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## THE POETICS OF VIOLENCE IN LITERARY RESPONSES TO THE ADANA MASSACRES

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The literary responses to the 1894-96 Hamidian massacres in their entirety can be seen as the struggle of the Armenian literati to conceptualize Turkish atrocities against the Armenian population of the Ottoman Empire, atrocities unexpected and unprecedented in scale and momentum. The old paradigm of responses to historical catastrophes was ruptured. The ancient concepts of sin and punishment, or the soothing image of martyrdom for the sake of Christianity rewarded by the gift of immortality fell short of explaining the widespread destruction and loss of life. Even the secularized concept of martyrdom underlying the Armenian Renaissance ideology of romantic patriotism and political optimism, advocating armed struggle, eulogizing the exploits of fedayees, and exalting the liberation movement could not withstand the shock. New literary tools were needed to portray and explain the calamity; a language of violence had to be crafted befitting the indescribable brutality. The literary responses to the 1894-96 massacres, in particular Siamanto's (1878-1915) and Daniel Varuzhan's (1884-1915) poetic representations of the calamity, laid the foundation to eventually achieve this language in the most effective way in these two great poets' ever-during, timeless portrayal of Adana massacres.

My focus in this paper and my dedication to the centenary of the 1909 massacres of Adana is that dimension of the literary responses to this calamity that has not been observed and studied before, namely the language of violence. A language that, as Stanley Fish puts it in his argument for the Readers Response literary theory limits our subjectivity as a reader and gives us an internalized understanding of the language, as native speakers of it, to experience these poems always controlled by normative boundaries set by the text. I will discuss this language, the discourse of violence and its use both to facilitate the actions of the perpetrators and to lay bare these horrible actions and their effects. I will demonstrate the binary opposition inherent in these two manifestations of the language of violence and their powerful effect, the reason why this poetic tool remained unparalleled in the literary responses to the Great Catastrophe of 1915 still ahead. But first, the beginnings of the language of violence.

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The initial response in Western Armenian literature to the massacres of 1894-96 was silence which gradually dissipated into lamentation, an old poetic device, a cathartic tool to vent out frustration and unleash the shackles of the language, or as Ulrike Bail puts it «a textual space of survival.» In effect, the initial responses to the calamity are characterized by the painful struggle to represent, as closely as possible, the morbid scenes of blood and death, coupled with helpless confessions to the inadequacy of language to do justice to the collective suffering and devastation beyond human imagination. For Hagop Oshagan the period during and after the massacres of 1894-96 «symbolized the brutal violence imposed upon our literature.»

«Kotorats» (Massacre, written in 1898) by Siamanto exemplifies that struggle to confront the catastrophe and find a proper discourse to encompass the reality in whole.

Massacre! Massacre! Massacre!  
 In the cities and outside the cities in our land.  
 And the barbarians, with booty and blood,  
 Return leaving the dead and the dying.  
 Flocks of ravens hover above.  
 Bloody is their mouth; they chortle like drunks...

.....  
 Listen! Listen! Listen!  
 The sinister howling of horrified dogs  
 Reaching me from the valleys and the graves.  
 O! Close your windows and your eyes too,  
 Massacre! Massacre! Massacre!

Siamanto has no alternative to offer, no solution to alleviate the pain. The only way out is to escape from the torrent of images, to close your mind against them to be able to survive and go on living.

The poem «Kotorats» with a changed title of «Mahvan Tesilk» (Phantom of Death) opens Siamanto's collection of poems published in 1907 as *Hogevarki ev Huysi Jaher* (Torches of Agony and Hope). Characteristically, the mood of the poems gradually changes from morbid despair and agony and mourning and lamentation over the loss to a yearning for a better future and a searching for a spark of hope. «Aspetin erge» (The Song of the Knight) is the turning point. It is the author's imaginary journey mounted on a winged white steed, back into the land of blood, suffering, and death, once his happy and thriving birthplace: «For my native valley I yearn, I yearn the valleys/that hold my home».<sup>1</sup> In keeping with the mood of the first poem, «The Phantom of Death,» Siamanto shuns direct contact with the scenes of devastation and death. They are still insurmountable, still causing him fear and agony, and he has no answer to it. «I shudder at the ruins, helpless bangs» (p. 145).

