

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 (The Qur'an 12:111)

Literary Classics of the Muslim World *(The Narrative Literature)*

REL 176 (Fall 2014)
TTH 9:40-10:55 (Hance Auditorium)

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Office Hours: Mon & Wed 9:45-11:30 (Schedule appointments via [this LINK](#)).

COURSE DESCRIPTION

There are three major themes of the class: 1) the relationship between religion, culture and literature; 2) the role and significance of narrative to human life in general, and religious traditions in specific; and 3) how to form a meaningful relationship with a text, and through the text with the cultural religious “other”. This a reading and discussion-based class. Throughout the semester we will read closely some of the most seminal 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, cultural and intellectual traditions over the centuries. 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 and conscientiously observe how our personal worlds interact with these texts, and are affected by our reading and engagement with them. We will seek to understand richness of human experience through narrative-literature, and narrative through human experience. Our approach to the study of these texts will be literary, intertextual, phenomenological, historical and multi-layered: It entails speaking from within the text, speaking with it, and speaking to/about it as well.

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. 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. You are encouraged to speak to the instructor about ways in which you may contribute in achieving these goals, both personally and as a group.

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 "one's 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.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS (each item is explained at length below)

Attendance & Participation	20% (includes Blog activity)
Introducing the Text	20% (10% paper, 7% Presentation, 3% Ann. Bibliog.)
8 Interpretive Reflections (IR)	40% (700 words, 5% each)
Reflection Essay “Why Narrative?”	20% (7-page maximum, Due Nov 18 th)

ATTENDANCE POLICY, CLASS DISCUSSION, AND PARTICIPATION

1. Keep track of your attendance. The last day you will turn in a pledged sheet detailing your attendance and your own assessment of your overall participation grade.
2. Attendance is compulsory in this course. More than **1 absence** without valid excuse such as sickness or family emergency etc. will result in the lowering of grade. (B+ will become a B, B a B- and so on)
3. It is an absolute must that electronic devices, if used at all, be used in the class for class-related activities only (e.g., taking notes, pulling up readings etc.).¹
4. Always bring the syllabus & assigned readings for the week to the class.
5. It is student’s responsibility to obtain notes and ‘catch-up’ in the case of absence. Absence will not be a good excuse for not knowing what happened in the class.
6. Occasionally, you may be asked to 1) summarize or present formally selective portion of the readings, 2) make critical comments, 3) work in groups, 4) turn in questions from the readings, and 5) bring examples from the media (audio/video, blogs, magazines, and social media) for further discussion and clarification.
7. Please do not come in late or leave early—it is disruptive.
8. Your participation grade will reflect the overall *quality* (and not simply quantity) of your contributions to the class throughout the semester. This includes proper class etiquette, attentiveness, preparing for the class, asking engaging questions and active and thoughtful engagement with the texts and **Blog-related activities**.

¹ Research has shown that students who multitask on a laptop during class receive lower test scores than students who do not (Sana, Weston, & Cepeda, 2013). Also, students who are around students who are multitasking on technology perform lower.

ASSIGNMENTS FOR THE SEMESTER

General Guidelines:

1. *The audience for all your written assignments is your REL 176 class.*
2. Use Standard font (Times New Roman) and margins (one inch on all sides).
3. Save paper: print on both sides and DO NOT create a separate cover page.
4. Only cite fully if it is a text other than those assigned. Use Chicago or MLA.
5. Do mention the WORD COUNT in the end.
6. Unless stated otherwise, all assignments will be posted on to the Moodle.
7. Each 24-hour delay will result in corresponding 10-point deduction.

Introducing the Text and the Author

1. 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 is a conflict of interest we can resolve it in the class. More instructions on that the first day.
2. 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. **Most importantly**, you should bring this "background information" to bear upon the reading of the text: show if and how this information does or should inform/transform/influence our reading of the text.
3. Your class presentation will not be more than 10-12 minutes. Eventually you will write this introduction and submit it along with a properly formatted annotated bibliography of the resources that were used for introducing the text.
4. You are encouraged to meet with the instructor to go over your plan of introducing the text beforehand or to discuss any questions that you may have.
5. DEADLINE: Outline of your Introduction and annotated bibliography will be posted onto the blog by NOV 6.

