

ARMIN THEOPHIL WEGNER : ARMENOPHILE

1886 - 1978

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Like a ball of fire, the heart of a comet in the heavens, the terrible news emanating from the mountains of Anatolia had reached our country and had fallen into the fountain of my heart. For a moment it hissed so that I burned with indignation and shame.... The ball of fire, the heart of the comet in the fountain of my heart, slowly had become petrified. But my heart preserved it, too, in its depths.

Armin T. Wegner, «Die Feuerkugel.»

1895. It was a very difficult year for the Armenians who lived in the Ottoman empire. The German emperor, who was assiduously courting the good graces of Sultan Abdul Hamid, did not at all seem to be disturbed by the massacres perpetrated under the rule of his newly won friend; neither did these Turkish affairs seem to matter much to the subjects of the emperor. Not much of the chilling truth ever reached the general German reading public — the imperial bureau of censorship in Berlin very efficiently saw to that.⁽¹⁾ In the final analysis, it probably did not matter much to the average newspaper reader of the empire; he reacted to far-away events still very much like his great-grandfathers had done. Their opinions we find beautifully expressed by Goethe's good citizens of *Faust I*. As they stroll through the countryside on Easter Sunday, they reflect:

Citizen: I know of no better way to pass my time on Sun- and holidays than discussing the news about battle cry and war, when far away, in the furthest corners of Turkey, all the different peoples clash.

Citizen: Yes, my dear fellow, I agree with you. Let them split their heads; let there be chaos and confusion — provided nothing changes here at home. (11. 860-871)

On one fine Sunday morning in 1895, however, the life of one little German boy was shaken by the abysmal heart of darkness that opened up before his soul. He had read an account of the horror emanating from the remotest corners of Turkey. Somehow it had passed the censor's scrutiny. Many years after the experience, the now aged man recalled his shock: «As the nightmare face of a giant — perhaps it was the face of God Himself — who, moving his thumb over the earth, scrapes together on the mountain slopes of Asia Minor the tears and spilt blood of mankind, in like manner there arose from the newspaper account the image of horror before the eyes of the Prussian school boy.»⁽²⁾ It proved to be an experience that shaped the long life of Armin Theophil Wegner.

Wegner? A name fresh in the memory of Armenians everywhere — a name very much forgotten in his own country. That, of course, was not always so. In the 1920s and 1930s, Wegner was numbered among the leading expressionistic poets of Germany; his accounts of the various journeys he made and published under different pseudonyms — Omer Tarik, Marco Polo, Franz Faber, Johannes Selbdritt, Signor Setti Venti, Gefangener einer goldenen Muschel, to mention a few — were very popular with the German readers of journals and travel books and later with the listeners to the wireless. It was the German novelist Thomas Mann who recommended Wegner for the literary prize of the German Academy in Berlin, an honour which he received in 1926.⁽³⁾

The work of Wegner the artist was appreciated; the work of Wegner the moralist often offended, for he could never separate his commitment to his art from his moral commitment to his fellow human being. The poet, always a dedicated humanist and pacifist, a leftist and a champion of the downtrodden of his world, was worried about the ominous signs of the times, and in April 1933 addressed his concerns in an open letter to Adolf Hitler, pleading with him for the fate of the Jews. As we know only too well, such appeals fell on deaf ears, but Wegner's forthrightness made him yet more suspect in the eyes of the authorities. When on May 10, 1933, the Nationalistic German Union of Students purified the German national spirit from the plague of all dissenting thought, the works of Wegner burnt along with those of Brecht, the brothers Mann, Zweig, Werfel, and many, many more. Wegner was subsequently arrested and started his journey as prisoner that took him through seven jails and three concentration camps. As far as his

artistic career in Germany was concerned, he was dead. At the end of the war, it was not surprising to see his name appear next to that of Franz Werfel on the memorial plaque with which the First German Literary Congress in October 1947 honoured the German writers that had fallen victim to the war.

In body, Wegner had survived the war; his health and creative spirit were broken. The plaque, after all, had not been all that wrong. The war had cost him his first marriage; Wegner felt that he could not join his wife, the writer Lola Landau, in Jerusalem. Instead, he found refuge in Italy; there he also founded a new family with the artist Irene Kowaliska. Exile was difficult; it was not always easy to keep body and soul together; and most important, it probably was the torture chambers in the concentration camps that had killed his ability to create. He continued to write but kept rewriting old things; any new undertaking remained fragmentary. His was the bitter lot of the exile. In Italy, he always remained a stranger; and the few trips back to Germany to work for broadcasting and to receive belated honours underline the fact that there, too, he had become alienated: from his country, his friends, his language.

The world slowly came to realise that Wegner was still alive and that he deserved to be recognised. In 1965, Wegner had been asked by Armenian friends to commemorate together with them the events that had taken place fifty years before in Turkey, and Wegner wrote the essay «Pari Lues». In it, he not only recalls the tragedy but celebrates the «eternal rebirth» which the Armenians were now able to experience in their republic.⁽⁴⁾ His hometown Wuppertal honoured him on his 75th birthday by opening the «Wegner Gedenk-Zimmer» as archive and in 1971 presented him with the Eduard-von-der-Heydt-Award. In 1956, the government in Bonn bestowed on him one of the highest awards of the German Federal Republic. Then, in 1972, the Goethe Institute in New York invited him for a lecture tour to various American universities and honoured him and his wife with a reception; he was similarly honoured by the German embassy in Rome on this 90th birthday. In 1971, Wegner had agreed with the Schiller-Nationalmuseum in Marbach that all his manuscripts and letters should find a home in the Archive for Modern German Literature; this was certainly not a mean recognition of the artist. Unfortunately, the Festschrift that had been planned to celebrate his 90th birthday came to naught.

Throughout his life, his two great passions were the fight for justice for the Jews and the Armenians. Therefore, to be invited by the government in Jerusalem in the summer of 1968 to plant a tree in the Forest of the Just and to become a member of the Yad Vashem — and to be invited in the same year by Catholicos Vazken I to Echmiadzin to receive there the order of St. Gregory, the highest Armenian distinction, were the crowning events in Wegner's life.

In many ways, Wegner's family background had prepared him well for his great passions. The Wegners could trace their ancestors back to the crusaders, to several medieval Templars who had gone to Palestine to take care there of the sick and wounded. Wegner's own father, a strict disciplinarian and Prussian official in constant conflict with his son, was a modern crusader of progress who had himself participated as supervisor in the construction of Bismarck's famous Baghdad railroad. Marie Appolonia Will, Wegner's mother, a sensitive and loving woman, came from a family of rich Hanseatic merchants. From her, a dedicated fighter for women's rights, Wegner had inherited his devotion to social justice, human rights, and pacifism. These, of course, were not virtues praised and disseminated in the Prussian schools in which the young Wegner was an absolute failure. The youth, instead, found his ideas strengthened by his true teachers: Shakespeare, Goethe, Tolstoi, Laotse, Whitman.

Therefore, it is not surprising that Wegner dropped out from school to seek satisfaction in the life of a farmer; he found himself even more isolated than before. He did, eventually, return to school, gathered experience on extended journeys, wrote both prose and poetry, attended Max Reinhardt's acting school, and in 1913 received his doctor degree in law from the University of Breslau for his dissertation dealing with the legal aspects of workers' strikes.

Like many a Byronic Child Harold before and after him, Wegner experienced a decisive moment of his life while visiting a famous battlefield. Amidst the wounded and dead of Tannenberg, Wegner made a vow to a dead Russian whose hand grew like a memento mori out of his shallow grave: «I shook his hand and said: 'I will always think of you' — and joined the Red Cross.»

After four weeks of training as male nurse with the Red Cross, he was assigned as volunteer to the Eastern Front but was sent home after serving there for a mere six months. Although he had distinguished himself and had been awarded the Iron Cross for bravery, he was dismissed from his position; it seems that his superiors did not appreciate his lack of enthusiasm for the glories to be won on the battlefield and statements like: «Do you think that I am betraying the land of my fathers in order to be able to love the heart of France?» — sentiments which he expressed openly to them and in letters that very much sounded like treason to his military superiors. As punishment for such subversive thought, he was threatened with the possibility of being drafted as soldier into the German army but was saved by a recommendation to Fieldmarshal von der Goltz who appointed Wegner to assist his own personal physician. In this manner Wegner found himself assigned as member of the German division of the Turkish health corps and was stationed in Baghdad.

Unlike most of the German intellectuals of his generation, Wegner, the pacifist, had not welcomed the war. He had heard Bertha von Suttner, the Nobel Prize winner for peace, talk about the horrors of the Balkan Wars; and he himself had experienced «the trenches of Death in Poland» — yet all this had not prepared him for what he was to see in the Syrian desert. His own struggle with typhoid, the flagrant denial by the Turks of the crimes perpetrated by their compatriots and government, the insensitivity of his fellow German soldiers to the Armenian suffering around them, man's inhumanity to man and his fellow creatures — all these experiences became the crucible in which his life and art were transformed and through which they assumed a new purpose and dimension.

Wegner, the artist with a moral commitment, could not stand aside and reflect coolly on what was happening around him; he was always the engaged artist for whom it mattered more to fight personally on a practical level for justice and his suffering fellow man than to create a perfect piece of art. His immediate German superiors — his patron von der Goltz had died of typhoid — were disgusted with his activities, while the Turkish authorities were outraged by Wegner's attitude towards the Armenians in the death camps, people whom he was not supposed to see. He visited the camps, an offence which could be punished with instant execution; he took photographs, another mortal sin; he smuggled letters out of the camps; and during his leave he tried to approach the ministry of war in Berlin, but with very little success. In May 1916, while convalescing from a renewed attack of typhoid, Wegner was recalled from his duties. On his journey to Istanbul, he was incarcerated by the German military police to appease the Turkish authorities who had noticed and vehemently objected to Wegner's sympathy for the Armenians. Back in Berlin, Wegner was fortunate not to be sent to another war front; he was appointed editor of *Der neue Orient*, a periodical published by the German foreign office, and later to *Der Osten*, a journal dedicated to promoting the unity and understanding among peoples.

The suffering of the Armenian people that he had seen in the cities and camps and deserts of the Orient haunted him, and we have to admire the courage of this man who followed his conscience and spoke out. Through public addresses in which he also showed the forbidden pictures he had taken of the Armenians in the death camps, he tried to awaken the conscience of the German public. We do not know how many slumbering still small voices he jolted; however, he did bother many a Turkophile who physically interrupted Wegner's presentations and beat up the speaker.

In 1919 when the leading countries of the world pondered over the fate of nations in the Peace Conference of Paris, Wegner addressed President Woodrow Wilson and the general public of the West in an open letter to the American president in behalf of the Armenians. Wegner himself regarded this letter as a personal pledge of honour he had made to all the

dead «whose bones cover the deserts along the Euphrates» and whose spokesman, he felt, he had become. After recalling the tortures and massacres, he pleads for positive resolutions to benefit the survivors of the genocide that they may live in peace and quiet in their own country. Wegner's rousing plea did not influence the conscience of the assembled great, and the hopes of the Armenians and their advocate were betrayed. Again in 1922, Wegner raised his voice and renewed his call since «from the mountains of Asia Minor we hear anew the voice of horror.» This apparently was not the case with the peacemakers assembled at Lausanne who did nothing to stop the fury of the National Turks and did not listen to Wegner's «Schrei vom Ararat», his appeal to the victorious nations in which he accuses the powerful nations of the West of selfishness and jealousy, of lying when they promised help, as in the case of France, to weak and powerless nations while all along supplying Turkey with weapons.

