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Assyrian Aesthetics: Recovering the Contemporary Assyrian Literature and Art of William Daniel (1903-88) and Andre Gvalevich (1911-85)

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Assyrian Aesthetics: Recovering the Contemporary Assyrian Literature and Art of William Daniel (1903-88) and Andre Gvalevich (1911-85)

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Abstract

In response to the lack of attention to contemporary Assyrian culture (i.e., mid-20th century to present) in Assyrian nationalism and Western curriculum, this paper creates a conversation between two Assyrian pieces of art—William Daniel's poem "The Problem" and Andre Gvalevich's oil painting portrait of William Daniel. In my argument, I show how "The Problem" and the portrait both advance themes of intimacy based on the aesthetic relationship between the artists and their respective audiences. I first borrow from Peter Balakian's account of aesthetics in his article "Poetry as Civilization" to define my theoretical context, and then I summarize and critique the methodologies of current scholarship that exist on my research topic. Secondly, I analyze Daniel's "The Problem" and Gvalevich's oil painting through the lens of intimacy by conducting close-reading evidence of the formal features in the pieces of art in combination with the biographical and historical contexts of the artists. Lastly, I summarize the conversation between the two pieces of art and then share questions for future scholars with the hope of generating more interest in this genre of scholarship. As I discuss in this section, aesthetic analysis and scholarship can be uniquely important in helping to eradicate the lingering history of oppression and silencing upon the Assyrian culture.

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Due to the extensive situations of oppression that have existed for the Assyrian people in recent history, including the Assyrian Genocide of 1915 (Yacoub) and the ISIS massacres of 2015 (Griswold), it might seem challenging at first to imagine an Assyrian population with contemporary culture. Whenever Western societies do discuss Assyrian culture, they usually do so through the lens of their ancient ancestors, as if an Assyrian culture does not exist in the present day. Most Western universities, for example, teach Assyrians solely through the discipline of "Assyriology," which excludes modern Assyrian experiences like the diaspora (Cheng). Similarly, Assyrian culture itself has traditionally promoted a sense of pride and nationalism of the ancient Assyrian customs. In the context of marriage, for example, Marta Woźniak-Bobińska interviewed members of the Assyrian population in Södertalje, Sweden, and found that "there were people who did not like any changes in rituals…and were afraid that identity would be lost if the young did not strictly follow the traditions" (7). While promulgating pride in heritage is an important part of nationalism in any culture, a sole focus on the past can cause many problems for a minority, stateless ethnic group vying for political recognition. It can create a simplified and stereotypical image of the "Assyrian" identity for the non-Assyrians in positions of power (like politicians), distract Assyrians and non-Assyrians from recognizing the abundance of contemporary art and philosophy within the Assyrian community, and limit the

sources of power and knowledge for the second-generation who are looking to navigate meanings of their ethnic identities in the diaspora (See “Since there are…” as an example).

In this paper, I present a scholarly case study that aims to typify the beauty of Assyrian art from the middle 20th century in order to show how this art can solidify, create, and progress contemporary Assyrian culture. One poem I will analyze is “The Problem” (1975) by **William Daniel** (1903-88). Daniel was an Assyrian poet, musician, and activist who survived the 1915 Assyrian Genocide and gained fluency in seven languages through his journey across the diaspora (Ishaya 42). Secondly, I will explore a portrait of Daniel by **Andre Gvalevich** (1911-85), an Assyrian painter and sculptor who produced over 300 artworks throughout his life. Gvalevich was born in Turkey but spent his later years in Iran and Russia with his family after escaping persecutions against Assyrians by the Ottoman Empire. Gvalevich worked with Daniel to collaborate on various pieces, including the portrait of Daniel. I chose to analyze these two artists together (instead of just one) because doing so can provide many sub-benefits for my goal of promoting contemporary culture. It can simultaneously recover the real-life friendship between the two artists from the silenced contemporary history of Assyrian people, represent a theme of solidarity and life among the Assyrian people in the diaspora, and reveal the variety of contemporary Assyrian artists that exists for students and scholars to study.

