The Rose and the Nightingale: Allegorical Gardens in the Debate Poetry of Parvīn E'tesāmī

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Abstract:
The significance of Parvīn E'tesāmī's poetic garden as a complex allegory, constructed out of several smaller metaphors, has received little detailed treatment. The present study proposes to explore this garden as an instance of classical Persian allegorical gardens that generally have didactic functions. As this study will argue, Parvīn's allegorical garden is most often rendered into a number of debates between conflicting characters selected from a vast array of entities and endowed with particular 'moral' qualities interacting without being subordinated to the authorial voice of the poet. The metaphorical pair of lovers, 'the rose and the nightingale,' with a range of earthly and divine meaning, is at the heart of this 'garden clash' motif, confronting other figures of this garden, notably the thorn, water (both as raining cloud and as stream), the ant and the moon. Though the garden represented through these debates can be seen to function within a religious framework, it does not lead to spiritual quietism and suppression of human efforts.
Keywords: Personification, Didactic, Fatalism, Mortality, Gnosis, *Carpe diem*

Introduction

Classical Persian poetry is rich in nature imagery, especially imagery relating to gardens (*bāgh, Būstān*) filled with roses and nightingales, evoking a world of love, beauty and virtue. As Giamatti (1966) notes, the word *paradise* itself "derives from the Old Persian word *pairidaeza*" which means "the royal park, enclosure, or orchard of the Persian king" (11). For although gardens flourished in the Arab lands, Arab literary ideals remained predominantly those of the desert; and except for some mystical writings, their treatment of the garden was essentially descriptive (Meisami, 1985). The same holds for the early Persian *qasidas* of such poets Onsorī, Farrokhī, and Manuchehrī, who

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employed "descriptive, concrete, and highly stylized nature and garden imagery" (232). In the romances of the twelfth century, however, gardens figure as settings for courtly life and romantic episodes enriched with allegorical imagery. In such writings, as Meisami (1985) argues, a new symbolic significance of the garden as a place of learning and discovery is born; one notable example being Nezamī's *Haft Paikar*, an allegory of a spiritual journey, which features seven gardens, each embodying a lesson in kingship for the protagonist, Bahrām Gūr. Allegorical Gardens also appear in the mystical writing of this period particularly in the *ghazals* of the thirteenth-century poet Jalal Al-Dīn Rūmī as the reflection of the beauty and majesty of its creator. For Rumi, allegory served as a "stylistic means for the depiction of spiritual *invisibilia* through the portrayal of the *visibitia* of nature" (245).Here,in contrast with Nezāmī, little descriptive details are given of the outward aspects of the garden whose inhabitants are all engaged in ritual actions of praise and adoration of God the Sovereign; a 'cosmic celebration' motif built on Qur'anic verses[1]. Likewise, in the courtly *ghazal* of the fourteenth-century poet, Hafez Shīrāzi, the garden functions as an important center of life where nobles, scholars and bards gathered for feasting and the recitation of poetry. In such poems, Hafez takes the reader "from the ostensible setting, the courtly garden, into the world-garden, the Book of Nature itself" (Meisami: 245).

Though significant differences in terms of both time and genre separate the medieval poets from the twentieth-century Parvīn E'tesāmī (1907-1941)[2], they are linked by a common interest in the allegorical use

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[1] Whatever is in Heaven and whatever in on Earth celebrates God the Sovereign [Who is] the Holy, the Powerful, the Wise! (Friday: 1).

[2] Rakhshanda E'tesāmī, known by her nom de plume, Parvin, was born in 1907 into a highly educated family in Tabriz. Her Father, Yusof Etesami, was a prominent journalist and man of letters who taught his precocious daughter solid training in Arabic and classical Persian literature, encouraging her to render into verse some literary pieces that he had translated from western sources, eleven of which is printed in his monthly magazine, *Bahar*. He also encouraged Parvin to recite her poems amongst the leading male literati of her day in his private literary salon and to accompany him on several trips in Persia and Iraq. Early in her life, Parvin's family relocated to Tehran where she received formal education in Iran Bethel, an American high school for girls. After graduation, she taught Persian and English for a year at her school and was also invited to tutor the queen of the Pahlavi at court but she declined the offer, choosing instead to work at the Library of the Teacher Training College in Tehran. In 1934, she married one of her father's acquaintances and moved to Kermanshah; the marriage, however, was dissolved in a few weeks and Parvin returned home. The first edition of her *dīvān* which her father had blocked before her marriage appeared in 1935. See Dominic Parviz Brookshaw, 2015. *Women Poets*, in

