Analytical assignment #2.3

Storytelling is done largely to garner fame for the storyteller, characters involved, and even the audience. This effect is prevalent throughout most storytelling, but especially in the tales Odysseus weaves for his audiences. Odysseus like all other Heroes, whether ancient or modern, yearns for his story to be told.

when Odysseus washes up the rocky shores on the land of the Phaeacians he encounters Nausicaa, the young princess of the island. Being the cunning man that he is, Odysseus tries to impress and flatter Nausicaa so that she might help him on his journey to get home. He begins with flattery, but then he says “Once, on Delos, I saw something to compare- a palm shoot springing up near Apollo’s altar. I had stopped there with the troops under my command on what would prove to be a perilous campaign” (Oddyssey 6.161). Odysseus is telling her that he was once an important military commander so that she will respect him and offer him advice or help.

When Odysseus enters the great palace of Alcinous he is also asked who he is. knowing that telling his whole story might end up helping him, Odysseus goes on for an eternity telling the story of his journey’s home. Odysseus knows that the more incredible he makes the story of his journey home, the more respected he will become by the Phaeacians. This helped him not only gain swift and safe passage home, but he also receives gifts of incredible worth simply because of his deeds and subsequent fame.

The idea of Kleos, glory, or what others hear about you comes up often throughout the text. There is the idea that having one’s story told long after they are dead gives them a sense of immortality. Odysseus main decision not to live with Calypso or to marry Nausicaa comes down to one thing, glory. A life with no fighting is what he would get on a remote island, either living with a goddess or a warless people. His fame is not something Odysseus is willing to sacrifice.

In life Achilles had the same drive as Odysseus, when making the choice between living a long uneventful life, or dying at war with incredible honor and fame Achilles chose the latter. After death Achilles thought differently, saying “Don’t try to sell me on death, Odysseus. I’d rather be a hired hand back up on earth, slaving away for some poor dirt farmer, than lord it over all these withered dead” (Odyssey, 11.510). Achilles sounds like he wouldn’t make the same decision given another chance. He however is delighted to hear that his son, Neoptolemus, is garnering fame and a reputation for himself because this adds to the kleos of Achilles himself. I believe ancient Greek heroes tell their stories in the attempt to become immortal.

Comments: Good/VG. The student’s work is solid. He provides a thesis statement and uses two citations from the primary source to support his points. There are some formatting errors and typos (such as lack of capitalization at beginning of para. 2 and misspelling of “Oddyssey”). The structure of the paper is loose (paragraph 4 is not integrated; jump from Odysseus to Achilles in para 5 is abrupt). Thesis statement is broad, but the idea of storytelling as a means to achieving fame and eventual immortality is followed throughout. Citations are
integrated into paragraph, with follow up statements that reflect upon the meaning of the citation, but do not explicitly connect the citation to the argument of the paper (about storytelling as a means to fame).
The Many Sides of Queen Clydamestra

The wife of the Greek King Agamemnon, Queen Clydamestra, is shown in many different lights throughout Greek stories. She is wife to the man who was the commander of the Greek forces fighting at Troy. Agamemnon angered the goddess Artemis because he was going to be responsible for the deaths of many innocent young men and women at Troy. Artemis demanded a sacrifice before she would allow the Greek fleet to travel to Troy and that sacrifice was Agamemnon’s own daughter. He sent for her to come to the island that they were marooned on under the premise that she was to marry the great hero Achilles, but really she was sailing straight to her death.

Clydamestra had every reason to be extremely upset at her husband, but her story is very narratologically complex with many people questioning whether she was in charge or just a pawn to Aegisthus. The light Clydamestra is painted in is largely influenced by who is telling the story. In the Odyssey you see Nestor talking of the Queen as though she defied Aegisthus until the very last minute and the whole world and the gods were working against her but she finally gave. That story conflicts largely with other renditions where Clydamestra is said to be the driving force behind her husband’s murder.

(“Clytemnestre hésitant avant de frapper Agamemnon endormi”, Baron Pierre-Narcisse GUÉRIN, Paris 1774 – Rome 1833, oil painting. Louvre, 5185.)

This painting by Frenchman, Baron Pierre-Narcisse Guerin, can be translated from to English and then it would be Titled, “Clydamestra hesitating before striking sleeping Agamemnon”. This painting is very interesting because you see Agamemnon possibly sleeping or in some kind of weakened state. It appears that he is waiting for his wife to come to bed, the
very title however gives away that maybe Clydamestra doesn’t really wish to kill her husband. You see her and Aegisthus in the shadows and she seems to be saying with her body language “no I’m not sure I want to go through with this” but Aegisthus is trying to reassure her and push her into the room.

(Mixing bowl (Calyx Crater) showing the killing of Agamemnon, The Dokimasia painter, 460 BC, red figure vase. MFA boston, 63.1246.)

