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and other times by appointment

## English 240 (World Literature): *Literature of North Africa and the Middle East*

❖ *Read this long and intimidating document and thoroughly familiarize yourself with its contents.* ❖  
*As they used to say on the old cop show "Dragnet": Ignorance of the law is no excuse.*

### Goals

Until Egyptian novelist Naguib Mahfouz won the Nobel Prize for literature back in 1988, few people in the English-speaking world (including people in English departments) knew much about contemporary writing in Arabic. There are lots of explanations for such ignorance of what is, after all, a major world literature, some of them rooted in the politics and economics of publishing, others in the West's persistent prejudice against Arabs and Islam. But over the past twenty years or so, and particularly in the aftermath of 9/11, the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq, the "Arab Spring" of 2011, the emergence of ISIS, the Syrian refugee crisis, and so on, the situation has changed. It's increasingly easy nowadays to find writing in translation from the Middle East and North Africa, and students of the humanities increasingly feel it's incumbent upon them to comprehend the human experience represented in that writing. Our aims in this class are in line with those trends. This semester, we'll expose ourselves to some of the major contemporary literary figures from a chronically misunderstood part of the globe, gain some small sense of the traditions out of which those writers have sprung, and become familiar with some of the recurrent concerns that cut across their work: the slings and arrows of recent regional history, the place of women in Arab and Muslim societies, and the Arab world's diverse encounters with a western-inflected "modernity."

### Work

There will be times—sometimes entire classes—when I'll need to lecture at you, perform an act of show-and-tell, or plant some idea or other in your head. But since I'm a relative newcomer to this territory myself, I'm expecting you to be enthusiastic learners who will explore it with me, both independently and coöperatively. Here's one way how: on six occasions of your choice (out of nine opportunities), you'll post a response to the week's assigned texts to one of a series of Moodle discussion forums. I'm aware that our insane schedules, among other things, can rob this old-school social medium of its full potential for knowledge-pooling and community-building. Still, this is one of the best technologies I know of for gathering your thoughts about a text and beginning to articulate them. So, erm...what exactly do I mean by a "response"? Look for a separate, long-winded handout. For now, let me stick to logistics:

On those occasions when you choose to write a response, **you must post it to the appropriate forum no later than 10:00 p.m. on the dates specified in the calendar** (below), so that other folks have a fighting chance of digesting it—or at least tasting it—before the next day's class. I recommend composing in Word, then copying and pasting into Moodle. (And don't simply upload an attachment; not everyone will be able to open it.) For safety's sake, save a copy of your work locally *and* print out a hard copy for yourself—maybe even bring that copy with you to refer to in class. Unless there's been a system-wide network failure or a documented problem with your Internet provider or campus computer labs, late responses will incur a penalty. Failure to make your six-response quota may result in a failing grade.

Each response should be at least 400 words, and in principle, you'll get more credit for more words (see the aforementioned handout for details). But since this requirement is aimed first and foremost at getting you to think out loud, without undue pressure or judgment, about challenging and sometimes provocative texts, I will normally just read each post and silently award you credit (assuming it's credit-worthy), unless you specifically ask me to respond to you personally about the substance of your work.

Collectively, these responses—which may be stylistically informal, but should still be thoughtful, not slapdash—may constitute freestanding, parallel discussions to those we have in class, especially if enough people build the momentum to carry them along. (I hope some of you will be motivated enough to do so of your own volition, but if you're stirred by grades, then you can guarantee yourself a boost of at least  $\frac{1}{3}$  of a grade on any given response by making a follow-up post, preferably in reaction to someone *else's* initial post, before the next forum opens. Again: consult the handout.) But even if a genuine online discussion fails to erupt, simply taking the trouble to work your amorphous gut reactions into on-screen ideas will still give you some ready-made material to draw on in class.

Occasionally I may bring your posts into the classroom, using one or more as of them as starting points for in-class discussion. But even if they stay online, it'll be nice to have them on hand. And anyway, I'm mostly interested in getting you to devote the care and attention required to cook them up in the first place. Still: a class session can be a lot more interesting if you've had a chance to read, hash over, and maybe even respond to what other folks are thinking before you all sit down in a room together. To that end, everyone should try to at least glance at other folks' posts before class. (Believe me, you'll often find some brilliant ideas there.)

