

THE THEME OF OLD AGE IN THE STORIES BY VAGIF SULTANLI (CASE STUDY THE STORIES “KUFİ XETTİ”, “XİFFET” AND “SEHER DUMANI”)

İlhama Gultekin

Ph.D, National Museum of Literature named after Nizami Ganjavi, Azerbaijan
e-mail: ilhamagultekin@gmail.com, orcid.org/0000-0002-7595-463X

Summary

Old age is one of the most discussed topics in literature, like death, love and separation. In the literature of almost all peoples, to say old, orator means an experienced person. In fiction, respect for old people, white hair, and white beard is preached, trust in their experience, and criticism of disrespect for them is inculcated. The best example of this in Azerbaijani literature is the monument “Kitabi-Dede Gorgud”. In the literature of the peoples of the world, in the works of Ernest Hemingway, Victor Hugo, Leo Tolstoy, Necip Fazıl Kısakurek and others, we are faced with descriptions of the sometimes bitter and sometimes proud aspects of this topic. However, in the era of modernization, decelerating family ties, the spread of the desire for individualization among both young and old people weakened social policy, limited the possibilities of the weaker sections of the population. In the stories of Vagif Sultanlı, we will explore the theme of illness and loneliness, which tests not only themselves, but also their children, of this “powerless” class. The object of our research is the stories “Xiffet”, “Seher dumanı” and “Kufi Xetti” from Vagif Sultanli's collection “Ters akin”. The subject of the research is the theme of death, loneliness and old age in the writer's stories, and the presentation of these themes. The feelings and pains caused by the Covid 19 pandemic, which makes loneliness felt not only by the elderly, but by all people from children to adults, are presented in the writer's story “Kufi Xetti” through the experience of an elderly person. The story, which shows the resistance of a person who lived to the marrow of loneliness to nature, does not just describe an epidemic, which once again proves that development and science will not work if time comes. Here the struggle of an elderly and especially lonely person with life, with people, with a way of thinking is reflected. When describing elderly people, the writer who chooses an elderly orphan or a parent on a sick bed as an image has increased the emotional load, and has created key points by emphasizing tradition and mentalism in almost every episode.

Key words: Azerbaijan literature, Vagif Sultanli, the theme of the age, pandemic literature, artistic description.

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1. Introduction

Doctor of philological sciences, professor Vagif Verdiyev Sultan (Sultanli) was born in 1958 in Kurdamir region of Azerbaijan. The fiction works of the writer, whose first story was “Yovshan etri”, were published in the collections “Sonmush Ulduzlar” in 1988, “İnsan Denizi” in 1992, “Qul Bazari” in 1999, and “Olum Yuxusu” in 2002. The last collection of stories of the writer is “Ters Axin”, published in 2003 by the publishing house “Azerneshr”. The book collected 31 stories written by the writer from 1978 to 2023, placed in different chronological order. In the stories of Vagif Sultanli, the “elderly” sometimes become the main character of the

story directly, and sometimes indirectly. In these stories, old age is associated with illness, loneliness and death. This loneliness is not just a test of the elderly, but of their children, who are left alone with their departure from life. While working on the mentioned topics, the research will focus on the main stories “Xiffet”, “Seher Dumani” and “Kufi Xetti”.

“The transition to a new stage of life creates a bewilderment. Life invites a person to face himself so that he can pass through this door by filtering. It is a cruel sound to man as a summons. The listener drags his feet and moans constantly. There is a person who has a lullaby of mercy in him. Old age is a chance to be cleansed” (Yabar, 2022: 62). Old age is one of the most discussed topics in literature, like death, love and separation. In the literature of almost all peoples, to say old, orator means an experienced person. In fiction, respect for old people, white hair, and white beard is preached, trust in their experience, and criticism of disrespect for them is inculcated. The best example of this in Azerbaijani literature is the monument “Kitabi-Dede Gorgud”. In the literature of the peoples of the world, in the works of Ernest Hemingway, Victor Hugo, Leo Tolstoy, Necip Fazil Kısakurek and others, we are faced with descriptions of the sometimes bitter and sometimes proud aspects of this topic.

