

## Teaching Literature in the Muslim World: A Bicultural Approach

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### Abstract

Although most universities in the Muslim world publicly recognize and support the teaching of Western literature, the exploration of some Western literary themes (for example, self-determination, sexual liberation, and gender equality) is viewed negatively by authority figures as well as by some professors and students.

To reconcile this concern with Lewis's view that the mutual study of literature between Westerners and Muslims is essential (1993), it is proposed that the judicious selecting and teaching of bicultural literature (Western writers on the Muslim world and vice versa) can introduce Muslims to Western literature and its themes with a minimum of cultural conflict. This article summarizes attitudes towards foreign language learning and literature in Muslim societies, identifies cultural divides between Muslims and Western literature, shows how bicultural literature can help bridge these divides, and concludes with a suggested list of bicultural literary works.

### Introduction

One of the remarkable qualities of Azar Nafisi's memoir *Reading Lolita in Tehran* (2003) is its passion for the kind of teaching of Western literature that can transform students' perceptions of their own lives and world. Unfortunately, it was Nafisi's refusal to conform to her country's norms and wear the veil that caused trouble for her in Tehran; authorities at the three universities where she worked either dismissed her or created conditions whereby she had no practical choice but to resign. The last teaching she did was to a small group of students who met at her home in secret.

Although most universities in the Muslim world publicly recognize and support the teaching of Western literature, the pedagogical/personal exploration of some Western literary themes (for example, self-determination, sexual liberation, and gender equality) is viewed negatively by authority figures as well as by some professors and students. These attitudes have caused scholars to propose restrictive strategies for the teaching of literature. They include selecting texts that convey "positive, moral and universal values" (Bin Mohamed Ali, 1999, p. 48), teaching "anticolonialist literature" (Zughoul, 1985, p. 24), and teaching literature "amorally" and with "free interpretation" to avoid alienating students (Al Maleh, 2005, p. 269).

To counterbalance these proposals with Lewis's belief that the mutual study of literature between Westerners and Muslims is required for "the unity of human culture" (1993, p. 128), and following the model set in Lewis's own pioneering work of bicultural literature (*A Middle East Mosaic*, 2000), it is proposed that the judicious selecting and teaching of West-Muslim bicultural literature can introduce Muslims to a wide range of Western literature and its themes with a minimum of cultural conflict and engage them personally as well. [1] This article summarizes attitudes towards foreign language learning and literature in Muslim societies, identifies cultural divides between Muslims and Western literature, shows how bicultural literature can help bridge these divides, and concludes with a suggested list of bicultural literary works. In keeping with Al Maleh's recommendation that English literature in the Arab/Muslim world be taught outside of a morally or culturally bound context, no specific pedagogical strategy is advocated.

### **Attitudes toward foreign language learning and literature in Muslim societies**

From the expansion of Islamic power in the seventh century A.D. to the 1800s, Muslims "had very little inclination or need to engage in the study of languages other than Arabic" (Casewit, 1985, p. 4). Arabic was the language of religion (the Qur'an), of the hadith literature, and of the ruling elite everywhere in the Muslim world with the exception of Baghdad after 1534 (when it fell to the Ottoman Turks). As for literature, for medieval Muslims "the literature of an alien and heathen society could offer neither aesthetic appeal nor moral guidance. The history of these remote peoples, without prophets or scriptures, was a mere sequence of events, without aim or meaning" (Lewis, 1982, p. 75).

