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**THE MEMORY OF GENOCIDE IN SOVIET ARMENIAN
LITERATURE¹**

Collective past, and especially significant events of the past, are indelible landmarks of collective memory. And that memory, historical memory, finds different representations and different meanings in the process of its passage from a generation to the next and under the dictates of the time. Literature is the locus of these representations. It is the place where the relationship between the self and the social and the constantly changing factors that influence these relationships are registered and represented. Literature purports the meaning as the synthesis of the relationship or the dialog of the self with the collective past in the context of the present.

The memory of the Genocide, as the most important event in the recent history of the Armenian people, the unresolved injustice, the indomitable pain and the mourning over the colossal loss persisted in the Diaspora and served as the backbone of Diasporan literature. The memory of the Genocide reverberated in literature as a source of identity, a leitmotiv or a hidden theme. Generations of Diasporan writers tried to confront the catastrophe, comprehend it, and deal with it. Diasporan Armenian literature one way or another relates to the Genocide².

This was not the case in Soviet Armenia where, with its Sovietization in December 1920, historical memory, the memory of the Armenian past, especially that of the Genocide of the 1915, was abruptly switched off. The future of the Armenian nation, prescribed by the Soviet rule, was not to converge with the past. But, Razmik Davoyan's (b. 1940) adaptation of the popular wisdom, "Thinking forward through the past" or "looking forward through the past", in his poem, suggesting that the path to the future of the nation passes through its ancestral past, sounds like a negation of that policy,

¹ My presentation at the conference, in the Armenian language, was based on this paper which is an extract from an ongoing research project.

² I have spent years to study and analyze the Armenian Genocide literature. My publications aim to categorize, depict, and interpret the literary responses to historical catastrophes down to the Genocide of 1915 involving also the comparative dimension lent by Jewish literary responses to their history of persecutions and to the Holocaust.

... And if, on your way,
 You don't meet your forefathers,
 You are on the wrong path...³

A nation without a past was so much easier to rule, assimilate, Russify. However, even if the officially accepted norms of proletarian literature and culture, Proletkult (Пролеткульт), did not allow the Armenian writers of the 1920s to write about the very recent memory of painful displacement, suffering, and death, the stories of this human ordeal were being told by the survivors secretly within the confines of their family. Verjine Svazlyan's (b. 1934) work, the collection of oral testimonies and eyewitness accounts, recorded in 1950s and 60s, attests to the persistence of the memory despite the threatening atmosphere of Soviet censorship⁴. Davit Mouradyan (b. 1951), reminisces the cozy nights when the elders spoke of the Old Country, and their stories permeated pain and yearning, "No! You cannot evoke these nights by simply depicting them. There are things that cannot be put in words. You have to be seated on your father's lap, devour these stories, and catch the sad gleam in the eyes of these men"⁵.

The collective memory was being transmitted orally but always challenged by the tenets of the new regime. How long would this unmediated transmission endure in this hostile atmosphere? Mouradyan's protagonist hopes that this memory would accompany his son as he grows up, and as "he in turn tries to find and not lose the thread, the invisible silver thread that grew thinner with time but, curiously, never breaks, that is if you hold it between your fingers and walk in its path"⁶. Indeed, the silver thread of collective memory grows thinner with time. The mediated transmission occurs either through orally preserved stories

³ From a poem, *Champortutium 1* (Journey, 1) in *Selected Poems*, a bilingual edition, translated by Armine Tamrazian (Macmillan Education, printed in Malaysia, 2002), p. 110.

⁴ Verjine Svazlyan recorded testimonies and songs of historical significance of the survivors over the last fifty years both in Armenia and abroad. *Hayots Tseghaspanutium, akanatesver aproghneri vkayutiunner* (Armenian Genocide, testimonies of eyewitness survivors), published in 2000, contains 600 testimonies. In *Hayots Tseghaspanutiune ev patmakan hishoghutiune* (Armenian Genocide and the historical memories, 2003), Svazlyan describes how in these difficult years of Soviet rule, in dire conditions and circumstances in 1955, she initiated the collection of folk songs and tales of the Old Country; then she expanded her search to collect survivor testimonies of Turkish atrocities in the 60s.

⁵ **Davit Mouradyan**, *Hrazhesht* (Farewell), a novella in *Gnatskner ev kayaranner* (*Trains and stations*), Yerevan: Van Arian Press, 2001, p. 124.

