Why the Fighting Cock?
The Significance of the Imagery of the *Khorus Jangi* and its Manifesto "The Slaughterer of the Nightingale"

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Abstract

In this essay I seek to explore the icon of the Fighting Cock movement (*Khorus Jangi*) and of its Manifesto, "The Slaughterer of the Nightingale," in order to consider its implications and imagistic allusions. In outlining the background of the *Khorus Jangi* and associated movements, I discuss the imagery of the *khorus* both in ancient Iran and globally, and in the context of the ideology of the *Khorus Jangi*. The Manifesto is discussed and analyzed and it is seen that the *khorus* prefigured the Manifesto, and heralded the appearance of a new movement in *painting*, as distinct from what had already happened in surrealist and modernist circles in *writing*. The manifestation of surrealist and modernist ideology in imagery seems to have been a response to this wake-up call of the *Khorus Jangi*.

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Introduction

European surrealist influences first impacted on Iran through literary works, primarily through the writings of Sadegh Hedayat (1903-1951). Surrealist ideas and techniques gradually came from literature to visual media during the 1940s and '50s. This happened mainly through the activities of the *Khorus Jangi* (lit. "Fighting Cock"), which was the name given to a rebellious surrealist and avant-garde group of writers and artists, and also to the magazine in which they published their critical and creative works. Each issue of the magazine was emblazoned with the image of the *Khorus Jangi* created by Jalil Ziapour. One point of the present essay is to reflect on the symbolic importance of this image, and indeed the title of the movement. As a magazine, *Khorus Jangi* went through two series before it finally ceased activity. There were five issues in the first series (hereafter *Khorus Jangi* 1) published in 1950: each issue had an essay on painting, on surrealism and other styles. There was a hiatus when the magazine's production was stopped by Government pressure. The second series (hereafter *Khorus Jangi* 2) contains a number of articles about the new art, and most importantly the Manifesto known as *Sall*ākh-*e Bolbol,* "The Slaughterer of the Nightingale."[1] The vigorous flourishing of the *Khorus Jangi* at the beginning of the 1950s was therefore short-lived, but it contributed significantly to the manifestation of surrealism in visual form that had previously been in gestation for a period of several decades in literary form, in the novel and in poetry. First however, it is necessary to consider one of the main stimuli for the formation of the *Khorus Jangi*, namely the condition of the artistic establishment in Iran and the reactionary ideology promulgated in the visual arts by the painter and teacher Kamal-al-Molk.

The Background: Kamal-al-Molk as a Stimulus for the Khorus Jangi

Whereas the European art tradition had been transformed over the centuries in a process whereby the *individual* artist emerged as the focus of artistic identity and fount of creativity, this was not the case in pre-modern Iran. Iranian artists of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had inherited nothing equivalent to the European legacy of developments in artistic styles, with their various systems of codifying visual language in symbols. As a result, such Iranian artists were fascinated by the European *past* and found themselves quite unattracted to the *contemporary* art of Europe. The art critic Karim Emami writes about the stasis of Iranian art in the early twentieth century in stark terms:

[1]See also the recent article by Bavand Behpoor, comparing the *Sallākh-e Bolbol* manifesto with the Manifesto of the Azad Art Group for the 1976 exhibition Volume and Enviroment II, "Introduction to 'The Nightingale's Butcher' and 'Volume and Environment II'", *ARTMargins* 3.2 (June 2014), 118–128.

> All through the twenties, thirties, and even forties, while in Europe cubists, surrealists, expressionists, abstractionists, etc. changed places at the vanguard of modernism, in Iran the accepted types of 'modern' painting were mostly academic renderings, in oils or water colors, of Iranian subject matter: family gatherings, street scenes, landscapes, and floral still lifes.[2]

When modernity brought figurative, representational art into the Iranian milieu, Iranian artists saw an opportunity to embrace the representation of nature and the world, instead of idealizing it or escaping from it.[3] Western techniques and rules of perspective, anatomy, light and shadow, and other ways of representing three-dimensionality, were most fascinating to them. For this reason, from the very beginning of modernization, Iranian artists in the nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries were more attracted to the naturalistic styles of eras long past, rather than to the more abstract, *e.g.* impressionist and symbolist, art of contemporary Europe. The most eminent of such naturalistic painters was Mohammad Ghaffari, known as Kamal-al-Molk (1852-1940), the last court painter of the Qajar dynasty: it was he who took Iranian art to the brink of a modern style. He was the first artist in Iran to change Iranian art radically, and though he himself was not a modern artist, he is said to have been the instigator of modern Iranian art.[4] Kamal-al-Molk's distinctiveness was that he completely detached himself from Iranian traditional techniques of painting and even, apparently, from conventional ways of *seeing* his surroundings. He was fundamentally influenced by European painting, in a way that cannot be found in the paintings of other artists of that period.[5] In his naturalistic paintings, he developed a style of almost photographic realism, yet one which does not slavishly submit to the rules of perspective. The technique of representing reality quasi-photographically was happening for the first time in Iran, allowing artists a high degree of detail in visual documentation in their paintings (albeit photography was already practiced in Iran at the time).[6] Most of his other work depicts scenes from ordinary life in Iran, in portrait, still-life and landscape painting.[7]

[2]Karim Emami, "Art in Iran, XI: post-Qajar (painting)," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater, vol. 2 (1986), 641. This article is now available, like all *Encyclopaedia Iranica* articles, in updated online format at www.iranicaonline.org/, (accessed July 2016).

[3]Fereshteh Daftari, "Another Modernism: An Iranian Perspective," in *Picturing Iran: Art, Society and Revolution*, eds. Shiva Balaghi and Lynn Gumpert (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002), 39-48.

[4]Emami, "Art in Iran, XI: post-Qajar (painting),"in Yarshater, 640.

[5]According to Ru'in Pakbaz, "Contemporary Art of Iran," *Tavoos Quarterly* 1 (1999), 168.

[6]See Iraj Afshar, "Some Remarks on the Early History of Photography in Iran," in *Qajar Iran: Political, Social, and Cultural Change, 1800-1925*, eds. Edmund Bosworth and Carole Hillenbrand (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 1983), 261-90.