Oh, do not halt, my courser, where these corpses scattered lie!  
 Fly far away from graveyards, where white shades of dead men be.  
 I cannot bear, I tell thee, I cannot bear again  
 The death of my dear native land with anguished eyes to see! (p. 145)

The journey continues into a sudden embrace of Hope (hope with a capital H connotating the concept and the ideal that the word suggests): «From this time onward, I will burn Hope's torches blazing bright». The poem ends in a vision of the masses marching toward victory:

What a procession, what a host, all glad and full of might!  
 'Tis Freedom pioneers; their swords flash out life giving rays,  
 And Brotherhood they celebrate in morning's glorious light.» (p. 145)

This vision of the future is a marked influence of Claude Henry de Saint-Simon who regarded artists as the cultural avant-garde who will lead «the triumphant march of mankind toward its glorious socialist future.» But also, since the poem is dated 1897-1907, the passage speaks of Siamanto's hope and confidence toward the Young Turk movement that was

<sup>1</sup> Alice Stone Blackwell, tr. *Armenian Poems Rendered into English Verse* (1917), facsimile ed. (Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1978), p. 144.

very much alive and active in Europe at that time. There is hope in the future; however, the memory of gruesome scenes of murder and rape, burning homes and churches and wiped out villages are very much alive and expressed as lamentations in Siamanto's poignant poetic representations.<sup>2</sup>

Daniel Varuzhan was very young when the massacres of 1894-96 occurred. He was personally affected by it, since his pandukht (self-exiled) father in Constantinople was falsely accused and imprisoned. After years of searching Varuzhan and his mother found him a tormented, emaciated man who died shortly after his son's visit in the prison. Varuzhan's «Hors bantin mej» (In my Father's Prison, written between 1906 and 1909) is a tribute to his father and all those who were thrown in Turkish prisons to die a prolonged and torturous death. It is in this poem that we come to witness the transformation in the 12-year-old boy's heart: spite and rancor against the perpetrators of a gross injustice done to his father and the whole nation.

And gazing long after you  
 O, my father, I cried there, alone,  
 (While within my chest a new rancor was shaking its head)  
 I wringed my heart out from my eyes.

The dilemma of the brutal massacres reverberated in Varuzhan's first poems in the collection titles *Sarsurner* (Shiverings), published in 1906 in Venice; however, his most dramatic response to the massacres echoes in a long poem «Jarde» (The Carnage) that he published in 1907. The literary piece does not intend a realistic portrayal of the event; descriptions are mostly abstract, shocking the reader with vivid colors or, as he later remarks, with «barbarian colors of Flemish masters.» The poem is fashioned after the Lamentations of the Old Testament—with personification of the victimized Armenia—mixed with the elements of Armenian songs of mourning, *yeghererg*, lauding the victim, anathematizing the victimizer. The piece is also a psycho-political analysis of the event, reflecting upon the instinctive drive of the Turk to kill and destroy, the insensitivity of the Big Powers and their Silence and failure to intervene to stop the carnage, but also the unpreparedness of the majority of the Armenian masses to resist and halt a catastrophe of such magnitude. The latter is pictured in the metaphoric image of Armenian men with the yellow mud of the wheat-fields on their feet and their chests smelling incense instead of gun powder. Varuzhan has not been able to reconcile with the memory of the traumatic past of the nation. In his mind's eye he still sees the evil and barbarian Spirit of Alp Aslan mounted on his white horse, leading the hordes of murderers. As in Siamanto, Varuzhan's response, too, ends with an optimistic note, a vision of the approaching footsteps of victory, again, an arbitrary ending, in stark contrast with the mood of the poem.

What is evident, however, is that Varuzhan is engaged in concocting the language of violence wrought up with metaphoric images and laconic strokes of his powerful pen painting gruesome scenes:

Their sabers cutting open streams of blood,  
 Rolling young heads  
 Some with dark others with blond hair

<sup>2</sup> This poem is significantly the last in the 1907 Paris publication of *Hogevarki ev Huysi Jaher*. Ten others have been added in the later edition published in Boston.

Crushed in the mud.

They hold on tight to the old men's throats

And crush their skulls against the wall.

They cut open our mothers' sacred bellies,

And our yet unnamed brothers,

Armenians without shapes fall out,

And are trampled, crushed.

Under foot, under truncheon, or horseshoe.

Ribs, and skulls, skulls, innumerable skulls

Are filling the cracks of the pavement with marrow and brain.

