

## The Beloved in Nader Naderpour's Poetry

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### Abstract

This paper offers a new picture of a modern Iranian poet and Nobel Prize nominee, Nader Naderpour, in light of his take on the feminine. The paper is an analysis of some less known love poems most of which were expurgated from his collections of poems after the Islamic revolution in 1979 in his home country. In his long and prolific career, he composed many poems celebrating the beloved in various ways. His outlook on the feminine ranged from simple poems detailing erotic and sexual scenes to very romantic and idealistic pictures of ethereal soul-mates. Naderpour's well-known power of vision, making him a significant modern Persian poet in this regard, enabled him to produce women in many forms, earthly or heavenly, literal or symbolic. Thus, in Naderpour one can find the voice of a typical modern Persian male poet as regards the beloved.

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Nader Naderpour (1929-2000), an Iranian poet who spent the last years of his life in the United States and died there, is not well known in the English-speaking world. He is a poet whose sensitivities are unforgettable for many Persian readers. His main concerns in poetry were nature, romance, and passage of time (youth, old age, and death).<sup>1</sup> His poems were written over decades and cover a variety of subjects, so it is hard to pigeonhole him into a single school of poetry.

Classical Persian poetry followed strict rules of prosody and rhyme and the subject matter was more or less fixed. But the atmosphere of the change in the subject matter of poetry including new issues of patriotism, freedom, feminism, and proletarian literature had already started with the Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911).<sup>2</sup> After the accession of Reza Shah to power in 1925, a new movement known as the New Poetry, which challenged the established form of poetry, emerged. The leader of the literary movement was Nima Yushij (pen name for Ali Esfandiyari, 1895-1960), who manipulated rhythm and rhyme and allowed the length of the line to be determined by the depth of the thought rather than by the established metrical rules. The reign of Reza Shah (1925-1941) which marked the end of the post-Constitutional period helped give rise to a kind of romanticism roughly comparable to the French romanticism. Disillusioned with social movements, poets preferred seclusion and took refuge in nature in that period. When Reza

<sup>1</sup> For a full discussion of Naderpour's view of nature, see Rouhollah Zarei and Roger Sedarat's *Nature and Nostalgia in the Poetry of Nader Naderpour* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> See M.R. Shafi'ee Kadkani. *Advār-e she'r-e fārsī: az mashrūtiāt tā soḡhūt-e saltanat (Periods of Persian Poetry: From the Constitutional Monarchy to the Fall of Absolute Monarchy)* 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Tehran: Sokhan, 2008) 35-37.

The Beloved in Nader Naderpour's Poetry. Rouhollah Zarei.

*Transnational Literature* Vol. 10 no. 1, November 2017.

<http://fhrc.flinders.edu.au/transnational/home.html>

Shah was deposed in 1941 upon the Anglo-Soviet invasion of Iran, the pressure of the deposed king's regime on Iranian intellectuals slackened, until the coup against Prime Minister Mosaddegh in 1953. Before the coup, there was a sense of mission and commitment to society among intellectuals and poets but after the coup, they felt insignificant and paralysed. There was a shattering of their dreams so many sought refuge in the world of imagination and seclusion again. The poet in this era was introverted, sullen, defeated, and dissident.<sup>3</sup> The quarter of a century between the coup and the 1979 revolution brought about certain new changes in Persian poetry including a further development of the romantic and individualistic trend an offshoot of which was erotic poetry.

*Havasnāma* or erotic poetry is an old but not very popular genre in Persian literature. The post-coup pessimism and sense of failure accounted for its rise. It was an unconscious outlet of dismay and a conscious vent for forgetfulness. The *carpe diem* philosophy which was the hallmark of Naderpour's poetry in those days prompted some of his contemporaries to criticise him for his lack of commitment and responsibility.<sup>4</sup>

The New Poetry movement in Iran not only broke away from the established rules but also updated the reservoir of themes by introducing subjects that met the need of modern Iranians. Naderpour very cautiously steered away from the traditional poetry and embraced the changes in form and content. Shams Langroudi (pen name for Javaheri Gilani), a contemporary Iranian poet and author, maintained that 'Naderpour's moderate and neo-classical poetry attracted most audiences in the 1950s because of the romantic and living images, addressing deep sensibilities and anxieties in modern human beings, and the ease and fluency of language.'<sup>5</sup> For this reason, Morteza Kakhi calls Naderpour a colossal secure bridge that helped his contemporary poets pass over from the prevalent old poetry to the New Poetry era.<sup>6</sup> Long before Kakhi, Nouri-ala referred to Naderpour and a few others as the pillars of the bridge connecting the classical to the new poetry.<sup>7</sup>

