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NAFS AS A LITERARY-AESTHETIC CATEGORY IN THE NOVEL BYGONE DAYS

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Abstract: This article examines textual variants across editions of Abdulla Qodiriy's novel “Bygone Days”. Nafs, a philosophical-religious category, occupies a distinct place in the human sciences. The word nafs appears in earlier printings of the novel but was altered in later editions, with consequences for its lexical meaning. Drawing on textual examples, the article analyzes the semantic layers of nafs, its function in the novel, and its scope. Nafs is read here as a literary-aesthetic category within the work.

Keywords: Abdulla Qodiriy, novel, nafs, nikah, to give oneself.

A literary work is a kind of enchantment — a created thing rich with mystery and wonder, possessing the power to act upon the moods, feelings, desires, and inclinations of the human being. A work of art occupies the borders of time, crosses the barriers of place and era, and continually discloses new meaning. Abdulla Qodiriy's Bygone Days has taken its place among the classics by occupying precisely those borders. Text is central to grasping the substance of a novel. On rereading, a word seems to have been set aside for you alone: you catch it freshly, uncover a different sense, and the novel begins another life.

Consider the wedding scene in Bygone Days. Qodiriy has composed the novel with such coherence that every word, gesture, state, mood, manner of address, expression, and mode of depiction completes and clarifies the others. The cumulative effect grows with each detail. In the author's design, Otabek occupies the position of an exemplar — the New Uzbek toward whom the writer's sympathies plainly lean. He is at once the foremost student of the madrasa and a worldly merchant, the leading intellectual of his age, an advocate of reform in every domain — both Qodiriy's ideal and the figure in whom the aspirations of the Jadids are gathered.

The chapter “Unexpected Happiness” contains the following episode: "Obtaining Kumushbibi's consent proved no easy matter. The mullah's question — “*You, Kumushbibi, daughter of Mirzakarim, have you entrusted to your uncle Muhammadrahim, son of Yuldosh, the authority to give your* **nafs** *to Otabek the Muslim of Tashkent, son of Yusufbek Hoji?*' — had to be repeated six or seven times; even then, only under pressure from the older female relatives, was her consent barely secured"”[1.43].

The expression that calls for reflection here is “your nafs.” Why precisely the giving of nafs?

A look at other editions reveals a different wording: *“Obtaining Kumushbibi's consent proved no easy matter. The mullah's question —* 'You, Kumushbibi, daughter of Mirzakarim, have you entrusted to your uncle Muhammadrahim, son of Yo'ldosh, the authority to give ***yourself*** to Otabek the Muslim of Tashkent, son of Yusufbek Hoji?' *— had to be repeated six or seven times; even then, only under pressure from the older female relatives, was her consent barely secured”*[2.33]. The 2008 edition reads the same way. Editions, then, vary. Was such a formulation customary in the marriage ceremonies of Marg'ilon at the time, or did Qodiriy choose the expression to suit his own purposes? According to Professor S. Sayfullah, the use of nafs in the wedding khutba survives in certain localities to this day. The wording is therefore not novel; it belongs to inherited practice.

That Qodiriy's “your nafs” was no accident is clear. I will attempt, so far as it can be grasped, to account for his choice. The sources establish that he studied under the foremost scholars of his time and possessed substantial learning. He knew the religious and shar'i norms thoroughly and kept logic in firm hand when selecting his words. Memoirs offer abundant testimony on this point. Two formulations call for attention: (1) to give one's nafs; (2) to give oneself. Why the

word nafs was dropped in subsequent editions remains obscure. The question, then, is which formulation carries the meaning the writer intended. The verb "***bag'ishlamoq***" — to give, to bestow — carries the senses of presenting as a gift, offering what one has, expending. Is the more familiar "to give oneself" broader in scope than "to give one's nafs," or narrower? The sources note that the Turkic word o'z (self) functions as a synonym of the Arabic nafs.

