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BA English Honours | Semester I | Calicut University

Introducing Print and Digital Narratives

Course Code: ENG1FM105 • Module 1 Notes

MODULE I: SONGS AND POEMS

1. The Acoustic and Poetic Imagination: Melody, Meter, and Social Consciousness

Poetry and song share an inseparable ancestral lineage. Long before the invention of the printing press or the codex book, human knowledge, communal history, spiritual devotion, and revolutionary dissent were preserved and transmitted through oral verse set to rhythm. From ancient agrarian folk songs celebrating seasonal fertility and mourning domestic exile to modern global pop phenomena streaming across billions of digital screens, the poetic form commands a unique capacity to bypass intellectual defenses and awaken profound emotional empathy.

In contemporary cultural studies, songs and poems are recognized not merely as decorative entertainment, but as vital ideological artifacts that encode societal crises, collective trauma, and political resistance. The boundary between "high" canonical literature and "popular" musical verse has dissolved: a folk lyric sung by an oppressed peasant woman in Gujarat carries the same aesthetic dignity and sociological urgency as a polished lyric by a British Poet Laureate or a Palestinian protest poem composed under military bombardment. This module analyzes four iconic vocal and poetic texts, illuminating how contemporary artists deploy melody, imagery, and meter to bear witness to personal loss, colonial dispossession, and human solidarity.

2. Global Pop Poetics and Collective Mourning: BTS's *Spring Day* (2017)

Released in February 2017 on the album *You Never Walk Alone*, *Spring Day* (*Bomnal*) by the South Korean group BTS (Bangtan Sonyeondan) is widely celebrated as one of the most lyrically sophisticated and culturally resonant pop songs of the twenty-first century. Transcending conventional boy-band romantic themes, the song is a profound, layered meditation on grief, generational loss, nostalgia, and the yearning for spiritual reunion across temporal and emotional winter.

CULTURAL & LYRICAL ANALYSIS **BTS: *Spring Day* (2017) – Thematic Tropes**

> *I miss you; saying this makes me miss you even more.*
> *Looking at your picture, I still miss you.*
> *Time is so cruel, I hate us.*
> *Now it's hard to even see each other's faces once...*
> *Winter is here, even in August.*
> *Snowflakes fall and drift farther away little by little.*
> *Like a tiny dust floating through the air,*
> *Will I reach you a little faster if I were the flying snow?*

A crucial critical dimension of *Spring Day* is its widely recognized subtextual allegory for the 2014 Sewol Ferry tragedy—a national catastrophe in which 304 passengers, predominantly secondary school students from Danwon High School, perished due to institutional negligence, corporate greed, and state failure. While never explicitly naming the disaster to avoid state censorship, the music video (directed by Choi Yong-seok) and poetic lyrics deploy poignant visual motifs of collective remembrance: yellow ribbons, an abandoned

carousel, mountains of discarded laundry, shoes washed ashore on a cold beach, and train compartments traveling through endless snow toward an ancient, blooming tree.

Furthermore, the narrative of *Spring Day* engages in explicit intertextual dialogue with Ursula K. Le Guin's celebrated philosophical short story, *The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas* (1973). The neon sign "Omelas" appears prominently in the video, referencing Le Guin's utopian city whose prosperity depends upon the continuous, horrifying torment of a single innocent child locked in a broom closet. In BTS's reimagining, the youth refuse to participate in an unjust social order that sacrifices the vulnerable for societal comfort; they choose to walk away together into the freezing winter, sustaining one another through solidarity until the metaphorical spring arrives. The song synthesizes the traditional Korean cultural concept of *Han* (deep-seated historical grief and unresolved sorrow) with *Jeong* (profound emotional attachment and collective resilience), demonstrating the profound literary depth achievable within global popular music.

3. Cartographies of Resistance: Najwan Darwish's *I Write the Land*

Najwan Darwish, born in Jerusalem in 1978, is acclaimed as one of the foremost contemporary Arab poets, continuing the heroic Palestinian poetic lineage established by Mahmoud Darwish and Samih al-Qasim. Translated into English with remarkable lyrical fidelity by Kareem James Abu-Zeid, Darwish's poem *I Write the Land* is an impassioned declaration of anti-colonial resistance against territorial theft, military occupation, and cultural erasure.

For displaced and colonized peoples, the act of writing is never neutral; it is an act of reclamation. Darwish rejects Western imperial cartography—which renames ancient villages, erects concrete separation walls, and bulldozes centuries-old olive groves to impose settler hegemony. In *I Write the Land*, the poet's pen becomes a topographical instrument. The speaker does not merely write *about* Palestine; he writes *the land itself* into existence, affirming that physical soil, rocky terraces, ancient stones, and ancestral graves are woven into the cellular memory of the Palestinian people.

Darwish utilizes vivid personification and historical juxtaposition. The land is depicted not as passive territory awaiting foreign conquest, but as a living, breathing body that remembers every martyr, every uprooted tree, and every exiled refugee. By asserting that language can preserve what military tanks attempt to demolish, Darwish exemplifies the Palestinian ethos of *Sumud* (steadfast perseverance). His verse operates as a permanent legal and spiritual deed of ownership, testifying that colonial occupation can confiscate geography, but can never erase the sacred bond between a people and their indigenous soil.

4. Subaltern Orality and Gendered Grief: The Gujarati Folk Song

The Gujarati traditional folk lyric, *Why Does the Peacock Perch on My Door Peg Cry?* (*Mara Te Medie Podhyo Re Popat Bolyo* / folk variants), represents the sublime power of Indian vernacular oral poetry. Preserved across generations by rural women in western India, the song gives voice to the acute emotional vulnerability, loneliness, and domestic claustrophobia experienced by a young bride in a patriarchal, patrilocal joint family household.

In traditional Indian folklore, the peacock is an ambiguous omen: its vibrant plumage and dance herald the arrival of life-giving monsoon rains, yet its shrill, mournful nocturnal cry is traditionally believed to prophesy tragedy, separation, and unfulfilled longing. In the folk song, the young bride sits alone in her marital chambers late at night while her husband is away on commercial trade or labor migration. The peacock perches upon the wooden peg of her door, crying persistently into the darkness.

Through repetitive, haunting refrains, the bride questions the bird: why has it chosen her door to lament? Does it mourn the absence of the rain, or does it recognize the silent, suffocating tears of a young woman

trapped within a household where she possesses no voice and no autonomy? The folk song operates through pathetic fallacy, transforming the wild peacock into an objective correlative for female distress. It exposes the hidden emotional cost of feudal marriage arrangements, demonstrating how subaltern women encoded their grief, defiance, and psychological survival within the communal melodies of folk tradition.

5. The Intimate Digital Epistolary: Carol Ann Duffy's *Text*

Carol Ann Duffy (born 1955), who served as the first female and openly LGBTQIA+ Poet Laureate of the United Kingdom, is celebrated for her incisive psychological realism, vernacular accessibility, and dramatic monologues. In her celebrated lyric *Text* (published in *Rapture*, 2005), Duffy explores the transformative impact of contemporary mobile telecommunications upon the ancient ritual of romantic desire and separation.

Historically, epistolary love poetry involved ink on paper, sealed envelopes, and days or weeks of agonizing postal transit. In *Text*, Duffy chronicles the modern technological ritual of romantic anxiety mediated by the mobile phone:

- **Physical Codependency with the Machine:** The speaker describes holding the phone "like an injured bird" in her hand, constantly checking the luminous screen, tenderly tending to the electronic device as though it were the physical body of the beloved itself.
- **Micro-Syntax of Digital Desire:** Duffy captures the peculiar linguistic aesthetics of the SMS era—the abbreviations, truncated codes, "xx" kiss signifiers, and the agonizing wait for the screen to light up with an incoming transmission.
- **The Illusion of Proximity:** While the mobile phone promises instantaneous, 24/7 connectivity, Duffy exposes the profound emotional alienation it induces. The glowing screen delivers words, but cannot deliver warmth, breath, or bodily presence. A missed notification or delayed response plunges the lover into sudden, acute insecurity.

Duffy demonstrates that while technology changes the speed and medium of human communication, it does not alter the fundamental vulnerability of the human heart. The mobile phone becomes a modern talisman of longing, encapsulating the timeless human terror of isolation in the connected digital era.

Advanced Multimodal & Cultural Studies Synthesis

In contemporary cultural studies and multimodal narrative theory, mastering *Introducing Print and Digital Narratives* demands a critical synthesis of textual, visual, and socio-political methodologies. Contemporary narratives transcend the traditional boundaries of the printed codex; they operate within dynamic convergence cultures where oral traditions, cinematic moving images, digital streaming algorithms, and graphic illustrations constantly cross-pollinate. Critical inquiry into Acoustic Verse, Pop Allegory, Resistance Poetry, and Digital Epistolary Lyricism requires examining how ideology, power, and identity are negotiated across diverse narrative media.

1. Contemporary Critical Dilemmas and Theoretical Frameworks

Scholars and cultural analysts interrogating Acoustic Verse, Pop Allegory, Resistance Poetry, and Digital Epistolary Lyricism navigate fundamental dialectics across multimodal forms:

- **Textual Purity versus Multimodal Convergence:** While traditional literary criticism privileged purely linguistic elements (syntax, metaphor, meter), contemporary digital and print culture mandates multimodal literacy. Theorists like Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen demonstrate that visual layout, typography, soundtrack, color grading, and framing constitute semiotic modes that convey independent

ideological meaning. Analyzing Acoustic Verse, Pop Allegory, Resistance Poetry, and Digital Epistolary Lyricism necessitates reading images, sounds, and texts as unified semiotic systems.

- **Subaltern Agency and Representation of the Peripheries:** The democratization of digital media has empowered marginalized communities—Dalit writers, queer creators, racial minorities, and colonized voices—to dismantle elite cultural hegemony. Spivak's query "Can the Subaltern Speak?" is answered through grassroots digital storytelling, protest poetry, and independent docu-fiction that bypass corporate and caste gatekeepers.
- **Commodification versus Counter-Hegemonic Dissent:** Late capitalism possesses a voracious ability to co-opt radical dissent into marketable consumer commodities (from commodified protest songs to commercialized fair-skin debates). Cultural critics must rigorously distinguish between superficial aesthetic tokenism and authentic, transformative counter-hegemonic critique.

2. Comparative Analytical Assessment

A structured comparative assessment delineates the aesthetic, structural, and political dimensions across conventional print and contemporary multimodal narratives in Introducing Print and Digital Narratives:

Evaluation Dimension	Traditional Print Paradigm	Contemporary Multimodal / Digital Paradigm	Strategic Scholarly Impact
Sensory Engagement	Monolithic linguistic decoding relying entirely on typographical symbols.	Multi-sensory orchestration combining voice, music, cinematography, graphic art, and text.	Deepens affective immersion and cognitive retention across diverse learning demographics.
Narrative Speed & Span	Linear temporal progression unfolding across chapters and extended book formats.	Non-linear compression (flash fiction, micro-memoirs, lyrical shorts, multi-layered visual montage).	Cultivates intense hermeneutic focus, demanding active inferential decoding from audiences.
Cultural Inclusivity	Metropolitan, elite literary circles defining canonical acceptability.	Decentralized grassroots expression celebrating indigenous dialects, queer narratives, and subaltern histories.	Democratizes knowledge production and dismantles institutional exclusionary barriers.
Societal Intervention	Reflective aesthetic distance often divorced from immediate public activism.	Immediate real-time intervention in human rights, environmental justice, and anti-caste movements.	Converts literature into an actionable catalyst for civic mobilization and legislative awareness.

3. Glossary of Multimodal and Cultural Theory Terms

Theoretical Term	Origin / Scholar	Comprehensive Definition & Media Application
Multimodality	Kress & van Leeuwen	The integration of multiple semiotic modes (visual, verbal, gestural, auditory) within a single communicative event or artifact to generate holistic meaning.
Convergence Culture	Henry Jenkins	The cultural paradigm where old and new media collide, grassroots and corporate media intersect, and the power of media producers and

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		consumers interacts in unpredictable ways.
Counter-Hegemony	Antonio Gramsci	Cultural and intellectual resistance designed to critique and dismantle the pervasive, normative common-sense ideologies of the ruling class.
Transmedia Storytelling	Jenkins / Scolari	A narrative technique where distinct elements of a fictional universe are dispersed across multiple delivery channels (books, web, games) for a unified entertainment experience.
Affective Labor	Hardt & Negri	Labor that produces or manipulates affects, feelings of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement, or passion, increasingly central to digital media economies.
Defamiliarization	Viktor Shklovsky	The artistic technique of presenting common things in an unfamiliar or strange way to enhance the perception of the familiar.

4. Methodological Roadmap for Cultural Analysis

Conducting scholarly analysis of Acoustic Verse, Pop Allegory, Resistance Poetry, and Digital Epistolary Lyricism follows an organized four-phase critical protocol:

- **Phase 1: Semiotic Decoding:** Systematically identifying signifiers, visual symbols, musical motifs, and linguistic registers employed in the text or media work.
- **Phase 2: Historical and Ideological Contextualization:** Situate the work within its specific socio-economic milieu—analyzing caste hierarchies, postcolonial borders, gender expectations, or corporate media environments.
- **Phase 3: Intertextual Dialogism:** Juxtapose the primary work with related global cultural artifacts, examining how local traditions dialogue with international artistic currents.
- **Phase 4: Critical Reception and Ethical Evaluation:** Assessing the impact of the narrative upon public consciousness, ethical responsibility, and the cultivation of human empathy.

Advanced Multimodal & Cultural Studies Synthesis

In contemporary cultural studies and multimodal narrative theory, mastering *Introducing Print and Digital Narratives* demands a critical synthesis of textual, visual, and socio-political methodologies. Contemporary narratives transcend the traditional boundaries of the printed codex; they operate within dynamic convergence cultures where oral traditions, cinematic moving images, digital streaming algorithms, and graphic illustrations constantly cross-pollinate. Critical inquiry into Module 1 Extended Cultural and Media Commentary requires examining how ideology, power, and identity are negotiated across diverse narrative media.

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