

BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO MODERN ARMENIAN LITERATURE

VARTAN MATIOSSIAN

November 9, 2013



HISTORY AT A GLANCE (1878-1922)

Date	Political situation
1878	Treaty of Berlin
1895-1896	Armenian massacres
1908	Ottoman Revolution
1909	Massacre of Adana
1915-1922	Armenian Genocide (1915-1917); Republic of Armenia (1918-1920); Treaty of Sevres (1920) evacuation of Cilicia (1920-1921); Smyrna fire (1922); emigration from Constantinople (1922)

WESTERN ARMENIAN MODERNITY (1850-1922)

- Զարթոնք (*Zartonk*, “awakening”)
 - Cultural-social (1850-1890)
 - Cleansing of Modern Armenian and triumph as single medium of expression
 - Internal bylaws: Armenian National Constitution (Ազգային Սահմանադրութիւն, *Azkayin Sahmanatrutiun*, 1861-1863)
 - Berlin Treaty (1878)
 - Political (1890-1915)
 - Formation of political parties
 - Development of the Armenian Question



WESTERN ARMENIAN IN 1801

- «Գանք հիմա **ծեծին** վրա. Երբ որ Նելսոնը **աղէկ մը** արեց **թշնամոյն** նաւերը, **խապար** դրկեց ցամաքը **ճէնկէ** դադրելու համար. **Զերէմ Ինկիլիզին** առջի նիւթը Մոսկովը զարնել էր. չէր ուզեր որ Տանիմառքային հետ դարձեալ **ծեծկըվելով** իր նաւերը **սախտէ**. հերիք սեպեց **անդատար** ընել որ թողու զինքը **ասանկով** երթալու, **ասանկով** սանքի զօռով **միւթարէքէ** ընել **տըվալ 8** սահթըվան համար. էրթեսի օրը 24 **սահաթ տահա** երկնցուցին **միւթարէքէն**» (*Taregrutiun*, 1801, Venice)



WESTERN ARMENIAN MODERNITY (1850-1922)

- Secularization
 - Secular elements in literature
 - Development of school network (end of 19th century: 10% of the population in schools; 1/3 of students were female)
 - Development of press
 - Women emancipation (= active participation in society)



WESTERN ARMENIAN MODERNITY (1850-1922)

- Elements of modernity coming from the Early Modern period

+

- Imposition of Modern Armenian over Classical Armenian as medium of expression of the society

=

Western Armenian literature



EVOLUTION OF WESTERN ARMENIAN LITERATURE (1850-1922)

- 1850-1880: Awakening of national awareness
- 1880-1908: Social and political criticism within the limits of censorship (Abdul Hamid II's reign). Limited patriotic production ("realism").
- 1908-1915, 1919-1922: Efforts towards a literary movement. The "Azadamard" generation. "Mehyan."



LITERARY CURRENTS

- Romanticism (Վիպասպաշտութիւն / *Vibabashdutiun*) (ca. 1850-1880)
- Realist school (Իրասպաշտ դպրոց / *Irabashd tbrots*) (ca. 1880-1900)
- Estheticist movement (Գեղասպաշտ շարժում / *Keghabashd sharjoum*) (ca. 1900-1922)



ROMANTIC AUTHORS

- Megerdich Beshigtashlian (1828-1868)
- Bedros Tourian (1851-1872)
- Serpouhi Dussape (1840-1901)



ROMANTICS: SOME FEATURES

- Breakup with the past
- Development of journalism and language
- Personal feelings
- Lyricism
- Introduction of patriotic subjects



MEGERDICH BESHIGTASHLIAN (1828-1868)

- Author of 60 poems in Classical and Modern Armenian (posthumously published)
- Founder of Western Armenian theater on a permanent basis
- Love and patriotic poetry
- Studied with Mekhitarists in Italy, influenced by Italian liberation movement.
- Victim of tuberculosis



BEDROS TOURIAN (1851-1872)

- He wrote poems and plays between 1867-1871 (posthumously published).
- Plays in Classical and Modern Armenian, mostly with historical themes.
- Poetry in Modern Armenian: love, illness, death. Died in poverty, of tuberculosis.



