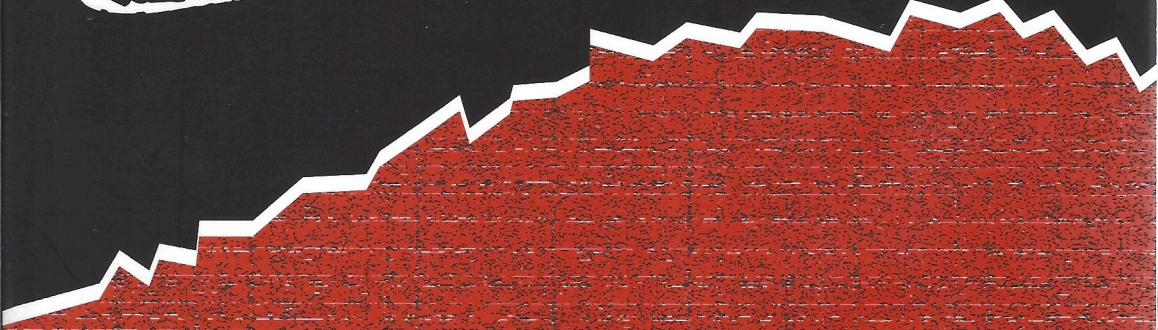


Cultural and Ethical Legacies

# The Armenian Genocide



Edited by

Richard Hovannisian



## Historical Memory: Threading the Contemporary Literature of Armenia

*Rubina Perroomian*

"'History is an unending dialogue between the past and the present.' History is a constant process of rethinking, rewriting and reinterpretation."<sup>1</sup> Every generation of every community or people tends to judge, reevaluate, and reconstruct the events of pivotal importance of the past in the light of knowledge of hindsight as well as the present exigencies and objectives. A people's past, and especially significant events of the past, are indelible landmarks in that people's collective memory. And that memory, that historical memory, finds different representations and different meanings in the process of its passage from generation to generation and under the dictates of the time. Literature is the locus of these representations. It is the place where the relationship between the self and the social and the constantly changing factors that influence these relationships are registered and represented. Literature purports revelations as the synthesis of the relationship or the dialogue of the self with the collective past in the context of the present.

The memory of the Genocide, as the most important event in the recent history of the Armenian people, the unresolved injustice, the indomitable pain and mourning over the colossal loss, persisted in the Diaspora and served as the common thread stringing together the diasporan literature. The memory of the Genocide reverberated in literature as a source of identity, a leitmotiv or a hidden theme. Successive generations of diasporan writers tried to confront the Catastrophe (*Aghet*), comprehend it, and deal with it. diasporan Armenian literature in one way or another relates to the Genocide.<sup>2</sup>

This was not the case in Soviet Armenia. Historical memory, the memory of the Armenian past and especially that of the Genocide of 1915, was abruptly switched off with the Sovietization of Armenia in December 1920. At least, that



was what the official line mandated. The future of the Armenian nation under Soviet rule was not to converge with the past. Razmik Davoyan, a contemporary poet in Armenia, challenges this policy, stressing the importance, for the present and the future, of the path a nation's ancestors crossed, that is, the bearing of the past on the present and the future:

And if you reach your forefathers,  
Then, you are close to your future;  
Before you, long before you,  
They set off thousands of years ago  
And they are the ones closest  
To all futures old and new.

And if, on your way,  
You don't meet your forefathers,  
You are on the wrong path  
And no miracle can save you now.<sup>3</sup>

A nation without a past was much easier to rule and assimilate or Russify—to use the term befitting the goal. However, even if the officially accepted norms of proletarian literature did not allow the Armenian writers of the 1920s to write about the very recent memory of painful displacement, suffering, and death, the stories of this human ordeal were being told by the survivors within the confines of their family. Davit Muradyan, a contemporary writer, pictures his protagonist in “Hrazhesht” (Farewell) reminiscing the cozy nights when the elders spoke of the Old Country, and their stories permeated pain and yearning: “No! You cannot evoke these nights by simply depicting them. There are things that cannot be put in words. You have to be seated on your father's lap, devour these stories, and catch the gleam and the sadness in the eyes of these men.”<sup>4</sup>

The collective memory was being transmitted orally but always challenged by the tenets of the new regime. How long would this unmediated transmission endure in that hostile atmosphere? Arsen, the protagonist of “Hrazhesht,” hopes that this memory would accompany his son as he grows up, and as “he in turn tries to find and not lose the thread, the invisible silver thread that grows thinner with time but, curiously, never breaks, that is if you hold it between your fingers and walk in its path.”<sup>5</sup>

The mediated transmission, the ever-thinning silver thread of collective memory, unfolded either through orally preserved stories of the survivors, who are mostly long gone now, or through literary representations of the Event. The latter, despite its shortcomings, was in full force in the Diaspora as a vehicle of transmittance, as a feeder for new creations. But in Soviet Armenia, the political atmosphere certainly did not accommodate the flow of literary responses to the recent traumatic experience, what would only be a natural way of dealing with it. Soviet Armenian literature was deprived of the immediate responses. The



tradition of the poetics of genocide was not in place for a natural, vertical that is, temporal development of Genocide literature.

### **Soviet Armenian Literature in the Changing Political Atmosphere**

With the Sovietization of Armenia, a drastic change was introduced not only in the political atmosphere, but also in the understanding of cultural and moral values, lifestyle, outlook, even norms and concepts pertaining to art and literature. A change in themes, ideas, and form was imposed. Literature had to follow the Soviet model: "national in form, socialist in content." It was to grow with no ties to its roots. Recourse to the past, even to deal with its psychological impact (let alone its political effect) on the present, had no place. The new path prescribed by the regime led to "socialist realism" in art and literature. Nationalistic themes were renounced and nationalism as an ingredient of Soviet identity was ruled out. The Congress of Soviet Writers in 1934 reiterated the goal to reach socialist realism, reinforcing again literature that was national in form and socialist in content. Andrei Zhdanov, secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, declared, "Such a method in belles-lettres and literary criticism is what we call the method of socialist realism." This kind of literature, he explained, was intended to convey ultimate meaning through the most transparent literary forms and, thus, help to "remold and educate the working people in the spirit of socialism." Zhdanov admitted, "Our Soviet literature is tendentious, and we are proud of its tendentiousness. Stalin defined it correctly when he called the [Soviet] writers 'engineers of human souls.'"<sup>6</sup>

To deviate from the official line was impossible. The government controlled virtually all publications. But what was worse, in order to protect their careers and sometimes even their lives, writers would exert upon themselves an unyielding self-censorship before submitting a manuscript, to the extent of distorting the truth, to comply with the prevailing ideology.

Looking back onto the literature of that period, one can read between the lines to discover the untold truth about life in those difficult years. But more important, one tends to weigh what is told and to measure the suppressed or alluded truth against the inevitable distortion and misrepresentation in the process of multilevel censorship, which the truth often underwent. From the distance of seven decades, one even tends to question if it would not be wiser to keep silent rather than bend to the rules, disguise the truth, or even misrepresent it. Wouldn't it be wiser to remain faithful to one's own art and the history of one's people, produce art in all honesty and keep it in "the drawers" with no hope of its seeing the light of day? Isn't that what some Russian dissident writers did? Decades later, just before and after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when the restrictions were lifted, a renewed interest for the Armenian past found its way into literature. But this recourse to the past is somewhat problematic, because the source of information and inspiration, and the raw material from which to draw historical knowledge is mostly the early Soviet Armenian literature. David



Roskies notes, "Artistic expression draws in equal measure from earlier art as from observable reality."<sup>7</sup>

