MODERN ARMENIAN DRAMA

AN ANTHOLOGY

EDITED BY
NISHAN PARLAKIAN
S. PETER COWE

Scene from G. Sundukian's *Pepo*. Diocese of the Armenian Church of America Players (1975). Director, N. Parlakian; (left) as Pepo, G. Achian and as Giko, S. Kilerciyan.

MODERN ARMENIAN DRAMA

AN ANTHOLOGY

EDITED BY
NISHAN PARLAKIAN
S. PETER COWE

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS
NEW YORK

THIS PUBLICATION WAS MADE POSSIBLE BY A GENEROUS GRANT FROM THE DOLORES ZOHRAB LIEBMANN FUND.

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS WISHES TO EXPRESS ITS APPRECIATION FOR ASSISTANCE GIVEN BY THE PUSHKIN FUND TOWARD THE COST OF PUBLISHING THIS BOOK.

Columbia University Press
Publishers Since 1893
New York Chichester, West Sussex

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Modern Armenian drama : an anthology / edited by Nishan Parlakian and S. Peter Cowe.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 0-231-11630-6 (cloth)
1. Armenian drama—19th century—Translations into English. 2. Armenian drama—20th century—Translations into English. I. Parlakian, Nishan, 1925– II. Cowe, S. Peter.

PK8831.E5 M6 2000
891'.992508—dc21

00-043162

Casebound editions of Columbia University Press books are printed on permanent and durable acid-free paper.

CONTENTS

PREFACE

By Armenian drama this anthology understands that body of plays originally composed in the Armenian language, and hence it excludes works in other languages written by playwrights of Armenian descent. The selections for this volume were arrived at in consultation with theater critics Professors Levon Hakhverdyan and Henrik Hovhannisyan of the Institute of Fine Arts in Erevan and in light of the judgment of its editors, who had experienced the dramas by reading, viewing, or staging them in both Armenia and the United States. The two interlocking principles that have guided the present choices are, first, the establishment of modern professional theater companies in the 1860s and the continuing popularity of plays within that repertory up to the present. The seven plays published in this collection span the years 1871 to 1992. The first four emanate from the rapid development of the pre-Soviet Armenian stage, and the next two represent the early and later phases of the Soviet period. The final item exemplifies the current era of transition to democracy and a market economy being charted by the post-Soviet Armenian republic. All but one of these pieces was written expressly for theatrical performance. Though Baronian's *Medzabadiw muratsganner* [Honorable beggars] appeared in novel form, the portions in dialogue outweighed the narrative frame, so that soon after its author's death the work was readily adapted for the stage, where it has enjoyed widespread success ever since.

The translation process, of necessity, involves a creative tension between the idiom of the original and target languages. The plays comprising this anthology present a particular challenge in that they span a wide diversity of linguistic levels. The register of Demirchyan's farcical *Nazar the Brave*, for example, is obviously slangy and colloquial, whereas that of *Ancient Gods* is elevated for the most part. In others, such as *For the Sake of Honor*, all the characters possess their own idiolect, depending on their personality traits. Often the unity of the spirit and the letter innate in the original cannot be re-created in the transfer, and hence the translator must devise some compromise to cope with this disjunction. In the present collection every attempt has been made to remain as faithful as possible to the thought of the original, and so we have often been constrained to recast its form. On occasion, when the sociopolitical and cultural gap between a play's Armenian ambience and that of projected English readers demanded it, the editors had recourse to adaptation of the original scripts. Humor being one of the great human imponderables, not all jokes in Armenian are funny in English. Roman transliterations of Armenian terms follow a modified version of the system employed by the *Journal of the Society for Armenian Studies* obviating the use of diacriticals, as laid out in the equivalency table at the end of the volume.

One of the goals behind the present endeavor has been to make available for performance in English representative plays of the Armenian repertoire that should appeal to theatrical groups of all levels. Consequently the editors considered it appropriate to insert supplemental stage directions in square brackets in an effort to facilitate readers' visualization and for assistance in stage production.

It is our pleasant obligation to acknowledge the kind permission of the playwrights Perch Zeytuntsyan and Anahit Aghasaryan for their works to be translated and the valuable comments of Professor Kevork Bardjakian of the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, at the project's initial stage. Aris G. Sevag and Aram Arkun of the Zohrab Information Center, New York, provided bibliographical assistance, and Dr. Nona Manoukian shared her linguistic expertise in certain nuances of translation. Our thanks go as well to the faculty of St. Nersess Armenian Theological Seminary, New Rochelle, for their hospitality and the use of their computer resources. John Taveras, computer expert at John Jay College of the City University of New York, also offered important advice. Archbishop Torkom Manoogian, formerly primate of the Eastern Diocese of the Armenian Church of America and currently Patriarch of Jerusalem, is to be credited for having created an interest in staging Armenian drama in the 1970s and 1980s, which has borne fruit in this volume. The editors express their appreciation for a grant from the Dolores Zohrab Liebmann Fund, represented by co-trustee Suren D. Fesjian, to facilitate publication and for the interest of Ms. Jennifer Crewe of Columbia University Press. Lastly, the editors would like to express their thanks for the patience and generosity of time lent to this effort by Anahit Tutunjian and Florence Parlakian.

INTRODUCTION

Armenian literature arguably has one of the longest and most varied dramatic traditions of Eurasia, though it has not been continuous. By its nature, drama, in contrast to poetry, is an urban art dependent on the institution of a theater and associated groups of actors, as well as the existence of a sizable and relatively sophisticated audience. For Armenian theater, these conditions were met by the cities of Constantinople, capital of the Ottoman Empire, and Tiflis, administrative center of the Russian viceroyalty of Transcaucasia. By the second half of the nineteenth century both possessed large Armenian communities with a burgeoning middle class, developed educational system, and significant socioeconomic and cultural contacts with Western Europe.

Similar conditions prevailed in Armenia during the Roman period, which witnessed a significant degree of urban construction. Some of these cities were equipped with theaters, for example, Artashat, capital of King Artashes I (188–c.160 B.C.), and Tigranocerta, capital of Tigran the Great (95–56/5 B.C.). The historian Dio Cassius records a memorable performance of Euripides' *Bacchae* in 53 B.C., in which the skull employed at Agave's dramatic entrance with her son's head was that of the Roman general Crassus. The production was overseen by King Artawazd II (55–34 B.C.), who also composed tragedies in Greek, which were valued by the writer Plutarch (A.D. 50–125) but have not survived.[1]