

TOROS TORANIAN

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Reflective Essay

Translated from the Armenian by
Aris G. Sevag

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Darkness Under the Sun

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*Dedicated to Haig Allaverdian, the witness to my book's
genesis, and from the depths of my heart to the victims of Sumgait
and the Armenian Earthquake.*

No, the title of this book is not a borrowing that perhaps recalls the name of a book titled *Darkness at Noon* by the German author Arthur Koestler. Koestler committed suicide in 1981. Far be it from me the very notion of suicide. Koestler committed suicide, despite being armed with the world's most progressive ideas. Why did it happen, I wonder? He was one of the leaders of the German working class, and suddenly he cut short his very own life.

Why? Why? This question torments my soul. I'm experiencing an affliction that has no name. I wish to forget the event yet it is present within me; it hurls me from one wall to the next and puts me in a nightmarish state.

Now, what am I thinking about? Where's my mind? Where am I? A short while ago, I was sitting in front of the window in my room, in one of the world's most ancient cities—Aleppo—and thinking of writing a short story, when the heartbreaking news came of the earthquake that had jolted the region of Leninakan and Spitak.

The sun had struck my back and was warming me, spreading a feeling of bliss in waves among the millions of cells that make up my body. It felt as if my body was a boundless ocean and the sun's rays were waves set free from a zephyr. The sound of those waves was coming to me like a melody. I was listening to myself, minute by minute, and was thinking of writing a story about that. I was thinking of naming that story, "I with Myself," or "The Sun and I."

The world was so wonderful like that. A seemingly imponderable state, in which one gives thanks to the Inscrutable One that he, one whose beginning and end has to do with the Mysterious, experiences such a moment of bliss. Is that moment incorporeal? But how can it be incorporeal when I can feel and experience that moment? I, a material being, a human of flesh and bones, am thinking or I am experiencing; that's how I feel. In other words, my thought has materialized on the vibrating fibers of my feelings.

I am ecstatic that I exist.

I live in Aleppo, one of the world's oldest cities. Yes, I'm a human being,

like one from Angola, Chile, or Ireland. However, can anyone say that I am not Armenian? I haven't created the Armenian people. The Armenian people came into being centuries ago and I, centuries later, am clinging firmly to the handful of our soil that is left to us. I am the continuation of the Armenian people; I'm the perpetuator of this people destined to carry on its existence, a people which has developed its culture over the centuries, cell by cell.

Now back to the earthquake . . . Spitak, Leninakan. I don't know who named the latter such. I don't know who had previously called it Alexandropol and, even earlier, Giumri and Gumairi.

Now I already said that I'm Armenian, but Leninakan doesn't have an Armenian name. This vexes me too. Why shouldn't an Armenian city be called by an Armenian name? Why shouldn't an Armenian person be baptized with an Armenian name?

Have you seen or heard of a centuries-old city in any country in any part of the world having been christened with an Armenian name? Is it perhaps because our Armenian names aren't pleasing to the ear? Why doesn't anybody adopt our names yet we adopt those of others? Thus, we don't value our own names either.

Who is preventing us from doing so? My father named me after his father, which doesn't displease me. It's good that he didn't name me after an American movie star. In that case, as a child, I would have aspired to be like that actor. I mean to say that I would not have lived my own life, with my own thoughts; rather, I would have imitated someone else's manners, I would have aspired to resemble somebody else.

But I'm alive, I exist. I believe that I'm a world unto myself. Why should I repeat the life of others? Why shouldn't I have my own life?

I am not an egoist.

I'm simply who I am. In other words, I'm Armenian. A type of human being, who has decided never to commit suicide, never to become despondent, even if the Himalayan mountains should come tumbling down on him; that is, on me, on the Armenian people.

No, I shall not become despondent, like the Italian writer Ignazio Silone, the great novelist of the 1930's, the author of the novel *Bread and Wine*, one of the founders of the Italian Communist Party.

Or, again, like the Italian writer Primo Levi who committed suicide. He too was a left winger, the author of a few novels, who ended his life after experiencing the horrors of fascist oppression.

I wonder, is the world truly one huge stage where mankind, after giving birth to the greatest of geniuses, like Tolstoy, Dante, and Narekatsi, continues to perform *The Comedy of Errors*?

Isn't this cause for anguish too? Is it not a greater woe that mankind shall continue to perform this play called *The Comedy of Errors*?

Why did Primo Levi commit suicide?

Why did this man commit suicide, particularly since he believed in international brotherhood? The heroes of his novels are good characters. Primo extracted them from real life and presented them to us as good examples but he didn't follow, or was not able to follow, the example of the very heroes created by him. Why? Was his life so unbearable? Primo Levi had read Dante's *Inferno*. He had read Franz Werfel's novel, *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*. He had seen plenty of misery, stood alongside men in suffering, so how and why did he detach himself from this army?

So there I was, sitting in my sunny room in Aleppo and thinking of writing a story.

The sun was dissipating my gloomy thoughts, just as it dispels the dark clouds and presents its shining face to the world.

I was feeling proud of the sun. Through my existence, I was happy to confirm the sun's universal power—the sole power which is an indiscriminating and universal benefit to all, which brings all beautiful things to life and the creature capable of appreciating all those beauties, known as man.

If man didn't exist, if he hadn't been summoned to existence, who would confirm the existence of the sun, the existence of beautiful things, the existence of evil?

"Satan, get lost, just for today let me not think about evil."

It's a sunny winter day. Calm prevails. Therefore I shouldn't become absorbed in gloomy thoughts. I should sit and write a story.

It's Wednesday, December 7, 1988. In the end, stretching something too far causes it to break, like an overstretched rubber band or empires flung too far. If further mention is necessary, we can begin with our neighbor, Turkey, and go back in time to the Persian, Roman, and Byzantine empires.

All of a sudden, there occurred an eclipse of the sun. The sun? Does it ever become eclipsed? No, it was my room that became dark. The warmth of the sun is still inside of me, in my veins, in the core of my being.

What happened? Does anything happen suddenly, or is any given event

the result of a certain aggregate or course?

An infernal racket, a tumult, an aggregate of billions of noises had filled the space, and my room was dark.

I felt my face, my eyes, and my ears; I rubbed one hand with the other to actually get a feel of myself. Do I exist? What happened? Did war break out suddenly? Or did another country, in violation of an alliance treaty, attack Armenia, just as Germany had invaded the Soviet Union in 1941?

How many bombs were dropped over Leninakan, plunging me into darkness like this? I'm in a spiritual darkness, I'm in hell, all I can hear is noise, noise, and more noise.

I hear cries for help coming from all four sides. I'm bewildered. I touch my eyes. They're there but I can't see anything. I'm engulfed in darkness. Nothing but darkness. My eyes are open but I can't see. I'm like the mole which can't see either.

What happened? I can't figure it out. Since I'm alive, I can think and, therefore, that which we call time exists too. I don't know how long I've been in this state. Now I hear voices. Someone is shouting, "Mama!"; another, "Oh, my foot, my hand, my head is about to explode, rescue me, someone, anyone, save me, help!" . . . pitiable voices, which now rush upon me.

I, in turn, shout, "I'm here! I'm alive! People, I hear you, do you hear me?"

One of them says, "I hear you, I hear; oh my arm, help me!"

I move yet I don't know how to get around in the dark. I try to walk with my hands extended. This is my room. I'm holding my pen. I was going to write a story. This is my desk. Now, in this darkness, when I don't know what happened in the world, in Leninakan, as I was thinking about the fate of prominent writers, about the sun, about my own happiness, the light has gone, or darkness has obstructed it. Now I hear plaintive voices. It is as if tanks are rumbling on top of my head, crushing my skull, my brain, and my thoughts under their caterpillar tracks.

Suddenly I shout, "No, I shall not commit suicide, never mind that Koestler and Primo Levi committed suicide, I shall not. Richard Wright, one of the founders of the American Communist Party, committed suicide too, in Paris.

If Richard Wright, the author of the novel *Native Son*, was an optimist, then why did he commit suicide?

Now I began to think that Leninakan is an earthquake center. I began to think that a war couldn't have broken out. I began to think that those infernal noises weren't caused by bombs; rather, they were the result of the remission, separation and collision of rock and earth.

If lightning results from the clash of clouds charged with positive and negative electric energy, then the earthquake causes death and destruction. Accordingly, I am under ground. Or buildings have collapsed on my house. Thus, pleas, cries for help, and unceasing voices are coming from beneath the ruins.

Extending my hand, I figure I'm touching the right wall of this room of mine. A few steps the other way is the left wall. This is where the door should have been. This is my desk; this, my chair. I sit down. I was going to write a story. I was going to write about myself. I was going to write about the sun. That story was going to resemble me, yet despite the presence of my desk, my papers, and my pen, I'm unable to write even one line. I am afraid that even if I should write until morning, I will not be able to write even one good line.

Until morning? What is morning? What is evening? Darkness is everywhere. I've opened my eyes wide but I can't see anything. How many hours have I been in this condition? Has it been six hours? I don't know, maybe it has been as long as two days or two months.

The voices around me have begun to grow faint, but tanks continue to roll above my head, crushing my brain, my thoughts.

I wonder, are people above ground coming to their aid?

Now I look around but can't see. However, I can hear. What a marvelous thing it is to hear! I hadn't previously thought about this. Now, though, if I can't make a connection with the outside world through my eyes, at least I can do so through my ears. I hear voices, clamor, the rotation of metal; I hear the sound of footsteps, the sound of rocks. I distinguish the sounds.

Now I am in love with my ears. My ears, I'm glad that you exist. You connect me with life; you keep me from becoming despondent; you even make me optimistic. Thank you, my ears!

Suddenly, my thoughts are transformed into sound; I wish to hear my own voice, so I shout—"Thank you, my ears." "What?" I hear a far-off voice. "Thank you for hearing," I shout again and again.

I told myself out loud that I would not lose hope, that I wouldn't be like Andre Gide. He gave up all hope.

Andre Gide was one of the great friends of the Soviet Union, who became quite despondent and said, "When I heard about Stalin's barbarous acts, I was horrified and, from that day on, I decided that justice doesn't exist under tyrannical regimes."

If Andre Gide was horrified by those acts, then what choice did those who experienced those brutalities have but to go mad.

What was Charents to do, the Armenian poet of the October Revolution, later accused of being nationalistic? What was Bakunts to do, the founder of modern Eastern-Armenian prose? What was Haik Bzhshkiantz to do, the legendary commander of the "Iron" Sixth Regiment of the Hunchaks in 1914?

I ask you, Andre Gide, what were they to do? They didn't just hear about those cruelties; their bodies bore the worst of those tortures. They were shot to death. In other words, truth was executed and you knew very well, Andre Gide, that justice could not be executed by shooting. That is why Charents, Bakunts, Haik Bzhshkiantz are still with us today; that is, justice is still alive.

I confess that, at this moment, I'm not physically injured. You can see that my mind is working more methodically than a clock. I can also hear. My being able to hear helps my brain function effectively. However, I must say that my condition doesn't resemble that of the voices I heard, with one crying out "Oh, my foot," another shouting "Oh, my hand," and a third screaming "My head's exploding" "Help!"

They are experiencing the pain. I, in turn, hear the pain experienced by them. My soul is agitated but, I wonder, can I feel their pain the way they do?

Upon hearing about the pain, Andre Gide lived on, only to become despondent. Others, however, experienced the pain without losing hope.

I feel as if I'm under the rubble of the apartment buildings in Leninakan leveled by the earthquake—the child of those who never lose hope. Perhaps I will not be able to emerge from beneath the ground, to come out from under the rubble. The air has already become heavy, I'm having difficulty breathing but I shall not give up hope.

I shout, "Friends, brothers, don't lose hope, you shall live, people up there are doing what they can to get to us, I hear the sounds of their tools, can you hear them too?"

I recalled my friend, Haig. What a time to remember him! Here I am in the dark, while he's in Chicago. Well, I'm alive, Haig, I'm under ruins,

thinking about you. Did you in the Diaspora hear about the earthquake that shook Armenia? I, your old friend, even while I'm under the ground, I am thinking about you.

Haig, your smile now is a ray of light which pierces my soul and illuminates my earth-covered body. I recall your telling me about the time you took the poet Gostan Zarian to the airport for his flight to Armenia where he would live out his remaining days.

Zarian said to you—

"Loneliness is taking me to Armenia."

Haig, I'm beneath the rubble. I'm not alone. See? I'm talking with you, I'm gaining strength from you, I'm gaining strength from the Diaspora, Haig!

Recently, a high-ranking official from Armenia, during a visit to America, proclaimed that Armenia doesn't need the Diaspora.

We need all the Armenians of the Diaspora and Armenia. We need adults and children alike, we need the wisdom of babes. See, Haig, my dear friend, my beloved Diaspora, even as I remain in the dark, under the rubble, the thought that we need the crystal-clear thinking of our children has illuminated my room. It's as if my eyes met the sun's rays; I closed my eyes tight and thought about how many children remained under the rubble, and how many crystalline thoughts were buried, never to come to light . . . I felt dizzy, Haig; that thought floored me. I don't know or remember how long I remained like that. The meaning of time has long since escaped me. My watch is phosphorescent so I was always able to see the hours and days clearly.

Again I look at the hands of my watch. They have stopped moving. The day, time, has stopped on December 7. I wonder, is today December 7th too? Has time in general stopped, like my, watch? I feel nauseous. I swallow my saliva. I have a piece of bread the size of an ear so I figure on finishing it off, eating it because my stomach is growling, but what can I do in this darkness?

Now I recall your meeting, as you told me, with the English writer Christopher Isherwood. This man had taken part in the Spanish Civil War. He died in Los Angeles at the age of 88. You met him inside the Chicago Opera House. He declined your dinner invitation and said, "I have totally devoted my life to silence and writing. The human soul's value increases in silence. . . ."

