

Inter-semiotic Reading of Expressionist Poetry and Painting in "Earthly Verses" and "The Night Cafe"

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Abstract

This study employs a comparative and semiotic analysis of Forough Farrokhzad's poem "Earthly Verses" and Vincent van Gogh's painting "The Night Café". Drawing on interdisciplinary frameworks from art criticism and literary theory, to examine how each medium conveys themes of human degradation and downfall. Highlighting shared semiotic codes, the study identifies key Expressionist techniques—distortion, vivid contrasts, and fractured forms—that convey psychological distress and societal decay. The study also argues that van Gogh's *The Night Café* and Farrokhzad's *Earthly Verses* employ parallel Expressionist strategies to expose modernity's dehumanizing effects, despite their distinct mediums and cultural contexts. Van Gogh's swirling brushstrokes and Farrokhzad's visceral syntax exemplify a shared emphasis on subjective emotion over objective representation. Beyond formal parallels, this interdisciplinary approach reveals how both artists critique modernity: Farrokhzad through gendered bodily metaphors, van Gogh through masculine alienation. By employing inter-semiotic analysis—examining how signs function across visual and verbal systems—this study illuminates transnational aesthetic strategies without positing false equivalences. The paper thus models cross-cultural art-literature comparisons that respect medium specificity while uncovering shared rebellions against modernity's alienation.

Keywords: Expressionism, inter-semiotic analysis, modernity, Farrokhzad, van Gogh.

1. Introduction

Expressionism, as both an aesthetic and a revolt against representation, emerged as a vital language for articulating modernity's psychological fractures. This study examines how Forough Farrokhzad's *Earthly Verses* (1963) and Vincent van Gogh's *The Night Café* (1888) deploy proto-Expressionist techniques—distortion, chromatic intensity, and formal fragmentation—to critique

alienation, while resisting homogenized readings of "universal" modernism. Though separated by medium, geography, and historical moment, both works exploit the affective power of disrupted form to render visible the tensions of their respective contexts: van Gogh's post-Industrial Europe and Farrokhzad's pre-revolutionary Iran.

The significance of this comparison lies in its challenge to Eurocentric art-historical narratives. While van Gogh is canonized as a precursor to Expressionist painting –“Daubler, the pre-eminent mediator between painting and literature of the period, calls Van Gogh the first Expressionist” (Weisstein, 1973, p. 115) -, Farrokhzad's contributions to literary Expressionism remain understudied in transnational modernist discourse. By placing these works in dialogue, we reveal how shared aesthetic strategies serve distinct socio-cultural critiques. Van Gogh's claustrophobic perspective and dissonant palette visualize urban isolation, whereas Farrokhzad's visceral metaphors ("the womb of earth grows pustules") articulate gendered confinement through the destabilized female body. Our analysis proceeds on three levels:

Formal Innovation: How van Gogh's agitated brushwork and Farrokhzad's syntactic ruptures translate emotional distress into artistic form.

Cultural Critique: The works' engagement with local anxieties—industrial alienation in *The Night Café* versus patriarchal oppression in *Earthly Verses*.

Intermedial Methodology: How comparing visual and poetic Expressionism can expand modernist studies beyond medium-specific boundaries.

This framework does not equate their contexts, but rather demonstrates how artistic form becomes a site of resistance to modernity's dehumanizing forces. In doing so, we argue for a more capacious understanding of Expressionism—one that accommodates Farrokhzad's Persian poetic rebellion alongside van Gogh's European avant-gardism.

This comparative study holds significant value for advancing interdisciplinary scholarship and artistic practice by illuminating the profound connections between visual and literary Expressionism. Through its analysis of Van Gogh's *The Night Café* and Farrokhzad's *Earthly Verses*, the research demonstrates how artists across cultures employ parallel techniques—distortion, vivid contrasts, and emotional intensity—to articulate psychological and social distress. The study makes three vital contributions: methodologically, it bridges art criticism and literary theory to develop a transmedial framework for analyzing Expressionist aesthetics; culturally, it decenters Eurocentric modernist narratives by positioning Farrokhzad's work as essential to global Expressionist discourse;

and artistically, it reveals how formal innovations in one medium can inspire creative breakthroughs in another. By showing how van Gogh's masculine urban isolation and Farrokhzad's feminist bodily poetics differently critique modernity, the research fosters cross-cultural dialogue while respecting unique historical contexts. Ultimately, this interdisciplinary approach enriches audience engagement, offering tools to interpret art and literature as complementary responses to universal human experiences like alienation and resistance. The study not only expands scholarly understanding of transnational Expressionism but also provides practitioners with new models for cross-pollinating creative disciplines, demonstrating how comparative analysis can deepen both artistic practice and critical appreciation.

