Nancy Nanney  
West Virginia University at Parkersburg

AN EIGHT-WEEK TEACHING MODULE  
on  
“Muslim Women and the Dramatic Arts”

**Narrative Description**

The teaching module entitled “Muslim Women and the Dramatic Arts” is appropriate for a variety of courses in literary and theatre studies, as well as interdisciplinary courses bridging, for example, political science and culture, sociology and art, and psychology and religion, depending on how one chooses to foreground the material. In this case, the teaching module is developed for inclusion in an upper division course entitled Topics in Women’s Literature (ENGL 387) which is taught on a rotational basis at West Virginia University at Parkersburg. Each time the course is offered the exact nature of the topic can vary according to the expertise and interests of the instructor. Generally, it features women writers from countries other than the United States and England. The first time I offered the course, I covered modern women writers from various parts of the world; the second time I taught it, I focused on modern literature by Arab/Muslim women writers (see Appendices I and II). In both cases, I included a variety of genres.

For spring semester 2004, I have selected a genre-based topic for the course: “Women and the Dramatic Arts: An International Perspective.” The main emphasis of study is stage drama, but film is also included as one of the performing arts. The eight-week module on “Muslim Women and the Dramatic Arts” will occupy the latter half of the semester.

During the first half of the semester, students will read and discuss plays by authors contained in the course text, *Modern Drama by Women 1880s-1930s: An International Anthology*, edited by Katherine Kelly. This appears to be one of the only drama anthologies devoted to plays by women from various parts of the world (in this case, North America, South America, Europe, and Japan). Some of the writers may be known (like Djuna Barnes); others are “rediscovered.” The anthology is intriguing because it will give students a chance to compare the image and concerns of the New Woman as she emerges on stage at the turn of the last century with the image and issues being faced and dramatized by Muslim women today, including those from Muslim majority as well as Muslim minority countries. The comparative approach should provide students ample opportunity to perceive both contrasts and connections among the varied works as they investigate each artist’s background, vision, and creative technique.

The teaching module, “Muslim Women and the Dramatic Arts,” begins during Week Eight of the course and lasts for the remainder of the semester. During the first introductory session of the module, students learn about the Muslim world in terms of its history as well as the multiple issues Muslims, especially women, face today. Attention is given to the role of women in Muslim society over time and place. As mentioned, the creative artists encountered in the course come from Muslim-majority countries, such as those of the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, and Southeast Asia, as well as countries in which they live as religious minorities, such as the United States. Students will focus, in particular, on the role Muslim women have played in the development of the arts, especially drama and film.

During the next seven weeks, students examine individual creative works. The first to be studied is a dramatic adaptation of *Pillars of Salt* by Jordanian novelist, Fadia Fakir. The adaptation was undertaken by students at the University of Durham in England and endorsed by Fakir prior to performance. Written originally in English, Fakir’s novel traces the life experiences of two Jordanian women: one urban and the other rural, who meet in a mental hospital after suffering nervous breakdowns. The depiction of these women’s pasts unveils the troubled history of Jordan from a female perspective. Fadia Fakir holds a Ph.D in Creative Writing from the University of East Anglia in England. She currently teaches in the Institute for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies at Durham University, where she specializes in: Arab women’s studies; gender, democracy and Islam; Arab women writers; and gender and creative writing.

Next, journeying to North Africa, the class will read a filmscript by Moroccan writer Farida Benlyazid entitled “The Gate of Heaven Is Open” and view *The Silences of the Palace*, a full-length art film directed by Tunisian filmmaker Moufida Tlatli. During the discussion portion of the lesson, students will consider the relative merits of drama and film in terms of each art form’s ability to convey the images and concerns of women.

The fourth work to be studied is a monodrama, *Penganggur Terhormat (The Respectful Unemployed Person*, 1996), by Malaysian author Dina Zaman. The play is a frank expression of youthful female frustration: a recent graduate has difficulty securing a position in corporate Malaysia because she wears a headscarf. The piece will be performed as a staged reading for the students. Dina holds an M.A. in Creative Writing from the University of Minnesota.

The fifth work is a play by Ratna Sarumpaet, entitled \_Marsinah: A Song from the Underworld \_(1997). Sarumpaet is an Indonesian author who suffered imprisonment at the tail end of the Suharto regime for her participation in a pro-democracy meeting in north Jakarta. Circulated electronically through the internet during the time of her incarceration (1998), the play had successive international readings prior to her release, the first being held in Spearfish, South Dakota. Sarumpaet features strong female figures in her drama that challenge social injustice.

