

Matthias Bjørnlund, historian and archival researcher specializing in the Armenian genocide and related issues, author of a Danish monograph on the Armenian genocide. He was lecturer at the Danish Institute for Study abroad in Copenhagen until 2014 and is currently working on a couple of books. 2015 he will be teaching a course on the Armenian genocide at an open university. He is co-editor of www.armenocide.net.

Iben Hendel Philipsen, bi-lingual Danish and English, professional translator and owner of IPWords with a Master of Arts in English/Postcolonial Studies from the University of Copenhagen (2014), prior to which she worked as an actor and director for 17 years.

SORROW IS TURNED TO JOY: A PLAY ABOUT THE 1909 ADANA MASSACRES, STAGED BY ARMENIAN GENOCIDE SURVIVORS IN GREECE'

Matthias Bjørnlund & Iben Hendel Philipsen

Abstract: In April 1924, a group of Armenian women genocide survivors in the care of a Danish missionary organization in Thessaloniki staged a play; Sorrow is Turned to Joy, based on the 1909 Adana massacres. The article briefly explores the framework and context of the missionary organization, the actors, and the theatrical performance, followed by a translation of the entire play from Danish into English.

Background

The year was 1924. In the Greek city of Thessaloniki (Salonica), the small Danish Evangelical missionary organization *Industrimissionen i Armenien* (The Industrial Mission in Armenia; IM) had established workshops, homes, and educational facilities for Armenian genocide survivors, mainly widows, young women, and children, from their base in the Papafi quarter. The organization was founded in Denmark in the autumn of 1921 under the motto of “*Hjælp til Selvhjælp*” (“Help to Self-Help”), and their first mission field was in Greek-controlled Rodosto (Tekirdag), a city overflowing with tens of thousands of destitute Christian refugees from Asia Minor. According to the memoirs of one of the IM missionaries, Margrethe Jepsen, on their arrival in the spring of 1922, the shores at Rodosto were filled with dead and dying people, mostly women and children, often half-naked and abused, sometimes pregnant from rape and tattooed by the perpetrators.² However, like most other non-Turks and non-Muslims, the IM staff and the Armenians in their care had to relocate head over heels (albeit under the formal protection of British, French, and Italian troops in the region) after only a few months as Kemalist forces took over Eastern Thrace and the city.³

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2. Axel Gram, *Blandt Armeniske Flygtninge i Grækenland. Med Erindringer af den Tidligere Armeniermissionær Margrethe Jepsen*, (Industrimissionen i Grækenland (Dansk Armeniermission i Grækenland), 1953), 13, 17-18. See also *Industrimissionens Blad* 1 4 (December 1922): 49; “City a Mass of Wreckage,” *New York Times*, 15 September 1922; H. L. Larsen, *Et Folk i Nød: Træk af Armeniernes Trængsler* (Aarhus: Industrimissionen i Armenien, 1933), 58; *The Orient*, 9 10 (October 1922): 93-94. On the tattoo issue, see, e.g., the documentary by Suzanne Khardalian, *Grandma’s Tattoos* (Sweden 2011); The Past under Our Skin, “A very wild publication: The slave market news”, <https://thepastunderourskin.wordpress.com/>

3. On the evacuation of Rodosto and the accompanying atrocities, see, e.g., Lysimachos Oeconomos, *The*

Now, two years later, the Industrial Mission was but one of many missionary and relief organizations, from the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) and the Near East Relief (NER) to the High Commissioner of Refugees of the League of Nations, working in Thessaloniki. Like Rodosto, it was a city overflowing with poor, miserable Greek and Armenian refugees from what had now become the Turkish Republic; in addition, it was a city plagued by diseases, including malaria, and it was still partly in ruins after the Balkan Wars and the Great Fire of 1917. To complicate matters further, the local and national authorities had become significantly less welcoming toward the Armenian refugees as Greece was now being flooded with more than one million Greek refugees from Turkey as a result of the League of Nations-orchestrated “population exchange” headed by the Norwegian League commissioner Fridtjof Nansen. As a result, organizations like IM, desperate to find a long-term solution to the problem, came up with more or less realistic ideas about what to do, such as large-scale migration of Armenians to regions and countries like Greek Macedonia, Brazil, Syria, Canada, the Soviet Armenian Republic, and Egypt. Some Armenians supported these ideas, as they feared the last remnants of the nation would disappear, should they be split into small groups all over Greece, while the Greek authorities, on the other hand, generally opposed such ideas as they did not welcome the prospect of larger concentrations of non-Greek populations within their country.⁴

Quite a few of the Western missionaries and relief workers in Thessaloniki and elsewhere in Greece were veterans with experience from working in the Ottoman Empire before and during the Armenian genocide, including the ABCFM missionaries Ruth Parmelee, Bertha Morley, and George E. White, Alma Johansson from the Swedish branch of *Kvindelige Missions Arbejdere* (Women Missionary Workers; KMA), Wilhelmine Grünhagen from the Danish branch of KMA, and Anna Jensen and Jensine Ørtz (Jensine Oerts Peters) from IM, former members of the German missionary organization *Deutsche Hilfsbund* and Danish

Tragedy of the Christian Near East, (London: Anglo-Hellenic League, 1923), 15ff; Ernest Hemingway, “Refugees from Thrace,” *Toronto Daily Star*, 22 November 1922; in Ernest Hemingway, *By-Line Ernest Hemingway: Selected Articles and Dispatches of Four Decades*, ed. William White (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002); “Rodosto Handed Over to Kemalists,” *The West Australian*, 15 November 1922; “Greek Soldiers Mutiny, Many Desertions from Troops at Rodosto Also Reported,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 6 August 1922; “Evacuation of Thrace to be Started Soon. Greeks Will Leave in 3 Stages, a 5-Day Period for Each Being Allowed,” *Cornell Daily Sun*, October 16, 1922; “Allied Troops Patrol Thrace” *The Hutchinson News*, 3 November 1922; “Greek Forces Begin Evacuating Thrace” *New York Times*, 16 October 1922; Panayiotis Diamadis, “Australian Responses to Hellenic Genocide in 1910-1930s with Additional References to Responses to the Assyrian Genocide and to the Shoah,” *Genocide Prevention Now* 11 (2012).

