

# Voices from Iran

## An Evening of Encounter and Reflection



Utrecht University (Faculty Club)  
The Aula, University Hall  
Domplein 29, Utrecht



ERC Advanced Grant  
Beyond Sharia: The Role of Sufism in  
Shaping Islam  
[www.beyondsharia.nl](http://www.beyondsharia.nl)



Utrecht  
University

*Prince in a Garden Courtyard*  
From: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/446160>

## Stemmen uit Iran

### Een avond van ontmoeting en reflectie

Iraniërs streven al meer dan 150 jaar naar de invoering van een democratisch bestel waarin de rechtstaat centraal staat, mensenrechten worden gewaarborgd, en alle burgers, ongeacht geloof, geslacht of afkomst, gelijk behandeld worden. De vreedzame demonstraties tegen onderdrukking van het Islamitisch regime die in december 2025 begonnen, bereikten een voorlopig hoogtepunt op 8 en 9 januari 2026. Het regime reageerde meedogenloos en in honderden steden over heel Iran werden duizenden mensen doelgericht gedood. Het is een recent voorbeeld van het buitensporige staatsgeweld waartoe dit regime in staat is. De omvang van dit bloedbad wordt nu al beschouwd als een nationaal trauma dat een plaats zal krijgen in de Iraanse geschiedenis. Iraniërs rouwen door gezamenlijk te demonstreren in steden in Australië, Japan, Europa, Canada en de Verenigde Staten. Daarmee willen zij niet alleen de stem zijn van hun landgenoten in Iran, maar ook laten zien dat een vrij en seculier Iran kan bijdragen aan de stabiliteit in een wereld waarin internationale verhoudingen onder druk staan.

Normaal gesproken vierten we aan onze universiteit op 21 maart het begin van het Perzisch nieuwjaar: Nowruz. Door de verdrietige gebeurtenissen hebben we dit jaar besloten om de slachtoffers in Iran te herdenken en respect te betuigen aan de nabestaanden en aan de moedige mensen die hun leven hebben gegeven voor vrijheid en democratie. Het volgende gedicht van K. Khalili (1907-1987), waarvan hieronder enkele verzen in vrije vertaling zijn geciteerd, wordt vaak aangehaald binnen de Perzischtalige gemeenschappen:

در کشور خونین کفنان ره نگشاید	گویید به نوروز که امسال نیاید
ماتم زدگان را لب پر خنده نشاید	بلبل به چمن نغمه شادی نسراید
ای وای وطن وای	خون می دمد از خاک شهیدان وطن وای

Vraag Nowruz om dit jaar niet te komen;

Vraag Nowruz het land gehuld in bebloed doodsgewaden niet betreden;

Vraag de nachtegaal om geen vreugdelied te zingen in de tuin;

De glimlach past niet op de lippen van de rouwenden.

Ach en wee! Bloed welt op uit de graven van zij die hun leven gaven voor hun vaderland:

Ach vaderland, wee vaderland!

Ask Nowruz not to come this year;

Ask Nowruz not to enter the land of blood-soaked shrouds;

Ask the nightingale not to sing any joyful melody in the meadow;

A smile does not suit the lips of mourners.

Alas! Blood is oozing from the graves of those who sacrificed their lives for the homeland:

Alas, homeland, alack homeland!





### Programme (6:00–7:30 PM)

**17:45 – Check-in and Registration**

**18:00 – Words of welcome**

*Prof. Ted Sanders (Utrecht University)*

*Prof. Asghar Seyed-Gohrab (Utrecht University)*

**18:10 – Persian Music**

*Maryam Imanizadeh (vocals & daf/ tanboor), Mehmet Polat (oud), Milad Ahmadi (vocals), Karvan Mustafa (kamanche), Arman Kavian (tombak), Ali Soltaninejad (santur)*

**18:25 – Pooyan Tamimi Arab (Utrecht University)**

*Visual Triggers of Iranian Feminism*

**18:40 – Exhibition: *Remembering the Rainbow God***

*Sara Emami*

**18:55 – Persian Poetry Recitation**

*Zhinia Noorian (Utrecht University)*

**19:05**

### Programme (7:30–10:00 PM)

**19:15 – Check-in and Registration**

**19:30 – Exhibition: *Les demoiselles de Tehran – Women, Identity and Resistance in Contemporary Iran***

*Aynaz Najafi*

**19.50 Nilou Yekta (Utrecht University)**

*“Don’t cry. Be Joyful.”: Funeral Videos as Protest in Iran*

**20:05 – Misagh Javadpour (University of Amsterdam)**

*When the Bazaar Burns: Memory, Violence, and the Struggle for Public Space in Iran*

