

# **Echoes of the Armenian Genocide in Literature and Cinema**

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**Abstract** The aim of the paper is to analyze the different effects that each medium (literature-cinema) may have on the experience of its readers and audience – what that medium is trying to cultivate, the limitations of each and how all of them in different ways bring greater attention to the historical phenomenon of the Armenian Genocide. With a focus on the renowned Italian-Armenian novelist Antonia Arslan's Genocide narrative *Skylark Farm* the paper will first discuss the literary genre as an instrument that brings greater attention to the historical memory and then will focus on the theme of the Armenian Genocide in cinema and will deal with the dramatized version of the *Skylark Farm* by the Italian directors, the Taviani brothers.

**Summary** 1. Introduction. – 2. *Skylark Farm*: the Intergenerational Transmission of Memory. – 3. *The Lark Farm*: the Limitations, the Strengths, the *Skopos*. – 4. Concluding Remarks.

**Keywords** Trauma Literature. Historical Memory. Antonia Arslan. Taviani Brothers.

## **1 Introduction**

One of the consequences of the Armenian Genocide was the scattering of those who survived into a global Diaspora. Traumatized and impoverished, these forced exiles and immigrants struggled to survive in new lands. Part of their survival strategy was to write about what they had experienced and witnessed. Survivor stories emerged painfully and with great difficulty. The obstacles were many, including a fragmented and traumatized community with far too few resources. Amongst the difficulties were the twin challenges of either writing in a language that few in their new lands understood or struggling to describe the indescribable in a foreign tongue. These immigrants, despite all the trauma and difficulties, decided to put pen to paper to document that which the world needed to know better. The potential audience and publishers were greatly limited. Yet, these important survivor memoirs emerged, often in isolation, in small print runs, and sometimes as unpublished manuscripts. They emerged in a variety of locales and conditions that characterized the global Diaspora.

These Diaspora fragments spread Armenian culture and seeds across the world. In so doing, the Armenian identity evolved and became more

diverse and complex and contributed to an emerging multiculturalism in the twentieth and twenty-first century.

As the different themes in the survivor accounts have been identified, the various dimensions of the collective trauma of the Genocide have become better known. What has emerged are the common factors (factor analysis), (sociological) themes, and (literary) motifs. Each memoir is a distinct first-hand observation of a massive catastrophe that swept swiftly over the Armenian nation and left such widespread death, devastation, and deep traumatic suffering. The memoirs are, in essence, victim-impact statements in a semi-literary form.

The survivor memoirs provide an invaluable research tool not only for researchers, but also for fiction writers who address the topic of the Armenian Genocide.<sup>1</sup>

Over the course of the last five years, this author has been involved in researching the essential role of eyewitness accounts in the birth of the Armenian Genocide narratives. In addition, the experience of translating Antonia Arslan's Genocide narratives (Arslan 2007, 2012) and teaching a course at California State University in Fresno on *The Armenian Genocide through Literature and Translation*<sup>2</sup> has led her to conclude that the literary representation of a trauma is not the immediate step after the historical event; but is actually the result of a multi-layered process.

First is the occurrence of the historical event. Then follows the translation of that event in the minds of the survivors, i.e., their memory and interpretation of the event. Memory later becomes the subject of oral history, and oral history enters the minds of the writers of memoir and fiction.

If we acknowledge that translation involves interpretation, then what exists here are different layers of translation, painting a vivid psychological picture of the event in the minds of its viewers, as illustrated in Table 1:

Table 1

History layer	Memory layer	Oral history layer	Literary layer
Historical event of the Armenian Genocide	Survivor's memory	Eyewitness accounts	Genocide narratives

Between these layers some other layers may intervene. For example, the passage from a survivor's memory to oral history can pass through a psychological layer, as the trauma often blocks the survivor from telling one's story:

1 Among many others, consider Werfel 2012; Hilsenrath 1991; Arslan 2004; Vosganian 2011; Bohjalian 2012.

2 For further details about the course cf. [http://armenianstudies.csufresno.edu/hye\\_sharzhoom/vol135/october13/5\\_sonaharoutyunian.html](http://armenianstudies.csufresno.edu/hye_sharzhoom/vol135/october13/5_sonaharoutyunian.html) (2015-05-22).

