

Diversity Only Terrifies Fascists

Routes of Radical Love

Reading *Layli & Majnun*

MELC 343 & MELC 543 A | Spring 2025 | SAV 156

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Mon. & Wed. 1:30-3:20 PM

Office hours by appointment



LAYLA AND MAJNUN AT SCHOOL

SCHOOL OF BEHZAD, TIMURID HERAT, CIRCA 1480

The story of *Layli & Majnun* is without a doubt the most globally-circulated and adapted love story to have emerged from West Asia. Together we will read Nezami Ganjavi's (d. 1209) twelfth-century narrative of *Layli & Majnun* in English translation. We will use this story as an entry point into formative debates on ethics or akhlaq, socially subversive poetry, mystical and profane concepts of love, and representations of animals in literature. These debates were part and parcel of Muslim societies that developed diverse ideas and practices of spirituality. This class will help you develop more imaginative and nuanced reading practices and use academic writing as a medium for critical thinking. Intrigued yet?

Central question: What types of radical beings/existence in the world does this love story open up for its readers?

Prerequisites: Familiarity with a second language would be desirable, but not assumed. Curiosity and empathy are however required.

Required materials: PDFs to be provided; if you wish to buy the main book, click [here](#).

What will you gain in ten weeks?

- **How to read academically**
 - Academic reading is produced in a collective and collaborative setting. In fact, this syllabus itself exists thanks to the intellectual generosity of my colleague Prashant Keshavmurthy and his virtual reading group with whom I read and discussed *Layli & Majnun*. In a group setting, we become critically aware of our assumptions and learn that our ideas develop in generous and patient interactions with others. This model of reading is not only a component of a university education, it's also vital for one's ability to operate in life.
- **A critical meditation on alterity**
 - What does it mean to live outside normative models of ethical behavior? What does it mean when a social outcast who is likened to wild animals composes delightful and moving poetry? What happens when two lovers adopt wildly different languages through which to communicate their love for one another? *Layli & Majnun* is a radical tale of being other in society.
- **How to read & appreciate poetry**
 - Poetry is seen by many in the U.S. as an academic or niche pursuit. However, in the cultures of West, Central, and South Asia, poetry occupies a central place as a mode of social and literary expression. Appreciation for poetry cuts through religious, social (literate/illiterate), economic, and national lines. It makes it all the more important to be able to read poetry as a major component of a cultural heritage shared among millions of people worldwide.

How's this course good for your life?

In “Neoliberalism: The Idea That Swallowed The World,” Stephen Metcalf writes, “‘Neoliberalism’ is not simply a name for pro-market policies, or for the compromises with finance capitalism made by failing social democratic parties. It is a name for a premise that, quietly, has come to regulate all we practise and believe: that competition is the only legitimate organising principle for human activity.” According to this logic, this course is only valuable insofar as it may help you become more marketable, on purely transactional terms.

What we are witnessing in our world today is the utter moral bankruptcy and the slow death of the age of the capital market. This experience is no doubt traumatic and devastating to millions of people. To best respond to it, we must learn how to create robust alternatives to corporate capitalism and its system of value-making. In this course, through slow and patient debate on issues that are central to human society, we can learn how to insist on the distinction between price and value and on the centrality of humanistic inquiry and intentional empathy in any healthy and thriving society.

How will I evaluate you?	Participation	15%
	Discussion posts	20%
	Presentations (2)	25%
	Quizzes	20%
	Final Essay	20%

	Total	100%

Grading scale:

A = 4.0–3.9 | A- = 3.9–3.5 | B+ = 3.4–3.2 | B = 3.1–2.9 | B- = 2.8–2.5 | C+ = 2.4–2.2
 C = 2.1–1.9 | C- = 1.8–1.5 | D+ = 1.4–1.2 | D = 1.1–0.9 | D- = 0.8–0.7 | E = Failure

Pedagogical Commandments

Participation (%15): It's important that you show up to class, engage the materials, ask questions, and support your peers. Broadly put: take ownership of your learning. If you can't show up to most classes, this class ain't for you.

Discussion posts (%20): At the end of each week, you are to post a reflection on Canvas in which you elaborate on one of the major points that we discussed that week. These reflections can also pose a question for further inquiry. So please be generous and intentional in your Canvas posts. Rubric is below:

I evaluate your reflection posts based on the depth of engagement with the main arguments of the readings, lectures, and other media from the week. Depth of engagement will be demonstrated through specificity (incorporating direct quotations or specific examples, richly described), critical, original analysis (questioning the definitions or interpretations of concepts or arguments, providing alternative examples, interrogating methods or data, and reflecting thoughtfully on what surprised you from what you learned), and clarity of expression. Your post should be at least 150–200 words. The more specific your post is, the more generously it will be graded. You are highly encouraged to respond to peers' posts.

Presentations (%20): You will do two mini presentations for this course, each worth %12.5 of your overall grade). The first will be done in a group and on a topic related to *Layli & Majnun* and the second will be a workshop of your final essay. The second presentation will give you the opportunity to present your ideas and receive critical feedback. Rubrics [here](#).

Quizzes (%20): Every week, I will take an unannounced quiz on the assigned reading. The quiz will be a straightforward question. As long as you've done the reading, you

will be able to answer. For those who miss class, you can email me a short paragraph demonstrating that you've done the reading in order to get full credit.

Final essay (%20) (5-7 pages, excluding bibliography): This is a polished and fully developed version of your second presentation. This essay will give you the opportunity to think critically about our discussions and readings on *Layli & Majnun*. Rubric [here](#). #*No-such-thing-as-overanalysis*

Policies & Stuff

Health:

- SafeCampus (24/7 help line for UW community): 206-685-SAFE;
<https://www.washington.edu/safecampus/>
- Campus resources for well-being: <http://wellbeing.uw.edu/>
- Counseling center and mental health services: 206-543-1240;
<https://wellbeing.uw.edu/topic/mental-health/>
- My SSP (24/7 phone or chat access to a counselor): 866-775-0608
<https://studentsupport.telushealth.com/ca/home>
- LiveWell (your overall well-being): <https://livewell.uw.edu/>
- Student Life's Student Care Report (if you are seriously worried about another student's well-being):
<https://dsl.uw.edu/staff-development/student-care-report-form/>
- UW Food Pantry:
<https://www.washington.edu/anyhungryhusky/the-uw-food-pantry/>

Academics:

- Odegaard Writing and Research Center (45-minute appointments and can help you at any stage of the writing process):
<https://depts.washington.edu/owrcweb/wordpress/>
- History Writing Center (30-minute individual appointments with the writing center director, or with an experienced instructor in the Department of History): <https://history.washington.edu/history-writing-center>

Religious Accommodation: It is the policy of the University of Washington to accommodate student absences to allow students to take holidays for reasons of faith or conscience or for organized activities conducted under the auspices of a religious denomination, church, or religious organization, so that students' grades are not adversely impacted by the absences. Click [here](#) to read further.

Academic Honesty: Students are expected to treat their fellow classmates and instructors with honesty and respect throughout the course. All exam answers and posters must reflect original work. No form of cheating is acceptable. The following [link](#) has information on academic honesty, plagiarism, and consequences. Students are expected to adhere to the University of Washington Code of Student Conduct which can be found at the following [link](#).

Civility for All: I am committed to creating a space that is inclusive to all. By all, I mean whoever may be reading this. The University of Washington is committed to fostering an environment where the free exchange of ideas is an integral part of the academic learning environment. Disruption of classroom discussions can prohibit other students from fully engaging and participating. Any student causing disruption may be asked to leave any class session, and, depending on the severity and frequency of that behavior, an incident report may be filled with Community Standards and Student Conduct. As a condition of enrollment, all students assume responsibility to observe standards of conduct that will contribute to the pursuit of academic goals and to the welfare of the academic community. For more detailed information on these standards, please visit [here](#).

FERPA Policies: Per FERPA rules, I cannot discuss grades via email. Please make an appointment to talk in my office if you have concerns. For more, see [here](#).

Incomplete grades may be assigned only if a majority of the coursework has been completed, meaning up to the last two weeks of the quarter per UW policies. To learn more, see [here](#).

¡All Key Information in One Place!

1	Quizzes (%20)	Taken in class, unannounced
2	Group presentation (%12.5)	Rubric here .
3	Solo presentation (%12.5)	Rubric here .
4	Discussion posts (%25)	11:59 PM every Sunday night (e.g. week 1 due on Sunday, April 6)
5	Final essay (%20)	Rubric here . Due Monday, June 9 at noon

Schedule

(certainly these days is worth squat, all dates are therefore tentative)

» For each day, we will read a portion of *Layli & Majnun* as noted below in the schedule. These readings will be contextualized by **discussion questions** (posted on Canvas) meant to better guide you through the poem. I will also assign **secondary texts** that will complement our reading of the Persian romance. Every reading will be posted in PDF format on Canvas under “files” and bear the date before which you have to read it. The complementary readings do not appear in the schedule (but do appear in the bibliography below). **I will let you know which secondary text to read for each class prior to that day.**

#	Date	Reading
1	3/31 Monday	Monday: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meet & greet with Prof. Funny - Topics to discuss: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are your expectations for this course? - What do you wish to gain from this course? - Why read <i>Layli & Majnun</i>?
	4/2 Wednesday	Wednesday: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Listen to “Rumi’s World” here on the <i>Ottoman History Podcast</i> (You can stop at 50.55 minute) - Read <i>Layli & Majnun</i>, p. 1-19.
2	4/7 Monday	Monday: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>L&M</i>, p. 19-34 - In-class extra reading here <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Q: Do you see a difference in the way the two translators, more than 120 years apart, approached the same text? How do their notes frame the romance of <i>Layli & Majnun</i>?
	4/9 Wednesday	Wednesday: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>L&M</i>, p. 35-47 - At home extra reading here

3	<p>4/14 Monday</p> <p>4/16 Wednesday</p>	<p>Monday:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>L&M</i>, p. 48-80 - Guest (in-person): Prof. Domenico Ingenito (UCLA) <p>Wednesday:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>L&M</i>, p. 81-91 - At home extra reading: text & reading guide
4	<p>4/21 Monday</p> <p>4/23 Wednesday</p>	<p>Monday:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>L&M</i>, p. 92-107 - In-class extra reading here <p>Wednesday:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>L&M</i>, p. 108-121 - At home extra reading here
5	<p>4/28 Monday</p> <p>4/30 Wednesday</p>	<p>Monday:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>L&M</i>, p. 122-134 - At home extra reading here <p>Wednesday:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Group presentations (see rubric on Canvas)
6	<p>5/5 Monday</p> <p>5/7 Wednesday</p>	<p>Monday:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Group presentations <p>Wednesday:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Group presentations
7	<p>5/12 Monday</p> <p>5/14 Wednesday</p>	<p>Monday:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>L&M</i>, p. 135-151 - Guest (virtual): Torange Yeghiazarian; Founding Artistic Director Emeritus, Golden Thread Productions <p>Wednesday:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>No class, Prof. traveling</i>
8	<p>5/19 Monday</p> <p>5/21 Wednesday</p>	<p>Monday:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>L&M</i>, p. 152-183 <p>Wednesday:</p>

		- <i>L&M</i> , p. 184-199
9	<p>5/25 Monday No class; Memorial Day</p> <p>5/28 Wednesday</p>	<p>Monday: - <i>L&M</i>, p. 200-232 (read at home)</p> <p>Wednesday: - <i>L&M</i>, p. 232-258</p>
10	<p>6/2 Monday</p> <p>6/4 Wednesday</p>	<p>Monday: - Solo presentations</p> <p>Wednesday: - Solo presentations</p>

→ Final essay due at noon on Monday, June 9 ←

Bibliography of Secondary Readings*

* The list below contains texts from which we will read excerpts in dialogue with our main text, Nezami Ganjavi's *Layli & Majnun*.

Al-Ghazali, *The Book of Love, Longing, Intimacy and Contentment: From the Ihyā 'ulum al-dīn (The Revival of Religious Sciences)*. Trans. Eric Ormsby. The Islamic Texts Society, 2011.

ʿAttar, Farid al-Din. *Memorial of God's Friends: Lives and Sayings of Sufis*. Trans. Paul E Losensky. Paulist Press, 2009.

ʿAttar, Farid al-Din. *The Conference of the Birds: A Philosophical Religious Poem in Prose*. Trans. C. S Nott. Berkeley: The Clear Lights Series, 1971.

Avicenne, *A Treatise on Love by Ibn Sina*. Trans. Emil Ludwig Fackenheim, 1943.

Avicenna, *Remarks and Admonitions*. Trans. Shams Constantine Inati. Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984.

Ḥallāj Al-Ḥusayn ibn Manṣūr. *Hallaj: Poems of a Sufi Martyr*. Trans. Carl W Ernst. Northwestern University Press, 2018.

Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', et al. *The Case of the Animals Versus Man Before the King of the Jinns: An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Epistle 22*. Oxford University Press, 2009.

- Minissale, Gregory. ***Images of Thought: Visuality in Islamic India, 1550-1750.*** Cambridge Scholars, 2007.
- Najm al-Dīn Rāzī, ‘Abd Allāh ibn Muḥammad. ***The Path of God's Bondsmen from Origin to Return: (Merṣād Al- ‘ebād Men Al-Mabdā’ Elā’l-Ma‘ād): A Sufi Compendium.*** Trans. by Hamid Algar. Caravan Books, 1982.
- Nizāmī ‘Arūzī. ***The Chahār Maqála: The Four Discourses.*** Trans. Edward Granville Browne. Published by the Trustees of the E.J.W. Gibb Memorial, 1978.
- Nezami Ganjavi, ***Layli & Majnun.*** Trans. by Dick Davis. Mage Publishers, 2020.
- Nizāmí, Ganjavī , et al. ***Lailí And Majnún; a Poem [Translated in Verse] from the Original Persian of Nazámi.*** Trans J. Atkinson. Oriental Translation Fund, 1836.
- Shaykh Mushrifuddin Sa‘di of Shiraz, ***The Gulistan (Rose Garden) of Sa'di: Bilingual English and Persian Edition with Vocabulary.*** Trans. by W. M Thackston. Ibex, 2008.
- The Nasirean Ethics by Nasir ad-Din Tusi.*** Trans. G. M. Wickens. London: George Allen & Unwin LTD, 1946.