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Speaking the Unspeakable: Armenian Women's Fiction Generations After Genocide

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Speaking the Unspeakable: Armenian Women's Fiction Generations After Genocide

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
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This project is for my mother,
and her mother,
and hers,
and hers...

It is also for all the women
who crossed a desert
and an ocean
so that I could sit here,
today,
writing about them.

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Introduction

“When I was a very little girl, my aunts, my mother’s sisters, who were all survivors of the Genocide, were really the ones who raised me. I probably stayed and lived more with them when I was smaller than I did with my mother. And they, you know, one of them, taught me to read and write Armenian, she taught me Armenian history and literature. It was, like, a very important, formal thing that I couldn’t not do. It would have been unacceptable otherwise.”

“It was clear, that they had lived through a genocide. It was clear, that the Turks were the bad guys that had decimated our people. But they never, ever talked about their experiences, their personal experiences, walking through the desert, living under the tents. They didn’t talk about that. They didn’t want to talk about that. ...But it was clear what the job at hand was. And the job at hand was to perpetuate the language and the culture, and its people. And to multiply it.”

“In our culture, there are some very specific things that are expectations of the place of a woman. I think particularly, as a result of the Genocide, the role of an Armenian mother is... it’s exceptionally critical that she have children, that she raise her children to understand, and come to know who they are, what it is to be Armenian, how to speak the language, how to perpetuate the culture, and that’s a very important piece of my identity. But by the same token, what I want in raising daughters, is to raise daughters who are able to stand up for themselves, to take care of themselves, to become economically independent adults who are contributing in a positive way, both to their Armenian identity and to who they are and what they want to do in life, without any cause to think that they couldn’t because they are a woman.”

-- Christine
a second generation Armenian American woman
my mother

And so begins an intergenerational conversation.

The history of the Armenian Genocide is contested. The stories, still, are told. In 1915-1917, 1.5 million Armenians were killed in a systematic campaign to homogenize the Ottoman Empire and construct a new Turkish state (Derderian 2). The Turkish State, to this day, denies these facts (Balakian 373). This is the narrative that Armenians are given. This is the narrative they frequently reproduce. This summary, the one reiterated in Armenian diasporan communities, always includes the number of victims, the 1.5 million who died. April 24 is Armenian Genocide Memorial Day. This is because on that day, in 1915, prominent Armenians in the Ottoman cities were arrested and executed, “effectively eliminating the community’s intellectual and political leadership” (Derderian 2), according to historical analysis. Then there were the mass killings of military-aged men. Then there were the “deportations,” often called death marches. After the massacres, those left to be deported were predominantly women and children. The Armenian narrative tends not to mention them.

In her article, “Common Fate, Different Experience: Gender-Specific Aspects of the Armenian Genocide, 1915-1917,” Katharine Derderian explains the particular experiences of Armenian women during the Genocide. Although she writes on a history that occurred over a century ago, she justifies her study by the fact that “scholarship has only recently begun to explore [the place of gender during genocidal persecution]” (Derderian 1). She cites “rape, kidnapping, sex slavery, and forced re-marriage” as “de facto instruments of genocide” (Derderian 1). This violence, she suggests, was “aimed at the destruction of the integrity of the group through its women, who embody its genetic and cultural continuity” (Derderian 1). Such an explanation is aligned with “traditional ideas of gender and nationality... that men are the bearers of ethnicity but that women

and children are susceptible to assimilation” (Derderian 4). Armenian women, then, in the case of forced re-marriages, were necessarily the site of Turkish assimilation, because they “embody” the group’s “genetic and cultural continuity” (Derderian 1). Because Armenian women were responsible for biological and cultural reproduction, they were the literal and symbolic site of violence against the biological and cultural group, leading Derderian to call sexual violence a “de facto instrument” of genocide. In other words, the violation of women’s bodies becomes synecdoche for the violation of the body politic. In her work to shed light on the specificity of women’s experiences through genocide, Derderian also historically categorizes those experiences. In doing so, she turns Armenian women’s voices into the voice of “the Armenian woman,” the symbolic mother of a nation nearly destroyed. In this project, I ask, what narratives are missing from this historical analysis? And how can fiction fill in the gaps?

In her collection of oral histories, *First Generation: In The Words of Twentieth-Century American Immigrants*, June Namias recounts the survival story of one female survivor of the Armenian Genocide, Araxi Chorbajian. Araxi’s testimony describes a phenomenon of the Genocide that Derderian’s article does not address. “How many *thousands*, hundred and thousands of Armenians, were killed in that Euphrates River!” she exclaims. “They were bound and thrown, all in groups. And some Armenian girls killed themselves there. They were pressured by the gendarmes. Rather than get raped, they threw themselves into the river” (Namias 92). For those Armenian girls, death was preferable to the shame of sexual violation. In their book, *Survivors: An Oral History of the Armenian Genocide*, Donald E. Miller and Lorna Touryan Miller cite many testimonies that confirm this practice. “In fact, this practice was common enough that

several survivors told us the words of a song which was sung in the orphanages that included the phrase ‘Virgin girls holding each others’ hands, threw themselves into the River Euphrates’” (Miller 103). For Armenian women during the Genocide, the threat of rape was constant. But shame itself was fatal. This shame was pervasive enough to be woven into the songs of little girls. This concept is specific. It is gendered. The women who survived to explain it were the ones who chose not to throw themselves into the river. Where did their shame go?

The first paragraph of Araxi’s testimony speaks to her silencing under the weight of a broader political agenda for genocide recognition. In the midst of a now century long fight to legally categorize these events as genocide and force the Turkish state to acknowledge its past atrocities, the collective nature of genocidal crimes takes precedence over individual experiences. The technical definition has remained stagnant since the 1948 United Nations Genocide Convention, and classifies genocide as “acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such” (UN Treaty No. 1021). The denial of the Armenian Genocide and the political goal of its recognition, then, led survivors like Araxi to speak on the terms of the “group, as such.” Although Araxi tells her individual story, she characterizes it as collective from the very beginning. In doing so, Araxi posits the violence she faced within a broader violence against a group, thereby contributing to the agenda of genocide recognition. “I was born in Turkey. We used to have an Armenian kingdom there. Of course, after the Turks occupied those places, the Armenian kingdom came to an end” (Namias 90). Araxi chooses to confront her reader with the pronoun “We”, before she even establishes her Armenian identity. She begins by clearly delineating an “us” and a

“them,” the Armenians and the Turks, respectively. Her language demonstrates the impossibility of the first person singular narrative for Armenian female survivors. The first person plural, the “we,” is necessary to characterize the violence she faced as genocidal. Namias’s introduction to her account confirms Araxi’s individual erasure.

When I first met her, she spoke mostly in historical terms. She saw herself as part of a panorama of Armenian history. She was often more interested in telling the Armenian story, aware of how little it is known, than in telling her own. As she spoke of her family, one sensed the fusion of her personal world and that of her people. (Namias 89)

To bear witness to a crime against a collective occasions the erasure of the individual. By seeing herself as “part of a panorama of Armenian history,” Araxi effectively narrativizes her people’s collective experience of suffering. Within the context of genocide, this is not only effective but legally essential. The violence she faced must not only be hers, it must be of the “group, as such,” in order to be defined as genocide. Araxi’s testimony exemplifies the erasure of the first person singular narrative in order to claim crimes against the “we.”

If the individual survivor could not speak on individual terms, Armenian women certainly could not speak to the specificity of their experiences. Again, there was a broader political agenda at play, one that silenced difference, or plurality of experience from within the community. To express the specificity of women’s experiences through genocide, or even to express dissent towards gender dynamics in diaspora, would be to foster divisions within the community. To foster divisions would be detrimental to the

collective agenda for genocide recognition, one that depended on the collective unity of the “group, as such.” In other words, post-genocide, in diaspora, the anxiety to maintain collectivity negated the possibility to assert difference within the group. To do so would be to further fracture a body politic that had just been nearly destroyed.

Still, Namias asked Araxi, “What effect was there on the relationship between men and women as a result of Armenian persecution?” Her response spanned a page and a half, but not once did she address the question directly. Part of this response was the retelling of an Armenian folktale:

I’d like to read you something. It’s a very short epic poem. ‘The Mother’s Heart.’ He says that there is a legend that a boy loved a girl. And this girl asked the boy to prove that he really loves her. And it says in order to prove, he should go and bring his mother’s heart to her. Kill the mother and bring the heart. So the boy is sorry and sad, crying, and the girl was very angry and said, ‘Don’t show your face to me unless you come with your mother’s heart!’ The boy goes and kills a goat and brings the goat’s heart, and the girl recognizes that it’s not the mother’s heart, so she’s even angrier. And then the fellow goes again. He’s so sad and he’s lost himself. He kills his mother and he’s bringing his mother’s heart to the girl. On the way he falls, and he hears the voice of the mother, even though it’s only a heart; the mother’s heart says, ‘Oh, my boy, did you *hurt* yourself?’(Namias 97)

Rather than speak explicitly on post-genocide Armenian gender dynamics, Araxi chooses to speak to them implicitly with this ancient folk tale. Armenian stories teach lessons. This lesson is clear. So strong is the commitment and love of the Armenian mother, that even her murder could not occasion the rejection of her son. The ultimate betrayal will not estrange the Armenian woman from her duty as mother. Considering Derderian's analysis of women as the embodiment of Armenian "genetic and cultural continuity," it can be argued that Araxi employs this folktale as national metaphor (Derderian 1). The Armenian mother will always care for her son, even after his ultimate betrayal. Likewise, the Armenian nation will always provide for her children, the Armenian people. Embedded within that metaphor is the role of Armenian women, the reproducers of the biological and the cultural. Still, post-genocide, in diaspora, after so much time and space has passed, Namias wanted to know if anything had changed. "What effect was there on the relationship between men and women as a result of Armenian persecution?" None, answered Araxi. Did you hear that story? Such dynamics do not change, or so the legend implies.

But more than a century has passed. What kinds of stories have Armenian women been telling since then? This project will explore two novels written by Armenian American women, both granddaughters of female genocide survivors. Fundamentally, this project seeks to understand how the authorial imagination can speak the unspeakable, and how fiction can reconstruct the real. Before addressing the specifics of these stories, one must first consider the role of the novel, and of narrative more generally, in the context of human rights abuses.

In “Mourning, Pity, and the Work of Narrative in the Making of ‘Humanity,’” Thomas Laqueur explores the potential of narrative, fictional or otherwise, in the wake of human rights abuses. Laqueur cites Richard Rorty’s “‘sentimentalist thesis’: the view that narratives of suffering generate fellow feelings that are -- and historically were -- crucial to the origins and continuing success of an ever widening struggle for human rights” (Laqueur 31). Rorty argues that “sad, sentimental stories” are those that foster a relationship between the teller and the listener, such that “‘the circle of the we’” is expanded to fit those geographically and culturally distant from ourselves. Laqueur agrees that this is not only emotive, but also practical. “In the end, one needs to care in order to legislate and to act” (Laqueur 32). Human rights discourse depends on stories. Fundamentally, he argues, narratives and human rights law are mutually constitutive. “In fact, and this is Rorty’s great insight: ‘rights’ -- in law and in practice -- followed upon the sentiment and stories even though rights now enjoy the independent force of normative prescription” (Laqueur 55).

Still, Laqueur acknowledges the limits of this thesis. He notes that sympathy with a fictional character will not necessarily make a reader any kinder to a real person in real life, and that sad and sentimental stories cannot be unequivocally depended on to move a reader to action. His examples even reference the Armenian Genocide directly: “It almost goes without saying that the success rate of ‘sad and sentimental stories’ was, and still is, discouragingly low. A cornucopia of such stories did not prevent... the great genocide of 1915-1916 by the regime of the young Turks” (Laqueur 35). But this is not his point. “Limits ought not to diminish the importance of what happened: in the late eighteenth century the ethical subject was democratized,” he explains. This meant that

“More and more people came to believe it was their obligation to ameliorate and prevent wrongdoing to others; more and more people were seen as eligible to be members of ‘the circle of the we’” (Laqueur 38). While history cannot confirm “‘an astonishingly rapid progress of sentiments, in which it has become easier for us to be moved to action by sad and sentimental stories,’” Laqueur suggests that “over the past two centuries we have seen an expansion of the universe about whom such moving stories might be told” (Laqueur 54-55). Narratives, he argues, occasioned the expansion of this circle by establishing an ethical connection between the teller and her listener, the image and its viewer, or the writer and her reader.

This ethical connection is established through visibility and empathic relation. “Narratives of suffering and of vanishing -- of pain and dying unremembered,” explains Laqueur, “constituted a claim to be regarded, to be noticed, to be *seen* as someone to whom the living have ethical obligations” (Laqueur 40). By making the dead visible, or noting those unnoticed, the producer of a narrative asks its consumer to see what cannot be seen. “Exact, slow, active, engaging seeing is central in the creation of sentiment, in keeping someone else within ethical range” (Laqueur 40). Beyond seeing, stories also ask their readers to feel. In the context of American slavery, Laqueur points to the fact that narratives do more than document suffering. “This is why so much effort is made not just to document violations of the flesh,” such as the physical degradation of slaves by slavemasters. Beyond this, many narratives present images of African mothers nursing, African parents losing their children, African husbands and wives being forcibly separated. “Of course, in the first instance, wrong is done to bodies, to ‘inviolable rights of man,’ to property in itself,” but still, the role of the narrative “demands insistently that

we see these bodies embedded in exactly the sort of nexus of social relations as those of their readers and auditors” (Laqueur 42). By crafting these socially relatable contexts, the narrative allows the reader to empathize with the suffering body, even if that suffering is distant from her own experience.

The mechanism of empathy, Laqueur suggests, is the imagination. He cites Adam Smith: ““By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments,” and, even more radically, “we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations”” (Laqueur 48). The imagination presents a solution to the problem of geographic, cultural, and otherwise circumstantial difference. “Imagination -- both of pain and of cultural embeddedness,” as Laqueur puts it, “substitutes for the sound of cries, the sight of blood and mangled flesh, the look of suffering, the awareness of social similarity” (Laqueur 48). The imagination Laqueur describes takes place on the part of the narrative’s reader. The living can craft narratives for themselves, such that their readers might understand how they feel. The question remains, then, who writes for the dead?

Laqueur cites the naming of the dead, exhumations, and forensic human rights inquests as a different kind of narrative construction. In the act of naming and explaining the fate of the dead, those who might have died unnoticed are made visible. Those previously unnoted dead are then brought into ““the circle of the we”” through “an imaginative recuperation of lost bodies” (Laqueur 49). These imaginations “bring the bodies back into the world of the living and incorporate them in a story” (Laqueur 54). Laqueur specifically notes the power of forensic anthropology in “naming the dead,

rendering them individuals one by one, and making evident how they died” (Laqueur 54). My proposition is that the novel does this also.

Like forensic investigators, realist or historical novelists have the capacity to bring the dead into the world of the living. Their tools are not forensic science, but rather the imagination. Both the forensic anthropologist and the novelist work to name and narrativize the dead, and ultimately “have the power to command ‘slow looking,’ ‘attentive looking,’ an insistent regard not of a work of art but of a person and a condition in its particularity” (Laqueur 55). These imaginary spaces allow the dead to present themselves as living in a way that perhaps they never could when they were actually alive. “Human rights and the claims of the dead grew together; the dead body came to stand for the body of the living” (Laqueur 55). And the “circle-of-the-we” expands. In this way, post-dehumanization and post-mortem, the dead are re-humanized and re-embodied through the work of narrative imagination.

