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NATURE AND MYSTICISM IN THE POETRY OF HENRY VAUGHAN, YUNUS EMRE AND NESİMİ

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ABSTRACT

It is generally agreed that a basic similarity of thought and expression underlies mystical literature produced in different ages and countries, regardless of national or religious traditions and almost transcending the limits of individual creativity.

In this study the works of three poets who lived in distant countries and in different ages have been compared with regard to their treatment of nature. All the three poets, Henry Vaughan (1622-1685), Yunus Emre (638/1240-720/1320) and Nesimi (d. 804/1404?), treated nature both as a source of imagery for expressing mystical beliefs and ideas and also as setting or an object of descriptive writing.

In the poems of Vaughan and Yunus we perceive a spontaneous and realistic response to nature. Nature is present in their poetry both for its own sake and as imagery. Nesimi, influenced by the movement of Hurufiism, believes in the existence of a deep bond between nature and God and sees nature as the mirror where God reveals divine truth and beauty. He gives expression to his mystical experiences in a language full of visual and concrete nature imagery. The depiction of nature as the symbol of eternal realities is a significant feature present also in Vaughan's poetry.

In spite of differences due to distinctions of culture and individuality, the poetry of Vaughan, Yunus and Nesimi reflects basic similarities in out-look and treatment. This affinity may, in some instances, be traced to the common heritage of the three poets in the mystical and philosophical traditions of the Hellenistic Middle East; however, it would be more accurate to attribute the similarities to an affinity of spirit rather than to the influence of the philosophical systems related to their mystical teaching. A study of their poetry reveals a deep bond underlying the mystical poetry of the East and the West, over a chasm of centuries and geographical boundaries, on the level of the human and as an expression of man's quest for permanent truth within the transient forms of nature.

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There seems to be an essential unity in all mystical poetry written in any age or country—a unity, which manifests itself not only in the ideas and experiences that form the subject matter of these poems but also in the basic tone or mood dominating such poetry. It is as though one and the same voice is heard through all the varieties of expression. Indeed, it seems as if, bent on attaining the innermost truth about himself, as well as the whole of existence, the mystic almost transcends the patterns of the conventions and traditions of his own age and country, and reaches a level of reality where all human experiences seem to converge. It is the perception of a fundamental similarity in mystical writings of different countries and ages that has led scholars to compare the works of mystics, professing different religions and influenced by widely divergent cultural traditions.

Evelyn Underhill in her well-known study on *Mysticism*, stresses the idea of a spiritual kinship between mystics of distant lands and ages, saying, "We meet these persons in the east and the west; in the ancient, mediaeval, and modern worlds."¹ Nevertheless, scholars and the lovers of mystical poetry have, at the same time, repeatedly and justly warned against the dangers of over generalization, against being misled into what Rudolf Otto called "the shadowy night of 'general mysticism'." He believed that the idea of an essential unity in mystical literature should be reconciled with a consideration of the variations of treatment and outlook, for, "The nature of mysticism only becomes clear in the fullness of its possible variations."²

The object of this study, which is concerned with comparing the mystical poems of Vaughan with those of two Turkish poets Yunus Emre ve Nesîmî from the point of view of their treatment of nature, is to show, in their works, the existence of an essential unity, and, at the same time, to point to the variations in their treatment of the theme, perceived, as far as possible, in a strictly literary context, as distinct from the philosophical and theological aspects of mysticism. A comparison of the work of poets belonging to countries and traditions which at first sight seem entirely remote may be justified by the fact that they had many essential characteristics in common. Not only were they all inspired by an intense love of God and gifted with an intimate awareness of His presence in the world, but each was also deeply sensitive to the beauties of nature which played a large part in their mystical experience. Yet, they wrote in different languages and according to the requirements of the literary and cultural traditions of their age and country. Moreover, they were all outstanding artists, and in their poetry gave voice to their personal yearnings and expressed their individual approach to mysticism.

Yunus Emre, who was born in the middle of the thirteenth century (638/1240) and died in 1320 A.D. (720 A.H.), lived in the vicinity of the river Sakarya in the north western part of Asia Minor, in a period when the Seljuk state had begun to disintegrate under the pressure of Mongol invasion and its place to be taken by small emirates of more or less independent nature. Yunus chose a life of seclusion and mystic dedication by joining the convent (*tekke*) of Tapduk Emre, the Shaikh of one

¹ Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism. A Study in the Nature and Development of Man's Spiritual Consciousness* (10th ed., London, 1923), p. 3.

² Rudolph Otto, *Mysticism East and West* (London, 1932), Foreword, p. v.

of the numerous religious brotherhoods professing non-orthodox and esoteric doctrines. Connections have been drawn between Yunus' beliefs and those of the Babai, Bektashi and Mevlevi dervishes. It has, however, been pointed out that there were no clear cut doctrinal divisions between the practices of the various religious groups active at the time.³ In "that creative thirteenth century when these orders had their birth,"⁴ as the age has been described, there was a tremendous vitality in the air. The Greek philosophers were studied and their ideas were incorporated into the thought of Islam, and the whole heritage of the Hellenistic Near East was blended with Arabic and Turkish folklore as well as with the local cultures of Anatolia.

The social and political conditions in Anatolia during the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries have been described by an orientalist in the following words:

The people were forced to pay heavy taxes, to support an army composed of local elements and foreign mercenaries and to raise crops for the descendants of the Khwarezmshāh, but were left to their own resources in defending themselves against the attacks of the Mongols. The ruthlessness and greed of powerful landlords knew no bounds. The peasant who could not reap his harvest or till his own field sought hope and comfort only in mystical beliefs.⁵

We find no direct references to the political or social affairs of his time in Yunus poetry;⁶ but, the cities destroyed by raids, the villages with their poor inhabitants, the barren and bleak countryside often come into his poems as setting and imagery.

