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## **THE PROBLEMS OF TRADITION AND INNOVATION IN THE ARMENIAN POETRY OF THE 1960s–1970s**

### ***Abstract***

In the 1960s and 1970s, the social–political and literary–cultural life of our country entered a new orbit. A new literary generation came to the scene, which will adjust the main directions of the development of Armenian poetry, orientation standards, content and forms of expression. It seems that the innovative young poets who came to the scene, proposing harmonious ideals and ideas for the new time, were pushed out of the national spheres, but in fact, it is moving towards the origins of the national culture, towards the rich deposits of Armenian medieval poetry. Thus, discussions of national-traditional topics also become relevant. By balancing the past with the new times, it becomes a unique panorama to depict the present with the most pronounced shadow lines. Especially in the 1980s, the traditions of the Armenian Middle Ages had a wide circulation in various types of literature, particularly in poetry, which meant a return to the origins of folk creativity. They can be considered the innovators who reformed, combined and crossed the ancient genres of Armenians: sharakan, taghi, prayer, mythological myths, etc. They tend to the generality of art, which was specific to Armenian medieval art manifested in the form of symbolic universality. The past is represented not by the balance of historical material, but by the present-day interpretation of the internal charges of ideological and philosophical orientations, ancient Armenian traditions, myths, Christian motifs, plots, and images contained in them. However, it should also be noted that this tendency (return to the origins) is generally of a global nature.

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### **Introduction**

Each historical period outlines its own unique path for the artistic process. Consciously or unconsciously, based on rational or irrational principles, formed on the basis of new views and perspectives of literary-social consciousness, literary traditions become a mirror reflecting that consciousness, one of the indicators of the degree of its worldview. Social and psychological phenomena merge, reality penetrates the text and, in turn, influences the ongoing literary experience, each work is created based on the same general-repeatable patterns of value and worldview of a specific era. The homogeneity of traditions, evolving concurrently within diverse cultural currents, is contingent upon historical necessity and the recurrent developments of universal movements, such as socioeconomic, intellectual, and other realms. Regarding the phenomenon of uniformity, generality and repeatability of literary traditions, Goethe's approach can be considered as one of the most appropriate comments: "The world always remains the same, circumstances repeat themselves, one nation lives, loves, and feels like another; so why shouldn't one poet sing like another? Life situations are identical. Why wouldn't situations of songs be the same as well?"<sup>1</sup> Thus, the repeatability of traditions is determined by the repeatability of vital circumstances, although it is also widely believed that literary repetition is nothing more than literary influence, epigonal imitation, etc.

The purpose of the article is to present the path of the new literary generation in the light of tradition and innovation, observing the characteristics and ideological tendency of the poetry formed in the 1960s and 1970s in that context.

Accordingly, we try to solve the following problems.

1. To consider the structural and aesthetic features of poetry of the new literary generation of the 1960s and 1970s in the context of tradition and innovation.
2. Identify the internal patterns, structure and features of thematic and content principles.

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<sup>1</sup> Eckerman 1985, 109.

Analytical and comparative, as well as structural, aesthetic and philosophical methods were applied to the study.

The scientific novelty of the article is that an attempt was made to present the characteristics of the poetry of the 1960s–1970s in the light of tradition and innovation, with analyses of its worldview and ideological system and scientific conclusions.

***Literary Process of the 1960s–1970s. The Struggle and Change of Literary Directions and Movements***

The 1960s and 1970s culture has been defined as innovative. It is necessary to determine what is summed up under this concept. In general, each historical and cultural period, determined by the laws of development, ideological and aesthetic progress, can be considered “innovative”, taking into account the transformations and innovations leading to development in a particular era. Hence it is logical to consider the literature developed in a particular era and reflecting the development of social life, to be innovative. As a rule, “innovative” means creative production that is structured during a period of transformation, when internal, dynamic changes, and movements are integrated into the socio-economic structure. Innovations are organized within the framework of tradition, becoming the guardians of the most recent visual representations, principles, and values for the establishment of confirmation. The sphere of human ideological, psychological, and moral perceptions is also transformed due to the changes in its ideological principles, way of thinking and practices. The struggle between the traditional and the innovative emerges not only in human consciousness, but also in the political, socio-economic spheres. When defining the poetry of the 1960s–1970s as innovative in a broad sense, it is important to emphasize the reforms that took place in the social and cultural sphere first and foremost. The trends of modernization of Armenian poetry at the end of the 20th century, the artistic reinterpretation of reality, poetic form, themes, content, lyrical motifs, moods, and moral-philosophical and ideological-aesthetic principles, were primarily determined by the shifts in the social and political life of the time. One of the special aspects of Soviet thinking was the aspiration to see everything in a defined and constant order, which meant stability, or “stagnation,” that is, narrowing of the boundaries of artistic thinking. Such an approach isolates artistic thinking from the ideological and spiritual-cultural system endowed with the universal

