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## A SERIES OF HIND-SITES

Spaces and Traces in Self-Translation

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*Ruins invite speculation by invoking memory and creating a relationship between the spectator and the object: we imagine the structure that existed, and it is the context of imagining what it was that valorises. It is speculation, which is to say the formulation of an unstable narrative, brought to the page, rendered public, that distinguishes a stack of abandoned bricks from an old fortress. I want to think about ruins in poetry — the words of others as they enter our own writing, the places we imagined ourselves inside, the way translation, itself, destroys in order to create based on a theory, a personal valorisation. I want to narrow the distance between wandering through ruins and diving into the wreck. What is an accident given hindsight? What is time given the assumption of presence that haunts the ruin? And how to begin an essay that excavates, and ruins, its own premise?*

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*For Christina*

‘Translation implies loss, always: the real question is, how does the translation carry its losses? Paradoxically, a translation grows stronger as a translation for coming to terms with what cannot be retrieved ... What is not possible in writing, however, may be possible in translation...’

Robert Kaufman & Philip Gerard, introduction to Jean Daive's *Under the Dome*

### 1. First Lines

*One November evening (in circumstances that would take too long to narrate here), I found in Paris, on the Mirabeau Bridge, a notebook with black, glassy, oilcloth covers, like the ones in which grocers used to keep accounts..... I did look for the owner of that notebook. I searched for him with enough perseverance that my scruples might be reconciled, but through rather vague means, so that the notebook would nevertheless remain mine. I publish a few fragments here. The clumsiness of some expressions, if it exists, is entirely due to my translation. The manuscript is in French.*

This is how it begins. The first lines of a writer's first book. The year is 1932. Mihail Sebastian introduces *Fragments from a Notebook* (2020) by disclaiming his own authorship: it is a translation of the black notebook discovered on Pont Mirabeau, a bridge in Paris.

Positioning himself as the translator of a French text into his native Romanian, the narrator occupies the role of detached observer, but what he is translating — what he is bringing back home — is the self he was in France when studying for his doctorate. Now I am speculating, which is to say that I am formulating a theory without firm evidence, and this formulation itself is a cognitive approach to sense-making that can't be disentangled from personal memory, or what we make of language to describe the world around us.

Sebastian's estrangement of the author from the language is significant; estrangement, itself, is a mode of being for Iosif Mendel Hechter, the given-name that Mihail Sebastian masks. As an openly hyphenated East-European Jewish-Romanian writer, Sebastian values the ability to cross borders, to leave the village for the city, to live the tension between ancestry and modern multinationalism in hybrid form. By making translation part of the text, Sebastian engages both the site and the alienation of his era; he writes from inside the loss implied by bringing words over borders. [i]

At some point in the notebook (and in real life), Sebastian strolls along the Seine, crossing into spaces where Jean Daive will stroll with his friend, Paul Celan, under the shadows of trees, amid the gargoyles of traffic, circling Pont Mirabeau, the bridge from which Celan would jump to his death over forty years later.

'The man who speaks in one language is no longer the one who writes in a different language,' Celan will say in a book where Daive revisits their routes (Daive 2009), encountering the same walls of reticence in his friend's refusal to speak of Romania, the silence surrounding his parents' death, the loss and pulse of his poetry.

Rosmarie Waldrop is also present: she will bring Jean Daive's *Under the Dome* (2020), a book about walking with Celan, into its English translation. The shade created by various trees will become the 'Celian dome' that Daive compares to 'the curtain of the double agent' (Daive 2009: 129), a veil Celan uses to conceal the significance of his actions, to push away questions he doesn't want to answer. [ii]

But Mihail Sebastian cannot know this. Nor can he know his first book will be translated in English decades later, during a global pandemic (2020). In Paris of 1932, what Sebastian knows is a novel by Rainer Maria Rilke (2009) set in the city with bridges — and what Sebastian recognises in Paris is loneliness, uncertainty, the displacement of a narrator who has travelled to find himself in this book which begins:

*So this is where people come to live; I would have thought it was a city to die in...*

Now the year is 1910. The narrator of *Malte Laurids Brigge* (Rilke 2009) has come to Paris to decide whether to be an artist. Published in journal form, hailed as the onset of literary modernism, *Malte* offers the transcription of a notebook which follows Rilke's doppelganger through life. The poet came close to titling the book 'The Journal of My Other Self'; and there is no plot outside the protagonist's hunger for self-definition and purpose.

