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**Marūfī's *Paykar-e Farhād* [*Farhād's Corpse*] :  
A Neo-Baroque Reading**

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**Abstract**

By Baroque, the “general attitude” and “the formal quality” of a work of art is implied which is trans-historical and “radiates through” histories, cultures, and works of art. In that way, just a seventeenth-century work of art cannot be considered Baroque; on the other hand, even a postmodern work can display Baroque features. However, bound to its era, the Baroque of 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries is not exactly the same as that of 17<sup>th</sup> century. Called Neo-Baroque, hence, the postmodern Baroque reflects not only features like intertextuality, polycentrism, seriality, instability and the fluidity of boundaries, and a sense of movement but also a postmodern Baudrillardian chaotic, schizophrenic world ridden with non-originality, simulation, and “repetition with variation”. To-be-both-but-none feature, i.e. fluidity, is also a distinguishing characteristic of Abbas Marūfī's *Paykar-e Farhād* [*Farhād's Corpse*]. As a sequel to Hedayat's *Būf kūr* [*The Blind Owl*], Marūfī's story tells us another story as well: a tale, told by a schizophrenic female narrator, full of fragments and digressions which signifies multiple worlds within the single world of the narrative, in whose labyrinthine structure the reader gets lost. To dig this other story out, the article first focuses on the potentialities with which neo-Baroque style can generally endow a text. Then, in the last part, it focuses on the major potentiality this neo-Baroque style has provided Marūfī with: the potentiality of resistance, of viewing the world from a feministic point of view or from the position of the abject.

**Keywords:** Neo-Baroque, Marūfī, Hedayat, Feminism, the abject, parody, postmodernism, *Paykar-e Farhad*

### Introduction

All the world's a stage / And all the men and  
women are merely players" (*As You Like It*, II,  
7, ll. 139-140)

Baroque is an umbrella term, which contains many definitions, and this per se makes it hard to reduce it to one single, clear-cut definition; Schatz, for example, defines it as "the final stage of genre development" where "conventions are parodied" (39). Others like Bazin ignore this "evolutionary model of genres" and discuss the "super potentiality" of all genres, including Baroque "to start incorporating the non-existing element in their always emergent framework" (qtd. in Juvan 3). This brings about an "inter-generic dialogue" with other genres and, thus, disapproves of the closed system of the "evolutionary model," while its undermining of a fixed distinction between the past and the present leads to the genre flexibility. This leads to Baroque as a hybrid dialogic genre. Along with them, comes Henry Focillion's definition of Baroque as "radiating beyond the historical confines of seventeenth century" (Ibid). In fact, Focillion is one of the first critics, before Deleuze or Ndalians, who claims that "identical traits remain constant in the most different environments and periods of time" (58).

With Omar Calabrese, Baroque moves beyond the world of art and becomes politicized. For him, "many cultural phenomena of our time are distinguished by a specific internal form that recalls the [B]aroque". Thus, he considers Baroque as a "trans-historical state," a "general attitude," which transcends beyond the confines of the historical periodization (Yoo 268). However, his contribution does not stop there; in fact, through his first introduction of the term "neo-Baroque" in his *Neo-Baroque: A Sign of the Times* (1992), Calabrese criticizes postmodernism's "conceptual limitation" and introduces an "alternative term" which can better describe the recent complexities of social phenomena (266). He believes that the understanding of the "aesthetic sensibility" of today's life necessitates "a more productive formal model" to contain the prevalent cultural diversity than the "unified, rigid, and inflexible framework of Postmodernism" (Ibid). In his view, the "rhythmic, dynamic structure without rigid, closed, or static boundaries" is the very intersection of the postmodernity with the Baroque, which has resulted in "a valorization of form [body, desire]," the fracture of frames, and consequently

the abolition of definite shapes and contours, especially those of time, place, and linearity (Ibid 268). And it is here, in this framelessness, in this transgression of the once-fixed boundaries, where the oppositional, the transformative, and the political stance of neo-Baroque work lies. Breaking through the rigid system of binaries, neo-Baroque work blurs and upsets what has been once labeled as the clear-cut and fixed; it undoes the old hierarchical systems of patriarchy and social class and promotes an equal position for those once threatening or abject (Doy 205). This very opposing potentiality along with the upcoming chances for the resistance on the part of “the other” and the abject has made neo-Baroque a particular favorite of recent cultural movements, including that of women or blacks.

Perhaps this very compulsion to do justice to the female character(s) in Hedayat's *The Blind Owl* has been the major underlying drive to oblige Marūfī to write his great novel, *Paykar-e Farhād* [Farhād's Corpse]. Although his is not the first sequel in Persian literature which parodies its source, and it will not be the last—*Shab Sarab* [The Night of Mirage] is an earlier specimen—yet what distinguishes it from the rest is its neo-Baroque style: the very point which has already been ignored in Marūfī's work and makes it, thus, worth dealing with here. Marūfī's *Paykar-e Farhād* like some other sequels provides its ignored female characters with the very voice and space they have been denied throughout the vast scope of history and within earlier works of art, including those of Hedayat. However, Marūfī's point of departure is in the way he carries this task: lashing out at Hedayat's silent, passive representation of female characters not only linguistically (giving them voice to express their mind) but also structurally (through his neo-Baroque style). Thus, in the following, the article first elaborates on the very major premises of neo-Baroque style and its potential as a resistant stance. Then, it focuses on the ways Marūfī sets them to work in his novel; and at last, it sheds light on the political, oppositional nature of the novel, lying in the intersection of its feminist ideology with a neo-Baroque style.

