

2. The following excerpt is from Rachel Cusk's novel *The Bradshaw Variations*, published in 2008. This passage describes Thomas Bradshaw's morning interactions with members of his household. Read the passage carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how Cusk uses literary elements and techniques to develop a complex portrayal of Thomas.

In your response you should do the following:

- Respond to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible interpretation.
- Select and use evidence to support your line of reasoning.
- Explain how the evidence supports your line of reasoning.
- Use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating your argument.

Par:

- 1 What is art? Thomas Bradshaw asks himself this question frequently. He does not yet know the answer. He used to believe art was a kind of pretending, but he doesn't think that any more. He uses the word *authenticity* to describe what he thinks now. Some things are artificial and some are authentic. It is easy to tell when something is artificial. The other is harder.
- 2 In the mornings he listens to music, to Bach or Schubert. He stands in the kitchen in his dressing gown. He waits for his wife and daughter to come downstairs. He is forty-one, the age when a life comes out of its own past like something out of a mould; and either it is solid, all of a piece, or it fails to hold its shape and disintegrates. The disintegration is not difficult to imagine. It is the solidity, the concrete form, that is mystifying. Disintegration does not involve questions of authenticity, but of a solid form the questions must be asked.
- 3 Mostly, in fact, it is the lodger¹ Olga who comes down first. He hears her tread on the stairs and doesn't recognise it: that is how, every day, he identifies her, by hearing her quiet, slightly plodding step and wondering who on earth it belongs to. She ducks her peroxided head at him, flashes her uncertain train-track smile. For six months now Olga has been embroiled in protracted dentistry. Beneath the metal braces her teeth are grey and disorderly. As a child her mother apparently never took her to the dentist. This was not out of neglect, Olga has told him. It was because Olga was frightened of going, and her mother couldn't bear her to be frightened, or to feel pain. She has told Thomas that she is saving up for a bridge and a set of caps. She has three different jobs and all the money goes on her teeth. She complains of the expense: in Poland the cost of dentistry is much lower. There, she could have all the work done—'All!' Olga repeats, making a chopping motion with her hand—for what she pays here for just one monthly visit.
- 4 These conversations do not entirely engage Thomas. When he talks to Olga he is both there and not there. He is waiting for Tonie² to come down, as the platform guard waits for the London train to come through. Tonie's appearances in the kitchen are brief. Like the train she stops, disgorging³ activity, and then departs again. It is a matter of minutes, but he needs to be ready. He hears Olga—in some ways he even identifies himself with her, both of them platform dwellers—but when she speaks he cannot reciprocate. He is as though sealed behind glass. He wonders if she realises this, realises that she can see but not touch him. She drinks tea from a giant Garfield⁴ mug and eats cereal, topping up the milk frequently from the plastic container that stands beside her bowl. He glimpses her bare, mushroom-coloured legs beneath the table, her feet clad in large soft slippers. He turns the music up a little: it is an offering, a form of explanation. He wants her to know that he is aware of his own limitations, of his failure to

make anything of their conversations in the morning. Sometimes this failure appears to him as something intrinsic to time itself, as an inner force, like decay. They pass and are forgotten, these interludes in the kitchen. And yet they are always the same: he could stand here for a hundred years and still have much the same conversation with Olga. There are, it seems, limitless copies of this conversation, but it never goes anywhere or develops. By the same token, it never dies. It has no relationship to time. This may be because it lacks authenticity.

Excerpt from *THE BRADSHAW VARIATIONS* by Rachel Cusk. Copyright © 2009 and 2012 by Rachel Cusk, used by permission of Farrar, Straus and Giroux and The Wylie Agency LLC. All rights reserved.

- 1:** a person who rents a room in a house
- 2:** his wife
- 3:** pouring out, releasing
- 4:** a cartoon cat

2. The following excerpt is from Jeannette Haien's novel *The All of It*, published in 1986. In this passage, Father Declan, an Irish priest, is driving home after a successful fishing trip. Read the passage carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how Haien uses literary elements and techniques to develop a complex portrayal of Father Declan.

