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BOOK REVIEW: “WESTERN ARMENIAN AND DIASPORAN WOMEN WRITERS” BY H. NALBANDIAN (Yerevan, Edit Print, 2020)

Naira Hambardzumyan*

Institute of Literature, NAS RA

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2792-8891>

Lili Karapetyan**

Yerevan State University

ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2899-6239>

In 2020, the Armenian-American philologist, literary scholar, and bibliographer Hovsep Nalbandian compiled and edited the anthology *Western Armenian and Diasporan Women Writers* (Yerevan, 2020, 560 pages), which was published by Edit Print Publishing House.

This is the first book by Hovsep Nalbandian to systematize the works of Western Armenian and Diasporan women writers, aiming to introduce a broader readership to the mentioned literature. The novelty of the work lies in its unification of literary works by Western Armenian women writers of the late 19th century and those of Diasporan Armenian women who, following the Armenian Genocide of the early 20th century, created literature in Armenian communities across various countries. According to the editor, the anthology is a tribute to all Armenian women writers, a concept Nalbandian conceived while lecturing at Mashtots College in Glendale, Los Angeles, USA (now closed).

Although an extensive amount of work has been undertaken, the editor of the book notes: “Such collections always have omissions. We have strived to present a comprehensive and inclusive new volume, particularly covering Diasporan short stories, essays, memoirs, poetry, and publicistic writings (being aware that the latter are not considered fictional literature). Naturally, some names are absent; otherwise, our modest work would have turned into a two-volume book” (p. 11).

An anthology of this nature is significant in contemporary society and remains actual, as it fulfills an educational function and exerts a certain influence on the

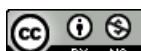
* nairahambardzumyan@yahoo.com

** starlet@ysu.am

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development of science and culture. It is also crucial from the perspective of stimulating research on key issues in the History of Literature. Furthermore, the work is timely and necessary, as there is an urgent need to reassess women's literature in the radically transformed literary world.

It should be noted that prior to Hovsep Nalbandian's initiative, no anthology of Armenian women writers' works had been compiled, making this collection the first of its kind. The presented volume offers an entire gallery of femininity. The voices of all the included authors seem to merge into a collective dialogue about women, unified through harmonious intonations, stylistic turns of phrases, and distinctive portrayals.

The anthology is comprised of three sections: prose (short stories, essays, memoirs), poetry and publicistic writings. Notably, these sections also have their internal systematization:

- a. Western Armenian Women Writers – Prose (short stories, memoirs, etc.): Srbuhi Tyusab, Zapel Asatur, Arshakuhi Teodik, Zapel Yesayan, Mari Peylerian, and others.
- b. Diasporan Women Writers – Prose (short stories, memoirs, etc.): Anais, Zaruhi Galemkearian, Haykanush Mark, Mannik Perperian, Siran Seza, Las (Louise Aslanian), and others.
- c. Western Armenian Women Writers – Poetry: Zapel Asatur (Sipil).
- d. Diaspora Armenian Women Writers – Poetry: Helen Byuzand, Arshi (Arshaluys Babayan), Pargevuhi Orfa Petrosian, Armenuhi Terzian, Mari Atmajian, Alicia Kirakosian, and others.
- e. Diasporan Women Writers – Publicism: Hilda Galfayan-Panosian, Nvard Madoyan-Taraghchian, Anahit Bostanjian, Salbi Gasparian, and others.

Through this kind of systematization, Hovsep Nalbandian has also sought to reveal the conceptual content of women's literature, which is closely related to questions of poetics. This circumstance also helps to consider the phenomenon from a typological perspective.

The most striking feature of women's literature is its ability to see, appreciate, and recreate the woman's character and the feminine beginning, that can be realized exclusively by a woman herself. In order to uncover the logic behind the development of women's literature, it is crucial to understand culture as a system, as these ideas are significant in contemporary academic and literary-cultural fields. This perspective makes it possible not only to avoid separating women's literature from men's literature based on genre and stylistic characteristics but also to address the issue of placing these writers on an equal footing with their male counterparts.

Literary historians often position women's literature outside the framework of the new realist tradition, placing it somewhere at the intersection of naturalism and sentimentalism – an approach that is unacceptable. Some literary scholars depict women's literature in vague, generalized terms, failing to engage with the issue in a serious manner. Others ignore the matter entirely, compiling scientific publications on the History of Armenian Literature without including women authors.

In the preface titled *Western Armenian and Diaspora Armenian Women Writers through the Lens of Hovsep Nalbandian*, published on pages 12-14 of the anthology, literary scholar Suren Danielyan writes: "In our impression, it encompasses two conceptual worlds. One aims to present the rich material as if in the palm of one's hand, just to directly reveal it through a comprehensive understanding, to show both the light and shadow of the issue's history, its previous developments – in short, the achievements, the intellectual traces left behind, the defining features, and, in a broader sense, the complete possible portrait of the selected individual. The second is your infallible worldview, the high standard of taste within you, which must be in harmony with your conscience. The order of selections demonstrates that the reader can rest assured – the editor's keen and responsible eye has recognized the strength, potential, individuality, role, and place of each author. If necessary, a precise and relevant editorial intervention has ensured the direct protection of the spark of talent within the broader whole."

Literary historians associate the emergence of women's literature with the developments of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which, by their nature, sought to legitimize alternative discourses that diverged from both a-systematic tendencies and the deconstructive approach of the Soviet myth.

Writer and literary critic Naira Hambardzumyan thinks that any literature that, in one way or another, challenges the dominant paradigm of the myth surrounding men's literature can be defined as feminine, even if it was created by male authors. It is precisely through this definition that the *lightening* enables literature of both genders to be examined and analyzed within the framework of a shared myth.

This encyclopedic work, designed for a broad audience, offers valuable knowledge for students and professors in the fields of Philological and Oriental Studies at universities in Armenia and beyond. It is also a useful resource for teachers and students in general education institutions, art school students, and journalists. Additionally, it holds scholarly significance by encouraging further research on women's issues.