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The Poet Nef'ī, Fresh Persian Verse, and Ottoman Freshness

Scholars have generally recognized the Ottoman poet Nef'ī (d. 1635) for his refinement of the panegyric in Turkish and his skill in its unflattering twin, the invective. They have thus paid little attention to the fact that he composed poems in Persian, and sufficient to compile a collection of them, simply viewing his output as a byproduct of his taste for the fresh style emanating from the East, particularly India, with no consideration of other factors at play. The article addresses this contextual gap by situating Nef'ī's engagement with the fresh style in relation to wider efforts at poetic renewal and also to literati disputes about the extent to which the fresh style and other currents from the East ought to be adopted and assimilated, in which differing formal and generic preferences, as well as linguistic and rhetorical concerns, were central. The article ultimately suggests that Nef'ī's overall work should be seen as part of those wider efforts that also aimed at making Ottoman practice distinctively fresh.

Keywords: Nef'ī; Persian Poetry; Ottoman Poetry; Fresh Style; Poetic Renewal; Form and Genre; Language and Rhetoric

Introduction

با فیض کمال نرسد فیضی و عرفی
گرچه نه ز هند و نه ز شیراز و خجندم
خاقانی روم که به تمکین معانی
در مملکت هند و عجم لرزه فکندم

Fayzī and 'Urfī came not with the grace of my Perfection [Kamāl],
Even though I'm not from India or Shiraz, or Khujand.
I'm Sovereign [Khāqānī] of Rūm, who by force of meaning
Spread tremor in the realms of India and Persia.¹

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¹Nef'ī, *Farsça Divan* (2000), 55.

So claims Nef'î (d. 1635) in a *ghazal* probably composed sometime after 1606, when he had settled in Istanbul. It would be easy to dismiss his assertion of native talent and its far-reaching seismic effect as sheer braggadocio, for Nef'î, like other Ottoman poets, routinely and favorably measured themselves against past masters of the Persian poetic tradition, a patrimony in their view. But unlike his peers' habit of expressing their worth in Turkish, Nef'î stakes his claim in Persian and, as standards of measure, privileges two recent poets, Fayzî of Agra (d. 1595) and 'Urî of Shiraz (d. 1591), known for their efforts at stylistic renewal of the tradition. Also, in recognition of how much of their efforts were in dialogue with their predecessors' work, Nef'î makes reference to a pair, Kamâl of Khujand, Ḥāfîz's contemporary, and Khāqānî of Shirvan, a poet from the twelfth century, with plays on the meanings of their pen names as indicated in the translation.

That a poet in Istanbul would be so preoccupied with Persian verse at a time when Turkish as a literary language, with a canon of poetic models, was firmly established in the Ottoman realms attracted the attention of Heshmat Moayyad, who between 2002 and 2003 published a series of articles in *Iranshenasi* under the heading "Turkân-i Pârsî-gûy," the last of which he devoted to Nef'î. Regarding this "Persian-speaking Turk," Moayyad observed that "the sway of the poetic language and tradition of Iranians is clearly visible," while acknowledging there are "phrases and compounds" peculiar to him.² Moayyad's assessment was based on the 1853 print edition of Nef'î's *divan*, on a number of poetic fragments that can be read strictly as Persian from *qaşîdas* largely composed in Turkish and a lone *ghazal* completely in Persian that is cited first as exemplary of Nef'î's "Persian mind and speech."³

In fact, Nef'î was sufficiently skilled in Persian to compile a *divan* of poems exclusively in the language, the earliest extant manuscript copy dating to 1620.⁴ Moayyad was unaware, however, that Nef'î had a Persian *divan* to his name, since he relied on old scholarship, especially *A History of Ottoman Poetry* by E. J. W. Gibb, who made no mention of such a collection; a print edition, produced by Mehmet Atalay, only appeared in 2000, a few years before the publication of Moayyad's article.⁵ And since then just a small number of studies have dealt with Nef'î's Persian *divan*, looking at individual poems.⁶ One reason for the scholarly neglect is the priority accorded to Nef'î's impact on the development of the panegyric *qaşîda* in Turkish, as well as of its unflattering twin, the invective or *hijâ*.⁷ A more pervasive reason is the scholarly presumption that Ottoman verse-making in Persian was an exercise in imitation, reserving "no space for literary creativity, innovation, or individuality," as Murat İnan

²Moayyad, "The Persian Poetry," 536.

³Ibid., 537.

⁴Nef'î, *Fârşça Dîvân*, MS Yazma Bağışlar 563.

⁵Atalay recently reissued his edition of Nef'î's Persian *divan* (2019) with a Turkish translation in prose.

⁶See, for example, Atalay, "Nef'î ve Sınır Ötesine"; Kanar, "Nef'î'nin *Tuhfetü'l-uşşak* Adlı Kasidesi."

⁷See, for example, Ocak, "XVII. Yüzyıl Şâiri Nef'î"; Andrews and Kalpaklı, "The Kaside."

puts it.⁸ Thus, despite the availability of a print edition, Nef'î's Persian divan and the motivations behind this collection have not received further critical attention.

Of course, Nef'î was not exceptional in composing verse in Persian. By the 1580s when Nef'î began to compose verse in general, actual linguistic competence in Persian, instead of mere knowledge of the poetic tradition, became a chief measure of a poet's worth for Ottoman literati.⁹ Moreover, Selim Kuru has observed that some literati around that time revisited Persian poetry for a "deeper re-evaluation of classical predecessors" and produced commentaries that also put emphasis on the importance of linguistic competence for appreciating their work.¹⁰ Most significant was Sūdî's commentary on Ḥāfiz's divan, which was completed in 1594 and soon became popular. İnan describes Sūdî's approach as a "purely grammatical" one that underscored the need among literati for a sounder comprehension of Ḥāfiz's poems.¹¹ To a certain extent, then, Nef'î's Persian divan can be seen as a forceful display of his linguistic competence, as expected of an ambitious poet. Still, the issue of competency alone does not explain why he turned to recent exemplars and their fresh Persian verse.

Gibb over a century ago advanced the view that Nef'î pioneered an "Artificial" poetic school that simply adopted the latest trend emanating from the East—that is, the *tarz-i tâza* or fresh style, which literati largely identified with 'Urfî and the Mughal courts—and additionally that this Persian-oriented school was in direct competition with a "Natural" Turkish one.¹² As an alternative to Gibb's reductionist and nationalist account of the literary scene in the early seventeenth century, authoritative to this day, Walter Feldman has proposed that we should view the adoption of the semantically richer fresh style by Nef'î and others as an act of "creative engagement" with the "novel literary challenge" from India.¹³ Feldman has gone so far as to state that their engagement constituted Ottoman efforts at renewal, at a "new aesthetic synthesis," which equally drew on existing Turkish poetic models.¹⁴ Feldman's account, though, foregrounds the role of poets with a mystical bent, Mevlevî in the main, and only mentions Nef'î in passing.

Ali Fuat Bilkan and Şadi Aydın, on the other hand, have remarked that, in looking to the fresh or "Indian" style, Nef'î tried to fashion a "personal poetic style," in order to set himself apart from his peers.¹⁵ But their assessment of Nef'î gives little consideration to what else was taking place in the literary scene at the time, except to say that he was among the earliest to embrace the fresh style. In addressing that

⁸İnan, "Rethinking the Ottoman Imitation," 673.

⁹On the importance of competence in Persian (and in Arabic) at the time, see Kim, *The Last of Age*, 116–27.

¹⁰Kuru, "The Literature of Rum," 2:583.