In your response you should do the following:

- Respond to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible interpretation.
- Select and use evidence to support your line of reasoning.
- Explain how the evidence supports your line of reasoning.
- Use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating your argument.

Par:

- 1 Nothing exaggerates a sense of lonely solitude so much as a long night drive through thrashing rain and dense, culprit fog.
- 2 Crouched over the steering-wheel of the old Ford, his head thrust forward, turtle-like, out of his collar, the only sound the sidelong loping strokes of the windshield wipers, he peered ahead through the car lights' gauzy beam at the narrow, winding road which kept vanishing and reappearing like a dark ribbon in a magician's hand, seen now, now not, depending on the shift of the fog....
- 3 It was terrible the way his splendid excitement had vanished almost the instant he'd left the Castle and started the homeward journey, the lilt and thrill of his great adventure draining from him suddenly, to be as suddenly replaced by a violent flush of self-pity caused (admit it) by the sorrowful fact that at the end of the long night drive there would be nought for him but the bulk emptiness of the bleak parish-house, its outside walls bleeding with damp, its windows dark, its high, cold rooms devoid of life except as he would enter them only to encounter, going before him in the chilly chambers, the exhaled, ghostly haze of his own breath; that...deadliness, juxtaposed to the powerful vividness of its imagined opposite: anticipation—of a lit window, of a waiting presence, of a voice asking those simple, linking, engaging questions which absence inspires: "How are you?" "How did you fare?" "What was it like?"
- 4 Oh, the blanknesses of solitude....
- 5 He ought to get a dog, a lively, sensitive puppy he could rear to companionable habits; one that would accompany him on walks and ride beside him in the car, that would sleep next to his bed and wag him awake of a morning, a warm, affectionate, entertaining little dog. He pictured the creature: a smallish terrier, a brindled,¹ charming cairn or smoothcoated brown-and-white Jack Russell,² all spiff and prance and independence but ready ever for a petting. "Father Declan's little dog," mothers would say of it in a recommending way, meaning it wouldn't snap when their children stooped to pat it. "'Tis Father Declan's": assurance that it wouldn't forget itself and spot the carpet.... Was there anything written against a priest having a dog? For sure the Bishop didn't have one. Could he think of a sixtyish priest he knew who did? He couldn't; though Father Patrick Joyce in Galway kept a toothless, stiff, off-putting thing of a cat, a feature of parish-house life you'd be less surprised by in Galway than in Roonatellin, priests in Galway being laws unto themselves.... And of course, there was the obstacle of Mrs. Duggin, who "did" for him as hasty morning-cleaner and washer and (hastier) cook. (He'd try again hinting to her how much he'd appreciate a bit of noontime meat or fish not fried to the consistency of cement, or a veg not boiled to a rag's limpness.) Mrs. Duggin wouldn't take to a dog.... He could hear

her: “I’m hoovering³ *hairs*, Father, *dog* hairs,” tousling the thin of her own, her mouth dropped disapprovingly. “It’s not that I’m complaining of the work, the amount of it, but *dog* hairs—”

6 But must he forever give in to the Mrs. Duggins of the world? forever keep sublimating wishes? as he was this instant sublimating (*burying*, or trying to) the wish (he struck the word *desire*) to share with someone this singular-in-his-life, brilliantly prodigious, gallimaufry⁴ twenty-four-pound-ten-ounce day, the bodily fact of it residing in the car’s boot,⁵ causing now that worrisome, unhealthy, grinding sound the engine was making (or so, in his angler’s⁶ pride, he fancied the source of the noise to be)....

7 Innocent, the mere wishing of a mere wish.

From *The All of It* by Jeannette Haien. Copyright © 1986 by Jeannette Haien. Used by permission of HarperCollins Publishers.

1: brownish or tawny, with streaks of color

2: Cairn and Jack Russell are both breeds of terrier.

3: vacuuming

4: chaotic

5: trunk

6: fisher’s

Question 2

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts as one-third of the total essay section score.)

The following excerpt is from Mavis Gallant's short story "One Morning in June," published in 1952. In this passage, Mike Cahill is in France for one year to explore his talent for art. Read the passage carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how Gallant uses literary elements and techniques to convey Mike's complex experience of studying painting.

