

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 Neşati. 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 Gâlib
Maẓmûnlarımı anlamamak ayb olmaz
Yektâ güher-i ğayb-ı hüviyyettir hep
Gavvâs-ı khred behre-ver-i ğayb olmaz

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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 (*mazmun*) and delicate, intricate

¹ Walter G. Andrews, Najaat Black and Mehmet Kalpaklı, eds., *Ottoman Lyric Poetry: An Anthology* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), p. 148.

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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:

Demdir ey kilk-i Neşati şevk ile gavvâs olup
Zîb-bahş ol bahr-i ma'nâdan yine lûlû çıkar²

It is time, oh pen of Neşati, 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

² *Neşati Divanı*, ed. Mahmut Kaplan (Izmir: Akademi Kitabevi, 1996), p. 103 ghazal 22.

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.

1. Istanbul University Library	T.Y. 545	: f. 29b
2. Süleymaniye Library	Nafiz Paşa 942	: not in this MS
3. Süleymaniye Library	Halet Efendi 699	: not in this MS
4. Süleymaniye Liberyay	Darülmesnevi 417	: f. 27a
5. Topkapı Palace Library	Hazine 937/2	: not in this MS
6. Topkapı Palace Library	Hazine 958	: not in this MS
7. Topkapı Palace Library	Hazine 964/2	: f. 31a
8. Topkapı Palace Library	Revan 798/2	: not in this MS
9. Millet Library	Ali Emiri, manzum 449	: not in this MS

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.

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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

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Couplet 1

MS1:

Gerd-i şad-ğamla ki âlûde aqar cûy-ı taleb
Ola mı 'aks-nümâ şâhid-i meh-rûy-ı taleb

MS2:

Gerd-i şad-ğamla ki âlûde aqar cûy-ı taleb
Ola mı 'aks-nümâ şâhid-i meh-rûy-ı taleb

MS3:

Gerd-i şad-ğamla ki âlûde aqar cûy-ı taleb
Ola mı 'aks-nümâ şâhid-i meh-rûy-ı taleb

SN:

Gerd-i sad gamla ki âlûde akar cûy-ı taleb
Ola mı 'aks-i temâşâ-yi meh-i rûy-ı taleb

MK:

Gerd-i sad gamla ki âlûde akar cûy-ı taleb
Ola mı 'aks-i temâşâ-yı meh-i rûy-ı taleb

my:

Gerd-i şad-ğamla ki âlûde aqar cûy-ı taleb
Ola mı 'aks-nümâ şâhid-i meh-rûy-ı taleb

Couplet 2

MS1:

Pây-ı dil âbile-dâr olmaz idi olmasa ger
Rîze-i seng-i elem ye's ile pür-gû-yı taleb

MS2:

Pây-ı dil âbile-dâr olmaz idi olmasa ger
Rîze-seng-i elem-i ye's ile pür kûy-ı taleb

MS3:

Pây-ı dil âbile-dâr olmaz idi olmasa ger
Rîze-seng-i elem-i ye's ile pür kûy-ı taleb

SN:

Pây-ı dil âbile dâr olmaz idi olmasa ger
Rîze seng-i elem-i ye's ile pürgû-yi taleb

MK:

Pây-ı dil âbiledâr olmaz idi olmasa ger
Rîze-seng-i elem-i ye's ile pür kûy-ı taleb

my:

Pây-ı dil âbile-dâr olmaz idi olmasa ger
Rîze-seng-i elem-i ye's ile pür kûy-ı taleb

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 'ışk hemân himmet-i pâkin derkâr
İrişür menzile elbetde tekâpû-yı taleb

my:

Eylesün 'aşk hemân himmet-i pâkin derkâr
İrişür menzile elbette tekâpû-yı taleb

And my reading of the ghazal:

1 Gerd-i şad-ğamla ki âlûde açar cûy-ı taleb
Ola mı 'aks-nümâ şahid-i meh-rûy-ı taleb

2 Pây-ı dil âbile-dâr olmaz idi olmasa ger
Rîze-seng-i elem-i ye's ile pür kûy-ı taleb

3 Yeter ey ye's yeter huşm ile bu çîn-i cebîn
Tengdir havşala-i gûşe-i ebrû-yı taleb

4 Eylesün 'aşk hemân himmet-i pâkin derkâr
İrişür menzile elbette tekâpû-yı taleb

5 Şâh-ı ümmîd-i Neşâfî nice olsun sîrâb
Bâğ-ı dilde katı âheste açar cûy-ı taleb

Translation and analysis of the ghazal:

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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) . . . *taleb* (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.

Taleb (desire) is a moon-faced beloved. In the Indian style at least one part of the *izafet* (compound) making up the simile must be abstract as it is here. In the classical period of divan poetry, it was possible to understand the point of the simile (*vech-i teşbih*), but in the Indian style it is, for the most part, not possible. For example, in the classical period one most commonly has compounds such as *dendan-i durr* (pearl teeth) in which both terms are concrete. In the Indian style compounds most commonly resemble *dağ-i nedamet* (the scar of regret) in which one of the terms is abstract.

In this poem *taleb* has the mystical sense of "desire for God." The mystics have traditionally found a relation between the heart and a mirror. If you clean your heart of worldly matters and make it pure and shiny as a mirror, God will be reflected on it. The heart is a place where God appears (*dil nazargah-i celil-i ekberest*: the heart is the place where the glory of the Most Great becomes visible). It is possible to see the same image in many poems of the Indian style. But let me give another example from the same poet. In another ghazal with the redif *arzu* (also "desire"), Neşati says,

Olmaz Neşâtî şâhid-i ümmid rû-nüma
Şâf olmayınca âyine-i câm-î ârzû³

Oh Neşati, the beloved of hope does not show his face until the mirror (glass) of desire becomes pure and clean.

Couplet 2

The foot of the heart would not be covered with blisters if the path of desire were not full of pebbles of sorrow and despair.

In another ghazal, Neşati says:

Pây-i dil ile tayy olunur râhile-i 'aşk⁴
It is the foot of the heart on which we travel the path of love.

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

³ *Neşati Divanı*, ed. Kaplan, p. 143 ghazal 99.

⁴ *Neşati Divanı*, ed. Kaplan, p. 126 ghazal 67.

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, Neşati reminds us of the famous phrase "seek and you shall find."

Couplet 5

How will the branch of Neşati'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?