

MWWWI Newsletter

Muslim Women Writers Workshop-International Newsletter

Volume 1, Issue 3

The Nurturing Pen

Dhul Hijjah 22, 1428 / Jan. 1, 2008



MWWWI

Wishes You A

Blessed

EID AL ADHA

Peace, Faith, and the Blessings of Allah be with you!

Celebrating EID AL ADHA in Oman

J.O.Y.

Upon entering Oman from the border of UAE via Ras Al Khamah, you feel you are entering your own country. All people wait in the same lines as you watch the mountain goats wandering through the cars. They search among the people for any dropped food or charitable offering. One even climbed up the side of the car asking for additional chips. The Omani people are great and friendly, all with wide smiles.

After passing through the border and entering Oman we snaked between the Persian Gulf on our left and the soaring mountains on our right. The beauty of this land almost seems untouched except for the well kept road we traveled. The small homes here and there grouped closely together around the local masjid splatter the landscape. All seems quiet and those you encounter do indeed seem to be content. Upon arriving at the small town of Khasab, we board our home for

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DIFF Makes a Difference!

Fourth Dubai International Film Festival Dec. 7 -14

MWWWI attends a highlight of DIFF

Three members of MWWWI, Maryam, Zakia, and Nasrah were fortunate to attend the Cultural Bridge Program, a highlight of DIFF. We went because we want to become better writers capable of communicating to peoples in all walks of life; to bridge the cultural divides and to improve our writing skills and productivity. Since writing is the backbone of the entertainment industry this was an opportunity to learn



firsthand what the latest trends are and how writing is transformed into film. Without good writers there are no good programs films, etc.

The Cultural Bridge Program, in its second year, specifically addressed this issue. Its purpose is to explore cinema's role in building bridges and explored DIFF's motto and overall ambition: 'Bridging Cultures, Meeting Minds.' Through dialogue and debate the panel attempted to minimize our differences and maximize our similarities.

Canadian Cameron Bailey, of Prospective Canada and Planet Africa was the panel moderator. The international panel of experts was: Danny Glover: United States, Gisele Khoury: Lebanon, Paulo Coelho: Brazil and Rada Jacobs of South Africa. Mr. Bailey introduced Paulo Coelho, Brazilian, international best selling author and well known in Dubai who gave the introductory address.

Mr. Coelho said: "Every culture in their heart appreciates God, beauty, and storytelling. We can connect the universal language. We learn but we need

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one night and one day. The captain draws the anchor and off we go into the shimmering blue green water. The depth of the water in the darkened black areas seems frightening somewhat. In my mind I think, 'I hope this boat stays afloat.'

We sail around the coast of Oman, rounding this small portion of Oman which is surrounded by UAE on two sides, the Persian Gulf on one and the Gulf of Oman on the other. We notice Omani fisherman letting out their nets into the water in their small boats. They leave the nets for approximately a day and then gather them on the following day. Many of the families here earn their livelihood by fishing.

The captain speaks of dolphins and the children's eyes light up in delight. Immediately they are running on the deck. The frightened mothers run behind them and secure them for the view. The dolphins run along



parallel to the hull of the ship, in a playful manner, as if in a race, crossing left and right occasionally taking in a breath by raising their topside just enough to get a breath of air by blowing out water.

There are two types of dolphins here, the handbag and Bottlenose. The Bottlenose dolphins seem to enjoy the racing, while the Handbag dolphins seem to enjoy putting on a show for us nearby. These social creatures are a marvelous spectacle to any eye, the young and the old. There was also a baby Bottlenose dolphin swimming in the race. He too passes our speeding boat.

The dolphins highlight the night, and the following morning, but the snorkeling, the following afternoon, indeed proved to be an adventure. We dropped anchor at a small island off the coast of Oman. It was a rocky island with sparse vegetation but was surrounded by a vast ecosystem with an endless supply of welcoming creatures. Each of us donned in snorkeling gear and flippers all jumped into the water one by one. The cold water was an initial shock but the tiny creatures distracted us from the cool temperature. The colorful fish swarmed around us with inquisitive eyes looking for a morsel and spiny porcupine like creatures covered with woody spikes wander the Omani Gulf floor, around the coral and rocky shoreline. Luckily, we were wearing flippers. Crabs scoot into the sand and under nearby rocks to avoid apprehension or detection.

