

PRS 496a/596a – Spring 2009
Topics in Classical and Ancient Persian Literature and Culture:
Themes and Structures in Classical Persian Literature

Professor Kamran Talattof
Department of Near Eastern Studies
Marshall 452, T and Th 1-1:50
Email: talattof@email.arizona.edu
Phone: (520) 621-2330

Course Description:

This course will investigate classical Persian poetry and prose. It presents a history of Persian literature from Rudaki to Hafiz through the study of Persian poetic genres as well as through the analysis of didactical and historiographical texts. The epics of Ferdowsi, love poetry of Nezami, mystic poetry of Rumi, and epigrams of poets such as Amareh will provide examples of how themes such as religion, love, and wine are constructed. The course is conducted in English but readings may include poetry in Persian. Students not familiar with the Persian language may consult the professor about the readings and requirements.

Requirements and Evaluation:

The final grade is based on a short paper (7 pages for undergraduate students and 15 pages for graduate students, excluding the footnote and bibliography) due the last day of classes (50%) and a project such as a class presentation or a final exam (30%), and regular attendance and participation (20%).

You papers may reflect any of the following: your personal response to one, two, or more of the works discussed in class. To demonstrate your thoughts and reactions to these works, you may include examples from the readings of as many of poets as you wish. You may address aesthetic aspects of the literary works that distinguish their author as great poets or discuss these works in their historical settings. You may use background readings provided in class, suggested additional readings, or sources found elsewhere to contextualize your perception of the literary work(s) you are discussing. Your paper should be double space the entire text. Choose any style of notation (Chicago, MLA, etc.) you wish, but then use it correctly and consistently. You are always welcome to discuss your topics, outline, methodology, first draft, and final paper with instructor to get the most feedback possible. However to do so, you should start as early as possible. Graduate students may be required to give a class presentation.

Readings:

Readings will be available on D2L. They include Persian poetry in English translation and in Persian. They also include analytical writings about Persian literature.

Schedule:

Week 1, 2:

Introduction, old Persian, middle Persian, the development of Persian literature, a taste of Persian poetry, Persian epigram (Course-pack)

Week 3, 4:

Persian epic, (The discussion of epic tradition focuses on the *Shahnameh* of Ferdawsi, explores ancient legends, discusses the tradition after Firdawsi and its relation to classical Persian romance writing.)

Definition of Epic and Epic tradition in Iran (course-pack)

Ferdawsi, *Rostam and Sohrab*

Ferdawsi, *Siayvush or Saiawush*

Week 5:

Qasideh or Qasida, (This sections discusses the root of the Qasideh poetic form in pre-Islamic period and focuses on its laudatory, elegiac, and satiric aspects.)

Definition

Rudaki

Farrokhi

Week 6:

The Persian Ghazal (This section discusses the lyrical expression in classical Persian literature and its conventions and devices by focusing on the poetry of Hafez in whose poetry this genre perfected.

Definition

Hafiz's work

Week 7:

The Ruba'i (Focusing on the poetry of Khayyam, this section will study this purely Persian poetic genre of rhymed couplet).

Definition

Khayyam's work

Week 8, 9, 10:

The Masnavi (We will discuss this genre as the preferred medium for all descriptive, romance, or narrative purposes to demonstrate how it allows the most freedom for the poet to present long stories.)

Definition

Nizami

Rumi

Week 11, 12:

Sufi poetry (This section discusses the mystical thought and expression in the works of great Sufis such as Sana'i, Attar, Rumi to find the unifying elements of mysticism.)

Definition

Sana'i (Handout)
Attar (Handout)
Rumi (Course pack)

Week 13:

Didactical prose (often accompanied by poetry) and historiography, (Through reading a sample of texts in translation, this section will attempt to find a common trend in the works of the authors who wrote didactical prose or historiography.)

Defininition

Sadi Shirazdi (prose and poetry) in *Gulistan*

Nezami Aruzi Samarqandi, 'selections from the Chahar Maqale' (Handout)

Nizam al-Molk, 'selections from the Siyasatname'

Attar, "The Story of Sheikh San'an from the Manteq ot tayr"

Week 14:

Review and Conclusion

Bibliography

- Ferdowsi, A. *Rustam va Isfandiyar. In the dragon's claws: the story of Rostam & Esfandiyar, from the Persian Book of Kings by Abdolqasem Ferdowsi* / translated, introduced, and annotated by Jerome W. Clinton. Washington, DC : Mage Publishers, 1999.
- Nizami Ganjavi, M. *The Haft Paykar: A Medieval Persian Romance* / translated with an introduction and notes by Julie Scott Meisami. Oxford [England]; New York : Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Talattof, Kamran, and Jerome W. Clinton. *The poetry of Nizami Ganjavi: Knowledge, Love, and Rhetoric* edited by Kamran Talattof and Jerome W. Clinton. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000.
- Davis, Dick. *Borrowed Ware: Medieval Persian Epigrams* / introduction and translation by Dick Davis. Washington, D.C.: Mage Publishers, 1997.
- Rumi, Maulana Jalal al-Din. 1207-1273. *Selections. English. 1994 The essential Rumi* translated by Coleman Barks, with John Moyne, A.A. Arberry, Reynold Nicholson. San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1995.
- Rumi, Maulana Jalal al-Din *We Are Three: New Rumi Poems* by Coleman Barks (Translator), 1988
- Arberry, A. J. (Arthur John), *Classical Persian literature* A.J. Arberry Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1994.