

**“VIOLENCE AND DEATH IN STORIES OF WAR PERIOD WRITER ÖMER SEYFETTİN”**

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# **VIOLENCE AND DEATH IN STORIES OF WAR PERIOD WRITER ÖMER SEYFETTIN**

## **ABSTRACT**

In this article, a brief biography is given and information is provided on, the period Ömer Seyfettin, one of the most widely read children's literature writers in Turkey lived in, and the subject of death and violence in 129 short stories he has written, compiled in 10 books, was analyzed. The data was subjected to computer aided quantitative analysis to determine at what level references were made to death and violence in these stories. Also, the subject of death and violence in stories was studied in the article by grouping them into various categories. In Category 1, what was the approach to war and the theme of war in stories; in Category 2, War and Child; in Category 3, the subjects of Illness, Misadventures, Suicide, Violence, Execution and Injury, which are the causes for individual deaths, were dealt with. The meaning of the violence-filled content of these stories in terms of children was discussed.

**Keywords:** Death, violence, children's literature, story, child, war

## **INTRODUCTION**

The attitude towards the control of death and concept of death has gone through a significant change in the last century. The main character of 20<sup>th</sup> Century, called the century of wars, is deaths, famine, disabilities and thousands of orphaned sick children left behind by the war. There is no study yet revealing how many books and articles have been published in Turkish on the subject of death and violence.

In Turkey, the subject of death and violence has started to find a place in the world of children with an excessive scariness as the works of certain authors like Ömer Seyfettin started to be

evaluated as part of children's literature or recommended to allow children to gain national consciousness. Due to migration from villages to cities occurring in Turkey starting in 1960s, poverty, misery, deprivation, violence and death themes have started to be dealt with frequently in the texts of children's literature. Furthermore, the political struggles in Turkey in the 1970s have introduced ideological approaches into children's literature with the polarization in political life being reflected onto children's publications. Although one cannot trace the appearance of the awareness of children's literature in Turkey to a distant past, it has to be stated that the symbol of child in stories, novels and poems does not reflect the happy human being type.

In Turkey too, in 1970s, like in the West, "death itself had re-entered children's books" as one of a number of issues – including divorce, illness and teenage sexuality – and that children might be helped to come to terms with through literature. (Colin, 1998, p. 109).

It was in this period that Ömer Seyfettin's story books were included in the scope of children's literature, stories were taken in course books and they were recommended to children by teachers as reading books.

### **PERIOD ÖMER SEYFETTIN LIVED IN**

1900s are years in which an empire was torn down and in place of it, a republic was established in Turkey. It was in such a period that Ömer Seyfettin lived. Years 1884 and 1920 are both the dates of birth and death of the writer and they also denote a period in which approximately 300 historical events took place when the disintegration of Ottoman Empire started. World War 1 and the War of Independence are the most significant historical events of this period.

Ömer Seyfettin graduated as an officer from the Army Cadet School. He served in 1903-1906 in Kuşadası Reserve Troop Battalion and was a Border Company Commander in Macedonia after constitutional monarchy was declared. He abandoned the military because of his interest

in literature, going to Selanik (1910); returned to the Army during the Balkan War and was taken prisoner by the Greeks in the siege of Yanya. He was a war prisoner for a year after which he returned to Istanbul and died there (1920). The writer, who reflects the period he lived in his stories, has experienced the full violence of the war years because of his military service. In the diary of a high school teacher, the writer states the following: *“It came to my attention, the thing called history is a transmitter of disaster! It either does not mention happiness at all or it just touches upon it superficially. It is a master in finding a tragedy, treacherousness, pain or poison even in the most joyous, most luck-filled periods! This sad trend in history, which is the heritage of humanity, is also inherent in the human being himself. Calamities, pains, grief leave deep traces in our souls almost like a wound. Our happiness, joys, good days melt away and are forgotten with the featherlike lightness of a dream”* (Letter to Homeland, p. 72). Indeed, Ömer Seyfettin, too, who wrote children’s stories, *either does not mention happiness at all or just touches upon it superficially.*

Along the same line, the writer says the following in his diary: *“Poor diary: I wrote the most bloody, terrible scenes in you. I read you so I don’t feel grief. You will be my friend as long as I live.”* (Lonely Efe, p. 63).

The writers most widely read by children in Turkey have been researched by various scholars and it was revealed from the results of these researches that Ömer Seyfettin was the best known writer and his stories were the ones read most. In a survey conducted on 755 children with different socio-economical and socio-cultural structures to determine the book reading habit among grades 4 and 5 of primary education, it was found out that Ömer Seyfettin was the writer best known in grades 4 and 5 and the books titled *The Currycomb*, *The Beating* and *The Haunted House* of this writer ranked 2<sup>nd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade among most widely known and read books. *The Currycomb* dropped to 4<sup>th</sup> place in grade 5 with other stories of Ömer Seyfettin being in 9<sup>th</sup> place. (Tosunoğlu, 2003, p. 550).

