

Mapping the Unmappable: A Critical Study of *Dead Reckoning: A Novel* by Bahman Sho'levar

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آدمی در عالم خاکی نمی آید به دست
عالمی دیگر ببايد ساخت وز نو آدمی
حافظ

It is impossible to have mankind in the ephemeral world
There should be built another World and another Man¹
—Hafez (704–68/1325–89)

There is the story that when the English navigator Sir Humphrey Gilbert
was lost at sea during a colonizing mission to North America in 1583, he
was last seen seated in a boat reading *Utopia*.²
—Ivan Doig

¹Translation is mine.

²Ivan Doig, ed., *Utopian America: Dreams and Realities* (Rochelle Park, NJ: Hayden Book Company, 1976), 125.

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I begin with a general introduction of Bahman Sho‘levar (1320/1941) and his first novel, *The Night’s Journey and the Coming of Messiah* (1966), specifying its key elements. Many of these elements can also be found in his second novel, *Dead Reckoning: A Novel* (1992), the focus of this paper. Analyzing *Dead Reckoning*, I specify three stages in the protagonist’s exile from Iran to America, demonstrating how each stage develops into and affects the subsequent one. I tackle questions such as the spatial aspect(s) of utopia, and argue that utopia and exile are flip sides of each other in that both indicate placelessness. I argue that because the protagonist is a Persian exile in the contemporary United States, his idea of having a farm there as a Garden of Eden—that is, utopia (or at least eutopia)—is not in sync with the present-day realities of America. Finally, I argue that even if “America is a state of mind,”³ there should be some ground for considering the United States, or at least certain parts of it, as utopia. In other words, something in the place attributed to utopia should trigger the said mental state.

Bahman Sho‘levar is an Iranian novelist, poet, literary translator, literary critic, psychiatrist, and political activist. He was born to an educated and politically savvy family in Tehran. The renowned Iranian writers Jalal Al-e Ahmad and Jalal Moqadam, who later became a well-known filmmaker, were his high school teachers, and they encouraged him greatly. He also attended Nima Yushij’s poetry reading circle. His first story was published in the newspaper *Mehregan* when he was only thirteen. Ever since his childhood, he has had a great aptitude for learning languages. His father knew six languages and had an extensive library. Sho‘levar’s translations of William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) and T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1922) were published in Iran, when he was eighteen and nineteen, respectively. He had to leave his study of medicine at the University of Tehran incomplete because he had to start a diplomatic career at the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) in Turkey. His sojourn in Turkey was an opportunity to have his first novel, *The Night’s Journey and the Coming of Messiah* (*Safar-i Shab*, 1966), published in Iran. He knew

³Bahman Sho‘levar, *Dead Reckoning: A Novel* (Philadelphia: Concourse Press, 1992), 2.

that if the novel were published when he was inside the country, his life would be endangered by the shah's regime.⁴ Later, he completed his education in the United States, earning a PhD in English literature and an MD in psychiatry.

Like novels by Zakaria Hashemi, Ismail Fasih, and Bahman Forsi, Sho'levar's *Night's Journey* portrays the situation of Iranian youth in the aftermath of the 1953 coup: a desperate, confused, and bitter generation who lost their sublime political and social ideals trying to survive in a ruthless environment. The novel recounts the wanderings of a young intellectual who, to extricate himself from the oppression and political failures of his time, turns to reckless drinking and spending his time with hooligans and prostitutes. In terms of content, the novel is influenced by *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) by J. D. Salinger, and in terms of technique, it is inspired by *The Sound and the Fury*.⁵ The novel ends when the narrator uses continuing his education as an excuse to leave Iran for the United States.⁶ Identity crisis, alienation, and the feeling of exile (at home) are the major themes of this work.

