

feeling is shared by many second-generation Armenians in Canada and the USA.

The question of identity, of finding a balance between the American present and the imposing Armenian past, has been a central preoccupation of second-generation Armenian Genocide survivor-writers from the outset. Nona Balakian characterized William Saroyan's literature as a combination of "the English tongue, the American soil and the Armenian spirit,"⁹⁵ and this is true for pretty much the majority of American Armenian writers when the content of their work is related to their Armenian roots.⁹⁶

The quest for self-identity takes imaginative literature along different paths, yet the Genocide and reconstruction of the memory of the Genocide remain the core leitmotif. This generalization, however, can only prove partially true, and of course, only in the case of diasporan Armenians. Being and feeling oneself to be an Armenian, carrying an Armenian heritage, in other words, having an Armenian identity cannot have a uniform definition when it is judged alongside the sense of belonging to the country of one's citizenship. That definition is closer to its traditional understanding in Middle Eastern countries and with regard to the major components shaping the Armenian identity. The prevalence of these

Asia, and Italy. Canadian literature thus more easily and naturally embraces Armenian American literature (pp. 71-2).

⁹⁵ Nona Balakian, "Writers on the American Scene," *Ararat* 18/1 (1977), as quoted and discussed in Shirinian, *Writing Memory*, pp. 30-32.

⁹⁶ According to Lorne Shirinian, "Armenian-North American literature is the authentic expression of the process of transculturation of this diaspora community." In the past, he says, it was seen as "*assimilated and not really Armenian or marginal, not really American*" (author's italics), that is, ethnic-American literature at best. See *Writing Memory*, pp. 64-5.