

Forūgh Farrokhzād's Unfinished Experiment

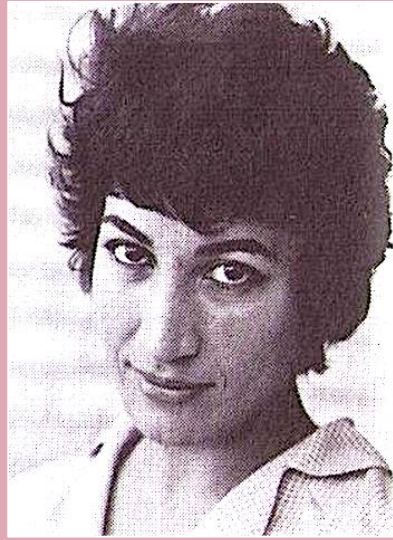
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Forūgh Farrokhzād (1935-1967) was an unconventional woman and an experimentalist poetess who constantly sought new experiences and enjoyed carrying them out at all costs. Her body of work reveals her as an empiricist with a dual persona. On the outside, she is friendly, cooperative, and uncompromising. On the inside, she is rational, focused, and secretive. Her secrecy, a feature of her empiricism, makes some of her pieces enigmatic.

Farrokhzād's experiments were focused on the form, structure, and content of the *ghazal* (sonnet), especially the *Šūfic ghazal*. Initially, she replaced the *beyt* with Fereydūn Moshīrī's *chārpāreh* (foursome),¹ ineptly manipulated the structure, and updated the content according to her own interpretation of *Šūfic ghazals*. In order to illustrate the modifications that she made, and the consequence of those changes, we shall analyze "Shab va Havas" ("Night and Desire"), one of her early *ghazals*.² Experiments with this particular *ghazal* appear in *Dīvār* and *Eṣiyān* as well.



The experiment was successful in the sense that it introduced the poetess to the public and gained her immediate notoriety. It also created scandals pertaining to the sexual ramification of her diction. As a result, she faced harsh reaction by her family and scathing criticism by her peers. Neither scandal, nor criticism, however, could effectively penetrate her shield and deter her. She persevered but, in the process, the husband, whom she loved, divorced her, and she lost the custody of her only child.

From an early age, somehow, perhaps inspired by her muse, Farrokhzād envisioned empiricism as the path for becoming a famous poet like Ḥāfeẓ.³ Her resilience in the face of harsh criticism enabled her to write three collections of poetry: *Asīr* (*Captive*, 1955), *Dīvār* (*The Wall*, 1956), and *'Esiyān* (*Rebellion*, 1958), mostly presented in *chārpāreh* style. All three collections symbolically depict a woman striving to set herself free from the grip of traditional bonds, societal as well as literary.

As mentioned, on the inside, Farrokhzād invoked reason and, to move her experiment forward, followed the advice of her muse. Like a loyal companion, during difficult times, her muse comforted her and provided incentive and guidance. With regard to updating the *ghazal* and transforming it into a vehicle for conveying

¹ Fereydūn Moshīrī is a prominent contemporary Persian poet. He wrote in classic style as well as *she'r-e now*. His *chārpāreh* consists of four *mišra'*-like fragments not tied to the traditional meters (*owzān*).

² The original form of this brief note is called "In Place of an Introduction." It appears in a forthcoming essay called "Influences on the Poetry of Forūgh Farrokhzād."

³ Khājeh Shams al-Dīn Moḥammad Ḥāfeẓ-e Shīrāzī is a Persian lyric poet. His collected works are regarded as one of the highest pinnacles of Persian literature.

complex philosophical and socio-political themes in contemporary vernacular, her muse often pushed her beyond her capacity, and to tears.

During the years that Farrokhzād was composing the poems for her early collections, in everyone's opinion, her career was moving along superbly. On the



surface, she also pretended that that was the case. Inwardly, however, she was not satisfied. From her perspective, a look at *she'r-e now* (new poetry) convinced her that she lacked credentials to enter the *she'r-e now* arena. The fact that she intended to surpass the founder as well as those who had improved the genre over the decades made matters even more challenging.

At the time that Farrokhzād was assessing the field and making a decision, her own assets included a ninth grade education, a few years of

reading classical poetry, and creation of three collections of *ghazals* mostly in the *chārpāreh* style. She also had plenty of patience, enthusiasm, and a keen eye for detecting significant insights embedded in the works of other poets and writers of fiction and, of course, she was supported by the dedication of an empiricist and a dogged determination to pursue her dream.

In order to improve her credentials, Farrokhzād approached the issue rationally and made drastic changes in her normal routine. Instead of composing poems, she studied the principles of *she'r-e now* and the various aspects of modern Persian fiction. *She'r-e now* and Persian fiction had been developing in tandem in Iran since the early 1920s. Together they had brought aspects of the Iranian society to the fore that, due to its handicaps, classical Persian literature had either bypassed them or ignored them. Fortunately, Farrokhzād's new friends, associates, and mentors recognized her talent and afforded her the space, wisdom, and the vision that she needed to continue her experiment. Major among those contributors were Aḥmad Shāmlū,⁴ Nīmā Yūshīj,⁵ Ebrāhīm Golestān,⁶ Šādeq Chūbak,⁷ and Šādeq Hedāyat.⁸ As a result of a period of intense study, soul-searching, and travel, Farrokhzād made enormous changes in her approach to poetry. Poems in the *Tavallodī Dīgar* (*Another Birth*, 1963) collection belong to this stage of her development.

⁴ Aḥmad Shāmlū (1925-2000) was an influential Iranian poet, writer, and journalist.

⁵ Nīmā Yūshīj, née 'Alī Esfandiārī (1895-1960), was a prominent Iranian poet and the founder of *she'r-e now*.

⁶ Ebrāhīm Golestān (1922-2023) was an Iranian filmmaker and literary figure.

⁷ Šādeq Chūbak (1916-1988) was author of short fiction, drama, and novels, as well as an advocate of womens rights.

⁸ Šādeq Hedāyat was a writer of short stories and a translator. He was one of the earliest Iranian writers to adopt literary modernism.

Following the school of Shāmlū, Farrokhzād composed some pieces that are enigmatic due to her use of concepts from the works of Chūbak and Hedāyat. Among those works there is a *ghazal* called "Āftāb Mīshavad" ("The Sun Rises"). In this article, "Āftāb Mīshavad" is of particular interest to us for three reasons. First, it is an updated *ghazal* in the sense that it is composed by using the principles of *she'r-e now*; second, as a *ghazal*, it has the same poetic value as a *ghazal* of Ḥāfeẓ called "Sīne Mālāmāl-e Dard Ast" ("My Bosom Is Brimful with Pain"). "Sīne Mālāmāl-e Dard Ast" is an earlier draft of Ḥāfeẓ's "Shīrāzī Turk" *ghazal* and speaks to the development of Ḥāfeẓ's craft;⁹ and third, Farrokhzād considered "Āftāb Mīshavad" a turning point in her progress towards achieving her goal of becoming a poet like Ḥāfeẓ.

By internalizing the poetry of Nīmā, Farrokhzād acquired the particular vision that she had admired in Ḥāfeẓ throughout her youth. Insight into Nīmā's work enhanced Farrokhzād's poetry by giving it transparency and depth to the point that her pieces became like snapshots taken to document fleeting moments of life. In short, with the assistance of Nīmā, she acquired the clarity of vision that she had been seeking to compose sublime *ghazals* like Ḥāfeẓ's "Shīrāzī Turk." It is with that vision that she composed her "Delam Barā-ye Bāghcheh Mīsūzād" ("I Feel Sad for the Garden"). Her command of the situation and the clarity of her vision in that poem illustrate her readiness to compose her desired *ghazals*. The collection of poems called *Bāvar Biyāvarīm be Āghāz-e Faṣl-e Sard* (*Let Us Believe in the Onset of the Cold Season*, 1974) belongs to this stage of her development.

The next step for Farrokhzād was to update "Āftāb Mīshavad" to the level of Ḥāfeẓ's "Shīrāzī Turk." In other words, in order to achieve her goal, she had to persuade her muse to combine her capabilities in composing "Āftāb Mīshavad" with the Nīmāic vision that she had used in "Delam Barā-ye Bāghcheh Mīsūzād." That experiment, unfortunately, due to Farrokhzād's untimely death, remains unfinished.

⁹ See a comprehensive study of Ḥāfeẓ's "Shīrāzī Turk" in relation to his earlier version of the same poem called "Sīne Mālāmāl-e Dard Ast" in Iraj Bashiri, "Hafiz' Shirazi Turk: A Structuralist's Point of View," *The Muslim World*, Part I, LXIX, No. 3, 1979, pp. 178-197; Part II, LXIX, No. 4, 1979, pp. 248-268.



Finally, according to Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī, creation is in flux and within creation there is a hierarchical order in which each order is either superior or inferior to the previous one or the one following. Many human beings are condemned to stay at the lower levels and only a few ascend to the very top level.¹⁰ Forūgh Farrokhzād belonged to the second group. Although conditions in the Iran of the 1950s and 1960s tried to overwhelm her and destine her to a life of confusion and servitude, she defied the odds and not only separated herself from that life, but also, in spite of her meager assets, climbed to the high levels of liberality and vision.

¹⁰ Iraj Bashiri. *Moderrn Iranian Philosophy: From Ibn Sīnā to Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī*, Cognella Publishers, 2014, p.172.