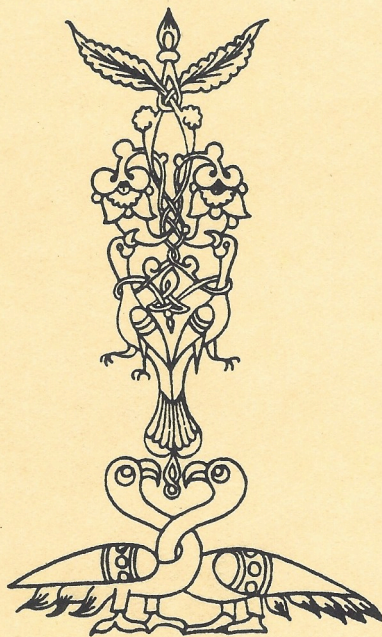


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## HAGOP OSHAGAN'S LITERATURE OF CATASTROPHE: STRUGGLE TO CONFRONT THE GENOCIDE OF 1915

The enormity and richness of Hagop Oshagan's literary legacy inspire awe and trepidation. His *Hamapatker Arewmtahay Grakanut'ean* (Panorama of Western Armenian Literature) fills ten volumes, approximately 6,000 pages. His novels, short stories, and essays add up to 4,000 pages. The three volumes of his unfinished novel *Mnats'ordats'* (Remnants) alone fill 1,800 pages. And these works are only those that are separately published. It is thus, a challenging, almost an impossible, task to encompass Oshagan's prolific literature in its entirety in a monographic or even a thematic study. Where to begin?

In this paper, I focus on Oshagan's artistic expressions and literary representations of the Catastrophe, the Genocide of 1915. I set out to segregate his artistic expressions from his critical writings and I soon realized that even to categorize his works is complicated. The line between his critical and artistic writings is very fine, often crossing back and forth within a piece. For example, despite its classification as a work of literary criticism, *Panorama of Western Armenian Literature* can be considered a novel in concept and character. As Krikor Beledian attests, "Oshagan the 'critic' has so much affinity with Oshagan the 'novelist' that, even in extrinsically different applications, one is confused with the other.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, I came to realize that in most of Oshagan's writings the Armenian Genocide is the underlying leitmotiv. It creeps up, sometimes unexpectedly, manifesting the author's continuing preoccupation with the unsolved dilemma of Armenian tragedy. In his writings—whether an entire novel, an essay, or a footnote—Oshagan struggles to find the answers to two basic questions: Why did the Turks commit so inhumane a crime, and what impact did the crime have on the remnants of the Armenian nation?<sup>2</sup>

My objective here is to explore Oshagan's poetics of Catastrophe, that is, the mechanics he developed to deal with the Armenian tragedy and how he transformed it into a work of art. I base my study upon



that poetics to show his philosophy and perception of the Armenian tragedy, his response to it.

I concentrate mainly on the collection of short stories entitled *Kayserakan Haght'ergut'iwn* (Imperial Song of Triumph, written in 1920) and the novel *Mnats'ordats'* (Remnants, written in 1933) which encapsulate how Oshagan undertook the task of confronting the Catastrophe, how he established for himself the tradition of writing about it, and how, finally, he failed to realize his lifelong ambition to create a work of art representing the Catastrophe. Oshagan's other works serve to further elucidate concepts and ideas embodied in these two artistic representations.

#### HIS LIFE

Hagop Oshagan was born in Brusa in 1883, to a landless peasant family called K'iwfechian.<sup>3</sup> He had a particularly unhappy childhood. His father died when he was five years old. His widowed mother worked long hours as a maid in her native village of Sölöz. For six months every year the family moved to the city of Brusa where she worked in a silk spinning mill. It is in this dual atmosphere of town and village that Oshagan spent his early life which he remembers ruefully: "O my barefoot, hungry, and miserable childhood."<sup>4</sup>

He began his teaching career in Sölöz at the age of seventeen. Then he moved to Brusa where, in 1902, he was asked to leave the school because of a dispute with the board of trustees. For the next six years he taught school in Marmarcheg, a village near Brusa, and in 1908, after the proclamation of the Constitution in the Ottoman Empire, he pursued his teaching career in the Armenian schools of Malgara and Constantinople.

By 1915, Oshagan had gained a relatively modest reputation as an author of critical reviews and short stories on Armenian village life which appeared in the periodicals of the time. In 1914, he and a group of young intellectuals, Daniel Varuzhan, Kostan Zarian, Aharon, and Gegham Barseghian, initiated the publication of *Mehean* (Pagan Temple), a monthly journal. Its title suggested the affinity of this group with the Armenian pagan past—the source of inspiration of a literary movement then popular in Constantinople Armenian literary circles. The manifesto, published in the first issue of *Mehean*, expressed the group's interest in the problems of contemporary Armenian literature and its efforts to rejuvenate it. Seven issues of the journal appeared in 1914 before it suspended publication.

Oshagan was in Constantinople during the horrors of World War I, living for three years the life of a fugitive. He had escaped the mass

arrests and executions of the Armenian intellectuals in the wake of the Genocide of 1915 but the government was constantly on his tail. When the war ended in 1918 Oshagan escaped to Bulgaria disguised as a German officer. During his two-year stay in Bulgaria he did not produce a serious piece of work. Except for a few passing references later, he did not talk about his personal ordeal during the years of deportation and massacre of Armenians of the Ottoman Empire. In one of these rare references, in *Mnats'ordats'* (Remnants), written years later, he describes how some moments in our lives disobey the rules of time; hours seem like days. Remembering an escape from an informer in Constantinople, he tells how the few minutes he had to distance himself from his hiding place to avoid arrest seemed like days. He recounts how his legs betrayed him and would not move, as if he had walked for days.<sup>5</sup>

He returned to Constantinople in 1920, and resumed his literary activity. For a short time, between 1920 and 1922, Constantinople witnessed a revitalization of Armenian intellectual life. The Armenian literary revival was crowned by the publication of the periodical *Bardz-ravank'*. A group of well-known writers, among them Vahan Tekeyan, Hagop Oshagan, Kostan Zarian, Shahan Berberian, and Gegham Gavafian, who had been fortunate enough to have escaped the 1915 massacres, signed a literary manifesto that appeared in the first issue of the periodical. The group stated its objectives: to revive national Armenian spirit and to delineate a new direction in the aftermath of the extermination of most of the greatest talents in Western Armenian Literature. In Constantinople, Oshagan published stories of massacre and deportation in *Chakatamart*, a daily newspaper. These stories were collected and published posthumously in a volume entitled *Kayserakan Haght'ergut'iwn* (Imperial Song of Triumph) in 1983.<sup>6</sup>

In 1922, when, after sacking Izmir (Smyrna), looting and burning Greek and Armenian quarters, the Turkish Nationalists, followers of Mustafa Kemal, reached the capital, Oshagan left his native land for good and went to Cyprus, Cairo, Paris, and, eventually Jerusalem, in 1935, where he taught Armenian literature in the Armenian Theological seminary.

The more Oshagan wrote about the atrocities, the deeper he was caught in the dilemma of writing about the Catastrophe. His plan to write the novel of the Catastrophe was never accomplished. The tight framework and limitations of the genre of the short story did not satisfy him. In a letter, in 1947, to Aram Haykaz, an American-Armenian writer, he wrote: "The short story is a trial period for a novelist. I am waiting for the novel, the novel from the hell that your youth was."<sup>7</sup> To write the novel of that hell was his dream too. He talked



about it all his life, and he felt he owed it to the Armenian people. In 1931 he finally began the novel, which he called *Mnats'ordats'*; and by 1934 he had published three volumes covering events up to the 1915 massacres. At the same time he wrote three more novels belonging to another cycle. But he never went back to finish *Mnats'ordats'* to cover the years of deportations and massacres. There are many hypotheses explaining why he did not. In "The Style of Violence," Marc Nichanian states: "The failure to complete the *Mnats'ordats'*, this stoppage on the threshold of Catastrophe, remains unexplained even until today."<sup>8</sup> Nichanian cites Oshagan's own remarks, scattered in his various works, as to why he did not finish the novel and finds the explanations problematic.<sup>9</sup>

After an interval of teaching in Jerusalem from 1934 to 1938, Oshagan resumed writing—but not a single line to complete *Mnats'ordats'*. Between 1938 and 1943, he produced his monumental work of literary history and criticism *Hamapatker Arewmtahay Grakanut'ean* (Panorama of Western Armenian Literature). Publication of this ten-volume work began in 1945, but most of it was published posthumously, the last volume in 1983.

Oshagan continued to write and dream of new projects until the end of his life. Step'an Kurtikyan, editor of the Soviet Armenian selection of Oshagan's works, claims that a year before his death, Oshagan had planned to start a new cycle of novels (10-15 volumes) to be entitled *Keank'is pēs* (an approximate translation would be Like My Life), focusing on Armenian life from the 1880s to the late 1940s, the life Oshagan himself had seen and lived.<sup>10</sup> Oshagan died in 1948 in Aleppo during a visit to the Armenian community there.

#### IMPERIAL SONG OF TRIUMPH: CATASTROPHE CONFRONTED

A series of five stories about the Armenian massacres and deportations of 1915 first appeared as feuilletons in *Chakatamart* in Constantinople, between January 18 and October 18, 1920. Publication in a separate volume edited by Boghos Snpian was undertaken sixty-three years later in 1983 on the occasion of the centennial of Oshagan's birth. It was entitled *Kayserakan Haght'ergut'iwn* (Imperial Song of Triumph),<sup>11</sup> the first volume of the publications honoring Oshagan.

*Imperial Song of Triumph* begins with a note entitled "In Lieu of a Preface" addressed to Kaiser Wilhelm. Oshagan dedicates his stories, or as he calls them, his elegy, to the Emperor, saying that he held the fate of the world in his hands during the years of World War I. He reproaches the Emperor for covering up the Armenian Catastrophe and castigates him for watching calmly, with pleasure and without

distress, the unprecedented atrocities committed against the Armenian people. He assures the Kaiser that, in spite of it all, Armenians do not hold a grudge against him, but they feel sorry for what history has predestined for him: "The Armenian nation does not deride. It cannot hate. Throughout its history more than anything else it has shown sympathy for others" (p. 10). This dramatic prefatory note demonstrates the author's awareness of German conspiracy in the *Catastrophe* and explains many aspects of Oshagan's reactions in his stories. Nevertheless, the issue of German conspiracy does not reverberate in *Imperial Song of Triumph* as it does later in *Remnants*.

The sequence of stories in the centennial publication of *Imperial Song of Triumph* follows the order in which they appeared in *Chakamtart* and they are discussed here in that order.

