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FARROḴZĀD, FORŪḠ-ZAMĀN

FARROḴZĀD, FORŪḠ-ZAMĀN, usually known as Forūḡ, Persian poet (b. Tehran, 1313 Š./1935; d. Tehran, 1345 Š./1967; Figure 1).

Life. Farroḵzād was the third of seven children born to Moḥammad Farroḵzād and Tūrān Wazīrī-tabār. She attended a co-educational elementary school in her neighborhood and after graduating from Ḵosrow Ḵāvar junior high school, transferred to Kamāl-al-Molk technical school to study painting and sewing. She did not finish high school and, at the age of sixteen, fell in love with and married Parvīz Šāpūr, in spite of parental objections. He was a neighbor and a distant relative, a satirist and caricaturist fifteen years her senior. Soon after their wedding the couple moved to Ahvāz, where he was employed by the Ministry of Finance. Their only child, a boy named Kāmyār, was born a year later. Farroḵzād's first published poems appeared at about the same time. In 1955, after three years of marriage, she decided to leave her husband, despite the inevitable psychological, financial, and social hardships that would follow her action. (According to the first national census of Persia taken in 1956, only 4 per cent of all women were divorced at that time in the city of Tehran.) The father, as dictated by law, was granted full custody of the child. The mother was denied even sporadic visitation rights. The pain of this forced separation never left her.

In September 1955 Farroḵzād suffered a nervous breakdown and was taken to a psychiatric clinic, where she remained for a month. Yet, a born survivor, with many reserves of talent and energy, she quickly recovered and developed new interests in cinematography, acting, and producing. In 1956 she traveled

to Europe (Italy and Germany) for the first time. The trip, which lasted nine months, allowed her a certain respite from the Persian literary scene from which she wanted to flee, perhaps from a sense of confinement and not belonging, perhaps from the lingering rumors she had attracted. It was followed by several other trips, both inside and outside of Persia. These journeys from one city, even country, to another, from one universe of definitions and meanings to another, characterize Farroḵzād's life and art for the next two decades. On the one hand, they demonstrate a dizzying, dazzling mobility; a refusal to be confined within familiar boundaries, certainties, and norms. On the other, they portray a sense of homelessness, of perpetual wandering, of exile.

In 1958 Farroḵzād began work as an assistant at the Golestān Film Studio. Her subsequent relationship with the owner of the studio, Ebrāhīm Golestān—a writer and film director, and a married man—started another scandal that spread quickly in Persia's literary circles. In 1960, oppressed by self-doubt, separation from her son, family problems, and financial insecurities, Farroḵzād attempted suicide. Reportedly, she had swallowed a container of sleeping pills and had to be treated in a hospital.

The last decade of Farroḵzād's life was a period of intense and remarkable creativity. In 1962 she made a documentary film, *Ḵāna sīāh ast*, about a lepers' colony. Living for twelve days in the colony, she adopted a boy, Ḥasan Manṣūrī, from his leper parents. *Ḵāna sīāh ast* was criticized at home and acclaimed abroad. It won the 1963 grand prize for documentary films at the Überhausen Film Festival, West Germany (Karāčī, pp. 45-59). At thirty-two, Farroḵzād had published an impressive body of works, had won fame and awards, but above all, and in her own words, "had found herself" (Esmāʿīlī and Ṣedārat, p. 16)—only to lose herself forever. She died in a car accident on 14 February 1967, and was buried, as she had predicted, beneath the falling snow: "Perhaps the truth was this young pair of hands/this young pair of hands buried beneath the falling snow/and next year, when Spring/mates with the sky beyond the window/and stems thrusts from her body/fountains of fragile green stems/will blossom, o my love, o my dearest only love" (title poem, *Īmān bīāvarīm be āḡāz-e faṣl-e sard,* p. 30).

Farroḵzād's personal life has attracted a kind of fantasy literature. She has been idealized and demonized, respected and rejected. The Persian reading public, critics, and commentators are both attracted to and repelled by her iconoclasm. Her detractors, like her admirers, have made her personal life the

focus of much debate and attention. Yet throughout her short literary career, Farroḵzād, who wrote in an autobiographical voice, showed a pronounced aversion to giving away even the scantiest biographical data on herself. Most likely she was reacting to the obsessively sensation-seeking interest of the critics in her personal life, an interest that all too often replaced (and still replaces) the more serious attention that her work deserves.

Works. The whole body of Farroḵzād's work—five poetry collections, some scattered poems, a short story titled "Kābūs," a travelogue *Dar sarzamīn-ī dīgar*, a few critical pieces, two unpublished film scripts, and an anthology of contemporary verse, *Az Nīmā tā bʿad,* compiled in collaboration with Majīd Rowšangar—resists the dominant cultural assumptions that framed her writing and its reception. It is a struggle against the institutions of both literature and society, an oasis of the conventionally forbidden—sexual, textual, and cultural. It disrupts social systems and hierarchies at their most intimate level. It reveals the pain and joy of transition from one cultural pattern to another. It personifies the pleasures of hybridization, of mingling the old and the new, but also of its pains and problems.

