

General Education Course
Iranian 55
Gender and Sexuality in the Arts and Literatures of Iran and the Middle East
Fall 2020

preliminary draft (final version will be uploaded during week 1)

Venue: Zoom virtual classroom:

<https://ucla.zoom.us/j/92266059881>

While all sessions will be recorded, attendance of online lectures (Tuesdays/Thursdays) is strongly recommended but not mandatory in the case of overlaps with other courses. Class participation during lectures counts as extra credit of 10 points.

Students will have to contact the instructor in order to clarify their specific circumstances if they are unable to attend lectures. In such cases, students are expected to download and watch the recorded lectures within 24 hours of the upload of the recordings.

Attendance of “discussion” sections (Fridays) with Teaching Assistants is mandatory, and it accounts for 10% of the final grade. Students who expect to miss one or more of these sessions will need to contact the instructor in advance.

Prof. Domenico Ingenito

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Office/Office hours:

Tuesdays / Thursdays, 2:30–3:30 pm

Schedule an appointment through this website:

<https://calendly.com/dingenito>

Course Description

The arts and literature of Iran and the Middle East constitute a resplendent and kaleidoscopic heritage that has deeply influenced the development of eastern and western civilizations for centuries. This course offers a multifaceted introduction to this artistic and cultural heritage from the perspective of its meditation on and representations of gender and sexuality in the context of broad socio-historical frameworks. Through textual analyses and exercises of analytic writing, students will learn how to think critically about the connection between gender and the pictorial, architectural, performative, cinematographic, and photographic dimensions of an artistic milieu.

spanning between Central Asia and the Middle East between the 10th century of the common era and the present time.

The lectures will acquaint the students with a broad variety of socio-anthropological, ethical, and historiographical issues stemming from both the mainstream topics characterizing the extensive field of Iranian studies in the broader context of the Middle East and the most controversial conversations on the nature of sexuality, ethnicity, and religion. All lectures will introduce a brief sketch of the historical background of the sources and the cultural issues discussed during the session. The weekly discussions will provide students with a multilayered approach to the study of Middle Eastern cultural expressions as a prismatic lens through which one may read the major anthropological challenges affecting the socio-political complexity of the world in which we live today.

Throughout the quarter, students will be constantly encouraged to apply their meditations on the connection between gender and the Middle Eastern cultural heritage to their exposure to the artistic experiences enriching the cultural landscape of Los Angeles and Southern California.

Apart from the composition of weekly reports and analytical papers, in order to facilitate a productive interplay between the assigned readings and the practical experience of the topics tackled in class, students will engage themselves with field assignments involving visiting art galleries, museums, and theatrical venues.

Discussion Sections with Teaching Assistants (TAs)

TA discussion sections will be structured as follows: sections will begin with a brief presentation of the main themes and concepts covered in both the readings and the lectures. Here, there will be an opportunity to ask and discuss any questions to clarify concepts covered in the week's course materials. Discussion will include 2-4 focus questions, key terms, or core concepts drawn from the week's lectures and readings in order to allow students to better grasp the broader topics of the course.

In order to work through these questions, we will use a "think-pair-share" format wherein students will take a few moments on their own to reflect on the questions posed and formulate their own thoughts. Next, students will be grouped in Zoom breakout rooms to share and discuss their reflections in a smaller group setting. Finally, the class will regroup to share their group discussions with the class. Other types of activities will be introduced in order to facilitate engagement with, interest in, and retention of the course material.

Students will be expected to participate fully in each discussion which includes thorough preparation of the reading materials before discussion and active participation in the section and breakout rooms.

Teaching assistants for this course are Julie Ershadi (Friday 9–9:50 am section) and Atiyeh Taghiey (Friday 10–10:50 am and 11:00-11:50 am sections).

Julie's office hours (jj27ersha@gmail.com) will be held via Zoom on Wednesdays, 10am –12 pm.

Atiyeh's office hours (ataghiei0@ucla.edu) will be held via Zoom on Thursdays, 1–3 pm.