2. Critical Background of the Research

The comparative analysis of poetry and painting remains an underexplored interdisciplinary frontier in Expressionist studies. While scholars have extensively examined these mediums separately, few have systematically investigated their shared aesthetic strategies. A notable exception is Biranvand et al.'s (2022) comparative study of Nima Yushij's poem "*Hey People*" and Edvard Munch's *The Scream*, which identifies parallel Expressionist elements—fear, despair, and social critique—across these works. Their methodology provides a foundational model for this research, though our study advances beyond their framework by incorporating inter-semiotic analysis and addressing cross-cultural dimensions absent in their Eurocentric focus.

Van Gogh Scholarship has predominantly emphasized his post-Impressionist legacy, yet key studies reveal proto-Expressionist qualities essential to our analysis:

- Schapiro (1994) and Feldman (1999) establish Van Gogh's radical departure from mimetic representation, particularly in *The Night Café's* chromatic dissonance and symbolic space.
- Hendriks & Vellekoop's (2019) technical analysis of his studio practice demonstrates how experimental brushwork prefigured Expressionist visual language.
- Van Gogh's own letters (Jansen et al., 2009) explicitly articulate his intent to convey "terrible human passions" (Letter 678), aligning with our reading of the painting's psychological intensity.
- Lobel's (2020) feminist-postcolonial critique offers a vital corrective to Western-centric narratives, facilitating equitable comparison with Farrokhzad.

Farrokhzad Studies, while rich in literary analysis, have rarely positioned her work within global Expressionist discourse:

- Davari & Khanjani's (2018) structural analysis of *Earthly Verses* details its syntactic fragmentation and visceral lexicon—features we reinterpret as literary analogues to Expressionist distortion.
- Alizadeh & Ma'navi (2017) identify Expressionist themes in her poetry but limit their scope to Iranian modernism, whereas our study bridges these observations with transnational artistic movements.

Existing scholarship has yet to explore the compelling parallels between Forough Farrokhzad's poetry and visual Expressionism, despite the striking resonance of her poetic techniques with this artistic movement. Similarly, Vincent van Gogh's connection to literary Expressionism remains insufficiently examined, particularly within non-Western frameworks. These research gaps highlight how the present study not only deepens our understanding of the intersections between literature and visual art but also breaks new ground by centering gender and postcolonial perspectives in its examination of these two artists. The absence of such comparative work in academic discourse underscores the originality and necessity of this interdisciplinary approach.

3. Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology

In Vincent van Gogh's painting "The Night Cafe," human degradation is the focal point, with all elements of the painting aimed at depicting this degradation. This overarching concept and final statement are consistent with the poem "Earthly Verses." Our analysis of the colors in this painting, informed by Johannes Itten's "The Art of Color," and our understanding of the embedded meanings within forms and the structural system of the painting, based on the precise theories of visual arts scholars and interpreters of Van Gogh's works, have enabled us to develop a deeper understanding of the hidden and apparent dimensions of this work. Unveiling these dimensions revealed the closeness of the hidden message in this work to the poem "Earthly Verses."

Given that Vincent van Gogh is the precursor whose techniques (e.g. emotive color, and distortion) influenced Expressionism and believed in the maximal use of artistic tools to convey thought and emotion, a remarkable comparison can be made between this painting and Forough Farrokhzad's poem "Earthly Verses." Among contemporary poets, Forough's last two collections contain exceptionally powerful Expressionist evidence compared to other contemporary poets. Forough also utilized all her artistic tools to express her thoughts.

We also analyzed Forough Farrokhzad's poem "Earthly Verses" from the perspective of Expressionist evidence. Ultimately, we identified the comparative elements of these two works based on the Expressionist principles governing both and the meanings embedded in the colors and words,

as well as the hidden message in the form and composition of both works. This analysis reveals a shared expression where this message is conveyed through lines and colors in one, and words and phrases in the other.

4. Research Questions

This study aims to address three key questions:

1. How does inter-semiotic analysis reveal shared Expressionist techniques in Farrokhzad's "Earthly Verses" and van Gogh's "The Night Café," despite their distinct artistic mediums and cultural contexts?
2. What universal human experiences emerge through comparative analysis of these works, and how might they inform transnational approaches to Expressionist art and poetry?
3. How can the reciprocal interpretation of these visual and literary Expressionist works generate new creative frameworks for contemporary artists working across disciplines?

5. Expressionism

In Expressionist art, content completely surpasses form. As Kandinsky states in "Concerning the Spiritual in Art": "An artist must have something to say, because their goal is not to master form, but to adapt form to the inner meaning" (Kandinsky, 2021, p. 115). Expressionist artists never seek conventional aesthetic concepts, sacrificing everything for their intended concept and purpose. "Expressionism is an art that pays little attention to conventional aesthetic concepts. It can sometimes be deeply sad, somber, or sentimental, but it is never merely beautiful and intellectually sterile" (Read, 2018, p. 75). Nazerzadeh Kermani (1989) interprets Expressionism as a school that seeks to express thoughts, mentalities, the essence of the subconscious, feelings, emotions, struggles, and abstract inner realities of its characters (p. 274). "Expressionism actually encourages humanity to return to human authenticity and reflects aspirations for a new life, deeming social revolution necessary" (Hosseini Mehr, 2021, p. 16). However, Expressionists believed in a revolution of the soul and spirit, not a political revolution. A common feature of Expressionist works is their depiction of emotional states in moments of turmoil, anxiety, or excitement. "In these works, the naked spirit and the agitated, trembling body appear before our eyes. We not only witness human fear of responsibility, guilt, physical corruption, or life's void, but we also participate in these fears and excitements through personal experiences" (Feldman, 1999, p. 312). As Bassie (2023) mentions "Historians still disagree today on what Expressionism is. Many artists who now rank as quintessential Expressionists themselves rejected the label. Given the spirit of anti-academicism and fierce individualism that characterized so much of Expressionism, this is hardly surprising" (p. 8). Even "many art historians