Interpretive Reflection (IR)

1. PURPOSE: Your IR is **Your Two-Minute Class Insight**. Its purpose is to help critical engagement with the issues and associated readings, and raising the level of class discussion. Good grasp of the issues and assigned material is therefore assumed.
2. ENGAGE READINGS: A good response paper will engage the readings and speak from both within and without these texts. Ask the instructor to explain this distinction.
3. AUDIENCE: In writing it, imagine you are reading it aloud to the class to hear and engage it. *Remember you are writing for your fellow classmates* who have also read the same material. Therefore, restating or summarizing the readings will be absolutely redundant. You may be asked to read it aloud in the class.
4. INTEREST: Choose to reflect on the aspects of readings that you find fascinating, intriguing, contentious, or simply unclear/confusing.
5. TONE: An IR is not an op-ed or an expression of how you felt about the readings. Like all writing, it is geared toward speaking to an audience and persuading it of your insight. You do not need to exclude yourself. So yes, you can use first person pronoun I! The question is what kind of “I” speaks.
6. The key questions you should be asking yourself are the following:
 - i. DO YOU CARE? Is this idea worth your time and effort? Do you care about the topic? Would you enjoy thinking about it?
 - ii. FEASIBILITY: 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. ILLUMINE: 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 summarizes?
 - iv. SHOW: Does it *show* (not just state) what it was meant to convey to the class?
 - v. PERSUADE: Does it successfully convince or persuade your classmates?

7. WITHIN/WITHOUT: In line with general methodology of the class, you should seek to speak from both *within* and *without* the text.
8. Besides posting your IR, you are also expected to regularly read and comment on IRs posted by your classmates. You may also be asked to peer-grade these IRs.

Reflection Essay on “Narrative”

Make sure you understand the goals for it; ask the instructor if you have any questions.

SOME GUIDELINES FOR THE BLOG

1. For the Tuesday session TWO substantial question *from within* the text need to be posted no later than **by 7 p.m.** on Monday. *It means that the readings for the week should be completed before this time.* For the Thursday session, TWO comments on the posts from Monday and ONE substantial question/comment *about* the text will be posted no later than **by 9 p.m.** on Wednesday. All questions need to be rated.
2. The instructor will clarify what he means by the crucial distinction between asking questions *from within* the text and asking questions *about* the text. These questions will be brought up in our class discussion and will be open to challenge, modification, and hopefully will resolve into some sort of consensus among the participants.
3. The quality of your contributions will be assessed in relation to how thoughtfully you engage the assigned texts in asking and responding to questions.
4. Your question should be substantial. It must:
 - a. Provide clarification as to how it is related to our study, the stake in the question for the one asking it (and for us as a class); in other words why is this question important to be discussed?
 - b. Make *within/without* distinction and emerge from and relate to the text/readings assigned for the day/week;
 - c. Be clearly and carefully articulated. It should display careful reading of the text and must not miss the obvious. Avoid typos and grammatical errors.
5. Your comment should:
 - d. Not be about how you feel (i.e., your open-ended opinion) but should bring the texts and our conversation to bear upon the question asked by your classmate;

- e. Reveal again careful thought and clarity of expression. Take time to make your comment comprehensible to the reader.
- f. Not avoid challenging and debating ideas, yet in a respectful way

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.

REQUIRED READINGS (Available at the Bookstore and on Reserve in the Library)

1. Mahdi, Muhsin and Hussain Haddawy. *The Arabian Nights* (Deluxe Edition). New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2008
2. Nizami. *The Story of Layla and Majnun*. (tr. Rudolph Gelpke) New Lebanon: Bruno Cassirers and Omega Publishers, 1997.
3. Ibn Tufayl. *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*. Transl. Lenn Goodman. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.
4. Sa'di. *The Gulistan (Rose Garden) of Sa'di* (bilingual edition). tr. Wheeler Thackston. Brooklyn, N.Y.: IBEX Publishers, 2008.
5. Rumi, Jalaluddin. *Tales from the Masnavi*. tr. A. J. Arberry. London and New York: Routledge, 2002.
6. Jah and Farooqi. *Hoshruha: The Land and the Tilism*. ?: The Urdu Project, 2008.
7. Hauerwas, Stanley and L. Gregory Jones (ed.) *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1997.

