Close Reading Essay

We often encounter difficulty in approaching a text because we try to say too much about it. You don't have to tell me what the text "means" or give me the "true" and "final" interpretation. Find a word, theme, image, symbol, etc. that you find compelling. Focus on its use throughout the text. Alternatively, find a passage or section of the text that intrigues you. Focus on interpreting just this part. This approach often helps you move towards an understanding of the text as a whole. Focusing on a specific piece of imagery or particular portion of the text also helps keep you close to the text (referring to the actual words of the text) when writing your paper.

In the excerpt from Nawal El Saddawi's *Growing Up Female in Egypt*, I would like you to read the story with special attention to descriptions of bodies. As you read, highlight and annotate all the images of the body. Why does she refer to bodies in this or that place? What is the context of this reference? What is it doing in the story and for the story?

After you have finished reading the story, I want you to write a short response (500 words) to the body imagery in it. Again, I am not asking you to interpret the whole story, only its use of a specific kind of imagery. In fact, you don't even have to write about all uses of body imagery. You can focus your topic further. You may write about only the body imagery in relationship to Firdaus, or only on the two episodes of feeling on page 329 (the body in relationship to love).

Your short response should have an introduction with a thesis. It should also have topic sentences. In writing about the story, be specific and concrete. Please always come back to the text: quote frequently. PLEASE CITE ACCORDING TO MLA STANDARDS.

Here are some ways of focusing down your topic further (I have emphasized in this story, because I don't want you to speculate on these relationships in general, but specifically in this story):

What is the relationship between bodies and prison *in this story*?
What is the relationship between bodies and gender *in this story*?
What is the relationship between bodies and nations *in this story*?
What is the relationship between the narrator and her body *in this story*?

**DO NOT TRY TO ANSWER ALL THESE QUESTIONS!** Find one, either here or that you come up with on your own, and answer that one question. Please do not begin the paper by restating the question.

If you choose to turn this assignment into your final paper, you must expand it to 1250-1500 words and include at least one outside source. I can help you find that outside source.