Table 2

Memory layer	Psychological layer
Survivor's memory	Psychological blocks

As Peeromian (2012, p. 7) asserts, the psychological block was one of the main reasons that the first-generation survivor-writers of the 1915 Armenian Genocide did not leave a very rich literary legacy in response to what they experienced. The other reason was the fact that the Armenian literati, the talented men of letters who could eternalize their first-hand experience were liquidated at the outset.<sup>3</sup> Very few, who somehow escaped certain death and reached freedom in the outside world, ventured to craft art out of that cataclysmic event. The shock was so powerful and so overwhelming that physical, temporal and emotional distance was needed for it to be absorbed and to allow the indescribable experience to burst out as literary expression. The Armenian Genocide survivor writer Kostan Zarian wrote: «Our loss is so enormous that it is impossible to write about it. We all have this great desire to forget. Our yesterdays are filled with blood and fire, our todays with uncertainty, and our tomorrows remain shrouded in mystery» (Zarian 1981, p. 20).

This was also the case of Nazi concentration camp survivors. For example, unlike survivor-writers Robert Antelme or Primo Levi, it took Jorge Semprún (among others) nearly two decades to write his first book, *The Long Voyage* (1963), a fictionalized account of his experiences as a deportee (Semprún 2005).

Another example of a further layer can be the literary translation of the historical narrative, if such a story makes it to an international readership, as shown in Table 3:

Table 3

Literary layer	Translation layer
Genocide narratives	Global readership access

Yet another example can be the cinematic interpretation of the historical event, as in the case of the Taviani brothers' film *The Lark Farm*, based on the Genocide novel by Antonia Arslan (2004).

In effect, in Tables 1, 2, 3 we have different layers of translation upon translation – to use memoirist Gunter Grass's term, with this theory we are «peeling the onion» (Grass 2008).

<sup>3</sup> As a pre-planned phase in the process of annihilation of the Armenian population of the Ottoman Empire, the government launched the full-scale arrest, incarceration, exile, and eventual murder of Armenian intellectuals, teachers, writers, poets and entire civil and religious leadership.

With a focus on the renowned Italian-Armenian writer Antonia Arslan's (2004) novel *La masseria delle allodole* (*Skylark Farm*), the paper will first discuss the literary genre as an instrument that brings greater attention to the historical memory, then will focus on the theme of the Armenian Genocide in cinema and will deal with the dramatized version of Arslan's novel by the Italian directors, the Taviani brothers.

The aim of the paper will be to analyze the different effects that each medium (literature-cinema) may have on the experience of its readers and audience – what that medium is trying to cultivate, the limitations of each and how all of them in different ways bring greater attention to the historical phenomenon of the Armenian Genocide.

## 2 *Skylark Farm*: the Intergenerational Transmission of Memory

Antonia Arslan's *Skylark Farm* belongs to a complex genre that mixes autobiography and biography, history and fiction, documentary and memory. The best-seller is a result of an intergenerational transmission of trauma and memories. The author recounts the story of her family which she heard from her grandfather Yerwant. Arslan begins the novel by introducing her grandfather, an important physician and surgeon living in Italy who after forty years, hopes to reunite with his Armenian family and brother Sempad, a successful pharmacist in a little city in Anatolia. But World War I ignites, and the ruling Young Turk government closes the border of the Ottoman Empire. Yerwant's dream vanishes. He will never be able to return to his country of origin. He will never see his Armenian family again, as they will be exterminated almost entirely by the Young Turk regime.