While most of the world might only understand Assyrians through their ancient identity, **I argue** that Daniel and Gvalevich’s artworks typify an active, relevant, and evolving Assyrian culture in contemporary culture because they typify the genre of aesthetics. I will proceed to conduct a close-reading analysis of “The Problem” and Gvalevich’s portrait that explores the theme of **intimacy** that calls on the artists’ respective Assyrian audiences to join them in

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developing their culture in the wake of silencing it has faced in recent history. I will first define the methodology of my paper more precisely based on the theories of aesthetics by Armenian-American poet and philosopher Peter Balakian. Secondly, I will conduct a literature review that respects yet critiques the scholarship that exists on William Daniel. (Unfortunately, there does not seem to be any cultural scholarship that exists on Andre Gvalevich). Thirdly, through the lens of intimacy, I will respectively analyze, and then summarize, Daniel's "The Problem" and Gvalevich's portrait of Daniel. Finally, I will write my conclusion. In addition to reflecting on the "why" of this project, my conclusion raises recommendations for future scholars whom I invite to join me in respecting the aesthetics of contemporary Assyrian art.

1. "Aesthetics" and Intimacy

When I use the word "aesthetics" or discuss the term more broadly, I am referring to the radical ability of literature and visual culture to reclaim the human dignity of an artist and their audience through imagination and emotion. Peter Balakian, an Armenian-American poet, essays a comprehensive account of aesthetics based on Primo Levi's memoir *Survival in Auschwitz*. As Balakian notes, when the Nazis abused Levi and other Jewish people in Auschwitz, Levi turned to Canto 26 of Dante's *Inferno* for relief. Through Levi's retelling of the canto to his friend, Levi was able to embrace the beauty of Dante's *Inferno*. "It is imagination's clamp in the force of memory and poetry, which allows for a recovered solidarity of truth" (12). The words "imagination" and "recovered" are important because they explain how poems and other forms of art differ from history and other disciplines that seek to define the world objectively. By connecting with, say, the creative metaphors of poetry, a reader is able to

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"imagine" a new reality and "recover" a deeply subjective and internal meaning. Put another way, art elicits emotion and imagination and, thus, allows an artist and their audience to reclaim identity. In the context of this paper, Daniel and Gvalevich enable this imagination through their themes of intimacy—i.e., through the way they allow their audiences to empathize with the characters or subjects in their pieces of art.

Another key component of Balakian's analysis is the fact that Levi is Italian and living in a non-Italian (and oppressive) environment. Levi relied on poetry as the "vise-grip" that offered a moment of "clarity" in a world of "the vast irrational" from Auschwitz. In other words, in situations of confusion and disorder such as a concentration camp, aesthetics enact structure and meaning for the people who experience it. In the context of the Assyrian collective experience, the irrational takes on many forms. Assyrians exist as a stateless group with members scattered in the diaspora, as a political entity suffering massacres in the Middle East (Griswold; Yacoub 216-217), and as a minority ethnic group struggling against the dominant culture's ideology during the process of assimilation in Western countries. In fact, Daniel and Gvalevich were thoroughly aware of the powers of art to present a "vise-grip" of "clarity" at a time when the Ottoman Empire tried to exterminate Assyrian culture during the Ottoman Genocide of 1915. Aesthetics allowed Daniel and Gvalevich and their audiences to hold a "vise-grip" on their human dignity through imagination and emotion in the face of "the vast irrational" of the Ottoman's massacres and genocide. I will soon apply these biographical and historical contexts to Daniel and Gvalevich's art to reveal this connection.

To elaborate on my theme selection for analysis, I chose "intimacy" because it is a perennial emotional response to the Assyrian collective experience today. The Assyrians

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diaspora places many Assyrian communities in isolation from each other, but Assyrians still exist together implicitly through their shared desire for an ethnic homeland. In practical terms, the goal for intimacy in the face of isolation was a prominent one for Daniel and Gvalevich. Daniel's "The Problem" reveals the separation between himself and his Assyrian community in Chicago amid creative and political differences, while Gvalevich's portrait contains formal elements that try to distinguish Daniel from his viewers in order to reflect Daniel's individuality in the Assyrian community based on his commitment to art. However, in response to this isolation, the artists had tried to create relationships with their audiences through their art, and I will soon proceed to show how.

