

ZABELLIANA -- 95th Anniversary of Zabelle Boyajian's *Armenian Legends & Poems*

Guest Lecturer

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Allow me to start with a confession.

I like proverbs. They are gems of thoughts expressing, in a nutshell, truth about reality. No wonder, Mesrop Mashtots, the creator of the Armenian Alphabet at the dawn of the 5th century A.D., chose the *Book of Proverbs* to start his major task of translating the Holy Bible into the Armenian language. Hence the first sentence ever appearing in Armenian letters was this beautiful phrase from the original Syriac of *The Proverbs* (1:2)

ՃԱՆԱԶԵԼ ԶԻՄԱՍՏՈՒԹԻՒՆ ԵՒ ԶԽՐԱՏ, ԻՄԱՆԱԼ ԶԲԱՆՍ ՀԱՆՃԱՐՈՅ

To recognise/acknowledge/know wisdom and counsel/advice,

To understand/comprehend/perceive the thoughts/words of genius/intelligence.

(In King James Version: *To know wisdom, and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding.*)

I acknowledge therefore the wisdom of considering any truthful and beautiful thought to belong to all humanity.

A beautiful Chinese proverb advises, “*A picture is worth ten thousand words.*” I have prepared 50 slides for you to enjoy and appreciate the creative output of a major Armenian woman artist who lived and worked in London during the first half of the 20th century. The slide show will then be worth half a million words. Yet, the same proverb wryly reminds us further, “*but you need words to say that.*” Hence, before letting you enjoy the slide show, I shall say few words.

At this point, I am well aware of a brilliant Latin proverb that gently but firmly warns anyone daring to use words for others to hear, saying: “*Aut tace, aut loquere meliora silentio*”, meaning, in plain English: “*Keep silent unless what you say is better than silence*”.

I do hope that what I am saying and shall continue to narrate about the literary and artistic milieu and phenomena of Zabelle Boyajian, will live up to that advice.

Volume 9 of the Armenian Encyclopaedia of 1983 has this biographical outline of Zabelle Boyajian.

- Born in Diarbekir in 1872. Died in London on January 26, 1957.
- She lived and worked in London as a painter, a writer and a translator.
- Her father, Thomas Boyajian, was the British Vice Consul in Turkey.
- She studied in London at Slade School of Fine Art.
- She had her individual art show/exhibitions in London in 1910, 1912; in Germany in 1920; in Egypt in 1928; in France, in Italy and in Belgium during 1940-1950.
- She used the pseudonym **Vardeni** for her literary works. Her first novel titled **Esther** was published in 1901.
- She collected, translated and assembled – partly in collaboration with Alice S. Blackwell – a voluminous album of a book titled **Armenian Legends and Poems**, published in 1916. It contained an essay, titled: *Armenia, Its Epics, Folk Songs and Medieval Poetry*, authored by Aram Raffi.

- Her dramatic rendering in poetic form of the tale of the mythical hero **Gilgamesh**, was published in 1924.
- Her travel notes and illustrations of Greece was published in 1938, titled, **In Greece With Pen and Palette**.
- She published a play titled **Etchmiadzin**, in 1943.
- She translated into English then published in 1948 Avedik Issahakian's epic poem in Armenian about the Arab philosopher poet, **Abul Ala Al Maari**.
- She mastered a number of European and Oriental languages.
- She wrote numerous articles and was a valiant campaigner for the Armenian cause. Most of her literary volumes included her own illustrations.
- She had extensive correspondence with the great Armenian literary figures of the time, particularly with Arshak Tchobanian and Avedik Issahakian.
- Her painting-portrait of Raffi is now at the Tcharents Museum of Literature & Arts.

Please bare in mind the brief outline just mentioned of Zabelle's C.V. I shall take it as the nucleus of a world, or a cultural globe with constituting threads emanating from and leading to the nucleus.

95 years ago, just a year after the great crime against humanity had started in 1915, now known as the Genocide of the Armenians (the 'Crime against Humanity' initiated a year after the world was engulfed in a total war--WW1), Zabelle Boyajian fought back through the only means she knew best, by publishing her **Armenian Legends and Poems**, in 1916. That was well 20 years after her own father had become a victim during 1894-1896 genocidal massacres in Ottoman Turkey.

