

The Epic roots of lyrical imagery in classical Persian poetry

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Origins

The classical Persian *ghazal* is a short (several to a dozen or so *bayts*) monorhymic poem, with a distinct beginning and ending. The two *miṣrāʿs* of its opening *bayt* (*maṭlaʿ*) are rhyming, as in the *qaṣīda*. The ending of the poem usually is marked by the poet's *takhallus* (pen-name), which is placed in the final *bayt* (the *maqtaʿ*)¹ This ending is a relatively recent feature of the *ghazal* convention. In the early stages, the closing of a *ghazal* was not necessarily distinct, but could be signaled by an apostrophe, a message, an aphorism, etc.²

The Persian *ghazal* has a lyrical or emotional content, most commonly of erotic or mystical (less frequently didactical, philosophical, anacreontic, descriptive, panegyric, etc.) character.³ Some authors put stress on a lack of strict logical connection between the consecutive *bayts* of a *ghazal*, in spite of their formal unity and a sort of general harmony in its mood.⁴

Thus conceived, the *ghazal* as a distinct literary genre took shape in the earliest period of new Persian poetry (9-10th centuries), to achieve its mature form only in the 12-13th centuries.⁵

Scholars dealing with the development of the Persian *ghazal* generally agree that its poetical form originated either from a detached introductory part of a *qaṣīda* (called *nasīb*, *tašbīb*, or *taghazzul*), or from a loose poetical fragment (*qiṭʿa*). Both are monorhymed forms.⁶ As Briginiski argues, the term *ghazal* was well-established already among early (10-11th centuries) Persian poets and theorists of poetics. Originally, it referred predominantly to the subject matter of a poem, and only later on it became a designation for a particular literary form, which steadily evolved into a separate genre.⁷

As for the origin of the Persian *ghazal*, two main sources are usually mentioned: – the Arabic *ghazal*, predominantly in its pessimistic version, which concentrates on the misfortunes of love rather than on its pleasures;

¹ Bausani 1965: 1075; Rypka 1968: 95; Duḷęba 1986: 273-3.

² Reysner 1989: 32.

³ Duḷęba 1986: 280.

⁴ Rypka 1968: 102-3; Lughatnāma-yi Dihkhudā: 209.

⁵ Bausani 1965: 1058.

⁶ Bausani 1965: 1057.

⁷ Briginiski 1972. A similar approach is still represented by Lughatnāma-yi Dihkhudā: 207-210, s.v. *qazal*.

– Iranian popular poetry of erotic character.⁸

According to Reysner,⁹ the early Persian poet who combined these two traditions most skillfully was Rābi‘a Quzdārī (also known as Rābi‘a Balkhī), a Khorasani poetess of Arab descent, who lived in the 10th century in Balkh.¹⁰ In Reysner’s opinion, Rābi‘a adopted popular lyrics in its “female” version (love poems sung by women) which still has its continuations in Iranian folklore. One of Rābi‘a’s love poems he quotes is a bilingual dialogue, in which the heroine of love complains about her fate in Arabic, while a bird answers her in Persian.

Apart from its oral folk tradition, Persian love poetry of the early Islamic period probably has had some other indigenous sources as well. The activity of Iranian court poets-cum-minstrels (*gūsān*, *rāmishgar*, *khunyāgar*) can be traced back to Parthian times at least. For instance, we know of the existence of some renowned minstrels at the Sasanian court, such as Bārbad in the time of Khusraw Parvīz. Their compositions have not survived, but references in historical and epic sources show that their poems, improvised to a string instrument, were not only of panegyric, but also of incidental and lyrical content.¹¹ The early new Persian poetry at the Muslim courts seems to continue the Sasanian tradition, enriched by strong Arabic influence.¹²

The panegyrist of the Samanid and Ghaznavid courts opened their *qaṣīdas* with elaborate descriptions of nature, feasting and wine-drinking scenes, love verses and lyrical passages of diversified character.¹³ The majority of the motifs characteristic of the classical *ghazal* can already be found in their poetry. This seems to be an immediate source of the *ghazal*’s imaginal universe. The homogeneity of rhyme patterns allows the *qaṣīda-ghazal* to transfer ideas and images both smoothly and in a natural way.