In *Night's Journey*, the protagonist (Homer) and his like-minded friends, such as Akbar Shiraz, yearn for and dream of a serene place where they can stay away from their drab and dirty daily lives:

I can't leave Shemroon now. When I take this money, I'll owe it to Hajji and to Hassan Chelowi to stick around a while. But gimme six months, let me marry off my sister with a good dowry to this guy who is standing by her, let me pay for some twenty or thirty acres for farming and cattle raising, then I'll go to give the Major a guarantee. Then I'd be a motherfucker if I ever show my face around this circle, I'll go somewhere where I won't ever see a human being. I says to the Major, Look, Chief, what could a gutterpup like me have

⁴Bahman Sho'levar, "Gouftegu Ba Bahman Sho'levar-2 ["Talk with Bahman Sho'levar-2"]", interview by Poupak Rad, *VOA Farsi*, 17 November 2009, www.youtube.com/watch?v=BFoAeRT0SEL.

⁵Hasan A'bedini, *Sad Sal Dastan Nevisi Dar Īrān (A Hundred Years of Story Writing in Iran)*, 4 vols. (Tehran: Nashr-i Cheshmeh, 2009), 1–2:639.

⁶Mohammad Ali Sepanlou, *Nevisandegan-e Pishrou-e Īrān (Iranian Pioneering Writers)* (Tehran: Ketab-I Zaman, 1993), 173.

become, if not a thug? A police officer? A doctor? An engineer? A teacher? [. . .] All Akbar Shirāz wanted was to get his sister married, give up a thug's life, buy a piece of land outside Tehrān, and farm and raise cattle. What Homer wanted was a quiet place in the countryside among the woods, with a small kitchen garden and a small poultry farm to survive on, and a small backyard zoo in which he could raise wild and rare animals. Suddenly all the dreams seemed to merge into one big dream, their dream. They all wanted the land in the country.⁷

The point is that this “good place” is not a “no place”; rather, it is a specific and mappable place near Tehran. All these dreams of living in utopia, however, come to an end when Akbar Shiraz is hanged and another one of Homer's friends, a talented medical student on the verge of graduation, commits suicide. The seemingly nearby place (i.e., utopia) close to Tehran is not reachable. Eutopia is a good place as long as it is a utopia (i.e., a no place). A specific place near Tehran offers nothing in the way of being a good place. Presumably, that is why in the end, the protagonist decides to leave Iran for the United States.

Although written decades after *Night's Journey*, *Dead Reckoning* seems to be the continuation of the same story with the same themes expanded and elaborated upon. It is as though this time the writer has had a free hand and free time to write about issues such as exile, uncertainty, placelessness, and a Homeric, Odyssey-like quest for utopia. Moreover, years of the writer's life in (self-)exile seem to have added depth to his writing. *Dead Reckoning* is “a more coherent and more readable novel than *Night's Journey* as far as the structure and the character development are concerned.”⁸

The novel is, in fact, Farhang Shadzad's diary recounting “the socio-political events in the country [i.e., Iran] and the blows they render to

⁷Bahman Sho'levar, *The Night's Journey and the Coming of Messiah* (Philadelphia: Concourse Press, 1966), 137, 151.

⁸Mohammad Reza Ghanoonparvar, “*Dead Reckoning [A'sākehsh]* by Bahman Sho'levar,” *Īrān shenasi* 5 (1993): 642–47. Quote on p. 646.

the life of Farhang Shādzād, the novel's protagonist and his family.”⁹ The story starts in the winter of 1963 when Farhang's elder brother, Alex (Eskandar), disappears. Farhang, who lives with his father, has another brother named Cyrus, who left Iran for America to go on with his studies. This happened simultaneously with Farhang's father, the head of the Supreme Court, divorcing his mother. Like his father, Farhang's Uncle J. (Jalal) is an ex-Marxist and ex-revolutionary, who is now a very rich man holding the office of vice–prime minister in the Iranian cabinet under the shah. Even after the 1979 Revolution, he continues to be a highly wealthy and influential man living in Switzerland, but having business interests and connections in Iran as well as many other parts of the world.

