to the ways the scenery descriptions in *Frankenstein* illustrate nature's power over humanity.

### Comparison of essay prompts

Based on an analysis of each of the four essay prompts, I abstracted three main components that are consistently addressed across each section: claim/argument, evidence, and significance. I highlighted key metalanguage in bold:

| Criteria | English 124 Section 1 Essay Prompt (Margo) | English 124 Section 2 Essay Prompt (Alex) | English 298 Section 1 Essay Prompt (Walter) | English 298 Section 2 Essay Prompt (Selene) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Claim/Argument | "gesture toward a **claim**" | "Be sure that your **thesis** is **argumentative**, not merely descriptive, and that your paper stays focused on this argument" | "provide **argument** and **evidence** in support of your position" | "In sum, a literary analysis has to have a major **interpretive claim** that is **debatable**—not everyone will agree with it—but not outlandish." |

| Evidence | "unpack details: **word choice, imagery, sentence structure**, etc." | "Why does the author use this particular **word** here and not another? What **imagery** does the author evoke and why? How is the **tone** of this passage constituted and why is it significant?" | "Your essay should consider formal matters. These include **prose vs verse (rhymed or unrhymed), word choice (imagery, metaphor, etc.), repetition, sentence structure and its relation to verse line** (if the passage is in poetry), and, of course substance (**theme, development of plot and character**, and so on)." | "It could be **what a character said at one point, a description of a setting, a shift in plot or point of view, a specific theme**." "...one of the challenges of literary analysis is to probe deep beneath the surface of the text, to find something beyond the obvious, to tease out more profound implications, to raise to the surface hidden or subtle patterns or meanings of **words, images, and any other literary aspect** we have discussed, in order to enrich the textual meaning." |
|---|---|---|---|---|

| Significance ("so what") | (not addressed) | "Make sure you explicitly address the **'so what?' question** in your paper—that is, the **stakes or the significance of your argument**." | "And you should also consider the **significance of your chosen passage in the context of the play as a whole**. What does it add? How would things be different if it didn't exist, or if it proceeded in another fashion?" | "The topic has to be **significant and interesting (not one that makes the reader go "so what?")**." |
|---|---|---|---|---|

*Table 4.5. Comparison of essay prompts*

In looking across each prompt, one can see distinctions across the sections in relation to the criteria for claim/argument: while Margo asks students to "gesture toward a claim" based on their observations of a text, the other instructors expect students to develop an argument: Alex states, "be sure that your thesis is argumentative, Walter suggests that students "provide argument and evidence in support of your position," and Selene instructs students to develop a "major interpretive claim that is debatable." Such a distinction may indicate the relative emphases of English 124 and English 298: while English 124 is focused on the task of close interpretation ("Why does the author use this particular word here and not another? What imagery does the author evoke and why? How is the tone of this passage constituted and why is it significant?", Alex's prompt), English 298 progresses toward the construction of broader claims in the context of a scholarly "debate" ("a literary analysis has to have a major interpretive claim that is debatable—not everyone will agree with it—but not outlandish", Selene's prompt).

In relation to the literary elements that students are expected to consider and incorporate into their writing, one distinction between the English 124 and 298 essay prompts is that both English 298 prompts encourage students to consider broader aspects of literature including plot development, characterization, and theme — elements that are not brought up in the English 124 prompts, which ask students to focus on smaller details such as word choice, imagery, tone, and sentence structure. This difference may indicate that English 298 is more advanced in its trajectory

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than the first-year English 124 course; moreover, while English 124 is a writing course that prepares students to write in a variety of contexts, English 298 is a literary interpretation course that initiates students into "the discipline of literary study" (English 298 course description). As stated in the department's course descriptions, while English 124 is focused on "writing and inquiry, with a special emphasis on literature," English 298 is more explicitly discipline-specific, "introduc[ing] students to the discipline of literary study," including "the foundational practices of interpretation" as well as "distinct scholarly methods and critical approaches used in literary study." Such a distinction can be identified in the students' writing as well: while essays from each of the four class sections focus on interpreting specific instances of literary language, the English 298 essays additionally delve further into broader thematic concerns.

In relation to my study, the differences between the class assignments in English 124 and English 298 shape my approach to analysis: in examining students' writing in English 124, I focus on the ways students attend to smaller details of literary language such as word choice, imagery, and tone, while in examining students' writing in English 298, I focus on the ways students construct broader interpretations of characterization and theme. In addition, as illustrated in the following sections, the findings of my linguistic analysis might in turn shape the articulation of assignment expectations: for instance, the finding that students in English 298 more frequently employ condensed noun phrases to convey abstract themes (e.g., "the significance of God and Satan," "a state of metaphorical blindness") could shape instructors' approaches to teaching students to distill ideas into abstract themes. This study thus opens avenues for instructors to more precisely articulate their expectations for students' writing in essay prompts and comments on students' essays.

In the table below, I have excerpted language from the guidelines that relates with literary scholar-instructors' expectations of *nuance* as described in the framework presented in the previous chapter:

| Instructors' expectations for students' writing | Expectations for *nuance* based on scholarship in the teaching of literature |
| --- | --- |
| Alex's guidance for students to consider questions including "Why does the author use this particular word here and not another? What imagery does the author evoke and why? | Relates to Tinkle et al.'s (2013) observation that proficient student writing is "attentive to details and nuances of language" (p. 512) and "notice[s] detail and subtlety" in literary texts (p. 516) |

| | |
|---|---|
| Selene's guidance for students "to probe deep beneath the surface of the text, to find something beyond the obvious, to tease out more profound implications, to raise to the surface hidden or subtle patterns or meanings of words" | Relates to Chick, Hassel, & Haynie's (2009) encouragement for students to notice "the subtle nuances of textual complexity" and to "offer more original, nuanced readings of literature" (p. 415) |

*Table 4.6. Instructors' expectations for students' writing related to nuance*

While Margo and Walter's criteria for *nuance* are not explicitly stated in the essay guidelines, an analysis of the students' essays, presented in this chapter, and interviews with the instructors, presented in the following chapter, illustrates the ways expectations that student writing is "attentive to details and nuances of language" (Tinkle et al., 2013, p. 512) and notices "the subtle nuances of textual complexity" (Chick, Hassel, & Haynie, 2009, p. 415) is implied in each of the instructor's goals for student writing. Margo and Walter's criteria for *nuance* may be implicitly assumed, which carries implications for more explicit expectations; based on the interview responses, I have been able to generalize their views of nuance. As I illustrate in the analysis of students' writing, a linguistic attention to meaning in students' language choices can render legible these often abstract, implicit expectations for writing.

## 4.2 Analysis of students' essays

Before proceeding to present these findings, I clarify a distinction between 'summary' and 'interpretation': while emerging students often relate *what* happens in a text – the surface-level actions or behaviors – literary instructors encourage students to delve into the underlying layers of signification, illustrating "how and why they read a particular work in a particular way" (Heinert & Chick, 2017, p. 326). As explained in literature review chapter, this distinction is reflected in Regaignon (2009)'s sense that "one of the great difficulties undergraduates face in making the transition from high school to college-level writing is moving from observation to insight and interpretation" (p. 122) as well as Tinkle et al.'s (2013) observations that some students' writing "relies on summary or paraphrase rather than analysis" or "mixes analysis with summary." Students also struggle with composing essays that are "attentive to details and nuances of language" or show "awareness of layers of meaning and tensions among formal features of language" (Tinkle et al., p. 512). More specifically, less proficient students summarize texts by restating the plot or action (e.g.,

"Oatley entails that by marrying Rose, the Lacy family would be dishonored, despite the financial and status gain that Rose would make by marrying up"), while more proficient students interpret the ambiguities of language or the latent layers of significance in the text ("At first glance, the word appears to be," "In another sense, it could mean"). These observations indicate that supporting novice students to engage in the literary interpretation that is valued is crucial to cultivating their abilities in literary critical writing. Understanding the language resources that can support students in crafting interpretations is the focus of the chapter.

**4.3 Preview of main findings**

In both English 124 and 298, students' essays present both summary and interpretation: while 7 out of the 24 essays (4 English 124 essays and 3 English 298 essays) summarize what happens in the literary texts, 11 out of the 24 essays (5 English 124 essays and 6 English 298 essays) interpret the significances of literary language. These findings that relatively more students in English 124 summarize literary texts as compared with students in English 298, while relatively more students in English 298 interpret literary texts as compared with students in English 124, illustrates the relatively advanced levels of the English 298 students. A linguistic analysis of the *Attitudinal* resources in the essays reveals that the students who summarize literary texts describe the emotions characters feel using *Affect* and describe characters' ethical and moral attitudes using *Judgment*. Meanwhile, the students who interpret literary texts tease apart the significance of the literary work or an author's craft using *Appreciation*. Further distinctions emerge from the essays that interpret literary texts: the students tease apart the multiple connotations of literary language by integrating *Engagement* resources that expand and contract the dialogic space, and calibrate the superficial and deeper layers of significance using *Graduation* resources that intensify and soften the strength of the Attitudes infused into the interpretations. Recognizing these differences offers the possibility of explicit attention to language choices that might not otherwise be part of the novice students' repertoires.

In the following section, I examine the ways students in English 124 and English 298 summarize and interpret literary works, then consider distinctions between students' writing in English 124 and English 298.

### 4.3.1 Summarizing literary texts using Attitude (Affect and Judgment)

7 out of the 24 essays (4 English 124 essays and 3 English 298 essays) I analyzed summarize literary texts by relating what characters feel (Affect), by reporting how characters convey moral or ethical judgments, and by conveying their own judgments of characters' motivations and behaviors (Judgment).

A summary/interpretation framework can be identified in both the English 124 and English 298 essays, though one distinction is that examples of summary appear in both sections of English 124 (in three essays from English 124 section 1 and in one essay from English 124 section 2), while examples of summary appear in only one section of English 298 (in three essays from English 298 section 2). While this could be an artifact of the essays I chose to analyze, such a finding indicates that a tendency to summarize literary texts is more prevalent in English 124, which could indicate that first-year students may struggle with the more foundational skill of interpreting literary texts and may need more support with crossing the threshold from summary to interpretation. As described in detail below, a linguistic analysis of the students' essays indicates a similar use of language resources used to summarize literary texts across the English 124 and English 298 students' essays; the analysis suggests that summary is realized in similar ways across these class levels. The finding that students in both English 124 and English 298 summarize what happens in the texts raises a need for more precise essay guidelines that more concretely describe what is expected in literary interpretation and what constitutes summary and interpretation; based on an analysis of students' writing in the two classes, in Chapter 6, I offer suggestions for more precisely articulating writing expectations in essay prompts, for instance, in clarifying and offering examples of what it means to "consider" or "discuss" issues of theme or characterization.

While both the English 124 and English 298 students' literary interpretations reveal similarities in the ways the students closely read literary language as a way of interpreting larger significances, a central distinction between the English 124 and English 298 students' literary interpretations can be identified in the targets of the interpretations – the entity (e.g., a word, image, scene, or character) to which the interpretation is directed. While the English 124 essays demonstrate a relatively greater emphasis on the interpretation of specific words, images, and lines of dialogue, the English 298 essays display a relatively greater emphasis on the characters and themes. Such a distinction, which can be seen in the examples below, illustrates the focus in English 124 on offering students practice with the skill of close reading and the process of interpreting literary language, as juxtaposed with the relative emphasis in English 298 on applying close reading

as a scaffold toward broader interpretations of characterization and thematic development. While I acknowledge the role that the assignment guidelines play in shaping students' responses, I likewise illustrate the value of the linguistic analysis: as discussed in further detail below, students in English 298 more frequently convey abstract themes using condensed noun phrases in their essays, which carries implications for supporting students to construct interpretations of thematic significance through an attention to students' language choices in writing. Moreover, I reveal the ways students in English 298 exhibit more advanced analysis and synthesis in ways that are independent of the assignment expectations; for instance, a student constellates thematic resonances across two literary texts in ways that go beyond the assignment expectations, which ask students to focus on one text. While instructors are familiar with the general differences between English 124 and 298, a systematic linguistic analysis illuminates finer distinctions across student writing in the two classes, including the ways students' interpretations in English 298 present relatively advanced interpretive capabilities in juxtaposition with students' interpretations in English 124. As I discuss in the following chapters, such findings could in turn inform approaches to teaching students to construct interpretations of literary significance in ways that foreground an attention to the meanings realized in students' own language choices in writing.

### *English 124 students' summaries of literary texts (using Affect and Judgment)*

In the English 124 essay below, the student summarizes what happens in Dekker's play "The Shoemaker's Holiday":

**Student's essay**:

"The first instance where Dekker stresses the over-importance of class in scene 16 is when Oatley explains to Lincoln why he's been careful to keep his daughter away from Roland. Oatley clarifies, "Not that I scorn your nephew, but in love I bear your honor, lest your noble blood should by my mean worth be dishonored" (Dekker 16.19). By saying this, Oatley accentuates how important it is for Rose to marry someone of her own class, and not Roland, who is too aristocratic for her. Oatley entails that by marrying Rose, the Lacy family would be dishonored, despite the financial and status gain that Rose would make by marrying up. In this way, Oatley is more concerned about the maintenance of the class system in England than the own well-being of his child."
(English 124 section 1, essay 6)

Key:
Appreciation in box
Judgment in underline

In this paragraph, the student summarizes the way Oatley, Rose's father, emphasizes the importance of Rose marrying within her own social class. The student describes the way Oatley tells Lincoln that if Rose, a lower-class woman, were to marry Roland Lacy, an aristocratic gentleman, "the Lacy family would be dishonored" by a marriage between their son and the lower-class Rose, "despite the financial and status gain that Rose would make by marrying up." As the student concludes, Oatley is more concerned with preserving the social class system in England than ensuring the "well-being" of his daughter, Rose. A linguistic analysis of this paragraph illustrates the way the student summarizes the characters' ethical motivations using Judgment. While the student does begin with a statement of significance using Appreciation ("Dekker stresses the over-importance of class"), what follows is a summary of what happens in this moment in the play. While the student incorporates a quotation ("Not that I scorn your nephew, but in love I bear your honor, lest your noble blood should by my mean worth be dishonored") and signals interpretation in the phrase "by saying this," the student follows the quotation with a statement that summarizes the scene ("By saying this, Oatley accentuates how important it is for Rose to marry someone of her own class, and not Roland, who is too aristocratic for her") rather than one that interprets its significance. In this sentence, the student describes Oatley's emphasis on social class status by drawing on resources of Judgment, which encompasses meanings related to social esteem and propriety. In addition, by stating that "the Lacy family would be dishonored" by a marriage between the higher-class Lacy and the lower-class Rose, the student summarizes the play by drawing on Judgment resources related to moral and ethical propriety – the "dishonor" such a marriage would be for the Lacy family. Similarly, in the concluding line "Oatley is more concerned about the maintenance of the class system in England than the own well-being of his child," the student summarizes Oatley's attitude toward Rose's potential marriage; the student describes the way Oatley values the class system over his child's well-being, conveying a Judgment of Oatley's sensitivity – or lack thereof – to his daughter. In sum, the student summarizes the play using Judgment resources related to social class status and moral propriety.

Meanwhile, in an essay from English 124 section 2, a student describes the characters' inner desires or yearnings by integrating Affect:

**Student's essay**:
"From her reaction to the room and all of its facets, the narrator can be characterized to gain a better understanding on the effect of the room throughout her digression into illness. Having a rather positive description of the room's layout at the beginning of the story provides a point in which the narrator's feeling about the room can be analyzed and compared to later points in the story, when <u>feels trapped in the room or completely</u>

obsessed with the room. As her mental state changes between scenes, her perception of the room also changes. When her and John move in, she doesn't want to stay in that room; by the time they are to leave she is completely obsessed with it."
(English 124 section 2, essay 6)

Key:
Affect in underline

In this paragraph, the student describes the way the narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" initially resists her rest cure yet eventually grows "obsessed" with the wallpaper's pattern: as the student writes, the narrator initially "doesn't want to stay in that room; by the time they are to leave she is completely obsessed with it." In the sentence "the narrator can be characterized to gain a better understanding on the effect of the room throughout her digression into illness," the phrase "can be characterized" appears to signal an interpretation of the characterization, yet what follows is a summary of the way the narrator's response to the room changes over time; the phrase "gain a better understanding" seems to refer less to the reader's understanding of the story and more to the narrator's own understanding of the effect that the room as on her. A linguistic analysis illustrates the way the student describes the narrator's internal states of feeling using Affect: the student summarizes the way the narrator experiences a state of disquieted yearning as she "feels trapped in the room or completely obsessed with the room." Similarly, in the sentence "When her and John move in, she doesn't want to stay in that room; by the time they are to leave she is completely obsessed with it," the student summarizes the way the narrator's feelings in relation to the room change over time: at first, she "doesn't want to stay in that room," exhibiting antipathy; then, she becomes "completely obsessed with it," experiencing a restless longing.

In this example, the student describes the way the story's plot progresses over time as the narrator's "mental state changes between scenes" while her "perception of the room also changes," yet in contrast with the instructors' expectations for close reading, it is less focused on specific instances of literary language and instead offers a general observation of the narrative progression. As Alex states in the essay guidelines, "be sure that [the] thesis is argumentative, not merely descriptive." In this example and in the following examples, the students imagine or empathize with the characters' thoughts and feelings using Affect and report the characters' ethical motivations and behaviors using Judgment yet merely describe these moments in a general sense rather than reaching toward *how* particular moments in the text are constructed or *why* these instances are significant.

***English 298 students' summaries of literary texts (using Affect and Judgment)***

In the following English 298 essay, the student likewise summarizes characters' feelings and behaviors, though the emphasis in this English 298 essay is more specifically on the characterization of Frankenstein's creature:

> **Student's essay**:
> "Lastly, **the creature constantly seeks to learn**. He hides in a hut to learn about a family's life and teaches himself to read. He is **most curious about companionship**. He **wants to know and experience living as part of a family or community.** He tracks Frankenstein across Europe in order to bid him to create a wife. The creature **threatens his creator** when Frankenstein refuses to make another monster: "I will work at your destruction, nor finish until I desolate your heart, so that you curse the hour of your birth" (102). The **need to learn about companionship drives the creature to violence**. Some may argue that the creature demonstrates a desire for friendship rather than a desire for knowledge. However, <u>the creature has never had someone who loves him</u>. Thus, although **he seeks companionship, he also seeks a new experience and new knowledge**."
> (English 298 section 2, essay 5)
>
> Key:
> Judgment in **bold**
> Affect in <u>underline</u>

In this paragraph, the student summarizes the novel by describing the creature's curiosity and eagerness to learn more about human companionship. Citing a line from the novel, "I will work at your destruction, nor finish until I desolate your heart, so that you curse the hour of your birth," the student relates, "The need to learn about companionship drives the creature to violence." The student conjectures that the creature is driven to violence due to his misery and loneliness: "the creature has never had someone who loves him," and so he "seeks companionship" as well as "new experience and new knowledge." The student appears to acknowledge a counterargument in the line "Some may argue that the creature demonstrates a desire for friendship rather than a desire for knowledge," yet the paragraph as a whole summarizes the creature's feelings and motivations rather than developing an interpretation of the novel.

A linguistic analysis of the essay reveals that the student summarizes the creature's yearning for knowledge by drawing on Judgment and Affect. In describing the way "the creature constantly seeks to learn," the student conveys a positive judgment of the creature's curiosity, eagerness to learn, and capacity to seek toward "new experience and new knowledge." The student then conveys a negative judgment of the creature's rashness, which emerges when "the need to learn about companionship drives the creature to violence" and the "creature threatens his creator." At the same time, the student recognizes the way the creature's loneliness may have led to his violent response;

the student draws on Affect to describe the creature's inner feelings of misery due to a lack of affection: "the creature has never had someone who loves him." In sum, the student describes the creature's curiosity and rashness using Judgment while reporting the creature's loneliness using Affect, summarizing how the creature feels and behaves.

Similarly, in the following English 298 essay, the student likewise summarizes the creature's feelings and behaviors using Affect and Judgment:

> **Student's essay**:
> "It is known from the beginning of the creature's existence that he <u>wishes companionship and love</u>, and yet, many times, he is <u>cast out by humanity</u>. The first time was when his own creator, Victor Frankenstein, <u>abandoned him out of fear</u> (Shelley, p. 36). He tries once more with the De Lacey family, **taking a more strategic approach and gaining the sympathies of the blind**, elder De Lacey man (Shelley, p. 93). However, he is **<u>once more cast aside</u>**, and <u>his hatred for humanity begins to blossom</u> as the creature says, '…from that moment I declared everlasting war against the species'" (Shelley, p. 95).
> <u>(English 298 section 2, essay 6)</u>
>
> Key:
> Judgment in **bold**
> Affect in <u>underline</u>

In this paragraph, the student describes the way the creature yearns for human companionship yet is "cast out by humanity" as his creator, Victor, and then the De Lacey family welcome him before casting him aside, leading the creature to develop a "hatred for humanity." A linguistic analysis of the essay reveals that the student summarizes the creature's longing for "companionship and love" using Affect. The idea that the creature is "cast out by humanity" could be simultaneously coded as Affect and Judgment: the creature experiences misery and loneliness having been forsaken (Affect); at the same time, the others enact a negative judgment of the creature by casting him out of society (Judgment). The student describes Victor's feelings of fear toward his creation using Affect ("abandoned him out of fear"), then conveys a positive Judgment of the creature's cleverness in "taking a more strategic approach" and "gaining the sympathies of the blind, elder De Lacey man" (Affect). In relating the way the creature is cast aside once more, the student describes the way his "hatred for humanity begins to blossom" as rejection leads to antipathy (Affect).

As in the English 124 examples, these English 298 excerpts summarize literary texts by describing characters' feelings, motivations, and behaviors. Yet in the task of literary interpretation, students are expected not merely to summarize what happens in literary texts but to attend closely to the intricacies of literary language and to relate specific elements with broader themes and significances. Thus, a space opens for instructors to support students to progress beyond summary

to *interpret* literary meanings and significance. A progression can thus be identified in the Appraisal resources: while Affect – descriptions of characters' feelings – and Judgment – descriptions of characters' moral behaviors – lend themselves to summaries of what happens in a story, Appreciation – evaluations of the quality or significance of a literary work – lends itself to interpretations of the significance behind a literary text. Students are expected to reach beyond simply retelling events in a story toward addressing the larger significance and possibilities for interpretation; an analysis of the ways students draw on Appraisal resources illuminates this progression from summary toward interpretation. In supporting students to cross the threshold from summary into interpretation, instructors could encourage students to move beyond describing characters' feelings and behaviors using Affect and Judgment toward unearthing intricate significances using Appreciation.