4. *Industrimissionens Blad* 211, 12, 13, 14 (1924): 158, 190-91, 206-07, 237-38; Isabel Kaprielian-Churchill, “Armenian Refugees and Their Entry into Canada, 1919-1930,” *Canadian Historical Review* 71 1 (1990): 90-91. For early U.S. relief efforts in Thessaloniki, Constantinople, etc., see, e.g., Suda Lorena Bane & Ralph Haswell Lutz, *Organization of American Relief in Europe, 1918-1919: Including Negotiations Leading Up to the Establishment of the Office of Director General of Relief at Paris by the Allied and Associated Powers* (Stanford University Press, 1943), 214ff.

KMA, respectively.⁵ Parmelee and Morley still worked for ABCFM,⁶ while Ørtz, who worked as missionary and relief worker in Malatia (Malatya) in the Ottoman Mamouretul-Aziz (Harput/Kharpert) province until 1914, founded IM in 1921, as she was unable to continue her work in the field for KMA.⁷ Many of these individuals and organizations worked together in the face of this massive humanitarian crisis; the Industrial Mission, for instance, cooperated with the Greek Red Cross and the League of Nations, and they received financial as well as material aid from KMA, the Greek government, and private donors like the Danish count Frederik Holstein.⁸

Aside from Jensine Ørtz, Margrethe Jepsen, Anna Jensen, and the missionary couple Andreas and Karen Hansen, during the early years, the IM staff also included a number of Armenians, among them the teachers Nevart, Takuhi Minasian, and Baron Hagop as well as the Protestant pastor (*Badveli*) Sarkis Kisilian (Kizilian; Keselian). Furthermore, the organization cooperated with local Protestant and Apostolic (Gregorian) Armenian leaders. The IM facilities were modest, usually located in cheap, functional barracks or tents in various quarters and refugee camps in and around Thessaloniki, including the Venizelos Camp, Tomba, Adabassartar, Kalamaria, and Tiniki Mahali (Tin Town; Tin Neighborhood), where large empty kerosene tin cans had been flattened and used as walls and roofs for makeshift houses for homeless Christian refugees from Turkey.⁹ The Industrial Mission's activities included micro-

5. See, e.g., Matthias Bjørnlund, *Det Armenske Folkedrab fra Begyndelsen til Enden* (Copenhagen: Kristeligt Dagblads forlag, 2013), 257; Jensine Ørtz, *Armeniske Martyrer*, KMA Pamflet Nr. 102, København 1917; Jensine Oertz Peters (Jensine Ørtz), *Tests and Triumphs of Armenians in Turkey and Macedonia* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1940); <http://www.aga-online.org/texts/malatia.php?locale=de>; <http://www.imprescriptible.fr/rhac/tome2/p4ch1>; Alma Johansson, *Ett folk i landsflykt: Ett år ur armeniernes historia* (Stockholm: KMA, 1930); *7 Gamle Koner* (Lemvig 1927); H. L. Larsen, *Blodets og Taarernes Land i Europa. En Orientrejse 1922* (Industrimissionen i Armenien, 1922); John O. Latrides, "Missionary Educators and the Asia Minor Disaster: Anatolia College's Move to Greece," *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 4 2 (October 1986): 143-57.

6. See, e.g., Isabel B. Rose, *Great Little Greece* (Boston, MA: American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, 1931), 8-11; Ruth A. Parmelee, "Meeting Salonica's Needs," *The Life Boat* 28 7, (July 1925): 199-201; Ruth A. Parmelee, *A Pioneer in the Euphrates Valley* (Princeton: Gomidas Institute, 2002 (1967)); Abraham D. Krikorian & Eugene L. Taylor, "Finding a Photograph for a Caption: Dr. Ruth A. Parmelee's Comments on some Euphrates (Yeprad) College Professors and their Fate during the Armenian Genocide", *Armenian News Networks/Groong*, 27 June 2011, <http://www.groong.com/orig/ak-20110627.html#sdendnotelsym>; Esther Pohl Lovejoy, *Certain Samaritans* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1933 (1927)), passim; "Asserts Atrocities Continue in Smyrna. Dr. Esther Lovejoy Describes Systematic Robbery and Outrages by Troops," *New York Times*, 3 October 1922; Bertha B. Morley, *Marsovan 1915: The Diaries of Bertha Morley* (Ann Arbor, MI.: Gomidas Institute, 2000).

7. In 1908, Danish-German missionary Anna Jensen from Frankfurt am Main went with Wilhelmine Grünhagen to Mezreh, where she worked at an orphanage. In 1915-1916 she worked at an Ottoman field hospital in Skutari near Constantinople (today the Üsküdar quarter in Istanbul), then, in 1916-1917, she worked as a nurse treating Armenian orphans in Aleppo. After the Armistice she went to the Ottoman Armenian provinces until she was expelled along with most other Western missionaries and relief workers in 1919.

8. See, e.g., H. L. Larsen, *Blodets og Taarernes Land i Europa. En Orientrejse 1922*, passim.

9. Tiniki Mahali (Teneke Mahalle) is a Turkish (in Ottoman as well as modern Turkish) term that was probably brought to Thessaloniki by Turkish-speaking Greek refugees. We thank Ugur Ümit Üngör, Amsterdam, and Stavros Terry Stavridis, Wapato, Washington, for this piece of information.

loans offered to Armenian entrepreneurs who wanted to start a small business like a bakery or a shop; distributing bibles in Armenian; running workshops for Armenian women and men to create jobs and produce handicrafts to be sold at bazaars in Denmark; providing homes for the old and the sick; and running a school for boys and girls in grades one to three. All in all some 200-500 survivors of the Armenian genocide and Kemalist persecution were housed, financed, employed, and/or educated by the organization at any given time from the early 1920s.

