LITERARY RESPONSES TO CATASTROPHE

A COMPARISON OF THE ARMENIAN AND THE JEWISH EXPERIENCE

RUBINA PEROOMIAN

LITERARY RESPONSES TO CATASTROPHE

Against a backdrop of the history of Armenian and Jewish persecutions, culminating in the Armenian Genocide and the Jewish Holocaust, the metamorphoses of these two peoples' literary responses to catastrophe are studied. The parallelism and disparity of the paradigms of responses are demonstrated as the signifiers of similar or differing worldviews shaped by religious, cultural, and sociopolitical determinants in Armenian and Jewish life. Literary responses, and through them the reactions of the victimized masses, reveal the unyielding persistence of pain in the lives of survivors. The comparative dimension between the Armenian and Jewish experiences sheds light on the universality of human suffering when confronted with extreme historical circumstances while also demonstrating the uniqueness of their experiences not only in terms of those circumstances but also in how they assimilated the tragedy into art.

Studies in Near Eastern Culture and Society

Issued under the auspices of the
G. E. von Grunebaum Center for Near Eastern Studies
University of California, Los Angeles

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Scholars Press
Atlanta, Georgia

LITERARY RESPONSES TO CATASTROPHE
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by
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Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Peroomian, Rubina.
Literary responses to catastrophe: a comparison of the Armenian and Jewish experience/ by Rubina Peroomian.
p. cm. — (Studies in Near Eastern culture and society; 8)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 1-55540-894-X. — ISBN 1-55540-895-8 (pbk.)
1. Armenian literature—20th century—History and criticism. 2. Armenian massacres, 1915–1923, in literature. 3. Jewish literature—20th century—History and criticism. 4. Holocaust, Jewish (1939–1945), in literature. I. Series.
PK8516.P46 1993
891'.99209358—dc20 93-26129
CIP

Printed in the United States of America
on acid-free paper

Այսքան արիւն թէ ձեզ ներեն մեր որդիք,
Թո՛ղ ողջ աշխարհ հայից կարդայ ներողութիւնք . . .

Ահարոնեան

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PART TWO
THE GENOCIDE

Acknowledgements

This comparative study of the Armenian and Jewish literary responses to catastrophe was first presented as a dissertation to fulfill partially the requirements for a doctoral degree from the Near Eastern Languages and Cultures Department at the University of California, Los Angeles. In the course of its preparation, I had the full support and guidance of my adviser, Avedis K. Sanjian, Narekatsi Professor of Armenian Studies at UCLA. I had the privilege of working with Arnold J. Band, Professor of Jewish Studies and Comparative Literature, who guided me in the selection of sources in Jewish literature. He read my work, made suggestions, and elucidated many critical issues and concepts pertaining to Jewish history and literature. Richard G. Hovannisian, Armenian Educational Foundation Professor of Modern Armenian History at UCLA, helped improve the quality of my dissertation with his critical comments and suggestions.

My dissertation would not have been completed without the invaluable suggestions of two prominent Armenian literary critics, Krikor Beledian and Marc Nichanian. I am deeply appreciative of the constant encouragement and observations received from Professor Leonardo P. Alishan of the University of Utah, a personal friend and a respected scholar and literary critic. Dr. Vahé Oshagan's comments on the chapter on Hakob Oshakan were very useful.

I filed my dissertation in June of 1989, along with some five hundred others in different fields and disciplines. I feel fortunate that it is among the few that make their way to publication, and am deeply grateful to Professor Hovannisian, who recommended my manuscript to the Gustave E. von Grunebaum

Center for Near Eastern Studies at UCLA. At that stage, particularly invaluable was the recommendation of David G. Roskies, Professor of Jewish Literature at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America and a renowned authority on Jewish Holocaust literature. I particularly value Professor Roskie's comment regarding my work: "It strikes me as a mature and highly original piece of synthetic scholarship." My utmost appreciation goes to Professor Hovannisian for his continued support and supervision throughout the entire publication process.

I would also like to express my special thanks to Teresa Joseph and Marina Leasim Preussner for their editorial assistance.

Finally, I extend heartfelt gratitude to my husband Neshan and my two sons, Vahé and Oshin, for their patience, understanding, and support. They endured with me the long years when I was so deeply immersed in the doleful world of genocide literature.

Introduction

The deportations and massacres of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire during the years 1915-1923 were an attempt to annihilate the Armenian population living within its boundaries and put an end to the 3,000-year presence of the Armenian people in their historic homeland. The cataclysmic event, which came to be known as the Armenian Genocide, made a lasting impact on the outlook, worldview, and daily life of the survivors, who tried to comprehend the trauma and come to terms with its memory. Their anguish was transmitted to succeeding generations, who continue to seek an explanation. Armenian post-Genocide literature bears the imprint of that catastrophic experience. Taken in its entirety, it is a response to the Catastrophe.

In order to assess the impact of the Genocide on the collective psyche of the Armenian people, I set out to examine its varied manifestations in the Armenian artistic literature produced after the event. The deeper I delved into the world of Armenian literary responses to genocide, the more I realized that the conventional tools for judging the beauty of a literary image, the coherence of a literary work, or the eloquence of language were inadequate when applied to the cataclysmic subject matter. I came to see that in some cases, ambivalence, and the inadequacy, even paralysis, of diction can express more eloquently the chaotic, demonic realm of genocide, of extreme violence and atrocity.

My futile search for a guide, a methodology of interpretation, an appropriate approach to genocide literature within Armenian literary criticism led me to Jewish scholarship on Holocaust literature. What struck me most in this rich

body of multifaceted critical work was not so much the parallelism in motivation, conception, and method for exterminating Jews and Armenians—studies in comparative genocide by Armenian and non-Armenian scholars have already addressed this subject. What impressed me was the similarity of responses to extreme moments in history. My readings in Jewish history and literary scholarship induced me to expand my initial plan and undertake a comparative study of the Armenian and Jewish responses to Genocide and Holocaust, while retaining the emphasis on the Armenian case.

Lack of knowledge of the Hebrew language did not hinder my work, since much of the Holocaust literature, primary sources as well as critical works, is either written in or translated into English. My reading has been selective, drawing upon works recognized by leading authorities in Jewish literature, well aware, however, of the differences in ideology, approach, and methodology among the Jewish critics upon whose studies I have anchored my bases of comparison and built my own hypotheses. The literature of the Armenian Genocide, on the other hand, especially literary works produced in the immediate aftermath, is almost exclusively in Armenian. In this study the Armenian sources are shown in transliteration, with English translations provided. I have also translated all Armenian quotations except where otherwise noted. Transliterations are simplified in the text and endnotes. The Bibliography is romanized, with diacritics, according to the Library of Congress Table.

In researching Armenian texts written in response to the horrors of Genocide, I found reverberations of the traditional explanations of catastrophe and references to ancient archetypes. I became aware of the tension a modern writer experienced when his subconscious inspiration from ancient archetypes weighed upon his conscious effort to record the atrocities and human sufferings of the modern world. Then I realized that studying literary responses to the Armenian Genocide as a single phenomenon was tantamount to trying to explain a historical event in a vacuum. Although the collective reaction of a people to an extreme historical event is dictated by the determinants of human nature, equally important are factors deeply rooted in that people's history and influenced by religious culture and national tradition. The Armenian response to catastrophe was thus shaped within the framework of the Armenian worldview and conditioned by geopolitical givens, ideology of religion, and cultural characteristics. My stance was validated when I studied the two monumental works by David G. Roskies and Alan Mintz on responses to the Jewish Holocaust.[1] The authors displayed the same concern and built a historical

[1] David G. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Literature* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press , 1984); and Alan Mintz, *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

background against which to judge the literary responses to Holocaust. Robert Alter in his review of these two works appropriately notes:

> Both [authors] share the conviction, which they succeed in making persuasive, that there exists not an absolute Catastrophe, 1939-45, but a complicated history of responses to catastrophe, in some ways continuous, in others composed of certain radical departures, and this history enters significantly into the effort of most Hebrew and Yiddish writers to apprehend imaginatively the latest and worst of the disasters.[2]

Initially I had planned a brief survey of traditional responses simply as an introduction to the subsequent discussion. That survey is now considerably expanded as Part I, "Traditions" In spite of this expansion and the intensification of emphasis, I do not consider my research and analysis of traditional responses complete. I have not dealt with every catastrophic event in history but have concentrated mainly on the general paradigm of responses, highlighting those in continuum and others in disruption with tradition. Part I is a backdrop against which the responses to the latest catastrophe are viewed.

Armenians have experienced massacres and devastation on their land throughout their tumultuous history, beginning with the legendary battles of their epic heroes against despotic foreign warlords. After the adoption of Christianity, Armenians stood up against the Persian kings of the fifth century and fought for their religious and political freedom. Armenians clung to their Christian faith despite the Arab campaign to force the spread of Islamic domination throughout the Middle East. Armenians suffered repeated incursions of Turkic invaders, endured oppression under Persian and Ottoman rule. Yet Armenians survived. The secret of their survival lies, perhaps, in their collective effort to overcome catastrophe by investing it with meaning. The Armenian creative mind strove to find a way to understand the calamity by formulating a response to it. The Genocide of 1915-1923 was a national catastrophe, the epitome of all catastrophes in the history of the Armenian people. Therefore the responses to it should be perceived within that context.

The measures undertaken to liquidate the Armenian population of the Ottoman Empire were unparalleled in their brutality. During the mobilization of the Ottoman army in the fall of 1914, most men between the ages of eighteen to fifty, regardless of race and religion, were drafted. Shortly after, all Armenian draftees were disarmed, put into labor battalions, and subsequently

[2] Robert Alter, "Vistas of Annihilation," *Commentary*, 79:1 (January 1985), 39-40.

executed in groups. The disarmament also included the Armenian civil population and was carried out through inquisition, incarceration, torture, and murder. In the spring of 1915, with the arrest and execution of intellectuals and civic leaders in Constantinople, the groundwork for the final stage, the mass deportation and massacre of the populace, was complete. The entire Armenian population was driven out of the historic Armenian provinces. Only in the central and western parts of the empire were a few exceptions made. As a general pattern Armenians in villages, towns, and larger cosmopolitan centers were either rounded up and slaughtered outright or forced on a death march toward the remote areas of the Syrian desert. Most perished on the way, falling victim to hunger, thirst, heat, cold, and disease, or prey to attacks by bandits and irregulars specially organized and sent by the government to speed up the execution. Few deportees reached the "destination," the Syrian desert, where camps were set up. Here, government orders were to "liquidate" the camps to make room for new arrivals.[3]

Thus the Armenian component of the Ottoman Empire was eliminated. Those who survived were not allowed to return to their homes. After the war they scattered throughout the Middle Eastern countries, Europe, and the United States, and eventually joined existing settlements in the diaspora or established new communities.

Life went on in these communities. Increasing cultural, particularly literary, manifestations attest to a gradual revival of determination to perpetuate national culture and traditions. The entire corpus of literature produced in the diasporan communities resounds, however, with the impact of the Catastrophe. It reflects the daily struggle for survival, which also necessitated finding a way to adjust to the new environment and come to terms with the traumatic memory of the massacres. This literature covers a complex spectrum, from addressing the Genocide directly to dealing with its aftereffects. The latter approach, without referring to the experience, seeks to understand and digest what was a terminus, which itself propounds a change in values in order to make a new beginning possible. This category of early diasporan literature encompasses a wide range of themes: nostalgia and homesickness, the romanticization of childhood memories, the hardship of adjusting to an alien culture and lifestyle, the lure of the non-Armenian of the opposite sex, resignation to

3 For a brief description and analysis of the events of 1914-1918 see Richard G. Hovannisian, *Armenia on the Road to Independence, 1918* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1967), Chapter 4, "The Final Years"; and Henry Morgenthau, *Ambassador Morgenthau's Story* (1919; rpt. ed. Plandome, New York: New Age Publishers, 1975).

the realities of life, resort to the world of memories and dreams, the danger of assimilation, and finally, the obligation to uphold Armenian language and culture (*haiapahpanum*).

The amount of Armenian post-Genocide literature is overwhelming, impossible to address fully in a study such as this one. To narrow down my scope I decided to select for study writers who dealt with the atrocities directly, who wrote mostly before 1930 and thus were most likely to reflect the immediate responses to the Genocide, and who attained significant reputation within the diasporan-Armenian critical circles. In making the decision to concentrate on four writers of artistic prose, I necessarily excluded a large body of poetry as well as sociological, political, and historical writings. I excluded also the many eyewitness accounts and narratives, notable among them Mikayel Shamtanchian's *Hai mtkin harke eghernin* (The Armenian Intellect's Dues to the Catastrophe), Mrs. Gabtan's *Tsavak* (Grief), Biuzand Pozachian's *Changheri banten* (From the Prison of Changiri), and Archbishop Palakian's *Hai goghgotan* (The Armenian Golgotha).[4]

Part II, "The Genocide," devotes a chapter to each of four writers: Zapel Esayan, Suren Partevian, Aram Antonian, and Hakob Oshakan. Their responses, I believe, transcend the temporal dimensions of the actual events: genocide is the substance as well as the subject matter of their art. By fictionalizing the substance, the four writers attempted to absorb the Catastrophe into a literary harmony and thereby succeeded in creating an imaginative truth that is the world of the artist of genocide. They created the "reality" that will endure, that will have an everlasting impact on the Armenian people.

In Part I, the comparison with the Jewish experience is a dimension added to shed light upon the origin and evolution of certain key concepts and to explain their manifestations in different literary contexts. The intent is to trace the divergent metamorphoses in the Jewish and Armenian responses to catastrophe. Part II emphasizes the responses of individual Armenian writers. Comparison with Holocaust literature is limited to distinct themes, approaches, and expositions, and serves to illuminate the universality of human suffering and the will to endure.

The uniqueness of the Jewish and Armenian experience lies not so much in the respective social, geopolitical, and historical circumstances, but in how

4 In a chapter dedicated to Aram Antonian, Hakob Oshakan lists a number of writings, personal experiences, and eyewitness accounts of the Armenian Genocide which appeared in the early period after the Catastrophe, along with a quick judgment of their artistic values. See *Hamapatker arevmtahai grakanutean* (Panorama of Western Armenian Literature), Vol. 9 (Antilias, Lebanon: The Cilician Catholicosate Press, 1980), pp. 243-244, note.

tragedy has been assimilated into art. To be sure, the pages that follow present a litany of horror stories of such brutality, such extremes of human suffering, that despite my scholarly discipline I have had my involvement. It is only appropriate that I dedicate this study to the memory of one and a half million Armenians—more than one-half of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire—who perished at the hands of the Turks, and to the six million Jews who fell victim to Hitler's diabolical schemes. It is my hope that this study will contribute not only to the field of scholarship but also to the cause of humanity.

PART ONE
THE TRADITION

I

Armenian and Jewish Traditional Responses to Catastrophe

The evangelization of the Armenian people, initiated by the apostles Saint Thaddeus and Saint Bartholomew, was a slow process in pagan Armenia. After Trdat III (Tiridates III, A.D. 287-330) accepted the new faith at the hands of Gregory the Illuminator in 301 and proclaimed Christianity as the official state religion, strong measures were taken to establish the domination of Christianity in Armenia. Nonetheless, the conversion of the masses took more than a century. According to Agathangelos and Pavstos Buzand, the main historians of the early Christian era in Armenia, the pagan beliefs, rituals, and lifestyle were deeply ingrained in the populace and lingered well beyond the official adoption of Christianity.

The decisive factor facilitating the dissemination of the new faith was the development of a national alphabet at the beginning of the fifth century. The Armenian literature produced thereafter served to teach the Christian tenets, worldview, and lifestyle, building a strong foundation for the Armenian Church, a new ideological and intellectual superstructure for Christian Armenia, and thus a political bulwark of Christian faith and national identity.

Armenian clerics, the only educated class, launched a vigorous effort to establish an Armenian written tradition that would assimilate the richness of the existing Christian literature. In addition to producing original works, they translated a large number of Greek and Syriac religious texts—liturgical, theological, patristic, exegetical, apologetic, and hagiographic. The most significant endeavor of the fifth-century Armenian scholars was the translation of the Bible. Under the guidance of Mesrop Mashtots, the inventor of the Armenian

alphabet, and Sahak Partev, the Armenian Catholicos of the time, a group of disciples translated the Syriac version of the Bible and later revised it according to the Greek text.[1] Now more accessible, the Bible was to make an enduring impact on the development of Armenian culture and philosophy and on the perception and interpretation of history by the Armenian people.

Biblical commentaries and stories from the Old Testament became favorite readings in churches and monastic schools, setting the example for the new Christian lifestyle. The apocryphal tradition of Noah's Ark resting on Mount Ararat helped Armenian historians establish their genealogy. To this effect, Movses Khorenatsi (fifth century) linked the origin of the Armenian nation to the descendants of Noah's son, Japheth. He named them one by one, down to Haik and Ara the Handsome.[2] Koriun (fifth century) called the Armenians the Ashkenazic nation; Agathangelos (fifth century) linked the Armenians to Torgom (Thoghorma). In all these cases, the history of the Armenian people was viewed as a continuation of the stories recorded in the Old Testament, which was adopted as part of the Armenian Church canon (the official acceptance of 37 books of the Old Testament came about at the Council of Partev in 768). Moreover, in order to make the association more credible and to lend color and vigor to their narrative, early Armenian historians often alluded to biblical texts and freely borrowed the imagery, metaphors, language, and in some cases even entire passages from the Bible, especially the Old Testament.

In this manner, Holy Scripture, religious writings, and many so-called Adam books, a popular genre in the post-biblical Judaic and early Christian literature, were translated into Armenian and became sources of knowledge and inspiration.[3] Most of all, they became a major channel for transmitting

[1] Textual critics place the Armenian version of the Bible in the same category with the Syriac and Latin versions, and some believe that in some ways it surpasses all other translations. The British Armenologist F. C. Conybeare has observed that "For beauty of diction and accuracy of rendering, the Armenian version cannot be surpassed." Cited in James Hasting, ed., *Hasting's Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: Scribners, 1908), I, 152.

For a study of the importance of the Armenian Bible and other genres of Armenian Christian literature, see Vardapet Karekin Sarkissian, *A Brief Introduction to Armenian Christian Literature* (London: The Faith Press, 1960).

[2] Robert W. Thomson, trans. and comm., *Movses Khorenatsi, History of the Armenians* (2d ed.; Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1980), pp. 74-75; hereafter Thomson, *Khorenatsi*.

[3] In "The History of the Forefathers, Adam and His Sons and Grandsons," *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies*, 1 (1984), 79-91, Michael E. Stone enumerates the Adam books discovered to date and examines two manuscripts of "Patmutiun nakhahartsen, Adama ev vordvots ev torants nora" (The History of the Forefathers, Adam and His Sons and Grandsons). He points out that the Armenian Adam books carry many traits of the Judeo-Christian tradition. W. Lowndes Lipscomb also points to this affinity, see his "Foreign Influences on the Armenian Apocryphal Adam Books," in Thomas J. Samuelian, ed., *Classical Armenian Culture* (University of Pennsylvania: Scholars Press, 1982), pp. 102-112, .

Jewish ideas and traditions into Christian Armenia. By the same token, this literature, especially the Adam books, became a popular source of reference in theological discussions on the origin of sin.

Devotion to the Bible, the genealogical link with biblical stories, and the striking parallels Armenians found between the recurrent suffering and persecution in their own history and that of the Jewish people paved the way for adopting the Jewish perception and interpretation of history. Christian monks and hermits, who set the new course for the Armenian people to follow, scorned the old Armenian beliefs, customs, and traditions. In their extreme devotion to Christianity, they even abandoned the concepts of nation and homeland. A total breach with Armenia's pagan past had taken place.[4] Eghishe's *History of Vardan and the Armenian War* (*Vasn Vardanants ev haiots paterazmin*, A.D. 451) exemplifies the transformation. In this eyewitness account of the Armenian struggle against the Persian incursions, Eghishe quotes a stimulating speech Ghevond the Priest delivered to the troops before battle. It is significant that the examples set forth to encourage the soldiers are drawn not from the Armenian past but from the Old Testament: Moses, the great righteous man who became a mediator between heaven and earth; David, the first king of Israel, Joshua, Gideon, and Jephthah, the earlier generals of Israel and the followers of the true faith, and the Maccabees.[5]

The Concept of Sin and Punishment

By embracing Christianity Armenians discovered the Almighty God, the creator and protector of all creatures on earth. They adopted the same relationship between man and God, the same moral code, that had developed during the long monotheistic history of the people of Israel. God had created man in his own image, and so he loved and protected him, his favorite and best creation and, as in a mutual pact, admonished man to remain faithful and to obey his commandments.

The prophets warned the people of Israel that if they defied God, sinning, violating the commandments, and vilifying his name, God would inflict upon

[4] See Manuk Abeghian, *Haiots hin grakanutean patmutiun* [History of Ancient Armenian Literature], 2 vols. (Erevan: Armenian SSR Academy of Sciences Press, 1944-46), I, 90.

[5] Robert W. Thomson, trans. and comm., *Eghishe, History of Vardan and the Armenian War* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1982), pp. 159-161; hereafter Thomson, *Egishe*.

them tremendous suffering and horrible catastrophe, which few would survive. The survivors would have a chance to look back, to acknowledge their sins as cause of the punishment, repent, and beg for mercy. Because they expiated their sins, God the merciful would forgive them and restore his love and protection.

At the core of the Jewish philosophy of life and worldview is the covenant between God and man. The covenant generated concepts that helped the Jews to explain history and respond to catastrophe. The notion of sin and punishment was the first of these concepts, and it was later transmitted to the Armenians. Before the transmission occurred, however, the implications of this concept had already undergone a significant metamorphosis. In order to understand its varied manifestation in Armenian literature, it is helpful to examine its evolution in the Jewish tradition.

The idea of God's "judgment" as a guide for response to tragic events was inculcated by the Jewish classical prophets, Moses being their prototype. The prophets acted as spokesmen for the people's moral consciousness, and their word was final on every subject. There is no written record of the prophetic teachings until the reign of Jeroboam II, beginning in 785 B.C. Thereafter, the known written messages of the classical prophets demonstrate their righteousness and their struggle for a better life for mankind. Fragments are preserved in the so-called Prophetic Books of the Bible. For example, it is said that the prophet Hosea (ca. 760 B.C.) foresaw an imminent national disaster (the Assyrian invasion) and warned that although God had loved the people of Judah and Israel in the past, they had proved unfaithful and careless in their duties to him. If God cared for them at all, Hosea contended, he would show it by the sharpness of the punishment. The prophet Micah (eight century B.C.) also considered national disasters to be God's punishment for the people's sins. According to Isaiah (740-701 B.C.), a prominent figure at the court of Hezekiah (720-692 B.C.), Assyria was merely an instrument with which God implemented his punishment and purged his people of their sins. Zephaniah (seventh century B.C.) regarded the Scythians, who invaded and devastated the land of Judah in 626 B.C., simply as God's instrument for punishing the ruling class for their injustices.[6]

According to biblical tradition, a copy of the long lost Law of Moses was found during the restoration of the Temple of Jerusalem, under King Josiah in 621 B.C. This text, known today as the Book of Deuteronomy, reinforced the

6 For a discussion of the prophetic movement see H. Tadmor, "The Period of the First Temple, the Babylonian Exile and the Restoration," in H. H. Ben Sasson, ed., *A History of the Jewish People* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), pp. 122-125.

teachings of the prophets, guided the Israelites in their moral laws, reminded them of God's love, and stressed obedience to him. The third chapter, entitled "A Great Warning," prepares the nation to face disaster if they disobey God's laws and is replete with *tokheha* (curses): "The skies above your head shall be copper and the earth under you iron" (Deut. 28:23); "Your carcasses shall become food for all the birds of the skies and all the beasts of the earth" (Deut. 28:26); "The Lord will strike you with the Egyptian inflammation, . . boil-scars, and itch, from which you shall never recover" (Deut. 28:27).[7] The text thus propounded an anticipation of national catastrophes and at the same time offered a response to it within a paradigm of explanation. In the words of Alan Mintz:

> Destruction, according to the covenant, is a sign neither of God's abandonment of Israel and the cancellation of His obligations to the people, nor of God's eclipse by competing powers in the cosmos. The Destruction is to be taken, rather, as a deserved and necessary punishment for sin, a punishment whose magnitude is in proportion to the transgressions committed. As a chastisement, the Destruction becomes an expression of God's continuing concern for Israel, since the suffering of the Destruction expiates the sins that provoked it and allows a penitent remnant to survive in the rehabilitated and restored relationship with God.[8]

One episode in the Jewish tradition may serve to illustrate the people's readiness to accept punishment for their sins. When the First Temple of Jerusalem was on fire, young priests climbed to the roof with the keys of the Temple in their hands and exclaimed, "Master of the universe, as we did not have the merit to be faithful treasurers, these keys are handed back into thy keeping"; they then threw the keys up to the heavens and jumped into the flames (B. Ta'anith 29a).[9]

Despite the readiness to accept punishment, the available paradigm did not easily explain the magnitude of the horrors of the First Destruction; the traditional responses were not adequate. For many of the authors of the Book of Lamentations, composed after the event, the fall of Jerusalem was an unprecedented disaster that could not possibly be justified by the concept of sin and

7 For the Mosaic curses, see David G. Roskies, ed., *The Literature of Destruction: Jewish Responses to Catastrophe* (Philadelphia, New York, Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1988), pp. 13-18.

8 Alan Mintz, *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 3.

9 See David G. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 15.

punishment. It was a sign of God's having "breached the contract." After all, God had promised to the Jews that "Your house and your kingship shall ever be secure. . . . Your throne shall be established for ever" (2 Samuel 7:16). And yet, the enemy had entered, defiled, and ransacked the Temple, and Jerusalem had fallen. Far too great to be considered a mere punishment, the Destruction was evidence of God's having abandoned his people and signaled an end to the relationship between God and man. It was a turning point in Jewish history; it washed away old meanings and explanations and necessitated new ones. According to Mintz:

> The special nature of the crisis in 587 [B.C.] provides us with terms for a definition of catastrophe that differentiates it from "mere" horror and destruction. Just as the true force of the fall of Jerusalem lay in its being perceived as a cancellation of the covenant, so we may define catastrophe generally as a destructive event whose horror derives from its bursting of available paradigms of explanation.[10]

The traditional explanation, with the concept of sin and punishment at its center, had reached the breaking point. It did not satisfy the poets of the Great Destruction. The prophets and priests who would interpret God's wrath and appease the pain of the sufferers were no longer there. Prophecy by undisputed leaders was replaced by counsels of the *hakhamim* (sages). The true guides of the Text were now the scribes and the scholars, and they interpreted the severity of the punishment not as a measure of God's love for his people but as a sign of his having abandoned them.

The magnitude of the disaster and a growing pessimism toward the covenant with God left the authors of Lamentations with a crisis of expression. Language failed to provide adequate means to describe the catastrophe. Only new conquests in the realm of language could secure a creative survival. The Book of Lamentations was a response to this crucial need. The lamentation genre, used for the first time as an expression of national sentiment in Jewish literature, was a most convenient vehicle for the outpouring of feelings. Lamenting a devastating loss had a cathartic quality that would relieve the pain of the author, the survivor, and the future reader as well. Although many verses in the Book of Lamentations fall within the traditional explanation of historical events and merely echo the fulfillment of the Mosaic curses, many more question the covenant. The sin is acknowledged, but there is a reluctance to accept the enormous punishment as a deserved consequence for the wrongdoings of the Jewish nation:

[10] Mintz, *Hurban*, pp. 20-21.

> The chastisement of my poor people
> Was greater than the punishment of Sodom,
> Which was overthrown in a moment
> Without a hand striking it (Lam. 4:6).[11]

Protest against God's judgment was a new outlet for the crisis of speech, apparent in such statements as "He has walled me in/ And When I cry and plead/ He shuts out my prayers," or "He spread out a net for my feet/ He hurled me backwards." God is held responsible for all the suffering. If he can break his promise and allow lowly invaders to defile and destroy his own sanctuary, the Jewish people can do the same to their enemies. In this new context the enemy gains importance not only as an instrument of God's will but as a distinct entity—a convenient target for Jewish frustration. Protest against God thus unites with a strong sense of anger against the enemy and an abhorrence of his brutality:

> The enemy stretched out his hand after all her [Fair Zion's]
> precious things
>
> She saw that the heathen entered her sanctuary
> Concerning whom you had commanded:
> "They shall not enter your assembly" (Lam. 1:10).[12]

This excerpt discloses another coping device, namely, the personification of the calamitized. This device may sound simplistic today, but in its time it was a powerful means for overcoming the crippling effects of catastrophe. Mintz asserts that "Resort to personhood in Lamentations is the first instance, and perhaps the most subtle, in what amounts to a general principle in Hebrew literature of responses to catastrophe."[13] Jerusalem is personified as Fair Zion or *Bat-tsion*, an analogical female figure who emphasizes the trauma of victimization. This dramatic figure makes the collective horror more accessible, more affecting.

The Book of Lamentations gives vent to intense emotions and protests against God and enemy. Then the poet, seeking consolation, adopts a calmer tone, but relief comes only when the covenant is recalled and when, in a woeful appeal, the author beseeches God "To renew our day as the old" (Lam. 4:21).[14] God remains silent, and his silence is a sign of his absence, which is intolerable to the sufferer. Classical prophecy offered consolation and hope in

[11] Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse*, pp. 17-18.

[12] Ibid., p. 18.

[13] Mintz, *Hurban*, p. 24.

[14] Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse*, p. 22.

the promise of divine deliverance because God's voice was heard through the prophet himself. Here in Lamentations, however, there is no prophet to mediate and give solace, no consolation other than to find the way back to God by engaging in prayer, a one-way conversation. What is characteristic about the Book of Lamentation is the shift away from the concept of sin and punishment. References to the people's sins as cause for the calamities are rare. In one such instances the poet explains, "Because the Lord has afflicted her [Fair Zion] / For her many transgressions."[15] It is obvious, as Mintz attests, that "The awareness of sin in Lamentations is secondary to the experience of abandonment and the horror of destruction."[16]

With the adoption of Christianity, and particularly after the translation of the Bible, the Book of Lamentations, and the Jewish apocryphal stories, Armenians came into contact with Judeo-Christian ideology based on the relationship between man and God.[17] This ideology introduced them to a new worldview which presupposed an entirely different perception of history.

Like most members of polytheistic societies, the pagan Armenians attributed natural disasters and cosmic phenomena to the wrath of the gods and offered sacrifices to appease them and win back their favor. The idea of offering sacrifice to obtain a certain god's favor may well be at the root of the concept of sin and punishment in the prophetic worldview. In spite of the prevalence of the idea of sacrifice, however, the core concept in explaining past events and responding to disasters in pre-Christian Armenia was the glorification of heroism. Quotations from pagan legends and folklore by Christian clerical historians, however fragmented and sometimes distorted ("revised" and "refined" to eliminate pagan elements and adapt them to the Christian ethic), clearly show glorification of heroism, loyalty to the king, and love of homeland to be the moving force of history in pagan Armenia. These concepts constitute the leitmotif of *Vipasank*, the traditional Armenian oral epic which encapsulates the events of the second century B.C., and of *Parsits paterazm* (The Persian War), recorded by Agathangelos, Movses Khorenatsi, Pavstos Buzand (fifth century), and Sebeos (seventh century), which covers the Armeno-Persian conflicts of the third to fifth centuries A.D.

[15] Roskies, *The Literature of Destruction*, p. 24.

[16] Mintz, *Hurban*, p. 3.

[17] According to Archbishop Ormanian, the Book of Lamentations, although not among the books of the Old Testament officially adopted by the Armenian Church (in the 24 canons of Partev, defined and regulated by the Ecumenical Council of 768), was translated into Armenian and widely read. See Archbishop Maghakia Ormanian, *Azgapatum* [National History] (Constantinople: V. & H. Ter Nersesian Press, 1912), pp. 883-884.

Christian clerics naturally rejected the pagan interpretation of history and turned to the Bible for a new explanation. The Bible provided, as Leonardo Alishan puts it, "the traditional defenses of the Armenian intelligentsia against the horrors of history." Expounding on the role of God and religion in the interpretation of these horrors (with reference to Herbert Butterfield's *God in History*), Alishan explains:

> One either traces "Everything in the long run to sheer blind chance . . . or to God." Tracing it to chance would of course result, for people with such a painful history as the Armenians, in mass despair and insanity. Thus the horror of history is defined as God's "Judgment," a judgment which "does not cancel the Promise."[18]

In the *History of Vardan*, Eghishe considers the devastating Persian invasion of Armenia as a punishment sent by God. He records Ghevond the Priest as saying to the troops before the war, "We were exposed to merciless condemnation relentlessly for our sins of transgression which we had unworthily committed in our desire for freedom. We brought upon ourselves the force of the Creator's anger, and moved the merciful Judge to take impartial vengeance on his creatures."[19] Like the prophet Hosea, Eghishe believes that God's punishment proceeds from love for his creatures: "He had previously cautioned, and therein revealed the mercy of his natural love. Then man by despising [the command] received the punishment of death."[20]

Eghishe makes frequent allusions to the Bible or reproduces entire passages. Nevertheless, his interpretation of the Persian invasion has a measure of originality within the network of meanings of the varied Armenian responses to catastrophe. For example, by holding the disunity of the Armenian princes responsible, he deviates from the concept of sin and punishment and ventures into political analysis. But then, in a conscious effort not to violate the authority of the "judgment," he calls that disunity a breaking of the *ukht* (covenant), and therefore, a sin deserving the punishment of death.

Movses Khorenatsi's *Haiots patmutiun* (History of the Armenians) provides another example of the impact of the Old Testament on Armenian historiography. His interpretation of history is based on the concept of sin and punishment; the impiety of the people and their defiance of the Law of God are responsible for the fall of the Arshakuni kingdom and the devastation of the country in the late fifth century. Following Holy Scripture, he chides:

[18] Leonardo P. Alishan, "Crucifixion without 'the Cross,'" *Armenian Review*, 38:1 (Spring 1985), 28-30.

[19] Thomson, *Eghishe*, p. 158.

[20] Ibid., p. 85.

> O Armenians, until when will you be hard-hearted? Why do you love vanity and ungodliness? Do you not know that God has glorified his saints and that the Lord will not hear when you cry to him? For you have sinned in anger and have not repented on your bed.[21]

Like the prophet Zephania, Khorenatsi views the enemy as an instrument for executing God's judgment. His use of the passive voice is another indication that the enemy's identity is irrelevant: "Cities are captured and fortresses destroyed; towns are ruined and buildings burned. . . ."[22]

Like the poets of the First Destruction, which covers the Armeno-Persian conflicts of the third to fifth centuries A.D. Khorenatsi is benumbed by the enormity of the catastrophe. His expressive powers are blunted, the wings of his imagination crippled. In search of a new medium of expression he ponders, "How shall I strengthen my tongue and repay in words my fathers for my birth and raising?"[23] Confessing to his incapacity, he resorts to a cathartic outpouring: "As I reflect upon these matters sighing, tears burst out inside me and make me wish to utter sad and mournful words. Nor do I know how to compose my lament and over whom to weep." The lamentation, a genre that can express enormous grief, pain, and agony, has found its way into Armenian written literature, and it enables Khorenatsi to devise his response to the catastrophe.

Khorenatsi's adoption of this particular genre in response to collective suffering may have been a recourse to Armenian folk creations, disdained by the clerical literati of the time. Indeed, lamentation was an important feature in Armenian oral tradition. Professional women mourners recited laments at funerals, sang elegies, bewailed the loss, and eulogized the deceased. Now, with the Book of Lamentations setting a precedent for the genre in high literature, Khorenatsi had a legitimate and respectable example to follow. The Book of Lamentations provided Khorenatsi with another powerful strategy, namely, personification, a method of expression used by the poets of the First Destruction. Thus Khorenatsi compares the fall of the Arshakuni kingdom and the devastation of Armenia with something familiar, pulls it down to the limited horizon of human imagination. And, following the example of "Fair Zion," he personifies the Armenian Church as an abandoned queen mourning the vanished splendor of her deserted sanctuary:

> Blessed were the first and second departures [the death of Catholicos Sahak and Mesrop Mashtots], for the groom and his best man were absent for a while, and you the bride endured it, preserving

[21] See Thomson, *Khorenatsi*, p. 252.

[22] Ibid., p. 354.

[23] Ibid., p. 35.

> your marriage in chastity. . . . And once when some paramour audaciously assailed your unspoiled couch, you the bride were unsullied. . . . But in this third departure there is no expectation of return. . . . You are uncared for in your widowhood.[24]

It was not easy for Khorenatsi to explain the collapse of the Arshakuni kingdom, the dispersion of its religious leaders, the masses of helpless people abandoned like sheep without a shepherd, victims of hardship, starvation, and death. He searched the Bible to find meaning for the chaos and anchored his explanation on the covenant between man and God. "According to the saying, there is no peace for the impious," he concluded; and after vividly describing the agony of the Armenian people he beseeched God to witness the magnitude of the suffering. But he could not find him: "What then this demonstrates," he wondered, "save that God has abandoned [us] and the elements have changed their nature?"

The thought of being abandoned by God filled Khorenatsi's heart with horror. The present was doomed, there was no hope for a better future. The only solace lay in the memory of the past, when the prophets interpreted and gave meaning to incomprehensible disasters. Earlier, he had turned to the past and called upon Jeremiah: "Awake Jeremiah, awake and lament like a prophet over the miseries we have suffered and the distress we shall endure. Foretell the rise of ignorant shepherds as once did Zacharias in Israel."[25] Why Jeremiah, among all the prophets? Khorenatsi implicitly compared the Armenian catastrophe with the destruction of the First Temple, Jeremiah being the prophet of doom. But there also may be a covert motive in his summoning that particular prophet, for it was Jeremiah who predicted not only imminent destruction but a revival as well. As Tadmor has noted:

> Jeremiah's message was that Nebuchadnezzar was an instrument of Divine anger . . . fulfilling a Divine plan to chasten all the lands, especially sinful Judah. But the period of chastisement will be limited to seventy years. . . . "When seventy years are accomplished, I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the Lord, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans and will make it perpetual desolations" (Jer. 25:12).[26]

It is perhaps with this recollection of Jeremiah's prophecy that Khorenatsi assumes a prophetic stance to predict punishment for the enemy and the

[24] See epilogue in ibid., pp. 350-354, for this and the following quotations from the "Lamentation."

[25] Ibid., p. 253.

[26] Tadmor, "The Period of the First Temple," p. 154.

revival of the Armenian nation in the future. He rediscovers what Mintz calls "the addressable other," and engages in a dramatic soliloquy addressed to God, who was absent during the lamentation: "From this may Christ God protect us and all those who worship him in truth. And to him be glory from all creatures. Amen."[27]

The concept of sin and punishment continued to be the prevailing explanation for catastrophic events used by most Armenian historians. The eighth-century historian Ghevond, in line with the interpretations of his predecessors, repeatedly expresses the view that the devastation inflicted upon the Armenian people during the Arab incursions arose from the gravity of their sins and from their disobedience to God, a sign of "heavenly wrath": "God made them commit brutalities against us so that he would avenge our evil deeds."[28] Addressing Mslim (Maslama), the commander of the Arab army, he says: "It was not because of your just deeds but because of our lawlessness that God permitted this disaster . . . so that we can see our weakness and return to God's Laws."[29] Characteristically, Ghevond sees no need to take action against the enemy, convinced that God will eventually seek vengeance for the innocent Christians. To substantiate his view, he brings in the example of the Greek emperor Leo (Leo III Isaurian, 717-741), who ordered his troops not to fight against the infidel because he expected revenge to come from above. With the same conviction, he describes the turmoil in Armenia during Abdel Malik's reign and shows how God avenged the spilling of Christian blood by having the enemy inflict death on themselves by their own hands. Elsewhere he qualifies the painful death of the Arab commander Amir Ibn Ismaiil as a well-deserved divine retaliation for the innocent blood he had shed.[30] The contradiction between the notion that God punishes the Armenian people with the hand of the enemy and then avenges that same enemy for spilling Armenian blood illustrates the author's confusion and his inability to cope with the events.

The eleventh-century historian Aristakes Lastivertsi recorded the events of his time, a disastrous epoch of Armenian history. The Byzantine incursions, the fall of the Bagratuni kingdom, and the subsequent Seljuk invasions left the land in havoc. Lastivertsi laments the calamities he has witnessed, but faithful

[27] Thomson, *Khorenatsi*, p. 354.

[28] Ghevond, *Patmutiun* [History], trans. into Modern Armenian by Aram Ter Ghevondian (Erevan: Sovetakan Grogh Press, 1982), pp. 110-11. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Armenian sources are mine.

[29] Ibid., p 92.

[30] Ibid., p. 26 and 122.

to the prevailing trend explains them as a deserved punishment. In a didactic tone he preaches absolute obedience to God:

> We have written all this so that you will read and learn that sin was the reason for all that befell us. And seeing us you will become frightened and tremble from the fear of His power and [will be able] to prevent [future calamities] by confession and repentance.[31]

The decline of the Latin principalities in the Near East had a powerful impact on Armenian intellectuals, who regarded the Latin presence in Asia Minor as a source of hope and support. Edessa was among the last principalities to fall.[32] The capture of this last bastion of Christianity made a profound impression on Nerses Shnorhali, Catholicos of Armenia from 1166 to 1172, and inspired a poetic response entitled *Voghb Edesio* (Elegy on Edessa) composed of 1,070 rhyming couplets. The prevalence of the concept of sin and punishment and Shnorhali's unquestioning submission to God's judgment are reflected throughout the poem:

> And now, in him we entrust
> our hope, our faith and love,
> For if he wishes and gives us life,
> we will render honor and glory to him.
> If this did not please him,
> and he handed us over to the infidel(s),
> We will still remain most content,
> for he determines what is good for us;
> Against the sins that we commit,
> like a kind father he admonishes us.[33]

The lamentation genre and the personification of Jerusalem vandalized as a tormented and abandoned widow, two major components of the Book of Lamentations, echo resoundingly in Shnorhali's response to the catastrophe of

[31] Cited in Manuk Abeghian, *Erker* [Works], Vol. 4 (Erevan: Armenian SSR Academy of Sciences Press, 1970), pp. 55-56.

[32] Edessa (Urfa in modern Turkey), a major cultural center in the medieval Near East, held out against Seljuk incursions until the arrival of the crusaders at the end of the eleventh century. Shortly afterward, Toros, the Armenian governor of the region, was murdered by the crusaders and together with the surrounding villages, Edessa became a crusader state known as the Barony of Edessa. In 1144, Edessa was besieged by Amir Zangi of Aleppo and fell after a month of resistance. The city was ransacked and the Christian inhabitants, consisting largely of Armenians, were slaughtered.

[33] Nerses Shnorhali, *Voghb Edesio* [Elegy on Edessa] (Erevan: Armenian SSR Academy of Sciences Press, 1973), p. 62. Subsequent quotations refer to this book with page numbers in the parenthesis.

his time. Lamenting, the victimized widow—Edessa personified—enumerates her many sins as the causes of the calamities that have befallen her:

> I neglected the commandments
> and evaded the laws.
> I was glutted with multitudes of sins
> and defiled by evil deeds. (p. 53)

The role of the enemy is minimized. Amir Zangi of Aleppo is merely a vehicle for God's judgment. The pattern, much like the one Ghevond had followed, is in line with the prophetic explanation of catastrophe. Shnorhali even draws a parallel with the suffering of Israel under foreign rule:

> It was not for his own strength
> nor by the power of his Mohammed
> That he was able to capture Urfa
> and put its people through sword and bondage,
> But because of my many sins
> and my frequent evil deeds
> He turned me over to the infidel,
> the stringent, rebel tyrant,
> As it sometimes happened
> earlier in Israel. (pp. 95-96)

What is remarkable in Shnorhali's response is the newness of the literary form and the secularity of content. The nationalistic spirit of the *Elegy on Edessa*, enhanced by lively nature imagery and graphic descriptions, establishes it as the first patriotic poem in Armenian literature. Testifying to a relaxing of strict Christian asceticism, Shnorhali's innovative elements laid the groundwork for the medieval revival, after centuries of stagnation, of Armenian literature in general and of religious poetry in particular. Nonetheless, it is apparent that some followers of this new philosophy of life went beyond Shnorhali's notion of a less rigid religious atmosphere. They questioned God's judgment; to them, wholesale bloodshed was not fair punishment for the people's many sins. On this point Shnorhali writes:

> . . . Some contended against it,
> and behold! they opposed it;
> For what reason, they asked,
> is this a righteous judgment of God?
> Is it that among all the Christian nations
> we were the only ones who sinned?
> Why among these many cities
> were only we to suffer punishment? (p. 102)

Making a broad digression at the cost of interrupting the poetic mood, the coherence, and the flow, Shnorhali cites numerous examples from the Bible to refute those who dare to question God and to prove the power of his judgment. His painstaking refutation suggests that the traditional paradigm of response to catastrophe, with the concept of sin and punishment at its core, was on the verge of disruption: change was in the making.

Beginning in the second half of the eleventh century, Armenia underwent significant sociopolitical changes. Constant incursions by the nomadic hordes of Central Asia—Seljuks, Mongols, and Tatars—left the country in ruins. After establishing complete dominion over Armenia, the invaders would allow the conquered a certain degree of economic and cultural freedom. It was during these periods of respite that the Armenians interacted with other Near Eastern peoples within the huge Seljuk and Mongol empires. The result was a gradual relaxing of Christian asceticism and of the spirit of hermitism, giving way in Armenia to a more secular outlook that embraced a love of life and nature and an appreciation of worldly pleasures. Armenian church leaders frowned on the change. In sermons and letters they admonished their flock against worldly and vulgar practices. Nerses Shnorhali's "Endhanrakan tughtn" (Encyclical Letter, 1166) is one example. In a similar vein Aristakes Lastivertsi testifies to the odious lifestyle of his contemporaries, even blaming women for the calamities visited upon Armenia.[34]

The new secular philosophy of life apparently reached even the monasteries. Grigor Narekatsi, the tenth-century mystic poet, successfully captured in his poetry a new spirit, a unique blend of religious asceticism, mysticism, and secularism. His innovative ideas, emanating from his *tagh*-s (songs), odes, and his masterpiece, *Matean voghbergutean* (Book of Lamentation), were bearing fruit, preparing the ground for the literary revival which would take place two centuries after his death.

Secular themes found their way into the writings of the clerics and poets, resulting in a dichotomy not only in literary themes, religious and secular, but also in the use of language. While Grabar, the Armenian literary language of the fifth century, continued to be used in the religious literature, the vernacular, the spoken language of the time, emerged as the most convenient vehicle for the medieval writer to reach the masses.

A humanistic worldview, personal feelings, and the idea of man as a lyric hero inspired a move in a new direction. Gradually liberated from the

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34 For the text of the Encyclical Letter see Gr. Hakobian, *Nerses Shnorhali* (Erevan: Armenian SSR Academy of Sciences Press, 1964), pp. 74-81. For Lastivertsi's comments see Abeghian, *Erker*, IV, 59.

constraints of religious literature, Armenian secular poetry began to flourish independently as a true reflection of the epoch. The new spirit evolved into a more relaxed stance with regard to the conflict between body and soul, yielding to the tendency to satisfy the demands of the flesh. Man was still sinful, but now medieval Armenian poets tried to find justifications for his sins. Man is made of flesh, they argued, and human flesh has its own needs, which cannot be completely denied. The psychological trauma caused by abstinence could be neutralized only by a substitutive gratification. Previously, Armenian clerical literati had sought gratification by serving and pleasing God and striving to follow in Christ's footsteps. Later, in the secularized milieu of medieval Armenia, asceticism lost its appeal, and worldly pleasures gained priority. (Such patterns of thought and lifestyle can be attributed to the impact of Eastern philosophy, especially to the influence of Persian-Muslim Sufism, with which medieval Armenian literati were familiar. The Sufis believed that the true path to God was through love rather than prayer.) Satisfying the needs of the flesh was to be sought even if the way to fulfillment was fraught with sin. God is aware of these needs, the clergy poets contended, and forgives man's desire for worldly pleasure. Hovhannes Tlkurantsi's poetry best reflects this totally secular view:

> He who feels the fire of love is hotter than fire itself,
> Prayers depart from his mind, menology he
> forgets to read. . . .
> He who has taste of sin
> To God he gives no ear.[35]

With this new perception of worldly sin and a more liberal interpretation of the concept of sin and punishment, medieval poets were unlikely to accept the notion that disasters were a punishment from God. This secularist attitude was not shared by all, however, so the paradigm of response from this standpoint was diversified. Some authors abided by the traditional concept; others vigorously questioned God's judgment; still others completely ignored the possibility of explaining history in this manner.

Abraham Ankiuratsi's elegy on the fall of Constantinople in 1453 is in line with the traditional response to catastrophe. Avedis Sanjian writes: "As a typical medieval author, Abraham attributes the calamity which befell Byzantium

35 See Varag Nersissian, "Medieval Armenian Poetry and Its Relations to Other Literatures," *Review of National Literatures: Armenia*, 13 (1984), 106. See Abeghian, *Haiots hin grakanutean patmutiun*, II, 402, for a brief discussion on Tlkurantsi, the Catholicos of Armenia (1489-1525; according to some literary historians, Tlkurantsi lived between the fourteenth to fifteenth centuries).

to the wrath of God as a punishment for the manifold sins of its leaders."[36] Stunned and bewildered by the fall of the Byzantine Empire and the capture of Constantinople, Abraham Ankiuratsi laments the slaughter, looting, and plunder of the city and its beautiful churches:

> Yet none of these sacred relics
> Wrought any miracles
> Because of their multitudinous sins,
> They all remained intensely mute. (p. 246)

After a vivid, emotional description of the battles leading to the fall of Constantinople, the tone of the poem becomes mournful and sullen. Ankiuratsi reiterates the appropriate psalms lamenting the loss and tries to find an explanation. He finds the answer embedded in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Listing a number of transgressions, particularly those committed by the city's leaders, he voices the following conclusion:

> Why did this happen to them?
> Because the pious diminished in number,
> And the truth had pined away.
> . . . . . .
> Because of this, God was intensely angered
> And punished them most severely,
> He smote them with bitter blows,
> And scattered them like dust. (pp. 250-251)

He ends on a didactic tone, advising his readers to pray more frequently, observe the fasts with chastity, and confess their sins properly. Then God will deliver them from evil and prevent misfortune.

In contrast, Arakel Baghishetsi, a contemporary of Abraham Ankiuratsi, in his elegy on the same tragic event, never mentions the sins of the people as its cause. Stepanos Orbelian, in his "Voghb i dimats katovghikein" (Elegy on Echmiatsin, 1299), and Hovhannes Tlkurantsi, the author of "Tagh kaji Liparitin" (Ode to Brave Libarid, 1369), are among many medieval authors who disregarded the traditional explanation for catastrophe.[37]

36 Avedis K. Sanjian, "Two Contemporary Armenian Elegies on the Fall of Constantinople, 1453," *Viator—Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, I (1970), 227. Page numbers for subsequent citations from this work are given parenthetically in the text.

37 In "Elegy on the Holy Cathedral of Echmiatsin" Stepanos Orbelian laments the deplorable condition of the seat of the Catholicosate, and through it, allegorically, the calamities that have befallen Armenia. See Avedis K. Sanjian, "Stepanos Orbelian's 'Elegy on the Holy Cathedral of Etchmiadzin': Critical Text and Translation," in Michael E. Stone, ed., *Armenian and Biblical Studies* (Jerusalem: St. James Press, 1976). Tlkurantsi, on the other hand, depicts the incursions of the Turkmens and the exploits of Liparit in defense of

Frik, a contemporary of Stepanos Orbelian, has a unique approach in explaining the events he has witnessed. Time and again he reiterates that he lives in a sinful era (*meghats dar*), and that God inflicts hardship, injustice, inequality, and social and political repressions to punish people for their sins. Despite his conviction that the sins of mankind are the cause of calamities, he is reluctant to submit to the "judgment" and repeatedly questions God: "How is this possible?" "How can we know?" In his best-known poem, "Endem Falaki" (Against Fate), Frik rails against the personified Fate; his words are actually directed at God, however, because Fate denies the accusations and retorts that, after all, it is the Creator who decides everything. In another poem, "Gangat" (Reproach), Frik remonstrates against Mongol invaders and asks why God cannot see the sufferings of the Armenian people:

> And here in the hands of the lawless
> Free men are turned into slaves,
> Prisoners hauled away. How many churches will you permit
> To be destroyed?
> And how many mosques are going to be built?
> How many wives should become widows?
> How many Christians doomed to be orphaned?
> How much blood should flow onto the earth?
> How many more despicable acts should this world commit?[38]

Frik refuses to accept the suffering as evidence of God's love; he does not believe that the enemy is merely an instrument for executing God's judgment. On the contrary, the enemy is an addressable entity and becomes a target for his anger and frustration. If there is hope that his curses will eventually cause the enemy's annihilation, his complaints will cease. The gratification evoked also substitutes for a protest against God's judgment. In fact, a yearning to silence the voice of protest permeates the poem, and the effort succeeds. Gratification is fulfilled, but only by substitution. Despite the prevailing bold and noncompliant mood, the poem ends on a note of conformity. Ultimately, Frik resorts to God's judgment and accepts the inevitable.

The Sense of Shame and Humiliation

A study of the Jewish response to catastrophe reveals an attitude not found in the Armenian tradition, namely, a strong sense of shame and humiliation.

Armenia. See Hovhannes Tlkurantsi, *Taghagirk* [Book of Poems] (Jerusalem: St. James Press,1958), pp. 1-3.

[38] See Diana Der Hovanessian and Matzbed Margossian, trans. and eds., *Anthology of Armenian Poetry* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), pp. 78-79.

This sentiment suffuses the prophetic literature before the First Destruction; it is emphasized in the Book of Lamentations and persists even through the Middle Ages. In spite of rabbinic endeavors to revise and reinterpret the covenant between God and the Jewish nation, the rabbis fail to reconcile God's way to his people in one area, and that is, in the words of Alan Mintz,

> Israel's humiliation in the eyes of the corrupt yet prospering Nations. The emotion of shame, so strongly felt in Lamentations, is never neutralized by the Rabbis. To the contrary: they amplify the accusation and its implicit suggestion of divine neglect and injustice.[39]

The sense of shame and humiliation persists in the history of Sephardic Jewry, particularly in the attempts of sixteenth-century authors to address the needs of Spanish exiles. Ashkenazi authors reacting to the calamities of the twelfth century were the first to question this perception. They imbued their writings with a sense of pride and superiority for having been chosen by God to endure tragedy and suffering. In their view, that choice was a spiritual compliment. This new perception spread to other Jewish communities of Europe and strengthened the interpretation of catastrophe as a God-given opportunity for the Jewish people to prove their ultimate devotion to him by martyrdom.

The pattern of response based on a sense of shame and humiliation did not carry over into Armenian literature. On the contrary, more often than not the literary works of early historians manifest a feeling of national pride. As Movses Khorenatsi puts it, "For although we are a small country and very restricted in numbers, weak in power, and often subject to another's rule, yet many manly deeds have been performed in our land worthy of being recorded in writing."[40]

The Concept of Martyrdom

Responses to catastrophe based on the concept of sin and punishment had lost power as the prevailing paradigm in the Jewish tradition. Since the First Destruction, and particularly after the Second Destruction, authors questioned and even protested God's judgment. A new explanation was needed, and astute rabbis were to find it through a rereading and reinterpretation of Scripture. The explanation they provided could soothe the sufferer and at the same time was compatible with contemporary Jewish canons and history.

[39] Mintz, *Hurban*, p. 5.

[40] Thomson, *Khorenatsi*, p. 69.

During the rabbinic hegemony, the Jewish people were continually involved in a strenuous struggle for political and religious freedom. Political independence was never achieved; therefore, political causes were downplayed and even suppressed in the memory to avoid disillusionment and frustration. Instead, the struggle for religious freedom was emphasized. Catastrophe was interpreted as a God-given privilege, an opportunity for the Jews to prove their righteousness by taking upon themselves the ultimate sacrifice of life for the glory of God.

A welcome diversion from the traditional prophetic response to history, the glorification of martyrdom is revealed in the Talmud—a product of rabbinic teachings—and especially in the accounts of the Hadrianic persecutions (A.D. 132-138). In these narratives the rabbis created new heroes to eulogize martyrdom. Miriam was one. She was modeled after the woman in the legend of The Mother and Her Seven Sons in 2 Maccabees 7. The narrative describes mothers simultaneously mourning and rejoicing—mourning for their sons about to be murdered, rejoicing because through their sons' martyrdom God's name will be sanctified. In the rabbinic interpretation of Scripture, Miriam is quoted as challenging Abraham: "Yours was a trial, mine was an accomplished fact."[41] Another model was drawn from the persecution and execution of Rabbi Akiva. According to the rabbinic interpretation, and contrary to the prophetic one, Rabbi Akiva did not die for his sins but gladly accepted death as the highest order of piety.

The shift in emphasis from the concept of sin and punishment to that of martyrdom is well expressed in the transformation of an ancient penitential prayer ascribed to Rabbi Akiva, "Avinu Malkinu," which begins: "Our Father, our King, we have sinned before You." By the early Middle Ages, the same prayer was reformulated to begin, "Our Father, our King, act for those who were slain for Your holy name."[42]

The heroic deaths of some rabbis were also recorded and set forth as examples for all Jews to follow. Thus, the concept of Kiddush Hashem, the sanctification of God's name, was redefined as the sacrifice of life in the name of piety: "During religious persecutions, the tanaitic rabbis ruled, 'Man is to give his life rather than violate even the least important of the commandments, as it is said, And you shall not desecrate My Holy Name.'"[43]

[41] Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse*, p. 35. For the English translation of this story, see Roskies, *The Literature of Destruction*, pp. 43-44.

[42] Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse*, p. 45.

[43] Ibid., p. 30.

The rabbis who devised the Halakah and Haggadah drew heavily on folklore to provide a historical base for their text.[44] Contained within these tales and anecdotes is the eighth chapter of the tractate "Mourning," which includes martyrological texts and suggestions on how the martyr should be honored. The description of Hanina ben Tradion's torture is a notable example:

> At the time of his execution, they wrapped him in a Torah scroll and set fire to him and to the Torah scroll, while his daughter, throwing herself at his feet, screamed : "Is this the Torah, and this its reward?"
>
> "My daughter", he said to her, ". . . if it is for the Torah scroll that you are weeping, lo, the Torah is fire, and fire cannot consume fire. Behold, the letters are flying into the air and only the parchment itself is burning." (8:12).[45]

In this and other examples of martyrological literature, the psychology of the martyr is typified. Torture and suffering are only thorns along the path that leads to the glory of martyrdom; they are a triumph for the victim, not a defeat.