*Skylark Farm* doesn't tell a linear narrative. In the first half of the novel the text often goes into italics and flashes ahead to when its characters are on deportation marches. For example when it mentions Azniv (one of the main characters of the novel) receiving a silk garment as a present, the text goes on to say «This silk will end up in the desert and serve as a blanket» (Arslan 2006, p. 28).<sup>4</sup> Antonia Arslan's use of premonitions such as seeing an «archangel [...] surrounded by fire» (pp. 95-96) and «smelled blood in the air, caught the scent of evil» (p. 21) adds mysticism to the experience of the book and foreshadows the horrible atrocities about to come.

The second part of the book describes the deportation of women to the Ottoman-controlled Syrian desert, with Arslan's heartbreaking choice of words: «Every so often, a piece of bread was thrown to the 'Armenians' as if they were dogs, from on high. Every so often, a spring, a little water.

4 Unless otherwise noted, all text references to the *Skylark Farm* are taken from the English edition of the novel (Arslan 2006).

They always had to drink after the horses of the *zaptiehs*, and on all fours like animals» (p. 172). However, reading about Sempad's wife Shushanig and their children's rescue by the Greek wailer Ismene and Turkish beggar Nazim brings some comfort to a disheartening situation.

In her novel Antonia Arslan speaks about the crucial role performed by the women of the victimized group in the transmission of memory in light of the fact that their men were brutally murdered at the onset of the atrocities. In many cases these women stayed alive passing through indescribable tortures and violence during the deportation:

He [the *zaptieh*] doesn't know she [Azniv] isn't eating the bread he gives her; she passes it to Shushanig, Veron, and the children. And he doesn't realize that that her rosy cheeks are glowing only with fever. [...] Araxy the cook is still carrying a ladle and a pot strapped to her back, and a can of muddy water balances on her hip. But each evening she cooks only grass, and the children cry. She wishes she could cut off a hand and give it to them, that her braid were food, and she stares impotently at her sturdy, useless skilled hands. Her last resource is a small bag of pistachios, which two nights ago she managed to unite from the saddle of a *zaptieh* who had taken her for the night. (p. 178)

The girl pressed on, getting lost in the vast dark, full of hostile, stealthy life. But in an abandoned barn she found a cat, that had just given birth, and like a terrorized animal, but too hungry to stop herself, she fought with the cat, took two of the kittens, killed them with her pathetic knife, then skinned and ate them while they were still warm, drinking their blood. (p. 181)

Antonia Arslan shows how the Armenian women suffered the major burden of Genocide consequences, such as lost family, lost homeland and beginning their life in a completely foreign place that today is called the Armenian Diaspora. A sentence from the prologue that was also put on the original cover reads:

My aunt always used to say: «When I've finally had it with you, when you got too mean, I'm leaving. I'll go stay with Arussiag in Beirut, with Uncle Zareh in Aleppo, with Philip and Mildred in Boston, with my sister Nevart in Fresno, with Ani in NY, or even with Cousin Michel in Copacabana - him last, though, because he married an Assyrian». (p. 5)

With this sentence, the author introduces the complex phenomenon of the Armenian Diaspora created by the Armenian Genocide. When a non-Armenian reader, completely unaware of not only the essence but also the existence of the Armenian Genocide, buys the book for its literary value,

while reading the above-mentioned sentence, asks him/herself: «How can a single person, Antonia's aunt, have as many relatives around the world?». The answer will come after reading the book.

Before writing her Genocide narrative Antonia Arslan had consulted many history books, but she has gained the plot also through saved photographs:

Arussiag, Henriette, and Nubar, two girls and a little boy dressed as a girl. Along with Nevart they are the numb survivors who will, after escaping Aleppo, come to the West. These children now look out at me from a snapshot taken in Aleppo in 1916, one year after their rescue, just before they embarked for Italy: their grave, childish eyes are turned mysteriously inward, opaque and glacial, having accepted-after too many unanswered questions-the blind selection that has allowed them to survive. They are wearing decent orphan clothes, but they seem dressed in uniforms of rags, and at a quick glance the eye sees prison stripes. Their dark Eastern eyes, with their thick brows tracing a single line across their foreheads, repeat four times, wordlessly, the fear of a future that will be inexorable and the hidden nucleus of a secret guilt. (p. 23)