Even so, simply advising students against using Affect and Judgment would be insufficient, as students may at times interpret literary meanings related to emotion or ethics; for instance, in the lines "When describing the color of the wallpaper the narrator says it is 'repellant,' 'revolting,' 'unclean,' and 'sickly' (43). These indicate the feelings of disgust the narrator associates with the wallpaper," a student interprets the intricate complexities of literary language using Appreciation while simultaneously noticing the narrator's "feelings of disgust" using Affect. Thus, I doubly coded this line as Appreciation and Affect: this student interprets the significance behind the literary language (Appreciation) while recognizing the narrator's negative emotional response to the wallpaper (Affect). The student recognizes that the meaning of the passage arises from the emotion, understanding the way literature reveals insight into the human condition. This example illustrates the ways students might interpret meanings related to a character's emotions using Affect.

While a general distinction emerges between the ways students summarize literary texts using Affect and Judgment and interpret literary texts using Appreciation, Appraisal resources of Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation are interwoven into and interacting simultaneously in a piece of writing. For instance, the student interprets the wallpaper descriptions by drawing on Affect as well as Appreciation: the student describes the narrator's feelings of disgust" using Affect, yet the student is not simply summarizing the narrator's feelings but instead takes a step further by interpreting the ways the descriptions of the wallpaper evoke a sense of disgust, thus relating a specific instance of literary language with a broader significance using Appreciation. If the student were simply to state that the narrator is feeling disgust, such a statement would be a summary; instead, the student interprets the way the literary language evokes a sense of disgust. In this example, the meanings of

Affect are embedded within the students' interpretation of the passage; the student draws on Affect in the service of interpreting the significance behind the literary language as opposed to merely summarizing what the narrator feels. Meanings of Affect and Appreciation are thus nested within the students' interpretation.

In relation to pedagogical implications, it is thus insufficient to simply equate Affect and Judgment with summary and Appreciation with interpretation. Rather than teaching students to only integrate Appreciation or to uncritically avoid using Affect and Judgment, it becomes important for instructors to guide students to focus on the literary *meanings* that are realized in the language choices in their essays. For instance, in the example above, instructors could sharpen students' awareness of the ways the student interprets the wallpaper descriptions using Appreciation while simultaneously conveying the narrator's feelings of disgust using Affect. In teaching students to draw on Appraisal resources, instructors could encourage students to interpret literary meanings using Appreciation beyond summarizing literary texts using Affect and Judgment; at the same time, instructors could help students recognize the ways the resources are simultaneously interacting, raising students' consciousness of the ways meanings of Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation may be simultaneously embedded into an interpretation of literary language and significance.

### 4.3.2 Interpreting the significances of literary language using Attitude (Appreciation)

While the above essays summarize literary texts, the following essays interpret literary texts by closely examining specific elements of literary language, including word choices, images, and tones, and relate these elements to larger significances. 11 of the 24 essays I analyzed (5 English 124 essays and 6 English 298 essays) interpret the significances of literary texts. Through close attention to literary language, the students "notice detail and subtlety" in literary texts (Tinkle et al., 2013, p. 516) and demonstrate an "attention to the details of the text" (Corrigan, 2019, p. 3). More broadly, these examples illustrate the spirit of close reading in relating the particular with the universal, the parts with the whole, as the individual elements coalesce into an organic unity.

A linguistic analysis of the students' essays illustrates that students interpret literary texts by integrating Appreciation resources — evaluations of the quality or significance of a literary or artistic work.

***English 124 students' interpretations of literary texts (using Appreciation)***

In the excerpt from an English 124 essay below, the student interprets the significance of the wallpaper's pattern in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wallpaper":

> **Student's essay**:
> "The pattern follows no rhyme or reason and is a thing of reckless abandon. She then goes on saying that the pattern's parts "plunge off at outrageous angles, destroy themselves in unheard of contradictions" (43). This shows the chaos the narrator sees in the wallpaper. She talks about the pattern plunging outrageously, expressing the freedom and disregard it has for order. The phrase 'unheard of contradictions' **showcases** the patterns' impulsiveness and wildness (43). It is **significant** she describes the pattern with this, because it is the complete opposite of her husband. Her husband represents order and facts, everything expected and square."
> (English 124 section 2, essay 1)
>
> Key:
> Explicitly inscribed Appreciation in **bolded underline**
> Implicitly evoked Appreciation in box

In this excerpt, the student relates specific descriptions of the wallpaper with larger significances: by closely reading words and phrases in the short story, the student interprets the way the descriptions of the wallpaper "show the chaos the narrator sees in the wallpaper" — its "impulsiveness and wildness." The student closes the paragraph by drawing a contrast between the wallpaper's "wildness" and the way the narrator's husband "represents order and facts, everything expected and square." In this sense, the student interprets the way the descriptions of the wallpaper expose a thematic contrast between chaos and order.

Significantly, a linguistic analysis of the Attitudinal resources in the excerpt from the student's essay can elucidate the ways in which the student signals the significance of their own interpretation by drawing on explicit tokens of Appreciation, or what can be described as literary metalanguage — self-referential language that is specific to literary interpretation (e.g., "**showcases**," "**significant**"). By employing Appreciation, students can gesture toward the positive aesthetic value of their interpretations; for instance, by integrating the word "showcases,"[7] the student illuminates the richness of meaning that emerges from the passage. Meanwhile, by integrating the phrase "it is significant," the student elucidates the importance of the interpretation, explicitly establishing its import using literary metalanguage. In a broader sense, the student

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[7] Note: "showcase" can likewise be read as contracting Engagement, yet in this instance, I place emphasis on the student's positive attribution of the way the phrase "unheard of contradictions" exhibits the pattern's "impulsiveness and wildness."

interprets the intricacies of literary significance, thus implicitly drawing on Appreciation resources. The Appreciation can thus be said to be "infused" (Hood, 2005) into the excerpt as a whole. The finding that Appreciation can be implicitly infused into an essay illustrates that beyond incorporating explicit tokens of Appreciation (e.g., "it is significant," "showcases") to interpret a literary text, it is important for students to learn to interpret literary significances by relating specific instances of literary language with broader significances, implicitly drawing on Appreciation resources. For example, in the line "The phrase 'unheard of contradictions' **showcases** the patterns' impulsiveness and wildness," the student relates the literary language ("the phrase 'unheard of contradictions'") with a significance ("**showcases** the patterns' impulsiveness and wildness"). While it is useful for students to signal the significances of their own interpretation using explicit Appreciation (e.g., "**showcases**," "**significant**"), it is also important to encourage students to focus on the *meanings* that their language choices create. For instance, instructors could guide students to interpret the significances of literary language by implicitly drawing on Appreciation; instructors could advise students that simply plugging in literary words and phrases into their essays may lead to essays that might not accord with valued literary meanings, as in the example discussed in the following chapter in which a student employs the phrase "much deeper than surface level" to summarize rather than interpret the literary text.

Similarly, in the excerpt below, an English 124 student interprets the subtle shades of significance that emerge from the literary language using Appreciation:

**Student's essay**:

"The informal interaction between these two characters reaffirms that Firk seems unaffected by Margery's new status, further emphasizing the confusing nature of class relations in the play. Dekker once again employs the dash when Margery says to Firk, "I pray thee, run-do you hear?" (10.3). It does not suffice for Margery to tell Firk to run, rather she must "pray" for him to do so. The Oxford English Dictionary explains that one of the possible definitions of pray is "To ask earnestly, beseech (God, a person, etc.) to do something, or that something may be done" ("pray"). Dekker's word choice shows that Margery has a deep desire for Firk's help. Perhaps if she had used another word, such as "ask" or had simply commanded Firk, her inferior, to investigate, she would not have elicited any action from him. Despite Margery's new social class, Firk still does not speak to Margery as though she is his boss. In addition to the word "pray," the use of the dash and the question, "do you hear?" indicate that she must ask this question in order to guarantee that Firk will listen to her. Throughout the text, there is evidence that Margery and Eyre take time to adjust to their more prestigious class standing. However, given that Firk is employed by the couple, one would expect him to be even more aware of their new status."
(English 124 section 1, essay 1)

Key:
- Implicitly evoked Appreciation in box

In this paragraph, the student interprets the way Margery's subtle word choice "pray" in her request of Firk illustrates that despite Margery's newfound higher social status as Firk's boss, Firk "still does not speak to Margery as though she is his boss." In particular, the student illuminates the subtle shades of significance that emerge from the word "pray" — "To ask earnestly, beseech (God, a person, etc.) to do something, or that something may be done." In delving into the intricacies of literary language, the writer juxtaposes the choice of the word "pray" with another possible word choice ("Perhaps if she had used another word, such as "ask" or had simply commanded Firk, her inferior, to investigate, she would not have elicited any action from him"). The student interprets the way Margery's more respectful word choice "shows that Margery has a deep desire for Firk's help" – that Margery preserves an earnest, beseeching tone toward Firk despite her status as Firk's boss. The student thus illuminates the way the playwright's word choices convey delicate degrees of meaning, in the slight variations of connotation that emerge from the word "pray," which indicates a subtle shade of subservience that complicates Margery's newfound higher status. As the student writes, "The informal interaction between these two characters reaffirms that Firk seems unaffected by Margery's new status, further emphasizing the confusing nature of class relations in the play." In this sense, the student unveils the intertwined interplay of language and meaning, in which a particular word choice ("pray") elucidates, refines, or sharpens the contours of meaning that arise from the literary text. In this paragraph, the student implicitly draws on Appreciation by interpreting the intricate complexities of literary language and explicitly signals the illustration of significance using the verb "shows" in the line "Dekker's word choice shows that Margery has a deep desire for Firk's help," as well as the verbs "indicates" and "emphasizes." In supporting students to interpret literary language in nuanced ways, instructors could encourage students to closely examine specific instances of literary language to expose subtle shades of significance that emerge from the literary texts, in this instance, to discern the ways the specific word choice "pray" could carry a slight shade of significance in relation to the character dynamics in the play. In supporting students to craft interpretations, instructors could guide students to construct interpretations that relate the literary language ("Dekker's word choice") with a broader significance ("shows that Margery has a deep desire for Firk's help").

*English 298 students' interpretations of literary texts (using Appreciation and Affect)*

While the English 124 excerpts focus on an interpretation of specific words and images, including the wallpaper's pattern, the English 298 excerpts below display a greater emphasis on the interpretation of broader themes:

> **Student's essay**:
> "The use of biblical themes is also extremely present in this passage, as the author chooses to use **diction** such as 'the heavens' and 'sheet of fire' (77) to describe Victor's surroundings rather than 'the sky' or 'the lake.' In her use of such terms, Shelley is indirectly reminding the reader of the **significance** of God and Satan, and therefore Adam and Eve, in the Creature and Victor's journeys. The storm is described as 'appear[ing] at once in various parts of the heavens' (77) perhaps **signifying** the looming presence of God and His anger towards Victor for disrupting a natural order in bringing such a creation to life."
> (English 298 section 2, essay 3)
>
> Key:
> Explicitly inscribed Appreciation in **bolded underline**
> Abstract noun phrases boxed

In this paragraph, the student interprets the representation of biblical themes in *Frankenstein*. As the student observes, Shelley employs terms such as "the heavens" and "sheet of fire" in order to depict the "significance of God and Satan, and therefore Adam and Eve, in the Creature and Victor's journeys." As the student continues, the storm "perhaps signifies the looming presence of God," who is angry with Victor "for disrupting a natural order in bringing such a creation to life." The student thus relates specific instances of literary language with the larger biblical themes that arise from the descriptions.

A linguistic analysis of this excerpt reveals the ways this student interprets literary themes and significances using Appreciation. Like the English 124 student above, the English 298 student explicitly signals the significance of their own interpretation by drawing on explicit tokens of Appreciation or literary metalanguage: the student notices the ways Shelley's language illuminates "the **significance** of God and Satan," discerning the ways the storm functions in "**signifying** the looming presence of God." By drawing on Appreciation, the student signals the interpretation of literary significance. In contrast with the English 124 excerpt, the focus on literary themes ("the use of biblical themes") illustrates a more advanced level of interpretation in English 298, which encourages students to develop broader interpretations of thematic development. While I acknowledge the role that the expectations of the course play in shaping students' responses, I likewise illustrate the value of a linguistic analysis in elucidating the ways students construct

interpretations of thematic significance. As illustrated in the analysis, I placed a box around the instances in which the student distills or condenses ideas into abstract noun phrases ("the use of biblical themes," "the **significance** of God and Satan," "the looming presence of God"). As detailed in the literature review in Chapter 2, Christie and Macken-Horarik write that one key characteristic of literary interpretive writing is "the control of symbolic abstraction," in which writers condense the concrete details of a text into abstract concepts that are often expressed as noun phrases. In this example, the phrase "the use of biblical themes" serves as an interpretive theme that can then be discussed further in the essay, while "the **significance** of God and Satan" serves as a statement of significance that can be further developed. The ability to condense ideas into noun phrases can thus enable students to construct more symbolic, abstract interpretations of thematic significance. Even so, as Christie and Macken-Horarik acknowledge, students may overreach in their attempt to employ a technical academic register, which suggests that while an overuse of abstract noun phrases may lead to unnecessarily complex phrasings, a moderate use of abstract noun phrases may be useful for the construction of thematic interpretations. This linguistic analysis illustrates a distinction between the ways students construct interpretations in English 124 and 298 in the way that students in English 298 more frequently present interpretations using condensed noun phrases than do students in English 124. While instructors are familiar with the general differences between English 124 and 298, a systematic linguistic analysis illuminates finer distinctions across student writing in the two classes, elucidating the ways students in English 298 create thematic meanings as realized in specific language choices that convey a greater degree of abstraction. A linguistic understanding of the ways students construct interpretations of literary themes can enable instructors to guide students in distilling concrete observations into abstract conceptions.

Similarly, in the English 298 essay below, a student interprets the thematic significance of the scenery descriptions in *Frankenstein*:

> **Student's essay**:
> "Just as Shelley's climate descriptions can **evoke**—or **invoke**—*a sense of lightness in Victor's joy, they can also augur his doom.* When Victor's demeanor worsens due to the death of Justine, he travels into the 'glittering' mountains where, the next day, the fair weather faltered and 'rain poured from the dark sky' (87). As ***Victor's spirits decay toward grief***, the scenery around him seems to mutate and decay as well, shifting from sunny to inclement as if Victor were a literary voodoo doll. This change in scenery also **foreshadows** his imminent encounter with the Creature; storm clouds begin to loom above the beautiful mountains, ***darkening the sky with the texture of a bad omen***. Even as Victor nears the end of his journey, no matter how far he travels, he cannot escape nature's seemingly omnipotent grasp; nature is inevitable. Such descriptions ***pursue Victor into the greatest***

***depth of his disparity***, all the way into the 'mountainous ices of the ocean' (182). Surrounded on all sides by freezing water, Shelley illustrates an aura that almost palpably emanates ***Victor's coldness, having lost all traces of the warmth present before***. And, at the pinnacle of the story's tension and isolation, just as ***Victor is nearest to his self-destructive vengeance***, 'the wind arose; the sea roared; and, as with the mighty shock of an earthquake, [the ice] split and cracked with a tremendous and overwhelming sound' (183). As if set in place by gravity, Victor's struggle and downfall accumulates into this singular moment where nature triumphs in all its power. In the final display of struggle, of Victor's final exertion, Shelley seems to suggest that nature, both literally and figuratively, has asserted its power over humanity."
(English 298 section 2, essay 1)

Key:
Explicitly inscribed Appreciation in **bolded underline**
Implicitly evoked Appreciation in box
Affect in ***bolded italics***

In this paragraph, the student interprets the way the descriptions of the weather in *Frankenstein* simultaneously shape and reflect, even accentuate and accelerate, Victor's internal states of being, evoking "a sense of lightness" while also "augur[ing] his doom." As the student expresses, the weather shifts "sunny to inclement" as Victor's "spirits decay toward grief;" the weather also "also foreshadows his imminent encounter with the creature. As the student expresses, the atmosphere at once echoes and anticipates Victor's internal atmosphere: "Shelley illustrates an aura that almost palpably emanates Victor's coldness, having lost all traces of the warmth present before." In attending closely to the ways the literary language evokes larger thematic resonances, the student interprets the way the scenery illustrates the overpowering sublimity of nature as "Victor's struggle and downfall accumulates into this singular moment where nature triumphs in all its power" and as "Shelley seems to suggest that nature, both literally and figuratively, has asserted its power over humanity." In this paragraph, the student captures a Romantic sensibility toward nature in which the external environment echoes or even heightens the slightest fluctuations of the inner consciousness, in its slight alterations, its ascensions and descensions.

A linguistic analysis of this excerpt reveals the ways this student interprets the literary theme of nature's sublimity by interweaving explicit and implicit Appreciation. For instance, in the opening line "Just as Shelley's climate descriptions can **evoke**—or **invoke**[8]—a sense of lightness in Victor's

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[8] In the student's word choices "evoke," "invoke," and "augur," we encounter language latent with suggestive meaning, imbued with shifting layers of literary affect. The word "invoke" suggests a more active calling forth of meaning into being through language, echoing the creation story in which the *Frankenstein* narrative is framed. It is interesting to note that the student writer simultaneously draws on the processes "evoke" and

joy, they can also augur his doom," the student interprets the ways the scenery descriptions illustrate Victor's shifting states of being; while the line as a whole implicitly draws on Appreciation in relating the literary language with a significance, the student likewise incorporates literary metalanguage ("**evoke**—or **invoke**") to convey the way the landscape conjures Victor's inner landscape, the physical summoning the psychological dimensions of being. The student also employs the literary metalanguage of foreshadowing: "This change in scenery also **foreshadows** his imminent encounter with the Creature; storm clouds begin to loom above the beautiful mountains, darkening the sky with the texture of a bad omen." In this sentence and interwoven into the paragraph, we can identify meanings of Affect implicitly invoked in the lines: for instance, the descriptions of "storm clouds begin[ning] to loom" and "darkening the sky" evoke the sense of doom gathering over Victor. It is important to note, though, that in contrast with the ways the students above draw on Affect to summarize literary texts, in this excerpt, the student draws on Affect to interpret the significance behind the meanings of Affect in the literary language. Specifically, the student interprets the ways the scenery descriptions at once affect and reflect Victor's shifting emotional states; nature's delicate movements become laden with symbolic implication. In this example, the student progresses beyond simply describing *what* Victor feels toward interpreting *how* the literary language creates these affective meanings ("As Victor's spirits decay toward grief, the scenery around him seems to mutate and decay as well"), relating the literary language with a significance. In this sense, meanings of Affect are interwoven into the interpretation alongside resources of Appreciation, with which the student signals the significance of their interpretations. In literary interpretation, affect and significance become intertwined as, in a sense, significance arises from affect. Even so, to construct an interpretation of literary language, it is important not only to describe affective meanings ("Victor's spirits decay toward grief") but to signal the significance of these meanings using Appreciation, as in the concluding line "Shelley seems to suggest that nature, both literally and figuratively, has asserted its power over humanity." In this line, the student interprets the way the author's craft ("Shelley seems to suggest") creates a larger significance related to the power that nature asserts over humanity. This analysis illustrates that while meanings of Affect, Judgment, and

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"invoke," which suggest differing degrees of agency: "invoke" implies a more active calling forth, an invocation, while "evoke" indicates a more passive immanence. The word "emanate," though perhaps not grammatically incorporated into the sentence, which may call for the phrase "emanate from," can likewise be interpreted as a process of bringing into being. "Emanate" might be conceived as an emergence, a coming forth, an exhalation from the source of inspiration, the breath of origination. By drawing on words including "evoke" and "invoke," the student conjures the process of literary creation.

Appreciation may operate simultaneously in an interpretation, Appreciation resources are necessary for the articulation of literary significance. By drawing on Affect and Judgment, students can relate the meanings that unfold in a story – that "Victor's spirits decay toward grief" – yet students are expected to progress beyond describing what happens in a story toward interpreting how and why the meanings of affect are significant. By drawing on Appreciation, students can signal the significance behind their interpretations of literary complexity.

I would also note that the students' own language in this essay weaves the tangible with the intangible, as in the phrase "the texture of a bad omen," which imbues a material quality of "texture" within the immaterial, inconsummate "omen." This analysis illustrates the ways the English 298 student's own linguistic expressions demonstrate more advanced capabilities in ways that are independent of the guidance in the essay prompt, which focuses students' attention on the language of the literary text as opposed to students' own writerly choices ("Imagine focusing the lens on one particular area of the text... What do you notice there that you can unpack in more detail in order to reveal a fuller meaning?"). In echoing the ways the novel, *Frankenstein*, represents the physical manifestation of internal conflict – the way the weather shapes and becomes shaped by Victor's inner states of being – the students' own expressions transmute the immaterial atmosphere ("omen") into a material presence ("texture"), the metaphysical materializing in a physical state of being. Similarly, in the phrase "the shape of its anxiety" in the previous paragraph ("Employing such weather-related language does not explicitly inform or warn of tragedy, but rather contributes to the shape of its anxiety"), the student imbues affect ("anxiety") with a physical form ("shape"), as feeling is given shape, endowed with embodiment. In the novel, the "anxiety" takes "shape" in the ebb and flow of the weather as it shifts from "sunny to inclement." Even as we can trace the trajectory of Victor's affective states by attending to the fluctuations of the weather in Shelley's scenery descriptions, so too we can discover in the students' own expressions the ways immaterial states ("omen," "anxiety") metamorphose into material forms ("texture," "shape"). The student's own language choices thus play with the thematic interplay between the physical and the metaphysical in the novel. In the layered abstractions of the student's own linguistic expressions, we encounter a symbolic transmutation between the material and spiritual, the tangible and intangible.

### 4.3.3 Interpreting multiple possible literary significances using Engagement and Graduation

While in the above examples, the students relate an instance of literary language with a single significance, literary scholar-instructors expect students to interpret the multiple possibilities of significance that emerge from a literary text. Such a sense of unfolding possibilities is encapsulated by Regaignon's (2009) contention that literary texts "contain more possibilities than those which appear at first reading, or first glance" (p. 124). By considering the multiple significances of a word or image in a text, students can demonstrate an "appreciation of the multiplicity and ambiguity of meanings that results from repeated close readings of a text" (Heinert & Chick, 2017, p. 327). As the singular unfolds into the multiple, literature invites a variety of readings. By teasing apart the rich, varied, even competing connotations of literary language, students can glean surprising, profound insights into textual significances, as reflected in Tinkle et al.'s observation that excellent close reading essays "show awareness of layers of meaning and tensions among formal features of language" (p. 512). Such an emphasis on seeking toward further possibilities of signification illustrates the "shared value of complexity" in literary interpretation (Wolfe, 2003, p. 407). In inviting interpretive possibilities, we explore new ways of knowing, of understanding ourselves and the world.

Out of the 11 essays that interpret literary significances, 6 essays (4 English 124 essays and 2 English 298 essays) interpret the *multiple* possible significances of literature. These essays that present multilayered interpretations illustrate qualities of nuance, or what Tinkle et al. describe as an attention to the "details and nuances of language" in literature (p. 512). In the following, I analyze examples of the ways students in English 124 and English 298 interpret the multiple possible significances of literature, then elaborate on the distinctions between students' interpretations in English 124 and English 298.