The following significant question was asked in the same survey: “What do you feel when you read and finish a book?” It is observed after calculation of the frequencies of the answers given by the students; the answer ranking first is “I feel as if I took part in the event”. The answer to this question is highly significant for our study because the children reading the violence-filled stories of Ömer Seyfettin say “I feel as if I took part in the event”. It is well known that Ömer Seyfettin usually wrote his stories “to give lessons or to take lessons”. When asked whether they read books for such a purpose, children who read Ömer Seyfettin placed the item of “giving lessons or taking lessons” in 6<sup>th</sup> place. This brings the phenomenon of feeling as if having taken part in the event for children in place of the purpose of taking lessons from such stories. According to Tosunoğlu, the number of children using the expression “I feel as if I took part in the event” after having read death and violence-filled stories is quite high. (Tosunoğlu, 2003, p. 250).

A similar study conducted on 1272 children from different economic and social status on the subject of reading habits covers grade 5, 6, and 7 students. According to the survey results of this study, three of the top 5 books most widely read by grade 5 students are Ömer Seyfettin’s stories titled Kaşağı (The Currycomb), Bomba (The Bomb) and Pembe İncili Kaftan (The Kaftan with Pink Pearls). It is terrifying that the story titled The Bomb is the second most widely read book among grade 5 students. Whilst The Currycomb preserves the property of being the 5<sup>th</sup> most widely read book among grade 6 students in the same survey, this ranking changes again in grade 7 with The Currycomb becoming the 2<sup>nd</sup> most widely read book. (Gönen, Öncü and Işıtan, 2004, p. 5).

Ömer Seyfettin has 10 books comprising 129 short stories. Below, 129 stories contained in 10 storybooks by Ömer Seyfettin are subjected to a quantitative analysis using a computer data base file. (Table 1). Pages referring to the death of individuals or a group of people were noted based on the records on pages disregarding whether the persons in the stories were real

or fictional. The unidentified persons who died in the rebellions and massacres, persecutions and in cases where people were thrown alive into the fired large ovens of the towns, in connection with the Balkan War, were added to the list if a number was given. Indirect references made to the subject of death alone were not taken into consideration. For example, an expression like “*was frozen as a corps due to bewilderment*” was not included in the list on the subject of death or reference to death. Yet, unspecified and general references to death like “War is Life” or “The soldiers, the gendarmerie and the police were going to shoot everyone in the garden and destroy by swords or knives the ones on the street, stopping them at the corner” (White Tulip, p. 30) were taken into consideration.

**TABLE 1. Reference to Death in Stories**

	<b>Title of Story</b>	<b>Pages of Text</b>	<b>All pages referring to death</b>	<b>Percent</b>
	BEYAZ LALE (WHITE TULIP)	152	151	99.3 %
	BOMBA (THE BOMB)	152	166	109 %
	GİZLİ MABET (HIDDEN TEMPLE)	152	44	28.9 %
	YALNIZ EFE (LONELY EFE)	152	40	26.3 %
	MEMLEKETE MEKTUP (LETTER TO HOMELAND)	152	38	25 %
	İLK DÜŞEN AK (FIRST GRAY HAIR)	153	33	21.5 %
	MAHCUPLUK IMTIHANI (TEST OF BASHFULNESS)	151	29	19.2 %
	YÜKSEK ÖKÇELER (HIGH HEELS)	152	15	0.9 %
	ASİLZADELER (THE NOBLEMEN)	152	7	0.4 %
	BAHAR VE KELEBEKLER (SPRING AND BUTTERFLIES)	153	7	0.4 %
	<b>TOTAL</b>	1521	530	31.2 %

**TABLE 2. References to Death in all Stories of Ömer Seyfettin**

	In 129 stories in total
<b>(1) Pages of Text</b>	1,521
<b>(2) All pages referring to death</b>	530
<b>(3) Pages referring to death other than “obituary”</b>	460
<b>(2) as percent of (1)</b>	34.8
<b>(3) as percent of (1)</b>	30.2
<b>Causes of Death of Individuals</b>	
<b>Illness</b>	50
<b>Misadventure</b>	6
<b>Suicide</b>	4
<b>Violence</b>	55
<b>Execution</b>	4
<b>War</b>	300
<b>Injury</b>	7
<b>Total</b>	426

The causes for death were dealt in seven categories (See Table 2). “War” covers any organized armed conflicts, real or fictional, which include armed rebellions and civil wars. “Violence” includes any case where someone deliberately does another fatal physical harm other than in war; that is, murder, man slaughter and execution. “Suicide” involves cases where types of behaviour like attempts resulting in actual death or not threatening the environment by suicide, displaying depressive behaviour with the idea of suicide or without it or harming oneself in general are recalled. “Illness, Suicide, Violence, Execution, Injury and Misadventures may be listed among the causes of individual deaths. (Colin, 1998, p. 111). Naturally, illness and injuries don’t result in death all the time. This point has been taken into consideration.

