

THE ARMENIAN ENCLAVE ON CAVANAUGH STREET: SOCIAL HISTORY AND THE MYSTERY NOVEL

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It all started with the death of his wife Elizabeth. Till that time, Gregor Demarkian had been employed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, chasing serial killers from Florida to Oregon to Massachusetts and back again. He did his job well; he established and then headed the Department of Behavioral Sciences; it was even rumored that he might be a possible candidate for the directorship of the Bureau itself. But then Gregor cut his own exalted career short: he had come to hate his job on account of the nightmare visions of the poor victims whose murder he had investigated, and Elizabeth's slow and painful death from cancer psychologically paralyzed him. Thus Gregor retired from Washington D.C. to the house he had inherited from his mother on Cavanaugh Street downtown Philadelphia, the house in which he was born. He had seen enough suffering and crime and wanted to be left alone with his private pain, but the world did not oblige him. And when the call and challenge come to the private man to be involved once more in righting the wrongs of this world, he--in the tradition of the investigator of the classic American detective novel, that "last just man whose integrity is his alienation"¹--leaves his retreat and haven in the Armenian enclave on Cavanaugh Street and becomes involved once more in the quest for justice.

This is the background history of Jane Haddam's private detective, this "Armenian-American Hercule Poirot" as he is known by just about everyone in America, and around whom the novelist has spun a good dozen "holiday" mysteries.²

Ms. Haddam certainly knows how to tell a good mystery yarn. Hers is a transatlantic version of the world of Agatha Christie; she, too, invites us to parties in isolated mansions, to yachts, country festivals, nursing homes and hospitals, vicarages, gardens and forests. Naturally we meet each time a new murderer, a person whom we

get to know, in whom we become interested, and for whom at the end of the story no punishment can be severe enough. Naturally there is at least one corpse, but at times the murderer leaves a veritable blood bath in his wake. And naturally there is the only true detective whose wit and logic and cunning and intelligence and scientific know-how will uncover the most intricately planned crime. We as armchair sleuths can join him, for we share his knowledge of facts; if our less developed detective abilities have misled us, we, along with the cast of the novel, are invited to just one more reunion in which this modern *deus ex machina* unravels the mystery.³ It is a strangely comforting and reassuring world over which Gregor, the Armenian-American, watches.

Like many of his American detective compatriots, he watches over the conventional and mythical "Great Wrong Place" that George Grella and Tony Hilfer have associated with American crime fiction.⁴ He does so, however, from the safety of his home on Cavanaugh Street to which he can escape, an ethnic Armenian oasis, a place that curiously reminds the reader of the mythical "Great Good Place" of American literature.⁵

What gives then coherence to Jane Haddam's string of mystery novels is not so much Gregor Demarkian, who does not develop as protagonist and whose various exploits are episodic, but the Armenian community on Cavanaugh Street, Gregor's Great Good Place, where people care about each other, where they still know what friendship means. It is a haven for children, widows, the elderly, and the displaced. The local saint, Father Tibor Krikorian, sets the moral tone and example, and his parishioners joyfully listen and emulate. God in his heaven must be very pleased with his Armenians on Cavanaugh Street!

Some of the exploits take our hero away from his home, and we do not see very much of this milieu, while in other episodes he is more involved with the folks on his street. Yet when we look at all the novels together, it becomes obvious that Jane Haddam has written a composite social history of an Armenian community in the diaspora, tailor-made to conform to the laws that govern the conventions of a literary topos, to be sure. What Ms. Haddam has written is not a depiction of all the social and historical facts of the society of her choice, the topos of the Great Good Place cannot accommodate them. Instead we are treated to a strangely whimsical and Dickensian idyll endowed with a heavily ethnic Armenian flavor, a type of social history nevertheless.

Survivors of the genocide who were lucky enough to pass the inspection on Ellis Island created the ghetto of Cavanaugh Street. The subsequent history of their community illustrates the archetypal pattern of any refugee community in America: the first generation denies, the second generation forgets, and the third generation rediscovers its history, its roots, its identity.

Through the lives of these generations that have been living on Cavanaugh Street,

Jane Haddam has created a chronicle of a people. Perhaps realizing such a concern through the conventions of a literary type constitutes a "crime" against the givens of the genre; but be that as it may, this "crime" elevates Ms. Haddam's mysteries above the common lot of detective novels.