On March 15, 1921, a young insignificant Armenian student, Soghomon Tehlirian, who had lost his whole family during the massacres of 1915-6, took justice in his own hands and shot the former Turkish minister of the interior who after WWI was living as exile in Berlin. Talaat, one of the organisers of the Armenian genocide, had in 1919 been condemned to death in absentia by a military court in Istanbul. The German court, in turn, declared the victim of the murderer, Talaat, guilty; «not the murderer, but the murdered man is guilty!» as Wegner put it in the preface to the published court proceedings that he as witness against Talaat had been asked to write. And once more he tried to arouse German sympathy for the massacred Armenians, for «the terrible suffering of a decimated people, who are arising from their graves lifting their decaying hands accusingly against the horrors of war and the cruelty of their executioner, raising their voice once more to declare before the tribunal of this court of law their great suffering.»⁽⁵⁾

Wegner had seen Talaat twice in his life as he recalls in the unpublished fragment «Gutes und Böses — Todesfugen». The first time was in Istanbul during the funeral of a foreign dignitary; the second time was in Berlin in a mosque during the Beiram feast. Wegner, who attended the ceremony of the slaughter of the sacrificial lambs, stood behind the kneeling and praying former Turkish politician. To Wegner, there was something touching in the humble position of the praying man which made the observer shudder for he read on the soles of Talaat's feet «indescribable remorse and humility... the expression of a haunted man, fleeing from Death.» A little later, Wegner muses with sympathy about what Talaat must have felt on his last walk in the streets of Berlin, listening to the approaching «light and swift steps of the angel avenging the crimes committed against a whole people that must have made his innermost self shake with long anticipated fear.» More than likely, the historical Talaat was innocent of such feelings.

That day in the court room in Berlin when the avenger was found to be not guilty, the countless dead of the Syrian desert again arose for the poet. He had once seen them pass before him in his mind. Then, recalling the pose of a Walther von der Vogelweide or the moral poets of the eighteenth century, Wegner surveyed from a stony hill the allegorical procession of suffering mankind: «As I sat on a mound of death / At the edge of the wasteland where the river / Flowed as in a dream — it so happened / That from the mountains came foaming a torrent of mankind.» Very soon it becomes clear to him that this mass of people, «a procession without end,» is driven on by a merciless enemy, «persecuted by a callous band of tormentors / With taunting claws of vultures and piercing shrieks of a pack of rabble,» and that these unfortunate ones in the foreground are the Armenians Wegner had seen on the death marches in 1916 around Meskene close to the Euphrates. As they come closer and closer, the poet's horror intensifies: «the barrenness of the mountains, where they / Threw themselves singing, into the puddles of yellow marshes / From the fountains that vomited their blood — / And the desert reeked with stench.»

The stench of human misery in the Syrian desert seems to overwhelm the poet on the hill of death, and in a nightmarish vision he realises that these harrowed Armenian men and women are the emblem of all mankind: «I saw, overcome by scourges and guilt, / Through the aged and vaulted house of time / The trek of man from the beginning.»⁽⁶⁾ Not much has changed through the centuries: history is composed of one vast chain of hatred, murder, vengeance, and destruction. Not even the poet's hill of death can stop the surge of evil — yet the saving grace of this poem «Die Austreibung der Menschheit» («The Expulsion of Mankind»), is the compassion of the persona for the poor victims, even though he as visionary realises more so than they the whole horror of their, of man's, fallen condition.

Even a sensitive soul like Wegner's can get numbed to human misery, and the poet often asks himself: «Which type of misfortune can, after so many months in the face of misery and suffering, still fill this estranged soul with horror?» He sees that the people of Tschanakale, like the inhabitants of so many other villages, have gone, have left their houses, have cruelly abandoned their animals, their cats, have left «their own souls behind, so that in the ruins of their houses thousands dreadfully bemoan their fate.» Full of compassion the poet understands «the unspeakable sorrow that filled the soul of these little animals... abandoned to fear, to cold, and to the bitterness of a creeping death.»⁽⁷⁾

This same misery the poet sees on the human level; from such a fate Wegner wanted to save the little boy Manuel whom he met blowing on the horn of a cow as he jumped happily between the crowds of the starving and the sick and the dying. Wegner liked the open face of the boy and wanted to adopt him and take him back to Germany. For once bribery did not work

in Turkey, neither on the lowest nor the highest levels, and Wegner all along knew quite well that his little friend would die in the desert, would become another white skull on the road to nothingness.⁽⁸⁾

It had never been Wegner's way to distance himself in the Wordsworthian manner from his experiences and recollect them in tranquillity; his method was to write in a most engaged manner to the moment. This happens also in the four Turkish tales.⁽⁹⁾ Two of them depict the Armenian suffering; they, in turn, are balanced with two that show the fate of Turks caught up in the turmoil of war. Together the four tales plunge the reader into the gore and senselessness of hatred and the battlefield. The tales tell not only of the persecuted Armenians but also show the fate of the simple Turks, who, like their Christian victims, are caught up and broken on the torture wheel of war. That not only the Armenians were its victims was one of Wegner's concerns, and he frequently emphasised the necessity that the four tales should always be published together. Wegner based the first three short novels on events that he himself experienced or had heard about when he was in Turkey; the fourth, «Der Sturm auf das Frauenbad», recalls the massacres of Erzerum about which he had read in the newspaper on that Sunday morning when he was a little boy. He later researched these gruesome events in the archives of the German embassy in Istanbul.

Whether Turk or Armenian, all of mankind is caught up in the vast and senseless and destructive web of war. The young Turkish boy of «Der Knabe Hussein» gets his education in the embraces of his superior officer and in the trenches of the battlefields of the Dardanelles where he perfects himself in the art of stealing from and killing of British and Indian soldiers till he gets severely wounded, is returned to the lover whom he has abandoned, and on his recovery becomes a regular member of the Turkish army. In the next tale, «Osman», the young peasant from Anatolia is thrown into a war he cannot understand and that robs him of everything that matters to him: his farm, his family, his limbs. The other two stories deal with Armenian subjects.

«Der Bankier» takes us to the starving Baghdad of 1917. Onigk Karribian has been tricked by the Turkish authorities into a trap. There he is captured, then taken to prison, interrogated, and on the following day hanged. After they have searched his office, the suspicions of the police are confirmed. Karribian is an Armenian revolutionary and spy who has been passing Turkish military secrets to the enemy. The police have found the blotting paper with which he dried the ink on the dispatches he sent in code on the bills of lading to his business partner in Teheran who is a fellow conspirator. As Karribian paces up and down in his cell and listens to the beating of his heart, Wegner recalls the banker's life for us.

Karribian is not a person for whom the reader can find much sympathy or compassion; rather, one can quite understand the anger of the

good Muslim citizens of Baghdad through whose lines he will have to run the gauntlet to the gallows. They curse him, spit on him, beat and kick him. He has never shown any compassion for the people of his city; he has always been very clever and has known their weaknesses; he used his knowledge, became very rich at their expense; he was the cause of their misery and hunger. Of course, there are reasons for this hatred, yet in the case of the banker Onigk we are uncomfortably close to the picture of the stereotyped ugly Armenian that the travellers to the East of the 19th century portrayed. The reasons that Wegner gives to explain the character and behaviour of this Armenian banker are also stereotyped and do not redeem his character.

Life for the Karribians in the poorer quarters of Baghdad was difficult; the father, a very industrious tailor, was poor; still, he was accused by the rabble of the street of having hidden treasures of gold. The younger Karribian got his education for life by watching his father's diligence and doing so, he himself became cunning and sly. Then he perfected his education during his apprenticeship in a bank in Teheran where he learnt about money, the French language, and how to deal with officials.

The events of 1899 finally reminded him of his Armenianness. His father was attacked on the street, the mob poured kerosine over his beard and clothing and lit him with a match. The enthusiastic cry of one of the bystanders — «Just look how he is burning, the swine... like a beautiful torch!» — was to haunt the son all his life. Eventually Karribian joins the revolutionary group called «The bell is ringing». Karribian in his cell can still remember the «long conversations with the rabble-rousers around the long narrow tables in the coffee house.» When he returned to Baghdad, the family had been impoverished, and he was now the head of the whole clan. His position as Armenian in Baghdad was demeaning, and his dignity was hurt. The contempt with which the Turkish authorities treated him, the terrible suffering that his family had experienced, all these filled him with shame and an overpowering desire to pay back all the injustice he and his family had suffered.

The only way to get even was to amass riches, for he realised the importance of «Power! Power! Was there another way to make people do your bidding than riches?» Consequently the young Karribian set out to become another Shylock and in the process became respectable in the community and a great philanthropist, and a good husband and father as well. He did attain his goal and became the richest citizen of Baghdad, even though it was not in the most refined manner: his money came from his trade in the refuse of the street dogs of Baghdad which British glove manufacturers deemed so essential in the tanning of the hides they needed. Karribian had gained power, but in his «innermost heart dwelt hatred, like provisions that have been set aside in a store room to which the door has been locked and for which the key has not been lost.»

His hatred leads him to spying, and together with a group of Jewish bankers he speculates with the currency of the country. Through these activities, he becomes unbelievably rich and the country bankrupt. We meet this conniving and totally debased Armenian Shylock again and again in the accounts of the travellers and armchair travellers. Karribian may have been misguided, but he was guided in all his activities by his devotion to a cause as he tells his family in his last will and testament: «Long live Armenia! Long live Liberty! You better believe in the final victory of our people; then you will never be unhappy again!» The cause is grand; for his part, Karribian does nothing to elevate it.

The money and the power that came to him through corruption and the sale of dung and his deep-seated hatred can bring redemption neither to him nor to his people, and the only consolation he can take with him to the gallows is given to him in his last dream, in the vision of the vast Armenian graveyard in which are buried the victims of past and future massacres and in which a coffin and a grave will be provided for him too. «Vive l'Armenie! ...Arise! Liberty is risen!» the corpses of the tortured and massacred Armenians cry.

The reader can only wish that Karribian's mother and Wegner had not respected the second clause in the dead man's will: that the family should assemble once more for a common meal with the corpse presiding.

In the second of his Armenian tales, Wegner returns with us to the past, to October 30, 1895, to be precise, the day when more than three hundred and fifty Armenians were brutally murdered in Erzeroom, a day that began a wave of massacres. «Three times the piercing call of a trumpet coming from the top of the minaret wounded the pure air» — in this manner the massacres under Sultan Abdul Hamid opened each day — and Wegner has dropped us in the midst of Hell. He spares us very few of the outrages that have been done «in the name of the Padishah! Death or Islam!» We see an old bishop as half of his face is suddenly torn off. In another corner of the town, a group of Turks are playing football with the chopped off heads of Armenians, while in the public bath the women and children of these helpless victims are raped and murdered. And so Wegner piles horror upon horror.

In all this carnage, there is one single ray of hope. The dandified son of the fiendish vali who rules over this hell and surrounds himself with sadistic delights that make those of Delacroix's *Death of Sardanapal* seem to be entertainment for children, this young man Lutfi loves the Armenian widow Sirpuhi and rescues her from rape and death in the bath. They escape together to start far away from Erzeroom a new life. In a very lyrical and beautiful passage, Wegner describes their love for each other:

*And the wind hurled himself from the heights of the mountains;
he was hot with the fragrances of spring. Like an unbridled horse,*

he galloped over the barren steppes, the mountains, the edge of the pit in which the lovers lay, clinging to each other like two sweet almonds in their shell — over the wall of burnt-out cities, the desert, the night; over the lovely house of the earth in which the dead live and which is the chamber of all lovers.

True, Thanatos and Eros from time immemorial have been considered to be twins, but the sensual love, and we do see no other, between these two, passionate on Lutfi's part and numbed and dumb on hers, cannot be strong enough to undo the murder of a whole people. The resolution of the tale is simply too lush and innocent. Wegner the expressionistic poet uses the metaphors of his school of poetics, and these delight in tortured contrast and shocking pictures, and they appealed to the taste of the reader of the early part of our century. It may be very commendable that Wegner ends this tale true to his humanistic and pacifistic philosophy of life — it was the wishful thinking of a good man — an unrealisable hope, nevertheless, as the subsequent genocide that Wegner had witnessed before he wrote the tale had already borne out.⁽¹⁰⁾

Wegner, always fond of travel, gladly accepted the invitation by the Young Soviet Union extended to a group of German writers to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the October Revolution. He recorded his impressions of this journey in *Fünf Finger über Dir*.⁽¹¹⁾ It proved to be a controversial book in its time, even though by 1933 it had gone through more than forty editions, many reviewers remained hostile. Some felt that the book was too positive as far as the history and institutions of the young Soviet Republic were concerned; others thought it was too critical. Many Armenian readers of the book shared the opinions of this latter group and did not at all appreciate Wegner's critical evaluation and reporting of what he had seen and heard in the new Republic of Armenia. Especially the passage in which Wegner reports with great compassion about the ragged young street girls hiding from the cold of winter under the scaffolding in front of the cathedral of Erevan aroused Armenian ire. «With their unkempt and slatternly hair and their ragged clothing, they reminded me of the refugee children I had seen in the desert,» Wegner wrote and continued that «like a family of monkeys they had crouched close together into a warren hole, busily chatting.» Wegner realised that the dirt and brutishness on the face of the oldest girl hid beautiful features that «glowed with a deep and wonderful sense of humanity.» His admiration for them grew when he was told that these poor children were no better than prostitutes.