of garden imagery. However, Parvīn chooses a different stylistic technique known as 'debate' (*Munāzere*) to convey her interpretation of this concept.[3] Parvīn's debates are rather akin to a narrative or dramatic prose, in that they furnish a platform for the plurality of conflicting characters selected from a vast array of entities and endowed with intellectual, emotional and moral qualities to interact rather than being subordinated to the authorial voice of the poet. She composes these debates in the traditional form of *qet'e* (fragment)[4] and *masnavī* (rhyming hemistiches)[5] avoiding Persian new form (*še'r e nou*) altogether. Some critics have detected elements of both Khorāsānī and Iraqi styles in her debates; the dominant didactic tone echoes that of the masters of the classical period (Brookshaw: 304). [6] Others have noticed instances of old-fashioned language in her debates with a tangibly archaic feel to them (304). Notwithstanding her classicism, the relative simplicity of Parvīn's language in these debates combined with what Moayyad calls her natural and moderate use of rhetorical figures has preserved her popularity in Iran until today (184).

Despite several studies on Parvīn's poetry, no research has yet treated the garden as an important allegorical construct in her debates.

Literature of the Early Twentieth Century from the Constitutional Period to Reza Shah, edited by Ali-Asghar Seyed-Gohrab, New York, I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd.

[3] According to Seyed Gohrab (2014), the origin of *munāzera* goes back to pre-Islamic times; the most famous debate poem being the Middle Persian text *Drakht-i Āsū rīk* which depicts the arguments between a goat and a date palm. Later, the poet Abū Mansūr 'Alī b. Ahmad Asadī of Tūs (born ca. 1010) includes munāzara in his *qasīdas*. Rather than commencing his qasīdas in *taghazzol*, he introduces disputes between day and night, heaven and earth, the bow and lance, and a Muslim and a Zoroastrian etc. See: Asghar Seyed-Gohrab (2014), *The Rose and the Wine: Dispute as a Literary Device in Classical Persian Literature*, "Iranian Studies", 47(1), p. 69–85.

[4] *Qet'a* is a one-stanza poem of at least four lines in which all the 'even' lines rhyme (abcb).

[5] A prosodic variety where the rhyme changes for each *hemistiches* (aa bb cc dd). A popular vehicle for mystical verses of Attār and Rūmī, *masnavī* was also a favorite with Parvin as its flexibility in length and topic allowed her to frame various moral anecdotes.

[6] Epic panegyric Khorāsānī style (Eastern Persian style) marks the first period (from the ninth century to the second half of the twelfth century) in which "poetry aimed at *sahl-i mumtani'* or inimitable simplicity", clarity of expression, and soft rhythm. Khorāsānī poets made limited use of Arabic jargon, compared to the next period of Persian poetry called *sabk i 'Iraqi,* a lyrical style that uses mystical notions, which begins in the middle of the twelfth century in Western Persia and ends in the sixteenth century. See Ali Asghar Seyed-Gohrab, *Metaphor and Imagery in Persian Poetry,* Boston, Brill, 2012.

The present study proposes to explore Parvīn's debate poetry as an instance of classical Persian poetry characterized by an allegoric use of the garden as a place of learning and contemplation. We will argue that her allegorical garden is most often built upon an opposition between various characters, all personified and given a moral role (or roles) that might sometimes be portrayed inconsistently. As we shall see, the conventional Persian pair of lovers, the beautiful rose and the sweet-singing nightingale, with its broad range of earthly and divine symbolism, is at the center of this 'garden clash' motif, confronting other figures of this garden such as the thorn, water, the ant and the moon.

