

LITERATURE AND HUMANITIES 1

Assignment 3: Writing Reflection and Comparison

Word Limit	1,500 words overall
Weighting	25% of overall course grade (NB: Part A will be graded S/U on the basis of earnestness of effort; Part B will be letter-graded and will form the basis for the overall assignment grade)
Presentation	MS Word format (no PDFs); regular font size (e.g. Times Roman 12); double spacing; indent the first line of each new paragraph and do not include any blank space between paragraphs; do include an essay title, page numbers, and a Works Cited page
Deadline and Submission Instructions	11:59pm on Saturday, 28 November 2020 ; email your Word documents to me at ila.tyagi@yale-nus.edu.sg

This final assignment consists of two parts. Part A asks you to reflect on your progress over the semester as a reader and writer; Part B invites you to conduct a comparison between two texts, involving at least one of the texts from the final cluster: *1001 Nights*, *al-Khansā*, or *The Decameron*.

Part A: Short Writing Reflection (300–400 words)

Reread your previous two writing assignments for the course, along with the professor's comments. Offer an earnest reflection on your progress as a reader and writer during this course.

The sort of questions you might ask yourself include, but are not restricted to, the following: What progress have you made in specific skills? What surprises you about your development as a writer? What are you still working on? What common concerns, themes, or interests do you handle in your previous two assignments? Do they reveal anything about your strategies and approaches as a reader and writer?

Part B: Comparison (1,100–1,200 words)

You may choose either option B1 or B2 below. Choose the option that most appeals to you. There is no intrinsic advantage of picking B1 over B2, or vice versa; both options offer significant scope.

Option B1: Comparative Essay

Write a short essay, involving at least one of *1001 Nights*, *al-Khansā*, or *The Decameron*, in which you compare a particular aspect of one of these texts with another text that we have studied, and on which you have not previously written a paper.

A possible topic for discussion might be, for example, one of the following: the function of storytelling and recording events; boundaries between beasts, humans, and divinities; justice and vengeance; the role of physical journeys; food and eating as cultural practices; cleverness, rhetoric and wit. You are encouraged to devise your own topic beyond this list.

Option B2: "Creative" Comparison

This is an opportunity for you to take a short section from one of our texts and recast it in the words of another one of our studied texts. You should ensure that you tackle at least one of the texts from the final cluster (*1001 Nights*, al-Khansā, *The Decameron*) as either the primary material for conversion or the new "host" voice. Again, you may not use a text on which you have previously written a paper as either the source or host text.

In going about this assignment, you will (a) choose a suitable short section and analyse for yourself what its core stylistic and thematic elements are, and (b) choose a new "host" author and think about how that author would recast the material in (a) to fit their own stylistic and thematic priorities. For example, how would *The Decameron* deal with the intrigues of Sima Qian's Empress Lü? How would the adventures of the third dervish from *1001 Nights* differ if they were written in the epic mode of Homer's *Odyssey*? etc.

In addition to your creative narrative, you should include a justification, in which you explain (with references where appropriate) why your choice of theme, style, manner of speaking, and perspective is characteristic of the voice you are seeking to impersonate. This can take the form of a few paragraphs entitled "Justification."

A suitable format would be:

- (i) Introduction: cite clearly or print the section you wish to recast. This does not count towards the word limit.
- (ii) Creative Narrative (c. 400-600 words): offer your creative retelling in the voice of the new "host" author.
- (iii) Justification (c. 600-800 words): justify the choices you have made in the form of a few body paragraphs. This section does not require an introduction or a conclusion.

Note 1: you can be as creative and inventive as you like, so long as you can convince the reader that what you say is consistent with the stylistic and thematic priorities of the host author.

Note 2: the best narratives will consider both stylistic and thematic aspects of the texts: i.e. they will consider *what* themes/motifs/topics are important to each author, and *how* each author tends to articulate and arrange those ideas.

