



## BOLBOL “NIGHTINGALE” II. IN PERSIAN LITERATURE

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### ii. In Persian Literature

The nightingale’s rich, beautiful and, to human ears, melancholy song has made it a symbol in Persian poetry of the lover who is eloquent, passionate, and doomed to love in vain (cf. Dehḵodā). It is virtually impossible to speak of the nightingale apart from the object of the nightingale’s affections, the rose, which embodies both the perfection of earthly beauty and the arrogance of that perfection. The rose accepts this adulation as its due, but is unmoved by the bolbol’s yearning and unaware of the evanescence of its own beauty. The rose’s cruelty is seen in its thorns, which prick the hand of any who long to hold it. Ḥāfeẓ devotes the whole of at least one ḡazal to a description and interpretation of how the relation of rose and nightingale embodies the nature of love and of life in general (raftam be-bāḡ sobḥ-dam-ī tā čenam gol-ī/amad be ḡuš nāḡah-am āvāz-e bolbol-ī). In mystical poetry the nightingale stands for the soul that is still enraptured by the world of appearances and so unable to penetrate to the world of transcendence (Farīd-al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār, *Manteq al-ṭayr*, ed. Ş. Gowharīn, 4th ed., Tehran, 1365 Š./1986-87, p. 42, lines 749-76). More rarely, the nightingale is given a positive value, as when Moḡammad is described as the “nightingale in a garden of crows” (Steingass) or the “nightingale of the eternal garden” (A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1975, p. 222). The rose and nightingale is both a very old figure in Persian and a widespread and enduring one.



Ferdowsī places a yearning nightingale and complacent rose in the introduction to the story of Rostam and Esfandīār (Šāh-nāma, Moscow, VI, p. 216 line 6), and from that point on it is a stock figure in the lyrics of virtually every Persian poet. Indeed, it is so commonplace that “rose and nightingale” have become a metaphor in English not just for Persian poetry but for Iran itself—the Land of Roses and Nightingales.