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IMADADDIN NASIMI

AND TURKIC ARTISTIC HERITAGE: THE NATURE OF SUCCESSION

IMADADDIN NASIMI Y EL PATRIMONIO ARTÍSTICO TURCO: LA NATURALEZA DE LA SUCESIÓN

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ABSTRACT

The relevance of Nasimi's contribution to Turkish and Azerbaijani literature is based on his capability to merge successfully Arabic, Persian, and Turkic cultural elements, turning him into one of the most important figures in medieval poetry. Despite the prominence of Persian and Arabic literature in the region, Nasimi stands out as an exceptional example of a poet who elevated his native Turkic language to the literary stage, thus filling a critical gap in the historical development of Turkic literature. The present study will debate Nasimi's contribution to the expansion of Turkish literature by using mysticism, philosophy, and love in a manner quite different from traditional literature and how in the course of doing so he helped bridge cultural gaps. Key findings reveal Nasimi's active role in the culturing of oral traditions and their adaptation to the broader Persian and Arabic context, positioning him as an important link in the development of the Turkish literary heritage. The aftermath of his work is immense and at the same time continues to shape the cultural identities of Turkey and Azerbaijan, further solidifying Nasimi's position as a foundational figure within the literature and culture of both countries.

Keywords: Turkic heritage, Hurufi movement, Cultural identity, Love and philosophy in poetry, Intercultural exchange in literature.

RESUMEN

La relevancia de la contribución de Nasimi a la literatura turca y azerbaiyana se basa en su capacidad para fusionar con éxito los elementos culturales árabes, persas y turcos, convirtiéndolo en una de las figuras más importantes de la poesía medieval. A pesar de la prominencia de la literatura persa y árabe en la región, Nasimi se destaca como un ejemplo excepcional de un poeta que elevó su lengua turca nativa al escenario literario, llenando así un vacío crítico en el desarrollo histórico de la literatura turca. El presente estudio analizará la contribución de Nasimi a la expansión de la literatura turca mediante el uso del misticismo, la filosofía y el amor de una manera bastante diferente de la literatura tradicional y cómo al hacerlo ayudó a salvar las brechas culturales. Los hallazgos clave revelan el papel activo de Nasimi en el cultivo de las tradiciones orales y su adaptación al contexto persa y árabe más amplio, posicionándolo como un vínculo importante en el desarrollo del patrimonio literario turco. Los impactos de su obra son inmensos y, al mismo tiempo, continúan dando forma a las identidades culturales de Turquía y Azerbaiyán, consolidando aún más la posición de Nasimi como figura fundamental dentro de la literatura y la cultura de ambos países.

Palabras clave: Herencia turca, Movimiento Hurufi, Identidad cultural, Amor y filosofía en la poesía, Intercambio intercultural en la literatura.

INTRODUCTION

Imadaddin Nasimi was a great 14th-century poet and thinker, whose influence on Turkic literature and mysticism is alive to this day. Born about 1369, executed in 1419, he is celebrated as one of the most important poets of his era, particularly associated with the Hurufi movement, which focused on mystical interpretations of Islam (Guliyeva, 2022). All his life was saturated with deep religiosity, and he is celebrated not only as a great artist but also as a martyr, persecuted because of his spiritual views. In 2019, Azerbaijan celebrated the 650th anniversary of his birth by announcing the Year of Nasimi as a sign of how long-lasting his work has been and culturally significant (Dessiatnitchenko, 2022). Nasimi is an ephesian poet with significant depth in spiritual searching, divine love, unity with the Divine, and complexities of human life. His most popular work, *The Garden of Secrets*, is an anthology of poems that enshrined his philosophical depth and spiritual musings into literature. His writing is characterized by intellectual ardor combined with lyrical elegance, merging religious thought with profound concern for human compassion. Despite the condemnation of his alleged “heretical” views, Nasimi was widely heard, especially among people who sought deeper spirituality (Guluzade, 2019). His works continue to inspire readers and scholars today, making him one of the leading figures in the literary history of Azerbaijan and the Turkic-speaking world in general. Thus, Imadaddin Nasimi stands as a colossus, representing the rich cultural heritage that has nurtured Turkic literature and spiritual thought. His life and works represent all the complexities of his era and continue to shape contemporary intellectual and artistic discourses (Tofiq, 2019).

