Influences on the Poetry of Forūgh Farrokhzād

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Abstract

This article examines the literary and intellectual influences that shaped the poetry of Forūgh Farrokhzād (1935–1967), one of modern Iran's most original voices. It advances three interrelated arguments. First, Farrokhzād began her career as an experimental poet, reworking Fereydūn Moshīrī's *chahārpāreh* style and reinterpreting the classical ghazal—especially that of Ḥāfeẓ—through a modern lens. Second, during her four-year hiatus from publication, she absorbed the innovations of *sheʿr-e now* and the narrative strategies of modern fiction, drawing in particular on the works of Aḥmad Shāmlū, Ṣādeq Chūbak, and Ṣādeq Hedāyat. This period transformed her poetic voice and deepened her engagement with the social and psychological realities of her time. Third, under the influence of Nīmā Yūshīj, Farrokhzād moved toward a synthesis of lyricism, philosophical reflection, and colloquial immediacy. By the time of her death, she was creating a distinctive poetic idiom that fused the structural discipline of the ghazal with the freedom of *sheʿr-e now*. In doing so, she sought to address urgent contemporary realities while sustaining the aesthetic resonance of the Persian tradition.

Introduction

Forūgh Farrokhzād occupies a singular place in twentieth-century Persian literature. Actress, painter, filmmaker, and above all poet, she wrote with candor and intensity at a time when Iranian society sought to confine women within prescribed roles. From her earliest work, she confronted those restrictions directly, giving voice to desire, alienation, and female agency in ways that scandalized some but resonated deeply with readers navigating a rapidly changing Iran.

This study approaches Farrokhzād not simply as a poet of rebellion but as an innovator who transformed inherited forms into a modern poetic idiom. Her development can be understood through three interrelated modes of influence—pervasive, temporal, and thematic. Pervasive influence denotes an enduring presence: for Farrokhzād, Ḥāfeẓ remained a constant interlocutor, his lyric intensity and Sufi sensibility suffusing her imagination throughout her career. Temporal influence is more transient. Fereydūn Moshīrī's formal structures shaped her early collections before giving way to the linguistic precision and emotional nuance of Aḥmad Shāmlū, and later to the philosophical vision of Nīmā Yūshīj. Thematic influence, by contrast, reflects her engagement with contemporary Iranian prose writers such as Sādeq Chūbak and Ṣādeq Hedāyat, whose narrative strategies and psychological depth sharpened her explorations of intimacy, alienation, and modern subjectivity.

Seen through this lens, Farrokhzād's literary trajectory emerges as a dynamic synthesis of tradition and rupture. Her first three collections—*Asīr* (Captive), *Dīvār* (The Wall), and *ʿEṣiyān* (Rebellion)—display her bold attempt to fuse Moshīrī's *chahārpāreh* structure with the lyricism of the classical ghazal.[1] After a four-year withdrawal from the literary scene following her divorce and the loss of custody of her son, she immersed herself in *sheʿr-e now* and modern fiction. The result was *Tavallodī Dīgar* (Another Birth), a landmark volume in which pervasive, temporal, and thematic influences converge to produce a strikingly original voice. In her final years, Yūshīj's visionary poetics enabled her to integrate philosophical reflection with lived immediacy, reinventing the ghazal through colloquial Persian, social critique, and a new spiritual register.

The pages that follow trace this evolution, emphasizing how Farrokhzād synthesized classical heritage, modern fiction, and the innovations of *sheʿr-e now* into a body of work that continues to define and transform Persian literature.

Biography

Actress, painter, and documentary filmmaker Forūgh Farrokhzād (1935–1967) was one of seven children born into a middle-class family in Tehran. [2] Her father, a strict military officer, oversaw the Pahlavi estates in northern Iran. Farrokhzād received her elementary education at Sorūsh and attended high school at Khosrow Khavar. She showed such a precocious talent for poetry that her composition teacher repeatedly accused her of plagiarism.[3]

Farrokhzād left high school after the ninth grade and enrolled at the Bānuvān Technical School, where she studied sewing and painting. She believed that sewing brought discipline and rhythm to her poetic craft. To deepen her understanding of visual art, she briefly studied under the renowned Iranian painter Jaʿfar Petgar (1920–2005).[4] Of the two surviving portraits she painted, the one of her adopted son, Hussein, demonstrates a keen eye for emotional nuance and technical detail.

In 1950, at the age of sixteen, she married Parvīz Shāpūr (1924–1999), a neighbor and distant relative. Parvīz, a government employee, was also known as a humorist and caricaturist. After their marriage, he was transferred to Ahvāz, and Forūgh followed him. Their son, Kamiyār, was born there in 1952.[5]

Life in Ahvāz, however, did not suit Forūgh. Daring, petite, and strikingly attractive, she was among the first Iranian women to wear tight-fitting clothes in

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[1] *Chahārpāreh* consists of four *beyt*-like fragments not tied to the traditional *owzan*.

[2] Michael Craig Hillmann, "Furugh Farrukhzad," In *Women Poets Iranica*. Encyclopaedia Iranica Foundation https://poets.iranicaonline.org/article/furugh-farrukhzad/, 2002.

[3] Behrūz Jalālī, "Zendegī Nāme-ye Forūgh," *Jāvdāneh Zīstan, dar Owj Māndan: Forūgh-e Farrokhzād* (*To Live Eternally, Permanence at the Peak: Forūgh Farrokhzād*), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, p. 559; "Hafteh Nāme-ye Zan-e Rūz," 16, Esfand, 1345.

[4] As a painter, Ja'far Petgar was influenced by Kamal-almolk. He brought his love for the color and patterns of Persian carpets, as well as his semi-technical approach to painting to the poor section of Iranian society.

[5] Forūgh Farrokhzād, "Yek Nāme az Dowrān-e Javānī-ye Forūgh," ("A Letter form the Young Days of Forūgh"), *Jāvdāneh Zīstan…* (*To Live Eternally…*), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, p. 56.

public and gained notoriety for her bold appearance. More significantly, she shared her poetry freely with friends and acquaintances, seeking honest feedback. The responses she received—often dismissive or scandalized—deeply unsettled her. Her husband, too, was confounded and disturbed by the emotional and sensual candor in her verses.

Yet despite the estrangement, Forūgh's feelings for her former husband endured—a truth captured poignantly in verses she wrote and which Ḥāʾerī later cited:

> After him, whatever I turned to
> Turned out to be a mirage
> What I held dear and looked for
> Was nothing but a dream
> After him, there is nothing to look forward to
> After him, what will I find
> But a cold grave…[6]

Despite her efforts to adjust to the conservative provincial environment, Forūgh found herself increasingly alienated. In 1954, she and Parvīz separated; their divorce soon followed. Custody of Kamiyār was awarded to Parvīz, and under pressure from his family, Forūgh was forbidden from seeing her son. To support herself, she began writing for various magazines. In a conversation with a friend, she confided: "I'm working at *Tehrān Moṣawwar*. I write things, but I don't sign my name."[7]

A turning point came in 1958, when the celebrated novelist Ṣādeq Chūbak introduced her to Ebrāhīm Golestān, a prominent filmmaker and intellectual. Their acquaintance quickly deepened into a close personal and professional relationship. Through Golestān, Farrokhzād was exposed to the works of modern Iranian writers such as Ṣādeq Chūbak and Ṣādeq Hedāyat, as well as to broader cinematic and literary forms. Golestān guided her understanding of narrative structure and the use of theme in fiction and film. Their bond lasted until her untimely death in 1967.

What ultimately reshaped—and scandalized—Farrokhzād's life was her fearless engagement with subjects long considered taboo in Iran's Shīʿī society. Her poetry addressed love, desire, alienation, and female agency with unprecedented directness. Religious authorities, community censors, and conservative scholars condemned her work. Even her own family and that of her ex-husband denounced her. Some well-meaning critics attempted to defend her by praising the originality of her imagery and her innovative approach to meter and form, but such efforts did little to shield her from harsh public judgment.

Retrospection

After the publication of *ʿEṣiyān* (*Rebellion*) in 1957, Forūgh Farrokhzād's life entered an even more turbulent phase, culminating in an unsuccessful suicide

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[6] Tusi Hayeri. "Tarhi az Chehre-ye Forūgh the Sokhanan-e Digaran" ("A Sketch of Forūgh Through the Words of Others"), Zistan, p. 615.

[7] Ibid.

attempt. What followed, between 1957 and the release of her groundbreaking collection *Another Birth* in 1964, was a profound transformation—not only in her literary vision and worldview, but in her social and emotional orbit as well. She reevaluated her friendships, her creative alliances, and the role of poetry in her life.

A turning point came in 1958 when the novelist Ṣādeq Chūbak, who knew her well, introduced her to Ebrāhīm Golestān (1922–2023), an acclaimed Iranian writer and cinematographer. What began as an artistic acquaintance quickly evolved into an intense, lasting relationship. Golestān, who had established a film studio the year before, was searching for collaborators. Farrokhzād became his assistant, creative partner, and close confidante. She worked alongside him and attended literary gatherings and private salons with Golestān and his wife, immersing herself in a new intellectual environment.

This collaboration offered Farrokhzād much more than employment. Through Golestān, she became deeply engaged with the works of Ṣādeq Hedāyat, Ṣādeq Chūbak, and other luminaries of Iranian fiction. She studied not only the content of their narratives but also the underlying architecture—themes, character arcs, structural integrity. Under Golestān's guidance, she developed a deeper appreciation for how literary themes function within narrative form, and how fiction communicates meaning beneath the surface. Their creative alliance continued until her untimely death in 1967.

Though the private nature of their relationship lies beyond the purview of this article, its emotional and intellectual impact is impossible to ignore. Their mutual affection is evident in their artistic tributes to one another. Farrokhzād dedicated her *Another Birth* collection to Golestān with the following verse:

> My whole existence is a dark verse
> That would perpetuate you and carry you
> To the dawn of eternal buddings and growths.
> In this verse, I sighed you, sigh.
> With this verse, I graft you to trees, water, and fire.[8]

And in the wake of her death, Golestān's grief surfaced in a letter he wrote to Ṣādeq Chūbak:

> I don't think about the past. It is useless anyway. And the future—for me, that too has become meaningless. Should I write? Should I make a movie? Waste of time.
> Life is a connection. I was a link in that connection, and still am. Forūgh was in my blood, and still is. Forūgh was between my fingers, but now she is not. There was a time I loved her so much that…[9]

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[8] Forūgh Farrokhzād, "Tavallodī Dīgar," (*Another Birth*), Entesharat-e Talāyeh, 2003, p. 171.

[9] Hamid and Christina Moghadam, "Correspondence Between Ebrahim Golestan and Sadeq Chubak," iranian-studies.stanford.edu at Htpp:// iranian-studies.stanford.edu › research › corres…

Farrokhzād was not the kind of artist content to merely recount others' experiences. She believed in direct confrontation with life's extremes—even if it meant courting disaster. Her suicide attempt, harrowing though it was, became a symbolic passage. Having stared into the abyss, she emerged with a renewed sense of agency—as though she had passed through a metaphysical gate and reentered life on her own terms. From that point onward, she rewrote the rules by which she lived and created.

In this new phase, she deliberately reduced her output of poetry and turned instead to studying the world around her. She immersed herself in contemporary cultural trends, read voraciously, and absorbed the innovations of modern poets and fiction writers. Her aim was not imitation but transformation. She sought to reshape Persian poetry—*sheʿr-e now*—into a medium as vital and resonant as the classical works of the past.

By a twist of fate, Golestān, too, was undergoing a transformation of his own. The changes in their lives paralleled each other, and they faced them side by side, with mutual encouragement and creative synergy.[10] Their collaboration deepened, and their trust in one another solidified. When this intense period of renewal came to an end, both had been changed. Farrokhzād returned to poetry not as a lost soul searching for her voice, but as a reborn poetess—self-fashioned, confident, and experimental.

She returned to *sheʿr-e now* determined not merely to contribute to it but to elevate it—to push it beyond the shadow of its forerunners, to imbue it with the same lasting influence that the great bards of the Persian canon had once wielded.

Before the *Asīr* Collection

Farrokhzād's poetic career began at a moment of cultural transition in Iran, when *sheʿr-e now* (modern verse) was gradually replacing classical Persian forms, and modern fiction was making its first inroads into Iranian society. Yet, Farrokhzād herself remained largely unaware of these developments. Immersed in the mystical sonnets of Ḥāfeẓ, she spent her early creative years reading *dīvān* after *dīvān*, detached from the literary experimentation unfolding around her. As for her contemporaries, they were still grappling with competing poetic models and unsure which direction to pursue.

In a later reflection, Farrokhzād described her early writing with a striking mixture of humility and honesty:

> There was a time when I wrote a lot of poetry. It poured out of me—two or three poems a day—in the kitchen, behind the sewing machine. ... I was very rebellious. The reason is that I read *dīvān* after *dīvān*. I don't know whether what I created was poetry. But whatever it was, it was the "me" of those days—very sincere. At that time, the poet in me had yet to take shape. I did not possess my own language, or my own form, or my own intellectual

[10] Cf., Mehdī Akhāvan Sāless. "Darbāre-ye Forūgh-e Farrokhzād" ("About Forūgh Farrokhzād"), *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, p. 412.

