An Evening with Arabic Poetry
Readings of Arabic verses and their translations by Arabic students, followed by an open discussion

Thursday, Nov. 21 @ 7:00-8:30pm
Robert A. Jones Conference Room

Organized by the Department of Arabic in the Division of Languages, Cultures, and Literatures, and supported by the Program in Comparative Literature, the Program in Linguistics, and the Program in Middle East Studies.

Verses by Imri’u I-Qays (6th century) on Nighttime

Read by Shams Mohajerani
Nighttime, like the waves of the sea, wraps me in its curtain
With all kinds of sorrow to test my resolve.

While it passes over me, stretching out from head to tail,
I asked the long night to end and bring in the morning, even
though the morning itself is no better.

What a night you are, as if your stars
were tethered to Mount Yadhbul by the strongest of ropes.

"Who am I?" by Nazik Al-Malaa’ika
(20th century)

Read by Sam Naumann and Jack Carew
"Who am I?"
The night asks who I am
I am its anxious deep dark secret
I am its rebellious silence
I veiled my essence with stillness
And I wrapped my heart in doubt
And I remained distraught here
I gaze, as the ages ask me
Who am I?

The wind asks who I am
I am its bewildered soul disowned by time
I am, like the wind, in no place
Endlessly we march, and never cease
And on we go, but never stop
And as we reach the bend,
We think it is the end of misery,
Only to find empty space.

And time asks who I am
I am, like time, powerful, I travel through the ages,
And return and grant them resurrection
I create the long gone past
Out of a temptation of pleasant hopes
And then return to bury it
To craft for myself a new yesterday
Whose tomorrow is ice

And the self asks who I am
I am, like the self, bewildered as I stare into the darkness
Nothing brings me peace
I stay and I ask and the answer
Remains veiled by a mirage
And I continue to think it is close
But once I get there, it melts,
Fades, and disappears.
"The Traveler’s Guide in the Forests of Meaning" by Adunis/Ali Ahmad Said (20th century)

Read by Cara Levine

What is the unseen?
A house we love to see
And hate to stay in.

What is a secret?
A closed door, if opened, it shatters.

What is a dream?
A hungry person who is incessantly knocking on the door of reality.

What is certainty?
A decision to give up the need for knowledge.

What is a kiss?
A visible harvest
Of invisible fruit.
أبو الطيب المتنبّي عن العِشق

Verses by Al-Mutanabbi (10th century) on love

Read by Mari Odoy

آرقُ على آرقٍ ومِثلِي آرقٌ 
وجَوهٍ يَزِيدَ وَعَبْرَةٌ نَتَرَفْرَقُ

Sleeplessness upon sleeplessness; those like me cannot sleep
Heartache grows, and a tear wells in my eye

جِهدُ الصَّبَابَةِ أُن تَكوَن كَمَا أُرَى
عَيْنٌ مَسْهَدَةٌ وَقَلْبٌ يَخْفَقُ

The yearning ache is to be as I am seen: Eyes that cannot sleep, and a
throbbing heart

ما لَاح بَرَقٍ أَوْ تَرْنَمٌ طَائِرٍ إِلَّا أَنْتَنَئِثَ وَلَي فَوْؤَادٌ شَيْقٌ

Every time lighting flashes or the birds call, I twist away and my heart
swells with longing

جِنَبُتِ مِن نَارِ الهُوَى مَا نَتْنَفْي
نَارَ الغَضا وَنَكْلُ عَمَّا تُخْرِقُ

I tasted the fire of love that never extinguishes; the fiery timber is
tireless, burning endlessly

وَعَدْلَتُ أَهْلُ العِشقِ حَتَّى دَقُتْهُ
فَعَجَبَتِ كَيفُ يَمُوتُ من لا يَعْشَقُ

I used to scorn those in love until I felt it, then I wondered what kills
besides love?
-alone-by-mahmoud-darwish-(20th-century)

read-by-ian-knapp-and-ian-mercer

"alone"

at a café, and with the newspaper, you sit.
no, you are not alone. half of your glass is empty
and the sun fills the second half.
from behind the glass you see people walking quickly
and you’re not seen. one characteristic of the invisible is to see
but not be seen.

oh how free you are, the forgotten one at the café.
no one sees the butterfly effect on you.
no one stares at your clothes or scrutinizes you
in your fog if you saw a young woman
and broke down in front of her
Oh how free you are attending to your own matters
In this crowd with no censorship from you
Or the reader.
So do what you like.
Take off your shirt or your shoes if you want.
For you are forgotten and free in your imagination.
Your name and your face are not important here.
Be as you are
Neither your friend nor your enemy are here to monitor your memories.