On the other hand, the idea of succession in art traditions can be viewed from different positions: the issues of style succession, artistic movements, and the influence of early artists on contemporary practice. It reflects how each generation of artists reacts to and continues from the previous generation, furthering a continuum in the evolution of art. Artistic succession is a movement that emerges as a response to the strict conventions exerted on artists. Artists wanted to break free from shackles to seek newer and greater artistic freedom. They also aimed at the establishment of new aesthetic principles (Ashrafi et al., 2023). The Vienna Secession, for example, created an exhibition society with its series of exhibitions for experimental works that were rejected by conventional salons. It shows how this wider pattern of succession works: every new generation resets the boundaries of art -both inspired and constrained by what has gone before. This is an example of artistic succession that is also moulded by the

historical and cultural environment in which this succession takes place (Cherkasov, 2024; Pereda, 2019).

Many a time, artists reflect the socio-political landscape of their times to create styles and movements. One good example of how this spiritual teaching and tradition is passed down visually is the idea of Apostolic Succession in religious art, influencing the way sacred themes are represented across generations. This could also be applied to secular art -legacies of past artists shape the stylistic and thematic choices of contemporary creators. Another dimension of succession, in art, may be termed visual succession. It is a general history of the shifting techniques and tastes over time in one medium or another. It's when certain themes or methods from previous works get re-envisioned by later ones, thereby creating an in totality accumulated but always evolving visual vocabulary. The study of this type of cause-and-effect in art will show how earlier works influence new interpretations and representations of art. That way, artistic succession refers to the transmission, transformation, and adaptation that the creative legacies of predecessors have undergone. This permanent circulation between past and present is enriching the artistic tradition and propelling continuous reinvention for the future of artistic expression (Becher, 2019).

Although the works of Imadaddin Nasimi have been widely given due attention regarding their contribution to mystical poetry and the Hurufi movement, the analysis of his influence on the artistic and literary succession is significantly incomplete. Most works referred to his style and spiritual themes, but not much was discussed about how his works had a direct influence on succeeding generations of poets and artists. In particular, it lacks the more sophisticated and detailed investigation of how his innovative use of the Turkish language could further influence later literary and artistic praxis and in what respect his mystical approach to languages and letters did influence the very course of the evolution of an artistic movement beyond poetry into other areas of artistic expression such as calligraphy or visual arts. Because of this, this paper will aim to briefly analyze the concept of succession in the work of Imadaddin Nasimi, exploring how his ideas and literary style influenced later generations of artists and writers.

DEVELOPMENT

Traditionally, all civilizations evolved around certain interlinked centers, thus determining the further development of humankind through an uninterrupted chain of succession throughout the history of human culture. One torchbearer was the great Azerbaijani poet of international recognition from Shamakhi – Imadaddin Nasimi – a

herald of universal Love and Dignity, who dared to compare Man to the Creator! The 600th anniversary of Nasimi's birth was celebrated under the auspices of UNESCO in 1973. That year, Azerbaijani scholars were very active, publishing, and sometimes even republishing, research on Nasimi, and subsequently new academic publications appeared and many anniversary publications were also released. In 2017, UNESCO marked the 600th anniversary of the poet's death. Simultaneously, the Institute of Literature named after Nizami Ganjavi in the Azerbaijani National Academy of Sciences (ANAS) successfully held the International Conference entitled "All the World of Nasimi in the Arms of the Universe," dedicated to the poet. Subsequently, the year 2019 was declared as the "Year of Nasimi" in Azerbaijan. Initial celebrations started at the end of 2018, with the Nasimi Festival held in Azerbaijan (28-30 September 2018) and a scientific conference held in Moscow. The solemn opening ceremony of a new monument dedicated to the great poet also took place that year.

The timeless reputation of Nasimi was partially shaped by his personality, which had absorbed the best of the culture and academia of his age and before, thanks to the poet's rich contacts. Below are lines from a ghazal of Nasimi:

"...I was the one who told the secret of burning hills.
I was the bright fire's Abraham. I'm Moses and Imran.
I'm Jesus, Alexander, and the water that gives life..."
(Nasimi, 2014)

Nasimi managed to transfer to future generations the power of the Word and its Letters.

"I'm the Holy Book, its letters, he to whom God spoke.
The word, the one who spoke it, and the argument I am..."
(Nasimi, 2014)

His noble mission was to mediate and disseminate ideas throughout the world as the Great Messiah. Thanks to his beautiful poetry, we can now understand Nasimi's perception of everything surrounding him; the Universe...

