A TRIAL READING OF NEŞATİ’S
TALEB GHAZAL

By Mehmet Kalpaklı

Before doing any further work on an Ottoman poem, it is important to establish a text. Yesterday several speakers asked the question, “What is the text?” My short answer to that question is that the text is (in our case) a reading that comes as close as we can make it to what the poet might have composed. So if we are to deal with Ottoman poetry, we need to be prepared, in so far as possible, to put ourselves in an Ottoman poet’s place.

In this particular situation, we know that this poem was written by a seventeenth-century poet named Neşatî. We also know that the poet was a mystic. Therefore, in approaching the taleb ghazal, we have two pre-considerations: first, the sebk-i hindi—the “Indian style” that was popular at the time—and second, tasavvuf or the science, practice, and rhetorical universe of mysticism. Before I go into more detail about the “Indian style” I would like to summarize its basic characteristics in a brief list: ambiguity, exaggeration (hyperbole), it was imaginative, speculative, creating new words and similes, it was characterized by association of words and meanings, by multiple meanings, and by mysticism.

In the Indian style (or “school”) ambiguity runs so deep that it often appears that the poem will be understandable only to the poet himself. Sheikh Galib, a famous poet of this style says:

Ol şâ’ir-i kem-yâb benim kim Ğâlib
Maźmûnlarımı anlamamak ayb olmaz
Yektâ güher-i gayb-i hüviyyettir hep
Gavvâs-i khured behre-ver-i gayb olmaz

I am that poet rare and seldom seen, Galib,
There is no shame in failure to comprehend my conceits,
Each is a unique pearl from Being’s mysterious deep,
And the diver of intellect has no luck in that mystery.1

As we know, the Indian style is named after the Persian poets, most writing in the palaces of India, who developed a rather hermetic style of poetry which included new and difficult to understand conceits (mazmûn) and delicate, intricate

imagery that went beyond the bounds of the traditional system. In this style, meaning or sense was more significant than the word. In the earlier, classical style, play with words often took precedence over meaning. In the Indian style, association came to the fore as a principle. However, these associations were often obscure to the reader, seeming to exist within a chaos decipherable only by the poet. The new conceits were generally created out of abstractions. For this reason it is quite difficult to unravel the conceits, to establish relations among meanings. As the imagery deepens, hyperbole increases. As individual words are loaded with more and more meanings, more is expressed in fewer words. In its Ottoman branch, the foundational topic is mysticism and mystical knowledge (irfan, gnosis). The everyday and mystical meanings of words are used together and this gives the poetry an increased profundity—and, naturally, gives us critics increased problems and confusion.

The Indian style begins to be seen in Ottoman poetry especially after the time of Nef'i (d. 1635). Because Nef'i selected (the Persian, Indian style poet) 'Urfi as his model and master, he employed the peculiarities of that style in his poetry. Without doubt, the greatest representative of the Ottoman Indian style was Sheikh Galib (d. 1799). It is with sufi poets such as Sheikh Galib that the Ottoman school of Indian style poetry came into prominence. In the Ottoman school virtually all of the poets were mystics (sufis) and, for this reason, most all the poetry produced by this school is mystical poetry. In addition, in order to create new meanings they used the Persian vocabulary of their repertoire in (Persian) compounds that their Iranian counterparts themselves did not use (for example, the germ-rev compound in the Na‘ili poem). Therefore, when we are doing a critical reading of poets such as Cevri, Neşati, Na‘ili, Sheikh Galib, etc. who were each mystical poets, it is obligatory that we keep in mind the gnostic/mystical character of the Indian style in Ottoman poetry.

As in the example from Sheikh Galib’s poetry that I cited above, meaning is deep, profound. The same image occurs in our poet, Neşati:

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Demdir ey kıl-k-i Neşatî şevk ile ğavvâs olup
Zîb-ghan ol bahr-i ma’nâdan yine lûtûn çikar
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It is time, oh pen of Neşatî, that passion make of you a diver bring up pearls from the ocean of meaning and adorn (the world).

For this reason it is quite normal that there would be places in Neşati’s poetry to which we today could not assign a certain meaning. As a matter of fact, for people today all our old poetry is difficult. It appears almost impossible in today’s technological world to enter that imaginative universe, that atmosphere, to feel what that poet felt. Only we critical (scholarly) readers with our experience and methods are able to perceive (the sense of) those meaning-filled couplets by means of the associations—sound as we can make them, yet still unclear—created in our minds by the words from which they are produced. It is as though we were listening to a distant broadcast on an under-powered radio: we listen through the static, the

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moments of fading and clarity, and even, perhaps, take some pleasure in what we hear so imperfectly.

There are two important things about Neşati: first, he is a representative of the Ottoman Indian style school and even one of the leaders of that school; second, he is a sufi master and spent his life on the mystical path. Therefore, when attributing meaning to his ghazal, we must take these two characteristics into account. However, before going on to the ghazal, I would like to digress for a moment to the manuscripts and modern editions of Neşati’s divan.

Neşati’s divan exists in about twenty copies in various Turkish manuscript collections. I was only able to examine those in Istanbul libraries. Among these is the Millet Kütüphanesi manuscript which is claimed to be in Neşati’s own hand. However, the ghazal with the redif taleb (along with several other poems usually found in his divan) is not found among the very limited contents of this “poet’s copy” manuscript. As can be seen from the table below, of the nine manuscripts of Neşati’s divan in Istanbul libraries, only three contain the taleb ghazal.

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The first edition of this ghazal appeared in Sadettin Nüzhet Ergun’s work Neşati: Hayatı ve Eserleri (Istanbul, 1933). For many years no scholarly work had been done on Neşati and his works until, in recent years, Prof. İsmail Ünver’s popular introduction to Neşati’s life and edition of his works, including translations of some selected poems into modern Turkish, was published by the Ministry of Culture in 1986. The taleb ghazal was not one of the selected poems. In 1996 Mahmut Kaplan’s master’s thesis, The Edition of Neşati’s Divan, was published in Izmir.

Finally, there are five different versions of this ghazal in the three manuscripts and the Ergun and Kaplan editions. In these five version there are different readings of the first, second, and fourth couplets. Below I give the variants found in the manuscripts and the editions followed by my own proposed reading for each of the three couplets.

MS1: Süleymaniye Library ms.
MS2: Istanbul University Library ms.
MS3: Topkapı Palace Library ms.
SN: Sadettin Nüzhet Ergun’s reading
MK: Mahmut Kaplan’s reading
my: my reading
A TRIAL READING OF NEŞATİ’S TALEB GHAZAL

Couplet 1

MS1:
Gerd-i şad-gamla ki ālûde aḵar cûy-i taleb
Ola mî ‘aks-nūmā şâhid-i meh-rûy-i taleb

MS2:
Gerd-i şad-gamla ki ālûde aḵar cûy-i taleb
Ola mî ‘aks-nūmā şâhid-i meh-rûy-i taleb

MS3:
Gerd-i şad-gamla ki ālûde aḵar cûy-i taleb
Ola mî ‘aks-nūmā şâhid-i meh-rûy-i taleb

SN:
Gerd-i şad-gamla ki ālûde aḵar cûy-i taleb
Ola mî ‘aks-nūmâ şâhid-i meh-rûy-i taleb

MK:
Gerd-i şad-gamla ki ālûde aḵar cûy-i taleb
Ola mî ‘aks-nūmâ şâhid-i meh-rûy-i taleb

my:
Gerd-i şad-gamla ki ālûde aḵar cûy-i taleb
Ola mî ‘aks-nūmâ şâhid-i meh-rûy-i taleb

Couplet 2

MS1:
Pây-i dil âbile-dâr olmaz idi olmasa ger
Rîze-i seng-i elem ye’s ile pûr-gû-yi taleb

MS2:
Pây-i dil âbile-dâr olmaz idi olmasa ger
Rîze-seng-i elem-i ye’s ile pûr kûy-i taleb