> capability. I was in a small and narrow environment usually referred to as the family circle. [11]

Farrokhzād submitted her first poem to *Rowshanfekr* magazine in 1955. Fereydūn Moshīrī, who was present that day, later recalled the moment with vivid detail: [12]

> A girl with disheveled hair and hands stained with fountain pen ink entered the editorial office of *Rowshanfekr*. In her hand she held a folded sheet of paper, crumpled from having been clenched a thousand times. She blushed, visibly trembling with hesitation, and placed the page on the desk. That girl was Forūgh Farrokhzād. Twelve years before her death, she brought her first poem to *Rowshanfekr*. Within a week, hundreds of thousands of readers had encountered her uninhibited poetry. Very soon after, she became a celebrated poetess with a growing legion of admirers. [13]

According to Moshīrī, one of the most prominent poets of the time compared Farrokhzād's audacious tone and her attack on social hypocrisy to Ḥāfeẓ himself. "If she can match the Tongue of the Unseen's command of language," he said, "we will have another Ḥāfeẓ on our hands."

Moshīrī's account is rich with details that distinguish the young Forūgh from the defiant, polished poet we recognize today. Her intellectual and emotional inexperience, her age—barely twenty—her shy demeanor, her unfamiliarity with the literary circles she hoped to join, the bold content of her poem, and the overwhelming public response—all of these elements reveal a young woman stepping into a space for which she was, perhaps, not fully prepared.

Was she aware of the impact her poetry would have on her conservative family, particularly her father and estranged husband? Had she anticipated the cultural shock her words would cause in society at large?

The sudden fame Moshīrī describes evokes the early career of Ṣādeq Hedāyat, whose first publications also brought swift notoriety—but at a high personal cost. Moshīrī's poet friend drew parallels between Farrokhzād's lyrical sensibility and that of Ḥāfeẓ. Had he been equally attuned to the world of fiction, he might have said: here is not just another Ḥāfeẓ, but another daring experimenter—another Hedāyat.

Early Influences

Farrokhzād's earliest poetic influences were the traditional masters of Persian verse—Ḥāfeẓ, Mawlānā, and Omar Khayyām.[14] In those formative years,

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[11] "Goftogu ba Forūgh" (4), *Zistan*, pp. 187-188.

[12] Fereydūn Moshīrī bridges the gap between traditional Persian poetry and *She'r-e Now* by emphasizing content at the expense of a rigid form.

[13] "A Girl with Ink on Her Fingers," *Jāvdāneh Zīstan , the Owj Mandan: Forough-e Farrokhzād* (Eternal Life, Permanence at the Peak: Forough Farrokhzād), Behrūz Jalālī , (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1375, pp. 702-703.

[14] Ḥāfeẓ (d. 1390), Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 1273), and Omar Khayyām (d. 1131) are among the most enduring classical Persian poets, whose mystical, philosophical, and lyrical works shaped centuries of poetic tradition.

she regarded Fereydūn Tavallalī as her role model, referring to him as *ostād-e khodam* ("my teacher"). [15] After Tavallalī, she gravitated toward Noṣrat Raḥmānī, whose work initially appealed to her. [16] But she soon recognized that Raḥmānī was primarily preoccupied with the sensual texture of language—a diction more suited to playful ditties than to serious verse. Disillusioned, she moved on and began imitating the *ghazals* of Mehdī Ḥamīdī Shīrāzī (1914–1986), a noted classicist and critic of Nīmā Yūshīj. Shīrāzī's controversial book *ʿEṣyān* (Rebellion, 1943) had stirred significant attention at the time.[17]

In her early twenties, three other poets captured her interest: Nāder Nāderpūr (1929–2000), Amīr Hūshang Ebtehāj (known as Sāyeh) (1928–2022), and Fereydūn Moshīrī (1927–2000).[18] Each had something unique to offer a young poet navigating the landscape of modern Persian verse. Nāderpūr, for example, came from a family environment not unlike Farrokhzād's—one that allowed him early access to the works of Rūdakī and Ferdowsī. Yet Nāderpūr remained indecisive in his literary loyalties. Torn between classical forms and Nīmā's revolutionary principles, he continued composing lyrical poetry in the traditional mode even as he began to accept that modern verse must reflect modern speech. Eventually, Nāderpūr embraced the idea that stanza length should be governed by the weight of the phrase and the nuance of expression. He believed that poetic rhythm should follow the natural flow of speech, and that rhyme should appear at the end of the *beyt* only when organically warranted by the thought structure.[19]

Though Nāderpūr was a member of the Tūdeh Party, Farrokhzād herself showed no interest in politics and paid little attention to his views—either as a socialist or as a poet.[20] Her own belief was that rhyme must emerge from the poem itself rather than be imposed upon it. Her particular devotion was to Ḥāfeẓ, and she maintained that both the form and content of the *ghazal* could be adapted for the modern reader to enjoy with the same depth of pleasure as past generations had.

Like Nāderpūr, Ebtehāj began his career writing classical *ghazals*, but he soon became a follower of Nīmā and embraced *sheʿr-e now*. His poetry increasingly addressed Iran's social, political, and cultural realities.[21] Farrokhzād, however, was

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[15] Tavallalī (1919–1985) was a key figure in transitional Persian poetry, blending traditional forms with new thematic directions; Furūgh Farrokhzād, "Yek Nāmeh az Dowrān-e Javānī-ye Forūgh" ("A Letter from the Days that Forūgh Was Young"), *Jāvdāneh Zīstan , dar Owj Mandan: Forough-e Farrokhzād* (*Eternal Life, Permanence at the Peak: Forough Farrokhzād*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, p. 57.

[16] Assadollāh Rahmani (aka. Noṣrat Raḥmānī (1930-2000), a follower of Tavallalī, wrote *chahārpārehs* as well as *she'r-e now*.

[17] Ḥamīdī Shīrāzī's *'Eṣyān* (Rebellion, 1943) was notable for its nationalist overtones and stylistic conservatism, standing in contrast to Nīmā Yūshīj's literary revolution.

[18] Nāderpūr, Ebtehāj, and Moshīrī were part of the post-Nīmā generation wrestling with questions of form, politics, and voice.

[19] Nāderpūr's views on poetic form are discussed in several interviews, including Goft-o-gu ba Nāder Nāderpūr (Tehran: Morvarid, 1991).

[20] Farrokhzād's political detachment is widely noted, though some biographers highlight her sensitivity to injustice in later work, such as *The House is Black* (1962).

[21] Ebtehāj's poetry gained acclaim for its elegant balance between lyricism and critique, particularly during the Pahlavi era.

not especially drawn to these themes at the time. Her focus remained on the intimate world around her rather than the broader ideological currents shaping the nation

Of these three figures, it was Fereydūn Moshīrī whose poetic path most closely aligned with her own. She found resonance in Moshīrī's *chahārpāreh* (four-part) style, which served as a bridge between traditional Persian verse—rigid in form and structure—and the freer, more fluid language of modern poetry. Moshīrī prioritized content over form while preserving the color, cadence, and emotional intimacy that had defined Persian poetry for centuries. Farrokhzād admired his style, particularly the freshness of his imagery, the tenderness of his voice, the strength of his imagination, and his subtle use of metaphor.[22]

By the end of this formative period, Farrokhzād encountered the work of Abolqāsem Lāhūtī (1887–1957), a communist poet who had fled Iran and taken refuge in Soviet Tajikistan.[23] Lāhūtī's poetry offered Farrokhzād a radically expanded vision. His work exposed the limitations of traditional verse and helped her realize the potential of poetry to address ideas and experiences beyond the mystical and romantic canon of Ḥāfeẓ, Mawlānā, and the few modern poets she had read. Under Lāhūtī's influence, she began to distance herself from conventional forms and develop a sense of creative independence.

This evolution is evident in her third collection, *ʿEsiyān* (*Rebellion*), where one can trace the subtle but undeniable presence of the *Qurʾān*.[24] The central poem, "*Bandegī*" ("Servitude"), is unusually long for her and explores the complex relationship between God, Satan, and humanity. Unlike her earlier work, this poem reflects the philosophical irreverence of Omar Khayyam. Following Khayyam's path, she interrogates divine authority. Her voice challenges God, or as she provocatively calls Him, "the Master of the Game," for bestowing upon humans the gift of poetic expression while simultaneously punishing those who pursue it.[25] Why, she asks, would God make poetry a source of joy and insight only to afflict both poets and readers with anguish and doubt?

We may conclude this survey of Farrokhzād's early influences with a final name: Golchīn Gilānī. Gilānī played a pivotal role in encouraging Farrokhzād to turn away from inherited forms and toward *sheʿr-e now*. More than a stylistic shift, this was the beginning of a new creative and personal chapter—a turning point that would eventually define her legacy in Iranian literature.[26]

Days of Confusion and Captivity

Following initial appearances in literary magazines, the early poems of Forūgh Farrokhzād were gathered and published under the title *Asīr* (*The Captive*).

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[22] Moshīrī's hybrid style is often seen as an accessible entry point for readers moving from classical to modern Persian poetry.

[23] Lāhūtī's exile in Tajikistan and role as court poet under Soviet patronage shaped his ideological and aesthetic output.

[24] The influence of Islamic cosmology and *Qur'anic* themes appears more overtly in *'Esiyān* than in Farrokhzād's earlier collections, often in complex, critical engagement.

[25] Forūgh Farrokhzād, *Dīvār* (*The Wall*), Amir Kabir Publishers, 1976, pp. 11-49.

[26] Golchīn Gīlanī (1910–1971) was a pioneering modernist who helped shape Iranian children's literature as well as adult verse, encouraging innovation in language and form.

This collection consists of forty-four poems written in both Tehran and Ahvaz. To oversee its publication, Farrokhzād traveled frequently between these two cities, consulting closely with Fereydūn Kār (1929–2007), the editor overseeing the manuscript's preparation. In the context of 1950s Iran—where women lacked the right to vote, hold public office, or retain custody of their children—such public and persistent engagement with a male editor was unconventional and drew considerable scrutiny.[27]

These travels also strained her marriage. Her husband, already uneasy about her literary aspirations, grew increasingly suspicious of her independent visits to Tehran and her interactions with unfamiliar men. The poems themselves—unapologetically intimate, emotionally exposed, and often erotic—exacerbated tensions within their fledgling marriage. As *Asīr* came into public view, so too did the private conflicts it had precipitated.

The collection opens with the poem "Shab va Havas" ("Night and Desire"), which offers insight into Farrokhzād's inner world and the fraught relationships between herself, her family, and the public. In this allegorical piece, "Desire," personified as a woman, longs for the embrace of "Sleep," envisioned as a distant bird perched high on a tree. The poem is constructed in the dialogic style of Parvīn Eʿtesāmī and adopts the lyrical cadence of Fereydūn Moshīrī's *ghazal* form:

> I am waiting for sleep, but alas,
> Sleep refuses to overtake me again.
> Sorrowful and sad I presume,
> Out of coyness he demurs.
>
> Like a shadow, he relentlessly avoids,
> The bright trap that my eyes set.
> While that hidden heart of his,
> Beats in the chambers of my heart.

The narrative arc of the poem soon shifts, its tone growing more urgent, even corporeal. Desire, no longer merely a poetic abstraction, becomes a voice for the poet herself, yearning for connection—not only spiritual, but physical—with a male beloved. The following verses are charged with emotional immediacy:

> I am drowned,
> In the innocence of youth,
> In these moments of oblivion,
> In these welcoming greetings,
> In these kisses, looks, and embraces.
>
> I want him to press me hard,
> Press love-stricken me hard, to himself.
> To put his warm and powerful arms,
> Around me and hold me tight.
> …

[27] On the legal and social status of women in 1950s Iran, see Eliz Sanasarian, *The Women's Rights Movement in Iran: Mutiny, Appeasement, and Repression from 1900 to Khomeini* (New York: Praeger, 1982), 91–104.

I desire him, I desire him,
I want him beside me in the dark.
I call him crying, I call him restlessly,
I call him patiently, tolerantly.

Yet, this confession is met with silence. As Desire's pleading gives way to resignation, the poem closes with an image of futility and cosmic indifference:

My every look, as if thirsty,
Searches into every nook and cranny
Of the endless night.
But that bird is perhaps
Crying on the roof of a wandering star.

Farrokhzād's insertion of her own voice disrupts the poem's frame, blurring the boundary between character and author. The result is not merely stylistic innovation, but an act of defiance: the transformation of a traditional *ghazal* into an erotic soliloquy. The reaction was swift. That such a poem was authored by a twenty-year-old woman—unmarried in spirit if not in law—made her the target of public censure. Why, critics asked, would a young woman write so boldly—and worse, submit such a work to a popular magazine like *Rowshanfekr*?

While later critics often viewed Farrokhzād's early works through the lens of feminist activism, this attribution may be anachronistic. The young woman who submitted these poems in ink-stained fingers to the editorial offices of *Rowshanfekr* was less a political dissenter than an audacious experimentalist. She sought fame, yes—but also the approval of her father, the affection of her husband, and a sense of identity as a poet.