Focus on diversity and inclusion

In an effort to meet the UCLA College Diversity Requirement, this course combines the study of Persian literature with an in-depth meditation on gender, ethnicity, religious identity, and sexual orientation. How does the study of Persian and Middle Eastern arts and literature shape the notion of “gendered self” in its historical settings, and how can its inherent distance from our modern Western conceptions help us reconfigure our perception of the relationship between identity and desire? What is the contribution of religious heterodoxies to the formation of an “Islamic” literary canon in Persian literature? How does this plurality of perspectives resonate with the Judaic, Christian, and Zoroastrian contributions to the formation of national literary canons?

What is the role of female writers in shaping of artistic canons that are generally deemed as being almost exclusively dominated by male authors? What is the relationship between power, ethnicity, and gender in medieval Iran and the Middle East, and how can such relationships apply to the modern geopolitical and cultural arena? Ultimately, how can the study of literature and the arts help us, on the one hand, develop a deeper awareness of the richness that stems from diversity and, on the other, deconstruct the notion of “pure” identities and orientations?

Examples of Artists and Writers Whose Lives and Works Offer a Diverse Perspective to the Study of Persian Arts and Literature:

An Islamic mystic who, in the 10th century CE, finds spiritual illumination while contemplating transgender prostitutes in a brothel.

An Iranian-Mongol princess who, in the 14th century, wrote erotic poems in which she pretended to be a man who is in love with a younger man.

Persian and Ottoman poets who praised the beauty of God through the contemplation of beardless (and, at times, bearded) young men.

A poet who never accepted the sexual norm of Iran in the 1950s and described her sexual freedom in passionate compositions that one can still find in most bookshops in the “Islamic Republic of Iran.”

A contemporary photographer who is tired of what she calls “chador-art” and prefers to work on “anti-orientalist” visual minimalism from her home in Tehran.

An anonymous instagrammer who shares with his followers his daily explorations “under the gay skin of Tehran.”

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, students will gain the ability to:

read literary, visual, and performative texts from the perspective of the relationship between gender, socio-cultural identity, and historical principles and patterns;

compose analytical texts and creative arguments on the basis of primary and secondary sources;

analyze historical processes from the viewpoint of both specific cultural expressions and broad anthropological questions;

compare literary texts in translation with secondary literature capable of providing insightful approaches to textual analysis;

deconstruct mainstream prejudices on the notions of identity, gender, desire, and spirituality;

tackle socio-cultural and aesthetic questions aimed at analytically approaching texts from a plurality of critical angles;

refine their written and oral rhetorical skills within the framework of group discussions and exchanges of critical arguments.

Weekly Workload (5-unit course): 15 hours (three hours per unit)

The weekly workload that students are expected to accomplish is divided into three hours of in-class instruction (Tuesdays/Thursdays lectures), one hour for discussion (Friday sections) and eleven hours of out-of-class work (homework, text preparation, lectures, media exposure, readings, etc.).

Required Readings and Textbooks

All primary and secondary texts will be provided by the instructor on the course website (CCLE).

Course Requirements and Grading

1) Attendance (Friday “discussion” sections): 10%

2) Weekly reports: 30%

Students are expected to participate by asking questions at the end of each lecture and by engaging actively during the weekly discussions. In order to prove their level of active participation, students are expected to submit a report on a weekly basis. The weekly reports, whose length should range between 250 and 700 words, should reflect the student’s active engagement with the lectures and the discussions. The reports should include the student’s personal take on the topics discussed in class as well as the assigned readings. Even though the reports shall not be graded, students may receive occasional feedback from the instructor, either via CCLE or as part of a public in-class discussion.

Weekly reports are due every Monday by 11:59 pm.

3) Midterm exam (30%)

Composition of a short essay (min. 1500 words) on a topic chosen by the instructor one week prior to the exam.

4) Final exam (30%):

Composition of a short essay (min. 1500 words) on a topic chosen by the students.

In both midterm and final essays students are expected to the majority of the primary and secondary sources covered by the course from week 1 through the latest lecture prior to the assignment of the essay question.

