

# PHILOLOGICAL SCIENCES

## NEF'Î AND HIS POETIC WORLD IN 17TH-CENTURY CLASSICAL TURKISH LITERATURE

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### Abstract

Although the seventeenth century in the Ottoman Empire was marked by political and social crises, it constituted a highly productive and rich period in terms of Classical Turkish literature. During this era, Divan poetry not only continued its established tradition but also gained new stylistic and expressive dimensions. One of the most prominent and innovative poets of the period was Nef'î. This article examines Nef'î's life, literary personality, and the main characteristics of his poetic output. Particular attention is paid to his mastery of the qasida genre, the innovations he introduced in language and style, and his poetic world distinguished by strong self-confidence and a pronounced spirit of self-praise (*fakhr*).

At the same time, the controversies surrounding Nef'î's satirical work *Sihâm al-Qazâ*, its aesthetic value, and its position within Divan poetry are analyzed from a critical literary perspective. By drawing on the views of both classical and modern scholars, the article offers a comparative evaluation of Nef'î's artistic skill in both panegyric and satirical poetry. In conclusion, it is argued that Nef'î's oeuvre played a significant role in the development of seventeenth-century Classical Turkish literature and that his poetry is also of considerable importance for the study of Azerbaijani-Turkish literary relations.

**Keywords:** Turkish poetry, Ottoman sultans, Nef'î, Azerbaijani, literary

### Introduction

Although the seventeenth century in Ottoman history is generally evaluated as a period of political and economic crises, from a literary perspective, it is regarded as one of the most productive and brilliant phases of classical Turkish poetry. During this period, Ottoman sultans not only patronized artists but also personally produced works in poetry and other fields of art. Ahmed I, who composed religiously themed poems under the pen name "Bahti", Osman II (the Young), known by the pen name "Farisi," meaning "master rider", Murad IV, who wrote under the pen name "Muradi", and Mehmed IV, known by the pen name "Vefayi," were all recognized both as rulers and as poets. In seventeenth-century Ottoman poetry, alongside poets who continued the poetic traditions of earlier periods, there were also poets who produced works under the influence of the **hikemî** (didactic) style, **Sebk-i Hindî** (the Indian style), as well as the trend of **mahallî** (localization or vernacularization). In the sources, the poetry of this century is classified into four main directions: the followers of Bâkî's style; those in search of new stylistic approaches; representatives of the **hikemî** and **mahallî** styles; and the exponents of Sufi poetry.

### Main part

One of the most prominent figures representing the innovative trend in seventeenth-century classical Turkish literature is Nef'î. This powerful poet, known by the pen name "Nef'î," bore the given name Ömer. Although sources indicate that he was born in Həsənqale, located approximately 40 kilometers from Erzurum, there is no precise information regarding his

year of birth. Nevertheless, scholars have concluded that the poet was likely born around 1572.

In substantiating this date, Abdülkadir Karahan draws attention to Nef'î's statement in a qasida addressed to Hafız Ahmed Pasha in 1034 AH (1625 CE), in which the poet notes that he had been writing poetry for "thirty years." At the same time, Karahan's discovery that Gelibolulu Mustafa Âlî, in the introductory section of his work *Mecma'ü'l-bahreyn* (1000 AH / 1591 CE), refers to Nef'î as "a young and intelligent poet" further strengthens this assumption. Relying on these pieces of evidence, Karahan considers it more plausible that Nef'î's birth date corresponds to the years mentioned above.

Relying on a manuscript found in Raif Yelkenci's book collection, Karahan notes that Nef'î's father was Mehmed Bey and his grandfather Ali Pasha, and he further states that the poet's lineage traced back to Shirvan. Although Nef'î initially used the pen name "Darîr," meaning "afflicted by harm," we understand from a qasida with the refrain (*redif*) "Sühan" that, upon the recommendation of Mustafa Âlî, he later changed this pen name.

Eyledüm mahlas-ı Nef'î ile kadrüm efzûn,

Zihn-i pâkimde görüp kuvve-yi izân-ı sühan.  
[2,207]

(I have enhanced my esteem by adopting the pen name Nef'î, perceiving in my pure mind the power of understanding in eloquent expression.)

It can be said that she did not have a very prosperous childhood, based on the words of the poet who satirized her father, who left her when she was still a child and went to be a bridegroom to the Crimean Khan:

Saadet ile nedîm olalı pedêr khanâ,

Ne mercimek görer oldu gözüm ne tarhâna.