Suren Sahakyan's *Herosapatum* (Tales of Heroes, 1990), for example, is no doubt a genuine attempt to eternalize the life and deeds of *fedayis* (freedom fighters) and to describe the suffering of the Armenian people at the hands of the Turks. In fact, it is one of the first ventures after the blackout of the Soviet era. Yet, the book suffers from historical discrepancies and a tendency (implanted by Soviet indoctrination) to trivialize the role of the national political parties in organizing and training the troops of *fedayis*, procuring arms, and planning the strategy of self-defense. On the contrary, in scarce references to their existence, political parties are shown to be involved in petty skirmishes among themselves and therefore a hindrance in the Armenian national struggle for freedom.<sup>8</sup> Given the systematic and continuous indoctrination of generations, this distortion was not intentional. Obviously, the literature these writers produced reflected what they were led to believe. They read about the Armenian armed struggle only in the works that were published after extensive changes and cuts to make them acceptable to the regime. Generations were educated with less emphasis on Armenian history, literature, and culture, and obviously, no emphasis on the traumatic experience of their forefathers. "These were the times of fear and shackles," Suren Sahakyan reminisces:

We were afraid to talk to Mshetsi Smbat, or any other former soldier of Andranik. Our parents were alien to us. We could get so many stories, true stories from them. We did not, and we lost a great deal. They came and passed away "sighing." They took with them many real life stories, episodes of the past that will never be told. Yet, we were being fed false history. Thus, came the years of brainwashing, making us forget the call of our blood, years of drought that only produced and eulogized men with no will and no homeland.<sup>9</sup>

### Sparks of a Rekindled Fire of Past Memories and the Years of Terror

The Bolshevik regime was successful in enforcing the prescribed literature. But as it were, memories of the past, raw and unattended, lived buried in the depths of the minds of even the most dedicated proletarian authors.

Eghishe Charents, the strongest proponent of the new wave of internationalism, was the first to backtrack. His inner conflict made him struggle to find the synthesis of nationalism (through the traditions of prose and poetry) and the revolutionary or rather the revolutionized reality. He chose "to look at the world with the eyes of an Armenian," that is to sustain the national characteristics of the new lyric hero and still remain in the domain of socialist realism and internationalism. Aksel Bakunts, Stepan Zoryan, and others also followed that path, and their endeavors marked the rebirth of national—but of course, not nationalistic—themes and content in Soviet Armenian literature. Historical themes from the Armenian past permeated the autobiographical novels.



The increased manifestations of nationalism in the works of Charents, Bakunts, Gurgen Mahari, Mkrtich Armen, and a few others turned other, more orthodox "internationalist" proletarian writers such as Azat Vshtuni and Nairi Zaryan against the "nationalists" and critics like Gurgen Vanandetsi, Norair Dabaghyan, Hayk Giuliukevkhyan, and Tsolak Khanzadyan who supported them. The censorship escalated and the purging of "dissident" intelligentsia began in 1936, dealing a deadly blow to Soviet Armenian literature. Even the most dedicated Communists were not spared. Both the "nationalists" and the "internationalists" came under suspicion. They were branded as traitors and anti-revolutionaries and were persecuted. The year 1937 symbolized the bloodiest time in the history of the Soviet Union. The rule of terror also prevailed in Armenia. Under coercion and from fear for their own lives, people informed on their neighbors and even on family members. Writers betrayed their closest colleagues, accusing them of subversive activities. Family members disowned the arrested one, vowed to forget him or her, and never maintained a relationship or correspondence with that "enemy of the people." Sons and daughters were forced to denounce their parents publicly and expose their "wrongdoings and repulsive deeds."

The full extent of Stalinist persecutions did not come to light until long after Stalin's death and the following period of political and social de-Stalinization. Until then, state censorship continued to prevail in the Soviet Union and was especially strong in Armenia. Memoirs of the victims of Stalin's terror were denied publication. Two of the most significant forbidden topics were the prison experience during Stalin's persecutions and any reference to the Armenian Genocide. It was only when the wave of Perestroika reached Armenia that the rejected memoirs, stories, and articles began to appear in the Armenian press and inspired new creations on the topic of Stalin's rule of terror.

The year 1937, the symbol, the wound, lives in the heart of every Soviet Armenian, since very few families escaped its effects. Ruben Zaryan writes: "If someone who managed to survive 1937 without an incident tells you that he has forgotten what happened and that it was a nightmare that came and is gone now, don't believe him. Look in his heart and you will see the smoldering wounds."<sup>10</sup> For Davit Muradyan, the story of the Gisakyan family is an Armenian story, "whichever door you knock on, you will hear a story like this or even sadder."<sup>11</sup> Armenians believe that they suffered more than any others in the Soviet Union. The Armenian secret police truly outdid itself. It was not enough to arrest and liquidate the Armenian writers and poets of significance. The police would raid their houses and the archives of the Writers' Union and destroy the manuscripts of the arrested literati. In some late-Soviet literary works, the terrors of the Stalin era are paralleled with the Genocide, two catastrophes twenty-five years apart. The memory of the Genocide of 1915 has resurfaced to serve as a parallel and a precedent.

In an interview in 1988, Sero Khanzadyan spoke of the years of Stalinist terror and the impact on Soviet Armenian literature: "For fifty years, they made



our literature bend over and be subservient. It was forbidden to mention the names 'Western Armenia,' 'Armenian Karabagh,' 'Armenian Nakhijevan.' They shut our mouths to the word '*Eghern*' [Event, meaning genocide]. They crossed out and threw away anything in our writings which alluded to the concepts of exile, prison, Siberia. . . . [The memoirs of ex-prisoners show us today] that not only our literature but also the entire country was in a state of incarceration and exile."<sup>12</sup>

### National Sentiments Aroused

Throughout the years of Soviet domination, the expression of nationalism in Armenia has fluctuated according to the political climate in Moscow. Proletarian, internationalist literature gave way to patriotism if there was a need to arouse the people's sentiments against foreign invaders—as it happened during World War II—or if the central government, entangled with internal sociopolitical problems, was unable to press hard and reinforce full censorship. An escalation of Armenian nationalism began with the outbreak of World War II, as Stalin's wartime policy called for Soviet patriotism to encourage the defense of the "motherland." In Armenian, the war was labeled as Patriotic War (Հայրենական պատերազմ). Patriotism, however, was diverted toward love for Armenia and, even more dangerously, toward the Armenian past and into a nostalgic recourse into the glories of historic Armenia.

The lenient central policy also resulted in the reevaluation and publication of the forbidden literature of the past. After all, Khachatur Abovian (1805-1848) was not a "backward bourgeois-liberal worshiper of the Russian capital but a true son of the Armenian people, a selfless, sacrificing symbol of love for the people."<sup>13</sup> (Notice that the carefully chosen word is people not nation—ժողովրդասիրութիւն not ազգասիրութիւն). Mikael Nalbandian's (1829-1866) yearning for freedom, Ghevond Alishan's (1820-1907) eulogy of Armenia, Mkrtich Peshiktashlian's (1828-1868) call for armed struggle to free the homeland, (Abovian's and Raffi's 1837-1888) dramatization of Armenian heroes in their struggle against foreign oppressors were published and widely read. Soon, original creations with nationalistic themes followed. The Great Patriotic War provided the subject; Armenian patriotism embellished the theme. The return to Armenian history to find parallels was another unique wartime phenomenon. For the first time in Soviet Armenian history, the subject of Armenian statehood and independence, albeit in the distant past, and the nation's struggle to keep that independence was undertaken in literature. Stepan Zoryan's *Pap Tagavor* (1943), Derenik Demirchyan's *Vardanank* (1943), and Nairi Zaryan's *Arşev Shamiram* (1944) are examples.<sup>14</sup> Soviet Armenian critics confirm that the concept of homeland in the wartime literature gradually evolved to encompass centuries-old history, the traditions, the past, the present, and the dreams of the future. These visions certainly did not belong to the "Great Homeland" (Մեծ Հայրենիք)—the Soviet Union.