### **Neo-Baroque or a Transformative Style of Art: Theoretical Framework**

In his book *Renaissance und Barock* (1888), Wölfflin declares that the excessive architectural features are paralleled in 16<sup>th</sup> century literature and music. He summarizes this innovation through the term “painterly style”; by

painterliness Woelfflin means nonlinearity and limitlessness, a celebration of infinity and of "fading boundaries", disorder, asymmetry, the mass, extremeness, a multi-directional movement which puts forth a sense of constant change. In that way, as Panofsky declares, Baroque goes against the symmetrical, the regulated of the earlier style and embeds a primary dualism "as both the climax and the decline of the Renaissance" (7). This feature puts Baroque in a similar relation to the Renaissance as the Postmodern has been put to the Modernism: "whether the Baroque is a continuation of or a break from the Renaissance" (Ibid). And thus the critics come up with the classification introducing the Baroque and the postmodern as the epochs of transition and crises and as "intermediary spaces" in which opposites come together, the tension is unresolved, and the paradox and oxymoron reign supreme. In fact, they are "cultural tropes"—the product of the time when there is a split within the self—whose output is a state of suspension where reality/fantasy and essence/appearance co-exist, where new visions of the world get opened up, and where linear time and space are demolished (Dimakopoulou 48). In such chaotic atmosphere, restoration of Leibniz's notion of "pre-established harmony" seems far-fetched and one cannot help but face new possible worlds ruled by a relationship which Leibniz calls, "incompossibility" (Deleuze 81). This "impossible" world contains the old logic of transition: that "of divergence and convergence" (Ibid). However, its principle of "convergence" fails it now. Thus, it results in "the infinite and heterogeneous series which no longer converge according to the principles of pre-established harmony" (Ibid); the "impossibles," then, "enter the arena of fragmentation" where "dissonances" are not only "excused from being resolved" but can be affirmed by this "new harmony" (Deleuze 137). And this evokes nothing less than "polyphonies of polyphony" (Deleuze 82) which effect a tendency towards fragmentation or "the duality of and/or," a celebration of fragments and decay (Ibid); what this means is confusion and ambiguity or the very first features of the neo-Baroque style.

According to Martin Jay, our "imagination has moved towards the Baroque—that is towards a rupture with classical and Renaissance perspectives—to complicate rational, visual, and narrative spaces" (Lopez-Varela Azcrate 3). In fact, the single-perspective Renaissance art, in Ndalianis'

view, becomes replaced by the dynamicity, the complexity, and the multiplicity of the (neo-)Baroque art (335). To determine who the characters are, where they pass through, and in which era they act out their roles, thus, becomes the hardest issues to grasp.

For Nietzsche, also (neo)Baroque is associated with a movement towards "ambiguity". In his *Human, All-Too-Human* (1876), Nietzsche declares that Baroque is the lack or the absence of classical norms and the birth of "new values": metaphor and allegory. In that way, Baroque transcends to a shift in epistemology, which reflects "a change of orientation towards models that emphasize processes instead of states" (Lopez-Varela Azcrate 4). The same point is set forth by Focillion, for whom Baroque form

passes into an undulating continuity where both beginning and end are hidden.... [the Baroque form] reveals 'the system of series' [that] become a 'system of the labyrinth,' which, by means of mobile synthesis, stretches itself into realm of glittering movement and color. (67)

This new world, then, necessarily moves towards openness, since it is lacking in crucial features of a closed system: those of "center/perimeter" and of stability and order (Ibid). Being dynamic, on the other hand, the resultant open system gives rise to many worlds/perspectives simultaneously while trying to keep them together, even if at the cost of complication and confusion. The "hybrid" which is born here displays the fragmented and the ruptured totality. This new (anti)system, in Calabrese's view, derives from the "nomad" way of thinking encouraged by the recent culture of Diaspora and is a reflection of Jamesonian schizophrenic, fragmented postmodern subject (38). This open hybrid system of Baroque, which is its major second feature, also allows for a "greater flow between the inside and outside"—like Leibniz's monads— which "invades the space in every direction" and ruptures its borders through its dynamic forces (Ndalianis *Entertainment*, 336). Renouncing the fixed, closed system of the past conventions, (neo-)Baroque comes first, in many critics' view, in its refusal to respect frames, limits, or boundaries. And this turns into (neo-)Baroque significant, distinguishing feature, where the text has become, in Deleuzean term, a "porous, spongy" matter (qtd in Ndalianis *Neo-Baroque*, 267). Ndalianis declares,

The central characteristic of the Baroque [...] is this lack of respect for the limits of the frame. Closed forms are replaced by open structures that favor a dynamic and expanding polycentrism. Stories refuse to be contained within a single structure, expanding their narrative universes into further sequels and serials. Distinct media cross over into other media, merging with, influencing, or being influenced by other media forms. [...] (Neo)Baroque form relies on the active engagement of audience members, who are invited to participate in a self-reflexive game involving the work's artifice. (*Entertainment*, 25)

This in itself results in (neo-)Baroque's other features like polycentrism, intertextuality, labyrinthine structure, fantastic aspects, illusion of movement or infinity, and vertigo (Lambert 168). In fact, when the borders get uncertain, the difference between reality and appearance, subject and object, fact and fiction, single and multiple, and the past, the present, and the future all topple down leading to the emergence of an intermediary space, where the position of the spectator or the context provides us with an answer or a resolution. In such atmosphere originality, the truth and the reality are done away with, and people live in a world where simulacra, relativism, and dream are the forming components; here identity is no longer stable, and people turn into mere actors for whom the world is another Shakespearian stage, and metamorphosis a daily practice.

