

## Molla-Panah Vagif (1717-1797)

### BIOGRAPHY

Vagif occupies a prominent place in the history of Azerbaijan due to his literary and political activities. He was a great poet, the founder of new realism genre in the Azerbaijanian poetry and also a prominent statesman and diplomat, eshikagasi- the minister of foreign affairs in the Karabakh khanate.

Vagif was born in 1717 in the village of Salahly in the Kazakh district of Azerbaijan. When approximately forty years old he had to move to Shusha because of disorders in Kazakh at that time. Soon after coming to Shusha Vagif became popular and beloved among the people due to his knowledge and talents. There was even a saying: "Not every literate person can be Vagif".

When being the eshikagasi, Vagif did a lot for the prosperity and political growth of the Karabakh khanate. Also, he had outstanding deserts in organizing the heroic defense of Shusha during the invasion of shah Qajar of Persia in 1795 and 1797.

Vagif died during the disorders, which followed Qajar? **s invasion of Shusha in 1797**. At the time of his death his house was plundered and many of his verses were lost. However, interest to his poetry was not. Already in 1856 for the first time Vagif? **s verses** were collected and published by Mirza Yousif Nersesov. Soon afterwards, with assistance of M.F. Akhundov, his verses have been published by Adolph Berge in Leipzig in 1867. Thus, his heritage has been preserved.

Vagif began a new era in the Azeri poetry. In his poems he praised and gave priority to the mundane feelings and desires, rather than the abstract divine ones. This was the main characteristic that distinguished Vagif from his predecessors and made him the founder of the realism genre in the Azeri poetry. The language of the Vagif poems was qualitatively innovative as well: vivid, simple, and closely approaching to the popular speech. That? **s why Vagif? s poems**? koshma have had a great influence on the Azeri folklore and many of them repeatedly used in the folk music of ashuks.

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### Having given all, I begged and prayed to find...

Having given all, I begged and prayed to find  
A present for my love. I found you, shamama<sup>[1]</sup>!  
Pomegranate-coloured, fresh from off the vine,  
You are like her breast, sweet-scented shamama.

How delicate your flesh, as subtle as the rose,  
As fragrant as the air when springtide lilac blows,  
And yet your hue, like mine, a saffron tint now shows  
Do torments rack your heart, poor little shamama?

So shapely and so tender? **those graces both you claim,**  
But since my love has beauty far beyond acclaim  
I fear that you would know the taste of bitter shame  
If placed beside her breast, smooth, rounded, shamama.

My loved one's shamama is more than honey-sweet,  
And if the angels saw, they'd kiss her very feet.  
Fine marble is her breast? **no whiter could one meet.**  
With sighs our hearts it wounds, o sweetest shamama.

I falter when I see my love beside her door.  
My mind is overcast and I know nothing more.  
Why should she make Vagif with childish tears implore  
That comfort she should give with her sweet shamama?

[1] Shamama? a small deliciously flavoured melon.

### For long, how long my love and I were parted!

For long, how long my love and I were parted!

We met again. As strangers we departed.  
Although we two did not exchange a word,  
The memories shared had left us heavy hearted.

Our faces gave no sign. Our glance was cool.  
Each stood and stared like some benighted fool.  
I was no moth that winds a burning spool  
Of love around a lamp... And we departed.

We stood together less than half an hour.  
We were not singed. The flame had lost its power.  
We felt no warmth. Our love could not reflower.  
She went her way. Unreconciled we parted.

Once we admitted neither of us cared,  
We suffered much as through this life we fared.  
The birds that in our souls once sang were scared?  
Like us they fled and wander heavy hearted.

Vagif once loved, but she deserves disdain.  
Yes, false she was? **he suffered all in vain.**  
We never spoke or thought of love again...  
Without embracing, strangers we departed.

## No dark-haired beauties grace Kura's long banks...

No dark-haired beauties grace Kura's long banks  
With drake's-head sheen and captivating faces.  
My soul has fled to far-off mountain peaks.  
It cannot rest in such low places.

No silk or linen natural grace enhances.  
No wilful woman preens with tempting glances,  
My heart forgets those tender darts-love's lances.  
A merchant would be lost in such strange places!

No maiden paints her face to seem more fair.  
No golden gauze upon their heads they wear.  
No scented breast is draped with silken hair,  
Enhancing creamy skin with dark silk tresses.