[7]See Hasan-Ali Vaziri, *Kamal al-Molk* (Tehran: Hirmand, 1987).

Apart from his paintings, there is another aspect of Kamal-al-Molk's legacy, namely his work as a teacher. The way he appreciated and wrote about Western art has profoundly affected popular Iranian artistic taste as he passed his understanding and experience on to later generations by establishing Iran's first academy of fine arts in 1911. This was the School of Applied Arts and Crafts in Tehran, *Madrese-ye sanāye'-e mostazrafe,* of which he was Director until his retirement in 1928. According to the art historian Ru'in Pakbaz, this event marked the beginning of contemporary and modern Iranian art.[8] In this period, when mimicking Western culture was so fashionable, Kamal-al-Molk did so in terms of visual art by importing Western ways of seeing and portraying reality and by distancing himself from the non-realistic ways of his ancestors. However, his paintings had more of his own imaginative originality and less of naturalistic representation than is ordinarily assumed.[9] Although Iranian artists and critics have blamed Kamal-al-Molk for his anachronistic preference for Western art, Iranian art remains indebted to him for his blending of Iranian and Western styles and ways of seeing in his work and teaching. It is in such an environment that Kamal-al-Molk's art is considered by Western critics to be an imitation, and not even a *good* imitation, of Western art.[10] Iranian critics blame Kamal-al-Molk for the failure of Iranian art to catch up with that of the West, as they focus on his preference for naturalism rather than impressionism.[11] Yet, even after Kamal-al-Molk's retirement from teaching at the School of Applied Arts and Crafts in 1927, his influence was continued by his students and followers, and his teaching method in painting and sculpture continued into the 1940s, and is still practiced today by some artists. In the 1940s important events on the international and national scene began to change the direction of Iranian art from that intended by Kamal-al-Molk. One of the matters of great contention of the modernists, which was rehearsed in the pages of the magazine *Khorus Jangi*, was that Kamal-al-Molk and his ilk were holding Iranian artists back in a dead art, and they opposed him to the last.[12]

The Fighting Cock Art Society

The *Anjoman-e Honari-ye Khorus Jangi* ("Fighting Cock Art Society"), to give it its full name, can be compared, if not fully equated, with the surrealist or avant-garde

[8]See Pakbaz, "Contemporary Art of Iran", 168.
[9]Daftari, "Another Modernism", 43.
[10]See Kishwar Rizvi, "Arthur Upham Pope and the Discourse on Persian Art," *Muqarnas* 24 (2007), 55.
[11]See Daftari, 43.
[12]SSee *e.g.* Shahin Saber-Tehrani, ed., *The Collection of Art Historical Speeches of the Late Master Jalil Ziapour: The Renaissance of Art (Majmo'e sokhanrāni-hā-ye honari-tahqiqi zendeh-yād ostād Jalil Ziāpur (ronesāns-e honar)* (Tehran: TMoCA and Eslimi, 2003). See also Layla D. Diba, "Qajar Photography and Its Relationship to Iranian Art: A Reassessement," *History of Photography* 37, no.1 (2013), 59; Fereshteh Daftari and Layla S. Diba, eds., *Iran Modern* (New York: Asia Society, 2013), 29.

movements of Europe. Like the Parisian avant-garde, the *Khorus Jangi* had several journals (though all had brief lives), but few available spaces for their meetings and for exhibiting their work. They wrote a manifesto and had connections with European art academies and groups of artists, but the cultural context and underlying art history are fundamentally different. The point of comparison is not to legitimize the Iranian group nor to regard the Parisian avant-garde as a prototype and exemplar for the Iranian. Partha Mitter has disputed the very legitimacy of notions such as the "originary" discourse of "the center" and the marginalized developments of "the periphery." Mitter's argument is that the Western avant-garde, despite its radical agenda, "failed to take into account either the progressive heterogenization of art or the richness and creativity of art practices in the periphery."[13] This failure, he also writes, "stem[s]from the monolithic linear narrative of an art history that does not allow for difference, in part a reflection of the unequal power relations between center and periphery."[14]

In Iran the *Khorus Jangi* has also been known as the *sourre'ālist-hā-ye Khorus Jangi,* "Fighting Cock Surrealists"[15]; such is the identification put upon this short-lived but influential art movement in modern Iranian history.[16] Something unique happened in the two years of its existence that has even weathered the Islamic Revolution, as it continues to be remembered by scholars, literary and art historians and artists in Iran today: for the first time, artists from different disciplines worked together as a group. This group of intellectuals strove to put their concerns into action, whereas previously artists and writers had acted individually and independently, or had depended on patronage by the aristocracy for their creative activity. The rationale for such a new group was, as Shiva Balaghi says, that "increasingly the role of the artist was fused with that of the poet, the long-standing conscience of Iranian society."[17] Such a fusion took place at the beginning of the 1950s in Iran in the collaboration between poets, painters, writers and critics, in the artists' society and magazine, both named *Khorus Jangi*.

[13]Partha Mitter, "Interventions: Decentering Modernism: Art History and Avant-garde Art from the Periphery," *Art Bulletin* 90.4 (December 2008), 544. He argues for the need to shift the center of gravity from "the originary discourse" to "a more heterogeneous definition of global modernism, incorporating the changes that have taken place in the twentieth century."

[14]Mitter, "Interventions." See also Partha Mitter, *The Triumph of Modernism: India's Artists and the Avant-garde 1922–1947* (London: Reaktion Books, 2007), 8-12.

[15]See Hassan Mir-Abedini, *A Hundred Years of Story Writing in Iran* (*Sad sāl dāstān nevisi*), vol. 1 (Tehran: Cheshmeh, 1998), 192.

[16]See Golrokh Boroumandi, "Khorus Jangi and the Dawn of the Art of Iran" ("Khorus jangi va sahar-e honar-e irān"), *Tandis* 162 (Ābān 1388 [November 2009]), 12.

[17]Shiva Balaghi, , in Balaghi and Gumpert, 31.

