

THE ROLE OF CINEMA IN TRANSFERRING MORAL VALUES TO THE YOUTH: A PHILOSOPHICAL READING OF THE FILM *THE BREATH OF THE BELOVED (MAŞUKUN NEFESİ)*

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Abstract:

The widespread and lasting impact of the art of cinema on society, especially the young mass, is an indisputable fact. It is possible to describe a fact that we will have difficulty in telling with hundreds of pages in a few hours, perhaps a minute, film. The younger generation has been transformed into a vastly watching mass rather than reading, thus, the influence of the cinemas has increased a lot nowadays. Naturally, it is possible to do many things with such an effective tool.

Mawlid tradition is not just an ordinary tradition. It is a musical school in itself, moreover a moral value education school. Moreover, this is a fundamental tradition not only in Turkey but also in the Balkans, the Indian Ocean, which many Muslims have adopted. At least with its decline in Turkey, Turkish classical music has weakened, which has begun to hit the ears most often in mosque services, and people are often complaining about the bad practices of the adhan, and Qur'anic recitations. Moreover, thanks to Mawlid performances, it is possible to convey both the development of religious feelings and moral values in young people.

The Breath of the Beloved is a production of Kaplan Film, one of the successful examples of the documentary-drama group that emerged in the audience in such an environment. The film is about the process of making a Mawlid mashq (learning how to sing) by kneeling in front of a master who follows the traditional method. The film tells the tradition of classical Turkish music, which has been practiced for centuries, with the help of real performers in authentic settings, aims to bring together both the revival of a tradition and a series of moral values education with the audience.

In this paper, by examining the Breath of the Beloved through a philosophical reading, the contribution of the film in transferring moral values to young people will be tried to be revealed.

Keywords: *Cinema, Youth, Moral Values, Moral Values, Mawlid tradition, mashq.*

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Introduction

Cinema is a phenomenon that emerges as the most powerful indicator in the modern era. For this reason, a phenomenon, thought, ideology and message have become indispensable ways of effectively communicating to masses. In Turkey, cinema has attracted considerable attention and has survived many different periods. Of course, it will go even further.

Films shot with religious and spiritual concerns in Turkish cinema stretch back to the 1970s.¹ We can say that the first serious experiments were collected under the name of National Cinema. The aim of the films in the National Cinema was to recreate the lost values, especially to young people to remind them of these values and to build a consciousness that possesses their culture.² We can say that the adventure of the National Cinema ended at the peak of its height. After the 1990s it was unable to produce a strong work and ended. But this does not mean that such topics will not be reproduced in the cinema. As a matter of fact, there are films which are about these values and even better than them. *The Breath of the Beloved* is exactly that kind of film.

The Breath of the Beloved film deals with the tradition of the lost values, that is the *mashq tradition* (learning how to sing in classical way). This tradition, which dates back to about two hundred years ago, is still very little practiced and almost about to disappear nowadays. Director Murat Pay, who wants to bring this situation to the agenda, has been carrying out the tradition of Mawlid mashq in the film of *The Breath of the Beloved*.

The Film has an interesting opening story. When Murat Pay was browsing old bookshops with his wife, they come across to the *Mawlid* book of Suleiman Chalabi and start to read it. They realize that they have different peace of mind with the effect of the book. He then consults another director, Semih Kaplanoglu, for why he should not do the film of it. The idea makes Kaplanoglu very happy, who assumes production and starts shooting.³ In the film, the leading roles are played by people who actually perform that profession in real life. Perhaps this is another sign to show us that the tradition of mashq is not a work that can be imitated as part of role playing. Who knows?

The Breath of the Beloved deals with the interest of Abdurrahman, a senior student of the conservatory in his final year, about Mawlid mashq. Hadi Hodja is his mentor while Mustafa Hodja will become his mashq teacher later. The film revolves around a moral education process within the context of mashq. The events take place in Istanbul and Bursa. We will review the scenes in specific chapters to examine their moral effects.

Moral Elements in the Film

1. Patience-Determination

Abdurrahman who is interested in music is also a janissary band member (*mahtaran*). One day he mentions about this request to his teacher Hadi. His mentor said that the tradition of mashq was almost gone and forgotten. When Abdurrahman insists, Hadi recommends Mustafa Başkan, the muazzin of Süleymaniye Mosque, and guides him. Abdurrahman's first task is to go to Başkan's house by conveying his mentor's respects. However, even without opening the door, Başkan says through the megaphone to him "Come back next week, my son."

¹ Yalçın Lüleci, *Türk Sineması ve Din*, Es yay., İstanbul, 2008, s.85.

² Mesut Uçakan, *Türk Sinemasında İdeoloji*, Düşünce Yay., İstanbul, 1997, s. 137.

³ Merve Korkmaz, "Bir Mevlithan Belgeseli: Maşukun Nefesi", *Bereket*, 2014, c.36, s. 33.