Most characteristically, in 1916, other intellectuals did the same as Zabelle did. Arshag Tchobanian was already on the same track for many years, in Paris, publishing scholarly books, analysing the historical and cultural heritage of the Armenian literature throughout the ages. In Moscow, many Armenian writers helped the eminent Russian intellectual Valery Bryusov (1873-1924) in the latter's monumental task to publish in Russian, in 1916, his **Anthology of Armenian Poetry Throughout the Ages**.

Interesting and historical coincidences are worth mentioning too.

In 1872, the year Zabelle was born, the great Armenian scholar and renowned literary figure Mkertich Emin's book, **Outline of Armenian Heathen Religion [Armenian Paganism, or Armenian Mythology]**, as labelled in various French and English translations], was published in Constantinople. Curiously enough, Mkertich Emin (1815-1890) had published his book first in Russian, which was soon followed by two editions in French, all in 1864, in Moscow. The 1872 edition was in Armenian, translated from the French edition by H. Tiroian. (L. Patikian: *Mkertich Emin on Armenian Heathen Culture*, in Armenian, published in Yerevan University Herald, 1974, v.1, p.206.).

Aram Raffi's essay in Zabelle's **Armenian Legends and Poems**, titled, *Armenia, Its Epics, Folk Songs and Medieval Poetry*, owed much to Emin's pioneering book, as was the case with numerous other researchers. It is well said and rightly so that "Emin laid the foundation of the scientific treatment of Armenian mythology in the middle of the 19th century, and his excellent contribution has become indispensable in this field." (Prof. M. Ananikian: *Armenian Mythology*, in *The Mythology of All Races*. New York, 1964. Volume VII, *Armenian and African*. Author's Preface, p 5.)

It is to be noted that Aram's essay alone covered ca. two fifths of Zabelle's volume, thus securing its function as the historical and intellectual content of the whole artistic *oeuvre*. After an *Introduction*, the essay tackled panoramic views of: *Armenian Paganism, Armenian Epics, Moses of Khorene, Adoption of Christianity, Golden Age of Armenian Literature, Middle Ages, Bagratuni Dynasty, The Crusades, Silver Age of Armenian Literature, End of Armenian kingdom, Renaissance, Eighteenth Century and onward, Characteristics of Armenian Poetry*, and finally the latest *Russian Era*.

Also in that same year of Zabelle's birth, in 1872, a young English archaeologist, named George Smith, announced to his British colleagues and professors that he had found a tablet, many thousands of years old, on which **The Chaldean Account of the Deluge** was engraved. That was the 11th tablet of the tale

of the Sumerian mythical hero **Gilgamesh**, written 1500 years earlier than the Greek **Iliad & Odyssey** of Homer. Lo and behold, Zabelle was to become the first author ever to publish, in 1924, a play in the English language titled, **Gilgamesh: A Dream Of The Eternal Quest**. The book was ready for publication in 1923 -- the date Sir Ernest Wallis Budge signed his *Introduction*. Furthermore, the first scholarly text in English, titled, **The Epic of Gilgamesh, Complete Academic Translation**, by R. C. Thompson, was published in 1928, in Oxford, five years after Zabelle's book, albeit Zabelle's was a dramatic play, in free-verse poetic form.

In his *Introduction to Gilgamesh*, Sir E.A. Wallis Budge, Keeper of the Egyptian and Assyrian Antiquities at the British Museum of the day, wrote that Zabelle

[...] shows a very special qualification for dealing with such a legend as the Epic of Gilgamesh, that is to say, a natural instinct and personal feeling which enables her not only to weave words, but to infuse the spirit of the old Sumerian narrative into her verse. [...] The coloured pictures with which Miss Boyajian has illustrated her work bear evidence that she has studied the art of the Babylonian seal-cylinder and of the Assyrian bas-relief, and of the antiquities in bronze from Urartu, or Armenia, her native land; and assuredly they illustrate the text in a remarkable degree. [...] And the present volume seems to me to be one of the very few in which poetry and art act as each other's handmaid with conspicuous success. (Zabelle Boyajian: *Gilgamesh: a Dream of the Eternal Quest*. 1924, London. *Introduction* by E.A. Wallis Budge.)

No surprise then why Sir Israel Gollancz, the famous Shakespearean scholar of the time, was to invite Zabelle Boyajian, who had just published her **Armenian Legends and Poems**, to contribute a poem commemorating the tercentenary of Shakespeare's death, in a book he edited, titled, **Book of Homage to Shakespeare**, which was published in London, late in that same year of 1916.