I wonder, were those words the reason why I, lying under the rubble, remembered you? I wonder, was this relative silence the reason why I remembered you and the humane writer Isherwood, who wrote the book *I Am A Camera*?

No, my dear Haig, I am not a camera. Many phenomena can escape the eye of that mechanical device, which is a human invention. Isherwood's eyes had the power of a thousand machines. If only this great writer, born before the turn of the century, had gone to Armenia, seen our country with his own eyes, witnessed this earthquake which shook all our people, and described everything for posterity's sake.

At present, I can't see the frightfulness of what happened. I am in the dark. I merely can hear feeble cries for help, Haig.

Now, Haig, get ready to hear me, I'm going to shout so loud that you'll be able to hear me in Chicago.

"Haig, I shall survive. I shall see you again and talk about literature, about the Black movement, about the Armenian cause, about this earthquake, about our salvation, about my salvation."

Do you hear me, Haig?

Oh, what kind of man am I? How long have I been sitting in this deep dungeon? I'm groping along in the dark, I feel the walls of my house, all the paintings are still in place.

This is Minas Avetisian's painting. His birthplace, Djadjoor, isn't far away. There, in Djadjoor, there was a permanent exhibit of Minas's paintings. I wonder, did anything happen to the village? Are Minas's paintings still there? If not, this is the umpteenth calamity to have struck Minas. Minas, call out from the other world. When fire consumed some of your works, I came to Yerevan and said to you, "At least you're alive, Minas, you'll create new works. Don't despair." A gentle smile crossed your face. Well, now that you are no longer, if your paintings are destroyed, who is going to paint them anew from scratch, who is going to bring them to life?

I have a hunch that your paintings are still intact. They shall exist forever, Minas.

The air became heavy. My breathing became labored. "My wife, my life companion, help me out." As it is, I can't raise my voice enough to call my daughter and my son.

See, I only called you when the air became heavy. When someone's in a bind, whom does he call for help, if not his immediate relatives?

Where are you? Do you see the sun? I hope you are among those searching for those who are buried. I hope you didn't have an accident or weren't tossed upside down by the jolt of the wild beast, like me.

I didn't call out to my mother or father for help. They witnessed the Armenian Genocide, soon tired of this life, and departed.

How can I call out to those who have gone? Since when have I been here anyway? I've lost track of the days. My breathing has become labored and, thus, I feel the taste of death in my mouth. Death has the taste of the earth; that is to say, it can cause new seeds to flourish. You, my life companion and my children, you have remained outsiders. Perhaps I may turn to dust, in which case it's up to you to cultivate this soil.

However, I have a hunch that I too shall remain a tiller, yes, I shall hang on.

I can visualize the movie version of Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*. We saw that movie together, right? We were in Beirut then. The movie was showing at the Rivoli Cinema.

When the lights went on, we saw that we were the only ones left in the theater. All the viewers had left because there weren't any love scenes in it, just the victorious hero-old man.

Now that I'm under rubble, Hemingway's old man gives me strength.

I am that old man who conquered the elements. My dears, I shall come out from under this rubble.

It was Hemingway who said, "You can kill man, you can scorn man, you can exploit or humiliate man, but you can never defeat man."

See here, I am that man that Hemingway was talking about, I shall join you. Search for me, help me. I, in turn, am looking for you every minute, and I know that I will reach you.

However, my dears, what I don't know is why Hemingway, the author of *The Old Man and the Sea*, the man who took part in the Spanish Civil War, put a stop to the work of his heart which beat for mankind. He committed suicide.

Didn't the old man of the sea, the hero that he created, who has now come to my aid, rush to help the one who created him?

Why?

This is the riddle which torments one who stands close to death.

Hemingway, I shall not follow your example, nor that of Wystan Hugh Auden, one of the greatest English poets of the 20th century, who was a

communist, who resigned from his party in 1939 and committed suicide in the 1980's.

What made me think of these intellectuals who had renounced the validity of one great idea or another and ultimately committed suicide? I am under the rubble—a plain, ordinary Armenian who has come to know you through your works, admired you but who will never ever execute your final step nor, especially, give up hope.

Tell me, what fault does an idea have? Is it at fault on account of its clarity, purity, or fresh breath? Tell me, what is its fault?

Grab by the collar those who don't execute that ideology, shake them up good, overthrow them! Yes, overthrow those types wherever you meet up with them! Let no Beria or Stalin be able to rise from the dead! Let them stay buried under all the curses of all peoples, let them get lost forever! I merely ask that nobody despair of life, which is the sun's gift to us.

From the depths of this darkness, from amidst these ruins, where there is no light, where I can feel the lack of oxygen with each passing minute, without a voice left, I cry out, "People, don't give up hope!"

Herbert Marshall, an exemplary communist, Russian expert, the reviver of Georgian history, and professor at various American universities, was deported from the Soviet Union by Beria.

Herbert Marshall had the faith of a monk with regard to socialism. He spent the decade of the 1930's at Moscow University, where he lectured on English literature. Then, on the basis of one letter written by him, Beria succeeded in expelling this great scholar from the Soviet Union.

On that occasion, quite a few prominent English, Italian, and French communists raised their voice in protest against the injustice committed. The protest was successful; Marshall returned to Moscow. The crystal was nevertheless broken. Its makeshift patch job could never restore it to its erstwhile condition; the previous appeal that communism held for Marshall, which was based on boundless faith, was gone for good.

The crystal became plain glass and lost its former value.

One of Herbert Marshall's works is devoted to Mayakovski, one of the greatest poets of the Communist Revolution. In that book, Marshall wrote about another great figure with deep admiration. That great figure was Charents.

I'm under the rubble but look how far I'm roaming!

Beria himself was executed too. Stalin's coffin was removed from Lenin's

mausoleum and placed underground. You, in turn, should open your closed mouths and, instead of sighing in despair, demand justice, for justice can be obstructed for one year, ten years, or seventy years, but it's impossible to obstruct it forever.

Demand justice. Justice doesn't come with the cry of the despondent. It doesn't come to one who is ill; it is not achieved by those who are vile, who steal, who are corrupt, or who are pusillanimous, and therefore mute in body and spirit.

Justice comes through force, unity, struggle, faith, and sacrifices. Justice shall be born out of death while many are of the opinion that justice is dead, that it died centuries ago.

I'm thinking about this now, in the dark. I ask, "Justice, are you really dead?" But what am I saying? After all, don't life and death walk shoulder to shoulder? Moreover, aren't they joined together, aren't they one? Therefore, justice, you exist; there's life in you, you are present in life, but your enemies have occupied your throne. I shall rise against them; we shall rise against them.

There's been enough retrogression. It's time to restrain the hooligans of the world. They wear modern clothes and live in mansions, while the writers of the speeches they deliver barely make a living. These hooligans quote from the great philosophers yet they are allied with the devil; they speak in the name of justice but they throw orgies, desecrating everything moral . . .

Oh, what thoughts I'm entertaining! My soul is truly agitated.

It's true, I can't see. How terrifying the darkness is! However, I'm happy—even in the ruins of this so-called house, in desolation, in solitude, in this helpless state of mine . . .

Remember, I can hear. Now I'm covering my right ear. With my left ear I hear feeble voices crying for help. I cover my left ear. With my right ear, I likewise hear frightful voices. 'I think, therefore I am.' Thus, not only do I hear but I can think too. Thinking is superior to hearing. I tell myself, "Relax, relax, you've run out of bread but there is other food. See, you can think, what a wonderful thing it is to be able to think, to be able to confirm your existence. Plus, you have a voice; a little while ago, you shouted, despite having thought that you had lost your voice; however, after eating that ear-sized piece of bread with jam, you shouted, you demanded justice. Look, see how much you have! You can hear, you can shout, you can think and . . . you know that you shall emerge from this darkness."

Now, what's going on outside? Where are my comrades, my friends? Why isn't any help coming? Apparently, it is but it's reached others first so soon it will be my turn, for sure. There's no way that it can't come. I shall see Leninakan again; again I shall stroll along the streets of this city; I shall go to the theater; I shall take flowers to the grave of Boloz Mukuch; I shall take my grandchildren for an outing. I shall live!

All of a sudden, Mayakovski entered my mind. Where are you, "Cloud with Drawers"? I recalled a line: "I chew all bureaucratism with my teeth." Where are you, Mayakovski, the eighth wave of the Revolution? Come and chew our present-day bureaucratism with your iron teeth. Come here, we need you. Where are you, do you see the 9th wave of the Revolution, Charents?

Oh, you committed suicide too. Why? You didn't give the reason, either. No, Charents didn't commit suicide. You most likely told Charents about your situation. Most likely you heard that neither Sahak Ter Gabrielian, nor Aghasi Khanchian committed suicide. They were murdered by the enemies of the Revolution, who were communists on the outside, fascists in disguise, true fascists.

Sergei Yessenin too committed suicide.

I think I'm going insane. What is this phenomenon? Yessenin can be called the Russian Medzarents, or Vahan Derian, or Madtheos Zarifian. Why did he commit suicide?

I, in turn, shall not commit suicide. I'm not saying that I am any stronger than those who committed suicide. I wonder, were they perhaps more sensitive? Did they suffer more? Regardless of the reasons, I consider the action of these great talents a weakness.

Alexander Fadeyev committed suicide too. I remember having read his *The Young Elite and the Breakup*. A whole generation grew up with those books.

I haven't forgotten the Armenian hero of the novel, Jora Haroutiunians. How could Fadeyev, the creator of a whole series of marvelous young heroes, have committed suicide when I saw so much promise in those blue eyes of his?

Even if the emergency workers should come late, remove me from this medieval cave, which has no windows, and ask me what I did in this darkness for days—who knows how many!—or centuries, for that matter, what answer shall I give them?

If I say that I thought about all those who committed suicide, they'll laugh at me. They'll say that I was in a state of shock, that I was touched in the head, or that I didn't find anything else to think about. Some most probably will add, "Take him to a rest home, let him relax for a week or two, and then interrogate him. Otherwise, you won't get a straight answer from him now, since he can't even open his eyes yet, on account of being so used to the dark."

I don't know who'll be the one to say that, but I wish to express my thanks in advance. Yes, indeed, it will be difficult for me to open my eyes, which have grown accustomed to the dark, to the outside world for at least the first few hours.

I'm certain, however, that I haven't gone mad.

Now I recall Edward Morgan Forster, the English novelist who wrote *A Passage to India*. He was a communist who had taken part in the Spanish Civil War as a correspondent and later, in 1939, resigned from his party.

It was wrong for him to have resigned.

See what judgments I'm pronouncing from underground! Unimpeded judgments. Meanwhile, above ground, he was an individual who had seen true misery.

George Orwell was another unfortunate character, isn't that so? Orwell was a novelist, columnist for *The London Times*, and a communist. There's hardly anybody who hasn't read his *Animal Farm*. And there's hardly anybody who's read it and not found it heartrending.

This influential man lived in isolation. In 1939, he resigned from the party he cherished so greatly, severed his relationship with *The London Times*, and announced, "I didn't renounce communism in order to become the prisoner of English nobility."

Didn't Boris Pasternak fall into despair too? This talented poet and prose writer, the winner of a Nobel prize, was forced to say, "The most regrettable thing is that those pupils of mine, who are great poets today, don't even bother to visit me. If I were dead and buried, maybe one of them would come and put a flower on my grave."

My head is about to explode. An involuntary prisoner to begin with, I am becoming even more of a prisoner with these thoughts; I'm terrified and, moreover, I'm surprised that I haven't gotten myself out of here by breaking through the still standing ceiling of my room.

In my sad state, however, a bright face comes to visit me, that of Osip

Mandelstam. A lover of Armenia and its culture, he wrote a book about both, and didn't despair until his tragic death in 1938.

Dull noises, a clamor make it seem like I am dreaming. But how could I have seen anything, since, no matter how wide I open my eyes, I can't see anything. Seemingly I see stars, stars that flee from me in fright, millions of stars . . . it's as if those stars are born of me and dart off in the opposite direction. But, then again, what is my direction? What direction am I headed in? Where are the stars headed incessantly? Then, later on, I think that I'm hearing the chirping of an army of crickets—incessant, unceasing. I wonder, is this what they call the sound of silence?

I don't need to put my ear to the ground in order to pick up distant sounds. I'm already underground. I have to listen for footsteps, tumultuous noises; I can't stand or sit idle; I must seek the light; I must reach the light; I as well must make an effort to reach the light; otherwise, I shall resemble those people who get up on stage and make speeches but subsequently don't do anything.

I recalled Arthur Miller, the American playwright who wrote *A View from the Bridge*. He viewed the world from a bridge; I, in turn, am viewing it from underground.

Arthur Miller was a left winger. He resigned from his party in 1949. Why did he resign from this party and begin to view the world from a bridge? Then, why did he write the book *Death of a Salesman*, which is a condemnation of capitalism?

Arthur Miller visited the land of his dreams, the Soviet Union, and wrote a book about it, entitled *In Russia*. I have translated that book into Armenian. Miller is a realist but one who became disappointed too. Why? Was it possible for a backward country to become transformed into a paradise from one day to the next? Was it possible to transform "wolves" into sheep from one day to the next? Why is it that people keep expecting miracles from that country?

Miracles occur in fairy tales, right? Jonah comes out of the whale's mouth. David slays Goliath. The Armenian David kills Msrah Melik. Dork of Ankegh causes enemy ships to sink in the Black Sea, etc. . . .

Let such events occur now, not only in books . . . For how many thousands of years must Mher remain confined in the heart of the Armenian highlands? When will he emerge from his mountain dwelling and liberate all nations and bring peace to them all? . . .

During this earthquake, while I've gone underground, perhaps Mher has spurted out from a cleaved rock and, riding David of Sassoun's steed, is shouting commands left and right. Perhaps this is so and I'm not aware of it, absorbed in my own thoughts . . .

Suddenly I shout --

"Hey, people, can anyone hear me? Did Mher, Mher of Sassoun emerge from the rocks? Hey, let me know, bring me the news."

