

# MES 250: Literatures from the Islamic World

3.0 lec.; 3.0 cr.; Pre-requisites: PREREQ: ENGL 110 AND SOPHOMORE.

Queens College, CUNY

Department of Classical, Middle Eastern, and Asian Languages and Cultures

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See details on Email Policy below

Office Hours: TBA

## Official Description:

This course is a study of a wide range of literary genres and themes from the region usually defined as the Islamic world. The texts we will be engaging with are part of the Arabo-Islamic tradition, but are limited to neither the Arabic language nor the Muslim religion. We will be reading, in English translation, texts originally written Arabic, Hebrew, Persian, and other languages. One of the main goals of the course is to understand the wide array of influences making up the remarkably rich and diverse cultures of the Middle East. The course will cover the time period beginning with the pre-Islamic period (6th century CE C.E.) to the 18th century.



## Organization of Course:

We will explore two broad themes over the course of the semester: **animals**—human and non-human—and **love**—earthly and divine. Our study of texts on these themes will allow us to identify, articulate, assess, and reflect on wide-ranging views from the Islamic world on the relationship between the individual and society. The majority of the texts we will read have a narrative format, but each of them emerges from distinct constellations of disciplinary perspectives, ranging from theological, political, ethical, philosophical, biological, and cultural.

Our first set of texts features keenly observed zoopoetics, animals as speaking subjects, and animals as proxies for human fears and desires. These texts include:

1. **Epistle No. 22 from *The Epistles of the Brethren of Purity*:** a fable/essay from a 10th-century Iraqi encyclopedia of mathematics, astronomy, ethics, politics, theology, and more
2. **Ibn Tufayl's *Hayy ibn Yaqdhan*:** a philosophical “novel,” often regarded as the first of the genre, from 12th century Andalusia
3. **Farid ud-Din Attar's *The Conference of the Birds*:** an epic Sufi (“mystical”) poem from 12th-century Nishapur

As we read, we will consider the status of the animal in Islamic literary and philosophical tradition and how this differs from humanist and post-humanist discourses of species. We will examine how animal allegories help illuminate the relationship between the individual and society and individual communities and society.

The second part of the course will explore the theme of love. First, we will study the story of **Majnun and Layla**, one of the world's most famous love stories, and its many retellings. We will pay particular attention to the Persian poet Nizami's 12-century version of the story and survey other versions that take the form of prose and poetry, of written text and stage performance, and of many languages—Arabic, Persian, Hindi, Turkish, and English. It has been conceived as an erotic love story and a Sufi allegory. We will consider the reception, interpretations, and legacy of these wide-ranging forms. Next, we will study works of *ghazal*, a type of amatory verse popular in South Asia and the Middle East in which Majnun and Layla are common figures. As we explore the theme of love in prose and poetry, we will consider how different conceptions of love position the individual vis-a-vis society and how these seemingly similar narratives offer different views on that relationship.

### **Textbook Information:**

You are required to obtain a copy of each of the following available at the QC Bookstore ([qc.textbookx.com](http://qc.textbookx.com)):

- Farid Ad-din Attar, *The Conference of the Birds*. Translated by Darbandi and Davis (New York: Penguin Classics, 1984).
- Lenn E. Goodman and Richard McGregor, trans., *The Case of the Animals versus Man Before the King of the Jinn* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
- Nizami, *The Story Layla & Majnun*. Translated by Rudolf Gelpke (London: Omega, 2011).

Other readings will be provided as pdfs on Blackboard.



### **Course-Specific Learning Objectives:**

***By the end of the course, students will have attained:***

LO1: A solid understanding of the major genres of the Islamic literary tradition

LO2: An appreciation for the wide array of influences making up the remarkably rich and diverse cultures of the premodern Islamic world

***They will be able to:***

LO3: Articulate the nuances of the themes of animals and love in the Islamic literary tradition;

LO4: Express, demonstrate, and integrate this knowledge; and

### **Queens College General Education Statement:**

***This course satisfies the following two Queens College General Education criteria.***

QC 1: Address how, in the discipline (or disciplines) of the course, data and evidence are construed and knowledge is acquired; that is, how questions are asked and answered.

QC 2: Position the discipline(s) in the liberal arts curriculum and the larger society

***In addition, this QC College Option LIT course satisfies the following four learning outcomes:***

LIT 1: Understand and be able to express the advantages of reading literature.

LIT 2: Engage in the practice of reading.

LIT 3: Appreciate different genres, including narratives, poetry, essays, or drama in their original language or in English translation.

LIT 4: Through discussion and writing, develop and improve upon skills used in understanding and appreciating literature.