Alex's disappearance and subsequent death under torture (he is a Marxist guerrilla) trigger a series of events that render life for Farhang unbearable. He is under constant pressure by the SAVAK to act as an on-campus informer for them. Finally, he manages to go the United States to fulfill his father's last wish:

And Dad wouldn't let me stick around [Iran] until he died. He wanted me out of that hellhole before he was pronounced dead. He was afraid they wouldn't let me go afterwards. The only satisfaction he would take to the grave was seeing me leave, out of the one eye that could still see. *To America my boy! Now! Before I die!* The last words I heard out of his mouth, the half that moved, while the other half, the paralyzed half, the speechless half, mocked me and mocked the world. [. . .] That's why he [the father] had to plan it all over again for me. He had to plan another America. A different one. *To America my boy!* He didn't know that America is a state of mind. You bring to America what you are. Did Cyrus have an America? Yes, the one he has got now. Put money in thy purse. I say, put but money in thy purse. And Alex? What America do you have out there in the water, my boy? *Only the total sincerity, the precise definition.*¹⁰

⁹Houra Yavari, "FICTION, ii(f). BY PERSIANS IN NON-PERSIAN LANGUAGES," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 2012, www.iranicaonline.org/articles/fiction-ii-f-in-non-persian-languages.

¹⁰Sho'levar, *Dead Reckoning*, 63, 67.

Farhang's father believes that America is humanity's final battlefield. Being a permanent student, Farhang lives in the United States for years. Throughout his years in America, he has a strange relationship with Iran: he is influenced by it and sometimes yearns to get back, but he also finds returning dangerous and even deadly. He lives with the memories of his murdered brother, the very memories that shape his identity and the way he perceives exile. His father dies sometime after his departure from Iran, which coincides with the anniversary of Alex's gruesome murder, but Farhang cannot return to attend his father's funeral. Several years later, again right on the anniversary of Alex's murder, Farhang's mother dies. This time, it is several years after the triumph of the 1979 Revolution, when an Islamic regime has established a dictatorship far more brutal than that of the shah. Farhang wants to return to Iran to attend his mother's funeral. Even more, he wants to find himself in Iran because that is where he lost himself.¹¹

Two points about exile are important here. First, I believe that although Farhang left Iran for the United States on a student visa, the term *exile* can be applied to Farhang's situation because the term can be used for those banished from their homes, refugees, domestic exiles, asylum seekers, the reterritorialized and deterritorialized, diasporic subjects, economic migrants, the infinitely detained, stateless people, expatriates, nomads, and transnational people.¹² More importantly, toward the end of the twentieth century, the word *exile* came to be known as a metaphor for "a new phase of social alienation."¹³ The second consideration concerns how an exile grasps the homeland they have left behind—that is, how they draw its map from the vantage point of exile. A map of this kind does not seem to be the same as the map the person draws prior to exile. In fact, this new map is "a new kind of narrative."¹⁴ This is a new space

¹¹Sho'levar, *Dead Reckoning*, 86–87.

¹²Karen Elizabeth Bishop, ed., *Cartographies of Exile: A New Spatial Literacy* (Abingdon-on-Thames, UK: Routledge, 2016), 2.

¹³Sophia A. McClennen, *The Dialectics of Exile: Nation, Time, Language, and Space in Hispanic Literatures* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2004), 1.

¹⁴Bishop, *Cartographies of Exile*, 6.

having a “navigable palimpsest.”¹⁵ If mapping lays bare the hitherto hidden structures,¹⁶ it might be possible to say that mapping lays bare for an exile objects and structures hidden in their homeland—for example, their identity and purpose in life, the forces that destroyed their life, and the future hope that may (not) exist in the homeland. Presumably, mapping makes people such as Homer and Farhang see that the utopia near Tehran they were yearning for had never existed.

But what is Farhang’s motive for turning back toward the homeland perpetually and even wishing to go there to find himself and what he has lost there despite his Uncle J.’s and Cyrus’s insistence not to do so? Farhang’s motive is his reckoning with the dead, which makes him who he is. This reckoning is the very act that causes him an identity crisis. Here, the dead are Alex and his parents, who each died on Alex’s anniversary, as well as Cyrus, Uncle J., and Clara (Farhang’s girlfriend, who betrays him), who are not physically dead but are dead for Farhang.