A linguistic analysis reveals that the students tease apart interpretive possibilities by interweaving Appreciation, Engagement, and Graduation resources.


***English 124 students' multilayered interpretations (using Appreciation, Engagement, and Graduation)***

As indicated above, 4 English 124 essays interpret the multilayered significances of literary language. I analyze two of these essays below and present the other two essays in Chapter 5 alongside the instructors' evaluations. In an excerpt shown below, an English 124 student interprets the multilayered significances of literary language in Dekker's play:

**Student's essay**:
"Rose decides to play along with them when she asks, "To lose your heart, is't possible you can?" (5.59). The homophone *heart* is essential to this line, because she is simultaneously asking two **very** different questions. On the surface, she is playfully questioning if these two hunters can really lose their prey while hunting. Of course, she knows the answer to this question because Sybil has already told her about killing their deer after it ran into a barn. However, Rose's question can **also** be interpreted as her *subtly* asking Hammon if he can **really** fall in love with her **that** quickly. The second meaning is **further** exposed when Hammon answers, 'My heart is lost' (5.60). Hammon's response to Rose immediately stands out in the exchange for a couple of reasons. On a **purely** structural level, Hammon's response is **considerably** shorter than most of the other responses, which has the effect of loading each word with **more** power. **Furthermore**, his answer is **very** true on two **entirely** different levels. Hammon has literally lost his hart, as in the deer he was hunting after. On a **deeper** level, Hammon also announces in this line that he has fallen in love with Rose." (English 124 section 1, essay 2)

Key:
- Explicitly inscribed Appreciation (literary metalanguage) in <u>underline</u>
- Engagement (expanding/contracting the dialogic space) in box
- **Graduation (raising the strength of an Attitude) in bold**
- *Graduation (softening the strength of an Attitude) in italics*

In this paragraph, the student interprets the double meanings of the homophone "hart/heart": "hart/heart" could signal the literal deer that Hammon is hunting or the metaphorical feeling of love. While the student acknowledges a literal reading of the line "My heart is lost" – Hammon has literally lost his deer, the student unearths an alternative meaning: "on a deeper level," Hammon "also announces in this line that he has fallen in love with Rose." In examining the essay more closely, we encounter the way the student interprets the way, as Margo expresses, "homophones simultaneously provide humor and contribute to character development." By signaling possible alternative readings of the literary language, this student exposes the latent layers of implication – the romantic subtext ("heart") lurking beneath the facade ("hart") – layers that remain partially concealed, exposing the intricate, subtle, contradictory complexities of the human condition.

A linguistic analysis illuminates the ways this student parses the intricacies of literary language using Appreciation, Graduation, and Engagement. The student interprets the multilayered meanings of the homophone "hart/heart" using Appreciation ("The homophone *heart* is essential to this line, because she is simultaneously asking two **very** different questions"). In this line, the student writer signals the multilayered meanings using the word "simultaneously" to indicate the ways the literal and metaphorical meanings could both manifest at the same time. The student elucidates the layers of their interpretations, including a "surface" level reading and a "further" meaning, by

interweaving Appreciation and Graduation ("On the surface, she is playfully questioning if these two hunters can really lose their prey while hunting;" "The second meaning is **further** exposed when Hammon answers, 'My heart is lost' (5.60)").

Even as the presence of intensified Graduation ("**also**," "**further**") in this paragraph might lead an analyst to note the use of emphatic claims, a closer examination of this excerpt complicates this initial observation while illuminating the subtle shades of significance that emerge from the student's interpretation. For instance, in the line "However, Rose's question can **also** be interpreted as her *subtly* asking Hammon if he can **really** fall in love with her **that** quickly," the student signals a contrasting meaning by integrating contracting Engagement expressions that indicate contrast ("However") alongside Engagement expressions that open up possibilities for interpretation ("can"). The student integrates the word "*subtly*" to suggest a hidden shade of implication in Rose's question while simultaneously construing the degree of the effect that is signaled. The word "*subtly*" could be simultaneously coded as Appreciation, or literary metalanguage, and as a softened Graduation expression. Meanwhile, the student clarifies their own rendering of distinctions among their "levels" of interpreting the text – on "structural," "literal," and "deeper" levels – by integrating sharpened and intensified Graduation ("On a **purely** structural level," "On a **deeper** level"). In oscillating between intensification and softening, the student calibrates the subtle shades of significance in the literary language using softened Graduation ("*subtly*") while signaling the layers of their own interpretations using intensified and sharpened Graduation ("**purely,**" "**deeper,**"), delving into deeper layers of significance.

Meanwhile, in the essay below, the student likewise interprets the multiple possible significances of literary language:

**Student's essay**:

"The dancer is **further** illustrated as "a fair bird-girl girdled in veils calling to me from the angry surface of some gray and threatening sea" (444). The use of the term 'girdled' offers several interesting meanings. The term **can** refer to cutting foliage in a specific way to promote future fertility. It **also** has historical connections to religion, as a symbol of protection and chastity (Moore 54). There is heavy irony in using this term as it can be associated with chastity or fertility. By describing the dancer in contradictions—innocent yet seductive—she **more** clearly represents the narrator in his struggle to decide whether or not to follow his grandfather's advice."
(English 124 section 2, essay 3)

Key:
- Explicitly inscribed Appreciation (literary metalanguage) in box
- Implicitly evoked Appreciation in underline

- Engagement (expanding the dialogic space) in ***bolded italics***
- **Graduation (raising the strength of an Attitude) in bold**

In this paragraph, the student interprets the layers of significance that emerge from the ambiguous, contradictory connotations of the term "girdled" in Ralph Ellison's short story "Battle Royale." As the student observes, "girdled" could simultaneously signify "fertility" and "chastity," ideas that might be conceived as opposite in nature. As the student expresses, the dancer is illustrated as a "fair bird-girl girdled in veils..."; the student observes that the term "girdled" "can refer to cutting foliage in a specific way to promote future fertility" and "also has historical connections to religion, as a symbol of protection and chastity." The student relates this observation to an interpretation of the dancer, who is simultaneously "innocent yet seductive." In this instance, the student casts light on a word ("girdled") that refracts into multiple dimensions, in a movement from singularity to multiplicity. In unearthing the various connotations of a word, the student enacts what Heinert & Chick (2017) describe as a "process of unpacking": "starting with the specific language at the surface of the text, the reader delves downward and then outward into the multiple connotations and contexts of the text" (p. 327).

A linguistic analysis illuminates the ways this student interprets multilayered significances by interweaving Appreciation, Engagement, and Graduation. In this sentence "The use of the term 'girdled' offers several <u>interesting</u> meanings," the student recognizes the multiple meanings of the literary language by drawing on Appreciation; the word "interesting" could be identified as explicit Appreciation that signals the positive value of the intricate richness in the literary meaning. The student invites one possible interpretation by interweaving Appreciation alongside Engagement resources that expand the dialogic space (***"can"***): "The term ***can*** refer to cutting foliage in a specific way to promote future fertility." In the following line, the student signals an additional significance of "girdled" by integrating Appreciation of the literary complexity alongside Graduation (**"also"**): "It **also** has historical connections to religion, as a <u>symbol</u> of protection and chastity." Using the intensifying "also," the student imbues a layer of meaning upon the first possible significance, calibrating the multiple, ambiguous associations of the word "girdled." Moreover, in the line "There is heavy <u>irony</u> in using this term as it ***can*** be associated with chastity ***or*** fertility," the student draws on Engagement resources that expand the dialogic space (***"or"***) to signal the dual possibilities of "chastity or fertility," which may exist in tension or contradiction with each other. The student similarly positions opposing meanings in counterbalance with each other using the contracting Engagement resource ***"yet"*** ("By describing the dancer in contradictions—innocent ***yet*** seductive"),

thus indicating a sense of contrast between innocence and seduction. By interweaving Engagement and Graduation expressions, the writer invites interpretive possibilities ("can") and signals contradictory meanings ("yet") while elucidating the layers of signification that emerge from the literary language ("**also**"). As illustrated in this linguistic analysis, scholars can elucidate the ways students interpret the "multiplicity and ambiguity of meanings that results from repeated close readings of a text" (Heinert & Chick, p. 327).

### *English 298 students' multilayered interpretations (using Appreciation, Engagement, and Graduation)*

While the English 124 excerpts unpack the layers of meaning in the literary language, the examples from English 298 present a relatively greater emphasis on characterization and thematic development. As indicated above, 2 English 298 essays interpret the multilayered significances of literature. I analyze both essays below; in Chapter 5, I present different paragraphs from these essays alongside the instructors' responses.

In the paragraph below, an English 298 student interprets the theme of blindness in *Oedipus*:

**Student's essay**:
"Oedipus, as well as his followers, live in a state of metaphorical blindness for much of the play. Sophocles emphasizes this by teasing at Oedipus' mental and, eventual, physical blindness at every opportunity, such as when Oedipus professes to his followers that he is 'not blind to [their suffering]' (4). Oedipus' over-the-top statements in this passage, such as, 'not one among you suffers more than I,' encourage readers to question whether Oedipus is blind to the extent of his followers' suffering or if his followers are blind to the grandiose nature of his statements (4). Repetition of language and imagery referring to blindness becomes particularly salient when Teiresias' literal blindness makes Oedipus' obliviousness painfully obvious. When the two are introduced, they are quick to call one another 'blind' for very different reasons (9). Though Teiresias essentially summarizes the ending of the play in which he resides, the titular character rejects his wisdom and allows his pride to give way to anger. As usual, Oedipus turns to his reputation to justify his behavior. In accusing Teiresias of 'envy,' Oedipus again displays his pride, saying '...all your birds and god-craft proved useless; you had no answer. Then I came—ignorant Oedipus—I came and smothered her, using only my wit' (10-11). Oedipus is no longer being cautious; he is declaring himself as one who outranks Teiresias, who is 'second only to Apollo' in his ability to 'see the truth' (8). As his primary concern has now shifted towards defending himself against the truth rather than helping his followers, his pride sorely stands out. Oedipus cannot conceive of himself as an ordinary human, let alone as the villain of his story."
(English 298 section 1, essay 1)

Key:
Appreciation (abstract noun phrases) in box

In this paragraph, the student construes "blindness" as an abstract concept or phenomenon, a theme that can be discussed and elaborated at length in the essay. As the student observes, Oedipus exists in a "state of metaphorical blindness" throughout the play; this metaphorical blindness thus transforms into a physical blindness. In interpreting the "repetition of language and imagery referring to blindness," the student unpacks instances in which Oedipus boasts of "his ability to 'see the truth'" despite his metaphorical blindness to his own "pride" and "villainy." In progressing beyond the literal meaning of the word "blindness," the student examines blindness in its various forms and manifestations as it arises in the play, as its associations transcend the physical to the psychological. In unearthing the multiple layers of significance that emerge from the literary language, the student interprets the ways "blindness" manifests itself in multiple states, as the several variations of this theme ("a state of metaphorical blindness," "mental and, eventual, physical blindness," "literal blindness"' expose layers of emergent signification — the literal, mental, physical, and metaphorical. In elucidating its multiple manifestations, the student recognizes the ways the states of blindness become immanent in the text, illuminating the manner in which a phenomenon — blindness — becomes symbolic. A linguistic analysis illustrates the ways the student interprets the complexities of the literary language by drawing on Appreciation; in particular, the student distills observations into themes realized in noun phrases ("a state of metaphorical blindness," "Repetition of language and imagery referring to blindness"). By condensing ideas into abstract conceptions, specifically by transforming states of being into interpretive themes, students can introduce larger themes that can be discussed and elaborated over the course of an essay, illustrating Walter's guidance for students to consider issues of "theme, development of plot and character, and so forth." In this example, the student develops the larger theme of metaphorical blindness by interpreting specific instances of repeated imagery in the play. Condensing ideas into abstract noun phrases thus enables students to construct interpretations of thematic significance – to construe the intricate, complex dimensions of literature.

Meanwhile, in the excerpt below, an English 298 student interprets the multiple possibilities of literary language in relation to character development in *Frankenstein* and *Hamlet*:

**Student's essay**:
"When Victor takes his boat out to the middle of the lake, is often 'tempted to plunge into the silent lake' (Shelley 62) and let the waters envelop him; he is eager, in the throes of his misery and restlessness, to sink into the placid lake and let death erase his troubles. Hamlet ponders whether it is more noble to live 'Or to take arms against a sea of troubles' (Shakespeare III.i.67), referring to the miseries and misfortunes of life. Victor's self-

described restless state ***could*** be construed as a sea of troubles: his mind is filled with noise and activity, stemming both from his guilt over the deaths of William and Justine and from his worry about what atrocity the monster will inflict next. Plunging into the lake would amount to evading his troubles, as he would effectively cure his misery by dying. Yet, while Victor is tempted to dive into a lake on multiple occasions, he does not; his urge is not acted upon, reducing the word 'tempted' to an internal conflict as opposed to a physical struggle. The 'tempted' reflects Hamlet's 'or,' which ***indicates*** the question he ponders on whether or not to live. The 'or' is what Hamlet's decision hinges upon, since he could either choose to shoulder his sea of troubles or take arms against them. Similarly, Victor's 'tempted' presents his question, and is the point at which either action or inaction will determine his fate." (English 298 section 2, essay 2)

Key:
- Implicitly inscribed Appreciation in <u>underline</u>
- Engagement (expanding the dialogic space) in ***bolded italics***
- Engagement (contracting the dialogic space) in box

In this paragraph, the student observes the way both Hamlet and Victor contemplate plunging into death to let "death erase [their] troubles." In juxtaposing Hamlet and Victor's states of being, the student interprets the way "Victor's self-described restless state could be construed as a sea of troubles." In interpreting the literary language across the texts, the student juxtaposes the way the word "tempted" in *Frankenstein* ('tempted to plunge into the silent lake') and the word "or" in *Hamlet* ('Or to take arms against a sea of troubles') illuminate the existential crises faced by each protagonist ("the question he ponders on whether or not to live"):

"The 'tempted' reflects Hamlet's 'or,' which indicates the question he ponders on whether or not to live." (English 298 section 2, essay 2)

In juxtaposing words that expose common significances across the texts, the student attunes to the intricate connotations of literary language, "rais[ing] to the surface hidden or subtle patterns or meanings of words" (Selene's close reading essay prompt). In this instance, the student excavates specific words — "tempted" and "or" — to interpret the ways in which these words illustrate the profundity of existence one encounters at the threshold of life and death: Hamlet "could either choose to shoulder his sea of troubles or take arms against them," while Victor inhabits "a point at which either action or inaction will determine his fate." Moreover, in recognizing the multiple possible significances of literary language, the student notes the way the word "tempted" could either signify an "internal conflict" or a "physical struggle" ("Yet, while Victor is tempted to dive into a lake on multiple occasions, he does not; his urge is not acted upon, reducing the word 'tempted' to an internal conflict as opposed to a physical struggle"). In examining the literary

language, the student illuminates the multiple, potential meanings that could be excavated from the word "tempted," including its physical and metaphysical dimensions, or its external and internal manifestations. By attending closely to specific elements of language, the student "reveals a fuller meaning or a deeper appreciation of the text" (Selene's close reading essay prompt). In addition, as discussed in the following chapter, the student goes beyond the assignment guidelines to consider the significances of literary language across two texts, *Frankenstein* and *Hamlet*, instead of one. In discerning the subtle significances of literary language, the student illustrates Chick, Hassel, & Haynie's (2009) guidance for students to notice "the subtle nuances of textual complexity" and to "offer more original, nuanced readings of literature" (p. 415).

A linguistic analysis illustrates the ways this student interprets the multiple significances of literary language by interweaving Appreciation and Engagement: for instance, in the line "Victor's self-described restless state could be construed as a sea of troubles," the student interprets the way Victor's state mirrors Hamlet's "sea of troubles" by drawing on Appreciation of the literary complexity while signaling the possibility of the interpretation using Engagement resources that expand the dialogic space ("could"). Similarly, in the line "The 'tempted' reflects Hamlet's 'or,' which indicates the question he ponders on whether or not to live," the student interprets the thematic connections between the literary language in the two texts by interweaving Appreciation and Engagement. In this line, the word "indicates" could be identified as a resource that expands the dialogic space in the sense that "indicates" is not fully committed to the interpretation (as opposed to a word such as "demonstrates," which forecloses spaces for alternative possibilities). In addition, the student signals contrasting meanings using Appreciation and Engagement resources that contract the dialogic space ("Yet, while Victor is tempted to dive into a lake on multiple occasions, he does not; his urge is not acted upon, reducing the word 'tempted' to an internal conflict as opposed to a physical struggle"). In this line, the student draws on the word "yet" to signal the contrasting meanings of "tempted" as an "internal conflict" or a "physical struggle," thus interpreting the multiple significances of literary language. In a broader sense, the student constructs a multilayered interpretation by integrating Appreciation to unearth the complexities of literary significance alongside Engagement to invite interpretive possibilities and to signal meanings of contrast between the physical and metaphysical dimensions of the word "tempted."

**4.4 Summary of findings**

      An examination of students' writing can illuminate the way nuanced interpretations are constructed. In addressing the first sub-question, "In what ways do students refine interpretations (using Attitudinal resources), invite or foreclose alternative possibilities of interpretation (using Engagement resources), and calibrate the strength of the Attitudes they infuse in their interpretations (using Graduation resources)?", a linguistic analysis of the Attitudinal resources in the students' writing reveals that the 7 essays that summarize literary texts describe characters' feelings using Affect and relate how characters convey moral attitudes using Judgment. Meanwhile, the 11 essays that interpret literary texts employ resources of Appreciation – evaluations of quality and significance. Among the essays that interpret literary texts, 6 essays tease apart the multiple possible significances of literary language by integrating Engagement resources that expand and contract the dialogic space and Graduation resources that calibrate the latent and apparent layers of signification that arise from literature. This sub-set of essays that present multilayered interpretations illustrates my conception of *nuance* as a recognition of the multiple possibilities, layers, and shades of significance in literary language. This analysis illuminates the ways students interpret literary significances in nuanced ways by integrating finely calibrated language choices.

      In addressing the second sub-question, "In what ways do students' literary interpretive moves relate to literary scholar-practitioners' expectations for literary interpretive writing as expressed in the scholarship on the teaching of literature?", this examination renders visible valued yet often abstract, elusive qualities of literary interpretation including *nuance* and *complexity*. As detailed in the pedagogical implications chapter, this study illuminates the ways literary interpretations are constructed in students' finer language choices, thus creating avenues toward supporting students to interpret literature in more nuanced ways. A linguistic analysis of students' writing illustrates the relative value of the Appraisal resources: while students summarize literary texts using Affect and Judgment, students interpret literary texts using Appreciation. As illustrated, Appreciation resources lend themselves to valued ways of interpreting literary language and significance. In supporting students to craft literary interpretations, instructors could encourage students to progress from summarizing literary texts using Affect and Judgment toward interpreting literary texts using Appreciation. At the same time, as discussed earlier in this chapter, instructors can guide students to recognize the ways meanings of Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation may be simultaneously embedded into an interpretation of literary language and significance. While supporting students to recognize meanings of Affect and Judgment that unfold in a story,

instructors can encourage students to signal their own interpretations of significance using Appreciation.

In addressing the third sub-question "In what ways do students' interpretations illustrate distinctions between English 124 and English 298?", I have found a distinction between a relative emphasis on interpretations of literary language in English 124 and a relative emphasis on broader interpretations of characters and themes in English 298. While in the English 124 essay above, the emphasis is relatively more on teasing apart the multiple possible connotations of the literary language, in the English 298 example, the student illuminates the apparent and latent layers of the character of Oedipus. Such a distinction can be seen in the larger idea that each essay introduces: while the topic sentence of the English 124 essay places a relative emphasis on the literary language, or the "ambiguous adjectives," the English 298 essay places a relative emphasis on the characterization of Oedipus. In other words, the English 124 student focuses on teasing apart the possibilities of literary language before gesturing toward an observational claim concerning the way the word "fast" might indicate implications for character development. Meanwhile, the English 298 student develops an essay that centers on an examination of the figure of Oedipus. While these distinctions might be subtle, a closer examination reveals that while in English 124, the relative emphasis is on practicing the process of closely interpreting literary language, in English 298, the close reading serves a larger purpose: as a way of revealing insights into character development. Illuminating the distinctions between students' writing in English 124 and 298 thus enables scholars to more precisely elucidate the ways students in English 124 practice the skill of close reading while students in English 298 employ close reading to construct broader interpretations of characterization and theme. This distinction may also reflect a difference in the essay prompts: as illustrated by the prompt analysis, while the English 124 essay prompts emphasize an attention to literary language (e.g., Margo's prompt encourages students to "'unpack' minute details of the text, such as word choice, imagery, sentence structure"), the English 298 essay prompts offer opportunities for students to develop interpretations of characterization and thematic development (e.g., Walter's prompt offers students an option to examine issues including "theme" and the "development of plot and character"). As the instructors describe, this increasing scope and complexity of the literary interpretive tasks can then serve as a scaffold toward supporting students to construct theoretically engaged readings that integrate theoretical approaches such as feminist or gender criticism. While I acknowledge the role of the assignments in shaping students' responses, I illustrate the value of the linguistic analysis in illuminating the ways the English 298 students'

interpretations of thematic significance are constructed in abstract noun phrases (e.g., "the significance of God and Satan"). Moreover, students' interpretations in English 298 exhibit more advanced analysis and synthesis beyond the assignment expectations, as in the student who constellates thematic resonances across two literary texts, *Hamlet* and *Frankenstein*. In addition, the linguistic analysis illustrates the layered abstractions in English 298 students' own language choices (e.g., "the texture of bad omen," "the shape of its anxiety"), which echo the themes of the material and spiritual in *Frankenstein*. The linguistic analysis reveals the more advanced writing capabilities of students in the upper-level class, independent of the guidelines in the assignment prompts. In this sense, students and instructors co-construct the expectations of an assignment: as the analysis of students' essays illustrates, students' writing may transcend what is typically expected in assignment, displaying an inventiveness in relation to the development of ideas and in the expression of linguistic style. In a dynamic fashion, students' responses can shape an essay prompt even as the assignment guidelines shape students' responses, creating avenues toward new ways of knowing and writing. As illustrated in the pedagogical implications section, the findings open avenues for instructors to more precisely articulate their expectations for students' writing in essay prompts; even so, instructors might continue to invite spaces for interpretive and creative possibilities that may be surprising or unexpected.