Recourse to the distant past was tolerated, but writing openly about the Catastrophe of 1915 (Aghet) and the lands lost to Turkey was a political stance still off limits, unacceptable to the regime. Hovhannes Shiraz's "Hayots Danteakan" (The Armenian Dante-esque) was one such daring expression that crossed the line. This young and sensitive soul was deeply impressed by the stories he had heard from survivor-refugees with whom he liked so much to associate. He adopted their grief, made it his own tragedy and expressed it repeatedly in his literature. "Hayots Danteakan" was his masterpiece.

The first version of this long poem was written in 1941 (titled "Danteakan epopea"). Shiraz had gathered authentic photographs and documents from the Genocide and intended to publish them together with the poem in a separate volume. Publication was denied. Censors labeled the work as too nationalistic and suggested to delete some passages and to leave the photos and documents out completely. Shiraz was not ready to compromise. Short passages from the poem were published during the poet's life. Some chapters were published in Beirut and Tehran, significantly, before they appeared in the Soviet Armenian press. The entire work, over 8,000 lines in twenty-four chapters, with the photo-documents was published posthumously in 1990.<sup>15</sup> "Hayots Danteakan" reveals the author's perception of the Armenian Genocide, his philosophy of life, his humanistic views, and his urge to erect a spiritual monument in the memory of the victims of the Genocide. He speaks to the nations of the world reassuring that if anything like the Armenian Catastrophe were inflicted on any one of them, his heart of an Armenian poet would not remain silent as did theirs. He would scream in horror and sound the alarm with the bell of his conscience and the agony of his father. He would roar with the wail of a doleful nation and cry out for their deaths.

After World War II, nationalism was no longer needed. It had already served its purpose and had to be abolished. Indeed, nationalistic sentiments reverberating in wartime Soviet Armenian art and literature had gone too far. The poetry of Hovhannes Shiraz did not even have the camouflage of the trite themes such as the union of nations or the great homeland of the Soviet Union. It was physically woven around Armenia with all its spiritual, geographical, and historical attributes, with the freedom-loving Armenian nation at the core.

The task of suppressing nationalistic outbursts was accomplished with a strong wave of censorship on cultural expressions. A reevaluation of published works of past Armenian nationalist writers was made, and Raffi was condemned once again. To halt the tremendous impact of his novels, his books were banned and the Association of Soviet Armenian Writers published a declaration (1951) in which the "shortcomings" of Raffi's novels, especially *Kaitser* (Sparks) were pointed out. The declaration concluded that the publication of *Kaitser* was a "political mistake."<sup>16</sup> The persecution and purge of living writers followed. Gurgen Mahari, Vagharshak Norents, Vahram Alazan, and others were labeled as too nationalistic and were imprisoned or exiled, some for the second time.



Ironically, 1951 was the year when Shiraz, perhaps ignorant of the new policy, or rather in spite of it, wrote the poem "Ani," dedicated to the splendid Armenian medieval capital city now under Turkish occupation, calling her home, pledging to do anything to bring her home. Despite his nationalistic aspirations, Shiraz was still a product of the system. He, too, sang the praise of the "Leader," Stalin, the "Father" of all nations. But even in these poems, he did not forget to appeal for the good of the nation, the return of Turkish-occupied historic Armenian lands. He called on Stalin, grateful for bestowing him a homeland—"You gave me my homeland. You won't let Ararat remain in exile."

This was not the approach of Shiraz's former wife, Sylva Kaputikyan, to Armenian history. Like many other young writers of her time, she was a true Communist, a believer in Stalin's ideal. Late in her life, she recalls a speech she delivered in 1952 in an Armenian writers' contest to win the Stalin medal. After forty years, she reads again the text of her zealous praise of Stalin and communism and asks herself: "Were these words sincere?" And she confesses in all honesty, "Yes, much to my chagrin and shame, they were sincere."<sup>17</sup>

### Wounds of the Past and Irredentism

Artistic ideology was shaken after Stalin's death in 1953 and during the relative respite during the Khrushchev Thaw of the late 1950s and early 1960s, resulting in the revival of nationalistic literature in Armenia. This began with Anastas Mikoyan's statement in Erevan (1954), in which he reinstated the value of the works of Raffi and Rafayel Patkanian, despite what he termed their excessively nationalistic character. The purged Armenian writers and poets also were reinstated posthumously, and Mikoyan, who played a decisive role in Charents's imprisonment and murder, was the one praising his art.<sup>18</sup>

This was to be a period of uncertainty with contradicting vibes. It took much courage for Verjiné Svazlyan, a young researcher repatriated from Egypt, to travel around the country in 1955 and record tales and folksongs that the survivors of the Armenian Genocide had brought with them from the *Erkir* (Homeland)—Western Armenia—long ago and had kept them hidden in deep layers of their memory, safe from scornful and hostile surroundings. In the relatively more favorable conditions of the 1960s she initiated the collection of the survivor testimonies and eyewitness accounts of the Genocide. Despite the threatening atmosphere of Soviet censorship, the historical memory of the people persisted. Svazlyan collected this valuable material but without the hope of publishing it someday. In fact, it was only in the year 2000 that her monumental work was published.<sup>19</sup>

The strong censorship was yielding in the 1960s. European contemporary literature was filtering into the country, and the younger generation was avidly absorbing it. In that context, Karen Simonyan's publication of a series, in 1965, titled *Hamashkharhayin poezia* (International Poetry), was a welcomed initia-

five. Six issues were published before the project was condemned and halted. But this fresh air from Europe had already made a phenomenal impact.

Again in this same context, the publication of Hrand Hrahan's *Im kyanki* (The Novel of My Life) in 1956 by the state publishing house Haypethrat was interesting. This "novel" is actually an autobiography, childhood memories of pain and suffering on the deportation routes during the 1915 Genocide. The annotation on the back of the title page clearly notes the topic to be "the mass extermination of the Western Armenian segment at the hands of Talaat, Enver and their colleagues, the leaders of sultanic Turkey (Սուլթանական թուրքիա)." The narrative evolves around episodes of Turkish atrocities and provides historical information about the arrest and tragic fate of Komitas (1869-1935), Grigor Zohrab (1861-1915), and Ruben Sevak (1885-1915). After roaming the world as refugees, the surviving remnants of Hrahan's family repatriate to Soviet Armenia. "In Lieu of Epilogue" is a laudation of Soviet Armenia, "the revived and flourishing homeland of Armenians," and how happy Hrahan's family is in that paradise. Perhaps, this Epilogue was the price that Hrahan had to pay to publish the book.

Khachik Dashtents's *Khodedan* (the name of the protagonist) was published the same year and *Ranchparneri kanche* (The Call of the Tillers) a few years later. They are fictionalized realities to leave for posterity the homeland and the people that no longer exist. They were autobiographical novels of the Armenian collective experience under the Ottoman yoke. *Ranchparneri kanche* depicts the armed defense of Sasun against Turkish assaults. Here, in these two novels, the villages of Sasun, swept clean today of their indigenous Armenian population, come alive again. Dashtents takes your hand and leads you through the mountain passes and idyllic villages perched on the mountain skirts. The majestic landscape of Sasun is painted with vivid colors intermingled with village life from the author's childhood memories. He takes you inside the shacks where the *tonirs* are smoking, bread is baking, and children are playing. Life is going on, and then the Catastrophe, the massacres in Mush and Sasun.

Dashtents lived with the hope to see his birthplace, Sasun, free again. He dreamed of the day he could return to it. He spoke of the yearning that nested in many survivors' hearts in Armenia:

My years, my years are passing.  
One is, you think, the repetition of the other.  
My eyes are always on the same light,  
The same hope,  
To go and get to,  
To go and get to  
The mountains of Taurus.

Dashtents audaciously describes in his novels life as he sees it, hopeless monotony, eyes fixed on an uncertain unfeasible future. And this is in contradic-



tion with the rosy image of life in the Soviet Union that the prescribed literature was to portray. Moreover, Dashtents dated *Khodedan's* foreword 1956, May 28. One wonders if this is a coincidence or a deliberate mention of a significant date, May 28, the date of the birth of the first independent Republic of Armenia in 1918.