In dreams I see the one I love today.  
In foreign parts I'll wake to my dismay  
And find my heart's delight is far away.  
I feel that I must die in these far places.

You see Vagif is pale, his heart oppressed,

For lie was torn away when he caressed  
The luscious swelling mounds of your sweet breast,  
So grief has marred his cheek with saffron traces.

### Now weep, my eyes. From love we have been parted!

Now weep, my eyes. From love we have been parted!  
Shed tears and let the people hear you cry:  
"Oh, visit her abode? **behold such beauty**  
As you may never see before you die!"

You are all, my love, my heart's delight.  
Your lips are sweet, your mouth is rose-bud bright.  
Without you I am dumb. My sorry plight  
Reduces all my world to one great sigh.

Vagif, the fluttering nightingale grows weak.  
In your love's lips the cure to ills it seeks,  
On snow-white breasts and blushing apple-cheek,  
From which may God avert the evil eye.

### The fragrance spread by your hair enhances every sense...

The fragrance spread by your hair enhances every sense  
For my soul is bound by love and held in beauty's sway.  
A letter could not describe the depths of my great pain.  
So I give the morning breeze a message to relay.

You sit? **your beauty** enchants, you rise and hold in thrall  
My two eyes that see your figure, lissome, slim and tall.  
Your ways are graceful and kind. You win the hearts of all.  
My ideal the Lord has made you? **lovely, charming, gay!**

Ah! Amber brought from the Yemen? **your lips, so pure and fair!**  
When I picture them in my mind my heart writhes in despair.  
Your beauty glows in a frame of jet-black waving hair,  
Iridescence in it gleams? **the drake's most vain display.**

My love embellishes thoughts that heart-strings weave about you.  
Most delightful words I hear when I can talk about you.

My love, my heart, o my soul! My life would end without you.  
May the Lord protect my love from evil eyes I pray.

Vagif must languish in pain, if love he cannot win,  
In the house of sorrow held? **bitter, wan and thin.**  
Vagif suffers torments of hell? **yet love is not a sin.**  
Oh, show mercy to Vagif, with love his pain allay.

## Molla-Panah Vaqif

Her face and features, rose and tulip tinted...

Her face and features, rose and tulip tinted,  
Were framed in sable locks. She gathered violets.  
How well the colours blend with eagle features,  
When on her creamy breast there nestle violets!

Her body carved from marble, locks of black  
And silky waves, can steal your heart, alack!  
And like Medjnun, you shall not get it back,  
She'll pin it to her breast mid purple violets.

At eighteen summers she has just begun  
To count the many hearts that she has won.  
O'er hills she walks in beauty shared by none.  
Mid rustling leaves and fragrant whispering violets.

Display your limbs and body, warm and nude,  
But never let my rival's glance intrude,  
Nor tolerate his touches harsh and crude. . . .  
Unworthy hands should never pluck sweet violets.

When one beholds her scintillating grace  
The blood like wine makes heart-beats throb apace,  
And when Vagif composes verses to her face  
The first and final words should be sweet violets.

## Molla-Panah Vaqif

From birth a lovely woman crowns the world's  
creation...

From birth a lovely woman crowns the world's creation.

Through middle age and on, her charm shall still exist?  
A jewel that time in passing can never touch or ravage?  
A hundred winters' storms her splendour shall resist.

A woman of true beauty shall never cease to please,  
Delightful, slim and supple as swaying cypress-trees,  
Her winsome, sweet enchantment always shall increase...  
Our love for her, our trust, forever shall persist.

Let her hundreds birthday come!? **Still upon that day,**  
Though her hand be weak and tremble, although her head be grey,  
With a quick glance of her eye she can steal our hearts away,  
We fall beneath her spell and do whate'er she list.

Her dignity increases beyond that of her youth.  
Her eyes are clear, serene, as limpid as the truth.  
Against her sharp-tipped lashes no man's heart is proof.  
The arrows from her bow their aim have never missed.

Vagif, to know delights of loving at its best  
Choose one whose proven heart will stand life's sternest test,  
And not some wilful girl who gives the soul no rest,  
Or night and day you'll swear from loving to desist.

## [Molla-Panah Vagif](#)

### If a beautiful girl walks with coverless hair...

If a beautiful girl walks with coverless hair  
Her person the following points should unite-  
Like a mirror her body should always be fair,  
Her locks should be ebon and set off her height.

