NELC 233: THE ARABIC LITERARY HERITAGE

Weds. 2-5 Van Pelt Library, Middle East Seminar Room

GOALS OF THE COURSE:

This course aims to give you a general survey of literary works written in Arabic from the 6th century A.D. till the present day. In the main, it adopts a strictly chronological format appropriate to such a historical survey, and yet it does not follow the traditional pattern of linking the trends in literature directly to the politico/dynastic events of Islamic history. Thus, the course is unradical enough to start at the beginning: with poetry, in other words. It then proceeds to investigate the development of the poetic genres in the earlier period and the means which were used to evaluate it. The center of the course focuses on the Qur’an as a key influence on Arabic literature and as a work of literature in its own right. The second half of the course deals with the earliest prose tradition, and then proceeds to investigate the renaissance (nahdah) in the 19th century and the emergence of a modern tradition of Arabic literature in its various manifestations: poetry, fiction, drama and criticism.

This course tries to be historical, but LITERARY-historical; in other words, the sequencing is one convenient to a discussion of the literature on its own terms and not those of external events. Needless to say, the outside world, political, religious and social, continually impinges on and influences the literature at every turn, and we will be investigating that. But this course tries to avoid the tendency of many older histories of Arabic literature whereby they become an illustration of the political history of the period or region rather than a survey of the literature itself.

As opposed to the other course which I teach about Arabic literature in English (AMES434 Arabic Literature and Literary Theory), this course ask the questions: Who? What? When? How much? and the like. The evaluative and analytical questions: How? Why? How good? and so on, are implicit in the selected readings for this course, but are explored in detail in the other course listed above).

The readings for each session will consist of selected examples of the literary genre being discussed and descriptions and analyses of them. Needless to say, the translations will never be a full substitute for a reading of the work in the original. However, as far as possible, I have selected translations which will give you a good idea of the CONTENTS of the piece in question from which you will be able to deduce information about the literature, the writer(s), the society, and the circumstances in which the work in question was conceived. The articles ABOUT the works should help you in this process.
EVALUATION:

(1) Attendance and participation.
Attendance is required at all classes. If you are absent for reasons other than sickness, you must write a two-page summary of the readings for that session and submit it no more than one week after the session itself.
All readings must be done BEFORE the session for which they are assigned; you will be expected to summarize and express opinions about the readings. This is very much a DISCUSSION course, and its success depends very much on your willingness to read the appropriate materials and then talk about them in class. Thus CLASSROOM PARTICIPATION counts for a great deal in the evaluation of this course: 40%. I hope that that figure gives you some idea of the importance which I attach to it.

(2) Exams and papers:
There will be a mid-term and final examination.
The MID-TERM will be based on the materials in the first 3 parts (Historical background, Qur'an, and poetry).
The FINAL exam will allow you to demonstrate a knowledge of the materials covered in parts 4-6 of the course (Prose/Narratives, Drama, and Criticism).
The two exams will each contribute towards 30% of the grade for the course.

PART I: THE SETTING:
SESSION 1: INTRODUCTION: PHYSICAL & HISTORICAL CONTEXTS
INTELLECTUAL HISTORY

PART II: THE QUR'AN
SESSION 2: THE QUR'AN AS LITERATURE

PART III: POETRY
SESSION 2: THE Earliest POETRY
SESSION 3: MU`ALLAQAT AND OTHER POEMS
EARLY ISLAMIC POETRY
SESSION 4: BEGINNINGS OF GHAZAL (LOVE POETRY)
FUSION OF CULTURES AND SIGNS OF CHANGE
SESSION 5: THE ARGUMENTS ABOUT "THE MODERNS"
AL-MUTANABBI, AL-MA`ARRI, & IBN AL-FARID
SESSION 6: POETRY IN AL-ANDALUS (SPAIN)
FROM INTERIM PERIOD TO NEO-CLASSICAL & ROMANTIC POETS
SESSION 7: MODERN ARABIC POETRY
PART IV: PROSE & NARRATIVE
SESSION 7: THE KUTTAB AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF ADAB
SESSION 8: MASTERS OF ARABIC PROSE: AL-JAHIZ & AL-TAWHIDI
THE ORIGINS & DEVELOPMENT OF THE MAQAMA
SESSION 9: POPULAR NARR.
MODERN ARABIC FICTION: THE SHORT STORY
SESSION 10: MODERN ARABIC FICTION: THE NOVEL

PART V: DRAMA
SESSION 10: THE BEGINNINGS OF DRAMA
SESSION 11: DRAMA IN THE CONTEMPORARY ARAB WORLD

PART VI: CRITICISM
SESSION 11: THE BEGINNINGS OF CRITICISM
SESSION 12: THE MAJOR CRITICS
MODERN ARABIC LITERARY CRITICISM