Shiraz University
Journal of *Poetry Studies*
Quarterly, ISSN: 2980-7751
Vol 18, Issue 1, Ser 67, 2026

OPEN ACCESS

Extended Abstract

DOI: 10.22099/JBA.2025.52524.4615

The Function of Karpman's Drama Triangle in the Narrative Poetry of Forough Farrokhzad

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Introduction

In the 1960s, the American psychologist Stephen Karpman introduced the three fundamental roles that every individual may assume in society: Persecutor, Victim, and Rescuer. This theory, later applied in psychoanalytic criticism and literary narrative analysis, became known as the Karpman Drama Triangle. The presence of these three roles within narrative structures and across myths, tales, and stories contributes significantly to their appeal. According to Karpman, the "Victim" is the central axis of the narrative, while individuals shift among the three roles, which are not necessarily restricted to human agents.

In relation to the poetry and life of Forough Farrokhzad, one of the most prominent contemporary Iranian poets, numerous critical discussions have arisen. Since traces of Karpman's Drama Triangle appear in her narrative poems, the problem under study is to examine the ways these roles are represented and to provide a psychological interpretation of

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Article Info: Received: 2025-04-05, **Accepted:** 2025-09-06
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their function. The findings reveal that the role of the "Victim" dominates her narrative poetry more than the other two roles. Furthermore, despite her apparent tendency to resist the victim role, Forough seems ultimately reconciled with it. This acceptance may be rooted in the prominence of her feminine identity and the social milieu in which she lived.

Method, Review of literature, Purpose

As Karpman's Drama Triangle is fundamentally psychological, this research adopts a descriptive-analytical method based on library resources to explore its functions in Forough Farrokhzad's narrative poetry.

Several relevant studies include Eric Berne's *Games People Play: The Psychology of Human Relationships* (1964) which regarded it as a psychological 'game.' Von Jones and Ian Stewart (2025) in *Transactional Analysis: A Reflection on Experimental Psychology*, explained the causes of behavior from a psychotherapeutic perspective. Saeedeh Samimi (2021) in her article "Analyzing the Character of Touba in the Novel *Touba and the Meaning of Night*" has tried to analyze the protagonist through Karpman's framework. Ali Sahebi (2000) in *Man and the Difficult Choice*, specifically studied the 'Victim Game.' Noushin Talebzadeh and Saeed Hessampour (2019), in their article "The Representation of Women in Forough's Farrkhzad's Narrative Poetry", highlighted the transition of Iranian women from traditional to modern society. Sirous Shamisa (1995) writes in the introduction to *A Glance at Forough Farrokhzad*, that his main focus is on the rhetorical and prosodic issues of her poetry.

The central objective and research problem of this study is to investigate the possibility or impossibility of the manifestation of Karpman's triadic roles in Forough Farrokhzad's narrative poetry, to explore the functions of these roles, to evaluate her performance within them, and to analyze the relationship between the element of "femininity" and the conscious acceptance of the "Victim" role.

Discussion

Karpman introduced the triadic model of Persecutor– Victim– Rescuer, which recurs in the structure of all dramatic narratives. The more artistically these roles are constructed and the more conflicts and contradictions are embedded within them, the more compelling the text becomes.

In Forough Farrokhzad's works (1935–1967), one finds several narrative poems in which Karpman's Drama Triangle is distinctly manifested through role shifts, the predominance of the "Victim," and Forough's apparent inclination to embrace that role despite

her outward resistance. This study identifies six narrative structures in her poetry, with the most frequent being Narrator= Victim+ Persecutor+ Rescuer in the background. In most cases, Forough elevates the role of the "Victim," often coupled with a protest reaction that pushes the character toward transformation, occasionally into the "Persecutor" role.

This aligns with the psychological view that women, being more vulnerable to life's hardships, develop an inward orientation inclined toward idealism (often through storytelling), which enables them to endure adversity. In some poems, her embrace of victimhood even borders on masochism—as seen in "Let Us Believe in the Beginning of the Cold Season", where she embodies an absolute victim. The poem "Div-e Shab" ("The Demon of the Night") may be regarded as one of Forough's most emblematic narrative texts for engaging with Karpman's drama triangle. At the same time, it provides a critical framework for exploring the representation of femininity in narrative discourse, the fluidity of role-shifting, the revalorization of the "victim," and the explicit articulation of the conscious embrace of this position.

Within Karpman's theoretical framework, the figures of the "hero" and the "villain" are not necessarily confined to human agents; rather, they may assume non-human, imaginary, or even transcendent forms. In the poem "Autumn", the "villain" is embodied in the non-human phenomenon of autumn itself. In "Weary", the non-human force of "death" assumes the role of the "hero," whereas in "The Sick One", "fever" emerges as the narrative "villain." In "Before God", the "hero" is identified with God—a transcendent being—while the narrator occupies the role of the "victim," that is, the human subject. In this poem, several non-human entities—such as love, sin, the body, and desire—are cast as the "villainous" agents within the narrative.

Conclusion

Karpman's drama triangle constitutes a psychological framework for analyzing interpersonal interactions across diverse situational contexts. Its findings provide critical insights into the underlying motivations of numerous actions and reactions. Extending this psychological construct into the domains of literature, art, and cinema can yield novel approaches to psychoanalytic literary criticism and the interpretation of narrative works. The present study demonstrated that:

1. The structure and content of Forugh Farrokhzad's narrative poetry embody the full manifestation of all three roles within the triangle: the "villain," the "victim," and the "hero."

2. These three roles, as represented in Forough's narrative poems, can be categorized into six distinct structural patterns: in one case, the narrator stands apart alongside the three figures, whereas in five cases, the narrator assumes one of the roles.

3. Within Forugh's poetry, primacy is granted to the figure of the "victim." Accordingly, the configuration "victim (narrator) + villain + shadowed hero" appears with greater frequency. The narrator's acceptance of the "hero" role is temporally brief and soon reverts to the position of the "victim," a role often sustained over an extended duration—even from childhood.

4. This analysis further underscores the sociological dimensions shaping the creation of the work. The titles and themes of Forough's narrative poems reflect both the imprint of her lived feminine experience and the prevailing socio-cultural climate, alongside her implicit protest against the status quo. The marked prominence of "femininity"—a decisive factor in sustaining the acceptance of the "victim" role—simultaneously reveals the broader socio-historical context of the period.

Keywords: Forough Farrokhzad, Karpman Triad, narrative literature

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