



Spatio-temporal Setting and Existential Anxiety in Shahrām Sheydāyi’s *A Fire for Another Fire*

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Abstract: This study explores the distinctive features of *A Fire for Another Fire* (1995), the debut poetry collection of Shahrām Sheydāyi (1967–2009), whose works have received little sustained academic attention so far. In this regard, apart from Sheydāyi’s self-conscious isolation from literary circles, the lack of due recognition needs to be investigated in relation to conceptual challenges of a deceptively simple, prose-like language. To probe the significance of his oeuvre, the present study examines the interrelatedness of the major themes in his poetry – particularly those related to time and existential anxiety – and how they are formalized through a writing style characterized by novel imagery, defamiliarization, fragmentation, and semantic disruption. It is intended to provide close reading and analysis of excerpts from approximately half of the collection’s thirty-nine poems and nine short pieces, organized into three sections and devoted respectively to poetic strategies and writing style, the thematic liminality of dream in relation to spatio-temporal confines, and the role of nature and poetry in confronting existential anxiety. The reading reveals that the poet’s encounter with the confinement of time and space is mediated through dream as a liminal temporal mechanism through which memory, anticipation, and present anxiety are held together beyond chronological sequence. Likewise, nature emerges as a profound source of solace in the face of existential despair – an anguish further confronted through poetry as an act of resistance against mortality. Rather than offering escape, nature and poetry function as forms of aesthetic resistance: they give shape to the speaker’s confrontation with finitude.

Keywords: *A Fire for Another Fire*, Defamiliarization, Dream, Existential Anxiety, Semantic Disruption, Shahrām Sheydāyi, Spatio-temporal setting.

- N. Shahbazimoghadam (2026). “Spatio-temporal Setting and Existential Anxiety in Shahrām Sheydāyi’s *A Fire for Another Fir*”. Semnan University: *The Journal of Linguistic and Rhetorical Studies* 17(43). 205-226.

[Doi: 10.22075/jlrs.2026.40598.2842](https://doi.org/10.22075/jlrs.2026.40598.2842)

1. Introduction

A Fire for Another Fire, the debut collection of poetry by Shahrām Sheydāyi (1967-2009), was first published in 1995. This volume was followed by two further collections; *Laughing in the Burning House* (2000) and *A Stone for Life, A Stone for Death* (2009), as well as a collection of Turkish poems, *Delilerin Kölgesi* (2010). Sheydāyi also wrote a short story collection, *The Refugees are Kicked out* (1999), and translated several literary works, mainly from Turkish and Polish into Persian. By the time of his death at the age of 42, he left behind a noteworthy body of work which has proved enduring and gained admiration. In 2017, his second collection was translated into English by Amy Grupp and Ramin Takloo-Bighash. Two excerpts from his third collection, translated by Lida Nosrati, were published in *Lunch Ticket* (2017) and *Dibūr: A Journal of Translation and World Literature* (2018); the latter translation was awarded a prize in a scholarly symposium and was published in *Poetic Currency: A Dossier*, a special issue of *Dibūr*. And, a selection of a few poems from *A Fire for Another Fire* with a brief commentary was published in *Delos: A Journal of World Literature & Translation* in 2022. The scholarly reception of Sheydāyi's works, however, has so far been limited to a few magazine articles; no formal academic study has yet been published in literary journals.

The lack of due recognition has been noted in most existing essays and online commentaries and has been partly attributed to Sheydāyi's detachment from the prevailing poetic spirit of his time. Deliberately or not, his poetry has remained underappreciated as his poetic and creative concerns did not fit into the literary workshops and intellectual networking that was characteristic of Persian literary circles in the 1990s and the 2000s (Kūti, 2024, pp. 98-99). Moving beyond the mainstream *littérature engagée* of the 1980s in Iran, the literary scene of the 1990s was a vibrant time with the flourishing of New Wave and Avant-garde poetry and the fervor of language-oriented poetry (Sarshār). Sheydāyi distanced himself from such movements as he was neither involved in poetry workshops nor expressed his view through interviews or poetry manifestos. His poetry has been included neither in anthologies devoted to contemporary Persian poetry nor in critical debates which are mostly focused on poetic movements and classified

concerns (Hūshiar Mahbūb, 2024, p. 105). Although his detachment from the zeitgeist of post-revolutionary Persian poetry is evident, it does not imply a lack of relevance to his time (Hoseini, 2024, p. 109). This can best be observed in his timeless themes concerning existence, time and death and socio-political concerns reflected in some of his poems. And, despite his distance from language-centered tendencies, his poetry shares certain features with the concurrent movements as no work of mind can be produced entirely regardless of its time. Sheydāyi's writing style does involve experimentation, notably the fragmentation of imagery and meaning beyond the free verse style of composition.

