

Poetry and the Sensitive World:

A Comparative Perspective on the Poetic Course of

Sohrab Sepehry, Arthur Rimbaud & William Blake

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Poetry has been one of the most popular art forms among Iranians in pre-modern and modern times. However, foreign readers are most likely to have heard of our classical poets such as Ferdawsi (known for his epic *Book of Kings*), Jalal al-Din Mawlavi (known in the West as Rumi), Hafiz (whose lyrical poems were translated and commented on by Goethe), or Saadi (whose bestseller is *The Rose Garden*).

Although Iranian traditional poetry enjoys enormous popularity in many countries, modern poetry has unfortunately remained almost unknown. Until the end of the nineteenth century, poetry was the dominant literary form of expression in Iran but by the end of the twentieth century, prose had acquired more prominence. None the less, the tradition of Persian poetry retained its importance in the twentieth century through great poets such as Nima Yushij, Mehdi Akhavan- Saless (1928-1990), Ahmad Shamlu (b. 1926), Forugh Farrokhzad (1935-1967) and Sohrab Sepehry (1928-1979).¹

Along with the poets mentioned above, Sepehry, who was also an avid painter, revolutionized the traditional forms of Persian poetry. He was born in the beautiful city of Kashan on the border of the Great Iranian desert and from an early age, the tranquil desert surroundings helped the young Sohrab to develop a true love for nature and for the

people around him. Soon, he began to write about objects, also painting them.² His education in painting as well as his skill in composing poems made him an architect of the modern poetic edifice.

This child of the desert also made long visits abroad and spoke French and English perfectly. Indeed, Sepehry had a universal culture: he read most of the great European and American contemporary poets as well as those of Latin America and Asia. Hence, his portrayal of his surroundings was inspired by the effects of European poetry. However, until very recently, and certainly prior to the translation of his works into different languages, Sepehry, like most of his fellow Persian artists, was completely unknown.³ Misunderstandings shadowed his career as a writer and artist and it is now left to later generations to recognize his importance.

This was also the case for Rimbaud and Blake: Blake's contemporaries called him a harmless lunatic. John Ruskin (1819-1900), the greatest British art critic and social commentator of the Victorian Age, felt that Blake's work was 'diseased and wild', even if his mind was 'great and wise'.⁴ But this was what we believed yesterday about Blake.⁵ In the twentieth and now twenty-first centuries, new critical approaches have seen Blake recognised as a highly original poet, artist and writer. Similarly, recent generations of French critics have made us realise how incomplete our knowledge of Rimbaud was. The long tradition of critical literature on Rimbaud has grown to enormous proportions over time. However, the old point of view, shared by both critics and editors, has been completely discredited.⁶

Blake and Rimbaud may have survived and be read all over the world; however, the great Persian poet still remains an enigmatic figure. Initially, Sepehry's poetry was not accorded a favourable reception by the intellectuals of the day due to the fashion for shallow Marxist critiques. Some contemporary artists criticized him as a naïve petty

bourgeois, indifferent to the dominant socio-political events of the time. Although most readers are likely to be attracted above all to his sensual, affective imagination, there are a small number of critics who wonder what the poet aimed to show 'at the edge of nothingness', 'beyond the patient lights', and 'above the sky paused for thought' (*Friend*).

Indeed, Sepehry's poems have not only an emotional effect but a profound intellectual and philosophical influence on the inner life of individuals which should be taken into account. It is also necessary to review the stereotypical formulas used in relation to him, which variously provoke the most sincere admiration or opposition. Perhaps our poet will have to wait, like his European fellows, for a century or more, to be recognized or perhaps studies such as this will gradually increase his accessibility. It is hoped that one day a complete study of this poetic imagination will be written. For the moment, however, the present discussion must limit itself to reading Sepehry through Rimbaud, and Rimbaud through Blake.

There is no doubt that Rimbaud's experiment in having recourse to visionary art and images⁷ looks back to Blake and we have certain proof attesting to the inspiration Sepehry drew from these two great artists.⁸ The parallels between these great men are many, but this paper focuses on their imaginary worlds.

Reading Rimbaud, Blake and Sepehry from a thematic critical perspective allows us to chart their respective creative impulses as these emerge through their texts. In spite of different cultural and religious backgrounds, one can trace striking similarities between the poets' imaginary universes, or what we might call an 'alchemical fraternity' in favour of poetry.⁹ In order to uncover the essence of their alchemical universe and to 'discover [their] interior "scenery"',¹⁰ I shall apply Gaston Bachelard's analysis of the 'manner of being in the world' to each poet, with due regard to the four elements of nature, and use

the method of Jean-Pierre Richard' – a combination of critical and creative poetics, or 'poésie critique - in order to reveal key features of their imaginary universes.¹¹ Through their analysis of the imagination of matter, or elements (Bachelard's 'l'imagination de la matière'), these thematic pioneers offer us a typology of the 'material imagination'. Following the thematic method of Bachelard in his book, *Water and Dreams*, water, as the alchemical principle of metamorphosis will be considered as the main natural element in their poetry. However, the aqueous element also combines with the other elements of nature, especially light; and this combination gives rise to ambivalent images which, for Bachelard, are considered to be successful images.¹²

It should, however, be noted that although Rimbaud, Blake and Sepehry are called great nature poets – and doubtless they are – they differ from other purely literary figures. In fact, whilst nature poets are variously dominated by the force of natural elements, our poets' manner is entirely different in that nature is simply forced to submit to their purpose. Moreover, their focus is not on objects but on their feelings about those objects: they are concerned less with describing nature than with suggesting the feeling nature arouses in them and, consequently, what they apprehend in nature will be what modifies their sensations directly.