2. Evaluating Current Scholarship

In contrast to aesthetics, the scholars who have researched William Daniel have mainly centered their analyses on what I define as "folkloric methodology" —i.e., on trying to discover the various ancient influences that engendered a poet's artistic style. Although folkloric scholars do analyze formal features, folkloric methodology contrasts with "aesthetics" because it systematizes the poem's historical origins instead of discovering the emotional responses that take place between the poet and the reader. Sargon Donabed, for example, has built upon Younan Hozaya's folkloric investigation of the poem *Kateeny Gabbara* by codifying the poem's formal features into certain genres: general heroic epics, classical Syriac poetry, and oral narratives of *Kateeny* the legend. Similarly, Alessandro Mengozzi has aimed to place the poem in the context of oral Assyrian folklore through a survey of various Assyrian oral narratives.

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Finally, Nineb Lamassu has investigated the formal similarities and differences between *Kateeny Gabbara*, oral narratives of *Kateeny*, and *The Epic of Gilgamesh*.

I appreciate these scholars' collective aim to promote contemporary Assyrian culture because not many scholars do so. Folkloric methodologies can be highly beneficial for many reasons, like providing the theoretical tools to distinguish definitions between "Assyrians" and similar ethnic groups like "Armenians." On the other hand, however, I think that the use of folkloric methodology by itself does not do enough to highlight the beauty of contemporary art and its ability to form authentic connections with Assyrian audiences today. I say this for two reasons.

First of all, treating Daniel's works as if they were historical artifacts can distract readers from recognizing the intended purpose of Danielian poetry—which is to be read for the sake of aesthetics. If we treat Daniel's text like historical artifacts, then we are not showing *how* Daniel attempted to relate to Assyrian readers' imaginations and emotions. For context, Daniel lived in the 19th–20th century (Ishaya 12), at a time when Assyrians were suffering massacres like the attempted genocide by the Ottoman Empire in 1915. In response to these injustices, Daniel wrote original texts, and translated texts from other cultures to Syriac, to share the beauty of poetry with Assyrian audiences and thereby inspire and strengthen them. Scholars have a duty to respect this aesthetic aim because it accurately reflects the intentions of the artist. Today, furthermore, as Assyrians face the lingering effects of oppression and silencing—through the political inequalities in countries that occupy Assyrians' homeland and the inadequate ethnic resources in the diaspora—Daniel's desires to inspire and strengthen Assyrian culture are especially necessary and relevant.

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A second reason why folkloric methodologies of Daniel can be problematic is that they turn Daniel's epic *Kateeny Gabbara* into the only primary source of analysis. Focusing solely on the epic does not do justice to the wealth of epistemology in Daniel's prolific portfolio, which features poems that may not contain an overt folkloric presence like *Kateeny Gabbara*. For example, some of Daniel's texts rely on length, genres, stanzas and themes that differ greatly from the epic genre (like "The Problem" which I will analyze in this paper). By diversifying the purview of Daniel's works, we can thereby accomplish the goal of preserving a diverse, complex, and kaleidoscopic account of contemporary Assyrian culture for today's audience.

To clarify, by disagreeing with folkloric methodologies, I am not trying to uphold a theory that tries to make a distinction between interpretations of form and history. As many scholars of aesthetics and culture such as Peter Balakian ("Arshile Gorky" 175) note, utilizing an author's cultural context for evidence has an essential purpose in shaping a scholar's formal analysis. By consulting an artist's cultural context, the scholar can provide a more accurate and mature analysis of artwork because they are bearing in mind the different emotional and cultural forces that influenced the artist's creations. On the other hand, however, I am trying to show why scholars of Assyrian art should consider using history for the sake of aesthetics. Aesthetics, in addition to folklore, should be the goal of scholarship that tries to promote contemporary Assyrian culture.

3a. Daniel's "The Problem"

Through the lens of my paper's main argument in this section, I will show how Daniel creates intimacy with his readers by allowing them to empathize with Daniel's struggles of

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loneliness. Although the original purpose of "The Problem" was to expose the marginalization of political organizations in the 1950-70s, I argue that the poem can still be relevant for today's Assyrian readers because Daniel describes its story's characters through fluid definitions that give room for interpretations from Assyrian audiences across time.