There is a sense of despondency, a gentle melancholy, pervading it all, which could perhaps be related to the atmosphere of general pessimism and dejection prevalent at the time. The presence of nature is felt in his poetry in the same way as in Homer's: there is not a great deal of direct description, and yet we feel that it is always there, that the poet and the people he describes live in the midst of it. He conveys this impression by vivid glimpses of village life and the countryside, in one or two lines. The snowy mountain wilfully obstructs his passage like a highwayman,⁷ the clouds gather round its peaks like clustering grapes,⁸ the lover's face is as pale as an autumn leaf,⁹ and certain words and phrases keep recurring: earth, stones, rain, springs, endlessly winding roads, impassable rivers.

The same instinctive response to the countryside and the vivid depiction of its fleeting as well as enduring aspects, through incidental description and simile, are

³ Yunus Emre, *Risālāt al-Nushīyya ve Divān*, ed. A. Gölpınarlı (Istanbul, 1965), Introd. p. xxxv. For an account of his life and the legends which have grown round him see *Ibid.*, Introd. pp. vii-xxxv; J. K. Birge, *The Bektashi Order of Dervishes* (London, 1937), pp. 53-6; E. J. W. Gibb, *A History of Ottoman Poetry* (London, 1900), I, 164-175.

⁴ J. K. Birge, p. 22; cf. P. Wittek, *The Rise of the Ottoman Empire* (London, 1966), pp. 30-31.

⁵ Yunus Emre Divanı (Complete Poems of Yunus Emre) ed. A. Gölpınarlı (Istanbul, 1943-1948), II, Introd., 375-6. See also P. Wittek, p. 30.

⁶ See Yunus Emre: *Risālāt al-Nushīyya*, Introd., pp. xxv, for allusions to the Mongol invasion.

⁷ Yunus Emre Divanı, I, 252, xxvii.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, I, 240, iv.

features also present in Henry Vaughan's (1622-1685) poetry. Like Yunus, Vaughan is the product of an age of social and religious turbulence. During the Civil War he retired to live in Breconshire- "a country situated in the heart of southern Wales, and noted for its fertile valleys and high mountains."¹⁰ His poems reveal a close observation of the natural setting and are imbued with a sense of the divine perceived through the beautiful forms surrounding him. We see the hills dressed in "faint beams" after sunset,¹¹ the "flowers that into fields do stray,"¹² the memory of his friends who have died "glows and glitters" in his bosom like 'stars upon some gloomy grove.'¹³

In Vaughan, just as in Yunus, the quality of perceiving and describing details of natural scenery is the outcome of individuality rather than being an assimilation of the literary values of the periods in which they wrote. Observation of nature for its own sake and a realistic description of natural scenery were very rare traits in the literature of Vaughan's age, and the tradition of stylized and conventional nature poetry handed down from the sixteenth century influenced the treatment of writers. As remarked by Alexander Judson, the conventional poetic associations of the "raven, owl and linnet" were still employed in Vaughan's poetry.¹⁵

Similarly, besides the realistic setting and imagery which characterize his treatment, Yunus also made use of the conventional description of nature that had become fashionable in West-Turkish poetry under the influence of Persian literature, such as the description of the rose garden and the nightingales in Spring. The realistic portrayal of nature is almost completely absent in classical Seljuk and Ottoman literature where nature is described in a stylized and artificial manner. The spontaneous and realistic response to nature which dominates in the poetry of the two poets points to the existence in both men of a deep love of nature asserting itself in spite of the literary traditions of their age.

Nature, however, is not present in their poetry for its own sake or for incidental description. It fulfils the purpose of giving expression to mystical states of mind. It also inspires the poet to speculate on God and mankind and stimulates him to experience mystical truth.

It would be helpful to begin our examination of this specific aspect of the treatment of nature by looking at a theme which is present in the poems of both Vaughan and Yunus: nature shown as in love with God and all creatures and objects worshipping Him. In Vaughan's words:

Birds, beasts, all things
Adore him in their kinds.¹⁶

¹⁰ A. C. Judson, "Vaughan as a Nature Poet," *PMLA*, XLII (1927), 146-156.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, "They are all gone into the world of light", l. 7, Works, II, 484.

¹² *Ibid.*, "Palm - Sunday", l. 9, Works, II, 501.

¹³ *Ibid.*, "Regeneration", l. 4, Works, II, 397.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, "They are all gone into the World of light", ll. 5-6, Works, II, 484.

¹⁵ A. C. Judson, "Vaughan as a Nature Poet," p. 155.

¹⁶ *Silex Scintillans*, "The Morning - Watch", ll. 14-5, Works, II, 424.

This well-known idea, which forms a stock image of religious hymns and which can be traced back to the influence of the Bible and the religious traditions dominant in the Middle East, occurs quite often in the poetry of Yunus. In a poem, calling the faithful to prayer, he says :

Ezan okur müezzin çağırur Allah adın
 Ağar pervaza kuşlar tesbih okur ağaçlar
 Himmet alın kardaşlar dur ırte namazına
 [The muezzin calls [the faithful] to prayer;
 he calls out the name of God
 The birds arise and soar to heaven,
 The trees whisper his praises,
 Take heed brothers and attend to your prayers.]

