

ANATOMY OF GENOCIDE STATE-SPONSORED MASS-KILLINGS IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE THROUGH ART AND LITERATURE

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The Armenian Genocide of 1915-1923 was a catastrophe unprecedented in the Armenian history studded with persecutions, forced deportations, and massacres. It was perpetuated by the Ottoman government and aimed to annihilate the Armenian population of the Ottoman Empire. The catastrophe was not only an event in the past awaiting recognition and retribution but also a lasting scar affecting the state of mind and creative imagination of the generations of survivors. It was a challenge to the ethical and moral standards of both victims and survivors who lived through the ordeal. It was a challenge to the traditional concepts and ideas, the major factors instrumental in shaping world perception and collective behavior.

The genocide echoed in the literature created by the survivors of this catastrophe; hence, a new genre was born, the genocide literature, the literary responses of the Armenian literati and, through their work, the reactions of victims to the genocidal experience.¹ The genocide literature makes no attempt to document the event; the event is a point of departure, a source of psychological and ethical impact that reverberates in artistic creation. With the imaginative realization of the Catastrophe (the Armenian Genocide) in literature, the author-survivor, and generations of survivors, strive to comprehend what is beyond comprehension, to come to terms with what is irreconcilable, so that life can continue.

Genocide literature consists of not only literary works with the Catastrophe as their theme but also those in which the Event is a hidden motive, a source of an unknown pain, and the cause of a gloomy and depressive state of mind engulfing the author's creative powers.

As the event drops back in time, the class of literary works in which the genocide is not narrated becomes richer and more complex. The Catastrophe becomes a covert psychological affliction, an inner tumult, symptomized by the dilemma of adjusting to the new environment, by the fear of assimilation and loss of national identity, by nostalgia and homesickness, by escape from painful reality into the world of dreams and memories of the past, and by the ruthless criticism of cultural, religious, and traditional values transmitted as

sacred fetishes from generation to generation. In these literary representations the Catastrophe, though not addressed directly as a literary theme, is tacitly acknowledged as an end to the Armenian collective life on Armenian historical homeland, a terminus that should be comprehended and new sets of values discovered, in order to make a new beginning possible, in order to make survival possible.

The author's perception of the atrocities becomes a leitmotiv dominating the literary work, whether the actual atrocities are narrated or only their impact is portrayed. Responses to genocide emerge through the varied manifestations of these leitmotivs which also generate the various themes of the genocide literature.

Ariuni mateane (The Book of Blood), a collection of short stories published in 1915, embodies **the glorification of armed resistance and heroism as a response to Turkish persecutions and injustice inflicted on Armenians.** The author, Suren Partevian (1876-1921), a prominent writer and publicist, remained ever preoccupied with the tragic fate of Armenians. The massacres of 1894-1896, the atrocities of 1909 in Cilicia, and the horrors of the Genocide of 1915 haunted him and reverberated in every line he wrote. The episodes in this collection may belong chronologically to the pre-Genocide era, but the imprint of contemporary thoughts and of interpretations of recent tragedies is obvious. The narratives are therefore transtemporal, and the memory of the events are subconsciously developing in the hindsight, from the perspective of more recent tragedies. Indeed, Sasuntsi Saro, Dali Baba, Haro, and Tigran the hunchback are idealized heroes with superhuman traits and an overpowering drive for revenge. This characterization of the hero has a Nietzschean ring to it: Partevian's heroes, too, live only to die in a battle against the enemy. As though to arouse self-esteem and to encourage Armenians to stand tall in self-defense, Partevian presents his heroes as the true descendants of mythical heroes of Armenia "immortalizing the true characteristics of the Armenian nation."²

Partevian's *Anmah botse* (The Immortal Flame, 1917) and *Dzaine hinchets* (The Sound Echoed, 1916), two romantic dramatizations of resistance during the horrors of 1915, also pursue the theme of extolling the spirit of fighting back: "Revolt, rebellion . . . 'eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth' . . . Resistance. . . . An honorable triumph over death," passionately exclaims the protagonist in The Immortal Flame.³