For context, "The Problem" was written in 1975 originally in the Syriac literature but later translated to English by Daniel himself (Ishaya 109). The poem consists of one long stanza that contains 38 lines and, thus, differs greatly from the epic heroic genre of *Kateeny Gabbara*. Thematically, while *Kateeny Gabbara* includes "contemporary concerns" such as "political Assyrianism" (Mengozzi 333), "The Problem" focuses directly on civic organizations in Chicago and other American cities.

Representing loneliness, to begin with, "The Problem" creates separation between Daniel and his audience in order to represent the marginalization within the late-20th century Assyrian American activism. In Ishaya's view, Daniel wrote "The Problem" as "a direct criticism of the Assyrian civic and political organizations" that were inattentive to systematic concerns (Ishaya 108). For example, Daniel's criticism had personal roots; when he immigrated to Chicago from Tehran in the 1950s, the organizations there failed to keep their promise of funding his arts and providing him with adequate housing (Ishaya 106). "The Problem" reflects that marginalization by describing the organizations as the pronoun "we," and those suffering abroad and locally as "our people." The poem's first two lines establish this conflict:

> *Our people* are strangers wherever they reside;
>
> While *we* drink [heartily] and swell in pride. (italics are mine) (Daniel, lines 1-2).

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The language advances an internal division, which works to expose the movements' failures to support Daniel and other marginalized Assyrians.

While the poem creates this division on a surface-level, its formal features cause the boundaries to become fluid and, thus, open gateways for new occupations in their spaces. The poem underscores an inherent irony because Daniel's story fits into both "our people" and "we." In another two lines, the poem exaggerates this distinction:

> Hunger gnaws the belly of [a] barefooted child;
>
> While we in banquets grow periodically wild. (Daniel, lines 5-6)

While Daniel worked directly with political activism, concocting texts such as *Assyrians of Today: Their Problem, and a Solution* (1969) (Ishaya 113), his socioeconomic status excluded him from the organizers' bacchanal events that the poem describes. Thus, Daniel's experiences transcend the division; his experiences intersect with both groups. Conversely, the organizations also fit both categories since they are naturally part of the general Assyrian race. When Daniel briefly introduces "our scholars the learned" as a third group, this belongingness becomes clear:

> We are Assyrians" [our scholars the learned] say, and this state
>
> Makes us very proud for Atour was great. (Daniel, lines 13-14)

The excerpt "We as Assyrians" situates "we" in context with all Assyrians—not just those in need. As the poem juxtaposes scholars with the organizations, the organizers become part of the general culture.

Through the fluid space that underscores the pronouns, the poem becomes intimate with the reader by inviting them to place their experiences in conversation with the characters.

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Towards the end, Daniel asks questions, like “Shall we ever cease to be just a sound?” (Daniel, line 27). Not only does the rhetorical style inherently call upon readers to enter the poem’s imaginative space, but the exact messages allude to philosophical dilemmas concerning the whole diaspora. Becoming more than “just a sound” does not solely exist for political organizations but for all Assyrians who desire representation —since, as the poem notes, they are “strangers wherever they reside.” For example, one scholar named Joseph Yacoub wrote about the Assyrian Genocide in *Year of the Sword* to preserve our history. College students, too, have tried to promote their culture, like U.C. Davis’ Assyrian Student Association who “[strive] to create visibility” when no one else will (Assyrian Student Association). Thus, Assyrians across many contexts seek representation like the 1950-70s political organizers.

In fact, a study of the publication history suggests that the poem functions to reach contemporary readers who feel disconnected from their Assyrian heritage. As I’ve found based on my personal conversations with Dr. Ishaya, “The Problem” is thus far only published in Ishaya’s biography *William Daniel: Portrait of an Assyrian Icon*. The biography includes Daniel’s life story, unpublished writings, and postcards from Assyrians whose lives he inspired. Based on the context of the biography, the poem works in conversation with the overall themes that underscore Daniel’s life that include the invitation for other Assyrians to engage in his writings (Ishaya 13). The poem seems to be a part of the book’s telos to promote Daniel’s works for us today when people rarely did so during his time. Furthermore, Daniel himself translated the poem from Syriac to English (Ishaya 108). While Daniel did translate his works, this particular translation is odd given that his intended audience was first-generation activists in the 1980s,

who speak and read Assyrian perfectly. It seems that Daniel wanted to open the poem to more Assyrian audiences who could not read or write Syriac, which includes many Assyrians today.