Indeed, Farrokhzād's early ambition was to revive the formal *ghazal* while infusing it with contemporary themes. As she herself believed, writing *ghazals* in the tradition of Ḥāfeẓ could be a pathway to literary immortality.[28] The editors of *Rowshanfekr* knew the public impact these poems would have. Rather than temper Farrokhzād's content, they amplified it for sensation, cultivating both her celebrity and her infamy.

Public readings of her poems were filtered through what she would later describe as the "petrified minds" of her critics. Some, such as the poet ʿAlī Sepānlū, interpreted the elusive bird at the poem's end as a metaphor for Farrokhzād herself.[29] Others, including family members and acquaintances, voiced their disapproval in more personal and hurtful ways. In response, Farrokhzād penned the poem "Ramīdeh" ("Shunned"), a lamentation against hypocritical praise and clandestine vilification:

I run away from these people who,
Upon hearing my poetry,

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[28] Farrokhzād's admiration for Ḥāfeẓ is widely documented. See Afsāneh Najmābādī, "Reading with Forūgh: Recasting Women, Prescripting Gender," Iranian Studies 28, no. 1–2 (1995): 101–22.

[29] ʿAlī Sepānlā, quoted in Mahnāz Koushā, *Voices from Iran: The Changing Lives of Iranian Women* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 137.

Appear as budding roses to my face.
But who, in their secluded gatherings,
Single me out as an ill-repute woman.

Farrokhzād's goal, as indicated earlier, was to retain the *ghazal*'s structure while updating its emotional and thematic content. But what precisely did she intend to modernize? "Shab va Havas" suggests that she aimed to redefine the traditional relationships between worshiper and deity, or lover and beloved. Where Ḥāfeẓ addressed the beloved through metaphor and indirection, Farrokhzād pursued a more immediate and personal appeal. In her poem, Desire pleads not only with Sleep but with a tangible male presence—perhaps her husband—for intimacy.

Herein lies the central tension. Ḥāfeẓ, as a *Sūfī* elder, made his spiritual appeals from within a community of religious mystics. His utterances were veiled, his metaphors polyvalent. Farrokhzād, by contrast, wrote as a young wife and mother, embedded in a patriarchal and Shīʿī society. Her intervention in the poem was neither abstract nor symbolic—it was immediate, vulnerable, and confrontational. In doing so, she overshadowed the characters she had so carefully constructed. By the poem's end, the reader is no longer sure whether the elusive bird signifies Sleep, Desire, or Farrokhzād herself.

And yet, despite these structural tensions, her experiment succeeded. As Moshīrī later acknowledged, it brought her instant fame.[30]

Her second collection, *Divār* (*The Wall*), comprised twenty-five poems and opened with the controversial "Gonāh" ("Sin"). Though stylistically weaker, the poem remains significant as a continuation of her earlier experiment. In "Gonāh", Farrokhzād dispenses with personification altogether. The poem recounts a physical experience—presumably an illicit sexual encounter—with unfiltered immediacy. Unlike "Shab va Havas", there are no intermediary characters, only the poet's voice reliving an act she found so overwhelming that, as she writes, "I could not stop myself from committing it."

In her third collection, *ʿEsiyān* (*Rebellion*), Farrokhzād revisited the formal tensions between poet and personified emotion. In "Setīzeh" ("Strife"), Desire confronts Dream directly, with no intrusion from the poetess. Dream, like Sleep in earlier poems, perches on a branch and begins to enchant. But this time, Desire resists. Aware of Dream's fickleness, she reaches for an anti-sleep potion. When Dream protests, recounting the trials he endured to reach her, Desire closes her tired eyes and—when he insists—presses her eyelids together in defiance.

Altogether, the three collections include 86 poems in which, according to a 1961 statement by the poet herself, less than ten of them measure up to her standards:

> In the three books that I have published so far, by my present-day standards, there may not be more than seven or eight good poems.[31]

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[30] See Fereydūn Moshīrī, interview in *Roshd Literary Quarterly*, no. 3 (1973): 27–32.

[31] Forūgh Farrokhzād, "Negareshī be She'r-e Emrūz" (A Look at Contemporary Poetry), *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, p. 167.

Husband

At the age of sixteen, Forūgh Farrokhzād entered marriage with a deep affection for her husband, Parvīz Shapūr. Yet, due to circumstances discussed earlier, the union quickly deteriorated, and the couple divorced shortly thereafter. Her family, especially her father, was not happy with her behavior. She probes the issue in one of her letters to her father:

> [You] consider me a frivolous woman with silly ideas obtained from reading romance novels and the stories in the "*Tehrān Moṣawwar*" magazine. I wish that was the case. If that was true, I could live a happy life! Because I would be satisfied with having a small room, a husband who is satisfied with life employment, and dreads any new responsibility, or seeking any advancement. And, of course, fighting with the mother-in-law and thousands of other dirty and meaningless issues. That would be if I didn't know a bigger and more beautiful world. Then I would accept to, like a silkworm, languish and grow in my limited, dark cocoon to the end of my life! But I have refused, and continue to refuse, such a life.[32]

Understandably, Shāpūr grew increasingly uncomfortable with Farrokhzād's close associations with male companions, including the editor of *Roshanfekr* magazine and the renowned modernist poet Nāder Nāderpūr.[33] The fact that figures such as Nāderpūr reportedly perceived their relationships with Farrokhzād as romantic only deepened Shapour's mistrust.[34]

Despite the separation, Farrokhzād continued to visit Shāpūr and, as the father of her son Kāmiyār, considered him part of her extended family. This enduring connection is reflected in the dedication to her second collection of poetry, *Dīvār* (*The Wall*), where she wrote:

> "Dedicated to Parviz, in memory of our shared past and with the hope that a token of my small gift can be a response to his infinite love.
> —Forūgh Farrokhzād, July 12, 1335 [1956]."[35]

Shapour's affection was apparently mutual: he financed her trip to Europe, a gesture that reveals continued emotional and practical support even after their divorce.[36]

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[32] Forūgh Farrokhzād, "Yek Goftogū-ye Kūtāh," ("A Brief Conversation"), *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, p. 219.

[33] Nāder Nāderpūr was a prominent figure in the generation of modernist Persian poets influenced by Western literary forms and existentialist thought. His association with Farrokhzād, while often discussed in literary circles, was also sensationalized by the popular press. See Michael Hillmann, *A Lonely Woman: Forūgh Farrokhzād and Her Poetry* (Washington, DC: Three Continents Press, 1987), 52–54.

[34] For further discussion of Farrokhzād's controversial relationships and their impact on her public reputation, see Farzaneh Milani, *Veils and Words: The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1992), 182–84.

[35] For the original dedication, see the second edition of *Dīvār* (Tehran: Amir Kabir Publications, 1956), unnumbered front matter.

[36] Hillmann, *A Lonely Woman*, 56.

Farrokhzād's poems capture the evolving emotional landscape of this early marriage. In "Ḥasrat" ("Regret") and "Yādī az Gozashteh" ("A Remembrance of the Past"), she reflects nostalgically on her early days with Shapour in Ahvaz.[37] As her literary voice matured, however, her tone grew increasingly critical. In "'Eṣyān" ("Rebellion"), she directly confronts her husband's efforts to control her writing, recalling how he scolded her for composing provocative poetry and, in an effort to preserve his family's reputation, confined her to domestic isolation:

> I said cage—but how can I explain?
> I was oblivious to hypocrites.
> This scheming, playful world—
> It eventually deceived me.[38]

In "Bāzgasht" ("Return"), Farrokhzād links the troubles in her marriage not solely to her husband's behavior, but to the stifling conventions of Iranian society. This critique becomes more intimate in the poem "Rāz-e Man" ("My Secret"), where she portrays her husband as someone incapable of truly understanding her poetic temperament. He misreads her melancholy as the result of infidelity, rather than recognizing it as a characteristic of her creative soul:

> Woe to me—and those eyes that
> Continuously searched in hidden places—
> Day and night, trying to decipher
> The secret in my eyes.
> Constantly eavesdropping
> On my conversations.
> …
> Well, here it is—
> What you have been so intently searching for:
> My secret—the secret of a madwoman.
> A madwoman for whom
> Renown and grace have no meaning.
> The secret of a woman
> Who has become a source of hate for you.
> That is what pains me—not your anger,
> Which means nothing to me.[39]

The poems in *Dīvār*, far from being angry tirades, are often tender vignettes—snapshots of intimate, emotional moments. These moments, according to Farrokhzād, are rarely appreciated for their quiet elegance. In "Gonāh" ("Sin"), for example, she describes a fleeting moment of forbidden intimacy, one that she insists cannot be rationalized or measured intellectually.[40] Such moments of

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[37] These poems are available in various anthologies of Farrokhzād's early work. See Forūgh Farrokhzād, *Divār* (Tehran: Morvarid Publications, 1956), poems 8 and 11.
[38] Translation adapted from Sholeh Wolpé, trans., *Sin: Selected Poems of Forūgh Farrokhzād* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2007), 76.
[39] Ibid., 89.
[40] Ibid., 53–55.

emotional candor are found throughout the collection, where Farrokhzād shares her private needs, frustrations, and memories—especially those involving her son and her husband—and explores their responses to her inner world.

In "Ḥalqeh" ("The Wedding Band"), Farrokhzād turns her gaze outward, critiquing the institution of marriage itself. Here, she deconstructs its rituals and symbolic structures, condemning them as mechanisms of control that bind women in silence and submission.[41]

Son

After the dissolution of her marriage, Forūgh Farrokhzād suffered the profound trauma of losing custody of her only son, the three-year old Kāmyār (affectionately known as Kāmī). Stripped of her maternal rights, she described herself as a caged bird, left to dream of a reunion that seemed increasingly out of reach. While she mourned the loss of her child in deeply personal terms, her audience, critics, and readers routinely misinterpreted her poetic language, projecting their own assumptions onto her verse.

In the titular poem of her first collection, *Asīr* (*Captive*), the simple declaration *torā mīkhāham* ("I want you"), directed at her absent son, was widely construed as a romantic or erotic overture.

I want you although I know
I shall never embrace you
You embody the bright blue sky
I remain a mere caged bird.
…

Oh, sky, were I to one day
Fly away from this silent cell.
What should I say to that child?
Forget me. I am a caged bird![42]

Kāmyār lived with his father and attended school in Tehran. He was in the ninth grade when his mother died. After that he studied in London and, in 1979, graduated from the Art Center. He painted many portraits of his mother but he admitted that nothing filled the vacuum that he felt in his soul. In addition to the poems in *Asīr* and *ʿEṣiyān*, Kāmyār felt the following verses in the collection *Īmān Biyāvarīm be Āghāz-e Faṣl-e Sard*, symbolically make references to him:

When my trust was dangling on the loose string of justice
All over the city, they were cutting my heart into pieces.

Or in

[41] See Afsāneh Najmābādī, "The Erotic Vocabularies of Reformist Women Writers in Early Twentieth-Century Iran," *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 9, no. 17 (2000): 47–62, for discussion of how writers like Farrokhzād challenged social norms through poetic symbols such as the wedding ring.

[42] Forūgh Farrokhzād, *Asīr*, Amir Kabir Publications, 1976, pp. 34-35.

When they were covering the childish eyes of my love with the dark kerchief of law.

Those tragic experiences, Kāmyār believed, were etched in his mother's mind.[43] The use of the informal second-person pronoun "to", while entirely natural in maternal address, was instead read as an illicit plea to a male lover.[44] This interpretive violence—rooted in patriarchal and moralistic readings—tormented Farrokhzād. The poem, suffused with longing and absence, becomes in such readings an invitation to flirtation rather than the lamentation of a bereaved mother.

This misreading was not an isolated incident. The theme of maternal loss recurs with striking emotional clarity in "Dīv-e Shab" ("Night Demon"), in which Farrokhzād dramatizes the moment when her mother-in-law arrives to take Kāmyār from her home. The child, asleep with his head in her lap, becomes the focus of a dark allegory: a night demon invades the domestic space, stealing children from their mothers' arms. The poem begins as a lullaby but morphs into a surreal confrontation with an accusatory force that renders the poet painfully self-aware:

Kāmī, Kāmī, lift your head off my lap.[45]

The moment evokes not only separation but an irretrievable rupture—a transition from intimacy to emptiness.[46]

In the poem *Bīmār* ("Sick"), Farrokhzād envisions her son burning with fever, helpless in a sickbed. She holds his delicate fingers, recalling the warmth and vitality of earlier days. Her despair is visceral:

Often his voice reaches my ear:
"Mom," my heart is on fire.
When I look, I see a little boy
In an unkempt bed,
Burning with fever.
The night is silent. In my arms,
The child moans in intense pain.
The monotonous beat of the clock
Laughs at my agitation and distress.[47]

Time itself becomes cruel and mocking in this passage, reinforcing her isolation. In these lines, motherhood is not an abstract theme—it is a scene of raw, embodied suffering.

