

Yunus Emre ve Dante'nin *La Vita Nuova* Adli Eserinde Yüceltme

The Perception of Exaltation in Yunus Emre and Dante's *La Vita Nuova*

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ÖZET

*Bu çalışmanın amacı 13. yüzyılda yaşamış biri Türk diğeri İtalyan iki şair – Yunus Emre ve Dante Alighieri'nin “Yüceltme” konusuna yaklaşımlarıdır. Her iki şairin de ana temaları aşktır. Yunus Emre Tasavvuf felsefesinin etkisi altında ilahi aşka inanıp şeyhi Taptuk Emre'nin rehberliğinde bu dünyanın geçici olduğunu, insanın esas amacının dünyanın zevklerinden kendini arındırıp Allah yoluna girmek olduğunu savunur. İnsan, tasavvufa göre Tanrının evrendeki bir yansıması olduğundan bu bilince ulaştığında tanrılaşabilir. Kendisi bu bilince ulaştıktan sonra da Yunus misyonunu Tanrı aşkını yaymak olarak belirlemiş ve herkesi bu yola davet etmiştir. Dante ise duyduğu dünyevi aşktan ilahi aşka geçişi başarmış; sevgilisinin Mutlak Gerçeklik olduğunun bilincine varmıştır. Yunus'un felsefesini yansıtan şiirleri ve Dante'nin yirmili yaşlarda yazdığı *La Vita Nuova* adli eserinde yapılan incelemede her iki yazarın da Tanrıyı yücelttiği ancak Tanrının aşkına ulaşma yollarının birbirinin tam tersi olduğu gözlenmiştir.*

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yüceltme, Dünyevi Aşk, İlahi Aşk, İnsan, Evren, Mutlak Gerçeklik

ABSTRACT

*The aim of this study is to compare the two poets' – Yunus Emre and Dante's perceptions of “exaltation”. The main theme of their works is love. Yunus Emre, under the influence of Taptuk Emre- his mentor, thinks that one must purify his soul from the worldly pleasures and dedicate himself to the way of God. In Sufism man is the representative of God in this world. This philosophy determines Yunus's mission in life which is to spread God's love among mankind. Dante, on the other hand, reaches self-recognition by transforming his romantic love into divine love realizing that the Beloved is the Absolute Truth. In the present work which is an analysis of the selected poems of Yunus and Dante's *Vita Nuova*, it is found out that both poets exalt God but they do it in different directions.*

Keywords: Exaltation, Love, Divine Love, Man, Universe, the Absolute Truth

1. Giriş

Yunus Emre is a great folk poet, the first Turkish sufi (Islamic mystic) troubadour who sings mystical songs for the Beloved, the Friend. Yunus lived during the late thirteenth century and the beginning of the fourteenth century, which was an age of religious repression. One constant theme in Yunus's poetry is Love, that of God for man and, therefore, of man for God. Dante Alighieri, on the other hand, is an Italian poet who also lived in the thirteenth century. Dante too admires troubadour love poetry. In the *Vita Nuova* (1292-1294), his youthful book of collected lyrics, he writes a series of lyric poems for or about Beatrice, an actual lady he loved. The *Vita Nuova* is the autobiography of a young man. It is the backward glance of a young poet, Dante, still in his twenties. He edits his work to reveal its place in his life and its meaning beyond literature. Although his poems are the complaints about the hardness of the Beloved written in the courtly love tradition in the beginning, in the course of his work, the sentiment felt for Beatrice, the Beloved, undergoes a gradual transformation and becomes a purified, spiritual love relationship. In the *Divine Comedy* (1307-21), his next work, too Beatrice becomes the instrument of God's grace: his love for Beatrice leads Dante to God's Love, i.e. salvation. Dante reaches divine love by subliming Beatrice. The Beloved leads him to God's grace. Yunus, on the other hand, under the influence of Sufism, sees the universe as the reflection of God. In the great chain of beings which starts with the minerals, plants, animals, and man, man is the most important entity reflecting the Creator in the universe. Yunus says that worldly pleasures are all transitory. This world is just a bridge on the way to God. What man should do is to purify his soul and see God in the universe and share the divine knowledge with Him. In Yunus's case, the poet Yunus is deified. He is one with God and guides mankind on the way to God. In Dante, the poet reaches salvation through Beatrice, the Beloved, i.e. Beatrice is deified. These two different perceptions of the exaltation/deification in Yunus and Dante will be the main point of the present study.

