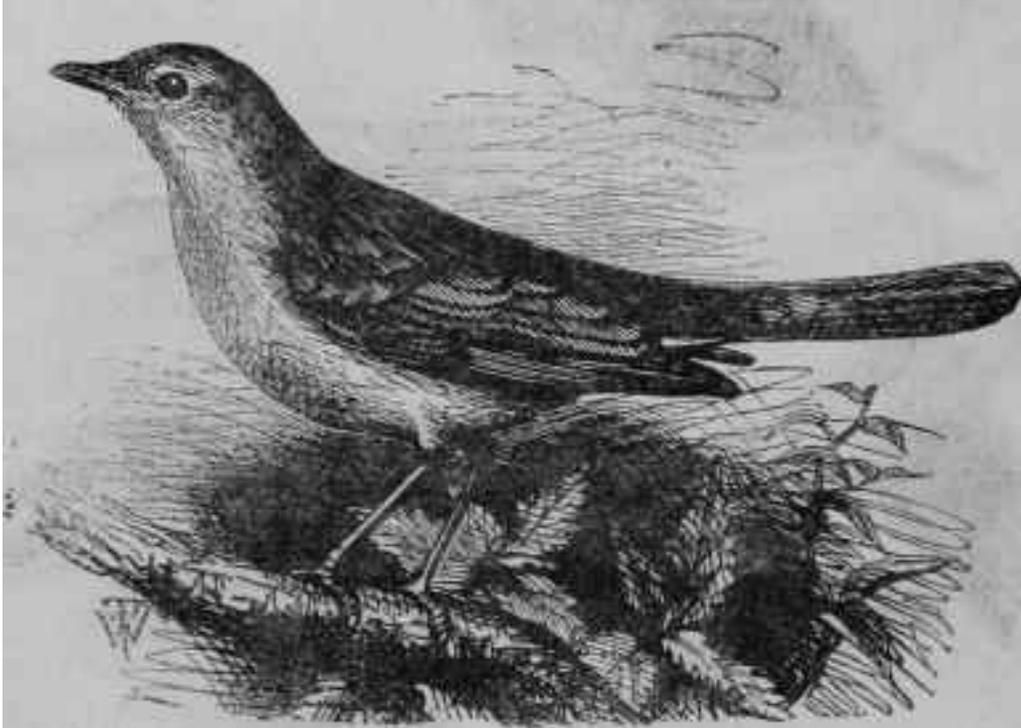


## Musings on the Nightingale And the Vale of Soul-Making



*LC Common Nightingale: Luscinia megarhynchos:  
subfamily Turdinae, family Muscicapidae*

*Old English nihtegala, of Germanic origin; related  
to Dutch nachtegaal and German Nachtigall, from the base  
of night and a base meaning 'sing'.*

“Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs, / Where youth grows  
pale, and spectre-thin, and dies”

### **Keats: Ode to a Nightingale**

יב הנצנים נראו בארץ, עת 12 The flowers appear on the earth; the

הזמיר הגיע; וקול התור,  
נשמע בארצנו.

time of singing is come, and the voice of  
the turtle is heard in our land;

**Canticles 2:11**



“The Cry of the Nightingale:”

The moment when flowers are dancing,

The nightingale sings in gardens secluded.

Each of its tunes sounds like the whistling wind  
To those seen as foreigners in their native land.

It cries like my ceaseless wails and laments,  
Each resonates, high and low through slopes.

It bemoans all night until the sun rises,  
Each breath comes out as a burning sigh.  
On virgin trees untouched by man's hand,  
It groans unceasingly for a lifetime,  
And sheds tears, full of grief; but who is there  
To appreciate it, to sympathize with its pains?"

**Rumi**

*He claims: Man andalib-i Rahmanam,*

**"I am the Nightingale of the Merciful."**

This nightingale who often wondered where the source of its own songs lay, in moments of complete union, found it impossible to distinguish between its own songs (ghazals) and a surah of the Qur'an inspired by the very Rahman, Merciful, whose nightingale it saw itself as. Thus in selecting surah 55 entitled al-Rahman, Rumi was not simply expressing his enchantment for its use of some of his favorite poetic devices, he also wished to bring to the forefront his deeply held conviction that God was indeed the Speaker, Composer, and Writer of his poetic enterprise. Were not both these from the same "indistinguishable source/s: Rumi and his Beloved God, in complete unison?"<sup>1</sup>

"I am the Nightingale of the Merciful": Rumi's Use of the Qur'an and Hadith,

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<sup>1</sup> <http://iranianstudies.ca/rumi/virani.pdf>

Nargis Virani

In the realm of a Chinese emperor many years ago, there was a Nightingale. And its song was so beautiful, it eclipsed the emperor's gardens, his palace of porcelain, everything.

So, as emperors will, he had the Nightingale brought from the woods to sing for him. And he cries, "The song's so beautiful."

"What a bird," cry the courtiers.

Before long, the emperor receives a gift: a mechanical Nightingale, encrusted with jewels. It sings only one song, but it keeps perfect time and you always know what to expect. "Incredible." "What a bird," cry the courtiers, as the real Nightingale is banished from the palace.

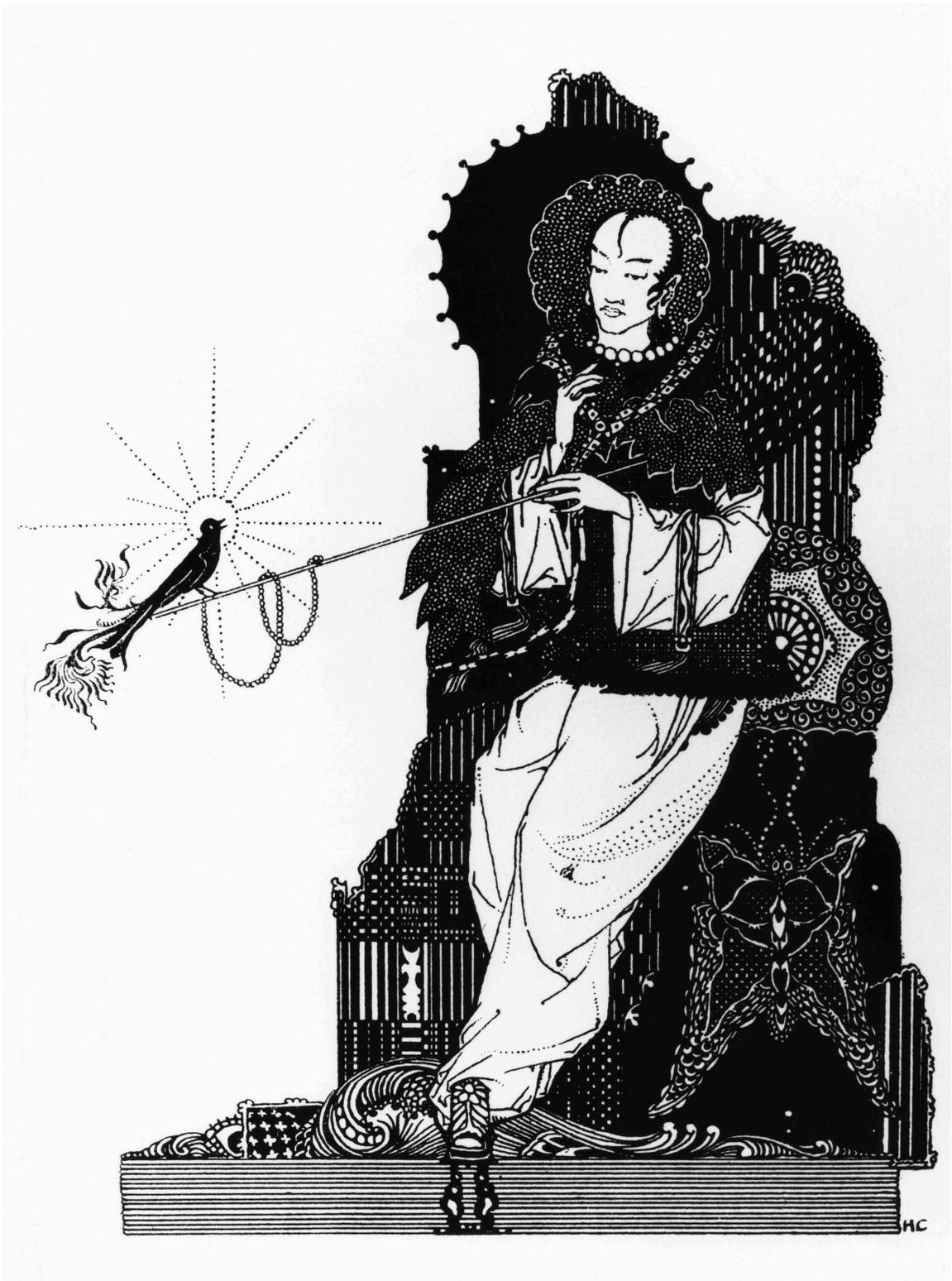
Five years later, the emperor is ill. Death lies on his heart. He orders his mechanical bird to sing, but there's nobody to wind it. Silence. Suddenly, a flutter of song floats by. "Little bird from Heaven, I know you of old," says the emperor, as the Nightingale flies to his bedside. "I banished you once from my land, and yet you have sung away the evil faces from my bed."