One of the IM homes in Thessaloniki, the so-called Mothers' Home, was reserved specifically for Armenian refugee women and girls from the Smyrna (Izmir) region who had just arrived in the city, pregnant from being raped by Turkish soldiers in their homeland, and in 1922-23 similar homes were run by the organization in Athens and Dionysi.¹⁰ It was part of a conscious effort by the Industrial Mission to provide shelter and education for these often marginalized, traumatized, and stigmatized women and their children, although they were to be kept in isolation from those who did not suffer a similar fate – as Jensine Ørtz and the head of the board of directors, provost Hans Lauritz Larsen, wrote in a direct address to their members and sponsors in *Industrimissionens Blad*, the IM monthly journal:

[Ørtz:] What do you think we should do? There are very many young women, even girls as young as 13-14 years of age, who have been in the hands of the Turks, and they are now to become mothers in a few months. I don't believe we can mix these girls with our young girls from Rodosto who have avoided such a fate. But what do you think? [Larsen:] I don't believe we can have them living and working together either. But what about those poor girls who have been ravaged and then thrown out to be picked up by their loved ones or by other merciful persons, those who now await such a sad fate? What do you, dear friends, think we should do with those poor youngsters? If there was money for a special home for them, then, by the grace of God, there would also be time to do the deed of the Good Samaritan to those who literally fell amongst thieves.¹¹

A typical example of the massive trauma, loss, and seemingly endless displacement that such refugees in Greece had to suffer is provided by Mariam Dilsisian, daughter of a rich Armenian merchant from Eskishehir (Eskisehir; Eski Shehir): In 1915 she was deported through Konya, Tarsus, Adana, and Aleppo towards Der Zor, where she witnessed the mass murder by fire of Armenian boys. She escaped to the mountains and was subsequently sheltered by an Arab Christian. Then, when it was decreed that anyone hiding Armenians would be executed, she was expelled from that household and forcibly married to a Turkish officer. She escaped once more and was sent by British soldiers to safety in Port Said in Egypt. From there she returned to Eskishehir after the end of the World War, only to be driven out yet again when the Kemalists took over the town.¹²

10. H. L. Larsen, *Et Folk i Nød: Træk af Armeniernes Trængsler*, 61.

11. *Industrimissionens Blad* 1 4 (1922): 49. The other members of the IM board were Nielsen Vrads, Kantor Bech Nielsen, and office manager Alfred Hansen: *Industrimissionen i Armenien (Hjælp til Selvhjælp). Bestyrelsens Udførlige Redegørelse af Sagen og Referat fra Mødet i Odense den 1. marts 1927* (Holbæk, 1927), 5. IM still exists and is now called *Dansk Armeniermission*: see www.armenien.dk.

12. H. L. Larsen, *Falden Blandt Røvere: Armenierne paa Apostelen Paulus Veje. En Orientrejse 1924* (Århus: Industrimissionen i Armenien, 1924), 42-49.

The play

Perhaps some of the Armenian women genocide survivors who performed and most likely wrote or co-wrote the play about the 1909 Adana massacres, a play transcribed and translated in full below, came from the Mothers' Home.¹³ What is certain, however, is that the actors drew on their own experiences from before, during, and after the genocide to create an artistic rendering of real events – as Hans Lauritz Larsen writes in his short introduction to the play (which he transcribed in full in Danish in a 1924 book about his inspection tour to Thessaloniki):

It should not be forgotten what was the cause [of the present situation for the Armenians in Thessaloniki]. – The past, which is the reason for all the suffering, was vividly described to us by our young girls who joyfully greeted us at our workshops, and the following lines are thus meant to describe the past, the conditions they endured when they were persecuted by the Turks. It should be noted that what is presented here as a drama is not made up or fiction; it is the bitter reality, retold by those who lived through it, and I can add that there wasn't a dry eye in the audience as these aspects from the times of trouble were retold in the vivid words of the Orientals.¹⁴

Like the sermon by Thessaloniki's Armenian bishop featured below, the play was most likely translated from Armenian into Danish by Jensine Ørtz, who spoke and read Armenian fluently. According to Larsen, the title of the play is *Sorrow is Turned to Joy*, a slight paraphrase of a quote from the New Testament, John 16:20, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, that ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy." It is arguably an early (though not the first)¹⁵ recorded instance of an Armenian theatrical play with a genocide theme. Because although the events described in the play take place shortly after – and revolve around – the massacres of some 20-30.000 Armenians in and around Adana in 1909,¹⁶ the cast of women genocide survivors

13. One should perhaps also consider the less likely possibility that the play could in fact be based on or simply be an earlier, unknown play that could have been written in the immediate aftermath of the Adana massacres.

14. Larsen, 1924, 29.

15. As one of the anonymous reviewers of the article has kindly pointed out, Suren Partevian (Bartevian) wrote fiction, including plays, with a genocide theme as early as during the First World War. The writings on the Cilician/Adana massacres and related issues by Zapel Esaian (Zabel Essaian/Yesayian) are also noteworthy. See, e.g., Marc Nichanian, "Testimony: From Document to Monument," in *The Armenian Genocide: Cultural and Ethical Legacies*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian, 51-52 (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2007); *Notable Women in Modern Armenian Drama: An Anthology*, ed. Nishan Parlakian (Belmont, MA: The Armenian Heritage Press, 2009); Rubina Perroomian, "Tears and Laughter of Cilician Armenia: Literary Representations of Destruction and Revival, 1909-1918," in *Armenian Cilicia*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian & Simon Payaslian, 392ff (Mazda Publishers, 2008); Rubina Perroomian, *Literary Responses to Catastrophe: A Comparison of the Armenian and Jewish Experiences* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1993), 89ff; "Armenian Women Victims of Genocide," in *Women and War: A Historical Encyclopedia from Antiquity to the Present*, vol. 1, ed. Bernard A. Cook, 29-31 (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2006).