Assignment 3

Part A: Short Writing Reflection

All the essays this semester have been vital in my journey and growth in Literature and Humanities. I would say I am pleasantly surprised as I thought I had lost touch with my literary skills. However, through my professor's feedback, I learnt that I was competent in providing in-depth analysis and touching on various aspects of each narrative, while intertwining it with the main subject of the essay. It is motivating to know that despite not having much confidence in my language, I am capable of writing strong comprehensive essays.

With that said, I am still trying to improve specific writing skills such as coherently structuring essays. I was unable to create a smooth flow between my paragraphs. For this, I need to connect each distinct idea with another by finding a commonality between them. Secondly, I struggled to form concise and thorough thesis statements. For this, I could separate the statement into two parts or find a common theme that encapsulates the points I want to mention.

Moreover, I have discovered that I have primarily focused on the status of women in society. For the *Ramayana*, I showed how Sita challenged patriarchy, in *Sundiata* I explored women's control over Sundiata's path to becoming king and in this essay, I also briefly touch on how both Athena and Peronella use patriarchy to their advantage. I have always been very passionate about women empowerment and thus, in all the texts this semester, my attention was instantly directed towards female characters. Hence, I have tried to wove my interests into the essays that I have written and make connections to the text's linguistics.

I have definitely been able to hone my skills in close-reading analysis and finding links not only between the texts we have studied but my other Common Curriculum modules too.

Words: 301

Part B: Comparison – Option B1:

Manipulation and deception in the *Decameron* and the *Odyssey*

Manipulation and deception are unique themes used in many narratives and are crucial in escalating the plot to the climax and propelling characters forward. These themes are prominent in both the *Decameron* and the *Odyssey*, where it highlights the importance of specific intentions of characters and gives the reader an insight into the character's intelligence. Manipulation is carried out mainly through language while deception is mostly based on the practicality of action. In this paper, I will compare the way manipulation and deception are executed through persuasive language and trickery in the *Decameron* and the *Odyssey* by examining the character's **methods and motives**. I argue that manipulation and deception can be used for personal benefit such as sexual pleasures and greater pride or they can be used for the benefit of others.

In Day 7 Story 2 of the *Decameron*, Filostrato tells the story of Peronella and her extra-marital affair with a man where she lies to achieve her desire of sexual pleasures. She cunningly finds a way to prevent the destruction of marriage while continuing to have an affair with another man she fell for, Giannello. When her husband returns back home early from work, Peronella effectively manipulates her husband into thinking that she is blameless although she is having an affair. Firstly, she bombards him with questions just as he sees her that adds pressure on him. She easily victimises herself by repeatedly using self-effacing terms to refer to herself like "poor me" and "little me."¹ This shows how could use their deemed inferiority to their advantage to get what they desired. Her use of negative diction like "evil", "suffer" and "bad" creates a hostile atmosphere between her and her husband, allowing her to swiftly shift the focus on him, for her to protect herself.² Moreover, she constantly uses the personal pronoun "I" to victimise herself and emphasise her "suffer(ing)" and "bad luck."³

¹ The *Decameron*, Day 7 Story 2, pg. 528.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

This clearly shows how Peronella slyly uses the subordination of women in society against a man to accentuate how resourceful and capable she actually is. Thus, she is able to manipulate her husband by making him appreciate her more without any suspicion, while still being able to receive pleasure from Giannello.

Similar to the *Decameron*, manipulation through language is used by Athena as she persuades her father, Zeus, to help Odysseus return home from Calypso's captivity in Book 1 of the *Odyssey*. Both Peronella and Athena seem to use emotional blackmail with men as a technique to get what they want and override their decisions – they use their ostensible weaknesses to their advantage. Athena uses similar negative diction with phrases like “bad luck”, “poor” and “suffered” when talking about Odysseus to evoke sympathy in Zeus.⁴ Like Peronella, Athena throws baseless accusations on her father like, “you do not even care!”, to make him feel like he is a cruel god.⁵ There is also the use of repetitive questioning by Athena when she asks him if he “remember(s) how (Odysseus) sacrificed to (him) on the broad plain of Troy...” and asks why he “dismiss(es) Odysseus” to guilt trip him.⁶ However, Athena's motivation to manipulate seems much more good-willed as compared to Peronella's. Athena avoids lying to her father and only persuades him through the facts to bring justice to Odysseus and help him regain control over his kingdom so that the people of Ithaca can lead better lives. But Peronella is shown to deceive her husband by lying and hiding her lover in a barrel for her romantic and sexual satisfaction. This shows that Athena is trying to achieve the greater good for Ithaca while Peronella only wants to attain satisfaction for herself. Therefore, Peronella and Athena depict their cleverness in many similar ways but differ mainly in their motives of manipulation.

