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E. Del Chrol
Marshall University

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When in Rome: A Multi-Genre Writing Exercise for Classics

E.Del Chrol

Marshall University



Back in my graduate studies I twice had the pleasure to be a Teaching Assistant in Amy Richlin's Roman Civilization class. Each time we implemented an exercise she has written about in CJ Forum.¹ In her exercise students are assigned the *persona* of an individual who could have existed in the ancient world (but didn't) and then generate responses from the point of view of that character to various texts in debates and on exams. Students must take a bare-bones description, usually one sentence long, and do sufficient research in the library to create historically plausible reactions from this *persona*. I can attest that students seemed more engaged with this intersubjective imaginative work, and I was certainly more engaged with the grading, no longer based on eighty essays about three factors contributing to the fall of the Roman Republic.

This article is not (just) meant as an encomium, though, but as a complement to her article, detailing some of the ways I have modified her technique to suit my circumstances teaching Roman Civilization at Marshall University for the past decade. Whereas Richlin teaches eighty to one hundred students in a lecture hall at a large public university (UCLA) situated in a multicultural city (Los Angeles, CA; population 3.8 million), I teach two dozen students in a traditional classroom at a

¹ Richlin (2013).

mid-sized public university in a small, largely homogenous city (Huntington, WV; population 50,000). You will see in my assignment the obvious debts in thought and structure to hers; this article details the ways I have modified and elaborated upon her structure to suit the demographics and distribution requirements of my class. I also include: the formal writing assignment for the course; rubrics for grading; detailed instructions on how to deploy and assess the assignment; some common points of difficulty and my solutions. I end with conclusions regarding why this sort of assignment provides a stronger, more interesting, and more pedagogically fruitful product than a formal paper might in a course populated with non-majors. Hopefully, you will have everything you need to run this exercise in your next class.

My Roman Civilization course is an upper division class that satisfies three distribution requirements (Humanities, Multicultural, and Writing Intensive) and, as a “triple-threat”, attracts mostly non-majors from outside the College of Liberal Arts. As a Writing Intensive course, it is capped at 24 (though we sometimes teach it at 35), and has to abide by Writing Across the Curriculum principles. Some of these principles comprise a combination of high and low stakes writing, formal and informal writing, the opportunity to revise a formal piece of writing, and written assignments counting for 50%+ of the grade. As a Multicultural course, it must compare American values and customs with the values and customs of other cultures. As a Humanities course, it treats literature in context, considering themes pertinent to the human condition. As a social historian, I tend to focus on themes of sex, sexuality, power, and persuasion. Because my students are by and large from a homogenous community, many of the readings and tasks are oriented towards inculcating an awareness of cultural, rational, and intellectual differences from — and within — the predominant Appalachian culture.

Mixed-genre assignments like the one outlined here demand students develop creative, aesthetic, intersubjective, and scholarly faculties. Nearly all my upper-division classes use versions of this project. For example, in an upper-division Classics course entitled *Rhetoric of Seduction*, students are required to come up with a campaign speech or a love letter and compose a commentary explaining how the techniques in the persuasive document intersect with the persuasive techniques we have analyzed throughout the semester. In every iteration of the project the length of the creative element (a narrative, speech, letter, or eulogy) is capped at a maximum 40% of the paper as a whole. As I stress to my students, the real intellectual discovery happens in the commentary portion of the assignment, and they must consider which readings and themes the commentary will treat before embarking on the narrative.

HANDOUT # 1

CHROL: Roman Civilization S15: *Persona* Project

INTRODUCTION

You have been randomly assigned a *persona* that could have existed (but as far as we know did not) from the mid-first century BCE. You will have two responsibilities with respect to this *persona*:

1. At various points in the term you will be expected to respond in writing or orally to a historical discussion or a piece of literature from the point of view of this character. Your understanding will be a rough outline at first, but as we treat various topics throughout the term you will accrete knowledge that will permit you to articulate your *persona*'s perspective in greater detail.
2. Your formal writing assignment will be to develop a 12-15 page text and commentary with an introduction, and will take place in three stages (*see below*). Imagine that modern you has discovered a family history either written about or by ancient you. You will write the "newly discovered" text in the hand of or about your character; then you will provide a scholarly commentary on it, noting how the ancient text accords with or challenges the readings, discussions, and lectures from this semester.