Curiously, government censorship had become more lenient toward literature that took its inspiration from the pre-Soviet Armenian past. Mourning the tragic loss of life and ancestral lands in 1915, demanding justice, pledging solemnly to bring home the Holy Mountain of Ararat and the occupied lands of historic Armenia were tolerated if these stayed within limits. That may have been in line with and served Soviet foreign policy of the time.

In this precarious period of fluctuating censorship, Paruyr Sevak's daring venture into capturing in poetry of epic grandeur the horrors of the Armenian Genocide for the first time in Soviet Armenia was another courageous deed. *Anlreli Zangakatun* (Ever-Tolling Bell Tower), a poem of more than 7,000 lines in forty-six chapters, was ready for publication in 1958. But the obstacles were many. Permission to publish was granted only on condition of heavy censorship. Thanks to Hamo Sahyan's intervention, the poem avoided the process and was published a year later with Sahyan as the editor. Stepan Alajajyan attests that heeding Stepan Zoryan's recommendation, Sevak added "Herosakan ghoghanch" (Heroic Peal), a chapter portraying the Armenian armed resistance against Turkish atrocities. This addition was made in the second edition of the poem. Alajajyan also remembers how Sevak bitterly asserted that Nairi Zaryan did not like the manuscript; Sergey Sarinyan reviewed it and liked only half of it, and Mkrtich Mkryan rejected it completely to earn membership to the Soviet Armenian Academy of Sciences.<sup>20</sup>

*Anlreli Zangakatun* embodies the life and work and the tragic fate of the great Armenian cleric composer Komitas Vardapet, ultimately a victim of the Genocide. But in reality, it is the story of Turkish atrocities and European politics. It is the songs, the labor, the customs, the joy and the tears, and the tradition of the Armenian people. It is the history of the Armenian national movement and armed struggle. Sevak was aware of the power of poetry and its "greater ability than prose to generate the most exact correlatives for feelings and states of consciousness,"<sup>21</sup> as Frieda Aaron puts it, and this, in response to an immense cataclysm like the Genocide. The impact was immense, and the work is still one of the most powerful literary responses to the Armenian Genocide.

Sero Khanzadyan's historical novel *Mkhitar Sparapet* (Commander Mkhitar, 1961) and Vahagn Davtyan's historical dramatic poem *Tondraketsiner* (The Tondrakians, 1960) are also brave explorations of the past, deliberations on the fate of the nation, and eulogies to the struggle for freedom. They, too, contributed to paving the way for a renewed Armenian national character and identity.

The popularity of *Tondraketsiner* was amazing. The authorities found in it all the tenets of Marxism-Leninism applied to the ninth-century "heretics"

of Tondrak. There was the people's struggle against the exploiting clergy and the despotic rulers. There were victims and victimizers. But there was also a subtle undercurrent of alluding to the disillusion and disappointment caused by the unfulfilled promises of the Soviet regime. Vahagn Davtyan's reputation and popularity kept him away from the malice of the authorities. Collections of his poems were being published indiscriminately, without the omission of the ones where he sang the love of his birthplace in the province of Kharpert (Kharberd), his homeland lost.

In this proliferation of unconventional materials in the early 1960s, also noteworthy is Stepan Alajajyan's novelette *Piunik* (Phoenix, 1962). The novelette was published in the foray of many obstacles and was rejected a few times. It was an autobiography, the story of a repatriated family and the hardship it faced and the discontent and disenchantment it experienced in Soviet Armenia. To be sure, the author came under suspicion. He was ranked among the dissident writers of the 1960s and was called by the KGB for explanations.<sup>22</sup>

The rise of nationalism in the early 1960s in Armenia was significantly coupled with irredentism. The relatively relaxed atmosphere preceding 1965 had paved the way for a semi-secret national movement, which was also largely responsible for the turn of events on April 24, 1965, during the commemoration of the Armenian Genocide, a first in Armenia. The commemoration began with an innocent rally, soon to turn into a turbulent demonstration. People took to the streets demanding the return of Armenian lands under Turkish occupation. Historical memory had shattered its fetters and, bursting into the open, was gradually impregnating the ignorant masses, those who hardly knew about the scope of the colossal catastrophe that had befallen the nation fifty years ago.

In an article titled "Ayspes kochvats nasionalizmi masin" (About So-Called Nationalism), written in 1977 and published only posthumously in 1988, Mushegh Galshoyan chastised Soviet Armenian leaders for having denied the Armenian people the knowledge and awareness of the greatest tragedy in their history. By doing that, Galshoyan maintained, they had also denied the world the knowledge about this fateful event in the history of mankind. The first genocide of our century was turned into an Armenian *Eghern* [a strictly Armenian issue] and kept under locks, he writes. And then, they hesitantly and fearfully pulled this fragment of Armenian past out from under the locks and organized a formal commemoration of the *Mets Eghern* (The Great Event/Genocide) for the first time on April 24, 1965. Galshoyan attests that the masses on the street were confused, not knowing what the demonstrators were demanding. Many heard the word "*Eghern*" for the first time in their lives. They repeated the word, first without knowing the exact meaning of it, even distorting it to sound like *eghevni* (pine tree). But as Galshoyan puts it, the ignorant crowd grew larger and larger. The word passed on mouth to mouth and with it the imprisoned history was gradually being emancipated.<sup>23</sup>



"We have not forgotten the Մեծ Եղեռն (The Great Calamity). . . . Մեր Մեր հողերը . . . Մեր հողերը . . . (Our lands . . . Our lands)," the demonstrators shouted. The memory had been transmitted, no doubt. As Silva Kaputikyan writes, "it turns out that yes, they had not forgotten. The memory, the nation's historical memory, interwoven in the sighs of our grandparents, the constant grief in their eyes and their voices trembling with tears and yearning had really done the job."

You, unending anguish of the last tragedy,  
 When did you wake in my veins?  
 Did you come to spread into my eyes  
 From the yearning eyes of my Vanetsi grandmother?  
 Or spreading out of our orphan lands  
 You came as bushy thorns to wrap around me?  
 Or it was Komitas the embalmed grief  
 Who brought it to us when he returned home?  
 Or poor Tekeyan the exhausted singer of death  
 Shared with me his burden of sorrow?  
 Or maybe the fever of the wavering Diaspora  
 Shattered the peace of my soul . . .<sup>24</sup>

The poem manifests the influence of the Diaspora in veering Soviet Armenian political thought from the official line toward that which was dictated by national interests. The Armenian diasporan thoughts, ideologies, and especially patriotism, together with the liberalism of the West, had found their way into Armenia. Thus, once again nationalistic sentiments were let loose and patriotism as a theme began to reverberate in literature as an indication of the identity of Soviet Armenia leaning toward Armenianness. The works of purged writers like Charents and Bakunts were published and studied. The tragedy of 1915 took center stage.

Vahagn Davtyan, as a trusted established writer, was granted permission to make a pilgrimage to Deir el-Zor in 1977. His encounter with the open graves of the victims of the Genocide was phenomenal, and the outcome: his masterpiece, his most famous poem, "Rekviem" (Requiem). Later, in 1981, in a poem titled "Hogh im kisivats" (My Divided Land), he speaks of a remorse piercing his heart, an ever-burning wound: why was he born so late not to be able to shed his blood in the battle for the freedom of his homeland like a wounded fedayi in the mountains of Erzerum. He yearned for his blood to mix with the tears of Aratsani, the river running through his native land, and become a part of the mystery of his people's perpetuation.

Meanwhile, Vardkes Petrosyan's *Haykakan eskizner* (Armenian Sketches, 1969) had come as a natural evolution in this ongoing process. It was a search for a modern nationalism, a necessary ingredient for nation and state building. It elevated patriotism to a new level of consciousness, drawing its meaning and implications closer to that which prevailed in the Diaspora. Irredentism was the new dimension of this concept.

