

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

# TURKISH LITERATURE

## **Course Description:**

Designed for English-speaking students, this graduate course focuses on the history and development of Turkish literature. Major authors and their representative works are discussed and analyzed in their social, political, and theoretical contexts. Related non-fictional works—theoretical books and scholarly articles—are also integrated with the intent of providing students with an in-depth critical and historical background.

## **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.

## Required Texts

- Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey*. Montreal: McGill University Press, 1964.
- Özcan Başkan, "Turkish Language Reform," in *The Transformation of Turkish Culture: The Atatürk Legacy*, edited by Günsel Renda and C. Max Kortepeter. Princeton, New Jersey: The Kinston Press, 1986, pp. 95-112.
- Ahmet Ö. Evin, "The Tulip Age and Definitions of 'Westernization'" in *Social and Economic History of Turkey (1071-1920)*, edited by Osman Okyar and Halil İnalçık. Ankara: Meteksan, 1980, pp. 145-160.
- Emre Kongar, "Turkey's Cultural Transformation" in *The Transformation of Turkish Culture: The Atatürk Legacy*, edited by Günsel Renda and C. Max Kortepeter. Princeton, New Jersey: The Kinston Press, 1986, pp. 51-101.
- 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.
- Kemal Silay, compiler and editor, *An Anthology of Turkish Literature*. Bloomington: Indiana University Turkish Studies Series XV, 1996.
- Kemal Silay, compiler and editor, *Turkish Folklore and Oral Literature: Selected Essays of İlhan Başgöz*. Bloomington: Indiana University Turkish Studies Series, 1999.
- Kemal Silay, "Singing His Words: Ottoman Women Poets and the Power of Patriarchy" in *Women in the Ottoman Empire: Middle Eastern Women in the Early Modern Era*, edited by Madeline Zilfi. Leiden: Brill, 1997, pp. 197-213.
- Kemal Silay, *Ahmedi's History of the Kings of the Ottoman Lineage and Their Holy Raids against the Infidels*. Sources of Oriental Languages and Literatures Series. Massachusetts: Harvard University, 2004.

## **Contents**

Unit I Historical Contexts  
Weeks 1-3

Unit II Ottoman literature  
Week 4-7

Language and Literature of the Ottoman Court  
Precursors of Modernity: Ottoman Literature, 17th–18th Centuries  
18th-Century Discourses of Dissonance  
Ottoman Women Poets and the Power of Patriarchy

Unit III Turkish Folklore and Oral Literature  
Week 8-9

Unit IV Turkish Sufi Literature  
Week 10

Yunus Emre  
Nesimi

Unit V Foundations of Modern Turkish Literature  
Week 11-12

Namık Kemal  
Tevfik Fikret  
Ibrahim Sinasi

Unit VI Modern Turkish Literature  
Week 13-15

Yahya Kemal Beyatli  
Nazim Hikmet Ran  
Sait Faik Abasiyanik

## Unit I **Historical Contexts**

### **Week 1**

#### *Topics*

Between Religion and Ideology: The Rise of the Ottoman Empire as Reflected in Literature  
The Concept(s) of Gaza and Jihad  
Glorification of Jihadist Discourse

#### *Reading*

Silay, *Holy Raids against the Infidels*, 1-24, VII-XIX

#### *Literary Terms*

Please briefly define key literary terms: *dastan*, *mesnevi*, *Iskendername*, *gazavatname*, *jihadname*

#### *Author*

Please write a brief author biography: Ahmedî

#### *Literary Analysis*

Please provide a brief description of the main theme and characters of Ahmedî's poem.

#### *Essay Topics*

1. Please provide an overview of the major theories regarding the foundation of the Ottoman Empire.
2. Please describe the concepts of *gaza* and *jihad* as discussed in the work.
3. Please provide specific examples from Ahmedî's poem in regards to its overwhelmingly religious discourse.

### Week 2

#### *Topics*

History of Secularism and Secular Traditions in the Ottoman Empire and in Modern Turkey  
Early Signs of Westernization  
Kemalist Revolution and Its Impact on Turkish Culture

#### *Reading*

Berkes, *Development of Secularism*, 3-19

Evin, "Tulip Age and Definitions of 'Westernization,'" 131-145

Silay, *Poetics of the Ottoman Court*, 121-127

Kongar, "Turkey's Cultural Transformation," 19-68

#### *Essay Topics*

1. Please give an overview of the history of secularism.
2. Please describe the "Age of the Tulips," and discuss the progressive nature of the era by providing specific examples.
3. Please give an overview of the Kemalist cultural revolution and its historical roots.
4. Discuss the concept of "Westernization."

