

# MES4290 Topics in Middle Eastern Literature and Culture

## Spring 2026

**Instructor: Prof. Teresa Pepe**

This course has been offered for the first time as an elective, following the restructuring of the MES programme. The topic for this semester was:

“Imagining the Future in the Middle East: Historical, Cultural and Ecological Perspectives”.

There were 6 students enrolled: 5 from the MES programme (3 students studying Persian and 2 Arabic) and 1 student enrolled in the Religious Studies MA Programme.

Teaching was organized in the form of lectures, seminar, group-discussions, creative writing exercise, and one excursion to an art exhibition at Kunstnernes Hus. The students have attended 80% of the course and presented earlier drafts of their portfolio entry. They have received feedback from the teacher in written and oral feedback. For the last draft, they have also given and received feedback by two fellow students in anonymous form using FeedbackFruit tool.

### Exam Format:

The portfolio must be submitted as one file in the .pdf format.

Length: 9-10 pages (excluding notes and bibliography), circa 3500 words, font 12. Each paper should have a bibliography.

Citation style: Chicago author-date, or APA. Choose one and use it consistently.

The examination text is given in English. You may submit your response in English, Norwegian, Swedish, Danish.

### Essay 1

Choose two primary texts that imagine futures relevant to the MENA region.

What shared question or problem do the two texts address? How do their formal strategies produce different visions of the future? How are those visions shaped by historical, political, or ecological contexts?

- Engage at least one theoretical conversation explicitly. Use theory to illuminate close analysis of the texts.

- Provide close readings of specific passages, scenes, images, or formal features. Use evidence from the texts to support your claims.

- Conclude with a brief reflection on the broader implications of the comparison for how we understand future imaginaries in the MENA region.

Length: 2-3 pages, circa 1000 words. Citation style: Chicago author-date, or APA. Choose one and use it consistently.

## Essay 2

- Choose two primary texts that imagine futures relevant to the MENA region. What shared question or problem do the two texts address? How do their formal strategies produce different visions of the future? How are those visions shaped by historical, political, or ecological contexts?
- Engage at least one theoretical conversation explicitly. Use theory to illuminate close analysis of the texts.
- Provide close readings of specific passages, scenes, images, or formal features. Use evidence from the texts to support your claims.
- Conclude with a brief reflection on the broader implications of the comparison for how we understand future imaginaries in the MENA region.

Length: 2-3 pages, circa 1000 words. Citation style: Chicago author-date, or APA. Choose one and use it consistently.

## Essay 3

For this assignment, you are required to submit your draft by the 23rd of April, and provide anonymous feedback to your 2 of your peers (by the 28th of April).

Peer review is used in education to help students learn more deeply by reading each other's work and practicing how to give constructive feedback using clear criteria.

Assignment requirements:

- Choose two primary texts that imagine futures relevant to the MENA region (one is a book that you have read in its entirety) . What shared question or problem do the two texts address? How do their formal strategies produce different visions of the future? How are those visions shaped by historical, political, or ecological contexts?
- Engage at least one theoretical conversation explicitly. Use theory to illuminate close analysis of the texts.

- Provide close readings of specific passages, scenes, images, or formal features. Use evidence from the texts to support your claims.
- Conclude with a brief reflection on the broader implications of the comparison for how we understand future imaginaries in the MENA region.

Length: 3-4 pages, circa 1500 words. Citation style: Chicago author-date, or APA. Choose one and use it consistently.

In addition to peer-review, you will receive feedback from the teacher at a later stage (but before the final exam).

### The essays should be assessed on:

- Clarity and coherence of your main argument (stated early and developed throughout).
- Depth of analysis of the chosen literary works (summary of the plot; description of main themes, characters, space and time; close reading of specific passages).
- Connection to wider political and cultural contexts (how these literary texts relate to broader issues and historical/political circumstances).
- Use of course readings (correct, relevant, and integrated into your own argument).
- Structure and academic writing (organisation, style, correct referencing).
- Evidence of independent thinking and creativity (not just reproducing others' arguments but applying them in your own way).
- Evidence of engagement with original-language texts: students who show that they have read the works in the original language(s) and meaningfully integrate reflections from this reading into their essay will be positively recognised in the assessment.