now prefer to describe Expressionism less as a style than as a "direction" or "tendency", a manifestation of a young generation's feeling for life" (Wolf, 2004, p. 8). Van Gogh's "The Night Cafe" is one of the outstanding works of this movement.



6. The Night Cafe

Vincent van Gogh's painting "The Night Cafe" was created in September 1888 in Paris and is now housed in the Yale University Art Gallery in New Haven. The café depicted is located at building number 30 in Lamartine Square, known as "De la Gara," and was run by Joseph Michel and his wife, Marie Ginoux, one of Van Gogh's models. Van Gogh painted "The Night Cafe" in exchange for rent and mentioned in a letter to his brother that he planned to paint at the café downstairs that evening. It is said that in early September 1888, Van Gogh stayed awake for three consecutive nights to paint the café's interior, compensating for his lack of sleep over the following two days.

The painting depicts the café's interior with a central doorway, half-covered by a curtain, leading to quieter areas. In the middle of the painting, a bar for serving alcohol is visible. Five customers are seated along the walls at tables, and the waiter, Joseph Michel, stands beside a billiard

table in the center of the room. The depicted customers appear drunk and abandoned, either asleep or dazed from wine. Van Gogh himself described the painting as "one of the ugliest paintings I have ever done" (Schapiro, 1998, p. 26). However, according to Meyer Schapiro (1998), "he greatly enjoyed painting it and there are few works he has signed with such determination" (Schapiro, p. 26). Van Gogh did not follow the Impressionist method and did not depict the pleasant side of the place. He considered this painting "equivalent but different from "The Potato Eaters"" (Schapiro, p. 27), with prevalent anxiety and sorrow reminiscent of his Dutch works.

A clock showing midnight highlights the element of time, emphasizing the night as a period filled with illusions and anxiety. Van Gogh stated, "I tried to convey that the café is a place where one can destroy oneself, go mad, or commit a crime. So I have tried to show the forces of darkness in a low-class dive" (Schapiro, p. 26).

One of the painting's most powerful features is its striking perspective, which swiftly draws the viewer's eye from the tables and chairs to the end of the café, where a doorway resembling the shape of a man is located. Van Gogh intensified this perspective with numerous converging lines on the café floor, contrasted by a broad red band around the café's walls. The lights with large halos of light in concentric circles add to the café's dreadful atmosphere and the volume of night and darkness. Notably, a bouquet of pink flowers is boldly placed among the brown liquor bottles, contrasting the bottles' harshness with the flowers' delicacy.

6.1. Color and Form

In Expressionist art, considered among the non-material arts, color and form are utilized to express thoughts and emotions. "The ultimate goal of all artistic endeavors is to extract and liberate the spiritual essence and nature of form and color, freeing them from the prison of the material world. Such a desire and aspiration give rise to non-material art" (Itten, 2005, p. 102). Artists who have achieved this ability and liberation, recognizing the spiritual nature of forms and colors, have skillfully and powerfully used them to express themselves and depict their inner messages. They have harnessed the spiritual essence of color and form to display the hidden meanings within their souls. "The artist uses surfaces and colors to reflect their inner self" (Itten, p. 102).

Van Gogh understood the power of color to communicate feelings and he used it to create works that are more emotional than realistic. The Expressionists adopted this aspect of Van Gogh's work (Crispino, 2008, p. 60). In the painting "The Night Cafe," we encounter a phrase of colors and forms where the artist is acutely aware of their impact on the audience and has employed them effectively to convey his mind's contents powerfully. Van Gogh stated about the use of color in his

painting: "The colors in this painting will not match the colors of nature according to the realists and all those who deceive people's eyes, but they will be intense and expressive colors that convey the painter's passion and excitement" (Van Gogh, 2023, p. 370).

"One of the main objectives of modern painting is to use color as an independent language to express thoughts and emotions" (Feldman, 1999, p. 199). Unlike many of Van Gogh's paintings, "The Night Cafe" does not use blue. Spiritually, "blue is always active and lively" (Itten, 2005, p. 94), and in this work, Van Gogh did not intend to display the spiritual aspect of human existence but rather focused on the material aspect. Therefore, he used a type of red mixed with orange and brown at the top of the painting. Spiritually, red contrasts with blue. "Red is always indifferent spiritually" (Itten, p. 94). Moreover, Van Gogh aimed to depict human emotions of turmoil and pain, which is why red is used extensively throughout the painting. "Red, which is also the color of the planet Mars, symbolizes the burning realms of war and evil spirits" (Itten, p. 94). Additionally, the dominance of lustful and physical desires is depicted with the color red. As Itten states in "The Elements of Color," blue or purple represents spiritual love, whereas red represents physical love.

