

ALISHAN, LEONARDO (1951–2005) Iranian American writer, poet, and literary critic of Armenian descent. He writes in English and Persian. He was born to Armenian parents in Tehran and came to America in 1973 to pursue his higher education. For a long time he taught Persian literature and comparative literature at the University of Utah, Salt Lake City.

He has participated in numerous conferences including the meetings of the Middle East Studies Association, the Southern Comparative Literature Association, Armenian Studies Association, the American Oriental Society, and the Center for Iranian Research and Analysis where he has presented papers on subjects ranging from classical Persian and Armenian literature to contemporary literary studies in comparative literature. He has been invited for guest lectures and seminars to a number of academic institutions, among them the University of California at Berkeley, University of British Columbia, University of Chicago, University of Texas, Columbia University, New York University, and the University of Armenia at Yerevan.

For Iranian Americans, he is a sought-after poet and critic who knows Persian poetry from ancient times to the present and who can quote an obscure Persian poet of the past and pinpoint the cultural, mythological, and Islamic elements in the piece. He is in love with his birthplace Iran, especially the Iran of yesteryears, which he compares to a beautiful woman in her youth shining like a morning star ("I Saw Susa," 2003). He has translated into English a number of contemporary Persian poems by Nima Yushij, Mehdi Akhavan-Sales, and Ahmad Shamlu among them.

He is known in American literature as the sensitive soul whose heart goes for all human sufferings, whose poetry has won him prestigious awards—Academy of American Poets Award (1977), New England Poetry Club's Daniel Varujan Award (1981), Lullwater Review Poetry Prize (2002), People Before Profits Poetry Prize (2003)—who has mastered the Japanese genres of haiku, senryu, and tanka and can create in those forms, new to many, by skillfully blending his most personal sentiments, his culture, and his heritage. He is a humanitarian. He dreams of sewing all the small and big flags of the small and big nations "into the biggest blanket and tent."

For the Armenian American literature, Alishan is that third-generation survivor of the genocide who lives gripped by the nightmare of genocide, struggling in vain to tell the world the story of that colossal tragedy, his grandmother's story. His strongest literary creations are about his "Granny" and bearing witness to her agony. He shares her agony; he is a part of it. "Gayané, the living martyr" appears in his poetry and fiction in the statue of Mary, with granny's face, burning in a church in Van where Armenians are locked and set on fire by the Turkish persecutors ("Ecce Homo," 2000). She appears as a mad woman who sees Turkish horsemen around her deathbed in a mental hospital in London ("An Exercise on a Genre for the Genocide and Exorcisms," 1992). She is a ladybug living on the Persian rug in his bedroom talking to him, nagging on him why he is so inept to tell the world her story and about the tragedy that befell her nation.

("The Lady-Bug and the Persian Rug," 1994). She governs his life and his emotions, his dreams and his waking thoughts. It is through her that Alishan sees the Armenian suffering from the genocide.

Alishan strives to find that proper means of expression for best picturing the inexplicable truth of genocide. "There is no proper genre for giving an artistic expression to the genocide," he complains. "[T]he artist is caught between serving his art and convincing people of his own people's collective catastrophe. He plays both the role of the detached artist and the passionate propagandist. Consequently, there is a chaotic confusion of genres and roles, resulting in a frustrated failure."

His poetry, fiction, and essays are published widely in national and international journals. He has published two collections of poetry, *Dancing Barefoot on Broken Glass* (1991) and *Through a Dewdrop* (2000). (See also Armenian American Literature, Armenian Genocide)

Rubina Peroomian