This Red Figure vase was the artwork of the Dokimasia painter, it shows the killing scene of Agamemnon. Agamemnon was coming out of the bath when he was surprised by Aegisthus, Clydamestra and seemingly multiple unnamed people. The most interesting thing to note on the artwork of this vase as it relates to Greek narratology is that Clydamestra herself is swinging an axe at her husband. In Greek mythology mothers are shown to have power mostly through scheming and manipulating men around them, in this depiction however you see Clydamestra directly participating in the murder.
Eta Hentz decided to design a dress to describe her interpretation of the Greek Queen Clydamestra. The blackness of the dress gives a sense of foreboding or secrecy of the queen. There is vine artwork all over the dress which I believe is conveying the idea that was shown throughout the text of Agamemnon that vines are encircling him and eventually there is nothing he will be able to do to escape his murder.

In the red figure vase you see Clydamestra swinging a killing blow with an axe on her husband, while in the oil painting it seems as though Clydamestra isn’t sure that she wants to be a part of her husband’s, and the dress seems to paint her as this scary, foreboding figure. I think these three pieces of art showcase the different ways Clydamestra’s story has been told throughout greek mythology. She’s the Master of the plan itself, or the one helping to swing the killing blow, or being bent against her will to kill her husband. We’ll never know which was actually true.
Comments: VG. Intro paragraph is vague and contains plot summary, hints at the complexity of Clytemnestra and how her story is told from different perspectives, but does not elaborate on why this might be relevant to the task at hand (comparing different visual representations of Clytemnestra’s story). This idea is picked up again in the conclusion, however. The descriptions of the works of visual art are succinct and point out features of the work that are pertinent to the student’s interests. Also, the student has chosen works from three time periods and in different media. This variety provides for interesting discussion of the different aspects of Clytemnestra’s story that an artist might choose to represent.

Aside from the repeated misspelling of Clytemnestra as “Clydamestra” throughout, the language is fairly clear and low on typos. The style is more in keeping with a “blog” or other informal assignment than the previous assignment.
I wholeheartedly disagree with the statement by Scholar Douglas Cairns that, “Euripides’ Medea does not subvert Athenian male stereotypes. It revels in them”. Euripides’ work, Hippolytus, definitely serves to subvert the Athenian male stereotype. The entire work is a testament to the errors in the misogynistic thinking of Athenian males and the repercussions that comes from their way of thinking of and treating women. He also shows that the right way for ancient women to break out of their oppression isn’t to do what Medea does. Medea fights through her oppression by casting off her motherly attributes and destroying everything that is dear to the husband who wronged her. She took away the very thing that makes her a mother by killing her children. Euripides is commenting that the way to escape oppression is not to become the force that is oppressing you because then you will destroy yourself in the process as Medea does.

Euripides during this play discusses the plight of women and shows what happens when one of them realizes how wrongly they’ve been treated, and takes revenge into their own hands. Medea sums this up during her long speech to the chorus, “Of all the living creatures with a soul and mind, we women are the most pathetic. First of all, we have to buy a husband: spend vast amounts of money just to get a master for our body” (Medea, 231). While this is not immediately attached to Athenian male stereotypes it does show a woman from a foreign society noticing and getting fed up with the actions of a stereotypical Athenian male. The actions of that male, in this case Jason loses everything he holds dear. I believe Euripides is trying to comment on how male actions may come back to bite them.

Jason does a great job in the play of strengthening the Athenian model of men who care mostly for their social stature, and use women mostly for children. Jason leaves Medea to marry the princess and does not care for the children anymore, this shows that he only cares for power and jumps to a woman who will give him a higher social standing as soon as the opportunity arises. He justifies this to Medea by saying, “My motive was the best: so we’d live well and not be poor. I know that everyone avoids a needy friend. I wanted to raise sons in a style that fits my family background, give brothers to the ones I had with you, and treat them all as equals” (Medea, 575). The chorus condemns Jason, “Jason, you’ve composed a lovely speech. But I must say, though you may disagree: you have betrayed your wife. You’ve been unjust” (Medea, 596). Euripides criticizes Jason’s actions, and he seems to be using Jason as a metaphor for all Athenian men. Euripides is condemning the poor actions of the Athenian men while also saying that the way to beat them is not to become them.

Comments: Excellent. Student uses citations from the assigned article with page numbers cited (except for first instance, which was part of the prompt). Student is confident in his assertions and stands by his claim in the opening sentence that he disagrees with the author’s assertion. Writing has a few typos and grammatical errors, but is generally clear and sensible. A strength of the analysis is its attempts to tie student’s own opinions to the evidence from the primary text in the service of explaining his disagreement with the article’s author’s claims. Student provides an original interpretation that is succinctly phrased in essay’s conclusion.
The story of Pygmalion as told by Ovid in his work *Metamorphoses* is filled with the theme of patriarchy or male dominance. This is shown indirectly from the very first line of the story. Ovid writes, “Pygmalion had seen these women living in shame, And, offended by the faults that nature had lavished on the female psyche, lived as a bachelor without any bedmate” (10.265). The women that Ovid is referring to are the daughters of Propoetus, who were the first prostitutes. In ancient Greek society, prostitutes were on a different social status than other women. They had power and control over their bodies, a weird status in ancient Rome. Men had complete control over their bodies. Most women had almost none, yet prostitutes were different, a strange gray area. Ovid draws are attention to how Pygmalion was so disgusted or scared by these women that he decided to live as a bachelor.