The next two plays to be read and discussed are by Pakistani-American playwright Bina Sharif. A former medical student, Sharif decided that her authentic passion was the theatre and so, twenty years ago, she bravely moved to New York City where she writes, directs and acts. *My Ancestor’s House* explores the dilemmas of South Asian women daring to be different from the cultural norms; *Democracy in Islam* focuses on the provocative decisions made by an unconventional Muslim-American family in the aftermath of September 11th. The final play, *Barriers* (2002), by Rehana Mirza presents a complex multi-cultural Muslim-American family, seeking to find their way through the personal loss and subsequent harassment they face as a result of 9/11. Barriers was performed from September 4-14, 2003 at the Noh Space/Theatre Yugen in San Francisco by the Asian American Theater Company (founded in 1973) and Desipina & Company (founded by two sisters, Rehana Mirza and Rohi Mirza, in 2002). As stated in the theatre program,

The mission of the Asian American Theatre Company (AATC) is to inspire, nurture and promote Asian and Pacific American voices. We are guided by the vision of diverse APA voices challenging and transforming our American stage. . . .

. . . Despina is a South Asian and Asian Pacific American theatre and film arts company firmly dedicated to promoting cross-pollinations of artistic, political, and cultural dialogues.

Rehana Mirza comes from a South Asian and Filipina background.

As students read the dramas and watch the videos, they will select and discuss in class what they consider the most striking sections of these artistic works. The class will then reach a consensus regarding which excerpts to include in the end-of-semester Reader’s Theatre project. These favored excerpts will be woven into a cohesive Reader’s Theatre piece that the students will perform together during the last class session. This final presentation will include not only dramatic readings from the plays but also video clips incorporated into the production. Thus, the class as a whole will contribute to the completed script and performance piece, deciding themselves (with guidance from the instructor) how best to organize the event.

The Reader’s Theatre program will be presented to an audience of the student’s own choosing, which could include other students, faculty, staff, friends, relatives, members of the community-at-large, etc. If possible, the event will be videotaped for future viewings. Each student will be asked to write an in-depth essay that reflects his/her experience in developing the performance. The reflective essay (15 points) will constitute a substantial portion of their individual grade for the project and is due at the beginning of the final exam period. Students will also be graded on individual assignments related to organizing the production (for a total of 25 points).

COURSE SYLLABUS  
(Revised)  
ENGL 387: Topics in Women’s Literature  
Time: Thursday, 7:00-9:45 p.m.  
Location: WVU-Parkersburg, Main Campus  
Spring Semester 2004

Instructor: Dr. Nancy Nanney  
Consulation hours: Monday-Friday, 11:00 a.m. – 12 noon; before or after class; or by appointment  
Office: Room 1214; Office phone: (304) 424-8361  
Prerequisites: ENGL 101 and ENGL 102 and 48 credit hours or instructor’s consent

**Description**: The syllabus for this course varies per term. The selected topic for spring semester 2004 is “Women and the Dramatic Arts: An International Perspective.” Week One is a general introduction to the subject as a whole. During the first half of the semester, students will study plays by female writers contained in *Modern Drama by Women 1880s – 1930s: An International Anthology*, edited by Katherine Kelly. The second half of the course will focus on recent plays and films by Muslim women from various parts of the world. The shift in time, place, and culture should provide a rich opportunity for a comparative study of female images and issues.

Throughout the course, students will piece together selected excerpts from the plays and films discussed in class, incorporating these selections into a joint script/film collage for an original end-of-semester Reader’s Theatre performance. Prior to the performance, they will rehearse the reading, adding representative set pieces, props, costumes, music, sound effects, lighting, and video projections to enhance their presentation. During the last week of the course, they will present their project to an audience of their own choosing.

**Course objectives**

* 1. To introduce students to plays and films by international female artists from a variety of cultural backgrounds
* 2. To introduce students (during the first half of the course) to rediscovered works by international female playwrights who contributed to the development of modern theatre
* 3. To introduce students (during the second half of the course) to playwrights and filmmakers from the Muslim world who create in a variety of languages, including English
* 4. To provide students the opportunity to compare the image and concerns of the New Woman as she emerged on the modern stage from the 1880s – 1930s with dramatizations of and by Muslim women today
* 5. To provide students an opportunity to see a live stage production of a play by an international female playwright
* 6. To provide students the opportunity to see films by international female filmmakers
* 7. To explore and compare the cultural, social, and political issues and concerns that have been central to international women playwrights
* 8. To understand better the cultural, social, and political environment in which female writers, engaged with drama and film, have developed their creative output

**Course texts**

Kelly, Katherine, ed. *Modern Drama by Women 1880s – 1930s: An International Anthology*. New York: Routledge Press, 1996.

Other selected readings will be placed on reserve in the library

**Instructional procedures**

Lectures, group discussion, cooperative learning approaches, creative activities, individual writing assignments, video viewing, guest speaker, utilization of internet resources, attendance at a play

**The evaluation of student work**

Four essays ….................................................12 points each (48 points total)

Preparation work for the  
Reader’s Theatre presentation…............................25 points

Post-performance commentary…...........................15 points

Final Exam…..................................................12 points

Total….....100 points

Each student’s final grade for the course will be based on his/her total number of points

90 -100 = A  
80 – 89 = B  
70 – 79 = C  
60 – 69 = D  
Below 60 = F

Note: All work is due at the beginning of class on the announced due date. Late assignments will only be accepted if notice is given to the instructor beforehand; late assignments will receive a reduced grade. Also, there are no make-up tests unless arrangements have been made with the instructor prior to the exam date.