So forgive the one who left you in the cafe
Because you didn’t notice the new haircut
And the butterflies that danced on her dimples.
And forgive the one who requested your assassination
One day, only because you didn’t
Die on the day you collided with a star ...
... and you wrote
The first song with its ink.
At a café, and with the newspaper, you sit
Forgotten in the corner, so no one offends your pure temperament, no one thinks of your assassination.
Oh how forgotten and free you are in your imagination

كم أنت جُزَّ في إدارة شأنك الشخصي
في هذا الزحام بلا رقيب منك
أو من قاري
فاصنع بنفسك ما تشاء
إخلع قميصك أو جذاءك إن أردت
فأنت منسي وحر في خيالك

ليس لإسمك أو لوجهك هنا عمل
ضوروني
تكون كما تكون
فلأصدق ولا عدُّ هنا يُراقب ذكرياتك

فالمس غذرًا لمن ترتكتك في المقهى
لأنك لم تلاحظ قصتان الشعر الجديدة
والفراغات التي رقصت على عُمارتها
والمس غذرًا لمن طلب اغتيالك
ذات يوم، لا شيء... بل لأنك لم تحدث يوم ارتبطت بنجمة...
وكتبت أولى الأغاني بحبها
مقهي، وأنت مع الجريدة جالس
في الزكن منصيًا، فلا أحد يُهين
مزاجك الصافي، ولا أحد يُفكر في
اغتيالك
كم أنت منسي وحر في خيالك
“Night and death”
by Mohammed Bennis
(20th century)

Read by Camille Kerwin

“Night and death”

Nighttime,
I write upon it
The light
Of the impossible.
No one waited for my descent.
Bewilderment,
Spreading in the flesh,
In the sun
Of the palm trees.

Fear,
I think the river renders it formless.
A drop thinned,
It landed from the darkness.
There were
The dead
And my face among them.
أجزاء من قصيدة "الحزن"
للشاعر صلاح عبد الصبور
Parts from “Sadness” by Salah Abdel Sabour (20th century)

Read by Isabella Mauceri, Marisa Edmundson, and Will O’Neal

"Sadness"

يا صاحبي، إنّي حزين
طلّق الصّباح، فّما ابتسّمت، ولم يّبر وجهي
الصّباح.
وختّجت من جْوِّ المدينة أطلّب الْرّزق المُتّاخ
وغمّست في ماء الْقِناة خّيَرُ أَيّامي الْكفاّ.
وزجّعت بعد الْظُّهَر في جَبَّي فَرْوُشَ
فُسْبِّث شاّيا في الْطَّرِقّ.
وزّرت قلبي نّحِي
وَينْغِبُ بِالنَّرْحِ المُوزَعِ بَيْنِ كُفَّي وَالْصّدِيقِ
قُل سَاعَةً أو سَاعَتَينَ
قُل عَشْرَةً أو عُشْرِتَينَ...
Then the evening came
Into my room crept the evening
Sadness is born at night because sadness is blind
Sadness is long, like the path from hell to hell
Sadness is silent
And silence does not mean acceptance that dreams die,
That days pass by,
That backs ache,
Or that a musty wind Touches life and turns everything in it detestable.

My friend said:
"Oh, my friend!...
What are we but a reckless jerk in the winds of a sandstorm
Or a foolish wish.
......
Oh, my friend!
Embellish your speech,
everything is devoid of any taste.
As for me, I have known the end of the steep slope.
Sadness envelops the path...”
"Where to?" by Fadwa Touqan
(20th century)

Read by Ellise Johnson

Oh sister, where will you go to break free of your destiny’s gravity? Strongly, it pulls you down. Be calm. For even if you cling to the tail of your own choices there is no escape. With which two wings will you fly away? Fly as you wish to the ends of the ends. Your wings are of wax and the sun fills the horizons ... there is no escape.
_parts from “The Last Words of Spartacus”
by Amal Dunqul (20th century)

Read by Emily Romero Rodriguez and Paola Halley

“Glory to Satan, Idol of the wind
Who said no in the face of those who said yes
Who taught humanity to tear into nothingness
Who said no and did not die
And became a soul fixed eternally in pain!