¹¹İnan, "Imperial Ambitions, Mystical Aspirations," 85. More specifically on Sūdî's commentary, see İnan, "Crossing Interpretive Boundaries."

¹²Gibb, *A History of Ottoman Poetry*, 3:247.

¹³Feldman, "The Indian Style," 32–3.

¹⁴Feldman, "The Celestial Sphere," 200.

¹⁵Bilkan and Aydın, *Sebk-i Hindi*, 140.

gap, Abdulkadir Erkal has pointed out that efforts at renewal, stylistic and otherwise, were prevalent, and that poets who adhered to a more Turkish “classical style” also brought about “changes and innovations.”¹⁶ Erkal’s account of the wider efforts is not framed rigidly in a binary of oppositional schools. Nevertheless, his account minimizes the fact that practitioners of a more Turkish style, to varying degrees, also engaged with recent Persian poetry from India.

The remainder of the article, then, situates Nef‘î’s own engagement in those wider efforts, especially in relation to his peers’ work and also to literati disputes about the extent to which the fresh style and other currents from the East ought to be adopted and assimilated to invigorate local practice. As I show, there were indeed rival circles of poets, if not schools per se, but their disagreements rested on conflicting opinions about the appropriate level, often expressed through sharp-tongued invectives, as well as on differing formal and generic preferences. And beneath the disagreements lay lingering reservations about the rhetorical suitability of Turkish as a literary language. We should, however, not view the Ottoman efforts at renewal as attempts to reproduce Persian practice. Instead, I suggest ultimately that the efforts aimed at making Turkish practice distinctively fresh.

Nef‘î’s Turn to Fresh Verse

We have little information about Nef‘î’s early years in his hometown of Erzurum, a provincial seat in northeastern Anatolia. Nef‘î was born around 1572 with the name ‘Ömer, and while a youth developed a keen interest in Persian poetry. How he learned Persian in the first place is unclear. But Michael Sheridan has recently pointed to the possibility that Nef‘î had been educated at home and in extended family circles, since his grandfather had served the Safavids until the 1540s before switching allegiance to the Ottomans, and before then and prior to settling in Erzurum, resided in Shirvan and raised Nef‘î’s father there, in a Persian-speaking environment.¹⁷ Be that as it may, it was in Erzurum that Nef‘î acquired his knowledge of Persian, besides receiving a standard education in Arabic.

It was also in Erzurum that Nef‘î initially met Mustafa ‘Ālî (d. 1600), a bureaucrat by profession and a prolific author with a deep appreciation of Persian verse and prose, when ‘Ālî was appointed provincial treasurer in 1584. Nef‘î’s own interest in Persian poetry was undoubtedly encouraged by ‘Ālî, who composed poems in Persian and had compiled a collection of them sometime before 1580, a copy of which has not survived. But we do have a work that has survived, ‘Ālî’s *Nādir ül-mahārib* (*Rarity of Warriors*), from 1568, which gives a clear indication of his preoccupation with Persian practice. Ostensibly a chronicle, the *Nādir ül-mahārib* served as a vehicle for showcasing, according to Cornell Fleischer, “[‘Ālî’s] ability to compose poetry and elegant *inşa* prose in both Persian and Turkish.”¹⁸

¹⁶Erkal, *Divan Şiiri Poetikası*, 136.

¹⁷Sheridan, “I Curse No One without Cause,” 55.

¹⁸Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual*, 44.

The two crossed paths again, seven years later in Istanbul around 1591, a period when 'Āli compiled new collections of poems in Persian. He was then busy composing *naẓīras* or response poems to Ḥāfiz's *ghazals* and fortuitously had a surprise visit from Nef'î, now nearly twenty years of age. Nef'î informed 'Āli that fellow literati were clamoring for his poems, hence motivating the latter to compile a small collection of his *naẓīras* for circulation. This meeting is related in the preface to the collection, which 'Āli entitled *Majma' al-baḥrayn* (*Confluence of the Two Seas*). It is also in the preface that 'Āli acknowledges Nef'î as a pupil of his and additionally as a *ghazal-sarā*, "ghazal-singer."¹⁹ Based on the acknowledgment, the two knew each other well, but the exact capacity in which 'Āli acted as a teacher is difficult to determine. Nef'î nonetheless viewed 'Āli as a mentor, for he later credited him with his "useful" recommendation of a pen name.²⁰

That said, on top of the *Majma' al-baḥrayn*, a few years later in 1594 'Āli produced a larger collection of *naẓīras* to the compositions of an array of past poets, from Firdawsī to Hātifi (d. 1521), with the title *Badī' al-ruqūm* (*Embellishment of Inscriptions*). The compilation of these collections reflected not only the broader interest at the time in reevaluating Persian poetry, but also a desire on the part of 'Āli, at an advanced age, to measure his worth as a poet, especially in comparison to the masters of the tradition. And in the preface to the *Badī' al-ruqūm*, 'Āli informs us that his interest in the masters stretched to "modern exponents."²¹ Still, of the names mentioned, most notably the Safavid poet Muḥtasham of Kashan (d. 1588), none could be counted as stylistic innovators.

To return to Nef'î, we find him once more in Istanbul in 1606, when he received a minor financial post, as comptroller of the mines for the imperial chancery. We know even less about what he did in the intervening years, except that he spent some time in Cairo prior to his move to the capital city, having composed a *qaṣīda* in Turkish praising the recently appointed provincial governor in 1604, as Sheridan has documented.²² It appears that it was only at this time that Nef'î had begun to burnish his reputation as a poet, particularly as a panegyrist, and given that, he probably continued to work on his craft, both in Turkish and in Persian, for an extended period after his initial stay in Istanbul when he visited 'Āli.

As for Nef'î's output in Persian, Atalay has shown that a fair number of his poems can be regarded as *naẓīras*.²³ That is unsurprising, since it was common practice among the poets of the fresh style to compose responses, "to demonstrate their mastery of the tradition and to display their refinements of and departures from

¹⁹Aksoyak, "Gelibolulu Mustafa Âli'nin," 330–33. Aksoyak provides the preface in both Arabic script and Latin transliteration.

²⁰As a rule, scholars have identified Nef'î's previous pen name as the "harmful" Żarrî. But Sheridan has convincingly argued that the old name must have been something else and not the too convenient Żarrî (Sheridan, "I Curse No One without Cause," 58, n. 102).

²¹Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual*, 142.

²²Sheridan, "I Curse No One without Cause," 59.