**Student responsibilities**

* 1. Students are responsible for being prepared for class. If you are absent, you are responsible for obtaining the information you missed, including the assignment for the next class. You are expected to complete work due on schedule, including that which is due upon your return.
* 2. Attendance is required and students are expected to arrive in class on time. A student who misses more than the number of class sessions meeting in one week is considered to be excessively absent. Thus, a student with two or more absences should consider withdrawing or risk a poor or failing grade in the course. Students who are excessively absent and do not withdraw will have their final grade reduced according to their total number of absences: each excessive absence will incur a grade reduction of 3 points. Since this course meets once a week, students who miss a substantial portion of any session will be marked absent accordingly. For example, a student who does not return to class after our 10-minute break will lose 1½ points from his/her final grade. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of class and after the break.
* 3. Students are responsible for maintaining a folder of all graded materials. This ensures that you know your ongoing standing in the course. Should you wish to consult with me later regarding your grade, you will need to bring your folder with you.
* 4. Students are responsible for knowing significant dates in the semester calendar (like the last day to withdraw from the class and the final exam date and time). This information is printed in the semester schedule of classes and in the college catalogue.
* 5. You are responsible for meeting with me to discuss any difficulties you are experiencing in the course. Please do so promptly so that problems can be addressed as soon as possible. My office is located in the humanities division office, room 1214, at the main WVU-P campus. My office hours there are: Monday through Friday from 11:00 a.m. to 12 noon at the main campus, before or after class in the evening, or by appointment. You may reach me by phone at: (304) 424-8361. If I am not in when you call, please leave a message with your name and phone number, and I will try to return your call as soon as possible.

**Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is the undocumented use of words/ideas that are not your own. Words and ideas belong to the person who initially composes/formulates them. To use this material without acknowledging the source is unethical and constitutes a serious offense in the academic community. If you use even a few words from a source, you must put those words in quotation marks and indicate the source through parenthetical documentation. The words and punctuation in quotations must be exactly as they appear in the original piece of writing. If you paraphrase or summarize (put into your own words) any description or idea taken from a piece of writing or other source, you must be sure that the vocabulary and sentence structure are substantially different from that in the original. Even though you have presented the original source in your own words, you must still indicate through parenthetical documentation this original source. The only exception is in the case of generally known facts or common knowledge. If you have any doubt as to whether a fact or idea is generally known, consult your instructor before submitting your paper. Any student who plagiarizes, whether from published material or from unpublished material (such as the writing of another student) will fail this course. The student may also be subject to suspension or expulsion from the university.

**Commitment to social justice**

West Virginia University at Parkersburg is committed to social justice. I concur with this commitment and expect to maintain a positive learning environment based on open communication, mutual respect, and non-discrimination. Our university does not discriminate on the basis of gender, age, disability, veteran status, religion, sexual orientation, ethnic background, or national origin. Any suggestions about how to further such a positive and open environment in this class will be appreciated and given serious consideration.

**Availability of counseling and disability services**

Please be aware that counseling and disability services are available for students at WVUP. If you think that you will need any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me of your concerns and make appropriate arrangements with Disability Services (424-8378).

I look forward to exploring the fascinating subject of international women playwrights and filmmakers with you this semester.

**READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS**

Week One (January 15, 2004) – General Overview of the Course

Introduction to the course  
Assessment/grading scheme  
Introduction to the major topic: “Women and the Dramatic Arts: An International Perspective”

When, why and how have women been excluded from performance?  
When, why and how have women been involved with the dramatic arts?  
What can we learn through a comparison of early modern plays by women writers and contemporary plays by Muslim female playwrights? In what ways are the images and issues of women similar or different across time and place? How might the New Woman emerging at the turn of the last century speak to Muslim women of the new millennium?

Class activity: View and discuss the video, *A Jury of Her Peers*, an adaptation of a short story of the same title by Susan Glaspell which is based on her play, Trifles (1916) .

View independently: Jane Camion’s *The Piano*, which is set in 19 th-century New Zealand. We will discuss the film in class on February 19, 2004. The video is available in the media center.