**20:20 – Mina Etemad (Journalist, writer and podcast producer)**

*The endangered lives of Lake Urmia*

**20:35 – Keynote Lecture: Professor Kamran Talattof (University of**

**Arizona) (online)** *The Lion and Sun Uprising: Cultural Memory and Political Transformation in Iran*

**21:15 – Q&A**

Abstracts:

**Pooyan Tamimi Arab**

*Visual Triggers of Iranian Feminism*

In this presentation, I present digital art posted on Instagram during the Woman Life Freedom uprising and more recently. The focus is on images that provoke and shape feminist political emotions while catalyzing transnational visibility. These images expose the protests' revolutionary and existential nature, foreground the liberated body in public acts of defiance, and mount a critique of theocracy that sometimes extends to Islam itself, intertwined with a sense of national self-assertion that separates Iran from the Islamic Republic.

**Pooyan Tamimi Arab** is Associate Professor of Secular and Religious Studies at Utrecht University. He is the principal investigator of Iran's Secular Shift, a mixed-methods project funded by the Dutch Research Council running until 2030.

**Sara Emami**

*Exhibition: Remembering the Rainbow God*

**Sara Emami** is User Experience Lead at Philips and known for her illustrations, which have been appeared in exhibitions on Woman Life Freedom and printed in newspapers such as *Die Zeit* and *De Volkskrant*.

**Zhinia Noorian**

*Persian Poetry Recitation*

Poetry is the soul of culture in Iran. It is the language to express thoughts, ideas and emotions. Life in Iran remains difficult, at times more difficult than one can imagine or explain. Yet, Persian speakers refuse to be silenced even in the face of the most suffocating experiences. For Iranians, poetry is the eloquent mode of communication, in moments of joy, but also at times of unfathomable despair and grief. The poems I have chosen for this occasion are good examples. Here you see the presence of hope for the highest human values such as freedom, but also helplessness. You see challenging death, with life, with love, with determination and above all, with hope.

My name is **Zhinia Noorian**. I started my PhD in Persian and Iranian Studies in 2020 at Leiden University and completed it at Utrecht University in 2022. My PhD dissertation is published as a book by Leiden University Press under the title, *Parvān I'tiṣāmī in the Literary and Religious Context of Twentieth-Century Iran*. I am back to Utrecht University for a second postdoc project for the ERC Advanced Grant, *Beyond Sharia: The Role of Sufism in Shaping Islam*, in the department of Philosophy and Religious Studies. In my previous project, I worked on the poetry of a Persian woman who is the only poet from the pre-modern times with a substantial collection of poetry. My research findings will echo this poet's lost voice and her ignored role in Persian literature and Sufism. It will soon be published as a book by De Gruyter. The focus of my new position is on Persian as a language of non-conformist Sufism in Anatolia from the thirteenth century onwards.

## **Aynaz Najafi**

*Les demoiselles de Tebran:  
Women, Identity and Resistance in Contemporary Iran*

**Aynaz Najafi** (b. 1992, Iran) is an Iranian visual artist currently based in Rome, Italy. She holds a Master's degree in the History of Ancient Iran, specializing in the influence of Manichaean miniatures on Iranian Islamic art. She studied Persian miniature painting under master Reza Mostajeran in Isfahan, developing a strong foundation in traditional techniques that

continue to inform her contemporary practice. Najafi has participated in numerous private exhibitions in Iran and collaborated with established galleries prior to relocating to Italy in 2022. She is currently continuing her studies at the Academy of Fine Arts of Brera in Milan and has exhibited her work in Switzerland, Milan, and Rome. Her practice centers on the condition of women in Iran and the broader Middle East. Working from a feminist perspective, she critically examines patriarchal power structures and the intersection of politics and religion in shaping women's lives in Iran. Najafi's paintings have consistently carried political and anti-religious undertones. Following her migration from Iran, her visual language evolved into a more direct, intense, and confrontational form. Making use of the freedom of expression available in Europe, she began producing explicitly political works. She has gained recognition for her radical artistic stance against the Islamic Republic, positioning her work as a form of visual resistance.