16. Matthias Bjørnlund, "Adana and Beyond: Revolution and Massacre in the Ottoman Empire Seen Through Danish Eyes, 1908/9," *Haigazian Armenological Review* 30 (2010): 125-56; Bedros Der Matossian, "From Bloodless Revolution to Bloody Counterrevolution: The Adana Massacres of 1909," *Genocide Studies & Prevention* 6 2 (2011): 152-73; Helen Davenport Gibbons, *The Red Rugs of Tarsus: A Woman's Record of the Armenian Massacre of 1909* (New York: The Century Co., 1917); Duckett

clearly, as pointed out by Larsen in the above quote, also draw on their experiences from 1915 onwards when performing (and, perhaps, writing) the play. Thus the play can be said to be representative of the sufferings of all Armenians and other victim groups during the final decades of the Ottoman Empire and the creation of the Turkish republic, especially the women and children.

This highly unusual theatrical performance was staged in the Industrial Mission's meeting hall in Thessaloniki in April 1924. Here, the IM field staff and a group of Armenians in their care entertained a delegation from the organization's board of directors in Denmark, among them Hans Lauritz Larsen and Rev. Johan Nielsen-Vrads.¹⁷ Besides inspecting all areas of IM's work in the city, visiting the ABCFM and League of Nations operations for inspiration, and attending the play as guests of honor, the two Protestant clergymen had both accepted an invitation to preach at an ecumenical April 24 genocide commemoration service in the Apostolic church in Thessaloniki, a service led by bishop Ejervanth (Yervand).¹⁸ In his own closing address to the large crowd of Apostolic, Protestant, and Catholic Armenians who filled the church and its premises, the bishop, like the women in the play, tried to make sense of the overwhelming amount of suffering that had befallen the Armenians before, during and after the genocide:

[...] Never before has a nation suffered what we have suffered. [...]. We waited for freedom and light through dark times, but world politics were always against us. We sat with shaking hands, but no one came to our rescue. Our eyes were directed towards the West, and yet we are here. We made many mistakes, but let it be our goal to stay in the true light and hurry towards the true goal. And when we commemorate our victims today, we commemorate that never before have such abuse and such martyrs been seen. But we will see God's guiding hand during these hard times. We witnessed our loved ones and our young fall along the road, and then we thought of our nation's future. The youth were like the rising sun. Our women, our young girls, sacred in our families, were trampled underfoot; we had to endure seeing them taken away by strangers. Many passed out and fell before they went to other men; many still live a hopeless life in the mountains, and we were not able to set our young women free. If we think about this we lose all hope. Yet, we will not forget that God can bring the light. [...]¹⁹

In his sermon, the bishop, who had experienced persecution and imprisonment himself in Adrianople (Edirne) during the war years, addressed not only the Armenian genocide and the general theological and philosophical problem of evil. He also

Z. Ferriman, *The Young Turks and the Truth about the Holocaust at Adana in Asia Minor during April, 1909* (London, 1913).

17. Larsen was in a way also a veteran when it came to backing persecuted Armenians, as he among other things had served as an interpreter for the German Rev. Johannes Lohmann when he toured Denmark and Sweden shortly after the 1890s Abdülhamid II massacres to raise awareness and generate support. Furthermore, the well-educated and well-travelled clergyman was also editor of the newspaper *Kristeligt Folkeblad*, member of the board of directors of an orphanage in Jerusalem, etc.

18. According to the Julian calendar that was still in use, April 24 would be April 11. We thank Abraham D. Krikorian and Eugene L. Taylor for this observation.

19. H. L. Larsen, 1924, 76. On the April 24 commemoration in 1923, see *Industrimissionens Blad* 2 7 (1923): 93-94.

specifically, and with considerable empathy, addressed a subject that is often taboo among victim groups after genocide: the perpetrators' large-scale and systematic abuse of women and children.²⁰ Some of the Armenian women themselves also tried to address this difficult subject in the refugee camps in Thessaloniki, but, as Larsen describes it, when they got to the part where the Turks raped the young girls, they all broke down crying.²¹ So, how to speak about the unspeakable?

As always, art is one possible answer, a way to address both the specific and universal aspects of suffering, and perhaps also to provide some amount of sorely needed therapeutic relief, meaning, and hope for the future.²² From the ancient Greeks, for whom tragedy

20. Matthias Bjørnlund, "A Fate Worse than Dying': Sexual Violence during the Armenian Genocide," in *Brutality and Desire: War and Sexuality in Europe's Twentieth Century*, ed. Dagmar Herzog, 16-58 (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Vahé Tachjian, "Gender, nationalism, exclusion: the reintegration process of female survivors of the Armenian genocide," *Nations and Nationalism* 15 1 (2009): 60-80; Ugur Ümit Üngör, "Orphans, Converts, and Prostitutes: Social Consequences of War and Persecution in the Ottoman Empire, 1914-1923," *War in History* 19 2 (2012): 173-92; Lerna Ekmekcioglu, "A Climate for Abduction, A Climate for Redemption: The Politics of Inclusion during and after the Armenian Genocide," *Comparative Studies in Society & History* 55 3 (2013): 522-53; Taner Akcam, Dicle Akar Bilgin & Matthias Bjørnlund, *The League of Nations in Aleppo: Armenian Women and Children Survivors 1921-1927* (2014), <http://www.armenocide.net/armenocide/orphan-children.nsf!OpenDatabase>