"Both worlds within my compass come,
but this world cannot encompass me...
Because in me, both earth and heaven
and Creation's 'Be!' were found..."
(Nasimi, 2014)

But, can something beautiful come into being suddenly from nothing? Undoubtedly, these gems of poetry were the product of a long evolutionary path, founded in the depths

of Turkic consciousness, which had remained unintegrated for several centuries, thereby forcing the poet's predecessors to create via an alien linguistic system. Having been discarded as worthless, Turkic poetry could not be recited in the palaces of alien rulers, whereas Nasimi developed his talent, founded upon the cultural heritage coming from the ancient traditions of oral dastans, and epic sagas like the Book of Dede Gorgud. He referred substantively to the works of both Persian-speaking luminaries, such as Nizami and Khagani, and the Arabic-speaking Azerbaijani poets of the 8th – 11th centuries. With the spread of Islam and the entry of Azerbaijan into the orbit of Arab-Muslim civilization, when the Arabic language – the language of the Quran – became a supranational means of communication among the peoples of the Caliphate, every individual became a representative of two or three cultures – his own, Arabic and Persian. Nevertheless, pre-Islamic Turkic heritage, the native verbal fabric of the narrative of Turkic peoples, was interwoven within the texture of foreign languages, decorating Arabic and Persian verses with the incidental speckles of Turkic dialects, including proverbs, aphorisms, refrains, references, etc. In subsequent centuries, the existing traditions of the Turkic peoples carefully evolved, and the continuity of Turkic poetry was ensured.

Despite the deepest divisions in society occurring after the adoption of Islam, resulting in the separation between the elite and the people, also present in literature, popular traditions continued to live on, albeit orally, feeding classical poetry with individual elements. Distinctive features of Turkic versification can be found in the classical Arabic poetry of the Umayyad period, especially in Abbasid poetry (8th and 9th centuries) where rhyme is almost imperceptible amidst the natural, smooth flow of words, where verses sound freely like prose. For added fluency, poets used the technique known as takreer, being the repetition of individual words within a verse. This is one of the key techniques used in the Book of Dede Gorgud, where the texts are akin to poems written in runic verse. The occasional use of proverbs is part of the pre-Islamic tradition of the Turkic peoples. The same trait can be found in the works of Nasimi:

"Only the one who has experienced the pain of parting
Knows the true value of meeting"

or:

"One cannot appreciate a face
Without comprehending the beauty"

(Azizova, 2019)

For example, the literary form of *takhallus*, unnatural to Arabic poetry and dating back to 779 (the end of the Damascus Umayyads), only appeared in Farsi in the 10th century. The tradition of using pen names by poets has been known in all forms of poetry, becoming a canonical way to complete a verse written in ghazals, which had been detached from the Arabic form of the poem known as *qasida*, becoming an independent form of classical Oriental literature. Nasimi regularly used *takhallus* forms in his poems:

“Who does not know the secrets of Nasimi,
He does not know the secrets of the worthiest Naimi”

or:

“Come, Ali, trust me with your secrets about the love of
your beloved one and about meeting her.

Ali! You are the essence of truth;

because you are courage – the dignity of truth.

As the letter ‘b’ with a dot under it, so you are forever inseparable from truth.

Oh, Ali! All things fade in front of her face.

For her, be happy, while the rivals will

Perish from sadness”

or:

“Imad! If, one day, your goal

Passes along your street – this is your hour.

Follow her – because she is a guest”

(Azizova, 2019)

The trilingualism of Nasimi is evident in his *divans* written in Farsi and Turkish and two ghazals in Arabic, included in the *Divan*, published in 1844. In 2014, Esra Kuru published the *muwashshahs* of Nasimi in *The Journal of Academic Social Science* (Kuru, 2014). The *muwashshahs* of Nasimi need further research, but it is important to remember that he was fluent in three languages, and thus we are dealing with a single author. According to the Orientalist Yevgeny Bertels, “the division of literature into Persian, Arabic, and Turkish is purely arbitrary, for the subject matter, as well as the external forms, remain the same. The only difference is the language (Bertels, 1988)”. Is this not a reasonable explanation of the connections between Nasimi’s masterpieces? As with his predecessors, the poet skillfully utilized the entire set of available literary tools at his disposal, including proverbs and idioms generally found in colloquial speech and folklore. Having been intricately interwoven into the fabric of Arab-Muslim literature by Nasimi’s literary

forebears, they had become an integral part of his poetic legacy.

According to Abdulazal Demirchizadeh, an Azerbaijani linguist: “Nasimi used to write ghazals, *qasidas*, *masnawi*, *fakhriya*, and *rubai* using the main elements of the *aruz* metrical system, utilized in all poetic forms of his time. He even created verses that are very close to a syllabic *heja* system. Therefore, his works rank among the richest and most remarkable works in Azerbaijani literature (Demirchizade, 1973)”. The Arabic poetry of the 11th century also contains similar examples, such as the *Qasida-i Tantarani* by Muinaddin Abu Nasr Ahmed bin Abd ar-Razzag Maraghi, who managed in Arabic to use the poetic figures of certain graphic patterns and stanzas similar to Turkic folk rhythms.