At this stage of her life, Farrokhzād's only consolation lay in imagining a future in which Kāmyār might come to understand her side of the story. She

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[43] Kāmyār Shāpūr, "Ḥarfhāi az Kāmyār Shāpūr" ("A Word or Two by Kāmyār Shāpūr"), *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, p. 624.

[44] See Afsāneh Najmābādī, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 126–27.

[45] Forūgh Farrokhzād, *Asīr*, Amir Kabir Publications, 1976, pp. 69-72.

[46] Farzāneh Mīlānī, *Veils and Words: The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1992), 114.

[47] Forūgh Farrokhzād, *Divān-e Forūgh Farrokhzād* [Collected Poems of Forūgh Farrokhzād], ed. Behrūz Gharīb (Tehran: Morvarid Press, 1985), 198.

believed that, in time, he would recognize how his father's family had distorted his image of her. In "Sheʿrī Barā-ye To" ("A Poem for You"), she addresses this imagined future directly:

> I am the one with a soiled reputation,
> The one who laughs out loud.
> I sought a voice of my own—
> But, regrettably, I was a woman.[48]

Here, Farrokhzād acknowledges her marginalization but transforms it into defiance.

> I thought of that land [Iran], the land that now was so many miles away from me, the land where being qua being was controversial. There I saw ridiculous and weak people who bowed their heads with artificial humility before idols of their own making. Idols that, over the years, they themselves had created and which, they themselves knew were fake. Yet they did not have the gumption to beat those idols on the head with their fists and step out of that ridiculous and hateful world.[49]

Her tone becomes sharper when she indicts the moral gatekeepers who helped shape her fate:

> I know it is difficult to fight
> This faith-wearing, hypocrite lot.
> It is a while, my dear innocent child,
> Since Satan has made our city his lair.[50]

In these lines, she envisions a time when Kāmyār, now grown, will read her poems and discover her truth hidden between the lines:

> I know it is difficult to fight,
> This faith-wearing hypocrite lot.
> It is a while, my dear innocent child,
> Since Satan has made our city his lair.
>
> A time will come, when your eye
> Will glide over this painful verse.
> You will look for me in between my words
> And will say: *She was my mother.*[51]

Her poetic voice shifts from lamentation to hope, however tenuous, resting on the transformative power of literature and memory. Some see in those statements echoes of Ḥāfeẓ but, in reality, they are evidence of her utter contempt for the situation in which her countrymen have placed themselves and, by extension, her.

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[48] Forūgh Farrokhzād, *ʿEṣiyān* (*Rebellion*), Amir Kabir Publishers, 1976, pp. 55-61.

[49] Forūgh Farrokhzād, "Dar Diyār-e Dīgar, Khāṭerāt-e Safar-e Orūpā/Safarnāme-ye Itāliyā" ("In a Different Land, Memoires of the Trip to Europe/The Italian Diary"), *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, p. 97.

[50] Ibid., 205.

[51] Forūgh Farrokhzād, *ʿEṣiyān* (*Rebellion*), Amir Kabir Publishers, 1976, pp. 57-60.

By the time she wrote "Bāzgasht" ("Return"), however, even that fragile hope appears to have faded. Having returned from a trip abroad, Farrokhzād surveys a homeland consumed by entropy and decay. The heat is oppressive, the river dry, the houses bleached of color, and the once-familiar dome of the old mosque now resembles an inverted, broken bowl. Children, stones in hand, torment stray dogs—a disturbing metaphor for moral disintegration. She returns to her own small room and whispers:

> I leaned against the wall,
> And quietly asked, "Is that you, Kāmī?"
> But alas, I realized that
> From that bygone bitter memory
> Only a name has remained.[52]

Finally, when Kāmyār was asked, except for "Bāzgasht," which other of his mother's poems made him happy? He referred to the poem "Fatḥ-e Bāgh" ("The Conquest of the Garden"). "Fatḥ-e Bāgh" is, indeed, one of the major poems of Farrokhzād. In this poem, through a crevice in a dirty wall, she sees the glorious reality that walls mask from ordinary people. In that world, according to Kāmyār, Farrokhzād symbolically saw the satisfying and peaceful world of her dreams. A world that is devoid of man-made rules and inhibitions.

This quiet devastation marks the end of a journey—not just through space but through the inner landscape of a mother estranged from her child. Her question hangs in the air, unanswered, dissolving into silence.

Muse

Farrokhzād's muse is one of the central forces behind the intensity and innovation of her poetry.

> For me, my muse is like a friend with whom I can share my troubles. My muse completes me, satisfies me, without bothering me.[53]

More than a literary device, this muse emerges as a deeply internalized source of creative resilience—a spirit that not only inspires her poetic voice but also fortifies her as she confronts the suffocating social, political, and personal pressures of her time. It is this inner force that persuades her, despite overwhelming resistance from critics and society, to persist in her poetic experiments until they achieve full realization. What were the difficulties involved and who were the individuals behind them? Critics who lacked talent but were determined to crush those who had the audacity to contribute notions that nullified theirs.

In *Īmān Biyāvarīm be Āghāz-e Faṣl-e Sard* ("Let Us Believe in the Onset of the Cold Season"), Farrokhzād alludes to the simultaneous birth of herself and her

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[52] Ibid., 211.

[53] Forūgh Farrokhzād, "Goftogū bā Forūgh # 5" ("A Conversation with Forūgh # 5"), *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, p. 202. (interviewers: Sīrūs Ṭāhbāz and Dr. Sā'edī)

muse—a metaphysical coupling that anchors her poetic identity.[54] Typically, this muse appears as a gentle companion, coaxing creativity from the edges of despair. Yet, there are moments, such as in the poem "Qorbānī" ("Sacrifice"), when the muse becomes something darker—demanding, voracious, even destructive:

> Except these tearful eyes,
> What else remains to me for you to take away?
> Oh poetry, oh blood-sucking muse,
> Enough is enough. No more sacrifice![55]

Here, Farrokhzād casts the muse as both instigator and tormentor, a figure who extracts creative vitality at the cost of personal suffering. Poetry, while redemptive, is never painless.

Death

By 1960, the psychic toll of her struggles pushed Farrokhzād to the brink of suicide. Rather than an end, however, this near-fatal experience became a crucible of transformation. According to her later reflections, the confrontation with death forced her to reorder her life and resolve her internal conflicts.[56] In "Baʿdhā" ("In the End"), she constructs a haunting meditation on the moment following her own imagined death—a calm, almost detached depiction of finality:

> My hands, free from the charm of poetry,
> Slide gently across my notebook.
> I remember how once, the blood of poetry
> Coursed aflame in my hands.
>
> After me, a stranger, thinking of me
> Will step into my humble room.
> At the side of the mirror, he will see
> A strand of hair, a fingerprint, and a comb.[57]

In this poem, death is not tragic but strangely intimate—a quiet letting go of the “family circle,” the old life, the roles she had been forced to play. The death she imagines is symbolic, a necessary severance from her former self. What follows is a rebirth.

This pivot is further articulated in *Ẓolmat* ("Pitch Dark"), where a faint light appears on the horizon—but even that flicker is shadowed by ambiguity. Her muse warns her not to trust appearances:

> The glimmer in the distance
> Might not be a light at all.

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[54] Forūgh Farrokhzād, *Dīvān-e Forūgh Farrokhzād* [Collected Poems of Forūgh Farrokhzād], ed. Behrūz Gharīb (Tehran: Morvarid Press, 1985), 243.

[55] Farzāneh Mīlānī, *Veils and Words: The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1992), 119–20.

[56] Farrokhzād, *Dīvān, 248.*

[57] Forūgh Farrokhzād, *'Eṣyān* (*Rebellion*), Amir Kabir Publishers, 1976, pp. 127-130.

It could be the shining eyes
Of the wolves of the desert.[58]

And yet, despite the warning, Farrokhzād chooses to continue. She embraces the unknown and commits herself to passing through the portal of metaphorical death—to be reborn not just as a poet but as a self-aware, socially conscious artist.

This transformation was not merely poetic but intellectual. During this period of withdrawal, Farrokhzād intentionally limited her writing output and immersed herself in the study of contemporary literary currents. She read widely—modernist poets, progressive fiction writers, and critical theorists of her time—while also engaging deeply with the structures and injustices of Iranian society. Her return to poetry was not a retreat but a reentry—renewed, sharpened, and visionary.

When she finally re-emerged into the realm of *sheʿr-e now* (modern poetry), Farrokhzād brought with her a voice that had not only survived exile and death but had transcended them. She returned not merely to write, but to transform the field—determined to elevate modern Iranian poetry to a level of cultural and spiritual resonance rivaling the canonical heights of classical masters like Ḥāfeẓ of Shīrāz.

Days of Liberality and Vision

At the beginning of the 1960s, following an unsuccessful suicide attempt, Forūgh Farrokhzād undertook a serious reexamination of her life and artistic path. Convinced that she could forge a meaningful future for herself based on her education and experience, she resolved to make drastic changes in both her personal life and creative work. Despite earlier limitations, she committed to a renewed engagement with literature—researching the evolving principles of *sheʿr-e now* (New Poetry) and analyzing contemporary short stories with fresh intensity.

Previously, Farrokhzād had experimented with blending the lyrical form of Ḥāfeẓ's *ghazals* with the "four-part" (*chahārpāreh*) poems popularized by Fereydūn Moshīrī, achieving considerable success. This fusion had already borne fruit in three collections of poetry. Now, however, she envisioned a bolder approach: to merge the essence of Ḥāfeẓ's classical sonnet structure with the evolving techniques of *sheʿr-e now*, update the thematic content of her verse, draw on the narrative richness of modern short stories, and produce a body of work radically different from anything previously published.

To this end, Farrokhzād closely studied the aesthetic reforms introduced by Nīmā Yūshīj, the founder of New Persian Poetry. In response to Iranians' increasing exposure to European culture, Nīmā had introduced sweeping changes to the traditional metrics (*awzān*) and rhyme schemes of Persian verse.[59] He argued that the rigid frameworks of classical poetry inhibited modern poets from expressing their generation's existential anxieties with the intensity they required. Farrokhzād found that Nīmā redefined rhythm and content with authentic vigor, no

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[58] ForūghFarrokhzād, *'Eṣyān* (*Rebellion*), Amir Kabir Publishers, 1976, pp. 87-88.

[59] cf., Abdulalī Dastgheyb, *Nīmā Yūshīj: Naqd va Barrasī* (Nīmā Yushīj: Criticism and Review), Farzin Publications, 1973, p. 54.

longer tethering the length of a poetic unit to the classical *miṣraʿ* (hemistich), but instead allowing the organic development of thought and feeling to determine structure. This innovation fostered greater cultural flexibility and enabled poets to incorporate novel ideas into their work with ease.

Moreover, Nīmā's reforms did away with obligatory rhyme, which traditionally constrained diction and stifled innovation. Freed from such constraints, poets were now able to choose words—especially new or colloquial expressions—with greater freedom, resulting in more diverse and realistic themes. In this newer poetry, the beloved (*maʿshūq*) is no longer a remote, idealized figure, but a real, tangible, and embodied presence—much like the lover portrayed in Farrokhzād's own earlier poem "Shab va Havas" ("Sleep and Desire").[60] In essence, the poet channels the emotional core of her experience into a dynamic, unconventional form, allowing the poem itself to evolve as necessary during its creation.

Yet not all of Nīmā's contemporaries welcomed these changes. Fereydūn Tavallalī, whom Farrokhzād once affectionately referred to as *ostād-e khodam*, initially imitated Nīmā's style, but soon became a vocal critic. Disenchanted, he returned to the classical forms of the *ghazal* and *qasīda*.[61] Meanwhile, Parvīz Nātel Khānlarī (1914–1991), distancing himself from both traditionalists and modernists, developed a new, simplified poetic style of his own. In contrast, Aḥmad Shāmlū (1925–2000) expanded on Nīmā's ideas and developed an even more complex idiom. Drawing upon the symbolic imagery of Ḥāfeẓ and Khayyam, Shāmlū created a rich, paradoxical landscape of meaning by integrating abstract and concrete elements into personified oxymoronic forms—an unprecedented achievement in Persian poetry. These innovations resonated deeply with the avant-garde. It was at this juncture that Farrokhzād abandoned Moshīrī's *chahārpāreh* style and embraced Shāmlū's vision. Her poem "*Setīzeh*" ("Strife") exemplifies her evolving poetic sensibility during this period.

Recognizing that traditional themes no longer reflected the social and psychological concerns of contemporary Iranians, Farrokhzād also turned her attention to the development of Persian fiction. She observed that the short stories of the time were structured around plot, topical concerns, and a diversity of characters—most of them urban men. Determined to expand this literary universe, she sought to center the lives of women and the conditions of the poor.