# CHAPTER 5

## Instructors' Expectations for Students' Literary Interpretive Writing

**Introduction**

In this chapter, I build on the linguistic analysis of students' writing samples in the previous chapter by considering the students' writing in relation to the instructors' evaluations of the essays as related in the interviews. I address the following research question:

1. In what ways do the linguistic patterns associated with Appraisal in students' writing correlate with the meanings realized in literary interpretation that instructors value in students' writing (based on a cross-analysis of writing samples, course materials, and conversations with instructors)?

   a. What qualities do instructors value in students' writing?

   b. In what ways do these qualities manifest in students' writing?

   c. In what ways does this cross-analysis illustrate distinctions between the ways literary interpretations are realized in English 124 and in English 298?

In addressing this question, I cross-analyze students' writing samples, instructors' comments on students' essays, and conversations with instructors. In addressing the first sub-question, I examine which qualities of writing instructors value in students' writing. In addressing the second sub-question, I examine the ways in which these qualities might manifest in students' writing and correlate with the findings from the linguistic analysis. In addressing the third sub-question, I examine the ways in which this cross-analysis illustrates distinctions between students' writing in English 124 and English 298.

In this chapter, I follow a similar progression as in the previous findings chapter, beginning with a discussion of the instructors' interview responses to the essays that they characterized as emerging — those that summarize or describe literary texts — before transitioning into the essays that they characterized as proficient — those that interpret literary significance. I then delineate the

instructors' interview responses to the essays that interpret the multiple possible layers and shades of literary significance.

I conclude the chapter with a cross-analysis of the linguistic analysis and instructors' evaluations, which illustrates the ways the instructors' abstract evaluations can be identified concretely in the students' language choices, thus rendering visible valued qualities of literary interpretation. Through this examination, I render visible the often impressionistic qualities of writing that instructors value, illuminating the delicate yet salient language choices that construe abstract qualities such as *nuance* and *complexity*. I argue that instructors need to develop a metalinguistic awareness of the ways students' language choices create valued meanings in writing; such an awareness can enable instructors to more precisely describe their expectations for students' writing and to refine their approaches to evaluating students' writing based on more explicit understandings of language.

## 5.1 Correspondences between my analyses and instructors' evaluations of students' essays

Based on a cross-analysis of the students' essays and instructors' evaluations, I found that my analysis of essays as proficient and emerging was validated by the instructors. Prior to the interviews, I asked the instructors to identify examples from students' essays that they evaluated as proficient and emerging examples of close reading. The two English 124 instructors shared Google Docs with excerpts from students' essays ahead of the interview, while the two English 298 instructors were unable to share excerpts ahead of time. Margo identified three proficient examples and three emerging examples, while Alex identified three proficient examples and four emerging examples. In my analysis of students' writing conducted months prior to the interviews, I had identified and analyzed four of the same excerpts as Margo (one proficient and three emerging) and four of the same excerpts as Alex (two proficient and two emerging). This finding that my observations accorded with the instructors' evaluations indicates that I had developed a sense of what constitutes strong and weak close reading essays. I gained this sense from my own background as an English literature major in college as well as my pedagogical training and experiences teaching English literature and writing, including close literary interpretation, at the secondary and postsecondary levels. In addition, I drew on my skills in linguistic analysis to more precisely elucidate the qualities of students' literary interpretations.

**5.2 Instructors' evaluations of essays that summarize literary texts (using Affect and Judgment)**

In the following, I discuss the instructors' evaluations of essays that summarize the literary texts. As illustrated in the first findings chapter, 7 out of 24 essays summarize the literary texts. While Margo described the emerging essays as "summary," Alex expressed that the emerging essays presented "descriptions" of the texts that are "not quite interpretation," echoing Regaignon's (2009) contention that "one of the great difficulties undergraduates face in making the transition from high school to college-level writing is moving from observation to insight and interpretation" (p. 122). In sharing an example of an emerging close reading, Margo identified one paragraph from a student's essay:

> **Student's essay**:
> "Another quote that demonstrates the importance of class in 16th century England can be seen in Lincoln's response to Oatley just a few lines later: 'So shall your Rose be free, my thoughts at rest, and much care die which now lives in my breast' (16.27). This response by Lincoln further shows that <u>the main concern of the men is ensuring the lovers marry within their class</u>. By using the wording 'so shall your Rose be free,' Dekker asserts that <u>by not marrying above her class, Rose would be free of the harsh judgement of society</u> on the couple for marrying out of line. Correspondingly, Lincoln says that 'much care' would die which lives in his 'breast,' **meaning that the anguish he feels by the dilemma at hand is much deeper than surface level**. In other words, **the prospect of Lacy marrying down is causing him a lot of distress and grief**, <u>further exhibiting the importance of class at the time</u>." (English 124 section 1, essay 4)
>
> Key:
> Judgment in <u>underline</u>
> Affect in **bold**

As Margo explains, "at first glance," the student appears to be interpreting the text but is summarizing the plot:

> **Instructor's comments**:
> "And at first glance it's like, 'Oh, great.' But then the more I dig into it, the more I'm like, what are you actually doing with that text, right, so: 'By using the wording 'So shall your Rose be free,' Decker states that by not marrying above her class she would be free of a harsh judgment of society.' So it's summary, right, he's skipping the quote and then he's kind of distilling it in his own words, or it's paraphrasing, right, as opposed to analyzing; there's no new meaning or new insight coming out."

Margo continues that while the student is "dispersing the quotes," he is "paraphrasing as opposed to analyzing." Margo observes that while incorporating textual evidence is "much better than just kind

of talking about [the text] at a distance," this moment signals that the student thinks he is close reading when he is actually summarizing the text. Margo expresses that there is "no new meaning or new insight coming out" of this selection; instead, "it is just a kind of performing and engagement with the text in a way that's not meaningful." Margo's statements invite an inquiry into the boundaries separating "meaning*ful*" from "meaning*less*" interpretations. In examining the essay, I had noted the student's use of the phrase "much deeper than surface level," which seems to signal a "depth reading":

> "Correspondingly, Lincoln says that 'much care' would die which lives in his 'breast,' meaning that the anguish he feels by the dilemma at hand is **much deeper than surface level**." [my emphasis]

In response to my question about the student's use of the phrase "much deeper than surface level," Margo explains,

> "He's taking a phrase to talk about the plot or the characters still; he's not saying there's meaning and language that I can bring out that's deeper than the surface level, so it's like co-opting the phrases in close reading in what is still kind of plot analysis."

A linguistic analysis illuminates the way the student describes the plot and characters as opposed to interpreting the "meaning and language": the student signals the interpretation of literary language in the phrase "By using the wording 'So shall your Rose be free,'" yet the interpretation does not come; in what follows, the student paraphrases the character's words using Judgment: "Dekker asserts that by not marrying above her class, Rose would be free of the harsh judgement of society." What Margo describes as what appears "at first glance" to be interpretation can be identified as the way the student signals an interpretation that is not realized, while the way the student is "skipping the quote and then he's kind of distilling it in his own words, or it's paraphrasing" can be identified as meanings of Judgment: rather than teasing apart the layers of meaning in the literary language, a move that Margo might characterize as "meaningful," the student instead summarizes the literary text.

As this example illustrates, literary metalanguage can be "co-opted" to create meanings that may not mesh with valued ways of meaning-making in literary studies. In relation to SFL analysis, Margo's observation about "co-opting" literary metalanguage exposes the limitations of an overreliance on examining the words and phrases in students' essays; Margo's point thus indicates the importance of analyzing the meanings realized in students' language choices beyond simply identifying specific words and phrases that appear to signal literary interpretation. In response to Margo's description of this excerpt as "a kind of performing and engagement with the text in a way

that's not meaningful," I acknowledge that the student's essay is not meaningful in the context of literary interpretation: while the student attempts to "perform" an interpretation by integrating interpretive phrases including "on a deeper level," a closer examination of the student's essay reveals that the student is using this expression in ways that do not accord with the literary meanings attributed to the expressions. Even so, an SFL analysis can reveal the meanings that *do* emerge from the student's writing: for instance, in the example above, the student describes the characters' feelings using Affect ("the prospect of Lacy marrying down is causing him a lot of distress and grief") and reports characters' judgments of motivations or behaviors ("the main concern of the men is ensuring the lovers marry within their class"). By closely examining students' writing for Appraisal resources, we can more precisely pinpoint the kinds of meanings students convey in their writing, elucidating specific moments in which students may summarize literary texts by describing what happens in a scene as opposed to interpreting the significance of specific details of literary language. In turn, a more explicit understanding of the meanings construed in students' writing can enable instructors to support students with shifting from describing the depth of a character's *feelings* ("the anguish he feels by the dilemma at hand is much deeper than surface level") toward delving into the depths of *significance*. For instance, with an understanding of the ways students describe characters' feelings and judgments using Affect and Judgment, instructors can more sharply recognize where students are in their thinking and encourage them to shift from relating what happens in a text toward interpreting the significance of the literary language. The linguistic analysis thus offers instructors a systematic approach to highlighting what students need to understand about how literary interpretation is achieved.

## 5.3 Instructors' evaluations of students' essays that interpret literary significances

In the following section, I examine instructors' evaluations of students' essays that interpret literary significances, with an attention to distinctions between students' interpretations in English 124 and English 298. As illustrated in the first findings chapter, 11 out of the 24 essays (5 English 124 essays and 6 English 298 essays) interpret literary significances; out of the 11 essays that interpret literary significances, 6 essays (4 English 124 essays and 2 English 298 essays) interpret the *multiple* possible significances of literature. The finding that relatively more students in English 124 interpret the multiple possible significances of literary language than do students in English 298 illustrates the greater emphasis in English 124 on unpacking the possibilities of literary language.

While teaching English 124, instructors emphasize a close attention to specific elements of literary language, including particular words, phrases, and images. For instance, Margo encourages students to demonstrate a "close attention to details" such as word choice, punctuation, and sentence structure; close reading serves as a "kind of a tool or a method or a means of engagement, maybe, that allows for deeper understanding or analysis." A key difference between the role of close reading in English 124 and English 298 emerges from the instructors' responses: Margo expresses that English 124 offers students an opportunity to practice "the process of close reading, which is a process of interpretation," "whereas, moving beyond English 124 moving to the other essays, it is expected for close reading to be for a purpose and not its own end;" for Margo, close reading "is a mini essay for me because the process is its own end here."

Meanwhile, for Selene, an English 298 instructor, close reading serves a larger purpose of facilitating broader interpretations of characterization and theme: as Selene expresses, "close reading is not just an isolated exercise, in which you have the luxury of parsing a sentence to death. It really is a sense of understanding why the characters behave the way they do." As Selene explains, "close reading is a scaffolding exercise" that enables theoretically and critically informed interpretations of literary texts. An examination of students' writing illuminates this distinction between students' interpretations in English 124 and English 298 in relation to the purpose and function of close reading: while an English 124 essay from Margo's class primarily employs close reading as a means of unpacking literary language, an English 298 essay from Selene's class employs close reading as a means toward developing a broader interpretation about character tropes. While I acknowledge the differences between the assignment expectations in English 124 and 298, I illustrate the way the student from Selene's section constellates thematic resonances across two literary texts, thus exhibiting more advanced analysis and synthesis beyond the assignment expectations.

### 5.3.1 English 124: interpreting the intricacies of literary language

### English 124 section 1

Margo immersed her students in interpreting Thomas Dekker's play "The Shoemaker's Holiday," a sixteenth century text which, as Margo expresses, plays with the audience's understandings of language through wordplay and commentary on the language use of characters from various social classes. In sharing an example of a proficient close reading, Margo identified one

paragraph from a student's essay. In the example, the student interprets the possible alternative significances of the word "fast" in Dekker's play:

**Student's essay**:
"Dekker introduces scene ten by using <u>ambiguous adjectives</u> to <u>showcase</u> the <u>interesting</u> power dynamic between Margery and the shoemakers. The passage begins with Margery addressing Hodge, saying he is too 'fast' for her (Dekker 10.1). At **first** glance, the word appears to be a synonym for 'rapid' or 'quick.' ***Perhaps*** Hodge physically moves too quickly, making it difficult for Margery to interact with him. In another sense, it ***could*** mean that he is too impulsive or inattentive to listen to her. However, 'fast' ***can*** **also** carry another meaning. According to the Oxford English dictionary, the word 'fast' ***can*** mean 'firm,' or 'not easily turned aside, constant, firm, steadfast' ('fast'). Therefore, ***perhaps*** Margery wants to say that Hodge is physically 'firm' in the sense that he is unwilling to fulfill her request to investigate whether Eyre has become Master Sheriff. Dekker's use of the word 'fast' causes the reader to question the nature of the relationship between Margery and Hodge. Regardless of the intended meaning of the word, Margery chooses not to interact with Hodge. The word ***indicates*** that her decision not to speak to Hodge possibly results from her belief that he would not listen to her, **even though** he works for her. Despite her higher status, she feels that she **must** fight for the attention of the journeymen. This *seemingly* simple word reveals both the <u>complexity</u> of the relationship between Margery and the other shoemakers and the fact that their interactions differ **significantly** from what would be expected between a boss and their employee. Her conversation with Firk, one of the **most** eccentric characters in the play, is **particularly** telling of this bizarre dynamic."
<u>(English 124 section 1, essay 1)</u>

Key:
- Appreciation (literary metalanguage) in <u>underline</u>
- Engagement (expanding the dialogic space) in bolded italics
- Engagement (contracting the dialogic space) in box
- **Graduation (raising the strength of an Attitude) in bold**
- *Graduation (softening the strength of an Attitude) in italics*

In this paragraph, the student interprets the ways the "ambiguous adjectives" in the play reveal insights into the relationship and "power dynamic" among the characters. The student considers the possible meanings of the word "fast," which range from more apparent to relatively hidden or latent layers of signification: as the student observes, "At first glance, the word appears to" mean "rapid" or "quick," and could refer to the way Hodge is "impulsive or inattentive." The student then illuminates an alternative possible meaning of "fast" as "not easily turned aside, constant, firm, steadfast," a meaning that might contradict the sense of "fast" as "rapid" or as "impulsive or inattentive." In exploring this interpretation of "fast" as "steadfast," the student draws out the possibility that "Margery wants to say that Hodge is physically 'firm' in the sense that he is unwilling to fulfill her request to investigate whether Eyre has become Master Sheriff." The student thus

exposes the multiple layers of meaning in the word "fast": in an initial layer, "fast" appears to mean "rapid," which could explain the way Hodge is too "impulsive" to listen to Margery; a further layer of meaning in the word "fast" could refer instead to the way Hodge is "not easily turned aside" and thus unwilling to listen to Margery. In relating the literary language with a broader significance, the student considers the implications that Margery's use of this word might have on the character dynamics in the play: despite Margery's "higher status" as an employer of the shoemakers, she struggles to gain their respect, as Hodge "would not listen to her, even though he works for her." As the student concludes, this seemingly slight instance of literary language exposes deeper implications underlying the characters' relationships.

In its close attention to the multiple possibilities of meaning in a single word, this example illustrates Margo's guidance in the essay prompt to "'unpack' minute details of the text, such as word choice, imagery, sentence structure, etc." By unpacking "the multiplicity and ambiguity of meanings that results from repeated close readings of a text" (Heinert & Chick, p. 327), the student invites multiple interpretive possibilities, illuminating the way the word "fast" can simultaneously signify contradictory qualities of impulsiveness and constancy. In parsing these possibilities, the student "show[s] awareness of layers of meaning" immanent in literary language and relates these meanings with the broader significances in relation to the character dynamics in the play (Tinkle et al., p. 512).

In commenting on this selection during our interview, Margo explained (themes I discuss are in bold):

> **Instructor's comments**:
> "I love that it's super focused; she's just looking at this one word, and she's pulling a lot out of it. I like that she **sets this stage for pulling out another meaning**; sometimes I can see students be like, this means this, I'm like, okay but why is that interesting.
>
> But she's saying, "at first we might think it means this one thing," right, like we associate fast with rapidness and quickness. But something else might be going on too, right: "another sense." It could also mean this thing. I think she does a good job of not saying it means this instead of that but it might have **multiple meanings** so I like the **ambiguity** there; I like that she **invokes the expectation** before moving away from it; that makes it feel more exciting, right, and then she really **situates it in the text** so she does that **next step**. It doesn't just end the paragraph with 'and this is everything I have to say about fast,' but she can then say, maybe this is what it means for Margery and maybe this is how it impacts those dynamics. 'Decker's use of the word fast causes the reader to question the nature of the relationship.' I mean, it's a big claim but sure, we're all paying close attention."

The terms that Margo uses, including "multiple meanings" and "ambiguity," illustrate Heinert and Chick's notion of the way literary interpretation demands an "appreciation of the multiplicity and

ambiguity of meanings that results from repeated close readings of a text" (p. 327). As Margo explains, the student "invokes the expectation" and "sets this stage for pulling out another meaning," then takes the "next step" by interpreting the implications of the analysis on the character dynamics. Margo continues, "It genuinely adds in new meaning that's beyond the surface level, so it feels like not an obvious description, but she is making us stop and pause and think about this word differently we probably would." Beyond describing the plot or characters on a "surface level," as the emerging essays do, this student invites readers to imagine innovative, alternative possibilities of interpretation.

Significantly, what Margo describes as the way the student "sets this stage" for interpreting the ambiguous connotations of a word and "adds in new meaning that's beyond the surface level" can be seen in the ways the student draws on resources of Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation in the essay. The student interprets the multiple possible significances of the word "fast" by drawing on Appreciation resources: in the first sentence of the paragraph, the student introduces the interpretation by integrating literary metalanguage, or explicit tokens of Appreciation: "Dekker introduces scene ten by using <u>ambiguous adjectives</u> to <u>showcase</u> the <u>interesting</u> power dynamic between Margery and the shoemakers." In this sentence, the student signals the way they are interpreting a specific instance of literary language (the "ambiguous adjectives" in the play) in order to draw a broader interpretation of the significance of the relationship between the characters ("the <u>interesting</u> power dynamic between Margery and the shoemakers"). By employing the word "ambiguous," the student signals the multiple, perhaps conflicting layers of meaning that emerge from the literary language. Meanwhile, by integrating the words "showcase" and "interesting," the student indicates the intricate richness of meaning that emerges from the literary work. By integrating the words "ambiguous," "showcase," and "interesting," the student elucidates the importance of the interpretation, explicitly establishing its import. These underlined expressions can be identified as literary metalanguage, or explicit tokens of Appreciation.

As the paragraph continues, the student interprets the multiple possibilities of literary significance that emerge from the word "fast" by implicitly drawing on Appreciation resources. For instance, in the sentence "At **first** glance, the word appears to be a synonym for 'rapid' or 'quick,'" the student interprets an initial or superficial meaning of the word "fast" as "be a synonym for 'rapid' or 'quick.'" In this sentence, the student unearths one possible layer of meaning in the word, interpreting the intricate complexities of literary significance using Appreciation. In conjunction with employing Appreciation to interpret the intricate complexities of literary significance, the student

signals the initial interpretation of "fast" as "rapid" or "quick" by interweaving Engagement and Graduation: in the sentence "At **first** glance, the word appears to be a synonym for 'rapid' or 'quick,'" the student invites an initial possible interpretation of "fast" as "rapid" or "quick" by drawing on Graduation resources that signal an initial reading ("at **first** glance") alongside Engagement resources that open spaces for other possibilities ("appears to be"). By employing the phrase "appears to be," the student signals the literal or superficial nature of this interpretation of "fast" as "quick." Then, the student recognizes another layer of meaning in the word "fast": "In another sense, it could mean that he is too impulsive or inattentive to listen to her." In this sentence, the student interprets the way "fast" could mean "impulsive or inattentive;" by noticing this possible connotation, the student discovers an intricate layer of meaning in the literary language using Appreciation. Meanwhile, the student signals this interpretive possibility using the Engagement expression "could mean," which expands the dialogic space for alternative possible interpretations, thus opening spaces for further possible significances beyond the literal sense of the word "fast".

The student then signals a contrasting layer of meaning in the word "fast": drawing on the OED, the student indicates that "fast" "can mean 'firm,' or 'not easily turned aside, constant, firm, steadfast.'" Importantly, this meaning of "fast" as "steadfast" or "constant" contrasts with the student's earlier interpretation of the word as "rapid" or "quick." The student thus unearths the multiple layers of meaning in the word "fast" – as "quick" or its opposite, "constant." As the student illustrates, this word might signify rapidity and impulsivity or its opposite, steadfastness. The student signals this contrasting meaning of "fast" as "steadfast" by interweaving Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation resources: "However, 'fast' can **also** carry another meaning." In this sentence, the student discerns the possibility of "another meaning" by drawing on Appreciation to interpret this further layer of significance in the literary language. In addition, the student signals an additional layer of meaning by employing the Graduation resource "**also,**" and signals the competing or contradictory layers of meaning by employing the Engagement resource "however," which contracts the dialogic space. The student also invites the possibility that "fast" connotes "steadfast" using Engagement resources that expand the dialogic space ("can also carry another meaning"). By interweaving Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation resources, the student unpacks the multiple possibilities of literary language while simultaneously signaling an openness to alternative possible interpretations, illustrating Regaignon's (2009) sense that literary texts "contain more possibilities than those which appear at first reading, or first glance" (p. 124).

What Margo describes about this excerpt in literary terms can thus be identified through a linguistic analysis of the ways this student draws on Appraisal resources to construct the interpretation. For example, what Margo describes as the way the student "invokes the expectation before moving away from it" can be identified in the way the student signals an initial possible meaning of the word" "fast" as "rapid" or "quick" by interweaving Appreciation alongside Graduation and Engagement expressions that calibrate multiple interpretive possibilities ("At **first** glance, the word appears to be"). In progressing beyond this initial reading, the student then discerns the ways "fast" could signify "impulsiveness" or "inattentiveness" in a figurative sense by drawing on Appreciation and Engagement ("In another sense, it could mean that he is too impulsive or inattentive to listen to her."). By interweaving Appreciation, Engagement expressions that open and close spaces for interpretive possibilities, and Graduation expressions that calibrate additional meanings, the student then illuminates another possible meaning of "fast" as "steadfast" or "constant," one that contrasts with the earlier possible interpretation of "fast" as "impulsive" ("However, 'fast' can **also** carry another meaning"). The student then signals the significance of their interpretation of the complexity of the character dynamics by drawing on literary metalanguage or explicit Appreciation. By closely examining meanings in students' language choices, we can render visible valued yet elusive qualities of literary interpretive writing such as a recognition of the multiple possible significances of literary language.