To a man such as Pygmalion the perfect woman was an object, not a real human being. This sentiment is such a common theme throughout ancient Greek and Roman literature. From Hesiod to Euripides women are portrayed as the most conniving, deceitful, and dangerous characters. Take the story of Agamemnon for example. His wife, Clydamestra, conspired to kill her husband and cheated on him while he was gone with a relative of Agamemnon’s named Aegisthus. Agamemnon, however, wasn’t the ideal father or husband. He sacrificed his daughter so that he could continue a war effort against Troy, and he brought home a concubine for his wife to take care of. Not exactly the best thing to bring your wife back from a trip abroad. Nevertheless, all the blame and shame are brought down on Clydamestra. Not only are women portrayed as tricky and dangerous, but many times characters often just state they wish women
did not exist at all. One such example is the anti-women tirade of Hippolytus in the play of the same name by Greek playwright Euripides. Hippolytus’ stepmother, Phaedra, becomes infatuated with Hippolytus because of he refused to worship Aphrodite. Aphrodite takes this very personally and chooses to punish Hippolytus for his pride. When Phaedra’s maid tells Hippolytus of her masters love he has this to say, “Zeus! What made you plague all men on earth with this affliction, brass disguised as gold- women! If it was to propagate the species, couldn’t you have found a way for this to be accomplished without wives?” (Hippolytus 678). He goes on to ask why men couldn’t just drop money off at a temple and receive a baby in return. I went into this great detail of the theme of hatred of women to emphasize just how much Ancient Greek and Roman men hated the race of women, and their desire to give women no control.

This is why he decided to sculpt himself the woman of his dreams. That woman for Pygmalion was literally an object. A woman that could never tell him no, never talk back, and never conspire against him. This woman is never given a name, not even after her transformation in the real world. She is trapped with Pygmalion and whatever he chooses to do to her. Gerome shows this in his painting with her body full of blood and life from the hips up, while her lower half is still made of ivory and immobile. She has no way to escape her creator if she wanted to. Ovid also shows this in his text when he talks about the moment of the girl’s transformation.

Ovid writes, “Our Paphian hero poured out thanksgiving to the goddess Venus, and pressed his lips onto real lips at last. The girl felt the kisses, blushed, and lifting her shy eyes up to the light took in the sky and her lover together” (10.322). This shows just like the girl in Gerome’s painting, Ovid’s interpretation also has no say in her body or future. The moment she is brought to life by the goddess Venus, she is married off under the grace of that same goddess. Also, it is possible that the girl in Gerome’s painting being half alive and half stone is because of
Pygmalion’s imagination. In Ovid’s story, the character of Pygmalion cannot tell whether the girl he has sculpted is alive or not and refused to believe the latter. He clothes her, covers her in jewelry, and even takes her to bed. Maybe Ovid is trying to make a point that women in Ancient Roman culture are indistinguishable from statues. Maybe the painting done by Gerome isn’t trying to encapsulate the transformation from statue to real girl. Maybe instead he is trying to show reality with the statue legs and Pygmalion’s imagination with the warm-blooded torso and above.

Gerome also paints a cupid in the top right corner of his famous piece. This shows the theme used throughout the metamorphoses of dangerous love driven by desire. This is obviously a thematic device as it cupid does not make an appearance in the actual story written by Ovid. I believe Gerome does this to emphasize a love that drives a man insane like how Pygmalion imagines his ivory girl as real when Ovid writes, “He often touches the statue to find out whether it is ivory or flesh, and is unwilling to admit that it is ivory” (10.278). It is easy to take notice of how Ovid portrays desire filled love. These stories usually involve a god deciding to take a woman for his own and forcing some horrible transformation on them. Pygmalion is a god to this girl in a way because he sculpted her. With these parallels drawn, why does Ovid leave the reader at a happy ending with Pygmalion?

Comments: Fair/good. The introductory paragraph is disorganized, making a strong claim about “male dominance” in the Met, but resorting to plot summary that seems disconnected. Paragraph two is a digression to discussion of misogyny in other texts that does not respond to the prompt or enhance the argument of the paper. Student makes notable attempt to compare chosen work of visual art to the text of Ovid’s poem, and is for the most part successful at going beyond simple comparisons between plot elements (as the prompt warns). Student makes an insightful observation about Pygmalion as “god,” comparing Pygmalion’s role here to that of
male gods imposing transformation upon mortal women in other sections of the Met. But the student does not pursue this in a conclusion. Instead, the conclusion ends with an open-ended question. Generally speaking, paper is well written and edited, with quotations properly cited. Its central weakness is organization and structure.

Final Notes: This student’s scores decreased from beginning to end – strong scores on AA2, 3, 4; then weak on 6 and 7. Perhaps he became tired as the semester went on, succumbing to stress at the end of the term and feeling the burden of a long writing assignment due in the final week of classes. It is also possible that the length and demands of the final assignment (7) were such that a student who could do well on a smaller, more focused assignment, became uncomfortable at this level and lost focus, thus leading to generalization and digression instead of carefully argued observations.