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“A Leaf, a Star”: Marvā Nabīlī’s Poetic Quest for Life and Immortality

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Introduction

This article explores the life and work of Marvā Nabīlī, an overlooked yet significant figure in modern Iranian art, cinema, and poetry. Known for her deeply personal and feminist voice, Nabīlī moved fluidly between artistic disciplines, beginning as a poet in the avant-garde literary circles of 1960s Tehran before transitioning to filmmaking, where she gained international recognition for her nuanced portrayals of women’s experiences. Despite her considerable contributions, both her poetry and cinematic achievements have remained largely forgotten in Iranian cultural history. This article traces her early life and education, her entry into cinema and the creation of her landmark film *Khāk-i sar bih muhr*, her place in Iran’s literary “New Wave,” and the philosophical and feminist dimensions of her poetry. It concludes with the rediscovery and republication of her poetic works, offering a selection of her poems that capture the lyrical depth and emotional resonance of her vision. By situating Nabīlī within the broader contexts of Iranian modernism, feminist art, and transnational cinema, the article aims to reintroduce her as a vital, complex voice whose work deserves renewed attention.

Early Life and Education: Foundations of an Artistic Journey

Mārtā Nabīlī, more commonly known as Marvā Nabīlī, was born on Farvardīn 11, 1320/April 1, 1941, in Tehran. Her father, ‘Alī

Muhammad Nabīlī, originally from Qazvin, was a businessman who traded a variety of goods across Iran, Afghanistan, and India. Her mother, Nāhīd Zand, a housewife, hailed from Shiraz. Both parents were well-educated and had a strong appreciation for art and literature. In addition to Marvā, the family included her brother Mihrdād, and another sister, Mīnā. While they primarily lived in Tehran and Ahvaz, the family also resided in Kabul for a period before Marvā's birth. Mihrdād Nabīlī (1311–1383/1932–2004), the eldest sibling, had a different career, working in banking, journalism, and teaching English. He was also a literary translator who has skillfully rendered works by authors such as Arthur Koestler, William Somerset Maugham, and Charles Dickens into Persian.¹

¹William Maugham, *Labah-i tīgh* [The razor's edge], trans. Mihrdād Nabīlī (Kitāb'hā-yi Jībī, 1341/1962); Arthur Koestler, *Az rah rasīdan va bāzgasht* [Arrival and departure], trans. Mihrdād Nabīlī (Kitāb'hā-yi Jībī, 1347/1968); Charles Dickens, *Dāstān-i dū shahr* [The tale of two cities], trans. Mihrdād Nabīlī (Farzān-i Rūz, 1381/2002).

The early death of Marvā's father made her mother the primary caregiver for the family. Motivated by her deep passion for art and literature, Marvā pursued her education at the Music Conservatory (Hunaristān-i Mūsīqī), Nūrbakhsh High School (Dabīristān-i Nūrbakhsh) and The Academy of Decorative Arts of Tehran, formerly the Art Institute of Tehran (Hunar'kadah-'i hunar'hā-yi taz'īnī-i Tihrān). After 1357/1978, the Faculty of Decorative Arts merged with several other institutions to form the University of Art (Dānishgāh-i Hunar). Among the founding professors of this faculty were Asad Bihruzān, Karīm Imāmī, Suhrāb Sipihrī, and Firaydūn Rah'namā. Marvā drew considerable inspiration from the teachings of Sipihrī and Rah'namā. Following Rah'namā's advice, she adopted the artistic name Marvā, a modified pronunciation of the ancient Persian word *murvā*, which means a good omen.

After spending some time studying and working independently in London, Marvā continued her education in the United States, where she earned a bachelor's degree in Cinema from Richmond College at the City University of New York. She then completed a master's degree in the same field at Goddard College in Vermont. Her career also included a period working in Iranian television (in the 1350s/1970s), involvement in theater

²Marvā Nabīlī, email message to author, from Bahman 1399/January 2021 to Urdībihisht 1400/April 2021.