Transforming and translating the protagonists of the pictures into the characters of the book Antonia is linking herself through a bridge towards her ancestors:

But it will be Zareh the skeptic, the European, who will save the family legacy, the children, and the photographs: the four little malnourished bodies curled together like dying birds, their small skulls all eyes, and the precious packet of family portraits, sewn up along with Gregory of Narek's prayer book inside a velvet rag and passed from hand to hand from the dying to the survivors. Parched, dried skeletons - memorials of a life that had been cordial and boisterous, with plenty of water, plenty of hospitality and mirth. (p. 29)

Thus the picture becomes a complicated form of self-portrait that reveals the ego of the writer necessarily relational and at the same time, fragmentary. As evidenced by Daniel Sherman (2002, p. 14):

Sight is the only sense powerful enough to bridge the gap between those who hold a memory rooted in bodily experience and those who, lacking such experience, nonetheless seek to share the memory.

Taking an input from Bella Brodzki's idea that «Culture's necessarily overarching orientation toward the future only obtains by sharing its past» (Brodzki 2007, p. 113), I conducted an experiment on collective memory

and testimony in an assignment I gave to my students at California State University Fresno. The students were called to write the story of their ancestor's survival. Most of them said to me: «I know something about my great grandparents, but I'm missing a lot of details. What should I do?». I advised them to fill in the gaps with their imaginations and take advantage of asking their parents and grandparents. As evidenced by Brodzki (2007, p. 113) «Thinking both psychoanalytically and historically also means that while we harbor the dream of plentitude, we always begin with a gap». In order to fulfill the assignment, some of them contacted their relatives living in other countries to inquire about their grandparents and, as we shared as a class, we heard some amazing stories.<sup>5</sup> This assignment contributed in raising their personal awareness of their ancestors' voyages towards refuge.

Antonia Arslan has done the same for filling in the gaps of an unknown past. In the meantime the geography, the places and the itineraries that she describes in her novel reveal not only significant moments of family history but also its inclusion in a determinate social space and national history (Alù 2009, p. 364).<sup>6</sup> This is important because it gives the historical part to historical fiction.

In yet another class assignment, based on the concept of Salman Rushdie's<sup>7</sup> 'translated man', students together wrote the names of the native cities and villages of their ancestors, as well as the places through which they passed on their long journeys of emigration before arriving to the United States. We also included in the map the languages they had learnt along the way. This initial exercise helped the students to visualize, re-realize and appreciate both their ancestors' geographical passages and their (the students) indelible connection to them. Further, the act of writing it on the board - taking the pen in hand - implicated them as the bearers and continuers of their ancestral memories. In the same way, Antonia Arslan's undertaking the mission of retelling the story continues the voyage of her ancestors.

Interestingly, she never mentions the name of her grandpa's birthplace, calling it 'little city.' «No one, patient reader, ever went back to the little

5 Some of these stories have already been published in Fresno (California) based *Hye Sharzhoom* international journal. Cf. «Family History Project Excerpts» 2013.

6 In her article Giorgia Alù refers to Anne Muxel (1996, p. 47) who, in her *Individu et mémoire familiale*, explain how rediscovering familiar places and spaces can help us to recover a biographical path, as well as the origin, progress and decline of a social, individual and collective destiny.

7 In his book of essays *Imaginary Homelands*, Salman Rushdie (1992, p. 17) asserts «Having been borne across the world, we are translated men. It is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation; I cling, obstinately to the notion that something can also be gained».

city», finishes Antonia Arslan in her book (p. 268). She does this intentionally. First because this is a novel and not a memoir and second, she doesn't want to personify, instead rendering the idea more globally and not to give the impression to the reader that the Armenians were persecuted in that specific place.