In addition to red, Van Gogh uses its complementary color, green, in "The Night Cafe." Green is the color of the plant world, but "when bright green is mixed with blue or gray, it easily conveys a sense of decay and disintegration" (Itten, p. 95). Van Gogh used a type of green mixed with gray or blue for the café ceiling, juxtaposed with red. Cliff (2009) supports that "He would exaggerate the clash of colors: red walls, green billiard table and ceiling" (p. 1). Green-blue is a color that, according to Itten in "The Elements of Color," "has a strong cold and aggressive state" (Itten, 2005, p. 95). Van Gogh uses a type of yellow that represents feelings of sadness rather than light and brightness. Overall, the use of color in this work may not be aesthetically pleasing, but it is highly effective in impact. Van Gogh stated, "I personally believe that better and greater results can only be achieved when one depicts nature with all its harshness, not its apparent and conventional beauty" (Van Gogh, 2023, p. 256).

Artworks share a common goal: "arranging elements to impact the viewer's perception" (Feldman, 1999, p. 267). Therefore, no elements in a masterpiece can be considered pointless, and none should be disregarded. Arranging elements to impact the viewer is called artistic composition. This composition in color refers to the juxtaposition of colors in an artwork to convey the artist's intended message. The effect of a color can be discussed based on its position and adjacent colors. The area of the painted surface should also be considered. The color red is used extensively at the top of the painting. "Dark red at the top of the image acts like a heavy weight" (Itten, 2005, p. 98). This weight contributes to the artist's desired sense of hardship and pressure. Using red alongside its

complementary color, green, as Itten states in "The Elements of Color," represents "material force and emotional delicacy" (Itten, 2005, p. 96). This material force and emotional intensity were also intended by the painter. Van Gogh remarked about the colors in "The Night Cafe," "These colors depict the intense environment of the café and its hidden pain and suffering" (Van Gogh, 2023, p. 372).

6.2. Line and Brushwork

Line is one of the most significant features in Van Gogh's paintings. He employs line uniquely in his works. In this painting, in addition to the strong and bold outlines of all the elements, we observe a flood of converging lines on the floor that swiftly guide the viewer's eye toward the back of the café and the doorway at the end. One important use of line is this guiding feature. "The line guides the viewer's gaze, encompassing movement and direction, and represents thought for an inexhaustible reason" (Feldman, 1999, p. 240).

The type of brushwork in Expressionist works is such that it "evokes various psychological reactions in the viewer, ranging from subtle feelings to intense excitement" (Feldman, 1999, p. 302). Van Gogh's method of painting is reminiscent of "the tumultuous movement we feel in a flood" (Feldman, p. 302). This method requires "the utmost maturity and confidence of the painter" (Feldman, p. 303). This type of brushwork actually depicts the pinnacle of the painter's freedom and release. "By making the powerful and chaotic movements of his brush strokes public, the painter shows that he is willing to express everything openly. In the post-Freudian era, artists declare that nothing should be hidden and nothing should be overlooked" (Feldman, p. 306). Van Gogh reflects on his brush strokes and method: "Everyone thinks I work very fast. In fact, it is the same passion, love, and understanding of nature that guides us, and this passion and love are sometimes so intense that one doesn't even feel how they are working. The effect of brush strokes appears continuously like words in a speech or correspondence. But this is not always the case, and sometimes one spends days struggling without any inspiration. Therefore, one must strike while the iron is hot" (Van Gogh, 2023, p. 351).

7. The Earthly Verses

The poem "Earthly Verses" is a relatively long poem from the collection "Another Birth" by Forough Farrokhzad. "The word "verse" in the poem's title is itself one of the most important religious concepts and by adding the adjective "earthly," Forough has reduced its divine significance and at the same time elevated the status of her poem". (Abbasi and Ramyar, 2020, p. 176) in this collection, poetic themes emanate from the essence of Forough, yet the poem maintains a social atmosphere. In

"Another Birth," Forough's self emerges from individualism and becomes social, unlike in her previous three collections. Forough writes to Shapour, "Life is very meaningless. As Hedayat said, all people are alike. Instincts and needs confined within a dirty frame. I cannot tolerate the ugliness. My soul, like a restless bird, is impatient. I loved beautiful and bright worlds, and now with open eyes, I recognize the filth and darkness of my living environment and society. Where can I find refuge?" (Shapour-Salahi, 2002, p. 248).