Rimbaud's poetry is an attempt at immediate understanding and discovery of the truth without going through the objective deductions of the rational mind: the narrator of *The Drunken Boat* glides down 'unconcerned' rivers to 'tepid water', 'grey and blue'; then, for ten nights, is tossed about by the 'tumultuous water' of the open sea.¹³

Similarly, the elements of rural life emerge, with extreme accuracy, from Blake's verses. His feelings in *Songs of Experience* arise from a literal and ecstatic experience of nature which consists of things to be felt, and his vision is an example of natural impressionism:

Summer, for example, passes through the valleys with its ‘fierce steeds [...] [who] sit down [...] on some bank beside a river’ and ‘rush into the stream’.

In their poems as well as in their paintings, both Sepehry and Blake look towards nature, illustrating a completely worked-out universe.¹⁴ In the course of *Water Footsteps*, Sepehry confronts various forms of created life, showing less interest in nature’s concrete specificities than in their effects:

Let’s taste the light,
Let’s test the weight of a village night
and balance the dreams of a gazelle.
Let’s fathom the warmth of a goose’s nest
without troubling the order of the grass.
[...]
Let’s go down to the sea and cast our nets
and entrap the zest of waters.
Let’s weigh the gravity of existence
in a lifted pebble.

Since light and water act as the essential elements for the metamorphoses in all three poetic universes, the image is subject to constant modifications. They have indeed discovered a technique for dislocating the elements of the ordinary world of experience and re-associating them in their imaginary universes. All three have reached the point where they do not hesitate to take nature to pieces and reconfigure it into a different shape.¹⁵

In *The Drunken Boat*, Rimbaud's images tend to dissipate as he contemplates them and as the boat 'float[s] down unconcerned Rivers [...] the giant snakes devoured by vermin fall from the twisted trees with black odors!' and 'Drowned men sank backwards into sleep!' In certain other texts, like the first of the two called *City*, the scene has been completely taken apart and reassembled so that the 'city' is one seen only in dreams; the poet, as 'an ephemeral [...] dissatisfied citizen of a metropolis believed to be modern, since all known styles have been evaded [...] see[s] the new ghosts rolling through the dense and eternal smoke of carbon'. Blake, whose poems offer another example of the poet taking the external world apart and putting it back together differently according to the needs of the imagination, went through the same transformation and sought to express these metamorphoses in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* or in *The Book of Thel* where the poet's eyes perform the work of dissociation.¹⁶ In *The Torrent of Sun*, Sepehry seems rather to be playing a game of staring at a scene until its elements dissociate themselves from one another before his eyes and re-associate in a harmonious manner so that a new and wonderful relationship can be established between phenomena. By removing the traditional categories of logic and perception, our poets manage to build their imaginary universes: in a dissolution of the opposition between animated and non-animated worlds, a shift occurs from the elements of nature to human/animated life and vice versa.¹⁷

This being the case, personifications are manifestly produced through their verses. As Blake suggests in *Jerusalem*, 'Rivers & Mount[a]ins Are also Men; every thing is Human'. Blake, as the great nature-mystic poet of the nineteenth century, expresses this vision in *The Price of Experience*:

It is an easy thing to laugh at wrathful elements,

To hear the dog howl at the wintry door, the ox in the
slaughterhouse moan;

To see a god on every wind and a blessing on every blast

Animism also reigns in *Water Footsteps*, which is, in fact, a long monologue on the
nature of creation:

I saw the face of loneliness
pressed to the window glass and felt
a kindling of fervour.

Thought idled. Now life
seemed to have turned into new year's rain
and maples full of thrushes.

[...]

Here I'm close to the world's beginnings,
I can feel the rhythms of flowers. I know what it is to be water,
to be the green of trees

One of the innovative features of Sepehry's poems is inviting everyone to 'wash
out' their eyes and look at their surroundings differently:

We need to rinse our eyes and view
everything in a different light.

We should cleanse our words
to be both wind and rain.

Or in Blakean terms: 'If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, infinite' (*Marriage of Heaven and Hell*). Moreover, this experience makes identification with the most ordinary of things possible. In *Songs of Experience*, it is a common fly that Blake identifies with:

Am not I
a fly like thee?
Or art not thou
A man like me?