Many decades later, the said poem was to cover the first page right after the *Introduction* of Viscount Bryce, when **Armenian Legends and Poems** was reissued, in 1958, both in honour of the Golden Jubilee of the Armenian General Benevolent Union, and in-memoriam of the first anniversary of Zabelle Boyajian's death in 1957. Here are the second and the last of the four stanzas of that poem titled, *Armenia's Love to Shakespeare*:

To me Armenia seems thy house, for first,
Thy visions there enthralled my wondering mind,
And thy sweet music with my heart conversed—
Armenia in thy every scene I find.

What token shall my poor Armenia bring?
No golden diadem her brow adorns;
All jewelled with tears, and glistening,
She lays upon thy shrine her Crown of Thorns.

If Aram Raffi's essay was placed as an extended epilogue in both 1916 and 1958 editions of Zabelle's book mentioned above, then the poem, **REPROACHES**, by the 13th-14th century Armenian writer, Frik, remained in both as the prologue, encapsulating Zabelle's own dignified stance vis-à-vis human predicament. Here are the 1st and the 4th of the seven stanzas she chose of the poem for her translation:

O GOD of righteousness and truth,
Loving to all, and full of ruth;
I have some matter for Thine ear
If Thou wilt but Thy servant hear.

We are not made of grass or reeds,
That thou consumest us like weeds;--
As though we were some thorny field
Or brushwood, that the forests yield.

In his *Introduction*, Viscount Bryce judiciously summed up Zabelle's accomplished tenacity in the preparation of her **Armenian Legends and Poems**, saying,

Miss Boyajian [...] is a member of that Armenian artists some of whom have, like Aivazovsky and Edgar Chahine, won fame in the world at large, and she is well qualified to describe with knowledge as well as with sympathy the art of her own people. (Z. Boyajisn; *Armenian Legends and Poems*. 1916 and 1958, London/New York. *Introduction* by Viscount Bryce.)



ARMENIAN LEGENDS & POEMS

Vahagn, King of Armenia

From *The History of Armenia*

By Moses of Khorene (Fifth Century)

Concerning the birth of this king the legend says—

“Heaven and earth were in travail,
And the crimson waters were in travail,
And in the water the crimson reed
Was also in travail.
From the mouth of the reed issued smoke,
From the mouth of the reed issued flame.
And out of the flame sprang the young child,
His hair was of fire, a beard had he of flame,
And his eyes were sons.”

With our own ears did we hear these words sung to the accompaniment of the harp. They sing, moreover, that he did fight with the dragons, and overcame them; and some say that his valiant deeds were like unto those of Hercules.

It's good to know that Aram was the first-born son of the celebrated novelist Hakob Melik Hakobian, (1835-1888), the pen-named Raffi, who was a kind of Walter Scott of the Armenians, with a difference. Raffi never idealised the medieval social, political and religious dogmas that exasperated the national unity of the Armenian people. His call for national liberation was rooted upon the urge to dismantle those medieval bondages, still debilitating the nation at large, aiming to attain the unity of struggle much desired for by the downtrodden majority and the avant-guard intellectuals of the 19th century.

Fascinating encounters are certainly worth highlighting.

The novelist Raffi and his family, his wife Anna, and two youngster sons, Aram and Arshak, were in Tiflis/Tbilisi during 1880's. There, Raffi met one of the most talented young painters of the time, a graduate from St. Petersburg Academy, named Gevorg Bashinjaghian (1857-1923). During those years, Raffi's novels had to pass through the tsarist censorship, especially when he had already proclaimed,

To persecute our Catholic, Protestant and even Muhammedan brothers as heretics, will only disgust and divide us more--we shall not indulge in such stupidities. (Raffi in 1880. Recently published in HAYASTAN periodical, 2007, Athens. No. 501, p. 6)

Raffi's new novel of 1886, **Samvel**, was not permitted to have public, especially on stage, presentations. The visionary Bashinjaghian, decided to present the novel on stage with a difference—actors to utter not a single word on stage. In 28 *tableau vivante*, or live panels, each presenting three scenes, Bashinjaghian majestically succeeded in producing Raffi's **Samvel** on stage. The theatrical and scenic phenomena thus created, enlivened a huge public enthusiasm, and no censure dared to act against it. But alas, on April 24, 1888 production of **Samvel**, the much admired novelist Raffi passed away, without having seen his latest *oeuvre*, phenomenally brought to life in 84 scenes, with actors and theatrical panels moving in 'Bengali fire/light' and shadows, all in total silence. (Kh. Samvelian: *Raffi & Bashinjaghian—An Unknown Page*, in Armenian, published in *Soviet Art*, Yerevan 1981, no. 9, p. 56.)

