DUO CULTURAL/POLITICAL PROGRAM IN TORONTO

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Category: Opinions

Reporter, Toronto, 17 June 2012

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Viken L. Attarian, a prominent personality in the Quebec arm of the Liberal Party of Canada, a public intellectual, and an engineer, presented an outline of the history of Armenian science fiction. After a brief outline of mostly English language science fiction, Attarian listed the four major preoccupations of the genre: current technological possibilities; time travel; space exploration and encounters with beings from outer space; and parallel worlds. He then introduced the five luminaries of the genre in Armenian literature: Krikor Kasbarian, Ashod Shaypon (Kasbarian), Kevork Der-Stepanian, Garen Simonian, and Simon Simonian. Attarian said that Garen Simonian (born in Yerevan in 1936 and living now in Paris) is the most prolific of the group.

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Krikor Kasbarin (1855-1942) is the chronological pioneer of Armenian science fiction. He not only wrote the first science fiction story (1906) but the theme of his novel (sex change) was a daring novelty. Mr. Shaypon (1905-1982) was one of the first Soviet writers to contribute to the genre. A poet, dramatist and screen writer, Mr. Shaypon reflected Soviet ideology in his writing. Garen Simonian, who started in the same Soviet vein as Mr. Shaypon, eventually veered from the Soviet megalomania ("we do it because we can") and expressed concern in the impact on humanity of unchecked science. Der-Stepanian, born in Yerevan in 1907, died in Montreal in 2006. His masterpiece--"Wiser Than Humans"--was published in 1984. He, too, was concerned in environmental depredation. Through mainly his advocacy, Der-Stepanian saved Lake Sevan when the waters were threatened by badly-devised government plans. Simon Simonian's "Anjamantros" (1978) is an expose of political chicanery and espionage disguised as science fiction.

Shahan Deirmenjian, who was master of ceremonies at the event, repeated his role the following day when the topic was the citizen's role in a democratic society. The panelists were Harout Manougian, Toronto District School Board trustee; Hagop MksyArtinian, past-president of the Ontario Young Liberals; and Viken L. Attarian, the newly-elected president of the Quebec wing of the Policy Commission of the Liberal Party of Canada. Although the three panelists are members of the Liberal Party, the discussions were non-partisan.

Citing the recent student riots in Quebec, Attarian made a clear distinction between the exercise of a citizen's rights through the ballot box and positive engagement by working within the system versus "street democracy" when citizens exercise destructive techniques and resort to mob rule under the guise of democracy.

Manougian observed that citizens don't have the inclination to follow the decision-making process of their elected representative. He deplored that too many citizens rely on ten-second Twitter news bites when they need detailed information to be engaged with events that have direct impact on their lives. MksyArtinian also criticized the complacency of citizens and cited the low voter turnout reflecting apathy.

MC Deirmenjian said that Canadian-Armenians have long been apathetic about "our roles and responsibilities within Canada. It is high time that an active Armenian organization presented to the Toronto community with the opportunity to have a candid discussion about our responsibilities as Canadian citizens."