### English 124 section 2

Meanwhile, in English 124 section 2, Alex's section, a student likewise interprets the multiple possible significances of literary language, with an attention to the layers of imagery and tone. I present an excerpt from a student's essay that Alex identified as proficient and that I had likewise identified as proficient in my initial examinations of student writing. In the essay, the student interprets a passage from Willa Cather's short story "Paul's Case":

**Student's essay**:
"[Paul's] rejection of the standard of the community is something that is looked down upon, but with **further** account of the lifestyle of the other families on that street, Cather allows the readers to see a lesser and lesser correlation between that pristine, golden family and the **only** correct way of living. Cather uses language like 'orgies of living' (111) and 'debauch' (111), to **fully** emphasize the drastic contrast in Paul's preference of activities compared to the other children. With these words that imply an association of *something* sexual or impure, it **vividly** captures what kind of life that would be considered a disappointment and unfavorable by the general population. […] As the paragraph builds up in this sense, it

concludes that his 'morbid desire' is **simply** for 'cool things and soft lights and fresh flower' (111). What follows this morbid desire doesn't **seem** so morbid after all -- pleasant **even**. The families of people perceive any lifestyle different from their humble ways as something scandalous. Are they **really** terrified of Paul living impure, -- religiously, economically, academically, -- or do they just repudiate anyone living as an anomaly? Cather's use of these vivid and harsh words seek to point out to the reader that the families falsely inflates the severity in Paul's aspirations as they deviate from [the] status quo."

Key:
- Implicitly evoked Appreciation in box
- Judgment in underline
- **Graduation (raising the strength of an attitude) in bold**
- Graduation resources (softening the strength of the Attitude) in *italics*

In this paragraph, the student writer begins by describing the ways the main character, Paul's, behavior deviates from the "pristine" moral standards of the community, whose members judge Paul for his "rejection" of this moral standard. The student notices the way Cather initially conveys a harsh moral judgment toward Paul's "impure" activities, which would be chastised by the community. Yet the student then discerns a shift in Cather's tone, which reveals that Paul is not engaged in debauchery but instead yearns for the softness and lightness of nature. The student writes, "As the paragraph builds up in this sense, it concludes that his 'morbid desire,' is simply for 'cool things and soft lights and fresh flower.'" As the student expresses, Cather's initial tone of judgment is revealed to be ironic; Cather is exposing the ways the other families in the community would "repudiate anyone living as an anomaly." The student concludes, "Cather's use of these vivid and harsh words seek to point out to the reader that the families falsely inflate the severity in Paul's aspirations as they deviate from [the] status quo;" in other words, Cather critiques the harsh moral judgment that the families impose upon Paul for deviating from normality. In a broader sense, the student offers an initial, superficial reading — that Cather conveys a negative judgment toward Paul — before unearthing a deeper understanding of the ways Cather in actuality expresses alignment with Paul's preference for "cool things and soft lights and fresh flower."

In responding to this excerpt during our interview, Alex describes the way the student progresses from an initial reading to a deeper understanding of the story:

**Instructor's comments**:
"What I really saw as working well in this particular example is that the author of the close reading moves from giving us a more first impression or surface-level reading of the passage to understanding how and demonstrating how the interpretation of that passage changes as the reader gets through it, so it has this sort of dynamism incorporated into it. So, they mentioned all these really loaded phrases — 'orgies of living,' 'debauch,' 'morbid desire' —

which sort of bait the reader into having a judgmental perception of Paul, the title character of 'Paul's Case.'

And what the author of this close reading seems to be doing to me is to say, 'Oh, well, don't, don't get seduced by the sort of normative perspective that Cather's narrator is invoking here,' because it's clear, once you get through the whole passage, that the tone of the passage is an ironic one, that the narrator is actually ironizing and criticizing the tendency of this community to harshly judge the pursuit of pleasure that Paul's character engages in…

And so this sort of ironic tone that the author of the close reading points out shows how the dynamism of this passage works, how we need to be really attentive to, you know, in this particular case, the way that irony works in literary language to create a certain ethos that we need to understand in order to properly interpret it."

In this response, Alex illuminates the "dynamism" of the student's interpretation of the passage in the short story — the way the tone shifts from the ironic to the earnest. A linguistic analysis of the student's essay illustrates the way the student interprets the sense of dynamism in the story: for instance, in the line "Cather uses language like 'orgies of living' (111) and 'debauch' (111), to **fully** emphasize the drastic contrast in Paul's preference of activities compared to the other children," the student interprets the significance behind the literary language in the short story by drawing implicitly on Appreciation, illustrating the ways Cather's word choices such as "orgies of living" and "debauch" "emphasize the drastic contrast" between Paul's moral behavior and those of the others in the community. In this line, it is important to note that while the student interprets the literary language using Appreciation, the word choices cited from the short story ("orgies of living" and "debauch") convey meanings of moral Judgment, as Alex describes. Meanings of Appreciation and Judgment are thus interwoven into the essay: the student interprets the significance of the literary language in the passage using Appreciation; at the same time, the student cites the morally charged meanings of Judgment that Cather conveys in the short story. As illustrated, a distinction arises between the ways the student describes what unfolds in the story using Judgment and interprets the significances of these meanings of Judgment by drawing on Appreciation.

This intermingling of Judgment and Appreciation can be identified throughout the paragraph: for instance, in the line "With these words that imply an association of *something* sexual or impure, it **vividly** captures what kind of life that would be considered a disappointment and unfavorable by the general population," the student interprets the significance of the literary language using Appreciation ("words that imply an association of *something* sexual or impure") while referring to the other characters' judgments of Paul using Judgment ("what kind of life that would be considered a disappointment and unfavorable by the general population"). A distinction can thus

be drawn between the ways the student develops their own interpretations of the passage using Appreciation and describes the characters' moral attitudes and behaviors using Judgment. While the student reports the characters' judgments as expressed in the story, an analysis of the paragraph as a whole illustrates the ways the student interprets literary significances using Appreciation: for instance, in the concluding line "Cather's use of these vivid and harsh words seek to point out to the reader that the families falsely inflate the severity in Paul's aspirations as they deviate from [the] status quo," the student relates the literary language and the author's craft ("Cather's use of these vivid and harsh words") with a larger significance ("seek to point out to the reader that the families falsely inflate the severity in Paul's aspirations as they deviate from [the] status quo"). In this sentence, the student interprets the significances of the morally charged language, interpreting the ways the narrator's harsh moral judgment of Paul's deviation from normality is revealed to be ironic. In a broader sense, the student interprets the significance of the literary language in the story using Appreciation of the author's craft while relating the meanings related to moral judgment that emerge from the story using Judgment. This analysis illustrates that while interpretations may interweave resources of Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation, it is by drawing on Appreciation that students signal the interpretation of literary significance.

A sense of dynamism, as Alex expresses, arises from the student's own language choices in the essay: the student unearths the intricate, subtle dimensions of literary significance by interweaving Appreciation, Engagement, and Graduation resources that alternately intensify and soften the strength of the Attitudes infused into the interpretation. For example, by integrating intensified Graduation resources including "fully" and "vividly," the student captures the intensity of the initial impression of the narrator's moral judgment of Paul ("Cather uses language like 'orgies of living' (111) and 'debauch' (111), to **fully** emphasize the drastic contrast..."), yet these intensified expressions are later softened ("What follows this morbid desire doesn't *seem* **so** morbid after all – pleasant **even**"), echoing the way the morally charged language of Judgment in the story ("orgies of living," "debauch") softens into sensuous descriptions ("soft lights and fresh flower"). In a mirroring of literary and interpretive language, the intensity softens as the narrator's judgment is revealed to be ironic, as the morally charged words transmute into the light sensory details. Through slight shifts in their own language, the student exposes the layers of significance that emerge from the passage: while the student recognizes an initial layer of harsh moral judgment in the narrator's tone, the student then unearths a deeper understanding of the way the narrator is in actuality satirizing or critiquing the way the other characters judge Paul's behavior. In this sense, the student

illuminates the initial and deeper layers of significance by implicitly drawing on Appreciation to interpret the complexities of the literary language.

In response to my question about the student's choice of the word "seems," Alex expresses:

**Instructor's comments**:
"So I think that here, really, I mean what the author of this close reading does remarkably well is to show how a reader assembles meaning from this passage. And I think 'seem' is, you know, the language of impression. How does it seem to you? There's always a sort of subjectivity to seeming. And so, in that sentence which follows — 'the desire doesn't seem so morbid after all' — really traces the way that Cather builds up this judgmental expectation that the reader could be, you know, seduced into endorsing, and then at the end flips it. And so the impression of what the narrator's perspective or judgment of this moment is that impression is built up to seem like one thing and then is contradicted at the end. So that 'seems,' you know, is made to change.

And so, yeah, I think by using that word 'seeming' here the author of the close reading is really emphasizing how close reading is about the reader's perception. It's about the impressions that a reader assembles and analyzes in order to interpret a work."

In noting that "seems is the language of impression" and that close reading is about "the reader's perception," "the impressions that a reader assembles and analyzes in order to interpret a work," Alex conceptualizes close reading as a subjective encounter with the text, as an unfolding process of constructing meaning. While Alex employs the language of "impression" and "perception," alluding to the subjectivity immanent in the word "seems," an SFL analysis can offer a more concrete means of elucidating for students the ways writers construct interpretations that progress from initial impressions toward deeper understandings.

### 5.3.2 English 298: interpreting characterization and theme

Whereas in the English 124 essays, the students primarily focus on the intricacies of the literary language while unearthing broader significances, in the English 298 essays, the students apply close reading as a means of developing broader interpretations of characterization and thematic development.

### English 298 section 1

In English 298 section 1, Walter's section, a student interprets characterization, exposing the layers of façade and reality in Oedipus's character:

**Student's essay**:

"Sophocles chooses to introduce Oedipus as a *seemingly* benevolent ruler who takes great pride in his reputation. Regardless of whether readers are familiar with his triumph over the Sphinx's riddle, it is quickly made obvious that they ought to know. Oedipus is not content to simply introduce himself as 'Oedipus,' but feels the need to tack on, 'Oedipus, whose name is known to all,' to his introduction (Sophocles et al 3). This is an *early indicator* of his pride, a fault in itself, but it is **quickly** balanced out by the humbleness shown in his eagerness to assist those beneath him. In professing that his "heart must bear the strain of sorrow for all," Oedipus presents himself as a king who empathizes with the common man (4). Within these first few lines, his character is established as one who has earned his reputation through actions which have benefited others...The talent which Oedipus naturally holds has caused him to forget that he does not stand above others." (English 298 section 1, essay 1)

Key:
- Explicitly inscribed Appreciation (literary metalanguage) in box
- **Graduation (raising the strength of an attitude) in bold**
- Graduation resources (softening the strength of the Attitude) in *italics*

In this paragraph, the student interprets the way Sophocles initially presents "Oedipus as a seemingly benevolent ruler who takes great pride in his reputation." As the student observes, Oedipus is prideful yet eager to show his humility in serving others: "In professing that his 'heart must bear the strain of sorrow for all,' Oedipus presents himself as a king who empathizes with the common man." The student concludes by expressing, "The talent which Oedipus naturally holds has caused him to forget that he does not stand above others." In a broader sense, the student discerns the disjunction between Oedipus's presentation as "a seemingly benevolent ruler" and the pride underlying Oedipus's facade.

In this instance, the student discerns the distinction between what appears to be the case on the surface and what lingers beneath, exposing latent layers of meaning beyond the manifest. In their theorization of the rhetoric of literary criticism, Fahnestock & Secor (1991) describe this dualism as *appearance/reality*: "the perception of two entities: one more immediate, the other latent; one on the surface, the other deep; one obvious, the other the object of search" (p. 85). In applying Fahnestock and Secor's conception to the teaching of literature, Wilder & Wolfe (2016) present a *surface/depth* strategy as one in which writers "link a surface reading (or a literal line from the text) to a concept, an idea, or a thought that is not explicitly stated in the text, that is, a layer of meaning beneath the surface reading." In exposing the realities that linger beneath "seeming" appearances, the student interprets the intricate complexities of literary significance, in its diaphanous dimensions.

A linguistic analysis illustrates the ways the student exposes the layers of pride beneath Oedipus's seeming benevolence by interweaving Appreciation and Graduation. In the opening line of the paragraph, the student writes, "Sophocles chooses to introduce Oedipus as a *seemingly* benevolent ruler who takes great pride in his reputation." In this line, the student interprets the intricate complexities of the author's craft using Appreciation: Sophocles introduces an initial layer of Oedipus as a "seemingly benevolent ruler" whose "pride" underlies this façade of benevolence. Alongside Appreciation of the literary complexity, the student wields the softening Graduation "seemingly" to introduce a layer of significance between the apparent and the actual, gesturing toward the way the text insinuates that which lingers beneath the appearance of benevolence — the reality of pride in Oedipus's character. Using softening Graduation, the student invites subtle shades of significance between appearance and reality, between what *seems* to be the case and what is: Oedipus seems benevolent at first glance but is revealed to be prideful upon a further examination and as the play unfolds. In the line "This is an *early indicator* of his pride, a fault in itself, but it is **quickly** balanced out by the humbleness shown in his eagerness to assist those beneath him," the student employs Appreciation to interpret the way the text foreshadows Oedipus's pride while integrating the softened Graduation "early indicator" to signal the subtlety with which the text insinuates what underlies Oedipus's façade. Yet this softening is juxtaposed with the intensifying expression "**quickly** balanced out," in which the appearance of "humbleness" hides the underlying pride. By counterbalancing softening and intensifying Graduation expressions, the student illuminates the simultaneity of heightened appearances and subtle interiorities. In an interplay of intensifying and softening expressions, the student calibrates the layers of complexity that arise from the characterization of Oedipus — the "pride" that lingers beneath a "seeming benevolence." In these expressions, we encounter the complexities underlying literary texts — the diaphanous dimensions that arise between appearances and realities, between the latent and the manifest. By integrating finer elements of expression, students construe the subtle, complex layers of literature. Thus, the student's own language exposes glimpses of literature's intricate facets.

In response to my question about the effect of the word "seemingly" in this student's essay, Walter expresses:

> **Instructor's comments**:
> "What I think the writer is trying to do here is that, and maybe this isn't the best way to say it, but I think the intent is to say, 'Sophocles enables an initial presentation to seeing the benevolence'…

By putting in 'seemingly,' the writer is saying, 'I don't think so.' But you could easily be fooled. Otherwise, so I think that's a defensible use of the adverb there; as I said, there might be a better way to say it, but I think it's actually doing cognitive work or interpretive work… You read that 'seemingly' as telling you the writer is going to now pull the rug out from under Oedipus, whereas in its absence you wouldn't assume that; it could go a different way. And there he was not setting you up for that."

As Walter expresses, by using the softened Graduation "seemingly," the student signals a disjunction between appearance and reality in which "Sophocles enables an initial presentation to seeing the benevolence" yet later moves to "pull the rug out from under Oedipus." In the absence of the word "seemingly," the reader of the essay might assume that Oedipus is in fact benevolent despite — or in spite of — his pride. Yet this benevolence is revealed to be a facade, mirroring Fahnestock and Secor's observation that in navigating between appearances and realities, one "reach[es] through or behind the textual facade to a hidden reality" (86). A linguistic analysis elucidates the ways the student constructs an interpretation of appearances and realities. By integrating Appreciation and Graduation, the student exposes the layers of literary significance, revealing the initial layer of Oedipus as a "seemingly benevolent ruler" as juxtaposed with a deeper layer of the "pride" underlying Oedipus's facade.

### English 298 section 2

In this English 298 essay from Selene's class, section 2, the student attunes to the way the subtle differences in the connotations of a word, "calamity," echoes in microcosm the distinction between Victor's and Hamlet's states of being:

> **Student's essay**:
> "In considering whether to take arms against his sea of troubles, Victor envisions that 'the waters might close upon me and my calamities for ever' (Shelley 62) if he does plunge into the lake. The word 'calamities,' in this <u>context</u>, relates to Victor's 'deep distress, trouble, or misery, arising from some adverse circumstance or event' (OED): Victor is deeply troubled by the prospect of the monster murdering more of his family, a worry that stems from his conviction that the monster killed his brother and led to the death of Justine. His misery, which accompanies his restlessness, is related to his grief over William's and Justine's deaths. He is <u>not</u>, however, dwelling on 'the respect / That makes calamity of so long life' (Shakespeare III.i.76-77). Hamlet is <u>alluding</u> to how the uncertainty of death compels people to tolerate the misfortunes of life; he ***may*** be using the same word as Victor, <u>but</u> its <u>connotation</u> in context is **quite** disparate. <u>Yet</u> when Victor's <u>usage</u> of 'calamity' is <u>juxtaposed</u> to Hamlet's, it becomes clear that 'calamity' **also** means 'an event or circumstance causing loss or misery' (OED)."
> <u>(English 298, section 2, essay 2)</u>

Key:
- Explicitly inscribed Appreciation (literary metalanguage) in <u>underline</u>
- Engagement resources that expand the dialogic space in ***bolded italics***
- Engagement resources that contract the dialogic space in box
- Graduation resources that raise the strength of the Attitude infused into the interpretation in **bold**

By attending closely to language across *Frankenstein* and *Hamlet*, the student illustrates the way the same word, "calamity," could conjure "disparate" connotations. The student draws a distinction between the connotations of "calamity" across the texts: while Hamlet's "calamity" is conceived in a more universal sense in relation to "how the uncertainty of death compels people to tolerate the misfortunes of life," Victor's is an inner experience of turmoil, as Victor experiences "misery," "restlessness," and "grief" caused by William's and Justine's deaths. In keenly discerning these subtle shades of significance in the word "calamity," the student registers the slightest nuances of meaning in the literary language; moreover, the student relates these word-level meanings to a broader interpretation of the distinctions between the ways the figures of Hamlet and Victor are represented in the texts: while Hamlet's calamity suggests a "general misfortune," Victor's signifies a "personal misfortune." In this essay, the student progresses beyond interpreting a single word toward considering the ways the literary language illuminates contrasting characterizations of Victor and Hamlet.

In responding to this excerpt, Selene clarifies that as the class read *Frankenstein* together, while this student brought in a discussion of *Hamlet* from her own prior readings. As Selene expresses, this student's essay "pushed the boundaries of the assignment," offering an "unconventional" reading of both *Frankenstein* and *Hamlet* that set hers apart from the other essays. Selene continues,

> **Instructor's comments**:
> "And it was all the more interesting because it broke the constraints of the assignment and interesting reads to me by taking one word, 'calamity,' and close reading it, right, not just within *Frankenstein*, but from a text that she had read outside of class.
>
> So she decided that she would do close reading of a word, but she would go outside the bounds of the text and compare two figures. And so then what she did was ultimately when you look at it, I, what to me, what most interested me about it is not just a close reading of the word 'calamities,' but that it was a philosophical reading of both the figures...
>
> What she did was to think about how two figures respond to the calamities in their lives and how those authors presented. And for her Hamlet seemed to be a much more public figure than Frankenstein, who was a much more private figure. You know, so she read Hamlet's as

a kind of public tragedy, you know, the context of what happens with the observers and the royal court. Whereas Frankenstein's was a much more secretive, much more personal tragedy, but only the readers, as far as the new reading. Most of the people around Frankenstein didn't know what was going on with him."

As Selene explains, the student offers "not just a close reading of the word 'calamities,' but... a philosophical reading of both the figures;" in other words, the student closely reads word connotations with a larger aim of illuminating the two figures: Hamlet as a "public figure" whose tragedy unfolds in "the context of what happens with the observers and the royal court" and Victor as a "private figure" who is "much more secretive."

Even as literary scholar-instructors emphasize the close reading of literary texts, an examination based in SFL can elucidate the ways students can construct a nuanced literary interpretation through meanings in their own language choices. A linguistic analysis reveals the way the student interprets the intricate nuances of significance in the literary texts by interweaving Appreciation, Engagement, and Graduation. The student discerns a subtle shade of distinction between the connotations of "calamity" in the texts by drawing on Appreciation resources. The student writes, "Hamlet is alluding to how the uncertainty of death compels people to tolerate the misfortunes of life; he may be using the same word as Victor, but its connotation in context is **quite** disparate." In this line, the student first acknowledges that Hamlet "may be using the same word as Victor" by implicitly drawing on Appreciation to interpret literary language while employing Engagement expressions that expand the dialogic space for alternative perspectives. She then signals her own interpretation of the contrasting connotations of "calamity": "but its connotation in context is **quite** disparate." By using the word "connotation," which is literary metalanguage or explicit Appreciation, the student signals her interpretation of the literary language across the texts. Alongside Appreciation, the student integrates Engagement expressions that foreclose dialogic space ("but") alongside Graduation expressions that raise the strength of the interpretation ("**quite**") to calibrate the degree of the distinction in the connotation of "calamity." By counterbalancing Engagement expressions that expand ("may") and contract ("but") the dialogic space, the student acknowledges that the characters are using the same word before introducing her own interpretation.

In the following sentence, the student writes, "Yet when Victor's usage of 'calamity' is juxtaposed to Hamlet's, it becomes clear that 'calamity' **also** means 'an event or circumstance causing loss or misery' [OED]." In elucidating the dimensions of her interpretation, the student signals a contrast between the connotations of "calamity" using explicit Appreciation ("usage,"

"juxtaposed") and contracting Engagement ("yet") while calibrating an additional layer of meaning using Graduation ("**also**"). By drawing on literary metalanguage including "juxtaposed," the student signals the way she is constellating literary language across two texts, thus "go[ing] outside the bounds of the text," in Selene's words. While simply integrating literary metalanguage (e.g., "connotation," "juxtaposed") might not in itself constitute a nuanced interpretation, a knowledge of literary-specific "disciplinary terminology" (Tinkle et al.) can support students to construct and more precisely signal their interpretations of literary language and significance. A linguistic analysis thus renders visible what it means, as Selene expresses, to glean a "deeper meaning that's in the words," to reach "below the surface," to "peel away the layers" of meaning immanent in a literary text. Significantly, while Selene's assignment asked students to interpret one text, *Frankenstein*, this student constellates thematic resonances across *Frankenstein* and *Hamlet*, going beyond the assignment expectations to exhibit abilities in the advanced analysis and synthesis of two literary texts. By applying SFL to expose finer distinctions between students' writing in English 124 and 298, scholars can more precisely elucidate the ways students in English 298 employ close reading to construct broader interpretations of characterization and theme across texts in ways that go beyond the class assignment guidelines.

## 5.4 Cross-analysis of the linguistic analysis and instructors' evaluations

This analysis illustrates a correlation between the linguistic analysis and the instructors' evaluations: in the English 124 examples, what Margo describes as "ambiguous" and "multiple meanings" can be identified as instances in which students interpret the "multiple meanings" of literary language using Appreciation resources that interpret literary significances alongside Engagement resources that expand the dialogic space (e.g., "At **first** glance, the word appears to be a synonym for 'rapid' or 'quick'… In another sense, it could mean that he is too impulsive or inattentive to listen to her."). Yet abstract qualities such as "multiplicity" and "ambiguity" may elude students' understanding, raising the need for more accessible ways of describing literary interpretation. Similarly, a linguistic analysis can illuminate, as Alex describes, the ways a student progresses from "initial impressions" toward "deeper understandings": in this instance, the student calibrates the relatively superficial and deep layers of their interpretations by interweaving Appreciation and Graduation ("What follows this morbid desire doesn't *seem* **so** morbid after all -- pleasant **even**."). Such elusive concepts as "subjectivity," "perception," and the "assembling" of

meaning are thus rendered concrete by means of a detailed, systematic linguistic analysis: while the student notices the way the narrator's tone initially "seems" to judge Paul's moral behavior, the student then unearths the narrator's more earnest tone of acceptance, illustrating the way the "morbid desire" softens into a "pleasant" taste for the softness of nature's beauty. In this instance, the student interprets this shift in the narrator's tone by implicitly drawing on Appreciation to expose the subtle easing of the morbid into the pleasant. The student calibrates this tonal shift using the softening Graduation "seem" while tempering the degree to which the desire can be construed as "pleasant" by integrating the intensifying Graduation "so" and "even." The student thus illuminates the subtle layers of tone emerging between the morbid and the pleasant by interweaving Appreciation alongside softening and intensifying Graduation.