The novel belongs among the most frequently reprinted works in Uzbek literature. It was edited by Khondamir Qodiriy based on the 1926 edition — published during the writer's lifetime — and reissued in the years of independence (1992). The present analysis relies on that edition. A printing for which the author was himself responsible counts as authoritative. Given the depth of Khondamir Qodiriy's experience in working with texts and the seriousness of his comparative editing against the original source, we may be confident that nafs stands in its proper place.

Abdulla Qodiriy grasped nafs in its widest sense and deployed the word according to that understanding. Islamic learning, it should be added, is in large part directed toward the science of nafs — its purification and discipline. What does it mean for Kumush to give her nafs? She entrusts to Otabek, by her own will, her trust and desire, her affection and heart, her consent— that is, her confidence and her power of choice. A family rests on mutual consent — a union of intentions, affections, and inclinations. If "to give oneself" means to give what one has, to surrender one's substance, then "to give one's nafs" means to arrive at a unity of desire and inclination. Qodiriy may thus be said to have approached nafs through the prescriptions of the shariah, through tasawwuf, and through the traditions of our classical literature. The question, then, becomes: what is nafs in itself, and what lies in its substance? It is no secret that in Qodiriy's day everyday speech naturally drew on Arabic and Persian vocabulary. This alone may account for his use of the word.

If we take the word "self" (o'z) as a unit that gathers within itself the essential qualities of being from the outset, then "to give oneself" comes to mean offering one's whole existence in both material and spiritual terms. When we remember that, after death, the body merges back into the earth while the spirit returns in its eternity to Allah, we may come a step closer to the sense of nafs — through the material side of the "self." It is possible that, because in modern usage " to give oneself " came to be understood in a bodily register, the expression later mutated into " to give yourself in bodily intimacy" (tan mahramlik bag'ishlamoq). To give oneself, in any case, means to offer all one has, to expend oneself. We should not forget that the "self" cannot be imagined as inanimate: it implies the unity of body and soul. If we attend to the spiritual-ethical foundation of nafs — its degrees, its character — we can see, beneath what looks at first like a single semantic field, a distinction not easy to register. Nafs is in some degree animal, in another human, in yet another a sacred spirit. Lust is nafs; anger is nafs; love is nafs; enmity, pride, and hypocrisy are nafs. All of these are gathered under the one term. Nafs is to be reformed, broken, disciplined, purified. The kernel of selfhood — its root and prior ground — is the "self," whereas in nafs what is implied is instability, unfinished states of the spirit, dispositions inclined to change.

The sources define nafs in the following way. The word is Arabic and signifies, among other things, spirit, the very thing itself, intellect, the body, blood, desire, and base appetites. Some scholars distinguish ruh (spirit) from nafs; other sources treat the two as identical. Certain authorities define tasawwuf as tazkiyat al-nafs — the disciplining of nafs. The Sufis themselves have at times spoken of nafs exclusively as that which commands evil: " Indeed, the self is ever inclined to evil, except those upon whom my Lord has mercy" (Surah Yusuf, 53).

In tasawwuf, the central task is to attain spiritual perfection (kamolot) through the disciplining and reform of the human nafs. Scholars draw particular attention to the fact that the Qur'an contains a hundred verses bearing directly on nafs and a further hundred and ninety-five

on cognate themes. The concept is not easily summed up in a single word: nafs gathers into itself the material and spiritual needs of the human being — will, inclination, desire, freedom, character, appetite, vanity. Mastery over one's nafs determines the substance of a human life. The story of the Prophet Yusuf — tried through his nafs — instructs humanity and stands as a model. Our forebears regarded the struggle with nafs as the greatest jihad. This struggle is humanity's primordial problem, set to continue until the Day of Judgment. As Mawlana Rumi has it: " O traveler of the path of Truth! Would you know the truth? Then listen: neither Moses nor Pharaoh has died. They live within you. They have hidden themselves inside your being. They wage their war within your heart. You must therefore cast these two enemies out of yourself!" As Mawlana insists, each of us carries Moses and Pharaoh within; our nafs dwells inside our breath.