I thought that I was shouting. Only I heard my voice and, as if I had just ascended a cliff, I fell to the ground exhausted, with no energy left.

In order to call Mher, one had to have a booming voice like that of Tsenov Ohan; whereas I didn't even amount to Tsenov Ohan's shadow. In order to see a shadow, the sun must be out, there must be light; meanwhile, I'm under ground, in total darkness, in spiritual darkness.

What happened to Arthur Miller? In 1954, when another earthquake struck America—the widespread earthquake called McCarthyism, when, in the initial words of the Communist Manifesto, a specter haunted America this time instead of Europe—Arthur Miller was summoned for interrogation.

First name, last name, parents' names, business, residence and, finally, the main question—Have you been a communist?

Miller's reply: "Where do you think I could have gone to see the devil, if not hell?"

It is bewildering.

Miller, don't say it like that. Instead, ask whose hands hold the keys to hell. They must go to hell so the road to hell may be closed.

Don't tell me I'm a dreamer. Would you deprive me of dreaming too? How can I live without dreaming? Here I am now underground; tell me, Miller, you who observe life from the bridges of New York, tell me, should I not dream about light and life? Shall I keep silent? Shall I not live? After all, living means dreaming, and you know that well.

Lillian Hellman, likewise, was taken by the best of dreams. She was your countryman. One of America's greatest dramatists. This dramatist was a communist, honored by Stalin. In 1950, Hellman resigned from the Communist Party and returned the medal she had received.

During the diluvian days of McCarthyism, when human dignity was swept up and tossed into the trash can, Lillian Hellman was summoned for interrogation. She was asked to tell what she knew about fellow writer

Dashiell Hammett. This writer of detective novels and screenwriter was one of the founders of the American Communist Party.

The reply of this courageous woman follows:

"Sir, isn't there any human elegance left in you? Isn't there a drop of decency remaining? You know, the rest of the world too knows that I sleep with that man. Will nothing be left sacred in America, on account of your paranoia? Senator, I forgive you. I ignore all these things that have happened. Likewise, I forgive you for all that's happened to me but God will never forgive you for asking this last question. You shall end up in hell. I'm leaving this stinking hall, which belongs to your Senate; send me to whatever jail you wish."

That was all she said. Nothing more needed to be said.

Subsequently she wrote *Scoundrel Times*, an anti-Zionist and anti-McCarthy book. Her death followed in 1984, in New York, and therewith this disillusioned one found her rest too.

Thinking about all this, how is it that I don't become thunderstruck in this excessive darkness and am not rendered into coal, yes, coal?

And I continue to think. Oh, thought! Oh, human brain, how much you can torture this human body which, even underground, functions like a clock! Who wound you, human brain, and how were you wound so that you can gather flashes of light from antennas, sometimes see distant, far-off groups of stars, yet sometimes not see under your very nose?

I tell you to stop but you don't. Brain, you are stubborn. You give commands to the heart and you don't stop working until the heart itself stops. The heart doesn't think but it stops functioning at practically the same time that you do. You're twins.

Now I tell myself to stop thinking. I think like that with you. Are you the one who thinks like that, or is it me? The result, however, is that you continue to think.

I'm thirsty but I don't know why. I had filled bowls with water, and they remain full. How can this be? There is something providential in this situation. I can't believe it. However, the reality is that I still have water. Thus, I can survive.

Now I recall Andre Malraux, the French sociologist and novelist, author of *Man's Fate*.

In 1936, Malraux fought in Spain against Franco. He too became

disillusioned and stated, "Communism is the stepchild of the Catholic Church. It is a Western notion coming from Christianity."

Where did Malraux come from and where did he go? He couldn't help but become disillusioned.

Then there was Picasso who, when fascism was raging in 1941, submitted his application and joined the ranks of the French Communist Party. Then, after the war, when he drew a portrait of Stalin as he saw him and published it in *Le Lettre Francaise*, a despicable campaign was launched against him. Picasso's representation was a caricature of Stalin.

Picasso was applauded for his famous painting "Guernica," which represented the cruelties of the Spanish fascists. Yet, when he ridiculed a soulless man, a beast, an individual responsible for the deaths of millions, he was stoned.

There's justice for you!

Where's the "Guernica" of Stalinism? Who shall be that miraculous painter who will depict this twin of Hitler with his bestial instincts?

After all, the world could have been different today without Hitler and Stalin.

Who shall paint the Ottoman Turkish "Guernica"?

When the one murderer isn't condemned, a new one is born. And thus *The Comedy of Errors* continues.

What about the "Guernica" of the earthquake? Blind is nature, which has blinded me for quite some time now; more accurately, it has deprived me of light and ended the lives of countless thousands.

With the occurrence of this thought, I shout, "Brain, enough is enough! Don't think such things! We are already few in number. We have always been condemned to be few in number."

"Brain, don't think about the thousands having been deprived of life on account of the earthquake. I tell you, don't think, listen to me just this once."

"Brain, you remember well that when Kievan Russia was in its formative period, the world population of Russians was five million. There were five million Englishmen in the ninth century; the number of Armenians at that time was likewise five million.

"Now look at the numbers and compare our population with theirs."

There weren't even five million Turks in the ninth century. Descending from the Tien Shan mountains, they followed the roads leading to the West.

They conquered the Arabs yet they feared them since the Arabs exceeded them in number and possessed a higher civilization.

Now, Evren, the president of Turkey, who is of Circassian descent yet considers himself a full-blooded Turk, has unearthed mass Turkish graves in Erzerum to prove that the bones found there are those of Turks killed by Armenians.

Now, Ozal, who is Turkey's prime minister, a Kurd by birth who considers himself a full-blooded Turk, has announced in the same city of Erzerum, the erstwhile Armenian capital city of Karin, that killings did indeed take place during the war, and that such events must not take place any more.

Any more. . .

I put it to you, how many Armenians are left for them to kill this time around? Where are the more than three million Armenians who used to live on the Armenian plateau? Where are the thousands of monuments of Armenian architecture? The scavengers haven't even spared the cemeteries; they've destroyed the *khachkars* (cross stones) and dug up the graves of the Armenians in the hope of finding money and gold.

The Turkish government leaders declare that the Armenians and Turks have lived side by side in peace and that we Armenians betrayed them during World War I.

As for our having lived side by side in peace, will history ever forget the roundup of children (*devshirme*) that began at the start of the 16th century, when the Turks went from one village to the next and periodically took thousands of under-age Armenian children, boys and girls alike, from their homes and proceeded to Turkify them?

The Turks increased in number while we decreased. Lamentation began in the Armenian villages.

Will history forget the massacres of 1895-96 organized by the Bloody Sultan Abdulhamid II, which took the lives of 300,000 Armenians?

Will it forget the Adana Massacre of 1909 which was organized by the Young Turks?

Will it forget the First Genocide of the 20th century, during which not only one and a half million Armenians lost their lives but the Armenian nation lost its ancestral homeland?

More than two million Armenians became Turkified during the past six hundred years. Had they procreated among themselves, the Armenian

population would have increased but they went under compulsion and increased the number of Turks.

Now the Turks shout, "We have a population of some fifty million." And this, at the end of the twentieth century, this century of knowledge, when we know that, in Turkey, there are 15 million Kurds, approximately two million Circassians, and other peoples of various nationalities numbering a few million. They are all referred to as Turks; i.e., the Turks openly wish to assimilate those peoples. On the other hand, though, they make discourses about human rights, they speak about democracy, and they wish to become part of the European Union, causing astonishment even among the Bulgarians who have been forcibly Turkified.

Are we Armenians the only people whom the Turks have forcibly Turkified over the centuries? Ask the Arabs about their experience, as well as the Greeks, the Bulgarians, the Yugoslavians, etc.

Then say why the Armenians don't number forty million today.

How could we reach forty million when we have always been subjected to annihilation—of course, while living side by side in peace with the Turks?

Let's not speak about Europe, about the Great Powers, about justice. All of them have behaved like whores for the sake of their own national interests.

The Turks, in turn, played the role of plague.

I said plague, and now who comes to my mind but Albert Camus, the French writer and author of a book by that name, *La Peste* [The Plague].

Albert Camus was a left-wing writer, founder-editor of the paper called *Combat*. He too became one of those who became disillusioned from communism after years of admiring the Soviet Union. His admiration turned to disillusionment in the 1950's. Why? Camus said the following in a book entitled *Lettres a un ami Allemand* [Letter to a German Friend]:

"All organized institutions, be they religious, ideological or sociological, have always contained in them the seeds of destruction."

Why would this internationally renowned writer descend from a pedestal, whose base was truly undefiled and is undefiled today as well? Bring down all the false statues from their pedestals, the very mention of whose names causes nausea and leaves the taste of blood in one's mouth. Bring them down so the noble, the healthy, the humane may remain.

What about John Steinbeck? These individuals have formed an army like a swarm of bees and, of all days, have picked this one to sting me here in the dark. I've gotten tired of sitting. I've worn down my palms from holding my

head. I have no idea what color my face is. My beard has grown longer, my face has broken out from my constant scratching.

Even the butterfly is attracted by the light yet these individuals are coming to the dark and not letting me think about myself, about my salvation, about getting out to where there's light, so I can see what has happened to Spitak and find out if my comrades, my friends are alive or not . . .

Yes, John Steinbeck was also a left-winger. In 1939, this American writer, author of *The Grapes of Wrath*, resigned from his party.

John Steinbeck maintained his communist sympathies until 1956, when the break occurred. Subsequently, he wrote two books extolling America, entitled *Travels With Charley* (1962) and *America and Americans* (1966).

Look where he started out and look where he ended up.

Now another bee comes buzzing in my head. This one is not one of those who became disillusioned; he was a novelist and playwright who remained faithful to his principles. He was one of the founders of the American Communist Party—Dashiell Hammett. Author of adventure novels, an indefatigable party worker, author of the famous novel, *The Thin Man*.

At the end of his life, Dashiell Hammett withdrew to his farm after distributing all his wealth to the poor.

He absolutely refused to respond to Senator McCarthy's questions, from which the smell of death emanated. He was taken in chains to prison, accused of being in contempt of the Senate. He remained there a year, then was released, whereupon he continued his work, his humane work.

Recalling Dashiell Hammett, I took a deep breath. It was as if the oxygen supply increased in the darkness of my room.

Lillian Hellman, in her memoir about Hammett, wrote that, after the success of one of her plays, which earned her fifty thousand dollars, she wished to get Hammett's opinion about her buying an expensive fur coat; the latter (he was her lover) said, after a long silence:

"My dear, do you wish to remain a writer or become a dressy prostitute? . . ."

One does not have to be a genius in order to answer this question.

After this remark, Ms. Hellman went crying to the bank and, from then on, for the rest of her life, never again thought about buying a fur coat.

What a contrast the wives of today's leaders present, with their fur coats! . . .

Now it's Langston Hughes' turn, another great American poet. He was black with a soul that was pure white. He was one of the founders of the American Communist Party who subsequently resigned from the very party he founded, declaring:

"Where there are orders, I have decided to not obey, even if that order is just."

He was not only a poet but the supreme defender of those having remained on the margin of society. He had taken part in the Spanish Civil War.

I recall one of his poems, "Afraid":

*We cry among the skyscrapers
As our ancestors
Cried among the palms in Africa
Because we are alone,
It is night,
And we're afraid . . .*

And another, "Prayer" [2]:

*. . . Gather up
In the arms of your pity.
Gather up
In the arms of your love --
Those who expect
No love from above.*

This could have been written by Charents.

I don't want to "contract like a ball all by myself." Now, being underground and closer to this American Black poet with the pure white soul, I shout, "Langston, listen to me, you are not alone, I am not alone, if there's just one person on the outside thinking about us, we are saved."

Millions of people read your works; my salvation, in turn, is close; I'm certain, I hear the voices of those digging in the earth; the earth is moving above my head. That's how I feel.

Man and hope are born together, Hughes. Man dies but hope lives on. Hope is immortal.

Such that, Hughes, we Armenians don't give up hope. If just one person is left on the earth to defend the Armenian cause, it will triumph without fail. However, the fact is, there are already thousands defending it.

Come, come, friends, there are so many of you above ground, I haven't had so many visitors in the light. But here, in the dark, underground, they continue to visit me.

This visitor is Dylan Thomas, the left-wing English poet who committed suicide in 1955.

They say that he was a formidable, marvelous reciter. He could move rocks with his recitations, like our Dork of Ankegh.

In 1954, the poet made a triumphant entry in America.

The Queen of England once invited this great national poet to her palace. Dylan Thomas refused the invitation, saying "You are queen by heredity. I have won my fame as an English poet with blood, just as the snail living in its shell bleeds by rubbing against it and is thus transformed into a pearl. In like manner, I have created poems through suffering, by bleeding and wearing myself out. Now, it is you who must come to me and not I to you."

The Turk, fearing the pen, killed our Varoujan, Roupen Sevag, Siamanto, Zohrab and a host of other intellectuals.

Stalin, fearing the pen, had hundreds of writers of various nationalities waste away in the freezing cold of Siberia.

The morning after Dylan Thomas recited his poetry in New York, the American papers wrote in large letters on their front pages: "Communist Dylan Thomas Captivates Americans."

Again, my mind flowed like beads of mercury towards the outside world. I wonder, what price did we pay for this earthquake? I have no idea. Sitting alone in brightly lit Aleppo, I receive desperate ones in my room, although I don't despair. What's more, I have come to an unscientific decision: not to despair.

Stephen Spenser. English poet. He too is one of the despondent ones. He was a Communist. He took part in the Spanish Civil War. In 1939, he resigned from his party and announced, "After my return from Spain, I became convinced that the Soviets played a role in the defeat of the Spanish war of liberation."

