



## Ozone Journal (Phoenix Poets)

By Peter Balakian

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### Ozone Journal (Phoenix Poets) By Peter Balakian

*from "Ozone Journal"*

Bach's cantata in B-flat minor in the cassette,  
we lounged under the greenhouse-sky, the UVBs hacking  
at the acids and oxides and then I could hear the difference

between an oboe and a bassoon  
at the river's edge under cover—  
trees breathed in our respiration;

there was something on the other side of the river,  
something both of us were itching toward—

radical bonds were broken, history became science.  
We were never the same.

The title poem of Peter Balakian's *Ozone Journal* is a sequence of fifty-four short sections, each a poem in itself, recounting the speaker's memory of excavating the bones of Armenian genocide victims in the Syrian desert with a crew of television journalists in 2009. These memories spark others—the dissolution of his marriage, his life as a young single parent in Manhattan in the nineties, visits and conversations with a cousin dying of AIDS—creating a montage that has the feel of history as lived experience. Bookending this sequence are shorter lyrics that span times and locations, from Nairobi to the Native American villages of New Mexico. In the dynamic, sensual language of these poems, we are reminded that the history of atrocity, trauma, and forgetting is both global and ancient; but we are reminded, too, of the beauty and richness of culture and the resilience of love.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

“In the dynamic, sensual language of these poems, we are reminded that the history of atrocity, trauma, and forgetting is both global and ancient; but we are reminded, too, of the beauty and richness of culture and the resilience of love.”—Pulitzer Prize committee

(2016 Pulitzer Prize in Poetry)

“Balakian is blessed with an eerie ability to connect seemingly unrelated events separated by vast amounts of time and space. . . . Balakian’s work is one of contrasts: the contrast between day and night, earth and sky, love and hate, the temporary and eternal, between inner war and outer peace.”

(Alexander Oliver *The Literary Review*)

“Balakian is a master of—the drifting, split-second mirage, the cinematic dissolve and cross-cut as well as the sculptural, statuesque moment chiseled out of consonant blends and an imagistic, jazzman’s ear for vowels. . . . Beautiful, haunting, plaintive, urgent. In our dying world’s age, these poems legislate a vital comportment to the demands of our shared present, timely and untimely both.”

(Keith Jones *Consequence*)

“While Balakian’s essays [*Vise and Shadow*] reveal the ways history and its discontents inscribe themselves in the smallest features of familiar texts, his poems [*Ozone Journal*] offer a mournful silence in the face of these social upheavals, and their aftermath, that is only possible within the realm of art. Readers will find both texts equally necessary and equally moving.”

(Kristina Marie Darling *Colorado Review*)

“[*Ozone Journal*] is a mix of intense sensory, even sensual, experience and cerebral force, the verse both meditative and urgent. Balakian’s long lines pick up and draw out thoughts, clauses, notes, in the rhythms of exploratory prose, then snap back at unexpected line-breaks, maintaining a gut-level as well as an intellectual tension.”

(Jamie Osborne *PN Review*)

“Few American poets of the boomer generation have explored the interstices of public and personal history as deeply and urgently as has Balakian, and his significance as a poet of social consciousness is complemented by his work in other genres.”

(David Wojahn *Tikkun*)

“In his new book, *Ozone Journal*, Balakian masterfully does the things nobody else does—derange history into poetry, make poetry painting, make painting culture, make culture living—and with a historical depth that finds the right experience in language.”

(Bruce Smith, author of *Devotions*)

#### About the Author

**Peter Balakian** is the Donald M. and Constance H. Rebar Professor in Humanities and professor of English at Colgate University. He is the author of seven books of poems, most recently of *Ziggurat* and *June-tree: New and Selected Poems, 1974–2000*. He is also the author of *The Burning Tigris: The Armenian Genocide*

*and America's Response*, a *New York Times* best seller, and *Black Dog of Fate*, a memoir. A new collection of essays, *Vise and Shadow*, is also available this spring from the University of Chicago Press.

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