The Rose and the Nightingale

A striking feature of classical Persian gardens is the abundance of flower imagery (*gol*), an emblem of all that is feminine, fragile, and fading, most often associated with nightingale (*bolbol*), the next recurrent garden metaphor representing 'a lover' whose love for the rose is sometimes unrequited. In the spiritual gardens of mystical writing, the rose was declared "to be the manifestation of God's glory" and "the sanction of religious experience" to which the nightingale, a metaphor of "the longing soul, is once and forever bound to love" (Schimmel, 1975: 299). Thus the innumerable roses and nightingales in Persian mystical poetry take on this metaphysical connotation of "soul-bird and divine rose" (299). Likewise, in the courtly gardens, the "rose's fate foreshadows the passing not merely of earthly splendor, but of all that is beautiful" and the "nightingale's lament arises from his knowledge that 'there is no token of fidelity in the rose's smile" (Meisami: 249). Parvīn utilizes this conventional pair of lovers in several poems including "Today and tomorrow" to explore the significance of beauty in the spiritual journey as that which leads to divine love, staging a debate between a rose and a nightingale as representatives of two conflicting views on beauty: mundane vs. divine. This poem opens rather erotically in a garden at night, capturing a nightingale infatuated with the fine petals of the freshly-blooming rose:

> The nightingale whispered to a flower one night,
> saying: "There is a request I wish to make to you.
>
> I have reached a decision to be united with you,
> if you, too, are of the same view (119).

The poem, very soon, deviates from the romance genre by introducing the motif of 'spiritual beauty' into the tale that appears to

allude to a famous *ghazal* by Hāfez.[7] Like the speaker in Hāfez's poem, the rose in "Today and tomorrow" conceives of love as a subtle feeling that does not stem from the physical realm but that requires a gift of "clear vision":

> The flower said: "come again to the garden tomorrow,
> to see what a fine spectacle there is".
>
> If your purpose is to praise our beauty,
> You will find many pretty faces there
>
> Wherever you step you will find fine petals,
> and on every side there is a delicate sweethearts…
>
> Thus you will observe the hidden secrets,
> if you have an eye with clear vision (119-120).

By the same token, in "The hidden flower," Parvīn looks at the spiritual vision of love and the ephemerality of human life through the image of a chaste rose that refuses the advances of a flirtatious nightingale in her quest for "the appreciation of the gardener" (316). Here, the invocation of 'the gardener' as the metaphor for God may allude to a Qur'anic verse referring to God as he who "caused lovely gardens to grow", (The ant: 60-61) – a view that, according to Meisami, informs Rūmī's garden imagery but is less obvious in that of Hafez (260).[8]

> A flower concealed its face under a leaf,
> And the nightingale said: "Hide not; for, you gladden our heart".
>
> Don't make us burn with your separation,
> I have been in love with you all my life.
>
> The rose answered: "Be not surprised at my seclusion;
> for, I conceal myself from evil eyes…"
>
> "He who gets light-headed reduces his worth,
> Thus this deal has frightened and made us heavy."

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[7] Wherefrom love ariseth is a hidden subtlety
Whose name neither the ruby lip nor the auburn hair is
The person's beauty is not the eye, nor the tress, nor the cheek, nor the mole
In this matter many a thousand subtlety heart-possessing is (Hāfez: 66).

[8] For Rūmī, the gardener is God, "who knows the hidden nature of the seed as of the human soul", see Meisami: 260.

The flirt of oglers last one or two days;
But the appreciation of the gardener is enough for us" (316).

The rose and the thorn

The rose and the nightingale often co-occur with a variety of other garden imagery that also enjoys symbolic roles in Parvīn's gardens. The first is the thorn which usually figures sorrow, tribulation, and passion; the thorn and the rose together depict "the antithesis of pain and pleasure, suffering and joy" (Cooper: 170). In Persian medieval literature, the thorn is "often associated with spiritual blindness, the incapacity of Reason, and the obscuring veils of physical existence" (Meisami, 1985: 243). Also, the man's "perception of mortality is symbolized in the world garden by the thorn that, in the garden of love, figures the lover's suffering (249)"; as Hafez reminds us, "without the calamity of the thorn, none plucked a rose"(456). Parvīn exploits the traditional significance of thorn in "A faultless flower", introducing it as a 'fault' of the rose that vexes the nightingale:

At dawn a nightingale said to the red rose:
"Why do you have so many thorns around you?"

"Such a lovely and sweet-smelling flower as you
Should not have a thorn as companion."