A confrontational stance towards gender categories and attributes, a merciless reflexivity and meditation on the nature of the self, an exploration of the exhilaration and the violence of love, and a candid portrayal of the high price paid by a literary woman to nurture her creativity—these are some of the issues that Farroḵzād explores in her writing. Not many of her contemporaries risked the creation of so complex, layered, paradoxical, and so vulnerable a world. That daring; that radical reformulation of ideals, relationships, and norms; that candor, have earned her a pariah status, but also have made her central to modern Persian literature. It is hard to freeze Farroḵzād's fluid poet-persona in a moment or in a familiar frame. She crosses boundaries, and refuses to be classified. Throughout her five poetry collections we witness the development of a female persona whose complexity defies the stereotype: a woman privileged with emotional, psychological, and intellectual awareness; a woman contradicting prevailing notions of the "feminine," and asserting, with however much awe and confusion, her sense of her self as different from that conventionally defined as belonging to women.

Asīr, Farroḵzād's first poetry collection, appeared in 1955. The collection contains forty-four poems and tells the story of a woman who feels frustrated and limited. The very title of the collection indicates feelings of imprisonment and despair. The poetic persona of *Asīr* is a confused young woman who has a

hard time forging an identity for herself. She relentlessly resists restrictive codes of feminine conduct, yet she is at the mercy of internalized cultural expectations and demands. She can neither deny herself independence and freedom from cultural conventions, nor can she liberate herself from the norms her society holds as the prerequisite for self-respect and morality. She feels trapped. "I think about it and yet I know/I'll never be able to leave this cage/even if the warden should let me go/I've lost the strength to fly away" (title poem, *Asīr*, p. 34).

Leaving her husband and her son, Farroḵzād retires into her art, which undergoes a major change. It is no longer predominantly personal and lyric. *Dīvār* and *ʿEṣyān* become vehicles for anger directed at the society in which she lives. She bitterly criticizes her society, especially its injustice towards women. Throughout the poems of these two collections, forty-two in all, one notices a much stronger and more sustained sense of the poet's autonomy. Years later, Farroḵzād described both books as a "desperate exertion between two different stages of life; the last panting before some kind of liberation (Ṭāhbāz, ed., p. 39). Indeed, soon preoccupations shift and a different kind of poetry develops.

With the intimate and the personal as an ever-present background, Farroḵzād's fourth collection *Tawallod-ī dīgar* (published in 1964), and *Īmān bīāvarīm be āḡāz-e faṣl-e sard* (published posthumously in 1974), celebrate the birth of a female character who rejoices in her independence. She becomes her own model, and in the process gives birth to a self in the image of her own liking and aspirations.

But it is not only the woman portrayed in Farroḵzād's poetry who is unconventional. Men, too, are on a journey of their own. They break conventional codes. They free themselves from stringent codes of masculinity (*mardānagī*). "The one I love/is a simple man/a simple man/I have hidden/in between the bushes of my breasts/like the last relic of a wondrous religion/in this ominous land of wonders" ("Maʿšūq-e man," *Tawallod-ī dīgar*, p. 82).

Before Farroḵzād, individualized reflections of men barely existed in women's writings in Persia. The few men portrayed usually lack any personal idiosyncrasies or nuances of character. They are captives of a cultural canon of masculine images and stereotypes. They are types rather than characters. They are, in effect, veiled. Farroḵzād strips away this veil of mystery and presents them in their all-too-human frailties, contradictions, and strengths.

She shows them warts and all. These are men who can choose and be chosen, desire and be desired, gratify and be gratified. No longer phantom personalities, dreams, figments of imagination; no longer prisoners in prisons of their own making; no longer compromised in their capacity for intimacy. Farroḵzād gives men a new life by giving them clearer focus. Liberated from sex-stereotyped modes of thought and emotions, committed to the expansion of their possibilities and potentials, they celebrate reciprocity and intimacy in relationships.

But the bliss enjoyed by men and women in Farroḵzād's poetry is short-lived. A recurrent theme, a topos, that links *Asīr* to *Īmān bīāvarīm be āġāz-e faṣl-e sard*, is, in fact, the relentless flow of time. Everything, even the moment of ecstasy, is ephemeral. Nothing can suspend temporality. The poet repeatedly mourns the quick, irreversible passage of time. Anxiety regarding the evanescent nature of everything breaks through her poems. Passionate love proves to be a transient illusion. Her constant quest for an ideal love, timeless and ethereal, ends in bitter disillusionment. Images emerge—of death, especially of the "sucking mouth of the grave" ("Wahm-e sabz," *Tawallod-ī dīgar*, p. 119). Living on the fringes of her society, alone and lonely, bothered by and conscious of her ephemerality, Farroḵzād foresees the coming of black clouds, of cold seasons. A rebel conscious and perhaps tired of her rebellion, an exile in her native land, she sees herself, time and again, as a lonely woman. "And here I am/a lonely woman/at the threshold of a cold season/coming to understand the earth's contamination/and the elemental, sad despair of the sky" (title poem, *Īmān bīāvarīm be āġāz-e faṣl-e sard*, p. 11).

