

Fall 2025 Graduate Seminars



MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES



The University of Texas at Austin

ARA 380C – Secrets of Arabic Eloquence

Dr. Avigail Noy

Course Description:

The title of this course is taken from the famed book, *Asrār al-balāghah*, by the eleventh-century scholar ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī. A work on Arabic eloquence, the *Asrār al-balāghah* is celebrated today as the apogee of Arabic-Islamic writings on poetic and rhetorical theory, both in the Arab world and in the West. In this graduate seminar we delve into the wide array of writings on the aesthetics of the Arabic language, whether in poetry, stylized prose, or the Quran. While al-Jurjānī’s ideas were transformational, he was not detached from the scholarly currents and debates of his time, which we will explore, including the question of the inimitability of the Quran. Students will contemplate the impact al-Jurjānī had on subsequent authors, all the way up to Muḥammad Abduh and Rashid Rida at the turn of the twentieth century, as ideas about the Arabic language bolstered the project of Arab nationalism. The class relies on weekly readings and discussion in Arabic (commensurate with student level), including readings of secondary sources in English. Prerequisite: two years of Arabic at the university level, or the equivalent (please consult with the instructor).

Skills and Outcomes:

- Learn how to engage with primary sources in Arabic.
- Improve Arabic language skills, including morphology, syntax, and broadening the lexicon.
- Improve Arabic pronunciation (emphasis on vowels) and speaking skills.
- Learn how to use resources in the field, including bio-bibliographical works and dictionaries, both modern and premodern, in Arabic and in European languages.
- Learn transliteration conventions and other publishing conventions in the field.
- Be conversant with the primacy of language and eloquence in the Arabic-Islamic world and the main debates in the field.

Evaluation:

Weekly readings, attendance, and participation (40%)

Presentation (10%)

Unit exercises (10%)

Research paper (40%)

HEB 380C – Bible in Hebrew: Genesis-Deuteronomy

Dr. Bruce Wells

Please contact the instructor for course details.

MES 385 – Nationalisms in the Middle East

Dr. Kamran Aghaie

Please contact the instructor for course details.

MES 386 – Global Gothic

Dr. Karen Grumberg

Global Gothic, World Gothic, International Gothic: scholars affiliated with the field of Gothic Studies have been drawing attention increasingly to the existence of texts that can be seen as

“Gothic” but which were authored in languages, places, and periods not conventionally associated with the Gothic. This seminar will consider some of these texts, along with the different approaches, questions, and debates that they have elicited from critics. One of the key questions that will animate our discussions over the course of the semester will be: is it possible, useful, desirable to adapt the Gothic, with its UK provenance, as an analytical category for non-Western literatures? What are the implications of doing so? As the scholarship on Global Gothic proliferates and this important sub-field continues to take shape, we will participate in this conversation in real time and consider how its dilemmas apply to the languages and regions in which students are building expertise. All readings will be accessible in English translation, but students will be encouraged to bring their own languages and literatures into the seminar in their oral presentation; those who can read the required texts in the original will be encouraged to do so.

MES 386 – Middle Eastern Modernities

Dr. Levi Thompson

Syro-Lebanese poet Adunis describes the coming of the modern era in the Arab world as “the shock of modernity.” But he was writing after the industrial revolution, the transition from a global mercantilist to a global capitalist economy, and the establishment of independent nation-states across the Arab world following the colonial period. In this class, students explore how Middle Eastern literature changed over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries through extended studies of works from the Arab *Nahḍah* “renaissance” and the Ottoman *Tanzimat* “reordering” period; to the aftermath of the Persian Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911); to the modernist poetry and prose of the mid-twentieth century Middle East. We will investigate the relationship of modernity to modernist literature in order to define what “modernism” means in a Middle Eastern context.

The course is comparative in nature and open to students with backgrounds in Middle Eastern language study (Arabic, Persian, Turkish, etc.) or some theoretical foundation in the literary study of another linguistic tradition. Expectations for student contributions to class presentations and discussions are tailored for each student’s respective academic background or intended specialization. The seminar will allow you to practice vital skills by reading across cultures and developing strong literary critical frameworks of analysis informed both by Western theory and the objects of our study.

All core texts will be available in English translation. No knowledge of Arabic, Persian, Turkish, or any language other than English is required to enroll in this seminar.

Examples of works we may read include but are not limited to: *Leg Over Leg* by Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq; *What Isa Ibn Hisham Told Us...* by Muhammad al-Muwaylihi; Taha Hussein’s autobiography *The Days*; Sadiq Hidayat’s *The Blind Owl*; the poetry of Nima Yushij, Nazik al-Mala’ikah, Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, and Adunis; Jalal Al-i Ahmad’s *Westoxification* (or *Occidentosis*); and others.

Grading scheme:

10% - weekly 1-page write ups of main points from the readings (completion grade only)

20% - guiding a class session (30 minutes – 1 hour or more)

30% - short paper based on guided class session materials (~2,000 words)

40% - final paper based on course materials (~4,000 words; 6,000 words *maximum*)

MES 386 – Reading the Maghreb

Dr. Emily Drumsta

Beginning with anti-colonial struggles for independence in the late nineteen-forties, fiction, poetry, and film from the Maghreb (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya) have been preoccupied with mothers and fathers, gestation and regeneration, inheritance and transmission, desires and origins blocked or diverted. In this graduate seminar, we will read Maghrebi literature and film of French expression, together with works of psychoanalytic and postcolonial theory, focusing in particular on uncertain origins and aborted futures, geographies of the North African landscape and of the soul. Novels by Kateb Yacine, Driss Chraïbi, Assia Djebar, and Abdellah Taïa; poetry by Abdellatif Laâbi, Habib Tengour, Mallek Alloula, and the journal *Souffles/Anfas*; films by Moufida Tlatli, Djebar, and Taïa. All readings in French; reading ability in French is required.

Cross-listed courses

MES 384 – The Military in Politics

Dr. Zoltan Barany

Please contact the instructor for course details.

MES 384 – War/Freedom in South Asia/Middle East

Dr. Jason Brownlee

This course examines the persistent tensions between interstate/intrastate armed conflict and both individual and societal concepts of freedom. It is regionally concentrated on the South Asia and the Middle East. Through readings, discussions, and select videos, students and the professor will examine how mass collective action has shaped political trajectories, often leaving societies oscillating between authoritarianism and instability.

The course is cross-listed in both South Asian and Middle Eastern studies programs and is designed to ensure that both regions receive sustained attention.

We will analyze key cases such as India's intervention in the Bangladesh Independence War, Pakistan's cycles of military and civilian rule, foreign occupations and indigenous resistance in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Arab uprisings, the rise, fall, and spread of the so-called Islamic State (including in South Asia), and the pursuit of nuclear weapons by developing states of the Global South seeking a geostrategic equalizer. The course also considers transnational linkages between the two regions, including through a week on South Asians in the Arab Gulf states.

We will see that war and regime change often unleash forces that make democracy unlikely. One recurring dilemma is the challenge of post-authoritarian transitions. In case after case, societies attempting to move beyond dictatorship find it hard to break free of internal armed conflict or renewed authoritarianism. The structural obstacles to lasting political transformation—and the realities that shape the limited range of post-conflict possibilities—will be central themes of our discussions.

MES 386 – Sufism/Islam Mystic Tradition

Dr. Syed Hyder

Committed to a comparative study of Islamic mystical traditions, this seminar will explore the major issues that scholars face when encountering histories, ideologies, aesthetics and literary endeavors concerning “esoteric” Islam. While reflecting on the methodologies that shape mystical discourses and their attendant scholarly reception, we will ask questions relevant to the literary genres and ideological orientations that have informed the category of Sufism. For instance, do we read the poetic verses of Jalaluddin Rumi with the assistance of the same grounding principles that we use to read Muhammad Iqbal’s *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*? How do the shared understandings of cross-lingual sufferings acquire concrete written and aural forms across regional and temporal zones? Our topics will also include the place of the political in the constitution of the spiritual; the role of gender and sexuality in the formation of the Sufi canon; and the invocation of Sufism as a byword for an Islam that eludes this-worldly politics.