In another poem, he gives a list of flowers and describes how each flower worships God in its special way.¹⁷ It is not difficult to see how easily this convention could lend itself to narrow didacticism. It was often employed to illustrate or give a moral lesson. Vaughan tells men to imitate birds, beasts and plants, and even inanimate objects such as stones and rocks, in their worship and service of God :

Walk with thy fellow-creatures : note the **hush**
 And **whispers** amongs them. There's not a **Spring**,
 Or **Leafe** but hath his **Morning-Hymn**; Each **Bus**
 And **Oak** doth know I **AM**; canst thou not sing?¹⁸

This poetic and religious convention became much more interesting and gained fresh significance when the poet transformed it into a symbol for expressing his actual experience or state of mind. We see it done in "The Morning-Watch" by Vaughan, where, the soul of the mystic waiting for the grace of God is identified with nature rejoicing at dawn, in a magnificent image of universal harmony :

O Joyes! Infinite sweetness! with what flowres,
 And shoots of glory, my soul breakes, and buds!
 All the long houres
 Of night, and Rest
 Through the still shrouds
 Of sleep, and Clouds,
 This Dew fell on my Breast;
 O how it **Blouds**,
 And **Spirits** all my Earth! heark! In what Rings,
 And **Hymning Circulations** the quick world
 Awakes, and sings;²⁰

[11. 10-11]

¹⁷ Yunus Emre Divanı, I, 54, xviii. Poems of this type of a narrow orthodox character are not very common in Yunus. A. Gölpınarlı suspects the authenticity of the poem; *ibid.*, I, 66.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, II, 540, cciii.

¹⁹ *Sillex Scintillans*, "Rules and Lessons", 11. 13-6, Works, II, 436.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, Works, II, 424.

The idea that all creatures and objects in nature are gifted with a sense of the Divine—we might almost say, the mystic's vision of the Divine—seems to have been accepted by both the writers. However, there are some striking differences in their approach to the theme. 'Vaughan sees nature almost closer to God than man; nature is free from strife and discord, and much more steadfast in its love of God. The contrast between the constancy of nature and the instability of man forms the subject of his poems.²¹ Although, nature, too, has suffered from the ill-effects of the Fall, it seems to have preserved its original state of purity and peace, better than man himself. In the "Distraction," he says:

Hadst thou
Made me a starre, a pearle, or a rain-bow,
The beames I then had shot
My light had lessend not,
But now
I find my selfe the lesse, the more I grow;
The world
Is full of voices; Man is call'd and hurl'd
By each, he answers all,
Knows ev'ry note, and call,
Hence, still
Fresh dotage tempts, or old usurps his will.²²

[11. 5-16]

It is in this inherent inclination in man towards evil and sin, which distracts him from his main quest:

Man hath stil either toyes, or Care,
He hath no root, nor to one place is ty'd,
But ever restless and Irregular
About this Earth doth run and ride,²³

Vaughan has experienced the same restlessness in himself.

Sometimes I sit with thee, and tarry
An hour, or so, then vary.
Thy other Creatures in this Scene
Thee only aym, and mean;²⁴

He, therefore, longs to feel the undivided love and devotion of other creatures for God. They are capable of feeling pure and spontaneous joy in God's presence; so Vaughan yearns to be like them and share in their ecstasy:

²¹ E.g., "Man", "Corruption", "The Pursuite"; the theme also occurs in "The Bird", "The Stone", "Palm - Sunday" and "Christ's Nativity".

²² *Silex Scintillans*, Works, II, 413.

²³ *Silex Scintillans*, "Man," ll. 15-8, Works, II, 477.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, "And do they so? Have they a Sense", ll. 21-4, Works, II, 432.

I would I were some **Bird**, or **Star**,
 Flutt'ring in woods, or lifted far
 Then either **Star**, or **Bird**, should be
 Shining, or singing still to thee.²⁵

In Yunus, we also meet with the image of the trees, stones and flowers portrayed as creatures striving to attain to God. He describes a host of tulips together as an order of dervishes intent on uniting with God.

Zâkir başı lâleler
 Tarıkınca varalar
 Hak cemalin göreler
 Tesbîh okur çiçekler
 [The *dhikr* is led by the tulips,
 Who long to attain to Thee in their order
 And even see Thy face;
 The flowers sing Thy glory].²⁶

He wants to worship God together with plants and inanimate objects,

Dağlar ile taşlar ile
 Çağırayım Mevlâm seni
 Seherlerde kuşlar ile
 Çağırayım Mevlâm seni
 [Let me call Thee
 With stones and mountains;
 Let me call Thee
 With birds at dawn.]²⁷

However, unlike Vaughan's there is a pathetic strain in Yunus' description of nature; it is a nature in love with God, but not so close to God as seen in Vaughan or in some of the other mystics. Yunus is keenly aware of the suffering and discord in nature; not only are natural objects subject to death, pain and change as much as men, but there is no hope of recompense for them in another life to come. In a poem where the poet imagines himself speaking to a yellow wild flower, wondering why it has so pale a colour, the flower replies by telling him about its hidden grief, its fear of death and its end in complete oblivion, whereas, man has a soul that is immortal.

Sordum sarı çiçeğe benzin neden sarıdır
 Çiçek eyder ey derviş âhım dağlar eridir

 Yine sordum çiçeğe kışın nerde olursuz

²⁵ Ibid., "Christ's Nativity", II, 13-8, Works, II, 442.

²⁶ Yunus Emre Divanı, II, 540, cciii. The *dhikr* is the 'recollection' or recitation of the attributes of God, see R. A. Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam* (London, 1963), p. 45-6.

²⁷ Yunus Emre Divanı, II, 552, ccxix.

Çiçek eyder ey derviş kışın tûrab oluruz
 Yine sordum çiçeğe tamuya girermisiz
 Çiçek eyder ey derviş ol münkirler yeridir
 Yine sordum çiçeğe uçmağa glrermisiz
 Çiçek eyder ey derviş uçmak âdem şehridir.

[I asked the yellow flower: "Why is thy face so pale?"
 He answered: "My sighs, O dervish, would make mountains melt!"

