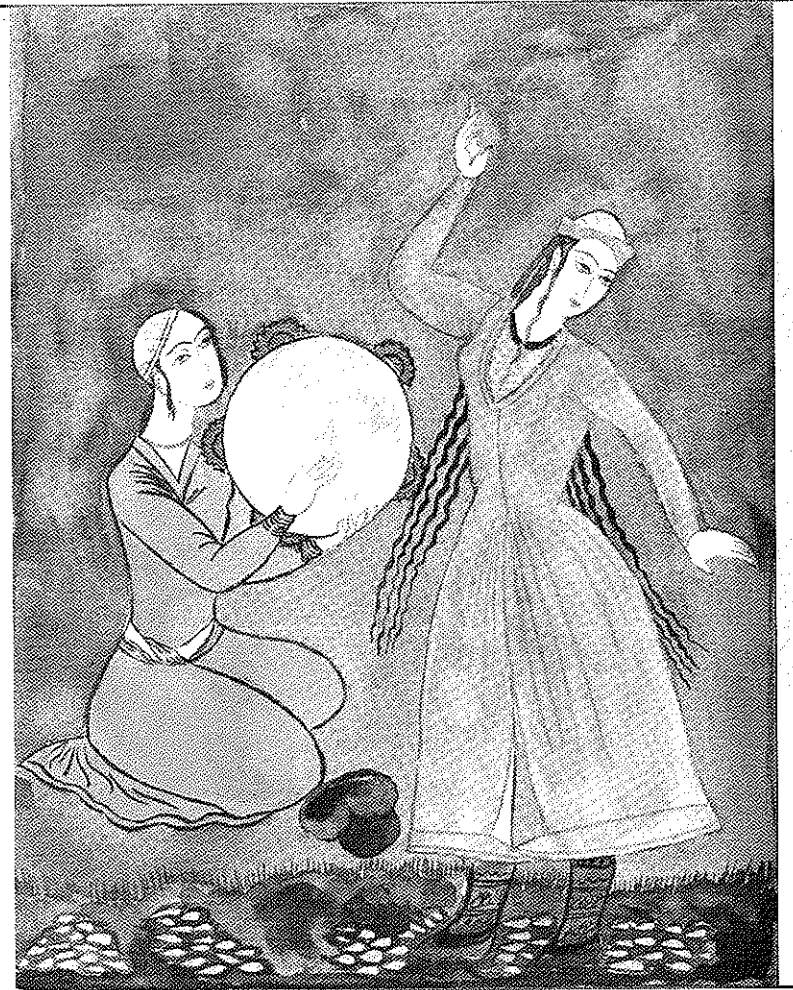


The Other Voice

Armenian Women's Poetry Through the Ages



translated by

Diana Der-Hovanesian

edited with Maro Dalley

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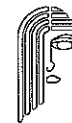
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Armenian International Women's Association
Watertown, Massachusetts

For Maro and Sona
also for Maggie, Helen, and Tamar

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Collecting and translating these poems has been both a joy and an obligation. I'm sorry I had to stop, leaving out the work of many young poets.

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Introduction

Armenian women poets are writing in a long and honored tradition. Poetry has always been considered the highest art form in Armenia, and poets, male or female, treated as celebrities. Poets are also expected to be political. In its pre-democratic past Armenian literature, like the literature in any oppressed society, was expected to carry secret messages of hope and pride to its people.

Poetry started as a religious art: chants to the sun, or songs of praise to the pagan gods in pre-Christian times.

The Armenian language is placed between Greek and Persian on the Indo-European linguistic chart. The people call themselves Hai, after Haig — a great, great grandson of Noah. Or perhaps the Hai is a tribute to their Hittite roots. Modern Armenians are an ancient people, a mixture of Urartuans and Hittites (the original inhabitants of what is now Turkey) and Armens (who came from Thrace). Writing by these ancestors on clay tablets is being unearthed even today in Armenia and present-day Turkey.*

But harder to find is the written material on perishable paper, on papyrus. Much is lost, destroyed not only by the Turks and other invaders, but by the Armenians themselves when they changed from pagan to become the first Christian nation (301 AD).

The earliest surviving examples of poems signed by Armenian women are from the eighth century. But some say ancient Armenia had been a matriarchy with predominantly female deities, Anahid, Nané, Astghik. And it is likely in the centuries before Christ that poems, songs, and prayers were written by women, but the abolition of pagan rites and the destruction of pagan temples removed evidence. What remains is oral literature that gives us an idea of the position of women. In the Armenian folk epic David of Sassoun, one of the oldest epics in recorded world literature, the sexes are not treated differently. The women are as strong and as wily as the men. Khantout Khanum, the heroine, is the ancient Armenian womanly ideal — clever and strong.

Fairytales, too, and folk songs and other oral traditions credit the leadership of women. Also monetary records show who was in charge of property and who was in charge of the division of labor on large estates. And most people who have grown up in Armenian households know the mother as head of the family.

With all the destruction in the area it is hard to find the work of any women writers who were contemporaries of Sappho. The only record we have of Armenian women's writing from pre-Christian times are the fortune-telling

* Ancient Armenians lived on lands now held by Turkey, Iran, and Azerbaijan, as well as present-day Armenia.

verses written for spring solstice (which was celebrated later as Hampartsoum, or Ascension Day) and other magical chants, cures, and prayers. But these are anonymous. Anonymous, too, the women's versions of the David of Sassoun tales handed down for centuries.

After Mongol and Turkish invasions Armenian women were hidden behind doors, and sometimes behind screens. These subjected people were at double risk: when invaders treat their own women as second-class citizens, the women of their subjects are in even more peril. And indeed under Turkish rule Armenians had no legal rights, no recourse to a court system. A Turk could take any Christian woman he desired away from her family.

So it is not surprising that one of our early Armenian woman poets from the eighth century taught school behind a curtain. Sahakdoukht wrote acrostics and riddles and many poems that survive. Another eighth-century poet was Khosrovidoukht, daughter of the prince of Koght. These lines are for her brother Vahan, martyred for Christianity.

Let me be inspired
in the clear part of my soul to compose songs
not songs that mourn... but joyous poems of praise,
Vahan, blessed of God, chosen of the tree, brave martyr,
It was while performing unselfishly
against enemy nations
that you were fixed forever like a star in our horizon.

In the thirteenth century the daughter of the Cilician King Levon III was Alits, who loved to write and was proud of her penmanship. (Cilicia is also called Lesser Armenia.) Alits was wooed by many suitors but waited for someone whose penmanship and wit matched her own. She wrote:

Many have come; many have tried.
But their *dza's* and *tza's** won't make me a bride.
The edge and curve of each tsa and dza
must be like Alits's, and must be just right.

Another early example of writing by a woman in the middle ages is from the village of Khantsak near Siunik, where Maran Khantsaktsi wrote jingles about her ungrateful and unfaithful husband.

*Armenian alphabet letters

My husband Gyu-Gyu passed away.
His funeral dirge I'll write today.
And finally I can curl my hair
And write whatever I want to say.

In the seventh century the Arab invasions from the east and the Seljuk and Ottoman Turks that followed forced the conversion to Islam from Zoroastrianism of Persia and others in the region, but the Armenians held fast to their Christianity if not to their lands. Large portions of the population moved westward from Greater Armenia to the Christian Byzantine Empire and its capitol, Constantinople, built by the Roman king Constantine on the site of the Greek Byzantium. The city became a great center of the Roman Empire. Before it fell to the invading Ottoman Turks in 1453, it was home not only to Greeks but Armenians who also provided some of the emperors and empresses of the Byzantine empire.

Because of a western presence in the city in the centuries afterward, even during the worst Turkish suppressions in the interior of what became Turkey, Constantinople remained a fairly safe cultural center for Armenians.

In the late nineteenth century, after Armenian schools had proliferated, literary journals were publishing works by women as well as men. Women writers such as Srpouhi Dussap, Zabel Asadour (Sybille), and Zabel Yesayan were part of the splendid literary renaissance in Constantinople of this time and early twentieth century. In some parts of the heartland of old Armenia, too, women were being educated thanks to the head of the Armenian church, Mkrtych Khrimian, known as Khrimian Hairig. (In other areas the Armenian language and schools were forbidden.) In the East where Armenian lands were now under Russian Tsarist rule, a rebirth in writing similar to that of Constantinople took place in Tiflis (Tbilisi) where many Armenians lived. Shoushanik Kourghinyan (1876-1927) and her poetry of social protest were part of it.

Back in Constantinople, in April 1915, Armenian writers were rounded up (along with politicians and other intellectuals), because poets were considered leaders. More than two hundred were executed. Then, the entire Armenian population was massacred or deported in the first genocide of the century.* Thus both writers and readership were destroyed. Armenian literature all but stopped for a generation of men. It took even longer for women writers to re-emerge.

*Of the 2,200,000 Armenians living in Turkey in 1913 only 150,000 remained alive five years later.

Introduction

The Ottoman Turkish Empire was falling apart, and the Turks had been pushed back from their European conquests. Greece and Bulgaria were freed, and it seemed Armenia would be next. The Turkish leaders decided genocide was the solution to “the Armenian Question.” Under cover of World War I, when Turkey joined the Austro-German alliance, Armenian young men were drafted and sent to labor camps and shot. Then, a defenseless population was disarmed, uprooted, and executed — all the while subjected to horrendous atrocities. With the Armenians of Anatolia removed, Turkey could join the other Turkic peoples in the East.

At the end of World War I, with the defeat of Turkey, Armenians won a small piece of territory in the Southern Caucasus which is the current location of Armenia today. The first Republic was soon taken over by the Soviets, but it is interesting to note that in its short life it was the first modern country to give women the vote and the first to appoint women diplomats.

Today in Armenia there are many women working in print and broadcast journalism as well as the creative arts. The leading poet is Sylva Gaboudikian who, with Maro Markarian, was an active political spokesperson for her country. Other poets include Anahit Barsamyan, Medaksé (a performance poet), Rosa Bedrosian and many young women poets. Two of the most promising, Tanya Hovanessian and Haigani Donoyan, died in the 1988 earthquake. This volume includes poems by them as well as by women from the diaspora: Iran, Bulgaria, France, North and South America, Lebanon, Egypt, and Syria, poets who write in Armenian. Many young Armenians in the diaspora, although using Armenian themes, now use the language of host countries. For a more detailed history, some suggested readings are listed in the bibliography.

TRANSLITERATION NOTE

There are two divisions of the modern Armenian language, Eastern and Western, with minor differences in pronunciation, verb endings, and spelling. I have used the Western transliteration of names as they are usually known, but placing the Eastern version of names first for poets from former Soviet Armenia, Georgia, and other eastern Armenian settlements. I admit and apologize for discrepancies in transliteration.

Armenian Women's Poetry Through the Ages

*Anonymous Folk Chants and Lullabies
Attributed to Women*

ANTSREV*

Rain is falling sheet by sheet,
shimmering swathes into the street
on small leaves on the trees,
on wide leaves on the trees,
on small flowers in the grasses,
on tall flowers, it falls and passes.
Rain is falling in gray mist
from the mountains wind-kissed.
Let the rain fall in the street.
In your cradle, sweetly sleep.

* *rain*

OROR, OROR*

Oror, oror, you're so sleepy.
Your crib is a silver boat.
Your blankets are woven gold.
You are sailing; you're afloat.
Oror, oror, you are sleeping.
Nanch, nanch, I am keeping
watch beside my little dove
in a nightgown sewed of love.

* *lullaby*

APRICOT TREE
(*Dzirani Dzar, Vye*)

Apricot tree, do not blossom
this year. Do not disturb my calm
with your white flame.

Apricot tree, do not bear fruit
this year. Don't let your branches move
to stir my pain.

Send the east wind back to the hills;
tell it not to come again.
That wind swept off my joy.

Spin the year back to its source,
back to the time before it bore
black shadows that remain.

This year everything was picked in vain.
The wind brought black clouds raining blood,
and left no dry stone to rest upon.

Hey, unjust world, what do we see?
We have an orchard filled with trees,
and a vineyard with no fruit for me.

EARLY IN THE MORNING

In the morning early
early in our garden
I met a handsome soldier,
a knight on a quest.

Early in the morning
in the morning in our garden
he pressed me so fiercely
he left blood on my face.

When my mother saw the mark
she gasped, "Who did that?"
"I went into the garden
and a rose thorn did."

"Let that rose bush be cut down.
Let that thorn be dried then
so it never scratches
your lovely face again."

"Mother, don't curse the roses.
Mother, don't curse the thorn.
It was a wandering knight,
handsome, in the morn.

He kissed me. And he kissed me
so he could get his fill.
Mother, if you curse him
he never, never will."

GO AND SEE WHO ATE THE GOAT

Go and see who ate the goat,
who shoved it whole
down his throat!

We went to see who ate the goat
and found the wolf, who ate the goat
who ate the pouch, which ate the sun.
What an ungrateful time has come
that we must swallow up the sun!
What a hungry time has come
that we must gobble down the sun!

– Hurry up, children, get a move on.
– We'll hurry as soon as our boots are on.

Go and see who ate the wolf
and gobbled it down in one big gulp!
We went to see who ate the wolf
and found the bear who ate the wolf
who ate the goat who ate the pouch
that swallowed the sun.

Oh . . .

what an ungrateful time has come
that we must swallow up the sun.

– Come on, don't flit and flaunt and flirt.
Don't flip up dust with that long skirt.

– Yes, I will flit and flirt around.

And raise up the dust from over the ground.

Go and see who ate the bear,
who ate the bear, who ate the bear!
Go and see who ate the bear
who was standing there.

We went to find the lion there
who ate the bear, who ate the wolf,
who ate the goat
who ate the pouch that ate the sun.

Oh, what an ungrateful time has come
that we must swallow up the sun.

LET ME ROCK YOU

Let me rock you to sleep while it is snowing.
From doves white feathers are flowing.
White cotton from angels wings blowing.
White wool from lambs . . . where my lamb is going.

THE NIGHTINGALE PERCHED

The nightingale perched in the garden
where the red, red roses grew,
breathed in their fragrance and exhaled
the sweetness in songs for you.
No song in all this world
only the nightingale's will do.
No song, just his, my darling
is sweet enough for you.

LIE DOWN

Lie down my sweet, lie, lie,
play ball with the moon so high.

THE BRIDE TO HER MOTHER

Myrig, * Myrig, do not weep.
 Myrig, try to smile.
 I'm the one who's leaving
 the one who needs to cry.

When tomorrow arrives
 I'll be gone, a bride.
 Our doorway empty, empty
 when the door opens wide.

My eyes are the wet eyes
 with tears trying to drop.
 Mother, Mother don't cry.
 I'm the one who needs to sob.

Hyrig, ** Hyrig, tomorrow's moon
 will find me far from home
 where I'll feel lost without you,
 where I'll feel all alone.

Mother, Mother, dry your eyes,
 I'm the one who needs to cry.
 Let me be the one who cries
 and remember you in smiles.

* *Mother*

** *Father*

PRAISE FOR THE BRIDE

Today she is our princess.
 Today she is our queen.
 Let us praise her beauty.
 Let us list her charms.
 Dress her in silken veils,
 with bracelets on her arms.