Equally, in Rimbaud's thinking "'I" is some one else'. In the *Visionary Letter*, the wood finds itself metamorphosed into a violin, then into a man who discovers himself to be a poet and, as re-associations continue, from the initial violin, he becomes the entire orchestra.¹⁸ The attentive reader of *Eight Books* may realize that the artist's poetic course proceeds in the same way. Inspired by Krishnamurti, Sepehry believes in a new philosophy of reality where things escape from the empire of habit or reason:¹⁹

Life's not something,
we put on the mantel of habit
and forget.

In a sort of fusion of ego with poetic cosmogony, our poets attempt to show that the world exists inside us and not apart from us. The ego of the poet, this microcosm, simply

a thing among all others, remains interdependent with the universe, the macrocosm. The ego no longer stands against the Other, but rather becomes the Other.

These three poets share a Mystical Cosmology: they speak the same language, use the same kind of symbols, deal with the same realities. Investigating their semi-mystical universes from a Far Eastern perspective, one can uncover how they elaborate a system of mythological figures to give flight to their imaginations. In *Jerusalem*, Blake explicitly addresses Eastern ideas which preoccupied him throughout his life (Sufism, Buddhism and Hinduism).²⁰ In *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* these ideas find their fullest expression as the poet confesses: 'The philosophy of the east taught the first principles of human perception'. Impressed by the Orient, Rimbaud makes us think of the 'Sons of the Sun' who come from India (*Vagabonds*). Through his love for India, he became familiar with the primordial language of myths.²¹ Through mythological personification, Rimbaud symbolically expresses different aspects of nature in *Ophelia*, and in *The Season* he provides a complex mixture of prophecy and social criticism.²²

Sepehry's familiarity with Indian thinking and, particularly, the Hindu trinity (Vishnu, Brahma and Shiva), explains the strange parallelism of thought between the Persian poet's mythic philosophy and that of Buddhism. Sepehry even confessed in a poem, also called *Buddha*, that 'Every being had become a Buddha'. Furthermore, he seeks his mythical ancestors in the *Water Footsteps* and thinks that he might be 'descended [...] from a plant in India, a shard from Sialk'. Similarly, the residence of his friend is 'at the foot of the fountain where spout out the myths of the Earth'.²³

Perhaps it is here that we come closest to an explanation of the similarities between the philosophy of these three great men, for all are related to Buddhist thought. Rimbaud and Blake have an affinity with the Oriental mind and express it in the symbols and

language available to them from their Western cultural heritage, while Sepehry expresses it in terms of his Eastern (and precisely, Persian) culture.²⁴

One of the most significant common figures in their poetry is the lotus or water lily.²⁵ From the earliest Indian collection of Buddhist sutras comes this description of the beginning of the world:

Between the mountains there were many rivers, flowing in all directions along a hundred different routes, moving slowly downhill, without waves. The rivers were shallow and their banks weren't steep, making them easy to ford. The water in them was clean and pure, and flowers floated on the surface in abundance. The currents were full of them.

Similarly, descriptions are given in *The Book of Thel* for 'The Lilly of the Valley'. Blake and Sepehry have even written a poem with this title. In *Water Lilly (Nenuphar)*, Sepehry refers to one of the Hindu figures where the four-faced Brahma is seated in the lotus position, an allusion to the Buddhist sutras which says that the lotus has four virtues: scent, purity, softness and loveliness:

Behind the dream's glass doors
and in the marsh-depths of mirrors,
wherever I had deadened
a corner of myself,
a Nenuphar was growing.

Rimbaud refers to this flower on different occasions: the mythological figure of Ophelia is first compared to 'some great lily, pale', surrounded by 'ruffled water-lilies' and in the poem *What is said to the poet about the flowers* he refers to the sacred characteristic of this flower which is used by 'young communicants'.²⁶

Moreover, as we know, Rimbaud and Blake were both desperately unhappy in Europe – the Occident - and were persuaded that somewhere outside their world there must be some better place, not Europe and not the Occident, but their opposite and thus an Orient.²⁷ The word is not the name of a place but a symbol to express their opposition. Rimbaud speaks in *The Season* for example, of an Orient where life would definitely be preferable to the one he has known in Europe.²⁸ The world Blake seems to have wanted is entirely different from the one in which he was living. Away from the characteristic delusions of the West,²⁹ his 'chambers of the East' are 'chambers of the sun' (*To the Muse*). A distinctive world is even brought into being in Sepehry's poetry, the features of which may be easily identified. There are references to Mesopotamia, the lands of the eastern Mediterranean, the Garden of Eden³⁰ and the myth of the Fall. Their poetry is thus not only a search for origins but for an elsewhere.

