

Outlaws & Tricksters of Arabic Literature (in Translation)

ASMB UN 3000 — Fall 2021; Tuesdays 2.10 - 4pm. Location: TBA

Matthew L. Keegan, AMEC

MLKeegan@barnard.edu 316 Milbank Hall, Barnard

Office Hours: Th 2 - 4pm or by appointment.

Book a slot during my hours: <https://calendly.com/mlkeegan>

OR: Email me with 3 different possible times on at least 2 different days



[Image: *Maqamat al-Hariri*, Bibliothèque nationale de France MS Arabe 3929]

Course Description:

What is so fascinating about outlaws and tricksters? They can be alluring and terrifying, creative and destructive. They wear disguises, upend the plans of their fellow humans, and bend societies to their will. They are unsettled and unsettling. But this course suggests that there is no single figure of the trickster. Rather, the significance of writing about tricksters and outlaws varies from text to text and from place to place. In this course, we will explore texts, mostly from the pre-modern period, written in Arabic (and sometimes Persian and Sanskrit) that depict outlaws and tricksters. We will ask after what texts are doing in the world when they tell stories that seem to celebrate and delight in the subversive, the strange, and the sinister. To help us think through these questions, we will also read divergent theories about outlaws, tricksters, and other subversives. At the end of the course, we will read the award-winning Iraqi novel *Frankenstein in Baghdad*.

Course Requirements:

Weekly Response Essays Prior to each class (by midnight the night before class), you will post a 500-word response to the reading. This weekly response is not a summary of the reading. Rather, you should choose one or two threads that cut across the readings or the different parts of a single reading and reflect on them. Detailed instructions will be handed out in week 1.

Reading. There is a great deal of reading in this class, sometimes up to 200 pages per week.

"Do not read superficially, lest you do me an injury and derive no benefit for yourself. You must study thoroughly and read continually; for you will then find the solution of those most important problems of religion, which are a source of anxiety to all intelligent men."

- Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed*

Do not let yourself languish in passive reading. Heed Maimonides's warning against superficial reading! You are responsible for finding meaning in the texts we are reading, which means continually asking questions of the text and registering what you think is going on, both in individual passages and in the text as a whole.

Participation & Engagement Participation and engagement *every week* and with *every text* is essential to the class.

Attendance. Attendance is *required* because your main responsibility is to discuss the texts in class. Because we meet only once each week, each meeting is all the more valuable. If you must miss class, notify me in advance to arrange an excused absence and a makeup exercise. To receive an excused absence, you may be required to submit written proof from your doctor or dean. **MORE THAN ONE UNEXCUSED ABSENCE WILL ADVERSELY AFFECT YOUR GRADE.**

Leading a Discussion Once during the semester, you will be tasked with leading the discussion. This means that you will prepare a set of discussion questions, which you will send me by Monday at 10am of the week you are leading. I will review them and discuss them with you. In general, I expect your questions to lead us through at least the first hour of class, after which I may chime in.

Essay You will write a final essay, which can take the form of either an interpretive essay of 10-15 pages or a creative work engaging with the themes of the course. The creative work should be about 10 pages and be followed by a 5-page interpretation/analysis. In week 11, you should submit a 1-page proposal and meet with me to discuss it.

Texts:

The following books are required for the course.

- Lewis Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World: Mischief, Myth, and Art* (2010) - ISBN: 0374532559.
- al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, *Selections from the Art of Party-Crashing*, translated and illustrated by Emily Selove (2012, repr. 2019) - ISBN: 0815636687.

Let me know if you have trouble getting either of these textbooks for whatever reason, and we'll find a way to get you access.

All other texts will be available in pdf format on Courseworks.

Grade Breakdown:

- Participation & Engagement, Attendance (15%)
- Discussion Leadership (15%)
- Weekly Response Essays (30%)
- Final Essay Proposal/Meeting (5%)
- Final Essay/Creative work (35%)

Course outline:

(Texts not available at the bookstores will be posted on the "modules" section of Courseworks):

Week 1: Orientalism

Abdelfettah Kilito, *Thou Shalt not Speak My Language* (2008), pp. 3-37.

Claude Levi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," in *Structural Anthropology* (1963), 206 - 231.

Recommended:

Documentary: "Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People" (2006)

Documentary: "Edward Said on Orientalism" (1998)

Week 2: The Literary Islamic

Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (2016), pp. 3-112; 492-514.

Maryam Wasif Khan, Chapter 1 of *Who is a Muslim?: Orientalism and Literary Populisms: "Mahometan/Muslim: The Chronotope of the Oriental Tale,"* (2021), pp. 26-50. [You may also wish to read or skim the introduction, pp. 10-25.]

Week 3: Tricksters and Archetypes

Lewis Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World*, pp. 3-198.

Week 4: The Social Bandit

Lewis Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World*, pp. 200 - 251.

Eric Hobsbawm, *Bandits* (1969), pp. 17-29.

Alex Winder, "Abu Jilda, Anti-Imperial Antihero: Banditry and popular rebellion in Palestine," *The Routledge Handbook of the History of the Middle East Mandates* (2015), 308 - 320.

Week 5: The Brigands called Sa'alik

al-Maqrīzī, *al-Khabar 'an al-bashar*, volume 5, sections 1-2: "The Arab Thieves," translated by Peter Webb, pp. 167 - 297.

Shanfara's ode of the Sa'alik, *Lāmiyyat al-'Arab*.

al-Ṭuḡhrā'ī's ode, *Lāmiyyat al-'Ajam*.

