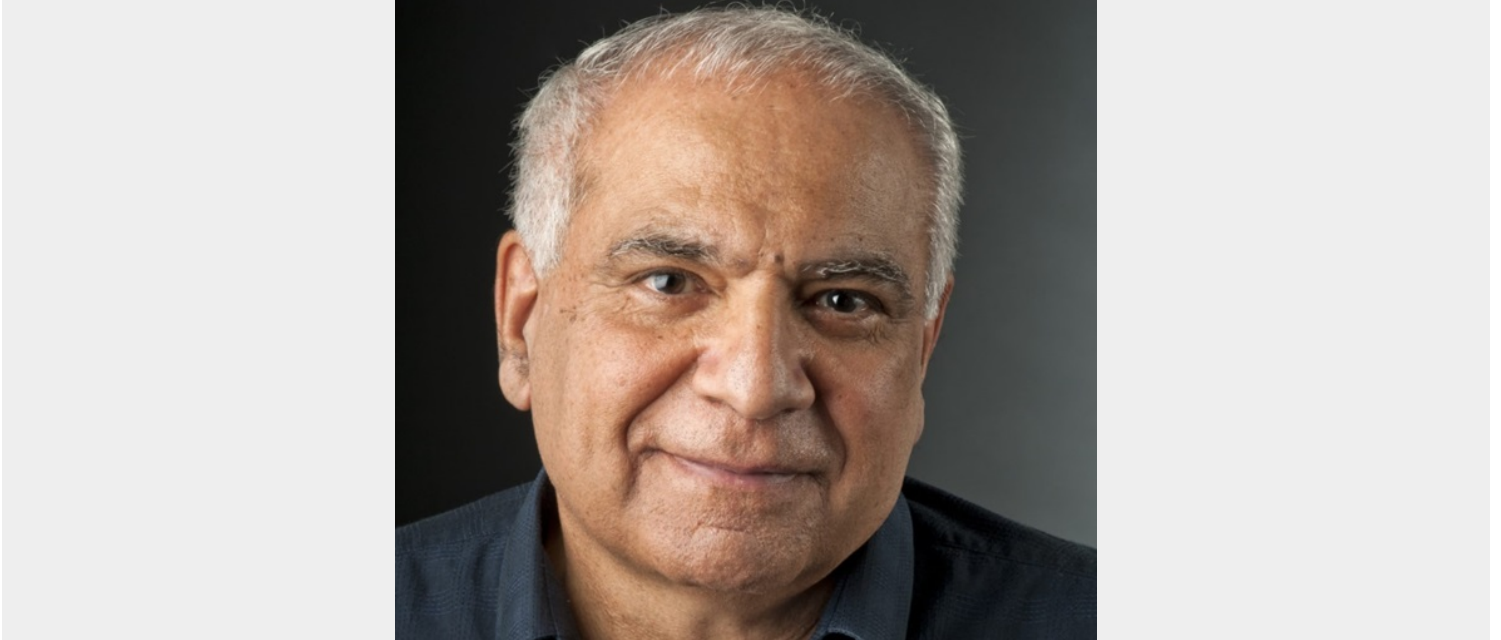


# AN APPRECIATION OF KEITH GAREBIAN'S NEW COLLECTION OF POETRY, ARETÉ

*Posted on May 27, 2024 by Keghart*



Category: [Opinions](#)



**By Prof. Lorne Shirinian**, Ontario, 14 May 2024

Keith Garebian and I have been sharing our poems and other writings with each other for some time. Last Friday, I received from him his most recent book of poetry, *Areté*, a chapbook containing twelve poems for which he was awarded the Ellen S. Jaffe Humanist Poetry Award in 2024. On first reading the poems, I was so struck that I immediately sent him an email expressing my admiration. As the email turned out to be in some sense a review, I thought it would be worthwhile to share it with Keghart's readers who are likely already familiar with his poetry. Below is the email with some additions to expand on some of the ideas.

May 10, 2024.

Dear Keith,

Congratulations on your new collection and the award! Thank you for sending me a copy. I really enjoyed reading the poems. They are different from your poems that deal with Armenian subjects as in *Poetry is Blood*, although as I read through them, certain passages resonated with this Armenian poet and reader. The poetic lines and the rhythms here are quite different in this new collection as, for example, in "The Boy Watched," from *Poetry is Blood*.

