

Reading Questions: *The Story of Zahra* by Hanan al-Shaykh, pp. 1-101

- 1) What aspects of this novel strike you as lying within the realm of literary postmodernism? What aspects of this novel strike you as appertaining or not appertaining to the realm of “women’s literature” (see readings by Zeidan and Cohen-Mor). (Emily)
  
- 2) How does Hanan al-Shaykh confirm or cofound your expectations regarding the depiction of women in Arab women’s literature? More generally, what aspects of this novel strike you as appertaining or not appertaining to the realm of “women’s literature” (see readings by Zeidan and Cohen-Mor)? (Meredith)
  
- 3) How do Zahra’s recollections of her childhood lay the groundwork for her later experiences at home in Lebanon and in Africa? (Claire)
  
- 4) What do you make of Zahra’s uncle Hashem, his relationship to Zahra, and the story of his escape from Lebanon? How do you “read” his character as a literary construct? (Katie)
  
- 5) Hanan al-Shaykh was certainly familiar with the works of Naguib Mahfouz, including *Miramar*. How does the character of Zahra in *The Story of Zahra* resonate with the character of Zohra in *Miramar*? Note: the name in Arabic is the same; the difference in transliteration is due to dialectal difference between Egypt and Lebanon. (Alex)
  
- 6) In an interview with literary scholar Paula Sunderman, Hanan al-Shaykh had the following to say: “I feel that [women] are victims of society more than victims of men because men are sometimes victims of society as well. They have to obey it, but a vicious cycle ensues because men are behind the wheels of change” (quoted in Ann Marie Adams, “Writing Self, Writing Nation: Imagined Geographies in the Fiction of Hanan al-Shaykh”, *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* vol. 20, no. 2 [2001]: p. 206). How does this sentiment play out in *The Story of Zahra*? (Mariam)