### Evaluation & Course Requirements

#### 1. Leading Discussions (25%)

You will be asked to open (~5-7 minutes) and lead (~20-25 minutes) the discussion at the start of class on two occasions over the course of the semester. You should engage your classmates in your observations and how/why questions about the texts they read and encourage all to participate. You may also ask them to share the questions they prepared with the class and connect these questions to your own. Be prepared to articulate your own reasoned responses to the questions you pose and to respond analytical to the responses offered by your classmates. For your first time as discussion leader, you will be scored out of 20 points. For your second time

1. Leading Discussions	25%
2. Participation & Preparation	30%
2a. Attendance & Participation	(10%)
2b. Reading Quizzes, Comp Questions and other Writing Activities	(20%)
3. Midterm Paper	20%
4. Final Paper	25%

as discussion leader, you will also be expected to apply the fundamental concepts fo literary analysis to your formation of questions and analysis of the text. You will be scored out of a total of 24 points. Expectations for both are detailed in the provided rubrics. Please review them well as you prepare to lead discussions. **These two assignments together satisfy LO3, QC1, and LIT4.**

#### 2. Participation & Preparation (20%)

Active participation and thorough preparation are key elements of this course.

##### 2a. Attendance and Participation (10%)

Class time will be largely dedicated to discussion. Come to class each session ready to participate through active listening and meaningful contributions. For each class session, you will be assigned a score out of 4 total points; one point each for (1) attending with copy of the text we are reading, (2) demonstrating familiarity with the text, (3) active listening, and (4) active contributions. If, in addition to showing up to class regularly, you read, listen, and contribute ACTIVELY, you will receive a perfect score for attendance and participation, which accounts for ten percent of your final grade. If you must miss class, please notify me in advance, get the class notes from one of your colleagues, and check Blackboard for any assignments you might have missed. You are responsible for any material and announcements you miss due to absences or lateness.

**\*Use of electronic devices other than laptops (when used to refer to class texts) is not permitted during class time. Anyone observed using them will be given a warning the first time, face a 2% grade reduction the second time, and be asked to leave the class for any subsequent violation.**

##### 2b. Reading Quizzes, Comprehension Questions, and other Writing Activities (20%)

For each class meeting, you are to prepare readings (look at “Readings” column) and complete any assignments due (look at “Assignments” column). You should read actively, making note of

the questions that interest you and texts that puzzle you. Come to class with copies of the assigned readings, your reading notes, and any written assignments due that day. Every so often, we will have a short, multiple-choice reading quiz at the start of class to check that everyone has read the assigned materials. You will not be given advanced notice, and you cannot make up these quizzes.

Your responses to comprehension questions and other written assignments will be scored out of a total of 4 points. Full credit will be given for excellent work, which means that your answer are written clearly, reflect good effort, and have no spelling errors. Three points will be given if only two of the above are true; two points will be given if only one of the above are true; and one point will be given if none of the above are true. No points will be awarded if the assignment is not delivered on time. **The reading assignments and reading comprehension and writing activities satisfy LO1, LO2, LIT 2, and LIT 3.**

### **3. & 4. Midterm (20%) Final Papers (25%)**

You will write one midterm paper (3 pages) and one final paper (5 pages). In each paper, you will address an open-ended question that you will explore based on the texts we have read in class. Your papers should use evidence from the texts we have read to support their conclusions. You should use our class discussion as a model for this kind of evidence-based literary analysis. See the provided grading rubrics for each these papers for details on how they will be evaluated. **The midterm and final papers satisfy QC 1, LO3, LO4, and LIT 4.**

#### **Question for Midterm Paper (Presented to students 2 weeks into course)**

Compare the concerns, desires, and fears of human and non-human animals as expressed in two or more of the texts we have read. How do these concerns and the way in which they are expressed contribute to the ethical views espoused by the text?

Your response should explore the following questions:

- How are these concerns conveyed or expressed in the text? Directly? Indirectly? By whom?
- What happens with these concerns at the conclusion of the narrative?
- What ethical views does the narrative advocate? Upon what are these views premised?
- Do the texts share underlying premises? Ethical views? Concerns?
- How does each text use allegory/fable to convert these views and concerns?

#### **Question for Final Paper (Presented to students 8 weeks into course)**

Articulate and defend an argument about how Majnun or Layla's place in their society, as depicted in Nizami's poem, affects his/her experiences, values, and choices. To help hone your argument consider how the character's experiences, values, choices might change if their place in society were to be altered. Consider, for example, their gender, age, occupation, social status, economic status, family situation, etc.

### **Collegiality and Mutual Respect**

Please remember that some of the topics we will be learning about and discussing are controversial, sensitive, and/or the subject of debate. You and your classmates may have strongly held personal opinions on different sides of a given topic. Please express your opinions but be respectful of your fellow classmates even when you strongly disagree. Follow the adage that sometimes we must agree to disagree agreeably.