Optional:

Peter Webb, "Study of the Arab Thieves," pp. 17 - 79 in al-Maqrīzī, *al-Khabar 'an al-bashar*.

Week 6: Satan, Charlatan Prophets, and Anti-Nomian Sufis

"Satan Wakes up Mo'aviya so he can join the congregation for the dawn prayer" in Rumi, *The Masnavi: Book 2*, translated by Jawid Mojaddedi (2008), pp. 152 - 181.

Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *God's Unruly Friends* (1994), pp. 1 - 64.

Abd al-Rahim al-Jawbari, *The Book of Charlatans*, translated by Humphrey Davies (2020), 2-67.

[Important note: Only read every other page. The even-numbered pages are all in Arabic, so you only need to read the odd-numbered pages!]

Optional:

Mohammed Rustom, "Devil's Advocate: 'Ayn al-Qudāt's Defence of Iblīs in Context," *Studia Islamica* 115 (2020), 65 - 100.

Week 7: Party Crashers

al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, *Selections from The Art of Party Crashing in Medieval Iraq*, translated and illustrated by Emily Selove (2012), pp. 1-174 [small-page format.]

John M. Ganim, "Medieval Literature as Monster: The Grotesque before and after Bakhtin," *Exemplaria* (1995), 27-40.

Week 8: The Tribe of Vagabonds

Abu Dulaf's Ode of the Banu Sasan in *The Medieval Islamic Underworld: The Banū Sāsān in Arabic Society and Literature* by C. E. Bosworth (1976), pp. 181 - 290.

Kristina Richardson, "Tracing a Gypsy Mixed Language through Medieval and Early Modern Arabic and Persian Literature," *Der Islam* (2017), 115-157.

Week 9: Advice for a Rogue's Life

Bryan Reynolds, *Becoming Criminal: Transversal Performance and Cultural Dissidence in Early Modern England* (2002), pp. 1-63; 125-156.

al-Jahiz, "The Narration of Khalid ibn Yazid" in *The Book of Misers*, translated by R. B. Serjeant (1997), pp. 36-47.

al-Hamadhani, "The Maqama of Advice" in *The Maqamat of Badi' al-Zaman al-Hamadhani, Translated from the Arabic with an Introduction and notes Historical and Grammatical*, translated by J. Prendergast (1915), pp. 153 - 155.

al-Hariri's *Maqamat*, "al-Maqama al-Sasaniyya" in *The Assemblies of Ḥariri: Translated from the Arabic with Notes Historical and Grammatical, Volume II Containing the Last Twenty-Four Assemblies*, translated by Dr. F. Steingass (1898), pp. 169 - 174.

Week 10: The Ethical Education of a Trickster

Kshendra, "The Grace of Guile" in *Three Satires: Nilakantha, Ksemendra & Bhallata*, edited and translated by Somadeva Vasudeva (2005), pp. 92-317 [Note: Only read the odd-numbered pages! The even-numbered pages are in Sanskrit.]

Week 11: Offending Shadows

Li Guo, "Paradise Lost: Ibn Daniyal's Response to Baybars' Campaign against Vice in Cairo," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (2001), pp. 219 - 235.

Ibn Daniyal, "The Phantom: A Shadow Play" in *The Performing Arts in Medieval Islam: Shadow Play and Popular Poetry in Ibn Daniyāl's Mamluk Cairo* (2012), 157 - 220.

Everett K. Rowson, "The categorization of gender and sexual irregularity in medieval Arabic vice lists," in *Body guards: the cultural politics of gender ambiguity* (1991), pp. 50-79.

Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (repr. 2006) 175-203.

Week 12: Haunting Outlaws I

Ahmed Saadawi, *Frankenstein in Baghdad: A Novel*, pp. 1 - 151.

Week 13: Haunting Outlaws II

Ahmed Saadawi, *Frankenstein in Baghdad: A Novel*, pp. 152 -288.

Week 14: Sociopaths

Watch the film *Catch Me If You Can*, directed by Steven Spielberg (2002). Optional watch party or watch the film on your own.

Adam Kotsko, *Why We Love Sociopaths*, pp. 1 - 18 and 94-107.

Rodanthi Tzanelli et al., "Con me if you can: exploring crime in the American cinematic imagination," *Theoretical Criminology* 9 (2005), pp. 97-117.

Disability Services Statement:

If you believe you may encounter barriers to the academic environment due to a documented disability or emerging health challenges, please feel free to contact me and/or the Center for Accessibility Resources & Disability Services (CARDS). Any student with approved academic accommodations is encouraged to contact me during office hours or via email. If you have questions regarding registering a disability or receiving accommodations for the semester, please contact CARDS at (212) 854-4634, cards@barnard.edu, or learn more at barnard.edu/disabilityservices. CARDS is located in 101 Altschul Hall.

Barnard Honor Code:

Approved by the student body in 1912, the Barnard College Code states:

We, the students of Barnard College, resolve to uphold the honor of the College by refraining from every form of dishonesty in our academic life. We consider it dishonest to ask for, give, or receive help in examinations or quizzes, to use any papers or books not authorized by the instructor in examinations, or to present oral work or written work which is not entirely our own, unless otherwise approved by the instructor. We consider it dishonest to remove without authorization, alter, or deface library and other academic materials. We pledge to do all that is in our power to create a spirit of honesty and honor for its own sake.

Please refer to the Honor Code booklet, distributed to all new students. If you do not have a copy at this time, please pick one up in the Dean of Studies Office.