### **Nilou Yekta**

*"Don't cry. Be Joyful.": Funeral Videos as Protest in Iran*

The final words of WLF protester Majidreza Rahnavard before his execution: "Don't cry. Don't read the Qur'an. Don't pray. Be joyful. Play happy music" are now echoing through commemoration ceremonies for those killed in the 2026 Iran massacres. But why are Iranians clapping, dancing, singing, and reciting poetry at funerals? How are these acts giving new meaning to the notion of "dancing on someone's grave"?

**Nilou Yekta** is a PhD candidate at Utrecht University exploring the aesthetic and affective dimensions of contemporary Iranian secular visual culture, with research interests in gender, the body, resistance, and secular martyrdom.

### **Misagh Javadpour**

*When the Bazaar Burns:  
Memory, Violence, and the Struggle for Public Space in Iran*

This lecture reflects on the deadly crackdown in Rasht's historic bazaar during the January 2026 uprising, where protestors were trapped under live fire by security forces. Situating these events within the city's longer political memory, it explores how violence and repression shape civic life and political imagination in Iran, and why Rasht remains symbolically significant today.

**Misagh Javadpour** is a researcher and lecturer at the University of Amsterdam. His research focuses on social movements, revolutionary processes, and political violence, with particular attention to modern Iran.

### **Mina Etemad**

*The endangered lives of Lake Urmia*

A reflection on Lake Urmia's ecological decline under mismanagement: as the lake disappears, algae die off, flamingos lose their breeding grounds, and surrounding communities are forced to relocate due to salt storms.

**Mina Etemad** is a journalist, writer and podcast producer who focuses on themes like belonging, migration and animal rights.

### **Kamran Talattof**

*The Lion and Sun Uprising:  
Cultural Memory and Political Transformation in Iran*

The December 2025 uprising in Iran marked a decisive transformation in the country's post-revolutionary political consciousness. Unlike previous protests defined by negation and opposition, the Lion and Sun uprising demonstrated a fundamental shift toward affirmative political vision grounded in historical continuity and identified leadership. This analysis examines how Iran's cultural memory, preserved through Persian literary traditions, pre-Islamic civilizational heritage, and civic rather than ideological values, became the dominant framework through which Iranians articulated their political aspirations during this uprising. The movement drew upon deep cultural resources that had survived decades of systematic suppression, transforming collective memory into political

action. Even after violent state crackdown, resistance evolved from organized protest into embodied cultural defiance, revealing how political struggle extends beyond conventional activism into symbolic meaning and ritualized memory. In this way, the uprising demonstrated how cultural memory does not merely sustain identity but actively reorganizes political imagination, transforming historical continuity into contemporary forms of authority, leadership, and collective aspiration.

**Professor Kamran Talattof** (Ph.D., University of Michigan) is the founding Chair of the Graduate Interdisciplinary Program in Persian and Iranian Studies at the University of Arizona. His interdisciplinary research and teaching focus on the intersections of ideology, gender, and textuality in Iran and the broader Near East. He has published numerous articles and books, including three award-winning monographs. His most recent works include *Nezami Ganjavi and Classical Persian Literature: Demystifying the Mystic* and two comprehensive edited handbooks on ancient, classical, and contemporary Persian literature. His forthcoming book, *The Triumph of the National Narrative: Iranian Women's Bestselling Novels, Activism, and Civil Society Nationalism*, will be published by Springer in April 2026.