As is only proper for a pilgrim to Armenia, Wegner paid a visit to Echmiadzin. What had he come to? «The snow-covered yard of the monastery. The medieval buildings constructed of stone with so many doors locking the cells. Is it a prison or a fortification?» The single old monk who broke the desolation, hobbling like an ancient crow across the yard, merely

intensified the desolation as did Wegner's cheerless audience with the *Pravda*-reading catholicos who wanted to have his patriarchal hand kissed. The audience took place on December 17, 1927, and His Holiness was Kevork V Soorenian.

It really did not matter to Wegner that Echmiadzin seemed to be dead; there was Erevan, the new centre, to which Wegner declares his love. It is a town teeming with life, with «the wonderful untameable power of a people almost completely rooted out» but that is sprouting again with new life:

Snow, heat, death, sickness, and poverty have descended upon this city, but untroubled by these past calamities, the town amidst the ruins is blooming again like a rose on a rubbish heap, a flower that whispers defiantly with its pale lips: 'How beautiful, how painful this life is! But look and see oh life is fond of me again. And I will be master of my fate again!'

Many years later, Wegner was to repeat his visit to Echmiadzin upon the invitation by Catholicos Vazken I Baljian in 1968 to be honoured for his work in behalf of the Armenians. The catholicos encouraged Wegner to continue his writing dealing with his Armenian experiences and even supported the poet financially for a while to be able to devote himself to his Armenian epic, an undertaking on which he had worked for a great part of his life but which he never finished. Wegner was very much impressed by Catholicos Vazken.

Back in Rome, the 82-year-old artist returned with renewed vigor to his Armenian material. Soon he came to realise that his attitude had very much changed during the past decades. While visiting a subterranean church at the foot of Mt. Ararat during his second visit to Armenia, the completed work had appeared to him as a vision, he was to recall in the essay «In-schrift in der Felsenkirche am Fusse des Ararat: Tiran. Das Gesicht am Himmel.» The epic was to be «not in the form of the lengthy tale as I had first planned, but in the form of songs following modern yet also ancient patterns, very much in the form of the roundelay of a legend.» This new poem he called «Das armenische Totenlied,» a poem he conceived of in different pictures that in his mind made up the twelve panels of one huge altar that would show the martyrdom of the Armenians. This altar was to be huge since the suffering to be shown was overwhelming; yet the poet was both physically and emotionally exhausted for such an undertaking. Therefore, like so much else in his life, «The Armenian Song of Death» remains an unpublished fragment hidden away in the basement of the Archive at Marbach.⁽¹²⁾

From the very beginning of the composition of the poem, Wegner wrestled with problems for which he had no answers: «Where to begin and where to end? Is it possible to put into words everything you have seen and heard? Whose fault is it? That of the Turks? The Armenians?... Of Time?

Eternity? Of man or God? Are my own actions just or unjust?» Then he, the old vates, despite all his doubting, again raises his voice to awaken all peoples from their sleep:

*No matter who you are, you are a human being to whom these words
are addressed;
No matter where you dwell and to which nation you belong....
Stand still for a moment and listen. For you are listening to
The song of Mother Armenia; its strains coming from
The slopes of the Caucasus Mountains are encircling the whole world
When she cries for her children.*

On the First Icon, Mother Armenia cries for all her children that found their death in the desert. In the foreground lies the body of the emaciated boy that Wegner had seen so often on the roadsides of Mesopotamia, «his feet, heavier than stones, two clubs /Attached to emaciated legs; his belly, an inflated sack.» The river flows past him a few paces away, but he is too weak to reach it, and the tears that have quenched his thirst have long dried up.

As the boy Mihran on the Second Icon awaits his death, he recalls the execution of his father. Were he still alive and with his son, «you would lift up your son /In your strong hands and would carry him to the banks of the river.» But the monster at the heart of the city and the whole empire, the gallows, has devoured him. Mihran recalls how, in a moment of generosity, the executioners granted the condemned man his last wish: to be allowed to sing once more. «You sang of bravery and submission /To man's fate here on earth; /Of love and dedication to the people of Saint Gregory.» For one moment, the wicked town holds its breath and listens; reality returns and the hangmen do their job. «Your body wavered for one moment, /Stretched, grew long like the fruit of the carob tree, /Long enough, it seemed to me, to link heaven and earth; /A clock weight of eternity.» It was the first time the boy «had come face to face with Death /And had understood him not.»

Mihran's life is prolonged for a while; kind fellow outcasts have brought the boy a pitcher of water. In his memory, he returns to a happier past — the Third Icon — that is soon shattered by the ominous chalk writing on the wall of their house; it brands the family. Jealous Armenian neighbours have betrayed the fatherless family. Mihran remembers how his mother sold his baby sister for a few Turkish pounds to a respectable looking Turkish judge. It was better to do so than to keep the child; she would not have survived. Yet the poor mother is almost driven insane by the screams of her baby daughter.

Mihran recalls — the Fourth Icon — how he and his brother, now separated from their mother as well, are driven like a herd of animals through a Kurdish village. There, «nailed to the wooden door of the Armenian church

/Crucified like Jesus of Nazareth,» the Kurds have executed an Armenian bishop. As the new refugees arrive, the boys hear that the Muslim crowd will pardon an Armenian priest if he will call from the minaret the faithful Kurds to their prayer. When the clergyman looks down from the minaret on the forest of Kurdish bayonets, he is petrified by fear. Instead of calling for prayer, «he shook with hysterical laughter. /Fear had robbed him of his mind,» and his insanity sanctifies him to his tormentors.

Other events pass before Mihran's eyes. The next panels show how the Armenian boys and men are separated from the group and are driven away. One of the male survivors tells how they first had to shovel their graves and then were shot by the Kurds. These dead will soon be joined by a group of young girls. On the way to the desert, the girls had been invited by Kurdish women to take a bath; this was a trick and their clothes were stolen. The naked girls are led by a regal beauty, a true descendant of the legendary Queen Semiramis of Van. After a night's rest, she will lead her companions once more in their dance; this time over the cliff and into the waters of the Tigris. «A thorny rosary with which Eternity herself had bedecked her neck. /A moment later the river grew calm again. /Thereupon, close to Mihran's feet, a cricket began to chirp quietly.»

For Mihran and the rest of the camp, the dance of death continues to Mardin; some of them will commit suicide on the way to escape from a life without hope, but «very strangely, Mihran at that time /Felt no hatred for those... /Who had planned his early death, no compassion for them /Nor any pity for himself.» Whoever can still move is driven on to the gates of Aleppo to be confronted there with Talaat's infamous order that the goal of their trek through the desert is nothingness.

Was it the memory of the dying boy Mihran or the tired memory of Wegner who could not complete all the panels of the altar dedicated to the memory of the murdered Armenians? Can such a story be pressed into neat panels? Therefore, it is quite befitting the subject matter that the «Totenlied» remains a fragment.

Several «panel» essays feverishly ramble on about guilt and God's injustice, man's nastiness, and the role of the poet, the role of America; while others focus dramatically on an event or a point in time; for instance, there is the moment when the boys in the wilderness come across a bush of brambles. «Women who had been driven by as if they were animals had fastened on it pieces of cloth they had torn from their clothing /To be in touch with their friends and relatives who by chance might pass the same spot.» The boys search and search the cluttered bush till they find a piece of their mother's blouse. It was to be the last joyful moment in Mihran's short life.

A short life — that was not to be the fate of the other little boy in Wegner's writings, Atam. Wegner had introduced this young survivor of the

massacre of Zeitun and had intended him to become the hero of his ambitious Armenian novel, his vision of war and peace. What the reading public was to see of the project is the sketch «Der Knabe Atam» (1932). Like so much else in the artist's life, the task of writing his grandly conceived Armenian novel kept him occupied for a great part of his life without ever completing it. The novel, variously called «Die Austreibung» or «Flecken vor der Sonne», has remained an unpublished fragment. Wegner had started to do research and plan for this novel already during the 1920s; in 1932 while on a holiday in Italy, he tried to bring order into what was already a vast amount of manuscript pages and called the version he planned to complete «Die Austreibung». At the moment of his arrest in May 1933 by the SS, he was working on this manuscript. When the war was over, especially after the catholics and the Armenians at home and in the diaspora honoured him, he returned to his «Armenian novel».

By this time, he had become old and tired, and his outlook on life had changed; the amount of manuscript pages that needed weeding out had grown; Wegner the expressionistic poet and master of the striking image was at heart not a novelist and had set himself the wrong task. Wegner, of course, was aware of some of these problems. Often he urged himself: «Shorten, shorten, shorten — this is the main problem!» To no avail. He knew that his background as poet had ill prepared him to handle the complicated structural problems of the novel that Balzac and Tolstoi had handled with such ease. Perhaps he also felt betrayed by his friend Franz Werfel whose novel *Die vierzig Tage des Musa Dagh* had become such a great success. Wegner thought that his friend had stolen the subject matter from him. There was also a sense of betrayal on the part of the Armenians themselves, Wegner thought. They were simply too enthusiastic in their praise of Werfel's novel.⁽¹³⁾

It had been Wegner's intention to let the little boy Atam of the published fragment — the child who tenaciously clings to life, whose family background and childhood, as Wegner describes them, are endowed with strong overtones of myth and legend — grow up to be the leader of his people and the hero of the novel. However, the older Atam gets in the various parts of the manuscript, the further he grows away from his promising beginnings. The last we see of him is the dandified and somewhat dull young man who gives the spoilt children of the rich Armenian merchants of Mesereh German and piano lessons. His own political, social, and intellectual growth has stopped. Some sections of the fragment depict Atam being taught contemporary Armenian history; in others Armenian revolutionaries and Young Turks want to win him for their respective camps. Atam, however, will remain the outsider and does not get involved. He lacks the love and compassion or intensity that any commitment demands.

Neither does he understand nor merit the love of the beautiful and intelligent Esther Worperian who embodies the qualities of an Armenian Jeanne d'Arc and has always dreamt of becoming «herself a revolutionary... who did not want to give in to weakness and humility; she did not want to kneel before authority... but through her education and energy had wanted to become the heroine who liberated her people from bondage.»

«Die Austreibung» may fail as novel and Atam as hero may be disappointing; nevertheless, the many fragmentary parts of this work conceived on such a large scale will delight the social historian with the many detailed descriptions of what life was like during the last decades of the Ottoman empire. Of great interest are the parts that deal with the life of little Atam in the village; they are done with great care and love to detail and are reminiscent of the pictures the Pre-Raphaelites painted with such devotion of the boyhood of Christ.

In long passages, Wegner describes the life of orphaned Muslim and Christian children led in the well-known Schneller School at Jerusalem where Atam after the death of his family grows up and receives his education; other parts introduce us to the schools and the teachers, the merchants and their families, the prisons and other institutions of the Armenians in eastern Turkey; while still other parts depict the life of the Ottoman sultan and the advisors and women around him in the palaces of the capital of the empire.