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value, opposing its restricted, consolidated, localized convictions and ideological positions to those related to humankind, and as a result, it will mean being left behind the developments of global significance. Uniformity is known to be alien to the variety of reality, philosophical, and spiritual worldview systems. Let's consider even just a few lines, with which the period called "stagnation" is presented in its full breadth and depth: "...it's hard to breathe the air together with you," writes D. Hovhannes, because we were born free, but we remained slaves" ("Manifest").<sup>2</sup> Reliving the same feelings, A. Shekoyan writes: "We are in a dead end. we have no way out. // Time has passed, we don't have time".<sup>3</sup> The same mood prevails in Martirosyan's poetic lines: "Who brought us, God, // to this eternal Sodom-Gomorrah?".<sup>4</sup> Tamrazyan's poem is also interesting in this sense. Tamrazyan mainly presents a demand to literature for psychological deepening: "Don't confuse me, I'm alone, / don't mix me with your faceless crowd".<sup>5</sup>

In those years, critical articles about the crisis of poetry were written in the literary press (in particular, in the "Grakan Tert" and "Garun" magazines). The point of view was developed that modern poetry, in general, was devoid of new value. Different viewpoints on tradition and innovation have developed many perspectives on the formation, manifestation, and traditional realities of innovation, while modern realities question the veracity of the content of the work. It means that many important issues have not been fully covered, and there is a barrier or inconsistency formed between traditional ideas. One of the main reasons for criticism was the absence of unique mentality and perception, and making sense of the reality in a specific way; according to them, instead of searching and finding new horizons with the strength of one's own talent, young poets mainly render well-known realities, grasp and re-poeticize the ideas and notions that had acquired meaning in well-known works long ago: "...You read one or another of their poems and involuntarily ask yourself: which country's poem is this, who is the author by nationality, and then reading his name and surname, you sober up. These poems devoid of patriotism and subject proper, don't mean anything...".<sup>6</sup> Modern poetic thought had gone beyond the scope of

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<sup>2</sup> Hovhannes 2013, 151, 152.

<sup>3</sup> Shekoyan 1990, 223.

<sup>4</sup> Martirosyan 2008, 70.

<sup>5</sup> Tamrazyan 2007, 26.

<sup>6</sup> Avetisyan 1985, 118.

perception of the prevailing times and the borders of the national thinking, posing such issues that dictated new definitions and standards, which, however, the given environment was not ready to accept. It is logical to believe that time will dictate new approaches to the interpretation of innovative poetry, and, as we have seen, from the opposite ends of approaches and interpretations that have been “traditionally” continued since those years.

Along with the ideological-aesthetic debates, the creator, who placed ideological-aesthetic freedom above everything was faced with the need to search and find his own artistic faith, overcoming a number of obstacles, the primary of which was related to the conflict of the ideological position between the overwhelming majority of literary critics and creators.

***Typological Patterns of Literary Development and Features of Their National Manifestation***

The poetry created in the post-independence period is filled with patriotic, eschatological, and political themes, which express national political ideas; sometimes, they are endowed with a spirit exposing public attention. Due to the crossovers of global investments, a new quality of urban poetics is formed. The national is perceived in the process of worldwide reality and psychological orientations. Poetry enters the world of philosophy step by step. The poetic self is depersonalized, seeking its impersonal origin beyond the spheres of external reality. This phenomenon, in particular, manifested itself in the poetry of Henrik Edoyan. In the beginnings of the poem, supratemporality and supraspatiality unfolding above the spatial-temporal stratifications of existence are formed as dominant features. Mainly in the 1980s, the traditions of the Armenian Middle Ages became widespread in various types of literature, particularly in poetry, which meant a return to the origins of folk art. They (young poets) can be considered innovators who reinterpret ancient Armenian genres such as hymns, prayers, mythological legends, etc. They strive for universality in art, which was specific to Armenian medieval art, and manifested in the form of symbolic universality:

...the past and the future, the transitory and the permanent are bound together in the totality of the eternal present.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Avagyan 2010, 39.