The title *Khorus Jangi*, "Fighting Cock" had been suggested by Gholamhossein Gharib: in the second issue Nima Yushij (1896-1960), the *éminence grise* of Persian poetry and 'Father of the New Poetry' (pedar-e she'r-e nou), contributed a poem "From the City of Morning" *(Az shahr-e Sobh)* starting with the line *qoo qoo li qoo* or a 'Cock a doodle doo'.

> Cock-a-doodle-doo crows the cock,
> from the hidden secret of the village
> down the road which is like a dried up vein.
> The blood leaps in the bodies of the dead
> it creeps up the cold wall of the dawn
> it leaks everywhere on to the plain.

In the first meeting of the group on 15 April 1949, there was discussion of the symbolic significance of the title *Khorus Jangi*, and it was said that they had chosen it for two main reasons: first, that in old Iranian literature *khorus* 'cock' is the symbol of wakefulness and is thought to be associated with Bahman, the spiritual being who is the protector of the creatures on earth, and who comes three times during the night to safeguard the universe. At dawn the cock, who is Bahman's agent, announces the arrival of Bahman and the coming of the light to the world. As to the adjective 'Fighting', Ziapour says: "So we chose a cock (a fighting one), who represents beauty and also fights for our existence, because no thought can be established without a great effort and fight."[18] The cock's ancient symbolism in Iran, overrides any latter-day, twentieth-century Freudian influence. In the Zoroastrian texts in Pahlavi, and in the Zoroastrian tradition in general, the cock is associated with the 'spiritual being' (*yazata*/*yazad*), known as Sraoša in Avestan (Srōš in Pahlavi, Soroush in modern Persian), as a *hamkār* 'collaborator' of Ahura Mazdā / Ohrmazd. According to the Zoroastrian texts the cock, *khorus*, 'is created to oppose the demons and sorcerers... collaborator of Srōš'.[19] Another text says: 'that cock they call the bird of the righteous Srōš. And when it crows, it keeps misfortune away from the creation of Ohrmazd'.[20] As Kreyenbroek says, 'the cock... raises its voice at dawn to call men to prayer and to perform their religious duties, and to save the sacred fire from attack by the demons in the last part of the night'.[21] Therefore the cock is not only a

[18]Saber-Tehrani, *Majmo'e sokhanrāni-hā,* 55.
[19]*Greater Bundahišn* 24.28; see B.T. Anklesaria, ed., trans., *Zand-Ākāsīh, Iranian or Greater Bundahišn* (Bombay, 1956).
[20]*Jawišt i Friyān* 2.25, cited in Philip G. Kreyenbroek, *Sraoša in the Zoroastrian Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 118.
[21]*Vendidād* 18.15, 22-23, cited in Kreyenbroek , *Sraoša in the Zoroastrian Tradition*, 172.

benign creature, on the side of good against evil, but also one who rouses men from their sleep to perform their proper duty. The symbolism is thus both ancient and powerful for Iranians. In Islamic symbolism the cock not only awakens Muslims for their morning prayer,[22] but also, in mystical texts, it was understood as the soul of inspiration[23]: the cock is the symbol of rude awakening. So, *Khorus Jangi*, "Fighting Cock", is an idea that has both mythological and mystical roots in Iranian tradition. An important point to observe is that for the *Khorus Jangi*, the icon was not merely a historical figure as a symbol of the cock (Soroush) awakening, *etc*., nor of the ancient sport of cock-fighting, but the actual visual figure as drawn by Ziapour. This was a combative, aggressive image, marching forward.

Fig. 1 Jalil Ziapour, Image of *Khorus Jangi* logo, 1949, Ink on paper.[24]

[22]Annemarie Schimmel, "Poetry and Calligraphy: Thoughts about their Interaction in Persian Culture," in *Highlights of Persian Art*, eds. Richard Ettinghausen and Ehsan Yarshater (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1979), 207.

[23]*E.g.* as in Rumi, *Masnavi* III.3339. Mohammad Este'lami, ed., *Masnavi-ye Ma'navi*, 7 Vols. (Tehran: Zavvar, 2000-2001).

[24]This image has been published in Daftari and Diba, *Iran Modern*; Balaghi and Gumpert, *Picturing Iran.*


L) Fig. 2 Persepolis stone griffin double protome column capital.
R) Fig. 3 *Frieze of Striding Lions*, view 2, Iran, Persepolis, Palace G, Achaemenid Period, reigns of Darius I and Xerxes, 522-465 BC, limestone - Oriental Institute Museum, University of Chicago.


L) Fig. 4 *Frieze of Griffins*, Susa, Palace of Darius, Department of Near Eastern Antiquities: Iran, Louvre.
R) Fig. 5 *Frieze of Archers*, Susa, Persian Archers at the Palace of Darius, Department of Near Eastern Antiquities: Iran, Louvre.

It is noticeable that in his proudly marching "Fighting Cock", Ziapour seems to have borrowed from the shapes, curves and lines of Achaemenian art, as for example in the gryphons, and also the lions in the friezes at Persepolis (see Figures 2, 3, 4, 5). Mouths open, as if they speak out, they stride forward looking intently to the future. The lines of the *Khorus Jangi* even reflect the spears and bows of the archers in the Persepolis friezes, and the horns on the Mesopotamian gryphon from the frieze at Susa.

How different the *Khorus Jangi* is from the static and decorative Persian calligraphic rooster of this nineteenth-century Islamic example:

On the other hand, how much closer Ziapour's image is to the modernist cockerel of Picasso.[25] Both are full of the noise of the rooster, but yet Ziapour's is devoid of

[25]I would like to record my gratitude to Professor Mohamad Tavakoli who recently mentioned to me in conversation that he had long ago been reminded of the *Khorus Jangi* when he had viewed Picasso's *A Rooster* (*Le coq*), and encouraged me to look into this subject, which has resulted in the present article.

