

The Comparative Study of Mari Evans and Forough Farrokhzad's Selected Poems: A New Historic Outlook

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Abstract

Extensive interest in the field of comparative literary studies emerged in the early decades of the nineteenth century with the main focus of comparing similarities in perspectives and variations in beliefs which congregate or rupture world views, representing human thought. It is the objective of the present study to analyze and compare the components which yield to the New Historical analysis of two literary pieces to discover the existing nuances related to the artists' socio-cultural milieu and to illustrate how this mirrors personality development in their poetry. For this means, two poems have been chosen: "I Am a Black Woman" from Mari Evans, a contemporary African-American poetess, and "Farewell" from Forough Farrokhzad, the influential, modernist Iranian artist. Results will indicate how the views of the two poets differ from one another in regard to the relationship between identity formation and the role that episteme plays in this process. Inevitably, there will be concern about the influence of zeitgeist in imagery production since literary work is the doings of historical-socio-cultural discourses as much as creative imagination.

Keywords: Comparative Studies, Discourse, Episteme, New Historicism, Zeitgeist.

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1. Introduction

Comparative analysis is an interdisciplinary method which is characteristically intercultural and transitional and concerns itself with studying the multi-dimensional components which may encompass social, philosophical, cultural, ideological factors helping to shape identity. This type of analysis, particularly in the field of literature, can act as a convenient and valuable tool for acquiring deep knowledge into processes and interactions, with the ultimate goal of deepening insight. Through a comparative study, especially in the field of poetry, similarities and differences in perspectives and world views will come to light and hopefully a greater appreciation for the richness and diversity of the world's literary heritage will result.

New Historicism is by definition, a modern critical literary approach which emphasizes on considering any work of art in a context of which the constituents are politico-historical, socio-cultural, and ideological-religious discourses. Ironically, this approach has concerns for the present, particularly on the impact of history on current events. The emphasis as suggested in *Literary Theory of Postcolonialism & New Historicism*, is on "the effect of the past on today and today's reinterpretation of the past" (Wang 1999: 232). Thus, New Historicism proposes a strong and meaningful oscillation between various discursive zones and accentuates their merge in order to examine the multi-dimensional components which encompass distinct discourses, particularly history.

Mari Evans (1923-2017), the celebrated prolific American poetess eagerly kindles into wakefulness a particular kind of consciousness which urges investigation into the status of Afro-Americans. Evans enacts her beliefs in her poetry, and as stated in *Resistance, Insurgence and Identity*, "Her poetry reverberates with ideas of resistance, mental insurgence and linguistic identity grounded in Black idiomatic traditions that can be heard in the everyday speech of common folk" (Douglas 2008: 151). Moreover, she works assiduously to enlighten Black individuals about the principles which hold priority among the members of her race, reminding them of humanistic values such as, resilience and dignity. "I Am a Black Woman" is a poem published in 1970 and currently appears in a poetry collection by the same title. The poem highlights horrendous hardships in two distinct cases which eventuate in the formation of a cognizant character in the crucible of tragic events, namely slavery and war which incidentally are of bold significance in the historical trajectory of Afro-Americans. Contrary to the initial sorrowful tone at the commencement, the poem ends on a much stronger note where

the persona publically addresses the whole world and claims she can be a role model inspiring others, meanwhile evoking a sense of aspiration. The thematic core is based on the Black identity and how it becomes the subject of pride as the beams of knowledge light the way. The last few lines in the poem are profuse with symbols and signs which readily yield evidence to the subject matter.

In Iran, at a time when not only art but also literature, and all else that mattered in a society, were dominantly controlled by men, Forough Farrokhzad (1934-1967), a rebellious poet, set foot into this world. She began to compose poetry in her late teens, displaying much promise. Her first collection *Asir* [Captive] (1955) with 44 poems, *Divar* [Wall] (1956) and *Esyān* [Rebellion] (1958), each with 25 poems, belong to the first period of the poet's literary career. *Tavalodi Degar* [Rebirth] (1964) with 35 poems and *Eman Beyavareem Be Aghaze Fasl Sard* [Let Us Believe in the Dawn of the Cold Season] (1973) can be affiliated to the second period. While still alive, many literary critics and the literati either ignored her works or took her poetry to task, for themes that were either too "loose" or too controversial for the taste of the conservative society. If her first three collections received little acclaim, her fourth attracted the attention of the media and literary circles for her talent had reached a level in maturity, both in form and content, so that it could no longer be ignored. In her short life, ending when she was only thirty-two, she composed poems that radiated with ingenuity and sensuality, with the intent of repelling the rigid boundaries that were set for women. In *A Lonely Woman*, it is stipulated that, "Farrokhzad's vision, even of universals, is ever redolent with the individuality of her own experience" (Hillmann 1987: 24). In Iran, from antiquity, women had always been the subject of poetry and they were praised for noticeable features, traditionally denoting beauty, for example, long hair, large black eyes and fair skin. However, Farrokhzad, as a modernist, was determined to bring about change and present a new and totally different picture of her gender by initiating change and giving a purposive and resonant "voice" to her persona.

Consequently, if,

comparative literature is the study of literature beyond the confines of one particular country and the study of the relationship between literature on one hand and the other areas of knowledge and belief such as the [fine] arts, philosophy, history, the social sciences, religion, etc. on the other (Dominguez, Saussy and Villanueva 2015: 5),

then it can be asserted that the various interactive discourses of Evans and Farrokhzad's lifetime, as emphasized by a New Historic stance, play a significant role in determining their perspectives towards the process of identity formation and questioning the dominant discourse in their respective societies. Worthy-of-note in the present analysis is how the cultural-socio-historical episteme determines the general tone and outlook that each artist holds in lending a definitive voice to the persona as identity formation is in process.

2. Literature Review

As expected, innovation is a meaningful target in all fields of study. Thus, it is essential to not only realize but also recognize what has already been carried out about a particular subject. In this section, the investigations which aided the author in data collection and presentation shall be introduced.

Stephen Henderson in *Understanding the New Black Poetry* (1973) emphasizes the significance of studying Black culture prior to analysis while in an outstanding collection of papers entitled *Black Women Writers (1950-1980): A Critical Evaluation* (1983), David Dorsey eulogizes Evans' style of composing poetry in "The Art of Mari Evans" and illustrates how the poetess is master of "Black aesthetic principles". *Resistance, Insurgence and Identity* (2008) by Robert L. Douglas traces Evans' mastery in composing poetry from 1952 to 1968. Kristin L. Matthews, in "Neither Inside Nor Outside: Mari Evans, the Black Aesthetic and the Canon" (2011), highlights the strength in Evans' poetry and argues why her work must be canonized.

In *English and American Studies: Practice and Theory* (2012), J.B. Metzler has accomplished a scholarly work of which in the section concerning New Historicism, there are valuable comments helping readers to discover the role that discourse analysis plays in determining how literary texts and their socio-cultural function explain the circulation and production of meaning in specific historical moments.

In an article entitled "American Slavery in History and Memory and the Search for Social Justice" (2004), Ira Berlin emphasizes the necessity of studying slavery in modern times as it is a crisis that transgresses the border lines of the past and enters the realm of the present while searching for social justice. The paper delineates how enslavement continues to exist in our collective memory and history.

Jasmin Darznik, in an essay entitled, "Forugh Farrokhzad: Her Poetry, Life, and Legacy" (2006), attempts to present a clear picture of Iran in the youth of the poet

which is ostensibly mirrored in her upbringing and lifestyle; moreover, she praises Farrokhzad's audacious attempt to write erotic poetry against all odds. Darznik stipulates, "She left behind a body of work that sits squarely on every vexed intersection in modern Iranian history: individualism and tradition, sexuality and religion, nationalism and modernity" (Darznik 2006: 21).

In her research work, *Forugh Farrokhzad* (2007), Sholeh Walope, sheds light on Farrokhzad's legacy as she calls for the recognition of women's potentialities and defies the established binary oppositions between the sexes. Farrokhzad's poetry, she claims, is the poetry of protest --- protest through revelation of the innermost, enigmatic world of women.

Women and Politics in Iran: Veiling, Unveiling, Reveiling (2007) by Hamideh Sedigh is a historical resource, which as its title suggests, provides a clear picture of the politico-cultural situation of Iran in the span between two dynasties. Much of the documented data, reflecting the circumstances under which women lived and fought for rights was adapted from this work.

In a paper entitled "Captivity, Confrontation and Self-Empowerment: Identity in Forugh Farrokhzad's Poetry" (2010), Parvin Ghasemi and Farideh Pourgivi commend the poet's style and highlight Farrokhzad's struggle against the mainstream, resisting conformity and subjugation in order to achieve liberation and self-empowerment.

Autoosa Kojoori-Saatchi's thesis entitled "The Culture of Revolution: Revolutionary Transformation in Iran" (2010), elaborates on the causes of the numerous social turbulences in the contemporary history of Iran and derives at the conclusion that chaotic internal systems, the interference of neighboring countries and super powers have been very influential. Provided historical data was of considerable help in understanding the historical ambience of the poet's era.