Today she is our queen to crown
 more radiant than sun's rays,
 like the apricot tree in springtime
 her beauty beyond praise.
 Place the bracelets on her arms
 and list her matchless charms.

ANOTHER GOODBYE

Do not cry, Mother,
 I'm the one who must cry.
 Do not sigh, wind,
 I'm the one to sigh.
 Do not tremble, silver leaves,
 I'm the one to shake.
 Do not creep across the sky, sun,
 It's my turn to say good-bye.

THE BRIDEGROOM'S FAMILY

The bridegroom's family has come.
 Mother, they're taking me away.
 Mother, I have changed my mind.
 Mother, I want to stay.

HIS DEAD WIFE

She will turn into an eagle
 who will sit on his window sill.
 Don't think he can fall asleep.
 Others might. He never will.

THE SISTER'S SONG

We all wait for my brother's voice.
 One word from him make us rejoice.
 He is the sun dispersing dark,
 the main artery of my heart.

I AM THE FOUNTAIN

I am the fountain, you the water.
 I am the fountain, you the rain.
 Hey, nazan, nazan jan.
 In my hair I wear sweet flowers.
 When your heart's on fire, think of me.

ROUND SONG

*(Each girl sings a different verse with a different boy's name
 and a fruit that rhymes with the name.)*

I went to market
 for apricots to sell
 then went to Mihran's street
 to yell:

Mihran, Mihran
 come buy my *tsiran*. *
 If you won't buy them right away
 wifeless, helpless, may you stay.

I went to market
 for watermelon
 When I got them
 I started yelling:

Manoug, Manoug
 Come for *tsumeroug* **
 If you don't buy some today,
 wifeless, helpless, may you stay.

* *apricots*

** *watermelon*

I LOVED BADLY

I loved badly.
I loved wrong.
He loved me
but not for long.
I loved him.
He took another.
He was my sun
that brought black
weather.

ON MY SHOULDER

On my shoulder is a pitcher
made of clay that's blue.

But you don't see what is inside.
Do you? Do you? Do.

You see me going to the well
so proper and cool.

But you can't see into my heart.
Do you? Do you? Do.

LET ME ROCK YOU TO SLEEP

Let me rock you to sleep
with songs of praise.
Let me be the cool evening
to your feverish days.
Let me be the drink you desire,
cool water for your burning fire.

LET ME LULLABY YOU

Let me lullaby you
as I take you to bed.
Bathe you with rosewater,
and hear your prayers said.
Sing you sweet lullabies,
put you in a sled,
And slip slide you
toward your little bed.

*Fortune-Telling Verses
for Hampartsoum, Ascension Day*

1.

The snow stays in the clouds
and does not fill the skies.
Your love stays in the hills
and does not hear your sighs.
Your heart fills with fire
and keeps sleep from your eyes.

2.

Like a pigeon waddling down the street
I walk this and that way and repeat
Please God hear me as I speak
Let my wish come true this week.

3.

O what lovely apricots
swaying on the branch. They're brought
to market rosy and unbruised
for any lucky fool to choose.

Ancient Magical Cures and Spells

FOR ACHING BONES

(say as you bathe)

Dear Lord, listen to my pleas.
and take my pain away
with waters at the end of day
with the Songs of Solomon
as I read and pray.

FOR BAD TIMES AT WORK

When your work is not going well
for protection from gossip's spells,
sprinkle the swallow's nests with a little clear water
saying, "Lord protect me from evil and slander."

TO PREVENT ROBBERY

Take some virgin soil and say,
"Protect me, my God, from thieves.
Let them turn aside and leave.
Keep them faraway."
Sprinkle your path as you repeat.

SNAKES AND SCORPIONS

"You are lord of the land and God most dear,
keep far, the poisonous things I fear.
Keep them on their own distant path.
Let my road be safe and clear."

FOR EYE PROBLEMS

Say the "Our Father" as you wash your eyes
and ask for God to sympathize.

FOR STOMACH ACHES

"Purge me, my God, make me clean.
Cure my liver, stomach, spleen."

FOR INFECTION

(chant as you wash)

Wash away the poison,
wash away the dirt
wash away what causes
swelling, pus, and hurt.

Khosrovidoukht Koghtnatsi

Khosrovidoukht (Khosrovitought) and *Sahakdoukht* were two Armenian poets of the eighth century. (The suffix "doukht" means daughter.) *Khosrovidoukht* was the daughter of a prince of Koght. Her brother Vahan, to whom she addresses this poem, had been kidnapped by Arabs and raised as a Muslim. When he grew up and found his family, he became Christian again. In 737 A.D. while traveling to Damascus, he flaunted his Christianity and was executed.

MORE ASTONISHING

More astonishing to me
than the lyrics made for you,
more amazing than the music
composed for your death,
is the sound of sobbing
mourning you, Lord Vahan,
chosen of God.
Let me be inspired in that clear part
of my soul to compose songs for you too,
but not songs that mourn;
but joyous with praises for your work,
blessing you, servant of God.

Although you found your labor
and your ascetic self denial
which I find terrifying,
more rewarding than praises,
let me praise, O blessed Vahan, lover of Christ.

Let those outsiders
who build upon vanity go down in defeat.

Let your soul rest in divine light,
O blessed Vahan,
chosen of the tree.

Brave martyr, it was while performing
unselfishly against the nations
of the south that you were fixed forever
as an immortal and blessed ruler of Koght.

A.D. 737

Sahakdoukht Siunetsi of the eighth century was known as both poet and musician. She not only founded music schools but also taught in one, discreetly behind a curtain. She worked in many forms of poetry, acrostics, riddles, and shapes.

ACROSTIC

Saint Mary, incorruptible altar,
giver of life, mother of life-giving words,
blessed are you among women,
joyful virgin mother of God.

And spiritual orchard, bright flower,
you conceived from God's word
as from rains flowing through the soul,
and with the shield of your body
made it apparent to men.

Heavenly fountain and earthly
distributor of life,
who from the rays of divine light
restored light to us and redeemed
our forefathers from the fall,
blessed are you among women
joyful and virgin mother of God.

Appearing to angels in majesty
you are our heaven on earth.
In your bosom you carried the ruler
of heaven's armies.
Blessed are you among women
joyful and virgin mother of God.

Known gate of heaven, stairway of God,
mediator of peace,
you alleviated the labor pains
of the first mother Eve, overcame death.
Blessed are you among women
joyful virgin mother of God.

Death was overcome; the nest of life
was opened by you, and also the road
to seraphic protection. You stripped
the fire from the sword of wrath.
Blessed are you among women
joyful and virgin mother of God.

Our happiness began with the greeting:
The Lord is with you.
With the faithful multitudes that praise you,
you stand blessed among women,
joyful virgin mother of God.

Unassuming habitat of the word
that conceived the fire of divinity
and was not consumed,
you are blessed like the burning bush
and stand blessed among women,
joyful virgin mother of God.

Known but mysterious redemption
you rose up to spread
the beauty of spiritual wings
over the world.

High as the soul, you raised
this earth with you
to the level of angels.
Blessed are you among women
joyful and virgin mother of God.

To the highest King of Eternity, too
let us give glory,
to Him who was made flesh
from the sacred virgin
to save earthen creatures from sin.
Blessed are you among women,
joyful mother of God.

Kohar (or Gohar)

Little is known about Kohar except what her long poem describes of her pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1695. The manuscript is in the library of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem. The poem lists a long series of misadventures with pirates, robbers, and abandonment before finally reaching Jerusalem.

COMPLAINT

(short excerpt)

I hate to complain
but you should be warned
of the many dangers to be found
on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

Even the priests were cheated like us,
robbed of our provisions and stores.
Never was there a ship like ours
on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

Horomsimé Agoulistsí

Horomsimé Agoulistsí was from Agoulis in the Armenian province of Goghlan. She was captured by the Persians in 1751 when she was still a teenager. While a prisoner, she wrote poems in the margins and last pages of manuscripts. Her fate is unknown.

TO AGOULIS

(excerpt)

Agoulis, I crossed your river
in tears, in tears
and thirsting for your sunlight
I am imprisoned here,

the captive of Agha Sehdi
with only strangers near.
My eyes pour torrents, my lips sigh
but only God's angels hear.

Mother, it was fate
that ripped apart our lives.
Mother, greet again for me
our dear countryside.

I would be willing to die
for family and friends.
Greet them for me, Mother,
for me once again.

Diana Agabeg Apcar

Diana Agabeg Apcar (1859-1937) was born in Rangoon, Burma of Armenian parents from Persia (Iran), grew up in India, and lived in Japan after her marriage. She wrote mostly prose in English, and served the Republic of Armenia in 1919 as its consul in Yokohama, Japan. Called the first woman diplomat in modern times (of any country), she helped countless refugees passing through Japan enroute to America. She never saw Armenia but wrote books, editorials, and appeals for her country in several languages. Occasionally she also wrote poetry and songs.

GOD, PROTECT HAYASDAN*

Let God protect our Hayasdan
and keep it without stain and free.
God bless its mountains, rivers, plains,
its springs and golden fields.
Let Armenia, with heaven's grace,
be fruitful and always safe.

God, keep Armenians pure and wise,
cleanse hearts of jealousy and pride.
Let vengeance be set aside.
Let our fatherland flower and grow.
Let Armenia, with heaven's grace,
be fruitful and always safe.

Fortify our monastery walls
so our church embrace us all
to live with our enlightened faith
among all people, in heaven's grace.
God protect Armenians with your love.
Let our land be a fruitful place.

* *Armenia*

Sybille

Sybille was born 1863 in Constantinople as Zabel Khandjian and died in 1934. She was educated at Armenian and French schools and Scutari College. In 1879 with eight classmates, she founded the Patriotic Armenian Women's Association, which aimed to build schools for Armenian girls in the interior of Turkey. During the Hamidian massacres of Armenians in 1894-1896, the association was forced to stop its work, but from 1908 until 1915 it began again. Sybille was married in 1901 to Hrant Asadour, editor of *Massis* (with Krikor Zohrab, the famous short-story writer). Her own works (two novels and a collection of short stories) were published during her lifetime, and a play was published in Boston four years after her death.

DON'T TELL ME

Don't say that all kindness is feigned
and smiles just inverted frowns,
that "noble" and "gracious" mere words
and love and illusion let us down.

Don't say spring odors are poisonous
and green ocean waves diseased.
Don't warn that winds grow into storms
and safety lies only on the beach.

Don't say all lips lie when kissing
and all passion is jealousy reversed.
Don't say sparkling, jeweled glances
are false emeralds, fake pearls.

Don't say life is doomed to darkness,
that eternal life is just a boast,
that the soul also is earth and ashes.
I believe in what I must.

THE CLOUD

(excerpt)

You weep in rain, I in tears.
 Thirst is a strange thing.
 Even filled with water
 we can feel parched.
 Look at you: sliced
 by a silver moon and sweating
 as you are battered and
 buffeted by rude winds.
 After suffering fiery desires
 (some name them sun) we become
 indifferent as we caress
 new cloud after new cloud.
 You weep in rain, I in tears.

EVEN ONE THOUSAND TWO HUNDRED YEARS AGO

*An excerpt from one of Sybille's speeches to raise money for schools
 in Cilicia after the 1895 massacres there.*

Even one thousand two hundred years ago
 we Armenians did something about
 women's education.

The poet Sahakdoukht, whose brother Stepan Siunetsi
 is better known, the poet Sahakdoukht
 established a music school in eighth century Armenia.
 Today such schools, the mark of a civilized nation
 do not exist here.

History also records Lady Shushan Pahlavuni
 established schools in villages
 in the most remote regions of Armenia.

And in the eleventh century
 King Ashot's daughter,
 mother of Siunats, loved literature
 so much she commissioned a better translation
 of the Gospel of John.

Now, here in the twentieth century,
 are we going to abandon our women?
 Are we going to let them
 be only servants to farmers and
 pack-carriers for peasants?

Anais

Anais (1872-1950) is the short story writer Yevkiné Avedisian, born in Constantinople and died in France. Her stories appeared in the important Armenian literary journals of her day.

ARMENIA

Like the spices of the acacia
that perfume the weather
your name anoints the air
where I go, forever.

I am the uprooted sapling
tossed along the road to die.
You are the saving dew,
of Khusag that revives.

My fortress, my blessing,
and the still-beating heart of Haig.
Isn't it strange to have never seen you
yet this longing never subsides?

Shoushanik Kourghinyan

Shoushanik Kourghinyan (Shoushanig Gourghinian) (1876-1927) was born Shoushanik Popolchyan in Gyumri (which was then called Alexandropol, and later during Soviet times, Leninakan). She graduated from Russian and Armenian local schools and became very active in social and political movements in the Armenian communities in the Caucasus, especially in Tiflis (Tbilisi) which was a great Armenian cultural center. She was known for her strong poetry of social protest and support for working people's rights. Much of her style seems dated now, but in 1907 her first book of poetry, *The Dawn's Early Light*, caused a great stir. She published plays, prose, and letters as well as poetry during Soviet times.

LET US UNITE

Enough of burdens, enough of woes,
weighing down our shoulders, enough of those
salty tears that dim our eyes.
Enough of weeping; enough of sighs.

Enough of old wooden rules and laws
sacrificing our youthful days,
keeping us behind four walls.
Enough of doors slammed in our face.

Sisters, let us awake and rouse
the world. Let our friends all try
to find a way to shake
off this dark unbecoming life.

Our lucky men, the cocky boys
should not be proud, should not boast.
They could not have reached anywhere
without our help, without our care.

Sisters, for our just place and cause
let us go forward. Let us unite
for the sake of freedom's sacred light.
We are all equal and equal to the fight.

DIM THE CANDELABRUM
LET THE CHANDELIERS REST

It is dark, a deep night when
the distant mountain peaks float through
the mist with pale faces. The colorless
stars shudder in their cold sleep
even as the soil below exhales
a dying last breath, as if a great sorrow
were tumbling down with the snow
over the face of the earth, as if
wings of air were heaved in sobs,
huge sobs in the dark moonless night.

But everywhere you are competing with heaven's
light and winning, with this incandescence,
your candelabra, and your electric torches.
In less than a second you can flick them
into life and, voila, the shining sky
disappears and everywhere below
in the bosom of darkness, your lavishly
decorated windows sparkle! Holidays
are celebrated here with bravado,
in the lap of luxury,
in the genius of gold and silver,
in the abundance of linen and gloss
you celebrate and luxuriate while
under your feet every stone has a story,
every brick has mortar which has sucked blood
and salty sweat. You celebrate a festival
with hearty laughs and let those laughs
echo over the walls which keep out the hungry
the unsmiling, those deprived of cover and
covering. Your lamps gleam, spreading light
over sated faces while your conscience hardens
like stones and your souls stay dark.

For duty's sake for the sake of honor
dim those chandeliers. And invite in
the hungry, the poor and naked
row after row, to your overflowing table,
invite the homeless, the poor little ones
left without parents. And let in those
hand-kissing mothers who fill the streets begging
dry bread outside your mansions.
Your palaces are the graves of those workers
who paid with their lives and rose
to heaven. *They* have paid for these
stately walls, engraved, carved and decorated.