Varuzhan's *Hayhoyank* (Curse, written in 1907), is another poem in response to the massacres, integrating the spirit of ancient concepts but with a new twist. The unnamed old woman, the lyric heroine stands above the crowd of wretched survivors of a mass slaughter, and raising her clenched fists, curses God for what befell the Armenian nation. She challenges the covenant between man and God; she questions God's judgment, protests His indifference toward the persecution of a people who faithfully worshipped Him and sacrificed their lives for Him. But the old woman is alone in her outburst as a lone champion of this strange uprising. The frightened youngsters in the crowd begin to cry; women pray. In a state of utter frustration and anguish, she walks to the edge of the abyss and hurls herself down. With her demise, the angry voice of protest is stifled in the seed.

It was the early 1900s and the passing of time and the innate spirit of revival of the nation had appeased the pain. Streaks of hope of a brighter future had already crept in. Optimism had grown back slowly. National pride and integrity lost in the widespread submission to the enemy's sword was being restored. The unabated memory of the massacres, however, still preoccupied creative minds and gave birth to literary works.

Siamanto had found the solution to the dilemma of crafting a literary response to the massacres. Distancing in time, overcoming the urge to describe the gruesome scenes as they were, he devised a unique poetic tool: recourse to the past, but not to borrow the old concepts to help him respond to the unexplained and indigested disaster. He found his inspiration in the heroic deeds in the Armenian pagan past, and with renewed enthusiasm began to eulogize the revolutionary acts of reprisal and armed resistance carried out by the fedayees of the present.

His collection of poems titled «Diutsaznoren» (Heroically, 1902) epitomize the author's view of collective trauma of the recent past, the present situation, and the future course of action. Siamanto idealizes the Nietzschean hero and hopes to see his spirit grow in every Armenian young and brave. Once again, it is the spirit of Hope encouraging action: «Take the lightning sword bravely in your hand.» Nothing new, just an underscored idealization of the Armenian Renaissance themes: armed struggle, revenge, revolt, retaliation. Then, «Dareru vrezh» (Revenge of the Centuries, written in 1902 in Geneva) resonating Siamanto's credo, a credo that was adopted by the devotees of the Armenian armed struggle for the liberation of the nation from the oppressive yoke of the Ottoman rulers: «Justice must be created and freedom fiercely seized.»

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In such an atmosphere, the Young Turk revolution of 1908 was received with enthusiasm. Equality, Brotherhood, and Justice to all, ideas adorning the promises of the Young Turk

leaders, were turned into slogans in the streets. After years of wandering in different cities in Europe, Siamanto too, like many other Armenian intellectuals, returned to Constantinople. He was physically weakened and ill with tuberculosis but full of optimism and plans for the future.

The Adana massacres of 1909, only a few months after the reinstatement of constitution and the proclamation of *Hurriet*, were a blow to the ideal of a peaceful coexistence with the Turk and a detrimental shock to all literary conventions that could ever help to devise responses to the new calamity.

The road that extended from silence to lamentation, to descriptive expressions, to call for action in order to reverse the fate of the nation, reaching eventually to Hope for a better future bumped onto a dead end. Standards collapsed. Poetic expressions were once again condemned to impotency.

The 1909 catastrophe occurred one-hundred years ago beginning March 31<sup>st</sup> (Old Calendar). And today with a spirit of commemoration and reevaluation of the event and its aftereffects, we look back to scrutinize once again the powerful literary responses, to marvel over the tools, the poetic strategies that remained unsurpassed, armed with the potency to respond even to the catastrophes of yet to come.

Zapel Esayan and Suren Partevian recorded the accounts as they witnessed them in the immediate aftermath of the catastrophe. I have studied their responses at length in two chapters dedicated to their work in *Literary Responses to Catastrophe: A Comparison of the Armenian and the Jewish Experience* (1993). They had indeed undertaken a difficult task to confront the disaster head-on and to assess its scale and aftereffects in order to recommend the scope of assistance needed. I have shown instances when they stopped stupefied unable to overcome the torrent of emotions: helplessness toward the victims, rage against the perpetrators, and praise for those who took arms and stood up in defense of their homes, city quarters, and villages. I have shown instances of total submission and inability to describe the scenes leading these writers to resort to lamentation or confession to paralysis of diction: «This is the first time, I discover so brutally the impotence of my pen, the painful struggle, the inadequacy of all meanings of the word to capture the scenes around me... the horrifying reality that crushes my soul.»<sup>3</sup> Or «I cannot find words accurate enough, dramatic and tragic enough, to describe the depressing, suffocating scenes of misery that I have witnessed these days.»<sup>4</sup> And, «Words are incapable of expressing the dreadful and unspeakable sights that my eyes witnessed.»<sup>5</sup>