This study endeavors to trace Sheydāyi's lack of academic recognition, beyond his isolation from contemporary literary movements, to the conceptual complexity of his poetry: its deceptively simple diction stages a troubled ontology in which time is unstable, space becomes uncanny, and poetry attempts to sustain meaning against mortality. In essence, apart from the poet's individualistic attitude and self-exclusion from poetic movements of the time, Sheydāyi's writing style can be considered as a major factor for the underrated academic reception of his works. There has been criticism of his poetry that considers his prose-like writing style as prosaic (Nikseresht, 2024a, p. 95). Given the powerful imagery and vividly uncanny atmosphere of his poems, such a criticism is difficult to sustain. Meanwhile, Sheydāyi's poems predominantly consist of short lines rather than the long, unbroken lines associated with prose poetry. And, his simple language, mostly prose-like and rhythmless, challenges understanding with its existential themes rather than metalinguistic features. As this article argues, the difficulty of Sheydāyi's poetry lies less in syntactic opacity than in the way its plain, prose-like diction carries ontological pressure.

Considering the flourishing and popularity of Persian new poetry (sher-e-no) after Nimā Yūshij, criticism concerning prose-like poetry has its roots in the emergence of free verse and subsequent related styles. As Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak observes, the term prose poetry has been used pejoratively to distinguish various forms of Persian free verse from classical poetry (Karimi-Hakkak). Beyond the boundaries of time and space, prose poetry has long established its significance, dating back in the western canon to the poetry of

such major figures as Walt Whitman, Charles Baudlaire and the later French symbolist poets in the nineteenth century. Notably, among Eastern European figures of prose poetry, Polish poets Wisława Szymborska (1923–2012) and Tadeusz Różewicz (1921–2014) have been translated into Persian by Sheydāyi, an influence that left its imprint on the translator's own poetry. It is noted that his poetry is mostly influenced, along with the poet's mother tongue, i.e. Turkish, by his works of literary translation from Turkish literature and the poets mentioned above (Kūti, 2024, pp. 98-100), which can be considered as another factor for the perplexity of following his line of thought.

Accordingly, speculating the reason for the limited critical attention, one may note that his poetry, despite being simple and prose-like, is complex. Unlike the contemporary interest in language-oriented poetry, which foregrounds language itself as the main subject or medium of experimentation, Sheydāyi's poetry revolves around semantic disruptions rather than syntactic complexity and esoteric language. Strategically, perception is delayed as it undergoes defamiliarization, and meaning is hard to grasp due to fragmentation and semantic disruptions. Conceptually, the interrelatedness among his major themes offers challenge to understanding. As such, the present work attempts to focus on his major themes, their interconnection and how they are enhanced through poetic strategies. This is to argue how his works are more profoundly comprehended and appreciated once such delicacies are noticed and deciphered.

2. Review of Literature

As noted in the introduction, only some magazine articles and online essays have so far been published about Sheydāyi and his works. There are five short essays in an online magazine, *Café Catharsis*, and a recent collection of essays in the poetry magazine, *Vazn-e-Donyā*, which contains the only published sources focusing on Sheydāyi and his body of work. The essays in *Vazn-e-Donyā* can be classified into two groups; some of them focus on the poet's creative writings, i.e. his poetry, and the others deal with his legacy as a translator. Precisely speaking, four articles and an interview discuss Sheydāyi's poetic endeavors.

Introducing the poet and his works, Ānūshā Nikseresht reviews some of the major features of Sheydāyi's poetry such as the novelty

of his imagery, prose-like narrative style of composition and the depth of his thought. He admires the poet’s uniqueness of voice and independence from the literary atmosphere of his time (Nikseresht, 2024a, pp. 94-95). A brief essay by Sepide Kūti describes Sheydāyi’s poetic language as individualistic and his poems set in a mysterious and uncanny atmosphere. A study of the schizophrenic poetics of Sheydāyi’s second collection, *Laughing in the Burning House*, is an excerpt from Mojtabā Hūshiar Mahbūb’s forthcoming book on the poet. The text focuses on the multi-layered spatial and temporal representations of the collection and relates it to the Jungian belief in the lack of spatio-temporal considerations in psychic themes (Hūshiar Mahbūb, 2024, p. 102). Accordingly, the schizophrenic writing style is materialized in the non-linear narrative of the schizophrenic character of the speaker. Furthermore, Sheydāyi’s concern with time is compared to St. Augustine’s concept of timelessness where past and future are both a part of the timeless present (Hūshiar Mahbūb, 2024, p. 102). The discussion also highlights the simple language, fragmented imagery as well as the prevailing death-consciousness of his poems (Hūshiar Mahbūb, 2024, pp. 101-104). In another brief essay, Farzām Hoseini discusses Sheydāyi’s poetry in relation to its context of 1990s in Iran, which is a time of modernity in a sociological sense (Hoseini, 2024, p. 107). It is asserted that Sheydāyi’s writing style is not compatible with the general tendency of his time in its emphasis on creating rupture to intensify uncertainty. According to the argument, his poetry does not follow this common trend despite being embedded in its time (Hoseini, 2024, p. 109). Most of these aspects regarding language, and narrative style of composition as well as time-consciousness and schizophrenic aspect of his works are raised in Nikseresht’s interview with Alirezā Ābiz (Nikseresht, 2024b, pp. 113-114). Most significantly, Ābiz highlights Sheydāyi’s existential concerns as reflected in his poetry, indicating a simultaneous sense of “engagement” and “detachment” (Nikseresht, 2024b, pp. 112, 116). In a similar vein, “Shahram Sheydāyi and the originality of despair” describes Sheydāyi as mainly concerned with time and existence, hence his prevalent depiction of fear and anxiety of existence in all of his three collections (*Café Catharsis*). Among the other four essays in *Café Catharsis*, “A Look at *A Fire for Another Fire*” specifically focuses on Sheydāyi’s debut collection,