The relevance of narrative to human rights discourse now established, I turn to the specificity of the Armenian context. In post-genocide diaspora, after most of the world has recognized the Armenian Genocide as such, what is the role of the fictional narrative? To begin to answer this question, I analyze two historical novels that imagine Armenian women’s experiences through genocide. In *Zabelle* (1998), Nancy Kricorian writes a historically fictionalized version of her grandmother’s experience as a survivor of the Armenian Genocide. Micheline Aharonian Marcom’s novel, *Three Apples Fell From Heaven* (2001), weaves together a series of disjointed stories that follow many characters

through their experiences during the Genocide. She too draws from the life of her maternal grandmother, another genocide survivor. Although Kricorian's and Aharonian Marcom's grandmothers survived a genocide, their stories died with them. These authors work like the forensic anthropologists Laqueur describes, re-naming and re-narrativizing their lives. Ultimately, both novels imagine the voices of the silenced, thereby reappropriating the typical historical narrative of the Armenian Genocide. It is through the fictional imagination that this reappropriation takes place.

Further, I argue that author positionality is relevant to the capacity for this kind of reappropriative literary imagination. My argument resonates with the work of historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot, who, in *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, acknowledges his own position as a Haitian writing about power and the construction of Haitian history. "I am aware that there is an inherent tension in suggesting that we should acknowledge our position while taking distance from it, but I find that tension both healthy and pleasant. I guess that, after all, I am perhaps claiming that legacy of intimacy and estrangement" (Trouillot xxiii). Throughout this project, I suggest that my novelists -- as Armenian American descendants of genocide survivors who write historical novels about the Armenian Genocide -- occupy this legacy of inherent tension. They grew up with a consciousness of genocide, but live temporally and geographically distant from that reality. The two novelists are both connected and disconnected to the contexts in which they write. Bearing in mind the silencing that Armenian women faced in diaspora as a consequence of a broader political goal for genocide recognition, Kricorian and Aharonian Marcom use fiction to produce the speech that was missing from the spoken, to fill the gaps in the historical record, and, paradoxically, to reconstruct

the real. I argue that these authors are positioned just close enough to and just far enough from their stories. In this way, they reappropriate the narratives from which those stories originated.

“The-circle-of-the-we,” then, operates uniquely in these texts. Beyond humanizing the poor, the ethnically different, or the survivor of extreme violence, these novels acknowledge the particularity of the Armenian “we” that was constructed in diaspora. Although codified to break through the silencing of the Genocide, its assertion of an uncritical collectivity produced silences of its own. Of course, the “we,” this idea of an Armenian collectivity, was reinscribed into the following generations, but it was also reconsidered, reinterpreted. Kricorian and Aharonian Marcom’s novels are textual examples of these reinterpretations. Both work to construct a circle within a circle, or a “we” within a “we,” of Armenian women. They do so by giving voice to the silenced specificities and tensions within Armenian women’s experiences. These authors can reclaim the first person singular narrative, the “I,” that their grandparents generation had to erase. They can do this because the “I” in their work is not about them, but rather about remembering the women who survived. Beyond asserting the the memory of a contested genocide, these novelists turn to the fictional imagination to write the words that Armenian female survivors could not speak.

This project consists of two chapters. In the first, I analyze both novels in the context of traditional Armenian storytelling. Both novelists posit their stories within the framework and terminology of Armenian folklore, although they do so in non-traditional ways. Their reappropriation of folkloric terms reflects their reappropriation of traditional Armenian narratives. I employ Martha Nussbaum’s theories on realist novels and

empathy, as well as the limited scholarly work on Armenian folk tales, to argue that both the novel and the folk tale are didactic in nature. Fictional storytelling, then, becomes an empathic action on the part of both the writer and the reader, ultimately teaching some kind of lesson. The novels at hand work to tell a new kind of Armenian story, the kind that humanizes Armenian women such that they are seen as dynamic individuals and heard as active voices. The second chapter explores the female body as the site of of this imaginative rehumanization. Beyond imagining voices to be heard, the authors imagine bodies to be seen, bodies that feel. I complicate Nussbaum's empathy with Andreas Huyssen's theory of mimesis, in which he considers the implications of authorship and positionality. I suggest that these authors, because of their position as Armenian American women, not only represent the stories of silenced survivors, but also implicate themselves as descendants of those survivors, inheritors of their own stories. Ultimately, I argue that these novelists reappropriate narratives about Armenian women by re-embodimenting them through the fictional imagination. Foundational to both chapters is the idea that fiction is capable of representing the real. Kricorian and Aharonian Marcom speak the words that their grandmothers could not. Fiction allows these words to be written, for the dead to be seen, and for Armenian female survivors' previously silenced voices to be heard.

Although fictional, both novels acknowledge their connection to concrete historical events. Kricorian cites the oral history interviews she did with Alice Kharibian, who was willing to share her story of friendship and survival alongside Kricorian's

grandmother (Kricorian 237). Aharonian Marcom cites many texts, including several survivor memoirs, U.S. Consulate Reports, and published oral history collections (Aharonian Marcom 268-269). Both novels are dedicated to the grandparents who inspired their creation. It is clear, then, that these authors have used other people's stories to craft their own. In this way, they literally reappropriate history to construct the narratives that are missing from the record. To give an example of how a writer can create a new narrative with an old story, I will now reinterpret an ancient Armenian folk tale.

The first story in Virginia Tashjian's book of Armenian folk tales is titled "The Lazy Man." The tale begins: "Once there was and was not in ancient Armenia a woman whose husband Hagop was the laziest man in the world" (Tashjian 3). While the title implies that the story is about the lazy man himself, the first line reveals that it is actually about his nameless wife. She comes first in the sentence, and acts as Hagop's point of reference. The plot's resolution depends on the wife's ingenuity.

Hagop is so lazy that he refuses to harvest the crops. He becomes so overwhelmed at the amount of work there is to do in the fields, that he collapses as though dead. While the village accepts his death and begins to prepare his funeral services, his wife suspects that Hagop has faked his death in order to avoid doing any work. She, of course, is right. As Hagop lies peacefully in his casket that night, the wife cleverly and silently enters the church, and in a loud, God-like voice, repeats the words: "O Those of You Who Are Newly Dead, come all of you. Start your work. Bring the cement and the stone; carry the mud so that a proper resting place in heaven may be made for you" (Tashjian 5). Once Hagop "heard that he would be forced to work in heaven, too, and when he realized that

even the dead must work, he pushed off his shroud, stepped out of the coffin, and ran home” (Tashjian 5). Then, the wife sneaks out of the church and takes a shortcut home. Shortly after she arrives, Hagop comes to the door. “‘Vay-y-y-y, husband! How did you come back to life?’ she exclaimed in pretended surprise” (Tashjian 6). Hagop explains what he learned about working in heaven, and simply said that he changed his mind about dying. And so, he picks up his farm tools and heads toward the fields.

In this story, Hagop’s wife achieves as seemingly impossible task -- convincing the “laziest man in the world” to work. Yet, she has no name and takes no credit. The lazy man cannot know how clever she is, or he will again cease to be motivated to work. In other words, her ingenuity depends on her silence. In the author’s note at the beginning of the text, Tashjian interprets the story for her reader. “‘The Lazy Man,’ like so many folktales from other parts of the world, describes the laziness of some common folk” (Tashjian x). In suggesting that the story is about the silenced ingenuity of the woman rather than the laziness of the man, I contest this interpretation. In presenting the story as such, I reveal her silencing. I make visible her ingenuity. In this project, I argue that these novels do the same.

Chapter One

From Folk Tales to Novels: Reappropriative Storytelling Through Fictional Imagination

The two novels that I analyze in this chapter, *Zabelle* and *Three Apples Fell From Heaven*, construct their narratives within the framework of traditional Armenian storytelling. Using Martha Nussbaum's theories about realist novels and empathy, as well as the limited scholarly work available on Armenian folk tales, I argue that both novels and folk tales are didactic in nature. Storytelling through fiction, then, is seen to be an empathetic and didactic process that yields particular socializing lessons. The novels at hand, I will argue, reappropriate the ancient cultural form of traditional Armenian storytelling in order to re-present cultural narratives surrounding Armenian women. In this way, Kricorian and Aharonian Marcom take something ancient and make it present. They construct characters who move beyond the archetype of the reproductive mother of a nation, instead becoming dynamic individuals through narrative. These authors are particularly capable of this task, as they are both Armenian American women, and granddaughters of genocide survivors. Their position from within Armenian culture, albeit temporally and geographically removed in diaspora, allows them not only to empathize but also to reclaim cultural storytelling and narratives. As simultaneous "insiders" and "outsiders" with respect to the stories they craft, these authors posit their novels within the terms of traditional Armenian storytelling, but they use those terms in a non-traditional way. By doing so, they suggest that are telling a new kind of Armenian story. With the first person narrative inaccessible to female survivors, the story of Armenian women's survival must be reappropriated for the story to be even tellable.

Ultimately, through fictional and empathic imagination, these novels tell stories that are at once ancient and present, old and new.

The Novel and the Armenian Folk Tale: Fictional Reconstruction Through Empathic Storytelling

In the preface to her book, *Poetic Justice*, Nussbaum considers what is at stake in the fiction rooted to specific historical and social contexts. Having worked in law schools, she insists, “I believe more strongly than ever that thinking about narrative literature does have the potential to make a contribution to the law in particular, to public reasoning generally” (Nussbaum xv). Nussbaum acknowledges the practical capacities for justice held in fiction, and in the novel specifically. This potential lies in the public value of “the ability to imagine the concrete ways in which people different from oneself grapple with disadvantage” (Nussbaum xvi). In a word, empathy.

In specific historical contexts of human rights abuses, like the Armenian Genocide, novels allow for a temporally, geographically, and culturally removed reader to begin to acknowledge and imagine the experiences of survivors. Nussbaum’s analysis focuses on these kinds of novels, and highlights their practical and emotive potential.

Novels (at least realist novels of the sort I shall consider) present persistent forms of human need and desire realized in specific social situations.

These situations frequently, indeed usually, differ a good deal from the reader’s own. Novels, recognizing this, in general construct and speak to an implicit reader who shares with the characters certain hopes, fears, and

general human concerns, and who for that reason is able to form bonds of identification and sympathy with them, but who is also situated elsewhere and needs to be informed about the concrete situation of the characters.

(Nussbaum 7)

Nussbaum points to the ability of novels to “inform” their readers about any given social context. Novels written from or about specific contexts, then, are effectively didactic in their presentation of particular historic moments. The difference between a historical and a literary explanation of those contexts, however, lies in the facilitation of those “bonds of identification” -- the result of an empathic reading. In the context of the Armenian Genocide, it is not difficult to imagine how a novel based on survivor experience might lead a reader to empathize, and be politically motivated (actively or not) towards genocide recognition. In this way, these novels are inextricable from the politics and the social worlds that surround them. Empathy enables these politics.

In her analysis of these “realist” novels, Nussbaum explains that her “central subject is the ability to imagine what it is like to live the life of another person who might, given changes in circumstance, be oneself or one of one’s loved ones” (Nussbaum 5). Citing Aristotle’s evaluation of literary art as ““more philosophical”” than history, Nussbaum highlights the empathic nature of the novel: “Literature focuses on the possible, inviting its readers to wonder about themselves. Aristotle is correct. Unlike most historical works, literary works typically invite their readers to put themselves in the place of people of many different kinds and to take on their experiences” (Nussbaum 5). Nussbaum suggests, then, that the empathic nature of the reader, or the act of reading, reflects and even contributes to the empathic nature of the individual in society. To read

fiction is to practice empathy. For this reason she asserts, “I defend the literary imagination precisely because it seems to me an essential ingredient of an ethical stance that asks us to concern ourselves with the good of other people whose lives are distant from our own” (Nussbaum xvi). The imagination enables action not only through empathy, but also by permitting a reader to visualize potential forms of action. Historically contextualized novels inform their readers about the contexts themselves, and implicitly educate a reader into this “ethical stance” of empathy. Nussbaum suggests, then, that novels have the power to be both historically and ethically didactic.

While traditional Armenian folk tales cannot be considered novels, they too can be categorized as didactic fiction. Fictional storytelling, regardless of cultural specificity, can be understood within Nussbaum’s theory of a “literary imagination” that encourages a particular “ethical stance.” With folk tales, those ethics are inextricable from the culture in which they are articulated. Scholarship on Armenian folk tales is limited. The writing that does exist, however, not only suggests the morally and culturally didactic quality of traditional Armenian storytelling, but also implicates women in the telling and reproduction of these stories, and consequently of those moral and cultural lessons. At the Third International Conference of the Armenian International Women’s Association, Alidz Agbabian, an Armenian-American author of children’s stories, presented her paper, “The Revival of the Ancient Art of Storytelling: Empowering the New Generation with Traditional Stories” (Agbabian 2005). An analysis of this paper yields productive insights into Armenian folk tales, as well as a critical perspective on Agbabian’s essentialization of Armenian women and the burden of biological and cultural reproduction that is placed on their bodies and voices.

Agbabian frames her analysis of Armenian folk tales in the context of her motherhood. She opens the article with her children, and ends with the “new generation” of Armenians, making a metaphor out of herself and her children for all Armenian women and all Armenian children. So, when she writes that she used folk tales to “lead” her children “towards becoming independent and responsible human beings with a strong sense of cultural identity,” we can extrapolate this idea onto the broader tradition of Armenian storytelling (Agbabian 172). The story becomes a tool for parental guidance in the socialization of “responsible human beings” whose values, in this context, are necessarily cultural. Agbabian then highlights the “timelessness” of these “ancient stories,” and cites the response of her own children and those in her storytelling groups as evidence of folk tales’ “ageless meanings” (Agbabian 174, 173). “The children enthusiastically responded to the meaningful premises of the stories, related to their characters and fundamental values” (Agbabian 174). Children garnered the “meaningful premises” and “values” embedded in the stories by “relating to their characters.” This “relating” can be read as empathy. Agbabian suggests, then, that empathy occasions education and transcends time. “Literature focuses on the possible, inviting its readers to wonder about themselves” (Nussbaum 5). Therefore, “it became obvious” to Agbabian that storytelling could “create a fertile ground for the education of the diasporan Armenian children” (Agbabian 174). For children in diaspora, Agbabian suggests, Armenian storytelling fosters a link not to a foreign culture, but to their own, creating a bridge that allows for continuity between generations with such diverse life experiences. Like Nussbaum’s realist novels, Agbabian’s Armenian stories are often employed for readers (and listeners) distant from their contexts. These readers are meant to empathize

in order to learn, and conduct themselves accordingly in the physical world. Fiction, then, is at once didactic and empathic, and this idea can be applied specifically to Armenian folk tales.

Agbabian, who raised her children in the United States, gives “special attention to the plight of girls” for fear of the “seductive popular culture” of her place and time. “How much more our young girls need to relate to the strong but nurturing female archetypes of our tradition!” she exclaims (Agbabian 174). She directly cites the responsibility placed on Armenian women, specifically, to reproduce culture: “Whether or not we have borne children, as nurturing female representatives of our generation we are responsible for building the identity of the next generation” (Agbabian 176). She roots this responsibility to Armenian women’s “nurturing” and “genetically inherited temperament,” thereby biologically and culturally essentializing Armenian women into a “temperament” suited for motherhood and childrearing (Agbabian 176). Her final remarks emphasize the onus she places on Armenian women to reproduce culture through storytelling: “It is up to us to open up [the] tremendous powers [of storytelling] to the new generation, by giving it the place it deserves in our families, communities and educational systems” (Agbabian 177).

To critique Agbabian’s essentialization of Armenian women is not to suggest that Armenian women should stop telling Armenian stories, but rather to demonstrate the didactic, socializing power implicated not only in the stories themselves but also in the act of telling. It can be argued, then, that Agbabian’s sense of responsibility as a storyteller is framed within gendered cultural constructs of motherhood, and that her stories in turn are capable of reproducing those same gendered constructs. Her

interpretation of gendered Armenian cultural values is reflected in her interpretation of the folk tales themselves. She feels responsible to share those stories in order to reproduce those gendered cultural values. Kricorian and Aharonian Marcom, I argue, reclaim the role of the Armenian woman storyteller in order to challenge the essentialized cultural narratives about her.

In her collection of nine Armenian folk tales, Tashjian explains the traditional structure of these stories. With slight variations, they all tend to begin and end with the same sets of phrases. Along with cultural content, then, comes cultural form:

Armenian folk tales always have a traditional, formal beginning and ending. Just as they usually begin with the phrase ‘Once there was and was not,’ so they usually end with the words ‘Three apples fell from heaven: one for the teller, one for the listener, and one for all the peoples of the world.’ (Tashjian ix)

The ambiguity of the introductory phrase “Once there was and was not” implies the potentially fictitious aspects of the story, and suggests that the tale may have been real or imagined. Along with this, the phrase suggests that the factual or historical aspects of the tale are not necessarily the crux of what the reader or listener will ultimately learn from it. The conventional ending of Armenian folklore underscores both the sanctity and the didactic nature of storytelling. The phrase, “Three apples fell from heaven: one for the teller, one for the listener, and one for all the peoples of the world,” does not invoke the role of “heaven” lightly, and implies divine confirmation or support of the teller, the listener, and all those to whom the story might apply. Further, by extending this divine

gift to all three parties, the phrase implicitly encourages listeners to pass along the tale later in their lives, and thereby reproduce the age-old cultural lessons embedded in the stories.

The phrases, “once there was and was not,” and “three apples fell from heaven...” can be found at various points in Kricorian’s and Aharonian Marcom’s novels. By employing these phrases, the two authors posit their narratives into the realm of Armenian storytelling. In the context of these historically fictionalized accounts of the Armenian Genocide, however, these phrases take on slightly different meanings than in traditional folk tales. The suspension of truth involved in the phrase, “once there was and was not,” has higher stakes in the context of a genocide not universally recognized as such. Even so, the novels are fictional and include the phrase to emphasize their suspension of truth. In doing so, they affirm the literary imagination as a productive place of possibility, a place where empathy can be constructed, and Armenian women’s stories reclaimed. The didactic nature of the stories is implicated by the use of the traditional ending, “three apples fell from heaven...” in its divine sanction of both the telling and reading of the story. Again, in the context of the Armenian Genocide, the stakes are higher in the reconstruction of these narratives.

Agbabian acknowledges the effect of storytelling on the storyteller: “As the stories started unfolding their messages to me, I realized that I was becoming the first beneficiary of the storytelling experience. (That is why I think the three apples in the traditional ending of Armenian folktales is always first for the teller.)” (Agbabian 172-173). The storyteller makes her own meaning. Both Kricorian and Aharonian Marcom slightly vary and re-place the traditional beginning and ending, thereby suggesting that

they use traditional terms to tell a non-traditional story. These two authors, then, reappropriate the cultural form in order to reappropriate cultural content, and represent Armenian women as dynamic individuals rather than a homogenized group with a “genetically inherited temperament” of nurturing, suited for biological and cultural reproduction. In post-genocide diaspora, these novels present the tension of women’s existence within a traditionally gendered culture that may be at odds with their individual needs and desires. Using ancient terms to craft present narratives about Armenian women, *Zabelle* and *Three Apples Fell From Heaven* work to reconstitute the active and complicated humanity of their female protagonists.

Zabelle’s New Story: Reappropriation Through Fictional Imagination

In her novel, *Zabelle*, Nancy Kricorian writes a historically fictionalized version of her grandmother’s experience as a survivor of the Armenian Genocide. The novel is not a text that one would normally include under the genre of folklore, but Kricorian tactfully manipulates the conventional forms of beginning and ending in order to posit her narrative within the realm of traditional Armenian storytelling. On an otherwise blank page, after the dedication and before the title page, the text reads: “Three apples fell from heaven: one to me, one to the storyteller, and one to the reader of this tale” (Kricorian). On the other end of the story, the first sentence of the epilogue reads, “There was, there was not, there was...” (Kricorian 229). Kricorian uses the two sayings inversely; that is, she begins with the conventional ending and ends with the conventional beginning. By doing so she characterizes her story within the bounds of traditional Armenian

storytelling, but clearly delineates herself from it as well, suggesting a development or a shift in the tradition.

Tradition is held in storytelling structure. Kricorian inverts that structure. In this way, she also inverts the power structures that uphold cultural tradition. It is important to note that the non-Armenian reader may not readily recognize Kricorian's use and manipulation of the traditional terms. This choice, then, builds an imagined community among her Armenian readership. Her inversion of the terms reflects her inversion of traditionally gendered power structures, and therefore builds community among Armenian women specifically. Her inversion -- end to beginning and beginning to end -- also reflects a circular relationship between time and storytelling. In this way, the framing of Kricorian's narrative problematizes a linear conception of time, thereby suggesting that her grandmother's story is hers, that her story is her grandmother's. Here she reflects their shared relationship to Armenian culture and historical memory of genocide. The function of this framing, then, is paradoxically two-fold, thereby reflecting the tensions addressed within the narrative. While the author's inversion of the phrases reaffirms Agbabian's notion of the "timelessness" of Armenian stories, it also subverts formal expectations of Armenian storytelling, thereby alluding to a subversive quality in the story itself.

Kricorian slightly alters not only the placement but also the format of the phrases. In the conventional ending (her new beginning), she replaces and repositions the words in order to suit the context of her novel. To clarify, the original phrasing reads: "Three apples fell from heaven: one for the teller, one for the listener, and one for all the peoples of the world" (Tashjian ix); and Kricorian's phrasing reads: "Three apples fell from

heaven: one to me, one to the storyteller, and one to the reader of this tale” (Kricorian). The author replaces “the teller” with “me,” “the listener” with “the storyteller,” and “all the peoples of all the world” with “the reader of this tale.” Kricorian obscures the division between storyteller and listener by replacing “the teller” with herself, but also by replacing the “the listener” with “the storyteller.” That is to say, in the context of presenting her grandmother’s story, she is both the teller and the listener, again demonstrating the hazy distinction between their two stories and the position of proximity and distance from which the story is told. By including “the reader,” she takes the oral tradition of Armenian storytelling and makes it literary. Further, she replaces the entire world with her readers, to recognize that those who do not read the novel will not have access to this kind of story. The author acknowledges the relevance of her specific form of representation, the novel. Although framed as an Armenian story, hers is one of a different kind, both in structure and content.

In the conventional beginning (her new ending), Kricorian maintains most of the original structure, with one major alteration. “Once there was and was not” changes to “There was, there was not, there was...” (Kricorian 229). This phrase is the first line of the epilogue in which Kricorian imagines her grandparents first meeting and marriage arrangement. By employing the phrase in this context and removing the word “Once,” the author acknowledges the fictitious aspects of the epilogue, but also distances her narrative from the fairy-tale-like quality of the word. Further, she separates the novel from the singularity of the word, and places the story in a more plural, continuous conception of time, rather than a frozen event. By removing the “Once,” then, Kricorian both affirms the historical aspect of the novel and suggests the presence of the past in

Armenian stories, particularly in the context of memorializing and remembering the Genocide. The novel also addresses the trauma associated with surviving genocide, thereby suggesting that the experience itself cannot be associated with the word “once,” as it is repeatedly re-lived within the life of the survivor and reproduced through intergenerational storytelling.

Still, there was, there was not, and this is a novel. Kricorian’s manipulation of the storytelling terms dances between an emphasis on a historical reality and its fictionalization. The content of the epilogue is relevant, as Kricorian imagines an overt sexual attraction between her great-grandmother and great-grandfather in their youth. This moment will be analyzed further in the context of the representation of “the body” in the following chapter, but ultimately it serves as an example of Kricorian’s rehumanization of her great-grandmother’s body. Fiction allows her character the space to express sexual desire. So, although Kricorian rephrases the traditional terms in order to emphasize the historicity of the story at hand, she employs and repositions them in order to highlight the relevance of fiction itself. The novel depends on her ability to imagine fictitious aspects into a historical reality of genocide. The traditional terms suggest that this is still an Armenian story, but Kricorian’s manipulation of the terms suggests that her story is teaching a new kind of lesson, the kind in which Armenian women are the protagonists, and their dynamic humanity replaces an idea of their genetically inherited temperament. This novel, both in content and in framing, then, uses fiction to reappropriate historical and cultural narratives, invert gendered power structures, and build community among Armenian women.

Within the novel itself, the traditional beginning is used in only one chapter, in which Zabelle tells her son two stories. Kricorian's use of the phrase in this particular chapter takes on a metaliterary quality, as the stories Zabelle tells mirror the reappropriative purpose of the chapter itself. Some summary is required to explain the context. After having settled in the United States and at the beginning of her marriage, Zabelle falls in love with a boy she meets working at Ohanessian's button factory. His name is Moses Bodjakanian. Ultimately, Zabelle gets pregnant with her first child, and Moses decides to move to another city to work in another factory. The two meet, secretly, before he leaves, to say goodbye. Zabelle wonders if she would have been happy with him. They shake hands. "This brief meeting of bodies filled me with longing for what I couldn't have" (Kricorian 83). At the end of that chapter, Zabelle decides to name her first child Moses. "It was a secret baptism. Now he was mine" (Kricorian 88). For Zabelle, her choice to name the child Moses is quite literally reappropriative, as the boy who she "couldn't have," at least in name, becomes "hers." Married to another man, Toros, Zabelle can only imagine what her life would have been like with Moses from the factory. Reclamatory naming allows her to acknowledge his unspeakable presence in her life.

Kricorian employs the terms of traditional Armenian storytelling during the next and last time Zabelle sees Moses Bodjakanian, ultimately emphasizing the reappropriative capacity of fictional storytelling. Much later in the narrative, after Zabelle has already had three children, she and her family travel to her husband's long lost friend's house for Easter dinner. Serendipitously, Moses Bodjakanian and his new wife happen to be guests at this dinner as well. Zabelle is so shocked to see him that she faints.

Moses Bodjakanian does not say a word at dinner. Zabelle puts her child Moses to bed. At this point, he asks her for a story.

‘Tell me a story, Ma.’

‘What kind?’

‘My story.’

I began, ‘Once there was, there was not, there was a boy named Moses. He was a handsome, intelligent boy with blonde hair, a strong nose, and two eyes that were meant to see the gates of heaven. One day Moses packed a small suitcase, complete with a lunch his mother had made him, and set off down the street to have an adventure...’ That was as far as the adventurer traveled, because Moses had drifted towards dreaming.

(Kricorian 119)

Moses asks for his own story. That is, he asks his mother for an imagined version of himself. She gives this to him, in the image of a boy with blonde hair, bound for the gates of heaven with his mother’s blessing inside his lunchbox. Although Zabelle begins with the traditional “‘Once there was, there was not,’” she tells a story that is not a traditional Armenian folk tale, but rather a story tailored specifically to her son and his imaginative needs. She gives her son a reclaimed imagination of himself, and frames this new image in old terms. Likewise, Kricorian does the same with her grandmother’s story, within the novel itself. It is the fictional imagination that constructs a bridge between the author and the story of someone else, such that the story can be told on different terms. As Zabelle tells a story of her son in a way he cannot (his hair, simply, is not blonde), Kricorian tells

the story of her grandmother in a way she could not when she was alive (albeit for more complex reasons).

Later in the chapter, the phrase is once more employed in order to assert the reappropriative capacity of fictional storytelling. After Zabelle puts her Moses to bed, she runs into Moses Bodjakanian in the kitchen. They exchange words, longing glances, and a secret kiss. “I thought the world would crack open and swallow us. That we would fall into a fiery furnace and burn, and not even Jesus could have saved us. I never told anyone, not even Arsinee” (Kricorian 121). Zabelle’s shame is intense enough to occasion the imagery of hell, and to affirm her silence. She “never told anyone,” not even her best female friend, because shame prohibited her from doing so. The author of fiction, however, does not write under the same restrictions. By writing this kiss, Kricorian speaks the unspeakable. After this expression of forbidden love, Zabelle tries to go back to sleep. Before she can fully drift off, her child Moses comes to her, unable to sleep, and asking for more stories.

‘Ma,’ Moses whispered. ‘I can’t sleep. Move over.’

Without waking entirely, I shifted closer to Jack, and Moses climbed into the bed beside me.

‘Tell me a story.’ He nestled into me like a spoon.

I remembered where I was and what had happened.

‘There was, there was not, there was a girl named Zabelle...’

‘That’s you,’ he said.

‘She lived in the old country, where sheep danced down the streets and birds nested in old ladies’ hair.’

‘You’re making that up,’ he commented sleepily.

I hugged him closer. ‘Yes, I’m making it up. True stories are too sad for little boys.’ (Kricorian 123)

Again, Kricorian employs the traditional beginning without the word “Once.”

Paradoxically, she removes the fairy-tale association with the word, but tells a story with dancing sheep and magical birds. She does so after specifically remembering where she is “and what had happened,” as if to suggest that the painful reality of her forbidden love occasions her own imaginative, fictitious reclamation of herself, and of her story. Even though Moses acknowledges her presence in the story (““That’s you.””), ultimately this fanciful reclamation is justified, because ““true stories are too sad for little boys.”” Like the novel itself, the story must be true and false at once. The way Zabelle tells reappropriative fictional tales to her son, then, reflects the way that Kricorian herself negotiates fact and fiction in order to reappropriate cultural narratives about Armenian women. In this particular chapter, Zabelle kisses the man she could never have, and expresses the love she “never told anyone” about. Zabelle does not use the traditional endings in these stories because the stories do not end. Likewise, the narrative unfolds before us.

Humor as Method in Speaking the Unspeakable

Beyond the traditional phrases, Kricorian employs humor in order to make Zabelle’s story accessible, to build communities within her readership, and to say what her protagonist could not. Humor can be found in many Armenian folk tales, often incorporated to make stories “perfect for storytime,” or enjoyable for children (Derderian

74). In *Zabelle*, Kricorian employs humor not only to make her story enjoyable, but also to say the unsayable in a form that is accessible to her readers. The jokes told in Kricorian's narrative, like the traditional phrases, reflect the complicatedly high stakes of the novel's historical background. Diane Nelson's analysis of jokes in the Guatemalan context provides a useful framework for understanding the role of humor in life and literature that grapples with violence. Ultimately, Kricorian makes her readers laugh in order to reappropriate the narrative tone of a horrific context, to build community among Armenian female readership, and to break the silencing of *Zabelle*'s quick-witted intelligence.

The direct interaction of humor and violence demonstrates the way that jokes can help survivors manage horror, present or past. Nelson explains that humor can serve as a coping mechanism. "Guatemalans are actually quite famous for their macabre humor, and many take national pride in it as a survival strategy" (Nelson 172). She cites one joke in particular, "a very popular joke," that turns a historical reference to a man being burned alive into a pithy remark about a barbecue to be held in his honor. "Horrific as the joke is," Nelson explains, "it functions as a tool wielded to recode and deflect, to make sense of the apparently irrational violence of the last thirty-five years" (Nelson 173). *Zabelle*'s best friend, Arsinee, is often the voice of these sense-making jokes. Her voice does the recoding and deflecting with which *Zabelle* sometimes struggles. "I hear voices at night," *Zabelle* confides in Arsinee towards the end of her life, as her PTSD is worsening. "Tell them to pipe down," Arsinee replies (Kricorian 6). One could take issue with the "horrific" element of this joking response, and suggest that it trivializes the long-term physiological effects of genocidal violence. Still, the humor itself

reappropriates the tone of severity in Zabelle's context, thereby acting as a suggestion of survival rather than a denial of her experience.

Marching in the desert, when they are still very young, Arsinee's humor quite literally saves Zabelle's life.

The day after my mother died, I sat watching the children around me, who were getting ready to go down to the river. They dug for cool sand, which they put in rags and tied around their feet so the sand wouldn't burn their soles. I had done this every day myself, but I was too tired to do it again. Just then someone shook my shoulder.

'Put these on your feet.'

I looked up at the narrow-faced girl who was holding out a pair of rags to me. When I didn't respond, she kneeled down in front of me and began to knot them over my ankles.

'Don't tell me you don't remember me,' she said.

It was Arsinee, a girl I knew from our town...

'How could I recognize anyone?' I asked. 'We all look like dogs.'

'My fleas would recognize me anyplace.'

I hadn't laughed in so long that it came out like a bark.' (Kricorian 21)

The death of her mother leaves Zabelle "too tired" to go on, to survive, but "just then" Arsinee comes to her rescue. At first, Zabelle does not respond to her prompting, and does not seem to be moved by their initial interaction. Then Arsinee makes her laugh. This changes everything. Arsinee continues to joke that her little brother "has made pets

out of his lice,” and Zabelle’s fatigue disappears. “Suddenly I wanted to run to the river,” she explains (Kricorian 21). Ultimately, it is Arsinee who makes her get up, as Zabelle describes her as physically “pulling me to my feet” (Kricorian 22). In this scene, Arsinee’s humor literally saves Zabelle’s life, thereby reflecting Nelson’s construction of humor as “survival strategy” (Nelson 172). Arsinee’s jokes and Zabelle’s laughter serve as a reminder of their humanity under dehumanizing circumstances. While the jokes about fleas are not necessarily immediately hilarious to the reader, they create a bond between two characters who are surviving under extreme conditions. They recognize the horror of having fleas at all and reframe it as something to be joked about. In this way they highlight the absurdity of their situation by drawing attention to it, naming it, and laughing at it. Laughing at all, in such a horrific context, is reappropriative in its propensity to change the narrative tone. Likewise, for the reader who has no experience with this kind of violence, humor makes the narrative accessible. Jokes, then, allow Zabelle to live her life, and the reader to read her story.

Beyond coping and survival, Kricorian uses humor to build community among Armenian female readership. Zabelle’s jokes would be humorous to any reader, but many of them are crafted to be specifically and particularly amusing to Armenian women. In the Guatemalan context, Nelson cites Freud to explain the role that humor plays in structuring a body politic. “Until the Quincentennial the Maya tended to constitute an absent presence in public discourse,” she writes, “the central but disavowed role of the Maya in national popular imaginings often slips out the back door in the form of jokes” (Nelson 173). She explains that jokes directed towards others can create a homosocial bond between those laughing, structured around their relation to the laughed-at. This

“parallels Freud’s theory of the structure of dirty jokes, which are directed at women but should not be told in their presence. Instead, men tell jokes to other men, and this structures a relation between the men (helps them form an identification)” (Nelson 173). These kinds of jokes “condense often contradictory fantasies and popular imaginings about the presence of indigenous peoples in the nation and in so doing help structure various bodies politic” (Nelson 173). Kricorian turns this identification-forming on its head, often making jokes about Zabelle’s husband or her abusive mother-in-law that place them on the outside, while Zabelle, Kricorian, and the Armenian female reader remain on the inside. Within the story, both Toros, the husband, and Vartanoush, the mother-in-law, wield silencing power over Zabelle. Kricorian’s jokes invert these power structures by placing patriarchal voices on the outside, and thereby rebuilding a body politic of Armenian women.

Just within the chapter in which Zabelle and Moses Bodjakanian kiss, Kricorian incorporates several community-building and silence-breaking jokes. Shared experiences and references strengthen bonds between the readers who understand them. For example, when speaking with Arsinee about the prospect of taking a long drive with her husband, mother-in-law, and three small children, she asks rhetorically, ““How would you like to be cooped up in a box on wheels with three whining children and Vartanoush singing bits of the Divine Liturgy?”” (Kricorian 113). The humor in this question is evident to the non-Armenian reader, but familiarity with the music of Armenian church service makes the joke all the funnier. In this way, Kricorian’s humor creates the bonds of identification to which Nelson refers. The joke continues in order to build a community of Armenian

female readership, thereby challenging the power dynamics that silence Zabelle's humor within the text.

In the car, "Vartanoush sat beside Toros in the front seat, humming 'Christ Is Risen' off-key... Toros insisted on what he called 'fresh-air,' but I was freezing" (Kricorian 113). Here a specific song is mentioned. Simply put, the reader who knows what it sounds like will laugh louder than the one who does not. Vartanoush sits in front to symbolize the precedence she takes over Zabelle in the household hierarchy. Zabelle says nothing about her terrible singing, just like she says nothing about Toros's "fresh-air." Her character cannot ask Vartanoush to stop singing, nor can she ask Toros to roll up his window. Instead, Kricorian incorporates humor into this piece of the narrative to create a community of readers who are in on the joke, thereby inverting the power dynamics of the interaction at hand, and writing the words that Zabelle's character cannot speak aloud.

Kricorian often employs humor in moments of Zabelle's silencing, thereby showing the reader what she would have said if she could have. "Freud notes that only jokes with a purpose risk meeting people who do not want to listen to them," Nelson writes (Nelson 174). Kricorian tells the jokes that Zabelle cannot for fear of upsetting a broader, male-dominated, Armenian body politic. In doing so, she creates bonds of identification that structure a body politic of Armenian women specifically, in which men like Toros or oppressively traditional women like Vartanoush are the objects of the laughter.

Several examples demonstrate the way Kricorian's jokes break Zabelle's silence. Toros comes home with a sack of "half-rotten" fruits and vegetables, with which Zabelle

is meant to cook for the coming week. When Zabelle notes their poor quality, Toros invokes their relative privilege: ““In the old country, we ate cats and dogs, we were so hungry. This food is good enough for Roosevelt”” he says. Zabelle “imagined shouting, ‘Then why don’t you give it to Roosevelt’s wife?’ Instead I hefted the bags to the back porch for sorting, where I tossed most of it into the forsythia bushes” (Kricorian 112). Later, when Zabelle sees Moses Bodjakanian at the Easter party, she does not know what to do or say. She laments her inability to speak as boldly as her friend, “Arsinee would say, ‘Moses and I knew each other years ago at Ohanessian’s. I fainted because of the shock of seeing he’s lost half his hair.’ ...But I kept my mouth shut” (Kricorian 116). After the Easter dinner, at which Zabelle does not eat very much, Vartanoush approaches Zabelle, ““Don’t tell me you’re pregnant again,”” she said, “I wanted to say, ‘You’ll be burying me nine months from now if I am,’ but I wouldn’t give the old woman the satisfaction. Instead I snapped, ‘I’m tired’” (Kricorian 117). Zabelle “imagined shouting” and “wanted to say,” but at the end of it all, she “kept her mouth shut.” Kricorian’s jokes speak for her. By positioning the patriarchal voices and perspectives on the outside of the joke, these humorous moments build community among Armenian female readership by breaking through the silencing of an Armenian female character.

Through her manipulation of traditional terms of Armenian storytelling as well as her subversive use of humor, Kricorian inverts power structures that can subdue Armenian women’s voices, and thereby builds community among her Armenian female readership. Ultimately, it is the fictional imagination that occasions her reappropriative storytelling. Her novel tells a new kind of Armenian story, in order to write what her grandmother could not speak.

Three Apples Fell From Heaven: Storytelling as Rumor and Rumor as Reinterpretation

The title of Micheline Aharonian Marcom's novel, *Three Apples Fell From Heaven*, clearly invokes the traditional ending of Armenian folk tales. The work weaves together a series of disjointed stories. The stories follow many different characters through their experiences during the Armenian Genocide. The chapters are not numbered but rather titled so as to emphasize the particularity of each one, alternating characters throughout in no discernable order. The reader, then, is launched into the stories of each character without expectation or assurance, as if the novel itself were a collection of related folk tales. Like Kricorian, Aharonian Marcom manipulates the phrasing and placing of folkloric conventions throughout her narrative. Ultimately, the author employs the terms of traditional Armenian storytelling in order to tell a non-traditional, subversive set of Armenian stories.

Much like Kricorian, Aharonian Marcom subverts expectations of Armenian storytelling by beginning with the traditional ending and ending with the traditional beginning. The title of the novel, of course, is "three apples fell from heaven," the conventional ending, although the reader does not yet know to whom those apples fall. This becomes clear later on in the text. Her penultimate chapter, "Arsinee," incorporates "There was and There was not" (Aharonian Marcom 259). Her inversion of the conventional beginning and ending, then, posits her narrative within the framework of Armenian storytelling, but changes the terms and the form of the frame. The intricacies of "Arsinee" cannot be understood without addressing the novel's first chapter, as

Aharonian Marcom chooses to repeat much of the language she uses in the opening story. By cycling language in this way, the author writes a circularity that structures the narrative in non-linear terms. This choice, combined with the manipulation of elements of Armenian storytelling, evokes the way stories of genocide are not only cycled but also reinterpreted from one generation to the next. Her novel, then, can be considered one of these reinterpretations, one that is ultimately reappropriative.

Aharonian Marcom begins the novel with a metaliterary interrogation, in order to prepare the reader for this kind of reappropriative storytelling. She opens the novel not with one of her characters, but rather with the writer and the reader. The opening chapter diverges from the structure of the rest of the novel, and constructs empathy by addressing the reader directly. “This is the Story that Rumor Writes” introduces the two actors with the first line, “She writes late at night, while you are dozing” (Aharonian Marcom 1). The Rumor is the writer. Playing on rumor’s association with orality, Aharonian Marcom links the oral tradition of Armenian storytelling to her ability to write this particular novel. In this way she invokes the role of her identity, one of both distance and proximity, in the telling of the story of the Armenian Genocide. She continues to draw distinction between herself and her readers. The writer is active while the reader is passive. The author emphasizes the active role of the storyteller. One works late while the other rests. In this way, she distinguishes herself from Armenian and non-Armenian readers alike. Both are dozing, but the implicit questions the writer asks them are different. To the Armenian reader, she asks, do you participate in this kind of reappropriative storytelling? Are you critical of the stories you have been told? To the non-Armenian, she asks, do you even know this story?

She continues this line of meta-questioning explicitly. Aharonian Marcom sets a post-genocidal scene: “The eaves are empty. The hamam is closed. The bakers and the bootmakers uninvented. The furrier is still lamented in the coldest days of winter. The sweetmaker was spared for a hard candy.” After generating the absence of these spaces and lives, the writer asks the reader, “Do you miss them? Long for them?” (Aharonian Marcom 2). The reader is then forced to answer, yes or no. In Nussbaum’s analysis of Dickens’ novel, *Hard Times*, she emphasizes the choice of the author to call directly upon the participation of the reader.

The participation of the reader is made explicit at many points in the narration. And it is brought home to readers that the story is in certain ways their own story, showing possibilities for human life and choice that are in certain respects their own to seize, though their concrete circumstances may differ greatly. Thus their attempts to interpret and evaluate are encouraged to be both affectionate and critical: for the text portrays them as social agents responsible for making a world that is either like or unlike the world within its pages. (Nussbaum 31)

Aharonian Marcom’s opening chapter forces the reader to think about what happens to others while she is “dozing” at night, and whether or not she “misses” or “longs” for the lives disappeared by genocide. By addressing the reader in this way, Aharonian Marcom implicitly asks her to consider her own positionality as related to the novel. Again, these considerations are different for Armenian and non-Armenian readers. Nussbaum concludes, “In imagining things that do not really exist, the novel, by its own account, is

not being ‘idle’: for it is helping its readers to acknowledge their own world and to choose more reflectively in it” (Nussbaum 31). In this way, Aharonian Marcom establishes that her novel, her story, is meant to force the reader to feel, to reflect, to empathize.

The opening chapter continues to link traditional Armenian storytelling to the memory of genocide, linking both to the new kind of storytelling in hand. Aharonian Marcom employs radical syntax to mirror the subversive character of her novel.

Rumor says things like, And so, and so

There was and

There was not

Rumor tells stories, this is the story she writes. Don’t believe her, she’s a liar of the first order. A mendacious tatterdemalion. (Aharonian Marcom 1)

The reference to rumor, paired with the use of the conventional “There was and there was not” and the oral quality of the phrase “And so, and so,” invokes the traditional orality and structure of Armenian storytelling practices. It also alludes to questions of truth and storytelling, as the veracity of a rumor is necessarily questioned. “Rumor tells stories, this is the story she writes.” Aharonian Marcom underscores the fictitious nature of her narrative so as to point to the interpretative nature of all narratives, even those that might acknowledge the Armenian Genocide as such. The emphasis on the rumor-like-quality implicit in cultural practices of oral storytelling recognizes the limits of traditional Armenian stories, folkloric or otherwise. In the context of genocide, the stakes of

storytelling are higher. Aharonian Marcom acknowledges this, but also suggests that the narrative is as subject to her reinterpretation as Rumor itself.

Aharonian Marcom deals with the stakes of genocide denialism by including the voice of the denier. In this way, she links the processes of storytelling and historical memory with denialism itself. “Don’t believe her, she’s a liar of the first order. A mendacious tatterdemalion,” says the disembodied denier (Aharonian Marcom 1). The phrase, “mendacious tatterdemalion,” repeats three times in the three page chapter. More than a liar, she a liar described in sophisticated vocabulary, in the kinds of words one might have to look up in a dictionary. In this way the author points to the role of language, the power of storytelling, in the creation of historical memory, in the creation of liars and truth-tellers. Still, she includes the denier’s voice in order to emphasize the mutual constitution of oppositional narratives. The denier plays a particular role in the construction of the memory he denies. “Rumor is an evanescent and mendacious tatterdemalion,” she repeats (Aharonian Marcom 3). Evanescent, that is, vanishing, fading away, fleeting, like memory itself. If memory is seen as fleeting in the face of denialism, then it must be asserted, and asserted, and re-asserted. “Don’t believe it,” the chapter ends, “she’s a liar of the first order. A mendacious tatterdemalion” (Aharonian Marcom 3). Again she highlights the role that fiction can play in reconstructing the memories of the unremembered. The denier tells you that the author lies. The author tells you this because, maybe, she does. By manipulating the memories that she has been given, Aharonian Marcom produces her own narrative, with its own truth. She can manipulate the narrative of genocide because that narrative has manipulated her. In this way her work is truly reappropriative.

Her penultimate chapter, “Arsinee,” repeats the language just described, emphasizing the cyclical nature of Armenian storytelling, but also considering how narratives of genocide may shift from one generation to the next.

This is the story rumor writes.

She writes it late at night, while you are dozing.

Don’t believe it, she’s a liar of the first order. A mendacious
tatterdemalion... (Aharonian Marcom 258)

Rumor says things like, And so, And so

There was and

There was not (Aharonian Marcom 259)

At the end of her novel, then, Aharonian Marcom employs the same language and syntax as she does at the beginning. Sonically and visually, the reader returns to the first chapter. The major shift in this later chapter, however, comes when the author confronts the reader with her presence. She does not use the first person in “This is the Story that Rumor Writes,” but in “Arsinee,” she asserts: “I am telling this story. I ask you, What is esculent? Running toward the dictionary, you answer: you, you, you. We eat her up, barbecue. Small children are lovely spiked on bayonet tips... This according to rumor only” (Aharonian Marcom 260). Here the author problematizes her novel’s consumption. “I ask you,” she writes, to draw a stark distinction between herself and her reader, her non-Armenian reader in particular. “I am telling this story.” It belongs to me, she says, even as it sits in your hands, read through your eyes. Even as it exists as a compilation of imagined lives temporally and geographically distant from the author’s reality, these

stories are hers because they are what she's made of a genocide that has woven itself into her consciousness through intergenerational storytelling. "This according to rumor only," because her fiction tells a truth that nonfiction could not.

She links this retelling to language, demonstrating the complexities and propensities of storytelling across languages, in diaspora.

Arsinee traces her roots back two thousand years or more, to her grandmother, the first woman, for rumor's sake we call her Eva, who liked apricots more than apples and did not wear shoes and loved to twist her foot from side to side, lift her leg and admire her talus-- she had no word in Armenian or Hebrew or Greek for that beautiful protuberance at the base of her leg. A rise in the skin, a bone-hill. The word came later.

(Aharonian Marcom 260-261)

Arsinee is not a character to whom the reader has been previously introduced. Her roots trace back to the first woman because her identity and her role in the story cannot be extracted from her womanhood. This first woman is called Eva. The name is reminiscent of Eve, of course, from Genesis, but it is just different enough. Unlike Eve, Eva prefers apricots to apples. Eva has a body. Rather than hiding it as Eve does in Genesis, she "admires" it, she finds it to be "beautiful" in all of its protuberances. Yet, she has no word to express this admiration. Her language limits her. This limiting language can be read as a metaphor for the time, space and culture of female survivors. "The word came later," in the form of this novel. The apples refer both to original sin and traditional Armenian storytelling. Eva prefers neither, and Aharonian Marcom expresses that preference.

Likewise, stories of genocide are translated from one generation to the next, and are made more expressible across linguistic, cultural, geographical, and temporal distance. This distance, paired with the proximity of Aharonian Marcom's role as a listener, an inheritor of these stories, allows for the reconstruction and reappropriation of Armenian women's experiences through genocide. Their voices, then, can be heard in a different language from the one they spoke.

Narrative Fragmentation and Eavesdropping: Aharonian Marcom's Surreal Realities

Aharonian Marcom writes three chapters that close with a variation of the traditional folkloric ending. Ultimately, these stories come together to emphasize the author's role as the compiler of untold, fragmented stories. "Mardiros," "The History Of Bozmashen As Iterated By The Local Dogs," and "As to Where Are the Bootmakers And The Town of Kharpert" are structurally and thematically linked by the author's choice to end them with the same sentence (Aharonian Marcom 93, 141, 180, respectively). All three stories incorporate bizarre, surrealist imagery around the grotesque fragmentation of human bodies. Ironically, the reader is left unsure as to which plane of reality these fictional stories belong. Each one ends: "And three apples fell from heaven, one for the storyteller, one for the listener, and one for the eavesdropper" (Aharonian Marcom 97, 145, 184, respectively). An eavesdropper is a person who listens to those who do not know that they are being listened to. An eavesdropper invades privacy. She spreads Rumors. "This is the story that rumor writes." Rumors, like the stories that eavesdroppers hear, are necessarily fragmented pieces of truth, like the fragmented bodies in the stories.

Aharonian Marcom suggests, then, that she herself is the eavesdropper, constructing a story from pieces of truths that were never really told.

“Mardiros” is the first of the three stories that ends with the eavesdropper. The direct reference to storytelling paired with the surreal content of the chapter work together to mirror the fiction-making involved in historical narrative construction. The title of the story is the name of an Armenian man, but also the Armenian word for “martyr,” naming him as a symbol for those who died during the Genocide. At the beginning, the protagonist is brutally tortured and left in a pile of dead men. Somehow, he gets up. We watch him walk through town. He runs into two women. “They noticed the swollen and decrepit and missing pieces of his lower extremities. The nails missing from his toes.” His body is fragmented. So is the sentence. Mardiros returns to the place where he was tortured, and speaks with his torturer. “What happens after this Story?” he asks the Commander.

Agh. Don’t worry, my son. This story will never have happened after it’s finished.

And the Rumors, where will they go?

The Commander adjusted himself again. With the marchers-- the Mesopotamian has space enough for everything.

You’ve thought of everything, sir.

Yes. We thought of you also (Aharonian Marcom 97)

And three apples fell from heaven, “one for the eavesdropper” (Aharonian Marcom 97). In the imagined world of the Commander, the “Story” turns to “Rumors” that will die

with the marchers. Yet, the author reveals this scene to the reader. She was eavesdropping, and now she is retelling. The novel serves as her platform. Throughout the story, it is unclear whether or not the protagonist is dead or alive. By the end, even if he is alive, it is evident that he will not survive: “We thought of you also” (Aharonian Marcom 97). Either way, Aharonian Marcom lets the reader see him, making the absent present, and giving voice to the unheard. As much as the Commander’s fiction can lead to the forgetting of the Martyr, Aharonian Marcom’s fiction can re-craft his reality.

In “The History Of Bozmashen As Iterated By The Local Dogs,” the second story with the varied traditional ending, a shepherd boy talks to his dogs and a mother who may or may not be dead (Aharonian Marcom 141). This story also directly references storytelling itself, and notes the importance of naming in particular, as Bozmashen was one of the Armenian villages that was disappeared and renamed after the Armenian Genocide. Somehow the dogs have started to howl from inside the boy’s ears. “They climbed inside my ears, Mairig” (Aharonian Marcom 142). His mother asks him, “Tell me, Isquhee, what stories have you been telling?” He had begun to think of his future wife. Her breasts and thighs. “Did you realize that she will stink and vomit? Pimples will form on her ass. She will shit in piles,” says Mairig. “...” is the boy’s reply. “How are your ears now, my son?” his mother wants to know. “...,” again, he replies (Aharonian Marcom 143). Suddenly, the boy is a dog. His cousin leaves the house the next day to search for sweet grasses. His auntie, Isquhee’s mother, warns him, “Be careful up there. The stories circulate like gnats’ black cloud and can mislead a man” (Aharonian Marcom 144). He is headed for the disappeared Armenian village of Bozmashen in particular. He cannot find it.

The Turkish or Kurdish farmer who was or was not a policeman held a sickle in his hand and with thrashing movements cut at the weeds growing there.

Effendi. I'm lost. Can you tell me how to get to Bozmashen?

Bozma-heh? Bozma-heh? Why, I'll kill you, you whore's son! And with that he ran toward Kurken with his sickle raised (Aharonian Marcom 145).

The man decapitates the boy. The dogs, Isquhee included, drink his blood. And three apples fell, "one for the eavesdropper" (Aharonian Marcom 145). In the "stories" told by the first Armenian boy, he imagines a perfect Armenian girl. His mother gives him a different image. She can, because she exists in fiction, and maybe she is only talking to a dog. She asks about his ears to see if his feelings have changed after hearing a new kind of story. His cousin then searches for something that does not exist. The "stories" about which his auntie warns him have disappeared the village of Bozmashen, and "mislead" the Turkish or Kurdish farmer into a murderous rage. There are two sets of stories referenced within this one, the first about the perfect Armenian wife, and the second about the necessary destruction of Armenian people and places in the Ottoman Empire. Both craft the kinds of narratives that "can mislead a man." This story reappropriates those stories, in order to say some something new. Like an eavesdropper, the author splices them together to suggest that the reader reflect and reconsider.

In "As to Where Are the Bootmakers And The Town of Kharpert," the third and final story that ends with the eavesdropper, boots become so popular that the townspeople begin to trade in body parts for them (Aharonian Marcom 180). Kharpert, like

Bozmashen, is another Armenian village that was disappeared and renamed after the Genocide. In this story, Aharonian Marcom embraces the absurd.

AS of today, July 5, blumpty blumpty, plucked out nails (in their entirety, please, no slivers or scraps), pulled-out hairs (bulbous roots also intact, please, this is a business), hands, fingers (allowable but of lesser value), feet (toes ineligible), fully intact soles, noses, breasts, testicles, (with penis, an added pair), secondary internal organs (minus the spleen, which can be given no exchange value), and all water sources will be accepted as official currency. Currency rates will change daily dependent on availability and circulation. Look for the signs in the Currency At A Glance in the north wing of the marketplace. (Aharonian Marcom 183)

And three apples fell, “one for the eavesdropper” (Aharonian Marcom 184). The scene refers back to the first chapter, in which Aharonian Marcom constructs a setting in which “the bootmakers [are] uninvented” (Aharonian Marcom 2). Eventually, “When the townspeople’s methods of payment began to dry up, the bootmakers looked up from their sewing and dyeing” and moved their business to Munich (Aharonian Marcom 184). The absurdity of the story, and the commodified fragmentation of bodies, reflects not only the absurdity of genocidal violence, but also the turning of people into stories. Again the author problematizes her novel’s consumption. She tells the story, retells it, and implies that the reader reconsider her choice to read it. Her complex narratives reflect the complexity of post-genocide storymaking and reconstruction.

Like Kricorian, Aharonian Marcom constructs herself as both the teller and the listener. She adds a third role, that of the eavesdropper, because she is more than the first two roles. She does not listen and repeat. She listens, without the tellers realizing, and compiles pieces of untold stories. The stories come together to become hers. The author takes these stories and arranges them, imagines them, ultimately reappropriating their meaning and telling. “This is the story that rumor writes.” Rumor is necessarily fragmented, like all the human bodies in the three stories just described. The Armenian body politic, in diaspora, is also fragmented. The Armenian story, then, becomes the Armenian stories. Aharonian Marcom tells only some of them, as she wishes.

Both Kricorian and Aharonian Marcom posit their narratives within the discourse of traditional Armenian storytelling. They manipulate traditional terms in order to reflect their manipulation of traditional stories. Kricorian inverts beginnings and endings and employs humor in order to build community and to express what her grandmother could not. Aharonian Marcom employs the same inversion, as well as a cyclical narrative structure and fragmented imagery, in order to suggest that all Armenian narratives are compiled as fiction might be, aiming to interpret and reinterpret reality. Both novels, because of the freedom that fiction permits, reconstruct the stories of silenced voices. The following chapter will explore the role of the Armenian female body as the site of this reconstruction, not only of voice but also of physicality and consequent humanity. Both authors, in their position of proximity and distance, are able to reclaim narratives of the Armenian Genocide. In this way, both tell a new kind of Armenian story.

Chapter Two

Writing the Body: Narrative Re-humanization Through Re-embodiment

Armenian female survivors, under the weight of a broader political narrative of ethnic genocide and the call for recognition, were left to negotiate with silence in diaspora. The speaking that was done, as previously explained, focused on a collective call for genocide recognition, and did not leave much room for the acknowledgement of individual experiences or the specificity of women's experiences during genocide. I propose that the inability of women to speak about that specificity can be attributed in part to the cultural taboos around women's bodies. Despite the physical degradation of genocide, Armenian women were never meant to speak about their own physicality, let alone the particular violences and tensions of being a woman during and after the Genocide. I recognize that the evidence for this claim is limited. That fact in itself -- that there is very little work that addresses Armenian women's relationships to their own bodies and self-expression -- supports my point. Nobody talks about it, and nobody writes about it.

Still, one can find allusions to this kind of cultural silencing in the literature itself, and supported by historical analyses. In *Zabelle*, Kricorian imagines a woman named Takouhi (Queen, in Armenian), speaking to the protagonist the night she is saved from servitude to a Turkish family, meant to meet her new Armenian family the following day. "“You are lucky, *aghchigs*, because there are many Armenian girls who were stolen away -- some of them were made wives to Kurds, some of them worse, and I can't use the words for what happened to our virgins during the deportations”" (Kricorian 38). Takouhi, whose name implies a quality of leadership and symbolism for a broader

Armenian people, quite literally “can’t use the words” to talk about women’s bodily experiences during genocide. Katharine Derderian cites the testimony of Satenig Marshlian, female native of Balikesir, referencing the kidnapping and rape of Armenian girls that preceded the deportations: ““You know the Turks did a lot of things but you cannot even talk about them”” (Derderian 7). Both the novel and the testimony cite an unspeakability surrounding the violence women faced during the Genocide. The shame is too heavy to speak through. Kricorian, and likewise Aharonian Marcom, engage in empathic imagination to find the words that survivors could not use. While the novels I analyze here do not explicitly describe the sexual violence to which Takouhi and Satenig allude, they do engage with women’s bodily experiences in a way that women’s testimonies could not.

Derderian explains why Takouhi and Satenig feel the need to reference the sexual violence women faced, only to characterize it as unspeakable a few sentences later.

While gender violence is typically mentioned in accounts of the Genocide as a way to emphasize the suffering of the victims, documentary evidence remains understandably scarce, survivor interviews scarcer still.

Contemporary observers often cited their discomfort openly discussing sexual violence, and some accounts explicitly expunge passages recounting it, or else summarize it only superficially. (Derderian 6)

Derderian notes the “discomfort” involved in talking about the violence women faced during genocide, but also the fact that it is “typically” mentioned. This kind of mentioning is the kind that Takouhi and Satenig do, a reference to the general concept

of violence against women, “as a way to emphasize the suffering” of Armenians as a whole. Or, as Derderian suggests, as an explanation of a kind of violence that was “aimed at the destruction of the integrity of the group through its women, who embody its genetic and cultural continuity” (Derderian 1). As explained in the Introduction, this analysis is aligned with “traditional ideas of gender and nationality... that men are the bearers of ethnicity but that women and children are susceptible to assimilation,” and are necessarily the object of assimilation, because they “embody” a group’s “genetic and cultural continuity” (Derderian 4, 1). This kind of historical analysis -- both on the part of Armenian survivors as well as historical works -- turns Armenian women into a symbol. The violence women faced serves as a symbol of the violence faced by Armenians as a whole. Again, the violation of women’s bodies becomes synecdoche for the violation of the body politic. Again, I ask, what narratives are missing from this historical analysis? If Armenian women’s bodies serve as a symbol, then the physicality and individuality of each one is erased.

The natural site of resistance to this symbolization, then, is the body. The novels at hand, *Zabelle* and *Three Apples Fell From Heaven*, both find ways to de-symbolize and re-embody Armenian women. Paired with Nussbaum’s theories on the empathic potential of the novel, as well as Andreas Huyssen’s complication of narrative empathy in the context of second-generation Holocaust survivors, I argue that these authors imagine and represent Armenian women’s experiences such that they become dynamic, human lives, rather than symbols. By constructing Armenian female bodies that are active and aware of their own physicality, these two novelists write the body as the site of imaginative rehumanization. In this way, the fictional

imagination allows these authors to reappropriate narratives about Armenian women through their re-embodiment.

I'd like to take Nussbaum's theory one step further, and suggest that empathy is not only the product of the novel, but also the producer. There are levels of empathy in these texts. The reader empathizes with the characters, as she is meant to do when she reads a novel. The author too participates in empathy, in the act of imagining the experiences of her characters. These imaginations in particular, generations after genocide, have the capacity to express what survivors could not. Fiction, in its suspension of an absolute or historical truth, provides the space for both the author and the reader to empathize, to imagine the experience of another.

In "Of Mice and Mimesis," Andreas Huyssen discusses Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, a graphic novel that depicts Spiegelman interviewing his father about his experience as a Polish Jew during the Holocaust. Huyssen proposes a theory of "mimetic approximation." Unlike Nussbaum, he considers the positionality of the author. In his context, he considers the literary significance of the author's position as a son of a Holocaust survivor.

... the complexity of the narration is not just an aesthetic device employed for its own sake. It rather results from the desire of members of the second generation to learn about their parents' past of which they are always, willingly or not, already a part: it is a project of mimetically approximating historical and personal trauma in which the various temporal levels are knotted together in such a way that any talk about a

past that refuses to pass away or that should not be permitted to pass... seems beside the point. (Huysen 71)

The narrative, then, is both his and his father's. Mimesis, Huysen explains, "is not identity, nor can it be reduced to compassion or empathy. It rather requires of us to think identity and non-identity together as non-identical similitude and in unresolvable tension with each other" (Huysen 72). In the context of fiction, these tensions can be addressed. "After all, the comic does not pretend to be history" (Huysen 74). Neither does the novel.

Huysen's theory suggests that it is important to note the particular relationship between these authors, their narratives, and the survivors who inspired them. Both Kricorian and Aharonian Marcom are granddaughters of genocide survivors. Both are Armenian American women who have inherited the kinds and the contexts of stories they write. They choose to fictionalize these stories, however, in order to empathize with, to imagine, the emotions that survivors like Takouhi and Satenig may have never expressed. The authors are familiarly and culturally connected to the stories, but also geographically and temporally removed from them. Likewise, "All of Spiegelman's strategies of narration thus maintain the insuperable tension within mimetic approximation between closeness and distance, affinity and difference," or connection and disconnection. "Mimetic approximation as a self-conscious project," then, "always couples closeness and distance, similitude and difference" (Huysen 79). Like Spiegelman, these two authors are both close enough to and far enough from the story to tell it in a new way. Their empathic efforts are particular, and meant to share those parts of the narrative that have been silenced.

While these novels may contribute to a broader consciousness raising about the Armenian Genocide, their focus on and fictionalization of Armenian women's experiences does the speaking that survivors could not. For this reason I argue that these novels participate not only in practices of recognition, but also of reappropriation. Kricorian and Aharonian Marcom write the bodies of their protagonists as active and aware of their own physicality, both generally and sexually. In other words, the authors write about these women's bodies in a way that the survivors themselves could not speak about them. Generations later, then, we see that Armenian women use fiction to find not only the voices but also the bodies of silenced survivors. To do so, they must imagine. That is, they empathize to create these voices, these bodies, thereby inviting the reader to empathize with the physical suffering of Armenian women during and after genocide. These levels of empathy work together to reappropriate the narrative of Armenian Genocide recognition, in order to recognize and reconstruct Armenian women's bodily experiences. Ultimately, Kricorian and Aharonian Marcom reclaim the Armenian female body on different terms through the reappropriation of her symbolism and the reconstitution of her humanity.

In her novel, *Zabelle*, Nancy Kricorian writes a version of her grandmother's real, lived experiences, but chooses to fictionalize them in order to have the space to imagine those experiences, to express those that perhaps her grandmother could not. This particular novel focuses on the interaction between the Armenian female protagonist and

the bodies around her -- those of other Armenians during the Genocide, those of other Armenian women in post-genocide diaspora, and those of Armenian men. My analysis of the body in *Zabelle* is split into four sections. Ultimately, I suggest that Kricorian reveals and reappropriates the symbolic relationship between Armenian women's bodies and the body politic, de-symbolizes Armenian women by reconstituting their humanity through their physio-emotional re-embodiment, acknowledges the intergenerational tensions between Armenian women in diaspora, and writes a world in which the Armenian girl can express physical desire. The author empathizes in order to imagine these relationships, and therefore invites the reader to understand the complexity of Armenian women's experiences during and after genocide.

Kricorian's Literary Symbolism: Revealing the Cultural Symbolism Imposed on the Body

In order to reveal the weight of the cultural and historical symbolism imposed on Armenian women's bodies (that they symbolize the biological and cultural reproduction of the group, that consequently the the violation of their bodies becomes synecdoche for the violation of the body politic), Kricorian must first construct empathy in her reader. If the reader empathizes with Zabelle's character, then she can begin to consider the complexities of this type of symbolization. The first chapter portrays Zabelle's early experiences as a child in Hadjin, but moves quickly to her family's strife during the deportations (Kricorian 15-27). Written in the first person perspective, Kricorian designs a child's disoriented vision of these horrific events, inviting her reader to imagine what that vision might look like, and what that child might feel like. The reader has only as

much knowledge as the young narrator, and is thereby left similarly disoriented, immediately empathizing with that feeling.

For example, a young Zabelle explains that her father and uncle left the house. The reader is given no context as to why the two men have gone, meant to assume that the narrator herself was given no context. “One day my father put some clothes in a sack and left the house,” she explains, simply (Kricorian 17). This gap in comprehension, or explanation, reflects the disorientation of a child’s experience through genocide. Like Zabelle, the reader sees only a picture of the aftermath. The reader’s perspective is fragmented in the way a child’s might be at the time. In this way, from the very beginning, Kricorian’s writing is structured to engage the reader in empathic action. Further, in this first description of genocide, Kricorian seems to write with Nussbaum’s idea in mind, of the “implicit reader who shares with the characters certain hopes, fears, and general human concerns” and who can therefore form “bonds of identification” (Nussbaum 7). Most readers can empathize with the loss or leaving of a loved one. Kricorian therefore begins her literary imagination of genocide with this scene in order to construct those initial “bonds” born out of “general human concerns” that apply to most readers. This bond, paired with a fragmented, childlike narrative, places the reader in Zabelle’s shoes.

Empathy is perhaps more difficult to construct in the description of extreme violence and suffering, in a scene that is geographically, temporally, and conceptually distant from its readers. Kricorian works towards this empathy through her focus on the physical. Her description of the forced deportations, or death marches, hinges on the presence of physical bodies in mass movement. Ultimately, I argue that Kricorian’s

construction of these suffering bodies is symbolic, in that the inability of the marchers to express their suffering represents the silencing of Armenian women in post-genocide diaspora. First, the author establishes the inexpressibility of the marchers' condition. Zabelle initially characterizes the marchers as Armenian: "We followed the ones ahead of us and were followed by those behind us, all the Armenians walking together" (Kricorian 18). Later, these people seem to lose their identities amidst the violence. "There were bodies everywhere I looked. Some were old, some were babies, some were bleeding from the mouth, some were half-alive" (Kricorian 19). Here the people are reduced to bare "bodies," rather than a collective group of "Armenians," all in varying states of physical vulnerability. Zabelle then describes their interaction with the environment, noting "the flies, the maggots, the animals chewing on an arm or a leg while the eyes rolled up, staring at the sky," in order to highlight their dehumanization under such extreme violence (Kricorian 19). In other words, Kricorian describes the process by which "Armenians" turn to "bodies." By imagining and constructing them in this way, Kricorian invites the reader to consider what it might be like to be in a physical body under such suffering, with no time, space, or opportunity to express that suffering.

Further, by moving from the name of the collective identity (Armenians) to a description of individual beings (bodies), Kricorian's writing reflects the act of dismantling a whole -- the object of genocide. She chooses to describe the suffering of the marchers through language that highlights the destruction of the collectivity, without emphasizing Zabelle's or her mother's personal anguish. Despite the extreme circumstances, Kricorian constructs images of people who suffer without expressing their own suffering. Zabelle, the narrator, does not complain. She only describes. In this way,

Kricorian emphasizes the state of Armenians during the marches, their bodies reduced to vehicles for physical survival. Kricorian's construction of these suffering bodies is symbolic. The inability of the marchers to speak, to express their suffering, represents the silencing of Armenian women in post-genocide diaspora, unable to express dissent or difference in a collectivity that had been nearly destroyed. In this way, Kricorian inverts the typical symbolism. Rather than the violation of Armenian women representing the violation of the body politic, the silencing of the body politic represents the silencing of Armenian women. By reappropriating the symbolism between Armenian women's bodies and the body politic, Kricorian reveals the silencing power of their symbolization.

Moreover, the way that Kricorian writes the bodies of her female characters as vehicles for physical survival reflects the way that Armenian women's bodies are viewed as vehicles for cultural survival. Again, in Derderian's terms, women "embody" the "genetic and cultural continuity" of the body politic (Derderian 1). After describing the horrific scenes of the bodies around her, Zabelle returns to an explanation of her survival. "But we kept walking," she says. "Where are we going? I asked my mother. She didn't know. But we kept walking" (Kricorian 19). Kricorian highlights the inability to process the physical manifestations of genocide in the moment; that is, one must "keep walking," or make a vehicle out of one's own body, in order to survive. Likewise, in the aftermath of the near destruction of the collectivity, the weight of this symbolization, this vehiculization of the Armenian female body, cannot be contested. The body politic must survive. Generations later, Kricorian empathizes. The novel, then, expresses what the women in the story could not. In this way, Kricorian's literary symbolism reveals the

silencing power of the cultural and historical symbolization of Armenian women's bodies, and asks her reader to empathize with its imposition.

Kricorian identifies this symbolic relationship through images of the Armenian female body, in order to imply and address the specificity of Armenian women's experiences. Zabelle's grandfather is the first member of her family to die in their march across the desert. When one morning, "he didn't wake up," her grandmother "slapped her [own] face and called out to God in a loud voice" (Kricorian 19). The next day she tells the rest of the family to leave her behind. "She said she couldn't take another step" (Kricorian 19). Zabelle's grandmother physically harms herself, shouts, and is ultimately paralyzed by the weight of the physical and emotional violence. Zabelle explains that her mother then "wrapped a scarf over my head so I couldn't look back" (Kricorian 19). Zabelle's mother covers her daughter's body in such a way that she cannot "look back" physically, but also such that she cannot not dwell emotionally in the pain of her grandmother's loss. Likewise, they "kept walking" (Kricorian 19). Because Zabelle's grandmother engages with the physio-emotional pain of her circumstances, her body is paralyzed. Because Zabelle and her mother do not, they keep walking. They survive. Through her grandmother's self-harm and Zabelle's obstructive scarf, Kricorian uses bodily imagery in order to highlight the relationship between physical survival and emotional engagement, suggesting that one must disassociate to survive. Again, Kricorian's imagination of these women's bodily experiences encourages the reader to empathize with the physical and emotional pain of the marchers, but also for the need to keep moving forward, unable to engage with that pain in order to survive. Again, the way that Kricorian writes the bodies of her female characters as vehicles for physical survival

reflects the way that Armenian women's bodies are viewed as vehicles for cultural survival.

Kricorian herself is the product of that moving forward, living two generations later in the United States. Her personal survival is relatively secured. This distance, both temporal and geographical, allows her to engage with the pain that the marchers, with the pain that her grandmother, could not. Empathy, paired with both her connection and her removal, enables Kricorian to write a story that represents the complexity of Armenian womanhood during and after genocide. The tensions between the individual suffering body and its own survival, then, reflect the tensions between Armenian women and the broader body politic. The need to survive outweighs the immediate need to feel, to express. Kricorian writes to express this tension, and make the reader empathize with it. In doing so, she reappropriates the symbolization that represses Armenian women's bodily expression in order to reveal the weight of its imposition. Kricorian, from her time and place of physical security in diaspora, identifies this tension because she can, and because the generations before her could not. The fictional imagination gives her the space to speak.

De-symbolization Through Empathy and Physio-Emotional Re-embodiment

After having revealed the silencing power of the cultural and historical symbolization of Armenian women's bodies, Kricorian uses bodily imagery to address the inextricable relationship between genocide's effects on the characters' physical as well as emotional realities. In this way she lets the reader see the physio-emotional manifestations of trauma that survivors could not express, thereby de-symbolizing and

rehumanizing female characters through their re-embodiment. Kricorian's first images of genocide depend on the physical bodies of Zabelle's mother and grandmother. After her father and uncle leave the house, Zabelle describes, "My mother was crying into her apron and rocking back and forth in the chair. Grandmother was pulling on her cheeks" (Kricorian 17). A clear link is drawn between emotional pain and bodily movement or manipulation. Her mother is "crying" and "rocking" while her grandmother is "pulling on her cheeks." The physical manifestation of emotions continues throughout the text. Later, it becomes clear that the physical harm of genocide leads to long term emotional consequences, which in turn themselves have physical manifestations.

As the narrative continues, the reader sees the physical and emotional manifestations of genocide years after Zabelle has secured basic safety. Throughout the novel, Zabelle has dreams, many of which are terrifying, distorted scenes from her time in the desert. Kricorian's choice to include dreams in the novel adds another level of removal from the historical facts at its base, thereby emphasizing their narrative importance and deliberate crafting. The dreams are written in italics to highlight this extra level of removal. Many of the dreams acknowledge the loss of Zabelle's mother. As readers, Zabelle does not grieve in front of us, but she cannot help but dream. By locating Zabelle's grief only in dreams, Kricorian emphasizes the inability of the conscious survivor to feel and to express. In this way she demonstrates the continued effects of past trauma, and the presence of what has been lost despite efforts to move forward in time and space.

For example, after she has been adopted into a new Armenian family, but before she meets them for the first time, Zabelle dreams that she is trying to bring her mother

some water in the desert. When she opens the tent, her mother is not there. “*I fell to my knees, tore back the blanket, and plunged my hands into the sand. I pulled up bone after bone: leg bones, arm bones, ribs, and finally a skull with rubies for eyes*” (Kricorian 39). This dream represents grief for her mother, paired with the anxiety of being placed in a new family, theoretically to replace the one she had lost. Because her mother cannot be replaced, all Zabelle can find are bones in the sand. She wakes up. “I sat up in bed. My hands trembled as I tied back my damp hair with a rag” (Kricorian 39). The physical experience of genocide leads to the emotional distress of night terrors, which in turn lead to physical manifestations like “trembling” and sweating. Kricorian uses bodily imagery to describe the long-term, inextricable relationship between physical and emotional effects of genocidal violence. By jumping in and out of Zabelle’s consciousness, Kricorian’s writing mirrors the lack of control a survivor may have over the memories of her individual experiences through genocide. In this way, Kricorian invites her reader to empathize with the consequences of such violence, and humanizes the survivor who is unable to express those consequences. Beyond this, the dream serves as a metaphor on multiple levels.

Within the storyline, the dream clearly represents Zabelle’s grief for a mother who cannot be replaced, an understandable anxiety the night before she is meant to meet her new Armenian family. It is also important to note Kricorian’s choice to fragment Zabelle’s mother’s body into bones. Kricorian fragments bodily images in order to mirror the fragmentation of the broader body politic. The dream alludes not only to Zabelle’s personal anxieties about trying to piece back together a family after hers has been lost, but also to broader social anxieties about piecing back together an Armenian community

that has been partially destroyed and displaced. The dream's imagery of Zabelle's mother in bones echoes an earlier metaphor from the text. While still in the orphanage, Zabelle explains, "I felt like a branch torn from a tree. The river swept me along, and I kept afloat as best I could. There was food every day. My hands were busy knitting, scouring pots, sweeping floors" (Kricorian 28). The narrator describes herself in metaphor -- a branch torn from a tree -- in order to explain her own sense of internal fragmentation after being removed from her Armenian community and family. She has been "torn" from the "tree" that once rooted her to the earth. Now a body in transit, unable to mend itself back to where it came from, Zabelle is "swept along" and "keeping afloat." The reference to "food every day" reiterates the idea behind the phrase, "we kept walking," in that both denote the need to compartmentalize the most basic needs in order to survive during and after genocide. The busy "hands" do this as well, but are notably detached from the rest of Zabelle's body. Zabelle is not busy knitting, scouring, and sweeping. Her hands are. In this way, the literary fragmentation of Zabelle's body, as well as her mother's body in the dream, reflect the unrooted, detached fragmentation of the collective body politic. Zabelle and her mother are described in pieces, because they themselves are pieces of a whole that has been dismantled.