Week Two (January 22, 2004)—The 1880s – 1890s

Assignment due:

Read: Anne Charlotte Leffler Edgren’s *True Women* (France) and Rachilde (Marguerite Eymery)’s *The Crystal Spider* (Sweden)

Week Three (January 29, 2004) – 1901

Assignment due:

Read: Amelia Rosselli’s *Her Soul* (Italy) and Zinaida Gippius’s *Sacred Blood* (Russia)

Week Four (February 5, 2004) – 1907-1908

Assignment due:

Essay #1 (related to the assigned readings)

Read: Elizabeth Robins’s *Votes for Women* (England) and Elsa Bernstein (Ernst Rosmer)’s *Maria Arndt* (Germany)

Week Five (February 12, 2004) – The 1910s

Assignment due:

Read: Hasegawa Shigure’s *Wavering Traces* (Japan) and Marie Leneru’s *Woman Triumphant* (France)

Week Six (February 19, 2004) – The 1920s

Assignment due:

Read: Djuna Barnes’ *The Dove* (U.S.A.) and Alfonsina Storni’s *The Master of the World* (Argentina)

We will also discuss Jane Camion’s film, *The Piano* (New Zealand)

Week Seven (February 26, 2004)—The late 1920s – 1930s

Assignment due:

Essay #2 (related to assigned readings/film)

Read: Marita Bonner’s *The Purple Flower* (U.S.A.) and Hella Wuolijoki’s *Hulda Juurakko* (Finland)

Week Eight (March 4, 2004) – Introduction to “Muslim Women and the Dramatic Arts”

Assignment due:

Read *Islam: Origins, Practices, Holy Texts, Sacred Persons, Sacred Places* by Matthew S. Gordon

Read “Gender and Religion in the Middle East and South Asia: Women’s Voices Rising” by Mary Elaine Hegland.

Outline of Content

Overview of Islam

History  
Contemporary times

Women and Islam

History  
Contemporary times

Muslim women and the arts

Muslim women and drama/film

Outline of Methods

Lecture, guest speaker, class discussion

Video viewing: *Muslims* (produced by The Independent Fund for Frontline)

Week Nine (March 11, 2004) – Dramatizing Jordanian Women

Assignment due:

Read “Women’s Rights in the Arab World” by Ramla Khalidi and Judith Tucker

Read “Gender and Citzenship in Jordan” by Abla Amawi

Read the dramatized adaptation of Fadia Fakir’s *Pillars of Salt*

Outline of Content

Overview of Jordan (history, society, politics, culture)

Overview of modern Jordanian drama

Fadia Fakir

*Pillars of Salt* as both novel and adapted playscript

Outline of Methods

Lecture, group discussion

Group reading from the dramatized adaptation of *Pillars of Salt*

Optional/additional reading

*Pillars of Salt* (the novel) by Fadia Fakir

Week Ten (March 18, 2004)

Spring Recess (no class)

Week Eleven (March 25, 2004) – Moroccan and Tunisian Women and the Art of Filmmaking

Assignment due:

Read “Becoming a Citizen: Lineage Versus Individual in Tunisia and Morocco” by Mounira M. Charrad.

Read Farida Benlyazid’s “The Gate of Heaven Is Open” in *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing*

Outline of Content

Overview of Morocco (history, society, politics, culture)

Overview of Moroccan film

Farida Benlyazid

“The Gate of Heaven Is Open”

Outline of Methods

Lecture, class discussion

Outline of Content

Overview of Tunisia (history, society, politics, culture)

Overview of Tunisian filmmaking

*The Silences of the Palace* directed by Moufida Tlatli

Outline of Methods

Lecture, video viewing ( The Silences of the Palace), class discussion

Week Twelve (April 1, 2004) – Islam and the Female Playwright in Malaysia

Assignment due:

Essay #3 (on a subject related to Muslim women and the dramatic arts in the Middle East/North Africa)

Read “Part IV: Religion and Law” by Elizabeth Warnock Fernea

Read Dina Zaman’s Penganggur Terhormat

Outline of Content

Overview of Malaysia (history, society, politics, culture)

Overview of modern Malaysian drama

Dina Zaman

Penganggur Terhormat (The Respectful Unemployed Person, a monodrama)

Outline of Methods

Lecture, class discussion

Performance of Penganggur Terhormat

Optional/additional readings

Nur Nina Zuhra (Nancy Nanney). *An Analysis of Modern Malay Drama*. Shah Alam, Malaysia: Biroteks, MARA Institute of Technoloby, 1992.

Solehah Ishak and Nur Nina Zuhra (Nancy Nanney). “Malaysia.” *World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre*. Ed. Don Rubin. Toronto: York University Press, 1995. 282-306.

Week Thirteen (April 8, 2004) – Muslim Women Playwrights in Indonesia

Assignment due: Read Ratna Sarumpaet’s *Marsinah: A Song from the Underworld*

Outline of Content

Overview of Indonesia (history, society, politics, culture)

Overview of modern Indonesian drama

Ratna Sarumpaet

*Marsinah: A Song from the Underworld*

Outline of Methods

Lecture, group discussion

Group reading of *Marsinah: A Song from the Underworld*

Week Fourteen (April 15, 2004) – Muslim Women Playwrights in the United States

Assignment due:

Read Bina Sharif’s *My Ancestor’s House and Democracy in Islam*

Outline of Content

Overview of South Asian Immigration to the United States

Overview of modern South Asian drama in the United States

Bina Sharif

My Ancestor’s House  
Democracy in Islam

Outline of Methods

Lecture, group discussion

Week Fifteen (April 22, 2004) – Muslim Women Playwrights in the United States (cont.)