For inspiration, she delved into the writings of Ṣādeq Hedāyat (1903–1951), Iran's most prominent modernist author of the 1930s and 1940s.[62] In *Būf-e Kūr* (*The Blind Owl*, 1937), Hedayat masterfully synthesized motifs from Iranian, European, and Indian traditions—a cosmopolitan technique Farrokhzād found compelling. She was especially drawn to his methodical structure, evocative language, and didactic intensity. She studied *Būf-e Kūr* alongside the short story

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[60] cf., *Karīmī-Ḥakkāk and Kāmrān Ṭalaṭṭof (eds.),* "Essays on Nīmā Yūshīj: Animating Modernism in Persian Poetry," *Middle Eastern Literatures*, 12 (1*), 2004, pp. 100-105.*

[61] Kāmyār ʿĀbedīī, "Tavallalī, Fereydūn,", http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2330-4804_EIRO_COM_879, 2016, (accessed July 6, 2024).

[62] Īraj Bashīrī, "The Life of Sadeq Hedayat," 2019, https://www.academia.edu/39277709/The_Life_of_Sadeq_Hedayat (accessed on July 6, 2024)

"Seh Qaṭreh Khūn" ("Three Drops of Blood," 1932), noting Hedāyat's meticulous approach to theme, structure, and semantic precision—all of which she consciously adopted in her own work.[63]

Similarly, Farrokhzād engaged with the short stories of Ṣādeq Chūbak (1916–1998), an atheist and a forceful advocate for women's rights. She carefully analyzed works such as "*ʿAdl*" ("Justice") and "*Daryā Cherā Tūfānī Shode Būd?*" ("Why Had the Sea Grown Stormy?"), absorbing their unflinching realism and moral urgency.

This sustained engagement with the poetry of Nīmā and Shāmlū and the prose of Hedāyat and Chūbak enabled Farrokhzād to glimpse the vast formal and thematic possibilities of modern Persian literature. It also revealed to her the expressive capacity of the Persian language when liberated from the ornate strictures of classical poetics. While the precise influence of these encounters on her later poetry remains to be fully measured, there is little doubt that they opened new intellectual horizons. More importantly, they introduced her to the diverse ideologies circulating in mid-century Iranian society—ideas she might have otherwise ignored.

In sum, Farrokhzād emerged from the turmoil of youth and the constraints of familial and societal expectation into a newly self-determined life and poetic mode. These transformations are vividly reflected in the works she produced during this period. Many of the paths she charted remain open to others committed to furthering her vision. The remainder of this article will examine more closely the influence of Shāmlū, followed by that of Nīmā, on Farrokhzād's poetry.

The Influence of Shāmlū

Before becoming acquainted with the works of Aḥmad Shāmlū and, later, Nīmā Yūshīj, Forūgh Farrokhzād paid little attention to the language of poetry or the visionary role of the poet.[64] At that early stage in her career, she regarded poetry primarily as a form of entertainment—a means of self-amusement. As she later admitted, she believed that by writing poetry, she was *adding* something to herself. It was only after encountering Shāmlū's work that she came to a more sobering realization: writing poetry, in fact, *took something away* from her.[65]

This shift in perspective marked a pivotal moment in her artistic development. Several poems from *Tavallodī Dīgar* (*Another Birth*) and *Īmān Biyāvarīm be Āghāz-e Faṣl-e Sard* (*Let Us Believe in the Onset of the Cold Season*) stem from this transformative period. It was during these years that, in her own

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[63] Īraj Bashīrī, "The Blind Owl: A Summary of the Story (Revised 2020)," at https://www.academia.edu/30937871/The_Blind_Owl_A_Summary_of_the_Story_Revised_2020_, 2016-2020 (accessed on July 6, 2024)

[64] Cf., Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), "Goftogū bā Forūgh #6" ("A Conversation with Forūgh #6 *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, pp. 225-226.

[65] Cf., Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), "Goftogū bā Forūgh #4" ("A Conversation with Forūgh #4"), *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, p. 194.

words, "thought qua thought" entered her life.[66] She came to understand how the liberation from rigid poetic form allowed her emotional and intellectual expression to deepen and evolve.[67]

She concluded that form, in itself, does not possess a strictly traditional or modern identity—it is not inherently classical or contemporary. As for poetic content and themes, despite the historical distance between her own society and that of Ḥāfeẓ, she argued that most of the differences were superficial. Both societies, she believed, grapple with the same core concerns—religion, ethics, love, honor, and courage.[68] Thus, she saw it as both possible and necessary to preserve the elegance and depth of the classical *ghazal* while updating its structure and imagery to speak to the realities of contemporary life—using stanzas instead of *beyts* (couplets).[69] (More on this later.)

One advantage in working with Farrokhzād's poetry is the wealth of self-reflective commentary she left behind—observations, confessions, and critiques, both positive and negative, about herself, her art, and the contributions of her peers. Some of her statements are emphatic, even polemical; others take aim at critics who, in her view, stubbornly clung to dogma and failed to appreciate innovation:

> In our country, and perhaps in the world at large, there are those who obstinately hold to their own opinions and rumors. For them, nothing exists unless they say it does. That includes "beauty." In their view, an object is beautiful or harmonious only when it aligns with their predefined standards. "Correct" is whatever fits within the bounds of their broad or narrow vision. As judges, they fiercely oppose everything new—new thoughts, new forms—in life, love, poetry, music, painting, and beyond… and they do so without the slightest attempt to understand what they are judging.[70]

At the same time, Farrokhzād was generous in her praise of those whose contributions were constructive, particularly when their feedback helped propel her work forward. Her tone toward such figures—especially Shāmlū and Nīmā—is collegial, even affectionate:

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[66] Cf., Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), "Goftogū bā Forūgh #6" ("A Conversation with Forūgh # 6"), *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, p. 228.

[67] Behrūz Jalālī, "Goftogū bā Forūgh(2)," ("A Conversation with Forūgh # 2"), *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, p. 176.

[68] Behrūz Jalālī, "Goftogū bā Forūgh #1" ("A Conversation with Forūgh # 1"), *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, p. 169.

[69] Behrūz Jalālī, "Goftogū bā Forūgh #1) ("A Conversation with Forūgh # 1"), " *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, p. 172.

[70] Forūgh Farrokhzād, "Dar Diyār-e Dīgar, Khāṭerāt-e Safar-e Orūpā/Safarnāme-ye Itāliyā" ("In a Different Land, Memoires of the Trip to Europe/The Italian Diary"), *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, p. Morvarid Publishers, 1375, p. 110.

> I became familiar with Shāmlū before I came to know Nīmā. Shāmlū was the bridge between Nīmā and my generation.[71] People read Shāmlū before they read Nīmā.[72]

Farrokhzād considered herself indebted to Shāmlū for her stylistic awakening and for helping her grasp the expressive range of the Persian language:[73]

> Throughout his artistic career, [Shāmlū] has addressed social issues, observing the world through a wide lens. He conveys the oppression and despair of his time through the blood and sinew of his words. His pain—raw, beautiful, humane—is sincere and often elevates his poetry to epic heights… Beneath the surface of his verse dwells a child with an innocent heart, calling out for sun and for life.[74]

From studying Shāmlū's style and linguistic experimentation, Farrokhzād came to believe that poets, like students, progress through stages of development. She realized that poetic content must first be internalized—lived and absorbed—before it can be authentically expressed. During a creative hiatus, she undertook two parallel processes: a deep introspection to discover her authentic self, and a rigorous reassessment of her poetic craft to align herself with the *she'r-e now* movement. Of this period, she wrote:

> Once you know yourself and master your craft, poems flow from your pen effortlessly.[75]

One of her major achievements during this collaboration with Shāmlū was learning how to incorporate the voices and ideas of other writers and artists into her own poetic framework. Through her work with Ebrāhīm Golestān, she learned how to allow the thoughts of others to emerge as prominent nodes in her own compositions. Her use of thematic elements from the works of Ṣādeq Hedāyat and Ṣādeq Chūbak, discussed below, reveals the depth of her artistic progress.

Farrokhzād was also exacting in her appraisal of Shāmlū. She admired his accomplishments but was not blind to what she saw as his weaknesses. She believed he was sometimes seduced by lofty ideas, failing to probe their deeper implications:

> In my opinion, Shāmlū is often enchanted by beautiful concepts. The praise that appears in some of his poems results from blending those concepts

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[71] Forūgh Farrokhzād, "Dar Diyār-e Dīgar, Khāṭerāt-e Safar-e Orūpā/Safarnāme-ye Itāliyā" ("In a Different Land, Memoires of the Trip to Europe/The Italian Diary"), *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, p. Morvarid Publishers, 1375, p. 110.

[72] Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), "Goftogū bā Forūgh # 4" ("A Conversation with Forūgh # 4"), *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, p. 186.

[73] Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), "Goftogū bā Forūgh # 4" ("A Conversation with Forūgh # 4"), *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, pp. 186-187.

[74] Forūgh Farrokhzād, "Negareshī be She'r-e Emrūz" ("A Look at Contemporary Poetry"), *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, p. 160.

[75] Cf., Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), "Goftogū bā Forūgh #4" ("A Conversation with Forūgh # 4"), *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, p. 194.

together without careful discrimination. It stems from his fascination with humanity, love, friendship, and women. He observes, becomes captivated, and forgets that to find true solitude—the inner space of reflection—he must dive more deeply into those very ideas.[76]

Shāmlū, for his part, had his own views about Farrokhzād. He regarded her poetic lens as simple and unembellished—more observational than exploratory.[77] He noted, for instance, that *Another Birth* contained what he saw as careless mistakes:

> These [errors] stem from inattention. Unfortunately, a lack of focus is not uncommon in Forūgh's work.[78]

Shāmlū cited several examples. In one line, Farrokhzād writes *barf mībārīd bar reshte-ye sost-e ṭanāb-e rakht* ("snow fell on the loose fabric of the rope of the clothesline"). Shāmlū argued that the more accurate phrasing would have been *bar band-e sost-e rakht* ("on the loose clothesline"). In another instance, she describes the market as immersed *dar bū-ye tond-e qahveh va māhī* ("in the pungent smell of coffee and fish"). Shāmlū contended that she should have used the word *pāsāzh* (arcade), even if it is a more modern term, because *bāzār* conventionally evokes the scents of spice and cinnamon—not coffee and fish.

He also disagreed with some of her conceptual choices. In her phrase *zavāl-e zībā-ye golhā* ("the beautiful decay of flowers"), he challenged the paradox: [79] "How can decay be beautiful?" [80] Similarly, Farrokhzād's belief that ugliness must be portrayed and laid bare in order to be fully understood struck him as problematic. Regarding linguistic accuracy, Shāmlū critiqued the final line of "*Tavallodī Dīgar*." He believed she should have written *be-doniyā mī-āyad* ("is born") rather than *be-doniyā khāhad āmad* ("will be born").[81]

Little ʿAli

Īraj Mīrzā (1874–1926) stands among the early voices of modern Persian poetry in twentieth-century Iran, known especially for his sharp criticism of entrenched social and cultural traditions. His best-known didactic quatrain, memorized by generations of elementary school children, is deceptively simple:

One day ʿAlī's mother advised him:

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[76] Cf., Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), "Goftogū bā Forūgh # 5" ("A Conversation with Forūgh # 5"), *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, p. 218.

[77] Aḥmad Shāmlū, "Shā'ereī Jostojūgar" ("An Inquisitive Poetess"), *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, p. 274.

[78] Aḥmad Shāmlū, "Tabalvor-e Jān-e She'r" ("The Crystallization of the Lifeline of Poetry"), *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, p. 286.

[79] Forūgh Farrokhzād, "Tavallodī Dīgar," (*Another Birth*), Entesharat-e Talayeh, 2003, p. 279.

[80] Aḥmad Shāmlū, "Shā'ereī Jostojūgar" ("An Inquisitive Poetess *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, p. 284.

[81] Aḥmad Shāmlū, "Shā'ereī Jostojūgar" ("An Inquisitive Poetess"), *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, pp. 285-286.

Beware! Don't go near the pool!
ʿAlī went—and fell straight into the pool.
Dear child, heed your mother's advice!

This moralistic verse, couched in folk wisdom and cautionary rhyme, reflects Iraj's ironic treatment of obedience and consequence. Yet it would later serve as the raw material for a far more psychologically charged reinterpretation by Forūgh Farrokhzād.

Farrokhzād, drawing from the simple diction and folkloric tone often associated with Aḥmad Shāmlū, rewrote Īraj Mīrzā's piece in a hauntingly modern register. Her poem, titled "ʿAlī Kūchīkeh" (*Little ʿAlī*), begins with similar simplicity. Little ʿAlī, initially, is content with the secure pleasures of terrestrial life—his world is prosperous, bounded, and familiar. But as the narrative unfolds, and ʿAlī begins to grasp the richness and mystery of the sea, he finds himself caught in an existential dilemma: Should he remain within the safety of known comforts, or should he surrender to the seductive call of the sea and its boundless, terrifying beauty?

Herein lies the poem's transformation—from moral parable to metaphysical riddle. To enjoy the splendor and secret delights of the sea, one must be reborn. And rebirth, Farrokhzād insists, can only be achieved through death. The gateway to transcendence is the portal of annihilation.