21. H. L. Larsen, 1924, 28.

22. See, e.g., *The Theatre of Genocide: Four Plays about Mass Murder in Rwanda, Bosnia, Cambodia, and Armenia*, ed. Robert Skloot (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008); *The Theatre of the Holocaust*, ed. Robert Skloot, vol. I-II (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982 & 1999); Nishan Parlakian, *Contemporary Armenian American Drama: An Anthology of Ancestral Voices* (Columbia University Press, 2004); Nishan Parlakian & S. Peter Cowe, *Modern Armenian Drama: An Anthology* (Columbia University Press, 2001); Gene A. Plunka, *Holocaust Drama: The Theater of Atrocity* (Cambridge University Press, 2009); Marie-Chantal Kalisa, "Theatre and the Rwandan Genocide," *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice* 18 4 (2006): 515-21; Amanda Breed, *Theatre for Reconciliation in Post-Genocide Rwanda* (University of Manchester, 2009); Karen Malpede, "Thoughts on a Theater of Witness and Excerpts from Two Plays of Witness: *Better People*, *The Beekeeper's Daughter*," in *Genocide, War, and Human Survival*, ed. Charles B. Strozier & Michael Flynn (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), 231-42; www.holocausttheaterarchive.org, www.armeniandrama.org. Post-WWII plays more or less about the Armenian genocide also include, in no particular order, *Night Over Erzinga: An Armenian Family's Story of Survival and Reconciliation* by Adriana Sevahn Nichols (2011), see also <http://www.illumemag.com/zine/articleDetail.php?The-Theatre-of-Armenian-Genocide-13840>; *Forty* by Leonora Rianda, (2014/2015); *Das Märchen vom letzten Gedanken* by Edgar Hilsenrath, (2014 (1989)), *Upstanders* by Teresa Docherty et al. (2008); Joyce Van Dyke, *Deported / a dream play* by Joyce Van Dyke, 2012; *Forgotten Bread* by Sevan Kaloustian Green (2010); *Bleach* by Leah Ryan (1999); *Brainpeople* by Jose Rivera (2010); *Protest* by Aram Kouyoumdjian (2005); *Dear Armen* by Kamee Abrahamian, Tiffany Golarz & Lee Williams Boudakian, 2013; *Silence* by Herand M. Markarian, 2012; *Flesh and Tenderness* by Kristen Lazarian, 2008; *Red Dog Howls* by Alexander Dinelarlis, 2012; *On the Couch with Nora Armani* by Nora Armeni, 2003; *Nine Armenians* by Leslie Ayvazian, 2013; *Nicht ich bin der Mörder, sondern er: Der Prozess Talaat Pascha/The Talaat Pasha Trial – A Theatre Project for Intercultural Studies* by Heinz Böke et al., 2010; *Soujourn at Ararat* by Nora Armani & Gerald Papisian, 1986; *State of Denial* by Rahul Varma, 2012; *Abaga* by Torange Yeghiazarian, 2001; *Komitas* by Lilly Thomassian, 2012; *The 40 Days of Musa Dagh* adapted for theatre by Melik Kocharyan, 1961 (1933); *I Wish I Die Singing* by Neil McPherson, 2005; *Great Silence* by Berj Zeytuntsian, 2009; *Beast on the Moon* by Richard Kalinoski, 1995; *FOUND* by Anoush Baghdassarian, 2014; and *Bitlis* by William Saroian, 1975. In the 1930s, Armenian school children and teachers in Thessaloniki staged a play, *The Refugees*, a tragic story about a family of genocide survivors; furthermore, several playwrights

equaled catharsis, an emotional cleansing that would bring about renewal and restoration, to modern psychological dramas, theatre has been used as a means of “living out” and conveying complex emotional experiences, transcending the “mere” telling of stories as it engages our entire physical presence simply by our occupying the same space as the actors on the stage.²³ And this is the avenue chosen by the group of Armenian women performing *Sorrow is Turned to Joy*, a play that appears to have been written specifically for the visit of the delegation from the Danish Evangelical donor organization. While the play to the authors of this article seems to contain elements of Christian drama – with the Biblical imagery and the strong themes of suffering, sacrifice, death, and resurrection that one finds in medieval Mystery and Morality Plays as well as in Easter Drama and Passion Plays²⁴ – it also fits several of the elements used today to define the modern “theatre of genocide”:

Like all engaged art, [the theatre of genocide] seeks to comment on and influence public discourse through various strategies: by the description of the victims’ suffering and the assertion of their essential worthiness, the discussion of the perpetrators’ motivation, the presentation of images of healing and compassion, the evocation of empathy, the questioning of the proper use of historical knowledge, and even the expansion and dissemination of what the critic Susan Sontag called a “collective instruction” of the public.²⁵

It is impossible (for us) to detach the story from the fact that those who (if not wrote it then) performed in it are the survivors of the very atrocities that are related in the play. This alone makes it utterly impossible to judge the play purely as a work of art. And yet it must be noted that they display a distinct awareness and knowledge of theatrical text. They

in Soviet Armenia dealt with the genocide, especially from the 1960s: personal communication with Suzanne Khardalian, Stockholm, Sweden, November 2013. For a brief introduction to the Armenian influence on Ottoman/Turkish theatre, see http://www.genocide-museum.am/eng/g_brief_06.php. See also Ali Budak, “The Contributions of the Armenians Over the Constitution of A New Social Life and Literature in the 19th Century,” *Ozean Journal of Social Sciences* 1 1 (2008): 65-74; Eden Naby, “Theater, Language and Inter-Ethnic Exchange: Assyrian Performance before World War I,” *Iranian Studies* 40 4 (2007): 501-10; Chrysothemis Stamatopoulou-Vasilakou, “Greek Theater in Southeastern Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean from 1810 to 1961,” *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 25 (2007): 267-84; Mara Yanni, “Shakespeare and the Audiences of the Greek Traveling Actors,” in *Shakespeare Worldwide and the Idea of an Audience*, ed. Tina Krontiris & Jyotsna Singh (Thessaloniki: Aristotle University, 2007), 175-92; Cora Skylstad, *Acting the Nation: women on the stage and in the audience of theatre in the late Ottoman empire and early Turkish republic*, MA thesis (University of Oslo, 2010); Olga Borovaya, *Modern Ladino Culture: press, belles-lettres, and theatre in the late Ottoman Empire* (Indiana University Press, 2012). Armenian theatre was also performed in places such as the Caucasus (e.g., in Tbilisi/Tiflis, Yerevan, and Baku, then part of the Russian Empire) and in Persia/Iran. See, e.g., the “Armen Ohanian” entry here: <http://armenianwomen.wordpress.com/>

23. See, e.g., Charles B. Daniels & Sam Scully, “Pity, Fear, and Catharsis in Aristotle’s Poetics,” *Noûs* 26 2 (1992): 204-17; Muriel Mirak-Weissbach, “Power of Art to Move Mind and Heart: Dink Remembered in Frankfurt,” *The Armenian Mirror-Spectator*, 6 February 2014. See also, more generally, Richard Kearney, “Narrating Pain: The Power of Catharsis,” *Paragraph* 30 1 (2007): 51-66; <http://chgs.umn.edu/museum/index.html>.