The speaker in *Sensation* is detached from his home world and completely free – as always in the midst of nature – to go where he wants; if only he can determine where he wants to go. He will, in any case, go far away, and there will be no more restraint upon him from wandering within the whole universe, like a 'gypsy'. Similarly, Blake makes poetry a means of metaphysical and psychic adventure. Undeniably through all his great poems, an angelic call can be heard, a sign to a journey of discovery and self-discovery, of pleasure and exploration. Hence, he believes that 'none by travelling over known lands can find out the unknown' (*All Religions Are One*). Sepehry's poems, too, have all the charm of the poetry of departing trains, steamers, and open roads. In *Traveller* the

poet may be heard simply talking about the journey, the route, the message, the experience. *Expanse of Green* is also full of sudden departures:

Tonight I shall go;
Toward the wordless vast which ever calls unto me;
[...]
I'll go away from this strange soil
On which
No one wants to awake the heroes in love
[...]
I must go farther, farther
There is a city behind the seas
Where the windows open to manifestation

This departure toward an unspecified but deeply desired goal is followed by a euphoria in which everything is beautiful and arouses pure delight, a region somewhere out of this world where one may escape *ennui* through entirely new experiences, a utopia that can be found not on earth but in poetry and daydreams.³¹ In *Song of Highest Tower*, for example, the figure of 'oblivion' must not be dismissed. 'The point is to arrive at the unknown by the dissoluteness of all the senses'.³² '[The poet] attains the unknown! Since he has cultivated his soul, which was rich to start with, more than anyone else! He reaches the unknown'.³³ Blake also attempts to attain the Unknown in his Land of Dreams, a completely strange space where 'the open road leads nowhere in particular' and the poet, in wonderment, asks: 'O, what land is the Land of Dreams? What are its

mountains, and what are its streams?' But he is sure that it is where 'One sets out in joy'.
And Sepehry too lives in an *Oasis in a moment*.³⁴

If you're coming to call on me,
I'm somewhere beyond nowhere,
There's a place beyond the nowhere
where pathways branch in the air

Nevertheless, he believes that there is some place behind this 'nowhere'. Thus, we witness the revelation of a new, unknown world where feelings, materials and colours are associated in an unexpected way.³⁵

In parallel, the four elements play a part, providing a metaphorical language for the poets: Rimbaud creates his feeling of a scene through metaphors such as 'a pink bell of fire' or 'a fog in the afternoon, green and tepid'. Blake's 'the morn blush'd rosy red' offers a similar example in *The Angel* and Sepehry's canary is that 'yellow wire of song' who sings on '[a] tree greener than the God's dream'. Through their lines, the reader discovers a search for words and images which evoke and reinforce a visual, colourful and coherent impression. In a way, their paintings are the song of colours and dreams in the context of nature, whilst their poems are the reflection of this atmosphere in the form of words, a reflection which also elaborates a system of correspondence between sounds and colours.

The poetry of Rimbaud is presented in the form of a symphony in 'white E, green U, red I, blue O and black A' (*Vowels*). The play of light and dark in Sepehry's poetry is accompanied by the music of nature: 'to draw the reeds and their shades on water' (*Expanse of Green*). We can see, therefore that there is another art form to which our

geniuses are also sensitive: music. Indeed, whether he knew what he was doing or not, Blake recorded an epiphany. His poems have a special spirituality that is connected to the deep inner life of human beings, 'to hear sounds of love in the thunder-storm and destroys [sic] our enemies' house' (*Price of Experience*). Similarly, Sepehry's poems are so peaceful and spiritual that they glide down to one's deep inner self at any time and in any place. The reader needs only a sharp ear for listening to the music of language and an eye for the ultimate meanings of minute forms and colours in lyric poems such as *Water Footsteps*:

to the indefinable damp of hay,
I hear the breath of the garden's voice.
Darkness cries as it slides from a leaf.
At home I hear a tree cough
and water sneezing out of stone.

[...]

I hear the footfalls of desire,
the lawful tread of blood in the veins,
and at dawn inside the well
the wings of stirring pigeons.

[...]

Rain falls upon the wet
eyelids of love, upon the aching
music of adolescence
in pomegranate enclosures.

Thus, the rhythm of the poem is determined by the rhythm of the experience to which it refers. For all three, there is a kind of fusion of ego with language; they write as if they breathe. This is what Richard calls 'fluidity of style'.³⁶ Within their verses, there is a magical correspondence between the names and the things that they indicate such that the letters of the alphabet seem to become the intermediaries between the imaginary universe and the material world.³⁷ Their language is not that of the lexicon; this is not the language of exchange, but an operational one that generates a new reality. As Sepehry claims: 'inside the word dawn, dawn will rise'. Moreover, he thinks that it is necessary that 'the word can become wind itself', 'can even become rain itself'. Blake also remarks in the opening stanza of *Auguries of Innocence*:

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower

And Rimbaud writes in the *Letter to Paul Demeny*, on « the future of poetry », 'any word [is] an idea'. Thus, 'to fix his giddiness', Rimbaud forges 'a poetic verb accessible in all the sensations'.³⁸ His style, while modern, is largely naturalistic, so that he can develop a philosophy of nature and of human relations with it.