## Week 3

### *Topics*

Revolution with Words: Turkish Script and Language Reforms

Turkish as a Member of the Turkic Language Family

Pre-Modern Reactions to Linguistic Hierarchy

### *Reading*

Silay, *Anthology*, 31-33

Silay, *Poetics of the Ottoman Court*, 7-27

Başkan, "Turkish Language Reform," 95-112

### *Essay Topics*

1. After briefly describing the languages with which Turkish had organic links, discuss the historical reasons for Arabic and Persian vocabulary dominance in Ottoman Turkish literary works.
2. Discuss the reactions of the pre-modern [pre-Republican] authors against Ottoman linguistic and literary elitism, and juxtapose them with those of the Kemalist revolutionaries. Analyze the proximities and differences.
3. Please provide an overview of the linguistic, cultural, and political dimensions of the Turkish script and language reforms.

## Unit II Ottoman Literature

Week 4-7

### Language and Literature of the Ottoman Court

#### *Topics*

Aesthetic Conventions of Ottoman Poetry

Gazel

Commentary

Religion and Literature

Fuzuli (16th Century)

Muhammed the Conqueror (1432–1481)

Süleyman the Magnificent *or* Muhibbi (1494–1566)

Originality and Ottoman Poetics

Typology and Method of Research

#### *Reading*

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

Silay, *Anthology*, 92, 176-179, 183-202, 223-232

#### *Literary terms*

Please briefly define the following literary terms: *gazel*, *divan*, imitation, intertextuality, convention, metaphor, synecdoche, simile.

#### *Literary Analysis*

1. Please analyze the *gazel* by Fuzuli (“Oh you, with the bow-like brow...”) on a couplet-by-couplet basis, and identify all figures of speech.
2. Please discuss the poem by Muhammed the Conqueror from the sole perspective of its theme and juxtapose it with that of Ahmedi’s epic on the early Ottomans.

#### *Essay Topics*

1. Describe the nature of “love” Süleyman the Magnificent portrays in the poems provided. In each poem, is it “this-worldly,” mystical, religious, homosexual, heterosexual? Provide textual evidence for your argument.
2. Compare the arguments of Holbrook and Javelidze regarding the issue of “originality” in literature

## **Precursors of Modernity : Ottoman Literature, 17th–18th Centuries**

### *Topics*

Literature as a Secular Tradition

Internal Dynamics of Ottoman Court Literature

Subversive Intent: Questioning the Canon

Nabi (1642–1712)

Nedim (1681–1730)

Crossing Boundaries: Folk Traditions and/in the Courtly Discourse

### *Reading*

Silay, *Anthology*, 202-203, 210-214

Silay, *Poetics of the Ottoman Court*, 57-69, 157 [PLATE 1]

### *Essay Questions*

1. How does the 17th-century poet Nabi “advise” the “novice poets” of the century? As a court poet himself, why is his “advise” significant? Pay attention to the fact that the first conscious and organized criticism of court poetry and its conventions began to emerge in the 19th century.
2. Please discuss how the 18th-century poet Nedim reflected the social and cultural changes of the “Age of the Tulips” in his poetry. Provide specific examples in support of your arguments.
3. Why is it significant to observe elements of “folk poetry” in the courtly tradition? Discuss the ways Nedim integrated such elements into his poetry.
4. Please describe the “Beloved” as represented by the 19th-century satirist Sabir. How does this modernist criticism of the “Medieval Beloved” differ from the internal reactions of the court poets of the 17th and 18th centuries?

### *Literary Analysis*

1. Please attempt to make a gender analysis of Nedim’s “Hammamiyye.” In a society based so much on religious norms and ethics, how does the poet challenge the establishment?