This section of the poem reads not like a fairy tale, but like the inner monologue of a soul teetering on the edge of self-destruction. It evokes the fevered lucidity of someone contemplating suicide—not in despair, but with philosophical calculation. The sea becomes a metaphor not merely for the unknown, but for liberation through obliteration. In the end, Little ʿAlī chooses to pass through the portal, to taste death and be changed—or perhaps, undone—by it. Farrokhzād later reflected on the emotional toll of writing the poem:

> In this poem, I have actually settled my accounts—with myself and with life. At the same time, I've spoken for all those who lack the courage to take risks. This poem is the result of my personal choices... It began as something private, and became a public reckoning.[82]

The metaphor of the sea—its abyssal promise and fatal allure—replaces Īraj Mīrzā's pond. This symbolic shift is not incidental. The idea came from a short story by Ṣādeq Chūbak, a pioneering figure in Iranian fiction and the first to employ colloquial Persian as a literary register. At the time Farrokhzād composed "ʿAlī Kūchīkeh," she was also working on the production of a film titled *The Sea*, based on Chūbak's story *"Cherā Daryā Tūfānī Shodeh Būd?"* ("Why the Sea Had Grown Stormy?").[83]

That story draws on a disturbing piece of regional folklore from Iran's southern coast: when the sea becomes violent, it is because the villagers have cast

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[82] Cf., Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), "Goftogū ba Furūgh (5)" ("A Conversation with Furūgh 5"), *Jāvdāneh Zīstan, dar Owj Māndan: Forough-e Farrokhzād* (*Eternal Life, Permanence at the Peak: Forough Farrokhzād*), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, p. 212.

[83] Ḥassan Kāmshād, *Modern Persian Prose Literature*, Cambridge University Press, 1966.

their illegitimate children into its depths. The water, vast and indifferent, bears the weight of shame and secrecy.

Having stood herself at the threshold of death, Farrokhzād understood what it meant to face that abyss. She knew the sea's promise—and its cost. Her sympathy extended not only to Little ʿAlī, but to all the children hurled into the abyss, whether by society, silence, or sorrow. In this retelling, she does not merely revise Īraj Mīrzā—she reclaims the tale from moralism and reframes it as a confrontation with mortality, agency, and the sacred terror of becoming.[84]

The Onset of the Cold Season

During the preparation of her documentaries, Farrokhzād engaged with a wide array of writers and immersed herself in contemporary literature. Through reading and conversation, she acquainted herself with the pressing issues of her time. That engagement left a profound imprint on her poetry—especially in the collections *Another Birth* and *Let Us Believe in the Onset of the Cold Season*, where she draws upon that knowledge with lyrical precision. This intertextual thread offers a valuable lens through which we can analyze, interpret, and understand her work.

One of the writers whose work Farrokhzād studied closely was Ṣādeq Chūbak—an atheist, an environmentalist, and a staunch advocate for women's rights. In his 1945 short story collection *Kheymeh Shab Bāzī* (*The Puppet Show*), a story titled "ʿ*Adl*" ("Justice") appears to have resonated deeply with Farrokhzād. Its themes seem to echo unmistakably in her haunting poem "Īmān Biyāvarīm be Āghāz-e Faṣl-e Sard" ("Let Us Believe in the Onset of the Cold Season").

The setting of Chūbak's story is bleak: a narrow alley at dawn. A car has collided with a *doroshkeh*, causing the carriage horse to collapse. Two street sweepers and a laborer, relying on crude and ineffective reasoning, attempt to help the animal rise—but fail. A crowd of men gathers, each offering commentary but no action. Among them: a man with a leather briefcase and dark glasses, a father and his young son, a feeble policeman, a beetroot seller, a mullah, a pipe smoker, a journalist, and a burly man. They theorize and moralize, but none lifts a hand to assist the suffering creature.

The description of the horse is unforgettable:

> Thin puffs of steam rose from its nostrils. The animal's body exhaled heat into the chill morning air. Its ribs were clearly visible beneath the skin. The dried imprint of five muddy fingers stained its back and neck. The horse trembled violently, yet remained calm—resigned, watching the crowd with wide, tearless eyes, the posture of a dignified being enduring its fate.[85]

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[84] Moḥammad Rezā Ghānoonparvar, "Chubak, Sadeq," 2009, at https://iranicaonline.org/articles/chubak-sadeq (accessed June 8, 2024).

[85] Ṣādeq Chūbak, "'Adl" ("Justice"), *Kheymeh Shab Bāzī* (*The Puppet Show*), Tehran, 1945.

Though understated, this passage reveals the deeper purpose behind Chūbak's story—and Farrokhzād, acutely perceptive, grasps its symbolic weight. The narrative condemns a passive and helpless Iranian society, paralyzed in the face of Western power (embodied by the automobile and its absent driver). At the heart of this paralysis, Chūbak suggests, lies Shīʿa clerical authority, represented by the mullah who, like the others, fails to act. The "five muddy fingers" on the horse's body symbolize *Panj Tan-e Āl-e ʿAbā*—the Five of the Cloak—whom Chūbak blames, obliquely, for Iran's spiritual and societal decay. The absence of women in the crowd underscores their systemic erasure: the true nurturers and potential saviors are confined to domestic spaces. Only one appears—indirectly—through her son, who stands beside his father.

Farrokhzād alludes to a similar scene in an interview about her poetic themes: a desolate alley at night, the aftermath of a car crash, a chilling wind. In "Let Us Believe in the Onset of the Cold Season," she evokes the image of a woman alone in that empty alley, battered by the unrelenting cold.[86] She blames herself—for failing to see, failing to act—and in this vulnerable moment, her mind returns to the origins of her life, her first encounter with loneliness and death.

She recalls the night of her conception—a mystical moment of convergence between her sperm and that of her muse. She imagines her mother crying, not with joy, but sorrow:

> That night of pain and becoming,
> When the sperm took form.
> …
> And my muse returned to the sperm
> I saw my muse in the mirror—
> Pure, translucent—
> And it called me by name.[87]

This memory sharpens into revelation. Her mother wept not merely from labor pains, but from foreknowledge: she was birthing a daughter fated to struggle, to suffer, to stand alone in an alley whipped by cold winds. Her tears were not for the miracle of birth, but for the truth of what it meant to be born a girl into a society where speaking truth was a dangerous act. Farrokhzād writes:

> Look over there—
> The one who spoke in words,
> Who soothed with glances,
> Who sought peace through tenderness—
> Is crucified on the cross of illusion.
> The trace of five fingers,
> Five letters of truth,

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[86] Bahman Khalīfe Banarvanī, "Introduction," Dīvān-e Furūgh-e Farrokhzād, Talyeh Publishers, 2002, p. 62.
[87] "Iman Biyavarim, p. 290.

Stamped across his face.[88]

We recall here Chūbak's dying horse, branded by the five muddy fingers. Farrokhzād, expanding on that symbol, finds the same mark on the face of the speaker—the one who dares to express compassion, truth, and longing. Whether horse, woman, or visionary, they are all crushed beneath the same inherited burden.

With this poem, and others like "Kasī ke Mesl-e Hīch Kas Nīst" ("He Who Is Like No One Else"), Farrokhzād takes her place among Iran's literary prophets—alongside Hedāyat and Shāmlū. In the 1940s, Hedāyat warned of theocratic rule taking root in Iran, drawing unsettling comparisons to the Islamic regime in neighboring Afghanistan. Shāmlū echoed those fears.[89] And Farrokhzād, in her own fiercely lyrical way, anticipated the arrival of Khomeinī—his hollow promises, and the cold season that followed.[90] Here is what she says:

Spread the tablecloth, and
Divide the bread, and
Divide the Pepsi, and
Divide the garden, and
Divide the whooping cough medicine
…
And would give our share, too.
I have dreamed…[91]

Earthly Verses

"*Earthly Verses*" is a complex and unsettling poem. To truly grasp its contours, we must find a point of entry. Ṣādeq Hedāyat's short story "Se Qaṭreh Khūn" (Three Drops of Blood)*,* itself a layered and elusive work, provides just such an opening. But before drawing that connection, let us briefly consider the existing literature on Hedāyat and Forūgh Farrokhzād.

In his article "*Is Another Birth a Child of The Blind Owl?,*" Mehdī Borhānī identifies striking affinities between scenes in Hedāyat's *The Blind Owl* and Farrokhzād's *Another Birth*.[92] Indeed, the episodes he highlights share emotional

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[88] [88] Furūgh Farrokhzād, *"Īmān Biyāvarīm be Āghāz-e Faṣl-e Sard"* (*Let Us Believe in the Onset of the Cold Season*), *Divan-e Furūgh-e Farrokhzād*, Bahman Khalīfe Banarvanī, ed., Talyeh Publishers, 2002, p. 294. See also Aḥmad Shāmlū, "Ebrahīm dar Ātash" (Ibraham in Fire), Zaman Books, 1978, pp. 28 and 29.

[89] Moḥammad Reza Ghānoonparvar, *Prophets of Doom: Literature as a Socio-Political Phenomenon in Modern Iran*, University Press of America, 1984, p. 38.

[90] Forūgh Farrokhzād, "Kasī ke Methl-e Hīch Kas Nīst" (He Who is Not Like Anyone Else), *"Īmān Biyāvarīm be Āghāz-e Faṣl-e Sard"* (*Let Us Believe in the Onset of the Cold Season*), *Dīvān-e Forūgh-e Farrokhzād* (*Collection of Poems of Forūgh Farrokhzād*), Bahman Khalīfe Banarvanī, ed., Talyeh Publishers, 2003, p. 316.

[91] Furūgh Farrokhzād, "Kasī ke Mesl-e Hīch Kas Nīst" (He Who is Not Like Anyone Else), *Tavallodī Dīgar*, 2003, pp. 312-316.

[92] Borhānī, Mehdī. "Āya 'Tavallodī Dīgar' Mowlūd-e *Būf-e Kūr Ast*?" ("Is 'Another Birth' a Child of *The Blind Owl?*"), *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, pp. 537-546.

climates, thematic concerns, and a common lexicon of despair and alienation. Yet, Borhānī limits his scope to surface parallels—emotional resonances, recurring motifs—and largely sidesteps the deeper messages encoded in these texts. His comparison hinges on the moods of Hedāyat's narrator and those evoked by Farrokhzād's poetic speakers.

Similarly, Ṣādeq Homāyūnī draws connections between Farrokhzād's characters and Hedāyat himself—as if Hedāyat, rather than a fictional narrator, were the true voice behind *The Blind Owl*.[93] Unfortunately, he is not alone in collapsing the distinction between author and character. Many readers have fallen into the same interpretive trap, mistakenly projecting Hedāyat's life onto his fictional constructs. The contrast with Farrokhzād could not be more pronounced: her life was an open book, often mined for clues about her work; Hedāyat's, by contrast, remains cloaked in mystery, inviting mythmaking.

What unites them, however, is a shared empiricism. Both were rigorous observers of human experience—careful, almost scientific in their creative experiments—and both were fiercely protective of the method behind their madness. It is through this methodological lens that we can begin to make sense of their respective contributions.

Since Borhānī and Homāyūnī have already explored the more obvious formal and emotional parallels, what follows is an attempt to demonstrate how Hedāyat's and Farrokhzād's works intersect conceptually. We do so with Farrokhzād's own assertion in mind: the author's message lies not in scattered fragments, but in the totality of the work.[94]

Farrokhzād's literary experimentation has been well documented. Her appropriation of Fereydūn Moshīrī's *chahārpāreh*, her subversive engagement with the *ghazals* of Ḥāfeẓ, and her revisions of short stories like "*Justice*" and "*Why the Sea Was Stormy?*" speak to her restless search for form and voice. In Hedāyat's case, we must distinguish between two bodies of work: one written for popular entertainment, and the other composed with deliberate philosophical intent. For the latter, Hedāyat meticulously prepared his psychological and social settings.

For instance, before writing "Three Drops of Blood," a story set in a mental asylum, Hedāyat actually spent time living among the institutionalized. He studied their rhythms—how they inhabited space and time, how they interacted with each other and the world beyond their walls. Only after grasping the inner logic of this closed, disordered world did he begin to narrate from within it—adopting the fractured perspective of the insane. Upon publication, the story generated confusion and controversy. Some questioned Hedāyat's own sanity.

The source of this confusion is not hard to find. Hedāyat, even in his message-driven stories, seldom signals that his characters are mentally unstable. Rather than narrating their disjointedness explicitly, he lets it emerge obliquely, through contradictions, non sequiturs, and faulty inferences. The rational reader, encountering these absurdities, instinctively tries to restore coherence. But the

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[93] Homāyoūnī, Ṣādeq. "Forūgh va Hadāyat," (Forūgh and Hadāyat"), *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, pp. 547-553.

[94] Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), "Goftogū bā Forūgh #5" ("A Conversation with Forūgh # 5), *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, p. 216.

harder he tries, the deeper he sinks into perplexity—until he finally grasps the point: the characters do not operate within the bounds of logic. Once that epiphany occurs, the story coheres in its own disturbing way.