In conclusion, I've shown that "The Problem" introduces the conflict between Assyrians in the poem but then deconstructs those boundaries through its language and the reader's relationship to the language. The conflict represents Daniel's loneliness and allows the reader to empathize with it, but the language then offers space for readers to join him in his call for unity. In his "Poetry as Civilization," Peter Balakian writes a theory of poetry that can further justify the ways the language connects Assyrian audiences with Daniel. As Primo Levi recited Canto 26 from Dante's *Inferno* to his friend at Auschwitz, he represents the beauty of connection that exists between the poet (Dante) and the translator (Levi, translating to his friend). Levi "becomes a kind of *collaborator*… The act of translating is a deeper kind of reading, for in translating there is *a reliving of the poem*, a kind of *rebirth* of the text through the translator that involves a radical identification between the translator and poet" (4). Although Daniel and his readers take different identities than the poet and translator in Levi's situation, Balakian's retelling of the story shows that the reader and Daniel can be *collaborators* who *relive* and *rebirth* the poem. In other words, as Daniel's language opens the poem to new audiences of Assyrians, he is creating an active and evolving Assyrian identity that is relevant for Assyrians across time.

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3b. Gvalevich's Portrait of Daniel

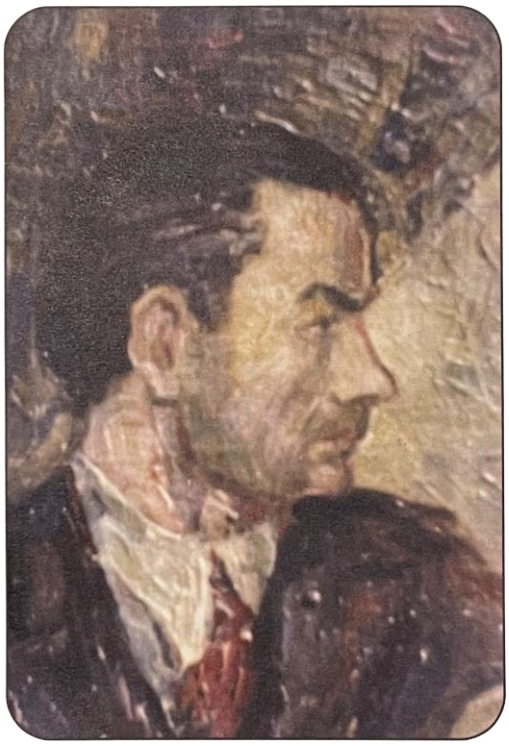

Figure 1: Portrait of William Daniel by Andre Gvalevich

In addition to Daniel's "The Problem," Andre Gvalevich's oil painting portrait of Daniel (see Figure 1) represents aesthetics. In this section, I will show that Gvalevich's and Daniel's biographical contexts address the stylistic ambiguity between separation and intimacy in the portrait by defining Assyrian leader who is inherently authoritative but nonetheless existing in deep, loving connection with other Assyrians. For context, Gvalevich and Daniel were close friends during the 1940s, at a time when Daniel lived with Gvalevich's family in Tehran (Ishaya 77). In fact, Daniel found his muse to write the epic *Kateeny Gabbara* by listening to Gvalevich's mom play Assyrian folkloric music on the piano (Ishaya 77). Although I am analyzing the version of Gvalevich's portrait that appears on the cover of *William Daniel: A Portrait of an Assyrian Icon*, I know after speaking with Dr. Arianne Ishaya that the original portrait exists with a personal friend in Southern California. There is also a gallery of other Gvalevich artworks in *Zinda Magazine* (see "Gallery" for more).

To begin with, there is a fruitful (yet at first ambiguous) conversation that occurs between separation and intimacy. On the one hand, through the theme of loneliness, we can note that the formal features advance an aloof relationship between Daniel and his viewer. Daniel's face is looking to his left and away from the viewers, and his eyes and mouth appear

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solemn and determined as opposed to warm, comforting, inviting. Additionally, the red, yellow, and blue colors of the background match the colors of Daniel's suits, which marble the connection between the portrait's foreground and background. This marbled connection compresses the space of the frame and, thus, fails to make the space open for the viewer in a way that an establishing shot of an open grass plane, for example, would. These formal features are perplexing: although Daniel dedicated his life to building relationships with Assyrian audiences through his poems, his facial features and the portrait's spacing maintain an indifferent attitude to the viewer.