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The past is represented not by the balance of historical material, but by the contemporary interpretation of the ideological and philosophical orientations, ancient Armenian traditions, myths, Christian motifs, plots, and the inner charges of images contained in them. The applications of the "mythical" image of the flood and Noah's ark become especially relevant. As an example, let's take a passage from the poem of Hakog Moveses:

What a flood is like this,  
it has no beginning and no end.  
The heart is swaying, your ark,  
in these endless waters.<sup>8</sup>

However, it should also be noted that this tendency (return to the origins) is generally of a global nature. T. Eliot observes in the essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent:" "Poetry is a living whole of everything ever written about".<sup>9</sup> According to T. Eliot's conception, "the existing monuments form an ideal harmony among themselves, and that is modified by the introduction of a new (the really new) work of art".<sup>10</sup> T. Eliot, recognizing the interactions between different stages of the past and present culture, the perception of deposits and heredity, considered the fusion and correlation of various historical-cultural periods essential. Its purpose is to reach the newest cultural level, the meaning of broadening the spirit and deepening the roots in poetry: "The time is 'now' // for someone living two centuries later // it will continue to be 'now'".<sup>11</sup> Thus, the poetry formed in the 1960s and 1970s is connected with medieval, Christian spiritual traditions by traditional ties. Contrary to this, at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a new quality of poetry began to appear, which was called "anti poetry". In Armenian poetry, it was manifested in the works of H. Grigoryan, A. Shekoyan and other authors. The title of A. Shekoyan collection "Anti Poetry"<sup>12</sup> was not chosen randomly, it is a direct evidence of the mentioned phenomenon.

Along with the new content and theme, there are also changes in the form. The poetic language is manifested more freely and independently. As for the poetic form, it lacks metrical regularity. Modern poetic thought is manifested in

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<sup>8</sup> **Movses** 2005, 36.

<sup>9</sup> **Eliot** 1934, 53.

<sup>10</sup> **Eliot** 1997, 159.

<sup>11</sup> **Hakobyan** 2009, 113.

<sup>12</sup> **Shekoyan** 2000.

verlibre. In other words, the innovative poet prefers the traditional poetic form, saturated with new content. One of the most important phenomena that appeared in the poetry of that period was the sharp transition to modern reality. Modernity fully became both an important thematic precondition of poetry and a key factor defining its content and motives. These trends of modernization of lyric poetry begin in the 1950s. The attention of the poets who came to the new arena is focused on the modern reality (H. Grigoryan, A. Harutyunyan, D. Hovhannes). They try to reinterpret the concrete historical course of reality with its multifaceted manifestations in the newest poetic ways. One of the essential qualities of the poetry of that period is the variety of themes. Mythological, spiritual and religious Scriptural themes continue to occupy a prominent place, becoming also the most important basis for the poetic themes of innovative poetry. In the collections of H. Edoyan, A. Harutyunyan, H. Grigoryan, A. Martirosyan, H. Movses, the manifestations of spiritual themes, particularly the use of myth, are among the primary poetic themes. On the basis of the mentioned topics, modern phenomena are artistically embodied and get a special meaning. It seems that the innovative young poets who came to the scene, proposing harmonious ideals and ideas for the new time, were pushed out of the national spheres, but in reality they were moving towards the origins of the national culture, towards the rich deposits of Armenian medieval poetry. Thus, the applications of national-traditional themes also become relevant. Every nation has a past history full of national traditions which has created cultural values. Those values transfer from national to the international level. Mythological religious topics are never out of context. They become meaningful through the text and within the text. Therefore, the creator, referring to the aforementioned traditional themes, logically and inevitably forms intertextual connections with other texts.

Their works are characterized by irony, parody, black humor, incomprehensibility, uncertainty, which are manifested both directly and figuratively. It should be noted that the poetry did not follow the specifics of postmodernist aesthetics in a purposeful way, but the whole reality was like that, completely in transitions, uncertainty and chaotic searches. In the hottest and sometimes unpredictable social, economic, political, scientific-technical (it is known that scientific-technical progress brings with it a certain moral-psychological retreat), and moral atmosphere, in the chaotic junctions of spiritual reality, the formation of this innovative current in Armenian literature was not accidental at all.