Types of resources you may use:

- » *In your possession*: Your notes, Shelton,² and the indices/footnotes/text of the other works we are reading this term.
- » *In the reference section*: *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (second and third editions); *Oxford Companion to the Classical World*; *The Oxford Companion to Classical Civilization*
- » *In the classroom*: *Oxford Classical Dictionary* and *Paulys realencyclopaedie der classischen alterumswissenschaft*

2 Shelton (1998) is one of the textbooks for our class. It is a sourcebook in translation, whose thematically-organized chapters consist of brief, primary text selections with an efficient introduction and commentary by Shelton to each piece.

- » *Internet resources:* Anything accessed through the Marshall Libraries website; www.perseus.tufts.edu; Lacus Curtius; stoa.org/diotima
- » *On reserve at library:* •Aldrete, G. 2008. *Daily life in the Roman City: Rome, Pompeii, and Ostia*; Bradley, K. 1991. *Discovering the Roman Family*; Bradley, K. 1994. *Slavery and Society*; Burford. 1972. *Craftsmen in Greek and Roman Society*; Carcopino, J. 1940. *Daily Life in Ancient Rome*; Dixon, S. 2001 *Reading Roman Women*; Dupont, F. 1994. *Daily Life in Rome*; Fantham, E. 1995. *Women in the Classical World*; Finley, M. 1965. *Slavery in Classical Antiquity*; Fitzgerald. 2000. *Slavery and the Roman Literary Imagination*; Gardner, J. 1991. *The Roman Household: A sourcebook*; Joshel, S. 1992. *Work, Identity, and Legal Status at Rome*; Kamm, A. 2008. *The Romans, an Introduction*; Kebric, R. 2005. *Roman People*; Lefkowitz. M. 2005. *Women's Life in Greece and Rome*; Louis, P. 1965. *Ancient Rome at Work*; McAuscan. 1996. *Women in Antiquity*; Mosse, C. 1969. *The Ancient World at Work*; Nicolet, C. 1980. *The World of the Citizen in Republican Rome*; Noy 2000. *Foreigners at Rome*; Rawson, B. 1986. *The Family in Ancient Rome*; Rives, J. 2007. *Religion in the Roman Empire*; Rupke, J. 2001. *Religion of the Romans*; Solmsen, F. 1979. *Isis among the Greeks and Romans*; Turcan, R. 1996. *The cults of the Roman Empire*; Turcan, R. 2000. *Gods of Ancient Rome: Religion in Everyday Life*; Wiedeman, T. 1981. *Greek and Roman Slavery*; Vivante, B. 2007. *Daughters of Gaia: women in the ancient Mediterranean world.*

Types of resources you may NOT use:

Anything from the internet not listed above (this means you, St. Wiki!), comic books, movies, The History Channel or any other cable channel, any of your family members. Heed these prohibitions lest the wrath of your ancestors be visited on your house, a visitation brought through their instrument, Dr. Chrol.

Individual Assignments

Stage 1: “How I understand my *persona*” / Introduction

For this assignment, produce a one-two page (500-750 words) description of your character. Consider this assignment the introduction to the book version of the text you discovered. As such, you should include all the usual biographical information one would need to know to gain an adequate orientation to the text you will write. The first sentence of the assignment should be the *verbatim* description you were assigned in class. The rest of the text is yours to write. Be sure to include such information as the dates of your *persona*'s life and death, where they lived, their family structure, and a bit about the times in which your *persona* lived. Especially important is your description of the key terms provided for your *persona*. If your *persona* is, for example, an Aedile, include a brief description of what an Aedile was. If your *persona* is a freedman/woman, include: where they were captured/bought from or if they were home-born (*uermus/a*); by what kind of master; and how they achieved their freedom. You may wish to include a brief description of how your text came to light – was it discovered in a hayloft in Germany, like one of the editions of Petronius' *Satyricon*? Or has it been in a safe-deposit box in Switzerland for 20 years after being discovered behind some rocks in the desert, like the Dead Sea Scrolls? Or has the papyrus been unearthed by Oxford's excavations in Oxyrynchus?