Death takes flight. The emperor lives. And the Nightingale returns to the green woods, where its song resounds most beautifully.<sup>2</sup>

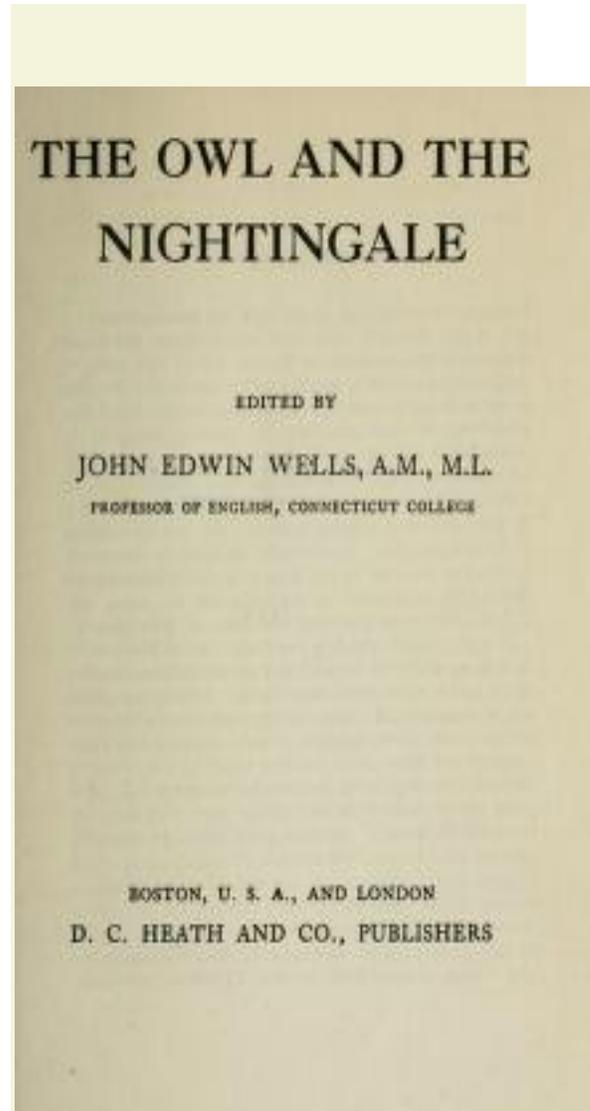
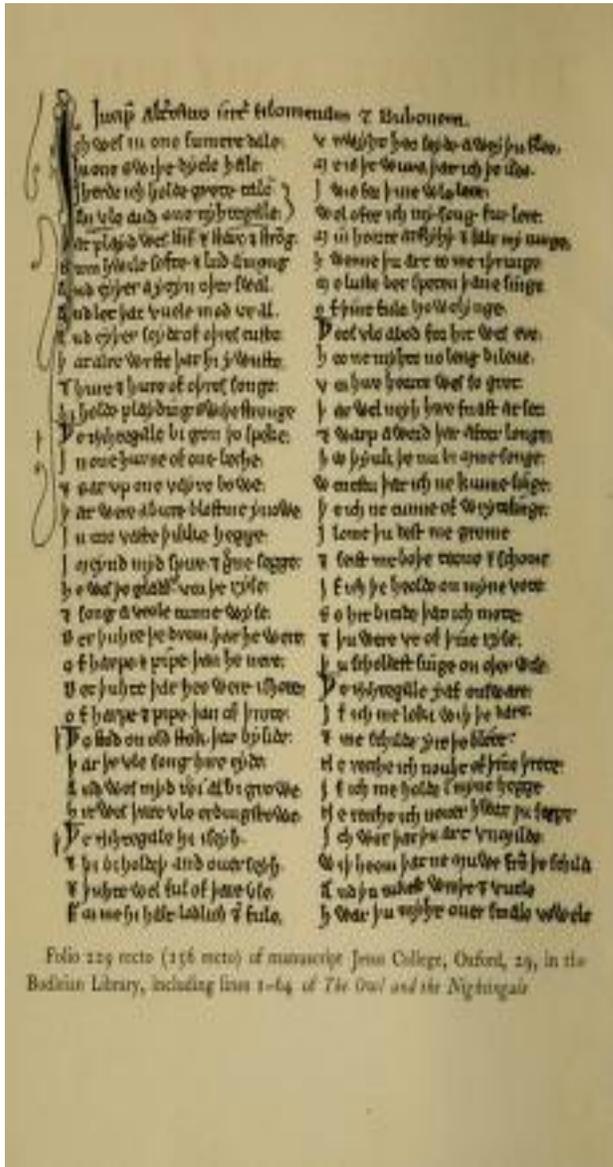
**From Hans Christian Andersen**

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<sup>2</sup> From a partnership between Audubon and BirdNote., [www.audubon.org/news/a-nightingale-fairy-tale](http://www.audubon.org/news/a-nightingale-fairy-tale)



The emperor and the singing nightingale, an illustration for "The Nightingale" from "Fairy Tales" by Hans Christian Andersen. Harry Clarke/Private Collection Archive/Bridgemen Image<sup>3</sup>



<sup>3</sup> <https://www.audubon.org/news/a-nightingale-fairy-tale>



***Owl and nightingale***

***(Illustrations from "De arte venandi cum avibus" Codex Ms. Pal. Lat. 1071, ca. 1260)<sup>4</sup>***

The Nightingale and the Rose

**From *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* (1888)**

"She said that she would dance with me if I brought her red roses," cried the young Student; "but in all my garden there is no red rose."

From her nest in the holm-oak tree the Nightingale heard him, and she looked out through the leaves, and wondered.

"No red rose in all my garden!" he cried, and his beautiful eyes filled with tears. "Ah, on what little things does happiness depend! I have read all that the wise men have written, and all the secrets of philosophy are mine, yet for want of a red rose is my life made wretched."

"Here at last is a true lover," said the Nightingale. "Night after night have I sung of him, though I knew him not: night after night have I told his story to the stars, and now I see him. His hair is dark as the

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<sup>4</sup> [http://www.hs-augsburg.de/~Harsch/anglica/Chronology/13thC/Owl/owl\\_text.html](http://www.hs-augsburg.de/~Harsch/anglica/Chronology/13thC/Owl/owl_text.html)  
<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/cme/OwIC?rgn=main;view=fulltext>

hyacinth-blossom, and his lips are red as the rose of his desire; but passion has made his face like pale ivory, and sorrow has set her seal upon his brow."

"The Prince gives a ball to-morrow night," murmured the young Student, "and my love will be of the company. If I bring her a red rose she will dance with me till dawn. If I bring her a red rose, I shall hold her in my arms, and she will lean her head upon my shoulder, and her hand will be clasped in mine. But there is no red rose in my garden, so I shall sit lonely, and she will pass me by. She will have no heed of me, and my heart will break."

"Here indeed is the true lover," said the Nightingale. "What I sing of, he suffers - what is joy to me, to him is pain. Surely Love is a wonderful thing. It is more precious than emeralds, and dearer than fine opals. Pearls and pomegranates cannot buy it, nor is it set forth in the marketplace. It may not be purchased of the merchants, nor can it be weighed out in the balance for gold."

"The musicians will sit in their gallery," said the young Student, "and play upon their stringed instruments, and my love will dance to the sound of the harp and the violin. She will dance so lightly that her feet will not touch the floor, and the courtiers in their gay dresses will throng round her. But with me she will not dance, for I have no red rose to give her"; and he flung himself down on the grass, and buried his face in his hands, and wept.

