

A review of Charents: In Search of My Armenian Poet

For most Armenians before my generation, Charents is a name of legend. Known as a genius poet, Charents was also a public activist and soldier during the First World War. Unfortunately very few members of my generation only know him by his masterpiece “Yes Im Massis Sarn Em Siroum” (I love my Massis mountain). Even I had the barest introduction to this great literary treasure until a few days ago.



Yeghishe Charents

On September 25, 2010 the ARPA film festival screened the documentary, “Charents: In Search of My Armenian Poet” at the Egyptian Theater. The film’s director is Shareen Anderson, an award winning filmmaker based in South Africa. On the day of the screening I was very excited at the opportunity to learn more about this prolific man. We soon shuffled into the unfortunately small theater where Professor of Armenian language and literature at UCLA, Anahid Keshishian, gave a wonderful introduction about her experiences with Charents. She described her emotional journey with this man as if they had been close relations; even though Charents had been killed by the NKVD (the predecessor to the KGB) in a Soviet prison sixty-seven years ago. I felt envious... Why hadn’t I had those same experiences? Why wasn’t I forced to read Charents in grammar school?

Nevertheless, the film soon began and it was very well directed. As the two hours quickly passed I began to revere a man whose work I had never read. Thankfully the film also included excerpts of his poetry. I won’t give any serious spoilers because I believe that this is a must see if you are interested in Armenian culture.

Any real criticism that I have of the documentary would be the focus on over compensatory praises by Charentsian fanatics. Rightfully so, Charents deserves every single one. However it was mentioned in one scene that Charents had actually shot a woman who had rebuffed his interests and spent 8 years in jail for it. Why was this man in so much internal conflict? This was always a quickly bypassed topic and like a shadow, loomed over almost each interview. Everybody in the theater knew it existed but it was never directly addressed. Though while that darkness could be very frightening and intriguing the director chose to leave it shrouded in mystery. However, let me reiterate that this documentary is still enchanting. Prior to seeing it, Charents was only a famous Armenian writer. Now he’s been mythologized to the likes of Sayat Nova, Hovannes Tumanyan and Komitas Vartabed. This documentary amplified my interest and doubled my reverence for his work.

Through my personal experiences, it seems that the diaspora hasn’t come to know and hold dear this extraordinary figure in Armenian culture. Thankfully “Charents: In Search of My Armenian Poet” definitely changed that for at least one Armenian. I just hope that my fellow viewers in that theater felt the same way.

- Krikor Yeghia Moloyan

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