I will often post reading or study questions to Moodle to help you get started. You, meanwhile, should always feel free to log on and make a spontaneous post of any length, at any time, even if you're not doing so for credit: gripes, questions, objections or clarifications; remarks about something someone did or didn't say in class; afterthoughts or second thoughts about the texts; etc.—it's all fair game. Lively, even heated, debate is fine. Just don't get personal or abusive, take care to avoid racist or sexist or other offensive language, and generally keep a civil tongue.

So, to enumerate your basic responsibilities (and how they count towards your final grade) more precisely:

1. Regular attendance. To contribute to a good discussion (and to get anything *out* of one), you've got to *be here*. So don't cut a lot of class: we'll miss you, there's no telling what *you'll* miss, and your grade will suffer. I will pass around a sign-in sheet at the beginning of each session, and you should make sure you've initialed it. You're entitled to miss four (4) classes to cover all the contingencies of life, both serious and trivial—with no explanation, apology, or penalty (though a courtesy e-mail is always welcome, and it's up to you to figure out what you missed and to know what's on tap for the next meeting). More than that will begin to hurt. Routine absences should not include days when major assignments are due. If I notice that you've missed more than six classes (that's 20% of the course), I will strenuously encourage you to withdraw, assuming that's still possible. Finally: please get to class on time, don't wander in and out or leave early, and don't spend your time IM'ing, Snapchatting, Facebooking, or web-surfing. (~ **10%** of your course grade.)
2. Careful and on-time reading of assignments, at least six (6) informal written responses to what you've studied (as outlined above, and according to the calendar below), and active engagement in the collective talk that ensues. In addition to writing, that is, you need to do your small part to start up discussions and keep them going—to show some degree of intelligence, inquisitiveness and enthusiasm, both in responding to one another and to the materials on the table, and in helping to control the direction and flow of the conversation. In a class of twenty people, you *may* be able to get away with being relatively quiet and shy (I sympathize with introverts), but you can't be absolutely anonymous. (~ **40%**.)
3. Successful completion of a short "research-paper-in-a-box." I'll provide a very specific template for you to follow in gathering, sorting, compiling, and evaluating information about a younger North African or Middle Eastern writer we're not studying in class. The finished product will be something under 10 pages. Details to follow later in the semester. (~ **20%**.)

4. A Digital Humanities project, tentatively centering on the current explosion of comics and graphic novels in the Middle East. (I'm considering several variations on a theme that differ in scope and complexity but all comprise a research element and the use of various forms of digital technology.) Once again: details to come. (~ 30%.)

We can and will talk more about any of these requirements, if and as we need to, as the semester progresses.

### Texts

Since this is an introductory survey of an enormous field, our reading list is correspondingly heavy. (Even so, we're barely scratching the surface.) There are eight (!) books you should buy at the HSU Bookstore, your local independent bookstore, or anywhere else you can find them:

- Hanan al-Shaykh, *Women of Sand and Myrrh*
- Hassan Blasim, *The Corpse Exhibition and Other Stories of Iraq*
- Nawal el Saadawi, *Woman at Point Zero*
- Nael Eltoukhy, *Women of Karantina*
- Emile Habiby, *The Secret Life of Saeed the Pessoptimist*
- Naguib Mahfouz, *Midaq Alley*
- Amos Oz, *Black Box*
- Tayeb Salih, *Season of Migration to the North*

Together these will take a bite out of your wallet, even though most of them are relatively short. If you're strapped for cash, try local and/or online used booksellers such as Half.com or ABEBooks.com, check the library, share a book or two with a friend, or ask me if I might have an extra copy to lend you. But *PLEASE* don't opt to "sit out" a title because you can't afford to buy it.

Finally, there's an online Course Reader (a collection of literary texts, essays, links, blog posts, and essential background reading, much of it required, some recommended) that's also accessible *only* via the class web page—not Oncores or Moodle). Since much of what's in the Reader is copyrighted, and since the doctrine of "Fair Use" for educational purposes has suffered under years of assault and disregard, you'll be prompted to enter a username and password (on the copy of your syllabus distributed in class) to see it. Many of these materials reflect my conviction that it's essential to put imaginative writing into dialogue with other kinds—critical, theoretical, expository—in whose light our primary texts will make a different kind of sense. Please note that the Reader's contents may evolve as the semester wears on; I'll keep you abreast of changes and additions.