24. See, e.g., *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 8, ed. Leeds Barroll (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1996), 54; Francis Edwards, *Ritual and Drama: The Medieval Theatre* (James Clarke & Co., 1976), 36ff.

25. Skloot, red., 2008, 5.

adhere to a classic dramaturgy of beginning, middle, turning point, and end, and include classic ploys such as female characters dressing up as young men in order to survive, a grip perhaps made most famous by William Shakespeare, and once the true identity of these young women is revealed some sort of order is restored.²⁶ Moreover, while they refrain from fleshing out the atrocities, there is a remarkable lack of sentimentality in the young “shepherd’s” recounting of what was done to the young girls when they were taken to the mountains. It is almost matter of factly described, and as such becomes very powerful as it also suggests a widespread knowledge of what actually went on, of how horror and endurance of horror become the normal state of affairs during times of massacre. The play may not exactly promise a happy ending – there seems to have been too much death and misery for that – but, as the title suggests, the message is that sorrow can still be turned to joy through shared pain and through reuniting with relatives who were believed to be lost. Thus at least small parts of a world destroyed, the world of the Ottoman Armenians, can be restored. So, whatever one might think of the purely artistic quality of the play, it is a strong testament to the courage and survival instinct of some of those who were subjected to almost unspeakable atrocities.

What follows below is a complete translation, as literal as possible (including the perhaps sometimes peculiar spelling of Armenian names and phrases), of the play as it appears in Larsen’s 1924 book, the only known source. It is a haunting story, realistic as well as stylized; a story both modern and ancient, surreal and grotesque, not unlike the collection of poetry by Siamanto, *Bloody News from My Friend*, which also revolves around the Adana massacres.²⁷ It is a story of love, death, loss, mourning, faith, despair, and redemption, of sacrifice, madness, suicide, and hope against hope, of massacre as a force of nature, of a common bond created through suffering, and of attaining the power “to stand up to tell the world what happened,” as it is put. The play takes place somewhere in the killing fields, probably in the Taurus Mountains outside Adana, shortly after the massacres in 1909.

Sorrow is Turned to Joy

[Introductory note by Larsen or, more likely, by the unknown writer(s) of the play]: *These women, who have lost everything, including their children, meet and comfort each other.*

26. Shakespeare’s so-called “Transvestite Plays” include *Twelfth Night*, *As You Like It*, and *The Merchant of Venice*. It should be noted that Armenian men and boys frequently dressed up as girls or women in order to survive on the death marches during the Armenian genocide, while girls and women would seek ways to make themselves less attractive to avoid sexual abuse (see Bjørnlund, 2009, *passim*), and it seems likely that Armenian girls and women would on occasion (i.e., when such a survival strategy would appear to have a chance of succeeding, or when there simply was no other alternative) dress up as boys to avoid rape or forced marriage, as suggested in the play.

27. Siamanto (Atom Yarjanian), *Bloody News from My Friend*, translated by Peter Balakian & Nevart Yaghlian (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996). Artistic interpretations of/reactions to the Adana massacres also include a Requiem Mass composed by K. Kalfaian (1913), as well as poetry and writings by Ruben Sevak (Rupen Sevag Tchilinguirian) and Taniel Varoujan, both of whom were arrested, tortured, and murdered like Siamanto and hundreds of others in connection with the round-up of Ottoman Armenian intellectuals and other community leaders on April 24, 1915. See, e.g., Mikayel Shamtanchian, *The Fatal Night: An Eyewitness Account of the Extermination of Armenian Intellectuals in 1915*, translated by Ishkhan Jinbashian (Studio City, California: Manjikian Publications, 2007).

Araksi: Today is Easter for those with a happy heart, but to me and my fellow sufferers it is a day of sorrow. We mothers do not know where our children are or how they have died. Oh God, my God, how is it possible to go through all this without dying. But we Armenians are like the burning bush in the desert, it burns and burns, but is not consumed by the flames. Oh God, my God, when will you let me meet my death as a wonderful release from this life? But, alas! I am alive, and like other mothers I will go to the mountains and search for the bones of my children. Oh Heaven, will I be happy even if I find the bones of my big girl? Oh, my home, when I look upon your white walls it is as if they have big red stripes of blood, and there, on the floor, she took her first steps and called for me with her sweet babbling. – And the last day she was here she left home saying, “Mother, I’m going to school!”, and never, ever did she come back. – Oh, my girl, where are you, you are impossible for me to find.

Vartuhi: Araksi, sister! Why do you not come with us to the graveyard? By letting our tears flow we find comfort. When the tears truly flow it is as if the pain goes numb.

Manik: Yes, we are at the graveyard, but it is not like any other, because our graveyard lies in the vast fields, mountains, and valleys.

Haiganush: Let us go. – It is Easter. Other people celebrate the Resurrection, but we...- Let us seek the bones of our children.

Dikranuhi: We cannot put flowers on their graves. No, let the lilies of the field bloom over their bones, and let other flowers be the incense, the sweet scent that the wind sweeps across their bones, bones that are pale from the sun and the wind.

Araksi: Yes, oh yes, my fellow sufferers, let us go to the mountains. Even if we cannot find their bones our tears will wash the earth that drank their blood.

They all go out searching.

Araksi: Alas, look at all the women here, all with the same aim as us.

Araksi looks for a lonely spot, while the others go to the ravines to search for the bones of their children.