The first story is a short, abstract picture, literally a bird's-eye view, of the Armenian Genocide. Two eagles living in the heights of glory and pride, above the mediocrity of mankind, are drawn down to the lowlands by the mysterious and intoxicating smell of death rising from the fields of murder and blood ("Artsiwneré" [The Eagles], p. 12). The abstract image of the *Catastrophe* enables Oshagan to maintain an emotional and physical distance. From the eagles' perspective, he views the crime being committed by men against other human beings. This unique conceptualization may be an experiment to develop a method of expression to contrast with the emotional outbursts of Armenian Romantic writers, whom Oshagan never ceased to criticize. Oshagan's treatment is a concrete example of T. S. Eliot's analogy of the "catalyst" which states that the poet's experience, his passions, and emotions are only the materials of the poet's mind. "The more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are material."<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, through his unique portrayal of the scenes of blood and murder, Oshagan departs from the conventional depiction of horrors as a function of his belief that horror and suffering, the backbone of the genocide literature, no matter how effectively and interestingly presented, eventually become monotonous and tiresome reading.

In his critical review of Aram Antonian's literature of *Catastrophe*, Oshagan maintains that when the theme is the horror of a colossal tragedy, a novelist, no matter how talented, cannot produce sufficient excitement to sustain the reader's attention.<sup>13</sup> Monotony, to Oshagan, is one of the major problems of the genocide literature, a problem that, in spite of various experimentations, he himself apparently did not thoroughly overcome. Twelve years after the initial publication of *Imperial Song of Triumph*, in 1932, when Oshagan was already en-



gaged in the composition of *Remnants*, the novel of the Catastrophe, he states in an interview with B. Tashian: "Catastrophe, immense but curiously monotonous, escapes the artist's encompassment, because variety is the principal prerequisite of art."<sup>14</sup>

In "The Eagles" neither the victims nor the victimizers have definite characters; scenes are enveloped in a mysterious shadow, and action is presented in metaphoric imagery, where the symbols of murder, crime, brutality, suffering, and pain are at play. The ominous glitter of spears and guns shining under the scorching desert sun and the piercing screams of pain and terror form the story's mystically blurred atmosphere. The smell of rotting corpses invites the eagles, hovering above the scene of carnage, intoxicated with the ecstasy of a heavenly feast awaiting them. Death is presented here in its most ironic aspect: from the point of view of these necrophagous birds, death is a source of life and pleasure. The birds commit the ultimate violence upon the corpses and complete the crime against the living and the dead alike. They peck at the brains of the dying, robbing the last sparks of their life; they drink the blood of corpses while it is still warm, and they suck the last traces of life flowing in the veins of the wounded.

The protagonists of "The Eagles," contrary to what the first reading would suggest, are not the eagles, per se, but Death and Dream (Oshagan's capitalization), two concepts in conflict. The eagles' physique and action only give shape to the characterization of the two concepts. The dark color of the eagles' feathers symbolizes the black garb of mourning over the murdered race. Their ferocious attacks upon the dead and upon those who are dying speak of the unchallenged domination of Death; but, at the same time, the two eagles' glorious flight back to the unreachable sky embodies the Dream of the nation, rising above Death:

The bestial beaks dig into the inextinguishable altar of light . . . and a little bit of Dream remains hanging at the tip of their beaks as though still trying to emanate beauty and creativity. These were what the race had contributed to the world throughout the centuries, and for which it had paid with its blood (p. 16).

The gloomy image of these eerie scenes created in the readers' mind fades when the author, the hitherto detached artist of the Armenian Tragedy, steps in to pour out his own vengeful emotions. The story ends with Oshagan heaping curses upon the eagles. He wishes immortality for them so that they will see other carnages and realize the uniqueness of the great Crime perpetrated against the Armenians (p. 17). From the literary point of view, the final passage is weak and inappropriate as an ending. Nonetheless, from the point of view of responses to catastrophe, it contains two important concepts. First,

Oshagan's conviction that other carnages will occur and that innocent blood will continue to be shed in abundance. There is no expectation of the world ever to become a safe and beautiful place to live and humanity ever to evolve toward civilization, away from inhumane, bestial conduct. The second is the emphasis on the uniqueness of the crime against the Armenians, an assertion that is reiterated in Oshagan's other stories. This assertion is not untypical of the literature of catastrophe elsewhere in the world, much as a suffering individual believes his or her situation to be unique. But how ironic that even though Armenians consider their own genocidal experience as unique and unprecedented, the world knows so little about it. It was Adolf Hitler who referred to mankind's short memory for atrocities. Before invading Poland in 1939 in regard to his plans, he is quoted as saying, "Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?"<sup>15</sup> Oshagan refers to this shortness of human memory when he says that other catastrophes will occur and more blood shed. This very lapse of memory for historical tragedies such as the Armenian Genocide or the Jewish Holocaust encourages repeating them. Even today, when the intrinsic relationship and parallelism of such atrocities have come to the fore, it is customary to label the Armenian Catastrophe as the Forgotten Genocide and so put world conscience to rest.

In the second story, "Vrdovwats Khghchmtank'ë" (The Agitated Conscience), emotional distance is obtained by personifying the village spring. The spring watches and depicts the preparations for the massacre of the Armenian villagers. Then, the act of slaughtering the "infidels" is viewed through the eyes of the executioners themselves. Despite the detached setting, Oshagan cannot maintain his stance as an indifferent and distant narrator. From the outset, in his description of the neighboring Turkish and Armenian villages the author reveals his preference. The "old" Armenian village is "nice." He has words of praise for the "modest campanile" of the Armenian church and the "big spring" in the village; and he compares these modest splendors with the "small, very small" Turkish village, which boasts not even "a meager minaret rising in that sad skyline." Nevertheless, Oshagan realizes that the Turkish village was built on top of the Armenian village as a result of a "vicious but farsighted stratagem" (p. 19). Furthermore, the spring personified contradicts its role as the detached bystander by participating in the history and tradition unfolding in the Armenian village through time. It shares both the grief and the happiness of the villagers. It becomes identified with the victimized Armenian people; its life story is the history of the nation that had suffered many hardships, even catastrophe. Like the Armenian villages, the spring is ready to forget the calamities



of the past and look to the future in the hope of better days to come (p. 21). Oshagan makes an effort, perhaps subconsciously, to show that the Armenians—the spring personified—are indigenous to the land. The spring was never able to get used to the presence of the “newcomers,” who subjugated it and made it wash their feet five times a day. The spring could not understand their speech, but “with an ingenious penetration into the depths of their souls, it discovered the pitiless, bloodthirsty beast hiding under the stony innocence of white gowns and turbans” (p. 23).

“The Agitated Conscience” depicts a mysterious ritual, a sacred sacrifice offered to God by pious Muslims headed by their holy leader:

The spring watched the dance and the prayer which rose to the sky to the merciful and the pure and humanistic God of that new kind of paradise. . . . It watched the light and impressive dance which words can create when ecstasy in the hearts runs overboard and when men send their enchantment together with their prayers and blessings up to the blue skies. (p. 23).

These pious men call God’s name a hundred times a day with a particular intimacy and reverence; they sing “the song of triumph” and beseech God to bestow power to their arms and peace to their conscience. God’s name is ultimately sanctified by shedding the blood of the infidels, looting their belongings, and celebrating the holocaust. In sharp contrast with this unusual ritual, some other nation simultaneously offers its last prayer to the same God, “whose injustice that nation forgets after every carnage and is ready once again to be slaughtered for the sake of His love” (p. 24). Therewith, Oshagan draws the contrast between the religious convictions of the two peoples: one is taught to sacrifice others—the infidels, who do not share his religious beliefs—as the ultimate glorification of God’s name; the other has learned to sacrifice himself and accept martyrdom as an ultimate sign of piety and devotion to God. With this scene of human sacrifice, Oshagan transfers the reader to a mystical ritual of pagan glorification of gods. The barbarity of the ritual of human sacrifice in heathenistic civilizations is surpassed by the brutalities committed. In the past one life was usually sacrificed to appease the wrath of the gods and to ensure the well-being of the whole race or the tribe. Here, says Oshagan, an entire village, an entire race is offered to the altar of God.

In this story Oshagan sets the Armenian Genocide in a strictly religious context and echoes the religious standpoint of victims as well as that of victimizers in their responses to the unfolding history of catastrophe.

The ardent Crusaders of the eleventh and twelfth centuries were probably similarly motivated when they massacred the Jews in Mainz

and Rhineland in the name of God. The medieval Jewish chroniclers do not expound on the atrocities; they merely speak of the zeal and readiness of the victims to embrace martyrdom. More than eight centuries later, the Armenian race was subjected to a similar fate.

A singular dimension of Oshagan's response to Genocide in this religious context is the distinction he draws between the God of the Muslims and the God of the Armenians. If regarded from the victims' point of view, "The Agitated Conscience" is a martyrology. But Oshagan stands in the victimizers' shoes and depicts the religious awe with which the sacrifices are offered to God. The reader perceives two images of God: one to whom Armenians offer their lives like the holy martyrs in Eghishē's or Shnorhali's literature; the other, the God of Islam, who silently and approvingly views the carnage and accepts the sacrifice offered to him by the Turkish villagers (the old religious leader of the Turkish village, dressed in white, the embodiment of God himself, gives the first example of the ritual of sacrifice and ceremoniously stands back to watch his followers carry out the slaughter). These two images could not belong to one God. The God watching the carnage could not have been the same God to whom the Armenians prayed since He did not object or intervene when the village Turks tied up the village priest, that "holy man of God," and forced him to walk in chains toward the spring to be slaughtered. That God did not object when "the victims were forced to keep their eyes open to the very end to see the shame rising from the pile of beheaded bodies and to hear for the last time the insults addressed to their powerless God and their religion" (p. 26). The sacrifice was offered to the "God of the Muslims" and the gratification belonged to the Muslim mob. "The old man's soul found a rare satisfaction that only a sacrifice on such a grand scale could offer. His conscience was stilled and cleared with the sacred offering" (p. 27).

The doubt about the oneness of God is shared by other poets and writers of catastrophe, Armenian and non-Armenian. An Armenian priest expresses it in a short story by Surēn Partevian entitled "On the Sea" in which the trauma of survival in the aftermath of the Cilician massacres of 1909 is portrayed. Here, the author himself expresses a lack of faith in the oneness of God. It is, indeed, difficult for a pious poet to accept that the God of Love and Goodness can also be the creator of inhuman creatures who would kill the innocent and the defenseless.

In "The Agitated Conscience," the sole motivation of the massacres appears to be religious intolerance and fanaticism—feelings that were instigated and aroused by the Ottoman government to guarantee the success of their genocidal intent. But it is unlikely for Oshagan to



suggest religious intolerance as the only reason for the massacres. What he makes abundantly clear is that religious intolerance was a stratagem used by the government to ensure the participation of the Turkish mobs in the execution of its plans. Surēn Partevian and Aram Antonian emphasize the roles played by individual government officials. Zapēl Esayan demonstrates that the Cilician massacres, which were initiated by local government officials and Muslim religious leaders in 1909, and during which more than 30,000 Armenians were murdered and Armenian towns and villages ransacked and burned, would not have been possible without the participation of Turkish mobs. Oshagan's view is in line with the latter. He portrays Turkish men, women, and children as actual participants in the carnage.