This world, then, cannot help but be ruled by seriality or the organized differentiation—another (neo-)Baroque feature. Here metaphors become abundant; allegories, in Walter Benjamin's view, form the crucial components;<sup>1</sup> the absolute, stable meanings/references are done away with; and the hope for the fixed meaning, identity, space, and time is all dashed. Here, the reader should get involved to tie the threads of meaning.

Therefore, if a (neo-)Baroque work does not carry a single, clear-cut meaning and just displays the return of "negative principles" (the decay, the fragmentation, ambiguity, vertigo, the lack of closure and uncertainty), how opposing and resistant can it become in the nature? (Lopez-Varela Azcrate 7). The answer is that the (neo-)Baroque through its essential features of

ambiguity, hybridity, polycentrism, and seriality, through its denial of fixed center, or its relish for fluidity upsets every hierarchical system in the work. In other words, as Calabrese notes, in neo-Baroque's deep fragmentary structure, each fragment acts as an autonomous part and shifts the center of the work, relocates it, and strives for domination (58); what comes up is a centerless, dynamic, tension-ridden narrative—a genuine neo-Baroque one—which is regenerated, re-written each time that it is read (Calabrese 60). This lack of originality in meaning or identity, in fact, foregrounds the very “constructedness” of the nature of these hierarchies. In other words, through the de-naturalization of these binaries (here man vs. woman) and the demonstration of the “constructed” nature, the neo-Baroque work reveals how these forms of “otherness” have been mere “construction” by the dominant system (here the patriarchy and capitalism) to justify its regulation of the so-called “other”—including women (Butler 395). This control has been generally enacted through social norms and formative stereotypes which throughout the history have associated the female body with the nature, disorder, the flesh, and lust while having aligned the male body with art, order, the mind, and control (Mahon 49). To shatter this old, dichotomous, convention-stricken world where the Butlerian notion of “normative violence” (violence of norms) is a daily experience, one can resort to the fluidity promised by the neo-Baroque style. Developing a hybrid, open, poly-centric narrative through which the binary systems of the “self” vs. the “other”/ man vs. woman/ reason vs. emotion (those threats to the dominant ideology) also get upset, neo-Baroque work tries to promote equality in one way or another; and, accordingly, it becomes political and resistant. When this upsetting of norms and the resistance against stereotypes are carried against a patriarchal system, neo-Baroque and Feminism do intersect; through its shattering of the image of a domestic, dependant wife of the past, through its foregrounding of female desires and feelings, and by the blurring of the borders of private and public, neo-Baroque can, in fact, maintain its feminist stance— that is to go against the “violence” of gender stereotypes (Mahon 37).

### **Neo-Baroque Features in *Paykar-e Farhād*: An Analysis of the Narrative**

Marūfi's novel is, in fact, a sequel to Hedayat's *Būf kūr* [*The Blind Owl*] (which justifies its lack of a clear, linear plot) and gives a voice to the silent female

characters in that story. It is the story of an intense love of a female image for her own painter, which finally forces her out of the painting on the Hedayat's porcelain pencil-case and sets her on a quest in search of the painter through the vast scope of Iranian history. This lack of frame (time/space at least) results in the juxtaposition of impossible eras and renders the female character as the typical Iranian women throughout the history; once she is the Sassanid little girl playing in the alley, the other time the young woman of 1930s, a drug addict, in fact, and at the end she turns into Shīrīn, the famous Sassanid princess. That is why the narrator, whose voice we hear as an "I", and from whose perspective the story is narrated, is a fragmented subjectivity far from an authentic identity. It seems to be apparently the girl, whom Hedayat's narrator saw once from the illusory window and got obsessed with, especially with her eyes—the ethereal girl painted on the porcelain, who had bowed to offer a white lotus to an old, hunchbacked man. She is there to narrate the part of the story Hedayat left unsaid: sometimes that of the ethereal girl, sometimes that of the Whore; one cannot tell them apart. It is as if she wears a new mask every now and then and undergoes some metamorphosis which ends up in a quixotic, schizophrenic character where the fragmentary pieces of different eras get combined and fixed identity becomes an illusory nostalgia. It is not, however, this ambiguous “who-ness” of the narrator which makes the story chaotic, but the blurred types of world to which she belongs—whether it is a world of the dead, of the alive, or of the undead (ethereal) also boosts its inherent tensions. Besides, her “what-ness,” her very identity, whether she is an image in a painting, a character in Hedayat's story, an archetypal figure of traditional Iranian woman (submissive and domestic), or a typical modern girl of 1930s-1940s Iran (thus more independent and less traditional) causes havoc throughout the work. She seems to be all but none, to be an accumulation of all characters but no individual one. This fluidity, this lack of authentic, stable identity, even though leading to major confusion, can insinuate the possibility of the yet-to-come.

### **Marūfī's Neo-Baroque Features**

The novel like most of neo-Baroque works of art deals with the issue of love and seems to be a romance in which the (anti)heroic female protagonist sets for a quest, or better said, an anti-quest. The knight-like female narrator, here, is

also searching for a male figure who is first the painter in Hedayat's story, later a young modern man of 1940s, and finally the archetypal Iranian romance figure— Farhād. However, Marūfī diverges from the canonical romance genre through his replacement of the hero and the heroine with *anti-heroines*. His selected ending for the story also differs from typical romance works: instead of living happily ever after, the hero and the heroine die sadly.