Assignment due: Read *Barriers* by Rehana Mirza

Outline of Content

Rehana Mirza

\_Barriers \_

Rehearse Reader’s Theatre project

Outline of Methods

Lecture, group discussion, group rehearsal

Week Sixteen (April 29, 2004) – Final Project

Assignment due:

Essay #4 (on a subject related to Muslim women and the dramatic arts in Southeast Asia and/or America)

Outline of Content

Group project: Reader’s Theatre presentation of “Women and the Dramatic Arts”

Outline of Methods

Performance, post-performance discussion

Week Seventeen (May 6, 2004)

Final exam (7:00 – 9:00 p.m.)

**Kindly note**:

All written assignments must be typed and double-spaced. Any sources referred to in your assignments should be documented according to the MLA format. This format is provided in your grammar handbook and on our college library website.

The above list of readings and assignments is subject to change. Please keep informed of any changes announced during regular class sessions. If you miss a class, be sure to find out from a classmate what you missed and whether there has been a change in the readings and assignments.

**Internet Teaching Resources**

[http://www.kakiseni.com](http://www.kakiseni.com/)   
Malaysian theatre update

<http://www.theatrelibrary.org/sibmas/sibmas.html>   
SIMBAS, The International Association of Libraries and Museums of the Performing Arts, with links to Indonesia, Jordan, Malaysia, Morocco, Tunisia, the United States, etc.

[http://www.salaamtheatre.org](http://www.salaamtheatre.org/)   
South Asian League of Artists in America

[http://www.internationalwomenplaywrights.org](http://www.internationalwomenplaywrights.org/)   
International Centre for Women Playwrights

[http://www.desipina.org](http://www.desipina.org/)   
Website for Desipina & Company, a South Asian and Asian Pacific American theatre and film arts company

**Bibliography**

Ahmed, Leila. *Women and Gender in Islam*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992.

Amawi, Abla. “Gender and Citizenship in Jordan.” *Gender and Citizenship in the Middle East*. Ed. Suad Joseph. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2000. 158-184.

Benlyazid, Farida. “The Gate of Heaven Is Open.” *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing*. Ed. Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.

Charrad, Mounira M. “Becoming a Citizen: Lineage Versus Individual in Tunisia and Morocco.” *Gender and Citizenship in the Middle East*. Ed. Suad Joseph. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2000. 70-87.

Fakir, Fadia. *Pillars of Salt*. London: Quartet Books, 1996.

Fakir, Fadia. *Pillars of Salt* [the adapted playscript].

Fernea, Elizabeth Warnock, ed. “Part IV: Religion and Law.” *In Women and the Family in the Middle East: New Voices of Change*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985. 215-223.

Fernea, Elizabeth Warnock, ed. “Morocco” [Chapter Two]. *In Search of Islamic Feminism: One Woman’s Global Journey*. New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1998. 62-143.

Gordon, Matthew S. *Islam: Origins, Practices, Holy Texts, Sacred Persons, Sacred Places*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Hegland, Mary Elaine. “Gender and Religion in the Middle East and South Asia: Women’s Voices Rising” [Chapter 5]. *Social History of Women and Gender in the Modern Middle East*. Ed. Margaret L. Meriwether and Judith E. Tucker. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1999. 177-212.

Kelly, Katherine, ed. *Modern Drama by Women 1880s – 1930s: An International Anthology*. New York: Routledge Press, 1996.

Khalidi, Ramla and Judith Tucker. “Women’s Rights in the Arab World.” *Arab Women: Between Defiance and Restraint*. Ed. Suha Sabbagh. New York: Olive Branch Press, 1996. 9-18.

Mirza, Rehana. *Barriers*. 2002. [manuscript copy pending]

Nor Faridah Abdul Manaf and Mohammad A. Quayum. “Dina Zaman.” *Colonial to Global: Malaysian Women’s Writing in English, 1940s – 1990s*. Kuala Lumpur: International Islamic University Malaysia, 2001. 305 – 311 and 345 – 365.

Ratna Sarumpaet. *Marsinah: A Song From the Underworld*. 1998. [electronic copy]

Sharif, Bina. *Democracy in Islam*. 2003 [manuscript copy].

*\_\_\_\_*. “My Ancestor’s House.” Contemporary Plays by Women of Color. Ed. Kathy A. Perkins and Roberta Uno. New York: Routledge, 1996. 262-279.