You may submit early drafts to Dr. Chrol, and likewise you may wish to share your ideas or get guidance during his office hours. He may even offer you tea.

Stage 2: Text and commentary I

Produce 5-6 pages of text and commentary. You should start with a revised version of the Introduction you produced for Stage 1. The journal/family history/daily life exposition of the *persona* in the hand of your character should be roughly three pages; the remainder should be a series of end-notes (not footnotes) addressing the issues of the text. Your cover page and your bibliography are not part of your page count. Use Shelton's introduction, text, and notes on each ancient source as a model for the type of work you do, keeping in mind the paragraphs below.

In the first portion you may wish to respond to a major event of the first century BCE. Was your character there when Spartacus' slave revolts tore through the countryside? Did s/he contemplate joining Spartacus? Was your character in Rome when Julius Caesar came through in triumph? Did s/he view Caesar as a god? As a tyrant? Or you may instead wish to tackle the implications of a social issue. Was your character a slave to a noble woman who committed adultery even after the Julian

legislation? Was your character a farmer or craftsman who was being driven out of business by a rich businessman who controlled massive slave farms or factories? Was your character that rich businessman crushing his enemies before him?

In the second portion you need to show where your ideas are coming from. The end-notes should treat references and quotations from ancient and modern sources. Use your end-notes to respond to the texts we read. If, for example, you found it implausible that slaves would sacrifice themselves for their master, as our ancient authors often claim (e.g. in Appian), your text may provide a counterpoint to the elite perspective and your end-note will adduce the text you are refuting. The rest of your end-notes should provide the basic background information a person with minimal background in the ancient world would need to understand the narrative.

Stage 3: Text and commentary II – this time it’s personal

By an incredibly lucky stroke, you have managed to find a text written by your character’s grandparent or grandchild. This will give you the opportunity to treat issues from the end of the second century BCE or the beginning of the first century CE. You will again produce 5-6 pages of text and commentary. You should create another introduction, this time one half-to one-page long. The remainder should be a balance of the journal/family history/daily life exposition of the character and a series of end-notes addressing the issues of the text. Try to reflect on different issues, or address dis/continuities in the themes from your first commentary. Be sure to include your original text and commentary in this document.

Students receive their characters by drawing them out of a hat. In a class of 24-35, I prepare 50 *personae*, 25 female and 25 male, populated mainly by characters from the bottom of the social spectrum but including a range of types that illustrate topics from the semester. A selection of *personae* is included at the end. Students are allowed to draw from either hat, and if they dislike the *persona* they drew, they may take another draw after everyone has had a first chance. Allowing the students to choose their gender and to draw twice obviates accusations of stereotyping or favoritism.

The first stage of the assignment occurs two weeks after the names are drawn. Students must compose a single page defining each of the terms in their persona’s description, and providing a general sense of who their character is. At this stage students needn’t have a plot or even sources articulated, just a basic, 500-750 word sketch. I meet with students for five minutes during one class period, giving praise or correction as needed, and directing them to specific resources they ought to con-

sider, or even potential avenues they might wish to pursue in their next stage of their project.

The major written assignments comprise an Introduction, Narrative, and Commentary.

THE INTRODUCTION

There are several benefits to doing an Introduction as detailed above. My students are mostly Juniors and Seniors, but many have not thought about the nature of what counts as necessary information. In initial drafts, many introductions resemble a hoarder's house, stuffed to the rafters with all sorts of discovered materials. One advantage to the Writing Intensive model, a model that demands rewriting, is that students can refine their introductions over the course.

I use two techniques to train students how to write efficient introductions. First, we analyze the back covers of the various Penguins and Oxfords we use in our course. These hundred word summaries contain essential factual data and a soupçon of the author or work's significance. Second, I ask them to show their Introductions to their parents. Whatever problems their parents have, an average reader would have, so the students should focus on these elements.

