ARMENIA WRITER-IN-RESIDENCE IN QUEBEC

Posted on July 20, 2014 by Keghart



Category: Opinions

20 July 2014

Diana Hambardzumyan of Armenia is writer-in-residence (July 14 to August 10) at Val-David, Quebec, upon the invitation of the International Writers and Artists' Residency program. During her stay she met writers, delivered speeches on Armenian contemporary literature, made contacts with publishers and addressed literary gatherings organized by the Hamazkayin Cultural Association in Montreal and in Toronto. She also met members of the Armenian Canadian Business Association at the AGBU in Montreal.

Ms. Hambardzumyan is a graduate (Honors) of the Yerevan State Institute of Foreign Languages. She teaches English and translation studies at the State Linguistic University. She has written 18 books and her work has been translated into 13 languages. Her most recent novel, "A Knock at the Door", was published in June. Earlier this summer she was honored by the mayor of Yerevan.

20 July 2014

Diana Hambardzumyan of Armenia is writer-in-residence (July 14 to August 10) at Val-David, Quebec, upon the invitation of the International Writers and Artists' Residency program. During her stay she met writers, delivered speeches on Armenian contemporary literature, made contacts with publishers and addressed literary gatherings organized by the Hamazkayin Cultural Association in Montreal and in Toronto. She also met members of the Armenian Canadian Business Association at the AGBU in Montreal.

Ms. Hambardzumyan is a graduate (Honors) of the Yerevan State Institute of Foreign Languages. She teaches English and translation studies at the State Linguistic University. She has written 18 books and her work has been translated into 13 languages. Her most recent novel, "A Knock at the Door", was published in June. Earlier this summer she was honored by the mayor of Yerevan.

KEGHART: Can you tell us the titles of some of your books?

DIANA HAMBARDZUMYAN: Among the books I have written are "Milky Way", "Across the Burnt Bridges", "Grief and Troubles Since the Time of Noah", "In the God-Inhabited Country", "Top Ten Stories" (Armenian-English), "Telegram to Fatima" (German, Russian), and "A Knock at the Door".

KEGHART: What are some of the major themes of your books?

D.H.: Man and his homeland—Armenia: its present and past; God and man; emigration; man-woman relationships; social, religious issues; and justice. They dominate my work and formed my intellectual self--me, as a person, thinker and creator.

KEGHART: How would you describe your style?

D.H.: It's experimental and novel. It's also mixed because of the language's simplicity, its colloquialism and literary nature.

KEGHART: Have you been influenced by other writers?

D.H.: World literature, including Armenian literature, has influenced me but it's life that made me a writer. There is no single writer whom I can point out among many favorites as teacher. I'm a self-made writer. My literary heroes have their prototypes in life but are so immensely transformed and artistically cultivated that even the prototypes are puzzled, or the prototypes are missing but the heroes live their own lives and come across their counterparts all of a sudden giving birth to siblings. So life makes my heroes and on their turn my heroes make life the way it is.

KEGHART: Can you tell us how your work has changed over the years?

D.H.: It has changed immensely--like me, my life, my way of thinking, the world, my country. On the other hand, it hasn't changed at all, as the core of my books has been and still remains man, whom I want to know well but haven't managed yet.

KEGHART: What's the literary scene like in Armenia?

D.H.: It is "multicolored". There are young writers who are in search of something new and better than the work of authors who have written their best books and don't write any longer. Then there are authors who have made their way in literature and are still making them, like me.

KEGHART: How have the Armenian economy, security issues, and emigration impacted book themes and sales?

D.H.: They have greatly impacted book themes. In my latest novel, "A Knock at the Door" (released in May 2014), I've touched upon all these issues: the economic situation, corruption, and injustice result in the insecurity. They also make people leave the country. But emigration doesn't solve the problems of a person who has moved to the developed world where he feels lonely and useless.

My sales are respectable compared to the majority of my writer colleagues. But when we hear of the sale of millions of copies of so many bestsellers in the West, it hurts us that because we live in Armenia, which has a few million people, our books can't become bestsellers overseas.

KEGHART: How does the current literary scene differ from that of Soviet days?

D.H.: It is different. In Soviet days writers led privileged lives. Sometimes their books were published with 500,000 runs and sold out quickly. This happened due to the ideological plans and programs devised in detail. Nowadays publishing and printing houses are private properties and business people don't dare invest much money in this area since they are not sure of returns. Nevertheless, there are prominent publishing houses. Among them are my two publishers--"Zangak" and

"Antares"--which are pioneers and leaders and do their best to change the situation. I trust them.

KEGHART: Is there concern in Armenia about Russia's attempts to impose its cultural influence on Armenia? If yes, how are they resisting Moscow's pressure?

D.H.: Armenia was under the Russian 'yoke' during the seventy years of Soviet rule. It wasn't as bad as the Turkish or Persian yokes. So it's not a new pressure for us. Since we endured the regime of the Soviet empire, we can and we must endure the neo-racist attempts of Russia to colonize Armenia. We are obliged to do so. There's no other way for a nation which has struggled for survival for many centuries.

KEGHART: What's the near future of Armenia's literature?

D.H.: It's high time for Armenian literature to pull down the barrier of small country syndrome and fetch the Nobel Prize. It's time the Nobel Prize recognized what's being created in Armenia.

KEGHART: The UN has said that Western Armenian is an endangered language. What can be done to save it?

D.H.: Even if the UN hadn't said it, we are wise enough to foresee it and take measures to preserve not only the Western Armenian but the Eastern Armenian as well. It must be the first obligation of every Armenian to speak his/her language not only at home but also in public. The government must enact laws to protect Armenian not only for future centuries but for today's Armenian kids growing up abroad. Armenians must acknowledge the necessity of protecting their language like people who take care of their motherland--instinctively and consciously. Language is the spiritual house of a nation.

July 20, 2014