Bashinjaghian's original and exclusively visual production of Raffi's **Samvel**, literally acted as a perfect in-memoriam pantomime. The production also seemed to enact, and unwittingly so, the Chinese proverb's dictum that a picture is worth 10 thousand words...

After Raffi's death, his widow and two sons decided to settle in England. In London, the Raffis continued their cultural activities. Their new home became an important meeting place for intellectuals and artists of Armenian and other nationalities. When in London, the Armenian revolutionary intellectual Stepan Shahumian visited the Raffi family home. (That was in late Spring of 1907 when Shahumian was a participant-delegate to the 5th Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, held in Fabian's Brotherhood Church in Southgate Road.) The Raffi family even established and promoted an *Armenian Workers and Students Union*, to which Armenian and non-Armenian activists participated in gatherings and in public lectures, literary and musical events. It is in one of those gatherings that Zabelle Boyajian became acquainted with the Raffi family. Later on, the most celebrated Armenian national hero, general Antranik, he too, became a frequent visitor to the Raffi family. (Trdat Khorshidian; *Zabel Boyajian on the Raffis*, in Armenian. Published in Garoun=Spring monthly, 1981, no. 3, p. 75.).

As if re-enacting somehow Raffi father's collaboration with the painter Bashinjaghian in Tiflis, the eldest son Aram Raffi now closely supported Zabelle's literary and artistic activities in London. Their first literary and artistic collaboration started in 1906, with the stage production of a play Zabelle wrote based on Raffi's yet unpublished novel, **Salbi** (published in 1911). The play was titled, **Armenia's Reconstruction**, and had successful re-staging both in 1907 and in 1913.

Aram's intellectual and literary activism was very much in demand. He contributed an essay, *Early Armenians in England and America*, in the newly published book in London, in 1914, by Noel & Harold Buxton, titled, **Travel and Politics in Armenia**, with an *Introduction* by Viscount Bryce. Two years later, in 1916, the monumental volume, **Armenian Legends and Poems**, became the jewel-in-the-crown of the creative collaboration of Zabelle and Aram. Zabelle eventually fell in love with Aram. Alas, Aram died just 43 years of age in 1919. She felt desolate, but the muses never abandoned her.

She was already known as the "Splendid Armenian Woman", the "Never-to-be-forgotten Zabelle Boyajian". With these and similar phrases some of the major Armenian intellectuals of the first half of the 20th century, such as Arshag Tchobanian (1872-1954) and Avedik Issahakian (1875-1957), expressed their genuine admiration for this multi-talented artist par excellence.

Zabelle started working to tell anew the most ancient and magnificent story of the Sumerian hero named **Gilgamesh**, illuminating her dramatic play with her own illustrations. In four years time after losing Aram Raffi, her close collaborator, Zabelle's new hero was reborn in her own words, lines and colours. The mythical hero of mankind, who had dreamt sixty centuries ago of an eternal quest, challenging the deities and divine predicaments to acquire immortality—albeit failing abysmally--was re-immortalised, not only in the ancient tablets of Mesopotamia, but in Zabelle Boyajian's pen and palette.

GILGAMESH: A Dream Of The Eternal Quest

Act II, Prologue

Gilgamesh in search of the Distant One.

Fierce is the sunset in that tossing sea,
Blood-red the waves against each other dash;
The scarlet sun floats in a golden sky
Of liquid fire; while, at the mountain gates,
Stand fearful scorpion-men, who guard the place.



A biographical data, often subject to unfortunate omission, has to be mentioned here. This also is what the above-mentioned Sir Ernest A. Wallis Budge wrote in his *Introduction to Gilgamesh*:

Her mother is an Englishwoman and a kinswoman of Samuel Rogers (1763-18550, the poet, who was famous as the author of the "Vintage of Burgundy," "An Ode to Superstition" and the

“Pleasures of Memory,” and was the friend of Fox, Sheridan, Byron, Moore, and Cary, the translator of Dante. Another kinsman of her mother was Samuel Sharpe (1799-1881), the Egyptologist, and thus there is small wonder that poetry and archaeology go hand in hand in Miss Boyajian’s works, and find in them happy expression. (E.A. Wallis Budge, *Introduction*. Ibid)

No small wonder, indeed. But I fail not to wonder why Sir Wallis Budge too, like many others, failed to mention the name of Zabelle’s mother—Catherine Rogers Boyajian. In an Armenian newspaper, a London Armenian researcher, Tigran Tigranian, has mentioned Zabelle’s one and only brother named Henry, who had settled in India and was employed there as an inspector of the British Rail. Henry died in 1932, well quarter of a century before her sister. Henry was supposed to have had no feelings towards his Armenian roots and culture, Tigranian asserted. The latter too, failed to mention their mother’s name (T. Tigranian: *Political Organisations Among Armenians*. Asbarez, June 3, 1985, p 5)

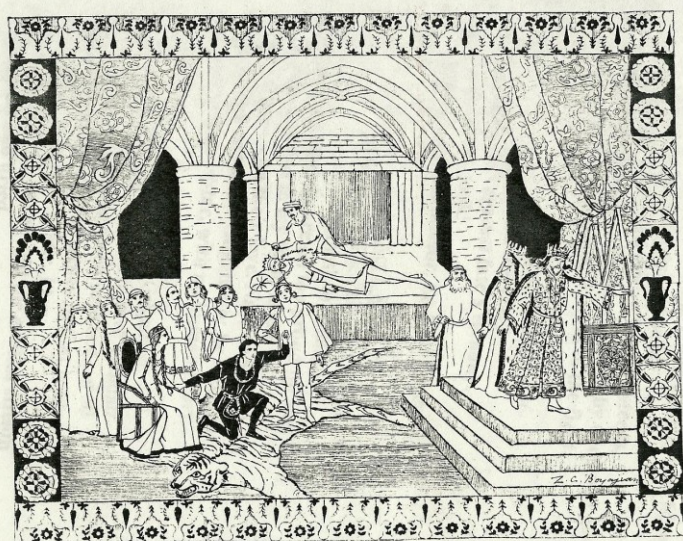
I had the good fortune of being acquainted, during 1980’s, in London, with Alexandra Raffi, the widow of Raffi’s younger son Arshag Raffi. My wife Araxie and I called her ‘mama Raffi’, to her utmost delight. She was a sweet, elegant, eloquent and dignified lady. She narrated us quite a lot about the Raffis and Zabelle Boyajian, to mention just a few of her tales. It seemed to me that Mnemosyne, the Titaness of Memory, had touched mama Raffi with utmost grace. She remembered fascinating details.

I learned from our ‘mama Raffi’ that Zabelle Boyajian eventually had a young protégé from Cyprus, named Hratch Gasparian, living in her house while a student in London. Hratch was a talented musician. He eventually became a first violinist of the famous Halle Orchestra, preceding what Manoug Parikian, another Cypriote Armenian, was to become with the London Philharmonia. It is supposed that Zabelle bequeathed all her art works to Hratch, who eventually married an English woman. After his death, all what Zabelle had bequeathed to Hratch were sent to New York. After Hratch’s wife’s death, no one knows, it seems, where and what happened with Zabelle’s bequeathal.

Back in 1986, after a presentation of Zabelle’s life and work I delivered in Aleppo, a young student of literature came towards me and opened the book in his hand. The book with illustrations, was Shakespeare’s HAMLET, in Hovhanness Massehian’s Armenian translation, published in Vienna by the Mekhitarist Press, in 1921. To my utmost astonishment and delight, Zabelle Boyajian was the author of the illustrations. I had never come across of any mention of this unique publication anywhere among the many articles I had perused through on Zabelle Boyajian’s life and art. For sure, that was a happy encounter for me.



Shakespeare’s HAMLET
In Armenian. 1921, Vienna
Front Page.




Shakespeare’s HAMLET. Armenian translation by Hovhanness Massehian.
Published in Vienna, Mekhitarian Press, 1921. Illustrated by Zabelle
Boyajian. Act III, Scene II. A Hall in the Castle--The Dumb Show.

In today's Armenia – now the Third Republic of Armenia– the literary scholar Trdat Khorshidian (mentioned above as the author of a data-source), has to his credit, informative and thoughtful articles on various aspects of Zabelle Boyajian's and Raffi family's activities in London. Khorshidian has mentioned that Zabelle's first one-woman show of her art-work had taken place in 1910, making her the first "oriental woman artist" (quoting a London newspaper) to exhibit her paintings in London. But the most memorable event of such art-shows was to be Zabelle's retrospective exhibition, on April 3-27, 1929, at London's Royal Westminster Palace Hall, where she had on show, among other paintings, her illustrations for her book, **Gilgamesh: A Dream of the Eternal Quest**. There were also paintings from her first visit to Greece in 1928 (Trdat Khorshidian: *Zabelle Boyajian as a Fine- Artist*. In Armenian, published in Garoun monthly, 1915, no.1, pp 57-59).

A year after the above-mentioned retrospective exhibition, Zabelle continued her journey in Greece in 1930, during the 100th anniversary of the Greek Independence. Her book, **In Greece, With Pen & Palette**, was published in 1938, with 16 of her paintings, prefaced by Sir Frederic Kenyon. On the cover-blurb of the book we read:

This book describes the impressions of an artist on a sketching tour in Greece, and brings vividly to life some of its history and mythology. Much of the history is recalled as a parallel to contemporary events and problems, while the retold legends invest the scenery with the atmosphere of the classical Golden Age of Fable. (London, Dent & Sons Ltd)

What an enormous loss to the tale of Armenia's natural beauty, historical and modern architectural monuments and contemporary life of the day, when we realize that Zabelle Boyajian never had the chance of a visit to neither the First nor the Second Republic of Armenia...

<p>In Greece With Pen and Palette. Part I. Chapter V. Delphi</p> <p>I was on the threshold of the great sanctuary itself—evidently the place where the victims used to be sacrificed, where had stood the door with the legend 'Know Thyself' over it. I crossed the open space and stepped on to what looked like a terrace—a platform—and there before me lay the uncovered base of the temple of Apollo. I walked along the edge of the terrace. [...] On and on I walked, down the great length of the building—its dimensions had been the same as those of the Parthenon. Somewhere down there—the exact spot has not been located—had been the holy of holies—the adytum—where the tripod had stood and the priestess had sat amidst fumes and vapours to receive the decrees of the oracle.</p>	 <p>THE TEMPLE OF APOLLO, DELPHI</p>
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Let us now pause a moment and ask ourselves. Why to bother remembering cultural happenings or events, researching cultural and artistic heritages, myths and legends, celebrating or commemorating events and personalities in sciences or in arts. In other words and to put it simply--who cares?

Strange as it might seem, mythology has its say and has paved the way for the good answer that science is acknowledging today.

We all know how debilitating is Dementia, not only to the patient but more so to the patient's immediate family members or carers. Dementia and Alzheimer's, just to mention two ailments, transform and render the patient into a vegetative state. When a victim of such ailments, any human being, what Aristotle called 'a social animal', soon becomes to be neither 'social' nor 'animal', but a vegetative being. Sociologists agree that a human society itself eventually acquires that same vegetative status, when devoid of all its cultural and historical heritage--the essence of its societal existence.

But, what about mythology's say?

Mythology reminds us with a flamboyant panache that the universe was at first indivisible, all shapeless, timeless and in total darkness, in a word, **Chaos**. The first impetus towards becoming a **Cosmos**, resulted in the formation of the primeval pair, **Uranus and Gaia = Heaven and Earth**. To continue nature's thrust to become an ordered, well arranged formation in multi shapes and distinct forms, yet each a part of the whole, Uranus and Gaia begot eight pairs of **Titans**, male and female, plus three **Cyclops** and three multi-headed giants. All these, represented the new multi-formed divisions of the Cosmos, such as light and darkness, time and space, lands and oceans, rivers, thunder and lightning, etc. The youngest Titan was **Chronos**, or **Saturn** of the Romans-- our *Saturday* namesake's mythical patron--holding a farmer's sickle, initially representing harvesting or farming, with the seasons at its service. Hence, **Time** became of the essence in farming and harvesting. And Chronos represented Time in the Cosmos.

Armenians still use the word **Jham** to mean both time and place of worship. Let us bear in mind the fact that in the East and West, and in the North and South of the world, those who controlled the places of worship, Heathen, multi-faith temples, then later on, monotheistic and Christian churches – just to mention one denomination--used to own most of the arable lands. That was the case in Ancient Armenia too, as witnessed by the historians of the period -- hence the meaning of **Jham** as **time** and as **church**.

The task of the Titaness **Mnemosyne**, meaning **Memory**, precisely was to help keep the Cosmos united in all its diversities. The Titaness originally associated with **Agriculture** was **Rhea**. Eventually Chronos married Rhea, They begot the first immortal deities, the **Gods**, six of them, **Hades, Demeter, Hera, Hades, Poseidon and Zeus**. Thus Rhea was called '**The Mother of the Gods**' -- **Anahit** of the Armenians. The latter was also called **Astvadzamayr**=Mother of god, **Astvadzadzin**= Creator of God, or, most significantly, **Mayr Zbaroutian** =The Mother of Goodness, as harvesting the fruits of the earth was indeed the ultimate good for all, even for the Gods.

Zeus, the youngest of the Gods, was the most audacious of all. He is **Aramazd** of the Armenians. His wife was the powerful and vengeful Goddess, **Hera**, As all the Gods were battling against the Titans to control the Cosmos, Zeus shrewdly had intercourse with the Titaness Mnemosyne, to bring memory in the service of the Gods, now become the new rulers of the Cosmos.

Memory herself was in need of unified multiplicity in the newly diversified Cosmos. Zeus and Mnemosyne beget the **Muses**. By creating the Muses, the division of labour of memory was finally accomplished with: **Calliope of epic song, Clio of history, Euterpe of lyric song, Thalia of comedy, Melpomene of tragedy, Terpsichore of dance, Erato of erotic poetry and Polymnia of hymns**.

Born out of memory and the tenacity of the Lord of Gods, Zeus, the Muses symbolised the creative powers, the source of all arts and knowledge. In doing so, the Muses assured Cosmos not to fall back into Chaos, especially after the clash of the Titans with the Gods, when finally and ultimately mortals were to replenish the earth.

Most tellingly, the Muses always acted in perpetual companionship with the **Carites**, or the **Graces**, essentially three, **Aglaia=Brilliance or Shine, Euphrosine=Joy, and Thalia=Flourish**. **It was thus made imperative that no art or knowledge was worth its calling that had no Grace infused in its essence**. There were two other frequently inseparable companions to the Muses. **Eros** and **Hegemone**. Eros assured the fruitfulness of creativity, while Hegemone ascertained creativity's potential to lead.

Hence, an art or knowledge when originated or acquired in company of Grace it unfailingly and naturally leads the way for others to emulate. Without Grace, the potential to lead becomes the brutish force that imposes rule without consent. The latter, alas, is what we are mostly faced with in our own turbulent world.

Graces accompanied Zabelle Boyajian as the Muses helped her to indulge in lines, colours and words. No surprise then that most of the poems she translated in her **Armenian Legends and Poems**, are those set to music by folk or professional musicians. Let's not forget that *Music* literally meant the art of the Muses par excellence.

Zabelle's last play, titled, **Etchmiadzin, A drama in Three Acts and Six Scenes**, was published in 1943, during the intense struggle of humanity—WWII-- to free itself from the evil of Nazi-Fascism—the brute hegemony of the time

Etchmiadzin, was Zabelle's only book without illustrations. She, nevertheless, incorporated, as integral part of the dramatic action of the play, various medieval Canticles, or Hymns of the Armenian Church, such as: *Light! Creator of Light*, *Sun of Righteousness*, and *Let the Holy Church Rejoice*. Even the muse of dance, **Terpsichore**, had her share in the play as Zabelle wrote down her stage instruction to have a **solemn dance** at The Temple of Anahid in Airarat (Act II, Scene I).

With her last book, **Etchmadzin**, Zabelle narrated poetically and scenically the historical and dramatic event when Christianity became the state religion of Armenia, in A.D. 301. Here are the first two stanzas out of four of the Hymn, titled, *Sun of Righteousness*:

Sun of Righteousness
With the morning light
Shine into my heart.

Grant that I may find
Thy rich store of grace
Hidden though it be.

Incorporating those Canticles, Zabelle was well aware that most of them were of later period than the early 4th century A.D. In fact, the Hymn mentioned above, was written by the great Armenian ecclesiastical poet of 12th century, Nerses Shnorhali (1102-1173), of whom Zabelle had already translated another poem in her major volume of **Armenian Legends and Poems**. She even had placed the seventh century Hymn of Sahak Dzoraporetsi, *Let the Holy Church Rejoice*, at the end of her play, to be performed before the last curtain fall.