⁶ *Ibid.*

of the survivors, now mostly long gone, or through literary representations of the Event.

This second best, the literary representations of Genocide, was in power and working in the Diaspora as a feeder for new creations. But in Soviet Armenia? The political atmosphere certainly did not accommodate the flow of literary responses to the recent traumatic experience, what would only be a natural path to deal with it. Soviet Armenian literature did not harbor immediate responses. The tradition of the poetics of genocide was not in place in order for a natural, vertical, that is temporal, development of genocide literature to occur.

The transition from nationalistic to internationalist, proletarian literature was a difficult one. That transition reflected also the process of the construction of the new Armenian identity from a nationalist character to that of a Soviet citizen with internationalist nature. In such an atmosphere, recourse to the past, even to deal with its psychological impact on the present – let alone its political effects – had no place.

A change in themes, ideas, and form was imposed. Literature had to follow the Soviet model: national in form, socialist in content. This is known as Socialist realism (not to be confused with social realism). The Soviet Armenian literature was to grow with no ties to its roots. It was to follow the new literary movement launched by the Bolshevik ideologues, exemplified by leading communist writers Vladimir Mayakovski and Maxim Gorky. In Armenia, it was spearheaded by pre-Soviet Bolshevik Armenian writers, and institutionalized by the declaration of the three –Eghishé Charents (1897-1937), Azat Vshtuni (1894-1958) and Gevork Abov (1897-1965). The declaration, published in the June 6, 1925 issue of *Khorhrdayin Hayastan* was a ruthless criticism of the past literary traditions and a call to destroy them in order to build the new. Among the themes despised and condemned were, of course, the Armenian national movement and armed struggle as well as the Turkish massacres and deportation of Armenians, even though Charents's early masterpiece, *Danteakan araspel* (*Dante-esque legend*, 1916), was an artistic expression of just these themes. Charents had experienced the death of the nation and witnessed his beloved homeland covered with the blood and unburied cadavers of his compatriots when at the age of 17 he volunteered to fight the perpetrators of that humongous crime⁷.

The history of the Armenian people was rewritten and taught with

⁷ In 1915 Charents enrolled in the 7th division of the Armenian volunteer army. On the way to Van, the brigade came face to face with the remains and evidences of the Turkish mass killings.

the tendentious goal of educating the new generation in line with the Soviet interpretation of history. Armenian literature was selected for teaching only if it carried the new ideology, or if it catered to class struggle. The goal was to show the triviality of past Armenian writers. Some writers were completely disregarded, especially those who were believed to be Dashnak-affiliated⁸.

With such a policy of education in place in schools, generations were educated with no interest toward Armenian history, literature, and culture, and obviously, unaware of the traumatic experience of their forefathers. Looking back to those days, Suren Sahakyan writes, "These were the times of fear and crisis. We were afraid to go near Mshetsi Smbat, or Andranik's soldiers. We were alienated from our parents. We could get so many stories, true stories from them. We did not, and we lost a great deal. They came and passed away 'sighing.' They took with them many real life stories, episodes of the past that will never be told. Yet, we were being fed false history. Thus, came the years of brainwashing, making us forget the call of our blood, years of drought that only produced and eulogized men with no will and no homeland"⁹.

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

Charents, the strongest proponent of the new wave of internationalism was one of the first to backtrack. His inner conflict drove him to find the synthesis between nationalism (through the traditions of Armenian prose and poetry) and the revolutionary or rather the revolutionized reality. He chose "to look at the world with the eyes of an Armenian", that is to sustain the national characteristics of the new hero and still remain in the domain of Socialist realism and Internationalism. Aksel Bakunts (1899-1937), Stepan Zoryan (1889-1967), and others, too, followed that path.

The rebirth of national themes and content in Soviet Armenian literature was marked by the endeavors of these freethinkers. Historical themes from Armenian past permeated the autobiographical novels. How could Gourgen Mahari (1903-1969) write about his childhood (Manku-

⁸ Dashnak is a pejorative name given to the members of Dashnaktsutun party (Armenian Revolutionary Federation) which the Soviet Armenian regime considered as its number 1 enemy.