One third of Ömer Seyfettin’s stories contain references to the theme of death. The probability that some of the deaths in the writer’s stories on the Balkan War are the same deaths is high. Furthermore, since some of his stories are entirely on wars, the number of pages of these stories was included in entirety in the group on references to death. In Ömer Seyfettin’s stories, sometimes the percentages of references to death are high; yet at other times, references made to warfare are more frequent. Still, warfare’s aspect giving rise to violence is a situation encountered more frequently in the stories. The stories are shaped within the framework of the heroism of sometimes Turks and sometimes other nations. The rebellions expanding specifically around the Balkans including certain wars which took place in Ottoman territories and the wars in the periphery of the Empire are focused upon in the stories. For example, there are references to the Bulgarian uprising which emerged as a result of the declaration of constitutional monarchy, the wars triggered by certain foreign elements in Turkey by provoking their own religious peers internally and conflicts taking place due to the internal disputes among certain nations around the periphery of the Empire. However,

there is absolutely no attempt on a systematic explanation of the Ottoman history in these stories. The writer, in his stories, fails to comprehend the silence of the Turkish nation against external rebellions and invites his nation to be alert, through nationalism. There are extremely interesting methods resorted to by Ömer Seyfettin to allow his nation to acquire the awareness of identity. To put forth this awareness, the author tries to tell through non-fictional violence-filled stories adding his own personal experiences that the real aim of the enemy nations was to eliminate the Turkish nation and to capture the lands it dwelled in.

Ömer Seyfettin has increased the dosage of violence even further in his stories titled *The Bomb* and *White Tulip* he wrote as a result of the Balkan War in 1911-1913. Whilst 166 references were made to death and violence in of 152 page long *The Bomb*, 151 references were made to death and violence in *White Tulip* (Table 1) he wrote, again in the same period.

**War:** In Ömer Seyfettin's stories, "War" is sometimes represented as a sacred being and sometimes a matter of honour. War is a path to being remembered for eternity and living in the hearts of people because "*Those who die for their nations live forever...*". (Seyfettin, *White Tulip*, p. 155). Furthermore, war is a craft with its own rules. War is a science (Seyfettin, *Letter to Homeland*, p. 111). Sometimes, enemy soldiers who fight bravely with the opposing side, wishing to give their lives in combat, are cited as examples in the stories: "*-Go and tell the Pasha. He shouldn't propose this to me. There may not be a greater insult to a soldier than this. I am a man of war just as he is a man of war. I either die or win. Yet, I see my life is over. Let him not stop. Let him attack with all his might. I definitely want to stay under the stones of the fort which will come down*". (Seyfettin, *Spring and Butterflies*, p. 110). In one of the stories, an enemy soldier who cannot take to surrender in war is also mentioned with praise. This hero has died honourably, refusing to surrender: "*The Janissaries tried very hard to capture Zondi wounded by a bullet alive but it was not possible. He fought crawling on his knees until his body was pierced all over by swords and spears and he died. – So Pasha*

*could not talk to this brave enemy?- Yes, he couldn't. He had his body and his cut off head buried across the fort. He ordered that a spear and a flag were erected on his tomb.”* (Spring and Butterflies, p. 111). Heroes of stories always think that war has moral value, high virtue and is a matter of great sacrifice: *“He was telling of the moral value, the grandeur and great sacrifices of the war with lived emotions.”* (Seyfettin, The Bomb, p. 32).

In stories, war heroes are monumentalized and these heroes perceive war as a craft: *“These were full warriors. They knew of only the order they took and what they would do. They were so lost in their crafts that ... they didn't care about history at all. They didn't know near or old history, in fact, what they have done once upon a time, they would forget the names of the towns they hit and the cities they pillaged. ..”* (Seyfettin, The Bomb, p. 135).

The writer compares the inability of a soldier to fight to half death: *“The officer was crying. They asked: - Where is he now? - ..., - Is he dead? – Wish he was... - What happened then? – He was half dead. - ?... – Yes, half dead... For a soldier, being unable to fight all his life means ‘half death’”* (The Bomb, p. 136-137).

The story book titled Lonely Efe deals with the psychology of a soldier who abandons the army fleeing the war. This soldier is rather interested in the social dimension of the war. In the below cited paragraph, the writer tells how the soldier was convicted by those around him and how his parents would be shamed of such treason before relatives and friends in the following manner: *“To leave the army at an age when I could do something, I could serve my country, to run away from fire, fighting and war!. Of course, I won't be returning to my country either to face the firing squad or to rot in jails like a low life or to be provoked. My beloved mother will die seeking my image in tears. My father will be shamed by my treason before his relatives and friends. He won't be able to look anybody in the eye.”* (Seyfettin, Lonely Efe, p. 41).

In *White Tulip*, the pen is compared to a dagger: *“What work do you do? – I’m a writer. – A writer? – Yes. – Then, you are a dagger. A dagger who used itself, whose handle is in the hand of its barrel...”* (Seyfettin, *White Tulip*, p. 24). The writer confirms how he has adopted this opinion with the following expressions: *“I was to go forth with my sword – I mean my pen – in my hand, starting from tomorrow.”* (Seyfettin, *White Tulip*, p. 26). It is understood that although his being an officer and the state of the period were instrumental in the writer’s making excessive references to the theme of war, also his literature teacher and the books he read also played a major role in it. In the story titled *Primo the Turkish Boy*, the child hero dares death to give a lesson to the enemy nations, taking part in rebellions and insurgencies in his country. The words of his teacher of literature are influential in the child’s interpretation of death: *“He thought of the grave and earth. How dark it must be over there. Just like a deep and dry well. Death... But was this a terrible and horrific thing as the old, the aged, the dishonourable and miserable people thought? No, no. The literature teacher in school... that this death which scared the ignorant so much... a pleasant dream and a deep sleep... An eternal sleep... from which one cannot wake up from...”* (Seyfettin, *The Bomb, Primo The Turkish Boy*, p. 132). In these words, death is compared to a dry well and a deep sleep.

The following expressions also deserve attention as it indicated how the literature teacher shapes up the national identity of the child by elements of violence: *“It reminded him of a poem which his literature teacher in school had him memorize and was murmuring to himself looking at the uniformed enemy crowd disdainfully ‘I am Turkish and I am your enemy, even if I’m the only one left’.”* (Seyfettin, *The Bomb, Primo The Turkish Boy*, p. 128-129). On the subject of how the books he read influenced his own personality, the writer tells of his buying a type of plain, narrow, short sword called *“rapier”*, having read George Courtelin’s books as follows: *“The rapier I bought for that coy, gay, carefree military life” I dreamt of reading*

writer George Courtelin's (French writer, 1858-1929) novels in Istanbul is hung over there...  
*It is looking at me sad and sorry with its gold threaded tassel.* (Seyfettin, Lonely Efe, p. 22).

Ömer Seyfettin's story books sometimes give too much detail when describing the death of someone or the psychology of a person before being executed. The writer compares the fight of a hero in the fighting arena or the battlefield to "A tiger's attacking a buffalo": "... *Vojvod Kasim jumped upon his opponent like an agile tiger attacking a buffalo lying on the ground.*" (Seyfettin, The Bomb, p. 140).

When describing the battlefield, the writer tells the scenes in full reality and draws a picture of misery. "*Yesterday, there was a horrific battle. We were beaten and defeated badly. Our battalion was administering the retreat. We had plenty of dead. We came to Manastir at night. But the western army commander did not let us in the city. We are wandering aimlessly outside the city. It's snowing heavily. Ensigns, whose feet are frozen scream. The injured are dying, writhing and groaning on the top of carts, on the ground, in the snow and mud.*" (Seyfettin, Letter to Homeland, p. 119).

The following lines, which tell how a doctor is changed by the scenes he has faced in war years depict war in the scariest manner: "... *Performing surgery without losing his calmness for years in hospital tents over which airplanes throwing bombs flew around all the time, seeing horrific wounds, severed arms, dissected abdomens, broken heads and terrible deaths have made him a totally different man.*" (Seyfettin, The Bomb, p. 32). The basic ideology in the stories in which this depiction and similar ones are made is violence.

One of the scary aspects of warfare is its ambiguousness, not knowing whether the violence will continue or not: "*Now, these sounds deafening the horizons stopped. Let's see if the bloody battle we are waiting for will take place? Or shall we rot a few more days in this misery?*" (Letter to Homeland, p. 121)

The most interesting one among the war related depictions is made in the story titled Primo The Turkish Boy. This time, the battlefield is a valley full of enemy corpses washed with red and warm blood: *“Coming from broad valleys washed with red and warm blood from battlefields full of millions of enemy corpses... It makes a white horse play on the steep ridges...”* (The Bomb, Primo The Turkish Boy, p. 134).

In the story titled, Primo the Turkish Boy, not cleaning of the blood and a sword dipped in the blood of the enemy is conveyed as a war tradition: *“On the walls were curved, gold inlaid swords, daggers and pistols. In fact, his father had taken one of those swords down one day and shown him a group of black spots, taking it out of its sheet... and he had said Let’s clean them Dad. His father had said No son. These are not dirt... These are enemy blood... This sword has seen seven wars. The enemy blood on it is its greatest asset. It is not cleaned...”* (The Bomb, Primo The Turkish Boy, p. 86).

The gun has taken its place in the world of the child as a sacred object. Primo The Turkish Boy has symbolized the gun as an instrument of vengeance: *“He went up to his room. He took his beloved weapon in his hand again and kissed it. How could he get its vengeance tomorrow without it? How could he show the enemy how Turkishhood has not yet died and that Turks who were aware of their being Turks still existed in the world? .. He loaded and emptied this sacred instrument...”; “Alas, if it could be possible for him to be buried tomorrow together with this sacred weapon which will fulfill the duty of the Turks?... (The Bomb, Primo The Turkish Boy, p. 132).* Towards the end of the Ottoman Empire, Turks have come out of many wars they participated in, losing. The Balkan War is one of them. When he hears the news about the defeat in the war, Primo is taken over by vengeance and wrath. He gets into such a state that this vengeance spreads all over his body like a poison. (The Bomb, Primo The Turkish Boy, p. 116). The child symbol of the writer represents a passionate idealist obsessed with becoming a hero. That the writer has given such an assignment to the child is scary even

if the conditions of the period are taken into consideration: *“Oh, what a scene!.. He was going to paint this place in blood a little later, turning it into a battlefield. Now, he was going to wait for the Greek soldiers and officers to pass by. He was going to open such a fire that he wouldn’t leave any of them alive.”* (The Bomb, Primo The Turkish Boy, p. 130); *“The enemy cannot say any more that ‘- We took Selanik which was in the hands of the Turks for five hundred years and nobody fired a shot at us’ and let them see what a hero a Turkish child is.”* (The Bomb, Primo The Turkish Boy, p. 132).

The child named Primo is inside a pool of blood coming to his knees in his dream. This blood is the blood of the enemy. It has become such a lake that when the moon and stars are reflected onto the lake from the sky, the figure of the Turkish flag appears. By this expression, the writer refers to a belief relating to the formation of the Turkish flag: *“He bends forward and sees that he is in blood up to his knees... This is the blood of the enemies of Turks... It has become a big lake... A red and endless lake... The image of the moon and the star in the sky is reflected on it... Oh, the embodiment of our flag, our noble flag. The concrete meaning of our sacred flag...”* (The Bomb, Primo The Turkish Boy, p. 134).

Increasing the intensity of the violence in war, the writer continues with his depictions smelling of blood and gunpowder as follows: *“What the migrants told were hair raising. The enemy was surrounding every Turkish village, was not forgiving even those asking for mercy, was executing all mails, was sending the small children to Greece as slaves to make them Christians, were raping the women and beautiful girls and were not leaving any stone on top of another... Of course, they would kill all of them or would scare them away by persecution... .. Then, indeed, they would devise a plot and would destroy many families by blood and fire, making up a fictional rebellion...”* (The Bomb, Primo the Turkish Boy, p.127-128).

Many people who lived in Macedonia, actually turning into a battlefield and who were not Turks were sick and tired of the scary bloody scenes in the Balkans: *“Suddenly, we will remember Macedonia, this country of cannibals. Dirty narrow roads, miserable naked men, endless snow stained by blood, black disgusting sharp axes, then black horrific Balkans, Pirin Mountain will appear before our eyes! You see, here, each minute goes by in tyranny, injustice, massacres, grief and pain. It is not possible to work comfortably in this filthy and wild place. This cruel Macedonia. Oh this bloody Macedonia...”* (The Bomb, p. 11).

In the story titled White Tulip, those losing the war are compared to a *“scared herd of animals”*. *“The army, which started retreating at the border, was passing through since two days ago. These ones coming back did not look like those who left at all. These were almost a herd of scared animals. All of them were unshaven, with dirty faces and their red clothes were torn. They were walking slowly, tired and miserable, bent under the muddy rifles on their shoulders.”* (White Tulip, p. 31).

In the paragraph below, too, the writer, as he did in other stories, describes the battlefield as a place where piles of corpses were gathered: *“This was the story of an old cavalryman who attacked to armoured enemy cavalymen using a broken shield he found on the ground when he was a prisoner and who cut their heads off. Salahaddin emerged before this black hurricane like a steel rock of strength. He broke these rabid live waves. He turned the desert into a red calm sea. Yes, he killed ten thousand enemies just in a few hours. He took the rest prisoner. He had the bodies thrown into the river because it was not possible to bury them. Everywhere was full of corpses. The rotting of endless piles of corpses poisoned the air. Doctors said that this battlefield covered by the poison of death should be abandoned immediately.”* (Seyfettin, First Gray Hair, p. 43).

**War and Child:** *The child does not know war and the related concepts. Therefore, he asks curious questions about war: “... - What does mobilization mean? It means the order for*

*preparing for war. ... Will there be a war? They say so. With which state? With the Bulgarian. Primo felt a strange joy inside him. Primo was always asking things about the war which Mustafa was unable to answer. Primo was hearing (news about war), a tremendous feeling of vengeance was rising from inside him, was spreading into his veins like a poison, hurting him all over.*” (The Bomb, Primo The Turkish Boy, p. 116).

In the story titled Primo the Turkish Boy, the child is a symbol shown as a model hero for the adults. In Ömer Seyfettin’s stories, war is an opportunity to record one’s name in history. To achieve this, a hero must be created. The writer resorts to certain methods to allow the sentiment of heroism to emerge in children. His concept of heroism means to display an extraordinary superiority in war to sacrifice one’s life. The names of those who sacrifice themselves for their countries would be recorded in history and this happens by achieving a great task: *“Primo thought for a minute. To record his name in history... How did this happen? – How is a man’s name recorded in history? His father answered patting his brown and curly hair: - By doing something great and sublime... By displaying heroism which would put everyone in awe...”* (The Bomb, Primo The Turkish Boy, p. 117). The writer gives the key to have one’s name recorded in history in the same story: *“He should sacrifice this mortal and transitory life for the grand life of the grand Turkishhood...”* (The Bomb, Primo The Turkish Boy, p. 121).

The sentiment of vengeance comes to the forefront in the created child type. In the story, Primo the Turkish Boy is full of such vengeance and hate; he tries to relax by firing at the picture of the King of Italy although his mother is Italian: *“Primo used to take aim with a training gun he bought from the town store. His target was a picture of the King of Italy. He used to put a shot sometimes on the hand and sometimes on the chest of this enemy of Turks.”* (The Bomb, Primo The Turkish Boy, p. 105).

The writer always reminds the child of what race he came from to encourage him in terms of heroism. The child, who was the member of the Turkish race, would never cry even if his father would be taken prisoner or killed by the enemy because crying is for women, the weak, those who lack strength and the cowards: *“Come on child, don’t be afraid he whispered. Don’t forget that you are a Turkish boy. Don’t cry, don’t be sad. Why should he cry? Women, the weak, the powerless, the vile and the cowards cried. He wasn’t going to cry but would make other cry. ...”* (The Bomb, Primo The Turkish Boy, p. 127).

In A Child Aleko, another important story by Ömer Seyfettin, where the child is the subject, it is told how the child destroyed enemy headquarters by exploding a time bomb. (White Tulip, p. 140).

### **1. Causes of Individual Deaths:**

**Illness:** In Ömer Seyfettin’s stories, illnesses are represented as natural consequences of wars. In the stories, the name of misery is illness. The plague and malaria lead the illnesses arising during wars. Also, in the stories, it is touched upon that the illness of scabies appeared as a result of filth. Also, typhoid fever, tuberculosis, cholera, typhus, syphilis Seretan (a type of tissue disease), are illnesses referred to in stories for various reasons. Enemy soldiers kidnap nine Turkish girls, have them take off their clothes in the tent but don’t like their bodies because all these girls are skinny and have malaria. *“They had brought nine girls. He had them undress in the tent. He looked at their bodies, didn’t like them. Two of them were all right but they were very skinny, had malaria...”* (White Tulip, p. 34).

The writer uses certain metaphors when depicting an illness: *“His heart was hurting his chest, a humid fever was burning his temples; feverish malaria was clamping on his wrists like cruel, invisible, poisonous handcuffs.”* (White Tulip, p. 35).

**Misadventures:** Tosun Pasha, who is extremely loyal to the Ottoman Sultan, falls from the grace of the Sultan because of some made up charges and is sentenced to death. Instead of

executing Tosun Pasha, the Sultan puts the execution order in a closed box and sends to another Pasha. Tosun Pasha, who wonders what, is written in the imperial edict but who gives up the idea of opening the box due to his loyalty to the Sultan, dreams that blood is coming out of the edict of the Sultan and wakes up as he sees that a storm of blood surrounds his whole body in red flames. Knowing that the sealed paper the Sultan gave him is his death order, he delivers the edict to the Pasha ordered by the Sultan. Although Pasha wants to avoid this duty saying that there is something wrong, I cannot execute this edict, Tosun Pasha forces the Pasha to perform this task and the Pasha hangs Tosun Pasha fulfilling what was required in the edict (Ömer Seyfettin, *The Bomb, The Imperial Edict*, p. 40).

In this story, too, the element of violence by misadventure is dealt with in total intensity and death is justified for the sake of loyalty.

**Suicide:** Suicide in Ömer Seyfettin's stories is not one's punishing himself but is an expression of despair. The purpose in the suicide's in the stories is not to get away from life but is to get away from realities which are painful and is an expression of a despair in changing one's own reality. The suicides in the stories involve a series of emotional experiences, awakening the sentiment of desperateness although they incorporate a dimension of thinking.

The Bulgarian army coming out of the Balkan War enters a town where Turks live predominantly and are greeted with a large flood of love by the Christian minority there. The task of pillaging of the town and the massacre of the people is given to Major Ratko Balkaneski. As a first task, Balkaneski calls the gang leaders of the town and orders that the necessary preparations be made to carry out the massacre. In the meantime, Balkaneski searches the most beautiful girl of the town and spares her for him. This girl is Lale Hanım. Sending his soldiers to Lale Hanım's house, he has Lale Hanım's whole family kidnapped

and killed. After a while; he, himself, goes to Lale Hanım's house, convinces Lale Hanım to open the open the door saying that he came for peace, that he would free her family if she opened the door, that he would just see the house and leave. Lale Hanım, opening the door innocently, is not aware of what is going on. Bulgarian officer, Ratko Balkanenski pursues Lale who goes to the upper floor and jumps on her. Lale: *"Stop a little... I am cold. Just let me close this window... and directly jumped over Ratko without touching him. Ratko found this perfect agility very attractive. He held her from her arms. He bit and bit her back. When he let her go, Lale went in front of the open window, swaying like a drunkard and suddenly she disappeared with a movement so fast that it was impossible to see. Stupified Ratko jumped out of the bed. He ran to the window; looked down, leaning out: Lale was lying down on the dark and dense grass."* (White Tulip, p. 64). Lale has thrown herself out of the window and committed suicide, causing the desires of the Bulgarian officer Balkanenski wishing to have her go to waste. Going even further in the story, the writer tells that Ratko displays a low behaviour as to have the dead body of the Turkish girl called Lale. *"Alas, this beautiful Lale had delivered her soul to death, running away from his embrace but... But she still was not paled. The sublime moonlight colour of her fresh life, her unmatched beauty still stood and he murmured before she got cold, before she got cold..... Couldn't that unique taste of her untouched virginity, which was perhaps to different, be tasted at least a little?.... He was afraid that she would get cold rapidly..."* (White Tulip, p. 67).

**Violence:** Violence, which is a suppressed type of behaviours inherent in the human being is described in dictionaries as *"Severe, untamed conduct, excess in reprimand and punishment; exertion of rough force instead of convincing and reconciliation"*. In Oxford English dictionary *"distortion of meaning"* and *"resorting to passionate conduct or language"* are also included in the definition of violence.

Violence means “To use force, exert pressure, acts seeking to harm and inflict injury on other people”. When dealt with solely in the scale of the individual, violence comes up when the equilibrium between the enhanced urges for aggressiveness and the interior control mechanisms of the individual fails. Whilst organic or neurological disorders and stimulants coming from the environment intensify the urges causing aggressiveness, certain chemical disorders in the brain and the vulnerability of the spiritual world of the individual weaken the control system.

Many researches have attempted to comprehend the powers shaping acts of violence and to predict who could be violent by this method. The findings of violence seen in enemy soldiers in stories overlap with scientific findings. For example, in soldiers, the intent to inflict harm at a high level, to make frequent and express threats, concrete planning, the capability to access instruments of violence easily, continuous anger, feelings of animosity or offendedness, enjoying watching violence and cruelty are the most frequently found characteristics. In “White Tulip”, the Ömer Seyfettin story with the highest number of depictions of violence, the writer gives a set of descriptions of torture which would distort the spiritual wellbeing of the reader: *“The comitadjis (Balkan rebels) were baffled in this hurricane of breasts, bellies, legs, loins and hair, not knowing what to do and were inventing most unimaginable fantasies going through a terrible delusion of ‘sadism’. Among these fantasies, the one they called ‘Live Hole’ was the most terrible one. First, a plump woman would lie on the floor, then they would lay on top of her a second beautiful woman who they liked on her back diagonally and they were having this woman held by other women from her hands and feet. Then, the comitadji who was next in line would approach and would put in a small bayonet a little below the belly and would take it out immediately. Then, he would satisfy himself on this hole exuding a dark red coloured blood and was extinguishing the most shameful, filthiest, most rotten fires of his animal nature in the belly of the poor convulsing, screaming woman*

*between her bloody intestines. The women whose bellies were pierced would not live and die moaning and in convulsions in a couple of hours". (White Tulip, p. 51-52).*

In the story titled Beyaz Lale (White Tulip), the writer describes how the Bulgarian army pillaged a Turkish town; with every detail lived during this pillaging presented in such a way to distort the psychology of let alone children, but even of adults. The selected heroes are such that they may lead the child towards "violence" and "crushing the weak". For example, the main character of the story, Bulgarian major Ratko Balkanenski, shows violence and tyranny as a privilege: *"A young woman can give birth to fifteen enemies. Killing a young woman or a girl means killing fifteen enemies together. If Turks had chopped all of us up, listening to the words of the elders when they captured this place, would there be any Bulgarian left today. They were mistaken. They didn't cut our women, children when they had the chance. The non-cut Bulgarians reproduced and strengthened by coupling. They rose from under their merciful, in other words, weak, sovereigns and now they climbed on top of them. I mean, massacre is a social medication."* (White Tulip, p. 53).

The terms "When they had the chance" and "merciful, that is weak" used in the excerpt above merit attention. With the term "When they had the chance", exertion of violence against the helplessness of the other side is shown as an opportunity which should be made use of. By the term "Merciful, which is weak", people with the sentiments of pity and helpfulness are described as "weak". All this is summarized by the phrase "Violence is a social medicine" and violence is represented as sole remedy for social comfort. (Bölükbaşı, 2002, p. 23).

The children may take the hero of a book they read as a model for themselves. The best known study on this topic is a test conducted by psychologist Bandura in 1961:

"In this test, the children watched an adult playing with simple toys and an inflated doll. In one of the test conditions, the adult started by picking up simple toys for about one minute. Then he turned his attention to the inflated doll. He approached the doll, he punched it, hit it

with a wooden hammer, threw it up in the air and kicked it around in the room. As he did these, he yelled “Break its nose, hit it on the head, and take this”. This behaviour lasted for about 9 minutes before the eyes of the children. In another condition, the adult quietly worked on other toys, did not show interest on the inflated doll. After a while, each child was left alone for 20 minutes with a set of toys including the inflated plastic doll. It was observed that the children who watched the adult performing aggressive acts acted much more aggressively than the children who watched him working on the other toys quietly. The first group punched, kicked and ill-treated the doll, making aggressive comments similar to the ones the aggressive adult said. The children in this situation learned to attack a specific type of doll. It was clearly revealed that they were more inclined to attacking than before the test. They were displaying more aggressive behaviour during the imitation process. (Freedman, Sears, Carlsmith, 1998, p. 253).

When they watch or read about an event involving excessive violence and cruelty, children throw it into their subconscious and recall it through various symptoms. This may later turn into a type of psychological disorder called “Inner Anxiety Neurosis” (Corman, 1998, p. 136). The Inner Anxiety Neurosis may present itself sometimes by perceiving a foreign face as an enemy, sometimes by living in continuous anxiety, fearing that something bad will happen to somebody close to the patient and sometimes by frequent nightmares or fear of death created for no reason. (Bölükbaşı, 2002, p. 25).

**Execution:** In general, in stories, the executions of war criminals, traitors and sometimes the innocent are told. A child who was orphaned when his father was beheaded when he was twelve years old, the execution of a wronged hero or the psychology of a man carrying his own death edict is told in the stories illustratively. The psychologies of victims going to the gallows are described superficially: *“To think of these rapidly was turning his brain, was shaking him with that fatalist, desperate but noble fear felt by the innocent person who would*

*extend his head under the sword of the executioner as he walked towards the rope to be hanged.*” (The Bomb, Primo The Turkish Boy, p. 76). The noble stance against death of the innocent victim to be executed is shown as a model in the stories.

**Injuries:** One of the natural consequences of wars is the injury. Ömer Seyfettin has an interesting power of imagination on the subject of injuries as well in his stories. Those who support the heroism image of the writer most are the war veterans wounded in various places. These heroes usually win victories despite being injured in various parts of their bodies. Such a situation is dealt with in this scene: *“His thick moustache, big hazel eyes with the looks of a falcon, his broad strong shoulders and his soldier-like walk made everyone admire him. He was wounded thirty times until then in various parts of his body, had brought the heads of many generals as gifts to the Pashas, hanging them on his spear.”*

When telling of injuries, the writer resorts to violence filled descriptions: *“- How should I say it. At that moment his left leg dropped to the ground with his stirrup, his boot. We ran. We held the head of the horse. We took him down. Blas Şeri entered the fort applauding him, yelling ‘Hurray, hurray!’. The poor man’s face was all yellow. He was looking at his detached leg on the ground, was saying ‘Whoever loves his god, kill me!’. We brought him to the tent in our arms. The surgeon stopped the blood which was running furiously.”* (The Bomb, p. 138).

Although being wounded is a matter of honour, death is nobler than getting injured. *“For a warrior, there is nothing as sad as living far away from war. Death was much better than being disabled at a young age. The dying warrior would retire to his eternal resting place in honour, yet the hero left without a leg would writhe in the pain of hell as long as he lived, yearning for war”.* (The Bomb, p. 138). Still, Ömer Seyfettin describes a soldier wounded in forty-nine places as a military legend hero in his story titled “How Many Wounds in All”. *“- He said look here. He was pointing to the very end of the couch on his left. - ... - Did you see, that officer? A very well dressed, young, very elegant, tall, slim, brown haired officer with the*

*large fur cap..., - I said I saw. Isn't the one you just saluted?, - Yes... A strange coincidence brought us together in Çanakkale, the Caucasus front, in Baghdad, in Syria and Macedonia, Always in hospital on the operating table...- So he was always wounded? – And in how many places? Guess? I calculated the war fronts I said: - Five places – No. - I added a few more to the number of the fronts. Ten places. – No. – Fifteen places. – No. – Eighteen. – No. – Twenty-five places. – No, more. – Thirty-five. – No. I couldn't say forty. This was incredible. I left saying – You're joking doctor, tell me. – Exactly forty-nine in all...” (The Bomb, How Many Wounds In All, p. 33-34).*

## **CONCLUSION**

In Ömer Seyfettin's stories, the deaths during war are described in a horrific manner. When deaths in the family are described rather than the grieving of the survivors, injuries or giving the details of illnesses, the memories of the dead are touched upon.

In many of the parts in Ömer Seyfettin's stories describing deaths, there are numerous scenes making no contribution to the experience of the young reader. Those losing their husbands or fathers, women and their children have to deal with very poignant consequences and a major part of the school children who lose one or both parents in wars look to the future pessimistically.

It is easy to exaggerate the impact of Ömer Seyfettin's stories as reading books. There is no doubt that these reading books are very widely read in Turkey either. Thousands of children living around here spend most of their time reading these books. Yet, these books are quite heavy for a lot of the children. In Turkey, parents and teachers assert that the events full of lessons selected in the book *“Nurture the love of reading in children and protect the youth to become unfeeling and tough individuals after the long and tiring studying hours spent in school”*. However, these children, reading scenes full of death and violence in stories, are looking at the future pessimistically, seeing other nations as enemy.

The violence-filled passages in Ömer Seyfettin's stories are unpleasant and it is time to realize that the worlds of certain children who lost their parents or siblings in the parts relating to deaths in the family have been destroyed. It is difficult to say how adversely the children are influenced by these books. Yet, it is clear that like other books written for children, the reading books in schools occupy the children's minds with the deaths of the Balkan War period. As it is continuously emphasized that death is very close to a person, help must be provided to these children growing up with these types of stories.

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