Unfortunatly, Atam gets lost in this vast and varied world. Had his mother lived, she would be disappointed; she, who through her dreams, saw him already as saviour of his people. Through his family background, the youth is related to both the modern Ottoman and the old Armenian ruling houses. It never becomes clear why the novelist has endowed the boy with such a burdensome heritage. Atam's character is far too pale and insignificant to bring the opposing strains of his heritages together. Does this really matter since throughout the thousands of manuscript pages of the novel, Atam remains blissfully ignorant of the true extent of his family heritage? And so does his cousin, no other than Sultan Abdul Hamid. Fascinating possibilities open up, but they remain hints and blind alleys that are not developed. Nothing in the fragments is ever resolved, and plot lines and character development get overwhelmed by a vast amount of detailed vignettes and pictures of Armenian life in the nineteenth century. They are very interesting in themselves and present a very vivid picture of a forgotten world.

Many of these domestic pictures with the boy Atam at the centre are masterful. There are the situations that dramatise the enmity and tensions that have existed for a long time between the Armenians and the Muslim overlords; there are the genre pictures of the lives of the rough Zeitunlis in constant conflict with their neighbours. The children have always been forced to grow up quickly; that is especially true for Atam's generation. Wegner shows how Abdul Hamid's press gangs round up Armenians: the

school inspector comes to check that the priest does not teach Armenian to the children, and for once, the teacher and Atam cooperate in duping and bribing the Turkish dullard. The tax collector comes to the village, tricks the little boy Atam into telling him all the family secrets so that he knows enough to squeeze the last piastre out of the family. The wolves attack the houses and barns of the poor villagers during the long and cold winter nights. We see what it meant to grow up in those subterranean village houses in the bosom of the large patriarchal families that placed so many restrictions on the children and the women.

Large sections of the manuscript deal with the customs connected with Armenian family life, and Wegner bears out what the travellers of last century observed: the Armenians were a very superstitious people. Arcadian their life seems to have been from the perspective of the outside observer, but Wegner emphasises the shadows under which all Armenia lived: the constant threat of the Turk, the Kurd, the monster that lived in their imagination and supposedly in the bowels of Holy Ararat as well — and all the lesser monsters that are legion and have always threatened mankind. Atam, too, was born under these shadows as his gentle mother teaches him through the lore of her people. One of these days, the elemental spirit of Mt. Ararat will contort itself again and again; it will become «crazed with pain and will spew its black bile over us, the peoples of the Holy Mountain... so that we will attack each other like mad dogs; fight, devour, and kill each other.» There is no end to the monster's agony; nobody is safe from its venom and poison.

Distrust and hatred have become the legacy of the peoples of Holy Ararat. Egisabeth cannot believe that there are honest and godfearing Kurds left on earth although her son's life was once saved by a friendly Kurdish shepherd. Her own personal experience has taught her to hate and seek revenge. Her other child, a baby girl, was killed by a stone thrown by a vengeful Kurd at the mother. It hit the girl instead. Egisabeth has kept the stone, «and I have spent many nights awake as I sat at home and sharpened the stone on the threshold of the house to be able to sink it one day into the heart of the murderer of my child.» This honed stone the mother leaves as legacy to her son Atam. With this heirloom, the boy will kill his first man, a Turkish officer, during the siege of Zeitun.

Young Atam who kills his grown-up enemy like young David slew Goliath certainly is no ordinary youngster. All the signs and portents that surround his birth and childhood make that amply clear. There should be a high destiny awaiting this golden son of Egisabeth, who is herself of royal lineage that includes the kings «Erowant, Tigran, Kagik, Japhet,» and the legendary Armenian patriarchs «Armenah», a grandson of Haik and «Haik himself who was a grandson of Noah.» Not only the burden of the royal house of the Bagratides rests on Atam's feeble young shoulder; through one

of the kidnapped daughters of his ancestress Princess Neure, the dancer who beguiled the old sultan, little Atam has become the close blood relative of one of the greatest Armenophobes of all times: Sultan Abdul Hamid. The Lady Damad, the daughter of the sister of the Sultan's mother who was abducted along with her sister and thus is a cousin of Abdul Hamid, has tracked down this newly born hope of the Armenian side of her family and has sent her wise man to watch over this boy — but what was to be the significance of this relationship? The wise man is lost somewhere in the manuscript, and we hear no more of the Lady Damad who wants to direct the fate of her people from the royal harem since all her children are at their birth murdered by their own father, Sultan Abdul Hamid.

There remains the little boy Atam, the young Atam, of the published fragment,⁽¹⁴⁾ the young survivor of the people and the spirit of Zeitun, the true emblem of the tenacity of the Armenians throughout their sad history.

The whole family, Father Haigasun, Mother Egisabeth, her younger the burning town into the vineyards.

The vineyards presented a picture of great desolation; uprooted vine-trees, shoes, clothing covered the ground. Sometimes they came across the body of a dead peasant still tied to a vine-tree; the naked bodies of ravished women were gleaming pale in the grey light of the early dawn.

«This might also be our fate!» Egisabeth stared at the distorted faces of the dead.

The air was rent by the wild shrieks of the dying, but the ensuing quiet was doubly horrifying. When the new day dawned, these five human beings stopped on a cliff high above the river. They had come to the end of their road. Haigasun had used up his last bullet. The torrent roared deep beneath their feet. For a long time, the parents whispered with each other. Atam sat on a stone close to the edge of the cliff watching their faces, faces already frozen by death. The voices and shots of the hunters were coming closer and closer.

«Come quickly! This is it!» His father got up resolutely. Egisabeth knelt down to pray. Haigasun took his wife in his arms; then they kissed each other. Things like this the boy had never seen.

«You are first,» she said.

«In the name of the Illuminator!» shouted Haigasun. «Long live Zeitun!» Suddenly he jumped, waving his gun high in the air; he pulled up his legs and disappeared in the gorge. Atam could not understand what had happened. His mother turned to him.

«In the name of Christ!»

Her eyes were wide open, her face radiant. He hardly recognised her. Quietly she put her hand on his head.

«Atam, now you will proclaim God's word up there, little priest,» she said. She wanted to take him by the hand, but the boy clung to the earth and cried:

«I don't want to! I don't want to!»

Takuhi was still sitting on the ground next to him, her forehead cradled in her hand. The mother looked at her son, then turned to her sister.

«You take him.» Her face shone with certainty.

«It isn't all that bad. Don't you want to see paradise?»

Then she stepped up to the edge of the cliff, leading Daniel by the hand. The boy cried and tried to pull her back as he looked at his younger brother. Then both mother and son fell like heavy sacks into the deep. Takuhi had gotten up and tried to take Atam by the hand. Her beautiful eyes, now moist with tears of sorrow, made him think of an angel. «Come!» she pleaded with him. «Do you want them to murder you? You have to come!»

But the little boy was possessed with the lust for life. He flung himself flat on the ground and screamed and flailed with both arms and legs while Takuhi tried to catch him by the jacket. Again they could hear the voices of the Turkish soldiers, now so close by that Atam could make out their words. Takuhi could stand it no longer; she tore herself free and jumped into the empty air while for a moment the wind played with her clothes.

The voices retreated, the rocks rose against the sky, and the empty gorge yawned. Atam had remained behind — alone.

NOTES

1. For a discussion of the «Armenian Question» and the massacres in the contemporary German press, see Uwe Feigel, *Das evangelische Deutschland und Armenien* (Göttingen, 1989).
2. Armin T. Wegner, «Die Feuerkugel», *Fällst du, umarme auch die Erde; oder, Der Mann, der an das Wort glaubte* (Wuppertal, 1974), pp. 17-20.
3. Recently, several of the shorter works of Wegner have been published in yet other collections: *Am Kreuzweg der Welten* (Berlin, 1982); *Die Verbrechen der Stunde — die Verbrechen der Ewigkeit* (Hamburg, n.d.); *Odysse der Seele*, ed. Ronald Steckel (Wuppertal, 1976). Also, his life and in a more limited way his works have been discussed in three book-length studies: Reinhard M. G. Nickisch, *Armin T. Wegner: Ein Dichter gegen die Macht* (Wuppertal, 1982); Johanna Wernicke-Rothmayer, *Armin T. Wegner: Gesellschaftserfahrung und literarisches Werk* (Frankfurt, 1982); and Martin Rooney, *Leben und Werk Armin T. Wegners (1886-1978) im Kontext der soziopolitischen und kulturellen Entwicklungen in Deutschland* (Frankfurt, 1984). These three studies, along with several of Wegner's autobiographical writings (contained in the above mentioned anthologies) as well as unpublished materials, provide a thorough background of the artist's life; I have relied on all these sources.
4. Armin T. Wegner, «Das gute Licht. Ein Gruss an das armenische Volk zur Erinnerung an seine Vertreibung in die Wüste im Jahre 1915.» *Aregak* (London, April 1965); *Nayiri* (Beirut, April 24, 1965); *Zartok* (Beirut, March 28, 1965); and *Die Weltwoche* (Zurich, April 4, 1966).
5. Armin T. Wegner, *Der Völkermord an den Armeniern vor Gericht: Der Prozess Talaat Pascha*, Tessa Hofmann, ed. (Berlin, 1980), p. vii.
6. «Die Austreibung der Menschheit,» *Am Kreuzweg*, pp. 73-75.
7. «Die Katzen von Tschanakale,» *Am Kreuzweg*, pp. 128-130.
8. Diary entries for October 11 and October 28, 1916, *Fällst du*, pp. 50-55.
9. Armin T. Wegner, *Türkische Novellen* (Dresden, 1921), Wegner had already completed them back in 1917. Also, Wegner's wish to publish these stories always together as a unit has not often been respected.
10. Rooney, too, feels that the love between the two lovers can never overcome the hatred from which they have escaped, p. 240.
11. Armin T. Wegner, *Fünf Finger über Dir: Aufzeichnungen einer Reise durch Russland, den Kaukasus und Persien 1927/28*, rpt. (Wuppertal, 1979), pp. 157-213.
12. The «Inscription» as well as the «Totenlied» exist only in manuscript versions; the latter is briefly discussed by Johanna Wernicke-Rothmayer, pp. 133-135. However the manuscript was very difficult to locate in the Archive at Marbach; it is not mentioned by Ingrid Kussmaul's catalogue of the manuscript collection of the Archive, *Die Nachlässe und Sammlungen des deutschen Literaturarchivs in Marbach am Neckar* (Marbach, 1983).
13. Wernicke-Rothmayer, p. 75.
14. The sketch «Der Knabe Atam» can be found in *Die Verbrechen*, pp. 9-15; *Fällst du*, pp. 56-62; *Am Kreuzweg*, pp. 189-195.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Mrs. Sybil Stevens, the daughter of the poet, and the Deutsche Schillergesellschaft Marbach for granting me permission to quote, edit, and translate selections from the unpublished manuscripts of Armin T. Wegner that are held at the Archive for Modern German Literature. My thanks go also to Mrs. Viktoria Fuchs, librarian at the Archive, without whose assistance I more than likely would not have been able to locate «Das Armenische Totenlied», and to Dr. Jochen Meyer who so kindly helped me to meet my deadline for publication. I am also deeply grateful to the Board of Managers of Haigazian University College who through a travel grant back in the summer of 1987 first introduced me to the Archive in Marbach and the Wegner manuscripts.

THE ARMENIAN SONG OF DEATH

THE FIRST ICON

The Prayer of the Child Dying of Thirst

"Water!

If only somebody would dip his fingers into a puddle of rain water
And wet my lips!
My body tanned by hunger, I rest on the threshold of this ramshackle inn.
You, people who live in the civilized parts of this world,
Do you really understand the meaning of water?"

These words were spoken by Mihran—a young refugee boy, twelve years old.
His feet heavier than stones; his knees, two clubs
Attached to shrivelled legs; his belly, an inflated sack—
He lay motionless in the doorway of a destroyed hostelry
And watched how every morning the sun, that blood-red murderer,
Rose over the wasteland and turned pale
With shame as he caught sight of the dying boy.
Was there under his skin still a shred of flesh left on his bones?
His chest, a pair of bellows, was hardly moving.
Nobody was left to kindle the fire to bake bread.
"Water!"

What agony! Just a few feet from the boy
The river gushed through the wasteland. Only a few days ago,
Mihran had left the shelter to crawl to the river bank to drink,
To soften a crumb of bread in the water.
Now, when the boy tried to get up, he tottered like a drunkard.
He was trying very hard to stand up straight. One step, two steps—
He fell down as if he had been pushed over by a fist.