I am hanging from the morning gallows
My forehead bows to death
Because I would not bow it in life.

(Translation of "The Last Words of Spartacus"
by Amal Dunqul)

المجلد للشيطان .. معبود الزياح
من قال "لا" في وجه من قالوا "نعم"
من عظم الإنسان تمزيق العذم
من قال "لا" .. فلم يمض
وظن روحًا أبديةً الألم!

(Translation of "The Last Words of Spartacus"
by Amal Dunqul)

مغطى أنا على مشاائق الصباح
وجثتي بالموت مخنثة!
لأني لم أخبث .. حيّة!

... ...
Oh my brothers crossing the square
Descending at the end of the evening
Down the street of Alexander the Great
Don’t be ashamed! Lift your eyes to mine
Because you are hanging beside me
On Caesar’s gallows
Lift your eyes to mine
Perhaps if your eyes met death in mine,
The void within me would smile
Because you raised your heads once.

Sisyphus no longer has the rock
upon his shoulders
It is carried by those born in slaves’ quarters
And the sea, like the desert, does not quench thirst.
Because those who said “no” drink nothing but tears
So raise your eyes to the hanging rebel
For you will end up like him ... tomorrow
... There is no escape
Do not dream of a happy world
Behind every dying Caesar, there is another!
And behind every dying rebel lie sorrows without a purpose
And tears shed in vain!
“The City and Me”
This is me
And this is my city
At midnight
The vastness of the square, and the walls
are like a hill
That appear and then fade behind
another hill
A leaf swirls in the wind, then lands
And is lost in the paths.
A shadow melts
A shadow spreads
As does the meddlesome eye of a tedious
lamp,
I stepped on its beams when I passed by
My emotions welled up with a sad
melody
That I began and then quieted.

"أنا والمدينة"
للشاعر أحمد عبد المعطي حجاجي
“Me and the City” by Ahmad Abdel-Mu’ti Hegazi (20th century)

Read by Naoise Reynolds
You? Who are you?
The foolish watchman does not comprehend my tale
I was driven out today
From my room
And I became lost without a name
This is me
And this is my city!

من أنت يا .. من أنت؟
الحارس الغبي لا يعي جِكَانِي
لقد طُرِدت اليوم
من عرفتي
وصرت ضائعاً بدون اسم
هذا أنا،
وهذه مدينتي!
Verses by Al-Buhturi (9th century) on springtime

Read by Will O’Neal

أُتْقَالُ الرَّبِيعُ الطَّلُقُ يَخْتَالُ ضَاحِكَاًُّ مِنَ الحَسَنِ حَتَّى كَأَنْ يَتَكَلَّمَ
Smiling spring comes to you, prancing and laughing from beauty until it was nearly speaking

وَقْدُ نَبِيَّ الْخُوْزُرُ فِي عَلَّسِ الدُّجَى أَوَايْلُ وَرْدٌ كَنْ بِالْأَمْسِ نُوْمَاً
As the Nowruz alerted, at the darkest hour of the night, the early rosebuds, which yesterday slumbered

يُفْتَقُّهَا بِرَذُ النَّدَى فَكَانَهُ يَبْثُ حَدِيثًا كَانَ قَبْلَ مُكْتَبَمَا
They now blossom by the cold dew, as if it is revealing a long kept untold secret

وَمِنْ شَجْرِ رَدَّ الرَّبِيعُ لِبَاسًةٍ عَلَيْهِ كَما نَشَرَتْ وَشِيَأً مَنْبَأْنَمَا
And from the trees, whose leafs the Spring restored, as if the earth was all adorned in colorful garments

وَقْرٌ نَسِيْمُ الرَّيْحِ حَتَّى خَسِبَتْهُ يَجِيءُ بِأنْفَاسِ الأَحْبَيْنَ نُغَمَٰ
And the breeze was so soft that I thought it brought with it the fresh breaths of the beloved.