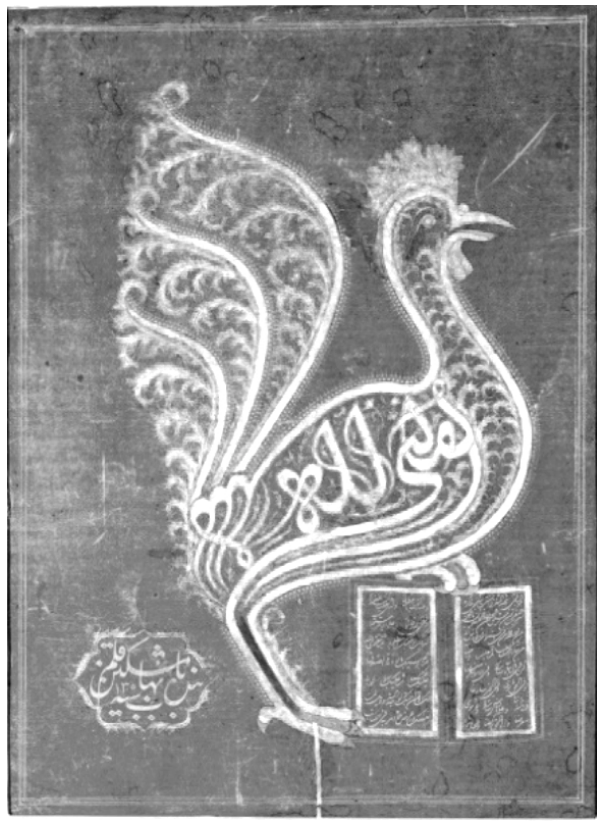

Fig. 6 Mishkin Qalam, *The Name of 'Baha'ullah' in the Form of a Rooster* (*Calligraphic Rooster*), 1887-1888, Ink, color and gold on paper, 47.94 × 35.72 cm. www.harvardartmuseums.org/art/212748.

Picasso's animal phallicism – nor does it confront the viewer in three-quarter aspect, but is in formal military profile.

Picasso had been altogether fascinated by the image of the rooster in the war-torn period of German occupation of France in the Second World War. As Gertje Utley reports:

> In the sketch for *Le Charnier*, crowing with open beak, the rooster is clearly also the messenger of dawn and resurrection, a symbol that - beyond its Christian implication - goes back to the sun bird of the Mithraic cult. Moreover, as nothing is ever one-dimensional in Picasso's work, the rooster here also occupies the role of triumphant Gallic cock. During the spring of 1945 Picasso drew a series of no less than 21 roosters, of which 3 at least boast the Croix de Lorraine … de Gaulle's Lorraine Cross, his symbol for the revival


R) Fig. 7 Pablo Picasso, *A Rooster* (*Le coq*), 1938, Charcoal on paper, 76.9 × 56.9 cm.
L) Fig. 8 Pablo Picasso, *A Rooster* (*Le coq*), 1938, Pastel on paper, 54 × 77.5 cm.

> of France. Contemporary critics acknowledged the implication and acclaimed one of Picasso's painted roosters as 'le coq de la libération' announcing the famous, much heralded 'lendemams qui chantent' ... One particularly combative example, a pastel rooster dated 29 March 1938, had been exhibited at the Salon d'Automne of 1944 and … was accompanied by this caption: 'After the Spanish bull appears the French rooster, always a symbol of vigor, of virile power, and bold action. As if it sang, with open beak and total dedication: '*Aux armes! Aux armes, encore et toujours!*'[26]

It is almost indubitable that Ziapour was affected by this combination of raw animal power and fervent patriotism, modeled on the cubist and surrealist depictions of the rooster in Picasso. Ziapour's image thus draws on something very ancient and Iranian, in the imperial iconography of a royal procession, and at the same time he reflects a modern image, and thus presents something both monumental and contemporary in its revolutionary forward momentum. The image thus predates and anticipates the verbal articulation of the Manifesto in *Khorus Jangi* 2.

[26]Gertje R. Utley, *Picasso: The Communist Years* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 60-1.

The *Khorus Jangi* presented the most organized rejection of two forms of what it saw as repressive influence, coming from opposite directions: on the one hand from the Soviet-inspired politicizing propaganda of the Tudeh party, and on the other from the reactionary and traditionalist views of those of the school of Kamal-al-Molk. Accepting the surrealist dogma that art should not be for the sake of any kind of social improvement, the *Khorus Jangi* announced: "writing, before anything else, is for soothing the inner desires of the writer, and nothing else."[27] The geographical and social space of the modern city allowed artists and writers a form in which to associate with one another at a time when there was still no official support for modern art. "Surrealism" was discussed for the first time in the first series of the *Khorus Jangi* ,[28] by Jalil Ziapour (1922-1999), who is said to have been "the standard bearer of modern art in Iran."[29] Ziapour was in fact the author of all the essays on painting in *Khorus Jangi* 1, which had an enduring influence on what artists think of as "modern", "art" and, in particular, "surrealism", in Iran. The five issues of *Khorus Jangi* 1 were moderate in size, running to between 40-60 pages.[30] Their writings were juxtaposed with the poetry of Nima Yushij who had revolutionized Iranian poetry by emancipating it from centuries of the constraints of classical meter and rhyme. The first series was terminated when the magazine was closed down after issue 5. Ziapour left *Khorus Jangi* at this point,[31] and started another magazine called *Kavir,* "The Desert". Soon this also was stopped by the government, and Ziapour went on to start yet another short-lived magazine, entitled *Panje Khorus*, "The Cock's Claw."[32]

The energy of this time seems to have been irrepressible and *Khorus Jangi* was revived for a second series in 1951,[33] by Gholamhossein Gharib and a different group of artists. After Ziapour had left the *Khorus Jangi*, he had been succeeded by the artist and poet Hushang Irani and two other important artists, the surrealist painter

[27]Gholamhossein Gharib, in *Khorus Jangi* 2 (1951), cited in Mir-Abedini, *Sad sāl dāstān nevisi,* 192.

[28]Hassan Shirvani *et al.*, *Khorus Jangi* 1, 1-5 (1950).

[29]This idea of Ziapour's being such a "standard-bearer" is not attributable to a precise original source but has been repeated in several secondary sources, e.g., *Iran* (newspaper), 3533, 5, 26 December 2006, and *Ayande-no*, 25 December 2006, and also in various online sources, for example Hamshahri, 20 February 2011, hamshahrionline.ir/details/128749. See also Ziapour's own website, ziapour.com/khoroos-jangi/.