Araksi: Loneliness, loneliness is what I love. Oh God, this life is no longer worth living. Where is my girl, maybe these valleys and mountains have heard her last cry for help, maybe they have heard if she still lives at the mercy of her assailant, or if her corpse was devoured by wild animals or by the birds in the sky. Only you, my God, know! If only I could find her bones I would use them to make a crucifix to remind me each day of Golgotha and the Cross where my innocent savior died. We Christians

are called upon to walk in His footsteps, but alas!, it is so difficult to do. God, you alone can give me the strength to endure this. It is as if everything falls apart, as if I am about to lose my mind. There is this desire, this urge to howl like a wild animal, it is as if it was all a dream, without any connection to reality. Yet you, almighty God, must be part of it all. Oh mountains, do you not hear my crying and moaning, do you not even bother to give me an answer?

The three other women come towards her, and she starts speaking to them.

Araksi: Excuse me, you have probably walked through many valleys and ravines to get here, I wonder if you have come upon skeletons that might look like my daughter's on your journey? Today, I am out looking for her bones.

Arschalusch: Yes, sister, we understand, but do not sit here alone, come with us and we will tell you who we are, and let us try to share each other's pain and forget.

Araksi: Forget.

Hermine: We are three mothers, and like you we are out looking for the bones of our loved ones, we have been wandering around but we found no grave or human bones.

Iskuhi: We have been searching since this morning. It is as if we are lost. It is our destiny to still, still be kept on the grindstone. I am surprised that we are still human, that there is still something left of this perishable body. – We want death, we long for it like a dear visitor, but God does not send us this blessing.

Arschalusch: Oh sister, why are you crying?

Iskuhi: Maybe because we cannot die.

Arschalusch: But do not forget that there is a divine reason for the suffering of us Armenian women. We will encourage each other to endure until the hour of God strikes, and to seek his will in everything. Like you, we all feel that death would be a welcome guest.

Hermine: Oh merciful God in Heaven, how can it be that not one drop of blessed rain falls on our fatally wounded hearts? – As soon as the clouds in the skies of our lives begin to clear and we dream of light for ourselves and our children, once again, you send black, thick clouds with lightning bolts that suddenly strike us.

Iskuhi: What are you doing? We walked together to forget what happened, to comfort each other. It is enough now. Our bodies can take no more. Let us commemorate our dead as those who now stand before

God's throne night and day, and let us thereby also prepare ourselves to become worthy of joining them.

Araksi: Oh, what a strange feeling! I sat alone on the mountain and heard only echoes of my cries. God sent you to me. You found me in one of the most dangerous moments of my life. Our lives are chained together by pain and crying, a third chain is still missing, it is death.

Arschalusch: Come, let us continue walking, just another short stretch before we have searched it all and convinced ourselves that the bones of our loved ones are not here.

Hermine: Yes, come, let us not stand here any longer, - just to find one bone would be enough of a reward for our toils today – let us forget ourselves and search – search.

Iskuhi: Listen, is it not the voice of the shepherd, is he not blowing his shepherd's horn? Let us go to him, he, who wanders around up here every day and talks to his sheep.

The shepherd: Alas, my sheep! You walk around, grazing ever so joyously, not knowing what awaits you. One day you shall die to preserve human lives. Oh my sheep! I do not know whose turn it is tomorrow. Every time I am in town and see sheep and lambs hanging, slaughtered, and see humans with big knives rip and cut them, it is as if I am being whipped with thorns. Oh, how difficult my work is, truly to be a shepherd and yet endure all this. But God, what can I say, it is your will. The animals must be sacrificed to the humans that you love above all. Oh God, you did see my tears yesterday when the beloved little lambs had to adorn the dinner table of a rich person, and there – there the other dear little lambs come to meet me, happy and trusting, and I, I must surrender them to death. – I cannot, – it is not for me, an orphan with a sensitive girl's heart. Even if I fool others with my costume my heart stays the same – it is not a job for me.

Arschalusch: We heard your voice and walked here to ask you: have you seen human bones up here?

Hermine: We have wandered the entire day, back and forth, to find the graves or bones of our loved ones. We wonder if you have seen any such thing. We beg of you to tell us, even if it were to be found in the wolf's lair.

Iskuhi: Noble shepherd! Do not be surprised. We are not the half savages our appearance might indicate, we are mothers, desperate mothers whose loved ones were torn from our embrace. Help us, enlighten us, are there any traces of human corpses or bones here? It is the comfort we went out to find today – the bones of our loved ones.

Araksi: Oh, good shepherd, hurry up, answer our questions, we are so tired, it is impossible for us to stand and to walk. Open your lips and tell us some good news.

The shepherd: May I ask you to sit here on the green grass? It is my living room. – Yes, on the other side, at the foot of the mountain, I will show you a little dirt mound. We were four girls who were only lightly wounded, but we, too, were thrown on the carts with all the other dead or half-dead and driven here. It was around sunset, and we were all unloaded there. They began to throw rocks and dirt on us to cover our small, innocent bodies that were to shape this mound, hidden and silenced to the world, but God gave the four of us the power to stand up to tell the world what happened.

Arschalusch: We do not want to ask much. The wounds in our hearts are so deep and drip with fresh blood. Just tell us where the other three are.

Araksi: How old were they? Are they your size?

The shepherd: Yes, we all went to the same school and we were in the same class. The storm broke out so fast that we did not have time to run back home, so we fled up here where we were discovered and nearly killed. For a while we lived of dirt and grass here, we were afraid of humans, and then we draped ourselves in the shepherd's cloak, trying to live and be useful in this way.

Hermine: That means they are shepherds like you. Where are they now? Can we not get to see them? If you tell us where they are we will never forget your goodness, oh, hurry up – –.

Araksi: If you can help despairing mothers who searched for their children's bones in the mountains, to find their girls alive, you will be the reason we can once again find happiness in this world, something which seems so impossible to us now.

Iskuhi: I am sorry, what school did you go to?