"Why is he weeping?" asked a little Green Lizard, as he ran past him with his tail in the air.

"Why, indeed?" said a Butterfly, who was fluttering about after a sunbeam.

"Why, indeed?" whispered a Daisy to his neighbor, in a soft, low voice.

"He is weeping for a red rose," said the Nightingale.

"For a red rose?" they cried; "how very ridiculous!" and the little Lizard, who was something of a cynic, laughed outright.

But the Nightingale understood the secret of the Student's sorrow, and she sat silent in the oak-tree, and thought about the mystery of Love.

Suddenly she spread her brown wings for flight, and soared into the air. She passed through the grove like a shadow, and like a shadow she sailed across the garden.

In the center of the grass-plot was standing a beautiful Rose-tree, and when she saw it she flew over to it, and lit upon a spray.

"Give me a red rose," she cried, "and I will sing you my sweetest song."

But the Tree shook its head.

"My roses are white," it answered; "as white as the foam of the sea, and whiter than the snow upon the mountain. But go to my brother who grows round the old sun-dial, and perhaps he will give you what you want."

So the Nightingale flew over to the Rose-tree that was growing round the old sun-dial.

"Give me a red rose," she cried, "and I will sing you my sweetest song."

But the Tree shook its head.

"My roses are yellow," it answered; "as yellow as the hair of the mermaid who sits upon an amber throne, and yellower than the daffodil that blooms in the meadow before the mower comes with his scythe. But go to my brother who grows beneath the Student's window, and perhaps he will give you what you want."

So the Nightingale flew over to the Rose-tree that was growing beneath the Student's window.

"Give me a red rose," she cried, "and I will sing you my sweetest song."

But the Tree shook its head.

"My roses are red," it answered, "as red as the feet of the dove, and redder than the great fans of coral that wave and wave in the ocean-cavern. But the winter has chilled my veins, and the frost has nipped my buds, and the storm has broken my branches, and I shall have no roses at all this year."

"One red rose is all I want," cried the Nightingale, "only one red rose! Is there no way by which I can get it?"

"There is away," answered the Tree; "but it is so terrible that I dare not tell it to you."

"Tell it to me," said the Nightingale, "I am not afraid."

"If you want a red rose," said the Tree, "you must build it out of music by moonlight, and stain it with your own heart's-blood. You must sing to me with your breast against a thorn. All night long you must sing to me, and the thorn must pierce your heart, and your life-blood must flow into my veins, and become mine."

"Death is a great price to pay for a red rose," cried the Nightingale, "and Life is very dear to all. It is pleasant to sit in the green wood, and to watch the Sun in his chariot of gold, and the Moon in her chariot of pearl. Sweet is the scent of the hawthorn, and sweet are the bluebells that hide in the valley, and the heather that blows on the hill. Yet Love is better than Life, and what is the heart of a bird compared to the heart of a man?"

So she spread her brown wings for flight, and soared into the air. She swept over the garden like a shadow, and like a shadow she sailed through the grove.

The young Student was still lying on the grass, where she had left him, and the tears were not yet dry in his beautiful eyes.

"Be happy," cried the Nightingale, "be happy; you shall have your red rose. I will build it out of music by moonlight, and stain it with my own heart's-blood. All that I ask of you in return is that you will be a true lover, for Love is wiser than Philosophy, though she is wise, and mightier than Power, though he is mighty. Flame-colored are his wings, and colored like flame is his body. His lips are sweet as honey, and his breath is like frankincense."

The Student looked up from the grass, and listened, but he could not understand what the Nightingale was saying to him, for he only knew the things that are written down in books.

But the Oak-tree understood, and felt sad, for he was very fond of the little Nightingale who had built her nest in his branches.

"Sing me one last song," he whispered; "I shall feel very lonely when you are gone."

So the Nightingale sang to the Oak-tree, and her voice was like water bubbling from a silver jar.

When she had finished her song the Student got up, and pulled a note-book and a lead-pencil out of his pocket.

"She has form," he said to himself, as he walked away through the grove - "that cannot be denied to her; but has she got feeling? I am afraid not. In fact, she is like most artists; she is all style, without any sincerity. She would not sacrifice herself for others. She thinks merely of music, and everybody knows that the arts are selfish. Still, it must be admitted that she has some beautiful notes in her voice. What a pity it is that they do not mean anything, or do any practical good." And he went into his room, and lay down on his little pallet-bed, and began to think of his love; and, after a time, he fell asleep.

And when the Moon shone in the heavens the Nightingale flew to the Rose-tree, and set her breast against the thorn. All night long she sang with her breast against the thorn, and the cold crystal Moon leaned down and listened. All night long she sang, and the thorn went deeper and deeper into her breast, and her life-blood ebbed away from her.

She sang first of the birth of love in the heart of a boy and a girl. And on the top-most spray of the Rose-tree there blossomed a marvelous rose, petal following petal, as song followed song. Pale was it, at first, as the mist that hangs over the river - pale as the feet of the morning, and silver as the wings of the dawn. As the shadow of a rose in a mirror of silver, as the shadow of a rose in a water-pool, so was the rose that blossomed on the topmost spray of the Tree.

But the Tree cried to the Nightingale to press closer against the thorn. "Press closer, little Nightingale," cried the Tree, "or the Day will come before the rose is finished."

So the Nightingale pressed closer against the thorn, and louder and louder grew her song, for she sang of the birth of passion in the soul of a man and a maid.

And a delicate flush of pink came into the leaves of the rose, like the flush in the face of the bridegroom when he kisses the lips of the bride. But the thorn had not yet reached her heart, so the rose's heart

remained white, for only a Nightingale's heart's-blood can crimson the heart of a rose.

And the Tree cried to the Nightingale to press closer against the thorn. "Press closer, little Nightingale," cried the Tree, "or the Day will come before the rose is finished."

So the Nightingale pressed closer against the thorn, and the thorn touched her heart, and a fierce pang of pain shot through her. Bitter, bitter was the pain, and wilder and wilder grew her song, for she sang of the Love that is perfected by Death, of the Love that dies not in the tomb.

And the marvelous rose became crimson, like the rose of the eastern sky. Crimson was the girdle of petals, and crimson as a ruby was the heart.

But the Nightingale's voice grew fainter, and her little wings began to beat, and a film came over her eyes. Fainter and fainter grew her song, and she felt something choking her in her throat.

Then she gave one last burst of music. The white Moon heard it, and she forgot the dawn, and lingered on in the sky. The red rose heard it, and it trembled all over with ecstasy, and opened its petals to the cold morning air. Echo bore it to her purple cavern in the hills, and woke the sleeping shepherds from their dreams. It floated through the reeds of the river, and they carried its message to the sea.

"Look, look!" cried the Tree, "the rose is finished now"; but the Nightingale made no answer, for she was lying dead in the long grass, with the thorn in her heart.

And at noon the Student opened his window and looked out.

"Why, what a wonderful piece of luck!" he cried; "here is a red rose! I have never seen any rose like it in all my life. It is so beautiful that I am sure it has a long Latin name"; and he leaned down and plucked it.

Then he put on his hat, and ran up to the Professor's house with the rose in his hand.

The daughter of the Professor was sitting in the doorway winding blue silk on a reel, and her little dog was lying at her feet.

"You said that you would dance with me if I brought you a red rose," cried the Student. "Here is the reddest rose in all the world. You will wear it to-night next your heart, and as we dance together it will tell you how I love you."

But the girl frowned.

"I am afraid it will not go with my dress," she answered; "and, besides, the Chamberlain's nephew has sent me some real jewels, and everybody knows that jewels cost far more than flowers."

"Well, upon my word, you are very ungrateful," said the Student angrily; and he threw the rose into the street, where it fell into the gutter, and a cart-wheel went over it.

"Ungrateful!" said the girl. "I tell you what, you are very rude; and, after all, who are you? Only a Student. Why, I don't believe you have even got silver buckles to your shoes as the Chamberlain's nephew has"; and she got up from her chair and went into the house.

***"What a silly thing Love is," said the Student as he walked away. "It is not half as useful as Logic, for it does not prove anything, and it is always telling one of things that are not going to happen, and making one believe things that are not true. In fact, it is quite unpractical, and, as in this age to be practical is everything, I shall go back to Philosophy and study Metaphysics."***

So he returned to his room and pulled out a great dusty book, and began to read.

A young Student is infatuated by the daughter of a Professor. She promises to dance with him till dawn at the Prince's ball if the Student will bring her a red rose. But in his garden there are no red roses. The Nightingale, who night after night romantically sings of such love as she believes she now sees demonstrated, is moved to provide the red rose so as to facilitate the love between the Student and the young woman. The Nightingale here is struck by "the mystery of Love". Following the typical pattern of threes, she goes to three rose trees asking for a red rose. The first bares only white roses, the second only yellow ones. The third is indeed a red rose tree, but because of a harsh winter cannot bare any roses. The

"finale," to use von Franz's term, is the method by which the bird can obtain the red rose. The Tree tells her:

"If you want a red rose [. . .] you must build it out of music by moonlight, and stain it with your own heart's blood. You must sing to me with your breast against a thorn. All night long you must sing to me, and the thorn must pierce your heart, and your life-blood must flow into my veins, and become mine."

*Poets have absorbed the traditional language of poetry and assume their readers or listeners have done so too. The implied reader of most poetry is an expert on nightingales, even if that reader has never heard or seen one. If it is possible for a nightingale to make an "innocent" appearance after 2,800 years in western literature it must be under special literary conditions that somehow both invoke and erase the associations the nightingale has acquired, as perhaps Coleridge does in "The Nightingale" as early as 1798, or Wallace Stevens much more recently in "The Man on the Dump," where the nightingale is included in the great garbage pile of worn-out poetic images. To repeat an earlier point, the ideal is to know the tradition and then decide in each case to what extent it is still in play.*

C G Jung, *Memories Dreams and Reflections*

See also the use of the nightingale in Mahler's song cycle.<sup>5</sup>

**Greek Roots: <http://www.maicar.com/GML/Tereus1.html>**

Tereus is the cruel Thracian king who helped King Pandion of Athens in his war against King Labdacus of Thebes, and having received one of his daughters seduced the other.

*Thrace's military aid to Athens*

These events took place five or six generations before the Trojan

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<sup>5</sup>[www.scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1794/18478/DMA\\_lecture\\_doc\\_Baechtel.pdf?sequence=1](http://www.scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1794/18478/DMA_lecture_doc_Baechtel.pdf?sequence=1)

War, at the time when Thebes and Athens waged war against each other for a matter of boundaries. This war was yet another setback for Thebes, then ruled by King Labdacus, grandfather of Oedipus. For King Pandion of Athens requested military assistance from abroad, receiving it from the Thracian King Tereus, who helped to bring the war to a successful close.

### *Alliance through marriage*

Now, either because this kind of help is seldom free, or just because King Pandion felt grateful towards Tereus for having contributed to the victory of Athens, or because it was a way of making of the Thracian king a permanent ally, it was decided that Tereus would receive Princess Procne, daughter of Pandion, as wife.

### *Bad omens*

Some affirm that this wedding was neither attended by Hera, the bridal goddess, nor by the CHARITES, but that instead the general and the princess, on the day of their marriage, were lighted by the ERINYES with torches stolen from a funeral. But these things, not being visible to the eye, pass unnoticed.

### *Happiness of the Royal Family*

Tereus took his wife Procne to Thrace where everybody rejoiced, first at their illustrious king marrying the Athenian princess, and even more when their child Itys was born. When five years had passed and they had had the time to grow accustomed to their happiness, Procne started longing after her sister Philomela, who had remained in Athens, and asked her husband:

"If I have found any favour in your sight, either send me to visit my sister or let my sister come to me."

Tereus gave his assent to his wife's request, and sailed to Athens.

### *Tereus covets his sister in law*

However, when he was received in the court of King Pandion, he met

sweet Philomela and fell in love with her. At the moment, they say, he understood that he was ready to pay whatever it cost to win the maid, being willing to corrupt her attendants with bribes, or tempt the girl herself with gifts, or even to ravish her and support his act by war, if it were necessary. So with this resolution in mind, Tereus transmitted to the king, more than willingly, Procne's request, and as his heart secretly burned with love for Philomela, they say, eloquence assisted his speech, and even tears came to his eyes while pleading for this cause that had become his own. He was so convincing that soon Philomela herself was asking the same thing, and finally King Pandion, yielding to the prayers of both, gave a second daughter to Tereus's keeping, saying:

"I pray you guard her with a father's love, and as soon as possible ... send back to me this sweet solace of my tedious years."

#### *Tereus's passion*

Tereus left Athens with Philomela on board, and so soon they came to Thrace, the barbarous king dragged her to a hut hidden in the woods where he, taking advantage of his physical strength, violated the girl. This is how the king of Thrace, caring nothing for the injunctions of Pandion, became a traitor and confused all natural relations, deceiving his wife, her sister, and the father of both. And by turning the girl who had been entrusted to him into his concubine, he made her the rival of her own sister.

#### *Shame kept secret by cutting off a tongue*

However, Philomela had no intentions of submitting, and she proclaimed that she would tell what happened to whoever listened, and that is why the savage tyrant, catching her by the hair and seizing her tongue with pincers, cut it off with his sword. And having done this horrid deed, the coward fellow proceeded to violate his victim again and again. Having thus obtained such a crushing victory, General Tereus returned home with his heart full of lies, telling his wife Procne a made-up story about the death of Philomela, whom he in reality had left speechless in the hut with a guard preventing her flight.

### *Procne learns the truth and plans revenge*

The girl remained a prisoner for one year, but in the course of it she wove a web with signs telling the story of her sorrows. When the web was finished, she gave it to one attendant, an old woman, begging her to carry it to Queen Procne, who, after unrolling the cloth, read the true story of her sister. When Procne learned what had happened, she did not utter a word, but instead prepared herself to rescue her sister during the natural confusion created by the festival of Dionysus that was being celebrated that year.

Appropriately disguised, she then came to the hut, and seizing her sister took her to the palace. Now that Philomela was safe, Procne felt that she was ready for any crime in order to avenge herself and her sister. And while she deliberated whether to put fire to the palace, or to cut out the king's tongue and eyes, or cut off his private parts, her son Itys came in. And it was this little Itys<sub>1</sub> who became the victim of the wrath of his unnatural mother. For such was her distress and hate that she smote little Itys<sub>1</sub> with a knife. And when the child was dead, both sisters cut the body into pieces and boiled it in brazen kettles. When they had thus turned the child into a meal, Procne served it to Tereus<sub>1</sub>, an ancestral sacred feast of which only the husband may partake, she said. That is how the king unwittingly devoured his own child, founding it delicious; and when he then asked for his son, Procne answered in cruel joy:  
"You have, within, him whom you want."<sup>6</sup>

But these things are so unbelievable, and so impossible to imagine that he kept asking for his son, not understanding in his utter blindness what his wife had told him until Philomela<sub>1</sub> came forward and hurled the head of little Itys<sub>1</sub> into his face. When Tereus<sub>1</sub> understood what he had done, he overturned the table, and with drawn sword pursued both sisters.

**But, as they say, they turned into birds, and so did he.**

*Things happened differently*

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<sup>6</sup> Procne to Tereus<sub>1</sub>. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 6.655

This is what happened to Tereus<sub>1</sub> and the daughters of Pandion<sub>2</sub>. Yet some have said that Tereus came to Athens to ask for Philomela<sub>1</sub>'s hand saying that Procne had died. They add that Pandion<sub>2</sub> granted Tereus<sub>1</sub> this second favor, and that the Thracian king embarked with Philomela<sub>1</sub> and Athenian guards along with her. But Tereus<sub>1</sub> threw the guards into the sea, and after having violated Philomela<sub>1</sub>, he entrusted her to the Thracian King Lynceus<sub>4</sub>, whose wife Lathusa, being a friend of Procne, sent the girl to her. At that time, prodigies revealed to Tereus<sub>1</sub> that his son Itys<sub>1</sub> was about to be killed by a relative, and he, believing that his own brother Dryas<sub>2</sub> was plotting against little Itys<sub>1</sub>, killed the innocent man.

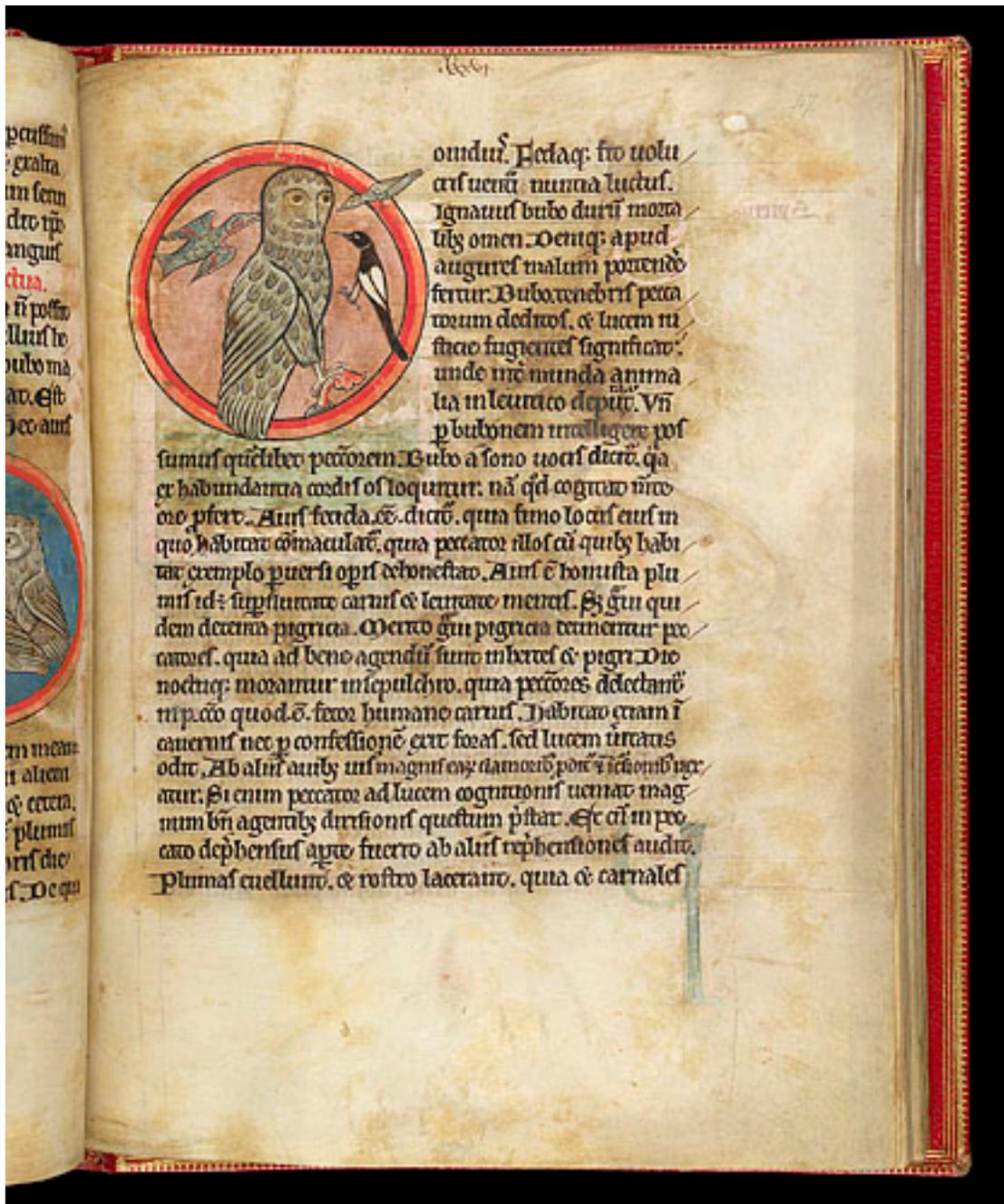
*All turned into birds*

In any case, after having committed the horrid crime, the sisters fled but were overtaken at Daulis in Phocis (the region bordering the Gulf of Corinth west of Boeotia) where they were turned into birds by the pity of the gods, **Procne becoming a nightingale**, and Philomela<sub>1</sub> a swallow (or the other way round), and Tereus<sub>1</sub> turning into a hoopoe, or as others say into a hawk. Others affirm that Tereus<sub>1</sub> reigned not in Thrace but in Daulis, and still others have said that his kingdom was near Megara, and that here he committed suicide when he found himself unable to seize the daughters of Pandion.

Philomela is a classical myth that has been able to hold its own on several accounts. The myth has transcended throughout time. It has managed to be interpreted and found culturally relevant over the years. Philomela has remained relevant throughout society through improved Sullivan 16 means of interpretation that include psychoanalysis, metaphors, folk themes, and symbolism in contemporary and medieval times.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> <http://department.monm.edu/classics/Courses/SullivanIP.2011.pdf>



**Manuscript(s)** (1) BL MS Cotton Caligula A.ix; (2) [Oxford, Jesus College](#), MS 29 (MS Arch. I. 29). Written in the 2nd half of the 13th century

***The Owl and the Nightingale*, trans. Brian Stone<sup>8</sup>**

It happened in the summery heart  
Of a secret vale's most hidden part,  
I heard an Owl and Nightingale  
Disputing on a mighty scale;  
Most keen and strenuous the debate, 5  
Now gentle, now in furious spate.  
And each against the other swelled,  
Each her spleen and ire expelled,  
Saying the worst of every feature  
That she could mock in the other creature; 10  
Contention was especially strong  
When each abused the other's song.

The first to speak, the Nightingale,  
In a corner of the vale  
Was perched upon a pretty twig 15  
Where blossom showed on every sprig  
And, fast entwined with reeds and sedge,  
There grew a thick and lovely hedge.  
She sang her varying tuneful lay,  
Delighting in that flowering spray. 20  
It seemed the melody she made  
Was on a pipe or harp string played,  
That pipe or harp, not living throat,  
Was shooting forth each pleasant note.  
Nearby there stood a stump alone, 25  
Decayed, with ivy overgrown,  
And here the Owl had made her den,  
And here sang out her 'hours' to men.1

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1. <sup>8</sup> English Language and Literature Timeline: 1090s: The Owl and the Nightingale, British Library's "Evolving Language" expedition (online and at the museum), 2011.

The Nightingale surveyed the Owl,  
And reckoned her opponent foul; 30  
Indeed all men declare with right  
That she's a hideous, loathsome sight.  
'Monster!' she cried, 'Away! Fly off!  
Simply to see you's quite enough  
To make me lose the urge to sing, 35  
You're such an ugly, evil thing.  
When you thrust out before my eyes,  
My tongue is tied, my spirit dies,  
Because your filthy clamouring  
Makes me rather spit than sing.' 40

....And having thus both said their say,  
Without their troops they took their way  
To Portisham. But how they fared  
In judgement when their case was aired 1790  
I cannot tell: it all depends.  
For this is where my story ends.



Ode to a Nightingale  
BY [JOHN KEATS](#)

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains  
    My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,  
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains  
    One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:  
'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,  
    But being too happy in thine happiness,—  
        That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees  
            In some melodious plot  
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,  
        Singest of summer in full-throated ease.

O, for a draught of vintage! that hath been  
    Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth,  
Tasting of Flora and the country green,  
    Dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth!  
O for a beaker full of the warm South,  
    Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,  
        With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,

And purple-stained mouth;  
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,  
And with thee fade away into the forest dim:

Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget  
What thou among the leaves hast never known,  
The weariness, the fever, and the fret  
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;  
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs,  
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;  
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow  
And leaden-eyed despairs,  
Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,  
Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.

Away! away! for I will fly to thee,  
Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,  
But on the viewless wings of Poesy,  
Though the dull brain perplexes and retards:  
Already with thee! tender is the night,  
And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,  
Cluster'd around by all her starry Fays;  
But here there is no light,  
Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown  
Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,  
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,  
But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet  
Wherewith the seasonable month endows  
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;  
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;  
Fast fading violets cover'd up in leaves;  
And mid-May's eldest child,  
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,  
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

Darkling I listen; and, for many a time  
I have been half in love with easeful Death,  
Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,  
To take into the air my quiet breath;  
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,  
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,  
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad  
In such an ecstasy!  
Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—  
To thy high requiem become a sod.

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!  
No hungry generations tread thee down;  
The voice I hear this passing night was heard  
In ancient days by emperor and clown:  
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path  
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,  
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;  
The same that oft-times hath  
Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam  
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

Forlorn! the very word is like a bell  
To toll me back from thee to my sole self!  
Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well  
As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf.  
Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades  
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,  
Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep  
In the next valley-glades:  
Was it a vision, or a waking dream?  
Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?

## Keats' Ode to a Nightingale in light of Rumi<sup>9</sup>

By Daniel Dyer

Much has been written about 'Ode to a Nightingale'. The poem is generally understood to be the lament of a poet who finds he cannot stay in the unreal world of his imagination but must return to the real, material world of decay, suffering and death. However, the poem can be read as exploring the possibility that we apply the word 'real' to the wrong world, and as bringing into question whether our normal waking state is not a kind of dream, less real than the visionary world the poet fleetingly encounters. The premise of this argument is founded on the understanding that the visionary world the poet has glimpsed is not the world of fantasy which we all experience through the daydreams of our egos, but an objective world the Sufis call *alami mithal*, 'the world of the image'. In the West, it is what medieval mystics referred to as the *mundus imaginalis*, and shamans from various traditional societies seem to refer to it when they speak of travelling in the dream world. The twentieth century Ibn 'Arabi scholar, Henry Corbin, called this higher reality the 'imaginal realm' and it has also been called the 'active imagination'. Mevlevi shaikh, Kabir Helminski, describes it as:

...a level of reality in which "meanings" are embodied as images which have a kind of autonomous existence. The imaginal world is an "interworld" in which visions, which are simultaneously meanings, are experienced by a psycho-spiritual faculty, the active imagination, or what Sufis would simply call the "heart." It is important to realize that this level of perception was reliably available only to those souls, which were to some extent "purified." In its mature functioning it was certainly not a conceptual, intellectual, or merely symbolic experience, but a visionary one of the kind that many Western psycho-spiritual explorers touch only rarely in their lives, but which is the natural medium of mature mystics.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://rumiscircle.com/2014/02/16/keats-ode-to-a-nightingale-in-light-of-rumi/>

[*The Knowing Heart*, 'Soul Loss and Soul Making']

Looking at the beginning of 'Ode to a Nightingale', it does not start how we might expect. We might expect the description of a garden or wood to set the scene. Instead we are presented with a state of mind, and in such a way are prepared for what is primarily an inner journey:

*My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains  
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,  
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains  
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk...*

It is significant that the ode opens with a pained heart longing for oblivion. Lethe is the river of forgetfulness, sleep and death, that flows into the darkness of Hades. The sense of aching emptiness, defeat and surrender in these lines may lead us to think that nothing very uplifting can follow. However, an acquaintance with these lines of Rumi might lead us to suspect otherwise:

The unsuspecting child first wipes the tablet  
and then writes the letters on it.  
God turns the heart into blood and desperate tears;  
then He writes the spiritual mysteries on it.

[*Mathnawi* II, 1826-27]

*In the Dark Places of Wisdom*, a book by the scholar of Greek, Peter Kingsley, describes how initiates into the Greek mysteries would lie

down in a cave or specially constructed place for incubation. They would do this in order to receive divine guidance. Kingsley describes how it was best to be in a desperate, hopeless state before entering incubation, because the initiate needed to be a kind of blank slate with no hopes or preconceptions and therefore fully receptive to whatever the Divine might bring. We know that Native American initiates do something similar, that Sufis and other mystics have also retreated into dark cells to receive illumination, and that the original function of the Egyptian pyramids may have been to provide a space for similar experiences (rather than functioning merely as burial chambers). The suppression of the physical senses seems to be instrumental, as does a shattering, desperate awareness of one's need and utter helplessness.

After having described his surrendered state, suddenly Keats is addressing a shadowy, mysterious presence:

*'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,  
But being too happy in thine happiness,—  
That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees,  
In some melodious plot  
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,  
Singest of summer in full-throated ease.*



The nightingale is introduced as a 'light-winged Dryad' (wood nymph) and, paradoxically, though it sings of summer, it resides in the darkness of 'shadows numberless'. Even more enigmatically, it is

singing in such deep shadows not because it is afraid of envy we are told, but because its joy is in some way too intense.

Commentators have generally fallen into two camps: those who interpret the nightingale as being a physical nightingale, and those who interpret it as a symbol in the conventional sense – i.e. a completely fictional representation of an abstract idea (art is often suggested). But there could be a third possibility: could Keats be describing an encounter in the imaginal realm?

The nightingale is a recurring image in Sufi poetry. For Rumi, the nightingale seems to represent the one who has transcended bitterness and who has been welcomed into intimacy with the sweetheart that is Allah:

When the heart has seen the sweetheart,  
how can it remain bitter?

When a nightingale has seen the rose,  
how can it keep from singing?

[*Mathnawi* VI, 2639]

Keats momentarily draws our attention away from the nightingale itself, however, to a thirst that he seems to associate with the bird; a thirst for an intoxicating drink that will allow him to join the nightingale in its ecstasy:

*O, for a draught of vintage! that hath been  
Cool'd a long age in the deep-delvèd earth,  
Tasting of Flora and the country-green,  
Dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth!  
O for a beaker full of the warm South,  
Full of the true, the blushful Hippocrene,  
With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,  
And purple-stainèd mouth;  
That I might drink, and leave the world unseen,  
And with thee fade away into the forest dim:*

Of course, the wine of spiritual intoxication is also an image central to Sufi poetry:

This heart of mine  
tugged at my collar  
and led me to the village  
of that Beloved of mine.  
When I drank the wine  
of that humble town,  
I unwound my turban  
and pawned even my shoes.  
As I gave up my intellect  
and took hold of Her ringlets,  
I got tangled in the curls She loosed –  
completely, beautifully entangled.  
Moment by moment the wine's taking over;  
see what my state has come to  
with such ancient wine.  
See what's happened to my mind.

[*Divani Shamsi Tabrizi*,

1413]

Keats' wine has been 'cool'd a long age' and has the humbleness of the earth. Rumi's wine is 'ancient' and drunk in a 'humble town'.

For Keats, the wine comes with a deluge of other associations too. It is a drink from Hippocrene, which for ancient Greeks was the fountain of poetic inspiration located on Mt Helicon, the place where the nine Muses live. In the Islamic tradition, there is the fountain of eternal life associated with Khidr, the mysterious spiritual guide, whom in turn we might equate with the Green Man of the West who brings spring in his wake. Keats' wine tastes of 'Flora and the county-green', Flora being the Roman goddess of spring and flowers. And then there is the association with the 'Provençal song' of the troubadours, the medieval poets who sang of chivalry and love in Provençal, Southern France, and who are now understood to have inherited much of their imagery (particularly the symbols of the nightingale and wine) from the Sufis (either via Muslim Spain or contact in the Middle East). So this heady surge of allusive imagery seems to be drawing Keats into a spiritual stream submerged deep within Western consciousness, rife with the imagery of spiritual intoxication.

Intriguingly, just as with the nightingale, there is a great deal of shadowy earthiness associated with the wine: 'the forest dim' and the cool of 'the deep delved earth' juxtapose images of 'sun-burnt mirth' and 'the warm South'. And when Keats associates the wine with dance, perhaps Flamenco naturally springs to mind; because that art form, at home in sun-drenched (Moorish) Spain, defines itself as being on a quest for *duende*, the dark energy of the earth.

Keats' ode explores this mysterious darkness further, but first he makes it clear that the nightingale he has encountered is of an immortal kind, for in the next stanza of his ode he contrasts its permanent state to the pitiful decay of everything in the material world. Still speaking to the nightingale, he says he wishes to...

*Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget  
What thou among the leaves hast never known,  
The weariness, the fever, and the fret  
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;  
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last grey hairs,  
Where youth grows pale, and spectre-thin, and dies;  
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow  
And leaden-eyed despairs;  
Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,  
Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow.*

Commentators who interpret Keats' nightingale as being a physical bird would seem to be on the wrong track, and we clearly sense in the lines above disillusionment with the sensual world in general. For Rumi, realization of the futility of purely earthly pleasures is an important step on the spiritual path:

People are distracted by objects of desire,  
and afterwards repent of the lust they've indulged,  
because they have indulged with a phantom  
and are left even farther from Reality than before.

[*Mathnawi* III, 2133-2134]

But Keats is disillusioned with thought too, which brings only 'sorrow' and 'despair'. He keenly felt the limitations of the rational mind, and

he aspired to a state in which one 'is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason' (he called this 'Negative Capability'). Rumi agrees: 'No matter how subtle the sleeper's thought becomes, his dreams will not guide him Home.' And he gives us these lines that may well offer us a key to understanding the real nature of Keats' nightingale:

While I am dwelling with you somewhere on earth,  
I am coursing above the seventh sphere, like Saturn.  
It's not I that is sitting beside you, but a shadow  
cast from a bird that flies above thought:  
because I have passed beyond thoughts,  
and have become a swift traveler farther on.  
I am the ruler of thought, not ruled by it,  
because the builder is ruler over the building.  
All creatures who are ruled by thought  
are aching in heart and mired in sorrow.  
I yield myself to thought purposely,  
but when I will I spring up from among them.  
I am a soaring hawk;  
thought is just a gnat:  
how should a gnat have power over me?  
I come down from those high currents,  
for the sake of those who need me.  
But when disgust at the coarseness of this lowly world seizes me,  
I soar up like *the birds who spread their wings*,  
not with feathers that have been glued on,  
but with these wings that have grown from my essence.

[*Mathnawi* II: 3555-3564]

Could Keats' nightingale be a glimpse of his own winged essence, or perhaps what the ancient Greeks might have termed his *daemon*? The rational mind can never really pin down or define what the *daemon* is. Perhaps, we can say that it is an inner divine guide, but also mysteriously our own higher self. Although Rumi is describing his own experience, he is also offering an esoteric

interpretation of the Quranic words: *the birds who spread their wings* (Surah al-Mulk 67:19).

Perhaps the spiritual identity that Keats has glimpsed can therefore be understood better through an acquaintance not only with Rumi, but also with the Quran.

Returning to Keats' ode, we find Keats plunging into ever more inviting shadows as he tracks the nightingale:

*Away! away! for I will fly to thee,  
Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,  
But on the viewless wings of Poesy,  
Though the dull brain perplexes and retards;  
Already with thee! tender is the night,  
And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,  
Cluster'd around by all her starry Fays;  
But here there is no light,  
Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown  
Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.*

*I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,  
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,  
But, in embalmèd darkness, guess each sweet  
Wherewith the seasonable month endows  
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;  
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;  
Fast-fading violets cover'd up in leaves;  
And mid-May's eldest child,  
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,  
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.*

Keats makes it clear that he is not describing the drunkenness of Bacchus, a self-indulgent drunkenness appealing to our lower nature. The intoxication for which Keats longs is of a higher order and goes hand in hand with 'Poesy'. Throughout the ages, mystics have expressed themselves in poetry, and the ancients with whom Keats identified understood that authentic poetry has a sacred origin and purpose. With its 'viewless wings', poetry is potentially a vehicle into the profound depths of the Unseen, where Truth and Beauty reside eternally with God.

Having entered 'the black core of the heart', a place from which his 'brain retards', Keats seems to sense through a kind of spiritual faculty, or by some heavenly insight. And having reached such a strangely blissful place, where even the flies seem to add to the beauty of the wine-filled roses, he wishes to die:

*Darkling I listen; and, for many a time  
I have been half in love with easeful Death,  
Call'd him soft names in many a musèd rhyme,  
To take into the air my quiet breath;  
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,  
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,  
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad  
In such an ecstasy!  
Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—  
To thy high requiem become a sod.*

In his penultimate stanza, Keats draws on the Bible to create what might be the most haunting image of the ode:

*Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!  
No hungry generations tread thee down;  
The voice I hear this passing night was heard  
In ancient days by emperor and clown:  
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path  
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,  
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;  
The same that ofttimes hath  
Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam  
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.*

The Book of Ruth tells the story of a Moabitess, Ruth, who marries a Israelite man. When her husband dies, her mother-in-law, Naomi, urges her to follow her heart and return to her own people if she wishes. However, having whole-heartedly embraced the God of the Torah and being devoted to Naomi, she refuses. They both return to Bethlehem where Ruth works with the reapers in the cornfields. She is a lonely outsider amid the other laborers, until her grace and

humility attracts the wealthy landowner, Boaz, to whom she is eventually married. What is interesting is that Ruth's homesickness can be interpreted in two ways. Superficially, we might assume it is longing for her native Moab. On a deeper level however, her longing is for her spiritual home; a home which is brought to her mind by the abundant sea of corn. Much as the corn is separated from the cornfield by the reapers, we have been separated from our spiritual home in the Unseen.

We might immediately think of the reed flute separated from the reed-bed at the beginning of Rumi's *Mathnawi*. In clinging to Naomi and the truth of the Torah, marrying Boaz and becoming the ancestor of David and Jesus, her course is set homeward.

The equating of the song of the nightingale to the song of longing felt in Ruth's heart, might lead us to view the nightingale's song as an ecstatic longing guiding us back to our spiritual home. Though Keats had little time for institutionalized religion and was no Christian in the conventional sense, we might sense in these lines an affirmation that the revelation of the prophets, in its pristine and uncorrupted state, calls to us in the core of our being, and that poetry is capable of coming from the same sacred source.

The words 'alien corn' might also have an uncanny association for the modern reader due to the phenomena of crop circles. Whether or not these are hoaxes, corn (and its reaping and removal) is a symbol that resonates within the human psyche at some deep and mysterious level.



Ruth in Boaz's Field, a painting by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld, 1828.

While the image of Ruth seems ripe with meaning, the image that follows of 'casements' on the sea can seem whimsical and frothy in comparison – perhaps deliberately so. A casement can be a case or a window – it holds something precious, or opens out onto something expansive. A Sufi might immediately think of the heart. The heart holds our precious essence and opens out like a window onto the ocean of the greater Self. At first glance, the ocean that Keats' casement floats on is 'perilous' and does not seem like a loving expanse of Spirit at all. However, we might conclude that it is the 'foam' that is dangerous here and not necessarily the depths.

For Rumi, the foam of the ocean represents material phenomena, beyond which there is a vast spiritual sea. Not being able to see beyond the foam is the real cause of our sorrow:  
The grief of the dead isn't because of death;  
no, it's because they focused on phenomenal forms  
and didn't perceive that these are only the foam,  
moved and fed by the Sea.

[*Mathnawi* VI, 1454-1455]

Within the depths of the sea, duality disappears and we discover the reality of Oneness. 'Dissolve in the being who is everything' Rumi urges us, just as Keats longs to 'dissolve' with the nightingale.

In Keats' poem, this foam is associated with 'faery lands forlorn'. In modern times the word 'forlorn' has come to mean lost or lonely. However, it originally carried the meaning of lost in a moral or spiritual sense – i.e. spiritually depraved. Fairies, of course, are thought to be capable of malice, to sometimes trap human beings in the fantasies of their egos. Whatever the nature of the 'casements', they may be in danger if they open amid the foam and the faery.

It is unclear what the relationship of the nightingale's song is to the danger. The nightingale is described as charming the casements – this could mean it offers a protective charm against the danger they may be in. Keats might be suggesting that the song of the nightingale, the song from the authentic depths of our being, rescues us from the superficiality of the foam and the faery. Yet there is an element of ambiguity – the nightingale's song could be part of the danger. After all, without the guidance of a mature mystic, how can we be absolutely sure that we have not mistaken the active imagination for the fancy of the ego? And even if our heart has experienced a genuine vision, how can we absorb our experience without our egos becoming inflated by it? Can Keats be sure the nightingale is not leading him into error? His poem 'La Belle Dame sans Merci' might be an exploration of making just such an error; its bleak refrain, 'And no birds sing', sets it very much apart from 'Ode to a Nightingale' however.

On a deep level, Keats seems persuaded by the benevolence of his nightingale. He seems to sense that he has tasted the possibility of an expanded self in their encounter, because he begins his final stanza by confessing that their parting will mean a return to his 'sole self'. We might notice, too, how their parting seems to be brought about by his having mentioned the 'forlorn' in the same breath as the angelic bird:

*Forlorn! the very word is like a bell  
To toll me back from thee to my sole self!*

*Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well  
As she is famed to do, deceiving elf.  
Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades  
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,  
Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep  
In the next valley-glades:  
Was it a vision, or a waking dream?  
Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?*

The 'fancy' that is a 'deceiving elf' has generally been understood by commentators to be the imagination, which is equated with the mere fancy of the ego. The conventional interpretation is that Keats is admitting that his vision of the nightingale is unreal. However, perhaps the 'deceiving elf' he refers to is actually the ordinary waking state which denies reality to the visions of the imaginal realm.