Meanwhile, my exchange with Walter illustrates the ways in which students can convey layers of superficial and deeper meanings by interweaving specific language choices into their essays, including softening Graduation ("Sophocles chooses to introduce Oedipus as a *seemingly* benevolent ruler who takes great pride in his reputation"). In this instance, a linguistic analysis illuminates the ways in which students interpret the shifting layers of appearances and realities by interweaving Appreciation to interpret literary significances and Graduation to calibrate the superficial and deeper layers of significance. Moreover, what Selene describes in broader terms as a "close reading" that expands into a "philosophical reading" of Victor and Hamlet can be seen in the meanings in the student's specific language choices. A linguistic analysis reveals the way the student interprets the contrasting connotations of "calamity" in *Frankenstein* and *Hamlet* by interweaving explicit and implicit Appreciation resources, Engagement resources that signal contrast, and Graduation resources that signal the extension or addition of meaning ("Yet when Victor's <u>usage</u> of 'calamity' is <u>juxtaposed</u> to Hamlet's, it becomes clear that 'calamity' **also** means 'an event or circumstance causing loss or misery' [OED]"). A closer examination of students' own writing can thus render legible what it means to unearth the "multiple," "deeper meaning[s]" of literary significance, elucidating the ways in which literary interpretations are constructed by means of delicate language choices.

In relation to the distinctions between the English 124 and English 298 essays, the English 124 essays present a focus on the intricacies of literary language and tone, teasing apart the connotations of the word "fast" in Dekker's play and tracing a shift between the "morbid" and "pleasant" tone in Cather's short story. Meanwhile, the English 298 essays draw on close reading as a means of crafting broader interpretations of characterization and theme: unearthing the layers of

appearances and realities in the character of Oedipus and contrasting the figures of Victor and Hamlet. More broadly, this finding illustrates a shift in emphasis from the more foundational skill of close reading in English 124 toward more advanced levels of interpretation in English 298. Importantly, this distinction can be seen independently of the class assignment expectations, as illustrated by the student essay from Selene's section, which goes beyond the assignment guidelines to juxtapose the connotations of literary language across two texts.

# CHAPTER 6
## Conclusion and Discussion

In this chapter, I present a summary of the study findings and offer scholarly contributions to the scholarship in the teaching of literature as well as pedagogical implications that can inform writing instruction and assessment.

## 6.1 Summary of findings

This study illuminates the ways student writers in English 124 and English 298 construct literary interpretations. The following table illustrates the key language resources in relation to the literary moves they enable:

| |
|---|
| Interpreting literary significances using Appreciation: <br> - "This seemingly simple word reveals the complexity of the relationship among the characters…" <br><br> Signaling multiple possible significances of literary language using Engagement: <br> - "[A word] could mean;" "However, [this word] can also carry another meaning" <br><br> Signaling superficial and deep layers of literary significance using Graduation: <br> - "Sophocles chooses to introduce Oedipus as a *seemingly* benevolent ruler who takes great pride in his reputation" |

*Table 6.1. Literary interpretive moves realized in language choices (SFL)*

As illustrated, students interpret the multiple possibilities and deeper layers of literary significance by interweaving Appreciation, Engagement, and Graduation resources, thus interpreting literature in nuanced ways. Interviews with the instructors reveal that the instructors' evaluations of student writing concord with the findings from the linguistic analysis. A cross-examination of student writing samples, course materials, and instructor interviews shows that the abstract qualities instructors value can be identified in students' language choices:

| Linguistic analysis of students' writing | Instructors' evaluations of the students' writing |
|---|---|
| Student writers summarize literary texts using Affect and Judgment<br><br>**English 124**:<br><br>Ex: "Dekker asserts that by not marrying above her class, Rose would be free of the harsh judgement of society on the couple for marrying out of line."<br><br>**English 298**:<br><br>"Although he seeks companionship, he also seeks a new experience and new knowledge." | paraphrasing as opposed to analyzing |
| Student writers interpret the multiple possibilities of literary language using Attitude (especially Appreciation), Engagement, and Graduation resources<br><br>**English 124**:<br><br>Ex: "At **first** glance, the word appears to be a synonym for 'rapid' or 'quick'… In another sense, it could mean that he is too impulsive or inattentive to listen to her."<br><br>Ex: "What follows this morbid desire doesn't *seem* **so** morbid after all -- pleasant **even**."<br><br><br>**English 298**:<br><br>Ex: "Hamlet is alluding to how the uncertainty of death compels people to tolerate the misfortunes of life; he may be using the same word as Victor, but its connotation in context is quite disparate. Yet when Victor's usage of 'calamity' is juxtaposed to Hamlet's, it becomes clear that 'calamity' **also** means 'an event or circumstance causing loss or misery' (OED)."<br><br>Ex: "Sophocles chooses to introduce Oedipus as a *seemingly* benevolent ruler who takes great pride in his reputation." | multiple meanings, ambiguity<br><br><br><br>subjectivity, perceptions, impressions, assembling meaning<br><br><br><br>close reading, philosophical reading, broke the constraints of assignment<br><br><br>initial presentation |

*Table 6.2. Summary of the correlation between the linguistic analysis and instructors' evaluations*

As this chart illustrates, instructors' abstract expectations for students' literary interpretive writing can be identified in specific language choices in students' essays; for instance, what an instructor describes as "multiple meanings" and "ambiguity" can be identified in the ways a student calibrates the multiple meanings of literary language using expressions that expand the dialogic space ("In another sense, it could mean that he is too impulsive or inattentive to listen to her"). Similarly, what an instructor describes as a student's recognition of Sophocles' "initial presentation" of Oedipus can be seen in the ways a student signals superficial and deep layers of interpretation using the softened "seemingly" ("Sophocles chooses to introduce Oedipus as a *seemingly* benevolent ruler who takes great pride in his reputation"). A linguistic analysis of students' writing thus elucidates the ways the qualities of literary interpretation that instructors value are realized in students' language choices.

This study illuminates the ways student writers in English 124 and English 298 construct literary interpretations. A linguistic analysis of the Appraisal resources in student writing samples illustrates a distinction between essays that summarize literary texts and essays that interpret literary texts: while student writers summarize literary texts by drawing on resources of Affect (evaluations of characters' emotional states) and Judgment (evaluations of moral and ethical dimensions), student writers interpret literary texts by drawing on resources of Appreciation (evaluations of the quality and significance of a literary work). Finer distinctions among the essays that interpret literary texts can be seen in the ways in which student writers interpret the multiple possible significances of literary language by interweaving Appreciation, Engagement, and Graduation. Specifically, in constructing multilayered interpretations, students integrate explicit Appreciation or literary metalanguage (e.g., "complexity," "connotation") as well as implicit Appreciation, or relating specific instances of literary language with a larger significance (when Victor's usage of 'calamity' is juxtaposed to Hamlet's, it becomes clear that 'calamity' **also** means 'an event or circumstance causing loss or misery'"). In constructing multilayered interpretations, students also integrate Engagement resources that expand and contract the dialogic space for alternative perspectives (e.g., "[This word] could mean;" "However, [a word] can also carry another meaning") and softening and intensifying Graduation resources (e.g., "This *seemingly* simple word reveals the complexity of the relationship between the characters"). By closely examining students' writing using the Appraisal framework, we can more precisely pinpoint the specific language choices that construe valued yet elusive qualities of literary interpretation including *nuance*, *complexity*, and *sophistication*.

In relation to the distinctions between students' writing in English 124 and 298, I illustrate a difference in course goals and assignments: while students in English 124 focus on unpacking the multiple possible significances of literary language ("At **first** glance, the word appears to be a synonym for 'rapid' or 'quick'… In another sense, it could mean that he is too impulsive or inattentive to listen to her"), students in English 298 present broader interpretations of characterization and theme ("Sophocles chooses to introduce Oedipus as a *seemingly* benevolent ruler who takes great pride in his reputation"). While I acknowledge the importance of the class assignments and expectations in shaping students' responses, I additionally illuminate the ways students in English 298 exhibit more advanced analysis and synthesis beyond the assignment expectations, as in the essay by the student who constellates thematic resonances across two literary texts, thus going beyond the expectations of the assignment ("Hamlet is alluding to how the uncertainty of death compels people to tolerate the misfortunes of life; he may be using the same word as Victor, but its connotation in context is quite disparate. Yet when Victor's usage of 'calamity' is juxtaposed to Hamlet's, it becomes clear that 'calamity' **also** means 'an event or circumstance causing loss or misery' [OED]"). Moreover, I elucidate the ways students in English 298 more frequently employ abstract noun phrases to develop interpretations of thematic significance ("Oedipus, as well as his followers, live in a state of metaphorical blindness for much of the play"). The linguistic analysis thus illustrates the ways students' interpretations of thematic significance in English 298 are realized in specific language choices that signal abstract themes. In the pedagogical implications that follow, I offer suggestions for crafting essay guidelines and discussing writing expectations with students in more concrete, accessible ways.

## 6.2 Scholarly implications

In contributing to the scholarship in the teaching of literature, this study illuminates through a linguistic lens the ways abstract qualities such as *nuance* and *subtlety* (Schilb, 2001) are construed in delicate language choices in students' writing. For instance, Regaignon's (2009) conception that literary texts "contain more possibilities than those which appear at first reading, or first glance" (p. 124) can be identified linguistically in the ways student writers invite alternative possible interpretations by interweaving Appreciation, Engagement, and Graduation (e.g., "At **first** glance, the word appears to be…In another sense, it could mean…"). We can thus draw a connection between the linguistic resources and the literary meanings: by integrating Appreciation alongside

Engagement resources that expand the dialogic space (e.g., "appears to be," "could mean"), students can signal a recognition of the multiple possible significances of literary language (Regaignon, 2009). Meanwhile, by integrating Graduation resources that intensify and strengthen the strength of the Attitudes infused into the interpretations, students can calibrate the superficial and deeper layers of their interpretations (e.g., "at **first** glance"), thus signaling an initial reading before delving into further layers of significance (Heinert & Chick, 2017). I thus elucidate the ways a recognition of *possibilities* of significance can be signaled using Engagement, while a recognition of the *layers* of significance can be signaled using Graduation. The findings thus illustrate the ways writers signal the multiple possibilities and layers of literary significance by employing slight language choices. While literary scholar-practitioners emphasize an attention to the language of literary texts, an attention to the language of students' own writing renders legible what it means to tease apart "the subtle nuances of textual complexity" (Chick, Hassel, & Haynie, p. 415), illuminating the salient language choices that construe literary-specific meanings.

The findings of the study likewise contribute to the linguistic scholarship on students' writing about literature. In complicating Rothery and Stenglin's (2005) that "conviction" lends a strength to one's literary interpretive argument (p. 233, p. 242), I illustrate that by interweaving softening Graduation expressions, writers can illuminate the subtler shades of literary significance, which emerge on a cline between what seems to be and what is revealed to be the case upon a closer examination. I postulate that these differences in findings may reflect the differences across the courses and assignments in this study, as well as the curricular differences between the Australian public secondary school system, which emphasizes the ethical dimensions of literature, and college-level literary interpretation, which encourages investigations into the nuances and complexities of literary texts. Within an ethical framework, intensified expressions may, as Rothery and Stenglin contend, seem "natural" in conveying the fullness of human emotion, yet in college-level literary interpretation, students are expected to progress from empathizing with characters' emotional states to interpreting the "subtle, intricate dimensions" of textual significance (Meg Sweeney). Such a progression from empathic and ethical considerations toward interpretations of significance can be seen in the Attitudinal resources in students' writing: while Rothery and Stenglin found that the secondary students primarily employed resources of Judgment, I found that college students draw on resources of Appreciation to interpret the intricacies of literary significance. While Rothery and Stenglin's study is situated in a secondary examination context, I illustrate that college-level writing about literature courses may demand that students discern more delicate degrees of nuance that

emerge from literary texts. In extending previous scholarship to the college context, I expose the ways softened expressions can create qualities of nuance in writers' interpretations. In particular, I find that by integrating Appreciation alongside softened Graduation, students can calibrate the initial or superficial layers of significance, as in the way a student signals the superficial and deeper layers of Oedipus's character using the softened "seemingly" ("Sophocles chooses to introduce Oedipus as a *seemingly* benevolent ruler who takes great pride in his reputation"). By juxtaposing softened and intensified Graduation, students can calibrate the layers of appearance and reality, for instance, in the line "The *seemingly* absent is **actually** present," a literary critic signals the layers of presence and absence in Larkin's poem by interweaving the softened "*seemingly*" alongside the intensified "**actually**," thus recognizing the subtle nuances of literary complexity.

Finally, an examination of students' literary interpretive writing reveals complex, layered readings that complicate the templates that writing studies scholars offer for teaching literary interpretation. For instance, Chick, Hassle, and Haynie (2009) offer templates that seek to elucidate the "multilayered" nature of literary significance (e.g., "the text is about ____, ____, and ____"; "On a literal level, the passage denotes ____, but it also figuratively invokes ____ and ____," p. 418). Yet perhaps paradoxically, the dichotomy of the "literal" and the "figurative" might not capture the complexity of literary significance, which is fluid and dynamic, shifting between what is exposed or concealed at a given moment in the text. While templates can be useful – Selene uses Wilder and Wolfe's strategies for teaching students to interpret surfaces and depths, as do I in my own teaching – a finer-grained linguistic analysis can enable the development of more precise, dynamic strategies that can guide students' writing. As I illustrate through the analysis of students' writing samples, student writers excavate the ways in which literary significances shift over the slightest intervals, emerging and dissipating over the course of a literary text. In contrast with the somewhat static templates offered by Wilder & Wolfe and Chick, Hassle, & Haynie, students' writing unsettles a strict, static binary between surfaces and depths, appearances and realities: for instance, in the line "What follows this morbid desire doesn't *seem* **so** morbid after all-- pleasant **even**," the student writer expresses the fluidity with which the "morbid" eases into the "pleasant," exposing the fluctuations of tone that by turns manifest and obscure as the passage unfolds. As construed in the student's language choices, the morbidity is lessened, yet lingers ("doesn't *seem* **so** morbid after all") as the tone reaches toward the pleasant ("pleasant **even**"). In the line "the softening "seem" signals the indeterminate nature of appearances, while the intensifying "so," juxtaposed with the contracting "doesn't," calibrates the degree to which the writer commits to the

claim. Meanwhile, the intensifying "even" reaches toward the possibility that Paul's desire can be construed as "pleasant." As modulated by the alternately softening ("*seem*") and intensifying ("**so**," "**even**") Graduation resources, this interpretation illustrates the ways the narrator's tone can amplify and diminish by delicate degrees, as the "morbid desire" gradually eases into the "pleasant" as the desire "doesn't *seem* **so** morbid after all." In the literary texts and in the students' writing, meaning materializes into being, shaped and unshaped by the contours of language itself. In dismantling the binaristic oppositions that the templates suggest, we can conceptualize significance as fluid rather than fixed, lingering at the threshold of becoming. Moreover, in refining our understandings of literary interpretive writing beyond broader interpretive moves, we can more precisely pinpoint the finer language choices that create a sense of *nuance* in an interpretation, exposing the ways student writers discern the subtle shades of implication immanent in a word or image, the slightest fluctuations of tone that unravel across a passage.

## 6.3 Pedagogical implications

In this section, I offer implications for writing instruction and assessment based on the findings of the linguistic analysis of students' writing samples and the cross-analysis of writing samples and instructors' evaluations of students' writing.

### 6.3.1 Implications of the linguistic analysis

In the following, I note suggestions for pedagogy and assessment below based on the findings of Chapter 5. In relation to literary scholar-instructors' expectations for literary interpretation, the finding that 7 out of 24 essays, or approximately 30% of the essays, primarily summarize the texts indicates that supporting students to progress beyond summary to *interpret* the complexities of literary significance becomes crucial to cultivating their abilities in literary critical writing. As discussed in the review of scholarship, literary scholar-instructors expect students to not merely restate textual action but to delve into the meanings and significances underlying particular moments in a text, echoing Herrington's (1988) observation that relatively successful undergraduate literature essays explored relationships between meaning and effect, addressing questions including "why," "how," and "so what," or why a claim is significant. In supporting these writers to interpret literature, we might encourage them to attend closely to the significances that arise from literary

language. For instance, in illustrating the way a student in English 298 constellates an interpretation of literary language across two texts, instructors could guide students in juxtaposing the connotations of the word "calamity" in *Frankenstein* and *Hamlet*, supporting students to read passages from each text closely and to notice the way "calamity" carries a more universal meaning in *Hamlet* as opposed to a more personal meaning related to Victor's misery in *Frankenstein*. In scaffolding close reading, instructors can encourage students to examine specific elements of literary language such as word choices and images in detail and to interpret these instances of literary language in relation to the broader significances of the texts. By guiding students through the ways model student writers construct literary interpretations, instructors can support students to attend more closely to literary language and to unravel further layers of meaning that emerge from a literary text.

A linguistic attention to students' writing can support students and instructors with refining their understanding of the ways meanings needed for literary interpretation are made in choices that focus on broader themes (Appreciation) and calibrate the layers of significance (Graduation, Engagement). For instructors, SFL offers a fine-tuned metalanguage for more precisely articulating their expectations for students' writing, though I acknowledge that SFL metalanguage can be daunting and complex in its layered abstractions, and in the way terms including "Attitude," "Judgment," "Appreciation," and "Engagement" defy commonsense understandings of these terms. In a practical sense, it may be difficult for instructors to find the time and resources to learn the tools of Appraisal; similarly, students might find it challenging to grapple with an added layer of linguistic metalanguage beyond the literary metalanguage that they may be expected to learn as part of a course. While it might not be necessary for instructors and students to learn the technical linguistic metalanguage of Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation, an understanding of the ways students draw on specific language resources to craft literary interpretations could enable instructors to support students to recognize the ways literary-specific meanings are realized in specific rhetorical strategies and language choices, for instance, in the ways students unpack the multiple significances of literary language using expressions that open up spaces for alternative perspectives (e.g., "[This word] could mean"). By guiding students to recognize the ways students can draw on resources that "open up" or "close down" spaces for other viewpoints, for instance, or by identifying specific examples of the ways students can draw on resources that **intensify** or *soften* the strength of their claims (e.g., "This *seemingly* simple word reveals the complexity of the relationship among the characters…"), instructors can call students' attention to the ways specific

language choices create literary-specific meanings in more readily accessible ways that might not necessitate introducing students to the technical terms of Appraisal.

Importantly, a linguistic view of the ways students summarize literary texts by describing characters' feelings and moral judgments and interpret literary themes and significance can offer instructors a concrete language for discussing with students what counts as summary and what counts as interpretation. For instance, while one instructor's essay prompt encourages students to be careful that they are not "relying on summary instead of analysis," this guidance appears as a bullet point that is not further elaborated upon with explanations or examples. By reviewing examples of summary alongside examples of interpretation, instructors can support students with recognizing the ways summaries and interpretations are constructed in writing, for instance, the ways students describe characters' feelings and moral behaviors and judgments or interpret the possible significances of literary language. Such a linguistic attention to writing could help students understand what constitutes summary and interpretation. Moreover, such classroom discussions could support students in understanding the ways descriptions of characters' feelings and motivations may be less valued in literary interpretation, while interpretations of the multiple possibilities of literary significance are often more valued, especially in the context of close reading. In this sense, a linguistic attention to students' writing can render explicit aspects of literary interpretive writing that might otherwise remain implied or unstated.

An explicit understanding of the ways language creates literary-specific meanings can support pedagogy in concrete ways: while guiding students to review model essays, instructors can immerse students in examining the language choices that realize literary interpretive moves. For instance, in scaffolding literary interpretive writing, instructors could elucidate to students the ways writers signal and develop interpretations of literary significance, thus progressing beyond describing feelings and judgments toward interpreting the implications for the characters' relationships (e.g., "This seemingly simple word reveals the complexity of the relationship among the characters…"). Examining the ways this student draws on literary metalanguage (e.g., "reveals," "complexity") in relation to the larger unfolding meanings in the essay can support students not only to interpret literary meanings but also to clarify for the reader the ways in which their own interpretations contribute novel insights into a literary work. As another illustration, in encouraging students to consider the multiple possibilities, layers, and shades of literary significance, instructors can prompt students to identify instances where a writer unpacks the connotative intricacies of literary language using expressions that expand the dialogic space (e.g., "[This word] could mean;" "However, [the

word] can also carry another meaning") or to discern moments where a writer delves into deeper layers of meaning by integrating resources that intensify or soften the strength of the claims infused into the interpretation (e.g., "Sophocles chooses to introduce Oedipus as a *seemingly* benevolent ruler who takes great pride in his reputation"). A linguistic understanding of writing can offer students new insights into the ways interpretive meanings can be constructed in language choices that realize those meanings in ways that instructors value.

At the same time, I wish to acknowledge the complex, interwoven nature of the Appraisal resources: while a general distinction emerges between the ways students summarize literary texts by drawing on Affect and Judgment and interpret literary texts by drawing on Appreciation, resources of Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation may be simultaneously interwoven into an interpretation, as in the line "Just as Shelley's climate descriptions can **evoke**—or **invoke**—a sense of lightness in Victor's joy, they can also augur his doom," in which an English 298 student interprets the significance behind the affective meanings in the novel ("Victor's joy" and "doom") by simultaneously drawing on Appreciation and Affect. This example illustrates the ways Appraisal resources may operate in intersecting and simultaneous ways both in a literary text and in a student's essay; considering that literature encompasses meanings related to emotional and ethical dimensions, this finding implies that it might be infeasible to advise students to simply avoid drawing on Affect and Judgment. Beyond simply instructing students not to employ Affect or Judgment, instructors could encourage students to focus on identifying literary *meanings* that emerge from a text – which may include meanings of Affect or Judgment – and to interpret the significance behind these meanings using Appreciation. For example, instructors might draw a contrast between the following two students' integration of affective meanings into their essays:

> 1. "When her and John move in, she doesn't want to stay in that room; by the time they are to leave she is completely obsessed with it." (English 124 section 2, essay 6)

> 2. "When describing the color of the wallpaper the narrator says it is 'repellant,' 'revolting,' 'unclean,' and 'sickly' (43). These indicate the feelings of disgust the narrator associates with the wallpaper." (English 124 section 2, essay 1)

While the first student summarizes what happens in the story using Affect, describing the narrator's feelings in relation to the room ("she doesn't want to stay in that room; by the time they are to leave she is completely obsessed with it"), the second student interprets the ways the literary language creates affective meanings ("These indicate the feelings of disgust the narrator associates with the wallpaper"). In reviewing these examples with students, instructors might draw students' attention to

the ways the second student relates the literary language – the descriptions of the wallpaper – with a significance related to affect, while the first student describes what the narrator feels as opposed to interpreting the ways the literary language in the story creates meanings of affect. In guiding students to progress from summary toward interpretation, instructors could encourage students to attend closely to specific instances of literary language, such as words or images, and to relate these instances with larger interpretations of significance. This example could serve as an illustration of the ways students draw on meanings of affect differently to summarize and to interpret literary texts, which in turn illustrates the intersecting, embedded nature of the Appraisal resources.