The narrator recounts the incidents taking place in Iran in two distinct manners. The first style is direct, present tense narration, which is mostly used in the early chapters, where everything is more or less clear and final. For example, all Alex’s comrades are like him: They do not surrender. They do not betray their ideals and comrades under torture. They endanger their lives to drop a newspaper containing the news of Alex’s murder in the Shadzaad family’s garden. The second style involves flashbacks: Farhang remembers what happened to him in Iran while he is in the United States. In this style, the formerly clear and transparent incidents and people seem shadowy and uncertain. The same solid revolutionary comrade of Alex, named Sufi, turns out to be a double agent who, after torturers raped his sister, started cooperating with them. Sufi drops the newspaper in the Shadzads’ garden at the order of the shah’s intelligence service to act as a ploy to get Farhang involved. It is not just Sufi who is revealed as a traitor; all the former communists

¹⁵Bishop, *Cartographies of Exile*, 6.

¹⁶Bishop, *Cartographies of Exile*, 7.

turn out to be officials in the shah's regime as well as nouveau riche contractors and businessmen. It is not just communists; even the shah shows signs of instability and identity crisis, hovering between being religious and materialistic, funny and arrogant. And it is not just people; lands and countries such as the United States sway between dystopia and utopia.

All in all, the novel shows a constant interplay between minimal pairs such as revolutionary/traitor, religious/materialistic, trustworthy/untrustworthy, successful person/loser, and apparent stability at home/instability in exile. Here, the protagonist ponders on home from his place of exile and later physically returns home only to find out that the stability in both home and exile has been the deepest kind of instability. A constant dialectical tension and interplay exists between the members of each of the said minimal pairs that create the exiled person's cultural identity,¹⁷ an identity in which crisis and instability are fundamental parts. In other words, the dialectical tensions and instability exist on both the ontic and the ontological level. The number and significance of real and concrete cases such as the abovementioned dichotomies which can be considered ontic indicate a much deeper, more universal reality—that is, the fundamental and ontological instability and ambivalence of an exile and the world they live in. The point is that despite the exile having an ontological status, each exile perceives and experiences exile and its associated anxiety and instability in a unique manner. In his critique of *Dead Reckoning*,¹⁸ Mohammad Reza Ghanoonparvar states:

What distinguishes Sho'levar's novel from the works by a majority of Iranian writers who write in English is that on the contrary to them; Sho'levar is not that interested in these writers' favorite subjects such as the encounter between modern and traditional outlooks and manners, or Iranian versus Western social and cultural

¹⁷McClennen, *Dialectics of Exile*, 2.

¹⁸Sho'levar tentatively translated the title of *Dead Reckoning* as *A'sakesh*, meaning "the blind helper," possibly taken from the Persian proverb "Koori A'sakesh-e Koor-e digar," meaning "the blind leading the blind." However, later on, he changed the title to *Bilengar*, meaning "anchorless."

values. The concept of identity in the works by the majority of these writers is the same as cultural identity which, after immigration to the West, is threatened by other cultures and, as a result, it turns into a kind of cultural confusion whereas in Sho'levar's novel, the said identity has mostly individual and philosophical aspects to it. In fact, *Asākesh* is the late twentieth century wanderings of a confused intellectual's quest for understanding concepts such as justice, freedom, and human identity.¹⁹

Edward Said also believes that “nationalisms [or any dominant power or regime that sends people into exile] are about groups, but in a very acute sense exile is a solitude experienced outside the group.”²⁰ So in the case of Farhang Shadzad, the said dialectical tensions which form his cultural identity could fall into the categories of time, space, and embodiment—a time, a space, and an embodiment which are Farhang's only.

1. Time: An exile has been thrown away from the present time of their nation. This brings about “a series of dialectic tensions between different versions of linear/progressive/historical time.”²¹ This means time could be cyclical, primordial, relative, and fractured. This is apparent in the manner in which Sho'levar narrates the story. The reader encounters a fractured diary with the times and locations of incidents not in a linear order.

2. Space: An exile considers this both liberating and confining. “It is noteworthy that the dual gestures of narrating utopic and dystopic places are common in exile writing. Consequently, spatial dialectics in exile writing relate to many factors regarding both real and imagined territories of existence.”²² In *Dead Reckoning*, the reader can see a wide variety of dystopic places, such as those in Iran that Sho'levar writes about in the beginning of the novel: SAVAK's premises, prison, and torture room,

¹⁹Ghanoonparvar, “*Dead Reckoning*,” 647.