Hagop Oshagan (1883-1948), a survivor of Genocide, a prominent man of letters and a critical authority on the post-Genocide Diasporan literature, developed the theme of armed struggle in his later works. *Mnatsordats* (Remnants, 1932-33), which he calls the novel of the Catastrophe, best reflects Oshagan's perception of the Armenian armed struggle. In it he refers to Armenian revolutionism as "our mysticism, which arms our chosen ones, but is not understood by the masses."⁴ He is convinced that the armed struggle failed not because Armenians were incapable of fighting but because Turks attacking Armenians were like a sea engulfing a small island.⁵ Pondering the Armenian revolutionary movement, he continues,

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.⁶

In conceptualizing the Genocide in Armenian literature, **self-criticism or internalization of the catastrophe is a recurring theme.**

Aram Antonian (1875-1951), an established prose writer of the time, was arrested on the eve of April 24, 1915, together with hundreds of Armenian intellectuals and civil and religious leaders in Constantinople. He survived the death march to Der-el-Zor and fled to Aleppo carrying the memories of three long years of captivation and escape filled with horrors and suffering. *Ain sev orerun* (In Those Dark Days), a collection of short stories published in 1919 is replete with narratives exposing the ugliest facets of the human psyche when confronted with an extreme situation. A psychologist might infer that it is the inner defense mechanism releasing hitherto suppressed human instincts to ensure survival. In this dehumanizing struggle, the victim is human nature with its moral and ethical conventions.

Antonian describes the degradation of the human character: "After the first few months they [the gendarmes] were all convinced that the best way to torture Armenians was through Armenians themselves."⁷ Victims have become victimizers. They hurt their own kin, they do anything to please their Turkish masters in order to gain scant privileges for themselves. The Armenian nightwatchmen, appointed by the Turkish gendarmes to maintain order in the camp, are sometimes more inhuman than the gendarmes themselves. They

provide the *mudur* (Turkish, for person in charge) with Armenian girls, make them dance naked during the orgies, and, worst of all, the deportees comply. They have lost the last traces of human dignity.

After the surviving few of the Armenian deportees reached Der-El-Zor, or other "final destinations" in the Syrian desert, they were either executed in mass or driven out, abandoned in the desert to die of starvation. Antonian records incidents of cannibalism among these devastated creatures. They ate the corpses of children starved to death. A young famine-stricken girl, lying on the bare desert sand, smells meat cooking nearby. "Mother, go ask some for me," she pleads, "I can't go on anymore." The poor woman 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."⁸

This is the dehumanizing quality of the Turkish Crime, the degradation of the Armenian people in the process of the execution of the Crime. Human attributes fall victim to these outrageous circumstances, the result of which, in the words of Lawrence Langer is "The ultimate degradation of the human image under the conditions of atrocity."⁹ In these circumstances, is it fair to judge the victims' morality? The world shuddered upon reading about cannibalism in the Volga region during the civil war following the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, then in Leningrad during the long Nazi siege of the city during World War II. Who was to bear the blame? Certainly not the Russian folk for whom that was the only means to survive, but rather the Bolshevik Revolution and the Nazi expansionism for causing this extreme degeneration of human nature.

Hagop Oshagan also delves into sharp and profound self-criticism in *Remnants*. Oshagan is convinced that "1915 would not have been possible if the network of espionage, subservience toward others, and the self-serving drive for wealth had not been so widespread."¹⁰ Besides instances of direct criticism, he vents his own bitter thoughts against the conduct of Armenian secular and religious leaders, the perception of traditional values, and the reactions of the masses to persecutions and massacres through the sarcastic remarks of a Turkish officer.