On the other hand, Gvalevich's portrait also represents a theme of intimacy because it contains formal and contextual features that seem to place Daniel in close connection with the portrait's viewers. First of all, even though Daniel's face is turning away from the viewer, he is still at the center of the viewer's attention because the portrait typifies a medium close-up angle that exposes to the viewer the precise details of Daniel's face, like his stubble. Additionally, the genre of the portrait itself reveals the metatheatrical connection between the portraiture and the subject, which shows that the subject can never be isolated inherently from his environment. Although Daniel is on his own, and Gvalevich is outside the frame, through the portrait, their connection was inseparable in real-life as two friends living together in Tehran. They depended on each other for cultural revival and emotional support during a tumultuous time for Assyrians in the aftermath of the Ottoman Genocide, and this portrait represents this solidarity by virtue of its creation. Lastly, unique to this one edition of the portrait, the portrait being on the cover of *William Daniel: Portrait of an Assyrian Icon* forms a dialogue with the

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themes of Daniel's biography—which naturally fosters intimacy between Daniel's reader and Daniel's life story.

Through the biographical context of Gvalevich and Daniel, we can clarify the ambiguity between the portrait's formal features. The biography indicates that the separation between Daniel and his viewer places Daniel as a leader for other Assyrians. Gvalevich notes that

> We need to recognize that our people are behind in the field of art appreciation…Of course, as long as we Assyrians do not have our own state, we do not have a unique art form. We can only take pride in the excellence of the arts of our ancestors. ("Biography")

In fact, theoretical context about Gvalevich's artistic style exemplifies how Gvalevich applied his life goal to his portrait. Gvalevich created the painting in the 1940s when he lived with Daniel, a fact that Dr. Ishaya confirmed with me when I met with her over the phone. However, the portrait also seems to echo Gvalevich's artistic identity during his years after the 1940s. Observing the portrait from the outset, the viewer notices its lax brush strokes and a small sample of colors, which suggest that Gvalevich painted the portrait in the 1960s or 70s when he had transitioned from studying impressionism from Russian art schools in his childhood to an original identity as an artist. At this later period, "the paint was freely splashed on canvas…the dance of colors, poetic and lively…[T]he artist, who in the 1940's worked with such faded colors, had suddenly acquired the boldness of a young man" ("Biography"). The years and dates aside, Gvalevich clearly used a more personal style of painting to compose Daniel's portrait than his impressionist artwork in the 1940s.

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Daniel had agreed wholeheartedly with Gvalevich. Describing the protagonist from *Cyrano de Bergerac*, one of his favorite pieces of literature, and applying it to the Assyrian context, Daniel writes that

> If you have a goal you believe in, then you need to work on it by relying on yourself, and only help from above, because it is no easy to find someone who will have the same outlook as you. (Ishaya 41)

In both these passages, Gvalevich and Daniel aim to evolve the culture through art. The passages might seem to come from hierarchical arrogance, as if the artists are looking at other Assyrians with conceit. But the language really stems out of respect to an erudite legend like Daniel. Dr. Ishaya writes about Daniel wanted to translate works like *Cyrano de Bergerac* to educate his "orphaned people" when Assyrians at the time held an indifference to the beauty of art (42). And as one of Daniel's students notes, Assyrians loved Daniel's leadership: "William Daniel is not only the writer of *Kateeny Gabbara*, but he was the real Kateeny. He was the one who revived the Assyrian literature by his works" (Ishaya 169).

To concretize this leadership in the portrait, we can take a particular look at one formal feature from the portrait: the dash of yellow color on the right. This color differs from the marmoreal colors of the background. It seems to be akin to a ray of sunshine, and Daniel directs his attention towards it as if he is the one concocting the light. Perhaps Gvalevich is referring to Daniel's first publication, which was a collection of poems entitled *Zahrira-d-umanuta* or *Rays of Artistic Inspiration* (Ishaya 68). While we cannot know for certain what referent constitutes the metaphor, we can deduce that Daniel is pointing to (or creating) something that is enlightening, bright, and powerful. Daniel's face and Gvalevich's desire to enact his original

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aesthetic identity direct the viewer towards a new direction in their culture. The light likely refers to the desire for progress that was a *sine qua non* for Daniel and Gvalevich as artists. Daniel, with a face that evokes deference from his viewer, is leading his Assyrian viewers and inviting them to join him in their journey of cultural development.