"Earthly Verses" is a social poem filled with anxiety and sorrow. The poet depicts the bitter reality around her, where the sun becomes cold, symbolizing the extinction of humanity. An absolute night envelops everything, leaving no escape. In this dark world, thought perishes, and there is no trace of seeking love and victory in life. Futility prevails, and people turn to opium, debauchery, and drunkenness to sink deeper into oblivion. As Forough herself puts it, "Perhaps the addiction to being / and the constant use of sedatives / has led pure and simple human desires / to the abyss of decline" (Farrokhzad, 2006, p. 239). Forough writes, "Happy corpses / Bored corpses / Silent thoughtful corpses / Well-behaved, well-dressed, well-fed corpses / at the appointed times stations..." (Farrokhzad, p. 285).

7.1. Innovative Compounds and Lexical Innovations

Forough employs novel lexical combinations to depict the prevailing darkness dominating society. However, these innovative constructions appear to align effortlessly in her mind, devoid of artificiality. In essence, Forough's poetry does not take shape on paper; rather, it forms within her consciousness before flowing onto the page. Within this organic, subconscious process, fresh expressions and novel compounds are naturally conceived. Examples of such inventive formulations include: faded windows, dubious imagination, caves of solitude, marshes of alcohol, toxic acrid fumes, lost ambiguous meaning, the fallen crowd, the ominous burden of the corpse, the painful craving for crime, petty criminals, and so forth.

7.2. The Rhetorical Aspects of the Poetry

The poem features a series of fresh and innovative similes, showcasing her unique poetic vision. For instance, in the line "The night was like a dubious thought, dense and rebellious," a direct simile compares the night to a dubious thought, enhancing the poem's atmospheric tension. Similarly, the phrase "caves of solitude" employs a simile too, likening solitude to dark, isolating caverns. Another notable example is the line "And in the phrase "and its name is the mournful dove that has escaped from hearts - faith," a simile is employed where faith is compared to a mournful dove.

Examples of various metaphors can also be observed in this poem. Some of them include: "lamb" as a metaphor for mankind, and "shepherd" as a metaphor for prophets. Both of these are explicit metaphors. In this poem, the frequency of implied metaphors is higher than other types. Examples include: "and the fish dried up in the seas" - drying is a characteristic of plants which in this phrase is attributed to fish. The phrase "faded windows" is another example of this type of metaphor. The poem also uses metaphors in verb, for example in the phrase "the sun had died" - the death of the sun meaning the sun's fading radiance, which is a subsidiary metaphor.

The use of allusion is also observed in several instances in this poem. Among these examples are the phrase "they were sinking into themselves" and the term "disheartened", both alluding to sadness. The phrase "cradles took refuge in graves" alludes to premature deaths. The poetic work additionally employs symbolic imagery. Within this composition, "night" serves as a symbolic representation of an oblivious and benighted society, "bread" embodies worldly avarice and materialistic yearnings, while "light" personifies hope and enlightenment. The literary device of lexical harmony manifests abundantly throughout the text, exemplified by terminological pairings such as "hashish and opium" and conceptually linked terms including "expectant mothers," "infant," "cradle," and "parturition." Furthermore, beyond the previously enumerated rhetorical devices, the strategic implementation of antithesis emerges at multiple textual junctures, with particularly salient oppositions between "sepulcher and cradle" and "nocturnal darkness and illumination", thereby amplifying the poem's structural complexity and thematic resonance.

8. Comparison of two works

Most of Forough Farrokhzad's poems and many of Vincent van Gogh's works are created in an Expressionist style. The poem "Earthly Verses" and the painting "The Night Cafe" exemplify this style. "The emotional style that has recently reached the stage of excitement is a reflection of humanity's repeated falls into the abyss of despair; the anxiety about whether human society will be able to overcome its increasing problems" (Feldman, 1999, p. 199).

In most of her poems, Forough shattered conventional aesthetic norms, creating fresh poetry. "Farrokhzad never drew a circle around her horizons but started from a point that seemed to be the beginning of an endless street, and the movement is longitudinal" (Moradi Kouchi, 2000, p. 74). Similarly, Van Gogh did not adhere to conventional painting norms or the modern Impressionist style of his time. In expressing himself, he broke down all barriers and, with remarkable commitment, sincerely portrayed his true self. Forough states, "Beauty can exist in the ugliest things. Poets disinfect words, and the language of modern poetry has become lifeless, limp, and inconsistent with life due to

these linguistic fumbblings" (Farrokhzad, 2006, p. 289). The Expressionist poet", wrote Kasimir Edschmid, "does not see, he beholds. He does not describe, he experiences. He does not represent, he forms anew. He does not accept, he seeks (Raabe, 1985, p. 19)

Forough's poetry is uniquely her own and bears her mark. In her last two collections, Forough reached a high level of intellectual development, reflected in her words. Her poetry vividly showcases her intellectual and spiritual evolution. Van Gogh similarly depicts his intellectual and mental development through colors, forms, and unique compositions, with his work being recognizable even without a signature. In this state, poetry, painting, and art, in general, shed artificiality and draw life from the artist's essence before coming into existence. Thus, their initial creation does not begin on paper or canvas. This type of poetry and painting may not seem attractive at first glance, but as Forough notes, "The answer to art cannot be just approval" (Farrokhzad, 2006, p. 291). They admit only the patient audience into their infinite world, never exhausting the viewer, and each reading or viewing brings new discoveries and pleasure. Van Gogh asserts, "Come and look at these artworks more carefully to know that their real value is thousands of times more than it appears at first glance" (Van Gogh, 2023, p. 505).