Yunus loves the Created for the sake of the Creator. He is a proselytizing wandering preacher who travels long distances to call people to the True Path. His main aim in his poetry is the Qur'an, the fundamentals of Islam, and the mystical way to God. He believes in the omnipotence of God in all creation. There is one condition to reach love of God and return to Him: one must refine his spirit and body. The love, which Yunus sings, is the force behind the existence of the world. In one of his most popular poems, he describes this fierce and burning love:

Aşkın aldı benden beni
Bana seni gerek seni
Ben yanarım dünü günü
Bana seni gerek seni

Your love has wrested me away from me,¹
You're the one I need, you're the one I crave
Day and night I burn, gripped by agony,
You're the one I need, you're the one I crave

Eğer beni öldüreler
Külüm göğe savurular
Toprağım anda çağıra
Bana seni gerek seni
(Fuat 1994: 164)

Even if, at the end they make me die
And scatter my ashes up to the sky,
My pit would break into this outcry:
You're the one I need, you're the one I crave

Yunus sublimates man as the representative of God. He refers to the idea of "vahdet'i vücüt", unity of being, "Oneness", which is a common theme in Sufi mysticism. In Yunus's philosophy, there is God and God is the absolute good, truth and beauty. He is the creator of the physical existence, nature, and time. Divine forms falling in time and space actualize themselves in matter and return to God. These forms are the appearances, or the shadows of the divine forms existing in God's eternity. Man gets initiated into the mysteries of God by making rational generalizations and also by his intuition, and that moment he is identified with God. In Yunus's mind, if any Muslim identifies his will with the will of God, and lives a virtuous life by establishing a balance between body and the soul, it is impossible not to be

¹ The translations of the poems are the works of the present writer.

one with God. This means that there is no boundary between the physical world and the divine and that man is God-like, and an extension of God's reality. For this reason, as a man who got initiated into the mysteries of the universe, Yunus does not hesitate to say that he existed with God before there was existence, and that he has become one with God. He asserts that in the primordial time he was God, and God was he:

"Ben bu sûretten ilerü adım Yunus değil iken
Ben olıdım, ol benidim, bu aşkı sunandayıldım.

Before I was in this form,
when my name was not Yunus,
I was He, He was I,
I was with the one who offered this love.

For his great love of God, Yunus loves all men and calls potential converts to the true path – the way to God:

Gelin tanış edelim
İşi kolayın turalım
Sevelim sevillelim
Dünya kimseye kalmaz
(Fuat 1994, 54)

Come, let us all be friends for once,
Let us make life easy on us,
Let us be lovers and loved ones,
The earth shall be left to no one.

Yunus is a humanist. He lives only for "Love". He constantly emphasizes the futility of attachment to the world because the physical world, belongings, riches and jewels block the mystic's way from God:

Şunlar ki çoktur malları
Gör nice oldu halleri
Sonucu bir gömlek giymiş
Anın da yoktur yenleri
(Fuat 1994: 66)

These men were rich as could be.
This is what they come to, see!
They reached the end and had to wear
The simple robe without the sleeves.

Yunus also expresses the pointlessness of the external forms of religion because

Bir kez gönül yıkdın ise	If you break a true believer's heart once,
Bu kıldığın namaz değil	It's no prayer to God-this obeisance,
Yetmiş iki millet dahi	All of the world's seventy-two nations
Elin yüzün yumaz değil	Cannot wash the dirt off your hands and face.

(Fuat 1994: 56)

Essentially Yunus thinks that people should live modest lives filled with love and friendship, aspiring towards spiritual purity and unity with God. He despises the pursuit of worldly riches because none of these can mean anything after death. He wants us to accept that death is inevitable. However, death is not an end. On the contrary, it is a hope for unity with the Absolute Truth. If one spends his life-time with friendship and love seeing the futility both of pursuing riches and of filling life with hatred, war and grudges, there is no need to fear of death. Yunus's mission in life is to travel long distances to spread the message of his spiritual mentor – Taptuk. He wants to inform and educate people and strengthen their faith.

Dante, on the other hand, in the *Vita Nuova*, which means “New Life”, with a retrospective style, expresses how he found his happiness, his meaning, the new life. The *Vita Nuova*, as the young poet reveals, is about “a new life” (Dante 1992, 3) and in this work he intends to express his discovery of happiness as it was revealed to him. He gives the account of his first sight of Beatrice when both of them were nine years old: “She appeared dressed in the most noble of colours, a subdued decorous crimson” (Dante 1992, 4). Dante falls in love with her at first sight. Nine years later, one afternoon he sees her and Beatrice greets him: “she greeted me so miraculously that I felt I was experiencing the very summit of bliss. It was precisely the ninth hour of the day” (Dante 1992, 6). After the first greeting, he becomes so happy that he retreats to his room and has a dream, in which the God of Love appears to him “in his arms there lay a figure asleep and naked except for a crimson cloth, loosely wrapping it” (Dante 1992, 6) and says something that the poet cannot understand at

that moment. The only thing that he understands is that “[he] is [his] master”. The God of Love holds his heart to “the lady of the blessed greeting” and she eats his “burning” heart (Dante 1992, 6). This vision becomes the subject of his first sonnet in his *Vita Nuova*. He asks for the help of the other poets of the time to interpret this dream but nobody can give any meaning to it *then* although as he says “*now* it is very clear to even the least sophisticated” (Dante 1992, 7). As he aims to reveal the meaning as it is revealed to him, the reader cannot unveil the hidden meaning behind yet.

A lady close to “the most gracious one” (Dante 1992, 9) dies and the poet writes about death. The God of Love, having seen that “[his] sighs could hardly relieve the anguish of [his] heart” (Dante 1992, 15), reminding one of the first vision Dante had, says: “I come from that far land,/ where I had sent your heart to serve my will;/ I bring it back to court a new delight” (Dante 1992, 16). The poet thinks that all his bliss depends on this lady’s greeting until she refuses greeting him. After he is denied this “bliss”, Dante once again closes himself in his room and once more sees the vision of the God of Love who says: “My son it is time to do away with our pretences” (Dante 1992, 19) and then the God starts crying. When he is asked why, although Dante does not understand what he means *then*, he says: “I am like the centre of a circle, equidistant from all points on the circumference, but you are not” (Dante 1992, 19). Differently from the first vision, in the second one the Love God tells him what to write about. It is from then on Dante writes to exalt his lady since he realizes his vanity in depending his true happiness on as arbitrary as the greeting of his lady. He recognizes that he should praise her because:

When [Beatrice] walks,
Love drives a killing frost into vile hearts
That freezes and destroys every thought;
And dare a thought remain to look at her
It has to change to good or else must die;
And if she finds one worthy to behold her,
He feels her power, for her least salutation

Bestows salvation on this favoured one
And humbles him till he forgets all wrongs.
This too has God Almighty graced her with:
whoever speaks with her shall speak with Him.
(Dante 1992, 36)

After a few sonnets in praise of the lady, Dante tells of the death of Beatrice's father and writes on the theme of death. In Chapter 23, he tells of an illness that he suffers for nine days and gives an account of the dream he had "on the ninth day" of his illness: He dreams that Beatrice dies and calls Death to take him too. If one remembers that in his second appearance to Dante, the God of Love was crying without telling Dante why. What he implied was that he is omniscient, i.e. he can see the past, present, and the future. For this reason, He knows already about the death of Beatrice whom he is holding in his arm wrapped into red clothing. This, Dante did not realize *then*. However, with this delirium-like vision he had, Dante's blindness to the reality seems to have come to an end and in the process of his spiritual growth he reached the peak point.

After this hallucination, Dante becomes more aware of Beatrice's divine qualities. She is a "miracle" (Dante 1992, 56). Throughout the book in which he edits this illumination retrospectively, Dante constantly draws a parallelism between Beatrice's life and the number nine. What he wants to underline is Beatrice's relation with the Trinity. As seen before, Dante meets Beatrice when he is nine years old. Their second meeting is nine years later. He had the two visions in connection with the ninth hour. It must also be noted that "three is the sole factor of nine and the sole factor of miracles is three, that is, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost"(Dante 1992, 61). Therefore, Beatrice is associated with the number nine, a miracle. Therefore, she too is miracle as the miraculous Trinity. She is Christ/God-like who comes from Heaven to earth, takes on flesh and blood, dies, and ascends to Heaven:

Beatrice has ascended to heaven,
Into a realm where angels live in peace;
.....
.....
And once removed from its enchanting form,
The tender soul, perfectly filled with grace,
Now lives with glory in a worthy place.
(Dante 1992: 64)

In the *Vita Nuova*, Beatrice is deified. She may be said to die twice: once in Dante's dream that he had when he was ill, and then in reality. Like the death of Christ, that of Beatrice is anticipated in this dream. This, naturally, transforms the cosmic order in the poet's mind because the limitations between the physical world and that of the Spirit merge into each other. For this reason, pointing out the spiritual growth of Dante, after the account of her death, Beatrice appears like Christ in his poems. She is a miracle who has already ascended to Heaven and is allowed to return to the world for the goodness of the mankind. She dies and ascends to Heaven again. She is back only to save the soul of Dante and all mankind.

This Dante recognizes when he sees Beatrice's power of attraction not only on the inhabitants of the city but also on the pilgrims coming from remote places to see her birthplace where she carried out her divine mission when sent to the terrestrial world:

She moves benignly in humility
Untouched by all the praise along her way
And seems a creature come from heaven to earth,
A miracle manifest in reality.
(Dante 1992, 57)

After the physical death, Dante knows that her beauty having removed itself from mortal sight has been transformed into the beauty of the soul, which is the true happiness. He wants to reach this happiness too. However, it lies above and beyond the material world where Beatrice is:

Beyond the sphere that makes the widest round,
Passes the sigh which issues from my heart;
A strange, new understanding that sad Love
Imparts to it keeps urging it on high.
When it has reached the place of its desiring,
It sees a lady held in reverence,
Splendid in light, and through her radiance
The pilgrim spirit gazes at her being.
But when it tries to tell me what it saw,
I cannot understand the subtle words
It speaks to the sad heart that makes it speak.
I know it talks of that most gracious one,
Because it mentions Beatrice;
This much is very clear to me, dear ladies.
(Dante 1992, 83)

The only thing he can do is “to hope that she will show [him] grace” (Dante 1992, 65). In this final sonnet, the poet’s sigh makes the journey up there and sees his lady who is “held in reverence”.

At the end of the book, Dante refers to his new work *Divine Comedy* in which he “hope[s] to write of [Beatrice] that which has never been written of any other woman. And then may it please that One who is the Lord of Graciousness that [his] soul ascend[s] to behold the glory of [his] lady, that is, of that blessed Beatrice, who in glory gazes upon the countenance of the One who is through all ages blessed” (Dante 1992, 84). Having completed the journey within, Dante promises to continue exaltation of Beatrice the Beloved in his next work. As in the *Vita Nuova*, in *Divine Comedy*, too, Beatrice guides Dante to perfection and God’s grace. In *Divine Comedy*, the journey to the celestial world has three steps: his soul ascends first from Inferno to Purgatory and then to Paradise. Virgil takes Dante only up to the Purgatory. From that point onward, only Beatrice guides Dante to Paradise.

In this study Yunus Emre’s philosophy and some of his selected poems reflecting his philosophy and Dante Allighieri’s the *Vita Nuova* have been compared. This study has

shown that these two poets have lived nearly at the same ages in two different cultures, and insisted on using vernacular poetry. As seen in the selected works of both poets, they both exalt their lovers. It is found out that Yunus's exalted bondage is to Taptuk - as his mentor in reaching God's grace, Dante's is to the God of Love - Beatrice. While Yunus's exaltation of God is through man to God, in Dante it is the reverse; through God to man. Yunus becomes "one" with God and this unity enables him to spread God's love among mankind. Dante's process of becoming is through Beatrice(God) to man. His romantic love for Beatrice functions as the initial step in his spiritual development which results in the capacity for divine love. As a last word, it can be said that although the direction is completely the opposite, there is exaltation in both Yunus's and Dante's poetry.

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