[30]The main writers of the magazine were Hassan Shirvani (playwright), Jalil Ziapour (painter), Manouchehr Sheibani (poet), and Gholamhossein Gharib (novelist).

[31]Sheibani had already left the magazine after issue 4 in 1328/1950.

[32]Bahman Mohasses, ed., *Panje Khorus* (1953).

[33]Gholamhossien Gharib *et al.*, *Khorus Jangi* 2.1-4 (1951).

Bahman Mohassess and Sohrab Sepehri. Irani[34] transformed the *Khorus Jangi* from being just another literary magazine into a radical modernist journal. The group knew itself as the immediate successors of Hedayat, who had died in the April of 1951, in Paris:

> We are a circle, who connect the art and ideas of Hedayat to the art of tomorrow – a group that wants to redeem itself from the old, rotten limitations. So it should be confident to play its part on the path of the perfection of art.[35]

Irani was the principal author, along with Gholamhossein Gharib and Hassan Shirvani, of a controversial manifesto that was published in *KJ2*, known as *Sallākh-e Bolbol*, "Slaughterer of the Nightingale." This manifesto of 13 articles,[36] which is discussed later in this essay, was deemed to be so worthy of attention that it was printed on the back cover of all four issues of the new series.

Transition: The Project of Surrealism According to the *Khorus Jangi*

The *raison d'être* of the *Khorus Jangi* was to reject the dominant ethos of established art and literature. For this group the medium of surrealist visual art as independent of the literary was still under construction. Ziapour, as a painter, felt an obligation to write about the evolution of European artistic styles, from primitive to surrealist, *i.e.* to give a narrative coherence to the transition from ancient art to surrealist art. He did this by adding his Iranian perspective on this story, adding his own criticisms, understandings and perspectives.[37] The motto they chose, from the poem of Farrukhi Sistani, expresses the fascination with the new and the desire to break all the old rules for the sake of a marriage with an unknown future:

> The tale of Alexander turned to legend and grew old,
> Bring new words! – for in newness is another sweetness told.[38]

[34]1925-1973, Hushang Irani is famed as the enfant terrible and pioneer of the New Poetry in Iran, who is remembered as a Dadaist, avant-garde poet, and Sufi with an enthusiasm for Buddhism. After the closure of *Khorus Jangi* 2, Hushang Irani continued to write in other periodicals such as *Apadana*.

[35]Gholamhossein Gharib, in *Khorus Jangi* 2-3, cited in Mir-Abedini, *Sad sāl dāstān nevisi,* 194.

[36]The number 13, believed to be inauspicious in Iran as elsewhere, was a favorite of the numerologically aware Hedayat, and, as in the minds of his followers, signified his flouting of convention.

[37]See Javad Mojabi, *Pioneers of Contemporary Persian Painting: First Generation*, trans. Karim Emami (Tehran: Iranian Art Publishing, 1998), 12-13.

[38]*fesāne gasht o kohan shod hadis-e eskandar/ sokhan-e no ār ke no rā halāvati degar ast.*

Khorus Jangi 1 had featured the poetry of a distinguished elderly poet, Nima Yushij, who, however forward-looking he was in his ideas, belonged to the past and did not wish to offend others.[39] As the magazine progressed from series 1 to 2, it became more radical in its outlook, culminating in an angry manifesto that is worthy of the European *avant-garde* of the 1920s.

After Ziapour had returned from Paris in 1948, he had been determined to pass on what he had seen in Europe and had wanted to reform the state of art in Iran. He was in sympathy with younger artists and writers associated with the *Khorus Jangi* who wanted to change things radically. However, he had a message for young painters who had studied in Europe and returned to Iran, whether or not they were radical: he warned them not to 'sell out' to the art traditions of Europe, but to reflect on what was worth celebrating in Iranian culture. His question to them was: where is the message that you, personally, are trying to put across? His response to his question was "We should be moving to link up with world culture and we should try at the same time to preserve our identity."[40] From his own experience in Europe he believed in what he called "the universal language of painting" and he emphasized the need to reconcile the best of Iranian art with this universal language. Early twentieth-century intellectuals such as Seyyed Hassan Taqizadeh had suggested that everything should be adopted in imitation of the West, with the exception of the Persian language.[41] Here, however, Ziapour was making the case for the urgent need to preserve what was still living in Iranian visual art, *i.e.* that visual language is as essential as spoken and written language. This demonstrates the tension Ziapour sees between the need for Iranian artists to learn from the West in terms of theory and technique, and for them to apply this to develop a modern Iranian national and cultural identity through their art. Yet, he talks about the excessive influence of Western art on modern Iranian art, caused by lack of knowledge of their national tradition. Ziapour believed that Iranian art had indeed been the inspiration for some modern Western art, and that

[39]Alireza Rezaei, "A Conversation with Jalil Ziapour about the *Khorus Jangi* Movement" ("Goft-o-guyi bā Jalil Ziāpur dar zamine-ye nehzate khorus jangi"), *Rastakhiz* 625 (Khordād 1356 [June 1977]), 7.

[40]Mojabi, *Pioneers of Contemporary Persian Painting*, 12.

[41]"…the unconditional adoption and promotion of the European civilization, a total submission to Europe, cultural assimilation of habits and customs, of organization, of the sciences and the arts, of European life and its life styles as a whole, *with the sole exception of language*... Iran has to become Europeanized in appearance and in reality, body and soul, that's all." See *Kaveh* 36 (1920), cited *e.g.* by Djamshid Behnam, "The Eastern Perception of the West," in *Globalization and Civilizations*, ed. Mehdi Mozaffari (London: Routledge, 2002).

before Europeans invented those art movements, Iranian artists had, so to say, been there before them. Ziapour was quite convinced of this pre-existence of elements of traditional Persian painting being not just antecedents of, but also influences upon, later Western art techniques and stylistic devices:

> The cubist and surrealist imagery of Iranian painters in the school of miniature painting has been the best evidence for Iran's artistic legacy before the work of the Europeans began.[42]