The poem and painting under our study depict the reality of the loss and destruction of human values. These works portray lonely, alienated humans who have strayed from their natural essence and are thus bewildered and confused. Van Gogh comments on the people of his time, "Nervous diseases and the like are partly the result of our artificial life; this incurable generation of ours in today's civilization. Weakness and impotence increase generation by generation..." (Van Gogh, p. 338).

The title of the poem is "Earthly Verses," which presents a paradox. A verse typically symbolizes a divine force and should be heavenly, but here it has become earthly. The earthly verses are composed by Forough and depicted by Van Gogh, inviting us to listen and observe. The poem takes the form of a narrative resembling the prophecies of astronomers, beginning in the past, flowing through the present, and continuing into the future.

The poem begins with the word "Then," emphasizing the importance of time. "Then / the sun cooled down / and blessings left the lands." Here, time is incomplete, indicating an unspecified beginning that led to the current situation. Additionally, "Then" can suggest the inevitability of a future event given the present circumstances. In "The Night Cafe," Van Gogh also emphasizes time by depicting a clock showing midnight at the back of the café. Midnight symbolizes events resulting from the day's occurrences, making the futility of daily life more apparent at night. The depicted emptiness and loneliness undoubtedly have roots in past events.

"The sun cooled down / and blessings left the lands" effectively depict the cessation of movement and effort due to disillusionment and depression, leading to the departure of blessings from life. This stagnation and drowsiness are also evident in Van Gogh's "The Night Cafe." The sun, a source of blessing and light, no longer has warmth and has become cold. In "The Night Cafe," the light does not evoke brightness and warmth. Van Gogh skillfully portrays darkness and coldness amid the intensity of artificial light.

"And the grass withered in the deserts / and the fish dried up in the seas." "To show decay, one must see (corruption) within the context of (being). Cold in the sun, dryness in the grass, and the drying of fish in dried waters" (Moradi Kouchi, 2000, p. 37). In the painting "The Night Cafe," Van Gogh also displays decay amidst bright colors and light. In his Dutch period paintings, such as "The Potato Eaters," Van Gogh uses brown tones throughout to depict the sorrow and grief of miner families. However, "The Night Cafe" is bathed in light and filled with yellow and red colors, yet decay and despair are depicted within these colors and light.

"The earth did not accept its dead anymore" expresses the departure from human essence. As humans originate from the earth, when the earth refuses them, it implies that returning to that essence is impossible. In "The Night Cafe," Van Gogh depicts this departure from human truth through the portrayal of alcohol bottles and drunken people. Perhaps Forough, with this phrase and the statement that the earth no longer accepts the dead, implies that people who appear alive are actually dead, and there is no difference between them and those who are already dead.

"Night in all the pale windows / Like a suspicious thought / was constantly in density and rebellion / and the paths left their continuation / in the darkness" – Night has seized the window, a symbol of freedom and release, and only night and darkness are in turmoil and growth. In Forough's poem, the continuation of the paths is abandoned in the darkness, and in Van Gogh's painting, the guiding lines on the café floor draw a path towards the end, showing the living and growing darkness rapidly moving between the chairs and tables towards the doorway, essentially towards greater corruption. This doorway at the end of the café, although bright and illuminated, evokes darkness because it further distances humans from their true essence. In Forough's poem, where it says "And the paths left their continuation in the darkness," a kind of helplessness is seen, as if people move without will, indifferent to the end of the path. Van Gogh's painting also displays a hidden attraction at the end of the café, drawing everything towards it involuntarily.

"No one thought of love anymore / No one thought of victory anymore / And no one / Thought of anything anymore" – Thought keeps humans alive. In Van Gogh's painting, the abundance

of liquor bottles symbolizes the loss of human intellect and love, and human ideals for victory and triumph. Forough sees death as when no one thinks of love and victory anymore. Therefore, the death Forough sings about and Van Gogh depicts is the death of human truth, not their physical or apparent death. Just as Van Gogh shows seemingly alive people who are, in fact, dead.

"In the caves of solitude / Futility was born / Blood smelled of opium / Pregnant women / Gave birth to headless infants / and cradles from shame / Sought refuge in graves" – A cave evokes a confined, dark space, reminiscent of the era of cave dwelling and backwardness. Van Gogh's painting does not exhibit the narrowness and darkness of a cave, yet it fits this word because, despite the light and color, the atmosphere is ruled by narrowness, suffocation, darkness, and loneliness. If the interior of the café had been filled with less vivid and darker colors, it might not have had such a profound impact on the viewer's soul. The poem shows the absence of human relationships, as truth and honesty are gone. Since thought is dead, the infants born from thoughtless people are headless, meaning without thought. Forough has seen the future of these infants in their current form. The joining of cradles to graves indicates that cradles do not nurture true humans and are essentially graves. Neither the current beings are alive, nor those who will be born; therefore, death and decay prevail, which is the same force of darkness that Van Gogh depicted in his "The Night Cafe." Considering that a cave has historically been a place for revelation and communion with the divine, in this context, the cave has become earthly, much like the title of the poem "Earthly Verses." The cave is not used in its celestial meaning as a divine meeting place but in its earthly sense, indicating loneliness and the absence of communion with the divine, leading to futility as a result of this solitude. Van Gogh's café is also a cave of loneliness and an earthly verse.