SERPOUHI (VAHANIAN) DUSSAPE (1842-1901)

- She had been French-educated; she learned Armenian with Megerdich Beshigtashlian. Love story.
- Late romantic.
- Author of three feminist novels: *Maida* (1883), *Siranush* (1884), *Araxia* (1887). The genre was still in its infancy at the time.



REALISTS

- Hagop Baronian (1843-1891)
- Arpiar Arpiarian (1852-1907)
- Krikor Zohrab (1861-1915)
- Dikran Gamsaragan (1866-1940)
- Levon Pashalian (1868-1941)
- Yerukhan (1870-1915)



REALISTS: SOME FEATURES

- Literary profile of Western Armenian language
- *Nouvelle* and chronicle
- A concept of “collective” literature
- Criticism of negative values
- Satire
- Journalism as public service



HAGOP BARONIAN (1843-1891)

- Transition period to realism
- The greatest Armenian satirist
- Editor of various periodicals (some of them closed by censorship)
- Most important works: *Perils of Politeness*, *Honorable Beggars* (both translated into English)
- Acute social and political criticism
- Very popular until today



ARPIAR ARPIARIAN (1852-1907)

- Head of the realist movement (became a “school”).
- Wrote short stories and novels.
- His most important work is the short novel *The Red Coin* (Կարմիր ժամուց, 1903).
- Political activist; he was killed by political opponents.



KRIKOR ZOHRAV (1861-1915)

- “The prince of the *nouvelle*” (short novel).
- His motto: “Life as It Is” (Կեանքը ինչպէս որ է), title of one of his books of short stories. Another important collection: *Voice of Consciousness*.
- Lawyer and Ottoman Parliament deputy. Exiled and killed in the Armenian Genocide.



KRIKOR ZOHRAV, “THE OBLIGATION” (ca. 1910)

- «Մեւ կաշիէ մեծկակ պայուսակ մըն էր, զոր առտու իրիկուն իր ձեռքը բռնած կերթար փողոցներէն: Իր կեանքէն անբաժան ընկերն էր այս տոկուն կաշիէ պարկը, որով ամէն իրիկուն իր տան պիտոյքը, հացն ու միսը կը տանէր, կամ պտուղը իր երկու փոքրիկ զաւակներուն, որոնք դրան առջեւէն կը բոլորուէին խոստմնալից ու խոստմնապահ այդ պայուսակին շուրջը»
- “Day or night, wherever he went, he carried this black leather bag on his hand, his inseparable companion in which he put the household purchases he made, bread and meat and fruit, for his two children who waited for their father every evening and gathered around the bag in anticipation of the treasures it would yield” (translated by Jack Antreassian).



DIKRAN GAMSARAGAN (1866-1940) , LEVON PASHALIAN (1868-1941), YERUKHAN (1870-1915)

- Gamsaragan: Novel *The Daughter of the Teacher* (1888).
- Pashalian: Short stories essentially published before 1900.
- Yerukhan: Novel *The Daughter of the Amira* (1910) and short stories collection, *In Life* (1912). Victim of the Genocide.



ESTHETICISTS

- Levon Shant (1869-1951)
- Yervant Odian (1869-1926)
- Rupen Zartarian (1874-1915)
- Siamanto (1878-1915)
- Zabel Yesayan (1878-1943)
- Vahan Tekeyan (1878-1945)
- Hagop Oshagan (1883-1948)
- Taniel Varoujan (1884-1915)
- Misak Medzarentz (1886-1908)

ESTHETICISTS: SOME FEATURES

- Poetry becomes art.
- Revolutionary vision
- “Provincial” literature
- Development of style and concepts (psychological analysis)



LEVON SHANT (1869-1951)

- The essential playwright
- Political theater: *The Egoist* (1902).
- Historical subjects: *Ancient Gods* (1908), *The Emperor* (1914), *The Princess of the Conquered Castle* (1921).
- Educator, political activist.