⁹ Suren Sahakyan, *Herosapatum* (Tales of heroes), (Yerevan: "Arevik" Press, 1990), p. 8.

tiun, Childhood, 1929, Patanekutiun, Adolescence, 1930), without touching the subject of the Ottoman massacres and deportations of Armenians? The Armenian Tragedy is the underlying leitmotif in Mahari's works. His yearning for his birthplace did not let go. To be sure, critics chastised him and called him bourgeois nationalist. Mahari, they said, mourns the untimely loss of the nationalistic past¹⁰.

Criticism and censorship escalated and the purging of "dissident" intelligentsia began in 1936. Thousands of Armenian writers, poets, artists, painters, political leaders, and engineers were arrested and found guilty of nationalist, anti-revolutionary activities. They were labeled as Trotskyists and Dashnaks, enemies of the people, traitors of the big ideal of Stalin.

Soviet Armenian literature experienced a severe setback. National tones gave way to hyperbolic, most of the time ridiculous similes and metaphors catering to the worship of the individual, until the outbreak of WWII. Stalin needed to inculcate the Soviet masses enthusiasm and willingness to defend the Soviet Union against Nazi Germany. He resorted to a cynical strategy of promoting patriotism, that is, Soviet patriotism. But Armenians pushed the envelope. Soviet patriotism was diverted toward love for Armenia and, even more dangerously, toward the Armenian past and into a nostalgic recourse to the glories of Historic Armenia. Stepan Zoryan's *Pap Tagavor* (King Pap, 1943), Derenik Demirchyan's (1877-1956) *Vardanank* (War of Vardanians, 1943), and Nairi Zaryan's (1900-1969) *Ara ev Shamiram* (Ara and Semiramis, 1944) were the products of Moscow's "lenient" policy.

Recourse to the distant past was tolerated, but writing openly about the Tragedy of 1915 and the lands lost to Turkey was clearly a political stance not acceptable by the regime. Hovhannes Shiraz' (1914-1984) *Hayots Danteakan* (Armenian Dante-esque, 1941) was one such daring expression that had gone past the limits but still tolerated under the circumstances.

After the war, nationalism was no longer needed. It had already served its purpose and had to be abolished. Stalin accomplished that also through more purges, exile, and execution. The new generation was systematically indoctrinated. Late in her life, Silva Kapoutikyan (1919-2006) recalls a speech she delivered in 1952, a zealous praise of Stalin

¹⁰ *Sovetahay Grakanutian Patmutiun* (History of Soviet Armenian literature), vol. I, Yerevan: The Academy of Sciences of Armenian SSR Press, 1961, p. 761.

and Communism. Forty years later, she reads the text of her fiery speech again and asks herself, “Were these words sincere?” She answers in all honesty, “Yes, much to my chagrin and shame, they were sincere”¹¹.

In the late 50s and early 60s the wounds of the past were re-kindled in Armenia and provoked irredentist tendencies. That was during the Khrushchev thaw, after Stalin’s death in 1953. It all began with Anastas Mikoyan’s¹² statement in Erevan (1954), in which he reinstated the value of Raffi’s (1835-1888) and Rafael Patkanian’s (1830-1892) works even though admitting their too nationalistic character. The purged Armenian writers and poets too were reinstated posthumously, and Mikoyan who played a decisive role in Charents’s demise was the one praising his art¹³.

But this was to be a period of uncertainty with contradicting vibes. Haypethrat, the state publishing house in Armenia published Hrand Hrahan’s (1892-1988) *Im kyanki vepe* (The novel of my life) in 1956, and the publisher’s note clearly explains the topic to be “the mass extermination of the Western Armenian segment at the hands of Talaat, Enver, and their colleagues, the leaders of SultanakanTurkia”¹⁴. At the end of the novel, Hrahan praises Soviet Armenia, “the revived and flourishing homeland of Armenians,” and how happy he is in that paradise. Perhaps, this was the price to pay to publish the book.

Khachik Dashtents’s (1910-1974) *Khodedan* was published the same year to eternalize in art the homeland and the people that no longer existed. The date under Dashtents’ foreword in *Khodedan* is 1956, May 28.

¹¹ **Silva Kapoutikyan**, *Echer pak gzrotsnerits* (Pages from locked drawers), Yerevan: Apolon, 1997, p. 14.

¹² Anastas Mikoyan (1895-1978), a staunch Bolshevik and a Soviet statesman, was born to Armenian parents in Sanahin, in the Yelizavetpol region of the time, in today’s Armenia. He was the only one who was able to keep his high ranking position in the Communist party during Lenin, Stalin, Malenkov, Khrushchev, and Brezhnev. He took an active part in the 1936-37 Stalinist purges of members of the Communist party. Stalin sent him to Soviet Armenia in 1937 to oversee the great purges of Armenian leaders, writers, and intellectuals.