Besides, his characters' identities are far from authentic, fixed ones and are constantly substituted through extreme forms of doppelgängers or mirror images. This fluidity is practiced to such an extreme extent that the reader feels s/he comes across the old, hunchbacked man throughout the whole story, and it seems to be done on purpose: "what if in conformity to the hunchbacked men group, you also hunched so as to look like an old, hunchbacked man" (102, translations of *Paykar-e Farhād* are mine). In fact, he is mirrored by other characters in the story; the painter displays some of his features; the female narrator comes across her own resemblance to him.

On the other hand, in some other places in the story, the female narrator is described through the same, precise features set for the Whore— the wife to the painter both in Hedayat's and in Marūfī 's stories: "She had slant, puffy eyes, with long eyelashes, protruded cheeks, long forehead, thin connected eyebrows, and half-open full lips" (35). This similarity becomes so close at some points that the reader may come to consider them both as the two sides of the same coin. They represent her two opposite poles: that of the body and that of the soul.

The result of this character overlapping is a more "painterly" work where the reader gets more motivated to seek those hidden parts (Wolfflin 32), even though this very source of reader's motivation (the blurring of identities) can feed into greater chaos and layering in the story and, thus, affirm the notion of the world as a stage and people as its actors. Here, life turns into a theater and each character's life story into a play-within- the play, composing the drama of the world. Maybe that is why the narrator goes nameless, and the other characters are described through their jobs or physiques. It seems that in a theatrical life, identity becomes just context-bound and the relish for an established one turns into a dream. People change with every shift in their temporal and spatial situation.

For characters with ruptured identities *originality* and *singularity* become some expendable features, maintained for a while and then, getting rewritten. Repetition, variations, and rewriting, however, are not the mere destiny of characters here. Everything has been touched with its brush: art, history, space. Even the work itself, as a sequel to *The Blind Owl*, has become doomed to repetition. Art itself becomes a notion of repetition—a copy—as the painter within the story produces and reproduces the same image on the canvas and porcelain so much so that the whore jokingly calls him “the imitator”: “From morning to night, his job was drawing pictures on the lid of pencil case (15); in another part, she says, “You copied something so many times and were too bored to look at them again” (37).

“Iconic” is the term Calabrese deploys to describe this mode of repetition when a work of art retains its former’s protagonist, themes, and narrative structure. Through an “iconic” mode of repetition, a work of art is not only recreated and regenerated through the time, but it also passes the boundaries of a single narrative and thus achieves framelessness. The question that may arise here is: which one can be more valuable, the primary work or its sequel? In Moraoa’s view, the copy “is not inferior to the original, but [it] is rather situated in its own self-supporting epistemological space” (qtd. in Spadaccini and Martin-Estudillo 253). The reason is the fact that any work of variation, including Marūfī’s, “refashions the past” (Ndalianis *Polycentrism*, 63). And in that way, it forms a complex network of connections in which different stories and media intersect (Ibid). Complex network gives birth to neo-Baroque intertextuality. This interweaving/intersection of different stories, texts, and media feeds into the logic, the “serial mentality”—to borrow from Eco—and the dynamism of a work of art. What comes up is the narrative multiplicity, whose many centers each strive for domination, yet none attains priority over the others. The result is a tension-ridden dynamic work.

The tension in Marūfī’s novel reaches its height when it reworks Nizamī’s *Shīrīn and Farhād* verse romance as well; it seems that Marūfī plays with this love story through the painter’s own painting of Farhād’s corpse on a rock. With the presence of Farhād in the story, the female narrator is metamorphosed into Shīrīn:

[The painter] said, “Aren’t you Shīrīn?”

I examined her from head to toe; he bore no resemblance to Farhād. (102)

In Nizamī's poem, Farhād sees Shīrīn in a lake and falls in love with her, but since she is a princess and engaged to Khosraw, the King of Iran, Farhād's love should be contained. To have her, he should carve Bīstūn Mountain. One night after the false news of Shīrīn's death, while pining for her, he commits suicide on the mountain; his body is later discovered dead by Shīrīn. Their story, like that of Hedayat, is also a story of unfulfilled love, born in a moment of an accidental look. Yet Marūfī in his reproduction of these two stories not only seeks to give voice to female beloveds and their femininity, having been rendered silent in their primary sources, but also to trace the concept of love through different eras and how it ends. She says to the painter (Farhād as well):

“ O' God, in which era of history we loved each other; the time I couldn't help eyeing you.”

I said [the female narrator]: “All people think you are dead. I also feel doubtful sometimes. By the way, are you dead?”

You said [the painter]: “We have lost our face; we have got blown out.”

I said [the female narrator]: “It has gone around you were hanged.” (37)

Then, later in book,

[The teacher] said to her female student: “Don't kill Farhād in your story. In Persian literature, Farhād has an appealing character. He is so popular. He stands for love. Never ever, on the part of anybody, tell Farhād to get lost and die” (124).

In fact, this interweaving of Nizamī's masterpiece into Marūfī's work also leads to the complexity of its female narrator. It changes her into undead ethereal being, which easily traverses her through the borders of history and the boundaries of space. Once she becomes an image on a lid of pencil-case, later an incarnation of a nobody in the Sassanid era, afterwards a glorified Sassanid princess, Shīrīn, then a debased addict girl of 40s, and at the end a devalued whore; all these metamorphoses and distortions of identities, in one way or

another, focus on the social, the patriarchal and the economical reasons which have enslaved women. This trans-historicity and trans-spatiality, in fact, has credited the narrator with some capability to speak for the women who have gone through the same plight in the course of centuries. In fact, every image ushers in a new story and leads to some multiplicity which can provide the reader with a chance to compare these different possible worlds regarding the *woman question*. Sometimes to visualize (and reflect upon) this fusion of the spatial and the temporal, body and soul, neo-Baroque narratives make use of mirrors in one way or another. Here, Marūfī also uses it in his story in a way that whenever the narrator stands in front of the mirror in the closet of Firdawsī Café, she traverses the borders of time, the past and the present, here and there, and adopts multiple identities. For her the mirror has the same function that a crystal globe fulfils for a fairy-tale magician: to look through and become dazed at the simultaneity of the past, the present and the future.