Zaman, Dina. *Penganggur Terhormat (The Respectful Unemployed Person)*. 1996. [manuscript copy].

**Filmography**

For the first half of the course:

*A Jury of Her Peers* – a film adaptation of Susan Glaspell’s short story of the  
same title which is based on her earlier play, Trifles (1916)  
The *Piano* directed and written by Jane Campion, set in 19 th-century New Zealand

For the teaching module on “Muslim Women and the Dramatic Arts”:

Muslims produced by The Independent Fund for Frontline  
The Silences of the Palace directed by Moufida Tlatli

APPENDIX I

COURSE SYLLABUS  
ENGL 387—Topics in Women’s Literature  
Time: Thursday, 7:00-9:45 p.m.  
Location: Jackson County Center, Ripley, WV  
Fall Semester 2002

Instructor : Dr. Nancy Nanney  
Consulation hours: Monday-Friday, 9:30-10:30 a.m. (main campus); before or after class at Ripley; or by appointment  
Office: Room 1214, main campus; Office phone: (304) 424-8361  
Prerequisites: ENGL 101 and ENGL 102 and 48 credit hours or instructor’s consent

Description : The selected topic for this semester is “Modern Literature by Women Writers of the Arab/Muslim World.” This timely course will include discussion of works by female Arab authors, not all of whom are Muslim, as well as works by female Muslim authors who come from a variety of countries and cultural backgrounds. We will read literature by prominent female authors, such as Ahdaf Soueif (from Egypt), Fadia Fakir (from Jordan), Fatima Mernissi (from Morocco), and Hanan al-Shaykh (from Lebanon), as well as works by emerging writers from various parts of the world. The course will cover translated works as well as literature composed originally in English. Also, a variety of genres will be included: poetry, plays, essays, memoirs, and fiction.

**Course objectives**

1. To introduce students to literature by Arab/Muslim women authors of the modern era: from the beginning of the 20 th century through to the present, with a special focus on contemporary authors

2. To introduce students to women authors from the Arab/Muslim world who write originally in Arabic as well as in other languages, including English

3. To examine a spectrum of genres which demonstrate the artistic talent of Arab/Muslim women writers

4. To familiarize students with prominent female authors from the Arab/Muslim world as well as emerging or “rediscovered” authors

5. To explore the cultural, social, and political issues and concerns that have been central to women writers of Arab/Muslim background

6. To understand better the cultural, social, and political environment in which Arab/Muslim women writers have developed their creative output

7. To provide an opportunity for students to meet with a talented female author of Arab and/or Muslim background

8. To provide students an opportunity to contact a cultural scholar/critic from the Arab/Muslim world via e-mail as a means of broadening the base of class discussion

9. To learn about Arab/Muslim culture in our vicinity, e.g., through organizing a class field trip

**Course texts**

Badran, Margot and Miriam Cooke. *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing*. (anthology, 1990)

Fakir, Fadia. *Pillars of Salt*. (novel, 1997)

Mernissi, Fatima. *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood* (memoir, 1994)

Soueif, Ahdaf. *The Map of Love*. (novel, 1999)

**Instructional procedures**

Lectures, group discussion/creative activities, cooperative learning approaches, individual writing assignments, video programs, guest speaker, e-mail correspondence with cultural scholars/critics from the Arab/Muslim world, utilization of internet resources, a class field trip.

**The evaluation of student work**

Three essays…......................................15 points each (45 points total)

Midterm Exam…................................... 18 points

Class presentation….............................. 25 points

Final Exam….......................................12 points

Total…......100 points

Each student’s final grade for the course will be based on his/her total number of points

90 -100 = A  
80 – 89 = B  
70 – 79 = C  
60 – 69 = D  
Below 60 = F

Note: All work is due at the beginning of class on the announced due date. Late assignments will only be accepted if notice is given to the instructor beforehand; late assignments will receive a reduced grade. Also, there are no make-up tests unless arrangements have been made with the instructor prior to the exam date.

Student responsibilities

1. Students are responsible for being prepared for class. If you are absent, you are responsible for obtaining the information you missed, including the assignment for the next class. You are expected to complete work due on schedule, including that which is due upon your return.

2. Attendance is required and students are expected to arrive in class on time. A student who misses more than the number of class sessions meeting in one week is considered to be excessively absent. Thus, a student with two or more absences should consider withdrawing or risk a poor or failing grade in the course. Students who are excessively absent and do not withdraw will have their final grade reduced according to their total number of absences: each excessive absence will incur a grade reduction of 3 points. Since this course meets once a week, students who miss a substantial portion of any session will be marked absent accordingly. For example, a student who does not return to class after our 10-minute break will lose 1.5 points from his/her final grade. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of class and after the break.

3. Students are responsible for maintaining a folder of all graded materials. This ensures that you know your ongoing standing in the course. Should you wish to consult with me later regarding your grade, you will need to bring your folder with you.