In another paper, titled «The Tears and Laughter of Cilician Armenians.» I have revisited the responses of these writers and have compared them to the burning intensity of Siamanto's and Varuzhan's poetic responses to that same calamity. I have stated, and I repeat here again that, «History documents and even tries to explain the massacres of 1909, but memoirs, testimonies, and eyewitness accounts mix fact and imagination to paint the horrifying truth the way it was. Poetry [on the other hand] captures one moment, one image, and the impact is incomparable.»<sup>6</sup> In this comparison, I contend, it is not only the power of poetry or the

<sup>3</sup> Suren Partevian, *Kilikian Arhavorke*, p. 69.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>5</sup> Zapel Esayan, *Amidst the Ruins*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>6</sup> In this paper, presented at a conference on Cilician Armenians, 2000, I have done a close reading of Siamanto's poems in his collection titled *Karmir lurer barekames* (Bloody News from my Friend), "Kheghtamah" (Strangled), "Pare" (The Dance), "Khache" (The Cross), and then I have briefly discussed Varuzhan's and

extraordinary talent and deep knowledge of the boundaries and possibilities of the language. It is the immediacy of the catastrophe, the on-the-scene, head-on experience for Esayan and Partevian impeding the language to overcome all boundaries and the imagination rising above the actual scenes of misery and atrocity.

In looking at the Adana massacres from the vantage point of the perpetrator and using Michael Foucault's terminology suggesting a broader meaning of government, the governmentality of the Young Turks depended on the promise of change of techniques and rationalities used by the Ottoman Sultans to rule over the multiethnic, multi-religious Empire. The events that unfolded in Adana and spread over all of Cilician Armenian towns and villages and beyond were in absolute negation of these promises, but they proved compatible with the subsequent policies and practices, in other words, compatible with the governmentality adopted by the Young Turks. It is a common knowledge that the massacres were instigated by reactionary forces as another manifestation of their counter-revolutionary activities. However, the Young Turk government's handling of the atrocities and their aftermath leaves no doubt about its conspiracy at least to continue what the reactionaries started. In that stage, it did not take extra effort by the government to introduce their true mentality and not the one they pretended to have espoused in relation to the ethnic minorities, Armenians in particular. The society willingly absorbed that mentality aspect or dimension of governmentality because the culture of violence, an intrinsic characteristic in the Turkish-Armenian centuries-long relationship and absolute domination, never showed a sign to ease. The culture of violence had to find its expressions in language in order to instigate action. And we have witnessed its use in the massacres of 1894-96 as manifested in the Armenian literary responses to them. That language, powerful and unsurpassed, echoes in the poetic responses to the 1909 catastrophe.

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The entire series of Siamanto's poems in *Karmir lurer barekames* (Bloody News from my Friend) makes us realize today the intensity, the dreadfulness of these massacres more than any statistics or a document could. To use Louise Rosenblatt's formulation, these are poems in which we live through, in this case through the massacres of 1909, «under the guidance of the text and experiences as relevant to the text.»<sup>7</sup> The following are excerpts of the perpetrator's language in utterances and portrayals of the crime through which the smooth flow of the operation and full participation of the populace was ensured.

Captured by Siamanto in «Irents erge» (Their Song):

I sow corpses in the garrets of slavery  
And these bodies I snatched because they are infidels,  
Allah says: turn the vally of the infidels into graves,  
Butcher the children, fuck all the virgins.

.....  
In the air like stars I spread cut heads,  
I spread death like a caravan of clouds.

Ruben Sevak's equally powerful poetic responses immediately after the Cilician massacres. The paper was published in a volume containing the proceedings of the Conference, titled *The Armenian Cilicia*, in 2008, Richard G. Hovannisian ed.

<sup>7</sup> "Definition of Reader-Response Criticism" by Ross Murfin.

What are you waiting for? It's all yours.  
Strike and eat and dance and get drunk...

.....  
Drink from my cup the blood of young virgins.  
Time runs. Justice changes its course. Drink from this virgin's skull.  
What's gold or silver next to this?<sup>8</sup>

Siamanto, «Kuyre» (The Blind) -- is an absolute manifestation of hatred and drive to murder the infidel. The blind man is applauding those who have spread death and devastation in the neighboring Armenian village and is burning with the desire of participating in the carnage.

How badly I want to feel a dead body with my hands.  
I smell the ashes--  
May you live a thousand years blessed ones.  
While walking, my sleepers suddenly stick to the earth....  
I know what it is ... I smell it.  
The blood of sinners is so hot  
It's like fire flowing over the roads....

