

Foundation Program English – Final Writing Portfolio & Reflection

Date: Apr 22nd, 2019

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Final Reflection

Identify your 2 greatest strengths in these assessments:

First, there is clear organization for each of the pieces even though it may not be evident. The personal narrative is in chronological order, and the story unfolds as time elapses, which can be inferred from temporal conjunctions like when, after, etc.; the rewrite is a narration interspersed with flashbacks, and Wainwright's recall was also in chronological order; Portia's suicide note was in logical sequence, explaining different reasons for her choice one by one.

Second, all three pieces are very emotional. The personal narrative may be the most powerful one, because it is about my own experience and thoughts and thus have the strongest empathy; the ending of the rewrite also intends to be emotional, expressing the indescribable sense of lostness; the last two pieces are full of emotion as well. For example, phrases like "I shall follow you to where you are and be by your side forever." expresses Brutus' love for Portia, and "I shall burn this heart, the one that used to be so fully devoted to you and Rome, with my everlasting faith and love." explicitly expresses Portia's devotion to both her husband and Rome.

Identify your 2 biggest challenges with these assessments:

The first challenge was to write in first person narrative point of view and explore the characters' inner thoughts. It turned out that comparing to knowing what a character thinks, it is relatively much more difficult to actually write that out and convey those thoughts to readers, especially when it comes to a minor role like Wainwright in the Reluctant Fundamentalist and Portia in Julius Caesar. I had to read their parts over and over again in order to figure out their thoughts and intentions.

The second challenge I met was to use different registers while writing different text types for different pieces. For example, while I was writing my personal narrative, I was quite comfortable with writing in first person in the form of a short story; however, when I was writing the other two pieces, I chose more challenging approaches and wrote in the first person in forms of internal musing, letter and even soliloquy, which I had never tried or even read before. Thus, I searched online about the structures and examples of these text types to get familiar with them first, and then try to write them by myself; I also turned to teacher for help when I mixed up the concepts of monologue, soliloquy and internal musing with each other.

For each criterion, summarize what you did well and what you could improve

Creative Writing Piece

Strengths	To improve
TEXTUAL UNDERSTANDING <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The rewrite, Portia's suicide note and Brutus' regret all show the understanding of the original work and the insight into the characters' spiritual world. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In all the three pieces, I mainly focused on only one or two characteristic of the main character and thus may not present the full images of those characters.
ARGUMENT CONSTRUCTION <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All the pieces are organized in order, either chronologically or logically. - In Portia's note and Brutus' regret, each idea is supported using appropriate evidence or clues from the original work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sometimes the transition of scenes or ideas are not perfect. For example, at the end of the personal narrative, the transition from climbing to standing at the cliff may be abrupt. It may be most evident in the rewrite because I intended to show the mental clutter inside Wainwright.
PRODUCING TEXT <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Each of the three pieces produces texts that tells a story. - The style of narratives all corresponds with the genres and text types I chose. - Many stylistic devices are used and accomplish the intended effect. For example, in the personal narrative, by employing metaphor and comparing the sky with a rag, I expressed anxious and discomfort. Also, a lot of rhetorical questions can be found in the other two pieces. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I used first person narrative point of view for all the three pieces. As a result, I did not get practice on how to write in third person point of view, which I should have tried. - Some ideas may not be conveyed efficiently because I sometimes wish to make the language vivid as well as a bit ambiguous and veiled.
USING LANGUAGE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The language in the personal narrative is vivid, with varied vocabularies and sentence structures. - Most of the grammar is correctly used. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In the last two pieces, however, the language is very simple and casual due to the text type.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The register for all three pieces is appropriate: the personal narrative is powerful and engaging; the rewrite is written in a casual tone with a little melancholy and lostness; and the last two pieces are full of emotion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The punctuations in sentences may be too often with too much parenthesis. - Sometimes sentence structures are not varied enough, especially in the rewrite and there are too many short sentences as a result of the text type (inner musing).
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RATIONALE:

Strengths	To improve
ARGUMENT CONSTRUCTION <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All the arguments are organized into paragraphs and the information within one paragraph is relevant. - A lot of cohesive devices are used—in comparison, moreover, especially, on the ground that, to name a few. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Some of the ideas may not be fully clarified because of limited space.
USING LANGUAGE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Grammar is accurate. - Sentence structures are varied. - Register is appropriate as a rationale. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Some long sentences may lead to grammar inaccuracy. - Vocabulary is not varied enough, with sometimes misuse of certain phrases.

