



Rawad Wehbe  
Tuesday and Thursday, 1:45-3:14  
BENN 24

Does “women’s literature” exist? How should this literary category be defined? Why does war create literary space for emerging women voices? How does being Arab shape women’s experience of literary production? Who are the Arab women who drove innovation in literature? And what does translation do to already marginalized voices in the face of global Englishification? In this course, you will study of modern Arabic literary forms in the context of the major political and social changes, which shaped Arab history in the first half of the twentieth century. This iteration of the class will approach modern Arabic literature from the angle of women’s experiences of war. We will begin by exploring the category of “women’s literature” in general and zooming in on its applications in Arabic literature. The aim of the course is to introduce key literary genres of modern Arabic literature: the free verse poem, the prose-poem, drama, the novel, and the short story. Together, we will study each of these emergent genres against the socio-political backdrop that informed it. Our purpose is to place these works in their social and historical context as well as the larger context of modern Arabic literature. The class will also address the politics of translation as a reading and representational lens and its role in shaping this body of literature and creating its image outside Arabic language and culture.

## I. Course Objectives

By the end of the course, you will be able to:

- Identify and comment on the primary literary forms, genres, and motifs that are indigenous to the Arabic language and heritage.
- Summarize trends, movements, debates in the development of Arabic literary history especially pertaining to the category of “women’s literature” and the experience of war.
- Distinguish between fact and matters of debate and ambiguity.
- Read literature in translation critically and cautiously.
- Reference some key theoretical concepts that pertain to intersections in gender, sexuality, and class in literary studies.
- Create an argument in the field of Arabic and/or comparative literary studies and present it through a written or other multi-modal approach.
- Develop reading strategies, practices, and approaches that will nourish you as a lifelong reader.
- Forge a fulfilling relationship to literature that challenges you in productive ways.

## II. Grade Distribution

Attendance: 10%

Participation: 10%

Reflection Notebook: 15%

Discussion Guiding 10%:

Written Responses: 20%

Final Paper: 35%

**Attendance:** Attendance is in-person and mandatory. Arriving five minutes late or more will impact your grade. You must present a valid excuse for absence, submit a Course Action Notice via [Path@Penn](mailto:Path@Penn), and be responsible for the material covered in the session(s) missed. Repeated absence will negatively influence the final grade.

**Participation:** The class will be conducted as a seminar. You are expected to come having read the assigned material and prepared to actively participate in class discussions.

**Notebook Project:** At the beginning of the course, you will be provided with a clean notebook. At the beginning of each session, you will be given an idea, concept, or term related to the content or meta-content of the course on which you will write, illustrate, and/or express your thoughts in a reflective and conscious manner. There is no word limit or expected length for each journal entry. However, I invite you to be genuinely thoughtful and inquisitive in your entries. When the semester is over you will have a complete journal filled with all your brilliant thoughts and ideas.

**Guided Discussion:** For at least one session, you will be responsible for opening and guiding discussion. These are short 10-minute informal presentations in which you summarize key concepts, share ideas of interest, and explain your understanding of the material. At the end, you are also required to pose 2-3 discussion questions to the class. You are welcome to draw on your interests, backgrounds, and other areas of study to make connections and find entry points into the reading material.

**Written Responses:** Five writing assignments that will either be a close reading of a text or an excerpt or a response to one of the critical readings. 500 words, Times New Roman, 11pt, double spaced, shared as attachment on canvas.

**Final Paper:** By **March 2<sup>nd</sup>**, you will submit a brief paragraph describing a topic in which you are interested and why. Additionally, you should identify the foundational approach(es) you plan to use. This portion of the project is graded solely on punctuality. By **April 6<sup>th</sup>**, you will submit a research question and tentative research plan (together approximately one paragraph in length) along with an annotated bibliography of 3 academic sources you plan to use. By **April 20<sup>th</sup>**, you will have met with me in-person (or via zoom) to discuss the project. This portion of the project will be graded on the basis of punctuality, demonstration of research and engagement with the foundational approaches, and specificity of project focus. **The final project is due May 2<sup>nd</sup>** and should be 2000 to 2500 words—for those not doing an essay, you will have to provide a 1500-word written explanation of any audiovisual project you create in addition to the project itself. The final project will be evaluated on the basis of (1) engagement with the concepts and ideas discussed in the course; (2) the self-awareness of methods you employ, be they textual research, ethnography, or other creative methods; (3) demonstration of conversation with class readings and materials; (4) clarity of writing. \*To fulfill the Middle East Studies Minor credit, you must complete a research paper meeting the 15-20 page requirement.

**Content Warning:**

*At times, this course may include readings, media, and discussion around topics such as sexual violence, physical violence, and identity-based discrimination and harassment. I acknowledge that it may be difficult to engage with this content. I will flag especially difficult content proactively and will do my best to make this classroom a space where we can engage bravely, empathetically and thoughtfully with difficult content every week.*

**III. Readings:**

You are required to have print copies of the five novels:

Hanan al-Shaykh, *Story of Zahra*, trans. Peter Ford  
Hoda Barakat, *The Tiller of Waters*, trans. Marilyn Booth  
Basma Abdel Aziz, *The Queue*, trans. Elisabeth Jaquette  
Sonia Nimr, *Thunderbird*, trans. M. Lynx Qualey  
Susan Abulhawa, *Against the Loveless World*

On Canvas, I will provide selections from:

Badran & Cooke, *Opening the Gates: A century of Arab Feminist Writing*  
Iman Mersal, *These Are Not Oranges, My Love*

Ghada Samman, *Arab Women in Love and War*  
 Nathalie Handal, *The Poetry of Arab Women: A Contemporary Anthology*  
 Joumana Haddad, *I Killed Scheherazade: Confessions of an Angry Arab Woman*  
 Ahdaf Soueif, *Cairo: Memoir of a City Transformed and I Think of You: Stories*  
 Nazik al-Malaikah, *Revolt Against the Sun*

#### Readings on Arab Feminist Writing:

Badran & Cooke. *Opening the Gates*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1990.  
*Love and Sexuality in Modern Arabic Literature*. ed. Allen et al., London: Saqi Books, 1995.  
 Fedwa Malti-Douglas. *Woman's Body, Woman's Word*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991.  
*Women in the Middle East: New voices of change*. ed. Elizabeth Fernea, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985.  
 Saddeka Arebi. *Women of Words in Saudi Arabia*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.  
 Golley, Nawar Al-Hassan. "Is Feminism Relevant to Arab Women?" *Women and Power in the Middle East*. ed. Suad Joseph & Susan Slyomovics, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001.  
*Arab Women Writers: an anthology of short stories*. Trans. Dalya Cohen-Mor. Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 2005.  
 Marle Hammond. "Subsuming the Feminine Other" *JAL* 31/1 (2000): 38-58.  
 Michelle Hartman. "Re-reading Women in/to Naguib Mahfouz's Al-Liss wa al-kilāb," *Research in African Literatures* Vol. 28 no. 3 (1997): 5-16.  
 Miriam Cooke. "Men constructed in the mirror of prostitution" in *Naguib Mahfouz: from regional fame to global recognition*, ed. Michael Beard & Adnan Haydar, Syracuse University Press, 1993, pp. 106-125.  
 Marle Hammond. "Formulating the First-Person (f.) in Two stories by Egyptian Authors Latifa Zayyat and May Telmissany" *MIT Electronic Journal of Middle East Studies* (2004): 53-69.  
 El-Sadda, Hoda. *Gender, Nation, and the Arabic Novel*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press: Edinburgh University Press, 2012.  
 Joseph Zaidan. *Arab Women Novelists: The Formative Years and Beyond*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995.

#### Readings on Translation Studies:

Spivak, Gayatri. "The Politics of Translation." *Translations Studies Reader*, 369-387.  
 Ettobi, Mustapha. "Cultural Representation in Literary Translation" *Translators as Mediators/Creators.* *Journal of Arabic Literature* 38.2 (2006): 206-229.  
 Jacquemond, Richard. "Translation and Cultural Hegemony: The Case of French- Arabic Translation." *Rethinking Translation*. Ed. Lawrence Venuti. New York: Routledge, 1992. 139-157.  
 Makdisi. Saree. "Post-Colonial Literature in a Neo-Colonial World: Modern Arabic Literature and the End of Modernity." *Boundary 2* 22.1 (1995): 85-113.

- Mehrez, Samia. "Translation and the Post-Colonial Experience: The Francophone North African Text." *Rethinking Translation*. Ed. Lawrence Venuti. New York: Routledge, 1992. 120- 138.
- Lefevere, Andre. *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Robinson, Douglas. *Who Translates? Translator's Subjectivity Beyond Reason*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001.
- Venuti, Lawrence. *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*. New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Venuti, Lawrence. *Scandals of Translation*. New York: Routledge. 1998.

## CLASS SCHEDULE

1/12

Introduction

1/17

Lefevere, "Pre-write" [ \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ ]  
Allen, "Translating Arabic Fiction" [ \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ ]

### Unit 1

1/19

Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own*, "Intro" [ \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ ]  
Hanan al-Shaykh, *Story of Zahra* (Book I, pp. 1-72)

1/24

Badran & Cooke, *Opening the Gates*, "Intro" [ \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ ]  
Hanan al-Shaykh, *Story of Zahra* (pp. 73-170)

1/26

Shihada, "Engendering War" [ \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ ]  
Hanan al-Shaykh, *Story of Zahra* (pp. 170-215)

1/31

Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak" [ \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ ]  
Daisy al-Amir, "The Eyes in the Mirror"  
Andree Chedid, "The House of Arrest"  
**\*Response 1 due on canvas\***

### Unit 2

2/2

Al-Hassan, "Is Feminism Relevant to Arab Women?" [ \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ ]  
Nawal El-Saadawi, "Eyes"  
Nawal El-Saadawi and Fedwa Malti-Douglas, "Reflections of a Feminist" (An Interview)

2/7

Cooke, *War's Other Voices*, "Introduction" [ \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ ]  
Hoda Barakat, *The Tiller of Waters*

2/9

Hayek, *Beirut: Imagining the City* (pp. 62-93) [ \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ ]  
Hoda Barakat, *The Tiller of Waters*

2/14

Etel Adnan, *To See the Sea is to become one with the Sea* (Selections)  
[ \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ ]

2/16

Khatib, "Violence and Masculinity" [ \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ ]  
Maroun Baghdadi and Nadia Tueni, *Whispers* (Film Clip)  
**\*Response 2 due on canvas\***

**Unit 3**

2/21

Hartman, "Gender, Genre and the (Missing) Gazelle" [ \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ ]  
Al-Khansā', "An Elegy (Marthīyah)," *Classical Arabic Literature*  
<https://arablit.org/2021/07/31/yasmine-seale-to-translate-al-khansa-for-lal-series/>

2/23

Drumsta, *Revolt Against the Sun*, "Intro" [ \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ ]  
Nazik al-Malaikah, (Selections)

2/28

Handal, *The Poetry of Arab Women* "Intro" [ \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ ]  
Iman Mersal (Introduction and Selections)  
Joumana Haddad (Introduction and Selections)

3/2

Knight, "Don't look for the Blade," [ \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ ]  
Joumana Haddad, *I Killed Scheherazade* (Selections)  
**\*Response 3 due on canvas\***  
**\*Final Paper Topic of Interest Due\***

3/4-3/12

Spring Break

**Unit 4**

3/14

Sahar Khalifeh, "My Life, Myself, and the World"  
Said, "The Palestinian Experience" [ \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ ]

3/16

Susan Abulhawa, *Against the Loveless World* [ \_\_\_\_\_ ]

3/21

Khatir and Mukattash, "Towards a Literary Matrilinial Lineage" [ \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ ]  
**\*Content warning: critical engagement with sexual violence and war**  
Susan Abulhawa, *Against the Loveless World*

3/23

[No Class: Self Care Day]

3/28

Abulhawa, "The Palestinian Struggle is a Black Struggle" [ \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ ]  
 Susan Abulhawa, *Against the Loveless World*

3/30

Sonia Nimr, *Thunder Bird*

4/4

Sonia Nimr, *Thunder Bird*  
**\*Response 4 due on canvas\***

**Unit 5**

4/6

Selections from Ahdah Souef, *My Cairo*  
 Mehrez, "Mulid al-Tahrir: The Semiotics of Revolution" [ \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ ]  
**\*Final Paper Research Question and Plan Due\***

4/11

Selections from Ahdah Souef, *My Cairo*

4/13

Basma Abdel Aziz, *The Queue*

4/18

Basma Abdel Aziz, *The Queue*  
 Kraidy, *The Naked Blogger of Cairo*, "Intro" [ \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ ]

4/20

Basma Abdel Aziz, *The Queue*  
 El-Ariss, *Hacks, Leaks, and Scandals*, "Intro" [ \_\_\_\_\_ + \_\_\_\_\_ ]  
**\*Last Day to Meet and Discuss Final Paper\***  
**\*Response 5 due on canvas\***

4/25

**Last Day of Class**

**Late Enrollment**

Any students enrolling late in the course will be expected to make up any and all missing readings and assignments. Late-enrolling students should contact me within the first day of their joining class in order to determine the deadlines for their makeup assignments.

**Communication Expectations:**

Students may expect me to respond to emails between 9 AM and 8 PM during weekdays (excluding school holidays). In general, my turnaround on emails is within 48 hours. For longer discussions, such as concepts from class, project topics, or grades, please arrange an office hour appointment rather than attempt a discussion over email. Please review the syllabus before contacting me. I reserve the right to not respond to questions whose answer is already present on this syllabus.

**Academic Integrity:**

It is the responsibility of the student to familiarize themselves with the [University of Pennsylvania's Code of Academic Integrity](#). If you are unsure about the validity of your attributions or references, feel free to contact me in advance of submission (with respect to my communication expectations above). In the unlikely event that concerns do arise after an assignment is submitted, I will forward all materials to the Office of Student Conduct for review.

**Electronic Devices:**

Students may only use electronic devices (computers, tablets) for reading material and only if printing out physical hard copies is not an option. Phones should be kept on silent at all times, and, in the case of an emergency, you should exit the room to answer a phone call. Simply put, laptops tend to distract students and their classmates, and hand-written notes have been shown to promote better retention. If you have an exceptional need, feel free to contact me so that I am aware of the situation. Otherwise, failure to observe this rule will negatively affect your participation grade.

**Late Assignments:**

Students who turn in late assignments will lose one grade level (e.g. "A" to "A-") for every 24 hours the assignments is late.

**Grading:**

Students must wait 24 hours before requesting a regrade and may not request a regrade one week after receiving the grade of their assignment. Additionally, students must submit a written justification for their regrade. The written justification should include a justification for their regrade request and indicate specifically the areas which they believe warrant higher marks.

**Students with Disabilities:**

I am happy to discuss appropriate academic accommodations that students with a disability may require. Students should register first with the Student Disabilities Services (SDS) to determine the appropriate accommodation. These requests should be made in the first two weeks, outside of exceptional circumstances. See the University of Pennsylvania's Policy on Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action for more details.

**Response 1:**

**How does war function in *Story of Zahra* as a critical lens? What does it reveal and how does it operate in the structuring the novel?**

**Response 2:**

**Analytically compare two characters from the two novels we've read so far. Trace their development through gender, war, and their relationship to the city.**

**Response 3:**

**Analyzing a poem in light of your reading of Michelle Hartman's article "Gender, Genre and the (Missing) Gazelle."**

**Response 4:**

**Is occupation and exilic literature a literature of war? How do decisions in genre and style amplify or muffle the Palestinian experience?**

**Response 5:**

**How does translation change and challenge our experience as readers? Knowledge of the original language aside, how can you tell a translation is "good" or "bad"?**