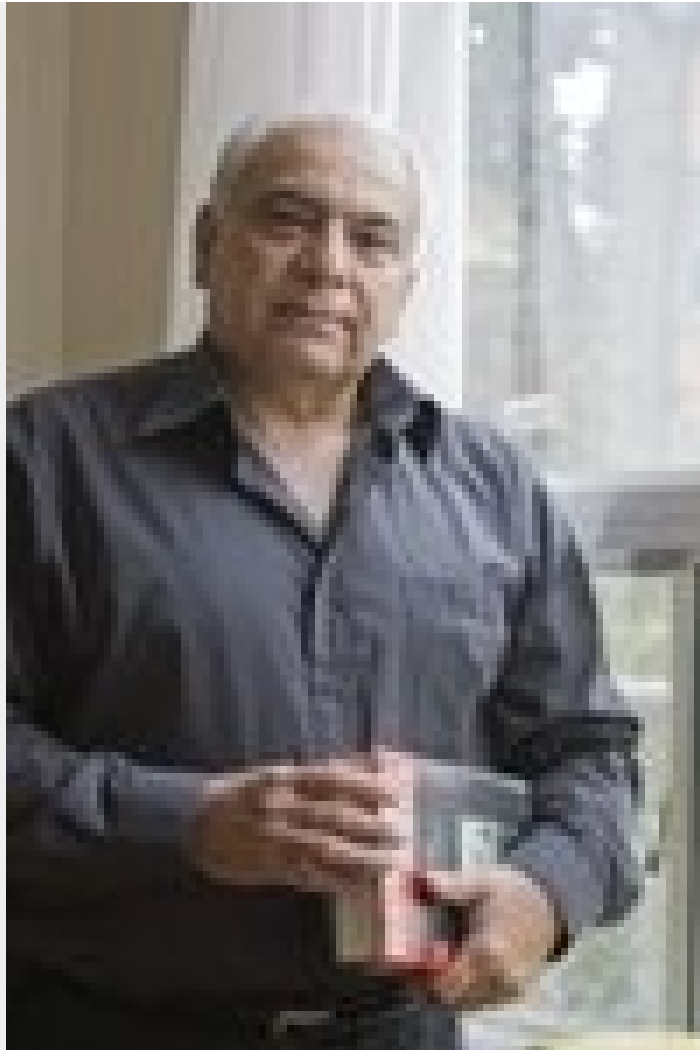


KEITH GAREBIAN'S "CHILDREN OF ARARAT"

Posted on April 6, 2010 by Keghart



Category: [Opinions](#)



✘ Born to an Anglo-Indian mother and an Armenian father, Keith Garebian is a widely published, award-winning author and freelance arts writer with 17 books and over 1,500 reviews, articles, interviews, and features to his credit in over 100 newspapers, journals, magazines, and anthologies. His latest book is a collection of poetry about his Armenian father, a survivor of the Armenian genocide of 1915. It was selected by eminent Canadian poet-jurors (Governor General Award winner George Elliot Clarke, Bill Bisset, and Alice Major) as one of the ten winning manuscripts to be published by Frontenac House (Calgary) as their historic Dektet 2010 series.

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Garebian has already won awards and accolades for individual poems from this book, including the Canadian Authors' Association (Niagara Branch) Poetry Award and Parliamentary Poem of the Month. Some of the poems were published in *Exile* and *Humanist Perspectives*, two prestigious Canadian journals.

Garebian quotes a line from Nietzsche to sum up what he feels about his motives for this book: ✘ "We have art so that we shall not be destroyed by the truth." Garebian has "made poetry out of human atrocity to remember how man can turn into beast. The raw truth of the Armenian genocide never ends, despite the vicious cycle of denial that spins relentlessly against it. What was once a political juggernaut (with the considerable help of the governments, though not necessarily the people, of the United States, England, Israel, and Germany) is now increasingly like a wheel spinning madly in sand.