A young man approaches dragging an Armenian beauty by her hair:

I chose this girl from nearby village,  
but she wouldn't become a Muslim, and refuses to be my wife.  
I am terrified by her eyes, I'm afraid she'll strangle me in my bed.  
A thousand pities that you're blind, but feel her body first,

The young man gives him his dagger and helps him to drive it in that naked virgin's heart. The wish is accomplished; he feels the warm blood of that virgin splashing on his face. That was heaven; the blind man shouts in ecstasy as if he had seen the light.

«A thousand cheers, I'm ready.  
Where is her heart my son?»

«Wait, let me guide your hand.»

As the blood splattered his face  
like flaming poppies,  
he shouted to the crowd:  
«My eyes are clear. I've seen the light.»

Studying the cycles of violence in early American West, Ned Blackhawk speaks of violence in New Mexican colony in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries and how violence from both sides had their public rituals and symbols including «the formal presentation of the scalps and

<sup>8</sup> With some reservation, I use the published translation in this and the following excerpts from Siamanto's collection of poems titled "Karmir lurer barekames" (Bloody News from My Friend). In some passages, the meaning of the poems is compromised, as the reader can see, to the poetic qualities the translators have striven to achieve or the poem is abridged. See, *Bloody News from My Friend, Poems by Siamanto*, translated by Peter Balakian and Nevart Yaghlian (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996). I have quoted the translations as they were without making necessary changes to convey the true meanings. Incidentally, the word sow (in I sow corpses -- ես դիակներ կը ցաննմ) is misprinted (I saw corpses) in the book.

ears of enemy Indians to the governor of colonial New Mexico and the mass, public rape of indigenous women captives,» or the «display of enemy body parts as trophies.» Well, this is happening in the Twentieth Century Ottoman Empire.

In the last days of his life, the old Turk, seeking paradise after death, remembers the only sin he has committed in life. Once, in his young age, infatuated with the beauty of a young Armenian girl, he had failed to deliver his everyday prayer to God. He had to repent, and his plans were diabolical:

Then two black men took a fair Armenian boy from Darson  
to the cellar and with a scimitar slashed off his clothes.  
His death shriek shook the house,

But to complete the ritual the old man was to drink the blood of that Armenian boy. And  
who should hand him the cup of atonement?

«There's no doubt,» he said:  
«The last child of that Armenian girl  
who cost me my place in paradise.»

So that grandchild brought him a silver tray  
With a gold cup filled with blood.  
«You unlucky ones, this cup is a symbol of your defeat,»  
and he bit into the cup  
and on the threshold of his paradise  
he smiled as he died.

The dream of paradise was realized. Violence turned into ritual performed with awe and piety. [Siamanto, «Kavutian» (Atonement)]

In a rich Armenian's house, the Turkish executioner is standing with a dagger in his hand, the dagger he has found in the house of this rich Armenian, the dagger with which he has killed the young master, and now it is the turn of the beautiful lady of the house. But the murderer has gathered an audience to applaud the performance and share the booty. The man orders the lady to take the dagger in her hand and thrust it in the heart of her two year old boy clinging to her chest and crying in terror. The audience is impatient. It is time for the evening prayers and the infidel woman is refusing to obey. Eventually, she takes the dagger, raises it in the air and down into her own heart:

The woman swung her dagger heavenward,  
Then collapsed dead her eyes open.  
But some blood-thirsty punk took her dead hand

With the dagger in it, and stabbed her son seven times. [Siamanto, "Dashuyne" (The Dagger)]

A perverted religious ritual is being performed in an Armenian church. A mother is begging the Turk to spare his son. But this is an opportunity for the murderers to turn the killing into a pleasurable entertainment. They ask the woman to take off her flowery dress.

In a minute the men came running out of the vestibule  
with a blood-soaked dress.  
«Isn't this your dress?»

Doesn't it smell familiar? What kind of mother are you?  
Smell it, go ahead!  
Don't be mad; we sacrificed your son on the altar  
with white cloths and candles.  
Now we'll paint your cross...

The executioners have turned the killing of their victims into a mystical performance adorned with a powerful script to match the formidable violence. [Siamanto, «Khache» (The Cross)]

In a marble bath of the Muslim lady a ritual is being conducted by the wicked witch of the town. The scene describes the slaughter of seven young Armenian virgins and spilling their blood in the bath, the blood running from the feet to the womb of the naked lady standing proudly as the goddess accepting human sacrifice. The witch has promised that the blood of Armenian virgins will bestow her the power of giving birth to conquerors and heroes of the race. Behind the curtains, an old Muslim clergy is reading a mysterious prayer to the Muslim God.