referring to time and the fear of time as the poet's main concerns and describing the poems as perceptive and interrelated in a sense that they seem to repeat each other so as to portray monotony of life (*Café Catharsis*).

The above-mentioned essays, insightful as they are, all are published in literary magazines and not the academic journals, indicating that Sheydāyi's oeuvre is yet to be diligently explored in the academia. Furthermore, as reviewed, most of these essays provide overall views of the characteristics of his poetry. Only a few of them focus on *Laughing in the Burning House*, and there is just one essay specifically dealing with *A Fire for Another Fire*. Although issues such as temporality and existence as well as taking refuge in art are raised in "A Look at *A Fire for Another Fire*," no research has yet textually examined the first collection with regard to its spatio-temporal liminality or within an existential-aesthetic framework.

3. Objective and Theoretical Frame

Considering the scarce scholarly attention paid to Sheydāyi's works, the present study seeks to underscore the significance of his oeuvre by exploring selected poems from his debut collection, *A Fire for Another Fire*. The collection comprises thirty-nine poems and nine one-stanza short pieces; this study analyzes approximately half of them. Except for four poems cited from published English translations, the material discussed consists of unpublished translated texts.

The textual analyses focus on close reading of selected poems from this collection, which depicts themes of existential anxiety, death, space and time. This study aims to examine the interrelatedness of his major themes and how they are formalized through a writing style characterized by novel imagery, defamiliarization, fragmentation and semantic disruption. The study contends that the true appreciation of Sheydāyi's poetry lies in recognizing these features not merely as ornamental devices and recurrent motifs, but as interconnected elements that reproduce, at the level of form, the speaker's inability to inhabit time, space, and selfhood securely. Accordingly, the three discussion sections are devoted respectively to the poetic strategies and writing style, the thematic liminality of dream in relation to confinement in space and

time, and the role of nature and poetry in confronting existential anxiety.

The theoretical frame of the study rests on three interrelated concepts: temporality, existential anxiety, and aesthetic resistance. In framing the spatio-temporal aspects of the poems, particular attention is given to the Augustinian concept of time and the role of dreams in transcending boundaries of time and place. Augustine's account of time is useful because it shifts time from an external sequence to an inward structure of consciousness: the past survives as memory, the future arrives as expectation, and the present is experienced as attention. Furthermore, the study highlights the existential dimension of the collection – drawing on Heideggerian notion of anxiety and uncanniness as well as Camus's views on art and nature – to investigate how the poet responds to existential anxiety by taking refuge in nature and poetry. Heidegger's account of anxiety explains the uncanny atmosphere of the collection. Anxiety does not simply refer to psychological fear of a specific object; it discloses Dasein's "not-at-home" condition and exposes the instability of everyday familiarity (1962, p. 233). Finally, Camusian writings on art and nature help explain how the poems respond to existential insecurity. For Camus, art does not abolish life meaninglessness; it gives form to the confrontation with it, while natural beauty offers a sensuous, non-theological mode of affirmation. Read through this triangulated frame, dream, nature, and poetry in *A Fire for Another Fire* are not merely recurrent motifs; they are formal and existential strategies through which the speaker negotiates time, anxiety, and mortality.

4. Discussion

4.1. Poetic Strategies, Language and Writing Style

Sheydāyi's poems are remarkable for their novelty of imagery as well as innovative and experimental quality. The distinctive features of his poetry, however, do not revolve around language experimentations such as linguistic and syntactic complexity, favored by language-oriented inclinations of the time. Moreover, while the nature of poetry gains a significant thematic role in some of his poems, namely "Poetry," "Window," and "The Wounded Leopard," language itself is not a subject of his works, demonstrating his distance from language-oriented tendencies. Concerning the distinctive features of his writing, most poems in his

first collection stage a rich array of novel imagery, fragmentation, defamiliarization and semantic disruptions. And, other formal features such as intertextual play and metapoetic reflections can also be traced in several poems. By discussing such features and their significance, this study aims to demonstrate how these features efficiently reinforce the thematic concerns of Sheydāyi's poetry dealt with in the succeeding sections.