The description of old age has no age. N.F.Kısakurek was 26 years old when he wrote the lines *“Years have become tears and flowed, / On the cheeks of the bright old man. / He has spread his leaf hair on the ground, / Autumn is crying at his feet”* (Kısakurek, 2013: 61). Viktor Hugo was 60 years old when he penned the lines *“...all life events constantly run away from us. Darkness is replaced by light. After a bright flash-darkness; you look, you hurry, you stretch out your hands to catch the moment that passes in front of you; every event is a bend in the road; and suddenly old age comes”* (Hugo, 2005: 152). That is to say, experience is not important in the description of old age. It is enough to be a good observer to be able to see the way of life hidden behind the wrinkles on people's faces.

In fiction, old age goes hand in hand with loneliness rather than death. Death is secondary here. Because if there is death, the work ends. There is no age to die. It brings fear to whoever is unexpectedly haunted. This is natural. But loneliness is harder to take for granted. The concept of work, stolen time, and family that people give to each other prevents us from taking it for granted. Especially the elderly value it as “unnecessary”. This “uselessness” makes them unprotected, like the cold of an autumn morning that works for the marrow.

2. Explanation of the pandemic with the “Kufi Xetti”

In our opinion, V.Sultanli's story that best describes this loneliness is “Kufi Xetti”. Although the story is dedicated to the corona virus pandemic, which began in December 2019 in China and swept the whole world, in our opinion the combination “nursing home” that we encountered in the very first paragraph was a two-word summary of what went through the head of the protagonist of the work.

Any historical event, especially war and infectious diseases, has produced hundreds of works of art throughout history. “A Journal of the Plague Year” by Daniel Defoe, “I Promessi sposi” by Alessandro Manzoni, “La Peste” by Albert Camus, “Station Eleven” by Emily St. John Mandel, “Nights of the Plague” by Orhan Pamuk, and “Zoom. The Story Quarantine” by Elena Boroda are just a few of them. The story “Kufi Xetti” by Vagif Sultanli is one of the works from this series.

The work begins with a description of the symptoms of the disease: *“Recently, his mind and memory were completely corroded due to his illness-related fainting spells... His body, weakened by illness, was burning due to fever; his lips were chapped, his tongue was dry in his*

mouth, and turned into a dry meat" (Sultanli, 2023: 193). The work does not only describe the epidemic, which once again proves that if time comes, development and science will not work at all. It reflects the struggle of an old and especially lonely person with life, people, and way of thinking. The scene in which everyone dies around it, which he encounters while descending the steps of the nursing home enveloped by the stench, continues in the corridor of the hospital, full of "the living", where he is placed. The writer's likening of footsteps to "tiring refrain" and tireless moaning to "old voice" makes the reader shiver.

The old man thinks that the exclamation "you are no more important than anyone" heard here is not in practice, a choice is made between patients, and also disregards older people. On the one hand, we can conclude this with the fact that in the era of modernization, thoughts towards the elderly have changed. Yesterday's youth and today's old people, who once benefited from their labor, have already become useless after the exploitation of the current system, and society is viewed as a burden on them. Changes in families cause them serious problems. The inadequacy of social policy also leaves them alone with their own problems (Unal, 2019: 278). Because of our faith, we live knowing that life is trust and death is right. However, when death knocks on the door, not everyone has the strength to meet it in cold blood. The bed, on which we willingly lie down to rest every night, turns into a "deathbed". The only one that does not change is the voice. The voice of nature, people. There is life if there is sound. If I hear, then I'm alive thought.

As we read the story, what we experienced once again passes before our eyes: empty streets, worries about the future, the thought that time has stopped, the devaluation of life, unprepared catching deaths, family members lost in a row, forgotten religion, imagination, the flight of family members from each other, the alienation of the mother to the child, the alienation of the child to the family. The epidemic ignored the centuries-old traditions of people. Fear of participation in the funerals of loved ones, marriages without weddings. "...he would close his eyes to the world without even being allowed to say goodbye to his relatives with his last breath like everyone else, and then he would be buried in a mass grave and that would be the end of everything" (Sultanli, 2023: 198). So, "Since everything was dragged into this inevitable end, not only people, but all life die" (Sultanli, 2023: 197).

The old man is trying to "record" in his mind the course of a terrible disease that is not yet completely clear to people. "Every now and then, when his eyes were touched by the shadow of a person standing in front of the window and watching something, he felt an involuntary feeling of envy. It was as if there was a completely different world on the other side of the window, and as the days passed, the world he had created in his imagination was covered with a different veil" (Sultanli, 2023: 196).

The hero believes that at a time when in the world the sound of footsteps hits the ears like a hammer blow, people should not go on with their lives carefree, as if nothing had happened. Here we see very clearly the sharp intellectual position of the writer. He shows that the cause of this disease should not be sought in a living being other than the person himself. The writer emphasizes directly, without playing a pun, that the Earth is cramped for the human soul, that the purity of the universe is stained with the cruelty of injustice and tyranny, and that the thought of Satan invulnerable to us does not justify itself if we play "three monkeys: "Following the demands of deafness, blindness and dumbness in the world, with the insistence of the prohibition of understanding and understanding, everything changed its shape and order, and the concept of justice disappeared. People of different religions, who have been hostile to each other for centuries, prayed to God in the same place for the forgiveness of their sins, their voices rising to the sky, intermingling like a Kufic line" (Sultanli, 2023: 199).

After the writer describes all the pain, emotions, the interruption arises. At some point in the night, the old man feels suffocated as he wanders between wakefulness and sleep, trying to see the future through the fog. It was time to reach out to the lonely old man. It would not be his family members or relatives who stood at the door and begged the doctors to save him, nor would it be fair. He would be saved by the fate. *"...One of the angels erased the fate on his forehead with his feeble wings, and the other rewrote his destiny with a milky feather"* (Sultanli, 2023: 199).

With the help of "angels who flew from somewhere", the pain that whined inside was gone, and the soul was renewed. The fear of death bound him to life. Today was not that day. He understood the value of easy breathing and wanted to fly as far as he could to get away from his past.

3. Old age in the stories "Xiffet" and "Seher Dumani"

Among the most thought-provoking stories of V.Sultanli in terms of subject matter, we can mention "Xiffet" and "Seher Dumani". Examples of fiction are part of the national culture and provide important material for the study of national values. Of course, each work of fiction is the embodiment of the individual perception of the world by a particular writer. However, there are some works, the analysis of which helps us to get down to the issue of gender, which is common and a little fashionable in modern times. Moreover, when tradition is involved in this, it confronts us with reagents that we cannot see and express in words. When we read the writer's works "Xiffet" and "Seher Dumani", we see there are two stories with the same beginning and end. The protagonist of one is a woman, the other is a man. Both protagonists are on the verge of death. This facing has similar and different sides. In advance, both stories begin with a description of loneliness. In "Xiffet" the season is winter, in "Seher Dumani" it is autumn. The first story describes an old woman – mother, who was "abandoned" in a dark room. The name is not given. As you read the story, feel the emotions experienced, it becomes clearer why the person presented was not named. The sensitivity that comes from the duty given by God, the name "MOTHER" is enough for people who put dishes in front of them, after making sure that everyone in the house will eat as much as they want, people who fall asleep sometimes on the dry floor, sometimes in the corner of their child's bed, after seeing everyone sleeping in a comfortable and clean bed, people who "pulled their hand" over their children, whom they suffered for years so that there would be no gossip in their house. The hero of "Seher Dumani" has a name, but he also represents a "FATHER", a man who thinks that being a burden on his son's shoulders is worse than the worst disease.

Epicurus sees it as foolishness to worry about a painless death. Because *"Therefore death, the most frightening of evils, is nothing to us, for the excellent reason that while we live it is not here and when it is here we are not living"* (Epicurus, 1972: 82), – says. But the heroes here are both older. There is not a single death here, born of illness, of misfortune. There is even more true death.

Both protagonists, following Azerbaijani customs, live on par with their sons. The woman's room is in such a quiet corner of the house that it is also possible to hear the sound of flying flies. The floor of her room is earthen and has no windows. She has chosen to stay here herself: *"She wanted this place because the floor was dirt. Most of her life was spent in this house; now she didn't like her son's house with wooden floors"* (Sultanli, 2023: 43). A woman knows whether it is day or night from the "flood of light that attacks" through the opened door of her room. *"It seemed to him that the door had opened, someone entered the room, and even*

when the door was opened, he saw a flood of cold light attacking the darkness. On the earthen floor began to walk a wet broom. They swept the room and poured the garbage into the eyes of the steamer, and then the shadow disappeared as it came" (Sultanli, 2023: 42). In general, the individualization that has been noticed in recent decades is manifested not only in young people, but also in the elderly. The weakening of family relations, in our opinion, is relevant for both generations. Deteriorating modern relationships create serious gaps between the younger and older generations. It's not just that young people don't want old people; the elderly are increasingly thinking that they should live their own lives and stay away from young people. This process instills in everyone the idea that they should live under their own conditions as best they can (Aydin, 2015: 237).

The protagonist has a name in "Seher Dumani": The old man Azim Azim has a window in his room, just like he has a name. The dim light of the morning falls on his face and does not let him sleep. And he wants to return his runaway dream, turning from side to side in his bed. The writer attributes this to the noise of the night. "Grandchildren do not sleep at night until morning, especially the youngest – there is no sleep in his eyes. Because of them, he cannot sleep or relax. But he is not bothered by it at all. On the contrary, this voice haunts him in his sleepless nights" (Sultanli, 2023: 79).

The woman, on the other hand, does not want to sleep during the day, because if she slept in bright air, she would not get sleep at night. "...spending the night without sleep was torment, torture, so she tried to keep his sleep and keep it for the night as best he could" (Sultanli, 2023: 44).

In both stories, the bed motif is the line that holds protagonists between life and death. It seems to the woman that she is at the end of the world, facing an unknown void, and if she turns over in bed, she will fall into the bottomless depth. The same thoughts are repeated for the old man Azim: "It seemed to him that he was not in his bed, where he lay down every day, but in a strange land, where the end of the world was unknown, where nothing other than clouds, sun and earth touched his eyes" (Sultanli, 2023: 78). The dream motif in "Xiffet" is not present in "Seher Dumani". Here, the woman hears her dead husband calling her in her sleep while lying naked in the soft snow like cotton. He even holds her hand so tightly that her left arm is torn from her wrist and remains between her husband's fingers. "Suddenly, the snow that covered the world began to melt quietly, and this endless stream carried her husband away. A green world begins after the roaring snow flood. She rushes after a stream of snow, screaming and panicking. – Give me my hand, what can I do without a hand, she exclaims" (Sultanli, 2023: 43).

After waking up from a dream, she checks her hand under the influence of the nightmare she saw. "Paralysis". Suddenly, darkness falls on his eyes. Every time she closes her eyes, she hears Azrael's breath. The protagonist of the story comes to terms with his old age, standing at the door of death. He ignores it, even if the inside is chased by the disease. He understands that at this age of life and age, pains come and pass lightly. What worries him the most is his loneliness. Her son comes to her room every day and sits next to her. But she wants to get up and go down to the foot of his garden, to the bank of the river that flows past her house. She can't stand it. Although the old man Azim is not completely exhausted like her, he also knows that he carries death inside him. But the difference is that old man Azim is afraid of death. The woman simply wishes her medication to be taken and her pain to be over. *No matter what the old man Azim did, he couldn't get away from the death that sank inside him, like pain, like fatigue, absorbed into his blood and existence, he felt fear of it. ... the old man Azim could not bear to carry the the death*" (Sultanli, 2023: 78). Here we see the non-physical strength, the will that nature has endowed a woman with. One of the different elements in the stories is the authority

in the house. The woman has accepted the fact that she no longer has a say in the house where she once had a mistress. *“Her son and her daughter-in-law argue from time to time, she could hear everything below. But doesn't say anything”* (Sultanli, 2023: 45). She does not worry about the house's cleanliness, whether dinner is ready or not.

The old man Azim does not interfere in his son's business. But he is disturbed by the garden, which is not watered early in the morning, animals that are not transferred to the pasture, chickens that are not released from the hive. *“It hurts the old man that while he was an elder, the worries of the house and family were resolved without him”* (Sultanli, 2023: 79).

In our opinion, The following lines from the old man Azim's mouth in “Seher Dumani” are expressions that best show the essence, meaning and purpose of both stories: *“...Even if he was sick, his pain was not treated as a pain. Even though he was burning with fever for days and his appetite was completely lost, the reason for this was sought in old age. And the biggest pain for the old man Azim was living as a guest in his own house”* (Sultanli, 2023: 79).

Both “Xiffet” and “Seher Dumani” end with the connection between nature and man. The mother leans on the trunk of the Elm tree, whose green leaves are torn off and fall on the ground, and the father passes away, blending into the morning mist.

The tree and the protagonist's death leaning on its trunk, described in “Xiffet”, also reminds of the poem “The Coming of Wisdom With Time” by William Butler Yeats.

*“Though leaves are many, the root is one;
Through all the lying days of my youth
I swayed my leaves and flowers in the sun;
Now I may wither into the truth”* (Yeats, 1983: 93).

Here the tree is a metaphor for life. The poet likened youth to leaves, and old age to roots. And the fallen leaves and flowers are the dreams of youth. Life comes from top to bottom. The flowers and leaves are mostly in the newly blossomed, delicate and beautiful part of the branches, gradually the branches thicken and the leaves disappear, the thickened branches unite at the stem and turn into a whole and mix with the soil together with the root. The soul of the protagonist of his story also turns into the trunk, mixing with the voice of his inner world.

4. Conclusion

The protagonists of all three stories we have examined, as Epicurus wrote, “are afraid of death not because it will torment when it comes, but because it will torment with its comes”. Old age does not come as suddenly as death. But the son of man is still perplexed, as if he was suddenly caught. He looks for traces of old age on his body. Gray hair, wrinkled hands, tired legs. However, the “elderly” of Vagif Sultanli does not mention these traces. They are more tormented by feelings of loneliness, inability to do their work, being pushed into the background. In the writer's stories, the tradition, mentholity seems to be hidden in the episodes, but in fact it shapes the course of all events. When we read the works, we see that there are several keys here. One of them is the season, the others are bed and sleep. In all three works, the inner world of people and natural phenomena are compared. The similarities between them are shown. They see their beds as graves. They are afraid that if they fall asleep, the blanket on them will return to the soil. The fear of going to sleep is followed by the joy of waking up to see the light of day again. Perhaps this fear is not from darkness, but from loneliness and silence. For if in the silence of the night the sound of water made them panic as it sounded in their ears like the roar of the sea, then by dawn it sounded like melancholy music in their ears, and as this sound spread to their souls, the fear of loneliness receded like a fog. However, it is interesting that the

darkness that separates none of the protagonists who are afraid of the night from life is not the night. The hero of “Xiffet” dies in the evening, while the cold dawn of the sun melting on the horizon dazzles his eyes, while the hero of “Seher Dumani” does not leave the world until the morning fog clears. In the stories of V.Sultanli, old age is not given as the opposite of youth. There are young characters in the stories, but they are not set against or compared to the elderly. The emotions of people who are angry because death comes suddenly and unprepared, which we witness in “Kufi Xetti”, and in “Xiffet” and “Seher Dumani” are the emotions of people who cannot get used to old age that comes step by step. It is as if old age is simply a role that is burdened on the shoulders of the heroes, a burden that has been involuntarily forced to lift. In general, fiction allows us to see how it affects the life of people, their family members, relatives, acquaintances, who are pained by death, moving away from the statistics of war, deaths and diseases, their way of life. From this point of view, the influence of fiction is more impressive than historical facts and statistics, and it has a greater impact on the way we look at those layers. In general, the stories of Vagif Sultanli can be regarded as the best examples of the reflection of the life of the elderly, which is the fruit of the joint “work” of the family of the modernization period and insufficient social policy.

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