Midterm and final essays will be graded on a scale from 0 to 100, and according to the following requirements:

A. Knowledge of the primary sources: 30%

B. Knowledge of the secondary sources: 30%

C. Analytical, stylistic, and grammatical skills: 10%

D. Originality and personal appraisal of primary and secondary sources: 30%

5. Class participation (For Extra Credit!)

Students who consistently attend lectures on Tuesdays and Thursdays and participate actively (through questions, comments, etc., expressed orally or via Zoom chat) **will be awarded an extra credit of 10 points.**

Grading scale:

100–98	A+
94–97	A
89–93	A-
85–88	B+
80–84	B
75–79	B-
70–74	C+
65–69	C
60–64	C-
55–59	D+
50–54	D
48–49	D-
Below 48	F

Course Schedule and Materials

Week 0 (October 1st): Course Presentation

Week 1 (October 6, 8)

An Introduction to Persian Literature and Islamic Visual Arts: Genres, Forms, Motifs

1. A brief introduction to classical Persian literature:

<https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/iran-viii2-classical-persian-literature>

2. The “Beloved” in Persian literature, de Bruijn:

<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/beloved>

3. Kjeld von Folsach. “The Human Figure in Islamic Book Painting.” In *The Human Figure in Islamic Art*, edited by Kjeld von Folsach and Joachim Meyer, pp. 1–41.

Focus on the Arts: Literature and Nostalgia in the Works of Shirin Neshat

Field Activity: Walk, Observe, Meditate, Write!

Week 2 (October 6, 8)

Iran and the Islamic Middle East through the Lens of Gender and Sexuality

1. *The Gendered Society Reader*, “Introduction”

2. *The Gendered Society Reader*, “Where Does Gender Come from?”

3. ““The Past Is a Foreign Country”” The Times and Spaces of Islamicate Sexuality Studies.” In *Islamicate Sexualities: Translations across Temporal Geographies of Desire*, edited by Kathryn Babayan and Afsaneh Najmabadi, pp. 1–40.

Focus on the Arts: Political and Gender Activism in the Songs of Mashrou’ Leila

Week 3 (October 20, 22)

Jahān, The Princess Who Would be a Poet: Persian Poetry, Gender Fluidity, and Misogyny

1. “Jahān Malek Khātun,” Encyclopaedia Iranica:

<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/jahan-malek-katun>

2. *Faces of Love*, Dick Davis, 15–54 (follow page numbers on Pdf file);

3. *The Gendered Society Reader*, “Cultural Constructions of Gender,” “Men as Women and Women as Men: Disrupting Gender,” Judith Lorber.

4. “Depictions of women in miniatures,” In *The Human Figure in Islamic Art*, edited by Kjeld von Folsach and Joachim Meyer.

5. “Jahān Malik Khātūn: Gender, Canon, and Persona in the Poems of Premodern Persian Princess,” Domenico Ingenito (selected passages).

Focus on the Arts: Afghan and Iranian Artists of L.A.

Field Activity: Walk, Observe, Meditate, Write!

Week 4 (October 27, 29)

Homosociality and Homoeroticism in Medieval Iran: Central Asian Palaces, Turkic Lovers, and Persian Poets

1. Ehsan Yarshater. “The Theme of Wine-Drinking and the Concept of the Beloved in Early Persian Poetry.” *Studia Islamica* 13, 1960, pp. 43-53.
2. Homosexuality in Persian Literature:
<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/homosexuality-iii>
3. “‘Dude, You’re a Fag’: Adolescent Masculinity and the Fag Discourse”, in *The Gendered Society Reader*, 80-92.
4. Passages from *Beholding Beauty*, Domenico Ingenito, chapter 1.

Focus on the Arts: The Experience of *Discostan*, “musical narratives from Beirut to Bangkok via Bombay.”