4. Students are responsible for knowing significant dates in the semester calendar (like the last day to withdraw from the class and the final exam date and time). This information is printed in the semester schedule of classes and in the college catalogue.

5. You are responsible for meeting with me to discuss any difficulties you are experiencing in the course. Please do so promptly so that problems can be addressed as soon as possible. My office is located in the humanities division office, room 1214, at the main WVU-P campus. My office hours there are: Monday through Friday from 9:30 to 10:30 a.m. at the main campus, one hour before class at JCC, Ripley, or by appointment. I will also be glad to speak with students at Ripley after class. You may reach me by phone at: (304) 424-8361. If I am not in when you call, please leave a message with your name and phone number, and I will try to return your call as soon as possible.

**Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is the undocumented use of words/ideas that are not your own. Words and ideas belong to the person who initially composes/formulates them. To use this material without acknowledging the source is unethical and constitutes a serious offense in the academic community. If you use even a few words from a source, you must put those words in quotation marks and indicate the source through parenthetical documentation. The words and punctuation in quotations must be exactly as they appear in the original piece of writing. If you paraphrase or summarize (put into your own words) any description or idea taken from a piece of writing or other source, you must be sure that the vocabulary and sentence structure are substantially different from that in the original. Even though you have presented the original source in your own words, you must still indicate through parenthetical documentation this original source. The only exception is in the case of generally known facts or common knowledge. If you have any doubt as to whether a fact or idea is generally known, consult your instructor before submitting your paper. Any student who plagiarizes, whether from published material or from unpublished material (such as the writing of another student) will fail this course. The student may also be subject to suspension or expulsion from the university.

**Commitment to social justice**

West Virginia University at Parkersburg is committed to social justice. I concur with this commitment and expect to maintain a positive learning environment based on open communication, mutual respect, and non-discrimination. Our university does not discriminate on the basis of gender, age, disability, veteran status, religion, sexual orientation, ethnic background, or national origin. Any suggestions about how to further such a positive and open environment in this class will be appreciated and given serious consideration.

**Availability of counseling and disability services**

Please be aware that counseling and disability services are available for students at WVUP. If you think that you will need any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me of your concerns and make appropriate arrangements with Disability Services (424-8378).

I look forward to exploring the modern literature of women writers from the Arab/Muslim world with you this semester.

**APPENDIX II**

READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS  
ENGL 387—Topics in Women’s Literature  
Instructor: Dr. Nancy Nanney  
Fall Semester 2002 – Jackson County Center, Ripley, WV

Week One

August 22, 2002

Introduction to the course  
Assessment/grading scheme  
Introduction to the Arab/Muslim world  
Introduction to issues confronting women in the modern Arab/Muslim world

Week Two

August 29, 2002

Assignment due—Read the following selections from the section on “Awareness” in *Opening the Gates* (Note: Be sure to read the biographical description which introduces each author. Also, please note that there is a glossary of terms at the end of the book on pages 405-407.):

“Introduction” (This is the editors’ introduction to the book.)  
Dalila al-Zaituni’s, “My Life” (on page 1)  
Etel Adnan’s “Growing Up to Be a Woman Writer in Lebanon”   
Warda al-Yaziji’s “Warda al-Turk”   
Nadia Tueni’s “Who Are You, Claire Gebeyli?”   
Fadwa Tuqan’s “Difficult Journey—Mountainous Journey”   
Huda Shaarawi’s “Farewell, Betrothal, Wedding”

In class: Discussion of the assigned readings

Week Three

September 5, 2002

Assignment due: Continue reading selections from the section on “Awareness” in *Opening the Gates*:

Shirley Saad’s “Amina”   
Ulfa Idelbi’s “Seventy Years Later”   
Zainaba’s “Lecture on Clitoridectomy to the Midwives of Touil”   
Alifa Rifaat’s “Who’ll Be the Man?” and “Honour”   
Khairiya Saqqaf’s “I Saw Her and That’s Enough” and “In a Contemporary House”

In class: Discussion of the assigned readings

Week Four

September 12, 2002

Assignment due: Continue reading selections from the section on “Awareness” in *Opening the Gates*:

Wadida Wassef’s “Hasan’s Wives”   
Nadia Guendouz’ “People”   
Marie-Aimee Helie-Lucas’ “Women, Nationalism and Religion in the Algerian Struggle”   
Daisy al-Amir’s “The Eyes in the Mirror”   
Noha Radwan’s “The Silk Bands”

In class: Discussion of the assigned readings

Week Five

September 19, 2002

Assignments due:

1. Write a 3-4 page typed essay (double-spaced) in which you discuss what “awareness” means in the context of Arab feminist writing. In your essay, refer to at least 3 works from the section on “Awareness” in *Opening the Gates* to support your points.