.....

Pedêr değil bu belây-i siyyehdir başıma,

Sözüm yerinde nola güç gelirse ger khanâ. [2, 46]

In the early phase of his literary career, Nefî was influenced by Persian classical poets such as Hafez and Sa'dî. Although the exact time and reasons for his arrival in Istanbul are not entirely clear, it is known that he lived in the city for approximately thirty years. He maintained close ties to the palace during the reigns of Ahmed I and Murad IV, and particularly under Murad IV's rule, he both gained significant influence and was ultimately driven to a tragic end.

Murad IV's stern character provided the context for both Nefî's panegyrics and his sharp satires. However, due to the discontent caused by his work *Sihâmü'l-qezâ*, the poet was distanced from the palace and, later, as a result of another satire he composed, he was strangled to death in 1635.

There is insufficient information regarding the poet's early years. Even the exact time and reasons for his arrival in Istanbul remain unclear. However, based on sources, it can be stated that he lived in Istanbul for nearly thirty years. The poet lived during the reigns of Ahmed I, Mustafa I, Osman II, and Murad IV, but he held affection only for Ahmed I and Murad IV.

He composed eight qasidas for the first and twelve for the second, thereby earning their respect. He also wrote qasidas for the grand viziers of the century Quyuçu Murad Pasha (d. 1020 AH), Nasuh Pasha (d. 1023 AH), Damat Mehmed Pasha (d. 1029 AH), and Khalil Pasha (d. 1040 AH) and received due honor from each of them. The most brilliant years of Nefî's life and art coincided with the reign of Murad IV; unfortunately, this period also encompasses the sorrowful and tragic phase of his life. Since Murad IV himself occasionally composed poetry, he consistently valued poets highly and invited them to various gatherings. Nefî was among the poets who attended these assemblies. By nature, Murad IV possessed a stern and somewhat passionate temperament. It was precisely because of this characteristic that he eagerly listened to and enjoyed both Nefî's panegyrics and his satire-filled verses. It should be noted here that Murad IV even had a poem dedicated to praising Nefî.

Gelin insaf edelim, fərq edelim miqdarı,

Şairiz biz deyu, laf ü güzafı koyalım.

Edelim bi-meze söz söylemeden istigfar,

Daməni-Nefi-i-pakîze-êdayı turalım.

Biz kelâm nakliyiz nerde o sâhib-güftar,

Ona teslim edelim emrine münkaad olalım. [6,7]

(Let us act justly and discern the true value of words. Rather than claiming 'we are poets' and speaking empty or trivial phrases, let us express ourselves with measured and respectful language. Let us take as our model the pure and refined style of Nefî. We are merely transmitters of words; the true author is Nefî, and we should submit to his command and show due respect to his expression)

However, these prosperous and happy days came to an end on June 24, 1630. According to tradition, while Murad IV was seated in his father Ahmed I's palace in Beşiktaş, reading Nefî's *Sihâmü'l-qezâ* and feeling deeply inspired, a lightning bolt struck near the

throne. Interpreting this as an ominous sign, the sultan tore the work to pieces. Nefî was then summoned and admonished not to compose satire again. Following this incident, Nefî was dismissed from his post. In fact, this event is even referenced in the verses of a poet who composed a satire about Nefî:

Gökden nazir eindi Sihâmü'l-qezâsına,

Nefi dili ile uğradı hakkın belâsına. [6,8]

There are several accounts in the sources regarding Nefî's death. According to tradition, the poet, having failed to keep a promise made to the sultan, composed a satire against Grand Vizier Bayram Pasha. As a result, Murad IV handed him over to Bayram Pasha, effectively signing his death warrant. The poet was strangled to death, and his body was subsequently thrown into the sea. Several dates of Nefî's death have been recorded using the abjad (numerical) system. "Keçdi Sihâmü'l-qezâ, qatlına oldu səbəb həcvî hâlâ Nefinin." (*Sihâmü'l-qezâ* passed, and the cause of his execution was still Nefî's satire.), "Nagahan geldi bir eksikli dedi tarihin, ah kim kıydı felek Nefi kîmi üstad'a" (Suddenly, history noted a deficiency - ah, who has struck down a master like Nefî?)

Based on all these dates, it can be stated that the poet was killed in 1044 AH / 1635 CE. Information about Nefî's life and works is available in various sources. In all these source particularly in the writings of Katib Çelebi (1608–1657), the *tezkiye* author Rıza (Seyyid Mehmed, d. 1671), Ziya Paşa (1825–1880), Recaizade Mahmud Ekrem (1847–1914), and Tofik Fikrət (1867–1915)—Nefî's skill in composing qasidas and satires is emphasized, and it is noted that he brought a fresh, original language and style to these genres. His fellow poets, including Sabri (d. 1648), Naili (d. 1666), Nabi (1642–1712), Nedîm (d. 1730), and Şeyh Gâlib (1757–1799), also acknowledged Nefî as a powerful poet. "The poet's mastery of poetic technique is particularly striking. It is difficult to find a poet who could so completely subjugate meter and rhyme to his emotions" [6, 13].

Referring to Ali Ekrem Bolayır, Karahan also recognizes in Nefî's work the power to create both exaggeration and harmony in poetry. In his poems, Nefî successfully expresses the battlefields of war, his love for arms and horses, the beauty of spring, heroism, as well as the pleasures of love and wine. Among poets, it was Nefî who devoted the most attention to the *fahriye* (praise) section of the qasida. In a qasida addressed to Ahmed I, the poet's strong sense of self-confidence becomes particularly evident.

İltifât et şuhân erbâbına kim anlardır,

Medhi-şahânı-cahan-bana veren ünvandır,

Kim bilirdi şu'ara olmasa ger sabıkda,

Dehre devletle gelip yine giden sultanı

Haşre dek âbî-hayâtı-suhânı-Bâkidir,

Andırıp zinde kılan namı-Süleyman Hânı.

This passage emphasizes the enduring value of poetic expression (*suhân*) over temporal power, highlighting the poet's role in immortalizing rulers and history through praise.

Nefî was sometimes so immodest that he compared himself to renowned poets such as Hafez (d. 1398), Khayyam (d. 1313), Urfi (d. 1591), Feyzi-i

Hindî (1547–1595), and Mohtasham Kashani (d. 1588), and on occasion even claimed to surpass them.

Nefî's Turkish and Persian *Divans*, as well as his collection of satires titled *Sihâmü'l-qezâ*, are extant. Numerous copies of his Turkish *Divan* exist around the world. In terms of quantity, qasidas occupy the largest space in the Turkish *Divan*. Besides the panegyrics written for the Prophet and for Mevlana, the *Divan* includes qasidas composed for three sultans, eight grand viziers, two şeyhülislams, and numerous influential state officials.

The Persian *Divan* consists of eight qasidas (four dedicated to Mevlana, one to Sultan Murad, one to Sultan Selim, one to Hüsam Giray Khan, and one to Şeyhülislam Mehmed Efendi), one *Sağiname*, one fahriye qit'a, twenty-one ghazals, and 171 rubaiyat. It can be noted that the poems in Nefî's Persian *Divan* are predominantly characterized by a Sufi atmosphere.

*Sihâmü'l-qezâ* is the work in which Nefî's most famous satires are collected. Due to its harsh and severe language, the work has not always received the literary recognition it deserves. Manuscript copies of this work are very rare. Based on the extant copies, researchers note that the poet primarily directed his satirical verses toward his father, Gürcü Mehmed Pasha, Kêmankeş Ali Pasha, Eknmekçi-zade Ahmed Pasha, Veysi, and Nevîzade, composing them in the forms of manzumé (verse), qasida, tarkibband, and qit'a. In addition, the work also includes satires aimed at other influential state officials and fellow poets. Among Nefî's fellow poets targeted in his satires were Mentiqi, Fırsatı, Nigar, Nihan, Bahsi Kâmil, Qânizâde Nâdirî, Ruhî, İtrî, Riyâzî, Kafzâde Fâizî, Azmizâde Haletî, Meşrebî, and Nevîzâde Atâyî. It would not be an exaggeration to say that there was hardly any notable figure whom Nefî did not satirize or speak against with sharp words whenever he had the opportunity. Ranging from irony and innuendo to direct insult and invective, many of these satires contain harsh expressions that have often hindered their appreciation as literary works. Nevertheless, *Sihâmü'l-qezâ* remains an excellent example of satirical poetry and lively invective. Within moral and ethical boundaries, these works provide the reader with clear demonstrations of the poet's brilliant reasoning and formidable mastery of satire. This further attests to Nefî's remarkable success in the field of satire. As noted above, Nefî's satires are collected in *Sihâmü'l-qezâ*. Manuscript copies of the work exist in Istanbul, Edirne, Ankara, and London [2, 130–141]. Researchers sometimes question whether *Sihâmü'l-qezâ* truly belongs to Nefî. The main reason for this doubt is that, in terms of language and style, the satire differs completely from the poet's *Divan*. The pure, clear, and refined language and style seen in his *Divan* are replaced in *Sihâmü'l-qezâ* by very coarse expressions. Saffed Sıdkı presents his study on *Sihâmü'l-qezâ* as "the spread of the eternal and original sin of *Divan* literature" [9, 23]. Metin Akkuş notes: "The work, which also contains various satirical poems, is filled with expressions related to accusation, contempt, and invective, which overshadow its literary value" (2,103). Mehmet Fuad Köprülü observes: "Except for a few poems in which the harmony and grandeur remind one of

the work of a great poet, most of the work consists of coarse, meaningless, and often obscene verses.

It is difficult to believe that a great poet like Nefî would compose such vulgar and rudimentary poetry" [7, 395].

Turhan Tan (Samih Fethi) states: "In his qasidas, Nefî is a fairy of harmony; in his satires, he is a drunken, foul-mouthed vagabond of the streets" (10). İsmail Habib Sevuk comments: "Many of the poems in *Sihâmü'l-qezâ*, where his satires are collected, are so full of obscenities that even a solitary reader hesitates to read them" [8, 152].

These assessments highlight the stark contrast between Nefî's refined *Divan* style and the raw, provocative nature of his satirical compositions, which has both intrigued and troubled scholars.

Karahan states: "Apart from these delicate subtleties, the poems in *Sihâmü'l-qezâ* do not possess great literary value. Occasionally, there are passages among these poems that reflect the characteristics of Nefî's artistry, but these are few. The manuscript copies of the work are also scarce no more than four or five—and they differ from one another" [6, 10].

In a satire by Şeyhülislam Yahya, he called Nefî an unbeliever (kâfir), and the response Nefî gave is known as a very famous example of satirical verse in Opoetry.

Of Şeyhülislam Yahya's poem:

Şimdi xeyli suhânverân içre,  
Nefî mânendi var mı bir şair.  
Sözleri sebâyî-müelleqâdır,  
İmrü'l-Qeys kendidür kâfir.

("Now, among many eloquent poets,

Is there one comparable to Nefî?

His words are like suspended ornaments,

Yet he is, like Imrû'l-Qays, an unbeliever (kâfir)."

This verse juxtaposes praise for Nefî's poetic skill with a sharp accusation regarding his personal or religious character, reflecting the sharp and satirical tone common in *Divan* literature.)

Of Nefî's response:

Bize kâfir demiş müftî efendi,  
Tutalı ben ana diyem müslimân.  
Varulduğda yarın rızâ-i cezâyâ,  
İkimiz de çıkaruz anda yalan. [2,250]

(The Mufti Efendi has called me an unbeliever (kâfir),

I will consider him a Muslim in return.

When we appear before the Lord on the Day of Judgment,

Both of us will be proven false then."

This reply cleverly turns the accusation back on the accuser, employing the sharp wit and moral reasoning characteristic of Nefî's satirical poetry.)

With this qit'a, which appears primarily in his *Divan* and in some copies of *Sihâmü'l-qezâ*, Nefî once again demonstrated his mastery in composing satire. However, such examples are quite rare. The majority of his poems focus more on the pride of the people he criticizes, often satirizing their outward appearance. In this regard, his qasida satirizing Fırsat provoked considerable objection among critics.

Ana benzerdi ger sürse yüzine zerbeçav iblis,

Ana benzerdi ger cinnî olaydı kehru-bâ-talât. [2, 200]

(Like a mother would, even if the devil with striking eyes approached your face,

Like a mother would, even if a jinn possessed the amber-colored beauty.”

The verse employs vivid metaphors and supernatural imagery to emphasize protective care and admiration, characteristic of Nefî's skillful use of figurative language in satire and praise.)

In *Sihâmü'l-qezâ*, in a qit'a titled “Derr-ı Haqqı Mehmed Ali,” we witness that the person being criticized is openly insulted:

Görmedim sâncileyin rînd-i cahan-dide gidi,

Bire nazuk, bire akmaq, bire vadide gidi.

Sen de İtrî gibi harlikde qalup ger şimdi,

Taib olsan nice olurdu bire varidə gidi.(2,247)

(I have never seen such a libertine with worldly perception;

One is delicate, another foolish, yet another in the valley.

If you, like İtrî, remained steadfast in your ardor  
Imagine what would happen to one in the valley.”

The verse combines vivid characterizations with moral and social commentary, reflecting Nefî's sharp observational skill and his mastery in satirical expression.)

In the satire addressed to Gürcü Mehmed Pasha, titled with the redif “a köpek,” Nefî employs extremely harsh language and does not hesitate to insult the person he criticizes.

Molla Sultana zıbıkçıbaşı da olsa eğer,

Görünür bana yine cariyeden kem a köpek. [2,161]

(“Even if Molla Sultan were the head of the guards,

He still appears to me as less than a dog compared to a concubine.”

This couplet illustrates Nefî's bold and provocative use of language in his satirical poetry, directly mocking the subject with vivid and scornful imagery.

Many Ottoman writers drew inspiration from the works of the prominent Azerbaijani poet Fuzuli. Ömer Nefi also composed poems under the influence of Fuzuli's works. What primarily connects Fuzuli and Nefi are the imagery and motifs in their ghazals and qasidas, as well as the great importance both poets attached to the art of language and poetry. Fuzuli, in Azerbaijani literature, served as a source of inspiration for Ottoman writers not only due to his aesthetic richness and poetic subtlety but also through the exemplary works he produced in the genres of ghazal and qasida. In Ömer Nefi's poetry, Fuzuli's influence is primarily evident in the choice of imagery and poetic motifs. The delicate metaphors, symbolic depictions, and emotional richness characteristic of Fuzuli's poetry are likewise reflected in Nefi's works.

In both ghazal and qasida genres, Nefi adopted Fuzuli's motifs and stylistic techniques, while simultaneously enriching this influence with his own poetic approach. For instance, in his ghazals, Nefi not only emulated Fuzuli's themes of love, nature, and philosophical reflection but also introduced new nuances aligned with the social and cultural context of his Ottoman milieu. This demonstrates that he did not merely replicate

Fuzuli's work but successfully integrated the poetic ideas he derived from Fuzuli into his own creative expression. A key factor linking Fuzuli and Nefi is their shared approach to the qasida genre. Both poets treated this classical form with great care, emphasizing intricate stylistic devices, thematic depth, and the aesthetic refinement of language, which reflects their similar poetic sensibilities and the high value they placed on the art of poetry.

In divan literature, Ömer Nefi stands out as the poet with the largest number of qasidas. Similar to Fuzuli, who composed qasidas in three different languages, Nefi's divan also contains a substantial collection of qasidas. Like Fuzuli's, Nefi's qasidas are primarily composed of na'ats (poems in praise of the Prophet), eulogies, and fakhriyyas (poems of self-praise). This structural and thematic similarity reflects the influence of Fuzuli on Nefi, while also highlighting Nefi's ability to adapt these classical forms to his own poetic vision. Both poets demonstrate a meticulous attention to linguistic refinement, thematic organization, and aesthetic expression, which underscores their shared approach to the qasida genre within the broader context of Ottoman and Azerbaijani divan traditions.

### Conclusion

Ömer Nefi can be regarded as a poet with a distinctive place in Ottoman divan literature. His work is notable not only for its formal and stylistic richness but also for successfully assimilating the influence of great Azerbaijani poets such as Fuzuli. Nefi applied Fuzuli's imagery, motifs, and poetic figures in his own works while recontextualizing them within the Ottoman cultural and literary environment. This demonstrates that he was not merely an imitator but a creative and original poet.

The great importance Nefi attached to the art of language and poetic aesthetics, the precision of his imagery, and the expressive richness of his ghazals and qasidas distinguish him from other Ottoman poets of his time. Moreover, his assimilation of Fuzuli's influence within his own style strengthened the literary connection between Ottoman and Azerbaijani traditions, creating a cultural and literary bridge between the two.

In conclusion, Ömer Nefi contributed significantly to the development of classical Ottoman divan literature while successfully integrating the poetic legacy of Azerbaijani poets into the Ottoman context. His oeuvre remains a vivid example of aesthetic richness, poetic subtlety, and the literary and cultural connections between these two traditions.

Studying the works of this great poet, particularly his satires, and introducing them to the Azerbaijani scholarly community is especially significant within the context of researching literary relations between Azerbaijan and Turkey.

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