

OTTOMAN LITERATURE

History of Turkish Literature I

Course Description

Designed for English-speaking students, the course will cover the literary history of Ottoman Turkey until the 19th century. The primary focus of the course will be the poetics of what is often called “Divan Literature” or “Classical Turkish Literature.” Rather than presenting a narrative account of this long literary history of the Ottoman Turks, the course will put many representative texts of this tradition under a microscope. Students will learn about the structural, thematic, cultural, and political nature of Ottoman Turkish literature. In addition, major theoretical and critical approaches will be incorporated into the lectures.

About the Professor

This course was developed by Kemal Silay, Ph.D., Chair of Ottoman and Modern Turkish Studies Department, Central Eurasian Studies, Indiana University.

Course Contents

Week 1-5

Unit I Theory

Week 6-9

Unit II Structure and Rhetoric

Ottoman Prosody

Rhyme: The Poetic Sound

Rhetorical Elements: Figures of Speech

Formal Aspects of Ottoman Turkish Poetry

Week 10-15

Unit III Text : Ottoman Turkish Poetry Under a Microscope

Nesīmī

Ahmed-i Dā'ī

Sheyh

Ahmed Pasha

Necātī

Mihri Hatun

Zeyneb Hatun

Zātī

Figānī

Fevrī

Hayālī

Fuzūlī

Bākī (d. 1600)

Sheyhülislām Yahyā

Nābī

Nā'īlī

Neshātī

Nedīm

Şeyh Gālib

Sünbülzāde Vehbī

Required Texts

- Walter G. Andrews, *An Introduction to Ottoman Poetry*. Minneapolis and Chicago: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1976.
- Walter G. Andrews, *Poetry's Voice, Society's Song: Ottoman Lyric Poetry*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985.
- Walter G. Andrews, Najaat Black, and Mehmet Kalpaklı, *Ottoman Lyric Poetry: An Anthology*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997.
- Walter G. Andrews and Mehmet Kalpaklı, *The Age of Beloveds: Love and the Beloved in Early-Modern Ottoman and European Culture and Society*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2005.
- Victoria Rowe Holbrook, *The Unreadable Shores of Love: Turkish Modernity and Mystic Romance*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994.
- Kemal Silay, *Nedim and the Poetics of the Ottoman Court: Medieval Inheritance and the Need for Change*. Bloomington: Indiana University Turkish Studies Series XIII, 1994.

Preliminary Notes:

Beginning around the 13th century and ending its long life span in the 19th century, Ottoman Turkish literature had a set of aesthetic rules and dynamics that were almost completely different from those of the folk literary traditions of medieval Anatolia and certainly from those of the modern and contemporary literatures that would later develop in Turkey. Court poetry being the predominate genre, Ottoman Turkish literature catered to a highly educated and select audience. Generally speaking, it was only the intellectuals trained in the so-called "Ottoman way" that produced and enjoyed the works of Ottoman literature. The Turkish-speaking subjects of Anatolia still continued to produce their orally-created literature. The conventions of Ottoman literature were greatly influenced by Persian classical literature. The earliest documented poetry collections (*divans*) of Anatolia (13th through 15th centuries) were emulations of Iranian literary paradigms. In addition to the poetic vocabulary, almost the entire corpus of images in early Ottoman poetry strongly resembled the creations of the Iranian poets. Whether the resemblances in these early works are interpreted by scholars as "sheer imitation" or "intertextuality," there exist some fascinating linguistic, structural, and thematic proximities. Almost all Ottoman poets received their literary understanding from the same common sources that had once served the Arab and Iranian poets. For this reason, it is most often very difficult to talk about the *original* or *individual* characteristics of a particular Ottoman court poet, especially in the earliest productions of this tradition. We must take care not to force upon medieval texts the criterion of "individuality" in the modern, 19th-century Romantic sense. Expression was considered true only when it was based on something that had been said before, i.e., when there was some kind of authority which acted as its measure of truth. Individual invention or creation was not the point; in fact, it was considered suspect. The only Creator was God; man was the creation, the created; he could not create anything himself. This was true in medieval Christian societies but even more so in medieval Islamic societies. Realistic, mimetic pictorial representation of human beings and of the natural world in general was strongly discouraged by the various interpretations of orthodox Islam.

