“INTEGRATING THE ISLAMIC NOVEL”

TEACHING MODULE/UNIT

Fall 2003   
William E. Mallory   
Department of English   
West Virginia Wesleyan College   
Buckhannon , WV 26201

LESSON PLANS

for

Leila Abouzeid’s Year of the Elephant

The basic GOAL of this 3-5 day unit is to integrate a North African Islamic novel, specifically Leila Abouzeid’s Moroccan novel—Year of the Elephant, into an African literature/culture course that has previously focused on sub-Saharan African literatures.

**UNIT OBJECTIVES**: Students will be able to perform the following tasks:

* to identify and recognize the predominantly Muslim countries of North Africa;
* to identify the main characters in the text and trace their character development;
* to list and define unusual terms found in the text;
* to identify the main elements of plot in the novel;
* to examine the basic vignettes/stories within the text;
* to compare character/plot development with sub-Saharan novels;
* to identify main themes in Abouzeid’s novel;
* to compare themes from Abouzeid’s novel with those from earlier texts;
* to identify the historical situation in Abouzeid’s novel;
* to distinguish between the different religious traditions in course texts;
* to identify characteristics of the author’s style of writing in the text;
* to relate the novel’s style to the manner of presentation of African storytelling.

**UNIT ACTIVITIES (Sessions I and II)**: Students will examine a map of Africa to identify predominantly Muslim areas. Students will read Abouzeid’s novel, chapters one and two, and identify the main differences between this text and earlier works covered in the course. Students will analyze the author’s style and place it beside texts examined earlier in the term. Small group work will identify unusual terms found in the text and define them from the glossary in the text. Other groups will identify historical names, dates, associations in the text and define them from reference works and/or internet resources.

**UNIT ACTIVITIES (Sessions II and III)**: Students will read chapters three and four. A brief quiz will be used to confirm student work progress in the unit. Class discussion will follow further plot and character development. Small groups will report on additional terms and historical situations found in the novel.

**UNIT ACTIVITIES (Sessions IV and V)**: Students will conclude their reading of the novel. Another brief quiz will evaluate their understanding of the text. One-paragraph written assignments will encourage students to compare their reading experience of Year of the Elephant with Ba’s So Long a Letter in terms of character development, storytelling style, and thematic development. Final class discussions will focus upon the situations of the narrators in both texts and the situations in which they find themselves. Further class participation will examine cultural contrasts with other texts from sub-Saharan Africa.

Finally, evaluation of the experience will be demonstrated in an hour exam on this unit which will ask for definitions of terms from the text and glossary, short explanatory paragraphs reflecting situations in the novel(s), and longer comparative essays that will put the characters, plot, style of this novel beside other texts covered in the syllabus.

NEH Focus Grant Seminar Project

WOMEN IN ISLAM

Narrative Description

The development of this module began with the objective of revising “Introduction to African Literature,” a 200-level literature course, whereby students encountered various literatures from the African continent. Previous semesters’ syllabi were constructed around the principle of introducing students to various literary forms found across the African continent: epics, folk tales, short stories, novels, plays and poems, all accessible in English translation. Previous professional development opportunities and summer seminar experiences in the teaching of African literature (1987 and 1992) led to the creation of this course as one that examined texts primarily from sub-Saharan Africa. After several semester offerings, exploration of various literary forms (similar to a standard introduction to literature course) remained constant, while the experience of encountering texts from different regions of Africa continually grew in importance.

For the “Women in Islam” project, a logical revision of the course syllabus entailed adding texts with themes and concerns from North Africa. While this prospect seemed logical and appropriate, such encounters added significantly greater complexity to the course overall; sub-Saharan Africa itself is incredibly diverse, but encounters with the Islamic world remained fairly minimal in course texts. One major exception was Mariama Ba’s Senegalese novel, So Long a Letter, which provideded a dramatic contrast to earlier West African novels (Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, Oyono’s *Houseboy*, Ngugi’s *Weep Not, Child* and Amadou Ba’s *The Fortunes of Wangrin*) already used in the course to focus upon the effects of Colonialism. So Long a Letter instead examined the post-independence period in Dakar, Senegal, as expressed through the eyes and mind of a Senegalese woman. This text highlighted earlier threads developed in the course, particularly in matters of narrative form with its first-person (“I”) narrator (also utilized in another text, p’Bitek’s *Song of Lawino*), its epistolary technique, and its relationship to the lyrical flow of the African griot in oral performance. Additionally, the fact that this text was written by an African woman, in sharp contrast to numerous texts previously encountered in the course by male authors proved beneficial. (However, several texts used later in the course were from southern Africa and were written by prominent women such as Bessie Head, Nadine Gordimer and Sindiwe Magona.)