### Miscellany

**Communication:** I will send official communiqués (clarifications, schedule changes, afterthoughts or announcements I forgot to make in class, etc.) via the course "Updates" page, which you should get in the habit of monitoring regularly. I will make every effort to publish any updates by midnight Tuesdays and Thursdays. Information on the Updates page *always* trumps the syllabus. If *you* have something for general distribution (an announcement, a cool weblink, etc.), feel free to send it to me, and I'll post it there.

**Grades:** Here's where the oppressive substructure of my seemingly benign classroom shows through. I try to go by the book, which was written in the days before rampant grade inflation: "A" is generally reserved for exceptionally, stunningly, well-written, well-spoken and insightful stuff. "B" signifies extra-ordinary—work which qualitatively speaking goes beyond mere course requirements. "C" is standard and normal; it meets the minimum requirements in every way. "D" is worthy of credit but substandard, and we all know what "F" means. If you're taking the class CR/NC, you need the equivalent of a "C" to pass. I don't expect to give any incompletes.

With few exceptions, I will read and respond to everything you turn in and put a grade on your formal written work, and I'll happily meet with you at any time to talk about your progress and prospects. If a personal

disaster befalls you in the course of the semester—your home burns down, your computer crashes, a marauding horde carries off your livestock—please don’t be embarrassed, and don’t just disappear: let me know, and as soon as humanly possible. At the very least, I can direct you to campus resources that may help, and together we may be able to devise a plan to get you through the semester in one piece. I don’t guarantee that I can accommodate every unexpected turn of events; you should also be prepared to withdraw from one or more courses, or from the university entirely, if the situation is dire enough. But there are sometimes contingency plans that can be put into effect if students alert their faculty *promptly* of personal crises that threaten their academic performance.

As for more routine problems: if you’re getting behind in the class, feeling as if you’re not “getting” something, or just having an intangible problem either mild or severe, ***don’t sit around fretting and cowering: come and talk to me without delay.***

**Disabilities:** Please let me know of any documented disabilities and recommended accommodations that would promote your success in this class.

**Plagiarism:** I take academic dishonesty *very* seriously. Passing off part or all of someone else’s words or ideas as your own will result—at the very least—in a failing grade for the course. The university definition of and policies regarding academic dishonesty can be found in the HSU catalog. Please be aware that plagiarism and other forms of dishonesty can result in expulsion from the University.

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*FOR ADDITIONAL COURSE POLICIES AND OTHER MORE GENERAL INFORMATION (ON CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE, MINIMUM OUTSIDE PREPARATION REQUIRED FOR THIS COURSE, PLAGIARISM & ACADEMIC DISHONESTY, DETAILED DISABILITY ACCOMMODATION, SEXUAL HARASSMENT & DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR, SAFETY INFORMATION, ETC.) LAID OUT IN EVEN MORE EXCRUCIATING DETAIL, SEE THE “COURSE POLICIES AND SYLLABUS ADDENDA” PAGE ONLINE AT <http://users.humboldt.edu/mseldridge/engl240/mideastpolicies.htm> IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF ALL STUDENTS TO READ AND UNDERSTAND THIS INFORMATION.*

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### CALENDAR

(Danger! Highly volatile: schedule, deadlines, and assigned readings subject to change!  
Please consult the course “Updates” page online for the most current information.)

Our first day on a given text may be devoted to a variety of activities, including but not limited to mini-lectures, guest visits, Q & A, videos, agenda-setting, and discussion. Subsequent days will be given over primarily to discussion. All assigned reading should be finished by the first day scheduled for a given text.

Unless otherwise noted, all assigned reading listed below is required. Be aware, however, that you will almost always find additional reading and/or web resources—in all cases optional highly recommended—in the online Course Reader. I strongly encourage you to make time for as much of this supplemental material as you can. Reading responses should focus primarily on the week’s required reading, but you should feel welcome to incorporate relevant thinking about other items, too.