Farroḵzād finds solace only in art—her adoptive faith, her shelter, her window to a utopic world, her means to attain eternity. She finally asserts that "only voice remains" ("Tanhā ṣedāst ke mīmānad," *Īmān bīāvarīm be āġāz-e faṣl-e sard*, p. 80). Poets come and go, but poems remain. The temporal illusion of the mundane is replaced by the eternal moment art affords. Time is stopped, controlled, its tyranny abolished, its willful passage conquered.

In the 1950s, when Farroḵzād published her first poems, the movement for modernism in poetry had already gained prominence in Persia. Nīmā Yušīj (1895-1960) had published the poem "Afsāna," which heralded the dawning of a new age in the history of Persian poetry. Nonetheless, a sense of dissatisfaction with classical poetics permeates only a few poems in Farroḵzād's first three collections. Of the eighty-six early poems, only twelve lack consistently rhymed couplets and do not adhere to classical formal

traditions. In Farroḵzād's own words: "I discovered Nīmā quite late, or rather at the right time—in other words, after many experiments, temptations, and a period of vagrancy and search" (Ṭāhbāz, ed., p. 37). It is through the development of a lyrical persona and through years of apprenticeship to her craft that the poet frees herself from rules of classical versification. She reaches a point where her poetic impulses can no longer be contained within traditional bounds. The breadth of content in her poetry requires new words, new images, new perspectives, and a well-developed sense of irony.

Farroḵzād's later poems, although markedly different from the earlier, do not represent an abrupt break. Rather, they constitute a natural culmination, the result of an evolution that gradually moves beyond traditional prosodic rules. In other words, Farroḵzād's progression toward free-form lines and meters is an organic necessity and not a fashionable abdication of traditional poetics: "I want to say that even after reading Nīmā, I wrote many bad poems. I needed to develop within myself, and this growth needed time" (*Āraš*, p. 39). In her early writings Farroḵzād showed disdain for worn-out, conventional themes, points of views, and rhetorical devices. In the later writings, she freed herself from confinement in and obedience to traditional prosodic rules. Regularity of line length and strophic organization are abandoned in favor of a free flowing structure. A language refreshing in its colloquialism, a style marked by inclusion of new words and images, peculiarities of syntax, and exclamatory sentences and interjections further heighten the intensity already imparted to her work by its thematic novelty. The canon of Farroḵzād's work makes up a passionate personal statement which gradually unfolds to become much more, to take in the concerns of a whole generation of women (even a society) that was struggling for personal and collective (self) acceptance outside of traditional boundaries.

From the very beginning of her literary career, Farroḵzād was a daring, often irreverent, explorer of a public language of intimacy. Hers was the subversive, the innovative text, not only in its subject matter, technique, or point of view, but also in its simple, unpretentious, lucid language. Her candid poetry never banishes what was customarily relegated to the private domain, if expressed at all. It violates norms that define proper language for a woman. Prior to her, if women treated sensual themes at all, they would do it allusively, through metaphors, or under the cover of symbols, games, and songs. Intimacy in the poetry of Farroḵzād is not camouflaged by formulas, allusions, metaphors, and symbols. It thrills in its directness and intensity. It represents a self-

assertiveness different from the self-effacing virtuousness of the ideal woman. It abandons the body to passion and the pen to tabooed expression. If this poetic persona's physical, emotional, and intellectual impulses cannot be contained within traditional boundaries, neither can her poetry. The adventurer in life becomes the adventurer in language.

Reception. Farroḵzād's works seldom leave the Persian reader impartial. They evoke strong attraction or keen aversion, exaggerated hostility or exalted praise. While some consider her a promiscuous woman, dangerous in her advocacy and practice of choice in love and art, others see her as a cultural heroine, a rebel in search of more breathing space. No matter how she is categorized, however, her stature derives as much from her detractors' criticism as from her admirers' adulation. In fact, she has become a double-metaphor. For her admirers, she mirrors courage, rebellion, and independence. For her detractors, she personifies promiscuity, loss of traditional values, and chaos. Her popularity, however, has grown consistently, especially after her death. Numerous reprintings of her five poetry collections, the continued appearance of articles and books on her life and her poetry, recordings of her voice reading her own poems or answering questions, the annual "Farroḵzād Prize," awarded to outstanding Persian literati and artists prior to the 1978-79 revolution, and various translations of her works, indicate Farroḵzād's enormous popularity inside and outside Persia.

Undoubtedly, Forūḡ Farroḵzād is among the most gifted women of 20th-century Persia. Persian society and literary criticism, however, have yet to come to terms with her unique achievement.

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Figure 1. Forūḡ Farroḵzād. Photograph courtesy of F. Milani.