Naderpour's evolution as a poet was steady and consistent over decades of literary activity. In 1950s, he was already well-known with the publication of *Chashmhā va dasthā* (*Eyes and Hands*, 1954), *Dokhtar-e jām* (*Daughter of the Cup*, 1955), and *She'r-e angūr* (*The Grapes Poem*, 1958). Thus when *Sormehy-e khorshīd* (*The Sun's Kohl*, 1960) came out, he was already at the pinnacle of fame. In modern Persian poetry, Naderpour is arguably the best in the use of imagery. Pictorial description dominates Naderpour's thoughts and feelings and his power lies in images that are clear and sharp.

Naderpour's heavy dependence on the production of images had supporters and detractors. Supporters believe that he rekindled an almost forgotten trend in poetry in modern times. Opponents, however, argue that an image in itself is insufficient and that Naderpour lived in an

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<sup>3</sup> See Hossein Shakki, 'Taghazzol va āshgehāneh-sarā'ī dar āsār-e Nāder Nāderpūr' ('Lyricism and Romanticism in Nader Naderpour') *Hafez Monthly* 33 (August 2006) 73-78.

<sup>4</sup> See Forough Farrokhzad's views below.

<sup>5</sup> Shams Langroudi (M.T.J. Gilani), *Tārikh-e tahlīlī-e she're no* (*An Analytical History of Persian Modern Poetry*) vol. 2 (Tehran: Nashre Markaz, 1991) 57.

<sup>6</sup> Morteza Kakhi, *Rowshantar az khāmūshī: bargozideye she'r-e emrouze Iran* (*Telling Silence: A Selection of Modern Persian Poetry*), 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. (Tehran, Agah Publishers, 1998) 53.

<sup>7</sup> Esma'eel Nouri-ala, *Sovar va asbāb dar she'r-e emrouz-e Irān* (*Imagery and Accessories in Modern Iranian Poetry*), 1<sup>st</sup> Ed. (Tehran, Bamdad Publishers, 1969) 407.

ivory tower and forgot other people's distress. Forough Farrokhzad (1935-1967), a famous contemporary of Naderpour, criticised him for overemphasis on images and de-emphasis on meaning:

Naderpour's poems are completely devoid of meaning. He is an expert imagist but what is the use of an image alone? What is he going to express with these images? Nothing. ... Only his own pains impress him.<sup>8</sup>

One factor responsible for the rise of the new poetry in Iran was the direct or indirect influence of European literature. Naderpour admitted that those influences, harmful or useful, were undeniable. The share of French literature was greater than the rest in this respect.<sup>9</sup> He mentions that

[A] factor that helped me improve on and modernize my poetry was French, the treasure I inherited from my knowledgeable and cultivated parents. I started to study the French poetry and soon I was familiar with Charles Baudelaire.<sup>10</sup>

Naderpour maintained that he was a poet of his generation. He did not see language isolated from its content. Therefore, he put forth what he felt in the current language. His language was not too archaic to scare the common reader away nor was it so colloquial to bore the elite. For this reason, he has had readers from among the general reader as well as the elites. 'Form and content,' he asserted, 'are born together like twins.'<sup>11</sup>

This paper will trace Naderpour's treatment of the beloved, with a focus on poems that were expurgated from his collected poems after the 1979 revolution in his home country. The female is deemed as powerful and a source of inspiration. At times, she becomes a soul mate, inspiring the speaker with romantic feelings. At other times, she becomes an erotic and sexual partner and on many occasions she is an inseparable part of the outside nature.