These artists strive for originality, that is, they strive to influence rather than to be influenced, and by virtue of the effects of their creative impulses, they aim to make a difference. As Blake believes, they '[m]ake [their] own laws', in order not to 'be a slave to another man's'.³⁹ It is, therefore, their ultra-contemporary character that has an effect on us. All three felt the need for a new language so '[i]t is the time for a universal language to come!' (*Letter to Paul Demeny*) Rimbaud is the explorer-poet who first discovered the limits of poetry. Blake also combines a variety of styles in his writings: he

is at once an artist, a lyric poet, a mystic and a visionary, whose work has always fascinated readers. As for Sepehry, although his poetry is based on the foundations of classical compositions, it clearly differs from them. His words are strange; they do not just create meaning; they can also create emotion and mood. Almost every word in his poems is 'impressive'; they say a lot and define by themselves. Indeed, every word describes itself so clearly that there is no need to offer further explanation. The result is a certain concision in their writing]:

Our orchard had once been a place
that lay in the shade of meaning,
where plants and feeling ran together,
where mirror, cage and glance were one,
an arc of fortune's green wheel.

In few words he manages to create a poetic purity. The exclamatory nature of his expression, its nominal quality, the absence of verbs and the elimination of every unnecessary syllable generate his originality.

Rimbaud's techniques of discontinuity may also prove to be a measure of the immense evolution in poetry over the last century: sentences are frequently incomplete; conjunctions are missing, ellipses are used almost everywhere. His music is thus made by the frequent use of silences, spread out in his verse.⁴⁰ This is a simple music whose richness comes from the many and long silences which envelop the text, like that 'sublime Trumpet full of strange piercing sounds, Silences crossed by Worlds and by Angels'. Blake, too, 'seeks' his silence through the *Night* and through the silence of the birds in 'their nest'. Witnesses of the insufficiency of language, our poets evoke the

silence which imposes its rhythm and even seems to control the words. This reminds us of the memorial beginning of the poem *The Way to the Orchard* where Sepehry says:

Come. Dissolve in a line
of silence like a word.
In the palm of my hand
melt love's glowing bulk.
Warm me. In the deserts

In addition to painting, music and literature, one can therefore say that the most sublime art for our poets is their creation of a new and original language which is the language of silence; a language which ensures harmony in the union of the human being with nature.⁴¹ Indeed, according to Bachelard, poetry is no more than the first phenomenon of silence.⁴² In *Alchemy of the Word* Rimbaud says: 'I turned silences and nights into words'; and in *As Nothing, We Gaze*, Sepehry claims that he 'is astounded by the repair of silence'. *Water Footsteps* is also full of these silences:

In the empty silence of my want
I was brushed by a fleeing, lone voice.
[...]
Silence shines all around
as a swallow falls from the Spring sky.
[...]
We'll sprinkle seeds of silence between syllables.

It may be that Blake wanted to put air in his 'silent valleys'. The same is also true of the monometres in Rimbaud's *Album Zutique* which allow a regular rhythm. Silence vitalizes the poets' style by means of a discontinuity of words and a non-achievement of images. This denunciation of speaking is either a form of revolt, as is the case for Rimbaud in *Bad Blood* where he remarks that he prefers 'to keep silent', or a recognition of the insufficiency of language that our poets face.⁴³ Certainly, Sepehry feels that human language is incapable of self-expression; hence there are many pauses, three points, dashes and ellipses which mark the absence of his speech. It is, for instance, in the following terms that he describes his preoccupation in the *Traveller*:

My preoccupation is necessary
- or the murmur of amazement
in the friction between two words
will be lost.

Love awakens detachment
and echoes distances -

To conclude, then, by expressive cuts, suggestive alliterations and contrasts between the terms of ordinary language, our poets create a pure poetry that enables the reader to witness to 'an hour of new literature', to be witness to the sudden appearance of a 'new language', '[a] language [...] summing up everything, perfumes, sounds, colours'.⁴⁴ They effect a fusion of nature as it is described by realists with the imaginary spectacle and it is here, like a conjunction point, that the three imaginary universes meet.

¹ Ali Esfandiari (1896-1959), called Nima Yushij, was also known as the « father of new poetry». He took revolutionary measures to establish a new perspective in

Persian poetry by breaking away from the ancient rules. Sepehry was inspired, to a great extent, by him. For biographical details on Sepehry, see Index.

² Sepehry's complete poetic works have been collected into a single volume entitled *Eight Books*, composed of eight different series of poems: *Death of Colour*, *Dream's Life*, *Torrent of Sun*, *East of Sorrow*, *Water Footsteps*, *Traveller*, *Expanse of Green* and *As Nothing, We Gaze*.

³ *Water Footsteps* has been translated by Germain Droogenbroodt and Massoud Hajizadeh into German as *De schreden van het water* (Lennik: Point, 2004), into French by Daryush Shayeghan as *Les Pas de l'Eau* (Paris: Difference, 1991) and into English as *The Lover Is Always Alone* by Karim Emami (Tehran: Sokhan, 2003). Daryush Shayeghan has also translated other poems by Sepehry, published under the title *L'Oasis d'Émeraude* (Paris: Imago, 1982), whilst David L. Marin has also translated *Expanse of Green* and *Water's Footsteps* into English. See *Poems of Sohrab Sepehry: the Expanse of Green*, trans. by David L. Marin (Los Angeles, Kalimat: Unesco, 1988). Extracts quoted in this article are taken from this translation.