On the other hand, a considerable amount of the pre-Islamic lyrical tradition has been preserved and developed within the body of early new Persian epic poetry, which, from the formal point of view (being composed not with a single rhyme as the *ghazal*, but in rhyming couplets) was not connected with the *ghazal* genre. It seems that the roots of some stock motifs of classical *ghazal* imagery should be looked for in epic works where their mythological and ritual background is still apparent. This is probably the case for the description of woman’s beauty in its affinity to descriptions of nature and ideal landscapes (e.g., a “paradise garden”), possibly reaching back to the cult of female deities of nature and fertility.

⁸ Braginskiy 1972: 167; Reysner 1989: 25.

⁹ Reysner 1989: 28-30.

¹⁰ Dabīrsiyāqī 1991: 158-61.

¹¹ Boyce 1957.

¹² De Bruijn 1987.

¹³ Cf. Osmanov 1974.

An epic precursor of the ghazal

What will be presented here is an early epic version of one of the most frequent motifs of classical, both erotic and mystical, lyrics, namely the rose and nightingale (*gul-u bulbul*) motif.

In the works of the great masters of *ghazal* this image proliferates. The rose (*gul*) stands for a beloved (*ma'šūq*), cruel to her lover and indifferent to his feelings. The nightingale (*bulbul*) represents a tearful lover (*'āshiq*), longing in vain for his beloved.¹⁴ While in 'Aṭṭār's "Speech of the Birds"¹⁵ and in Sa'dī's "Second Treatise"¹⁶ the rose symbolises an object of earthly, temporal passion, as opposed to the true values of the eternal life, in the mystical *ghazal* the rose becomes a manifestation of God's perfection, and, accordingly, as Schimmel puts it, "the nightingale who yearns for the rose [...] is, in mystical language, the soul longing for eternal beauty."¹⁷

In the poems of Ḥāfiẓ of Shirāz (d. 1390), credited as being the most representative of the classical Persian *ghazal* poets, the two currents of lyrical poetry – the earthly and the mystical – are combined so that it is difficult to distinguish one from the another. The attributes of the antithetical yet complementary rose-and-nightingale pair of symbols as appearing in Ḥāfiẓ' *Dīvān* may be summed up as follows¹⁸:

Rose: beautiful (159), laughing, smiling (70, 159), blossoming in spring (359), in a garden (183); offering a cup of wine (75), inviting to drink (454); unfaithful (70), untrustworthy (159), shortlived (80), unavailable (61), seducing (62), coquettish (288); making her lover suffer (120, 238); wounding him with her thorns (121, 287), making him bleed (because of her red colour) (121), burning him with fire (248, 416), laying a trap for him (159); preferring the birds of idle speech (464); being coquettish with the Wind (219) and listening to its secrets (399).

Nightingale: weeping, lamenting (61f., 70, 80, 86, 183, 237, 474, 555), singing (464), whistling (503), praising the Rose (75); in a garden (183, 473), at dawn (63, 120); in love (70, 183, 288), suffering of love (237), longing, patient (287); wounded (80, 120), bleeding (120), burning with love (248, 416), bound in a trap (159, 287), imprisoned in a cage (183, 355), jealous (of the Wind) (219).

A similar distribution of qualities between rose and nightingale is already present in Sa'dī's (d. 1292) *ghazals*, although the moral contrast between the two and the sadomasochistic nature of their relationship is probably less distinct there.

¹⁴ Clinton 1990: 337-8; Bausani 1965: 1058-9.

¹⁵ Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār 1968: 47-9.

¹⁶ Sa'dī n. d.: 13f.

¹⁷ Schimmel 1975: 307.