Looking toward heaven, the petrified barren beauty  
Rose to her feet.  
As the warm blood began to rise  
Up her legs to her womb. [Siamanto, «Loganke» (The Bath)]

Seeing leftovers still lurking in that Armenian village, the mob rises shouting, «We need to attack once again. There are people who still breathe... We sought graveyard yet there is life in there. We all want ashes and death, infidels!» Siamanto, «Zavake» (The Son).<sup>9</sup>

Siamanto's «Pare» (The Dance) is in itself the epitome of Turkish atrocities against innocent women. It is an episode related to the author by a German missionary woman who had witnessed a most horrific practice of public violence and incredible utterances of the Muslim murderers:

a dark crowd standing in a vineyard  
Lashing twenty brides  
and singing filthysongs.

.....  
'Dance,' they raves,  
'dance till you die infidel beauties.  
with your flapping tits, dance!  
Smile for us. You're abandoned now,  
you're naked slaves,  
so dance like a bunch of fuckin' sluts.  
We're hot for your dead bodies.'

These are masterful representations of images that remained unparalleled even in Hagop Oshagan's Mnatsordats (Remnants). The language befitted the crime, provided a tool, a strategy that worked better than any command from above to turn the mob into the cruellest

<sup>9</sup> I have skipped citing excerpts from the translation of this poem. It does not match the original. It is too short and does not do justice to the torrent of imagery, diabolical scenes, and horrifying dialogs Siamanto created in this poem.

and most sadistic murderers to shore up the Young Turk governmentality.

In the case of Zapel Esayan, except for a few instances of cynical utterances by Turkish murderers, such as «You don't have God! Just as your Christ died by torture, so will each one of you die by torture» (p. 169), she takes the language of violence to the level of metaphoric expressions, where objects and symbols signify human behavior. «I have witnessed the arrogant and shameless Turkish quarters standing tall amongst Armenian ruins ... I noticed the cynical expressions of unpunished criminals» (p. 18-19). Or, the scene of Muslim minarets «rising arrogantly amongst the ruins of Armenian homes burnt to ashes by the fire of hatred» (p. 25). Zapel Esayan too, in her own way tried to explore the character of the Turk and what made him a murderer. She views the Turks with the eyes of orphaned children who have witnessed the killing of their parents as cold-blooded murderers whose eyes burn with evil passion to destroy and kill (p. 40). She attributes this behavior to the nature of the Turk who «nurtures bloody aspirations and destroys.»<sup>10</sup> A woman recounts how the Turks killed her husband and son. «The Turkish neighbor women stood there laughing at my sorrow. The more I cried the louder they laughed» (pp. 75-76). A Turkish woman had loaded wounded men, women, and children in a carriage with a promise to take them to safety, but instead, she had pushed them into the river to drown. Another Turkish woman was seen crushing the head of a child kneeling over his mother's dead body. The two women were brought to court and tried. Ironically, they were sentenced to death by hanging and then pardoned. The thrill of bloodshed had intoxicated women so much, Esayan observes, as to forget the friendship and hospitality of their Armenian neighbors. (p. 218).

And now contrast this discourse with its binary opposition the crushing, heartrending, tragic images of the catastrophe the executioners accomplished to fulfill. New literary critics following the Readers Response theory believe that our experience reading a text and responding to it is not so much under the guidance of the text, but more so it is motivated by deep-seated, personal, psychological needs. Yes, it is the psychology of a survivor of a great collective catastrophe that draws us to reread and relive the experience of our predecessors' dreadful struggle of survival through the hell that burned in Cilicia in 1909 and once again in Western Armenia and the entire Ottoman Empire in 1915.

Once again examples from Siamanto's «Bloody News from My Friend» elucidate the flip side of the coin, images of utter tragedy, the unparalleled results of unprecedented atrocities that the language of violence achieves to depict. A man returns to his village to find his house ruined, the body of his wife at the threshold, and his young son still clinging to her. The Turks have noticed him from a distance and are coming to finish him off too to complete the carnage of the entire village. The man has to rescue his son, the only Hope of the future, and bury his wife. The scene describes his morbid struggle giving his dead wife the funereal ritual within the raging waves of the river and fighting with the waves and the incoming corpses to reach the sea holding his son high, clenching his belt by his teeth. He finally reaches the sea and puts his son down on the shore to notice stupefied that his wife's corpse had accompanied them to the sea shore as if to make sure that her son is saved. Siamanto, «Zavake» (The Son).<sup>11</sup>

The corpses were piled high as trees.  
and from the from the springs, from the streams and the road,

the blood was stubborn murmur,  
and still calls revenge in my ear. . . . Siamanto, «Pare» (The Dance)

And the meaningful synthesis of it all in that same poem: «so people will understand/ the crimes men do to men.» a prototype of the renowned and much quoted phrase «man's inhumanity to man.» And another poetic outburst that has endured through time to become the ultimate defiance against humanity, its principles and values: «Human justice/ I spit in your face.»

Siamanto's «Kheghtamah» (Strangled) is a classic in the Armenian genocide literature and the embodiment of the Armenian collective suffering. How many wretched Armenian women on the road of deportation have gone crazy after strangling their crying infant to save others or after hurling their daughters in the river to save them from Turkish molesters? How many of these wretched women have wandered seeking death when surviving the horrifying experience had been impossible?

In the darkness we heard  
the flash-dance crackling, flaring in the sun-  
guns, spears, bayonets, and swords.  
Corpses like uprooted trees  
fell on the roof of our cellar.  
Through the walls we heard shrieks, mute breathing,  
the ghost given up.  
Blood seeped through earth ceiling  
and trickled [down] our faces.

This is human tragedy in a sinister landscape of violence and murder. Then another sinister image in that same poem:

In the dark, the mother  
offered her throat, then her son's . . .  
Then like snakes, two arms found the infant,  
and the silence in the cellar was a storm.  
I thought we had all died.  
Then we heard the man above cursing  
and the killers left.  
Was this salvation? Can slaves be saved?  
Every day that mother half-naked stands by the road delirious,  
Hanging on the skirt of a stranger, the enemy, the passerby  
[--See these hands of mine? Do you see these hands?  
It was I who strangled my newborn in that cellar...  
Believe me, it was I who strangled him, what unfair people you are,  
strangle me at least. I have no strength in my hands.  
It was I, in that cellar, who strangled my newborn with all my strength...  
Have you no heart? Strangle me. My hands

<sup>10</sup> This is an excerpt from a letter written from Mersin to her husband in Paris, discussed in *Literary Responses to Catastrophe: A Comparison of the Armenian and the Jewish Experience*, p. 107.

<sup>11</sup> For the same reasons mentioned in note #9, I have skipped the translation.

have no strength any more...]<sup>12</sup>

Varuzhan's textualization of the catastrophe is more complex and abstract.

In «Kilikean mokhirnerun» (To the Ashes of Cilicia), he guides a foreign visitor (otarkan) to the disaster stricken land to show him the wounded left dying, to listen to their painful sighs and moaning, the unburied corpses scattered in the smoking ruins of their houses, crucified men, naked, their blood running down to make streams gushing down the hill. «Behold! The Turk ignited the pyres of his amusement/ Sobbing skeletons are burning grandly.»

«Arevangiche» (The Abductor), is the painstaking struggle of an Armenian man, his fight to save a virgin from her abductor and eventually his victory. The poem ends with the grateful prayers of all the virgins of the same fate whose innocence and purity had fallen victim to the lustful crime.

Varuzhan's synthesis of Turkish Armenian relationship is also captured in «Derenik» (a boy's name in Armenian), a poem that has significantly found its way into the Armenian language primary school textbooks. The mother drives out his son who has come inside crying with his head bleeding. Ali, the Turkish boy has hit him. «Get out, and don't come home until you hit him back and wash your blood with his...» The boy is scared. Ali is Turkish and there is evil in his eyes. «And you are Armenian,» the mother replies; «go fight your fight with whichever you want.» Surprisingly, however, Varuzhan does not end the poem with the boy's victory over his Turkish opponent. That would have been too mundane and unrealistic. There, in the yard, a big stone in his hand, the blood flowing down his cheek, Derenik is long awaiting the enemy at his door.

And once again, metaphoric images by Esayan and Partevian, synthesized in formulations like «beyond the gallows of Adana, can a road to justice still exist?» They both believed that the Turkish-Armenian relationship had suffered a detrimental shock that would never heal.