This fragmentation, again, reappropriates the symbolization imposed on Armenian women's bodies. It even operates similarly, as women's fragmented bodies symbolize the fragmentation of the body politic. The difference in this narrative, however, is that Kricorian is not only identifying the symbolization, but also demonstrating how it makes her protagonist feel, both physically and emotionally. The author acknowledges the symbolic relationship such that her reader might feel the pain of

it, might empathize with it. Through the description of the physio-emotional effects of genocidal violence, paired with the silencing power of the symbolic relationship between Armenian women's bodies and the body politic, Kricorian uses empathy to re-embody and consequently reconstruct the humanity of Armenian women during and after genocide.

Physicality and Intergenerational Connection

Moving forward, it is important to note the bodily connections between the women in the text, as they can be read to represent the intergenerational connections between Armenian women. Kricorian's writing, through imagery and metaphor, both implicitly and explicitly links Armenian women to each other and to the Genocide, across time and space. In the prologue of the novel, Zabelle is an older woman living in Massachusetts, with children and grandchildren. The opening scenes paint a picture of the relationship between Zabelle and her granddaughter, Elizabeth. Notably and in contrast to the rest of the story (aside from the epilogue), Kricorian writes the prologue in the third person narrative perspective, as if to suggest that the narrator is seeing all the generations of women in the text, as opposed to representing Zabelle's particular voice. For example, Zabelle presses Elizabeth to eat, offering her food several times despite her refusals. "Zabelle disliked seeing the collar bones poking out of her granddaughter's shirt," and tells Elizabeth that she looks like a "scrawny chicken" (Kricorian 3). Later, during Zabelle's narrative, Kricorian implicitly links the two women's bodies by reimplementing that same phrase. When Zabelle leaves the orphanage and is first left alone in the pantry of the Turkish family's house, she stuffs herself with food. "By the

end of four weeks in that household, I was no longer a scrawny chicken,” she explains (Kricorian 30). Here, by using the same language to describe both grandmother and granddaughter, at distinct points in time and space, Kricorian implicitly links their two bodies. Further, she explains Zabelle’s discomfort with her granddaughter’s thinness as a response rooted to her experience with food during genocide. Likewise, in the desert, after learning that all of their husbands had been shot and killed, “The women screamed like a flock of starved birds” (Kricorian 19). Kricorian uses the same imagery -- that of a starving bird -- to describe Armenian women across the time and space of four generations, from genocide survivors (the women in the desert) to their great grandchildren (Elizabeth). This literary connection between the female characters implicitly prepares the reader to empathize with the intergenerational effects of genocidal violence, and the particularity of those effects upon Armenian women’s bodies.

Kricorian employs symbolism to describe the onus placed on women for cultural reproduction, passed down not only through a broader Armenian narrative but also through women themselves. After their brief argument about food, Zabelle abruptly decides to give her granddaughter a silver thimble from the old country. Elizabeth says she can’t take it, she doesn’t even know how to sew. But Zabelle insists she have it: “‘Doesn’t matter.’ Zabelle closed her hand over Elizabeth’s, the thimble like a seed in the girl’s palm” (Kricorian 4). Kricorian makes an obvious symbol out of the object, calling it a “seed in the girl’s palm” in order to represent cultural reproduction. The physical passing of the object -- the instrument of that reproduction -- mirrors the passing of reproductive responsibility from one generation of women to the next. The thimble itself is a relic of an older place and time, and can also be seen as a tool for the production of

Armenian textiles, or cultural art which is typically gendered as women's work. The symbol weaves together the biological and cultural elements of reproduction, with the material instrument of artistic culture being described as a "seed." In this way, Kricorian demonstrates the onus placed on Armenian women's bodies to participate in this reproduction, both biologically and culturally, because of the expectation that they bare Armenian children and raise them as such.

Elizabeth, notably, resists taking the thimble at first, by saying "I can't sew" (Kricorian 4). It is important to note the linguistic (or at least sonic) connection between "sewing" with a thimble and "sowing" seeds, as if to imply that Elizabeth's inability to sew -- to produce material aspects of Armenian culture -- mirrors her inability to sow the metaphorical seeds of the culture. Although Zabelle says this "doesn't matter," Elizabeth's reaction reveals the intergenerational tension between Armenian women in post-genocide diaspora. To complicate this metaphor, Kricorian later reveals that it was Moses Bodjakanian, Zabelle's forbidden love with whom she shared a forbidden kiss, who gave her that thimble. Although the reader eventually learns this, Elizabeth has no idea. In this way, Kricorian writes Zabelle's awareness and assertion of her own physicality, desire, and emotional needs (through the forbidden kiss) into the "seed" of the thimble. This gets passed down as well, even if Elizabeth does not know it, even if Zabelle could not tell her about it. The thimble then, is paradoxically a symbol not only of the onus of reproduction placed on Armenian women's bodies, but also of their self-ownership and agency. Even further, the scene expresses Zabelle's inability to verbally express or pass down that agency, thereby demonstrating Kricorian's need to do so through the fictional imagination. To recall Huyssen's theory of mimesis, one could

argue that this symbol falls into the “strategies of narration” that “maintain the insuperable tension within mimetic approximation between closeness and distance, affinity and difference,” or connection and disconnection, in this case, between a genocide survivor and her granddaughter (Huysen 72). This small literary moment, rich with symbolisms that the reader must work to break down, engages the reader in an empathic understanding of the complex intergenerational tensions among Armenian women in diaspora.

Imagined Desire

Kricorian imagines the tensions not only of the contemporary Armenian American girl, but also of the Armenian Ottoman girl, a century ago. In the epilogue of the novel, she writes the meeting and marriage of Zabelle’s parents, Lucine Kodjababian and Garabed Boyajian. In doing so, Kricorian imagines the physical tensions between shame and desire, asking that the reader do the same. As mentioned in the first chapter, the epilogue of the book begins: “There was, there was not, there was a girl named Lucine Kodjababian who lived in the town of Hadjin, Cilicia, in the Ottoman empire. In the same town, not very far away, lived a boy named Garabed Boyajian.” One day, the narrator explains, Lucine and Garabed passed one another in the street “and exchanged glances, which left each dreaming of the other” (Kricorian 229). The narrator then explains that, in 1909 in Cilicia, “it was not usual that boys chose their wives, or that girls gazed back at boys in street” (Kricorian 229). Consequently, after that exchange of glances, Lucine’s cousin was so shocked that she asked, ““What, have you no shame?”” (Kricorian 229).

Despite her cousin's warning, when Garabed ran to her the next time he saw her and asked for her name, Lucine told him. Again, her cousin exclaimed, "Are you crazy? ... Why are you shouting your name shamelessly in the street?" (Kricorian 230).

Kricorian imagines Lucine's desire:

And what did Lucine remember? Not his handsome face with its proud dark brow or his head of thick, black hair. Not the plain of his shoulders that rose out of the sleeveless vest. Not the red sash tied where his baggy pants met his shirt, above the narrow hips. She remembered the way his fierce eyes locked on hers, making her want something. (Kricorian 230)

Here Kricorian adds an untellable piece to the story of her great-grandparents' love. By writing her great-grandmother as a character with intense, physical desire, Kricorian reclaims sexuality as a legitimate facet of Armenian womanhood, across time and space.

Lucine's cousin represents the cultural shame and stigma around sexuality with which Armenian women contend, intensified by the time and place of the story at hand.

Lucine's decision to tell Garabed her name, however, represents her agency in spite of that shame and stigma. This is a moment in which Kricorian's empathy quite literally gives voice to a female character, through dialogue, reflecting the novel's broader goal of breaking through silencing of Armenian women. In this way, Kricorian imagines the story of her great-grandmother in such a way that reappropriates her image, and embodies her as a woman with real, human desire, and enough empowerment to act on that desire.

Kricorian empathizes in order to create a reality in which her great-grandmother's desire could be expressed. Nussbaum articulates this idea by suggesting that the novel itself is a metaphor for a particular interpretation of the world:

The novel calls on us to interpret metaphors. But we can now say more: the novel presents *itself* as a metaphor. See the world in this way, and not in that, it suggests. Look at things as if they were like this story, and not in other ways recommended by social science. By reading the novel, we get not just a concrete set of images in terms of which to imagine this particular world, but also, and more significantly, a general cast of mind with which to approach our own. (Nussbaum 43-44)

By reappropriating the symbolic relationship between Armenian women's bodies and the body politic, acknowledging the intergenerational tensions between women in post-genocide diaspora, and writing a reality in which the Armenian girl can (and may, and does) desire, Kricorian participates in the kind of world-making that Nussbaum describes. Through her empathic imagination, the writer engages her reader in the empathic process as well, thereby confronting the silence imposed by broader Armenian narratives and calls for genocide recognition. In this way, again through the fictional imagination, Kricorian says what her grandmother and great-grandmother could not.

Making Anaguil Visible: The Armenian Female Body At Once Present and Absent

In *Three Apples Fell From Heaven*, Micheline Aharonian Marcom writes many chapters around the experiences of Anaguil, an Armenian girl who loses her mother and saves herself and her sister by assimilating into a neighboring Turkish family. Aharonian Marcom connects herself, the writer, to Anaguil's character by fragmenting herself into the narrative. In doing so, she demonstrates the tensions between Armenian women's visibility and invisibility, or presence and absence, within a broader body politic that they are meant to reproduce in post-genocide diaspora. By confronting and reappropriating the symbolic meaning imposed on Armenian women's bodies, as well as writing Anaguil's body as resistant and aware of its acute, physical needs, Aharonian Marcom imagines a world in which the Armenian girl is de-symbolized and re-embodied.

As explained in the previous chapter, Aharonian Marcom opens the novel not with one of her characters, but rather with the writer and the reader. In "This is the Story that Rumor Writes," she describes the unnamed writer from the reader's point of view: "When you look at her you cannot see her" (Aharonian Marcom 1). This description presents a writer who is at once visible and invisible, or present and absent. She is in the work even if the reader cannot see her. Aharonian Marcom blurs the lines between herself and her characters, personally implicating her own experience as an Armenian American woman, the granddaughter of genocide survivors, in this novel of imagined stories. Throughout the narrative, Aharonian Marcom rarely employs quotation marks to indicate dialogue, occasionally making it difficult for the reader to distinguish who is speaking. The reader is then left wondering whether certain lines are spoken by a particular character, or another, or the narrator, or the author herself. In this way

Aharonian Marcom reaffirms her absent presence. As Huyssen suggests, “the complexity of the narration is not just an aesthetic device employed for its own sake. It rather results from the desire of members of the second generation to learn about their parents’ past of which they are always, willingly or not, already a part” (Huyssen 71). Although the author is not herself a survivor, she can create and represent the stories of genocide because of the way they have been woven into her consciousness. In this way she is particularly capable of the empathy Nussbaum describes, but also possesses enough temporal and geographical distance to reclaim typical conceptions and narratives around Armenian women’s bodies. She is both close enough to and far enough from the story to tell it. Dancing between presence and absence in this way, Aharonian Marcom exemplifies the tension between experience and representation in the the post-survivor generations. She too focuses on the Armenian female body in order reappropriate its meaning.

In that opening chapter, like any other line in the story, Aharonian Marcom writes, “Bodies.” This word exists as its own sentence, an independent image that asserts the relevance of the body throughout the text (Aharonian Marcom 3). From the beginning, the body is written into the text on different terms. The opening chapter constructs a metanarrative through its direct involvement of both the reader and the writer, thereby positing the novel into the realm of reality, of physical consequences. The sentence, “Bodies.” is grammatically fragmented. Other sentences in the chapter also break grammatical rules, as described earlier. Because this chapter is open about its metaliterary theme, it can be argued that Aharonian Marcom subverts typical syntax in order to reflect her subversion of typical narratives and symbolisms imposed on

Armenian women's bodies. The "Bodies" in the sentence remain undescribed; or, in the terms used to describe the writer herself, they are there, but you cannot see them. The narrative to come allows the reader to see.

The following story, "An Omelette for Mama," describes Anaguil's trip to the egg-seller. Through her character, Aharonian Marcom presents the body of an Armenian girl as passive and manipulable, but at once resistant. In this way Aharonian Marcom acknowledges the physical confines of expected Armenian femininity during the time of the Genocide, but challenges the idea that women and girls acted within the confines of those expectations. Aharonian Marcom writes Anaguil's body as the site of both her passivity and her resistance. To begin, Anaguil is walking to the egg seller. "She speaks under her breath," "She stares at the ground," "She whispers, Four eggs only, to no one in particular" (Aharonian Marcom 4). Aharonian Marcom underscores her passivity and silence. Her voice and her eyes are subdued, she is neither heard nor seen. Although Anaguil speaks, albeit quietly, "no one in particular" is listening. She is there, although no one seems to notice. Like the writer herself, "When you look at her you cannot see her" (Aharonian Marcom 1). Anaguil's dance between presence and absence mirrors Aharonian Marcom's self-descriptive language in the first chapter, thereby implying a generational continuity of being there but not being seen, or of speaking and not being heard.

Aharonian Marcom locates and describes Anaguil's passivity in her body, but begins to challenge it through her imagination. In this way she reflects the role of the fictional in its capacity to rehumanize and reembody Armenian women, thereby justifying the function of the novel itself. It is in this fictional, imaginary landscape that

Aharonian Marcom first adds complexity to Anaguil's initially passive character. "She then imagines herself running, her hair coming loose from its plait, uncovering itself from the black veil that covers her today like a dark shroud" (Aharonian Marcom 5). Anaguil imagines her body in movement, unrestricted by the symbolism of both the veil and the plait, or braid. Anaguil's imagination of her own body is the site of her rehumanization, just as the novel itself reconstitutes the humanity of dehumanized survivors through their fictional re-embodiment. Without direct explanation, it is implied that Anaguil wears the veil to protect herself in public space from being identified as Armenian. The "dark shroud," then, obscures not only the spirit inside of her that wants to run and let her hair loose from its braid, but also her Armenian identity. She must hide both in order to survive. Aharonian Marcom puts Anaguil's imagination at odds with both Armenian and Turkish gendered customs that are located on the female body -- the braid and the veil, respectively -- thereby asking the reader to empathize with the confines of those femininities. In the act of hiding, Anaguil is at once present and absent. Again, like the writer herself, you can look at her, but you cannot see her.

By juxtaposing the stark distinction between Anaguil's written actions and imaginations, Aharonian Marcom underscores the tension between an Armenian girl's self-expression and traditional gender dynamics. Within the same sentence, it is implied that Anaguil must hide her active individuality as she must hide her Armenian identity. To make either visible might yield immediate, physical danger. Similar to Kricorian, then, Aharonian Marcom participates in the reappropriation of the symbolic meaning imposed on Armenian women's bodies. Again, the tensions between individual survival and self-expression serve to highlight the tensions women face between themselves and

their responsibility for collective survival. Again, this symbolic work is located in the Armenian female body because of the notion that women “embody” the “genetic and cultural continuity” of the group (Derderian 1). Aharonian Marcom exposes the tensions involved in this kind of symbolism. By writing Anaguil in this way, after implicating fragments of herself into the narrative, she implies that Armenian women across time and space have had to hide or suspend their own individuality and bodily expression in order to secure the survival of the body politic. In the story, the Armenian must hide her Armenian-ness. The Armenian girl must hide her non-feminine instincts. Likewise, generations later in diaspora, Armenian women must hide similar instincts under the weight and threat of the disappearance of the body politic. That is, they make their individual selves invisible such that the collectivity can remain visible. In the act of hiding, these women are at once present and absent. The novel that is removed from the time and space of genocide is capable of the kind of empathic imagination that expresses and visibilizes these tensions.