An understanding of the key differences between students' writing in English 124 and English 298 can illuminate for instructors the ways students' writing illustrates the curricular goals of each class: a focus on close reading in English 124 and an emphasis on broader interpretations in English 298. In teaching English 124, instructors can guide students to tease apart the intricacies of specific elements of literary language, including particular words, images, and tones, for instance, in teasing apart the ways the narrator's tone shifts from irony to earnestness in Cather's short story "Paul's Case." In this instance, instructors can encourage students to attend closely to a passage, scaffolding for the students the way Cather initially employs morally charged language such as "orgies of living," "morbid desire," and "debauch" to convey what seems to be a harsh moral judgment of Paul's behavior, then shifts into describing Paul's preferences for "soft lights and fresh flowers," thus conveying an acceptance of Paul's desires. By supporting students to attune closely to these subtle shifts in narrative tone, instructors can guide students in recognizing the irony behind Cather's morally charged language, which in actually critiques the other characters' judgment of Paul; instructors can help students to discern the way Cather's more earnest tone emerges from the end of the passage, in the sensuous descriptions of "soft lights and fresh flowers." In this way, instructors can elucidate the ways students can trace the emergence and shifting of narrative tone in a passage, illuminating the manner in which students can develop initial understandings of a passage that are later reversed as new layers of meaning arise. Meanwhile, in teaching English 298, instructors can encourage students to employ close reading as a scaffold toward developing broader interpretations of character and theme, for instance, in unearthing the layers of appearance and reality in Oedipus as a character. For instance, instructors could guide students in closely examining the play as it unfolds, recognizing the way Sophocles initially presents Oedipus as a benevolent leader before exposing the pride lingering beneath Oedipus's façade of benevolence. In this instance, instructors could clarify for students what an interpretation of the layers of characterization might look like in an essay. With

this understanding of the emphasis of the course, students could focus on closely interpreting literary language in English 124 or on constructing broader interpretations in English 298. Such a careful attention to essay writing could support students to understand the curricular goals and expectations of each class and to craft interpretations that reach toward achieving these goals in ways that the instructors value.

### 6.3.2 Implications of the cross-analysis of student writing samples and instructors' evaluations

While I argue for a closer attention to the language of writing, in a few instances, the instructors' perspectives complicate my focus on language: as the conversations with the instructors reveal, simply integrating words and phrases such as "at first glance" or "upon a closer examination" might not in itself constitute a nuanced literary interpretation. As the cross-analysis of the students' writing and the instructors' evaluations shows, novice student writers may integrate literary metalanguage in ways that do not accord with literary interpretive meanings; for instance, an English 124 student employs the phrase "much deeper than surface level" in ways that summarize a character's feelings as opposed to interpreting the significance of literary language ("Lincoln says that 'much care' would die which lives in his 'breast,' meaning that the anguish he feels by the dilemma at hand is much deeper than surface level"). Such a finding indicates the importance of discussing with students what constitutes more and less valued meanings in literary interpretation, and how these meanings are constructed in language. While discussing example essays with students, instructors might call students' attention to the ways students integrate literary metalanguage to summarize literary texts; for instance, instructors could guide students to recognize the ways the English 124 student above describes the depth of a character's feelings as opposed to interpreting the significance of the literary language. By discussing such examples with students, instructors can raise students' consciousness of the ways writers might use language to summarize literature, thus exposing the limitations of simply "plugging in" literary phrases into an essay. Meanwhile, in discussing essays that interpret literary texts, instructors could engage students in examining the valued literary meanings in the essays, for instance, in noticing the ways writers interpret the multiple layers and shades of significance in literary language. In illuminating the ways literary interpretations are constructed in writing, instructors can guide students in attending closely to the *meanings* created in the language choices beyond individual words and phrases. By focusing on the ways literary

interpretive moves are realized in specific language choices, instructors can raise students' conscious awareness of which meanings are valued in literary interpretation and why.

Such an attention to the meanings needed for literary interpretation could likewise enable instructors to more closely align the guidelines and criteria in their essay prompts with descriptive, identifiable examples of proficient writing and to refine their commentary on students' writing beyond impressionistic evaluations. For instance, while one instructor's criteria for an excellent close reading essay expect students to interpret texts in ways that are "nuanced, surprising, and original" and to incorporate "textual evidence, analysis, and argument," such abstract and generalized descriptors may elude students' understanding. As Melzer writes in *Assignments Across the Curriculum*, assignment prompts may ask students to apply general rhetorical strategies such as "evaluate," "argue," or "describe," yet these strategies may differ across disciplines (p. 64), yet as David Bartholomae argues, words such as "analyze, define, describe, argue . . . are located in a very specialized discourse. Analysis, for example, is a very different activity— its textual forms, that is, vary greatly— in an English course, a history course, a sociology course or a chemistry course" (Bartholomae, 1983, p. 310). As Melzer continues, rather than responding to generalized expectations for academic writing, students may "encounter more sophisticated and discipline-specific genres of research writing, or assignments that are connected not to abstractions about what a specific discipline values, but rather to the specific criteria or rubric of the individual instructor or assignment" (p. 68). Melzer recommends that students attend to "the discourse community context and the individual instructor's expectations" (p. 124).

In relation to the assignment prompts analyzed in this study, a need arises for instructors to more precisely articulate writing expectations such as *unpacking*, *nuance*, and *complexity*. As Heinert & Chick (2017) write, "We ask students to react and interact with literature with increasing nuance, complexity, and expansiveness; therefore, we should first unpack—for ourselves and with the students—what we mean by these requests" (p. 326). For instance, instructors might unpack what we mean by the common disciplinary metaphor of "unpacking": three out of the four essay prompts ask students to "unpack" ("'Unpack' minute details of the text, such as word choice, imagery, sentence structure, etc.", "unpack and analyze the details that make [the passage] complex", "What do you notice there that you can unpack in more detail?"). In essay prompts, instructors could offer more concrete explanations and examples of student essays that unpack the multiple meanings of literary language. For instance, instructors might detail the way an English 124 student considers alternative possible interpretations of the word "fast" in Dekker's play. In including an excerpt of

this essay in a prompt, instructors could explain the way the student begins by considering an initial, literal meaning of the word as "rapid" or "quick" before unpacking alternative possible meanings of the word as "impulsive" or as its opposite, "steadfast" or "constant." In this way, instructors could render more transparent to students what is meant by general instructions to "unpack" the details of literary language. In this instance, unpacking entails identifying specific words or phrases that might carry multiple meanings, then breaking down the layers of possible meaning in the word: first, a superficial, apparent meaning ("rapid" or "quick"), then alternative meanings ("steadfast" or "constant"). Instructors could then detail the way the student relates these possible meanings with the implications for the characters' relationship: the character may be too impulsive or may instead be steadfast in their manner.

In the essay guidelines, instructors could explain that "unpacking" means considering multiple, alternative possible interpretations of a word or image in the text; instructors could encourage students to identify initial, superficial, or apparent meanings of the word before delving into further possible connotations or excavating meanings that might be in tension or contradiction with each other, as in the contrast between "impulsive" and "steadfast." For instance, instructors could prompt students with questions such as: *Identify a particular word or image in the text that is intriguing to you, that seems contradictory or ambiguous, or that might hold more than one meaning. As you read the passage and write your essay, "unpack" the word or image: what are the possible ways this word or image might be interpreted? What would a literal or superficial meaning of the word or image be? What would be another, perhaps metaphorical, layer of meaning? Do any of these possible meanings contradict with each other, and if so, why do you think this is? How might these meanings affect or change the ways we understand the text, the characters' relationships, the themes, etc.?* With a linguistic attention to students' writing, instructors could present an example student excerpt annotated with the instructors' commentary on the ways the interpretation is constructed using specific language choices. For instance, instructors might highlight places where the student offers an initial reading using phrases such as "at first glance, the word appears to be..." and unearths alternative meanings using phrases such as "another meaning of the word could be..." At the same time, instructors could encourage students to focus on the meanings created in the essay as opposed to encouraging the uncritical integration of literary words and phrases. Guiding students to comparatively analyze students' writing that employs literary metalanguage in more and less valued ways could raise students' consciousness of the ways students construct literary meanings; for instance, a comparative analysis of the essay that interprets the multiple possible interpretations of the word "fast" and the essay that summarizes the character's

feelings in the play ("the anguish he feels by the dilemma at hand is much deeper than surface level") could enable students to recognize ways of attending to the *meanings* realized in their language choices. Such an unpacking of what we mean by "unpacking" can enable students to more concretely understand our expectations for their writing and to apply these understandings while writing interpretive essays.

The findings likewise raise implications for instructors to more precisely articulate their expectations for students' writing in English 298. While the essay guidelines prompt students in general terms to interpret theme and characterization ("theme" and the "development of plot and character"), a need arises for instructors to more concretely illustrate what is meant by generalized strategies such as "discuss," "consider," and "explore" ("Choose a passage—a speech, a relatively short dialogue, a brief piece of narrative—and discuss its significance," "consider the significance of your chosen passage in the context of the play as a whole," "explore each example in more detail"). For instance, in illustrating what might constitute discussing the significance of a passage in relation to characterization and thematic development, instructors could offer an example of a student's essay that examines the role of blindness in Oedipus: "Repetition of language and imagery referring to blindness becomes particularly salient when Teiresias' literal blindness makes Oedipus' obliviousness painfully obvious." By dissecting the way this student interprets the repetition of the imagery of blindness within the larger theme of blindness in the play, instructors could elucidate to students what it means to "consider formal matters" such as "repetition" in relation to its "significance...in the context of the play as a whole." In addition, instructors could raise students' consciousness of the ways the student unearths the literal and metaphorical dimensions of blindness by distilling ideas into abstract noun phrases: "Oedipus, as well as his followers, live in a state of metaphorical blindness for much of the play." In this example, the student condenses concrete observations of the ways blindness manifests in the play into an abstracted conception expressed as a noun phrase: "a state of metaphorical blindness." In sharing this example with students, instructors could draw students' attention to the ways this student constructs an interpretation of thematic significance by distilling ideas into abstract themes that can then be discussed further in the essay. At the same time, instructors could advise students to think critically about their language choices: beyond simply asking students to integrate dense noun phrases into their writing, instructors could encourage students to distill their observations into themes that they can then develop and refine over the course of an essay. In this way, instructors can render visible to students the ways literary interpretations are constructed linguistically in students' essays, thus elucidating the

ways expectations such as "consider[ing] the significance of your chosen passage in the context of the play as a whole" can be explicitly identified in specific language choices that realize these meanings that instructors value. Equipped with a systematic knowledge of language choices that are specific to literary interpretation, instructors can more precisely pinpoint the instances in students' essays that construct disciplinarily valued meanings and styles within their particular class contexts of English 124 and 298.

In the essay guidelines, instructors could prompt students with questions such as: *Identify examples of repeated imagery (or other formal features such as meter, rhyme, etc.) in the play. How might this imagery (or other formal features) be interpreted in literal or figurative ways? How might the imagery (or other formal features) carry implications for our understanding of the play, of the characters and themes?* Instructors could then accompany these suggested questions with excerpts from students' essays annotated with instructors' commentary. With a linguistic understanding of students' writing, instructors might even annotate excerpts from students' essays for instances in which students convey abstract themes using condensed noun phrases (e.g., "a state of metaphorical blindness"). In this way, instructors could draw students' attention to the ways interpretations of thematic significance are constructed in specific language choices even while preserving a focus on the literary *meanings* created in these language choices: a recognition of the ways recurring images of blindness could carry larger thematic significances. While this example essay prompt might be specific to this particular student's essay on the imagery of blindness in *Oedipus*, instructors could adjust the scope and range of the essay prompts according to the breadth or depth of investigation that they are seeking in an assignment.

In a broader sense, by working in reverse – that is, by studying model essays and creating assignment guidelines in response to students' actual writing – instructors can articulate their expectations for students' writing in more precise ways that are attentive to students' specific writerly choices, including the ways students invite interpretive possibilities using expressions that expand the dialogic space and calibrate the layers of their interpretations using intensified and softened expressions. In this sense, students and instructors can co-construct meaning in negotiating the expectations of an assignment: as the analysis of students' writing reveals, students' essays may transcend the assignment expectations, displaying an inventiveness in relation to the development of ideas and in the expression of linguistic style, as in the English 298 student whose own language choices play with the thematic resonances of the literary novel, in the interplay of the material and the spiritual (e.g., "the texture of a bad omen," "the shape of its anxiety"). In attending to meanings in students' language choices and in adapting essay prompts in response to students' writing,

instructors can discover the ways surprising interpretive and creative possibilities may emerge from students' writing. In turn, instructors can create more accessible, transparent approaches to supporting students to grow into literary ways of interpreting and writing.

## 6.4 Contributions of the study

This study contributes an innovative framework that illuminates students' writing through a linguistic lens: a systematic approach to highlighting what students need to understand about how literary interpretation is achieved. In reinterpreting literary scholar-instructors' expectations for students' writing in linguistic terms that relate to the instantiation of literary interpretation in students' essays, the study offers a new perspective of writing that can guide literary and writing pedagogy; an attention to language in writing can raise students' and instructors' consciousness of the ways language works to create valued meanings in writing. By precisely pinpointing the ways literary interpretive moves are realized in language, the analysis elucidates the ways interpretation and analysis can be modeled for students through an attention to the ways language choices shape the meanings. In turn, a metalinguistic awareness of writing can sharpen students' and instructors' abilities to recognize and describe what constitutes a nuanced, multilayered interpretation of literature. In elucidating the ways nuanced interpretations as conceptualized by instructors is construed in writing, the findings render explicit the often impressionistic descriptors of literary interpretation, creating pathways toward more concrete, accessible approaches to teaching writing.

While literary instructors have long emphasized a careful attention to the intricacies of language in literary texts, this study illustrates that close literary interpretation is a process constituted as much by writing as it is by reading. A careful attention to students' own writing can elucidate the ways students interpret the larger significance and possibilities for interpretation that are signaled by particular language choices. In illuminating the intimate intertwining of reading and writing, the study exposes a need for a more sustained attunement to the *writerly* dimensions of literary interpretation. In other words, close reading in the composition classroom needs to be expanded to encompass "close readings" of students' own writing, in teasing apart the ways students craft nuanced interpretations in their writing. For instance, students might recognize qualities of nuance in literary language yet struggle with crafting nuanced interpretations in their own writing. In addressing the challenges that novice students might encounter while reaching toward nuanced interpretations, the findings elucidate the ways students integrate seemingly slight language choices

to demonstrate a recognition of multiple interpretive possibilities and deeper layers of significance. The study can sharpen instructors' and students' awareness of the ways students strive to articulate their own interpretations in nuanced ways. In bridging a gap between readerly recognition and writerly expression, the study weaves a writerly thread into the interwoven tapestry of interpretation and renders legible a writerly dimension that is often tacitly implied or subsumed into the readerly focus of interpretation.

**6.5 Tensions**

While I offer pedagogical implications above, including suggestions for ways instructors can more precisely articulate our writing expectations in essay prompts, I recognize that providing specific, illustrative examples of close reading could expose tensions between creativity and constraint. In offering concrete explanations and examples of student essays, instructors may delimit possibilities of interpretation and constrain alternative ways of interpreting literary language and significance. For instance, in the example essay prompts I offer above, I encourage instructors to craft prompts that guide students to examine the literal and superficial meanings of the imagery of blindness or to unpack the initial and deeper layers of significance in the word "fast." Such an approach to explicitly articulating our expectations for students' writing may be useful in clarifying what it means to "unpack" literary language, yet in specifying the steps of close reading (e.g., "*What would a literal or superficial meaning of the word or image be? What would be another, perhaps metaphorical, layer of meaning?*"), instructors might unwittingly constrain possibilities for students' close readings, creating a template or recipe for close reading that students might uncritically reproduce in their essays. A challenge arises: how might instructors scaffold close literary interpretation in clear, concrete, and specific ways without reducing interpretation to a repeatable formula? One possible approach could be to offer multiple examples of different ways students interpret literary language: for instance, instructors could guide students in examining the ways one student considers the differing connotations of the word "calamity" across *Hamlet* and *Frankenstein*, while another student discerns the way the scenery descriptions in *Frankenstein* illuminate the power of nature. By sharing examples of the varying ways students craft literary interpretations, instructors could model what constitutes a close reading while also inviting spaces for inventive, surprising, or original interpretations.

In relation to drawing on literary metalanguage, drawing on the SFL metalanguage could likewise enable instructors to support students in crafting literary interpretations in ways that

establish clear expectations for interpreting and writing while inviting spaces for students to discover multiple, alternative ways of interpreting literature. In drawing students' attention to their language choices, instructors could model different ways of showing openness to multiple possible layers and shades of significance. In guiding students to examine a model essay, for instance, instructors could illustrate the ways a student displays an openness to alternative interpretive possibilities using expressions that expand the dialogic space (e.g., "at first glance, the word *appears* to be…in another sense, it *could* mean…"), attuning to the subtle shades of literary language. A focus on word- and sentence-level language choices thus offers new ways of modeling an "openness" to alternative interpretive possibilities. In illustrating a different way of signaling the layers of significance, instructors could guide students to recognize the way a writer calibrates surface and depth meanings by interweaving language choices that soften and intensify the strength of an interpretation (e.g., The symbols, although *seemingly* absent, **actually** create present time"). In this sentence, the writer discerns the apparent absence using the softened "seemingly" and recognizes the actual presence using the intensified "actually." In sharing this example with students, instructors could model how softening and intensifying expressions create surface and depth meanings that could be put into the service of interpretation. By guiding students to focus on sentence-level choices, instructors could elucidate the different ways literary interpretations are constructed in finer language choices.

A related tension emerges from the question over the extent to which literary close reading, as conceived and enacted by literary scholar-instructors, perpetuates or resists standard language ideologies. In particular, the emphasis in close reading on an attention to the intricacies of minute literary elements such as word choices, images, and tones may retain a New Critical focus on form and technique; as Smith (2016) argues, such a focus on the "atomized," "scientified," "decontextualized" elements of literary language may come at the expense of investigations into broader meanings or historical or political contexts. In guiding students to excavate the connotations of a word or image, to attune to techniques such as rhyme or enjambment, we might advance a conception of language as minute, static, isolated elements to be extracted for close examination, pieced apart and reconstructed. By attending closely to the smaller details of literary language, we might elide an understanding of language in its broader relation to audience, purpose, and genre; as well as history, culture, and society. Moreover, close reading might be conceived as a privileged form — as one that originates from and is reproduced in elite, Western traditions of literary criticism, traditions that may exclude alternative cultural modes of knowledge production. Such an observation carries implications for encouraging students' literacies in ways that honor and nurture

diverse identities and multiple ways of knowing and being, that foster inclusion rather than exclusivity. For instance, instructors might encourage students to study the structures and assets of different dialects of English, to experiment with the possibilities and effects of various dialects and registers on different audiences, and to investigate aspects of language change, including connotations of words and usage practices, in order to understand its historical and political implications.

Yet at the same time, close reading can offer students an entry point into attending to writers' choices and their effects, a means of appreciating the images and tones of language, an avenue toward disentangling the entanglements of language and meaning, a pathway toward the discovery of original insights. In navigating these tensions between the possibilities and limitations of close reading, we could support students to recognize and learn ways of interpreting and writing that have traditionally been valued in the literary studies community. For instance, we could guide students to recognize ways of signaling multiple interpretive possibilities using expressions that calibrate additional meanings ("Yet when Victor's usage of 'calamity' is juxtaposed to Hamlet's, it becomes clear that 'calamity' **also** means 'an event or circumstance causing loss or misery' (OED)"). In supporting students to attend to the ways specific language choices create valued meanings, we could render visible forms of literary interpretation that might otherwise be privileged or exclusive, making close reading more readily accessible to novice student writers. Through the careful explication of potential choices students could make, we could assist the language development of students from diverse language backgrounds including those whose first language is not English, thus creating avenues toward more democratized writing pedagogies. We might conceptualize close reading as a particular linguistic register that is specific to literary interpretation and as one particular form of interpretation among others, which might encompass historical or theoretical approaches to literary criticism. In this sense, we might introduce students to close reading as a way of expanding students' repertoire of interpreting and writing even while raising students' critical consciousness of its status as a historically privileged form.

## 6.6 Affordances and limitations of the study and implications for future research

While I situate this study in linguistic theory, I recognize that an SFL attention to language offers just one tool among many others; a linguistic attention to students' writing can be conceptualized as one thread interwoven into a multidimensional tapestry of approaches to teaching

writing and literature, which might include instructors' emphasis on literary ways of describing close reading such as *surface and depth readings*, *multilayered meanings*, and the *assembling of meaning*. While acknowledging its limitations, I suggest that an attention to students' language choices in writing can offer an additional tool in instructors' toolbox, one that complements and expands rather than replaces the thoughtful, rich, and committed work that instructors are already doing in writing about literature classrooms, for instance, in guiding students to annotate a literary passage or to apply Wilder and Wolfe's strategies for constructing surface and depth readings. At the same time, I contend that the specific utility of this language-based approach to teaching writing lies in the ability to illuminate the less immediately visible or apparent aspects of students' writing, including rhetorical strategies or language choices that may lie beneath the surface of students' and instructors' discursive consciousness or ability to articulate. For instance, students might not be fully aware of the ways literary interpretations are constructed in language choices that expand and contract dialogic space for alternative perspectives (e.g., "However, the word can carry another meaning"); a word-level attention to the ways meanings are realized in writing can support students who might struggle with crafting interpretations, including second language learners and multilingual students. An attention to the language of students' writing can elucidate for instructors the ways students reach toward deeper readings in their language choices in ways that might not align with valued ways of interpreting, as in the case of the student who employs the phrase "much deeper than surface level" to summarize rather than interpret a text. Drawing on the SFL metalanguage to support students in expanding their linguistic repertoires can thus enable instructors to more precisely pinpoint language choices and rhetorical effects that may otherwise remain tacit for students and instructors.