Another classroom assignment from my California State University experience dealt with the question of the story's transmission. Each student using his or her part of the genealogical tapestry illustrated the geographic and linguistic journeys of their ancestors. The students were asked as an extension, to report their family history to one partner in the classroom. It was then the task of the partner to re-reflect the story and report it. After a series of retellings, the students eventually had to report these stories back to the class, thus directly engaging in the process of transmission and translation. We aimed here to internalize the process of a story's transmission and how, from one person to another, feelings, details, chronology and the like become translated. Thus, the story, especially the oral tale, is a shared substance between interlocutors, and simply does not exist without both the teller and the listener, the writer and the reader. So when we return to consider the gravity of Arslan's work in the telling of the Armenian Genocide from a very personal perspective, we come to the realization that, by sharing her own family history, as readers we also become a responsible player in that story. In this case, we are both called upon to consider and remember the Genocide, in addition to entering into its discourse. To consider Arslan's work on such a global scale, then, is of tantamount importance.

Winner of many prestigious awards in Italy and worldwide, the Armenian Genocide novel *Skylark Farm* has been translated into Dutch, English (four editions), Eastern Armenian (two editions), French (two editions), Finnish, German (two editions), Greek, Hungarian, Japanese, Romanian, Russian, Slovenian, Spanish, Swedish, Turkish (translated, but not published yet) and Western Armenian. *Skylark Farm* is a trilogy. The second volume is entitled *La strada di Smirne* (Arslan 2009) and has been translated into Eastern Armenian by this author (Arslan 2012). The third volume is entitled *Il rumore delle perle di legno* (Arslan 2015).

### **3 The Lark Farm: the Limitations, the Strengths, the Skopos**

When the Italian famous film directors and screenwriters the Taviani Brothers proposed Antonia Arslan to dramatize *Skylark Farm*, there was also a strong interest from Hollywood in acquiring the movie rights. But Antonia Arslan was aware that in the past the several attempts to produce a Hollywood film on the Armenian Genocide were blocked. She knew that prominent directors and actors throughout the decades have attempted to



produce the film based on Franz Werfel's novel *Forty Days of Musa Dagh*, but they had no success.<sup>8</sup> Hence, Antonia Arslan agreed to the Taviani Brothers' suggestion.

The Taviani Brothers announced right in the beginning that the film would have been freely inspired from *Skylark Farm*, i.e. the plot would have been relatively the same but the directors had the right to change something or make additions and in fact they editorialized, accessorized the film, and inserted fictional material in the movie like love episodes, etc. This is quite normal because even if it originates from a novel the filmmaker translates to film his perception/translation of the fiction.

Naturally there is always the matter of fidelity of the film to the novel, generally expressed as a function of adequacy and acceptability, whereby the former is more or less what we mean by equivalence, and the latter is more or less what we mean by believability to the audience.

When a book is translated into a movie some questions arise. One of the first questions is to ask about the film genre (documentary, drama, historical narrative, etc.) that the filmmaker has chosen since each film genre will create a different kind of viewing experience for audience. The film's genre is drama, based on a historical novel, so the goal is to awaken interest, even engagement in an historical event; the limitations and strengths of a film translation are evident in the selection of passages from the novel, the filmic treatment of those passages, the omission of passages, etc. This reflection leads into the relationship of the source (novel) and the target (film) and opens up such questions as what other source modelling material is evident in the film? In fact the Tavianis have not only cut episodes from the novel but they also added some in. There is an episode in the film which recalls a passage from another Armenian Genocide narrative by Alice Tachdjian *Stones on the Heart* published in Italy. In the book there is a scene of two women forced to dispose of the child by suffocating back to back (Tachdjian 2003, p. 94).

The film is a Spanish co-production and the Spanish actress Paz Vega is a central character in the movie. Even the Spanish translation of the movie *Skylark Farm* is entitled *El Destino di Nunik* as she interprets Nunik's role.<sup>9</sup> In fact when the film had just come out some Armenians were concerned that the filmmaker had inserted a double love story of Nunik for two Turkish officers interpreted by two handsome actors, the Italian Alessandro Preziosi, and the second Turkish officer is the German actor Moritz Bleibtreu. One of my students at California State University Fresno wrote in his final paper:

8 According to *Variety* magazine, *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh* has become «the most on-again and off-again motion picture production in Hollywood history» (Torosyan 2012).

