

“The Double Standard of Aging” in Penelope Fitzgerald’s Fiction¹

Yeşim Sultan Akbay

*Süleyman Demirel University, Türkiye
Cambridge University, The United Kingdom*

Abstract

The concept of old age has always been an issue that matters. The critic Susan Sontag argues in "The Double Standard of Aging" (1972) that women, in comparison to men, receive more negative attitudes as they age, which she calls a "social pathology," also known as gendered ageism. Scholars believe that almost all literature gives us an idea about what it is like to age. The present paper, thus, aims to analyse Penelope Fitzgerald's novels *The Bookshop*, *Offshore*, *At Freddie's* and *Human Voices*, which are drawn from her life, in line with old age, employing descriptive (the phenomenon of ageing), qualitative (biographical, literary reviews and interviews), and text-based methods. A late bloomer herself, Fitzgerald's fiction, though subtle, complex yet insightful, has much to offer on the issue of old age. Her fiction offers a critique as well as a profound compassion for old age, covertly emphasizing its double standard and finally suggesting a possibility for resistance and redefinition of ageing as a natural and meaningful part of life.

Keywords: contemporary novel, gendered ageism, late-bloomers, old age

¹ This study is based on my ongoing studies at Cambridge University, Faculty of English, Cambridge, England, as a Visiting Scholar supported by TÜBİTAK 2219 Postdoctoral Scholarship from February 18, 2024, to February 17, 2025. I would like to thank TÜBİTAK BİDEP for their support, my home institution Süleyman Demirel University, and my host institution, Cambridge University, Faculty of English, for the opportunities they provided.