*By Sara Emami*



## Persian Poetry Sung by Singers

از خون جوانان وطن  
شاعر: عارف قزوینی

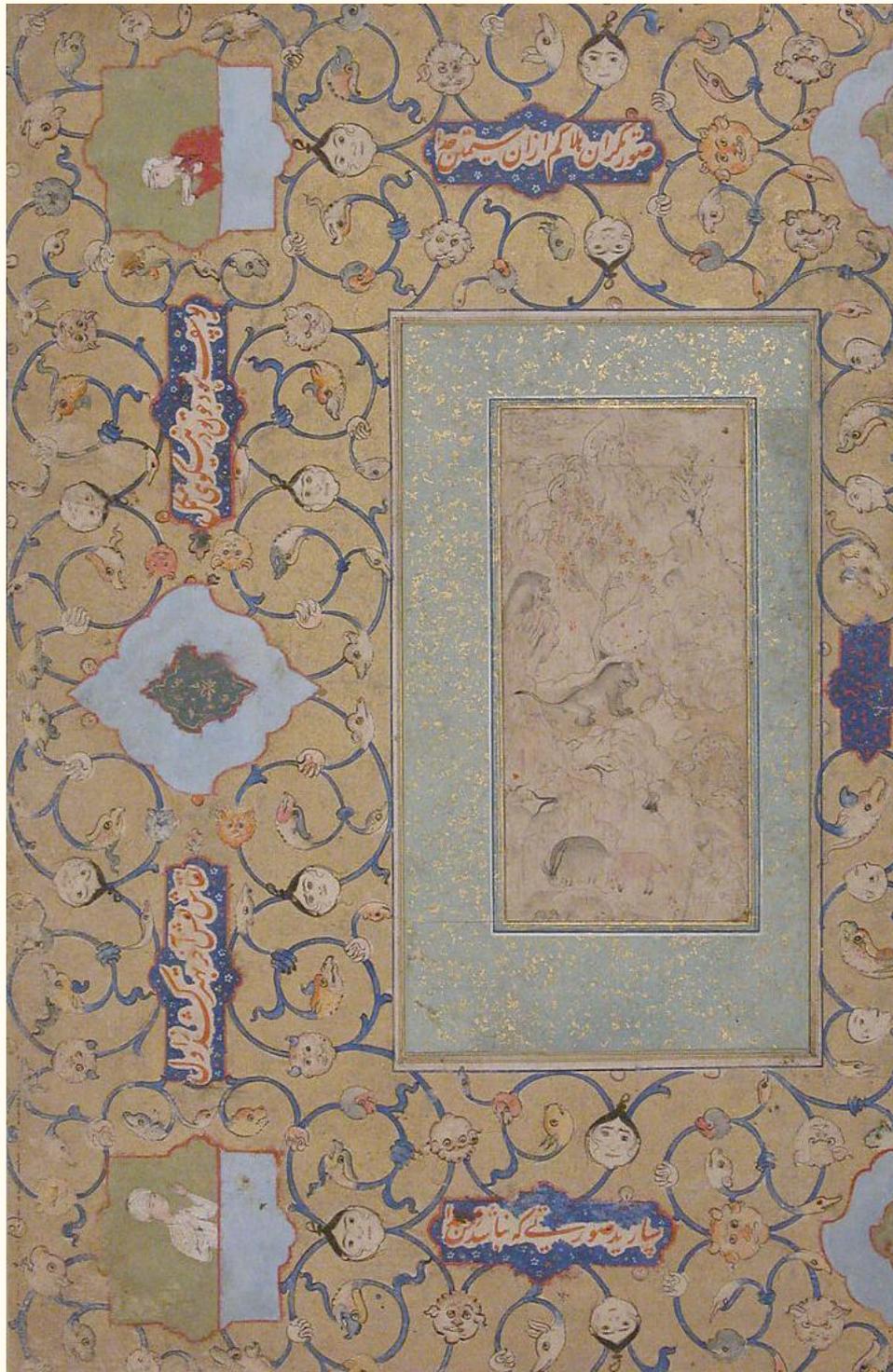
از خون جوانان وطن لاله دمیده  
از ماتم سرو قدشان سرو خمیده  
در سایه گل بلبل ازین غصه خزیده  
گل نیز چو من در غمشان جامه دریده  
چه کج رفتاری ای چرخ! چه بد کرداری ای چرخ!  
سر کین داری ای چرخ! نه دین داری، نه آیین داری ای چرخ!

From the blood of the homeland youth, tulips have sprouted  
The cypress's tall form is bent in sorrow for cypress-tall youths  
In the shadow of the rose, the nightingale writhes in sorrow  
The rose, like me, has torn her robe.  
How crooked you are, O Wheel! How mischievous you are, O  
Wheel!  
You are intent on revenge, O Wheel!  
You have neither religion, nor rules, O Wheel!