9 This role is 'Azniv' in the book and unlike the film is not a central character in the volume.

A change I dislike in the film is Nunik's second romance with a Turkish soldier, one who is helping lead a caravan of Armenian women to their death in Syria. I feel like Nunik must have a very deep case of Stockholm Syndrome, as she seems to only fall in love with Turkish soldiers. Besides catering to fans of romance movies I can't understand why this change was made. It almost seems to pander to a Turkish audience by showing a sympathetic Turkish participant in the Genocide, who we're meant to feel sorry for because he doesn't really want to be there. Was he added to make any Turk watching feel less guilty? Obviously, the Turkish audience for this movie would be small if not nonexistent, so the addition of this character is puzzling. The two characters are both serving the same purpose as a sympathetic perpetrator and love interest, so it would make a lot more sense to merge them together, from a storytelling perspective. As it is the second Turkish soldier is redundant at best, and raises a lot of unfortunate implications. However, at achieving the purpose of spreading awareness about the Armenian Genocide, I think that the book and the film are both effective in their own ways, all criticisms aside. And movies usually reach an even larger audience. Along with telling a story, the movie speaks truth, and I'm glad it was made. If the directors thought they needed to add more romance so more people would go see it, I think that it's justified, though I wish it had been done differently.<sup>10</sup>

During the 'film vs novel' discussion with cinema critic Dr. Artsvi Bakhchinyan from Armenia, he confessed:

Like from any artistic display of the Armenian Genocide, Armenians had great expectations of Taviani's film, and as a general rule these expectations were unjustified. Of course, we should be grateful to the great masters of cinema for being able to bring the pain of our people to the public at large, which was not sufficiently informed of the history of this tragedy. However, in my humble opinion as a film critic, the extremely classical shape, style and language in which the story was presented was at least half a century late. The same cannot be said about the book. The presented motivations for the film as a tragedy remain almost undiscovered. According to the film, one perceives the false notion that those motivations were purely economic. From historical and psychological points of view, the behavior of the main heroine of the film is not characteristic of an Armenian woman at the beginning of the twentieth century and gives the wrong idea that the Armenian woman, like Nunik, were throwing themselves into the arms of the Turks. In fact, the opposite occurred.

10 An excerpt from the final paper of Suren Oganessian, California State University Fresno.

I also discussed this topic with Arthur Lizie, professor of film, video & media studies at Bridgewater State University, when he attended my lecture with his students at Ca' Foscari University of Venice in January 2015.

Skylark Farm is a better book than The Lark Farm is a good film. But the latter is likely the more valuable of the two creations. *Skylark Farm* has a lot of features that hook intellectuals and people who read a lot of novels – a challenging narrative structure, the personalization of the individual within both societal and historical frameworks, the attempt to represent that which cannot rationally be comprehended, and the grim honesty of speaking truth to power: it's a story that needs to be told that's well told. But... But we don't live in a world in which artistic merit is the final arbiter of value or the best means to social and cultural change and understanding. Through most lenses, *The Lark Farm* isn't a great film. But it works.

Lizie underlined the didactic value of the film and concluded:

While the foreign students can't bear witness to the Armenian Genocide from historical records or from a masterful piece of literature, they can testify because of a movie with pretty faces enacting a predictable narrative theme. And that's a conversation starter.

When we ask about the effect of a film, we are dealing with the rhetorical and artistic purposes of the film, i.e. we are probing into the film's *skopos* or purpose with regard to the audience. The grammar, syntax, and vocabulary of film create meaning in their own right but also invite the viewers to take some meaning away from the viewing experience.<sup>11</sup> The greatest power the film has is its visual effects and emotional impact. Through the utilization of music, sound effects, the setting, costumes, props, and of course the talented actors, the film is able to create the perfect atmosphere for the audience to become fully absorbed in the plot and invest their emotional attachment to the movie.