³Marvā Nabīlī, email message to author, from Bahman 1399/January 2021 to Urdībihisht 1400/April 2021.

and ballet (in New York), and filmmaking (in the 1360s/1980s and 1370s/1990s). Since around 1356/1977, Marvā has lived in the United States, initially in New York and later in Los Angeles. She spent about fifteen years in Los Angeles, working in the film industry with a focus on film editing in studios such as Paramount, Warner Bros, Sony, Universal Pictures, and Disney.²

Entering the Cinematic World

Marvā's first foray into cinema came with her role in *Siyāvush dar Takht-i Jamshīd* (*Siyāvush at Persepolis*) (1346/1967), a film directed by her professor, Firaydūn Rah'namā. Inspired by Firdawsī's *Shāh'nāmāh*, the film featured Marvā in the role of Farangīs, Siyāvush's wife. In addition to acting, she also served as the script supervisor. Although Rah'namā's film did not garner much attention in Iran—likely due to the political dominance of leftist ideologies at the time—it gained recognition in Europe and won the Jean Epstein Award at the Locarno Festival. Marvā's experience of participating in the film, combined with her trip to London and her subsequent stay in the city, sparked her interest in different filmmaking styles, particularly Japanese cinema by directors like Yasujiro Ozu and Kenji Mizoguchi. While studying in the United States in the late 1960s, Marvā's passion for cinema grew even stronger. At Richmond College, she studied under professors such as John Hancock, Gerald Mast, Richard Saez, Richard Barsam, Leonard Quart, Antonin Liehm, and Robert Bresson. It was there that she developed a particular familiarity with contemporary French and Italian cinema. Meanwhile, following the Prague Spring of 1968 and the Soviet Army's invasion of Czechoslovakia, many Czechoslovakian filmmakers, including Miloš Forman, Ivan Passer, Jiří Weiss, Jan Kadar, and Jiří Menzel, relocated to the United States. Some of them were involved with Richmond College. This provided young filmmakers like Marvā with exposure to the trends, styles, and structures of filmmaking in Eastern Europe.³



In 1353/1974, Marvā returned to Iran for a period. During this time, at the invitation of the filmmaker Bārbud Tāhirī, who happened to be her relative and one of the three directors of the 26-episode television series *Samak-i ‘Ayyār*, she worked as the script supervisor for the project.⁴ In addition, Marvā co-produced an eight-part series for the Iranian children’s television program titled *Afsānah‘hā-yi kuhan-i Īrānī* (Ancient Persian folktales) alongside Malik Jahān Khazā‘ī.⁵ Her involvement in these projects not only allowed her to cover part of her living and educational expenses but also provided her with hands-on experience, deepening her understanding of the filmmaking process and the cinematic environment.⁶

The film for which Marvā gained acclaim is the subject of her thesis project at Goddard College. Originally titled in Persian as *Khāk-i sar bih muhr* (The sealed soil), it was made in 1356/1977.⁷ The story is set in *Qal‘ah-‘i Naw‘askar* (Shams‘ābād), located in Dezful County, Khuzestan Province, Iran. This village is a military fortress that dates to ancient times. In the early 1350s/1970s, the government was building another settlement alongside the old road to this fortress, encouraging people to relocate to the new village. Children from the *Qal‘ah* would attend school in the new village, while women would fetch drinking water from its pump. The juxtaposition of old and new settings, along with the conflicts between tradition and modernity, provided the backdrop for the film’s screenplay and production. Marvā’s film explores the story of a teenage girl named *Rūy-bih-khayr* or more succinctly *Rū-bih-khayr*, who rejects all suitors in the village. She contemplates her independence and individuality as a woman and aspires to shape her own identity. However, in a world surrounded by traditions, the family, and neighbors believe that the young woman of marriageable age has been bewitched or put under a spell. Therefore, they attempt to “rescue” her from this predicament through well-known traditional means.

Due to Marvā’s limited financial resources, the filming of her

⁴Other directors of this series are Muhammad Rizā Aslānī, a poet and filmmaker, and Vārūzh Karīm Masīhī.

⁵Marvā Nabīlī was more involved in set and costume design in Iranian cinema.

⁶See Kāmyār ‘Ābidī, *Marvā Nabīlī: Shā‘ir va sīnamāgar* [Marvā Nabīlī: Poet and filmmaker] (Tehran: Murvārid, 1402/2023), 33. This monograph includes a biography and an analysis of Marvā’s poetic and cinematic works of Marvā, along with the text of 43 of her poems, the majority of which have been published for the first time by the present author. For information on other sources and bibliographic references, see pages 147–49 of the book.

