

"WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?" ASKS THE POET

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Probing Deep Psychic Waters

✘ **Vahe H. Apelian**, Loveland, OH, 20 November 2015

Berj Cholakian's just-published one-hundred page *Monologues* is a collection of thirty-two poems written over the past four decades. Artistic color pictures precede the poems and help enhance the author's reflections in each poem. The cover depicts a lonesome man treading along on a foggy day. The book is dedicated to his late son Sevag and daughter Tamara. ✘

The first six poems are *Oblivious Existence*, *Enigma*, *Introspect*, *Sacred Love*, *Pax Atomica*, and *April of Reincarnation*. They were written in 1977 and published in "Kuwait Times" when he worked as area manager for a British/Saudi firm there. The titles give a sense of the reflective mood he expresses in these monologues, as life may well be an *Enigma* that needs to be sorted out where:

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Suddenly
Love is hate
Life is death
Light is darkness
and NO is
Perhaps....

The next is *Aliens...?* It was written three decades later. The short biographical sketch sheds light on the prolonged lapse. After Kuwait he moved to Southern California where, for the next twenty-five years, he ran his own trading business that must have taken all of his attention and stamina while he tried to cope with the profound loss of his son.

The ensuing poems, from 2007 onward, continue to reflect on perennial subjects that have been

written "since the beginning of the alphabet", as he puts it. He tackles them again with a quest to make sense of the *Enigma* and to affirm values and believe in them. I quote from *I Still Believe* (July 2012)

*I still believe
That
A full-hearted laugh
or
A tacit smile
Will enlighten
Our aura
And
Enliven our heart*

Cholakian presents similar subjects titled *God, Love, Life, Religion*, and akin themes but in different style and format: He explains, in his notes that he wrote "with as little words as possible to avoid being tedious in conveying my thoughts". The poetic monologues written in the later years are more personal (*Of Hope and Faith, Boundless Love, Tears of Joy and Sorrow* and others).

A sense of resignation and need for comfort become palpable in the later poems, especially in "*Letter*" To My Late Son and *Homage To My Orphaned Father*. Don't we all resign to the inevitable eventuality and concede that man proposes God disposes? Some call it fate, others kismet.

In his "letter" to his son, written twenty years after Sevag's untimely death, Cholakian reveals that he continues to struggle to find solace, to try to fill his loneliness and emptiness. He even writes to his son to control his anger against no other than "The Creator" or God. After all the struggle and grief, he ends his "letter" letting Sevag know that the only thing left for the father to do is to bid his son good-bye to see him soon. He writes:

*Tentatively
Let me tell you
Good bye my son
And
See you soon*

I was particularly consumed by this poem as I remembered what Aram Haigaz noted that the All Mighty God could not stand the loss of his beloved Son and had Him resurrected to sit by Him. I drew on my remembrance in an attempt to understand and convey the pain of a grieving father but not to sound insensitive to our Christian faith.

✘ His last monologue – *Homage To My Orphaned Father* – was written in April 2015 and is about memorializing the life of his orphaned father and paying tribute to him "*With eternal love*".

Cholakian's father hailed from Agn, the famed Armenian town that was the birthplace of an inordinate number of influential Armenians in many fields, so much so that Pascal Carmont (*The Amiras: Lords of Ottoman Armenia*) wondered if Agnetsis possessed a certain gene that catapulted them to such heights in so many fields. Along with a good number of the wealthy Armenian Amiras who hailed from Agn, the eminent Armenian poet Siamanto and revolutionary idealist Papken Suni were from the same town. Cholakian is no less a contributor to the enrichment of the post-Genocide Armenian Diaspora literature.

In the epilogue Cholakian notes that the "book of contemporary poetic monologues in epigrammatic style" is his humble legacy to humanity. After all is said and done the only thing remains of us and can long endure is our remembrance of each other. As Cholakian says in *Oblivious Existence* (Jan. 18, 2007):

*In this endless space
In this dim place
Called the world
There remains no trace....
Of you
Of me
Of all
Just only a remembrance....*

Undoubtedly the book is just that, a legacy of the author's impressionable mind which attempted to make sense of the universe in his early literary ventures forty years ago and ended up coping with the profound loss of his son and paying homage to his parents. The book is also a testament of solid friendships and of friends -- Dr. Kevork and Cecile Keshishian and Yenovk Balikian -- who obviously have shared his pain and experiences and who together sponsored the publication of this beautifully rendered hardcover.

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