The Tavianis managed to have an excellent cast with Paz Vega, Moritz Bleibtreu, Alessandro Preziosi, Angela Molina, Arsine Khanjian, Mohammed Bakri, Tchéký Karyo, Andre Dussollier, Laura Efrikian, etc. The filmmakers testified in one of their interviews, the actors were not only involved professionally but also emotionally. According to the testimonies of the directors, after watching the whole film for the first time the Turkish-

11 For Audiovisual Translation among others see: Zatlin 2005; Diaz-Cintas 2009; Cronin 2009; the collection of essays by Agost et al. 2012.

born Greek Jewish actor Tchéky Karyo had burst into tears and when he got quiet he said that he had not only watched the tragedy that they had interpreted, but he had also seen his Jewish uncle and grandfather. So in the imagination of the actor Karyo the Armenian Genocide and the Jewish Holocaust all of a sudden were crossed.

Usually many readers watch movies based on the books they've read and come out disdained. Why? Because so many parts of the story are cut out. So we as readers search for mistakes and sometimes disregard whether the movie was nicely directed, produced, etc. The book and film should be considered separately because each mode of transmission has its own limitations and its own powers. The film works especially well for the audience with little or no knowledge about the Armenian Genocide. By contrast, Armenians, more aware of the Genocide, can have more mixed sensations; either of gratitude towards the filmmakers or judge the accuracy as mentioned above. A completely unaware person however begins to learn about the historical phenomenon of the Armenian Genocide.

When in 2006 the Taviani brothers were shooting the film their intention was to raise awareness about the Armenian Genocide and show the world the need to stop such crimes against humanity from reoccurring. Also, their desire was to see their movie circulating in the schools. Today their goal is fulfilled as the film is shown in many Italian schools mainly among the students of the 8th grade year when they learn about the World War I and the students of last year of high school. The film was widely circulated in many European countries and screened across the world, often accompanying presentations of the novel. It stimulates reflection on a story known by few, in part because few film makers have brought the Armenian Genocide onto the screens before.

#### 4 Concluding Remarks

Undoubtedly it is not possible to penetrate the world of the Armenian Genocide without reading the history. However, documents, statistics and data do not provide the whole story. On the other hand, the important memoirs and eyewitness accounts often cannot express the unthinkable horror of the Genocide by themselves, as blockages and psychological barriers can impede the author from revealing the whole trauma. Here, we can see the importance of artistic literature which by fusing historical fact with creative writing can reach a larger readership and make a global impact. This is the case of many Genocide narratives, where the authors, by reconstructing their family history, merge historical research and the imagination from a collective memory. Historical research and imagination - very important independently - produce a fascinating synergy when merged together, especially with regard to the *collective*.

In his *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, P. Nora (1989, p. 24) asserts that:

In fact, memory has never known more than two forms of legitimacy: historical and literary. These have run parallel to each other but until now always separately. At present, the boundary between the two is blurring; following closely upon the successive deaths of memory-history and memory-fiction, a new kind of history has been born, which owes its prestige and legitimacy to the new relation it maintains to the past... History has become the deep reference of a period that has been wrenched from its depths, a realistic novel in a period in which there are no real novels. Memory has been promoted to the center of history: such is the spectacular bereavement of literature.

In the *Skylark Farm* we can call into question the very genre of art and literature, for example, 'art for art's sake' or art for a social cause, or testimony for catharsis. Literature and testimony are different, and then there is the literature of testimony, which is another genre all together. And further, even if it is not exactly Antonia Arslan's testimony but a retelling of a retelling, Arslan's text is a literature of testimony.

Antonia Arslan's Genocide narrative *Skylark Farm* with its 32 editions in Italy alone, has sold over 600,000 copies to an Italian readership for the most part previously unaware of the Armenian Genocide. However, it is through the power of translation into more than fifteen languages that *Skylark Farm* has surpassed the borders of Italy taking the knowledge of the Armenian Genocide throughout the globe and thereby contributing to its 'afterlife' - to use the word of Walter Benjamin (2000) - as well as its cinematic rendering to a global audience.

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