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REVOLUTION OF A WRITTEN WORD
(A SHORT OVERVIEW OF CURRENT
ARMENIAN LITERARY PROCESS)

The second republic of Armenia has gained independence in 1991, right after being the first to leave the collapsing USSR. This change has largely influenced publishing industry and literature itself. Publishing, being completely state governed before, was privatized and faced considerable difficulties, just as the country fell into severe economic and political crisis that arose from the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh (today Artsakh), failure in economy, emigration, etc. The decade after independence was marked by books about war, challenges of migration, criticism of the Soviet state which was not permissible under the previous regime and its censorship. Meanwhile, publishing has become a small and difficult business, print runs dropped to a minimum of 500 and less copies, self-publishing dominated over commercial deals, book distribution systems failed and book prices rose making it virtually a luxury product for most people.

The break of millennia brought upsurge in publishing. By 2010 vast number of new authors appeared. Their themes shifted considerably from the post-Soviet theme. They addressed new social, political issues with a greater accent on internal world of an individual. The writers started to seek new styles and genres to express their ideas, some of them reaching for postmodernism – something that came quite belatedly from Europe, though just in time when considering local realities.

Poetry has always been strong in Armenian literature historically and during the Soviet era. Consequently, a new generation of young poets have appeared with some outstanding names such as Hasmik Simonyan, Karen Antashyan, Armen Sargsyan, Husik Ara and others. Among fiction writers, the names such as Aram Pachyan with a long running bestseller *Goodbye, Bird* (2012), Hrachya Saribekyan and his *Sun of the Twins* (2013), Jean Chat (Hovhannes) Tekgyozyan and his novel *Fleeting City* (2012), Armen of Armenia with *The Return of Kikos* (2013) and *Mommyland: The Flag* (2016) and many others who took over the literary scene. The new generation of writers started to experiment with form and content, touched upon some burning issues of modern Armenia, such as

relationships in a militarized state, gender and LGBT issues in Armenian society, internal conflict of an individual in the modern world. At the same time, the authors of the older generation started to publish new novels and gained another momentum. These are the authors such as Gurgen Khanjyan with his novels *Yenok's Eye* (2012) and *Give Me Your Hand, Kid* (2017) who uses modern topics and language and being an author of the older generation isn't afraid of open descriptions of sex and sexuality, Hovhannes Yeranyan's *The Rope of Sin* (2017) who touches upon father and son relationship, Susanna Harutyunyan's *Ravens before Noah* (2015) with outstanding depiction of a mystical village inhabited by Genocide survivors which stays out of reach of Soviet government, as well as others, who found their way through many general topics relevant not only locally but internationally, too. These authors also introduced the modern novel which became a new trend in literature, while before all these authors were more interested in short stories.

With the changes on the literary scene, publishing industry underwent some considerable changes. Even though the official number of registered publishing houses is over 200, the number of active publishers is not even over twenty, most of them publishing less than five books a year. There are three publishers who produce over hundred books a year. These are big publishing houses that supply the market with almost 70 percent of books in Armenian language. Only some 20 % of those come from Armenian authors and the rest are translations from other languages. In 2018, new small publishing houses were established that focus on translated non-fiction. This is a brand-new trend, as non-fiction has not been popular among readers.

The effort to promote Armenian literature worldwide intensified over the past few years. Some authors made successful debut internationally: for instance, Aram Pachyan in Ukraine, UK and with rights sold to Bulgaria, Egypt, France and elsewhere, or Jean Chat (Hovhannes) Tekgyozyan in Turkey, Canada and France. The work with foreign markets has its own challenges largely arising from the lack of literary translators from Armenian to other languages, and limited state support to translations.

The recent Velvet Revolution in Armenia gives a lot of hope to see considerable change in the country, particularly in publishing. Apart from the many changes that Armenia currently faces in the system of governance, there is an imperative condition that bears the potential to serve as the base conducive for change. The new Prime Minister of Armenia, Nikol Pashinyan is an acclaimed journalist and author of the book *The Other Side of the Country*, which has been published shortly after his appointment. It is a novel he has written a decade earlier that appeared in parts in newspaper. Yet it was only recently that it came out as a book. It was sold in several thousands of copies and influenced public mind as no hitherto government official has been closer to intellectuals. It is also worth noting that

the Velvet Revolution had its anthem based on a poem by the Prime Minister. The poem contained no political text. Cultural revolution is what the people in Armenia hope for now, as it would be the key prerequisite for the growth on the book market and publishing industry that can bring the country to the new level of development.