Zabelle Boyajian was also well versed in tackling theatre's space-time-action 'limitations', as she herself indulged in acting and producing her plays. Zabelle chose only four stanzas of Shnorhali's Hymn. Suffice to mention that the original Hymn, *Sun of Righteousness* consists of 36 stanzas, diligently cast in the sequential pattern of the Armenian Alphabet, each stanza having three lines, and every line counting five syllables. (N. Shnorhali, *Prayer Song*. In Calendar 1982, St Etchmiadzin, pp 222-223)

Most significantly, Zabelle was keen to recast her translations into the syllabic pattern of the originals but not bothering with the number of the stanzas in general. Hence the above Shnorhali Hymn she translated has five syllables in each line of the stanza, as in the original. That was the case of most if not of all her translations of poems in her major books, as in the quatrains of REPROACHES-- the prologue to her monumental book, **Armenian Legends and Poems**. In fact, the original Armenian of Frik's REPROACHES consists of 60 quatrains, each line counting eight syllables, hence the number of syllables in Zabelle's translation. (FRIK, *Verses*. In Series of Armenian Lyric Poetry, Yerevan 1982, pp 100-108)

All the above 'restrictions' totally disappear in her **Gilgamesh: A Dream Of The Eternal Quest** There, Zabelle's own vision of free womanhood is cast in harmony with nature's abundance in favour of humanity at large. She often deviates from the original in crucial details to highlight her own grasp of the archaic tale, bringing it closer to Biblical myths, eventually to allow breathing space for mankind's redemption from eternal damnation. Zabelle even chose the land around Ararat, the land of Urardu, to be the 'mouth of the rivers' of the original epic, (reminding us of Nayiri=the land of rivers) through which Gilgamesh eventually will reach his ancestor Hasis-Adra (Biblical Noa, Babylonian Utnapishtim), who lives forever 'where the sun rises.' The following is their final dialogue when Gilgamesh asks his godlike ancestor about his own mortal life (Act II. Scene 2):

Gilgamesh What then should I do?

Hasis-Adra Seek not to probe the mysteries of death:

Thy work is life; life wants thy utmost thoughts.
[...]
And when the world has learnt true righteousness,
And seen that evil only brings forth ill,
The blossoms of this land shall grow more sweet
Than heaven's roses are.

In the original, when **Gilgamesh** “laid himself down”, **Enlil**, the father of the Gods delivers his last advice through the “wise men”, saying:

Deal justly before the face of the Sun.

(N.K. Sanders, The Epic of Gilgamesh. An English Version, Penguin Books, 1972, p.118)

Zabelle's hero **Gilgamesh** receives the ultimate answer to his quest as an advice from the shadow of his closest companion **Ea-bani** [Enkidu, of the Sumerian original], the wild, natural man, who was finally resting in **Aralu**, the underworld. Here is their last dialogue as Zabelle envisaged (Act III. Scene 2):

Gilgamesh Can nothing then prevail against this fate?
Is there no corner in the earth of heavens
Where I may hide my head, and so escape?

Ea-bani Nothing can save thee, Gilgamesh, from death;
But ask me not, and heed not what I say,
My words are but the echo of thy thoughts---
[...]
Cease from this quest, and ever turn thy thoughts
To knowledge and true wisdom. [...]
Learn to respect the dignity of man
[...]
There is no death for him who fears not death.

With fifteen paintings Zabelle illuminated her masterpiece, **Gilgamesh: A Dream of the Eternal Quest**. I tend to imagine she did not fear death. She certainly respected the dignity of man, and woman too I hasten to add.

To date, I have not seen any original painting of Zabelle Boyajian. My acquaintance with her art world is through her published volumes and illustrations. Perhaps one day, another more audacious researcher than me will oblige to find where the originals are --images the muses lovingly dictated to Zabelle, and touched her with all the graces of memory's entourage.

Meanwhile, let us enjoy the slide show of Zabelle's published pictures, worth many thousands of words, I believe.



This unique and
Majestically statuesque
Photo-portrait of
ZABELLE C. BOYAJIAN
Was the gift of
Alexandra Raffi
Lovingly called
'Mama Raffi'
To
Khatchatur I. Pilikian
In 1982
London