Oman, so much to say and seemingly not enough words, "I hope to go there again." Life begins and ends with you. (24/12/2007) J.O.Y. 

to absorb; a cultural connection is in the heart".

He mentioned his book, **The Alchemist**. "I could feel the imaginary world far away from Brazil. I made my life more interesting. I went to the desert to do something, to do dune bashing. I drove it was fun but I got stuck. This moment is what a cultural bridge is about: how to use my cultural background to get out of this. I tried my hands, then I surrendered myself, and I was part of a magical experience." He had to rely on someone to rescue him." It took two hours but I was involved in an experience: to learn to give of yourself, there is no need to cross; your values belong to the same symbols; a bridge is a symbol.

"We learn but we need to absorb; a cultural connection is in the heart." Paulo Coelho

Cameron Bailey then asked the panelists: What can cinema do to build cultural bridges?

Rada Jacobs, a filmmaker and novelist: **The Middle Children, Eyes of the Sky, and Slave Street**, gave the example of how a film she made showed cultural differences between children of the same age, and different races in South Africa. A question she asked 5 and 10 year olds, What would you ask God? yielded amazing answers: Why do people kill each other? (A poor child in South Africa). A well to do child (white) asked, who will win the rugby world cup? It showed the cultural divide that still exists in South Africa. She also mentioned the film, *Tutsi*; that also shows there are problems in South Africa even with democracy.

Gisele Koury of Lebanon is a producer of cultural programs, talk shows, and documentaries. She said that Lebanon is a virtual country. Every ten years they have a civil war. In Lebanon there is an idea of democracy. The most remarkable thing she said was:

"Lebanon is an idea not a nation." Gisele Koury

The image abroad of Lebanon is one of an easy life, fun and night life, a limited view. The Imaginative use of film could broaden this image.

Danny Glover, actor, producer, said he was born at the right time. He experienced all the civil rights movements, ex. Montgomery bus boycott. Being born at the right time can be a motivator and provide opportunities not experienced before. Cinema brings all kinds of people and financing together. "The idea that I am a citizen of the world did not occur to me until I began to work in cinema."

He produced last year's DIFF film, **BAMAKO** by Mali
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Coming to Know Islam: Part 2

The Cultural Center

The Cultural Center on the base was situated just next to our building. Inside the building there were tailors, launderers, gift shops and the very important Post Exchange.

Launderers were very important to the well kept soldier. They starched our uniforms so heavily that once, my uniform sleeve cracked while I was trying to fight my way into the right sleeve. I laugh now thinking about it. The humidity of this area was very high because Dhahran is very close to the Persian Gulf. Sometimes the sweat would just drip from your fingertips, while standing immovably in formation. Consequently, the heavily starched uniforms one wore did not allow any evaporation of the sweat.

The tailors were amazing. If you gave them any simple picture, they could put it on cloth. They could sew everything from the basics, to intricate flowers. The only thing I ever got from them sewn, were my uniform nametags, but their talent in sewing was the best I had ever seen.

There was also a gold gift shop, which was always busy. They sold gold by the gram. The bright yellow gold of 22 kt and 24 kt were of a brilliant yellow which I had never seen before. I purchased a few things, a novel puzzle ring, earrings and necklaces during my stay.

The Post Exchange was very important, PX for short. They sold everything from ketchup to magazines. All the magazines which we were not allowed to bring in through customs were sold here, from Glamour to Cosmopolitan. How I love ketchup!!! You could say I am a ketchup connoisseur. The ketchup in Saudi is bitter. The ketchup in Germany is sweet. And lastly, Heinz ketchup in US is, for me, the best. I would buy my own ketchup in the PX, to take to the chow hall (military terms for cafeteria). Many thought it to be strange, but I just like ketchup.

In the middle of all these shops was a place that was normally empty and one day I decided to venture inside. It was the Saudi Arabian Cultural Center. It was a place where you could go to inquire about Islam and the local customs of the Arab people. It was tended to by a young East Indian man who seemed quite content in life. He would answer questions, but often asked questions politely, which would cause one to ponder one's faith.

I was a Methodist Christian at the time. At this point in my life I wasn't too concerned about religion. I was

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director Abdurrahmane Sissako. It was a great experience for him in Mali, Africa. "We can use film to mobilize people around issues to bring positive change.

"Imagination can be a truthful vision." He referred to a film he made about American Indians and how he had to use his imagination to fill in some missing gaps in the story. Later he was called by a descendant of an Indian chief who told him that what he had IMAGINED was an accurate representation of what really happened: a fictional story tells the truth

"We can use film to mobilize people around issues to bring positive change." Danny Glover

Mr. Coelho mentioned two pillars for success: 1. Discipline: to be focused; 2. Compassion: for you to get there the moment you surrender then you can obtain your desire. Finally, he told why he had not wanted any of his books to be made into films: because he was afraid of them not being properly translated or staying true to the book.

During the question period Mr. Glover was asked: What lessons can Arabs learn from African Americans struggle in the US film industry? There was no clear answer to this except that it was suggested that Arabs need to develop stories about their own culture and stay in their countries not migrate to the LA film industry.

Filmmaker Ahmed Maanoun wants to start his own cultural bridge. Martin Scorsese saw his film, **Trances**, and liked it enough to have World Cinema Foundation restore it and show it at Cannes this year. But this was a bridge started by someone else. Rada said that she was successful in getting her film produced because of her naiveté. She called influential people and asked for what she wanted directly. Sometimes this works.

It was not all seriousness though. There was some fun when Mr. Coelho said that tragedy can be used to learn about culture as in the film, 'City of Hope,' which shows the worst side of a situation. He got a good laugh from the audience when he said he disagreed with doing this type of film because the news media, ex. CNN, do enough of that. MWWWI's own Maryam Ismail made a comment that elicited loud laughter from the audience also. She said that there are bridges here in Dubai but they are 'floating bridges.'

"---mixing all these nationalities with the films, the different backgrounds, creates a platform for people to discuss openly." Masoud A. Al Ali

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just bored looking for something to do. So I visited there a few times and even asked the man if I could visit a Saudi local family. This visit would never materialize, but remain in my inquisitive mind. I remember two questions he asked me specifically. He asked me about the shorts I was wearing and why I didn't feel I should cover my legs. He also asked me if Jesus thought it was OK to drink alcohol. I can't remember the specifics, but the thoughts lingered in my mind of his polite approach to disagreements between my faith at the time and his, Islam. He disagreed with me in a subtle way that was seemingly unnoticeable, yet apparent. I understand his methods today, but could not fathom them at that point in my life.

J.O.Y. 

To be continued

"Don't get it right, just get it written." --James Thurber

AWARD WINNING WRITER NICK WARBURTON VISITS DUBAI

How can you write what you don't know? Lie about it. That's what Nick Warburton did at Magrudy's Time Out Creative Writing Master class on Nov. 20. The upstairs venue at Magrudy's Jumeirah bookshop was cozy and packed with a mixed audience of mostly women, young and older (me), some men and many nationalities as is usually the case in UAE. It was an atmosphere conducive to his presentation about writing. This was but one of many writing workshops that Warburton has conducted throughout Britain and in West Africa. I went listened, learned and loved it but later lost all my notes of the occasion. I was left with my memory and imagination to fill in the gaps.

Warburton told us a story about how he first became interested in writing; it was through reading. How many times have we heard that! His father was in the cleaning business and would sometimes take him along on certain jobs. One such job was at a school. He remembered two things about the school: the smell of oranges and books. The smell of oranges was pleasant and persistent. Every time he went to the school on the same day every week he would smell the oranges. While his father worked he would wait in the large room lined with books (the library perhaps?) with a long table in the center. Here he would sit and read while waiting for his father. His love of books, reading and writing began there.

It was an enchanting story; the whole audience paid rapt attention. We were waiting to hear what caused the orange smell when he suddenly finished the story. He astounded us by saying the story was a lie!!! He also added that the bit about the orange smell

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Did this event live up to its goal? I agree with DIFF artistic director Masoud Amralla Al Ali who said: "This is a long term goal. But mixing all these nationalities with the films, the different backgrounds, creates a platform for people to discuss openly. The festival guests will learn more about us, the Arab world and the Arabs will learn more. Through the medium of film, which I think is a powerful medium, you can achieve something," he added.

Zakia 

"Many people hear voices when no one is there. Some of them are called mad and are shut up in rooms where they stare at the walls all day. Others are called writers and they do pretty much the same thing" -Meg Crittenden

Warburton continued:

was an added touch that aroused our curiosity, and kept us anticipating an explanation which he did not provide. But this expectation did help move the story forward.

This story was an example of how a lie can be used to convey a truth. Fiction in this sense is a lie according to Warburton. Capturing our attention this way awakened our curiosity about the authenticity of what he said after this. He told us other stories and asked us to guess whether they were true or not!

Afterwards questions were asked about: his writing habits, his favorite authors, and publishing tips. He used to work at home but now works from an office. Not all of his time is spent writing; correspondence takes up some of his time and thinking too. Thinking is an important pastime for a writer and he does a lot of this and reading. The Great American poet Robert Frost and William Shakespeare are two of his favorites. He also mentioned a few living writers but I cannot tell a lie, I don't remember them. Basically his stories come from everyday life. In each of us there is a story. We just have to tap into it, be disciplined enough to write it down and work on it.

Warburton is an award winning British author who has written novels and scripts for stage, television and radio and is considered a master of the 30 minute script. He has written seven books for children including: **The Seventh Owl**, **To Trust a Soldier** and **Lost in Africa**; and was the Joint winner of BBC/Radio Times Drama Award, 1985. A current work is the five part adaptation of the Gospel of St. Luke which was broadcast Dec. 17 to Dec. 21 on BBC Radio. To find out more about Nick Warburton go to BBC Radio and TV or just type his name on any search engine.

Zakia 

Our Scientists: Where Did They Go?

A Brief Analysis of Muslim Scientists, Past, Present and Future.

Nadia Hakkou

Many of us discuss with great energy and passion the numerous brilliant scientists and engineers who lived in the centuries after the Prophet (SAWS) and the Sahaba (RA). We should be rightly grateful to have benefited from their many important discoveries, inventions and research including; Mathematics & Algebra from Mohammad Ibn Musa al-Khawarizmi, Astronomy from Abu Abdullah Al Battani and Medicine and Physics from Ibn Sina. We then ask ourselves, how could nations with so many advanced concepts, ideas and practices, lose this ability to excel in science and technology?

In this series of brief articles I hope to shed some light on the subject and how we can learn from our own mistakes, others' mistakes and ultimately understand and utilize the advice given to us by the Prophet (SAWS) and the Sahaba (RA).

There is no doubt that people today face more and more distractions and diversions in their daily lives. We are constantly bombarded with news, advertising, cell phone calls, emails, text messages and so on. We struggle to find time for ourselves to do what all real scientists, scholars and intellectuals spend a large part of their time doing –reading.

As Muslims we have a head start; Allah commanded the Prophet (SAWS) to "Read in the name of your Lord." If we look back at the lives of the great scientists, either Muslim or others we discover that they all had a great interest learning and discovering by reading. They studied works of other people, carried out trials, tests, and slowly developed and understood principles which gave them a firm foundation in various aspects of science. It is this system of learning which has been lost by our current education system and is at the heart of the weakness we see in the Muslim world at present. We want to copy and emulate the West's gains – but forget that what we see are the fruits of peoples' hard, determined, structured research.

We should ask ourselves, "How can we benefit from the advances of the West, while ensuring that we maintain our identity?" While we understand the need for academics and university graduates in any society, we also have to appreciate that a population of university graduates alone would not be capable of building houses, cars, and aeroplanes. They could not produce our food (in sufficient quantities), clothes, etc.

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Perhaps it is beneficial at this stage to look at the hadith from the Prophet (SAWS): "Khadejah said that someone asked: "O Rasulallah, which gain is best?" He (SAWS) said: "A man's work by his hand, and every honest business."

Insh'Allah, in the coming *MWWWI* Newsletters, I hope to elaborate on how we can replicate the successes of the past and what steps we can make to implement them in our lives and in our society.

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Nadia 

The Poetry Corner–Present

FEARLESS

***Afraid, of any argument
Disapproval, mild dissent
Yet often feeling discontent
I felt obscured within my troubled soul***

***Timid, in approach and mood
My heart was effortlessly bruised
My mind ever lost, confused
My encumbrance began to take its toll***

***Then you came to befriend me
With gallantry, defend me
To rebuild and to mend me
I found hope and a recession of my sorrow***

***You never wavered beside me
Gave your wisdom to guide me
To find the courage inside me
Suddenly, I looked forward to tomorrow***

***I promise a loyalty that's true
Until the day I perish too
To always love and cherish you
You are my hero and a lasting treasure***

***What a difference you've made
My emotion shield, my rapier blade
The reason why I'm not afraid
This bond we share no one can sever***

Nafeesa 

The Poetry Corner -Past

Al Khansa

Tumadir bint Amru al-Harith bint al-Sharid, usually referred to as **Al-Khansa** (Arabic translated as either "gazelle" or "short-nosed") was born (c.575-c.646), to a rich family in Najd, in the center of today's Saudi Arabia. Khansa was a member of the Sharid clan of the Banu Sulaim people; as such, she was part of a powerful family of west central Arabia, near Mecca and Medina. A contemporary of Prophet Muhammad, she met him 629 and converted to Islam. The Prophet is said to have been very impressed by her poetry.

She became a celebrated poetess. In her time, the role of a female poet was to write *elegies* for the dead and perform them for the tribe in public oral competitions. Al-Khansa won respect and fame in these competitions with her elegies for her brothers, Sakhr and Muawiya, who had died in battle.

She had four sons: Yazeed, Mo'awiya, Amro, and Amrh, all of whom converted to Islam. She urged her sons to fight jihad. All four were killed in the Battle of Qadisiyah. When she received the news, she allegedly did not grieve, but said, "Praise be to Allah who honored me with their martyrdom. I pray for Allah to let me join them in heaven."

She was celebrated not only for the intensity and tenderness of her elegies, but also for the new directions she gave this established form of verse. To this day she remains a legend in Arabic literary annals. Most of her elegies are about her brother Sakhr:

**"The herald of the dead announced the loss
Of the most generous man, Sakhr;
And he cried it so loud
That far and wide he was heard.
It wounded me so painfully
That in my misery I looked like a drunken person.
Every morning when I awaken,
The first rays of the sun remind me of him
And every evening when the sun sets
I mourn for him"**

And in another she mourned:

**"What have we done to you death
that you treat us so, with always another catch
one day a warrior
the next a head of state
charmed by the loyal
you choose the best
iniquitous, unequalled death"
I would not complain
if you were just.
But you take the worthy
Leaving fools for us."**

"The rising and setting of the sun keep turning my memory of Sakhr's death. and only the host of mourners crying for their brothers saves me from myself"

"And Khansa weeps in the dark grief."

Zakia 

Continued in next column this

Khansa's life spanned the pre-Islamic and Islamic periods. Her earlier poetry sees nothing after death but "dust":

"The dust is blown over his beauties."

O Sahkr! who will be for time's accidents,
or who will make easy the rough to ride?
You were the comforter without substitute,
you were neither sweet nor bitter.
The dust is blown over his beauties,
over the bright freshness of his face

After Islam: *Khansa apparently accepted Islam, although still with an awareness of what had been lost. But perhaps one bright spot appears: with Islam's promise of an afterlife, the dust to which her brothers had gone can now be watered by Allah's power:*

Umar (R.A.), during his caliphate, asked her why she lamented and mourned even after embracing Islam (as mourning is forbidden in Islam). She replied: "Before embracing Islam, I lamented for their (brothers') vengeance and I lament now for their being in hell.

*I will weep them, by Allah, while grief longs
and while Allah fixes the mountain peaks.
Allah watered earth that came to hold them
with the morning cloud's downpour.*

*I see time wasting my tribe, my father's sons.
I became tears that my weeping does not dry.
O Sakhr, what use is lament or grief
for the dead in a grave that was a halt?*

*Let not Allah remove Sakhr and his love
nor Allah remove my lord Muawiya.
Let Allah not displace Sakhr, for he is
brother of bounty building by high acts.*

*I will weep them, by Allah, while grief longs
and while Allah fixes the mountain peaks.
Allah watered earth that came to hold them
with the morning cloud's downpour.*

When she saw the dead bodies of her sons, she did not weep. She burst into an elegy:

**"My sons I bore you with pain
And brought you up with care;
You have fallen today for the cause of Islam,
Who says you are dead;
You are very much alive, and alive with honour.
I feel proud to be the mother of martyrs."**

When Al Khansa's wailing was transformed into an eloquent submission to the will of God, she became a symbol and inspiration to all the believers. If we compare her behavior before and after her epiphany of belief, we can understand the profound effect of Islam on its followers. *Selections from the Diwan of al Khansa- translated & commented on by Arthur Wormhoudt. [Oskaloosa, Iowa]: Wm. Penn College, 1977, c1973. ([158] p.)LC# PJ7696 K5 A28 1977*

The Sharjah World Book Fair: A World of Discovery Maryam Ismail

The 2007 Sharjah World Book Fair was the most organized of any of the other seven that I have attended. For English speaking visitors there was a large selection of books and displays. This year was particularly interesting for me because for the first time I attended the lectures that are usually announced only in Arabic. The schedule was also written in English, so I was really excited to attend them. One which I attended was totally in Arabic to my surprise. Nonetheless, I along with my two daughters and nephew stayed for the entire lecture which was very informative.

I learned that Emily Nasrallah, is the author who has specialized in telling the stories of the children of war-torn Lebanon. She felt that these children were the ones who would find relief most in expressing themselves artistically, be it through writing, drawing or painting. What I found so amazing about her was that she was preoccupied with her life, her country, and the difficult situations of the post 1967 Lebanon, unlike many other Arab writers who focus on the West and how to fit in. She states:

"As a writer who has lived through the tragedies of her people and her country, and who sees similar tragedies unfolding with similar peoples around the world, I have to ask what effect this writing has .I must ask if the word still possesses the power to champion right-does it still possess the strength to carry the cries of the destitute and oppressed? And I must ask if there are still, in a world filled with the clamor of war machinery, ears that can hear the moans of the weak and the cries of the desperate."

I am looking forward to next year for more book bargains, informative lectures and rows and rows of exciting literary discoveries.

Maryam 

MWWWI wants to hear from you for suggestions, contributions, info on literary events, etc.

Contact:

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Calendar of Events:

MWWWI Meeting dates:

Date: Jan. 5, 2007 (one meeting this month)

Venue: Qanat Al Qasbah

Time: 12:00- 1:00 PM

Workshop Presenter: Nabila Usman

Topic: *Excellent Imagery*

Our meeting will be at the Luna Rossa located at Qanat al Qasbah on the Masjid side opposite the bridge from 12 to 2PM. InshaAllah, we have a discount. The food cost is reasonable. Lattes and such are expensive as they are everywhere. For directions, a location map is on the website, with an interactive find-your-direction-mode. www.gaq.ae. It is very useful though it has only three main sets of directions.

Other MWWWI meeting dates:

Feb. - Sat. 2; Tues. 5

Mar. - Sat. 1; Tues. 4

Apr. - Tues. 1; Sat. 5

May- Sat. 3; Tues. 6

June- Tues. 3; Sat. June 7

July- Tues. 1; Sat. July 5

August - **Summer Break!!!**

Do you Know? Remember from *MWWWI Ramadan Newsletter Issue 1*

What is triple parellelism? Parallelism - from the Greek for "beside one another," the grammatical or rhetorical framing of words, phrases, sentences, or paragraphs to give structural similarity.

Ex. *King Alfred tried to make the law clear, precise, and equitable."*

Ex.:Two or bicolon parallelism: *The bigger they are, the harder they fall; Three, tricolon or triple parallelism as in Shakespeare's Richard II:*

I give my jewels for a set of beads,
My gorgeous palace for a hermitage,
My gay apparel for an almsman's gown,
My figured goblets for a dish of wood .

What is rhetorical abstraction? **Rhetorical:** The art of persuasive argument through writing or speech. **Abstract:** Language that describes qualities that cannot be perceived with the five senses.

Ex: calling something *pleasant* or *pleasing* is abstract, while calling something *yellow* or *sour* is concrete.

Ex: "*It was the stillness of an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention.*" Joseph Conrad

Name a Muslim woman poet? Rada Hamwi
Diwaji (Syrian poetess- 3 volumes of poetry)!

Write a sonnet: Next month!

*Workshop certificates available at Jan. meeting!