

Persian Literature

ISLA 388

Winter 2022, Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill
University



Course instructor: Professor Prashant Keshavmurthy

Course number and semester: ISLA 388, Winter 2022

Meets: 4.05 PM – 5.25 PM, Wednesdays & Fridays

Location: Zoom/Room 491, Sherbrooke 688

Professor: Prashant Keshavmurthy

Institute of Islamic Studies

Office 311, Morrice Hall

Office hours: Wednesday 2-3 PM or by appointment

Course description: This undergraduate course is intended to introduce you to a selection of classic texts in English translation from the millennium of pre-19th century literature in Persian. Rūmi, Firdawsi, Hāfiz and other famous poets will form parts of the syllabus. We will read these texts with an attention to literary and conceptual issues that their authors and contemporaneous readers would themselves have attended to while also asking how our locations as twenty first century readers of pre-modern poems and prose might serve as points of interpretative vantage and disadvantage. Among our questions will be: what assumptions about selfhood and character do these texts make? How was literature thought to perpetuate and yet undercut father-son relations? How was didacticism ironized? What kinds of reading competencies do these texts assume? How did a ghazal or masnavi relate to prior, present and future ghazals or masnavis? What kinds of social spaces – the court, the Sufi hospice, the coffee house, the madrasa, the home – did these texts circulate in, assume and help produce? What gender ideals did they assume and prescribe? What genre logics do they obey and disobey? How did these texts and their literary cultures understand emotion and how do those understandings differ from our own?

Method of evaluation:

Our classes will take place at the two scheduled class times on Zoom and then, if the rules change, in room 491, Sherbrooke 688. This is the break-down of and explanation for the final grade:

Participation in live sessions: 10%

Mid-term essay: 40%

Final essay: 50%

Explanation:

Participation in live sessions: to minimize “Zoom fatigue”, live sessions will count for no more than 10%. You are encouraged to have your camera on unless this is difficult for you. If so, please email me to let me know that you prefer to not have your camera on.

The mid-term essay: This is worth 40% of your final grade. Topics for the mid-term paper and final essay must be devised in consultation with me and will be judged for coherence of over-all argument, interpretative insight and grammatical correctness. Please make sure your essay is free of typos before you send it to me. You may choose to write on a text or passage or theme or motif from any text on the syllabus. *This essay must be an exercise in interpretation through close reading, not paraphrase.* As I do not expect a graduate-level research essay, I will not expect you to do any secondary reading. However, if you feel the need for any, feel free to ask me. The essay must be between 7 to 10 double-spaced pages long. It must have a title capturing your main argument.

The final essay: This is worth 50% of your final grade. The rules for this are the same as those for the mid-term essay except that this essay must address another text than the one you chose for your mid-term essay.

Deadlines: The midterm essay is due by email by midnight of **1st March** and the final essay by email by midnight of **15th April**.

Please send me your essays in MSWord, not as PDFs. If you would like extensions for the final essay, extensions will be granted but please ask me for one.

Your weekly readings for this course will, with a few exceptions, range between 90 to 100 pages per week. You must feel free to read in advance of a class as per the syllabus. You will be expected to attend every class having read the week's assignments.

Texts to be purchased: if you do not already possess the following texts, you may buy them from the **McGill Bookstore online (<https://leJames.ca/textbooks>) which also ships books to your home address:** 1. Farid ud-din Attār, *The Conference of the Birds*; translated by Dick Davis and Afkham Darbandi 2. Jalāl al-Din Rūmi, *The Masnavi: Book 1*; translated by Jawid Mojadeddi 3. Abolqasem Ferdowsi, *Shāhnāmeḥ: the Persian Book of Kings*; translated from the Persian by Dick Davis 4. *Nasrullah Munshi, Kalila and Dimna*; translated by Wheeler Thackson 5. Fakhraddin Gorgani, *Vis and Ramin*; translated by Dick Davis 6. Nizami, *Haft Paykar: A Medieval Persian Romance*; translated by Julie Scott Meisami. 7. Obeyd Zakani, *Ethics of the Aristocrats and Other Satirical Works*; edited and translated by Hasan Javadi.

