

The Reader's Experience and Forugh Farrokhzad's Poetry

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Forugh Farrokhzad (1935-1967) is undoubtedly the first Iranian feminist poet who employed unconventional methods of expression in portraying her unique radical ideas concerning the limitations of Iranian women's lives in the mid twentieth century. The aim of this study is to examine Forough's feminist, anti-traditional beliefs from the perspective of both male and female critics/readers in order to shed more light on the diversity of responses which are essentially based on different ways of reading her poetry.

Forugh Farrokhzad (1935-1967) is undoubtedly the first Iranian feminist poet who employed unconventional methods of expression in portraying her unique radical ideas concerning the limitations of Iranian women's lives in the mid-twentieth century. The daring and controversial quality of her works,¹ moreover, parallels her non-conformist lifestyle. In other words, Forugh's art is a most illuminating expression of her own much troubled life — as a woman poet — as well as a manifestation of her feminist protest against the restrictive codes of a patriarchal society. During Forugh's lifetime, her poetry evoked a multiplicity of reactions ranging from sincere admiration to hostile critique. The reception of her poetry differed greatly from one reader/critic to another, mainly because “[the] formal features [in her poems did] not exist independently of the reader's experience ...”² It was after the tragic accident which resulted in her death that critics began to consider her work seriously from both the aesthetic perspective and also in terms of its immediate implications for Iranians and, more specifically, for women in Iran. The aim of this study is to examine Forugh's feminist, anti-traditional beliefs from the perspective of both male and female critics/readers in order to shed more light on the diversity of responses based on different ways of reading her poetry.

Forugh's poetry is a vehicle through which she attacks the incomprehensible network of restrictions called tradition which have served millions of Iranian fathers and

¹ Mahin Amid “Women Poets and Feminine Poetry” *The Image of Woman in Iran's Culture*, No. 3. Golnaz Amin Lajavardi, Homa Sarshar, Marjan Mohtashemi, eds., (Los Angeles: Dynasty Press, 1993), p. 50.

² Stanley Fish, “Interpreting the Variorum” *Is There a Text in This Class?*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 147.

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husbands for hundreds of years as an unalterable body of fundamental codes of social conduct. In other words, Forugh's feminist position starts from the cultural axis, and as her work develops, it embraces other relevant branches of feminist criticism. In the following four lines of "A Poem for You," for example, Forugh states her radical views on accepted social norms —operating culturally, for the most part — which affected her own life as a woman:

It was I who laughed at futile slurs,
the one that was branded by shame
I shall be what I'm called to be, I said
But oh, the misery that "woman" is my name

According to Farzaneh Milani, Forugh used to challenge "many issues on a personal level, but by publicizing them, she questioned them on a cultural level as well."³ In other words Milani, as a female feminist critic, interprets the above lines first on the level of their applicability to Forugh's own life, and then extends her analysis to the more general question, i.e. the plight of Iranian women in the mid-twentieth century. In the continuation of this argument, Milani states that Forugh's poetry is a "record of her own strict disbelief in 'blind obedience'"⁴ to the patriarchal codes which used to govern her life before her marriage in the form of her father's orders and, after her marriage, in the shape of her husband's self-centered desires. Thus, for Milani, the image of a caged bird, as employed by Forugh in the following lines from "Let Us Believe in the Beginning of a Cold Season," proves to be the most apt analogy for the confined life of the poet as well as that of women in general:

I am that bird, that bird who for long
has been planning to fly
in my confined heart, songs turned sour
life spoils with longings

Milani argues that through the image of the caged bird, Forugh succeeds in communicating her plight as an oppressed woman which, in turn, ultimately leads to her hopes for "the moment of flight."⁵ It is, therefore, essentially "the structure of the reader's experience rather than any structures available on the page that [is] the object of [speculation]"⁶ in the above lines.

Nevertheless, Milani maintains that the rejection of conventions and mores in Forugh's poetry does not equate an approval of anarchy. She sees Forugh as a poet who simultaneously dismisses hackneyed conventions and offers a new basis for ethical concepts. To quote Milani, for Forugh morality was a "personal discovery rather than blindly institutional."⁷ In this regard, the following lines from "Conquest of the Garden" exemplify Milani's argument:

It is not a question of weakly splicing two names
and pairing them in the fusty pages of some register

³ Farzaneh Milani, "Forugh Farokhzad" *Persian Literature*, Ehsan Yarshater ed., (New York: Bibliotheca Persica, 1988), p. 368.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., p. 372.

⁶ Fish, p. 152.

⁷ Ibid., p. 377.

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It's a question of my hair,
gay with the singed poppies of your kisses
and the secret loyalty of our bodies
and our nakedness glinting
like the scales of fish in water
It's a question of the silvery life of a song
sung by a little fountain at dawn

Though quite oppositional in tone, the above lines most explicitly constitute a world based on an autonomous morality. "The secret loyalty of our bodies," in this world, becomes the basis for Forugh's moral ideology. In the continuation of her analysis Milani asserts that Forugh does not approve of the traditionally expected relationship between the beloved and her lover, that is, the persona in the poem is no longer the "passive woman which has been... the female sexual ideal."⁸ Milani implies that for Forugh, the traditional life pattern of women is synonymous with captivity: a life of imprisonment which would ultimately result in despair. The persona's despair following such life is contrasted to "the silvery life of a song/sung by a little fountain" In this same vein, in an article titled "Conflicts Between Traditional Roles and Poetry," Milani posits many of Forugh's poems through a recording of "the extraordinary revelations of the agony of confinement [hint at] a life hungering for freedom."⁹ For Milani, the following lines from Forugh, "Captive" are quite explicit in this regard:

I wait for that one careless instant
From this dark prison to wing away
and laugh in the keeper's face
At your side my life beginning its new day

I think of this knowing I shall never
be able to escape this plight
For even if the keeper should let me go
I've lost all my strength for the flight

Relying on these lines and considering the actual events of the poet's life, Milani asserts that the love of freedom in Forugh's poetry was so intense that it finally culminated in the breakup of her marriage in real life. In other words, Forugh's marriage to Shapur was basically an obstacle blocking her path to her exalted goal. For Milani, the longing for the moment of flight suggests Forugh's intense wish for freedom to express her feelings through poetry. Milani takes her interpretation even further and suggests that Forugh was so infatuated with the idea of freedom that she even left her only child behind and did not for one moment think of sacrificing her role as a mother in favour of becoming a poet. This brings Milani to a generalization about Forugh's ideas concerning motherhood, that is, Forugh "refused to consider maternity as the only destiny for women..."¹⁰ The

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Fazneh Milani, "Conflicts between Traditional Roles and Poetry in the Work of Forugh Farokhzad" *Women and the Family in Iran*, Asghar Fathi, ed., (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1985), p. 288.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 236.

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following lines from “Another Birth,” however, lead Milani to a slightly different conclusion:

In the shelter of night,
let me be impregnated by the moon
let me be filled
with tiny drops of rain,
undeveloped hearts,
scores of unborn children
let me be filled
may be my love
will be the cradle
for the birth of yet another Christ

What Milani deduces from these lines is that Forugh’s poetry is a defense “of the rights of motherhood and an affirmation of childbearing when and where it is a woman’s choice.”¹¹ With her feminist reading of Forugh’s poetry, Milani implies that Forugh justifies pregnancy and childbearing and also endorses them from a certain perspective: if maternity does not prevent a woman from expressing her individuality, it will even help her to bring joy to her own and other people’s lives; it will give “birth [to] yet another Christ.”

Implicit in almost all of Forugh’s poems is a yearning for a situation that would allow women to benefit from a broad and comprehensive range of social activities. Such a life would open up more advanced intellectual possibilities for women. Milani brings such a perspective to her analysis of “Captive”¹²:

Bind my feet in chains again
so that tricks and deceits won’t make me fall
so that colorful temptations
won’t bind me with yet another chain

According to Milani, for Forugh, the significance of “women’s independence and intellectual growth”¹³ is so marked that at an early stage of her career as a poet she calls for chains. These chains, from Milani’s perspective, will help her remain steadfast in her pursuit of an intellectual life, and protect her against the tricks and temptations of the more convenient, less socially challenging traditional functions expected of women.

At a time when most Iranian male critics were unwilling to regard Forugh’s poetry as a justified cry against inequality between the sexes, and when they were reading her work mostly as obscene and scandalous, Michael Hillmann, a western critic, joined Milani in elaborating on the feminist implications of Forugh’s art. To Hillmann, for whom feminist discussions were more justified than for his Iranian counterparts, the issue of submission to the old-fashioned restrictive codes of the patriarchal society was a major theme in Forugh’s poetry. According to Hillmann, “The Windup Doll” becomes a most revealing prototype of this dimension of Forugh’s poetry:

One can genuflect a whole lifetime
with bowed head at the foot
of a saint’s cold sacrophagus.
One can find God in a nameless grave.
One can find faith with an insignificant coin.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Milani, “Forugh Farukhzad”, pp. 372-373.

¹³ Ibid.

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One can rot in the precincts of a mosque
like an old prayer reader.
Like zero in addition, subtraction, and multiplication,
one can always achieve a constant result.
One can see in the depths of your pupils
a colorless button from an old shoe.
Like water in its own container, one can dry up

In response to every obscene
squeeze of a hand,
one can exclaim without reason:
O, I'm so happy!

From Hillmann's critical perspective, the above lines "represent many women as objects at home very much like furniture, cut off from life outside which they view only from behind windows."¹⁴ From his point of view, these lines perfectly show the extent of the poet's disbelief in the mechanical obedience to meaningless, social clichés imposed most tyrannically on women in a closed society. What makes Hillmann reach this conclusion is the wide gap he discerns between the world of women reflected by the poet in these lines and the more open, less codified lives of women in the West.

According to Milani, in Forugh's poetry, denial of traditional functions assigned to women finds a particular reflection in the poet's rebellious position against "the conventional man-woman relationship,"¹⁵ quite often presented in the form of marriage. In her view, what Forugh sought in marriage was a close emotional relationship between the couple. Milani considers the following lines from "Captive" as evidence of the poet's disillusionment with marriage as a traditional institution:

Perhaps addiction to existence
and habitual tranquilizers
have dragged our pure and simple desires
into the pit of degeneration
perhaps the spirit's been exiled
into solitary on a desert island
Perhaps I merely dreamed the cricket's voice.

To Milani, "the cricket's voice" in the last line of this stanza alludes to an ideal state of partnership between husband and wife based on notions other than "addiction to existence" and "habitual tranquilizers." From Milani's feminist perspective, the traditional love-free relationship between a married couple does not embody the most crucial factors in marriage, i.e. trust and partnership.¹⁶ For her, Forugh's poetry, and in the following case, lines from "Captive" imply that the purpose of a marriage based on notions other than love is merely "functional. He desires her body; she desires his long-term commitment: sex in exchange for loyalty."¹⁷

You, with your sincere heart, woman
don't seek loyalty in a man
He does not know the meaning of love
don't ever tell him the secrets of your heart

¹⁴ Michael C. Hillmann, *A Lonely Woman: Forugh Farrokhzad and Her Poetry*, (Washington, D. C.: Three Continents Press and Mage Publishers, 1987), p. 81.

¹⁵ Milani, "Forugh Farrokhzad", P. 370.

¹⁶ Milani, "Forugh Farrokhzad", p. 370.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 374.

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Likewise, Hillmann's reading of the following lines from "Conquest of the Garden" embodies the same notion of marriage:

Everyone is afraid
everyone is afraid, but you and I
joined with the lamp and water and mirror
and we were not afraid.
I am not talking about the flimsy linking of two names
and embracing in the old pages of a ledger.
I'm talking about my fortunate tresses
with the burnt anemone of your kiss
and the intimacy of our bodies,
and the glow of our nakedness
like fish scales in the water.
I am talking about the silvery life of a song
which a small fountain sings at dawn.

Hillmann sees the above lines as an explicit revelation of Forugh's "rejection of societal conventions and her expression of determination to follow the dictates of her heart. The speaker knows that a relationship of true love has little to do with signing of the marriage certificate."¹⁸ According to Hillmann, the same theme is central to the following lines from "Barriers":

A down hearted woman looked at that gold ring
and saw in its shining design
days wasted in hopes of a husband's fidelity,
wasted.

Hillmann's impression of this poem is based on a close examination of the poet's choice of words. The "gold ring" can symbolize a marriage which will ultimately result in the disappointment of the wife's hopes by the end of the stanza. Similarly, "the down-hearted woman" and "the wasted days in hope of a husband's fidelity" further construct the image of the wife's shattered hopes in matrimony. To Hillmann, the above lines are crucial in constituting the image of a woman who would ultimately come to realize that "her wedding band is a band of slavery and servitude."¹⁹

The aptness of both Milani's and Hillmann's remarks concerning the concepts of love and marriage in Forugh's poetry is further justified by Iraj-e Gorgin's interview with the poet herself:

¹⁸ Hillmann, p. 97.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 81.

I ... think that my world has no relation to the world of my father; the distances are evident. ... I think that the manner of approach for someone today has completely changed in relation to someone who lived twenty years ago -- an approach he has due to different concepts, for example, religion, morality, love, honor, bravery, heroism. ... I'll give a simple example. We talk about love and the character of Majnun who was, well, the symbol of constancy and steadfastness in love. But in my opinion since I am a person who is leading a different sort of life, his personage is for me completely ridiculous. When the science of psychology comes along and shatters his image for me ... it shows me that he was not a lover, but a sick man- he was a man who constantly wanted to inflict harm upon himself ...²⁰

As has already been briefly mentioned, the solution Forugh proposes to overcome a rigid, oppressive relationship between a couple is a partnership based on reciprocity, trust and love. According to Milani, "Conquest of the Garden" is a celebration of one such love:

The crow that soared
over us
and vanished into a drifting cloud's troubled thoughts
its voice a short spear arching across the horizon
will carry news of us to the city
Everybody knows
Everybody knows
you and I saw the garden
through that door, cold embrasure
and picked the apple
from that happy branch out of bounds
Everyone's afraid
Everyone's afraid, but you and I
who were joined to the lamp, the water, the mirror

In her interpretation of a symbolic love in the above poem, Milani has made a reference to the "legend of Adam and Eve," however, seen from a new perspective.²¹ In the analysis of these lines, Milani states that in Forugh's world, lover and beloved enter "the garden" side by side and pick the apple together; moreover, the beloved is no longer held responsible for the lover's mistake. In other words, "there [exists] no devil"²² and no sign of the snake anywhere in the garden. According to Milani's reading, the poem

is the story of two lovers who evade social constraint not by escaping or defying it so much as by declaring it irrelevant. This poem ... is an eloquent affirmation of the possibility of friendship and communication between a man and a woman, a relationship based neither on a marriage license nor on physical or economic needs alone. It speaks of

²⁰ Hasan Javadi and Susan Sallée trans., *Another Birth: Selected Poems of Forugh Farokhzad*, (Emeryville, Californis: Albany Press: Middle Eastern Series, 1981), p. 92.

²¹ Milani, "Forugh Farokhzad", pp. 377-378.

²² Ibid.

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emotional, intellectual, and sensual compatibility, of love, and of common concerns.²³

Another critic, Ardavan Davaran, sees a similar “celebration of passionate love and a disregard for conventional affront”²⁴ in “Conquest of the Garden.” Interpreting “Conquest of the Garden,” Davaran has, however, paid more attention to the aesthetic features of the poem rather than its immediate feminist and social implications. Nevertheless even when he comments on the associations of the kind of unconventional love praised by the persona, Davaran emphasizes the secondary consequences of the unconventional love-relationship instead of focusing on the more urgent implications of the poem. To him, the meaning of the lines stems from “the associations of crows in folk tales with the spreading of tattle-tales. Thus the crow will carry ‘news of us’ -- that is, news of our relationship -- to the town ... The simile here alludes to the potential cutting and wounding quality of such a tattle-tale.”²⁵ As Davaran’s analysis of the above-cited lines proceeds, however, the gap between his interpretation and Milani’s reading of the same poem becomes more apparent. Davaran’s interpretation of the second last part of the poem is based on an innocent picture of the lovers in a natural setting which ultimately portrays the ideal union of the pair symbolized by the traditional Iranian “symbols of illumination , i.e. light, water, and mirrors.” In this way, quite unlike what Forugh and Milani would have easily assumed, Davaran seems not to be able to believe that at this stage the lovers are ready to dispense with conventions and build their love on notions which have no necessary relevance to the “symbols of illumination” in the customary Iranian marriage ceremony. Davaran’s symbolic interpretation of lamp, mirror, and water would both to the poet and Milani stand for a genuine love relationship free of any traditional association whatsoever.

Even a quick survey of Forugh’s poetry shows the large extent to which men are represented in her poems. Before presenting the image of the ideal male partner in her later poems, however, Forugh had pictured men with absolute partiality. According to many critics, Forugh was essentially the first woman to offer an “individualized, not restrained portrayal of men”²⁶ in her poetry. As Milani’s analysis of the following lines from “Captive” shows, in the poet’s earlier works men were generally presented as “physical creatures, led by erotic instincts and frightened of intimacy.”²⁷

He was taught nothing but desire
interested in nothing but appearance
whenever he went, they whispered in his ears
woman is created for your desires

This disturbing image of men as creatures led solely by sexual impulses is common to almost all of Forugh’s poems. “Men’s fear of intimacy” is, however, added to the list of their other negative attributes from Milani’s own extreme perspective. In other words, it is the extent of the critic’s feminist views which determines the ultimate meaning of these lines. According to Milani’s reading of “Divine Rebellion”, infidelity is yet another problematic male characteristic:²⁸

²³ Ibid., p. 378.

²⁴ Javadi, pp. 118-119.

²⁵ For Davaran’s discussion of “Garden Conquered” see Javadi’s *Another Birth*, pp. 119-124.

²⁶ Milani, “ForughFarokhzad”, p. 370.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

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you show affection for no one
unless you have her in your embrace
and when you open your arms
'soon, she is forgotten

It was basically the oppression of women by the dominant patriarchal codes which led both the poet and the feminist critic to judge the poem as a cry against inequality between men and women. Nevertheless, the appeal to equality is so explicit that it brings Hillmann's interpretation of men in Forugh's poetry close to Milani's. According to Hillmann, in Forugh's works men appear "in various stances, from proud, possessive, uncomprehending, faithless conquerors of the body of selfless lovers..."²⁹

Despite the fact that men's sensuality is a serious target of the poet's critique, there appears to be no direct opposition to the pursuit of physical love in Forugh's poems as long as it is equally enjoyed by men and women. As a rebel against the applicability of impractical moral conventions, Forugh calls the attention of her readers to the fact that sensual love should not necessarily be considered the sole domain of men. In this regard, Massud Farzan explores the theme of sexual love in "Another Birth":

I saw I was being freed
I saw my skin burst with love's expansion
I saw my burning body melt
and pour pour pour
in the moon, in the quivering moon sunk into the dark...

or again in "The Rose":

The rose
The rose
The rose

He took me to the rose garden
and in the dark put a rose in my hair
and finally
slept with me on a rose leaf...

According to Farzan, though economical in language, these lines are quite articulate in celebrating the act of sexual union;³⁰ an experience on the part of the poet which had never before been dealt with by any Iranian feminine writer or poet.

As both Hillmann and Farzan have argued, sexuality is a central, albeit not always explicit, theme in many of Forugh's poems. To prove this point, Hillmann focuses on the following poem titled "Friday:"

Friday
quiet
desperate
like old alleys, sad
with its sick, lazy daydream
with its surreptitious, long yawns.
Friday

²⁹ Hillmann, p. 16.

³⁰ Massud Farzan, "Forugh Farrokhzad, Modern Persian Poet" *Critical Perspectives on Modern Persian Literature*, Thomas M. Ricks, ed., (Washington, D. C. : Three Continents Press, 1984), p. 436.

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no expectations
surrender.

The house
empty
oppressive
with doors shut against the onslaught of youth
with darkness and visions of the sun
with loneliness and guesses
about the future and doubts
with its curtains, books,
cupboards, and pictures.
O how peacefully and pridefully passed by
my life like a strange stream
in the heart of those quiet, desolate Fridays
in the hearts of those empty, oppressive houses,
O how peacefully and pridefully it passed.

The implicit reference to the sexual desires of the persona of the poem is made explicit through the deliberate interplay of words. Hillmann believes that,

The very title of the poem suggests an Iranian context, in which terms the poem becomes a characterization of an Iranian girl's adolescence, a period of time when society stifles feminine sexuality so that girls will remain virgins until marriage. As the Iranian weekly day off and Sabbath... Friday was a day of window-shopping, visits to friends and relatives and picnics, except for the unchaperoned teenage girl for whom it could be lonely, full of daydreams only because she had to stay home with doors physically shut against the onslaught of youth or youthful sexuality.³¹

The rebellion against feminine sexual passivity generated through blind obedience to moral conventions, and the fulfillment of one such desire finds ultimate reflection in the poem titled "Divine Rebellion," where the persona of the poem demands a sexual union with Satan himself:

Weary of divine asceticism,
at midnight in Satan's bed
I would seek refuge in the downward slopes
of a fresh sin.

I would choose at the price of
the golden crown of godhood,
the dark and painful pleasure
of sin's embrace.

To Hillmann there exists a kind of "challenge in sexual terms in 'Divine Rebellion', whose speaker muses that if she were God, she would conclude a long day's activities in sexual intercourse with Satan..."³² In other words, the denial of traditional beliefs in this poem results in a symbolic rejection of God himself to whom the validity of all

³¹ Hillmann, p. 80.

³² Ibid., p. 78.

conventions and beliefs is ultimately tied. In a similar way, the pursuit of passionate love is symbolized by a union with Satan. Whereas for Hillmann the theme and images in this poem refer to the pursuit of a physical love as a means of flight from sexual enslavement, other critics have derived a totally different meaning from the poem. These readers see the imagery of the poem as merely an obscene, sinful evocation of sexual feelings. This kind of harsh critique of Forugh's poetry finds evidence, for example, in Shoja al-Din Shafa's introduction to "Captive."³³ As Milani has argued, Shoja al-Din Shafa "instead of discussing Forugh's revolutionary demand for the verbal and emotional space denied women through centuries in Iranian culture, or praising her attempt to appropriate new emotional and sexual terrain between the sexes,[has] apologetically [reminded] the reader: 'let he who has no sin cast the first stone at the sinner.'"³⁴ To prove his point Shafa has concentrated on the following lines and has in his final analysis portrayed a shameless, sinful woman:

From my bright eyes snatch
the eagerness to run to another;
...and teach my eyes
to shy away from the shining eyes of others ...
O lord, o lord ...
show your face and pluck from my heart
the zest for sin and selfishness.
Do not tolerate an insignificant slave's
rebelliousness and refuge-seeking in others ...
O able, unique God.

According to Hillmann, however, Shafa has singled out the poem merely as a reaction against "the feminine and feminist content and tone of Farrokhzad's poetry."³⁵ In other words it is basically Shafa's already formulated reactionary position against Forugh's feminist beliefs which results in such interpretation of the poem.

Perhaps the different stages of Forugh's poetry more than the works of any other poet show the high degree of the poet's divided self. According to almost all of the critics of Forugh's poetry, her work reflects the inner conflicts of a person in whom these contradictions are simultaneously at operation: "These conflicts are most explicit in the battle between the self and society; independence and traditional women's roles; traditional functions and commitment to art; and between sensuality and puritanical morality."³⁶ In the following lines for "Captive", already discussed in another context, Milani comments on the persona's "painful tension between independence and, conversely, domestic security and traditional women's roles:"³⁷

Bind my feet in chains again
so that tricks and deceits won't make me fall
so that colorful temptations
won't bind me with yet another chain

The persona's fear of being tempted by the colorful deceits of tradition, in this poem, is so immense that she has to call for chains to withstand their power. In other words, according to Milani, breaking away from tradition was not as easy for Forugh as it appears to be in her poetry. Despite their victimizing nature, these conventions had deep

³³ Milani, "Forugh Farokhzad", p. 373.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Hillmann, p. 87.

³⁶ Milani, "Forugh Farokhzad", pp. 371-373.

³⁷ Ibid.

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roots in the poet's existence and prevented her from pursuing her career as a poet with ease of mind. Milani finds traces of such inner conflicts everywhere in Forugh's poetry.

It is, however, in terms of these same inner conflicts and struggles with conventional codes that Forugh's poetry reaches its zenith. In this regard Milani has made a symbolic interpretation of the following lines from "O Land Full of Jewels": Perhaps those two hands were true, those two young hands buried below the never ending snow

And next year, when spring
sleeps with the sky beyond the window
and shoots thrust from her body
the green shoots of empty branches
will blossom, O my dearest one, my dearest only one

The change in nature and the arrival of spring are the symbolic aspects of these lines which Milani takes as signs of growth and blossoming of the poet's art.³⁸ Moreover, Milani believes that the gradual growth of Forugh's art is indicative of the artist's discovery of her individuality.³⁹ According to her, "O Land Full of Jewels" clearly show the process of the poet's discovery of her self:

After all the madness, ah my god
is it possible I've returned to my senses
And it seems that "she" has died in me,
So tired and silent am I, all hopelessness

Melancholy, interrogating the mirror,
What do you think of me now, what?
But in the mirror I see, oh god
nothing I was, not even the shadow of that

Like the Hindu dancer, on my own grave
with such deliberate grace I dance
To brighten this hut the light of a hundred
burning desires I've given with extravagance.

It is, therefore, from Milani's perspective, the process of change and self-knowledge that accounts for the meaning of these lines. In this regard Esmail-e Nouri - Alla too has stated that during her career Forugh had always complained of being indifferent and having spent her entire life in analyzing this sad indifference. According to Nouri- Alla, Forugh essentially made use of her reminiscences and feelings to communicate this state.⁴⁰ To Nouri-Alla the following lines from "Those Days" are quite illuminating in imparting the feeling of loss which is created by the lapse of time:

Those days are gone
Those fine days
Those sound, abundant days
Those skies filled with spangles
Those branches filled with cherries

³⁸ Ibid., p. 368.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 374.

⁴⁰ Amir Esmaeli and Abolghasem Sedarat, *Javedaneh Forugh Farokhzad*, (Tehran: Marjan Press, 1968), p. 56.

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Those houses leaning upon each other
with green fences of ivy
Those rooftops of frolicking kites
Those alleys giddy with the acacia's perfume

In other words, in Forugh's poetry, the nostalgia for the past and the discovery of the self are two faces of the same coin. In this way the poet's past experiences continually condition the progress of her work and result in the final perfection of her art.

Closely related to Nouri-Alla's argument, Abdol Ali Dastgheib has stated that the entire collection of "Another Birth" is the manifestation of a sincere person's intention to find herself:⁴¹

With utmost joy
I walked to the window and fervently, six-hundred
seventy-eight times, drew into my breast
air grown thick ...

Dastgheib's reading of these lines suggests that both the persona's joy and her ability to breathe in the thick air are the result of the poet's success in having found herself and her goal in life.

The search for identity in Forugh's poetry, moreover, links her work to the worlds of politics and sociology. As stated above, Forugh was no indifferent artist. In spite of the fact that her poetry often embraces certain autobiographical elements, it is, nevertheless, frequently quite political in tone. The following poem from "Another Birth," for example, has evoked multiple responses mainly from two groups of readers:

I know a sad little fairy
who lives in an ocean
and ever so softly plays her heart into a magic flute
who dies with one kiss each night
and is reborn with one kiss each dawn.

The above lines are from the last stanza of Forugh's most discussed poem "Another Birth." Despite the apparent socio-political implications of these lines Hillmann believes that they should be read from a specific biographical perspective:

It may ... be difficult for a reader to appreciate fully [the above-cited lines] without knowing that [Forugh's] employer and lover, Golestan, may have spent much time at the house he put at Farokhzad's disposal but presumably went back to his own nearby home at night, leaving the poet alone to await a kiss in the morning.⁴²

For Milani, on the other hand, the poem embodies richer notions, with clear feminist overtones:

Another Birth' celebrates the birth of a female character who rejoices in her new options, a warrior who has fought for her every in her path to freedom. She becomes her own model and

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 180.

⁴² Michael Craig Hillmann, "An Autobiographical Voice: Forugh Farokhzad" *women's Autobiographies in Contemporary Iran*, Afsaneh Najmabadi, ed., (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 40.

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gives birth to a self in the image of her own likings and aspirations.
Her rebirth is indeed a self-birth.⁴³

Similarly, Zubizarreta believes solely in the political implications of the following lines from “Another Birth” and is inclined to disregard the biographical associations of the poem:

My whole being is a dark chant
that will carry you perpetuating you
to the dawn of eternal growths and blossomings
in this chant I sighed you, oh
in this chant
I grafted you to the tree, to the water, to the fire.

There is no reason why one cannot read these lines in terms of the love affair between Forugh and Golestan, which has already been dealt with by Hillmann in his analysis of the same poem. As a matter of fact, the words which to Hillmann are key concepts in justifying his channel of analysis do appear in these lines too. The word “dawn,” for instance, can imply the moment of the separation of the lover from the beloved which was alluded to by Hillmann in his interpretation. According to Zubizarreta, however, in “Another Birth” “the poet comes as close as she ever came to complete harmony with her inner compulsions toward personal, social, and artistic freedom.”⁴⁴ In the continuation of the same argument Zubizarreta asserts that one can sense Forugh’s development in the lives already mentioned.⁴⁵

Not all of Forugh’s poems are, however, as controversial as the previous one. For instance, according to Hillmann in “Someone Who Is Not Like Anyone” the poet explicitly calls for justice for the lower class Tehranis:

I’ve had a dream that someone is coming.
I’ve dreamt of red star
and my eyelids keep twitching
and my shoes keep snapping to attention
and may I go blind
if I’m lying.
I’ve dreamt of that red star
when I wasn’t asleep
someone is coming,
someone is coming,
someone better, ...

For Milani too, the poem is rich in sociological implications. According to Milani, in this poem, “Farrokhzad presents a dream of an egalitarian Iranian society.”⁴⁶ As the poem proceeds, moreover, the idea of justice with all its political implications becomes more explicit:

⁴³ Farzaneh Milani, *Veils and words*, (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1992), p. 135.

⁴⁴ John Zubizarreta, “The Woman Who Sings No, No, No; Love, Freedom and Rebellion in the Poetry of Forugh Farokhzad” *World Literature Today* vol:66, No. 3, Djelal Kadir, ed., (Oklahoma; The University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), p. 424.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Hillmann, p. 65.

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someone is coming from the sky
at Tupkhaneh square
on the night of the fireworks
to spread out the table cloth
and divide up the bread
and pass out the Pepsi
and divide up Melli park ...
and give away whatever doesn't sell
and even give us our share.
I've had a dream ...

Thus, from Hillmann's perspective too, "someone Who Is Not Like Anyone" can stand for Forugh's "most expansive statement as to hopes for the political and social salvation of the Iranian people."⁴⁷

The diversity of the readers' responses to Forugh's poetry, therefore, does not only reveal the inherently rich and encompassing ideas of the poet—presented in her work both on the personal level and the sociological one—but also the personal, cultural, and ideological beliefs each reader brings with herself/himself to the poetry. In this way, the multiplicity of these responses can be justifiably understood.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 68.

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