2. Read Fatima Mernissi’s *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood*

In class: Discussion of Mernissi’s memoir

Week Six

September 26, 2002

Assignment due: Read selections from the section on “Rejection” in *Opening the Gates*:

Nadia Sururi’s “Female Contractions” (p. 123)  
Aisha al-Taimuriya’s “Introduction to The Results of Circumstances in Words and Deeds”   
Bahithat al-Badiya’s “Bad Deeds of Men: Injustice”   
Ghada Samman’s “Our Constitution—We the Liberated Women”   
Emily Nasrallah’s “September Birds”   
Hanan al-Shaikh’s “A Girl Called Apple”

In class: Discussion of the assigned readings

Week Seven

October 3, 2002

Assignment due: Continue reading selections from the section on “Rejection” in *Opening the Gates*:

Ihsan Assal’s “The House of Obedience”   
Evelyne Accad’s “The Excised”

In class:

Discussion of the assigned readings  
Midterm examination (open book), 8:30-9:45 p.m.

Week Eight

October 10, 2002

Assignment due: Continue reading selections from the section on “Rejection” in *Opening the Gates*:

Andree Chedid’s “House of Arrest”   
May Muzaffar’s “Personal Papers”   
Fadhma Amrouche’s “My Mother”   
Samar Attar’s “Rima”   
Nawal al-Saadawi’s “Eyes”

In class: Discussion of the assigned readings

Week Nine

October 17, 2002

Assignments due:

1. Write a 3-4 page typed essay (double-spaced) in which you explain how the concept of rejection applies to writings by Arab feminist authors. In your essay, refer to at least 3 works from the section on “Rejection” in *Opening the Gates* to support your main ideas.

2. Read Fadia Fakir’s *Pillar of Salt*

In class: Discussion of Fakir’s novel

Week Ten

October 24, 2002

Assignment due: Read selections from the section on “Activism” in *Opening the Gates*:

Fawziya Abu Khalid’s “A Pearl” (p. 213)  
Hind Nawfal’s “The Dawn of the Arabic Women’s Press”   
Zainab Fawwaz’ “Fair and Equal Treatment”   
Bahithat al-Badiya’s “A Lecture in the Club of the Umma Party”   
May Ziyada’s “Warda al-Yaziji”   
Qut al-Qulub’s “The Elopement and the Impossible Joy”

In class: Discussion of the above readings

Week Eleven

October 31, 2002

Assignment due: Continue reading selections from the section on “Activism” in *Opening the Gates* :

Nabawiya Musa’s “The Effects of Books and Novels on Morals” and “The Differences Between Men and Women”   
Nazira Zain al-Din’s “Unveiling and Veiling” and “The Young Woman and the Shaikhs”   
Zoubeida Bittari’s “The Voice of Happiness”   
Farida Benlyazid’s “The Gate of Heaven Is Open”   
Nuha Samara’s “Two Faces, One Woman”

In class: Discussion of the assigned readings

Week Twelve

November 7, 2002

Assignment due: Continue reading selections from the section on “Activism” in *Opening the Gates* :

Fatimah Mernissi’s “Who’s Cleverer, Man or Woman”   
Chaibia’s “My Life”   
Sufi Abdallah’s “Eight Eyes”   
Huda Shaarawi’s “Pan-Arab Feminism”   
Inji Aflatun’s “We Egyptian Women”

In class: Discussion of the assigned readings

Week Thirteen

November 14, 2002

Assignment due: Continue reading selections from the section on “Activism” in *Opening the Gates*:

Duriya Shafiq’s “Islam and the Constitutional Rights of Women”   
Amina Said’s “Feast of Unveiling” and “Why, Reverend Shaikh”   
Amatalrauf al-Sharki’s “An Unveiled Voice”   
Assia Djebar’s “Introduction to Nawal al-Saadawi’s “Ferdaous”   
Nawal al-Saadawi’s “Reflections of a Feminist”

In class: Discussion of the assigned readings

Week Fourteen

November 21, 2002

Assignments due:

1. Write a 3-4 page essay (double-spaced) in which you discuss how writing can be a form of activism for Arab feminist authors. In your essay, refer to at least 3 works from the section on “Activism” in *Opening the Gates*.

2. Read Ahdaf Soueif’s *Map of Love*

In class: Discussion of Soueif’s novel

Week Fifteen

November 28, 2002

Thanksgiving recess (no class)

Week Sixteen

December 5, 2002

Class presentations and review

Week Seventeen

December 12, 2002

Final examination (open book), 7:00-9:00 p.m.

**Kindly note**:

All written assignments must be typed and double-spaced. Any sources referred to in your assignments should be documented according to the MLA format. This format is provided on the internet (search under “Modern Language Association”).

This list of readings and assignments is subject to change. Please keep informed of any changes announced during regular class sessions. If you miss a class, be sure to find out from a classmate what you missed and whether there has been a change in the readings and assignments.