"For, such as association lowers your worth,
And disgraces anyone who comes close to you" (312).

Though argumentative by nature, "A faultless flower" displays a passive attitude towards the inevitable; a fatalistic motif recurring throughout Parvīn's poetry that Zarrinkub (1999) traces as far back as Faxr od-Dīn e Gorgānī's *vīs o rāmīn*, in which, the life of the lovers and their conflicts are referred to as inevitable events sealed before their birth. Fatalism also plays a dominant role in the poetry of later poets including Khayyam and Hāfez who claim supports for their views in the Qur'anic references to *qalam* (the Pen) and *lawh* (the Tablet), meaning that whatever occurs in the world was written by God with the Pen of the Divine Will (*qalam-e mašiyat*) on the Tablet of the eternal decree (*lawh-e qazā*). The same allusions to Qur'anic expressions such as *qazā wa qadar* (fate and destiny) that inform classical poetry also abound in that of Parvīn, illustrating the perennial influence of this motif in Persian poetic tradition (Zarrinkub: 396-398). If we interpret "The faultless flower" on these fatalistic grounds, we may conclude that God decreed that every rose (human) must have a thorn (fault) for "only God is the faultless flower" (314):

A Rose is obliged to have a thorn as companion;
For, the garden and meadow are ruled by fate…

"What other expectation can one have from this world?
For the firmament is most audacious."

Don't complain of the scales of destiny
For it always diminishes the weight of everyone…

When the sphere offers you a companion, sit by it,
And what the Lord considers proper, is right (313).

The theme of human imperfection recurs in "A flower and a thorn", a debate between the rose and the thorn as two metaphors for arrogance and humility which begins thus:

One morning in a garden a flower said to a thorn:
"Aren't you ashamed of your ugly face?"

A garden is a spot for a rose, lily, and sweet basil.
A thorn had better find a place in a salt-marsh

Anyone who lacks colour, odour, and fruit
Is dejected, sorrowful, and disgraced…

The thorn laughed and said: "you have seen no hardship;
For, anyone who suffers pain is distressed" (322).

As evident in the numerous references to fate ("sphere"), the motif of predestination dominates the present poem too. Furthermore, the use of the flower as a symbol of transient life in the last line of the extract, which recalls the imagery used by Omar Khayyam in his quatrains, intensifies the gloomy fatalism overshadowing the poem. [9]

"I am placed here, not with my own consent,
And if you are wise, laugh not at the fallen one."

The sphere does not look upon a recluse favourably
And such a hope or expectation is futile…

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[9]Oh, come with old Khayyám, and leave the Wise
To talk; one thing is certain, that Life flies;
One thing is certain, and the Rest is Lies;
The Flower that once has blown forever dies (xxvii).

> The decorator of the sphere did not make up my face
> So, don't ask me why I have no suitors…
>
> Whether we are a thorn or a flower, annihilation is the end,
> And no flower remains eternally in the world's garden (323-324).

For all her classicism, Parvīn is not consistent in the use of garden imagery, purposefully reversing their significance whenever the context requires so. As her next poem "The unworthy" testifies she occasionally represents the thorn as the snob that, ironically, attributes its "ugly face", "unpleasant smell" and "uneven leaves" to a freshly-bloomed flower:

> "Your red colour has dazzled my eyes,
> And your ugly face has made the air gloomy."
>
> "Your unpleasant smell has wearied me,
> What design and purpose was in this?"
>
> This fruitless bough of yours is a disgrace,
> And your uneven leaves teach a lesson
>
> You are full of defects, while we are perfect,
> We are noble, and you are only a ruffian (358).

Though the thorn's exaggerated account of its merits and that of flower's defects is fairly comical, its greater aim is to offer constructive criticism, using wit to draw attention to social abuses and lack of empathy, a critical view that characterizes much of Parvīn's debates. As a poet whose writing career coincided with the tyrannical reign of Reza Shah (1925-1941), the period when many Persian poets wrote poetry with prince-flattering contents, Parvīn chooses to address the ethical issues quietly, hiding behind the allegorical imagery as "this disguised mode of expression" allowed her to vent her feelings of dissatisfaction at human follies (Moayyad 164). To amuse the reader, her treatment of these figures is initially witty and humorous but her tone often shifts to stark sarcasm as is the case with the rest of "The unworthy" which, in retaliation, the flower reminds the thorn of its own "ugly" and "abject" state, thereby directing the signification of the title to the latter:

> The flowered laughed at it and said: "You unkind one,
> Though you are ugly, your words are right…
>
> how can we whose origin has been pure,

contaminate your existence?

