



Spring 2025 Graduate Seminars

 MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES



The University of Texas at Austin

MES 381 – Theory/Practice Literary Translation

Dr. Emily Drumsta

Translator Eugene Nida once suggested that “successful translating involves one of the most complex intellectual challenges known to mankind.” This graduate seminar will introduce students to that complexity through reading, analysis, reflection, discussion, and, of course, translation. Translation encompasses numerous fields, including linguistics, comparative literature, literary studies, cultural studies, and creative writing. Therefore, the course will touch on all these elements, at varying and overlapping intervals. We will learn about the history of literary translation, different theories of and attitudes toward translation, controversies in translation, the general status of translation, and strategies and techniques of translation.

The seminar is open to students of all languages translating into English. Heritage speakers are welcome, collaboration is permitted, and an open-spirited approach to this developing and fascinating practice is strongly recommended. Because there is no consensus about what makes “good” translations, this course will introduce the predominant views of translation and to the rationales for those views. This approach is intended to provide students with the tools necessary to chart their own paths as a translator. Student translations will be evaluated by the standards suitable to their approach, not by pre-established, generic standards.

MES 385 Ideas of the East

Dr. Mikiya Koyagi

Geocultural categories such as the West, the East, Asia, and their subcategories such as the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and East Asia have gained political relevance in the last two hundred years. This graduate seminar examines the significance of the transnational movement of people, ideas, and goods in the process of constructing these categories. In particular, instead of studying European/Western construction of Asia/the East as a course on Orientalism would do, this course pays attention to the engagement of various peoples of Asia/the East in constructing the ideas of Asia/the East in the contexts of imperialism, nationalism, and decolonization. These peoples include the Japanese, the Chinese, Indonesians, Indians, Iranians, Arabs, Turks, and many more. In short, this course is concerned with how regions were produced through global interactions.

MES 386 Space and Place in Literature

Dr. Karen Grumberg

What does the representation of space and place in literature contribute to our understanding of global social and cultural dynamics since the 19th century? We hear much about the politics of contested space: territory and airspace, cartography and border, nation and colony. We hear less about the experiential dimension of such spaces, and about sites of everyday life: places as ordinary as a house, a street, a garden, a train. Yet such locales underpin the way we experience the world, nurturing or resisting the diversity of the humans who inhabit or pass through them. Thinking about place and space from this perspective invites us to illuminate the human experience for its own sake; it also compels us to acknowledge the way such experience activates political and ideological paradigms. This course will explore the poetics of space as expressed in literature from the Middle East, Europe, and the United States. We will examine these fictional texts from an interdisciplinary array of theoretical perspectives on space and place, which

consider the meanings of space as a place, as a condition, as a metaphor, and as a practice. All readings will be in English or English translation.

MES 386 Islamic Feminism

Dr. Hina Azam

Description

Islam and feminism are often considered to be contradictory in their essences and objectives. Nevertheless, we now find more than a century of writing by Muslim women (and men) who draw their inspiration from their religion, and who seek to reconcile Islam's scriptures and traditions with principles of gender equality and justice. This course explores the idea of Islamic feminism, and surveys its history and key writings. Students will be introduced to some of the practices, doctrines, and texts of Islam that have been considered most problematic from a women/gender perspective, and will read and discuss the ideas of several critical figures from the 20th and 21st centuries. Throughout the course, students will be encouraged to reflect on the idea of, and varying definitions of, "Islamic feminism," as well as to develop their own definitions of the term. All required readings will be in English.

In addition to carrying the expected MES, RS and WGS crosslistings, this course also carries an American Studies (AMS) crosslisting, for two reasons: First, much critical work in Islamic feminism is being carried out by U.S.-based scholars, writers, and activists, and study of that work receives significant attention in this course. Second, this course seeks to interrogate the dichotomy not only between "Islam" and "feminism," but also between "Islam" and "the West." Studying the discourses of Muslim American feminists leads us to imagine different ways of being Muslim, feminist, and American.

Course Requirements/Grading

Attendance	20%
Class Participation	20%
5 Reading Responses – 8% each	40%
Term Paper in 4 parts	35%
-- Part A) Proposal	5%
-- Part B) Annotated Bibliography	10%
-- Part C) Outline wIntro & Thesis	5%
-- Part D) Paper	15%

Course Readings:

Textbooks (tentative list):

- Margot Badran. *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences*. 2009.
- Barbara Stowasser. *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation*. 1994.
- Lamia Shehadeh, *The Idea of Women Under Fundamentalist Islam*. 2007.
- Qasim Amin. *The Liberation of Woman, and The New Woman*. 1900.
- Fatima Mernissi. *The Veil and the Male Elite (Le harem politique – Le Prophète et les femmes)*. Tr. Mary Jo Lakeland. 1987.
- Amina Wadud. *Qur'an and Woman*. 1992.
- Gisela Webb, ed. *Windows of Faith*. 2000.
- Aysha Hidayatullah. *Feminist Edges of the Qur'an*. 2014.
- Kecia Ali. *Sexual Ethics and Islam*. 2006.

- Zaynab Ghazali, *Days from my life (Ayyām min ḥayātī)*. Tr. A. R. Kidwai. 1978.
- Bint al-Shāṭi' ('A'isha bt. 'Abd al-Raḥmān), *Wives of the Prophet (Nisā' al-Nabī)*. Tr. Matti Moosa. 1973.

Additional readings (articles, essays, and book chapters) will be available in PDF format on Canvas.

Arabic primary text reading supplementation: If enough students are interested, an optional session to read primary texts in Arabic can be arranged.

MEL 380C Akkadian II

Dr. Heath Dewrell

Please contact the instructor for course details.

MEL 383D Exegetical Semnr: Hebrew Bible

Dr. Bruce Wells

This seminar considers the character and function of the pentateuchal texts or legal collections that typically fall into the category of biblical law. It also examines the relationships among the collections and what can be gleaned about them concerning the practice of law in ancient Israel. Current scholarly theories seek to answer a number of questions related to these topics. First, what is the nature of these so-called legal texts? Were they a form of legislation, a scribal restatement of legal customs, a kind of wisdom literature, a collection of moral ideals, or something else entirely? Second, how should we understand the relationship between biblical law and the legal customs and traditions from other parts of the ancient Near East? Third, what can we learn about the rules that governed litigation, personal status, family, inheritance, property rights, contract, and crime, among other topics? Finally, how do these collections relate to their surrounding narrative context, and how should we order them chronologically? These are the main questions that the seminar will seek to address. Readings will come from primary sources mainly in Biblical Hebrew (with a few in Akkadian) and from a wide range of secondary literature. Accommodations can be made for students who do not know Biblical Hebrew and/or Akkadian.

Cross-listed courses

MES 381 – Religious Competition in Late Antiquity

Dr. Geoffrey Smith

Scholars have employed a variety of models to characterize religion in Late Antiquity. Some talk about trajectories or religious currents that move through time, others emphasize regionality or regional dynamics, still others have suggested that we take seriously the role of landscape and trade networks when charting the development of religion in the Ancient Mediterranean World. In recent years the model of religious competition has emerged as a dominant paradigm. This course will explore the prospects and limitations of this model by considering the usefulness of the competition model for understanding how Christians interacted with co-religionists as well as their Roman, Egyptian, and Jewish neighbors from the first through fourth centuries CE. In this course we will read primary sources as well as scholarship on the topic. All primary sources will be read in translation.

MES 385 Violence and Colonialism

Dr. Benjamin Brower

Please contact the instructor for course details.

MES 386 Crossing the Mediterranean

Dr. Valerie McGuire

Between Napoleon's expedition to Egypt in 1798 and decolonization a century and a half later, the Mediterranean region constituted a "colonial sea" (Borutta and Gekas, 2012). Within a *longue durée* frame, this course interrogates the ways the Mediterranean region has historically presented a counter-narrative to modernity: first challenging the project of ethnically homogeneous nation-state in the colony, and then later, the black-and-white binaries characterizing early decolonial movements.

The course discusses how major postcolonial theorists were rooted in the Mediterranean, including seminal thinkers Fernand Braudel, Michel Foucault, Edward Said, Jacques Derrida, Antonio Gramsci, and Albert Memmi. We study the transnational turn of area studies broaching the sub-fields of Mediterranean Studies, Archipelagic Thinking, and Oceanic Worldmaking. Focusing on literary and cinematic productions from both shores of the Mediterranean, we interrogate themes of exoticism, race, sexual, gendered, and religious identities, as well as narratives of displacement, cultural translation, neocolonialism, and memory. All course texts are available in English, but students will be prompted to read in the original language when possible.

Requirements

Preparation and participation in class discussions 20%

Oral presentation on one set of readings 15%

Mid-term workshop on one primary text (5-7 pages) 25%

Final research paper on a different text than the short paper (5000 words) 40%

Required Texts and Films:

André Aciman, *Out of Egypt* (1994)

Cristina di Belgioioso, *Intimate and Nomadic Life in the Orient* (1852)

Albert Camus, *The Stranger* (1942)

Kamel Daoud, *The Mersault Investigation* (2013)

Isabelle Eberhardt, *Diaries of a Nomad* (1904)

Jean-Claude Izzo, *Black and Blue* (2006)

Laila Lalami, *Hope and Dangerous Pursuits* (2005)

Claire Messud, *This Strange Eventful History* (2024).

Michael Ondaatje, *The English Patient* (1992)

Igiaba Scego, *Adua* (2015)

The White Squadron (Augusto Gennia, 1936)

Pépé le Moko (Julien Duvrier, 1937)

The Prophet (Jacques Audiard, 2009)

The Attack (Ziad Doueiri, 2012)

Io capitano (Matteo Garrone, 2023)

MES 390M Appld Mthd/Prac Mid E Studies

Andrew Butters

Please contact the instructor for course details.

MES 398T Supv Teaching in MES

Dr. Jonathan Schofer

The goal of this course is to give graduate students a chance to develop their own personal identity as a teacher/scholar in light of both field-specific disciplines and current standards and technologies of teaching. The RS 398T course is specifically designed to assist graduate students who will be teaching undergraduate courses in Religious Studies and related disciplines both as AIs at UT and in academic teaching positions after graduation. The course stresses teaching professionalization, conversance with standard literature on teaching, learning, and assessment, and practical experience in assembling personal teaching materials and syllabi for the academic market.