Let the bloodied and the shredded prey enter,
let the black silhouettes of handless, footless, headless
corpses approach. Let the corpses leave behind
their boxes and visit you with dreadful looks.
Let their horrendous chuckles echo your gaiety
as they sing of their deprived lives,
the song of dry bread. And in the dark let their poor dark
alleys protest the injustice of light.
Give your chandeliers a rest. Put out the lights.

DESIRE

I wanted to welcome you
into my soul, like a god,
lost and road weary,
who would call this home.

I wanted the nightingale
kept in one garden
and have his free songs
sung for me alone.

I wanted you jailed
as part of the song
of my blood and
the sway of my bones.

I wanted when I died
my name to be
carved on your heart
that hardest of stones.

Mannig Berberian

Mannig Berberian was born in 1883 into a literary family in Constantinople. After surviving the genocide, she lived in Europe and died in Italy in 1960. Her first book, in 1911, was a volume of prose poems. Her next two books were published in Paris and Egypt.

I WANT TO BELIEVE

I want to believe that if you had known
how wan and weary, how sick and worn
I was with longing and with loss
let me believe that you would have crossed
mountains or seas to come home.

You would have left those distant blue
horizons and lands I only knew
imagining every step with you
had you but realized how I
die a thousand deaths of longing, die.

THERE ARE DAYS

There are days I imagine
I've forgotten you.
Your face dims in my dreams.

My freedom and loveless days return
as if I were boarding a train

rushing through time watching
life pass
always on the other
side of the glass.

Heranoush

Heranoush, born Nargis Arshagian in Constantinople in 1887, began writing in her teen years. She died at 18.

INSTEAD OF A POEM

(The Piano)

If only there were a piano
in my half-lit living room and
if only my fingers could make music
leap from its keys to speak; if only
such a piano could weep what I weep
at twilight with art and flirtation,
with notes like gold drops of sun;
if only my piano felt the fevers
burning me from within; and if only
my curved fingers were strong
enough to really run, then pain
could turn into pure, clear song.

Armenouhi Terzian

Armenouhi Terzian (born in 1910) lived in Constantinople where she was one of a group of writers greatly influenced by Garbis Janjigian and his use of "ordinary speech" and bright images.

THE MACHINE

It pumps its human dark flow.
Does it have a life of its own,
this machine that plows
dutifully through dust,
smoke, soot, rhythmically
wearing out its own center

while its soul
looks down on it
like something apart.

FOR THE NEW YEAR

Every year I improve it.

This year again I decorate it
with green for hope,
red for love
and hang its boughs with
flickering stars.

I, the faithful pilgrim,
loyal to a new dream
give the gods of the New Year
their every due.

But the next day
my sleepy eyes see
only chalk idols again.

ARMENIAN EASTER

Come, let the battle of the eggs begin.
 Let us strike them front and back.
 Red, green, multi-hued. Perhaps
 heaven's stars will shower as they crack.

Let us fight our Easter eggs,
 blood colored or in tints of spring.
 Let us strike and be struck until the bells
 of a new resurrection ring.

STONES

Rocks,
 clumps, rows of rocks.
 And on the rocks, seagulls
 dreaming of white gull flocks.

Lands,
 acres, lots,
 plot after plot marked
 by stone rocks.

Letters,
 black letters
 on the stones
 lines of silent talk.

Rocks,
 white stones
 for men of dust
 making words
 they think will last.

A LIFE

Short. Young. Small. Thin.
 And there you are surrounded
 by giants, huge, gluttoned, satisfied.
 And you, tiny and full of thirst.

Thirsty while their fountains flow
 but cannot quench your smouldering fire
 trapped inside your short frame.
 Everything else stretches far ahead.

Small. Short. Thin. And then
 suddenly you've grown
 tall, big, round, sated too
 and it's life itself that is too short.

A THREE-DAY STORY

He didn't nod or say hello when we met on the street.
 I ran home heartbroken to weep and weep.

Today it happened again. This time I didn't cry.
 But went on sadly, slightly hurt and wondering why.

Tomorrow if he's just as rude when our paths cross
 I will walk head up, straight ahead and laugh it off.

Nazenni Der Michaelian

Nazenni Der Michaelian was born in Constantinople and lived in France after the genocide.

IN THE PANTHEON

(excerpt)

Here is the door marked "exit"
for the thunderous life of the great.
Here in the orderly arrangement
there is still chaos left.

Here my soul churns and shudders
and envies the saviour wings
of forgetting that lift us away
from the unanswered, the unhealed
and the unfulfilled.

Nameless, colorless, raceless
no longer the servants of guilt—
at peace, at peace, at peace,
the secret life of art and artist revealed.

Maria Atmadjian

Maria Atmadjian was born in 1913 in Bafra, a Black Sea port. In 1915 after her father's death in the genocide, she and her mother made their way to Syria, Ethiopia, and finally Paris where Maria published nine books of poetry and three of criticism. She served as chairman of the Armenian-French Writers Union.

WALKING UNDER STRONG SUNLIGHT

(excerpt)

You, the witness of our pagan
sun-worshipping past,

you, in whom the blazing dreams
of Aramais's race began,

you, the golden covenant of life,
shine and anoint our land.

Place your crown on my forehead,
your scepter in my hand.

MANOUSHIAN STREET*

Perhaps you passed, smiling at mothers with children,
looking for your orphaned childhood on this street.
Perhaps you walked as a mourner following the funeral
of a girl worn down by labor she was forced to do.

Perhaps you were among the crowds running
out of breath with raised fists (taunting
the forces haunting, wounding you), demanding
a fair share of light and bread.

You grew up with the picture of injustice
in your eyes: young butchered bodies
of the genocide. In your heart the need
for vengeance.

And this street for ten years
was a bloody field with air strikes raining
fire and guarded by you and your hero troop.

Then you were the wounded deer, held captive
by the murdering crooked cross** and
Manoushian, you became one with all French heroes,
your name a flag, a hope, to decorate not only
this, but all the boulevards on earth.

**Street in Paris named for the World War II resistance fighter
Misak Manoushian, who was executed by the Nazis*

*** Swastika*

Arshalouys Markarian

Arshalouys Markarian (Markaryan), born in 1914, lives in Yerevan. She is the author of 15 books.

SONNET FOR SOSEH

When paradise was lost to us, when
paradise was lost, Armenian women
made altars of our mountains
even when heaven turned aside.
The Armenian woman became the sigh
we breathed, and the reason why
we lived—seeing her in harm's
way, beside the Fedayi, rifle over arm.

Left bereft of Serop, Soseh,* you
yourself became the voice of a new
liberty calling us like gold bright
Anahid. Soseh, your name filled
the fountains of our hills
showering our dark age with light.

YEARS

In a few seconds they passed.
In agitation and crises they passed.
In sorrow and grieving they passed.
They left and the years passed
adding happiness to pain,
adding bitterness to sweet rain
under blue skies and gray.
And when I looked to see where
we all had passed and gone
there was only darkness there.
My sunset too had passed.

** freedom fighter*

Maro Markarian

Maro Markarian (Markaryan), born in 1915 in Georgia, graduated from universities in Yerevan and Moscow. Her poems, both subtle and accessible, musical and memorable, made her the most beloved woman poet of her time. She was also an activist for children's rights and the Karabagh movement. She died in 1999.

THE APRICOT TREE IN THE SNOW

Snow is falling in our
orchard, mixing with
the white blossoms of
the apricot trees.
The sun is glazing
the snow with light
while something like a song
rises crazily in my throat.
Oh, my dears, I want to give
you something, something
filled with this light.
But what song or poem
could praise enough
this tree's white blossoms
falling with the snow.

MARO MARKARIAN

JUSTICE

There is something in this world
called Justice.
Compensation, Restitution
are its other names.
But it is never called Punctual.
On the contrary it always comes
too late. Like a missed love,
timed wrong, worse when it arrives
than if it had never come.
Causing more pain.
There is something in this world
named Justice that arrives late
to find a new name on its door:
Injustice.

IT IS SAID

It is said the bud is better
than the open rose.
Petal by petal, like a love
that's voiced, it goes.

It is said love's burning word
that scars the heart unsaid
chills into ice
once it is aired.

But given the choice
I choose to have it heard.

TO OUR FOREMOTHERS

What did you do, mothers,
 when under your tired feet
 only scorched land
 was left, dry and without seas?
 Without a shepherd, you were left
 leaderless like your sheep.
 The bloodied villain was soul-less,
 the hero, helpless and weak.
 How did you rescue us, mothers,
 out of chaos, out of flame,
 to the path, the higher road,
 how did you find the way?

ONCE AND NOW

Our problems were endless once,
 our losses without gains.
 Our strength dissipated
 to flow off with the rains.

No confusion now, please, heart,
 no mis-steps, no aches.
 There's no time left
 to correct mistakes.

IN THE BEGINNING

In the beginning
 at every side
 and at every turn,
 everything about
 you began with fire
 to burn and burn.
 Always with fire
 it continues
 without compromise
 or cause. Since
 the day of your birth
 a conflagration
 began with never a pause.

A GREAT PITY

You never offered me a share
 of your hard life and deep despair.
 I found no way into your heart
 to ease the hurt and torment there.

Aloof, correct, nothing but kind
 your words belied the tortured mind.
 Our smiles the smile of those who part,
 you on one road, I left behind.

I had no right to make complaints.
 You gave me none. But it's a shame
 life passes by and we remain
 strangers who left the past unclaimed.

WITH GRIEF AND REGRET

With tears and reluctance
 we come into this world
 and with grief
 and regret we depart,
 leaving behind everything
 sacred and dear,
 everything worthwhile
 torn to shreds.

Our daylight ebbs, fading
 as it flows shore to shore
 making a rainbow over our time.
 Time and everything
 we called life and love depart,
 leaving with grief and regret.

EVERYONE

Everyone wants to change the world.
 Advice, advice he spouts.
 But no one starts with himself
 or takes what he hands out.

DUSK

The velvet blossoms
 of the peach
 are falling on the deep
 blue lake

delaying the coming
 of the dark
 with petals of light
 flake by flake.

THOSE WHO HAVE

It's pouring on the ocean.
 The rain does not stop.
 But on the burning desert?
 No string of rain, no drop.

SNOW IS ON THE GROUND

Snow is on the ground
 but a green, green branch
 with red black buds
 is rocking and rocking
 tapping our window pane
 on this cloudless day.
 Buds at last, and spring
 is knocking and knocking.

ALTITUDE

Why this climb, this upward thrust
 through icy cloud and freezing mists?
 What is the pull of what is steep,
 and thin air difficult to breathe?
 Why the lure of lightning, snows,
 to quicken pulse and shake the dark?
 All are harmful to the heart.
 Stay in the lowlands, away from peaks,
 or plains. But where are you going
 as I speak?

DOUGH

Out of a dough called Love
 you kneaded and made me, God,
 then put me on an expanse
 called Indifference here below.

WINTER

My fountain of songs never runs dry.
 Time has not sapped its singing.
 My desires still blaze and fly.
 Time has not eased their stinging.

But I must sing more softly now.
 Cold air makes listeners cool.
 And childish dreams must not be told
 unless I play the fool.

WHEREVER THEY HANG US

Why should we be afraid of the dark?
 Wherever they hang us we turn into light.
 On the road, near and far, far and near
 to push back the dark, we become bright
 lamps. Anyone should want us on a black night,
 good companions, shapers of fate.

It's all the same whether the sun shines,
 whether or not lightning strikes.
 Using any talent, in any form,
 by igniting ourselves we spread light.
 We preserve by burning. This is our work:
 we are chartered by law to change the dark.
 We burn without dimming, burn without fail.
 Wherever they hang us, we illuminate.

THE PAST

Those days of my past
 difficult to get through,
 days ruled by tyrant love
 seemed hard to endure.

Walled in like ravines,
 with pitfalls, deep and black,
 those harsh days blossom
 into flowers when I look back.

Adriné Dadrian

Adriné Dadrian (1915–1999), older sister of historian Vahakn Dadrian, was born in Chorum, Turkey and educated in French and Armenian schools in Constantinople. She attended universities in Germany and Austria. Her last years were spent in France. She was one of the leading poets of a group of women writers in Istanbul influenced by poet Garbis Janjigian.

WHY

Why are you not speaking
when everyone shouts?
Why are you not smiling
while the bright sun is out?
Why are you not singing
with the fields so green?
What are you afraid of now
when our future's here it seems.
Why are you hesitating
with the soil ready to sow?
Why are you procrastinating
while the Arax flows?
Why act so humble
when the fatherland acts strong?
Why this motionless inertia
when everything should move?
Why are your eyes cast down
when our goal is high?
Why are you staying in the dark
when there is so much light,
light from within and without
from the flaming Armenian torch.

ADRINÉ DADRIAN

ARITHMETIC

I know, by loving you
just what I gained.
I know what I lost.

And if you add
pain to gain and the cost
and draw the line

what will remain?
Your love for me
and for you, mine.

GAVE, GIVEN

What a clean heartache
I gave you
with my mono-
syllabic "no."

Now I cannot go
back to loving you.

What a lingering burden
you left me, replying

"But I will always
love you."

NO MATTER HOW DISTANT

No matter how distant I kept from you
the nearer my foolish thoughts crept to you.

No matter how I divided up my heart
your heart remained in each divided part.

No matter how your love was rejected, denied,
dreams and sleep brought you into my heart's eye.

What good is it for mind to turn us to stone
when crazy hearts have soft minds of their own.

Sylva Gaboudikian

Sylva Gaboudikian (Kaputikyan) was born in 1919 in Yerevan of parents from Van. In her time she was the most famous woman poet and writer and filled not only the Yerevan opera house on her 80th birthday celebration, but also similar auditoriums world wide. She had been married to the poet Hovhannes Shiraz and was the mother of Ara Shiraz, a famous sculptor to whom she dedicated her best known poem, "Words for My Child," a didactic poem telling her son to forget her before he forgot his mother tongue. Besides writing some of the most tender love poems of her day, she and Zori Balayan were the brave spokesmen for the Karabagh freedom movement. Gaboudikian's poetry won every top literary award given by the Soviet authorities.

THE WALNUT TREE

(to the diaspora)

There is a walnut tree
growing in the vineyard
at the very edge of the world.

My people, you are like
that huge ancient tree
with branches blessed by the graces

but sprawling
over the small corner of land,
roots and arms spread out
and spilling your fruit
to nourish foreign soils.

FOR MARIA PETROVICH

(her Russian translator)

No one to help carry this burden now.
No one to sort the right and wrong.
Only you, who wept Armenian tears
could translate my sorrow to song.

OUR LOVE

Because you are not truly ours,
yet ours, we love you
with a lover's love,
Armenian world.

Ours, the way the blood
coursing our veins
is ours,
and not ours the way
the sun crowning Ararat is
unowned.

Unownable as
the manna settling
on the Sassoun woods,

unpossessed as the wind
that strokes the field
of Moush, unheld.

You are near enough
for us to hear the beat
of your heart, almost feel it,
under our rough hand,

and separated by borders
you are distant,
rising like the cathedral
of Ani out of red ruins.

O unholdable mirage,
we reach endlessly
while you leave endlessly
to go away.

Not with a household
family love
but with a lover's grieving
we love you,
Armenian world,
Armenian soil.

FAR FROM HOME

The language of love
is the same in each land.
"I love you" even in Armenian
you understand.

But my sudden homesickness
I cannot translate
how I miss Armenia's stones
in this festive place.

For you – Ararat is biblical,
Noah's mountain alone.
For us – cradle and gravestone,
breath, joy and pain.

The century old sorrow
that flows in our blood –
even told in your own tongue
remains unexplained.

IF I DON'T LOVE YOU

If I don't love you, (and I don't love you),
 why is winter so much like spring this year
 and why is the pale sun blazing such heat
 and why does the overcast sky seem so clear?

If you don't love me (and you don't love me)
 then why do the passers-by float by
 on your street with such strange smiles and
 why don't the houses and sidewalks stay in place?

If I don't love you and you don't love me
 then why has this warring world gentled
 and why do the stars suddenly scorch the sky?

COME BACK SAFELY

Even to say good-bye
 even if it's the last time
 even reluctantly

even to hurt me again
 even with the harsh acid
 of sarcasm that stings

even with a new kind of pain
 even fresh from the embrace
 of another. Come back, just come.

AUTUMN

Like grapes of late autumn
 overlooked by the harvesters' eyes
 you sweeten like raisins,
 like gold incense, sun dried.

Purified by rare light
 freed from harvest and tax
 you store the sun's heat,
 you eat the cold frost.

You who outlasted spring's
 flowering, summer's fruit
 to be plowed back to earth, wild
 autumn songs of dry, wiry root.

PERHAPS

Perhaps you became so small, Armenia,
 so we could carry you in our hearts.
 Perhaps you changed into charred parchment
 so we would tremble lest you fall apart.
 Perhaps your handful of soil is meant
 as talisman, lesson and exercise.
 Your name became the symbol, perhaps,
 for purification in a world of lies.

WORDS FOR MY CHILD

(excerpt)

With this sweet spring
of melting brooks
and waking buds and birds
my little son begins to speak
his first Armenian words
softening the air
with ancient speech
rejuvenated on his tongue
like communion blessing us,
his first words have sprung.
The treasure
I pass along to him,
holy jewels of our race,
fashioned by light of old stars,
syllables that mark our place,
like Haig's arrow
flying through time
shaped by St. Mesrob's art*
into script and history
making light of dark,
kept as balm to heal
the exile's wounded heart,
cheers the soldier
on the field; and joins those torn apart.
This language my young mother sang
in lullabies to me
has reached, my son, to you.
Keep it refreshed, made new.
Protect it as you'd protect me
from any cut or wrong.
Keep it, my son. Forget your mother
before forgetting your mother tongue.

** St. Mesrob is credited with the invention of the
Armenian alphabet in 405 AD.*

ARMENIAN EYES

Wherever the place, in whatever face
you are unmistakable, Armenian eyes,
uniquely shaped, uniquely sized,
always recognizable, Armenian eyes.

How could you survive
what Armenian eyes have seen,
how could you stay open
where Armenians have been

and remain as you have,
both gentle and mild?
I am always amazed at
your tranquility, Armenian eyes.

WHEN THE TELEPHONE RINGS AND NO ONE ANSWERS

There are a thousand kinds of sighs,
shrill, bass,
pressed from water,
from lungs,
pressed from stones, trees, and winds.
And as if there weren't enough moaning,
men stretched metal wires house to house
so that the ring of a telephone
can interrupt the laughter
in a room, while in another place
a hopeless girl drops the receiver
into its cradle and her head
into a deaf pillow.

WARMTH

I walk lighting the street
with your fire.
You burn too, but with hers.
I ache for, laugh with,
lean toward your words.

You bend too, but to hers.
On the inside of my dream
is your face. On the inside
of your dream is hers.

That's it. That's life.
Let's live it loving.
Let the world turn
not remembering us,
me, with your fire,
you with hers.

WHAT I NOTICE

You ignite
it, hold it
lightly,
as if to
show
something
about us
you want
me to know.
You exhale
warmth
that would
burn me,
flicking
ash,
breathing
slowly,
out of
habit,
just to
pass
time,
alleviating
boredom.
You don't
inhale
but put it
down
to forget
and fail
to finish,

smoking
only part
of each
cigarette.

Seta Jejoyan-Tevian

Seta Jejoyan-Tevian (1920-1965) lived in Constantinople and was part of a group of active women poets.

MY CHILDHOOD

In those days
two plus two
equaled four
 not more
 not less.

A and B were good
 neighbors.
The garden and orchard
 tree to tree
the street lamps and posts
 were made to run
 between.
And every once in a while
 whorls of clouds
 had to be admired.

The moon was
 a huge smiling face,
the sea a vastness
 with no end.

I had invisible friends
Mannig, Garo, Marco,
 but an old gardener
 yelled at us
 waving his cutters.

SETA JEJOYAN-TEVIAN

The day brought warm food,
the night a hand
that kept the covers in place
with love. New shoes
replaced shoes with holes.

Neat stitches mended
my stockings.

Those were the days
 I believed my eyes
which defined the world.

SHE DID, SHE DID NOT *(Owner Chowner)*

She had hypnotic eyes, she did.
Eyes with a soul? She did not.

She had a sweet smile, yes she did.
But with kindness in it? She did not.

She did have stylish clothes, she did.
But her own style? She did not.

She did have money to spare. She did.
But know how to spend it? She did not.

She knew what she owned. Yes, she did.
But that it owned her, she did not.

TYPEWRITER

With neither words nor voice
like the piano unplayed,
it sits in its proper place
with nothing to say

as if the letters
on its keys are lines
from another world,
only white designs.

But when my fingers work
tap-tapping left and right,
then its reward is
our fatigue at night.

SHABBY RAGS

My soul is a bag of patches,
shaggy rags, remnants and swatches,
a little sack of silks and velvets,
strips of furs and bits of satins.

Pieces without fit or matches.
Pieces that don't come apart.
My soul is a bag of patches,
my own catch-as-catch-can scraps.

Maria Hagopyan

Maria Hagopyan, poet and physician, was born in 1922 in Stavropol where her parents had escaped after the genocide in 1915. She was educated there and in Baku, where she graduated from the Azerbaijan Medical Institute. She moved to Yerevan and worked as an editor of *Hygiene*. She was married for a time to poet Hamo Sahian. She is the author of seven books.

ADVICE

Forget your childhood, I was told.
It was a dream, a blink of eye.
Don't look back, don't search or call.
It was a fairytale, a lie.

Forget your lost love, I was told.
It was a rainbowed tear that dried
with the heartbeat of a new day.
Push old sorrow from your mind.

Forget past losses, I was told.
Be happy with this day. You know
today is all that counts;
and then we close our eyes to go.

All this advice unasked and free
is telling me to forget me.

A POET HAS NO SECRETS

A poet has no secrets;
they are all on display.
A poet has the wings of birds,
a bird's vulnerability.

At one whisper, one hint,
the poet weaves a cloud,
with one glance she suffers,
falling in love with love.

Her first pain is for herself,
her second for the song,
the third replaces others
while she searches for a word.

A poet has no secrets;
they are all there on the page.
A poet has the wings of birds,
and their fragility.

APRICOT TREE
IN THE BLOCKADE

In our yard an apricot tree
would bud and blossom each year
dancing among the steadier trees
casting pink lights to each breeze.

When its fruit ripened it was
in yellow golds on red stones.
Our tree wore amber sunlight,
jewels that were hers alone.

Now the apricot tree in our court
yard, rises stripped and bare.
Its two branches casts shadows,
a black cross on the cold air.

FOR THOSE GOOD DAYS

Many were those who touched your heart,
many who held your thoughts,
but you brought heart and thoughts
to me in our good days.

There was one who was your muse,
one a wound to heal,
one a slave at your command,
one a soothing hand.

But more than all the others
I was your love's desire.
I put the shine into the green
of the springtime of our years.

I gave the flavor to your life.
I was your day, your hour.
I was the best among the rest
of your good years.

Arpi Kouloumian-Aghakhanian

Arpi Kouloumian-Aghakhanian, born in 1925 in Teheran, publishes poems in many current literary and popular Armenian journals in the diaspora. She lives in Los Angeles.

YOUR BLACK EYES

Dark, sad, filled with sighs
when we met there were tears
on the brim
of your black eyes.

Not tears of homesickness
entreaty or surprise
but gems on the rim
of your black eyes.

Your lips curved down
looking sad and wise
but there was no anger
in your black eyes.

With despair your throat
was filled with sighs.
But a runaway song lit
your black eyes.

I saw a deep secret
like desire rise;
I saw my reflection
in your black eyes.

Seda Demirjian

Seda Demirjian, born in 1927 in Constantinople, is a poet, editor, and teacher of French and music. She is the anthologist of several volumes of Armenian literature (in Armenian). She lives in Michigan.

I AM NOT A POET

My pen falls from my hand,
mid-sentence and midway
refusing to execute what my thoughts dictate.

Poets have a muse
who wills them to create.
But I always seem to lose
her along the way.

Sure, the ideas flow,
but the pen won't comply.
The poet is the finder
of the words to write.
But I get lost in silent space.
So then who am I?

THE LONER

He played years of
racquet ball
with no partners
at all.

Years of playing
without end
it was inevitable
he would tend

to become like
his friend
- the wall.

DON'T WORRY

Don't fret, little girl,
this ache will pass.
This suffering will drain
into the past.

A new you will join
the human race.
You'll find a new man
to take you to the place

this guy and you
didn't get to see.
And you yourself will become
what you wanted him to be.

HIM

He was a poet. I was no one at all.
He made words into things.
I made nothing at all.
I loved him because
his poems spoke to me.

He loved me because
I listened eagerly.

He loved me the way
the sun loves its own twilight,
the sky loves the moon,
the swallow its flight.

He loved me the way
the dark loves its own shade
and God loves the creatures
He himself has made.

Rosa Bedrosian

Rosa Bedrosian (Petrosyan) was born in 1930 in Leninakan (now Gyumri). From 1941 to 1946 she worked as an electrician, returning to the university for her degree in 1951. She worked next as librarian and has published 12 volumes of poetry.

A SMILE

The sun rose
and fell in the lake
shattering its rays.
In every drop
a piece of light.
And what's got into you
to make your smile so bright?

TODAY

Today anyone can say anything.
I feel so kind, so mild,
so humble under the arching sky
carrying you on my inward eye.

ROSA BEDROSIAN

YOU WERE BORN

You were born
so I could measure the world
through you and see distance
as one sights Venus and Mars
through a telescopic lens.

You were born
so I could see myself
as one sees reflected in crystal
one's body and soul
held in an enchanted globe of light.

Before you came
I was unborn as the blind bird
inside the shell.
And you came so I could see.

Anahid Boghikian-Tarpinyan

Anahid Boghikian-Tarpinyan, poet and translator, was born in Syria, graduated from Aleppo Giligia College, American College, and in 1946 emigrated to Armenia. Since 1950 she has taught English at the Brusov Institute. She headed the English department at the Charents School for 30 years.

I NEED TO FEEL

All I need is just a bit of it
... and I turn to song.
Touch me carefully. Seedlings
need spring warmth and songs.

Don't be surprised
if I turn to summer heat
and fire, the harvest feast
upon your table

and then to Massis snow.
All I need is tenderness
and I turn to song.
I was born in springtime.
Springtime snows can melt.

TREE

I'm tired of wishy washy fools
and whining complaints,
grumbly mumbly half truths
and self doubting weather vanes.

O for someone sturdy as
this rough barked, deep root tree.
But there's no one around like that
except perhaps for me.

Medaksé

Medaksé was born Medaksé Boghosian in Artig, Armenia in 1929. She uses only one name, perhaps because she was orphaned as a child or perhaps because she considers herself a feminist. She is the author of many popular books of poetry and is known as the working woman's spokesperson. Her strong singing voice also makes her a striking performance poet.

ENVY (*Yeranee te*)

I envy the cling of the shirt you wear
that, even in daylight, can be indiscreet
and trace your torso's outline and dare
to wrinkle coquettishly with pagan heat.
Imagine envying an innate thing,
and losing my senses like a flaming wing
of a meteor? Does a shirt have feelings or soul
that I die to hold what it can hold?

What does it care that a woman desires
to wash it because it has felt the fires
of your body and wants to inhale
the warmth of the collar, even the stale
earthly memory of wear and weave
of a sleeve?
What does it care that I envy the clasp
of its pearly buttons that measure the time

of our short lives with their upward climb,
dressing and undressing you, unasked,
leaning against your beating heart,
while I who envied no other's lot
stand silent, apart and jealous of cloth.

DELLE YAMAN

The sun dawned like a wound
 spraying blood
 in the snows of Massis.
 And Lake Van. Lake Van grew
 salty with tears. Its ripples, its waves
 pain, open pain. And at the edge
 of the lake, on the path to the ravine
 a young boy carrying his death
 walked in silence, stunned, numbed
 by what he had seen. He walked in terror
 reeling from the slaughter of
 everyone he knew. Everyone
 even his baby sister
 in her cradle, her screaming stilled.

He was saved by a miracle
 as he ran toward the barn,
 a brief miracle.
 Halfway he was caught by a Turk who
 handed him over to a Turkish soldier
 to finish him off.

"Stop. This is the place," he heard
 the soldier say. The boy looked
 for the last time around him
 his sea, the mountains in bloom.
 Then he turned to the soldier to ask
 "Let me sing my father's song. Before
 you kill me."
 "Hurry and begin."
"Delle Yaman. The sun rose up
 lighting Massis's crest. *Vye,*
Delle Yaman. But I was left
 here by love bereft. *Yaman, yaman.*"

The boy's blood drained
 from his face as he faced
 the peaks of Ararat.
 He was singing the Armenian
 folk song of despair and mourning
 in front of Massis, mountain source
 of hope and rebellion.
 He was singing the song
 of crisis and premonition.
 Ringing the bell of warning and loss
 as never before toward his mountain,
 mountain of defiance and hope.

The soldier listened like a stone man.
 Never had he heard such a sweet tortured voice.
 Never before had he been moved by an Armenian song.
 "What kind of prayer is this, Allah," he asked
 looking at the unarmed singing boy.
 And looking up toward heaven he gave the boy a shove.
"Mashalla. Get out of here. Hurry. Get lost."

The boy turned. The song still on his lips
 and ran toward the ravine.
 When he reached the edge
 the soldier woke from his reverie
 and watched his trigger finger move
 as the boy ran. From force of habit
 the trigger finger moved,
 pressing down, so that boy
 and song rolled down the cliff,
 the abyss echoing *"Delle Yaman. Vye."*

IT'S NO SECRET

Your laundry, like your life, has shrunk
to a small mound in a tiny basin.
And what about your heart? You hide it
but, believe me, everyone can read
and see no man lives inside this house
by glancing at the waving linens on the line.

Every wash has its own biography and reveals
the people in a house, their size,
their taste, even what they love.

And on your balcony the story
flaps and unflaps in the wind,
a story with no man's shirt, pajamas,
or jeans beside the feminine apparel.
A widowed wash snaps in the wind and telegraphs:
No one is cared for here.

Do the wooden pins pinch your nerves,
squeezing out, and emphasizing loss.
The wind blows the virginal white
wares and slaps them toward the rails.
Your nightgown limply hung comes to life
as if this were its only chance,
as if the flowers on its hem try
to be dipped again in light.
And your dress, crazed by the gale,
has wound its arm around and around
the line as if to cling to something
that fate would rob it of,
by dashing it, again, again,
against the wall.