'Who am I?': the question haunts the text.

*'Who are you?' the older lady behind the desk asks in French. 'Why are you here?'*

1996. A small brunette sits near the Seine: she is ordinary, unremarkable, her eyes angled downwards as if attached to something invisible on the sidewalk; the air around her swollen with soft cathedral of French voices echoing over the river. She is eighteen, all of life ahead.

A young man is there, camera in hand. His round face glows like the small torches near crypts. There is myth in him, legend in his jubilant health, prestige in his calf muscles, clear skin. He is ready to begin his first semester of undergrad. Later, he will complete his graduate work at America's most prestigious music school, learning to navigate tendonitis while performing piano and composing quartets with strings. But for now, he absorbs Paris. He takes photos as the girl speaks French, as she finds accommodations, as she makes sandwiches and salads from leftovers, as she washes their underwear in public fountains, hanging it to dry in plaster window frames of hostels.

The two wander the terrain of a love story both are writing: he, in a piano composition which wins a national award, she, in her notebooks, where every detail of his skin is committed to memory.

Although the young man doesn't speak French, he selects a French title for his winning composition. Between Ravel and Debussy, strings and impressionistic flutes, there is *Pour Ma Chere Alina*. It is music she hears when his fingers run over the camera; it is the image where omen will encounter itself in fulfillment.

## 2. The Accidents

*...the real question is, how does the translation carry its losses? Paradoxically, a translation grows stronger as a translation for coming to terms with what cannot be retrieved... (Daive 2020: 11)*

For persons displaced by history, the dead feel closer than the living. To be haunted by history is to live with it, to articulate its space inside your body, to make a map that leads from one self to another. It is to remain unfinished by it, to persist in collusion with the beckoning text, as this year has drawn me deeper into Paul Celan's life, deeper into his literary lineage looking for something particular, finding, instead, a thickened lineage, a web of conversations among writers and texts which translate themselves, hind-sites.

The irretrievable itself becomes a hind-site, a space from which one could have known better, seen further, foretold the future. All voices meet in a lecture which forms around a sidewalk drain, an encounter in a stretto. Or in the flesh of Mihail Sebastian, looking at 2,000 years of Jewish history, noting in himself 'the divide between the Danube and the ghetto' (Sebastian 2017: 153). [iii]

Disorientation is normal for refugees, for exiles, for minorities who move between cultures and languages seeking safety. The self mapped across hind-sites recognises the material text of flesh: it palpates the stories buried in scars, navigates Paul Celan's meridians. The body speculates its translation. Like his narrator, Rilke went to Paris to become an artist, to answer the question of whether being an artist required the loss of ordinary, bourgeois life.

Where Rilke learned silence from the pews of massive stone cathedrals, I learned silence from the years my right knee would not allow me to kneel, the quiet iconography of screws, stitches, adaptations. In Paris, I was trying to find her: that girl in the photo, torn between Romania and Alabama, fortune and accident, flesh and disembodiment. There is no other story — the question of how one should live, as human, as writer — inextricable from the identity of the speaker. Who am I in translation?

I know the girl in the photo from her diaries, from her dialogues with Rilke's angels and Marguerite Duras' demons. After Paris, she (like, the boy) will set off to make art. She will begin a creative writing program in Pittsburgh; she will benefit from a small fellowship. And she will leave the stories she wanted to tell before the year ends. She will not explain why. For decades, she will do things which are not writing, and reserve writing for the nights which belong to her, the nights which expect nothing.

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*Therefore I am deformed by connections with everything that surrounds me here.*

These words belong to Walter Benjamin, but I will find them in an essay collection by an artist that references Aldo Rossi's notes, where Rossi tracks the relations among things from his own relationship to Benjamin's text, and concludes: 'The emergence of relations among things, more than the things themselves, always gives rise to new meanings' (Davey 2020: 74).

Rossi builds his argument from the bones of influence, or the words he underlined and could not forget. [iv] Many of us wander through Walter Benjamin's words trying to find his grave; many remain haunted by his tragic death. Some of us look for Gherasim Luca and Benjamin Fondane.