Nafs signifies the selfhood, the soul, and the heart of the human being. Imam al-Ghazali writes on this: "Know, who has created you? Of two things, the first is the visible body, which is called the frame and may be seen with the outward eye. The second is the inner meaning, which they call nafs, and also call the soul, and also the heart" [3.95]. The scholar thus divides the human being into two: the body, and the inner meaning of the body.

Uzbek literary scholarship possesses the methodological apparatus of psychology, psychoanalysis, and psychobiography, through which the inner life, states, experiences, and inclinations of the human being are analyzed. In the investigation of psychic states, the inclinations of nafs hold the central place. For this reason, Islamic literature attends to nafs more closely than it does to ruh. Some sources, indeed, treat nafs and ruh as one concept. Western scholarship has accomplished a great deal in this area and has developed a wide range of research methods. Our own approach is more measured — restrained, even reticent — and proceeds from altogether different premises. Where the question concerns the "noble being" (mukarram zot) who has taken on the divine trust, we should not forget that a fine but unmistakable difference separates East and West: the criteria and the orientation are not the same.

In the Maktubat of Imam Rabbani, ruh and nafs are opposed: the strengthening of one entails the weakening of the other. The Islamic intellectual tradition treats the term psychology differently from Western scholarship. In Arabic, psychology is ilm al-nafs — " the science of the self." Aristotle's treatise is rendered as al-Nafs or Ruh [4.8]; that is, for Aristotle too, psychology is the science of nafs. The sixth section of Ibn Sina's al-Shifa bears the title Kitab al-Nafs — The Book of the Self.

The current fashion of translating "psychology" as ruhshunoslik — "the study of the spirit" — does not, in my view, fully justify itself. However far the human being rises in knowledge, he is not capable of unveiling the secret of the spirit. What he in fact studies is nafs. It is for this reason that when people asked the Prophet (peace be upon him) about ruh and its nature, the following verse was revealed: " And they ask you about the soul. Say: the soul is of the affair of my Lord, and you have been given but little knowledge" (al-Isra 85).

Tasawwuf — known as "spiritual cultivation" (ruhiy tarbiya) — rests on the meanings of qalb, ruh, aql, and nafs. In its spiritual register, nafs is the faculty that supervises and governs all the needs belonging to the intellect and the spirit. This nafs is the human personality, the "I." The demands and recommendations of the shariah are addressed to it. Material nafs is meanwhile subordinate to spiritual nafs, and the two together constitute the human being [5.71]. Al-Ghazali, who bears the title Hujjat al-Islam, has written extensively on nafs [6.17]. The Prophet's saying — "*Your fiercest enemy is the nafs within you*" — points to a great deal. Nafs has its degrees: the nafs that has overcome the assaults of lust and submitted to the command of truth is al-nafs al-mutma'inna, the tranquil self; the nafs that wavers between right and wrong is al-nafs al-lawwama, the self-reproaching self; the nafs that submits to the assaults of lust and the whisperings of Satan is al-nafs al-ammara, the self that commands evil.

In Ruhiy tarbiya (Spiritual Cultivation), Sheikh Muhammad Sodiq Muhammad Yusuf sets out the stages of perfection in simple and graceful prose. "Islam has paid distinct attention to both the body and the spirit of the human being. In this regard, the meanings designated by qalb and ruh, together with nafs, are of great consequence. Qalb is a divine, spiritual, subtle thing; the truth of ruh is known to none other than Allah Most High. Yet because so much is said in the Holy Qur'an about the purification of nafs, the term nafs is more widely used than either qalb or ruh" [7.4]. The sheikh has thus not lost sight of the mysteriousness of ruh but employs the term as a synonym of nafs.