²³Nef'î, *Farsça Divan* (2000), 14–33.

the model[s],” to quote Paul Losensky.²⁴ And as stated at the outset, Nef`ī was well aware of the dialogic aspect to their poetry. Yet from the twenty or so *naẓīras* cited by Atalay, it is evident that, Nef`ī, in contrast to `Ālī, was concerned more with modern exponents of the fresh style, and chiefly with `Urfi. For instance, Nef`ī composed five *naẓīras* to `Urfi's *ghazals*, early specimens of his verse-making in Persian, if we accept `Ālī's recognition of him as a “*ghazal*-singer” while a young poet. For a closer inspection, then, what follows is one of `Urfi's *ghazals* and Nef`ī's *naẓīra*—the first *ghazal* recorded in his Persian *divan*—along with translations:

بوی پیراهن یوسف دهد اندیشه ^۱ ما روبه از بی جگری رم کند از بیشه ^۲ ما قوت بازوی دل می طلبد تیشه ^۳ ما باده گر خام بود پخته کند شیشه ^۴ ما لله الحمد که آزاد شد از پیشه ^۵ ما	گفتگوی غم یعقوب بود پیشه ^۱ ما اندران بیشه که ما شیر و بیم آفت نیست کوهکن صنعت ما داشت ولی فرق بسیست در دل ما غم دنیا غم معشوق شود عرفی افسانه تراشی بخموشی بفروخت
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Talking about Jacob's grief became our job;
 The scent of Joseph's shirt gives our worry.
 No danger in that wild where we're gentle lions;
 Yet the faint-hearted fox flees our wilderness.
 Farhād had our skill but the difference is great;
 The strong-arm of the heart seeks our pick.
 In our heart, may grief for life be for the beloved;
 If the wine's raw, our bottle makes it cooked.
 `Urfi, a teller of tales, sold them for silence!
 Praise be to God, now he's free from our job!²⁵

معنی بوقلمون صورت اندیشه ^۱ ما گر بود از دل جبریل امین شیشه ^۲ ما گم شود در دل خارا به طلب تیشه ^۳ ما نم ز آتشگه دوزخ بکشد ریشه ^۴ ما نفعی ار شیر خدایی خذر از بیشه ^۵ ما	ساحرانیم که صد بوالعجبی پیشه ^۱ ما عهد کردیم که بی مغیچه جامی نکشیم کوهکن سنگ تراش آمده گوهر جو نیست گلبن گلشن عشقیم که در باغ جانان جز ز لخت جگر خویش غذایی نخوریم
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We're conjurers, hundreds of marvels our job;
 Chameleon meanings give form to our worry.
 We swore not to drink a cup without a Magian boy,
 Even if our bottle is guarded by Gabriel's heart.
 Farhād's here to sculpt rock, not to seek gems,
 Lost in the hard stone's heart in search of our pick.

²⁴Losensky, *Welcoming Fighāni*, 9.

²⁵`Urfi, *Kulliyāt*, 1:232.

We're the rosebush in love's rose garden in paradise;
Yet moisture from the fire of hell draws our roots.
We're nourished by nothing but bits of our hearts;
Nef'i, if you're a lion of God, beware of our wild!²⁶

In his *nazīra*, Nef'i points to and utilizes a technique typical of the poets of the fresh style who sought to conjure up new or yet unveiled meanings in their responses. It involved "the remixing of common tropes and idioms, or the subtle variation of old thematic patterns," as Rajeev Kinra describes it.²⁷ In line with that, Nef'i refigures the basic imagery and reverses the order. And additionally, by removing the initial reference to Joseph's story, he recasts the mystical thematic trajectory of the original. In a similarly creative manner, Nef'i composed *nazīras* to 'Urfi's *qaṣīdas*, ten in total, over half of which are responses to his *na'ats*, devotional odes to the Prophet Muhammad, including one of his most popular, entitled the *'Ummān-i javābir* ("Sea of Jewels"). For comparison, here are the opening two couplets, respectively, of 'Urfi's *'Ummān-i javābir* and of Nef'i's *nazīra*:

دل من باغبان عشق و حیرانی گلستانش از دل دروازه باغ و ابد حد خیابانش
چنان باغی کزان گلچین نیارد گل برون بردن نه آن باغی که یابد خارچین از بیم دورانش

My heart is love's gardener and bewilderment its rose garden,
Eternity the garden gate, perpetuity the limit of its flower bed.
It's such a garden that the picker dares not take a rose away;
Nor is it a garden that the picker of thorns fears his fortune.²⁸

دلم سرمست جام عشق و عقل کل زبان دانش نگوید نشنود هر دو بجز توحید یزدانش
چه توحید آشنا حرفی ز خلوتگاه غیب الغیب چه دل رسوا ندیم بزمگاه خاص سلطانش

My heart's drunk by love's cup, the divine intellect its interpreter;
Both neither speak nor hear a thing except the unity of its lord.
What known unity! A word of the retreat of the unknown world.
What infamous heart! The private party companion of its master.²⁹

As is well known, 'Urfi's *qaṣīda* itself was a *nazīra* to a long homiletic piece by Khāqānī, his *Mir'āt al-ṣafā* ("Mirror of Purity"). Nef'i probably also had this *qaṣīda* in mind when he composed his poem, since he was in his own right quite

²⁶Nef'i, *Farsça Divan* (2019), 55–6.

²⁷Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire*, 212.

²⁸'Urfi, *Kulliyāt*, 2:185.

²⁹Nef'i, *Farsça Divan* (2019), 7–8.

familiar with Khāqānī's work, particularly his *qaṣīdas*.³⁰ And as Atalay has observed, Nef'ī's *naẓīra* was equally a response to a *qaṣīda* produced by an older poet esteemed among Ottoman literati, the *Anīs al-qalb* ("Companion of the Heart"), of Fuzūlī (d. 1566), a resident of Baghdad who dedicated his poem to Süleyman I after the sultan had conquered the city in 1534 and took as a model Khāqānī's *Mir'āt al-ṣafā*.³¹ Fuzūlī's poem begins:

دلَم در جیست اسرار سخن درهای غلطانش فضای علم دریا فیض حق باران نیسانش

My heart's the pearl box of secrets, speech its rolling pearls,
Knowledge's expanse the sea, God's blessing its April rain.³²

Nef'ī also drew on other Persian verse produced more locally. This is especially apparent in his *rubā'īs*, many of which were *naẓīras* to Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī's and comprise the bulk of his *divan* of 200-plus poems.³³ That Nef'ī, who was neither a Mevlevī nor affiliated with any other Sufi order, looked to Rūmī testifies to the old master's enduring poetic appeal among Ottoman literati keen on Persian verse. That Nef'ī did so also accords with Feldman's observation that Ottoman poets at the time were not exclusively interested in emulating the fresh style. And lastly, that Nef'ī chose to compose so many *rubā'īs* can be seen as a display of his mastery of the quatrain form and variations of it, which he put to good use with his invectives. The invectives are addressed below. But for now, and again for comparison, what follows is one of Rūmī's *rubā'īs* and Nef'ī's *naẓīra* with an alternate rhyme scheme:

گنجینهٔ اسرار الهی مائیم بحر گهر نامتناهی مائیم
بگرفته ز ماه تا بماه مائیم بنشسته بتخت پادشاهی مائیم

The treasury of divine secrets we are;
The sea of boundless jewels we are.
Caught by the moon to Pisces we are;
Seated on the royal throne we are.³⁴

مائیم ز ماه تا بماه مائیم گنجینه و گنج پادشاهی مائیم
فیض ازل و ابد ز ما جو یعنی سر تا به قدم سر الهی مائیم

³⁰Ocak, "XVII. Yüzyıl Şâiri Nef'i," 64.

³¹Demirel, *The Poet Fuzūlī*, 137–38.

³²Fuzūlī, *Farsça Divan*, 17.

³³Nef'ī also composed five *qaṣīdas* in praise of Rūmī, four in Persian.

³⁴Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, *Hiz. Mevlânâ'nın Rubailerī*, no. 1502.

We, from the moon to Pisces we are;
The treasury and the royal coffer we are.
Seek the gift of eternity and perpetuity from us;
From head to toe, the divine secret we are.³⁵

Yet not all of Nef'ī's responses were explicitly religious in nature. Nef'ī composed a *nazīra* to a panegyric *qaṣīda* by Muḥtasham dedicated to Tahmasp I, and moreover tailored his ode to praise Murad IV, likely on the occasion of the Ottoman sultan's accession in 1623. In composing this *nazīra*, Nef'ī must have also been acquainted with a similar eulogy of the Safavid shah by Vaḥshī of Bafq (d. 1583), Muḥtasham's bitter rival.³⁶ Still, it is not always easy to establish whether Nef'ī modeled his *nazīras* on a single poem or several, or exactly when, but it is obvious that he resorted to a wide array of exemplars, though his main interest lay in those of the fresh style. Nef'ī indeed did not ignore 'Urfī with respect to the panegyric *qaṣīda*. For example, in the early 1530s, to secure new patronage, Nef'ī reworked a poem of 'Urfī's honoring Abū'l-Faṭḥ of Gilan (d. 1589), the Mughal court physician, into a eulogy of the Crimean khan Cānibek Giray.³⁷ Thus Nef'ī continued to produce verse in Persian until late in life, before eventually being executed for an invective that was too impolitic.

On the whole, then, the responses by Nef'ī represent his own reevaluation of the current state of Persian poetry, and in pronounced dialogue with 'Urfī's work. But Nef'ī's opinion of his older contemporary, who was not shy about boasting of his poetic achievements, was not entirely positive. In his *nazīra* to the *'Ummān-i javābir*, rather appropriately and evocatively in the self-praise portion, Nef'ī initially praises 'Urfī for his *mu'jiza-gū'ī*, "miraculous style," but subsequently criticizes him for the complacency of his secular panegyrics:

نه اندک مایه قانع از تنک طرزی و هم مغرور سخن را منحصر داند به خود از فیض عرفانش

What little lot he's content with, of limited style, and smug!
He thinks speech special to him, by the grace of his savvy.³⁸

Nef'ī ends by stating that he named his more desirable composition the *Tuḥfat al-'ushshāq* ("Gift to Lovers").

Nef'ī begins one panegyric *qaṣīda* with a self-praise, in which he predictably extols his talent for producing creative and meaningful verse, and concludes:

³⁵Nef'ī, *Farsça Divan* (2019), 82.

³⁶Ibid., 46–8. Cf. Muḥtasham, *Divān*, 152; Vaḥshī, *Divān*, 187–91.

³⁷Nef'ī, *Farsça Divan* (2019), 38–41. Cf. 'Urfī, *Kulliyāt*, 2:65–71.

³⁸Nef'ī, *Farsça Divan* (2019), 15. 'Urfī would not have completely disagreed with the criticism, since he viewed the composition of panegyrics for patronage as an imposed task, stating in a verse: "[It] is a composition for the greedily ambitious." Quoted in Shackle, "Settings of Panegyric," 1:208–9.

نکته پرداز خدایوروم از وحی خیال طرز شعرم روش غیر و لسان دگر است

I'm a poet whom God nurtures through divine vision;
My poetic style is of another way, of another language.³⁹

Whether with this claim of freshness Nef'ī directly targeted 'Urfī is hard to say. Regardless, Nef'ī makes the claim in a *qaṣīda* dedicated to Es'ād Efendi, a dignitary fond of Persian verse, on the occasion of his appointment as sheikh ūl-Islam in 1615. Notably, this *qaṣīda* can be counted among the few that Nef'ī composed as original pieces. That is, Nef'ī's output was not restricted to the composition of response poems. Likewise was the case with his *ghazals*, including the *ghazal* from which the epigraph is taken. As a final example, quoted in full is an original *ghazal* of Nef'ī's, the one Moayyad cited as exemplary of his competence in Persian, which is straightforward in content, but with an unusual *radīf* rhyme, an odd compound in the penultimate couplet, and another boastful claim about the strength of his poetic speech in the last:

جز باده پرستی به جهان پیشه ندارم	گیرد غم اگر دامنم اندیشه ندارم
گر باده بیابم چه کنم شیشه ندارم	من رند تهی دست سبک بار جهانم
با خاک چمن رابطه ریشه ندارم	آن گلین عشقم که در آتشکده رویم
جز ناخن اندیشه دل تیشه ندارم	فرهامم و در کندن کهسار معانی
از دشمنی نه فلک اندیشه ندارم	نعفی سخن پرور شمشیر زبانم

If grief takes hold of my skirt, I've no worry;
Besides worshipping wine here now, I've no job.
I'm the empty-handed rake, free of worldly care;
Even if I find wine, what to do, for I've no bottle!
I'm that rose-bud of love which grows in a fire pit;
But attached beneath the lawn's earth I've no root.
I'm Farhād, and to dig up the mountains of meaning,
Besides the nail of the heart's worry, I've no pick.
I'm Nef'ī, cultivating speech with my dagger tongue;
Of the enmity of the nine heavens, I've no worry.⁴⁰

Fresh Talk among Peers

It was from 1606 onward, once settled in Istanbul, that Nef'ī built his reputation as a poet, primarily as a panegyrist composing in Turkish, for he obtained the patronage

³⁹Nef'ī, *Farsça Divan* (2019), 40.

⁴⁰Nef'ī, *Farsça Divan* (2019), 61.

of the sultan and high-ranking officials. Nefî was on particularly good terms with two grand viziers, Murad Pasha and Naşûh Pasha, between the years 1606 and 1614. It was also during this period that Nefî started to produce invective verse to assist them in slandering and maligning their political rivals. After the dismissal of Naşûh Pasha as grand vizier in 1614, Nefî no longer had the steady support of any great patron, though he continued to compose odes in praise of the sultan. And it would take almost a decade, with the accession of Murad IV, for Nefî to receive regular patronage, this time directly from the sultan.

The earliest recognition of Nefî as a poet was given by Riyâzî (d. 1644), a madrasa instructor based in Istanbul, as well as a poet and biographer. In his *Riyâz uş-şu'arâ* (*Gardens of Poets*), compiled in 1609, Riyâzî provides a brief notice on Nefî and remarks: "He is [the chancery's] painter of meanings and its zither-player who arranges words in the Persian [*acemâne*] manner in the direction of Iraq."⁴¹ This appraisal is at once positive and negative. While giving Nefî his due for his meaningful verse, Riyâzî criticizes him for his Turkish style being overly Persian and too old school, especially in the manner of Hâfîz.⁴² Riyâzî's criticism of Nefî regarding his poetic language, of course, is not unjustified. Yet his criticism that Nefî was bound to a long-standing model such as Hâfîz is peculiar, given the interest at the time in reevaluating his poetry.

Riyâzî's appraisal of Nefî's style was based on his *ghazals* in Turkish, with no recognition given to other sorts of composition or to his poems in Persian. His appraisal readily circulated around literary circles in Istanbul and triggered Nefî's anger. Nefî responded with an invective, in Turkish and as a *dû-baytî*, expressing his displeasure in quite aggressive terms. That Nefî felt comfortable to do so, since the potential for physical retaliation was real, indicates that he composed the invective when he was still under the protection of his great patrons. Therefore his response must have been immediate. Here is the invective:

شاعر پشت و اصم یعنی ریاضی چلبی طقونوب تذکره سنده بزہ اویمش او تنه
لکه ین نسبت ایچون بن دخی دوندرمز ایسم ضرب هجویله گوتن گوشنه گوشن گوتنه

That deaf, lap boy of a poet, Riyâzî Çelebi
Taunted me in his *tezkiye* to get the better of me.
My shame if I don't strike back and bend him
Ass to ear, ear to ass, with my smashing words!⁴³

Nefî would compose several more invectives along these lines, mocking the fact that Riyâzî was hard of hearing.

⁴¹Riyâzî, *Riyâzûş-Şuarâ* (2017), 319.

⁴²Ocak, "Ölümünün 350. Yılında Nefî," 12.

⁴³Nefî, *Sihâm-ı Kazâ*, MS Yazma Bağışlar 7274, fol. 19a. Cf. *Sihâm-ı Kazâ* (2018), 105.

Riyāzī naturally replied and in an equally sexually charged manner, typical of invectives. But he also attacked Nef'ī's boastful claim of having "another way" or style of poetry. One of Riyāzī invectives against Nef'ī goes:

شاعر مأبون اولان نفعی کبی مائل اولور هم زبانه تازه یه هم شعر بی اندازه یه
تازه سینک مهرزی هرگز گوتندن چقمسون بویله بر آغز گرک اویله زبان تازه یه

A catamite poet like Nef'ī fancies
The fresh tongue and the drawn-out verse.
Ever up his ass let his fresh boy's needle be,
That's the mouth such a fresh tongue needs.⁴⁴

The invective by Riyāzī amounts to a warning that Nef'ī should refrain not only from spewing invectives at him but also from bragging about his claims of stylistic novelty. Riyāzī says as much in another invective, which begins:

یر ایمش بولدوغی بوقی نفعی

Nef'ī eats whatever shit he finds.⁴⁵

Riyāzī is never explicit about what he finds shitty or bad about Nef'ī's style, besides stating it is overly Persian. This is particularly surprising, since Riyāzī himself was quite familiar with Persian poetry, old and recent. In fact, two years prior to his biographical dictionary, in 1607, he compiled a Persian–Turkish lexicon of terms and phrases entitled *Düstūr ül-'amel* (*Guide to Practice*), in which Persian verses are amply quoted as illustrative samples, including verses from *Farhād u Shīrīn* of Vaḥshī and the *sāqī-nāma* or "book of the cupbearer" by Zuhūrī of Turshiz (d. 1616).⁴⁶ In another invective, though, Riyāzī attacks Nef'ī for being Mustafa 'Ālī's lap-boy, "taking and making profit from his mouth," suggesting at least that he was aware that Nef'ī, like his mentor, had a habit of composing *naẓīras* in Persian.⁴⁷

Still, it is difficult to assess to what extent Riyāzī's judgment affected Nef'ī's poetic standing. As mentioned already, after the dismissal of Naṣūh Pasha in 1614, Nef'ī no longer had the steady support of any great patron. And we have very little information about his situation from then to the accession of Murad IV in 1623, except that he composed a few *qaṣīdas* eulogizing 'Osman II, who reigned from 1618 to 1622, and that he was discharged and reappointed to his financial post in

⁴⁴Nef'ī, *Sihām-ı kaza'*, MS TY 511, fol. 92a.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Açıköz, "Riyāzī'nın Düstürü'l-'Amel'i," 6.

⁴⁷Nef'ī, *Sihām-ı kaza'*, MS TY 511, fol. 92a. In fact, Riyāzī accuses 'Ālī of being a pederast, of being a *kün-bāz*, "ass-player."

the chancery. Politically speaking, in view of the struggles over the Ottoman throne marked by Mustafa I's two brief reigns, 1617–18 and 1622–23, it would have been remarkable if Nef'î had obtained the patronage of high-ranking officials. Also noteworthy is that it was during this period of political unrest that Nef'î began to compile copies of both his Persian divan and Turkish divan.⁴⁸ It may well have been that Nef'î compiled his Persian divan to counter Riyâzî's criticism that his style was too Persian in the old manner, that he was indeed aware of current and changing trends, and to position himself better to attract new patrons once the political unrest abated. In any case, Nef'î's situation did improve with Murad IV. How Nef'î initially managed to find favor with him is unclear. But we do know that the newly enthroned young sultan was partial to invectives and additionally appreciated Persian poetry, much more so than 'Osman II did.

However, less than a year prior to Murad IV's accession, we have another appraisal of Nef'î's poetry by Kâf-zâde Fâ'izî, a madrasa instructor in Istanbul who compiled an anthology of Turkish verse entitled the *Zübdet ül-eş'âr* (*Cream of Poems*), shortly before his death in 1622. Fâ'izî prefaces his selection of Nef'î's poems by stating tersely and bluntly: "These couplets are chosen from among his nonsense."⁴⁹ Fâ'izî then quotes just three couplets from a single *ghazal* of Nef'î's. In his negative judgment, like Riyâzî before him, Fâ'izî makes no reference to the fact that Nef'î produced other kinds of poems. Fâ'izî's silence is even more conspicuous, since by the time of his anthology Nef'î's reputation as a panegyrist was well recognized. So it appears that Nef'î was *persona non grata* with certain literati working in the capital.

As Abdülkadir Karahan observed years ago, the negative judgment stemmed, to no small degree, from the aggressive stance Nef'î took toward some of his peers.⁵⁰ Nef'î composed nearly a hundred invectives against them, the vast majority of which were assorted quatrains in Turkish and produced between 1609 and 1623, before he came under the patronage of Murad IV. Nef'î's invectives would later be collected during Murad IV's reign under the title *Şihâm-ı kâzâ* (*Shafts of Doom*). And the biggest target of Nef'î's tongue-lashing was Fâ'izî, himself a practicing poet who happened to be receptive to the fresh style.⁵¹ Nef'î composed more than twenty invectives against Fâ'izî, by far the largest number dedicated to any peer or rival poet; by comparison, he produced only five for Riyâzî. One of Nef'î's invectives against Fâ'izî goes:

قاف اوغلی نصیحتدر ایشت بو سزی بندن بیل رتبه عرفانکی یارانه اولاشمه
زهری قتی مهلکدر آنک بر دخی زنهار افعی یه اولاش مهرز نفعی یه طلاشمه

Kâf-zâde, hear this word of advice from me:
Know your skill's limit, stir not a true poet.

⁴⁸The earliest extant copy of the Turkish divan (MS Laleli 1771) dates from 1620.

⁴⁹Kâf-zâde Fâ'izî, *Zübdet ül-eş'âr*, MS Şehid Ali Paşa 1877, fol. 100b.

⁵⁰Karahan, *Nef'î*, 16.

⁵¹Okatan, "Kafzâde Fâ'izî," 6.

His venom's utterly fatal, so take heed then:
Reach for the viper, not for Nef'ī's prick!⁵²

This invective by Nef'ī, in which he crudely disparages Fā'izī for having less than stellar knowledge of poetic art, was a response to Fā'izī's earlier invective targeting him. Fā'izī's invective is noteworthy in that it was a mere couplet in Persian, and, as Tulga Ocak has suggested, was probably produced during 'Osman II's reign.⁵³ And the couplet, as follows, quickly circulated:

آن شاعر هجا گو که نام اوست نفعی قتلش بچار مذهب واجب چو قتل افعی

That invective-spewing poet who goes by the name Nef'ī,
His death, like a viper's death, do the four schools demand.⁵⁴

Fā'izī's call for execution echoes an invective by Riyāzī, in which he accuses Nef'ī of *kufriyyāt*, of profanity, an offense punishable under Shari'a law.⁵⁵ How serious Riyāzī and Fā'izī were in uttering as much we cannot say. Both did not refrain from using blasphemous language in their own invectives, and Nef'ī's reply implies that such charges did not concern him. Curiously, Nef'ī did not compose his reply in Persian.⁵⁶ Yet, as his invective against Fā'izī makes obvious, there was no need since Fā'izī's knowledge of poetic art was not up to par, and presumably nor was his command of Persian, as can be seen from the rudimentary couplet of an invective.

That said, in another invective by Fā'izī, quite vulgar in imagery but couched in religious-legal terms, we get a clear indication of how he regarded Nef'ī's poetry and his claim of stylistic novelty:

تازه اشعار دیو ای گیدی بد مذهب گنمه گل یوق یره تبریز و قم شیرازه
گنمسون کهنه طلاغی قرینک آغزکدن اولمز ای نفعی سکا بویله زبان تازه

Hey blasphemous ass, in search of fresh verse,
Don't go in vain to Tabriz, Qom, or Shiraz!
Don't let your mouth quit your wife's old clit!
Hey Nef'ī, that's not the fresh tongue for you!⁵⁷

⁵²Nef'ī, *Sihām-ı Kazā'*, MS Yazma Bağışlar 7274, fol. 16b. Cf. *Sihām-ı Kazā'* (2018), 95.

⁵³Ocak, "Ölümünün 350. Yılında Nef'ī," 6.

⁵⁴The couplet is recorded in Na'imā, *Tārīḫ*, 3:236.

⁵⁵Nef'ī, *Sihām-ı Kazā'*, MS TY 511, fol. 92a.

⁵⁶Nef'ī did compose invectives in Persian, mainly targeting Vaḥdetī, a little-known poet from Baghdad.

⁵⁷Nef'ī, *Sihām-ı Kazā'*, MS TY 511, fol. 89a. In the manuscript, the invective is misattributed to another rival poet, Nev'ī-zāde 'Atā'ī.

In making reference to Safavid cities, Fâ'îzî in his own way lambasts Nef'î for his overly Persian style, while insinuating that the “invective-spewing” poet might have been sympathetic to Shi'ism. Also conveyed in Fâ'îzî's criticism is that Nef'î was more beholden to the work of recent poets linked with Safavid Persia who produced lyric *ghazals* closer to the classical manner, or “amatory poetry with a more profane cast,” as Losensky puts it, and among the leading figures of this *maktab-i vuqû'*, or “Realist School,” were Muhtasham and Vaḥshî.⁵⁸ The criticism is not unwarranted if Nef'î's *qaṣîdas*, and not his *ghazals*, are considered, in Turkish and Persian. But nowhere in the attacks on Nef'î's style by Fâ'îzî or Riyâzî is there an admission of his engagement with the fresh style that was identified with the Mughal courts in India.

Nef'î's interest in poetry connected with India did not wane once his reputation was firmly established. This is most apparent in a letter that Nef'î wrote, around 1619, to Ünsî (d. 1664), a friend and fellow poet who was posted to Cairo. At the end, Nef'î asks his junior peer rather ornately to procure for him a copy of the *divan* of Naẓîrî of Nishapur (d. 1612): “May the drops of my pearl-scattering pen adorn your heart's neck and ear henceforth and out of kindness Master Naẓîrî's *divan* be sent forth.”⁵⁹ Nef'î's request is telling on two fronts. First, the work of some eastern poets circulated more widely in central Ottoman lands than that of others. More significantly, later in his career, it seems, Nef'î developed a further interest in the work of poets recognized for their panegyric *qaṣîdas*, Naẓîrî being one, whose poems occasionally matched the fresh style of his main rival—namely 'Urî.

If castigated for being too Persian in his style, Nef'î likewise rebuked a few of his critics for being too Turkish in their poetic practice and thus mistaking what freshness involved. This he makes known in a long invective in *qaṣîda* form against Veysî (d. 1628), a judge and poet who belonged to the same literary circles in and around Istanbul as Fâ'îzî and Riyâzî did. In the poem, Nef'î slams Veysî for not being able to distinguish the difference between the old and fresh style, and the reason for that, he states at the outset, is his failure to heed the “precedence of rhetoric” (*sebḳ-i belâğat*).⁶⁰ In Nef'î's view, then, freshness could not be achieved without prior skill in rhetoric, which required learning in Persian and, of course, in Arabic.

Toward an Ottoman Freshness

In the introduction to the *Riyâz uş-şu'arâ'*, ostensibly about exemplary poets composing in Turkish in the Ottoman realms, Riyâzî quotes numerous verses. He begins by extolling the virtue of poetic expression, and how the Prophet showed the way and to reinforce his point quotes a couplet in Arabic from a *na't* by Jâmî, though unattributed. Needless to say, the quotation of supporting verses is a

⁵⁸Losensky, “Poetics and Eros,” 749.

⁵⁹Ocak, “Nef'î Konusunda Yeni İki Belge,” 129.

⁶⁰Nef'î, *Sihâm-ı kazâ'*, MS Yazma Bağışlar 7274, fol. 8b. Cf. *Sihâm-ı Kazâ'* (2018), 65.

typical rhetorical device, and one employed to demonstrate an author's knowledge of the poetic tradition. Still, of the verses Riyāzī quotes, none are in Turkish. In fact, besides another Arabic couplet, the rest of the verses are all in Persian. Of the verses in Persian only two are attributed, one to Jāmī again and the other to Niẓāmī, two bygone poets known for their *maṣnavīs*.

The remaining verses in Persian, also unattributed, come from Ẓuhūrī's *sāqī-nāma*, a lengthy and recent *maṣnavī* produced in 1591 at the Nizam Shahi court in Ahmadnagar in the Deccan, and are entirely taken from the initial part of the poem. For example, Riyāzī quotes two separate couplets from the section devoted to love, in order to reinforce the point that the best poets earned fame through passionate, heart-felt poetry:

مگر رحمت عشق دهقان شود که در باغ جان خار ریحان شود
دل آیینہ طلعت یار نیست گر صیقل عشق در کار نیست

May the cultivator's loving mercy be such that
In the soul's garden thorns turn into sweet basil.
The heart reflects not the beloved's countenance,
If the polisher of love has not been put to use.⁶¹

It is evident from the introduction that Riyāzī deeply appreciated Ẓuhūrī, so much so that he himself composed a *sāqī-nāma* in Turkish, taking as a model Ẓuhūrī's *maṣnavī*, albeit not in the same meter—that is, not in the *mutaqārib* meter associated with the genre, and thus the work was not strictly a *naẓīra*. As for Ẓuhūrī, his own peers considered his style fresh, if not to the same extent as 'Urfī's, and Ẓuhūrī's *sāqī-nāma* itself constituted an innovative departure on the genre.⁶² Riyāzī, however, gives no indication that he shared such a view. Still, it appears that Riyāzī composed a draft of his *sāqī-nāma* as early as 1609, in the very year he compiled his *Riyāz uṣ-ṣu'arā'*, and had a finished version by the time he issued a recension of his biographical dictionary in 1618.

In that period, a number of Ottoman poets also produced *sāqī-nāmas* in Turkish. 'Azmī-zāde Ḥāletī (d. 1631), a teacher and judge by profession, composed his *sāqī-nāma* between 1614 and 1616; Nev'ī-zāde 'Aṭā'ī (d. 1635), a teacher and judge as well and additionally Ḥāletī's pupil and Fā'izī's friend, composed a draft version in 1617. Both of them took as a model Ẓuhūrī's poem. Fā'izī himself produced a strophic variety in 1618, drawing on Vaḥshī's example, and as a part of his *maṣnavī* on the story of Laylā and Majnūn. And Yaḥyā Efendī (d. 1644), a student of 'Aṭā'ī's father, composed a short *maṣnavī* variant, similar in design to 'Urfī's rendition, sometime thereafter and likely before his appointment as sheikh

⁶¹Riyāzī, *Riyāz uṣ-ṣu'arā'*, MS Ali Emiri Tarih 765, fol. 2b. Cf. *Riyāzū'ş-Suarā'* (2017), 21; Qazvīnī, *Tazkīra-i maykhāna*, 306–7.

⁶²Losensky, "Zohuri Toršizi." On the development of the genre in Persian, see Losensky, "Sāqī-nāma," Sharma, "Hāfiz's *Sāqīnamah*."

ül-Islam in 1622. Hence shared among all of them was a special interest in adopting and assimilating the *sāqī-nāma* genre that had recently re-emerged and become fashionable in the East. Moreover, in doing so, they also looked to poetic antecedents in Turkish.⁶³

The *sāqī-nāmas* produced by this coterie practically amounted to a “poetry contest,” as Aslı Niyazioğlu remarks.⁶⁴ And it was a contest that Nef'î also participated in. In fact, around that time, he composed two *sāqī-nāmas*, one in Persian and another in Turkish. Nef'î's *sāqī-nāma* in Persian is a strophic poem, and took as a model the version produced by Abū Turāb Beg Furqatī (d. 1617), whose own poem was based on Vaḥshī's example.⁶⁵ As for the *sāqī-nāma* in Turkish, it is also in strophic form, but the poem is quite different in tone and substance, and therefore not a translation.⁶⁶ It is not clear which *sāqī-nāma* Nef'î composed first. But there is little doubt that, in producing both, he engaged in a game of one-upmanship with his rivals.

The *sāqī-nāmas* produced by Riyāzī and others, poets who adhered to a more Turkish style, further raises the question of whether, through their compositions, they were simply following a fashion or attempting to create a fresh take on it, or a new synthesis. Indeed, a few did make claims of freshness, 'Aṭā'î being the most outspoken. He credits his teacher Ḥāletī with producing the first proper *sāqī-nāma* in Turkish, a *maṣnavī* composed in *mutaqārib*, “in the meter of the *Shāh-nāma*.”⁶⁷ Yet nowhere in his appraisal of his teacher's *sāqī-nāma* does 'Aṭā'î acknowledge that the poem constituted an innovative departure. In the conclusion to his own version, finished in 1621 and entitled *Ālem-nümā* (“World-Mirror”), after singling out Zuhūrī and Niẓāmī, 'Aṭā'î asserts confidently that his work now laid down a “new custom” (*nev āyīn*), not only for the *sāqī-nāma* but also generally for *maṣnavī*-writing in Turkish.⁶⁸ And so, for 'Aṭā'î, fresh poetry was indeed achievable and unequivocally linked with form and genre.

At the same time, 'Aṭā'î's broad claim of freshness about *maṣnavī*-writing, represented “a direct challenge to the Persian poetic tradition,” of its authoritative status, as Sheridan has observed. And Nef'î seems to have been keenly aware of 'Aṭā'î's claim. In a long invective targeting the literary “public” (*cumhūr*), Nef'î commences with an attack on 'Aṭā'î's style:

نوعی زاده بزه بو شیوه خیزانه نه دن سنی سگمک بزه ایلر گبی مطلب دگله

Nev'izāde, why for us this crawling style of yours?
Hey, it's not our wish, like many folk, to fuck you!⁶⁹

⁶³On the development of the Ottoman genre, see Canım, *Türk Edebiyatında Sâkinâmeler*, 42–7.

⁶⁴Niyazioğlu, “The Very Special Dead,” 230.

⁶⁵See Nef'î, *Farsça Divan* (2019), 50–54. Cf. Qazvīnī, *Tazkira-i maykhāna*, 155–62, 324–31.

⁶⁶See Nef'î, *Nefî Divanı*, muşammet no. 3.

⁶⁷Nev'î-zāde 'Aṭā'î, *Ḥadā'iq al-ḥaqā'iq*, 740.

⁶⁸Nev'î-zāde 'Aṭā'î, *Sâkinâme*, 204. Like Niẓāmī, 'Aṭā'î produced a *khamsa* or quintet of *maṣnavīs*.

⁶⁹Nef'î, *Sihām-ı kazâ*, MS Yazma Bağışlar 7274, fol. 10b. Cf. *Sihām-ı Kazâ* (2018), 72.

In similar terms, Nef'ī goes on to disparage other poets, including Fā'izī and Riyāzī. But he reserves his harshest judgment for Ġanīzāde Nādirī (d. 1626), who belonged to the same circles, with this couplet:

شاعرم دیرسه اگر شاعره اثبات هنر خط تعلیق ایله دیوانی مرتب دگله

If he says, "I'm a poet," is it proof of one's skill
Just to have a divan written down in *ta'liq* script?⁷⁰

The couplet targeting Nādirī typifies a common thread in all of Nef'ī's invectives against his rivals—his criticism that they had second-rate knowledge of poetic composition, particularly of Persian practice, and therefore had no basis for making any claim of freshness. Moreover, Nef'ī's criticism suggests, fairly or not, the inattention on the part of his rivals to the "precedence of rhetoric" in any creative enterprise, about which Nef'ī is upfront in his invective addressed to Veysī. As a final example, here is another invective aimed at all of them, in which Nef'ī again demands proof of skill:

اهل علمك قولى قربانیوز الله بلور ای ککز لر هله سز علمکز اثبات ایذیکز
هرزه کرد ره نظم اولدیکوز اما یول آزوب دوشدیکز کهنه خالی سخنه بوق یذیکز

We're slaves and sacrifices to the learned, God knows;
Now then catamites, demonstrate your knowledge!
You've dived in poetry's way, astray you went;
You've fallen into old muddy talk, shit you ate!⁷¹

Underlying the critical attacks Nef'ī leveled against his rivals was concern over Turkish as a poetic idiom, and by extension as a literary language. That concern Riyāzī too conveyed in his own way. In comparison to 'Aṭā'ī, his bold associate, Riyāzī was circumspect about his poetic enterprise, with no assertion of freshness. What's more, in his *Riyāz uş-şu'arā'* he voices lingering reservations about Turkish in explicit terms. In the conclusion to the introduction, Riyāzī mentions the difficulty of composing verse in Turkish, "because the words are inadequate and improper," adding that one should not fault the "ancients" (*ḳudemā'*), due to the linguistic limitations of earlier generations. To reinforce the point, Riyāzī then quotes a couplet by Jāmī, from the last chapter of his *Subḥat al-abrār* (*Rosary of the Pious*), in which Jāmī requests his readers to refrain from being too critical of the work:

اصل معنیست منه تا وانی در عبارت چو فتد نقصانی

Meaning's the core; so don't impose a fine
When a deficiency in expression occurs.⁷²

⁷⁰Nef'ī, *Sihām-ı ḳazā'*, MS Yazma Bağışlar 7274, fol. 11a. Cf. *Sihām-ı Kazā'* (2018), 74.

⁷¹Nef'ī, *Sihām-ı ḳazā'*, MS Yazma Bağışlar 7274, fol. 15b. Cf. *Sihām-ı Kazā'* (2018), 91.

⁷²Riyāzī, *Riyāz uş-şu'arā'*, MS Ali Emiri Tarih 765, fol. 3b. Cf. *Riyāzū'ş-Şuarā'* (2017), 22–3. For a further discussion of the relevant couplet, see Kim, *The Last of An Age*, 138–9.