Have you ever seen a thorn shy away from a flower?
Or seen a flower to become a thorn and hurt others?

Your mates are abject and none else,
How can a flower be worthy for you, capricious one?

"When one considers a worthy one to be unworthy,
He is bound to be vexed at his presence" (359).

The rose and water

An emblematic "source of all potentialities in existence," water is associated with birth, fertility, refreshment, and the fountain of life (Cooper: 188). It plays an important symbolic role in many religions, including Islam which refers to water in several Qur'anic verses as what "revives the earth," from which classical poets might have derived the motif of 'water of life' (Bees: 65). For instance, in his epic romance *Haft Paikar*, Nezāmī compares his beautiful Egyptian hero, Māhān, to a thirsty man in quest for water: "As soon as Māhān heard the words of Khizr,... a thirsty man, he saw the Font of Life" (212). Similarly, Hāfez likens his prince's sword to "the stream of the country," exhorting him to plant "the tree of justice" and pluck "the root of ill-wishers" (390). The motif of water appears in Parvīn's "A red rose" in the figure of a 'cloud' which also signifies "fertility" and "compassion" by virtue of its reviving rain (Cooper: 38). This poem opens in a sunny garden where a fading flower entreats a passing cloud (*abr*) for some raindrops to survive:

A red rose was withered one day by the heat
And the bright sun took away its colour.

In the moment of being sick and withering
A small cloud was passing above it.

When the flower saw that passing cloud,
It cried aloud and became impatient,

Saying: "O life-giving cloud, linger a little;
For lack of moisture has taken away my hue…

"That same nightingale who had acted as a dear friend,
And had leapt on around me joyfully all the time;"

"On seeing his beloved in such a distress,
Departed from the garden not to return" (318).

Sadly, when the cloud returns to rain the rose was already dead. In a sense the raining cloud can be seen to serve as a metaphor for the resourceful people who hesitate to help those in need (the rose); the last line of the following extract, "what medicine can a doctor give to a dead man" which figuratively echoes the 'moral' of the tale, i.e., 'help before it is too late,' reinforces this interpretation. As with most of Parvīn's allegorical gardens, melancholia is the most salient feature of "A red rose," illustrated in the fading image of the rose and the consequent infidelity and the abandon of the nightingale, as well as the unceasing tears of the cloud at the end of the poem:

When that cloud came back again to scatter pearls,
It looked around for that lost rose.

It saw a broken flower, lacking all hue and odour,
full of expectation and full of aspiration.

It washed her face with unceasing tears,
but what medicine can a doctor give to a dead man? (319-321)

Water also recurs in Parvīn's allegorical gardens in the figure of 'running water', a popular metaphor with several classical poets, particularly Hāfez who used it to refer to 'the passing of time'[10]. Parvīn utilizes the same motif in "The flower's message", capturing a beautiful rose anxious to send a secret message to her beloved nightingale, through 'the running water' which refuses the task on account of its own 'fleeting nature' and the flower's 'brief existence':

A flower said to the running water: "I want you,
To tell the secret which I'm uttering to the nightingale"

If he sends a message, bring it for me,
And if he prostrates himself, wash off his dust."

"Tell him that we are constantly gazing at the door;
for him to come tomorrow and smell us."

The water said: "such a task is useless to give to the running water,
For you won't find me even if you search a life-span."

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[10] On the marge of the passing stream, sit and the passing of life behold
For this example of the passing world is for us enough.
See also Hāfez, *The Dīvān*, translated by Henry Wilberforce Clark, London: Octagon Press, 1974: 268.

"send your message by another messenger,
Since your hope in me leads to nothing."