Looking ahead...

Looking ahead, what will you focus on improving? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More varied vocabulary and sentence structures. - Grammar, especially when writing long sentences. 	How will you do this? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Combine the extensive reading with intensive reading and learn from other writers. - Know more, think more and write more. - Try various text types and different genres.
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Personal Narrative & Rationale

Rationale

The personal narrative is in the form of a short story, because a short story has an attractive plot, along with a series of unfolding events as well as more characters, providing more freedom while writing it. Meanwhile, short story can force me to write a more engaging and moving narrative in a limited space.

Besides, the personal narrative will be written in first person point of view, so that I can use the most natural voice. In comparison, telling my own story in third person narrative is not as natural, especially when expressing inner emotions and thoughts. Also, talking in first person can create a strong empathy of readers, as they can be immersed in the world I created and better understand the narrator's emotion and thoughts.

The story I chose was my hiking experience in Trolltunga, Norway. It is known as one of the most dangerous trekking routes in the world and it is one of the most unforgettable experiences I have ever had. Even though it may not be the most challenging or exciting one, only during this hiking did I experience the process of constantly going beyond myself regardless of endless desperation. It made me realize the true meaning of faith, perseverance, and one's unlimited potential. And because of this, the story will emphasize more on my own feelings and inspirations rather than the spectacular view during the hiking.

Personal Narrative

So here we are, at the foot of the mountains, the starting point of the 30-kilometer mountain hiking.

Seeing the sign of "Do NOT Enter After Noon", we hesitated.

Dad lifted his hand to block the glare from the midday sun. "Noon has not gone yet." He said as he tugged the bag over his shoulder. "Just keep going."

Yes, but we are risking our lives. If we don't finish the whole trip before sunset, even god can't save us in such a leak place. Yet I understood why Dad said this. We'd been anticipating this hike, the one with the world's most dangerous trekking route, for so long. This might be the only chance in his life to come here, Trolltunga, meaning Troll Tongue in Norwegian legends.

So we moved on. It went well at first. There were stone steps, with birds chirping and streams running along.

Unfortunately, we had barely covered 3km when it began to rain.

First it was just drizzling, then it started storming. Overhead, the sky became as dirty as a rag, making me feel like dragging it down and cleaning it. The raindrops fell from seemingly nowhere, turning dust into mud. The ground became slushy and slippery with the wind growing chilled to marrow. Climbing now was increasingly stiff.

We had no choice but to keep dragging ourselves upwards. It seemed to be a century when we saw a group of people coming down for the first time.

"You saw that? The Trolltunga?" asked my Dad.

"No, the weather's terrible. It may be a while before the rain stops, and it may even rain heavier. Anyway, good luck."

We fell back into silence and slowed to a steady walk. The sudden muteness gnawed at my insides, making my blood as cold as the damp air.

"Let's go back," after losing her balance for the tenth time, Mom finally broke the silence.

I stopped. Indeed, never for a moment in my whole life had I had such a great desire for my little bed in our motorhome, the soup made by Mom, and the hot bath ... *Let's go back.*

"You may stay here, and we shall go," Dad interrupted before I could throw my stick away and cry it out.

Why is he using "we"? We should GO BACK.

Yet Dad had already proceeded. I stared at his back for a while, the rain-soaked shirt clinging to his broad shoulders.

I followed him. I kept reminding myself that if I give up, all I did would amount to nothing. It seemed that the more I had given to something, the less willing I was to give it up.

The rest of the route was numbing to me. Mud kept sloshed my legs and peppering all over me. My socks were now a mixture of brown and red, but I crawled, step by step, shivering and exhausted, and finally saw the little wooden sign at the mountaintop, reading an almost faded "Trolltunga".