Weekly readings:

Week 1: Class 1: a brief lecture introduction to the course as well as a discussion of the readings, the means of evaluation and choosing readings that you would like to present in class. **Class 2:** 1. Shams-i Qays-i Rāzi, Conclusion to *Al-Mu'jam fi ma'āyir ash'ār al-'ajam (Compendium on the Rules of Poetry in the Persian East, ca. 1258, Iran, Central Asia)*; and 2. a selection of short poetics texts by Rūdaki (d. 941 C.E., Bukhara, Samarqand) who is considered the earliest major poet in New Persian. You will find PDFs of both on MyCourses.

Week 2: Both classes: 1) A selection of ghazals by two poets of 14th century Shiraz: Hāfiz & Jahān Malik Khātūn; 2) Khatmi Lāhori (17th c, India), Commentary on the Shirazi Turk verse by Hāfiz. You will find PDFs of both on myCourses.

Week 3: Both classes: The translator’s introduction; Sa’di’s own preface and Chapters 7 and 8 from *Gulistān (The Rose Garden, 1258 C.E., Shiraz)*. You will find these in a single PDF on myCourses.

Weeks 4: Both classes: All of Fariduddin ‘Attār, *The Conference of the Birds* (d. 1221, Nishapur, Iran). Please also read the translators’ introduction.

Weeks 5: Selections from Jalāluddin Rūmi, *The Masnavi: Book 1* (d. 1273, Central Asia). Please read the translators’ introduction and then from the beginning (i.e. Rumi’s own prose introduction) till the end of the chapter entitled “Interpretation of ‘We have returned from the lesser jihad to the greater jihad’); then from “The story of the encounter between a grammarian and a boatman”) to the end of the book.

Weeks 6 & 7: Class 1, 2 & 1: The translator’s introduction to and the following ghazals from Rumi, *Swallowing the Sun*: all the ghazals in the two selections uploaded.

Week 7: Class 2: Sufi discourses on the ethics of listening to music: 1) Hujwiri, “Concerning Audition” from *Kashf al-mahjūb (The Unveiling of the Veiled, d. 1073 – 1077, Lahore, present-day Pakistan)*. 2) Yāhyā Maneri, “Listening to Music” from *Maktūbāt-i sadi (The Hundred Letters, d. 1381, Maner, North India)*. 3) Leonard Lewisohn, “The Sacred Music of Islam”. You will find PDFs of all three texts on MyCourses.

Week 8-9: All four classes: Selections from Firdawsi, *Shāhnāmeḥ: the Persian Book of Kings* (d. 1019 – 1025, Ghazna, present-day Afghanistan). Please read the translator’s introduction and the following selections: pages 1-131; “The Legend of Seyavash” (pages 215-275), “The birth of Sekandar” (454-455), “The Reign of Sekandar” (pages 456-528), “The Reign of Bahram Gur” (pages 622-678).

Week 10: Both classes: The translator’s introduction to and all of the main text of Nasrullah Munshi (c.1120, Ghazna, present-day Afghanistan), *Kalila and Dimna*.

Week 11: Both classes: Fakhruddin Gorgani, *Vis and Ramin* (Isfahan, Iran, fl.ca. 1050), Introduction & pages 1-142, 325-377.

Weeks 12 and 13: All four classes: Nizami Ganjavi, *Haft Paykar: A Medieval Persian Romance* (ca.1197, Marāgha, present-day Azerbaijan). Please read the translator’s introduction and all of the main text.

Week 14: Both classes: Obeyd Zākāni, *Ethics of the Aristocrats and Other Satirical Works* (d. 1370, Shiraz, Qazvin). Please read the translator’s introduction and all of the main text.

McGill Policy Statements

Academic Integrity: McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information).

L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (pour de

plus amples renseignements, veuillez consulter le site www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/).

Language of Submission: In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

Conformément à la Charte des droits de l'étudiant de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté (sauf dans le cas des cours dont l'un des objets est la maîtrise d'une langue).