.
 I asked him, "Where do you go in winter?"
 He said, "O dervish, we become dust in winter!"
 I asked him again, "Do you, then, enter hell?"
 He replied, "Hell is for the unbelievers."
 I asked him then, "Do you enter paradise?"
 He replied, "Paradise is the abode of men alone!"]²⁸

The theme of grief, of sadness at the heart of things is a recurrent one in Yunus' poetry. It can be interpreted as the projection of his own sorrowful yearning for God, of his own grief at being apart from him. All created things and men where at one time together and one with God. Then, they separated. This separation is, according to the Sufis, the essence and meaning of the creation. The terms of 'the one' and 'the many' and the ideas of 'union' and 'separation' are familiar themes in Sufi poetry. Quite often it is symbolically expressed through the image of a plant plucked from its bed or the branch of a tree cut off from its trunk.²⁹ In a poem, he relates the sorrow of the water-wheel which groans as it turns saying.

Dağdan indirdiler beni
 Yapağım budağım kanı
 İnilerim dünü günü
 Derdim vardır inilerim

[They brought me down from the mountains!
 Ah! where now are all my boughs and leaves?
 I groan day and night;
 I have my grief, so I moan.]³⁰

In another poem, he questions the nightingale about the cause of its lamentation, "Is it" he asks, "because you have crossed snowy mountains and deep rivers and left your beloved behind?"³¹ or "Is it that your young too has been snatched away by the falcon?"³²

²⁸ Yunus Emre Divanı, II, 541, cciv.

²⁹ Mevlânâ (Maulana Jalal al-Din Rûmî) starts *The Mathnawî* with the words, "Listen to the reed how it tells a tale, complaining of separations - / Saying, 'Ever since I was parted from the reed - bed, my lament hath caused both man and woman to moan.'" *Op. cit.*, trans. R. A. Nicholson (London, 1925 - 40), p. 5.

³⁰ Yunus Emre Divanı, II, 595, cclxxxi.

³¹ Yunus Emre Divanı, II, 593, cclxxix: "Karlı dağlar mı aştin / Derin ırmaklar mı geçtin / Yârin-den ayrı mı düştün?"

³² *Ibid.*, II, 593, cclxxviii: "Senin de yavrunu şahin mi kaptı?"

It is then, this tone of grief and separation which characterizes Yunus' presentation of nature. It is significant that such an undertone of melancholy and nostalgia seems to pervade most of Anatolian folk poetry and music. It may be partly attributed to the character of the landscape itself, inspiring one with feelings of loneliness and sadness, with its vast desolate plains and distant snow-capped mountains. We often find Yunus talking to the mountains and clouds as though to spirits akin to his own, asking for sympathy and pity:

Karlı tağların başunda salkım salkım olan bulut
Saçın çözüp benim için yaşın yaşın ağlar mısın

[O cloud, that on the snowy mountain peak gatherest in clusters,
Wilt thou let thy hair down and weep for me?] ³³

Like Yunus, Vaughan also grieves at the death and decay of natural creatures and objects. In "The Garland" he describes how in his youth he was warned to desist from chasing "frail beauty,"

Flowers gather'd in this world, die here; if thou
Wouldst have a wreath that fades not, let them grow,
And grow for thee; who spares them here, shall find
A Garland, where comes neither rain, nor wind. ³⁴

[11. 33-34]

The image of plucking flowers that fade is used here metaphorically to give a moral lesson, however, the lines betray a tenderness for the flowers which are forced to die a premature death. Vaughan could never accept their fate of complete oblivion as Yunus did. He holds out a ray of hope also for them, by extending to them the blessings of eternity. Both in "Palm-Sunday" and in "The Book," there is a clear statement of his faith in the restitution of all created things in a world hereafter. Hutchinson, who deals fully with this aspect, remarks "The appears to be Vaughan's generous interpretation of the scriptural phrase, 'the times of the restoration of all things' (Acts iii. 21), though few Christian thinkers have developed the idea so far as he has done." ³⁵ The following lines from "Palm-Sunday" illustrate this point very well:

Trees, flowers & herbs; birds, beasts & stones,
That since man fell, expect with groans
To see the lamb, which all at once,
Lift up your heads and leave your moans!
For here comes he
Whose death will be
Man's life, and your full liberty. ³⁶

[11. 11-17]

³³ Yunus Emre Divanı, I, 252, xxvii.

³⁴ *Silex Scintillans*, Works, II, 493. A deep sympathy for plants is expressed in "The Timber" and "The Sap".

³⁵ F. E. Hutchinson, *Henry Vaughan* (Oxford, 1947), p. 176.

³⁶ *Silex Scintillans*, Works, II, 501.

On the whole, we meet with a more hopeful and happier attitude to nature in Vaughan. In "The Book" he describes how the tree that has been cut down, is turned into a book; it serves a good purpose; and the eye of God had watched it and loved it in all its transformations.³⁷ The tree which Yunus sees growing by the road side inspires him only to think of death and the futility of mortal aspirations :

Böyle lâtlf beznüben böyle şirin düzenüben
Gönül Hakka uzayuban dilek nedür neye muhtaç
Ağaç karır devran döner kuş budağa bir kez konar
Dahi sana kuş konmamış ne güğercin ne hud dürraç
Bir gün sana zevâl ire yüce kaddun ine yire
Budakların oda gire kaynaya kazan kıza saç

[For what purpose dost thou deck thyself with so much charm?
Stretching thy boughs upwards as if in hope of reaching Heaven?
What dost thou strive for so?
Time passes, the tree grows old, the bird perches but once
on the bough!
On thy boughs no pidgeon nor partridge has yet alighted!
Death will come some day and fell thy great trunk
And let it lie stretched on the earth.
Thy twigs will serve to boil the cauldron and heat the griddle.]³⁸

Neither of the two poets are satisfied with transient natural beauty alone. The yearning for eternal beauty which exists only in God is expressed by Vaughan in the lines,

For thy eternal, living wells
None stain'd or wither'd shall come near :
A fresh, immortal green there dwells,³⁹

The same idea is echoed by Yunus :

Sen baktığın gülistanın Gülleri solmaz Allahım
[The roses of the garden of which Thou art the keeper
never fade.]⁴⁰

The ultimate object of the mystic poet is to attain to that land where there is no decay,

There grows the flowre of peace,
The Rose that cannot wither.⁴¹

³⁷ *Silex Scintillans*, Works, II, 540.

