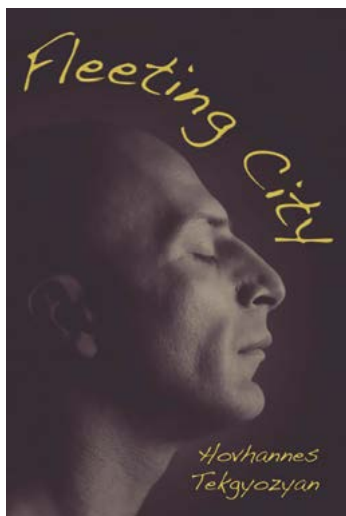
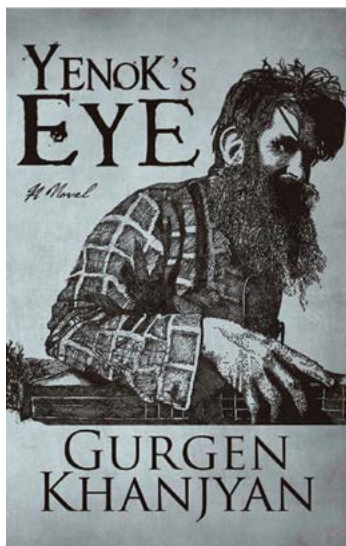


On Starting the 1st Armenian Literary Agency

“... our ultimate goal is to fill the bookshelves of readers all over the world with books by Armenian writers. We’re one step closer to fulfilling that dream.”

—Arevik Ashkharoyan



With passion and perseverance, a small agency is working hard to develop an infrastructure for translation and a global audience for Armenian writers. *By Arevik Ashkharoyan*

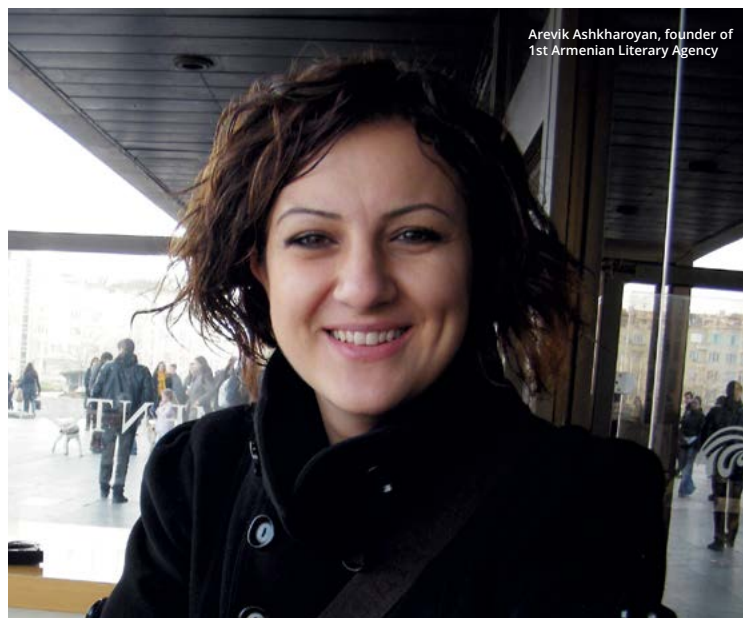
Right before my 30th birthday, I finally decided to quit my job with the intention of starting something of my own. In Armenia, you don't deal with books to earn a good living or, really, to earn anything at all. You do it purely out of love and perhaps a naïve belief in bringing your childhood dreams of a better world to life. Today, it sounds unbelievable that only four years ago I was searching the web to find the definition of the words “literary agent.”

I officially started the 1st Armenian Literary Agency in 2012 with a list of ten contemporary Armenian writers. It is unquestionably a huge responsibility to be not only the first, but also the only one in the field. At my first Frankfurt Book Fair, wearing uncomfortable high-heeled shoes and excessively formal attire, I was challenging publishers with a diverse list of novels by Aram Pachyan, Hovhannes Tekgyozyan, Gurgen Khanjyan, Hrachya Saribekyan, and others.

Now, three years later, we have over 30 Armenian writers on our list, and they represent a wide range of styles and write in an array of languages. One of our new arrivals is Gohar Markosyan-Kasper. Writing in Russian and living in Estonia, Markosyan-Kasper's extravagant and funny *Penelopa* – a reflection of an emancipated Audrey Hepburn – guides you on a one day tour of Armenia in the '90s. *Penelopa* takes you through the dark streets of Yerevan, the capital of a newly independent Armenia, a country in a post-Soviet economic crisis involved in a regional conflict and in domestic political uprisings.

Another recent addition to our family is acclaimed Armenian screenplay and fantasy writer Harout Ghukassian, whose *Book of Genius* and numerous film scripts can effortlessly compete with both *A Song of Ice and Fire* and television episodes of *Game of Thrones*.

Finding a great book makes you



Arevik Ashkharoyan, founder of 1st Armenian Literary Agency

feel like a gold miner. And even though all the praise will go to the writer, the feeling of engagement in this magic will never make you regret your efforts – irrespective of the challenges.

With my passion for all types of challenges, I could make a long list of those that have become serious obstacles in my work: the lack of a strong cultural policy, no translation support program, even the lack of literary translators that are capable of translating from Armenian into a number of languages (this, in particular, has been constraining the number of deals we could have made by now).

These challenges mobilized our efforts to create non-governmental organizations such as the Armenian Literature Foundation and the Armenian Association of Literary Translators. This also seems to be a good path toward the establishment of a civil society in our country, a society where the public is taking the initiative to reform, with the hope that the government will catch up with all the developments soon.

What we have done to date is

not a long list of deals, but a result of our team's personal devotion and love of our work. We were pleased to have *Yenok's Eye* by Gurgen Khanjyan published in the U.S., and later there were two Turkish deals in cooperation with our co-agent Kalem Literary Agency in Turkey: *Fleeting City* by Hovhannes Tekgyozyan (2015) and *The Inhabitants of Ankimyr* by Armine Anda (2016) in Turkey. Just recently, we released the short story collection *Robinzon* by Aram Pachyan in Ukraine. In 2016, we are expecting the English edition of *Fleeting City* from Mosaik Press in Canada and are now finalizing deals for the book with publishers in France and Italy. We were likewise thrilled to have a short story by Armen of Armenia featured in the 2015 volume of *Best European Fiction* by Dalkey Archive Press.

It seems that now the words “Armenian literature” are no longer terra incognita for foreign publishers. Still, our ultimate goal is to fill the bookshelves of readers all over the world with books by Armenian writers. We're one step closer to fulfilling that dream. •