We can see a deep connection and continuity of the centuries-old traditions rooted in common Turkic culture, and an intimate relationship between poetry and oral folklore, which later resulted in ghazals, *rubai*, and *tuyugs*. According to Bertels, such a relationship was unique to the poetry written in the Turkic languages. We attempted to examine how native elements were integrated into foreign culture over the centuries. Only a poet who could fluently speak his native language and later tried to transplant all its nuances into an alien culture could achieve this level of expertise. Otherwise, it is impossible to explain the masterpieces of Nasimi written in his native language. The oeuvre of Nasimi is the product of long literary development.

Nasimi’s masterpieces written in his Turkic language are indicative of historic evolution. It would be correct to say that the Azerbaijani people erected the first literary monuments to Love. It was only the giant classical authors of Azerbaijani literature, including Nasimi’s predecessors, such as Nizami and Khagani, who created epic and lyrical pieces of poetry that were distinctive in their splendor, greatness, and rebellion. That is why Nasimi reached heights not only as a poet but also as a philosopher. According to his greatest teachers, Love, if sincere and encompassing, denounces (*fana’a*) the identity of a human being, his ego, dissolving it in the being of the Creator (God).

The conclusion made by the greatest master, Ibn al-Arabi (1165-1240), is simple and in harmony, not only with his era but omnipresent across all epochs of humanity: love is the cause and driving force of the Universe. Nothing will exist without Love. Love, in its perfect form, makes an individual immortal. Is this the secret of Nasimi’s immortality? The Almighty sent a man to earth to earn Love and be loved as much as he knew how to Love.

The highest value of human personality is creativity, which is accompanied by Love, being comparable to the creativity of the Creator, who created man with Love. Human creativity is akin to that of the Almighty, which later led to the deification of Man and the unity of Man and God through poetry, for one can only reach God through poems. The leading 12th-century Azerbaijani poet Nizami Ganjavi believed that the poet hid the key to the treasury in his mouth. God – Individual – Creativity (words, letters) are all on the same plane, shaping the foundation of true being (Truth). Many medieval thinkers and knights of the pen made considerable efforts to interpret the symbolism of the idea and the universal mysteries hidden in literature. However, Nasimi focused not on the literal symbolism of Hurufism, but on its deep essence. He adopted it as a school of high morality and spirituality and as a guide to civic behavior. Thus, the concept of Hurufism on the elevation of an ideal person to divine heights (the Man as God) was manifested in sparkling colors in the magical prism of Nasimi's works. Therefore, the concept of the incarnation of the Creator (Ənə-l-haqq – "I am the Truth") is a pivotal line of the Hurufi philosophy, which does not deny Love, but makes it dependent on prophetic letters and sounds. The works of Nasimi contain a universal dimension, replete with humanistic ideas, inspiring men to be elevated as both earthly and spiritual beings.

CONCLUSIONS

Imadaddin Nasimi's impact on Turkish art and literature is undeniable and nowadays it is considered one of the most important figures in the cultural landscape of both Turkey and Azerbaijan. His masterful use of Turkish, Persian, and Arabic in his poetry showed not only skill in these languages but also bridged cultural divides. Besides being fully in the vortex of the Hurufi movement, Nasimi opened a new dimension to Turkish literature and gave intellectual and spiritual impetus to a few poets who achieved such feats. For this reason, the Azerbaijani government declared 2019 the "Year of Nasimi", hence showing his relevance to the present time and appreciation of his artistic legacy. Nasimi merged love, philosophy, and mysticism in such a way that his works rated him as one of the most popular and influential poets in the history of Turkish literature.

His works represent an important element in a chain of successive development and artistic heritage of the Turks. Being in the thick of centuries-long Turkic tradition, his works at the same time represent an insertion of borrowings from other cultures into it, which is a striking example of the development and adaptation of Turkish literature. As scholars like Bertels have pointed out, the

intimate relation that Nasimi's poetry had with oral folklore brings into relief the specific character of the poetry in the Turkic languages and its function of preserving elements of autonomy even when expressed in foreign languages. The masterpieces of Nasimi, written in his native Turkic language, stand as a testimony to the historical evolution of Turkish literature and its capability for the monumental creation of love, philosophy, and rebellion. Through his work, Nasimi not only preserved traditional Turkic forms of literature but also went on to extend them, leaving behind a legacy that continues right up to this day to spur and inspire Turkish and Azerbaijani cultural identity.

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