Zapēl Esayan attributes the eager participation of Turkish mobs to their hatred for Armenians. She contends that although there was a long history of "bread sharing" between Turks and Armenians, Turks harbored hatred toward the Armenians. Despite outward signs of tranquillity, Esayan maintains that the venom of hatred and intolerance had poisoned the Turkish attitude toward Armenians, whom they called *kāfir* (infidel) or *raya* (slave). These sentiments, she believes, were transmitted from one Turkish generation to another. The development of this theme in Esayan's narrative is, however, not convincing. She touches upon the subject occasionally but seldom exemplifies it. In two infrequent examples she writes: "Hatred had contaminated even the young generation" and "A young Turkish boy, with a hateful expression on his face, cursed at us as our carriage passed through the Turkish quarters of the town; others began to laugh. . . ."<sup>16</sup> Oshagan's "The Agitated Conscience" interprets more broadly the role of the Turkish mob in the carnage. His story describes the eager participation, not only of Turkish men and women but also of young boys, all of whom shared the ecstasy of shedding the infidel's blood:

A fifteen-year-old hero had nailed the head of a slaughtered man to the end of a long wooden stick. The eyes were gouged out, and the eyebrows were plucked. The stick on his shoulder and a rifle on his chest, he walked up and down the streets of the Armenian village to experience the pleasure of the terror he spread among women and children around him (p. 27).

The theme of religious intolerance or "the command of faith" (p. 29), as Oshagan calls it, as the motivation behind the massacres recurs throughout the story. Two young Turks fulfill their religious duty by setting fire to a barn in which villagers who were of no use to the Turks were locked up. The victims were old women, who could neither work around the house nor give birth to Turkish children, and young boys and girls, who were too young to be beheaded with adults

but old enough to remember the crime against their kin, hence they were unworthy of being raised as Muslims. These two Turkish boys were participants in the extermination of the Armenian village.

This scene of victims burned alive is a frequent occurrence in Zapēl Esayan's accounts. However, in contrast with Esayan's horrifying descriptions, Oshagan remains cool and detached. The flames of the burning barn rise to the sky with playful motion; the golden smoke covers the blue of the peaceful sky like a beautiful golden veil (p. 29). Oshagan startles the reader with a painful reality: while the massacre is a catastrophe for Armenians, it can be a source of mystical gratification and the fulfillment of a sacred ritual for Turks.

If the two youths who set the barn on fire had the eloquence of the German commander in Paul Celan's "Fugue of Death," they would probably shout mockingly: ". . . as smoke you shall climb to the sky / then you'll have a grave in the clouds it is ample to lie there (Celan's punctuation)."<sup>17</sup> For Celan and six million Jews, "death comes as a master from Germany."<sup>18</sup> Less than twenty-five years earlier, death had come to the Armenian people in Turkish garb with a radical ideology as its sword in hand—the ideology of Islam as perceived by the Young Turks.

Oshagan takes the viewpoint of the perpetrators and successfully shows the victory of the Crime. But when it comes to describing the terror and suffering of the victims, words fail him: "And from inside there arose, there arose the scream, the unheard of, the inexplicable cry, for which human language has no word" (p. 29). The violence committed against the Armenians not only threatened the very existence of an entire nation, it also thwarted the artist's ability to capture the entire scope of that violence in the realm of words. Language is impaired; it is fatally wounded. That very language that in the past had been capable of creating magnificent prayers and divine liturgies was now paralyzed: "The vessel of sound and syllable lay injured and humiliated at the foot of the steeple, like a dethroned crown" (p. 30).

In "The Agitated Conscience" the Turkish women, too, are shown as eager participants in the looting and carnage of their neighboring Armenian village. Like their men, they too share the fulfillment of a holy duty toward God. The loot is not only material wealth—such as food, jewelry, objects of value, or a whole house; it is also human beings: children to be raised as Muslims, attractive young women to bear beautiful and healthy children for their sons, strong women to work as slaves around the house.

In one day the Armenian village had changed owners; it was physically the same, but something had changed. For Oshagan, the experience is traumatic. He remembers the homes where ancient Arme-

nian traditions had been kept alive; now they are emptied of their inhabitants and their spirit. A strange, unnamed thing has moved in.

All of this brings into mind Uri Zvi Greenberg's long poem "The Streets of the River" where the author describes a dream in which he visits his paternal home in Poland. His parents and sister have fallen victim to the Holocaust. Their house has new inhabitants, a gentile family "who cooks pork and drinks wine from his family's pots and Sabbath goblets, and there is nothing that he in his shame can do."<sup>19</sup> Both Oshagan and Greenberg stress the differences in religion and culture between the true owners and the confiscators of these houses. Even the walls of these homes are experiencing the trauma of violence. Oshagan personifies the houses in the Armenian village, and ascribes soul and spirit to them:

The spirit of the Armenian village had escaped for good. . . . Half a day had been enough time for the ancestral goodness and sincerity to be chased out, perhaps with no return and to be replaced by I do not know what: something depressing that belonged to their [Turkish] souls, something that made them afraid to open their doors and windows, but it let them in cold blood tear open the stomach of their female victims alive (p. 30).

What is it in the Turkish soul for which Oshagan cannot find a name? "Something which differentiates between the races" (p. 30). Oshagan's narrative implies that, if this "something" (*ban mē*) is responsible for the differences, it must be the entire spectrum of Muslim values and principles, as perceived and practiced by the Turks in the village. These values condone the killing of infidels with clear conscience; they promise a sense of fulfillment if the last trace of sacrilege against Islam is wiped away. This sacrilege manifests itself in the last scene of "The Agitated Conscience." The old Muslim leader cannot bear the sight of two Turkish women quarreling over an Armenian child; that was considered a sacrilege. How could two members of a "holy race" curse at each other over a trivial infidel? The cause of this sacrilege had to be eliminated. And the holy old man sets out to do just that. "He grabs the child's neck and presses it hard, presses it so hard until the last vibration of life in the child's muscles and veins stops. The child's dead body falls at the old man's feet, and thus peace returns to allay his agitated conscience" (p. 32).

The third story, *Tantan* (a child's onomatopoeic expression referring to the sound of bells), is a moving story of a five-year-old Armenian boy whom a "benevolent" Turk had discovered alive under a pile of massacred deportees. Inspired by the "unique piety of his race and with the just gratification of having done a good deed" (p. 35), the old Turkish man had taken the child to a Turkish orphanage in Constan-



tinople. This orphanage had been established for Armenian children who were to be brought up as Muslims. The Armenian Genocide here is viewed from the perspective of a child. His infantile perception of events puts the Catastrophe in a dimension out of time, out of space, out of order. Dream and reality are confused. The sequence of events is mixed up. "In his memories, he walks in a caravan of death, bare-foot and hungry, a white rag on his head. His brothers and sisters are all with him, all the children of the town . . . and his sisters diminish day by day . . . and his brothers lie scattered on the road one by one" (p. 35). The child's memory has stored a confusion of scenes of horror and suffering, together with familiar colors and sounds of his native village and his happy home. Finally, the boy is attracted by the memory of the inviting sound of the village church; he runs away from the orphanage and finds his way to freedom in the nearby Armenian church.

The fourth story, *Vrējē* (The Revenge), is a scene of slaughter, a harrowing feast of murderers preying on a group of helpless deportees. Oshagan creates a microcosm of the Catastrophe without attempting to impose his own judgment. Victims and victimizers all demonstrate the nature of human behavior as revealed under the stress of extreme historical events. The story portrays in minute detail the actions of the criminals and the deep satisfaction they derive from their deeds, and delineates the agony of the victims, their last sighs, supplications, prayers, anger, and revenge.

Oshagan describes how the sound of a whistle can generate a terrible sensation. It can induce a horrifying shiver through the nerves. It can cause an inexplicable tremor which no one in the world but the victims themselves would feel. The sound of a whistle brings back the memory of the Turkish commander's order to start the execution of the herded deportees. The handful of men and women lucky enough to survive the massacres would carry the agonizing memory of this sensation as long as they lived. The sound of a whistle will live in the memory of these survivors just as, in Aram Antonian's eyewitness account, "Ban Ch'ėkay" (It's All Right), the last cries of a young boy being tortured to death will live in the memory of the few survivors of the Meskeneh concentration camp during the deportations of 1915. The handful of men and women, who have been haunted by these memories are unique in that only they are capable of knowing all too well the reality of that trauma.

Oshagan realizes the trauma of carrying the undying pain of the memory of a dire experience, when the pain bursts open like a wound to the slightest whip. He compares the sound of the whistle with "the blowing wind which the miserable artists of the murdered nation

were unable to paint. The sound reaches out to the conscience of nations whose artists were fortunate enough to have been spared the task of describing horrors" (p. 44). This strange blowing of the wind, for Oshagan, translates into "silence" and "terror" in the art of writing. What he means is that writing has been condemned to silence or has been aborted. The Armenian writer is condemned to failure for he has not been able to symbolize terror in the realm of art; he has been unable to transform terror into something tangible and livable brought down to the limits of human imagination.

The participation of the Turkish mob, men and women alike, is once again demonstrated in "The Revenge." The first sinister whistle blows as an order to the caravan of helpless women and old men to kneel down in a circle. The commander blowing the whistle to start the execution appears in his Western attire, symbolizing the influence of Western civilization, and then gives orders to commit inhuman crimes (p. 46). Likewise, the soldiers whose "actions are sanctioned by the government's official uniform have their rifles ready to shoot as soon as they hear the second blow of the whistle" (p. 47). Turkish men "armed with axes and daggers, with that terrible look of anticipation in their eyes, await their turn to carry out their mission, to complete the domination of death, to silence the last traces of life" (p. 47). In this demonic ritual Turkish women too have their share; they shoulder the task of selecting the loot—the young women, already separated from the deportees; then they join with the young Turkish boys in stripping the last belongings of the slain victims (p. 50).

Oshagan's efforts to attribute human qualities to these murderers are not successful. He is not able to develop characters out of Turkish soldiers, the commanding officer, and others participating in the carnage. His descriptions of them are only physical. The reader can visualize what they are wearing, what they are armed with, how they move and act. But who are they? Oshagan sheds no light on what they think, what their motivations, dreams, and goals are. We see only their eyes burning with a savage greed for material objects.

The last scene of "The Revenge" symbolizes Oshagan's dream, the perpetuation of the Armenian nation, which like a phoenix will rise from the holocaust. But the phoenix is the embodiment of revenge. The author is convinced that it is the spirit of revenge that will guarantee the perpetuation of the nation. A little boy buried alive under a pile of corpses struggles out in the dark of the night. Half-conscious and weak, he begins to walk when he is attracted to a feeble sound. A young Turkish baby is crying on the roadside. "The mother had apparently left her baby behind to carry her loot to the village" (p. 52). At the sight of the baby, "a strong sense of rage and revenge—that of the entire

Armenian race'—boils in the boy's veins. He thrusts his finger in the tiny throat of the Turkish baby and pushes hard. The cry dies down; the baby is strangled. The story ends with a rhetorical question: "Was this the revenge of the race?" It is an ambiguous ending. The act of revenge is fulfilled, and survival and perpetuation are implied. One may assume that Oshagan presents here his synthesis, that is, the perpetuation and revival of the nation is possible only if the act of revenge has been accomplished. Or, perhaps, the perpetuation of the nation is by itself an act of revenge against the perpetrators.

