NEHC 20222 / GNSE 22222

Masculinities in pre-modern Middle Eastern Literature

Spring Quarter 2020
Monday / Wednesday, 4:30-5:20pm, Room TBD

Instructor: Alexandra Hoffmann (she, her, hers)
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Office hours: TBD

Course Description

Have you ever wondered what men looked like, how they lived and loved in the pre-modern Middle East? In this class, we will encounter cuckolded husbands, muscular heroes, angry kings, mad lovers, and chivalrous bandits – all fictional. We will analyze how masculinities are constructed in selected passages of Arabic, Persian, and Turkish literature in translation, and evaluate normative expectations, caricatures, and anxieties about masculinities in the cultural consciousness of the pre-modern Middle East.

In this course, you will become familiar with theoretical principles of the study of masculinities as well as acquire tools for literary analysis and close reading. Case studies will be drawn from a variety of literary sources, such as the Thousand and One Nights (Alf Layla wa-layla), the Persian Book of Kings (Shāhnāmeh), the love story of Laylā and Majnūn, as well as other texts.

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- Explain the social construction of masculinities
- Articulate the challenges of applying modern gender concepts to pre-modern literary texts of the Middle East
- Close read primary source texts (in translation) through the lens of gender studies
- Formulate arguments about masculinities based on close analytical reading of a primary source text (in translation)
- Evaluate constructions of masculinities in a primary source text (in translation) and clearly present this evaluation in an academic paper
Course Requirements

Attendance & Participation: 20%
Assignments: 40%
Midterm paper: 20%
Final paper: 20%

**Attendance & Participation:** You are expected to be present and on-time for each class. Since assignments are based on readings and discussions in class, it is crucial that you attend regularly. If you need to miss class, let me know beforehand. If you have two absences, you will need to come by my office hours to find a solution. As for participation, you are expected to have read all assigned texts actively (for example, by underlining words, writing comments in the margins etc.) and be ready to participate in class discussions by sharing questions and offering thoughts about the readings. If you feel uncomfortable speaking in class you may send your comments or questions to me before class and I will bring them into the discussion. Additionally, each student will serve as close-reading expert on an assigned passage in small group discussions in class. You will receive mid-quarter feedback about your attendance & participation grade.

**Assignments:** You are required to complete a total of eight assignments (as specified in the course schedule), usually short responses of 300-500 words each. These assignments are to be completed after a class meeting and will thereby help solidify recently learned content or approaches. Assignments will be evaluated on a scale from 1-5 points; a rubric for these assignments will be communicated beforehand. All assignments are to be uploaded to the Canvas course site.

**Midterm paper:** You will write a short paper (5-6 pages; double spaced) on an assigned passage. The paper will be graded according to the grading rubric provided on the Canvas course site. It is due at the beginning of week 6. You will have the opportunity to revise your paper for a better grade if the paper is resubmitted before the beginning of week 8.

**Final paper:** The final paper will enable you to utilize skills that have been acquired and practiced during the quarter on a topic of your choice. In the final paper, you are expected to close read a passage in a primary source (in translation) and present the evaluation in an academic paper of 8-10 pages (double spaced). The topic of the final paper should be chosen after consulting with me in office hours or by email. The final paper will be graded according to
the grading rubric provided on the Canvas course site. It is due on Wednesday of exam week.

**Classroom policies**

**Feeling welcome:** I am committed to maintaining an inclusive and welcoming classroom, a space for critical and civil exchange of ideas. I believe that recognizing that we have different backgrounds is beneficial for our learning, and I ask that everybody engage with empathy towards those with a different viewpoint than one’s own. It is my intent to present materials and activities that are respectful of diversity: gender, sexuality, disability, generational status, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, religious background, and immigration status. Due to the nature of this course, some readings will include topics that some students may find challenging. I aim to forewarn the class about such content. I appreciate any further suggestions for promoting a positive and open environment.

**Disability Services:** If there are circumstances that make our learning environment and activities difficult, please let me know. If you need accommodations due to a disability, please contact Student Disability Services at 773-702-6000 or disabilities@uchicago.edu and return to me with a formal letter and arrangement from that office.

**Plagiarism:** The use of any writing or ideas that are not your own without appropriate quotation and citation will result in an automatic failure of that assignment, and potential disciplinary action. If you are unsure what plagiarism constitutes, or are concerned about how to avoid it, please check with me. Also see [https://studentmanual.uchicago.edu/academic-policies/academic-honesty-plagiarism/](https://studentmanual.uchicago.edu/academic-policies/academic-honesty-plagiarism/)

**Electronic devices:** There are times in class where I will ask you to open your laptop for an activity, or to explore concepts related to course discussions and in-class activity. However, since I believe that these technologies can be distracting – not only for you, but to others in the class as well - I would prefer that you do not use your laptops during class discussions. I would like you to be fully present, and engage with your colleagues face-to-face.
Course Schedule

Week 1: What are Masculinities?