It is also worth noting that, just prior to quoting Jāmī, Riyāzī complains that among the ancients were many poetasters, whom he chose to exclude from his biographical dictionary. To support this point, he quotes another unattributed couplet in Arabic. Riyāzī probably sourced the couplet from *Khizānat al-adab* (*Storehouse of Literature*), an anthology of Arabic poetry compiled by Ibn Hija al-Ḥamawī (d. 1434) that not only functioned as a guide to rhetorical embellishment, but also was known to literary circles in Istanbul.⁷³ And the couplet rather aptly appears in the section on *munāsaba*, on the suitability of words to meanings, and it goes:

إذا كنت لا تدري سوى الوزن وحده فقل انا وزان و ما انا شاعر

If you know nothing else but meters,
Say, "I'm a counter of feet, not a poet."⁷⁴

It may seem a bit odd that there remained among Ottoman literati at the beginning of the seventeenth century an anxiety about Turkish as a poetic idiom, that Turkish had yet to rival Persian in rhetorical sophistication at a time when it was firmly established as a literary language, with a canon of poetic models. But that concern did persist and no doubt led Riyāzī to compile his Persian–Turkish lexicon.

Riyāzī was not the only member of the wider public, beyond his circles, to exhibit such a concern, and especially in a hands-on manner. Some literati rewrote older *masnavī* works in a rhetorically richer language. The most prolific figure in this endeavor was Cevrī (d. 1654), a madrasa product who earned a living as a calligrapher. In the introduction to his 1621 rewriting of Bihīştī's *Selīm-nāme*, a century-old chronicle of Selim I's reign, Cevrī provides an explanation. He tells us that since the language of this *masnavī* and others "being 'ancient Turkish,' everybody had long desired such a recasting, and therefore he had undertaken the job," to quote Hatice Aynur.⁷⁵ And in his rewriting, Cevrī mainly replaced Turkish words with their Persian counterparts. As for his audience, whether Cevrī specifically had in mind the likes of Riyāzī, Fa'izī, and 'Aṭā'ī is not certain. But Cevrī does say there was much demand for his work, and the one figure who would have definitely appreciated his work was Nef'ī. Cevrī was a friend and admirer, and copied for Nef'ī a later edition of his Turkish *divan* around 1630.⁷⁶

Cevrī's work also points to other efforts by literati devoted to further elevating Turkish as a poetic idiom. Most notably, in the 1610s, there appeared the first proper Ottoman work on rhetoric, İsmā'īl Ankaravī's *Miftāḥ ul-belāga* (*Key to Rhetoric*). Ankaravī's *Miftāḥ ul-belāga*, allegedly a Turkish translation of and commentary on al-Qazwīnī's fourteenth-century Arabic digest of rhetoric, is actually an adaptation of Maḥmūd Gāvān's fifteenth-century *Manāẓir al-inshā'* (*Perspectives on*

⁷³See Ibn Hija al-Ḥamawī, *Khizānat al-adab*, 210.

⁷⁴Riyāzī, *Riyāz uş-şu'arā'*, MS Ali Emiri Tarih 765, fol. 3a. Cf. *Riyāzū'ş-Şuarā'* (2017), 22.

⁷⁵Aynur, "Ottoman Literature," 3:483.

⁷⁶Sheridan, "I Curse No One without Cause," 68.

Elegant Prose), a Persian work produced in the Deccan, and significantly the adaptation focused on the parts related to verse.⁷⁷ Ankaravî's work and similar efforts thus indicate that the rhetorical heightening of Turkish rested not only on linguistic competence in Persian but more crucially on technical mastery of its poetic idiom.

It is within this context as well, which is less documented, that Nefî's overall work should be seen. His engagement with the fresh style, then, had the larger purpose of advancing Turkish practice to new rhetorical heights. In a *qaşîda* praising the grand vizier Öküz Mehmed Pasha (d. 1619), Nefî even asserts, "the taste of [his] speech is no imitation," echoing his prior claim that his style is "of another way" and hence putting forth his own challenge to master poets, past and recent, of the Persian tradition.⁷⁸ And Nefî's eventual choice of the *qaşîda* as the vehicle for displaying verbal skill was tantamount to a declaration to his local rivals that they did go astray in preferring the *masnavî*. The *qaşîda*, of course, has traditionally been considered *the* poetic form, the oratorical standard, by which to measure rhetorical virtuosity.⁷⁹

Nefî's assertion of his inimitable verbal skill did meet the approval of some fellow literati. Rızâ Mehmed (d. 1641) in particular, in his sequel to Riyâzî's biographical dictionary of 1640, commends Nefî for his *qaşîdas*, "unique with a fresh tongue."⁸⁰ Rızâ's lofty estimation of Nefî reflected the positive change in his reputation, though not always in terms of stylistic novelty, during Murad IV's reign. It was then that Nefî produced his best panegyric *qaşîdas* in Turkish, which would come to be emulated by the succeeding generation of poets.

Conclusion

That Nefî's poetic practice was indebted to the fresh style coming from the East is virtually axiomatic among scholars, due to his appreciation of 'Urfî's poetry. And certainly, Nefî's output in Persian attests to that. Yet even a cursory glance at his poems in Turkish, far greater in number, makes plain that his practice equally drew on local models. Regarding his *qaşîdas*, Ocak has observed that Nefî, in adopting and assimilating techniques associated with the fresh style, outside of Persian grammatical elements, endeavored to improve on the style of Bâkî (d. 1600).⁸¹ The choice of Bâkî was a clear one, since he was canonized as the "sultan of poets" by the 1580s when Nefî began to compose verse. So Nefî's effort at stylistic improvement or freshness also targeted Bâkî, who, it should be noted, was better known for his *ghazals*.

⁷⁷On the *Miftâh ul-belâğa*, see Ferrard, "Development of an Ottoman Rhetoric."

⁷⁸Nefî, *Nefî Divanı*, *kaşîde* no. 33.

⁷⁹As Julie Meisami has noted, "poetry and the poetic use of language was the standard to which oratory was likened," the opposite of the classical Aristotelian formulation (Meisami, *Structure and Meaning*, 445–6).

⁸⁰Rızâ Mehmed, *Rızâ Tezkiresi*, 205.

⁸¹Ocak, "XVII. Yüzyıl Şâiri Nefî ve Kaside," 66. On the particular techniques Nefî adopted, see Erkal, *Divan Şîri Poetikası*, 170–74.

If the most assertive, Nefî was not alone in claiming freshness. As Feldman has pointed out, it was from the early seventeenth century onward that the use of the term “fresh” or “new” started to be employed by Ottoman poets to describe their work, specifically in reference to style and in reaction to the challenge posed by the poetry produced in India.⁸² And, as discussed, poets who adhered to a more Turkish style, especially ‘Aṭā’î, made a similar claim with respect to poetry from India. These poets also were not averse to the fresh style, and did exploit some of the techniques.⁸³ Their disputes with Nefî, then, were over the appropriate level of adoption and assimilation, besides formal and generic considerations. For Nefî and his like-minded peers, there was a further preoccupation with what I call the rhetoricity, or the very quality, of Turkish as an effective poetic idiom, for which the fresh-style poetry served as the key technical resource.

In turning to the fresh-style poetry, however, Nefî did not think of himself as inferior to fellow poets farther out east. Rather, Nefî and other ambitious poets at the time, despite the disagreements, viewed their work as a fundamentally different linguistic enterprise. For them, it was the Turkishness of their poetry, by virtue of the use of Turkish, as opposed to the “Indianness,” to borrow a term from Kinra, that made their own practice distinctively fresh.⁸⁴ Thus the Ottoman efforts at freshness aimed additionally at a renewal of the greater poetic tradition that could eventually surpass the prevailing Persian variety coming from India.

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⁸²Feldman, “Imitatio in Ottoman Poetry,” 45–6.

⁸³Erkal, *Divan Şiiri Poetikası*, 151.

⁸⁴Kinra, *Writing Self, Writing Empire*, 224.

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