The fifth and last story, entitled "Imperial Song of Triumph," the title of the book, is another abstract image of the massacres. The association of the story's title with its content, however, is farfetched. In "In Lieu of a Preface," Oshagan dedicates the stories to Kaiser Wilhelm to add to the "songs" of his many triumphs. But nowhere in the stories does he ever allude to the German Conspiracy in the Armenian Genocide. Perhaps this last story about the aftermath of the Armenian Genocide shows the Kaiser's crowning achievement; perhaps the eradication of the Armenian nation from its native land was the finale to the German emperor's "song of triumph."

The landscape in this last story is strewn with bones and skulls "wiped clean from their flesh by nature and by the wild birds and beasts," the few remaining traces of Armenians. They are scattered around the desolate landscape "to remind the world that Armenians once lived here." The biblical analogy of "wolves and lambs graze together," which Oshagan cites here to underscore the centuries-long peaceful coexistence between the Turkish and Armenian peoples, is certainly ironic. In the context of how Oshagan typifies Turks and Armenians, however, the analogy of wolves and lambs can be taken as a reference to the relationship of victim-victimizer or slaughtered-slaughterer, themes developed in all five stories of *Imperial Song of Triumph*.

The wolves and lambs are meant to be the figurative representations of the Turks and Armenians, but their figurative attributions are occasionally interrupted with realistic portrayals of the animal world. With respect to Oshagan's response to genocide, the theme demonstrates the irony of the biblical analogy and the naïveté of the world that still dreams of the day when "wolves" and "lambs" will be able to live together in peace, but little else. Since this naïveté still persists, Oshagan asks the final question: "Will the world believe that the Catastrophe occurred?" The question sums up his entire effort to record the Armenian tragedy.

Oshagan tried to bring the facts of the events within the grasp of human imagination by engraving them in the more tangible and intel-



ligible world of artistic language and metaphor. Yet he still doubted that the world would believe his portrayal of the reality.

With his five diverse conceptualizations of the Armenian Genocide, written only a few years after the event, Oshagan contributed his spontaneous response to the legacy of Armenian literature devoted to the Catastrophe. From information and explanations in his later works, and after a second retrospective reading of *Imperial Song of Triumph*, one can surmise that Oshagan had assumed the task that he had expected of other Armenian artists: to shape the nation's response to the Catastrophe, to comprehend and to explain to the world the inconceivable and unthinkable truth.<sup>20</sup> To fulfill this task, Oshagan developed a technique: to keep a distance and to present the Catastrophe in a detached and dispassionate manner. He sought to find the source of the calamities in the clash of Turkish and Armenian characters resulting from a difference in culture, tradition, and religion. And he attempted to highlight certain aspects of the Catastrophe through concise and manageable literary tableaux. The stratagem did not prove satisfactory to Oshagan. He therefore aimed for the colossus, and that colossus was called *Mnats'ordats'* (Remnants).

#### REMNANTS: NOVEL AND FATE OF THE ARMENIAN TRAGEDY

The first installment of Oshagan's famous novel *Mnats'ordats'* (Remnants)<sup>21</sup> appeared as a feuilleton in the daily newspaper *Husaber* on January 16, 1932. By then Oshagan was well known as a literary critic and novelist. On the occasion of this publication, B. Tashian conducted a series of interviews with the author based on which Tashian published seventeen articles in various newspapers and periodicals over a period of sixteen years (1932-1948), subsequently compiled in *Mayrineru Shuk'in tak* (In the Shade of the Cedars). In the interviews Oshagan describes his plan to write a novel underscoring his objective to salvage the remnants of the Armenian people—their sentiments, traditions, and aspirations. He asserts that many poets tried to thematize the nightmare of the Armenian tragedy in their pretty phrases, but Armenians lacked the man of letters who could shoulder that enormous task. He does not pretend to be the man who can salvage the Catastrophe and the preceding events from the ravages of time. He was well aware of the complexity of this undertaking; uncertain that he would be able to surmount all the obstacles he nevertheless engaged in the venture, hoping to realize a lifelong dream.<sup>22</sup>

*A Microcosm of the Armenian Tragedy*

The novel *Remnants* was to have been published in three volumes, entitled *Argandi Chambov* (Through the Womb), *Ariwni Chambov* (Through Blood), and *Dzhokhk' (The Hell)*. Volume I, *Through the Womb*, was divided into three sections or books. Volume II, *Through Blood*, was divided into nine sections, or books, three in Part One and Six in Part Two, the latter in a separate volume now known as Volume III. *The Hell* which was projected as Volume III, was never written. *Through Blood* stops at the threshold of the deportations and massacres of 1915. *The Hell* was to have followed the people of Brusa in their ordeal during the years of deportation and massacre.

In a letter dated January 1, 1934, Oshagan responded to Mrs. Eugenie Palian's criticism of *Mnats'ordats*<sup>23</sup> being lengthy and slow moving: "I will not try to repudiate your opinion on 'M.,'"<sup>24</sup> he writes, "but I feel some explanations are necessary. . . ."<sup>25</sup> He gives his reasons why he felt it important to devote the first volume of his novel to a detailed history of a family and why he chose to concentrate on the story of one particular *family*: "It is a revolutionary thought of mine to discard the *generalities* and *anchor* myself on the particular, because that is the only reality [emphasis by Oshagan]. But it seems to be beyond the possibilities of the near future."<sup>26</sup> Oshagan consistently adhered to the scheme he had developed in *Imperial Song of Triumph* for writing about the catastrophes, that is, to create a microcosm of the tragedy by concentrating on a particular image of the atrocities and thereby reach the universal through the particular. By telling the story of the sufferings of his native village, Oshagan planned to encompass the entire Armenian Tragedy: "It is not only this village that I have in mind. My vision extends to all the communities of our nation" (Vol. II. p. 389).

The story of *Remnants* occurs at the turn of the century and portrays Turkish persecutions and unjust treatment of their Armenian subjects. It is a realistic narration with no romantic elaborations. At the very beginning of the novel, Oshagan says the village he is writing about, a village near Brusa, is not a composite of beautiful scenes of sunrise and sunset, the melody of a flute, and a shepherd girl. Village life, he says, is a mixture of constant tension, will power, brutality, and deprivation; it is a struggle in which only the victor eats (I, 23).

The narrative evolves around the detailed history of the Nalbandents', a highly respected, well-to-do family. The first few hundred pages contain the clan's century-long history prior to the deportations and massacres of 1915. After providing this lengthy background,

Oshagan relates the latest tragedy which caused the annihilation of the Nalbandents' clan. Serop, the only heir of the family, is married but childless. His mother waits in vain for a grandchild to perpetuate the name of the clan. After years of torturing her daughter-in-law, dragging her to every physician, and forcing all kinds of remedies on her, she discovers the truth about her son, that he cannot perform as a husband. Determined to see the perpetuation of the family at any price, she instigates an affair between her daughter-in-law and Shoghonents' Soghom, the young servant of the family. Serop finds out about this ongoing love affair only after his wife becomes pregnant. Humiliated and enraged, he resorts to perfidious means to avenge his wife's adultery. He solicits the aid of Turkish government officials, whom, as Oshagan hints, he had served as an informer and even as a lover. He reports to them that there are *komitajis* (members of Armenian political organizations or revolutionary activists) in the village and that Soghom is one of them. The Turkish official, who waited for such a pretext, conducts an "investigation" and fabricates a false report. The "suspicious elements" and able-bodied young men in the village who had refused to trump up the names of *komitajis* are arrested and sent to the center in Brusa with a file on them. Orders to quell the "unrest" in that village near Brusa are quick to come, and the groundwork is laid for persecution on a large scale. The astounded villagers try to find an explanation for their plight and find it in an old proverb: "The Turks burn the whole blanket to kill a flea. Armenians do not have a blanket to burn" (II, 393). Turkish government officials, from the lowliest rank to the commander, and pious and patriotic Muslim citizens from the neighboring villages willingly participate in carrying out the orders. There is no Armenian resistance; the Turks murder the "conspirators," including women and young girls. Earlier in the narrative Oshagan had pondered: "Look at our history! So long as there is a shadow of resistance in the fronts, there are no massacres. . . . And the phenomenon of women being killed in punishment is something new" (I, 543).

Persecutions of Armenians were not infrequent in the Ottoman Empire before 1915. Oshagan relates that since the village had suffered the anguish of the massacres of the 1890s this new harassment was not expected: "As a distant echo of the events of 1896, an ominous conviction had gripped every household: The lives of the Armenians were defenselessly relinquished to the whim of the Turks. Catastrophe could arrive any time" (II, 185). The shock of the massacres of 1894-1896 had apparently not subsided, and Armenians lived in fear, expecting the worst ahead.

Oshagan does not provide a specific time frame for this tragedy in



Brusa, but apparently it occurs in a period of time immediately preceding the deportations and massacres of 1915. In this setting the characters in the novel, of course, know nothing about the impending catastrophe, but the memory of the massacres of 1890s is still alive. Their consciousness of the past casts a pall over the future. Oshagan frequently alludes to ominous images on the horizon. The conflict between past and future establishes much of the dramatic and psychological tension in the novel.

In the context of events that take place between the 1890s and 1915, Oshagan traces the Turkish persecutions of the past and draws parallels with it. He writes his novel with the memory of the massacres of the 1890s in the background and the Genocide of 1915 in hindsight. He flashes back to the past to remind the readers of the parallelism and to show that certain thoughts and ideas are deeply rooted there. Similarly, he projects into the future to compare the events, the characters, and motivations with those that are to come a few years later.

Oshagan's stance is clear. The Armenian Genocide is not an accidental event but the culmination of a series of persecutions, not only during the last decades of Ottoman rule before World War I but throughout Armenian history: "For two thousand years (sometimes five to ten times in one century) our people have experienced their 1915s."<sup>27</sup>

Oshagan contends that it is possible to encompass catastrophe in literature like any other event in history. Continuing his deliberation on the Armenian Genocide, he adds: "Therefore, through concentration, insight, and particularly the right conception, I believe, it is possible to approach the Catastrophe. Besides, unfortunately, I have the personal experience, too."<sup>28</sup>

The unwritten last volume of *Remnants* was supposed to tell the story of the deportation and massacre of these villagers. The novel *Remnants* had the same fate as the villagers themselves. The Genocide not only caused the near annihilation of the Armenians but also shattered the conventional network of meanings and paralyzed the creative imagination. Oshagan's confident determination to conquer the event by bringing it into the more comprehensible world of language was killed. *Remnants* remained unfinished.

In long descriptive passages, reminiscences, analyses, short and disjointed exclamations of the characters as well as brief expressions of despair, anger, love, joy, hope, and frustration, the Armenian village speaks to us.<sup>29</sup> The long history of Armenian customs and traditions is manifested in the everyday life of the village. The village comes alive with its joy and misery, with the interrelations within the rural society. Oshagan fixes for eternity the image of the Armenian village

just as did Hovhannēs T'umanian and Avetik' Isahakian, and just as Hamastegh, Mushegh Ishkhan, and Aram Haykaz were to do after him. The first 489 pages of *Remnants* are devoted to the image of the village; then, Oshagan suddenly stops, as though he had just remembered to include the role of the Turk in that setting. In a long aside he talks about the Turks and states his intention to build Turkish characters as he had perceived them.