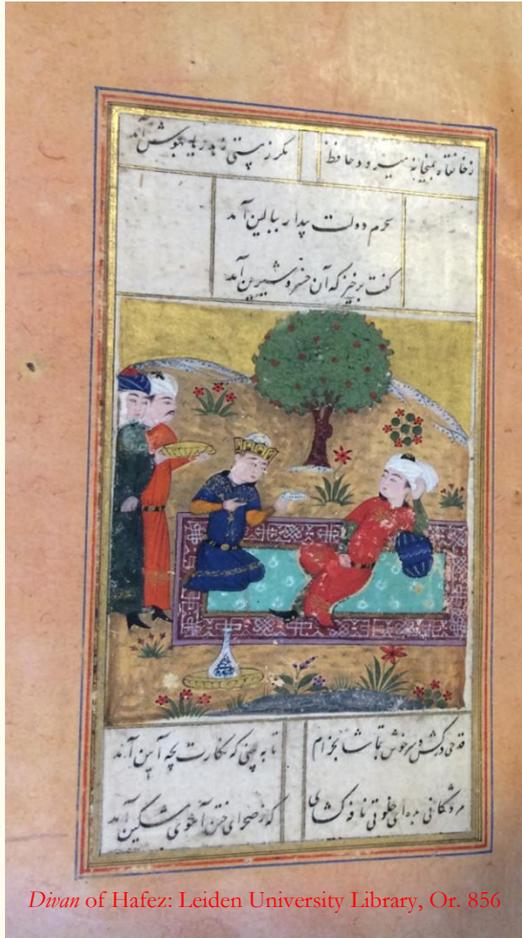
(second stanza of the poem by 'Aref from Qazvin, died 21 January 1934)  
The tulip has been a symbol of martyrdom from medieval times in Iran.

“In the second stanza, the poet repeats the title, adding the two omitted words, i. e. “tulips grow.” Tulips, flowers of spring and new life, grow unexpectedly because of death, as the blood of youths has been poured on the soil. Red tulips represent life, passion and youth, but are here subverted. The cypress trees in the second line are known for being evergreen, free from the fluctuations of life, and because of their stature represent a noble character. Now they are bent in mourning for the youths. The rose and nightingale are another familiar, even cliché, metaphor for lovers, transformed in this poem to an image of bereavement. The faithful nightingale—the poet—does not show itself: it crouches in distress under the shadow of the rose. In the next line, the poet compares himself to the rose, which has torn its robe, as a sign of mourning.” (for the entire poem’s translation and commentary see A.

Seyed-Gohrab, "Poetry as Awakening: Singing Modernity," in *Literature of the Early Twentieth Century: From the Constitutional Period to Reza Shah*, London / New York: I.B. Tauris., 2015, pp. 105-110; more on Aref see *Heel de nacht tel ik de sterren, Aref-e Qazvini* by A. Ghodrätzadeh)



Source : <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/452515>



*Divan of Hafez: Leiden University Library, Or. 856*

سرو روان من کو  
شاعر: انوری

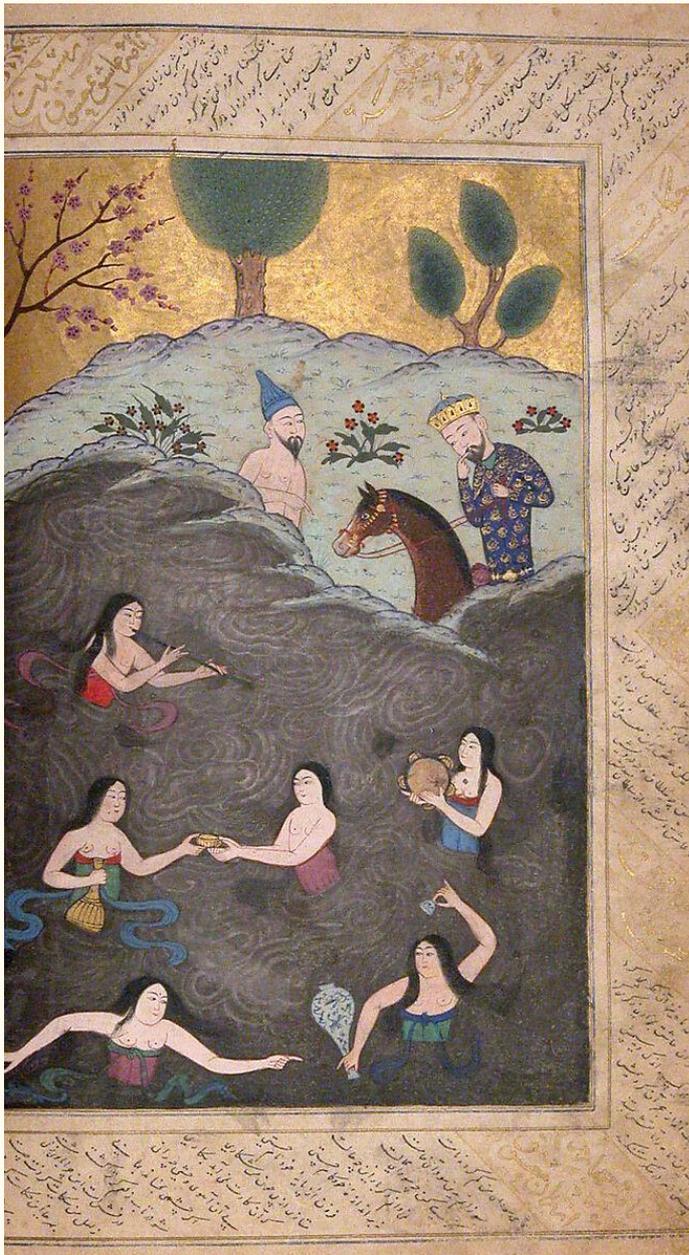
ای مردمان بگوئید آرام جان من کو  
راحت‌فزای هر کس محنت‌رسان من کو  
نامش همی نیارم بردن به پیش هر کس  
گه گه به ناز گویم سرو روان من کو  
در بوستان شادی هر کس به چیدن گل  
آن گل که نشکفیده‌ست در بوستان من کو  
جانان من سفر کرد با او برفت جانم  
باز آمدن از ایشان پیداست آن من کو  
هر کس به خان و مانی دارد مهربانی  
من مهربان ندارم نامهربان من کو

