

# **Kurdish Literature. Between Borders, Past and Modernity.**

**21.X. 2014**

**Collegium Maius, Michał Bobrzyński Conference Hall**

**Jagiellonian University**

*It is difficult to organize the seminar on Kurdish literature while such turmoil is happening in Kurdistan. However, keeping in mind the great Dimdim epic which proves that there is no defeat as far as there are words to create the story, similar to Kraków literary traditions which made the town a fortress of sense even in times of nonsense and annihilation, we decided not to change our plans. Despite the tragic events we will continue to narrate the beauty of Kurdish culture dedicating our seminar to all the people who are now suffering and defending their homes in Kurdistan.*

**10.00-10.30 Opening of the Seminar**

**10.30-13.00 Session**

**Prof. Michiel Leezenberg (University of Amsterdam)**

**“The Kurds have not made love their aim”: Love, (trans-) gender and  
sexuality in Ehmedê Khanî's Mem û Zîn**

Love is a central theme in Ehmedê Khanî's late seventeenth-century mathnawi epic 'Mem û Zîn', nowadays seen by many as the Kurdish national epic. Like many other poems in the tradition of Nizami's 'Layla and Majnûn', Khanî's epic exploits the ambiguities between human, worldly or 'metaphorical' love and divine, 'literal' or truthful love; more strongly than Nizami's epic, however, 'Mem û Zîn' addresses the human, physical, and sexual dimensions of love as well. In my talk, I will focus on two episodes: first, the famous scene where Mem and Zîn first meet each other during Newroz, while both are cross-dressed. This scene is wonderfully

ironic and even humorous; but it elicits rather different reactions from the girls and the boys. Second, I will discuss Siti's and Tajdîn's wedding night. I will then place Khanî's depiction of human and sexual love against the background of other premodern and early modern poetic traditions of the Islamic world, and contrast it with the rather different views on sexual identity and morality of more recent times.

**Dr Amr Taher Ahmed (Austrian Academy of Science, Vienna)**

**Nationalism: A Game-Changer for Literary Connections in Early  
Modern Kurdish Poetry**

For centuries, Kurdish poetry developed mainly in the wake of the Persian literary tradition. But with the rise of literary modernity and the formal renovation of Kurdish verse in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Kurdish poets moved away from the Persian heritage. Kurdish modernists were still familiar with Persian poetry, old and new. Yet, in their search of a suitable model for reform, they turned to modern Turkish poetry instead. Abdullah Goran's poetry is, in many respects, exemplary of Kurdish modernism. My paper focuses on Goran's contribution, while seeking to account for this remarkable shift from the Persian reference to the Turkish model on a wider scale. Though by no means less politicized than their Turkish counterparts, early modern Persian poets never established nationalism as a criterion for renovated poetic patterns; their undertakings were rather triggered by technical considerations. In the Turkish and Kurdish contexts, on the other hand, poetic patterns were viewed above all as identity labels, and the formal reformation of poetry as a lever for the preservation of national identity.

**Dr Hashem Ahmedzadeh (Institute for Research and Development -  
Kurdistan, Erbil)**

**Fact and Fiction in Modern Kurdish Narrative Discourse**

The modern narrative discourse, i.e. the novel and short story, contrary to the traditional modes of narration, e.g. fable and romance, which is, in the first hand, based on general views

and didactic paradigms, has its origins in the individual experiences and modern epistemological ideas. The rise of the modern Kurdish narrative discourse provides the researchers on the relationship between fact and fiction with excellent examples. This presentation, examining the first two Kurdish narratives, a short story and a novel, from the early 20th century, argues how fact feeds fiction in the Kurdish context. The presentation aims to apply the existing theoretical foundations, which discuss the epistemological and social bases of the modern literary narrative discourse, to the Kurdish modern literary discourse. Ian Watt's ideas about the particularity of experiences, times and places in the novel and Michael Foucault's views on the type of the "will to knowledge" that contributed to the emergence of realism provide the theoretical bases of this presentation. The presentation, examining the lacuna and space of two Kurdish modern literary narrations, highlights the certain existing relations between fact and fiction in the world of Kurdish society and literature.

**Dr. Clemence Scalbert-Yücel (University of Exeter)**

**Kurdish literature as a literature of resistance?**

This presentation is based on the analysis of some works from kurmandji literature that developed in the diaspora and in Turkey from the late 1980s onwards. According to Barbara Harlow, literature of resistance is a literature whose texts differ not by their form but by their uses and goals: they aim to support the movements of national liberation and are used as such. It seems that Kurdish literature developed in some respect as a literature of resistance as understood by Harlow. The authors were closely associated to the Kurdish national movements and their texts often dealt with the national movement and the national feelings. However, the study of the texts shows that their form actually bears some specificity. The use of the paratext (as in footnotes, prefaces, etc.) is common and helps to actually document and describe the national movement and struggle and express the nationalist feelings.

**Dr Joanna Bocheńska (Jagiellonian University)**

**When a Dog Becomes a Cat.**

**Hesenê Metê's *Şepal* and few questions on betrayal and faithfulness in the light of the ethical approach to literature.**

Can Kurdish modern literature assist in living not only for the Kurds but also for foreign readers? What kind of beauty, experience and thought can it offer? Is it only the Kurdish specific that we can learn about or maybe the rich moral imagination we can derive from reading it? In my presentation I will analyse one of Hesenê Metê's short stories entitled *Şepal*, highlighting the role of the moral consideration it offers the reader. My research refers to the new ethical approach to literature represented by Martha Nussbaum among others which stands in opposition to both traditional instruction-based didacticism and postmodernism which abolished the role of the writer and its work in transferring any ethical message. In light of the approach the role of literature is not to instruct the reader on how to live but rather to deal with the doubts and reflections considering the given reality and human deeds. In such a perspective the literary aesthetic creates the valuable ethical dimension of a story. That is why Martha Nussbaum claims that literature is an important part of philosophy.

The seminar is organized in the scope of the research project entitled *How to make a voice audible? Continuity and change of Kurdish culture and of social reality in postcolonial perspectives* ([www.kurdishstudies.pl](http://www.kurdishstudies.pl)) financed by the National Science Centre of Poland.