Foreign languages began to take on importance as European nations began to invade Muslim lands. France invaded Algeria in 1830, and Russia took the Emirate of Bukhara and other Central Asia territories beginning in the 1860s. Great Britain conquered Egypt and Iraq in 1882 and 1917, respectively. At first the Muslim ruling classes regarded foreign languages as a means to conduct business and unlock "the secrets of European technical superiority" for military purposes (Casewit, 1985, p. 5). Over time, however, many who learned the languages of the hated oppressors, especially at the expense of Arabic in non-Arab lands, were seen as collaborators, opportunists, or sycophants. In the words of Pakistan's nationalist poet, Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938):

*You have acquired and stored up knowledge from the strangers  
And polished your face with its rouge;*

*You borrow luck from their ways  
And I know not whether you are yourself or someone else!  
Your mind is chained to their ideas;  
The very breath in your throat plays on others' strings!  
Borrowed converse pours from your lips,  
Borrowed desires nestle in your hearts! . . . .*

(Saiyidain, 1965, p. 21)

The introduction of Western literary works, in contrast, seems to have not provoked antagonistic feelings, perhaps because it appeared in translation. Western poetry, fiction, and (later) drama began to be published in Istanbul and Cairo in the mid-19th century. By the early 20th century, "great numbers of literary works had been published into Arabic, Persian, and Turkish, and a new literature was developing in all three languages, profoundly affected by European models" (Lewis, 1993, pp. 35-36). There were, however, restrictions on what was translated. Snir (2003) notes, "The dominance of Islamist discourse in the literary system during the last century was reflected through censorship and banning of books for religious considerations and for the harm they might do to public morality" (p. 82).

At the outset of the 20th century, attitudes toward foreign languages remained conflicted. By this time the British and French had built secular institutions of higher education in Muslim lands in which English or French were the primary languages of instruction. According to Sardar (1977), the goal was:

[S]imple and direct: to "civilize the native," to change his way of life. It was a package deal containing the deep-rooted seeds of Islam-Christendom conflict and the moral arrogance and "rational materialism" of nineteenth-century Europe. (p. 157)

Sardar notes that in the receiving cultures, some traditional scholars declare that "even to learn occidental languages amounted to a kind of surrender" (p. 157). Lewis (1982) sees Muslims taking at least some initiative in accepting Western ways: "At last Muslims were turning towards Europe, if not with admiration, then with respect, and perhaps fear, and paying it the supreme compliment of imitation" (p. 308). As for the reception of Western literature, by the 20th century:

The European forms of literature—the novel, the short story, the play, and the rest—are now completely adopted and absorbed. . . . Even the very texture of language has been affected, and some modern writing in Middle-Eastern languages, especially in newspapers, reads like a literal translation from English or French. (Lewis, 2002, p. 147).

After the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in 1918, the West began to facilitate the breakup of the Muslim world into smaller, Western-dominated states. Great Britain and France created mandate countries in the Middle East: Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Kuwait. The division of South Asia into India and Pakistan and the division of Southeast Asia into Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, and Indonesia further divided Muslim societies. In the north, the newly formed Soviet Union continued Russia's firm control of Muslim lands in Central Asia and outlawed Islam. Elsewhere, most of the rest of the Muslim world remained under firm colonial rule. Yet the influence of the

West—its languages, literature, and tradition of liberal thought—contributed to many Muslim independence movements. Nasr (1999) writes:

The new leadership educated in western ways employed *European* ideals to question the morality of colonialism . . . whereas the old elite had relied on *Islam* to resist colonialism. In the end the former approach proved more potent, as it paved the way for independence. (p. 579, emphasis added)

After World War II many Muslim countries became liberated from their colonial rulers. However, several came under the power of dictators supported (sometimes imposed) by the West for Cold War and capitalist purposes. Ironically, the resulting westernization of these countries led to the rise of Islamism, which in turn led to radical Islamic thought and open hostility toward the West. Esposito (1999) notes that Islamists "attribute the weakness of the Islamic world primarily to the westernization of Muslim societies, the penetration of its foreign, 'un-Islamic' ideas, values, and practices" (p. 683). Although the West assisted the Afghani mujahideen against the Soviet Union in the 1980s and Bosnian Muslims and Kosovar Muslims against the Serbs in the 1990s, because of the West's financial and political interests in Muslim lands and support of Israel, Western powers were still often viewed negatively, or at least suspiciously, in the Muslim world.