## 18th-Century Discourses of Dissonance

### *Topics*

The Time for Festivity Has Come

Same-sex Discourse and Court Poetry

Sünbülzade Vehbi (d. 1809)

Kaside

Poetry on Poetry: Metapoetics as Literary Criticism

Defense *and* Denunciation of the Canon

### *Reading*

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

Silay, *Anthology*, 215-223, 624-625 [Biographies]

### *Essay Topics*

1. Discuss the weakening of the 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 which were handed down by his companions). Compare the Ottoman poet-*rind* (epicurean) character with the *zahid* (zealot).
2. After discussing the representation of same-sex discourse in the poetry of Nedim, briefly define the existing scholarship's critical and political positions in dealing with such "sensitive" issues.

### *Author*

Please write a brief author biography: Sünbülzade Vehbi

### *Literary Terms*

Please briefly define the following literary term: *kaside*

### *Literary Analysis*

1. Please analyze the "*Kaside on Poetry*," 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.



## **Ottoman Women Poets and the Power of Patriarchy**

### *Reading*

Silay, "Singing His Words," 197-213

### *Literary Terms*

Please briefly define the following literary terms: *écriture féminine*, "female rage," *nazire*.

### *Essay Topics*

1. Please discuss Ann Rosalind Jones' "theory of negotiation" and its applicability to the works by the women writers of the Ottoman Empire.
2. How did the Ottoman women poets manipulate and/or challenge the patriarchal norms and traditions in order to gain access to literary production?
3. Please briefly define the "Age of Belief" and its impact on literary creation.
4. How did the Muslim Ottoman women poets talk about wine, the wine glass, intoxication, and other similar themes despite the religious prohibition against drinking?

### *Literary Analysis*

1. Analyze the poem ("Remove your veil...") by the 15th-century women poet Zeyneb Hatun. Why would a female poet struggle to emulate the patriarchal notions of "man's superiority"?

## Unit III **Turkish Folklore and Oral Literature**

### Week 8

#### *Topics*

Dream motif and Shamanistic initiation  
Structure of Turkish folk romances  
Tale-singer, performance, and his audience

#### *Reading*

Silay, *Turkish Folklore and Oral Literature*, 11-24, 64-75, 76-132

#### *Literary Terms*

Please briefly define the following literary terms: *hikâye*, *âşık*, motif.

#### *Essay Topics*

1. Please discuss the function of "dreams" in becoming a Turkish troubadour. Pay attention to the pre-Islamic religious practice of Shamanism and its initiation rituals, and the transformation of them into sedentary "Islamic" settings.
2. Discuss the essay "Structure of Turkish Romances." How does this essay differ from the Russian formalist Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*?
3. Discuss the performance reactions of the tale-singer to different audiences. Why and how would a tale singer shorten his story when he is faced with a non-traditional audience. Give specific examples of reactions from both the traditional and non-traditional audiences of the tale-singer's performance.

### Week 9

#### *Topics*

Protest literature  
Shadow Theater  
Folk romance (romantic epic)

#### *Reading*

Silay, *Turkish Folklore and Oral Literature*, 339-358, 174-200, 302-332

#### *Literary Terms*

Please briefly define the following literary terms: *taşlama*, *halk ozanı*, *hayali*.

#### *Essay Topics*

1. Please briefly define the concept of "protest" in the context of the Turkish tale-singing tradition.
2. Discuss the structure of the Turkish shadow theater, Karagöz. Clearly define each section of the performance.
3. How do the characters of the Turkish shadow theater Karagöz reflect the social, cultural, and political nature of Ottoman-Turkish society?

#### *Literary Analysis*

1. Please briefly provide a description of plot, themes, and the main characters of the "Romance of Âşık Garip and Shah Sanem."

## Unit IV **Turkish Sufi Literature**

Week 10

### **Yunus Emre** (13th century)

#### *Reading*

Silay, *Anthology*, 34-41, 42-57, 87, 618 [Biographies], 629-630 [Biographies]

#### *Author*

Please write a brief author biography: Yunus Emre

#### *Essay Topics*

1. Please briefly discuss how Annemarie Schimmel argues the significance of Yunus Emre's (a medieval poet) discourse of mystical love for the people and artists of the Republic of Turkey. Even though Atatürk banned Islamic orders and sufi *tekkes* (dervish lodges) in 1925, Yunus Emre is one of the most celebrated and beloved "national" poets of the Turks. Does this constitute a contradiction or is it a natural cultural outcome of the Kemalist regime's success in protecting Islam-as-culture from Islam-as-politics?
2. In the poems provided, please identify the major sufi ideas of Yunus Emre's humanistic love and juxtapose them with those of orthodox Islam.

