

Paper 2 prompts

Choose one of the following topics. (There is some overlap between them; you may end up writing a paper on storytelling that is also a paper about justice. That's fine!). Write a 4-6 page paper driven by a strong, clear argument, supported by deeply analyzed evidence from the text. This paper will be due, by email, in our final week of classes.

1. First person. A number of texts we have read employ first-person narration. These include the implicit I used in both Wang Wei's and Li Bo's poetry as well as Dante's first person narrative form in the *Inferno*. *The Thousand and One Nights* is structured differently because of its layered framework: switching between first and third person narration. Consider the different effect(s) that first person narration produces: locking the reader into a storyteller's subjective experience, for instance, or perhaps shutting the reader out (Wang Wei lets us into a landscape, but not a mind; Dante's sinners and Dante himself, by contrast, offer a certain amount of inwardness, both psychological and affective, or emotional). Write an argumentative essay analyzing the use of the first person in at least two texts we have read this semester.

2. One story, many stories. Many of our longer texts contain inset stories—myriad short narratives, often extremely varied and arresting in and of themselves—within a larger framing story. In Dante's *Inferno*, for example Dante the Poet punctuates the journey of Dante the Pilgrim with portraits of the damned souls' suffering and tales of their lives on earth. In *The Thousand and One Nights*, Shahrazad tells story after story to the king—in order to survive, and perhaps also to teach, counsel, and reveal something about the nature of storytelling itself. And in *Antigone*, the guard repeatedly has to tell the story of the offstage action: Antigone's burial and reburial of her brother. Considering at least two texts we have read this semester, write an argumentative, analytical essay addressing the relationship of inset narratives to the work as a whole.

3) The uses of storytelling. People tell each other stories, over and over, in the poems, plays, and stories we have read. And they seem to do this for various reasons: self-expression and confession (storytelling as a means of communicating self to world); building social bonds (storytelling as a kind of gift, or debt); to delay a negative outcome (storytelling as strategy). Looking at two or more texts—or two or more storytelling characters—write an argumentative, analytical essay on the uses of storytelling. NOTE: You may use the *Odyssey*, here, but only in addition to two other texts.

4) Metamorphosis: In both *The Thousand and One Nights* and the *Inferno*, human beings undergo various transformations—into animals, into new bodies, into both (think about the *snakes*, late in the *Inferno*, in particular!). Write an analytical, argumentative essay on two or more specific instances of transformation. What principles lie behind them? Is there justice in transformation—and if so, what constitutes that justice? How and why can they be reversed? What do they demonstrate? And, does each text have a coherent program behind its transformations—or do the rules change, so to speak, on a case-by-case basis?

5) The Uses of Comparison: Metaphors, similes, and allegories are all forms of comparison, in which an outside image conveys or even re-describes an idea, or event, in a text. They are found throughout Dante's *Inferno*, the *Thousand and One Nights*, and Sophocles' *Antigone*. Write an essay built around careful close-readings of two or three similes, allegories or metaphors (extensive, implied or

otherwise) from at least two of the above works, and determine the role each plays in producing meaning in the work.

6. Justice/Crime and Punishment: In almost all of the texts we have read, some conception of justice—especially when it comes to punishment comes into play. Yet justice is never an easy concept to pin down. For instance, in the *Odyssey*, the suitors violate the codified guest-host relationship, yet, for some readers, Odysseus’ response—mass slaughter—seems in excess of what might be considered “just.” Think about other systems that are violated in the text we’ve read—divine laws in *Antigone* and the *Inferno*; the laws of the city in *Antigone*; the inscrutable rules by which demons operate in *The Thousand and One Nights*. Certain texts, like *Antigone*, offer multiple, competing conceptions of justice. Others, like the *Inferno*, offer vivid portraits of justice enacted on the souls of sinners—with very little outright theorization of the “laws” behind these punishments. Write an argumentative paper analyzing the “fit” between crime and punishment in the systems of justice articulated (or implied) in two or more different texts we have read this semester.