### The Stalin Purges as a Second *Eghern* in Armenia

Significantly, while the political atmosphere in Soviet Armenia had become more permissive toward the Armenian past, it was still risky to talk about the years of Stalin's reign of terror. Of the thousands of exiled literati not many had returned, and those who returned after Stalin's death did not dare speak out about their ordeal, their torturous life in the gulags. Encouraged by the government's more tolerant approach to the freedom of art and literature and by the reassurance, or rather by wishful thought that the days of Stalinist censorship were over, the former victims began to put their memoirs in writing. Not one of them received permission to publish. This, of course, does not mean that these memoirs remained unknown and unread. The manuscripts were circulated. People knew about their existence and the overall content. That was the Armenian underground *Samizdat*.

Gurgen Mahari's memories of his exile, *Haykakan brigad* (Armenian Brigade) was ready in 1964. Publication was denied until the years of Perestroika in 1989. Nairi Zaryan's *Hartagoghi chamban* (The Milky Way), another eyewitness account of life in Stalin's prisons, was denied publication in 1963. That was also published in 1989.

Suren Ghazaryan, a former Chekist, and a victim of Stalin's persecutions, titled his memoirs written in the Russian language "That Should Not Be Repeated" and sent it to *Novyi Mir* monthly in 1967. In response, the editor, Russian poet Aleksandr Tvardovski praised Ghazaryan's courage, his determination to endure the tortures to stay alive and tell the world about his ordeal. He complimented the author's style, clarity of diction, and the vivid imagery but added that the publication of this work was out of the question. Tvardovski was nonetheless hopeful: "Some day, this and many other memoirs like this will be published and will render service to communism." Ghazaryan's memoirs were translated into Armenian as *Da chpetke krknvi* and published in 1987.<sup>25</sup> It was one of the earliest of such publications in Armenia, before others found their way out of the locked drawers into the light of day. The possible reason is that Ghazaryan's memoirs were published in Russian first. Thus, it was all right to translate and publish it in Armenia.

Gurgen Mahari's novelette, *Tsaghkats pshalarer* (Blooming Barbed Wires), a testimony of torture and death in Stalin's prison camps, was published in 1988. But as Davit Gasparyan attests, the work was already known to the public after it was first published in installments in *Nayiri* in Beirut, between 1971 and 1972. Throughout the narrative, together with scenes of torture and agonizing life in the prison camps and dark solitary cells, echoes Mahari's unquenched yearning for his birthplace of Van. Nostalgic reminiscences reveal themselves in the most unexpected places in *Tsaghkats pshalarer*. "I quenched my longing for the rivers of my birthplace from Hrazdan, my longing for Van from Erevan. And they thought it was too much. They deprived me of that; they made me



a criminal in one night and locked me in a dark prison cell.”<sup>26</sup> Mahari was a wretched, broken man when he returned. His youthful vigor, he confessed, his love for life and his stamina to create had fallen victim to the suffocating atmosphere of Stalin’s prisons, as his happy childhood remained buried under the thick walls of the citadel of his beloved Van.<sup>27</sup>

The era of relative freedom had been coming to a gradual end with Brezhnev’s rise to power and his efforts to close the hatches of the post-Stalin relative leniency. The mysterious deaths of Paruyr Sevak in 1971, Minas Avetisyan, the distinguished painter, in 1975, Mushegh Galshoyan in 1980, and still others were seen as evidence of renewed covert persecutions. Even the concept of *dissidentia* had acquired a fluid meaning to rationalize persecutions.

Was Arshak (Sergey Arshakyan) a dissident? He was an amateur writer, a metallurgist by profession, in the 1960s writing about the love of freedom, the love of homeland, and childhood reminiscences of the persecutions of the Stalin era. That was not permissible. The KGB called him in for some “explanations.” *Gnchuhin* (The Gypsy Woman), the novel he wrote in 1977, was denied publication. Arshak had gone too far. Hrach Simonyan, the protagonist in this novel is a young man of dreams and imagination. He is the leader of a group of Russian miners, but he feels inferior, because he has lost a homeland (Western Armenia). The rivers Tigris and Euphrates have turned their backs to him. And yet, these elements are the main ingredients of his identity. He is ashamed in front of his Russian co-workers, because he does not have seas and rivers. He dreams of them but does not have the power and the will to get them back.<sup>28</sup> He is in love. He is under the spell of a gypsy woman not only because of her extraordinary beauty but also because of her people’s spirit of freedom and the universal love that she embodies.<sup>29</sup> In her wisdom he sees the secret of “the evil that threatened to annihilate my people, that put the sword on the throat of my city as a boundary line.”<sup>30</sup> Simonyan’s childhood memories are shrouded by the repressions of the Stalin era. He has made all the decisions of his life not by his own will but by following orders “in the nightmare of those dark years.” As a young boy he accompanied his mother to the party meetings every night, “as a shield and a protector.” Because “if she didn’t go to these meetings, it would prove that she was an accomplice to my executed father and shared his enmity against the Leader [Stalin]. And they would take her too. . . . She took me along, so that they would not take her temporarily—because she was very pretty—or for good, because she was my father’s wife.”<sup>31</sup> This novel along with other provocative works by this author was published beginning from 1995.

### **The Nationalistic Movement and the Karabagh Conflict**

According to a survey on Soviet dissident artists, “the nonconformist movement began [in Russia] in the late 1950s and ended in Perestroika in 1987 when artists who had not adhered to the acceptable styles and ideology of socialist realism came out, as it were, from underground.”<sup>32</sup> But state censorship before

Perestroika had been harsher in Armenia than in Russia itself, as evidenced by the fate and relatively small quantity of the nonconformist writings in Armenia. It also took longer for the Armenian KGB to loosen its grip—if it ever did—on Armenian life. And then, there was the even harsher self-inflicted censorship, “Would they publish this? No, this is not publishable. They will once again reject it.” The wave of Perestroika, thus, was late in reaching Armenia. Publications of rejected material proliferated in the years between 1988 and 1991. These were mostly reminiscences of the devastating years of Stalin’s rule of terror. The works of older generation poets were also being pulled out of their coffins, the boxes locked in the archives, and published.

It was time for the public to know about what remained under locks for decades. Among these were Avetik Isahakyan’s “Hayduki erger” (Fedayi Songs) and two poems by Hovhannes Tumanyan, “Hin krive” (The Old Fight) and “Verjin ore” (The Last Day). Isahakyan’s “Hayduki erger” obviously praised the Armenian freedom movement of the late nineteenth century, scorned and neglected by the Soviet historiography. These poems also manifested that the author’s political orientation was not congruent with the Communist ideology. Tumanyan’s “Hin krive” was written in the late 1890s and, as Hovhannes Ghazalanyan attests, was confiscated and destroyed by the tsarist authorities because it laid bare the Russian stance against the Armenian Cause and the tsarist real politic. Russians came to rescue Armenians in the name of Christ, Tumanyan wrote, and they thanked God to see the carnage and the Armenian lands devoid of Armenians. Soviet censorship continued the trend and the poem was left out of the publication of his *Erkeri zhoghovatsu* (Collection of Works). “Verjin ore,” on the other hand, was an ode to the military operations of the Armenian volunteer army in 1915.<sup>33</sup> That, too, was censored.

The Iron Curtain separating the Soviet Union from the Western world had been lifted even long before Perestroika. European trends and ideas kept penetrating. The Armenian youth growing up in the 1970s and the 1980s zealously read the Soviet dissident literature, especially that of Solzhenitsyn. They inhaled the nationalistic air of the Armenian Diaspora, and followed the road set forth by the more daring, rebellious souls. Henrik Edoyan, Armen Martirosyan, Davit Hovhannes, Hrach Sarukhan, Hovhannes Grigoryan, Alvar Petrosyan, and others were able to forge modern Soviet Armenian literature, which was not necessarily nationalistic but certainly national. They were not the propagandists of the Soviet official line but modern nationalists who were able to absorb the new, the Western, the diasporan Armenian, and to create the spiritual atmosphere for a national revival. In a way, the dissident generation of 1965 had with its writings prepared the ground for the movement of 1988, which reached its apex in the massive demonstrations demanding the liberation of Mountainous Karabagh (Artsakh) from repressive Azerbaijani rule.<sup>34</sup> The leaders of this movement were none other than the writers and poets of yesterday, now turned political activists.