Week 5 (November 3, 5)

Intergenerational Desires in Arabic and Persian literature

1. Franz Rosenthal. “Male and Female: Described and Compared.” In *Homoeroticism in Classical Arabic Literature*, edited by J.W. Wright and Everett K. Rowson, pp. 24–54.
2. Lyric openings (*nasibs*) from Farrokhi Sistāni’s poems of princely praise (*qasidas*).
3. Poems by Abu Nuwas.
4. *The Gendered Society Reader*, “Coming of Age and Coming Out Ceremonies Across Cultures,” Herdt.
5. “A Marvelous Painting.” Domenico Ingenito

Focus on the Arts: The Erotic Gaze in Medieval and Early Modern Persian Miniatures

Week 6 (November 10, 12)

Gender fluidity and mysticism in medieval and modern islamicate societies

1. Attār’s *The Language of the Birds* (*Manteq al-Tayr*), introduction and selected passages.
2. Everett K. Rowson, “The Effeminate of Early Medina.” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 111 (1991): 671–93.

3. “Men as Women and Women as Men: Disrupting Gender,” *The Gendered Society Reader*, 22-40.
4. Passages on the “visionary experience” from Al-Ghazālī’s *Kimiyā-ye Sa‘ādat*.

Field activity: How does the contemporary performative arts scene of L.A. combine the representation of non-binary genders with the aesthetic experience of the sublime? During the first four weeks of the course students are urged to attend performative events in some of the most cutting-edge arts venues of L.A. (Redcat, LACMA, Museum of Jurassic Technology, The Getty Museum, The Broad, The Hammer Museum, etc.).

Week 7 (November 17, 19)

Beholding beauty: the psychology of the lyric subject between ideals of courtly love, spirituality, and the obscene

1. Ghazals, fragments, and qasidas from the collected works of Sa‘di Shirazi;
2. Domenico Ingenito, “Tabrizis in Shiraz Are Worth Less Than a Dog;”
3. Minoos Southgate, “Men, women, and boys: love and sex in the works of Sa‘di.”
4. “What is a Beautiful Body?’ Late Ottoman ‘Sportsman’ Photographs and New Notions of Male Corporeal Beauty,” Murat Yildiz.
5. Lagrange, “The Obscenity of the Vizier.”

Focus on the Arts in the Persianate World: Performed Folklore, Ceramics and Gender in Contemporary Georgia (yes, the country!)

Field Activity: Walk, Observe, Meditate, Write!

Week 8 (November 24)

Mapping Transformations of Sex, Gender, and Sexuality in Modern Iran

Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards*, 15–45.

Afsaneh Najmabadi, “Gendered Transformations: Beauty, Love, and Sexuality in Qajar Iran.” *Iranian Studies* 34 (2001): 89–102.

2. Gender Relations in Modern Persia, Farzaneh Milani:
<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/gender-relations-i#pt1>

Week 9 (December 1, 3)

Female poets and queer artists before and after the Iranian revolution of 1979

Selected lyrics by Forugh Farrokhzad (d. 1967) and contemporary poet Fatemeh Shams
Documentary: *Fifi Howls from Happiness: Bahman Mohassess*, by Mitra Farahani.

“Mitra Farahani’s lyrical documentary explores the enigma of provocative artist Bahman Mohassess, the so-called “Persian Picasso,” whose acclaimed paintings and sculptures dominated pre-revolutionary Iran. Irreverent and uncompromising, a gay man in a hostile world, Mohassess had a conflicted relationship with his homeland—revered by elites in the art scene and praised as a national icon, only to be censored later by an oppressive regime.”

Special session: Zoom interview with Mitra Farahani and Fatemeh Shams

Week 10 (December 8, 10)

The aesthetics of nostalgia and desire in a virtual arena: instagram and the challenges of contemporary media historiography

Instagram: Tom of Tehran, chador art, and visual minimalism.

Rahimi, Babak. “Digital Javanmardi: Chivalric Ethics and Imagined Iran on the Internet.” In *Javanmardi: The Ethics and Practice of Persianate Perfection*, edited by Lloyd Ridgeon, Gingko, London, 2018, pp. 281–296.