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It was dictated by the demands of life, it was built and developed in the context of modern reality and with that logic. In general, at the current stage of development, in the context of the scientific and technical revolution and achievements, writing a poem for and about the person of the third millennium is a difficult task:

It becomes more and more difficult  
to write poetry  
or live with your eyes on the gentle glow of autumn  
or on the opened pages  
of the Gospel,  
it is increasingly difficult to read a book  
in front of the square eye of the TV....  
to count the images of the past, to touch  
the circle of memories, where  
the heart lives, pressed  
in the hand of revelation...<sup>13</sup>

Due to the modern atmosphere and thinking in poetry, the manifestation of a great variety of human aspirations, ideas, psychology and worldview can be observed. The poetic way to give all this a multifaceted meaning begins with the word, with a rethinking of the artistic meaning and weight of the word. On the way of its transformations, sometimes the word is freed from its objective premises, breaking and destroying its material template: "words are no longer signs to us, nor ornaments, // but the very thing they represent..."<sup>14</sup> writes R. Davoyan.

The newest poem is full of irony towards the rejected reality. The social, political, psychological allegory of the time is emphasized in them. As an example, let's take H. Grigoryan's poem endowed with certain universal social and psychological foundations, which, due to this artistic quality, also becomes a universal generalization:

Before it's too late, forgive his sins, O God,  
and if possible, receive his soul by state order,  
if not heaven, then at least purgatory and in no case hell,  
because there he will immediately appear in the arms of his own...

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<sup>13</sup> **Edoyan** 2016, 498.

<sup>14</sup> **Davoyan** 1969, 32.



and immediately bribery will flourish like never before...<sup>15</sup>

At the base of the poem, with allegorical and ironic accents, there arises the pathos of artistically expressive criticism of the vices of the century. In this very poem, the author remains faithful to his artistic nature and style, achieving a thoughtful and broad inclusion in the realistic perception and transformation of the well-known vices of the century, bringing Armenian poetry closer to the spheres of global feelings and thoughts. The following poem included in Harutyunyan's "Shem" (Threshold) collection was also created on the basis of social and political crisis:

Here is the apocalypse of the city  
Dead end, sky and silence  
Dead hours  
Which are only born in the hotel  
And are transparent like water.<sup>16</sup>

No doubt, modern Armenian poetic thought has followed the achievements of the latest European literary experience, but at the same time, in essence, it has also developed a stream opposite to that current: political poetry, about the homeland and the people. In the poetic text, associations and metaphors are manifested anew. Through metaphors, the psychological equivalent of modern reality, the history of "new times" is formed:

....Hard is the way through these mountains and ridges,  
where wolves chase the hunters and  
wait in ambush behind bushes and in holes  
safely hidden.  
....Where first there is punishment, and then the crime will happen,  
where first there is applause, and then the song is played,  
where at first everything is destroyed  
and God walks around, homeless...<sup>17</sup>

### ***Conclusion***

The foundations of national and universal views, the mentality orientations are defined in the fundamental elements of creativity. The modern poetic current aimed

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<sup>15</sup> Grigoryan 2006, 26.

<sup>16</sup> Harutyunyan 1984, 36.

<sup>17</sup> Grigoryan 2006, 112.

to bring Armenian poetry, with its poetics and content, parallel to European art, to create the newest art on the basis of the changes in national reality and the development of ideas, preserving the national nature of the work, to strengthen the possible rapprochement of Armenian and European literary sectors: it can be said that the modern poetic system is a meaningful system of generalized, contented points of view, life phenomena defining the worldview of the period, giving meaning to national and universal movements. It is endowed with intertextual qualities, has a pictorial nature, is structured with fragmented themes, allusions and quotations (the poetry of that period is characterized by intertextuality: in the poetry of Henrik Edoyan, for example, intertextual connections with the works of Dante, Eliot and other famous authors of world literature can be found), with the fusions of the most diverse contributions of Armenian and world literature, with the fusion of mentalities, with the reinterpretations of eternal themes, certainly not in the way of similar imitations, but with the branching of new semantic substructures, from the point of view of one's own world perception, with the spirit and starting point of perceiving and reflecting from one's own point of view, with special options of ideological-artistic multiform changes. Imports of traditional symbols, images, plots, motifs or quotations of excerpts from other textual structures are not unnecessary repetitions, but the observation of this or that phenomenon, reality, sometimes with the same view, but from a completely new point of view.

