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ENG 4850-001: Contemporary Literature of the Middle East

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English 4850-001 Contemporary Literature of the Middle East
TTH 5-6:15 CH3159
Fall semester 2005
Dr. Susan Bazargan
Office Hours: T 1:15-2, 3:15-5; Th: 3:15-5 and by appointment
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This course will familiarize you with the literature produced by contemporary writers from one of the most volatile, complex, and often misunderstood geographical regions of the globe: the Middle East. As you will soon find out, the term "Middle East" is a fluid one, the definition depending on one's viewpoint and geographical position. While no precise borders define the region, the "Middle East" (for the sake of this course) will include: Iran, Iraq, Bahrain, Turkey, Cyprus, Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt. (Afghanistan is sometimes included in the region, so if you wish to focus on that country for your assignments, you can.) Obviously, we cannot cover the whole region but only selected countries. We will begin with Iran and gradually make our way to Turkey, Lebanon, Palestine, Israel, and finally Egypt. Our main focus will be short stories and novels (poetry, in my opinion, doesn't translate very well). Since political issues comprise the major theme of many of the works we'll read, it's necessary that we acquire at least a fundamental knowledge of the history and politics of each of the countries we're surveying. Please bear in mind that almost all of the works we'll read are translated; what is lost in translation cannot be replaced—except by your efforts and imagination! The "strangeness" of the cultures, the names of the authors, characters, and places might also offer challenges which, I hope, you'll take on with an open mind and a sense of empathy and understanding.

Course requirements:

Attendance and Participation:

I consider this course a graduate-level seminar, so its success depends a great deal on your work and contributions. Class attendance and participation are, of course, expected. You can "miss" class twice during the semester (no questions asked), but if you exceed that number, your grade will suffer (1/2 point for each unexcused absence). If you're ill, let me know; show some evidence (other than coughing on the phone; a doctor's note would help). In case of a family emergency, please stop by the first chance you have so that we can talk about classes you've missed.

Assignments:

The three main assignments (other than the final exam) should be ideally related.

Assignment 1: Paper # 1: Your first paper is a book review of at least 5 pages. I'll leave it up to you to choose the book you want to review. (It cannot be a book assigned for class.) It could be a literary text (a collection of short stories, a novel, etc.); it could also be a book (obviously relevant to the course) of historical, cultural, and/or political interest. You can select writings by an author from one of the countries not mentioned in

the syllabus, or the work of an author who has piqued your interest. You can focus on a single country as the context for the three assignments.

Assignment # 2: Class presentation.

In teams of 3, you will do an oral presentation in which your team will introduce a Middle Eastern country in a way that would be helpful to the readings assigned from that region. Each student will speak for 20 minutes (a total of 60 minutes for the team). The last team will discuss a country (and a writer) not on the syllabus.

Assignment # 3: Paper # 2:

Your second paper is a research paper of at least 10 pages (not counting the selected excerpts and the annotated bibliography). Your assignment is as follows: Suppose you were part of a team of editors preparing an anthology of contemporary literature of the Middle East (which could be used in a course such as this one). Your task is to choose one country and three writers. Your paper will include: a) carefully chosen background information on the country; b) introductions to the authors and the selected works; c) an annotated bibliography (include at least 6-7 items) that would help the reader learn more about the region and the authors. If your selected works are short, please include them in your "packet." Otherwise, they can be listed.

Final Exam:

You'll take a take-home final exam.

Grading Policy:

Paper # 1: 20%

Paper # 2: 35%

Presentation: 20%

Final Exam: 25%

Other Policies:

The English Department policy on plagiarism is available on our web site. The punishment is nasty and brutal. Don't do it.

If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Coordinator of the Office of Disability (581-6583) as soon as possible.

Required Texts:

Adnan, Etel. *Sitt Marie Rose*

Ben-Ezer, Ehud. *Sleepwalkers and Other Stories*

Liebrecht, Savyon. *Apples from the Desert*

Mahfouz, Naguib. *Midaq Alley*

Mozaffari, Nahid. *Strange Times, My Dear*

Pamuk, Orhan. *Snow*

Satrapi, Marjane. *Persepolis*

Course packet: Kanafani, Ghassan, *Palestine's Children. Returning to Haifa and other Stories.*

Class meetings:

8/25: Introduction to the course

8/30: IRAN

Selections from *Strange Times, My Dear*

Introduction (xv-xxvi) and: "The Mirror," "The Victory Chronicle of the Magi," "Sorraya in a Coma"

Sept. 1: "Ask the Migrating Birds," "The Eyes Won't Take It," "The Grocer from Kharzeville."

9/6: "Women Without Men," "Hitchcock and Agha Baji," "First Love"

9/8: "Another Birth" (handout). *Persepolis*

9/13: *Persepolis*

9/15: **Team # 1 presentation on Turkey and Orhan Pamuk**

9/20: *Snow*, Chaps. 1-9

9/22: *Snow*, Chaps. 10-20

9/27: *Snow*, Chaps. 21-30

9/29: *Snow*, Chaps. 31-37

Oct. 4: *Snow*, Chaps. 38-end

10/ 6: **Team # 2 presentation on Lebanon and Etel Adnan**

10/11: *Sitt Marie Rose*, pages 1-59

1/13: *Sitt Marie Rose*, 60-105

10/18: **Team # 3 presentation on Palestine and Ehud Ben-Ezer**

10/20: *Sleepwalkers and Other Stories*

10/25: *Sleepwalkers*

10/25: "Returning to Haifa"

Paper # 1 is due.

10/27: Team # 4 presentation on Israel and Savyon Liebrecht

Nov. 1: Selections from *Apples from the Desert*

"A Room on the Roof," "Apples from the Desert," "A Married Woman"

11/3: "Hayuta's Engagement Party," "Excision," "Written in Stone"

11/8: "The Road to Cedar City," "'What am I speaking, Chinese?,' she said to him."

11/10: Team # 5 presentation on Egypt and Naguib Mahfouz

11/15: *Midaq Alley*, Chaps. 1-10

11/17: *Midaq Alley*, Chaps. 11-20

Thanksgiving Break

11/29: *Midaq Alley*, Chaps. 21-end

Dec. 1: Team # 6 presentation on ... (the choice is yours!)

12/6: "Thirst" (handout). Review

12/8: Pick up take-home final exam; return by noon, Dec. 9 (in my mailbox).

Deadline for Paper # 2.