¹⁸ In the following quotations from Ḥāfiẓ, the numbers in brackets refer to the pages of the Ḥāfiẓ-i Shirāzi 1960 edition. – Some additional examples can be found in Mu'in 1985: 217-225.

For Ḥāfiz, the nightingale became a symbol of poetic creativity, especially if stimulated by suffering. The poet compares or identifies himself with the bird not only as an unhappy lover (86, 389), but as an artist as well (454). Thus for Ḥāfiz, the nightingale is a rare bird which sings *ghazals* (288, 291) and teaches the secrets of love – just as the poet teaches how to compose *ghazals* (473). If the poet is forced to silence he likens himself to a silent nightingale (359), a nightingale with its tongue bound up and imprisoned in a cage (355).

In the earlier, panegyric poetry of the Ghaznavid court, a different approach to the motif “rose and nightingale” prevails. Fouchécour, who thoroughly analyzes the descriptions of nature in 11th-century Persian poetry, observes that in the works of the great Ghaznavid panegyrists such as ʿUnṣurī (d. 1039), Farruḥī (d. 1037) and Manūčihri (d. ca. 1040), the nightingale is personified predominantly as singer, reciter, story-teller and/ or musician. Also, the nightingale is referred to as *hazār-dāstān* “possessor of a thousand stories”, *hazār-āvā* “possessor of a thousand voices or melodies”, simply *hazār* “thousand”. Another name for it is *zand-bāf* (variant: *zand-vāf* “Zand-weaver” or *zand-khān* “Zand-reciter” (from *Zand*, a famous commentary on the Avesta, written in the Pahlavi language). It usually appears together with other birds (such as *kabg* “partridge”, *qumrī* “turtle dove”, *ṣulṣul* “ring-dove”, etc.). It shows itself in places where roses grow, such as in rose-gardens, and at times when the roses are blossoming (i.e., spring). Finally, although the motif of love between the rose and the nightingale appears sporadically, it seems to be only of secondary importance in this early period.¹⁹

Fouchécour ascribes the merit of having developed the love symbolism of the rose-and-nightingale archetype to the West Iranian 11th-century poet Qaṭrān-i Tabrīzī (d. ca 1073).²⁰ However, the imagination of the nightingale as an unhappy lover of the rose is already present in the works of some 10th-century East Iranian poets such as Munjīk-i Tirmizī (d. 987)²¹ and Kisāʿi-yi Marvazī (d. after 1002)²², as one can judge from the poorly preserved remains of their *dīvāns*.

A Text From Firdawsī's Shāhnāma

A lyrical passage that is crucial to the subject is found in Firdawsī's epic *Shāhnāma* (written between 975-1010). It contains an 11-verse introduction to the “epic of Rostam and Isfandiyār” (*dāstān-i Rostam-u Isfandiyār*), which one of the most dramatic of all Iranian epics. Prodded by his envious father Gushtāsp, the young crown prince Isfandiyār starts a fight with Rostam, an old champion of unusual strength, and as a consequence perishes. The introduction announces this tragic event:²³

¹⁹ Fouchécour 1969: 139-41.

²⁰ Fouchécour 1969: 225.

²¹ Dabīrsiyāqī 1991: 150-51.

²² Amīn-Riyāḥī 1991: 102.

²³ The Persian text follows Firdousi 1967: 216f. (verses 5-16), the translation is mine.

5. *Hame busetān zir-e barg-e gol-ast*
hame kuh por lāle-vo sombol-ast
 The whole garden is covered with rose petals,
 all the mountains are full of tulips and hyacinths.
- Be pālīz bolbol benālad hami*
gol ze nāle-ye u bebālad hami
 In the garden the nightingale is weeping all the time,
 and as it is weeping, the rose grows all the time.
- Ču az abr bīnam hami bād-o nam*
nadānam ke narges čerā šod dažam
 Since I see the wind and moisture coming from a cloud,
 I do not know why the narcissus is sad.
- Šab-e tire bolbol naxospad hami*
gol az bād-o bārān bejombad hami
 In the dark night the nightingale does not sleep,
 the rose swings from the wind and rain.
- Bexandad bolbol az har dovān*
ču bar gol nešinad gošāyad zabān
 The nightingale is laughing at both of them.
 As it seats itself on the rose it starts his song.
10. *Nadānam ke ‘āseq-e gol āmad gar abr*
ču az abr bīnam xoruš-e hažabr
 I do not know whether it fell in love with the rose or with the cloud,
 as I hear the cloud uttering a lion’s roar.
- Bedarrad hami bād pirāhan-aš*
derafšān šavad ātaš andar tan-aš
 The wind tears the cloud’s shirt again and again
 so that its body shines with fire.
- Be ‘ešq-e havā bar zamin šod govā*
be nazdik-e xoršīd-e farmanravā
 It [the cloud? the wind? the nightingale?] is witness of the love of the sky to the earth,
 in the presence of the ruling sun.
- Ke danad ke bolbol če guyad hami*
be zir-e gol andar če muyad hami
 Who knows what the nightingale is saying,
 whom it mourns under the roses?
- Negah kon sahgāh tā bešnavi*
az bolbol soxan goftan pahlavi
 Listen at dawn,
 and you will hear the nightingale’s story in Pahlavi.
15. *Hami nālad az marg-e Esfandiyār*
nadārad be jozz nāle z-u yādgār
 He mourns the death of Isfandiyār all the time,
 except for lamentation, he has no memory of him.

Ču āvāz-e Rostam šab-e tire abr
bedarrad del-o guš qorrān-e hažabr
 Like Rustam's voice, the cloud in the dark night
 tears one's heart and ears with a lion's roar.

The text consists of a series of images, which are interrelated. They are numbered I-IV below.

- I. The first larger image is a spring landscape, with garden, mountains and flowers such as roses, tulips hyacinths and narcissi blossoming in rain and wind. Although spring rain is seen as a joyous event, this scene is sad, as can be seen from the behavior of the the narcissus.
- II. The second picture shows a rose and a nightingale in a stormy night. The nightingale weeps while sitting on a rose plant. The rose keeps growing as the bird is singing, and it swings in rain and wind. The nightingale laughs, but it is not clear at whom – perhaps at the rain and wind. In any case, it is in love, either with the rose, or with the storm cloud, which roars like a lion.
- III. Now we see a spring storm. This is perceived as a conjugal act between Sky and Earth in the presence of the Sun, with cloud and lightning as witnesses to their wedding.
- IV. In the final scene, the nightingale mourns the death of Isfandiyār. Its lament is in the Pahlavi language, and it is the only memory left over from Isfandiyār. On the other hand, the storm cloud roars like Isfandiyār's murderer Rustam.

In order to be fully understood, the above passage has to be considered on one hand in the context of Isfandiyār story which follows immediately thereafter. On the other hand, the context of all its epic homologues (the stories of Siyāmak, Ābtin, Īraj and Siyāvush) is also important. In particular, the extended *dāstān* on Siyāvush supplies essential comparative material.

The suggestive scene created by Firdawsī refers to the myth which, in its consecutive versions, underlies the whole mythological part of the *Shāhnāma*. It is the story of a young prince who is innocently murdered and then revived in the person of his posthumous son. It clearly originates from an agricultural myth of death and resurrection, of cyclic departures and returns of a nature deity. On a metaphorical level the epic tradition compares the perishing hero to a sacrificial animal, while the son, in whose person the hero is reborn, is compared to a plant (a tree, a sprout, or a flower) which emerges from the blood of the dead.²⁴

In these epics, the hero's death often results in natural disasters (draught, in particular) and in the decline of nature as a whole. For instance, after the death of Īraj, his garden is destroyed and his favorite trees are uprooted.²⁵ In such contexts, the motif of animals and plants mourning for the deceased is often repeated. The

²⁴ For details see Krasnowolska 1998: chapter. 5.