Vahan Tekeyan (1878-1945), who took refuge in Cairo in early 1915, likewise feels blameworthy. This most respected Diasporan poet of his time lamented the gradual demise of his people, the survivors of the Genocide, forcibly driven out of

their homeland and dispersed in the world. In the poem *Ptuke* (The Clay Pot, 1928), he allegorically depicted the deplorable state of the Armenians in the Diaspora with no dreams, no goals, not a spark of hope. In this poem Tekeyan holds Armenians themselves responsible for bringing the calamities down upon their head. "... We caused our own destruction; / O horror! we consumed ourselves..."

Interestingly, the theme of self criticism, that is, the internalization of the tragedy, persisted in the works of the second generation survivors in the post-Genocide Diaspora. The theme was adopted by the generation of orphans, also called the desert generation for having experienced the horrors of genocide at an early age and for beginning their literary careers in exile. The world had treated them most cruelly. They had fought alone to survive a catastrophe and then had to struggle to overcome the difficulties of adapting to an alien environment. This profound psychological trauma resounded in the literature they produced and in the characters they created. However, surprisingly, when it came to reflect on the source of their misery and psychological trauma, most of these writers looked inward, searched the Armenian past, and blamed their own ancestors and their interpretation of Armenian tradition passed on to them.

Shahan Shahnur (1902-1974), who had been able to flee to France after the war and begin his writing career in Paris, embodies this spirit of protest and criticism in one of the characters in his most famous novel, *Nahanje arants ergi* (Retreat Without Song, 1927-1929). Pondering the dilemma of survival in dispersion, Suren, a rebellious soul, exclaims:

Our grandfathers weren't able to sculpt anything out of flesh. . . . The succeeding endless generations of our forefathers have not been able to rescue us. . . . In the place of collective effort, we have put guerrillas—all our monasteries are proof of this. . . . In the place of struggle, we have put quarrelsomeness—our political parties are proof of this. . . . 11

The formation of the *Menk* (We) group in Paris, by young Armenian poets and writers in itself is a collective gesture of protest against the past generation, a criticism of all traditional values, and a search for a new means to survive and perpetuate through art.

It is natural for a victim of misfortune or the victims of a collective wrong to find a scapegoat to blame. In a way, it is a psychological reaction, and it helps to alleviate the pain. The survivor-writers of the first generation blamed the victims

in their conduct and behavior. The generation of orphans went further to blame their predecessors and reject the tradition they transmitted. This generation, too, resorted to inward criticism in reaction to their misery.

In view of this widespread and continuing tendency to internalize the tragedy, the question remains. Where is the enemy, the perpetrator of the crime, the author of the degradation and dehumanization of the nation, the cause of the Armenian dispersion and the prolonged genocide in the Diaspora? The Turk plays no part.

Exception is Oshagan's deliberate effort to characterize Turkish officials organizing and executing the genocide and the Turk in the street eagerly participating in the carnage. Oshagan has the best examples of the theme of **facing the perpetrator**. In *Vrdovvats khghchmtanke* (The Offended Conscience) and *Vrezhe* (The Revenge), two episodes in *Kayserakan haghtergutiun* (Imperial Song of Triumph, 1920-1921), he portrays the massacre of an entire Armenian village at the hands of the Turks from the neighboring village.

Oshagan succeeds in demonstrating that what Armenians perceive as a catastrophe the Turks view as a source of mystical gratification and the fulfillment of a sacred ritual.

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. ¹²

Oshagan further elaborates on the Turkish character, instinctive drives, motives, and objectives in his later novels. He strives to find the answer to an enigmatic question: why is it that "the Turks, from the *vizier* [Turkish word for the highest executive officer] to the peasant shepherd, received the orders of annihilation with such peace and calm, as if it was a pleasant invitation to the centuries old instincts?"¹³