The Armenian Girl's Resistance, Both Real and Imagined

While Aharonian Marcom acknowledges the expectations of feminine passivity, she writes Anaguil's body as ultimately resistant. She imagines the girl's resistance in order to challenge the idea of her passivity, her victimhood. Anaguil gets to the egg seller and requests the eggs. Despite her active imagination, “She drops her gaze to the ground. A goodgirl” (Aharonian Marcom 7). Aharonian Marcom writes “goodgirl” as one word, compressing two distinct words into one in order to emphasize the concept, or the confines of Anaguil's expected femininity. Then the egg seller touches her. “As he

begins to remove the coins from her hand, he runs his fingers down the center of her palm. He slowly glides his fingers along each of the red moons and when finished reaches to her wrist... I do have discounts, cutie” (Aharonian Marcom 8-9). Anaguil shakes her head, “and notices in that moment how her hands perspire; she smells the bitter residue of the coins in the sweat of her palms” (Aharonian Marcom 9). Here Aharonian Marcom acknowledges Anaguil’s physical response to the violence of the egg seller’s proposition. She sweats. She smells. He calls her a “little-whore” (Aharonian Marcom 9). Then she resists: “Anaguil receives the egg he hands her into the linen square she has brought from home. She carefully folds the cloth around the egg and for each fold of fabric she utters one syllable: I-shit-in-your-mouth: cacudes” (Aharonian Marcom 9). Anaguil’s careful folding of domestic cloth is woven into her resistance to the man who thinks he can touch her. Aharonian Marcom incorporates aspects of feminine domesticity into her resistance, thereby challenging her expected passivity without entirely rejecting the “home” from which she came. The cloth, whose folding occasions each syllable of the curse, is the object of Anaguil’s resistance. In this way Aharonian Marcom locates the source of her defiance in the home, the space typically gendered female. Doing so allows the writer and the character to reclaim the home as resistant space in spite of the confines of expected femininity. Ultimately, Aharonian Marcom gives the Armenian girl agency without entirely rejecting her culture, her home, thereby reflecting the tensions and negotiations that Armenian women have made across time and space. The author herself is connected enough to Armenian culture to understand feminine expectations, but geographically and temporally distant enough to challenge

them. In this way, the negotiations Anaguil makes reflect those that the author herself has to make.

She then acknowledges the effects of these tensions, again focusing on Anaguil's bodily response:

Anaguil turns away from the egg-seller's stall and she feels how the back of her dress now sticks to her skin; her hands tremble as she begins walking. It was worth it, she thinks, it was worth going to the market alone and buying from that son of an ass. The boys are at home safe with Mama, and I have done something I never expected. She disregards the burning feeling in her belly as she begins the walk home. She presses her thighs tightly together and ignores the need to relieve herself. (Aharonian Marcom 9)

Anaguil's choice to curse the man yields physical manifestations, like the sweat on her back and the trembling of her hands. This perspiration is different than the last, because "it was worth it." Anaguil's resistance is something she "never expected." The reader never expects it either, after Aharonian Marcom's markedly passive characterization. While Anaguil "disregards the burning feeling in her belly" and "ignores the need to relieve herself," Aharonian Marcom acknowledges her physicality. In this way, she creates a reality in which the Armenian girl can feel, and in which her resistance is found inside her body. Again, the novel is the space in which the writer can imagine the Armenian girl as resistant, and expose the tensions located and imposed upon her body.

The reader is meant to empathize with these complexities, in order to challenge the narrative that turns Armenian women's bodies into simple symbols.

Bodily Contemplation and Rejection: Acknowledgment of the Tensions Within

Aharonian Marcom continues to imagine Anaguil's relationship to her own body. Her character sweats again a few stories later, at the *hamam*, or the bathhouse. The author interlaces the imagery of Anaguil's sweat with her femininity, rooting an inexplicable shame to the natural physicality of the body. Sitting in the heat, "the sweating begins, at the temples, on the arms, in the armpits, behind each knee, in the groin: the secretions of impurities flow and run and dribble to the stone floor -- like juice, like sweet sugar water, like pomegranate seed milk, like menstrual blood" (Aharonian Marcom 26). Aharonian Marcom notably splits this sentence at "the groin," immediately moving to images of "secretions of impurities" and "menstrual blood." In this way she associates the body's inherent impurities with Anaguil's womanhood. Further, she links menstrual blood to the color of pomegranates, the national fruit of Armenia, thereby emphasizing the connection between her femininity and her ethnicity.

Yet, Anaguil lies on the floor, "to contemplate her own body's purging and thirsts" (Aharonian Marcom 26). Aharonian Marcom allows Anaguil to engage with the impurities she has just described. Inside her own imagination, Anaguil may "contemplate" her own body rather than reject it. "Where could I travel if I were to follow the path of my own sweat and piss," she wonders, "down which alleyways would I wander? Would they lead me back to some place where I could recognize myself?" (Aharonian Marcom 27). Anaguil acknowledges her own physicality and considers its

limits. That is, she considers what might happen if she were to act on her bodily instincts. At this point in the story, it is clear to the reader that Anaguil and her sister have been taken in by a neighboring Turkish family, both adopting Turkish names and language so they can pass as Turkish and avoid forced deportation. Again, to remain visible (alive) they must remain invisible (un-identifiable as themselves, as Armenians). Anaguil's new name is Fatma. For this reason Anaguil struggles to "recognize" herself. Through fiction, Aharonian Marcom allows the reader to recognize her as Anaguil, even if the character struggles to recognize herself as such. This existence inside her physical self, yet stripped of her identity, constructs a body that is at once materially visible but immaterially invisible. She may "contemplate her own body," but in order to survive, she may not reveal its multifaceted reality. Likewise, Armenian women may contemplate their bodily instincts, but do not make visible that contemplation, in order to ensure the expected visibility of the body politic. Again, Aharonian Marcom reappropriates the symbolic meaning of the Armenian female body in order to reveal the pain of its prescribed limitations.

Anaguil begins to relax in the heat. She more explicitly acknowledges her physical impulses, but ultimately rejects them. Her muscles "begin to spread out across the bathhouse like an unfurled spring. I am hungry for oranges, she thinks. And brine cabbage pickles. Tourshi" (Aharonian Marcom 28). Anaguil lets herself relax as if she were a spring unfurling. This relaxation occasions her self-observation, and leads to the acknowledgment of her hunger. A few pages later, as they prepare to leave the bathhouse, Anaguil takes two oranges out of a linen sack. "She gives half an orange to Ahmet and another to Nevert. She gives the second orange to Gulhan Hanim, who is already eating

tourshi. She herself takes nothing” (Aharonian Marcom 30). The repetition of the oranges and the tourshi (brine cabbage pickles) demonstrates Anaguil’s acute awareness of her physical needs paired with a constant and unquestioned rejection of those needs.

Aharonian Marcom explains this rejection by implicitly linking the female body to shame and impurity. Yet, by writing Anaguil’s body and physical impulses in explicit terms, Aharonian Marcom gives voice to her unspoken needs, and justifies the urgency of imagining her story. Denial of her own needs is part of what is expected of Anaguil. This is why the empathetic author must fictionalize her desires in order to reconstitute her as a sentient person, rather than a self-denying symbol for collective identity. In this way, Anaguil is made visible to the reader despite the multiple levels of invisibility under which she suffers. The novel provides the space for Aharonian Marcom to imagine and construct an Armenian girl’s body such that the tensions within it are revealed, but its instincts are expressed. Fiction, in its suspension of truth, occasions this expression. The reader then empathizes with the girl’s rejection of her own needs, and is left to consider the relationship of that rejection to the Genocide, and how it might be passed down through generations.

Anaguil cuts off her own relaxation before being called to leave, in such a way that links the rejection of her physical needs not only to her shame, but also to the experience of genocide. Shortly after she allows her muscles to “[unfold] like a ball of yarn,” she “tightens her arm muscles and she grasps and rolls and tugs the unfolded yarn, the unfurled spring back into her taut back” (Aharonian Marcom 28-29). Anaguil actively resists a rare moment of bodily calm and self-observation. Aharonian Marcom explains why. “She hates the hamam now. She hates the collusion of its seduction. Its ruthless

indifference and reckless forgetting” (Aharonian Marcom 29). Aharonian Marcom emphasizes “seduction” and “forgetting,” thereby implying that Anaguil’s acknowledgement of her own physical needs exists in tension with the reality of the Genocide. Anaguil cannot sit in her body as Anaguil, knowing that she must be called Fatma in order to survive. She wonders “how it is that she can keep bursting open inside herself and not disappear or dissolve or become marbled dust. Perhaps it is the becoming of someone else. She herself is Fatma Hanim: a goodgirl” (Aharonian Marcom 29). Again, Aharonian Marcom employs the compounded word “goodgirl.” Here, she links the confines of feminine passivity to the confines of identity during genocide. That is, the forced rejection of Anaguil’s identity during genocide mirrors the rejection of her own female physicality in the broader sociocultural world. Aharonian Marcom directly and grammatically links these paralleled rejections by juxtaposing them with a colon, “Fatma Hanim: a goodgirl” (Aharonian Marcom 29). In the time and space in which her character lives, Anaguil must present herself as Fatma, the goodgirl. In this novel, generations later, Aharonian Marcom can make her character visible as Anaguil, the girl.

Ultimately, Aharonian Marcom crystallizes these tensions in one of the novel’s shortest stories. The first two lines connect imagery of Anaguil’s menstruation to the violence of the Genocide: “Anaguil wakes up bleeding. And it is as if all of Kharphert flows from her in tiny and big clots and flows and viscous threads of blood and body blooded. She cries.” This simile places the violence of genocide and the menstrual cycle on either side of an “as if,” allowing them to be read as parallel violences. Then Anaguil tastes her menstrual blood. “And although appalled, she loves her blood’s taste... She loves the taste of body in her mouth” (Aharonian Marcom 214). Here, despite the

violence and the tears, Aharonian Marcom writes an Anaguil who “loves the taste” of her own “body,” an unsettling and radical reclamation of self, of her own physicality. This image is immediately juxtaposed with Anaguil questioning another female character, Haigan, about the confines of their expected femininity. As they embroider, the two women talk:

Don't be stupid, Haigan says.

But it's awful, it makes my eyes water and my fingers ache, aching to run outside.

It's what every girl must do well... Who else will embroider the towels?...

Anaguil looks at her closely. Is this what we're good for, Haigan? This machination of hands like little water mills? These arch rosettes on white linen?

You want to be a good wife and mother, don't you?

(Aharonian Marcom 215)

In this story, Aharonian Marcom pairs the Armenian woman's radical acceptance of her own body with her verbal questioning of cultural gender roles. Anaguil acknowledges the physical pain of those roles. Her “eyes water” and her “fingers ache” from the gendered task of embroidery. Notably and impossibly, her fingers are “aching to run outside,” as if her body were physically yearning to run away from the physical imposition of domestic gender roles. “Is this what we're good for?” Anaguil asks. She is met not with an answer, but rather with a rhetorical question that closes the story: “You want to be a good wife

and mother, don't you?" This passage constructs Anaguil's critical approach to her own femininity, again, without entirely rejecting it. She is left with the rhetorical question, "don't you?" so as to illustrate the post-genocide anxiety and responsibility placed on women for biological and cultural reproduction. The answer is not necessarily no, nor is it yes. The tension exists unresolved, but acknowledged. Through Anaguil, Aharonian Marcom writes an Armenian female character who is too complicated, too acutely physical, to exist as a symbol.

By confronting and reappropriating the symbolic meaning imposed on Armenian women's bodies, locating both passivity and resistance in the female body, as well as acknowledging and constructing the acute, physical needs of Anaguil, Aharonian Marcom's empathic authorship manages to de-symbolize and re-embody the Armenian girl. "Where could I travel if I were to follow the path of my own sweat and piss," wonders Anaguil, imagines the writer (Aharonian Marcom 27). Nussbaum explains, "good literature is disturbing in a way that history and social science writing frequently are not. Because it summons powerful emotions, it disconcerts and puzzles. It inspires distrust of conventional pieties and exacts a frequently painful confrontation with one's own thoughts and intentions" (Nussbaum 5). The fictitious space of the novel allows writers like Kricorian and Aharonian Marcom to imagine Armenian women's bodily experiences, such that the unspeakable is spoken, such that their voices and needs, although imagined, although generations later, are heard. The reader, then, is meant to listen.

Conclusion

In this project, I hope to have demonstrated the role of fiction in the wake of human rights abuses. Through literary analysis, I suggest that the novel is one place where the unspeakable can be spoken. In its suspension of historical truth, the fictional imagination allows the writer to empathically imagine the experience of another, thereby rehumanizing characters whose stories may have been previously ignored. In the context of the Armenian Genocide, I note the importance of authorship and positionality. I propose that these novelists, Nancy Kricorian and Micheline Aharonian Marcom, occupy a particular place of distance and proximity that has allowed them to reappropriate historical narratives in order to fill the gaps in the historical record. In this way, the fictional imagination may tell the stories of those who were silenced, including those of Armenian female genocide survivors. While I analyze novels only in the post-genocide Armenian context, I would argue that this line of thinking could also apply to other moments of historical trauma.

Originally, this project was meant to have three chapters. Time permitting, I would have analyzed Armenian American women's poetry, and considered how it functions in comparison to the two novels at hand. Looking specifically at Diana Der-Hovanesian's *The Second Question* (2007), I intended to explore the assertion of the poetic self and the role of the body, comparing the poems that address the Genocide directly and those that do not. After having worked so long within the fictional imagination, I would have first asked, what is the role of the poetic imagination in the wake of human rights abuses? And then, what does this poet do? How does she contribute to the voices of Armenian women in post-genocide diaspora? How does she

construct what is at stake in her poetry, if at all? Unfortunately, I did not have time to pursue those questions as a part of this project. Instead, I will include a poem of my own.

“I feel...I don’t know. I feel ashamed, that my children, that I wasn’t able to make sure that they learned the Armenian language. But I feel very proud, that they have grown to feel that they are Armenian... and that they know how to make boureg better than anybody I know (pause for crying and laughing).”

“I don’t think of myself as feminist, nor do I not think of myself as a feminist. I just, I am who I am. And I want my daughters to be who my daughters are, who they are. And I want, any woman to be able, to stand up and take care of herself and not take any shit from anybody ever. And sometimes we’re good at it and sometimes we’re not. It’s um... (more crying).”

-- my mother,
Christine

“Mama, are you proud?”

They crossed this ocean for you,
mama,
for me,
mama,
I know,
mama.

Inhuman modesty structured their bones,
mama,
I know,
mama,
but listen,
mama.

We, you and me, can do what they can’t,
mama,
what they couldn’t,
mama.

They turned to stone
so they could cross that desert
for fear of nothing
but the snakes;

They watched the girls
who looked just like them
throw their lives
into that river

(for fear of everything
but the snakes);

And so,
and so.

They kept walking

for you,
mama,
for me,
mama,
I know,
mama.

Now
their blood runs only in the rivers
of your varicose veins
leaking out the valves
of my pediatric heart.

This blood we spill for them,
mama,
they know,
mama,
it hurts,
mama.

They crossed that ocean so we wouldn't have to drown,
mama,
don't you know that,
mama?

Don't you know
they'd be proud,

mama?

what
would you say
if
someone
were to
listen,

Mama?

“You gave them wings”
said the cousin

I got them from you
i wanted to say,

Fly,

mama.

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