¹³ In a poem dedicated to Charents, Khachik Dashtents expresses confidence that there will come a day when Charents will rise again from the dead and his art will find its deserved appreciation. And on that day, Dashtents asserts, those who condemned him more staunchly will be the ones who will rush to the podiums to anoint their cursed past with the light of your memory. See *Bagin*, 7-8-9/95, p. 88. Dashtents’ prediction had come true.

¹⁴ **Hrand Hrahan**, *Im kyanki vepe* (The novel of my life), Yerevan: Haypethrat, 1958. *Sultanakan Turkia*, means Sultans’ Turkey.

One wonders if this is a coincidence or a deliberate mention of a significant date, May 28, the date of the birth of the first independent Republic of Armenia in 1918, a period in history that was effaced in Soviet historiography and probably yearned by Dashtents.

Stepan Alajajyan's (1924-2010) novella *Piunik* (Phoenix) was published in 1962, after it was rejected a few times. The novella was an autobiography, the story of a repatriated family and the hardship, disappointment, and disillusion they experienced in Soviet Armenia. To be sure, the author came under suspicion. He was ranked among the dissident writers of the 1960s and was called by the KGB for explanations¹⁵.

The rise of nationalism in early 60s in Armenia was significantly coupled with irredentism. The Genocide of 1915 was being commemorated in 1965, for the first time in Soviet Armenia. But the commemoration turned into a turbulent rally. People took to the streets demanding the return of Armenian lands under Turkish occupation. "We have not forgotten the Mets Eghern (The Great Massacres)", "Our lands. . . Our lands," the demonstrators shouted. The memory had been transmitted no doubt. As Silva Kapoutikyan writes, "it turns out that yes, they had not forgotten. The memory, the nation's historical memory, interwoven in the sighs of our grandparents, the endless sorrow in their eyes and their voices trembling with tears and yearning had really done the job".

In an article titled *Ayspes kochvats nasionalizmi masin* (About the so called Nationalism), written in 1977 and published only posthumously in 1988, Mushegh Galshoyan (1933-1980) chastises Soviet Armenian leaders for having denied the Armenian people the knowledge and awareness of the greatest tragedy in their history. By doing that, Galshoyan maintains, they had denied the world the knowledge about this fateful event in the history of mankind. The first genocide of our century was turned into an Armenian Yeghern and kept under locks. Then, he adds, they hesitantly and fearfully pulled this fragment of Armenian past out from under the locks and organized a formal commemoration of the Mets Yeghern for the first time in April 24, 1965¹⁶.

¹⁵ **Stepan Alajajyan's** *Champezi vra* (On the roadside), housing the novella *Pyunik*, is a compilation of the author's memoirs, notes, and reminiscences about his contemporary intellectuals and overall life in the trying years of the 60s in Soviet Armenia. The book was published in 1998 in Los Angeles.

¹⁶ Galshoyan's article naturally remained under lock until it was eventually and posthumously published in *Garun*, 1988, no. 8. The article is cited in *Bagin*, 9/10, 91, pp. 110-123. The paraphrased quotation is from p. 111.

Significantly, while the political atmosphere in Soviet Armenia had become more permissive toward the Armenian past, it was still risky to talk about the years of Stalin's terror. From the thousands of exiled literati not many had returned, and those who returned after Stalin's death did not dare to speak out about their torturous life in the gulags, and if they wrote their memoirs, like Gurgen Mahari, Nayiri Zaryan, Suren Hovhannisyan, publication was denied. However, people knew about their existence and the overall content. The manuscripts went around and were read avidly. That was the Armenian Samizdat (самиздат)¹⁷.

In this precarious period of fluctuating pressure and degree of censorship, Paruir Sevak's (1924-1971) *Anlreli Zangakatun* (Unsilenced bell-tower, first published in 1959) was a daring venture. For the first time in Soviet Armenia, it captured in poetry of epic grandeur the horrors of the Armenian Genocide. The venture was also a pace setter.