²⁰Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 177.

²¹McClennen, *Dialectics of Exile*, 2.

²²McClennen, *Dialectics of Exile*, 3.

and by extension, the whole country. Farhang's struggles continue in the United States. The visa officer in the US embassy in Tehran, Alan Dugan, believes that the jungle Farhang is struggling with in Iran does not stop at the US border; rather, it covers most of the United States with the exception of some patches, some safe islands where people such as Walt Whitman, Henry David Thoreau, and Herman Melville could live and write freely. Still, if someone is in one of those safe areas and wants to confront the jungle, it will destroy them:

“My father would be delighted to hear you [Alan Dugan] saying that,” I said. “That is what he always says. You know, he is a great believer in Constitutional Democracy. He admires your constitution. He is always talking about the First Amendment and the Fifth Amendment to the American Constitution. Listening to him, you wonder whether he is the Chief Justice in America or here.”

“I am a believer in our constitution, too!” said Alan. “But at this moment I can almost see Thomas Jefferson turning over in his grave. And I can hear Toynbee's words, then when we adopt the methods of our enemy, our enemy has conquered us.”

“Do Americans know what their government supports abroad?” I asked.

“Interesting question. There are those who know and condone. There are those who don't know and condone. There are those who know and don't care. There are those who don't know and don't care. And there are those who know and try to fight it and do not succeed. These last ones are still dreaming Jefferson's dreams. Have you read any Jefferson?”

“No,” I said. “But my father has a shelf full of his works. He greatly admires him. He says when he speaks of America, he speaks of Thomas Jefferson's America. It is to Thomas Jefferson's America he wants to send me.”

“Your father is an enlightened man! You should read Jefferson,” he said. “Sometimes I wonder how far we have strayed from his dream of America.”

“So the jungle doesn’t end at the American border?” I asked.

“No, unfortunately not!” said Alan. “The jungle extends everywhere. The only difference is that in America, the jungle is a patchwork, interspersed with small isolated colonies of the saved. Out of those colonies come men like Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, Whitman. ‘Isolatos,’ Melville called them then, and isolatos we still are. In America they let you get out of the jungle and stay out, if you really don’t have the killer instinct, if you really want to go vegetarian, but only if you don’t try to stop the jungle, to do something to stop it. You won’t catch any big games that way. But then, if you are a vegetarian, you don’t need big game.”

“And if you try to stop the jungle?” I asked.

“Then they crush you,” he said.²³

3. Embodiment: The dead bodies Farhang remembers and the way they affect him account for his unique experience and the way he perceives Iran, the United States, and again Iran as an exile. These dead bodies determine how and what Farhang perceives through his own body. He becomes the embodiment of exile: the exile per se, not just a person in exile.

Thus, America becomes not a passive vision of a utopia, but rather an active and personal commitment to it. The protagonist goes in search not of America, but of *his* America. In this sense, his becoming an American encompasses more than an accident of geography. He becomes the embodiment of that search for value which was behind the original idea of America, and which has to be renewed by each generation, indeed by each individual, if the idea of America is to be saved.²⁴

²³Sho’levar, *Dead Reckoning*, 138–39.

²⁴Robert Reed, introduction to *Dead Reckoning: A Novel* by Bahman Sho’levar (Philadelphia:

The space dimension of the abovementioned tripartite deserves more elaboration. This dimension could be either utopic or dystopic, which are the flip sides of each other. In other words, when someone is an exile, it is hardly imaginable that they live in a place that gives a feeling of happiness or of being in a befitting place. On the other hand, the same experience makes the person wish to be in a place which does not make them feel like an exile. As a result, in an exile novel, there is hardly a neutral place. In the context of *Dead Reckoning*, the novel has possibly three dystopian stages which lead into one allegedly utopian stage at the end. Further, I would argue that this utopian stage is too utopian and cannot be considered an organic result of the previous parts of the novel. In other words, it is not in sync with its dialectical result of the related social, political, and historical conditions and underpinnings. Later, I will make comparisons and contrasts between Sho'levar's novel and the fictional travel memoir *The Last American, a Fragment from the Journal of Khan-Li, Prince of Dimp-Yoo-Chur and Admiral in the Persian Navy* (1889) by J. A. Mitchell to see whether or not the United States could serve as a proper place for establishing a utopia.