COURSE OUTLINE

Key: On Reserve (R), E-View Library (E), On Moodle (M)

PART I: NARRATIVE TEXTS OF THE MUSLIM WORLD

Week 1 (Aug 26-28): Narrative, Religion and Literature within the Muslim Context

- “Literature” *The Islamic World: Past and Present* [Oxford Islamic Studies Online (E)]
- Jerome Bruner, “Life as Narrative” (M)
- Tolkien, “On Fairy Stories” (M)

Week 2 (Sep 2-4): Literary Narrative

The Arabian Nights, 3-154

Week 3 (Sep 9-11): Literary Narrative Continued

The Arabian Nights, 155-202 & 303-349

Watch before Sep 9 Class: *Arabian Nights* (2000) (R)

IR I due before the class on Sep 11th

In the opening pages of *The Arabian Nights* Shaharзад tells her sister, “Then I will begin to tell a story, and it will cause the king to stop his practice, save myself, and deliver the people” (17-8). Why does Shaharзад think she can accomplish these goals? And then there is the *Foreword* (3) where the author discusses his purpose for writing this book. How does the author intend to accomplish his goals he lays out in the *Foreword*? Does he accomplish these goal? What’s the connection between what Shaharзад says and what the author says in the *Foreword*? Is the narrative believable? Are you convinced that the task was accomplished? Engage the text for your analysis and discussion.

Week 4 (Sep 16-18): Philosophical Narrative

Hayy ibn Yaqzan, 95-166

IR II due before the class on Sep 23th

Relate the prologue of the text (95-103) to the tale?

Week 5 (Sep 23-25): Romance Folktale Narrative

Readings: *The Story of Layla and Majnun*, 1-177

IR III due before the class on Sep 30

Reflect on section LIV

Week 6 (Sep 30-Oct 2): Wisdom Narratives I
Gulistan, “Prologue”, Chapters 1 & 2 (pp. 1-74)

Week 7 (Oct 7-9): Wisdom Narratives II
Gulistan, Chapters 4, 5, 6 & 7 (pp. 98-147)

IR IV due before the class on Oct 9
(From hereon in you will choose the topic yourself)

FALL BREAK
FRIDAY, October 10 (4:30 P.M.) - WEDNESDAY, October 15 (8:30 A.M.)

Week 8 (Oct 16): Wisdom Narratives III
Tales from the Masnavi, p. 11-134 (First 40)

Week 9 (Oct 21-23): Wisdom Narratives IV
Tales from the Masnavi, 154-286 (Second 50)

IR V due before the class on Oct 16th

Week 10 (Oct 28-30): Epic Fantasy
Hoshruba, TBA

Week 11 (Nov 4-6): Epic Fantasy continued
Hoshruba, TBA

IR VI due before the class on Nov 6th

Nov 6th: Introduction & Annotated Bibliography DUE

PART II: NARRATIVE, LITERATURE, RELIGION, LIFE

Week 12 (Nov 11-13): What is Narrative? Why Narrative? Narrative and Religion

- The Narrative Quality of Experience”
- Paul Ricoeur, “Life in Quest of Narrative” (M)
- “Introduction” *Why Narrative?*

IR VII due before the class on Nov 18th

Week 13 (Nov 18-20): Theorizing Narrative

- David Carr, “Narrative Explanation and its Malcontents” in *History and Theory* (Feb 2008), 19-30 (M)

Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology] ed. Hauerwas and Jones

- “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”

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

WHY NARRATIVE? REFLECTION ESSAY*

(To be posted before the Class on Nov 20th [max. 7-page double space])

OPTION I: 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? By what criteria do we decide that one story is better than another? Use the Muslim narrative texts we have studied this semester in support of your analysis.

OR

OPTION II: Incorporating some of the themes listed under OPTION I, mention which of the stories we studied this semester was in your view the best? Why?

OR

OPTION III: Even better than OPTIONS I & II TELL A STORY THAT CAPTURES YOUR THOUGHTS ON OUR STUDY THIS SEMESTER

**NOTE: You will also comment on at least two other essays on the blog.*

THANKSGIVING BREAK

TUESDAY, November 25 (4:30 P.M.)-MONDAY, December 1 (8:30 A.M.)

PART III: SYNTHESIS & CONCLUSION

Week 14 (Nov 25): Scriptural Narrative I: The Prophet's Night Journey

Readings: *Isra-Mi'raj* Account (M)

The class for Week 14 may be cancelled due to a conference

Week 15 (Dec 2-4): Scriptural Narrative II & Conclusion of the Study

Readings: The Qur'an: Chapter 12, Yusuf/Joseph (E); Joseph from *Lives of the Prophets* (M)

IR VIII due before the class on Dec 4th

(It should incorporate theory of narrative)

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? Your reflection paper should incorporate the theory of narrative.

Week 16 (Dec 9): Maybe used to conclude the class

Wednesday, December 10 Fall Classes End
December 8-10 Optional Class Days