³⁸ *Yunus Emre Divanı*, I, 73, Ç.

³⁹ *Silex Scintillans*, "The Seed growing secretly", II, 21-3, Works, II, 511.

⁴⁰ *Yunus Emre Divanı*, II, 586, cclxiv.

⁴¹ *Silex Scintillans*, 'Peace', II, 14-5, Works, II, 430.

The theme of 'the rose that cannot wither' or 'the star that never sets' is, of course, the expression of the mystic's desire for eternal beauty and truth. It is significant that the search of the poets for God in nature leads them to denounce natural beauty in favour of divine beauty. Both Yunus and Vaughan describe the state of union with God through metaphors of darkness and light. Yunus conveys his experience with the words :

Bir kara alem gördüm
Kara gönüller açar
Katı karadır illâ
Âlemlere nur saçar
Anda birlik iletmez
İkiliği nitsinler
İllâ fena kumaşı
O ilde katı geçer

[I saw a dark land that brightens gloomy hearts,
A land of darkness which is the source of the light of the universe,
A land beyond unity where duality cannot enter.
Only the garment of non-being is sold there.]⁴²

The description reminds us of Vaughan's lines in his poem, "The Night":

There is in God (some say)
A deep, but dazzling darkness; As men here
Say it is late and dusky, because they
See not all clear;
O for that night! where I in him
Might live invisible and dim.

[11. 49-54]⁴³

Both the poets employ nature imagery to convey the ecstasy of the mystic when he feels himself in union with all the creation and with God. The mystic describes himself in an idiom reminiscent of the richly metaphorical language of the Songs of Solomon. He is transformed into a rose, a nightingale or a garden;⁴⁴ he is the source of all plenty, his heart has turned into silver, his breath smells of musk and amber, he is a tree whose branches yield nourishing fruit and whose leaves are medicinal to the ailing.⁴⁵ Vaughan relates the effect of the 'sweet glance' of God on his soul in the words,

...I flourish, and once more
Breath all perfumes, and spice;
I smell a dew like Myrrh, and all the day
Wear in my bosom a full Sun; ...⁴⁶

⁴² Yunus Emre Divanı, II, 540, ccii.

⁴³ Sillex Scintillans, Works, II, 523.

⁴⁴ Yunus Emre Divanı, I, 46, ii; II, 584, cclx.

⁴⁵ Yunus Emre Divanı, I, 47-8, vi.

⁴⁶ Sillex Scintillans, "Unprofitableness", II, 8-11, Works, II, 441.

The image of the brook that flows to join the sea is commonly used in mystical poetry to express the journey of the mystic to God. In Yunus we have also the very homely image of a pond and ducks—one of the favourite images of Anatolian folk poets. His heart in a state of bliss is "a pond in which ducks and geese are playing."⁴⁷ In another poem his joy in being united to God is expressed by the image of "a duck sporting and diving in the lake."⁴⁸

Both Yunus and Vaughan employ traditional or mythical symbols as well as realistic nature imagery to describe the land of bliss or the heavenly city. In his poem called the "Regeneration", Vaughan gives an account of the mystic way and the state of regeneration to which it leads him in highly metaphorical language.⁴⁹ Yunus, too, resorts to the literary traditions of his own age to describe his picture of eternity, as an evergreen land with rivers of light, studded with diamonds and jewels, where the believers dressed in coloured garbs ride on *buraques*, where the nightingale sings incessantly to the rose that never decays.⁵⁰

The symbol merges with the real in Vaughan, but with Yunus, one feels that the figure remains as a poetic or mythical convention and that the fusion between the real and the imaginary is not complete. Yunus' real world was the barren and rocky countryside, its narrow and tumultuous brooks, its fresh water springs, the snowy mountains and flocks of clouds, the villages with their vineyards, ducks and mills. He has poems that depict the experience of perceiving God in nature, where he, like Vaughan, sees all natural objects possessed by love and longing for God and where he is inspired by nature to think of eternal truth and beauty. But, most of the time, nature reminds him of mortality, separation and grief. He has a keen sense of realism that underlies his mysticism and makes him strongly aware of the imperfections of nature. It is his refusal to be blinded by the myth of an evergreen and ever happy nature that leads him to criticize the literary conventions of Persian poetry. Writing about the nightingale's love for the rose, he says :

Yılda bir kez hayvanlara
Aşk yeli eser bunlara
Kimi âdem hayvan olur
Hayvan aşık olmaz imiş

Aşık olmıyan âdemî
Benzermiş bir ağaca
Ağaç yemiş vermeyince
Budağı eğilmez imiş

[Once a year animals feel the pangs of love!
Some men are animals in nature; yet,
It is said, animals cannot feel true love.
He who loves not is like a tree;

⁴⁷ Yunus Emre Divanı, I, 89, xxv: "Niçe ördek niçe kaz hoş oynar gölümüze."

⁴⁸ Yunus Emre Divanı, II, 534, cxciv: "Ördek olsun girsın dalsın oynasın / Allah dostlarının gölüdür tevhid."

⁴⁹ Silex Scintillans, "Regeneration", II, 397-9.

⁵⁰ Yunus Emre Divanı, II, 538, cxcix; 476-7, CI, CII.

Its boughs will not bend
Unless weighed down by fruit.]⁵¹

In Yunus' view, man is closer to God than nature. Love is the only thing that overcomes change and decay, and man alone is capable of feeling true love. The man who does not love is like a dry tree, fit only to be burned as wood.