It is worth noting that nafs stands as a central problem in the works of Western thinkers as well — Freud, Jung, Fromm. What Freud singled out as the dominant matter, the question of libido, is fundamentally a question of nafs. His essay on literature, "Dostoevsky and Parricide," subjects the human nafs to deep analysis as its principal subject. To any Muslim, the relation of son to father described there — the son's seeing his father as a rival — may seem unnatural. In the East, the father is held in altogether higher esteem. As for Jung's archetypes, these collect and generalize the memories and inclinations bound up with nafs. Nafs is, accordingly, an immense problem of literature, and of human life.

The artist who finds a way from nafs toward ruh is one who has come to know his own selfhood. The Turkic peoples used o‘z and o‘zlik — self, selfhood — in place of nafs. In the works of Hazrat Navoiy, nafs is depicted as the decisive problem of human life. The great poet offers many figures of liberation from "the veil of one's selfhood" and of attaining perfection through the dismantling of "the edifice of o'zlik." Navoiy uses “self” and “selfhood” interchangeably with nafs in many places.

Returning now to the matter at hand: is it correct to read Bygone Days through the category of nafs? Does such an approach diminish its literary-aesthetic value? Reading Qodiriy's novels under the category of nafs may invite debate. The question becomes clearer once we remember that Qodiriy drew, in writing Bygone Days, on oral folk creation, the national epic tradition, religious-Sufi narratives, and the conventions of classical literature. The social-historical and literary-pedagogical currents that shaped his mind have left their traces in the compositional structure of the work and in its substance and meaning. Can we deny the presence of nafs in the love of Otabek and Kumush? What place does nafs hold in love, and do the sensual feelings belong to nafs? What force brought Zaynab into Yusufbek Hoji's household over Otabek's objection? That fancy was nothing other than a nafs-driven contrivance, fed by Uzbek-oyim's pride and self-conceit. What gave Zaynab the hope of bearing a life with a husband who showed her no affection — was that not, too, a fancy issuing from nafs? What governs the relations between Zaynab and Kumush — reason, or hatred? What is the share of nafs in it? How are we to read Homid's lawless, lustful actions? Nafs — that and nothing else. That is the truth. What drove Zaynab to murder? Does this, too, not come down at last to nafs? So long as a human being exists, the rightful claim of nafs in his constitution cannot be denied.

In the love of Usta Olim, one can sense the breaking of nafs, submission to Allah, and at the same time the hope of the hereafter. How is one to weigh Yusufbek Hoji's reflections on life? Is it sufficient that a man whose nafs has been pacified should make “the sorrow of the homeland” his personal pain? Was the principal measure for Yusufbek Hoji the sorrow of the reckoning before his Creator and his hope for the hereafter, or did his sorrow for the homeland gather into itself the highest aim — the longing for Islamic perfection? Hoji stands as the image of a man who has risen above his nafs into the spiritual realm. Here lies the central claim of literature. Attainment of perfection, and the passage through its stages while remaining faithful to one's “ I,” is the noble aim of the human being who has come to know himself. In Qodiriy's novels, the destinies of human beings caught in the maelstrom of social-political problems are narrated

through the lives of the protagonists. Behind each figure stands the truth of life and human fate. The point to register is this: it is not right to confine the novel to tasawwuf alone or to the category of nafs; rather, through a single word in one edition, the author has drawn attention to the artistic apprehension of religious and national thought. In that act of apprehension — in his vivifying, through artistic figures, of the concept of nafs (which is among the great inheritances of human knowledge) — his talent shows itself with sudden clarity.

Our observations confirm that Abdulla Qodiriy approached the problem of nafs in reliance on the traditions of our classical literature. Nafs has long carried serious scientific, religious, and pedagogical weight in tasawwuf. Through the use of a single word, distinctive features of the author's outlook come into view, and nafs establishes itself as a serious literary problem. Literature is not free of conviction. The science of nafs constitutes a decisive stage in human perfection. In the literary work, nafs is apprehended as one of the central matters; readings bearing on it continue.

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