Keats can be understood as celebrating the fact that ordinary waking consciousness cannot triumph completely and sometimes a higher reality breaks through, even if we cannot hold onto it for long. Certainly, he at least holds this open as a possibility in the double-headed questioning of the final lines. If we have never experienced the imaginal realm, or heard or hoped of its existence, we might be tempted to brush past Keats' question, to assume it is there merely for poetic effect, to stress the intensity of his fantasy. For if we take him seriously, our whole conception of reality may need turning on its head.

Rumi, however, insists on just such a shake-up. He might have answered Keats with these lines:

He has caused what is non-existent to appear magnificently existent,  
while the truly existent He has caused to appear as non-existent.  
He has hidden the Sea, yet made the foam visible;  
He has concealed the Wind, but displayed the dust.

[*Mathnawi* V, 1024-1025]

As for the imaginal realm: could it be the 'wide expanse' that Rumi describes for us below?

Stir a little like the fetus that you may be given  
the senses to behold the Light.

Then you will leave this womb-like world  
and go from the earth into a wide expanse.  
Know that the saying, “*God’s earth is wide,*”  
refers to that spacious region where the saints are at home.  
The heart isn’t weighed down in that spaciousness:  
there the fresh boughs of the palm tree  
don’t become dry and brittle.  
Right now you bear the burden of your senses:  
You grow weary, exhausted, and stumble.  
When you sleep, you’re carried aloft;  
your fatigue falls away, and your burden,  
your pain and anguish, are taken from you.  
Consider your sleep as just a taste  
of that state in which the saints are soaring.

[*Mathnawi* I: 3180-3186]

Again, Rumi’s wisdom is based on the Qur’an and the words ‘God’s earth is wide’ are a direct quotation from *Surah Az-Zumar* (39:10). The Arabic word for ‘earth’ used in the Qur’an is *wardu* and the linguistic root from which it derives also contains the following meanings: ‘a place for abiding’, ‘to be patient’ and ‘a tremor arising from a relaxed state’. The Arabic word for ‘wide’ used in the Quran is *wasi’atun* and its linguistic root gives us ‘to comprehend’ and also one of God’s names, the All-Comprehending (*Al-Wasi’*). Could we therefore understand ‘God’s earth is wide’ as: ‘The God-given place, where we patiently abide and feel tremors of ecstasy, is the place where we truly comprehend’? Such a place is where the saints abide continuously Rumi tells us.

To conclude, rather than describing a desperate flight from reality, Keats’ ode may well be describing a desperate flight *into* Reality. We can read his ode as proposing the existence of a spiritual realm veiled from normal waking consciousness, and we might turn to Rumi, Sufism and the Qur’an if we want to confirm its existence. Keats was only 23 when he wrote his ode. In another two years he would succumb to tuberculosis, but in his brief life he challenged the increasing materialism of his day and its assumptions (assumptions which have taken root even more firmly in our own time). For him the world was the ‘Vale of Soulmaking’, and so, like Rumi, he inspires us

to set about the work of making a soul and perceiving the reality of Spirit.<sup>10</sup>

Keats final stanza implies, however, that the nightingale's song provides a cathartic experience that, in reality, acts as a source of poetic inspiration. As the nightingale's song fades away, he cries,

“Forlorn! the very word is like a bell to toll me back from thee to my sole self! Was it a vision, or a waking dream? Fled is that music:—do I wake or sleep?”

Although Keats laments his inability to express his emotions with the ease of the nightingale, as he wakes from his slumber under the influence of the nightingale, he finds himself having written an ode of almost equal poetic power as the nightingale's song. The ode encapsulates the frustration behind writing a compelling poem, his fears of mortality, and the connection between poesy and immortality. His experience with the nightingale is cathartic, as though the legacy of Philomela's suffering eased his own pains. Keats distances the literal connection of the raped girl to the bird and blurs the general pathos of the song with his own sorrow. Keats has effectively deconstructed the symbolism of the nightingale, repurposing her as a useful trope to express his own anguish.<sup>11</sup>

## What is left to say?

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<sup>10</sup> *The Knowing Heart*, by Kabir Helminski, Shambhala Publications  
*The Pocket Rumi*, translated by Kabir and Camille Helminski, Shambhala Publications  
*The Rumi Daybook*, translated by Kabir and Camille Helminski, Shambhala Publications  
*Jewels of Remembrance*, translated by Kabir and Camille Helminski, Shambhala Publications  
*Love's Ripening: Rumi on the Heart's Journey*, translated by Kabir Helminski and Ahmad Rezwani, Shambhala Publications  
*In the Dark Places of Wisdom*, by Peter Kingsley, Element Books

<sup>11</sup> The Flight of the Nightingale: From Romans to Romantics Kevin Patrick Milewski College of Arts and Science, Vanderbilt University,  
<http://vurj.vanderbilt.edu/index.php/vurj/article/viewFile/3767/1875>

**The nightingale is a symbol of beauty, immortality, and freedom from the world's troubles. Nightingales are known for singing in the nighttime, hence the name. In Greek and Roman myth, the nightingale also alludes to the Philomel (Philomela), whose tongue was cut out to prevent her from telling about her rape, and who was later turned into a nightingale by the gods to help her escape from death at the hands of her rapist.<sup>12</sup>**

This wonderful bird. Overlooked by most yet enshrined in our culture by those sensitive to hear its plaintive tune, we have engaged in true anthropomorphic projections that express our deepest longings. Yet the Greek culture has seen its darker side projected as well with the gods interfering with the affairs of men and forever giving us the plaintive pleasure of her song as a plea from the depths of her ethical wish to expose her sister's perpetrator.

From Rumi we hear how she allows us to fill our imaginal space and resist the tragic poet's (Keats) view of the sublime, love and death.

In the transformation on our deeper selves as we become aware of all aspects of our lives, the longing and yearning, the pining and desire for wholeness and peace are represented anthropomorphically by these wonderful creatures, and for me, none more so than this precious little bird.

I am moved most by the Chinese tale. The emperor's settling for the mechanical nightingale is emblematic for our modern desire to replicate

What is pure and natural for what is reliable predictable, safe and lifeless, a machine.

Worse, the metaphor based on the greek plays suggesting murder rape and betrayal have echoed into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>12</sup> The Nightingale in Greek and Latin Poetry ,Albert R. Chandler, *The Classical Journal* Vol. 30, No. 2 (Nov., 1934), pp. 78-84

The Nachtigall Battalion (English: Nightingale Battalion), also known as Ukrainian Nightingale Battalion Group (German: *Bataillon Ukrainische Gruppe Nachtigall*), officially known as Special Group Nachtigall, was the subunit under command of the German Abwehr special operations unit Lehrregiment "Brandenburg" z.b.V. 800. Along with the Roland Battalion it was one of two military units formed February 25, 1941 by head of the Abwehr Wilhelm Franz Canaris, which sanctioned the creation of the "Ukrainian Legion" under German command. It was composed of volunteer "ukrainian nationalists," Ukrainian operating under Stephan Bandera's OUN orders.

In Germany, in November 1941 the Ukrainian personnel of the Legion was reorganized into the 201st Schutzmannschaft Battalion. It numbered 650 persons which served for one year at Belarus before disbanding.

Many of its members, especially the commanding officers, went on to the Ukrainian Insurgent Army and 14 of its members joined SS-Freiwilligen-Schützen-Division «Galizien» in spring 1943.

The Simon Wiesenthal Center contends that between June 30 and July 3, 1941, in the days that the Battalion was in Lviv the Nachtigall soldiers together with the German army and the local Ukrainians participated in the killings of Jews in the city. The pretext for the pogrom was a rumor that the Jews were responsible for the execution of prisoners by the Soviets before the 1941 Soviet withdrawal from Lviv. The Encyclopedia of the Holocaust states that some 4,000 Jews were kidnapped and killed at that time. It further states that the unit was removed from Lviv on July 7 and sent to the Eastern Front.<sup>13</sup>

The Polish side contends that members of the Nazi-led Nachtigall battalion also participated in the massacres of Polish professors,

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<sup>13</sup> Gutman, Israel. "Nachtigall Battalion". *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*. Macmillan Publishing Company: New York, 1990

including the ex-Polish Prime minister Kazimierz Bartel, Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński and others, in Lwów in 1941. See Massacre of Lviv professors.<sup>14</sup>

The rage and murderous human spirit lives on, the use and abuse of the nightingale lives on too.

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.alfreddezayas.com/Chapbooks/Lembergmassacre.shtml>