So standing at the edge of the great cliff, I was unprepared for the feeling of awe that came over me, the howling gale buffeting my jacket, and the weeds exposed in the chilly air, growing tenaciously, and rooted in the crevice, which was in turn rooted at the edge of Trolltunga, which stuck out from a huge rock, which rested upon the mountain, which was growing from the earth itself, and from this mountain the weeds were stretching, in such a way so wonderful that I was filled with pride, and reminded of my parents, my friends, and all creatures in the world, for life is so fragile, and so beautiful.

I heard a faraway voice calling my name. I looked back, and I saw Mom.

Rewrite a Scene & Rationale

Rationale

The rewrite is mainly based on two scenes from the novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid: Wainwright's advice for Changez to shave his beard and the handshaking upon Changez's resignation. Also, there are other details involved that refer to the novel. For example, Wainwright's silence after 9-11 and Changez's radicalness can be reflected in the narrative; the last line is a Marvel quote, since Wainwright always did so while speaking; throughout the narrative, there is evidence implying Wainwright's attitudes toward cultural differences and Islam, which corresponds to the original novel. All that can help shape the character better, as Wainwright always believed in the assimilation of culture and the possibility of integration for people like him.

The rewrite is in the form of an internal musing of Wainwright, a black man working as an analyst in Underwood Samson, when he was walking on a street at night. The piece will thus be in first person narrative because of the text type. This choice is made on the ground that internal musing can better reflect Wainwright's internal conflicts and explore his true feelings. Also, the setting is not on any special occasion, and thus implies this kind of inner conflict can happen to Wainwright on any night like this.

Overall, the aim of the piece is to explore how different people (Changez and Wainwright), even with similar status (both are non-white and graduates from Ivy League), can have very different attitudes and values towards the US empire because of individual differences. Also, the piece attempts to reveal some inner conflicts of Wainwright as a non-white in the US, and thus to explore the perspectives of a broader group like him.

Rewrite

This is my tenth year at Underwood Samson, or maybe eleventh, I can't remember. Yet I bet, I am excellent at my job. That's not boasting; I've always been ranked first in the whole company, well, since that Pakistani guy left. What is his name again? I can't remember that either...

That girl passing by, an American, is hiding her handbag. I've seen that thousands of times. That's how white women treat black men.

Changez. I remember his name now.

I remember when my family moved to the States, I hated it. Those older white boys used to shout at me with insults and laugh me at my appearance. I was not angry, but I was confused about why I was treated like that.

Father told me the best way to silence them was to keep silent. Dad gave me the best advice, and I kept silent for years till the hatred eventually waned. I finally realized the reason behind that hatred over the years: it is the difference, both culturally and racially.

But I am an American now, just like all these white people around me. I was assimilated, and I could see the bright future ahead—

Then I met that Pakistani. He was the top analyst in our company and the most hard-working guy I had ever met. He was a polished and interesting man who was the only one in my life to have that kind of bond with. We became great friends as well as competitors the first time we met.

It was in 2001 when 9-11 broke out. I could sense that there was something tumultuous for everyone around me. Americans wanted revenge like crazy. Muslims were beaten and discriminated everywhere. Still, I kept silent, but Changez was never a man like that. I noticed something changing inside him, though I was not sure what that was, yet I would never believe those gossips in the company about Changez or any other Muslim people.

When he came back from holiday, he was growing a beard, an Islamic beard.

“Look, man. I don’t know what’s up with the beard, but I don’t think it’s making you Mister Popular around here”, I inquired.

He looked at me with unprecedented firmness and said that beard was common where he came from.

I didn’t say anything more to him after that. I knew he must have gone through some turmoil, and he had made his mind to discard the great opportunity of staying in the States; he refused assimilation.

The last time I saw Changez was as he was leaving. He got fired, just like what I had warned him about.

Our last handshake was good and firm, partly out of the sincere friendship and respect, and partly to encourage him that racial and cultural differences can always be transcended. I was never that kind of man to do things like that: shaking hands with someone leaving soon with the rest of the company indifferently staying in their seats. For this time, however, I have never regretted.

I’ve never seen Changez since then; we completely lost contact. Now I am thinking of him again. Maybe I did so whenever white women pass me and hide their handbags. Looking back now, he would certainly be amused by my obsession: why do we need to do everything for the States regardless of our own identity and culture? After answering the question of what the Americans want me to do, he is the one who keeps me wondering: do I really want that kind of assimilation?

