

Self-Revelation in Women's Writing: Zora Neale Hurston and Forugh Farrokhzad

- African and African American Studies 372E (29730) • Comparative Literature 323 (33125) •
- Middle Eastern Studies 342 (41060) • Women and Gender Studies 340 (46645) •

Spring 2015...TTh 3:30-5 pm...MEZ 1.102

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Office Hours: TTh 1:30-3 pm, and by appointment

American prose fiction and Persian lyric poetry constitute two of the most vital literary traditions in world literature. This course deals with one prominent figure in each, the American fiction writer **Zora Neale Hurston** (1891-1960) and the Iranian lyric poet **Forugh Farrokhzad** (1935-1967). A three-fold rationale accounts for the comparative pairing and study of these two writers and their works in the course. First, both writers have special and similar relationships to the literary traditions in which they wrote both because of their gender and because of Farrokhzad's lack of participation in Muslim culture, on the one hand, and Hurston's African ancestry, on the other. Second, Farrokhzad and Hurston exhibit similar subject matter interests and points of view, presumably in part because of their modernist perspectives and similar removes from mainstream cultural and social power bases. Third, they use prose fiction and lyric poetry, respectively, as vehicles for **self-revelation** and self-realization. Such self-revelation has particular significance both because of its cultural unexpectedness in their respective traditions and because of mixed consequent mainstream reaction to it.

The core **course activities** are close readings and group discussion of the chief writings of Hurston and Farrokhzad in the contexts of the crafts of prose fiction and lyric verse, the practice of autobiography, American culture, Iranian culture, and women's participation in American and Persian/Iranian literatures. Students leave the course well acquainted with the lives and works of two prominent writers and with literary modernism and are better prepared thereafter to read and analyze works of prose fiction and lyric verse *in vacuo* and in their cultural contexts.

The **required course texts** are: (1) Joanna Russ, *How to Suppress Women's Writing* (1983); (2) Zora Neale Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934); (3) Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937); (4) Zora Neale Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942); (5) Zora Neale Hurston, *Seraph on the Suwanee* (1948); (6) Michael Hillmann, *A Lonely Woman: Forugh Farrokhzad and Her Poetry* (1987, available online at utexas.Academia.edu/MichaelHillmann); (7) Forugh Farrokhzad, *Sounds That Remain: Forty Poems by Forugh Farrokhzad in English Translation* (2015, available on the course Blackboard); and (7) "Self-Revelation in Women's Writing: A Course Packet" (on the course Blackboard) containing a course schedule and calendar, chronologies, biographical sketches, a handful of critical essays, Hurston's short story called "Drenched in Light" (1924), and the course bibliography.

Course grades are based on: (1) class participation, e.g., discussion of assigned readings [15% of the course grade]; (2) two oral presentations, one a report on an assigned primary course (i.e., a poem or a short story or a discrete part of a novel) and the second a report on an assigned secondary source (i.e., a biography or literary critical study) [10% of the course grade each]; (3) a review test on the third to the last day of the course [25% of the course grade]; (4) four two-page papers on assigned reading [4% of the course grade each] ; and (5) a term paper [24% of the course grade], a draft due two weeks before the end of the course and a revised version due on the last day of class. The course has no final examination. The grading scale is: A (93–100), A- (90–92), B+ (87–89), B (83–86), B- (80–82), C+ (77–79), C (73–76), C- (70–72), D+ (67–69), D (63–66), D- (60–62), and F (0–59). Information about class attendance, religious holidays and holy days, plagiarism, and accommodations for students with disabilities appears

on the course Blackboard.

Self-Revelation in Women's Writing Course Calendar

- 1 T Jan 20 Discussion of course goals, activities, and assignments and the significance of the notion of self-revelation.
Assignments: Read Hurston's "Drenched in Light" (1924) and Farrokhzâd's "The Sin" (1954).
- 2 Th Jan 22 Self-revelation in Hurston's "Drenched in Light" (1924) and Farrokhzâd's "The Sin" (1954).
- 3 T Jan 27 *How To Suppress Women's Writing* by Joanna Russ 1.
A thumbnail sketch of Zora Neale Hurston's life in the context of African-American history.
- 4 Th Jan 29 *How To Suppress Women's Writing* by Joanna Russ 2.
A thumbnail sketch of Forugh Farrokhzâd's life in the context of Iranian culture.
- 5 T Feb 3 Ideas about autobiography and autobiographical writing from an outline (handout) of Sidonie Smith and Julie Watson's *Reading Autobiography* (2010, second edition).
- 6 Th Feb 5 Hurston's *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934) 1.
- 7 T Feb 10 Hurston's *Jonah's Gourd Vine* 2.
- 8 Th Feb 12 Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) 1.
- 9 T Feb 17 Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* 2.
- 10 Th Feb 19 Hurston's life and *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942) 1.
- 11 T Feb 24 Hurston's life and *Dust Tracks on a Road* 2.
- 12 Th Feb 26 Hurston's *Seraph on the Suwanee* (1948) 1.
- 13 T Mar 3 Hurston's *Seraph on the Suwanee* 2.
- 14 Th Mar 5 Hurston's *Seraph on the Suwanee* 3.
- 15 T Mar 10 Self-revelation in Hurston's writing and prose fiction as autobiography.
- 16 Th Mar 12 Farrokhzâd's life—*A Lonely Woman*, Chapters 1 and 2.
- 17 T Mar 24 Farrokhzâd's "Captive," "The Wall," and "The World of Shadows."
- 18 Th Mar 26 Farrokhzâd's "Call to Arms," "To My Sister," "Divine Rebellion" and "A Poem for You,"
- 19 T Mar 31 *A Lonely Woman*, Chapter 3.
- 20 Th Apr 2 Farrokhzâd's "Friday" and "The Windup Doll."
- 21 T Apr 7 Farrokhzâd's "Conquest of the Garden" and "Green Delusion."
- 22 Th Apr 9 *A Lonely Woman*, Chapter 4.
- 23 T Apr 14 Farrokhzâd's "Another Birth."
- 24 Th Apr 16 Farrokhzâd's "Someone Who Is Not like Anyone Else" and "I Feel Sorry for the Garden."
- 25 T Apr 21 *A Lonely Woman*, chapter 5.
- 26 Th Apr 23 Farrokhzâd's "Those Days" and "It Is Only Sound That Remains."
- 27 T Apr 28 Drafts of term papers due.
Self-revelation in Farrokhzâd's poetry and lyric poetry as autobiography.
- 28 Th Apr 30 **Review Test.**
- 29 T May 5 Review of Review Test.
Group discussion of term paper drafts.
- 30 Th May 7 **Term papers due.**
Conclusions about "Self-Revelation in Women's Writing."