Week 1 (Aug. 23 & 25)	T: Introductions and housekeeping. Th: Lecture/screening/discussion. “Permission to Narrate”: Arabs, Orientalism, and the West <b>Reader:</b> Badawi, Said (required); Esposito, Michalak, <i>et al.</i> (highly recommended—c’mon! it’s early in the semester!)
Week 2 (Aug. 30/Sep. 1)	Naguib Mahfouz, <i>Midaq Alley</i> (reading response due Mon. evening, 8/29) <b>Reader:</b> Said x-xiv.

Week 3 (Sep. 6 & 8)	Reminder: campus is closed on Monday in observance of Labor Day. (Workers of the World, Unite!) <b>Monday, September 5th is also the last day to drop/add a class!</b> Nawal el Saadawi, <i>Woman at Point Zero</i> ( <b>reading response due Mon. 9/5</b> ) <b>Reader:</b> nothing required—but do browse the recommended selections.
Week 4 (Sep. 13 & 15)	Tayeb Salih, <i>Season of Migration to the North</i> ( <b>reading response due Mon. 9/12</b> ) <b>Reader:</b> nothing required—but do browse the recommended selections.
Week 5 (Sep. 20 & 22)	Hanan al-Shaykh, <i>Women of Sand and Myrrh</i> ( <b>reading response due Mon. 9/19</b> ) <b>Reader:</b> nothing required—but do browse the recommended selections (and get a jump on the reading for Weeks 11-14 related to Israel-Palestine).
Week 6 (Sep. 27 & 29)	T: Interlude: Introduction to Digital Humanities (guest presentation by Marissa Mourer, HSU Library). <b>Class meets in Library 208.</b> Th: Emile Habiby, <i>Saeed the Pessoptimist</i> ( <b>reading response due Wed. 9/28</b> ) <b>Reader:</b> Said “Foreword” xiv-end, plus additional readings on Palestine and Israel (see the Updates page for details).
Week 7 (Oct. 4 & 6)	<i>Saeed</i> , continued.
Week 8 (Oct. 11 & 13)	T: ArabComix DigHum Braindump: proposals, feedback & critique, refinement. Go! Th: Screening and discussion of Elia Suleiman’s <i>Chronicle of a Disappearance</i> <b>Reader:</b> [TBA], with additional recommended readings on Palestine and Israel (see the Updates page for details). <b>Due</b> (Thu. 10/13): <b>“Research Paper In a Box.”</b>
Week 9 (Oct. 18 & 20)	Amos Oz, <i>Black Box</i> ( <b>reading response due Mon. 10/17</b> ) <b>Reader:</b> readings on Palestine and Israel (see the Updates page for details).
Week 10 (Oct. 25 & 27)	<i>Black Box</i> , continued. (Some time <i>may</i> be allotted to lab/workshop/catch-up, as needed.)
Week 11 (Nov. 1 & 3)	Dystopian Futures I: Hassan Blasim, <i>The Corpse Exhibition</i> ( <b>reading response due Mon. 10/31</b> ) <b>Reader:</b> [TBA]
Week 12 (Nov. 8 & 10)	Dystopian Futures II: Nael Eltoukhy, <i>Women of Karantina</i> ( <b>reading response due Mon. 11/7</b> ) <b>Reader:</b> [TBA]
Week 13 (Nov. 15 & 17)	T: <i>Women of Karantina</i> (continued). Th: Workshop/lab/catchup day. In principle, a near-final “draft” of your ArabComix project should be ready for advance viewing, feedback, and commentary. Be prepared to work assiduously on final revisions & pulling everything together over Thanksgiving Break.
Week 14 (Nov. 29/Dec. 1)	T: Workshop/lab time. It’s <i>possible</i> that we’ll want one or two people to begin presenting on this day. We’ll clarify the schedule as we get closer to this date. Th: ArabComix in the House! (Official, er, unveilings—and reports—of/on your DH Projects.)
Week 15 (Dec. 6 & 8)	Presentations, continued.

**N.B.:** There is no final exam in this course, but if necessary, we will meet one last time during our scheduled exam period, **Thursday, Dec. 15, from 12:40-2:30**, for (more) presentations, last words, tearful goodbyes, and (who knows?), possibly even some Mediterranean food. Keep the time and day open.