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## ԱՎԱՆԴՈՒՅԹԻ ԵՎ ՆՈՐԱՐԱՐՈՒԹՅԱՆ ԽՆԴԻՐՆԵՐԸ 1960–1970–ԱՎԱՆ ԹՎԱԿԱՆՆԵՐԻ ՀԱՅ ՊՈԵԶԻԱՅՈՒՄ

ՀՌԻՓՍԻՄԵ ԶԱՔԱՐՅԱՆ

### Ամփոփում

1960–1970-ական թթ. Հայաստանի հասարակական-քաղաքական, գրական և մշակութային կյանքը թևակոխեց նոր շրջափուլ: Թվում էր, թե ասպարեզ եկած նորարար երիտասարդ բանաստեղծները նոր ժամանակին համապատասխան-ներդաշնակ իդեալներ ու գաղափարներ առաջադրելով՝ դուրս են մղվել ազգային ոլորտներից, այնինչ, իրականում հայ բանաստեղծության նորոգյա ընթացքը շարժվում էր դեպի ազգային մշակույթի սկզբնահիմքերը, դեպի հայ միջնադարյան բանաստեղծության հարուստ ավանդները: Այսպիսով, արդիական էին դառնում նաև ազգային-ավանդական թեմաների արծարծումները: Անցյալը զուգակշռելով նոր ժամանակների հետ՝ դառնում էր յուրօրինակ համայնապատկեր ներկան առավել ընդգծված ստվերագծերով պատկերելու համար: Առավելապես 1980-ականներին հայ միջնադարյան ավանդույթները լայն շրջանառություն ունեին գրականության տարբեր տեսակներում, մասնավորապես՝ պոեզիայում, ինչը նշանակում էր վերադարձ դեպի ժողովրդական ստեղծագործության ակունքները: Նրանց (ասպարեզ եկած երիտասարդ բանաստեղծներին) կարելի է համարել հայոց հնամենի ժանրերի՝ շարականի, տաղի, աղոթքի, դիցաբանական առասպելների և այլնի նորոգող, զուգավորող-խաչավորող նորարարներ: Նրանք հակված են արվեստի ընդհանրականությանը, ինչը հատուկ էր հայ միջնադարյան արվեստին: Անցյալը ներկայացված է ոչ թե պատմական նյութի հաշվեկշռով, այլ դրանցում ներփակված գաղափարափիլիսոփայական միտվածության, հայոց հնագույն ավանդույթների, առասպելների, քրիստոնեական մոտիվների, սյուժեների, պատկերների ներքին լիցքերի մերօրյա իմաստավորումով: Հարկ է սակայն նաև նկատել, որ այս միտումը (վերադարձ ակունքներին) առհասարակ ընդհանուր-համաշխարհային բնույթ է կրում:

**Բանալի բառեր՝** *տեքստ, գեղարվեստական տեքստ, ավանդույթ, նորարարություն, պոեզիա, գրականություն, հեղինակություն*:

## ВОПРОСЫ ТРАДИЦИЙ И НОВАТОРСТВА В АРМЯНСКОЙ ПОЭЗИИ 1960–1970-Х ГОДОВ

РИПСИМЕ ЗАКАРЯН

### Резюме

В 1960-1970-е годы общественно-политическая, литературно-культурная жизнь Армении пережила новый этап. Сформировалось поколение молодых писателей, определивших ключевые направления развития армянской поэзии, ее содержание и способы выражения. Казалось, молодые поэты-новаторы, выдвигая соответствующие новому времени идеалы и идеи, остались в стороне от национальных традиций, однако на самом же деле они тяготели к истокам национальной культуры, к армянской средневековой поэзии. Таким образом, стала весьма актуальной национально-традиционная тематика. Особенно в 1980-е годы армянские средневековые традиции получили широкое распространение в различных жанрах литературы, в частности, в поэзии, что означало возвращение к истокам народного творчества. Это было новаторством, переосмыслением древних жанров, таких как гимн, стих, молитва, мифологические легенды и т. д. Вступившие на литературное поприще молодые поэты стремились к универсальности, свойственной армянскому средневековому искусству, представляя прошлое в современном осмыслении, в частности, древнейших армянских традиций, преданий, христианских мотивов, сюжетов и образов. Следует отметить, что эта тенденция возврата к истокам в целом носит глобальный характер.

**Ключевые слова:** *текст, художественный текст, традиция, новаторство, поэзия, литература, постмодернизм.*