Here Ziapour is saying that there are traces of these modern movements to be found in the art of pre-modern Iran. Although Ziapour insists that they did not have political aims, but wanted solely to enlighten people on the art of the day, he was interrogated by the government as to why he was bringing "cubism" to Iran, and he was subsequently suspected of being a communist sympathizer or Communist Party member. In fact the association between cubism and Communism was known in Iran, and was alluded to in *Panje Khorus*.[43] Ziapour's attitude was that the Government and society were merely ignorant. According to him the only groups they were fighting against were 1) the politicians who thought the art should be produced for people and 2) the naturalists and Kamal-al-Molk's pupils and fans.[44]

Ziapour wrote a number of articles for *Khorus Jangi* 1, none of which have been translated into English, all in a style of writing that is challenging even to the native speaker-translator: they are badly punctuated, idiosyncratic in spelling, old-fashioned in style, and devoid of all references. In the first issue of *Khorus Jangi* 1, Ziapour, who was known as a cubist painter, wrote about cubism, but although he did so from an avowedly surrealist point of view, he is not uncritical of it:

> From the surrealist point of view cubism included all the conventions of the old movements, with a few exceptions… …With all its restrictions, the innovations

[42]Jalil Ziapour, "*Goft-o-gu bā khorus jangi,*" *Ferdowsi* (Khordād 1346 [June 1967]), goo.gl/TQDQjf; also in Saber-Tehrani, *Majmo'e sokhanrāni-hā,* 274-277.

[43]See Ziapour, "*Goft-o-gu bā khorus jangi*". Picasso's involvement with communism was mentioned in an article by Helen Turner, "Picasso Under Criticism," trans. Sohrab Sepehri, in *Panje Khorus*, ed. Bahman Mohassess (30 April 1953), 6. It is true that the only major artist who was influenced by surrealism in this period was Bahman Mohassess (and also his cousin Ardeshir Mohassess) but, as I have argued in the latter chapters of my PhD thesis, a considerable number of artists began to display surrealist tendencies, in different ways, using surrealist styles and incorporating surrealist techniques in the period after the Iranian Revolution.

[44]See Jalil Ziapour, "The Old Painters of Iran and their Survivors" ("Naqqāshi-e qadim-e irān va bāzmāndegāneshān*"*), *Tandis* 65 (6 Dey 1384 [27 December 2005]), 6.

> that cubism brought into existence were more in accord with the time and represented the spirit of its artists better than any other movement could express.[45]

In an article in the second issue of *Khorus Jangi* 1, Ziapour reflects on how art could be improved in Iran, and mildly chastises the self-excusing attitude of those who complain about conditions for the artist in Iran:

> These inappropriate complaints arise mainly because... they are unaware that the favorable artistic environment has to be prepared by the artist himself and not by [other] people.[46]

In later articles,[47] he criticizes old-fashioned attitudes and backward-looking views, impressionism and other, older styles, yet at the same time he stresses the value of Iran's artistic traditions. In issue 5 of *Khorus Jangi* 1, immediately after a poem by Nima Yushij, in his longest and most controversial article, Ziapour alludes to surrealism and the surrealists. Unfortunately, because of his lack of referencing, it is not clear to what period of surrealism in Europe he is referring:

> Surrealism, after a series of weak manifestations that happened in unfortunate times, could not establish a firm foundation. But occasional manifestations sowed their seeds so that it could have relatively more success in its later manifestation.[48]

Ziapour was influenced by his French painting teacher, André Lhote, who had been critical of the surrealists and had admired the artists of the previous era. Lhote believed that the better survival of artistic influences of Van Gogh and his era would have much improved and benefitted the new art, surrealism or anything else. Ziapour quotes Lhote as saying that the surrealist paintings are pleasing only to the few, not to the many, are full of falsehood and melancholy, and "speak mostly about terrifying nightmares." Lhote concedes, says Ziapour, that "all masterpieces are mixed with some sort of falsehood and exaggeration," but he also questions thus:

> 'why cannot an artist invent a lie that is pleasing to a greater number of people? Why cannot he invent lies in a way that is not disgusting and unacceptable?' … If we go back to the masterpieces, we can see that the best, most

[45]Jalil Ziapour, "Painting" ("Naqqāshi,") in *Khorus Jangi* 1, eds. Hassan Shirvani *et al*, 1(1950), 31; trans. A. Foroutan. All translations of such modern prose literature are by this writer, unless otherwise indicated.

[46]Ziapour, "Painting," in *Khorus Jangi* 1, 2 (1950), 12.

[47]Ziapour, "Naqqāshi," in *Khorus Jangi* 1, 3 and 4 (1950), 4.

[48]Ziapour, "Naqqāshi," in *Khorus Jangi* 1, 5 (1950), 3.

> pleasant exaggerations and lies can be easily accepted as existing in such masterpieces.'[49]

Ziapour reports this not in order to condone Lhote's disapproving views on the surrealists, and responds to such remarks and to other critics of the surrealists, defending them:

> If the surrealists had come up with another kind of falsehood, out of the myriad possible falsehoods, which might have pleased the Lhotes of this world, would not someone like Lhote then chide them that there are thousands of other falsehoods that would be even more pleasing, ...so then why didn't surrealists use them, as their predecessors did? Surely such petulant, nagging objections have always been made against those who take the lead?'[50]

In discussing Breton's *Second Manifesto*, Ziapour once again seems to be on the side of surrealists as he celebrates and defends them. According to Ziapour, the surrealists as far as possible rejected the actions and conventions of their predecessors and threw away the "mended wheels" that remained for them in the form of a memento: "Such reactionaries," and perhaps he has Lhote in mind, "in being conservative and cautious to such an extent, are the enemies of the arts."[51] Ziapour then asks a series of rhetorical questions in a monologue in the persona of "the surrealist." The surrealist is clearly Breton, as Ziapour is quoting directly from the words of Breton's *First Manifesto*:

> Let us not mince words: the marvellous is always beautiful, anything marvellous is beautiful, in fact only the marvellous is beautiful.[52]

Ziapour says (with a little Persian poetic license and expansion):

> The surrealist says the fine arts should be the instrument of pleasure which is one of the essential necessities, and particularly it should become the motivation of a marvel, a new marvel,[53] because it is the marvellous that is beautiful. This marvellous in any kind and any form is beautiful. There is never any marvel which is not beautiful. When a little breeze of a marvel arrives it is enough to fill a breath of fresh air and refresh a soul.[54]

[49]Ziapour, "Naqqāshi," in *Khorus Jangi* 1, 5 (1950), 5.
[50]Ziapour, "Naqqāshi," in *Khorus Jangi* 1, 5 (1950), 4-5.
[51]Ziapour, "Naqqāshi," in *Khorus Jangi* 1, 5 (1950), 10.
[52]André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. Richard Seaver and Helen Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 14.
[53]*yek shegefti, shegefti-ye tāze*.
[54]Ziapour, "Naqqāshi," in *Khorus Jangi* 1, 5 (1950), 9.