⁴ Cited by Dover, R., *William Blake (1757-1827): Poet, Artist, and Engraver*, available at <http://io.newi.ac.uk/rdoover/blake/welcome.htm>.

⁵ Like that of many others, John Ruskin's view of Blake was mixed and undetermined. For a more detailed discussion of his critical approach to Blake, see Morton D. Paley, *The traveler in the Evening: The Last works of William Blake* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). An important analysis is also offered by Romantic theorists on the mind, emotions, and imagination of this poet in Abrams, M. H., et al., *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 6th ed. Vol. 2. (NY: W. W. Norton and Company, 1993), and in Abrams, M. H., *English Romantic Poets* (London: Oxford University

Press, 1960). The evolution of Blake criticism is also traced in Magill, Frank, et al., *Critical Survey of Poetry* (New Jersey: Salem Press Englewood Cliffs, 1982).

⁶ Rimbaud has been considered a rebellious, inscrutable poet, which is why Verlaine mentioned his name under the list of "Poète maudits". For further commentaries, see 'Malédiction ou révolution poétique Lautréamont / Rimbaud' in: *Actes du colloque sur Poètes maudits ou révolution poétique Lautréamont, Rimbaud de 1989* sous la direction de Jean-Paul Corsetti et Steve Murphy (Presses Universitaires de Valenciennes, 1er trimestre 1990). Mario Matucci, has also made a comprehensive study of the two aspects of Rimbaud's poetry in *Les deux visages de Rimbaud* (Neuchâtel: Langages, 1986). In this work, Matucci analyzes the conflicting criticisms on the poet's life and works.

⁷ See Enid Hester Rhodes' thesis on *Violence and Vision: William Blake and Arthur Rimbaud: A Comparative Study* (Brown University, 1964). See also Graham Robb, *Rimbaud: A Biography* (NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000).

⁸ In *Blue Room* (Tehran: Soroush, 1997) Sepehry refers to both English and French poets, comparing his thoughts to theirs.

⁹ This expression is taken from Céline Bryon-Portet's thesis, *Nietzsche et Rimbaud: une fraternité alchimique*, University Toulouse 2, Octobre 2000, Reference: 00TOU20074.

¹⁰ Werner Sollors, *The Return of thematic criticism* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), p.163.

¹¹ Most of my analyses are based on Bachelard's work on the aqueous element. See Gaston Bachelard, *L'eau et les rêves: essai sur l'imagination de la matière*

(Paris : José Corti, 1943). See also Jean-Pierre Richard, *Poésie et profondeur* (Paris : Seuil, 1955).

¹² Bachelard refers frequently to ‘composed images’ which are made up of different elements of nature: ‘La vie des images s’offre en série, elles désignent une matière première, un élément fondamental’. See Gaston Bachelard, *L’Air et les songes: essai sur l’imagination du mouvement* (Paris : José Corti, 1942), p.13. In addition, an entire chapter from *L’eau et les rêves* is entitled ‘Les Eaux Composées’ (‘composed waters’), *op.cit.*, pp. 126-154.

¹³ All translations are from Martin Sorrel, *Collected Poems: Rimbaud* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

¹⁴ Sepehry studied painting at the College of Fine Arts at Tehran University and produced numerous paintings applying the same soft and gentle style that can be found in his poems. Inspired by Japanese and European painting, he managed, however, to naturalize and personalize the borrowed style in light of his oriental mysticism.

¹⁵ All in all, the image into which their happiness translates itself depends on the condition of the light. Moreover, the stability of the image that is identified with happiness depends on the stability of nature: the light changes so the image dissipates; that is their formula. In the first paragraph of *Metropolitan*, boulevards of pink and orange sand cross each other and are peopled by ‘young and poor’ families buying fruit, the whole scene being covered by a ‘winey’ light. Then Rimbaud takes us to a second plane where, under fog and smoke, there is confusion in the scene; a chimerical island appears on a luminous third plane. Blake’s vision, in *The Book of Thel*, takes shape under the light of a white- grey and somewhat special sky. As the light changes, the image disappears and with a shift of light values the scene reintegrates itself. Due to the shifting nature of its imagery, Sepehry’s poetry also lends itself to various interpretations. His ‘friend’ (who is interpreted as being

the muse and thus his poetry) 'grew like a tree with the benison of light' (*Friend*). As 'light, flower, water, self gyrate with the fish in a pure, vivid cluster' the little Sohrab is in wonderment by the effect of the light: 'How light smoothes the copper bowl!' (*Light, flower, water, self*).

¹⁶ John Lucas, *William Blake* (London: Longman, 1998), pp.22-23.