Her cheeks should recall springtide tulips a-blowing.  
Her lips should be red and like cut amber glowing,  
Her body, a jewel no fault ever showing,  
From her head to her toes should be pure pearly white.

Her dress should be neat and impeccably clean.  
Her manner must never be mincing or mean.  
Her breath should be sweet and her glances serene,  
Her hair with cool violets' scent should delight.

Both her arms and her legs should be graceful and slim,  
Her buttocks well rounded, not fat, or too thin,  
On her ankles two dimples and one on her chin,  
Her face should be round and her bones should be slight.

At the door of maturity-fifteen, not more,

With no band on her brow that might cover some flaw,  
She must not be precocious, or push to the fore,  
Yet charming to guests that her lord may invite.

Let her beauty each morning attention excite-  
A fine preening pheasant, delighting the sight.  
She should not talk too much, but be gay and forthright.  
Attentive she must be, and always polite.

Her allure should grow greater as time passes by.  
Reserved she should be, retiring and shy,  
Giving jaded men strength with a sweet-scented sigh.  
Her words should be honeyed, her smile should be bright.

She must always be honest in deed and in word.  
Intrigues by her prattle should never be stirred.  
She should stand like a pine-tree and utter no word  
Though fearing her head from her neck you may smite.

O Vagif, to the soul a sweet girl should appeal...  
Our Khan needs a beauty, why waste so much zeal  
Describing what powers-that-be ought to feel?  
Let her heed our great Khan and bow to his might.

**I went out to talk to a girl with dark eyes..**

I went out to talk to a girl with dark eyes.  
She said, "You must go, I cannot let you stay!  
Many people can see us. With signs we can't speak-  
It's no time to bring winking eyes into play!"

Your coquettish warm languor is my deadly foe.  
The breezes are brushing your curls to and fro.  
It's time we should kiss. I beg you, don't go,  
But come, let us love, there is no more to say!

Vagif says, be bold! Such a chance never miss.  
Stroke the nape of her neck as you beg for a kiss.  
Wasting time in discourses would be quite amiss. . .  
Now my breath comes in gasps-do not tease me I pray.

**[Molla-Panah Vaqif](#)**

## The tips of silk tresses that outline your face...

The tips of silk tresses that outline your face  
Make an ebony frame to set off your skin.  
Each lock has a sister and the two interlace,  
With serpentine grace encircling your chin.

Your two flashing eyes are a soul-stirring sight  
And each has ten thousand great elephants' might.  
There's a rosy-hued bud on each breast round and white,  
Glimpsed through a fabric transparently thin.

Your features the Goddess of Fortune amaze,  
White houris and angels at such beauty gaze.  
Golden bracelets with amber and diamonds ablaze  
Clasp your delicate wrists with their velvety skin.

My heart she has hidden, where, nobody knows.  
But my mind and my faith go wherever she goes.  
Her cheek is of ivory, tinted with rose,  
Couched in soft hair and each curl has a twin.

My name is Vagif, to my dear one I say,  
I keep watch on the road through the night and the day!  
Oh, queen of all beauties, will you not come my way?  
You are breaking my heart? **and that is a sin..**

## Molla-Panah Vaqif

### My Kaaba, Karbala, my Mecca, Medina, my own!

My Kaaba, Karbala, my Mecca, Medina, my own!  
Trie earth that you tread is a sanctuary, love's sacred place,  
I worship, adore you. I call you my holy Black Stone.  
When I bow down before you, towards you I first turn my face.

Do not take to heart any maladroitt words I may say.  
My mind is confusion, inebriate, fuddled and fey.  
If you are not near, if you bear your slim body away,  
It seems that the world is confounded in time and in space.

My faith, my beliefs, my whole life to your braids I have bound.  
No love like my love for your curls in the world could be found.  
Departing I wreath in your hair my emotions profound,  
So keep them secure as a pledge till my path I retrace.

O my sky, O my sun, O you full moon of mine!  
You're my treasure, my glory, my soul's light divine!  
Your great beauty my heart shall forever enshrine.



Every word about you leaves a honey-sweet taste. :

The drake's iridescence is dulled when you come.  
The cockatoo hearing your voice is struck dumb.  
Vagif has been wounded, his heart is now numb.  
He claims that his pain has been caused by your grace.