Oshagan's novels, and especially *Remnant*, are peopled with Turkish characters in different walks of life and with different views. They are all active participants in the planning and execution of the massacres. Mehmed Sureya Pasha, the modern intellectual, has been able, with no difficulty at all, to reconcile his European education and universal humanistic ideologies with his racial and religious drives to mastermind anti-Armenian schemes. Suleiman Bey is a common criminal, and the Armenian persecutions are the best opportunities for

him to vent his murderous instincts. Osman Bey zadé Osman is a patriotic soldier who obeys and carries out, in all orthodoxy, the national motto: "Whoever exploits the Christian is a true son of the Turkish land."¹⁴ Sheik Sabit is the synthesis of "[Armenian] reminiscence of the Janissaries—their features and atrocities—and the semi-savage nomadic tribes of Asia and Africa."¹⁵

It is plausible to suggest that the overall absence of the Turk in the genocide literature is actually a manifestation of a subconscious effort. It is the rationale behind another characteristic trait, thus, another important theme of the genocide literature: **the victims' inability or unwillingness to believe in what is happening to them.**

Zapel Esayan, the most respected and successful female novelist of the pre-Genocide era, who recorded her eyewitness accounts of the massacres of Armenians in Cilicia in 1909, pictures this incredulity in the words of a survivor: "We knew it very well but pretended ignorance. We played blind and deaf. . . . Shame on us. . . . He who does not know how to die does not deserve to live. . . . We are a bunch of slaves."¹⁶ Partevian describes in *The Immortal Flame* the unpreparedness of many Armenians at the outbreak of the deportations and massacres of 1915 to believe in the plans of the Turkish government against them. A character in the novel, Atom Azatian, a well-educated Armenian, views the ongoing deportations as a temporary phenomenon. There will be hardship and pain, he projects, "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."¹⁷ The truth is that the majority of Armenians, and particularly the leadership, still believed that they could allay the anger of the Turks and prevent large-scale massacres. Oshagan refers to this mentality in *Remnants*. He describes Ohan, the priest, and Artin Varzhapet (Artin the teacher) uselessly flattering the Turkish commander to ward off the imminent danger of annihilation hovering over the entire village.

It would be simplistic to attribute this unwillingness or inability to see the truth to political naiveté alone. The explanation lies in the Catastrophe itself, the magnitude of which ruled out for many the possibility of an earthly cause. Perhaps, there was a supernatural conspiracy behind all this, the victims surmised. There must be. And the crushing conviction was substantiated with disillusion and frustrated expressions of shattered faith in the benevolence of God. Once again

the relationship of man and God came to the fore, tradition rose from the subconscious to provide an explanation for the inexplicable disaster:

Vahan Tekeyan's poetic responses to genocide are the embodiment of the concept based on **the covenant between man and God**. Most of his poems on the theme of genocide are dialogues with God or rather soliloquies addressed to God. In a poem entitled *Ahavor ban me aintegh* ("Something Terrible There," 1916), Tekeyan depicts the gruesome carnage, laments the slaughtering of an entire nation, and makes pathetic calls for help. There is no mention of the perpetrators of that "terrible thing;" instead, he addresses God and holds Him responsible:

An enemy God, of course, who was looking from His hiding place
Launched upon it [the Armenian people] all the evil in the world.

If God caused the misery, then God himself will bring about the deliverance. In another poem, *Piti mornank* (We Shall Forget, 1918), Tekeyan bargains with God:

We will forget our awesome wound and our grief,
We will forget, won't we? if we return to our land.

Within the same context of God's involvement, Daniel Varuzhan (1884-1915) is outstanding in his daring outbursts of anger and protest. In the poem *Hayhoyank* (Curse, written between 1906 and 1909), Varuzhan, a victim of genocide, portrays a deplorable scene of survivors of a carnage during the massacres of 1894-1896. The lyric hero rises above the crowd and outpours her rage and protests against God:

God! God insidious and bloodthirsty,
I protest against you.
Look down and see the falseness of your generosity. . .

