

## LEVON MANVELYAN AND "MURCH" JOURNAL

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** Poet, prose writer, dramatist, translator, pedagogue, literary critic and public figure Levon Manvelyan (1864-1919), entering the literary arena at the end of the 19th century and playing an important role in shaping Armenian literature of that period, as well as becoming one of the key authors of the era, actively collaborated with the literary and socio-political journal "Murch" founded by Avetik Araskhanyan and published in Tiflis during 1889-1907, contributing various materials. **Methods and Materials:** The work employed biographical, comparative, and hermeneutic methods of literary text analysis. **Analysis:** Both Levon Manvelyan's literary works and critical articles, being direct products of that period, were mainly published in the literary and socio-political journal "Murch". **Results:** Manvelyan's works, which are unique manifestations of the era and left a crucial mark on the course of Armenian literature, although now primarily hold literary-historical and cognitive value, nevertheless attract attention from the perspective of artistic coverage of the period. In this regard, "Murch" journal's role was particularly important in establishing Manvelyan as a poet, translator, dramatist, and literary critic. It is no coincidence that his name is closely associated with the journal.

**Key words:** Levon Manvelyan, "Murch" journal, creative work, history of literature, critical articles, literary process, literary-historical value.

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## ԼԵՎՈՆ ՄԱՆՎԵԼՅԱՆԸ ԵՎ «ՄՈՒՐՇ» ՀԱՆԴԵՍԸ

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ԳԱԱ Մանուկ Աբեղյանի անվան գրականության ինստիտուտ, Երևան, ՀՀ

### Ամփոփում

**Նախաբան.** Բանաստեղծ, արձակագիր, դրամատուրգ, թարգմանիչ, մանկավարժ, գրաքննադատ և հասարակական գործիչ Լևոն Մանվելյանը (1864-1919), գրական ասպարեզ մտնելով 19-րդ դարավերջին և կարևոր դեր խաղալով հայ գրականության տվյալ փուլի

ձևավորման գործընթացում, ինչպես նաև դառնալով ժամանակաշրջանի առանցքային հեղինակներից մեկը, ակտիվորեն աշխատակցել է Ավետիք Արասխանյանի հիմնած և 1889-1907 թվականներին Թիֆլիսում տպագրված գրական, հասարակական-քաղաքական «Մուրճ» հանդեսին՝ հանդես գալով տարաբնույթ նյութերով: Մեթոդներ և նյութեր. Աշխատանքում կիրառվել են գրական բնագրի վերլուծության կենսագրական, զուգադրական և հերմենևտիկ մեթոդները: Վերլուծություն. Լևոն Մանվելյանի ինչպես գեղարվեստական ստեղծագործությունները, այնպես էլ գրաքննադական հոդվածները, լինելով տվյալ ժամանակահատվածի *անմիջական ծնունդ, հիմնականում լույս են տեսել գրական, հասարակական-քաղաքական «Մուրճ» հանդեսում: Արդյունքներ*. Լևոն Մանվելյանի ստեղծագործությունները, որոնք ժամանակաշրջանի յուրօրինակ դրսևորումներն են և կարևորագույն հետք են թողել հայ գրականության ընթացքի վրա, թեև այժմ առավելապես ունեն գրապատմական և ճանաչողական արժեք, այնուհանդերձ ուշադրություն են գրավում ժամանակաշրջանի գեղարվեստորեն ընդգրկման տեսանկյունից: Այս առումով առանձնակի կարևոր է «Մուրճ» հանդեսի դերը Մանվելյանի՝ որպես բանաստեղծի, թարգմանչի, դրամատուրգի և գրաքննադատի կայացման գործում: Եվ պատահական չէ, որ նրա անունը սերտորեն կապված է հանդեսի հետ:

**Բանալի բառեր՝** Լևոն Մանվելյան, «Մուրճ» հանդես, ստեղծագործություն, գրականության պատմություն, քննադատական հոդվածներ, գրական գործընթաց, գրապատմական արժեք:

**Ինչպես հղել՝** Փարսադանյան Ս. Լևոն Մանվելյանը և «Մուրճ» հանդեսը // ՀՀ ԳԱԱ ՇՀՀ կենտրոնի «Գիտական աշխատություններ»: Գյումրի, 2025: Հ. 1(28): 185-191 էջեր:

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**INTRODUCTION:** Poet, prose writer, dramatist, translator, pedagogue, literary critic and public figure Levon Manvelyan confirms through his works the pattern that each period in literary history, besides having major authors who characterize its essence, also produces writers who, while not making great artistic discoveries, play a significant role in shaping the literary process of that phase [1, p. 57]: Entering the literary arena at the end of the 19th century and authoring poems, epic poems, dramatic poems, a novel, literary and theatrical articles, Levon Manvelyan played an important role in shaping Armenian literature of that period, becoming one of the era's key authors. In other words, Manvelyan is an author who influenced the course of literature, and his works now primarily hold literary-historical value.

Being a well-rounded individual and one of the most serious intellectuals of the era, Levon Manvelyan was simultaneously a modest, diligent, and honest writer with his own unique convictions and principles [5, p. 3]. This is evidenced by the testimonies of his contemporaries.

#### **Levon Manvelyan and the Literary, Socio-Political Journal "Murch"**

Levon Manvelyan's creative period in Armenian literary history was marked by the literary debut and progression of distinctive authors: Raffi, Shirvanzade, Muratsan, Tserents, Alexander Tsaturyan, Hovhannes Hovhannisyan and others.

Levon Manvelyan's works, being artistic manifestations of that period, were mainly published in the literary and socio-political journal "Murch," founded by Avetik Araskhanyan and published in Tiflis from 1889 to 1907.

It is a known fact that after the medieval period - in the 17th-18th centuries and the first decades of the 19th century - the literary-social movement that began had not fully resolved its objectives due to insufficient socio-economic and ideological prerequisites. The new decades were a complex and tense period for Armenians, marked by the formation of new economic and political relations, great shifts, and intellectual awakening. Under these conditions, the Awakening generation of Armenian intellectuals fulfilled its historical mission [14, p. 195]. Literary scholar Samvel Muradyan writes about this: "The press experienced unprecedented quantitative and qualitative growth; the social currents formed around it developed journalism and its language; along with published books, the press also gave space to fiction in its pages, through which the language of our poetry, prose, and drama developed. In modern times, the role of theater was especially invaluable in the development of language" [14, p. 195].

Being a representative and follower-successor of the Awakening generation through his works and national-ideological convictions, Levon Manvelyan's creative innovation is directly connected with theater. It is evident that he was fascinated by Shakespeare's works and, under the latter's influence, even wrote tragedies ("The Misanthrope," "The Patricide," "Ideals and Reality," "Artavasdes II").

Manvelyan's works "Magda" [6], "Painter Tashchyan" [7], and "Doctor Yervand Boshayean" [4] are interesting. The author calls the latter a comedy, following Gabriel Sundukyan. However, it is apparent that in this work, it is not the comedic circumstances that play a role, but rather the dramatic ones [3, p. 660].

By the way, the drama "Painter Tashchyan" was once criticized in "Murch" journal, which was followed by Manvelyan's harsh response [11, pp. 153-158].

Particularly noteworthy among Manvelyan's works is the dramatic poem "Towards the Heights," which describes one of the most important episodes in the life of the great enlightener Khachatur Abovyan - his ascent to Mount Ararat with Friedrich Parrot. The work is titled "Towards the Heights," yet it doesn't depict the actual ascent to Ararat, but rather the events before and after. The author emphasizes not the unfolding of actions, but the revelation of characters' feelings. From an artistic perspective, the poem is a weak work, but it's interesting ideologically. Abovyan's ascent to the biblical mountain is symbolically paralleled with reaching the heights of science. And Abovyan appears as a pioneer through whom the enlightenment and progress of the Armenian people must take place.

The publication of Manvelyan's dramatic poem "Towards the Heights" in "Murch" was followed by a critical article by T. Y., in which the author criticizes Manvelyan for his literary material, particularly writing: "He (Levon Manvelyan - S. P.) narrates actual events in verse with meticulous accuracy" [15, p. 207]. Considering this fact as a serious flaw for the work, the critic ends the article with the following sentence: "It must be said that Mr. Manvelyan's verse is beautiful and polished" [15, p. 208].

This critical article in "Murch" is followed by Manvelyan's response titled "On the Occasion of a Literary Question" [9, pp. 80-86]<sup>1</sup>, in which the author attempts to answer the critic and explain the main idea of his work, the poem "Towards the Heights."

First highlighting the main points that, according to the critic, the author didn't choose suitable material for his poem, that "feeling is very scarce, and finally, there's a complete absence of drama" [9, p. 80], Manvelyan counters with the justification that to find the idea of the writing, it's

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<sup>1</sup> The article was published with the following editor's note: "We are publishing this article both out of our principle of being patient towards every sincere and honest conviction, and because we consider the author's perspectives to be important" [9, pp. 80-86].

necessary first to clarify what prompted the writer to take up the pen and artistically reproduce this or that material, which would then be followed by following the main hero, his words or actions, and then drawing conclusions about the idea of the work [9, pp. 80-81]. Manvelyan then writes that the guiding idea of this work stems not from Parrot's aspiration but from Abovyan's heart and mind, then emphasizes the coincidence of physical ascent and high human aspirations [9, p. 81].

Manvelyan then notes that the critic accuses him of having "very scarce" emotionality. According to Manvelyan, this is not accidental but a purposeful choice. He emphasizes that his poem depicts social and intellectual renaissance, meaning the poem's main aspiration lies in portraying ideological and intellectual developments. Manvelyan is confident: "The foundation of drama is not feeling, but struggle, whatever type it may be. On the other hand, more often various elements are mixed in the same writing - description and history, thought and reasoning, feeling and struggle" [9, p. 82].

The criticism also raises the question of why the hero or central idea of "Towards the Heights" avoids dramatic developments. Manvelyan counters in this case as well, insisting that the poem depicts not dramatic development but intellectual renaissance, and the ascent to Mount Masis's peak symbolically represents not only physical but also intellectual renaissance.

However schematic and pathetic Manvelyan's dramatic poem may seem today, his response is admirable, where he justifies all the points that were questioned by the critic.

Along with his literary and translation activities, Levon Manvelyan published various materials and reviews in the literary and socio-political journal "Murch," which were primarily unique responses to the era and given reality. These critical articles and reviews constitute the most important and perhaps most valuable part of Levon Manvelyan's literary heritage. Accordingly, Manvelyan's articles published in "Murch" in the late 1890s and early 1900s not only elevated Armenian literary criticism to a new level but are also important for revealing the author's literary taste and fully uncovering his artistic convictions.

Manvelyan's critical articles not only raised Armenian criticism, especially theatrical criticism, to a new level but are also important from the perspective of understanding the literary debates of the era. It should also be noted that Manvelyan received positive evaluations from the editorial board of "Murch" journal. In one of the journal's issues, it is particularly written: "Mr. Manvelyan, with his theatrical reviews, not only established a regular section in 'Murch,' but also gave theatrical criticism a proper position in our Armenian press in general" [2, p. 519].

In continuation, we read: "Armenian theatrical groups have never shown such respect for the Armenian press as the group from last winter showed towards 'Murch's' theatrical criticism" [2, p. 520].

"Murch" journal served as an irreplaceable platform in establishing Levon Manvelyan as a poet, translator, dramatist, and literary critic, and in this regard, it is no coincidence that his name is closely associated with the journal. The author himself valued and highly appreciated this circumstance. In this context, Manvelyan's poem written on the occasion of "Murch's" tenth anniversary, titled "In Memory of 'Murch's' Decade," is noteworthy as the best manifestation of the above [12, p. 82].

Levon Manvelyan's critical and literary articles are important in the context of Armenian literature's developmental history. As a literary scholar and critic, he actively engaged in literary discussions of the late 19th and early 20th centuries and, why not, often guided the evaluations given to the literary process.

In Levon Manvelyan's literary heritage, the critical article published on the occasion of Hovhannes Tumanyan's poetry collection, which appeared in "Murch" journal, is of exceptional interest.

Thus, Levon Manvelyan as a critic, first addressing Armenian literature and its connections with the era's issues, makes noteworthy observations: "Armenian poetry, long withered, began to bloom anew in the late eighties, and this brings me joy. This is a phenomenon that has its social

causes and will not go unnoticed by future literary historians. Why certain types of writers - tragedians, novelists, or poets - appear at certain times, and why certain branches of literature become dominant, this question must seek its answer in the general conditions of social life. What I'm saying, of course, needs no proof; it's not a new idea that there is a great and reciprocal influence between literature and social life, and if today we notice that our poetry in recent years is beginning to occupy a notable place in literature, to show itself, this circumstance certainly deserves serious attention and encouragement" [13, p. 93].

Then, highly appreciating Tumanyan's artistic values, Manvelyan emphasizes the All-Armenian poet's creative originality, highlighting the depth and multifaceted layers of his poetry, writing: "In his poems, he resembles neither our old nor new poets; he stands apart, he is independent, he is a kind of novelty for us. This uniqueness is the folk element, which constitutes the true pulse of his narrative verses. And indeed, show me one who has so systematically and successfully made Armenian peasant life the subject of verses, as we see in our poet's poems" [13, pp. 95-96].

In this regard, Manvelyan's following observation made on another occasion is noteworthy, which helps to fully understand the critic's above-quoted thought: "Each individual supremely knows the country where they were born and raised, and the society with which they have interacted and morally connected. Every poet, painter, and artist in general takes their subjects largely from the life and nature they are closely familiar with, which they have observed and studied" [8, p. 123]. And according to Manvelyan, they willingly or unwillingly submit to the influence of their environment, and their creation bears a unique stamp. And naturally, a poet cannot better imagine the life of a foreign nation that they are not well acquainted with, while their native environment is different. From this, the writer concludes that art, like a plant, can best grow and bloom on its native soil [8, p. 123]. Manvelyan, continuing the thought, writes that "An artistic work cannot become universal if it does not bear the distinctive features of a specific environment; it becomes universal when it is born in a specific environment and bears the stamp of genius" [8, p. 123].

Manvelyan particularly appreciates Tumanyan's poem "Loretsi Sako," specifically writing: "In no poem does Mr. Tumanyan show himself with such characteristic features, with his worthy and deficient sides, as he does in the verse 'Loretsi Sako'" [13, p. 96]. Critic Manvelyan is especially attracted by the fact that Tumanyan manages to prove his natural ability through individual beautiful pieces [13, p. 96].

In general, Manvelyan was convinced that Armenian artistic literature should incorporate folk and contemporary vital multifaceted elements, while at the same time, the motifs and materials should encompass a broader scope. Manvelyan was concerned by the fact that "it (meaning Armenian literature) is compressed within a narrow circle," and it is necessary to remove this framework so that a wider horizon opens up for modern Armenian poetry [3, p. 67].

Levon Manvelyan provided an almost comprehensive and in-depth analysis of Hovhannes Tumanyan's works. He examined Tumanyan's creations not only as valuable and comprehensive examples of Armenian literature but also as works rich in ideological and psychological depth. Manvelyan's critical views reveal much about what distinguishes Tumanyan's writings from his contemporaries.

Concluding his analysis, Manvelyan points out metrical monotony as a creative shortcoming in Tumanyan's work [13, p. 100]. Notably, Levon Manvelyan was among the first to provide a serious critical evaluation of Tumanyan's works.

Overall, Levon Manvelyan's critical articles varied in their emphasis and depth. In his critical writings, beyond general theoretical discussions, Manvelyan addressed both individual authors and specific works.

From this perspective, we should highlight one of Manvelyan's articles published in "Murch," written on the occasion of Arakel Nalbandyan's publication of "Fables." In this critical piece, Manvelyan highly praises the fabulist's style, describing it as "smooth and polished," while first establishing the importance of the fable genre, particularly original fables, in Armenian literature [10, pp. 155-158].

**CONCLUSION:** In summary, we can conclude that Levon Manvelyan, while being a prolific author and one of the developed intellectuals of his era, demonstrating literary principle and holding his unique place in the Armenian literary-social sphere of the period, has left only a modest mark in the history of Armenian literature through his artistic works. Although Manvelyan's works, which are unique manifestations of their time and have left a crucial imprint on the course of Armenian literature, now primarily hold historical and cognitive value, they nonetheless attract attention from the perspective of their artistic representation of the era. In this regard, the role of "Murch" journal was particularly significant in establishing Manvelyan as a poet, translator, dramatist, and literary.

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