"There is no hope for me, I am too tired to continue on my way—
I will never leave this ruined place," he thought.
His throat was parched; his lips burned with fever;
His tongue stuck to the ceiling of his mouth.

"Water!"

He did not wish for a whole cup of water—a mouthful would be enough—
For as much as one can carry in a cupped hand from the river.
"But I will never be able to reach the river," he thought.
Days ago he once cried because of his misery.
The tears ran into his mouth, and he drank
The briny water. Each tear he licked from his lips.
"No longer do I have any tears left; they have all dried up," he told himself.

DAS ARMENISCHE TOTENLIED

ERSTES ALTARBILD

Gebet des verdurstenden Knaben

'Wasser!

Wenn einer nur seinen Finger in eine Regenlache tauchte
Und führe mir über die Lippen damit—
Ausgegerbt von Hunger ruhe ich auf der Diele der zerstörten Herberge.
Menschen, die Ihr an bewohnten Orten der Erde haust,
Ahnt Ihr, was Wasser ist?'

So sprach Mihran, ein geflüchteter Knabe von zwölf Jahren zu sich selber.
Die Füße schwerer als Stein, die Knie zwei Keulen an
Ausgehöhlten Beinen, der Bauch ein geblähter Sack.
Reglos lag er in der Tür des zerfallenen Rasthauses
Und sah zu, wie am Morgen die Sonne, die blutrote Mörderin, über der Wüste
aufsteigt,

Um vor Scham zu erbleichen, als sie ihn erblickt.
Ist unter der Haut an seinen Knochen noch Fleisch?
Die Brust, ein Blaseblag, hebt sich kaum mehr.
Niemand ist da, um Feuer anzuzünden oder Brot zu backen.
'Wasser!'

Oh Qual, da strömt, wenige Schritte von dem Knaben entfernt,
Der Fluß durch die Wüste. Vor Tagen kroch Mihran noch
Aus dem Schatten an sein Ufer, um zu trinken,
Eine Krume von Brot in der Flut aufzuweichen.
Richtet der Knabe sich auf, schwankt er wie ein Betrunkener.
Mühsam sucht er sich aufrecht zu halten. Einen Schritt, zwei Schritte,
Da fällt er schon, als hätte ihn eine Faust gestoßen.
'Ohne Hoffnung bin ich,' denkt er, 'zu müde, um weiterzugehen.
Diese zertrümmerte Herberge werde ich nicht mehr verlassen.'
Der Schlund brennt ihm, die Lippe glüht, die Zunge klebt am Gaumen.

'Wasser!'

Nicht einen Becher, nur nach einem mundvoll verlangt es ihn,
Den man mit flacher Hand aus dem Flusse schöpft.
'Ich kann ihn nicht mehr erreichen,' dachte er.
Einmal vor Tagen weinte er aus Kummer.
Die Tränen liefen ihm in den Mund. Er trank
Ihr salziges Naß. Jede Zähre leckte er sich von den Lippen.
'Ich habe keine Tränen mehr,' gestand er sich. 'Sie sind vertrocknet.'

The Song of the Hanged Man

"My Father, my Creator, if only you were here!"

Mihran said to himself.

"If you were here, you would lift up your son

In your strong hands and would carry him to the bank of the river.

When as I child I used to ride pick-a-back, from your strong shoulders

I would often survey the crowd around us.

How cheerful and colourful the world was then!

"I saw you for the last time as the henchmen of the Turkish empire

Were leading you through the streets of the City on the Golden Horn

To the place of your execution.

"I had often seen the smooth faces of our hangmen

Behind the closed windows of their carriages.

The black silken tassels were hanging from their red fezzes

As motionless as the leaves of a tree on windless days.

"There it stood, the monster, in the middle of the square in front of

The fountain in the heart of the mighty City of Constantinople—

The gallows—and stretched its long giraffe-like limbs towards heaven.

At the highest point, where the three beams are joined,

They had attached a little wheel and had passed a rope over it.

The merchants of the market place used this contraption to lift

Sacks of corn and the carcasses of slaughtered oxen to weigh them.

"The soldiers had already pulled over your head

A white shroud. It came down to your feet.

They had fastened a piece of cardboard on your chest.

On it they had recorded the sentence of death they had passed on you

And the name of a traitor,

For everything has to be done according to law and order.

Law and order for them is omnipotent,

Sanctioning even bloody human sacrifice.

Without "law and order"—they would remain as innocent as children.

"An immense crowd of men, women, and children

Had gathered in the square seeking amusement.

They had already put the noose around your neck, Father,

Der Erhängte der singt

'Oh, mein Vater!' sprach Mihran zu sich, 'Wärs Du hier,
Der mich gezeugt und erschaffen hat!
Wärs Du hier, auf starken Händen würdest Du
Deinen Sohn nehmen, ihn an das Ufer des Flusses tragen.
Oft, wenn ich als Kind auf Deinen Schultern ritt,
Konnte ich über die Menge hinwegblicken.
Wie heiter und bunt war die Welt!

Zuletzt sah ich Dich, wie die Büttel des türkischen Reiches
Dich durch die Straßen der Stadt am Goldenen Horn
Zur Hinrichtung führten.

Oft hatte ich die glatten Gesichter unserer Henker
Hinter den Scheiben ihrer geschlossenen Wagen bemerkt.
An ihren roten Filzhelmen hingen die schwarzen Seidenquasten
So unbewegt wie die Blätter eines Baumes an windstillen Tagen.

Da stand auf dem Platz vor dem Brunnen
Mitten in der mächtigen Stadt Konstantinopel
Ein Untier, der Galgen, und streckte seine langen Giraffenarme aus.
In der Höhe, wo die drei Balken zusammenstoßen,
Hatte man ein Rädchen befestigt, über das ein Strick lief.
Die Händler auf dem Markt benutzten es, um Kornsäcke
Oder geschlachtete Ochsen daran auf die Wage zu legen.

Die Feldjäger hatten Dir ein weißes Sterbehemd,
Das bis zu Deinen Füßen reichte, schon über den Kopf gezogen.
Auf die Brust hefteten sie Dir eine Papptafel
Mit Deinem Todesurteil und dem Namen eines Verräters darauf,
Denn alles muß sich nach der Vorschrift vollziehen,
Sie ist allmächtig, selbst das Blutopfer erlaubt sie ihnen.
Gäbe es die Vorschrift nicht, sie würden unschuldige Kinder bleiben.

Eine unübersehbare Menge von Männern, Frauen und Kindern
Hatte sich auf dem Platz wie zu einem Vergnügen versammelt.
Die Schlinge hatten sie Dir schon um den Hals gelegt, Vater,

Ready to hoist you on your rope up into the air as if you were a flag,
Then you begged them to allow you to sing just once more before your death.

"Your deep and melodious voice in our better days
Had delighted many people.
They granted you your wish, and you sang.

"Your eyes lowered, your feet carefully put side by side,
You sang with the taste of pleasure of the sweetness of ripe mulberries,
You sang with the awe and the glory of a priest
At a funeral, a funeral that was your own.
There was neither sadness nor anger in your song.
It praised bravery and submission to
Man's fate here on earth;
Love and dedication to the people of Saint Gregory,
The patron of our people.
Many of those who listened to you fell on their knees.
To me it seemed that your voice vaulted to the heavens,
Descended to the dead beneath the earth,
And then returned again.

"The passers-by stood still on the street,
The drivers of mules stopped their carts,
Those of donkeys their animals to listen to you.
Your face gleamed
Pale and sad like the setting moon just before dawn.
Your song lasted for a long time, and the huge and mighty city
Held her breath, kept silent, and listened to you.

"Then you put your head obediently into the noose.
As if swaying in the wind, your body wavered for one moment,
Stretched, grew long like the fruit of the carob tree,
Long enough, so it seemed to me, to link heaven and earth;
A clock weight of eternity, silently swinging back and forth.
A little child in the arms of his mother was amused
When he saw you swinging and laughed.
Then I closed my eyes and lost my senses.

"A simple man who was standing next to me in the crowd
Looked at me quietly and walked away.

"This was the first time I had come face to face with Death
And understood him not."

Im Begriff Dich an Deinem Strick wie eine Fahne in die Luft zu ziehen,
Als Du sie batest vor Deinem Tode noch einmal singen zu dürfen.

Du hattest eine tiefe, wohl lautende Stimme,
Die während unserer glücklichen Zeit nicht nur Dich erfreute.
Man erlaubte es Dir, und Du sangst.

Die Augen niedergeschlagen, die Füße sorgsam nebeneinander gestellt,
Sangst Du mit dem Ton der Köstlichkeit und süßer reifer Maulbeeren.
Mit der Ehrfurcht und Herrlichkeit eines Priesters
Bei einem Begräbnis sangst Du, das Dein eigenes war.
Weder Trauer noch Zorn erklangen in Deinem Liede,
Nur Kühnheit und Ergebung in das Schicksal des Menschen auf der Erde,
Liebe und Treue zu dem Volke des heiligen Gregor,
Des Schutzherrn unseres Volkes.
Viele, die Dir dabei zuhörten, fielen auf die Knie.
Deine Stimme aber schien mir, hob sich bis in den Himmel hinauf,
Stieg zu den Toten unter die Erde hinab,
Und kehrte wieder zurück.

Die Vorübergehenden auf der Straße blieben stehen,
Die Maultiertreiber hielten ihre Karren an,
Die Eseltreiber ihre Tiere, um Dir zuzuhören.
Bläß und traurig leuchtete Dein Anlitz dabei,
Wie der Mond gegen Morgen, ehe er untergeht.
Lange sangst Du, und die weite, mächtige Stadt
Hielt ihren Atem an, schwieg und lauschte Dir.

Dann strecktest Du den Kopf gehorsam in die Schlinge.
Einen Augenblick, wie vom Winde bewegt, schwankte Dein Leib,
Streckte sich lang aus, eine Schote an einem Johannisbrotbaum.
So lang erschien er mir, als reichte er vom Himmel bis auf die Erde,
Ein Gewicht der Ewigkeit, das lautlos hin-und-herschwankt.
Ein zweijähriges Kind auf dem Arm seiner Mutter,
Als es Dich so erblickte, lachte darüber.
Da schloß ich die Augen und die Sinne schwanden mir.

Ein einfacher Mann in der Menge, der neben mir stand,
Blickte mich schweigend an und ging davon.

So sah ich ihn zum ersten Male, den Tod,
Und verstand ihn nicht.'

The Sold Child

"Water!"

Some refugees who were passing had responded to Mihran's plea
And had put a pitcher of water and a few pieces of bread next to him.
As Mihran awoke very early one morning, a fly crawled over his lips,
Its feet still moist from drinking at the river.
With the tip of his tongue, he caressed the traces of moisture
And shuddered with bliss.
Another time, a drop of dew fell on his face.
How tender was this sweet delight which he greedily lapped up!
When he was a little boy, such joy had flowed like honey
From his mother's breast.

"Once more, Mother," he pleaded, "return to me!"

The days in the capital raced each other gaily while
In the brittle throat of spring swallows were chirping everywhere,
And in the narrow alleyways light and shade were competing for happiness.
The left eyetooth of both his mother and his younger brother Avedis protruded;
Both shared the same joyful laughter.
She always said that Avedis resembled her.
While Mihran, lost in thought, was daydreaming, he asked himself,
"Where are you? Why are you so quiet, Mother?
You can do anything with your voice. If you were sitting next to me,
Your words would turn into water on my tongue."

The day the four Hamparzuns were separated from each other,
They had already left the capital. The mother, who always got up early,
Saw one morning that the number "four" had been chalked
On their front door. The family consisted now of four people
Since the death of the Father: the Mother; Avedis, the younger brother;
Lusik, their two-year-old sister; and Mihran.
The Mother, full of misgivings, wiped the number off. Since the soldiers
Had marked on the walls of each house the number of people they were
Supposed to collect, they were thus able to hide. But an Armenian neighbour
Betrayed them. "Why do I have to leave,
And the Hamparzun family is allowed to stay?" she complained.
Three days later the Hamparzuns, too, were taken across the water.