There have been other novels that have explored the impact of the genocide on those who survived and their descendants. Carol Edgarian's book *Rise the Euphrates*⁶ especially comes to my mind. Seta, the narrator of the events of the novel and member of the third generation, soon to give birth to her child, probes the fears and shame, the love and hate that bind these generations together in what is basically an alien environment. It is a psychological novel written with great sensitivity and wisdom. Of course, we cannot say the same about Haddam's series of novels. The genre of the mystery novel is not made for the probing of the subtle psychological complexities of the members of any community. Very wisely Haddam simply chronicles; she tells us what happened and shows us the people without trying to analyze and explain the quirky ways of her characters and how their strange behaviour may be related to their personal or collective history. For me one of the most memorable moments in *Rise the Euphrates* occurs when Ani Baboostian, the eighty-nine-year-old survivor of the genocide, shares her "shame" hidden under her flamboyant scarf with the community at the April 24 commemoration service. Superficially Ani resembles any of the eccentric women who live on Cavanaugh Street: "Her vanity showed in the gold and ruby rings she wore on every finger including her thumbs, and the vibrant scarves she wrapped around her neck, this one orange with crimson tulips." Then Ani unties her orange and crimson scarf and raises her chin so that the whole congregation can see

"the letters that covered her from neck to sternum. The tattoos were in the shape of a cross.

"You young ones can't read Turkish," Ani said, her green eyes opened wide.

"Look here, young ones. Look at Ani Baboostian, slave girl. These letters are the names of her owners. These are the ones who violated her. Look now and remember what you see" (pp. 136, 138).

On Cavanaugh Street, the "scarves" of the women are even more flamboyant--only whether they hide any mystery or not nobody cares to find out. But then the uncovering of this type of "mystery" is not the *raison d'être* of Ms. Haddam's mystery series.

Gregor felt little regret when as a young man he exchanged the squalor of the Armenian ghetto on Cavanaugh Street for Harvard and then the FBI. He was an American; his much older brother had fought in the American army and died during World War II. About his Armenian identity? To generations of Armenians their lan-

guage has given identity in the diaspora. Gregor our Armenian-American can barely recognize the letters of the Armenian alphabet and can hardly curse in his mother tongue. No wonder, for we are told that he "did not think of himself as a particularly 'ethnic' man, in spite of the fact that his parents had been immigrants from Armenia (*Stillness*, p. 70). This attitude is typical for the second generation immigrant, sociologists assure us.

His father had died when Gregor was very young. He was fond and close to his mother, the link with his Armenian roots. In *Not a Creature was Stirring*, the earliest novel in the series, we read that when he was a little boy

his mother told him stories about Armenia. Her Armenia wasn't the historical Armenia, because she'd never seen that. She had been born in Alexandria and come to the United States before she was twelve. It was Gregor's grandmother who had been in Yerevan that November of 1915 when the Turks had come. Blood everywhere, horses everywhere, a million and a half dead in less than a year: the stories had come pouring out into the dark of Gregor's room every night when his mother came to put him to bed. Even now, after more than forty years, he could smell the stink of dying. He thought his grandmother must have been a truly great storyteller. Either that, or his mother had a genius for imagination. Whichever it was, he found himself at the age of fifty-five...firmly anchored in the agony of a country he had never seen (p. 21).

In all the novels, this is the only "lengthy" reference to the genocide. It is also the only time that we are told how firmly Gregor is rooted in "the agony of a country"--what this could possibly mean to him in reality, we never see. Perhaps Gregor has forgotten himself, or it has become ambiguous like the "historical" detail about the Turks coming to Yerevan in November of 1915 has become confused as it was transmitted.

As a child, he also encountered the Armenian "Grand Cause": Should they reclaim the land of their fathers? No; he and the members of his community "would simply stay in America and build a Real Armenian Culture, distinct but not separate from the American culture around them." How this was to be accomplished remained a mystery to him, especially since the younger generation was not at all fond of the idea (*Not a Creature*, p. 21).

He has Armenian roots, but it has always been easy for him to assume a complete American identity as student and later with the FBI. Being six-foot-four and having broad shoulders, "he was a modern American man in a camel's-hair topcoat and good cashmere-lined gloves, but he carried the seed of a wild and savage manhood, a masculinity of the steppes", a type of Armenian-Asian identity, his friend and companion Bennis thinks (*Stillness*, p. 57). It is a pity that this "wild manhood" aspect of his character remains so completely suppressed that we never see it.

His roots, though, do go back to the Armenian enclave in Philadelphia. In the early days, he expected to be comfortable anywhere in the United States, "and maybe in Armenia, too, although he had never been in Armenia" (*Baptism*, p. 122). To speculate about the historical reality of an actual Armenia, however, never occurs to Gregor. Back then, it was enough for the people of Cavanaugh Street "to make a point of showing how thoroughly American they were." Then they were all poor and their quarter a slum (*Baptism*, p. 122).