"Once I pass by this spot, I can never return,
And once you are withered, you won't grow again" (151)

The nightingale and the ant

Despite the recurrence of the 'transient life' motif in Parvīn's poetry, her perception of which never leads to the doctrine of the Carpe Diem, "a Latin phrase from one of Horace's *Odes*" meaning "seize the day" which has become "the name for a very common literary *motif,* especially in lyric poetry" (Abrams and Harpham, 2009: 31). In a typical *carpe diem* poem, the speaker emphasizes that "life is short and time is fleeting in order to urge his auditor – who is often represented as a virgin reluctant to change her condition – to make the most of present pleasures" (31). A set of variations on this motif has spread throughout Persian poetic tradition; one notable work being *The Rubáiyát* of Omar Khayyam which communicates "the poignant sadness – or else desperation – of the pursuit of pleasures under the sentence of inevitable death" (31). A brilliant moral counter to the *carpe diem* motif could be discerned in the debates of Parvīn, particularly in "The nightingale and the ant" which captures a nightingale in a spring garden, joyfully singing and flying over the rose bush, invites an ant to seize the moment:

A nightingale enamoured with the beauty of a flower
Was full of joy in the spring season.

It entered a meadow and sang a beautiful song,
And danced gleefully and opened its wings.

It flew here and there with ecstasy,
And perched at last on a rose-bush

Thus when it was close to the sweetheart,
It noticed an ant at the foot of a tree

The enamoured bird looked at the ant
With pride and surprise for some moments.

And said laughingly: "O you ignorant one,
I have never seen an ant so short-sighted as you."

"Now is the time of joy, not work,
And not the time of grief and hoarding" (132).

The ant, symbolic of 'diligence,' opposes this epicurean vision of the nightingale, reminding the idle lover of the hard times ("riot of autumn wind"):

> The ant turned to it and gave this answer;
> "You are negligent, O impatient and frenzied lover…
>
> "So, O friend, like me build a dwelling,
> And prepare a place for your means of living…
>
> "A flower is your guest only for a day or two,
> Since the riot of autumn wind will carry it away" (132-133).

As the tale advances, warm seasons draw to a close and the flower fades away, leaving the nightingale heartbroken and in desperate need of food and shelter to survive. In vain the epicurean bird seeks the ant's aid:

> The ant said: "I have nothing for you in my house,
> For, a sponger of an ant can only be an ant"
>
> "Go away, for, I have shut my door,
> For, now is not work time, and I am very tired" (135).

The motif of season, the nightingale and the rose utilized in this poem abounds in Persian poetry; particularly in the quatrains of Khayyam for whom the Nightingale seems to be "the Bird of Youth" which upon the disappearance of the spring and the rose, "leaves our branches, flies off beyond mortal sight and perception" (Maiti: 508). To wash down the care of this evanescent life, he seeks solace in "wine," a metaphor for the spiritual ecstasy which, according to Schimmel (1975), signifies the obliteration of human attributes and annihilation of man in the object of adoration; "Come, fill the Cup, and in the Fire of Spring," exhorts Khayyam (VII). Parvīn is no less haunted by this sense of impending doom, as the rose figuratively reminds the nightingale, "we are betrothed to the wind of autumn" (316), yet her perception of mortality is hardly disguised in any epicurean imagery. For all her yearning for the 'world's gardener,' Parvīn considers life in terms of small and steady efforts: "I am a worker on the earth… and my wage is what destiny has given me" (E'tesāmī: 133) – another view inspired by Qur'anic teachings that warn "everyman receives only what he makes an effort for" (The Star: 39).

The nightingale and the moon

Traditionally represented as the feminine power (queen) with the sun as the masculine (king), the moon "is the eye of the night as the sun is the eye of the day (Cooper: 106-107). In medieval courtly gardens, the moon (*mah, māh)* generally figures 'the lustre and the beauty of the beloved,'[11] a motif with which Parvīn opens "Link of light," featuring a nightingale in a garden praising the 'moon' as the most glorious celestial light by virtue of which the beloved flower receives illumination at night. This light-hearted flattery, very soon, turns into a heated argument as the nightingale calls the daily disappearance of the moon a 'selfish' act:

> In a garden once at night
> A nightingale whispered to the moon saying:
>
> "when at night you remove the veil from your face,
> The visage of a flower receives illumination"
>
> There is nothing more pleasant for me
> Than to see the dews on the petals for a while…
>
> "Be kind and tell me why you sit on such a lofty place;
> Since it is not fitting for the good to be selfish"
>
> "You are a light, and no light sleeps with dark
> And no doctor turns away from the sick" (153)

