

prac. crits on Ovid Met. 3: a rough and ready guide

ANALYZE

1. read through your piece carefully before writing anything on paper
2. look for features in the text on at least two levels:
 - a. thematic, literary-critical, interpretative features
 - b. small-scale linguistic features, eg zeugma, alliteration, polyptoton
3. annotate any observations that occur to you as you read through; you might find it helpful, for instance, to put more thematic observations in the left margin, and more technical observations in the right margin
4. for thematic features in particular, look for:
 - a. any links to metamorphosis, the major thematic link between all the stories in the Met.
 - b. any way in which your passage is an aetiology, or a wonder-story, another major shared link between all the stories in the Met.
 - c. any major thematic point, perhaps even a “moral” to the story
 - d. Ovid’s overall focus in the passage: is he drawing attention to scenery (is there an ekphrasis?), an emotional exchange, some action...is it a blend...?
 - e. characterization of a particular figure through direct quotation or Ovid’s narrative of his or her actions
 - f. any narratological features of interest: does Ovid address the reader? does he allow someone else to tell a story? is the speaker omniscient, a victim of dramatic irony...? etc.
5. all the Met. is narrative, so your passage should fall into natural segments, eg summary narrative (ie what some critics have called “telling”, a more historiographical mode of writing) or direct quotation (ie “showing”; a more dramatic mode of writing), perhaps between different speakers, or similes—mark out these segments and consider the overall aesthetic pace of the passage
6. as for small-scale linguistic features, think about the cumulative effect of these devices, rather than just listing them as they occur in a non-reflective way; what purpose does a particular effect serve? is it actually significant to its passage or, taken together, are such effects simply characteristic of Ovid’s poetic style...perhaps it’s both in some instances?
7. if you do find a simile: ask yourself what’s the effect of the comparison? from what sphere of life has Ovid drawn the comparison? natural life? human life?

CONTEXTUALIZE

1. how does your passage relate to its immediate context? what happens before? what happens next?
2. how does the passage relate to any stories in Met. 3?
3. how does the passage relate to the themes mentioned above and are these themes evident in other stories in Met. 3?
4. what about Ovid overall as a poet? what does this passage tell us about him?

SYNTHESIZE

1. you might find it helpful to have one or two summary points you want to make about your passage—this might be a way of helping you organize your observations
2. say something about the passage per se, but try to make some reference in general to Ovid as poet: remember he is responsible in some way for the words on the page and he could have done it differently
3. what is your evaluation of the piece? don’t be afraid to use the first person and be willing to take a bit of a risk in putting forth an argument

remember: avoid writing your essay until you get a feel for the whole thing and what you want to say about it—you have up to an hour and a half, roughly speaking, to do the prac. crit: try to do at least 20–30 minutes of note taking before you begin to write and your observations will be much sharper and more coherent