After the death of Elizabeth, he returns hoping to find a place "to rest, like a shark looking for a place to die" (*Baptism*, p. 224). He has no other place to go. He does not know what to expect; in thirty-four years he has been back only twice. He vividly remembers coming back for his mother's funeral:

The steps of Holy Trinity Church were crumbling. The gold paint on its double front doors was chipped and peeling. The building where Gregor's mother had lived was in fairly good repair, but the building next to it was abandoned on the top two floors. Pacing the sidewalks on the night of the wake, getting away from the endless stream of condolences delivered to him by people he didn't know any more, Gregor accidentally turned the wrong corner and found himself face to face with a porno bookstore....Gregor knew that the porno bookstore was a sign, the mark of the beast, the beginning of the end (*Dear Old Dead*, pp. 65f). Now he is prepared "to find Cavanaugh Street changed into an Hispanic neighborhood. He'd been prepared to accept it as a battleground for teenage gangs, a strip for prostitutes, a drug bazaar, a burnt-out hulk" (*Not a Creature*, p. 22).

Instead a pleasant surprise awaits him. The second generation of Armenians, the generation that has discovered the American flesh pots, has adopted the home of their youth and fixed it up. The slum that Gregor left has "transmuted itself from an immigrant Armenian ghetto to an upscale urban enclave" (*Feast*, p. 53). And he is slowly falling in love with this new Armenian street that now conforms to the American Dream of the Great Good Place.

The ramshackle pawnshop has been replaced by a flower shop, and the once abandoned buildings had all been face-lifted and become respectable looking. To be sure, the first impression of life behind these renovated facades seems a bit hysterical (*Festival*, p. 67), and those old friends of Gregor seem to be Armenian translations of Dickensian characters. Still, what a surprise! At the heart of the crime-ridden downtown of the Philadelphia of the 1990s, there is an Armenian oasis where things are not out of joint; where the joys of night life have not impinged on a healthy family neighborhood (*Fountain*, p. 320).

It is such an anomaly: "Cavanaugh Street was a small town in a large city, and people there often talked and thought in ways that were more rural than urban" (*Festival*, p. 309). Such an anachronism: "Cavanaugh Street thought it was living in the

nineteenth century. Doors were for going in and out of, not for locking up. When they locked up, they just lost their keys anyway. Besides, what could possibly happen in a neighborhood like this?" (*Feast*, p. 59). Such perfection: "Cavanaugh Street was an Eden when the serpent had been headed off at the pass" (*Raven*, p. 42).

"Give me your poor..."--and like the Statue of Liberty, Cavanaugh Street invites yet another generation of landless Armenians to the Great Good Place of America.

Cavanaugh Street and America have been good to the earlier immigrants. In *Bleeding Hearts*, we hear about this success story. When the women of Gregor's generation raised their children, Cavanaugh Street was hardly better than a slum. Their husbands worked day and night to make it possible for their children to study. They literally sacrificed their health for the welfare of their families. They starved themselves so that their children could eat meat. The Karens and Stephens, the Lisas and Alexanders were bright and successful and earned the big money. They repayed their surviving parents with interest on every single cent they had ever been given. Thus Cavanaugh Street came to be a tribute to the American success story and the Armenian sense of family (*Bleeding Hearts*, p. 89). The widowed mothers and the odd surviving grandfather lead a life of leisure and luxury--the fathers had usually died in their prime of exhaustion.

Cavanaugh Street has been remodelled by the generosity of the children and their concern for their widowed mothers. "The buildings had been spruced up and gutted and remodelled and rearranged. The tenements had been changed into townhouses and floor-through condominiums with twelve-foot-high ceilings and marble fireplaces and Anderson windows in brownstone frames" (*Festival*, p. 74). The women came to lead the life of the leisured nouveaux riches: showered with money, furs, diamonds, European cars, vacation houses in the Bermudas...Gregor is surprised:

The changes that had come to Cavanaugh Street and that had first disturbed him now amused him instead. So everybody's children and grandchildren had grown up and gotten rich and tarted the place up till it looked like a billboard for Ralph Lauren Polo. So what? They were only trying to give the old people, who had worked so hard for so long for so little, a taste of what most of the country had always been working for (*Precious*, p. 39).