⁷*Khāk-i sar bih muhr* directed by Marvā Nabīlī, (1977, Germany). Berlin International Film Festival.

⁸ 'Ābidī, Marvā Nabīlī, 35.

⁹ *Nightsongs*, directed by Marvā Nabīlī, (1984, United States). Balfour Films Ltd.

¹⁰ Jamshīd Akrāmī, "The Blighted Spring: Iranian Cinema and Politics in the 1970s," in *Film and Politics in the Third World*, ed. John D. H. Downing (New York: Praeger, 1987), 131–44. Sara Saljoughi, "A Cinema of Refusal: The Sealed Soil and the Political Aesthetics of the Iranian New Waves," *Feminist Media Histories* 3, no. 1 (2017): 81–102.

¹¹ For a summary of the viewpoints expressed by several scholars, including S. Saljūqī, M. R. Shīrāvān, N. Bādī, S. 'Aqīqī, R. Nazar'zādah, H. Nafīsī, see 'Ābidī, Marvā Nabīlī, 53–64.

project was completed in just six days. Bārbud Tāhīrī and his cinematography team took on this task for her. All the actors in the film, except Flūrā Shab'āvīz, who portrayed the role of Rū-bih-khayr, were local villagers. The director produced the film without government approval, a risky decision given that at the time, the government strictly prohibited filming in impoverished areas. Marvā traveled to the United States with the film negatives packed in her suitcase. Her film received the Best New Director award at the San Remo Film Festival in Italy in 1977 for its innovative perspective. The film was also selected for screening at other festivals.⁸ In 2017, on the fortieth anniversary of Khāk-i sar bih muhr, the British Film Institute in London honored Marvā and her film as part of their feminist film series, with the director herself in attendance.

While Marvā gained recognition for her 1983 film *Nightsongs*, which was produced by her husband, Thomas A. Fucci, and explores the challenging life of a Vietnamese immigrant woman in New York's Chinatown, she is primarily known and acclaimed for *Khāk-i sar bih muhr*.⁹ As film critics and scholars have noted, in the latter, unlike contemporary Iranian cinema of her time, Marvā portrays a woman determined to reclaim her individuality. She resists the constraints imposed by traditions and reflects on her identity as a human being.¹⁰ *Khāk-i sar bih muhr* emphasizes women's independence in the modern era and their confrontation with tradition, set in a remote village setting. For this reason, Iranian admirers of feminist art have warmly embraced the film as a significant precursor to this art.¹¹

Poetic Themes: Dreams, Existence, and Feminism

Marvā, who already showed artistic and literary talent from childhood, encouraged by her mentors, Sipīhrī and Rah'namā, turned to poetry after completing her studies at The Academy of Decorative Arts (*Hunar'kadah-'i Hunar'hā-yi Taz'īnī*). Some of her poems from this period (1343–1347/1964–1967) were published in avant-garde and progressive journals such as *Tur-*



fah (Novelty), Juzvah-'i shi'r (Collection of poems) and Shi'r-i dīgar (Another poetry).¹² These samples reveal that, like many of her young contemporary poets, she was not drawn to the Nīmā'ī style of poetry.¹³ Instead, her poems were composed in free verse, without rhyme or meter, or with prose-like structure, known as shi'r-i sipīd (literally, “white poetry,” blank or free verse) in Iran. Moreover, it is evident that, despite embracing innovative perspectives in her poetry, Marvā avoids, to a certain extent, overly complex or obscure imagery. As a young poet, her language is notably clear and refined, and she demonstrates a mastery of prose poetry, keenly aware of the literary boundaries of her craft.