The picture which Naderpour draws has roots in the past and present. In the classical Persian literature, women had no grand status. They were either the enchanting beloved or the unfaithful and deceitful woman. Very rarely do they appear as good and pious.<sup>12</sup> In lyric poetry, too, the beloved is, as Shafi'ee Kadkani maintains, a divine, inaccessible, cruel and bloodthirsty masochist.<sup>13</sup>

The female appears in three forms in classical Persian literature. In the first form, which provides a negative picture of women, she is humiliated and belittled as in didactic and religious literature. In such cases, we are dealing with a 'woman' rather than a 'beloved' since there is a clear-cut borderline between the two in Persian literature. The thirteenth-century Sufi poet,

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<sup>8</sup> Forough Farrokhzad, *Harfhā-ī ba Forough Farrokhzad (Words with Forough Farrokhzad)*, ed. Sirous Tahbaz (Tehran: Roshdieh, 1956) 35.

<sup>9</sup> Yazdan Salahshour, *Dar āyeneh: nagh-d-o barrasī-e she'r-e Nāder Nāderpūr (In Mirror: An Analysis of Nader Naderpour's Poetry)* (Tehran: Morvarid, 2001) 126.

<sup>10</sup> Nader Naderpour, 'Goft-o-gūy'ī bā Nāder Nāderpour: shā'er-e bozorg-e mo'āser-e Iran' ('A Dialogue with Nader Naderpour: A Great Contemporary Iranian Poet'), *Mirās-e Iran (Persian Heritage)* 4:15 (Fall 1999) 114–117.

<sup>11</sup> Vahid Eidgah Torghabeh'i, ed., *Kohan dīārā: nagh-d-o tahlil-e āsh'ār-e Nāder Nāderpūr (My Ancient Land! An Analysis of Nader Naderpour's Poetry)* (Tehran: Sokhan, 2009) 186.

<sup>12</sup> See Yahya Arianpour, *Az Nīmā tā rūzegār-e mā: tārikh-e adab-e fārsī-e mo'āser (From Nima to the Present: A History of Contemporary Persian Literature)*. Vol. 3. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Tehran: Zavvar, 2003) 4.

<sup>13</sup> Shafi'ee Kadkani 23.

Rumi, for instance, maintains that one should take women as clothes with which a man cleans his dirt, 'Know that they are like a garment; in them you can cleanse your own impurities and become clean yourself.'<sup>14</sup> In the same century, Sa'di talks about housewives:

If thy wife take the road to the bazar, beat her, or sit thyself like a woman in thy house. Let her eyes be blind in the presence of strangers; when she goeth from thy house, let it be to the grave.

Take a new wife each Spring, O friend, for last year's almanac serves no purpose.<sup>15</sup>

This was more or less typical of the age, culture and dominant masculine attitude. Thus, the poet might at times have been voicing dominant negative views about women rather than his own beliefs.<sup>16</sup>

In the second group, which is indeed a rare case, they are adulated and idealised. To Nizami, a twelfth-century poet, women were not objects of masculine lust but he found in them the potential to run the country, to judge and give counsels. Mahin Banu, an Armenian queen and her niece, Shirin, who becomes the queen after her aunt's death, are such examples in *Khosrow and Shirin*. In this specific example, psychological and cultural factors like xenophilia might be involved in the poet's positive take on the two as they were not Iranians. A prominent Iranian scholar, Zarinkoub, maintains that Shirin is in no way inferior to Khosrow, the Iranian king.<sup>17</sup> Being superior for whatever reason, she does not represent an Iranian woman or the attitudes toward her.

The third group includes charming women for whom love poems are composed as in lyrical poetry. There is, of course, a sharp difference between the second and the third attitude towards women as in the third they are merely objects of love or, more properly, of lust and it is their body that matters. However, there is a point where this group and the first meet and that is the picture of the woman or beloved as a temptress who entices men into sin. Reminding the Western reader of Medusa, in classical Persian poetry the long hair of the beloved is sometimes compared to snakes. In Irāqī, a thirteenth-century Persian poet, we read, 'I hung onto her dishevelled hair/ How fond of me to hold a snake's tail'<sup>18</sup> or in another line by him, 'Tying heart with the hair of any beloved / was leaving heart with a new dragon.'<sup>19</sup> The biblical story of Adam and Eve is repeated in the Islamic tradition so it is not surprising that beautiful women should be linked with Satan, snakes, and Paradise. Persian Sufi literature is replete with such images. Gha'ani, a nineteenth-century poet, makes abundant correlations of the tempting tresses of the beloved with snakes and Satan in the Garden of Eden.<sup>20</sup> Simin Behbehani, a contemporary female poet, puts it in this way, 'The apple tree is bowing before the cypress / as if Eve has a

<sup>14</sup> Rumi, *Discourses of Rumi (Or Fihi ma Fihi)*, Translated by Arthur J. Arberry, Omphaloskepsis: Ames, Iowa, 2000) 156.