## Molla-Panah Vaqif

### Although Bairam, the feast, is on its way I sigh...

Although Bairam, the feast, is on its way I sigh,  
At home there's not a sack that holds a thing to eat.  
The jars that held the oil are empty and quite dry  
There's not a whiff of cheese and not a shred of meat.

We put no faith in God, who pity never shows ?  
If country bumpkins knew they'd drive us off with blows!  
In every village house the honey overflows.  
It's only in our own there's nothing sour or sweet.

In this wide world of ours we've not a goat to show,  
And ne'er a pretty lass to set the heart aglow.  
Vagif, don't ever boast about the things you know [1].  
God knows our store of wisdom's poor and incomplete!

(1) Vagif means knowledgeable.

### Kura's sweet banks abound with lovely places...

Kura's sweet banks abound with lovely places.  
How sad that other beauties should be missed!  
Those silken tresses, captivating' faces? **Alas!**  
It seems that here they don't exist.

Our wintering-place is in Giragbasan?  
The lowest plain that lies beneath the sun.  
A lodge we dwell in, but there's only one. Alas!  
No villages near here exist!

Yet there are girls of beauty living here,

With tulip lips and eyes both proud and clear;  
But no sweet-tongued and playful little dear  
To warm the heart and give its strings a twist.

Though balmy air is wine throughout the night,  
No lips with languorous moan exhale delight.  
Although the girls are such a lovely sight,  
Among them well-groomed beauties don't exist.

A mass of glory flows from every head...  
By jet-black hair a glow of light is spread.  
Their dress is silver-trimmed. Their kerchief red.  
Without a trace of tulle like morning mist.

With golden thread their bodices are sewn.  
On milky skins dark beauty-spots are shown.  
Their hair hangs free and loose by breezes blown.  
It seems that well-trained curls do not exist.

Like crested kestrels each one sports a crown.  
Uncovered are their lips and eyes. They frown  
Like headsmen when the axe comes flashing down.  
If looks could kill I swear I'd not resist.

In far-off parts my heart is dull and sick,  
I know girls' winning ways and every trick.  
Slim arms are decked with bracelets wide and thick.  
There's not one amber bead on any wrist.

They'll primp before a mirror, using paint  
To stress a dimpled curve that seems too faint,  
To eyes applying shadows with restraint,  
But your slim hennaed fingers I have missed.

Vagif has hopes that God may help him yet,  
If I stay here the graveyard cough I'll get,  
For our sweet nymphs my heart cannot forget.  
And yet it's here I still must long exist.

**I beg you, look among the wedding guests...**

I beg you, look among the wedding guests.  
If one most lovely girl is present by some chance,  
I shall not tell her name, but most of you can guess  
Sweet daughter of our friend, beguile us with a dance!

Impatiently we wait to see her whirl and swing,

And trust that anguish from our soul's she'll fling.  
With bracelets on your wrists and on each hand a ring,  
We beg you show your grace. Beguile us with a dance!

Her figure's newly formed, supple, slim, divine.  
She holds my heart in thrall. For her true love I pine.  
Now to her loving friend, oh, let her give a sign,  
And at this marriage feast beguile us with a dance!

Molla Vagif shall call for help with bitter cries.  
Not tears, but blood shall spurt from his lamenting eyes  
Unless that lovely girl to show her grace will rise.  
Although it breaks my heart, beguile us with a dance!

### Her brows like quivering bowstrings set me yearning...

Her brows like quivering bowstrings set me yearning.  
I'd sacrifice my life for what I see.  
I touch one lock and round my head starts turning. . .  
Like some bright lamp she sears the heart in me.

How well I know youth's beauty in full spate?  
That glowing hair and skin, the supple gait!  
My eyes caress that figure slim and straight.  
Its grace outdoes the swaying cypress-tree.

Amid the mountain rocks I spend my night  
Consumed by dreams to which her face lends light.  
If beauty steals my health, as if for spite,  
From that sweet sickness never set me free!

I dedicate my trust, my faith and fame  
To lovely women. Theirs is my good name.  
If their bright eyes condemn me, then, for shame,  
From death I shall not flinch with mercy's plea.

Oh, Lord above, I beg you, help Vagif  
And grant the solace of a sweet relief.  
Let her appear, although her stay be brief,  
And as my guest spend just one night with me.

