Modern Multiforms: Ancient Narratives as Adapted into Movies and Graphic Novels

BASICS

Instructor: Elizabeth Thornton
Class Time: R 3:00-5:50
Location: Covel Commons 218
Class ID: 143092208

Office/Drop-In Hours: Friday 2:00-4:00 pm, Covel 214 and by Appointment*
Email: thorntone.ucla@gmail.com

*With a week’s advance notice, I can make myself available on Thursday before class or on other times on Friday.

MORE ABOUT THIS COURSE

Required Books/Readings/Featured Screenings:
Zahra’s Paradise by Amir (Soltani) and Khalil (Bendib) and V for Vendetta by Alan Moore and David Lloyd
Additional readings distributed via website include excerpts of:
• Three by Kieron Gillen, Ryan Kelly, and Jordie Bellaire
• 300 by Frank Miller
• "The People’s Audit"—zine published by the Stop LAPD Spying Coalition
• Walking with the Comrades by Arundhati Roy

In-class screenings will include:
• Khalnayak and Raavan (Bollywood’s retellings of the Rāmāyaṇa)
• V for Vendetta, cinematic adaptation

Assignments and Grading Breakdown:
• Participation (includes worksheet checks) 40%
• Week 4 Capstone and Week 8 Essay (averaged) 25%
• Final Paper/Project: 25% (Due June 13)
• Presentation 10% (Weeks 8 and 10)

Grading Scale
Letter grades will be used in this class—but for the purposes of averaging/weighing, here is a rough guide to the numerical value of these letter grades.
A+ 98 or above
A 95
A- 92
B+ 89
B 86
B- 83
C+ 80
C 77
**Extra Credit**

The first three office hour visits each count for one extra point on your final grade. Members of the team that scores the most cumulative points on *Kahoot!* quizzes will receive one extra-credit point each. Other extra-credit opportunities will be announced—and you have the option of proposing an extra credit project as well.

**Participation**

Participation means being both physically *and mentally* present in class. You can give evidence of the latter by filling out worksheets, taking notes, discussing *Kahoot!* quiz questions with your teammates, and being prepared to comment on some key questions or concepts that you will find listed under the “Write” section of the weekly homework. *Please bring the readings to class in text or electronic form.* If a financial or other issue makes this extremely difficult, let me know and we will work out a way to get you access to the texts.

**Paper (in three stages)—Each stage needs to be turned in as a hard copy and on Turnitin**

**Stage 1: Due Week 4: Three paragraphs on visual analysis** (Note--this is not a complete essay!)

Pick either two frames from one of the discussed graphic novel excerpts, or from a myth multiform of your choosing (if you choose your own source, it would be good to run it by me first.) Write a short three-paragraph comparative analysis of these pictures using the “social semiotic” methods discussed in class:

- **Paragraph A:** Definitions. In the topic sentence, identify the source or nature of the pictures you are analyzing and what method(s) you will use to analyze them. (Refer to the pictures as “Figure 1” and “Figure 2” and include a labeled copy of the pictures at the end of your assignment.) Using quotations and citations from the assigned “Visual Meaning” (by Jewitt and Oyama), define ALL the terms you will use in your method of analysis. (If using “interactive” analysis, you will be defining the terms “interactive meaning,” “contact,” “distance,” and “point of view,” in order to talk about the nature and strength of relationships constructed with the viewer. If using “narrative” analysis, you will be defining the terms “narrative meaning,” “actor,” “vector,” and “goal,” in order to talk about the role of action lines in communicating power hierarchies between characters.)

- **Paragraphs B-C:** Comparative analysis. Using only observations that can be discussed via your method’s toolkit/terms, discuss meaningful similarities and differences between the two pictures. The topic sentence of each paragraph should announce a point about one picture’s meaning.

**Stage 2: Due Week 8: 4-6-page essay critically interpreting a visual multiform**

Expanding upon Stage 1, write a 4-6-page essay in the following format:

- 1st paragraph=thesis paragraph (=summary of argument/ “abstract”)
- 2nd paragraph=background info about multiform, including identification of the myth of which it is a multiform.
- 3rd paragraph=introduction of visual analysis method(s) and definition of terms
- At least three body paragraphs containing your visual analysis
- Last 2 paragraphs = interpretation and conclusion. Combining the results of your visual analysis with contextual information/comparison with other multiforms/critical theory, interpret their relevance to the social and political messages communicated by the multiform.

**Stage 3:** Due June 13—Expansion of essay OR related visual creative project

Edit and re-submit your Stage-2 paper. Propose a creative project that builds on the insights of your previous essay (needs to be discussed and approved in office-hour meetings)

OR

Edit and expand your Stage-2 paper. Here is the format for the beginning of all papers:
- 1st paragraph = thesis paragraph (=summary of argument/“abstract”)
- 2nd paragraph = introduction of multiform
- 3rd paragraph = introduction of method and definition of terms

Here is the format for the middle and end of **Expansion Type A.**
- At least SIX body paragraphs containing your critical reading of TWO PAIRS of pictures
- Last two to three paragraphs = interpretation and conclusion

Here is the format for the middle and end of **Expansion Type B.**
- At least three body paragraphs containing your critical reading of one pair of pictures
- Last FOUR TO SIX paragraphs = interpretations and conclusion

**Presentation**

Length: Approx. 15 minutes. **Due on Week 8 or Week 10.** The basic tasks are as follows:

1) Find (from materials outside of the class) an image or two that depicts a retelling of a traditional narrative. It could be nearly anything—a TV series advertisement that depicts a reframing of Little Red Riding Hood, a still from a movie or a music video, a portrait of a figure (e.g. the royal portraits from the “Elizamyth” lecture in GE 30 B). The subject of your presentation does not have to be the same as the subject of your papers.