Farrokhzād's "Earthly Verses" presents a similarly disoriented world—one that, for reasons left ambiguous, has veered off its moral and metaphysical axis:

> Then
> The sun got cold
> And blessing left the fields
> ...
> And the grass dried up in the fields
> And the fish dried up in the seas
> And the earth refused to accept
> Its dead
> ...
> The sun was dead
> The sun was dead, and
> In the minds of children
> Tomorrow had a vague, lost meaning
> ...
> They illustrated the strangeness
> Of this old word
> In their notebooks
> In bold black blots
> ...
> But always, on the sides of the squares
> You could see these little murderers
> Standing
> And staring
> At the rising water in the fountain...

Some critics dismissed the figures in the poem as "ugly" and asked Farrokhzād for justification. She stood firm. "*Earthly Verses,*" she insisted, was among her most significant poems—a work in which she experimented for the first time with dialogic structure.[95] She defended her grim vocabulary: "*the dead sun,*" "*the land that refuses to accept the dead,*" "*starving prophets who abscond from the promised land,*" and "*members of a society of cutthroats who sleep in beds of blood with underage girls.*" The grotesquerie, she argued, was not an expression of individual ugliness, but of systemic corruption:

> "There is no ugliness in the people themselves. The ugliness, the rot, and the violence are symptoms of a society that has made them abnormal. At the end of the poem, when the little murderers stand and listen to the

[95] Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), "Goftogū bā Forūgh #5" ("A Conversation with Forūgh # 5), *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, p. 209.

murmuring water, it becomes clear that their capacity for beauty is still intact."[96]

If we juxtapose Farrokhzād's bleak, post-moral society with the lunatic world Hedāyat conjures in "*Three Drops of Blood,*" the parallels become striking. Like Hedāyat's inmates, Farrokhzād's "little murderers" are numbed to life's blessings, yet still retain a flickering sensitivity:

Maybe behind the crushed eyes,
In the depth of freezing
There still existed
A confused half-living thing
That desperately wanted to
Believe in the purity of the song of the waters.[97]

In a world where the sun is dead—where even time has lost its meaning—the members of such a society no longer act in obedience to divine will. They obey only the self-generated, deranged scripture of their own making. In "Three Drops of Blood," Hedāyat plunges the reader into a society that flouts reason. The reader struggles to decipher the illogical tales told by the insane and finally accepts that within that world, logic itself is meaningless. Likewise, "Earthly Verses" depicts a community abandoned by faith—a civilization adrift in moral darkness. It is the kind of world the scriptures warn against.

Of course, one crucial difference remains: Hedāyat's world is grounded in material reality; Farrokhzād's is visionary, even apocalyptic. Yet both worlds are marked by deprivation—each community bereft of some vital force. In "Earthly Verses," the absent element is faith:

The sun was dead
And no one knew
That the name of the sad dove
That had abandoned the hearts
Was faith.[98]

We find a similar descent into darkness in "Dīdār dar Shab" ("A Meeting at Night"), one of Farrokhzād's more metaphysical poems. The idea of epiphany in darkness recalls Hedāyat's "Tārīkkhāneh" ("The Dark House"). That story centers on a man who, disillusioned by rapid westernization and deep societal inequity, retreats into isolation. He lives his final days in a room shaped like a womb, and from that interior darkness reflects on the society he has renounced:

Like a hibernating animal, I wanted to find a hole in the ground, lose myself in it, and find consistency. Darkness and silence, like a photograph developing in a darkroom tray, reveal the fragile, hidden traits that the noise

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[96] Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), "Goftogū bā Forūgh #5" ("A Conversation with Forūgh # 5), *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, p. 209.

[97] Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), "Goftogū bā Forūgh # 5" ("A Conversation with Forūgh # 5"), *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, p. 217.

[98] Forūgh Farrokhzād. *Tavallodī Dīgar*, Talayeh Publishers, 2003, p. 237.

of life obscures. That darkness was within me, and for no reason, I kept trying to dispel it.[99]

In "Dīdār dar Shab," Farrokhzād inverts the premise. She speaks with a spirit who has died but refuses to relinquish her attachment to the physical world. Through this spectral conversation, Farrokhzād explores the difficulty of interpreting life once familiar certainties vanish. Yet, she suggests, the same darkness that annihilates external markers of identity can also yield inner revelation:

Have you,
Who keep your face hidden
Behind the shadow of the gloomy mask of life,
Ever thought about this sad reality
That those who are living today,
Are but facsimiles of living beings?[100]

In composing this poem, Farrokhzād reveals that she, too, had undergone a period of reflection under comparable circumstances.[101] The result is not despair, but a deeper questioning of what it means to live, to perceive, to believe—especially in a world where the sun, faith, and reason have all been eclipsed.

The Influence of Nīmā Yūshīj

We have discussed the roles of language and content in shaping Forūgh Farrokhzād's poetic voice. Now we turn to another fundamental element in her development: vision. During the final years of Nīmā Yūshīj's life, Farrokhzād was entering her thirties—a period marked by intense self-reflection and artistic transformation. These were the years in which she sought to integrate a new way of seeing into her poetry:

I am happy that my hair has turned white and that two deep lines have appeared between my brows. I am glad I am no longer a dreamer. I am about to turn thirty-two. Though it means thirty-two years have passed, it also means I have finally found myself.[102]

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[99] Ṣādeq Hedāyat. "Tārīkkhāneh" ("The Dark House"), *Sag-e Velgard*, Amīr Kabīr, 1964, p. 134. Also at: https://www.academia.edu/45044111/The_Dark_House_by_Sadeq_Hedayat_translated_by_Iraj_Īraj Bashīrī (accessed November 3, 2024)

[100] Cf., Manūchehr Ātashī, "Shūresh va She'r-e Forūgh," *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, p. 521.

[101] Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), "Goftogū bā Forūgh # 5" ("A Conversation with Forūgh # 5 *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, p. 209.

[102] Forūgh Farrokhzād. "Az Nāmehā-ye Forūgh" ("From Forūgh's Letters"), *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, pp. 62-63.

Farrokhzād held Nīmā in the highest regard. Her reverence for him was on par with the awe she expressed for Ḥāfeẓ. In conversation, she often quoted Nīmā's aphorisms, drawing from his poetic philosophy:

> You have to diminish something in order to increase something else.[103]

She explained his influence on her poetry in striking terms:

> For me, Nīmā was a beginning. It was in his poetry that I first encountered an intellectual atmosphere—not superficial or vulgar sensationalism, but a voice that interpreted experience, that possessed vision and emotion beyond petty desires and ordinary circumstances. His simplicity astounded me, especially when such complex and dark questions of existence lay behind that simplicity… In his simplicity, I discovered my own."[104]

Like Ḥāfeẓ, Nīmā was a point of origin—a second genesis for Farrokhzād. He reshaped her thought and gave her intellectual space to breathe. His hidden intricacy, veiled by an unadorned tone, captivated her. Nīmā taught her the power of the gaze—how to see. Yet what set Farrokhzād apart was her womanhood: she saw what Nīmā saw, but through a different window.[105]

She was drawn to Nīmā because of his insistence on the essence and integrity of poetry. He did not require that every *beyt* carry a fixed portion of the poem's meaning. Instead, he embraced a holistic vision. Farrokhzād regarded this as one of the great achievements of modern Persian poetry:

> One of the valuable traits of contemporary poetry is that it moves closer to the essence of poetry itself. It resists the generalizations of classical Persian verse, where each couplet was expected to encapsulate a portion of the whole."[106]

Nīmā championed the idea that a poem, in its entirety, should reflect the emotional and existential conditions of its time. Contrary to the claims of some proponents of *sheʿr-e sepīd* (blank verse), he did not abandon traditional form altogether; he modified it.[107] Farrokhzād echoed this view:

> I don't support this kind of poetry [*sheʿr-e sepīd*]. A complete and perfect work of art arises from a total fusion of content and form. Once complete,

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[103] Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), "Goftogū bā Forūgh #5" ("A Conversation with Forūgh # 5"), *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, p. 212.

[104] Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), "Goftogū bā Forūgh #4" ("A Conversation with Forūgh # 4"), *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, pp. 185-186.

[105] Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), "Goftogū bā Forūgh # 4" ("A Conversation with Forūgh # 4"), *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, pp. 185-186.

[106] Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), "Goftogū bā Forūgh # 1" ("A Conversation with Forūgh # 1"), *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, p. 171. (Iraj Gorgīn, Radio interview, 1965)

[107] Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), "Goftogū bā Forūgh # 1" ("A Conversation with Forūgh #1"), *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, p. 172. (Iraj Gorgīn, Radio interview, 1965)

> it cannot be altered. In this regard, *sheʿr-e sepīd* is weak. It's open to reinterpretation and change.[108]

Under the dual influences of Nīmā and Aḥmad Shāmlū, Farrokhzād gradually moved away from the unrestrained sensuality that characterized her early work. She began crafting a more measured, layered poetry that engaged with ideological, political, and social tensions of her time. From Nīmā, she absorbed two essential perspectives: a materialist one akin to Shāmlū's, but more clearly articulated; and an ideological one that transcended the mundane.[109] With Nīmā's guidance, she refined *sheʿr-e now*, solidified its form, and reimagined its content with a distinctly feminine voice.

Her relationships with Shāmlū and Nīmā turned her into a self-reliant and conscious poet—one who, like Shāmlū, bore witness to life, and like Nīmā, defined it anew. In her poem "Daryāft" ("Snapshot"), she delves directly into the entanglement of life and art, depicting life as it slips past her.[110] Each moment becomes both an ending and a beginning. This poetic logic contrasts sharply with the fragmentary significance of classical Persian poetry, where meaning accumulates couplet by couplet. In "Daryāft," meaning emerges only through the poem as a whole—only this structure can portray the narrator's descent into existential mire.

> In my view, we should never isolate a single stanza for judgment. Doing so obscures the larger intent. When read in isolation, these stanzas may seem flawed—but when situated within the poem's full intellectual context, their meaning becomes clear. This is a defining trait of contemporary verse: it is no longer a matter of *beyt* by *beyt*.[111]

In her satirical poem "Ey Marz-e Por Gohar" ("O Precious Land"), Farrokhzād widens her lens. The title alludes to a patriotic anthem recited daily by schoolchildren during the Pahlavī era. That song praised Iran's bounty and promise. Farrokhzād subverts it, transforming it into a biting critique—an ironic lament. Her poem implies that the anthem did not arise from the lived experience of the people; its "precious gems" are, in fact, comforting lies.[112] Through colloquial Persian, wordplay, and dark humor, she interrogates topics traditional poets avoided—social decay, false nationalism, spiritual barrenness.

By the time she composed the poems in her final collection, the complexity of her thought had deepened markedly. Her work probes systemic ills, conjures

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[108] Cf., Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), "Goftogū bā Forūgh # 2" ("A Conversation with Forūgh # 2"), *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, p. 179. (Interviewer: Moḥammad Taqī Ṣāleḥpūr)

[109] Farzaneh Milani, "Farroḵzād, Forūgh-Zamān," Encyclopaedia Iranica, 2011, Volume IX, Fasc. 3, pp. 324-327.

[110] M. R. Ghanoonparvar, *Prophets of Doom: Literature as a Socio-Political Phenomenon in Modern Iran,* University Press of America, 1984, pp. xxi, 73-96.

[111] Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), "Goftogū bā Forūgh # 5" ("A Conversation with Forūgh # 5"), *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, p. 216.

[112] Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), "Goftogū bā Forūgh # 5" ("A Conversation with Forūgh # 5"), *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, p. 209.

images of foreboding, and gives voice to fears long buried in the collective memory of her readers.[113] In her lyrical, haunting, and prophetic poem "Delam Barā-ye Bāghcheh Mīsūzad" ("I Feel Sad for the Garden"), she offers both a poignant portrait of contemporary society and a grim glimpse of its trajectory.

The poem opens with images of desolation: withered flowers, an empty yard. Each family member is locked in a cocoon of complacency—detached, unaware, or unconcerned:

> The father content with his pension,
> The mother awaiting the Mahdī,
> The brother lost in fleeting pleasures,
> The sister chasing the fruits of modernity.

But their satisfaction, Farrokhzād warns, is illusory—a fragile screen concealing the violence that festers beyond their threshold:

> The yard of our house is lonely
> The yard of our house is lonely
> All day, behind the door
> Echoes the sound of dismemberment
> And explosions.
>
> In their gardens, the neighbors plant
> Grenades and submachine guns.
> Children in our alley have filled
> Their briefcases with little bombs.
>
> The yard of our house is dizzy.
> I am afraid of a time that has lost its heart,
> Of the futility of all these many hands,
> Of the strangeness painted on so many faces.

The poem ends with a devastating image:

> And the heart of the garden has swollen
> Under the sun.
> And the mind of the garden
> Is being gradually emptied
> Of the memory of green. [114]

Here, Farrokhzād weaves three themes into one: a dying horse in an alley, a woman weathering deathly winds, and a garden awaiting destruction. Beneath this surface desolation churns the real machinery of collapse—ignorant rulers, sectarianism, and the disorienting forces of westernization. For her capacity to see beneath appearances, Farrokhzād credited Nīmā:

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[113] Cf., M. Azad, "Barrasī-ye *Tavallodī Dīgar*" (Review of *Another Birth*), *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, p.378.