Expressing his idea about the essence of poetry, Sheydāyi makes use of unconventional and novel images in poems such as "Poetry," "Window," and – most impressively – in "The Wounded Leopard," where poetry is likened in its power and compassion to "a wounded leopard/That deeply cries for the butterfly sitting on its wound" (p. 196). In these metapoetic pieces, poetry is both animated and intertwined with natural elements which function beyond a source of inspiration in a romantic sense. In "Window," poetry is described as "emerged from the sea" since the speaker has immersed his hand in the sea water, and it is personified as "listening to music" and "reading books," potentially showing that it becomes part of him (8-9).¹ Portrayed with "childlike eyes," poetry strolls to the spring along with a gazelle and looks "so lovingly into water" that "the water drinks the gazelle" ("Poetry", p. 45). The enlivenment of poetry and its presence among elements of nature create an interconnected source of serenity and soothing. In this poem, where the personified poetry relieves pain and loneliness, its intrusion in one's dreams connects the person with others through retelling story-like dreams beyond time and space. Likewise, "Red Childlike Joy" portrays an addressee who is "wiping windows and having words seated on the chairs in my poems" (my emphasis), the poet's way of connecting the writer to the reader beyond time, as he likely imagines someone reading his poems indefinite time after his death.

Such personified images most often involve semantic disruptions and defamiliarized images, embedded in a simple writing style with minimum syntactic challenge (Nikseresht, 2024a, p. 97). For instance, in "The Wounded Leopard," poetry is missioned with the task of "extracting stone from its meaning/and blowing blood in

¹ .Apart from "The Child in Me is Always Dreaming," "The Wounded Leopard," "The Old Earth," and "Catharsis," which are quoted from the translated version in *Delos*, the page number for the rest of the excerpts are from the original version, and the translated lines are unpublished material.

that" (p. 196), which is an urgent call to remove mechanization and re-create lived experience and fresh perception. Here, defamiliarization becomes existential rather than merely formalist as it interrupts the automatism through which the terror of living is normally concealed. Among other instances, in "Silence," the speaker relates "the wind blowing in my dreams" to the possibility that "a window must have been left open in people's looks," which initially create a sense of weirdness but aims to hint at human interconnectedness beyond time and place (p. 20). "Catharsis," a poem similar to "Poetry" in its celebratory depiction of human interconnectedness with nature and poetry, relates the speaker's self-containment and serenity to the revelation of his being "earth's younger brother" and the surroundings where "the tigers have been tamed/And, for the sake of the gazelles, /they fasten white handkerchiefs to trees" (p. 200), indicating the joy of such a unity.

Besides the aforementioned instances of defamiliarization, "Sooner or Later" explicitly invokes defamiliarization as an urgent means to break through the constraints of habituated perception, the idea first propagated by the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky, who asserts that "art exists so that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feels things, to make the stone *stony*" (Shklovsky, 2017, p. 9, emphasis original). According to Shklovsky, by making perception difficult and prolonged, one's experience of the object will revolve around pure perception rather than prior knowledge and understanding of it, the process he refers to as "defamiliarization" (Shklovsky, 2017, p. 9). In Sheydāyi's poetry, defamiliarization intensifies the urge to experience life beyond automatized perception, either to foreground its meaninglessness or to deal with and go beyond existential anxiety. In "Sooner or Later," Sheydāyi looks at the deeper effect of habituation towards life as the speaker asks the addressee to "foresee [that] the future is already over" and that "an epidemic disease has afflicted the eye" (p. 60), questioning "don't you ever think having eyes, eyebrow, tongue and head is a very weird thing?" and warning that "we see things so often/that we never know them," hence the fear "to get used to this game" (p. 61). The overall idea of this poem suggests that habituation, which paradoxically fosters estrangement in and among human beings, must be disrupted and challenged so that one can find oneself capable of more daring acts.

The thematic focus on habituation and the urge for defamiliarization in “Sooner or Later” recalls, though in a much darker sense, certain lines from Sohrāb Sepehri’s long and well-known “The Water’s Footfall” in which the speaker advocates washing eyes and looking differently. Above and beyond explicit allusions to places and figures in poems such as “Red Childlike Joy” and “The Blood that Constantly Sparkles,” intertextuality in Sheydāyi’s poetry can be observed in his use of certain words and images that carry significant conceptual interconnectedness with the works of Sepehri and Forūgh Farrokhzād. It has been suggested that Sheydāyi’s poetry neither bear similarities to the works of other Persian poets nor is a continuation of any other poet’s work (Nikseresht, 2024b, p. 118). While this study strongly agrees with the second assertion, it has some reservation against the first; in some of Sheydāyi’s poems, there is a vivid sense of interconnectedness and resonance with Sepehri and Farrokhzād, although the conceptual weight of the images may differ. Beyond mere influence, intertextuality in Sheydāyi’s poetry can be understood, in Bloomian terms, as a creative revision of precursor voices through which originality is preserved despite evident resonance with earlier poets, since “poetic influence need not make poets less original; as often it makes them more original” (Bloom, 1997, p. 7).