In looking forward to future research, I plan to extend this study to the specific domain of second language writing. A linguistic approach to writing may be especially relevant for L2 writers, who might struggle with word- and sentence-level issues while composing essays; in addressing this pedagogical challenge and in drawing on my own background as an immigrant and an ESL student, I intend to examine the ways in which second language writers craft literary interpretive essays, with a particular attention to the difficulties L2 students may encounter in constructing essays. In particular, a close attention to the language of writing could equip students with specific options for learning academic registers. Such studies could in turn inform pedagogical approaches to supporting L2 students' literary interpretive writing, including approaches to scaffolding interpretive moves, annotating model essays for writers' choices, and illuminating the ways finer language choices create

valued meanings in writing. I likewise aim to expand the scope of my research to encompass longitudinal studies of students' writing over the undergraduate years and across the curriculum, revealing the ways students compose in particular disciplinary contexts and over the stages of schooling. In situating my research in a writing in the disciplines approach, I strive to elucidate valued ways of writing with an aim of supporting students to enter broader scholarly conversations across contexts. To nurture students' development as writers, I believe it is vital to understand more fully the ways they write themselves into being.

## 6.7 Concluding thoughts

By closely examining the ways students' language choices create literary meanings, we can make legible Chick, Hassel, & Haynie's (2009) guidance for students to notice "the subtle nuances of textual complexity" and to "offer more original, nuanced readings of literature" (p. 415). A linguistic analysis illuminates in finer detail what it means to notice "layers of meaning" in literary texts (Tinkle et al. p. 512). Such layers of meaning brim with the potential of excavation, inspiring an unearthing of their intimacies. To trace nuances in literary texts is to discern with finer detail the subtle contours of expression, to expose the intricate weave of language and meaning, to disentangle the threads into which literary language is interwoven. In a philosophical sense, to unearth multiple significances is to plant seeds of possibility into the ground, to cultivate the expansion of branches skyward and the delving of roots downward into the earth. We might conceptualize a recognition of possibilities as an openness to avenues of exploration and discovery, a reaching toward unexplored territories of potential, a seeking toward latent spaces of signification, as insights unravel rhizomatically into further dimensions. To interpret literature is thus to deepen, enrich, and complicate our ways of knowing and being, in a perpetual unfolding of being, in a traversing of the threshold from summary into interpretation.

# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A

### Interview Questions

1. How would you define or describe 'close reading' as a skill in literary interpretation? How do you conceptualize 'close reading'?

2. Why do you teach close reading? What is the value, if any, of close reading?

3. (*based on specific essays*) In these essays, which (if any) particular words, phrases, lines, or passages would you identify as examples of excellent close readings?

4. (*based on specific essays*) Which words, phrases, lines, or passages (if any) would you identify as examples that are lacking in the qualities you are looking for in a close reading essay.

# APPENDIX B

## Close Reading Essay Prompts

## Margo's Essay Prompt

When:
1/24: Draft of Close Reading due
                PR Memo due
1/26: Peer Review Workshop
                PR letters due
     1/31: Draft 2 Due class time
                Final Close Reading Essay Due by midnight
                Includes 1-2 page cover letter

What:

Write an essay that analyzes the particular language of a passage in *The Shoemaker's Holiday* using **close reading** as your primary method. As close reading necessitates a zooming in on details and specifics, you will want to only address one passage or section rather than the whole piece. Your paper should gesture toward an observational claim, that should appear early in the essay, but the majority of the paper should be working with the text itself. You can write about any aspect of the text that interests you.

A "passage" should be either a speech or a section of dialogue, no larger than a page and a half.

-        3-5 double spaced, typed, pages in 12-pt Times New Roman font
-        Bibliography at end and correct citation of text throughout (see Wood and Miller)
-        Please include an appropriate title (not "Close Reading Essay")
-        Printed

Who:

Your assumed audience for this paper will be your peers in this class. This means that you are speaking to readers who have read the text, so, while you must <u>situate</u> your analysis, you do not need to spend much time summarizing the plot of whichever short story you choose to work with.

How:

Begin with evidence. I recommend beginning with a section of the text that seemed particularly interesting to you. Ideally this would be the passage you've annotated in class but it does not need to be. Consider how this passage relates to the whole, and make your

motivation for focusing in on this particular point explicit. "Unpack" minute details of the text, such as word choice, imagery, sentence structure, etc.

Don't try to address everything in the text! I'd much rather you say a lot about a little than a little about a lot. Thus, be careful about generalizing: **all claims/interpretation/ analysis/conclusions should come logically from something you've pointed out in the text.** Make the connections between what the text says and what you're saying about it clear.

Once you have written the close reading part, introduce and conclude your paper by finding some sort of observation that your evidence and analysis leads to. Since we have not yet discussed writing a thesis and making an argument, this will not be the primary focus of this paper, however, I would like your analysis to at least **gesture toward a claim.** By this I mean that your close reading should point to some sort of tentative conclusion about some aspect of the text. Your claim could be only about one passage, or the whole text, but it should follow from your evidence (your evidence should not just be examples of a thing that you've pointed out in your claim).

What to avoid:
- The 5 paragraph essay. Structure your essay around *your* ideas, not a pre-made construct
- The tri-partite thesis (by using a, b, and c, Dekker…). Again, your claim should fit into your ideas, not vice versa
- "Book Club claims" that are too large, obvious, or cannot be argued with (ie. "Dekker creates strong, realistic characters to draw in his audience")
- Relying on summary instead of analysis

# Alex's Essay Prompt

## Option 1: Short Story Passage Analysis

Choose one of the short stories from our first unit (by Cather, Ellison, or Gilman). Select a relatively short passage from this text that you've determined to be complex, confusing, dense, moving, meaningful, and/or in need of unpacking. The passage you choose can be as short as a few sentences, or as long as a medium-length paragraph, but should in no case exceed a page (250 words). As you draft your essay, you will close-read this passage and formulate your own interpretation of it in relation to the short story as a whole and the ideas addressed therein. Your argument may, but need not, address the theme "(un)doing normal" that has organized our course readings.

### *Things to keep in mind:*

○ If you choose a passage we've discussed extensively in class, be sure that the ideas you present are original: do not just rehash what we've already said about it.

○ Please **reproduce the passage** as a block quote under your title, with page numbers. This does not contribute to your word count.

○ Be sure to consult Meg Sweeney's "The Art of Close-Reading" as you draft your essay.

## Option 2: Outside Object Analysis

Choose an object from outside of class to close-read. This object could be almost anything that is comparable in scope to a short prose passage: a music video, a painting, an advertisement, a short poem, a photograph, etc. You will need to **email me with your object selection by Sun. 1/20 at 11:59 PM** in order to get this object approved so we can ensure that it is of appropriate scale for this assignment. This email should just be a few sentences about what your object is and why you think it is an interesting one to write about. As you draft your essay, you will close-read this object and formulate your own interpretation of it in relation to a larger concept or idea. **For this option, your argument should in some way address the theme "(un)doing normal" that has organized our course.**

### *Things to keep in mind:*

○ You should choose an object about which you have enough to say. Remember, it has to be able to sustain a 3-4 page paper, and you should be able to make a surprising and worthwhile argument come out of your analysis.

○ Make sure your object is something you can address thoroughly within 3-4 pages. To this end, it may be a part of a larger whole: for example, a short scene rather than a whole film; a passage rather than a novel, etc.

○ Be sure to consult Meg Sweeney's "The Art of Close-Reading" as you draft your essay.

## Length & Formatting

- **Length:** at least 900 words (~3 pages), no more than 1200 words (~4 pages)
- **Format**: Modern Language Association (MLA)
  - ○ Times New Roman, 12 point font
  - ○ Double-spaced
  - ○ Parenthetical citations

■ Ex: According to the narrator, "New York, for Maud Martha, was a symbol" (49).
○ Title (not "Close-Reading Essay"), first page header, name and page numbers on subsequent pages, work(s) cited page
○ See https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/24/ for reference and examples of MLA formatting

**Cover Letter**
● Your final essay should include a reflective cover letter, approximately **500 words (~1 single-spaced page)** in length. The purpose of this letter is to help me to understand what went smoothly for you in the writing process and what was challenging so I can address these things as we work together this term to help you grow as a writer. Please address the letter to me.
● The letter should **describe your process** of engagement with the close-reading genre.
● You may want to **consider some of the following questions** when drafting your letter (these are just suggestions; you don't need to address all of these in your letter):
○ Which aspects of the assignment felt most challenging? Most enjoyable?
○ Have you done close-reading before? If so, how did writing this essay help you to sharpen your skills? If not, was the genre an easy or a difficult one for you? Why?
○ What new insights did the writing process allow you to gain about your object?
○ Did you find that you had a good idea of where your paper was going from the outset, or did your ideas come together more in the process of writing?
○ How might you see yourself using close-reading (or the critical and analytical skills it requires) in other classes or contexts?
○ If you had an extra 48 hours to work on this essay, how would you use that time and why?
○ What particular aspects of your essay would you especially like feedback on?

**Grading Criteria** The main components of my grading criteria are: **thesis/argument, evidence/analysis, organization, purpose, audience,** and **style/conventions**. You will be assigned a letter grade for each of these categories, which will be used to determine your overall paper grade.

● **Thesis/Argument (30%):** You can make any argument you like about these passages or objects. Keep in mind that **the best theses, especially in short papers, are specific rather than general, surprising rather than obvious**. Be sure that your thesis is argumentative, not merely descriptive, and that your paper stays focused on this argument. The best arguments will also be surprising and the result of deep analytical thinking: they will force the reader to consider something in an unfamiliar light, challenge common-sense readings, or reveal some unobvious truth about the object of investigation.

● **Evidence/Analysis (30%):** Through close-reading, you will **cull evidence from the small details of the passage and determine how these details fit together to create meaning.** Consider all the elements at work in your object and think about all the choices that went into the creation of the object as well as what intentions might have been behind those choices. If you're doing passage analysis, you might ask questions like: Why does the author use this particular word here and not another? What imagery does the author evoke and why? How is the tone of this passage constituted and why is it significant? **Your goal here is to reveal how complex this passage is**, to unpack and analyze the details that make it complex, to articulate

an argument about how we should interpret the passage given these complexities and how it contributes to what the object as a whole is saying about a particular concept.

● **Organization (15%):** A well-organized paper is one that *develops* an argument as it progresses, with each new point building from what came before. Rather than presenting separate and disconnected points, an organized paper makes sure that all elements of the argument are tied together. Each paragraph should make a single, distinct point that is clearly articulated at the outset of the paragraph. It should also be clear from the transitions between paragraphs how a new point is building on what came before. Only a brief introduction and conclusion are necessary for this paper.

● **Purpose (10%):** Make sure you *explicitly address the "so what?" question* in your paper—that is, the stakes or the significance of your argument. This should ideally be addressed in the paper's introduction. The stakes of your paper need not be extremely broad, but should answer the following questions: Why does it matter that we interpret this object or passage in this way? Why should we care? What does your analysis reveal that we wouldn't otherwise be able to see? You might explicitly address your paper's driving questions as one way of introducing your "so what."

● **Audience (10%):** *The audience for this essay will consist of your peers in this class*. If you've chosen a passage from something we've all read, you can assume that the context is self-evident and you don't need to give much background information. If you've chosen an outside object, you might need to set the stage a bit to give your readers this contextual information. Please make this contextualization succinct, as description is not argument, and keep in mind that, because you will need to provide more background information, your paper might need to be closer to the upper end of the word limit if you choose an outside object.

● **Style/Conventions (5%):** Follow MLA formatting and parenthetical citation style, including a Works Cited page. Be sure to thoroughly proofread your essay for spelling and grammar errors that might detract from meaning or rhetorical impact. Pay attention to the rhetorical impact of your word choice, sentence structure, and other elements of your writing style.

**An "A" paper:**

● **Thesis/Argument** is nuanced, surprising, and original. The thesis is clearly stated at the outset and the paper maintains its focus on developing the argument persuasively. The argument is deep, well-supported, and goes beyond what is obvious to provide new insight on the object.

● **Evidence/Analysis**: The paper pays close attention to the details of the passage or object and thoroughly unpacks these elements using close-reading in order to advance the argument. Analysis of evidence is sophisticated, persuasive, and meaningfully develops the thesis, going beneath the surface to consider less obvious possibilities. The paper uses a variety of evidence to move the thesis forward, to expand upon it, and to complicate it throughout the paper rather than to merely "back it up."

● **Organization**: The paper is seamlessly and logically organized, with fluid transitions that flow from one point to another while keeping the main point in focus. Each point of the argument is clear, but the points presented are not repetitive.

● **Purpose** ("so what") is clearly addressed and it is apparent to the reader why the argument is important and worthwhile.

● **Audience**: The paper makes every effort to account for the needs of its audience, providing (only) appropriate background information. It addresses its audience respectfully and is accessible to all potential readers.

● **Style/Conventions**: The author's voice is strong and stylistically artful, using appropriate language and varied sentence structure. The paper is formatted correctly according to MLA style and is free of careless grammatical errors.

## A "B" paper:

● **Thesis/Argument** is clearly stated at the outset, although the thesis may be more obvious than that of an "A" paper. The paper maintains a focus on its thesis, but the argument might be a bit repetitive, rehashing the thesis rather than pushing it forward or complicating it.

● **Evidence/Analysis:** Evidence is well-chosen and thoughtfully analyzed, although there may be some gaps in the argument for which the author has not accounted.

● **Organization:** The paper is logically organized, but some structural issues are present: transitions may not flow seamlessly, it may not be clear how each point builds from what came before, or the points may be somewhat repetitive.

● **Purpose** ("so what") is present, but is perhaps implicit or not very clearly articulated.

● **Audience** is mostly taken into account, but some choices are not appropriate to the audience. The paper may provide insufficient background on texts with which the audience is not familiar, or too much background on texts that the audience can be assumed to know. The tone of the paper might be too informal for the given audience.

● **Style/Conventions:** A consistent authorial voice is evident, but some awkwardness might exist at the level of tone and style. The paper makes a fair attempt to match MLA formatting and, while it may contain typos and grammatical errors, these are not on the whole distracting and do not detract from the reader's ability to understand the paper.

## A "C" paper:

● **Thesis/Argument** is not clearly articulated; the paper may be more descriptive than argumentative. Without a central, argumentative thesis, the paper comes across as unfocused to the reader.

● **Evidence/Analysis** is selected and analyzed, but it is unclear how the analysis comes together into a thesis. Alternately, the paper might employ far too little evidence to support its thesis, or may make no attempt to interpret the evidence it presents.

● **Organization** is haphazard rather than purposeful, without logical transitions between ideas.

● **Purpose** ("so what") is unclear and not explicitly addressed.

● **Audience:** a number of choices are made that actively alienate the audience. The tone of the paper might be aggressive or disrespectful, or the paper may discuss topics with no regard for the amount of prior knowledge the audience should be expected to have.

● **Style/Conventions:** The paper may be carelessly written, without much attention paid to cultivating voice or style, or to maintaining the proper formatting. The paper contains a number of careless typos and grammatical errors that are distracting or obscure meaning.

**A paper receiving below a "C-":**

Has failed to complete the assignment satisfactorily. Any paper that is drastically too short, off-topic, incoherent, or otherwise inappropriate to this assignment is at risk for receiving a grade lower than "C-." Any paper that is revealed to be plagiarized will receive the lowest failing grade. However, it is unlikely that any paper that goes through a process of peer-review could fall into this range.

**Due**
**Dates**
● **Sun. 1/20, 11:59 PM**: If you choose **Option 2,** please email me a brief description of your object by this time in order to get it approved.
● **Mon. 1/28, 2:30 PM**: Email a complete draft of your essay to me and to the members of your peer-review group.
● **Wed. 1/30, 2:30 PM**: **Peer-Review Workshop**: Write one peer-review letter for each member of your group. Email each of these both to me and to the member of your group for whom it was written before class starts. Bring laptops to class.
● **Sun. 2/3, 11:59 PM**: Email me your final essay, including the reflective cover letter.

**Walter's Essay Prompt**

Flood to Shakespeare
Due Sunday, February 17

Please consult the Writing Notes in the Papers folder before beginning your essay.

Regardless of which topic you choose, your essay should make frequent and detailed reference to the text or film you're discussing. Avoid generalizing comments like: "Sophocles's (or Shakespeare's) greatness is evident in everything he writes about." Also avoid claims like: "no one has previously noticed." On the other hand, if you don't like something in one of the texts, it's fine to say so, as long as you obey the standard rule: provide argument and evidence in support of your position. You may of course write on topics and passages that we've discussed in class, but if so your paper should focus on matters that we didn't address or addressed only in passing.

1. Choose a passage—a speech, a relatively short dialogue, a brief piece of narrative—and discuss its significance.
    1. Your essay should consider formal matters. These include prose vs verse (rhymed or unrhymed), word choice (imagery, metaphor, etc.), repetition, sentence structure and its relation to verse line (if the passage is in poetry), and, of course substance (theme, development of plot and character, and so on). This is not a complete list of possibilities, but neither is it a list of required elements. In other words, don't write sentences such as: "There's a lot of alliteration"—unless you have something to say about the alliteration. On the other hand, you should have something to say about some formal features of the passage you choose.
    2. You should also locate your passage in its immediate context. How does it follow from, contrast with, anticipate the passages or scenes on either side of it?
    3. And you should also consider the significance of your chosen passage in the context of the play as a whole. What does it add? How would things be different if it didn't exist, or if it proceeded in another fashion?
    4. This topic is obviously most accessible if you choose to focus on Shakespeare, since he's the first writer in English we're considering. But it's possible to do this effectively with, say, the Bible or Sophocles or Boccaccio as well, and maybe even with *Gilgamesh*.
    5. Students often shy away from a topic of this sort, but it's one of the best ways to ground your paper in careful attention to detail.
2. Write on any familiar, but important topic. For example:
    1. Plot development. Does everything that happens feel necessary, contingent? Does the resolution follow from what's come before? Why or why not? Who is the plot about? The answer here can be singular or plural. But note that if you conclude that there's a single main character—as is often but not always the case—you need to explain what the other characters are doing in the play. How do your answers affect your overall interpretation? Good choices: almost everything.
    2. Characterization. Choose one or more characters and explain how they're characterized. "How" means both what they're like and how (by what methods) the author creates the sense of a real person. Does the character develop, learn anything? What's the function of the character in the play as a whole? Sophocles, Shakespeare, Joseph, and maybe *Gilgamesh* would work.

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3. Language: prose vs verse, blank verse vs rhyme, elevated Latinate language vs more homespun speech, complex syntax vs short and pity statements, and so on. (See also topic 1.) The aim of such an essay is to show how specific linguistic choices contribute to/create/affect the overall movement and sense of the play.
4. Setting. What's the thematic significance of the different settings and the movement between or among them?
5. Thematic emphasis. What is your text about? Given the topic of the course, you might opt to focus on ecological matters, perhaps in relation to social, economic, or political issues. But feel free to take on other matters—psychology or religion, for instance. The risk of this topic is that you'll float above the text. You'll get a better result, however, if you anchor your broad claims in a limited number of passages, passages that you analyze in some detail.
3. Comparisons between two or more works. The possible emphases are much the same as in question 2. Good choices: Flood narratives, Sophocles and Shakespeare.
4. Non-fiction or quasi-nonfictional accounts: Thucydides, Procopius, Boccaccio on the Black Death, Galen, Cassius Dio, American genocide texts, Little Ice Age comments. You could write on some or all. If you get a thematically coherent group, you can ask what they have in common and what their differences might imply. If your choices are more heterogeneous, you can ask the same questions, but your answers are likely to be more general.
5. The relationship between fictional and non-fictional accounts of ecological crisis. Here the obvious choices are Thucydides-Sophocles or Little Ice Age comments with Shakespeare. But more unexpected connections might also prove revealing—for instance, Thucydides with the Biblical 10 plagues. What do we learn from such comparisons?
6. Write on any of the posted study questions.
7. Combine any of these topics into something that works for you.
8. Come up with a topic of your own. Highly recommended—but if you do so, please run it by me. The goal isn't censorship; it's to make sure that your topic is something you can productively write about.

**Selene's Essay Prompt**

You may write this (MLA font and type like Times New Roman or Arial, 1" margins, indented paragraphs—no extra space between them) double-spaced, 2-pp. close reading essay on any topic from any text we have read so far, but you may not repeat it again. So if there is a topic you are burning to develop at more length, you may want to hold off on it. Review the tips for literary analysis in Wolfe and Wilder (Modules) and read through the "Overview of Strategies" and "Questions to Help you Dig Deeper" in that excerpt for topics and approaches. In sum, a literary analysis has to have a major interpretive claim that is debatable—not everyone will agree with it— but not outlandish. While claims can be creative, they should not come out of a blatant misreading of the text. The main claim has to be supported with textual evidence, analysis, and argument. The topic has to be significant and interesting (not one that makes the reader go "so what?"). As indicated by the surface/depth and "digging" analogies that Wolfe and Wilder use, one of the challenges of literary analysis is to probe deep beneath the surface of the text, to find something beyond the obvious, to tease out more profound implications, to raise to the surface hidden or subtle patterns or meanings of words, images, and any other literary aspect we have discussed, in order to enrich the textual meaning.

We will use the metaphor of the microscope for close reading. Imagine focusing the lens on one particular area of the text. It could be what a character said at one point, a description of a setting, a shift in plot or point of view, a specific theme. What do you notice there that you can unpack in more detail in order to reveal a fuller meaning or a deeper appreciation of the text? Draw out the significance of those details for the reader and offer a fresh or unusual perspective (caution: remember that you can't go completely wild). Obviously, you will need to read (and even reread) attentively and scrupulously, noting exactly what the text says. But you won't be simply summarizing it. Instead, you will keep peeling the layers off to reveal the nuggets of insight you find nestled in that scene, that dialogue, that image. You may certainly draw upon other readings for comparison or contrast but keep a laser focus on the main claim (your central argument), so you don't end up merely listing or summarizing obvious points or skimming over one text and another. Go deep rather than broad, so try and limit the number of examples you are using (for textual evidence) in order to explore each example in more detail. Sometimes, even a single page or an exchange of dialogue or a tightly related series of images can provide grounds to make a large enough claim for this paper (and remember that you do need a claim that pertains to the text at large even if you are doing it through a limited number of specific details). One or more of the tools of literary analysis we have consulted so far may be engaged, but choose one particular focused topic.

Consult the Study Guide and recall our discussions. Go over your notes. Ask questions—but remember to answer them in prewriting! Reread the text and mark a passage or page (or two) that you think deserves deeper scrutiny and reveals a particular insight that lights up the text. I won't provide specific prompts now but do look at the prompts in the Canvas Posts if you're short of ideas. You may develop a previous post, but do not repeat what you have already submitted for a grade.

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