In your response you should do the following:

- Respond to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible interpretation.
- Select and use evidence to support your line of reasoning.
- Explain how the evidence supports your line of reasoning.
- Use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating your argument.

He had come to France because the words "art" and "Paris" were unbreakably joined in his family's imagination, the legend of Trilby's Bohemia¹ persisting long after the truth of it had died. When his high school art teacher, a young woman whose mobiles² had been praised, pronounced that his was a talent not to be buried under the study of medicine or law, his family had decided that a year in Paris would show whether or not his natural bent was toward painting. It was rather like exposing someone to a case of measles and watching for spots to break out.

In Paris, Mike had spent the first three weeks standing in the wrong queue at the Beaux-Arts,³ and when no one seemed able to direct him to the right one, he had given up the Beaux-Arts entirely and joined a class instructed by an English painter called Chitterley, whose poster advertisement he had seen in a café. It was Mr. Chitterley's custom to turn his young charges loose on the city and then, once a week or so, comment on their work in a borrowed studio on the Quai d'Anjou.⁴ Mike painted with sober patience the bridges of the Seine, the rain-soaked lawns of the Tuileries, and a head-on view of Notre Dame. His paintings were large (Mr. Chitterley was nearsighted), askew (as he had been taught in the public schools of New York), and empty of people (he had never been taught to draw, and it was not his nature to take chances).

"Very *interesting*," said Mr. Chitterley of Mike's work. Squinting a little, he would add, "Ah! I *see* what you were trying to do here!"

"You do?" Mike wished he would be more specific, for he sometimes recognized that his pictures were

flat, empty, and the color of cement. At first, he had blamed the season, for the Paris winter had been sunless; later on, he saw that its gray contained every shade in a beam of light, but this effect he was unable to reproduce. Unnerved by the pressure of time, he watched his work all winter, searching for the clue that would set him on a course. Prodded in the direction of art, he now believed in it, enjoying, above all, the solitude, the sense of separateness, the assembling of parts into something reasonable. He might have been equally happy at a quiet table, gathering into something ticking and ordered the scattered wheels of a watch, but this had not been suggested, and he had most certainly never given it a thought. At last, when the season had rained itself to an end (and his family innocently were prepared to have him exhibit his winter's harvest in some garret⁵ of the Left Bank and send home the critics' clippings), he approached Mr. Chitterley and asked what he ought to do next.

"Why, go to the country," said Mr. Chitterley, who was packing for a holiday with the owner of the Quai d'Anjou studio. "Go south. Don't stop in a hotel but live on the land, in a tent, and paint, paint, paint, paint, paint!"

"I can't afford it," Mike said. "I mean I can't afford to buy the tent and stuff. But I can stay over here until August, if you think there's any point. I mean is it wasting time for me to paint, paint, paint?"

Mr. Chitterley shot him an offended look and then a scornful one, which said, How like an American! The only measuring rods, time and money. Aloud, he suggested Menton.⁶ He had stayed there as a child,

and he remembered it as a paradise of lemon ice and sunshine. Mike, for want of a better thought, or even a contrastive one, took the train there a day later.

¹ *Trilby*, a popular 1894 novel by George du Maurier, focuses on the unconventional lifestyles of artists and musicians in 1850s Paris.

² suspended decorative sculptures designed to move with air currents

³ a famous art school in Paris

⁴ a neighborhood on the Île Saint-Louis, an island in the Seine river in Paris

⁵ a small, dismal attic room

⁶ a town on the French Riviera

“One Morning in June” by Mavis Gallant. Copyright © 1952 by Mavis Gallant. First appeared in the June 7, 1952 issue of *The New Yorker*. Reprinted by permission of Georges Borchardt, Inc., on behalf of the author’s estate. All rights reserved.

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Question 2

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts as one-third of the total essay section score.)

