

Surely in these stories [of the Prophets] is a lesson for people of deep intellect; it is not a tale fabricated, but a confirmation of what is before it, an explanation of everything, a guidance and a mercy for those who believe (Qur'an Chapter 12 [Yusuf/Joseph]: Verse 111)

Literary Classics of the Muslim World

REL 476 (Religion Seminar, Fall 2013)
Mon 1:30-4:20 (Chambers 1045)

Dr. Syed Rizwan Zamir

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Office Hours: M, T & Th 9:45- 11:00. Schedule appointments via www.signupgenius.com

NOTE: If you are unable to meet during these times, schedule appointment through email.

Course Description:

This is a reading and discussion-based seminar. Throughout the semester we will closely read some of the most seminal “narrative” texts of the Islamic literary traditions. The shared features of the chosen texts are narrative prose— storytelling plain and simple – rich content, and influence they have exerted in shaping the Islamic literary and intellectual traditions over the centuries. Through a close reading of the literary texts the seminar seeks to understand richness of human experience through narrative-literature, and narrative through human experience. Our approach to the study of these texts will be historical, literary, intertextual, phenomenological and multi-layered: It entails speaking *from within* the text, speaking *with* it, and speaking *to* it as well. We will ask questions about the worldview of the authors (and readers/listeners) of these texts, authorial intention, reception of these texts (the effects of the language and stories upon its speakers and hearers), and consciously observe how our personal worlds interact with these texts and are affected by them. Finally, in view of our study of these texts we will seek to understand the role and significance of narrative for human life in general and religious life in particular.

Objectives of the Course

Beyond learning the contents of this course, the objective of this course is to enhance the skills of thoughtful reading, writing, speaking and group discussion, and thinking (both analytical and imaginative) of all the participants of the seminar. More importantly, we will seek integration of these varied intellectual activities. Implicit but the most significant goal of this class is to make learning *relevant, useful, enjoyable* and *meaningful* for all involved in the class. Making the class more relevant to you personally is something that will require your engagement and deep interest. Feel free to talk to the instructor about ways in which you (or/and the instructor) could contribute in achieving these goals, personally and as a class.

Learning Goals:

By the end of this course, students will have:

1. Studied closely some of the most seminal texts of Muslim literary traditions
2. Learned the influence of literary texts on Islamic theology, ethics and culture; in other words, study of these literary texts will provide an insightful window into Muslim life and culture
3. Learned an interpretive framework for a conscious and self-aware reading of Muslim literary texts. This will involve consciously observing the influence of "their own world" in shaping what they see in Muslim literary texts, and through these texts, the Muslim world itself.
4. Gained exposure to different genres within the literary traditions of the Muslim world
5. Honed their thinking skills through articulation of clear and well-thought out questions related to the texts every week, speaking skills by engaging in regular discussion-heavy in-class conversations about the literary texts; and
6. Sharpened the ability to write thoughtfully and pointedly about these texts through response papers of varying length throughout the semester

Seminar Requirements (each item is explained at length below)

1. Class Discussion and Participation = 20% of the final grade [includes **mandatory Nov 14 Public Lecture** by *Dr. Seyyed Hossein Nasr*]
2. Introducing the text = 10% (includes bibliography 3% due on SEP 30th)
3. Interpretive Reflection Papers = 8 (750-900 words, 7% each = 56% of the final grade)
4. Final Reflection Essay = 14% (Due Nov 18th)

Class Discussion and Participation (I)

- i. *Preparing* (and not just reading!) the weekly assigned text is a must for your successful participation in every seminar session. Attendance is obligatory. Two or more unexcused absences may result in an automatic failure.
- ii. Besides preparing the text, in each session you will turn in 2 *substantial* questions/comments from the text and 1 *substantial* question/comment about the text. Feel free to inquire about this crucial distinction. These questions will be brought up within the seminar session and will be open to challenge (you may need to defend your points), discussion, modification, and hopefully will resolve into some sort of consensus among the seminar participants.
- iii. Broadly speaking your participation grade is based on the overall quality of your in-class participation throughout the semester. This includes proper class etiquette, attentiveness, preparing for the discussion sessions, asking engaging questions and responding to those asked by the instructor. Mere presence in the seminar room does not constitute participation. Do ask the instructor if you have any questions regarding how to make your participation more effective.

Introducing the text (II)

- i. Each new text will be introduced by one of you. I will pass on the signup sheet the second week of the class (Sep 2nd). Please review all the texts and choose in order of priority the text you'd like to present. If there are conflicts of interest

we can resolve it in the class. More instructions on that the first day.

- ii. In introducing the text you will have to introduce the text from both *within* and *without*: *within* means introducing the author of the text and his other works, the authorial intent (goals for writing this text), what you consider to be the key passages and significant themes within the text, and finally those ideas/passages that you consider puzzling and your reasons for why they are confusing; *without* entails discussing the influence of this text upon Islamic literary and intellectual traditions, debates within the secondary scholarship and a bibliography of secondary scholarship on the text. Better you integrate your comments about within and without, more successful the introduction will be. The introduction will not be more than 15-20 minutes.
- iii. You will also submit a properly formatted annotated bibliography of the resources you will use for introducing the text. (Use the Chicago format)
- iv. You are encouraged to meet with the instructor to go over your plan of introducing the text beforehand or discuss any questions that you may have.

Interpretive Reflection Papers (III)

1. *The audience for all your reflection papers is your REL 476 seminar class.*
2. Your reflection paper will be used to enhance discussion during the seminar. You must also be prepared to read it aloud in the seminar.
3. The purpose of the response paper is to help you reflect and *critically engage* the materials you have learned in the class. *Remember you are writing for your fellow classmates* who have also read the same material. Therefore, restating or summarizing readings will be absolutely redundant.
4. Yes, you need to demonstrate that you have a good grasp of the material and have critically engaged the readings. Choose to reflect on the aspects of readings that you find intriguing, contentious, or simply unclear/confusing.
5. IMPORTANT: Akin to II (ii), a good response paper will speak from both *within* and *without* the text.
6. The key questions you should be asking yourself are the following:

- i. Is this idea worth your time and effort? Do you care about the topic? Would you enjoy thinking about it?
 - ii. Is the idea manageable within the word-limit prescribed for the assignment? With only 750-900 words, you must write after having fully developed your thoughts so you could state those as clearly and succinctly as possible.
 - iii. Will it be found interesting and illuminating by the class as a whole? Why should your classmates care about what you have to say? Does the reflection offer something different/new or merely summarize?
 - iv. Does it *show* (not merely state) what it was meant to convey to the class?
 - v. Does your paper successfully convince/persuade your classmates?
7. A response paper is not an op-ed or an expression of how you felt about the readings. Response paper, like all writing, is meant to persuade the reader of your analysis. You do not need to exclude yourself. Yes, you can use first person pronoun I! Just do not pretend as if you have some objective view-from-the-top stance. With full awareness of the assumptions you bring to your analysis you must try to persuade your reader of your analysis.
8. Unnecessary quotes from the readings are as unacceptable as a rambling current of thoughts unrelated to the subject at hand. Do mention the WORD COUNT in the end.
9. Standard font (Times New Roman) and margins (one inch on all sides) are expected at all times. Only cite fully if it is a source other than the assigned material. You may use Chicago or MLA format. Loose paper without proper staple will result in loss of points.

Final Reflection Essay (IV)

Feel free to ask questions about the assignment during the course of the semester.

Required Texts

1. *Tales from the Thousand and One Nights*. Transl. N. J. Dawood. Penguin, 1973.
2. Rumi, Jalaluddin. *Tales from the Masnavi*. Transl. A. J. Arberry. London and New

- York: Routledge, 2002.
3. Sa'di. *The Gulistan (Rose Garden) of Sa'di* (bilingual edition). Transl. Wheeler Thackston. Brooklyn, N.Y.: IBEX Publishers, 2008.
 4. Ikhwan al-Safa. *The Case of Animals in the Court of Jinn*. Transl. Lenn Goodman and Richard McGregor. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012.
 5. Qutbuddin Suhrawardi. *The Magic Doe*. Transl. Aditya Behl. New York and London: Oxford UP, 2011.
 6. Ibn Tufayl. *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*. Transl. Lenn Goodman. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.
 7. Abdullah Bilgrami and Ghalib Lakhnavi. *The Adventures of Amir Hamza*. Transl. Musharraf Farooqi. New York: Modern Library, 2012
 8. Porter Abbott. *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* 2nd ed. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Late Papers Policy:

Each 24-hour delay in submission of the paper will result in corresponding 10-point deduction.

Writing and Speaking Centers:

Basic writing and speaking skills are expected in this course and quality of both will be critical to your success in this course. You are therefore strongly encouraged to consult writing and speaking centers for your assignments and class presentations. Look up the links below for more information on the services they provide:

Writing Center: <http://www3.davidson.edu/cms/x11014.xml>

Speaking Center: <http://www3.davidson.edu/cms/x15986.xml>

Disabilities: A student who requires accommodation for a documented disability of any type should see me *immediately* to discuss modifications to course requirements.

Academic Honesty: Students are expected to fully abide by the Honor Code as set out by the College and should pledge all their assignments and exams.

COURSE OUTLINE

Monday, August 26: Scriptural Narratives I

The Qur'an: Chapter 12, Yusuf (Joseph)

Monday, September 2: Scriptural Narratives II

Yusuf/Joseph & Ascension of the Prophet (*Mir'aj*)

Reflection Paper I due on Sep 2nd

The Qur'an 12:3 reads, "We narrate to you the best of narratives, through what We revealed to you – this Qur'an. Yet before it you were heedless" and 12:109: "Surely in these stories [of the Prophets] is a lesson for people of deep intellect; it is not a tale fabricated, but a confirmation of what is before it, an explanation of everything, a guidance and a mercy for those who believe".

What in your view makes this narrative "the best"? What do you think are the lessons of this story? How is it an explanation of everything? How is it guidance and mercy? And why only for those who believe? How do we understand these Qur'anic claims?

Monday, September 9: Literary Narratives I

Thousand and One Nights, 13-164

Monday, September 16: Literary Narratives II

Thousand and One Nights, 237-407

Reflection Paper II due on Sep 16th

In the opening pages of *Thousand and One Nights* Shaharзад tells her sister, "Then I will tell you a tale, which, if God wills, shall be the means of our deliverance (22). Later, the King proclaimed, "O, Shaharзад, this thousand and first night is brighter for us than the day! (405) How is a tale(s) salvific, and the thousand and first night, *brighter than the day*? What is it about these tales that they led to repentance from the King (406)? Are you convinced of the power of narrative? Why, why not? Inasmuch as possible argue from the text.

Monday, September 23: No Seminar this Week

Readings: *Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, Chapter 1, 2, 7 & 8

Watch: *Arabian Nights* (2000) [Library Reserve]

THIS WEEK: 1) Prepare your introductions & 2) Bibliographies (due Sep 30th)

Monday, September 30: Philosophical Narratives I

Hayy ibn Yaqzan, 95-166

Seminar Discussion in the first half = Narrative Theory & Arabian Nights TV Series

Reflection Paper III due on Sep 30th:
Relate the prologue of the text (95-103) to the tale?

Monday, October 7: Wisdom Narratives I

Gulistan, “Prologue”, Chapters 1, 2 & 3

Monday, October 21: Wisdom Narratives II

Gulistan, Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7 & 8

Reflection Paper IV due on Oct 21st (from hereon in you will choose the topic yourself)

Monday, October 28: Wisdom Narratives III

Tales from the Masnavi, p. 11-153 (First 50)

Reflection Paper V due on Oct 28th

Monday, November 4: Spiritual Narrative

The Magic Doe, 39-194

Reflection Paper VI due on Nov 4th

Monday, November 11: What is Narrative? Why Narrative? Narrative and Religion

Cambridge Introduction to Narrative, Chapter 3-6 & 9-14

“The Virtues, the Unity of a Human Life, and the Concept of a Tradition”

“From System to Story: An Alternative Pattern for Rationality in Ethics” from *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology* ed. Hauerwas and Jones (will be provided)

In-Class Activity: Group Presentations on the readings for this week

Nov 14th: “Islam and the Modern World” (Public Lecture by Dr. Seyyed Hossein Nasr)

Monday, November 18: Theorizing Narrative

FINAL REFLECTION ESSAY: Due in the Class Nov 18th (max. 5-page double space). Drawing from the texts studied this semester write a reflection essay on the role and meaning of narrative in human life. What are the particular strengths, weaknesses of and challenges for narrative in accomplishing these goals? How is “narrative” and study of narrative relevant for the study of religion?

Monday, November 25: Philosophical Narratives II

The Case of the Animals, 63-316

Reflection Paper VII due on Nov 25th (It should incorporate theory of narrative)

Monday, December 2: Epic Literature

Adventures of Amir Hamza, TBA

Reflection Paper VIII due on Dec 2nd (It should incorporate theory of narrative)