To have this multiplicity of worlds/eras at one place necessitates a break with the closed, single-framed narratives and its traditional linear style. In other words, fluid boundaries must be enforced in order to bring up some chance for comparison and a subsequent social criticism; thus, it is not just “space” and “time,” which are fluid, but death and life, the body and the soul, and the past and the present also depict blurry boundaries. Even the genre in which the novel can fit is indistinct since the author has drawn upon different genres—including autobiography, fairy tales, mythology, history, tragedy, Gothicism, folklore, and romance—each of which “stretches its universe” through the deployment of conventions of other genres (Juvan 1). Like the Chinese box or Deleuzian folds, each story is “told upon” the other, and each genre accommodates the elements of another so much so that the spaces merge into one another (83). However, as Ndalianis declares, this expansion of generic conventions takes place as the established “rule of the game,” which implies that those drawn-upon conventions are not “the leading ones but rather as those which are to be “corrected, varied, or even teased out” (*Entertainment*, 360). That is why most neo-Baroque narratives are parodic at the level of their structure. Besides, this “freedom of form” or the “generic flexibility” imposes a sort of zigzagging on the narrative structure leading to an illusion of motion and the trompe l'oeil effect, which per se results in a freer form (Wolfflin 15). A

zigzagged narrative enjoys not only the back-and-forth pattern of motion, imposed by narrator's remembrance and a retrieval of the past (through her collective unconscious), but also a multidirectional motion fostered through coincidences or impulses. In one scene, for example, she says how thirsty she is, and she suddenly relishes for a cold soft drink branded "Canada"; then, she remembers about her father's life, and how she was waiting for him in the afternoons to come back home and bring a bottle of "Canada" for her. This juxtaposition of scenes, whose only relation is based on the narrator's impulse or mere coincidence, makes the novel intersect different stories in a labyrinthine pattern. While this randomness of selection reflects back upon the chaotic outside world and the torn mentality of the narrator, it also, as Sarduy believes, demonstrates the struggle going on between the Apollonian principle of the order, of the distinct form and the Dionysian principle of impulses and of the distorted form:

We have learnt to escape. But where to? Where was the border between these two? Where should we stand to be neither enslaved to the preachers of ethics, nor a bird of prey to the immoral beasts? Till that day, I know no other jobs but being drawn on a pencil case. (12)

This tug of war between rationality, clarity, and the order on the one side and chaos, ambiguity, and randomness on the other affects each territory and, thus, involves a blurring of boundaries now and again. Assuming a space for this distortion of the fact and fiction is the key to understanding the novel since Marūfī's female narrator is the same ethereal girl in Hedayat's story, who has come out of the painting on the pencil case to voice her love for her own painter. The very thought of an image falling in love with her painter would not be possible unless the borders between the fact and fiction became suspended and one enjoyed immersion into the fantastic world Todorov talks of. Once one accepts that, the story will have a frame in its framelessness (at once closed and open): the quest to find her beloved, who once appears in the form of a Sassanid painter, the other time as a young painter in Firdawsī Café, then in the shape of Bāssī— the neighbor boy— and finally in the form of a "you" who can be Marūfī, Hedayat, or the painter in Hedayat's story and even the reader.

This traverse between the reality and the dream, the fact and the fiction, nevertheless, is best foregrounded by the novelist at the point when the narrator moves in and out of the painting on the pencil case or the canvas in the workshop. In fact, she declares that she has once moved into the painting to escape the swordsmen who had followed her. However, whenever she moves in, she ought to put up with an old hunchbacked man, with a turbaned head and lecherous eyes. And every time she has to offer him a fresh lotus flower to express her offer of peace (in ancient Iran, lotus was considered as the flower of peace and kings offered it to their guests from other countries). Another time she says that the time she was in the painting, the old hunchbacked man came to look at it; he had felt a liking for it; in fact, the seller had said to the narrator, still part of the painting, to offer the old man a lotus. Her story, thus, varies with her every new retelling, and in that way she denies the reader an authentic origin. Whichever story the readers take as true, all share the notion that she is an image in a painting, with whom the painter falls in love and then enchants her. This image, then, passes the border of his paintings and enters the world of reality—Tehran in 30s and 40s. Then she starts searching for a young man whom she once saw in Ferdawsī Café. At the same time, she becomes a daughter to a political journalist who was later shot to death by the government. This image, on her daily quest for the painter, once passes by a painting workshop and store; casting her searching eyes on each painting, she moves in and out of them. Among them, one painting attracts her attention more. It exactly displays the painting on the pencil case with only one difference: it lacks the girl, and there is a high rock by its river. Feeling hot, she takes off her clothes and moves into the painting to swim in the river. As she is surfacing, she relishes for someone to look at her. At this moment, the story intersects with that of Nizamī's. Moving out of the painting, she suddenly sees the painter's signature there.

