WOMEN OF THE MIDDLE EAST: REPRESENTATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS (HUM 4000/5000)

Instructor: Dr. Kari Neely
Credits: 3
Office Hours
Meeting Times:
e-mail: ksneely@mtsu.edu

A. Course Description and Objectives

This course examines images of Middle Eastern women and their reception in the Middle East and the West. Through an exploration of notable women such as Cleopatra, Mary mother of Jesus and the Egyptian singer Umm Kulthum, we address how political and social issues have been and are played out upon women. Our knowledge of real Middle Eastern female role models is expanded by discussion of women such as the pharaoh Hatshepsut, neo-Platonic philosopher and mathematician Hypatia, poetess Rabia' the Mystic, Queen Helena of Adiabene and Egyptian feminist Huda Sha'raawi.

We begin the course learning techniques and methodologies of analyzing the lacunae in texts and how others have “read into” these spaces according to their own historical and cultural positions. For example, we will ask: “How can the story of Eve/Hawwa lead to such varied interpretations?” Later, we will address how our own consumption of these and current images fuels the distance and misunderstandings that exist on all sides. To encourage a meaningful dialogue, guest speakers will present their own analysis of these representations and our perceptions of them.

Throughout the course we will pursue these objectives:

- Survey our own representations of Middle Eastern women and analyze our perceptions of them
- Read texts that illustrate how others have represented and, at times, misrepresented Middle Eastern women
- Broaden our understanding of the various roles that Middle Eastern women play in their own societies, in their own creation of female symbols, and in their own female iconography.
- Examine gender roles in the Middle East through an exploration of alternative representations
- Develop our theoretical vocabulary for analyzing primary texts from various cultural contexts, including those originating within the Middle East
- Understand the issues of translation that complicate the research process

The MTSU President’s Commission on the Status of Women provided funding for the development of this syllabus. The syllabus may not be reproduced or distributed without permission from Dr. Kari Neely, Foreign Languages & Literatures, MTSU.
B. Units and Texts:

The following is a list of Units taught in the course. Texts listed will be modified and supplemented by guest speakers. A full bibliography for the course is provided.

**In the Beginning: Eve/Hawwa and Lilith**

- Alphabet of Ben-Sira
- Milton’s *Paradise Lost*
- Mahfouz’s *Children of the Alley*

**Egyptian Queens: Cleopatra and Women of Antiquity**

- Francesca T. Royster’s *Becoming Cleopatra: The Shifting Image of an Icon*
- Roehrig, Catharine H., Renée Dreyfus, and Cathleen A. Keller. *Hatshepsut, from Queen to Pharaoh*.

**Videos:**
- *Nefertiti Resurrected*, documentary
- *Cleopatra*, movie classic
- *Rome* [HBO series]

**The Temptress: Potiphar’s Wife Zulaikha**

- Genesis 37, Qur’an Sura 12
- Genesis Rabba
- Sefer ha-Yashar
- al-Ghazali’s tafsir
- Jami’s *Yusuf and Zulaikha*
- Webber’s *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*.
The Cult of Virginity and Muslim Piety: Pharaoh’s wife Asya; Mary/Maryam; Fatima

Barbara Stowasser’s Women in the Qur'an, Traditions, and Interpretation
Mary Clayton’s The Apocryphal Gospels of Mary in Anglo-Saxon England
Amina Wadud’s Qur’an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman’s Perspective

Political Woman in Front of and Behind the Scenes

Hanan Ashrawi’s This Side of Peace: A Personal Account
Elinor Burkett’s Golda
Suad Joseph and Susan Slyomovics’s Women and Power in the Middle East.
Afshaneh Najmabadi. Women with Mustaches and Men Without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity.
Noor’s Leap of Faith: Memoirs of an Unexpected Life.
Huda Shara’s Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist (1879-1924)
Maria Dzielska. Hypatia of Alexandria

Videos
The Journey to Golda's Balcony
Hanan Ashrawi A Woman of Her Time

Wives of the Prophet and Muslim Feminism:

Lila Abu-Lughod’s Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East.
Fatima Mernissi and Mary Jo Lakeland’s The Forgotten Queens of Islam.
And Women and Islam: An Historical and Theological Enquiry.
Salman Rushdie’s The Satanic Verses.
Amina Wadud’s Qur’an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective.

Videos:
I exist voices from the Middle Eastern lesbian & gay community.
Muslim women talk sex.
In My Own Skin The Complexity of Living As an Arab in America.

The Storyteller and Entertainer: Public and Private Spaces

Husain Haddawy and Muhsin Mahdi’s The Arabian Nights = Alf Laylah Wa-Laylah.
Rosemarie Thomson’s Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary
Excerpts from Rabi’a the Mystic and her fellow-saints in Islam
Fadwa Tqa’s A Mountainous Journey: An Autobiography
Videos:
Umm Kulthum a voice like Egypt
Persepolis
Sheikhates Blues
Arabian Nights

C. Activities and Grades:

Students will participate in the following activities:

Reaction Papers/Responses: For each unit, all students will be asked to engage with the materials presented in class through writing assignments and activities such as responding to a set of questions, gathering external materials related to the topic, or performing research tasks as assigned by the instructor.

Presentation: Students will present one female figure related to one of the units. Students will be assigned a unit during the first week of class.

Examinations: Examinations will be take-home essays. Students will have 48 hours to complete each examination.

Research Papers: Guidelines for research papers will be distributed the first week of class. Graduate research papers will be a minimum of 20 pages in length, will include an abstract and an annotated bibliography, and will be presented to other graduate students in a mock conference format.

Grades:

Undergraduates:

Option One: Midterm and Final

Attendance and Participation: 10%
Reaction Papers/Activities: 25%
Presentation: 15%
Midterm: 25%
Final: 25%

Option Two: One Exam and Research Paper
(Research Paper 10-15 pages, topic approved by instructor)
Attendance and Participation: 10%
Reaction Papers/Activities: 25%
Presentation: 15%
Examination: 25%
Research Paper: 25%

Graduate Students

Attendance and Participation: 10%
Reaction Papers/Activities: 15%
Presentation: 15%
Midterm: 25%
Research Paper: 35%
  Abstract: 5%
  Annotated Bibliography: 5%
  Conference Application: 5%
  Conference Presentation: 5%
  Paper: 80%

D. References and Textbooks

Course readings will draw from this partial list of works and will be augmented by selections provided by guest speakers:


Barbosa, Peter, and Garrett Lenoir. Lexist voices from the Middle Eastern lesbian & gay community. [United States]: Arab Film Distribution, 2004.


Umm Kulthum, Kamal Abd Al-Aziz, Michal Goldman, Omar Sharif, and Virginia Danielson. *Umm Kulthum: a voice like Egypt*. [Cairo]: Arab Film Distribution, 2006.