

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND FINE ARTS

Spring 2006

Modoc 118 TTh 2-3.15

(TEACHING) CONTEMPORARY MIDDLE EASTERN LITERATURE ENGL467/RELS482/HUM400/MEST469

Instructors: Robert Burton (ENGL) and Loren Lybarger (RELS)

**Office Hours: Rob Burton [Trinity 232] TR 11-12.30 + W 2-4
Loren Lybarger [Trinity 236]**

Course Overview

This course attempts to reflect a growing academic interest in Middle Eastern culture, particularly a distinguished literary tradition that pre-dates and follows on from the Qur'an. Religion, politics, gender, and national identity crucially shape the works of writers from Arab, Jewish, and Iranian backgrounds. By examining these works and their influences, we also want to explore ways in which Middle Eastern voices can receive an effective hearing in our schools, particularly at the High School and College level.

The following questions will help to drive the agenda for the course:

- What is the Middle East, and what do we mean by "Middle Eastern literature?"
- How do we discuss and teach this literature? How does our position within the North American context shape our approaches?
- What perspectives do we gain about ourselves through an encounter with Middle Eastern literary voices?
- What literary genres have historically emerged within Middle Eastern societies? Is the Qur'an literature? How has the Qur'an, as oral recitation and written text, shaped other literary forms? What genres predominated in early and Medieval Arab and Muslim societies, especially in the imperial court cultures and among mystics? How have these earlier genres influenced contemporary literary forms? Finally, how do we account for the rise of the novel, short story, and free-form poetry as the dominant modes of imaginative expression in the Middle East?
- How do the experiences of European colonialism, post-colonial nation-state formation, migration to the West, and globalization figure within the works of contemporary Middle Eastern writers? Are there common themes that arise among the diversely situated authors whom we will be reading? To what extent do these themes reflect a distinctive "Middle Eastern" sensibility? To what extent do they give shape to other kinds of "imagined communities?"
- To what extent do Jewish and Arab writers operate from aesthetic sensibilities that are similar and different? What ideas have these authors contributed towards a political problem ("the Palestinian issue") that has proven to be intractable for many generations?

These are complex questions that we hope to address through lively discussion (in the classroom and online) and through mini-lectures/presentations, including a guest lecture by one of the authors on the Reading List (Joe Sacco). Throughout the course, students will be asked to reflect critically and reflexively on the readings as part of an effort to make interdisciplinary connections and enter into a cross-cultural dialog with our selected authors. Hopefully, the course will thus help to heighten your appreciation of a rich body of literature, whether you have interests in later becoming teachers, diplomats, journalists, or religious scholars.

Reading List In Order of Study

Course Reader (A packet of essays, poems, short stories, and excerpts from longer works)

In addition to the Course Reader, the course will be organized around the following titles:

Rumi, Jelaluddin Love Is A Stranger (Poems)

Mahfouz, Naguib. Arabian Nights and Days (Novel)

Salih, Tayeb. Season of Migration to the North (Novel)

Sacco, Joe. Palestine (Graphic Narrative)

Keret, Edgar. Gaza Blues (Short Stories)

Rifaat, Alifa Distant View of a Minaret (Short Stories)

Requirements

Your Final Grade will be determined as follows:

A) 2 short (3-4 page) Creative Papers = 30% (15% each)

B) 2 medium sized (5 page) Expository Papers = 40 % (20%each)

A separate handout will be given out in class with specific Writing Topics, Due dates, and details about Revision possibilities

C) Final Exam = 15% (consisting of short ID's and choice of Essay)

D) Attendance + Participation (including class + online discussions + occasional In-class Quickwrites) = 15%

Note: We are prepared to give "bonus" credit to those that are exemplary in their attendance and participation. Similarly, more than 3 unexcused absences may result in a lowering of your overall grade.

Calendar

NOTE: Page references for Homework Reading will be announced in class

Unit 1. Classical + Mystical Arabo-Persian Literature (Weeks 1-3)

T 1/24 Intro + Syllabus

Th 1/26 Course Reader (Maps. Ash. Glover, backgrounders on "Islam" and "*Arkān al-Dīn*: The Five Pillars")

T 1/30 Course Reader (1001 Nights)

Th 2/2 Course Reader (Backgrounders on "Arabic" and "Qur'an" plus "The Opening," "The Dawn," and "Destiny")

T 2/7 + Th 2/9 Rumi

Paper # 1 (Short Creative) Due Next Week Th 2/16

Unit 2. Reading the Islamic Past (Weeks 4-6)

T 2/14 + Th 2/16 Mahfouz

T 2/21 + Th 2/23 Mahfouz

T 2/28 + Th 3/2 Course Reader (The Rushdie Affair)

Paper # 2 (Medium Length Expository) Due Next Week Th 3/9 **Revisable**

Unit 3. Between West and East, North and South (Weeks 7-9)

T 3/7 + Th 3/9 Film Showing In This World

***** Spring Break *****

T 3/21 + Th 3/23 Salih

T 3/28 + Th 3/30 Salih

Paper # 3 (Short Creative) Due Next Week Th 4/6

Unit 4. Nationalism and Identity in Contemporary Israel + Palestine (Weeks 10-13)

T 4/4 + Th 4/6 Sacco

T 4/11 + Th 4/13 Sacco

T 4/18 Course Reader (Darwish)

Th 4/20 Keret

T 4/25 + Th 4/27 Keret

Unit 5. Gender + Patriarchy (Weeks 14-15)

T 5/2 + Th 5/4 Rifaat

T 5/9 Rifaat

Th 5/11 Course Reader (El-Saadawi)

Paper #4 (Medium Length Expository) Due Next Week TBA

WEEK 16 FINAL EXAM