### *The Character of the Turk*

Through the relationships of the Nalbandents' family with other villagers over the years, with Turkish officials visiting this Armenian village, and with Turkish neighbors of nearby villages, Oshagan builds Turkish and Armenian characters. "The first part of the novel is dedicated to the confrontation of the two nations,"<sup>30</sup> he explains in *In the Shade of the Cedars*. By "confrontation" (*chakatum* in Armenian) is meant the differences of the two in "spiritual realities"—culture, customs, traditions, religion, and superstitions. Again, he has followed the scheme developed in *Imperial Song of Triumph* to define and characterize both the victims and the victimizers, the Armenians and the Turks, in their private lives, thoughts, and motivations, convinced that in order to understand the Catastrophe one should know the Turk, which, he contends, is absent from Armenian Genocide literature. In a chapter devoted to Aram Antonian, in *Panorama*, Oshagan writes: "Ain Sev Orerun (In Those Dark Days) is, of course, written [as a protest] against the authors of [those who generated] that darkness, and, needless to say, Turks are these authors. However, the role of the Turks is so minute in that drama of 200 pages."<sup>31</sup> In the same chapter, Oshagan discusses Antonian's contribution of undeniable evidence of the Armenian Genocide collected in *Mets Ochirē* (The Great Crime). He writes:

History cannot prove anything, since it is an arena of denials. . . . I separate the matter from its historical and legal aspects to put it on moral ground. . . . But the Turks? From the vizier to the peasant shepherd, they all calmly and peacefully accepted the decree of the annihilation. That was an invitation to their centuries-old instincts and a pleasant one.<sup>32</sup>

Oshagan believes that genocide literature should portray the participation in the carnage not only of the Turkish officials in charge but also of the common Turkish people. Moreover, in this portraiture, the Turk should not be a faceless character. He boasts that he succeeded in creating the overall Turkish image:

After all, he is the one [Oshagan talks about himself] who has given us absolute examples of the Turk, not just the executioner of the Armenian people, but companion to their souls for centuries and the ultimate cause of their tragedies but in any event a human being. . . . In the Armenian novels the Turk is a cliché scarecrow, the ogre of the legend. Oshagan has not retouched the picture, of course, but he has created the original.<sup>33</sup>

Oshagan does not claim to have portrayed the complete image of the Turk and his psychological drives and motives when he was murdering the Armenian people. He explains that his two novels *Hachi Abdullah* and *Hariwr Mek Taruan* have the purpose of creating the Turkish image that he intended to complete in the last volume of *Remnants*, "The Hell." According to his own confession in *Panorama*: "The Hell of *Remnants* was to be created based on this psychology, the [psychology of] 1915."<sup>34</sup> Despite the fact that this project was not realized, he still firmly believes that his contribution in this respect is unmatched. In the same passage in *Panorama*, he cites a letter from an artist saying that in order to know themselves, the Turks should translate Oshagan.

*Remnants* is full of scenes of Armeno-Turkish interrelations, in which Oshagan exerts a conscious effort to build the character of a Turk. One such character is Mehmed Pasha who was educated in France. He was "an admirer of Tier . . . but a Turk before anything else."<sup>35</sup> He orders the arrest and torture of all the men in the village to make them confess that they conspired with Soghom to Serop's murder. He threatens the whole village and orders extreme measures to compel Soghom to come out of hiding. But then he stops the killings, not out of mercy, but, as Oshagan reasons,

because subconsciously he was repeating the move of his ancestors. Centuries ago, the victorious commanders would stop the killings and forced conversions, not out of humanitarian reasons, as we like to believe now, but because they knew they needed the Christian flock. Every Turk today through his instinctive wisdom is aware of the message of the race (II, 384).

Another Turk was Suleiman Bey. When he was twenty he had killed his stepmother and cut the dead body in pieces. He was acquitted because of his father's connections. After that, Suleiman became a loyal military man. For a man of that background, Oshagan maintains, killing a fifteen-year-old Armenian girl (he tortured Soghom's sister to death to learn of Soghom's hiding place) was not only a military duty to suppress the "unrest" in the village but a heavenly pleasure as well (II, 406).

Osman Beyzadé Osman Bey, still another Turk, a protégé of the Sultan himself, was a patriotic soldier who lived in opulence in a



mansion in Constantinople. He had earned his position by adopting wholeheartedly, in mind and in action, Sultan Abdul Hamid's "political message" that "whoever oppresses the Christians is a true son of the Turkish homeland" (III, 192).

Still another Turk, Mehmed Sureya Pasha, the special envoy of the Porte, represented the modern Turk. His modern mentality, Oshagan maintains, was the outcome of his "possibly Slavic origin, a perfect example of a few centuries of mixing with the bloods of kidnapped Christian women and forcibly Turkified males. These characters mold the higher echelon of the big cities and gradually expand to make the character of the modern day Turk" (III, 338).

Oshagan discusses the mind-set of the modernized Turkish officers on various occasions. In a chapter in *Panorama* where Aram Antonian's work is studied, he observes that these same civilized, well-educated officers who read Hugo, Lamartine, and Nietzsche, were conspirators in the Armenian massacres. Oshagan attests to the fact that these modernized Turks angrily protested the trial and execution of a few Turks who were found guilty of perpetrating the Armenian deportations and massacres.<sup>36</sup> The reverberation of this idea in the typification of Mehmed Sureya Pasha is obvious.

At one point in the novel Mehmed Pasha's interrogation of Mat'ik' Mëlik'khanian, an Eastern Armenian revolutionary activist in prison, adds an interesting dimension. The interrogation covers seventy-eight pages. Let us overlook for the moment the technical fallacy of this whole scene—the fact that a conversation that long is apt to take at least eight hours, and that in the narrative this conversation occurs after many hours of group investigation. Instead, let us look at another dimension present in this interrogation. The Turkish official asks no questions, makes no accusations, and the prisoner does not try to defend himself, as one would expect. The interrogator delivers a lengthy speech, a discourse interrupted only by short sentences, exclamations, and affirmative gestures by the prisoner. In the speech Mehmed Sureya Pasha explains his interpretation of Turkish governmental policies not only toward the Armenians but also regarding international diplomacy. He sets forth the modern Turk's aspirations and ideologies which we recognize today as Pan-Turanism. His extreme familiarity with Armenian history, culture, worldview and interpretation of history sounds unrealistic. Mere observations, no matter how astute, could not have given him such tremendous insight. The limited non-Armenian written sources of the time could not have provided him with such in-depth knowledge, and surely he did not read Armenian. It is more plausible to assume that Oshagan agrees with the Turk's staunch criticism of Armenians—Mat'ik's silence is further proof of that—and

adds his own insight to the discourse. The problem of reality in the Ottoman Empire sounds exaggerated even coming from Oshagan himself.

It seems that here Oshagan is exploiting his intention to present the Turkish viewpoint. He vents his own grievances and discontent against ancient and medieval Armenian historians who judged the events from a strictly religious point of view, against religion itself which poisoned the Armenian feelings for the Muslim Turks, against the existing political parties and their activities, and against the classic trend of glorifying the Armenian past as a way to activate the aspiration for self-determination.

On the issue of the role of the Armenian church in the rejuvenation of the Armenian nation, the argument goes as follows:

"You only have your church to enact your internal restoration; but the means it employs is contrary to what other churches would do."

"The sons of Israel didn't do any different" [Mat'ik replies].

"Never. These are two different situations. Yours is a pure retreat into the past; in other words, retreat from your present. You do not descend into the abyss of your centuries to obtain strength. They recoil in their synagogues with an absolute determination to reinvigorate in their faith and to receive the ability to hate those surrounding them. You pursue the psychology of your ancestors, which is to mature for death." (III, 289)

This juxtaposition of Armenian and Jewish responses is a rare occurrence in Armenian creative literature. Although expressed through a Turkish character, Oshagan seeks to find the roots of responses to similar historical situations in the religion, tradition, and the history of the two peoples.

The interrogation, or rather, the Turkish officer's attack on Armenian traditional values goes on:

"What have you done more beautiful than getting slaughtered in masses? This act of yours is as much inglorious as it is a heroism. Have you tried to delve into the enigma of the events that have caused your destruction? . . . This is not God-sent punishment for your sins, as your chronicler-historians tried to convince you. It is not a blind whim of luck, as your revolutionary theories judge . . . (III, 290).

Besides the unreal romantic pleasures that your books have taught you, you have not learned to experience other pleasures like the pleasure of domination. I do not mean violence or murder, but the right to self-determination, the right not to become slaves to others. And this is the catastrophe."

"Our people have pursued this dream for centuries" [Mat'ik retorts].

" . . . It is so true, and perhaps painfully true. . . . But to aspire to freedom with romantic sentimentalism does not lead to the realization of that dream (III, 294).

Mehmed Sureya Pasha raises important issues and authoritatively draws conclusions. He argues that in spite of centuries of coexistence

between Turks and Armenians, Armenians did not try to understand the culture, language, and poetry of the Turks. This particular point is, of course, the gist of Oshagan's argument which echoes throughout the novel. Oshagan is convinced that Armenians do not know the Turks well enough to be able to understand the Catastrophe and respond to it.

In a footnote in the chapter on Antonian in *Panorama*, Oshagan reveals the identity of Mehmed Sureya Pasha, the real-life name of a Turkish high-ranking official.<sup>37</sup> He talks about a long conversation he himself had with this Turk in 1917 in Constantinople. He notes that he has patterned the interrogation of Mat'ik Melik'eanents<sup>38</sup> in the prison after his own conversation with Mehmed Sureya Pasha. This insight helps to understand why many issues raised by Mehmed Sureya Pasha relate more appropriately to the years of World War I than to the preceding era where the interrogation in the novel occurs. Mehmed Sureya Pasha emerges in the Armenian Genocide literature as a representative of the post-Genocide Turkish worldview and not a cliché murderer.

Oshagan continues to develop Turkish characters of different walks of life and different views. Another is Sheikh Sabit, totally different than Mehmed Sureya Pasha. He is the living synthesis of "our reminiscence of the Janissaries<sup>39</sup>—their features and atrocities—and the semisavage nomadic tribes of Asia and Africa" (III, 338).