The lengthy response of the moon is strikingly didactic in its dignified tone and allusions to religious and literary texts. The early metaphorical reference to the moon as the 'reflection of the sun's glory,' which appears to allude to the *Qur'anic* verses describing the moon as the trail of the sun,[12] introduces the moon as an emblem of 'modesty' and 'gratitude'. Shortly afterward, the figurative use of the moon as 'the gleaner' to the sun's harvest, recalling the sowing imagery in a *ghazal* by Hāfez, adds on to its instructive and moral significance:[13]

> The moon said: "In facing the glory of the world-illuminating sun,
> I have no choice but to go to sleep."

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[11] O the splendor of the moon-beauty from the illumined face of Thine
The lustre of beauteousness from the chin-dimple of Thine. See also Hafez, *The Dīvān*, 12.

[12] By the sun and its radiance, and the moon as it trails after it… (*The Qur'an*, The Sun, 1-2: 595)

[13] The green expanse of sky, I beheld and the sickle of the new moon/To me, recollection came of my own sown-field and of the time of reaping (Hafez, 407)

"This brightness and purity is not due to myself,
This light is the reflection of the sun's glory."

All the rays that you see in me belong to him,
And here I am a gleaner, and he owns the harvest (154).

The debate concludes soon after the moon states the overall didactic theme, "he who humbled himself becomes lofty" (154), by inviting the reader to reflect on the tragedy of life in the light of 'the inevitability of fate', 'evanescence of life', 'finality of death', 'passage of time' and 'importance of human efforts;' in a sense summarizing all the motifs examined in this study:

"Our lot is to be hidden and evident now and then;
And this order has been given by the revolving sphere"

"From the beginning we are worried about performing our task;
For, time is a lender and we are debtors."

"When the passage of time makes us rich,
Next day on its demand we must pay it back" (155).

Conclusion

The poet considered in this study, separated by time and the nature of the genre from her medieval precursors, represents an individual approach to the writing of poetic allegory; the differences in her style could be discerned by comparing her use of a common source of imagery, the garden. She sets out to construct a poetic garden out of many small 'debates' between varied entities, each serves a moral purpose. This 'garden clash' motif finds its formal expression in her extensive use of personification; an important metaphorical device in medieval Persian poetry that does not enjoy the same prominence as an allegorical technique as it does in the poetry of Parvīn. With most Persian poets, as Meisami argues, "individual personifications are rarely sustained and remain on the level of tropes; their cumulative effect is to people the poems with an abundance of lively images" (240). Here, in contrast, all the lively images are contrived to signify a second, correlated order of signification, clearly witnessed in the treatment of the rose and the nightingale along with all the other garden imagery examined in this study.

Parvīn's knowledge of classical Persian literature, however, enriched her poetic garden with several important motifs including fatalism, evident in her ample metaphorical references to fate; as well as the motif of transient life, often represented in the images of the rose and

the running water. Though in formal terms these motifs figure within the same religious framework that informed those of her predecessors, they often lead to a different conclusion. As indicated earlier, the failure to find a logical answer to the question of mortality leads the mathematician-poet Khayyam to the hollowness of life and "the sublimity of the carpe diem motif" (maiti: 491). His lyricist successor, Hafez, welcomes the same epicurean doctrine "from the door of joy" and writes: "Reckon plunder; and, in the rose-garden, drink wine: For till another week, the rose is not" (162). Meisami reminds us that the exhortation to "reckon plunder" and "drink wine" is not to be interpreted as "an invitation to self-indulgence but to the wise employment of life's brief span in dedicated service on the path of love" (250). Regardless of the disputed mystical signification of 'wine,' 'cup' or 'goblet' as metaphors for 'spiritual ecstasy,' such imagery is generally lacking in the poems discussed in this study. For all her spiritual reflection, the temporariness Parvīn is concerned with is not the kind that could lead to quietism and inaction; as the ant repeatedly urges the nightingale "Rise and plaster your roof with mud" for "work has more weight and worth than words" (E'tesāmī: 133).

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