For that: much grief  
and anger against a sky  
of venomous sun, hawks  
with razor claws

or in "Memorial"

The wall speaks names  
of bodies unrisen  
from faraway  
despoiled graves

The short tight lines are precise and evocative, leaving a wound like an incision from a scalpel. In some ways, they are akin to certain poems in my recent collection, *Rendering the Timeline* (2021) in that the syntax leads the reader to the argument in the poem such as in "Identity Papers."

first there are the unnamed dead  
and their voiceless stories  
that vex the restless mind  
family history mute  
into the new world  
lives abridged, discounted and disbelieved

Keith, the last stanza of "Intervals of Creation" in *Areté* is breathtaking. You articulate beautifully what

we all strive for in writing poetry.

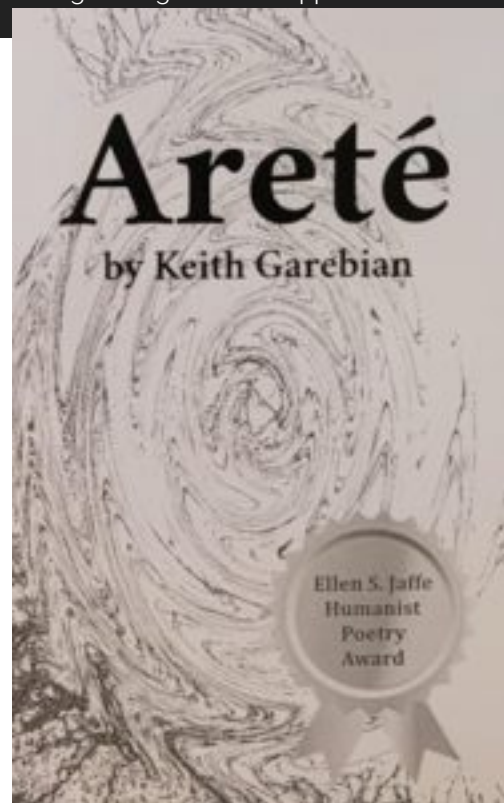
Brushes with poetry, mind cleared  
to respect its own focus  
Flourishes of life in ink, brush rooted  
in the heart, every dip, swerve, billowing  
contemplation out of inner silence.

In "The Nails That Stick Up," the irony of "Before divining to survive/she needs to forget" is not lost on those of us weighed down with memory and necessity. "The world knocks you back.../Some memories are nails that stick.../They will be hammered down." When I read this, I thought of *Poetry Is Blood* and my poems such as the last stanza of "Unmasked," in *Rendering the Timeline*.

the eternal skin lies in wait  
reluctant boy scans the horizon  
extends one foot forward  
and sees the trap  
but a feint from his worn bag of tricks  
yet another artful evasion  
avoids peals of laughter  
he turns and walks away  
not quite intact  
but safe at least  
for now

The last stanza of "Windings" is so profound. You capture what poets and artists strive for without

being conscious of it. At the end, when the work, the poem, is there before you, it is always a stunning moment to see "dreams sliding out of her heart," what was "within herself."



I loved "Areté." "Ruin is normal, inevitable fate/binding art and life to extinction." We know that only too well. You offer an answer in the final poem of the collection, "The Sun Always Rises on Her-" She, the persona in the poem, and most of us are always "pointing at things to be rescued.../knowing that drowning isn't an option." The wonderful final two lines offer the consolation of the duty and need, in our case, to explore and to write honestly, "of loving the craft/of being human relentlessly."

The wonderful thing about this collection is that the dropping of the atomic bomb on Nagasaki and Japanese artists and immigrants are subjects for your poems, and I love that. However, the resonances extend outwards like ripples on a pond beyond the subjects in the poems. They connect with others because of the human experience in your poetry. Perhaps your personal history as an Armenian cannot so easily be camouflaged. The poetry in this collection is encompassing, another step on your journey, the human journey.

Best,

Lorne

**Lorne Shirinian** is a poet, novelist, playwright, memoirist and Professor Emeritus of English and Comparative Literature. His new novel will be available this summer.

Copies of Keith Garebian's new book are available for \$10.00 (including Canadian postage) by writing to [kgarebian@gmail.com](mailto:kgarebian@gmail.com).



## Comments



**LK** – 2024-05-27 13:07:43

Thank you, Keith Garebian and Lorne Shirinian, for applying your formidable talents to expression of thought and sensation through poetry and for so firmly contributing to the canon of Armenian literature.



**Keith Garebian** – 2024-05-27 08:42:51

Just to highlight the fact that my chapbook is essentially about Ruth Asawa, Japanese-American sculptor, who had to battle racism, gender bias, and poverty to achieve what was an unparalleled level of artistic excellence in her time. But thanks to Lorne for his customary thought-provoking comments.