<sup>15</sup> Sadi, *The Bustān of Sadi*, translated by A. Hart Edwards, (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1911) 97.

<sup>16</sup> Ali Khaghani, *Zan az negāh-e shā'er (The Woman in the Eyes of the Poet)*, (Tehran: Nedaye Farhang, 1997) 14.

<sup>17</sup> Abdolhossein Zarinkoub, *Pīr-e ganje: dar jostojū-ye nākoja-ābād (The Elder of Ganja: In Search of a Never-never Land)*. 8<sup>th</sup> ed. (Tehran: Sokhan, 2010) 102.

<sup>18</sup> Irāqī, *Dīvān-e ashār (Collected Poems of Irāqī)*, ed. Akbar Khani Jazani, 8<sup>th</sup> ed. (Tehran: Negah Publishers, 2012) 132 (translation mine).

<sup>19</sup> Irāqī, *Collected Poems*, 204 (translation mine).

<sup>20</sup> M. Rastegar Fasa'i, ed., *Āshenā ī bā Ghā'ānī Shīāzī (An Acquaintance with Gha'ani Shirazi)* (Tehran: Bavardaran, 2001).

present to deceive Adam' ('Judas Tree').<sup>21</sup> Forough Farrokhzad finds man and woman equally responsible for the original sin although she finds it a necessary step for growth and finding truth:

Everyone knows,  
you and I saw the garden  
from that cold crabbed aperture  
and that we plucked the apple  
from that playful, hard-to-reach branch.

Everyone is afraid  
everyone is afraid, but you and I  
dared join with the lamp, the water and the mirror.<sup>22</sup>

In Naderpour we at times encounter the image of the beloved as a seductress or as he puts it, a 'sin-thirsty woman.'<sup>23</sup> On a number of occasions he does employ the image of snakes to refer to women. In 'Feverish Thirst', the speaker muses, 'the serpents of her arms crept on my shoulders',<sup>24</sup> and in 'The Sun's Blood' he writes,

Like a drunken serpent  
she was lying in the grass,  
from the cleft of her lids  
sun rays shone on the crystal of the eyes.<sup>25</sup>

All in all, the image is not positive.

In the Persian language, there is a single third person pronoun for both male and female. This has caused ambiguity and has led to age-old questions regarding the gender of the beloved in a given poem. Classical Persian poetry is full of overt or covert cases of homosexuality. In the Sufi spiritual poetry, things get more convoluted when God too as the beloved enters the equation. However, the gender in contemporary poetry is quite known to the audience as she is described in unambiguous terms. In modern times the picture of the beloved has grown more and more vivid as the expression of love has become much more down-to-earth. The beloved moves away from an impersonal and homogenous whole to a clearer personal identity one can find in everyday life.<sup>26</sup>

The change of the picture was partly due to the efforts of female poets.<sup>27</sup> Alamtaj (pen name, Jaleh) Gha'em-maghani (1884-1947) was one the first women to publicly fight for the female cause in the world of literature. The unhappy prearranged marriage at the age of 17 with a man

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<sup>21</sup> Simin Behbehani, *Majmū'e-ye ash'ār (Collected Poems)* (Tehran: Negah Publishers, 2006) 545 (Translation mine).

<sup>22</sup> Forough Farrokhzad, From 'Conquest of the Garden', *Majmū'e-ye ashā'r-e Forūgh Farrokhzād (Forough Farrokhzad: Collected Poems)* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Tehran: Negah, 2004) 273-274 (Translation mine).

<sup>23</sup> Nader Naderpour, *She'r-e angūr (The Grapes Poem)* (Tehran: Morvarid Publishers, 1958) 95.

<sup>24</sup> Naderpour, *The Grapes Poem* 71.

<sup>25</sup> Naderpour, *The Grapes Poem* 90.

<sup>26</sup> See Shafi'ee Kadkani 62-63.