SO LONG

Don't think I don't get the picture.
Don't think I don't know this game.
You want me to make the first move,
you want me to make the break.
You want to play innocent victim,
the gentleman so put-upon.
This is an old trick, a card game
weak men play in these weak times.
Why not tell me to my face
instead of complicated claims,
fantasies and concoctions.
Let's call pain a pain.

Don't think I don't get the picture.
Don't think I don't know this game.
You want me to leave first
switching off my own home's lights
so the guilt and blame are mine
while you're magnanimous and kind.

You're a persecuted saint
while my self-respect's something to rip
into seven wounds, seven stains.

Love doesn't have a golden cage;
love doesn't have a grave.
Nor revenge: love has no chains.
If it's truly in the past
and what remains are only games,
then happy journey. Have your way.
But don't think I don't know your name.

FOR MEN ONLY

Men, what's your beef
 about us anyway?
 Haven't you learned
 how to make love yet
 in all these years?
 Undressing a woman
 is a delicate art, roughnecks.
 You can't just let
 your fingers move like
 creeping bugs. No.
 You have to have a strategy
 against each buttonhole.
 You have to whisper
 to each earring.
 You must enflame the hairpins.
 And you have to gather
 a bouquet from
 the flowers of a nightdress.
 Tenderly. And don't pick
 those flowers out of duty.
 But because you want
 every single one.

GOSSIP

Whisper whisper whisper
 sibilance abounds,
 hissing so much we forget
 how your true voice sounds.

Sotto voce secrets pour
 into every ear
 interfering, marring
 what we want to hear.

Seda Atamian-Israelian

Seda Atamian-Israelian, painter and poet, was born in 1933 in Teheran where she was educated in art. After her marriage she returned to finish her university studies in literature. She worked for several daily newspapers.

LIKE A SNOW MAN

"Hey, Mr. Sun,"
 said the snowman
 looking up,
 "You give life to
 everything in the world,
 everything;
 but you kill me
 melting me drop by drop."

"Hey, Mr. Sun,
 let me look into
 your burning eyes
 and remember
 the crucible of love
 and how love copies
 the death
 of the snowman."

Julietta Krikorian

Julietta Krikorian (Grigoryan) was born in Yerevan in 1935 and is the author of four volumes of poetry. She lives in Paris and California.

MAKE A TIGHT FIST

Make a tight fist
and curl your tongue
behind your teeth.

Count the poses
that parade
before registering
on your brain.

Bare and unashamed
truth is dismissed
or trembles unsaid
on your lips.

We learn to market
lies and trust
the disguised
as holy writ.

We who were born
after trial and fire
were meant to inherit
a bit more than this.

READING THE LEAVES

Even the crow's child has
friends. Not me. My story's in
autumn's falling leaves.

Irma Ajemian-Tokat

Irma Ajemian-Tokat, 1936–1990, lived in Constantinople and published widely in the local Armenian press.

ARS POETICA

You are a poet, I am often told
because you see with a lover's eye
and speak to the heart. And I reply

But, very often a poet must break
love's stranglehold and take
liberties to tell his tale.

The poem itself must prevail.
To move you with fire may be the goal
while the eye itself remains cold.

WANDERER

Who is calling me an exile,
leaderless, and without a home?
You who call me a wanderer,
yourself are landless, unowned.

Together we can make a country.
You give me love, I give you care.
Together we are whole, complete.
Love and care are all we need.

WALKING ANTHEM

Arms wide open, striding through air,
we march forward, a happy pair.

From arm to arm, hand to hand,
courses the unbreakable chain

of power, will and inspired force,
knowing your life is mine, mine, yours.

My happiness, complete; my cup, full;
we walk with joy, welcoming one and all.

STONES

Stone turns to grain, stone turns to bread
thanks to somebody's labor and sweat.

Stone becomes art, stone becomes hope
thanks to some rough stone mason's strokes.

Stone gives life, stone gives birth
thanks to somebody's bent back and worth.

Let bread be stone, poison and dirt
for the exploiter of those who work.

And let stone be bread. Life and hope
for those laboring for those who work.

Alicia Ghiragossian

Alicia Ghiragossian was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and received her law degree there. She wrote in Spanish, and her poems were translated and published by Vahakn Davtian in the 1960s in Armenia, where they became very well known. She now writes in Armenian and is a striking performer of her work. She lives in Los Angeles.

MY WILL

In the huge city of Buenos Aires
in the year 19 hundred something
in September at such and such
a time of day, or to be exact, night,
my arrival was announced and made official.

But, dear fellow human beings
since then I have accumulated nothing
to leave you...
graduate of a university
a piece of paper
certifying my work
but useless to my life.

Some snapshots of friends
who have disappeared from my life
and of course books
books and books.
But what will calm my poor spirit?
O, that I could leave you something
from this life so precious
it would make me immortal,
something that cannot be bought
in any shopping mall,
something to redeem my living.

LOST LOVE

A love, destroyed
should not carry the name
love. Let it be called
Illusion.
Real love never dies
ever.

I am your love
the real love

your first and last
and those in between.

I am all the women
you loved in the past
and those you will
someday.

It's very clear what
true love is.
It's me.

Shnorhig Vorperian

Shnorhig Vorperian was born in Ethiopia of Armenian parents in 1939. Her poems appear in the diaspora press.

AFTER RAIN

The rain has poured
a million suns
into the ditches,
tiny spinning blinking
suns on lashes of the grass.

The rain has brought my eyes
a flood of suns.
Do not imagine
that these are tears
that I blink back.

Alla Ter Hagopyan

Alla Ter Hagopyan (Der Hagopian), born in 1940 in Yerevan, now lives and writes in Moscow. She writes mostly in Russian.

WINDS CANNOT BE TIED

Winds can't be tied down to one tree.
Fly off, my dear, fly, and feel free.
Everlasting tenderness, everlasting pain –
nothing lasts; not loss, not gain.

What a strange tree I turned out to be.
I wanted to become the mulberry
rising in smoky silk to the skies
hiding neither ripe fruit nor pride.

I wanted a choir of birds on my breast.
I wanted April cares to caress.
But an adolescent heart that can still feel
means all is not lost. Some things are real.

In my bright shawl of golden leaves
I try finding the correct words for grief.
Instead I laugh and set you free.
Winds cannot be tied to one tree.

Dzaghkanoush Dzadoourian

Dzaghkanoush Dzadoourian was born in 1941 in Teheran, Iran. She lost her sight at three. At seven she urged her parents to have her taught reading and music. Her father arranged for her to be taught braille while he himself read Armenian literature to her. She is also a performing singer.

THE LIGHT

I found the lamp that can't go out
long ago and when the bleakest night
descends to douse the clearest light
the oil in my lamp does not give out.
I have the light that never dims.

Let the blind man approach for light
so that complete blackness does not
descend on him. Even the blind will see
by this light. Even the road will be
illuminated all the way.

My oil in my lamp does not give out.
My light does not, cannot go out.

GOLD BRACELET

So much golden light rings my arm
with warmth, glitter and sheen.
Wouldn't you think such brightness could impart
some light into my hopeless heart.

Roupina Barseghian

Roupina Barseghian (Parseghian), born in 1941 in Iran, was educated in the local Armenian schools. In 1955, after her father's death, she was sent to Poona, India to live with relatives and returned later to Iran to marry. In 1975, she started writing poetry, and her first book was published in 1977. She lives in Germany now and works in broadcasting.

SIEVE

Because of your sharp words
my pierced heart has become
a sieve of holes and leaks.

Nothing can stay now
nothing in this sieve heart
nothing anyone speaks

remains but a quivering spear
from you that I keep
as a tiny souvenir.

SANTA CLAUS

The presents on the Christmas
tree were handed to all
the children except me.

They told me it was because
(too bad) you know the myth is false
and don't believe in Santa Claus.

Hilda Kalfayan

Hilda Kalfayan, born in 1942 in Istanbul, now lives, writes, and publishes in Paris.

MY LONELINESS

Wherever I go
on whatever ground
under whatever sky I am found
it is always there
 clinging to my skirt
 stuck to my shoes
 kneeling in my heart.
I've never seen such bald-faced persistence.

EYEGLASS

I chose the ear pieces
made of naiveté,
circular frames
brotherly and alike
for each eye.

I had the lenses,
rose colored, ground with hope,
donned them to see my world
when suddenly they were
knocked off and crushed
by filth.

I had to get another pair
of course. This time
undecorated, clear and cold.
But I don't know how to see
out of such non-Armenian glass.

ME/YOU

Every time I wanted
to say "you"
I said it right out.

But every time
I wanted to say "me"
"you" came again
to my lips.

Evidently I know who
you are but am not
so sure of me.

2

Every time you wanted
to say "I"
you said "I"
self satisfied.

Once in a while,
surprising me
when you wanted to say "you"
"I" came from your mouth.

Your self-centered tongue
mixes us up, looking
for its own identity.

Sonia Balassanian

Sonia Balassanian, born in Iran in 1945, was educated in art and poetry both in Iran and New York City. She is the author of four books of poetry and has shown her paintings at major art exhibits in Venice and elsewhere.

UNTITLED

When I close my eyes
music begins, color on
color begins...

My mother gave permission for me
to play with the sun.

She sprinkled stars in my hair
and let me race with fiery stallions.

With cathedrals for playhouses
who wouldn't be happy?
But one day I woke
to see all the branches
in our orchard shaking,
rain pelting, birds falling
and the garden earth cracked open.

Anahit Barsamyan

Anahit Barsamyan, born in 1948 in Yerevan, Armenia, graduated from Yerevan State University. She has worked in broadcasting and magazine editing, most recently at *Kragan Tert*, the literary journal published by the Writer's Union. She is the author of five books of poetry and several volumes of short stories.

FRACTIONS

I am from that land of mountains,
partly bloom and mostly stone.
Our waters are mountain waters,
partly cloud, mostly sun.
I am from that ancient race,
made of mountain clay and earth.
I am from that place, those people,
partly water, mostly thirst.

FULL MOON

Inch by inch the darkness creeps.
Let me go down into the street
and breathe deeply, just breathe.
All day long papers and books.
Alone and feeling incomplete,
as if playing half a role.
I go out. What do I see?
The thin silver moon turned gold;
tonight at least something is whole.

ANAHIT BARSAMYAN

FIRST DEFINITION

How would I know? Who could have heard
all the meanings for this one word?

I only knew what I felt when
I wrote your name again, again.

Then when you spoke the same word too
it meant something else to you.

I ran from you and hid in tears.
What did I know in those past years?

RAINY DAY POEM

Let this rain increase and pour,
filling our street more and more.

Let the storm sweep me along
toward shelter at your door.

When you invite me inside
let there be no one beside

you. Then, let the rain start
flooding streets and our hearts.

SNOW IS FALLING

Snow is falling on our street,
 filling each doorway with peace.
 Immaculate, incandescent light,
 shimmering silver from every side.
 Snow is falling, I can't sleep
 wanting to gather blossoms tonight,
 a wreath of petals, white, white, white.

MY FATE

What I loved most
 when I was small
 was a cherished brown
 haired wooden doll.

Its hair like mine,
 its eyes my shade,
 the best loved doll,
 ever made.

A neighbor boy
 full of needless spite
 snatched it one day
 to toss in the fire.

That was the day
 my singed hands learned
 two kinds of ashes
 two kinds of burn.

KARABAGH WAR WIDOWS

In your hair you have coiled
 the gold sheen of sorrow, widows,
 young widows, of twenty, thirty.

Sometimes you forget and laugh
 warmly, sometimes even
 without holding back but then
 days and weeks pass
 and the laughter winds down
 to an old remembered hum,
 a melody warm with
 healthy vital yearning.

Sometime you smile without tears.
 What are you smiling at?
 God, Destiny, Chance?
 And sometimes memory takes you
 in its arms, and tears shine quietly
 on pride's sharp thorns.

YOUR VOICE

Your clear voice so smooth,
 your words balm and gauze
 soothe the hurt and pain
 they themselves have caused.

LEDA

Light of my youth, where have you flown?
On what wall do you rest,
on what cemetery stone?
Where did you take my long lost faith?

Once in a while in dusk's wavering shade
when my past arises and memories awake
it seems you are back, swan,
from the clouds, from the lake.

Here I am, I call: Here, my heart-break.
You've found me again, the same silly girl.
But what was it I did, and what did I say
back then to send you away, away, away?

LETTER

Why am I writing to you again?
What a waste of time.
I would do better looking at birds
or listening to bells chime.

Why am I writing to you again?
It really is a crime.
I should be skipping stones or else
picking columbine.

Why am I writing to you again.
It truly is a shame.
I should be soothing the neighbor's
child, calling him by your name.

Hasmig Gharayan

Hasmig Gharayan, born in 1945, served as a soldier in the Karabagh war after her son was killed in battle there. She lives in Yerevan.

CALLING CARD

We were never friends or brothers.
Faithful hearts do not betray.
Devotion is meaningless when
killing is the order of the day.

You call yourself a man of peace
with your finger curved around
a trigger. You veil with lies
the bombs you left on our ground.

With my feet on holy stones
with my back against the wall
I am the judge of this century,
the twentieth century of hell.

DESIRE

To sleep until the cock crows –
in my dreams my little son.
To sleep perhaps forever, soul soaring
like an eagle's wing with him.

To wake, if God wills it,
to good tidings we are free.

Vehanoush Tekyan

Vehanoush Tekyan was born in Beirut in 1948 and graduated from the American University of Beirut in philosophy and English literature. Her work shows the influence of modern French poetry, especially the Surrealists who had a large influence on most of the poets writing in Beirut in the sixties and seventies. Tekyan has lived in New Jersey since 1978.

PSALM TO WIND, LAND, DARKNESS

(excerpt)

I dance so it will rain.
And the sky opens up in screams
because it sees me
dancing, singing
on the cracked, parched earth.

Trees like lazy shadows wounded
on the deserted fields
look like thin infants
between dirty legs.
Forgotten tombstones lean side by side
near abandoned churches.

My typewriter owns every size key,
even red with white wings.
Between them there is dust,
a fine, tasteless dust.
Before I woke, a man, suffering,
isolated, woke up before me.

Today my prayer blooms in my hands
like a damp oyster
and I climb the hills secretly
to drink wisdom from sun filled wine.
I go there for you. Be there.

TRASH COLLECTION DAY

Greetings. I'm collecting dreams today.
Give me your discards
on this spring cleaning day.
I am gathering everything I can.
Dreams don't live long on dead end streets
so I layer them all in a huge
shipping trunk. I spread yellow on yellow.
Then lock them in.
Let them stare into each other's eyes
until their words lose meanings,
lose pronunciation and even
their very molecules die from
inactivity, unmedicated, unmeditated.
Then at the right time I will set fire
to the whole lot
and calmly watch their demise.
Multi-color dreams will meld in the dark
like poisoned flames keeling over.
Then the dreams will collapse fold by fold.
Won't it be fun to watch them
disintegrate?
I'll collect any variety of dream you have.
Instead of burning flags for
peace let us set fire to dreams.

Hripsimé Hovanessyan

Hripsimé Hovanessyan, born in Yerevan in 1948, graduated from Yerevan State University in philosophy. She is the author of six books of poetry and writes for *Bamber* (Messenger), a newspaper.

THE APPLE OF MEMORY

The apple of memory looks moist and red,
but now we see the worm's hole.
On the table beside it is a knife.
I put them all there, I should know.

If I slice the apple there is no one
to give the half.
The knife called "love" is blunt now.
I would rather rename it "the last laugh."

WHILE EATING POMEGRANATES

It is said the fist is exactly heart sized.
How can this be? My fist is so small.
While the huge pomegranate of your heart
fits in my heart where it's installed.

Everything is as it should be;
we sit with a pomegranate to share.
Everything is fine except that
my key doesn't open your door.

You do the talking. I listen.
Perhaps we are halves of one whole.
You say I am yours and you are mine.
Why doesn't your key open my door?

Amalia Kaprielyan

Amalia Kaprielyan, born in 1950 in Yerevan, is the author of three books of poetry. Her work appears often in journals.

HALF OF US

If you are part of me
and I am part of you
then half of us must be
half me and half you.

If my heart is yours
and your heart is mine
we must be a pair
of a mixed up kind.

My conscience is you,
your conscience is me.
We both have a lot
of responsibility.

My torment is you
and I yours again.
But for both hurts I'm
the soother of pain.

My love is you
and your love I.
But why am I the one
keeping both alive?

SEA SPRITE

If someone asks what you're searching
on your lonely seaside walks
you don't admit you've lost something;
you won't admit your old ache.

You keep walking on the shore
with old but fresh memories
turned into mermaid dreams
that cannot live without the sea.

And there she is, the water sprite
soft and luminous of face
belonging only to you. Let years pass,
she waits and waits.

In the quiet of the evening
she floats back with one word, *soon*.
Is she bringing back the past?
Does she mean a coming doom?

Perhaps she'll say, *Later* — not soon
as the waves increase in height.
But you know the fate already
of those who love a water sprite.

Lena Antaranayan

Lena Antaranayan, born in Vanadzor City, Armenia in 1950, is the author of three books of poetry.

THE WHISPER

What secret did the wind tell
to make our horse bolt away
up the mountain side
leaving barn and hay?

What made our horse run faster
than any spur could do?
Only the tethered horses,
only the tied ones knew.

Byourik Petrosyan-Markaryan

Byourik Petrosyan-Markaryan, an engineer, became a poet late in life. She is the principal of an elementary school in Yerevan and the author of several volumes of poetry.

OUR OLD HOUSE

Barely standing on a shaky base
my childhood totters with its trembling walls,
crumbling plaster and abandoned roof
my childhood peels away and falls.

FALL

Autumn rushes in with dusty feet,
frosts the yellowed grass and edge of brooks,
burying the roots of shedding trees
with the golden lymph of coming spring.

Autumn rushes in and the ripe fruits fall
from old and abandoned trees.
Autumn rushes by in a gust of leaves
leaving us the golden hope of coming spring.

THE CROWD

Behind cement barriers
and a narrow cage
the jungle throbs
in the lion's cars
and in his indignant
roar of rage
while the crowd enjoys
make-believe fears.

Agnes

Agnes, a contemporary poet living in Yerevan who uses only a single name, was born in the fifties in Armenia and is the author of four volumes of poetry.

LATE SPRING

Spring is late this year.
But don't think it's my fault!
Snow and sleet still come
and icy roads need salt.

In the frozen hills
the melting, thawing halts.
My love too has chilled.
Don't think it's my fault.

Sona Van

Sona Van (Ter Hovannesian) was born in Yerevan. She graduated from Yerevan Medical Institute with an M.D. and received an M.A. in clinical psychology in Los Angeles where she now lives. She is the author of two books of poetry and several CDs.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

My grandfather
was a minister.
He believed in
God from 9 to 6.
At night he
would rest.

My father was
a physicist. From
9 to 6 he ignored
God. After 6
he secretly believed.

My aunt kept all
her love letters
in her Bible. And
read them both with
the same rapt look.
Watching her through
the keyhole I couldn't
tell which redemption
she preferred.

I almost forgot
to mention my mother.
She was too busy
to believe or not.
She was too busy
making things, baking
all day long.

My father, the physicist
believed in Christ's
manger birth. He said
most ridiculous stories
were true because
no one would make up
such stuff. He also
believed in miracles.
For instance Mother.

Father always said
she was a miracle and
had made us all from dough.

SOMETIMES

I love you more
in absence,
loving the silence
of your absence
and my aloneness
when I
am missing you.
Sometimes
you are never
so near
as when
you are not here.

MY COUNTRY

You are the ideal and
idea I cannot grasp.
You are the answer
to questions I don't ask.
You are the voice that
reaches me in waves.
You are the pain with
color, shadows, shades.
You are the love that
no language can name
except the tongue that
bears your own name.

Sirvart Melkonian-Lopian

Sirvart Melkonian-Lopian lives in the Armenian settlement in Sochi near the Black Sea. Her work has appeared in the *Hamshehagan Tsain*.

PART OF IT ALL

I was and I was not
part of it all,
no solid earth
beneath my feet
one with the wind
one with the birds
I too had wings,
no goal to reach.
Why was it then
we had to meet
and plant in earth
my flying feet?

Golia Der Hovhannisian

Golia Der Hovhannisian was born in Tabriz, Iran in 1955 and lives there.

ABOUT BEING ARMENIAN

I don't know when
I can't remember just how
I first realized
I was an Armenian
but I am sure
that was the same day
I discovered the sad story
of my sad life was full
of question marks,
interjections, and exclamation points.
Commas too, but not one,
never one full stop period.

Shushig Dasnabedian

Shushig Dasnabedian, born in 1955, is the author of four books of poetry published in her native Beirut and in Yerevan, where she also now lives part of the year. She has a doctorate from the Ecole des Lettres, University of Paris, 1980.

THE BURNT OFFERING

A poem is a burnt offering to invoke
the world. It is a sacrifice, a Lent,
an abnegation, a secret exercise.

I live in a private world of letters,
jokes. Already I do not exist outside
of my paper pages. With my offerings
I too go up in smoke.

Kohar Kasparyan

Kohar Kasparyan, born in 1958, emigrated from Yerevan to Munich where she works for an American broadcasting company. Her poems have been published in *Karoun*, *Avante Garde*, and *Nork* newspapers. Her first poetry book was published by Nayiri Press in Yerevan.

I'M SITTING IN THIS DISTANT PLACE

I'm sitting in this distant place
and reliving your story
for you and also for me.
I'm writing it all down
and the paper is reviving the pain
because
paper is the memory of memory.

MAKE A COMMITMENT

Make a commitment
the way
the sun does to God,
mist to the eye,
the fish to silence.

Make a promise
the way
the wind does to fields,
lightning to the forest,
the soul to its dreams.

Decide to belong
the way
a candle does to light,
the tear to the cloud,
the seed to the soil.

Make this commitment
and your wandering will
find its home and
your indecision will be crowned
with life.

Aida Aslanian

Aida Aslanian was born in 1954 in Teheran.

HOPE

What is it that by leaving
turns day into night?
What silences birds
and steals the sunlight?

What robs the calendar
of the days that glow?
What wounds by its absence;
drains as it goes?

What supplies the oxygen
to make the bloodstream whole?
What provides soul to the flesh
and fire to the soul?

Janna Hagopyan

Janna Hagopyan, born in Karabagh in 1948, is the author of four volumes of poetry.

ARTSAKH*

Even if I knew
the language of the gods
there would be no words
enough to measure
how your name fills my life, Artsakh.
Let me become one
of your flinty stones
spread border to border.
Let me be one blossom
on your perfumed fields.
If they are not the most
fragrant then I
know nothing of spring.
And if your rivers are
to be chained and kept
from reaching the sea
let me become dust
for the wind singing
your name, Artsakh.

** The Armenian name for Karabagh*

JANNA HAGOPYAN

VISITOR

I am the one
opening my own door
thinking the real owner
will suddenly appear.
Like my own roses
temporarily vased
I am the visitor
anywhere anyplace.
Always the stranger
together, alone.
Even at home
I'm never at home.

THE WIND IS A WILD MAN

The wind is a wild man
pounding at my gate,
rattling windows too
that are about to break.
Instead of a storm knocking
I wish it were you.

Come in, I would shout.
Calm down, crazy guy.
Sit down next to me.
I'm happy you turned out
to be so impetuous.
I'm happy you came by.

Arpi Alexandre

Arpi Alexandre, born in 1959 in New Julfa, Iran, writes in Armenian, Persian, and French. She won the Alex Manoogian prize for *Echo of Happiness*.

DIDN'T I COME?

Didn't I come
even through the snow?
Didn't I find
the road still green?
I can show it to you
anytime you choose,
the road where the sun
turns winter to spring.
Hey, *paregam** look my way –
our hands form a bridge
for life's highway.

* *friend*

Sato Amirian-Ajemian

Sato Amirian-Ajemian signs her poems Sato A. She started writing as a teenager and has been publishing since 1979.

VISITING MY GRAVE

With no flowers
no tears
I visited my grave
and was shocked
to see it arrayed,
fragrant with wreathes
and bouquets.

Who could it be
who visited here
this nameless
unmarked
house of earth?

Except for me,
wasn't it true
no one yet knew
of my death?

Mariné Khatchadour

Mariné Khatchadour, born in Yerevan in the 1960s and educated in Los Angeles, graduated from the University of California at Los Angeles and also studied at Yerevan State University.

OATH

I swear by the earth I was born of,
by the compacted dust I became
by the stone I turned into, I swear
by the love of mother earth
to decorate the ancient graves
of ancient gods with new vows.

I swear to destroy the stagnated pools,
old dams, filled with my ancestor's blood.
I salute earth-mother-woman
in all her godliness without fear or shame.
I bless her godliness and invite
our ancient gods again to praise
mother-woman-earth
naming their praise "Song of Revelation."

I am a woman born of earth,
compacted earth turned stone.
I denounce the cowardice of
the civilized male brain that doubts
the strength which he hacks to pieces by
lying for the sake of gold, silver,
uranium bonds. I denounce the civilized male
brain that tells me I am white
and because of that desirable.

MARINÉ KHATCHADOUR

But I am not white. I am earth,
the color of earth. I curse cowardice
and the civilized male brain that loves
man's color but not man; loves
the fable but not the mountain, Massis,
loves the shape but not the woman.

I am mother earth, her dust compacted
to stone. I protest
militancy, imprisonment of soul or mind,
male gods, male leaders and
their law enforcing automatic guns.
I protest male-made false borders,
false restrictions in the workplace
and streets. Curse them all.

Anahid Kocharian

Anahid Kocharian was born in 1962 in Stepanakert, Karabagh.

KARABAGH

Karabagh's dialect is shaped
by centuries. It contains
boulders, cliffs and
mountain chains.

These rocks are lit by a star
weaving light like a mother
waiting at heaven's gate
unforgiving of the storms that roar

trying to still the tongue
articulating *ayp** and *pen**
trying to remove the flower
and leaving only the dry stem.

** The first two letters of the Armenian alphabet*

Lilith

Lilith was born in Yerevan to the poet Medaksé and Hamlet Aghagulian (an engineer) in the late sixties. She decided to use a single name as her mother does. Her first book won a Writer's Union award.

GAROD*

Armenians say longing
is colored blue
but this need for you
is slowly squeezed
from the yellow of the autumn trees
in the flaming sunlight.

They say longing
is colored blue
but this ache
is a white Niagara
clamoring and pushed
by wind down
the mountains, having all
the colors of light.

** Armenian word for longing, yearning,
and homesickness*

FORGETTING

I saw your name painted
everywhere over walls
over asphalt
sidewalks chalked everywhere.
I heard your name everywhere:
in the wind that
disheveled my hair.
The syllables of
your name once
filled my world
with your face.
It is autumn now
and raining.
And all the chalk marks
are erased.
The rain is removing
your name and your face.

IT'S WAR

My city worn and weary
you have become
a black clad woman
watching, head lowered,
funeral after funeral,
shaken and shaking
with the pain of loss.
Your leaves drained
of color fall
into wet mirrors.

It's said that Satan
marks at birth
the foreheads
of the doomed.

Today there is a stillness
everywhere on your streets,
on the lips of the surrounding hills.

My God, our Lord, when will you lift
off this fate written on our foreheads?
Remove the devil's black finger nail
which writes such atrocious destinies.
Save us from further crucifixion.

Haigani Donoyan

Haigani Donoyan, who was born in the 1950s in Leninakan, now Gyumri, died in the 1988 earthquake. She was the author of two books.

WHEN I AM NOT WITH YOU

When I am not with you
I am the autumn morning
when it rains.

DRAW A POMEGRANATE TREE

Draw a pomegranate
tree for me please.
When we're apart
I'll be happy to see
its falling blossoms,
its ripening fruit
as I caress paper
instead of you.

HAIGANI DONOYAN

THAT ONE

I am that one
whose heart climbs
Ararat mountain.
I am the one kneeling for confession
in front of the ravines
as I receive communion
from the dawn's profligate
colors.

I am the one swearing
I am yours.
And I come to you with branches
of pomegranate in my arms.
Meet me, my love,
I am the one with fire
in my eyes and lightning
in my brows who will give birth
one day to a Vahakn for you.
And a daughter whose name
is Astghig, whose lips
will be petals and whose
hair plaited with flowers
will reach her waist.

My mother promised me to you;
and I have sworn to be
your sacrifice, my fatherland.

And if my living – (day,
moment or year) does not help
calm your heavens, and
if my songs are not strong
or able to soothe away
either care or torture
then, let me...
no, don't let me swear
or make any more promises,
just let me sing,
fatherland.

Tanya Hovanesian

Tanya Hovanesian was born in Leninakan (now Gyumri) and was one of the most promising of young poets at the time of her death in the 1988 earthquake.

I AM NOT A PAINTER

but if I could just paint
my eyes on canvas
and name my painting "Sadness"
I'd be famous.

SNOW

When it's snowing
and the woods are hard to see
we'll kiss under
the branches and climb the cold tree.
Everyone seeing us will exclaim
Look how that tree has blossomed in flame.

TANYA HOVANESSIAN

MY FATE

was to live as
a human
called the most
able after God.

My fate
was to live
in this fearful
century.

My fate was
to have a dream
I could not reach
and to die without
kissing
even your eyes.

HEY, LITTLE MIDGET *(shortened version)*

Hey, little gold topped
midget brained guy,
did you really imagine that I
could be bowled over? I?

All I could ever be to you
would be Mommy. Why
do you brag when your brain
can't reach a flea's eye?

I AM A WOMAN NOT A FOOL

I know that fire burns
but even so
I stretch a finger.
Even so
I know poison drips
from both your eyes
so why
am I handing you my heart
even so.

Ani Pahlivanian

Ani Pahlivanian was born in 1972 in the village of Artig, Armenia.

MY LIFE

I am equal to your calling.
I am the light of my own dreams.
I belong to pain, but also
I am the beloved in the house of love.
I am the question mark
of your revenge.
If I have lips that heaven uses
they are my lips.
I have my own rock hard will.
Even if I belong to the crucified
I also belong to my own word's fate.
I belong to a need and want.
I belong to me.

Sonia Tashjian-Tavtyan

Sonia Tashjian-Tavtyan is representative of a new writers group in Yerevan whose work, like that of the American L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Poets, is difficult to translate because it is based more on aural effects.

CONCERT

Let the delicate syllables
that speak
from your flute
fill with the breath
of wood aroma and the soil
of the poplar root,
fill with wood sap
and sound like the mass
of Gomidas while the song
braids around our heads
and for its length
we believe death is dead.

Talin Ozkalaxi

Talin Ozkalaxi, born in Istanbul, is studying Polish and other Slavic languages and literature in Ankara. She graduated from Armenian schools. Her poems appear in Armenian newspapers including *Nor San*.

MAN'S INHERITANCE

When inspiration strikes
I am the hurricane
flooding your mind.

When faith swells in my heart
I am the lightning
that illuminates your life.

When revenge and justice
move in I become your
true aspirations.

When I am struck by love
I am your tears.

When yearning strips me bare
I am fabric at hand.

When death walks through the door
I am the bright place in your soul.

NATURE'S NAMELESS LAW

I am that bit of ice
cracking the boulder's side,
the handful of soil
mighty with roots inside;
the wild wind which won't recognize
borders, rules or pride.
I am the bright idea
unknotting mankind's brain.
I am the nameless law
snapping slavery's chains.

Anoush Nagashian

Anoush Nagashian was born in the 1970s in Jerusalem where for centuries there have been Armenian churches, a patriarch, and an Armenian quarter.

WISING UP

I said, Don't send me flowers.
But secretly I thought
love might blossom like the flowers
you could have bought.

I said, Don't send me flowers
hoping you'd read eyes, not words.
But all I got were thorns, your words
like dry little swords.

Verginé Ziflioglou

Verginé Ziflioglou is a young Armenian poet living in Istanbul.

LIKE THE CHAMELEON

Everyday my heart changes color.
Today copper yellow, tomorrow green
as spring leaves, glistening wet.
Everyday my heart changes color
like the hare in winter over snow.
Or tulips bright as they can get.
My heart wears a different color daily.
It's too soon to grow up yet.

Noushig Mikayelian-Ohanian

Noushig Mikayelian-Ohanian was born in Aleppo, Syria in 1978 and did her graduate work at Yerevan State University. She now lives in Armenia and has published one book of poetry. Her work, like that of other contemporary writers, is primarily in free verse, but the samples here are rhymed as in the *byren* (Armenian) style of old folk poems. Her riddles, like such poems everywhere, mean two things at once. These two are for the Diaspora and Ararat.

RIDDLES

I.

You look through us everywhere.
Underfoot? Bare feet, beware.
Scattered, broken in the grass
you think we're dew, not shattered glass.

II.

Made of ice, made of stone,
inherited but not owned.
Disappears in mist and showers,
out of reach, but always ours.

Naira Haroutiunyan

Naira Haroutiunyan was born in Yerevan in 1979. Her first book was published in 2000.

OUR SEA

O ur sea, same old sea
U nder the old skies, but we
R each no shore. The shores are

L ost. And even if they're there
O ur eyes do not, cannot,
S ee them. So why does
T he same sea-

S ickness wrack our bodies
E ven now as if our sailors
A re still rocking in the water?

UNINFORMED

The tree grew among
rocks but the roots
reached deep
into the earth.

Then it was chopped
down but its roots
uninformed, kept
wringing earth
waiting . . .

Nouver Sehlahla

BLUE

Halcyon bird, fisher of blue,
gather blue vistas for me. I too
am in love with the horizon and free.

I want blue oceans, blue skies and winds
braided with indigo, sapphire and azure.
Look at me:

my wide heart and eyes are ready
to fill with your blue, blue, blue.

Rosanna Asadrian

POSSIBILITIES

Let's leave the word
happiness
out of it, shall we?
Whatever it is
you are looking for
whatever you seek
let's leave it nameless
but within reach
promised by each daybreak.
There it is, your heart's desire
pushing toward you
bursting like mountain springs
but then, oh, a thousand regrets
there it goes
snatched away by
something nameless.

Susanna Asoyan

YOUR MUSE

Tell me the truth
about the blue bird
who visits you
and casts such a spell
you believe you can fling your heart
across the skies
forgetting
it won't grow wings
and cannot fly.
Still like your unnamed
bird you glide
across nameless
boundaries and walls
and rise.

Violette Krikorian

Violette Krikorian (Grigoryan) was born in the seventies in Yerevan where her work is very popular with her contemporaries. She edits a magazine.

LOOKING FOR A HUSBAND

Give me a horse, a horse
with blue eyes, blue dreams, blue wings.
A horse with golden mane
gold hooves and golden whinny.
Give me a horse
which has never been in a film
not even as the hero's mount.
Give me a horse,
a non-performing
non-circus horse.
Give me a horse
who's never aroused pity
from poets as it was carted
off to race. Give me a
silent one willing to listen
to me endlessly.
Give me a horse without name,
one I call simply Horse,
one without pedigree or fame
that I honor only as horse.
Not one born of water,
not one born of fire
but one not afraid of rockets
and not in awe of planes.
I'd give anything except...
No, I'd give that too
for one horse I can lean on
and turn the world on its heel.
One of you must be my horse.
I won't point. But
 just step forward
 only
 one
 horsestep to me.

GIGOS*

Well, here we are sitting across
 from each other being rocked by this bus.
 I'm hoping it will be a long trip.
 The dim light is pleasant. You please
 me too. I don't know you but I want
 you to be strong, kind and extremely
 loving. I'm a good catch too.
 Although tired, although sad, and although
 I've been called discouraged and lazy.

But don't ask. Let's pretend I'm brand new
 and let's imagine you love me. And
 this bus is a horse drawn carriage.
 You're taking me to — well, we're eloping
 to a far off luxurious mansion.
 We'll shut and bar the doors and windows
 when we get there and won't be disturbed.
 Good. Let everything happen in its time.

Let the ticket taker be the best man.
 And the guy with the beard, the priest.
 He'll marry us at the next stop.
 And our first born will be a daughter.
 Don't get excited. Let it be a boy.
 It's clear we'll name him Gigos.
 It's perfectly clear. He'll fall down
 from a tree. *Akh*, my child, my darling
 sweet little boy. What a sorrow
 you've brought to your poor mother.

**The title of a well-known Armenian tale by
 Hovaness Toumanian about a foolish bride
 imagining the loss of a future child, Gigos.*

Don't stare like that. Haven't you ever
 seen a passenger in tears?
 I guess you've never read
 Toumanian or any other tales. O.K.
 You could at least hand me some
 kleenex. Can't you understand
 how a grieving mother who's lost
 her son cries? Where are you going?
 Devil take you, you're getting off
 at this stop. Don't you read
 fairy tales at all?

Gariné Raphaelian

Gariné Raphaelian (Kariné Rafaelyan) was born in the seventies. Since obtaining her doctorate in literature, she has worked as the director of the Terenig Demirjian Literary Museum in Yerevan.

WHAT I WANT

I don't want your heart.
Who'd want a heartless heart?
I don't want your love.
Loveless love's not my style.
All I want is you
to give me back my smile.

Biographies

Brief biographies of Armenian women writers (those who either wrote in Armenian or were widely translated into Armenian) including noted prose writers whose works are not in this anthology. This list does not claim to be complete nor does it include writers of scholarly work. (An asterisk indicates writers whose poems appear in this volume.)

VICTORIA AGHANOUR was born in 1855 in Padua, Italy and died in 1910. Since she wrote in Italian, her work is not included here. However, in her time she was well known among Armenians because her work was translated into Armenian.

VARSENIG AGHASYAN (1895-1974) was born in Nakhichevan, an Armenian region now part of Azerbaijan. She was educated in Tiflis and worked in Baku for the Armenian daily there and in Armenian broadcasting. She wrote poetry and plays.

AGHAVNI was the pen name used by Aghavni Krikorian for both her poetry and prose. She was born in Kars in 1911, graduated in 1931 from Leninakan Teachers College, and worked both as a journalist and editor. Aghavni was the author of three volumes of poetry and several collections of essays. She died in 1992.

*AGNES, a contemporary poet living in Yerevan who uses only a single name, was born in the fifties in Armenia and is the author of four volumes of poetry.

*HOROSIMÉ AGOULISTSI was from Agoulis in the Armenian province of Goghtan. She was captured by the Persians in 1751 when she was still a teenager. While a prisoner, she wrote poems in the margins and last pages of manuscripts. Her fate is unknown.

*IRMA AJEMIAN-TOKAT, 1936-1990, lived in Constantinople and published widely in the local Armenian press.

*ARPI ALEXANDRE, born in 1959 in New Julfa, Iran, writes in Armenian, Persian, and French. She won the Alex Manoogian prize for *Echo of Happiness*.

*SATO AMIRIAN-AJEMIAN signs her poems Sato A. She started writing as a teenager and has been publishing since 1979.

*ANAÏS (1872-1950) is the short story writer Yevkiné Avedisian, born in Constantinople and died in France. Her stories appeared in the important Armenian literary journals of her day.

*LENA ANTARANYAN, born in Vanadzor City, Armenia in 1950, is the author of three books of poetry.

*DIANA AGABEG APCAR (1859-1937) was born in Rangoon, Burma of Armenian parents from Persia (Iran), grew up in India, and lived in Japan after her marriage. She wrote mostly prose in English, and served the Republic of Armenia in 1919 as its consul in Yokohama, Japan. Called the first woman diplomat in modern times (of any country), she helped countless refugees passing through Japan enroute to America. She never saw Armenia but wrote books, editorials, and appeals for her country in several languages. Occasionally she also wrote poetry and songs.

ARAX (1903-1978) was born Araxe Avedisian in Kirovagan, Armenia and educated in Tiflis and Yerevan State University. She worked as a journalist in Moscow and wrote many children's stories in Armenian.

ZABEL ASADOOR (1863-1934) see Sybille.

*AIDA ASLANIAN was born in 1954 in Teheran.

*SEDA ATAMIAN-ISRAELIAN, painter and poet, was born in 1933 in Teheran where she was educated in art. After her marriage she returned to finish her university studies in literature. She worked for several daily newspapers.

*MARIA ATMADJIAN was born in 1913 in Bafra, a Black Sea port. In 1915 after her father's death in the genocide, she and her mother made their way to Syria, Ethiopia, and finally Paris where Maria published nine books of poetry and three of criticism. She served as chairman of the Armenian-French Writers Union.

ZAROUHI BAHRI (1880-1958), novelist, was born in Constantinople, and in the twenties moved to Paris where three of her novels were published.

*SONIA BALASSANIAN, born in Iran in 1945, was educated in art and poetry both in Iran and New York City. She is the author of four books of poetry and has shown her paintings at major art exhibits in Venice and elsewhere.

SEDA BALIAN-HAGOPIAN, prose writer, was born in 1933 in Baku, moved to Iran, and did her postdoctoral studies at the University of California at Los Angeles.

SHUSHAN BARDIZBANYAN-PHANOUS, journalist, was born in Egypt in 1938. She now lives in the United States.

*ANAHIT BARSAMYAN, born in 1948 in Yerevan, Armenia, graduated from Yerevan State University. She has worked in broadcasting and magazine editing, most recently at *Kragan Tert*, the literary journal published by the Writer's Union. She is the author of five books of poetry and several volumes of short stories.

*ROUPINA BARSEGHIAN (Parseghian), born in 1941 in Iran, was educated in the local Armenian schools. In 1955, after her father's death, she was sent to Poona, India to live with relatives and returned later to Iran to marry. In 1975 she started writing poetry, and her first book was published in 1977. She lives in Germany now and works in broadcasting.

ANAHID BAYANDOUR, born 1940 in Yerevan to the poet Maro Markarian and her husband B. Bayandour, studied and graduated from the University of Moscow Institute of Literature, winning awards in translation. She has published translations and a study of Hovhanness Toumanian. She was a member of parliament of the Republic of Armenia in 1999.

*ROSA BEDROSIAN (Petrosyan) was born in 1930 in Leninakan (now Gyumri). From 1941 to 1946 she worked as an electrician, returning to the university for her degree in 1951. She worked next as librarian and has published 12 volumes of poetry.

ALVART BEDROSSIAN (Petrosyan), born in Yerevan in 1945, served as editor of Navasart.

MARINEH BEDROSSIAN was born in the 1970s in Yerevan and works there for a children's magazine.

*MANNIG BERBERIAN was born in 1883 into a literary family in Constantinople. After surviving the genocide, she lived in Europe and died in Italy in 1960. Her first book, in 1911, was a volume of prose poems. Her next two books were published in Paris and Egypt.

NINA BERBEROVA (1901-1993) was born in St. Petersburg. She lost her father in the Stalinist purges and eventually moved to Paris. She wrote prose and poetry in Russian, French, and English. She died in the United States, where she taught at Princeton.

MARIE BEYLERIAN was born in 1880 in Constantinople and died in the genocide of 1915 in Tocat, in the interior of Turkey, where she was teaching.

She was the author of many editorials, short stories, and feminist essays appearing in *Artemis*, a journal which she founded.

*ANAHID BOGHIKIAN-TARPINYAN, poet and translator, was born in Syria, graduated from Aleppo Giligia College, American College, and in 1946 emigrated to Armenia. Since 1950 she has taught English at the Brusov Institute. She headed the English department at the Charents School for 39 years.

HRIPSIME BOGHOSIAN (Poghossian) (1899-1972) was born and educated in Tiflis (Tbilisi). After her university studies there, she worked for a children's magazine as editor. In 1934 she moved to Yerevan, working as a poet, translator, and editor.

*ADRINÉ DADRIAN (1915-1999), older sister of historian Vahakn Dadrian, was born in Chorum, Turkey and educated in French and Armenian schools in Constantinople. She attended universities in Germany and Austria. Her last years were spent in France. She was one of the leading poets of a group of women writers in Istanbul influenced by poet Garbis Janjigian.

*SHUSHIG DASNABEDIAN, born in 1955, is the author of four books of poetry published in her native Beirut and in Yerevan, where she also now lives part of the year. She has a doctorate from Ecole des Lettres, University of Paris, 1980.

*SEDA DEMIRJIAN, born in 1927 in Constantinople (Istanbul), is a poet, editor, and teacher of French and music. She is the anthologist of several volumes of Armenian literature (in Armenian). She lives in Michigan.

DIANA DER-HOVANESSIAN, born in the United States, is the author of three books of poetry in Armenian, eight in English, and eleven books of translations from Armenian.

ALLA DER HAGOPIAN (see ALLA TER HAGOPYAN).

*GOLIA DER HOVHANNISIAN was born in Tabriz, Iran in 1955 and lives there.

*NAZENNI DER MICHAELIAN was born in Constantinople and lived in France after the genocide.

ARMENOUHI DIKRANIAN (Tigranian) was a well known writer in Constantinople at the turn of the century.

*HAIGANI DONOYAN, who was born in the 1950s in Leninakan (now Gyumri), died in the 1988 earthquake. She was the author of two books.

SRPOUHI DUISSAP (1841-1901), daughter of philanthropist and educator N. Vahan, was born in Constantinople. She was not only the first Armenian woman novelist (three novels), but was also the author of several manuals for women's education. She served as a director of the "Women's Society for the Promotion of Education." She and her French husband also conducted a famous salon where French and Armenian intellectuals gathered.