²⁵ Firdawsī 1960: 106 (*Feridun*, verses 450-452).

period after the hero's death is likened to winter, while the birth of the new heir to the throne is compared to the regeneration of nature in spring.

In the most elaborate epic story of death and resurrection, that of Siyāvush, a flower called either *khūn-i siyāvushān* ("Siyāvush's blood") or *farr-i siyāvushān* ("Siyāvush's glory") grows from the blood of the dead prince after it has been spilled on barren soil.²⁶ Simultaneously, his posthumous son is born in concealment. The new ruler's birth is announced by marvelous dreams and visions of rain clouds after a long period of drought,²⁷ and of a light amidst the dark night.²⁸

According to Narshakhī's testimony (mid-10th century),²⁹ the death and resurrection of Siyāvush were celebrated on *Nawrūz*, the first day of the solar New Year and the beginning of the agricultural season, in Bukhara. On this day the citizens of Bukhara used to make blood offerings on the alleged grave of Siyāvush at one of the city gates. The singers (*mutribān*) and story-tellers (*qawwālān*) sang their famous mourning songs, for which Narshakhī uses the words *nawḥa* ("lament, elegy") and *gerīstan-i muqān* ("weeping of the Magi, i.e. Zoroastrians").

In the *Shāhnāma*, there is a passage metaphorically referring to the birth of Siyāvush's son Kay Khusraw:³⁰

Ze xāk-i ke xun-e Siyāvūš bexward
be abr-andar āmad deraxt-i ze gard
 From the earth watered with Siyāvush's blood,
 a tree grew up to the clouds.

Negāride bar barghā čehr-e u
hami buy-e mošk āmad ze mehr-e u
 His [i.e. Siyāvush's] face was painted on its leaves,
 out of his kindness it smelled of musk.

Be dey-māh nešān-e bahārān bodi
parasteš-gāh-e sugvārān bodi
 It was a sign of spring in the month of Day [Dec.-Jan.]
 and a place of worship for the mourners.

In another passage,³¹ the entire nature laments the death of Siyāvush:

Benālad hami bolbol az šāx-e sarv
čū darrāj zir-e golān bā tazarv
 A nightingale weeps on the branch of a cypress,
 a partridge and a pheasant under the roses.

²⁶ Firdousi 1965: 152-3 (*Dāstān-i Siyāvush*, verses 2342ff.). The relevant verses are not included in the Moscow edition (Firdawsī 1960).

²⁷ Firdousi 1965: 199f. (*Siyāvush*, verses 3021f. and 3040-44).

²⁸ Firdousi 1965: 158 (*Siyāvush*, verses 2423-2428).

²⁹ Narshakhī 1972: 23f., 32f.

³⁰ Firdousi 1965: 167 (*Siyāvush*, verses 2562-2564).

³¹ Firdousi 1965: 170 (*Siyāvush*, verses 2591-2593).

*Hame šahr-e Turān por az dāq-o dard
be biše-darun barg-e golnār zard*

The whole country of Turān is full of grief and sorrow,
pomegranate leaves wither in the woods.

*Gerefte šivan be har kuhsār
na faryādras bovad-o na xāstār*

There are laments at each mountaintop,
with no sign of a rescuer and no avenger.

These two passages offer a direct parallel to the rose-and-nightingale introduction to the story of Rustam and Isfandi-yār.

From the first text it can be seen that the plant (here a tree, homologue of the *khūn-i siyāvushān* flower) which grows from the murdered prince's blood is in reality his reincarnation. This can be seen from the image of his face on each leaf.

The marvelous tree is said to be a *parastish-gāh* (place of worship, shrine) where the mourners (*sūgvārān*) gather to lament the dead. This seems to be a reference to a special ritual practice. Until today trees and bushes which grow at the graves of the saints are venerated in Iranian lands as epiphanies of the *sacrum*. The miraculous tree is a sign of hope and revival. Its appearance in winter, here represented by the month of *Day*, marks spring. The resurrection of the hero in the form of a plant and the ceremonies performed with this plant are closely interrelated. Laments for the dead and the expression of joy about his return are represented as coinciding.