Thematically, Ba’s novel followed earlier discussions in the course on such topics as love, death, modernity, independence, and family, and yet it also introduced a new thread into the course: the rights of women within the Islamic tradition. Precisely at this point the course syllabus opened itself, at least thematically, to further encounters with materials from the “Women in Islam” seminar. By introducing a North African novel, an important geographical region of Africa could be added to the course, and the opportunity for thematic interplay with the Islamic elements of So Long a Letter would extend course themes and open up new possibilities for discussion.

The selection of Leila Abouzeid’s *Year of the Elephant* was based upon several factors that made it an appropriate choice for a unit in the course. Summer reading of several North African texts suggested numerous possibilities (some of which are listed in the bibliography), and *Year of the Elephant* offered the most promise as a text to place beside *So Long a Letter* because it included elements of both form and content that related well to Ba’s text: the “I” female narrator, a stylistically distinct flow and rhythm, content covering the period of struggle for independence in Morocco, and a focus on the life of a divorced traditional Islamic woman attempting to understand her situation and negotiate her way after the movement for independence had succeeded.

Placing Leila Abouzeid’s *Year of the Elephant* in the course for a week’s discussion after a week’s discussion of Ba’s *So Long a Letter* seemed appropriate and an excellent opportunity to include materials from the “Women in Islam” seminar experience. Initial class sessions in the unit involved setting Abouzeid’s novel in a geographical and historical setting. Map identification (included in the text), brief oral reports on the period of the independence movement, and identification of terms from the novel’s glossary provided the basic outline. The following class sessions covered the middle section of the text and examined individual episodes and flashbacks that centered on the movement towards independence and the narrator’s role in this struggle. Final class sessions focused on the two concluding chapters of the novel and considered matters of form, the flow and style of the narrative as well as the unraveling, oral qualities of the novel. Additionally, several important topics highlighted and concluded the final class sessions: encounters with the West, the role of religion, the narrator’s resolution of her situation, and comparison between the situation of Abouzeid’s narrator and Ba’s narrator.

NEH Focus Grant: “Women in Literature”

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

**PRIMARY TEXTS (NOVELS)**

Abouzeid, Leila. *Year of the Elephant*; A Moroccan Woman’s Journey Toward Independence, and Other Stories. Trans. Barbara Parmenter. Austin: Center for Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, 1989.

Ba, Mariama. *So Long a Letter.* Westport, CT: Heinemann, 1981.

Chraibi, Driss. *Mother Comes of Age*. Trans. Hugh A. Harter. Washington: Three Continents P, 1984.

Conde, Maryse. *Segu*. New York: Viking, 1984.

Djebar, Assia. *Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade*. Westport, CT: Heinemann, 1993.

*A Sister to Scheherazade.* Trans. Dorothy Blair. London: Quartet Books, 1987.

Kane, Cheikh Hamadou. *Ambiguous Adventure*. Trans. Katherine Woods. London: Heinemann, 1963.

Kourouma, Ahmadou. *The Suns of Independence*. Trans. Adrian Adams. London: Heinemann, 1981.

Macgoye, Marjorie Oludhe. *The Present Moment*. New York: Feminist P, 2000.

Rifaat, Alifa. *Distant View of the Minaret and Other Stories*. Westport, CT: Heinemann, 1985.

Saadawi, Nawal El. *Woman at Point Zero*. Zed, 1983.

Salih, Tayeb. *Season of Migration to the North*. Trans. Denys Johnson-Davies.Westport, CT: Heinemann, 1970.