Kur'ağacı niderler kesup oda yakarlar
Her klm âşık olmadı benzer kuru ağaca

[What can you do with a dry tree?
You cut it down and burn it in the fire.
Whoever loves not is like a dry tree.]⁵²

Man's spiritual and artistic achievements are ultimately more valuable than the uncultivated beauty of nature. He finds a path to God through his own heart or through contemplating the beauty of another man's face.

This leads us to question how far nature played an integral part in Yunus' mystical experience. We have seen that nature inspired Vaughan directly and carried him into a state of trance or ecstasy. He saw nature irradiated by a transcendent glory and even caught glimpses of "The shady City of Palme trees" through the objects and forms of nature. The intimate communion between nature, God and man seems to be less emphasized in Yunus' poetry. It is in this respect that we can draw a parallel between Vaughan and Nesimi to whom nature also appeared as an immediate revelation of the beauty of God and led him into a state of ecstasy and bliss.

We know very little about Nesimi except that he lived in the fourteenth century, that he was executed in Aleppo in the first decade of the fifteenth century on account of his heretical opinions,⁵³ that he came under the influence of Hurufiism (Hurûfiyya = Literalism) founded by Fazlullah (Fadl Allâh) of Asterabad in the second half of the fourteenth century, a sect that had many points in common with Hermetism and was greatly influenced by esoteric doctrines that were to a great extent modifications and adaptations of Islam of Neo-Pythagorean and Neo-Platonic philosophy.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Yunus Emre Divanı, II, 592, cclxxvi.

⁵² Yunus Emre Divanı, I, 77, iv.

⁵³ The date of Nesimi's (Nesimi Saiyid 'Imad al-Din) death has been given as 804/1404 in certain records. The source and meaning of his *makhlâs*, 'Nesimi' are also disputed. See for an account of his life, A. Gölpınarlı, *Nesimi, Usulî, Ruhi* (Varlık Yayınları, İstanbul, 1953), Introduction; E. J. W. Gibb, *History of Ottoman Poetry*, I, 343-68; A. Bausani, "Nesimi," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed., vol. III (Leiden and London, 1971); and, A. Alparslan, "Câvidân - nâme'nin Nesimi'ye Tesiri," unpublished "Habilitationsschrift" (submitted to the İstanbul University, 1967), 50-55.

⁵⁴ Hurufiism was influenced by Isma'ili doctrines and by the work of a group of thinkers of the tenth century, known as the *Ikhwan al-Safa'* or the Faithful Brethren of Basra. The latter composed an encyclopedia of sciences, called *Rasa'il Ikhwan al-Safa'*, in which the whole corpus of Hellenistic philosophy was assimilated into the Islamic tradition. For information on Hurufiism and its doctrines, such as the occult significance of letters and numbers, see *Textes Persans Relatifs à la Secte des Hôtroufis* ed. and trans. M. C. Huart (Leiden, 1909), Introduction; J. K. Birge, *The Bektashi Order of Dervishes*; and A. Alparslan, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-49.

Like Vaughan, Nesimî constantly saw God in his works and became inspired by the beauty of nature to think of the beauty of God:

Her zerrede güneş oldu zâhîr
Toprağa sücûd kıldı tâhîr
Nakkâş bilindi nakş içinde
La'l oldu ayân Bedahş içinde

[The sun was reflected in every atom
The purest of beings descended into dust
The artist's self was revealed in his works
As the ruby in the mines of Badakhshân]⁵⁵

He calls God "the jewel of the world," "the very life and soul of the universe" and "the secret treasure hidden away in time."⁵⁶ The idea of the immanence of God in the universe is one of the main doctrines of Hurufiism and has an important place in Hermetic philosophy. A. C. Judson comments on the significance attached to the doctrine in the writings of Vaughan and finds a connection between the attitude taken up by the poet to that expressed by his brother, Thomas Vaughan, in his hermetical preatisses. According to Thomas Vaughan, nature was the most direct path to the understanding of God. In his *Lumen de Lumine* (London, 1651), he described the notion of the immanence of God in nature in the words:

Certainly He [God] built and founded nature upon His own supernatural centre. He is in her and through her, and with His eternal spirit doth He support heaven and earth as our bodies are supported with our spirits.⁵⁷

The doctrine finds an echo in Henry Vaughan's poetry where he states that nature reveals God's beauty in such a perfect way that one could learn about Him by watching nature,

...Each tree, herb, flowre
Are shadows of his Wisedome, and his Pow'r⁵⁸

The search of the soul for spiritual truth leads her to penetrate into the secrets of nature; the soul addresses the body with the words:

⁵⁵ *Nesimî Divanı* (The Poetical Works of Nesimî. Turkish and Persian Texts) (Istanbul 1286/1869), p. 34. In the transcription a relatively simple method has been followed where the lengths of the sounds have been indicated but other details have been omitted to conform to the modern Turkish alphabet.

⁵⁶ The last phrase is reminiscent of the well-known Had'ith that likens God to "a hidden treasure," to which a great significance was attributed in Hurufi writings.

⁵⁷ *The Works of Thomas Vaughan*, ed. A. E. Laite (1919), 1119, p. 297. Quoted from A. C. Judson, "Henry Vaughan as a Nature Poet", p. 152.

⁵⁸ *Silex Scintillans*, "Rules and Lessons", II, 95-6, II, 438.

Poore, querulous hadfull! was't for this
 I taught thee all that is?
 Unbowel'd nature, shew'd three her recruits
 And Change of suits.⁵⁹

He continues to explain that there is no real death:

For a preserving spirit doth still passe
 Untainted through this Masse,

Which doth resolve, produce, and ripen all
 That to it fall;⁶⁰

In the same way Nesimî learns divine truths from nature; he says.