Today, in spite of their distrust and suspicion of the West ("learners are likely to have absorbed unfavourable attitudes towards native English speakers [or Westerners in general] from their social milieu" [Casewit, 1985, p. 15]), many Muslims share a corresponding, paradoxical desire to understand and join it. Millions of Muslims around the world want to learn English and are indeed doing so. Unfortunately, the ideological messages of much of what is broadcast, published, and recorded in English worldwide conflicts with the culture, values, and beliefs of many Muslims.

### **Cultural divides separating Muslims from Western literature**

Scholars have identified two basic cultural divides that may separate Muslims from an appreciation of Western literature: imperialistic and religious/moral.

**Imperialistic divides** exist with literature that is U.S.- or Eurocentric in relation to people of developing nations. Such literature may be uninformed or prejudiced regarding Muslims. Zughoul (2000), in his discussion of Mark Twain's *Innocents Abroad*, writes that "Islamophobia" has existed in English literature "throughout the ages" (p. 85). Said (1978) discusses several Western authors whom he considers U.S.- or Eurocentric in their views of Muslims. (See *Orientalism*)

**Religious/moral divides** are encountered with literature that exists outside of the "code of life based on the holy Qur'an and the precedents (*sunnah*) and sayings (*ahadith*; singular, *hadith*) of the Prophet" that is "enshrined in religious law (*shari'ah*)" (Casewit, 1985, p. 9). Al Maleh writes that Arab/Muslim teachers follow "a self-imposed censorship . . . when it comes to assigning reading material or ordering textbooks. Books with radical or highly controversial subjects are quickly excluded; no *Waiting for Godot*, no *Lady Chatterley's Lover* are ever considered, to mention just two examples" (p. 272). In her study of Kuwaiti students of English language and literature, Haggan (1998) finds that the students had a "considerable

unease regarding some of the material they had to read, *in spite of a fairly exacting standard of censorship . . .* " (p. 85) (italics added). Indeed, religious/moral divides may exist even at the level of simple discourse: for example, Arabic is rich in pious exclamations and references to God ("God bless you," "Praise be to God," "If God wills") and English is not. In response to such concerns, Al Maleh recommends training students "to read the 'foreign' text cross-culturally" so that they can "bestride the cultural divide, and traverse moral controversy" (pp. 269-70).

In accordance with one of the controlling ideas of Lewis's anthology of West-Muslim writings (*A Middle East Mosaic*, 2000), this article proposes that the literature most successful in helping students "bestride the cultural divide" is bicultural literature—namely, gifted, often expatriate Western writers exploring the Muslim world and similarly gifted, usually immigrant Muslim writers exploring the West.

### **Three bicultural works: *The Gallery*, *Arabian Sands*, and *Foreigner***

The following excerpts are from bicultural works that address, navigate, or put into context West-Muslim divides. The first excerpt, from John Horne Burns's WWII novel *The Gallery*, shows an awareness of the fact that one of the primary divides between the West and the Muslim world is imperialistic:

- When I see an Ayrab child watching the chocolate bar in my hand, something tears at me.*
- It should. You're arriving at the focus of the modern world. People are killing one another right and left. The newspapers don't say why. It's very simple. There's an unfair distribution of the world's goods . . . We're heading either for world socialism or complete destruction.*
- You mean I'm not crazy when I feel like crying all the time?*
- You're hopelessly sane. Most people have to go to the movies to bawl. A few do it over the life they see around them . . . The only advancement made by the human race is because some guy discovered pity. He found out that everyone was really quite like himself, with unimportant differences. We all must die alone. And we start dying with our birth. And a thousand years from now we'll all look equally silly: the movie star, the Ayrab whore, the financier, and the hustler . . . If only we could publicly acknowledge our silliness for the few years that we are alive, we could then pool whatever dignity we possess. Then life would be worth living for all, instead of for the few.* (Burns, 1947, p. 157, ellipses the author's)

The second excerpt, from the travel narrative *Arabian Sands* by Wilfred Thesiger, summarizes the Arab tribesmen's concept of government:

*Arabs rule but do not administer. Their government is intensely individualistic, and is successful or unsuccessful according to the degree of fear and respect which the ruler commands, and his skill in dealing with individual men. Founded on an individual life, their government is impermanent and liable to end in chaos at any moment. To Arab tribesmen this system is comprehensible and acceptable, and its success or failure should not be measured in terms of efficiency and justice as judged by Western standards. To these tribesmen security can be bought too dearly by loss of individual freedom.* (Thesiger, 1959, pp. 46-47)

The third excerpt, from Nahid Rachlin's novel *Foreigner*, contrasts a Westernized Muslim's lack of faith on a trip back to her home country, Iran, and a Qur'anic Muslim's strong faith. The novel explores in part the distance between westernized Muslims and Qur'anic Muslims.

*We passed through a corridor and entered another courtyard where a simple beautiful mosque stood. I could see men and women lined up in separate chambers inside, praying.*

*"Do you want to join them?" Mahmood Majid whispered.*

*I shook my head.*

*"You never pray, do you?"*

*"No, do you?"*

*"I did even when I was in the United States. It makes you stop everything a few times a day, be alone with yourself."*

*"I wish I could pray," I said, believing it at the moment. (Rachlin, 1978, p. 124)*

These works, in their intelligence, sensitivity, and dual awareness of Western and Muslim cultures, offer the Muslim reader a door to inhabiting them that monocultural Western works may not. Indeed, scholars such as Said (1978), Zughoul (1985, 1986, 2000), and Haggan (1998) have shown how many (monocultural) Western works present considerable barriers to comprehension and appreciation by Muslim readers. The relative popularity of bicultural writers such as Nahid Rachlin, Paul Bowles, and Azar Nafisi in the Muslim world is linked to their ability to knowledgeably explore West-Muslim cultural divides and commonalities.

### **Suggested bicultural literature for Muslims**

Most of the following literary works are explorations of the Muslim world by Western writers and vice versa. This does not necessarily mean that Muslim and/or Western themes are at the forefront of all of the works—only that the two worlds, Muslim and West, co-exist in artistic expression.

In general the texts are written in contemporary, jargon-free, concise, and concrete English, qualities important to third-world language learners. [2] Thematically they are disparate, in accordance with one school of thought in contemporary Islamic pedagogy:

*The best method that the teacher can adopt in order to save students from being influenced by one author or the other is to make students proceed through the works of different writers who are at variance with each other. The teacher and students can then objectively explore the moral frameworks of different writers and find how conflicting their judgements and realizations are. At the same time it will be a highly instructive exploration for students if they are trying to find out how in spite of the variety of realizations these writers have been able to present truthful images about Man in various situations. (Husain & Ashraf, 1979, pp. 102-103)*

### **AFGHANISTAN**

*Caravans*, James A. Michener (1961, 448 pp.)

Novel. An account of an American woman, married to an Afghan engineer, who goes missing in Afghanistan.

*Under a Sick Moon: A Journey Through Afghanistan*, Peregrine Hodson (1986, 240 pp.)

Non-fiction. A report by a British journalist who, disguised as a native, travels with a band of mujahideen resistance fighters in northeastern Afghanistan during the Soviet invasion.

*The Places in Between*, Rory Stewart (2004, 299 pp.)

Non-fiction. A record of a trek from Herat to Kabul after the fall of the Taliban.

## **AFRICA**

*The Gallery*, John Horne Burns (1947, 392 pp.)

Novel. Vignettes of the experiences of American servicemen abroad in WWII, many in the Muslim world of North Africa.

*The Spider's House*, Paul Bowles (1955, 432 pp.)

Novel. Through the character of Amar, the Moroccan-Muslim protagonist of the novel, an exploration of what Western civilization has lost by discarding religion as a social and cultural foundation.

*The First Man*, Albert Camus (1996 [1960], 272 pp.)

Novel. Camus's last work, a remembrance of his coming of age in Algeria.

*The Coup*, John Updike (1978, 318 pp.)

Novel. An American-educated African leader attempts to lead his nation to Islamic purity.

*A Bend in the River*, V. S. Naipaul (1979, 288 pp.)

Novel. A Muslim Indian merchant in East Africa experiences the limitations of faith in a society undergoing rapid changes.

*Angry Wind: Through Muslim Black Africa by Truck, Bus, Boat and Camel*, Jeffrey Tayler (2005, 256 pp.)

Non-fiction. An account of crossing the Sahel, the Saharan borderlands of Chad, Nigeria, Niger and Mali.

## **BANGLADESH**

*The Tortured and the Damned*, Robert Payne (1977, 427 pp., OP)

Novel. How the systematic decimation of a people led to the uprising and the creation of a new democratic state.

## **CAUCASUS**

*Hadji Murad*, Leo Tolstoy (1910, 192 pp.)

Historical novel. An account of the devout Muslim and Chechen warrior Hadji, set during the 1851-52 Russian-Chechen wars.

*Ali and Nino*, Kurban Said (1937, 237 pp.)

Novel. In Azerbaijan during WWI and the Russian Revolution, a young Tartar and Shi'ite Muslim, Ali, rejects social convention by marrying his childhood friend, Nino, a Georgian Christian.

## **CHINA**

*Familiar Strangers: A History of Muslims in Northwest China*, Jonathan N. Lipman (1997, 266 pp.)

Non-fiction. An overview of the 1,300-year history of Muslims in China, based on primary and secondary sources in various languages.

## EUROPE

*Life Is a Caravanserai*, Emine Sevgi Ozdanar (2000 [1991], 300 pp.)

Novel. Portraits of Turkish immigrants in post-WWII Germany.

*Atlas of a Tropical Germany: Essays, 1990-1998*, Zafer Senocak (2000, 142 pp.)

Non-fiction. Analyses of the sociocultural effects of guest workers, many from Turkey, in post-WWII Germany.

*Leaving Home: Towards a New Millennium: A Collection of English Prose by Pakistani Writers*, Muneeza Shamsie (ed.) (2002, 458 pp.)

Essays, memoirs, and stories set in Europe and North America as well as contemporary India and Pakistan.

*Minaret*, Leila Aboulela (2005, 288 pp.)

Novel. Najwa, an immigrant from Sudan who has suffered many losses, finds solace among Muslim women in a London mosque.

## INDIA

*A Passage to India*, E. M. Forster (1924, 368 pp.)

Novel. The adventures of three English newcomers to India and the Indian with whom they cross paths.

*Midnight's Children*, Salman Rushdie (1980, 552 pp.)

Novel. An exploration of the Midnight's Children (children born in the first hour after the birth of India as a nation) and their leader Saleem Sinai.

## INDONESIA

*Country of Origin*, Edgar du Perron (1935, 438 pp.)

Novel. Evocative remembrances of a childhood spent in West Java at the turn of the century.

*The Ten Thousand Things*, Maria Dermout (1958, 244 pp.)

Novel. A sensory portrait of life on an island in the Moluccas (Spice Islands).

*The Year of Living Dangerously*, Christopher J. Koch (1978, 296 pp.)

Novel. The experiences of Western journalists in Jakarta in 1965, shortly before the fall of Sukarno.

*The Flame Tree*, Richard Lewis (2004, 288 pp.)

Novel. A look at the culture of Indonesian Muslims through the eyes of a 12-year-old American boy who is the son of Christian missionaries.

## IRAN

*Foreigner*, Nahid Rachlin (1978, 192 pp.)

Novel. An Iranian woman in exile in the U.S. returns to her homeland.

*Garden of the Brave in War: Recollections of Iran*, Terence O'Donnell (1980, 216 pp.)

Memoir. Observations of the everyday lives of villagers and townspeople in Iran.

*Reading Lolita in Tehran*, Azar Nafisi (2003, 343 pp.)



Memoir. The experiences of a professor teaching Western literature in post-revolutionary Iran.

*Mirrors of the Unseen: Journeys in Iran*, Jason Elliott (2006, 432 pp.)

Non-fiction. Impressions of Iran interspersed with commentary on Iranian history and culture.

## **IRAQ**

*Guests of the Sheik: An Ethnography of an Iraqi Village*, Elizabeth Warnock Fernea (1965, 368 pp.)

Non-fiction. A narrative by an American who assumed the dress and sheltered life of a harem woman.

*The Prince of the Marshes: And Other Occupational Hazards of a Year in Iraq*, Rory Stewart (2006, 416 pp.)

Non-fiction. An account of post-invasion Iraq by a Coalition deputy commander.

## **MALAYSIA**

*Lord Jim*, Joseph Conrad (1900, 362 pp.)

Novel. A seaman on a pilgrim ship bound for Mecca loses his courage when the ship appears to founder.

*The Long Day Wanes: A Malayan Trilogy*, Anthony Burgess (1964, 512 pp.)

Novel. Impressions of the natives and outsiders (Chinese, Indian, British, etc.) who made up pre-independence Malaya in the 1950s.

*The Consul's File*, Paul Theroux (1977, 209 pp.)

Fiction. Twenty stand-alone chapters told by an American consul sent to close down a consulate in a small Malaysian town in the 1970s.

## **MIDDLE EAST**

*Flaubert in Egypt: A Sensibility on Tour*, Gustave Flaubert (1972 [1849], 240 pp.)

Non-fiction. Excerpts from Flaubert's diaries, letters, and travel notes that document his 1849 trip to Egypt and the Red Sea area.

*Arabian Sands*, Wilfred Thesiger (1959, 347 pp.)

Non-fiction. An account of the nomadic Bedouins of Southern Arabia.

*The Alexandria Quartet*, Lawrence Durrell (four vols.) (1962, 884 pp.)

Novel. A multidimensional investigation of modern love and the possibilities and limits of cross-cultural understanding, set in Alexandria before WWII.

*At the Drop of a Veil*, Marianne Alireza (1971, 275 pp.)

Memoir. The story of an American college student who marries a Saudi in 1943 and moves to Jeddah in 1945 to raise a family.

*Motoring with Mohammed: Journeys to Yemen and the Red Sea*, Eric Hansen (1992, 272 pp.)

Non-fiction. The story of a young American shipwrecked in 1978 on a deserted island in the Red Sea.

*Gate of the Sun*, Elias Khoury (2006 [1998], 475 pp.)

Novel. Portraits of Palestinians from all walks of life and their relationship to Israel.

*A Middle East Mosaic: Fragments of Life, Letters and History*, Bernard Lewis (2000, 496 pp.)

Non-fiction. A cross-cultural anthology of letters, diaries, and histories discussing travel, government, society, arts, and science in the Middle East and the West.

*Palestine*, Joe Sacco (2002, 288 pp.)

Graphic novel. A representation of the contradictions and tragedies of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

*The Cairo House*, Samia Serageldin (2003, 248 pp.)

Novel. A story of the lives of the privileged in Cairo in the 1950s and '60s and in exile in the West.

## **PAKISTAN**

*Train to Pakistan*, Khushwanth Singh (1956, 181 pp.)

Novel. A gripping presentation of the impact of the partition of Pakistan from India in 1947.

*Amritsar to Lahore: A Journey Across the India-Pakistan Border*, Stephen Alter (2000, 214 pp.)

Non-fiction. A look at the lasting effects of the partition on the lives of ordinary people.

## **TURKEY AND THE BALKANS**

*Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, Rebecca West (1941, 1181 pp.)

Non-fiction. A historical and cultural exploration of former Yugoslavia.

*The Towers of Trebizond*, Rose Macaulay (1956, 288 pp.)

Novel. A whimsical portrayal of British travelers in Turkey in the 1950s.

*Gallipoli*, Alan Moorehead (1956, 400 pp.)

Non-fiction. A narrative of the British defeat at Gallipoli in WWI.

*Blood Tie*, Mary Lee Settle (1977, 386 pp.)

Novel. A group of Westerners in Turkey and their interactions with Turks form the genesis of this examination of cross-cultural understanding.

*Scotch and Holy Water*, John D. Tumpane (1981, 348 pp., OP)

Memoir. Wry observations of Turks and their culture by an American expatriate.

*Birds Without Wings*, Louis De Bernieres (2004, 576 pp.)

Novel. A re-imagining of life in Eskibahce, a small town in Anatolia, in the last days of the Ottoman Empire.

*Pretty Birds*, Scott Simon (2005, 368 pp.)

Novel. The story of two teenage girls during the siege of Sarajevo.

## **UNITED STATES**

*A World Between: Poems, Short Stories, and Essays by Iranian-Americans*, Persis M. Karim, Mohammad Mehdi Khorrami (eds.) (1999, 224 pp.)

An anthology of stories, essays, and poems by more than 30 first- and second-generation Iranian Americans.

*Post Gibrán: An Anthology of New Arab American Writing*, Munir Akash, Khaled Mattawa (eds.) (2000, 460 pp.)

A collection of fiction, drama, non-fiction, and poetry by 43 Arab-American writers.

*Out of Place: A Memoir*, Edward W. Said (2000, 336 pp.)

The famous Lebanese-American scholar's life story.

### **(GENERAL)**

*Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey*, V. S. Naipaul (1982, 448 pp.)

Non-fiction. A record of a seven-month journey across the non-Arab Muslim world.

*For Rushdie: Essays by Arab and Muslim Writers in Defense of Free Speech*, Anouar Abdallah (ed.) (1994, 302 pp.)

Non-fiction. Reactions of Muslim writers to the controversy surrounding Salman Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses*.

*Beyond Belief: Islamic Excursions Among the Converted Peoples*, V. S. Naipaul (1999, 432 pp.)

Non-fiction. An account of Muslims living in non-Arab Muslim countries.

### **Conclusion**

This article has summarized attitudes towards foreign languages and literature in Muslim societies and outlined the divides that may separate Muslims from an appreciation of Western literature. It has shown how bicultural literature can help bridge these divides, and has proposed a list of bicultural literary works.

Although levels of acceptance of Western literature fluctuate throughout the Muslim world, it is worth repeating Lewis's belief in the value of cross-cultural literary study: "the unity of human culture . . . requires such mutual study [of literature]. I stress the word 'mutual' " (1993, pp. 128-9). It is hoped that bicultural literature will promote this mutual study and understanding.

### **Notes**

[1] SLA research is in agreement on using culturally and personally accessible texts with learners. Aebersold and Field (1997) suggest that two criteria for text selection are "(1) the cultural content of the works and (2) the relevance of the works to the lives of the students in the class" (p. 162). Collie and Slater (1987) state that "If the language of the literary work is quite straightforward and simple, this may be helpful but is not in itself the most crucial yardstick. *Interest, appeal and relevance* (italics added) are all more important" (p. 6). Finally, Harrison (1990) writes that "Much depends on the sensitive choice of texts, so that students can be enabled to move from their own immediate world, over time, to other imaginative worlds" (p. 52). All of these statements are critically relevant to the teaching of literature to Muslims, for whom Western literature and its themes can be culturally distant.

[2] Zaghoul (1986), in his research on English departments of the third world, states that it can be safely generalized that "the linguistic competence . . . of even the graduate from a Third World university does not enable him to make sense of a literary piece, let alone appreciate it. The student usually ends up glossing vocabulary items rather than studying literature for appreciation and analysis" (p. 7).

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