The folds of history are finally opening. Nevertheless, they are opening. In the meantime, cities are being reduced to ashes; cultural monuments, to

ruins; thousands upon thousands are dying, and millions are being prevented from coming to life. . . .

Who doesn't know Nikos Kazantzakis, the great Greek writer who had socialist leanings at one time?

Supposedly, Kazantzakis was invited by Stalin to Moscow in 1927 to speak on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution. Later he declared: "Whether one is a tsar or a communist, once he enters the Kremlin, he undergoes an inexplicable transformation."

In Moscow, when the Russians wished to look over his speech, he ripped up the pages of his prepared speech and immediately returned to Greece.

I would like to believe that the great writer Kazantzakis took this courageous step.

Panait Istrati was one of Kazantzakis's contemporaries. This Rumanian writer, who won the hearts of millions of readers but who became disillusioned with the concepts of his beloved socialism, left his country and died abroad in 1950.

I wish that all these despondent individuals would become a barricade against despair and topple those forcing others to despair.

Who can say that the fault lies with the concepts of socialism, who? Those who apply those concepts are, for sure, the guilty ones, the bunglers, the ones who are deriving personal benefit. It is the arms of these types which must be twisted.

It was not for nothing that Pariur Sevak wrote in his "Contemporary Prayer":

*-- In no courtyard should you accept
Their sacrificial animals,
Which aren't theirs, but stolen.
So faith itself won't be sacrificed,
Pure-noble,
Sincere-true.
Close your ears tight
To their slippery prayer...
By which they deceive not themselves, but you...
And, enough's enough, understand once and for all,
That even those who curse God
Are much more preferable,*

*Because faith itself has vexed them:
 Pierced-bloody,
 Burning-slapped,
 Pained-screaming,
 Faith, a child born
 To become a father.
 And if you're a father,
 Don't let phony believers kill it.*

Come, Luis Bunuel, come; you didn't become despondent, come and give warmth and light to our villages and towns buried in the rubble of the earthquake, and relate your past.

He was a Spanish Communist writer who was denied entry to the United States in 1951.

You surrounded the world with barbed wire, thinking that our planet is a zoo, whereas the beasts are the ones who put up that barbed wire.

Opposition, opposition, opposition and, finally, internment.

But, no, the end is the burning of jails and the tearing down of the barbed wire . . . this is the end, indubitably.

Even an animal will rebel when you confine it, and man will too, all the more so.

Remember the novel, *Papillon*, and the film made from it. People exert superhuman efforts to escape from jail, despite knowing that, in the event they get caught, they will be compensated only through death by guillotine.

Remember Jack London's . . . Man can store so much will in his nerves, muscles and brain that when he is rendered into a cylinder, he can endure.

Remember Hemingway's *The Old Man And The Sea*.

Remember Dostoyevski's heroes; remember our brave fedayeen; remember Antranig who, though ill, became healthy in an instant in order to punish Beshara Khalil and indeed punished the bloodthirsty Khalil.

Finally, remember our victims in Siberia. Those who weren't shot to death cut down trees in the forests for years, gritted their teeth, survived and returned to their homeland after the death of the mass murderer.

In May 1963, I had a conversation with the writer Vahram Alazan, who had returned from Siberia and was on his death bed.

I had many conversations with Guren Mahari and Mkrtich Armen, who cut down trees for 8 years, which were reminiscent of the latter's short story

entitled "The Communist in the Cylindrical Hat." In reply, Mkrtich Armen wrote the book *Patviretsin Handznel Dzez* [They Ordered to Turn You Over], a testimony to the Siberian tragedy. And then there was the writer who "enjoyed" Siberia the longest—Walter Aramian, the brother of Raphael Aramian, who said, "They took me away, accusing me of being a Trotskyite. I didn't even know what Trotskyism was."

Mahari wrote *Tsalkats Pshalarere* [Barbed Wires in Bloom].

Hey, you despairing ones, did you hear about this? Did you read *They Ordered to Turn You Over* or *Barbed Wires in Bloom*? No, you didn't, because they were written in the language of a small people and weren't translated into Western languages.

Gurgen Mahari deserves a Nobel prize for his *Barbed Wires in Bloom*. His fellow Armenians held up its printing for over two decades to prevent the truth from ringing out. And now those years are called the years of Brezhnevian stagnation. But weren't you the ones who clapped your hands and stamped your feet over the stagnant Brezhnev and his ilk? And, all of you, were you communists? Were you parrots or human beings when that "great" leader was being bribed day and night . . . even by the Azeris? No, not even, rather especially by the Azeri Turks!

You're brave when you get on stage and quote from Marx and Lenin. You should have gone one step further by selecting a quotation and giving it to Brezhnev, in order to put an end to the stagnation, which had begun to be transformed into a swamp.

You should have grabbed the hands of those offspring of Stalin, who used to extinguish their burning cigarettes on the head of the genius Acharian.

You should have pointed your guns at the chests of those who were shooting to death the indomitable Aghasi Khanjian and Aksel Bakunts, the incomparable master of Armenian prose, our "Alpine Purple," our "Apricot Branch," as well as the immortal Charents, one of the greatest singers of the October Revolution, who left us with his "Enamel Profile," "Seven Mysteries," and "Sweet Armenia."

Otherwise, you're just masters at giving speeches.

After all this, recall the following words on the 17th page of Andranik Zaroukian's *New Armenia, New Armenians*: "It's not a sin, of course, to live on foreign soil but being buried in foreign soil is undoubtedly a misfortune. As for reconciling with foreign soil, bequeathing one's children and grandchildren to foreign soil, that is stealing from the paternal soil and the

fatherland, and a transgression against the divine commandment of 'ashes to ashes, dust to dust.'"

(Return to your soil!)

I want to kiss you, Bunuel. Where is the Armenian Bunuel? Where is the Russian Bunuel? Where are the Bunuels of all peoples, needed to slaughter the Francos?

They're gone; they're all gone. The colony of the bees in the dark has left me alone. Since when have they come without me calling them?

And now, without me telling them to go, they've gone, they've all departed.

Again I am alone. Can man survive in solitude? Since man has lived, he has memories so he can't be alone. Now, if my foreign visitors have left me, I can call my Armenian acquaintances. After all, I'm no spring chicken, I've lived quite a few years, so I've got memories and, this time, I am condemned to death by tyranny.

Nature, you're not stupid and, like tyrants, you know that anyone who is condemned to death is not afraid of any threat. With a small motion, the ceiling can come crashing down on me and I'll die. However, I'm already underground so I'm not afraid of that threat.

See, I'm under the ground and still haven't died. Therefore, our soil is rich in oxygen.

But being buried alive is no way to go. A rage comes over me, a bright red rage and, seeing this color of mine, I'm certain that the Spanish bulls would become enraged and . . . human political bulls as well.

I recalled Aram Haigaz. He had come to Armenia in 1969. He had come but not by invitation. His instrument was not the drum. It was the violin. That's why he hadn't been invited.

Haigaz, Aram Haigaz, you survived the Armenian Genocide, you became a shepherd among the Kurds, you were from the same town as Antranig—Shabin Karahisar, you were left an orphan from the Genocide but when you became free, you reached America, and you became a father to us through your literature.

It's good that you went to Armenia and saw your paternal soil; you didn't die with that dream unfulfilled, like Hamasdegh.

Remembering is good. Forgetting is good too, they say. I'm going to think about this and see if they're right. I don't like repeating what others

say, like a parrot. I thought about it at length; no, I didn't find forgetting to be good. Even if forgetting will bring pain, I don't agree that I should forget. Pain can strengthen me.

Tell me, how can I forget the Armenian Genocide. That's painful, right? How can I forget the death of my father and mother? That's painful, right? No, I don't want to forget. I don't want to forget Sumgait. They want us to forget. No matter who wants the impossible, they can't succeed. Let Russia forget the Crimean War. Let Leningrad forget the German siege. Let Indochina forget the American occupation. Let Japan forget Hiroshima. Let Bulgaria forget about the murder of five thousand Bulgarians by scimitar in the village of Batak, on the trunk of one tree. Let the Palestinian Arabs forget about their occupied lands. Let Greece forget about the burning of Smyrna. Let them all forget and then come and teach us about forgetting.

Which way of death is best—hanging, execution or being buried alive, as fits my situation? I prefer the last means. Because when I breathe, I have hope. The hope of living. The hope of seeing the sun, of seeing greenery when photosynthesis runs its vital course through the leaves and caresses our eyes with its bright verdancy.

That's the reason why the Armenian grandmother blesses her grandchildren, saying "May your sun remain green, child."

So, I'm alive, the thread of my life hasn't been cut and the thread of my hope hasn't been cut, which isn't made of thread but of diamond. So, I shall live, despite the earthquake.

Vahram Alazan did not die in Siberia; upon his return to Armenia, he gave eyewitness testimony. A writer must give testimony about his time. Alazan gave testimony about the brutalities committed during 1936-1937.

"Sahak Ter Gabrielian, the old Bolshevik and president of the People's Committee Council, was killed after having been thrown out of a fourth-floor window, half dead after sustaining a terrible beating. Then a report was written up, stating that Ter Gabrielian jumped from the window of his fourth-floor room, supposedly with the intention of committing suicide.

The hands and feet of the true Bolshevik Arsen Yesayan were twisted and tied to his back; then he was thrown face down in the bathroom. For a few days and nights, his frightful screams shook the prison building. The bathroom was located beneath our cell and every day we used to hear Arsen Yesayan's heart-wrenching screams. Following those tortures, Yesayan lost his mind and was executed in that state of madness.

Haigaz Karageozian, representative of the Benevolent Society in Armenia, was beaten with iron bars so badly that the muscles of his body had become detached and intertwined with the strips of his shirt. He was in our cell; we used to witness his tortures and get all choked up.

The famous hydroelectric plant engineer Hovsep Ter Astvatsatrian, who was not a party member, was given lengthy beatings; then his feet were tied together and he was hung head first from his fourth-floor window, facing the courtyard. After remaining in that state for a few days and nights, no longer able to withstand the tortures, Ter Astvatsatrian was forced to sign a statement that he indeed was a saboteur and, as such, he was shot to death.

I was made to stand on my feet for 48 hours straight and was savagely beaten with fists, iron bars, boot heels etc. A few times I fainted and fell to the floor; they dumped water on me, whereupon I regained consciousness, and once again they continued beating me. Before being imprisoned, I had suffered a broken right shoulder blade in an automobile accident, which hadn't yet healed. When I told my examiner about it and requested that I not be hit in that spot, he reacted with a wicked laugh and said, 'Yeah? We'll see about that now.' Then, he deliberately began to strike me with an iron ruler precisely on my right shoulder. The hitting and beating was accompanied by vulgar and hooliganish curses levelled at my relatives. . . .

Zakar Mikayelian, the warden of Yerevan's central prison, and his assistant, Sinanian, used to throw Maro Alazan, my only true female comrade in the bitter days of my life, down on the cement floor of the cell and, in the presence of 32 women, kick her with their boots so badly that she would lose consciousness and was then confined to bed, motionless, for five months."

These are testimonies which can make one stop thinking; otherwise, as I'm doing now in this darkness, one can only conclude that the organizers of all these actions were extreme beasts, predecessor barbarians to Hitler, but never, never Communists.

Now, all coiled up for quite some time in this darkness, I've surrendered to the vortex of thoughts and am seeking a way out. Above ground, in the light, I used to take care of my daily business, run around all day long, and would forget to toss a glance at, devote even the slightest thought to, the future.

If we shall only be aware of today and not be able whatsoever to foresee tomorrow, prepare for tomorrow, and if tomorrow our children, in turn,

shall walk groping along their life's path, then what is the difference between us and animals? Tell me, what is it?

Yes, everybody has ignored our suffering. It is we who must not ignore our own suffering. We shouldn't want pity from the world, or cry and lament before others to the point of causing disgust. Let us finally make a confession to ourselves: Who likes to hear wailing and shrieking? People just close their eyes and ears. They don't want to see and hear. Therefore, we must present ourselves not as debtors but rather as creditors. And, in order to become creditors, we have to be prepared to flood the world with facts and statistics, to become the "ever-ringing belfry". . . .

Yes, this earthquake must have been frightful, I began to think to myself. Otherwise, I would have long since been rescued from this window-less cave.

Why, why did this earthquake have to strike us? But we didn't condemn the earthquake which has its centers. Why, why did we find it? This is the truth.

When an earthquake struck exactly here, in Leninakan, in 1926, it made its presence felt and thereafter, sitting like a mad dog, went to sleep.

Since it was bound to wake up sooner or later, what preparations did we make for that eventuality? It's obvious that we didn't make the necessary preparations. Had we done so, I would now be above ground and not below it.

We're skillful when it comes to writing tragedies.

Moses of Khoren ended his *History of Armenians* with tragedy. Gregory of Narek wrote a tragedy. Abovian wrote an elegy. So did Nalbandian. Raffi wrote an elegy. Toumanian's *Anoush* is an elegy. Shnorhali wrote the "Elegy to Edessa." Shahan Shahnour's *Retreat without Song* is an elegy; and our entire life is a tragedy. Who do you want to listen to us?

Everything became turned upside down. Remember, I was sitting by a sunny window in my home in Aleppo and was going to write a short story entitled "I with Myself" or "The Sun and I."

And then came this seemingly endless darkness, when I had guests during these days or centuries, I don't know, from the old and new continents, from many countries of the world. They came; some kindled my hopes and made me into an autumnal varicolored tree (Mikayel Gurjian would have said "Vareni.") Others, desperate themselves, further strengthened my will. Do you want to know why? Because I learned a long time ago from Saroyan that we have something to learn even from badly written books.

Isn't that the reason why I find Bedros Tourian's words true?

*Hopelessness, of the grave
We drank much of that black milk . . .*

That is why we have decided not to despair.

I said a short while ago that it is not good to forget. But perhaps didn't I forget Artsakh, the right of the people of Artsakh to self-determination, after descending underground? The upheavals in our capital city and throughout the land? Yes, no such tide has risen on the Atlantic Ocean in any century that can compare with what occurred or was forged in Armenia, in the heart of Yerevan.

Not since the days of our daring meliks and David Beg has our people in Artsakh come out into the open with such unity and so resolutely demanded its rights.

They had reached the end of their rope.
And, as the immortal Toumanian said:

*Like two formidable mountains,
Two centuries enclose us.
Behind one are old fairy tales;
Behind the other, it's dark and quiet,
And we're in the narrow pass between them.*

Narrow pass. Well, when have we ever not been in such a position?

When we rose to our feet in unison in Artsakh and Armenia, when we raised our fists in protest, the way Shiraz used to, it was at that moment that our brotherhood-preaching neighbors, having armed themselves, organized the carnage of the Armenians in Sumgait, thinking that this century was that of Tamerlane and posing as new Talaats.

This was not the work of hooligans, as the press in Moscow—likewise "fraternal"—would like to to misinform us; rather, it was an organized massacre. Things had been decided days in advance—the neighborhoods, even the day and time . . .

The bloodbath went on in Sumgait for three days and three nights, with defenseless "fraternal" Armenians being massacred by Azeri Turks . . .

Our people, both in Artsakh and in Armenia, woke up from their

seventy-year torpor in the course of those three days; it arose with wisdom and recalled its wise poet Toumanian:

*Who knows when man becomes wise like this?
Does that come from age, or is it the result of experience?*

Both age and experience have an effect, forever beloved and precious Toumanian, and added to this is the effect of Gorbachev's relative freedoms.

Thus, under a socialist regime, if one demands his own home, he must be killed. And especially in such a country like the Soviet Union, the state had to wait three days before restraining the murderers, while the police not only had to play the role of observer but also encourage the mob of criminals

So, vardapet, see if this doesn't drive you crazy.

It's something else that, no matter what calamity befalls the Armenian people, whether divine or man-made, we shall say, like the great poet from Kars, Yeghishe Charents:

Like a stone thrown at the inaccessible Mt. Ararat

But our body still feels the pain. And the pain from the wound becomes more throbbing, the wound opens wider when the one causing the damage speaks in the name of brotherhood. What brotherhood is left to speak of, when they bury it in Sumgait, in Kirovapat, in Nakhichevan, in Baku and, furthermore, when that brotherhood is buried by means of the central press in Moscow!

Moscow, prepare a green book about the history of socialism, about brotherhood, and record therein the life of the Armenian people, the life of all peoples, the life of the Turks and Azeris wishing and trying to destroy you every day, and show, first to yourself and then the rest of the world, if there is a people more fraternal, more faithful to socialism, than the Armenian people.

We don't put ourselves above others

But let Lenin's Armenian allies speak, let Stepan Shahumian speak, let Aleksandr Miasnikian speak. Moscow, you are the one who is saying that Stalin committed countless offenses, one of them being the turnover of Artsakh to Azerbaijan, so why are you repeating the same offense? In this matter, how are you different from Stalin?

You know full well, Moscow, how the Armenians fought against the huge armies of Wrangel and Denikin. Who made Baku into a fortress against English imperialism and the Turkish Azeri Musavats? What role did Haik Bzhshkiantz, the commander of the "Iron" division, play at the time of the seizure of the city of Ulianovsk?

Moscow, you know well that Armenian volunteers came from as far away as America and fought against the Fascist Franco in Spain.

You know well that Stepan Shahbazian, one of the founders of the Communist party in Bulgaria, was Armenian.

You know well that we had more than fifty brave generals on the fronts in World War II and that we lost 300,000 brave soldiers in that war.

During that same period, hundreds of Armenians had risen up in the name of victory over Fascism in France; among them the national hero of France, Missak Manoushian, stood out. He was one who barely escaped the Turkish scimitar and was executed by the Nazi Germans, with victory nearly in sight.

Yet you accuse a people, which has made this much sacrifice in the name of socialism and brotherhood, of extremism and, in your words, nationalism.

Thus, an entire people, the Armenian people, is nationalist, seventy years after the victory of the socialist revolution.

If that's the case, then the direct question must be asked of you: "Who's at fault?" For seventy years, weaponry was in your hands, the jails were under your control and so were the radio, television, schools, the entire propaganda machine, from kindergarten all the way to the university.

Thus, you have managed to transform the socialist Armenian people, forbidden to move inside its skin for seventy years, into a nationalistic army of three-four million people and, to restrain them, you fill the streets of Yerevan with tanks.

Lift your eyes for a moment and see who you are raising your hand against—the Red Army soldiers, who are absent in Sumgait, are standing in front of the Writers House in Yerevan, raising their hands against an Armenian woman writer.

Yes, we are condemned to remain silent. Death threatens us. However, history will tell you: "Moscow, this is the land of Armenia. A fraternal people lives here. Don't confuse this land and people with Afghanistan, where the Azeris joined the mujahids and where the Armenians died for the sake of your national interests."

Take your tanks out of Yerevan, leave a defenseless people, which had "vowed" to defend Lenin, in peace.

Yes, you couldn't use your tanks in Afghanistan but you use them in Armenia, where there aren't any agents of imperialism.

We have received you with bread and salt, going back to the days of Peter the Great and Empress Catherine.

With your retreats, you have put us at the mercy of the Turk. We spilled so much blood in Gerch that a new saying was created: "Gerch, hayeru verch" (Gerch, the end of the Armenians).

For centuries, the Armenians weren't defeated by death.

This is the kind of people you're dealing with.

Again I quote from Toumanian:

*Valleys, o valleys, black, wide-mouthed,
Like these deep wounds in my heart;
You are also the traces of God's blow,
I'm coming to you, I wish to sing;
Speak too, tell stories too,
Come and compare by means of your gorges,
Let me see, are you as large and deep
As the frightful grief of my soul? . . .*

That grief is proof of our boundless love. Therefore, the one who loves you will not criticize you; rather, he shall fraternally, in a stentorian voice, demand the price of brotherhood. We demanded so many times by whispering and received nothing. Now, what we want is not a request but a fraternal demand. We are not the ones changing fronts. We are the most stable detachment at the front. It is wrong to strike against this stable detachment, a thousandfold wrong.

We know how to wait. But until when? When will it be such that Moscow's political interests will coincide with the just interests, the just cause of the Armenian people?

Open your archives, Moscow, and there you will find numerous documents confirming the Armenian Genocide of 1915.

You are the citadel of socialism, brotherhood. As a brother, why don't you mourn with us over our pain? Why don't you declare to the whole world that in the year 1915, the Turks subjected us to genocide and seized from us our centuries-old homeland?

If the land of socialism won't defend its brother, then who will do so?

Again, I quote from Toumanian, who adored your Tolstoy, Chekhov, Turgenev, Pushkin and you:

*The Armenian grief an endless sea,
A huge dark sea,
Suffering in that black sea,
My soul is swimming.*

*And our eyes are looking with longing
At the distant stars,
The edge of the sky, wondering
When will the bright morning dawn
In the Armenian mountains,
In the green mountains.*

When? Like our great poet, we too repeat, when? How long must we wait?

Then, those saying "when?" formed an army, burst forth in Artsakh and gave birth to a fearless son named Henrik Poghosian.

Then, those saying "when?" formed army corps in Yerevan and gave birth to the Karabagh Committee, which was led by eleven Armenian sons born in your bosom.

They were doctoral candidates in the sciences, doctors, corresponding members of the Academy of Sciences, and writers.

A million people followed them. The official leaders didn't want to listen. The question arises, why?

Why did the people hang on every word of the Karabagh Committee? The Committee had neither weapons nor plates of armor, neither police nor army, neither punitive detachments nor prisons.

Why did the people follow the Karabagh Committee?

Could it happen that an entire people turned hooligan? Could it happen that the million demonstrators sold out? How did it happen, Moscow, that the betrayal of someone like Beria, who created bloodbaths, escaped your sharp eagle-eyed vision for decades, yet suddenly you saw that the entire Armenian people, including the faithful Communist and great scientist Viktor Hambartsumian, was nationalist? An entire people nationalist? Well, where were you for the past seventy years?

Apparently, the number of those exiled by Stalin to Siberia was few. Otherwise, these "weeds" wouldn't have sprouted in Armenia.

The power is in your hands now. Arrest the members of the Karabagh Committee.

Starting from their kindergarten days, they were nurtured on Marxism. Must one be afraid of that small group? If there's a fear, we must study the reasons so we can help you.

Why did those fellows rise up in protest?

Because, quoting from Siamanto, they found that --

*And swords flashed . . . let me be rid of shackles of weakness,
swords are still flashing
And my eyes of a poet see blood, blood, blood . . .
And, under the snow falling with the weight of marble,
The solitude of ruins and corpses is feeling cold,
O, listen to the frightful squeaking of these wagons,
Under the weight of the corpses piled on them,
And the tear-filled prayers of grieving persons,
Whose line extends along a path to common graves . . .*

Moscow, this occurred in the Ottoman Empire, during the reign of Sultan Abdulhamid II; it continued during the rule of the Young Turks, one of whom was Enver who, as you know, was felled by an Red Army Armenian soldier east of the Caspian Sea, where he had gone to carry out his Pan-Turanistic designs.

This also took place during the reign of Kemal, praised by you in vain and . . . again this happened seventy years after the establishment of socialism, in Sumgait, Kirovapat, Baku, and Nakhichevan, which was Armenian territory for centuries and which the Azeri Turks emptied of its Armenian population, right under your very eyes, with your silent complicity.

And now the last Armenians of Nakhichevan were brought to Armenia in helicopters. The question arises as to why. One can only conclude that the Azeri Turk can kill but the Armenian must leave his native soil.

This is why the Karabagh Committee was created. This is why, as opposed to a chauvinist group, an entire people followed that committee and not the official leadership.

The question arises as to why.

Because that leadership did not represent the will of the people.

And now, those unarmed fellows, true patriots, who have neither prisons nor armies, are in prisons which, moreover, are far removed from their city of residence, their loved ones.

Again the question arises as to why.

Are the courts in Moscow fairer than the courts in Yerevan, or is it because Yerevan is a frontier province, as it sometimes was for Tsarist Russia?

If the Moscow courts are superior, then why couldn't they teach a lesson to those committing genocide in Sumgait? Why weren't charges brought against the party leaders of Azerbaijan, who are the ones actually responsible for this genocidal campaign?

Nobody can cloak the light of the Sun and detract from it by throwing mud at the Sun.

Having let the real murderers go free, you go and arrest the unarmed and defenseless members of the Karabagh Committee, men of science and culture, and take them to Moscow. Why?

And, as if that weren't enough, you try to convince, through all your news media apparatus, that these men are saboteurs and nationalists.

The great academician Viktor Hambartsumian made the same demands. Arrest that nationalist too, so that the world can shame you. Arrest the one million demonstrators too who, according to you, are chauvinists.

Now you are blackening the image of all in the press. You call them "ignorant," yet upon their finishing graduate school, you signed their diplomas . . . out of ignorance.

Of those fellows, I know Levon Ter-Petrossian.

Levon was born in Aleppo into a Communist family. His father was known in Communist circles as "Soldat" (soldier) because he was a true Communist. He knew Arabic and French; he persisted in educating himself and knew the rudiments of Marxism better than many university graduates.

Soldat-Hagop Ter-Petrossian had a taste of prison life during the

administration of the "solicitous" French authorities. He was one of the first to repatriate to Armenia. Levon was barely a year old when he moved to Yerevan with his parents. The years passed. In 1963, I went to Yerevan and became a student in the Oriental Languages department of Yerevan State University.

Levon was a classmate of mine for a year.

I saw and confirmed that the indomitable Soldat-Hagop Ter-Petrosian was the leader of a Communist and, at the same time, Armenian family in his and our homeland, and was an exemplary citizen.

I saw, and I confirmed, that both Levon and Soldat's other children had truly begun to live a life suitable to a new man.

The fruit had not fallen far from the tree.

The other members of the Committee, being Levon's friends, are not different from him.

Jails have never been able to triumph over justice. And that's more so today.

At this juncture, I find myself turning to Roupen Sevag. I was going to write a short story in this sun-drenched room of mine. The earthquake sent me underground, preventing me from writing this story which was going to be about me. So, when I lost the desire to write this story, and prior to going underground, I was hit by an equally, if not more, frightful "earthquake"—the "earthquake" of Sumgait—which, instead of ripping up the earth, crushed faith. Nevertheless, I decided not to lose my faith and began to write the annals of these bloody days so that I too could erect a wall against falsehood.

I know that there are experts who can cause this wall of truth to collapse on me, in my house, in the street, at any time.

If such an event should occur, I can die but my writings will not cease being the truth. Therefore, the day will come when these words of mine will shine but never these lies which are being, and can still be, fabricated by official circles.

At one time, they used to say that Stalin doesn't lie.

Let them say the same thing today. Who will believe them?

Now, let me turn to my beloved poet, Roupen Sevag:

*. . . Now, where are you, delightful promises of the cross,
Where are you, vain cries of brotherhood,*

*The earth is vomiting fire everywhere,
The rivers are swelling with blood and corpses . . .
. . . Bells, you are silent, God is dead.*

Respond to the Armenian poet, if you can. A year ago, in better days, I went to Switzerland in search of traces left by Sevag on the shores of Lake Geneva and on the steps of the University of Lausanne, which the poet, a subsequent victim of the Armenocide, had gone up and down thousands of times.

Also near the palace in Lausanne, where the Armenian Question was buried, I saw a dog cemetery whose graves bore touching inscriptions.

Our poet was denied a grave, like his million-plus brothers. But read the above lines again. Poets don't die.

From time to time, some people disgust others. But when those same people are alone, when there is nobody around, they can ponder to the point where they can disgust themselves.

Now I began to think, can I disgust myself?

I shall ask my brain. Can you disgust me, brain, with your endless questions, whose answers you again shall give?

My brain said no. When you say that you disgusted me, then I will have worked nonstop. When you say, "Don't disgust me," I must stop working. And you know that when you tell your heart to stop working and it obeys you, you're no longer alive. Then, there are neither those who disgust nor those who get disgusted.

The same goes for your liver. The same goes for your brain, that is, I.

Work, brain, work! Lack of work shall bring my death—the later, the better.

Let me think and not speak. If I speak, my vocal chords will get tired and I can lose my voice. However, my brain truly does not get tired. Sometimes, with my eyes opening and closing or closed—it's all the same in the dark—I sleep and, during that short time, I have dreams.

According to medical science, that's good. One who never dreams dies sooner because his brain is working less. Therefore, I shall live a long life.

Brain, engage in literary, social and political analyses so time will pass, so I can fill the void. There, above ground, are the granaries of Shirak. Those granaries too must be filled after the earthquake.

This room is closed on all sides. I wonder, could it be Noah's Ark? Ararat

is near too, very near. Hell, if there's a flood, my ark shall ascend Ararat. But what are you saying, brain of mine? You can't solve a simple problem: it isn't that there's a flood, and my ark will ascend Ararat; what has occurred is an earthquake which, instead of lifting me up, has brought me underground.

However, the need within me to live is as powerful as Niagara Falls. So is the need among the Armenian people.

I say to myself that I will come in touch with death and see what it's like in this darkness, this ark, this cave, but my brain doesn't permit it. First, it says, that you can't see death; the phosphorescent light of your watch is too weak in order to see death. What about coming in touch with death? That too is impossible, especially since you shall live.

I wish to get down on my knees and worship my brain. Marvelous brain, I hear the truth from you. Thank you for encouraging me, urging me to keep living and telling me that I shall live.

Long live brain! A thousand fold!

As compensation for your encouragement, I decided not to die in this darkness but rather above ground, in the light, although I feel weakened; a weakness has overcome my body.

I'm a doctor, an anesthesiologist by profession. I haven't taken any anesthetic medicine yet my body has begun to grow numb; I've not taken Dolozol or breathed nitrous oxide; I haven't injected myself with Nezdanol or Fostan. I haven't inhaled ether or halotane.

What a situation I'm in! I'm not moving or speaking so I won't get tired out. The result, though, is the opposite. So I should speak or yell and I do so, "Brothers, rescuers, what's keeping you? . . ."

There's no answer.

I'm going to set myself in motion. My brain's desire isn't sufficient. It says that I shall live. I better resort to self-defense. Motion is life. I've still got water. There are still some foodstuffs, although the bread is finished.

While I'm thinking about living here, people above ground perhaps have given up hope on me; maybe they're having a requiem service performed and, according to our pagan rites, it's "kelekh" time. They'll be eating and drinking and talking about me. I wonder who will have come and what they will be saying. Let them say whatever they want. As for me, I choose to recite Charents out loud:

*I've come from centuries past and am going victorious,
To the coming centuries, to the bright future . . .*

Of course, this doesn't refer to me. Rather, it refers to the Armenian people and Charents.

My land is Armenia. Armenia is so beautiful that I fell in love with this land of mine when I was still a young man.

I love horses very much.

For me, the horse symbolizes freedom. And, for me, my homeland symbolizes freedom. I am Armenian by virtue of my fatherland. I am proud of my homeland. On account of my homeland, I have an identity and I identify myself as an Armenian to all foreigners.

My beloved horse is in the habit of kicking. Now, is that any reason not to love the horse, meaning freedom?

Now, pretend that the homeland loved by me, you and everybody else is a horse which kicked. That kick is the earthquake, owing to which I've been in the dark for who knows how long.

What do you say, shall I stop loving my country, loving my identity, on account of this kick? Just think of what I will become in the eyes of the world, in my own eyes, when I stop loving my homeland.

Nothingness.

Even being under ground, I shall love my destroyed homeland, my suffering homeland, my homeland that refuses to despair, my identity, even more.

My dear poet, Missak Medzarents, please pay me a visit and recite from your series of "if only I could be" so that my soul can relax under the light of your poem.

Medzarents replied to me as follows, dispelling the darkness in my room:

*There is grief in my wounded heart,
Which even sunlight can't cure;
A deep and painful anguish
Which will deepen when night falls.
And I shall live, grief shall bring
New energies suddenly to my wounded soul;
I shall turn to life before the night.*

This is Medzarents's message to us. Whatever the case, even if the sun is unable to heal our wound, we shall return to life before evening comes.

They call us a "nation of wanderers." Yes, we are wanderers. There are Armenians on all five continents of this earth. There's an Armenian in the city of Cape Town, South Africa, who has given the name "Ararat" to the building in which he dwells.

The Armenian wanders from country to country to erect Ararats.

First of all, we have not become wanderers out of choice. But when we have been forced to leave Van, we produced Arshile Gorky in America. When we were forced to emigrate from Dikranagerd, we produced Carzou in Paris, as well as Charles Aznavour, Jansem, Henri Verneuil and Henri Troyat. Back to America, we can also point with pride to Rouben Mamoulian or the Fresno-born son of Bitlis immigrants, William Saroyan.

See, this is how we wander, not like beggars, but like light-giving stars, sources of light in the arts and professions . . .

They're late in coming to rescue me from this darkness. I guess that means the catastrophe from the earthquake must be frightful.

This earthquake is like the reptile coming to steal; once it bites, effecting a cure won't be easy. Precisely for that reason, however, we must summon our forces in accordance with the degree of suffering. Recently, my 13-year-old grandson wrote the following: The higher the mountain, the deeper the valley; the greater the suffering, the greater the effort necessary to heal from it.

Congratulations, grandson of mine, those words of yours gave me energy.

Pain diminishes when suffering is great. I have personally experienced that, when I was given a severe beating. The beating was so horrible that I didn't feel the pain after a while.

Now is the time to feel the pain, to eliminate the pain.

If the great native of Gumri, the Master Avetik Isahakian, were alive, he would not have been spared that suffering. Yet, despite the fact that the Master didn't see this earthquake like an eyewitness:

*Cry my woes, mountain hyacinth,
Aluan-aluan flowers,
Cry my woes, garden hyacinth,
Cool breezes from the cloudy sky . . .
Heaven and earth darkened,
I cry, homeless and helpless.*

Then the Master wandered along foreign, barren roads but when he heard a voice from the homeland, he sung out:

*Stop, my caravan, it seems to me
That someone is calling me from my homeland.*

The Master returned and declared that our language is our homeland. Armenia means the Armenian language.

I imagine that this time I'm a bee flying toward the flower gardens of Armenian poets, writers and thinkers, and everywhere I see grief.

It's as if our land has been struck by a continuous earthquake and that, as a nation, we are in mourning.

Derian too confirms that:

*It's dark, and cold and stormy,
Terror and death fill our paths;
Bloody path - Lucky is the one
Who has a paternal home now . . .*

Elsewhere --

*Don't mix us with your wild bearlike tribes,
Our land is destroyed but it's holy and ancient,
Just as our shining mountain has seen a thousand snows,
So treachery and bitterness are not new to us.
Like a phoenix you rise from the fire, rise with new
Beauty and glory brilliant and luminous . . .*

Indeed, our poetry is marvelous yet sad, grievous, sorrowful, and distressing but never causing despair.

On the contrary, suddenly a ray of hope flashes, as in the last lines of this Derian poem:

*We are sad but we are a people who knows not despair.
We are a people who've suffered but have vowed to live.*

Centuries are witness to this truth. So is our mountain. So are our

monasteries. So too is little Armenia snatched from the jaws of beasts, and today it is subjected to a horrible earthquake, on top of it all.

What message is the already elderly poet Vahe Vahian sending out in his poem "A Newborn Child"?

*Forget, if you can, if it's good to forget,
Mankind's evil against us . . . Forget, even, my son,
The torrent of blood, which shook the foundations of your race,
But never forget the fuming soul of the victims.*

This is a sacred prophecy which rings true today and shall ring true tomorrow, since our neighbors in both the East and West are constantly harboring the dream of exterminating us, which they couldn't achieve over the past six centuries, despite the local and widescale massacres organized by them against us.

They are amazed that they can't put an end to us through massacres.

The world is amazed that we are still surviving.

But we know that we were born to live, since we believe, as the poet Karnig Attarian does, that

*. . . And they fight continuously
On the edgeless mountain Spiurk.
It is our vow, my son,
Not to abandon the position of courage,
To perhaps fall due to sunstroke,
But to stand up again proud,
To perhaps feel the tremor of death
But climb every minute . . .*

Tell me, will a people possessing this kind of logic and resolution not live? Of course, it will live. We are the ones who will decide that, and not the massacres, not the earthquakes which, no matter how destructive, will succumb when they hit upon the diamond-hard rock of our will.

What we have is a handful of earth. Many see even that handful of earth as being too much for us. We know the value of that earth; we know that this little handful, albeit rocky, volcanic and earthquake-prone, is the guarantee to obtaining a larger territory.

That is why the Armenian-American poet Alexander Kelejian has written in his poem "The Path to Land and Reparation":

*But when you grow strong, with your roots in the soil,
Know that this is
The immutable cruel verdict of nature:
The path to survival;
As the essence of you and your roots
The unbroken path.
The sword against dismembered flesh, blood, tears,
And the savage destruction over centuries, still unpaid:
The path of reparation.*

One day when I was returning from Djermuk, I overheard the conversation of a group of Azeris.

An Azeri, surrounded by a dozen or so of his compatriots, said to them, "The Armenians are stupid idiots. They're all running to Yerevan. That's good for us. We will settle here, we'll have ten kids and, in the near future, these lands will be ours."

Now, what have you to say about the mentality of the Azerbaijani whom we disdain?

Yes, we're fleeing from the Armenian villages. There must be a return to the village; otherwise, the Azeri peasants will not only be milking our sheep but also the Armenians from their lands.

Now that a Sumgait erupted like a volcano, now that an earthquake rent our land, our people have woken up and shall become masters of their territories, their villages. They shall rebuild what's destroyed and shall resettle on their rocky soil which is paradisiacal to them.

The number of atrocities committed by the Azeri Turks throughout the years of Soviet rule against the Armenian peasants, particularly in the villages near the Azeri border, runs into the hundreds, literally several hundreds. As it is, this is the sad part. We forget that we have been massacred but they don't forget that they have committed massacre and are continuing to commit massacre. Beatings are an ordinary occurrence. Another common occurrence is to pick fights on the pretext of grazing their sheep on our pastures and committing murders. When they take their sheep to our side, the land belongs to everybody, it's Soviet land, but when the Armenian

peasant goes a few meters into "their" territory, they start screaming and shouting that the Armenians wish to usurp Azeri land.

Quite a few killings occurred in the region of Shamshadin during my student days. When the secretary of the Idjevan regional committee sent a few Armenian laborer families to an Azeri-populated village elsewhere in Armenia, all the Azeris presented a protest to Moscow, stating that the Armenians wished to take over their village.

The Azeris massacred us in the past, namely in 1905 and likewise in the 1920's, in Shushi and Baku. They carried on in the same barbaric fashion during the 70-odd years of Soviet rule.

This is Turkish brotherhood for you.

How can I not recall Shiraz in Gumri, the town of Shiraz, when he was the one who rejuvenated Armenian literature with his lyric poetry. He made Gumri come alive throughout Armenia and the entire Diaspora.

*I shall engrave on the heart
Of that century, as wounds,
The names of two million Armenians,
As traces of the Armenian grief,
As sins of the globe.*

Yes, they are global sins. When the world is silent in the face of genocide, when even, even the Soviet Union—protector of the small nations—is silent in the face of a genocide, the Armenian Genocide.

The Armenians are not on the side of the imperialists; rather, they are on Russia's side.

The Diaspora, in turn, is on Russia's side. Can Moscow forget that the Diaspora sent warm clothing to the Red Army soldiers during World War II? The Diaspora undertook a major fund-raising drive and used the proceeds to send tanks baptized with the name "David of Sassoun" to fight against nazism. Bulgarian Armenians, Rumanian Armenians, French Armenians, along with Razgradian, Boghosian, Haig Tbirian, Missak Manoushian, Las and numerous partisans rose up to overthrow nazism.

Again, like the old days, come, dear Shiraz, we are ready to listen to you:

*People, do you hear, nations, do you hear
This book of lament of mine is your textbook...*

*Let the past wound become a textbook
On the desk of today's child.*

*Again, the Armenian nation shall be born
From the womb, half alive, into this world,
From these sevenfold hellish infernos,
It shall again ascend Mt. Ararat....*

It is this hope which inspires me, even while I'm underground. It's not a short distance from under the ground of Gumri to the summit of Mt. Ararat, but we have decided as a nation to make that trip, repeating the words of the Diasporan Armenian poet:

We shall reach your summit, oh Sacred Mountain.

And, along with Shiraz, we know:

*My nation, believe,
If you don't put up a fight,
They won't give you Mt. Ararat.
Armenia, flower
Before your eternal Mt. Ararat,
So your martyrs may be reborn, in the form of flowers.
Armenia, flower,
The more you blossom and become like a giant,
The sooner you'll regain your land.*

This is the only path by which we shall achieve our dream. But, alas, this earthquake changed the deadline for realizing our dream. Only the deadline has changed. The goal remains the same. Our *modus operandi* will take on a new impetus. Counter pressure unfailingly follows pressure, and our caravan shall stubbornly soar towards its final destination.

The great poet of Shirak has collected the breath of all Armenian generations on the flash point so that Armenian hearts may become ignited and thus become light on the path toward the realization of the supreme goal. That path doesn't lead us to seize the lands of others; it leads us to our occupied lands.

One day, Zareh Vorpouni arranged for me to meet with the poet Nigoghos Sarafian.

He was a taciturn individual yet, when he spoke, he did so with a particular stress and conviction. He was a sad, melancholy man, with a grudge against the world and mankind; on his forehead were furrows dug by the plough-share of an expatriate's life over decades.

Even that sad man thought like this:

*One day we shall pass on, but our nation shall live.
Its existence is the only meaning of life;
Let us be the fecund seeds of existence.*

If an Armenian expatriate thinks like this, then the Armenian standing firm on his paternal soil must think and, especially, act along these lines all the more so.

When I told Sarafian how I had pictured him, he finally laughed. When he laughed, he rather resembled my perception of him. While he was in the midst of that lingering laughter, he said:

"We ended up in foreign lands, we became educated, we witnessed civilization, we became writers without readers. In order to have readers, one must have a homeland, from whose lack all our sadnesses are born. Ground, ground, without ground it is difficult to cultivate literature, to make it live. What was our fault that caused us to end up here?"

The thinking of Puzant Topalian, who lived in the same city [Paris], was the same:

*May our tempered will, burned by past failings,
Wear a shirt of fire;
May the soaring soul of my ever-alive people
Rise from the ashes and be reborn . . .*

Writers change, they go from one continent and country to another but the goal, the target, the starting point and the overall impetus to reach the goal always remain the same.

Turning to the Middle East, we find Andranik Zaroukian who writes:

*Before leaving, the crucified said, 'The sin of the
Armenians is passed on to the sons;
The frightful wrath of Vahakn is left from you to us.'*

Instead of becoming a destructive force, that frightful wrath shall strengthen our will to live, to build, to rebuild; it shall transform the copper dispositions of the defeated into steel.

Also of the same city [Beirut], Andranik's friend from youth, Moushegh Ishkhan, would shout:

*Only tears are real out of life.
My heart bleeds from the world's pain.*

The Istanbul-Armenian writer Zahrad, in turn, says with a heavy heart:

*I sing ten kinds of grief
Of ten persons in ten lines.*

And these individuals, these poets, whose hearts bleed from the pain, the grief of the world, are not Communists, they're Armenians.

The love of the Armenians toward mankind is born of the suffering of the Armenian people.

The Armenian people, having experienced massacre and plunder over thousands of years and having been forced to abandon its fatherland, adhered to socialism through a natural evolution, and more than just superficially at that.

Now, after all these tribulations, after all the Sumgait and like massacres, after the earthquake, the question arises in the minds of some: If this socialism deceives us too . . . then what will our situation be? ...

The one who thinks like this is never at fault; the events and people propelling him to this thought are at fault. Pure and simple.

Now, see what I'm thinking about, instead of writing a short story, huddled in this dark!

Wherever our people have gone, they have paid a blood-tax to the country which has accepted them. In France, they fought against fascism. In Cyprus, they stood alongside the Greeks. In Syria and Lebanon, they were in the vanguard of anti-imperialism. During the Iran-Iraq war, it happened

that two Armenian soldiers, without knowing each other, raised cold weapons against each other. What a frightful phenomenon! We have always lived in chaos, like I am now, but we have always sung the song of recovery everywhere.

If we had looked at our fatherland, our rock-ridden piece of the earth, through the eyes of a peddler, we would have abandoned it centuries ago, instead of worshipping it. Paris, New York, London or Beirut can not be a home for us, just as Constantinople did not become our home, despite the fact that Western Armenian literature blossomed there.

The springboard for our flights into space is Armenia, which lacks plains, bodies of water and valuable minerals but is rich in rocks and earthquakes. No matter how much Armenia cracks, it will not be able to bankrupt us.

The fatherland is not for peddlers, although every fatherland does have its peddlers.

We are not a fatalist people. If we were fatalists, we would be dead; we would be condemned to living solely in books.

The universe is eternal and endless; our people is one particle of the infinite. We are an atom. The atom is small but even the atom contains unlimited power. And we are the atom containing that unlimited power.

We recall and don't forget all the incursions to which our country has been subjected, which have played the role of locusts on our lands. We consider forgetting a sin; recalling, a virtue.

During the days of Shah Abbas, when our people were driven to Persia, the Arax River became filled with corpses, which became a bridge for the other deportees. A contemporary emigre recorded the following:

". . . they shouted with a powerful outcry amidst weeping, sighing, sobbing, bawling, shrieking, grieving and anguish all mixed together but mercy and salvation came from nowhere"

This situation was repeated for centuries. Ten or more times in the past century—the massacre of Van, the massacre of Sassoun, the massacre of Shushi, the massacre of Baku, the massacre of Adana, the massacres of Aintab, Marash and Ourfa, the Armenian Genocide, the massacre of Sumgait, again the massacres of Baku, Kirovapat and Nakhichevan. The list is too long to enumerate further.

But have you seen the Armenian people despair? No, you won't see that!

For us, Armenia begins with each person who feels himself to be Armenian; he's ready to sacrifice and believes in the survival of the

Armenians. The disparaging one belongs to a separate class. He doesn't belong to us. He is without a fatherland. And, it's obvious, one who doesn't have a fatherland has nothing.

We have many roots wandering around in the Diaspora. A root can dry up or become estranged away from its soil. A root must aspire to its soil. Our roots are accustomed to wrapping themselves around rocks, dig in rugged places; therefore, on foreign soil, they are condemned to losing their tenacity developed over the centuries, and, in order not to lose that tenacity, they must return to their own soil, one which is rocky but has the advantage of being their own.

Someone somewhere has said, "The human brain is the last to change." That's true; in the final analysis, the human brain is not a bag to be emptied from one minute to the next and filled with what you desire. The human brain is the result of development over millennia.

In the course of building the road to socialism, Lenin had a fear which, he said, came from the chauvinism attendant to Russia as a major power.

He was right.

Life would have been so much more beautiful if the concept of true brotherhood had prevailed, if people had respected each other's national dignity.

We are not beggars and shall not turn into beggars. We only ask that we not be plundered of our values.

The thousand-year-old oak is our coat of arms. The eagle is our coat of arms. Whereas the Greeks used to worship the olive tree, we worshiped the plane tree [Amer. sycamore—tr.], the plane tree forest. Despite all sorts of winds, we shall rise, like our plane trees, like the mighty oak trees.

We have not been born to crawl. The eagle does not crawl. Eagles need mountains. We have those mountains. Others wish to fold us up like a handkerchief and put us in their pockets. Be careful, we are oak trees; we can't be folded up. We are humble but not submissive. We are proud of our country and our Armenian identity but we don't despise anyone. We are creative but not egoistic. We work and we distribute our beneficence to all.

Our inimitable poet has said:

If only I could do a thousand good deeds in exchange for a greeting.

Winter ends and spring follows, always and everywhere, just as the light

shall follow this darkness. The cloudy sky has given way to blue brightness, always and everywhere.

The Armenian bard Jivani has sung:

*Bad days come and go, Like the winter;
One need not despair;
They'll end, they come and go.*

Our faith is our fatherland. The paternal soil is our mother; our distant forefather, sister, brother, the woman we love is known. The paternal soil is our everything. That is to say, without it we don't exist, life doesn't exist.

These were my thoughts when suddenly the light of the sun rushed in with the force of Niagara Falls. I literally was blinded. I couldn't see already and when the light rushed in, I thought I saw the light for a second and immediately I became blind. I am huddled with my eyes tightly closed.

There are rescue workers all around. I could tell they speak French. 'I'm okay, I'm alive,' I said, stammering. They embraced me, I felt the breath of a dog. I had been so preoccupied with my thoughts that I didn't hear the sounds of work. It's impossible.

Someone shouted in Armenian:

"Hurrah, there's a survivor here, alive and well. Three days later, a living healthy man."

I thought, "Has it only been three days?" I thought months had passed since the earthquake.

Three days of darkness. Now I'm in the light but I don't feel the light. My eyes are closed. I couldn't see anything underground with my eyes open, but now, even though I'm above ground, I still can't see anything since my eyes are closed due to the intensity of the light.

There was no light underground but I was in the company of the brilliant ideas of enlightened men. Underground, I lit bonfires of hope and I warmed myself with that fire for three whole days, a whole eternity.

They took me but I know not where. They said, "You must rest and avoid the blinding light of the sun for a few days."

And that's just what happened.

Days later, I went outside for the first time. The sun was no longer blinding me. My eyes had adjusted to the sun. Where's my familiar Leninakan? Where is my Giumri? Alas! What has happened? Alas! Alas! . . .

widespread ruins, no buildings left standing. I covered my eyes with the palms of my hands; meanwhile, tears were relentlessly streaming down my cheeks

"Hey, take it like a man," said someone next to me. "Everybody is experiencing the same pain, you gotta' be strong. The important thing now is to work, not to cry and lament"

I'm astonished, I'm bewildered over the punishment meted out to my belle, my Giumri. My God, what sin did we commit, what sin? . . .

I would have preferred to have died underground, to not have come out and seen all this, seen this hell. Tamerlane passed through here, Genghiz Khan passed through here, the Turks have passed through here, barbarians of the world have passed through here. . . .

There's no water or electricity. All the schools, hospitals, factories, homes, high-rise and one-story buildings, even the churches have collapsed

I envy the dead who number in the thousands; those who shall not see this unbearable situations.

It's cold. The winds of Leninakan pierce right through to your bones. It's wintertime with snow. There's no refuge, no bread, the list of things that are lacking is endless.

Underground, though, I was becoming a hero, right? I was philosophizing.

Shame on me! Why envy the dead? It would be better if they were alive and, moreover, able to rebuild. I was lucky enough to join the ranks of those engaged in reconstruction. I should recognize the value of my luck.

Yes, I'm among the ranks of those engaged in reconstruction.

The leader of the Soviet Union came and went.

So we are not alone. Gorbachev said that the city will be rebuilt in two years, whereupon a Giumri native shouted:

"Comrade, add a zero."

It's true. A minimum of twenty years is needed to transform these widespread ruins into the state that existed three days earlier, in order for the people to be able to walk merrily along the streets of Leninakan.

Rebuilding a city doesn't just mean erecting buildings, bringing in electricity and repairing the gas pipelines. A city is a city by virtue of its people.

Tens of thousands have died. Tens of thousands have become orphaned

and have already been sent to different republics. Tens of thousands have lost hands, feet, eyes. Now, our city, towns and villages have an army of disabled persons.

"Armenians, come and see if you don't go mad"

No, there's no time to go mad. There's time only to work like a madman.

I'm standing and wish to help any way I can. People are pulling out pieces of wood from demolished houses alongside and on top of the ruins. They're making fires and warming themselves in the streets. Sadness is written on everybody's faces, a sadness that knows no bounds. It's as if these people are eternally deprived of the right to laugh any more. There isn't a single person who hasn't lost a relative.

Suddenly, one of the people standing around the fire says:

"Leninakan is gone, Giumri is left."

This people never loses its fondness for life.

While digging, we pull out another survivor like me from below the ground. It's the ninth day since the earthquake. This man survived. Barely after being pulled out, he asks:

"What happened with the Artsakh conflict? If they haven't turned Artsakh over to Armenia, bury me again."

"Hey, you ass," another confronts him. "We pulled you out so you can go fight for Artsakh, and now you want to flee?"

Those present want to laugh but a guilty smile barely spreads across their faces.

"The Russian soldiers are standing around and"

"They've got a rough time of it too, brother," objects a second person.

"Well, Gorbachev came in a hurry from America and shook his finger at us. Was this the time to shake his finger at us? He's the leader, let him act like a father, show some true concern, otherwise we don't need him."

"Even if he does, everything has its time; the Soviets will rebuild the country. The help sent from abroad is fine but it doesn't begin to satisfy our needs," says another, and the talking and conversing continues like this. Putting the talk aside, the scene is horrific. You just want to close your eyes and flee.

Hey, man, where are you fleeing to from these ruins? These are your ruins. You've got to clean them up and rebuild. Hey, it was a minute, brain, forgive me but I don't know for sure, was it you thinking like that or I?

Coffins, coffins, coffins. Where did so many coffins materialize from?

Thousands were buried without coffins. Someone, a European, is photographing the coffins. Turning to him, a native of Giumri says:

"Why are you photographing the dead instead of the living? See this man who has emerged from below the ground and is working? Take his picture. It's we who shall rebuild the country. Take the picture of these children, these are our country's future. What's the point of taking pictures of coffins?"

"Write, write, apparently you're a journalist. We have not given up hope, we shall live and build."

I translate these remarks.

The European says, "Your people won't die, they'll live."

So many issues will arise after the earthquake. For this reason, not only did the earth's bowels move and the earth's surface move and crack, but millions of hearts ruptured too.

Our people experienced two earthquakes this year. The first was the Sumgait earthquake, in which hundreds lost their lives at the hands of the enraged Turkish mob. And because the local rulers had organized that genocide and the central authorities acted weakly in establishing the necessary law and order, which resulted in inaccurate news reports, the Azeri Turks felt less constrained; they showered threats upon the local Armenians who began to emigrate en masse to Armenia under the threat of death.

There you have the Soviet regime, in existence for seventy years, yet a fraternal people is forced to flee. Solve this enigma in the life of a superpower.

And because the central authorities didn't make the necessary arrangements for months, what happened in Sumgait was followed by similar episodes in Kirovapat, Shushi, Khanlar, Baku, Nakhichevan and elsewhere, and the Armenians were kicked out of their homes and forced to emigrate to Armenia.

Yes, the central government is guilty not only in the eyes of our people, its very own citizens, but also in the eyes of the Diaspora and the rest of the world.

What is the meaning of emptying Nakhichevan of its last Armenian inhabitants? What a betrayal this is! Is it possible to label this action otherwise?

Did the Armenian people, wronged from all sides and having placed all its hopes in Soviet justice, deserve to be wronged here too?

Who shall give justice to this people?

After all this, the Red Army descended on Yerevan. Why? Because the

Armenian people, the entire population, had come to its senses. A million of them took over the main square of Yerevan and expressed their demands regarding Artsakh, demanded justice with marvelous unanimity and discipline.

The Red Army was unable to conquer Afghanistan. It came to Armenia. They condemned the Karabagh Committee because the strikes organized by it caused the loss of millions of rubles. On the other hand, how many billions of rubles in damages were caused to the Soviet Union by the Soviet army's entrance into Afghanistan, and who should be criticized and sent to jail for that?

Besides material damages, which can be regained, how many tens of thousands of Red Army soldiers, including Armenian soldiers too, lost their lives as a result of the invasion of Afghanistan? Who should be condemned in this regard? Who should be put in jail for this?

Sure, it's easy to arrest the members of the Karabagh Committee and accuse them of wrongdoing which they didn't commit. They are defenseless; they have neither the press nor the militia, neither the army nor, especially, the jail at their disposal.

But don't think that the Karabagh Committee members don't have their defenders; their defender is history. If history is being distorted today, it will be corrected tomorrow, just as they have decided now to correct the distorted history of the Stalinist era and the period of stagnation under Brezhnev's rule. The question is, how will the mistakes of the Diaspora, being repeated, left and right, be corrected?

With the first earthquake having still not ended, the Armenians, till this day, are continuing to flee from Azerbaijan; in other words, they are fleeing from death and coming to Armenia. Fear is stronger than death. It is stronger than all regimes. And we see that, instead of uprooting the fear of death, the upper-echelon apparatus of the Soviet regime is calmly instructing those fleeing from death: return to your former places of residence. How can they return, how can they go and face death?

Gentlemen comrades, why don't you show us how for once? Go and live there, among the Azeri Turks, and then let the Armenians, the defenseless Armenians, follow your example. We know that the Soviet authority is our protector but why are things happening which shouldn't happen, which are characteristic of capitalist systems but never socialism?

The first earthquake was still going on when the second one hit—the

impetuous, tragically destructive earthquake in Leninakan, Stepanavan, Spitak, Kirovakan and dozens of villages.

The animals sensed the coming earthquake. Why didn't the government paternally inform the people to beware so that at least the number of victims would be fewer?

Why were foreign rescue teams prevented from lending assistance the same day, when they could have saved numerous lives?

It's easy to make speeches, quote from Lenin, Marx and Engels. The difficult thing is to foresee, to work.

Who shall be punished for all the delays? Who shall be punished for poisoning the environment of a small republic?

Don't say that the members of the Karabagh Committee were the cause of the earthquake too, and the ones who poisoned the environment!

Tell who is going heal the deep wound of the displacement of faith.

An ancient people has been feeling the pain of living or dying for years on end.

But this pain is not new for us. We have lived with that pain for centuries and have established that no threat, or finger shaken at us, can stop the procession of the Armenian people.

It is impossible to forget Silva Kaputikian's "Open Letter," which made us cry; but let's read the following, written by the lecturer Tigran Khezmalian in response to an article in *Izvestia* and published on the second page of the November 25, 1988 issue of *Grakan Tert*:

"When the future generations examine these times that we're living in, they will not be struck with dismay by our economic failures, the destruction of the rural economy or technological accidents. They will be appalled by the wickedness of our society. Those, who snatched the thousand-year-old traditions of humanism from the people and gave them nothing in return, will cause consternation.

Sumgait is not a new wound for Armenia; it is a new blow to the people's never-healing wound. Three-thousand-year-old isolation . . . but the cause of pain to the soul is something else.

. . . Now we are all hurt by the disregard and indifference shown during our days of suffering. This is what, first and foremost, separates us from others."

Yes, condolences were not expressed even to the families of the victims of the Sumgait genocide.

This is simply a phenomenon which is far from reflecting a fraternal attitude.

Stalin's crimes were kept secret and covered up for decades too. Nothing remains secret under the sun, no matter how great and clever the concealers are.

Neither lies nor bribes, neither deception nor force, neither the army nor violence can conceal the crimes committed, especially when what has occurred is planned genocide.

Silence, even in politics, is not always golden. The Armenian people, in turn, can no longer remain silent even in front of fire. Artsakh is Armenia.

Now, it is necessary to rebuild the country through concerted common efforts. Armenia shall recover through extraordinary measures undertaken by the CIS and the Armenian people themselves. There's no doubt about that. Foreign countries have helped and will continue to help; the Diaspora has helped and will continue to lend its assistance uninterruptedly. But the country itself is the main link; the Armenian people, with its absolute devotion, shall be the main architect of reconstruction.

Reconstruction involves the following: opening roads; building homes; rectifying the sewers; building schools; establishing hospitals; building centers for the arts, conservatories of music, theaters; reestablishing factories; securing work for the population; finding arms and feet for the disabled; curing the mentally ill; awakening a feeling of brotherhood; raising the orphans, especially as Armenians. There are tens of thousands of orphans.

Vahan Tekeyan, the prince of Armenian poetry, wrote in one of his letters: "If the nation does not care for and raise its orphans as Armenians, the nation itself will become an orphan in the future and surely a more wretched orphan."

If our people is permitted, it has the energy to keep its orphans, raise them in the Armenian and humanistic tradition, despite its death-boding condition.

The Armenian laborer shall work; the Armenian scientist shall toil; the Armenian architect shall build cities, taking into consideration not only the earthquake factor but also that of the centuries-old Armenian building tradition. In the final analysis, we don't have the right to forget that we Armenians are a people who have given architecture to the world.

Our intelligentsia, our writers are under the weight of a huge responsibility.

First, they have the obligation of writing and speaking the truth. They saw and experienced how the lies of seventy years melted under the rays of truth during the past few years.

Today's lies as well will melt under other rays. Therefore, it is necessary to write and speak the truth, which is permanent.

Second, to inspire this people with life; to inspire faith in this people; to summon the assistance of our powerful Vahagn, our just David of Sassoun, Kevork Chavush, Antranig of Shabin Karahisar so, like an eagle, he may soar over our souls and over Leninakan, Spitak, Kirovakan and Stepanavan being rebuilt.

Days ago, sitting in front of my window, I was going to write a short story entitled "I with Myself" or "The Sun and I" but just look at what I wrote.

While spiritually remaining under ground, I've been walking on terra firma now for days. Did I perhaps change the topic? I look at what I've written and come to the conclusion that I've stuck to my topic, I haven't gone beyond my topic.

Here's a mother, a mother who was rescued along with her three surviving children. This Armenian mother has infinitely sad eyes. This is Mother Armenia. They took her picture. There isn't a paper, either in Armenia or in the Diaspora, which hasn't printed this photograph. This sad mother is Armenia here, without a doubt. I swear in all the languages of the world, in the name of Mesrob and Antranig, that this Armenia shall laugh because she is not alone in the final analysis.

Many think that we are alone. There are Armenians too who think that the Armenian is walking alone.

The earthquake showed that it isn't so.

We were alone in the Armenian Genocide and in Sumgait, but when the earthquake hit, the world was jolted and we received assistance from the entire world.

The first to help us were we ourselves. A few hours after the earthquake struck, rescue workers from Yerevan and all other parts of Armenia converged on the towns and areas affected by it.

Then, our Georgian brothers appeared in the front ranks of the first groups to lend a helping hand. They did what was possible and impossible. Then came the Russians and the soldiers, knowing full well that they were not in Afghanistan but in Armenia. Then came the others from the Baltic

countries of the Soviet Union, from the Ukraine, from all regions of Siberia.

They came from all over the world. They came from Japan, from wounded Cuba, the Arab world, hungry Ethiopia, charitable Switzerland and chivalrous France, armed with dogs, rescue dogs.

The world finally felt that it was one body and that wounded Armenia was its little finger in need of healing.

The Armenian people is not ungrateful. My grandfather used to say: "I think that I'm in debt for life to him who has given me a glass of water." That's how our people is.

Now I find a doll in the ruins of a house. My eyes well up with tears; as it is, they're always full. The doll is here but the one playing with it isn't

Here's a playground. The ground is cracked. The basketball stanchion remains undamaged. Our youths used to practice here . . . They're no longer here . . . But tomorrow new ones are sure to come.

Here's a school, totally destroyed. Textbooks and notebooks were caught in the wind and are now sticking up above the snow.

A scientist-mathematician picks up a notebook and sees that it contains arithmetic problems that have been solved; above them, in red ink, shines the number five, which is the teacher's mark indicating "Excellent." The scientist is moved and wants to take that notebook, whose owner is dead, with him as a sad memento.

I wonder, would the owner of that notebook have become a scientist?

Armenian people, you have so much work to do! How patient you have to be! How much you have to gather your energies! How hard you must labor to maintain your revolutionary alertness, your status as rightful owner, in lieu of this widespread destruction!

But you have no other road to travel. After causing Spitak to go underground, the earthquake can not drown your pure, most just claim for what's rightfully yours, which extends from Karabagh-Artsakh to Nakhichevan and beyond, Western Armenia.

The political winds, which blow according to interests, are cold for you today, but that cold is incapable of freezing your status as rightful claimant.

There are cases which have no time limitations.

Armenian writer, listen to the voice of your poet: Become the breath of your time, and don't betray your lyre .

Armenian writer, Armenian politician: If you are Armenian, defend the

Armenian Case in Moscow, instead of falling in line with the defenders of the Azeri Turks' interests in Yerevan, which is directly harmful both to the Armenian people and to the Russian people.

I won't forget Henrik Poghosian, the eagle of Artsakh. They removed him from his high post without knowing that an eagle doesn't crawl.

I won't forget those people who went on a hunger strike for days in support of the unification of Artsakh with Armenia.

Who can forget that scene?

Artsakh is ours not in opposition to government decisions but superseding all government decisions. Just as the earthquake is ours with all the destruction it brought. You accept the second, right? You will also accept the first, even if the number of Azeri Turks is fifty million.

Justice is above all the millions, it's above all the atomic bombs. The people of Indochina proved that with the decades-long struggle it waged against the US, and the Armenian people shall prove that, no matter how difficult the struggle may be.

Read what Zori Balayan wrote:

"Approximately ten percent of Armenia's 29,000 square km territory is arable land. The overall annual wheat production satisfies the demand of the country's population for only 26 days. Wheat is imported for the remaining days of the year.

Nagorno-Karabagh itself can feed Armenia's population and, in the event of annexation, can guarantee Armenia's life for the next hundred years."

There you have it.

This is how every Armenian must be, a member of the Karabagh Committee. This is how an entire people can not be imprisoned. This is how, from the venerable scientist Viktor Hambartsumian to the newborn infant in Spitak, and even the Armenian infant born in Syria or the Sudan, there must be the same cry: Karabagh-Artsakh is ours!"

Unity. Karabagh is ours!

I wonder, how much will we look at Sumgait and the earthquake, as a nation this time, and how much will our necks bend?

Despite having twisted necks, we shall directly achieve justice.

And, in order to achieve justice, we shall use all our powers every minute, we shall come together like a fist and make the impossible possible.

We shall give blood, shed our minds, use the strength in our arms so that soon, very soon, our schools may fill up with pupils in Giumri and Spitak,

Kirovakan and Stepanavan, and the songs of Komitas may be sung there; so that our factories may operate, where the spirit of Antranig will soar; so that boulevards may be full of Armenian couples in love, and many thousands of Armenian infants chirp in new homes, Armenian children destined to become eagles.

Forgive me for writing these pages instead of a short story.

I didn't commit suicide, like many great despondents.

My hope is my people. The center of my earthquakes is my land, which shall again find the cut-off body member therein.

World, one part of your body is being reconstructed.

There's a darkness under the sun. That darkness shall be dispelled.

Aleppo

1989-1994

Biographical Sketch of Toros Toranian

Toros Toranian was born in Aleppo on February 29, 1928. He received his elementary education at the Boghosian-Gulbenkian School. For the first two years of secondary school, he attended the American College of Aleppo. In 1944, he went to Cyprus and became a student at the Melkonian Educational Institute in Nicosia, completing its general program.

After getting married and having two children, Ani and Ara, he pursued a course of study in political economy at the University of Sofia. As a third-year student, he went to Yerevan where, following a year of study at Yerevan State University, he entered medical school and completed the six-year program in 1970.

Upon his return to Aleppo, he passed the state exams and, during the next three years, specialized in anesthesiology.

After practicing his profession for twenty years, he retired and devoted himself to literary and journalistic efforts.

He has been a repeat member of the Syrian regional committee of the Armenian General Benevolent Union and chairman of the local chapter's executive committee.

He holds membership only in the AGBU, as a veteran.

He began to write while he was still in elementary school. To date, he has written approximately two thousand articles and written some seventy books.

The principal newspapers to which Toros Toranian has contributed are as follows: **Syria**: Yeprad, Yergir, Tebi Yergir, Nor Abril, Meshagouyt, Oshagan; **Lebanon** (Beirut): Zartouk, Ararad, Zhoghvadzou, Echer Kraganutian yev Arvesdi, Nor Aintab, Azkayin Meshagouyt, Nayiri, Khosnag, Shirag; **Turkey** (Istanbul): Marmara, Kulis; **Egypt** (Cairo): Arev; **France** (Paris): Ashkharh, Haratch, Gamk, Antasdan, Lusaghpiur, Arahed; **Bulgaria** (Sofia): Yerevan; **United States**: Nor Or, Nor Giank, Lraper, Angakhoutioun, Husharar Miutian; **England**: Arekag, Gochnag; **Armenia** (Yerevan): Garun, Pioner Kanch, Kanch, Grakan Tert.

The number of all his published books (including his own writings and those of others) comes to 165. They fall into the following categories: (1) poetry; (2) prose; (3) translations; (4) works written in Arabic or commissioned for translation into Arabic and published at T. Toranian's expense; (5) works whose prefaces were written or whose publication costs were underwritten, in full or in part, by T. Toranian.

Accepting the invitation of the Armenian government, he participated in the Armenia-Diaspora Conference that was held in Yerevan on September 23-24, 1998.

He has vowed to continue writing as long as he lives.