“Under the Gay Skin of Tehran”, Ali May: <http://eroticreviewmagazine.com/articles/under-the-gay-skin-of-tehran/>

https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2017/aug/01/tom-of-finland-leather-legendary-gay-aesthetic-touko-laaksonen?CMP=share_btn_fb

Shirin Walton, “Re-Envisioning Iran Online Photoblogs and the Ethnographic ‘Digital-Visual Moment.’” *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication* 8 (2015): 398–418.

Disclaimer on sensitive contents

Some of the readings that will be the object of critical analysis contain words and textual representations whose graphic nature might offend the sensibility of some students. Should the ensuing discussion (for example, on matters regarding sexuality, religion, ethnicity, or the concept

of “obscenity”) elicit adverse feelings, it is the student’s individual responsibility to decide whether or not to leave the session, without compromising the intellectual level of the conversation. Vulgar, denigrating, sexist, or racist comments shall not be tolerated and the instructor is prone to report to the academic authorities any verbal or written abuses directed at individuals or social groups.

The instructor will signal the presence of all specific readings that might offend the religious or ethical sensitivity of some students. Although it is the instructor’s responsibility to ensure that such delicate topics are discussed in a protected context that relates to the learning goals of the course, students who, on personal, religious, or ethical grounds, prefer not to be exposed to sensitive materials are urged to contact the instructor in order to negotiate alternative readings.

Disclaimer on recorded lectures

All lectures (Tuesdays and Thursdays) will be conducted over Zoom. As the host, the instructor will be recording these sessions. The recording feature for others is disabled so that no one else will be able to record this session through Zoom. No recording by other means is permitted. All sessions will be posted on the CCLE class website unless otherwise notified. If you have privacy concerns and do not wish to appear in the recording, do not turn on your video. If you also prefer to use a pseudonym instead of your name, please let the instructor know what name you will be using so that they know who you are during the session. If you would like to ask a question, you may do so privately through the Zoom chat by addressing your chat question to instructor only (and not to “everyone”), or you may contact the instructor by another private method. If you have questions or concerns about this, please contact the instructor.

Pursuant to the terms of the agreement between the vendor and UCLA, the data is used solely for this purpose and the vendor is prohibited from re-disclosing this information. UCLA also does not use the data for any other purpose. Recordings will be deleted when no longer necessary. However, the recording may become part of an administrative disciplinary record if misconduct occurs during a videoconference.

PLAGIARISM AND STUDENT COPYRIGHT

Plagiarism in any form is a violation of the UCLA Student Conduct Code. All class assignments are expected to be original work submitted by individual students; or, if directed by the instructor, by students working in a team.

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Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, the use of another person’s work (including words, **translations**, ideas, designs, or data) without giving appropriate attribution or citation. This includes, but is not limited to, representing, with or without the intent to deceive, part or all of an entire work obtained by purchase or otherwise, as the student’s original work; the omission of or failure to acknowledge the true source of the work; or representing an altered but identifiable work of another person or the student’s own previous work as if it were the student’s original or new work.

(UCLA Student Conduct Code, Section 102.01c: Academic Dishonesty–Plagiarism.)

Unless otherwise specified by the faculty member, all submissions—whether in draft or final form—to meet course requirements (including a paper, **translation**, project, exam, computer program, oral presentation, or other work) must either be the student’s own work or must clearly acknowledge the source.

All class assignments are expected to be original work submitted by individual students or, if directed by the instructor, by students working in a team. Should a student purchase or otherwise acquire a document from a third party (such as TermPaperExample.com) and submit such a document as original work for the class assignment, such action is plagiarism and a violation of the code.

The grading process for a student suspected of having engaged in plagiarism or other forms of cheating is described in the *The Manual of the Los Angeles Division of the Academic Senate*, SR A-306.

If a student is suspected of having engaged in plagiarism or otherwise having cheated, the infraction is reported to the Dean of Students for consideration of disciplinary proceedings. Until such proceedings have been completed, the grade DR (deferred report) is assigned for the class.