It is a commonplace that the amassing of new money and the things it buys often leads to ridiculous excesses. Gregor's neighbor old man George Tekmanian and his grandson provide a case in point. But why shouldn't George, his "geriatric punk" who thrives on buttered rum punch and explosive Yerevan Specials, who loves to dress up in his fancy dress suit that he once bought when he was a youth to celebrate the demise of the Ottoman empire--why should he not enjoy all the expensive baubles, Baccarat crystal bowls, needlepoint-embroidered wing chairs, and outrageously youth-

ful sweaters and socks that are presents of his grandson? What can one expect from a family of Armenian "nuts" except the impossible apartment of old man George as Gregor calls it:

the first time he'd seen it he'd thought he was hallucinating. George's grandson Martin had made a killing in the stock market--six or seven killings, from the look of it--and since George had adamantly refused to leave Cavanaugh Street for the Main Line, Martin had decided to bring the Main Line to George. George's apartment had been gutted and remodelled, its rooms made larger and airier, its soft plywood floors replaced with polished oak, its plain walls adorned with plaster moldings. In its present incarnation, it could have been a cover for *Metropolitan Home*, or a page from one of those catalogs for Yuppies Who Have Everything.

Martin had bought his grandfather every possible useless gadget. "There were also paintings, but both Gregor and George tried to ignore those. Martin had an unfortunate passion for postmodern art" (*Not a Creature*, pp. 32f). Though the street is populated by any number of actual and potential "nuts", they do not usually go quite to such length to prove themselves.

The mundane ethnic focal points of Cavanaugh Street, Ohanian's Middle Eastern Food Store and Ararat Restaurant, are certainly much more down to earth than either old man George's lofty abode or all those impressive stone mansions of the widows. Gregor's mother used to buy her chickens at Ohanian's; in fact it is the oldest Armenian establishment on the street. The family left the old country so long ago that they have forgotten how to write grammatically correct Armenian.

The daily life of the residents of Cavanaugh Street is controlled by food--Armenian food, that is. Food unites them, gives meaning to their daily routine, socializes them. Food is to be shared; this is the credo of old and new immigrants alike. Food unites the continents; thus Father Tibor has established a well functioning food line between Cavanaugh Street and Yerevan. Whether or not a person can appreciate the joys provided by Armenian food often determines his true "ethnic" identity on Cavanaugh Street. The merry widows wouldn't even mind if Gregor were to marry Bennis, a true blue WASP; she loves the food they cook, and therefore she is one of them. Food is the life blood of the community. To prepare it is the only creative activity, their life task, left to the women, and they indulge in it with a vengeance. They all love to eat each other's goodies. This is not to deprecate the joys of cooking and eating; they are at the heart of any civilization, man's very survival, but on Cavanaugh Street eating is overdone. In the case of Father Tibor and the new immigrants, it is understandable that they need to make up for all the lean times they experienced during Soviet rule; but is it a collective need for the older residents to compensate for something in their history as well?

And so they eat, eat themselves through a Land of Cockaigne; and when the women need a break they can all adjourn to the two mundane ethnic focal points of their street where they are also treated to gossip and the news of the outside world. The Ohanians may no longer be so sure about the shape of Armenian letters, but their store room, a veritable Ali Baba's cave of Oriental culinary delights, provides actually one of the very few tangible connections with the Middle East from where they all have originally come. But like so much else in ethnically-conscious America, both store and restaurant are quaint and have become somewhat of a tourist attraction. Spruced up as it is, but stagnating in its past, this might also be the fate of the street as such. Perhaps the influx of the young immigrant families from Armenia will make a viable community life possible again. The society of aging widows for whom the absentee sons and daughters have so lovingly and abundantly provided is moribund.

These merry widows are delightful in their peculiar way and are sexually still very much alive, yet they are basically parasites. They will suck out of their community and children and lovers whatever they can, but they will return nothing in turn except the food they cook. Their bright and successful sons and daughters will not return, and the occasional grandchildren that come to seek their roots are not numerous enough to carry on a viable community.

Gregor may have lost his wife Elizabeth, but by returning to his mother's house he gained many "mothers". Cavanaugh Street is a female world. And the Lida Arkmanians, Hannah Krikorians, Sheila Kashimians, and all the others who once were his classmates will cook for him and take good care of him, of any male who strikes their fancy. They are powerful ladies of independent means. They may be ladies of fashion dolled up in designer clothes, minks, and diamonds, yet they are still very much the daughters of those powerful widowed Armenian ladies of old that the Western travellers so often encountered in the villages of Anatolia.⁷

Mothers--Gregor has nothing against Armenian mothers. He himself remembers his own mother and grandmother. They were wonderful women, perhaps a bit hysterical and tyrannical (*Murder Superior*, p. 79). The Mothers rule the street. The day commemorating them has no equal; Christ and God pale in their presence. "Nothing was as big a holiday as Mother's Day on Cavanaugh Street", or, "Mother's Day was on a par with Easter on Cavanaugh Street. People around here said 'my mother' the way twelfth-century religious fanatics had said 'my God'" (*Dear Old Dead*, pp. 324, 59).

