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ASBAREZ SPECIAL ISSUE

**SPECIAL
SUPPLEMENT OF
THE 81ST
ANNIVERSARY
OF
THE ARMENIAN
GENOCIDE**

1915 Never Again



The headline suggests that the Armenian people will not stand for a repetition of the events of 1915—the Armenian Genocide.

As we prepare to mark the 81st anniversary of the Armenian Genocide, perpetrated by the Ottoman Turkish government, continuing today by the modern-day government of the Republic of Turkey through its revisionist denial of its ancestors' guilt in committing the first genocide of the 20th century, we must reaffirm the Armenian nation's commitment to the Armenian Cause and further accelerate our demands for recognition of and reparations for the Armenian Genocide.

This special issue addresses several crucial issues which directly involve the modern-day pursuit of *Hai-Tahd*.

□ An analysis of Dr. Rubina Perroomian's thesis, *Literary Response to Catastrophe* focuses on how Armenians translated their status as victims of a genocide into literature—a social reflection of a culture.

□ A report from the US State Department documents the continuing violations of human rights in Turkey, today, and illustrates the inherited barbarism being used in an undeclared war against the Kurdish minority.

□ The eyewitness account of Hamilton Riggs, once again, comes to prove that the Armenian Genocide did, in fact, occur, despite efforts to deny and skewer history.

□ Profiles of authors Krikor Zohrab and Roupen Zartarian, reflect on the losses of intellectuals on April 24, 1915—the onset of the Armenian Genocide. A short story by Avedis Aharonian characterizes the struggle to battle the Turkish onslaught.

□ Finally, a recent petition against revising the facts of the Armenian Genocide in academic circles concludes this special issue devoted to the 81st anniversary of the Armenian Genocide.

SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT ON THE 81ST ANNIVERSARY OF THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

Comparison Between Armenian and Jewish Responses to Catastrophe in Literature

BY ARIS G. SEVAG,
Jackson Heights, NY

Literary Response to Catastrophe, Dr. [Rubina] Peroomian's doctoral thesis published in 1993 by Scholars Press of Atlanta, GA under the sponsorship of the UCLA GE Von Grunebaum Center for Near Eastern Studies, represents the culmination of this courageous scholar's research into the realm of post-Genocide Armenian literary responses, completing and complementing initial forays in the form of such papers as "Hagop Oshagan's Literature of Catastrophe: Struggle to Confront the Genocide of 1915" published in *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies*, Volume 4, 1988-1989, and "Armenian Literary Responses to Genocide: The Artistic Struggle to Comprehend and Survive" published in *The Armenian Genocide: History, Politics, Ethics*, edited by Richard G. Hovannisian, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992, as well as others which have appeared in *Armenian in Patmabanasirakan Handes* [Historical-Philological Journal] of the Armenian Academy of Sciences in Yerevan. However, as its title suggests, *Literary Responses* goes much further: It not only presents representative Armenian literary responses to the Genocide but puts those responses, as a whole, in perspective in light of not only Armenian responses to Catastrophe down through the ages but also the Jewish responses to the manifold catastrophes to which the Jewish people have been subjected throughout their history.

Parentetically, permit me to substantiate the contention I introduced by saying that, to date, despite the singular nature of Dr. Peroomian's study, a review of it has yet to appear in the English language [The Armenian Review published a review of Peroomian's book in its Winter 1992 edition, see page 3]. Meanwhile, despite its being in the English language, there have appeared four Armenian-language reviews: a short piece by the recently deceased Armenian writer and journalist Hakob Karapents (*Nor Gyank*, Oct. 28, 1993); a medium-length article by Armen Donoyan, editor of *Navasart* monthly (*Asbarez*, July 21, 1994) and another by Harutiune Kurkjian (*Droshak* 8 Sept.- 21 Sept. 1994), plus a lengthy treatment by Rita Vorperian (*Asbarez*, July 9, 1994 and *Hairenik*, July 14, 1994).

A few words about the author's motive

for this study. Aside from the practical aspect—the obtaining of her doctoral degree—there is the so-called "voice of the race," a term immortalized by the late writer Aram Haigaz, who has spoken through Dr. Peroomian and propelled her to overcome the untold psychological and spiritual traumas she was bound to have experienced in the course of her work. And that voice found its ultimate expression in the final



Dr. Rubina Peroomian

two lines of Avedis Aharonian's poem, "The Blind Troubadour": If our sons forgive you [meaning the Turks] for [shedding] this much blood, may the whole world hold the Armenian [race] in contempt." As a daughter of that race, Peroomian could not allow herself to suffer the ignominy and the pangs of conscience she would have suffered, had she ignored that call from within.

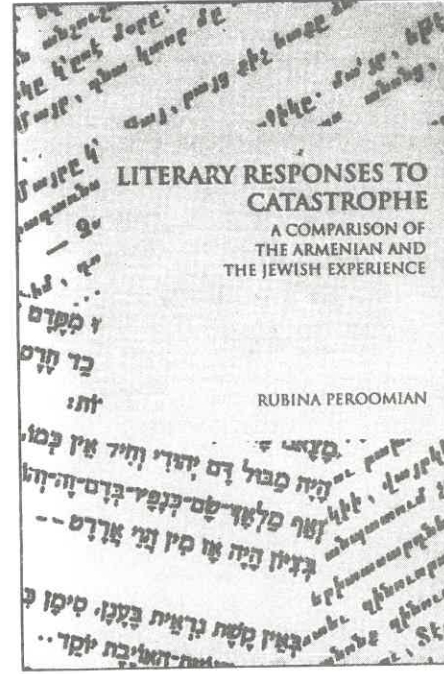
Before delving into the work itself, let us address the question of why this comparison between the Armenian Genocide and the Jewish Holocaust. A case could very well be made for gratitude to the Jewish writers who, Leo Hamlian says, were "among the most responsive to the Armenian holocaust and who seemed to understand the importance of remembering these events better than any other ethnic group except the Armenian themselves." ("The Armenian Genocide and the Literary Imagination," in *The Armenian Genocide in Perspective*, ed. by Richard G. Hovannisian, Transaction Books: New Brunswick and Oxford, 1986, p. 165). Actually, however, there is a much more fundamental—and academic—reason for this comparative analysis, which is best explained in the author's own words: "The

deeper I delved into the world of Armenian literary responses to genocide, the more I realized that the conventional tools for judging the beauty of a literary image, the coherence of a literary work, or the eloquence of language were inadequate when applied to the cataclysmic subject matter. I came to see that in some cases, ambivalence, and the inadequacy, even paralysis, of diction can express more eloquently the chaotic, demonic, realm of genocide, of extreme violence and atrocity. My futile search for a guide, a methodology of interpretation, an appropriate approach to genocide literature within Armenian literary criticism led me to Jewish scholarship on Holocaust literature." (p.1) As the author, so shall we be struck by the similarity of responses of the Jewish and Armenian peoples to extreme moments in their respective histories.

Peroomian's familiarity with the monumental works of two Jewish authors, David G. Roskies and Alan Mintz, convinced her of the necessity to know the history of the catastrophe, as well as the victims' responses, down through the ages in order to make a fair assessment of the literary response which followed the Armenian Genocide—which constitutes the second, and larger, part of her study.

Thus, going back to the very first catastrophe of both peoples, the author comes to the conclusion that each, in turn, in order to survive and emerge physically and mentally alive from the horrors, tried through collective effort to endow the catastrophe with a meaning, to "find its cause," so to speak.

The first standard we find in the history of catastrophe-response is based on the concept of sin and punishment. The idea of God's "judgment" as a guide for response to tragic events was inculcated by the Jewish classical prophets, Moses being their prototype. Going back to the eighth and seventh centuries BC, the Assyrians and the Scythians, respectively, were seen as instruments with which God implemented his punishment and purged his people of their sins. This paradigm held sway until the horrors of the First Destruction; for many of the Jewish authors, the fall of Jerusalem was an unprecedented disaster that could not possibly be justified by the concept of sin and punishment. They went so far as to accuse God of "breaching the contract," or Covenant. Yes, the sages and scholars, not the prophets, became the true guides of the Text, and lamentations became the literary genre in response to the new



interpretation of catastrophe. "Lamentation was a most convenient vehicle for the outpouring of feelings. Lamenting devastating loss had a cathartic quality that would relieve the pain of the author, the survivor, and the future reader as well. The sin is acknowledged, but there is reluctance to accept the enormous punishment as a deserved consequence of the wrongdoing of the Jewish nation." (p. 14). Moreover, the enemy gains importance not only as an instrument of God's will but as a distinct entity—a convenient target of Jewish frustration. Protest against God unites with a strong sense of anger against the enemy and an abhorrence of his brutality" (p. 15). Further analyzing the Lamentation, "there is no prophet to mediate and give advice, no consolation other than to find the way back to God by engaging in prayer—a one-way conversation. (By the way, we can classify the song, "Ur eir, Asdvad: what is characteristic about the Book of Lamentation is the shift away from the concept of sin and punishment. Reference to the people's sins as cause for calamities are rare...It is obvious, as Mintz attests, that 'The awareness of sin and Lamentations is secondary to the experience of abandonment and the horror of destruction.'" (p. 16)

As a backdrop for understanding Armenian responses to catastrophe, it must be understood that, from the fifth century AD on, "devotion to the Bible, the genealogical link with biblical stories, the striking parallels Armenians found between the recurrent suffering and

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persecution in their own history and that of the Jewish people paved the way for adopting the Jewish perception and interpretation of history." (p. 11) An excellent example of the application of the sin-punishment spin to calamitous events suffered by the Armenians is the speech delivered by Ghevond the Priest to the troops before the battle of Vardanantz, as handed down by Eghishe in his *History of Vardan and the Armenian War*. Even the disunity of the Armenian princes, which could be viewed as a venture into political analysis, is termed as a breaking of the covenant and therefore a sin deserving the punishment of death (p. 17). And, as we shall see later on in the case of the post-Genocide writings, Khorenatsi too is benumbed by the enormity of the catastrophe, his expressive powers are blunted, the wings of his imagination crippled (p. 18). He too resorts to lamentation which, in Peroomian's opinion, "may have been a recourse to Armenian folk creations...and was an important feature in Armenian oral tradition." (p. 18)

In succeeding centuries, Eghishe and Khorenatsi are followed by the historian Ghevond, Aristakes Lastivertsi, Nerses Shnorhali, Grigor Narekatsi, Abraham Ankiuratsi, Arakel Baghishetsi, Stepanos Orbelian and Frik. However, the feeling of shame and humiliation that comes forth in Jewish literature doesn't appear in Armenian literature, in which that feeling is replaced by the feeling of national pride.

The next stage in Jewish literature is the concept of martyrdom which consoles the victim of the catastrophe. Whereas in the Armenian tradition, with the introduction of Christianity, along with the concept of sin and punishment, that of martyrdom was also adopted. Again following the Holy Bible, the story of the Maccabees is often mentioned in the writings of Khorenatsi, Catholicos Hovannes, Tovma Artsruni, Anania Shirakatsi and Stepanos Asoghik. "The most important differences, however, in the perception of martyrdom lies in the anticipation of reward in the Armenian tradition and the absence of such expectations—or ambivalence about it—in the Jewish tradition...Perhaps it is to compensate for this lack that the Jewish response to martyrdom acquired an extrinsic dimension; it turned toward, targeting the enemy, the victimizer, for a cathartic outlet for anger, rage, and frustration." (p. 36)

Furthermore, although the parallels between Armenian and Jewish responses to catastrophe continue, the author properly notes that while the Armenians, following the example of Christ's ascension, seek

Book Review

Literary Responses to Catastrophe: A Comparison of the Armenian and the Jewish Experience

REVIEWED BY G.M. GOSHGARIAN
University of Burgundy
Armenian Review, Winter 1992

This book examines the literary treatment of a literally unspeakable subject, mass annihilation. The term "Catastrophe," as Peroomian uses it, is both a proper name designating two historical events, the Armenian Genocide and the Final Solution, and a common noun that designates the diverse calamities visited upon Jews and Armenians over the centuries. Thus Peroomian set out to put literary responses to the great modern Catastrophes—Holocaust and Aghed—in the context of traditional Jewish and Armenian responses to the countless catastrophes that preceded them. But this eminently comparative project issues in an only intermittently comparative study. The discussion of the Jewish experience dwindles steadily until it has become no more than a decorative backdrop for the book's real subject, the literary treatment of the Armenian national tragedy. The bulk of this "comparative" study is accordingly devoted to works by four Armenians: Zabel Esayan, Suren Partevian, Aram Andonian and Hagop Oshagan. This choice implies further narrowing of focus to a generation and a genre: the four authors studied in depth were all between thirty-two and forty years old in 1915, and they all wrote mainly prose fiction. Its title notwithstanding, then, Peroomian's book is best described as a study of the influence of Armenia's Judeo-Christian literary tradition on four modern writers' treatment of the Genocide, with an occasional side-long glance at Jewish Holocaust fiction.

But if Peroomian's reach exceeds her grasp, she nevertheless grasps a good deal, at least as far as Armenian literature is

immortality in martyrdom, that concept is not so clear with the Jews because the Jews are still waiting for the coming of their Messiah. Furthermore, the medieval Armenian poet Frik, giving immortality a secular connotation, "implied that immortality was not limited to life in heaven; it could be attained in this very world if one was capable of embracing a true and a great love." (p. 41) This theme was further expounded in the love-poems

concerned. Her study begins with a useful overview of the responses their religious traditions made available to Jews and Armenians confronted by the catastrophes to which both peoples were repeatedly subjected. These responses took, she says, essentially four forms. Catastrophe could be regarded as well-merited divine punishment; as punishment disproportionate to the sin which provoked it; as martyrdom, which it was a privilege—consequently a triumph—to endure; or, in a Christian variation on this last possibility, as a ticket to glory on earth and eternal recompense in Heaven.

This little classificatory scheme admits to a few principles of variation. Thus the four ways of regarding catastrophe just mentioned, and the vision of oneself and the enemy which they imply, can be identified a more or less characteristic of a people or a period. This provides Peroomian as basis for comparing the Jewish and Armenian traditions in various historical epochs, something she does in interesting, if hardly earthshaking fashion, in the first, all too brief part of her book. It is, however, a second, chronological principle of variation that, more or less explicitly, founds the central discussion of Esayan's essayistic treatment of the 1909 pogroms in Adana, and Partevian's, Andonian's and Oshagan's fictional evocations of the Genocide. Here Peroomian is guided by the idea that the modern Armenian tradition should be read as a gradual translation into secular terms of the key concepts of the traditional religious response to catastrophe—notably martyrdom and glory—a secularization that culminates in a rejection of the model that inspires it. This notion is finally inadequate, as Peroomian herself seems to discover as she goes along; but it nevertheless provides a

of Nahabed Kuchak (16th c.)

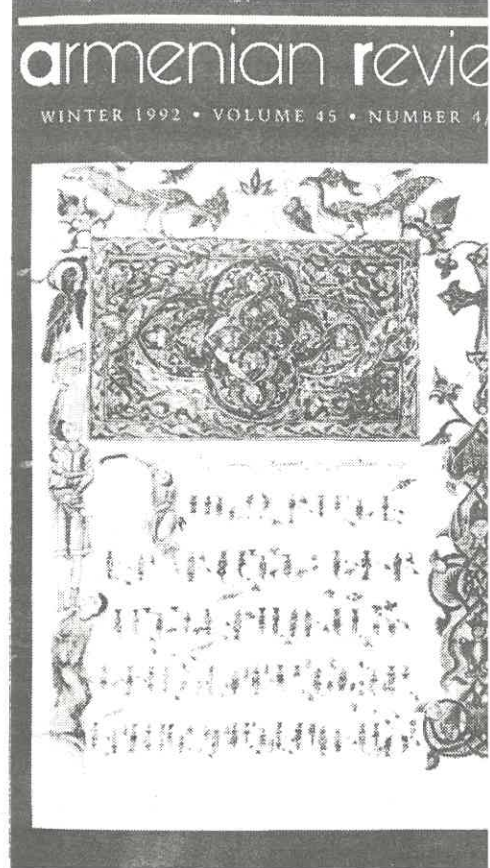
In the second chapter of the first part, Peroomian presents a description of the Armenian and Jewish intellectuals. While the Armenians were proponents of the fortification of national awareness, the Jews were attempting to find bases of understanding with their Christian neighbors for the sake of harmonious coexistence. Actively in Armenian literature trumpeting the Armenian

way of organizing a number of fine readings of some key texts, permits intellectual criticism of, say, Partevian's unrelentant bombast or Oshagan's occasional racism clears the way for a critical discussion can rise above the impressionism and emotionalism of much modern Armenian literary criticism.

Finally, not the least of the virtues of Peroomian's book, which has a good deal to recommend it, is that she gives us English translations of generous sampling of the texts she focuses on. Though they sometimes betray, like the rest of the book, that they are the work of a non-native speaker of English, they are nevertheless accurate, clear renditions of judiciously chosen passages, and will, I hope, stimulate a demand for more better English translations of modern Armenian classics.

liberation struggle of Israyel Ori, Hovhannes Emin and Shahamir Shahami beginning from the 17th century, carried on by Khachatur Abovian, Ghazaros Alishan, Movses Taghian, Stepanos Nazarian and Mikayel Nalbandyan, gradually losing its religious emphasis and becoming a national liberation movement, though, always having its opponents, such as Badveli Deroyent Hovhannes Hisarian. The Jews, in

(Continued on the Next



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became more submerged in religion, and, until the end, remained a religious collective, without becoming a nation. The concept of armed struggle for self-preservation appeared among the Jews only at the beginning of the 20th century, after the pogroms, when the Jewish writer called his people's passivity "fear and badness" and took the issue out of the realm of religion. It is then that the reactions of the two peoples to catastrophe approached each



Zabel Essayan

other.

Prior to that, however, the two peoples hadn't still faced the greatest catastrophes, the Armenocide and the Holocaust. The Armenian massacres, which began in 1894 and which would lead to the execution of the plan of Armenocide during 1915-1918, appeared on the horizon. Meanwhile, the losses suffered by the Jews in World War II permanently cut their ties with the traditional approach and the Covenant with God. It was necessary to maintain one's physical existence and not conceal fear under religious pretexts. In any event, the reaction of writers in the face of catastrophe was always stupefying silence and the rape of the creative imagination. A certain distance in time was required in order for tongues to speak. It was precisely for this reason that the first description of the Hamidian massacres were published by Eastern Armenian writers, such as Hovannes Hovannisian and Avedis Aharonian, based on eyewitness testimonies of Western Armenian refugee. After these events, Western Armenian literature underwent a fundamental change in orientation.

In Aharonian's perception, "blind obedience of fate and surrender to God's will brought many miseries upon the Armenian nation. It was time to act, to take arms and defend one's life, honor and possessions, to say no to the lessons of patience and obedience and fight." (pp. 75-76) "Tatul, in 'Don't Pray Anymore,' expresses Aharonian's views. Tatul's father, the priest of the village, shocked by his son's decision to leave the church and join the fedayees, comes to understand him only when he is dying from a Turkish bullet. With the last breath he whispers, 'Don't...pray...anymore...God...will forgive you.'" (p. 76) Here Peroomian draws an apt parallel with Yekel, the protagonist in I.M. Weisenberg's "A shtetl," who shouts at the rabbi, "No psalms!...Only arms, real arms!" (p. 76) Arpiar Arpiarian's *Karmir Zhamuis* [Red Offering] is a characteristic expression of this new psychology, which also explains Siamanto's and Daniel Varoujan's retrospective look at Armenian paganism. It is under this light too that the following three types of heroic Jewish characters must be observed: "baal-guf" (men of action), "schlemiel" (the men of reaction, those who can only speak and are incapable of action), and "telushim" (men of inaction, the lazy intellectual or philosopher who doesn't participate in any movement).

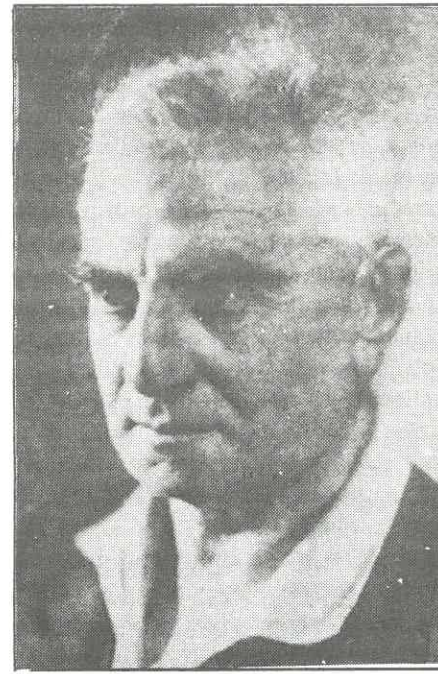
In the second part of her study, Dr. Peroomian tries and succeeds in pointing out the impact of Catastrophe on the literature of Zabel Essayan, Souren Bartevian, Aram Andonian and Hagop Oshagan. In doing so, she not only highlights the effect of said catastrophe on the Armenians individually and collectively, but also digs into contemporary Jewish literature sharing the same fate.

The foursome of writers constituting this second part, which comprises slightly more than half the book, may not seem comprehensive for the study's purpose. The author explains her rationale as follows: "The amount of Armenian post-Genocide literature is overwhelming, impossible to address fully in a study such as this one. To narrow down my scope I decided to select for study, writers who dealt with the atrocities directly, who wrote mostly before 1930 -and thus were most likely to reflect the immediate responses to the Genocide, and who attained significant reputation within Diasporan-Armenian critical circles." (p.5) Nevertheless the writers selected seem to be representative of descriptive, geographic, ideological and other equivalent realms in Armenian life.

A woman, Zabel Essayan; a journalist, Souren Bartevian; a revolutionary activist, Aram Andonian; and a novelist, Hagop Oshagan. Readers of the works of these writers will bear out Peroomian's confirmation of the theory of the French critic, Jacques Lacane, that lamentation symbolizes loss, and that language is the domain of this symbolization.

Thus silence, speechlessness, inability to speak are the reaction to the catastrophe. From this viewpoint, Essayan's characteristic work remains *Averagneroun mech* [Among the Ruins], a descriptive-documentary volume, commissioned by the Armenian authorities in Constantinople following the 1909 Adana massacre of some 30,000 Armenians. She writes, "What I saw is something beyond imagination...it is difficult for me to present the whole picture [of the catastrophe]. Words are incapable of expressing frightful and indescribable scenes, which I was an eyewitness to." That notwithstanding, that little which Essayan describes shows that the religious explanation to catastrophe still lingered in the minds and souls of the victims; the revelation of the "sin-punishment" formula is still sought as consolation. Essayan even often allows the outburst, asking what sins of the nation are responsible for this punishment. Despite this, she doesn't consider the victims as martyrs. Her approach is more analytical, critical and realistic, approaching the reaction of the writers who were eyewitnesses to the Jewish pogroms of WWII. Essayan seldom deals with the political motives behind the events (as is the case also with the other three writers). Nevertheless, the universal desires for freedom and justice are reflected in her pages. She touches lightly on the description of the typical Turk, contrasting the civilized and constructive Armenian national character with the nature of the Turkish character, terming it destructive and blood-drinking.

Souren Bartevian brings a different approach as he reproaches the Armenians having sought refuge in the Diaspora who live a comfortable and dissipating life in foreign lands. Although, along with criticism, he also gives descriptions which nail the Turk to the pillar of shame. Nevertheless, laying emphasis on the Armenian people at the threshold of the Armenocide and the life it led in Diaspora, Bartevian to a certain extent avoids description of the catastrophe and thus resembles the reaction to catastrophe of the



Hagop Oshagan

Jewish writers preceding the Holocaust.

In the works of the Armenian authors subjected to scrutiny, Peroomian finds the effect of major catastrophe not only in the existence of those works, but also in their absence. An interesting approach which can be justified in light of Peroomian being well versed in those writers' works and with their talent. Otherwise it would be absurd to reach conclusions based on a writer's unwritten work or absence of statement.

Contrary to Essayan, who finds the cause of catastrophe in the national character that defines the Turk, for Bartevian it is the slavish psychology of the Armenian people which led it to tragedy. Therefore, the necessity to wake up and resist is noticeable in the writings of Bartevian the journalist.

In Andonian's works, the principal one being *Medz Vojire* [The Great Crime]—a documentary volume consisting of the memoirs of Naim Bechian, chief secretary to the committee in charge of deportations in Aleppo, interspersed with the author's reactions and comments—the Turk doesn't appear by name, but his presence is quite evident. Like Bartevian, Andonian tends toward the internalization of the catastrophe but contrary to Bartevian, Andonian's reproach is aimed at the refuge of the exiles—the Diaspora. Andonian blames the victims of the crime—the Armenians themselves, particularly the survivors who, following the catastrophe, lived on bestial instincts, in physical and moral filth and dirt, whose parallel Peroomian sees in the analysis of the Jewish critic Roskies who makes reference to the immorality of the Jewish people for the sake of survival.

According to Peroomian, it was only Hagop

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Oshagan who unceasingly sought the answers to his two main questions, which were: why did the Turk commit such an inhuman crime as this, and what effect did that crime have on the survivors of the Armenian nation? Oshagan attempted to give the answers to those questions in his lengthy, albeit unfinished, novel *Mnatsortats* [Survivors]. Peroomian makes an attempt to account for this incompleteness in terms of language to describe the crime, as the effect of catastrophe on literature, again trying to infer conclusions from absent works.

The Parisian Armenian critic Marc Nchanian does the same, saying that, for Oshagan, speaking about death meant going straight to his own death. It is for this reason, perhaps, that Oshagan in his initial works adopted the presentation of abstract images, placing a physical and emotional distance between him and the events. Even considering all his unfulfilled promises, Oshagan remains the zenith of Catastrophe Literature, with his inventions and unique approaches. Oshagan sees the cause of the catastrophe in the Turkish character because, he says, just as there are criminal individuals, so too are there criminal races. They engage in crimes because they don't have anything else to do, or because they can't do anything else. In order to prove said theory, it was necessary for Oshagan to finish his novel—based on actual events of the 1915 carnage. He couldn't. Yet what he gave in the two volumes of this novel, as it is, can be considered monumental work.

Oshagan became the only writer who called the enemy Turk "Turk" and considered that name not as a symbol of national belongingness but as "qualitative adjective" says Peroomian and adds that, according to Oshagan, in order to understand the catastrophe, it is necessary to know the Turk. With this opinion, Oshagan negates all the previous explanations—the sin-punishment concept, the comfort of martyrdom, the act of self-blame—all of which strive for one thing: not name the enemy and therefore not face the enemy.

In Jewish literature, Peroomian puts Yuri Zvi Greenberg on a par with Oshagan. On other levels as well, the author finds parallels between the two. Thus, the work of both is monumental and both are difficult to read. And, to date, no one has had the courage to make a study of either in monographic form.

All in all, this study of Dr. Peroomian, unique in its kind, strives to achieve two objectives. The first is to become reconciled with Catastrophe through the path of literature and art. Not only passive

reconciliation but also by means of proper questions, impel the Armenian intellectual to analysis and to find curative answers to the whys and hows of the Armenocide, so that it will be possible to close that tragic page of Armenian history and literature, and strive to find means of perpetuating survival through art, language and literature. In short, through this work of hers, the author wishes to say that the Armenian nation, both in terms of its common people and its intellectual elite, remains submerged in a thick morass, from which only the renewal and perpetuation of said nation's physical and cultural life can guarantee rescue.

The author's second aim, relying on centuries-old Armenian literature and its evolution, shows by examples that the only means of coming out of the morass is armed resistance by the Armenian people against all kinds of violent acts and the peoples executing them. In order to substantiate said theory, she appeals to Jewish literature, wherein she finds the same messages, never mind that both the final political and spiritual goals of the two peoples are not the same. As is evident from a reading of this volume, centuries were needed so that the two nations, in turn, could bring the realization of their collective national aspirations out of the religious realm and come to the conclusion that the salvation of some human beings from the violence of others must not be entrusted to God.

Unquestionably this work of Dr. Rubina Peroomian is an important contribution to Armenian literature as well as Armenian history and, specifically, the Armenian Genocide. Although it could be expanded, this relatively concise study present greater possibilities of being read and is accessible to a broader range of readers, something which justifies the author's objective.

In conclusion, I would like to offer a few observations as we approach the 80th anniversary of the Armenocide. First, let's look at our national agenda, which is traditional in terms of pursuing our decades-long objective of gaining international recognition of the reality of the Armenocide, not to mention its acknowledgment by the Turkish government and granting of reparation; traditional in terms of combating the deliberate rewriting and distortion of its history; traditional in terms of honoring the sacred memory of our one and a half million victims. The Armenian individual can play a very limited role in the pursuit of these objectives: he can participate in the upcoming commemoration; he can write or call his congressman and President, urging passing of a genocide resolution. A select few Armenian—and non-Armenian—scholars can continue to write and speak

about new research on topics of genocide, as well as refute attempts at rewriting and distorting the history of the Armenian genocide.

All the activity involving the rank-and-file Armenians is all very well and good but it presents two readily identifiable shortcomings: (1) it is short-term in nature; (2) it fails to provide a vehicle to emerge from that "thick morass" mentioned above.

In this connection, let us turn to what I referred to as the "novel" aspects of this genocide anniversary. In both the Diaspora and Armenia, the number of genocide survivors is so small, and their role in the collective so minimal, that for the first time practically the Armenian Cause is wholly in the hands of the descendants of the survivors, rather than the survivors themselves. And, as is the case with other aspects of identity, this transition entails a conscious effort, a willful act of first knowledge and then a distinct viewpoint. This process, of course, applies to the genocide and had its impact on our collective psyche. Turning to Armenia proper, there are signs that this process is being undergone there as well, replete with fumbling and going to extremes, such as the recent pronouncements of acting Minister of Education, Ashot Bleyan, banning the teaching of the genocide in primary and middle schools and, in particular, Paruyr Sevak's *Anlereli Zankagadoun* [Unsilenced Belfry] dedicated to the genocide, in general, and Gomidas Vartabed, in particular. This process is not all that surprising, considering the absence of a freely evolved collective response to the genocide, in contrast with the Diaspora: fifty years of silence, followed by a quarter century of orchestrated popular mourning and commemoration of the events of 80 years ago.

Strange as it may seem, we can take comfort at least in the fact that there is sufficient recognition of Paruyr Sevak's magnum opus to generate a widespread debate over Bleyan's radical decree. For if sufficient effort is not taken not to acquaint our younger generations with the "overwhelming amount of post-Genocide literature," down the road we could well face a situation whereby we're holding on to the shell emptied of its contents. This metaphor brings me to the final point of my address this evening. It is essential to maintain an awareness not only of the actual history of the Armenian Genocide but also the response of its victims—and their descendants—to its as expressed in literature, art, music and other realms of culture. The latter, I maintain, is preferable because it is generally more accessible to a greater number of individuals. And, in the diaspora specifically,

the literary legacy spawned by the genocide needs to be made intelligible to the younger generations through a systematic program of translations into English, French and/or Spanish. In this regard, I would submit to you that one of the reasons for the overall cognizance of the Holocaust and the plethora of studies concerning it is the availability of translations into various foreign languages of practically all the significant literary works written in response to the Holocaust in either Yiddish or Hebrew.

Contrast that enviable situation, if you will, with the sparseness of Armenian literature available in Western foreign languages. Indeed, in embarking on this story of hers, Dr. Peroomian faced the situation not only baking the cake but preparing ingredients as well. I mean to say that, with the exception of Aram Andonian's *M Vojire*, whose English and French translations had been commissioned for political propaganda purposes shortly after publication in Armenian, as well as a number of poems having been translated by Alice Stepanian Blackwell (published in 1917); Diana Hovanesian and Marzbed Margoss (published in 1978); and Aram Toleg (published in 1979), she was obliged to make her own translations of those excerpts of works by the Armenian authors utilized in her study. Such a project, while extensive, is well within the scope of possibility. What we have to realize too—and we are indebted to Dr. Peroomian for this realization—is that a story or novel, as a whole doesn't need to be a masterpiece to merit consideration in translation. Dr. Peroomian more than adequately advances the thesis that no single literary response to the genocide can do justice to the complexity of that mind-boggling reality. To get as close to the whole as possible, many pieces are needed—some big and some small. Looking at the vast literary output in this light, we cannot scientifically classify what elements of a response we have produced, which ones are accessible for study, and which ones need to be made available for said purpose. By doing so, we may become the true beneficiaries of this literary legacy, getting to know ourselves better in the process and sharing that knowledge with other peoples for their enlightenment, and hopefully betterment, all.

The above address was given on March 23, 1995 at a program devoted to Dr. Rubina Peroomian and the aforementioned book, held at Dag Hammarskjöld Lounge, Columbia University, and sponsored by the Armenian Club of Columbia University and the Armenian Club of New York University and the New York branch of Hamazkay Educational and Cultural Association.

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