Oshagan writes pages analyzing the Turkish character. He discusses the genetic elements that have dictated the drive for looting and murdering for centuries. He talks about patterns of behavior, which, he believes, are the result of religious determinants. His analysis aims to demonstrate the criminal in the making. "There exist not only criminal people but also criminal races," Oshagan formulates.<sup>40</sup> He exemplifies this conviction throughout *Remnants*, by citing the negative attitude of Turkish characters vis-à-vis Armenians. No matter how different the Turkish characters may be, Oshagan asserts, they all agree in their perception of the Armenian cause. An illiterate vulgar prison guard in *Remnants* does not have the sophistication of Mehmed Sureya Pasha's ideas, but he knows one thing: "Armenians were stupid to yearn for freedom, and to be discontented with the paradise that is theirs to enjoy" (III, 432). The reason to kill Armenians, then, is to teach them to appreciate what they have. Another example of negative attitude is exposed in an orphanage where young Armenian children were being raised as Turks. A Turkish nurse in charge of breast-feeding the baby orphans thought of an unusual way to satisfy her hatred for Armenians. She wet her nipple with poison when feeding an Armenian baby. However, she was poisoned herself, "and that was her reward" (II, 417).

The novel moves very slowly with very little action. But Oshagan



does not care: "Do not expect a silly pasha to constantly brandish his sword left and right, spit and curse, and shout orders to kill. This is the external, the single-faceted moving action" (III, 67). What is important for Oshagan is how the pasha thinks. What are the roots of that thought? What is the motivation behind that thought which leads to action, which creates a particular perception of the Armenians, and which develops into a pattern of behavior against them?

In general, the individual Turkish characters Oshagan paints are enemies of the Armenian people. In very rare instances does one come across a positive note or a favorable remark about an amiable Turk. He makes many generalizations and does much stereotyping. For example, he writes: "The old proverb was right to attach rape to the right arm of the Turk and looting to his left" (II, 18). Or: "The Turk was more beautiful when he was slaughtering" (II, 511). And the same idea again: "The Turk has never been so heroically beautiful with an internal fire burning in him as when he beats a prisoner, a woman, a child. No nation has experienced that heavenly pleasure as the Turkish nation has while witnessing the beating of infidels" (II, 47). The Turkish policeman, he writes, is a miserable creature, scorned by the Turkish citizens and insulted and beaten by higher-ranking officers. This character changes completely when he is in an Armenian village. There he becomes a tyrant superior, the symbol of Turkish rule (I, 526). Or: "Besides sex, there is only blood that arouses the Turk" (I, 506).

The word "Turk" for Oshagan is often not a reference to a nationality; it is a qualifying adjective and a specific predicament: "In each one of his swearings, colorful, unique, and strong, he puts a large piece of Turkishness and corruption" (I, 514). He continues: "Traces of immense hatred, exceptionally Turkish, began to form on his face" (I, 531). Or: "Pitilessness and Turkishness filled the atmosphere" (I, 533). Or: "His words were Turk, that is with the Turkishness of the five-century empire, mixed with the breath of 300,000 slaughtered Armenian victims" (I, 554).

In a long passage that interrupts the narrative, Oshagan talks about the massacres of 1915. The passage presents one of the rare instances in *Mnats'ordats'* where Oshagan describes the massacres that he intended to cover in the last part of his novel. Here, he draws a parallel between the practice of violence in Turkey before and after World War I in an apparent reply to some European apologists who maintained that the Armenian Catastrophe was an outgrowth of the war situation. In it he uses the word "Turk" as a descriptive, qualifying adjective:

It was not the outbreak of war which made the Turks so much Turk. Before or after the war, it has been the same. The soldier, the volunteer, the layman, the clergy, with an inexplicable smile on their face, would twist the tortured, half-dead Armenian prisoner's head and shamelessly ask him "Is your wife pretty?" . . . I repeat. This is not an outcome of war psychology. . . . They raped young women in front of their ropebound husbands. They forced women to watch to the last moment the slaughtering of their husbands. While two Turks would hold the man down, with his face sweeping the ground, others would unhurriedly sharpen their knives; then they would try the knives against the neck of the man. The execution would begin. They would push the knife very slowly, twisting like a screw, passing the skin then cutting the veins, one by one; they would pause here to prolong the agony, before tearing the larynx apart. The deep, inexplicable ugliness of all this! I stress these because the world confuses the massacres with the passion of violence. The world thinks of an irresponsible criminal psychology when visualizing the Turks engaged in murder (II, 381).

Oshagan, himself, is not able to explain what connotation the adjective Turk has for him, not even by the end of his third volume: "Turkishness translates into Turkishness without explanation," he states: "In these instances, the Turk is the animal outlined by our historians of a thousand years ago, but they gave no explanations either. He kills for not being able to do something else" (III, 614 [underlined by Oshagan]).

Not one Armenian writer has put so much emphasis upon the role and the instrumentality of the Turk with respect to the Armenian Tragedy. *Remnants* is the repository of an array of responses to genocide expressed by the author and by the Armenian characters. In the majority of cases, the vantage point is the agency of the enemy. Oshagan's perception of the Turkish role in the Armenian Genocide is evident also in *Panorama*, especially the chapters dedicated to the writers who recorded the Catastrophe.

### *Armenian Characters Responding to Catastrophe*

Catastrophe is two-sided; one side inflicts the violence, the other side is inflicted. In the Genocide of 1915 Armenians and Turks are the actors, and the genocide literature should reflect the perceptions and responses of both. It should disclose the roots of centuries-old hatred and mutual intolerance that surface in everyday life in the form of superstitious prejudice. For example, Armenian villagers "consider the water desecrated if a Turk has bathed in it" (I, 521). The Armenian genocide literature should expose the "centuries-old contempt of Turks toward Armenians, which has turned green by the government's venom. It has become a new hatred that has racial roots and will subside only by the conquest of Asia" (II, 378).

Oshagan takes upon himself the task of demonstrating various ways that Armenians perceive catastrophe: "A couple of books [parts] of this novel shall demonstrate the variations of our thought on our tragedy. It is my duty to give the origin of half a century of evolution till its tragic end" (II, 387). He looks inward and outward in the quest for clues to explain the Catastrophe. He attributes the failure of Armenian resistance to the enormity of the Turkish yoke. He believes the Armenian armed struggle failed not because they were incapable of fighting but because Turks were like a sea engulfing an island of Armenians. Oshagan writes this about the Armenian revolutionary movement which was unleashed in the 1880s: "We may call these revolutionists, who believed in the ideology of freedom, and who sacrificed their lives for it, madmen or criminals. That is because we are seeking a scapegoat to blame for the Catastrophe. But those who will write the history of our revolution, should stop and think about the thoughts and ideas of these men" (II, 387).

Oshagan favors the ideology of the revolutionists. He emphasizes the significance of that movement as a crucial phase in recent Armenian history. "In the 1900s, *k'omit'a* [Oshagan uses a name the Turks had given to the Armenian political activists and revolutionists] is neither a concept nor a fairy tale. It is our mysticism, which arms our chosen ones, but it is not understood by the masses" (III, 37). He argues against those who believed that if Armenians had not taken arms in resistance, they would not have been massacred. "The [Catastrophe of] 1915 would not have been possible if we had less of these benefactors [he refers to the village priest who made up the list of 'suspicious' men in the village and turned it over to the Turkish commander]. There is a lot we need to say not to the Turks but to ourselves in particular" (II, 389). The issue of having many traitors certainly upsets and troubles the author. He blames them for the calamities that befell the Armenians under Ottoman rule, and at the same time he seeks the roots of this phenomenon: "No nation, in our times, has given birth to so many traitors. . . . During the massacres of 1896, the Turks destroyed the strength of our morale. . . . We learned to hate our enemies, but more than that we learned to hate each other. Now, on top of this add the centuries of calamities and the ruinous thoughts that our history transmitted to us. Then, you will see the pleasure of the Turks when taking advantage of our decadence" (II, 407-408).

In characterizing the Armenians, he juxtaposes the revolutionary thinker, who endangers his life for the liberation of the Armenian nation, with the "loyal" citizens of the Empire. The latter, representing the majority, have learned to please the Turks. Even though these



Armenians have not severed their ties with the church and the community, they live and think like Turks (III, 203). Suk'ias Efendi is one of these characters very similar to Arp'iar Arp'iarian's Hayrapet Efendi in *Karmir zhamuts'*. Suk'ias Efendi knows how to flatter Turkish officials and win a favor. He believes that the only choice for Armenians in the Empire is to bend over backward for the Turks and stay away from their wrath. Oshagan argues that "It is wrong to sit in Paris or New York, in the twentieth century and judge our people. [You should] put them in their own land, at least fifty years earlier; then you will be modest in poeticizing its weaknesses" (III, 202).

In addition to his effort to reflect the Turkish view and motivations, Oshagan turns inward and tries to portray the reactions of the victims, their perception, and their psychology. He believes that every person in the novel of genocide deserves character development regardless of his or her role in the plot. "The more people with a certain measure of characterization appear [in the novel] the more facets from the spirit of our nation we will be able to salvage."<sup>41</sup> Oshagan believes this, but he strongly criticizes authors like Surēn Partevian who portray only the ugly facets of the victims' psyche. He agrees that an author should not hesitate to picture the reality no matter how hideous it is. He does not deny the validity and plausibility of the lowly actions committed by Partevian's protagonists: "It is the frequency of these actions that makes a book a little suspicious, and one wonders why this nihilistic psychology. . . . And a book like that is a sin for our literature."<sup>42</sup>

Based upon that conviction, Oshagan populates his novel with hundreds of Armenian characters from all walks of life. Each one contributes to the heavily textured representation of Armenian life which spanned a period after the massacres and persecutions of the 1890s to the Genocide of 1915. Each one of these characters brings his or her own understanding of the Armenian tragedy and the response to it.

Hachi Art'in, the rich, articulate, and well-respected father of the Nalbandents' family, "did not fear the Turks, who tried to reciprocate their beatings from the Christians [Russians and Greeks] on the Armenians" (I, 68). This statement is loaded with political implications regarding Ottoman policies toward the minorities in the Empire.

Father Ōhan, the priest, and Art'in Varzhapet, the teacher, do everything they can to allay the anger of the Turkish commander when Serop' Agha, the commander's friend and informer, is assassinated. The danger of annihilation hangs over the entire village. The priest uses his skill to flatter the Turk, and, in the meantime, warns the villagers not to resist the persecutions. The teacher writes a petition

to the government, and the majority of the villagers sign it, begging for the mercy of the Sublime Porte avowing that "There is no salvation for Armenians outside Turkey." Oshagan remarks that the teacher was repeating a motto formulated by Hambardz'um Alajajian, an Armenian publicist, in an editorial in *P'unj* more than a decade before as a response to the massacres of 1896 (II, 363). Without comment, Oshagan records the feelings of the majority of the village people, sentiments he maintains are shared by many in the Empire, that no matter how brutal the yoke, without Turkish sovereignty Armenians could not survive.

The young Mat'ik Mēlik'khanian who was interrogated is an Armenian freedom fighter. Soghom meets him in prison and is impressed by his high spirit. Mat'ik awaits his execution, and, despite the ordeal of his torture and the imminent death, "He is still laughing and throwing jokes through his broken teeth. . . . He is happy because fate has finally brought his end near. [This is] indescribable bliss, which our ancient martyrs experienced, when, kneeling under the sword, they made haste to die sooner" (III, 153). Oshagan draws a parallel between the enthusiasm of becoming a martyr in the ancient times and at present. The enthusiasm is the same; only the motive and the goal have changed.

The unnamed Armenian prelate of Brusa is a loyal servant of the government, a conservative thinker and the embodiment of an Armenian religious leader characterized and ridiculed by Mehmed Sureya Pasha. The impact of persecutions, unleashed by the government under the pretext of Serop's murder, had reached the Armenian prelacy of Brusa. The prelate had to take extra steps of precaution to ward off the danger. He contemplates the situation and draws conclusions, based, significantly, on the Bible, still the source of his knowledge and the key to his interpretation of the imminent catastrophe: "[The Armenian] national affairs are in a very delicate state. . . . We ruined our peace and comfort with our mistakes. . . . We should be cautious and especially flexible not to stir their fanaticism. God has certainly determined everything with His invincible will . . . blessed be God's will" (III, 490, 492).

Oshagan typifies the Armenian religious leaders in terms of their response to Turkish oppression. The pattern is what Mehmed Sureya Pasha had defined: preaching obedience to fate and to God's will, eulogizing martyrdom for the sake of Christianity.

In his commentary on Aram Antonian's genocide literature, Oshagan traces the change of thoughts in the Armenian clerical leadership.

In the 1800s an Imperial decree was able to wipe out our entire leadership. Our Patriarch in those days, would mourn over the event. By offering sacrifices, he would try to appease God's wrath, which had come to them through the decree as a punishment for our immense sins. In the 1900s, again an Imperial decree was able to turn the Armenian population of a prosperous city into ashes within 24 hours. Neither the Armenian Patriarch nor the intelligentsia explained the cause of the event blaming the sins we committed. Thus this resulted in an acute misunderstanding between Turks and Armenians. The Turks presented us as the enemy of the government with no adequate reason.<sup>43</sup>

The prelate in *Remnants* living in the 1900s acted according to Oshagan's definition of reaction in the 1800s. Obviously, the change of outlook evident in the response of the Armenian prelate cited above was not widespread. Especially the less educated, more conservative leadership still adhered to what was handed down by their predecessors.

Soghom's mother is an interesting figure in the narrative. Her name is never mentioned. Perhaps Oshagan does not deem it necessary to give her a name, or perhaps peasant women were not mentioned by name but by their relation to some man. To this effect, she is either referred to as *Soghoments' knik* (the woman in Soghoments' family) or *Soghomin mayrë* (Soghom's mother). She appears only at the end of the third volume, but her sentiments, her behavior, and most significantly, her response to the Armenian Tragedy make her an important element in the novel. She learns about her son's possible acquittal. Exhilarated by the news, she runs to the prelate for advice on how to expedite her son's freedom. But when she learns about the conditions of his pardon, she is stunned. She cannot believe that her son would relinquish his faith and convert to Islam in order to gain freedom. Oshagan intervenes here to explain: "The truth is that a voluntary or a forced death causes ten times less pain to the survivors than Turkification" (III, 499). The reason, Oshagan maintains, is not profound devotion of Armenians to Christianity, but that Armenians, especially those living in closed communities with very limited relationship with the Turks, had built a Turkish stereotype in their minds, which consisted of "the miserable vendors in the Armenian quarters. As to the Beys and Pashas, they belong to the fairy tales" (III, 50). Oshagan's reasonings imply that if Armenians had been in touch with the Turks and had known their upper classes well, conversion to Islam and Turkification would not have sounded so outrageous. For these isolated Armenians "Turkification was tantamount to death with no return . . . and Soghom was dead in this world . . . more importantly, dead for the world beyond" (III, 500). Oshagan explains that Armenians faithful to traditional beliefs lived the deprivation, pain, and suffering of this world in the hope of a better life beyond death.



Christianity had taught them so, and the priest had repeated it every Sunday in his sermon. Turkification meant trading life in heaven for a better life on earth, and for Soghom's mother that was inconceivable. She had brought up her children with unspeakable pain and misery in the hope of reunifying the family with her dead husband in heaven. Now she was confronted with a difficult choice: should her son convert to Islam or die on the gallows? The dilemma eventually drove the poor woman insane. She collapsed under the lethal blows of intrigue and brutality. This way Oshagan saved himself and the woman the trauma of making that difficult choice. The impact of the Armenian Tragedy paralyzed the woman's mental faculty.

Soghom's incarceration in Constantinople and his own experience with Turkish prisons offer Oshagan the opportunity for a realistic description of the sinister Turkish prison—filthy, unlivable, and pest-infested. The description stands out as the strongest condemnation of Turkish justice:

Torture is an art here, unsurpassed anywhere in the world; life is a contest of bestiality between the prison guards and the inmates. Prisoners—thieves, murderers, rapists—rob each other of the last drop of human dignity. . . . Prison officers are experts in making the prisoners talk and confess to their "crimes" or inform on a "conspiracy" going on in the prison. . . . In this kingdom of evil, a few Turkish victims of the regime, deprived of all their rights, are condemned to death by starvation. . . . There are a few Armenians, some common peasants, accused of anti-government revolutionary activities. They drag their chains and hope for a fair trial to prove their innocence (III, 125-132).

#### *Foreign Elements, Influences, and Intervention in Armeno-Turkish Relations*

Oshagan had dedicated the *Imperial Song of Triumph* to the Kaiser because he was convinced that the German government had an important role in planning and implementing the Armenian massacres, but the stories in the series did not cater to the development of the theme. It is in *Remnants* that references to German conspiracy occur: "[The Genocide of 1915] is a German concept, but, of course, that is the new Turkish idea as well. [The Armenian Genocide is] a paramount reproach thrown at the mentor's face" (III, 83). Oshagan does not blame the Germans alone, convinced that the indifference of other European nations contributed greatly to the success of anti-Armenian Ottoman policy. Portraying the Turkish mob's enthusiastic participation in the harassment and murder, Oshagan calls them "the slayers" (*ktrtoghner* in Armenian): "[This is] a catastrophic word," he says, "which we learned to spell as a child; we came to feel it in our teen years, and

we lived it a quarter of a century. [It is a word] other nations do not understand, and this ignorance destroyed our cause" (II, 380).

The issue of the indifference of European nations is stressed several times throughout the novel. He explains once that other nations did not know the Turk, could not understand the extent of Turkish atrocity. To know them, he maintains, "seeing them is not enough. One should feel them. And the only way is captivity. Many Europeans, French and British, experienced that captivity imposed upon them by the Turks in Iraq and Cilicia. They should have written their memoirs. Then the world would understand the Armenian Tragedy" (III, 13). Here again is revealed an important aspect of Oshagan's struggle to digest the Catastrophe: to know the Turks is to understand the Catastrophe. But besides this issue, he raises the question of the indifference of European nations. He blames them for not intervening. He believes that they could have stopped the atrocities if only they had tried.

#### *Monotony of Genocide Literature*

According to Oshagan, genocide literature can be monotonous. Horror stories or mournful lamentations, in repetition after repetition become tiresome reading. One solution, he suggests in his commentary on Surēn Partevian's literature of atrocity, is to add atmosphere to the plot. Partevian's *K'ayk'ayum* (Destruction) he says, stands out among his other works because characters are drawn against a background of customs and traditions which enriches the picture and endows it with life and color.<sup>44</sup>

Of Aram Antonian's major work, *In Those Dark Days*, he mentions that the characterization of the victims saves it from becoming a boring cliché. The men and women in this collection have identifiable human qualities and feelings of love, hatred, jealousy, frustration, and self-centered instincts. He has praise for Antonian's use of flashbacks of memories pertinent to the current experience, which bring to life Armenian popular customs, ancient beliefs, and superstitions and make the stories more interesting.<sup>45</sup> These added dimensions help the reader to understand certain reactions and behaviors—the end result being the better understanding of public responses to catastrophe.

Oshagan applies these concerns to his own writing. He paints a background for every scene with detailed descriptions of people and places. If the tight framework of the short stories in *Imperial Song of Triumph* did not give him this freedom, the genre of the novel provided him with abundant opportunities. Unfortunately he is trapped in exaggeration. He interrupts the narrative, begins with a long aside, abandons the theme at hand, and engages in uncontrolled outpourings

of thoughts and reminiscences. He justifies it all by saying, "The images in our minds do not abide by the rules that we have made for a book" (II, 149). He follows the flight of his imagination and argues against any rule that would limit an artist's fancy and impose any framework of time or space on the narrative: "It is unfortunate if a novelist refrains from recording memories of past incidents for the sake of remaining in the limits of the present" (III, 347). Abiding by the rules when writing a novel, he comments, is tantamount to wishing to please the reader. "I have not lost hope for the day when a writer will liberate himself from the humiliation of serving others and will pour out his thoughts abundant and naked" (III, 72). So let the reader think whatever he wishes; the best of novelists, Oshagan maintains, could not possibly picture in a few hundred pages the tragedy of a single life that he has witnessed.

The novel is replete with deviations. Long, detailed descriptions, flashbacks, an intrusive story smack in the middle of another. A deluge of excessive details and reminiscences makes the reading difficult. "Of course, the novel has its rules which deny such deviations," he admits (III, 67). But he is justified, and explains his method, intentions, and style several times in Volume X of *Panorama*. In a 91-line footnote, he discusses the subject of deviations from the main subject, long paragraphs, and lengthy parenthetical remarks or footnotes in a novel. He cites the example of Marcel Proust, who "sometimes opens a parenthesis of a few pages long." In that same footnote, he refers to James Joyce, whom he calls a revolutionary:

Joyce . . . has gone beyond the rules of clarity and with no hesitation, without going to a new paragraph or using conventional signs [of punctuation] writes the novel. The epilogue in *Odyssey*<sup>46</sup> runs 200 pages in one paragraph, without a comma or a stop—newly devised means to lead the unintelligent. The ancient manuscripts ignored all that. The clever reader, after some exercise, would become familiar with the text and would benefit from a more careful reading and a better understanding of the text.<sup>47</sup>

His obvious purpose, he says several times, is not to create a novel conventional in form and concept—characters in action, a specific plot, a mystery, and a suspense leading to a solution. He aims to capture the voice of the tortured and the torturer, "to bring the spirit of a land into style"<sup>48</sup> (III, 78).

#### CONCLUSION

Among the first-generation writers of Genocide Oshagan has the last word on the Armenian Tragedy. And he is the most complex.



Krikor Beledian correctly stated that "Oshagan finishes up, fulfills, and completes the entire Western Armenian literature whose novel he writes because he is its only novelist."<sup>49</sup>

Writing about the Western Armenian literature produced before the Catastrophe in *Panorama*, and portraying life before the Catastrophe in *Remnants*, Oshagan strove to complete the novel of the pre-Genocide era. He said everything that could have been said. But, the biggest challenge of his life was how to write about the genocide literature and how to compose genocide literature. A wild, violent, and unmanageable torrent separated pre-Genocide and post-Genocide writings. It meant fighting uncontrollable emotions, trying to give shape to chaos. Before reaching a new beginning, before writing about life after genocide, Oshagan had to confront the Catastrophe, digest it, and explain it. He had to acknowledge and understand the reality of an end which made time stop.

Oshagan strove all his life to find the way to understand that end in order to make possible a new beginning. He looked to the past, but did not find the guiding light. He searched for a genre most suitable for genocide literature, ruled out the genre of lamentation and the glorification of the loss, devices to which many writers and poets had resorted to pull through the agony of writing the story of the Armenian Genocide. He would certainly have agreed with Mintz: "A national literature that makes no discriminations and absorbs every negative event into the rhetoric of absolute catastrophe, that rushes to idealize and beautify what was destroyed, that takes off into the heavens of inflated ornamental language—this is not a national literature that will serve the nation."<sup>50</sup>

Oshagan, too, felt deeply the shattering of the old tools handed down by his predecessors to explain catastrophe. Desperately, he wrote: "The generation of the Constitution had handed us down no oracles to face up to such unplaceable acts. That is what also makes possible the destruction of our soul."<sup>51</sup> He took upon himself the difficult task of devising that "oracle." When he wrote those lines, he was already engaged in writing *Remnants*, the novel of the Catastrophe. But *Remnants* was never finished.

Nichanian's suggestion based on Oshagan's own explanation is that he did not go on with his novel because of a combination of nervous collapse, the subject of death as a deterrent, and the supercilious attitude of a new generation of Armenian writers in Paris. In fact, further evidence of Oshagan's deteriorated health as a cause preventing him from working on his novel is found in his own words: "*Remnants* has cost Oshagan's life. That work has been the cause of his illness."<sup>52</sup> He does go on to say, however, that Proust who suffered

the fate of his work, nevertheless did not abandon it. I agree with Nichanian that Oshagan's explanations are questionable and suggest a hypothesis: Oshagan composed the *Imperial Song of Triumph* when he had not yet experienced the dispersion. He wrote the stories when he was still in Constantinople, in his native environment, as was the case for Esayan when she wrote *Amidst the Ruins*.<sup>53</sup> *Remnants* was conceived in the diaspora when Oshagan lived with the evidence of the annihilation of at least half the nation and the dispersion of the survivors. Oshagan was functioning as an uprooted plant in an alien soil. Writing about the source of that evil involved great pain and required a tremendous amount of work and research. "To portray the Catastrophe from every respect, only talent and imagination are not enough," Oshagan confesses. "A great deal of research should be done to acquire information on the demography of the place; many memoirs and narratives which relate to the customs, traditions, and the preceding events should be read."<sup>54</sup> Besides the huge amount of work involved, Oshagan had set high standards for himself and the novel of his dreams which he simply was not able to meet.

No one can tell what the unwritten part of the novel would have added to the legacy of Armenian genocide literature. Oshagan indicated that the third and last part of the novel was to encompass a particular story of the massacres and deportations related to him by a survivor from his own native village. His narrative aimed to reinstate the true meanings of murder, war, and massacres, because

After 1918, instead of correcting the delirium of the past generations, the Germans found a way to legalize and nationalize these criminal instincts. In 1930, every German, every Italian believed that war was the best thing for humanity. The last volume of *Remnants* was going to demand that the world take a decisive position against every one, individual or collective, to avenge murder by murder. If at least the hands, let alone the heads, of a few thousand Turks were cut, the post-1939 world would not have to mourn such tragedies within Europe's most cultured centers.<sup>55</sup>

It is appropriate to end this paper with Oshagan's outreach to the world to take a position against the perpetrators of the Armenian Genocide. It was not an urge for revenge but an unselfish motive that generated his appeal: let the world learn a lesson from the past and not repeat it again.

## NOTES

1. K. Beledian, *H. Oshagan, K'nnadatē* (H. Oshagan, the Critic), *Bagin*, 1-2 (Jan.-Feb. 1984), 110.
2. Karekin Sarkissian, Catholicos of the See of Cilicia, in a preface writes: "Oshagan focuses on the psychology of the Turks and the terrible wound they have cut open in the life of Armenians" (in Hagop Oshagan, *Hamapatker Arewmtahay Grakanut'ean* [Panorama of Western Armenian Literature], Vol. X [Antelias, Lebanon: Armenian Catholicosate of Cilicia Press, 1982] p. j).
3. Oshagan's first stories and reviews are signed with this name.
4. Hagop Oshagan, *Erker* (Works), St. Kurtikian, ed. (Erevan: Sovetakan Grogh Press, 1979), p. 3.
5. Hagop Oshagan, *Mnats'ordats'* (Remnants), Vol. II (Cairo: Husaber Press, 1933), p. 316.
6. Hagop Oshagan, *Kayserakan Haghtergut'iwn* (Imperial Song of Triumph), Boghos Snpian, ed. (Beirut: Altapress, 1983).
7. Hagop Oshagan, *Namakani* (Letters), Vol. 1 (Beirut: Altapress, 1983), p. 27.
8. Marc Nishanian, "The Style of Violence," *Armenian Review*, 38, 1-149 (1985), 7-8.
9. Nishanian cites these explanations in "The Style of Violence" as possible answers to the enigma: (1) Oshagan had a nervous breakdown in 1934, which prevented him from writing; (2) writing about death for Oshagan was tantamount to walking straight into death; and (3) he was so upset about the attitude toward him of the "Paris Boys" clique, that he simply lost the stamina to write. Incidentally, the Paris boys (*P'arizi tghak'ē*), as Oshagan called them, were a group of young Armenian writers, mostly orphans of the 1915 massacres adrift in an alien land. The literature they produced was a reflection of their pain, deprivation, and longing, but at the same time it was a rebellion against and a contempt for Armenian traditional values and the older generation of writers, particularly Oshagan. They published the periodical *Menk'* (We), which, although short-lived (only 5 issues published between 1931 and 1934), is considered a phenomenon in recent Armenian literary history.
10. Oshagan, *Erker*, p. 7.
11. Oshagan, *Kayserakan Haght'ergut'iwn* (Imperial Song of Triumph). Hereafter, page numbers in parentheses are references to this publication.
12. T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in *Critical Theory Since Plato*, Hazard Adams, ed. (New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Atlanta: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1971), p. 784.
13. Oshagan, *Panorama*, Vol. IX (1980), pp. 261-262.
14. B. Tashian, *Mayrineru Shuk'in Tak: Grakan Zruys' H. Oshagani Het* (In the Shade of the Cedars: A Literary Interview with H. Oshagan) (Beirut: Altapress, 1983), p. 19.
15. Quotation and analysis of authenticity and circumstances in Kevork K. Bardakjian, *Hitler and the Armenian Genocide*, Zoryan Institute Special Report 3 (Cambridge, Mass.: The Zoryan Institute, 1985).
16. Zapēl Esayan, *Awerakneru mēj* (Amidst the Ruins) (Beirut: Etvan Press, 1957), p. 221.
17. Lawrence L. Langer, *The Holocaust and Literary Imagination*, (New Haven, Conn., and London: Yale University Press, 1975), p. 11.
18. *Ibid.*
19. Alan Mintz, *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature*, (New York, N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1984), p. 184.
20. See "The Revenge" in *Imperial Song of Triumph*, p. 44.
21. In "The Style of Violence," Nishanian explains that in Armenian *Mnats'ordats'*



also means Paralipomènes (what remains to be said after the historical books, in the Greek version of the Old Testament)" (p. 7 n. 17). Which meaning Oshagan meant is not clear. Did he have the spiritual salvation of the "remnants" of the Armenian nation—the survivors of the massacres—in mind (as he explains in *In the Shade of the Cedars*)? Did he intend to write about the crucifixion of the Armenian people, as the Paralipoménon of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ? Or, was it his intention to leave it equivocal?

22. Tashian, *In the Shade of the Cedars: A Literary Interview with H. Oshagan*, pp. 13-14.

23. *Remnants* was published by Husaber Press, Cairo, in 3 volumes: Vol. I in 1932 and Vols. II and III in 1933. All volume and page references are to this edition.

24. "M" is a reference to *Mnats'ordats'* (Oshagan, *Letters*, p. 59).

25. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

26. *Ibid.*

27. *In the Shade of the Cedars*, p. 20.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

29. Oshagan uses this style, particularly in the first two volumes of *Remnants*. He does not allow his characters to do the talking. They express themselves in exclamations, unconnected words, short sentences. Oshagan is the speaker. He narrates the views of his characters, how they feel and what they intend to say. He interferes in their conversations to express his own comments on a similar event. If one eliminates all the words expressed by the characters in the novel, the narrative will not suffer at all. But to do the reverse and try to read only the conversation that goes on between the characters would reduce the novel to a few pages of disconnected expressions.

30. *In the Shade of the Cedars*, p. 14.

31. Oshagan, *Panorama*, IX, 264.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 278.

33. *Ibid.*, X, 8-9.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

35. *Remnants*, II, 392.

36. *Panorama*, IX, 281.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 290.

38. Oshagan refers to a character in *Remnants* named Mēlik'khanian. His later novel *Mat'ik Mēlik'khanian* portrays the heroic saga of this same revolutionary activist. It is not clear, therefore, whether the variation Mēlik'eanents' is a spelling error or a deliberate reference to a real person.

39. The organization of Janissaries (Yeniçeri in Turkish, meaning new army) was initiated by the Ottoman Sultan in the fourteenth century. They were the primary guardians of the Sultan's throne, his eyes and ears in the Empire. Gradually they grew into an independent entity, actually dictating the Sultan's moves and controlling the Empire. The terror they spread in the country and the atrocities they committed gained them the reputation of ferocious exploiters and executioners. It was not until 1826 that Sultan Mahmud II finally disbanded them.

40. *Panorama*, IX, 271.

41. *In the Shade of the Cedars*, p. 19.

42. Oshagan, *Panorama*, VII (1968), 378-379.

43. *Ibid.*, IX, 277-278.

44. *Ibid.*, VII, 389.

45. *Ibid.*, IX, 262.

46. Oshagan has confused the title of Joyce's novel *Ulysses* with the *Odyssey*, Homer's novel about Ulysses. Joyce had chosen the title *Ulysses* for the parallelism of characters and experiences of Homer's hero and his own protagonist.

47. *Panorama*, X, 208.

48. I have translated the Armenian *och* into "style," but, I should admit, the English word does not readily lend to the connotation Oshagan intended. The word *och* has a much deeper meaning for Oshagan than its usual denotation. Nichanian's "The Style of Violence" intends to explain this word in a complicated passage by Oshagan which ends: "And while the catastrophe is style and temperament for our historians, it is only a theme, subject to literary development, for our modern writers." A comparison of the usage of the word "style" in these two contexts suggests that Oshagan intended not to thematize the Armenian spirit in his novel but to make the Armenian spirit the style of the novel.

49. Beledian, *H. Oshagan, the Critic*, p. 111.

50. Mintz, *Hurban*, p. 118.

51. Oshagan, *Panorama*, VII, 353-354. For an in-depth analysis of this statement in the context of a larger paragraph, see Nichanian, "The Style of Violence," pp. 1-26.

52. *In the Shade of the Cedars*, p. 10.

53. A collection of nonfiction essays which embody Zapel Esayan's confrontation with the Cilician massacres in 1909.

54. *In the Shade of the Cedars*, p. 16.

55. Oshagan, *Panorama*, IX, 285n.