1) Introduction

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=owGykVbfqUE
Herbert Grönemeyer. Men (Kobalt Music Publishing Ltd, 1988)

* * * * * Assignment 1: Find a youtube video, a meme, a song – anything from contemporary popular culture that speaks to (or criticizes!) some current norms of masculinities. Post your link to the Canvas discussions page. You will be asked to comment on your selected piece in our next class in small groups.

2) Theoretical framework


Week 2: Thinking about Gender in Another Time & Another Land

1) Historical Masculinities


*** Assignment 2A: Reflect on the challenges of applying gender theory to pre-modern literature in ca. 300 words. To be uploaded to Canvas as one document together with assignment 2B.

2) **Orientalism at work: Aladdin**

Disney’s Aladdin: Theme song ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TqW924kQ4M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TqW924kQ4M))

Edward Said on Orientalism: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fVC8EYd_Z_g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fVC8EYd_Z_g)


*** Assignment 2B: Reflect on the historical problems in studying the Middle East [as part of “the Orient”] mentioned by Edward Said in ca. 300 words. To be uploaded to Canvas as one document together with assignment 2A.

**Week 3: The Thousand and One Nights**

1) **Bridging the Gap: Popular culture and its gender norms**


2) More from the Thousand and One Nights


*** Assignment 3:
Pick one of the embedded tales of this week’s readings (The Arabian Nights) and mark key vocabulary that will be relevant for an analysis of the construction of masculinities. Reflect upon how these key words help us examine gender norms, anxieties, or ridicule in the text. You can submit your response in two forms. A) You can write a short academic response of ca. 500 words OR B) you can create a 2-3 minute audio file for a general audience.

Week 4: Becoming a man in the Book of Kings (Shāhnāmeh)

1) The Book of Kings


2) Epic boyhood


**** Assignment 4: One way to approach a text is to think with its characters. Imagine you are Sohrab – that is, a teenage boy. You’re on the battlefield and encounter Gordāfarīd and fight with Rostam. What is going through your mind (anger, resentment, excitement, anxiety)? Your thoughts should be plausible – so you have to make sure you read the passage again closely to get any hints about how Sohrab is feeling. Write 300-500 words.

**Week 5: Male bodies in the *Shāhnāmeh***

1) **What’s love got to do with it?**


2) **Muscles that matter**


**** Midterm paper: Write a 5-6 page academic essay (double spaced) about the assigned passage (*The meeting of Bahman and Rostam*). In your paper, you should compare the two main characters of the passage (Rostam and Bahman) in terms of how their masculinities are
constructed in the text. You are expected to base your arguments on specific lines and vocabulary in the text, and your discussion should reflect upon the difference between kingly and heroic masculinities. For this assignment, you do not need to summarize the plot, nor are you required to use secondary sources about the Shāhnāmeh. However, substantiating your arguments by referring to the theoretical texts on gender theory may be helpful. Due at the beginning of week 6.

**Week 6: Lovers**

1) **Layli and Majnūn**

2) **Masculinity and Madness**


**** Assignment 5: Write a tinder profile for Majnūn. Find a picture of him from an illustrated manuscript online (for example, visit [http://www.islamicpaintedpage.com](http://www.islamicpaintedpage.com)), and write a short text (ca. 150 words) about his qualities as a man. Upload the “profile” as a word/pdf document to Canvas.

**Week 7: Beloveds**

1) **Age of the Beloveds**


2) **Love poetry**


***** Assignment 6: A family member recently asked you how school is going. You want to write them an email and tell them about this class. In ca. 300 words, explain to them why so many love poems were written about teenage boys.

***** Students who wish to resubmit their revised midterm papers must do so before the beginning of week 8.

**Week 8: Homoeroticism**

1) **Before Homosexuality**


2) **Legal norms vs royal etiquette?**


*****Assignment 7: Write a response of ca. 500 words in which you reflect on El-Rouayheb’s arguments and how they are compatible with the instructions Kaykāvūs gives to his son in the Qābūsnāmeh.
**Propose a paper topic by the end of this week. Your topic must be approved before you start researching and writing.**

**Week 9: Non-binary genders, cross-dressing, and female masculinity**

1) **Eunuchs and Intersex people**


2) **Cross-dressing and female masculinity**


**Assignment 8**: Send me an outline of your final paper by the end of this week. It can be a first rough draft, a few paragraphs, or a table of contents.
Week 10: Changing Discourses

1) 19th century transformations


***Final paper: Write a 8-10 page academic paper (double spaced) on a passage of your choice. All topics must have been approved by me. A grading rubric and detailed instructions can be found on the Canvas course site. The paper is due on Wednesday of exam week.