Gördüm seni felekde yıldız
 Buldum seni hem kitâb içinde

[I saw you as a star in the sky,
 And as the Word in the Book]⁶¹

The perception of the mystic tie between God and nature finds an expression in Vaughan's beautiful lines in "The Holy Communion",

Darkness, and day-light, life, and death
 Are but meer leaves turn'd by thy breath.⁶²

The interplay between spirit and matter, between God and His creation inspired Nesimî with some of his most poetical images and conceits. In a poem, he describes how nature derives all its beauty and grace from God; the perfume wafted by the morning breeze is the sweet smell of the Beloved's hair.⁶³ Night and day are reflections of His hair and cheek,

Şâma benzer dediler kara saçın
 Ârızın nûruna seher dediler.

[Thy hair is black like the night
 The blush on Thy cheeks they called the dawn.]⁶⁴

In spite of the concrete imagery employed to describe God, nature is never completely identified with God. It is the lover of God and the recipient of His gifts.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, "Resurrection and Immortality", II, 19-22, II, 401.

⁶⁰ *Idem.*, II, 31-4.

⁶¹ *Nesimî Divanı*, p. 160.

⁶² *Sillex Scintillans*, Works, II, 457.

⁶³ *Nesimî Divanı*, p. 80: "Saba müşkin deminden kim mu'attar kılmuş âfâkı." [The morning breeze laden with the perfume of Thy hair has filled the world with sweet fragrance.]

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

Mîhr ile mâh u müştêrî hüsnüne bendedir velî
[The sun, the moon and Jupiter are all enslaved by Thy beauty] ⁶⁵

Nesîmî saw nature as a medium through which God revealed Himself, and perceived the existence of a deep bond between nature and God. Yet he also stressed the view that though divinity can be seen through nature, it is by no means confined to nature. Addressing God, Nesîmî exclaims,

Hüsn-i ruhun sıfâtı kevm ü mekâna sığmaz
Ey gevher-i yegâne; sen genc-i lâmekânsın.
[The beauty of Thy cheek cannot be described in terms of
time and space
O my peerless gem Thou art the Treasure that has no space.] ⁶⁶

These lines may be compared with Vaughan's couplet,

If the Sun rise on rocks, is't right
To call it their inherent light? ⁶⁷

The concept of God half visible behind the veil of matter is expressed by Vaughan in "The incarnation, and Passions".

To put on Clouds instead of light,
And cloath the morning-starre with dust,
Was a translation of such height
As, but in thee, was ne'er exprest;

[11. 5-8] ⁶⁸

Nesîmî makes use of the images of light and the clouds, not in the context of incarnation as in Vaughan, but in the more general context of the immanence of God in the universe. God reveals His beauty through the shapes and objects of nature yet He is reluctant to appear to man in all His glory,

Koyma yüzünü nikâb içinde
Haşroldu 'adem hicâb içinde
Dağıtma yanağın üzre zülfün
Neyler bu güneş sehâb içinde

[O do not hide Thy face behind a veil
Non-entity has melted away in shame
Let not Thy hair fall down upon Thy cheeks
How can Thy sun be hid in clouds.] ⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Nesîmî Divanı, p. 64.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 119.

⁶⁷ Silex Scintillans, "The Dedication", 11. 19 - 20, II, 395.

⁶⁸ Ibid., Works, II, 415.

⁶⁹ Nesîmî Divanı, p. 160.

We can perceive a quality of ecstasy and lyricism in Nesimî which recalls the approach of Vaughan. The height of spiritual joy finds expression in both writers through recurrent images of light and radiance, almost always contrasted to, or in paradoxical combinations with darkness. The preoccupation with the imagery of light and darkness naturally goes together with an interest in the stars and the sun. Vaughan seems to be fascinated by the stellar world; he is, quite often, led into a state of trance while watching the stars:

When to my Eyes
(Whilst deep sleep others catches,) Thine hoast of spyes
The starres shine in their watches,
I doe survey
Each busie Ray,
And how they work, and wind.⁷⁰

The rays almost hypnotize him and transport him into land of joy and light. In his poem, "The Starre," the correspondance between the stars and the objects on earth is described in a language strongly reminiscent of hermetical terminology, and words of significance in hermetic philosophy such as "sympathie," "magnet," and "vitall fire" occur in the text.⁷¹ It is not difficult to see how a system of ideas such as Hermetism, with its exaltation of nature to a plane of divine revelation, and its insistence on close communion between the spiritual and physical would appeal to a mystic poet highly sensitive to natural beauty and one to whom the stars came to resemble the 'true Joys'⁷² of eternity and light to appear as "intimate with Heav'n."⁷³ Vaughan's keenest perceptions of the divine or of eternity are through symbols of light and darkness,

I saw Eternity the other night
Like a great Ring of pure and endless light,
All calm, as it was bright.⁷⁴

We find in Nesimî the same preoccupation with the imagery of light and darkness and a similar interest in the stars and the sun. One of his favourite images is that of the planets revolving intoxicated with God's love:

'Aşk-ı Subhânî meyinden vâlih oldu şöyle bil
'Arş mest u ferş mest u kevkeb-i seyyâr mest.

[Know that immersed in the wine of the love of God
The spheres, the earth and all the moving planets are drunk!] ⁷⁵

⁷⁰ *Silex Scintillans*, "Midnight", II. 1-7, Works, II, 421.

⁷¹ *Silex Scintillans*, Works, II, 489.

⁷² *Silex Scintillans*, "The Constellation", I. 2, Works, II, 469.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, "Ascension - Hymn", I. 24, Works II, 482.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, "The World," II. 1-3, Works II, 466.

⁷⁵ *Nesimî Divanı*, p. 39.

He uses the imagery of light and of the heavenly bodies to express his vision of the divine :

Leyl u nehâr içinde şems u kamer gibi us
Her yane kim bakarsam 'ayn el yakîn 'ayansın.

[Whether at night or in day time as the moon or the sun
I see Thee plainly revealed wherever I look.]⁷⁶

The capacity of seeing the beauty of nature as the reflection of divine beauty is considered by mystics to be a result of intensified sensibility. The mystic strives to purify his mind and to heighten his powers of perception in order to be able to see reality in a truer and more vivid manner. Vaughan longs for the clarity of vision he enjoyed in childhood :

Happy those early dayes! when I
Shin'd in my Angell-infancy.

When on some gilded cloud or flowre
My gazing soul would dwell an houre,
And in those weaker glories spy
Some shadows of eternity;"⁷⁷

Vaughan shared with other mystics⁷⁸ the belief that the child is gifted with the ability of perceiving truth clearly and of seeing the divine in nature. The mystic hopes to regain the child's vision of eternity by becoming as pure as a child. This belief is absent in the poetry of Nesimi, as it is in that of Yunus, according to whom heightened perception is achieved through love. Both Nesimi and Yunus longed not for the lost innocence of the child but for the maturity and deep understanding of the self-disciplined adult. This view was held by most Sufis who believed that it was only through suffering and self-sacrifice for the sake of a loved one that one could come to see truth and beauty clearly. In their teaching love, whether directly for God himself, or for a human being, purifies man and enables him to unite with the divine.

We have seen that nature played an important part in the poetry of the three writers studied above. Yunus and Vaughan employ imagery derived from nature to express their mystical faith; and their poetry contains an ultimate rejection of natural beauty in favour of eternal beauty. Nesimi and Vaughan seem to have a closer affinity in the essential quality of their inspiration and of their response to nature. Nesimi, like Vaughan, is gifted with a keen perception of the divine in nature. He is inspired by nature to speculate on God, and he conveys his experience in a language full of visual and concrete nature imagery. Both conceive of the spiritual world in terms of light, fire and whatever is bright, clear and pure.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 119.

⁷⁷ *Silex Scintillans*, "The Retreat," ll. 1-2, 11-4, Works, II, 419.

⁷⁸ The same longing for the purity of the child's vision is expressed by Thomas Traherne, a mystic poet and a contemporary of Vaughan; see, *Poems of Felicity*, ed. H. I. Bell (Oxford, 1919), p. 3.

In spite of differences due to distinctions of culture and individuality, the poetry of Vaughan, Yunus and Nesimî reflects basic similarities in outlook and treatment. This affinity may, in some instances, be traced to the common heritage of the three poets in the mystical and philosophical traditions of the Hellenistic Middle East; however, it would be more accurate to attribute the similarities to an affinity of spirit rather than to the influence of the philosophical systems related to their mystical teaching. A study of their poetry reveals a deep bond underlying the mystical poetry of the East and the West, over a chasm of centuries and geographical boundaries, on the level of the human and as an expression of man's quest for permanent truth within the transient forms of nature.

HENRY VAUGHAN, YUNUS EMRE VE NESİMİ'NİN ŞİİRLERİNDE MİSTİSİZM VE DOĞA

ÖZET

Mistik konularda yazılmış olan eserlerde ulusal gelenekler, din, çağ ya da kişisel farkların ötesinde bir anlatım ve düşünce benzerliği olduğu bilinen bir gerçektir. Bu yazıda ayrı ülkelerde, başka zamanlarda yaşamış üç mistik şairin eserleri benzeyen ve değişik yönleriyle karşılaştırılmıştır. Ele alınan şairler, Henry Vaughan (1622-1685), Yunus Emre (638/1240-720/1320) ve Nesimî (ölümü 804/1404?) mistik inançları dile getiren şiirler yazmışlar, doğayı gerek düşünce ve inançlarını dolaylı olarak imgeler yoluyla yansıtan bir araç, gerekse doğrudan doğruya tasvirlerinde konu olarak ele almışlardır.

Vaughan ile Yunus'un şiirlerinde doğaya karşı içten bir sevginin varlığını duyarız. Her iki şair mistik inançlarını anlatmak için doğayı konu edinen imgelerden cömertçe yararlanmış, şiirlerini gerçekçi tasvirlerle bezemişlerdir. Hurufilik akımının etkisinde kalan kudretli şair Nesimî ise, doğa ile Tanrı arasında yakın bir ilişkinin var olduğuna inanmış, doğayı Tanrının güzelliğini ve ezeli gerçekleri yansıtan bir ayna olarak görmüştür. Şair ilahi varlığa olan coşkun sevgisini doğadan esinlendiği somut imgelerle anlatmış ve yer yer doğayı adeta Tanrılaştırmıştır. Doğanın ebedi gerçeklerin simgesi olarak belirmesi Henry Vaughan'ın şiirlerinde de görülür.

Sonuç olarak, kültürel ve kişisel ayrılıklardan doğan farklı özelliklerine rağmen Vaughan, Yunus ve Nesimî'nin şiirlerinde duygu ve deyiş benzerlikleri var. Bu benzerlikler, yakın doğu ve batı mistisizmine, eski ve Hellenistik çağlardan beri süregelen bazı felsefi ve gizemci akımların aktarılmış olmasından doğabilir. Ancak tarihi zemin bize belirli inançların dayandığı geleneksel yapıyı açıklamaktan ileri geçemez. Bunun ötesinde, ayrı çağ ve başka ülkelerde yaşamış şairlerin eserlerinde görülen ruh birliği, zaman ve coğrafya hudutlarını aşan, insanlık düzeyinde bir beraberliğin varlığını açıklar. Bu eserlerde doğanın geçici biçimlerinin dışında ölümsüz gerçeği arayan insanın her yerde bir olan özlemini duyar gibi oluruz.