Esayan sees the lingering mistrust for the Turks:

What will not be replaced or compensated in the aftermath of this inexplicable catastrophe is not so much the houses that were turned to ashes, or the ruined orchards, or the vast number of dead. Rather, it is the paralyzing and hopeless sensation reflected in the eyes of the survivors. It is the feelings of a nation trampled and crushed under brutal heels. Those who rose yearning for light and freedom were crushed with pitiless cruelty.<sup>13</sup>

Partevian doubted if the faith Armenians once had in their Turkish neighbors would ever be restored:

The bodies of the dead will be buried; the wounds will heal, the tears will dry up, the blood will be wiped away, the ruins will be rebuilt, the catastrophe will be redressed. But there is something broken, something sunken in our souls; there is a ravage of faith, a pain of frustration that will remain incurable.<sup>14</sup>

x x x

12 The translation of this poem too is abridged and schematic. It hardly conveys the tension, the meaning, and the impact building up within the original. Furthermore, some inaccuracies in translation have distorted the original meaning. I have inserted my own translation in brackets in the last six lines. The Balakian-Yeghlian translation goes, "I strangled my baby. It's true. / Have pity on me, for I'm a coward. / You could wring my neck in a second. / Have you no heart?"

13 Esayan, *Averaknerun mej*, p. 28.

14 Partevian, *Kilikian arhavirke*, p. 200, from the essay "Andarmelin" [The Incurable].

Norman Holland suggested that when we read, and I would say especially when we read about our people's tragic past, we find our own «identity theme» in the text by using «the literary work to symbolize and finally replicate ourselves.» The catalyst in this reading is the language of violence, an aesthetic counter-violence to portray the landscape of the most striking and sinister acts of mob violence, torture, and murder in the literature of atrocity, a shocking encounter for the reader, to see the truth about the nature and the motive of the perpetrators, the magnitude of the atrocities and the resulting disaster. In her study of Wallace Stevens's poetry, Jaqueline Vaught Brogan asserts that «he is acutely aware of .... the constitutive power of language in shaping the structures and experiences of our actual world.» By being aware, Brogan meant to say that Stevens achieved that function in his poetry, not many have. The Armenian poets and writers of the Adana massacres, in their difficult, self-imposed task of textualizing the catastrophe sought to achieve that goal and found the solution in devising the language of violence befitting the world of catastrophic atrocities around them.

Zapel Esayan did not venture to create art after 1915. She could not surpass the mastery by which she had created the morbid images of the 1909 massacres. Suren Partevian composed two pieces, mediocre in comparison to his Kilikian Arhavirke.

Siamanto and Varuzhan did not survive the Genocide of 1915 to immortalize in their greatness, the truth of the Genocide as it occurred. But take any of the pieces they created in response to the massacres of 1909 and change the date they were written, you will have a landscape of the atrocities of the 1915 before your eyes. These literary gems served the survivors of the 1915 Genocide to commemorate and mourn their dead, to express anger, sorrow, and vengeance.

It can be easily said that in terms of magnitude, extent, duration, and participation of the populace, the massacres of 1909 present a microcosm of the genocide of 1915. But the literary responses to the massacres of 1909, the poetic tools, the language, and the intensity of images in literature remained unsurpassed and shadowed the immediate responses to the 1915 Genocide. They became powerful sources of inspiration for new art forms to introduce the truth about the Armenian Genocide. They built a paradigm to last and to assist the poets and the writers of the future in their struggle to portray the Catastrophe, the genocide of Armenians at the hands of the Turks.

**Ռուբինա Փիրումյան  
Բռնության պոետիկան Ադանայի կոտորածների  
գրական արձագանքներում**

ամփոփում

Հոդվածում ներկայացվում է 1909 թ. Ադանայի հայերի կոտորածների թեմայի արտացոլումը գրականության մեջ: Հեղինակն անդրադառնում է Միամանթոյի, Դանիել Վարուժանի և հայ մյուս գրողների ստեղծագործություններին, վերլուծում դրանք և ցույց տալիս Ադանայի ողբերգության կապը դրանց հետ՝ համեմատելով Ադանայի 1909 թ. կոտորածի և 1915-1923 թթ. կոտորածների արձագանքները գրականության մեջ: Հեղինակն Ադանայի կոտորածները հակված է դիտելու որպես 1915 թ. ցեղասպանության խտացված դրսևորում: Հեղինակի մյուս կարևոր եզրակացությունն այն է, որ գրականության մեջ Ադանայի կոտորածի արտացոլումը որոշակիորեն ստվերում է մնացել՝ ի համեմատություն 1915 թթ. ցեղասպանությանն անդրադարձող գրական ստեղծագործությունների: