

Forugh Farrokhzad and the Persian Literary Canon

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“If a writer is no longer rewritten, his or her work will be forgotten.”

André Lefevere¹

“People seem not to see that their opinion of the world is also a confession of character. We can only see what we are, and if we misbehave we suspect others. The fame of Shakspeare or of Voltaire, of Thomas à Kempis, or of Bonaparte, characterizes those who give it.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson²

Although often justified, it is hard to avoid dramatic declarations when reviewing the literary impact and legacy of Forugh Farrokhzad (1935-1967). Literary critics rarely shy away from discussing her work in superlative terms. Hamid Dabashi describes her as “the most celebrated woman poet in the course of the Persian poetic tradition and a seminal modern Persian poet, regardless of gender.”³ Michael

¹André Lefevere, *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*. Translation Studies (London: Routledge, 1992), 112.

²Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Conduct of Life* [electronic Resource] (Blacksburg, VA: Virginia Tech, 2001), www.ebrary.com/landing/site/bodleian/index-bodleian.jsp?Docid=5000633, 76.

³Hamid Dabashi, “Forugh Farrokhzad and the Formative Forces in Iranian Culture,” in *Forugh Farrokhzad: A Quarter-Century Later*, ed. Michael Craig Hillmann, 7–36; *Literature East & West*, (Austin: Department of Oriental and African Languages and Literatures, University of Texas at Austin, 1988), 24: 7.

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Hillman asserts, “The best known among [Iranian women] is the poet Forugh Farrokhzad (1935-1967), the most famous in the history of Persian literature.”⁴ Farzaneh Milani explains that, although denounced by some “for its immorality and its advocacy of promiscuity... her work has been among the most popular in modern Persian literature.”⁵ For better or for worse, one thing critics seem to agree on is that Farrokhzad challenged, or even threatened, the normative values of her culture; innovative and exemplary, her place in the canon of modernist Persian poetry is well-established.

Farrokhzad’s towering position in the modernist canon is all the more remarkable given her virtual isolation as a woman poet. How a woman poet secured entry into this canon – despite, and in part, because of the patriarchal literary and social context in which her work has been received – will be a key focus of this essay, as well as asking what her literary survival can tell us about the processes of canon formation in the Persian literary context. It remains an understated truism in Persian literary historiography that not all speakers, readers, and writers of Persian have had equal influence over and access to the ever-evolving canon of works. Scrutinizing the nexus of factors privileging some works and authors over others (gender not least amongst them) is an important step towards writing more accurate and inclusive literary histories - a task distinct from simply writing about the contents of the canon itself. In the spirit of illuminating new ways in which literary historians can think about (and tentatively contribute to) canonisation, the latter part of this essay will examine Farrokhzad’s profound influence on two important women poets writing in post-revolutionary Iran, and argue that this connection underpins her continued canonical inclusion.

The Processes of Canonisation in Persian Literary History

Derived from the Greek term *kanna*, referring to a type of firm marsh reed, a *kanon* (also Greek) came to mean any kind of straight bar or rod, and more figuratively, a rule or standard.⁶ Via Latin, Europe and the West inherited the word and developed the concept of a ‘canon’ as means of esteeming, categorising, and preserving artistic works that adhered to (often equally inherited) ‘exemplary’ aesthetic standards. Of course, what constitutes ‘exemplary’ aesthetic standards, and more recently, the

⁴Michael Craig Hillmann, *A Lonely Woman: Forugh Farrokhzad and Her Poetry*, 1st ed. (Washington, DC: Three Continents Press; Washington, DC, 1987), 1.

⁵Farzaneh Milani, *Veils and Words: The Emerg-*

ing Voices of Iranian Women Writers (London: Tauris, 1992), 133.

⁶Dean E. Kolbas, *Critical Theory and the Literary Canon* (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 2001), 12.

social, political, economic, and ideological factors which inform such judgements, has been the subject of endless debate. And yet, despite the controversy of its various applications, the utility of the term persists and the reality of ‘canonical’ works can neither be argued away nor whimsically changed.⁷

Given its European origins, the conceptualisation of a ‘canon’ and the processes of canon formation have not often been considered in the context of Persian literary historiography. For a literary culture that practically endows sainthood upon its most revered figures, challenging the received wisdoms of authorial hierarchies and developing a framework in which to understand the success and survival of certain poets over others is an overdue task that this section will begin to redress.

In pre-modern times, the writing of *tazkirahs* (biographical anthologies of poets) was the primary method by which information about notable poets and samples of their poetry was transmitted from generation to generation.⁸ Producing these manuscripts was an expensive task, commissioned by and for the courtly and educated elites.⁹ The fruits of such labour are a primary source for much of our knowledge regarding canonical (and obscure) poets from the classical era. William Hanaway makes the argument that in this period, one cannot truthfully discern a canon of Persian poetry. This, he posits, is due in part to the textual inconsistencies that marred reproductions of manuscripts and hence denied readers an authoritative, standardised text,¹⁰ and also because in his view *tazkirahs* were “by and large idiosyncratic works, written for reasons other than to transmit a canon of poetry.”¹¹ For Hanaway, there seems to be little distinction between “major and influential poets from minor and little-known ones.” He continues:

There is no sense of common ideals among the anthologizers’ comments, except perhaps an implied approval of style. *Tazkiras* in this sense seem to be almost acanonic. The transmission of a canon must be a deliberate and self-conscious act, and not done only by implication.¹²

Whilst it may be true that *tazkirahs* were written for diverse purposes with varying criteria for inclusion (such as regional, temporal, and general groupings),¹³

⁷For a comprehensive overview of the contemporary canon debate, see Chapter 3 in Kolbas.

⁸Jan Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature* (Dordrecht: Dreidel, 1968), 316.

⁹William L. Hanaway, “Is There a Canon of Persian Poetry?” *Edebiyât* 4:1 (1993): 5.

¹⁰Hanaway, “Is there a Canon of Persian Poetry?” 8.

ry?” 8.

¹¹Hanaway, “Is there a Canon of Persian Poetry?” 7.

¹²Hanaway, “Is there a Canon of Persian Poetry?” 7-8.

¹³Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature*, 316.

Hanaway's conception of canon formation as necessarily self-conscious is somewhat contentious. *Tazkirah-nivisī* succeeded in preserving and promoting the names and reputations of many poets and styles, with the result that by the eighteenth century certain poets had obtained a wide level of cultural familiarity and canonical standing.

The *bāzgasht-i adabī*, a literary movement beginning in the mid-eighteenth century, attests to this point. The *bāzgasht* promoted a return to Khorasani and 'Eraqi styles of poetry, reacting against the Indian style (*sabk-i hindī*) that had gained prominence in the preceding centuries.¹⁴ Hanaway contends that this movement did nothing to help form a consciousness of a canon, due to the lack of "accompanying social, intellectual, political, or ideological change."¹⁵ However, the imitation of poets such as Sa'di, Hafez, Farrokhi, 'Onsori, Ferdowsi, and Manuchehri must have contributed substantially to their cultural importance and familiarity. Furthermore, to suggest this trend was in no way ideological may be too simplistic, as Alessandro Bausani argues, for the return to 'native' literary styles correlates with a kind of isolationist nationalism emanating from Shi'ite Iran, reacting against the wider Persianate (and Sunni) region.¹⁶

Moving into the modern period, nationalist perspectives continued to hold sway over Persian literary historiography and the implicit understanding of its canon. The work of Western Orientalists contributed to this outlook; E.G. Browne's famous four-volume *Literary History of Persia* was particularly influential on both Western and Iranian perceptions of the canon, and notable for his exclusion of the "writings of those who, while using the Persian language as the vehicle of their thought, were not of Persian race."¹⁷ The devaluing of non-Iranian Persian literature is a trend that continues to this day.

The growing influence of both foreign ideas and academic works formed just a part of the changing social and intellectual landscape in early twentieth-century Iran, a change reflected in the drive towards the formation of a modern nation-state. This development would have significant effects on canon formation.

In *Critical Theory and the Literary Canon*, Dean Kolbas describes canon formation as dependent on:

¹⁴William L. Hanaway, "Bāzgasht-e Adabī," ed. Ehsan Yarshater. *Encyclopaedia Iranica* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1990), 58.

¹⁵Hanaway, "Is there a Canon of Persian Poetry?" 9.

¹⁶Hanaway, "Bāzgasht-e Adabī", 59.

¹⁷Edward Granville Browne, *A Literary History*

of Persia, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1920), 3. Omar Khayyam's entry into the canon only after the success of Edward Fitzgerald's nineteenth-century rendering of his *rubā'iyat* further attests to the contribution of Western Orientalists.

a process of cultural familiarisation that in turn depends on social confirmation and broad institutionalisation... [it] is a historically cumulative process, and [...] continual social confirmation over time is necessary for any work to be canonized.¹⁸

He emphasises how, in the Western context, the establishment of nation-states affected the formation of literary canons, stating that in the modern period:

The transformation of literary canons [...] had been profoundly influenced by the prescribed values and priorities of the state, where the inculcation of abstract ideals has given way to a sense of shared identity by appeal to national history and distinct cultural heritage.¹⁹

In the Persian literary context, we have seen that “continual social confirmation” derived from the *tazkirah* tradition and centres of power such as royal courts provided a sense of a canon by at least the nineteenth century. These valorising forces were largely superseded by the institutions and ideology of the emergent nation-state of Iran.

In the 1920s, Reza Shah’s nascent state was able to convert the nationalistic, western-looking intellectual trends of the past few decades into a fully-fledged programme of modernisation and state-building. Legal, tax, and land reform changed the fabric of Iranian society drastically, as Iran rapidly developed the institutions and practices of a modern nation-state. In the cultural sphere, the state’s educational policies and ideological orientation had the most profound effects on literary canonisation. The commission of literary anthologies and textbooks in the late 1920s and 1930s exemplify the influence of the ‘prescribed values and priorities of the state’ on textual transmission and hence, canon formation. Hanaway cites two examples: *Ganj-i sukhān* compiled by Zabih Allah Safa,²⁰ and *Sukhan va sukhānvarān* of Badi al-Zaman Foruzanfar.²¹ Both texts seem to have been designed for pedagogical purposes, with the latter commissioned by the Ministry of Education in 1928.²² The Ministry established several criteria on which Foruzanfar was to base his selection. Two points are particularly telling:

3. To the extent possible, all the poets of the past who were the most famous of their age will be mentioned, except that more of the

¹⁸Kolbas, *Critical Theory*, 60.

¹⁹Kolbas, *Critical Theory*, 21.

²⁰See Hanaway, “Is There a Canon of Persian Poetry?” 11.

²¹See Hanaway, “Is There a Canon of Persian Poetry?” 11.

²²See Hanaway, “Is There a Canon of Persian Poetry?” 11.

best poets will be included, and fewer of those whose powers had declined.

[...]

6. The basis of selection will not be limited to merely verbal and rhetorical beauty, but will include content sufficiently decent and elevated as to retain its elegance when translated into foreign language.²³

This demonstrates an imperative for aesthetic judgement in the publication of certain poets over others, as well as a moralising dimension and a preoccupation with establishing a cultural identity worthy of foreign approval. In other words, widespread literary transmission assumed an explicitly ideological function²⁴ – legitimising political power by appeal to historical precedent – the state and its nationalist supporters attempted to form, or at least co-opt, the national canon.²⁵ As Wali Ahmadi succinctly writes, “The inception of a unified nation-state [...] necessitated the creation of a unifying culture, with literature playing a pivotal role in the process.”²⁶

The institutionalisation requisite to canon formation was further established after the founding of the University of Tehran in 1934, and the creation of a PhD programme in Persian literature in 1937. Muhammad Taqi Bahar’s *Sabk-shināsī* (1942)²⁷ formed the course text, having been commissioned by the Ministry of Culture for that end.²⁸ According to Ahmadi, Bahar’s task was to “canonize, or monumentalize texts which [...] necessitate the continuing consolidation of Persian literature as a field of cultural study and a disciplinary institution”, and *Sabk-shināsī* was “not only a grand history of the evolution and development of Persian prose literature, but also a seminal text in what may be called the disciplinary emergence of Persian literature as a national institution.”²⁹ Bahar’s disparagement of *sabk-i hindī* further attests to

²³Badi al-Zamān Furuzānfar, *Sukhan va Sukhan-varān*, Revised Edition (Tehran: Khwārazmi, 1971), 9; quoted in Hanaway, “Is There a Canon of Persian Poetry?”, 11.

²⁴Kolbas, *Critical Theory*, 15.

²⁵Hanaway, “Is There a Canon of Persian Poetry?” 11.

²⁶Wali Ahmadi, “The Institution of Persian Literature and the Genealogy of Bahar’s ‘Stylistics,’” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 31, no. 2 (2004): 141–52.

²⁷Wali Ahmadi, “The Institution of Persian Lit-

erature and the Genealogy of Bahar’s ‘Stylistics,’” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 31, no. 2 (2004): 141–52.

²⁸Roxanne Haag-Higuchi, “Modernization in Literary History: Malek Al-Sho’ara Bahar’s ‘Stylistics,’” *Culture and Cultural Politics Under Reza Shah: The Pahlavi State, New Bourgeoisie and the Creation of a Modern Society in Iran* (London: Routledge, 2014), 19.

²⁹Ahmadi, “The Institution of Persian Literature”, 145, 149.

the nationalist agenda of his work.³⁰ It was the authority bestowed on this text by the institution of the university that confirmed its pivotal role in the formation of the literary canon.

The nationalist ideology of the state and many intellectuals did not only attempt to immortalise certain poets by means of the syllabus and new anthologies. A pantheon of national poets was to become further inscribed on society's collective historical outlook, thanks to the successful monument-building agenda of the *Anjuman-i āsār-i milī* (Society of National Heritage). Among their many projects was the construction or renovation of landmark tombs for various historical figures including many poets, such as a tomb complex of Ferdowsi in Tus (1926-34), the tomb-garden of Hafez in Shiraz (1936-39), and the tomb of 'Omar Khayyam in Nishapur (1956-62).³¹ These structures "aimed to work as heritage, which had to be read as venerable and timeless."³² The reinterment of these historic figures was covered widely by the state-run media, and "the modified biography and persona of these men were circulated among the masses by means of photographs, stamps, postcards and coins."³³ Street names, statues, and public squares honouring these national literary heroes can be added to this list of what Kolbas calls "the symbolic minutiae of popular culture" which "all combine in the logic of the cultural field to valorise or stigmatize certain writers and works."³⁴ In Pierre Bourdieu's model of the field of cultural production, such a constellation of elements in combination with institutional components "plays a role in the symbolic consecration of particular works of art and the formal recognition of individual authors and artists."³⁵ This is not to suggest that the likes of Hafez, Ferdowsi, and others were previously unknown to the general population, but simply that the state was eager to sponsor and initiate public efforts to preserve and promote Persian literary heritage in order to propagate a unifying national culture.

As Iran developed as a modern, capitalistic nation-state, the increased commodification of culture in parallel with the entrenchment of institutional authority and influence

³⁰Hanaway quotes Bahar describing *sabk-i hindī* as a "mediocre poetic craft," Hanaway, "Bāzgasht-E Adabī," 58.

³¹Talinn Grigor, "The King's White Walls: Modernism and Bourgeois Architecture," *Culture and Cultural Politics Under Reza Shah: The Pahlavi State, New Bourgeoisie and the Creation of a Modern Society in Iran* (London: Routledge, 2014), 95-118. Many other histor-

ical figures and poets could be included here, and not all were canonical, such as Bābā Tāher 'Oryān whose tomb was renovated in Hamadan in 1950-51.

³²Grigor, "The King's White Walls," 102.

³³Grigor, "The King's White Walls," 102.

³⁴Kolbas, *Critical Theory*, 62.

³⁵Quoted in Kolbas, *Critical Theory*, 61-62.

diversified the mechanisms of cultural familiarisation necessary for canon formation. Consequently, charting the fortunes of individual writers, artists and works becomes a task requiring considerable scholarly attention. Before looking more closely at Forugh Farrokhzad and the relationship of women authors to the canon, two further significant developments affecting canon formation in Persian literature must be briefly considered.

The aforementioned intellectual currents of modernisation in Iran not only came to shake up the political and social arrangements of the country, but also challenged the attitudes of writers and artists themselves regarding art's social function. Exposure to European thought and literature throughout the second half of the nineteenth century caused what Ahmad Karimi Hakkak terms a "verbal and ideological decentering" which prompted a gradual shift in the thematic concerns of writers, and eventually, the emergence of an entirely new formal approach to poetry unbound by the rules of the classical tradition: *shi'r-i naw* ('new poetry').³⁶ Hanaway contends that the emergence of *shi'r-i naw* was the first ideological shift in the history of Persian literature of enough significance to force the establishment of distinct modernist and pre-modern canons.³⁷ The ideological tensions between these two camps are still felt today and continue to inform many of the processes of canon formation, with the traditionalists gaining extra wind in their sails following the Islamic Revolution of 1979.³⁸

After the 1979 Revolution, the newly empowered Islamist authorities and their mobilized supporters initiated a cultural revolution that would have severe consequences for literary production, valorisation, and canon formation in Iran. Universities were closed down for several years, strict censorship was imposed, and strategic efforts were made to intimidate and coerce the intellectual community into greater conformity.³⁹ The state forged close ties with 'Islamic' authors who offered ideological support for Islam in general and the Islamic government in particular, providing them "a readership in schools, religious schools, Islamic associations and mosques as long as they worked within the state-sponsored Islamic discourse."⁴⁰ Institutional power was recognised as a key weapon in the battle for

³⁶Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak, *Recasting Persian Poetry: Scenarios of Poetic Modernity in Iran* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1995), 9.

³⁷Hanaway, "Is There a Canon of Persian Poetry?" 10.

³⁸Ancient-Modern distinctions lie at the root of many canon debates. Kolbas, *Critical Theory*, 15.

³⁹Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak, "Censorship in Persia," ed. Ehsan Yarshater. *Encyclopedia Iranica*, December 15, 1990, www.iranicaonline.org/articles/censorship-sansur-in-persia.

⁴⁰Kamran Talattof, *The Politics of Writing in Iran: A History of Modern Persian Literature* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 112.

cultural hegemony, and various official bodies were created to sanction, sponsor, and bestow awards onto ideologically compatible works.⁴¹ The overt imposition of state ideology on the field of cultural production was also reflected in a more prescriptive (and moralising) form of censorship, as opposed to the more prohibitive impulses of the Pahlavi era.⁴² Thus, contemporary or historic works that fall beyond the prescribed values of the Islamic Republic, were, and continue to be, banned, censored, or left to succeed by little more than their own devices.

Nevertheless, the Iranian government fails to maintain a complete monopoly on the mechanisms of cultural familiarization and evaluation that inform canon formation in the Persian literary context. Private galleries, literary journals, and cinemas have been able to feature works that have little to do with the prescribed values of the state (though their licenses remain granted at the whimsical discretion of the authorities), and the Internet is providing an unprecedented forum for counter-cultural discourse. Yet, it is my contention that it is the substantial cultural capital wielded by the diaspora community that presents the largest challenge to the supremacy of the Islamic Republic's cultural narrative.⁴³ The influence of these rival centres of cultural evaluation on Farrokhzad's legacy will be considered, but not before assessing another axis along which a work's relationship with the canon often hinges: the gender of the author.

Women and the Canon

The importance of Farrokhzad's successful canonisation cannot be understood without acknowledging the difficult relationship women writers have had (and continue to have) with the canon.

For the best part of the last half-century, feminists and literary theorists have contemplated the apparent absence, exclusion, and marginalisation of women writers in the annals of literary history. Considered a global phenomenon symptomatic of patriarchy, this has resulted in an undeniable dearth of feminine perspectives and

⁴¹Talattof, *The Politics of Writing in Iran*, 112-113. The Ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance, the Council for Cultural Revolution of the Islamic Republic, and the Centre for Islamic Art and Thoughts are three of the most influential institutions here. See also Fatemeh Shams, "Literature, Art, and Ideology under the Islamic Republic: An Extended History of the Center for Islamic Art and Thoughts," *Persian Language, Literature and Culture: New Leaves*,

Fresh Looks, ed. Kamran Talattof (London: Routledge, 2015).

⁴²Karimi-Hakkak, "Censorship in Persia."

⁴³Approximately 3 million people are believed to have left Iran between 1979 and 1985. Babak Elahi and Persis M. Karim, "Introduction: Iranian Diaspora," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 31, no. 2 (2011): 381-387.

realistic representations of women's lived experiences – their creativity, struggles, and aspirations effectively muted. To counteract this historic suppression of women's voices, many have argued for the necessity of 'opening the canon' to hitherto ignored women writers, and devoted academic attention to an exclusively feminine literary tradition. Despite presenting some methodological problems, focusing on a parallel women's literary culture ultimately allows us to more effectively challenge dominant patriarchal attitudes towards women and women writers – attitudes which are no less manifest in Persian literary history than any other.

Until recently, it was a pervasive misconception in Western literary criticism that women writers were simply absent from literary history. However, the efforts of feminist literary historians have demonstrated, as Claire Buck highlights, that "women have been writing in considerable number for as long as men."⁴⁴ The content of their work, the reason for their historic omission, and the appropriate critical response are three questions recent scholarship has sought to answer. In *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*, Toril Moi outlines the progression of thought of many feminist literary critics, moving from:

suspecting all attempts at segregating women from the mainstream of historical development as a form of anti-egalitarianism, they came, during the 1960s, to accept the political necessity of viewing women as a distinctive group if the common patriarchal strategy of subsuming women under the general category of 'man', and thereby silencing them, was to be efficiently counteracted.⁴⁵

Such endeavours aimed to work against the stereotyping, misrepresentation, and exclusion of women writers in the 'standard' reference books in the field,⁴⁶ and also to give a space for forms of writing more commonly practiced by women but deemed secondary or periphery by the male-dominated academic establishment, such as letters and diaries.⁴⁷ Elaine Showalter was one of the first Western academics to practice this 'woman-centred criticism'.⁴⁸ Her advocacy offered an effective rebuttal to those who claimed that an exclusive focus on 'women's writing' hurt the cause of women's liberation by essentialising what it means to be a woman. She writes:

⁴⁴Claire Buck, *Bloomsbury Guide to Women's Literature* (London: Bloomsbury, 1992), ix.

⁴⁵Toril Moi, *Sexual/textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*. 2nd ed. (Y. London: Routledge/ New Accents), 52.

⁴⁶Virginia Blain, Patricia Clements, and Isobel Grundy, eds., *The Feminist Companion to Lit-*

erature in English: Women Writers from the Middle Ages to the Present (London: Batsford, 1990), viii.

⁴⁷Buck, *Bloomsbury Guide to Women's Literature*, x.

⁴⁸Catherine Belsey, "Critical Approaches," in *The Feminist Companion to Literature*, 238.

Women writers should not be studied as a distinct group on the assumption that they write alike, or even display stylistic resemblances distinctively feminine. But women do have a special history susceptible to analysis, which includes such complex considerations as the economics of their relation to the literary marketplace; the effects of social and political changes in women's status upon individuals, and the implications of stereotypes of the woman writer and restrictions of her artistic autonomy.⁴⁹

These "complex considerations" must be borne in mind when historicising the work of women writers in the largely misogynistic culture of Persian letters. Sunil Sharma has cited the absence of such considerations by anthologists in the classical period as a reason behind the failure of the classical literary tradition "to properly accommodate the memory of women poets."⁵⁰ He points to one of the most substantial *tazkirahs* of the eighteenth century as case in point: Vāleh's *Riāz al-shu'arā'* (Delhi, 1747). Despite including more women poets than any other contemporary *tazkirah* (twenty-seven in total), it lists all entries alphabetically and fails to meaningfully distinguish poets by their gender.⁵¹ Consequently for Vāleh, Sharma posits, "a successful female poet is one who writes like a man."⁵² No women, to our knowledge, compiled anthologies of classical Persian poetry; *tazkirahs* were thus framed by male anthologists whose interest in women poets attempted "to co-opt women with literary aspirations to the task of winning (elite) women's consent to the dominant (and misogynistic) project of poetry."⁵³

Focusing on women poets in nineteenth-century Iran, Dominic Brookshaw highlights the same problem when examining women-centred *tazkirahs*, such as the *Nuql-i majlis*, compiled in 1825 by a male anthologist.⁵⁴ Despite the "active involvement of women in the production of poetry" – as poets and patrons – textual records of their work remain scarce.⁵⁵ Elsewhere Brookshaw suggests that the loss of *dīvāns* of women poets was "most likely more common than the loss of those of male poets," and attributes this in part to "residual anxieties about women's writing in general,

⁴⁹Quoted in Moi, *Sexual/textual Politics*, 49.

⁵⁰Sunil Sharma, "From 'Ā'esha to Nur Jahān: The Shaping of a Classical Persian Poetic Canon of Women," *Journal of Persianate Studies* 2:2 (2009): 148-64.

⁵¹Sharma, "From 'Ā'esha to Nur Jahān," 155.

⁵²Sharma, "From 'Ā'esha to Nur Jahān," 155.

⁵³Sharma, "From 'Ā'esha to Nur Jahān," 151. Sharma cites this description of the Ottoman

poetic tradition as equally applicable to the Persian context.

⁵⁴Dominic Parviz Brookshaw, "Qajar Confection: The Production and Dissemination of Women's Poetry in Early Nineteenth-Century Iran," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 17, no. 2 (2014): 113-46.

⁵⁵Brookshaw, "Qajar Confection," 113.

and, more specifically, about the preservation of their compositions in a written form”.⁵⁶ In such a literary culture, where women poets “remained a novelty at the margins of the literary communities or were appropriated by a male tradition”,⁵⁷ the absence of women writers from Persianate cultural memory comes as no surprise.

Farzaneh Milani has perhaps made the greatest academic contribution to rectify such cultural amnesia and delineate a women’s tradition in Persian literature, with two book length studies on the topic. In *Veils and Words* (1992), Milani points to the “virtual monopoly of literary representation” held by Iranian men for centuries as a principle reason behind the scarcity of feminine representation in Persian literary history.⁵⁸ She focuses on the metaphor of the veil to explain the historic silencing of women’s voices, writing:

The enormous gap between the time, space, and quality of critical attention devoted to male writers and that devoted to women writers was profoundly troubling. Soon, I came to realize that women’s veiling can be practiced on many levels. Literary criticism was once such arena. In conventional approaches to literature, I saw a failure to chronicle and capture women’s unveiled voices and the many internal and external hardships faced in their efforts to counter exclusion – spatially or verbally.⁵⁹

Milani revises her thesis somewhat in her later work, *Words, Not Swords* (2011), correlating the degree of freedom of movement to that of freedom of expression. “Physical confinement – not the veil –”, she writes, “was the foundation of women’s subordination in Iranian society and the source of their literary quasi-invisibility.”⁶⁰ The demarcation of a women’s tradition in Persian literature therefore becomes an imperative not only in order to overcome the “transient fame” of its writers,⁶¹ but also to help historicise the women’s liberation movement, shedding much needed light on the creative talents and common struggles of Persian speaking women. Indeed, if we are committed to a more accurate depiction of women’s literary contributions

⁵⁶Dominic Parviz Brookshaw, “Women in Praise of Women: Female Poets and Female Patrons in Qajar Iran,” *Iranian Studies* 46, no. 1 (2013): 17–48.

⁵⁷Sharma, 161.

⁵⁸Farzaneh Milani, *Veils and Words: The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers* (London: Tauris, 1992), 139.

⁵⁹Milani, *Veils and Words*, xv.

⁶⁰Farzaneh Milani, *Words, Not Swords: Iranian Women Writers and the Freedom of Movement*.

1st edition. Gender, Culture, and Politics in the Middle East (Y. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2011), xx.

⁶¹The “transience of female literary fame” is the phenomenon described by Elaine Showalter whereby “each generation of women writers has found itself, in a sense, without a history, forced to rediscover the past anew, forging again and again the consciousness of their sex.” Quoted in Moi, *Sexual/textual Politics*, 54.

and lived experiences throughout history, the need for a “women-centred” criticism in the Persian literary context becomes plainly clear: the strong male bias in literary production, evaluation, and representation must be challenged and deconstructed.⁶² In Milani’s words:

If we were to engage the issue of gender as a critical category, it would no longer be possible to disregard, push to the margins, or relegate to footnotes women’s vital contributions to Iranian modernity.⁶³

The work of literary historians such as Sharma, Brookshaw, Milani, and others, therefore, does not only represent efforts to explain and rectify historical omissions of women authors from the literary record, but also a stage in the process of opening the canon itself.⁶⁴

Farrokhzad and the Canon

The unprecedented level of academic attention given to Farrokhzad (primarily in the West) has indeed been one important factor in her successful canonisation. Several book length studies and numerous articles about her and her work make Farrokhzad easily the most studied Persian-language woman poet in history. How did she reach such heights of literary fame?

Farrokhzad’s dramatic (even notorious) biography has certainly leant itself to continued interest and intrigue. An outspoken, female divorcee, Western-looking and fashionably dressed, Farrokhzad’s public persona ostensibly conformed with “the motifs and dispositions which were uppermost in the highly ideologized counter-culture of her time”.⁶⁵ As is the case for many artists who die young, her untimely death, at the age of thirty-two, contributed to a highly marketable narrative of her life, compounding the critical tendency to mythologise and beatify all things

⁶²This reflects the advocacy of Najmabadi, Kia, and Shakhshari for using “gender as a lens for reading the constitution of power relations and the shape of culture” in Iranian historiography. Afsaneh Najmabadi, Mana Kia, and Sima Shakhshari, “Women, Gender, and Sexuality in Historiography of Modern Iran.” *Iran in the 20th Century: Historiography and Political Culture*, ed. Touraj Atabaki (International Library of Iranian Studies ; 20. Y. London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 177–97.

⁶³Milani, “Words, Not Swords,” 8.

⁶⁴This echoes Pierre Bourdieu’s assertion that

the discourse about a work “is not a mere accompaniment, intended to assist its perception and appreciation, but a stage in the production of the work, of its meaning and value.” Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, European Perspectives (Y. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 110. Quoted in Kolbas, *Critical Theory*, 63.

⁶⁵Dabashi, “Forugh Farrokhzad and the Formative Forces in Iranian Culture,” in *Forugh Farrokhzad: A Quarter-Century Later*, ed. M. Hillmann, 18.

Farrokhzad. Writing during the 1950s and 1960s, a time in which Iranian society was undergoing a number of modernising reforms and women were gaining more rights and access to the public sphere, for many, Farrokhzad and her modernist poetry became emblematic of what Milani has termed “the emergent Persian woman.”⁶⁶

Dean Kolbas has argued that “an author’s or work’s flexibility to ideological appropriation,”⁶⁷ partially correlates with their potential for canonisation – this seems to be the case with Farrokhzad. Since the revolution of 1979, Farrokhzad has received a lot of attention outside of Iran, by the diaspora and beyond, including many translations of her poetry and creative projects inspired by her verse and life.⁶⁸ The transmission of her work into a Western context imbues it with a new critical potential, one facet of which Persis Karim articulates as a refutation of “the often singularized narrative of women’s oppression” that “counteracts the plethora of negative media representations of contemporary Iranian life.”⁶⁹ That Farrokhzad’s reputation undermines the Islamic Republic’s narrative of womanhood too, is a further political dimension to her continued relevance. Indeed, the revolution of 1979 and the cultural establishment’s subsequent distaste for modernist writers in general, and Farrokhzad in particular, has imbued her work with renewed subversive potency. Despite her work being censored, it remains widely read in Iran, particularly by women, and her gravesite is frequently visited by admirers.⁷⁰ The appropriation of Farrokhzad’s works, and indeed Farrokhzad herself, by many such artists and onlookers may also be reflective of a certain nostalgic tendency – often rose-tinted – felt by much of the diaspora for the Iran of the 1950s and 1960s. Farrokhzad’s famed vitality, empowered lifestyle, and unveiled beauty arguably symbolise that era for many expatriates – an irony, considering Farrokhzad’s sense of alienation in her own time.

One element of Farrokhzad’s work in particular has been subject to a critical obsession by her admirers and detractors alike: her portrayal of the female erotic

⁶⁶Milani, *Veils and Words*, 137.

⁶⁷Kolbas, *Critical Theory*, 64. This is suggested by Kolbas in light of the posthumous appropriation of George Orwell’s works and reputation.

⁶⁸For example, the Iranian visual artist and filmmaker Shirin Neshat has used Farrokhzad’s poems in her photographs and films. See Jasmin Darznik, “Forough Goes West: The Legacy of Forough Farrokhzad in Iranian Diasporic Art and Literature” 6, no. 1 (2010): 103–16.

⁶⁹Karim, “Re-Writing Forough,” 185. Karim also points to Farrokhzad and renewed interest in

her work as a symbolic rebuttal of “New Orientalist” tendencies among some transnational Iranian creative artists, such as Azar Nafisi.

⁷⁰Comments by figures as prominent as Ayatollah Khamenei himself about Farrokhzad have kept her in the public consciousness. On 12.9.2014, whilst in hospital for prostate surgery, he criticised some “so-called intellectuals” for praising Farrokhzad in order to humiliate Parvin Etesami. www.youtube.com/watch?v=uhYU9vxdxg0.

and the sensual. Although by the 1950s and 1960s unabashedly feminine and even sexualised female artists and stage performers had reached some public prominence,⁷¹ Farrokhzad was the first to bring such notions into the domain of ‘respectable’ culture with her poetry. Whilst this phenomenon has led to a reductive understanding of her artistic significance, it has nevertheless bolstered her level of cultural familiarity and hence, canonical standing. Exaggerated pronouncements that she was “the founder of Persian poetry’s feminine culture”⁷² and “the first person in whose words one can find a feminine tone,”⁷³ for many have cemented her position as the exemplary, pioneering woman poet.

However, Farrokhzad’s literary impact must be understood in broader terms. Her exemplary status as a modernist women poet is evidenced by the continued influence she has on the work of women writing poetry in post-revolutionary Iran – a pervasive influence that helps maintain her canonical standing. By shining light on the footprints of Farrokhzad’s poetry found in contemporary writers, literary critics can help expand her canonicity beyond the parochial and at times prurient interest which has often underpinned it. Accordingly, the final part of this essay will demonstrate Farrokhzad’s importance to two leading contemporary women poets from Iran, based on recent interviews conducted with each of them and a close-reading of their published work.

More women are writing poetry in Persian now than ever before, and literature in general accounts for over 50% of all books by women published in the Islamic Republic.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, women authors, particularly those working within the modernist tradition, face more difficulties than most in getting their work published. I recently interviewed two leading, young modernist poets – Granaz Moussavi

⁷¹For example, the Iranian singer, actress, and stage performer Bānu Mahvash gained prominence in the 1950s for singing risqué songs and writing a book that has been described as a sex manual, entitled *Secrets of Sexual Fulfilment* [Rāz-e kamyābi-ye jensi] (1957). See Hamid Naficy, *A Social History of Iranian Cinema*, vol. 2 (Durham, NC ; London: Duke University Press, 2011), 209.

⁷²Reza Baraheni, “‘Farrokhzād bunyānguzār-i maktab-i mo’annas-i shi’r-i fārsī’ [Farrokhzad, Founder of the Feminine school in Persian Po-

etry],” *Ferdowsi*, no. 950 (February 16, 1970): 20. My own translation.

⁷³Nader Naderpour, “‘Furūgh va zabān-i zanānah’ [Forugh and Feminine Language].” *Ferdowsi*, no. 28 (February 17, 1974): 30. My own translation.

⁷⁴See Small Media report on publishing in the Islamic Republic, “Writer’s block,” 29, small-media.org.uk/writersblock/file/Writer%27s-Block.pdf.

(b.1976) and Sara Mohammadi Ardehali (b.1976)⁷⁵ – to gain a better sense of these difficulties as well as to find out their own perspectives on Farrokhzad’s influence on their work. Writing since the 1990s, there is over a thirty-year gap between the output of Farrokhzad and these poets, and yet her impact on their poetic practice and philosophy is tangible, highlighting her continued canonical importance. Moussavi and Ardehali’s relationship with Farrokhzad struck me as all the more interesting and important given they are of a similar age to that of Farrokhzad in her poetic career, and could plausibly be described as “emergent Persian women” of the twenty-first century.

It must first be noted that the process and possibilities of poetic production in Iran have changed considerably since the 1979 revolution. Whilst like Farrokhzad and her contemporaries, who could not criticise the government openly in their work, today’s writers must also carefully negotiate topics deemed ‘unislamic’ by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance. With this comes a strong moralising element, inevitably felt more heavily by women writers. Consequently, poetry containing sexual imagery or allusions is rarely published. The censor’s demands often seem arbitrarily picky and lacking in literary sensitivity, a point to which Moussavi’s experiences attest. In a recent interview, Moussavi told me how for her first officially published volume, *Pāberahneh Tā Sobh* [Barefoot ‘til Morning], the censor required a total of seventeen adjustments – mainly changes to words and phrases, but some poems having to be completely removed.⁷⁶ One example Moussavi recalls was having to remove an innocuous use of the word ‘*sīnahband*’ [bra], which was regarded as too erotic, replacing it with ‘*dāman-i guldār*’ [flowery skirt] in the poem ‘*Furūdghah*’ [Airport]. Her next collection was approved without any necessary changes, although following its second print-run, the books were confiscated on the second day of the annual Tehran Book Fair by representatives from the Ministry. A few months later, the books were once again approved for public consumption. Moussavi waited five years hoping to gain permission to publish her most recent collection in Iran; unsuccessful, she instead published in Australia. The social

⁷⁵Granaz Moussavi’s works include poetry: *Khatt khatti rū-yi shab* [Sketching on the Night] (1997), *Pābirahnah tā subh* [Barefoot Till Morning] (2000), *Āvāz ‘hā-yi zan-i bī-ijāzah* [Songs of a Forbidden Woman] (2003), ‘*Bāzmāndigān-i sabr*’ or ‘*Les Rescapés De La Patience*’ [The Survivors of Patience] (2006), *Hāfizah-yi ghirmiz* [Red Memory] (2011); Film: ‘*Tehrān-i man, harāj*’ [My Teh-

ran for Sale] (2009). Sara Mohammadi Ardehali’s works include poetry: *Rubāh-i sfīdī kih ‘āshiq-i mūsīqī būd* [A White Fox who was in Love with Music] (2008), *Barāyi sang ‘hā* [For the Stones] (2011), *Biḡānah mikhandad* [The Stranger Laughs] (2013), *Gul-i surkh ‘ī dar zad* [A Rose Knocked] (2015).

⁷⁶Interview conducted with Moussavi on 17 March 2015.

taboos of Farrokhzad's era have thus given way to the strict, moral guidelines of the state as the primary stimulus for pre-emptive self-censorship, with the result that poetic exploration of sexual or sensual tropes is not merely frowned upon, but legislated against.

During my interview with Moussavi, she recalled an anecdote from very early on in her career that reveals something of both Farrokhzad's formative influence on her poetry and the cultural establishment's distaste for the pre-revolutionary poet. In 1994, Moussavi was invited – to her surprise – to participate in a state-run poetry event to celebrate Women's Day, along with many other women poets from around the country, at the University of Zahedan in southeast Iran. During the course of the various lectures, seminars and recitals, Moussavi recalls feeling increasingly out of place:

All of the poems had very prescribed [*sifārishī*] contents...and after a while I realized that nobody had mentioned Forugh's name once! Not one person mentioned this influential, ground-breaking poet. ... So when I went up to read my poems, I said: "I'm dedicating my first poem to Forugh Farrokhzad, due to the fact that it is Women's Day and I'm very amazed that nobody has mentioned her name so far, and I think that it's appropriate to mention her here."

When I finished my recital, there was a terrible silence in the lecture hall. A few people calmly clapped, but everyone was looking at me angrily.

After returning to our hotel room that night, there was a strong banging on the door around 10pm. I opened the door and a few women [officials] came into the room and it's unbelievable, I still don't believe it, one of the women came towards me and gave me a hard slap in the face. She said "Are you writing your poetry for a prostitute?" And then they kicked us out of the hotel.⁷⁷

Through this act of defiance – surely knowing that mention of Farrokhzad would be provocative – it seems Moussavi sought to channel something of Farrokhzad's troublemaking spirit. Like Moussavi, Ardehali aligns herself with Farrokhzad's counter-cultural reputation, and even welcomes (perhaps aspirationally) a comparison between their lives, telling me in a recent interview:

⁷⁷Interview conducted with Moussavi on 17 March 2015. My translation from Persian.

Forugh – because of extremists, because she spoke about her feelings, and about love – was rejected by society, she had a hard life, and people cursed her. So when I started writing seriously, I had to ask myself – Sara, if you also want to write honestly and sincerely, society will reject you – do you want to do this or not? And I decided that yes, I wanted to. So in this way, in terms of a [woman] poet’s position in society, Forugh spoke to me. Her biography, her life spoke to me.⁷⁸

It would seem that, for Ardehali as much as Moussavi, to be a good woman poet one must embody a certain disruptive female character, à la Farrokhzad. This outlook confirms that Farrokhzad’s exemplary standing – and therefore her canonicity – is to some extent political. However, it is not just these poets’ attitude to being a poet that owes a debt to Farrokhzad, but also their poetic technique itself. That is to say, her canonicity is also aesthetically underpinned. A brief examination of some of Ardehali’s poems will begin to demonstrate this point.

Ardehali’s poems tend to be short and written in simple language, replete with personal reflections on life in Tehran for a young Iranian woman. Unsurprisingly, young Iranian women constitute her principal readership.⁷⁹ Written in free verse, her poetry is often formally experimental, imbued with twenty-first century terminology and even occasional words and phrases in English. Whilst her thematic concerns are diverse, a consistently candid presentation of a woman’s perspective and feelings, as well as her use of imagery from the natural world, demonstrate a certain engagement and resonance with Farrokhzad’s aesthetic legacy.

In the poem “Asīr” [Captive], from Ardehali’s first collection, one can observe something reminiscent of Farrokhzad’s typical dynamic between confinement, frustration, and moments of passion. It reads:

I don’t understand this world
This building is very tall
So I won’t commit the rooms to memory

The stairs are endless
I have no business here,
Nothing,

⁷⁸Interview conducted with Ardehali on 15 December 2014. My translation from Persian.

⁷⁹Conveyed to me in an interview I conducted

with Ardehali on 15 December, 2014 in Tehran. She was confident of this, based on demographic statistics of visitors to her website.

Except
Leaving behind
The taste of a kiss
In the stairwell⁸⁰

The poem's title suggests a sense of imprisonment⁸¹ – both physically within the city's seemingly interminable high-rise architecture, and emotionally, having to steal an unsanctioned moment of passion in an empty stairwell beyond society's gaze. The idiosyncratic sanctuary of unused stairwells situates the episode in modern-day Tehran, where massive, residential tower blocks are now increasingly pervasive, and apartments are almost exclusively accessed by lifts. 'Asīr' is immediately evocative of Farrokhzad's first collection of the same name, and echoes her recurring portrayals of entrapment, such as in 'Asīr' and 'Jum'ah' [Friday] (in which she describes being trapped at home as a child on a "Friday of submission" in a "house of loneliness")⁸², and clandestine, fleeting love moments, such as in 'Būṣah' [Kiss] or 'Gunāh' [Sin] (although Ardehali's love moments are necessarily less erotic). 'Juft' [Couple] is a poem in which Farrokhzad demonstrates a similar tension between isolation and romantic connection:

Night falls
and after night, darkness
and after darkness
eyes
hands
and breathing, breathing, breathing...
and the sound of water
that flows from the tap drop by drop by drop

Afterwards two red sparks
of two cigarettes
the tick-tock of the clock
and two hearts
and two solitudes⁸³

⁸⁰Sara Mohammadi Ardehali, *Rubāh-i sifidī kih 'āshiq-i mūsīqī būd* [*A White Fox who was in Love with Music*], 1st ed. (Tehran: Āhang-i Dīgar, 2008), 59. All quoted poetry is my own translation; the original Persian is available in the Appendix.

⁸¹Milani has suggested that "physical confine-

ment" has been the central concern in the lives of Iranian women over the past sixteen decades, and "the most recurring theme of their writing." Milani, *Veils and Words*, 8.

⁸²Forugh Farrokhzad, *Tavalludī Dīgar* [*Another Birth*]. 4th ed. (Tehran: Morvārid, 1969), 69.

⁸³Farrokhzad, *Tavalludī Dīgar*, 51.

Ardehali clearly employs the same laconic style in her poem to the same end as Farrokhzad – leaving most details of the romantic liaison unsaid, thereby defiantly enhancing the sense of implied transgression.

The stifling potential of domestic spaces and routines is another conceit shared by the two poets. Ardehali's 'Shabīkhūn' [Night Ambush] is an ironic depiction of banal domesticity:

Seven times
I wash
The glasses and
The plates and
The pots
How exciting this night is.⁸⁴

This six line poem captures the same embittered spirit of Farrokhzad's 'Arūsak-i Kūkt' [Wind-up Doll], in which Farrokhzad lists the mundane, unfulfilling activities and expectations of a house wife ("For long hours... one can stare at the smoke of a cigarette/one can stare at the shape of a cup/one can stare at a colourless flower on the carpet") before ending with a similarly sarcastic declaration: "'Oh, I am so lucky.'" ⁸⁵

However, unlike Farrokhzad, the presence of the state in Ardehali's poems is often pronounced and antagonistic. This is frequently conveyed through the theme of censorship, such as in the poem 'Dūstit Dāram' [I Love You]:

Your poems were printed
Poems that I had dreamt about

Your poems got permission to be printed
They reckoned those three dots
Were the footprints of Sheikh Shahāb ad-Din Suhrawardi

My poems were rejected
They said the shoulders of my poetry
Have a manly scent
They told me to remove "your child"
And "the pulsations of my body" too

⁸⁴Sara Mohammadi Ardehali, *Barāyi sang'ha* (2011), 30.
[For the Stones], 1st ed. (Tehran: Cheshmeh,

⁸⁵Forugh Farrokhzad, *Tavalludī Dīgar*, 75.

Any book that is published now
 I guess
 Someone
 Someplace
 Has become a ‘...’⁸⁶

Assigning the poem a title incongruous with the content immediately notifies the reader of the censor’s crude hand, whose redactions are exposed as inconsistent: if “the pulsations of my body” were previously prohibited, why are they allowed here? Similarly absurd, what possibly justifies censoring a child? Or more fundamentally, how is it that the censor permits a poem so clearly about censorship? Ardehali mocks this haphazard judgment though her suggestion that the “three dots” inserted by the censors to replace supposedly problematic words or phrases, to them absurdly represent “the footprints of Sheikh Shahāb ad-Din Suhrawardi”, a revered twelfth-century Islamic scholar. Such a heavy-handed impingement on the transmission of a (female) voice from the private to the public sphere, filtered through a (theoretically) Islamic moral paradigm, is again indicative of the new nuances of control in the era of the Islamic Republic. Faced with such violations of autonomy, Ardehali’s struggle for authentic intimacy recalls Farrokhzad’s frustrated longing for union, albeit prompted more by governmental than cultural reasons. This point is expressed eloquently in the short poem, ‘Shi’r-i muntashir nashudah’ [Unpublished Poetry]:

They can’t read
 My hand

 My hands
 Are your unpublished poetry.⁸⁷

The denial of intimacy is perhaps one reason why a sense of loneliness also permeates much of Ardehali’s work. Her first collection features two poems with the word ‘tanhā-ī’ [solitude] in their titles,⁸⁸ and it appears again in her second collection:

The only lake in which I’ll become naked
 Is solitude
 There we become the body
 I sing songs whose words I don’t understand

⁸⁶Ardehali, *Rubāh-i sifidī kih ‘āshiq-i mūsīqī būd*, 85-86.

⁸⁷Ardehali, *Barāyi sang-hā*, 97.

⁸⁸Ardehali, *Rubāh-i sifidī kih ‘āshiq-i mūsīqī būd*: *Tanhā-ī* [Solitude], 34; and ‘*Sad sāl-i tanhā-ī*’ [One Hundred Years of Solitude], 95.

Solitude
And that restless stag
With twisted antlers
Which slowly slowly sets off at sunset
He lifts up his head
His powerful sense of smell selects his path
His antlers
Push aside dry branches and virgin thickets

Solitude
And awakening the water's reflection in the large and plant-eating eyes of
the stag
Perhaps forests far off forests
Centuries far off centuries

Solitude
And singing a song
A song which kept up
A wild stag
With twisted antlers
In a far off forest⁸⁹

The opening image evokes Shirin's nude bathing in Nizami's famous tale of Khosrow and Shirin, an image also recalled by Farrokhzad in 'Ābtanī' [Bathing]:

I became naked in that pleasing air
To wash my body in the water of the spring⁹⁰

In engaging with the familiar motif, Ardehali establishes a romantic, even erotic scenario; the image of the potent, untamed stag, following nothing but his senses, pushing aside "dry branches and virgin thickets", metaphorically alludes to a sensuous, passion-filled lover. Farrokhzad's eroticism is equally metaphorical:

I pressed my body against the soft, new grass
Just like a woman sleeping on top of her beloved
I gave myself up completely to the spring's arms⁹¹

⁸⁹Ardehali, *Rubāh-i sifidī kih 'āshiq-i mūsīqī* 55.
būd, 98-99.

⁹¹Farrokhzad, *Divār*, 56.

⁹⁰Farrokhzad, *Divār [Wall]* (Tehran: Morvārid),

For both poets, then, nature not only functions as a sort of refuge for their speakers, but also as a vehicle to explore desires frustrated or eschewed by Iranian society. At odds with the prescribed values of the dominant culture, an ensuing sense of loneliness engulfs each of them. Farrokhzad memorably expresses this notion in one of her later poems:

And this is
I a solitary woman
at the threshold of a cold season
at the beginning of understanding
the polluted existence of the earth⁹²

On the one hand troubling, on the other hand liberating, Ardehali's speaker similarly asserts that it is only in "solitude" that she will become naked. Thus, both poets utilise the painful yet nurturing space offered by isolation to discover and preserve something obscured and eroded in the company of others: their authentic, uncovered selves.

Conclusions

Understanding canon formation in any literary context asks scholarship not simply to extol the already well-documented virtues of celebrated authors, but investigate how and why these authors have successfully entered into cultural memory and achieved their exemplary status. This is not to diminish the insight or craftsmanship of canonical figures, but rather to recognise that artistic merit is not the sole determinant of literary survival, when factors as diverse as economics, ethnicity, religion, and gender have so evidently affected an author's access to the literary marketplace and their subsequent evaluation and reproduction throughout history. The natural response to this line of inquiry is initiating efforts to write into literary history those figures who have been unduly excluded. Such considerations have been few and far between in Persian literary historiography.

The case of Forugh Farrokhzad interestingly illustrates some of the dominant factors at play in the canonisation processes of the last fifty years, particularly how gender discrimination has prejudiced attitudes towards her importance. The politically tumultuous events throughout the Persian-speaking world over the past half-century have only exacerbated this problem, with Farrokhzad commonly appropriated as a weapon in the battle over conflicting narratives of womanhood and modernity.

⁹²Forugh Farrokhzad, *Imān biyārvarīm bih* [Let Us Believe in the Beginning of the Cold Season], (Tehran: Morvārid, 1974), 37.

The testimonies of Granaz Moussavi and Sara Mohammadi Ardehali clearly attest to the fact that Farrokhzad's canonical importance is one that blends the memory of Forugh the poet with that of Forugh the iconoclast. That Farrokhzad's perceived rebelliousness has such symbolic importance to these writers is hardly surprising given the long, politicised history of critics sensationalising this characteristic as either her greatest virtue or greatest vice. Nevertheless, the intertextual relationship between the work of Farrokhzad and that of many post-revolutionary women writers, as evidenced above in the case of Ardehali's poetry, goes some way in demonstrating the powerful aesthetic legacy she has also bequeathed to subsequent generations.

This is an often overlooked facet of Farrokhzad's deserved place in the canon, which is in no small part due to the reductive critical engagement she and other women writers have historically received. The candour, wit, and tensions between domestic settings and images from the natural world found in Farrokhzad's poetry are just some elements of the poetic language inherited and employed by her successors. It therefore behoves literary scholars to explore and interrogate the debt owed to Farrokhzad's poetry in the work of other leading Persian-language women poets, poets such as Moussavi, Pegah Ahmadi, Fatemeh Shams, Bahareh Rezaee, and others. This is for two principal reasons: not only with the aforementioned motive of expanding Farrokhzad's canonicity beyond being dependent on her utility as a political prop, but also to overcome the well-documented phenomenon of "transient female literary fame" which threatens to afflict her and her successors alike.

Appendix

Extracts of poetry quoted and translated

Sara Mohammadi Ardehali, "Asīr," *Rubāh-i sifīdī kih 'āshiq-i mūsīqī būd* [*A White Fox who was in Love with Music*], 1st ed. (Tehran: Āhang-e Digar, 2008), 59.

سر از این دنیا در نمی‌آورم
این ساختمان خیلی بلند است
به خاطر نمی‌سپارم اتاق‌ها را

پله‌ها تمام نمی‌شوند
هیچ کاری ندارم اینجا
هیچ

جز
باقی گذاشتن
طعم یک بوسه
در پاگردی

Ardehali, "Shabīkhūn," *Barāyi sang 'hā* [For the Stones], 1st ed. (Tehran: Cheshmeh, 2011), 30.

هفت بار
می‌شویم
لیوان‌ها و
بشقاب‌ها و
قابلمه‌ها را
چقدر جان دارد این شب

Ardehali, "Dustit dāram," *Rubāh-i sifīdī kih 'āshiq-i mūsīqī būd*, (2008), 85-86.

شعرهای شما چاپ شدند
شعرهایی که خواب دیده بودم
شعرهای شما اجازه‌ی چاپ گرفتند
آن‌ها خیال کردند آن سه نقطه‌ها
جای پای شیخ شهاب‌الدین سهروردی است
شعرهای من برگشت خوردند
گفتند شانه‌های شعرم
بوی عطر مردانه می‌دهند
گفتند "کودک تو" را حذف کنم
"تپش‌های تنم" را نیز
هر کتابی حالا چاپ شود
من حدس می‌زنم
کسی
جایی
سه نقطه شده است

Ardehali, “Shi’r-i muntashir nashudah,” *Barāyi sang’hā* [For the Stones], (2011), 97.

دستم را
نمی‌توانند بخوانند

دست‌های من
شعر منتشر نشده‌ی توست

Ardehali, “Tanhā-ī” *Barāyi sang’hā* [For the Stones], (2011), 98-99.

تنها برکه‌ای که در آن برهنه می‌شوم
تنهایی‌ست
آنجا تن می‌شویم
آوازهایی می‌خوانم که واژه‌هاشان را نمی‌دانم

تنهایی
و آن گوزن ناآرام
با شاخ‌های پیچ‌خورده
که آهسته آهسته در غروب راه می‌افتد
سر بالا می‌گیرد
شامه‌ی قوی‌اش مسیری بر می‌گیرد
شاخ‌هایش
شاخه‌های خشک و باکره‌ی بیشه را کنار می‌زند

تنهایی
و بیدار کردن انعکاس آب در چشمان درشت و گیاه‌خوار گوزن
شاید جنگل‌ها جنگل دور
قرن‌ها قرن فاصله

تنهایی
و خواندن آواز
آوازی که
گوزنی وحشی
با شاخ‌های پیچ‌خورده را

در بیشه‌ای دور
بیخواب کرده

Forugh Farrokhzad, "Jum'ah," *Tavalludī Dīgar [Another Birth]*. 4th ed. (Tehran: Morvārid, 1969), 69.

جمعه ساکت
جمعه متروک
جمعه چون کوچه‌های کهنه، غم‌انگیز
جمعه اندیشه‌های تنبل بیمار
جمعه خمیازه‌های مودی کشدار
جمعه بی‌انتظار
جمعه تسلیم

خانه خالی
خانه دلگیر
خانه در بسته بر هجوم جوانی
خانه تاریکی و تصور خورشید
خانه تنهایی و تفل و تردید
خانه پرده، کتاب، گنج، تصاویر

Farrokhzad, "Juft," *Tavalludī Dīgar [Another Birth]* (1969), 51.

شب می‌آید
و پس از شب، تاریکی
پس از تاریکی
چشم‌ها
دست‌ها
و نفس‌ها و نفس‌ها و نفس‌ها ...
و صدای آب
که فرو می‌ریزد قطره قطره از شیر
بعد دو
نقطه سرخ

از دو سیگار روشن
تیک تاک ساعت
و دو قلب
و دو تنهایی

Farrokhzad, "Arūsak-i kūkī," *Tavalludī Dīgar [Another Birth]* (1969), 75..

می توان ساعات طولانی
با نگاهی چون نگاه مردگان ثابت
خیره شد در دود یک سیگار
خیره شد در شکل یک فنجان
در گلی بی رنگ بر قالی
[...]

آه من بسیار خوشبختم

Farrokhzad, "Ābtanī," *Divār [Wall]*. (Tehran: Morvārid, 1956), 55-56.

لخت شدم تا در آن هوای دل انگیز
پیکر خود را به آب چشمه بشویم
[...]

تن به علفهای نرم و تازه فشردم
همچو زنی کاو غنوده در بر معشوق
یکسره خود را به دست چشمه سپردم

Farrokhzad, "Imān biyārvarīm bih āghāz-i fasl-i sard," *Imān biyārvarīm bih āghāz-i fasl-i sard [Let Us Believe in the Beginning of the Cold Season]*, (Tehran: Morvārid, 1974), 37.

و این منم
زنی تنها
در آستانه فصلی سرد
در ابتدای درک
هستی آلوده‌ی زمین