MS3:
Pây-i dil âbile-dâr olmaz idi olmasa ger
Rîze-seng-i elem-i ye’s ile pûr kûy-i taleb

SN:
Pây-i dil âbile dâr olmaz idi olmasa ger
Rîze seng-i elem-i ye’sile pûrgû-yi taleb

MK:
Pây-i dil âbile dâr olmaz idi olmasa ger
Rîze-seng-i elem-i ye’sile pûr kûy-yi taleb

my:
Pây-i dil âbile-dâr olmaz idi olmasa ger
Rîze-seng-i elem-i ye’s ile pûr kûy-yi taleb

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Couplet 4

MS1:
Eylesün ‘aşk hemân himmet-i pâkin derkâr
İrişür menzile elbette tekâpû-yı taleb

MS2:
Eylesün ‘aşk hemân himmet-i pâkin dergâh/derkâr
İrişür menzile elbette tekâpû-yı taleb

MS3:
Eylesün ‘aşk hemân himmet-i pâkin derkâr
İrişür menzile elbette tekâpû-yı taleb

SN:
Eylesin ‘aşk hemân himmet-i pâkin dergâh
İrişir menzile elbette tekâpû-yı taleb

MK:
Eylesün ‘ışık hemân himmet-i pâkin derkâr
İrişir menzile elbetde tekâpû-yı taleb

my:
Eylesün ‘aşk hemân himmet-i pâkin derkâr
İrişir menzile elbette tekâpû-yı taleb

And my reading of the ghazal:

1 Gerd-i şad-gamla ki âlûde akar çûy-ı taleb
   Ola mı ‘aks-nûmâ şâhid-i meh-rûy-ı taleb

2 Pây-ı dil âbile-dâr olmaz idi olmasa ger
   Rîze-seng-i elem-i ye’s ile pûr küy-ı taleb

3 Yeter ey ye’s yeter hism ile bu çîn-i cebîn
   Tengdir havsala-i güse-i ebrû-yı taleb

4 Eylesün ‘aşk hemân himmet-i pâkin derkâr
   İrişir menzile elbette tekâpû-yı taleb

5 Şâh-ı ümmîd-i Neşâtî nice olsun sîrâb
   Bâğ-ı dilde katî âheste akar çûy-ı taleb

Translation and analysis of the ghazal:

The ghazal belongs to the Indian style. First of all, it has a redif (repeated element after the rhyme). The almost universal use of redif is common to Indian style poems, although it was used earlier (but far less frequently). Only in the Indian style did the redif become an obligatory element. The redif is a word that attracts the attention of the poet; it is a word that he wishes to expand upon. It is the focal point of the poem, the poem’s center. The whole poem develops from it and is interwoven with it. Redif is the subject-link between couplets and, thereby, provides the poem’s continuity. The redif taleb is used in its mystical/sufi sense. Taleb is one of the stages of the mystical path. He who “does” taleb has just set out
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on the path and begun to seek the “desired one” (matlub). That which is “desired” is Truth/reality (real reality). In sufism:

*talib* (seeker/desirer) . . . *matlub* (sought/desired) . . . *tales* (desire)
(traveler on the path) (end/destination of the path)

**Couplet 1**

When the stream of desire flows full of hundreds of griefs, how can it (the stream/mirror) reflect the moon-faced beloved of desire.

_The path of love is full of problems but we still have to pass along it to reach the Beloved (God)._
Couplet 3

Oh despair! Enough of this angry frown! Comprehension is narrow in the angle of desire’s eyebrows.

Couplet 4

If love only manifest its pure and holy effort, the one who wanders about with desire will certainly reach his goal (God).

The whole ghazal is full of hopelessness but here, in this couplet, Neşatı reminds us of the famous phrase “seek and you shall find.”

Couplet 5

How will the branch of Neşatı’s hope be full of sap. In the garden of the heart the stream of desire flows very slowly.

If you do not desire enough, how will you reach your goal?