¹⁷ Hence, in their imaginary universe, everything is in normal association with nature. Moreover, the practice of their poetry becomes indistinguishable from the search for beatitude within nature. In any case, the rule holds that nature is inseparable from happiness and feeling happy automatically produces the thought of being outdoors; the elements of which felicity is composed may also be recognized easily as contact with nature. Rimbaud begins to identify the search for happiness with the process of making poetry. As early as *The Drunken Boat*, happiness appears to him to be available through poetry when all other avenues are closed off. Poetry is indeed the way to happiness, like a fugue, a fugue of the imagination and thus the combination of freedom, nature, and love. Sometimes Blake tends to draw on his fantasies and his fantasy, in return, offers him an avenue of escape from real life; 'then the groan and the dolour are quite forgotten' (*The Price of Experience*). In *Traveller*, Sepehry, tired of the life that he has lived as a sort of voyage, demands desperately:

And what is the remedy
for all this sorrow?

The reply is *nooshdaru*, the magical antidote, which is, indeed, poetry. Thus, the poem itself has become a kind of remedy, an alternative track in a world strained by a lack of poetry, a world that is perishing because of a lack of vision.

¹⁸ W.H. Frohock, *Rimbaud's Poetic Practice: Image and Theme in the Major Poems* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 91.

¹⁹ Jiddu Krishnamurti (India 1895-United States 1986): a great philosopher whose entire adult life was spent giving passionate discourses on the concept of the nature of human beings and their relationship with nature. Krishnamurti proposed that objects and materials be released from the empire of reason and habit. For biographical details see Mary Lutyens, *Krishnamurti: the Years of Awakening* (New York: Avon, 1975).

²⁰ For a further examination, see Mark S. Ferrara, 'Ch'an Buddhism and the Prophetic Poems of William Blake', *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, 24 (1997), 59-73.

²¹ Many, like A. Rolland de Renéville, interpret Rimbaud's poetry as implying close familiarity with eastern philosophy and his poems have been mined for possible debts to Hindu philosophy. See A. Rolland de Renéville, *Rimbaud le voyant* (Paris: La Colombe, 1974).

²² In *Ophelia* Rimbaud says:

'Heaven! Love! Freedom! What a dream, oh poor crazed Girl!

You melted to him as snow does to a fire;

Your great visions strangled your words.'

Another significant example is the poem called *light* from the *Season* Collection:

"'Nothing is vanity; on toward knowledge!" cries the modern Ecclesiastes, which is *Everyone*. And still the bodies of the wicked and the idle fall upon the hearts of all the rest...?'

²³ His epic poem, *Traveller*, is also taken as symbolizing the struggles of the inner life and the achievement of the true integration of the personality as shown in Buddhist

thought.. His images are also derived from the earth-mother myths of Iran, India, and Mesopotamia.

²⁴ See Richard Wilhelm, Tung- Pin Lu and C.G. Jung, *The Secret of the Golden Flower: a Chinese Book of Life* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.: New York, 1962), p.87.

²⁵ This common figure can also lead us to C.G. Jung's theory of archetypes (an idea, image, or symbol that forms part of the collective unconscious): the presence of a mystical figure which passes through the substance of all traditions and which in essence embodies a certain intuitive knowledge. As for the symbolism of the lotus flower, this herb has always been associated with Buddhism and Chinese culture. It is a symbol of rebirth since it closes at night and remains under the water and in the morning, it resurfaces and brings forth another flower in bloom. It was associated with the sun because it opens in the morning and closes at night. Horus, the sun-god, was often depicted sitting on a lotus (like Buddha and Brahma). Floating above the muddy waters of attachment and desire, the lotus flower also represents purity of body, speech, and mind in Buddhism. The lotus, whose petals are each marked with the square symbol of the earth element, is also considered to be the earth-as-goddess, source of the essence of life, which is thought of as Moisture.

²⁶ Second *Letter* to Théodore de Banville, Charleville, 14 July 1871. All letters are from Sorrel, *Collected Poems: Rimbaud, ed. cit.*

²⁷ The idea of Eastern man as an Other for the West is to be considered as more than a mere manifestation of Exoticism and can be traced back to the Romantic period when Western thought borrowed significant concepts from the Orient, especially from Indian philosophy. See John James Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment: the Encounter between Asian and Western Thought* (London, New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 54-70.

²⁸ Rimbaud refers to Eastern countries as 'saint countries'. See the analysis of '*Vie I*' by Pierre Brunel, *Éclat de la violence, pour une lecture comparatiste des 'Illuminations' d'Arthur Rimbaud* (Paris : José Corti, 2004), p.170.

²⁹ On these issues see Margaret Topping, *Eastern Voyages, Western Visions: French Writing and Painting of the Orient* (Oxford, Bern, NY: Lang, 2004).

³⁰ For Pierre Brunel, *op.cit.* p.209, Rimbaud's 'palm Gardens' are the lost paradises and 'Eden garden', the one that has been found again. In *Milton Blake travels through 'a Land' which is interpreted as being 'Eden' and which could be found merely by 'a harsh imagining and reimagining of the ideological world'*. See Nicolas M. Williams, *Ideology and Utopia in the Poetry of William Blake* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp.4-6. Jason Whittaker has also analysed 'the legend of a lost Eden in Atlantis' in *William Blake and the Myths of Britain* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999).

