

Narratives Across Culture

(COML1025 | SAST1124 | ENGL0039 | MELC1960 | THAR1025)

Instructor: Apurva A

Prasad Time: 5:00 pm-7:50

pm Day: Tuesday and

Thursday

Location: Online

Office Hours: TBD

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I. Course Description: Narrative—the ability to tell(suppress) stories, document(distort) lives, and generate(fabricate) fiction and nonfiction—is a fundamental way we communicate and make meaning in this world. Culture- the ability to form(break) community, connect(sever) people, and find(bury) meaning- is often mediated through narrative.

In this course, we will think critically about how narratives move across cultures and how cultures themselves are formed and constituted by narrative. How do authors narrativize cultures “different” from their home culture? In what way do the historical processes of trade, travel, intellectual exchanges, and colonization bring communities into contact? How is knowledge formed through narrative? We will also consider the loaded word “culture”- Is it only the elite who own “culture”? Whose narratives are “culturally important” and why?

We will read texts by authors and scholars from Europe, South Asia, America, and the Middle East. The texts we study span three centuries, from the 1700s to the 2020s, across narrative forms like the travelogue, play, autobiography, and poetry. We will also read theories from literary studies, sociology, and anthropology to think critically and comparatively about the narratives we read. While this course covers a long history, we will situate each “text” in its “context” to heighten our understanding, appreciation, and perspective on each work.

No former knowledge of any topics is required.

Please write to apurvap@sas.upenn.edu with queries.

NOTE: Students are given two pass classes for the course.

The instructor will allow you to compensate for the class by either completing an extra assignment or offering the students a recording of the class and requesting they summarize three critical details in 300-400 words. The exact requirements of students may differ, but the logic of the two pass classes remains the same. I understand that students are working or doing internships during the summer, and this is a built-in accommodation for the course. If you know you will miss the class, do write to the instructor and complete a Course Action Notice Prior.

II. Course Objectives:

- Facilitate students' ability to become careful and discerning readers of texts—an invaluable skill that automatically translates to better writing.
- Write competently, formulate a strong argument, and carefully substantiate claims.
- Develop the ability to think critically and comparatively across different texts and contexts in a critical, ethical, and intersectional manner.
- Present their ideas confidently and ask peers relevant questions about their work.

III. Assignments/Activities Weightage:

- Canvas Posts: 20%
- Quizzes: 15%
- Class Participation: 15%
- Mid-Session Assignment: 20%
- Final Assignment: 30%

IV. Assignments/Activities Description:

Canvas Posts (20%): Canvas Posts are a useful way to assess your understanding of the texts we cover and allow you to ask the class and instructor any questions. Students must post an interesting *quote* from the reading and *analyze* why it is important. For instance, you can write about what critical themes, tensions, and plot points this quote from the text highlights. On the other hand, if it is theory reading week, you could signal the usage of a particular critical term that the text uses in a sentence and why you think it is insightful. Finally, students must also put down at least one question (students are welcome to ask several questions) about the text. This can be anything from clarification, confusion, or a challenge to the text. Lastly, students are also free to comment on the text itself.

Students write five posts at the start of each week, each worth 4% of the overall grade. There is a post for Week 1, and students are permitted one “pass week” where they need not post. The posts need to be 350–450 words overall. Posts must be up by **11:59 p.m. on Monday** before class on Tuesday.

Post Format:

Quote:

Analysis:

Questions:

General Comments:

Quizzes (15%): Quizzes are to test your basic knowledge of the text, and you are free to use the internet, your notes, and the text itself to make claims. There will be five quizzes, each 3% of the grade. All of them are mandatory. Each quiz will not have more than 9-10 questions. The quiz is not meant to confuse you but to clarify concepts. The quizzes must be completed by **11:59 p.m. on Wednesday** before class on Thursday.

Class Participation (15%): Please come prepared to discuss the texts in class. Structured discussions will be an important part of the class. Class participation will be gauged according to 5-6 small in-class assignments/ activities weighted at 2% each. The final 3%-5% will be at the instructor's discretion and weighed around the quality of points you bring to class and your capacity to engage with peers and communicate effectively. These assignments/ activities will be at random during class, and students will be allowed to make up one missed assignment upon discussion with the instructor.

Mid-Session Assignment (20%): This assignment will be short (2-3 pages, double-spaced) and based on the text we have studied in class thus far. Students will have a choice of 3-4 questions on this assignment.

Final Assignment (30%): TBD

V. Schedule and Tentative Readings:

(Note: Students will not have to buy any of these texts unless they wish to. These readings are tentative and subject to change but give a good sense of the overall direction of the course and the kinds of reading to expect.)

Week 1:

May 27th: Introductions, Course Objectives and Questions

May 29th: Read Williams, Raymond. "[Culture is Ordinary](#)" (1958): Essay

Week 2:

3rd June: Swift, Jonathan. *Gulliver's Travels*. (1726): Travelogue Excerpts

5th June: Swift, Jonathan. *Gulliver's Travels*. (1726): Travelogue Excerpts & "The Present Miserable State of Ireland" (1776): Letter

Week 3:

10th June: Said, Edward. *Orientalism* "[Introduction](#)" (1997): Literary Studies book excerpt.

Additional: Abu Lugod, Lila. "[Writing Against Culture](#)" (1991): Anthropology Essay.

12th June: Hwang, David Henry. *M. Butterfly* (1988): Play.

Week 4:

17th June: Hwang, David Henry. *M. Butterfly* (1988): Play.

19th June: TBD

Week 5:

24th June: Dirks, Nicholas. "[Castes of the Mind](#)" (1992) Sociology Paper/ Book Excerpt.

Additional: Guru, Gopal. "[Dalit Women Talk Differently](#)" (1995) Sociology Article and Rege, Sharmila. "[Dalit Women Talk Differently: A Critique of 'difference' and Towards a Dalit Feminist Standpoint Position](#)" (1998): Sociology Article- response to Guru.

26th June: Dutt, Yaschica. *Coming Out As Dalit* (2019/2024): autobiography

Week 6:

1st July: Dutt, Yaschica. *Coming Out As Dalit* (2019/2024): autobiography