The shepherd: "To Askrinian's school! Oh, if only I, too, could find my mother! Dear Madam, do not think that I did not have a mother. Oh majrik [*mayrik, mother*]! Majrik! My home, my home! I know what it means to have a good home, but I have heard that our whole town has been burnt to ashes and that no one is still alive, and this is why I have given it all up to hide in this shepherd's cloak. Tell me; where are you from, and where do you come from?"

Arschalusch: As you may imagine, we are from a place where life has begun again, where it is not completely extinct. Maybe you can find your father and your mother there.

The shepherd: Quiet, do you hear the singing? It is one of the other shepherds. Wait here a moment, she will be here soon, we often meet here.

Araksi: Oh, what do I hear? The voice of my girl. – My girl, my dear girl! Does your voice come from Heaven? Then I am in Heaven. Paradise is such a wonderful place, no more pain. – – Goodbye, world, I never want to see you again.

Araksi faints.

Araksi: Now I am in Heaven, where no one can take my child from me.

Hermine: Look, look, here is your girl...

Araksi's eyes are closed. She has fallen into Hermine's lap, overcome by joy.

Anik: Oh, what am I seeing? Is it my mother, my mother whom I believed to be dead? Majrik! Majrik! Is it you! – – – Why do you not speak? Do you not know your Anik? Look, look, majrik, it is me that you carried in your arms so that no thorns should pierce me. It is me, a shepherd, a hardened shepherd who has struggled with life, an honest fight to keep my purity and earn my bread. Women, women! Why do you stand so petrified, tell me, is it a vision or is it reality, is it really my mother or is it a spirit from Heaven that has taken her form? But what do I see, tears are rolling down her cheeks ...Mother, will you not say something? ... Could it be a spirit that comes by day and not by night to seek me ...Oh, embrace me, it cannot be an evil spirit who wants to attack me. Mother, why do you not say something?

Iskuhi: Sisters, let us do something to wake her up. By finding out her child is alive her joy made her senseless and powerless.

Arschalusch: “Look, she opens her eyes. Talk. Look. Here is your girl.

Araksi: Yes, you wonderful angels, I know. ...So this is heaven. ...Oh, my girl, we are happy here, we have no fear of death any more, or of separation, eternity is here for us, we cannot be persecuted here. ...Here is paradise ... What peace and what rest ...If I had known this I would have come here sooner ...Oh sisters, why do you cry? Rejoice! You, too, will find your children here ...My sweet girl, how did you die? Who killed you?

Anik: Mother! I am alive, I am not dead. Who says I am dead! I have gone through many hardships, yes, I stood up from the grave, but mother, why do you not say something?

Hermine: Sister, we are still in the world. Your girl is not dead. These are not her dead bones, God let her come back into your arms alive.

Iskuhi: This sister believes that she is in heaven, but let us see what she

will do when she is completely awake. Wake up! Wake up! Sister, it is no dream, it is reality.

Anik: Majrik, majrik! I am with you.

Araksi: Oh, we are still here! What joy, I thought I was up there, that I had died and gone to heaven and found my girl who was dead ... Oh come, let me embrace you, my girl, do not be afraid. I am your mother. Your father is also alive, come, we will go to him.

Anik: Majrik! Is hajrik [*hayrik, father*] really alive ... he lives ...

Araksi: Yes, he lives, and each and every day he earns all the bread we can eat ... Come, let us go! Oh, what will your father say? We have made promises to God so many times, just so that we might find your grave or bones from your body. But how shall I thank you, Lord, for having my living child in my arms? Oh sisters, I am happy now, it only hurts me that you have not found your girls. May God lead your way so that you might also find them, start a home once again, and regain your will to live.

Vartuhi: Look, I have found a bone. Perhaps it is a part of my child's body. Oh, my dear little girl, why do you not answer me? ... Look at the dry bone. I must press it to my chest. What the Turks have completed here in Adana during this spring (1909) is of such a nature that even wild, bloodthirsty animals could not have been more cruel. Oh, my child, my child ... Maybe you look from heaven upon your desperate mother.

Manik: On my way here, I met 3-4 children who told me: "We come from our hiding place to search for our mothers. We have heard that several have risen again; oh, tell us if our mothers are alive ... Do not hide anything from us" – Seeing them made such a deep impression on me that I quickly disappeared to hide my tears from them. Oh, my girl, I wonder if you too wander around, searching for your mother, or if you gaze down on me from heaven.

Siranusch (the shepherd): Oh, what do I see, the woman who speaks is my mother. How shall I identify myself in such a way that she will not react like Anik's mother?, but waiting – I cannot wait either ... Majrik, majrik! It is me, I am not dead! Embrace me, mother! Mother, is father alive? Why are you mute? Show your joy. It is me. Touch me.

Haiganusch: Truly, truly, it is Siranusch. How the shepherd's dress had changed her.

Manik: Oh, my girl, you stand here in front of me like an angel. What a wonder that these eyes of mine really see you alive, it is a miracle, a great miracle of God ... Oh sisters! I wish the same happiness for you. Let us walk around, praying that the almighty God will guide us and

that you may also find your children. Come, my child, I must embrace you again, and soon we shall go home. Father is alive. He is home. Our house was not burned down, come, child, home ...home.

Vartuhi: Tell me, where did you meet the 3-4 little children, maybe one of them could be my child?

Manik: Down there, close to where we split up. Come, it is not night yet.

Araksi: Glory to the Lord who has miraculously granted us our two girls. We hope and pray that God will grant you your children, too. Oh my child, you who grew up raised by a mother's soft hand. Your feet had not seen the sun, and now ...Being a mother is hard for an Armenian woman ...Only you, God, can give us the strength ...Come, child, I will hold you to my heart, the heart that was beating in fear and pain for you, but now it jumps with joy. In my deep sorrow and on my clouded sky, God has let a beautiful rainbow appear. He has not forsaken me after all; he let pretty fresh flowers bloom from my crown of thorns instead. God, perform this great miracle for many Armenian mothers so that sorrow may turn to joy here on earth, and so that our children and we may sparkle like finely cut jewels in your crown.