Farhang's meeting with the visa officer at the US embassy in Tehran marks the end of the first dystopian stage. The persecuted, cross-questioned, and harassed protagonist ultimately wants to extricate himself from his situation. As mentioned, though, the visa officer warns him that the jungle extends to the United States and that anyone wanting to confront the jungle will be destroyed.²⁵

Farhang decides to return to Iran to attend the burial of his mother and to find himself where he lost himself: "Today, I know enough about myself, to go looking for my America. I am going back to start looking where I began, where I missed the boat in the first place, where I lost myself."²⁶ Farhang chooses to go to Iran despite his brother Cyrus's and his Uncle J.'s insistence not to do so because of the danger prevailing in the country. During his time in the United States,

Concourse Press, 1992), iv.

²⁵Bahman Sho'levar, *Bilengar* (Philadelphia: Concourse Press, 2009), 139.

²⁶Sho'levar, *Bilengar*, 288. Translation is mine.

Farhang wanders from one place to another. He fails to establish deep and meaningful connections with people and places. He experiences everything by himself, drawing a solitary mental map of his own exile. At a certain point, he does not accept his long-sought-for US citizenship. All through this time, he feels that the dead bodies of his dear ones define his present situation. Also, in this second stage, there seems to be no sign of the utopia Alan Dugan spoke about.

The imprisoned Farhang, who is on the verge of torture and even execution by the Islamic regime in Tehran, is forced to leave the country, never to return. In this third stage, the haunting memories of his murdered brother as well as the torturers and intelligence officers he met years ago under the shah's regime return to him with a vengeance, especially because he meets those torturers again. When he finally leaves Iran and reunites with his uncle, who has used both his money and connections to set Farhang free, in Switzerland, he finally talks with his uncle about his dream of establishing a farm somewhere in Iowa that would be a recreation of the Garden of Eden. Furthermore, he rejects his uncle's offer of money to purchase the land. He talks about this although he is not in the United States yet. This is what he envisions about America. He seems more like a dreamer, not caring about whether he can buy a piece of land and start a farm with no money. He also does not pay attention to whether historical, political, and cultural facts of the time in the United States are conducive to establishing such a utopia by and for exiled Persians. If American writers and thinkers of past centuries managed to establish a utopia on a limited basis, it does not necessarily mean that an exiled Persian like Farhang Shadzed will be able to do that empty-handed. In the end, he expresses a vague hope to the Statue of Liberty that although he has returned empty-handed, things will change: "As we made the final descent into New York and the plane tipped its wing in the glare of the rising sun, I caught a glimpse of the Lady with the Lamp. I spread out my hands for her to see. I had come back empty-handed again. But I hoped I would not remain that way forever."²⁷

²⁷Sho'levar, *Dead Reckoning*, 336.

Here, the common point between Farhang and Alex is that both have a dream or vision for which the former experiences exile and the latter loses his life. Another common point is that this dream or vision is placeless: it is a good place which, in fact, is no place. This is the same as “Thomas More’s pun: eutopia-the good place; *utopia*-nowhere.”²⁸ The novel gives no indication that Alex thought of a place like this. In the end, Farhang talks about starting a farm, a sort of Garden of Eden somewhere in Iowa. Prior to that, almost throughout the novel, however, he thinks that America is more a mental and psychological state,²⁹ which is why the United States he experiences is different from the United States his father expected and why it is as though Farhang and Cyrus live in two separate Americas. It is interesting that on all of the aforementioned pages (iii, 67, 68, and 297), the words *U.S.* or *America* could easily be replaced with either *exile* or *utopia* (i.e., no place). Only at the very end does the United States become purely “promised land”—that is, a good place (eutopia). Hence, this ending does not seem organic and logical; rather, it looks like an added grain of optimism.

