

Close Reading at the Paragraph Level

In the masque scene of Act IV, Shakespeare presents the most dramatic example of Prospero's role as a creator of illusion. At the beginning of the scene, Prospero explains to Ferdinand his desire to celebrate his betrothal to Miranda with "another trick" (IV.i.43) that serves to show the couple the harmony made available in marriage. Prospero's description of this illusion as a "vanity of mine art" (IV.i.47) is very important for understanding the role of Prospero's imagination. While "mine art" implies Prospero's creative control over this masque sequence, "vanity" suggests a certain level of indulgence of the imagination that Prospero experiences as creator. The goddesses in the show proceed to present a utopian vision of the harmony that Ferdinand and Miranda will experience with nature in their marriage. In this extended song describing the bounty of an infinitely abundant harvest, the close reader is reminded of Prospero's creative input on the illusion as Juno blesses the couple saying, "that they may be prosperous/ And honour'd in their issue" (IV.i.114-115). Shakespeare uses a clever play on the word "prosperous" and its obvious resemblance to "Prospero's". This pun recalls the theme of Prospero's possessive nature with Miranda ("That they may be [Prospero's]") that has been previously established in the play. Furthermore, these lines describe Prospero's function as the creator of this marital arrangement. Thus these verses serve as a mark of Prospero's authorship over this sequence.

Well-Developed Paragraph:

1. Advances a strong claim in the topic sentence.
2. Engages with the text closely and carefully to support that claim.
3. Analyzes that textual evidence from various perspectives.
4. Leads to a refined claim in light of the analysis.

Joel Dodson 3/30/09 4:23 PM

Comment: This second paragraph is a superb model for (a) paragraphing and (b) close reading. The topic sentence begins forcefully yet clearly, flagging *what* the paragraph will be about ("Prospero's role as a creator of illusion") while also advancing a *claim* (that the masque in Act Four is Shakespeare's "most dramatic example" of Prospero's creative role). The paragraph then proceeds to offer detailed textual evidence to support this claim. But rather than simply cite words that restate or certify the topic sentence, the paragraph moves us *forward*, mingling descriptive summary with close analysis. In so doing, what the author shows is how *narrative* problems in the play become problems of *language*, and vice versa – a point amply shown in the fascinating analysis of how the pun on "prosperous" and "Prospero's" displays a creative control that has always been at stake in the play.