3c. Coalescing Daniel and Gvalevich in Summary

I began this paper by asking how we as scholars can begin to interpret Daniel and Gvalevich through aesthetics. To attain this goal, I have explored the aesthetic theme of intimacy that occurs in Daniel and Gvalevich's art. "The Problem," first, allows the reader to empathize with Daniel's isolation from his Assyrian community in Chicago through his pronouns, and then be able to accept Daniel's call of unity among Assyrians through the poem's deconstructive language. Similarly, although Gvalevich depicts Daniel ambiguously between loneliness and intimacy, the historical context of both Gvalevich's and Daniel's missions as artists demystifies the ambiguity by depicting Daniel as a loving leader who had welcomed his audience to join him in evolving Assyrian culture. Ultimately, the relationship between the artist and audience can elicit the radical shattering and complexity that manifest Balakian's definition of "aesthetics." The relationship "ignites" and "restores" an identity for Assyrians who, in Gvalevich's and Daniel's era, were facing genocide, massacres, and political inequalities (12). These struggles exist for Assyrians today in the context of ISIS massacres and the struggles of assimilation in the vast worldwide diaspora, which shows why the importance of aesthetics is still an essential medium of analysis today.

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4. Reflections for Future Scholars

Due to the extreme injustices that have been inseparable experiences in Assyrian history, the general question of "why scholarship?" elicited tangible introspection from me while I conducted this research project. While I love thinking, arguing, and theorizing for their own sakes, I also felt that these experiences can seem unimportant practically, with the greater aim of helping Assyrian people. But after spending some time in personal reflection, I've realized that scholarship offers many benefits to the Assyrian community. For example, introducing Assyrians to the scholarly circle embeds the contemporary culture with an ethos and resect. As an Assyrian student myself, moreover, the inherent effort of research has allowed me to feel confidence and pride in my critical thinking skills, which helps disrupt the history of silencing that I've personally faced along with other Assyrians in our collective experience. Finally, the audience of scholarship is professors in education, politicians seeking epistemology for their policies, and other professions in spaces of power who can use their knowledge for justice. If these audiences read the research, they can offer practical benefits for Assyrians.

Scholarship, in other words, has an important role in seeking justice for the Assyrian people (and, generally, for other minority groups in the West Asian region). My hope is that scholars who have interests that relate to Assyrian studies (and Middle-Eastern cultural studies more broadly) can support contemporary Assyrian aesthetics. To demonstrate how this paper can be a case study, scholars can collaborate with the theories of other diasporic texts like Armenian writers (who are part of the general collective experience of the Ottoman Genocide) as a form of coalition-building, just as I tried to show the similarities between Daniel and

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Gvalevich. This dialogue can create new understandings about Assyrian texts and place the texts in contexts (like Armenian studies) that already have a strong academic focus.

Secondly, scholars can analyze other contemporary Assyrian artwork beyond Daniel or Gvalevich. One example is a recent virtual exhibit from the Art Ark Gallery in San Jose entitled *Diaspora in Bloom: Assyrians in the 20th Century and Beyond* that features works by new Assyrian painters and sculptors. Another example is to view more paintings by Gvalevich in his gallery (see "Gallery"), or read more poems by Daniel. Right now, Daniel's poems are only available to the public through *William Daniel: Portrait of an Assyrian Icon*. The book is only available in 7x10-inch dimensions and as a hard cover edition. While this size can be beneficial for many reasons, I also think that a different production method (such as a paper copy, with smaller and more practical dimensions, or a digital collection of the poems) can provide easier access to more Assyrian readers and scholars. Lastly, one form of contemporary art can be from the narratives and stories of real-life Assyrian people through interviews (including autobiographies like Julius W. Mirza's *An Assyrian Dream: The Mirza Family Story*). While realism does not fit the definition of "aesthetics" in many theoretical accounts, storytelling can nonetheless offer reflections and life journeys that reveal complexities, imaginations, and emotions from the subjects and the readers.

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