But back in Bucharest in the 1930s, Mihail Sebastian will support his own writing life by working as a translator for the Romanian King's Foundation. This Foundation will publish Sebastian's translation of Marcel Proust's correspondences from French into Romanian, whose preface Christina Tudor-Sideri will translate:

*... here are pages in which we recognize ourselves to the point of identity — and we are frightened of the fact that someone has lived before our time with the same intensity, a feeling that seemed to us exclusively personal.* (Sebastian 2021: xi)

What does it mean to be displaced by a notebook — or recovered in a text?

When Rosmarie Waldrop asks these questions of Edmond Jabès in Paris, he will say: 'Your body is a book of thoughts that cannot be read in its entirety.' He will tell her that 'writing is an act that invokes silence, or makes silence legible in its entirety' (Waldrop 2003: 113).

For Jabès, writing, itself, is an act of translation from the silence which forms the word into the 'silence of the book' (Waldrop 2003: 111-112), which is to say writing translates the unsaid (or unspeakable) into a legible artefact which expands or complicates the silence, as text remains a visual relationship, a space in which sound is not available.

For Waldrop, the unsaid hidden behind the text is ‘the first loss’, so the text is a record of grief, or a form of grieving in which loss is preserved not as what existed but as *what was lost*. This is the body in translation. When Jabès insists that his work is not influenced by theory — not structuralism, laconicism, Sasseurian linguistics, etc. — no, ‘it is lived, experienced’ — Waldrop finds his response insufficient. Reading is ‘a part of living,’ Waldrop counters, from which she reasons that theory is part of life. Perhaps she overlooks the translation.

After grappling with this on the page, Waldrop relents, observing that aphorisms (which come out of lived experience by definition) appear regularly in Jabès’ writing, while axioms (self-evident truths that rely on pure reason) are absent from his work.

For Jabès, writing is an act which rejects theory, as Rilke imposes a distance between the philosopher’s argument and poet’s act of beholding — or maybe he rejects the attempt to be boxed inside it, to be narrowed into a usable discourse of academic arguments.

The aphorism is not axiomatic — the axiom, itself, is the cement of ideology which Jabès has reason to mistrust.

But it is 1934, the year when Sebastian's birth into a Jewish family whose names can be traced to the first Romanian census, makes him subject to new laws which ban Jews from writing, teaching, practising law, or signing their names to a publication. The loss of signature rights is a loss of the self, an imposed silence. He will sign his play, *The Star Without a Name*, as Victor Mincu (Bejan 2019: 102). He will tell none outside a few of the actors during a private dinner. The narrator needs money to survive in an increasingly forbidden world. The play does not bring him money. So Sebastian writes music reviews and publishes them under the pen-name, Flaminus.

And now it is 1937 when the pleasure of having his work translated by Nicolae Iorga, an intellectual of the Right, occurs. In his own journals, Sebastian marvels, again, at the absurdity of discovering his thoughts on music extolled in an increasingly anti-Semitic journal. Iorga will not know that Flaminus is actually Sebastian. In the same issue, in the next column, a regular commentator will call Sebastian one of ‘those corrupters of the mind’ (Sebastian 2003: 113) who distract Romanians from their mission of national greatness. [v]

### 3. The Missing

In the same year, in September, after finishing drafts for a novel set amid the ruins of love, a novel which begins with the absurdity of a woman being hit by a car when crossing the street, Sebastian will travel from Paris back to Bucharest. At some point on this return journey, he will realise the suitcase carrying the first five chapters of his manuscript, *The Accident*, is missing.

The lost manuscript will torture him. The writer will sit on Bucharest park benches under lindens, seeking to ‘recuperate’ each phrase. When this fails, he will chide himself for rewriting it, for being unfaithful to the first version, the superior one which he ‘initially achieved’ and cannot find again (Sebastian 2003: 123).

In October 1937, a month after losing his suitcase, Sebastian will rush home to his Bucharest apartment with a racing heart, possessed by a strange hope that a package from Paris is waiting for him on the steps. He still cannot believe the red folder and yellow notebook are gone:

*Each time I think of that accursed moment when I first noticed the suitcase was missing, I have the same feeling of gloom, the same refusal to believe it.*

For Sebastian, his disbelief is a feat of mental absurdity, a farce. He will marvel at the way his mind refuses to accept the loss, as the phantom limb insists on staying attached to the body, even if only in memory, a ghost.

In his journals, Sebastian will recall laughing when he first discovered the suitcase was missing. He will describe his responses to this discovery again and again. 'In the face of disaster,' he laughs again. He will end his entry for this date with thoughts of death. It is his thirtieth birthday.

In the coming months, Mihail Sebastian will pursue the lost words like an abandoned lover pursues the beloved's aroma over a pillow. Each trace is a threshold, an entryway for possible encounter. What emerges resembles charred paper pulled from a fire, a page ruined by ash.

To rewrite requires imagining the ghost, speculating the flesh that laid over the missing body. This is difficult. The lost manuscript continues to haunt and distract him. It hunts him down as he hunts it: there is mutuality in their desire for reunification. The memory of the beloved seeks the lover, reminds the lover of a time he could have loved.

Around him, in Romania, the rise of the fascist Iron Guard is no longer a secret. Sebastian watches his close friends, fellow poets, historians, and intellectuals, invent a god to inhabit the construction of a Greater Romania. He refuses to believe they are serious.

On December 21st, less than four months since his return from France, Sebastian will stare at the Iron Guard's electoral victory as if it were an 'exciting football match'. Torn, again, between disbelief and despair, he will imagine the hundreds of thousands of Romanians who must unite in order for this to occur. He will not — in his journals — mention the word unity. But he will allude to it, vaguely, asking 'to what extent ... can all this change one letter, one, even, in a destiny that is not mine but all of ours?'

In 1940, *The Accident* will be published under his pen name, Mihail Sebastian. The yellow notebooks in the suitcase will stay lost.

Time passes in flurries of pigeons.

*Accidents are things which result from upset ancestors.*

The accident is the ghost's way of getting attention.

My notebooks translate my grandmother's Romanian words into English.

What did Sebastian's ancestors want from him? What if the ancestors are not a support network so

much as an angry choir demanding why we deny them, why we attempt to survive outside their shadows? Who waits for us on the bridge over the water in a foreign capital?

On 24 May, 1945, while crossing a Bucharest street, Sebastian will be hit by a car. The absurd premise of his novel's love story meet his life in a meridian.

Unlike Nora, the novel's female protagonist, Sebastian will not survive the accident. He will survive the rise of fascism, the second World War, and pogroms, the Shoah, but not the accident.

Like Sebastian, I learn French when studying in France. The first semester of my seventh grade year will be spent in a French classroom, struggling with gendered nouns, as my father works on sabbatical. This is the year before the accident, the year before August when I cross a street in Tuscaloosa and the car hits me.

I don't remember anything. Unlike Sebastian, I survive. I survive for no reason, past the point when the neurosurgeon tells my parents there is no option left but to wait, to see what happens, and whether their daughter will return from this accident.

Like Sebastian, I seek to recover myself in notebooks, the spaces which a skull fracture erased. Like him, I remain estranged from the author of those notebooks who could not know the accident was coming, who could never have imagined its breadth.

When I regain consciousness, when my brain begins unswelling, I will return to this life speaking French. The nurses in the small Alabama hospital will not know what to do; they lack translators for critical care patients recovering from head-injury. I turn sixteen in a different body, one in which puberty has paused.

And I will not know what I said during this untranslated period because I spent days speaking a language none could understand. This adopted language, French, will remain the tongue-of-second-lives, the text of first lines, the thing I knew at a time when I could not walk.

I find myself on its banks, seeking a bridge.

#### 4. The Point

*'Look, seek and wonder, tremble...*

*Already you yourself no longer have a past.'*

Oskar Milosz, *L'amoresue Invitation*, a novel set entirely in the remembered present

Ekphrasis is a mode of recognition, a way of re-visioning oneself. It is a dialogue with a visual text which possesses the power of a mirror. In this sense, it is enchanted, or occupies the space of enchantment, being transfixed, altered, summoned by words which make magic. There are photos.

'Much of what we see, we see because we know it is there', Karl Ove Knaussgard writes in his book

about Edvard Munch's art, and this knowing is 'a matter of recognition, of the registering something that already exists in us'. But the relationship between image and recognition is tenuous, personal, and intimate.

A photograph offers a visual surface where one may re-cognise the self. Roland Barthes described 'the cast of the dice ... that accident which pricks' (Davey 2020: 24) as the image's punctum. For it is the surprise that sticks with us, the surprising attraction of what was not intended and yet preserves a moment eternally. The image's punctum shocks us with its unforgettable absurdity.

Barthes will die at 64 when he is hit by a truck, an accident he will not see coming.

In the screech of brakes and the serenade of distant sirens, I hear the photo of the girl near the bridge, her eyes silenced by pain and love for the boy taking the photo. She will hide pain from him. They will make love in Paris, in gardens, in tiny rooms, in public areas with little to hide them from others. She will write a poem about his hands after they tour the Museum of Rodin. But the smile is punctum.

Beneath it, the girl carries the date and time of a back surgery scheduled upon her return to the US. The surgery will happen one week before she and the boy set out for different colleges across the country; each seeking to scale the gates of their separate art forms.

The boy will spend the night with her in the hospital bed. Surely she smiles at him. She doesn't know her journals from that summer will disappear.

She will keep the photo close, its punctum eternal.

See the photo of his grandfather that Brandon Shimoda attaches to his bedroom mirror when writing the memoirs seeking his Japanese ancestors.

See the silence of a snap, a moment in time when the girl near the bridge lacks a language for pain, and the point is the space which brings the boy she loves into the land of the language in which returns from the accident.

See the bridge one may cross in order to meet the ghost.

See Sebastian's *Fragments from a Found Notebook*, which ends with the narrator returning to the Louvre to stare, again, at a Memling. Sebastian could not know that the black notebook he found in Paris, the one he claimed to translate rather than author, would come back in the actual loss of the yellow notebook. It is an accident, and yet, it is a punctum.

The spaces of recovered bodies become sites of reconciliation, locations where one conjures the beloved from bones re-membered. The image we revisit becomes an icon in the interior landscape, a point on the map of hind-sites.

## 5. The Bridge

*You said: I used to invent love when necessary. When I walked alone on the riverbank. Or whenever the level of salt would rise in my body, I would invent the river.*

I return to these words from Mahmoud Darwish's *In the Presence of Absence* (Darwish 2011: 120) while imagining a bridge. It is 1897. The new Parisian bridge linking the left bank to the right bank is completed. Designed to represent boats, the Pont Mirabeau's two piles show the Seine going upstream and downstream, moving at cross-currents, continuously. The prows of the boats are decorated by statues celebrating commerce, abundance, navigation, and the city of Paris itself.

The Pont Mirabeau is a high-travelled bridge filled with cars and traffic.

I study its construction, each corner an edge condition that reveals the relationship between what we want and need in time. What we want to remember, a sort of visual syntax for how the eye absorbs a landscape. The materiality of lived environments articulates time as an aspirational condition, both present and absent.

On April 19th or 20th of 1970, it is believed that Paul Celan jumped into the Seine from Pont Mirabeau, close to his apartment. On his desk, he left open another conversation with the dead: Wilhelm Michel's biography of Holderlin, open to page 464, with the following sentences from a letter by Clemens Brentano underlined: 'Sometimes this genius goes dark and drowns in the bitter well of his heart' (Michel 1925: 464).

We translate this differently, depending on what we want Celan to have known or said; what we want from the silence of that site. To translate, after all, implies the interpretative gesture, the reading-into of things, associations, idioms, experience.

The silences held both joy and rue in what must be called 'the walk with Celan' experience. Once upon a time Emil Cioran, Paul Celan, Maurice Blanchot, Edmond Jabès all lived in Paris, and took walks together. And once Zbegeniew Herbert visited. According to a tweet by Ilya Kaminsky, Herbert took a four-hour walk with Celan, which he later called the 'happiest four hours of my life.' When asked to describe what they talked about, Herbert said: 'Nothing.'

Celan was buried in Pere Lachaise on May 12th, the same day that Nellie Sachs died in Stockholm of cancer. Not far away, the grave of Celan's first son, who died a few years after his birth in 1953. Also nearby, the bones of Gisele Lestranger-Celan, buried in 1991. And, to complicate eternity, the graves of Yvan and Claire Goll also hold space in Pere Lachaise, this cemetery-space in which the arguments of the living turn to stone.