Between the years 1988, the beginning of the Karabagh movement, and 1991, the birth of the independent Republic, Armenians suffered two major cataclysms. One was a natural disaster, the terrible earthquake that left entire cities, towns, and villages in ruins—more than 50,000 dead and a population of survivors maimed physically and emotionally. The other was a manmade disaster, an echo of the 1915 Genocide, now against the Armenians of Azerbaijan—massacres and flight in Sumgait, Baku, and Ganja. Characteristically, the memory of the Genocide of 1915 was resurrected in the literary responses to both catastrophes.

Just a few weeks after the earthquake, Davit Hovhannes composed a free verse, an emotional response to this disaster. "Haverzhakan haye" (The Eternal Armenian) embodied the determination of the Armenian people to persevere and perpetuate against all odds, be it the *Eghern* or the earthquake. In this poem the eternal Armenian, a collective persona, is God, a Son of God, a mother gone mad, an unburied father, a son under the wreckage. It encapsulates at the same time the images of a wretched victim and a triumphant and omnipotent God as a symbol of eternity.

The memory of the earthquake and its physical impact persisted for more than a decade. Arevshat Avagyan's poem "Mite pordzadasht e Hayastane" (Is Armenia a Testing Ground?) is a protest against the universe, which brought about that horrendous disaster, just as it is against the perpetrators of the Genocide. "Is Armenia a testing ground where *Eghern* and earthquake and the blockade are tested?" The Armenian patience is strong, but it, too, has its limits. "Maybe, indeed, Armenia is a testing ground to reach the eternity of spirit."<sup>35</sup> Avagyan strikes a familiar note, a traditional explanation for extreme suffering which lasted for centuries and helped the disaster-stricken survivor reach a healing catharsis. God is always testing the love of his most devoted people. Martyrdom in the name of God is rewarded with eternal life.

Many poets sang the courage of the new fedayis in the battle against the Azeri oppressors. Fallen victim once again to the Azeri-Turkish atrocities, it was impossible not to remember the genocide committed by the forefathers of today's perpetrators. It was not possible to mourn the loss of the districts of Shahumyan and Getashen and not to remember Mush and Van. Robert Karayan's poetry is recourse to this past. It evokes the memory of the massacres of 1915 and the acts of self-defense against the Turkish army. "Shushva krvi vordik kajazun" (The Brave Sons of the Battle of Shushi), "Hnik erger" (Little Old Songs), "Enkats kajordinerin" (To the Fallen Brave), "Te es enknem" (If I Fall) manifest the parallel imagery between two tragedies that befell the Armenian nation seventy-two years apart.<sup>36</sup>

The massacres in Sumgait, Baku, and Ganja reawakened the memory of the Genocide in Maksim Hovhannisyan and are reflected in his collection of stories and essays, *Artsakh im, tsav im* (My Artsakh, My Pain). The memory of the past tragedies reverberates in the contemporary carnage. The struggle in Artsakh,



the life and the joys and pains of its people—the Artsakhtsis—come alive in these stories. Here, Heydar Aliiev, the Azeri president is described as “the new leader of genocide, a new shoot from Talaat’s generation.”<sup>37</sup>

In a satirical rendering of an Azerbaijani professor’s presentation at a conference at Columbia University, Hovhannisyan quotes the professor bragging about the historical truth he had revealed in that conference and how he declared that Armenians were newcomers who settled late in Transcaucasia. They were mostly refugees from Iran and Turkey, he had explained. And to update his audience, he added, “As you know, Armenians lived in Eastern Anatolia before, not now.”<sup>38</sup>

Ruzanna Asatryan’s *Shushi* (2003) is a narrative poem of more than 450 lines, an ode to the liberation of Shushi, the jewel city of the old Armenian culture. The city was Turkified after Stalin granted the control of Mountainous Karabagh to Azerbaijan. The poem depicts the heroic battle the new fedayis waged to accomplish that amazing feat. And the massacres of 1915 are in the background, appearing as parallel situations, as metaphor, as sources of historic interpretation. The memory of the old fedayis of Western Armenia adorns the images of new bravery.<sup>39</sup>

### The Literary Milieu of Independent Armenia

In the atmosphere of independent Armenia, one can suggest that all the basic components of a modern national literature are now in place. The atmosphere is ripe for the rebirth of national literature: the language, the soil, the presence of a common history and common destiny for almost three million people living in their homeland, sharing the same ethnic identity. The interruption of historical memory is mended. The Turkish-Armenian restrained relationship is a part of everyday life in Armenia. The memorial complex of Tsitsernakaberd and the majestic duo of Sis and Masis (the two peaks of Mount Ararat) that hover above the Erevan landscape are constant reminders of the historical injustice. Metakse, the renowned poetess of Armenia, who sings of a woman’s most intimate sentiments, the beauty, the pain, and the pleasures of love, who sings the glory of God and exalts nature’s splendor, could not remain indifferent toward that monument that embodies so much meaning, the suffering of the past and the aspirations of the future. In the poem “Tsitsernakaberdum” (At Tsitsernakaberd), she pictures the poetic grandeur of the sky above the monument, the gathering of the clouds and nature’s preparation to mourn over the victims of the Armenian Genocide. And the sky is shedding tears; the clouds bow in reverence to lament the spilling of Armenian innocent blood.<sup>40</sup>

After more than a decade of independence, however, the Soviet experience still weighs heavily in the minds of the masses. Mushegh Galshoyan’s thoughts back in 1977 negating this mentality have not yet taken root. “While weeping and wailing are useless,” he wrote, “writing about twisted fates and shattered spirits as the effects of the Catastrophe is a very contemporary issue.”<sup>41</sup> There

are still those who believe that the Genocide concerns the Diaspora alone. It is the Diaspora's source of pain, political aspirations, and literary inspiration. There are still those who follow the line of thought imposed by Soviet-Turkish politics that writing or speaking about or even remembering the Genocide is masochism. Soviet citizens, the official line propagated, should always look forward to the future. What is the use of digging into the past? It was with the dissemination of this mentality, together with calculated policies vis-à-vis the Armenian Diaspora that the Soviet regime succeeded in creating a chasm between the two segments of the Armenian nation, a chasm that still refuses to bind.

The rediscovery of the past and the confrontation with the Catastrophe have not gone very far among Armenian writers. Instead of finding their way into the world of fetter-free, non-tendentious literature, instead of impregnating the soil for the rebirth of a national literature, many writers are engaged in a reactionary exercise against the Soviet era. This reaction is not about returning to the forbidden roots of the tradition of the nineteenth-century Armenian literature. The nationalistic themes permeating the literature of that era do not speak to the souls of today's Armenians in Armenia. The reactionary exercise is the experimentation in other forbidden grounds: the realistic description of life and morality or rather immorality as it is, the reality that existed and was carefully covered up in the Soviet era and not that which was prescribed to be recorded by the Soviet authorities. Graphic accounts of sexual encounters, perverted love affairs, and street life are abundant in some post-Soviet works of writers such as Guren Khanjyan, Norair Adalyan, and Violet Grigoryan.

These observations lead one to think, however, that the literature of Armenia of the 1990s represented a reactionary phase or, more optimistically, a transitional one. And that is a normal phase after an era of prescribed content in socialist realism. I can see the seeds of a healthy national literature sprouting its delicate shoots. The Armenian literati still bears the flag of nationalism, which brought about its crucifixion in the Soviet era and is leading people today toward national aspirations. Robert Yesayan, Ludvik Duryan, Ruben Vardanyan, Guren Gabrielyan, voices, young and new, echo the sufferings of the past and demand justice and retribution.<sup>42</sup>

The old yearning becomes a source of inspiration and finds a new outlet in the free atmosphere of independent Armenia:

I saw a dream. It was Van and Aigestan,

....