This rite of passage is not just limited to the “meta-physical,” undead, and ambiguous lady of the painting, the painter (sometimes in form of “you”) also enjoys it every now and then. Coming back to the same store to get new orders, the painter looks at his own work there, moves in and sees Farhād's corpse (the title of book) on the mountain there. Sitting at the teahouse by the mountain, he hears a group of students approaching while singing along a poem about

Farhād. The teacher shows them the carvings on the Bīstun Mountain and goes on with its history/story.

The more these passages occur, the higher the fragmentation becomes; and in keeping with that, the narrative reaches the level of grotesque. Its best instance is when, somewhere in the story, the narrator, i.e. the image girl, thinks that she is the old hunchbacked man. In such “hyper texts,” as Juvan terms them, the reader has a hard time to sail through “digressions after digressions which lack a center, a dominant story” (Juvan 2). And that de-centeredness, in his view, displays the Deleuzian concept of “the nomad thought”.

### **The Intersection of Feminism and Neo-Baroque**

As it was mentioned before, a neo-Baroque narrative, regardless of its difficult and nonlinear style, has always the potentiality to be political and, thus, resistant. As one critic declares, when a frame “collapses,” all the traditions having been based upon that frame also topple down. This framelessness, on the one hand, fosters the hybrid nature of the neo-Baroque narrative, especially through its carnival of many voices and perspectives— or “a polyphony of polyphonies”; and, on the other hand, it promotes a Deleuzian “rhizomatic,” structure of non-hierarchy— or polycentrism. In this non-hierarchical structure, then, no voice achieves priority over the others, all voices can be heard, no one is “spoken for,” and no ideology claims the transcendental, absolute truth. This, thus, promotes some polyphony, revealing how the early ideologies were, in a Butlerian sense, some timely social “construction” by the dominant. When the suppressing ideologies of the past are disclosed as “constructs,” so are the cultures, the values, and the standards they have prioritized. If his polyphony has just led to this sense of awareness, it will still advance a better chance for equality and can render the dialogic relationship between “us and them” more likely.

Neo-Baroque, in that way, can surpass the realm of arts to act out as a mode of being, as Edouard Glissant encouraged it in 1990. In fact, the adoption of the neo-Baroque's premises in social life, as Mbembe points out, can provide the suppressed with a sort of autonomy by the possible pushing forward of the boundaries of the dominant ideology (Mbembe 129). The expansions they seek are mostly planned at two levels: first, the denaturalization of the *given* realities or truths as mere “construct”; second, the inclusion of larger groups— i.e.

further realities. This emancipatory potentiality of neo-Baroque structure may have led to its popularity with the postcolonial and feministic writing. In fact, it is through its poly-centric, parodic structure that the neo-Baroque has turned it into a counter-discourse and, thus, capable of resistant and emancipatory move.

### ***Paykar-e Farhād: A Feministic Re-vision***

Regarding what is said, it seems very usual that in a neo-Baroque narrative the reader witnesses a tug of war between the two consisting elements of an already-established binary such as man/woman, black/white, and the self/the other. This leads to an always-present clash between the oppressed and the oppressor, whose mastery is challenged. Marūfī's text is also replete with these tensions and conflicts, especially those ones running between the female characters and the male painter. In fact, it is the painting's realm which is a battlefield to this war. As a painter, he practices the visual art, in which vision is privileged over other senses. And from a feministic point of view, visual art is considered "the domain of masculine privileges since it secures male mastery through the act of representation" (Foster 71); to postmodern critics, "vision" is never disinterested, while the "investment in the look is not privileged in women as in men. More than the other senses, the eye objectifies and masters" (Irigaray qtd. in Foster 70). It is, in fact, the same obsession with the vision and mastery which leads the painter to draw the woman he loves since drawing can provide him with a sense of control or domination which he lacks in his real life. The interesting point about his painting is that he portrays and shapes her the way he likes, not the way she actually is. It is, as Helen Cixous points out, maybe due to the fact that "when a woman is asked to take place in this representation, she is, of course, asked to represent a man's desire", and when she refuses this, it means "a challenge, a threat, a loss of virility" (Ibid 75). The punishment to this disobedience can be death as it has been the case for the Whore or some sexual harassment as the Image Woman, the narrator, in the café or elsewhere suffers from. Through her story of the way she has come into the painting, she talks of her escape from "those stranded, bare-footed [swordsmen], sweating and thirsty, searching for a girl who hasn't given up easily [..]" (87).

Besides, there are other notions like stripping, unveiling and nudity (among the narrator's daily experiences) which also feed the masculine vision/gaze and prove/secure the male dominance since "the moment the look dominates, the body loses its materiality... it is transformed into an image" (Irigaray, qtd in Foster 70). This may explain why the narrator metamorphoses/passes boundaries every now and then or why the painter is persistent to draw the Whore's image.

In contrast to this privileging of gaze in patriarchal texts, other senses like touch and smell are also foregrounded— a juxtaposition of the incongruous. Throughout the narrative, the reader witnesses many scenes which show an obsession with the hands and the lips of the female narrator and the Whore. Theirs are adored whether for their beauty or their taste and kind touch. The painter seems obsessed with "the semi-open, warm, full lips which seem as if torn way from a hot, long kiss yet non-satiated" (85). The sense of smell plays a very significant role: it is the smell of coffee, rain, blood, death, dirt which are felt strongly by the narrator. For example, near the end of novel, when the narrator is waiting in the rain outside the painter's house, she guesses the painter's presence or absence through feeling or not feeling the smell of his suit. Even the word she uses to describe her drug is "a sweet smell". This concern with multiple senses is counter-discursive and Baroque due to the imposition of vision over other senses, especially smell, described by Freud as a reflection of transition from matriarchy to a patriarchal epoch.