³¹ In fact, throughout their poems and in the form of a search, all three poets attempt to achieve their ideal. Sometimes this search for an ideal is presented as a return to the origin, a return to genesis by movement going down, lead by allegory and myth which are the sources from which all human experiments originate. This search is also sometimes presented in the form of nostalgia for a refuge, for an unknown place usually placed in the high spaces far away, so that there is always a 'Sublime Scene' and a 'Search for Origins'. See Vincent Arthur De Luca, *Words of Eternity: Blake and the poetics of the sublime* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1991), p.146.

³² *Letter* to Georges Izambard, Charleville, 13 May 1871.

³³ *Letter* to Paul Demeny, Charleville, 15 May 1871.

³⁴ This is the name of one of the poems from *As Nothing, We Gaze*.

³⁵ No matter what they call it, in their «Wasteland» we can observe a whole topography of backgrounds (‘space beyond the seas’, ‘beyond the sound closures’) which lends a certain perspective to their works: ‘back spaces’ are inscribed in their poetry through the use of words such as ‘behind’ and ‘beyond’. As in their paintings, these terms grant a certain depth to the landscapes described in their poetry.

³⁶ The pattern of Richard’s critical work takes the form of a motion that recedes from images to sensations, in order to ‘seize the act through which the mind, coming to terms with its body and that of others, unites with its object in order to constitute itself as subject’ (my translation). See Jean- Pierre Richard, *Littérature et sensation* (Paris: Seuil, 1954).

³⁷ Bachelard thinks that when nouns think and dream it means that the imagination is active. See Gaston Bachelard, *La Poétique de l’espace* (Paris : PUF, 1957), p.112.

³⁸ *Letter* to Paul Demeny, Charleville, 15 May 1871.

³⁹ Proverbs from *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*.

⁴⁰ The musical reference makes it possible to consider writing as having three elements: the relationship of sounds/feelings, the issue of rhythm (verbal recurrences, rate, and structures) and the question of sound vs. silence. For further discussion see Michel Murat, *L’Art de Rimbaud* (Paris: José Corti, 2002).

⁴¹ They felt a desire to embrace large portions of humanity in the mass whereas the voice that says ‘Je, I or ??{man}’ could be that of almost anybody. Because the poet ‘is responsible for humanity, even for the animals; he will have to make feel, touch, hear his inventions; if what he brings back from over there has a form, he gives form; if it is formless, he gives it formless’, from *Letter* to Paul Demeny, Charleville, 15 May 1871.

⁴² See Chapter XII of *L’Air et les songes*, *op.cit.*, entitled ‘Déclamation Muette’.

⁴³ '[T]he silence of the Buddha [...] has been as fruitful as his utterances in the production of philosophies and theologies. Sometimes it is far more interesting to conjecture what a prophet might have meant if he had spoken than to listen to what he actually said'. See Troy Wilson Organ, *The Silence of the Buddha, Philosophy East and West*, 4, 2(1954), 125- 140 (p.127).

⁴⁴ *Letter to Georges Izambard, Charleville, 13 May 1871.*

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Sohrab Sepehry (Biography)

1928 Born in Kashan, Iran

1948 Faculty of Fine Arts, Tehran University

1951 Published his first collection of poems, *Death of Colour*

Published his second collection of poems, *Dream's Life*

1955 Translated Japanese verses and published in Sokhan magazine

1957 Travel to Europe (Paris and London)

Paris Fine Arts School: Lithography Field

1958 Two months' travel, Rome to Paris

Venice Biennale

1960 Second Tehran Biennale; First Prize in Fine Arts

Travel to Tokyo to learn inlay; visited cities and art centres in Japan

1961 Visited Agra (Taj-Mahal) in India on his return to Iran

Published collection of poems *Torrent of Sun & East of Sorrow*

1963 San Paolo Biennale, Brazil

Group exhibition 'Iran Contemporary Art', France

1964 Travel to India, Pakistan and Afghanistan

1965 Published *Water's Footsteps* poem and collection of poems *Traveller*

Travel to London and Munich

1966 Travel to France, Spain, Netherlands, Italy, Austria

Collection of poems *Expanse of Green*

1968 'Roiane Festival', France

1969 International Painting Festival, France; won the 'Special Prize'

1970 Travel to USA, Long Island, New York

Group exhibition in Bridge Hampton City

1971 Individual exhibition in Boston Gallery, New York

1972 Individual exhibition in Cyrus Gallery, France, Paris

1974 Travel to Greece and Egypt

1976 Iran Contemporary Art Exhibition, Switzerland

1977 Collection of poems *As Nothing We Gaze*

1978 Travel to England for blood cancer treatment

1979 April 20 deceased in Tehran **April 21**; buried in Meshed Ardehal, Kashan (as per his will)

1990 Publication of his book *Blue Room*