Sow Fall, Aminata. *The Beggar’s Strike or Dregs of Society*. Trans. Dorothy Blair. Harlow: Longman, 1984.

**SECONDARY SOURCES**

Aboul El Fadl, Khaled. *Speaking in God’s Name: Islamic Law, Authority and Women*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2001.

Abu-Lughod, Lila. “Feminist Longings and Postcolonial Conditions.” In *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East.* Princeton: Princeton UP, 1998.

Ahmed, Leila. *Women and Gender in Islam: History Roots of a Modern Debate*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1992.

Badran, Margot and Miriam Cooke, eds. *Opening the Gates: A Century of Arab Feminist Writing*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990.

Donaday, Anne. “Assai Djebar’s Poetics of Subversion.” L’Espirit Createur 33.2 (1993): 107-17.

Fernea, Elizabeth Warnock, ed. *Women and the Family in the Middle East*. Austin: U of Texas P, 1985.

Gordon, Matthew S. *Islam*. New York: Oxford UP, 2002.

Gunner, Elizabeth. *A Handbook for Teaching African Literature*. Second Ed. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1984.

Haddad, Yvonne Yazbeck and John L. Esposito, eds. *Daughters of Abraham*. Tallahassee: U of Florida P, 2001.

*\_\_*, eds. *Islam, Gender and Social Change*. New York: Oxford UP, 1998.

Hay, Margaret Jean, ed. *African Novels in the Classroom*. Boulder: Reinner, 2000.

Keddie, Nikki and Beth Baron, eds. *Women in Middle Eastern History*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1991.

Keddie, Nikki and Lois Beck, eds. *Women in the Muslim World*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1978.

Lazreg, Marnia. “Feminism and Difference: The Perils of Writing as a Woman on Women in Algeria.” *Feminist Studies* 14.1 (Spring 1988): 81-107.

Meriwether, Margaret and Judith E. Tucker, eds. *Social History of Women and Gender in the Modern Middle East*. Westview, 1999.

Mernissi, Fatima. *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Woman’s Rights in Islam*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1991.

Mohanty, Chandra Talpade, Ann Russo and Lourdes Torres, eds. *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1991.

Mortimer, Mildred. *Journeys Through the French African Novel*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1990.

Nashat, Guity and Judith E. Tucker. *Women in the Middle East and North Africa: Restoring Women in History*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1999.

Roded, Ruth, ed. *Women in Islam and the Middle East: A Reader*. London: I.B. Tauris, 1999.

Sonbol, Amira El Azahary. “Questioning Exceptionalism: Shari’a Law.” *Arab Studies Journal* 6.1 (1998): 77-86.

Sonbol, Amira El Azahary, ed. *Women, Family, and Divorce Laws in Islamic History*. Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1996.

Stowasser, Barbara Freyer. *Women in the Qur’an: Traditions, and Interpretation*. New York: Oxford UP, 1994.

Tucker, Judith. “Gender and Islamic History.” *Essays on Global and Comparative History*. Washington, DC: American Historical Association, 1993. 1-37.

Tucker, Judith E., ed. *Arab Women: Old Boundaries, New Frontiers*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993.

Walther, Weibke. “Women in Islamic Law, in the Koran and in Tradition.” *Women in Islam*. Marcus Wiener, 1993. 47-72.

Woodhull, Winifred. *Transfigurations of the Maghreb: Feminism, Decolonization, and Literatures in French*. Minneapolis: U of Minn. P, 1993.

**INTERNET TEACHING RESOURCES**

“Author Shares Story of Struggle for Independence and Non-western feminism at UD.” University of Dayton, 4 September 2001  
<http://www.udayton.edu/>

Hassan, Salah D. “Web Resources on Middle Eastern Cultures.” Culture and Politics: Middle East Report. Summer 2001   
<http://www.merip.org/mer/mer219/culture-web-resources.html>

Moukhlis, Salah. “’A History Postponed’: Women’s Identity and the Postcolonial State in Year of the Elephant: A Moroccan Woman’s Journey toward Independence.” Research in African Literatures 34.3 (2003): 66-83.   
<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/research_in_african_literatures/v034/34.3moukhlis.html>

**FILMOGRAPHY**

[www.arabfilm.com](http://www.arabfilm.com/)

*The Battle of Algiers*. Dir. Gillo Pontecorvo. Guidance Associates, 1988.

*A Female Cabby in Sidi Bel-Abbes*. Dir. Belkacem Hadjadj. First Run Icarus Films, 2000.

*Silences of the Palace*. Dir. Moufida Tlatli. Amorces Diffusion, 1994.

*Still Ready: Three Women from the Moroccan Resistance*. Dir. Hakim Belabbes. Baker, 1998.

*Who They Are, Who They Are Not*. Mystic Film Video, 1991.

*Zinat: One Special Day*. Dir. Ebrahim Mokhtari. First Run Icarus Films, 2000.

—REVISED—

INTRODUCTION TO AFRICAN LITERATURE (ENGL 230.01)

Fall 2003 – MWF 9-9:50am   
William Mallory – English Annex 34 (-8067; 472-6613)   
e-mail: [Mallory\_we@wvwc.edu](mailto:Mallory_we@wvwc.edu)  
Office Hours: TTh 8:30-9:30am; MW 8:30-9am; 3:30-4:30 pm

This course introduces students to a variety of literary forms and texts from several parts of Africa. Course materials have been selected to meet the following objectives:

* To explore several literary genres using specifically African texts;
* To develop critical vocabulary for approaching and understanding works of literature;
* To understand these literary texts within the appropriate historical and cultural contexts from which they come;
* To compare the customs, rituals, and patterns of life in non-western cultures with those of our own culture;
* To confront the universal questions of life and human nature.

**Course Texts**

* Niane, Sundiata
* Achebe, Things Fall Apart
* P’Bitek, Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol
* Ba, So Long a Letter
* Abouzeid, Year of the Elephant
* Larson, Under African Skies (stories assigned throughout the semester)
* Jeyifo, Modern African Drama
* Additional texts and handouts as appropriate

**Course Requirements**:

Students are expected to attend all classes and required activities. More than three absences, excused or unexcused, may adversely affect a student’s grade in the course. Six or more absences may result in failure for the course.

Final grades in the course will be determined as follows: class participation, which includes class discussion, occasional quizzes and possible brief oral reports (20%); two examinations (40%); a final examination (40%). An optional five-page analysis or comparison paper on a topic of your choice (and approved by the instructor) will be due at Fall Break and may be averaged equally into the above formula to help improve your grade if necessary.

The instructor reserves the right to modify the assignment schedule and grading policies to meet the needs of the class.

**Calendar of Assignments**

Be alert: Calendar modifications will occur regularly—always check with the instructor!

8/27 Course Introduction; background for Africa

8/29 Background, plus Haley excerpt from Roots

9/1 Diop, Tales of Amadou Koumba

9/3 Additional tales, from African Skies text (Tutuola, “Sarzan,”)

9/5 Wend Kuune (video)

9/8 Wend Kuune – discussion

9/10 Short stories from African Skies text (Laye)

9/12 Sundiata

9/15 Sundiata (continued)

9/17 Achebe stories from African Skies text

9/19 Caravans of Gold (video)

9/22 Achebe, Things Fall Apart (part 1)

9/24 Achebe, Things Fall Apart (parts 1 and 2)

9/26 Achebe, Things Fall Apart (part 3)

**9/29 FIRST EXAM**

10/1 p’Bitek, Song of Lawino (parts 1 through 7)

10/3 p’Bitek, Song of Lawino (parts 8 through ending)

10/6 Short stories from African Skies text (Ngugi)

10/8 Short stories from African Skies text (Ogot)

**10/10 Recess Day**

10/13 Short stories from African Skies text (Salih, Philombe)

10/15 Short stories from African Skies text (Aidoo, Honwana)

10/17 Ba, So Long a Letter (chapters 1 through 14)

10/20 Ba, So Long a Letter (chapters 15 through 29)

10/22 Ba (continued)

10/24 Short stories from African Skies text (Ousmane, etc.)