However, what makes Marūfi's narrative mostly Baroque is giving voice to the female characters, both of whom have been rendered silent in Hedayat's text. In Marūfi's novel, the relation between man and woman, like all other kinds of relationship with an "other", is one of power and subjugation. This kind of relationship gets generally tainted with the social norms and stereotypes which picture women as sexual, amoral, monstrous, vampire-like or in one word femme fatal, while male characters are gentle being, victimized by these unruly, sex-hungry women. Besides, women are usually represented, judged, and spoken for from a male perspective/vision: one learns about The Whore, or the Image Woman, the narrator, just through what Hedayat's male narrator tells us in *The Blind Owl*; in fact, one cannot hear them talk for themselves. Marūfi's narrative, however, breaks with this silence and lets "the other" speak for herself. To speak is to be foregrounded, and as "the other" moves to the

foreground, it is pursued by the so-called monstrosity, devilishness, and amorality it has been associated with in the dominant culture. It is for this reason that some critics, including Lopez-Varela Azcrate, consider the neo-Baroque as the celebration of “negative principles,” the “anti-heroes,” and “the excess and grotesque reality” (7). It displays a Bakhtinian carnival which eases a dialogue between the “self” and “the other”. And like every carnival, “the other” can be represented in its extremity or excess— that of hyper-sexuality, anti-traditionalism, poverty, or anti-sociality.

Tell me, who are you really? Where are you from? [...] She was getting sillier every day. You looked at her shoulders and cape; they were similar to those of pre-historical women, layered with rows of fat. You looked at her laughter, her way of looking, and the movement of her hands, and none of them seemed womanly and delicate. She looked like an animal who packed away whatever she came across. (118)

The excess is, in fact, foregrounded to intensify the challenge to the old, stereotype-ridden system and to seek a new one as well; hence, the characters may display hyper sexual energy, extreme poverty, huge drug abuse, or heavy drinking. As Jean-Michel Ganteau indicates:

Such texts share aesthetic and ethical traits mainly based on the prevalence of hyperbole, proliferation, depravity of ornamentation, and flux that tend to challenge prior aesthetic codes [...] and unremittingly focus on the darker, submerged, and neglected sides of contemporary society and history, on alternative psychological and spiritual experiences, on complementary worlds and heterocosms ... on the prevalence of the other in a mass culture generally obsessed with the rhetoric of the same and its simulacra. (198-199)

Besides, a deployment of an oxymoronic, paradoxical style along with these excessive, grotesque features, can further promote the subversion of social norms, clichés, and stereotypes: “Whether she was an angel who behaved like a whore, or a whore who behaved like an angel” (35) or “Neither could you put

up with her, nor could you forget her love. An amalgam of love and hatred” (119).

This ambiguity reaches its height when the life narratives of the female characters (that of the Image Woman/narrator and the Whore) frequently become overlapped--the mirror images. The purpose of these affinities and departures, of course, is much higher than upsetting the social norms. They are, in fact, to question the whole history-- the patriarchal, official history-- whose rule of subjugation has been more or less the same through centuries: the process of gender reification. In Butler's view, the patriarchal discourse throughout the history has tried to fixate women in a set of pre-determined roles and behaviors which have been declared to be induced biologically and, thus, natural (71). These discursive categories, in fact, generally act as the “regulatory ideals,” which once have been internalized by the society and can guarantee the maintenance of the patriarchal system (Ibid. 72). For Butler, the major regulatory ideals throughout the history have been those about gender, sex, and the body. Their significance, in Butler's view, generally stems from the fact that these discursive constructs (gender, sex, and body) are subject to a “natural fallacy”: as “something given in biology” and, thus, unchangeable. Accordingly, they have been enabled to abort any chance of “resistance, of the re-articulation of the categories, and hence of the social and self-transformation” and stay in the history (Ibid. 99). However, this “natural fallacy” is not enough to guarantee the maintenance of these discursive categories; “recognition” (in its Hegelian sense) is another means. In fact, every person needs “recognition” in order to exist (Ibid. 105); to deny “recognition” to somebody means to deprive them from their very being, to kill them metaphorically (as the narrator and the painter are killed, dead and yet alive). This denial, in Butler's view, occurs at the very moment one resists the dominant discourse, whose transgressor is always rendered “abject”, in one way or another: the mad, the whore, the artist, the poor, etc. (Ibid).

“I pulled on my cigarette a deep-throated puff and its spiraling smoke got trapped in my throat”

[...] (One of the three men said) “Woman is not to smoke”.

I said, “I smoke” and then frowned

[...] And then she is verbally and sexually harassed. (89-90)

In fact, by resisting the regulatory ideal of “the angel woman” and going out to the streets, the narrator, hence, is forced to experience her “abject” state wherever she goes: whether it is the ancient Iran, Tehran of 40s, or modern Tehran. She is treated in one way or another as the object of sexual appeal, a body without soul, or an image without voice; a treatment which was far cry from the way the respectable woman of the discourse got treated:

A huge, black car blew its horn for me. I turned a deaf ear to that. Then a man passed by me and said under his breath, “wanna eat you”; and I behaved as if I hadn’t heard it, but that was driving me crazy. I had so many enemies, and I didn’t know that! I lived in a world where there was no refuge; a world which could never resemble a human world; a place like a wild jungle, and I have to put up with that, to walk with fears, to sleep with terrors, and to wake up with worries. How long could I live that I had to spend more than half of it on pre-empting conspiracies? And why no one helped me? I felt dizzy. I thought of where I was, where I was going to, and at which time I was standing. I didn’t know whether to turn back or to move on. Where should I return to? (98)