The Ottomans who were trying to solidify their military and political legitimacy accepted the cultural baggage of Islam and the Persian literary tradition. This was a fundamental factor in their efforts to consolidate power and in laying the foundations of cultural greatness to complement their military and political dominance. Much was invested in literary and cultural activities. They brought scholars, artists, poets, and others from the great centers of Islamic civilization. And in a society based on strict obedience to authority, both political and religious, they established literary circles where obedience to tradition, to the great authors of the Persian and Arabic traditions, and later, to the great authors of their own literary past, was one of the essential rules. For a typical Ottoman poet, this world and nature in general were not the primary sources of inspiration for poetic creation. His sources were limited to those of the classical tradition. For example, a poet who wanted to depict the beloved in his poem did not turn to the living examples around him as mimetic models. Instead, he preferred to read the *divans* of the older poets, the masters of the art, and he tried to imitate the symbols and metaphors that they had already accepted as representing or signifying beauty. It should be noted that when we encounter similes made with the names of this-worldly objects, they are mostly represented in a distorted and exaggerated manner. Moreover, in this poetry, descriptions of elements of the natural world, such as the sun, moon, certain kinds of trees, flowers, and fruits, drinks, animals, and the like, were not in fact based so much on actual observations by the poet of the world around him as on the canonical vocabulary which he had inherited. A huge gap always appeared between the object and its representation. He represented in his poetry not a direct copy of nature but

an abstract nature structured by the conventions of the artistic traditions within which he was working. Natural or this-worldly elements were cited for their symbolic values, values which had been fixed by convention. For example, a typical classical poet would not be inclined to add new names to the limited list of countries that the classical canon allowed him to mention; neither would he represent someone short as beautiful. Being a classical poet (at least until the end of the 17th century), he could not write a poem extolling the beauty of a woman with *short* hair. By the same token, he could not go against the grain and praise someone with *blond* hair because according to the canon, beautiful hair had to be black. The point, for him, was not to create something new or to construct a realistic imitation of brute reality, but to re-state the traditional models. How something was said was more important than what was said. For him, the fundamental rules for being a "good" poet started with this obedience. The classical tradition provided the poet with not only the fixed formulas and metaphors but the vocabulary and a particular style of discourse appropriate to the conventions of this literature as well. Grammar and rhetorical tools were taught for centuries without any modification using certain canonical texts of Islamic literature, such as the *Gulistan* of the Persian poet Sa'di. One of the first requirements of the classical audience was to know that the beloved of Ottoman Turkish poetry was an idealized character and that these images were fixed by convention. The signs constituted a system which was agreed upon, so to speak, by the poet and his audience. No one truly tampered with these images or this system until the localization movement which showed its first serious activity toward the second half of the 17th century and gained momentum in the 18th century. The entire output of Ottoman Turkish court poetry, *though not a completely static tradition*, exhibits many similarities to what is known in the West as *medieval literature*, even though the historical scope of the European Middle Ages, the period between antiquity and the Renaissance dated by many as lasting from the 5th to the 15th century, does not correspond exactly to the Ottoman Turkish medieval period.

Unit I Theory

Week 1

Outline

Aesthetic Conventions

Poetry in Its Immediate Environment

Readings

Silay, *Poetics of the Ottoman Court*, 29-54.

Andrews, *Poetry's Voice*, 143-174.

Essay Topics

1. Provide an overview of the aesthetic conventions of Ottoman poetry. Give specific examples regarding the pre-modern characteristics of this discourse.
2. Discuss the concept of convention in Ottoman Turkish poetry.
3. What is the notion of ecology Ottoman Turkish court poetry?

Week 2

Topics

Imitation

Intertextuality

Originality

Localism and Turkishness

Realism

Readings

Holbrook, *Unreadable Shores*, 32-50, 97-124.

Andrews, *Poetry's Voice*, 19-61.

Silay, *Poetics of the Ottoman Court*, 70-89, 108-120.

Essay Topics

1. How does Victoria Holbrook define Ottoman intertextuality and originality? What poet and his work play a significant role in her arguments?
2. Discuss the linguistic method that Walter Andrews employs in his revolutionary approach to the Turkish/local aspects of Ottoman poetry.
3. Does Kemal Silay's "internal dynamics" approach to Ottoman court poetry differ from those of Holbrook and Andrews? Give specific examples from literary and other textual evidence that he presents.

