

Alienation, awe, and distancing

David Kherdian's father, Melkon, was a survivor of the 1909 Adana massacres:

My father came from Adana
 but his father was born in Kharpert,
 where, my mother says:
 "Most of the people were educated
 at the University," but
 my father wasn't educated anywhere³⁸

That was all he knew of his father's past, a past that he could not and would not want to penetrate. Their relationship was shrouded by mysterious untold stories of torture and death, creating an abyss between them that lasted his father's lifetime. The result was a complex feeling of awe, respect, and admiration that young David held for his father, compounded by fear, resentment, and alienation:

legs like piano stumps
 chest like a barrel (much
 in the manner of Babe Ruth)
 he growled like a crossed
 lion when Armenian-angry,
 but was bear silent when not

and died in a Milwaukee hospital
 on my sister's fifteenth birthday
 far from any home.³⁹

³⁸ David Kherdian, "My Father," in *On the Death of My Father*, n.p. Of the title poem in this collection (anthologized in *Forgotten Bread*, p. 323), William Saroyan has said that it is "one of the best lyric poems in American poetry" (<http://www.davidkherdian.com/node/24>). For a biographical sketch of Kherdian, see *Forgotten Bread*, pp. 318–21.