Three girls of the same age are murmuring in secret.

Young and slim three girls like three sisters,

I realize suddenly it's grandma, mother, and I.

....

It is war in Van, fires, the loud fanfare is calling.

Tired and miserable the three women carry bread to the battlefield,

Three women are walking with difficulty on the deportation route,

It seems they stop near the walls of Erevan.  
Do not ask. That's us again, grandma, mother, and me.<sup>43</sup>

The memory of the catastrophic events in her grandmother's birthplace is so vivid that Silva Kaputikyan sees herself caught within that tragedy. She is a player in that tragedy as a young girl living in Van, then as a new bride participating in the self-defense of Van, and finally, as a wretched refugee behind the walls of Erevan. Is it possible to live in a catastrophic event in the past just like the present without having been there? Elie Wiesel says: "Yes, one can live a thousand miles away from the Temple and see it burn. One can die in Auschwitz after Auschwitz."<sup>44</sup>

The discovery of the past and gradual awareness of the transmitted memory is best exemplified in Arevshat Avagyan's poetry. This accomplished poet and painter published several volumes of poetry, the first in 1963. But historical memory began to creep into his poetry only after 1974, reflecting more intensely in his last collection in 2003. He is the son of a refugee from Mokats Ashkharh (Micks). He is a continuation of his father's hopes and dreams, and the seeds of historical memory are cultivated in his soul through the reminiscences of his childhood—a father's yearnings and a mother's anathema. He knows how to fly through time, through centuries of Armenian history for the sake of the future renewal. In the poem "Patgam" (Bidding), he admonishes the new generation to love the light of knowledge, fellow human beings, and,

Before everything else  
And after everything else  
Love your homeland which is red in your veins  
Its sky that shines deep in your eyes  
And love the road to eternity  
That continues through your feelings and your days.<sup>45</sup>

Avagyan's poetry is a struggle for the perpetuation of universality and the continuity of Armenian life and spirit, the continuation of historical memory. His art is a bridge between the past and the future, lest the future is severed from its roots in the past as was done once in the author's lifetime. Characteristically, his art becomes more and more deeply embedded in history and in the memory of his forefathers, the battles they fought, the identity they carved in his soul.

Rafayel Ghazanchyan initiates the publication of the memoirs of his father, a Genocide survivor. In the introduction of the volume he writes: "How is it possible not to see the enchanting images of lost horizons in the gazes of these eyewitnesses of the Catastrophe, not to feel their hope and aspiration to return to their homes? The silly preaching of some not to 'dig up' the past sounds totally absurd."<sup>46</sup>

The contemporary writer looks to the past for an answer to the historical injustice, and the echoes of present Turkish-Armenian relations come across



in various voices. Aghasi Aivazyan's "Antun turke" (The Homeless Turk) and Henrik Edoyan's call "Hey, Turkish Poets" in "Turk banasteghtsnerin" (To Turkish Poets) are significant achievements.<sup>47</sup>

Davit Muradyan depicts life in Armenia in the 1950s in "Hrazhesht," but the thread of memory extends far back, the odyssey of the Gisakyan family of Kharpert, the hardship and loss of loved ones in the deportation route and exile, and the continuing predicament under Stalin's rule of terror in Soviet Armenia. Muradyan has a unique delineation of how memory is transmitted or "how the memories of others suddenly become yours."

Not suddenly though, but slowly growing in your life. Like a stone tied to your foot, or like the rope connecting mountaineers together, something you have no right to let go. Complete strangers appear before your eyes. You even hear their voices. Things that you have never touched seem to have been seen a thousand times. Episodes that you have not been a part of, you live them through as an eyewitness. Those who pass away leave their life to us. This is the silver thread.<sup>48</sup>

The horrors of the Stalin era continue to appear at least as a secondary theme in literature, as they are certainly a part of the childhood memory of today's older Armenian writers. Interwoven with that life is yet the silver thread coming from farther back. Ruben Hovsepyan's *Levon Pap* (Grandpa Levon) has gone through many a hardship during the deportations and then in Soviet Armenia during the difficult years of Stalin's reign. His family history is an evidence of the lifestyle prescribed by the regime. In it the ties with the old and the traditional are disrupted. Levon Pap is a sad witness to that. He tries to salvage something from the past by adopting an orphan from Mush, a boy who faced death, as did many others like him. He endured hardship, famine and cold on the road of deportation. "The snow in the valley of Mush is red now."<sup>49</sup> There are such deep and rich implications in this brief but mysterious statement. The link with the past, the historical memory, manifests itself in Levon Pap's hopeless struggle to salvage and revive the discarded and despised culture of Cochineal; for him that red worm has become the symbol of national values trampled upon.

Aghasi Aivazyan writes about contemporary life in Erevan but the silver thread of memory expanded back in history. "On New Year's day in 1892 we were 27 of us," Kirakos remembers, even though he was generations away from being born, and by saying "we" Kirakos means his family, his forefathers. "On New Year day in 1916 we were three. He [Kirakos's father] celebrated the New Year alone in 1920 in our home in Erevan. He was almost dead when they became two again. . . . The second was my mother, another starving refugee, who stood on the threshold of my refugee father's home and said, "Happy New Year."<sup>50</sup>

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There is renewed interest in Armenia to rediscover the past and deal with it. This interest stretches among the entire scope of intelligentsia in various do-

main and among the literati for that matter. The impetus is certainly the closer relationship with the Diaspora and thus acquaintance with and understanding of the diasporan Armenian psyche, goals, and aspirations. Then, there is the Turkish-Armenian, and in that context also the Azerbaijani-Armenian relationship with most recent tragedies, and on top of it all the continuing denial of the truth of the Armenian Genocide that challenges the minds and the sanity of sensitive souls and demands response, literary response as a catharsis, as a protest, and as a sanctuary of historical memory. This is the thread, the silver thread that grows thinner with time but never breaks, that is if those in the Diaspora and in Armenia hold it between their fingers and walk in its path.

### Notes

1. Israel Gershoni, "Imagining and Reimagining the Past," in *History and Memory* 4, 2 (1992): 5, quotation from E. H. Carr, *What is History?* (London, 1964), p. 30.
2. See Rubina Perroomian, *Literary Responses to Catastrophe: A Comparison of the Armenian and the Jewish Experience* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), in which the literary responses to historical catastrophes culminating in the Genocide of 1915 are analyzed; idem, "New Directions in Literary Responses to the Armenian Genocide," in *Looking Backward, Moving Forward: Confronting the Armenian Genocide*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (New Brunswick, NJ, and London: Transaction Publishers, 2003), pp. 157-180, in which responses of the second- and third-generation writers are examined.
3. From the poem, "Champortutun 1" [Journey 1] in *Selected Poems*, a bilingual edition, trans. Armine Tamrazian (Macmillan Education, printed in Malaysia, 2002), p. 110.
4. Davit Muradyan, "Hrazhesht" [Farewell], a novella in *Gnatskner ev Kayaranner* [Trains and Stations] (Erevan: "Van Aryan," 2001), pp. 115-184, quotation, p. 123.
5. Ibid., p. 124.
6. "Socialist Realism and the Holocaust: Jewish Life and Death in Anatoly Rybakov's *Henry Sand*," in *Publication of the Modern Language Association of America (PMLA)* (March 1996): 240-255, quotations, endnote N-2 and p. 241.
7. David Roskies, "Foreword" to Frieda W. Aaron's *Bearing the Unbearable* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990), p. ix.
8. Suren Sahakyan, *Herosapatum* [Tales of Heroes] (Erevan: Arevik Press, 1990). The passage on p. 118 is an example. The political atmosphere of the time and especially the ongoing conflict with the Azerbaijanis made it necessary to resurrect hitherto forgotten individual fedayis of the Armenian armed struggle and glorify them as national heroes and inspiring role models, deliberately leaving out the details of planning and organizing the movement. The Communist regime had set the trend and the Armenian National Movement, the party at the center stage and ruling the newly independent Republic, reinforced it.
9. Ibid., p. 5.
10. Ruben Zaryan, "Erku khosk" [Two Words], *Bagin* [Pakine], no. 7-9 (1995): 125.
11. Muradyan, "Hrazhesht," p. 148.
12. See Sero Khanzadyan's interview in *Grakan Tert* (1988), no. 49, quoted in *Bagin*, no. 9-10 (1991): 26.
13. Zvart Ghukasyan, *Sovetahay grakanagitutiyune* [Soviet Armenian Literary Criticism] (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1981), p. 234.