Rah'namā took the initial steps to recognize and support the young poets of the early 1340s/1960s who were moving away from the Nīmā'ī tradition, both orally and in writing. In addition to Marvā, notable poets such as Ahmad Rizā Ahmadī (1319–1402/1940–2023), Muhammad Rizā Aslānī (born in 1322/1943), Bīzhān Ilāhī (1324–1389/1945–2010) also deserve mention.¹⁴ As both a poet and a filmmaker educated in France, Rah'namā referred to this group as the “new wave” (mawj-i naw) of Iranian poetry in the mid-1340s/1960s, drawing inspiration from the French cinematic New Wave (La Nouvelle Vague), which emerged between 1958 and the late 1960s.¹⁵

Dreams and imagination play a pivotal role in shaping her poetic mind. In one of her poems, she speaks of a “shadow of imagination” that “has fallen upon the edge of her heart’s well.”¹⁶ In another poem, she alludes to a “shadow of dream” that “had rested upon her heart,”¹⁷ illustrating how “shadow and imagination” continually occupy her thoughts.¹⁸ She expresses hope that “shadows” might lead to our liberation. However, her exploration goes beyond mere reverie.¹⁹ She seeks “a cup of infinity” and strives to “nurture a new plant.”²⁰ In one poem, while contemplating “the beyond,” she emphasizes that “in the expanse of this moment” lies “a historical point” where “locks are eternally open.”²¹ It seems that in some of her poems, she

¹²Marvā Nabīlī's poems were published in three journals: one poem in Jung [Turfaḥ] 8 (Ābān 1343/October 1964): 144–45; another in Juzvah-'i shi'r 2 (Urdūbihisht 1345/April 1966): 46–47; and three poems in Shi'r-i dīgar 1 (Āzar 1347/November 1968): 62–64. Special thanks to Seyyed Farzām Husaynī, writer and journalist, for providing the information and granting access to the second journal.

¹³The Nīmā'ī style employs meter ('arūz) but does not use rhyme, whereas the sipīd style is characterized by its freedom from both meter and rhyme.

¹⁴See Firaydūn Rah'namā, “Dū naw'zād-i bāvar-kardani” [Two believable newborns], Jung [Turfaḥ] 8 (Ābān 1343/November 1964): 143–46.

¹⁵Shams Langarūdī, Tārīkh-i tahlīlī-i shi'r-i naw [Analytical history of modern poetry] (Tehran: Markaz, 1377/1998), 3:36.

¹⁶'Ābidī, Marvā Nabīlī, 67.

¹⁷'Ābidī, Marvā Nabīlī, 82.

¹⁸'Ābidī, Marvā Nabīlī, 82.

¹⁹'Ābidī, Marvā Nabīlī, 88.

²⁰'Ābidī, Marvā Nabīlī, 70.

²¹'Ābidī, Marvā Nabīlī, 132.

²² Ābidī, Marvā Nabīlī, 90.

²³ Ābidī, Marvā Nabīlī, 71.

²⁴ Marvā Nabīlī, Bargī va sitārah: Daftar-i shī'r-i das-t'nivīs bih khat-i shā'ir [A leaf and star: A hand-written poetry collection by the poet]. (n.p. mid-1340/1960), poem no. 4.

²⁵ Nabīlī, Bargī va sitārah, poem no. 5.

²⁶ Ābidī, Marvā Nabīlī, 102–3.

²⁷ Ābidī, Marvā Nabīlī, 99.

²⁸ Ābidī, Marvā Nabīlī, 106–7.

balances between temporal and timeless perspectives. Nevertheless, she remains steadfast in her pursuit of “a furrow of eternity”²² and, at times, even listens to the “roar of immortality.”²³

In Marvā’s poetry, we encounter a searching narrator whose eyes and ears are finely attuned to observation and perception, while her mind yearns for experiential exploration. For example, in one of her longer poems, we witness repeated instances of this quest:

I seek the drumbeats echoing from the weeders

Wandering through salt flats, reed beds, and embers²⁴

In another poem, she explicitly affirms her questing stance:

I shall traverse every desert,

Run through every marsh,

To rediscover my existence,

To rearrange the beads of this game,

To chant hymns upon her hand,

And to find my gaze sprouted upon the smiles of rocks²⁵

The narrator embarks on mental journeys, accompanied by nature and its myriad manifestations, perpetually navigating the path.²⁶

The narrator of the poems articulates both hopes and despondencies in her quests. While she reassures herself with promises of a brighter future,²⁷ she also candidly acknowledges her fears and anxieties.²⁸ A noteworthy point is that the narrator primarily lives in the present moment; the tense of the verbs (in the



poems) is often present or future, and rarely past. Although the interplay between darkness and light is prominently featured in Marvā's poetry, the poet's profound affinity for the sun is undeniable:

And we shall set forth

Venturing into the forest of the sun²⁹

My great sun

Who has stirred light in my veins³⁰

The great sun shall cradle the darkness in its embrace³¹

They envy this child of the sun³²

For the great sun has cleansed the ties bound in the city³³

In one of her poems, Marvā addresses a group of historical and sacred figures, namely, "prophets and martyrs," inviting them to "come to the paths of our garden" to witness, among other things, "how the trees blossom and nurture the hearts." Her final message to this assembly is that "our wayfarers," in addition to greeting you, "will wash your unripe fruit in the fountain of fervent love." One of the key concepts in Marvā's poetry seems to be her profound interest in *mīhr* (affection) or in this context, "the fountain of fervent love."³⁴ How is this *mīhr yā 'ishq* (affection or love) reflected in Marvā's poetry? In one of her poems, certain manifestations of *mīhr/ 'ishq'varzī* (affection/ expressing love) are articulated in ambiguous and dreamlike manners, highlighting the poet's cherished concepts and atmosphere: "Far apart, the vapor of our dreams intertwined, lost itself, and spread over all."³⁵ In another poem, a distant love stirs the narrator's thoughts, while an expression like "The night spreads your embrace over me" suggests a closer spiritual connection.³⁶ This notion of a near-distant bond is similarly under-

²⁹Nabīlī, Bargī va sitārah, poem no. 12.

³⁰Nabīlī, Bargī va sitārah, poem no. 14.

³¹Nabīlī, Bargī va sitārah, poem no. 15.

³²Nabīlī, Bargī va sitārah, poem no. 14.

³³Nabīlī, Bargī va sitārah, poem no. 15.

³⁴Nabīlī, Bargī va sitārah, poem no. 23.

³⁵Nabīlī, Bargī va sitārah, poem no. 7.

³⁶Nabīlī, Bargī va sitārah, poem no. 7.

³⁷, Bargī va sitārah, poem no. 33.

³⁸Nabīlī, Bargī va sitārah, poem no. 34.

³⁹Nabīlī, Bargī va sitārah, poem no. 38.

scored in two other poems, where she speaks of “unique love”³⁷ and “holding one’s own voice.”³⁸ Nevertheless, what ultimately remains may be a hopeful attachment to despair:

Your room stands empty, cloaked in nights

I smell your bed

I hear your body’s song entwine with mine

Cries dissolve into the fragrance of your sweetness

I am alone, and the entire space echoes this solitude

We are two wingless solitudes

Weeping over the passage of time that clings to our ravaged hearts³⁹

Although some indications of the poet’s gender can be found in a few of the above poems, a more pronounced emphasis on this aspect emerges in several of her other verses. The narrator humorously mentions the traditions that women are compelled to accept, while also sarcastically critiquing the confines imposed upon women by the modern world. In both cases, a resonant voice of feminist protest echoes through her verses:

My heart has dissolved in a nest,

And my wheats are consumed by the desire to grow.

The earth has fallen in love with me,

And in the pulse of life, I think of you.

You pass by so simply despite your familiarity,



Laughing so effortlessly⁴⁰

⁴⁰Nabīlī, Bargī va sitārah, poem no. 28.

These golden fish,

⁴¹Nabīlī, Bargī va sitārah, poem no. 22.

Whose scales are polished each day,

⁴²Nabīlī, Bargī va sitārah, poem no. 26.

To grant their virgin daughters a greater splendor.

These bashful and worthy dolls

Who regard a single night as a trust for their future husbands,

These husbands, esteemed for their kindness...⁴¹

I am bare, without coverings,

I have torn through these colorful molds,

I am overflowing with constraint.

[...]

I am a weeder who has shed the gleaning shoes of civilization,

And in my nakedness, I pursue my weeding⁴²

Overall, in Marvā's poems, dreams prevail over reality. The narrator shares her dreams, recounting her suffering, loneliness, and fears. Elements such as night, wakefulness, and sorrow serve as the foundation for various images and descriptions in her poems. Part of the narrator's anguish arises from her awareness of human's existential condition. Throughout these poems, there is a constant effort to uncover a deeper, more elusive meaning of existence. A struggle to grasp a truer understanding of the concept of God is evident in many of her verses. However, at a certain point in the poet's writings, the narrator's rebellion against the human's existential condition transforms into a

rebellion against her social position as a woman, disheartened by prevailing traditions and the conventional portrayal of women. At times, she addresses this situation with irony, and at other times, she confronts it head-on.

