

Honors Topics in Literature  
Poetics and Politics in Modern Arabic Fiction (In Translation)  
21:350:432 | 21:525:252  
Rutgers University-Newark  
Department of English  
Fall 2022

Location: Hill Hall 217

Times: Tuesdays and Thursdays 11:30-12:50

Instructor: Dr. Amir Moosavi

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Office: Hill Hall, Room 515

Office hours: Tuesdays 2:30-4:00; by appointment online or in-person

Course Dates: September 6—December 13, 2022

This course is an introduction to the novel in modern Arabic literature, with special attention to the close relationship between literature and politics in second half the twentieth century until the present. Using novels written by Arab writers, the course uses literature to chart how writers have responded to historic moments and major political events that have affected the Arab world. The course showcases literary writing across a geographic region that encompasses North Africa, Southwest Asia (the “Middle East”), and diasporic communities in Europe and North America. Major themes will include the experience of Arab writers under oppressive colonial and postcolonial regimes, exile, war, the often-fraught relationship between writers and religion, and the politics of translation. Readings include novels and short stories by Sinan Antoon, Sonallah Ibrahim, Elias Khoury, Ghassan Kanafani, Naguib Mahfouz, Ahmed Saadawi, Tayyib Salih and others.

**Some course goals:**

- To understand why and how Arab writers have turned to literature as a primary mode of expression in the twentieth and twenty-first century
- To gain an understanding of the cultural influence of major political trends in the Arab world in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries
- To learn about major historical events in the Arab world and how they have both impacted those societies
- Improve close reading and writing skills through in-class activities and regular written assignments throughout the semester.
- To improve presentation skills

**Grading:**

In-class participation and discussion: 20%

In-class presentation: 10%

Map quiz: 5%

Essay 1: 15% due Tuesday, October 11

Essay 2: 20% due Sunday, November 6

Essay 3 (final presentation & paper): 30% due Sunday, December 18

## Readings

You should be prepared to read approximately 150 pages per week for this course, either in the form of primary (a novel, short stories, memoir, etc.), or secondary readings (historical studies, literary criticism, journalism, etc). If the book is available for free via Rutgers-Libraries, I have indicated so in the course schedule. I will upload other readings to Canvas. If a text is not available for free online or through the library, I expect you to obtain a copy. Below is a list of texts that we will be reading throughout the semester, in the order that we will read them. I have placed physical copies of all the books on reserve at the library, but those are limited. If you purchase the books, used or new books are fine, as are e-copies. However, please get the book in English and make sure that it has page numbers (or clear locations, as in Kindle versions).

### The following books are not available online:

Naguib Mahfouz, *Adrift on the Nile*  
Sonallah Ibrahim, *That Smell*  
Adania Shibli, *Touch*  
Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, *In Search of Walid Masoud*  
Elias Khoury, *White Masks*  
Ahmed Saadawi, *Frankenstein in Baghdad*

Recommended: James Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East: A History*  
Roger Allen, *The Arabic Novel: An Historical and Critical Introduction*

## Course Schedule

The corresponding readings for each week, if not listed above, can be found online. All readings must be done *before* class and you must bring to class whatever we are discussing that day. Our class time is meant for discussion, debate, questions, and close reading.

### Week 1

Tuesday, Sept. 6  
Course introduction, expectations, syllabus review

Thursday, Sept. 8

#### To read for class:

- Roger Allen, "Introduction," from *The Arabic Novel: An Historical and Critical Introduction*
- Tawfiq al-Hakim, excerpt from *Diary of a Country Prosecutor* and selections from *The Essential Yusuf Idris*

## ***Week 2***

Tuesday, Sept 13

To read for class:

➤ James Gelvin, Chapter 15 of *The Modern Middle East*  
Naguib Mahfouz, *Adrift on the Nile*, pages 1-53

Thursday, Sept 15

To read for class:

Naguib Mahfouz, *Adrift on the Nile*, pages 53-128

## ***Week 3***

Tuesday, Sept 20

To read for class:

Naguib Mahfouz, *Adrift on the Nile*, pages 128-171

Thursday, Sept 22

Selections from Allen, *The Arabic Novel*

## ***Week 4***

Tuesday, Sept 27

To read for class:

Sonallah Ibrahim, *That Smell*

Thursday, Sept 29

To read for class:

➤ Selections from *The Essential Nawal Saadawi: A Reader*

## ***Week 5***

Tuesday, Oct 4

To read for class:

➤ Tayyib Salih, *Season of Migration to the North*, pages 1-87

Thursday, Oct 6

To read for class:

➤ Tayyib Salih, *Season of Migration to the North*, pages 87-139

## ***Week 6***

Tuesday, Oct 11

Paper 1 Consultations / small group presentations

Thursday, Oct 13

To read for class:

➤ Ghassan Kanafani, *Men in the Sun*

Sunday, Oct 16 by 11:59PM: \*\*\*Essay 1 Due\*\*\*

**Week 7**

Tuesday, Oct 18

To read for class:

➤ Ghassan Kanafani, "Returning to Haifa"

Thursday, Oct 20

To read for class:

Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, *In Search of Walid Masoud*

**Week 8**

Tuesday, Oct 25

To read for class:

Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, *In Search of Walid Masoud*

Thursday, Oct 27

To read for class:

Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, *In Search of Walid Masoud*

**Week 9**

Tuesday, Nov 1

To read for class:

Adania Shibli, *Touch*

Thursday, Nov 3

Essay 2 consultations and peer review

\*\*\*Sunday, November 6, 11:59PM: Essay #2 Due\*\*\*

**Week 10**

Tuesday, Nov 8

To read for class:

Elias Khoury, *White Masks* 1-81

Thursday, Nov 10

To read for class:

Elias Khoury, *White Masks* 82-140

**Week 11**

Tuesday, Nov 15

To read for class:

Elias Khoury, *White Masks* 141-303

Thursday, Nov 17

To read for class:

Sinan Antoon, *I'jaam: An Iraqi Rhapsody* 1-36

**Week 12**

Tuesday, Nov 22

To read for class:

Sinan Antoon, *I'jaam: An Iraqi Rhapsody* 36-97

Thursday, Nov 24: Thanksgiving

**Week 13**

Tuesday, Nov 29

Ahmed Saadawi, *Frankenstein in Baghdad* 1-109

Thursday, Dec 1

Ahmed Saadawi, *Frankenstein in Baghdad* 110-195

**Week 14**

Tues, Dec 6

Ahmed Saadawi, *Frankenstein in Baghdad* 195-281

Thursday, Dec 8

➤ Short stories by Hasan Blasim

Final paper presentations

**Week 15**

Tuesday, Dec 13:

Final paper presentations

Friday, Dec 16 11:59PM: Final Essay Due