This article is the first text written by an Iranian that attempts to express how the surrealist thinks and what surrealism is about, but now it is time to move on to the central piece of evidence of this discussion, namely the manifesto of the *Khorus Jangi*.

The "Slaughterer of the Nightingale" Manifesto of *Khorus Jangi* 2

The second series of the magazine *Khorus Jangi* had a more unconventional format from that of the first series, was more controversial and, according to the claims of the writers, it was intended to make its readers curious about and amazed by what was written. Gholamhossein Gharib, one of the members of the group who had survived the transition from the first to the second series, and a principal author of the Manifesto, states:

> in an environment alienated from art, this behavior, of the artist's escaping from public trivialization and mockery, is unavoidable.[55]

They were influenced by the teachings of the surrealists and denied art for the sake of any kind of social improvement. Gharib, in an article entitled "The Unconscious in Literature," writes:

> At the time of writing we should plunge into the depths of ourselves and avoid mental control and let our minds function freely in its mechanical activity and let wondrous images continue to emerge.[56]

He was perhaps the first to talk about surrealist techniques such as automatic writing. Gharib's stories were much inspired by the writings of Hedayat and were written in an epic style combining poetry and prose. They are inspired folkloric stories with a surrealist atmosphere: according to him all his fantasy is expressed freely and with no regard to the rules and conventions of art and everyday life.[57] Gharib, Irani and Shirvani are named as the authors of the manifesto "Slaughterer of the Nightingale": it is a title that is perhaps lost on those who are unfamiliar with Persian poetic tropes: the nightingale[58] stands for the romantic tradition of Persian classical poetry, the symbol of the tragically love-stricken "lover who lives only to adore the rose." The nightingale is therefore an iconic symbol of something sublime from the past, yet which has become banal in the present. Breton referred to such a thing:

> The marvellous is not the same in every period of history: it partakes in some obscure way of a sort of general revelation only the fragments of which come

[55]Cited in Mir-Abedini, *Sad sāl dāstān nevisi,* 193.
[56]Mir-Abedini, *Sad sāl dāstān nevisi,* 192.
[57]Mir-Abedini, *Sad sāl dāstān nevisi,,* 193.
[58]Persian *bolbol*, which entered English as 'bulbul'.

down to us: they are the romantic ruins, the modern mannequin, or any other symbol capable of affecting the human sensibility for a period of time.[59]

The nightingale was just such a Persian "romantic ruin" and Iranian "modern mannequin". The text of the *Khorus Jangi* 2 Manifesto "The Slaughterer of the Nightingale" is given below in an English translation by the present writer:

1. The art of *Khorus Jangi* is the art of the living. This screeching will silence all the voices who try to wail at the grave of the old art.

2. We have begun, in the name of the dawn of a new artistic period, our brutal fight against all the old artistic traditions and rules.

3. The new artists are the children of time, and the right of artistic life belongs only to its pioneers.

4. The first step of any new movement is followed by the smashing of the old idols.

5. We condemn to oblivion those who worship the past in all kinds of art: theatre, painting, the novel, poetry, music, sculpture, and we smash the old idols and parasitic (flesh-eating) imitators.

6. The new art that considers intimacy with the inner self as the pathway to artistic creation, has within itself all the verve and leaping of life and cannot be separated from it.

7. The new art moves over the graveyard of idols and ill-fated imitators in order to destroy the chain of traditions, and to reinforce the freedom of expression of emotion.

8. The new art tears apart all the old bonds and announces the new as the location of beauty.

9. The existence of art is dynamic and progressive. The only artists who are alive are those whose ideas are reinforced by the new knowledge.

10. The new art is inconsistent with all the claims of those who support art for society, art for art, art for whatever.

11. For the progress of the new art in Iran it is necessary that all the groups that are in favor of the old art must be abolished.

12. Creators of artworks should be informed that the *Khorus Jangi* artists will

[59]Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, 16.

fight the dissemination of obsolete and trivial works in the most extreme way.

13. Death to all fools![60]

This text shares many characteristics with other manifestoes of avant-garde movements. Several types of language typical of such manifestoes occur in various combinations. To begin with, there is a predominance of romanticized, poetic idealization :"wail[ing] at the grave of the old art" #1; "dawn of a new artistic period" #2; "the children of time", "pioneers" #3; "the verve and leaping of life" #6. Another dominant style is angry, heroic, violent, revolutionary language: "brutal fight" #2; "smashing" #4,5; "condemn to oblivion" #5; "chains" #7; "freedom" #7; "bonds" #8. Sub-themes of the manifesto are from religion: "worship #5 of idols" #5, and #7, an evangelistic proclamation of "the new location of beauty" #8; "new knowledge" #9. He also refers to death and morbidity: "grave" #1; "graveyard" #7; "parasitic, flesh-eating imitators" #5. Lastly, there is cursing, dehumanizing and threatening language typical of revolutionary slogans: "Death to all fools!"