A singular dimension of the Armenian literary responses to genocide in the context of the covenant between man and God is the idea of the duality of God, the doubt in the oneness of God. This idea finds an unusual manifestation in Oshagan's "The Offended Conscience," in *The Imperial Song of Triumph*. In a morbid scene of slaughter, Oshagan draws a distinction between the God to whom Armenians pray and so willingly offer their lives—in the example of the martyrs of medieval and ancient Armenia—and the God of Islam who watches with approval the carnage and accepts the human sacrifice His worshipers offer to Him.

In these varied manifestations of the theme of God and the Catastrophe, the most popular way to address God is, of course, to pray to Him for mercy, to beg Him to intervene and save the suffering nation. The precedent for this response—a response that most probably was an instinctive reaction among the helpless victims of the genocide—goes back to the inception of Christianity in Armenia, when Armenians discovered God, His infinite power, His boundless generosity. The writers naturally reflected the reactions of the populace, the men and women victims and survivors calling God in their agony. Exclamations, such as “Mother of God! come to our rescue. . . Jesus. . . show your power,”¹⁸ or “O God. . . Where is God?”¹⁹ are common in the Armenian literary responses to genocide.

Throughout their turbulent history of persecution and bloodshed, Armenians have been able to recover and look forward to a better future. Poets and writers have extolled the spirit of Armenian determination to rise again despite all odds. **Rebirth and an optimistic visions of the future** occur repeatedly in response to the massacres before the Genocide of 1915. The stance is strictly secular and rests on the tradition set forth by nineteenth-century Armenian renaissance writers. One such theme is revival, developed and elaborated by renaissance writers to spur confidence and self-esteem and to encourage the struggle for emancipation. In the aftermath of the 1894-1896 massacres, the theme of rebirth recurred as a response to the national disaster. Daniel Varuzhan ends his poem *Jarte* (The Massacre) with an optimistic note of prophesy for a better future. After a torrent of deadly scenes and suffering, he assures the mourning mothers,

The coming of Dawn, a Dawn, whose footsteps
Believe me, mothers,
I hear.

In the immediate aftermath of the Armenian Genocide the theme of rebirth and enthusiastic forecasts for the future are obviously and understandably absent. Survivor-writers, who had escaped the fate of hundreds of thousands of their fellow-Armenians, had left their homeland in ruins and devastation. The nation had turned into masses of survivors, scattered throughout the world in abject poverty and uncertainty. The picture was gloomy: people uprooted from their land, frightened and confused in a new, alien environment.

Decades had to pass for generations of Armenian writers in the Diaspora to witness the rebuilding of the nation's will to survive, to perpetuate. They would,

then, proudly extol the determination of the Armenian people to sustain their national identity, language, and culture. Inspired by this upsurge, William Saroyan would proclaim defiantly:

I should like to see any power of the world destroy this race, this small tribe of unimportant people, whose history is ended, whose wars have all been fought and lost, whose structures have crumbled, whose prayers are no longer uttered. Go ahead, destroy this race. Let us say that it is 1915 again. There is war in the world. Destroy Armenia. See if you can do it. Send them from their homes into the desert. Let them have neither bread nor water. Burn their houses and their churches. See if they will not live again. See if they will not laugh again.

The future was not as clear in the immediate aftermath of the genocide. **Dispersion was the condition of life, the state of mind, and the literary theme** in the post-Genocide Armenian literature. Horrifying memories of the past haunted reason and rationality. Creative power was paralyzed and expression of talent was obscured. Zapeł Esayan was unable to lift the veil of sadness enveloping her work: "It is hard to explain what I went through and the thoughts and reflections that generated this effect. Perhaps my yearnings for my homeland can explain that haze and the sadness in my work and my character," she writes in 1919 in Constantinople.²⁰