O people! Pray say where is the comfort of my soul?  
Where is the one who brings comfort to everyone, but distress to me?  
I don't say his name publicly to anyone:  
in furtive amorous tone I say at times, where is my graceful cypress?  
In the garden of delight, everyone is picking a rose:  
where is that rose, not yet burgeoned in my garden?  
When my beloved went on a journey, my soul also left me:  
at his return, it was clear where my soul had been?  
Everyone has a caring lover at home,  
I have no caring lover, where is my uncaring love?

(Translation by A.A. Seyed-Gohrab)

Anvari (born in Abivard, Khorasan ca. 1126 and died in Balkh after 1165). On Anvari's life, work and historical context see J.T.P. de Bruijn, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. Anvari (online available at <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/anvari/>)

کابوکی لی لیه  
ترانه محلی



کابوکی لی لیه ، کابوکی لی لیه  
لی لی لی لی لیه ، لی لی لی  
کابوکی سورم وای وای

دهردی خنجر آسانه  
دهردی دل زور گرانه  
از عاشقم لی لی  
کچکه مالم وای وای

کابوکی لی لیه ، کابوکی لی لیه  
لی لی لی لی لیه ، لی لی لی  
کابوکی سورم وای وای

یارم اسکی ماچینه  
ده وای دهر دو برینه  
از عاشقم لی لی  
کچکه عومرم وای وای

کابوکی لی لیه ، کابوکی لی لیه  
لی لی لی لی لیه ، لی لی لی  
کابوکی سورم وای وای

من عاشقی جانانم  
له عالم سرگردانم  
از عاشقی لی لی  
کچکه مالم وای وای

**Houshang Ebtehaj** (1928-2022), a poet and musician, published under the pseudonym “Shadow.” His life covers the period of Reza Shah (r. 1925-1941), his son Mohammad Reza Shah (r. 1941-1979) and the Islamic Republic (1979-present). He worked at National Iranian Radio, producing musical program based on classical Persian poetry. The following song became famous when Mohammad-Reza Shajarian performed it.

هوشنگ ابتهاج (ه.ا. سایه)

Oh Iran! For hope, a stately-columned court,  
with light just dawning on its domes,  
See! Good fortune’s sun is rising there where  
the eastern road is running blood.

ایران ای سرای امید  
بر بامت سپیده دمید  
بنگر کزین ره پر خون  
خورشیدی خجسته رسید

Yes! the hearts are choking,  
Yet joy’s lustrous entourage is swelling.  
Our sunrise as a red red rose,  
but why does our dawn rise red?  
Because our foes have dipped their hands in  
blood.

اگر چه دل‌ها پر خون است  
شکوه شادی افزون است  
سپیده ما گلگون است  
وای گلگون است  
که دست دشمن در خون  
است

Ay Iran! May sorrow never reach you,  
may your glory be eternal.

ای ایران، غمت مرساد  
جاویدان شکوه تو باد

Our path, the way of truth,  
The path towards that Day.  
Unity, and unity alone,  
The spell that opens victory.