Vardges Petrossyan's (1932-1994) *Haykakan Eskizner* (Armenian sketches, 1969), Sero Khanzatyian's (1915-1998) *Mkhitar Sparapet* (Commander Mkhitar, 1961), and Vahagn Davtyan's (1922-1996) *Tondraketsiner* (Tondrakians, 1960) are brave explorations of the past, deliberations on the fate of the nation, and eulogies of the struggle for freedom. They prepared the ground for a renewed Armenian national character and identity.

The popularity of *Tondraketsiner* kept Vahagn Davtyan away from the suspicion and malice of the authorities. Collections of his poems were being published indiscriminately. In these poems he sang the love of his birthplace Kharbert, his homeland lost, his longing to shed his blood in the battle for the freedom of his homeland, so that his blood will mix with the tears of Aratsani River, the river running through his native land. Vahagn Davtyan traveled to Der-El-Zor in 1977, a sort of a pilgrimage to the site where the final liquidation of the remnants of the Armenian massacres took place. Deeply affected by the sights he encountered, he wrote his most famous poem, *Rekviem* (Requiem), which was published immediately.

The era of relative freedom ended with Brejnev's rise to power and his efforts to tie the loose ends of post-Stalin lenient policies. The mysterious deaths of Paruir Sevak in 1971, Minas Avedisyan in 1975,

¹⁷ *Samizdat* (самиздат) was an underground practice in Soviet Union in which dissident writers copied and disseminated materials and entire books censored by the regime or rejected for publication. Harsh punishment awaited those who were caught.

Mushegh Galshoyan in 1980, and still others were evidence to the renewed persecutions covertly underway. Even the concept of dissidencia had acquired a fluid meaning.

Arshak (Sergey Arshakyan) was an amateur writer, a dissident because he wrote about love of freedom, love of homeland, and childhood reminiscences of the persecutions of the Stalin era. As a young boy, his protagonist accompanied his mother to the party meetings every night, “as a shield and a protector”. Because, “if she didn’t go to these meetings, it would prove that she was an accomplice to my executed father and shared his enmity against the Leader [Stalin]. And they would take her too.... She took me along, so that, they would not take her temporarily—because she was very pretty—or for good, because she was my father’s wife”¹⁸. This novel and Arshak’s other works were published beginning from 1995.

The wave of Perestroika (перестройка) and Glasnost (гласность)¹⁹ was late to hit Armenia. But when it did, the publication of rejected material, mostly reminiscences of the devastating years of Stalin’s rule of terror, proliferated. That was between the years 1988 and 1991. The works of older generation poets were also being pulled out of their coffins, the locked boxes in the archives, and were being published. Hovhannes Toumanian’s (1869-1923) *Hin krive* (The old battle) – where he had written that Russians came to rescue Armenians in the name of Christ and they thanked God to see the carnage and the Armenian lands devoid of Armenians – and *Verjin ore* (The last day), which was an ode to the military operations of the Armenian volunteer army in 1915, were unearthed and published. So was Avetik Isahakian’s (1875-1957) *Hayduki yerger* (Fedayee Songs)²⁰.

State censorship in the period before Perestroika had been harsher in Armenia than in Russia itself as evidenced by the fate and relatively small quantity of the nonconformist writings in Armenia. It also took longer for the Armenian KGB to loosen its grip—if it ever did—on Armenian life. And then there was the self-inflicted censorship that pressed

¹⁸ **Arshak**, *Gnchuhin* (The Gypsy woman), Yerevan: “Vark” Press, 1995, p. 20.

¹⁹ Perestroika (перестройка) was a policy promulgated by Mikhail Gorbachev in 1980s and aimed at restructuring the Communist party and the Soviet system. It was concurrent with the policy of Glasnost (гласность) which suggested more openness and transparency in government affairs.

²⁰ Taken from **H. Ghanalanyan**’s article, *Yerku khosk* (Two words), published in *Hayastani Hanrapetutun*, April 2, 1991 and cited in *Bagin* 9-10/91, pp. 66-70.

heavily in the mind of every writer and poet; “Would they publish this? No, this is not publishable. They will once again reject my work. I need to make changes.”

In any event, there was no return. Perestroika had to come. The iron curtain separating Soviet Union from the world had been lifted. European trends and ideas kept penetrating in. The Armenian youth growing in the 70s and the 80s zealously read the Soviet dissident literature especially that of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (1918-2008). They inhaled the patriotic air of the Armenian Diaspora, and followed the road set forth by the more daring, rebellious souls. Henrik Edoyan (b. 1940), Armen Martirosyan (1943-2009), Davit Hovhannes (b. 1945), Hrachia Sarukhan (b. 1947), Hovhannes Grigoryan (1945-2013), Alvard Petrossyan (b. 1946), and others were able to forge the modern Soviet Armenian literature, which was not necessarily nationalistic but certainly national. They were not the propagandists of the Soviet official line, but modern nationalists who were able to absorb the new, the Western, the Diasporan-Armenian, and to create the spiritual atmosphere for a new national revival.

In a way, the dissident generation of the 1965 had prepared with their writings the ground for the movement of 1988²¹, which reached its apex in the wide spread demonstrations demanding the liberation of Karabagh from the grip of Azerbaijani despotism, discrimination, and persecution. The leaders of this movement were no other than the writers and poets of yesterday now turned into political activists.

Between the years 1988, the beginning of the Karabagh movement, and 1991, the birth of the independent Republic, Armenians suffered two major cataclysms. One was a natural disaster, the devastating earthquake of Spitak in the northern region of Soviet Armenia, the other was a man-made disaster, a small-scale repetition of the 1915 Genocide against the Armenians of Azerbaijan in places like Sumgayit, Baku, Ganja, and other Armenian towns and villages. Characteristically, the memory of the Genocide of 1915 came alive in the literary responses to both catastrophes. Examples are, Davit Hovhannes’s *Haverzhakan haye* (The eternal Armenian), Arevshat Avagyan’s (b. 1940) *Mite pordzadasht e Hayastane* (Is

²¹ It is important to note that dissidence or dissident literature does not have the same connotation in Armenia as in the rest of the Soviet Union. While the Moscow dissidents were in disagreement with the Communist regime, the Armenian dissident literature was national in spirit, rooted in history, connected to the past, stemming from the impact of the Armenian Genocide, the loss of life and homeland. It simply entertained forbidden subjects.

Armenia a testing ground?) and Maksim Hovhannisyan's *Artsakh im, tsav im* (My Artskh, my pain).

Many poets sang the courage of the new fedayees in the battle against the Azeri intruders. Having fallen victim to the Azeri atrocities, it was impossible not to remember the genocide committed by the Turks, the brothers of today's perpetrators. It was impossible to mourn the loss of Shahumian and Getashen and not to remember Mush and Van. Robert Karayan's *Shushva krvi vordik kajazun* (Brave sons of the battle of Shushi), *Hnik Yerger* (Little Old Songs), *Enkats kajordinerin* (To the fallen brave sons) and *Te yes enknem* (If I fall) manifest the parallel imagery between two tragedies that befell the Armenian nation 72 years apart.²²

Ruzanna Asatryan's (b. 1948) *Shushi* (2003) is a narrative poem, over 450 lines, an ode to the liberation of Shushi, the jewel city of the old Armenian culture that was Turkified after Stalin granted the rule of Mountainous Karabagh to Azerbaijan. The poem depicts the heroic battle the new fedayees waged to accomplish that impossible mission. And the massacres of 1915 are in the background, popping up as a parallel situation, as a metaphor, as a source of historic interpretations. The memory of old fedayees of Western Armenia adorns the images of new bravery.²³

The old yearning becomes a source of inspiration and finds a new outlet. Silva Kapoutikyan writes

I saw a dream. It was Van and Aigestan,

...

Three girls of the same age are whispering in secret.

Young and slim three girls like three sisters,

I realize suddenly its grandma, mother, and I.

...

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

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

Three women are walking hardly on the deportation route,

It seems they stop near the walls of Yerevan.

Do not ask. That's us again, grandma, mother, and I²⁴.

The memory of the catastrophic events in her grandmother's birthplace is so vivid that Kapoutikyan sees herself caught within that tragedy.

²² Robert Karayan, *Lusabatsnerin endharaj* (Welcoming the dawns), Los Angeles: Hayasa printing, 1999.

²³ Ruzanna Asatryan, *Shushi*, Yerevan: "Amaras" Publishing, 2003.

²⁴ Silva Kapoutikyan, *Hin karot* (Old Yearning) from *Echerpakgzrotsnerits*, p. 658.

She is a player in that tragedy as a young girl, a new bride participating in the self-defense of Van, and a wretched refugee behind the walls of Yerevan. Is it possible to live in a catastrophic event in the past just like the present without having been there? Elie Wiesel says, “Yes, one can live a thousand miles away from the Temple and see it burn. One can die in Auschwitz after Auschwitz”²⁵.

Hovik Hoveyan’s (b. 1956) collection of poetry opens with a poem titled *Anapat* (Desert). He is there himself “in the orchard called Der-Zor” as a piece of bone turning into dust at the whim of the wind like thousand others. The wind is the only witness,

Arevshat Avagyan is the son of a survivor from Mokats Ashkharh. He is a continuation of his father’s hopes and dreams, and the seeds of historical memory are cultivated in his soul through the reminiscences of his childhood. He knows how to fly through time, through centuries of Armenian history for the sake of the future renewal. In the poem *Patgam* (Bidding), he admonishes the new generation to love the light of knowledge, their fellow human beings, and “Before everything else/And after everything else/Love your homeland which is red in your veins/Its sky that shines deep in your eyes/ And love the road to eternity/That continues through your feelings and your days”²⁶.

Rafael Ghazanchyan (b. 1938) initiates the publication of the memoirs of his father, a Genocide survivor. In the introduction of the book he writes, “How is it possible not to see the enchanting images of lost horizons in the gazes of these eyewitnesses of the Catastrophe, not to feel their hope and aspiration to return to their homes? The silly preaching of some not to ‘dig up’ the past sounds totally absurd”²⁷.

The present Turkish-Armenian relation finds curious echoes in artistic literature. Aghasi Ayvazyan’s (1925-2007) *Antun turke* (The homeless Turk) is an abstract comedy-tragedy that is rooted in an absolute reality in the past. In this imaginative interaction with the Turk, fate brings the Armenian and the Turkish wanderers together under a freeway overpass in Pasadena (USA), where the homeless hang out. The Armenian blames the Turk for the present dire situation: “You Turks, if you had not invaded Armenia from Central Asia, or wherever you came from

²⁵ Alan L. Berger & Naomi Berger, ed. *Second Generation Voices, Reflections by Children of Holocaust Survivors and Perpetrators*, Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2001, “Introduction”, p.1.

²⁶ Arevshat Avagyan, *Hangrvanner* (Phases), Yerevan: Nor Dar Press, 2003, p. 107.

²⁷ Rafael Ghazanchyan, *Hayrakan tseragir* (Paternal manuscript), Yerevan, 2003, p. 3.

... if you had not driven my grandfather out of his home in Bitlis or Kars or wherever ... if you had not slaughtered the children and the old ... I could welcome you in my house in Bitlis or wherever. We could drink wine together.” Surprisingly, the Turk takes the blame and does not repudiate, but the outcome is fruitless. The rapprochement, despite the similar conditions and fate that drew the Armenian and the Turk together, does not go anywhere.²⁸

Another example of such an innovative voice in literary responses to Genocide in Armenia is Henrik Edoyan’s call “Hey, Turkish Poets.” The author addresses the Turk, and, at the same time, he intimates the importance of the role of literati, in this case the Turkish intellectuals at the time of the Genocide. Edoyan believes that they could make a difference and prevent the atrocities. The first stanza sets the pattern:

If one of you, just one, had spoken up
 “Why kill this trembling child,
 his slaughtered parents were enough,”
 We might have raised a glass together
 if not a monument.

The poem continues in the same mood, reproaching Turkish poets for not speaking out when “innocent girls,” children, women, and old men, “the old gods who walked and toiled this land” were being killed, when “manuscripts [were] soaked in blood again.” And if they had taken sides and said, “Let’s not kill the genuine poets / at least not them.”/ You, too, could have been the real thing.” Turkish poets have remained silent, and their silence is deemed as complicity, unfitting a real artist, as Edoyan sees it.²⁹

Davit Mouradyan’s novella *Hrazhesht* depicts life in Armenia in the 1950s, but the thread of memory extends far back in the past, the odyssey of the Gisakyan family of Kharbert, the hardship and loss of loved ones on the deportation route and in exile, and the continuing predicament under Stalin’s rule of terror in Soviet Armenia.

The horrors of the Stalin era continue to appear at least as a secondary theme in literature, as they are certainly a part of the childhood memory of the Armenian writer. Interwoven with that life is yet the memory of the distant past. Ruben Hovsepyan’s (b. 1939) *Levon Pap* (Grandpa

²⁸ Aghasi Ayvazyan, *Antun turke* (The homeless Turk), *Nor Dar*, no 2 (1999), p. 58-60.

²⁹ Henrik Edoyan, “Hey, Turkish Poets,” trans. Diana Der Hovanessian, *RAFT* 6 (1992), p. 11.

Levon) has gone through lots of hardship in those years. His family history is an evidence of the lifestyle prescribed by the regime. Levon Pap is a sad witness to the disrupted ties with the old and the traditional. He tries to salvage something from the past by adopting an orphan from Mush, a boy who faced death, endured hardship, famine and cold on the road of deportation. "The snow in the valley of Mush is red now,"³⁰ Levon Pap struggles to revive the discarded and despised culture of Cochineal; for him that red worm is the symbol of national values trampled underfoot.

Aghasi Ayvazyan writes about his contemporary life in Yerevan, but the effects of the Genocide are in the background. "On New Year's day in 1892 we were 27 of us." Kirakos remembers, even though he was not born yet. "On New Year's day in 1916 we were three. He [Kirakos's father] celebrated the New Year alone in 1920 in our home in Yerevan. He was almost dead when they became two again. . . The second was my mother, another starving refugee, who stood on the threshold of my refugee father's home and said "Happy New Year."³¹

Today in the relatively free atmosphere of independent Armenia, one can suggest that all the basic components of a modern national literature are in place. The atmosphere is ripe for the rebirth of one national literature: the language, the soil, the presence of a common history and common destiny for almost three million people living in their homeland, sharing the same national identity. The rupture of historical memory is mended. The Turkish-Armenian restrained relationship, coupled with Azerbaijani-Armenian tension—continued Azeri assaults, belligerent declarations, distortion of history, and intimidations on the backdrop of recent bloody incidents—are a part of everyday life in Armenia. The memorial complex of Tsitsernakabert and the majestic duo of Sis and Masis that hover above the Yerevan landscape are constant reminders of the historical injustice.

There certainly seems to be a renewed interest to rediscover the past and deal with it. On top of it all is the continuing denial of the truth of the Armenian Genocide that challenges the minds, the sanity of sensitive souls and demands response, literary response as a catharsis, as a protest, and as a sanctuary of historical memory. This is the thread, the invisible

³⁰ **Ruben Hovsepyan**, *Yes tser hishoghutiunn em* (I am your memory), collection of short stories and novellas, Yerevan: A Publication of the Armenian Writers' Union, 2003, cited from *Vordan Karmir* (Cochineal Red) novella, p. 30.

³¹ **Aghasi Ayvazyan**, *Entir Erker* (Selected works), Yerevan: "Nairi, 2001, from the story *Kirakos*, p. 9.

thread of historical memory which may grow thinner with time but will never break, that is if we in the Diaspora and in Armenia hold it between our fingers and walk in its path.

Ռուբինա Փիրումեան

Յեղասպանութեան յիշողութիւնը խորհրդանշայ գրականութեան մէջ

Հայաստանի խորհրդայնացումով պարտադրուած նոր արժէքներն ու նորմերը ենթադրում էին նոր կենսաձև, նոր աշխարհայեացք ու պատմական յիշողութեան, եղեռնի յիշողութեան խախտում: Գրականութիւնը և ընդհանրապէս մշակութային ստեղծագործութիւնները պիտի ծառայէին պոռթկալի դասակարգին ու նրա մէջ սերմանէին սովետական ինքնութիւն և անսակարկ հաւատարմութիւն դէպի խորհրդային մեծ հայրենիքը: Հայոց գրականութիւնը պիտի զարգանար կտրուած իր արմատներից ու աւանդոյթներից: Զեկոյցի նեղ սահմաններում փորձ է կատարուած վերծանելու այդ տարիներին գրականութեան մէջ արտացոլք գտած բայց արգելուած մօտիկ անցեալի յուշերն ու ազդեցութիւնը և յետագայի ազգայնական զեղումների և նոյնիսկ պահանջատիրութեան արտայայտութիւնները՝ ի հեճուկս խորհրդային ճնշող քաղաքականութեան և գրաքննութեան: Անդրադարձ է կատարուած նաև 1988-ի երկրաշարժի և Ազրբէյջանում հայութեան ջարդ ու կոտորածների առթած գրական ազդումներում եղեռնի յիշողութեան առկայութեանը և թէ եղեռնի թեման ինչպիսի արտացոլք է գտնում այսօրուայ հայ-թրքական պրկուած յարաբերութիւնների միջավայրում:

