

Archiving Our Stories Workshop

Sample exercise

An Việt Archives

Source text:

Biển đợi...

Biển hãy đợi! Ngày hẹn rồi sẽ đến
Thân xác phần và hồn tôi bên mẹ
Sóng tìm bờ sẽ dẫn lối tôi đi
Trùng dương nôi năm tháng nói những gì
Ôi! Ký ức biển xuân sắc xanh rì.
Miên viễn nỗi chu kỳ ngày trở lại
Như vòng tay nơi mẹ rộng mở mãi
Đón nhận cơn mưa mang! Ấy chốn đi về
Vọng tiếng gọi mạch nguồn đời...thơ đại.

Guiding Translation:

Waiting Sea | The sea awaits

Sea, please wait! The day will come
When my body and soul is by my mother
The shore seeking waves will guide me
What do the years say about the ocean
The salty soul is imbued with eternal love
Oh! Memory of deep blue and youthful sea.
Forever connecting the cycle of days returning
Like the arms of a mother forever open
Welcoming and nurturing! That is the place to return to
Echoing the call of the source of life...innocent.

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Literary extracts & prompts

Tilted Axis Press

from *Our City That Year* by Geetanjali Shree, tr. Daisy Rockwell (p.13)

I am not omniscient. I write about wherever I am, whenever. I cannot weave things together. I wouldn't know a warp from a woof. But I cannot escape writing. Will any witness survive this horrifying tongue that flickers about devouring our city? Because, who knows, tomorrow this tongue could find us...and you? And if we are no more ...

And who knows if by some simple coincidence we survive, or you survive, then perhaps we'll be able to understand something when we look back. Or preserve something.

But now, just write. Write without comprehension. And if not you, then I will write down whatever you say, write, see; whatever can be expressed in ink.

from *A Book, Untitled* by Shushan Avagyan, tr. Deanna Cachoian-Schanz (p.1-2)

Written as a literary experiment while its author was simultaneously translating the poems of Armenian writer Shushanik Kurghinian into English, *Girq-anvernagir* reads on its surface as a translator's diary. However, through seemingly unrelated and fragmented vignettes in disparate and unidentified voices, the reader discovers that Avagyan is actually mapping out a larger archival or archeological site. The book's first chapter, "Preface, or We as Two Separate Planets," draws our map: an imagined encounter between two early twentieth-century writers, Shushanik Kurghinian and Zabel Yesayan, whose legacies have largely been obscured and forgotten. Juxtaposed with this fictive meeting is a conversation between two characters—"the typist/writer" (ostensibly Avagyan, the author) and her friend Lara—who share with each other what they've uncovered while sifting through the archives of various state institutions in Yerevan in their effort to piece together the forgotten stories of Kurghinian and Yesayan. The novel opens with "the typist/writer" and Lara sitting in a café in "Yerevan, just as their predecessors might have done. Discussing the fragments they have found in the archive, including letters that were written to the forgotten authors, the friends are burdened with questions of loss. Lara suggests to write a book about it. Avagyan answers her call.

In the chapters that unfold, *Girq-anvernagir* not only tells the story of the author and her friend's search for Kurghinian and Yesayan, but through that story, the novel is also a poetic reflection on authorship and the fashioning of the self. The novel, then, might best be described as a work of metafiction or autotheory—a genre of literature in which the text theorizes itself. As such, *A Book, Untitled* tells a story about, in, and through archival gaps: an approach through which Avagyan as author and literary critic offers her own commentary on censorship, editorship, translation, and the lost legacies of these (women) authors in the Armenian literary and historical canons.