It should be noted that a conviction as deeply rooted in the Jewish tradition as the concept of sin and punishment cannot have been totally renounced. References to it do recur in Jewish literature, but mostly as passing remarks, like statements made from habit, or in a context where prevailing popular and superstitious trends are criticized. Shalom Spiegel quotes from R. Eliezer bar Nathan's "Selihah," a penitential poem in praise of the mass martyrdom of Jews in Mainz (1096). Although the poem is a eulogy on martyrdom as the sublime voluntary act for the glorification of the Name, one line reveals the author's belief in the old prophetic explanation: "But oh! because of our sins the enemy prevailed and captured the gateway."[46] In the Armenian tradition, with the inauguration of written literature at the beginning of the fifth century, the concepts of martyrdom and of sin and punishment were adopted simultaneously. For the Christianized Armenian literati, the two concepts were equally acceptable and were used interchangeably to interpret national disasters.

Martyrdom, in the sense of highest degree of devotion to the king and homeland, was certainly not new to Armenians. What was new in the

[44] Through a revisionist reading of Scripture, the rabbis of the first and second centuries A.D. derived a system of rules and legal matters, the Halakah, and a mythology of the mundane, the Haggadah. Their interpretations were drawn from Jewish folklore and popular beliefs and were forged to answer the emotional and spiritual needs of the time.

[45] Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse*, p. 31. For the entire story of Rabbi Hanina Ben Tarikon's martyrdom, see Roskies, *The Literature of Destruction*, p. 47.

[46] Shalom Spiegel, *The Last Trial*, trans. from the Hebrew by Judah Goldin (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967), p. 18.

Christian Armenian literature was the Judeo-Christian connotation of the concept of martyrdom. For example, Stepanos Orbelian considers King Smbat a martyr because he was killed while waging war against the Muslim Amir Yusuf. He does not call Gagik II a martyr, however, because he was killed by Constantine IX, the Christian king of Byzantium, although underlying both incidents were the same political motives:

> The first among them was Ashot
> Then his son Smbat,
> Who was martyred in Dvin the great
> And was crucified like Christ. . .
>
> Until Gagik, the last among them
> Who never returned from the Greek lands,
> Whom the wicked Greek nation
> Put to death forthwith.[47]

At the core of the idea of martyrdom in Christian literature is the example of Christ in the New Testament, who gained eternal life in heaven by his act of martyrdom on earth. Martyrdom as a key concept was developed further in the life stories of the early Church Fathers, giving rise to the Christian martyrological literature. It has been suggested that tanaitic rabbis, searching Scripture for a new explanation of catastrophe, came across the concept of ultimate sacrifice for the sake of religion in Christian teachings. In *The Last Trial*, an extensive study of the subject, Shalom Spiegel strongly refutes this notion and argues that the rabbis of the Second Destruction followed the example of Isaac's martyrdom in formulating their new interpretation of catastrophes.

There is no question that human sacrifice was common in pagan times and that it was suppressed in the Jewish tradition. Even the story of Abraham and Isaac has come down to us with some ambiguity, opening the door for disputation as to whether the act of sacrifice was actually completed. Was Isaac saved miraculously at the last moment, or was he slaughtered and burned and his ashes taken to heaven, there to be revived? The offering proper is deemphasized in the Old Testament. Instead, attention is focused on Abraham's willingness to offer his firstborn, and on Isaac's character as the prototype of the sacrificial victim.

Shalom Spiegel analyzes in meticulous detail the account of Isaac's martyrdom, the memory of this act of *Akedah* within Jewish literature through time, and the parallelism between Isaac's Akedah (his binding on Mount Moriah) and the Crucifixion. Spiegel asserts that Christians and Jews alike inherited,

47 Sanjian, "Orbelian's 'Elegy,'" p. 269. The references are to King Ashot Bagratuni (885-890), King Smbat (890-914), and the last Bagratuni king, Gagik II (1042-1045).

from a pagan source, the concept of shedding human blood for the redemption of generations, and that in the Jewish and the Christian traditions the evil, the possessor of the power of death, is vanquished by the death of the martyr, who gains eternal life for himself, and through him for others.

The heroic revolt of the Maccabees against Antiochus Epiphanus in the second century B.C. also provides examples of ultimate devotion and self-sacrifice for the sake of religion. Its impact on Armenian classical writers is undeniable. According to Robert Thomson, the concept of the holy Covenant (*Ukht*), a major theme in Eghishe's work, carries the same implications as *berit qodes* in Maccabees, and Priest Ghevond's speech is modeled after that of Matathias (1 Macc.2, a passage cited by Paul in Heb. 11 and included in the readings for the Christian festival of the Maccabees as celebrated in the Armenian Church). Thomson states that Pavstos was the first author to mention the Maccabees explicitly "when he described the festival of those Armenians who died fighting the Persians, since 'they fell in combat like Judas and Matathias Maccabee and their brothers.'" He goes on to list references to the Maccabees by Movses Khorenatsi, Hovhannes Katoghikos, Tovma Artsruni, Anania Shirakatsi, and Stepan Asoghik.[48]

The idea of martyrdom is deeply rooted in the history of human civilization. It is explicit in the Armenian pagan tradition, subdued in the Jewish monotheistic tradition, emphasized in the Christian teachings, and then given a new interpretation by the rabbis of the Second Destruction. With such diverse influences coming from different cultural, religious, sociopolitical, and geographical factors within the Jewish and the Armenian societies, it is not surprising that the expression of the concept of martyrdom as a response to catastrophe is so varied in the respective literatures. Manifestations within the texts are representations, or, to use Ferdinand de Saussure's terminology, signifiers of the conceptualizations devised to cope with and respond to disaster in the realm of literature. These conceptualizations—the signifieds in the texts—are themselves the signifiers of the multifaceted characteristics of the two traditions.

Perception and Treatment of Martyrdom

"The rabbis cut history down to manageable size by dissassembling the Great Destruction [of Herod's Temple, A.D. 70] into archetypes and moral lessons and by coding the memory of catastrophe into the liturgical calendar,"

48 See Robert Thomson, "Eghishe's History of Vardan: New Light from Old Sources," in Thomas J. Samuelian, ed., *Classical Armenian Culture: Influences and Creativity*, pp. 41-51.

writes David Roskies.[49] Indeed, because rabbis and not historians were in charge of recording Jewish history, historical events were noted in terms of the intensity of the disaster they brought upon the Jews and their similarity to earlier catastrophes; dates were not important. History consisted of a loose string of accounts of martyrdom in which the political, temporal, and geographical significance of events was minimized and the ultimate sacrifice for Judaism was dramatically underscored. The treatment of Maccabees in the rabbinic tradition is a good example. Each of the two books has its own ideological slant. The first records military operations, defeats, victories, and the temple's restoration. The second book, especially chapters 6 and 7, deals exclusively with individual accounts of heroism, self-sacrifice, and martyrdom—the latter for national as well as religious objectives. It is martyrdom that has survived in midrashic literature and folklore and become the source of inspiration for future acts of martyrdom.

Other examples of the transtemporal and archetypal treatment of martyrdom are found in the literary responses to the Crusader massacres of the Jews in 1096 and 1146 in Mainz and in the Rhineland, the expulsion of the Jews from England in 1290 and from Spain in 1492, and the Chmielnicki massacres of 1648-49 in the Ukraine. By clustering the memory of the latest catastrophe with the memory of others already commemorated, its observance is justified and the memorial eternalized. The artistic dramatization of all martyrdoms is so incorporated in the liturgy of Yom Kippur.

The reason for this particular Jewish approach to history is history itself. The Jewish people, very early in their history, and ultimately in the fifth century, were dispersed around the world and reduced to religious communities. Ethnic tradition and devotion to religion were the only bastion for the people to uphold. Martyrology perfectly served the purpose of invoking ethnic and religious sentiments and for strengthening religious bonds among the people. Conversely, at least until the final destruction of Cilician Armenia by the Mamluks of Egypt in 1375, the Armenians maintained a certain degree of political independence in the regional principalities and kingdoms of the land.[50] Their continual struggle against foreign usurpers became a source of inspiration for historiography and artistic literature and prevented martyrology from obscuring the political and temporal significance of the historical events.

[49] Roskies, *The Literature of Destruction*, p. 50.

[50] Armenia proper lost its independence in 1071 A.D. after the defeat of the Byzantine armies by the Seljuk Turks at Manzikert. Late in the eleventh century, the Rubinians founded a principality in Cilicia (outside Armenia proper), which was later recognized as a kingdom. The Rubinians resisted the frequent invasions of Seljuks, Tatars, and Mongols, but the Armenian kingdom of Cilicia was overrun by the Mamluks of Egypt in 1375.

Another feature of the Jewish treatment of the concept of martyrdom is the dramatic scheme of mourning, with God as an actual participant in the lament. This effective restatement of Scripture alleviates the pain of the trauma and provides a catharsis for the reader. Returning to inspect the aftermath of the destruction, God is filled with remorse and summons Jeremiah to call Moses and the patriarchs to join him in a great lament: "Woe is me! What have I done?"[51]

Lamentation and mourning after a catastrophic event are a customary theme in Jewish literature and a powerful catharsis for the audience. Since the compilation of Lamentations, elegies have been written in the same pattern, sometimes even employing the same forms and metaphors. But involving God in the act of mourning is a new device, an attempt to mend and renew the breached covenant and inspire hope and courage to the dispersed nation. There is no exact parallel in Armenian literature. A rare allusion to God's involvement does occur in Stepanos Orbelian's "Elegy on Echmiatsin," in which the heavenly hosts are invited to lament over the misery of Armenia. The pious Armenian clergyman does not deem it appropriate to involve God directly in such earthly matters as mourning over the destruction of the land, thereby denying himself the consolation that God's sympathy and remorse might provide:

> I now invite the heavenly hosts,
> To heaven on high I send forth cries,
> To have them descend to my humble abode,
> To join with us who are earth-born.
>
> To listen to my bitter woes,
> To share my tragic afflictions,
> To lament and weep appropriately,
> To share my misery with infinite woes.[52]

There is also a difference between the importance given to individual martyrs of the Armenian Christian tradition and the clustering and compilation of the memory of martyrs and collective martyrdom in the Jewish tradition. In the Christian ritual, Christ is regarded as the prototype for all martyrs; Church Fathers or individuals who followed his example of martyrdom are also commemorated individually, each one revered as a saint. In the Armenian Church calendar a commemorative day is dedicated to each saint. The Armenian Book of Menology, *Haismavurk*, which originated in the early

[51] For the English translation of the lamentation "Jeremiah and the Patriarch," see Roskies, *The Literature of Destruction*, p. 51.

[52] Sanjian, "Orbelian's 'Elegy,'" p. 266.

Christian tradition, recounts the lives of Armenian saints and numerous accounts of martyrdom. Grigor Khlatetsi, Tserents (fifteenth century) was the last to edit and update the *Menology*. He utilized the artistic devices and traditions of Armenian folklore to embellish the lifestories of the martyrs of the past and also added contemporary accounts.

Martyrology remained a popular genre among Armenians for setting examples and entertaining the pious reader. The lives of religious leaders and lay individuals such as Shushanik Vardeni, Vardan Mamikonian's daughter, and Vahan Goghtnetsi were dramatized. Another fine example of martyrological literature is the lyric poem "Andzink nvirealk" (The Consecrated Persons) by Komitas Catholicos Aghtsetsi (sixth to seventh century). It is an ode to the beautiful Hripsime and other virgins who dedicated their lives to the love of Christ: "For you, blessed martyrs, / The host of angels incorporeal / From heaven to earth descended, and men / Celebrated with the Christ God's band of soldiers."[53]

Among the Jewish people, accounts of individual martyrs were combined into a dramatic schema. In the legend of Rabbi Akiva and the Ten Harugei Malkhut, the stories of ten martyrs in different times and places are combined into a single episode and commemorated in Jewish liturgy as a collective martyrdom. David Roskies acknowledges the contrast between the two treatments:

> The early Christians pursued the path avoided by the rabbis. The Church appropriated the Books of Maccabees as a canonical text, transforming the grave of the martyred mother and her seven sons into a Christian holy site. . . . Contrast what happened to Rabbi Akiva—as good a candidate for sainthood as any of the early Church Fathers.[54]

The first collective disaster in medieval Jewish history was the mass murder of the Ashkenazi Jews in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. It generated literary responses which, in terms of style and imagery, were formulated in accord with the legend of Rabbi Akiva and the Ten Harugei Malkhut. What was new in the treatment of these events, as Roskies has noted, was the concern for names, dates, and specific events, with two scenarios, one political and the other martyrological, present and competing with each other.[55] What

53 See Levon Mkrtichian, comp. and comm., *Hai dasakan knarergutiun* [Armenian Classic Lyric Poems] (Erevan: Sovetakan Grogh, 1986), pp. 150-154.

54 Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse*, p. 39. For the English translation of the "Ten Harugei Malkhut," see Roskies, *The Literature of Destruction*, pp. 60-69.

55 Roskies, *The Literature of Destruction*, p. 71.

is unique in the martyrological scenario is the amplification and glorification of the experience of mass martyrdom and the willingness, even eagerness of the Jews to embrace martyrdom. Solomon Bar Simson, a chronicler of the Crusader massacres of 1096, records: "There is nothing better than to offer ourselves as a sacrifice":

> There women girded themselves with strength and slaughtered their sons and daughters, along with themselves. Many men likewise gathered strength and slaughtered their wives and their children and their little ones. . . . The young women and the brides and the bridegrooms gazed through the windows and cried out loudly: "Behold and see, our God, what we do for the sanctification of your holy Name, rather than to deny you for a crucified one. . . ." "The precious children of Zion," the children of Mainz, were tested ten times, like our ancestor Abraham and like Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. They offered up their children as did Abraham with his son Isaac.[56]

The Ashkenazi Jews of the twelfth century considered their experience equivalent to the ancient Destruction and the new disaster an enactment of the Lost Temple. The scale of the collective act of voluntary human sacrifice for the sake of religion obliterated the distance between the Jews and the rituals of the Lost Temple. With such a dramatization of the act of martyrdom, the sense of humiliation before the gentiles, deep-rooted in the Jewish tradition, gave way among the Ashkenazis to contempt for the victimizer and feelings of guilt in those not called upon by God to prove their piety by martyrdom. These feelings of self-doubt and guilt, the first recorded evidence of the survivors' traumatic experience, were to become more complex after the Holocaust. Roskies elaborates:

> Nothing had really changed on this score since the tanaitic rabbis had laid down the procedures, but the pride of being an elect, of being second only to Jerusalem, gave Ashkenazi Jews the right to challenge God in a way he had scarcely been challenged before—with a collective call for vengeance. . . . With group memory then at its keenest, the remembrance of the dead provoked a pointed call for divine action: "May He avenge the blood of his servants which had been shed. . . . He will execute judgment upon the nations and fill the world with corpses; He will shatter the enemy's head over all the wide earth" (Ps. 110:6-7). . . . On Passover, at the dramatic high point of seder, when the door was opened for Elijah to come in, he was greeted with an outburst of rage. "Pour out your wrath upon the nations that do not know you and upon the kingdoms which do not

56 Ibid., pp. 80-81.

> call upon your name. For they have devoured Jacob and laid waste your dwelling place (Ps. 79:6-7). Pour out your fury upon them, let your fierce anger overtake them (Ps. 69:6-7)."[57]

Roskies cites a number of such appeals for God's vengeance and concludes that although there is nothing new in these passages (all biblical quotations), their cumulative effect was new in the twelfth century. This acute outburst, which grew more intense with time, had a soothing, comforting effect on the survivors of the Crusader massacres and subsequent persecutions. As a phenomenon, it remained a characteristic of the Jewish response not matched in Armenian literature.

The impact of Christian ethics prevented such an outlet. Instead, in instances when the Armenian soldiers could retaliate, the exercise was barbaric. *Patmutiun Tarono* (The History of Taron), by the eighth-century historian Hovhan Mamikonian, contains numerous episodes of Persian regiments besieged and slaughtered, captured Persian princes stripped naked, humiliated, and burned alive.[58] The enthusiastic narration and lively description of these vengeful acts served as a catharsis for the author and the reader alike. Obviously, the response to the catastrophe was revenge, as brutal as it could be, and not glorified martyrdom. Mamikonian's stance is inconsistent, however. When the enemy launches a deadly attack causing massive destruction, he views it as the unavoidable destiny of the Armenian nation. In such instances, the catharsis is realized either by abiding by God's judgment or by glorifying martyrdom for the sake of Christianity. But *The History of Taron* does not reflect the prevailing trend. Neither Sebeos (seventh century) nor Ghevond (eighth century) describes the contemporary wars in such abundant detail or records popular reactions mixed with folktales and songs.

The most important difference in the perception of martyrdom lies in the anticipation of a reward in the Armenian tradition and the absence of such expectation—or ambivalence about it—in the Jewish tradition. The Christian Armenians offered their body as a sacrifice to their faith and anticipated redemption of their soul. They expected a magnificent host of angels to fly them to heaven and unite them with God. These reassurances are lacking, or at least are not articulated in the Jewish ritual. Perhaps it is to compensate for this lack that the Jewish response to martyrdom acquired an extrinsic dimension; it turned outward, targeting the enemy, the victimizer, for a cathartic outlet for anger, rage, and frustration.

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57 Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse*, pp. 44-45. For other examples see Roskies, *The Literature of Destruction*, pp. 82-88, "History as Liturgy in Ashkenaz."

58 See Abeghian, *Haiots hin grakanutean patmutiun*, I, 409-421.

The Armenians did have an example to follow: Christ's resurrection on the third day was expounded by the Christian Fathers and the example was offered as an unquestioned reward for those who would suffer and die for Christianity. In the Jewish tradition, although the idea of immortality was accepted, it was not emphasized. The prophets did preach: "After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live in his presence" (Hos. 6:2), but they did not clearly specify the notion of immortality as a reward for martyrdom. Robert Thomson points out: "The only passage in Maccabees that definitely associates eternal life with the covenant is 2 Macc 7:36: The youngest of the seven brothers to be martyred says to Antiochus: 'My brothers have now fallen in loyalty to God's covenant, after brief pain leading to eternal life.'"[59] Shalom Spiegel argues that the reason immortality was not elaborated upon is because of the anticipation of the Messiah and the Jews' unwillingness to believe that Christ was the expected one:

> Much did our fathers suffer when the priests and apostates forced them into disputation before kings and pontiffs, to prove from talmudic literature that the Messiah had already come. This is why Jews shut their doors and Christians threw theirs wide open to the theme of the third day of Resurrection.[60]

For Jews who became martyrs for their faith there was no immediate reward, except for remembrance in a ritual of collective commemoration. The motivation for embracing martyrdom was to perform the ultimate act of sanctifying God's name. Medieval Hebrew scholars amplified the theme of reward for the sufferers beyond what had been elaborately set forth by the act of Isaac's Akedah so that the Jews might follow his example more enthusiastically. Thus, deliberately slanting the interpretation of Akedah, Hebrew scholars resurrected the idea of immortality as a reward for martyrdom. To this effect, Solomon Bar Simson ends his chronicle with the words, "Blessed are they, and blessed is their portion, for all of them are destined for the life of the world to come. May my portion be with them."[61] Shalom Spiegel cites R. Eliezer bar Nathan, another chronicler of the Mainz massacres, who clearly shows an expectation of redemption: "Innocent souls withdrew to eternal life, to their station on high."[62] Again, in another chronicle of the same massacre, Master David, the Gabbai, is quoted as shouting to the mob: "If you slay me, my soul will abide in the Garden of Eden—in the light of life. You, however, will descend to a deep

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59 Thomson, "Eghishe's History of Vardan," p. 44.

60 Spiegel, *The Last Trial*, p. 12.

61 Cited in Roskies, *The Literature of Destruction*, pp. 81-82.

62 Spiegel, *The Last Trial*, p. 25.

pit, to eternal obloquy, condemned with your deity—the son of promiscuity, the crucified one."[63]

The concept of immortality in the Jewish perception of martyrdom never matched the significance and importance it had for Armenians. In fact, for many Armenian writers the idea of gaining eternal life through martyrdom became a moving force in history. Eghishe's *History of Vardan* revolves around the theme of martyrdom as the highest degree of commitment to Christianity and the source of immortality as the deserved gift of God to the sufferers. Immortality as a key concept emerges at the outset. Adopting the spirit of "an ancient dictum," Eghishe declares: "'Death not understood is death, death understood is immortality.' Who does not know death, fears death; but he who knows death does not fear it."[64] He then relates how the Armenian clergy and the princes and all the people of the land gathered in the capital city of Artashat, in A.D. 451, to reply to the threatening letter of the Persian king, Yazdigerd. Their collective voice, representing the will of the nation, expressed its unswerving commitment to Christianity and determination to resist Yazdigerd's coercions to convert to Zoroastrianism:

> From this faith no one can shake us, neither angels nor men, nor any kind of cruel torture. . . . Do immediately whatever you wish: torture from you, submission from us; the sword is yours, the necks are ours. We are no better than our ancestors, who on behalf of this witness laid down their possessions, properties and bodies. (p. 92)

Enraged, the Persian king launched an extensive military assault to crush the nation's will and resistance, and the Armenians prepared for the battle. Eghishe once again emphasizes his interpretation of the principal objective of the battle in the form of a collective outburst of devotion and determination by the Armenian army: "May our death equal the death of the just and the shedding of our blood that of the blood of the holy martyrs. May God be pleased with our willing sacrifice and not deliver his church into the hands of the heathen" (p. 166). He explains that the warriors "considered the struggle to be in no way for a material cause but for spiritual virtue, they desired to share the death of the valiant martyrs" (p. 152). Like other Armenian historians of the fifth century, Eghishe believes that the sins of the people caused the calamities that befell them. Then, as a contrast to divine punishment, he dwells on God's reward for obedience and praises the glory of immortality. Bishop Hovsep's letter to Mihrnerseh, the Persian *hazarapet* (vizier), demonstrates the simultaneous presence of the concepts of martyrdom and sin and punishment and their interchangeability in explaining national disasters:

> Only man and angel have been left free in their own will, for they are rational. If they abide by his command, they are immortal and sons of God. . . . So where transgression increased, he inflicted all with death; but where there was attentive obedience, he bestowed gifts of immortality. (pp. 88-90)

Recording the battle of Avarair with martyrdom as its central theme and impetus is not unique to Eghishe. Every ancient and medieval Armenian historian writing about the same event has taken the same path as Egishe. Lazarus of Pharb (Ghazar Parpetsi, fifth century) quotes Vardan, praising martyrdom and encouraging the soldiers to sacrifice their lives for Christianity; however, unlike Eghishe's examples of devotion and martyrdom on the heroes of Israel, Parpetsi's archetype is Gregory the Illuminator. Stepan Asoghik (tenth-eleventh century) also claims that "Saint Vardan died for the Holy Covenant and the Christian faith."[65]

The Arab dominion over Armenia, from the seventh to the middle of the ninth century, brought more devastation. Contemporary chroniclers such as Sebeos, Ghevond the Historian, and Tovma Artsruni all emphasize the religious aspect. Their writings follow the existing paradigm; artistic configurations of the events recreate the enemy's tyrannical acts, the psychological sufferings caused by forced conversions, and the victims' yearning for freedom of conscience. Their idealization of martyrdom and emphasis on immortality were intended to encourage future generations to be ready to die for Christianity.

One should bear in mind that the chronicles and the martyrological literature were produced by the clergy and represented their views, whereas the Armenian masses still cherished and idealized tales of heroic acts past and present. Stories of courage and heroism in popular uprisings and battles against Arab rulers were transmitted from one generation to the next. In the course of centuries, these stories added reminiscences of ancient legends, elements of old beliefs, as well as impressions from contemporary events. In the late nineteenth century the stories were collected and edited, revealing a folk creation, epic in dimension and characteristic. Known today as *Sasuntsi Davit* (David of Sasun, after the epic hero)—or *Sasna tsrer* (The Daredevils of Sasun), this work embodies the Armenian people's spirit of struggle against the injustices of a socioeconomic structure which shackled individual freedom and denied the

63 Mintz, *Hurban*, p. 88.

64 Thomson, *Eghishe*, p. 68. Page numbers for subsequent citations from this work are given parenthetically in the text.

65 Stepan Asoghik, *Patmutiun tiezerakan* [Universal History], ed. S. Malkhasiants (St. Petersburg, 1885), p. 78, quoted in Thomson, "Eghishe's History of Vardan," p. 48.

right to self-determination. What is more important, it illustrates a desire for independence and a questioning of God's judgment. (A thematic study of this national epic, which embodies the reaction and response of the Armenian common folk to national catastrophe, would likely yield valuable results.)

Literary responses to the capture of Edessa in the twelfth century were in line with the traditional trend in formal literature. Although Shnorhali's interpretation is not devoid of political elements, it is dominated by his religious outlook. After explaining the event as a godsent punishment for the sins of the people of Edessa, Shnorhali advances that the main objective of the Edessan troops was to join the ranks of the holy martyrs in heaven. He compares their venture with both the heroic resistance of the Maccabees—the universal Judeo-Christian archetype—and the war of Vardan—the Armenian archetype of martyrdom:

> Little was the sorrow they suffered,
> Countless the reward they were bestowed,
> They were tortured for a moment
> But they inherited eternity.
> . . . . . .
> And if we suffer physical defeat
> Our souls will shine with brightness,
> We will be seated with the righteous
> In our Father's Kingdom of Heaven.[66]

The serene mood of the poem is in contrast to the turbulent outpourings and appeals to God in Ashkenazi poetry. This polarization is evidence of the mediation of cultural and religious determinants in shaping the milieu, tone, and mood of poetry in response to national catastrophe.

Martyrdom is the motive for struggle against the enemy in *Patmutiun vasn azgin netoghats* (History of the Nation of the Archers). Grigor of Akants, a thirteenth-century historian, regards Prince Toros not as a soldier defending his homeland but as a martyr for Christianity. He quotes King Hetum's reflection on the battle and the death of his son: "Just as such a number of horsemen strove on behalf of the Christians and became worthy of heavenly crowns, so also did my sons. Toros fought for Christianity and was martyred for the Christians. He has joined the band of the holy Vardanank and has become worthy of the same crown."[67]

Clearly, Eghishe's interpretation of the war of Vardan made a tremendous impact on the Armenian historiography. It infused a religious meaning, motivation, and purpose in the nation's struggle against the Persians. Influenced by his superb work, writers adopted his position, his views, and sometimes even his words to record past history and to interpret contemporary national disasters. Eghishe furnished the prototypical martyr's tale, and in Vardan he defined a sacred archetype, a source of inspiration, and an example for future generations of Armenians.

[66] Shnorhali, *Voghb Edesio*, excerpts from pp. 59 and 61.

[67] See Thomson, "Eghishe's History of Vardan," p. 48.

Secularization of Martyrdom

The secularization of outlook and the relaxation of Christian asceticism, beginning in the eleventh century in Armenia, brought about a new perception not only of sin and punishment but also of martyrdom. The prevailing Eastern philosophy, and especially the new interest of clerical writers in Armenian folklore, which was full of life and love of nature, influenced the idea of martyrdom. The strictly religious concept incorporated a secular context in which martyrdom for the sake of a friend or a beloved was a virtue, which befitted only the good and righteous, and which no evil spirit deserved. Frik, a thirteenth-century Armenian lay poet, translated from an unknown Persian author, probably a Sufi, a quatrain which expounds on this notion:

> It is not but the good ones who are being killed.
> Those who have no feelings and character are never killed.
> If you are a true lover, do not be afraid of being killed.
> Filthy is [the corpse] that was not killed.[68]

Immortality also, previously considered as God's reward to the martyrs, acquired a secular connotation. Frik implied that immortality was not limited to life in heaven; it could be attained in this very world if one was capable of embracing a true and a great love: "Blessed be he who has that love in his heart."[69] Hovhannes Tlkurantsi went even further and equated immortality with the enjoyment of a woman's love:

> Your bosom is a paradise of immortality,
> A paradise full of fruits of immortality.
> You are an example of Goodness,
> You are loved by God and men alike.[70]

Or,

[68] Frik, *Divan* [Poems] (New York: Armenian General Benevolent Union Publication, 1952), p. 124.

[69] Ibid., p. 381.

[70] Tlkurantsi, *Taghaspurk*, p. 14

Your bosom, a paradise of immortality,
Calls back the departed soul,
His face will never turn pale
Nor his steps will grow heavy with age;
He will never die.[71]

The secular dimension of the theme of love and immortality is further expounded in the love-poems of Nahabed Kuchak (believed to have lived in the sixteenth century). For this lay poet love is a cult, a source of divine pleasure, but also a source of pain. In praise of his beloved, he violates the mystery of the Christian rituals like prayer and confession, or biblical concepts like picking the forbidden fruit of Paradise:

. . . your kiss
is sweeter far than any fruit
that grows on land or on the sea.
It is like that forbidden fruit
that Adam tasted from the Tree.

* * * * *

Your breasts are snow-white cathedral,
your nipples eternal lamps.
Oh let me become your verger
and tend to your vernal lamps!

* * * * *

I have made her snow-white breasts my chapel,
to her breasts I make my confessions.

* * * * *

Your breasts are the Garden of Paradise,
let me pick your apples at will.[72]

Beginning in the sixteenth century, constant battles, growing foreign oppression, and devastation created an extremely unfavorable environment for artistic and cultural activity in Armenia. Intellectual life was stifled. Secular poetry was limited to lamentations on the plight of the Armenian people. Poets like Karapet Baghishetsi, Minas Tokhattsi, Hovhannes Mshetsi, and others composed elegies, some with a spark of hope and optimism, others beseeching God for mercy. The tradition of poetry of love, exile, and social injustice continued in the songs of the semiliterate wandering bards (*ashughs*), but their songs lacked the spontaneity and richness of imagery characteristic of the secular poetry of the preceding two centuries. Religious poetry, already in

[71] See Nersissian, "Medieval Armenian Poetry and Its Relation to Other Literatures," p. 107.

[72] Adapted from Nahapet Kuchak, *A Hundred and One Hayrens*, Ewald Ozers, trans. (Erevan: Sovetakan Grogh, 1979), pp. 48, 56, 62, 63.

decline, was now stagnant and mediocre. The major themes which were the backbone of religious poetry had already lost their mystic veneration and were being treated in a casual manner. Casual also was the treatment of the relationship between man and God. Davit Saladzortsi (seventeenth century), for example, lauds God and Christ not as heavenly, transcendental existences but as earthly creatures.

In such a milieu was history recorded by uneducated clergy who merely enumerated events with no discrimination as to source, and no attempt to analyze cause and effect. Arakel Davrizhetsi, the best-known historian of the seventeenth century, in an effort to emulate his predecessors, repeats biblical stories, cites examples from Israel's past, and resorts to the long worn-out concept of sin and punishment to explain the incursions of Shah Abbas I. He depicts men and women who refuse to renounce their faith and suffer ignominy and death at the hands of Persian invaders, but curiously, in contrast to his predecessors, he places no emphasis on an immediate reward for martyrdom. In fact, the anticipation of redemption and immortality is explicitly downplayed. The only reward the martyrs receive, as Davrizhetsi sees it, is the commemoration of their courageous acts in the church liturgy. Obviously, martyrdom had lost its power to interpret collective catastrophe and instigate resistance against the enemy. Even Davrizhetsi's few references to the martyrdom-immortality concept seem to be only passing remarks and repetitions of formulas of the past.

In Hebrew literature, in contrast, martyrology as a substitute for Jewish history and martyrdom as a response to catastrophe persisted unchanged. Martyrdom did not acquire the secularized connotation it did in Armenian medieval poetry but continued to draw its inspiration from traditional asceticism. In spite of the vast variety of themes it encompassed, Jewish secular poetry cautiously avoided concepts and themes with religious connotations until the renaissance of the nineteenth century. The interpretation of history and the response to catastrophe were unquestionably entrusted to the rabbis. The literature they produced—*midrash*, *piyyut*, and chronicle—continued along the path of response to catastrophe which unfolded during the eleventh- and twelfth-century Crusader massacres. It followed the same pattern of historical chronicles, dirges, and glorification of *Kiddush Hashem*, despite the fact that subsequent calamities (the Black Death, 1347-1348, and the Chmielnicki massacres, 1648-1649) were far more devastating.

Only in Nathan Nata Hanover's narrative of the Chmielnicki massacres, a tragic consequence of the Cossack revolt under Bogdan Chmielnicki in the Ukraine, does martyrdom appear to have lost its zealous followers and its unquestioned power to explain catastrophe. In *The Deep Mire* (or *The Abyss of Despair*), Hanover demonstrates the reluctance of the Jews to embrace martyr-

dom.[73] The chronicle speaks of conversion and massacre rather than voluntary martyrdom. In the meantime, however, Shabbetai Hacohen Katz's response to the same catastrophe, in *Scroll of Darkness*, follows the path of the sanctification of martyrdom.[74]

73 See Mintz, *Hurban*, pp. 102-105.

74 Ibid., p. 104.

2

Impact of the Renaissance on the Paradigm of Responses

Intellectual revival and the resulting emancipation movements in Armenian and East European Jewish communities occurred almost concurrently at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Under parallel conditions and with similar motivations, Armenian and Jewish intellectuals endeavored to fight the backwardness of the masses by disseminating the ideas of enlightenment. Their efforts were met with suspicion, even antagonism, by the traditionalist, mostly religious leaders in the two communities.

Opposition to progressive thinking was less accentuated in Armenia than in the Jewish communities. Despite open hostility between the traditionalists and the modernist civil educators regarding curricula and methods in Armenian parochial schools, the conflict did not spread nationwide or obstruct the programs of enlightenment. Among the Jewish communities in Europe, however, the Haskalah (Enlightenment) movement, an offshoot of the European Enlightenment, met with outright opposition. The educational plans proposed by the westernized *maskilim* (the enlightened) assigning priority to secular studies over Talmud Torah were simply unacceptable to pious rabbis and the Jewish public. The maskilim and the Armenian progressive writers advocated enlightenment and modernization; also, their response to the plight of their people was critical of the traditionalist school of thought established by religious leaders and devoutly followed by the Jewish and Armenian masses. The Haskalah literature of the time is a repository of criticism of Hasidic tenets, internal Jewish organizations, and even of the foundations of Talmudic law; and the Armenian Renaissance literature produced by progressive intellectuals is critical of the ignorant and despotic clergy and of the newly emerged

ruling class of wealthy merchants, who exploited the masses and inflicted social injustice.

Despite a striking parallelism, the Jewish Haskalah and the Armenian progressive movement of the early nineteenth century and, for that matter, the roles of the maskilim and of Armenian progressive writers in their respective communities, had a fundamental difference: the Armenian enlightenment movement aimed to elevate national consciousness and patriotism and sow the seeds for a national struggle for freedom, whereas the maskilim aimed to achieve a balanced and peaceful coexistence for the Jewish communities and their Christian neighbors. Their solution suggested integration of Jewish communities into gentile societies, abandonment of Jewish tradition, and even conversion. This reformism, sometimes carried to exaggeration, antagonized the Jewish religious leadership and the traditionalist public.

In addition, Armenian traditionalists enjoyed the support of both the Ottoman and the Russian authorities, whereas Armenian progressive intellectuals were always censored and persecuted. Conversely, the maskilim resorted to the coercive power of the German, Austrian, Polish, or Russian authorities to implement plans for reform. In fact, they had the alliance of the gentile governments to help them fight the hegemony of Jewish religious leaders and the isolation of Jewish communities.

New Response in Armenian Renaissance Literature

The Armenian progressive movement, even at its earliest stages, was more politically oriented than the Haskalah, which aimed primarily for social and educational reforms. As a result, most of the literature produced by the early Armenian Renaissance writers has a political slant and entertains the idea of emancipation from the oppressive foreign yoke. Israel Ori's (date of birth is not known) venture in the late seventeenth century, perhaps too progressive to be understood and appreciated in his time, has become now, a century later, a political goal for activists and a source of inspiration for the literati.

As a young man in 1680, Ori decided to travel alone to Europe and pursue the plans of the Armenian delegation, which was dispersed after the sudden death of Catholicos Hakob Jughaietsi. The objective was to appeal to the European powers for help for the Armenian plight. After years of futile negotiations and interaction, Ori finally managed, in October 1701, to meet with Peter the Great, in the hope that since Russians had an interest in Transcaucasia the tsar would agree to consider his proposal. He anticipated that with military assistance from Russia, a simultaneous uprising of Armenians and

Georgians in the Caucasus would result in the liberation of Persian Armenia. Ori died in 1711 without accomplishing his goal.

Hovsep Emin (1726-1809), another devotee of the Armenian emancipation movement, followed Ori's path and spent his entire life appealing to European royalty and political and military leaders to intervene on behalf of the Armenian nation for freedom from Persian and Ottoman repression. His efforts went unrewarded, but he remained optimistic about future possibilities. With the notion of introducing the European public to the Armenian question, Hovsep Emin penned his memoirs in English. Published in London in 1792, this fine example of Armenian political literature places the responsibility for the nation's deplorable predicament on the servile and conformist posture of Armenians toward powerful foreign rulers. It clearly states that foreign oppression was not a fulfillment of God's judgment but the result of the Armenians' lack of courage in defending themselves: "I feel sorry for my religion and my homeland. We are submerged in ignorance and slavery, and like the Jews we are dispersed in the world," Emin writes, "because our fathers did not fight for our homeland."[1]

Indeed, the political aspirations and progressive worldviews of Armenian modern thinkers provoked a new perception of the Armenian plight and a new response to contemporary crisis. Political awakening was especially evident in the Armenian community in India. Movses Baghramian of Madras published in 1772 *Nor tetrak vor kochi hordorak* (A New Book Called Exhortation), an emphatic appeal for the revival of the Armenian people and a stimulus toward a liberation movement:

> I wish the Armenians could become martyrs for the freedom of their homeland. . . . It would have been so much better if some of us sacrificed our lives for the rest, rather than let the whole nation become subservient and slaves of the enemy. . . . We should struggle; we should take arms and learn to use them.[2]

This fresh interpretation of the concept of martyrdom was a blow to the traditional explanation of history. The strictly religious context which explained the act of martyrdom had been secularized by medieval Armenian poets to incorporate social attributes and personal emotions. The Renaissance writers were creating a political context. Martyrdom, to them, was a means toward a political goal, a worthy sacrifice for the freedom of the homeland, a connotation reverting to pre-Christian times.

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[1] *Hai nor grakanutean patmutiun* [History of Modern Armenian Literature], 5 vols. (Erevan: Armenian SSR Academy of Sciences Press, 1962-79), I, 198.

[2] Ibid., I, 18.

Shahamir Shahamirian's (1723-1797) *Girk anvaneal vorogait parats* (A Book Called the Snares of Glory), published in Madras in 1773, is another emotional appeal for self-defense as a means toward emancipation. A new literary theme was in the making which was to become the backbone of the Renaissance literature of later decades. The same theme of extolling armed resistance against the oppressors originated in Jewish literature with I. M. Weissenberg, whose Yiddish novella, *A Shtetl,* describes the anti-Jewish violence during the 1905 Russian Revolution and foreshadows future pogroms.

The liberal ideologies kindled by Indian-Armenian intellectuals were not isolated sparks. Armenian progressive writers, especially the Russian-Armenian intellectuals and the Mkhitarist fathers, strove to disseminate the seeds of patriotism and to revive the spirit of national self-esteem and awareness of past glories. Nationalism was a common ground for the emancipatory efforts of various individuals and institutions. The perception of ultimate goals, the methods undertaken to achieve them, and the projections about the nation's future were diverse, however. In spite of a homogeneous façade of patriotism, the diversity in approach and frame of mind generated a pluralism, in meaning and expression, in the responses to history during the Armenian Renaissance.

Patriotic tragedies, filled with sentimental pathos invoking past glories and eulogizing the exploits of past heroes, were produced and staged in the Mkhitarist congregation from the 1750s.[3] The Mkhitarists believed that staging examples of patriotism was the most effective way to inspire national pride in the audience, which for them was limited to students and members of the congregation.

The expression of nationalism in Mkhitarist literature represents a polarization of ideas that ranges from staunch support of armed resistance to abject submission and fatalism. Inspired by Father Jakhjakhian's popular tragedy, *Trdati haghtutiune Hrchei vra* (Trdad's Victory over Hrche), staged in 1789, Gabriel Avedikian, a Mkhitarist philologist and theologian, wrote a poem entitled "I menamartutiun Trdata ev Hrchei" (On the Duel of Trdat and Hrche), which admonishes Armenians to shake off timidity and conformism and strive for a better future:

> Throw off your cloak of slavery
> With a vigorous strike at emancipation.
> The glories to come will be greater
> Than those of all your ancestors. (p. 134)

3 For a survey of historical tragedies composed and staged by Mkhitarist fathers, see ibid., I, 131-145. Page numbers for subsequent citations from this work are given parenthetically in the text.

In a dedicatory ode to his own play, staged in 1804, E. Tovmajian, another Mkhitarist monk, encourages the audience to heed the heroic deeds of the protagonist: "Take the example for real. / Face danger for the love of homeland" (p. 136). He appeals to the audience to view the tragedy not as a mere theatrical dramatization removed from reality but as an example to emulatè.

The sentimental patriotism and nationalistic implications in Mkhitarist literature reached their climax in the poetry of Ghevond Alishan (1820-1904), especially the "Nahapeti erger" (Songs of Nahapet), which he published between 1847 to 1850 as the creations of a medieval poet named Nahapet. Perhaps Alishan wished to avoid recognition because of the bold spirit in these poems, which invoke glorious past struggles and openly advocate armed resistance to achieve freedom; or perhaps it was because unlike all other Mikhitarist authors, he wrote the poems in the vernacular (*ashkharhabar*), the language of the masses, rather than classical Armenian. Evidently Alishan, like his contemporary Khachatur Abovian, wanted to reach and educate the Armenian populace which neither read nor understood classical Armenian. Although he and Abovian came from entirely different environments, both advocated armed resistance to obtain emancipation. Abovian conceived his role model in a contemporary setting; Alishan resorted to past heroic examples to stimulate action; in this respect he remained faithful to the Mkhitarist trend. With invocation and exhortation, he sought to awaken Armenians from the lethargy of servitude and ignorance and make them stand up for their rights:

> We are the sons of valiant men, Armenians great and free;
> Our grandsires were descended from a hero-ancestry;
> Our fathers brave on Ararat were strong to draw the bow;
> . . . . . .
>
> No nation can survive unless it glows with patriot flame;
> No son of Armenian race is worthy of his name
> Unless to all the virtues of his father he aspires.
> . . . . . .
>
> Armenia, sit no longer mute and hidden in the shade!
> Through us among the nations shall thy name be glorious made.
> Loyal until our deaths, for thee we'll strive with hearth and hand.
> Then brothers, ardent brothers, long live our native land![4]

In an 1849 article in *Bazmavep*, the literary periodical of the Mkhitarist congregation, Alishan compares the past with the present and once again voices his opinion, thinly disguised in the words of another person. Even as

4 Alice Stone Blackwell, *Armenian Poems Rendered into English Verse* (1917), facsimile ed. (Delmar, N.Y.: 1978), pp. 110-111.

subtly as here, seldom in Mkhitarist literature has the ideology of nationalism and patriotism been expressed with such vigor and tenacity:

> The memory of our unsurpassed heroes and famous men of the past cannot obliterate the reality of our present bondage and misery. . . . Our forefathers are a source of pride to us only when we can emulate them. . . . Someone was boasting that we have trunks full of swords and rifles hung on our walls. "And of course," a listener retorted, "it is because of their lying in the trunks or hanging on the walls that you have not been able to kill even a flea." Indeed, if we want to convince others and especially ourselves that we have arms, we should show them by using them.[5]

On the whole, boundless devotion to Christianity and traditional conformism overshadowed the patriotic aspirations of Mkhitarist literature. Even the heroic episodes of pagan Armenia acquired Christian meaning and interpretation. Father Jakhjakhian's poem, "I pespesutiun baroyits ev vichaki haitnich astvatsayin geraguin imastutean" (For the Diversity of Fortune and Fate as the Manifestation of God's Sublime Wisdom, 1825), reveals a mind influenced by Christian fatalism:

> Why should you complain that someone is a queen and another a maid?
> . . . . . .
> If everyone was worthy of a crown,
> Who would labor in your mill or in your cattle shed?
> Or if the peasant scribbled useless maps as you do,
> Who would till the garden for your comfort? (p. 73)

It is pointless to struggle because everything is predetermined and preordained in heaven; social ranks and dispositions in human societies are God-given arrangements, hence, unavoidable and unquestionable.

There exists a definite parallelism between the Armenian traditionalistic and the Jewish Hasidic worldview. Specifically, the Mkhitarist traditionalism was in concert with Hasidism in that both looked to the past, reviving ancient archetypes and presenting them as role models for the present. But contrary to the Hasidic policy of isolation and more in line with Haskalah thought, the Mkhitarists endeavored to introduce current Western ideas into Armenian literature and to hasten their integration into the Armenian intellectual worldview.

As a general trend for many Mkhitarist authors, national consciousness, enlightenment, and awareness of past glories were adequate tools to guide

5 *Hai nor grakanutean patmutiun*, I, 482. Page numbers of this same source for subsequent citations from the works of the Mkhitarist monks are given parenthetically in the text.

literary responses and the quest for solutions to the national plight. Outside the Mkhitarist congregation a more politicized atmosphere prevailed, with nationalist intellectuals advocating action in order for the nation to gain freedom. Hovhan Vanandetsi (1772-1841), for example, yearns to see a free country that will carry the name of Armenia once again. In order to achieve this goal, he urges the Armenians to shake off servitude and stand as free and tall as did their forefathers. In fact, Vanandetsi is among the first to openly advocate the use of force, as important as enlightenment and honesty for achieving national objectives:

> Your sublime name quickens my heart with new excitement,
> And sighing, I aspire to you,
> To you, to you my only hope,
> Armenia, Armenia, Armenia. . . . (p. 169)

> You are the sons of heroes,
> Do not let the spirit of your ancestors die in you.
> You are from a noble race but grown idle.
> For what is the use of having great heroes as your ancestors
> When with your deeds you debase yourself to
> lowliness. . . . (p. 159)

> In national affairs there are three
> That we know will bring compensation,
> Letter, sword, and trade useful to people. (p. 130)

Tadeos Soginiants (exact dates unknown) focuses on a new facet, life in the diaspora, and points to the futility of the diasporan communities. Armenian poets of the Middle Ages had composed songs about exiles who tried to escape the poverty and misery of their home town by seeking better luck in alien lands. These exiles worked hard, often in miserable conditions, and sent money to their families left behind. More often than not they died poor and lonely, with the pain of unfulfilled yearning devouring their heart and soul. The poems describing the plight of these individuals constitute a genre known as the songs of exile. Soginiants developed a new genre which encompassed the trauma of exile in the collective experience, dramatizing the doom of entire communities outside Armenia rather than the sad fate of an individual exile. In *Tetrak vor kochi voghb Haiastaneaits* (A Book Called an Elegy on Armenia, 1791), he cries out to the Armenians living abroad, "The land that belongs to others cannot be your home. . . . Come to your senses! Enough of what came to pass. Hereafter struggle to gain your own home" (p. 76).

The futility of the diasporan communities and the wisdom of returning to the homeland constituted the principal ideology of the Zionists at the end of the nineteenth century. But the earlier maskilim had a long internal battle to

wage before their progressive ideas could take root and become a political ideology.

Jewish Cantonist Literature

The conflict between Hasidic leaders and the maskilim grew stronger when the Tsarist government, which controlled all Eastern European Jewish communities, issued in 1827 an all-inclusive decree for military service irrespective of race and religion. This decree proved to be beneficial for the Armenians in the Russian Empire as it gave them the opportunity to acquire military training, but it brought hardship and misery to the Jewish communities. During the reign of Tsar Nicholas I, special military training units which drafted minors were formed; they were called Cantonist battalions. The rabbis opposed the drafting of Jewish boys because they considered it to be a violation of religious freedom and a channel for the eventual assimilation of Jewish recruits; the maskilim, however, welcomed the decree as a step toward westernization.

The application of the draft decree was greatly abused by Jewish religious leaders who themselves were forced to fulfill the high quotas levied on the Jewish community. The *khapers* or *lovtshiks* in charge of the draft kidnapped and turned in youths from poor families. The draftees, usually about twelve years old, were isolated from the Jewish community and forced to convert to Christianity. The suffering and bitterness caused by vicious khapers and hypocritical rabbis is well reflected in the Hebrew literature known as Cantonist, which dates from 1827 to 1855, the period of Tsar Nicholas's reign. According to David Roskies, the Jewish community turned inward and blamed its own leaders, believing that the Tsarist government would have prevented the extremes of recruiting minors and forcing conversions had it been aware of these practices. "If Cantonism was a central link in the chain of Jewish suffering," Roskies maintains, "it was because, in the words of one grandmother, not even the *tokheha* among its curses listed the possibility of the Jews being kidnaped by other, pious Jews."[6]

Despite the controversy arising from the draft decree, the maskilim did not lose faith in the Tsarist government's good intentions. A. B. Gottlober, a Haskalah writer of the time, echoes this faith in a story about the Cantonist camps and blames the Hasidim for the catastrophe. In his story the maskilic hero is freed and the *kahal* (Jewish community council) deputy is drafted instead.

[6] David G. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 60.

The Jewish literature of the Cantonist era responded to the hardship of that period in a way entirely unlike the traditional response to catastrophe. The torture of minors and the forced conversions were not considered martyrdom; the usual *tokheha* was not poured over the enemy, nor was there antagonism against the Tsarist government.[7] Rather, the reaction was inward, laying bare the corruption of the Jewish leadership and the decadence of Hasidic teaching. The implementation of the draft decree accentuated existing sociopolitical inequalities, internal exploitation, and corruption. It caused the synagogue hegemony to erode. Russian Jewry needed new values, measures, and ideas in order to survive.

The Armenian Vernacular

Grabar, the classical language used by the Armenian Renaissance writers, slowed the momentum toward enlightenment and emancipation. Communication with the masses and dissemination of ideas in Grabar was impossible. The vast majority could not read Grabar and thus remained untouched by the new ideas. During this same period, the Jewish masses also were detached from the Haskalah literature, not because they were unable to read the literature but because they resented it and remained faithful to the synagogue ideology.

Its richness in syntax, grammar, and tradition notwithstanding, Grabar could no longer serve as an effective vehicle for communication and education. Over the centuries the spoken dialects had drifted away from the static classical literary language—the language of fifth-century Armenia—and the uneducated populace was absolutely unfamiliar with it. Khachatur Abovian (1805-1848), mentioned earlier, a dedicated teacher, writer, and activist, was one of the first to break the language barrier and write in the vernacular. He knew well that this language was crude, full of dialectal elements and foreign words, but he knew equally well that expressed in the vernacular his thoughts and ideas would have a better chance of reaching the masses.

Abovian composed in 1840-41 the first Armenian novel written in the vernacular, *Verk Haiastani* (The Wounds of Armenia), a "Patriot's Lament," as the subtitle informs. The novel, punctuated with versified interjections, is

[7] Anti-Christian sentiments were abundant in the folk songs of the Cantonist era, but when they were published in 1901 these parts were censored by the Tsarist government; see David G. Roskies, ed., *The Literature of Destruction, Jewish Responses to Catastrophe* (Philadelphia, New York, Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1988), p. 116; see pp. 119-121 for examples of Cantonist songs.

indeed a lamentation on the devastated land and its enslaved or slaughtered sons and daughters:

> Woe to a nation whom no one protects in this world,
> Woe to a land that is in enemy's hands,
> Woe to a people who submit to the enemy
> Unable to defend their lives and their land.[8]

Not just another tearful elegy on the plight of the Armenians, Abovian's novel is a guiding light toward a solution, an embodiment of the Armenian people's sociopolitical aspirations. In the face of constricting compliance and numbing conformity, Abovian forges in the personages of Aghasi, Vardan, and their brave friends the character of the future freedom fighters. His protagonists respond to the plight of the Armenian people and defend the honor of their fellow countrymen with their weapons. For the first time in modern Armenian literature, and with a convincing plot in a contemporary setting, armed resistance is advocated and Armenian Christian comformism is rejected.

Petros Agha, portrayed in the novel as a well-respected leader of the community, argues with a clergyman who firmly believes that only prayers and obedience to God will bring deliverance to the Armenian people:

> Jesus Christ himself took Peter's sword away so that the Christian Armenian never takes a sword in his hand. Prayer, lent, fasting, and ritual are the Christian's sword. . . . I agree; we must have all of these. But, I tell you, when you don't have a sword they cut your throat, snatch your children, seize your belongings, and enslave you. This is how it goes. What can you do? (p. 151)

Abovian refutes the religious interpretation of catastrophe, but obviously cannot break with it entirely. The atmosphere is still imbued with religious spiritualism. The prototypical image of Saint Vardan and his martyred troops in the battle of Avarair is mirrored in a new setting in which the freedom fighters prepare for a counterattack. Vardan, the new warrior (symbolically the namesake of Saint Vardan), speaks to his troops to boost their spirit before the combat, but significantly, he ends with a prayer asking God to accept him and his friends into the ranks of the Holy Martyrs of Avarair (p. 202). In this long discourse echoes of the popular interpretations based on religious concepts still reverberate:

> O Lord our God, if before you
> We were sinful, we were unlawful,

[8] Khachatur Abovian, *Verk Haiastani* [Wounds of Armenia], (Erevan: Erevan University Press, 1981), p. 109. Page numbers for subsequent citations from this work are given parenthetically in the text.

> And we did not obey your commandments,
> Why didn't you kill us? Why did you spare us
> Only to put our parents to the sword. (p. 204)

Nonetheless, besides redemption and eternal life, these new martyrs seek the assurance that the example they set will awaken the enslaved nation, and that their armed struggle against the oppressors will continue:

> . . . woe to you if you do not show courage,
> And you do not unite to make use, one day,
> Of this sword, this fire,
> And this flame on your enemy,
> . . . woe to you if you do not burn him, and kill him,
> To free your nation and your land.
> . . . woe to you if you stay poor and miserable
> Like the way you are now. . . . (pp. 205-206)

In line with many Eastern Armenian Renaissance writers, Abovian considered the Russian occupation and influence in Armenia desirable and beneficial. At the same time, contrary to many Haskalah writers for whom a lesser degree of Jewishness was a token of modernization, he struggled for an independent national identity and against the Tsarist policy of Russification.

The increasing use of vernacular reflects a concern for reaching the masses to educate and sensitize them to their own plight. Movses Taghiadian (1802-1858) turned to the vernacular, and particularly in two popular genres of the period, travelogue and journalism, attempted political analysis. In an article in *Azgaser Araratian* (Calcutta, 1852), he criticizes the outdated interpretation of history and attributes Armenia's plight to the tyranny of foreign rulers: "We see that both [the Russian and the Ottoman empires] have huge power, but instead of discreetly putting their power to work to build the world, they use it to terrorize people and to inflict misery upon them and their land." He concludes: "Therefore should we say this is a punishment for our sins?"[9] His scornful attitude toward traditional explanations later explodes into an angry protest paralleling in Armenian literature Perets's or Lamed Shapiro's derision of the concept of sin and punishment in the Jewish response to the pogroms of World War I.

Armenian Renaissance writers gradually refined and embellished the vernacular with the result that a literary language, with its Eastern and Western branches, began to take root among the comparatively enlightened masses. In that language, the press had become an effective vehicle for the dissemination of enlightenment and humanistic ideologies. Nationalistic articles, fiction, and

[9] Quoted in *Hai nor grakanutean patmutiun*, I, 335.

poetry, published in newspapers and periodicals, called on the Armenian people to stand up for their basic human rights and to fight for a free homeland. Among these periodicals were: *Azdarar* (1794-1796), *Shtemaran* (1821-1823), *Azgaser* (1845-1848), and *Azgaser Araratian* (1848-1851) in Calcutta; *Ditak Biuzandian* (1812-1816) in Venice; *Masis* (1852-1908) in Constantinople; *Ararat* (1850-1851) in Tiflis (modern Tbilisi); and finally and most significantly, *Hiusisapail* (1858-1864) in Moscow.

An aesthetic and purely formalistic analysis would not do justice to the literary creations of the Armenian Renaissance. A vast majority of these works would perhaps fall short of literary excellence. In essence, the literature of that time, and even of subsequent decades, is committed to national sociopolitical emancipation. It is *littérature engagée*, to use Jean-Paul Sartre's terminology, loaded with emotional declarations and political slogans. There is no definite line between journalistic discourse colored by oratorical pathos, and artistic, imaginative, fictitious creation. According to Roland Barthes's categorization of literature in "readerly" and "writerly" texts, the majority of these works could be considered as readerly with limited possibilities, because of how little they could mobilize. Even as a mere vehicle of ideology, however, Armenian Renaissance literature deserves a special place in the history of Armenian literature for having shaped the nation's new outlook and for bringing about a turning point in the paradigm of response to catastrophe.

The time frame during which generations of Armenian intellectuals were engaged in the enlightenment and emancipation movement coincides with the Haskalah movement of the post-Cantonist era within the Jewish communities in the Russian Empire. In both instances the trend was toward modernization, which meant also the secularization of language and literature. In the case of the Armenians, the modern literary language was institutionalized and the Armenian masses were brought closer to the national goal of emancipation. In the case of the Russian Jewry, the emphasis was on the instutionalization of secular literature and the dissemination of the ideas of the maskilim.

The draft was relaxed after the death of Nicholas II in 1855, and the reign of Alexander II brought more reforms and eased censorship. With their continued faith in Tsarism, the maskilim applauded the new reforms. Hopes were rekindled for an ideal Russian-Jewish coexistence and the prosperity and perpetuation of Jewish communities within Russian society. Alexander II's liberal policies granted Jews an opportunity for emerging from isolation and being a part of that society. The new openness encouraged a lesser degree of Jewishness in terms of religion, tradition, clothing, and occupation. To expedite this process, the second generation of Haskalah writers, now able to reach the Jewish community through numerous newspapers, periodicals, and publications in modern Hebrew, criticized social ills and described life in the Jewish communities in realistic terms. Jewish writers such as Judah Leib Gordon, Sholem Y. Abramowitsh, Abraham Kovner, and Moses Leib Lilienblum, all destined to play an important role in the shaping of Jewish responses to the forthcoming pogroms, made their first appearance in the periodical press. The ultimate goal of this modernized generation of Jewish intellectuals, according to Roskies, was to find "a rational form of Jewishness within a framework of gentile acceptance."[10]

The Armenian Renaissance literature, on the other hand, with its typical inflated, declamatory style and emotional invocations, inspired readers with national pride and made them aware of their past history. Patriotic songs like those of Gamar-Katipa or Mikayel Nalbandian instilled in young hearts a yearning for freedom, even if the price was loss of life. The last two stanzas of Nalbandian's "Azatutiun" (Freedom) best echo the spirit such songs were meant to transmit:

> Freedom! I called out,
> Let lightning, fire, flares, and iron
> Burst over my head,
> Let the enemy plot—
>
> Until death, until the gallows,
> Until dropped from the scaffold of death,
> I will shout out over and over.
> Endlessly, Freedom![11]

Modern, secular ideas were disseminated to educate an idealistic generation ready to fight for the emancipation and perpetuation of the Armenian people. In this context the "lullabies" composed by various Renaissance poets are significant. Unlike the conventional, gentle songs with which mothers lull their babies to sleep, these lullabies tell how a mother should educate her child and idealize the woman who yearns to see her son fighting for his homeland. Rafael Patkanian's (1830-1892) "Ororotsi erg" (Cradle Song) describes a mother calling upon the birds to comfort her crying child. The song of the nightingale, symbolizing the boy's future as a deacon, does not comfort him; neither does the songs of the *abeghadzag* (a bird symbolizing the clergy), nor the song of the turtledove (a mourner), nor that of the magpie (a thieving silver dealer). Only the battle song of the brave falcon finally soothes the child. The

[10] Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse*, p. 61.