The following excerpt is from Jane Urquhart’s novel *The Night Stages*, published in 2015. In this passage, an artist named Kenneth is finishing a mural for a new airline terminal using the long-established medium of egg tempera, a paint made of egg yolk, pigment, and water. He thinks about the influences on his work and how his mural may be received. Read the passage carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how Urquhart uses literary elements and techniques to convey Kenneth’s complex perspective as he completes his mural.

In your response you should do the following:

- Respond to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible interpretation.
- Select and use evidence to support your line of reasoning.
- Explain how the evidence supports your line of reasoning.
- Use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating your argument.

It had taken him three months to complete the thirty-six four-by-six-foot panels that would join together, like a huge puzzle, to form the immense mural. The last thing he painted, on the final morning, was a third apple—airborne—tossed by a child juggler. The apples were like tiny planets, and the child, otherwise small and unexceptional, gained power through his manipulation of them. Kenneth had to break one last egg to paint this, and as he passed it from hand to hand, letting the white drain to the floor, and allowing the clean yolk to settle in his palm, he looked at this boy—his serene, confident expression, the three apples aloft, the face calm with the knowledge that they would be kept in the air indefinitely. While Kenneth mixed the yolk with the warm shades of ground pigment, he remembered the critic telling him to keep things on the picture plane flat, two-dimensional, and he smiled as the apple became spherical under his brush. When he could imagine the weight of it in his hand, he knew he was finished. Then he began to toss brushes, palettes, and pigments down to the floor below. There was a drill shrieking somewhere in the building. The clatter his tools made on landing must have been drowned out by its noise.

Kenneth figured he had broken five thousand eggs, more or less, in the making of the mural, and each time he broke the shell, he thought of the critic’s head, the smooth baldness of the top of it. Humpty-Dumpty,¹ he thought, this wall, and the wall of cultural fashion that could keep you out, for a while, until the great fall. By now he knew that fashion always fell, it failed and fell. He was happy to be free of it. And as he used the shell to separate the white

from the yolk, he thought about Harding,² a man who had never made use of egg tempera. He wondered what had become of him. And the woman Harding had loved, whether she had ever painted again, and whether or not he himself would ever come across a painting by Gentleman.³ The girl in Germany, the couple in Italy,⁴ floated by, a sense of them here and there in the mural. These narratives fought for space in his mind. But the mural itself, he knew, was divorced from narrative. As it should be, he whispered to himself, as it should be. *Flight and Its Allegories*.⁵

Once he was on the ground, he rifled through a canvas sack until he found the camera he was looking for, a Brownie Starflex, with six exposures still available. He shot the mural from left to right. Then he walked across the full length of the half-tiled floor. This was the last exposure and it would make the mural look incredibly small, like a two-inch-long piece of ribbon with an unreadable pattern on it. But he wanted to show its proportions to a friend and, in any case, the more professional pictures would be taken later, after he was gone, when the mural had begun to live its own independent life in the presence of an audience.

For months now there had been noise, the workmen’s power tools and, in the odd moments when those were silent, the roar of the planes arriving and departing at the old, soon-to-be abandoned terminal. He had seen the passengers, through the plate glass of the windows, rivers of them, pouring down the steps that were pushed up to airliners, then flowing darkly across the tarmac. What would they make of *Flight and Its Allegories*? Would they be struck by it? Or would they simply pass it by,

preoccupied by the mysteries of their individual lives
as they walked forward or waited in the lounge? He
was not unaware that public art could be—and often
was—ignored. Still, what pleasure he had taken in the
making of it.

¹ Humpty-Dumpty is a nursery-rhyme character, typically
depicted as an egg. He falls from a wall, breaks, and
cannot be put together again.

² Kenneth's former art teacher, who cautioned Kenneth
against appropriating the ideas, styles, and techniques of
other artists

³ Alexander Gentleman, an obscure artist that Harding
once knew; another artist later copied his style and gained
fame as a result

⁴ "The girl in Germany" and "the couple in Italy" are
people Kenneth met while backpacking through Europe.

⁵ Allegories are works of literature or art that express
moral or political messages, often through the use of
symbols.

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Question 2

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts as one-third of the total essay section score.)

The following excerpt is from Nisi Shawl’s novel *Everfair*, published in 2016. In this passage, the narrator describes the experience of a young woman, Lisette, as she rides her bicycle through the French countryside in July 1889. Read the passage carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how Shawl uses literary elements and techniques to portray Lisette’s complex response to her experience of riding her bicycle.

In your response you should do the following:

- Respond to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible interpretation.
- Select and use evidence to support your line of reasoning.
- Explain how the evidence supports your line of reasoning.
- Use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating your argument.

Lisette Toutournier sighed. She breathed in again, out, in, the marvelous air smelling of crushed stems, green blood bruised and roused by her progress along this narrow forest path. Her progress, and that of her new mechanical friend. Commencing to walk again, she pushed it along through underbrush and creepers, woodbine and fern giving way before its wheels. Oh, how the insects buzzed about her exposed skin, her face and hands and wrists and ankles, waiting to bite. And the vexing heat bid fair to stifle her as she climbed the hillside slowly—but the scent—intoxicating! And soon, so soon, all this effort would be repaid.

There! The crest came in sight, the washed-out summer sky showing itself through the beech trees’ old silver trunks. Now her path connected with the road, stony, rutted, but still better suited for riding. She stood a moment admiring the view: the valley, the blurred rows of cultivation curving away smaller and smaller in the bluing distance, the sky pale overhead, the perfect foil for the dark-leaved woods behind her and by her sides. Not far off a redwing sang, cold water trickling uphill.

She had the way of it now: gripping the rubber molded around the machine’s metal handlebars, she leaned it toward her and swung one skirted leg over the drop frame. Upright again, she walked it a few more steps forward, aiming straight along the lane, the yellow-brown dust bright in the sun. The machine’s glossy paint shone. Within the wheel’s front rim its spokes were a revolving web of intricacy, shadows and light chasing one another. Tiny puffs of dust spurted from beneath the black rubber tires.

She raised her eyes. The vista opened wider, wider. The road laid itself down before her.

Up on the creaking leather seat. Legs drawn high, boots searching, scraping, finding their places . . . and pedal! Push! Feet turning circles like her machine’s wheels, *with* those wheels. It was, at first, work. She

40 pedaled and steered, wobbling just once and catching herself. Then going faster, faster! Flying! Freedom!

Saplings, walls, and vines whipped by, flashes of greenbrown greengrey as Lisette on her machine sped down the road, down the hill. Wind rushed into her

45 face, whistled in her ears, filled her nose, her lungs, tore her hair loose of its pins to stream behind her. She was a wild thing, laughing, jouncing over dry watercourses, hanging on for dear, dear life. Lower, now, and some few trees arched above, alternately

50 blocking the hot glare and exposing her to it coolwarmcoolwarm, currents of sun and shade splashing over her as she careened by. Coasting, at last, spilling all velocity till she and the machine came to rest beside the river.

55 The river. The comforting smell and sound of it rushing away. Out on the Yonne’s broad darkness a barge sailed, bound perhaps for Paris, the Seine, the sea beyond,¹ carrying casks of wine and other valuables. Flushed from her ride, Lisette blushed yet

60 more deeply, suddenly conscious of the curious stares of those around her: Mademoiselle Carduner, the schoolmistress; and Monsieur Lutterayne, the chemist,² out for a promenade during his dinner hour or on some errand, seizing a chance to vacate his

65 stuffy shop. Flustered, she attempted to restrain her hair into a proper chignon,³ but at only sixteen and with many pins missing, this was beyond her skill. She began furiously to plait⁴ her thick blond curls, and the others moved away.

70 At last she was alone on the riverbank with her

mechanical friend. She tied her plaits together, though she knew that momentarily they would slither apart. She stroked the machine's still-gleaming handlebars, then leaned to fit her forehead at their center, so. "Dear one," whispered Lisette. "How can you ever know how much you mean to me? Who would not give all they could, everything they had, in exchange for such happiness as I have found with you?"

¹ The Yonne River in France is a tributary of the Seine River, which passes through the city of Paris toward the Atlantic Ocean.

² pharmacist

³ a hairstyle in which the hair is pinned into a knot at the nape of the neck or at the back of the head

⁴ braid

Everfair by Nisi Shawl. © 2016, Nisi Shawl.

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Question 2

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts as one-third of the total essay section score.)

The following excerpt is from Brenda Peynado’s short story “The Rock Eaters,” published in 2021. In this passage, the narrator is one of a group of people who left their home country after developing the ability to fly, an ability that is accepted as realistically possible within the story. Years later, the group returns to that country with their children. Read the passage carefully. Then, in a well-written essay, analyze how Peynado uses literary elements and techniques to convey the narrator’s complex experience of this return home.

In your response you should do the following:

- Respond to the prompt with a thesis that presents a defensible interpretation.
- Select and use evidence to support your line of reasoning.
- Explain how the evidence supports your line of reasoning.
- Use appropriate grammar and punctuation in communicating your argument.

We were the first generation to leave our island country. We were the ones who developed a distinct float to our walk on the day we came of age. Soon enough we were hovering inches above the ground, then somersaulting with the clouds, finally discovering we could fly as far as we’d ever wanted. And so we left. Decades later, we brought our children back to see our home country. That year, we all decided we were ready to return.

We jackknifed through clouds and dodged large birds. We held our children tightly; they had not yet learned to fly. Behind us trailed roped-together lines of suitcases packed with gifts from abroad. We wondered who would remember us.

Our parents, those who were still alive, came out to greet us, hands on their brows like visors. Some were expecting us. Others were surprised, terrified at the spectacle of millions of their prodigals¹ blotting the sky with our billowing skirts, our shirts starched for the arrival. We touched down on our parents’ driveways, skidding to rough landings at their feet, denting cars, squashing flowers, rattling windows.

Our old friends and siblings, the ones we’d left behind, kept their doors locked. They peered through window blinds at the flattened flowerbeds, the suitcases that had burst and strewn packages all over the yards and streets, our youngest children squealing now that they’d been released, the peace we’d broken by returning. They didn’t trust us, not after our betrayal decades ago, the whiff of money we’d earned or lost in other countries like a suspect stench. Our parents hugged their grandchildren and brought them inside to houses with no electricity, candles wavering like we were in a séance. “More brownouts,” they told

35 us. “We remember,” we said, recoiling at how little the place fit us anymore. Those first nights we slept in our old beds, our feet hanging over the edges, the noises of the city and the country crowing and honking us awake, music from radios and guitars, 40 celebrations we’d not been invited to.

We dragged our children along to knock on the doors of old friends and siblings, the ones who never developed the ability to fly. They eventually, 45 reluctantly, opened their doors. At first we sat stiffly on couches and inquired after their health and others we once knew. Then we got them to laugh with us about the time we pulled the nuns’ skirts or put gum in the kink of a rival’s hair, when we caught baby chicks in the village and raised them, or cracked open 50 almonds on the malecón.² Then their children came shyly out of their rooms and took ours by the hand. We smiled when we saw them climbing trees together in the patios, their children showing ours how to eat cajulitos solimán and acerolas³ from the branch.

55 We introduced our children to everyone we used to know: at colmados,⁴ by the side of the road, at the baseball fields, at country clubs we had to beg to be let back into. We showed our children the flamboyán trees in the parks, blooms of coral red spilling in the dirt. We showed them the granite striated through the 60 rock faces of mountains, the glimmering pebbles under waterfalls, the red dust that stained the seats of their best clothes. We walked past the stray dogs that growled and whined; the most ancient among them remembered us, wagging their tails when they saw us 65 and running to sniff our offspring. We dunked our children into the rivers we’d once swum. We dug through the banks for the arrowheads that belonged to

the Tainos, who'd been erased after the Spanish came,
their remnants lost in the mud.

Lost, the children whispered in awe and fear,
turning the black, glinting points in their palms,
testing the hardness of flint between their teeth. Back
in our foreign homes, we had never talked to them of
history.

We remembered we'd been happy. "We loved this
land," we said. We forget why we ever left.

¹ children who have left home and then returned

² a walkway along a waterfront

³ Cajulitos solimán and acerolas are types of fruit.

⁴ neighborhood stores

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