"What a bitter and dark time / Bread had subdued the wondrous power of the mission / the hungry and wretched prophets / Fled from the divine rendezvous / and the lost lambs of Jesus / No longer heard the shepherd's call / in the bewilderment of the plains" – All sacred things have been replaced by the material and profane world. Prophets, like shepherds, whose task is to guide and show the way, are no longer heard in the bewildered plains. The absence of guiding force and the contamination of divine humans with earthly desires, and the defeat of the mission's power by worldly greed, have led humanity deeper into the swamp of neglect and futility.

"In the eyes of mirrors, it seemed / Movements, colors, and images / Reflected inversely / and above the heads of the low jesters / and the shameless faces of the harlots / A sacred luminous halo / Burned like a flaming umbrella" – These phrases depict the inversion of values. In this complete inversion, the lowly and the harlots have gained a sort of sanctity, and colors and lights have strayed

from their essence. It is much like Van Gogh's "The Night Cafe," where the essence of light has vanished. Light does not bring brightness. The way the lamps and their surrounding light are depicted, with specific and rough brush strokes forming circles around the light source, is distressing and terrifying. In this manner, opposite to the essence of light, there is no trace of delicacy. Light, which is supposed to be gentle, bringing brightness and calmness, in "The Night Cafe," adds to the volume of violence and darkness.

"The swamps of alcohol / with their pungent poisonous vapors / Drew the inert mass of intellectuals / into their depths / and the pesky rats / Gnawed the gilt-edged books / in the old cupboards" – Intellectuals, who are supposed to enlighten society, have fallen into the trap of sedation. "It is not only death that renders life meaningless and futile, but it is life itself, with its unknown terrors, that slowly gnaws at him like a mouse from within." (Moradi Kouchi 2000, p. 127). Books, symbolizing the past, culture, and ethics, are being gnawed by pesky rats. This lack of identity and confusion is clearly seen in the drunk and wandering people in the café and the overall atmosphere dominating it. The people in the café represent the state of humans, and the entire café space reflects the prevailing societal environment.

"The sun was dead / The sun was dead and tomorrow / In children's minds / Had a vague lost meaning / They depicted the strangeness of this old word / In their exercises / With a large black spot" – Forough perceives this somber state as ongoing, impacting future generations to the extent that children will no longer grasp the concept of the sun.

"People / The fallen group of people / Heart-dead, withered, and bewildered / Under the ominous burden of their corpses / Moved from one exile to another / And the painful urge for crime / Swelled in their hands" – The characteristics Forough attributes to the people of her society—heart-dead, withered, and bewildered—are precisely what Van Gogh depicts in his painting. These traits are exhibited in the people seated at the tables through various painting techniques. The journey of these seemingly alive corpses from one exile to another is illustrated by the involuntary movement of all elements in the painting toward the back doorway. It demonstrates how individuals are dragged from the exile of drugs and opium, which have distanced them from their human essence, to another exile that further alienates them from their true self. The noble human is light-hearted, and if they bear a burden, it signifies their distance from their true self. This ominous burden of corpses, along with the heaviness and grounding of the wandering human, is evident in Van Gogh's "The Night Cafe" and the bent and contorted figures within it. In this space, each person seeks relief from suffocation in the absence of others, as if the presence of others suffocates them, leading to a desire to commit a crime.

Van Gogh states about "The Night Cafe": "I have tried to express that the café is a place where one can ruin oneself, go mad, or commit a crime. So I have tried to show the forces of darkness in a low-class dive... all this in an atmosphere like a devil's furnace. In bright yellow..." (Schapiro, 1994, p. 26).

"Sometimes a spark, a tiny spark / would suddenly shatter this silent lifeless society from within / they would attack each other / Men would slit each other's throats with knives / and amidst a bed of blood / they would lie with underage girls / they were drowning in their own terror / And the terrifying sense of guilt / had paralyzed their blind and dull souls."

Van Gogh remarks about his painting: "I have tried to express the terrible human emotions with red and green" (Schapiro, p. 26). Explaining the atmosphere of his work to his brother, he writes: "The room is blood red and deep yellow. With a green billiard table in the middle. There are four lemon-yellow lamps with orange and green light. Everywhere there is a clash and contrast between the most alien color tones of red and green in the bodies of the small sleeping ruffians. In the gloomy, quiet room, in purple and blue" (Schapiro, p. 26). Forough sees the urge to commit crime in these tormented people as so intense that it has paralyzed their souls. The way several figures sit at the café tables, their convoluted and drowsy postures, with distortion and exaggeration, evokes the word "paralyzed."