Week 3

Topics

Mystical Dimensions

Orthodox Clergy

Heterodox Discourses

Readings

Andrews, *Poetry's Voice*, 62-88.

Andrews and Kalpaklı, *Age of Beloveds*, 270-303.

Silay, *Poetics of the Ottoman Court*, 70-89, 90-107.

Essay Topics

1. Discuss the mystical-religious voice in Ottoman poetry. Focus specifically on the dichotomy of "This World/That World."
2. How do Andrews and Kalpaklı explain/analyze the peculiar interactions of this-worldly love of court poetry within the dynamics of Ottoman concepts of law and religion? To what degree do the historical and textual evidence that they provide make their arguments credible?
3. Discuss the weakening of the orthodox religious establishment in the 18th century as reflected in court poetry and other arts of the Ottoman court. How did the poets of the time challenge the orthodox clergy? Compare their discourses of repudiation with the orders of the Qur'an and Hadith (records of the sayings of Prophet Muhammad handed down by his companions). Compare the Ottoman poet-*rind* (epicurean) character with the *zāhid* (zealot).

Week 4

Topics

Love, Sex, and the Text

Readings

Andrews and Kalpaklı, *Age of Beloveds*, 1-32, 129-162.

Silay, *Poetics of the Ottoman Court*, 101-102.

Essay Topics

1. Discuss the story of Notaras and Muhammad the Conqueror (1432-1481). If the historical sources that Andrews and Kalpaklı are referring to are accurate, how does this story challenge the perceptions of the "normative" notions of "Islamic" Ottoman love themes of the past? Make an attempt to situate this story's "love" theme within the much larger context of the highly pluralistic nature of "love" in Ottoman literary texts.
2. How do Andrews and Kalpaklı explain the fact the "beloved" as reflected in Ottoman Turkish literature and visual arts were predominantly male? Why is the female as "beloved" so rare in this long tradition?

Literary Analysis

1. Make a gender analysis of Nedim's "Hammāmiyye." In a society based so much on religious norms and ethics, how does the poet challenge the establishment?

Week 5

Topics

Critical Approaches to Ottoman Literature:
Orientalist, Philological, Islamist, and Postmodernist

Readings

Andrews, *Poetry's Voice*, 175-189.
Holbrook, *Unreadable Shores*, 1-11, 12-31.
Silay, *Poetics of the Ottoman Court*, 7-28, 128-154.

Essay Topics

1. Discuss the empirical evidence that Andrews presents in his analysis of Turkish scholars' approach to Ottoman literature. According to the author, where does Turkish scholarship fail in regards to the study of Ottoman Turkish literature?
2. How does Holbrook support her arguments concerning the study and reception of Ottoman culture and literature in modern Turkey? What methodology does she employ in establishing her theories on the "negative" effects of Turkish nationalism and language reform regarding Ottoman literature?
3. In contrast to the above-mentioned literary historians, Silay adopts a different approach. Discuss it citing specific examples that he presents as historical/textual evidence.

Unit II Structure and Rhetoric

Ottoman Prosody

Readings

Andrews, *Introduction to Ottoman Poetry*, 14-19, 19-47.

Essay Topics

1. Discuss the logic and principles of Ottoman Turkish syllable quantity, paying special attention to long and short, closed and open syllables.
2. What is the basic structure of the "ilm ul-'arūd"? What modifications did the Persians and Turks make to this system in order to make it more suitable for their literary languages? Provide specific examples in terms of its application to Turkish.

Rhyme: The Poetic Sound

Literary Terms

Define the following terms: "kāfiye," "hurūf," "harekāt," "revī," "vasl," "faults in rhyme," "adornments of rhyme," "rhyme scheme."

Readings

Andrews, *Introduction to Ottoman Poetry*, 48-64, 64-70.

Literary Analysis

1. Analyze the following couplets' rhythmic structure:

Dil-i zārı hasta kıldı ne yamān nezāredir bu
Şeb-i gamda koydu hālın ne siyeh sitāredir bu

Açılıp gül-i terinden mey içerdı sāgerinden
Ele al ki hançerinden dil-i pāre pāredir bu

O perī-yi āh-ı şebgīr ede cāmeh^wāba teshīr
Olunur mu lutfi ta^cbīr ne hoş istihāredir bu

Felekā tokuz sefīnen güm eder habāb-veş dil
Hazer eyle cünbişinden yem-i bī-kenāredir bu

Der imiş görüp ol āfet bu tahammülüm cefāya
Dil-i Nā'ilī degildir kopa (koya) seng-i hāredir

Rhetorical Elements: Figures of Speech

Readings

Andrews, *Introduction to Ottoman Poetry*, 72-128.

Andrews, *Introduction to Ottoman Poetry*, 115. Literary

Literary Terms

After defining the following terms give specific examples of their application in Ottoman Turkish poetry: "simile = teşbîh," "trope = mecâz," "metonymy = kinâye," "derivation = iştikâk," "folding and scattering = leff ü neşr," "repetition = tekrîr," "question and answer = su'âl ve cevâb," "equivoque = ihâm, tevriye," "beautiful assigning of cause = hüsn-i ta'lîl," "return = rucû'," "pretended ignorance = tecâhül-i 'ârif," "hyperbole = mübâлага," "putting forth a proverb = irsâl-i mesel."

Literary Analysis

1. Analyze the poem "The sun of thy cheek..." by the 16th-century poet Bākī in terms of its figures of speech.

Formal Aspects of Ottoman Turkish Poetry

Reading

Andrews, *Introduction to Ottoman Poetry*, 131-173.

Literary terms

Define the terms "mısrā'," "beyt," "müzdeviç," "mükerrir," "murabbā'," "muhammes," "tahmīs," "taştîr," "tardiye," "müseddes," "kıt'a," "rubā'î," and "müstezîd."

Essay Topic

1. Discuss the structural and thematic characteristics of the following literary forms: "Gazel," "kasīde," and "şarkı."

Unit III Text : Ottoman Turkish Poetry Under a Microscope

Week 10

Nesīmī (d. 1404), **Ahmed-i Dā'ī** (d. 1417), **Sheyhī** (d. 1431)
Ahmed Pasha (d. 1496), **Necātī** (d. 1509)

Readings

Walter G. Andrews, Najaat Black, and Mehmet Kalpaklı, *Ottoman Lyric Poetry*, 27-44, 163-169, 211-218.

Literary Analysis

1. Analyze Nesīmī's "Oh my idle of the temple..." from the perspective of Islamic mysticism. Explain the expressions "idle of the temple," and the "wheel of the skies."
2. Analyze the following expressions in Ahmed Pasha's "Ask about my wailing..." and "is there any heart...": "Bird of dawn," "wounded heart," "fire of my sighs," "cyle of the moon," "arrows of your glance," "rose and nightingale."
3. Discuss the theme of "wine" in Necātī's "Those glances of rain..."

Essay Topics

1. Discuss the concept of "torture" in Ahmed-i Dā'ī's "the torture of the beloved..."
2. How does Sheyhī compare "both worlds" in his "Your sun-face..." and "It's the season of spring..." Is there textual evidence in these poems to assume the poet's fascination with the "this world" over the "other"?

Week 11

Mihri Hatun (d. 1512), **Zeyneb Hatun** (d. 1473)
Zātī (d. 1546), **Figānī** (d. 1536), **Fevri** (d. 1570)

Readings

Walter G. Andrews, Najaat Black, and Mehmet Kalpaklı, *Ottoman Lyric Poetry*, 45-53, 56-58, 60-65, 169-174, 218-221, 225-227, 229-233.

Literary Analysis

1. Analyze the following *gazels* by Mihri Hatun and Zeyneb Hatun from the perspective of gender in literary discourse: "I opened my eyes from sleep...", "At times my longing for the beloved...", "My heart burns in flames...", and "Remove your veil..." Are there any gender-specific images and technical differences in these poems written by two Ottoman women poets? If yes, provide textual and historical evidence; if no, discuss the possible literary, linguistic, historical, and political reasons for your arguments.