Conversely, in several of Marvā's poems, both explicit and subtle reflections of love intertwine the poet's spiritual experiences with her emotional ones. In these verses, love emerges as a redemptive force, transforming and rendering tangible the spiritual and linguistic space of the text. At certain moments, the beloved takes on a more concrete form; however, more often than not, the beloved appears elusive and ethereal. Nevertheless, as with many other poets, the exploration of love and emotion in Marvā's work leads to a diminishment of ambiguity, allowing clarity to prevail over the darkness of the mind in certain passages. Even the element of night in this collection differs from its portrayal in her other works. If we consider the arrangement of the poems in her collection a chronological journey, love eventually withdraws from its primary role—or one of its primary roles—as a source of salvation, as the collection concludes with the reign of silence, sorrow, and suffering.

In her poetry, Marvā exhibits a fascination with intermingling of images, objects, and elements of life, forging unconventional relationships between them. Also, the narrator engages in a dialogue with nature, perceiving it as alive and dynamic. The poet permits her unconscious mind to shape her perceptions, influencing both her inner and outer worlds. The fluidity of her stream of consciousness and her technique of associating meanings are evident in her verses. She draws to some extent on elements of spoken language and conversational tones in these works, but this usage remains firmly within the confines of standard written language and does not deviate from its norms. Occasionally, she employs forms of literary expression, but overall, her poems carry a prose-like quality and form. Thus, in addition to this prosaic quality, Marvā's poetry can be categorized within the New Wave movement, particularly its more



moderate tendency. Nevertheless, there is an aspect that somewhat distinguishes Marvā's poetry within the New Wave movement: she has notably drawn from the language and form of her professor, Suhrāb Sipihri, particularly from *Zindigī-yi khvāb'hā* (Life of dreams, 1332/1953).⁴³ Indeed, Sipihri's prose-like style and structure, along with his dreamlike and enigmatic atmosphere in this collection, have left a lasting impact on Marvā's poems. For example, like Sipihri, she speaks of "drinking the night"⁴⁴ and the "infinity of the orient (mashriq)."⁴⁵ Although Marvā's poetry often straddles the line between Romanticism and Surrealism, with elements of both poetic schools present in her works, in several poems, she ventures towards a realistic representation of life from a feminine perspective, sometimes bordering on criticism and protest. These examples, particularly in terms of content and to some extent language, bring her closer to the influential poetry of Furūgh Farrukhzād in *Tavalludī dīgar* (Another birth, 1342/1963).⁴⁶ Nevertheless, Suhrāb Sipihri's influence on Marvā's poetry appears more palpable and extensive.

Most of Marvā's poems date from around the mid-1340s/1960s. Although some of her poems from this period have survived, she gradually distanced herself from poetry (and Persian literature) as she became more involved in cinema.⁴⁷ In the latter half of the 1340s/1960s, she transcribed her poems in a notebook at the suggestion of Firaydūn Rah'namā. It is likely that Rah'namā submitted this notebook to *Intishārāt-i Murvārīd* (Murvārīd Press) for publication in the early 1350s/1970s, though Marvā was unaware of this. The first page of the notebook reads: "Marvā—A Leaf and a Star—with a Foreword by Firaydūn Rah'namā." Although there was no introduction in the handwritten version, this introduction was published without any attribution to Marvā under the title "A Preface to a young poet's collection" in the first of the two published issues of *Shi' r-i dīgar* (Another poetry) during the latter half of the 1340s/1960s.⁴⁸

Unfortunately, with Firaydūn Rah'namā's death due to illness

⁴³Suhrāb Sipihri, *Hasht Kitāb* [Eight books] (Tehran: Tahūri, 1355/1976), 84–83.

⁴⁴Ābidī, *Marvā Nabīlī*, 119.

⁴⁵Ābidī, *Marvā Nabīlī*, 82.

⁴⁶See Furūgh Farrukhzād, *Tavalludī dīgar* [Another birth] (Tehran: Murvārīd, 1342), 127–28.