راه ما راه حق  
راه بهروزی‌ست  
اتحاد اتحاد  
رمز پیروزی‌ست

May peace and freedom bless the world, all  
the world, forever.  
The world’s great peace raised up  
in memory where lovers fell.

صلح و آزادی  
جاودانه بر همه جهان خوش  
باد  
یادگار خون عاشقان

O Spring, evergreen spring, may you flourish  
in these fields forever.  
(translation by S. McGlinn)

ای بهار ای بهار تازه  
جاودان  
در این چمن شکفته باش

## Recitation of Persian Poetry by Dr Zhinia Noorian

### Free Fall

Alone

he ran on

a few steps ahead of me  
before he fell  
on the road to freedom

freedom is beautiful  
even when you're in free fall  
toward death  
even  
when you grow cold  
lying in your own blood

Bullets!  
dear bullets!  
please  
go back to your shell casings  
and we go back to our homes (pp. 456-  
459)

### سقوط آزاد

تنها

چند قدم

جلوتر از من می دوید  
پیش از آنکه سقوط کند  
روی خیابان آزادی

آزادی زیباست  
حتی وقتی سقوط آزاد می کنی  
روی مرگ  
حتی  
وقتی روی خون خودت  
سرد می شوی

گلوله ها!  
گلوله های عزیز!  
لطفاً  
به پوکه هایتان برگردید!  
ما نیز به خانه هایمان بر می گردیم!

شبیم آذر

### Shabnam Azar (born 1977)

Dick Davis, *The Mirror of My Heart: A Thousand Years of Persian Poetry by Women*. Translated and introduced by Dick Davis. 1st bilingual edition, first publ. 2019, reprinted Washington D.C.: Mage Publishers, 2020.

Death too will grow old one day  
 he'll become weary  
 and sit down,  
 he'll bend over, with his head on his knees  
 he'll hug himself, like life  
 and stretch out his hands, hesitantly, in the  
 alphabet  
 of stone fragments, walls and  
 drag words out of the dark earth's depths  
 and  
 bring them together, sculp them, break off  
 bits  
 in a faded voice  
 and he'll think the moon  
 is a kinder glance for leaving, and  
 love  
 a past more complete than the road, and  
 he'll stand up  
 draw breath, blink  
 freed  
 on the threshold of the short pause  
 that is life  
 Words are alive  
 they breathe  
 they dream  
 they make love and  
 like pain  
 they twist in death's waist  
 they give up the ghost and  
 they become poems and  
 they remain ...  
 we are not alone;  
 we are wandering birds  
 that do not wake up  
 from words' dream (pp. 426-429)

مرگ هم پیر می شود یک  
 روز،  
 خسته می شود  
 می نشیند  
 خم می کند سرش را روی  
 زانوهایش  
 بغل می کند خودش را، شبیه  
 زندگی  
 و دست می برد با تردید در  
 الفبای قاطع سنگ، دیوار،  
 ریشه، و  
 بیرون می کشد کلمات را از  
 سرایش تاریک خاک و  
 جمع می کند، می تراشد، می  
 چیند تکه هایش را  
 در صدای رنگ پریده اش  
 و فکر می کند ماه  
 چشم انداز مهربان تری برای  
 رفتن است و  
 عشق  
 سرگذشت کامل تری از راه، و  
 بلند می شود  
 می ایستد  
 نفس می کشد، پلک می زند  
 رها  
 در آستانه مکث کوتاهی  
 که زندگی است.  
  
 کلمات زنده اند  
 نفس می کشند  
 خواب می بینند  
 عشق می ورزند و  
 مثل درد  
 در کمرگاه مرگ می پیچند و  
 جان می دهند و  
 شعر می شوند و  
 می مانند ...

ما تنها نیستیم  
پرندگانی سرگردانیم  
که از خواب کلمات  
نمی پریم

ماندانا زندیان

**Mandana Zandian (born 1972)**

Dick Davis, *The Mirror of My Heart: A Thousand Years of Persian Poetry by Women*. Translated and introduced by Dick Davis. 1st bilingual edition, first publ. 2019, reprinted Washington D.C.: Mage Publishers, 2020.



Source: [https://historicaliran.blogspot.com/2010/03/haft-sin.html#google\\_vignette](https://historicaliran.blogspot.com/2010/03/haft-sin.html#google_vignette)