Das verkaufte Kind

'Wasser!'

Flüchtlinge, die vorüberzogen, hatten auf Bitten Mihrans
Einen Krug voll davon neben ihn gestellt, und einige Scheiben Brot.
Einmal als Mihran in der Morgenfrühe erwachte, kroch eine Fliege,
Die Füße noch feucht vom Trinken am Flusse, ihm über die Lippen.
Er strich mit der Zungenspitze darüber, erschrak vor Seligkeit.
Ein anderes Mal fiel ein Tropfen Tau auf sein Gesicht,
Wie milde war die süße Lust, die er schlürfte.
Einst, da er klein war, quoll sie wie Honig aus der mütterlichen Brust.
'Noch einmal, Mutter,' bat er, 'kehre mir wieder.'

Froh liefen die Tage in der Hauptstadt um die Wette, wenn überall
In der spröden Kehle des Frühlings Schwalben zwitscherten,
Licht und Schatten sich in der engen Gasse um das Glück stritten.
Im Munde der Mutter stand, wie bei dem jüngeren Bruder Avedis,
Der linke Eckzahn vor, beide hatten das selbe frohlockende Lachen.
Stets sagte sie, daß Avedis ihr ähnlich sei,
Während Mihran so versonnen vor sich hinträumte, fragte er sich
'Wo bist Du? Warum schweigst Du, Mutter?
Deine Stimme vermag alles. Säßest Du hier,
Deine Worte würden sich auf meiner Zunge in Wasser verwandeln.'

Als die vier Hamparzuns voneinander getrennt wurden, hatten sie
Die Hauptstadt schon verlassen. Eines Morgens fand die Mutter,
Die stets früh auf war, die Zahl vier mit Kreide
An ihre Haustür geschrieben. Vier Menschen waren sie,
Seit der Vater nicht mehr lebte. Die Mutter, der jüngere Bruder
Avedis, ihre zweijährige Schwester Lusik und Mihran.
Nichts Gutes ahnend, wischte die Mutter die mit Kreide
An die Tür geschriebene Zahl fort. Die Feldjäger hatten an jedem Haus
Die Zahl der Leute verzeichnet, die sie abholen sollten,
So konnten sie sich verstecken, aber ihre armenische Nachbarin verriet sie.
'Wieso muß ich fortgehen?' sagte sie zu den Feldjägern,
'Und die Hamparzuns bleiben hier,' beklagte sie sich.
Drei Tage später wurden auch die Hamparzuns über das Meer gebracht.

In the midst of the gigantic serpent of the dispossessed
Crawling along a never ending yellow mud wall,
Among the baggage mules and the horse- and ox-drawn carts,
The four Hamparzens crept.
Shouts and curses;
The moaning of wheels, the tinkling of bells, the hissing of whips!
The dust of the street rained so heavily on the people
That their clothes, faces, hands were covered by fur.

Men were transformed into bears and black haired young girls into old women.
Whole villages were on the move,
And the wheels of their ox-drawn carts moaned and groaned
As if they were singing a never ending melancholy dirge.

The road was lined by ordinary Turks, merchants and officials
Who wanted to purchase from the refugees their rugs or jewellery.
It was an opportunity for childless couples to buy little boys and girls
And bring them up as their own.
A substantial district judge, very formally dressed,
Was wooing assiduously chubby-cheeked little Lusik.
The black cherries of her eyes, her long braids
Interlaced with many tinkling silver coins had won his heart.
The child, — her creamy cheeks, her teeth, her glances —
Was glowing warm and cheerful, like a lamp in the dark.
Therefore her father used to call her "Lusik", little light.
The Turk wearing his red felt cap, waddling like a duck,
And smiling good-naturedly, kept on following the Mother
Offering her more and more money.
The Mother, however, did not want to put up her child for sale,
But Lusik was simply too heavy so that the Mother could not always carry her,
And the child was too weak to walk the long way ahead by herself.
The soldiers did persuade the Mother eventually
That it would be in the best interest of her child to be sold.
One of them had accompanied on two occasion refugees on their trek.
He was not mean but very unpredictable should he be hindered
In carrying out orders. When asked for his advice,
He would cleverly rub his index finger against the ridge of his nose
As if to hone it.

Der große Heereswurm von Vertriebenen, in dem die vier
Zwischen Ochsenkarren, Pferdewagen und Packeseln dahinschlichen,
Wälzte sich eine gelbe Lehmmauer entlang, die kein Ende nahm.
Rufe, Räderknarren, Glockengeklirr, Peitschenknallen, Flüche!
Der Staub der Straße fiel so dicht auf die Leute herab,
Daß Kleider, Gesichter, Hände davon wie mit Fell bedeckt waren.

Männer machte er zu Bären, schwarzhäufige Mädchen zu Greisinnen.
Ganze Bauerndörfer befanden sich unter der Menge.
Und die Räder ihrer Ochsenkarren stöhnten und seufzten,
Als sängen sie unablässig ein schwermütiges Lied.

Am Wege standen türkische Bürger, Kaufleute und Beamte,
Um von den Flüchtlingen Schmuckstücke oder Teppiche einzutauschen.
Kinderlose Eheleute kauften ihnen zweijährige Knaben und Mädchen ab,
Um sie als eigene Kinder aufzuziehen.
Ein wohlbeleibter Obrichter im Gehrock,
War inbrünstig um die pausbäckige Lusik bemüht.
Die schwarzen Kirschen ihrer Augen, die langen Flechten,
An denen lauter silberne Münzen klingelten, hatten es ihm angetan.
Alles an dem Kinde, die milchigen Wangen, die Zähne, die Blicke,
Leuchteten warm und frohlockend, wie eine Lampe im Dunkeln.
Ihr Vater pflegte sie deshalb Lusik, 'Lichtchen', zu rufen.
Der Türke in roter Filzkappe, wie eine Ente hüpfend, bot
Der Mutter gutmütig lächelnd bei jedem Schritt mehr Geld an.
Die Mutter wollte ihr Kind nicht hergeben, allein Lusik war zu schwer
Als daß die Mutter sie immerfort tragen konnte,
Das Kind zu schwach, um selbst den weiten Weg zu laufen.
Die Feldjäger überredeten die Mutter, dies sei besser für ihr Kind.
Einer war zweimal mit Flüchtlingen durch das Land gezogen.
Boshaft war er nicht, doch unberechenbar, wollte man
Ihn hindern, einen Befehl zu befolgen.
Um Rat gefragt, legte er schlaue den Zeigefinger
Gegen seinen Nasenrücken, um ihn, wie an einem Wetzstein, zu reiben.

Finally the Mother relented in order to save Lusik.
After they had agreed on the price,
The Mother divided the money among her and the two boys.
But when Lusik was torn from her arms, the child cried miserably
And stretched out her little hands for her mother, but in vain,
While the judge clutched the child to himself and ran away.
The Mother, unable to bear the desperate cries of her child,
Wanted to follow the Turk, but the soldiers held her back.
She raved as if she had lost her mind,
And her cries were even louder than those of Lusik.
The soldiers, who could not bear to hear a mother crying for her child,
Assigned her to another group of refugees to have peace and quiet.
This is how the family was separated.

"Let's hurry up!" they shouted—only to correct themselves immediately:
"Slowly, slowly! Haste is of the Devil!" They were afraid to feel compassion.
Once again the Mother's cry of agony rent the air
And then died out in the commotion. The soldier laughed, but during
The next rest stop shared their food with the two boys.
Who will ever understand the calculating mind of greedy officials,
Who the compulsion of their superiors to steal the stars from heaven itself
Just to fasten them on the epaulettes of their uniforms?

Schließlich gab die Mutter nach, um Lusik zu retten.
Nachdem man den Preis vereinbart hatte,
Verteilte die Mutter das Geld unter sich und die beiden Knaben.
Doch als man Lusik aus ihren Armen riß, schrie das Kind laut,
Streckte vergeblich die kleinen Hände nach ihr aus, während
Der Obrichter das Kind an sich pressend davoneilte.
Unfähig sein verzweifeltes Rufen zu ertragen, wollte
Die Mutter ihm nachstürzen, aber die Feldjäger hielten sie zurück.
Wie toll gebärdete sie sich, schrie noch lauter als Lusik.
Unfähig, eine Mutter weinen zu hören, ordneten sie die Frau
Einem anderen Flüchtlingszuge bei, um Ruhe zu haben.
'Rasch, weiter!' riefen sie. Gleich darauf: 'Langsam, langsam,
Die Eile ist vom Teufel!' Sie fürchteten sich vor ihrem Mitleid.
Noch einmal durchzitterte der Angstschrei der Mutter die Luft,
Und erlosch im Gedränge. Die Feldjäger lachten, teilten aber
Bei der nächsten Rast ihren Reis mit den beiden Knaben.
Wer wird je die Rechnung habgieriger Beamter verstehen,
Wer die Sucht ihrer Hauptleute, die Sterne vom Himmel zu entwenden,
Um sie auf die Schulterblätter ihrer Waffenröcke zu heften?

THE FOURTH ICON

The Madman

"Water!"

Now hardly audible, Mihran again pleaded for water.
Every movement he made on the bundle of straw that had been
Thrown on the hard threshold made his bones ache.
In his memory he returned to the outset of his long wanderings
When he was still together with his brother Avedis,
And later when he was alone; the boys did not see their mother again.

While he was thinking about what had happened to him,
He wondered what was more dreadful:
The execution of his father in Constantinople or
The mute suffering of all those he had seen
Dying of starvation in the desert.

After they had been separated from their mother, the boys were
Assigned by the soldiers to another group of refugees.
Thus they came for the first time to the land of the Kurds.
These people, handsome and wild, belong to a tribe that
Celebrates every year the memory of their Muslim saint Ali
By bloody flagellations which they inflict on themselves.

They were considered to be the worst enemies of the Armenians,
A people with whom they had been sharing since time immemorial
The same mountain valleys.
Given more to thieving and war than to working in the fields,
And being great lovers of freedom, yet for centuries drafted and
Taken advantage of by the Turkish army—these Kurds
Claimed the Devil to be their God.
Their women did not wear the veil;
Yet it could happen that, surprised by a stranger,
They would pull their dress over their head.
"Cover up your face!" they would cry frightened, and by doing so
Would uncover the most private parts of their bodies.

Der Wahnsinnige

'Wasser!'

Kaum hörbar kam der Ruf von neuem von den Lippen des Knaben Mihran.
Jede Bewegung auf der Schütte Stroh über der harten Diele schmerzte ihn.
Seine Erinnerung ging bis zum Anfang des langen Weges zurück,
Den er zuerst mit seinem Bruder Avedis zusammen,
Später allein, gegangen war. Beide sollten ihre Mutter nicht wiedersehen.

Während er darüber nachdachte, fragte er sich,
Was schrecklicher war,
Die Hinrichtung des Vaters in der Hauptstadt,
Oder das stumme Leid des Einzelnen
An dem er so viele in der Wüste erlöschen sah.

Nach der Trennung von der Mutter hatten die Feldjäger Mihran und Avedis
Einer anderen Schar von Flüchtlingen zugestellt.
So kamen sie in das Land der Kurden, das sie zum ersten Male betraten.
Schön und wild gehört dieses Volk einem Menschenstamme an,
das jedes Jahr das Fest
Ihres mohammedanischen Heiligen Ali mit blutigen
Geiselnungen am eigenen Leibe begeht.

Sie galten als die bittersten Feinde der Armenier,
mit denen sie seit Menschengedenken
Die gleichen Täler bewohnten.
Mehr zu Raub und Krieg als zu Feldarbeit geneigt,
freiheitsliebend, aber durch jahrelangen
Dienst im türkischen Heer ausgebeutet, betrachteten
Die Kurden den Teufel als ihren Gott.
Ihre Frauen verschleierten sich nicht.
Überraschte sie dagegen ein Fremder, konnte es geschehen, daß sie ihr Kleid
Über den Kopf schlugen. 'Verhülle Dein Antlitz!'
Riefen sie erschreckt, indem sie zum Erstaunen anderer
den Anblick ihrer Blöße freigaben.