The women are the residing spirits of the houses; of Ararat Restaurant where Linda Metajian rules and where she hides her nagging and screaming widowed grandmother (a perfect virago, to borrow a term the travellers of last century used so freely when they described elderly Armenian widows); of Ohanian's Grocery Store where Krissa Ohanian watches over her niece Mary and the caves of food. In his mind,

Gregor associates Krissa with the type of the grand and strong Armenian women who in former days led their families through times of war and famine (*Bleeding Heart*, p. 249).

These ladies are no prudes. They guard and initiate into the secrets and power of sex as we see in their prolonged "scientific" discussions concerning both the male and the female orgasm (*Precious Blood*, passim). It seems that this is a topic that has enjoyed a time-honored tradition among Armenian matrons as old George recalls: "Even women of my generation talked about orgasms, and most of them are dead.... I think...that the women I grew up with wouldn't have called it orgasms" (*Precious Blood*, p. 38). Old George is not all bothered by this topic, though he might be about the "good" stories handed down from Armenian mother to daughter in which penises and sodomy figure so prominently, stories which are as greatly appreciated by "the ladies of Cavanaugh Street as they had been long ago by their ancestresses in Armenia" (*Festival*, pp. 85-97).

When these good Armenian society matrons get together and talk sex or give a party that stands under the sign of sex--as the party given by Hannah Krikorian to celebrate her "friendship" with Paul Hazzard (*Bleeding Heart*, passim)--there is something mythic about them; they seem to become the embodiment of a very ancient feminine force. It is as if we have stepped into the world of the ancient goddess Bona Dea.

Bona Dea presides over the secrets of women and cannot be bothered with silly intruding men who have offended against the sacredness of womanhood. At the height of her party, Hannah Krikorian--another very foolish Pompeia--allows her attractive lover Paul Hazzard to enter her house, even her bedroom. He profanes the party, basically a women's affair, with his presence. He has been very mean to his wife and drove her insane; the Bona Dea and her women do not let such offences go unpunished. At the height of the party, he is stabbed by one of them, though it is not an Armenian woman, and it is left to Gregor, as it was once left to Julius Caesar, to see that justice is done and that the female spirit of the feast of the goddess is purified.⁸

On no other occasion in any of the other novels are all the women of Cavanaugh Street assembled, and Hannah's apartment is transformed into an absolute female "madhouse". The different generations of the diaspora are collected under one roof, and the modest atmosphere of Hannah's apartment is turned into an orgy of food and lewed sex talk as well as a celebration of Armenian womanhood.

They have all come: the six sex crazy teenage daughters of Mrs. Devorkian, all the merry widowed Lidas and Sonias. And the venerable relics of the first generation, those almost centenarian survivors of the genocide that we see on no other occasion have come as well. They are those six old ladies known as Mrs. Manoukian, Mrs. Karidian, Mrs. Vartanian, Mrs. Baressian, Mrs. Astokaian, and Mrs. Erijian. Their

black-clad presence is forbidding and casts a shadow over the party. They guard Hannah's apartment as if they were the different heads of the hell hound Cerberus. Are they the Sibylls, or the Furies, or the Fates of their little universe? Bennis would say "all of the above". She knows that they watch over the sexual welfare of the denizens of the street as she has found out herself when they accosted her once in church about her alleged immoral behavior with Gregor.

At Hannah's party, however, they seem to act as guardians of a yet deeper secret of the feminine experience. This has to do with victimization, passive suffering, and the genocide. Being passive and being victimized and yet survive, these points have throughout history been associated with the feminine sphere of life. The few survivors we see in Ms. Haddam's novels are all women, and they all carry within them the knowledge of death, and yet they are the carriers of life as well. Life and death: those are the mysteries of the Bona Dea.

Such a memory of the *mysterium tremendum* of the Bona Dea is a sacred trust that should not be shared lightly; this holds true also in the world of the novels. This "trust" partly explains the behavior of any first generation that have survived a holocaust and who refuse to express their "shame" and trauma and at times even deny them. We are reminded of the behaviour of the grandmother in *Rise the Euphrates*. The celebration of such a "mystery" knowledge seems also to be at the heart of Hannah's party. The presence of all the women of Cavanaugh Street emphasizes this fact. It is during their party that we have one of the extremely rare occasions when we hear about the genocide. Again the account is very restrained and underplayed, again removed almost to the realm of fairy tale and myth as when we hear about the events of 1915 and 1916 from Gregor's mother and grandmother. The women carry this knowledge in their soul; they do not need to speak about it. It suffices for Mrs. Vartanian to utter, her voice "pregnant with doom", that she too has come from Armenia. "1916" says it all. The date suffices. No need to explain and describe.