In another article entitled, "*From Modernization of Daniel Lerner (1950s) to Present Day Modernization of Tehran, Iran*" (2014), Yadegari discusses Daniel Lerner's investigation of Iran while tracing the various causes of expeditious changes, namely the unstable tempo of urbanization and modernization and its effects. In the article, "Forough Farrokhzad and the Persian Literary Canon" (2017), Pishbin analyzes and illuminates the merits of Farrokhzad's poetry, in addition to, examining the reasons as to why Forough's poetry must be canonized.

In a brief article entitled "*Farrokhzad the Iconoclast: A New Wave in the Visual and Literary Art of Iran*" (2018) by K. Neethu Tilakan, Farrokhzad's four

collections, published before her death, are reviewed and a general comment is made about the uniqueness of her poetry. The article also makes a comparison and notes differences in Forough's poetry in her former collections and the later ones by elaborating on her maturation and depth of thought affecting identity formation.

In a paper entitled "The New Historicism" (1992), Dwight W. Hoover reviews the developments in the field and traces the origins of the approach. He concludes his work by agreeing with George Orwell that the historian has the obligation of preserving the past. The paper sheds light on the extent to which the "co-text" of a literary work must be considered alongside the text in literary analysis.

In an illuminating paper entitled "Reading Texts as a New Historiocity Analyzing the Discourses of Sauvshun" (2019), Hossein Payandeh elaborates on the criteria which differentiates Historicism from New Historicism and applies the principles of the latter onto Daneshvar's eminent novel.

Yet, in another paper entitled "*Fables Agreed Upon: A Comparative Study of New Historicism and Alternate History*" (2021), the authors Feng Li and Lewis Yitzhak offer a comparative analysis of New Historicism and Alternate History. The analysis is carried out while concepts such as narrativity, inter-textuality, and spatiality are compared in both fields.

3. Theoretical Framework

New Historicism, as a critical literary approach, stipulates that in analyzing a work of art, the historical and cultural context in which the text is produced is essentially to be assessed and it would be a grave mistake to exclusively focus on the formal structure of the text per se, as literary pieces are not to be deemed as solitary forms. In this regard, a work should not be interpreted by concentrating on the universal themes embedded in the work but hyper-textual information such as the author's social background and the cultural context need to be considered as well. Thus, a New Historic outlook will tentatively divulge how notions, attitudes and ideologies cooperate across a broader spectrum and go beyond the literary stances in order to situate artistic texts in a position where they can be estimated on a historical basis. Findings obtained through a New Historic analysis will pave the way to a profound understanding of the impact that historical and cultural discourses have in relation to life at large. The interpretation of any literary text should take into account the association amid discourses so that metaphorically expressed "a text becomes a battleground of competing ideas among the author,

society, customs, institutions and social practices that are all eventually negotiated by the author and the reader and influenced by each contributor's episteme" (Bressler 1994: 187). Hence, it is New Historicism which claims to provide its advocates with a practice of literary analysis that traces the intricate interconnection between all human activities, as it confirms its own prejudices and provides a more thorough perception than other literary approaches.

This study is an attempt to display, in the light of New Historic principles, via a comparative method, how the various, distinctive and significant discourses, namely, historical-socio-cultural ones, are reciprocally active in a close network of associations to determine and then oppose common thought within a community so as to reveal its influence on the manner in which an artist chooses to present an outlook. Furthermore, there will be endeavors to unveil the episteme that encircles the milieu of the selected poets while allowing them to "give voice" to their personae in a manner of self-expression while encountering oppression and subjugation - Evans as a marginalized member of her community and Farrokhzad entangled in the mesh of biased patriarchal convictions. The New Historic outlook applied to the two poems is a clear manifestation of how the poet's power in imagery creation is not inseparable from the context in which it was fashioned. Arguably, the research will display that in reality a literary work is much less the outcome of the artist's imagination and more the result of the social, cultural and historical circumstances in which she lives.

Both poems will be read in the light of the poet's historical and cultural background. This is an indispensable section of the methodological approach in this study for the critic's chief role in interpreting history is not to provide an account for what actually happened but to explain how it should be understood and "how cultural meaning emerges from historical events" (Klages 2006: 125).

In the wake of interrelated connections, interpretation reveals that there exists a complex web of interlinked discourses that empower and shape cultural beliefs. Plausibly, no single discourse will divulge the pathway to the discovery of truth concerning worldview and it is the particular details which reveal the more prominent issues worthy-of-note (Geertz 1973: 26). Analyzing social and cultural discourses discloses how the selected poets in this study choose to make a statement and elaborate on the views concerning identity formation. In order to unlock the intricacies of the textual meaning, three domains will be probed; instances from the poet's personal life, the interactive and effective socio-historical discourses and how

they graft in the artist's work, and last but not least, the process of identity formation. In this light, even the tone which the poet uses throughout the work can act as a reflective behavioral code which helps to shape the text.