Their menfolk cheerfully raided their Armenian neighbours;
While the Armenians, clever and industrious, for their part,
Were concerned how to be of service to their Turkish masters.
This did not endear them to their Kurdish neighbours, especially
Since Armenians also played the role of tax collector among the
Kurds in behalf of their Turkish oppressor.
Thus the Kurds and the Armenians had always lived together,
Hating each other.

Already on their day of arrival in the first Kurdish village
Mihran and Avedis were to experience this in a most revolting way.
There, on the market place of the small town, hung,
Nailed to the wooden door of the Armenian church,
Crucified like Jesus of Nazareth, the Armenian bishop.
His head, covered with the black hat, was bent low to the ground;
It no longer moved.

When the refugees entered the town, a second Christian priest
Was led to the other end of the square, to the place of the
Muslim house of God with its fountain.
Water was flowing from this fountain in which
The Faithful wash their feet before prayer.
After the priest had washed himself,
He stepped through the door of the minaret.
He had been assured:
"If you confess to be a Muslim
And call the Kurds of this town to prayer,
We will let you live.
If you refuse, you will be shot."

All inhabitants of the town had gathered on the adjacent roofs.
In the square, the guard stood attention,
Their rifles aimed at the minaret.
All was quiet.
The fountain in front of the mosque splashed quietly.
Then the priest stepped onto the balustrade of the minaret.
But when he looked down from his cage and saw
From every direction rifles aimed at him,
He was petrified by fear, and instead of calling the words
"Come to prayer," he was shaken by demented laughter.
Fear had robbed him of his senses.

Durch Raubüberfälle auf Armenier hielten sich ihre Männer schadlos.
Klug und fleißig, als Handwerker und Händler friedlich gesinnt,
Waren die Armenier darauf bedacht, ihren türkischen Herren gefällig zu sein.
Bei den Kurden machten sie sich verhaßt, weil sie auch die Steuern von ihnen
Für ihre türkischen Machthaber einzogen.
So verbrachten beide —Kurden und Armenier—ihre Tage in Zwietracht.

Schon am Tage ihrer Ankunft in der ersten kurdischen Ortschaft
Sollte sich dies Mihran und Avedis auf abscheuliche Weise zeigen:
Auf dem Marktplatz der kleinen Stadt—quer an die
beiden Flügel des Holztores der armenischen Kirche
Genagelt—hing, wie Jesus von Nazaret gekreuzigt, der armenische Bischof.
Das Haupt mit dem schwarzen Röhrenhut tief zu Boden gesenkt, rührte er sich nicht mehr.

Als die Flüchtlinge eben eintrafen, führte man einen zweiten christlichen Priester
An das Ende des Platzes, wo das mohammedanische Gotteshaus stand.
Aus dem Brunnen davor floß das Wasser, in dem die Gläubigen sich vor dem Gebet
Die Füße waschen.
Nachdem auch der Priester sich gereinigt hatte,
Trat er durch die Tür des Gebetsturmes.
Man hatte ihm versichert:
'Wenn Du Dich zu unserem Glauben bekennst, lassen wir Dich am Leben.
Tust Du es nicht, wirst Du erschossen!'

Die Bewohner des Ortes hatten sich auf den umliegenden Dächern versammelt.
Auf dem Platz stand die Wache, die Flinten auf den Gebetsturm gerichtet.
Alle verharrten in Schweigen.
Ruhig plätscherte auf dem Platz vor dem Bethause der Brunnen.
Nun erschien der Priester auf dem Söller der Turmes.
Doch als er—wie von einem Mastkorb herabblickend— unter sich von allen Seiten
Die Läufe der Flinten auf sich gerichtet sah, erstarrte er vor Angst und
Statt der Worte 'Herbei zum Gebet!' brach er in wildes Gelächter aus.
Vor Schrecken hatte er den Verstand verloren.

"Lower your guns!" the Commander ordered.
"Let him go! God has visited the mansion of his soul!"
All those who, a moment ago, had derided the priest
Now marvelled full of admiration at his salvation,
For a man under the curse of madness is regarded
In the Orient as a man sanctified by God.

'Senkt die Flinten!' befahl der Stadthauptmann.
'Gebt ihn frei! Gott ist in das Haus seiner Seele eingekehrt!'
Alle die den Priester noch eben voll Hohn betrachtet hatten,
Sahen ihn nun voll Bewunderung für seine Rettung an,
Denn der vom Wahnsinn Befallene gilt im Osten als von Gott geheilt.

Vor den Toren von Aleppo

Das Schicksal von Flüchtlingen ist ungewiß.
 Seit dem Aufbruch von Mardin war der Zug der Armenier
 nicht mehr zur Ruhe gekommen.
 Viele starben unterwegs, andere feundeten sich miteinander an.
 Die beiden Knaben Hamparzun teilten alles mit Silva und
 ihrer Mutter die sie in Van kennengelernt hatten.
 Als sie zuletzt die Berge des Amanus und des Taurus überquerten,
 Fanden sie die Landschaft vertrauter als die Wüste.
 Hier galten weder Bosheit noch Niedertracht—nur das grausame Leben.

Eines Morgens standen Avedis und Mihran vor den Toren von Aleppo,
 Einer Stadt, die man 'die Weiße' genannt hat, die aber
 'die Schwarze' heißen sollte,
 Und fragten sich, ob sie wohl hier ihrer Mutter begegnen würden.
 Vor dem Eintritt in die Stadt blieben sie lange vor einem Strauch
 Am Wege stehen. An seinen Ranken hatten vorüberziehende Frauen
 Streifen ihrer Blusen und Röcke befestigt, um den ihnen
 Folgenden Verwandten Kunde von sich zu geben.
 So boshaft und niederträchtig der menschliche Geist ist,
 So hilfreich und erfinderisch vermag er zu sein.
 Über und über mit bunten Stoffstücken bedeckt
 Gleich der Strauch einem zum Mummenschanz verkleideten Tänzer.
 Er sah aus als hätte er sich in ein Gewand gekleidet,
 Das aus den Kleidern aller Frauen Armeniens gewebt war.
 Lustig wirkte er, ein Spaßmacher in einem Maskenzuge,
 Und neigte sich doch bekümmert zu Boden als weinte er.
 Lange blickten all Flüchtlinge nach dem Mund, den Augen
 Dieses Gespenstes, um an einem abgerissenen Streifen
 Einer Bluse oder eines Rockes zu erkennen, ob einer aus
 Ihrer Familie hier vorübergezogen war. Viele

Many families were reunited again.
Avedis and Mihran, too, stopped in front of this bush.
Their hearts glowed with hope
When they found what they had been looking for. How well
They remembered the time their mother was wearing for the first time
That white blouse with the black and blue dots.
Finally they untied the colourful ribbon
From its branch and covered it with kisses. They showed it
To everybody they met on their way and asked if any of them
Had met the woman who was wearing the blouse made of this cloth.
But not one person could recall ever having seen this woman;
The boys never saw their mother again.

When they entered the city of Aleppo, every corner was occupied by refugees.
Tired and exhausted, they seemed to be asleep.
But if they were touched, it became obvious that they were dead,
victims of a plague.

The Mayor of Aleppo—a conscientious Turk feeling great compassion
For the refugees—had no idea how to save the town put in his trust
From destruction. Therefore he had turned to the Minister of the Interior
Who governed from Constantinople, and with the help of the swiftness
Of a flash of lightning that has been imprisoned in a piece of wire,
Had addressed the following message to him:
"Countless numbers of Armenian refugees have arrived in Aleppo,
What shall we do with them?"

Talaat, one of the power bosses of the new Turkey,
A man who had elevated himself to be of noble rank,
Was sitting in his easychair behind the arcades of the High Porte
When this message was given to him.
As he smoothed the piece of paper with his right hand,
He read the message that had been sent to him.
While he was exhaling the smoke of the cigarette that
Was dangling from the corner of his mouth.

Fanden sich auf diese Art wieder.
Auch Avedis und Mihran blieben vor diesem Strauche
Stehen. Hoffnungsvoll erglühten ihre Herzen,
Als sie gefunden hatten, was sie suchten. Wie gut erinnerten
Sie sich dieser weißen Bluse mit schwarzen und blauen Punkten
Als die Mutter sie zum ersten Male getragen hatte.
Schließlich lösten sie den bunten Streifen
Von den Zweigen, um ihn mit Küssen zu bedecken. Sie zeigten ihn
Jedem, dem sie begegneten, um ihn zu fragen, ob er einer Frau
In einer solchen Bluse begegnet sei. Doch niemand konnte sich
Daran erinnern, und sie sollten ihre Mutter nicht wiedersehen.

In Aleppo fanden sie alle Plätze mit Vertriebenen besetzt.
Vor Müdigkeit niedergebrochen, schienen sie zu schlafen.
Rührte man sie aber an, erkannte man, daß sie tot waren, Opfer einer Seuche.
Der Bürgermeister von Aleppo, ein gewissenhafter Türke,
Ratlos, wie er die ihm anvertraute Stadt vor der Vernichtung behüten sollte,
Auch voller Mitleid für die Vertriebenen, hatte sich
Mit Hilfe der Schnelligkeit des in einem Drahte gefangenen Blitzes
An den in Konstantinopel herrschenden Kanzler des Innern
Mit der Botschaft gewandt:
'Ungezählte Scharen armenischer Flüchtlinge sind in Aleppo eingetroffen,
Was soll mit ihnen geschehen?'

Talaat, einer der Machthaber der neuen Türkei,
Der seinem Namen selbst die fürstliche Würde hinzugefügt hatte,
Saß in seinem Sessel hinter den Fensterbögen der 'Hohen Pforte'
Als man ihm diese Botschaft überbrachte.
Mit dem Ballen der rechten Hand den Papierschein glattstreichend,
las er die ihm übersandte Nachricht,
Während er zwischen zwei Zügen den Rauch seines schief
In dem Mundwinkel steckenden Tabakröllchens vor sich hinbließ.

Without compassion, stern and aloof like a Roman emperor,
He wrote his answer on the same piece of paper:
"The goal of the deportation is nothingness."
And with the help of that same swiftness of the imprisoned
Flash of lightning that had relayed the message to the Minister,
Talaat returned the answer to its destination.

The Mayor of Aleppo, outraged at the answer he had received,
Expressed his opinion freely to an acquaintance.
Though this criticism was confidential, the latter
Could not keep quiet. Soon the whole town knew the news.

When the news reached the ears of Avedis and Mihran, they recalled
The day when their father was hanged.
His death, too, had been ordered by Talaat.
A few days after the execution, the whole town went to
The funeral of a foreign diplomat who was buried in Istanbul.
The two boys mingled with the crowd
To see the man who was responsible for their fate.
Now in Aleppo, they remembered him:
A tall man in a black suit, clever and stubborn,
With broad shoulders and the neck of a bull,
With melancholy eyes and a silky moustache.

When Avedis and Mihran were told that those seven words
"The goal of the deportation is nothingness"
Came from the mouth of Talaat, they knew the fate that awaited the Arme-
nians.
They themselves had already come face to face with this "Nothingness".
Many citizens of Aleppo had succumbed to the plague that
Decimated the refugees, and many of them had died as well.
Whenever the townspeople met the refugees, they would attack the unwelcome
guests.
Mihran, once caught in such a situation, could only save himself

Mit der erbarmungslosen Härte und Größe eines römischen Kaisers
Schrieb er die Antwort auf den gleichen Schein:
'Das Ziel der Verschickung ist das Nichts!'
Mit Hilfe der gleichen Schnelligkeit des in einem Drahte gefangenen Blitzes,
Mit welcher der Kanzler die Frage erhalten hatte,
Ließ Talaat die Antwort an den Ort seiner Bestimmung zurückgehen.

Als der Bürgermeister von Aleppo sie erhielt—
unfähig, seine Empörung darüber zu verschweigen—
Hatte er sich bei einem Bekannten darüber unwillig geäußert.
Obwohl diese Mitteilung vertraulich war, vermochte
Auch dieser nicht darüber zu schweigen.
Bald wußte es die ganze Stadt.

