

CET Syllabus of Record



Program: CET Jordan

Course Title: (AM/THTR 370) Culture, Politics, and Religion in Arab Theater

Total Hours: 45

Recommended Credits: 3

Primary Discipline / Suggested Cross Listings: Theater Arts / Middle East Studies, History

Language of Instruction: English

Prerequisites/Requirements: None

Description

This course examines Arab theater as a reflection of cultural, political, and religious realities in the Arab world. Beginning with a brief history of Arab theater, including the post-Abbasid Era, and covering early traditions like storytelling, shadow plays, and passion plays, the course introduces students to the world of Arab theater through the works of some of the 20th century's prominent Syrian and Egyptian playwrights of the literary genre as well as contemporary plays from Iraq. These works are then juxtaposed by performances of popular comedic plays from Egypt and Kuwait, replete with social satire and dark humor. Students connect the content of the theater with their local context in Amman by conducting interviews with local people to understand how and why cultural, political, and religious themes resonate with audiences, throughout the generations. Students meet with local performance artists and playwrights to gain insight into the world of theater, including challenges and visions for the future, from the perspective of the practitioners.

This course shares thematic content with *AM/LANG 370* taught in Arabic, however the respective approaches differ. The Arabic language version of the course has the added aim of exploring content to strengthen Arabic language skills and utilizes Arabic language sources.

Objectives

Through their participation in this course, students:

- Gain understanding of the history and background of Arab performing arts traditions (storytelling, shadow theater, *maqama*, belly dancing and *dervish* traditions)
- Establish a foundation for understanding modern history of the Arab World and major historical and social events.
- Recognize prominent Arab playwrights and Arab theater institutions
- Make connections between Arab theater and social change in the Arab world
- Learn the fundamentals of dramatic critique
- Develop the research skills necessary for understanding Arab theater practice

Course Requirements

Students must complete all assignments before coming to class. Reading assignments include plays or articles ranging from 20 to 40 pages per class session. Students are also assigned to watch recorded performances with English subtitles from three to six acts long, up to three hours in length. Students must come to class prepared to demonstrate what they have learned by engaging in critical discussion of assigned works, making links to course themes, uncovering the message or moral of the play, and

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analyzing the use of satire and humor. Class attendance, as outlined in the CET Attendance Policy, is critical for success in the course and includes guest lectures and field-based components.

Throughout the course, each student takes a turn preparing a critical analysis of a play and giving a formal Power Point presentation in class, including a summary, interpretation, and analysis of the work. Field-based excursions for this course include meeting with local performance artists and playwrights to learn about the perspectives and critical issues facing the performing arts community in Amman. Students conduct interviews with theater community members to learn about popular perceptions of theater and to observe how theatrical works are understood and interpreted over time and across generations. Students complete three reflection papers, analyzing their findings, which they present to the class.

Students write a final paper on a topic agreed upon with the instructor. Topics could include a comparative analysis of multiple works by the same playwright, or of literary and performed works addressing similar themes. Students choose between giving a Power Point presentation on their paper or presenting a dramatic rendition of a scene(s) from the works analyzed.

Grading

The final grade is determined as follows:

- Participation 20%
- Critical analysis 20%
- Reflection papers (3) 30%
- Final paper 20%
- Final performance/presentation 10%

Readings

Abdul Azim, Samir. *Sayed The Servant*. Directed by Hussein Kamal. Performed by Adel Imam, Omar El-Hariri, Raja Al-Jeddawi. Egypt. 1985.

Admer Gouryh. "The Sociopolitical and Cultural Ambience of Walid Ikhlas's Drama." *World Literature Today*, vol. 62, no. 1, 1988. Pages 50-55.

Allen, Roger. *An Introduction to Arabic Literature*. Cambridge University Press, 2000. Pages 193-215.

Amine, Khalid. Decolonizing Theater History in the Arab World. The Case of the Maghreb. *Horizons/Théâtre* [Online], 12. 2018.

Al-Azraki, A.; Al-Shamma, James. *Contemporary Plays from Modern Iraq*. Bloomsbury. 2017.

Badran, Nabil. *Bye Bye London*. Directed by Almunsif Alsuwaisi. Performed by Abdulhussain Abdulredah, Ghanem Al-Saleh, Mariam Al-Ghadban, Dawood Hussain. Kuwait. 1981.

Carlson, Marvin. "Negotiating Theatrical Modernism in the Arab World". *Theater Journal*, December 2013, Vol. 65, No. 4, "Modernism" (December 2013), pp. 523-535.

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Cleary, Donald L. Jr. "What's It All About? The Critical Method of Analysis as Applied to Drama." *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, vol. 25, no. 2, 1991. Pages 89-96.

Denys Johnson-Davies. *The Essential Tawfiq al-Hakim: Great Egyptian Writers*. Cairo: American University of Cairo Press, 2008.

Alhajri, Khalifa Rashed. "A Scenographer's Perspective on Arabic Theater and Arab-Muslim Identity."