The characteristics of *avant-garde* publications and their manifestoes have been identified by Renato Poggioli in his study of the theoretical basis of the avant-garde. In brief they are:

> …activism, or the spirit of adventure; agonism, or the spirit of sacrifice; futurism, or the present subordinated to the future; unpopularity and fashion, or the continual oscillation of old and new; finally, alienation as seen especially in its cultural, aesthetic, and stylistic connections.[61]

These culminate in what Poggioli sees as one of the primary characteristics of avant-gardism, *i.e.* "experimentalism". All six are emphatically articulated in the *Khorus Jangi* manifesto, as well as the seventh which Poggioli had previously mentioned[62] as a *sine qua non* of such publications, *i.e.* their non-commercialism, and hence their short lives. Poggioli also accounts for a contradictory tone which is clearly present in the *Khorus Jangi* manifesto, which results from a paradox of the disparagement and encouragement that sit together in such manifestos:

> it works directly, as an emotional leavening, on the mentality of the artist in our time, making him assume arbitrary and paradoxical positions in the face of

[60]Sirus Tahbaz, *The Unique Fighting Cock: The Life and Art of Hushang Irani* (Tehran: Farzan, 2001), 8.

[61]Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Gerald Fitzgerald (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 131.

[62]Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 22.

his own work. Thus it is seldom expressed in critical theory, but often lyrically, as a poetic confession.[63]

The only element in the manifesto which has a surrealist ring to it, apart from its vivid title and the group's identification with surrealism, is article 6, which appears to address the unconscious, bringing the psychological depth of the artist to the fore. This particular psychological, quasi-mystical element does not feature in Poggioli's checklist of concepts that characterize avant-garde movements, but it is easily reconciled with many surrealist statements of artistic intent and accords with much that is familiar in Persian poetry and culture generally.

However strident and forward-looking the words were, they did not result in surrealist images in actual graphic depiction, *i.e.* in paintings in the journals. The only manifestation in graphic art was that of the modernist artist, Hossein Kazemi (1924-1996), who was Ziapour's contemporary and peer. Kazemi, had moved from figurative painting to abstract design, but his *Two Figures*, painted in the late 1940's was inspired by Hedayat's *Blind Owl*.[64] Yet, ironically, there is no image extant of this painting: other pictures of this artist that survive seem to represent the theme of duality, but they are not surrealist paintings. The first ever recorded surrealist works are those of Jalil Ziapour, the artist of the image *Khorus Jangi*, in 1959, namely the painting, "Hope" ("Omid"), and a drawing, "Inner Pain" ("Dard-e Darun"),[65] but again, unfortunately, they have not survived.

Conclusion

In this essay I have tried to substantiate the late flowering of Surrealism in visual art as a matter of art historical fact. After the early spring of surrealist writing of Hedayat, and later that of his followers who contributed to the *Khorus Jangi* in the early 1950s, it took a decade more for any kind of surrealist paintings to appear. The restriction of public spaces in Tehran for the exhibition of visual art was a factor in this – artists and other critics of society must always struggle for their voice to be heard. The important point is not merely one of available space in Tehran, but rather that Iranian culture was such that what could be tolerated in the written word in one period could not be countenanced at all in visual form at that time. The idea of Hedayat's *painting* a work such as *The Blind Owl* in the 1930s, '40s or even '50s

[63]Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, 71.

[64]See Ehsan Yarshater, "Contemporary Persian Painting," in *Highlights of Persian Art*, Ettinghausen and Yarshater, 1979, 368 – however no image of this painting could be found.

[65]*Dard-e daru,* Jalil Ziapour's website, www.ziapour.com/artworks/ (accessed July 2016).

in Iran is unthinkable. Even the literary work was unpublishable in unexpurgated form in Iran until the era of Mohammed Reza Shah in the 1950s; but how much later would any graphic realization of its themes and contents have been? Surrealist painting, as distinct from surrealist writing, seems to have been unacceptable until the 1960s, and was still deemed undesirable as a graphic representation – although the ideas behind it were by then in currency. Even with its relatively minimalized accentuation of the carnal, the sexual and eroticism in general,[66] surrealism could not take place on the painter's canvas in Iran until after a change in the moral climate had swept the West (as late as the 1960s even in Britain and North America) and began to have its impact on Iran. In Iran it was not just modesty and reluctance to unveil the body that delayed modernism in visual art, but also, as discussed above, the conservatism spear-headed by Kamal-al-Molk and those who followed him. The only surrealist artist who had belonged to the *Khorus Jangi* and the *Panje Khorus* was Bahman Mohassess, but his work had not taken its mature shape in this period.

In *The Blind Owl* Sadegh Hedayat wrote within the novella form, *i.e.* within the protective boundaries of a declared work of fiction. His work itself was a combination of nationalism, surrealism and classicism. Jalil Ziapour, by contrast, in writing *about* surrealism, in discussing it and exposing it as a subject, was not *creating* a surrealist work; indeed, he never claimed to be a surrealist artist. What he was doing, for the first time in Iran, in writing *about* surrealism, was perhaps *more* dangerous because it exposed the conceptual nature of surrealist ideology, whereas the surrealist literary work itself is deliberately evasive and more difficult to interpret conceptually. *Khorus Jangi* 2 took this even further and in its manifesto presented critics with ideology "on a plate" so to speak, or at least on its back cover. This complexity of Hedayat's work had not protected it from expurgation and being banned for many years. Visual art was a step further in this process of manifestation of radical ideas, as it is not a silent, ideologically neutral medium: painting is of course as much a work of thought as the written word: indeed, one of the characteristics of surrealist painting that makes it vulnerable to censorship is that its most striking features is the effect to shock. The juxtaposition of disparate elements, techniques of fictive layering[67] and collage, estrangement and alienation, and above all the distortion and disfigurement of "reality" all symbolize to the viewer discontent with what *is* and urge the need to transform to something else envisaged, whether that is self or society.

[66]*I.e.* in comparison with the situation of surrealism in the West.

[67]See Aida Foroutan, "Fictive Layering and Inversion in the Surrealist Paintings of Ali-Akbar Sadeghi," *Iranian Studies* 49.4 (July 2016), 533-53.

It is debatable how far the legacy of the *Khorus Jangi* movement accurately conveyed what Hedayat and other surrealist writers had intended. Similarly, what they understood by surrealism may not be what Western art history understands by the term: rather it was what the *Khorus Jangi* had selected to pass on. By far the clearest indication of what they stood for and what they wanted is seen in the *image* on the front cover, and the *manifesto* on the back cover. What lay between the covers still has to be evaluated by posterity.