⁴⁷Ābidī, *Marvā Nabīlī*, 137–46.

⁴⁸Firaydūn Rah'namā, "Dībāchah'i khvāhad būd bar daftar-i shi' rī az shā' irī javān" [A preface to a young poet's collection], *Shi' r-i dīgar* 2 (Āzar 1347/ December 1968): 40–42.

⁴⁹Kāmyār 'Ābidī, *Sad sāl-i shi'r-i zanān-i Īrān: Muntakhab-i shi'r-i āzād, Nīmā'ī va sipīd* [One hundred years of women's poetry in Iran: A selection of free verse, Nīmā'ī and blank verse] (Tehran: Murvārīd, 1400/2021), 52.

in Murdad 1354/1975, the poet's identity remained unknown to the publisher. This period coincided with her final years in Iran and her increasing involvement in cinematic endeavors. The publisher finally made this notebook available to the author of this article in 1395/2016. The author, after gathering necessary literary and cinematic information, locating the poet herself who was residing in the United States, conversing with her, and obtaining her permission, published her collection as part of a book titled *Marvā Nabīl: Shā'ir va sīnamāgar* (*Marvā Nabīl: Poet and filmmaker*) in the fall of 1402/2023 through the same publisher in Tehran. The 150-page book, which consists mainly of her poems, revived the poetic persona of this nearly forgotten Iranian female filmmaker, who, apart from a brief mention in *Sad sāl-i shi'r-i zanān-i Īrān* (*Hundred years of Iran's women's poetry*), had not been widely recognized in works related to women poets.⁴⁹

Selected Poems

This section presents the full text of three of *Marvā Nabīl's* poems to illustrate the distinctive atmosphere of her poetry. These works reflect the historical and literary quests of an Iranian female poet in the 1340s/1960s, a period characterized by a significant flourishing of Iranian modernism and modernity, particularly in themes of existence, eternity, love, and femininity. The selected poems demonstrate cohesive structure and form, refined language, and concise expression.

First Poem:

A shadow of illusion

fell on the edge of the heart's well.

I sought to drag it to sorrow's swamp,

but a claw of light snatched it away.



Grief's blackness

⁵⁰Nabīlī, Bargī va sitārah, poem
no. 1.

Morphed into a crow, perching on my heart.

I aimed to dissolve it within myself

It struck with its beak and flew away.

A flower opened its eyes, smiling.

I meant to pull it into a dream

A dewdrop trickled into the reverie.

The shadow of illusion, grief's darkness, the flower's eye

All intertwined, then vanished.

I hung my window on a branch

And now, alone

Just the branch and I⁵⁰

Second Poem:

My great Sun,

You who have stirred light in my veins,

Who have hung my soil's roots anew on a star's eye-branch,

Now in bubbles, you tear apart the glass sky

To lay my praising hands upon you.

Earth sprouts from your droplets,

⁵¹Nabīlī, Bargī va sitārah, poem
no. 14.

Spreading over what grains on my eyes' bitter paths

I lay a fragment of my vein

In the bottomless rivers of your existence,

So your hand may graze its root,

To bring forth a birth.

Perhaps one day, humans,

A leaf, a star,

A stone

Will envy this sun-born child

And bow in worship to you.⁵¹

Third Poem:

O river, spreading across the scorching sands of my life,

If you've filled the gaps between my days,

If you've washed away the sharp edges of life from my night,

Carry my heart to your sea.

I shroud history's womb in my chest of solitude,

So the days may break free,

And memories may rise unchained,

This plant you've rooted in the sea,



Climbs, weaving me

⁵²Nabīlī, Bargī va sitārah, poem no. 19.

Into life's aged tresses⁵²

Conclusion

Marvā Nabīlī's life and work exemplify the creative and intellectual dynamism of Iran during the 1340s/1960s and 1350s/1970s. Her groundbreaking contributions as both a poet and a filmmaker have established her as a figure of immense cultural significance. Through her poetry, she explored deep existential questions, while also addressing the constraints imposed by society, particularly upon women. In her films, she captured the struggle of women to assert their identities in a world dominated by tradition. Marvā's work continues to inspire and resonate with audiences, serving as a reminder of the power of art to challenge societal norms and offer new visions of selfhood and freedom.