4. Discussion

In a thorough analysis, various connections which characterize and define a poem in a network of relationships need to be taken into consideration. Once this is carried out, the readers may come to possess a deeper knowledge of the text than the creator of the literary piece. This is an acknowledged fact as hidden meanings are disclosed and unconscious and subconscious levels in the text, which the author is completely oblivious of, are unveiled for the reader who has an omniscient view in regards to the socio-historical-cultural milieu.

4.1 "I Am a Black Woman"

The poem resembles a tri-part narrative, each discussing a distinct topic but at the end amalgamating to produce a cohesive text, focusing on the concept of "identity formation". It covers the topics of slavery, anti-war protests and the formation of the black identity, particularly of the Black woman. Another argument which shall be addressed in this section is the significance of discourse analysis in the inquiry throughout the literary text and the socio-historical-cultural milieu which affects the voice resonant in the persona.

In the first part of the poem, the horrendous issue of slavery is the main concern. Records have it that, between the fifteenth and nineteenth century, European ships transported 12.5 million Africans to the New World, from Kongo and Angolia, of which only 10.7 survived. The slave trade provided political power, social standing and wealth for the colonizers in America. Through an unjust system which violated and denied natural rights, such as life and liberty, from the enslaved and imposed unpaid and coerced labor upon them, the free natives of Western and Central Africa were forcefully carried away to be commercialized, discriminated against and inherited. The "Atlantic System" involved the transaction of goods and humans that were hauled across the Atlantic Ocean, notoriously called "the Middle Passage", in an intolerable process characterized by execrable conditions. Chained together in special "slave ships" which were devoid of any conveniences for the long and hazardous journey across the ocean, slaves were landed on the shores of America with no knowledge of where they were going or if they would ever be released.

Overheating, thirst, starvation, violence and illness rendered the conditions on board so unbearable that the slaves would either not survive or would attempt suicide by jumping over board to rid themselves of the fright and confusion pertaining to their tragic predicament. Those who arrived safely to land were destined to toil on plantations for food and shelter and nothing much more. In an inequitable system named “chattel bondage”, not only slaves but also their progeny became the property of the slaveholder to be exploited or sold as was seen fit. The plantation owners who mainly dwelled in the agriculturally beneficial southern regions and avaricious for wealth and economic turnover, had little thought about the human beings who toiled on their farms only for basics and victuals.

Most of the plantations harvested cotton and sugar cane, the latter being notoriously labeled the “brutal” crop since many workers were either maimed or killed during its cultivation. Widespread disease, unfavorable climate and inhuman working conditions rendered everyday life a continual struggle for survival. In the areas where the black population outnumbered the white, the colonists were advised to exploit the slaves to the verge of exhaustion so that there would be no threat of rebellion and strict measures were taken to curb any enthusiasm for potential protests. Enslavement was a racial, life-long and hereditary discrimination, mercilessly inflicted on individuals regardless of their sex and age. Special communities were formed to aid refuge through canebrake and forest into the sanctuary of the northern states, where slavery was illegal, with the use of forged passes. Many were caught during escape and were either brutally whipped to death as a deterrent act or mutilated to prevent further attempts. The outrageous crime of enslavement is one that the Black community will never pass into oblivion for the intention is not to forget or forgive but to constantly recall. Black members owe part of their subversive and pliable character to their history of slavery. The wretchedness with which slaves fought for liberation shadows the first few lines of Evans’ poem. The words that the poet uses in order to resurrect the pain and hardship which the Black minority has had to endure throughout time, artfully emerges within the following lines:

I saw my mate leap screaming into the sea
and I/ with these hands/ cupped the lifebreath
from my issue in the canebrake

(Evans 1970: 11).

These lines relate the despondent story of how the Africans were abducted to the New World, a phenomenon which has forever scarred the conscious and unconscious memory of the Black and is oftentimes reflected in Black literature. Evans paints two images; the first of a slave who intends to extricate himself by going overboard and the second, an escapee, hiding in the canebrake, fighting for his life. Evans inter-weaves the two instances since they are related as suggestive ways to emancipation which has a permanent desirable virtue and is an inseparable limb of humanity. Freedom from dominion and imposition are merits valued by all members of the Black community, who wish to reflect the atrocities of slavery in their art, whether visually or verbally.

In the second part of the poem, as an activist, the poet, along with so many other protesters in, not only America, but also some European countries, in the decades of the 1960s and 1970s, voices her abhorrence of war and its atrocities. In those years, most students became political activists and opposed the decision of politicians, by joining various campaigns and rallies. Evans composes,

I lost Nat's swinging body in a rain of tears
and heard my son scream all the way from Anzio
for Peace he never knew... I
learned Da Nang and Pork Chop Hill
in anguish
Now my nostrils know the gas
and these tire/d fingers
seek the softness in my warrior's beard

(Evans 1970: 11).

Within these lines, Evans retells the appalling story of overseas wars in which many young American draftees lost their lives. With references made to the sites where the US army had established military bases in Europe and Asia, like so many other activists, Evans outspokenly gives voice to her persona, expressing her disapproval of overseas war and the conscription service, thus converting her emotions into visual verbiage, providing an outlet for emotional expression.

As early as 1945, rallies took place among the Merchant Marine sailors condemning the government for the exploitation of merchant ships to transfer troops to southwest Asia to settle what was called the "subjugation of the native population of Vietnam" (New York Times, 2019). In 1954 and in 1960, American Quakers, in regards to religious concerns, protested via the media. They also held a silent protest,

called the “Pentagon Riot” in which 25,000 students, the same number as the soldiers sent to Vietnam, ringed the Pentagon for two whole days, followed by acts of civil disobedience. Peace movement leaders opposed the war on moral and economic grounds, maintaining that the people in Northern Vietnam were defending their country against needless intrusion of foreign aggressors. Da Nang in Vietnam, Anzio in Italy and Pork Chop Hill in Korea were sites where American troops had their bases, locations where young men came together in call for service without alternatives, requested by their commanders to kill with impunity. A disaster from the beginning and a tragedy at the end, all that was achieved from overseas confrontations was the loss of precious lives. Four million Vietnamese and 58,000 Americans lost their lives in the war in Vietnam. Much more were perished by shell bombs spreading toxic gases, harming the defenseless natives while leaving a repercussion of harm and toxicity for generations to come. There was no attainment but the legacy of changing America’s military engagement forever by replacing the involuntary draft system with a voluntary program. The US government is still held responsible for the loss of lives, destruction of infra-structure and the environment, besides being the cause of human suffering. Evans’ poem seems to be composed in the wake of all those objections about unnecessary conflicts resulting in catastrophe. Many agree with the poet that, unfortunately, politicians are not smart enough to have learned from the dismal experiences of the past and still advocate needless foreign intrusion whenever the opportunity arises. That is exactly the reason why Evans takes it upon herself to reverberate the resonance of the brutality in war after five decades and recognizes this socio-political awakening as part of an artist’s mission.

In the poem, the active and alert persona, who is well aware of the turbulences in the historical past of America, comments on how related events have shaped her character. The persona is hardened in the crucible of mishaps and hardship and becomes a strong, determined person --- one that can be characterized by admirable strength and fortitude and becomes the proto-type of the Black individual. The poet writes,

I
am a black woman
tall as a cypress
strong
beyond all definition still
defying place
and time
and circumstance

assailed
impervious
indestructible

(Evans 1970: 12).

Intermittent misfortune, in the contemporary history of America, has sculpted a rebellious character out of the black woman who defies all and becomes invincible. A striking factor is the undeniable role that the political episteme plays on the formation of Evans' persona. She is not concerned with the "self" and the "personal", but on a larger scale, with what engages her external world and her community. The obsession with anti-war protests whittle a formidable cast for the rebellious spirit who becomes an activist and reacts to decisions made in ignorance and arrogance on the part of politicians, implementing policies and merely wishing to quench their thirst for wealth and power while overlooking the immediate needs of the people they represent. Evans emphasizes the shift of transgressing the closed circuit of being involved with the "particular" to what is "communal". The transformation seems worthwhile and is what donates character to a voice who has stepped onto the vaster arena of public affairs. The poet ends the poem with a few suggestive words, "Look/ on me and be /renewed" (Evans 1970: 12).

Evans' poetry is the mnemonics of endurance and resistance, illustrating how historical and political events lend a worldly-wise character to the identity of the Black woman. Both discourses leave bold imprints in the poem and contribute intrepidity and valiance to the creation of a voice who straightforwardly indicates her anxieties when she proclaims, "I am a black woman".

4.2 "Farewell"

In order to have a better focus of the ambiance in which Forough worked and lived, it is essential to regress into the historical past of her native land for at least a century, though researchers would unanimously agree that the sense of severity and deterioration that imbued her times, could be traced back into antiquity for Iran has long been, and to some extent still is, characterized by a male-dominant superiority. The situation of the Iranian woman can be best summarized in the writings of Bibi Khatum Astarabadi (1852-1920), an outspoken Qajar woman,

Behind the closed doors at home, prohibited from everything in life, education, training and social life, women are regarded as mindless, like infants. They are

confined to the burdens of household work and child-bearing and are considered the slaves and servants of their husbands (Sedghi 2007: 25).

This quote paints an indeed miserable picture of women's social position, supported by cultural beliefs or rather misbeliefs; however, this has been the Iranian woman's life in a nutshell. The British orientalist, Clara Rice who had travelled to Iran comments on women's situation thus,

Most trades are in the hands of men, such as pottery-making, calico-printing, felt-hat making and confectionary. All shops are kept by men ... there is no profession open to women. Art, music and literature may be said to be closed to them. All occupations followed by them [women] call for manual work rather than brainwork (Sedghi 2007: 25).

However, women were not the only victims of oppression and generally speaking, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the whole country was afflicted by economical backwardness and political chaos.

Patriarchal tendencies and strict religious teachings aggravated the situation for women and confined them to the rooms and the courtyard of their fathers or husbands' houses. They were "strictly safeguarded from the public domain or men's world, their houses or rooms had no windows facing the streets and the outside world and their mobility was severely controlled" (Sedghi 2007: 26). Class and social level had no or very little effect on how women led their lives since the patriarchal system proposed that there should be strict male control over women's labor and sexuality both in private and public. The ambition of many young women, in passivity, was to wait for an economically advantageous matrimony which would provide them with more liberation in expenditure than they were allowed in their fathers' household.

In Iran, traditionally, families favored and celebrated the birth of baby boys over girls. The reason becomes obvious once we learn that the general attitude to the upbringing of girls was that they were to understand that their sexuality, reproductivity and labor were the only merits they had as assets. Without any specific training, girls were expected to follow in their mothers' footsteps and they were condemned to act as another link in the chain of the feminine-life cycle, confined to houses, rooms and courtyards, having little to do with the hustle and bustle of contemporary life, in full flow, beyond the doors segregating them from the rest of the society.

This drastic situation extended far into the reign of the first Pahlavi (1925-1941), though after the visits made by the king to Turkey, amendments were made. The king allowed girls to pursue their education in modern-style schools and they were encouraged to continue their studies, though sending them abroad was still out of the question. More liberties were granted and women were invited to work in the service sector which they gladly accepted for this gave them a chance to leave the confinement of their houses and to be seen. Years of retro-gradation acted as a catalyst and urged women to learn, gain skills and prepare themselves for social presentation. Women, regardless of their social class, were affected by the modernization policies proposed by the second Pahlavi (1941-1979) taking the best advantage of the opportunity offered to them by lifting the heavy sanctions imposed on their lives. The resulting mobility was a blessing which opened the portals of social and cultural change and encouraged woman to seek what they were, no doubt, entitled to. Forough Farrokhzad was born into the turmoil of such circumstances. Her father was a colonel and had strict military discipline, subjugating the whole household. Partly due to this fact, and somehow as tradition dictated, in those days, girls were married off in their adolescence. Forough left the sanctuary of her father's house and got married to the satirist Parviz Shapour. Rebellious and impatient, curious to gain new experiences on a daily basis, she sought divorce a year after a baby boy was born. Her husband denied any kind of meeting between mother and son, adding despair and misery to Forough's general restlessness. A headstrong and determined character, she was intent on expressing her views in a daring voice, one that distinctly mirrored the Iranian woman's oppressive social situation in a purely male-dominated world. Her first poetry collection *Asir* (1955) was the harbinger of a voyeuristic fascination with poetry and was published when she was only twenty one.

Three keywords describe the character and poetry of Forough Farrokhzad; controversial, iconoclastic and rebellious. She was born at a time of great social change. Several decades before her birth, the cultural and social circumstances were all in favor of a rigid patriarchal community in which women had a very small role, if any at all. All that was expected of women was to manage households without being heard or seen. Presentation in the society, in any form, was completely unheard of and, of course, unexpected. Farrokhzad entered the society just as reform was beginning and this is acknowledged as the most difficult point of transition in any society on the verge of an evolution, for it is at this time when new ideas have not been completely settled and traditional ways have not been fully eradicated.

Forough entered this intermediary period when she had to not only deal with the demands of her own family but also face the interrogation of the society. As a woman, she did not want to abide to the cultural episteme of her time and strived to provide women with the opportunity to be seen and so she gave them a voice in her poetry. Of course, her poetry was looked down upon and scornfully received for what critics judged to be erotic and immoral.

The journals which were appalled by the uncensored presentation of the “female voice” in her works would interview her constantly, seeking the truth of her intentions. They were interested in discovering why she was so obsessed with the female gender in her poems. No doubt, due to physical, emotional and spiritual inclinations, a female poet will be inclined to give greater attention to certain issues, ones which are not usually addressed by men. However, she refrained from setting border lines between issues regarding gender difference. Ostensibly, the cultivation and mental growth of an individual knows no boundaries and the nourishment of one’s positive characteristics up to a level worthy of being, otherwise known as “human”, is what really counts.

Forough tried to be the live example of what she preached. If she wanted women to have freedom of expression, the right to enter the society and be part of its economic cycle, and to be able to lead independent lives, liberated from the dominance of the other sex, in her short life, she exhibited all these ambitions to perfection. To her, it was essential for women to go beyond the traditional binary oppositions and to live their lives as they saw fit. Farrokhzad strongly opposed the idea of the episteme prevalent in the society and proved that aimless silence and excessive modesty which were expected norms for women were meaningless and only set to benefit the male supremacy. With her poems, she sliced through the conventions of her time and stepped onto the terra firma of reality, displaying the power of poetry to ward off superstition and bias.

A closer look at a selected poem “Veda” [Farewell] which appears in her poetry collection *Asir* [Captive] can set light to matters. For the sake of fluent discussion, a translation by the researcher is provided. The first issue worthy of attention is the topic of the poem; a single word, with no modifier --- connoting loneliness and separation. These are feelings which describe not only Farrokhzad’s situation but the circumstances for any rebellious individual who is ready for opposition. She writes,

I go fatigued, desperate and bereaved
To the ruins of my domicile

I swear to God I will take away from your city
My frenzied, distraught heart

(Farrokhzad 1971: 26).

There are no better word choices which can build an ambience, one that goes beyond the borders of the poem to describe a general atmosphere of constant rejection. As a member of the female community, Farrokhzad was prosecuted for her modernist and revolutionary thoughts. To remain and fight would be a behemoth task and to flee a craven act. She chose to stay and fight although in her private life, she had the opportunity to join her brothers who lived abroad. Nevertheless, even the most valiant are fatigued and fall into despair under duress. The general tone of the poem displays her readiness to condemn herself. In the second stanza we read,

I take it away to a remote place
To absolve it from the tint of sin
To absolve it from the disgrace of lust
From all longing and ruin

(Farrokhzad 1971: 26).

Criminals are usually incarcerated as a form of punishment and those who are irremediably corrupt and, who are considered hopeless cases of redemption, are sent into exile. According to the norms of the society, Forough admits that the feelings of love and lust are major crimes punishable by the law, to the greatest degree and so she is prepared to go into exile.

The notion of being punished for falling in love is underscored in the third stanza. She composes,

Taking it away and distancing it
From you, O image of improbable hope
Taking it to bury it alive
So it does not ponder a reunion

(Farrokhzad 1971:26).

Forough lived in a strictly religious society in which the majority practiced Islam. Muslims read in a Koranic verse, in a strict command that they are not to bury their baby girls live (6.141) which reputedly was the practice among the Arab before the oncoming of Islam. Nothing can be more horrific than to bury someone alive, perhaps as a form of punishment, and this is the kind of punishment that she thinks “improbable” dreams are subject to.

Moans shiver, tears dance
O, let me escape
Best that I evade all

(Farrokhzad 1971: 26).

The above lines compose the fourth stanza in which the poet intensifies her feelings of guilt and blames herself for whatever has taken place. Indetermination and lack of confidence situate her in a dilemma and she contemplates surrendering her love. The feeling of despair is characteristic of individuals who are infirm or have no justification for their choices. No doubt, lust or love was completely uncalled for and unacceptable in Forough's time and that is why she is not completely sure of the wholesomeness of her decision.

In the next stanza, there are indications to the fragility of women which lead them to make the wrong decisions which they are unable to support. We read,

By God, I was but a cheerful blossom
The hand of lust picked me off
I became the flame of a thousand sighs
So that my lips would not reach the others'

(Farrokhzad 1971: 27).

In a very common metaphor, in the Persian language, which considers women to be frail, Farrokhzad compares herself to a blossom, delicate and short-lived which was picked off a sturdy branch by the hand of lust. The persona is all woe and grief for she believes there is no other way but to forego this forbidden love that has made her feel so guilty and she censures "the other" for her predicament.

In the last stanza, a final decision has been made and instead of standing up and defending her prerogative, the voice in the poem accepts defeat and in an act of self-punishment intends to leave and go into exile. Finally, Forough writes,

I have decided to journey
I go with a smile but a bloody heart
I go so that you leave me be
O vain, futile hope

(Farrokhzad 1971: 27).

The hope for the continuation of her clandestine relationship becomes a vain hope and there seems nothing more she can do but to flee. This was the fate of young women who made their own choices in falling in love; first, they would

reprimand themselves for having decided to taste the forbidden fruit, then they would start blaming their innocence as the main culprit and eventually, they would resort to self-punishment even before the conservative society did.

The general dreary and sad tone of the poem is a reflection upon the milieu of the poet which makes her suffer from a guilty conscience, acting as a deterrent force in seeking the liberty to experiment by trial and error. In her misery, she is the stereotype woman, who is not supposed to desire anything but what the radical society prescribes for her or strict religious codes dictate --- a young woman was to keep close confinement and yield to the bondage of conformity, not only until she got married but ever after. The asphyxiation proves to be a burden for Forough and her persona echoes the proclivity for more freedom of choice, particularly in the intricate details of personal life. The socio-cultural episteme authorized control over women's lives and as a victim who had experienced the dire consequences of such imposition first hand, Farrokhzad felt the need to display the negative impact of fixated socio-cultural beliefs, resulting in suppression. Sadly speaking, this illustrates how limitations leave traces of deterioration on minds, in a continual process of retro-gradation, leading to social passivity. The prevalent cultural and social discourses act as invisible agents, dominating her life and that of many other women who were deprived of making even the most basic and elementary choices in their lives, such as how and whom to love. The oscillation between being subjugated into accepting norms, stipulated by agents of authority within the society, and the volition of the individual to experience, what is otherwise labeled as taboo, is the situation that exemplifies the prevailing trends prescribed by the cultural climate of Forough's time. This, indeed, was the circumstance that Farrokhzad intended to overcome by reflecting it in her poetry. In a dialectic process, she strived, on the one hand, to expose the problems which were hindering the Iranian woman from the natural rights that all individuals are liable to; such as gaining experience, and on the other hand, she defied the society, in person, to realize what she desired for her kindred.

5. Conclusion

The present study was carried out to elaborate on three critical points. First and foremost, the comparative analysis made in the light of New Historic principles discloses that all human thought and behavior is contextual and exists in a mesh of interrelated connectedness. That is why both poems are analyzed in the light of the events that shape the socio-historical-cultural episteme of the poets. Secondly, there

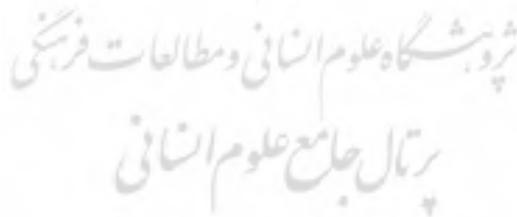
are apparent, seemingly unlikely, but actual linkages between diverse historical discourse and the socio-cultural products in any given literary text. Thirdly, evidence collected from the proposed samples reveal how Evans and Farrokhzad's mindsets about identity formation diverge in order to mirror the effect of historical events on the artist's mentality in imagery production and choice of literary style. Their means of expression and tones for the articulation of ambitions and tendencies, as members of their respective societies, are completely distinct. Evans, an Afro-American who recreates the wretchedness of her forefathers in slavery and the bitter experience of war, presents the image of a pertinacious, extrovert individual who intends to revive incidents and experiences from slavery and war as she presumes them to be of utmost significance in the current political atmosphere, and argues how the historical and political discourse, in an interrelated mesh function to shape the "Black identity". On the other hand, there is Farrokhzad's introverted persona who is involved in a conflict about forbidden love, a very individualistic matter, battling the prevalent bias in her society. She exhibits the façade of an individual who demands answers to the imposition of the society but does not await an answer and punishes herself with self-inflicted exile, even before the society has made the attempt. The former poet claims that the historical episteme has oriented and strengthened her social-wise identity, given her strength to rise phoenix-like from the ashes of her doomed past and cursed present to metamorphose into the character of a formidable, invincible person. This is perhaps the effects of residing in a developed country where individuals have the right to question history and political decisions affecting their lives. This is so, while in a developing country, plagued with backwardness and cumbersome restraints, the latter poet censures the widespread dogmatism and the influence it has had on womenfolk in recreating a meek submissive character, who is far from attaining the desirable place any individual deserves where one has the right to make personal and immediate choices for one's survival.

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