The night is chilly, I can see my breath against the sharp air under the dim street lights. I can’t stop shivering, but I know at least I can shiver myself warm.

"That's not a question I need answered."

Portia's Suicide note and Brutus' Monologue & Rationale

Rationale:

The two pieces aim to explore the inner world of Brutus and Portia by depicting Portia's final moments as well as Brutus' grief on the loss of wife based on the original scenes in Julius Caesar by William Shakespeare.

Portia's suicide note is emotional yet full of contradictions, showing the complexity of thoughts and toughness of the character. The most obvious contradiction is at the beginning of the letter, saying she didn't intend to write it. Beyond that, her love for Rome and Brutus was also contradictory, because Brutus killed Caesar and made her guilty and want to remedy the great fault by her death; her love for Brutus was contradictory, as she could not determine if she still loved him or whether Brutus still trusted her. Because of this, she wanted to make sure as least she still loved him before death. The piece not only explains why Portia chose to suicide, but also attempts to clarify why she killed herself in such a cruel approach by saying "I shall burn this heart with my everlasting faith and love".

Brutus' deeper reflection is rather a combination of ration and emotion. Upon hearing the news and reading Portia's suicide note, he tried to be stoic and repress his sorrow just as he always did in the original play. However, as he was alone, he could hardly hide his emotion anymore, but even while he was expressing his deepest sorrow, there were still evident rational reasoning and reflective thinking. Moreover, regardless of the deep love and regret he showed, in the end, he still saw Portia as a weak woman who was unable to take on any political responsibility, which is in accordance with Roman's prejudice towards women at that time.

Portia's suicide note

Dearest Brutus,

I am sitting at the stove, writing to you.

To be honest, I do not intend to write this to you. I even want to drop the pen now, yet I can't. I can't leave you without letting you know the reason and make you think me so cruel to leave you alone.

So I shall suppress my grief, and keep writing.

I love you Brutus, so deeply that I shall die bravely for you. Since we got married, I have been wishing that everyone in the world could be as happy as we were and love whoever they love, yet you, Brutus, killed the one they loved deepest. I know the only thing I can do right now is to atone for you. I do have selfish motives though: I want to keep my faithfulness till death, yet I fear that as I lay dying one day, I will love you no more because of the great mistake you made.

Please don't feel sorry for me.

Do you still remember that night before our marriage? You told me that you may not accompany me all the time, and I understood that you, as one of the most honorable men in Rome, were busy running everything, so what did I say to you? Whenever you are ready for an expedition, inform me, as I shall go with you.

But now I am still here at the stove, the very place we sat together so often ten years ago, side by side and hand in hand, whispering in one another's ears. Was there anything that we could not talk about together? Or any feeling that we shall not pour out and share with each other?

Looking back now, the only remaining is a bleeding heart.
So now I shall burn this heart, the one that used to be so fully devoted to you and Rome, with my everlasting faith and love.
Now that you don't trust me anymore, I shall turn to death instead.
After that, my spirit shall be with you whenever and wherever you are.
Fare thee well
Portia

Brutus' monologue

Calm down, Brutus, calm down.
You are the leader.
You have huge decisions to make ahead.
YOU are the one who decides the success or failure of the entire Roman empire.
...
Still, she has left me alone to face all these challenges ahead.
Of course, I love so deeply Rome and its people and Caesar.
Of course, I bear so hard in mind every single word of our promises.
But which one should I choose? You were clever, and you knew me so well and to you, the answer was so obvious.
I stabbed Caesar all because of the Rome I love. I have never told anyone the heartache I suffered every day when Caesar's last stare keep flashing in front of my eyes whenever and wherever I go, I have never regretted that however, as only my suffering can bring liberty to all. Neither do I regret for not telling you the conspiracy, because otherwise, as I knew you so well, by no means would you remain silent.
I did not tell you those because I loved you, too. I did not want you to suffer what I have been suffering. That is my own affairs, which you, as a woman, shall never bear. Yet I do regret for not accompanying you, which I will make up to you soon, after the war ceases and the people are safe. I shall follow you to where you are and be by your side forever.