Secondly, in Day 10 Story 10 of the *Decameron*, the theme of manipulation through trickery is showcased through Dioneo's story, where Gualtieri plays with his wife's feelings

⁴ The Odyssey, Book 1, pg. 107.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

for years and deceives her multiple times just to ensure that she is truly patient and docile. In this story, Gualtieri marries an ideal woman but still decides to “test her patience by subjecting her to constant tribulations” and “making life intolerable for her.”⁷ Gualtieri’s intentions seem awfully evil as he does not sympathise with all the pain and suffering his innocent wife would have to go through just to earn his trust. He then gets his children taken away from her and pretends to have them “put to death.”⁸ This elicits a horrified response from the reader as they would think he is extremely self-serving and ruthless to put his own respectful wife through such emotional turmoil. Additionally, Gualtieri goes on to say that he could “no longer put up with Griselda as his wife any longer” and proceeds to “put Griselda aside and take another wife.”⁹ This successfully makes Griselda seem disposable and replaceable to Gualtieri. Through this series of heartless tricks played on naïve Griselda, Gualtieri misleads her for a long time in their marriage just to test if she is worthy of him and ultimately concludes that she is due to her silence and obedience.

This story of Gualtieri can be compared with the scene between Odysseus and Polyphemus in Book 9 of the *Odyssey*, where Odysseus craftily defeats Polyphemus and manages to escape his cave due to his infallible trickery. As he leaves, Odysseus announces his real name, “Odysseus, the city sacker”, to everyone to raise his reputation.¹⁰ Gualtieri hides the truth from Griselda for years to find out if she remains dutiful towards him. Therefore, both stories carry out deception for selfish means. Furthermore, Odysseus uses violence to escape Polyphemus as he starts “scheming to take revenge on him and hurt him” and convinces Polyphemus to have a lot of wine to easily make him the victim of his trap.¹¹ However, Gualtieri causes more emotional torture for Griselda. Also, Odysseus uses hospitality against the host, Polyphemus, by stabbing him in the eye in his own home. For

⁷ The Decameron, Day 10 Story 10, page unknown.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ The Odyssey, Book 9, pg. 256.

¹¹ The Odyssey, Book 9, pg. 250.

Gualtieri, all events took place in his own household which allowed him to have greater control on the consequences. Finally, both stories differ in the reader's response – Odysseus, the “good guy”, conquering evil Polyphemus causes the reader to feel proud while Gualtieri mercilessly being unjust to his blameless wife in their marriage angers and disgusts the reader. Hence, although both Odysseus and Gualtieri deceived due to personal motives, their true natures are substantially different from one another.

In conclusion, manipulation and deception are well used in the plots of the *Odyssey* and the *Decameron* but their uses differ greatly in the characters' desires and circumstances. Sometimes, these themes fulfil multiple goals. For example, through Peronella's story of manipulation, Filostrato empowers women but simultaneously, Peronella's behaviour shows how manipulation can be used for immoral means. Trickery is used in storytelling for Gualtieri's and Odysseus's stories, but for distinct purposes. Odysseus's account seems quite exaggerated to favour his own pride while Dioneo simply tells his story for entertainment and to advise people to not follow in Gualtieri's footsteps. Thus, deception and manipulation are not only essential in adding thrill into a story, but telling the reader more about each character and conveying an important message.

Words: 1199

Total word count (Part A & B): 1500

Works Cited

Wilson, Emily R. *The Odyssey*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2018.

Boccaccio, Giovanni, and Wayne A. Rebhorn. *The Decameron*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2013.

Puchner, Martin. *The Norton Anthology of World Literature*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2012.