

# **NARRATIVE ACROSS CULTURES**

**COML 125. 900**

**Summer 2021**, 11-week Session: May 24 — August 6, 2021

Thursday 5:00pm-8:50pm

**Instructor:** Sherif H. Ismail (sherifi@sas.upenn.edu)

Office hours by appointment

## **Course Description**

From prehistoric cave paintings to Snapchat stories, human beings make sense of the world by telling stories. In this course, we will read a selection of narratives from around the world, and from different times — ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, Greek and Sanskrit cultures, medieval narratives, modern fiction, contemporary social media, and Twitter-literature. We will consider unique historical contexts of narratives, but we will also ask about similarities and continuities between cultures and traditions. We will pay attention to formal aspects of storytelling, and will learn to analyze unfamiliar and new genres. As we read, discuss, and interpret diversely, we will examine how narratives may suggest to us different ways of seeing the world. In turn, we will reflect on our own practices of narrative.

All readings will be in English or in English translation. Students at all levels, with or without prior exposure to the humanities, are welcome. This course fulfills Sector III: Arts & Letters.

## **CROSS-LISTINGS**

ENGL 103. 900

NECL 180. 900

SAST 124. 900

THAR 105. 900

## **Required Books**

Jamaica Kincaid, *Lucy* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1990. ISBN 978-0374527358)

Amos Oz, *The Hill of Evil Counsel* (Vintage, 1993. ISBN 978-0099747406)

Arundhati Roy, *God of Small Things* (Random House, 1997. ISBN 978-0812979657)

**(All other readings will be made available on Canvas: <http://canvas.upenn.edu/>)**

## **Activities & Assignments & Evaluation**

### **1. Regular attendance and active participation in class discussion 20%**

This course is a seminar, meaning that student participation is important. Each meeting will be driven by student discussion. As such, please read the assigned texts and think about what you have read before coming to class. We encourage students to bring perspectives from their respective disciplines and to push each other to engage critically with the material we discuss.

### **2. Weekly Canvas post before each class 20%**

This is 200-250 word. It can be a question that shows in-depth engagement with the week's readings, or a quote selected from the readings, with an explanation about why it is selected, or a reflective paragraph on your experience of reading the texts for that week. These posts are due by 5 p. m. on the day before each class.

### **3. Two short papers 40%**

These are 5 -7 pages in length, double-spaced, and are **due June 24 and July 22**. The papers should include a close reading of one or more of the texts we have read in class. They may draw on class discussions, but they must expand beyond them, to emphasize your own voice and perspective. The papers can also be based on and expanded from your Canvas posts. Citations should be in MLA style.

### **4. A creative project 20%**

This project can be a fictional interview with an author or literary figure discussed in class. It can also be an adaptation of any text that we have studied throughout the course of the semester; some ideas include a painting, a soundtrack, a film adaptation, a photo-series, comic book, a sequel or re-write. With your project, please include a two-page (double-spaced) explanation of why you chose that specific project, and what you aim at by doing it; for example, what critical ideas it is responding to or is in conversation with. This assignment will be presented on the final day of class.

## **Class Policies**

**Class Attendance:** Attendance is required in this course. Students are permitted to miss class for legitimate medical reasons only (sickness on the day of class). If a session conflicts with a religious holiday, let us know within the first two weeks (as per Penn policy) and you will be excused. If an extenuating circumstance requires that you miss a class, consult with

us as soon as possible in order to discuss makeup work. More than one unexcused absence will result in a lowering of your grade.

### **Disability Statement**

The University of Pennsylvania provides reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities who have self-identified and been approved by the office of Student Disabilities Services (SDS). Please make an appointment to meet with us as soon as possible in order to discuss your accommodations and needs. If you have not yet contacted SDS and would like to request accommodations or have questions, you can make an appointment by calling (215) 573-9235. The office is in the Weingarten Learning Resources Center (WLRC) at Stouffer Commons, 3702 Spruce Street, Suite 300. All WLRC services are confidential.

Our **Code of Conduct** incorporates the University's Code of Academic Integrity that states that we, a community committed to upholding academic integrity and the free pursuit of knowledge, will not accept any form of academic dishonesty. Furthermore, our code of conduct insists that we meet in a harassment-free environment for everyone, regardless of race, age, religion, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance, body size, or skill level.

## **Weekly Schedule**

### **May 27**

Ancient Egypt, "Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor"  
*Epic of Gilgamesh*, Tablet XI  
*Rigveda*, "Hymn of Creation" (10.129)  
Hesiod, *Theogony*, "Prometheus"

### **June 3**

*Aesop's Fables* (selections)  
*Kalila and Dimna* (selections)  
La Fontaine, *Fables* (selections)

### **June 10**

*The Arabian Nights*: "The Tale of the Three Apples"  
Mark Twain, "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County"  
A. S. Byatt, "The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye"

### **June 17**

E. T. A. Hoffmann, "The Sandman"  
Edgar Allan Poe, "William Wilson"  
Nathaniel Hawthorne, "The Minister's Black Veil"

## **First Paper Due**

## **June 24**

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper"  
Franz Kafka, "The Metamorphosis"  
Daisy al-Amir, "The Eyes in the Mirror"

## **July 1**

Jorge Luis Borges,  
"The Library of Babel"  
"The Aleph"  
"The Book of Sand"

## **July 8**

Stephen Crane, "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky"  
Jamaica Kincaid, *Lucy*

## **July 15**

Jean Rhys, "The Day They Burned the Books"  
Susan Glaspell, "A Jury of her Peers"  
Ann Petry, "The Witness"

## **Second Paper Due**

## **July 22**

James Joyce, "An Encounter"  
Chinua Achebe, "Dead Men's Path"  
Amos Oz, "The Hill of Evil Counsel" in *The Hill of Evil Counsel*

## **July 29**

Arundhati Roy, *God of Small Things*

## **August 5**

Jennifer Egan, "Black Box"  
Mia Moody-Ramirez, "Black Twitter Narratives"  
Lauren Leigh Kelly, "A Snapchat Story: How Black Girls Develop Strategies for Critical Resistance in School"

## **Creative Project Due**