*DZAGHKANOUSH DZADOURIAN was born in 1941 in Teheran, Iran. She lost her sight at three. At seven she urged her parents to have her taught reading and music. Her father arranged for her to be taught braille while he himself read Armenian literature to her. She is also a performing singer.

*SYLVA GABOUDI KIAN (Kaputikyan) was born in 1919 in Yerevan of parents from Van. In her time she was the most famous woman poet and writer and filled not only the Yerevan opera house on her 80th birthday celebration, but also similar auditoriums world wide. She had been married to the poet Hovhannes Shiraz and was the mother of Ara Shiraz, a famous sculptor to whom she dedicated her best-known poem, "Words for My Child," a didactic work telling her son to forget her before he forgot his mother tongue. Besides writing some of the most tender love poems of her day, she and Zori Balayan were the brave spokesmen for the Karabagh freedom movement. Gaboudikian's poetry won every top literary award given by the Soviet authorities.

*HASMIG GHARAYAN, born in 1945, served as a soldier in the Karabagh war after her son was killed in battle there. She lives in Yerevan.

*ALICIA GHIRAGOSSIAN was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and received her law degree there. She wrote in Spanish, and her poems were translated and published by Vahakn Davtian in the 1960s in Armenia, where they became very well known. She now writes in Armenian and is a striking performer of her work. She lives in Los Angeles.

SHOUSHANIG GOURGHINIAN (see SHOUSHANIK KOURGHINYAN).

JULIETTA GRIGORYAN (see JULIETTA KRİKORIAN).

*JANNA HAGOPYAN, born in Karabagh in 1948, is the author of four volumes of poetry.

*MARIA HAGOPYAN, poet and physician, was born in 1922 in Stavropol where her parents had escaped after the genocide in 1915. She was educated there and in Baku, where she graduated from the Azerbaijan Medical Institute. She moved to Yerevan and worked as an editor of *Hygiene*. She was married for a time to poet Hamo Sahian. She is the author of seven books.

*NAIRA HAROUTTUNYAN was born in Yerevan in 1979. Her first book was published in 2000.

*HERANOUSH, born Nargis Arshagian in Constantinople in 1887, began writing in her teen years. She died at 18.

*TANYA HOVANESSIAN was born in Leninakan (now Gyumri) and was one of the most promising of young poets at the time of her death in the 1988 earthquake.

*HRIPSIMÉ HOVANESSYAN, born in Yerevan in 1948, graduated from Yerevan State University in philosophy. She is the author of six books of poetry and writes for *Bamber* (Messenger), a newspaper.

MARIE-THERESE JABRAYAN-VOSKERICHIAN, born in 1934 and educated in Beirut, now lives in New York. She is the author of several novels and young people's stories.

*SE'IA JEJOYAN-TEVIAN (1920-1965) lived in Constantinople (Istanbul) and was part of a group of active women poets who wrote in the style of Garbis Janjigian.

ZAROUHI KALEMKERIAN (1874-1971), poet and memoirist, was born Zarouhi Seferian in Constantinople. She used the pen names Euterpe or G. Zarouhi in her poetry and essays published in Constantinople and New York, where she and her husband settled in 1921.

*HILDA KALFAYAN, born in 1942 in Istanbul, now lives and writes and publishes in Paris.

*AMALIA KAPRIELIAN, born in 1950 in Yerevan, is the author of three books of poetry. Her work appears often in journals.

SYLVA KAPUTIKYAN (see SYLVA GABOUDI-KIAN).

JANET KARAMANOUKIAN-KASSOUNI, born in 1935 in Beirut, is the author of juvenile literature, criticism, and other prose.

*KOHAR KASPARYAN, born in 1958, emigrated from Yerevan to Munich where she works for an American broadcasting company. Her poems have been published in *Karoun*, *Avante Garde*, and *Nork* newspapers. Her first poetry book was published by Nayiri Press in Yerevan.

*MARINÉ KHATCHADOUR, born in Yerevan in the 1960s and educated in Los Angeles, graduated from the University of California in Los Angeles and also studied at Yerevan State University.

MARIAM KHATISSIAN, novelist and educator, was born in Tiflis, Georgia, which during her day (1845-1914) was an Armenian cultural center. She was the president of the Armenian Women's Benevolent Union from 1882 to 1907. One of her four novels, *On a New Road*, was published in St. Petersburg in 1894. In her writing Khatissian describes Armenian social life in the Caucasus at the turn of the century, issues surrounding assimilation, and the entry of women into the professional and public spheres.

*KHOSROVIDOUKHT (Khosrovitought) and Sahagdoukht were two Armenian poets of the eighth century. (The suffix "doukht" means daughter.) Khosrovidoukht was the daughter of a prince of Kohght. Her brother Vahan, to whom she addresses the poem published in this volume, had been kidnapped by Arabs and raised as a Muslim. When he grew up and found his family, he became Christian again. In 737 A.D. while traveling to Damascus, he flaunted his Christianity and was executed.

*ANAHID KOCHARIAN was born in 1962 in Stepanakert, Karabagh.

*KOHAR (or Gohar) is little known, except what her long poem describes of her pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 1695. The manuscript is in the library of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem. The poem lists a long series of misadventures with pirates, robbers, and abandonment before finally reaching Jerusalem.

*ARPI KOULOUMIAN-AGHAKHANIAN, born in 1925 in Teheran, publishes poems in many current literary and popular Armenian journals in the diaspora. She lives in Los Angeles.

*SHOUSHANIK KOURGHINYAN (Shoushanig Gourghinian) (1876-1927) was born Shoushanik Popolchyan in Gyumri (which was then called Alexandropol, and later during Soviet times, Leninakan). She graduated from Russian and Armenian local schools and became very active in social and political movements in the Armenian communities in the Caucasus, especially in Tiflis (Tbilisi), which

was a great Armenian cultural center. She was known for her strong poetry of social protest and support for working people's rights. Much of her style seems dated now, but in 1907 her first book of poetry, *The Dawn's Early Light*, caused a great stir. She published plays, prose, and letters as well as poetry during Soviet times.

*JULIETTA KRIKORIAN (Grigoryan) was born in Yerevan in 1935 and is the author of four volumes of poetry. She lives in Paris and California.

*VIOLETTE KRIKORIAN (Grigoryan) was born in the seventies in Yerevan, where her work is very popular with her contemporaries. She edits a magazine.

LAS, or Louisa Aslanian, a novelist, was born in 1906 in Tabriz, Iran and was educated there and at the Russian gymnasium in Tiflis. In the early 1920s she studied at the Sorbonne in Paris. During World War II she was part of the French Resistance and died in a Nazi concentration camp. Her stories in Armenian have appeared worldwide.

LEILI (1892-1951) was born in Tiflis of parents who were refugees from Karakilisia. She graduated from the Hovnanian school in Tiflis. Her work was praised by Vahan Derian. She was a friend of Eghishe Charents. Her last years were spent in Moscow. She was the author of several books of translations, but her own volume of poetry was published in Yerevan after her death.

*LILITH was born in Yerevan to the poet Medaksé and Hamlet Aghagutian (an engineer) in the late sixties. She decided to use a single name as her mother does. Her first book won a Writer's Union award.

HAYGANOUSH MARK was born 1883 in Constantinople and died there in 1966. She was the founder in 1905 of the feminist magazine, *Women's Flowering*. After marrying editor Vahan Toshigian, she moved to Smyrna (Izmir), where in 1919 she established and edited another journal, *Armenian Woman*, which continued in publication until 1932.

*ARSHALOUYS MARKARIAN (Markaryan), born in 1914, lives in Yerevan. She is the author of 15 books.

*MARO MARKARIAN (Markaryan), born in 1915 in Georgia, graduated from universities in Yerevan and Moscow. Her poems, both subtle and accessible, musical and memorable, made her the most beloved woman poet of her time. She was also an activist for children's rights and the Karabagh movement. She died in 1999.

*MEDAKSÉ was born Medaksé Boghosian in Artig, Armenia in 1929. She uses only one name, perhaps because she was orphaned as a child or perhaps because she considers herself a feminist. She is the author of many popular books of poetry and is known as the working woman's spokesperson. Her strong singing voice also makes her a striking performance poet.

LUCY MELIKIAN, born in the late twenties in Syria, is the author of five novels in Armenian and several in English. She now lives in New York.

*SIRVART MELKONIAN-LOPIAN lives in the Armenian settlement in Sochi near the Black Sea. Her work has appeared in the Hamshenagan Tsain.

*NOUSHIG MIKAYELIAN-OHANIAN was born in Aleppo, Syria in 1978 and did her graduate work at Yerevan State University. She now lives in Armenia and has published one book of poetry.

ISKOUHI MINAS (Minasian) was born in 1884 into an aristocratic Armenian Catholic family in Constantinople. She wrote in Italian, French, and English. Her poems were printed in the local French papers and reprinted in Paris. She produced eight volumes of poetry, one novel in French, and many short stories in Armenian. She died in 1933.

ARPI MISSAKIAN, critic, journalist, and editor of the newspaper *Hratch* in Paris, was born in Cairo, Egypt in 1925.

*ANOUSH NAGASHIAN was born in the 1970s in Jerusalem where for centuries there have been Armenian churches, a patriarch, and an Armenian quarter.

ALICE ODABASHIAN, born in 1913 in Bulgaria, is a poet, playwright, and translator.

*TALIN OZKALAXI, born in Istanbul, is studying Polish and other Slavic languages and literature in Ankara. She graduated from Armenian schools. Her poems appear in Armenian newspapers, including *Nor San*.

*ANI PAHLIVANIYAN was born in 1972 in the village of Artig, Armenia.

ROUPINA PARSEGHIAN (see BARSEGHIAN).

*BYOURIK PETROSYAN-MARKARYAN, an engineer, became a poet late in life. She is the principal of an elementary school in Yerevan and the author of several volumes of poetry.

ROSA PETROSYAN (see BEDROSIAN).

*GARINÉ RAPHAELIAN (Kariné Rafaelyan) was born in the seventies. Since obtaining her doctorate in literature, she has worked as the director of the Terenig Demirjian Literary Museum in Yerevan.

*SAHAKDOUKHT SIUNETSI of the eighth century was known as both poet and musician. She not only founded music schools but also taught in one, discreetly behind a curtain. She worked in many forms of poetry, acrostics, riddles, and shapes.

SEVDA SEVAN was born in 1930 in Bulgaria, where she serves as Armenian cultural ambassador. She writes primarily in Bulgarian.

MARIETTA SHAGHINIAN (1888-1982) was born in Moscow and wrote poetry, short stories and novels in Russian that were translated into Armenian. She wrote many travel pieces about Armenia as well. Her early work was very successful, but Marxist critics labeled her experimental writing as "internationalist."

SHAHANDOUGHTI (Srpouhi Bertetsian), born in 1929 in Beirut, studied at St. Joseph University and was the editor of *Ayk* daily for many years until the Lebanese civil war. She has written several books of poetry and prose.

ANAHID SHAHINIAN was born in Lori. In 1941 she graduated from Yerevan State University. She has won top literary prizes from the Soviet government for her stories. Besides 11 volumes of stories, she has published a book of travel writing and three volumes of translations from the Russian.

ANGELA STEPANIAN, born 1917 in Tiflis, was educated at Yerevan State University. She translated from German and Russian and published several novels and collections of short stories.

*SYBILLE was born 1863 in Constantinople as Zabel Khandjian and died in 1934. She was educated at Armenian and French schools and Scutari College. In 1879 with eight classmates, she founded the Patriotic Armenian Women's Association, which aimed to build schools for Armenian girls in the interior of Turkey. During the Hamidian massacres of Armenians in 1894-1906, the association was forced to stop its work, but from 1908 until 1915 it began again. Sybille was married in 1901 to Hrant Asadour, editor of *Massis* (with Krikor Zohrab, the famous short-story writer). Her own works, two novels and a col-

lection of short stories, were published during her lifetime, and a play was published in Boston four years after her death.

LUCY TARGYUL (1905-1955) left Van where she was born just before the genocide to study in Tiflis and Yerevan State University. She is the author of novels and short stories.

*SONIA TASHJIAN-TAVTYAN is representative of a new writers group in Yerevan whose work, like that of the American L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Poets, is difficult to translate because it is based more on aural effects.

*VEHANOUSH TEKIAN was born in Beirut in 1948 and graduated from the American University of Beirut in philosophy and English literature. Her work shows the influence of modern French poetry, especially the Surrealists who had a large influence on most of the poets writing in Beirut in the sixties and seventies. Tekyan has lived in New Jersey since 1978.

*ALLA TER HAGOPYAN (Der Hagopian), born in 1940 in Yerevan, now lives and writes in Moscow. She writes mostly in Russian.

*ARMENOUHI TERZIAN (born 1910) lived in Constantinople where she was one of a group of writers greatly influenced by Garbis Janjigian and his use of "ordinary speech" and bright images.

ARSHAGOUHI THEODIK was born Arshagouhi Chezvechian in 1875 in Constantinople and died in 1922 in Switzerland. After graduating university in England, she married a writer, Theodik Labjinjian, and used his first name in her writing. She traveled to Adana after the massacres in Cilicia for relief work and wrote about the plight of the Armenians there. In 1920 she published many articles in French about the Turkish genocide of the Armenians.

*SONA VAN (Ter Hovannesyian) was born in Yerevan. She graduated from Yerevan Medical Institute with an M.D. and received an M.A. in clinical psychology in Los Angeles where she now lives. She is the author of two books of poetry and several CDs.

SHAKEH VARSIAN (1925-2001) was born Varsenig Polajian in Nicosia, Cyprus. She was a prose writer and prize-winning journalist in Yerevan. Among outstanding younger essayists and editors are LUDA AVAKYAN and GARINÉ CHODIKYAN of *Karoun*.

Biographies

*SHNORIG VORPERIAN was born in Ethiopia of Armenian parents in 1939. Her poems appear in the diaspora press.

ZABEL YESSAYAN was born Zabel Hovanessian in 1878 in Constantinople where she graduated from the Armenian schools. In 1895 she studied literature and philosophy at the Sorbonne. Five years later she married the painter Dikran Yessayan and had two children. After her first novel, she went to Adana to report on the massacres. In 1911 her interviews with survivors were published. To avoid arrest in 1915 (she was listed among the writers to be rounded up), she escaped to Bulgaria. In 1933 the Soviet government of Armenia invited her to teach at Yerevan State University. She wrote and published many short stories there but eventually fell victim to the Stalinist purges and died in prison in 1942 or 1943.

*VERGINÉ ZIFLIOGLOU is a young Armenian poet living in Istanbul.

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About the translator's past work

Diana Der-Hovanesian, author of 22 books of poetry and translations, was Fulbright professor of American poetry at the Yerevan State University, Armenia, in 1999 and 1994. She has taught workshops on the poetry of human rights, Armenian poetry in translation, and poetry-writing at various universities. Her own poetry has appeared in *American Scholar*, *Poetry*, *New York Times* and numerous literary quarterlies and has won such awards as a National Endowment for the Arts grant, P.E.N./Columbia grant, the Paterson Prize, and the Armand Erpf Translation award.

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