

Syllabus

Title of the Course: Literature and Social
Issues in the Middle East

Name of the Instructor: Dr. Mohammed Almahfali
Dr. Shada Bokir

Weekly class time: Wednesdays
14:00 – 16:00 CET

Language: English

Sponsored by New University in
Exile Consortium

min. number of participants: 1

max. number of participants 20

This Seminar is funded by the New University in In Exile Consortium based at the New School

Description of the course

This course explores the significance of literature in the Middle East throughout history. It provides a survey of Arabic literature through a selection of texts on a wide range of topics. In this seminar, the literature will be examined in relation to the contextual settings during which it was written. Students will learn more about the lives of the classical Arab poets and the circumstances in which their poetry was created. Furthermore, we will evaluate how modern Arabic literature addresses social issues, by discussing a sample of modern Arabic literature including poetry, novels, and short stories. Through the readings provided in the course, there will be vivid discussions on the literature in relation to the social context of the period from a variety of perspectives.

Learning Aims

To provide a general understanding about:

In this course, participants will:

- study the major aspects of Arabic literature and their progress through the course of history.
- explore the major social aspects that have influenced literature and its expression in the Middle East.
- improve their understanding of the Middle Eastern culture and the different historical aspects that helped in shaping the present society.
- be introduced to the foundations of Arabic Literary themes and techniques of the literary texts in relation to the environment it was created in.

Upon the successful completion of the course participants will be able to:

- Analyze the evolution of Arabic literature through history.
- Evaluate the influence of social issues on Arabic literature and its expression in the Middle East.
- Appreciate the cultural diversity and social context of Middle Eastern society.
- Evaluate the literary themes and techniques used in Arabic literary texts and understand their relationship with the environment in which they were created.

Course requirements

Course components include:

- Lectures
- Readings
- Discussions
- Written Assignments
- Presentations

The final grade for the course will be based on the following:

Tasks will be based on materials supplied in advance and based on participants' independent guided research. Participation and contributions are mandatory for receiving the grade. The grade consists of the following:

- 30% Presentation.
- 30% 1 short assignments of 400-500 words.
- 40% Final assignment of 3000-4000 words.

Organization of the course

Methods of Instruction: The class will be based on instructor's input and participants' prior reading, which will enable engaged discussions, either in small groups or in a larger setting. Participants will prepare short presentations and use those as a basis for discussion.

Outline of the Course Schedule

Week 1 12/04		Introduction: about class structure, assignments, deadlines.
Week 2 19/04	deciding a research topic, submit a title.	The Poet as a Hero in Pre-Islamic literature
Week 3 26/04		Sa'aleek Poets's phenomenon as a social movement in the Arabic Literature
Week 4 03/05		Religious Beliefs in Pre-Islamic Poetry
Week 5 10/05		Islam and Literature
Week 6 17/05		Ancient Legends and fairy tales
Week 7 24/05	Short paper due (Abstract)	Women and Literature
Week 8 31/05		Death and afterlife in pre-Islamic Poetry
Week 9 07/06		Freedom of expression and literature
Week 10 14/06		From Parody to Realism in Yemeni Novels. Yemen and the Arab World in Wajdi al-Ahdal's novels
Week 11 21/06		Arabic Literature in Diaspora
Week 12 28/06	Presentations, 7-10 Min.	Diasporic Haunting in modern Women's writing
Week 13 05/07		The social transformation in Arabic literature
Week 14 12/07	Long paper Due	Symbol and myth in modern Arabic poetry
Week 15 19/07		Conclusion and discussions

Syllabus / Reading List

Week 1: Introduction

Introduction of the history of Arabic literature and the importance of Arabic language from the ancient times of classic poetry. The historical different eras in the middle east and the development of the literature and the society that led to modern times.

Week 2: The Poet as a Hero in Pre-Islamic literature

Al-Shanfara's¹ Lamiyyatu'l Arab, the 6th century Arabic poem, can be seen as a text about the horrors of desert traveling, even for those who have been bred on its edges. The poem draws a grim image of traveling solo in the Arabian Deserts. Yet, the poet here is the hero who fears no danger, who dread no death is facing all these horrors and overcoming.

Reading materials:

- Mansour, W. (2005). al-Shanfara's Lamiyyatu'l Arab and the Horrors of Desert Traveling. Ankara Üniversitesi Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi Dergisi, 45 (2), 45-57. (Reading pages from 45-57).
- Treadgold, W. T. (1975). A Verse Translation of the Lāmīy Ah of Shanfarā. Journal of Arabic Literature, 6(1), 30-34. (Reading pages from 31-34).

Week 3: Sa'aleek Poets's phenomenon as a social movement in the Arabic Literature

Sa'aleek Poets were a group of poets in Arabic Literature who emerged as a social movement in the early 8th century. Their movement had a significant impact on the development of Arabic Literature, influencing future generations of poets and artists. In this lecture, the poetic phenomenon will be identified and linked to the theoretical discussion about pre-Islamic literature and Arabic literature in general.

Reading materials:

- Yulianto, W. E. (2020). Between the Sa'alik and the Early Muslims: A Jamesonian Reading on Lamiyyat al-Arab. PARADIGM: Journal of Language and Literary Studies, 3(1), 25-42.

Week 4: Religious Beliefs in Pre-Islamic Poetry

This class is to discuss how pre-Islamic poets viewed religious beliefs and how the Arabs dealt with such beliefs in the period that preceded the emergence of Islam, known as the Jahiliyya. The study discusses Arab religious beliefs and rites, which were filled with mythical elements such as idol worship, worship of the sun, plants, and animals.

Reading materials:

- Masarwah, N. Religious Beliefs in PreIslamic Poetry. *Sociology Study*, 3, 531-42. (Reading pages from (532-542))

Week 5: Islam and Literature

The relationship between Islam and Arabic Literature is a complex and debatable topic. Some argue that Islam had a negative impact on the development of Arabic Literature, while others argue the opposite. During this lecture, the intricate relationship between the two will be explored in detail, with a focus on examining its various aspects through the use of models and examples

Reading materials:

- Gafaïti, H. (2009). Notes on Islam and literature. *Religion & literature*, 41(2), 45-52.

Week 6: Ancient Legends and fairy tales

Arabic legends are inseparable from Arabian thought. They reveal every fashion, involve every social class and reflect every change in the evolution of Arabic literature. They took us to the fancy and the unbelievable that create the marvellous fantasies, yet they are connected tightly to the environment, the desert life and to the people that inhabit it.

Reading materials:

- Norris, H. T. (1983). Fables and Legends in pre-Islamic and early Islamic times. *Arabic Literature*, 384-86. (Reading pages from 374-386).

Week 7: Women and Literature

The representation of women in Arabic Literature as a subject has been prominent, however, their active participation in the creation of literature was limited until the modern era. This lecture will delve into the historical evolution of the role of women in Arabic Literature, with a specific emphasis on the growth of feminist literature in the contemporary era

Reading materials:

- Bishara, H. (2022). Feminist Writing in Contemporary Arabic Literature: A Problem in the Term and a Controversy on the Concept-A Critical Study. *International Journal in Management and Social Science* 10(09), 37-51.

Week 8: Death and afterlife in pre-Islamic Poetry

In early Arabic poetry, references to religious concepts are often mysterious, an understanding of the poetry's social and religious context as well as considerable for reasonable explanations. Ancient Arab beliefs concerning the owl for example were interrelated with the manners and religious customs of that predominantly nomadic society. The Owl at that time was associated with specific death, and afterlife, thus becoming an important religious symbol to Arabs, a further instance of the inevitable interrelationship between the religious beliefs and practices of the pre-Islamic tribes.

Reading materials:

- Homerin, T. E. (1985). Echoes of a thirsty owl: Death and afterlife in pre-Islamic Arabic poetry. *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 44(3), 165-184. Reading pages from (165-184).

Week 9: Freedom of expression and literature

Literature plays a crucial role in the expression of ideas in the Arab world. Historically, before the rise of modern media, literature and its various forms were the primary means of conveying thoughts and opinions. This lecture will examine the complex relationship between literature and expression in the Arab world, with a focus on analyzing the different literary models that are related to this concept

Reading materials:

- Allen, R. (1995). Arabic Fiction and the Quest for Freedom. *Journal of Arabic Literature* 26, 1(2), 37-49.

Week 10: From Parody to Realism in Yemeni Novels. Yemen and the Arab World in Wajdi al-Ahdal's novels

Yemeni fiction has developed a style of writing that modern literary studies tend to consider one of the manifestations of postmodern aesthetics. is best seen in the works of Wajdi al-Ahdal (born in 1973), one of the most discussed and translated Yemeni authors

Reading materials:

- Suvorov, M. (2020). Yemen and the Arab World in Wajdi al-Ahdal's novels: from Parody to Realism. *Арабистика Евразии*, (9), 51-64.

Week 11: Arabic Literature in Diaspora

In the early 19th century, a migration movement began from the Arab world, particularly from the Levant, to North and South America, leading to the formation of an Arabic literature movement in those countries. This lecture will explore the cultural and social factors that shaped this movement and examine the impact of migration on the literary production of Arabic literature in the diaspora

Reading materials:

- Abdelhady, D. (2007). Cultural production in the Lebanese diaspora: Memory, nostalgia and displacement. *Journal of Political & Military Sociology*, 35(1), 39-62.

Week 12: Diasporic Haunting in modern Women's writing

An analysis of how diaspora Arab women writers trigger the infinite potentials of death and rebirth, of social and political engagement, in order to awaken a transformation on the individual and communal levels.

Reading materials:

- Al-Samman, H. (2015). *Diasporic Haunting. Anxiety of Erasure: Trauma, Authorship, and the Diaspora in Arab Women's Writings*. Syracuse University Press. (Reading pages from 107-125).

Week 13: The social transformation in Arabic literature

In this lecture, we will delve into the ways in which Arabic writers and cultural producers have depicted the social and political changes that have taken place in the Middle East. We will examine how these changes have been reflected in their works and how these works have in turn influenced and shaped the societies in which they were produced.

Reading materials:

- Hafez, S. (1994). The Transformation of Reality and the Arabic Novel's Aesthetic Response. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, 57(1), 93–112. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/619498>.

Week 14: Symbol and myth in modern Arabic poetry

Many modern Arab poets, as a result of the cultural dialogue with the West, have begun to use a number of symbols and myths in constructing poems. This lecture will work to identify these symbols and myths, how to use them, and to identify their cultural and social contexts.

Reading materials:

- Zeidan, J. (1979). Myth and Symbol in the Poetry of Adūnīs and Yūsuf al-Khāl. *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 10, 70–94. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4183013>.

Week 15: Conclusion and discussions

This session will be dedicated to a concluding discussion with the students about the content of the course, final thoughts and comments and recommendations.