

MODERN ARAB CULTURE AND LITERATURE

MDES 343 • Spring 2025 • Professor Adam Spanos • Spanos@usc.edu • Tues. Thurs. 3:30 – 4:50

This course introduces students to major debates in theories of modern Arabic cultural formation. We will begin by surveying prominent accounts of the origins of modernity and devote special attention to the Nahda, the awakening or renaissance of intellectual life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. We will read foundational and experimental works of modern literature, including novels by Jurji Zaydan, Naguib Mahfouz, al-Tahir Wattar, and Radwa Ashour; poetry by Adonis, Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, and Nazik al-Malaika; and plays by Tawfiq al-Hakim and Saadallah Wannous. We will then turn to Arab responses to the question of Palestine, focusing especially on the cultural consequences of the 1967 War; we will examine responses by intellectuals, activists, and creative writers to the defeat. Finally, we will study contemporary directions in Arabic fiction animated both by the 2011 revolutionary sequence and by the retrenchment of authoritarian rule in its wake.

This course is for anyone who loves literature and has an interest in understanding the sources of modern Arab creativity. All readings will be English, with Arabic available on request.