### **Academic Honesty**

Cheating and plagiarism, including that from electronic resources, is UNETHICAL and a VIOLATION of the CUNY policy on academic integrity. When quoting or paraphrasing from a source, please use appropriate citations. Memorizing or copying from Internet sources is plagiarism.

Students who plagiarize or cheat on exams are violating the Academic Integrity Policy of CUNY and will receive a grade of “ZERO”, be reported to the Office of Student Conduct, and face possible sanctions, including suspension from the university.

For more information, see CUNY’s policy on academic integrity:

<http://www.qc.cuny.edu/StudentLife/services/studev/Documents/Academic%20Integrity%20Violation%20Form%20RV.pdf>

### **Blackboard, Communication, and Office Hours:**

#### **Blackboard:**

This course will require that you use Blackboard to access course readings, handouts, and announcements as well as pre-class reading quizzes

- It is the student’s responsibility to access Blackboard and make sure that their Blackboard linked email is in working order.
- All email communications to the course will be sent out via the Blackboard email system. A test email will be sent out the first week of classes. Make sure your Blackboard email is working.
- Please be advised that instructors can monitor whether or not a student has accessed Blackboard and different modules of the site. Everyone should have logged onto Blackboard at least once during the first week of classes.
- Announcements for the class as well as any necessary changes to the syllabus will be posted on Blackboard; it is the student’s responsibility to check announcements and note any changes made. Please check the site frequently.
- In the rare event of class cancellation, an announcement will be posted on Blackboard and an email sent out to the entire class as far in advance as possible.
- **Technical Support:** If you encounter issues with Blackboard access, the Queens College Helpdesk (<http://www.qc.cuny.edu/computing/>, (718) 997-4444, [helpdesk@qc.cuny.edu](mailto:helpdesk@qc.cuny.edu)) is located in the I- Building, Room 151 and provides technical support for students who need help with Queens College email, CUNY portal, Blackboard, and CUNYfirst.

#### **Communication and Office Hours:**

- I can best be reached by email at [kirsten.beck@qc.cuny.edu](mailto:kirsten.beck@qc.cuny.edu). I will usually respond within 48 hours on weekdays.
- Please include your full name and class section in the email. Please do not send email communications without providing your full name and class section.
- I am happy to respond to your questions via email, but please try to avoid emailing me questions that can be answered by checking Blackboard or the syllabus.

- If my office hours do not fit your schedule, I am happy to make an appointment at another time. Please email me to make an appointment.
- It is a good idea to keep in touch with other students in the class. You should take the names, emails, and phone numbers of two of your classmates at the first class session.

### **Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:**

Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation should register with and provide documentation to the Office of Special Services, Frese Hall, room III. The Office of Special Services will provide a letter for you to bring to your instructor indicating the need for accommodation and the nature of it. This should be done during the first week of class. For more information about services available to Queens College students, contact the Office of Special Services (718-997-5870) or visit their website (<http://sl.qc.cuny.edu/oss/>).

### **Course Evaluations**

During the final four weeks of the semester, you will be asked to complete an evaluation for this course by filling out an online questionnaire. Please remember to participate in these course evaluations. Your comments are highly valued, and these evaluations are an important service to fellow students and to the institution, since your responses will be pooled with those of other students and made available online, in the Queens College Course Information System (<http://courses.qc.cuny.edu>). Please also note that all responses are completely anonymous; no identifying information is retained once the evaluation has been submitted.

### **Schedule of Classes**

*Please note: this schedule is subject to change—check Blackboard for updates.*

#### **I. Course Introduction**

- 1. Tuesday, August 27th - QC 2, LIT 1**  
 Course Introduction  
     Overview of texts  
     Why read literature?  
     Excerpt from Ahmed's *What is Islam*  
 Assignment Due: None

#### **II. Animals**

#### **Dispute Between Animals & Man, Epistle No. 22, from the *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity***

- 2. Thursday, August 29th - LO1, LO2, LIT 2, LIT 3**  
 The Brethren of Purity and their *Epistles*  
     Origins of the Brethren  
     10th century Iraq  
 Assignment Due:  
     I.R Netton pp. 1-8, Goodman pp. 99-172
- 3. Tuesday, September 3 - LO1, LO2, LIT 2, LIT 3**  
 Epistle No. 22 & *Kalila wa Dimna* (the *Panchatantra*)  
     Ibn al-Muqaffa', the translation movement, and Arabic literary prose  
     "The Ringdove"

Assignment Due:

Goodman pp. 172-248, "The Ringdove" from *Kalila wa Dimna*

**4. Tuesday, September 10 - LO1, LO2, LIT 2, LIT 3**

Epistle No. 22 & Animals vs. Humans

Muhammad Iqbal's "A Cow and a Goat"

al-Jahiz's *Book of Animals*

Munif's *Endings*

Assignment Due:

Goodman pp. 248-316, Muhammad Iqbal's "A Cow and a Goat," Selection from al-Jahiz's *Book of Animals*

**5. Thursday, September 12 - LO1, LO2, LIT 2, LIT 3**

Epistle No. 22 & Posthumanism

Orientalism

Humanism & Posthumanism

Assignment Due:

Excerpts from Said's *Orientalism* and Hallaq's *Restating Orientalism*

**Ibn Tufayl's *Hayy ibn Yaqdhan***

**6. Tuesday, September 17 - LO1, LO2, LIT 2, LIT 3**

Ibn Tufayl's *Hayy ibn Yaqdhan*

Assignment Due:

Khalidi pp. xxix-xxxiv, 99-153, Esposito pp. 269-289

**7. Thursday, September 19 - LO1, LO2, LIT 2, LIT 3**

Islamic Science & Philosophy

Al-Ma'arri's "Veganism"

Assignment Due:

D. S. Margoliouth's "Abu 'l-'Alā al-Ma'arrī's Correspondence on Vegetarianism," and "Introduction" in *The Epistle of Forgiveness: Volume One, A Vision of Heaven and Hell*

**Farid ud-Din Attar's *The Conference of the Birds***

**8. Tuesday, September 24 - LO1, LO2, LIT 2, LIT 3**

Attar, Rumi, and Sufi Poetry

Assignment Due:

Darbandi and Davis, "Introduction" to *The Conference of the Birds*, pp. 9-26

Attar, *The Conference of the Birds* pp. 29-51 (up to "The other birds protest...")

Spend 15 minutes reading more about and poetry composed by Jalal al-Din

Muhammad Rumi

**9. Thursday, September 26 - QC1, LO3, LO4, LIT4**

*The Conference of the Birds*

Midterm Paper Workshop Part I

Assignment Due:

Attar, *The Conference of the Birds* pp. 51-109 (up to "The restless fool and dervish...")

Prepare to share the ideas and arguments you present in your paper with the class

**10. Thursday, October 3 - QCI, LO3, LO4, LIT4**

*The Conference of the Birds*

Midterm Paper Workshop Part II

Assignment Due:

Attar, *The Conference of the Birds* pp. 109-169 (up to “Majnoun searches for Leili...”)

**11. Thursday, October 10 (Draft for Midterm Paper Due) - LO1, LO2, LIT 2, LIT 3**

*The Conference of the Birds*

Assignment Due:

Attar, *The Conference of the Birds* pp. 169-229

**Al-Hariri's Maqamat and Midterm Papers**

**12. Tuesday, October 15 - LO1, LO2, LIT 2, LIT 3**

Maqamat

Assignment Due:

Ashtiany, *Abbasid Belles-Lettres*, pp. 125-135

**13. Thursday, October 17 (Midterm Paper Due) - LO1, LO2, LIT 2, LIT 3**

Al-Hariri's Maqamat

Assignment Due:

Cooperson, *Stand and Deliver*, excerpt pp. 1-27

Submit midterm paper

**III. Love**

**15. Introduction to Majnun Layla - LO1, LO2, LIT 2, LIT 3**

Romantic Tales in Salma Khadra Jayyusi (editor) - *Classical Arabic Stories: An Anthology* (2010, Columbia University Press); Alasdair Watson - “From Qays to Majnun: the evolution of a legend from ‘Udhri roots to Sufi allegory”

**16. Majnun Layla in the Aghānī - LO1, LO2, LIT 2, LIT 3**

Introductory Section, Qasim Haddad's *Chronicles of Majnun Layla* (pp. 17-23)

**17-20. Nizami's Majnun Layla - LO1, LO2, LIT 2, LIT 3**

Nizami - *The Story Layla & Majnun*

17. (II.6) pp. ix-36 (Editor's Note - XI)

18. (II.8) pp. 37-87 (XII-XXVII)

19. (II.13) pp. 87-132 (XXVIII-XL)

20. (II.15) pp. 132-177 (XLI-LIV)

**21. Reception - LO1, LO2, LIT 2, LIT 3**

Rokus de Groot “The Arabic-Persian Story of Laila and Majnun and its Reception in Indian Arts”; Eric Clapton's *Layla*

**22. Ghazal: Ḥāfiz, Jāmī, Rūmī - LO1, LO2, LIT 2, LIT 3**

Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam*, pp. 32-46

**23. Ghazal: Ghalib - LO1, LO2, LIT 2, LIT 3**

**24. Workshop Papers: Draft I Due - LO1, LO2, LIT 2, LIT 3**

**IV. Conclusions**

**25. Workshop Papers Draft II Due - QC 1, QC2, LO1, LO2, LO3, LO4, LIT 4**