The second text presents a scene of mourning with the participation of birds and plants. Here we find our nightingale lamenting for the dead prince together with other birds. The plants involved in this scene are a cypress tree, roses and pomegranates. The yellow, withered colour of the pomegranate's leaves is a hint which again allows to identify the season of the year, for the hero's death is connected with the death of plants in autumn. Now the mourners are awaiting a new charismatic leader, i.e. the new incarnation of the dead, who would appear to avenge his own death, just like new plants appear in spring.

Symbolism

In the context briefly outlined above the symbolism of Firdawsī's rose-and-nightingale passage becomes intelligible. The symbolic scene, here forming the introductory section of the *dāstān*, may at some point well have been placed at its end, i.e., after Isfandi-yār's burial. Comparing his fate with Siyāvush's makes it clear that Isfandi-yār is mourned for as an agricultural deity. The Isfandi-yār scene is placed in spring, as indicated by spring flowers, a violent storm and torrential rain. This is also the season when the rites for Siyāvush were held and the *Farvardegān* (All Souls) festival was celebrated, immediately before *Nawrūz* (New Year), which fell on the first day of spring. Storm and rain, the meaningful components of the scene, symbolize a vernal revival of nature after its "death" in winter.

Moreover, the scene seems to allude to the ancient beliefs recorded in Yasht XIII. 45-56 of the *Avesta*:³² during the vernal festival of *Farvardegān*, the *fravashi* (ancestral souls), who are imagined as warriors, armed and on horseback, fight duels in the sky with one another in order to gain rain clouds, each for their respective tribe and their living kinsfolk. The spring storm in Firdawsī's introduction appears to be a reflection of the periodically repeated duel of the two mythic heroes, which is dealt with extensively in the sequel of the text. The cloud roaring like Rustam succinctly illustrates this.

In passage quoted from the *Shāhnāma*, death and resurrection of the deity are celebrated jointly, in a way similar to the Siyāvush story and Narshakhī's Bukharan rite. There is a tight close interrelation between death and birth, despair and joy. In the poetry of Ḥāfīz and other classical *ghazal* poets, the nightingale is always represented weeping, whereas the rose is laughing. But Firdawsī's nightingale is both lamenting and laughing, and probably both of these forms of expression are ritually significant.³³

In Firdawsī's verses the motif of love appears on two levels. One part of its manifestations are the violent storm and the rain, which come from the sky down to the earth. This motif, characteristic of old agrarian cults and still frequent in Iranian folklore, is presented by Firdawsī with much dynamism and skill. The scene is violent, involving a rain cloud which roars like a lion, while the wind is tearing off the cloud's shirt and stripping its fiery body, producing lightning. The sun, acting here as a ruler before whom the marriage is concluded, is possibly invisible, as the whole scene might be occurring during nighttime. We witness a cosmic mystery which is cyclically repeated each year, comprising meteorological phenomena and personified celestial bodies as its actors.³⁴

At the same time the love motif is extended to the nightingale, for we are told that this bird is enamored, although the poet hesitates as to the object of the bird's affection, which may either be the rose, or the cloud. Within the composition of a complex scene with a generally erotic mood, the nightingale's love thus seems to be an element of secondary importance, a corroboration of the leading motif rather than one of its own right. Yet, we can see that the relationship between the rose and the nightingale is already firmly established.

In popular Iranian Muslim beliefs red flowers (predominantly roses, but also tulips (*lāla*) and poppies (*shaqāyiq*) are regularly connected with the graves of the saints and martyrs and play a role in vernal rites held in such places. Such was

³² Darmesteter 1960: 517-20.

³³ See Propp 1984: 224-42.

