Loss in Modern Arabic Literature
Fall 2018
Brown University

The Basics:
Instructor: Greg Halaby
Email: ghalaby@gmail.com
Class location: 204 Sayles Hall
Time: MWF 12-1
Office Hours: B006 Marston Hall -- TBD and by appointment

Summary:
This course examines the literary expression of and response to various forms of loss, including military defeat, diaspora, and prison confinement in Arabic poems, short stories, and novellas from the 20th century through the post-Arab Spring. We will explore how texts reimagine social and political geographies through diverse poetic and narrative techniques to enrich our understanding of the region and of central debates in its literary tradition. Readings are organized around different types of loss, of homeland, the beloved, freedom, hope, and war. Though the topics may seem quite grim, we will find that many of the readings render forms of loss into aesthetics of beauty or empowerment.

No knowledge of Arabic necessary; students with Arabic may read in the original.

Course Structure:
This course relies heavily on student engagement in the form of presentations, active participation, and discussion. I will provide discussion and pre-reading questions to help guide and enhance our dialogue. In accordance with students’ familiarity with modern Middle Eastern history and literature, I will provide brief lectures to contextualize the readings. We will have weekly student presentations that will transition into an open discussion.

Students will also be asked to select poems of their choice (from available anthologies) that deal with the weekly themes. They will then recite the poems to the class, analyzing the form and structure, and commenting on the personal or emotive significance.

Course Goals:
-Gaining a familiarity with Arabic literature through one of its most prominent themes.

-Engaging in critical analysis of the texts, while also zooming out to acquire a basis of social, historical, and political context relevant to the readings.

-Nuancing our understanding of intersecting identities in the Middle East (e.g. gender, religious, national, ethno-linguistic) through their literary expression.

Course Time Commitment:
Over 13 weeks, students will spend 3 hours per week in class (39 hours total). Required reading and preparation for the discussion is expected to take around 7 hours per week (91 hours total). In addition, writing and researching for papers (see above) account for a total of about 45 hours over the
course of the term. Finally, in-class student presentation(s) will take an additional 5 hours of preparation.

Accessibility and Accommodations Statement: 
Brown University is committed to full inclusion of all students. Please let me know early in the term if you have a disability or other conditions that might require accommodations or modification of any of these course procedures. You may speak with me after class or during office hours. For more information, please contact Student and Employee Accessibility Services at 401-863-9588 or SEAS@brown.edu. Students in need of short-term academic advice or support can contact one of the deans in the Dean of the College office.

Assessment:
Instructions for all written assignments will be posted on Canvas.
Active participation: 20%
In-class presentations: 20%
Three short response papers (2 pages each): 15%
Short Paper (5 pages): 15%
Final Paper (10 pages): 30%

Books:
The Poetry of Arab Women: A Contemporary Anthology ed. Nathalie Handal
Ghassan Kanafani, Returning to Haifa
Sonallah Ibrahim, That Smell and Notes from Prison
Nawal El Saadawi, Memoirs from the Women’s Prison
Basma Abdel Aziz, The Queue
Hassan Blasim, The Corpse Exhibition

Schedule:
Note: This is a new course, and I will therefore make significant adjustments according to the students' needs, interests, knowledge of Arabic, and exposure to the region. An updated reading schedule of the readings will be provided after the first week of classes.

Part I: The Beloved and the Homeland

Week 1: Introduction: Why Arabic Literature and Why Loss?
• Wednesday: Course goals, structure, and assessment. Why Arabic literature?
• At home reading for discussion on Friday:
• Friday: Background - What is a qasida? Who is al-Khansa’?

Week 2: The Loss of the Beloved: Classical Poetic Origins
• Poems by al-Khansa, Tarafa, Imrul Qays, Layla al-Akhyaliyya
• Selection from The Mute Immortals Speak: Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual and Transforming Loss into Beauty

Week 3: Loss of the Beloved (2): Modern Poets
• Mahmoud Darwish, “Jameel Buthaina” and “A Mask... for Majnoon Laila”
• Nazik al-Malaika, “Cholera” and “A Song for Mankind”
• Poems by Adonis
Week 4: The Loss of the Homeland
- Mahmoud Darwish, “Identity Card”
- Ghassan Kanafani, Returning to Haifa

Week 5: The Loss of the Homeland (2)
- Selection from Liana Badr, A Balcony over the Fakihani
- Emile Habibi, The Mandelbaum Gate

Part II: Military Loss and Confinement

Week 6: The Loss of al-Andalus
- Poems by Shawqi and Adonis
- Selection from Looking back at al-Andalus: The Poetics of Loss and Nostalgia in Medieval Arabic and Hebrew Literature, Alexander Ellison

Week 7: Military Loss: The 1967 June War
- Selections from Sadiq Jalal al-Azm, Self-Criticism after the Defeat
- Darwish, “A Soldier Dreams of White Tulips”
- Nizar al-Qabbani, “Fragments from Notes on the Book of Defeat”

Week 8: Loss of Freedom: Arabic Prison Narrative
- Sonallah Ibrahim, That Smell and Notes from Prison
- Prison poems by Ahmed Fuad Negm and ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Abnudi
- “Women, Writing, and Politics in Sonallah Ibrahim’s That Smell and Notes from Prison,” Waed Athamneh

Week 9: Loss of Freedom: Arabic Prison Narrative (2)
- Nawal El Saadawi, Memoirs from the Women’s Prison
- Prison poems by Ahmed Fuad Negm and ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Abnudi
- “Arabic Fiction and the Quest for Freedom,” Roger Allen

Part III: New Directions and Experimentation

Week 10: Loss of Hope (1): Dystopias
- Basma Abdel Aziz, The Queue
- Short stories from Hassan Blasim, The Corpse Exhibition and The Madman of Freedom Square

Week 11: Loss of Hope (2): Dystopias
- Short stories from Hassan Blasim, The Corpse Exhibition and The Madman of Freedom Square
- Selected poems

Week 12: Loss of the Present: Science Fiction and Futurism
- Ahmed Khaled Tawfik, Utopia
- "Hacking the Modern: Arabic Writing in the Virtual Age," Tarek El-Ariss