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'As if the soul vibrated only to one single sound, as if the mind could get excited only once,' Edmond Jabès said of unity, of otherness, of how we define inclusivity to exclude the foreign (Waldrop 2003: 117). Jabès' book, *A Foreigner / Carrying in the Crook / of His Arm a Tiny Book* (1991), reflects on the rising racism he observed in France during his final years.

Scouring her mentor's words, Waldrop finds Jabès locating the basis of intolerance in 'Our craving for

Unity, for One truth, One religion, One culture, One identical image of ourselves' (Waldrop 2003: 117).

The cry for unity is a bridge that promises to create banks, and it is the bridge itself which is dangerous. One might stand on this bridge and lose hope.

While reading Waldrop's translations of Paul Celan's prose works, I will find an essay on Edgar Jené. Here, the hyphenated, homeland-less Celan fleshes out his understanding of 'the Other':

*Many oaths have we sworn in our waking lives, in the hot shadow of impatient flags, backlit by an alien death, at the high altar of our sanctified reason. We kept our pledges at the cost of our secret life. But when we came back to where we had made them — what did we find? The colour of the flag was the same, the shadow it threw even larger than before. Again, people raised their hands. But to whom did they pledge allegiance? To the Other, whom we had sworn to hate. And death, the alien? It was so busy it had no need of our oaths at all... On the altar, finally, a cock, crowing. (Celan 2003: 9)*

When I think of the alien death, I remember my grandfather's fear that he or my grandmother would die while visiting us in the US. He feared nothing more than being buried in foreign soil, away from his ancestors and kin. It's an ancient fear, kinned to Ovid's.

Guillaume Apollinaire's poem, '[Le pont Mirabeau](#),' returns in so many translations, the numerous poets who have been touched by a bridge joining two banks, an interlocutor between lovers. But it is Richard Wilbur's translation and rhythm that haunts me:

All love goes by as water to the sea  
 All love goes by  
 How slow life seems to me  
 How violent the hope of love can be

(Auster 1984: 13)

We find our own strangeness in encounter with the self, the foreign 'I' which Adam Zagajewski discovers upon first returning to a Lvov he cannot recognise, which is to say, a Lvov who does not recognize him. It is this relationship between the self in returning to the homeland that fascinates me. It is the perpetual estrangement and astonishment of endless translation.

The poet looks to the poem for the missing homecoming.

The poem itself may be 'a kind of homecoming,' Celan suggests in his famous Meridian speech. The poem may be the encounter that allows us to project 'ourselves into the search for ourselves' (Celan 2003: 53). The space and the trace which fleshes the hind-site.

## 6. THE LOST

*She and not she; she is present and absent, it is as if her presence holds my absence within her, and her absence carries the presence of details...*

Mahmoud Darwish will say this in his book about the presence of absence, or Palestine (Darwish 2011: 119). Darwish will recount a lifetime of living between spaces, attempting to recover a land that no longer exists on official maps.

The girl in the photo will read everything he has written in the years of unwritable tears and quiet surgeries. She will find him in the stories of refugees and deportation camps. At this point, the girl will be what others call a woman, a wife, the mother of three children. On the census, there are no words for all the humans crouching inside her. She will check the most ordinary box, curl into it, and write on its walls.

She will take her American children and husband to visit her homeland. In the Belu cemetery in Bucharest, she will lay on top of her grandfather's grave and think about the meridians which meet in the map of her body.

When friends worry that she is too obsessed with death, she will smile. She will stare at the years of notebooks, stacked near the bed, those dialogues with ghosts who taught her that death is not separate from life: it is the silhouette of a bridge, the absence of diacritics, the football game on the screen followed by cheering fans of a new fascism in the same stadium, a new ethnic nationalism rising in her adopted country.

At thirty-five, she will whisper into the silence, submitting her first poem for publication to appease the dead poppies on the meridians. She will never finish her degree in creative writing, never go to the grad school her immigrant parents treasured, never read herself out of the silences that mask the rise of neo-fascism, ethno-nationalism, and borders dividing the bodies.

The hyphen at the heart of her translations will return in magazine articles about Romanian orphans written by Americans who refused to make connections between the dictator's criminalisation of abortion and the abandonment of countless children. The notebooks will thicken as her home-state, Alabama, attempts to emulate the dictator's war against wombed bodies.