³⁴ We learn little about Isfandiyār's marriage, which should correspond to the hierogamy of Sky and Earth, from the *Shāhnāma*. Isfandiyār marries his sister (or sisters), whom he rescues from the Turanian king Arjāsp's captivity after having passed a route full of challenges. More is said about Siyāvush's double marriage; within the mythical structure of the story Farangis, the mother of Siyāvush's son and avenger Kay Khusraw, is equalled to the earth, from which the *khūn-i siyāvushān* plant emerges.

probably also the original meaning of the rose in the introduction to “Rustam and Isfandiyyār”. The plant seems to be a reincarnation of the martyred hero and a sign of his resurrection each spring. Thus, the rose is a homologue of the *khūn-i siyāvushān* flower and to the marvellous tree from the murdered hero’s blood.

Looking for an explanation for the presence of the nightingale in the Firdawsī scene one may suppose that at an early stage of the myth the bird might have represented the soul of a deceased person. The image of the human soul as a bird is quite frequent both in Iranian folklore and mystical literature, for instance, in ‘Aṭṭār’s *Mantiq al-ṭayr*; gnostic parables by Avicenna, Suhrawardī, etc.³⁵ Thus the bird’s longing for the flower would be tantamount to the soul’s longing for its body from which it has been separated.

In the classical *ghazal*, the rose and the nightingale symbolize two elements which stand in sharp opposition: the rose is generally female, beautiful, firmly bound to the ground, short-lived, ephemeral, and of questionable moral qualities. The nightingale, on the other hand, is male, inconspicuous, characterized by its ability to fly, its noble feelings, its unshakeable striving for the beloved and its exquisite sense of art. These series of qualities seem to fit the body-soul opposition as conceived in Muslim gnosticism (*irfān*).

Bausani³⁶ observes that in Ḥāfīz’ poems the nightingale sings in Arabic, which is the sacred language of Islam, so his song should be considered a recitation of the *Qur’ān* or a prayer. In contrast, the language of Firdawsī’s nightingale is Pahlavi, the language of Zoroastrian Iran. Also the court poets contemporary to Firdawsī often qualify the bird as *zand-bāf* and *zand-khān*, thus making him chant in the language of the sacral texts of the Zoroastrian religion. For Firdawsī, the bird’s singing in the pre-Islamic language of Iran, the only memory left of the ancient heroes, is a part of his own cultural patrimony, preserved through oral transmission. The wailing nightingale in the introduction to “Rustam and Isfandiyyār” can be linked not only to the birds lamenting Siyāvush’s death, but also to Narshakhī’s *muṭribs* and *qawwāls* – professional singers and reciters, who perform their ritual laments at the burial place of Siyāvush in Bukhara. Firdawsī does not directly identify himself with the singing bird but, in many passages of his work, ascribes the same role of a guardian of the old tradition to himself. His contemporary panegyrists see in the nightingale a court minstrel-poet like themselves, although the terms used by them for the bird preserves an old idea of the sacredness of his songs.

³⁵ See Corbin 1960: 165-202.

³⁶ Bausani 1965: 1058.

Conclusions

Summarizing the preceding analysis, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- The origins of the rose-and-nightingale motif in *ghazal* poetry should be looked for in ancient agrarian mythology, beliefs and rites as preserved in the Iranian epic tradition.
- Originally, the erotic symbolism of the image seems to have been of secondary importance. But it steadily developed and gained a central position as the issue of death and resurrection gradually fell into oblivion. The bird's mourning for the dead evolved into the lament of a lover in despair.
- In the original myth the rose-and-nightingale motif pair may have symbolized the opposition of body and soul, albeit not necessarily with the implication of a moral polarization of the two elements. Later on, the idea was elaborated in different ways in mystical poetry.
- The epic idea of the bird as a singer of sacral texts and guardian of tradition was continued in Persian lyrical poetry in new forms: the nightingale as both court poet-and-singer and as an inspired artist.

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