<sup>27</sup> I have excluded female poets of older times like Rabia Balkhi (10<sup>th</sup> century), Mahsati Ganjavi (12<sup>th</sup> century) and Jamileh Isfahani (17<sup>th</sup> century) as we have access not only to poems by modern female poets but to their lives.

whose daughters were older than Jaleh made her look for love in the world of imagination. In her poems she addresses the personal and social sufferings of women and explicitly criticises the patriarchal culture of her times. Many of her poems criticise her forced marriage with a man she never loved: 'Is it marriage or prostitution? / Is it life or in fact death?'<sup>28</sup>

Parvin E'tesami (1907-1941) is another poet who called for social changes through mild censures. She did not actively participate in the social movements for women's rights and freedom.<sup>29</sup> She aimed to teach her compatriots humanitarianism, so her poems are basically free from hedonism and topical issues. The woman in her poems, who is usually a mother, is divine, creative, able and knowledgeable, but romantic love is never her concern. In 'The Woman in Iran' she offers a model of chastity for women. The real pearls, she maintains, to decorate women are simplicity, chastity and immaculacy:

Chastity is in the eye and the heart  
The shabby chador is not the foundation of Islam.<sup>30</sup>

But that was not the approach of the Forough Farrokhzad. She tried to save the beloved and the woman from the male gaze in her poems. Shafi'ee Kadkani argues that in Forough one comes across unprecedented personal experiences.<sup>31</sup> She broke away from the established norms and maintained her own identity. She dared describe the hero sensuously which was atypical for a female poet of her time in Iran:

My beloved  
with his shameless bare body  
stood upright on his sturdy legs  
like death. ...  
My beloved  
is a simple human being  
I have hidden  
in the bushes of my breasts  
like the last sign of an amazing religion  
in an ominous wonderland.<sup>32</sup>

Last but not least was Simin Behbehani (1927-2014), twice a Nobel Prize nominee, a prominent poet and activist who addressed the issues not only of women but of men in our times. A poem like 'A Prostitute's Carol' reflects the plight of a certain class of society which very rarely finds its way into a male poet's mind.

There are rare occasions in Naderpour as in 'From a Half to the Other' with its telling title, when the woman is granted such independent identity:

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<sup>28</sup> Alamtaj (Jaleh) Gha'em-maghani, *Divān-e Jāleh (Jaleh Gha'em-maghani's Collected Poems)* (Tehran: Maa Publishers, 1995) 48.

<sup>29</sup> See Arianpour 540.

<sup>30</sup> Parvin E'tesami, *Divān-e Parvīn'e E'tesāmī (Parvin E'tesami's Collected Poems)* (Tehran: Ketab Nemouneh, 1992) 221-222 (translation mine).

<sup>31</sup> Shafi'ee Kadkani 23

<sup>32</sup> Farrokhzad, *Collected Poems*, 'My Beloved' 240-243 (translation mine).

O grandeur of the Being!  
O great joy!  
O immortal feminine soul!  
In the depth of this dark night,  
flow as the river of light! ...  
Remain a woman, O essence of femininity!<sup>33</sup>

However, the beloved in Naderpour appears in different forms. In her crudest form, she is a sex object. There are many such poems, almost all of which were included in his books of poems before the revolution and censored in the versions published after the revolution. The composition of such poems coincides with Naderpour's youth when sexual, erotic and romantic themes were his main concerns. Many of the poems discussed in this paper are from *The Grapes Poem*. They can be categorized based on the degree as well as the overtness of sexuality.

The beloved in the first category is a mere sexual partner quenching the thirst of the avid speaker. There is little trace of Naderpour's typical power of depiction and varied imagery in these poems as they are overtly literal. In 'Feverish Thirst'<sup>34</sup> the speaker does not bother to cover eroticism in the figurative language he is familiar with. The poem draws on few literary tropes and is mainly a direct narration of corporeal enjoyment. In the poem, 'Need,'<sup>35</sup> romantic images are still straightforward and little figurative description of the beloved is given.