Als Avedis und Mihran davon erfuhren, entsannen sie sich des Tages,
An dem man ihren Vater erhängt hatte.
Sein Tod war gleichfalls auf Anordnung Talaats erfolgt.
Als damals wenige Tage später das Begräbnis
Eines ausländischen Botschafters in Stambul stattfand,
An dem alle Würdenträger der Stadt teilnahmen,
Hatten sich die beiden Knaben unter das Volk gemischt,
Um den Mann zu sehen, dem sie ihr Schicksal verdankten.
Nun tauchte die Erinnerung daran wieder in ihnen auf:
Ein hochgewachsener Mann in schwarzem Gehrock,
voller Klugheit und Starrsinn,
Breitschultrig und mit dem Nacken eines Stiers,
Mit schwermütigen Augen und einem weichen Schnurrbart.

Als Avedis und Mihran hörten, daß die sieben Worte:
'Das Ziel der Verschickung ist das Nichts'
Aus dem Munde Talaats stammten, wußten sie, was den
Armeniern bevorstand.
Sie hatten diesem 'Nichts' schon ins Auge gesehen!
Zahlreiche Bewohner der Stadt hatten sich an den Krankheiten
der Flüchtlinge angesteckt,
Viele von ihnen waren daran gestorben.
Wo immer Einwohner Vertriebenen begegneten, fielen sie
über diese her.
Einmal hatte Mihran sich nur dadurch retten können,

By pretending that he, too, was a citizen of the town;
Like them he threatened with his stick and yelled: "Beat him! Beat him!"

Avedis and Mihran would much rather have stayed in Aleppo than be returned
to the desert.

There was a convent school in town, belonging to the German Society of the
Orient.

Founded in 1905 by a group of German pastors,

It was now under the patronage

Of the German authorities.

Back then, the Armenians were persecuted by Abdul Hamid, the descendant of
A Turkish Sultan and an Armenian pleasure girl at court.

This is the reason why the murderous Sultan hated his own blood.

At his command many Armenians were persecuted and murdered—

Just to show that he was a true Turk.

Avedis and Mihran had tried in vain to find shelter on

The premises of the Society of the Orient.

The Young Turks were more ferocious persecutors than the Sultan had ever
been.

The Baghdad Railroad linking Aleppo and the River Euphrates had already
been completed, and so

The soldiers one morning herded all the refugees into the train.

In the wagon on the way to their destination, the two brothers met

An old man who recognised the gay ribbon of their mother's blouse.

She, like so many of the refugees, had died of one of the deadly diseases.

All that remained was the pattern of her blouse—

A shrivelled flower—in the hands of the boys.

Translated by

Dr. INGRID LEYER SEMAAN

Daß er mit ihnen den Stock schwang und scheinbar
drohend ausrief: 'Schlagt ihn!
Schlagt ihn!' als wäre er selbst ein Bewohner der Stadt.

Avedis und Mihran wünschten in Aleppo zu bleiben,
statt in die Wüste zurückzukehren.
Hier gab es eine Klosterschule der 'Morgenländischen
Gesellschaft', die unter dem Schutze der deutschen Behörden stand.
Sie war im Jahre 1905 von deutschen Pfarrern gegründet worden.
Damals war Abdul Hamid, Nachkomme eines türkischen Sultans
Und eines armenischen Freudenmädchens an Hofe, ihr Verfolger.
Aus diesem Grunde haßte der mordgierige Sultan sein eigenes Blut.
Zahlreiche Armenier ließ er verfolgen und hinhängen,
Um so zu beweisen, daß er ein Türke war.

Vergeblich hatten Avedis und Mihran versucht,
in den Räumen der 'Morgenländischen Gesellschaft'
Unterkunft zu finden.
Die Verfolgungen der Jungtürken waren schlimmer als die des Sultans.
Die Bagdadbahn zwischen Aleppo und dem Euphrat war schon
vollendet, und so wurden
Eines Morgens alle Verbannten durch die Feldjäger auf sie verladen.
Unterwegs im Zuge begegneten die beiden Brüder einem alten Manne,
Der den bunten Streifen der Bluse ihrer Mutter wiedererkannte.
Sie war, wie viele Vertriebene, einer tödlichen Seuche erlegen.
Nur das Muster ihrer Bluse blieb—eine vertrocknete Blume—
in den Händen der Knaben.

ARMIN WEGNER

ԱՐՄԻՆ ԹԷՈՖԻԼ ՎԵԿՆԷՐ ՀԱՅԱՍՏԷՐԸ
(1886-1978)

(ԱՄՓՈՓՈՒՄ)

Գոկտ. ԻՆԿՐԻՏ ՍԸՄԱԱՆ

Հպանցիկ ակնարկէ մը ետք գերման Արմին Թեոֆիլ Վեկնէրի կեանքին ու գործունէութեան վրայ՝ Գոկտ. Սըմաան կը փորձէ շեշտը դնել բանաստեղծ, արձակագիր, վիպագիր, ընկերային գործիչ Համաշխարհային Առաջին Պատերազմի ընթացքին Օսմանեան Կայսրութեան սահմաններէն ներս մարդկութեան ծառայելու մեկնած մարդուն վրայ, վերիվայրումներով առիթ կեանք մը, որ մնաց ենթակայ ո՛չ միայն պատերազմի ընթացքին իր ապրած ցնցումներուն եւ յուշերուն, որոնք իրն եղան ահաւորութենէն Հայկական Տասնհինգին՝ այլ նաեւ այն նշումներուն եւ հալածանքներուն, որոնք իր բախտակիցներէն շատերուն հետ վիճակուեցան իրեն երեսունական թուականներու Երրորդ Ռայխի ստեղծած մութ ազգայնականութեան եւ մոլեռանդ ու թթու ցեղապաշտութեան շնորհիւ: Ինչպէս բազմաթիւ գերման գրողներուն եւ արուեստագէտներուն գործերը՝ իրեններն ալ դարձան հրոյ նարակ եւ ի՛նքն ալ ուրացուեցաւ փողոցի տականքին եւ նացիականութեան կերտած եւ յառաջացուցած պիղծ ցեղամոլներու եւ գտարին արիականութեան յանախանքէն վարակուած մարդկային խեղճեանքին նախնիրային իմաստակութենէն եւ առայդ նաշակեց չորն ու չարը կեղբոնացումի կայաններուն: Այսուհանդերձ՝ Համաշխարհային Երկրորդ Պատերազմի աւարտէն ետք անիկա մերժեց մնալ սահմաններէն ներս իր հայրենական հողերուն եւ անցաւ Հռովմ, ուր անցուց մնացեալ մասը կեանքին:

Վերիվայրումներով, ահաւոր ցնցումներով եւ փնտելտումի ենթարկուած մարդու իր հոգիով եւ առօրեայով, սակայն, Վեկնէրը մնաց պինդ ու զօրաւոր հաւատաւորը մարդկային եւ անհատին արժէքներուն, եւ արտայայտչապաշտ քերթողի իր էջերուն մէջ դրսեւորեց մարդկայնական այն ոգին, որ իրն էր եղած Հայկական Տասնհինգի օրերուն իսկ: Նկարագրային գիծի մը վերածուած այս մարդկայնականութիւնը, որ կը մատչի մարդասիրութեան՝ քայքայ իրեն հետ կեանքի իր բոլոր արահետներուն վրայ եւ մինչեւ աւարտն իր կեանքի օրերուն:

Իր գործերէն բազմաթիւներ եղան դրսեւորումը հայու տա-
նապանքին եւ արիւնումին. անհատական եւ ընկերային իր կեան-
քէն նե՛րս ալ անիկա եղաւ իր հայրենակիցներուն մէջ այն շա՛տ
փշերէն, որոնք գիտցան զանագանել իրան ու արդարը եւ զանոնք
վեր դասել իրենց պետականութեան քաղաքականութեան անբա-
րոյութենէն, եւ առ այդ ձայն բարձրացնել հոն ուր անհրաժեշտ էր:

Քաջ ու խիզախ, եւ նշմարտութեան եւ մարդկային արժէ-
ներու խօսնակ այս գրողն էր, որ ի վերջոյ, օր մըն ալ հրաւիրուե-
ցաւ էջմիածին՝ ստանալու համար գերագոյն գնահատանքը գոր-
շայ Եկեղեցին կրնար տալ որեւէ մէկուն: Հո՛ն էր որ Վազգէն Ա.
Վեհափառին հետ ունեցած մտերիմ գրոյցէ մը ծնունդ առաւ գա-
ղափարը երկնումին հայու տառապանքին արժանի քանի մը գոր-
ծերու: Ահաւասիկ, Արմին Թեոֆիլ Վեկնէրի հայութեան հետ ա-
ղերսուող կարգ մը այլ գործերու կարգին՝ Դոկտ. Ինկրիտ
Սըմաանը կը մատչի հիմնական երկու այն գործերուն, որոնցմէ
տասը նուագեայ դիւցազներգութիւն մըն է առաջինը՝ *Տաս Արմե-
նիչէ Թոթենլիյա* խորագրով, եւ վեպ մը երկրորդը՝ *Տի Աուսթ-
րայունդ* վերնագիրով, որոնք յաջորդաբար կը հիւսուին Միերան
եւ Ադամ անունով պատանի երկու հայորդիներու շուրջ:

Դժբախտաբար, սակայն, անոնցմէ երկուքն ալ մնացին թե-
րաւարտ, եւ հագիւ թէ անոնցմէ փոքր հատուածներ եւ փոքր ամ-
փոփումներ հասան մամուլի բարիքին. ըստ Դոկտ. Սըմաանին՝
Վեկնէր չկարողացաւ ամբողջացնել զանոնք՝ պարզօրէն անոր
համար անցնող տարիները շատ բան էին փոխած իրմէ ներս. առ
այդ յօդուածին հեղինակը կ'եզրակացնէ, թէ «մինչ այդ անիկա
ծերացեր էր եւ յոգներ, եւ կեանքի հանդէպ փոխուեր՝ իր կեց-
ւածքը: Աներ էր քանակը ձեռագիրներու էջերուն, որոնք պէտք
ունէին յօտումի: Հիմնականին մէջ վիպագիր մը չէր աչքառու
պատկերներու արտայայտչապաշտ բանաստեղծ Վեկնէրը, որ
ինքզինքն նետեր էր սխալ գործի մը: Անշուշտ Վեկնէր ի՛նքն իսկ
գիտակ էր այս հարցերէն ոմանց: Յանախ կը կրկնէր ինքզինքին.
«Կրնատէ՛, կրնատէ՛, կրնատէ՛ — ա՛յս է հիմնական հարցը». սա-
կայն՝ ի գուր: Անիկա գիտէր, որ բանաստեղծի իր երէկը գինք վատ
էր պատրաստած վեպի բարդ կառոյցին հետ վարուելու համար,
մինչդեռ Պալգաքն ու Թոլսթոյն վարուեր էին անոր հետ այդքա՛ն
հեզասահ կերպով: Գուցէ անիկա կը զգայ նաեւ, որ իրեն դաւա-
նաներ էր իր բարեկամը՝ Ֆրանց Վերֆելը, որուն *Մուսա Տաղի
Քառասուն Օրերը* վեպն եղեր էր մեծ յաջողութիւն մը: Վեկնէր
կը խորհէր թէ իր բարեկամն իրմէ խլեր էր նիւթը: Դաւանանու-
թեան շեշտ մը կար հայերուն մօտ նաեւ՝ կը մտածէր Վեկնէր: Ա-

Ողբ պարգորեն շա՛տ էին խանդավառ Վերֆէլի վէպի իրենց գովեստին մէջ:

Դոկտ. Ինկրիտ Սըմաանի ուսումնասիրութիւնը լուսամուտ մըն է Արմին Թէոֆիլ Վեկների գրականութեան հայութեան հետ առընչուող հատուածին վրայ բացուող, իսկ անոր յաջորդող գերմաներէն եւ անոր անգլերէն թարգմանուած հատուածները յաւելում մը՝ գերման բանաստեղծին ներքին աշխարհին լաւագոյնս նանաչումի նամբուն վրայ: