

Sean:

This is a good topic, and as you can see, your topic already contains the germ of your argument! You seem to be asking something like, "What's the relationship between D'Elmont's 'ambition,' which he finally gives up after he seems to lose Melliora, and his eventual happiness in love?" Your answer to that question will be your thesis. Just be sure not to get sidetracked by tangential topics--stay on focus. I look forward to reading your draft!

Molly:

Good topic! I think you've got a lot of room to play here. You may want to think about rephrasing or simplifying your question just a bit, so you can clarify what your thesis might look like--for instance, "In *Love in Excess*, how do social conventions shape or limit the expression of female desire?" Notice how that allows you to zero in on your topic? I look forward to reading your draft!

Aini:

This is a pretty broad question, Aini, as it's written: "What is Behn's opinion of women in reference to Isabella and Imoinda?" However, you are clearly interested in the ways that Behn represents women, so we can absolutely start there. You'll want to narrow this a bit--for instance, focusing on one text can help, as can clarifying what feature of her representation of women is most interesting to you. You could ask, "Why do both Imoinda and Isabella have to die in Behn's fictions? What trait do they share that makes them both subject to punishment?" Or, "Why does the narrator encourage us to see Isabella's point of view?" Or, "What is the nature of Isabella's criminality?" Notice how these questions are much narrower, and yet still about the way that Behn represents women. I look forward to reading your draft!

Macarena:

This is an interesting topic! Female curiosity is definitely significant in all of these fictions, especially in *Love in Excess*. Your topic, however, seems to be going in two different directions, in part because of a slight misreading of the quote (at least, as it's described in your comments). Your quote is particularly interesting in that it is about the "error[s]" of female "fancy"--notice that D'Elmont is suggesting that she only desires him because her "fancy" clouds her "judgment," and that this is a typically female failing. But, instead of condemning her *for* her desire (in this particular quote), he's saying that he cannot take her up on her offer because it would be unfair to ("to the prejudice of") his friend. You might look at how "fancy" is represented in the novel! What is "fancy"? Look it up in the Oxford English Dictionary! You could do something fascinating on this image and how it is functioning in *Love in Excess*. Or, you could just focus on "the dangers of female sexual curiosity" with a question like, "What are the dangers of female sexual curiosity in Haywood's novel?" I look forward to reading your draft!

Elvis:

I like how your topic questions become more focused as they continue! I might even read points 2 (“social conventions affect Behn’s female characters”) and 3 (“social conventions trap women”) as parts of an outline for the larger topic: What are the effects of social conventions on Behn’s female characters? I think this is a strong topic. One thing you’ll want to be very careful to do, though, is to define--with reference to the text--what “social conventions” you’re talking about. That, in fact, could be a way to further refine your topic. Do you want to work with both “The History of the Nun” and *Oroonoko*? I look forward to reading your draft!

Erica:

This is an interesting topic! You are clearly interested in the narrator’s position, which is an excellent way to narrow your approach. However, the “social constraints” may be a little broad, and they’ll have to be clearly defined in your essay; what about rephrasing your question, something like: “What kinds of institutions does Behn explore in ‘The History of the Nun,’ and how do they constrain [or dictate? or structure? or direct?] Isabella’s actions?” This kind of question ensures that you have a clear shape to your draft. I look forward to reading your work!

Susan:

Good choice of a question to adapt! There’s lots of material to discuss in *Love in Excess*, too. However, you may want to choose one or the other of those questions--either “How does Haywood’s work explore the nature of love?” or “How do the moral consequences of passion differ for men and women?” Your quote seems not to directly address either of these questions, however--or rather, your analysis doesn’t quite address the questions you’re posing. You’ll definitely want to brainstorm a bit about these two potential topics, and use that to help you choose. I look forward to reading your draft!

Jyotshna:

Very interesting topic! It is a bit broad right now, though, in part because you haven’t suggested why killing Imoinda makes the novel anti-feminist. There are lots of counter-arguments to consider, not the least of which is the narrator’s atypical power in the novel, and her atypical (if incomplete) sympathy with an “Other.” Note that your working thesis also seems very either/or. How can you tease out the complexities of Behn’s feminism? That is, what are we missing by using only Imoinda’s death as the key piece of evidence? You may want to think about what function Imoinda serves in the novel, keeping in mind the earlier portion, too. I’m only a little worried that this is a big topic, and perhaps you’re *more* interested in the way Imoinda is represented by the narrator--with a final gesture to the issue of feminism. I look forward to reading your draft!

Clare:

Interesting topic! I especially like that you've already identified a narrowed topic--the sexual double standards that govern male and female behavior. Yet, you might want to consider how you can be more concrete and precise about the "double standard." Notice that I wrote "sexual double standard," which already defines the terms a bit? Your close reading clarifies the need for more precision and concreteness--notice that you don't quite address the details of the language used in the quotes (which are excellent!). For instance, how is masculine behavior characterized in the first quote ("What man that does not boast....?")? What does the *second* quote ("Women are by nature more constant...") suggest about masculine behavior? What about how the quotes characterize femininity? Notice that both quotes suggest that these characteristics are *natural*, predetermined. Perhaps you could narrow your topic by taking a step back and asking, first, "How does Behn characterize the natural differences between men and women in 'The History of the Nun'?" I look forward to reading your draft!

Nicole:

Ooo, nice and narrowed topic! And, I do like how you suggest a way to further refine your question by using the language of "What is the relationship between....?" I presume this would be revised as, "What is the relationship between Isabella's early life in a convent and her slow transformation into a murderess?" This, of course, suggests that there *is* a relationship. I think you should go with this! But, notice that your quote doesn't really address your topic, and neither does your commentary on the quote. You'll want to look at how the convent is characterized--what do we know about the Abbess? About Isabella's parents? About her age when she first goes into the convent? How does this shape her future actions? Then, consider if there are any similarities between how her behavior is shaped here (why does she make the choices she does about entering the convent?) and in her reasons for killing her husbands? I look forward to reading your draft!

Lauren:

I notice that you and Nicole have very similar topics, but I also notice that you have a *second* topic in yours, too. You may want to focus there? That is, "How does Behn's 'The History of the Nun' characterize the relationship between the mind and the heart?" I like the idea of trying to connect the context of Isabella's convent education to her criminality to this struggle between mind and heart, but I'm not *quite* sure how you're planning on doing that--and, you've only got five pages! You could also rephrase the question like this: "In what ways does Isabella's behavior reflect a struggle between mind and heart?" Regardless, you'll probably want to narrow your focus, and be judicious about your chosen quotes. I look forward to reading your draft!

Melissa:

You've got quite a constellation of topics, here! I would suggest that you try to restate your question into a simpler form, which will help keep you on track as you draft. For instance, I notice that your quotes emphasize his nobility of spirit, his fear of being shamed or treated with

contempt. These are important elements in his character, and as we discussed, it's the main reason why the narrator is able to find common ground with him--she values the "nobility" of character that makes him better than/different from the common sort. What if you were to focus here with your question? For instance, "How does the narrator justify Oroonoko's murder of Imoinda and his own suicide justified?" Here, his enslavement (as distinct from other Africans' enslavement) becomes evidence. Remember, it's not slavery in general that the narrator finds problematic--it's the enslavement of a noble man. I look forward to reading your draft!