2) Let us know what narrative is being retold here, and explain its privileged status in a specific geo-cultural context. Give us the basic political and historical background information required to begin to understand the significance of the retelling.

3) Give us something to think our way through, such as a visual analysis chart, which you would help us fill out before making a point about the messages embedded in this visual multiform.

Make sure to give us a handout/PowerPoint to help us connect the dots. The handout/PowerPoint must provide a bibliography for students who would be interested in reading more.
Month 1—Weeks 2-4 Homework

**Due Week 2 (April 11)**
Read:
- *Three*, Chapters 1-2 (W)
- *300*, entire graphic novel (W)
- Herodotus, excerpts from *Histories*: 7.102-105, 7.177-192, 7.202-235, 7.239 (W)
- “Visual Meaning: A Social Semiotic Analysis” article (W): ONLY pages 134-137, the section on “Narrative Meaning” (pp. 141-143), and the section on “Interactive Meaning” (pp. 145-147)

Write (recommended):
- A paragraph on some differences between the ancient account of the battle of Thermopylae and Frank Miller's version
- A paragraph describing the various action lines (vectors, actors and goals) in key frames of *Three* and *300*

**Due Week 3 (April 18)**
Read:
- *V for Vendetta*, Book 1 (9 Chapters)
- *Zahra’s Paradise*, Chapters 1-7
- “People’s Audit” (W)
- “Visual Meaning”: Sections on analytic meaning (144) and compositional meaning (147-152).

Write (recommended):
- In chart or paragraph form, analyze a picture from *Zahra’s Paradise* or *V for Vendetta* using one of the visual analysis toolkits learned thus far
- Pick the two pictures that you will work with for your first writing assignment, and bring them to class

**Due Week 4 (April 25)**
Read:
- “Visual Meaning” Article—Finish
- *Zahra’s Paradise*, Chapters 8-11
- *V for Vendetta*, Book 2

Write:
**PAPER, STAGE 1 (THREE PARAGRAPHS): TYPED UP, DOUBLE-SPACED, PRINTED OUT AND TURNED IN TO TURNITIN.**

Month 2—Weeks 5-9 Homework

**Due Week 5 (May 2)**
Read:
- *Zahra’s Paradise*, Chapter 12-end
- “Story of Rostam and Sohrab,” from the *Shahnameh* as translated by Dick Davis (w): pp. 187-197, 202-205 and 209-212 (as demarcated on scan)
- “Some observations on Paradigmatic and Syntagmatic Order,” by Peradotto (w): pp. 85-87

Write (recommended):
- Try and write a syntagm that fits both *Zahra’s Paradise* and the “Story of Rostam and Sohrab.”
Due Week 6 (May 9)

Read:
- “Civilizational Exclusivism” by Murat Es (w): pay attention particularly to the definition of orientalism and ways in which orientalist binaries can be visually represented
- “Women's Lamentations as protest in the *Shahnama*” (w): focus on the lines that Davidson translates, which were omitted from Dick Davis’ excerpts
- “The Enduring Mythology of Persia” by Fereydoun Hoveyda (w): pages 41-46 (Note: we are reading this as an example of orientalist thinking)
- The May 10 worksheet will have a space where you can declare whether you want to present on Week 8 or Week 10. Re-read the guidelines of the worksheet and make a decision.

Write (recommended):
- Write a paragraph answering the following questions: what figures and roles are missing from Hoveyda’s retelling of the story of Rostam and Sohrab; if he included those figures, would it be possible to use this story in service of his argument about Iran and Iranians?
- Chief among Hoveyda’s omissions is the erasure of Tahmineh/Tahmina. How are this character’s relationships to the story’s father and son similar to Demaratos’ relationships to Sparta and the Persian court? How would these relationships complicate the orientalist binaries advanced by Miller and Hoveyda?

Due Week 7 (May 16)

*In preparation for screening of *V for Vendetta* on this day*

Read:
- *V for Vendetta*, Book 3 (=remainder of graphic novel)
- “A is for Anarchy, V is for Vendetta” (w)
- “Anarcha-Feminism in Alan Moore and David Lloyd’s *V for Vendetta*” (w)
- Pre-film handout (w): Familiarize yourself with the political references in the pre-film handout by skimming the linked-to article
- *The Redemptive Self: Stories Americans Live By* (w): Prologue and Chapter 1

Write (recommended):
- Using the two recommended articles, David Lloyd’s foreward, and/or Alan Moore’s Postscript, find three specific points of contact between Margaret Thatcher’s England and the plot/dialogue lines of *V for Vendetta*
- Take notes on the highlighted phrases and references in the pre-film handout, leaving space to fill in

Due Week 8 (May 23)

Write:
**PAPER, STAGE 2 (EIGHT PARAGRAPHS): TYPED UP, DOUBLE-SPACED, PRINTED OUT, AND TURNED IN TO TURNITIN.** Half of you will also present on this day (topics of paper and presentation can be the same).

Due Week 9 (May 30)

*In preparation for screening of *Raavan* and partial screening of *Khalnayak* on this day*

Read:
- “Mr. Chidambaram’s War” from *Walking with the Comrades* (w)
- Excerpts from *Many Rāmāyaṇas*: pp. 3-7 of “Introduction” and 22-37 of “Three Hundred Rāmāyaṇas” (w)