"LETTERS TO BARBRA"

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Rubina Peroomian, **Ph.D.**, Prof. of Literature, UCLA, Los Angeles, 2 February 2019

Paul Chaderjian, *Letters to Barbra*, Meshag Publishing, 2018. Pp. 524.

As a reader who had the chance to read the manuscript before publication, I thank Paul Chaderjian for letting me into the world of "Adam Terzian," a world in which the past, the present, and the future co-exist in conflict, never in harmony, a world that is marked with the trauma our parents and grandparents lived and unwillingly transmitted to us to shape our identity that we have to live with tragically, in conformity; and if we object, if we turn away, we are doomed; we cannot find peace. The sense of belonging is displaced, it becomes meaningless, only a source of pain and compunction, an anxiety.

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If you are looking for a leisurely, easy reading, a narrative that takes you on a smooth ride of chronologically recorded episodes, this book is not for you. It needs your full commitment and concentration. It is not a text you just read and forget, but something you live with. Here, the reader becomes the subject, the teller of his/her own life story. And this is because the author offers an exceptional style and language that grabs, that pulls the reader deep into the world he describes.

Letters to Barbra is profound. The torrent of ideas, the thoughts flying back and forth in time, the anachronistic sequence of events make the text difficult to digest. It does not read smoothly like a novel or an ordinary autobiography. So, I do not see it to gain popularity immediately after its release. One is to expect more than that. Chaderjian writes, "I wrote because I had to write." So, I would add, you read because you have to read and see the mirror image of your life, a part of yourself in the complexity of your identity, an Armenian caught in the web of intricate relationships defying time and space.

Chaderjian had the courage to be honest with the character he created. As an eleven-year old boy, this character, named Adam, witnessed the Beirut bombing, the fears and tears during that senseless civil war. But that experience did not remain in the past. It comes forth like an episode

recurring throughout Adam's life, thus showing the persisting impact of the trauma. And although, the purpose of writing letters to Barbra—Barbra Streisand, a Hollywood idol of the time—comes to light only towards the end of the text, it is obvious that this "game" Adam played so faithfully was a catharsis he sought, a need that did not subside over the years. The burden of the past and its impact on his/our everyday life is there, resonating, as Adam experiences, in debilitating downfalls, unsatisfying successes, the real life and not the imagined or coveted, or the ideal in multicultural, multireligious Los Angeles, the transgenerational pain, the unfulfilled parents' expectations. And in addition to all that, the true face of the Diaspora and the "homeland" and its people with a huge gap between them. Chaderjian/Adam felt that gap. He recognized the truth before many of us did.

Letters to Barbra is an artistic chronicling of generational struggle for self-realization and quest for identity. Now that it is published and available, let it run its own life. May that be a long one.

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Paul Chaderjian is writer and broadcast journalist and has reported for Al Jazeera, CNN, ABC News and television stations in Fresno, New York, Yerevan, Los Angeles and Honolulu. For the past five years, he was a Senior Producer and Reporter for the Al Jazeera Media Network, based in Doha, Qatar.

"Letters to Barbra" the novel by Paul Chaderjian is now on sale

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