The Introductions also may contain information on how the text was 'found', which helps reinforce how fragile our link to the ancient world is, and how random the accidents of transmission were. On the second day of class, I usually do a "how distant were they" exercise. The students line up shoulder-to-shoulder in a long hallway or out on the campus. The students are then told that each of them represents a generation, and generations here are defined as 25 years – this is both to make the math easier but also because most of my students are approximately that age. Students then count down from the year 2000, each one in turn calling out their year, which is 25 less than the year preceding. When a student shouts his or her number, he or she retreats to the back of the line. At various points, I will pause the countdown and punctuate that date with a placard that has a date near to the one shouted and an illustration that I then place on the ground on that spot. We begin with the election of George W. Bush in 2000, go through the Vietnam War, World War II, and the Civil War. But we don't just focus on tragedies, we also pass through Shakespeare, the printing press, and the Magna Carta. By the time we get to Roman dates, and pass from CE to BCE, there is a substantially long physical distance from our starting point to our end point -- either the traditional founding of Rome

(Roman Civ class) or Homer (Myth class). I then briefly lecture on the mechanics of transmission and loss -- how texts were preserved (copied by hand; dug from the desert; discovered in bogs) or were lost over the centuries (burned; lost; eaten by bookworms; ruined by water; or intentionally destroyed to make room in a library or archive). This small lecture frequently is accompanied by pointing to the other end of the line, infrequently with tears, and always ends with a recommendation not to sell back their books at the end of the semester.

Requiring students to devise the means of transmission of their fictional text from the ancient world to today encourages reflection on how pristine our current texts are and how messy they have been throughout most of our history. Though many students adopt a discovery similar to that of the Dead Sea Scrolls, some present clever analogies. One such student had his text surface like the papyrus wrappings of a mummy, but with manuscript pages wrapping a used Xbox from eBay, and another found hers behind the walls in a house that was being ‘flipped’.

NARRATIVE AND COMMENTARY

Students most enjoy producing the text written in the hand of their character that they ‘found’. As you will see in the Rubric section below, I do not grade the artistic merits of the work beyond the abstract terms ‘flow’ and ‘historical sense’. Students who have a creative flair can produce genuinely moving works, but, since the commentary is the real point of the assignment, I don’t want students with a leaden pen to feel left out. Indeed, I stress how little artistry counts in the final product. Plausibility, though, is key and is tied to research.

I require students to compose two assignments, one from the perspective of a grandparent or grandchild of the first *persona*, so that they reflect upon the large scale changes of the Republic or the small-changes of fortune that happen to families. Some students are intrigued with the difficulties of social mobility, keeping a family business, losing relatives or wealth in the proscriptions. Many devise complex, multigenerational revenge plots, and even more explore early Christianity. An unforeseen benefit has been that students use their writing to address difficult personal issues or issues of identity vicariously through their characters. The alien environment of Ancient Rome is a safe space to consider topics too taboo or frightening to bring up in the modern world.

Devising a second character is difficult for a lot of students, and the second projects often reveal a combination of writer’s block and haste. Heretofore I have not required any in-class presence of the second *persona* beyond starring in a second

narrative and commentary; I suspect this is a contributing factor to the shallowness. In future semesters I will allow students who have trouble devising the second *persona* to draw from the remaining slips, and also have classroom assignments where this new character needs to appear in debate or discussion.

Pushing students for plausibility demonstrates the limits of both positivism and truthiness, the gut feeling that something feels true, to borrow a term from Stephen Colbert. One of the implicit goals of the assignment is for students to consider how the ancient world differs from today, to feel the alienness of the Romans. As the semester progresses, I push the students more and more to support what their truthy gut tells them with evidence from the readings. As we press harder and harder for evidentiary clues, students have to work from written texts to indirect evidence – if there's nearly nothing from women and slaves and the lower classes, how do we read against the grain of the sources we do have to get at a possible reality?

If, for example, a student writes, “The horror of this miserable campaign against those beer-swilling, shaggy-bearded, aurok-loving Germans was deepened when I read from you that little Marcia was thrown from her pony and killed,” he might follow with an endnote that his line demonstrates that a centurion could love his daughter, contrary to the evidence from the papyrus from a soldier to his pregnant wife about exposing the newborn if it were a daughter,³ or to claim that the sorrow at the loss of a daughter is not something restricted to a luxury of upperclass males such as Cicero.⁴

Part of the magic of this assignment is how the creative and scholarly sides squeeze the hermeneutic, positivist, and humanist perspectives. Students must attempt to create a plausible narrative from a different subject position, and are frequently pushed to explain why they think something is plausible, what evidence there is for their perspective, and if there is none, why that might be. If they express a perspective that they feel must be right, such as calling suicide a cowardly and dishonorable escape, we can investigate why this line once delivered by a pastor or a guidance counselor might preclude them from considering self-harm as an appropriate response. Should we consider the words of Lucretia in Livy *ab Urbe Condita* 5, the suicide is not honorable *per se* but rather forecloses others using her rape as a precedent to cloak sexual misconduct and demonstrates an awareness of her place in future history, or even as a human sacrifice at the foundation of the Roman Repub-

3 P. Oxy. 744. G.

4 Cic. *Att.* 13.20.1.

lic. By juxtaposing a student's gut feeling about a difficult topic with other ways of explaining it, we can help a student discover the contours of her belief system. The archaeology we then conduct on her beliefs helps situate her in the grand sweep of human history. Ultimately, this is a liberating action – a student can better understand her own beliefs to affirm them or realize that the world of ideas is broader than she previously thought.

One mini-lesson which helps inculcate an awareness of the contours of a student's belief system is the Formal vs. Functional exercise. Not all analogies are apt, since our field's focus on historical and cultural specificity helps avoid flattening difference between peoples. I recall a student approaching me the third day of the first course I taught on my own, asking me to weigh in on a debate he was having with his pastor, asking: "Who was more perverted, the Greeks or the Romans?" My attempts to nuance his question, interrogating "Greek", "Roman", and "perverted" fell on aggressively deaf ears but instructed me in the importance of understanding the different predispositions of my students.

The Formal vs. Functional distinction reduces a different sort of disposition generated by good-hearted attempts at multicultural education, namely the radical, anti-foundational equivalence of all peoples. Tom Habinek, in his Diversity in the Classical Western Tradition class at USC, used to call it "Food-court multiculturalism", i.e. a philosophy of "you eat tacos? we eat hamburgers! we must all be the same." These facile comparisons preclude genuine engagement with other cultures, and blunt articulation of and debate about values. When the answer is "it was just their way of life and we have to accept it," we can't interrogate the calculus of slavery or female infanticide, let alone globalism or glass ceilings.

The commentaries demand reflection on these sorts of issues. If a student does indeed find evidence for her claims, we can press upon whether the similarity is formal or functional -- i.e. is the commonality we observe one that just looks the same (as in "that cloud looks like a schoolbus but is probably not a schoolbus"), or does it have some deeper analogous structures. I regularly use the following exercise to teach the Formal vs. Functional distinction.

THE "FORMAL VS. FUNCTIONAL" EXERCISE

In the course of our readings the first time we run across a piece of ancient literature that describes the beauty of an adolescent, I ask if there are similarities in what was seen as beautiful in the ancient world and today. Students note characteristics such as a graceful figure, smooth skin, stylish and neat clothing, modesty, innocence, and

wit, all attributes that are conventionally beautiful today. When we address the age of the person in the poem, I direct the conversation toward youth beauty pageants, and specifically the TLC show “Toddlers & Tiaras”. Students often know that in child beauty pageants very young girls wear adult makeup, adult clothes, and engage in dance routines, behavior, and deportment that is appropriate for pageants for people in their late teens and early twenties. The ground laid, this becomes the hook for our lesson.

For our first stage of analysis, we address what makes something beautiful in both eras and construct some hypotheses why the similarities exist—perhaps there are similar social structures in the two worlds, or perhaps these sorts of feelings tap into innate human desires, or perhaps modern concepts of beauty can be traced back to ancient literature. We then describe how one of the main differences in the ancient text and modern custom is actually a similarity. In many such erotic pieces, paleness was seen as the most beautiful skin tone, whereas today many Caucasian pageant contestants have been known to spend time on a tanning bed—needless to say, this is not a universal practice across all the diverse populations of America, but it is common for some, particularly in my region. Nonetheless, this demonstrates that a formal difference (that is, a difference in the way these two characters are presented) is actually a functional similarity (that is, a similarity when viewed from a deep cultural comparison). In the example of skin tone, paleness in the ancient world—for women at least—signified that they were women of leisure, not having to go outside and work, but rather able to sit inside and enjoy a life of free play, culture, and self-cultivation; in modern times, being tan signifies that one is not stuck inside working all day, but rather has time to go out, frolic, play, and engage in healthy activities under the sun. Thus there is a fundamental analogy at work in both cultures and the differences are only skin deep.

In the second stage we return to comparing Honey Boo-boo and child pageants with our text, turning to a formal similarity cloaking a functional difference. If there are similarities in attributes that are attractive in these two cultures, what is different? The implications of beauty. In our ancient text, the adolescent was receiving praise as an entrée to developing a romantic relationship with the speaker of the poem, whereas today we rightly de-sexualize our youth. None of the children or adolescents who take part in our pageants, regardless of how many adult behaviors they present on stage, are supposed to be seen as objects of romantic love or lust, and it would be repugnant and criminal were they presented as such. Indeed, pageant culture is aggressively asexual. Modern pageants emphasize talent, poise, and verbal acuity; the prizes are scholarships to college. The sexuality of the entrants is down-

played, they are “Miss” (not “Mrs.” or “Ms. America/USA”). When sex is present it causes great consternation, as we saw with Vanessa Williams losing her Miss America crown for appearing in *Playboy*, the Miss Florida competition excluding Caroline Schwitzky because she appeared in a pageant at a pornographic film convention, Carrie Prejean’s nearly losing her title as Miss California for risqué modeling photos and a sexually explicit home video, or the allegations of Sheena Monnin, Miss Pennsylvania, that Miss USA was rigged based on looks. By comparing the uses to which beauty is put in each of these time periods, we can see that the formal similarity (attributes of beauty) cloaks a functional difference (implications of beauty).

ASSESSMENT: ANONYMOUS PEER REVIEWS

Anonymous peer reviews are an important first assessment of this work. I prefer these over in-class reviews or drafts initially submitted to me for several reasons. I notice that when students speak face to face, many of them have not learned how to deliver criticism in a useful/diplomatic/tactful fashion. Raised on the internet, flush with power and indignity, many comments are too harsh and delivered with a rotten, snotty tone. The opposite also happens, when a student might only deliver praise without any type of criticism at all. Perhaps they are afraid of offending, perhaps there is a romantic or sexual attraction to their colleague/partner, perhaps there is a fear of conflict or of reprisal, perhaps they lack confidence in their own critical abilities. Rarely is a student in the middle ground and capable of giving a solid, face to face critique. Anonymous peer reviews tend to avoid these problems because the students don’t have to face their object and they have a rubric set before them as well as a grid to fill out.

The anonymity of peer reviews can breed hostile indignation, as mentioned above, but this rudeness is forestalled by two measures. First, I have an in-class discussion arguing that criticism is in its heart a form of persuasion. Students have to be able to trust their critic and realize that the comments are in the best interest of the project. Comments delivered too harshly won’t be taken seriously and can hamper the good work you are trying to do. This lecture is affectionately known by the punchline, “Don’t be a jerk.” The second mechanism is to enforce civility by saying that inappropriate comments will be docked from the peer review section of the grade, and terrible comments will negate the grade for the section. Since the rule is if you don’t do a section you get a zero on the whole assignment, this effectively means that uncivil discourse causes a student to miss a section and thereby fail the class. An armed society is a polite society.

Another advantage to anonymous peer reviews is that students get to see what another person's paper looks like. As an undergraduate I know that I was a pretty lousy writer, quite lazy, and a coward where criticism was concerned. My skills were weak and I skated by on the originality of my ideas. Not until I started really paying attention to how articles are written and reading drafts of classmates' work in graduate school did I start to get a sense of what is expected of me as a writer. By adding an audience, one imbued with a panoptically-valid paranoia (which students read my paper? whose papers did I read?), the orientation of a paper shifts from a professor/student binary, and much better work results.

Students who are compelled to read the work of another and to take an active interest, noting what is successful and what isn't, take a more active approach to their own work. Next, it guarantees a draft before the deadline. Finally, by seeing my rubric sheet (the second page of the cover sheet attached to the peer reviews), students have a clear idea of what I find important and how I grade, and students have specific, descriptive, and guided ways for analyzing the merits of their own text.

The mechanics of the anonymous peer reviews are straightforward and require precise record keeping. In preparation I make a list of all my students in a spreadsheet and collect all their electronic submissions in a folder. Then I open each document in turn, stripping off the cover page and pasting the "Anonymous Review Sheet" (see below). I save the document with the name [Greek letter]ROUGH, letters assigned in the order of my opening the document, and I note in the column next to the student's name what the new document title will be. Once all the documents have been renamed, I randomize the order of documents twice, one in each successive column, and students are then emailed two documents. Here is an illustration from a hypothetical (and awesome) class:

Attachment 1

Name	Paper code	Edit Code1	Edit Code2
DeToo, Artoo	Alpha	Beta	Delta
Organa, Leia	Beta	Alpha	Epsilon
Skywalker, Luke	Gamma	Epsilon	Beta
Solo, Han	Delta	Gamma	Alpha
Vader, Darth	Epsilon	Delta	Gamma

After grading the texts, students change the title to [Greek letter]EDITED and email me their edits; I then return the edited copies to the students.

A model of the comment sheet I attach to the first page of the peer review follows, as well as a model of my grading rubric. On the first page is a check-sheet so students (and I) can get a quick sense of the quality of the paper in the areas for grading. Definitions are provided on the second page of the cover sheet. Students are instructed to put their comments in-line, in brackets, and emboldened. As there are a range of word-processing programs in use, this simple model works well across platforms, even if saved as Rich Text Format.

Attachment 2

Persona Paper 1 Comment Sheet

Instructions: please read and comment on the attached paper. Put your comments in the body of the text [inside brackets and emboldened]. Additional comments may be attached at the end of this paper. After your editing, please fill out the boxes below.

IMPORTANT:

Before emailing the paper back to Dr. Chrol, you must change the final element of the file name from “ROUGH” to “EDITED”. For example, if you were emailed a file entitled “alphaROUGH” you will email it back “alphaEDITED”.

Email the full document to Dr. Chrol by [DATE, TIME].

Paper name: [examplename]ROUGH

Please put an X in the appropriate box:

	Great	Good	Coming Along	Needs Work	Needs Serious Revision
Introduction 20%					
Historical Accuracy					
Flow					
Text 30%					
Flow					
Historical Plausibility					
Commentary 30%					
Treatment of Themes					
Citation					
Mechanics 10%					
Swerve 10%					

Please type any general comments (i.e. not included in the text itself) below:

Rubric Definitions

Introduction 20%

Historical accuracy - Does the text suit what we know about the ancient world?

Flow - Does the introduction set out all the information that a novice reader would need to understand the persona?

Text 30%

Flow - Is the text internally coherent? Do the pieces flow into each other? Is there an organic unity? Does the argument make sense?

Historical sense - Does the text adequately represent what we know of the era? Does the text address important issues of social or political history? Does the text evidence research?

Commentary 30%

Treatment of themes - Does the Commentary adequately explain the opaque sections of the Text? Does the Commentary in its response to Text engage with issues of social or political history? Does the Commentary evidence research?

Citation - Is there adequate recourse to ancient and modern material to back up the Text? Do the Text and Commentary respond to ancient evidence?

Mechanics 10%

Does the piece STRICTLY adhere to the Style Sheet? Is the piece grammatically correct? Are rules of punctuation and formatting correctly followed?

A paper may NOT receive a perfect score in this area if there are more than 2 grammatical or punctuation errors.

Swerve 10%

(This is a subjective assessment of how the text feels to you as critic.)

How does it feel? Does the Text and Commentary address issues of the ancient world? Does it express a deep understanding of the era? Does it demonstrate research into Roman topics?

Persona Project Grade Sheet

Name:

Topic area	Grade	Comments
Introduction 20%		
Historical Accuracy		
Flow		
Text 30%		
Flow		
Historical Plausibility		
Commentary 30%		
Treatment of Themes		
Citation		
Mechanics 10%		
Swerve 10%		
Total 100%		

NOTE: I also include a copy of the rubric definitions found at the end of the Anonymous Peer Review Sheet (see above).

CONCLUSION

The true value of this assignment is the intersubjective work that the students have to do. Instead of an intellectually lazy version of the cliché “walk a mile in another’s shoes”, students are compelled to produce evidence for their claims or infer from a lack of evidence. Classics courses provide students with a vocabulary for discussing difficult topics — first with the alien cultures of the ancient world, then with our own. In my eyes, societies develop codes to address specific needs, and it is up to the citizens of these societies to understand the underpinnings of those codes. When faced with a different moral system, curiosity, understanding, reason, and negotiation ought to trump the easy anti-foundationalism of ‘well, you’re different, how about that,’ or the recent aggressive solipsism of, ‘you are constraining my religious freedom by saying I shouldn’t say hateful things about you’. And so through comprehending the historical contingency of certain basic categories of understanding the world, like the relative value of a citizen/male/adult/free life relative to a barbarian / woman / child / freed / slave life, or working through the social calculus underpinning slavery, child marriage, the separate but unequal worlds of women and men, or autochthony, students become disturbed from their conventional patterns of thought. After the once-stable pillars underpinning their understanding of the world have been reduced to basic building blocks, students are liberated to create self-generated, authentic bridges across the empathy gaps generated by ideology.

APPENDIX: EXAMPLE *PERSONAE*

Men:

Manetho, Egyptian scribe at the library of Alexandria

Marcus Cornelius Scipio, Aedile on his way up, properties in Tusculum and Rome

Lucius Audax Tullius, freedman, baker in Rome

Postumus Corbutus, free farmer from the countryside

Gnatho, slave from countryside

Felix, boy-toy for rich master at Rome

Mucius Cornelius Terentius, ex-Praetor, Senator, in a priestly college

Gaius Metellus Luculianus, Eques, primarily lives in Pompeii where he owns a large wine farm

Vibius Pullo, Centurion with the legions, from Locri, was in the army for 10 years

Crystomathus Catulus, freed, received great wealth on the death of his master, the Senator Marius Catulus

Myrddin, son of a Gaetolian hetman (chief), hostage at Rome

Ferox, slave, gladiator, originally from Gallia Narbonensis

Leontiskos, slave, actor, originally from Macedonia

Gaius Trebucio Valentinius, Tribune, father was a freedman

Publius Octavian, freedman, undertaker

Women:

Julia Cornelia Dolabella, wife of a Consul

Athena Tironia, freedwoman, wealthy proprietress of a fuller's concern

Tertia Lentula Nasica, Vestal Virgin

Fortunata, slave, originally from Syria, prostitute

Fotis, priestess of Isis at Rome

Minor Sulpicia, wife of a tavern-owner

Postuma Cato, wife of a Quaestor on his way up
Psyche, slave, weaver-woman
Byrrhaena, farm slave, originally from Numidia
Tullia Figula, freedwoman baker
Charite Domna, runs a fish-stall with her husband in Rome
Lucia Tiberia, wife of an *insula* owner
Publia Peperna, wife to an *eques* who imports pottery and grain from
Egypt
Quinta Cinna, wife of a Sabine farmer
Talthibula, freedwoman originally from Bithynia, hairdresser

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