Some of the most recurrent images in Sheydāyi’s collection – such as wind, sea, dream and boat – resonate with similar motifs in Sepehri’s poetry, where elements of nature are depicted conceptually and beyond mere description of nature. For instance, “Waiting Room” recalls lines from “The Water’s Footfall,” where rain functions as a figure of experiential immediacy, though the impulse to experience is replaced by the inevitability of exposure to a less soothing environment. Similarly, the image of boat in the lines from “The Old Earth” echoes Sepehri’s “I’ll Build a Boat” and its “urge to build a boat and leave a dispassionate and unheroic land,” but “the image here is unpromisingly darker” with its boat rowing on dry land (Shahbazi’s commentary in Sheydāyi, 2022, p. 204), hoping for no refuge to reach to: “We need to feed our fears again/and take out our boats/We need to row again/on this dryness” (p. 198).

Similar to Farrokhzād's poetry, images associated with light, window, voice and silence are prevalent in Sheydāyi's collection. Besides dedicating one poem in *A Fire for Another Fire* – "In the Wind" – to Farrokhzād's memory, Sheydāyi seems to echo the language and images of Farrokhzād in some of his poems, while maintaining his own poetic style, atmosphere, tone and idea. For instance, in Farrokhzād's "Window," the image of window is still the source of hope and release as the remaining means of connection and communication. In Sheydāyi's "Window," the image of window does not convey a similar underlying meaning as "an axe [is] trembling the other side of the window" ("Window", p.9), to execute a poem which comes from the sea and is likened to a window. The metaphoric representation of poetry as a window resonates with Farrokhzād's describing poetry as a window which is open to her whenever she reaches out (Farrokhzād).

Sheydāyi's writing style is deceptively simple and prose-like, concealing a deeper complexity beneath the surface. As noted, rather than complexity at a structural and syntactic level, his writing style challenges understanding conceptually (Nikseresht, 2024b, p. 119). Existential themes and fundamental concepts depicted through defamiliarized images and fragmented language shape a poetic that cannot be easily grasped, partly explaining the scholarly negligence. He is also miserly in his use of punctuation; commas, periods and other punctuation marks rarely appear in the often short and broken lines with plenty of blank spaces, hinting at brevity and blankness of life. As such, Sheydāyi's sparse punctuation does not merely mark stylistic economy; it produces hesitation, suspended syntax, and semantic incompleteness, making the reading process itself approximate the instability of the poetic subject. As already noted, his writing style has also been described as schizophrenic in a number of commentaries (Hūshiar Mahbūb, 2024, p. 103; Nikseresht, 2024b, p. 114). Hūshiar Mahbūb notes that the narrator of his poems exhibits a dual existence, which he associates with the fluidity of the spatio-temporal setting of his poems (p. 102). Ābiz relates this duality to the poets' own split sense of existence between meaninglessness and the attempt to make sense of life (Nikseresht, 2024b, p. 114). The split nature of the narrator can be observed in the dream-like status of the speaker in several poems, specifically in the monologue in "In This Room," where the speaker talks to his

younger self, transgressing the boundaries of time and space. The significance of dream and existential concern of his poetry are respectively dealt with in the next two sections.

4.2. Dream and Spatio-temporal Setting

The setting and overall atmosphere of Sheydāyi's poetry are mostly characterized as strange and unsettling, imbued with a sense of eeriness. The portrayal of mysterious places, whether a room or a city, is considered a distinctive feature of his poetry (Kūti, 2024, p. 100). The atmosphere of his poetry has also been described as both "multi-dimensional" (Nikseresht, 2024b, p. 119), and "filled with unfamiliar spaces and plural geographies" (Hūshiar Mahbūb, 2024, p. 102). Space in Sheydāyi's poetry is not simply strange or mysterious; it is claustrophobic and existentially unhomely. Rooms, cities, windows, and even the earth lose their ordinary function as spaces of dwelling and instead become sites where the subject encounters the insecurity of being. This is where Heidegger's account of uncanniness becomes especially useful: these spaces are uncanny because they deprive the subject of ordinary dwelling as "everyday familiarity collapses" and make the familiar world appear as a place in which one is no longer fully at home (1962, p. 233).

Sheydāyi converts that philosophical condition into recurring spatial images of enclosure, darkness, silence, and blocked thresholds. Such spaces evoke a sense of imprisonment, whether the confinement is limited to a single room or spread within the wider scope of the whole earth: "along with the wind, water, soil and fire/ we are exiled to this plant" ("We Don't Get Free", p. 5). Thus, the sense of place is most often gloomy, unpromising and insecure, offering no rescue out of confinement. For instance, "The Closed Door" stages a room where "silence has got confused," implying self-confusion and breakdown of communication as "We talk to ourselves/The lamp to itself/.../And, the darkness behind the window to no one" (p. 75). The room behind the 'closed door' dramatizes a plural space since the speaker imagines dwelling simultaneously within the limits of a poem and the city, encompassing both the textual and the external world. As observed in the following excerpt, this poem suggests entrapment inside a suffocating atmosphere; whether a room, a town or one's emotions, metaphorically represented as a poem or throat.