The process of coming back to the door of Başkan is repeated three times. On the other hand, there are other events in the film that continue with the same repetitions do not run out of sight. Here, it would be necessary to give some information about the place of three digits in Islamic culture. The repetition of events three times and three consecutive events come to fruition is meaningful for Islamic religion. As it is known, one (1) belongs only to Allah. Two (2) represent conflict and opposition. Whereas three (3) expresses inclusiveness, "good things happen three times".⁴ Therefore, the events are inclusive and lead to reach One (1), that is Allah. For Abdurrahman, who has not begun mashq yet, these events will gain meaning in the future and he will learn that if he wants to attend mashq, he should be patient.

The second recurring event is his seeing a work related to Mawlid in the old bookshops. Asks for the price and learns that it costs 70 TL for it was signed by the author. Despite the fact that the owner of the bookshop reduces the price to 60 TL Abdurrahman thinks it is too much and leaves the shop without buying the book. Even though it is standard practice for the shop owners in Turkey, the price discount of the book can be considered that Abdurrahman is on a good cause in his learning of Mawlid mashq.

The third and another parallel event is that the lamp of the room is not lit. He tries to repair the lamp but the first experiment will fail. After these recurring failing events, he goes back to the teacher's door again and returns with the same negative answer "come back next week my son". Now, Abdurrahman starts changing the course of events. First, he will go and buy the book. He does not give up repairing the lamp but cannot be successful.

He does not give up on going to the door of Başkan at the same time every week, and for the fourth time he secures a meeting with a teacher in a mosque. This shows us the first step of mashq tradition. If knowledge is demanded, even if one is returned from the door, it is necessary not to give up without getting the final result. Today, realizing this possibility is almost equal to zero. But science, especially the mashq, requires love, that is to say, requesting with love. It may be that the hodjas exhibit such an attitude for they want to know if one is really serious on one's insistence on anything.

2. Submitting a Job to the Expert

Abdurrahman, who made an appointment with Mustafa Hodja, returns to his house after the first meeting and the lamp in the house is still not working. This time he brings a mechanic to fix the lamp. It is lit, which means metaphorically that the joy of learning is also fired in his heart. In this process, Abdurrahman learns to deliver what he cannot do and what he is not capable of to the experts. If he is studying for a mashq with a teacher, the other works in his life should be left to their teachers. When we look at the events from this perspective, mashq is an education that permeates every area of our life.

3. Humility

On the other hand, Hadi Hodja is preparing the young children for Mawlid reading. On the first day, he explains them what mashq is all about. He says: "We first read for Allah's consent, then read for the intercession of the Prophet Muhammad. Never forget this and whatever stage of your life you come to, never forget where you come from. Envy, arrogance and pride are things

⁴ Annemarie Schimmel, *Sayıların Gizemi*, çev., Mustafa Küpüşoğlu, Kabalcı yay., 2000, İstanbul, s. 69.

that we should not have in our business. You are not reading and you are being read. Who are you read by? By the writer, by whom it was written for. Do not forget these things ”.

From the sayings of Hadi Hodja, we understand that the mashq is the one that controls our life, our moral stance, and our submissive sense of faith. Hadi Hodja, who draws attention to what is done for the elderly person, relates this tradition to the divine dimension and emphasizes its seriousness. Let's say that the teacher says, "It will not be in our profession", it must be someone who is sure of the honest, modest and faithful person who is aware of the seriousness of his work, away from pride and pride.

4. Master-Apprentice relationship

Abdurrahman and Mustafa Hodja often come together to do mashq. Master Mustafa was born blind at birth. During mashq, he also gives many advices to Abdurrahman. One day he says to Abdurrahman, "you will be so much preoccupied by studying Mawlid just as the food is cooked in the oven". He brings in Mimar Sinan's case in terms of artistic maturity. At the age of 35, he built a masterpiece like Süleymaniye Mosque (in Istanbul) which he considered a foreman's work and at the age of 83, he constructed Selimiye Mosque (in Edirne) as masterpiece of maturity. In other words, Sinan did not perceive himself matured until the age of 83. Likewise, Abdurrahman should consider himself as competent until the end of his life. For to be considered competent in the science means not to need to learn again. As a matter of fact, the scholars emerge out of the individuals who collect the science until they die. As a matter of fact, life will end again but science will continue.

5. Professional Ethics

At this time, Abdurrahman both meets with Hadi Hodja and meets Mustafa Hodja to do mashq. One day Hadi Hodja commenting for the mawlid says to him, "There are many ways of remembering our master, but the real aim is to practice his commands and the Mawlid should be continued for his intercession." He advises Abdurrahman to continue the mashq with Mustafa Hodja.

This rhetoric brings to my mind the saying of the Prophet, "The actions are valued according to the intentions." Certainly, Mawlid was written to praise the Prophet Muhammad are the sources of praise and is read to commemorate Him. However, as we read, if our intention is to follow commands better and earn His favour, we do not only have to be educated, we move much further, and we learn to be aware of the real cause of the mashq practice.

One day they stuck somewhere while they were doing mashq. Mustafa Hodja cannot remember which of the two readings of the words "*nuru-nura*", and first asks Abdurrahman to look at the notes in the notebook, then to switch on the record to listen to it carefully. They search for it until they find the correct reading for it. It seems to be a very small detail, but this shows the meticulousness of this work. They do mashq from memory and the teacher is very careful not to make any mistakes about it.

One day Abdurrahman and Hadi Hodja come together when Hadi reads a Mawlid to him and comments, "I have been singing for 20 years and never forgot it. Because I learned this through mashq." He then adds, "musical note has killed this tradition." He emphasizes mashq's permanence, but now this tradition is about to be over.

Perhaps the subtlest idea in the film is where Mustafa Hodja tells Abdurrahman to visit the grave of Suleiman Chalabi in Bursa in order to get his permission as the author before reading Mawlid. He sends Abdurrahman, also saying that praying in the Great Mosque of Bursa would be a good idea. It is worth remembering that the film deserves to be shot even for this scene since it reminds the audience of asking for permission of an author, who passed away ages ago, in order to read his book. As a matter of fact, it is the work of mawlid written by Suleiman Chalabi which is the occasion initiated the tradition of mashq, and thus, he is accepted as the master of this tradition. A young man asking permission from someone who died long ago while we do not even care about each other also shows us what we lost.

When the mashq comes to the end, Mustafa Hodja tells that the end is actually a new beginning; quoting the example of Qur’anic recitation, he says: "We read the Surah Nass, but after that we read the Surah al-Fatiha again; thus, we start again". As we know, according to Islamic belief, even death is a new beginning. Just as İsmet Özel said in one of his lines, "we are dead, so that we will live."⁵ Death is a transition to a new life and it is everlasting. Everything that ends will continue as the beginning of another thing that will also come to an end. The cycle continues until it reaches to the everlasting One.

Mustafa Hodja gives his rosary to Abdurrahman as a testimony of mashq, a tradition he learned from his teacher, but Abdurrahman somehow loses it and cannot find where ever he looks for it. One day he goes to visit the footsteps of the Prophet Muhammad in Topkapi Palace, and as he leaves the place while walking backwards, he sees his rosary on the floor. In this scene, the rosary placed in such a way that if he had left the place as one normally would do, that is, walking forwardly, he would not have been able to find his rosary. But he was able to see it as he was leaving backwardly as a sign of respect to the Prophet. Here, one more thing may have caught our attention. The fact that he chooses to visit the footprints Muhammad rather than another sacred custody suggests that we should go and follow Him. Indeed, the tradition of mashq is another way of going through the footsteps of a master.

At the end of the film, the audience see Abdurrahman reading a Mawlid in a mosque.⁶

Conclusion

Cinema is a modern language used to convey ideas to us. We can even say that it is the most effective one in doing that. We read it at the same time as we watch it. The director wants to tell us something, but after the film was shot and served to the audience, the real reader is the audience. What the viewer understands and takes as the reader from the film, the film means to him only what he makes of the film.⁷ We too actually wrote what we read and understood from the film while we were writing *The Breath of the Beloved*.

As we have seen throughout film, Abdurrahman's each attitude prepares the next thing that will be encountered. The better the behaviour, the better the things he meets. As it was explained in the hadith, the servant takes the first step, then Allah opens the path.⁸ We see in the film that the tradition of the mashq begins at childhood. Abdurrahman is actually in a late age for this job.

⁵ İsmet Özel, *Erbain*, İklim Yay., İstanbul, 1987, s. 62.

⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kysl6v1xnDg> (erişim, 10.9.2017)

⁷ James Monaco, *Bir Film Nasıl Okunur?*, çev. Ertan Yılmaz, Oğlak yay., İstanbul, 2014, s.153.

⁸ Buhari, "Tevhid", 50.

If it were not for Abdurrahman's request and determination, the mashq would probably not be possible for him.

The goal of examining the mashq tradition in a film actually contains much more than memorizing a mawlid and reading it mutually. The student learns the methodology of mashq from the beginning of the lesson with the teacher, the attitude of the teacher, the example of the teacher, and his advice alike. Like a master-apprentice relationship, the student is embroidered bit by bit. The apprentice sits next to his master's knee and does everything he can to find out the best way to learn without questioning. After a while, he looks like his master not only in his job but also in manners. When this relation is based on a work like mashq, coming from the Sufi tradition, the manifestations of it in the life of the learner come out as patience, diligence, modesty, stability and respect.

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