Hamdan, Mas'ud. "The Carnavalesque Satires of Muhammad al-Maghut and Durayd Lahham: A Modern Layer of Comic Folk Drama in Arab Tradition." *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*. Spring 2004. 137-146.

Jayyusi, Salma and Roger Allen. *Modern Arabic Drama: An Anthology*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.

Jayyusi, Salma. *Short Arabic Plays: An Anthology*, edited by Salma Jayyusi. New York: Interlink Books, 2003.

Al-Maghut, Muhammad. "The Village of Tishreen." 1973. Translated by Ahmad Mahfouz. *Arab Stages. Volume 2. Number 1. Fall 2015*. Martin E. Segal Theatre Center Publications. 2015.

Myers, Robert and Nada Saab. *Sentence to Hope: A Sa'dallah Wannous Reader*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019.

Pavis, Patrice. *Analyzing Performance: Theater, Dance, and Film*. University of Michigan Press, 2003.

Rubin, Don. *The World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theater. Vol 4 The Arab World*. Routledge. 1999.

Alsaleh, Asaad. "Approaching Sa'dallah Wannūs's Drama: The Manifestos for a New Arab Theater." *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics, No 39, Transnational Drama: Theater and Performance*. 2019. Pp. 190-227. Department of English and Comparative Literature, American University of Cairo.

Salem, Ali. *The School of Mischief*. Directed by Houssam El-Din Mustafa. Performed by Suhair El-Babili, Adel Emam, Saeed Saleh, Younes Shalabi, Ahmad Zaki. Egypt. 1973.

Selaiha, Nehad. *Nehad Selaiha Selected Essays Vol. 2*. Martin E. Segal Theater. 2020 Pages 15-41; 393-427.

Selaiha, Nehad. *Nehad Selaiha Selected Essays Vol. 5*. Martin E. Segal Theater. 2020 Pages 209-222.

Additional Resources

Al Jadid. A Record and Review of Arab Culture and Arts - <https://www.aljadid.com/>

More Arabic Plays available on Netflix:

Frag, Alfred. *The Witness Who Didn't See Anything*. Directed by Muhammad Fadl and Hany Motawie. Performed by Adel Imam, Nahed Gabr, Omar El-Hariri, Nazim Sharawy, Hala Fakher. Egypt. 1976.

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Al-Hakim, Tawfiq. *Fifty Year-Old Teenager*. Directed by Fouad Al Shatti. Performed by Abdulhussain Abdulredah, Haifaa Adel, Dawood Hussain, Mohamed Gaber. Kuwait. 1997.

Kamar, Bahgat. *Raya and Sekina*. Directed by Hussein Kamal. Performed by Shadia, Soheir El Bablily. Egypt. 1982.

Kamar, Bahgat. *No Longer Kids*. Directed by Samir Al Asfory. Performed by Saeed Saleh, Hassan Mostafa, Ahmed Zaki, Younes Shalabi. Egypt. 1979.

Nada, Faisal. *The Married Couples*. Directed by Hassan AbdulSalam. Performed by Samir Ghanem, George Sidhum, Sherine, Nagah El-Mogui. Egypt. 1978.

El Ramly, Lineen. *Lock Your Girls In*. Directed by Fouad El Mohandes. Performed by Sanaa Younes, Sherihan, Ahmed Rateb, Iglal Zaki, Zakariya Mowafi. Egypt. 1982.

Outline of Course Content

The course covers 2-3 topics per week.

Topic One: Introduction

- Critical analysis of theater
- History of Arab theater
- Abbasid Period

Topic Two: Pre-Theater and Storytelling

- Khayal al-Zill (shadow plays), Hakawati (storytellers)
- Ta'zieh (passion plays), Maqama (rhymed prose, poetry); Aragoz (puppetry)

Topic Three: Abu Khalil Qabbani

- The establishment of Arab theater, and Qabbani's models and examples
- The beginnings of political criticism in Arab Theater

Topic Four: Tawfik al-Hakim

- Various works: *The Tree Climber*, *The Song of Death*, *The Sultan's Dilemma*
- Theater of the absurd, literary comedy, dark social commentary

Topic Five: Mamdouh Udwan

- Various works: *That's Life*, *The Mask*, *Reflections of a Garbage Collector*
- Palestine, politics, marginalization of the disabled

Topic Six: Sa'adallah Wannus

- Various works: *The King is the King*, *Wretched Dreams*, *The King's Elephant*, *An Evening's Entertainment for the Fifth of June*, *The Glass Cafe*
- Regional politics, social critique
- A New Arab theater, Modernism in Arab theater

Topic Seven: Muhammed al-Maghut

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The Village of Tishreen

Criticism and satire of the colonization of the Arab world

Topic Eight: Walid Ikhlassi

The Straight Path, Pleasure Club 21

Criticism of the government and politics

Topic Nine: Contemporary Iraqi Theater

Various works: *A String Bird on Our Roof, Romeo and Juliet in Baghdad, The Takeover*

War, occupation, exile

Topic 10: Comedy & Satire

Recorded performances of *Sayed The Servant, Bye Bye London, The School of Mischief*

Political and social critique, art reflecting life or life reflecting art?