[114] Forūgh Farrokhzād, "Delam Barāy-ye Bāghche Mīsūzad" ("I Feel Sad for the Garden"), *Tavallodī Dīgar*, 2003, pp. 306-311.

> Nīmā opened my eyes and said, "Look." But I taught myself how to look. There was a time when Nīmā nearly drowned me. But now, I feel I've been rescued. Nīmā was the original traveler. I want to continue from where he stopped—either because he could not, or because he never had the chance to smooth the jagged terrain. I will try to make that path easier. I will do my honest best."[115]

The Influence of Ḥāfeẓ

As previously noted, the influence of the classical Persian poets—Khayyām, Maulānā, and Ḥāfeẓ—is foundational to the evolution of Forūgh Farrokhzād's poetic voice. Her earliest compositions—some of which she herself did not even consider true poems—drew from this deep literary wellspring. We have already observed how she merged the lyrical cadence of Ḥāfeẓ's *ghazals* with the *chahārpāreh* structure popularized by Fereydūn Moshīrī to forge a new medium for her accessible, emotionally direct verse. At that early stage, her engagement with the *ghazal* form remained elementary. One does not require a keen eye to discern Ḥāfeẓ's imprint on her initial forays into poetry.

The presence of Khayyām is most palpable in her *ʿEṣiyān* (*Rebellion*) collection, where she frequently invokes his philosophical skepticism to underscore her thematic points. Yet it is the influence of Maulānā that runs deeper—transcending mere homage in a few *mathnawīs* that praise the grandeur of love. For Farrokhzād, the love she evokes—aligned with the loftiest of human sentiments—is clearly distinguished from the base, transactional desires often mistaken for affection.

In her own words and work, she mourns the modern degradation of love from a transcendent union of souls into a commodity measured by biological or material needs:

> In today's poetry, love is no longer portrayed as one of the purest, most radiant human emotions—a sacred fusion of souls. Instead, it has been reduced to a mechanical function, a mere transaction between bodies.[116]

This love—the one Farrokhzād reveres—cannot be charted by clocks or recorded in ledgers. It resists quantification:

> Today, love is measured by the ticking of the clock, and as data in notebooks... The feeling I express is the generative one, the force that will carry me to the finish line...[117]

These reflections belong to the mature Farrokhzād. Whether the love depicted in her earlier collections—often labeled as scandalous—is of the same

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[115] Cf., Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), "Goftogū bā Forūgh # 6" ("A Conversation with Forūgh # 6"), *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, p. 228.

[116] Cf., Forūgh Farrokhzād, "Negareshī bar She'r-e Emrūz" (A Look at Contemporary Poetry"), *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, p. 162.

[117] Cf., Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), "Goftogū bā Forūgh # 4" ("A Conversation with Forūgh # 4"), *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, pp. 198- 200.

spiritual kind remains an open question. Her poem "'Āsheqāneh" (Amorously) reveals one facet of her evolving conception of love.[118] In contrast, "Mordāb" (The Swamp) confronts a love-deprived society, a society she depicts as stagnant and stifling:[119]

> If I had recourse to the sea,
> Why would I dread sinking?
> Water that ends its flow in a swamp
> Is diminished by its own stagnation.
> Its soul succumbs to decay;
> Its depth becomes the tomb of the fish.[120]

The realization that Nīmā Yūshīj had reached the same intellectual plane as Ḥāfeẓ, and had unlocked new poetic possibilities, was exhilarating for Farrokhzād. More importantly, it revived in her the conviction that *sheʿr-e now* could transform the *ghazal*—not only in content but in form.[121] Traditionally, the *ghazal* comprises seven *beyts* (couplets), culminating in a *maqtaʿ* and marked by a *takhalloṣ* (pen name).[122] Farrokhzād began experimenting with a novel format, substituting stanzas for couplets. Her poem "Āftāb Mīshavad" (The Sun Rises) stands as a representative example.

When "Āftāb Mīshavad" was first published, critics dismissed it as a nostalgic regression to classical modes. Farrokhzād, perhaps in an effort to protect her experiment, appeared to agree. She even grouped it among her "unsuccessful" poems. Reflecting on *Tavallodī Dīgar* (*Another Birth*), she candidly confessed:

> There are a few poems I should never have published. "Safar" (Journey) is one—I should have torn it up. A couple of stanzas at the beginning of "Ān Rūzhā" (Those Days) lack natural flow. And "Āftāb Mīshavad" is entirely off track. It has musicality and evokes a pleasant feeling—something that might excite a fourteen-year-old girl.[123]

Yet her private remarks elsewhere betray a deeper, more conflicted truth. Her admiration for Ḥāfeẓ and her aspiration to write poetry of his caliber suggest that "Āftāb Mīshavad" was more than a sentimental experiment:

> I wish I could compose poetry like Ḥāfeẓ, and possess the kind of sensitivity that could forge authentic connections among all living beings.[124]

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[118] Forūgh Farrokhzād, "Āsheqāneh" ("Amourously), *Tavallodī Dīgar*, 2003, pp. 206-210.

[119] Cf., Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), "Goftogū bā Forūgh # 4" ("A Conversation with Forūgh # 4"), *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, p. 199.

[120] Forūgh Farrokhzād, "Mordāb" ("Swamp"), *Tavallodī Dīgar*, 2003, pp. 230-231.

[121] Forūgh Farrokhzād, "*Ghazal*" ("Sonnet"), *Tavallodī Dīgar*, 2003, p. 190.

[122] *Maqta'* is the last *beyt* of a *ghazal*; *Takhalloṣ* is the pen name of the poet, in the case of "Āftāb Mīshavad," Forūgh.

[123] "Goftogū bā Forūgh # 4) ("A Conversation with Forūgh # 4"), *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, p. 196.

[124] Behrūz Jalālī, "Zendegī Nāme-ye Forūgh" ("A Biography of Forūgh"), *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, p. 65.

She was acutely aware of her limitations and the distance she still needed to travel to match her ambition. Before analyzing her psychological state during the composition of this *ghazal*-experiment, it is worth examining "Āftāb Mīshavad" in closer detail.

The poem comprises seven stanzas and subtly references her identity through an indirect pseudonym. Written in modern standard Persian, it replaces the traditional couplet structure with stanzaic form, enabling the expression of layered, multidimensional themes:

> Look in my eyes, and see
> How grief is melting away, drop by drop.
> And how my defiant dark shadow
> Is seized by the sun.
> See my whole existence crumble.

As the sun rises, it dissolves the poet's sorrow and the agitation that once unsettled her. In this moment of radiance, she feels liberated. Her worldly attachments disintegrate, and a spark lifts her spirit beyond earthly confines to commune with her muse.[125] There, in a transcendent city of verse and emotion, she hears the wings of angels. Acknowledging her poetic frailty, she pleads for her muse's light—like the sun's rays—to illuminate her voice:

> Look how the wax of night
> Melts away, drop by drop,
> And how the dark goblet of my eyes
> Is filled with the wine of your lullabies.
> See how, as you, like the sun,
> Blow on the cradle of my poetry,
> It becomes illumined.[126]

This spirit of experimentation—initially kept private—is a well-established feature of Persian literary culture. Ṣādeq Hedāyat, for example, shared nothing about the composition of *The Blind Owl*, "Buried Alive", or "Three Drops of Blood", rendering those works enigmatic even to his contemporaries. Likewise, Ḥāfeẓ is said to have revisited his celebrated "Shīrāzī Turk" *ghazal* repeatedly over his lifetime. One of its early prototypes, beginning with *Sīne mālāmāl-e dard ast ey Darīghā hamdamī* ("My bosom is brimful with pain, ah, a remedy!"), lacks the sophistication of the final version—its metaphors are flat, its imagery transparent, and the mystical synthesis of body and spirit absent.[127]

Farrokhzād's "Āftāb Mīshavad" shares a kinship with this early, underdeveloped *ghazal* of Ḥāfeẓ. On one hand, its conversational tone and imprecise imagery render it diffuse and thematically unfocused. On the other, its innovative structure marks a serious attempt to rejuvenate the *ghazal*. Her muse,

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[125] We know from the poem "Let Us Believe in the Onset of the Cold Season" that the sperms of the poet and that of her muse were born at the same time. We also know that, at that same time, the future poet and her muse were separated from each other.

[126] Forūgh Farrokhzād, "Āftāb Mīshavad" "The Sun Rises"), *Tavallodī Dīgar*, 2003, p. 180-182.

[127] Īraj Bashīrī, "Ḥāfiẓ' Shīrāzī Turk: A Structuralist's Point of View," The Muslim World, LXIX, 3, 1979, p.196.

ever-present, enables her to explore new intellectual and emotional terrain beneath a universal aesthetic veil. She defended the poem in personal terms:

> This poem measures the progress of my effort—at least for my own benefit.[128]

She understood that her future as a *she'r-e now* poet hinged on creative breakthroughs. It is entirely plausible that a closer reading of poems like "Āftāb Mīshavad" might uncover fresh insight into the trajectory of her experimentation. Consider, for instance, the distinctly Ḥāfeẓian register in the following lines:[129]

> I know that a fight
> With this pretending pious lot
> Would not be easy.
> Your city and mine, my dear child,
> Became the den of the devil
> Long ago.[130]

The specter of death loomed large in her imagination, sharpening her determination to bring her poetic experiments to completion. In a final letter to her brother, she wrote:

> I will be the first in our family to die. You will be the second. I know this.[131]

Two statements—one from Farrokhzād herself, the other from literary critic Gholāmḥosein Yūsefī—signal the future direction of her poetic project. Yūsefī, assessing "Āftāb Mīshavad" for its strengths and weaknesses, linked it to her poem "I Know a Sad Little Fairy":

> The poem has a lyrical tone, rhythmic movement, and poetic delicacy. Its imagery is fresh. It comes from the same imagination that produced:
>
> I
> know a sad little fairy
> who lives in an ocean
> and plays his heart out on a wooden reed flute
> softly... a sad little fairy
> who dies at night from a kiss
> and is reborn at dawn with a kiss."[132]

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[128] "Goftogū bā Forūgh # 4" ("A Conversation with Forūgh # 4"), *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, p. 200.

[129] Ātashī, Manūchehr, "Shūresh va She'r-e Forūgh" ("Rebellion and Forūgh's Poetry'"), *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, p. 514.

[130] Forūgh Farrokhzād, *'Eṣiyān* (*Rebellion*), Amir Kabir Publishers, 1976, p. 60.

[131] Forūgh Farrokhzād, "Az Miyān-e Nāmehā" ("From Among Letters"), "), *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, p. 134.

[132] Gholāmḥosein Yūsefī, "Ṣedā-ye Bāl-e Barfī-ye Fereshtegān" ("The Sound of the Snowy Wings of Angels"), *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, p. 306.

Farrokhzād herself echoed this sentiment, though with more emphasis on thematic continuity:

> It has been months since I parted ways with *Another Birth*. Still, I believe it is possible to begin again—from where that poem ends. A new intellectual beginning. Language and rhythm will find their place. What matters are thought and content. I believe I can start anew with the poem about the sad fairy who plays her heart out on a reed flute, dies, and is reborn.[133]

A comparison of these two assessments reveals that, while Farrokhzād publicly yielded to critics of "Āftāb Mīshavad," she privately aligned with Yūsefī's appraisal. Her brother, Fereydūn Farrokhzād, offered a final word on her artistic identity:

> To me, she was not a Ḥāfeẓ reimagined in modern garb. She was a Maulavī—a continuation of Maulavī, expressed through another form.[134]

Conclusion

Forough Farrokhzad occupies a singular place in the landscape of modern Persian literature. Her life and work reflect the intricate interplay of personal experience, social constraint, and artistic daring. Through her poetry, Farrokhzad navigated the tensions of love, motherhood, desire, and creative autonomy, forging a voice that is both deeply intimate and profoundly universal. Her candid exploration of female subjectivity challenged societal norms, redefining the possibilities of self-expression for women in Iran and establishing her as a pioneering figure in literary modernism.

Farrokhzad's poetic innovation—marked by formal experimentation, psychological depth, and existential inquiry—continues to inspire scholars, artists, and readers worldwide. The enduring resonance of her work attests to her remarkable ability to transform private experience into public discourse, to render the personal universal, and to insist upon the necessity of authenticity in art and life. In reflecting on her oeuvre, one confronts not only the literary achievements of a singular poet but also the broader cultural and historical currents that she so powerfully articulated.

Ultimately, Farrokhzad's legacy endures as a testament to courage, creativity, and the relentless pursuit of a poetic voice unbound by convention—a voice that continues to speak, challenge, and inspire across generations.

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[133] "Goftogū bā Forūgh # 4" ("A Conversation with Forūgh # 4)"), *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, p. 197.

[134] Fereydūn Farrokhzād, "Forūgh be Ravāyat-e Barādarash" ("Forūgh Acoording to Her Brother"), *Jāvīdāneh Zīstan* (*Eternal Life*), Behrūz Jalālī (ed.), Morvarid Publishers, 1997, p. 597.

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