When the narrator finds that the past and the present, the father, the painter, and the hunchback man, and ancient Iran and modern Tehran are all but the same, she becomes indecisive. To escape this time, the narrator sees that the preceding eras are not much different. In other words, in every era she stands, fate keeps the same thing in store for her. She is chased by a fate which is embodied through the old, dirty, hunchbacked man who is by her, here and there, now and then:

I wanted to flee [...] and now could I? Does someone believe it?  
The whole pain was that they wanted either to cover and hide us or to strip our clothes off. And *we* have learnt to flee, but where to?  
Where was the border between these two? (12) [*Italics added*]

To relieve this pain, she resorts to drugs. As she finds the outside world so nasty, she takes refuge in her inner world. The pain, she feels, however, is not just the result of this alienation, but that of her fragmentation too. She

represents a schizophrenic postmodern subject who has become bereft of her/his subjectivity and has lost the power to control the world around. She cannot even locate herself in the outside world; she is a “girl who, from helplessness or bad luck, [has] filled the syringe and shot up” (73).

While the narrator resorts to drugs, the Whore seeks solace in sex. In her sad life story, as she recounts to the sick painter, she talks of her childhood, and how she has been sexually victimized and harassed by her drunkard father and later the grocer who rewarded her with fruits which never passed the door of their poverty-stricken home:

You are so good, but alas. I wanted to give birth to your loveliest son. I am not good. I have never been good. I understood the facts of life when I was just ten. I went to the back of the fruit store; I had some apples, grapes, the fruits I loved, and he... (131)

Afterwards, she escapes from home and turns into a professional sex worker. She, however, confesses to the painter that the whole issue was just a matter of taking revenge on men and nothing else. She says:

I wanted to outwit men, but I couldn't. I beautified myself, enchanted them, ensnared one, and then went out with them. I directed my venom at them, but it didn't satisfy me. (132)

In this world of cruelty, she once met a painter who paid her to sit for him (just as a sitter), but she did everything other than that. This led to some clashes which were not, of course, because of her defiance but due to their mutual yet impossible love. She could not sit as “a deaf, blind model, a statue,” and he could not, then, help beating her to bruise because of that. She enjoyed it, however— a masochistic joy though; she confessed it was worth having that since he was “different” from other men.

To the painter, she also meant something different; she reminded him of something unconscious, something of the past, and something like an old meeting. They married at last, yet their marriage took place just as he found out that “Shīrīn”— the symbol of purity and love— had died. With this news he went dead too and started a life of an undead, ethereal being like the narrator. “The strangest thing in the world had happened. You were not dead, but you did not live too. You were just alive. The man [...] just is to announce he hasn't

died yet” (129). A woman bereft of her soul and an artist bereft of his art made a becoming match. It was at that point that their marriage became possible— a marriage of two undead who had to live, while they had died some time before, each in his/her own way; maybe it was those moans of anguish which push them into a marriage bond: “let’s put our heads on each other’s shoulder and cry. Let’s with the fallen, dozy feebleness; after all tiredness one feels, let’s turn to each other for solace” (133-134).

These scenes of confessions, while letting the Whore voice her sufferings, refashions Hedayat’s narrative as well. In other words, through speaking for herself, the narrator enlightens the reader that it was society not her sexual perversion which has made a whore out of her; that she has been *victimized dually*, to borrow Spivak’s phrase, both by her father (the family) and the patriarchal society; and that she exemplifies someone who has been robbed of any safe haven and, thus, feels broken and insecure everywhere. For her, the private and the public connote the same: unsafe and cruel. And here she turns into a Baroque figure: one who cannot have any claims to any home— a place where she can feel safe and sound. Homeless and feeling insecure, she wishes to get lost among people, to go incognito: “I wished I were a poker card, getting lost in the shuffle to such extent that no one could any longer guess which card I could be” (97).

Though she seems as if giving up, her story remains challenging and oppositional: whether it is through its fragmentary process of recollection and remembrance, through its dispensing with prevalent social clichés and stereotypes, or through its stimulation of the readers’ imagination to get their perspectives broadened and, thus, to effect some change; the very change whose urgency is highlighted later by the very end of the story when a baby girl is born, and her birth and arrival in that world can promise another story, which will not be much different from that of the narrator or the Whore.

### Conclusion

To obtain a true grasp of life, one cannot ignore the neo-Baroque’s major premise: that a linear way of storytelling deludes the reader into believing that life is as straight as the realistic narrative, and its characters are as easy to know. Neo-Baroque believes that life is a labyrinth, and its reality can be

reflected more faithfully through the labyrinthine, extra-real structures. To convey the plights women have faced through centuries, a linear style of narrative falls short. And nothing can do justice to them but giving them the right to speak for themselves; and this per se entails a polycentric, dialogic, and non-hierarchical narrative which a monologic style is incapable of. As a sequel to Hedayat's narrative, Marūfi's is not an inferior copy, but a recreating and refashioning version, especially regarding the female characters. His is a new narrative which grows on Hedayat's story yet blooms new flowers through its deployment of neo-Baroque aesthetics and mentality; in fact, it is through its aesthetic that it induces a new perspective, and that enables one to see through the norms and conventions which secure one's mastery and the other's passivity. And it is through the mentality that it endows the reader with some courage for change, with new eyes to see.

#### End Note

<sup>1</sup> . Neo-Baroque narratives deploy allegories since, as Walter Benjamin believes, allegories function as fragments and like the ruins it embeds a nostalgic memory of the past (qtd. in Cowan 117)

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