

Close Reading Competition 2020

Thanks to all the students who entered this year's *emagazine* Close Reading Competition, responding to the opening to Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. We had a record-breaking number of entries.

Many congratulations to all our shortlisted students and particularly to our winner Deia Leykind (Francis Holland School) and our joint runners-up Emilia Warr (Camden School for Girls) and Molly Elliott (Hall Cross Academy). Do take the time to read their excellent close readings. Deia's is on page 5 of the magazine. Emilia and Molly's can be downloaded from the open pages of the *emagazine* website.

Professor Peter Barry's Comments

The item set for the close-reading competition set a stiff challenge, and the quality of all the shortlisted entries was very high. I close-read them ‘unseen’, without looking at students’ names or the names of their schools. Also, I did not make any formal list of required points, approaches, or criteria beforehand. But as I carried on reading, I realised that I was thinking about three broad areas, which can be ‘thumb-nailed’ as Content, Shape, and Language. To expand each of these in turn, I asked myself: (a) Are there unique or very strong insights here, and if so, how well is their full significance brought out? (b) Is the piece effectively structured, with succinct identification of issues in the earlier part and some rounding off or pulling together of material towards the end? (c) Is the language of the

response clear and precise, is it accurate when technical terms are used, and is it appropriate and effective in tone?

The winning entry stood out from the others on the shortlist, so it wasn't a photo-finish and many congratulations are due for that performance. I was asked to decide on a second and a third, and these two also stood clear of the remainder. But having spent a long time trying to decide which of them was second and which third, I realised (while unloading the washing-machine) that the result was obvious – they are the Joint-Runners-Up, and much credit is due to them too. I was also asked to identify any entries that deserved to be 'Highly Commended', if I thought there were some who merited this, but no number was specified. I identified four entries in this category, a compact group running close behind the leaders, and deserving extra credit and recognition.

The remaining shortlisters are all placed in the 'Commended' category to recognise their achievement in being in the top six percent of the total competition entry. Our congratulations, of course, also go to the schools and teachers of all these high achievers.

Finally, what I liked most about the shortlist as a whole was the ‘joined up’ quality of the responses to the passage. The students didn’t just identify literary tropes or explain isolated details – they joined up the dots of individual points to build a ‘reading’ of the passage. They were confident in using the technical terms associated with close reading, but not over-awed by them, so that they were integrated into lively and fluent accounts of the significance and power of the text.

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