Here, we are inside a poem
 Here, love letters are not exchanged
 Here is the throat of a hungry town.
 The lights of the houses are on
 till morning
 And, when the words go crazy,
 all the glasses in the town
 are tortured and broken down.
 This is no place for a bunch of flowers
 For falling in love
 For making a date. (p. 76)

In most poems, spatial confinement is closely tied to the constraints of time. As an example, one can refer to "The Old Earth," in which the aforementioned image of the boat rowing on dry land is embedded in the unfriendly and indifferent surrounding of a city where "everything has grown old" and "no other world has entered upon the old one" (p. 198). In such a world, where "illusions keep us going" (p. 198), time is boldly described as "the most dangerous joke/which has fit in our books, thoughts and feelings" (p. 198). The danger of time lies not simply in its passage but in its internalization: the subject carries past and future as forms of present disturbance. The poem questions the nature of time, the unstable distinction between present, past and future, and our obsession with past and future as time deceives us with grief for past and vain hope for future: "Whatever comes to the world/turn back to the past/Here, tomorrow is playing with the town/Like a rumor" (p. 198).

As evident throughout the collection, the depiction of time ranges from nostalgia to contemplation about the nature of time. Several poems not only express nostalgia for the past but also cast doubt, question and even challenge the temporality of existence. A nostalgic sense of time is expressed early in the volume as the speaker in "We don't Get Free" laments that "time passes in reminiscences; it distances and harvest all things" (p. 4). Grieving over time and memory, the tone later shifts into a more overtly contemplative direction, as the perception of time is problematized by questioning "why nobody has ever told us/ the earth is constantly taking things back/ and we think that time passes" (5), implying the ontological complexity of time. Likewise, a simultaneous sense of

nostalgia and temporal insecurity prevails in “The Child in me is Always Dreaming,” in which the speaker both reviews childhood memories of “local melodies,” “trees by the pavements,” and “apricots in the neighboring villages” and confesses about his obsessions with time and his fears about the temporal nature of existence:

I am afraid of anything getting to its end.
 I am afraid of having photo albums
 Of memories
 Of the logic of the daily routine
 Of the sun setting
 Of the time being *capable of* passing by
 Of the past being left behind. (p. 192)

As observed, lamentation for the passage of time shifts into contemplation about the nature of time, even while engulfed in the remembrance of past, and a certain cease-to-be kind of fear prevails. The anxiety concerning death and mortality is markedly dramatized in relation to the twenty-seven-year-old speaker reappearing in a number of poems such as in “The Absent Playmate” and “In This Room.” In “The Absent Playmate,” time is envisaged as a “playmate” of the twenty-seven-year-old speaker: “twenty-seven years of playing with ‘time’ and bearing with the weight of the absent playmate” (p. 43), which may give the impression of treating time as one’s double. The paradoxicality embedded in “absent playmate” indicates the puzzling and haunting nature of time as a playmate or double that is not available, implying the frightening spectrality of time. “In This Room” further problematizes the concept of time in a self-confrontation. The twenty-seven-year-old speaker, apparently the poet himself, is in a dialogue with his seven-year-old self and speaks of his difficulty to fit in chronological time as his dreams distort his diachronic sense of time:

I have dreamed of my future
 I have lived the years to come
 The remaining troubles me
 I wish I wasn’t so much in rush
 Then, like others,
 I would at least fit in time. (p. 69)

The feeling of having already lived the future produces an Augustinian distension of consciousness, in which memory and

expectation do not follow one another but press simultaneously upon the present. This blurry depiction of time, one that merges present with past and future and challenge its diachronic perception, is evident in Sheydāyi's poetry, which has been described as "timeless," given that the "present" moment travels across multiple dimensions of time in an Augustinian sense of temporality (Hūshiar Mahbūb, 2024, p. 102). According to Augustine, time is experienced as a living present, composed of our "present attention to the present" as well as "present memory of the past" and "present expectation of the future," implying human consciousness unites these divisions of time in a "simultaneous presence" (Tornau, 2024). In this regard, Sheydāyi's poetry can be understood as enacting a multidimensional present, in which temporal moments coexist and flow together, reflecting a conscious engagement with time rather than a simple chronological sequence.

The disruption of time and space in Sheydāyi's poetry has been described as a "spatio-temporal continuum" (Hūshiar Mahbūb, 2024, p. 102), a notion that can be further explicated through the Bakhtinian concept of chronotope. While the experience of time in this study is based on Augustinian frame, Bakhtin's chronotope can help describe how this inward temporal pressure is spatialized in the poems. Accordingly, chronotope may be understood as the interconnected configuration of time and space within a literary work – an "abstract connection between space and time" in which "moments in a temporal sequence" are reversed and interchanged in space (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 100). In Sheydāyi's world, this interconnectedness is frequently mediated through dreams, as spatio-temporal concerns are closely associated with dreaming, one of the most recurrent motifs in his poetry. The words "dream" and "sleep" appear frequently throughout his poetry. Out of thirty-nine poems in the collection, only seven lack any reference to "dream" or related terms such as "sleeping" or "awakening from dreams." It is noteworthy that the Persian word (خواب), which occurs most frequently, is closest in translation to "sleep," yet, unlike the verb (خوابیدن) meaning "to sleep," the noun (خواب) and the verb (خواب دیدن) are commonly used to denote "dream" or "dreaming," which the poet evidently employs to position diverse temporal and spatial realms alongside one another. Dream is therefore not simply a theme but a structural permission to violate chronological and