Deniers often sound like loonies who insist that the earth is flat or that the jury is still out on Evolution. Denial becomes a second genocide because it would obliterate all memory of and responsibility for race-murder, granting no peace to millions of bones, no respect to the dead, no consolation or closure (that mythical notion) to survivors, and no real basis for the idea of universal justice." Garebian intends to memorialize "the incredible, staggering suffering" of his father's tribe, to "give voice in a special way to the dead, and to defy the deniers who would conveniently forget the genocide that will not be forgotten."

Garebian ardently hopes that the international Armenian community will throw its support behind this book because unless this community shows this support, he does not believe that there will be hope for more books by Canadian writers on the Armenian genocide. He would be willing to read and discuss his work at Armenian cultural centres in North America or Europe. At a special reading

of poetry at the Hamazkayin Community Centre, Toronto, on March 21, 2010, where Garebian joined Lorne Shirinian and Alan Whitehorn as readers, Children of Ararat did pleasingly brisk sales. Retailing at only \$15.95, the book has been praised by no less a literary eminence than Peter Balakian who wrote in a blurb: "If you want to feel how deeply a genocidal history can impact the imagination, read these brave, passionate, relentless and incandescent poems by Keith Garebian."

Poems by Keith Garebian

DIKRANAGERD*

When he talked of Dikranagerd
my father's eyes vanished
into a town sometimes Turkish,
sometimes Russian,
history as swift as a flood,
roots swept away
with crops and trees, fields
dissolving, everything muddied.

The only permanence—Ararat,
In white caps neither growing
nor breaking, awaiting
some angel to deliver
the landscape:
the stone-faced churches,
rocky fields,
oxen pressed each to each for heat
like dark orphans in pictures.

Perhaps I would have died with history,
grandparents and aunts, a whole tribe
uprooted from metallic ground,
hard as the heels of assassins,
or the bones left by ravenous dogs
too weak to chew them.

My father always sipped his tea noisily,
teeth braced the way he flinched
from memories, no sugar cube
to sweeten his loss,
slowly re-tasting his life

In slurps, a far-away look in his eyes
once gold in Dikranagerd

** Dikranagerd won first prize in a Canadian competition*

Cut

Dressed in fezzes and uniforms,
moustaches thicker than their lips,
sinewy arms crossed in proud distinction,
they sit as pashas at a table,
staring straight at the camera lens
while two heads
lie on platters
spattered with blood.

One moment defining what they did
in their spare time before dreaming up
reason to round off
genocide to zero.

JULY IN DIYARBEKIR

Cloudless blue and no wind to ruffle
partridge in olive trees
or even a silk scarf.

Islands of mulberries,
watermelon pregnant with pink juice,
the Tigris changing colour in a whim,
flat roofs covered with white cloth
to keep sleep cool,

The people loved these wonders with consistency
of custom, not knowing
July would be a killing month,
human nature turned into a bestiary.

If they had put their ears to the ground,
they would have heard blood gushing
In Aintab, Harput, Sivas, Yozgat.

And their kinfolk at the mercy of a new science,

vivisection and its fresh possibilities.

flesh opened as if for a butcher carving into sheep,
the remains turned into scraps
for vultures, whose long necks unscolded
in ravenous swoops.

In the clean evening light
the city hulled baskets of bulghur,
sticking to work as shopkeepers disappeared,
children taken from their school.
women at the baths went clean to grief.

Work kept others from thinking
about the unbvelievable.
July became a month of tendons
and sinews, the fitful vulnerability
of flesh, death by wholesale subtraction.

Between the staked olive trees, the partridge
caught their spurs in wires,
wrenching the sky with cries.

MY FATHER

To Speak His Own Love

Named Adam, he wasn't the first-born
yet he felt a wound in his side,
something wrenched from him
in Eden, and he was cast out
among weeds and bare stones
never to be free of wariness,
even when held by desire,
making it hard to speak his own love
from a fixed place in the world.

*You may secure a copy of "**Children of Ararat**" from [Amazon.ca](https://www.amazon.ca/) or [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com/)*