Essay Topics

1. Write an essay discussing the reference to "Alexander, Hızır, and Water of Eternal Life" in Ottoman Turkish literature.
2. Discuss the following images: "Swaying cypress," "rivers of paradise," "burnt black," "blood-colored wine," "freezing gale," and "sigh."

Week 12

Hayālī (d. 1557), **Fuzūlī** (d. 1556), **Bākī** (d. 1600)

Readings

Walter G. Andrews, Najaat Black, and Mehmet Kalpaklı, *Ottoman Lyric Poetry*, 66-80, 90-99, 175-181, 183-187, 233-237-239-241.

Essay Topics

1. In his "They do not know how to search..." *gazel*, Hayālī challenges the religious clergy of his time: "Hey ascetic, don't talk about the tortures of Hell to the tavern-goers!" Read the other *gazels* by him to locate similar descriptions of the *zāhid*, the ascetic, and discuss the concept of tavern as a "secular space" in Ottoman Turkish poetry and how it functioned as a social and political mechanism to challenge the orthodox establishment.
2. The story of "Leylā and Mejnūn" was one of the most recited and rewritten medieval romances in Ottoman Turkish literature. First, write an essay focusing on the main plot of the story, and then try to identify the poems where there is a direct allusion to it.
3. What kind of love dominates the *gazels* of Bākī? Discuss the historical, textual, and scientific reason to assume that the foundations of Bākī's poetry were religious? Discuss the subject with specific examples.

Week 13

Sheyhülislām Yahyā (d. 1644), **Nābī** (d. 1712), **Nā'īlī** (d. 1674)

Readings

Walter G. Andrews, Najaat Black, and Mehmet Kalpaklı, *Ottoman Lyric Poetry*, 105-106, 114-128, 188-189, 191-195, 245-246, 249-252.

Essay Topic

1. Sheyhülislām Yahyā (the Chief Minister of Islamic Law) writes the following in one of his *gazels*: "Let the hypocrites practice their way in the mosque / And you, come to the tavern, where there is neither hypocrite nor hypocrisy." Discuss these words of a religious authority of the time within the dynamics of the changing nature of the Ottoman State.

Literary Analysis

1. Analyze the following expressions: "Boy of the garden," "scented candle," "exploding sigh," "hands folded," "Jesus," "bewildered gazelles," "the Kaaba of love," and "the veil of meaning."

Week 14

Neshātī (d. 1674), **Nedīm** (d. 1730)

Readings

Walter G. Andrews, Najaat Black, and Mehmet Kalpaklı, *Ottoman Lyric Poetry*, 131-132, 195-196.

Silay, *Poetics of the Ottoman Court*, 57-69, 157.

Literary Analysis

1. Analyze the following expressions in Neshātī's "We are desire hidden in the love-crazed call of the nightingale," and in his "You're gone—I'm alone in the company of longing": "The divine strand," "so what if we are famous," "the color of our existence," "the perfect mirror," and "the wheel of the sky."

Essay Topics

1. Discuss how Nedīm reflected the social and cultural changes of the "Age of the Tulips" in his poetry. Provide specific examples in support of your arguments.
2. Why is it significant to observe elements of "folk poetry" in the courtly tradition? Discuss the ways Nedīm integrated such elements into his poetry.
3. Describe the "Beloved" as represented by the 19th-century satirist Sābir. How does this criticism of the "Medieval Beloved" differ from the internal reactions of the court poets of the 17th and 18th centuries?

Week 15

Şeyh Gālib (1799), **Sünbülzāde Vehbī** (1809)

Readings

Walter G. Andrews, Najaat Black, and Mehmet Kalpaklı, *Ottoman Lyric Poetry*, 149-152. Silay, *Poetics of the Ottoman Court*, 128-148.

Literary Analysis

1. Analyze the following images in Şeyh Gālib's "You are my effendi," and "I won't abandon you": "Effendi," "moth," "love's burns," "perfect pearl," "saki," "dervish crown," "pen of fate," "mihrab," "sword of your glance," and "moth to your candle."
2. Analyze the "*Kasīde* on Poetry" by Sünbülzāde Vehbī in terms of its depiction of the poets of the century. Pay attention to the unique discursive characteristics of this work, such as its metapoetic definitions, defenses, and refusals of the canon.