Sometimes Naderpour's descriptive and imaginative power is at the service of sexuality. 'Relish'<sup>36</sup> is an example of an erotic poem detailing acts of sex. In 'Geography' the city of Tehran is imagined as a prostitute to whom Mount Alborz is making love:

In the sky's ceramic tallow-burning light,  
on a colourful bedspread with hundreds of patches,  
Tehran, the prostitute,  
lies drunk and naked.  
She has closed her eyes out of fear  
the red-skinned sun might sew her at dawn  
to the bed with his arrow,  
but she has opened her two fat legs  
and the Alborz mountain range  
is screwing her in the dead of the night.<sup>37</sup>

In 'The Sun's Blood' the sky is depicted as a voyeur and the speaker-lover bars the beloved with his shadow from the sky's amorous glance.<sup>38</sup> In 'Night Flower'<sup>39</sup> human and nature together have a significant part in the production of the images of love-making. Sometimes human romance finds a counterpart in nature and gradually the two plots merge in a concerto:

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<sup>33</sup> Nader Naderpour, *Majmū'eh-ye ash'ār (Collected Poems)*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Tehran: Negah Publishers, 2004) 547.

<sup>34</sup> Naderpour, *The Grapes Poem* 69–72.

<sup>35</sup> Nader Naderpour, *Sormeh-ye khorshīd (The Sun's Kohl)* (Tehran: Morvarid Publishers, 1960)135–137.

<sup>36</sup> Naderpour, *The Grapes Poem* 171–174.

<sup>37</sup> Naderpour, *Collected Poems* 494. Tehran is situated at the skirt of the mountain range, Alborz, a masculine name in Persian.

<sup>38</sup> Naderpour, *The Grapes Poem* 89–92.

<sup>39</sup> Naderpour, *The Grapes Poem* 115–117.

The city lay naked in the arms of the cloud,  
no star's toothed eye  
watched her through tree branches.  
The cloud slipped his aquamarine hand from the minaret top  
onto the dome of her breast.

...

The shower of my feverish kisses  
planted fever blisters on her lips like the rain's kisses,  
she was sleeping and I cried all night  
like a cloud over the ruins of her body. (From 'A Cloud over a Ruin,' 1960)<sup>40</sup>

In 'Impatient' nature helps prepare the beloved for the lustful lover. In the morning the curves of her body are carved by the sun's golden axe, at noon beads of sweats drip from her body, and at night she is prepared for the bed.<sup>41</sup>

Naderpour shows an incredible power of vision, turning an ordinary thing or image into a beautiful artifact at will. This is a reminder of the seventeenth century English metaphysical poets whose wit and sensibility created romantic images out of unromantic objects such as fleas. Images of lovemaking can come from anywhere. The following epigrammatic poem is a romantic scene whose images are borrowed from bakery:

I knead the warm dough of your limbs.  
The breasts: sweet loaves,  
one, the moon; the other, the sun.  
The hot oven of my bosom opens mouth  
O God, how full is my bare tablecloth tonight! ('Tablecloth,' 1959)<sup>42</sup>

Naderpour's youth and the post-coup milieu were two main factors which had their inevitable impact on the production of sexual explicitness in poetry, although he is not the first in Persian poetry to write about such subjects.<sup>43</sup> However, as the poet grows older and more mature he engages in more figurative approaches to topics with romantic or erotic overtones. In the following short poem, images from nature strongly blend with that of lovemaking. The poem describes a woman in terms of nature but the sex act is now described symbolically. Thus, a gradual shift from the literal to the figurative is perceived in Naderpour:

She belonged to the earth's naked body:  
soft white soil  
with two burning hills  
embraced by the sun  
and two arms of a river  
flowing down  
to a shameful cleft

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<sup>40</sup> Nader Naderpour, *Giāh-o sang na, ātash (Not Plant and Stone, but Fire)* (Tehran: Morvarid, 1978) 24–27.

<sup>41</sup> Naderpour, *The Grapes Poem* 93-94.

<sup>42</sup> Naderpour, *The Sun's Kohl* 79.

<sup>43</sup> Azraghi (11<sup>th</sup> century), Suzani Samarghandi (12<sup>th</sup> century), Ubayd-e Zakani (14<sup>th</sup> century), and Iraj Mirza (19-20<sup>th</sup> century) were some famous figures who talked about sexuality in naked terms though for various purposes.

at the bottom of which  
grew a wet patch of grass  
watered by a spring  
as red as a smile.

I wept in the evening  
of her narrow ravine. ('Natural Map' 1975)<sup>44</sup>

The beloved is not always a sex object. Naderpour at times enhances her from terrestrial to celestial domains. In such cases she is wrapped in spirituality and becomes more and more ethereal. 'Sketch' is particularly important in that there is a dramatic shift from the body to the soul, from the earth to paradise, from the human to the houri, and from the reality to fantasy. The speaker used to know the beloved's body well enough but for the first time he discovers her heavenly self and wishes her to be his soul-mate.<sup>45</sup>

In 'Fugitive' the speaker remembers and wishes for a return of youthful caprices when both the lover and the beloved were young: 'though the sun of your eyes got the colour of the autumn, / in my eyes you are still the smiling spring.'<sup>46</sup> Nature provides fine images, however, unlike 'Sketch' in which the woman is presented as an angel, she is now a bewitching seducer, an unavoidable 'sin-thirsty woman.'

Naderpour is first and foremost a poet of nature.<sup>47</sup> It is not unusual for the reader to find the beloved occupying a special place in his portrayal of nature. Different gradations of his take on the feminine from the most spiritual to the most carnal can be observed here, too. The day is seen as a woman who emerges from the dawn and on whose long hair the dust of the red dusk glitters.<sup>48</sup> The sun is described as a woman from whose breast, the milk of light flows into the copper sky.<sup>49</sup> The beloved is sometimes a bird that has abandoned the speaker who is likened to a lonely chicken.<sup>50</sup> However, Naderpour's favourite natural image is that of the tree. The poet is able to see the tree as he wishes, either spiritual or carnal. The beloved can be a tree giving virgin birth to a bird in the morning as in the following short poem composed on Christmas Eve:

The spirit of the morning  
hangs fruit on the virgin tree;  
from its green womb  
a bird is born, and flies  
toward the red opening  
in the sun.

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<sup>44</sup> Zarei and Sedarat 34-35.

<sup>45</sup> Naderpour, *The Sun's Kohl* 67-68.

<sup>46</sup> Naderpour, *The Grapes Poem* 95-97.

<sup>47</sup> See Zarei and Sedarat.

<sup>48</sup> Naderpour, 'A Woman with a Lantern in Hand' (1969), *Collected Poems* 538.

<sup>49</sup> 'A Future in the Past' (1984), Zarei, 70.

<sup>50</sup> Naderpour, 'A Lantern beyond the Reed-Bed' (1960), *Collected Poems* 359-360.

A brother to light,  
this happy bird ('The Holy Spirit,' December 1969).<sup>51</sup>

She can be the last leaf on a dead bony tree;<sup>52</sup> or the tree itself is an erotic object for the sun's lust:

Dusty Poplars,  
without bending,  
wash their feet in the brook  
and the lecherous Sun, from among branches,  
warmly kisses their marble-white legs. (From 'An Approaching Spring,' 1964)<sup>53</sup>

At last, the borderline between the tree and the beloved is blurred and the two become one as the object of the speaker's romantic love:

Your body's aroma,  
your lovely tall figure,  
your warm blood,  
your blossoming breasts,  
your gracefully long legs,  
awaken the spring in me. ('A Lover Looks at a Tree,' 1970)<sup>54</sup>

Some images and concepts produced here are typical of love poetry but some others are unique to Naderpour. The poems selected from Naderpour's books of poems composed over decades are intended to offer a snapshot of his take on the beloved in his poetry. His depictions do not account for the beloved in her entirety in Persian literature. However, in his massive poetical corpus, Naderpour portrayed a fairly comprehensive picture of the desired and beloved woman under a male gaze. It is true that in him the beloved has no identity to express and she is only there to be loved passively. The period of suppression between the coup and the revolution which brought about dejection among intellectuals was not so bad after all from another perspective. Mohammad Reza Shah's secular regime did not care about implementing strict moral and religious codes on published material so new branches of literature like erotic poetry had a chance to flourish, while some older branches, like strict moralism in the didactic literature, withered. Good or bad, many were to miss erotic poetry on the formal literary scene in the years after the Islamic revolution.

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<sup>51</sup> Zarei and Sedarat 37.

<sup>52</sup> Naderpour, 'The Leaf and the Wind' (1961), *Collected Poems* 377.

<sup>53</sup> Naderpour, *Collected Poems* 444.

<sup>54</sup> Zarei and Sedarat 33.

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