[11] Aram Tolegian, comp. and trans., *Armenian Poetry Old and New* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1979), p. 109. Page numbers for subsequent citations from this work are given parenthetically in the text.

dangers of the battlefield are preferable to the comforts provided by various trades:

> Come, brave falcon, quit your prey,
> Maybe my son will favor your song. . .
> When the falcon appeared my son fell still,
> And slept to the sound of the battle songs. (p. 117)

Patkanian's political ideology is more explicit in a long poem entitled "Kaj Vardan Mamikoniani mahe" (The Death of the Brave Vardan, 1858). The poem describes Armenia and the battle of Avarair in the fifth century from a standpoint different from that of Eghishe. Here the historical setting seems only a convenient backdrop against which Patkanian expresses his political views and forecasts the future—his description is actually more reflective of the contemporary crisis than of that prior to the battle of Avarair. The finale, entitled "Vardani erge" (Vardan's Song), is a long inspiring discourse that Vardan supposedly delivered to the soldiers before battle. Enumerated are all the injustices inflicted upon the nation, each followed by the rhetorical question, "Shall we still be silent?" With oratorical vigor, Vardan encourages his troops to punish the enemy who "Takes away the lands that once belonged to us," who "Robs us of our crown, our speech, our weapons," and who "Uproots us from our homeland" (p. 121). In only one of the nine stanzas does he touch upon the religious aspect of the conflict and speak of the sacrilege of the church. With this new characterization of Vardan, Patkanian overturns Eghishe's religious interpretation of the battle of Avarair. He ends the poem with a vigorous appeal to the nation to face danger and die bravely so that national self-determination, lost long ago, may be regained. Unlike Eghishe's hero, Patkanian's Vardan does not promise redemption and immortality; the soldiers' martyrdom can only restore freedom and glory to the homeland.

A fundamental difference in the perception of past history is evident not only in Patkanian's but also in Stepanos Nazarian's (1812-1879) works. In "Patmabanakan charer" (Historiographical Discourses, 1857) Nazarian analyzes the Ottoman capture of Constantinople in 1453 and praises the heroic defense of the city: "There is no greater or more glorious scene in the whole world than that of a nation which, despite bloody and destructive offensives, has the courage to stand up and safeguard its most sacred and valued belongings, its life and honor, and to take up arms with a gallant zeal either to win the battle or die."[12] His interpretation is an answer to Abraham Ankiuratsi, who four centuries earlier had attributed the fall of Constantinople to God's judgment, his

[12] Quoted in *Hai nor grakanutean patmutiun*, II, p. 78.

punishment of the people and particularly the leaders of the city for their many sins. It is also an answer to contemporary traditionalist thinkers who continued to view history as had their predecessors.

The traditionalists disputed and opposed the literary activities of Armenian progressive writers. They disapproved of the vernacular as a medium for literary creations; they also criticized the glorification and fictionalization in artistic literature of the clandestine Armenian liberation movement. These faithful followers of traditional ideas still wrote in classical Armenian and searched for a solution to the Armenian plight in conformist and compromising measures. Teroyents (Hovhannes Chamurian) and Hovhannes Hissarian, two novelists of the 1860s, condemned those "light-headed" and "opportunist" leaders of "secret organizations" and their "bandit fighters" who dared act against God's will, who turned away from the teachings of the Armenian Church, and who struggled instead for social equality and national self-determination. These dangerous ideas, they thought, could only bring more calamities upon the Armenian nation.

The progressive ideas of Abovian, Patkanian, Nalbandian, Nazarian, and others were bearing fruit in spite of reactionist activities. Ideologies that had revolutionized the European socioeconomic and political structures were now penetrating into the Ottoman-, Russian-, and Persian-occupied lands of Armenia and into Armenian communities in the diaspora. In the wake of political revival, enlightened Armenians could no longer tolerate discrimination, oppression, and forced conversions. The first major airing of grievances and dissent against the Ottoman regime took place at Zeitun in Cilicia in 1862. It began as a revolt against discriminatory and illegal taxation and developed into the first relatively important military action against the Ottoman regular army. This daring endeavor kindled national pride, increased solidarity, and intensified the determination to continue the struggle. The literary response to the Zeitun uprising took many directions within the context of the ongoing paradigm. On the one hand, the event was fictionalized and presented as the only effective response to a national crisis; on the other hand, the conservatives held fast to their traditional explanation of national catastrophes and strongly condemned the new movement. In addition, there were those who believed that it was necessary to arouse national sentiments and love of freedom among the masses, but who still resorted to the long worn-out method of archetypal approach, praising ancient heros and setting the example for Armenians to follow. Khoren Archbishop Narbey, for example, sought to inspire pride by invoking past heroic deeds and in poems published between 1868 and 1874 he repeatedly resorted to biblical references and the mystical past. In a poem entitled "Let Us Live Armenians," he reasons that Armenians should continue

to struggle and perpetuate and cites apocryphal references to the birth of the Armenian nation and examples of past glories. He ends the poem on a hopeful note of a better future for Armenia:

> Our land is holy; on its sacred soil
> God walked, what time he Adam forth did drive;
> Our language he devised; he spoke it first:
> Then, brethren, as Armenians let us live![13]

In another poem entitled "Let Us Die Armenians," Narbey shows how a better future can be achieved:

> Anchor your hope, too, on the cross! Have faith
> The light will shine, since you to it are true.
> It was your nation's bulwark; be it still
> Weapon and flag to you! (p. 56)

Not much has changed over the centuries. Just as Ghevond the Historian (eighth century) ignored the need for Armenians to fight, believing that God would eventually act against the enemy, Narbey, too, envisages the nation's revenge through God and concludes: "Let the nation's foe / Alone accursed be" (p. 57). The only political message is in the opening stanza, a warning not to rely on foreign help:

> Brothers, we have no hope from foreigners;
> Gaze not around for aid! Though with good-will
> The foreigner receive you as a guest,
> He is an alien still. (p. 55)

The Armenian leadership of the time had learned a lesson from the sad experience of waiting and hoping for foreign intervention to relieve Armenian suffering under the Ottoman Empire. The message was now being passed on to the masses.

The Zeitun uprising became a source of inspiration for patriotic literature, realistic as well as romantic in vision and expression, and advocating further action. Smbat Shahaziz's (1841-1907) series of poems, "Azatutean zhamer" (The Hours of Freedom), and Mkrtich Peshiktashlian's (1828-1868) "Mah kajordvuin" (The Death of the Hero), "Taghumn kajordvuin" (The Burial of the Hero), and other poems of the series of "Zeituni Erger" (Songs of Zeitun), express the enthusiasm and excitement this incident generated. Once again, death in defense of the homeland was idealized. The splendid vision of a dying

[13] Blackwell, *Armenian Poems*, p. 52. Page numbers for subsequent citations from this work are given parenthetically in the text.

soldier and the image of the emancipated nation replaced the vision of the Christian martyr joining the heavenly host in eternity.

Humble, unknown heroes who waged a difficult war against foreign rulers and young intellectual activists who lived a dangerous life disseminating revolutionary ideas and elevating people's consciousness inspired the birth of dream characters like Karo, Aslan, Haso, Vardan, and others in the novels of Raffi (1837-1888). With powerful diction, rich imagery, and convincing plots, Raffi depicted brave men striving to overthrow an unjust socioeconomic and political structure. On the road toward that goal, Raffi advocated, it was essential to abolish the traditional conformism that had cost Armenians their sense of determination and their national pride.

To illustrate the Armenian clergy's submissive and servile frame of mind, Raffi reports his conversation with a village priest in *Parskakan Patkerner* (Persian Tableaus):

> "Our Lord Jesus Christ says, 'Graze my sheep.' This means that we, the Armenian Christians, should be like sheep in order to become worthy of God's kingdom."
> "Do you mean to say that when the foreigners plunder, dishonor and murder us, we Christian Armenians should tolerate it quietly and patiently?"
> "Yes, that is right son, 'Patience is worth a life' the Bible says."
> Hearing the clergyman speak like this, it becomes clear to me; Armenian weakness truly reaches sheepish timidity.[14]

The protagonist Karo protests in a similar vein in *Kaitser* (Sparks), a novel inspired by the contemporary national struggle: "The priest-teacher preached blind obedience and taught us to bow our heads and submit to every authority, no matter how heavy and unbearable the yoke."[15] Countering expressions of pessimism and total submission with the vision of a just social order which, he believes, will eventually prevail, Raffi underscores the absolute fatalism emanating from a priest's advice to his flock:

> We should not worry about the life in this world. This life is vain and ephemeral. For each person God has predetermined his daily living, more for one, less for another. God will not leave His creatures hungry. No matter how much man tries, he cannot change what God has determined for him. (p. 337)

[14] Raffi, *Parskakan patkerner* [Persian Tableaus] (Vienna: Mkhitarian Press, 1913), pp. 347-348.

[15] Raffi, *Kaitser* [Sparks], Vol. 1 (Erevan: Haipethrat, 1963), p. 328. Page numbers for subsequent citations from this work are given parenthetically in the text.

In the same novel, Haso dreams of a better life for the exploited: "When justice and equality reign again, when the worker is liberated from exploitation by the rich, then it will be the worker's paradise" (p. 336). It was time to take control over the course of history, to have faith in the power of the masses whose subversive potential was a guarantee of a better life for the suppressed and exploited:

> People, the masses, are a power. They cannot tolerate the brutal hand that suppresses and enslaves them. They will rise eventually; they will shatter their chains and shake off the yoke of the tyrant. The moment has come. . . . Our nation lives in that stage. (p. 463)

The entire spectrum of Raffi's novels, with settings both contemporary and past, encapsulates the ideologies, worldviews, and responses to the national dilemma in the Armenian Renaissance literature.

Thus the Renaissance literature reveals two major directions. The first is inward, revolving around criticism of inner conflicts within the existing socioeconomic structure. By criticizing the current situation and directly confronting the problems, the Renaissance writers aimed at changing the status quo for the sake of a better future for the Armenian people. They addressed the ills of the society, the exploitation of the poor, the moral decadence of the rich, the ignorance of the clergy, the poverty and misery of the intellectual minority, and the alienation of youth with respect to the agony of the nation. The inward direction of responses reverberates in journalistic articles and artistic literature, ranging from songs of exile and love poems to pastoral themes, drama, and satire.

The second direction is outward, focusing on the hardships imposed by foreign rule and by intolerable interrelations with the oppressors. Representing also Armenian political aspirations, this kind of literature aimed to ignite a yearning for political emancipation. The theme was expounded mostly in patriotic poetry, journal articles, romantic novels, and short stories. Owing to the scarcity of current models, the inspiration for this literature came largely from distant history, glories of the past.

In terms of motifs, ideas, goals, and messages, the literature of inward direction has parallels in the literature of the maskilim. But the political ideology of national emancipation and freedom of homeland which triggered the outwardly directed literature was far more subdued, and in nineteenth-century Haskalah literature only in its embryonic stage. Armed struggle in self-defense was to be reflected later, in the literary responses to the Jewish pogroms of the early twentieth century.

The 1880s

The 1878 Berlin Conference marked a turning point in the history of the Armenian national struggle. Religious and secular leaders whose hopes for reforms, and even autonomy, were kept high by the promises of the Great Powers before the conference, were now confronted by indifference. This deception taught Armenians a lesson. It was quite clear now that those who had military power, like the Balkan people, could make themselves heard and gain independence for their homeland. Khrimian Hairik, head of the Armenian delegation at the Berlin Conference and later Catholicos at Echmiatsin, portrayed the atmosphere at the conference with an analogy: nations with an "iron ladle" (military power) and the ability to fight could get their share of "the porridge" (justice), but no one listened to those without. Armenians only had petitions to present, and when they tried to get their share of the porridge their "paper ladle" collapsed. The outcome of the conference was shocking, disappointing, and frustrating, but the worst was yet to come. The indifference of the European Powers vis-à-vis the Armenian question encouraged Sultan Abdul Hamid II to personally take charge of the issue and eliminate the Armenian question once and for all. The result was an escalation of repression, censorship, and persecution. Armenians living in the Caucasus, on a small segment of their historic lands now under Russian rule, fared only slightly better. There, the governmental policy, implemented more forcefully in the 1880s, was gradual assimilation of minorities into Russian society. This policy increased censorship, stifled national sentiments, promulgated restrictive laws, and banned political activities.

During this period, and especially after the assassination of Alexander II in 1881, an intense anti-Semitic propaganda was unleashed because of the suspicion of a Jewish conspiracy in the plot to kill the tsar. The alienation and intolerance of Jews by the Russian government and populace increased drastically, and the heretofore dormant or subdued anti-Semitic sentiments led to the pogroms, the persecution and slaughter of Russian Jewry. The pogroms of 1881 started on April 27 in Elizavetgrad and soon spread from Kiev to Odessa and the entire Ukraine. The government's intervention was intentionally slow (after the pogroms, the Russians implemented special laws and regulations further isolating the Jews and provoking emigration).

The pogroms marked a turning point in the paradigm of Jewish response to catastrophe, more because of a change in attitude toward calamity rather than the extent of physical and material loss. Just as the outcome of the Berlin Conference had disappointed Armenian progressive writers, the Jewish pogroms of 1881 shocked and confounded the westernized intellectuals—the

maskilim—who had believed in the goodwill of the Russian government and the feasibility of a peaceful, prosperous life for Jews within Russian society.

In the political realm, the persecutions resulted in stepping up the organization of the masses and in the strengthening or creation of Armenian and Jewish political parties. In the realm of literature, however, the responses went in opposite directions: Armenian authors remained emphatically committed to political emancipation, whereas most Jewish writers turned to the prophetic and rabbinic teachings for explaining and giving meaning to catastrophe.

Judah Leib Gordon's famous editorial, "Comfort Ye, Comfort Ye, My People!" reveals this prominent Haskalah writer's reaction to the pogroms. Drawing a parallel between the current pogrom and the suffering of the Jewish people in Isaiah's days, Leib Gordon admonishes the Jews to awaken and identify their own contribution to the disaster. As Isaiah attributed the sufferings of the Jews to the sins they committed so Judah Leib Gordon, also, turns to the Jews and asks them to "seriously and honestly judge whether all accusation against us are false. . . . If we are guilty of any faults we must seek counsel and rid ourselves of them, to exorcise the evil from within us."[16] Michael Stanislawski, in a discussion of this editorial, notes that "with its finely meshed alternation between self-criticism and hope, consolation and rebuke," Judah Leib Gordon's response mirrors Isaiah's prophecy. Leib Gordon's analysis of the situation and his inward criticism, the internalization of the problem, parallel with Raffi's criticism of the internal social ills.

Alan Mintz maintains that the prevailing trend in the Jewish responses was medievalization; in other words, the medieval models (not biblical ones, curiously) were reshaping the response to the new catastrophe. Mintz, too, draws on the example of Judah Leib Gordon and his poem "My Sister Ruhamah," in which the author resorts to the old style of mourning over the destruction and the use of the ancient literary device of personification, depicting Israel as a woman victimized (the memory of Fair Zion):

> Why do you sob, my sister Ruhamah?
> Why are you downcast, why is your spirit agitated?
> Because plunderers have fallen upon your honor and profaned it?
> If the fist has triumphed, the hand of the enemy grown mighty,
> Can the blame be yours, my sister Ruhamah?[17]

[16] For this excerpt and a discussion on the editorial, see Michael Stanislawski, *For Whom Do I Toil? Judah Leib Gordon and the Crisis of Russian Jewry* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press 1988), pp. 167-169.

[17] Alan Mintz, *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 115.

Mintz notes this same phenomenon in the poetry of other pogrom writers like Judah Halevi Levin, M. M. Dolitsky, and Simon Frug (the last a Yiddish poet) and concludes:

> The distinctively biblical mold in which the subject of the pogroms was cast was the result of the conventions of Haskalah poetry and its linguistic ideals. In the wider literary culture of the 1880s and 1890s it was the Middle Ages that were pushed to the center of consciousness. The ground was prepared by the rediscovery in Jewish historiography of the martyrological documents of the Middle Ages.[18]

According to Stanislawski, however, the pseudo-biblical subtitle of "My Sister Ruhamah," which reads, "In honor of the daughter of Jacob who was raped by the son of Hamor," was only intended to elude the tsarist censors.[19] Stanislawski finds no tendency of medievalization in the poem. The trend to return to historic models to avoid the government's suspicion of course has many parallels in the Armenian literature of that same period. Rafael Patkanian's "Vardan's Song" is an example.

Among the Jewish responses to the pogroms of 1881, Sholem Abramowitsch's literature stands out as manifesting an entirely different approach. A strong critic of Jewish backwardness, a proponent of the Haskalah programs for reforms, and a major neoclassic prose satirist, Abramowitsch regarded the nineteenth-century pogroms as a strictly Jewish drama in which, as in Lamentations, the enemy—the non-Jew—does not figure at all. His mock epic "Hanisrafim" (1897), about a class of beggars (*nisrafim*) left homeless by fire, capitalizes on the fact that the concept of sin and punishment, although discarded long ago in the rabbinic response, lived on in the form of superstition among the Jewish masses. For example, he describes how the Jews in Kabtsiel, his hometown, attribute an epidemic of infant deaths to divine punishment for their sins, rather than to the unsanitary conditions in which they live.

Abramowitsch derided the exaggerated lamentations in a group of short stories. His treatment admonished that pathetic sobs over the pogroms mythologized them. Referring to the Destruction of the Temple, a myth unparalleled in history which still brings tears to the eyes, he warns that diluting historical catastrophe into sanctified myth prevents survivors from rallying forces for change. Likening the pogroms to a cancer, he suggests a Jewish mobilization in order to sever the afflicted part and thus prevent the cancer from spreading.

[18] Ibid., p. 116.

[19] Stanislawski, *For Whom Do I Toil*, p. 198.

Saul Tchernichowsky, a young contemporary of Abramowitsch, attacked medievalization in a different manner. In the long poem "Baruch of Mainz," he builds the negative character of the protagonist by turning the account of Master Isaac upside down. By boldly pouring out his rage and his hatred of gentiles with curses, Baruch violates the conventions of the time. Ironically, his curses divert the blaming of gentiles by betraying his need to allevaite his own sense of guilt. At the end of the poem, Baruch does not follow the example of his prototype, Master Isaac, who sacrificed himself in a fire set by his own hands; instead, he emerges from the flames and lives on, representing the tainted figure of the survivor.

Criticism of the traditional response to catastrophe in the works of Abramowitsch and Tchernichowsky, however isolated, is a major departure from the rabbinic approach which sanctified the event and which, without attempting a sociopolitical analysis, stressed its emotional impact. The examples these authors set forth in the late nineteenth century would bear fruit only decades later.

The twenty years of Jewish history after the pogroms of 1881 are marked by political activity, especially by the Zionists and the Bundists, who even organized self-defense groups to fight persecution. The abundance of contemporary political literature is evidence of the deep concern for a solution to the Jewish situation. This does not mean, of course, that the Jewish masses wholeheartedly embraced the new ideas and followed the political parties; on the contrary, a vast majority remained aloof from the issues and continued to adhere to traditionalism.

Jewish political activities did not prevent the pogroms in the Ukraine and Bessarabia, which culminated in the ravage of Kishinev in 1903 and the bloodshed following the 1905 Russian revolution. Although the loss of life and the material damage to the Jewish communities during these pogroms were far more serious than in 1881, the literary responses to both events were similar, the reason being, perhaps, that the later pogroms were not totally unexpected. Already aware of the weakness and vulnerability of the Jewish settlements, Jewish intellectuals realized that gentiles would not accept Jews into their socioeconomic structure and foresaw their ever-increasing enmity erupting into sporadic violence. The return to Jewish reality of S. Ansky (Shloyme-Zanvl Rappoport) and his dedication to Jewish cultural life are an example. This Russified political activist, the "Old Narodnik," became a loyal member of the Jewish community and produced much poetry and fiction intended to reconcile

"his modernist credo and his discarded Jewish past." His most important work is the novella *Behind the Mask* (1909), which portrays a maskilic rebel.[20]

Hebrew and Yiddish poets continued to compose sentimental lamentations, but Abramowitch's and Tchernichowsky's seeds of revolt were begining to bear fruit. Chaim Nachman Bialik's vigorous rejection of the exaggerated lamentations of the victims of Kishinev best reveals the impact. In his long poem "Bair haharegah" (In the City of Slaughter, 1903), Bialik depicts the magnitude of the catastrophe. Unlike his contemporaries, he does not mourn; on the contrary, he ridicules and scolds as cowards those who witness the murder of their loved ones while hiding to save themselves. Like Abramowitsch, he derides those who are about to be killed for crying out "We have sinned," and those who think that being slaughtered like sheep is martyrdom that will be rewarded. In this poem, God is the speaker who challenges the Jews' conformism and incites their anger so that instead of mourning they will protest against him and demand justice for themselves:

> Let them against me raise their outraged hand;
> Let them demand!
> . . . . . .
> Let fists be flung like stone
> Against the heavens and the heavenly throne.[21]

Bialik wanted to reveal the Jews' internal drama by accentuating their inability to defend themselves and by showing how they masked their cowardice and impotence with outdated explanations of catastrophe. He intentionally left out the sporadic acts of self-defense during the Kishinev pogroms to accentuate Jewish vulnerability. Expounding on the significance of Bialik's poem, Alan Mintz writes:

> Martyrdom as a response to catastrophe was appropriate in its time; its persistent idealization in the modern age is a cover for a failure of nerve and a blaspheming of the memory of the truly great. . . . Bialik, in brief, negates not the texts and ideas of the tradition but the liturgical use to which they have been put. To interpret new disasters liturgically, to absorb them into a millennial drama, to draw their destabilizing force, to be quieted by promises of redemp-

[20] For a discussion and analysis of this novella as well as Ansky's role in the Jewish struggle for emancipation, see David G. Roskies, "The Maskil as the Folk Hero," *Prooftexts*, 10 (1990), 219-235.

[21] Roskies, *The Literature of Destruction*, p. 165. The English translation of this long poem is on pp. 160-168.

tion and to persevere in faith—what was appropriate and creative
in its own time has become pretext and evasion.[22]

Weissenberg's novella *A Shtetl*, written in the aftermath of the 1905 pogroms, is another outcry against the traditional response to catastrophe. Weissenberg actually advocates armed resistance, pistols and revolvers instead of psalms. The novella reveals the decline and vulnerability of the Jewish market towns (*shtetlekh*). In the new economic structure in the Russian Empire, which lagged behind the industrialization of Europe, the Jewish market towns had less and less to offer. Once proud of their past glories and their unbreakable covenant with God, Jewish communities were gradually losing their advantageous position. The shtetls were becoming useless and were vulnerable to resentment and attack from within and without.

Gradual digression from synagogue interpretations and the intensifying sociopolitical analyses in literature drew the Haskalah literature closer to the Armenian progressive writings. With the increase in persecutions following the Berlin Conference, the political activities and armed struggle of the Armenians triggered acts of revolt, self-defense, and retaliation. These ventures, in turn, served as inspiration for a more realistic patriotic literature. Nevertheless, romantic invocation of past glories and hyperbolic role models based on Armenian archetypes lingered as a favorite trend even among progressive writers.

Just as Tchernichowsky had derided the sanctification of past catastrophes and Abramowitsch had criticized the mythicizing of past heroes, so too did Hovhannes Hovhannisian (1864-1929). In protesting against the exaggerated romantic eulogies of the past and the fetishizing of ancient heroes, he was questioning and criticizing a characteristic trait in early Armenian Renaissance literature. For as much as resorting to archetypes to exemplify heroism and patriotism had been appropriate and necessary in the Renaissance literature, the approach was now becoming obsolete. The rhetoric of patriotic poetry, already worn out from overuse, needed reforming. Hovhannisian initiated the reform by negating the conventional treatment of the past. His poem "Siuneats ishkhane" (The Prince of Siunik) was a blow against tradition. It was dedicated to Prince Vasak, a character who comes forth through ancient Armenian historiography as the notorious traitor of the fifth-century battle of Avarair. Vasak's pathetic confessions and patriotic justifications for his actions challenge the traditional interpretation of the battle. The poem's bold prelude scorns the overglorification of history and the sanctification and excessive eulogizing of past heroes:

[22] Mintz, *Hurban*, p. 150.

Immortalized by the luster of blood and by sufferings,
The days of the past appear now as a dream.
I gaze at them not with pride
But a profound sympathy.
What did our much-praised, brave ancestors leave for us?
An inglorious homeland of tears and lamentation.
And the rain of flowers,
Which, with the childish joy of the mindless,
We are the first to spread,
I view as a sign of our wretched soul:
A mass of slaves who love the chains,
This is the unworthy heritage they left for us.[23]

Hovhannisian's strong reaction signals a new approach in the making, one that might have developed into a realistic self-analysis and a healthy encounter with and evaluation of past Armenian history. His search for a new stance for viewing history could have been the beginning of a new paradigm in the literary responses to history, but his attempt was curtailed by another devastating and brutal wave of Armenian massacres and persecutions. The literary movement was not destined to unfold further along its course.

In similar circumstances and with similar objectives, East European Haskalah writers were also following the path of modernization in their responses to collective sufferings. Engaged in strong criticism of the corrupt inner structures, they aimed to achieve a peaceful coexistence with the gentile world. But like the Armenians, the Jews had yet another catastrophe ahead, the culmination of all past pogroms, which would not only put an end to Jewish prosperity but virtually eliminate the Jewish presence in Eastern Europe.

[23] Hovhannes Hovhannissian, *Hatentir* [Selected Poems] (Erevan: Haiastan Press, 1971), p. 204.

3

Rehearsal for Genocide

The situation in the Ottoman Empire took a turn for the worse in the late 1880s. The increasing arrests, mass murders, and sociopolitical upheavals were symptomatic of a serious crisis nationwide. The Tsarist government on the other side of the border was intensifying its pressure on any nationalistic expression in Russian Armenia. The strong censorship of Armenian publications in both the Ottoman and Russian empires stifled the voices of protest and cries of suffering.

The wave of massacres in Ottoman Armenia and the persecutions of the 1890s were triggered by an incident in Sasun, a mountainous region where a cluster of hard-to-reach Armenian villages maintained a semblance of independence and where Armenian revolutionary ideas and emancipatory thoughts were quickly absorbed. In 1894, the people of Sasun, encouraged by the revolutionary activists of the Armenian Hnchak party, refused to pay the illegal taxes exacted by the Kurdish chieftains. The Kurdish reprisal, the Sasunites' armed defense, and the intervention of the Ottoman army on the side of the Kurds eventually resulted in the massacre of the Armenian population of Sasun. Over the next two years, the massacres spread throughout Ottoman Armenia, from Trebizond to Erzerum, Bitlis, Kharbert, Marash, and Aintab. As many as 300,000 Armenians were killed, tens of thousands were forcibly converted to Islam, and 2,000 villages were burned to ashes. Although the massacres were not completely unexpected, their magnitude, unprecedented brutality, and swift, spontaneous spread throughout the country destroyed any hope for a peaceful settlement of the Armenian question. Coexistence between

Turks and Armenians in the heterogeneous Ottoman Empire now seemed impossible.[1]

The horrors were too enormous for Armenian writers to assimilate. The literary reaction was silence: creative imagination had been stifled by shock, bewilderment, and a crisis of language and of overpowering emotions. The second generation of writers, who had advocated armed struggle and eulogized the exploits of the *fedayee-s* (Turk. guerrilla fighters; literally, persons who sacrifice their life for a cause), were left speechless. The tools handed down by their predecessors were inadequate for coping with a collective misery of this magnitude. The silence was breached, however, by the echoes of popular songs, anonymous folktales dedicated to a valiant act of resistance or commemorating the martyrdom of a hero. A study of the revolutionary songs of that era reveals many aspects of popular responses to foreign oppression and of the Armenian plight.[2]

The emotional shock of unexpected catastrophe tends to paralyze the poetic expression of a sensitive artist. Secondary writers are usually less affected, their limited artistic imagination being less vulnerable. Mihran Damadian, a teacher in Sasun and a member of the reformed Hnchak party, was one such poet and revolutionary activist. Suspicious of his activities, the Ottoman government had him arrested in 1893 and he was sent in chains to a prison in Constantinople. His prison reminiscences, in a poem entitled "Bantarkeal heghapokhakan" (The Imprisoned Revolutionist), are a daring protest against the oppressors and echo the persecutions that preceded the Sasun massacres:

> Rejoice! Another revolutionist,
> Turk, you have caught and in your prison pent.
> I too have fallen victim to your wrath;
> But know, O tyrant, that I am content.[3]

Damadian calls the prison a dungeon where Greeks, Serbians, Montenegrans, and Bulgarians have been tortured for aspiring to deliverance from the Turkish

[1] For a brief historical overview of the events in this time period, see Christopher J. Walker, *Armenia, The Survival of a Nation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980), pp. 140-173.

[2] For a brief analysis and a discussion of various themes in the revolutionary songs, see Rubina Peroomian, "Heghapokhakan-fedayakan ergere Artatsolkn en Hai Heghapokhakan Dashnaktsutean gaghaparabanutean" (The Revolutionary Fedayee Songs Reflect the Armenian Revolutionary Ideology), *Asbarez* (Los Angeles), December 13, 1985.

[3] Perch (Mihran Damadian), *Nershnchumner* [Inspirations] (Cairo: Vima Press, 1898), pp. 38-40. For English translation of the poem cited, see Alice Stone Blackwell, *Armenian Poems Rendered into English Verse* (1917), facsimile ed. (Delmar, N.Y.: 1978), pp. 230-232.

yoke. Now, he believes, it is the Armenians' turn. The revolution demands sacrifice, and he is a martyr whose death will bring the nation one step closer to freedom:

> I enter prison gladly, kiss my chains,
> Embrace the darkness with a chilling breath.
> Better the gallows is than your base yoke,
> And revolutionists can sport with death. . .
> Then what to me is prison, torture, chains?
> "Long live Armenia!" my last sigh will be.
> What care I even for death? By this my death
> The martyr nation shall at last be free!

This poem is perhaps not the cry of a great poet but that of a freedom fighter raging at his nation's persecutors, a man convinced that only revolution can bring about the emancipation of his people. Configuring a daring response to the calamities, the poem reflects the reactions of thousands of brave men and women who chose to reject the path of servitude and conformity and fight.

Established writers and poets of the time, whether expatriates who fled to avoid persecution or those who remained, could not find words to describe and explain the massacres of 1894-96. The event was too immediate, and needed distance and the mediation of time. Eastern Armenian poets, however, whose involvement was predominantly through the eyewitness accounts of Western (Ottoman) Armenian survivor-refugees, were quick to respond.

It is no accident, therefore, that the first response came not from within the fires of the hell, but from a poet in distant Russian Armenia, Hovhannes Hovhannisian, whose fresh new style and perceptions had already in the 1880s rejuvenated the stagnating poetry of the Armenian Renaissance. The poem he wrote in 1894 in the wake of the Sasun massacres is one of sorrow and disillusionment:

> We lived and suffered through the centuries
> And we waited patiently,
> Obedient to our fate,
> Hoping for this misery to end.
>
> And today, behold! With the torrent of blood
> The blue sky has blushed.
> Helpless sighs and cries of sadness
> Have snatched the smiles from our face.[4]

[4] Hovhannes Hovhannisian, *Hatentir* [Selected Poems] (Erevan: Haiastan Press, 1971), p. 132. Page numbers for subsequent citations from this work are given parenthetically in the text.

One year later, Hovhannisian wrote another poem alluding to the massacres that were spreading throughout the Ottoman Empire. He laments no more, but conscious of his poet's calling, he ponders his choices:

> Even if there is misery and torture
> Even if the only sound heard
> Is the clatter of the chains of slavery
>
> Do not lose your hope! Stand up!
> Take your lyre and sing!
> Sing the song of sufferings!
> Lament and let us lament with you.
>
> Or let the robust cords of your lyre,
> Like the bells of victory,
> Move the lifeless souls. . .
> Let your voice thunder. . .
> In a world liberated by blood.

Indeed, the poet can either lament the loss and have others weep with him, as the traditional writers have done, or he can listen to Shelley: "Be the mirror of futurity," and as an artist, "the man of imagination," work toward the realization of Saint-Simon's dream to "Initiate the march" and lead the masses toward a glorious future.[5] Hovhannisian adopted the latter course; he chose to exhort the nation to fight, to shed blood for the freedom of the homeland. The poem ends in an exaltation of military victory and a strong expression of confidence in the future.

The waves of massacres did not end quickly, as Hovhannisian had anticipated. Hope shattered, he questions his own optimism in "Sgo orer" (Days of Mourning, 1896) and resorts to the traditional response, the old poetic device of mourning and lamentation:

> Heavy clouds are piled above your head,
> Can sorrow be any more morbid than this?
> Oh, let the tears bitterly fall
> Like torrents from my pale eyes.
>
> Or, perhaps, O my heart! you are so invincible
> That you will endure this pain too.
> Or, perhaps, your hope is so strong

5 In *De l'organisation sociale* (1825), Claude Henri de Saint-Simon regards artists as the cultural avant-guarde who will lead "the triumphant march of mankind toward its glorious socialist future." Quoted in Matei Calinescu, "Literature and Politics," in Jean-Pierre Barricelli and Joseph Gibaldi, eds., *Interrelations of Literature* (New York: MLA of America, 1982), p. 128.

> That you still believe the sun will shine;
> You will find new strength and new life again;
> Spring will once again flower for you. (p. 140)

The initial hope for a speedy end to the disaster has faded. Hovhannisian is barely able to absorb the events. It is only his strong faith in his calling and role in society that makes him keep on singing. His response wavers between unresolved emotions and tearful lamentations and a desperate drive to cling to the last bit of hope, to overcome the sorrow, to fight and vanquish the evil.

Avedis Aharonian (1866-1948) is another Eastern Armenian writer and member of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation who learned of the persecutions that followed the Russo-Turkish war in 1877-1878 and about the massacres of the 1890s from Western Armenian refugees. Moved by their accounts, he recreated the pathetic fate of the Ottoman Armenians in his short stories. His fictionalizing of pain, sorrow, tears, and suffering to portray the transtemporal grief of the Armenian people earned him the attribute of *vshti ergich* (the poet of grief).

"Put em kat" (A Drop of Milk), "Pshur em khats" (A Crumb of Bread), and other early works are somber depictions of torture and slaughter, filled with helpless sighs, appeals for sympathy, and lamentations on the misery of the sufferers. Only much later does Aharonian regain some calm and replace emotional outbursts with a cooler analysis. One of his best stories is entitled "Khaie" (The Armenian, 1898) (*khai* is a dialectal form of the word *hai*, a name for Western Armenian refugees, that is, those coming from the lands of historic Armenia). In this story, the first in the series *Azatutean chanaparhin* (On the Road to Freedom, published as a separate volume in 1902), Khai proclaims, to the amazement of the men of the village, the priest, the *melik*, and the *res*, that he does not believe in destiny. On a stormy winter night, disdainful of the evil spirits hovering over the little Armenian village, he tells his story to the frightened peasants. This unusual man, the reader discovers, had been a fedayee fighting in the mountains of Western Armenia, where an unexpected turn of events and escape from death at the hands of a Kurd taught him not to surrender to fate.

With the characterization of the fearless Khai, Aharonian inaugurates a new direction in his literary response to catastrophe, manifest in his subsequent short stories, "Pative" (The Honor, 1899), "El mi aghotir" (Don't Pray Anymore,1899), "Ariunot ttkhmor" (Bloodstained Yeast, 1899), and others. These stories embody the author's new perception of the Armenian tragedy, a perception that reflects also the multifaceted and conflicting reactions of the Armenian masses. Aharonian had come to believe that blind obedience to fate and surrender to God's will brought many miseries upon the nation. It was time

to act, to take arms and defend one's life, honor, and possessions, to say no to the lessons of patience and obedience and fight. Tatul, in "Don't Pray Anymore," expresses Aharonian's views. Tatul's father, the priest of the village, shocked by his son's decision to leave the church and join the fedayees, comes to understand him only when he is dying from a Turkish bullet. With his last breath he whispers, "Don't ... pray ... anymore ... God ... will forgive you."[6] How significant that in similar circumstances Yekl, the protagonist in I. M. Weissenberg's *A shtetl*, shouts at the rabbi, "No psalms! ... Only arms, real arms!"[7]

The immediate response to the massacres of 1890s by the Western Armenian writers was silence. Two years later, Grigor Zohrab (1861-1915), writer, publicist, and member of the Turkish parliament, who would himself become a victim of the Genocide, alluded cautiously to the massacres in his article "Ergenk" (Let Us Sing):

> We should not lose strength and stumble in the face of life's events; we should confront them openly as we would act toward an unwelcome visitor. Our public needs to sing and laugh in order to achieve the mental and spiritual health without which progress is impossible. A nation that laments has never been useful for anything.[8]

Zohrab's concern about the nation's state of mind is evidence of the terrible impact of the massacres on the collective psyche of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. Indeed, continued persecutions and the way in which they were directed to perceive and interpret catastrophes had changed the character of the Armenian people. Zohrab suggested confronting the problem in order to shake off the mournful attitude toward life and adopt a new, optimistic look toward the future.

Why did it take so long for Zohrab to speak out? Was it censorship? Was it the magnitude of the catastrophe that mesmerized the author? Censorship, of course, was an important factor, for during the 1880s and 1890s Armenian publications were closely controlled. Large number of periodicals and newspapers were shut down and many Armenians were arrested on the suspicion of nurturing revolutionary ideas.

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6 Avetis Aharonian, *Azatutean chanaparhin* [On the Road to Freedom] (Tehran: Alik Press, 1956), p. 38. The stories were first published in the periodical *Droshak* (Geneva), in 1902.

7 See David Roskies, ed., *The Literature of Destruction, Jewish Responses to Catastrophe* (Philadelphia, New York, Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1988), p. 171.

8 First published in *Masis*, Feb. 15, 1898; repr. in Grigor Zohrab, *Erkeri zhoghovatsu* (Collection of Works), Vol. 2 (Erevan: Haipethrat, 1962), p. 399.

In Mihran Damadian's poem, "Nahatak Smbatin mor voghbe" (The Lament of Martyred Sumpat's Mother), the lyric hero is arrested and tortured to death because of a fragment found among his papers, which read: "The Turk is as wild as a wild cedar tree."[9] Hakob Oshakan, too, speaks of the rigidity of the period. In his account of the Armenian literature of the 1900s, he attests that for the Western Armenian poets and writers in the Ottoman Empire, it was "a terrible nightmare to witness the agony of the nation, and not only remain silent but pretend to be contented. Our immense suffering," he adds, "was a forbidden zone for our literature." This period "symbolizes the brutal violence imposed upon our literature."[10]

Despite all this evidence, I am still skeptical that the government's measures, censorship and persecution, could have suppressed all expression of emotions and grievances. Artistic talent and creative imagination can always find a way to circumvent censorship and give expression to national trauma. Ruben Zardarian, for one, tried allegory and created images suggestive of the Armenian tragedy. It is perhaps more plausible to think that the shock and confusion after the events and the inability to find words to express the unspeakable were responsible for the silence. This hypothesis may explain why writers who had fled abroad and were free of censorship also remained silent for a time.

Arpiar Arpiarian (1852-1908) was one of the Armenian intellectuals who fled in 1896 to avoid arrest, but it was not until 1898 that he began writing a novel about the persecutions of the 1890s. He completed the project in 1902, but the narrative, curiously, stopped short of the actual scenes of the 1894-1896 massacres. This talented and popular writer was not prepared to confront the complex universality of a catastrophe that raised troubling issues regarding the human predicament. Notwithstanding all its shortcomings, Arpiarian's novel *Karmir zhamuts* (The Red Offering) is an important work in that it elucidates a number of perceptions of and approaches to the Armenian problem by contemporary Armenians of different dispositions. The character Ter Husik personifies the modern clergy, who challenge traditional conformist attitudes and criticize Armenian leaders for having blunted the nation's dignity and its spirit of self-defense by preaching obedience. Ter Husik is a revolutionary who openly advocates and actually assists the nation's armed struggle. Then there is Arsham, the political activist, a hero of reaction, a man of words incapable of

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9 Blackwell, *Armenian Poems*, p. 237.

10 Hakob Oshakan, *Hamapatker arevmtahai grakanutean* [Panorama of Western Armenian Literature], Vol. 9 (Antilias, Lebanon: The Cilician Catholicosate Press, 1980), pp. 249 and 259.

real action. His character resembles the *schlemiel* in the Jewish literature of World War I, discussed later. Another character is a leader of the community, Hairapet Efendi, a cautious wealthy merchant who "knows" how to deal with government officials, and does it best by compliance and servitude. His views are shared by the majority of the people; obviously it could not be otherwise, because the majority of Armenians were subordinates of their own wealthy class and subservient to them in every respect.

With these diverse mentalities at play, the *The Red Offering* develops as a succession of clashes, but ends with victory for the revolutionary approach at the same time emphasizing also the importance of diplomatic cautiousness. Hairapet Efendi is imprisoned by the same government officials he thought he could handle so easily, and still faithful to traditionalism, turns to God to ask which sins are responsible for his suffering. While in prison, he meditates over the past and realizes the failure of his efforts in view of the enemy's actual intentions. Meeting with Ter Husik after his release, he gives the priest a bag of gold to buy weapons for the nation. Taking the bag, Ter Husik says that this is "red offering," implying the revolutionary purpose of that special donation.

Siamanto's (1878-1915) first poems also reflect an initial confusion. Siamanto, who was destined to become a victim of the Genocide, had fled the persecutions of 1894-1896. After wandering in shock in the Near East and Europe, he finally settled in Paris, but even in the safety of that haven it took a long time for him to recover, to break the wall of silence and write his first poem, "Kotorats" (Massacre, 1898). The nightmare is still vivid in the author's mind. He has not yet confronted the catastrophe, grasped the reality, digested it, and coped with it. The only escape is to close eyes and ears and shut oneself off, cut communication, and pretend detachment:

> Massacre! massacre! massacre!
> In the cities and outside the cities in our land.
> And the barbarians, with booty and blood,
> Return leaving the dead and the dying.
> Flocks of ravens hover above.
> Bloody is their mouth; they chortle like drunks ...
> Listen! listen! listen!
> The sound of storm in the waves of the sea ...
> O! close your windows and your eyes too,
> Massacre! massacre! massacre![11]

[11] Siamanto, *Amboghjakan erker* [Complete Works] (Beirut: Sevan Press, 1974), p. 181. This poem was first published in 1898 in an Armenian magazine in Manchester, England. In 1906 Siamanto published a collection of his poems entitled *Hogevarki ev huisi jaher* (Torches of Agony and Hope), in which this poem was included but renamed "Mahvan tesil" (Phantom of Death).

In "Ap me mokhir haireni tun" (A Handful of Ash), a poem in the series *Hogevarki ev huisi jaher* (Torches of Agony and Hope), Siamanto still laments the destruction of his homeland. The dilemma persists. He is unable to push the haunting images from his mind; on the contrary, instead of mellowing with time, the memories have intensified:

> I learned with tears, with tears I learned of the ruins,
> Of your broad walls battered down, stone by stone,
> Onto your fragile border of flowers in the garden ...
> On a terror-filled day, day of slaughter, of blood ...[12]

Siamanto's style has grown richer: his descriptions are smoother, an ease of expression is evident. But terror still hovers on the horizon of his mind. In fact, the terror continued to dominate his imagination and became the central theme and the driving force in his poetry.

In his first collection of poems, *Diutsaznoren* (Heroically), published in 1902 in Paris, Siamanto is at the peak of his descriptive talent. He now believes that daybreak is near, hopes and dreams will soon come true, but the nation must stand up and fight for the realization of that bright future. New also is the participation of the ghosts of ancient Armenian heroes, who have come to cry out their protest and to convey their message:

> Take the lightning sword bravely in your hand,
> And with your sword, under the bright stars,
> After taking the Oath of oaths,
> Cross our swords,
> And at least for once in your life, get out of yourself.
> If you can, walk with us. Here is the way.[13]

In terms of response to catastrophe, Siamanto's first collection of poems contains no new concepts. There are appeals for revenge, revolt, and retaliation, exemplified by the deeds of mythic heroes from the glorious past. What is unusual, however, is the poet's strong optimism. In this respect, he is in accord with the trend set forth by the Renaissance writers.

Siamanto breaks his silence with his first expressions of pain in the form of elegy and lamentation. The genre makes it possible to speak once again. Then suddenly, with an enthusiastic projection into the future, he transports the reader into a world of sanguine optimism. Optimism toward the future, a revival of the Renaissance spirit, though seemingly untimely and inappropriate

[12] Blackwell, *Armenian Poems*, p. 225.

[13] Siamanto, *Amboghjakan erker*, p. 15.

in the midst of the unresolved dilemma, is shared by most turn-of-the-century writers. Still reeling from the recent horrors, these writers once again nurture the visions that Renaissance writers had dreamed of in vain. The reason is, perhaps, the turn of the new century and the expectations of a new era and a new world. This attitude was encouraged by some favorable political developments, notably international interest in the Armenian Question and, of course, the immediate, exhilarating effects of the Armenian armed struggle. Maybe the fact that the nation had survived an era of disasters and calamities inspired optimism and, at the close of the nineteenth century, gave way to a bright vision for the future.

Daniel Varuzhan's (1884-1915) long poem "Jarde" (The Carnage) best expresses this temperament.[14] First published as a pamphlet in 1907, it was subsequently reprinted in 1909 with other poems sharing the same theme in a collection entitled *Tseghin sirte* (The Heart of the Race). "The Carnage" reveals the persistence of the unresolved dilemma of the 1894-1896 massacres in Varuzhan's mind, a psychological crisis with lasting impact on his creative imagination. More than a mere description of atrocities, the poem is a powerful cry of hatred for and protest against executioners who are driven by animal instinct to kill and devour, whose only intellection is their inflamed religious fanaticism:

> The command! There. In the sermon in Pilal
> Rancor thrusts like the horns of a bull;
> In the diligent courtyards of the mosques,
> Sticks are shaped, whips are weaved
> With venomous snakes.
> Sabers are sharpened.

Varuzhan was seeking reasons for the massacres and exploring the motivations of the perpetrators; he could not possibly foresee his own execution in a more devastating catastrophe, the Genocide of 1915. With bitter irony in this poem, he "blames" the Armenians for eliciting the sympathy of the Great Powers in San Stefano and Berlin (a reference to the conferences of 1878, after the Russo-Turkish War) and for sharing their grievances with the European powers. He infers sarcastically that these were sins that instigated the anger of the Turks, and concludes that therefore, the Armenians brought the calamities upon themselves. In the same poem, however, he also addresses the nature of the perpetrators and lays bare the barbarian spirit of the Turks, "the spirit of

[14] Daniel Varuzhan, *Banasteghtsakan erker* [Poetic Works] (Antilias: Cilician Catholicosate Press, 1986), pp. 141-149.

Alp Aslan" that fills the world with the corpses of those who try to interrupt its dreadful thrust by asking for their right to live.

"The Carnage" is an extraordinary fusion of traditional and modern responses to catastrophe: Armenia is personified, in the fashion of Movses Khorenatsi's "Lamentation," as a mournful, wretched woman. Varuzhan, the speaker of the poem, orders her to lament, but the motive for her lamentation is far different from that of Khorenatsi's widowed Armenian queen. She does not mourn because her children have sinned and induced God's anger, or because the enemy has snatched her children and her companions away, but because her friends and allies have entered into a conspiracy of Silence (capitalized in the original), because their intervention has not gone beyond emotional speeches on her deathbed, and because her sons are still unarmed, unprepared. "On their shoes, instead of blood, they carry the yellow mud of the fields of wheat."

The female survivors depicted in "The Carnage" gather to mourn their sons, brothers, fathers, and husbands. Their lamentation is an outcry against Islam, Turkish mothers, the Sultan himself. Toward the end of the poem, the mournful images and heartbreaking suffering are unexpectedly transformed into a splendid vision of tomorrow. The poet-prophet promises "the coming / Of a Dawn, a Dawn, whose footsteps / (Believe me, mothers), /I hear."

Time had not mitigated the pain. Wounds are still bleeding anger, frustration, and hatred in Varuzhan's and Siamanto's poetry. In all circumstances, however, these two noted poets of Armenian sorrow maintain a clear but optimistic vision, and in the midst of the flaming hell they dream of a bright tomorrow.

In Siamanto's second volume of poems, *Haiordiner* (Sons of Armenians), the author strives to develop the character of the ideal modern hero who might realize the bright future of the Armenian nation. The epigraph is a quote from Nietzsche: "The most beautiful life for a hero is to mature for death in struggle."

"Dareru vrezhe" (The Revenge of the Centuries, written in 1902 in Geneva), the first poem in the series, reveals a change in Siamanto's perception of history. Discarding the heavy burden of history, Siamanto refuses to "carry eternally the vainglories" of the past and rejects the ancient literature, manuscripts in which "generations had wept over their blood and sufferings." He refuses to walk in his ancestors' footsteps, which led them "from defeat to enslavement and from supplication to lament." He knows how his ancestors burned their feet "begging for mercy in the ashes of the ruins," how they were "happy in their tears," and how "they dreaded fighting." Authoritatively he lays

down his credo: "Justice must be created and freedom fiercely seized."[15] It is in this same context that Varuzhan's *Hetanos erger* (Pagan Songs) should be viewed. The return to the pagan past by these two authors should not be construed as a retreat from reality or a denial of the present, but rather as a return to a source of strength, glory, and eternity that will inspire survival and perpetuation.

Negation of the past had been initiated two decades before by Hovhannisian, but the waves of massacres in the 1890s had stalled the trend and it was nearly a decade before it was picked up again. Here was a potential for a new response to catastrophe. Ironically, each time a new offshoot of a response promised a breakthrough in the paradigm of responses to catastrophe, a more shocking disaster occurred and halted the development of the new interpretation of history. The immediate response was inevitably submerged yet again in the dark world of lamentation and mourning. The Cilician massacres of 1909 were one such event.

The Jewish pre-World War I criticism of the traditional eulogy presents striking similarities with the trend described above. Jewish and Armenian progressive writers, in markedly different parts of the world but under somewhat analogous conditions, had come to believe that the exaggerated glorification of the past prevented a healthy attitude toward the future. The Russian pogroms of World War I brought more emphatically to the fore the inner corruption of the Jewish community structure. Traditional shtetls, the market towns which represented the Jewish diasporan socioeconomic structure and symbolized survival in the gentile world, were not only under attack by Russian and German armies but were also strongly criticized in the Jewish literature of the time by the Jewish proletariat, by Marxist Jews, and by those who believed in an eventual Jewish national sovereignty. The shtetl was treated as a microcosm of the Jewish people in dispersion in danger of total destruction. An entire historical phase was over. Zionist writers now nurtured a vision of returning to the land of Zion to create a homeland—a last refuge against the catastrophes of history.

World War I had brought the plight of the East European Jewry into the open. The picture was clear: the Russian army carried out pogroms upon Jewish communities and expelled hundreds of Jews along Russia's borders; Jews were the target of hatred and vengeance for the Poles and the Ukrainians; Jewish soldiers were treated with suspicion. Sholem Aleichem's "Tales of 1001 Nights"

[15] Siamanto, *Amboghjakan erker*, p. 54. Poems belonging to the *Haiordiner* (Sons of Armenians) collection were written between 1902 and 1908 and first published in Constantinople in 1908.

and S. Ansky's "The Destruction of Galicia" best describe the situation. Once again, the vulnerability of the Jews was emphasized. Ansky's "Destruction of Galicia" is replete with harrowing scenes, such as the following retelling of an eyewitness account:

> "My hands lose their strength and my eyes become red with tears of blood," writes a Jewish soldier, "when I remember the horrors it has been my lot to see in Galicia, when I remember the acts of savagery that the Cossacks have carried out against Jews. There is murder and robbery, women are raped in the streets, the breasts of old women are cut off and the wretched people are left to die. . . ."[16]

Sholem Aleichem describes the pogroms in Krushnik and Rakhov and every Jewish town in Poland.[17] There must be a solution to all this. Should the Jews return to Israel? S. Y. Agnon compares and juxtaposes the two existing ideologies: persistence in the diaspora versus building a homeland in Israel:

> There are pious men in the country who have built themselves Houses of Study, and they boast that when our holy Messiah reveals himself he will come first to their House of Study. These young men, on the other hand, do not boast that the Messiah will come to them first; they do not mention him, but most of their thoughts are devoted to going up to the land of Israel and cultivating the soil. I do not know which are more worthy of love: the pious in the Diaspora who wish to trouble the Messiah to come and visit them abroad, or these young men who take the trouble to go up to the land of Israel to prepare it for him.[18]

The calamities of World War I inflicted tremendous material and physical loss on the Jews; they also shook the traditional moral standards. Jews lost faith in the Covenant and in their bond with God. The long sought hope for favorable relations with the gentiles was shattered permanently. Personal survival was the one important issue, regardless of the price.

Leyb Olitzky's wartime stories best reveal this sacrilege, the abandonment of traditional morality. They are laments on the total destruction of Jewish tradition. In one story, a rabbi bemoans the destruction which he believes is far worse than that of the Second Temple, because Jews have abandoned God's laws and are left without Torah. External persecutions only veil the internal decay. Unlike the medieval chroniclers, Olitzky does not sympathize with the victims. He regards them as lowly creatures who have given up traditional

[16] Roskies, *The Literature of Destruction*, p. 211.

[17] See ibid., pp. 226–34.

[18] David G. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 131.

hierarchy, group solidarity, and transcendental faith, only to surrender to base animal instincts and commit crimes as heinous as those committed against them.

Oyzer Warshawsky's *Smugglers*, another wartime story in the mode of critical realism, lays bare the most repugnant aspects of man's behavior when faced with a choice between becoming a "martyr of faith" and exchanging all his principles for a lowly existence. "The war has broken out and the good old days are gone—because of our many sins," concludes the protagonist, who typifies the ordinary Jew. Then, weighing the situation, he decides to drag out his existence and save himself, no matter what the cost.[19]

Unlike the literature of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in response to the Jewish pogroms, the literature that responded to World War I seldom looked for ancient archetypes. The tradition of the Hasidim, Cantonist, and pogrom responses did not satisfy the World War I poets and chroniclers. Their worldview was so secularized that they could deride the concept and judgment of God, going so far as to compare him to a clown running the world:

> God in a striped and spotted robe
> And trousers--half yellow, half red.
> He's playing a comb and blowing a flute--
> And life goes dancing with death.[20]

Lamed Shapiro laughs in bitter irony at the wretched victim who cries out for divine mercy and accepts death as punishment for his sins. In the short story "The Jewish State" (1919), the audacious protagonist denounces the Jewish God and ridicules members of the congregation who believe that they are being punished. "For your sins!" he laughs. "Do you have the strength to sin? Do you even have the brains to sin?"[21] The tablets were broken. Jewish traditions were altered. Among those who recorded the internal and external Jewish tragedy during World War I, however, there were writers like Ansky and Sholem Aleichem who shaped their response upon the ruins of the ancient tradition of sin-retribution-redemption, and who strove to give meaning in literature to the altered Jewish spiritual life.

The tradition set forth by Bialik, Abramowitsch, and Tchernichowsky was thriving in World War I literature with more practical ideas for the creation of a Jewish national resistance. David Bergelson, I. D. Berkowitz, Zalmen

[19] Ibid., p. 118.

[20] Ibid., p. 150; with this quotation from Lamed Shapiro, Roskies discusses Shapiro's approach to the Jewish pogroms and his attempt to make the pogroms into the ultimate parody by subverting the myth of both Judaism and Christianity.

[21] Ibid., p. 151.

Schneour, Lamed Shapiro, and other writers of the pogroms enthusiastically developed the theme of Jewish resistance. As the revolutionary acts of the Armenian armed struggle had inspired Armenian writers, so did incidents of Jewish self-defense give rise to fictional stories with modern heroes. David Roskies' grouping of these heroes according to their character and behavioral patterns has a twofold interest: first, the information it provides on the status of the Jewish resistance, and second, the comparative characterization of the Jewish and Armenian modern heroes fictionalized in literary responses to catastrophe (discussed in Part II).

Roskies proposes three categories of modern Jewish heroes: the heroes of action (*baal-guf*), reaction (*schlemiel*), and inaction (*telushim*), all of whom represent sad but realistic images of the Jewish resistance. The baalguf acts only when the need arises; he is a Nietzschean superman, an iron man born of intense suffering, but his actions only maintain the status quo; he is incapable of bringing about change. The schlemiel's reaction is usually verbal aggression—or silence, when the magnitude of the disaster stuns and paralyzes him; he, too, is incapable of achieving any change. The talush is the alienated urban intellectual or self-taught philosopher who lives a peripheral life, knowing too much and doing too little.[22] Expounding on these three types, Hebrew and Yiddish writers realistically described the status of the Jewish communities in the diaspora and their ability to defend themselves against the impending catastrophes from the antagonistic gentile world surrounding them. In the words of Alan Mintz, "Although the Holocaust was an incalculably greater tragedy for the Jews than the pogroms, the image of the Jewish cowardice had already been fixed and the recourse to classical consolation literature discredited."[23]

[22] A comparative study of the characteristics of these heroes and those portrayed in Grigor Zohrab's "Tsanot demker" (Familiar Faces) or in Abovian's, Raffi's, and Arpiarian's novels can reveal interesting parallels and contrasts in the cultural, psychological, and ideological aspects of Armenian and Jewish pre-Genocide responses.

[23] Alan Mintz, *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 154.

PART TWO

THE GENOCIDE

4

Zapel Esayan (1878–1942?)

It is commonly agreed among the Armenian literary historians that Zapel Esayan's *Averaknerun mej* (Amid the Ruins) is the best artistic achievement inspired by the horrors, atrocities, and aftereffects of the Cilician massacres of 1909. An accomplished writer of free verse and short stories, Esayan was able to mold feelings of love, hope, lust, envy, jealousy, and frustration into artistic and lyrical expression, and she was capable of opening the darkest corners of the human psyche. A sensitive and keen observer who knew her environment well, she created for her characters settings which vividly and realistically reflected life in Constantinople with all its social, political, and economic deprivations and injustices under Ottoman rule. She stressed particularly the underprivileged status of women in Armenian society and was known as an outspoken feminist writer.

Zapel Esayan was born in 1878 in Skutari, Constantinople, in an era of political upheaval for Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. Growing up with the horror stories of Hamidian repression, she learned to aspire to and struggle for the ideals of the nation. She had just begun her literary career in Constantinople with her first poems published in local papers, when the terror of the 1894-1896 massacres spread throughout the empire and heavy restrictions and censorship shackled Armenian social and cultural life. Along with other Armenian intellectuals, Esayan fled to Paris to breathe the air of freedom. There she continued her literary career as a writer of short stories and articles and was widely published in French and Armenian periodicals. Her sojourn in France (1895-1902) broadened her outlook and provided her with opportunities for closer contact with contemporary literary movements and ideologies.

Although Esayan made Paris her home, she never severed her bonds with her birthplace.

In addition to her literary activities, Esayan also participated in Armenian political life in the Ottoman Empire. Working within the system she established close ties with the government as well as with the European diplomatic circles and became a respected and influential authority. The separation of the Armenian lands or an independent Armenia outside the Ottoman Empire was a farfetched idea for Esayan, who believed that the solution to the Armenian plight was in the restoration of law and democracy throughout the country.

Her political views regarding Turko-Armenian cooperative efforts to reestablish the Constitution in the empire are reflected in a letter dated October 16, 1908, addressed to her husband in Paris: "rising from the ashes, [Armenians today] are lending wings to the newborn Turkish yearnings of freedom to take flight. Armenians are leading the whole country toward the best of fate. I believe in this with all my blood and soul."[1] Esayan never anticipated freedom to come soon. In a 1908 article she wrote: "To us freedom is only a glittering word. . . . We can obtain freedom with struggle. . . . We can never expect to receive it as a gift."[2] Siamanto, in a poem entitled "Dareru Vrezhe" (The Revenge of Centuries), had eloquently and powerfully formulated the same thought, advocated by the proponents of an Armenian armed struggle and national uprising to regain freedom. As an important phase in the evolution of Armenian political thinking, the notion of armed struggle was gaining momentum, while supplications to the Sublime Porte for the easing of the Armenian situation and appeals to the European powers for intervention were meeting with disdain and indifference.

It was in this atmosphere that Armenian intellectuals and political activists welcomed the revolution of 1908 spearheaded by the Young Turk (Ittihad ve Terakki) party. The restoration of the Constitution in the empire was received with much enthusiasm and optimism. Even the skeptics were deceived by proclamations of liberty and brotherhood, which promised a just and peaceful coexistence among Turks and all minorities in the empire.[3] Yet

[1] Zapel Esayan, *Namakner* [Letters], ed. Arpik Avetisian (Erevan: University of Erevan Press, 1977), p. 77.

[2] Zapel Esayan, in *Zhamanak*, no. 1 (1908), cited in *Hai nor grakanutean patmutiun* [History of Modern Armenian Literature], Vol. 5 (Erevan: Armenian SSR Academy of Sciences Press, 1979), p. 793. The reference to this quotation is from an unpublished manuscript of Esayan's (Fund No. 220-229).

[3] For a concise survey of Young Turk ideology and governmental policies of the subsequent years, see Richard G. Hovannisian, *Armenia on the Road to Independence, 1918* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 28-30.

within a year the new rulers had turned into dictators. The Young Turks fostered a nationalistic ideology, known today as Pan-Turkism, which was to have a devastating effect on the ethnic and religious minorities of the empire, especially the Armenians.

The shocking massacres of Armenians in Cilicia were the first manifestation of the policy of Turkification and the consolidation of power. Entire towns and villages were plundered and set afire by the Turkish mobs. The Armenian population of Cilicia was attacked without regard to social, economic, or intellectual disposition. Turks set out to kill the peasant, the merchant, the teacher, and the clergyman alike. More than thirty thousand were killed, some burned alive; many thousands were wounded or left homeless and starving. The Young Turk government denied any involvement, yet the central authorities were slow to intervene and local officials made no effort to rescue Armenian survivors from the continuing harassments in the aftermath of the massacres. Furthermore, punishment of the perpetrators was limited to a few show trials.

As a member of the second delegation sent by the Armenian Patriarchate in Constantinople, Esayan visited the disaster area in June 1909 to assess the catastrophe and provide immediate help to the survivors. Her first letter, to her husband in Paris, written from Mersin, the delegation's first stop in Cilicia, voices her growing skepticism about the Constitution's power to change the government's anti-Armenian policies and the intolerance of the fanatical Turkish masses:

> Cilicia is destroyed. From what I have heard, I can tell that the entire Armenian people have fallen victim to a premeditated plan. . . . The conspiracy of the present [Turkish] government is evident. . . . For centuries our hard-working people have nourished our enemy. Today they receive their reward. . . . Even cannibals are better than these monsters; at least they eat each other to sate their hunger.[4]

For the first time in her life, Esayan had come into close contact with the Armenian masses. She lived with the disaster-stricken people for three months, sharing shelters filled with the odor of sweat, pus, and filth. She heard the moans and screams of mothers driven mad by witnessing the slaughter of their children. She saw creatures half-alive, dragging their mutilated bodies around, hoping for a miracle to make them whole again. She visited the ruins of plundered and burned houses, schools, and churches, where decomposed corpses still lay in the sun, prey to vultures and hyenas. She visited prisoners in heavy chains, condemned for having dared take arms in self-defense.

[4] Esayan, *Letters*, pp. 93-94.

Upon returning to Constantinople Esayan reported her findings in series of articles in the local press.[5] She had confronted the horrors directly and experienced their immediacy. In attempting to "vividly present the national tragedy with the genuine inspiration and the temperament of the artist,"[6] Esayan employed the full force of her talent to give an artistic expression to her people's national trauma. The outcome was a volume entitled *Averaknerun mej* (Amid the Ruins).[7]

Esayan's visit to Cilicia is reminiscent of the journey Bialik made to Kishinev in 1903 to record eyewitness accounts, assess damage, and collect documents on the massacre of Jews in that Ukrainian city. Bialik was a member of a newly formed group of Jewish intellectuals who had come together in Odessa to establish a secret bureau for gathering information and documents regarding the destruction. He was also instrumental in the organization of armed self-defense units in Jewish communities. Like Esayan, Bialik was an activist with a mission, not a survivor or bystander. Like Esayan's *Amid the Ruins*, the long poem "In the City of Slaughter" (see Chapter II) is an account of Bialik's actual encounter with the disaster in Kishinev.

Amid the Ruins

Esayan's literary representation of the events in Cilicia is far removed from her earlier works. The gifted sculptor of feeling and temperament was now confronted with the challenge of portraying the collective suffering, textualizing the national tragedy, and giving meaning to an inexplicable traumatic experience. She had now "plunged into the heart of the catastrophe,"[8] and, for the first time, had come into direct contact with the tragic lot of the Armenian people:

> I felt my individuality fading away bit by bit, melting into the collective suffering. There was a new voice in my soul painfully awakening me to a new consciousness. . . . That is when I fully realized the destiny of my people. . . . That is when I relived the hell about which I was told but to which I had always remained aloof. (p. 31)

Amid the Ruins is neither a novel nor a collection of short stories or memoirs. Nor can it be considered "reportage," as Hakob Oshakan labels it.[9] The artistic element is too strong for this work to be considered a report or a chronicle. The outpouring of feeling, the psychoanalytic approach to characters, emotions, and behavior, the rich metaphors, imagery, and hyperbolic expressions—all come into play to elevate the work to the level of artistic creation, closest in genre to a non-fiction essay.

The book is composed of eight chapters, each titled separately. In addition, the first four chapters are marked A, B, C, and D, a categorization abandoned thereafter. The link between the chapters is forged mainly by the leitmotif, the massacre of Armenians in Cilicia. Although unconnected in subject matter, the scenes intertwine to form a larger picture of the atrocities and the aftermath. Another link is formed by the author's presence throughout the work. As narrator, the author describes what she herself has seen; she cites foreign witnesses, as if to authenticate her accounts of the events and lend another perspective; she quotes the exact words of survivors, faithfully resounding the last cries of a dying nation; she contemplates and interprets the catastrophe, the motivations behind it, the process of execution, and the consequences.

This unequivocal subjectivity notwithstanding, Esayan demonstrates a conscious effort to remain cool, controlled, and politically detached while still portraying the events impartially and realistically. To that effect, she asserts in the preface that she will try to "steer away from any political influence . . . national prejudices, grudges, traditional feelings and racial hatreds," and continues: "I have kept on recording faithfully when my heart was laden with antagonism, when the victimizers have filled my heart with shame, despair and disgust, when I have witnessed the arrogant and shameless Turkish quarters standing tall amongst Armenian ruins, when I noticed the cynical expression on the faces of unpunished criminals" (pp. 18-19).

Esayan keeps reminding herself and the reader that she is judging the tragedy neither as an Armenian nor as a sentimental woman: "I would like the reader to forget the nationality of the author and remember that these pages reflect human feelings—pain, sorrow, despair and agony . . . [to see that] these pages, more than being the impressions of a sentimental woman, are the genuine and spontaneous impressions of a human being" (pp. 119-120). But

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5 *Hai nor grakanutean patmutiun*, V, 794, mentions two series of articles as examples: "Dzainer vorberu tshvarutenen" [Voices from the Misery of the Orphans], and "Agheti zoheren" [The Victims of the Catastrophe].

6 Cited without attribution in Sevak Arzumanian, *Zapel Esayan: Kianke ev gortse* [Zapel Esayan: Her Life and Works] (Erevan: Armenian SSR Academy of Sciences Press, 1965), p. 160.

7 The novel was apparently well received. In a favorable review in *Vostan*, 6 (1912), 450-454, Mehekan (Tigran Chokiurian) asserts that although the horrors of the Cilician massacres had inspired many writers and poets, Zapel Esayan was the greatest among them.

8 Zapel Esayan, *Averaknerun mej* [Amid the Ruins] (Beirut: Etvan Press, 1957), p. 21. Page numbers for subsequent citations from this work are given parenthetically in the text.

9 Hakob Oshakan, *Hamapatker Arevmtahai Grakanutean* [Panorama of Western Armenian Literature], Vol. 6 (Beirut: Hamazgayin Press, 1968), p. 310.

she is not always the poised, serene narrator. Often she becomes so involved that she cannot keep a balanced distance from her characters and their experiences, as she had succeeded in doing in her earlier works. The subject matter engulfs her and her storyline and her rhetoric reach the breaking point and collapse. The narrative is paralyzed and she stops, dumbfounded. Gruesome images and afflicting emotions overwhelm her, clouding her vision and impairing her diction: "What I saw is beyond all imagination. . . . It is difficult for me to present the entire picture. Words are incapable of expressing the dreadful and unspeakable sights that my eyes witnessed" (pp. 39-40).

Esayan complains about the inadequacy of language to express emotion and describe the nation's sufferings. Her complaint is not unusual—the shock of collective disaster has always had a paralyzing effect on locution. During the long history of Armenian persecutions, many writers have searched for new means to respond to catastrophe. Some have found a way by imposing a change on the paradigm of responses to catastrophe; others have looked to the past for a clue or an answer. More often than not, Esayan, too, resorts to the past and uses the oldest means, lamentation, with sensational and pathetic outbursts followed by rhetorical declamations. Indeed, lamentation is one of the oldest responses to tragedy, the best example in the Jewish tradition being The Book of Lamentations, written after the First Destruction of the Temple.

The French literary critic Jacques Lacane believes that lamentation symbolizes loss and that language is the domain of this symbolization. Without symbolism survival is impossible. Acting as a catharsis, lamentation relieves tension, eliminates the complexity of encroaching imagery and emotions, breaks the agonizing silence and numbness, and makes expression possible. Esayan tries hard to avoid the pathetic in her writing and maintains her serenity and the composure of a dispassionate chronicler most of the time. She resorts to the genre of lamentation mainly when she reproduces the survivors' reactions, demonstrating in the process the birth of this genre. First she attests that the survivors are unable to describe their experience; "confused and perplexed expressions" impair their speech (p. 24); "their sighs and tears, the incoherent words" they stutter, say nothing of the reality" (p. 26); then, in a moment of extreme frustration, she hears their loud and piercing scream, "Aman!" As they begin to sing a song of death, suddenly the words flow freely and easily. The act of lamentation proves cathartic, and communication is once again established:

> They shot my son with a rifle
> vuy ... vuy ... vuy
> You became prey to the worms, my son
> vuy ... vuy ... vuy

> You put your bleeding head on the black soil
> vuy ... vuy ... vuy ... (p. 186)

Imagery

Most striking in *Amid the Ruins* is Esayan's deliberate juxtaposition of contrasting images. The narrative is, indeed, a complex structure of intertwined feelings and contrasting impressions, as when, for example, hideous scenes are set against the natural beauty of the Cilician countryside. Growing up on the beautiful shores of the Bosporus, Esayan was deeply sensitive to the beauty of nature and had admired the gardens of Silihdar, a neighborhood in the Asian quarter of Constantinople where she was born. In her memoirs, *Silihtari parteznere* (The Gardens of Silihtar), she describes the lush greenery, the blue skies, the multicolored flowers of her birthplace: "I remember my suffering in this multifaceted beauty of nature, my powerless urge to embrace and hold every scattered scent, color, light and dream. . . ."[10] She is amazed that people can be indifferent to such splendor, and reasons that it must be because their lives are burdened with so much pain. As for her, the nostalgic memories of Silihdar's natural splendor have sometimes been the only comfort and consolation in her otherwise turbulent and unhappy life.

The beauty of the Cilician panorama does not escape her sensitive eye. In the midst of misery and death, there are times when she forgets the horrors of this catastrophe: "I would feel an urge to smile at the bright dazzling sky" (p. 23), "to watch the splendid Mediterranean sunset and the rich diversity of colors of the vegetation flickering under the sun" (p. 64), "the silhouettes of slender cypress trees and white minarets rising tall against the rich, voluptuous green" (p. 179); and feel "the scented, warm, and caressing morning breeze" (p. 193). But these moments of ecstasy soon fade; how can "people become such terrible criminals in nature as beautiful as this?" (p. 193). It must have pained the sensitive artist to realize that "the beauty of nature was a cover-up of an awesome crime" (p. 179), to see how "the shadow of death darkened the world" (p. 216). Somber images encumbered nature's beauty and she felt the urge to scream, "Sun! Life! Warmth!" as if to reinstate their existence in the world (p. 130).

Frequent references to nature in Esayan's depictions of the massacres recall Nelly Sachs's poetry on Jewish suffering in the concentration camps. Sachs escaped from Germany to Sweden in 1940, and did not herself experience the

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[10] Zapel Esayan, *Silihtari parteznere* [The Gardens of Silihtar] (Cairo: Husaber Press, 1959), p. 24.

camps. Therefore, in terms of living the ordeal, the two authors have a parallel predicament. Although neither one had direct personal experience of the catastrophes, the magnitude of the atrocities and the people's sufferings seared their sensibilities. With regard to nature as a referent, there is a difference: nature provided Esayan, as it had Hemingway, with solace and escape from the painful reality. For Sachs, nature was a source of gloomy metaphors in her descriptions. Lawrence Langer has noted:

> The poet takes items of nature like earth and hills, horizon and moon, customary sources in romantic (or even sentimental) verse, and which indeed must have formed much of the visual milieu of the camp inmates, and identifies nature with its familiar guise with unfamiliar, unexpected, improbable emotions and substances: "madness and earth," "horizon of fear," "hills of dust," and "evil moon," for example—a strategy that unites a mood of uneasiness and bizzare horror with traditional images and finally undermines the spirit's confidence in the durability of the reality which has always supported it."[11]

The technique of metamorphosing benign images in nature into of atrocity, according to Langer, is used also by Wolfgang Borchert in his short essays and prose. Borchert, a young German soldier, returned from World War II physically and morally broken, to see the scenes of atrocity in his own homeland. Disillusioned, he wrote his well-known play, *The Man Outside*, and a lyrical essay entitled "In May in May Cried the Cuckoo," replete with images such as "the chimneys, like the fingers of corpses, stabbed the late afternoon sky," or "green grass alive like the hair of the dead . . . gruesome, ghastly, gracious gray grass."[12]

In Sachs's poems and Borchert's essays the moon is "mean," the horizon "fearful," the grass "gruesome" or "ghastly." The epithets of nature blend with the atrocities. In Esayan's stories, on the other hand, the splendor of nature remains detached from the ugliness of crime. Splendor and the ugliness eventually converge, however, as Esayan turns away from the beauty of nature because it is a cover on an awesome crime. Similarly Borchert cries out, "unforgettable, gigantic grass carpet, over the graves of the world." The last cries of the dying and the contemplations of the survivors present another example of juxtaposition in Esayan's narrative. At times the victims she portrays implore hopelessly and pray for mercy; at other times they roar like wounded lions seeking revenge.

[11] Lawrence L. Langer, *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1975), p. 26.

[12] See ibid., pp. 36-39, for a discussion of Borchert's works.

Scenes of helpless submission repeat in various episodes. The Turks surround a church where Armenians have taken refuge and threaten to set it on fire if the Armenians do not surrender. Prayers grow ever louder; the victims believe in God's mercy—after all, he would not allow his flock to be slaughtered by disbelievers. But the miracle fails to materialize. With bitter irony Esayan records the old priest's verdict: "Our Lord Jesus Christ, by his unquestionable will, has determined that once again the innocent blood of his flock should be shed. . . . In a moment the blood will gush out from your veins. . . . But now, as you still have time, bow your heads and ask redemption for your sins. . . . The last hour has come; God's mercy is boundless" (p. 33). In another scene, the head of the village warns those who want to take up arms: "Is it up to us to go against Islam? These rifles are good for shooting pigeons, not human beings. There are twenty Martinees against our one rifle. We should bend our necks, give up our weapons and hope for mercy" (p. 88). In the ruins of a burned school where people had taken refuge, Esayan sees naked bodies half-burned, mounds of bones, pools of dried blood, and "leaves of books, half-burned, half-stained with blood, surrendered to the whim of the wind. And on the open page with tears I read, 'God have mercy on us and bless us; show us your visage and have mercy on us'" (p. 143).

These examples illustrate the victims' readiness to accept national calamities as God's judgment, a concept deeply rooted in Christian tenets which has prevailed throughout the centuries and shaped the tradition of response to catastrophe. There is only one nuance, a subtle difference in perception: the twentieth-century Armenian, while still accepting the calamities as divine punishment for his sins, dares to question God. A woman who has lost her husband and two sons in the massacres at Adana asks, "O God, for what sins are we being punished? . . . What is this wrath of yours against us which does not die away with so much tears and blood? . . . With all these sufferings you have heaped upon us, please give us at least the patience of Job" (p. 113). There is no attempt to comprehend the sociopolitical causes of the catastrophe; the outlook is still strictly religious. The voice of protest against God dies down into abject submission. Similarly, an old man from Kharbert views the events as the fulfillment of God's judgment: "I do not know what kind of curse fell upon our head. . . . The enemy hit [us] again and this time everything was ruined" (p. 56).

At times, when confronted with extreme pain and misery, Esayan breaks down and loses her stand as a dispassionate viewer. She joins with the victims to cry out, "For the atonement of what sins [of ours] has God remained deaf and mute, as if he were absent from the holy place?" (p. 32). Significantly, she admits here that the disaster is indeed a punishment from God. Her consola-

tion is that God did not see the magnitude of the disaster to stop it. Jewish prophets initiated this interpretation more than two thousand years earlier. If God were present, they said, he would not have allowed the destruction of the Temple and the slaughter of his chosen people. Now, some twenty-five centuries later, a similar idea was emerging to explain the massacres in Cilicia. One wonders whether Esayan's response was merely a mechanical reiteration of people's reactions, an old formula for relieving the enormous emotional pain, or a long buried conviction arising from the subconscious.

Bialik puts forth a similar concept in "In The City of Slaughter." Besides detailing events and composing poetic scenes of murder and destruction, he pursues a higher purpose: "To desacralize history in God's own name."[13] In the fashion of midrash poetry, God descends to earth to investigate the destruction, but unlike the God of Lamentations, he admits his failure and castigates himself: "Forgive, ye shamed of the earth, yours is a pauper-Lord! / Poor was he during your life, and poorer still of late."[14] Esayan's example just cited above is a rare instance when the author speaks with God, but the conversation is one-way, a soliloquy in the form of a rhetorical question. Unlike Bialik, she never ventures to challenge the deity.

The narrative in *Amid the Ruins* does not have the torrential intensity of a raging soul, as in the responses of Siamanto and Daniel Varuzhan. These two poets angrily protest God's judgment, even curse and denounce him, and impute to him the calamity that has befallen the Armenians. The atmosphere they create is, of course, religious, even when they negate God's power. In comparison, Esayan's response is more secular. Except for a few instances where she addresses God, she speaks either to the victimized survivors or to her potential readers.

Esayan is critical of those who submit to slaughter like sheep, and of those who sacrifice principles and beliefs to save themselves—a criticism present also in the Jewish response to pre-Holocaust pogroms. Curiously, in Holocaust literature the criticism is modified. The Jewish literary critic Edward Alexander explains this phenomenon by pointing out that "it was a central intention of the killers to turn their victims into helpless sheep before slaughtering them. . . ."[15] This notion, applied to the Jews going to the gas chambers without resis-

[13] David G. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Literature* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press , 1984), p. 89.

[14] David G. Roskies, ed., *The Literature of Destruction: Jewish Responses to Catastrophe* (Philadelphia, New York, Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1988), p. 164. For the English translation of the entire poem, see pp. 160-168.

[15] Edward Alexander, *The Resonance of Dust: Essays on Holocaust Literature and Jewish Fate* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1979), p. xviii.

tance or emotion, is equally applicable to the Armenians. Centuries of oppressive Turkish rule had surely turned them into helpless sheep, physically and psychologically. The victimizers had removed the will of self-defense by dehumanizing their victims before slaughtering them.

Despite all these considerations, Esayan does not shrink from showing the ugliest facets of the victims' psyche and their sinful debasement. She reproaches those who bought their escape from death with the life of a loved one. She quotes a survivor tormented by his conscience. He had seen his brother running toward the well where he himself was hiding, a place known only to the two brothers. An angry Turkish mob was in pursuit. If he let his brother in, the Turks would find and kill them both. So he covered the opening to the well with a rock and locked his brother out, only to witness his death from his safe refuge. The episode concludes with bitter irony: "How sweet life is for us" (p. 141).

In another episode, Esayan notices a pile of corpses against a wall with high windows in the ruins of a church where a group of Armenians were burned alive. The wall is covered with bloody scratch marks. "How awful," she writes. "People must have trampled over each other, crushed the dying and the dead bodies underfoot to reach the windows and escape" (p. 188).

Esayan unveils the frightful truths without attempting to eulogize or mythify the victims. She does not view them as martyrs fetishized in the Christian martyrological literature. Her descriptions, unlike those of the typical medieval writers, do not inspire the reader with mystic awe and reverence for the "martyrs of Jesus Christ joining the angels of justice in heaven." Her treatment is analytical, critical, and realistic. This new perspective parallels the treatment of Jewish victims by the Jewish writers of World War I. Leyb Olitzky, Oyzer Warshawsky, and other chroniclers of that war's pogroms refused to think of the victims as martyrs who died for *Kiddush Hashem* (sanctification of the Name) (see Chapter III).

Within the scheme of contrasting ideas and images, Esayan alternates scenes of slaughter with accounts of heroic self-defense. The clergymen, preaching patience and subservience, are shown in striking contrast to those "who smelled more like gunpowder than incense, and from whose mouth flowed words of encouragement to fight rather than prayers and calls for submission" (p. 148), (they are real-life examples of Arpiar Arpiarian's characterization of Ter Husik in *The Red Offering*). She lauds those survivors who begin their testimonies with "in those days of war" and contrasts them with those who sigh and moan and recall their experiences of the days of "misery, murder, and hardship" (p. 204). In passages permeated with notions of courage and self-esteem, her narrative turns upward. The descriptions become colorful, warm,

and enthusiastic. Praising the heroes of Hadjin, Sis, Sheikh Murad, Kara Bazar, and Chork Marzpank, she remarks with relief:

> Our minds full of sorrow, preoccupied with irretrievable losses and burdened with horrible stories of murder and suffering, would suddenly brighten up with the testimony of a heroic struggle. Hanging on every word of the teller, we would listen in exhilaration, grateful to those men who, in our agonizing journey, gave us the chance to hold our heads high with pride. (p. 151)

Although Esayan expresses sympathy for those unable to defend themselves and for those who meekly succumb to the enemy's sword, she does not conceal her admiration for those who took up arms. Several times during her narrative she stresses the fact that those who fought back escaped imminent massacre—albeit at the cost of heavy casualties—whereas submission invariably led to total slaughter. She expresses the same view in a letter dated September 16, 1909, written from Mersin to her husband in Paris. Here she notes that the people of Osmanieh, "having acted prudently [*khohemuteamb*, underlined by Esayan] and having heeded the *aghas* [master] and the clergy were destroyed, and the place was leveled to the ground." She describes the delegation's visit to the village Chork Marzpank as a spiritual nourishment after the extreme tension in Osmanieh: "Women, children, young and old have resisted as one the Turkish assaults and have remained firm and resolute to the end. Today they restate their readiness to defend their lives and honor or die behind the barricades."[16]

Contrasting examples of surrender and resistance demonstrate an approach entirely different from Bialik's "In the City of Slaughter." Both Esayan and Bialik were staunch supporters of self-defense, but Bialik's tactic is to omit any mention of resistance, rare as it was, in the Kishinev pogrom, thus showing his contempt toward this inadequate and unorganized enterprise. His purpose is to stress the necessity of armed resistance. God does not accept the dead of the Kishinev pogrom as his martyrs, nor does he promise them redemption:

> Your dead were vainly dead; and neither I nor you
> Know why you died or wherefore, for whom, nor by what laws;
> Your deaths are without reason; your lives are without cause.[17]

Bialik goes on to cite God's words of encouragement to the Jews to act on their own, and, as seen in an earlier reference to this poem, to protest against him and demand retribution. The tactic was successful, according to David G.

[16] Esayan, *Letters* , p. 104.

[17] Roskies, *The Literature of Destruction*, p. 164.

Roskies, who testifies that Bialik's poem "did more to agitate for Jewish self-defense than any proclamation of the Odessa Hebrew writers or the Central Committee of the Bund."[18]

Esayan exalts the incidents marked by resistance. She believes that those who fight back are the true descendants of the brave forefathers of the Armenian people. In praise of the heroes of Dortyol she writes: "[They] have descended from a very noble vein of the race. And the more we go back in the past, the closer we come to their origin and see its authenticity" (p. 203). Elsewhere, with reference to another heroic reaction, she asks rhetorically: "From which untarnished strain of the race have descended these peasants, who reacted so differently in those disastrous days, although they resembled their peers in appearance and were accustomed to tilling the land like others?" (p. 90).

Courage is inherent in the Armenian race, Esayan believes. If Armenians have become docile, it is because of external factors beyond their control which, in the course of history, have stained their noble origin. The description of a visit to the ruins of the Leo Fortress, a twelfth/thirteenth-century fortification, explains her conviction. With admiration for this majestic symbol of past glory, she contemplates the mediocrity and subservience of Armenians of her time and concludes that the past is enviable because the Cilician kingdom had the military power to defend its people: "Behold the past! A huge tombstone standing taller than all of our meaningless lives. . . . It seems so unattainable, as if our slavish feet will never touch that sacred land" (p. 152). Not unlike many Renaissance thinkers, Esayan is convinced that only by recalling the glories of the past can self-esteem be restored and the nation encouraged to fight for its rights. It is for this reason, she believes, that foreign rulers have always suppressed any attempt by Armenian intellectuals to revive the memories of the past (pp. 152-153).

Military power and armed struggle are rarely noted in the Jewish literature of the early twentieth century. With the exception of the few writers mentioned earlier, interpretation of catastrophe was predominantly embedded in the Judaic teachings of suffering and redemption, and, to some extent, in the sanctification of faith through martyrdom. Contrary to Sutzkever's idealization of Jewish armed revolt, this approach was accentuated in the Holocaust literature of Moshe Flinker and Nelly Sachs, who understood suffering to be the only road to redemption, and the rebirth of Israel to be the direct result of the Holocaust.

[18] Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse*, p. 91.

Esayan's response consisted of her first-hand impressions of the catastrophe molded into an artistic representation. She barely touched upon the political motivations behind the massacres. In that era of political tumult, it was difficult to pursue logic in political analysis and maintain a consistent opinion toward Turkish policies. Her response did not involve political analysis. Evidently, she was neither a keen political observer nor a committed partisan. In fact, she has been much criticized for her vacillating political affiliations. Despite her familiarity with the Turkish character and psyche, she often fell into contradictions and expressed conflicting views on the Young Turk revolution. She distrusted the proclaimed liberalism and brotherhood, and yet saw a bright future for the two nations. She discussed the lack of understanding and cooperation between the Young Turks and the Armenian political parties. Even before the Cilician massacres, she referred to the Turks in one of her letters as follows: "This race has something incorrigible. . . . We have daily evidence of this. . . ." Then, in the same letter, "The two nations have now begun to understand each other's mentality, and they have had time to penetrate each other's inner feelings. Now no administration can set one nation against the other."[19]

The massacres of Armenians in Cilicia disillusioned Esayan, for she had witnessed the conspiracy of the government. Her disappointment reverberates in a letter from Mersin, in which she reports how surprised and cheated the Turks felt upon seeing the delegation still alive, for they had been told that no Armenian would be living anywhere in the empire.[20] This same idea echoes also in *Amid the Ruins*. Describing the interrogation of imprisoned survivors, she maintains that it was not about what they had done, but about how they had managed to stay alive (p. 183). Without dealing with the political causes behind the massacres, Esayan underscores the political consequences: the shattering of mutual trust and any possible cooperation between Turks and Armenians in the future:

> And what will not be replaced or compensated in the aftermath of this inexplicable catastrophe is not so much the houses that are turned to ashes, or the ruined orchards, or the vast number of dead. Rather, it is the paralyzing and hopeless sensation reflected in the eyes of the survivors. It is the feelings of a nation trampled and crushed under brutal heels. Those who rose yearning for light and freedom are now crushed with pitiless cruelty. (p. 28)

[19] Esayan, *Letters*, pp. 76-77, from a letter dated October 16, 1908.

[20] Ibid., p. 93. Esayan's letter, dated June 18, 1909, was written to her husband in Paris from the delegation's first stop in Cilicia.

The disillusionment that engulfs Esayan in the aftermath of the Cilician massacres is a trait found also in Jewish literature. Jews and Armenians refer not to diminished religious faith, principles, and nationalism, but to the loss of trust and hope toward gentiles or Turks. As Edward Alexander points out in his study of Alexander Donat's *The Holocaust Kingdom*:

> The faith that was shattered in the Holocaust was not Judaism but various surrogates for it that have attracted Jews ever since the Enlightenment. When, for example, in a passage filled with anger toward himself, Donat bemoans the fact that "we were . . . stripped of all we had held sacred," he enumerates among the articles of exploded faith Polish nationalism, two thousand years of Christianity, "silent in the face of Nazism," and devotion to modern Western civilization. Judaism, however, is not mentioned.[21]

The massacres in Cilicia occurred only a year after the proclamation of the Constitution which gave such hope to the Armenians, who believed the promises of the Young Turks. The perfidy was a lesson for those with eyes to see. A prisoner in Adana remarks sarcastically, "Do you know why we are now in this palace? Long live the *Hurriyet* ["freedom," the slogan of the Young Turk revolution]" (p. 121). Other survivors express the same bitterness: "We suffered in silence; the more they humiliated us, the more we bowed our heads, betrayed our language and nationality; we forgot our needs and fed them. We deprived our children of their rights" (p. 164). Still another survivor complains, "It is not the first nor the second time; the nation's blood was not shed just this once. . . . We knew it very well but pretended ignorance; we played blind and deaf. . . . Shame on us. . . . Why do we live, whom do we live for in this world? . . . He who does not know how to die does not deserve to live. . . . We are sons of slaves. . ." (p. 89).

Such expressions reveal a dichotomy of responses: on the one hand, the survivors' disappointment for having trusted the Turks and their unwillingness to believe in the reality of the massacres; and on the other hand, a change of outlook evidenced by exclamations of outrage and protest. Fitting in with the first set of responses is I. L. Peretz's "The Shabbes-Goy." Based on nineteenth-century Jewish Chelm folk tales, the story is about a Chelm rabbi who refuses to blame the *shabbes-goy* (a gentile helper to do chores the Jews are forbidden to do on the Sabbath) for brutally beating his Jewish master; instead he blames the Jew and advises him to appease the criminal.[22] In the same vein, Sholem Aleichem describes, in "Dreyfus in Kasrilevke"(1902), the unwillingness of the

[21] Alexander, *The Resonance*, p. 12.

[22] Ibid., p. 5.

Jews of Kasrilevke to believe Dreyfus's conviction and that the French court could commit such an injustice. In discussing the theme of incredulity, Alexander offers an interpretation, not widely shared, that this unwillingness to blame others is based on Jewish faith in "the divine promise that 'the truth must always come on top, just as oil comes to the top of water!' The more credible the divine promise, the less credible (to them) is the evidence that denies it." Alexander concludes that this "supernal knowledge . . . makes them superior to all merely political considerations."[23] His interpretation does not necessarily hold true for the Armenian responses. Rather, I would suggest that the inability, or the unwillingness, of the Armenian victims to believe what was happening to them stemmed from political immaturity—the naiveté of the masses in clinging to false hope as a substitute for action. Moreover, because of the Armenian geopolitical situation, and in the absence of a widespread, collective self-defense, Armenians had little choice other than to trust the new regime and hope for a brighter future.

The second set of responses is illustrated by those survivors for whom the catastrophe is not a God-sent punishment for their sins but an unavoidable consequence of their cowardice and failure to stand against the enemy: "I was base and cowardly; this is why I am being punished," utters Kassab Misak on the gallows (*Amid the Ruins*, p. 133). He accepts death not as a punishment for his alleged crimes but because he failed to take part in the armed resistance. A hundred-year-old man exclaims, "I am telling you the truth. . . . My beard is gray from anxieties and grief. . . . Listen to this old man, there is no hope for Armenians anymore. From now on the only possession of an Armenian should be a gun" (p. 166). It is noteworthy that this feeble old man ponders the Armenian past and draws conclusions. In a trembling voice he preaches armed resistance and admonishes against humiliating servility.

A woman, sole survivor of her family, asks: "We came [to this world] and we are leaving now . . . that is all right . . . but is our suffering going to serve a purpose? Tell me, is there hope for the deliverance of our nation?" (p. 59). The traditional religious explanation does not satisfy this simple peasant woman; a Christian martyr's glory and immortality in heaven are not what she seeks. She wants the blood that has been shed and the enormous material and human loss that has been experienced to be considered as the price the nation has paid for its freedom. Elsewhere, Esayan praises a mother who has lost her son in battle but who is still ready to sacrifice all her other sons in the struggle for freedom (p. 201). Esayan lauds those who fought without the slightest hope of winning,

[23] Ibid., p. 7.

those who bravely endured torture in the prisons, and those who held on to their dignity and integrity even as they walked to the gallows.

Recalling her visit to a temporary hospital set up in the British consulate in Adana, Esayan writes: "Our hearts swelled with pride; sadness and grief pressed our throats; our eyes were full of tears . . . when we saw them. Their sad faces glowing with the resplendent brightness of martyrs, and their smiles, like the beams of a fecund sun, inspired us with hope and courage" (p. 53). The word "martyr" has a paradoxical use here. The phraseology is reminiscent of medieval chronicles praising Christian martyrs, but the context is definitely secular. The concept of martyrdom, which with the Christian era had acquired a strictly religious connotation in Armenia, seems to have returned to its original pagan connotation. In *Amid the Ruins*, martyrdom denotes a supreme devotion to freedom and justice, universal ideals that embody the yearnings of all humanity.

Throughout her life Esayan struggled for freedom and justice, for herself, for all women, and for all the deprived classes of society. The yearning for freedom nested in her heart as a child—already at the age of four she could recite Mikayel Nalbandian's "Freedom."[24] The domain of Esayan's struggle was literature; she was convinced that "literature is not an ornament, a luxury or an ultimate flower, but a strong means, a weapon to fight against everything that is unjust."[25] Indeed, her works resound with her rebellious spirit. In her response to the Cilician catastrophe is embodied her fight against injustice. Her strategy is to draw vivid contrasts and to juxtapose good and evil: the hideousness of the massacre versus the beauty of the Cilician scenery; valiant self-defense versus passive submission and conformity; the intact Muslim minarets "rising arrogantly amongst the ruins of Armenian homes burnt to ashes by the fire of hatred" (p. 25); and the vision of happy, healthy children playing peacefully in other parts of the world contrasted with scenes of Armenian orphans starved and huddled, trembling with fear and anxiety (p. 64).

Characters

Armenian and Turkish characters are portrayed with psychoanalytical skill and subtly interwoven into the narrative. Esayan is constantly searching for motives behind the catastrophic events in Cilicia, and her Turkish characters

[24] Esayan, *The Gardens of Silihtar*, p. 43. (The poem in question is discussed in Chapter II, above.)

[25] See Arzumanian, *Zapel Esayan*, p. 22. Here a reference is made to Esayan's unpublished autobiography (document no. 5, pp. 370-371, Museum of Literature and Art, Erevan).

serve her analysis of the ethnic, religious, and psychological factors which can dictate behavior and initiate action.

The special delegation sent by the Patriarchate of Constantinople to help victims in Cilicia was unable to alleviate the suffering. Esayan heard the screams and curses of women begging for help wherever she went: "Kill me before you leave; trample my dead body under your feet and then go, because you have no remedy for my suffering" (p. 67). She had no answer, no words of consolation for the imprisoned innocent. Her words rang hollow: "Have hope and patience. . . . Eventually, justice will be rendered unto you. All the humiliation you bear now will be compensated with appreciation for your courage and devotion" (p. 121). Frustrated with the situation in Cilicia, she asks: "Why are we here? What have we accomplished?" And, unable to help in any tangible way, she tries at least to identify the source of the evil, viewing the catastrophe not as an isolated event but as a link in a chain of Armenian persecutions: "With each sigh the collective and impersonal lamentation was manifested . . . the lamentation of the Nation. All the martyred souls of the distant past, all the martyred soldiers of the ideals of Light, Freedom, and Peace, rose from their centuries-old graves and suffered once again" (p. 34).

By exploring the characters of Armenians and Turks in a series of artistic imagery and metaphor, Esayan tries to find answers in both the victim and the victimizer. She looks at the victimizer through the eyes of frightened orphans who have survived unspeakable horrors and witnessed their parents' murder. To these children, the world is a slaughterhouse. They see the Turks as cold-blooded murderers whose eyes burn with evil passion to destroy and kill (p. 40). A woman explains why the Turks killed her husband and son: "My husband was the most handsome and the bravest. . . . That is why they killed him. My son looked like a rose; whoever looked at him, wished to look at him again. . . . They killed him right in front of my eyes. The Turkish neighbor women were laughing at me, making fun of my sorrow . . . the more I cried, the louder they laughed" (pp. 75, 76).

One episode depicts two Turkish women on trial for their participation in the massacres. One woman has been accused of loading wounded men and children into a carriage under the pretext of saving their lives, only to push them into the river. The other woman was seen crushing the head of a child kneeling over his mother's body. Although sentenced to hang at first, both women are later pardoned and set free (pp. 126-127). Esayan portrays the hatred of Armenians that Turkish women shared with the men. The thrill of bloodshed and plunder intoxicated them so much that they forgot the friendship and hospitality of their Armenian neighbors and became deaf to the

victim's cries (p. 218). The fire of hatred had robbed them of their feminine softness and their humanity (p. 195).

The participation of fanatic Turkish masses in the looting and killing not only facilitated and expedited the spread of death and destruction but also destroyed Armenian trust and dignity. A woman cries out:

> Woe unto us; who will protect us and comprehend our plight? Their [the Turks'] hatred is like the fire of hell. . . . Why should we go on living? They denied us our humanness. They did not even treat us as dogs; they killed us saying, "You don't have a God! Just as your Christ died by torture, so will each one of you die by torture." . . . The tears that we shed on this accursed soil could make a sea. . . . We are their slaves. Woe unto us. (p. 169)

The negative image of the Turk is occasionally countered by accounts of good Turks who shelter victims and save them from the mob. Esayan faithfully records, not only in *Amid the Ruins* but throughout her artistic work and in her private letters, this kindness and understanding, as if to prove her willingness to see the good in the Turk. In *The Gardens of Silihdar*, she recalls the sincere, delicate character of Fayize, her Turkish childhood friend, and the honesty of Dr. Nahad Bey, Fayize's young uncle, and his criticism of the Armenian persecutions in the 1890s. Tenderly she remembers the young Turkish sailor whom she and Fayize met during their cruises together. The two girls had shared a special affection and pity for the boy whose sad, sallow face spoke of his profound pain. Esayan's objectivity and her realistic approach to character analysis encourages confidence in her judgment. The reader is thus led to agree with her view that uniformity of language, lifestyle, and customs are not enough to insure peace among races. Esayan argues that in Cilicia, Turks and Armenians are alike in every way except character. Living side by side for centuries, these two peoples in the course of time had grown similar in appearance, lifestyle, even customs and traditions. In certain parts of the empire, including Cilicia, the only language spoken was Turkish. Yet, there is a basic difference that can never be effaced and that, Esayan maintains, consists of their "national characteristics": one group is civilized, builds, and creates; the other nurtures bloody aspirations and destroys.[26]

Many Jewish Haskalah writers also strongly believed that Jewish integration into the mainstream of life in Eastern Europe and in Germany was the solution to the Jewish plight. In reality, however, the tendency to assimilate was more prevalent among Jewish modernist intellectuals, and the Jewish

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26 Esayan builds this argument in a letter to her husband, written in Mersin, June 18, 1909. See Esayan, *Letters*, p. 94.

masses remained in isolation. In contrast, Armenian intellectuals fought for the preservation of national characteristics, and in many instances the uneducated masses lost many of their distinctive attributes, except religion of course, and acquired those of their Turkish neighbors. Needless to say, similarity in language and lifestyle was no guarantee of safety for either community. Just as Tsarist pogromists and the German Gestapo did not differentiate between westernized and traditionalist Jews, so also the Turks did not spare their Armenian neighbors despite the many traditions they shared together.

Revival as a Response

Esayan transformed her painful investigation of the disaster-stricken Armenian communities in Cilicia into somber but realistic literary images. The experience did have its bright side, however, for she came to discover an important Armenian trait: the determination to survive and persevere. Despite irreparable losses, the survivors struggled to rebuild a new life upon the ruins. Esayan's observations inspired her with optimism on the future of the Armenian people in Cilicia: "In a few years the orchards will bear fruit again, the fields will be covered with the golden grain of copious crops, and the children's cries will once again fill the empty houses. . . . The tortured but invincible race will persevere despite all murderous intentions" (pp. 165-166). Elsewhere, in a similar style, she proudly asserts:

> The plans of the enemy once again had proven fruitless, and, in spite of our hopelessly sad impressions, the immortality and the ingenuity of the nation had escaped the hatchets, swords, guns, and fire. . . . The enemy was condemned to impotence in the face of our persistent vitality; and this feeling hovered over the ruins, rose from the ashes of the martyrs, reflected in the ghostly appearance of widows, and glittered in the eyes of the orphans. . . . (pp. 221-222)

Esayan's optimism seems to intensify by the end of the narrative. Increasingly, scenes of despair are contrasted with efforts at revival, and sorrowful laments brightened with visions of future prosperity. Eventually, the survivors are able to turn away from the grim past toward a brighter future. Once again young couples face life with hope. As they try to rebuild their ruined homes there are again thoughts of marriage, new families are formed: "Adana was being resurrected from the ashes" (p. 226).

The theme of rebirth is absent from the Jewish responses to pre-Holocaust pogroms. Although the geopolitical factors in the history of persecutions of the two nations prompt a comparison, it is only in Holocaust literature that the theme of rebirth unfolds as a response. Unlike the "final solution," destruction

was not nationwide either in the pre-Holocaust pogroms or the pre-Genocide massacres. Writers were still able to pursue their vocation and maintain their integrity, to try to make sense out of the tragedy, but usually they made their observations from a distance, in their own unchanged familiar environment.

The pre-Holocaust Jewish writers—Abramowitsch, Tchernichowsky, Bialik, and others—observed the moral decline of the Jewish communities, their inability to defend themselves, maintain their collective integrity, or endure national crises. By means of various techniques, they endeavored to arouse national pride and awaken the people to political Zionism, which in many cases did not agree with religious quietism. Their efforts were not always fruitful. Many progressive intellectuals, especially the Zionist writers, realized that the European Jewish communities were doomed, vulnerable as they were to assimilation or antisemitic attacks. In the words of Alan Mintz:

> The entire enterprise of European Jewry had to be viewed as no longer viable and as already under the aspect of destruction. During World War I and the Russian Revolution and Civil War, the violence against Jews, on a much vaster scale than in preceding decades, strengthened the power of this analysis, and, practically, caused the removal of almost all Hebrew writers and the institutions of Hebrew literary production to Palestine. In Hebrew literature between the wars, the works of Uri Zvi Greenberg, Yitshak Lamdan, Hayim Hazaz, and S. Y. Agnon, often written under the influence of Expressionism, established an apocalyptic mode replete with visions of destruction.[27]

The theme of rebirth was immaterial in this situation, but paradoxically, it appeared in the responses to the Holocaust. Research on the treatment of the theme within the Jewish and Armenian responses reveals fundamental differences in the vantage point and in the rationalization of a future rebirth. In both contexts, the influencing factors were deeply embedded in the culture, tradition, and religion. Esayan witnessed the signs of an Armenian rebirth on the same blood-soaked land and considered the sprouting of new life as evidence of Armenian endurance, perseverance, optimism, and hard work. Conversely, Jewish writers visualized the rebirth from the ashes of the Holocaust in the creation of the State of Israel and considered it as the divine plan for redemption.

Moshe Flinker was a sixteen-year-old Dutch Jew who hid in Belgium in 1942-43 and was killed at Auschwitz in 1944. His diary has become an important historical document as well as a valuable literary work on the Holocaust.

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[27] Alan Mintz, *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 9.

Trying to find meaning in the horrors inflicted upon all East European Jewish communities, Flinker wrote: "I find it very hard to believe that what we are going through today is only a mere link in a long chain of suffering."[28] For him these sufferings were the birth pangs of the coming of the Messiah and the end of Jewish exile: "The prophet foretold that we would not return [to Eretz Izrael] because of our righteousness but as a result of the evildoing of our enemies and our agony at their hands. . . ." He was convinced that what was happening to East European Jews was nothing less than the culmination of all Jewish suffering—a necessary cataclysm before redemption. Therefore, redemption, the divine Promise, was near. Here, says Alexander, despite Flinker's strong religious stance, he believed "that the success of the Messianic era will be contingent on Jewish statesmanship in the New Jerusalem," and rationalized that "because normative Judaism never separated celestial from earthly Jerusalem, it made of Jerusalem a unique symbol of orderly civilized life."[29]

Abraham Sutzkever, writing under the most appalling conditions in his hiding place in the Vilna ghetto in 1943, envisioned the coming of the dawn. He believed in the eternity of the Jews and planted his "Jewish word . . . . / So its spirit won't be extinguished,"[30] like the grains of wheat that were discovered in the tomb of an Egyptian king after nine thousand years, and which bloomed in the gardens when planted. "Maybe the word, too, will wait patiently / To see the light, / that predestined hour / When they, too, burst unexpectedly into flower." Wladyslaw Szlengel, writing in the Warsaw ghetto in 1943, extols the uprising of the Jews and the splendor of that armed revolt, in which he sees the dawning of freedom for the Jews.[31] David Roskies provides an interesting explanation, that the tendency to find the possibility of redemption through armed revolt, or faith in the eternalness of the very act of writing, was an attempt to return to the traditional response to catastrophe (challenged by the Jewish secular intellectuals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries), "to piece together the broken tablets of the covenant."[32] Sutzkever survived the Holocaust and shouldered the task of responding to the catastrophe and reestablishing order in the chaos, choosing national rebirth as the

[28] Alexander, *The Resonance*, p. 34.

[29] Ibid., pp. 35-36.

[30] From the poem "Kernels of Wheat," in Roskies, *The Literature of Destruction*, pp. 496-497. For a discussion of the theme of rebirth in Sutzkever's poetry, see Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse*, pp. 236-253.

[31] From the poem "Counterattack," ibid., pp. 487-488.

[32] See ibid., pp. 565-566.

theme of his poetry. By throwing a bridge between past and present and reviving ancient archetypes, he eternalized the armed resistance of the Vilna ghetto.

The theme of rebirth acquired a more secular meaning in the works of other Holocaust survivor-writers. Nelly Sachs, for one, believed that "the sinking occurs for the sake of the rise," "how in death / Life begins." In a poem entitled "To You that Build the New House," she admonishes survivors to look ahead to the nation's rebirth, to rebuild their houses and erect their walls, and not to "hang your tears for those who departed, / Who will not live with you then."[33] In comparison, Esayan's optimism falls within the pantheon of Armenian national characteristics, whose germ she found in the ruins of Cilicia. Her venture into the realm of the literature of catastrophe is unmatched in format and genre, as well as in sincerity and spontaneity of expression. Yet, *Amid the Ruins* is not the masterpiece befitting Esayan's talent and skill. The narrative occasionally collapses under the torrent of events; episodes are presented in rapid succession and characters rush in and out, making it difficult for the reader to fully absorb the reality. The terrible events she encountered overburdened her with somber impressions and she felt compelled to write about them all, to encompass them all. What is more important, she had to devise new modes of expression because those she had mastered so well were inapplicable to a tragedy of this magnitude. The magnitude of the catastrophe impaired her literary imagination, and she found her way out by rhetorical outbursts and enumerations of facts intruding upon the coherence of her work.

The Genocide

Zapel Esayan's literary response to catastrophe is reflected in the single volume, *Amid the Ruins*. In 1911, Esayan published a few short stories and novellas with the Cilician massacres as the central theme, but apparently they did not warrant publication in separate volumes.[34] With the exception of these

[33] For the quotations from Nelly Sachs' poems, see Alexander, *The Resonance*, pp. 45-47.

[34] Arzumanian mentions the following, which appeared in the 1911 issues of *Azatamart*: the novella "Anetsk" (The Curse), the short stories "Safie" (Safieh) and "Nor harse" (The New Bride), and the impressionist chronicle "Gravakan" (Pledge). He finds them devoid of artistic value, and contends that Esayan tried to develop the concept that the criminal will be punished by God's tribunal for having spilled innocent blood. See Arzumanian, *Zapel Esayan*, p. 156.

The works just cited were not available to me, hence I cannot make a personal judgment. But if Arzumanian has correctly identified this new twist on religious inter-

works, she continued her literary activities in line with the genres and themes she had developed prior to the 1909 massacres. The subsequent catastrophes suffered by her people did not inspire literary artistic creations. She lived through the massacres of 1915 and managed to escape arrest and execution, as she herself wrote in a 1915 letter from Philipe (Edirne).[35]

Returning to Turkey after the war Esayan engaged in the task of seeking out orphans and establishing orphanages. Although she witnessed conditions even worse than those she had seen in Cilicia, she never again forged her impressions into a literary fiction. Perhaps it was her hectic life as a social worker and activist that prevented her. She did find time to record the eyewitness accounts of a survivor named Toroyan, in *Zhoghovurdi me hogevarke* (The Agony of a Nation, 1916-17),[36] and to record, edit, and publish the memoirs and travel notes of Murad, a freedom fighter and political activist, *Muradi chambordutiune* (Murad's Journey, 1917).[37] Esayan made no further attempts to fictionalize the raw material she had at hand.

The immediate post-Genocide era saw the publication of two highly subjective fictions by Esayan, which are generally considered to be her best works: *Verjin bazhake* (The Last Cup, 1916)[38] and *Hogis aksoreal* (My Exiled Soul, 1919).[39] *The Last Cup* concerns the agony of a married woman who has committed adultery. It is a sentimental journey into the complex world of the feminine psyche, where parental love and devotion and traditional faithfulness and obedience to her husband are challenged by a yearning for real love and spiritual freedom. One wonders how the author of *Amid the Ruins*, a woman who had devoted herself to the welfare of the survivors in the aftermath of the Genocide, could in such turbulent times isolate herself in personal emotions and write about a married woman's love affair. Perhaps it was a deliberate attempt to take refuge from the suffocating images of horror and suffering. Only a few references in *The Last Cup* connect her story to the reality of the time: "Those were terribly difficult days for us . . . fear and constant threats were

pretation, it would be a complete departure from Esayan's secularist point of view expressed in *Amid the Ruins*; the subject merits further investigation.

35 Esayan, *Letters*, p. 118.

36 Published in *Gorts* (Baku), 2, 3 (1917).

37 Published in ibid., 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 (1917).

38 Written in 1916 and first published in ibid., 1 (1917).

39 Written in 1919 and first published in Vienna in 1922.

hanging over our heads," or "the entire Armenian people were apprehensive anticipating the horrors that awaited them."[40]

It is a mystery why Esayan chose not to write about the atrocities. Oshakan's remarks make this matter even more enigmatic: "Her miraculous escape from Constantinople," he writes, "was all the inspiration she would need to formulate the outline of her novel. She did not write, as I, myself, did not write that novel which was to cover events that were beyond any imagination."[41] Oshakan hints at the difficulty of capturing in a novel imagery beyond human imagination, which is perhaps why Esayan avoided the subject. A novel about the Genocide of 1915 had to surpass *Amid the Ruins*, or at least overcome its deficiencies. Once again, she was confronted with a problem she had been unable to handle well in *Amid the Ruins*. Another mold or device was needed for shaping a novel on the Genocide. Apparently, she never found it.

Esayan frequently discussed genocide literature in her lectures and articles, and she ruled out the elegiac genre as a suitable form. In a letter to Hovhannes Aivazian, editor of *Kochnak*, dated January 26, 1925, she criticizes works such as Hrach Zardarian's *Astvats ka te chka* (Is There a God? Or Is There Not?) and Zareh Vorbuni's short story "Nik-Nik" for their sighs and tears and symptoms of pessimistic nihilism.[42] In a letter to Vorbuni, she states that Armenian writers living in the uncertainty of the diaspora, disillusioned with the present, and not knowing what to do or where to go, should not transfer to literature their own dilemma as mystical and religious sentimentalism. That kind of literature is unsuitable for Armenian youth who should be facing the future with optimism.[43] The same concern—that the new generation would be contaminated by morbid sentimentalism—may be why Esayan turned down Levon Mozian's offer to publish the serialized work *The Agony of a Nation* as a book. In a letter dated January 28, 1924, she tells him that considering the present condition of the Armenian people, it would be inappropriate to publish so gloomy a work.[44] Her views on the life of the young in diaspora reflect her belief in the rebirth of the nation, a belief that, unfortunately, she did not translate into artistic expression.

Esayan never created a literary work thematizing the Genocide, but its impact consistently fed her imagination. The novella *My Exiled Soul* speaks of

40 Zapel Esayan, *Verjin bazhake* [The Last Cup] (Antilias, Lebanon: Catholicosate of Cilicia Press, 1986), pp. 30-31, 36.

41 Oshakan, *Panorama*, VI, 249-250.

42 Esayan, *Letters*, p. 247.

43 Ibid., p. 265.

44 Ibid., p. 242.

the difficulty in creating a work of art when the artist's soul is restrained, when the wings of imagination are enchained with morbid visions. The protagonist is a woman painter in Constantinople. While awaiting the viewers' reactions at an exhibition of her paintings, she analyzes and criticizes her own art. She knows that her colors are vague, her paintings hazy, and wonders: "Would they be able to understand me? . . . Would they at least understand that my weaknesses and deficiencies are not accidental nor a result of carelessness, but the outcome of an uncontrollable temperament?"[45]

What is this temperament that blocks the clear and vivid expression of talent? "It is hard to explain what I went through and the thoughts and reflections that generated this effect. Perhaps my yearnings for my homeland explain the haze and even that sadness itself which has left its imprint even on my character" (p. 133). She is certainly alluding to the sociopolitical pressures of an oppressive foreign rule in her country, Western Armenia, which obstructs an atmosphere favorable for intellectual freedom and prosperity. "We are exiled in an alien, faraway land. We are exiles in our own homeland because we are deprived of our national life. . . . We are bound to our land only with frail strings" (p. 146).

The person of Esayan is present in every line of the novella. Change the pigments, brushes, and canvas to pen and paper and find her own frustration at her inability to create a literary work with a clear vision, her inability to find the pure source of inspiration by sublimating the temperament of an exile (p. 146). Esayan strives to create the ultimate, an art that will encompass the personal and collective sufferings and yearnings. She believes in the artist's calling, in the artist's innate power and talent to bring about, through art, the deliverance of the nation: "I feel that I should let out the scream of the nation suffering for centuries under the yoke of oppression and slavery. I ought to let out the scream of liberation with my personal talent and with my intrinsic power" (p. 151). Esayan struggled to find the literary mold for voicing the survival of the nation through art, to transcend the impact of the Genocide by confronting it in art. What she envisioned was not lamentations, complaints, or bleak visions of the future—in this context her criticism of Hrach Zardarian and Zareh Vorbuni is more apt. Longing for a more favorable environment that would permit her imagination to take flight without restraint, she waited for the bright sun of her homeland to shine upon her works and lift the haze (p. 131).

45 Zapel Esayan, *Hogis aksoreal* [My Exiled Soul], in *Erker* [Works] (Erevan: Haipethrat, 1959), p. 133. Page numbers for subsequent citations from this work are given parenthetically in the text.

Esayan's yearnings took her to Soviet Armenia, and in 1933 she settled there permanently. She enthusiastically embraced the Soviet system, with all its shortcomings, and hoped that a relative financial security and peace of mind would enhance her creative labors. She led a busy and productive life, teaching, lecturing and writing articles and novels.

The novel *Barpa Khachik* (Uncle Khachik; *barpa* is Greek for uncle) is the last of three major works Esayan produced between 1933 and 1936 in Soviet Armenia. It depicts life in the Ottoman Empire from the 1890s until the end of World War I. The novel merits consideration because it covers a critical period. Therefore, one would expect to find either a confirmation of Esayan's earlier responses to the Armenian tragedy or a new approach and an interpretation of catastrophe based on her new political convictions and different vantage point. The story flies swiftly past the events. The only allusion to the massacres of 1894-1896 occurs early on, "during the days when the entire Armenian population in the capital, perturbed and anxious, was awaiting the imminent horrendous occurrences."[46] Later in the novel, referring to the Young Turk revolution and the massacres of 1909, Esayan notes: "The days of reaction (*reaktsiayi orere*) had had harsh consequences in a few provinces, and Hurriyet, even though victorious, had come out debilitated through those calamitous days."[47]

The impact of the World War I deportations and massacres on the plot of the novel is minimal. Barpa Khachik is arrested and sent into exile. A depiction of his ordeal would have presented an opportunity to write about the Armenian experience during those terrible years, but Esayan skips Khachik's life in exile, jumps to the postwar Allied occupation of Constantinople and describes the hardship and humiliation the Allies imposed upon the Turks. There is a conscious effort throughout to remain faithful to the friendly Soviet-Turkish ties, to follow the communist ideology and show the exploitation of the working class regardless of ethnic or religious background. Esayan's goal is to fabricate a story of the Marxist movement in the Ottoman Empire, to show how Turkish, Armenian, and Greek students formed cells to read and discuss the Communist Manifesto while the world burned in World War I. Turkish-Armenian relations are placed in the context of communist camaraderie. Racial, religious, and ethnic differences do not count for the Armenian Mihran, the Greek Vasil, and the Turks Safieh, Nahad, Abdul Rahman, and Remzi. They are all equally exploited and victimized by the despotic govern-

46 Zapel Esayan, *Barpa Khachik* [Uncle Khachik] (Erevan: "Haiastan" Press, 1966), p. 49.

47 Ibid., p. 88.

ment, the wealthy, and the victorious Allies in the aftermath of the war. Historical events are given a Marxist interpretation, based on economic factors and transformations in the means of production.

The theme, content, and language (an awkward mixture of Western Armenian with Eastern Armenian expressions, phrases, and grammatical forms) of *Barpa Khachik* are a departure from the author's former output. Apparently, Esayan intended the novel to set the record straight and to dilute her once strong nationalistic interpretations of history. But, again, in such a close-cut criticism, one should not rule out the possibility of the hidden hand of censorship; the accumulation of Eastern Armenian elements in certain parts of the work supports that suspicion.

A theme that does thread weakly through the work is rebirth in the aftermath of the Genocide, rebirth of the nation in Soviet Armenia. The possibility of survivors renewing their lives on the ashes of their homes, as in the case of the Cilician massacres, is irrelevant since the few who survived were not allowed to return. The sad reality in the diasporan communities frustrated Esayan's hopes for an Armenian future in the diaspora. In fact, the final chapters of *Barpa Khachik* testify to her disillusionment with France and the French-Armenian community. Soviet Armenia alone remained a haven for an Armenian future, and, for Esayan, a symbol of the nation's rebirth. Her treatment of this theme could have developed parallels with many post-Holocaust writers on Israel for Jews. But she expounded on the theme only by reiterating a series of communist slogans, such as "Long live the fighting international proletariat" or "Long live the victorious proletariat of Russia."

Esayan's efforts to correct past "errors" and to adapt to the new environment were not successful. She remained entrapped, unable ever to voice that scream of liberation for her nation. Her arrest during the purges of 1937 in Soviet Armenia closed the unfinished book on her literary legacy.[48]

[48] In a footnote to a chapter dedicated to Zapel Esayan, Minas Tololian writes: "The last years of Esayan's life remain a mystery. After a long silence from 1937 to the 1960s, Soviet sources merely mention 1943 as the date of her death." See *Dar me grakanutiun* [A Century of Literature], Vol. 1 (2d ed.; Boston: Armenian General Benevolent Union Publication, 1977), p. 593. Tololian drew the information from *Grakan teghekatu—Haiastani groghneri miutean antamneri, 1934-1974* [Literary Bulletin—On the Members of Writers' Guild of Armenia 1934-1974] (Erevan: 1975), pp. 190-191.

According to *Hai nor grakanutean patmutiun*, V, 802, Esayan died in 1942.

5

Suren Partevian (1876–1921)

During twenty-five years of active participation in the cultural and political life of Western Armenia, Suren Partevian (the pen name that Sisak Partizpanian chose for himself) established his career as an editor, columnist, and author. He founded a number of newspapers and periodicals, serving as editor for several of them. They included *Vaghvan dzaine* (The Voice of Tomorrow) in Manchester, *Nor keank* (New Life) in London, *Azg* (Nation) in Boston, *Dashink* (Treaty) in Izmir, *Hosank* (Current), *Egiptakan taretsoits* (The Egyptian Almanac), *Husaber* (Bearer of Hope) in Cairo, and *Shushan* (Lily) in Constantinople. Partevian was famous for his acrimonious language. His writings, laced with irony and sarcasm, earned him the reputation of being a ruthless critic. He held public figures and political parties up to ridicule and attempted to create scandals even when the events he reported were insignificant. In the words of Hakob Oshakan, "Suren Partevian slaughtered people with words."[1] Some admired his critical style and sought out his articles; others abhorred and rejected his harshness, deeming it unhealthy and destructive. In any event, his outspoken, passionate stand on many issues made him a controversial figure.

Suren Partevian's multifaceted literary output coincided with the most critical and tragic period in modern Armenian history. Involved in the struggle to resolve the "Armenian Question" not only as a writer but as a committed activist, he published articles, reports, short stories, and novellas that focused on the massacres of the 1890s, the persecutions and political upheavals before

[1] Hakob Oshakan, *Hamapatker arevmtahai grakanutean* [Panorama of Western Armenian Literature], Vol. 7 (Beirut: Hamazgayin Press, 1968), p. 368.

and after the Young Turk revolution of 1908, the 1909 massacres in Cilicia, and finally, on the mass deportations and the genocide of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. Oshakan writes: "Even the smallest crumb of his writings that has reached us tells about the imprint of the fire and blood. He is a writer haunted by the massacres."[2] Where Zapel Esayan's *Amid the Ruins* was a single sojourn into the realm of genocide literature, Suren Partevian's entire literary legacy breathes the pain and horror of the massacres. It can be said that he was a writer obsessed with the Armenian tragedy.

Biographical information on Partevian is meager, and his literary works have not triggered enough interest to generate critical studies. Soviet Armenian scholars treat him as an author of secondary importance and devote only five pages to him in the multivolume *Hai nor grakanutean patmutiun* (History of Modern Armenian Literature).[3] The most extensive source on Partevian is a chapter in the sixth volume of Oshakan's *Hamapatker arevmtahai grakanutean* (Panorama of Western Armenian Literature). A criticism of Partevian's character and lifestyle, the chapter aims to show that this author's personality affected his writings. The man behind the work is described as "weird," "unruly," and "pitiable" in all of his "drives," "falls," and "passions," traits that weakened the impact of his works.[4] The chapter title, "The Editor, the Novelist and the Defamer," well reflects the critic's strong opinion against Partevian. It is hoped that the distance of six decades will make it possible to evaluate Partevian's work separately from the man he must have been.

Partevian was in his teens living in Constantinople when the massacres of 1894-1896 spread over the entire Ottoman Empire. By his own testimony in *Kaikaium* (Destruction), he took refuge on a British cargo ship and fled to London.[5] He had witnessed or heard eyewitness accounts of the murder of his compatriots and the plunder of Armenian towns and villages. Curiously, *Destruction*, his first response to the massacres, does not picture scenes of devastation but focuses on the sad aftermath that unfolded beyond the borders of the actual catastrophe. Partevian saw Armenian refugees in London, Paris, Manchester, and other European cities struggling desperately to survive in totally unknown and unfamiliar environments. He observed the reaction of those Armenians who were already established to the tragic fate of their

[2] Ibid., VII, 352.

[3] *Hai nor grakanutean patmutiun* [History of Modern Armenian Literature], Vol. V (Erevan: Armenian SSR Academy of Sciences Press, 1979), pp. 755-760.

[4] Oshakan, *Panorama*, VII, 354.

[5] Suren Partevian, *Kaikaium* [Destruction] (Izmir: Mamurian Press, 1910), p. 1. Page numbers for subsequent citations from this work are given parenthetically in the text.

brethren in the Ottoman Empire, and toward the refugees whose problems and constant needs disturbed their comfort and jeopardized their image as quiet, law-abiding businessmen. *Destruction*, a collection of six short stories, is a realistic portrayal of the decline in traditional values and the fading of ideologies and ideals in the diasporan communities, a reality which, in Partevian's view, was as tragic as the blood bath in the Ottoman Armenia.

In these stories, Partevian transcends the themes of catastrophe per se and confronts a reality which he characterizes by the general term *kaikaium* (destruction), which also connotes disintegration and dissipation. He explains that the stories "embody an ominous and fateful moment of Armenian life. They sketch a turbulent and historic transfiguration in Armenian reality. They crystallize a critical phase of our national psychology" (p. g). In that one word "kaikaium" the author synthesizes Armenian survival in the diaspora in the aftermath of the disastrous events that caused the first mass exodus of Armenians in modern times. The dedicatory note sets the tone for the principal theme of the work and lays bare the tainted, dehumanized, degraded characters in their struggle for survival: "I dedicate these pages from the lives of fugitives to those who have remained attached to their native land."

Each character in *Destruction* reacts to the catastrophe in a unique way. In the episode *Ter-papa* (Priest-Father), the title character is a self-centered, greedy hypocrite who exploits his pastoral position to accumulate wealth. The news from the old country upset him greatly not because of sympathy for the victims but because the flow of refugees to his parish threatens his comfortable life and his peace of mind. He tries to avoid the problems of the refugees and justifies his reaction by blaming the victims for what has befallen them. Nonetheless, he is drawn in when a refugee knocks on his door late one evening seeking food and shelter for the night; he drives the man away and even threatens to call the police if he does not leave.

In "Mghdzavanje" (The Nightmare), Nazaret, an established, well-to-do businessman, dreams that he is in his native village, caught in the middle of murder and plunder with his fellow villagers "upon whose destruction he had built his immense fortune." Ironically, these nightmares are not the result of anxiety about his fellow countrymen but are caused by indigestion after a heavy dinner the night before. To comfort his conscience, Nazaret sends the next morning a "generous" donation of one gold piece to the Armenian prelacy for the starving Armenians.

Partevian's cast of characters is composed mostly of well-established families living a carefree life in the diasporan communities. Having secured the necessities of life, these people are now "avidly engaged in the pursuit of further wealth and luxury" and think little about their less fortunate compatriots. The

news of the massacres burdens their conscience and disturbs their routine; their reaction, therefore, is resentment toward those who have invaded their communities and who are walking evidence of the reality they try so hard not to see. The main character in "Gaghtakane" (The Refugee) is a filthy wretch of a man, whose eyes burn with the terrors from which he has escaped. When he attends church and to receive communion dares to stand in the same line with the fine-looking, pious parishioners, the reaction is outrage and revolt and the church clerk drives him out. That rejected refugee, Partevian concludes, "represents the people of Armenia, the suffering, the enslaved, the persecuted Armenians whom the members of Armenian communities under foreign skies, wealthy, successful, but estranged, avoid with disgust" (p. 70).

Partevian hammers away at the aloofness of the diasporan communities and the self-serving stance from which they judge and respond to the Armenian national tragedy. At the same time, he criticizes the refugees who have fled their homeland only to become a burden on the societies in diaspora. He has contempt for their piety and the religious values they insist upon: "What did you see, man? What goodness, empathy, or help did you receive from that God to whom you stubbornly insist on rendering faith?" (p. 68). Partevian perceives a character change among the refugees and blames the charity organizations for teaching them to beg, to abandon their pride and engage in humiliating activities. He portrays this corruption in several protagonists, such as Zapel, the title character of one of the stories, a young woman who becomes a prostitute; or the nameless young man from Constantinople in "Gtutean zoher" (Victims of Charity), who feigns love for a wealthy English benefactress in the hope of snatching a share of her wealth; or the young refugee in "Krismesi irikun me" (A Christmas Eve), who recounts the story of his survival in broken English to an indifferent crowd in order to get money for the charity organization that sponsors him; or the refugees with money who pretend to be poor in order to receive travel fare to the United States. Continuing his journey in the uncertainty of diaspora, Partevian witnesses Armenian national pride being put up for sale by the European so-called benefactors, and he resents it. He rails against the Salvation Army officer who uses stories of Armenian suffering to coax donations from the crowd gathered in a hall on Christmas Eve ("A Christmas Eve").

Elsewhere, as in "Haghtvatsnere" (The Vanquished Ones), Partevian is more sympathetic in his depiction of the idealist intellectuals, who live with the bitter remorse of having left their homeland, of having severed their roots from the soil which, for a thousand years, nurtured them with tradition and gave them a sense of belonging. Their dreams are now crushed, but their pride remains intact and prevents them from resorting to degrading, dehumanizing means of survival. For them, Partevian maintains, physical destruction is inevitable.

Partevian's writings do not revolve only around self-analysis and self-criticism. In "Put me jur" (A Drop of Water) he condemns the perpetrators. The religious ecstasy of shedding Armenian blood is expressed on the faces of the Turkish mob as joy and satisfaction, as if a holy sacrifice had been offered to the God of Islam, a solemn duty toward the Prophet had been triumphantly fulfilled. Partevian also faults the European powers, who after nurturing Armenian hopes and promising emancipation, have now turned away, pretending not to see the immense suffering. Crushed with frustration and terror, survivors flee, leaving behind their dead and their plundered homes. Only a short time ago they harbored optimism, letting out a daring cry of liberty, singing "with such enthusiasm the song of victory: 'A voice resounded from the Armenian mountains, / Armenian mountains of Erzerum. . .'" ("Trenin mej" [In The Train], p. 14).

By concentrating on the aftermath of the massacres, Partevian avoided the task of describing the bloodshed, for he was convinced that it is sacrilegious to transform the nation's suffering into narrative, to bring it down to the level of language and discourse. Perhaps he felt that to attempt such a description with his limited abilities would be tantamount to sacrilege. In fact, time and again in his artistic representations of the Armenian tragedy, he stopped to confess to the paralysis of his creative imagination and to his inability to reproduce the true picture of the atrocities.

The Cilician Catastrophe

Only ten months after the Young Turk revolution and the restoration of the Constitution in the Ottoman Empire, the Armenians in Cilicia became victims of an appalling conspiracy. In April 1909, Muslim mobs, their fanaticism and religious intolerance aroused by the Ottoman religious and governmental leaders, began a series of attacks on Armenian villages and the Armenian quarters of towns in Cilicia, looting and burning property and slaughtering the Armenian population. Like Zapel Esayan, Suren Partevian also served in a delegation sent by the Armenian Patriarchate in Constantinople to investigate the disaster and help the survivors; thus he too was witness to the suffering. In *Kilikean Arhavirke* (The Cilician Catastrophe), published in 1909 in Constantinople, he gives a straightforward account of facts, numbers, and eyewitness accounts, without embellishment. The work is divided into three parts: the title story "Kilikean arhavirke" (The Cilician Catastrophe),

"Kilikean sarsurner" (The Cilician Horrors), and "Kilikean mghdzavanje" (The Cilician Nightmare).

The preface is an Armenian translation of a French article "Charikin handep" (Against the Evil) co-authored by Partevian and Mikayel Kiurchian. In their analysis of the political, economic, and ethnoreligious factors involved in the Cilician massacres, the two authors compare the event to the massacres of 1894-1896:

> Armenians fought with the courage and determination of a martyr, inspired by the enlivening faith and hope of "imminent" deliverance. Today, Armenians feel the frustration of having trusted and worshiped in vain the coming of that deliverance for the past ten months. And this frustration is causing the destruction of the nation. This trusted deliverance, in a night of hopelessness, throws the nation into the unexpected, fatal fires of holocaust.[6]

Part One, "The Cilician Catastrophe," the largest of the three divisions, takes up nearly half the book and includes eleven essays which depict Partevian's impressions before actually confronting the catastrophe, his thoughts, emotions, and observations during the journey toward the disaster-stricken area. The similarity of context and circumstance between this part and Bialik's long poem "Upon the Slaughter," written on the eve of Bialik's trip to Kishinev, calls for a comparative study of the two works. Before engaging in such an analysis, however, it should be noted that although both works express their authors' first reaction to news of catastrophe before coming face to face with it, the actual writing of "The Cilician Catastrophe" was completed after Partevian returned to Constantinople, whereas Bialik's "Upon the Slaughter" was written before his visit to Kishinev. Therefore, Partevian's account cannot be considered to be completely free from the impressions of the catastrophe.

David Roskies characterizes Bialik's response as an antiliturgical outburst, written "in the language of prayer put to subversive use."[7] In explaining and dealing with Jewish persecutions of the modern era, Bialik wants to show the bankruptcy of religious concepts. "Upon the Slaughter" shows God as incapable of taking revenge; thus the possibility of divine justice and retribution is rejected. Only after Bialik returns from Kishinev does the burden of his memory outrage him into action advocating self-defense. This transformation in attitude is reflected in "In the City of Slaughter."

[6] Suren Partevian, *Kilikean arhavirke* [The Cilician Catastrophe] (Constantinople: Nshan Papikian Bookstore, 1909), p. b. Title of episode and page numbers for subsequent citations from this work are given parenthetically in the text.

[7] David G. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 88. The poem is discussed on pp. 86-88.

Partevian's response does not rely on religious forms or allusions, nor does it refute a fixed concept of a prevailing response to catastrophe. His writing is purely secular in form and in content. If, indeed, there is disillusionment, it relates to political misgivings and misguided trust in the goodwill of the Young Turks—not to God abandoning his function. If someone is to be admonished, it is the Armenian political leadership, not the masses who blindly follow.

The delegation negotiates with the Turkish officials for permission to visit the afflicted area and Partevian records the difficulties the government officials create at every step. His initial conviction that the massacres were a result of the lingering Hamidian anti-Armenian policies and not perpetrated by the Young Turks is shattered when he discovers the Young Turk party's involvement. His hopes for the deliverance of the Armenian nation, as promised in the reinstated Constitution, crumble. Partevian's analysis revolves around the theme of brotherhood between Turks and Armenians, promised by the Constitution, as a yardstick for judging and interpreting the events:

> The truth is that it is the Armeno-Turkish brotherhood itself that is being strangled, murdered, and buried in ash and blood in Cilicia. Armenians had pinned their trust and faith upon that brotherhood, and, after the downfall of the oppressive regime of Yildiz (the Seat of the sultan), they had engraved it on their desolate souls forever. ("Bot ev ahazang" [Bad News and Alarm], p. 34)

Pondering relentlessly the notion of brotherhood, Partevian hoped that this painful incident would at least alert the Armenian leaders and "awaken them from their sinful lethargy to see the unreality to expect liberation by the Ittihad army; it will make them resume their serious role" ("Tur! Tur!" [Give! Give!], p. 55). Is there a future for Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, he asks; will they be "free citizens of the Empire or the outcasts of Ottoman society?" ("Vaghordaine Adanayi mej" [The Aftermath in Adana], p. 82). But he is unable to find an answer. Unlike Zapel Esayan, who so confidently insisted on her rights as an Ottoman citizen and questioned the government about the tragic events in Cilicia, Suren Partevian doubted that Armenians had any future at all in the new society ruled by the Ittihad (Young Turk) party.

The shock and perplexity resulting from the unexpected magnitude of the catastrophe generated contradictions in Partevian's analysis, as was the case with Zapel Esayan. In one instance, Partevian forgets the accusations he has made against the Young Turk party and praises the new leaders, Talaat, Djemal, and Mehmed Ali, as "patriotic and devoted soldiers" who will not shun the truth and who will make recompense for old and new mistakes committed

against the Armenians ("Aniravvats me" [A Victim]). This contradiction reveals his confusion and is characteristic of his initial reaction, before logic again prevails; it is, itself, a response to catastrophe.

Part One is filled with analytic arguments. The author attempts to measure the consequences of the tragedy and gropes for lessons to be learned. The ugly truth that emerges about the Armenians themselves is depressing. A national catastrophe can rob men and women of their humanistic values and national spirit: "Faced with the national tragedy, I wish we could have at least the solace of witnessing a trace of vitality, moral beauty, and collective self-consciousness. But alas, national disasters have always unveiled our internal corruption and impotence ("Menk mezi" [Between Ourselves], p. 84). In the same essay, Partevian condemns wealthy Armenians who failed to give financial support to the Armenian orphans. Their failure allowed Germans to take over and send the children to Germany for political purposes. He lays bare the treachery of those Armenians who joined the enemy camp in order to save their own skins ("Between Ourselves" and "Ailaserum" [Degeneration]). This kind of criticism, significantly, reveals a twist in the prevailing trend of traditional response to catastrophe: A reason can always be found for blaming the victims for crimes committed against them.

The Jewish poet Abba Kovner criticized this approach when writing about those who betrayed Jews to their German executioners: "Perhaps they were not guilty—/ there is always someone more guilty: / (the victim) / (the victim)."[8] With these bitterly ironic lines, Kovner rejects the traditional interpretation of atrocity according to which an enemy is only an instrument of divine will, and catastrophe itself is a test God has devised to measure the loyalty and faith of his favorite people. Partevian, on the contrary, still targets the victim, subconsciously reiterating the traditional interpretation.

Whereas ancient and medieval Armenian writers blamed catastrophes on the sins of the people, Partevian castigates the Armenian victims for having lost their national spirit and values when subjected to extreme hardship. This internalization of the problem is further developed in his fiction, as in *Destruction*, *The Armenian Woman*, and other works dealing with national disasters, and it resonates even more emphatically in Aram Antonian's writings in response to the Genocide of 1915.

Self-criticism and internalization are more evident in the Jewish literary responses to the pre-Holocaust pogroms. As Roskies notes, writers reveal the basest human traits in the struggle for survival. Leyb Olitzky, a prominent

[8] See Edward Alexander, *The Resonance of Dust: Essays on Holocaust Literature and Jewish Fate* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1977), p. xvii.

maskilic writer of the World War I pogroms, ridicules a rabbi involved in a religious practice of exaggerated piety, who laments the collapse of Jewish morality because his own daughters have become whores serving Russian and German officers in return for favors. Olitzky deplores the disruption of family unity in the Jewish struggle to survive, as when a family abandons its crazed daughter to the advancing Austrian army, or when a man denies help to his own father caught in a pogrom. Fishl Bimko, another pogrom writer, describes the emerging class of wheeler-dealers who exploit their own kind by profiting on wartime scarcities, to say nothing of Jews who make money by informing on the wheeler-dealers themselves.[9] In Armenian as well as Jewish examples of realistic or satirical criticism, revelations of the depths to which people can sink do not evoke the reader's sympathy, but the subtext reveals the psychological effects of violence. The goal of the victimizers is not solely the physical destruction of Armenians or Jews; rather, it is to totally destroy the prevailing social order, moral standards, and accepted patterns of behavior. They purposefully dehumanize their victims before killing them.

Part One of *The Cilician Catastrophe* consists of the contemplations and analyses of a skilled journalist and critic. The language is rich, the style fluent but pompous. Partevian loads his sentences with adjectives and buries his thought in complex sentence structure—a popular style in late nineteenth-century Armenian journalism. It is Partevian the journalist and not the creative, artistic writer who is here expressing himself. Stream of consciousness and critical analyses flow easily, except when he attempts to describe shocking events and disturbing experiences. In those passages, overwhelming emotion disrupts the narrative, and the author confesses his impotence: "I cannot find words accurate enough, dramatic and tragic enough, to describe the depressing, suffocating scenes of misery that I have witnessed in these days" ("Veraproghnerun hamar ognutean kocher" [Appeals for Aid for the Survivors], p. 44). Elsewhere he writes:

> This is the first time that I discover so brutally the impotence of the painful struggle of my pen, the inadequacy of all the meanings of the word to capture the scenes around me, the visions of misery that fill my eyes, and the horrifying reality that crushes my soul. I can hardly find the courage to stand on my feet to see and to comprehend. ("Dahichnern u zohere" [The Executioners and the Victims], p. 69)

[9] For a study of the wartime testimonies, see Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse*, pp. 116-117.

Suren Partevian shares the dilemma of many writers who have faced the urge to write about an enormous tragedy. And like many such writers, after an abortive effort, he too confesses to his mental paralysis and resorts to an elegiac call for a solution: "Ah! *yavrum*, ah!, is it your fate that you should look with amazed and innocent eyes upon this bloody catastrophe? O, miserable, condemned generation!" ("Appeals for Aid for the Survivors," p. 44).

Part Two of *The Cilician Catastrophe*, "The Cilician Horrors," consists of eight episodes which recount what Partevian has himself witnessed, without elaboration, fictionalization, explanation, or analysis. Nonetheless, "The Cilician Horrors" comes closer to an artistic work. The style is more descriptive and vivid than ordinary reportage, and emotional expressions often pour out. One after the other the terrifying scenes pass, as on a movie screen, each scene capturing a small detail, a personal experience.

Aside from the description of the event, Partevian records some survivors'reactions that are representative of their attempt to understand and explain the calamity. A survivor named Sasuntsi Armenak says, "We did not need weapons and artillery. We needed schools, education and brains. . . " ("Tsovun vrayen" [On the Sea], p. 142). The notion is a novel one—it is rare to find the idea of promoting enlightenment and education as a response to catastrophe. Armenak, a survivor of the massacres, suggests that proper education could have prevented the disaster but does not explain how. Perhaps education and preparedness would have helped the Armenians to better understand the Young Turks, to deal with them instead of becoming their victims. Perhaps Armenak is referring to the aftermath, speculating that survivors would have coped had they been better educated. Whatever he meant, such an attribution to the role of education never comes up again in Partevian's writings. Armenak keeps to his authoritative stance, scolding the panic-stricken people: "Enough of this mourning, crying, and lamenting. Have a little courage; aren't you Armenians?" (ibid., p. 142). His reproach illustrates another aspect of the popular response. He encourages Armenians to fight back, to show courage because courage is a true Armenian characteristic. Zapel Esayan, also, in *Amid the Ruins*, refers to this trait as a source of encouragement, with the difference being that despite her interpretive interventions, she allows the episodes themselves to reveal the theme, whereas Partevian treats the theme rhetorically.

Priest Hairapet, one of a handful of survivors from a massacred village, renounces God in an outburst of protest: "If my God is also the God of these [Turkish] unbelievers, these ferocious beasts, I don't believe in God. . . . I don't believe in God" ("Hairapet," p. 169). Had Partevian elaborated on this theme, described the inhumanity of the Turkish executioners, and unraveled the psychological impulses that gave birth to such a reaction in Hairapet, one

would have a literary piece to compare with a similar outburst in the Jewish response. To renounce God when action against the executioners is impossible is a departure from the traditional responses to national tragedy. Nonetheless, the scope of the interpretation and the frame of reference generating the response are still religious; the response is based on the man-God·relationship which has governed the explanation of history through time.

Dan Pagis, a survivor of the Jewish Holocaust, presents the reverse of this line of thought. According to Alan J. Yuter, Pagis, in the poem "Testimony," first defends the humanity of German executioners:

> No no: they definitely were
> human beings: uniforms, boots.
> How to explain? They were created
> in the image.[10]

But then he denies God, the deity in whose image the murderers were created. Is there a parallel religious context in which a man of God, such as the priest Hairapet, and a pious Jewish survivor react? Partevian does not furnish the tools to build that analogy.

Each of the eight episodes in "The Cilician Horrors," recorded in a brief, telegraphic style, could serve as the topic of a short story or novel. Each character could be developed into a full-blown protagonist. Is it lack of imagination, or is it the morbidity of the scenes and the encumbering memories that prevented Partevian from venturing into such an endeavor?

In *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto*, Emmanuel Ringelblum records accounts of cruelty and heroism, degradation and resistance in a terse, matter-of-fact-style. Alvin H. Rosenfeld quotes several examples:

> A man came along with a pass. The watchman on Grzybowska Street took him into the guardroom, tortured him there for two hours, forced him to drink urine, have sex with a Gentile woman. They beat him over the head, then cleaned the wounds with a broom. The next day, they treated him humanely, gave him food and drink, took him to his destination, on the way saying that Jews are people too. . . .
>
> Death lies in every street. The children are no longer afraid of death. In one courtyard, the children played a game tickling a corpse.[11]

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[10] Alan J. Yuter, *The Holocaust in Hebrew Literature: From Genocide to Rebirth* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Associated Faculty Press, Inc., 1983), p. 51.

[11] Alvin H. Rosenfeld, *A Double Dying: Reflections on Holocaust Literature* (Bloomington, Ind. and London: Indiana University Press, 1980), pp. 45-46.

As terse and matter-of-fact as the writing style may be, the impact is undeniable. The Jews had the scribes of the ghetto, like Chaim Kaplan, who kept a journal in the Warsaw ghetto; they had Emmanuel Ringelblum, the historian, who collected every piece of information with the purpose of providing sound evidence for the future to judge. By comparison, the 1909 massacres in Cilicia, except in Esayan's and Partevian's essays or Siamanto's and Varuzhan's poetry, were barely focused either as a literary theme or as a historical event to be recorded in detail.

Part Three of Partevian's *Cilician Catastrophe*, "The Cilician Dilemma," consists of six essays on the aftermath. "The Young Turks should be proud of their accomplishment," Partevian remarks. "The Armenian situation today is worse than it was during the Hamidian period" ("Andarmanelin" [The Incurable], p. 193). Throughout these essays, Partevian cries out in frustration—as he sees no attempt by the perpetrators for justice or redress, as he witnesses the indifference of the foreign powers, as he hears the Turkish government admonish the Armenian people to bury the memory of past misfortunes and go on living. Memories of the past cannot be buried, Partevian believes: "What is being buried is the most precious thing the Turks could ever possess, and that is compunction" ("Tapanakari me zeteghume" [The Laying of a Tombstone], p. 187). Rather than arousing hatred, however, the resulting frustration causes the author to wonder why the Turks conceived so evil a crime. What is it that is lost forever amidst the ashes of this holocaust? He tries to find an answer:

> The Young Turks considered the Armenians a threat and tried to eliminate them. But the Armenians were never a threat. With the massacres, the Turks put a stop to the economic and physical progress of Armenians so that they would never have the chance to dream treacherous dreams. . . . The bodies of the dead will be buried; the wounds will heal; the tears will dry up; the blood will be wiped away; the ruins will be rebuilt; the catastrophe will be redressed. But there is something broken, something sunken in our souls; there is a ravage of faith, a pain of frustration that will remain unhealed. ("The Incurable," p. 200)

Only once in all of "The Cilician Dilemma" does Partevian attempt a dramatic presentation. In the essay "Ir knoj u kuirerun i khndir" (For The Sake of His Wife and Sisters), a newspaper notice of a man's search for his wife and sisters in the aftermath of the massacres triggers a sentimental outburst. Partevian lets his imagination fly, and using the dramatic setting of a survivor's desperate search for his loved ones he creates a microcosm of what uprooted survivors confront. Now, finally at a point where he can release his feelings and reach a rewarding sublimation, he stops, experiencing the same impotence he had faced in writing the first part of the book. Confessing his failure, he contends that only Victor Hugo was able to successfully illustrate a similar situation in his novels. By this conscious move from expression to silence, Partevian means not to deny the adequacy of art to transfigure atrocity, but to admit his own incapacity to shape the unthinkable into a narrative.

Partevian witnessed the agony of the victims. He lived the blood and fire of the catastrophe, but was helpless to describe the horror. Confusion and disillusion paralyzed his artistic imagination and turned his literary creation into a mere account of facts and evidence. He was never able to transform his unique experience into an artistic work that could capture the immediacy of the tragedy and ignite the readers' imagination.

The Armenian Woman

Two years after the publication of *The Cilician Catastrophe*, in 1911, Partevian published *Haiuhin* (The Armenian Woman), a collection of six short stories. Having fulfilled his task of reporting the 1909 massacres, he turned to the massacres of 1894-1896. He had never been able to reconcile himself to them and they surfaced in every literary work he produced. *Destruction*, published in 1910, dealt with the aftermath of 1894-1896. *The Armenian Woman* fulfilled Partevian's need to relate an unthinkable crime that not only remained unrequited but was actually repeated by the same perpetrators. His dedication reads: "To you, Armenian Woman, the superhuman bearer of the cross of suffering, I dedicate these episodes inspired by your tragic fate."[12]

The stories in *The Armenian Woman* were inspired by Partevian's profound sympathy for Armenian women during the persecutions of the 1890s, and were probably developed further and crystallized during his visit to Cilicia. In *The Cilician Catastrophe*, Partevian had written:

> O, these women and the inconceivable ruthlessness of their fate. I should have seen them in the midst of their painful bereavement and misery to have truly known the Armenian woman, that unbelievable interfusion of patience, endurance, docility, and superhuman tolerance of pain and suffering, in front of whom you would want to kneel with a feeling of gratitude and affection.[13]

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[12] Suren Partevian, *Haiuhin* [The Armenian Woman] (Constantinople, P. Palents Bookstore, 1911). Title of episode and page numbers for subsequent citations from this work are given parenthetically in the text.

[13] Partevian, *The Cilician Catastrophe*, pp. 129-130, from the essay "Sovialneru toghuntske" (The Parade of the Famine-stricken).

It is in this context that *The Armenian Woman* was conceived, and the character, patience, and endurance of women victims met their testing ground.

Most of the stories in the collection seem to be based on incidents Partevian had witnessed. The theme and subject of each episode are truly moving. What prevents the work from becoming a masterpiece, however, is the author's method of conceptualization, his rendering of the text, and the fictionalization of his material.

In "Saiko," the title character kills her newborn because it was conceived in a forced conjugal union with her Kurdish kidnapper. Other women in a similar situation forget their kidnapping and rape and rear their illegitimate children with new husbands, young village men who have married the defiled young women—an unlikely occurrence in traditional Armenian patriarchal village life. Saiko alone cannot forgive and forget. She believes that the child she is bearing is the manifestation of "Hassan's crime in the womb of an Armenian." Partevian capitalizes the noun "Armenian" (*Haiun*, usually lower case) to generalize the meaning of his statement and to stress the fact that the crime is not an isolated incident but was committed against many Armenian women.

Saiko's infanticide is a substitution for her suppressed feelings of hatred and revenge toward the real criminal, yet the author does not arouse the reader's sympathy. By portraying Saiko's vengeful act, Partevian strives to reinstate the violated moral order. Although the baby growing in her womb is the symbol of the crime committed against her, Saiko's reaction not only fails to restore the moral order but, more emphatically, demonstrates its total collapse and the irreversible psychological impact of catastrophe on human behavior.

Unlike Saiko, Siranush is a typical victim sharing the destiny of many like her among the entire nation: "Her pure and bright innocent soul had crashed against the dark wall of Crime and Injustice. The forces of Evil had attacked her virgin soul with all things abominable and disastrous" ("Ariunin hachakhanke" [The Abundance of Blood], p. 33). Siranush has been driven nearly insane by the murder of her parents, who sacrificed themselves to save her life. From her hiding place, she heard their screams and the killers' laughter. She herself escapes physical violence and possible death, yet she pays dearly for her survival. The story line in "The Abundance of Blood," unlike that in "Saiko," has nothing out of ordinary—it describes something that hundreds of survivors have experienced—but the telling fails the plot. The narrative is weighed down with verbose, complex sentences and rhetorical statements, and the plot remains raw and splintered. Were it told with simplicity and spontaneity, the story might have had a stronger impact.

Zapel, a young woman portrayed in "Kuire" (The Sister), is driven insane by her tragic experience. Her younger brother was killed in attempting to resist her abductors, who dragged her into a bordello. Here, Zapel is forced to dance for the male audience. Suddenly she notices her older brother sitting with a Turkish officer. She cries out, "Help me, brother, get me out of here!" But the brother denies knowing her and walks away, indifferent to her heartrending pleas. Once again, the story line is promising, but the text suffers from the same deficiencies as in "The Abundance of Blood." Perhaps the author is blinded by overwhelming emotions; perhaps the urge to encompass the catastrophe in its entirety and to say everything as exhaustively as possible in the limited framework of a short story defeats the purpose. In any event, the impact is somehow missing.

Each episode in the *Armenian Woman* is similarly wanting. The virginal Sarah in "Hatsin uzhe" (The Power of Bread) finally submits, like other starving village women, and sells her body to a Kurd for a piece of bread for her brother and sister, the only survivors of their family. After eating her share of the bread, she regains her physical strength, realizes what she has sacrificed, and kills the Kurd. She, too, like Saiko, Zapel, and Siranush, does not submit silently, though other women throughout the stories experience a similar degradation and endure silently in the struggle to survive. Herein is a problem that entraps the author: the collection is dedicated to the tormented women, "the superhuman bearers of the cross of suffering"; yet in most of the episodes the women are subservient, accept degradation, and cope with it. Even though they suffer enormously, their behavior is not praiseworthy. Only Saiko, Sarah, Zapel, and Siranush demonstrate a reaction—be it rebellion, revenge, or even insanity—worthy of the author's tribute. Partevian's stories are peopled with women who have been humiliated and defiled, who for the most part are incapable of attracting the reader's sympathy, and it is to these "superhuman sufferers" that the work is dedicated.

The importance of *The Armenian Woman* lies not in the artistic realization of human suffering or the heinous faces of atrocity Partevian strives to capture. His endeavor is to extract the image of the Armenian woman as a victim of catastrophe. Partevian's women do not have the immaculate holiness of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God in her suffering, to merit an immortal ode by Grigor Narekatsi; neither do they have the nobility of Shushanik, the Christian martyr, to symbolize the glory of martyrdom. These women are not poetic figures like the widowed, defiled queen who personifies the victimized Armenian nation in Movses Khorenatsi's lamentation, or the abandoned queen who personifies the ravished Echmiatsin in Stepanos Orbelian's "Elegy." They are a collective representation of all these glorified figures in a realistic modern

setting, subjected to the most heinous of atrocities. They seldom emerge as heroines; rather, they are ordinary human beings who suffer without the consolation of a martyr's reward of immortality, or at least of knowing that their suffering can bring the realization of a goal—a national goal—one step closer. Many a time they collapse physically and morally, unable to withstand the pressure of torture. In *The Armenian Woman*, Partevian has been successful in capturing and immortalizing the agonizing moments in the life of Armenian women victims of Turkish atrocities.

The continuum between the symbolized female figures in the Armenian literature of past catastrophes and the characters in *The Armenian Woman* parallels the personified female characters in Jewish responses to catastrophe: Miriam in ransacked Jerusalem, portrayed in Lamentations; Judah Leib Gordon's Ruhamah, who mourns the human losses during the nineteenth-century Russian pogroms; Emmanuel Ringelblum's unnamed woman, "The mother of someone killed in January [who] hit a German in the street, then took poison";[14] or Charlotte Delbo's "dancing skeleton of a woman, freezing to death" in "None of Us will Return."[15] The last two examples of female Holocaust victims endure their last moments in the Nazi concentration camps without the solace of anticipating redemption. In their last moments a gesture, a slight movement of the limbs, is the only difference between life and death, which Lawrence Langer undertakes to define in his analysis of "None of Us will Return":

> From the window of their barracks, the narrator and her friends see a pile of corpses dumped naked in the nearby snow. Suddenly one of the living sees the hand of one of the "corpses" move—she is still alive. . . . But atrocity desensitizes compassion, eliminates the once clear border between life and death, makes longing to die more of a virtue at times than the will to live. The narrator looks numbly at the spreading fingers and feels void of response.[16]

The Book of Blood

The news of the forced deportations and the massacres of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire began to spread abroad in 1915, with reports which forecast a colossal tragedy. In that same year, Partevian published, in Cairo, *Ariuni mateane* (The Book of Blood), a collection of eleven stories and an epilogue in

[14] Cited in Rosenfeld, *A Double Dying*, p. 45.

[15] Cited in Lawrence L. Langer, *The Age of Atrocity*, (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1978), pp. 204-205.

[16] Ibid.

verse, still focusing upon the massacres of the 1890s.[17] It is obvious that he had not yet come to terms with that catastrophe, and was unable to capture it in a work of imagination that could transcend his output of reportages.

Partevian's *The Destruction* describes the aftermath of the 1890s massacres; *The Armenian Woman* is about the atrocities themselves; in both works the leitmotif is the trauma of survival. *The Book of Blood*, however, pursues a definite political ideology, that of a national resistance, and embodies the author's yearning for revenge against the enemy who denies human rights, enslaves, and kills. Although his response seems more crystallized, Partevian's recounting of events that took place long before 1915 reflects contemporary thought and bears the imprint of interpretations of recent tragedies. The events of 1915 appear to have influenced the author's recollections of the 1890s and changed his view toward them, suggesting that the episodes of *The Book of Blood* are transtemporal in that the memory of past events subconsciously lives on against the perspective of more recent developments.

The first story, "Patneshi vra" (On the Rampart), sets the mood and the ideology that pervade the other episodes in *The Book of Blood*. It eulogizes war and sanctifies the spirit of revenge. Saro, a *fedayee* (freedom fighter) from Sasun, goes to the Caucasus to take part in the Armenian defense against Tatar assaults (the reference is to the Armeno-Tatar clashes of 1905-1907). He is seeking revenge for the Turkish plunder of his native village, even though the enemy is not exactly the same. Like Zapel Esayan, Partevian believes the true Armenian to be courageous and gallant, and portrays Saro as a brave fighter who epitomizes the "true characteristic of the Armenian nation." Like Esayan, he too accentuates courageous behavior by contrasting it with the slavish attitude of the masses and their zeal to go on living no matter how lowly and pitiful their life may be. Partevian's idealization has a Nietzschean accent: Saro, the hero, lives only to die in battle with the enemy. The conceptualization of the theme of revenge, however, is drawn to exaggeration. Rather than elaborating on the attributes of a fedayee, Partevian creates in Saro a man of arms with a brutal instinct to fight.

The short story is too limited in scope to allow for all the messages the author wants to convey. Unable to develop his message in the narrative, Partevian interrupts it with rhetorical statements and slogans. For example, instead of developing his text to imply that Eastern and Western Armenians

[17] Suren Partevian, *Ariunin mateane* [The Book Of Blood] (Cairo: M. Shirinian Press, 1915). Page numbers for subsequent citations from this work are given parenthetically in the text.

are united in their common cause, he declares, "To die for Caucasus-Armenia is to live for Sasun."

In "Zinakitsnere" (Comrades In Arms), two men and a guide are traveling on a winter night through the mountain roads of Armenia, transporting arms for the fighting fedayees. The old guide, Deli Baba (literally "crazy daddy" in Turkish), is a devotee of the Armenian cause who has offered his two sons "to the altar of the sacred battle for freedom." Once again, the narrative suffers from too much rhetoric. The mysterious atmosphere that should have been evoked by the image of three men, moving slowly in the rugged mountains under a load of arms, loses its intensity. The simple conversation likely to occur between two soldiers in such a context is turned into an exchange of grandiloquent speeches. The old fedayee lectures the young soldier, who has asked for permission to visit his family in a village on their way:

> You will not be allowed to forge your own deification with a glorious act; nor will your friends abroad, who sent these arms and bombs, be able to boast about your heroism. . . . This is your fate, young man, and if you don't like it go back. . . . There are no wife and children for you. We renounce our wives and children because we do not want to denounce the war. . . . Go, if you do not intend to return again. Go, if you are ready to become a deserter. (pp. 28-29)

If the story were stripped of its thin plot and simple narrative, all that would remain is a series of slogans. The failure is not in the fact that the slogans are devoid of valid ideologies to back them; on the contrary, the collection of stories is permeated with the author's conviction that armed struggle is the only means for destroying the existing in order to build the new. In this particular story, the arms the soldiers carry are "the tools of destruction for building freedom"; the ruins of the ancient glories of Armenia are a smoldering fire "from under whose ashes the liberating flame of destruction will rise." The problem lies not in the lack of ideas, themes, or stories—for Partevian's literature is rich in all these; rather, it is the lack of synthesis. The vehicle that must carry the message is crude and unpolished, and the plot too weak for the particular incident to unfold smoothly and naturally. From the literary point of view this deficiency is indeed a failure, but it is itself a response to a colossal catastrophe. It speaks of the failure by an entire generation of Armenian literati to capture the enormity of the disaster within the scope of a literary response.

"Krtser eghbaire" (The Younger Brother) is another eulogy on armed struggle and revenge, but it is even less convincing than the previous ones. Partevian endows Aram, a revolutionary activist, with all the rhetorical equipment of the Armenian nationalistic revolutionary movement, but when it comes to action Aram is a failure. The suspense built around him and the sympathy and admiration aroused for him come to an abrupt, inconclusive end. Partevian deviates from the main topic to pour out his criticism of the skirmishes among various Armenian political parties (which stems, perhaps, from his own entanglement in them), thus undermining the theme of armed resistance. To save the situation, Partevian brings in a younger brother in an abortive effort to compensate for Aram's failure to act, but he is unable to plot a concrete action; his solution remains within the domain of rhetoric, and the story ends, leaving the expectation of action unfulfilled.

There are two possible explanations for Partevian's failure to come to grips with his theme. One possibility is that he has difficulty going beyond the words and substitutes action with slogans; the other is that by suspending the action, he reveals deliberately, or subconsciously, his perception of the Armenian revolutionary movement as fruitless. An idealized hero at the beginning of the story, Aram is transformed into a cowardly victim. In the author's view, disunity and passionate disputes among the Armenian political parties are the causes of the inaction, and he points to the disillusionment of idealistic revolutionaries in the provinces when they come face to face with the bourgeois mentality and paper nationalism of the Constantinople intelligentsia.[18] In Partevian's view, this is reason enough to incapacitate not only the individual activist but the entire Armenian national struggle.

The theme of internal friction is stressed further in "Terrore" (The Terrorist). The subject of this story seems inconsistent with the rest of the collection, and at first it is hard to understand why it was included. A deeper analysis brings to light the thematic link, namely, internalization of the failure of national struggle, self-blame as an undercurrent in the author's response to catastrophe. The protagonist, Aharon, is a hero-victim. He is a dedicated party member endowed with all the valued qualities of an active participant in a newly formed diasporan community. Aharon is drawn unwillingly into a power struggle among mediocre leaders, and is left with two choices: he can kill the opposition leader he once worshiped and become a criminal, or he can pull out entirely and be accused of desertion. He chooses the latter course and shares Aram's destiny of inaction.

The act of revolutionizing the Armenian nation remains unrealized in *The Book of Blood.* Political demonstrations, "the funeral corteges of the Armenian slavish subservience," organized by "the first soldiers of the Armenian revolt,"

[18] The historical Armenian lands within the Ottoman Empire, with the largest concentration of the Armenian population, were partitioned into six provinces (*vilayets*): Van, Bitlis, Sivaz (Sebastia), Kharbert, Diarbekir (Tigranakert), and Erzrum (Karin).

bear no fruit. Partevian enumerates the needed ingredients and prompts, "Action called for sacrifice, brave men to surrender to blood and fire. Action demanded heroic hands to render justice and sanctify the catastrophe" (p. 38); but the metamorphosis from rhetoric to action does not occur. Partevian fails to create the fictional setting in which his characters could develop in order to bring the action to life.

The character development in "Kuze" (The Hunchback) is also a failure. With his heroic resistance against the enemy's attacks, the hunchback Tigran rises above the masses who have ridiculed and despised him for his physical deformity. The beauty of his soul shines, in contrast to the dull conformism of the masses. But again, the author is unable to capitalize on this contrast and allow the narrative itself to deliver the message. Hastily he spells it out: the catastrophe has stripped Armenians of their pride and ideals and then has turned them into slaves who beg the ruthless killers for mercy.

Partevian is conscious of his unsuccessful efforts to depict the full scope of the massacres; he recognizes the problems but is unable to solve them. "Anonts mahere" (Their Deaths) is a testing ground for these problems as well as a confession of his impotence. The narrator, probably modeled on the author, is a well-known writer and community leader who abandons his lifelong quest for sacrifice and faith, "the mundane sentiments of jealousy, lust, and deception," who leaves "the city of slavery" to find new horizons. His mysterious journey toward an unnamed destination takes him into a community of simple, sincere Armenians who had participated in the armed struggle. The writer-leader hopes to receive inspiration and strength from the people who nurtured the ideology of freedom and emancipation and became the flag-bearers of the Armenian armed struggle. The men he meets, as Partevian describes them, are akin to the people in "The Younger Brother." The fighters here in the provinces, in the aftermath of the massacres, are impatiently awaiting orders to unleash their wrath and avenge the nation. In this community the narrator discovers "the heroes of the decisive battle of tomorrow." The warm welcome these people show him as the long awaited Poet inspires him with energy and self-confidence. But an old fedayee, Haro, who has fought many battles against enemy armies, has no faith in the visitor's ability: "The powerful Poet," he predicts, "will come to create the great elegy, the splendid epic poem of the Armenian Revolution and the freedom fighters . . . to immortalize the awesome beauty of Armenian Insurgence ascending from underneath the thick layer of centuries of slavery. . . . You don't seem to me like the Poet of that miracle masterpiece and the artist of that deification" (p. 54). Partevian's idealized response to catastrophe—insurgence—comes across in "Their Deaths" as in nearly every story in *The Book of Blood*. But here he explicitly confesses his

inability to create the artistic mold that could give expression to the Armenian response. The reason Haro gives, and obviously one that Partevian believes, is that "Your miserable bourgeois eyes have not burned from the heat of the red blood being shed. Your dragging feet never touched the black soil of the homeland. Your lungs did not breathe the catastrophe. Your lips did not feel the blood-dripping kisses of dying heroes" (ibid.).

Should the poet indeed live the catastrophe and feel the horrors on his own flesh in order to be able to immortalize his experience in poetry? Should the poet himself be a survivor? Elie Wiesel, the renowned writer-survivor of the Holocaust, maintains that only one who has been there has the right to speak. The well-known Jewish literary critic Alvin Rosenfeld believes that the best portrayals in Jewish Holocaust literature of "life" in the Nazi concentration camps are produced by those who themselves experienced the meaninglessness of the two categories of life and death.[19] Unquestionably, Ka-Tzetnik, Dan Pagis, Abba Kovner, to name only a few survivor-poets, could not have created their masterpieces, with their magic fusion of documentary importance and literary value, had they not shared with their fellow inmates the intimacy of horror and death. Nonetheless, a creation of a literary work requires more than the living and breathing of a tragedy. An artist must have the tools to materialize the poetry of catastrophe; he must be able to master the poetics of catastrophe and draw meaning from the experience.

Armenian traditional poets and writers labored hard to devise such a poetics. Some, like Khorenatsi in the fifth century or Arakel Baghishetsi and Abraham Ankiuratsi in the fifteenth, sought it in the lamentation genre. Others, like Eghishe in the fifth century or Stepanos Orbelian in the thirteenth, sought it in martyrology. Still others, like Eghishe again or Nerses Shnorhali in the twelfth century and Grigor of Akants in the thirteenth century, glorified God and sang a eulogy of redemption and immortality as the rewards for suffering on earth. The result was always cathartic: the poet of catastrophe succeeded in mitigating the survivor's pain. These devices clearly belonged to the past, however, and could not satisfy the modern poet.

Partevian needed to create something new, yet was unable to find a device that would make a difference; his writings were not far removed from those of his predecessors. Here and there one notes his struggle. In "Their Deaths" he concentrates on collective heroism, which he perceives as synonymous with insurgence. In Haro's words, the future masterpiece will be "the divine and

[19] See David G. Roskies, "The Holocaust according to the Literary Critics," *Prooftexts*, 1 (May 1981), 209-216, for a discussion of different approaches to Holocaust literature and the canons and values of criticism with regard to the genre of survivor accounts.

eternal [*nvirakan ev havitenakan*] 'Mateane hai ariunin' [The Book of the Armenian Blood]." Is this a play on words? Partevian titled his work *Ariunin Mateane* (The Book of Blood). Was he implying that he had succeeded in creating a masterpiece?

The stories in *The Book of Blood* paint a broad picture of the insurgents fighting against the perpetrators. What Partevian offers, however, are limited impressions of dreams, anguish, pain, and suffering, which do not capture the scope of the catastrophe. Haro authoritatively lays out a microcosm of the Armenian tragedy in "Their Deaths," explaining in detail the saga of the dead heroes, as if to show the Poet what the masterpiece must encompass. But the text within the text is a failure, and the experiment is far from being a beacon on the difficult path of Partevian's quest. Although moving and doleful, the episode of the dead heroes reveals no new techniques and opens no new horizons in the poetics of genocide literature.

Partevian's creative journey in the realm of Armenian tragedy continues in *The Book of Blood*. He fills the volume with violent imagery in an attempt to shape the confusion of that chaotic world of catastrophe. His approach is twofold: on the one hand, he depicts a detail of the tragedy in each episode, and on the other hand, he employs an oratorical style when the narrative falters because of his creative limitations. "Bari lur me Vahramin" (A Good News for Vahram) encapsulates both approaches, with two contrasting elements in the struggle of survivors in the aftermath of 1894-1896. Among the survivors, who are now refugees scattered in foreign lands, there are those who are totally absorbed in the day-to-day struggle, trying to adapt to their new environment and enjoy the good life. Then there are the isolated few who reject the good life and faithfully adhere to their ideals; this group represents the "prisoners of conscience" who have "dared to go back and enter the fateful gates of Destruction." Here, Partevian points up the dichotomy of responses to trauma, a theme that develops into complex, multifaceted artistic expressions in the post-Genocide diasporan literature, and which unfolds in its embryonic form in Partevian's descriptions of the refugees in Europe. Some try to forget the past, to bury memories of the catastrophe in ephemeral pleasures. By assimilating into their new context, they strive to develop a new sense of belonging. Many succeed in extinguishing the embers of pain and nostalgia, though a few are imbued with a yearning that crosses the limits of personal pain and becomes a national aspiration for justice and freedom. In the struggle they hurt themselves, they die, they rot in prisons, but they echo the response of the brave. They become the voice that stings the conscience of the indifferent masses.

The plan is admirable. The author seems to have reached the gates of success, yet once again his artificial style kills the plan at its inception. Instead of

developing credible characters in a suitable setting, Partevian creates characters who function only as messengers or spouters of ideology. Vahram believes strongly in the Armenian cause and the determination to act for its just solution, but he is immobilized by petty squabbling within the leadership. His arrest and imprisonment turn him into a passive observer, patiently awaiting the coming of good tidings from the outside world. There is no suggestion in the story as to how the solution will come, as if its realization were dependent on extrinsic factors beyond Partevian's control. The story begins and ends in uncertainty; the only suggestion of a solution is a call for reconciliation, peace, and unity among the various political factions.

Like many of Partevian's characters, Vahram is unable to act for two reasons: he is isolated from the field of action, and his mind is poisoned with the goings on among various political factions. Partevian's protagonists are rendered immobile by internal and external forces—the disrupting conflicts within the Armenian front and the ruthless enemy persecutions. Nonetheless, these obstacles do not justify inaction. His lack of a clear perspective and his inability to prophetize are further reasons for the lack of action and for his characters' resorting to self-criticism and self-blaming in response to the tragedy.

"Azatutean goghgotan" (The Golgotha of Liberty) shows the heroes of the Armenian struggle in exile. The hand of oppression and injustice has severed them from the free world, halting the action. There is nothing new in Partevian's strategy, yet he is still caught up in trying to create the long anticipated masterpiece:

> A superhuman ingenious hand was needed to give birth to the miraculous creation of that piece in the contemporary Armenian elegiac literature . . . which would be symbolically called "Erjanik mernoghner" (Those Who Died Happily). It would encompass an entire historical era and embody the awesome spiritual thrust of the entire race. It would become the eternal and undying monument to the unconfined Armenian faith. (p. 86)

Here is a similar formulation of the theme of national insurgence in "Their Deaths"; the difference is in the reference that follows, to external factors instrumental in the catastrophe: an outburst of hatred toward "the Western Powers" and the "old whore" called "European diplomacy" (p. 87). Partevian further projects that the masterpiece would expose "the treacherous conspiracy of the world leaders with the great Murderer of Yildiz" (p. 90).

Once again the goal is set; once again the outline, though impractical and unrealistic, is formulated. The problem is that an agenda of such magnitude can fit only in a frame of epic proportions in genre and character. Perhaps Partevian is aware of the problem; nevertheless, while many of his contempo-

raries, such as Daniel Varuzhan, Siamanto, Tekeyan, and others, searched the Armenian epic tradition to mold songs of the new liberation struggle, Partevian turned to ancient Armenian religious poetry, whose rich language and eloquence he undoubtedly had mastered. The characterization of his heroes in mystical and spiritual metaphors suggests a parallel between the yearning of pious Armenians to become martyrs for Christianity, and the unrestrained zeal of the modern freedom fighters to sacrifice their lives for new ideals. This return to ancient religious forms and media of expression should not be interpreted as a rapprochement with the traditional response to catastrophe. Partevian's position is explicitly on the side of armed insurgence and revenge. He is critical of compliance and rejects the solace and mitigation of pain that religious interpretations tended to provide.

"Khorann u patneshe" (The Altar and the Bulwark) represents the dramatization of this view. In this story, the resistance fighters decide to destroy the altar in the old monastery and use the materials to build a bulwark. Partevian's treatment of the sacred relic parallels Sutzkever's endeavor to reverse Jewish consciousness, that is, to build a symbol of Jewish resistance which takes its strength from the most venerable sources of Jewish tradition. Sutzkever's poem "The Lead Plates at the Rom Press," dated September 12, 1943, portrays Jewish fighters who break into that revered Jewish institution and melt down the sacred letters into bullets.[20] David Roskies, discussing Sutzkever's poetic legacy, maintains that this event never took place. Similarly, we cannot ascertain whether Armenian fighters actually destroyed the altar, or whether the incident is the fruit of Partevian's imagination. The point is that Sutzkever and Partevian both tried to connect past and present and draw new meanings from ancient values.

The glorious days of the monastery are long gone, Partevian contends. The miracles that were performed there and the mystic awe that surrounded the edifice are just a memory: "The supernatural ideal of the past had to give way to the new faith." The aged monk, the embodiment of tradition, is so shaken by the fighters' intention that he suffers a heart attack and dies. His body, a symbol of the past and, as Partevian puts it, "the cadaver of religious submissiveness," is abandoned in the church of old beliefs. The nation today, Partevian suggests, needs a new deity, a new covenant, and the disciples of this new prophecy are the freedom fighters, the believers in the "religion of rebellion."

Before the altar is torn down, a young priest blesses the freedom fighters and offers them communion with holy wine from the golden chalice of the

[20] Roskies cites and discusses Sutzkever's poem in *Against the Apocalypse*, pp. 250-252.

church. Although the ceremony alludes to the religious spiritualism of the soldiers of Vardan preparing for martyrdom, it certainly is not a token of the persistence of traditional beliefs. On the contrary, the ceremony is performed to sanctify the new faith by destroying the old. Partevian upholds the mysticism of religious poetry only to demonstrate the momentous importance of the freedom fighters's mission, for they are the soldiers of a new, revolutionary ideology. By revoking the memory of past spirituality the paradigm of responses to catastrophe is disrupted. The new response stipulated by the revolution is contrasted with the old, which had its origin in the teachings of Jesus, who in his time revolutionized the world. Despite the destruction of the altar and the death of the old priest, Partevian's recourse to the spiritual past softens his stance against the ancient values and draws him into a parallel with Sutzkever, who in "Rom Press" alludes to the struggle of the Maccabees and the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem, thereby bringing the past into the forefront of the Jewish armed resistance.

The juxtaposition of old and new responses is repeated in Partevian's "Prkarar sute" (The Saving Lie). An aged bishop, the spiritual leader of the two villages to the left and the right of the monastery, preaches obedience, patience, and endurance. The traditional concept of sin and punishment prevails in his perception of the imminent catastrophe. On the day of a Turkish assault, the village on the right follows the bishop's instructions and gathers in the church to pray for God's mercy. The village on the left, under the leadership of Kzir Ohan, who had deliberately distorted the bishop's message, takes up arms and fights. The village on the left stands untouched, proud, and tall. In the village on the right the church is set on fire, burning the bishop and his obedient flock. Partevian's repeated emphasis of "right" and "left" is quite probably deliberate, suggesting a political stance.

Partevian's characters represent various mentalities and social dispositions which react to the Armenian tragedy in different ways. Although the author is unsuccessful in developing full-bodied, real-life characters, their behavior gives a distinct idea of human responses to extreme conditions. His characters may be compared to the "categories of heroes" in Roskie's study of individual behaviors under stress in pre-Holocaust Jewish literature. To the first category of heroes—*baal-guf* (men of action)—belong the "inarticulate boor who lived by his passions and responded not to the dictates of Law but to the varied calls of nature," who fought back when Jews were in danger, qualifications reminiscent of Nietzsche's superman "unfettered by moral scruples . . . a noble savage who

gives vent to his original, natural, but subsequently repressed desires."[21] These characteristics, marking a radical departure from the traditional concept of the Jewish hero, are easily traceable in Partevian's stories. Sasuntsi Saro in "On the Rampart," Deli Baba in "Comrades in Arms," Aharon in "The Terrorist," who thought less and did more, and even Saiko in "Saiko," who performed an illogical, unjustifiable act of revenge, are characters who come close to the baal-guf's motivations. Nonetheless, it is important to note that only their motivation is similar. Partevian's characters do not act alone, nor do they act by instinct or impulse, as the Jewish baal-gufs do; they are very much integrated into a group fighting for a cause.

Roskies' second category is composed of the *telushim* (literally, "dangling men"), the men of inaction, "who agonize so long and hard about their place in the world that their confrontation with society, when such occurs, leads nowhere. . . . They know too much and do little." Perhaps Aram in Partevian's "The Younger Brother," Vahram in "A Good News for Vahram," or the two soldiers traveling with Deli Baba in "Comrades in Arms" belong to this type, and perhaps Partevian himself—his own character coming through his writings—seems to be a talush. Judging from the subjectivity of Partevian's text, and taking it as a revelation of his unconscious relationship with the characters he creates, one can postulate that Partevian's literary works, the subliminal consciousness of his fantasy, address a reality embedded in his own psyche. Like the modern Jew, Partevian has no recourse to traditional explanations of catastrophe and the catharsis they offer. Unlike the baal-gufs, who do not hesitate to take an action, he contemplates so deeply that he drowns in the rhetoric of action, never able to leave rhetoric behind and materialize action in the realm of his literature. He lacks the imagination to suggest a solution and forecast the result of the Armenian insurgence or armed struggle which he propagates. To cover that shortcoming, he subconsciously confines the power of his characters and condemns them to inaction.

Roskies' third category is that of the *schlemiel*, the men of reaction. The shlemiel "may be said to represent the normative type in eastern European Jewish fiction . . . he makes no dent in the world, for he becomes hero . . . when real action is impossible, and reaction remains the only way a man can define himself." In Partevian's fiction, this character is the normative type also, and belongs to the mass of people who react to catastrophe in their own way and as the moment dictates. The nameless women in "The Armenian Woman," who marry the village men to legitimize their children conceived in

[21] For the quotations in this passage and a more thorough analysis of these characters, see ibid., pp. 141-143.

rape, and those who stand along the road to sell their bodies in return for a piece of bread for their starving children, are only reacting to atrocity.

Despite the similarities, however, the parallelism between the Armenian and Jewish characters should not be overemphasized. The cultural, religious, and ethnic parameters mediating individual and collective behavior unquestionably underscore the uniqueness of each peoples' responses to catastrophe.

Throughout his work, Partevian views the Armenian tragedy from a critical point of view by means of self-analysis. The only way to overcome the catastrophe is through national insurgence or revenge. The reason this reaction is not achieved is that the Armenian nation is still faithful to traditional conformity and submissiveness and does not seem unified in the struggle. Partevian's failure in the prophet-poet vocation he assumed for himself was that he was unable to materialize action in the realm of his literature. As for his rigid stance with regard to self-blame and self-criticism, it is worth noting that such intense concentration left little room in his fiction for developing the image of the Turk, his motivations and his intentions. In an analysis of Nelly Sachs's poetry Edward Alexander states that in her poems "The German murderers are disembodied and without personal identity, it is because that is the metaphysical (but not legal) justification due for turning millions of Jewish victims into smoke."[22] One may question whether Alexander's reasoning is applicable to Partevian. This modern interpretation marks a radical departure from the traditional one, which explained the enemy's absence by implying that the enemy's identity was irrelevant. Alexander's new explanation takes its cue from the poet's conscious—or subconscious—urge to retaliate. The fact that Partevian denied the Turks a defined face and character was probably an unconscious reverberation of the concept of disregarding the enemy. It is unlikely that his motivation was based on any conscious or subconscious urge to retaliate.

If the perpetrators in Partevian's stories had been better defined some light might have been shed on the making of the criminal and the essence of his crime. Unlike Esayan, however, who sought to find the causes for the Armenian tragedy in the character differences of Turks and Armenians, Partevian zeroes in on the characteristics of the Armenian nation and tests their stability against the pressures of the most critical and turbulent periods in Armenian history.

Partevian's narrative stands as a strong, overt criticism of the slavish mentality of the Armenian masses, but he does more than criticize the weak: he stresses the virtues of the strong. He eulogizes those few Armenians who stood

[22] Alexander, *The Resonance*, p. 43.

up for their rights by taking up arms in self-defense, like Saro, Tigran the hunchback, and Haro the fedayee; by promoting and propagating the idea of revenge and freedom, like Vahram and Aram; or by harboring a strong psychological reaction to the atrocities despite their helplessness, like Saiko and Sara. In all these situations, the masses remain inactive, subject to the author's contempt or castigation.

Encouraging self-defense and scorning compliance and submission occurs in the Jewish pre-Holocaust responses, as in Abramowitch, Tchernichowsky, Bialik, Olitzky, and others. Post-Holocaust responses take a different course. Often, they return to religious interpretations such as *Kiddush Hashem*—martyrdom for the cause of Judaism—and redemption, to rely on the cathartic relief these explanations have to offer. The Holocaust writers rarely talk about self-defense. Sutzkever's idealization of the Vilna ghetto uprising has already been discussed; another instance is found in Alexander Donat's description of the liberation of the Jews of Dachau by Patton's Third Army in *The Holocaust Kingdom*. As Edward Alexander puts it, Donat "deplores the inability of the newly liberated Jews to take revenge upon their German masters through an act of collective punishment," and continues with Donat's interpretation:

> We had the souls of slaves, of cowards; we were crippled by two thousand years of pogroms and ghettos; two thousand years of the Six Commandments had tamed and blunted in us that natural virile impulse of revenge. The sublime words, "Thou shalt not kill," which had been our shield against murder and persecution became the shield and protector of a nation of murderers and our alibi for our own cowardice and weakness.[23]

Donat echoes the maskilic contentions against Hasidic teachings which turned the Jews into passive, quietist masses, and which counseled against resistance and violence lest the purity of Kiddush Hashem be desecrated. The maskilic approach is in striking parallel to that of the Armenian progressive writers, down to Partevian himself, who attributed the failure of a collective, nationwide uprising in self-defense to teachings of patience, conformity, and acquiescence in anticipation of redemption in heaven.

Moshe Flinker also criticizes Jewish inaction, but from a somewhat different point of view. At the beginning of his diary his stance is strongly religious, but as the news of the Jewish persecutions intensifies he grows more and more impatient. His spiritual activities—keeping a diary and praying—no longer satisfy him; writing "cannot reestablish our continually violated honor. Action

[23] Ibid., p. 14.

alone is of any use."[24] Then Flinker continues by questioning the "chosenness" of the Jews: "Is it a nation of soldiers or farmers? No—it is a nation of victims. . . ." Flinker further contrasts the inaction of the European Jews and the action of the Palestinian Jews.

The theme of armed struggle and self-defense occurs only in the Jewish literature that deals with the Warsaw or Vilna ghettos, where such resistance was actually undertaken. Abba Kovner organized and led the resistance in the Vilna ghetto, and depicted the most valiant and heroic actions. The resistance fighters of Vilna built their defense positions with "the great volumes of the Talmud in their brown leather binding." Alexander quotes Kovner and concludes:

> The event has remained with Kovner as a revelation of the complex possibilities of renewal in the interactions between matter and spirit. . . . Talmud was here degraded from a spiritual to a physical role; yet in the process it enabled a preservation of Jewish life through a transformation of the traditional Jewish passivity in the face of violent threat.[25]

Writing about the Warsaw uprising, Alexander explains that "Those who did eventually undertake armed resistance were the ones who were emptied of all hope of whatever kind, secular or religious." He then quotes Donat: "There is no precedent for the eventual uprising of the Warsaw Ghetto because it was undertaken . . . without the slightest hope of victory in life."[26]

By contrast, Partevian's portrayal of Armenian defense does not occur in a similarly hopeless situation; nor does it appear to be a gesture of last resort. His theme is the literary reflection of a political state of mind, a phase in the political history of the Armenian people, marked by serious attempts for armed struggle on the national level. The theme is the backbone of Partevian's response not only in *The Book of Blood* but in all of his post-Genocide works.

The Book of Blood ends with the long poem "Anlkelin" (One Who Cannot Be Abandoned), possibly Partevian's only attempt at verse. The poem recapitulates his perception of the Armenian catastrophe as well as the conflict between Compliance and Rebellion personified. Partevian doubts that the "Spirit of Rebellion" has fallen victim to the disaster. With faith and determination, he vows the perpetuation of "Rebellion," "Vengeance," and "Holy War," in spite of a foreboding of disaster. The Spirit of Rebellion contends:

[24] Ibid., p. 39.
[25] Ibid., p. 56.
[26] Ibid., p. 12.

"Behold! the red horizons
Portend disastrous dawns again
And foresee dreadful confrontations.
No! I am not deserted by the brave Armenians.
Behold! the fierce uproar of their multitude
I hear from far away.
The troops of the New War here arrive." (p. 160)

This poem does not specifically refer to the massacres of 1894-1896, as do the other stories in *The Book of Blood*, and seems to focus on the 1909 and 1915 massacres, thus serving as a bridge between them. With this finale, Partevian resumes the poet-prophet vocation he had given up in episodes requiring a projection into the future, so that *The Book of Blood* ends with prophecies of new disasters, confrontations, and resistance. And yet, the "Spirit of Resistance"—in the sense of persistence and perpetuation—prevails in the poem, as it does in all of Partevian's literature, indeed as it does in the entire tragic history of the Armenian people.

Literature of the 1915 Genocide

In 1916 the impact of the genocide of Armenians was still underway, gradually manifesting itself in the Armenian literature of the time. Arsen Erkat's *Anapatin hushardzane* (The Monument of the Desert), a collection of short stories published in Cairo, is a representation of the Armenian deportations and death marches through the desert. Partevian's preface to this collection illustrates his perception of the Genocide. Significantly, his interpretation of this most recent catastrophe seems to be the same as before. The following passage once again shows his internalization of the event:

> This is what our negligence and desertion brought about upon us. But now, it is time to come to our senses, to realize that during the great crisis we spent valuable time in painful sterility. . . . We made mistakes in weakness. It is clear to all of us now that we have not been able to become a strong determinant factor in the battlefield; during our great holocaust, we were silently reduced to an expectation of an external altruistic intervention. It is a proven reality today that the glorious resistance of Vaspurakan would not have been destroyed, and that Zeitun and Sasun would not have fallen if the military operations and the armed self-defense, at least this once, were organized on the national level.[27]

[27] For this quotation and a short introduction to Arsen Erkat and *The Monument of the Desert*, see *Hai nor grakanutean patmutiun*, V, 753.

Partevian is still blaming the Armenian people and not the perpetrator. He is still convinced that a national uprising could have prevented the nation's victimization, and he is striving to find within the Armenian reality reasons why an insurrection did not materialize.

Later, Partevian elaborates on this same idea in his literary response to the Genocide of 1915. His play *Anmah botse* (The Undying Flame) is a dramatization of the life of the Azatian family at the outbreak of the catastrophe and during the deportations.[28] Arsen Shahinian, a family friend and a strong proponent of armed resistance, praises those who rose in self-defense in Van and Sasun. He criticizes Atom Azatian and all those who believe in the goodwill of the Young Turk party, who still hope for a future Armeno-Turkish coexistence, and who find armed struggle a dangerous venture for Armenians in the Ottoman Empire. Through the interplay of opposing views, as expressed by Atom Azatian and Arsen Shahinian, the author explains why resistance on a national level did not occur, and why those who were blind to the government's intentions became the first victims of the planned annihilation. Arsen argues with Atom's wife, Siranush, actually the central character of the play,

> "Does Mr. Azatian still expect assistance from those criminal Young Turks? I feel sorry for his and your naiveté. . . . The Ittihad, a thousand times more anti-Armenian than [Sultan Abdul] Hamid, has decided on our total annihilation. . . . The Ittihad will not lose the opportunity to destroy our entire nation, an opportunity which [the Turks] dreamed about for a long time and which until now had not presented itself. . . . And we still expect mercy and protection from those who complacently carry out the orders of the party. (p. 29)

More alert and realistic than her husband, Siranush is ready to join the resistance and fight against the fate that looms ahead for her and for the entire Armenian people.

Although the characters in *The Undying Flame* have the potential for becoming memorable heroes in the literature of the Armenian tragedy, the play does not do them justice. Now in the role of playwright, Partevian is unable to meet the requirements of the genre. Devoid of spontaneity, simplicity, and genuineness, his oratorical style, more than ever, hinders the conceptualization of dramatic settings, suspense, and convincing plot development.

Despite the literary shortcomings in *The Undying Flame*, a careful reading exposes new traits in the paradigm of Partevian's responses. For the first time

[28] *Anmah botse* (The Undying Flame, 1917) and *Dzaine hnchets* (The Sound Echoed, 1916) were published in one volume (Alexandria: Aram Stepanian Press, 1917). Page numbers for subsequent citations are from this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

the enemy has an identifiable face and character. Unlike Hasan in "Saiko" or the Kurdish passerby in "The Power of Bread," Mazhar Shakir is not just a tool of treason, adultery, or rape; he is made human, with motivations and yearnings. Shakir is Atom's friend and a fellow member of the Young Turk party. During the turmoil of World War I and the Armenian persecutions, he refuses to help his friend; instead, he has Atom arrested and the family deported so that he can abduct Siranush, whom he has coveted for a long time. With all the virtues of the heroic Armenian women who would rather risk their lives than tolerate dishonor, defilement, and humiliation, Siranush resists the abduction and redeems her integrity by committing suicide. She could certainly be added to the list of heroines in *The Armenian Woman*.

In the play Partevian describes the inability of many Armenians, Atom among them, at the outbreak of deportations and massacres to believe in what was happening to them. Atom ardently refutes his friend Arsen, who believes in resistance, revenge, and death with honor, and who sees the deportations as "the most infallible system for collective death conceived in an evil copulation of German intricacy and Turkish barbarity." Atom admits that "undoubtedly, there will be physical losses during the deportations. . . . But after all, this is not a widespread massacre. . . Many will endure; they will live; they will survive." Is this line of thought the echo of a naive belief in the goodwill of the Young Turk government, or is it the unthinkable that mesmerizes the victims and blurs their perspicacity?

The incredibility of genocide is a frequently recurring theme in Jewish Holocaust literature. Alexander devotes a whole chapter in *The Resonance of Dust* to a discussion of the Jews' unpreparedness to believe in the reality of the horrors, referring to the literature of Chaim Kaplan, Alexander Donat, Eva Heyman, Elie Wiesel, and others:

> When they launched their campaign of genocide against the Jewish people, the Germans relied not only on the indifference of the nations of the world to the fate of the Jews but on the inability of most people to credit reports of genocide, and to believe that in the midst of the twentieth century the most cultivated nation of Europe would devote all its energies and much of its resources to the production of Jewish corpses.[29]

In planning the annihilation of the Armenian nation Turkish leaders capitalized on this same phenomenon. Partevian, in hindsight, criticizes his protagonist for being so naive as to be blind to the true meaning of the deportations. It is this same naive belief in the goodwill of the Young Turks and the

[29] Alexander, *The Resonance*, p. 10.

future of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire which gave rise to contradictions in Esayan's and Partevian's responses to the Cilician massacres of 1909.

Published in the same volume with the *The Undying Flame* is the play *Dzaine hnchets* (The Sound Echoed), an adaptation of a 232-page novel published as a serial in a periodical of the time. Oshakan calls both the novel and the play an exploitation of the Armenian tragedy.[30] He considers them worthless from a literary standpoint, and does not bother to critique them in his chapter on Partevian in *Panorama*. In terms of literary value, the play is, indeed, worthless; it shares the same shortcomings as *The Undying Flame*. The development is artificial, the sequence of events unconvincing, and the geographical settings ambiguous. Again, the characters deliver speeches instead of conversing with one other, and they do not fit the milieu depicted in the drama.

The Sound Echoed adds little to Armenian genocide literature, but it is worth mentioning as the last evidence of Partevian's response. The setting is the Caucasus, where the Russian-Armenians are mobilized to resist the advancing Turkish army and to rescue the Turkish-Armenians caught in the holocaust. The perception of the Armenian plight and yearning for resistance, which Arsen displays in *The Undying Flame*, is intensified and somewhat clearer in "The Sound Echoed." Interestingly, the main protagonist is again a woman. Princess Sonia Asaturof, a Russified Armenian who lives a lavish life in Tiflis, is suddenly sensitized to the plight of her compatriots in the Ottoman Empire. She joins the volunteer troops fighting against the approaching Turkish army and works as a nurse on the battlefield. She meets her destiny while gathering information on the enemy's movements. Her characterization typifies Partevian's overly romantic interpretation of the role of women in the Armenian armed defense. Here, contrary to *The Undying Flame*, opposition to collective armed resistance does not come from the passive, ignorant masses or from those intellectuals who still believe in the Young Turks' goodwill. Rather, it comes from the coward who is afraid to take arms and sacrifice his life defending the nation. Partevian praises the gallantry of Armenian volunteer troops on the Russo-Turkish front and calls their struggle "the sacred war for the liberation of the nation," echoing the liberation movement that was launched in Erzerum in the 1880s.

The author's unswerving position with regard to the Armenian armed struggle is noteworthy. Even in the midst of the bloodbath, Partevian sees a possibility for Armenians to gain their freedom by means of a collective armed

[30] Oshakan, *Panorama*, VII, 386.

uprising. He believes that a free homeland is the only haven for the nation's prosperity, and the only way to achieve that goal is by force.

In the Holocaust literature, the rebirth of the Jewish nation in an independent state is seldom associated with armed struggle. Moshe Flinker's diary illustrates his vision of the future in the realization of the State of Israel, but the means for reaching that goal are nothing like Partevian's. Flinker believes that the State of Israel will be created by the will of God: "I am absolutely sure that all the sufferings that we have undergone have given us certain rights, and by the general spiritual elevation of our people we have managed to raise the question of the Jews to the status of a problem for all mankind." The Jewish sufferings during World War II, unsurpassed throughout the Jewish history of persecutions, were a cataclysm, a redemptive process on the way to deliverance: "The return of our beloved people to their homeland . . . will be the greatest revenge that could ever happen."[31]

Partevian's literary corpus may lack artistic value, but it does unveil the problems of the poetry of atrocity. The use of ideological rhetoric to cover his artistic deficiencies; contradictions in judgment occasioned by shock and bewilderment; vigorous attacks on religious and social traditions; attempts to inject a new spiritualism into armed struggle; and finally, the abortive quest to create a masterpiece that would embody the Armenian tragedy, merit attention, especially from the standpoint of the impact of catastrophe on creative imagination.

[31] For quotations from Flinker and a discussion of his work, see Alexander, *The Resonance*, pp. 40-41.

6

Aram Antonian (1875–1951)

Aram Antonian was arrested in Constantinople along with hundreds of Armenian political leaders and intellectuals—poets, writers, teachers, publishers and journalists, artists and musicians—on the evening of April 11, 1915 (April 24 by the new Armenian calendar), and sent to the interior of the Ottoman Empire for extermination. An activist in the Hnchak party, he had served time in prison for participating in a political rally. Therefore, as an undesirable, he was among the first group of Armenian leaders to be arrested. According to Hakob Oshakan, Antonian fell en route from an open vehicle loaded with prisoners and broke his leg. The accident saved his life, for he was left behind to die while the others were taken away and shot. Unlike his unfortunate companions, he lived on and was able to bear witness to the tragedy of the Armenian people during the fateful years 1915 to 1918.

Antonian was born and educated in Constantinople. An energetic and hardworking young man, he was able to rise quickly to the forefront of the literary milieu. He edited satirical and literary periodicals, authored articles, novellas, and short stories depicting life in the capital; he criticized social ills and made political analyses of the Armenian plight in the Ottoman Empire.

After his lucky escape, Antonian spent nine months wandering in the mountains, hiding from the gendarmes and government officials to avoid capture. With all roads to freedom closed to him, he was left with no choice but to join a group of deportees on a death march toward Der-el-Zor in Syria.[1]

[1] Another account of Antonian's arrest and deportation states that he was hospitalized for his broken leg and then driven to Der-el-Zor with other deportees. See Aram Andonian [Antonian], "The Memoirs of Naim Bey," in *The Turkish Armenocide*, Documentary Series

The roads they traversed on foot were covered with bodies of the murdered and mutilated, and victims of disease, famine, and thirst. Antonian stayed with deportees in concentration camps around the town of Meskeneh in the desert, near the shores of the Euphrates River, not far from Aleppo. He saw how vulnerable these wretched people were to the attacks of bandits preying on their last meager possessions. He witnessed the anguish and desolation of their last days, their hopes for a miracle, or at least for a peaceful death. Theirs was a mere physical struggle to survive, and their death meant only the defeat of the body. He came to realize how continuous physical and emotional hardship strips the victims of their ability to endure cold, heat, starvation, filth, disease, degradation, humiliation.

Antonian was fortunate and escaped a second time. Taking advantage of the confusion caused by the dismissal of the camp *mudur* (director), he fled to Aleppo. In the next two and a half years, until the end of World War I, he was on the run to avoid imminent arrest. He spent time in Aleppo, Damascus, and Beirut, always haunted by his memories of death and destruction. When the English army entered Aleppo and the Turks hastily pulled out, Antonian found the peace of mind to resume his vocation as a writer and transform the unique experience he had survived into the communicable world of language. He wrote his reminiscences of the nation's agony, revised and refined the episodes he had scribbled hastily as he watched them happen in the concentration camps, and tried to retrieve history "by interviewing those survivors who could still remember the unspeakable horrors of the past five years. . . . Thousands of women and men came to me. They spoke; they wrote down [their stories], and no one's ordeal resembled that of another."[2]

Antonian believed that he owed it to the Armenian nation to commit his experience to writing. For the sake of history, the truth had to be salvaged from oblivion, but the task was overwhelming. Based on the immense raw material he had in his possession, just an outline of the tragedy would be an enormous undertaking.

> Many times I thought that a volume needs to be written for each [survivor] in order to encompass, at least in a schematic way, the overall picture of the terrible horrors. And there were a hundred thousand of these survivors, each one of whom had a story to fill a volume. Yet, this colossal endeavor would still fall short of the stories of those who had perished, taking with them more than a million volumes. (p. 21)

Vol. 2 (Np [University of Pennsylvania Printing Office]: Armenian Historical Research Association, 1965), pp. v-vi.

[2] Aram Antonian, *Mets vochire* [The Great Crime] (1921; 2d ed. Beirut: Ghukas Karapetian Publishing, 1977), p. 21. An English translation was published as "The Memoirs of Naim Bey" (see n. 1 above). All references to this work are to Antonian's original, with page numbers given parenthetically in the text.

His own first-hand experience and the eyewitness accounts entrusted to him by survivors were supplemented by a unique resource, the memoirs of the Turkish official, Naim Bey, chief secretary to the committee in charge of deportees in Aleppo. Antonian met him in 1916 in Meskeneh, where Naim Bey had been sent to carry out the extermination of the surviving deportees. They met again in Aleppo two years later, after the war. The former government official supplied Antonian with documents, telegrams, deportation and execution orders, his own accounts of the massacres at Ras-ul-Ain and Der-el-Zor, and his interpretations and analyses of Young Turk policies. Antonian translated all the documents into Armenian and compiled them in *Mets vochire* (The Great Crime), completed in 1919 in Paris and published in 1921 in Boston.[3]

The work is written in the first person, with direct quotations from Naim Bey's testimony. As if to dispel any doubt regarding the authenticity of the documents, Antonian occasionally interrupts the narrative with an explanation or an analysis demonstrating the relevance of the secret documents to subsequent events related to him by survivors (p. 28). His painstaking concern to obviate any possible denial—proved valid today in view of the Turkish campaign to declare all the documents to be forgeries—was criticized by Hakob Oshakan: "I do not know why he attributed so much importance to these telegrams, when as an Armenian he certainly knew beyond the shadow of a doubt who the true authors of this drama were and what results they were after. It was the destruction of Armenians."[4] Oshakan was familiar with the nature and the mind set of the Turks, but he never thought that one day they would firmly deny ever having planned and perpetrated the genocide of the Armenians, and claim that Naim Bey's testimony was fabrication. Obviously, many Armenians, Oshakan among them, believed, like the Jews in Kasrilevke, that "the truth

[3] In the context of the ever-increasing Turkish propaganda against the truth of the Armenian Genocide, many Turkish and pro-Turk scholars are working to challenge the authenticity of Armenian and foreign documentations of the Genocide, under the sponsorship of the Turkish Historical Society. One such endeavor, cast against the Naim-Antonian documents, generated a meticulous, scholarly investigation by Vahakn N. Dadrian to prove the document's authenticity. The outcome of Dadrian's research was published as "The Naim-Antonian Documents on the World War I Destruction of Ottoman Armenians: The Anatomy of Genocide," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 18:3 (1986), 311-360.

[4] Hakob Oshakan, *Hamapatker arevmtahai grakanutean* [Panorama of Western Armenian Literature], Vol. 9 (Antilias, Lebanon: The Cilician Catholicosate Press, 1980), p. 272.

must always come out on top, just as oil comes to the top of water,"[5] and Armenians would never have to fight to prove the truthfulness of the truth.

The Great Crime intends to show a thorough picture of the annihilation of those Armenian deportees who had survived the death march. It exposes the liquidation of entire concentration camps for the purpose of making room for new arrivals. Antonian believed that only by reading the actual letters and telegrams that contained the government's detailed orders could one comprehend the full scope and reality of these atrocities (p. 156).

The content and style of *The Great Crime* remove the work from the category of artistic literature, and consequently set it beyond the scope of this study. Nonetheless, it is a valuable resource in an analysis of Antonian's response to the Armenian tragedy. It is in *The Great Crime* that Antonian—successful writer, satirist, critic, editor, and publisher—breaks down, and, in an unrestrained emotional outburst, describes the pain of having to live with the memory of the hell he has survived. He confesses his inability to carry out the task of portraying the Armenian tragedy:

> Life in those circumstances was not easy. When today [1919], three years later, I recall those dreadful days, I feel that I have returned to that hell again. I do not mean the hell that our ancient clerical writers strove to surpass one another in describing. This was not the hell that Dante painted, but something infinitely more harrowing. The horrors of this hell only those who lived it will know, and they will never be able to describe it, because human language is not capable of doing it. (p. 89)

The inadequacy of language did not stop Antonian. He continued to record, just as Chaim Kaplan did in the Warsaw ghetto years later. The parallelism in their responses is noteworthy. Alvin H. Rosenfeld attests to Kaplan's resolve to record and not to abandon the "historical mission" he had assumed, regardless of worsening conditions in the ghetto. Two men, separated by more than a quarter of a century, were undergoing the same hardship, confessing to the same weakness in fulfilling the difficult task they had undertaken. "It is beyond my pen to describe what befell us last night," Kaplan confides; "Dante's description of the Inferno is mild compared to the inferno raging in the streets of Warsaw. . . . I haven't the strength to hold a pen in my hand, I'm broken, shattered."[6] Confessions of impotence, as pointed out previously, are frequent

5 The quotation from " Dreyfus in Kasrilevke" by Sholem Aleichem is discussed in Chapter IV.

6 Alvin H. Rosenfeld, *A Double Dying: Reflections on Holocaust Literature* (Bloomington, Ind., and London: Indiana University Press, 1980), p. 40.

in the literature of atrocity in any language, in any period, from the literature of the First Temple to the contemporary accounts of man's inhumanity to man. In Antonian's case, this confession is worth noting, first, because it is not repeated in his reproduction of Naim Bey's memoirs or in his stories of destruction and death; and second, because it initiates a long artistic digression (about 11 pages) from the course of his factual narrative. The passage is a microcosm of the Armenian tragedy, in which death is the major theme, the leitmotif, the only possible explanation then for every sound in nature, every sigh of the sick, every cry of the newborn: "The idea of death is more fearsome and more ominous than even death itself, because death does not live; it strikes like lightning and flashes like a bolt; whereas, in the form of a dominating idea, it becomes an everlasting continuity. It is alive" (p. 97). It was difficult to be so close to death, to live with its reality, and try to speak about it. Words, no matter how skillfully or artistically expounded, and imagery, no matter how concretely illustrated, could only suggest the horrifying reality.

The artistic portrayal of physical and spiritual waste is achieved with an immediacy, a spontaneity that could come only from one who had lived the experience. Lawrence L. Langer, commenting on Charlotte Delbo writes: "Since Delbo herself is a survivor of Auschwitz, she works with a reality reimagined rather than imagined, creating a disturbing and original alliance between memory and invention, history and art."[7] Langer would have made the same comment had he read Antonian. The paradox is that direct contact with destruction and the overwhelming burden of memories sometimes cloud the artistic imagination and make the creation of art impossible.

Antonian's lengthy emotional outpouring in *The Great Crime* may be an indication why he was unable to capitalize on the unique resources he had amassed, why he could not produce volumes of stories based on real-life experiences: he could not relive the hell he had to describe. Personal involvement had limited his perspective of the events, impaired his artistic imagination, paralyzed his medium of expression, and turned the act of narration into torture.

"Knowing the bitterness of suffering is the only condition that can authorize the writer to penetrate life," wrote Father Dajad Yardemian, quoting Cicero, "It is a big misfortune not to have suffered," and Oscar Wilde, "Profundity is the prerogative of those who have suffered and have known how to suffer."[8] Antonian had the fateful prerogative of having lived the hell, the

7 Lawrence L. Langer, *The Age of Atrocity* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1978), p. 201.

8 Father Dajad Yardemian, *Astvats ev zhamanakakits grakanutiune* [God and the Contemporary Literature] (Los Angeles: Mkhitarian Press, 1986), p. 12.

subject matter of his literary representation; and yet, in the long, productive life he led after the massacres (in Paris, until his death in 1951), he contributed only one volume to the literature of the Armenian Genocide.

Written in 1919, *Ain sev orerun* (In Those Dark Days) comprises six short stories about Armenian deportees during the death marches or in the concentration camps. There was no paucity of material, on the contrary. Antonian repeatedly asserted that what he had seen or heard would fill volumes; yet, he picked only six episodes to develop in the short story genre. He briefly recorded a few more episodes in *The Great Crime*, to show the brutality of the perpetrators in annihilating entire camps and caravans of deportees. Some of these episodes could well have become masterpieces had they been elaborated upon and fictionalized, for Antonian certainly had the talent.

The world shuddered upon reading about the cannibalism in the Volga region after the civil war that followed the Russian revolution of 1917, and again during the Nazi siege of Leningrad from 1941 to 1944. Who was to bear the blame? Certainly not the Russians who committed the act, but rather communism and Nazism, for causing this ultimate degeneration of human nature. After the surviving Armenian deportees were gathered in concentration camps in Der-el-Zor, the final measure was either mass execution or driving them into the desert, where they would die of starvation. It is not generally known that those devastated creatures, whom the Turkish executioners chose to abandon in the desert to die, ate the corpses of children who had starved to death. Not limited to murder, Turkish atrocities also extracted the last traces of humanity. Antonian records an episode in which a young, famine-stricken girl, lying on the bare desert sand, smells meat cooking nearby. "Mom, go ask some for me; I can't go on any more." The mother goes and returns empty-handed. "They didn't give you a piece?" asks the girl. "When I die, mother, you eat my meat alone; don't give it to anyone" (pp. 116-117).

Abraham Sutzkever cried out in the Vilna ghetto, helplessly holding his poisoned newborn dying in his arms. With a poetic force, he was able to translate the devastating urge to sate the dehumanizing hunger into a feeling above love, into a drive to become one with his beloved baby to save the body from descending into nothingness:

> Because of hunger
> or because of great love—
> your mother will bear witness—
> I wanted to swallow you, child,
> when I felt your tiny body
> cool in my hands. . . .
> I wanted to swallow you, child,

> to taste
> the future waiting for me.
> May be you will blossom again
> in my veins.[9]

Sutzkever's dramatization of love turned into immense pain and displaced emotions urges the reader to condemn the savagery of the German nurses in poisoning a newborn, heeding an order that no Jewish woman should give birth. Antonian leaves his readers with mixed emotions, the girl dying of hunger, the prospect of a mother eating her dead child, the neighbors who do not share their meat. In any case, the attention is not directed at the Turk who planned the scenario.

In another episode, Antonian reports that the governor of Bitlis ordered the burning of nearly one thousand Armenian children he had gathered in Tashkhod. The children were set on fire and their bodies dumped in a pit dug for the purpose. Antonian says that for days one could hear the wails and moans of those still alive, and that no one was allowed to go near them (p. 178). Factual accuracy and controlled emotions prevented Antonian from letting his creative imagination take flight, whereas a quarter of a century later a similar episode near Auschwitz became one of the most shuddering and overwhelming scenes in Elie Wiesel's *Night*. Wiesel, a fifteen-year-old boy at the time, relates his experience:

> Not far from us, flames were leaping up from a ditch, gigantic flames. They were burning something. A lorry drew up at the pit and delivered its load—little children. Babies! Yes, I saw it—saw it with my own eyes . . . those children in the flames. . . . I pinched my face. Was I still alive? Was I awake? I could not believe it. How could it be possible for them to burn people, children, and for the world to keep silent? No, none of this could be true. It was a nightmare. . . . Soon I should wake with a start, my heart pounding, and find myself back in the bedroom of my childhood, among my books. . . .[10]

With a parallel experience of helplessly watching hell on earth, Antonian never attempted to create a classic of Armenian Genocide literature, in the way that Elie Wiesel's *Night* is to Jewish Holocaust literature. The reason may lie in his commitment to history and his urge to record, as precisely as possible,

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[9] From Abraham Sutzkever's "To My Child," in David G. Roskies, ed., *The Literature of Destruction: Jewish Responses to Catastrophe* (Philadelphia, New York, Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1988), p. 494.

[10] Elie Wiesel, *Night*, transl. from the French by Stella Rodway (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), p. 41.

the ordeal of the nation so that the world might judge. But this may be a hasty and superficial conclusion. Perhaps Antonian's inability to carry on in the agonizing world of genocide literature condemned him to silence, a sort of suicide, perhaps, although not literally, like Sylvia Plath's suicide, submitting to Adorno's aphorism—no poetry after Auschwitz. After *The Great Crime* and *In Those Dark Days*, Antonian chose to remain silent and kill in himself the voice that he felt had proved inadequate to evoke the indescribable experience of the victims and the insane rationale of the victimizers. He said and wrote no more.

The Great Crime and *In Those Dark Days* are two literary gems which Antonian contributed to the legacy of literary responses to the Armenian Genocide. The first work is a factual narrative, the second an artistic representation of the same reality. The first supplies the historical background that permits a better understanding of the second; it presents the events realistically, with interpolated analyses of motivations, goals, causes, and consequences. The second work brings the events to life with fictionalized pictures and artistically molded outbursts of love, hate, longing, pain, prayers, and animosity. Another important aspect falls within the scope of Antonian's response to genocide, that is, the perspective from which the catastrophe is regarded. *In Those Dark Days* tells the story of the victims, their cries of pain, sorrow, rage, and revenge; most important of all, it offers vivid evidence of the decadence of the human psyche caught up in the most inhumane circumstances of history. *The Great Crime* tells the story of the victimizer; it presents the crime from the point of view of the executioner. Except for the few interruptions by Antonian—editorial remarks, explanations, cross references, and interpretations—*The Great Crime* may be considered as the confessions of an executioner. If *In Those Dark Days* is a tribunal where the victimized Armenian nation is judged for having relinquished basic human qualities, then *The Great Crime* is a tribunal of the victimizers which reveals the process of implementing a diabolical plan.

Realistic Portrayal of the Armenian Tragedy

The straightforward, unembellished description of life in the concentration camps is a drama in itself. But when incidents shock the ominous peace in the camp, and when the victims are subjected to exceptionally painful situations, then a masterpiece may be born that can bring an obscure fragment of the Armenian tragedy to the attention of human consciousness.

Two mothers are sobbing on the shore of the Euphrates, awaiting news of their missing sons. A week earlier, one lost her son to the raging river; today another boy is said to have drowned. Whose son is it? How can poor Lusik bear the death of her second and last son? The wait is agonizing. "Which one of these two mothers was going to be the lucky one? . . . On whose head was the terror of this agony going to break?"[11] Antonian sets forth every detail of the women's anguish. Even though the moments of uncertainty create a tense situation, they also inspire hope and help the victims through the trauma: "'Mother of God! Come to the rescue'; 'Jesus . . . show your power' they prayed. Then, turning, they looked into each other's eyes and their looks had the same expression. Like the clouds of two burning sticks of incenses, they melted into each other and became one" (p. 52).

Finally, a body floats down the river, bumping against the boulders. The mob gathered on the shore is in turmoil. At last a man bravely jumps into the river to bring the body ashore. Now, the curious mob watches two bodies struggling against the rough waters—the swollen body of a boy and a man risking his life to rescue the dead. The climax is reached when the two mothers view the corpse: it is Lusik who has lost her second and last son to the raging current of the Euphrates.

The tragedy builds. Unable to bear the shock, Lusik mourns her son's death and her mourning unveils a battered world of motherhood. Her sanity is slipping away. Again and again she utters loving, caressing words, then screams helplessly and swears at the unknown. Her kisses storm the corpse as though hoping to awake in it a meager spark of life. Then, in a violent seizure, Lusik lets out a last piercing scream, tears open her shirt, letting her unsightly, shriveled breasts hang from her bony chest. In a rage, she sinks her teeth deep into the corpse's neck and the dark blood gushes out over her pale face. This is the last sign of life her brain has commanded, and she collapses over the body of her son: "The blood drop by drop oozed out from the wound where Lusik's teeth were still clenched. It ran into the desert sand, drawing sinister configurations as though to record the story of this heinous incident" (p. 66).

Human tragedy is taken to its extreme. It is the crucifixion of the nation. Antonian takes hold of the reader and drags him into a world of agony and everlasting death. Was Lusik's reaction an act of desperate love or an expression of hatred and revenge? Bestial rage, teeth driven into the flesh of a dead child, blood painting a deadly face, two dessicated breasts—these are not elements that elevate the impact of drama, yet they startle and shock the reader out of the role of distant spectator and force him to think about the unthinkable. The immediacy of the details jolts the reader only until he realizes that to react with disgust is to betray the humanity of the deportees and reject

[11] Aram Antonian, "Mairere" [The Mothers], in *Ain sev orerun* [In Those Dark Days] (Boston: Hayrenik Press, 1919), p. 47. Hereafter, story titles and page numbers in parentheses refer to this publication.

their ordeal. With this technique, Antonian fights the monotony of repetitive tragedies, which can benumb the reader and desensitize him to the endless tortures the characters endure.

The domination of death in Antonian's stories is so overpowering that the characters fade into faceless victims, and Death becomes the true protagonist, very much present and playing its ghastly role. Death becomes the central focus, the major theme. But Death's omnipresence creates an atmosphere of indifference, passivity, inertness, and moral insensibility among those facing it and living with it everyday. Antonian, too, has been there, has lived the experience wherein no one sympathizes with the dying because one, too, is on the verge of dying.

The responses of survivors mourning over the dead are usually interspersed with the memory of their confrontations with other deaths. When death is everywhere and ever present, when it becomes a blessing for those still living, then mourning loses its conventional meaning, purged of its usual purpose. In the words of Jean Améry, a survivor of Auschwitz and the author of *The Season of the Dead*, it is the "total collapse of the aesthetic idea of death," because "in the concentration camp there was no Tristan music to accompany death, only the bellowing of the SS and the Kapos."[12]

Lawrence Langer attempts to rationalize the survivors' response to death under extraordinary circumstances, in an extraordinary period, which he calls "the age of atrocity." He quotes Simone de Beauvoir's formulation of this response and maintains that the same formulation holds true in the case of the collective memory. In *A Very Easy Death*, de Beauvoir describes her conflicting emotions after her mother's death and concludes: "When someone you love dies, you pay for the sin of outliving her with a thousand piercing regrets."[13] One may compare this sentiment with Antonian's reaction to death and mourning:

> They did not cry, because they were not different from those who were dead. Death had penetrated their body, their soul, the marrow of their bones. . . . They did not cry because the tears shed upon the dead do not really stem from our sorrow. Pain is silent. The tears that we shed after a beloved are the tribute we pay, a sort of tax we owe them for having had the opportunity to survive them, to enjoy the beauty of life, the sun, the water, the light, the warmth, the

[12] Quoted in Lawrence L. Langer, *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1975), p. 71. Langer explains that the Kapos were brutal inmates, often criminals, in charge of certain prison barracks. Their behavior and actions seem to parallel those of the Armenian nightwatchmen in Antonian's stories.

[13] Langer, *The Age of Atrocity*, p. 29.

> flowers, the fruits, the blue of the skies, the green of the prairies, the voices of loved ones, the humming of the birds, all the pleasures and passions, all the loves and intimate relationships." ("Keankin hognutiune" [The Weariness of Life], p. 129).

This interpretation may sound cynical, but it fits well with Antonian's technique of startling the reader with contrasts of life and death, with unconventional but realistic metaphors and imagery, of dragging the reader into the world of torture and death. Consider, for example, Charlotte Delbo's dancing skeleton, a dying woman's last struggle to reach some pure snow to wash her swollen lip. The description does not romanticize the situation; on the contrary, as Langer explains, it emphasizes "the ultimate degradation of the human image under the conditions of atrocity."[14] The impact of this passage is greater, perhaps, than that created by a sentimental depiction of a dying woman. Using the same technique, Antonian avoids a pathetic description of the misery and affliction of women in a caravan arriving at the concentration camp near Meskeneh. He makes a stronger impact with his use of flashbacks that contrast their present appearance with how they looked before. These moving skeletons are painful proof of the transformation of human beings born to live the pleasures of life, to love and to be loved, into filthy, faceless creatures resembling the frightening witches in stories grandmothers tell. These nameless creatures had once been women with fresh, living bodies: "To imagine that these breasts have had their graceful period of virginity; to imagine these breasts, round and firm, shining with snow-white brightness, with pink nipples, caressed by desirous hands, have experienced sensuous pleasure," and now these same breasts are "covered with filth and mud, hanging like the livers of slaughtered animals, neither blue nor black nor green, but a mixture of all those, a deadly color that caused nausea" ("Jur ... Jur" [Water ... Water], pp. 80-81).

This may be the passage that irritated Hakob Oshakan, who, though fascinated by Antonian's skill and fluidity in describing the deportees, seems to have been offended by the explicit physical descriptions and sexual metaphors.[15] Yet, it is hard to imagine a more effective means for conveying the painful reality. Antonian did not shy away from unconventional imagery. Unlike his contemporaries Zapel Esayan and Suren Partevian, he refused to be bound by the acceptable conventions of literary idiom; and unlike them, he was not so bewildered as to blame the inadequacy of language for his failure to describe a reality whose hideousness was actually beyond description. He had found his way out through an unconventional medium of expression.

[14] Ibid., p. 205.

[15] Oshakan, *Panorama*, IX, 260.

What Price Survival?

I have pointed out numerous instances illustrating the internalization of the Armenian tragedy and showing how responses to catastrophe swing from reaction toward the perpetrator to reaction toward self. Like an image in a mirror, the reaction is reflected back to the victim and expressed as self-condemnation. Antonian's *In Those Dark Days* is a fine example of this phenomenon, a superb representation of the Armenian tragedy turned inward. As Hakob Oshakan points out, the perpetrator is absent, except for a few gendarmes, a few Arabs, and the camp *mudur*. From the first to the last, one is aware of the absence of the Turk who in each episode has actually caused the tragedy. Neglecting the Turk's role in the drama of atrocity, Antonian indiscriminately depicts men and women acting like beasts, instinctively trying to survive, no matter what the odds.[16]

Oshakan's argument is valid in a sense; the perpetrators are not the protagonists in Antonian's stories. But this phenomenon is evidence of the inward twist, the internalization of the tragedy and the response to it. In this respect, Antonian, who in his factual narratives does not fail to expose the enemy and his crime, perhaps subconsciously follows the tradition of responses to catastrophe by presenting it as the internal drama of the nation. In the traditional Armenian responses to catastrophe, as seen in Part I, the enemy was an instrument of divine judgment whose identity did not matter; so also in Jewish literature, beginning with the authors of Lamentations and midrash, continuing down to Sholem Yankev Abramowitsch and Chaim Nachman Bialik. It should be noted, however, that the enemy is absent only physically. Antonian does not deem it necessary to repeat over and over that the Turks perpetrated the catastrophe, a technique that enhances the drama of the story. The Turks may be absent, but evidence of their presence is felt in every line, in every image. Like an ominous shadow, the crime hovers on the horizon of every episode. It is there when the Armenian victim commits the lowliest self-serving act, becoming a vicious executioner and compensating for his pain by making those weaker and more vulnerable suffer. It is there when the Armenian victim gradually becomes dehumanized and surrenders to bestial instincts.

In their treatment of the enemy as actor in the tragedy, both Antonian and Suren Partevian neglect the physical presence of the victimizer. Zapel Esayan not only characterizes the Turks but also tries to analyze their motivations and psychological traits, and depicts their feelings while committing the crime. In these circumstances of national suffering, in this ultimate test of history, it is

[16] Ibid., 9, 264.

the stability of the human psyche and the strength of human character, not national traits, that are being judged. Although the name "Armenian" is frequently emphasized in derogatory contexts, the target is not the Armenian national character. Similarly, when Bialik, in "In the City of Slaughter," condemns the cowardice and inaction of the Jews during the Kishinev pogroms, he is not questioning the Jewish national character; nor is Leyb Olitzky so doing in his collected war stories, when he lays bare the collapse of the religious and moral order and the humiliating means of self-defense employed during the 1915 pogroms. In all these instances, if someone or something is to blame, it is the atrocity itself that has diminished human dignity, altered conventional values, and induced human will to accept the inversion of values.

Like Bialik and Olitzky, Antonian exposed the collapse of moral conventions when Armenians turned against Armenians in their dehumanizing struggle to survive: "After the first few months [the gendarmes] were all convinced that the best way to harm Armenians and inflict pain upon them was through the Armenians themselves" ("Water ... Water," p. 84). Antonian did not shrink from exposing the reality; his national pride did not prevent him from describing the events he had witnessed. Unlike Suren Partevian, he did not dwell on heartbreaking episodes to produce sentimental drama. Antonian played down the crushing effect of his dramatizations by introducing a secondary motif, the degradation of human character. This original technique adds credibility to his narrative.

In "The Mothers," the man who risked his life to retrieve the boy's body stands naked by the river, shouting curses. His clothes have been stolen. Here is an example of man's abject need and regard only for himself in an abnormal situation which compels him not only to refuse to help others but also to exploit every possible situation to his own advantage. A similar conclusion is drawn elsewhere when an old woman behaves as though she alone were suffering. She stubbornly demands to have her dead grandson's body removed from the tent even though she cannot tip the undertakers, as the wealthier deportees can. "The widespread misery," writes Antonian, "the commonality of suffering, the frequency of deaths, and finally, all the tortures and pains of that damned life had, beyond doubt, made people selfish and egoistic" ("The Weariness of Life" p. 122). In "The Mothers," the frenzied mob pushes and shoves, not to help or console the grieving mothers but to get closer to the scene of action, to satisfy their morbid curiosity, to live a moment of excitement at the price of another's anguish, and to experience temporary relief from their own agony.

In another story a crowd is rushing toward a cliff to watch the last struggle of a fourteen-year-old boy who has been punished for having dared to run away from the camp ("Ban che ka" [It's All Right]). The camp is sealed from the

outside world; no one hears the wretched boy's frantic cries. Half dead from fear and torture, the boy is bound and dragged alongside the hill, crashing against the rocks as a gendarme on horseback pulls him. The inmates are indifferent spectators, viewing the event as on a movie screen. When the sense of reality is lost and the perception of terror blinded, the principle of endurance governs, dictating another series of reflexes which in normal situations would be outrageous. Instead of protesting the monstrous punishment or rushing to help the dying boy, the inmates watch, concerned only that his escape would have an adverse effect upon their own lives in the camp. "Come on down! Give yourself up! They won't hurt you," they shout. But they do not believe their own words. Well aware of the boy's fate, they are more concerned with pleasing the gendarmes in order to save their own necks. The boy had dared to disturb the deadly calm conditioned by the deportees' absolute and unquestioning submission. Any change in the status quo was bound to bring dire consequences.

Farther away in the camp, a mother is tormented with uncertainty and despair. Did her son make it to Aleppo, or was he caught? Is he being tortured now? Is he alive? "It's all right," the women around her callously speak. "Don't worry! It's all right." Antonian cannot find a justification for their indifference, as if this incident had no bearing on the lives of these wretched deportees, and writes in outrage:

> They were killing a boy . . . the mother . . . he was her only son. . . . She was shouting out the awful pain in her heart. . . . She was consumed by despair and hopelessness . . . a life was fading away. . . . Nothing could justify the crime; yet it was being committed in the most brutal way . . . the gendarmes were committing the crime with such ease, as if playing a game . . . they were laughing while committing murder . . . they were capable of slaughtering all the inmates of the camp, like playing a game, laughing . . . and yet it was all right for the deportees, as if nothing important had happened, as if the life of a young boy was not at stake . . . indeed what importance could these small dramas have compared with the horrors these people had lived through ("It's All Right," p. 9).

The passage is full of ellipses, giving the situation a visual as well as a verbal expression. The device not only emphasizes the suspense but broadcasts the difficulty of expression. Antonian wants to arouse the reader's imagination, to dramatize visually what words cannot adequately describe.

Intense suffering tends to numb feelings toward others, to turn one into a cold blooded observer. But pain is not always translated into indifference; on occasion the victims experience an unquenchable rage against their executioners. Although in "It's All Right" they cannot help the boy, their hearts are full of sorrow, fear, rebellion, hatred, rage—responses generated as they watch,

helplessly, the execution of an innocent boy. These responses remain buried, however, only adding to their torment: "What hatred we felt toward the gendarmes at the moment when that young boy sent us, from the awesome depths of his fear, his maddening look of unspeakable supplication! Powerless hatred, the worst of all sufferings . . ." (p. 13).

In Elie Wiesel's *Night* two men and a boy are convicted of sabotage within the camp and sentenced to hang. The sentence is carried out and the inmates are forced to march by the gallows to learn the lesson of absolute obedience. The experience leaves the narrator in a similar state of mental suffering, but the response remains in the religious framework of protest against God's silence:

> The two adults were no longer alive. Their tongues hung swollen, blue-tinged. But the third rope was still moving; being so light, the child was still alive. . . .
>
> For more than half an hour he stayed there, struggling between life and death, dying in slow agony under our eyes. And we had to look him full in the face. He was still alive when I passed in front of him. His tongue was still red, his eyes were not yet glazed.
>
> Behind me, I heard the same man asking:
>
> "Where is God now?"
>
> And I heard a voice within me answer him:
>
> "Where is He? Here He is—He is hanging here on this gallows . . ."
>
> That night the soup tasted of corpses.[17]

"It's All Right" ends with the execution of the refugee boy whose only crime was his flight for freedom. Yet, this episode, more than any other considered thus far, is played out as a drama, according to the spectators' view of the brutal execution and their response to it. The sound of the boy being dragged and his helpless screams, "Mother . . . Mother," echo in the distance and travel through time and space, reverberating in the memory of those survivors who witnessed it. "Years have gone by, but they still resound. . . . They will always resound, always resound . . ." (p. 19). The echo will summon the sharp pangs of remorse the onlookers had tried to suppress; the last terrified look of the dying boy will haunt many memories. Later, the echo will remind those who were there of "an expression of pain, suffering, supplication, but above all, an expression of reproach" in that young victim's eyes—reproach for the absolute submission that translated into indifference to your neighbor's plight, so long as it did not affect you. Here, it is indifference toward the boy's destiny: "Don't worry, it's all right." The nightmare of this incident haunts the survivors, as does the burning of babies in Elie Wiesel's memory. The responses diverge considerably, how-

[17] Wiesel, *Night*, pp. 70-71.

ever. While Antonian responds with remorse, an internalization of the catastrophe, a self-blaming for indifference and inaction, Elie Wiesel remembers how his faith in God was killed in that incident: "Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith for ever. . . . Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things, even if I am condemned to live as long as God Himself. Never."[18]

Nowhere in "It's All Right" are the executioners blamed for killing the boy; the guilt is inverted toward the victims themselves. Antonian blames them for their conformity, abject submission, indifference, and inability to act. "It's All Right" is the story of the Armenian tragedy internalized, in which Antonian develops an important theme not encountered in any of his other stories. The survivors of this particular camp, who had bought their survival with their indifference toward the plight of others, and all the survivors in various circumstances, are eventually purged of the dehumanizing defense mechanisms they had developed during those tragic years. Time restores the humanity they had lost to the hellish torture they had endured. A sense of guilt settles in their hearts. The immediate response to trauma—to survive no matter what the cost—is replaced by remorse and self-criticism. The reaction has not yet passed the limits of internalization.

Antonian's internalization does not stop at exposing the victim's indifference and inaction. In his narratives, the victims themselves become victimizers by inflicting pain on weaker and more vulnerable deportees. Perhaps to suppress their own sense of guilt for their humiliating servitude, or perhaps unable to take action against the perpetrators, they torture the weak to alleviate their own pain.

The Armenian nightwatchmen in "Water ... Water," appointed by the gendarmes to maintain order in the camps, are sometimes even more cruel than the gendarmes themselves. What a striking parallelism with the Kapos in Améry's *The Season of the Dead*! Antonian condemns these base characters, who will do anything to please their Turkish masters and gain privileges for themselves. They provide young virgins to satiate the mudur's lust. They make the girls dance naked during the orgies of Turkish officials. What is even worse is the fact that the inmates are aware of these circumstances and do not protest: "For them that was a natural precondition for living, a sort of a tax to pay. When their innocent daughters were snatched away to be raped and then passed around among the lower-ranking officers, they made no protest. They sometimes even handed over their daughters as ransom to alleviate their own

[18] Ibid., p. 43.

suffering" (p. 94). Indeed, thousands of miles away, during the same devastating war, civilian populations of stateless people were similarly victimized. The Jewish communities sacrificed their morality and their principles as a price for their lives and well-being. Roskies writes:

> There is scarcely a Jewish prose account, fictional or autobiographical, that does not dwell on the pornography of the war. At best, wives and especially daughters were sent to the local commandant to finagle a permit for flour, salt, lumber, or what have you, invoking nothing more than their feminine charms. This was jocularly known as "delivering a '*bitoy*'," a pun on the Hebrew for "daughter" (*bat*) and the German for "petition" (*Bitte*).[19]

During the pogroms of World War I as well, Jewish women either voluntarily or compelled by the needs of the family sold their bodies in exchange for favors.

Internalization occurs more often in the Jewish responses to the pre-Holocaust pogroms. The trend continued during World War II, when ghetto writers discharged a torrent of anger toward the enemy within. In contrast, as Roskies attests, survivors of the Holocaust focused on the external enemy: "All the victims assumed an aura of holiness. . . . The stories of betrayal and internecine warfare were suppressed, reinterpreted or forgiven."[20] An example of this type of treatment is Ka-Tzetnik's novel, *House of Dolls*. Young, attractive Jewish women are sterilized and inducted into the "House of Dolls" to entertain German soldiers. They are fed well and assigned to light work, as long as they satisfy their customers. Ka-Tzetnik describes the prolonged survival, degradation, and moral outrage in this hellish environment. The heroine, Daniella, struggles to preserve her moral integrity "by daydreaming of a better past. When finally her resistance falters, she makes the bid for freedom that ends in her death."[21] Antonian was aware of the anguished Armenian Daniellas and their dehumanization in the notorious orgies of the Turkish gendarmes, but none of these wretched creatures was given a face, a name, or a character in his stories. Only the story of Zapel, in Suren Partevian's "Kuire" (The Sister), parallels Daniella's.

Most women in Antonian's stories have lost their physical attractiveness to the hardships of deportation. The nightwatchmen beat them like dogs. The

[19] David G. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 116.

[20] Roskies, *The Literature of Destruction*, p. 382.

[21] Alan J. Yuter, *The Holocaust in Hebrew Literature: From Genocide to Rebirth* (Port Washington, NY.: National University Publications, Associated Faculty Press, 1983), p. 9.

appearance of these half-naked, barefoot women, robbed of all traces of womanhood, skin encrusted with dirt and filth, is the result of their long journey without food and water. When they arrive at the camp in Meskeneh, the hopes of the inmates who were anticipating good news of deliverance and return to their homes are shattered. At first, the refugees welcome the newcomers and help them find water and food. Their motivation, Antonian claims, is not pity or compassion but self-centered interest.

The anticipation of freedom is an underlying motif expressed explicitly in "Water ... Water" and present in Antonian's other stories as well. It stems from the deportees' naiveté in believing the Turk's justifications for the deportations, and from their ignorance of the principal objectives of the Turkish operation. In any event, the hope for impending deliverance is instrumental in shaping the popular response to the immediate situation. With the prospect of imminent freedom, survival becomes an all-consuming desire. The deportees are driven to endure whatever sacrifice is required, in order to greet the day that will bring the news of their deliverance.

The Jewish experience was similar. The ghettoized Jewish communities still maintained a certain degree of cultural and economic freedom. Times were difficult, but the ordinary Jew remained hopeful. The news of mass executions in gas chambers or by firing squads hardly reached them, and rumors were met with the classic denial of the truth, to keep the solidarity alive. This situation promoted a spirit of community and an impulse for collective survival (although instances of egotistical behavior, treason, and collaboration are many). Denial of what was really happening best resonates in Elie Wiesel's *Night*.

Contrary to expectations, the new caravan of women in "Water ... Water" did not bring good news; the deportations and massacres were still going on, and this knowledge brought about a change in attitude toward the newcomers. The initial expressions of compassion were replaced by disillusion and anger. What better scapegoats than these helpless women, who were the living embodiment of death itself. They were destined to perish, and the mudur was to perform the execution. A signal to the Armenian nightwatchmen was enough, the gendarmes' orders would be carried out. Now transformed into ruthless executioners, the nightwatchmen beat the women who dared to disobey. One woman exclaimed:

> "O God. . .Where is God ?" and ran toward the river, to the water which she had been deprived of for days.
>
> "They did the same thing to us in Azazi. . . . There was no God there either," grumbled the nightwatchman and raised his stick to strike another blow on the poor woman's back, as though it were a rule that Armenians should settle the score of the torture, pain, and humiliation inflicted upon them by other Armenians.
>
> That was the only way they knew to mitigate their own pain and find solace. (p. 85)

Where was God, to see the injustice, the torture and humiliation these Armenian women had to endure at Meskeneh? Where was God, to see the bodies of innocent Jews dangling on the gallows at Auschwitz? A quarter of a century and thousands of miles apart, two victimized nations raised their voices in protest against God. The traditional appeal to God resonates in their response to national catastrophe. "O God! Forgive our many sins," the traditional Jew and the Armenian would pray and accept the enemy's sword as God's just punishment. "For which sins are we being punished?" the Armenian victim of the massacres of Adana would ask. The context is unchanged; it is still a dialogue with God. The interpretation of catastrophe and the response to it are still deeply rooted in religion. Only this time, God is blamed for remaining silent, for not acting to save his suffering flock.

Class Differences: A New Motif

Unlike Zapel Esayan and Suren Partevian, Antonian frequently touches upon the subject of class differences as a determining factor in the degree of vulnerability of the victims. Considering his own background and his political affiliations as an active leader of the Marxist Hnchak party, this approach is not far-fetched. Nonetheless, it is hard to believe that such differences could exist amidst the shared misery in the concentration camps. The spontaneity with which this new motif is introduced, and the turn of the events that support it, make Antonian's contention convincing. The more affluent inmates, those who somehow still had a few pieces of gold to spend, lived in private tents. With the money, or through the responsibilities they assumed in the camp as aides to the Turkish officials, these deportees bought privileges and advantages, and therefore relative comfort. In contrast, those whose belongings consisted only of the rags on their backs and a mat to sleep on lived in the large, vermin-infected communal tent.

In Antonian's story "Patgarake" (The Stretcher), the head nightwatchman Bekshi Bashi is one of the Armenian exploiters. Hundreds of men, women, and children are dying every day from typhus. Snow is the only means for bringing down the burning fevers of the sick. Martik Agha, an inmate, learns that the Arabs are selling snow and hurries to get some for his stricken son. He is told that Bekshi Bashi has bought up all the snow and is now selling it for a much higher price, as he has done with the flour, fruits, and vegetables that the Arabs

occasionally bring to the camp to sell. Martik Agha is furious, but can do nothing. He cannot afford the price Bekshi Bashi wants for the snow; he, too, has become a victim of Bekshi Bashi's greed. Whereas in "Water ... Water" the nightwatchman's motivation in beating the woman was to satisfy a grudge, here the motivation to exploit others stems simply from self-centered interest. The easiest way for Martik Agha to appease his fury is to vent his anger on a scapegoat, and the scapegoat is there. A small boy searching for his mother comes to Martik Agha's tent, insisting that here is where he left his sick mother earlier. This was their very own tent, he says; there could not be two green tents so alike. There is no way to convince the boy that he is mistaken. The man, engulfed in his own misery, tries to chase him away but to no avail. The boy keeps coming back, crying and searching for his mother. Finally, in his fury, Martik Agha grabs the child and beats him, heaping his own misery on the boy as though he had caused it.

In the same story, the boy is victimized by another class of "privileged" persons, those inmates in charge of disposing of the corpses. They are the Armenian undertakers, exploiters of the dead and the living alike, who haughtily sport their armbands, inscribed in Turkish, which prove their official employment by the city of Meskeneh. They dump the bodies on a big stretcher to speed up the task of collecting the dead every day. Who cares if the bodies are treated like trash, if this one's head is under that one's belly, or if some leg or hand covers another's face? The undertakers administer the final indignity: "The respect for the dead, which had certainly been one of the most primitive feelings of mankind, had disappeared. Was it because of the multitudinousness of the deaths, or the repelling sight of the decomposing, unburied corpses?" (p. 178).

The boy at last finds his mother, lying on a stretcher. In his excitement he jumps on it and hugs his mother. He cannot believe she is dead, no more than he could believe that the green tent was not theirs and that his mother was not lying there waiting for him. The undertakers chase him away, but the boy will not let go, so they decide to take him along. "Let him sit there. If he doesn't want to let go, we will take him too" (p. 177). They cover the stretcher with a blue blanket that serves as a common shroud. The boy is now in the dark, surrounded by corpses. Terrified and nauseated, he screams and faints. Has he fainted, or is he dead? The undertakers don't care; their only concern is to dispose of the corpses and come back to the camp for hundreds more. "He's dead; he's dead," two women say. "Poor boy," whispers another. And a third one protests: "O, ruthless God, is this your justice? ... Don't you see? . . . Don't you hear? . . . May you become blind. . . . May you become deaf . . ." (p. 186).

This incident momentarily arouses the deadened feelings of the bystanders. Shock has initiated a dialogue with God in order to find some solace, just as it did for the ancient and medieval Armenians in catastrophic situations. Once again, God's judgment evokes a protest, but in a much stronger mode than in "Water ... Water." Once again God is the key, for only God can put an end to the suffering. The struggle still does not encompass action against the victimizer; protestations are not directed at the enemy. The struggle consists of sustaining physical existence, no matter how degrading and humiliating the means, until God's wrath has subsided.

Even though all the inmates are exposed to the same perils and all share the ultimate fate of total destruction, those who have some means can cope somewhat better and prolong their survival. Even when it comes to burying the dead, undertakers prefer to serve those whose families have money to pay them. Let the corpses of the poor families decompose and rot right in front of their eyes. In an episode in "The Weariness of Life," the undertaker refuses to take an old woman's grandson, the fifth typhus victim in her family. She begs him to carry the corpse away, to make room for her last grandchild, lying on the bare floor burning with fever. The undertaker speaks:

> "Leave your dead outside, like others do." The undertaker pushes the old woman aside and hurries toward the big, comfortable tent nearby.
>
> "They must be rich," the woman murmurs, "even in the desert the rule is the same. . . . But they don't have other sick ones as I do. . . ." (p. 134)

She watches desperately as the undertaker carries the dead daughter of a "rich" man. Left with a rotting corpse and a dying child, she attacks the man in a spell of fury, another example of assault between victims in which grudge and retaliation are the motives. The old woman and the man grapple with each other in the filth and mud, two human figures stripped of their humanity: "Unable to rise against those who had caused this tragedy, these poor people had turned on each other, as if by adding to the pain of another they could alleviate their own suffering," (p. 136) Antonian concludes.

The world that Antonian describes in *In Those Dark Days* is the epitome of the conflict between atrocity and survival. Endurance during the death marches and in the concentration camps does not involve the intellect; the struggle is reduced to physical survival, the struggle to stay alive. In these stories, where survival meets the constant challenge of death and destruction, the final, total victory of the Crime is a foregone conclusion. The author's realistic

treatment of the subject bespeaks his skepticism; there is no glimmer of even a dim light.

How can one expect to find Zapel Esayan's optimistic finale of rebirth and revitalization in Antonian's somber narrative of total annihilation? Esayan wrote *Amid the Ruins* in Constantinople, in her own native environment, where nothing yet portended what was coming. She wrote her work after returning from the disaster-stricken land of Cilicia, knowing that the damage, although of enormous proportions—at least from the point of view of physical loss—was reparable. She had witnessed the Armenian spirit of perseverance rising from the ruins. She had seen the survivors' determination to begin a new life on the ashes of the old.

Antonian's environment was exile. His daily contacts were with the homeless, jobless refugees who had no prospects of relief. He had seen Armenian homes, towns, and villages evacuated, their inhabitants uprooted with no hope of return. If the remnants of the nation were to survive, and if the people were to resume their lives, they were condemned to do so as refugees in alien lands. There could be no return to Western Armenia. Apparently, Antonian had no faith in the future of the new Republic of Armenia, born in May of 1918 in the far eastern corner of the historic Armenian lands. The leaders of the short-lived Republic were not given a chance to create a favorable and secure environment for the survivors of the Genocide. In fact, neither in *The Great Crime* nor in *In Those Dark Days* does Antonian mention the existence of the Republic of Armenia as a haven for the survivors. *In Those Dark Days* ends on a dark and sullen tone, reflecting the reality of the immediate aftermath of the Catastrophe.

7

Hakob Oshakan (1883–1948)

The volume and richness of Hakob Oshakan's literary legacy make a monographic, or even thematic, study of his literature a challenging and all but overwhelming task. I set out to scan and study his artistic representation of catastrophe and his response to it, but soon realized that he wrote on the Armenian Catastrophe his entire life. In all his writings—whether directly or in reviews of others—he sought to answer two questions: Why did the Turks commit such an inhumane crime? What impact did that crime have on the remnants of the Armenian nation? In the words of Catholicos Karekin Sarkissian: "Oshakan focuses on the psychology of the Turks and the terrible wound they have cut open in the life of Armenians."[1]

Oshakan was a prolific writer. Literature was his life. His *Hamapatker arevmtahai grakanutean* (Panorama of Western Armenian Literature) fills ten volumes, approximately 6,000 pages. His novels, short stories, and essays add up to 4,000 pages. The three volumes of his unfinished novel *Mnatsordats* (Remnants) fill 1,800 pages. In addition, a large corpus of unpublished works was recently entrusted to the archives of the Institute of Literature of the Academy of Sciences in Soviet Armenia.

The line between Oshakan's critical and artistic writings is very fine and often crossed within the same piece, as in *Panorama of Western Armenian Literature*, which is classified as literary criticism but is like a novel in concept and character. As Krikor Beledian attests, "Oshakan the 'critic' has so much

[1] Karekin Sarkissian (Catholicos of the See of Cilicia), Preface to Hakob Oshakan, *Hamapatker arevmtahai grakanutean* [Panorama of Western Armenian Literature], Vol. 10 (Antilias, Lebanon: Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia Press, 1982), p. x.

affinity with Oshakan the 'novelist' that, even in extrinsically different applications, one is confused with the other."[2] These complexities notwithstanding, I have endeavored to explore, in as much reading as possible, Oshakan's poetics of catastrophe, that is, the mechanics he developed to transform the Armenian tragedy into a work of art.

After a brief overview of Oshakan's life I will concentrate on two of his major works: the collection of short stories entitled *Kaiserakan Haghtergutiun* (Imperial Song of Triumph, written in 1920) and the novel *Mnatsordats* (Remnants, written in 1933). These writings encapsulate how Oshakan undertook the task of confronting the Genocide, how he established for himself a tradition of writing about it, and how, finally, he failed to realize his lifelong ambition to create a work of art representing the Catastrophe. My readings of Oshakan's other writings serve to further elucidate concepts and ideas embodied in these two important works.

Biographical Sketch

Hakob Oshakan was born in Brusa in 1883, to a landless peasant family called Kiufechian, a name he used in his early works. His childhood was particularly unhappy. When he was five years old his father died. His widowed mother worked long hours as a maid in her native village of Sölöz, and for six months of every year moved the family to the city of Brusa, where she worked in a silk spinning mill. It is in this dual atmosphere of town and village that Oshakan spent his early life, which he recalls ruefully: "O my barefoot, hungry, and miserable childhood."[3]

At the age of seventeen, Oshakan began his teaching career in Sölöz, then moved to Brusa where, in 1902, he was asked to leave his post because of a dispute with the school's trustees. For the next six years he taught in Marmarcheg, a village near Brusa, and in 1908, after the proclamation of the Constitution in the Ottoman Empire, he pursued his teaching career in the Armenian schools of Malgara and Constantinople.

By 1915, Oshakan had gained a modest reputation as the author of critical reviews and short stories on Armenian village life, published in the periodicals of the time. In 1914, he and a group of young intellectuals, Daniel Varuzhan, Kostan Zarian, Aharon, and Gegham Barseghian, initiated the publication of

[2] K. Beledian, "H. Oshakan—Knnadate" [H. Oshakan, the Critic], *Bagin*, no. 1-2 (1984), 110.

[3] Hakob Oshakan, *Erker* [Works], ed. St. Kurtikian (Erevan: Sovetakan Grogh Press, 1979), p. 3.

Mehean (Pagan Temple), a monthly journal. Its title suggests the group's affinity with the Armenian pagan past, the source of inspiration for a literary movement then popular in the Armenian literary milieu in Constantinople. The group's manifesto, published in the first issue of *Mehean*, declares interest in the problems of contemporary Armenian literature and pledges to rejuvenate it. Seven issues of the journal appeared in 1914 before publication was suspended.

Oshakan was in Constantinople during the horrors of World War I, living the life of a fugitive. He had escaped the mass arrests and executions of the Armenian intellectuals at the beginning of the Genocide of 1915, but the government was constantly after him. According to Marc Nichanian:

> Legend (for legends have grown up around his name) has it that he was captured seven times and that he escaped each time. He remarked later that he was probably driven by a will to live stronger than himself; to live, from that moment on, with one thought in mind: to tell of the drama of his people, and to reconstruct the Western-Armenian sensibility which had in 1915 come to its culmination.[4]

When the war ended in 1918, Oshakan, disguised as a German officer, escaped to Bulgaria, but produced no serious work during his two-year stay there. Except for a few passing references, he did not talk about his ordeal during the years of deportation and massacre. In one of these rare references, written years later, he notes how some moments in one's life disobey the rules of time. Hours can seem like days, he remarks, recollecting his escape from an informer in Constantinople and how the few minutes he had to distance himself from his hiding place to avoid arrest seemed like days. His legs betrayed him and would not move, as though he had been walking for days.[5]

He returned to Constantinople in 1920 and resumed his literary activity. For a brief time, between 1920 and 1922, Constantinople witnessed a revitalization of Armenian intellectual life. The Armenian literary revival was crowned by the publication of the periodical *Bardzravank*. A group of well-known writers, who had been fortunate enough to have escaped the 1915 massacres—among them Vahan Tekeyan, Hakob Oshakan, Kostan Zarian, Shahan Berberian, and Gegham Gavafian—signed a literary manifesto which appeared in the first issue. The group's objectives were to revive the national Armenian spirit and delineate a new direction in the aftermath of the extermination of

[4] Marc Nichanian, "The Style of Violence," *Armenian Review*, 38:1-149 (1985), 6.

[5] Hakob Oshakan, *Mnatsordats* [Remnants], Vol. 2, Part One (Cairo: Husaber Press, 1933), p. 316.

the greatest talents in Western Armenian literature. In Constantinople, Oshakan published stories of massacre and deportation in the daily *Chakatamart*. They were collected and published posthumously in a volume entitled *Kaiserakan haghtergutiun* (Imperial Song of Triumph) in 1983.

In 1922, when the Turkish nationalists, followers of Mustafa Kemal, reached the capital after having sacked Izmir (Smyrna) and looting and burning the Greek and Armenian quarters there, Oshakan left his native land for good. He traveled to Cyprus, Cairo, Paris, and eventually to Jerusalem in 1935, where he taught Armenian literature at the Armenian Theological Seminary.

The more Oshakan wrote about the atrocities, the deeper he was caught in the dilemma of writing about the Catastrophe. The tight framework and limitations of the short story genre did not satisfy him, but his plan to write *the* novel on the Catastrophe was never realized. In 1947, he wrote to the American-Armenian writer Aram Haikaz: "The short story is a trial period for a novelist. I am waiting for the novel, the novel from the hell that your youth was."[6] To write the novel of that hell was his dream; he felt he owed it to the Armenian people, and he talked about it all his life. In 1931 he finally began work on the novel, which he called *Mnatsordats*, and by 1934 had published three books (as volume 1 and volume 2 in two parts) covering events up to the 1915 massacres. (He wrote three other novels in the same period which belong to another cycle.) Oshakan never went back to finish *Mnatsordats*, to cover the years of deportations and massacres. In "The Style of Violence," Marc Nichanian states that "The failure to complete the *Mnatsordats*, this stoppage on the threshold of Catastrophe, remains unexplained even until today."[7] Nichanian culls Oshakan's own remarks, scattered in various writings, and suggests several possibilities for this enigma: (1) Oshakan had a nervous breakdown in 1934, and his illness prevented him from finishing the novel; (2) writing about death for Oshakan was tantamount to walking straight into death; and (3) Oshakan was so upset about the attitude of the "Paris boys" clique toward him that he simply lost his stamina to write.[8] None of these explanations satisfies Nichanian, for whom the incompleteness of Oshakan's novel is itself a representation of Catastrophe.

6 Hakob Oshakan, *Namakani* [Collection of Letters], Vol. 1 (Beirut: Altapress, 1983), p. 27.

7 Nichanian, "The Style of Violence," pp. 7-8.

8 The "Paris boys" (*Parizi tghake*), as Oshakan called them, were a group of young Armenian writers, mostly orphans of the 1915 massacres, adrift in alien lands. The literature they produced was a reflection of their pain, deprivation, and longing; at the same time it was a rebellion against and contempt for Armenian traditional values and the older generation of writers, particularly Oshakan. They published the periodical *Menk* (We), which, although short-lived—only five issues were published between 1931 and 1934—is considered a phenomenon in recent Armenian literary history.

After an interval of teaching in Jerusalem, from 1934 to 1938, Oshakan resumed his writing, but added not a single line to complete *Mnatsordats*. Between 1938 and 1943, he produced the monumental *Hamapatker arevmtahai grakanutean* (Panorama of Western Armenian Literature), published from 1945 to 1983, most of it posthumously. He continued to write and dream of new projects until his death, in 1948, while on a visit to the Armenian community in Aleppo. Stepan Kurtikian, editor of the Soviet Armenian edition of Oshakan's selected works, claims that a year earlier Oshakan was planning a new cycle of novels to be entitled "Keankis pes" (which loosely translates as "Like My Life"), which would consist of ten to fifteen volumes. The work would focus on Armenian life from the 1880s to the late 1940s, the life Oshakan himself had seen and lived.[9]

Imperial Song of Triumph

Five of Oshakan's stories about the events of 1915 first appeared as feuilletons in *Chakatamart* in Constantinople, between January 18 and October 18, 1920. Their publication in a separate volume, edited by Poghos Snapian, was undertaken sixty-three years later, in 1983, on the occasion of the centennial of Oshakan's birth. Entitled *Kaiserakan haghtergutiun* (Imperial Song of Triumph),[10] it was the first volume of publications honoring the occasion. Snapian mentions a note on the last page of Oshakan's *Khorhurdneru meheane* (Temple of Thoughts, published in 1922 in Constantinople) announcing the forthcoming publication of "Kaiserakan haghtergutiun" in a separate volume. The plan never materialized, however, and Snapian adds that it is not known whether the five stories were the only ones the author intended to publish under that general title.

Imperial Song of Triumph begins with a note entitled "In Lieu of a Preface," addressed to Kaiser Wilhelm. Oshakan dedicates his stories, or as he calls them, his elegy, to the emperor, stating that Wilhelm held the fate of the world in his hands during the years of World War I. He reproaches the emperor for covering up the Armenian catastrophe and castigates him for calmly watching, with pleasure and without distress, the unprecedented atrocities committed against

9 Oshakan, *Erker*, p. 7.

10 Hakob Oshakan, *Kaiserakan haghtergutiun* [Imperial Song of Triumph], ed. Poghos Snapian (Beirut: Altapress, 1983). Page numbers for subsequent citations from this work are given parenthetically in the text.

the Armenian people. He assures the kaiser that in spite of everything, Armenians do not hold a grudge against him. Rather, they feel sorry for what history has predestined for him: "The Armenian nation does not deride. It cannot hate. Throughout its history more than anything else it has shown sympathy for others" (p. 10). This dramatic prefatory note demonstrates the author's awareness of the German conspiracy in the Catastrophe and explains many aspects of Oshakan's reactions in his stories. Nevertheless, the issue of German conspiracy does not echo in *Imperial Song of Triumph* as it does later in *Remnants*.

The sequence of stories in the centennial publication of *Imperial Song of Triumph* follows the order in which they appeared in *Chakatamart*. "Artsivnere" (The Eagles), the first story, is literally a bird's-eye view of the Armenian Genocide. Two eagles living in the heights of glory and pride, above the mediocrity of mankind, are drawn to the lowlands by the mysterious and intoxicating smell of death rising from the bloody fields of murder. The abstract image enables Oshakan to maintain an emotional and physical distance. From the eagles' perspective, he views the crime being committed by humans against other humans. This conceptualization may be an experiment to develop a method of expression that will contrast with the emotional outbursts of Armenian Romantic writers, whom Oshakan never stopped criticizing. Oshakan's treatment here is a concrete example of T. S. Eliot's analogy of the "catalyst," which states that the poet's experience, his passions and emotions, are only material for the poet's mind: "The more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material."[11] Furthermore, Oshakan's unique depiction of the scenes of ravage is a function of his belief that horror and suffering—the backbone of genocide literature—no matter how effectively and interestingly presented, eventually make for monotonous and tiresome reading.

In his critical review of Aram Antonian's literature of catastrophe, Oshakan maintains that when the theme is the horror of a colossal tragedy, even a talented novelist cannot produce sufficient excitement to sustain the reader's attention.[12] Monotony, to Oshakan, is one of the major problems in genocide literature, a problem which, in spite of various experimentations, he himself apparently did not overcome. Twelve years after the initial publication

[11] T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in Hazard Adams, ed., *Critical Theory Since Plato* (New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Atlanta: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1971), p. 784.

[12] Oshakan, *Panorama*, IX, 261-262.

of *Imperial Song of Triumph*, in 1932, when he was already working on *Remnants*, he stated in an interview: "Catastrophe, immense but curiously monotonous, escapes the artist's encompassment, because variety is the principal prerequisite of art."[13]

In "The Eagles" neither victims nor victimizers have definite characters; scenes are enveloped in mysterious shadow, and action is presented in metaphoric imagery, where the symbols of brutality, suffering, and murder are at play. The ominous glitter of weapons under the scorching desert sun and the piercing screams of pain and terror form the story's mystically blurred atmosphere. The smell of rotting corpses invites the eagles, and they hover above, intoxicated with the ecstasy of the heavenly feast that awaits them. Here death is presented in its most ironic aspect, the point of view of these necrophagous birds, for whom death is a source of life and pleasure. The birds commit the ultimate violence upon the corpses and complete the crime against the living and the dead alike. They peck at the brains of the dying, robbing the last sparks of life; they drink the blood of corpses while it is still warm; they suck the last traces of life flowing in the veins of the wounded.

The protagonists in "The Eagles," contrary to what a first reading suggests, are not in fact the eagles but Death and Dream (Oshakan's capitalization), two concepts in conflict. The eagles only give shape to the characterization of the two concepts. Their dark feathers symbolize the black garb of mourning for the murdered race. Their ferocious attacks upon the dead and dying speak of the unchallenged domination of Death. At the same time, their glorious flight back to the unreachable skies embodies the Dream of the nation, rising above death:

> "The bestial beaks dig into the inextinguishable altar of light . . . and a little bit of Dream remains hanging at the tip of their beaks as though still trying to emanate beauty and creativity. These were what the race had contributed to the world throughout the centuries, and for which it had paid with its blood" (p. 16).

The concept of the flying eagles taking the aspiration of the nation to eternity brings to mind Uri Zvi Greenberg's poem, "I'll Say to God," with its similar textualization of the perpetuation of the Jewish nation against the "powerful armies of the barbarians":

[13] B. Tashian, *Mairineru shukin tak: Grakan zruits H. Oshakani het* [In the Shade of the Cedars: A Literary Discussion with H. Oshakan] (Beirut: Altapress, 1983), p. 19.

the sadness is there, true enough,
but soaring above all this, there soars the eagle of song,
carrying in his beak the crown-of-the-universal-kingdom.[14]

Greenberg believed in survival through art. His eagle is not a conspirator in the crime against the Jews but only a divine messenger, who carries out the perpetuation of the nation through the immortalization of art.

The eerie scenes in "The Eagles" fade when the author, hitherto the detached artist of the Armenian Tragedy, steps in to pour out his own emotions. The story ends with Oshakan cursing the eagles, wishing them immortality so that they will see other carnages and recognize the uniqueness of the great Crime perpetrated against the Armenians. From the literary standpoint the final passage is inappropriate and weak; but from the point of view of responses to catastrophe it contains two important concepts. The first is the conviction that other carnages will occur and that innocent blood will continue to be shed in abundance. There is no expectation that the world will ever become a safe, beautiful place to live, and that humanity will ever evolve toward civilization, away from inhumane, bestial conduct. The second is the emphasis on the uniqueness of the Armenian Tragedy, an assertion Oshakan reiterated in his other stories. The assertion of uniqueness is typical in the literature of catastrophe in general, much like the expression of a suffering individual who believes his or her situation to be unique.

In the Jewish critical literature of the Holocaust, one frequently comes across statements such as "unique experience," "an unprecedented crime," "an unparalleled example of man's inhumanity to man," "a systematic mass destruction of a kind never before known and hardly to be imagined." Lawrence Langer's comments on Holocaust literature apply equally to Armenian Genocide literature: "The uniqueness of the experience of the Holocaust may be arguable, but beyond dispute is the fact that many writers perceived it as unique, and began with the premise that they were working with raw materials unprecedented in the literature of history and history of literature."[15]

How ironic that even though Armenians consider their own genocidal experience as unique and unprecedented, the world knows so little about it. It was Adolf Hitler who referred to mankind's short memory for atrocities. In discussing his plans for Poland before the 1939 invasion, he is quoted as saying,

[14] David G. Roskies, ed., *The Literature of Destruction: Jewish Responses to Catastrophe* (Philadelphia, New York, Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1988), p. 572.

[15] Lawrence L. Langer, *The Holocaust and Literary Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1975), p. xii.

"Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?"[16] It is to the phenomenon of short memory that Oshakan is referring when he says that other catastrophes will occur and more blood will be shed. The memory lapse for historical tragedies such as the Armenian Genocide or the Jewish Holocaust encourages repetition. Even today, when the intrinsic relationship and parallelism of such atrocities have come to the fore, it is customary to label the Armenian Catastrophe as the Forgotten Genocide, and so put world conscience to rest.

The second story in *Imperial Song of Triumph*, "Vrdovvats khghchmtanke" (The Agitated Conscience), achieves emotional distance by personification. The village spring watches and depicts the preparations for the massacre of the Armenian villagers. The act of slaughtering the "infidels" is viewed through the eyes of the executioners themselves. Despite the detached setting, Oshakan cannot maintain his stance as an indifferent and distant narrator. From the outset, in his description of the neighboring Turkish and Armenian villages, he reveals his bias. He has words of praise for the "old" and "nice" Armenian village, its "modest campaniles" and the "big spring"; and he compares these modest splendors with the "small, very small" Turkish village, which boasts not even "a meager minaret rising in that sad skyline." Nevertheless, he realizes that the Turkish village was built on top of the Armenian village as a result of a "vicious but farsighted stratagem." Furthermore, the spring personified also belies its role as the detached bystander by participating in the life of the Armenian village through time, sharing the villagers' grief and happiness. The spring becomes identified with the victimized Armenian people; its story is the history of a nation that has suffered many hardships. Like the Armenian villagers, the spring is ready to forget the calamities of the past and look with hope to the future. Oshakan, perhaps subconsciously, makes an effort to show that the Armenians are indigenous to the land: the spring never could get used to the presence of "the newcomers," who subjugated it and washed their feet in it five times a day. The spring could not understand their speech, but "with an ingenious penetration into the depths of their souls, it discovered the pitiless, bloodthirsty beast hiding under the stony innocence of their white gowns and turbans" (p. 23).

A mysterious ritual is depicted in "The Agitated Conscience," a sacred sacrifice offered to God by pious Muslims and their holy leader:

[16] For an analysis on the truth of this statement, see Kevork B. Bardakjian, *Hitler and the Armenian Genocide*, Zoryan Institute Special Report 3 (Cambridge, Mass.: The Zoryan Institute, 1985).

> The spring watched the dance and the prayer which rose to the sky to the merciful and the pure and humanistic God of that new kind of paradise. . . . It watched the light and impressive dance which words can create when ecstasy in the hearts runs overboard and when men send their enchantment together with their prayers and blessings up to the blue of the skies. (p. 23)

The devout call God's name a hundred times a day with a particular intimacy and reverence; they sing "the song of triumph" and beseech God to bestow power to their arms and peace to their conscience. God's name is ultimately sanctified by shedding the blood of the infidels, burning and looting their belongings, and celebrating the holocaust. At the same time, another nation is offering its last prayer to the same God, "whose injustice that nation forgets after every carnage, and is ready once again to be slaughtered for the sake of his love" (p. 24).

In "Agitated Conscience" Oshakan places the Armenian Genocide in a strict religious context and echoes the religious beliefs of victims as well as victimizers in their responses to the unfolding history of catastrophe. He draws a sharp contrast between the religious convictions of the two peoples: the Turks are taught to sacrifice others—the infidels, who do not share their religious beliefs—as the ultimate glorification of God's name; Armenians have learned self-sacrifice and accept martyrdom as an ultimate sign of piety and devotion to God. With the notion of human sacrifice, Oshakan transfers the reader to a mystical ritual of pagan glorification of gods. The barbarity of the ritual in heathen civilizations is surpassed by the brutalities committed. In the past, usually one life was sacrificed to appease the wrath of the gods and to ensure the well-being of the entire race or the tribe. Yet now an entire village, an entire race is offered to the altar of God.

The Crusaders of the eleventh and twelfth centuries were probably similarly motivated when they massacred Jews in Mainz and the Rhineland in the name of God. Medieval Jewish chroniclers do not expound on the atrocities; they merely speak of the zeal and readiness of the victims to embrace martyrdom. More than eight centuries later, the Armenian race was subjected to a similar fate.

A singular dimension in Oshakan's response to Genocide in the religious context is his distinction between the God of the Muslims and the God of the Armenians. Viewed from the victims' point of view, "The Agitated Conscience" is a martyrology. But Oshakan stands in the victimizers' shoes and depicts the religious awe with which the sacrifices are offered to God. The old religious leader of the Turkish village, dressed in white, the embodiment of God himself, gives the first example of ritual sacrifice and then stands back to

watch his followers carry out the slaughter. The reader thus is given two images of God: the God to whom Armenians offer their lives like the holy martyrs in Eghishe's or Shnorhali's literature; and the other God, the God of Islam, who silently and with approval views the carnage and accepts the sacrifice offered to him by the Turkish villagers. Yet these two images cannot belong to one God. The God watching the carnage cannot be the same God to whom the Armenians pray since he neither objects nor intervenes even when the Turks tie up the village priest, that "holy man of God," and force him to walk in chains toward the spring to be slaughtered. That God does not object when "the victims were forced to keep their eyes open to the very end to see the shame rising from the pile of beheaded bodies and to hear for the last time the insults addressed to their powerless God and their religion" (p. 26). The sacrifice is offered to the "God of the Muslims," and the gratification belongs to the Muslim mob. "The old man's soul found a rare satisfaction that only a sacrifice on such a grand scale could offer. His conscience was stilled and cleared with that sacred offering" (p. 27).

Obviously, the attack is launched not only against the Armenian people but against their God as well. This perception is found in other artistic formulations of Armenian responses to catastrophe. One example is Aharonian's "Don't Pray Anymore," discussed earlier; when the Armenian priest begs to be spared "in the name of God," the Kurdish Hakki Beg answers "Our God and yours are not the same."[17] Oshakan's stance in "An Agitated Conscience" comes close to the rabbinic response generated through the sermons and preachings in the ghetto. As David Roskies observes, the ghetto preachers reformulated and redefined ancient Jewish concepts to shape a message of consolation. Rabbi Kalonimus Kalmish Shapiro, for example, explained Kiddush Hashem, previously perceived as the consequence of martyrdom, to be the Jewish people's share of suffering with God, because God was the one who was being attacked. Zelig Kalmanovitsh, historian and cultural activist, expounded on that idea in referring to the catastrophe in the ghetto as a war not against the Jews but against the "sacred triad" of Israel-Torah-and-God.[18]

The distinction between the triumphant God of the enemy and the assaulted God of the victimized nation generates a doubt about the oneness of God, a theme recurrent in the literature of catastrophe. An Armenian priest expresses it as a denial of God in Suren Partevian's "On the Sea," discussed earlier: "If my God is also the God of these unbelievers . . . I don't believe in

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[17] Avetis Aharonian, *Azatutean chanaparhin* [On the Road to Freedom] (Tehran: Alik Press, 1956), p. 35.

[18] Roskies, *The Literature of Destruction*, pp. 504–505.

God. . . ." In "The Agitated Conscience" Oshakan himself questions the oneness of God. It is indeed difficult to accept that the same God of Love and Goodness can be the creator of those who would kill the innocent and the defenseless.

The Jewish poet Dan Pagis doubted that God could be the creator of both good and evil. In his poem "Testimony," he argued that if God created man "in *the* image," and if the Germans were humans in God's image, then the divinity of God was subject to suspicion. But to avoid the sin of sacrilege, Pagis resorted to a comforting and logical explanation: "A different creator made me."[19] According to Alan Yuter's interpretation of this poem, "God, the Germans, and the Jewish poet have all lost their identity as a consequence of the Holocaust."

In "Testimony" Pagis emphasizes the form and likeness of God. In "The Agitated Conscience," Oshakan stresses the duality of God. Perhaps it is a subconscious recourse to the Zoroastrian tenets in which Zervan creates the world and entrusts the creation therein to his two sons, Ahuramazda and Ahriman. What Ahuramazda creates is good, and what Ahriman creates is evil. This ancient belief may have surfaced anew as explanation for the dilemma of God the creator of the helpless and innocent as well as creator of the inhumane murderers. With respect to the recurrences of pagan beliefs, Shalom Spiegel writes: "It is very hard to drive out pagan spirits, and each generation must renew the battle against them. What is more, the very measures adopted to expel them are frequently themselves a partial admission of the vitality of pagan ways."[20]

The sole motivation of the massacres in "The Agitated Conscience" appears to be religious intolerance and fanaticism, deliberately aroused by the Ottoman government to guarantee the success of its genocidal intent. But it is unlikely for Oshakan to offer religious intolerance as the only reason for the massacres. What he does make clear is that religious intolerance was a stratagem used by the government to ensure the participation of the Turkish mobs. Suren Partevian and Aram Antonian stressed the role played by individual government officials. Zapel Esayan showed that the Cilician massacres would not have been possible without the involvement of Turkish mobs.

[19] See Alan J. Yuter, *The Holocaust in Hebrew Literature: From Genocide to Rebirth* (Port Washington, NY: Associated Faculty Press, Inc., 1983), p. 51. Yuter's analysis of the poem is on p. 52.

[20] Shalom Spiegel, *The Last Trial*, trans. from the Hebrew by Judah Goldin (New York: Pantheon Books, 1967), p. 77.

Oshakan expresses a similar view and portrays Turkish men, women, and children as actual participants.

Zapel Esayan attributed the eagerness of the mobs to the Turkish hatred of Armenians. Although there was a long history of "bread sharing" between Turks and Armenians, Esayan maintained that the venom of intolerance had poisoned the Turkish attitude toward Armenians, whom they called *kafir* (infidel) or *raya* (slave). These sentiments, she believed, were transmitted from one Turkish generation to another. The development of this theme in Esayan's narrative is not convincing, however. She touches upon the subject occasionally but seldom exemplifies it. In two of the infrequent occurrences she writes: "Hatred had contaminated even the young generation," and, "A young Turkish boy, with a hateful expression on his face, cursed at us as our carriage passed through the Turkish quarters of the town; others began to laugh."[21] Oshakan's "The Agitated Conscience" reveals more broadly the role of the Turkish people. His story describes the eager participation not only of Turkish men and women but also of young boys, all of whom shared the ecstasy of shedding the infidels' blood:

> A fifteen-year-old hero had nailed the head of a slaughtered man to the end of a long wooden stick. The eyes were gouged out, and the eyebrows were plucked. The stick on his shoulder and a rifle on his chest, he walked up and down the streets of the Armenian village to experience the pleasure of the terror he spread among women and children around him. p. 27)

The theme of religious intolerance, or "the command of faith," as Oshakan calls it, as the motivation behind the massacres recurs throughout the story. Two young Turks fulfill their religious duty by setting fire to a barn in which "useless" villagers are locked up. The victims are old women who can neither work nor bear Turkish children, and young boys and girls, too young to be beheaded with adults but old enough to remember the crime against their kin—hence, unsuitable for being raised as Muslims. The scene of victims burned alive recurs frequently in Zapel Esayan's accounts. In contrast to her harrowing descriptions, Oshakan remains cool and detached. As the barn burns the flames rise to the sky with playful motion; the golden smoke covers the blue of the peaceful sky like a beautiful golden veil. He startles the reader with a painful truth: for Armenians the massacre is a catastrophe, for Turks it can be a source of mystical gratification and the fulfillment of a sacred ritual.

[21] Zapel Esayan, *Averaknerun mej* (Amid the Ruins) (Beirut: Etvan Press, 1957), p. 221.

If the two youths who set the barn on fire had the eloquence of the German commander in Paul Celan's "Fugue of Death," they would probably mock: "As smoke you shall climb to the sky / then you'll have a grave in the clouds it is ample to lie there."[22] With its unusual form and punctuation, fragmented phrases, and the illogical alliance of images of love and death, Celan creates the illogical atmosphere into which the German atrocities fit so well. Oshakan, on the other hand, distances himself from the somber metaphors of victimization, and with as much calm as he can muster pictures the crime. For Celan and six million Jews, "death comes as a master from Germany." Less than twenty-five years earlier, death came to the Armenian people in Turkish garb, with a radical ideology as its sword in hand—the ideology of Islam, as perceived by the Young Turks.

Oshakan takes the viewpoint of the perpetrators and shows the victory of the crime; but when it comes to the victims, words fail him: "And from inside there arose, there arose the scream, the unheard of, the inexplicable cry, for which human language has no word" (p. 29). The violence threatened the very existence of an entire nation in the world of men, and also thwarted the artist's ability to capture the scope of that violence in the realm of words. The same language which in the past could express magnificent prayers and divine liturgies was now paralyzed: "The vessel of sound and syllable lay injured and humiliated at the foot of the steeple, like a dethroned crown" (p. 30).

Oshakan also shows the Turkish women as eager participants in the looting. Like their men, they share the fulfillment of a holy duty toward God. The loot is not only material wealth—food, jewelry, objects of value, or a whole house. It is also human beings—children to be raised as Muslims, attractive young women to bear beautiful and healthy children for their sons, strong women to work as slaves in their homes. In one day the Armenian village changed owners; outwardly it looked the same, but something had changed, and digging into that ominous change was a traumatic experience. Remembering the homes where ancient Armenian traditions had been kept alive, Oshakan sees that now they are emptied of their inhabitants and their spirit; something strange, unnamed, has moved in.

All this brings to mind Uri Zvi Greenberg's "The Streets of the River," a long poem about a dream in which the author visits his paternal home in Poland. His parents and sister have fallen victim to the Holocaust, and their house has new inhabitants, a gentile family "who cooks pork and drinks wine from his family's pots and Sabbath goblets, and there is nothing that he in his

[22] Langer, *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination*, p. 11.

shame can do."[23] Both Oshakan and Greenberg stress the religious and cultural differences between original owners and confiscators. Oshakan personifies the houses in the Armenian village, ascribing soul and spirit to them. Even the walls experience the trauma of violence:

> The spirit of the Armenian village had escaped for good. . . . Half a day had been enough time for the ancestral goodness and sincerity to be chased out, perhaps with no return and to be replaced by I know not what: something depressing that belonged to their [Turkish] souls, something that is afraid to open their doors and windows, but it let them in cold blood tear open the stomach of their female victims alive. (p. 30)

What is that quality in the Turkish soul for which Oshakan can find no name, that something "which differentiates between the races"? Oshakan's narrative implies that if this "something" (*ban me*) is responsible for the differences, it must be the entire spectrum of Muslim values and principles, as perceived and practiced by the Turks in the village. These values condone the killing of infidels; they promise a sense of fulfillment if the last trace of sacrilege against Islam is wiped away. What, in their view, is considered sacrilege? The answer is revealed in the last scene of "The Agitated Conscience," The old Muslim leader cannot bear the sight of two Turkish women quarreling over an Armenian child. How can members of a "holy race" curse at each other over a trivial infidel? The child is causing a sacrilege, and therefore must be eliminated. The holy man sets out to do just that. "He grabs the child's neck and presses it hard, presses it so hard until the last vibration of life in the child's muscles and veins stops. The child's dead body falls at the old man's feet, and thus peace returns to allay his agitated conscience" (p. 32).

Oshakan's attempt to adopt the victimizer's vantage point and view the killing of Armenians through the eyes of the pious Turks has a distinct parallel with Lamed Shapiro's scheme in "White Challah." In this short story, written in 1919, Shapiro builds a psychological portrait of Vasil, a Russian peasant soldier during the war. As a young boy Vasil was so soft-hearted that he cried upon seeing the sharp edge of a bone pierce the skin of a dog. As Vasil matures, however, he grows to hate Jews, with whom he has had little contact but whom he has been taught to perceive as strange, as the people who sold Christ and who were to blame for everything. When the time comes he is ready to slaughter Jews without mercy, as if they embodied the evils of the war and the cause of his own pain. Like Oshakan, Shapiro successfully depicts the ecstasy that the

[23] Alan Mintz, *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 184.

killing of "unbelievers" can arouse. Like Oshakan, he too pictures scenes of fire and carnage as sacred rituals dedicated to the "Eternal God," the God of the victorious: "Pillars of smoke and pillars of flame rose to the sky from the entire city. Beautiful was the fire on the great altar. The cries of the victims—long-drawn-out, endless cries—were sweet in the ears of a god as eternal as the Eternal God."[24] Notice Shapiro's differentiation between the god (lower case) of the Russian soldier and the God of the Jews, the Eternal God.

The third story, "Tantan," is a moving story of a five-year-old Armenian boy ("Tantan" is a child's onomatopoeic expression referring to the sound of bells). A "benevolent Turk" discovers the boy alive under a pile of massacred deportees. Inspired by the "unique piety of his race and with the just gratification of having done a good deed" (p. 35), the old man takes the child to an orphanage established in Constantinople to raise Armenian children as Muslims. Here the Genocide is viewed through the eyes of the child, whose perception of events puts the Catastrophe in a dimension beyond time and space, beyond order. Dream and reality are confused, the sequence of events mixed up: "In his memories, he walks in a caravan of death, barefoot and hungry, a white rag on his head. His brothers and sisters are all with him, all the children of the town . . . and his sisters diminish day by day . . . and his brothers lie scattered on the road one by one" (ibid.). The child's memory has stored a confusion of scenes of horror and suffering, together with the familiar colors and sounds of his native village and his happy home. Finally, remembering the inviting sound of the village church bells, the boy escapes from the orphanage and finds his way to freedom in a nearby Armenian church.

The fourth story, "Vrezhe" (The Revenge), tells of murderers preying on a group of helpless deportees. Oshakan creates a microcosm of the Catastrophe without attempting to impose his own judgment. Victims and victimizers all demonstrate the nature of human behavior as revealed under the stress of extreme historical events. The story depicts, in minute detail, the actions of the criminals and the deep satisfaction they derive from their deeds, and delineates the agony of the victims, their last sighs, supplications, prayers, anger, and revenge.

The sound of a whistle can generate a terrible sensation, writes Oshakan. It can induce a horrifying shiver through the nerves. It can cause an inexplicable tremor which no one but the victims will feel. The sound of a whistle evokes the memory of the Turkish commander's order to start the executions. The men and women lucky enough to survive will carry the memory of that whistle as long as they live, just as in Antonian's eyewitness account, "It's All Right,"

[24] Roskies, *The Literature of Destruction*, p. 262.

the dying cries of a boy being tortured will live in the memory of the few survivors of the Meskeneh concentration camp. Those who are haunted by such memories are unique in that only they are capable of knowing the reality of the events that trigger them. In a parallel situation, Lawrence Langer expounds on this unique capacity among Holocaust survivors, and quotes the following from David Rousset's "L'Univers Concentrationnaire": "Normal men do not know that everything is possible. Even if the evidence forces their intelligence to admit it, their muscles do not believe it. The concentrationaries do know. . . . They are set apart from the rest of the world by an experience impossible to communicate."[25]

Oshakan, too, realizes the trauma of carrying an indelible memory whose pain bursts open like a wound to the slightest provocation. He compares the sound of the whistle to "the blowing wind which the miserable artists of the murdered nation were unable to paint. The sound reaches out to the conscience of nations whose artists were fortunate enough to have been spared the task of describing horrors" (p. 44). This strange wind, for Oshakan, translates into "silence" and "terror" in the art of writing. Artistic creation has been condemned to silence, or has been aborted. The Armenian writer is condemned to failure, for he cannot symbolize terror in the realm of art, to transform it into something perceptible brought within the limits of human imagination.

The participation of the Turkish mob, men and women alike, is once again depicted in "The Revenge." The first sinister whistle is an order to the caravan, made up of women, children, and old men, to kneel in a circle. The commander then blows the whistle for execution; he is in Western attire, symbolizing the influence of Western civilization. As to the soldiers, their actions are sanctioned by the government's official uniform; they are ready to shoot as soon as they hear the second whistle. Meanwhile, Turkish men, "armed with axes and daggers, with that terrible look of anticipation in their eyes, await their turn to carry out their mission, to complete the domination of death, to silence the last traces of life" (p. 47). Turkish women participate also, shouldering the task of selecting the loot—the young women, already separated from the deportees. They then join with the young Turkish boys in stripping the last belongings of the slain.

The efforts to attribute human qualities to the murderers do not succeed. Oshakan's descriptions of the Turkish soldiers, the commanding officer, and others participating in the carnage are only physical. The reader can visualize what they are wearing, how they are armed, how they move and act. But who

[25] Langer, *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination*, p. 33.

are they? Oshakan sheds no light on what they think, what their motivations, dreams, and goals are. We see only their eyes burning with a savage greed in anticipation of the booty.

The last scene in "The Revenge" symbolizes Oshakan's dream, the perpetuation of the Armenian nation, which like a phoenix will rise from the ashes of the holocaust, but here the phoenix is the embodiment of revenge. Oshakan is convinced that it is the spirit of revenge that will guarantee the perpetuation of the nation. In "The Revenge," a little boy buried under a pile of corpses struggles out in the dark of the night. As he begins to walk, weak and half-conscious, he is attracted by the cry of a Turkish baby, apparently left behind while his mother carries her loot to the village. At the sight of the baby, the rage and sense of revenge overwhelm the boy. He thrusts his finger in the baby's tiny throat and pushes hard. The cries die down, the baby is strangled. The story ends with a rhetorical question: "Was this the revenge of the race?" It is an ambiguous ending. The act of revenge is fulfilled, survival and perpetuation are implied. One may assume that what Oshakan presents here is his synthesis, that is, the revival of the nation through revenge. Or, perhaps, the perpetuation of the nation is in itself an act of revenge against the perpetrators.

Did the Jewish victims have the opportunity to fulfill an act of revenge or retaliation and experience a sense of gratification as a result? I am not aware of any such reference in the Holocaust literature. Given such an opportunity, perhaps the sense of shame for having survived the Holocaust would not have been so strong as to paralyze, in many survivors, the will to heal themselves and to go on living. What I have encountered more frequently in the Holocaust literature is the synthesis of perpetuation through faith, and, more importantly for the writers, perpetuation through art. This is particularly true in Abraham Sutzkever's poetry, in which the redemptive capacity of art challenges the dominance of death. David Roskies quotes a short poem by Sutzkever addressed to the audience in a cultural exhibition in the Vilna ghetto: "Death itself shrinks before this beauty, / And drives back again / His grimy smoking cauldron."[26]

Oshakan's fifth and last story, "Imperial Song of Triumph," which gives its title to the collection, is another abstract image of the massacres. The association of the story's title with its content is far-fetched, however. In "In Lieu of a Preface," Oshakan dedicates the stories to Kaiser Wilhelm to add to the "songs" of his many triumphs. But nowhere in the stories themselves does he ever allude to the German conspiracy in the Armenian Genocide. Perhaps this last

[26] David G. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 238.

story about the aftermath of the Armenian Genocide was intended to show the Kaiser's crowning achievement; perhaps the eradication of the Armenian nation was the finale to the German emperor's "song of triumph."

The landscape in this last story is strewn with the few remaining traces of Armenians, bones and sculls "wiped clean from their flesh by nature and by the wild birds and beasts." They are scattered around the desolate landscape "to remind the world that Armenians once lived here." With an ironic tone Oshakan cites the biblical analogy of wolves and lambs grazing together, as if to underscore the true meaning of the centuries-long peaceful coexistence between the Turkish and Armenian peoples. In the context of his characterization, however, the analogy may also be taken as a reference to the victim-victimizer or slaughtered-slaughterer theme in the five stories of *Imperial Song of Triumph*. Although the wolves and lambs are meant to represent the Turks and Armenians, their figurative attributions are occasionally interrupted with realistic portrayals of the animal world. As to Oshakan's response to genocide, it demonstrates little less than the irony of the biblical analogy and the persistent naiveté of a world still dreaming of a day when wolves and lambs will live together in peace. His final question, "Will the world believe that the catastrophe occurred?" sums up Oshakan's entire effort to record the Armenian tragedy.

Many writers who have recounted their traumatic experiences have asked the same question. Mention can be made of Alexander Donat, the Jewish writer, and Dr. Ignacy Schipper, the Jewish historian in the Warsaw Ghetto. Edward Alexander reports Schipper's concern:

> If the murderers are victorious, they will write the history books and either celebrate their achievements or else wipe out the memory of the Jews as thoroughly as they had wiped out their lives. "But if we write the history of this period of blood and tears—and I firmly believe we will—who will believe us?"[27]

David Roskies finds the same concern in the diligent efforts of a small group of Yiddish writers—I. L. Peretz, Jacob Dinezon, and S. Ansky—who collected all possible data pertaining to the Jewish pogroms of World War I, lest the world choose to rewrite history from the victimizers' point of view: "Woe to the nation whose history is written by foreign hands and whose own writers are left to later compose only songs of lament, penitential prayers, and threnodies," they warned.[28]

[27] Edward Alexander, *The Resonance of Dust: Essays on Holocaust Literature and Jewish Fate* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1979), p. 13.

[28] David G. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse*, p. 135.

While he did not record the events with factual precision, Oshakan did attempt to bring the facts within the grasp of human imagination by placing them in the more tangible and intelligible world of artistic language and metaphor. He transcended the factual to reach the truth of the art. Yet he still doubted that the world would believe him.

With the five diverse conceptualizations of the Armenian Genocide in the *Imperial Song of Triumph*, written only a few years after the event, Oshakan contributed his spontaneous response to the Armenian literary legacy of the Catastrophe. Based on his later works, and after a second, retrospective reading of the collection, I posit that Oshakan took on the task he had expected other Armenian artists to assume, namely, to shape the nation's response to the Catastrophe, to comprehend and explain to the world the inconceivable, unthinkable truth. To fulfill this task, Oshakan developed a distancing technique that would allow him to present the Catastrophe in a detached and dispassionate manner. He sought for reasons in the clash between the Turkish and Armenian character, a clash resulting from differences in culture, tradition, and religion. Dissatisfied with his approach of highlighting aspects of the Catastrophe through concise and manageable literary tableaus, he aimed to create the colossus, and that colossus was to be titled *Mnatsordats* (Remnants).

Remnants

The first installment of *Mnatsordats* (Remnants),[29] Oshakan's best-known novel, appeared as a feuilleton in the daily *Husaber* on January 16, 1932, at a time when Oshakan was already well known as a novelist and literary critic. On the occasion of this publication, Beniamin Tashian conducted a series of interviews with him, and over the course of the next sixteen years (1932-1948) wrote seventeen articles based on them which appeared in various newspapers and periodicals. The articles were subsequently compiled in *Mairineru shukin tak* (In the Shade of the Cedars). In the interviews Oshakan described his plan to write a novel that would express his objective to salvage the remnants of the Armenian people—their sentiments, traditions, and aspirations. Many poets had tried to thematize the nightmare of the Armenian tragedy in their pretty

[29] Nichanian, "The Style of Violence," p. 7, n. 17, explains that *mnatsordats* also means *paralipomènes* (that which remains to be said after the historical books, in the Greek version of the Old Testament). Which of the meanings Oshakan intended is not clear. Did he have in mind the spiritual salvation of the "remnants" of the Armenian nation, the survivors of the massacres, as he explains in *In the Shade of the Cedars*? Or did he intend to write about the crucifixion of the Armenian people, as the *paralipomènon* of the Crucifixion? Or was his choice perhaps just the equivocality of the word?

phrases, he observed, but Armenians lacked the man of letters who could shoulder such an enormous task. Far from pretending to be the man who could salvage the Catastrophe and the preceding events from the ravages of time, Oshakan was, in fact, well aware of the complexity of such an undertaking. Uncertain of ever succeding in surmounting the many obstacles, he nevertheless engaged in the venture with the hope of realizing his lifelong dream.[30]

Mnatsordats (Remnants)[31] was planned to comprise three volumes, entitled *Argandi chambov* (Through the Womb), *Ariuni chambov* (Through Blood), and *Dzhokhk* (The Hell). Volume I, *Through the Womb*, was divided into three sections or books (*girk*, as Oshakan calls them), and volume II, *Through Blood*, into nine, three in Part One and six in Part Two. *Through Blood* stops at the threshold of the 1915 deportations and massacres. *The Hell*, projected as volume III, was to have followed the people of Brusa during the years of deportation and massacre, but was never completed.

In a letter dated January 1, 1934, Oshakan responded to Eugenie Palian's criticism of *Mnatsordats* as lengthy and slow paced, and explained why he chose to concentrate on the story of one particular family and why he devoted the entire first volume of his novel to it: "I will not try to repudiate your opinion . . . but I feel some explanations are necessary. . . . It is a revolutionary thought of mine to discard the generalities and anchor myself on the particular, because that is the only reality. But it seems to be beyond the possibilities of the near future"[32] (author's emphasis). In writing about the Catastrophe, Oshakan consistently adhered to the scheme he had developed in *Imperial Song of Triumph*, namely, to create a microcosm of the tragedy by concentrating on a particular image, and thereby reaching the universal through the particular. By telling the story of his native village, he planned to encompass the entire Armenian Tragedy: "It is not only this village that I have in mind. My vision extends to all the communities of our nation" (II, Part One, p. 389).

The story of *Remnants* takes place at the turn of the century and portrays Turkish injustices and persecution. It is a realistic narration, with no romantic dramatization. At the very outset, Oshakan states that the village, near Brusa, is not a composite of beautiful scenes of sunrise and sunset, the melody of a flute, and a shepherd girl. Village life, he says, is a mixture of constant tension,

[30] Tashian, *In the Shade of the Cedars*, pp. 13-14.

[31] *Mnatsordats* was eventually published in three parts by the Husaber Press in Cairo: Vol. I in 1932, and Vol. II, Parts One and Two, in 1933. All volume and page references are to this edition.

[32] Oshakan, *Letters*, p. 59.

will power, brutality, and deprivation; it is a struggle in which only the victor eats (I, p. 23).

The novel begins with a detailed history of the highly respected, well-to-do Nalbandents family prior to 1915. After providing this voluminous background, Oshakan recounts the last tragedy which caused the annihilation of the Nalbandents clan. Serop, the only heir of the family, is married but childless. His mother waits in vain for a grandchild to perpetuate the family name. She torments her daughter-in-law for years, dragging her to every healer and physician, and forcing all kinds of remedies upon her. Finally she discovers the truth: her son is unable to perform as a husband. Determined to assure the perpetuation of the clan at any price, she instigates an affair between her daughter-in-law and the young servant, Soghoments Soghom. The girl objects at first but eventually gives in, and the arranged relationship becomes a true love affair. Serop finds out about it only when his wife becomes pregnant. Enraged and humiliated, he decides to avenge her adultery. He solicits the aid of Turkish government officials, whom, Oshakan hints, he had served as an informer and even as a lover. Serop tells them that there are *komitajis* (members of Armenian political organizations or revolutionary activists) in the village and that Soghom is one of them. The Turkish officials, of course, welcome the pretext to conduct an "investigation" and fabricate a false report. The "suspicious elements" and the able-bodied young men in the village who had refused to turn over the names of komitajis are arrested and sent to Brusa. Orders to quell the "unrest" in the village are quick to come, thus laying the groundwork for persecution on a large scale. The astonished villagers try to find an explanation; it is an old adage, they say, that "The Turks burn the whole blanket to kill a flea. Armenians do not have a blanket to burn" (II, Part One, p. 393). Turkish officials, from the lowliest rank to the commander, and pious, patriotic Muslim citizens from the neighboring villages willingly participate in carrying out the orders. There is no Armenian resistance; the Turks murder the "conspirators," including women and young girls. Earlier in the narrative Oshakan had pondered: "Look at our history! So long as there is a shadow of resistance in the fronts, there are no massacres. . . . And the phenomenon of women being killed in punishment is something new" (I, p. 543).

Armenian persecutions were not infrequent in the Ottoman Empire before 1915. Oshakan relates that since the village had suffered the anguish of the 1890s massacres this new harassment was no surprise: "As a distant echo of the events of 1896, an ominous conviction had gripped every household: The lives of the Armenians were defenselessly relinquished to the whim of the Turks. Catastrophe could arrive any time" (II, Part One, p. 185). The shock of the

1894-1896 massacres had not yet subsided, and Armenians lived with the expectation of worse to come.

Oshakan does not provide a specific time frame for these events in the village near Brusa, but they must have occurred immediately preceding the deportations and massacres of 1915. In this setting the characters of course know nothing about the impending catastrophe, although the memory of the massacres of 1890s is alive within them. Their awareness of the past casts a pall over the future. Oshakan frequently alludes to ominous images on the horizon. The conflict between past and future establishes much of the dramatic and psychological tension in the novel.

In the context of events taking place between the 1890s and 1915, Oshakan traces the Turkish persecutions of the past and draws parallels with them. He writes his novel with the memory of the massacres of the 1890s in the background and the Genocide of 1915 in hindsight. He flashes back to the past to remind readers of the parallelism and to show where certain thoughts and ideas have their roots. Similarly, he projects into the future to compare events, characters, and motivations with those that are to come a few years later. His stance is clear: The Armenian Genocide is not an accidental event but the culmination of persecutions, not only during the last decades of Ottoman rule before World War I but throughout Armenian history: "For two thousand years (sometimes five to ten times in one century) our people have experienced their 1915s."[33]

Edward Alexander points to a similar interpretation by Isaac Bashevis Singer in the novel *The Family Moskat*. Here, writing on the Holocaust, the Jewish writer views the Nazis as only the latest in a long succession of murderers who have imposed themselves upon Jewish history again and again: "Yes, every generation had its Pharaohs and Hamans and Chmielnickies. Now it was Hitler."[34] Singer tries to understand the Holocaust as an event in Jewish history, so that regardless of its enormity, it can be conquered in literature. Both Oshakan and Singer suggest that it is possible to encompass catastrophe in literature like any other event in history. Continuing his deliberation on the Armenian Genocide, Oshakan adds: "Therefore, through concentration, insight, and particularly the right conception, I believe it is possible to approach the Catastrophe. Besides, unfortunately, I have the personal experience, too."[35]

[33] Tashian, *In the Shade of the Cedars*, p. 20.

[34] Alexander, *The Resonance*, p. 150.

[35] Tashian, *In the Shade of the Cedars*, p. 20.

Alexander's study of *The Family Moskat* touches upon another theme that parallels Oshakan's *Remnants* in its unfinished form. The events in Singer's novel belong to a period prior to the Holocaust. Hence the concluding statement, "Death is the Messiah. That's the real truth," according to Alexander "gains its tremendous force less from the events within the novel than from the reader's knowledge of what will befall the Jews after the novel ends."[36] This can be said equally of *Remnants*. The unwritten last volume of *Remnants* was supposed to tell the story of the deportation and massacre of the Armenian villagers, but the novel *Remnants* suffered the same fate they did. The Genocide not only caused the near annihilation of the Armenians, it also shattered the conventional network of meanings and paralyzed the creative imagination. Oshakan's confident determination to overcome the Catastrophe by bringing it into the more comprehensible world of language was met with frustration: *Remnants* remained unfinished.

In long descriptive passages, reminiscences, analyses, short and disjointed exclamations by the characters, as well as brief expressions of despair, anger, love, joy, hope, and frustration, the Armenian village speaks to us. Oshakan uses this style, parenthetically, particularly in the first two volumes of *Remnants*. His characters do not speak. Rather, they express themselves with exclamations, unconnected words, short phrases. Oshakan is the speaker; he narrates the views of his characters, how they feel and what they intend to say. He interferes in their conversations with his own comments on a similar event. If all the words spoken by the characters in the novel were eliminated the narrative would not suffer; but to attempt the reverse and try reading only the character's utterances would reduce the novel to a few pages of disconnected phrases.

In Oshakan's narrative the history of Armenian customs and traditions is manifested in its everyday life. The village comes alive with its joy and misery, with the interrelations within the rural society. Oshakan devotes the first 489 pages of *Remnants* to fixing the image of the Armenian village for posterity, just as Hovhannes Tumanian and Avetik Isahakian did, and just as Hamastegh, Mushegh Ishkhan, and Aram Haikaz were to do after him. Then, Oshakan stops suddenly, as though he had just remembered to include the Turk in that setting. In a long aside he talks about the Turks and states his intention to build Turkish characters as he perceived them.

[36] Alexander, *The Resonance*, p. 149.

The Character of the Turk

Through the relationships of the Nalbandents family with other villagers over the years, with Turkish officials visiting this Armenian village, and with Turkish neighbors in nearby villages, Oshakan builds his Turkish and Armenian characters. "The first part of the novel is dedicated to the confrontation of the two nations," he explains in *In the Shade of the Cedars*.[37] By "confrontation" (*chakatum*) is meant difference in "spiritual realities"—culture, religion, customs, traditions, and superstitions. Again, Oshakan follows the scheme he developed in *Imperial Song of Triumph*, to define and characterize victims and victimizers, Armenians and Turks, in their private lives, thoughts, and motivations. He is convinced that in order to understand what happened one should know the Turk, who, he contends, is absent from Armenian Genocide literature. In a chapter in *Panorama* devoted to Aram Antonian, Oshakan maintains that although *In Those Dark Days* is a protest against the Turks, the authors of that darkness, "the role of the Turks is so minute in that drama of 200 pages."[38] In the same chapter, Oshakan discusses Antonian's compilation of evidence for the Armenian Genocide, *The Great Crime*:

> History cannot prove anything, since it is an arena of denials. . . . I separate the matter from its historical and legal aspects to put it on the moral ground. . . . But the Turks? From the vizier to the peasant shepherd, they all calmly and peacefully accepted the decree of the annihilation. That was an invitation to their centuries old instincts and a pleasant one.[39]

Genocide literature should portray the participation not only of the Turkish officials but also of the common people. Moreover, the Turk should not be faceless. To that effect, Oshakan boasts of having succeeded in creating a comprehensive portrait:

> After all, he is the one [Oshakan is speaking about himself] who has given us absolute examples of the Turk, not just the executioner of the Armenian people, but companion to their souls for centuries and the ultimate cause of their tragedies but in any event a human being. . . . In the Armenian novels the Turk is a cliché scarecrow, the ogre of the legend. Oshakan has not retouched the picture, of course, but he has retained the original.[40]

[37] Tachian, *In the Shade of the Cedars*, p. 14.

[38] Oshakan, *Panorama*, IX, 264.

[39] Ibid., IX, 278.

[40] Ibid., X, 8-9.

Oshakan does not claim to have presented a complete portrait of the Turk and his psychological drives and motives when murdering the Armenian people. He explains that *Hariur mek tarvan*, the planned series of novels consisting of *Hachi Murad*, *Hachi Abdullah*, and *Suleiman Efendi*, were intended to create the Turkish image he hoped to complete in the last volume of *Remnants*, "The Hell." According to his own confession in *Panorama*, "The Hell of *Remnants* was to be created based on this psychology, the [psychology of] 1915."[41] Despite the fact that this project was not realized, Oshakan still firmly believed that his contribution in this respect was unmatched. In the same passage in *Panorama*, he cites a letter from an artist stating that in order to know themselves, the Turks should translate Oshakan.

Remnants contains many scenes of Armeno-Turkish relations in which Oshakan exerts a conscious effort to build the character of a Turk. One such effort is his portrayal of Mehmed Pasha, who was educated in France and is an admirer of Thiers, "but a Turk before anything else" (II, Part One, p. 392). Mehmed orders the arrest and torture of all the village men in order to extract confessions that they conspired with Soghom in Serop's murder. He threatens the whole village and orders extreme measures to compel Soghom to come out of hiding. Then he stops the killings, not from compassion, but because subconsciously he is repeating the actions of his ancestors. Centuries ago, victorious commanders would stop the killings and forced conversions not for humanitarian reasons, as one would now like to believe, but because they needed the Christian flock. "Every Turk today through his instinctive wisdom is aware of the message of the race" (II, Part One, p. 384)

Another Turk, Suleiman Bey, at the age of twenty killed his stepmother and cut her body in pieces. He was acquitted on account of his father's connections. Afterwards, Suleiman became a loyal military man. For a man with such a background, to kill a fifteen-year-old Armenian girl—to learn Soghom's hiding place Suleiman Bey tortures his sister to death—is not only a military duty (to suppress the "unrest" in the village) but a heavenly pleasure as well (II, Part One, p. 406). Yet another Turk, Osman Beyzade Osman Bey, is a protégé of the Sultan himself. A patriotic soldier, he lived in opulence in a mansion in Constantinople, having earned his position by adopting, body and soul, Sultan Abdul Hamid's "political message" that "Whoever oppresses the Christians is a true son of the Turkish homeland" (II, Part Two, p. 192).

Oshakan also discusses the mind-set of modernized Turkish officers on various occasions. In the chapter on Aram Antonian in *Panorama*, he observes that the same civilized, well-educated officers who read Hugo, Lamartine, and

[41] Ibid., X, 24.

Nietzsche were conspirators in the Armenian massacres and protested the trial and execution of a few Turks found guilty of perpetrating the Armenian deportations and massacres.[42] The same idea echoes in *Remnants* in his characterization of Mehmed Sureya Pasha, the special envoy of the Porte, who represents the modern Turk. His mind-set, Oshakan maintains, is the outcome of his "possibly Slavic origin, a perfect example of a few centuries of mixing with the blood of kidnapped Christian women and forcibly Turkified males. These characters mold the higher echelon of the big cities and gradually expand to make the character of the modern-day Turk" (II, Part Two, p. 338).

Mehmed Sureya Pasha's interrogation of Matik Melikkhanian, an imprisoned Eastern Armenian revolutionary activist, adds an interesting dimension to the novel. The interrogation covers seventy-eight pages. Let us put aside for the moment the technical fallacies of the scene—a conversation of that length would likely take eight hours or more, and in the narrative it takes place after many hours of group investigation. Instead, let us focus on another aspect of the interrogation. The Turkish official asks no questions, makes no accusations; the prisoner does not try to defend himself, as one might expect. Mehmed gives a lengthy speech, interrupted only by brief sentences, exclamations, and affirmative gestures by the prisoner, in which he gives his interpretation of governmental policies not only toward Armenians but also with regard to international diplomacy. He sets forth the modern Turk's aspirations and ideologies, which we recognize today as Pan-Turanism. Mehmed's familiarity with Armenian history, culture, worldview, and interpretation of history sounds unrealistic, however. Mere observation, no matter how astute, could not have given him such insight. The limited non-Armenian written sources of the time could not have provided him with such in-depth knowledge, and it is highly unlikely that he could read Armenian. It is more plausible to assume that Oshakan agreed with the Turk's strong criticism of Armenians—Matik's silence substantiates such an interpretation—and adds his own insights to the discourse. This criticism sounds exaggerated, however, even coming from Oshakan himself.

It seems that here, Oshakan is exploiting his intention to present the Turkish viewpoint. He vents his own discontent with ancient and medieval Armenian historians who judged events from a strictly religious point of view. He criticizes religion itself, which poisoned Armenian feelings for the Muslim Turks, the existing political parties, and the classic trend of glorifying the Armenian past to activate the aspiration for self-determination.

[42] Ibid., IX, 281.

On the role of the Armenian Church in the rejuvenation of the Armenian nation, the argument proceeds as follows:

> "You only have your church to enact your internal restoration; but the means it employs is contrary to what other churches would do."
>
> "The sons of Israel didn't do any different," [Matik replies].
>
> "Never. These are two different situations. Yours is a pure retreat into the past; in other words, retreat from your present. You do not descend into the abyss of your centuries to obtain strength. They recoil in their synagogues with an absolute determination to reinvigorate in their faith and to receive the ability to hate those surrounding them. You pursue the psychology of your ancestors, which is to mature for death." (II, Part Two, p. 289)

The juxtaposition of Armenian and Jewish responses is a rare occurrence in Armenian creative literature. Although expressed through a Turkish character, Oshakan seeks to find the roots of responses to similar historical situations in the religion, tradition, and the history of the two peoples.

The interrogation, or rather, the Turkish officer's attack on Armenian traditional values, goes on:

> "What have you done more beautiful than getting slaughtered in masses? This act of yours is as much inglorious as it is a heroism. Have you tried to delve into the enigma of the events that have caused your destruction? . . . This is not God-sent punishment for your sins, as your chronicler-historians tried to convince you. It is not a blind whim of luck, as your revolutionary theorists judge. . . . Nations grow and flourish not conservatively isolating themselves, as you believe so, but by the tremendous flood of torrential sentiments that weave the souls together. Yet you would not have four people who would experience the same feeling with the same intensity. . . . (II, Part Two, p. 290)

And he continues:

> "Besides the unreal romantic pleasures that your books have taught you, you have not learned to experience other pleasures like the pleasure of domination. I do not mean violence or murder, but the right to self determination, the right not to become slaves to others. And this is the catastrophe."
>
> "Our people have pursued this dream for centuries," [Matik retorts].
>
> ". . . It is so true, and perhaps painfully true. . . . But to aspire to freedom with romantic sentimentalism does not lead to the realization of that dream." (II, Part Two, p. 294)

Mehmed Sureya Pasha raises important issues and draws conclusions with authority. He argues that in spite of centuries of Turkish-Armenian coexistence, Armenians did not try to understand the culture, language, and poetry of the Turks. This particular point is, of course, the gist of Oshakan's argument, which echoes throughout the novel. He is convinced that Armenians do not know the Turks well enough to be able to understand the catastrophe and respond to it.

In a footnote in the chapter on Antonian in *Panorama*, Oshakan reveals the identity of Mehmed Sureya Pasha, the actual name of a high-ranking Turkish official, and says that he patterned the prison interrogation of Matik Melikeanents (also referred to as Melikkhanian) after a conversation he himself had with Mehmed Sureya Pasha, in 1917 in Constantinople.[43] This information explains why many issues raised by Mehmed Sureya Pasha relate more appropriately to the World War I years rather than to the preceding era, the time when the interrogation is supposed to have occurred. Mehmed emerges in the Armenian Genocide literature as a representative of the post-Genocide Turkish worldview and not a cliché murderer. As to the identity of the Armenian revolutionary, Oshakan's later novel *Matik Melikkhanian*, the same character's heroic saga, gives ample reasons for believing that the author modeled his protagonist on an actual person.

In complete contrast to Mehmed Sureya Pasha is the character of Sheikh Sabit. He is the living synthesis of "the Janissaries—their features and atrocities—and the semi-savage nomadic tribes of Asia and Africa" (II, Part Two, p. 338).[44]

Oshakan writes many pages analyzing the Turkish character. He discusses the genetic elements that for centuries have dictated the drive to loot and murder. He talks about patterns of behavior, which, he believes, are preconditioned by religious determinants. His analysis aims to demonstrate the criminal in the making: "There exist not only criminal people but also criminal races."[45] Oshakan exemplifies this conviction throughout *Remnants* by citing the negative attitude of the Turks toward Armenians. No matter how different the

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43 Ibid., X, 290.

44 The organization of the Janissaries (Turk. Yenicheri, meaning new army) was initiated in the fourteenth century by Orkhan, the founder of the Ottoman Empire. The Janissaries were the primary guardians of the sultan's throne, his eyes and ears in the empire. Gradually the organization became an independent entity which controlled the empire and effectively dictated the sultan's moves. The terror they spread in the country and the atrocities they committed gained the Janissaries their reputation of ferocious exploiters and executioners. It was not until 1826 that Sultan Mahmud II finally dissolved the organization.

45 Oshakan, *Panorama*, IX, 279.

Turkish characters may be, he asserts, they all agree in their perception of the Armenian cause. A vulgar, illiterate prison guard lacks the sophistication of Mehmed Sureya Pasha's ideas, but he knows one thing: "Armenians were stupid to yearn for freedom, and to be discontented with the paradise that is theirs to enjoy" (II, Part Two, p. 432). The reason for killing Armenians, then, is to teach them to appreciate what they have and to be thankful for it. One example of negativity is the orphanage where young Armenian children are being raised as Turks. A Turkish wetnurse finds an unusual way to express her hatred: she wets her nipple with poison when feeding an Armenian baby, but is poisoned herself—"and that was her reward" (II, Part One, p. 417).

The novel *Remnants* moves slowly, with very little action. Oshakan seems not to care: "Do not expect a silly pasha to constantly brandish his sword left and right, spit and curse, and shout orders to kill. This is the external, the single-faceted moving action" (II, Part Two, p. 67). What is important is how the pasha thinks. What are the roots of that thought? What is the motivation behind that thought which leads to action, which results in a particular perception of Armenians, and which develops into a pattern of behavior against them?

The individual Turkish characters Oshakan paints are, by and large, enemies of the Armenian people. Rarely does one come across a positive note or a favorable remark about a Turk. Oshakan makes many generalizations and does much stereotyping. For example, he writes: "The old proverb was right to attach rape to the right arm of the Turk and looting to his left" (II, Part One, p. 18). Or: "The Turk was more beautiful when he was slaughtering" (I, p. 511). And the same idea again: "The Turk has never been so heroically beautiful with an internal fire burning in him as when he beats a prisoner, a woman, a child. No nation has experienced that heavenly pleasure as the Turkish nation has while witnessing the beating of infidels" (II, Part One, p. 47). The Turkish policeman, he writes, is a miserable creature, scorned by Turkish citizens and insulted and beaten by higher-ranking officers. His character changes completely in an Armenian village, however. There he becomes a tyrant superior, the symbol of Turkish rule (I, p. 526). Or: "Besides sex, there is only blood that arouses the Turk" (I, p. 506).

Often, Turk or Turkish refers not to nationality, but is a qualifying adjective for a specific predicament: "In each one of his swearings, colorful, unique, and strong, he puts a large piece of Turkishness and corruption" (I, p. 514). And: "Traces of immense hatred, exceptionally Turkish, began to form on his face" (I, p. 531). Or: "Pitilessness and Turkishness filled the atmosphere" (I, p. 533). And again: "His words were Turk, that is, with the Turkishness of the

five-century empire, mixed with the breath of the 300,000 slaughtered Armenian victims" (I, p. 554).

Interrupting the narrative is a long passage about the massacres of 1915, one of the few instances in *Remnants* which describe the massacres that Oshakan intended to cover in the last part of the novel. Here, he draws a parallel between the practice of violence in Turkey before and after World War I, in an apparent reply to European apologists who maintained that the Armenian Catastrophe was an outgrowth of the war situation. Again, the word "Turk" is a descriptive, qualifying adjective:

> It was not the outbreak of war which made the Turks so much Turk. Before or after the war, it has been the same. The soldier, the volunteer, the layman, the clergy, with an inexplicable smile on their face, would twist the tortured, half-dead Armenian prisoner's head and shamelessly ask him "Is your wife pretty?" . . . I repeat. This is not an outcome of war psychology. . . . They raped young women in front of their rope-bound husbands. They forced women to watch to the last moment the slaughtering of their husbands. While two Turks would hold the man down, with his face sweeping the ground, others would unhurriedly sharpen their knives; then they would try the knives against the neck of the man. The execution would begin. They would push the knife very slowly, twisting like a screw, passing the skin, then cutting the veins, one by one; they would pause here to prolong the agony, before tearing the larynx apart. The deep, inexplicable ugliness of all this. I stress these because the world confuses the massacres with the passion of violence. The world thinks of an irresponsible criminal psychology when visualizing the Turks engaged in murder (II, Part One, p. 381).

Oshakan himself is not able to explain the connotation that the word "Turk" has for him: "Turkishness translates into Turkishness without explanation," he states. "The Turk is the animal outlined by our historians of a thousand years ago, but they gave no explanations either. He kills for want of not being able to do something else" (II, Part Two, p. 614, author's emphasis).

Not one Armenian writer has placed so much emphasis on the role and instrumentality of the Turk with respect to the Armenian Tragedy. *Remnants* is the repository of an array of responses to genocide expressed by the author and his Armenian characters. In the majority of cases, the vantage point is the agency of the enemy. Oshakan's perception of the Turkish role in the Armenian Genocide is evident also in *Panorama*, especially in the chapters dedicated to the writers who recorded the Catastrophe.

According to Mintz, Uri Zvi Greenberg occupies the same position in Jewish Holocaust literature: "Greenberg's poetry constitutes a reverse of this

exclusion [of the enemy in Jewish literature]. . . . Again and again, in hundreds of poems the vision is repeated: the besotted gentile, his murderous nature, the history of blood. . . ."[46] In "No Other Instances," for example, Greenberg vents his anger for the Jewish lot and the "brutal torture" they suffer "in a land of gentiles": "All the culture of gentile kingdom at its peak / flows with our blood, / and all its conscience, with our tears."[47] "God and His Gentiles" is another poem in which Greenberg vents his animosity even more at the German executioners, generalizing the word "gentile" to encompass every negative attribute, as Oshakan does with "Turk."

The Character of the Armenian

Catastrophe is two-sided: one side inflicts the violence, the other has violence inflicted upon it. In the Genocide Armenians and Turks are the actors, and the genocide literature should reflect the perceptions and responses of both. It should disclose the roots of age-old hatred and mutual intolerance that surface in everyday life in the form of superstitious prejudice (for example, Armenian villagers consider the water desecrated if a Turk has bathed in it). The Armenian Genocide literature should expose the "centuries-old contempt of the Turks toward Armenians, which has turned green by the governments' venom. It has become a new hatred that has racial roots and will subside only by the conquest of Asia" (II, Part One, p. 378).

Oshakan took upon himself the task of demonstrating how Armenians perceive catastrophe: "A couple of books [parts] of this novel shall demonstrate the variations of our thought on our tragedy. It is my duty to give the origin of half a century of evolution until its tragic end" (II, Part One, p. 387). Looking inward and outward in his quest for clues to explain the catastrophe, he attributed the failure of the Armenian resistance to the enormity of the Turkish yoke. Armed struggle failed not because Armenians were incapable of fighting but because the Turks were like a sea engulfing an island of Armenians. Of the Armenian revolutionary movement unleashed in the 1880s Oshakan wrote:

> We may call these revolutionists, who believed in the ideology of freedom, and who sacrificed their lives for it, madmen or criminals. That is because we are seeking a scapegoat to blame for the Catastrophe. But those who will write the history of our revolution should stop and think about the thoughts and ideas of these men (II, Part One, p. 387).

[46] Mintz, *Hurban*, p. 169.

[47] Roskies, *The Literature of Destruction*, p. 575; see pp. 576-577 for the poem "God and His Gentiles."

Clearly, Oshakan favored the revolutionists' ideology and believed their movement to represent a crucial phase in recent Armenian history. "In the 1900s, *komita* [Oshakan uses the name Turks gave to Armenian political activists and revolutionists] is neither a concept nor a fairy tale. It is our mysticism, which arms our chosen ones, but is not understood by the masses" (II, Part Two, p. 37). In opposition to those who believed that had Armenians not taken up arms in resistance they would not have been massacred, he said that the catastrophe of 1915 "would not have been possible if we had less of these benefactors [a reference to the village priest who makes up a list of 'suspicious' men in the village and turns it over to the Turkish commander]. There is a lot we need to say not to the Turks but to ourselves in particular" (II, Part One, p. 389). He was certainly troubled by the many traitors and blamed them for the calamities under Ottoman rule. At the same time he sought to explain them:

> No nation, in our times, has given birth to so many traitors. . . . During the massacres of 1896, the Turks destroyed the strength of our morale. . . . We learned to hate our enemies, but more than that we learned to hate each other. Now, on top of this add the centuries of calamities and the ruinous thoughts that our history transmitted to us. Then, you will see the pleasure of the Turks when taking advantage of our decadence. (II, Part One, pp. 407-408)

In characterizing the Armenians, Oshakan juxtaposes the revolutionary thinker, who risks his life for the nation's liberation, with the "loyal" citizens of the empire. The latter, representing the majority, have learned to please the Turks; even though they have not severed their ties with the church and the community, they live and think like Turks. Sukias Efendi is one such character, very similar to Arpiar Arpiarian's Hairapet Efendi in *Karmir zhamuts* (The Red Offering), discussed earlier (see Chapter Three). Sukias Efendi knows how to flatter Turkish officials and win favors; he believes that the Armenians have no choice but to bend over backwards for the Turks and stay away from their wrath. "It is wrong to sit in Paris or New York in the twentieth century and judge our people," Oshakan argues, "[you should] put them in their own land, at least fifty years earlier; then you will be modest in poeticizing its weaknesses" (II, Part Two, p. 202).

In addition to his attempt to present the Turkish view, Oshakan turns inward and tries to portray the victims' reactions, their perception of the Armenian plight, and their psychology. He is convinced that every character in the novel of genocide deserves character development, regardless of the extent of his or her role in the plot. "The more people with a certain measure

of characterization that appear [in the novel], the more facets from the spirit of our nation we will be able to salvage."[48] At the same time, he strongly criticizes authors like Suren Partevian who portray only the ugly facets of the victims' psyche, although he does not deny the validity and plausibility of the base actions of Partevian's protagonists. An author should not hesitate to picture the reality, Oshakan notes, no matter how hideous, but "It is the frequency of these actions that make a book a little suspicious, and one wonders why this nihilistic psychology. . . . And a book like that is a sin for our literature."[49]

With this conviction in mind, Oshakan populates *Remnants* with hundreds of Armenians from all walks of life. Each one contributes to his heavily textured representation of life prior to the Genocide of 1915, in the aftermath of the 1890s massacres. Each one brings in his or her own understanding of the Armenian tragedy and the response to it. A few of the numerous characters in the novel are summarized below.

Wealthy Hachi Artin, the articulate and respected father of the Nalbandents family, "did not fear the Turks, who tried to reciprocate on Armenians the beatings from the Christians [Russians and Greeks]" (I, p. 68). This statement is fraught with political implications regarding Ottoman policies toward the minorities in the Empire.

Father Ohan, the priest, and Artin Varzhapet, the teacher, do everything they can to allay the anger of the Turkish commander when Serop Agha, the commander's friend and informer, is assassinated. The danger of annihilation hangs over the entire village. The priest uses his skill to flatter the Turk, and, in the meantime, enjoins the villagers not to resist the persecutions. The teacher writes a petition to the government, and the majority of the villagers sign it, begging for mercy from the Sublime Porte and avowing that "There is no salvation for Armenians outside Turkey." The teacher is repeating a motto formulated by the Armenian publicist Hambartsum Alajajian in an editorial in *Punj*, more than a decade earlier, in response to the 1896 massacres (II, Part One, p. 363). Without comment, Oshakan records the feelings of the majority in the village, which, he maintains, are shared by many in the empire: no matter how brutal the yoke, without Turkish sovereignty Armenians could not survive.

Matik Melikkhanian is a young Armenian freedom fighter. Soghom meets him in prison and is impressed by his high spirit. Matik awaits his execution, and, despite the ordeal of torture and the prospect of imminent death, "He is still laughing and throwing jokes through his broken teeth. . . . He is happy be-

[48] Tashian, *In the Shade of the Cedars*, p. 19.

[49] Oshakan, *Panorama*, VII, 378-379.

cause fate has finally brought his end near. [This is] indescribable bliss, which our ancient martyrs experienced, when, kneeling under the sword, they made haste to die sooner" (II, Part Two, p. 153). The enthusiasm of becoming a martyr in ancient times and at present is the same; only the motive and the goal have changed.

The unnamed Armenian prelate of Brusa is a loyal servant of the government, a conservative thinker, and the embodiment of the Armenian religious leader characterized and ridiculed by Mehmed Sureya Pasha. The impact of the persecutions, unleashed by the government under the pretext of finding Serop's murderer, reaches the prelacy in Brusa and the prelate must take extra precautions to ward off the danger. Contemplating the situation he draws conclusions based on the Bible, still the source of his knowledge and the key to his interpretation of the impending catastrophe: "National affairs are in a very delicate state. . . . We ruined our peace and comfort with our mistakes. . . . We should be cautious and especially flexible not to stir their fanaticism. God has certainly determined everything with His invincible will . . . blessed be God's will" (II, Part Two, pp. 490,492). Oshakan represents Armenian religious leaders in terms of their response to Turkish oppression. The pattern is what Mehmed Sureya Pasha defined: preaching obedience to fate and to God's will and eulogizing martyrdom for the sake of Christianity. In his commentary on Aram Antonian's genocide literature, Oshakan traces the change of outlook in the Armenian clerical leadership:

> In the 1800s an Imperial decree was able to wipe out our entire leadership. Our Patriarch, in those days, would mourn over the event. By offering sacrifices, he would try to appease God's wrath, which had come to them through the decree as a punishment for our immense sins. In the 1900s, again an Imperial decree was able to turn the Armenian population of a prosperous city into ashes within twenty four hours. Neither the Armenian Patriarch nor the intelligentsia explained the cause of the event, blaming the sins we committed. Thus this resulted in an acute misunderstanding between Turks and Armenians. The Turks presented us as the enemy of the government with no adequate reason.[50]

Living in the 1900s, the prelate in *Remnants* behaves according to Oshakan's definition of reaction in the 1800s. Obviously the change of outlook evident in his response was not widespread. Especially, the less educated, more conservative leadership still adhered to what had been handed down by its predecessors.

[50] Ibid., IX, 277-278.

Soghom's mother is an interesting figure in the narrative. Her name is never mentioned. Perhaps Oshakan does not deem it necessary to give her a name, or perhaps peasant women were identified only by their relation to a man. The mother is referred to either as *Soghoments knik* (the woman in the Soghoments family), or *Soghomin maire* (Soghom's mother). She appears only at the end of the novel, but her sentiments, her behavior, and most significantly, her response to the Armenian Tragedy make her an important element in the overall texture.

Learning of her son's possible acquittal, Soghom's mother is exhilarated and runs to the prelate for advice on how to expedite his freedom. But when she learns of the conditions for his pardon, she is stunned. She cannot believe that her son would relinquish his faith and convert to Islam in order to gain freedom. Oshakan intervenes here to explain that death, whether voluntary or imposed, causes ten times less pain to the survivors than Turkification. The reason, he maintains, is not profound devotion to Christianity; it is because Armenians, especially those living in closed communities with limited contact with the Turks, had a Turkish stereotype in mind, which consisted of "the miserable vendors in the Armenian quarters. As to the Beys and Pashas, they belong to the fairy tales" (II, Part Two, p. 500). The reasoning implies that if Armenians had been in touch with the Turks and had known their upper classes better, conversion and Turkification would not loom so outrageous. For these isolated Armenians, "Turkification was tantamount to death with no return . . . and Soghom was dead in this world . . . more importantly, dead for the world beyond" (ibid.). In sum, Armenians faithful to traditional beliefs lived the deprivation, pain, and suffering of this world in the hope of a better life beyond death. This is what Christianity taught and what the priest repeated every Sunday. Turkification meant trading life in heaven for a better life on earth, and for Soghom's mother that was inconceivable. She had brought up her children in unspeakable hardship in the hope of reuniting the family with her dead husband in heaven. Now she was confronted with a difficult choice: Should her son convert to Islam and live, or die on the gallows? The dilemma eventually drives her insane. In this way Oshakan spares himself—and the woman—the trauma of making the difficult choice.

Soghom's incarceration in Constantinople and his own experience with Turkish prisons offer Oshakan the opportunity for a realistic description of Turkish prisons: filthy, pest-infested, unlivable. The description stands out as the strongest indictment of Turkish "justice":

> Torture is an art there, unsurpassed anywhere in the world; life is a contest of bestiality between the prison guards and the inmates. Prisoners—thieves, murderers, rapists—rob each other of the last drop of human dignity. . . . Prison officers are experts in making the prisoners talk and confess to their "crimes" or inform on a "conspiracy" going on in the prison. . . . In this kingdom of evil, a few Turkish victims of the regime, deprived of all their rights, are condemned to death by starvation. . . . There are a few Armenians, too, mixed with the criminals; some educated intellectuals, some common peasants, accused of anti-government revolutionary activities. They drag their chains and hope for a fair trial to prove their innocence (II, Part Two, pp. 125-132).

In my study of Jewish Holocaust literature, I have found no edge of comparison with Oshakan's rich texture of Armenian characters, each responding to the Tragedy in his or her own way. David Roskies' pre-Holocaust characters, the *baal-guf*, the *telushim*, and the *schlemiel*, do not persist through the Holocaust. There seems to be a reversal of the treatment of public response to catastrophe. The image of the Jewish victim that emerges from the Holocaust literature is wrapped in mystic awe, a holy figure suffering the barbarity of the gentiles and patiently accepting that which is preordained. The Jewish masses in the ghettos, which now can be viewed as "the dark prelude" to the Final Solution, "saw themselves then at the sad end of an era, at the start of something 'new and momentous,' and as actors in a well-rehearsed Jewish drama."[51] The coping behavior of individual Jews in the ghetto was overshadowed by the collective behavior taking shape under the direction of the ghetto rabbis and even most modernized writers. In the struggle for survival ancient archetypes were invoked and given new meaning, comparing the deportation from the ghettos to the exile of the Jewish people in the ancient times. Simkhe Bunem Shayevitsh's poem "Lekh-Lekho" exemplifies the search for comfort and consolation.[52] The rabbis, on the other hand, devised the involvement of God in the suffering of the Jewish nation as solace. Finally, as Roskies attests, came the realization that such means were inadequate vis-à-vis the final destruction: "What was needed instead was some form of action, whether a last defiant stand in the ghetto or the reinvention of the Jews by the last surviving writers."[53]

Foreign Influence in Armeno-Turkish Relations

Oshakan blamed the European nations for not intervening in the Armenian tragedy, for he believed they could have stopped the atrocities if

[51] Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse*, p. 203.

[52] Roskies, *The Literature of Destruction*, pp. 520-530.

[53] Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse*, p. 208.

only they had tried. As noted earlier, he dedicated the *Imperial Song of Triumph* to the kaiser, for he was convinced of the German involvement in the Armenian massacres, although the idea does not echo in the text. It is in *Remnants* that references to German conspiracy occur. Noting that the Genocide of 1915 is a "German concept," he adds: "But, of course, that is the new Turkish idea as well. [The Armenian Genocide is] a paramount reproach thrown at the mentor's face" (II, Part Two, p. 83).

The Germans alone were not to blame; the indifference of other European nations contributed greatly to the success of the anti-Armenian Ottoman policy. In a scene depicting an enthusiastic Turkish mob engaging in harassment and murder, Oshakan calls the Turks "the slayers" (*ktrtoghner*), "a catastrophic word, which we learned to spell as a child; we came to feel it in our teen years, and we lived it a quarter of a century. Other nations do not understand [it], and this ignorance destroyed our cause" (II, Part One, p. 380).

European indifference is stressed throughout the novel. In one instance Oshakan explains that other nations did not know the Turk and could not understand the extent of Turkish atrocity: "Seeing them is not enough. One should feel them. And the only way is captivity. Many Europeans, French and British, experienced that captivity imposed upon them by the Turks in Iraq and Cilicia. They should have written their memoirs. Then the world would comprehend the Armenian Tragedy" (II, Part Two, p. 13). Here again is revealed an important aspect of Oshakan's struggle to come to terms with the Catastrophe: to know the Turks is to understand the Catastrophe.

The Monotony of Genocide Literature

Genocide literature can be monotonous, observed Oshakan. Stories of horror, no matter how startling, or mournful lamentations, no matter how catching they may sound, in repetition after repetition make for tiresome reading. One solution, as he suggests in his commentary on Suren Partevian's literature of atrocity, is to add atmosphere. Partevian's *Kaikaium* stands out among his other works because characters are drawn against a background of customs and traditions which enrich the picture and endow it with life and color.[54] Of Aram Antonian's major work, *In Those Dark Days*, Oshakan says that the characterizations of the victims save it from being a boring cliché. The men and women have identifiable human qualities and feelings, and the use of flashbacks effectively brings to life Armenian popular customs, ancient beliefs,

[54] Oshakan, *Panorama*, VII, 389.

and superstitions to make the stories more interesting.[55] These added dimensions help the reader to understand certain reactions and behavior, the end result yielding a better grasp of the public responses to catastrophe.

Oshakan is mindful of these concerns in his own writing. For every scene he paints a background with detailed descriptions of people and places. If the tight framework of the stories in *Imperial Song of Triumph* did not give him this freedom, the genre of the novel gave him abundant opportunities. Unfortunately, he is often trapped in exaggeration, interrupts the narrative, begins a long digression, or engages in uncontrolled outpourings of thoughts and reminiscences. He justifies it all by saying, "The images in our minds do not abide by the rules that we have made for a book" (II, Part One, p. 149). Following the flight of his imagination Oshakan argues against any rule that would limit an artist's fancy and impose any framework of time or space on the narrative: "It is unfortunate if a novelist refrains from recording memories of past incidents for the sake of remaining in the limits of the present" (II, Part Two, p. 347). To abide by the rules when writing a novel is tantamount to wishing to please the reader. "I have not lost hope for the day when a writer will liberate himself from the humiliation of serving others and will pour out his thoughts abundant and naked" (II, Part Two, p. 72). Let the reader think whatever he wishes—even the best novelists, Oshakan maintains, could not possibly depict in a few hundred pages the tragedy of any single life that they had witnessed.

Remnants is replete with deviations: overlong descriptions, flashbacks, one story intruding in the middle of another. An excess of details and reminiscences makes the reading difficult. "Of course, the novel has its rules which deny such deviations," he admits (II, Part Two, p. 67), but he justifies himself and explains his methods, intentions, and style several times in Volume 10 of *Panorama*. In a massive footnote (91 lines), he discusses the question of digression and the seemingly endless paragraphs, parenthetical remarks, and footnotes. He cites the example of Proust, who "sometimes opens a parenthesis a few pages long," and refers to James Joyce, whom he calls a revolutionary:

> Joyce . . . has gone beyond the rules of clarity and with no hesitation, without going to a new paragraph or using conventional signs [of punctuation] writes the novel. The epilogue in *Odyssey*[56] runs 200 pages in one paragraph, without a comma or a stop—newly devised means to lead the unintelligent. The ancient manuscripts ignored all that. The intelligent reader, after some exercise, would

[55] Ibid., IX, 262.

[56] Oshakan seems to have confused Joyce's *Ulysses* with Homer's *Odyssey*. Joyce, of course, chose the title for the parallelism between Homer's hero and his own protagonist.

become familiar with the text and would benefit from a more careful reading and a better understanding of the text.[57]

His own obvious purpose, Oshakan reiterates, is not to create a novel conventional in form and concept—characters in action, a specific plot, a mystery, a suspense leading to a solution. His objective is to capture the voice of the tortured and the torturer, "to bring the spirit of a land into style"[58] (II, Part Two, p. 78).

Conclusion

If anyone among the first-generation writers can be said to have the last word on the Armenian Tragedy, it is Hakob Oshakan, the most complex among them. Krikor Beledian has correctly stated that "Oshakan finishes up, fulfills, and completes the entire Western Armenian literature whose novel he writes because he is its only novelist."[59] By writing about Western Armenian literature produced before the Catastrophe in *Panorama*, and by portraying life before the Catastrophe in *Remnants*, Oshakan strove to complete the novel of the pre-Genocide era. He said everything that could be said. The greatest challenge of his life, however, was to discover how to write genocide literature and how to write about it. A wild, violent, unmanageable torrent—the Catastrophe—separated pre-Genocide and post-Genocide writing. It meant fighting uncontrollable emotion, trying to give shape to the chaos that the Catastrophe was. Before coming to a new beginning, before writing about life after genocide, Oshakan had to confront the Catastrophe, absorb it, and explain it. He had to acknowledge and understand the reality of an end which made time stop.

Throughout all his life Oshakan attempted to find a way for understanding that end in order to make a new beginning possible. He looked to the past, but found no guiding light there. He searched for a suitable genre, ruling out lamentation and glorification of loss, devices many writers and poets had

57 Oshakan, *Panorama*, X, 208.

58 I have translated *voch* as "style," but the English does not readily lend itself to the deeper meaning Oshakan intended. In "The Style of Violence" (see n. 4 above), Nichanian attempts to explain the connotation of this word in a complicated passage by Oshakan, which ends with the following sentence: "And while the catastrophe is style and temperament for our historians, it is only a theme, subject to literary development, for our modern writers." A comparison of the meanings of "style" in these two contexts suggests that Oshakan did not intend to thematize the Armenian spirit in his novel, but rather to make the Armenian spirit the style of the novel.

59 Beledian, "H. Oshakan, the Critic," p. 111.

resorted to in order to pull through the agony of writing the story of the Armenian Genocide. Oshakan would undoubtedly have agreed with Mintz, that "A national literature that makes no discriminations and absorbs every negative event into the rhetoric of absolute catastrophe, that rushes to idealize and beautify what was destroyed, that takes off into the heavens of inflated ornamental language—this is not a national literature that will serve the nation."[60]

Oshakan felt deeply the shattering of the old tools handed down by his predecessors to explain catastrophe: "The generation of the Constitution had handed us down no oracles to face up to such unplaceable acts. That is what also makes possible the destruction of our soul."[61] He took upon himself the difficult task of devising that oracle. When he wrote those lines he was already working on *Remnants*, the novel of the Catastrophe, which would remain unfinished.

Based on Oshakan's own explanation, Nichanian suggests that he did not go on with his novel because of a combination of factors: a nervous collapse, the subject of death being a deterrent, and the supercilious attitude of the new generation of Armenian writers in Paris. Evidence of his deteriorating health is found in Oshakan's own words. Speaking of himself, he wrote: "*Remnants* has cost Oshakan's life. That work has been the cause of his illness."[62] He drew a parallel with Proust, yet admitted that although Proust suffered the fate of his work, he did not abandon it.

I agree with Nichanian that Oshakan's explanations are questionable, and suggest the following hypothesis: Oshakan composed *Imperial Song of Triumph* when he had not yet experienced the dispersion. He was still in Constantinople, in his native environment, as was the case for Esayan when she wrote *Amid the Ruins*. *Remnants*, on the other hand, was conceived in the diaspora, when Oshakan was an uprooted plant in an alien soil, living with the evidence of at least half the nation's annihilation and the dispersion of the survivors. Writing about the source of that evil involved great pain and required an enormous amount of research. "To portray the Catastrophe from every respect, talent and imagination are not enough," Oshakan confessed. "A great deal of research should be done to acquire information on the demography of the place; many memoirs and narratives which relate the customs, traditions, and the preceding

60 Mintz, *Hurban*, p. 118.

61 Oshakan, *Panorama*, VII, 353-354. For an in-depth analysis of the statement in a broader context, see Nichanian, "The Style of Violence," pp. 1-26.

62 Tashian, *In the Shade of the Cedars*, p. 10.

events should be read."[63] In addition to the sheer volume of work involved, Oshakan set high standards for himself and for the novel of his dreams, standards he simply was unable to meet.

If there is general agreement among Jewish literary scholars that Uri Zvi Greenberg is the foremost figure in Holocaust literature, then many present-day Armenian scholars will acknowledge that Oshakan is his counterpart in the literature of the Armenian Genocide. If, as Alan Mintz maintains, Greenberg's "Streets of the River" is the single most important work on the Holocaust in Hebrew literature," then the body of Oshakan's literature on the Genocide is indeed a monument in response to the Armenian Tragedy. Like Oshakan, Greenberg "attempts to face the Holocaust and grapple with the enormity of the loss."[64] The literary legacy of these two authors has other parallels. Their output is prodigious, and they are both difficult to read. To date no one has ventured to undertake a monographic study on either one.

My thematic study of Hakob Oshakan set out to help unravel his intricate thought and to shed some light on one aspect of his literary output, namely, his treatment of the theme of catastrophe. It is hoped that the hypotheses advanced, the concepts and ideas pinpointed, and the methodology developed have laid the groundwork for confronting and understanding the literature of the Armenian Genocide.

No one can know what the unwritten part of *Remnants* would have added to the legacy of that literature. Oshakan indicates that the third and last part of the novel was to encompass a particular story related to him by a survivor from his own native village, to reinstate the true meaning of murder, war, and massacres:

> After 1918, instead of correcting the delirium of the past generations, the Germans found the way to legalize and nationalize these criminal instincts. In 1930, every German, every Italian believed that war was the best thing for humanity. The last volume of *Remnants* was going to demand that the world take a decisive position against every one, individual or collective, to avenge murder by murder. If at least the hands, let alone the heads, of a few thousand Turks were cut, the post-1939 world would not have to mourn such horrible tragedies within Europe's most cultured centers.[65]

It is fitting to end this chapter with Oshakan reaching out to the world to take a position against the perpetrators of the Armenian Genocide. It was not

[63] Ibid., p. 16.

[64] Mintz, *Hurban*, pp. 172 and 165.

[65] Oshakan, *Panorama*, IX, 285, note.

an urge for revenge, but an unselfish motive that generated his appeal: "Let the world learn a lesson from the past and not repeat it."

Conclusion

The prophets of ancient Israel blamed the sins of the Jewish people for the calamities that befell them and promised deliverance and redemption if they repented. The concept of sin and repentance did not satisfy the poets responding to the destruction of the First Temple. New outlets were sought, new poetic devices were wrought, among them lamentation over the loss, personification of the victimized, and protest against God. The rabbis of midrash explained the slaughter of the Jewish people during the Crusader massacres and the subsequent persecutions as a God-given privilege that enabled the Jews to prove their righteousness by accepting the ultimate sacrifice of life for the sanctification of His Name.

In order to respond to the tragic fall of the Arshakuni kingdom in Armenia, Khorenatsi adopted the genre of lamentation and personified victimized Armenia as a grieving widow. Eghishe, Ghevond, Lastivertsi, and other medieval Armenian clerical writers held the multitudinous sins of the people responsible for the plight of the Armenian nation, or they glorified martyrdom and lauded the victims as martyrs of Christianity who would be rewarded with immortality.

In the Armenian and Jewish responses to national catastrophes, the paradigm remains intact if existing poetic devices, and particularly religious concepts, prove adequate as explanations. When the magnitude of the event renders traditional responses obsolete, the paradigm becomes disrupted, and new explanations and devices are sought.

The Armenian Genocide and the Jewish Holocaust represent two climactic disruptions in the history of responses to the collective suffering of two peoples. The disruption of the paradigm can be seen in the initial responses to

these catastrophes: shock and bewilderment, pathetic expressions, and paralysis of diction. Within the realm of language, the artist of atrocity had to devise new means for dealing with the unparalleled catastrophes, find new ways for bringing the inconceivable and inexplicable into his own world of imagination, in order to make the catastrophe communicable in art. Except for a few works of artistic value, the literary responses to the Armenian Genocide until the late 1930s consisted of poorly described episodes filled with sentimental pathos. Except for Greenberg's poetry and A. Appelfeld's fiction, the literary responses to the Jewish Holocaust until the 1960s consisted of a few journalistic reports and survivor memoirs. George Steiner has explained the literary void immediately after the Holocaust with his well-known theory of silence, on the inadequacy of language for dealing with the enormity of the catastrophe. And Lawrence Langer has stated, "Insufficient time and perspective, the youth and literary inexperience of many aspiring authors among the survivors, together with a reticence bred by the traumas of survival, are the real sources of difficulty in the gradual growth of an art of atrocity."[1]

This analysis holds true with regard to the Armenian Genocide as well. With the majority of Armenian literati fallen victim to the Genocide, it remained for the second generation of writers—Shahan Shahnur, Zareh Vorbuni, Nikoghayos Sarafian, Mushegh Ishkhan, and others—to uncover the full extent of the catastrophe. The tragedy was not only the slaughter, violence, and pillage but also the forced exile, the trauma of adaptating to an alien environment, and the pain of being orphaned.

Jewish survivor-writers did not experience this same tragedy. In Israel they were confronted with the indifference of the Palmah generation, who had created the independence of the new state with blood and sacrifice, and who compared the victimization of East European Jewry with the leading of sheep to slaughter. This badge of condemnation was not removed until the Eichmann trial in 1961, when the new Jewish society became familiar with the tragic world of the Holocaust. The first outpourings of Jewish Holocaust literature were the reports by the survivors. The Holocaust, its survivors, and the literature that responded to it became primary concerns for the Jewish State and its people. From their proud position of power and political stability, the new leaders of Israel now viewed the remnants of European Jewry with sympathy and understanding, and attempted to provide the means to cure them of their agonizing feelings of shame and humiliation, their paralyzing nightmares of indelible memories.

[1] Lawrence L. Langer, *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1975), p. 16.

It is therefore not surprising to find the theme of the Jewish nation's rebirth and the reality of the State of Israel replacing the traditional concept of redemption and salvation as rewards for the nation's sufferings. Nelly Sachs's poetry demonstrates the link between the destruction of European Jewry and the rebirth of the nation in the State of Israel. Uri Zvi Greenberg nurtures the vision of deliverance. Espousing the Zionist notion of national revival, he believes that extreme suffering may be transformed into a redemptive force. His notion of redemption and deliverance, however, "is not the deliverance of the classical Jewish thought but a self-willed and self-achieved national greatness."[2] Furthermore, "The fact that the land of Israel was never subjected to Nazi invasion is for Greenberg a sign of God's beneficent favor."[3] It is an oversimplification to say that the reality of the independent State of Israel is the only reason for such a contextualization of the theme of rebirth. In his poetry Greenberg views the rebirth of Israel as a divine scheme of redemption. This spiritualism is also the moving force in Moshe Flinker's diary, written in 1942-43 during the Nazi persecutions. Flinker believed that the unparalleled sufferings and intense torture were "the birthpangs" of the Messiah. Again, his notion of the coming of the Messiah was none other than the end of Jewish exile and return to Israel. Sutzkever, despite his secular worldview, attempted to model life in the ghetto according to ancient archetypes and "linked the ghetto's tragic history to the theme of generational and natural continuity."[4] In spite of national and political aspirations, the context of the Jewish responses to sufferings is traditional; only the connotations of the words "redemption" and "salvation" are new.

The theme of rebirth is nonexistent in the Armenian literary responses to the Genocide. Perception of the experience in the post-Genocide diasporan circumstances could not translate into hope for a better future and the revival of the nation. In contrast with Holocaust survivors, who could look to an independent Jewish State as a refuge, the Armenian Genocide survivors were scattered throughout the world, and had little or no prospects of ever returning to their homes.

The situation was quite different in the aftermath of the massacres of 1894-1896 and the Cilician pogroms of 1909. The Armenian survivors were able to

[2] Alan Mintz, *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 170.

[3] Alan J. Yuter, *The Holocaust in Hebrew Literature: from Genocide to Rebirth* (Port Washington, NY: Associated Faculty Press, Inc., 1983), p. 42.

[4] David G. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture* (Cambridge, Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 239.

remain on their land and rebuild their lives upon the ruins of their homes. Although they lived on with the sad memory of an inexplicable tragedy, they did not lose their sense of belonging to a homeland. Zapel Esayan considered herself "a free citizen, a full-blooded daughter of this country [the Ottoman Empire]" at the time she voiced her protest to the government for the crime committed in the Cilician massacres "against a group of citizens of that same country."[5]

The writers who responded to calamities before the Genocide of 1915 could dream about or actually witness the rebirth of their nation. In the aftermath of the massacres of 1894-1896, Hovhannes Hovhannisian sang of Armenia's bright future; Varuzhan prophesied the coming of the dawn; Siamanto advocated action because, he promised, daybreak was near. After the Cilician pogroms, Esayan heralded the resurrection of Adana from the ashes of destruction. She believed that "the enemy was condemned to impotence in the face of our persistent vitality."[6]

The theme of rebirth is largely absent in the Jewish pre-Holocaust literature of atrocity. Bialik, Abramowitch, Tchernichowsky, and other pogrom writers witnessed the moral decline of East European Jewish communities, and their inability to defend themselves or withstand national crisis. The escalating violence against Jews during World War I and the civil war in Russia came to prove the vulnerability of the East European Jews and brought to the fore the issue of imminent destruction.

The traditional concepts that had been used so effectively in earlier times to explain the Jewish and Armenian history of persecutions gave way to new secular meanings. Reward and redemption for the martyred youth of the 1860 Zeitun uprising in Mkrtich Peshiktashlian's poetry are gained by defeat of the enemy and deliverance of Armenia. The woman who lost her whole family in the Cilician massacres, as Esayan portrays her, does not dream of her loved ones being rewarded with eternal life in heaven. She wants to see the deliverance of the Armenian nation as the purpose for their martyrdom. Another of Esayan's protagonists confesses before dying on the gallows that he accepts the punishment for his sin, which is the sin of not being brave enough to take up arms against the enemy.

In a similar vein, Bialik explains the Kishinev pogroms as a God-sent punishment for the sins of the Jewish people. Their sin, however, is not defiance of God's laws but their inability to defend themselves. Olitzky, Warshawsky, and other chroniclers of the World War I Jewish pogroms indiscriminately laid bare

5 Zapel Esayan, *Averaknerun mej* [Amid the Ruins] (Beirut: Etvan Press, 1957), p. 20.

6 Ibid., pp. 226, 222.

the ugly facets of human behavior in the struggle to survive. Contrary to established traditions, these writers did not treat the victims as martyrs who sacrificed themselves for *Kiddush hashem.*

The secularized perception of martyrdom has its parallels in Esayan's treatment of the victims of the Cilician massacres. It appears also in Partevian's responses to that same event, in the form of sharp criticism of the victims' behavior in their struggle to survive. In fact, Partevian's condemnation of the victims overshadows that of the enemy, the perpetrator of the evil. The enemy is of minor importance in Partevian's response, perhaps because of a subconscious reiteration of traditional trends. The enemy's identity and role in catastrophe were disregarded in both the Armenian and Jewish traditional responses, because these responses were based on the covenant between man and God, a relationship in which the enemy was merely an agent for carrying out God's judgment. This lingering perception in the subconscious of the modern writers is often manifested by blaming the victims for what befalls them or for the way they withstand the trauma.

Self-criticism and internalization of the catastrophe are at the core of Antonian's responses to the Genocide of 1915. Antonian portrays a whole array of Armenian nightwatchmen, undertakers, and ordinary inmates who exploit their fellow deportees. In their abject subservience, they go out of their way to serve the Turkish officers' most base and sadistic desires in hopes of prolonging their own survival. There is little reference to the victimizers who humiliate, degrade, and dehumanize their victims before killing them.

Esayan, and especially Oshakan, are more conscious of the victimizer's role. Esayan searches the character of the Turk in an effort to find motivation and purpose for their actions. Oshakan concentrates on various Turkish mentalities, religious motivations, and political ideologies, as well as the conspiracy of non-Turkish forces behind the 1915 Genocide. Consequently the internalization of the catastrophe is reversed in Oshakan's responses and the enemy is pushed to the foreground. In Greenberg's poems of the Jewish Holocaust the reversal of the enemy's exclusion is "ballooned into an epic obsession."[7] Repeatedly Greenberg displays the evil nature and murderous intentions of the enemy, as if to create "the countertheme of shame and accusation," which also characterizes, for example, the protagonists of Ka-Tzetnik's novels *House of Dolls* and *Atrocity* and other post-Holocaust fiction.

Jewish post-Holocaust literature frequently deals with the sense of shame for having survived the Holocaust by submitting to degradation, and with the psychological impact of the crushing remorse, a theme almost nonexistent in

7 Mintz, *Hurban*, p. 169.

the literary responses to the Armenian Genocide. Antonian briefly touches upon the subject in "It's All Right." Three years after the incident the author experiences remorse when he recalls his indifference and inaction while watching a young boy's execution in the concentration camp.

It should be noted that the Jewish expression of shame and humiliation is a variation on the theme of internalizing the catastrophe. The difference is that the type of internalization discussed above does not exist in post-Holocaust literature. No Jewish writer blames the Jews for the holocaust that engulfed Eastern Europe or criticizes them for disregarding the possibility of an organized self-defense. Except for the passionate calls to armed struggle by Abraham Sutzkever and Abba Kovner, there are few hymns to Jewish resistance in the ghettos during the Holocaust. Writers do not blame the victims for their failure to resist the enemy, as did Bialik and other writers of the pogroms of World War I.

Conversely, the theme of armed defense and retaliation occurs frequently in the Armenian responses to catastrophe. It was the backbone of the Renaissance rhetoric. It is the moving force of Partevian's *The Book of Blood.* It is a source of pride, a beacon of light in Esayan's *Amid the Ruins,* and it has inspired many poems and stories in popular responses to the Armenian Tragedy.

Jewish literary criticism of Holocaust literature has made enormous strides. In less than half a century after the Holocaust, or more accurately, during the past twenty-five years, there has been an outpouring of literature in Israel and in North America on the responses to Holocaust. Critical works discuss Holocaust literature from every aspect and vantage point. What is more important, they promote a better understanding of the Jewish experience throughout the world. In contrast, critical study of the Armenian Genocide literature has just begun, some seventy years after the event, and there is still a long path to tread. In the 1930s Hakob Oshakan laid the foundation and raised the problematic questions of reading Genocide literature. Fifty years later, the precedent is revived. The new interest in Genocide literature has different meanings and is based upon different motives for Armenian scholars.

"I believe that the main purpose of criticism is to lead readers back to the literature under discussion," writes Lawrence Langer in the preface to his study of Holocaust literature.[8] In line with this thought I maintain that critical and analytical works on the Armenian literary responses to genocide, especially in the major languages of the world, can help promote a recognition and understanding of the Armenian Genocide.

[8] Langer, *The Holocaust,* p. xiii.

In order to thrive, Armenian diasporan literature must overcome the Catastrophe by embarking on new directions, adopting new cultural determinants and a new set of values. After seventy years, Armenian diasporan literature is still unable to confront the Genocide of 1915; artistic expressions of that event still bear the imprint of an enigma, an unencountered terminus.

When the Armenian artist confronts and comprehends the Catastrophe as a terminus, a healthy, potent diasporan literature may result. Literary criticism can play a significant role in the process. Hakob Oshakan realized the crushing effect of the Catastrophe as early as 1929: "Very few would think to associate this phenomenon [the mediocrity of post-Genocide literature] with the profound decadence of our mind after so many colossal catastrophes."[9] Armenian diasporan literature cannot continue in the vein of the pre-Genocide tradition because, as Oshakan attests, the Armenian people and the concept of Western Armenian literature became victims of the Genocide.[10] Critical literature can and should deal with the eschatology that is the Armenian Genocide, in order to pave the way for a revival of Armenian diasporan literature.

[9] *Zvartnots,* 6-7 (1929), 284.

[10] Hakob Oshakan, *Spiurke ev irav banasteghtsutiune, Vahan Tekeyani aritov* [The Diaspora and the True Poetry, on the Occasion of Vahan Tekeyan] (Jerusalem: St. James Press, 1945), pp. 2-3.

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LITERARY RESPONES TO CATASTROPHE

A Comparison of the Armenian and the Jewish Experience

RUBINA PEROOMIAN

Studies in Near Eastern Culture and Society 8

Issued under the auspices of the G. E. von Grunebaum Center for Near Eastern Studies, University of California, Los Angeles

Against a backdrop of the history of Armenian and Jewish persecutions, culminating in the Armenian Genocide and the Jewish Holocaust, the metamorphoses of these two peoples' literary responses to catastrophe are studied. The parallelism and disparity of the paradigms of responses are demonstrated as the signifiers of similar or differing worldviews shaped by religious, cultural, and sociopolitical determinants in Armenian and Jewish life. Literary responses, and through them the reactions of the victimized masses, reveal the unyielding persistence of pain in the lives of survivors. The comparative dimension between the Armenian and Jewish experiences sheds light on the universality of human suffering when confronted with extreme historical circumstances while also demonstrating the uniqueness of their experiences not only in terms of those circumstances but also in how they assimilated the tragedy into art.

Scholars Press

ISBN 1-55540-894-X
ISBN 1-55540-895-8 (pbk.)