### **Nesimi** (14th century)

#### *Author*

Please write a brief author biography: Nesimi

#### *Literary Analysis*

1. Analyze Nesimi's "My picture, my darling..." in terms of all the metaphors employed in the construction of a pictorial representation of the Creator.

## Unit V Foundations of Modern Turkish Literature

Week 11-12

### **Namık Kemal** (1840-1888)

#### *Reading*

Silay, *Anthology*, 250-253, 259-262, 617, 627-628 [Biographies]

#### *Author*

Please write a brief author biography: Namık Kemal

#### *Literary Analysis*

1. Please analyze the concept of freedom in Namık Kemal's "Freedom *Kaside*." Focus on the fact that while the poet is still writing in an Ottoman classical genre, he is introducing such a modern concepts as "freedom." Compare his new discourse with that of the classical period and with the humanist but pacifist discursive position of Islamic mysticism (sufism).

### **Tevfik Fikret** (1867-1915)

#### *Author*

Please write a brief author biography: Tevfik Fikret

#### *Essay Topics*

1. How does Tevfik Fikret treat the issue of religion in "Haluk's Credo"? Can we call this poet "mystical"? Provide textual and historical evidence for your argument.
2. Tevfik Fikret was one of the favorite poets of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of modern Turkey. Carefully read the poems provided and make an attempt to find the philosophical common grounds between the two thinkers.

### **İbrahim Şinasi** (1826-1871)

#### *Reading*

Silay, *Anthology*, 240-249, 611 [Biographies]

#### *Author*

Please write a brief author biography: İbrahim Şinasi

#### *Essay Topic*

1. In the "Wedding of a Poet," what social institution does Şinasi criticize? How revolutionary was his criticism? Discuss this play within the context of the history and evolution of modernity in Turkey.

## Unit VI **Modern Turkish Literature**

Week 13-15

### **Yahya Kemal Beyatlı** (1884-1958)

#### *Reading*

Silay, *Anthology*, 295-302, 465-468, 607 [Biographies], 612 [Biographies]

#### *Author*

Please write a brief author biography: Yahya Kemal Beyatlı

#### *Essay Topic*

1. Despite being considered one of the founders of modern Turkish poetry, Yahya Kemal Beyatlı employed many aspects of Ottoman culture and literature in his works. In the poems provided, identify these elements, and discuss whether the poet succeeds in implementing the past into present in a non-confrontational manner.

Orhan Veli Kanık (1914-1950) and the *Garip* Movement

#### *Author*

Please write a brief author biography: Orhan Veli Kanık

#### *Literary Analysis*

1. Please analyze the poems by Orhan Veli in terms of the language employed.

### **Nazım Hikmet Ran** (1902-1963)

#### *Reading*

Silay, *Anthology*, 325-374, 530-531

#### *Author*

Please write a brief author biography: Nazım Hikmet Ran

#### *Essay Topics*

1. Discuss the elements of romantic communism in Hikmet's poetry. Please give specific examples from his works.
2. How does Hikmet transform a medieval character into a socialist hero in his masterpiece *The Epic of Sheik Bedreddin*?
3. Identify the signs of the Nazım Hikmet discourse in Ataul Behramoğlu's poems.

**Sait Faik Abasıyanık** (1906-1954), **Aziz Nesin** (1915-1995), **Yaşar Kemal** (b. 1922)

*Reading*

Silay, *Anthology*, 397-403, 426-436, 443-455

*Literary Analysis*

1. Please briefly provide a description of plot, themes, and the main characters of "A Dot on the Map" and "The Man Who Does Not Know What a Tooth or a Toothache Is" by Sait Faik Abasıyanık.
2. Analyze the provided short stories by Aziz Nesin in terms of their ideological stance. What specific modernist concerns do you observe in the stories?

*Literary terms*

Please briefly define the following terms: liminality, liminoid, ritual, *semah*, anti-structure.

*Essay Topic*

1. According to the article "Liminality, Ritual, and Social Performance," how does Yaşar Kemal problematize the issue of nomadic entity in Anatolia?