As for the generation whose childhood was embedded in the horrors of massacres, the impact was not manifested in sadness alone. The horrors of the genocide and the deprivations and misery afterward were not only painful experiences to becloud their mental horizons, but they were a school of life where these young wanderers learned their first lessons of survival; they were a window through which the reality of life was perceived. Many of these young men and women tried to cling together seeking consolation in each other's company. Many tried to find the coziness of their abandoned homes in the warm atmosphere of the Armenian churches and local community organizations. But most of them drifted away once they recovered from the initial shock. The boys found their happiness in ephemeral love affairs with easygoing, fun-loving German, French, and Italian women. In the words of Shahnur,

Marianne [the French girl], with her irresistible charm, approached each one of them and dragged them away, here and there. Whether here or there, the winner always remained the same: always the same Nenette, the grand-daughter of Manons, Ninons, and Nanas. Some were married, many moved in with girlfriends, the Armenian Church became empty, the number of letters sent home decreased and, of course, far away mothers wept.²¹

In this passage from Shahnur's Retreat without Song, the author touches upon a painful reality, and, at the same time, encapsulates a typical theme commonly developed in the literature of this generation, namely, assimilation and loss of ethnic identity, the thinning of the Armenian society, to which Tekeyan, too, sadly attested.

More than any other factor in the Diaspora, indeed, the attractiveness of the culture of the host country and the overpowering lure of non-Armenian women threatened Armenian ethnic identity. This fascination with the non-Armenian, coupled with the helpless and unsuccessful effort to resist the temptation, was a typical dilemma of the Diasporan youth. It was a tragic reality and it inspired artistic expression—poetry, short stories, and novels.

Those who remained faithful to their Armenian ethnicity and resisted assimilation had a difficult battle to wage. They did not always succeed in reconciling their two identities. The conflicts which arose from dual identity and which affected both the personal lives and the collective endeavors of Armenian youth in the Diaspora are reflected in the literature of the time. On the personal level, Shahnur's characters Petros (or Pièrre, the French name he acquired) and Lokhum in Retreat without Song, Norayr (or Robert, his French name) in *Pchegh me anush sirt* (A Bit of Sweet Heart), Tages Balabanian in *Terdzak me, ir erku hiurere ev zanazan depker* (A Tailor, His Two Guests and Different Incidents), and Hambardzum in *Haralezneru davachanutiane* (The Treason of Spirits) vividly personify that helpless struggle. Some surrender to the sweeping waves of the new world; others stubbornly fight, but the end of the line for all of them is either suicide or a corner in an asylum.

On the level of collective endeavors the outcome was no better. The old values were fading against the colorful background of the new culture. There was no direction to follow, no new values by which to abide. In a lecture on the Armenian literature in the Diaspora, in 1925 in Paris, Vazgen Shushanian (1902-1944), a revered literary figure, observed,

The struggle of the old generation was clear. They strove to overthrow the rule of the tyrannical oppression, or to enrich the culture. The struggle is ambiguous and uncertain today. The socio-political, the literary and philosophical values of the past seem meaningless. The new or the old civilization? What is the literary direction? We are wandering in darkness.²²

Caught in the hardship of the everlasting struggle, vanquished and stripped of their strength and will power, some found **solace in isolation and in escape from the reality around them**. In the literature they produced, this reaction was translated as dreams of the past and nostalgic reminiscences of childhood memories. According to Vazgen Shushanian's own confession, "Indeed, from long time ago, my soul has known two pleasures and my body two sustenances, two mannas, memories and dream."²³ Shushanian's literary legacy is a genuine artistic representation of this frame of mind. Shushanian, who was orphaned during the massacres and deportations, grew up in the streets of Middle Eastern towns in destitute and uncertainty. He was finally able to settle in Paris and start a career of a writer. Childhood memories, although sometimes trivial little things "a happy man may have long forgotten, but," Shushanian admits, "these little things pile up in my mind. They keep returning to me, and I return to the happy home of my early childhood."²⁴

In 1924 in Paris, Levon Zaven Surmelian (1907-1996), another young survivor, published a collection of poems constituting mostly of childhood reminiscences. *Tunis hishatake* (The Memory of My Home) is a romantic poem filled with pathetic yearnings for his murdered parents and the happy home of his childhood from which he was brutally driven away:

I search singing, my home—a memory,
But its intimate image is fading day by day.
I remember my father's picture like the head of Jesus,
My mother, sad and kind, was still a lovely maiden.

In Surmelian's poetry the genocide looms as an awesome barrier in time and space separating him from his loved ones. *Asatsvatsk lrutean* (A Saying about Silence) pictures Surmelian's imagination overshadowed by his dead mother's image. Unable to overcome the persisting mental state of being an orphan, he tries to drown himself in silence:

O silence,
Descend, descend,
And cover me
Like my mother's soul.
My lovely, my tender mama.

The wounds are not healed yet.

Survivors of the Catastrophe, driven out of their homeland, continued their life in the Diaspora. They tried to live a normal life, get married, bear children. But there was something inexplicable, an enigmatic psychological dilemma, that weighed on their souls and was transmitted from generation to generation. It became **an incomprehensible sensation for the following generations**. The continued nightmares and eventual madness of Leonardo Alishan's grandmother weighed heavy, like an affliction, on Alishan's young soul, enkindled his creative imagination in a transfiguration in art. Hagop Karabents it sounded like "the groaning of the earth," the call of his homeland in far off Kansas city. Born in the Diaspora never having seen Armenia, Karapents carried "in his sad eyes the pain and the longings of his people in exile."²⁵

Times change. The new generation adopts the culture, the language, and the life-style of the host country. One speaks the mother tongue with an accent or does not speak it at all. Parents and children become strangers to one another. Relationships grow colder. David Kherdian, an American-Armenian writer, who writes in English, would perhaps give anything to be able to enjoy wholeheartedly the happy life of his family in Wisconsin, to forget about the massacres of Adana, whence his father escaped, and the terrors of Afyon Karahisar, where his mother spent her unhappy childhood; yet, an unknown pain, a remorse weighs heavy on his soul, as in his poem "For My Father":

Why have I waited until your death
to know the earth you were turning
was Armenia, the color of the fence
your homage to Adana, and your other
complaints over my own complaints
were addressed to your homesickness
brought on by my English.

Genocide is not comprehended yet. Its impact persists.

They speak English. The language is lost. They are assimilated. But the pain lingers. The hyphenated Armenianness follows David Kherdian, Diqna Der Hovanessian, Peter Najarian, Peter Balakian, and other American-Armenian writers. The unresolved dilemma of a dual identity, experienced by the past generation, visits them like a nightmare. Diana Der Hovanessian struggles in vain to overcome the dilemma in "In My Dream":

I found the bloodied arm on the ground
 before me. "You didn't need it" said the voice.
 I saw a sea of dismembered limbs tossed,
 strewn on the horizon and beyond.
 "You didn't really need these bones."
 They covered land that stretched, pressed past.
 "You didn't need these provinces, did you?"
 What would you do with all these stones?"
 A mountain of broken bodies rose.
 "You didn't need Mt. Ararat, did you?"
 I tried to speak. No tongue. My breath froze.
 "You didn't need that language, did you?"
 I woke, washed, and looked in the glass.
 Only another American there dressed in fine clothes.

Is it possible to come to terms with the memories and the consequences of the Catastrophe? Is it possible to leave them behind and look back at them peacefully and rationally as a past, painful and teaching experience? Is it possible to render meaning to this experience, create the masterpiece, the last echo of the literary responses to Catastrophe and transcend the elongated era of genocide and to clear the way for the universal in Armenian Diasporan literature? There is no answer.

My answer is that as long as the genocide continues in the Diaspora, as long as the ethnic identity is fading away, the language is being forgotten, the spiritual ties are losing their grip, as long as the Turkish denial of the Crime is adding fuel to the fire of suffering souls, the genocide will overshadow the creative imagination and the Armenian Diasporan literature will reverberate with the responses of the survivors of an injustice that still awaits redress.

NOTES

1. For a detailed discussion of genocide literature and the paradigm of responses to collective trauma through time, see this author's Literary Responses to Catastrophe, A comparison of the Armenian and the Jewish Experience (Atranta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1993).
2. Suren Partevian, *Ariuni mateane* [The Book of Blood] (Cairo: M. Shirinian Press, 1915), 8. (All quotations from Armenian sources are my translation unless cited otherwise)
3. Idem, *Anmah botse* [The Immortal Flame] (Alexandria, Egypt: Aram Stepanian Press, 1917), 32.
4. Hagop Oshagan, *Mnatsordats* [Remnants], Vol. 2, Part 2, (Cairo: Husaber Press, 1933), 37. (Vol. 1 was published in 1932 and Vol. 2, Part 1 in 1933)
5. Ibid., Vol. 2, Part 1, 386.
6. Ibid., 387.
7. Aram Antonian, *Ayn sev orerun* [In Those Dark Days] (Boston, Mass.: Hayrenik Press, 1919), 84, from the episode entitled *Ju ~r . . . Ju ~r . . .* [Water . . . Water . . .].
8. Aram Antonian, *Mets Vochire* [The Great Crime, 1921], second edition (Beirut: Ghikas Karapetian Publishing, 1977), 116-17.
9. Lawrence L. Langer, *The Age of Atrocity* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1978), 205.
10. *Remnants*, Vol. II, Part I, 389.

11. Shahan Shahnur, *Nahanje arants ergi* [Retreat Without Song], a novel written in 1929-30. Quotation from a translation by Mischa Kudian (London: Mashtots Press, 1982), 88-89.
12. Hagop Oshagan, *Kayserakan haghtergutiun* [Imperial Song of Triumph], a collection of short stories written in 1920, Boghos Snpian, ed. (Beirut: Altapress, 1983), 27.
13. Hagop Oshagan, *Hamapatker arewmtahay grakanutean* [Panorama of Western Armenian Literature], Vol. 9 (Antilias, Lebanon: Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia Press, 1980), 278.
14. *Remnants*, Vol. 2, Part 2, 192.
15. *Ibid.*, 338. The organization of Janissaries (Turk. Yenicheri, meaning new army) was initiated in the 14th century in the Ottoman Empire. The Janissaries were the primary guardians of the sultan's throne. The terror they spread and the atrocities they committed gained them the reputation of ferocious exploiters and executioners. It was not until 1826 that under the European pressure the sultan finally agreed to dissolve the organization.
16. Zapel Esaya, *Averakneru mech* [Amidst the Ruins], a collection of essays and short stories written in 1910 (Beirut: Etvan Press, 1957), 89.
17. Partevian, *The Immortal Flame*, 34.
18. Aram Antonian, *In Those Dark Days*, from *Mayrere* [The Mothers], 52.
19. *Ibid.*, from *Ju~r. . . Ju~r. . .* [Water. . . Water. . .], 85.
20. Zapel Esayan, *Hogis aksoreal* [My Exiled Soul] (first published in Vienna in 1922) in *Erker* [Works], (Erevan: Haypethrat, 1959), 133.
21. Shahnur, *Retreat without Song*, trans. Kudian, 86.
22. Quoted in preface by A. Topchian to Vazgen Shushanian, *Erkir hishatakats* [Land of Memories] (Erevan, 1966), 3.
23. Vazgen Shushanian, *Alekots tariner* [Tumultuous Years], unpublished, quoted in Sevan, *Vazgen Shushanian*, 33.
24. Vazgen Shushanian, *Land of Memories*, 341.
25. Hagop Karabents, *Antsanot hoginer* [Unfamiliar Souls] (Beirut: Atlas Press, 1970), 156, collection of short stories, from the story *Voreve teghits minchev aystegh* [From Anywhere To Here] written in 1955.