

Guest Editorial

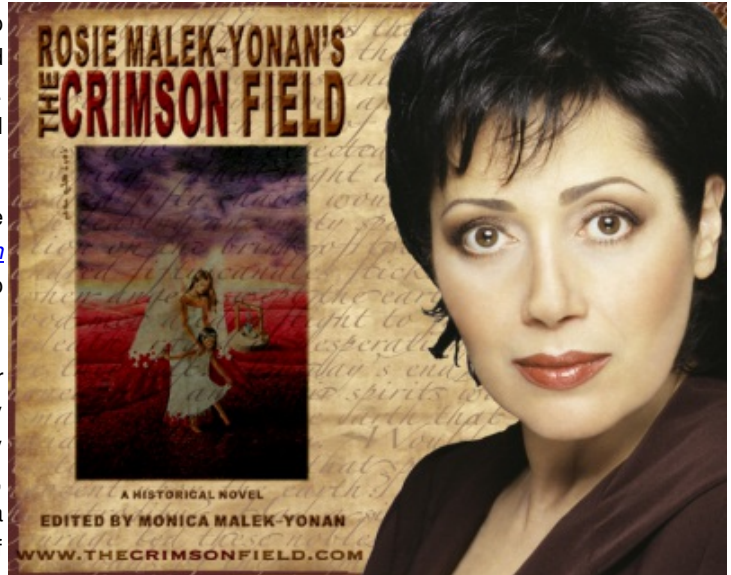
SUNY Days for 'The Crimson Field' **Rosie Malek-Yonan**

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Los Angeles (AINA) -- The State University of New York, also known as SUNY, is the largest university system in the United States. With sixty-four campuses, it can be traced back to 1816. Four Ivy League State University of New York colleges, which still exist today at Cornell University, were established in 1862.

Professor Ellene Phufas, who teaches World Literature for the SUNY system, contacted me to include my book, [The Crimson Field](#) about the Assyrian Genocide (1914-1918) for her students to read.

This all came about after Professor Phufas read an article I wrote for AINA about my book's website being hacked into and defaced by Turkish criminals. Though the actions of cyber-terrorists are a felony in the U.S. and most countries, they did in fact increase book sales, caused option offers and paved the path for my book to become a vehicle for the study of the Assyrian Genocide at institutions of higher learning.



"I have the privilege of selecting texts that I believe are very significant and sometimes ignored or unknown," Professor Phufas wrote to me.

Up until now, the study of the Assyrian Genocide that coincided with WWI, and took place in Turkey and northwestern Iran in the Assyrian inhabited region of Urmia, was globally absent from the curriculum of educational institutions.

"The Crimson Field" is on its way into classrooms and in so doing the Assyrian Genocide is no longer invisible. It was required reading in 2009 and will continue in 2010. Phufas' own translation of Ilias Venezis' "NOUMERO 31328" had previously been used as an example of books about the Christian Genocides in Asia Minor by Ottoman Turks and Kurds.

Professor Phufas gave me her rationale for selecting "The Crimson Field":

"The interplay of history and fiction is a subject of immense range and has been used to greater or lesser effect over the years by ethnic groups who have been victimized by catastrophic genocide aggression and hatred. A successful author of such a work must also necessarily be a researcher in order to delve into the past and the horrible events that have occurred especially if there is no substantial body of scholarly material available in the academic milieu of that particular historic event. From this point of view a work such as this becomes as significant a historical document as any other written by the standards of historical research methods. When a work such as this, is one of few if any to be found, then it become even more important that the wider public becomes aware of these events. Such a work is Malek-Yonan's 'The Crimson Field.'

For many years of my life I was vaguely aware of modern day genocides, but was overwhelmingly familiar only with the Jewish Holocaust committed by the Nazis and their allies in Europe during WWII. I was vaguely aware of the Armenian genocide but that too was a reality beyond my immediate concern or interest. It was never discussed in Church or any of my courses while at college. After I started teaching at Erie Community College in Buffalo, NY, I came into contact with refugees from Southern Sudan, people who had witnessed and survived unbelievable horror: indiscriminate bombing, enslavement, rape, and even crucifixion. I realized then that all these refugees had been victimized because of their faith --

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they were Christians who had been deliberately attacked by Muslims and the Islamic government in their country for the simple fact of being Christian. As I started to read about their plight, I began to discover and re-discover my own history, that of the Greeks, Armenians, and Assyrians who had virtually disappeared from Asia Minor now the land called Turkey. And then I learned that they had disappeared not because of emigration for political positions but simply because of the genocidal ethnic cleansing policies of the Turkish government based on religion and ethnicity before, during, and after WWI.

Millions of people had vanished in a brutally short time: men women and children murdered as well as forced into exile from their millennia-old homelands. Having read many works about the Jewish holocaust I wondered why there were so few sources - both fictional and non-fictional about the Christian Holocaust in the Middle East, a tragedy that continues to this day especially as experienced by the Assyrian People of the Middle East in Iraq, a people who had already suffered repeated attempts to wipe them out and who had somehow managed to survive. Why was so little, if anything, being said in the popular media about these millions of victims? Why were repeated attempts to recognize the Armenian Holocaust being debated and then mysteriously dropped from sight? Why was the Greek Genocide of Asia Minor not being discussed or even written about except rarely and only fairly recently?

I decided that there were some small steps that could be taken that were within the realm of my capability. First I started translating works from Greek into English, realizing that many of the descendants of the Greeks who came to America could no longer read Greek. Secondly, I decided that I would use works of literature in my classes at the college...works that focused on the deliberate attempt to destroy the millennia old communities of the peoples throughout the Middle East. However, very few sources were available. Then one day by reviewing the AINA website I found out that an author called Rosie Malek-Yonan had written a book called 'The Crimson Field.' Not a moment passed before I ordered the book and read it--yes, in one night. I knew that this would be a world that my students could read about and understand while at the same time learn about a people who so often resided in the recesses of our minds if at all. Yes they were as important as the Jewish Communities of Europe, as the Southern Sudanese of Sudan, or the Tutsis of Rwanda. Their story had to be told too. Malek-Yonan had started the process.

I can only hope that more authors of these above mentioned communities will begin to tell their stories -- the stories of the ancestors who lived and died, and yes, some of whom survived. Santayana had it right: 'Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.' We can no longer afford to keep the past in darkness, what the Ancient Greeks call 'Lethe' - concealment or forgetfulness. We owe our unforgettable ancestors a debt of memory: We cannot give them anything else. But we can at least give them their words back and an audience to read them. That is the first step."

Every Assyrian is a living link to the genocide. The past does not end. In writing "The Crimson Field," I wanted to at the very least preserve the history of my own family but the process and end result has proven to be much more than that.

Rosie Malek-Yonan is an Assyrian actor, director and author of [The Crimson Field](#). She is an outspoken advocate of issues concerning Assyrians, in particular bringing attention to the Assyrian Genocide and the plight of today's Assyrians in Iraq since the U.S. lead invasion of Iraq in 2003. On June 30, 2006, she was invited to [testify](#) on Capitol Hill regarding the genocide and persecution of Assyrians in Iraq. She is on the Board of Advisors at Seyfo Center in Europe that exclusively deals with the Assyrian Genocide and is an Ambassador for the Swedish based Assyrians Without Borders. She has worked with many of Hollywood's leading actors and directors. She played the role of Nuru II-Ebrahimi, opposite Reese Witherspoon in New Line Cinema's "Rendition." To schedule an interview with Rosie Malek-Yonan, please send your request to contact@thecrimsonfield.com.

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