Linda Melajian, the young enlightened guardian of Ararat restaurant, needs to see these unmentionable events more clearly and in a little wider context. Her great-grandmother had come from Armenia. And you should have heard her story! Her little child and her husband had been killed during the Turkish massacres. She kept photos of them in her room. Then she came to Cavanaugh Street, married again, had another family. And she led a good and happy life.

This "mystery" of survival exemplified by Linda's ancestress is celebrated at Hannah's party as it is every day by the women of Cavanaugh Street. There is no need to tell the gory details over and over again; and so we never see Father Tibor, who loves to celebrate any and all occasions, say mass on April 24. In fact, in the world of the novels it is dangerous to approach these events too closely when coming from outside the experience. Precisely this is what Paul Hazzard, the outsider, the man,

tries to do. He brings the masculine tools of his profession – logic, reason, psychological analysis – to rationalize and generalize these events away when he explains to Linda and Mrs. Vartanian what the genocide should mean to them. Perhaps it is also for this "male" presumption that shortly after his lecture he is killed. Perhaps this is also the reason why Ms. Haddam is so strangely reticent about letting her characters share their memories of the genocide.

Being reticent and quiet is one way to cope with the knowledge of the *mysterium tremendum* of the genocide. This is the way the founders of the community of Cavanaugh Street could live with their memories. Their way of coping with their "shame", their passive acceptance of their fate at the hands of the Turks in most cases is symptomatic of the way the Armenian diaspora community at large dealt with their past. But is this the only way to deal with the trauma of past experience?

It was in Yerevan, not too long before Hannah's party, that God spoke to another survivor of the genocide, one old lady called Aunt Helena Oumoudian, to collect her niece Sophie recently orphaned in the great earthquake and betake themselves to America to be saved from further doom and destruction. Thus the lovely young girl Sophie and her aunt came to Cavanaugh Street. History seems to repeat itself: another generation of "survivors" that has to purge itself of its burden of past experience has arrived to Cavanaugh Street. But are the "historical" burdens really the same?

The centenarian Sibyls certainly have gained a worthy sister. Aunt Helena, the gargoyle lady rapping her gargoyle cane, is their comical foil. She is formidable, but she has always had spunk. No passive acceptance of anything as far as she is concerned! The word "shame" does not exist in her vocabulary. This lady has a history of which neither she nor her family is ashamed. Sophie even proudly tells Father Tibor and Gregor her aunt's story as an introduction to the old lady before they meet her in person. The whole world can hear this story, for Sophie tells it in the hallway of their apartment building. And it is a genocide story. In it we see the active involvement of the then young girl Helana in risking her life to save a family tradition from the Turks. The murdering Turks did not scare her one bit. She loved and therefore wanted to preserve the family heirlooms, so she had her mother "bury her in the root cellar along with them and after it was over it took the villagers three days to get her out," Sophie proudly recalls (*Festival*, p. 126). For Aunt Helena, surviving did not shame her; she triumphed and stayed in Armenia. In Armenia, of course, the problems the survivors from Turkish fury had to face were very different from those of the Armenians in the American diaspora, and therefore their ways of coping with the past would be different as well. Perhaps we can say that Aunt Helena's story is symptomatic of their way? In any case, Aunt Helena's family silver tea glasses are a proud emblem for her manner of coping with the past that she brings with her to America. The original people of Cavanaugh Street unfortunately do not have any positive emblem

that connects them with the genocide.

Formidable though she is, she will succumb to the ways of her new environment as did the early immigrants, and thus she literally "falls" and breaks her hip in the embrace of old man George while dancing the tango as he was "lowering her down to the floor". So we leave her, this new "Empress of the Universe" of Cavanaugh Street, this "tiny queen of an oversized throne", holding her black gargoyle cane "like Queen Victoria about to chastise Disraeli. Her spine was straight. Her head was held high...her eyes as clear and hard and bright as an evil imp's" (*Festival*, passim). The family heirloom though will pass to her niece Sophie.

While the survivors watch and admonish, Aunt Helena experiences her "fall", the merry widows cook and have their last flings with the opposite sex, some of their daughters and granddaughters have returned to live on Cavanaugh Street. There is also the newcomer, the lovely young Sophie from Yerevan, a worthy addition to any society. After she has satisfied her insatiable thirst for education, she will return and settle down with young hopeful Joey Ohanian of the food store, "hardly a pious, traditional Armenian young man" and more in the line of "something of a rip" (*Festival*, p. 122) who is head over heels in love with her. The strain of the new immigrant tradition in this union will regenerate the old.

Sonja Veladian who works with UNICEF has returned from Somalia. The sexual abuse she experienced from one of her mother's many lovers when she was a young girl, it seems, has not left too deep a scar. She is jovial, bright, and well educated. But will she stay? (*Bleeding Hearts*, pp. 273-286).

We have already met Mary Ohanian and Linda Mehajian, the young ladies presiding over the food establishments. Linda is the typical young Armenian woman of the younger generation. She has attended one of the most prestigious private universities in New England where she did extremely well. Yet she returned and helps her family run the restaurant. She will stay, and so will Mary.

It is the embodiment of the new Armenian-American woman, Donna Moradanyan, who like a Madonna rules supreme over Cavanaugh Street. The future of the community is centered around her; her illegitimate son Tommy, the son of an Armenian father; and Russell Donahue, her Irish-American husband-to-be. This will be the new nuclear family of the integrated Armenian society in the American diaspora.

The tightly closed Armenian community of the earlier generations has opened up a bit, and prejudices and ethnic barriers have softened. This process started already in the first volume of the series with the true blue WASP Bennis's coming to Cavanaugh Street and her acceptance as possible future wife of Gregor by the widows. We see a similar concern for patterns of social change developed in *Rise the Euphrates*, but as usual, Ms. Haddam examines superficially and does not show what type of human pain is involved on the part of the individuals who are trying to break

down social patterns and mores.

Donna has never belonged to the group of bright and promising daughters of the street, though she is eccentric enough to feel there at home. And she turns out to be a good mother. She loves to cook, she is artistic, and she loves to decorate in a grand way. On every possible holiday, the mansions of the widows and the church as well are wrapped up like gigantic gift packages. Another "nut". Nobody would ever suspect that she is Armenian. From where she has gotten her looks remains a riddle to Gregor. How is it that she "came out looking like a virginal Swedish exercise nut" since all the "unpteen-thousand" of her ancestors were definitely of Armenian extraction? (*Not a Creature*, p. 145).

Since she is such a nice and naive girl, the whole Armenian enclave watches over her when she becomes an art student at university. Yet that concern doesn't prevent her from getting pregnant. She does have enough sense to realize that Peter Desarian is very unreliable and that she should not get married to him even though her bright little Tommy needs a father very badly. Enter Russell Donahue. It will be a good marriage, the street approves of the match, including Donna's mother, but in her case it is for all the wrong reasons. Little Tommy who at the age of four talks like a professor will have a good father.

The future of Cavanaugh Street lies also with Holy Trinity Church and the resident priest Father Tibor, both representing the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church. Cavanaugh Street is blissfully unaware of the existence of both the Armenian Catholic and Protestant churches.

Cavanaugh Street was an Armenian-American neighborhood and therefore dedicated to the Armenian Christian church....Long ago, Armenia had been the first country on earth to make Christianity a state religion. Lately, Armenia seemed poised to become the most fervent example of religious revival in the newly liberated countries of Eastern Europe. On Cavanaugh Street, the response was subtler but undeniable. Even old agnostics like Gregor showed up at church on Sunday, and a surprising number of young people--raised to be secular children in a secular age--weren't agnostic at all. Father Tibor Kasparian kept them all moving in the direction he wanted them to go (*Festival*, pp. 67f).

Father Tibor preaches and practices a practical version of Christianity, and so the doors of the church and the doors of the homes and hearts of Cavanaugh Street have been opened wide to the new wave of immigrants, and to any branch of persecuted mankind for that matter.

Lida and her "cohorts" have found a new purpose in life; they cook and bake and send food packages to the new Republic of Armenia. They are forever busy doing something for their newly formed Society for the Support of an Independent Armenia. For Father Tibor, it is an article of faith to help anyone who suffers and

hungers, and so he often forgets his own needs. His friends have to rescue him when they realize that "after months of dealing with wandering Armenian refugees from... all points across the collapsing Soviet Union, Tibor had collapsed himself" (*Bethlehem*, p. 59). It is very difficult for him to heed their admonition: "You can't save the entire Republic of Armenia on your own" (*Feast*, p. 63).

For his efforts, Father Tibor has been awarded with an official letter of thanks from the new government in Yerevan (*Bleeding Hearts*, p. 179).

With the coming of the new immigrants, the character of the neighborhood has changed:

There were always kids hanging around Cavanaugh Street, looking to make money doing errands. There hadn't when Bennis first moved into her apartment....Now Holy Trinity Armenian Christian Church was running a parish school of its own and most of the older women were placing displaced families in equally displaced housing and the neighborhood was expanding again, for the first time in decades. It was an immigrant neighborhood again for the first time in decades, too (*And One To Die On*, p. 270).

The church school teaches the children, the women feed the families, but there are so many refugees, and Cavanaugh Street, after all, is a small place. Therefore the women "started buying up real estate on the fringes, hoping to export what Cavanaugh Street was to any other part of Philadelphia they touched" (*Festival*, p. 123).

A new symbol has arrived on Cavanaugh Street as well: since the Republic of Armenia declared its independence, "a positive rain of Armenian flags had descended on Cavanaugh Street" (*Feast*, p. 54). Strangely enough, the political ideologies and the parties that we associate with these Armenian flags have been lost somewhere over Europe or the Atlantic on their way to Philadelphia. It seems that none of the people of the street have ever heard about being affiliated with any of the Armenian political parties. How un-Armenian! What a neutral Armenian utopia at the center of the City of Brotherly Love!

Before Father Tibor came to his safe American haven, his Eden untainted by any political viper, he was a political refugee from the Soviet system. His parishioners know that he

had had a terrible life: arrested and imprisoned in the Soviet Union...suffering through God only knew what until he could make his way overland and underground, first to Israel and then to the United States. Tibor's wife had died in a Russian prison. Tibor himself limped slightly, and had only partial use of his left arm (*Baptism*, p. 79). Many who know him call Father Tibor Kasparian a saint, for he is a great devotee of good causes, and he has spent too much of his time thinking about the true meaning of Christian humility, which he had decided must be absolute (*Bethlehem*, pp. 57f).

He has succeeded in translating his insight into daily action: he is an intellectual who knows many languages, yet like St. Francis he enjoys communicating with birds and brings up by hand and eye dropper orphaned kittens. Once deprived of food, he has learned to appreciate God's gift to mankind and has become a champion eater. He is a great lover of books and collects them "like other people collect dust." A saint, perhaps, but a quirky and Dickensian one, comfortable to be with.

The same we can say about the Armenian oasis Ms. Haddam has created and her version of Armenian history. True to a point: a world removed and cleansed, a world comfortable to live in. And aren't these the characteristics and qualities that make the topos of the Great Good Place so attractive to us?

Ms. Haddam has chronicled her fictionalized version of a social history of an Armenian community in the diaspora. "True" sociologists and historians more than likely will raise their learned eyebrows at such an assertion. What historical truth is there to be gleaned from mystery novels? But what is closer to the Truth: events that actually happened or fictionalized events that might happen? Naturally the latter, Aristotle says. And who are we to contest the insight of our great teacher?

REFERENCES

1. Tony Hilfer, *The Crime Novel: A Deviant Genre* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), p. 7.
2. I have based my study on the following twelve of Jane Haddam's mystery novels, all published by Bantam Books of New York: *A Stillness in Bethlehem* (1992), *Not a Creature Was Stirring* (1990), *Baptism in Blood* (1996), *Dear Old Dead* (1994), *Quoth the Raven* (1991), *Fountain of Death* (1995), *And One To Die On* (1996), *Festival of Deaths* (1994), *Feast of Murder* (1992), *Precious Blood* (1991), *Murder Superior* (1993), and *Bleeding Hearts* (1994).
3. For a discussion of the mystery novel as genre, see the following essays reprinted in Jochen Vogt, ed., *Der Kriminalroman*, vols. 1 and 2 (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1971): Dorothy Sayers, "Aristoteles über Detektivliteratur," pp. 123-138; Berthold Brecht, "Über die Popularität des Kriminalromans," pp. 315-321; Helmut Heissenbüttel, "Spielregeln des Kriminalromans," pp. 356-361; Richard Alewyn, "Anatomie des Detektivromans," pp. 362-371; and Otto Eckert, "Der Kriminalroman als Gattung," pp. 528-532.
4. Hilfer, pp. 30f.
5. Richard Chase, *The American Novel and Its Tradition* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975).
6. Carol Edgarian, *Rise the Euphrates* (New York: Random House, 1994).
7. For a discussion on how Armenian women were seen by Western observers, see my two articles: "Woman to Woman: The American Missionary Wife and the Armenian Woman," *Haigazian Armenological Review*, 16 (1996), pp. 233-261; "The Armenian Woman in the Eyes of Western Observers," *Annals of the University of Balamand*, 4 (1996), pp. 63-91.
8. My reference is to the celebration of the Feast of the Bona Dea on December 3, 62 B.C. at the Domus Publica, at the time the residence of the Pontifex Maximus, one Gaius Julius Caesar and his second wife Pompeia Sulla. The celebration was desecrated by the Roman patrician Publius Clodius. The ensuing scandal compromised Pompeia, and the goddess had to be appeased with the blood of many innocent children.

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