

AMES 1836

Modern Middle Eastern Literature

Middle Eastern history and culture is global: it shapes foreign and domestic policy, sparks debates on religious freedom, is at the epicenter of a global migration crisis. It figures in the music we listen to, the food we eat, the shows that play on TV. It is at once distant and intimately (for some frightfully) close. This course pursues such global entanglements through readings in contemporary Middle Eastern literature, translated from Arabic, Hebrew, Persian, and Turkish. This is not a historical survey of Middle Eastern cultures, but rather a spatial exploration, highlighting the region's diversity and exploring a range of issues regarding the relationship between writing and politics: the relationship between classical and modern literary forms and legacies of colonialism, the ethical and aesthetic challenges of bearing testimony to violence, and the manners in which literature both reflects and subverts racialized and gendered social structures.

Student Learning Objectives:

- Understand diverse philosophies and cultures within and across societies:
By the end of the semester, you will be familiar with representative writers and texts from Turkey, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Iran, Palestine, Israel, Egypt, and Libya. Through these texts you will learn of key social and political questions that have shaped Middle Eastern cultures for the past thirty years, such as the way literary forms change over time, the role of art in times of violence, or the way migration and exile have shaped writing.
- Understand the role of creativity, innovation, discovery, and expression across disciplines:
Over the course of the semester, we will consider the manner in which writers have utilized a diversity of literary tools to address situations of oppression, ecological catastrophe, war, exile, or social change more broadly. Relying on close reading and literary analysis skills, we will explore how literature has been used as a tool of resistance, testimony, and communication across borders, or as a means of imagining life-worlds beyond the limits of the present.

Assessment:

The class assignments are designed to develop as well as assess the above mentioned skills. Regular reading/map quizzes will assess your comprehension of the readings. Take-home midterm and final exams will focus on your ability to forge connections, contextualize, and construct arguments about different readings. Over the course of the semester you will regularly engage in discussion and in group work, and will present your findings to the class.

Participation and group work	15%
Six quizzes	30%
Midterm	25%
Take Home Final	30%

Liberal education: Literature and Global Perspectives

Gaining critical literacy in diverse cultural traditions is one of the foundational principles of liberal education. This course introduces students to the complexity and diversity of the modern Middle East through its literature, and encourages them to use this knowledge to reflect upon the representations of the Middle East that circulate prominently in the media. Through acquiring initial familiarity with a range of sites, contexts, and histories of the Middle East, you will gain a set of critical tools for embarking on further exploration of the region.

This course examines literary production from across the Middle East from the past 30 years. The materials include numerous genres: novels, short stories, memoirs, poetry, and film. We will not examine these materials in isolation, but will contextualize them socially and politically, highlighting the diversity and complexity of the modern Middle East. Throughout the semester, we will reflect on the challenges posed to Middle Eastern writers by oppression, war, or exile, and will examine the manner in which these challenges have shaped literary production. From the use of literature as a form of testimony, to its use as a vehicle of biting satire, we will pay special attention to the manner language and form shape literature's effects and affects. Finally, we will think about translation and global circulation of literary texts: its limitations as well as the possibilities it opens up.

In this Global Perspectives theme course, you will cultivate the following habits of mind:

(1) Thinking ethically about important challenges facing our society and world:

Our readings and discussions will reflect on some of the most urgent issues facing Middle Eastern and global societies: Women's rights, migration and refugee regimes, state violence, and trauma. I encourage you not to think of the texts in this class as isolated objects, but rather to recognize how they emerge from particular social contexts, and to consider the range of creative reactions which they embody.

(2) Reflecting on the shared sense of responsibility required to build and maintain community:

Our course begins with Rabih Alameddine's analysis of the politics of translation in a global literary market, and his discontents will remain with us throughout the semester as we continue to think of what Middle Eastern literature is translated, how it relates to what we already know about the region, and how it challenges our conceptions. More broadly, this essay will encourage us to think of our responsibility as readers as well as global citizens. The texts we will read, from Khaled Mattawa's epic rewriting of the Mediterranean refugee crisis to Khaled Khalifa's tragicomedy from the Syrian war, will highlight the importance of communities, both longstanding and ad-hoc, for human thriving and survival.

(3) Connecting knowledge and practice:

One of the focuses of the class is how writers and writing respond to the challenges of the present, demonstrating the impossibility of separating theory and art from political and social action. You are encouraged to put the materials in conversation with other sites and contexts

you may be familiar with: international intervention (in the Middle East and more broadly), the migration crisis, debates on cultural authenticity and appropriation, transnational feminism, or authoritative rule.

(4) Fostering a stronger sense of our roles as historical agents.

The course materials regularly highlight the role of creativity and invention in coding, comprehending, and intervening in history. While the geopolitical context of the texts might not be familiar to some of you, understanding how writers and thinkers have positioned their work as ethical interventions against racism, sexism, or economic inequalities should make you more conscious of their own position within racialized histories, and of your ability to envision and articulate alternatives. Furthermore, the course's attention to translation, transmission, and the entanglements of global histories encourages the students to consider their own positions, modes of agency, and access to knowledge.

Regular participation in class discussions (15%)

Come to class prepared and ready to work. This includes completing the readings attentively and carefully, bringing in notes and questions, and actively joining the discussion. The better you read the class materials, the better the conversation, and the better the conversation, the better the class. We will be dealing with some controversial or explicit material in this course - remember to keep an open mind, not only as you read, but also during your engagement with others in class. While I encourage you all to be honest, mutual respect is a crucial part of this class. No ranting, soapboxing, hate speech, or disrespectful behavior of any kind will be tolerated.

Speaking up in class does not come naturally to everyone; yet, it is a critical part of the learning experience for you and your peers. Discussion offers you a chance to better formulate and deliver your own ideas, while improving your ability to respond to different positions. If you find it difficult to speak up in class, please see me early in the term to discuss your concerns and jointly establish a strategy for increasing class participation.

Reading quizzes (6 x 5 points each = 30%)

In the second week of the semester there will be a blank map quiz of the countries of the Middle East. There will be 5 more readings quizzes, to be filled out on Canvas, throughout the semester. These quizzes are designed to examine your basic comprehension of the reading.

Midterm and Final (25% and 30% respectively)

You will have a week to complete these take home exams, which will examine your ability to form arguments and contextualize our various readings. Your exam will take the form of an essay in response to one of three possible prompts. Handouts on academic writing practices will be distributed and discussed in advance.

Grading rubric: (each ranked between 1-5, for a total of 20 points).

- Followed the instruction of the prompt in terms of word count (not counting fluff) and answering the given question.
- Has a concise and original argument: your response should have a clear and specific claim that is not obvious upon first reading of

Attendance

In case you are unable to attend class, please inform me as early as possible.

This applies to more than just your physical presence: **Please put away your phones, tablets, and laptops during class, take handwritten notes, and bring hardcopies of the texts.** Research shows that students who take notes by hand perform better than those who take notes on their laptops. On the other hand,

research also shows that electronic devices can enhance the quality of group work. On days when group work is scheduled, I will inform you in advance. Unauthorized technology use, including of cell phones, will be counted as an absence. If this policy poses any problem, please discuss it with me.

Communication

Throughout the semester, I will post reminders and announcements using email and Canvas. You should check both on a daily basis. The best way to communicate with me is in person, either in the classroom, during office hours, or by appointment. *Make use of office hours.* I am always delighted to meet and discuss your work or the course materials. If you make an appointment but cannot show up, it is basic courtesy to email and cancel in advance.

Please see Canvas for additional policies and let me know if you have any questions.

Required texts:

Orhan Pamuk, *My Name is Red* (Turkey)
Shahrnosh Parsipur, *Women Without Men* (Iran)
Ibrahim al-Koni, *Gold Dust* (Libya)
Donia Maher and Ganzeer, *The Apartment in Bab El-Louk* (Egypt)
Hoda Barakat, *Night Post* (Lebanon)
Adania Shibli, *Touch* (Palestine)
Orly Castel-Bloom, *Dolly City* (Israel)
Khaled Khalifa, *Death is Hard Work* (Syria)

Course packet with additional texts.

Week 1	Introduction
Tues	Intro to course

Thurs	Rabih Alameddine "Comforting Myths: Notes from a purveyor"
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Week 2	The Past is the Present: East and West
Tues	Kwame Anthony Appiah, "There is no such thing as western civilization" <i>Map Quiz</i>
Thurs	Pamuk, <i>My Name is Red</i> (Turkey)
Week 3	The Past is the Present: Literature and Other Arts
Tues	Pamuk cont.
Thurs	Pamuk cont.
Week 4	Gender
Tues	Maya Mikdasi, "How Not to Study Gender in the Middle East" Shahrnosh Parsipur, <i>Women Without Men</i> (Iran)
Thurs	Parsipur cont.
Week 5	Place I: Desert
Tues	Ibrahim al-Koni, <i>Gold Dust</i> (Libya)
Thurs	al-Koni cont.
Week 6	Place II: City
Tues	"Comix and Graphic Novels Modul," <i>Khalina.org</i> Donia Maher and Ganzeer, <i>The Apartment in Bab El-Louk</i> (Egypt)
Thurs	Maher cont.
Week 7	Place III: Sea
Tues	Khaled Mattawa, "East of Carthage: An Idyll"
Thurs	Mattawa
Week 8	Place IV: Exile
Tues	Edward Said, "Reflections on Exile"
Thurs	Hoda Barakat, <i>Night Post</i> (Lebanon)
Week 9	Place V: Exile at Home
Tues	Raja Shehadeh, "Diary of an Internal Exile"
Thurs	Maysaloun Hamoud, <i>In Between</i> (Film) (Israel-Palestine)

Week 10	Place VI: Internal Spaces
Tues	Adania Shibli, <i>Touch</i> (Palestine) Shibli, "Of Place, Time and Language"
Thurs	Lila Abu-Lughod, "Return to half-ruins: memory, postmemory, and living history in Palestine."
Week 11	Genre I: Dystopia
Tues	Orly Castel-Bloom, <i>Dolly City</i> (Israel)
Thurs	Castel-Bloom cont.
Week 12	Genre II: Horror
Tues	Selection from Hassan Blasim, <i>The Corpse Exhibition</i> (Iraq)
Thurs	Blasim cont.
Week 13	Genre III: Crisis Ordinary
Tues	Khaled Khalifa, <i>Death is Hard Work</i> (Syria)
Thurs	Khalifa cont.
Week 14	Genre IV: Poetry
Tues	Selection from Shimon Adaf, <i>Aviva No</i>
Thurs	Conclusion