YERVANT ODIAN (1869-1926)

- Most important satirist after Hagop Baronian
- Post-realist. Social and political criticism.
- Produced many *feuilletons* (novels in installments), written for day-to-day.
- Most celebrated works: *Twelve Years Outside Constantinople* (memoir, 1922), *Comrade Panchoonie* (satire, 1911, 1914, 1924), *Accursed Years* (genocide memoir, 1919).
- Genocide survivor



RUPEN ZARTARIAN (1874-1915)

- Prose poetry and short stories: *Night Clarity* (1910).
- Teacher, political activist, and editor.
- Victim of the Genocide.



SIAMANTO (1878-1915)

- Most famous for his depiction of massacres, suffering, and liberation movement in his poetry: *Heroically* (1902), *Armenians* (1905-1908, three books), *Bloody News from My Friend* (1909)
- Also authored a famous poem, *Surp Mesrob* (1912).
- Victim of the Genocide.



ZABEL YESSAYAN (1878-1943)

- The “great lady of Armenian literature.”
- *Among the Ruins* (1911), a masterpiece on the massacre of Adana.
- *The Gardens of Silihdar* (1935), a masterful childhood memory.
- Novelist: *My Soul Exiled* (1922).
- Died during the Stalinist purges.



VAHAN TEKEYAN (1878-1945)

- The “prince of Armenian poetry.”
- Love, personal feelings, patriotism.
- Preoccupation for style.
- His most famous books: *Miraculous resurrection* (1914), *From Midnight to Dawn* (1919), *Love* (1933).
- Political activist and editor.



VAHAN TEKEYAN, “YOUR NAME” (Fragment)

Ինչո՞ւ անունըդ այստեղ չըկարենամ գրրել ես
Եւ աշխարհի չըյայտնեմ թե՛ քեզ ինչպե՛ս սիրեցի...
Երկու վանկե՛րը անոր ես կը գուրցեմ գաղտնապէս,
Եւ ան ամբողջ կը թըլի սիրոյ մատեա՛ն մը ինձի...
Ինչո՞ւ անունըդ այստեղ չըկարենամ գրրել ես...:

Հիմա, հեռո՛ւ իրարմե՛ միայն անո՛ւնըդ ունիմ
Բերնիս վրայ, համբոյրի մը պէս աննիւթ եւ անոյշ.
Գիշեր ատեն, սենեակիս մենութեան մէջ մըտերիմ,
Եւ զայն կըսեմ եւ ահա՛ քեզ կը տեսնեմ քաղրայուշ.
Հիմա հեռու իրարմե՛ միայն անո՛ւնըդ ունիմ...:



VAHAN TEKEYAN, “YOUR NAME” (Fragment)

Why can't I write your name across this page
announcing my love to all the world?
Pronouncing its two syllables under my breath
I breathe in a book of love but can't exhale
that breath and write your name.

Now, far apart, your name is all that's left,
upon my mouth a benediction and a kiss.
At night I hold its sweet taste on my lips
and see you as you used to be.
Now, far apart, your name is all that's left.

(translated by Diana Der Hovannesian and Marzbed Margossian)



HAGOP OSHAGAN (1883-1948)

- The essential critic: *Panorama of Western Armenian Literature* (1945-1982, 10 volumes)
- Short story and massive novels: *The Remnants* (1932-1933).
- “Mehyan” group.
- The concept of the Catastrophe.
- Survivor of the genocide



TANIEL VAROUJAN (1884-1915)

- The greatest poet pre-1915
- Educated in Venice (Mekhitarists) and Ghent (Belgium), which impacted on his poetry.
- Main works: *The Heart of the Race* (1909), *Pagan Songs* (1912), *The Song of the Bread* (posthumous, 1921).
- Victim of the genocide.



MISAK MEDZARENTZ (1886-1908)

- Most important name of Armenian symbolism
- Two volumes of poetry: *Rainbow* (1907) and *New Odes* (1907).
- Nature, love, humanism.
- Died of tuberculosis.