## I suffer hell's fierce torments, ghastly flames now sear...

I suffer hell's fierce torments, ghastly flames now sear  
My soul, forever seeking you, my love divine.  
This separation dulls my spirit. Death is near,  
But then forever yours shall be this heart of mine.

The softness of your chin on softer tresses lies.  
My soul they try to steel, those scintillating eyes.  
He who seeks to flee from love, from life itself then flies!  
That is what the people say? **I seek you, love of mine.**

I swear by Kadija, by Sakina I swear,  
I swear by Heiranisa, by Amina I swear,  
By Kaaba, Mecca and Medina I declare  
That sorrow grips Vagif's hot heart, beloved mine.

No pine or cypress-tree more graceful have I seen,  
For figures such as yours are few and far between.  
I'm half the man you knew, I now am sick and lean,  
I shall get worse unless I see your face divine.

## Don't seek a cause to part. I heard each word you say...

Don't seek a cause to part. I hoard each word you say.  
So do not cut the bonds that our two hearts still tie.  
I would no other man should ever come your way,  
For fear lest with strange love my love might have to vie.

I long to drink my fill from those eyes deep and dark  
And to your gentle words forever I would hark,  
So, darling, be my sun when death is looming dark,  
Then from my soul's warm nest my dream shall never fly.

Vagif's true heart can never from your love be free.  
Forever I'll adore you. Can you not love me?  
Oh, why when I approach you, darling, do you flee?  
My kiss would draw no blood. No cannibal am I!

## You have plagued me for years, you have wounded and stung me, my beard!

You have plagued me for years, you have wounded and stung me, my beard!

May Allah visit His wrath upon you, and promptly, my beard!

Such disaster no hurricane brings, nor a sand-storm, my beard!

Ah, if only a foe's yatagan smote and trimmed you, my beard!

By a spiteful shaitan and a mad were you fashioned, my beard!

As a rosy-cheeked youth I was beardless but gay and content,  
For I kissed many lips, and my days were agreeably spent,  
And not once did the fairest of maids my attentions resent.  
But 'tis all in the past, and today they deride and torment  
Him who, thinking to please them, did thoughtlessly sprout you, my beard!

Not for naught so despondent am I, not for naught do I brood:  
You embarrass and shame me, disgrace me and leave me subdued:  
You are matted, ill-smelling and greasy with remnants of food.  
And, disgusted, the damsels away from you turn, in no mood  
To accept my advances and treat me with kindness, o beard!

Were each hair that you boast strung with diamonds and pearls, even so  
I would wish to be rid of you, beard, for to you do I owe  
The disdain that the fair ones for me unmistakably show.  
Less than grass are you worth, yet like grass you continue to grow.  
If I had but my way, for a mat I would use you, my beard!

Sad and grieved is Vagif, for the thought fills his heart with dismay  
That his dark, shining beard will too soon turn a lusterless grey,  
That a mangy white dog he will come to resemble one day,  
That alone at a feast where the young wax highhearted and gay  
He will, shivering, sit in a corner, unwanted, my beard!

## In this world there is nothing in which to believe...

In this world there is nothing in which to believe.  
All things are distorted I clearly perceive,  
And friends' declarations are meant to deceive.  
Fulfilment of promises I can't perceive,  
While for falseness in love my whole being must grieve.

A servant, a hermit and even the Khan  
Submit to great torments to gain what they can

And chase after riches with grisly elan.  
We've watched and we've listened to many a man,  
But found only nets of deceit that men weave.

The world rings with voices that howl and incite.  
Men outwit each other, they struggle and fight  
For gold all around us? **a miserable sight!**  
Subordinates should know their leaders are right,  
But gold for subordinates leaders don't leave. . .

Mankind always follows a rule that seems mad?  
Give help to a man when he's down, make him glad,  
He'll do you bad turns till you're sorry and sad!  
Whatever is good incites all that is bad.  
Close friends become foes, they quarrel and leave.

No savant, no student, or fool can be free.  
They are slaves of the Shah and the powers-that-be.  
The truth is distorted? **this great sin I see,**  
The sheiks, rogues and preachers oppress you and me,  
They're not worth our prayers? **to faith they don't cleave.**

Each man has a passion for one thing alone?  
Some pine for a woman, some lust for a throne,  
While shahs dream of grasping the land others own.  
Distraught with desire, they must languish and groan,  
But peace in this world no one tries to achieve...