10/27 Abouzeid, Year of the Elephant (chapters 1 and 2)

10/29 Abouzeid, Year of the Elephant (chapters 3 through 5)

**10/31 SECOND EXAM**

11/3 Poetry from West Africa

11/5 Poetry (continued)

11/7 Poetry (continued)

11/10 Poetry (continued)

11/12 Jeyfo, Modern African Drama: (Soyinka, Death and the King’s Horseman)

11/14 (continued)

11/17 Modern African Drama: (Aidoo, The Dilemma of a Ghost)

11/19 (continued)

11/21 Modern African Drama: (Fugard, Sizwe Bansi is Dead)

**Fall Break**

12/1 South African short stories in African Skies text (Head, Gordimer, Magona, etc.)

12/3 (continued)

12/5 Course conclusions

**FINAL EXAM DURING FINALS WEEK**

**Previous Syllabus**

INTRODUCTION TO AFRICAN LITERATURE (ENGL 230.01)

Fall 1998 – TTh 1-2:15 pm   
William Mallory – English Annex 34 (-8067; 472-6613)   
e-mail:   
Office Hours: TTh 8:30-9:30am; MW 8:30-9am; 3:30-4:30 pm

This course introduces students to selected African literary works and the cultures from which they come. Toward this end course materials have been designed to meet the following objectives:

* To find a point of access for understanding selected African litereary texts;
* To develop critical vocabulary for approaching works of literature;
* To place the literary texts in appropriate historical and cultural contexts;
* To discover similarities and differences between customs, rituals, mores of a non-western culture and those of our own culture;
* To confront the universal questions of life and human nature.

**Course Texts**

Background materials, stories, and essays as appropriate

Davidson, Caravans of Gold (video)

Achebe, Things Fall Apart

Diop, Tales of Amadou Koumba (excerpts)

Niane, Sundiata

Yeelen (video)

P’Bitek, Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol

Heinemann Book of African Poetry in English , plus works by Senghor

Ba, So Long a Letter

Oyono, Houseboy

Fugard, My Children, My Africa! (performance)

Woza Albert! and Sizwe Bansi is Dead (videos)

Head, A Collector of Treasures

Ngugi, A Grain of Wheat

Sembene, God’s Bits of Wood

**Course Requirements**

Students are expected to attend all classes and required activities. More than three absences, excused or unexcused, may adversely affect a student’s grade in the course. Six or more absences may result in failure for the course.

Final grades in the course will be determined as follows: class participation, occasional quizzes and journal entries (30%), two examinations (40%); a final examination (30%).

The instructor reserves the right to modify the assignment schedule and grading policies to meet the needs of the class.

**Calendar of Assignments**

Be alert: Calendar modifications will occur regularly—always check with the instructor!

9/6 Caravans of Gold (video) plus Achebe, Things Fall Apart , Part One

9/8 Achebe, Things Fall Apart, Parts Two and Three

*Traditional Culture*

9/13 Wend Kuuni (video) and Niane, Sundiata

9/15 Yeelen (video)

9/20 Diop, Tales of Amadou Koumba (excerpts)

9/22 p’Bitek, Song of Lawino

*Confrontations with the Modern World*

9/27 p’Bitek, continued

9/29 Poetry selections from Heinemann anthology

10/4 Poetry (cont.)

**10/6 First Exam**

10/11 Oyono, Houseboy

10/13 Oyono (cont.)

10/18 Woza Albert

Fugard, My Children,My Africa! (performance)

10/20 Sizwe Bansi is Dead

10/25 Ba, So Long a Letter (chapters 1 through 14)

10/27 Ba, So Long a Letter (chapters 15 through 29)

11/1 Head, A Collector of Treasures

11/3 Head, continued

**11/8 Second Exam**

11/10 Ngugi. A Grain of Wheat

11/15 Ngugi, continued

11/17 Ngugi, continued

**Fall Break**

11/29 Sembene, God’s Bits of Wood

12/1 Sembene, continued

12/6 Sembene, continued

12/8 Course Review

**FINAL EXAM DURING FINALS WEEK**