"Constantly at executions / When the noose / Forced the convulsing eyes of the condemned / Out of their sockets / They would withdraw into themselves / And from the thought of lust / Their old and tired nerves would throb / But always on the edges of the squares / You would see these little criminals / Standing / Staring / At the continuous flow of fountains / Perhaps still / Behind the crushed eyes, in the depth of the freeze / A confused semi-living thing / Remained / That in a feeble effort wanted / To believe in the purity of the water's song / Perhaps but what an endless void / The sun was dead / And no one knew / That the name of that sad pigeon / That fled from hearts, was faith." The crushed eyes in Forough's poem are eyes without insight, and with this metaphor, Forough illustrates the depth of stagnation and immobility, which is also depicted in Van Gogh's painting. In her poem and Van Gogh in his painting have depicted subjects that might not have been common or poetic in the world of poetry and painting. Forough says, "Today's poetry is afraid to mention the names of objects and places it deals with from morning till night and still resorts to words that have hundreds of years of poetic tradition behind them" (Moradi Kouchi, 2000, p. 182). She speaks about the relationship between poetry and the poet with the painful truths of society: "Today's life is full of suffocation, but poetry is devoid of any cry. Consideration, customs, fear, shame, and the pursuit of

fame are walls that have surrounded today's poet. He does not think of rebellion and revolt against the factors of corruption and decay in his society. Because for him, just having the title of a poet is enough, and he has only learned to say: Oh, I am in pain. And he thinks he has fulfilled his mission by stating this sentence" (Moradi Kouchi, p. 282).

In the final lines of her poem, Forough addresses the root cause of human degradation and the separation from one's human essence, identifying the lack of faith as the reason for modern man's bewilderment. She says that no one realizes that the fleeing of the dove of faith from hearts has left humans aimless and distressed. Van Gogh states: "In legends, it is said that a great force was used in the creation of this world. I think this legend is true, but I don't know why one does not see the desired perfection in it. The only hope left for us is to witness a better and more complete creation in another world" (Van Gogh, 2023, p. 343).

"Oh, voice of the prisoner / Will your cry of despair ever / Dig a passage towards the light / from any direction in this hateful night? / Oh, voice of the prisoner / Oh, last voice of all voices" – Forough concludes the poem with a faint possibility of salvation, much like a delicate pink bouquet contrasting with the bottles of alcohol on the café table. It seems that Forough places the responsibility of deliverance and salvation on poetry and art because she herself becomes a voice that transcends time: emerging from the past, resonating in the present, and echoing into the future. She becomes the messenger herself.

9. Conclusion

Comparing metaphysical paintings, which possess meaning and expression, with poems created in the same manner and dominated by content over form, fosters a kind of collaboration and harmony among nations. This valuable harmony transcends time, place, and the type of artistic medium. Expressionist poetry, like Expressionist painting, reveals the inner self and exposes human pain and suffering. This artistic style has a close connection with the human psyche, which is the key factor in the proposed comparison. "The Night Cafe" can be considered one of Van Gogh's works with strong Expressionist elements. In this artwork, the surface of a seemingly simple subject is broken to reveal its sorrowful core. Although this breaking of the surface detracts from the visual beauty of his painting, it was Van Gogh's intention, as he aimed to evoke the sorrowful and terrifying impact on the viewer.

Upon closer examination, Forough Farrokhzad's poem "Earthly Verses" reveals a similar atmosphere of sorrow and pain found in Vincent van Gogh's painting "The Night Cafe." Forough utilizes new and colloquial language, blending ancient and contemporary literature with vivid

descriptions and similes to capture the societal mood. Both artists portray human bewilderment, degradation, and alienation from fundamental human principles. The figures in Van Gogh's painting are introspective, and the inertia that pervades the café highlights nihilism and futility. The colors and lights, despite their artificiality, act contrary to their nature and deepen the darkness. The painting's perspective showcases humanity's involuntary inclinations and destructive tendencies. Similarly, the characters in Forough's poem have become involuntary criminals with a growing desire for crime. Forough depicts their movement from one exile to another, which is more perilous than mere inertia and stagnation. This destructive movement is mirrored in Van Gogh's painting. Forough describes people whose fear and guilt have paralyzed their souls, a paralysis reflected in Van Gogh's distorted figures and disordered tables. To maximize the impact of her words, Forough uses unusual and new expressions, while Van Gogh employs bold and striking colors and unconventional forms to convey terrifying human conditions. Both works were created at the height of the artists' intellectual maturity, expressing the profound pain of humanity's estrangement from its true essence. Both artists aim to evoke a revulsion for this way of life and a yearning to return to an authentic human identity in their audiences. This research reveals that both artists depicted their own experiences, not merely what they observed or heard. This authenticity is the primary reason for the profound impact of these works on their audiences. The study demonstrates that the thoughts of genuine world artists are sometimes so similar that they seem unified, indicating a movement towards global unity and oneness beyond the confines of countries and borders.

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