spatial order. In the first poem of the collection, “The Words That Remain of Us,” the speaker reflects on his distance in time and place: “Perhaps I have soared aloft in dreams/to other worlds/I hear your voices days later” (p. 2). Here, dreaming can metaphorically imply death. As such, the experience of time is interrogated through dreams, which provide a liminal possibility to navigate temporal and spatial dislocation. Alongside dreams, nature and poetry function as stabilizing forces, offering additional means of negotiating the challenges of existence, as discussed in the following section.

4.3. Existential Anxiety and Death

Sheydāyi is cognizant of life’s meaninglessness while striving to make sense of it (Nikseresht, 2024b, p. 114), a tension reflected most clearly in the recurring themes of existence and existential anxiety. In its broadest sense, existence weighs heavily across many poems in the collection; where themes of life, pain, loneliness, and death are embedded within a pervasive atmosphere of uncanniness and existential anxiety. The uncanny atmosphere permeating Sheydāyi’s poetry may be understood in Heideggerian terms as a condition of existential “not-at-home,” closely associated with anxiety and estrangement from ordinary reality (1962, p. 233). For Heidegger, anxiety differs from fear because it has no determinate object; it discloses the nothingness or groundlessness that everyday life usually covers over. Sheydāyi’s poems transform this philosophical condition into image: planet, room, window and earth become signs of a world that no longer shelters the subject. Early in the collection, the speaker in “We don’t Get Free” reflects on the reductive nature of human existence by asking “why everything on this planet diminishes us prior to union” (p. 4). The poem then expresses an anxiety associated with spatial confinement: “what if this planet is a bodiless head hanging in the sky/ a head whose facelessness covers up my horror with its leaves and twigs” (p. 4). This image conveys a sense of spatial insecurity and amplifies the ensuing perplexity “Perhaps the earth/is not the planet to live on/ which is why/ something in us remains unsurfaced forever/ never returning to this life” (5). Thus, fear prevails in all aspects of life, as it is, in essence, “the fear of living on earth” (“Polluted Hands”, p. 63). In an effort to overcome the fear of existence or to endure its burden, the poet initially takes refuge in language, seeking to make

sense of life through connecting with others; for within the limitations of time and place, language stands as his sole sanctuary: "to hear each other's voice is happiness/ to talk to each other is happiness," yet the speaker then concedes that he "is not good at these subtle games," at the very art of communication ("Polluted Hands", p. 63).

As ordinary communication fails, poetry becomes the collection's counter-temporal mode of address: it allows the speaker to reach an unknown reader from beyond the limits of the lived moment. Accordingly, the speaker in "Waiting Room," who confesses that "I talk to hide my fear" (p. 81), replaces direct communication with poetic connection beyond time: "my poems will be imprisoned in books / and the day you turn the pages / 'the meeting day'" ("Waiting Room", p. 82). As observed, the speaker envisions addressing the reader after his death about their "meeting" once the pages are turned. Similarly, in "Red Childlike Joy," the speaker addresses the reader directly, asking "let me breathe in you/ you that have fixed your eyes on my bygone hand" (p. 24), in which the hand that once wrote the lines and the reader's eyes make communication possible, transgressing time and space. In both of these cases, the poems create a temporal bridge, allowing the speaker to connect with the reader beyond the limits of life, so that poetry itself becomes a medium through which memory, presence, and emotional exchange endure. Perhaps it is this very perspective that compels the speaker in "In This Room" to believe that "The ones who come to my grave/ have killed me inside them/ once they accept that I am dead" (p. 69).

As already discussed, three poems in the collection – "Window," "The Wounded Leopard" and "Poetry" – primarily interrogate the role and significance of poetry within Sheydāyi's existential outlook. To foreground the consolatory power of poetry, "Poetry" begins by asserting that poetry "sits beside our loneliness" and "leaves us something that replaces life" (p. 45), thus presenting poetry as a source of companionship, consolation, and existential meaning. In Camusian terms, this consolation should not be read as metaphysical redemption; it is an aesthetic form imposed on suffering, a lucid act of endurance rather than an escape from absurdity. Conceived as "the reflection of lived experience" in "The Wounded Leopard," poetry is defined to "recreate life within

words” (Shahbazi’s commentary in Sheydāyi, 2022. p. 190), and express our unspoken pains: “Poetry/is not a chance for magic, wonder or overflow of feeling/it is a moment of silence in the throat/a push into the last of the meeting places/ ... It’s the living of life once again” (p. 196). Such poetry serves as a means of mediating one’s confrontation with fear and loneliness, while also helping individuals confront death not through denial but by imbuing it with meaning. As the final lines of the poem foreground, the immortality of the written word – that is, the poem – can both lend meaning to life and offer solace in the face of death, serving as a fire that keeps another fire alight:

Poetry is the hand that knocks on a closed door
and kisses the shadow in a human
the shadow in a stone.
It is a death spell
Only broken by children
unknowingly
so that we can return to death.
A fire for another fire. (p. 196)

In several poems throughout the collection, the act of writing poetry is represented alongside images of dreaming, awakening from dreams, or composing poetry within a dream state. In this way, a form of spatio-temporal plurality is enacted through both dreams and poetry, bringing the speaker and the addressee together across time and space: “Someone in me, dreams it all/ and all find their way into my poems” (“We don’t Get Free”, p. 4), “I dream of you looking for me within words” (“Your Scent” 33), “once you fall asleep, poetry comes to you” (“Poetry”, p. 46), or “I talk to you in my dream / and all will be published” (“A Poem for a Scarecrow” 73). In this sense, poetry is closely linked with the world of dreams; just as dreams transcend the constraints of time and space, poetry breaks through spatio-temporal boundaries, as a means of coping with existential anxiety. As parallel mediating structures, dream and poetry suspend chronological time and allow impossible address to convert isolation into a fragile form of relation.

Poetry, as such, can be regarded as Sheydāyi’s “salvation” (Shahbazi’s commentary in Sheydāyi, 2022. p. 190), one that shields him from the pains of life and creates a sense of profound tranquility and pure serenity. This is best illustrated in “Catharsis”

– one of the collection's few poems marked by serenity and relief – as the speaker feels compelled to write a poem in celebration of his newfound awareness of being connected to nature: "I would love to return to my hands from all eyes / and write something for all. / My eyes are looking at everything with confidence / Now that I know I am the earth's younger brother" (p. 200). Remarkably, "Catharsis" abounds with natural imagery and most clearly demonstrates that nature functions as a counter-force to existential groundlessness, frequently represented as a remedy for the constant pain of existence, but without cancelling mortality. Words such as earth, fire, sun, moon, light, tigers, gazelles, trees, apples evoke the richness and vitality of the natural world.

In a manner reminiscent of Camus's conception of artistic creation, poetry and natural beauty in Sheydāyi's work function not merely as an escape from existential anxiety and mortality, but as means of confronting and enduring them through aesthetic experience. In this sense, Camus's assertion that "the path that leads from beauty to immortality is torturous but certain" (Camus, 1967, p. 77), aptly reflects the collection's recurrent association between suffering, beauty, and poetic transcendence. Similar to Camus's refusal of both nihilistic surrender and consolatory transcendence, Sheydāyi's nature imagery does not solve the problem of death; it makes existence bearable by intensifying sensory contact with the world. In several instances, the images of nature are interwoven with poetry: "Poetry has emerged from the sea" ("Window", p. 8); "Poetry carries a scent that stirs the birds into restlessness" and "From distant lands, poetry drifts in with the winds" ("Poetry", p. 45). Such poems underscore how the intertwining of nature, poetry, and dreaming offers the poet a refuge from the existential weight of life, suggesting that solace and renewal are found in the continuous dialogue between the self and the natural and poetic worlds. As the speaker in "We Wander about Eyes Shut" highlights, "For the fear of time/we leave pieces of our lives" in creative endeavors such as poetry or painting so as to "survive" (p. 51).

5. Conclusion

The reading and textual analyses of almost half of the poems in Sheydāyi's debut collection, *A Fire for Another Fire*, demonstrate his profound engagement with the most complex dimensions of human existence, despite a deceptively simple, prose-like language.

The collection's apparent simplicity is precisely what enables its philosophical force: the ordinary language of rooms, windows, childhood, earth, and fire becomes the medium through which time, anxiety, and mortality are made strange. While most of the poems employ intertextual plays, metapoetic reflections, defamiliarized images, and semantic disruptions, their conceptual and thematic significance ultimately transcends the language and formal strategies. As discussed, the exploration of time, death, and existential anxiety in Sheydāyi's poetry unfolds through a fragmented style that itself mirrors the instability of being. Dream functions as a liminal possibility through which the poet imagines transcendence beyond temporal and spatial confinement, offering momentary release from the burden of existence. Nature and poetry, meanwhile, emerge as interrelated forms of refuge – sources of consolation that transform existential pain into creative and spiritual continuity. This is to indicate that dream, nature and poetic endeavor are not merely recurrent motifs; they are formal and existential strategies through which the speaker negotiates time, anxiety, and mortality. By illuminating these recurrent patterns, the study highlights Sheydāyi as an underrated voice, whose contribution to contemporary Persian poetry lies not only in transforming isolation into a quest for meaning and despair into reflection, but in discovering poetic forms through which despair can be temporally extended, aesthetically shaped, and momentarily shared.

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