14. *Pap Tagavor* is about the deeds of Pap, a fourth-century Armenian king, known for his strong stand for Armenian statehood and for the structural reforms he imposed on the Armenian Church. *Vardanank* is the story of the historic battle that the Armenians waged in A.D. 451 against the Persian king to defend their political independence and freedom to practice their Christian religion. *Ara ev Shamiram* is based on a legend depicting the Armenian struggle against the legendary Assyrian queen Semiramis's assaults and encroachments.
15. See *Bagin*, no. 9-10 (1991): 44-47, for an interview with Sipan Shiraz, the author's son, on the occasion of the publication of *Hayots Danteakan* [The Armenian Dantesque] and a segment from the poem. The interview had been originally published in *Grkeri Ashkharh*, no. 6 (1990).
16. See Levon Ghazaryan's article on the impact of Raffi's *Kaitser*, in *Hay grakanutyune patma-gortsarakan lusabanutiamb* [The Armenian Literature by Historio-Practical Explanation] (Erevan: Armenian Academy of Sciences, 1989), p. 324.
17. Silva Kaputikyan, *Echer pak gzrotsnerits* [Pages from Closed Drawers] (Erevan: Apolon, 1997), p. 14. This interesting collection of unpublished essays, texts of various speeches, letters, and poetry is divided into three parts: "Before 1988," "1988," and "After 1988." This categorization demonstrates Kaputikyan's perception of 1988 (the year the Karabagh movement was unleashed) not only as a turning point in the history of Armenia but also as a turning point in her own political activism. Many pieces included in this book speak of the author's nationalistic sentiments and her covert sense of belonging to the spiritual homeland she came to know through her grandmother's stories of pain, hope, and yearning.
18. In a poem dedicated to Charents, long before the exoneration of the poet, Khachik Dashtents expressed confidence that there will come a day when Charents will rise again from the dead and his art will find its deserved appreciation. And on that day, Dashtents asserts, those who condemned him most zealously will be the ones who will rush to the podiums to anoint their cursed past with the light of his memory. His prediction came true. See *Bagin*, no. 7-9 (1995): 88.
19. Verjiné Svazlyan audio-recorded or videotaped and authenticated testimonies and songs of historical significance of the survivors over the last fifty years both in Armenia and abroad. *Hayots Tseghaspanutyun, akanates veraprogneri vkayutyunner* [The Armenian Genocide, Testimonies of Eyewitness Survivors], published in 2000, contains 600 testimonies. In *Hayots Tseghaspanutyune ev patmakan hishoghutyune* [The Armenian Genocide and the Historical Memory, 2003], Svazlyan describes how in these difficult years of Soviet rule, in dire conditions and circumstances beginning in 1955, she initiated the collection of folk songs and tales of the Old Country and expanded her search in the 1960s to collect survivor testimonies of the Turkish atrocities of 1915.
20. For more details, see Stepan Alajajyan, *Champezri vra* [Alongside the Road] (Los Angeles: Nor Kyank, 1998), p. 53. *Champezri vra* is a compilation of his memoirs, notes, and reminiscences about contemporaries and overall life in the trying years of the 1960s in Soviet Armenia.
21. Aaron, *Bearing the Unbearable*, p. 1.
22. Alajajyan speaks of his bitter experience when his novelette, "Piunik," was being scrutinized in *Champezri vra*.
23. Galshoyan's article was eventually published in *Garun*, no. 8 (1988), quoted in *Bagin*, no. 9-10 (1991): 110-123, quotation p. 111.
24. Silva Kaputikyan, *Tsave nuynpes tsnun e neruzh* [Pain Can Also Give Birth to Inner Strength] in *Hayatsk Erevanits*, no. 4 (25) (April 2000): 5. The last two lines are, most likely, a reference to her visit to the diasporan Armenian communities in 1962. From this journey she returned transformed, full of awe and praise for the spirit.



- the Armenianness, and the struggle against assimilation she had witnessed. She even had the audacity to suggest that the KGB follow the example of the Diaspora to commemorate April 24 every year (See *Echer pak gzrotsnerits*, p. 58).
23. For information about this memoir and a segment from it, see *Bagin*, no. 9-10 (1991): 3-21, and for the letter, 3-4.
24. Guren Mahari, *Tsaghkats pshalarer* [Blooming Barbed Wires] (Erevan: Sovetakan Grogh, 1988), p. 21.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
26. Arshak, *Gnchuhin* [The Gypsy-Woman] (Erevan: "Vark", 1995), p. 13.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 59.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
30. Renee Baigell and Matthew Baigell, *Soviet Dissident Artists* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), preface, p. xi.
31. Hovhannes Ghanalanyan's article "Erku khosk" [Two Words] was published in *Hayastani Hanrapetutyun*, April 2, 1991, and quoted in *Bagin*, no. 9-10 (1991): 66-70.
32. Dissidence or dissident literature does not have the same connotation in Armenia as in the rest of the Soviet Union. While the Moscow dissidents were in disagreement with the Communist regime, the Armenian dissident literature was national in spirit, rooted in history, connected to the past, stemming from the impact of the Armenian Genocide, the loss of life and homeland.
33. Arevshat Avagyan, *Hangrvanner* [Phases] (Erevan: "Nor Dar," 2003), p. 353.
34. Robert Karayan, *Lusabatsnerin endharaj* [Welcoming the Dawns] (Los Angeles: Hayasa, 1999).
35. Maksim Hovhannisyan "Terunakan aghotk" [Lord's Prayer], in *Artsakh im, tsav im* [My Artsakh, My Pain] (Erevan: Nayiri, 1998), quotation, p. 151.
36. *Ibid.*, from an essay, *Mister Sviatikhovskin haytnagortsum e* [Mr. Sviatikhovski is Making a Discovery], pp. 237-238.
37. Ruzanna Asatryan, *Shushi* (Erevan: "Amaras," 2003).
38. Metakse, *Erb es galu Ter?* [When Are You Coming, Lord?] (Erevan: Nayiri, 2003), p. 93.
39. See note 23, quotation on p. 114.
40. For more works of contemporary artists in response to the Genocide of 1915, see Perroomian, "New Directions in Literary Responses," pp. 174-178.
41. Silva Kaputikyan, "Hin karot" [Old Yearning] from *Echer pak gzrotsnerits*, p. 658.
42. Alan L. Berger and Naomi Berger, eds., *Second Generation Voices: Reflections by Children of Holocaust Survivors and Perpetrators* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2001), p. 1.
43. Avagyan, *Hangrvanner*, p. 107.
44. Rafayel Ghazanchyan, *Hayrakan tseragir* [Father's Manuscript] (Erevan: Graber, 2003), p. 3.
45. For a discussion of these two works, see Perroomian, "New Directions in Literary Responses."
46. Muradyan, "Hrazhesht," p. 143.
47. Ruben Hovsepyan, *Es tser hishoghutyunn em* [I Am Your Memory], collection of short stories and novellas (Erevan: Armenian Writers' Union, 2003), quotation from *Vordan Karmir* [Cochineal Red] novella, p. 30.
48. Aghasi Aivazyan, *Entir erker* [Selected Works] (Erevan: Nairi, 2001), from the story *Kirakos*, p. 9.