

20th Century Arabic Literature and History:

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Course Objectives

In this course, we try to do the following:

1. Study the modern Arab world, starting from the post-colonial period, roughly from the 19th century, till today. Three aspects of Arabic life are covered: history, culture and literature.
2. Understand the main features of modern Arabic culture, covering the cinema, the press, music, visual arts and the main literary genres, fiction, poetry and drama. Such features would necessarily include historical landmarks that have always affected the Arab world.
3. Focus is given to conflicts such as cosmopolitanism vs. nationalism and secularism vs. fundamentalism.
4. Recognize major historical, cultural and literary figures from the Arab in the modern age.
5. Compare and contrast literary techniques, major figures and well-known works of Arabic literature with their Western, especially American, counterparts.
6. Perceive the interaction between Arabic literature with Arabic art, music, philosophy and cinema.

Course Topics

1. **Colonialism and Arabic life:** The so-called clash of civilizations and its origins. European colonization of North Africa and Asia in the 18th and 19th century is studied not just politically but culturally. The notion of orientalism is viewed from the time of French imperialism to Edward Said's theories. The rise of nationalism and patriotism is also highlighted. The dangerous role of translation and mistranslation of texts from both cultures is underlined. Music and literature of this period reflect the interaction with the West.

2. **Twentieth Century life:** The twentieth century is given special attention due to the enormous social change it witnessed in the region. The effect of the World War, the beginning of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the sweeping current of republicanism, socialism, fundamentalism, secularism and neo-nationalism are all looked at closely. Literature, art, pop culture and the cinema are the arena of socio-political attempts to control the Arab world.
3. **Post-colonial and post-royal life:** the Nasserite era; Sadat; the present.
4. **Fiction:** Mahfouz, Aswani and others.
5. **Poetry:** Darwish, Nizar and others.
6. **Drama:** Shawki and others.
7. **Music:** Um Kalthoum, Abdel Wahab, Farid, Halim, Shamma and others. The mixture of Arab and Western musical instruments. The *oud*.
8. **Visual Art:** Cartoonists and political satire. Figure painting and calligraphy.
9. **Writers away from native lands (Arabs, Muslims and non-Muslims):** from Gibran to Khaled Hussein.
10. **Arabic cinema and literature:** the development of filmmaking in the Arab world; major directors: Chahin and others; adaptation of literary works. Hollywoodization and vellification of the Other.
11. **Arabic pop-culture:** Music, the visual arts and TV. Islamization, secularization and politicization of culture. Aljazeera and Arab media.
12. **Contemporary literature and major issues today:** censorship; globalization. multiculturalism; Aswani's *Chicago*.

Reading Material

All texts for required reading will be available in the library and/or Macalester bookstore shortly.

Mahfouz, Naguib. *Children of the Alley: A Novel*. Anchor; 1st Anchor Books Ed

Jayyusi, Salma Khadra (Editor). *Modern Arabic Poetry*. Columbia University Press

Al Aswany Alaa. *The Yacoubian Building: A Novel*. Harper Perennial

Suggested Reading

A list for further supplementary library reading will be prepared shortly.

Assessment

Class participation (30%):

All you need to do here is come prepared to class with the necessary reading and ready to engage in active discussion. There are no hardly any right and wrong answers here, except for basic historical facts – and even those you are welcome to argue about if you can disprove them. Bring serious ideas that contribute to analysis and exploration of facts and try to support your ideas with reading.

Papers/Presentation (30%):

Two long papers are required for completing this course. I should approve of the topic first. Deadline will be agreed upon in class.

Quizzes (40%):

Two quizzes are held in class to assess your progress up to that point. Dates will be agreed upon in class. Ideally, one quiz would be held late October and the other early December.