

useful in depicting the enormous amount of interviewing done over a long period of time. The index is complete. The work would have been helped by the inclusion of photographs. The cover photograph showing a Communist funeral march through Harlem honoring an Italian-American comrade Alfred Luro is better than a thousand words. Count the few blacks and the many white comrades.

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Peter Najarian. *Daughters of Memory*. (Berkeley, CA: City Miner Books, 1986) 157 pp., \$8.95 paper.

Daughters of Memory is Peter Najarian's third work of fiction. The first, *Voyages* (1971) is a classic story of a young man born to immigrant Armenians beginning to come to terms with his family and communal past against the New Jersey backdrop. Written with lyricism and simplicity, it is one of the finest novels by an Armenian American writer. Najarian continued to explore the various parts of his psyche in the less accomplished second book, *Wash Me On Home, Mama* (1978). But it is only in this latest work that his growing maturity as a writer combined with his developing gifts as a visual artist produce an unusual story about the interweavings of personal and collective history.

As in earlier works, the narrator is on a quest for the eternal feminine. Yet it is only in this latest story that she enfolds all of history with her limitless capacity to arouse desire and inspire art. Although the narrator, Zeke, is ostensibly in love with a contemporary woman named Dolores, the most vital feminine force in the story is his mother, a splendid character who appeared in middle age as the Melina of *Voyages*. There her strength as an Armenian woman emerged not only through her survival of the genocide of 1915, but from her rare courage in coming to America and claiming a life for herself by doing the unconventional: divorcing herself from an arranged marriage and marrying the man she really loved. Here, this mother appears later on in life, and in prose that captures the beauty of aging as completely as any other passages in contemporary fiction, Najarian pays homage to the spirit of a woman who becomes increasingly identified with the universal the closer she moves to the end of her life: "She's an old woman with a face like Sitting Bull's, her lips disappearing as she takes her teeth out and brushes them with baking soda . . . [her nails] less nail than fungal crust, chthonic and recyclable, her feet like the ground itself, the bunions and calluses like a transition into the world of rocks and trees" (117).

This portrait of a woman who has anchored her son's life with the

simplicity and durability of granite is supported by delightful vignettes of old Armenian women of Fresno chewing on gossip as naturally as they suck pumpkin seeds. Najarian has a sure sense of the rhythms and preoccupations of these women, the way their thoughts are translated from Armenian dialect into American English. The humor and love he brings to these exchanges, interspersed throughout the book, are one of its major delights; as their miniature dialectics evoke the tragedies of the Armenian past, the mundane betrayals of a transplanted life, and the underlying vitality of their common sense. The old women become an Armenian American version of a Greek chorus; their wisdom is no less deep for being homegrown; they've seen it all and time has contracted to a still point from which they see things whole and pure.

As the narrator pursues his own vision of wholeness, his travels take him back to the lost country. In *Voyages*, the protagonist Aram Tomasian fled to England to recover his Armenian and American identities; toward the end of *Daughters of Memory*, Zeke makes his way back to Turkey, once the Armenian homeland. The passages which describe this odyssey are refreshing for any Armenians numbed to the usual knee jerk clichés about the filthy Turk and the unerasable hatred of one people toward another. Najarian's depiction of the unspeakable is just as graphic as that of any other Armenian writer, but he sees farther. Seventy years after the events of 1915, nature has taken over the historical and political absolutes of the past; the Turkish villages Zeke visits in the back country of Anatolia are spotted with individuals who were once Armenian. But now they look, speak, act Turkish; or is it, that the Turks now look no different from the Armenians? Both are hospitable and finally harmless.

There is a steady mood of reconciliation in these pages, a mood sustained by Najarian's meditation on the role of art in history. After a catalogue of the dead, in which he invokes the spirits of a representative handful of family acquaintances who were either starved, enslaved, raped, or humiliated, Najarian brings together the world of art and life just as surely as he has just united the Turk and the Armenian: "the terror of history impossible to draw, all drawing a transformation and every suffering doomed to become art" (140). This conclusion is not so different from the one that Najarian's countryman, Arshile Gorky, reached when he turned to the world of abstraction to redeem the pain of exile. But if the focus of Gorky's myth was the old country itself, for Najarian it is the ever-elusive female who reincarnates as all the women he has ever loved, known, or seen. The drawings, particularly the abundance of nudes, in the volume are thus an appropriate support to the text: stripped of specific roles and status, these women are laden with the mystery and the memories of the author's past and the desire that keeps him drawn and drawing.

As the book ends, the tension between desire and reconciliation is maintained. After watching Zeke make love to a Turkish prostitute, we

flash back to Fresno where the Armenian crones reaffirm the harmony of the life cycle:

What is [your granddaughter] studying?
Life, she says she's studying life.
What do you mean she's studying life?
That's what she told me, she said she was studying life sciences.
Is there any money in that kind of subject?
There's money in everything.
Not in raisins. There's no money in raisins anymore.
You wait, in a few years there'll be money in raisins again too (157).

Written with one of the finest prose styles in contemporary American fiction, *Daughters of Memory* helps the Armenians catch up with ourselves and points us toward the love that redeems history.

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R. Carlos Nakai. *Changes: Native American Flute Music*, LP Record CR-615 or Cassette CR-615-C, 1982, \$8.95; and *Cycles: Native American Flute Music*, Cassette CR-614-C, 1985, \$8.95. Canyon Records Productions, Inc., P.O. Box 17911, Phoenix, Arizona 85011.

Perhaps humans are most ethnocentric when it comes to matters of food and music. "Soul food" has become a dimension for defining ethnic groups—the dishes may be chitlins, bagels, tacos or other such foods. As society becomes more open, these foods pass from the ghettos and barrios to the community at large. One would hope that some inter-ethnic group understanding and appreciation might accompany the sharing of varying gustatory pleasures. Music represents another dimension of ethnic group identity. As with learning to eat different foods, one might comprehend something of the spirit of another people by listening to their songs—their soul music.

The flute, the rattle, and the drum represent the triumvirate of American Indian musical instruments. The music for these instruments has been handed down from generation to generation. The musicological system represented has a very long tradition if one can judge from fragments of flutes and rattles preserved in archaeological sites dating eight to ten thousand years ago. Thus, listening to Native American music today can put one in touch with a traditional sense of time which is one of the dimensions of American Indian ethnicity.

R. Carlos Nakai is a Navajo-Ute musician and educator who performs traditional Native American songs and composes new melodies on a hand-crafted flute of red cedar heart-wood. During the approximately twenty-two minutes of *Changes* we can listen to a collection of fourteen