The Last American by J. A. Mitchell could be seen as an opposing perspective to Sho‘levar’s quasi-utopian approach toward the United States in *Dead Reckoning*, which portrays the United States as the only country in the world with patches that offer the possibility of establishing a utopia immune to tyranny and corruption. *The Last American* is the fictional travel memoir of a Persian prince, whose sailship reaches North America inadvertently. This is the year 2591, when the United States has been wiped from existence through drastic climate change. The story offers an anti-utopian view of the United States, which is either a ruined utopia or has never been a utopia in the first place: “There was nothing to leave. The Mehrikans [Americans] possessed neither literature, art, nor music of their own. Everything was borrowed. The very clothes they wore were copied with ludicrous

²⁸Jean Pfaelzer, *The Utopian Novel in America, 1886–1896: The Politics of Form* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1984), 3.

²⁹Sho‘levar, *Dead Reckoning*, iii, 67, 68, 297.

precision from the models of other nations. They were a sharp, restless, quick-witted, greedy race, given body and soul to the gathering of riches. Their chiefest passion was to buy and sell.”³⁰

Interestingly, the Persian sailors leave their ship in a city that turns out to be the ruins of New York. In fact, the first sight that catches their attention is that of the Statue of Liberty: “Right ahead, in the middle of the bay, towered a gigantic statue, many times higher than the masts of our ship.”³¹ The subsequent descriptions of New York City impart a sense of dead and decayed glory mingled with glittery superficiality and materialistic values. As a result, being an important symbol for and in such a city, the Statue of Liberty conveys nothing but the sense of decay, despair, and vanished glitter: “Beyond, from behind this statue, came the broad river upon whose waters we were floating, its surface all aglitter with the rising sun. To the East, where Nofuhl was pointing, his fingers trembling with excitement, lay the ruins of an endless city.”³² If in this story, the United States is presented as a dystopia, that presentation is based on the details and evidence portrayed in the story.

This seems to be in sharp contrast with how Farhang invokes the same statue twice, like a deity as a witness: first, when he promises to build a utopia or Garden of Eden somewhere in the United States and does not need the deity’s help, and second, when he confesses to the same deity that he has failed, but there is still hope. It could be argued that a writer is free to depict concepts such as hope, utopia, eutopia, and exile as well as objects such as the Statue of Liberty the way they want to, especially if they believe that “America is a state of mind.”³³ While it is difficult to disagree with such a position, “description of utopian fiction... hinges on this general notion of historical possibility...the utopian *novum* (the novelty or innovation) requires a historical logic, a historical

³⁰J. A. Mitchell, *The Last American, a Fragment from the Journal of Khan-Li, Prince of Dimph-Yoo-Chur and Admiral in the Persian Navy* (New York: F. A. Stokes & Brother, 1889), 7.

³¹Mitchell, *Last American*, 4.

³²Mitchell, *Last American*, 5.

³³Sho‘levar, *Dead Reckoning*, 297.

empiricism as well.”³⁴ *Dead Reckoning*, however, lacks a historical, cultural, and political logic of this kind to substantiate the writer’s claim that the United States has the capacity to be a potential promised land or Garden of Eden for a Persian exile. Some may object that plenty of evidence of this capacity can be found in a variety of sources. However, it is important to note that the novel as a self-contained and autonomous entity should provide the reader with such a logic. Besides, due to different cultural, historical, and social backgrounds, the opportunity for people such as Whitman, Thoreau, and Melville to live and write freely in the patches not yet covered by the jungle might not necessarily be available for a Persian exile. As mentioned earlier, “nationalisms [or any dominant power or regime that sends people into exile] are about groups, but in a very acute sense exile is a solitude experienced outside the group.”³⁵ So, in the case of Farhang Shadzad or any other Persian exile, the said dialectical tensions which form his cultural identity could fall into categories such as time, space, and embodiment—a time, a space, and an embodiment which form their unique experience and may be poles apart from those of Whitman, Thoreau, and Melville.

³⁴Pfaelzer, 16.

³⁵Said, *Reflections on Exile*, 177.