She will translate herself over borders. She will lose nothing in this motion, gain only maps. She will keep notebooks to record the conversations of ghosts. She will finish a poetry collection titled *Dor* (Stefanescu 2021), a word for longing which many Romanians find untranslatable. In this book, she will not attempt to translate *dor* so much as paint it, layering it over photos, memories, exiles. The poems will include several fugues inspired by Ioan Petru Culianu's short stories and prose pieces, gathered in *Arta fugii* (Borbely 2013), which has a double significance in Romanian, where fugue indicates both a musical form that relies on repetitive counterpoint as well as the act of running, or *fuga*, motion undergirded by a wish to escape or flee. The poems will exploit this double-meaning in the context of her parents' defection and the musical form itself.

*You become words ... you do not know the difference between utter and utterance. You will call the sea an overturned sky.*

The woman will read these words by Mahmoud Darwish (2011: 32) aloud to her children as they lay in a meadow marked 'No Trespassing.' She will teach her children to give words to clouds that can be carried to family graves in Romania. She will remind them that none of her family is buried in this American soil. The clouds are intercessors; the ocean is connective tissue; the meridians are glowing points on a map.

When the musical composition gets accepted for publication, the boy who wandered through Paris with her will rename the piece. The title will be in English, and the girl's name will disappear from it.

Imagine a photo that does the work of an entire suitcase.

'But there was only one moment of emotion: the last phrases of the andante in the Bach Concerto,' Mihail Sebastian will write in his notebook as fascism swarms through Romania.

The girl recognises that andante. The last phrases of music remain in her throat like the end of the Bach fugue her son wrangles across the piano, over and over, the fugue tearing through the small house, rattling its walls.

The accident will keep happening; its survival will continue to demand new surgeries, treatments, adaptations. When her friend suggests yoga, the woman's smile will meet the smile of the girl in the photo, the one who cannot translate pain into their language. Pain and joy make love, weave circles through silence.

She will stay haunted by love, ghosted by the humans she left, inhabited by the crimes of the countries in which she exists. She will abide in these things without seeking refuge, choosing, instead, to read them in, allowing herself to be deformed and reformed by the interior borders. For it is precisely these connections which deform, or render one legible, to others across the barrier of language.

'There is no place that is not the reflected place of another', Edmond Jabès reminds (Waldrop 2003: 154). [vi] In making maps of the hind-sites which define her, she will recognise the bridge, the accident, the punctum, the notebook, the first lines of a poem. She will find what is missing while trying to recover the sites which define her. Like Mihail Sebastian, she will not start writing a new piece on Mondays.

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[i] In the translator's introduction to Sebastian's *Found Notebook*, Christina Tudor-Sideri describes the process of reading and translating as one in which a 'surrogate author' emerges from 'interpretive creation'. I am indebted to her creations and to the way this invokes an alternative model of allegiance to a writer with which we remain conversant.

[ii] For more on this particular silence, and 'the curtain of the double agent', see pages 80-82, where Daive mentions that Celan sets up a caution, a marker between then: 'silence as reverberation of our interiority'. This just before the (very long silence) 'and ellipses which enter the mention of

Bachmann's name'. I take, here, the significance of ellipses in the poetic line to leave the door open, to refuse, really, to close it. The ellipses is an evasion that suggests fidelity. The story Celan offers is that 'her poems aren't always very good' and that 'she expected much' from him and that he 'disappointed her very much' but that he 'loved her' and then he met Giselle. This is a linear construction. Bachmann died in Rome three years after Celan's death in Paris. See also page 115, where Daive says 'Paul Celan, Edmond Jabes, and I all walk with our hands behind our backs.'

[iii] In *For Two Thousand Years*, see page 153, where Sebastian describes how his Jewishness is not monolithic, given family origins and classes: 'One side's sensitivity is the other's fussiness. The divide between the Danube and the ghetto.' See also page 28, where narrator refers to his family 'home, on the right bank of the Danube', which suggests he identifies strongly with his mother's side of the family.

[iv] See, particularly, Morya Davey's 'Notes on Photography and Accident', written in 2008, which coalesces around the notion of accident as 'the lifeblood of photography', and mentions Barthes' 'cast of the dice ... that accident which pricks the punctum'. For Davey, the 'found quality of the vernacular photograph' is what makes us vulnerable to it, an implied intimacy that reaches out. Janet Malcolm operates at this 'metadiscursive level' where what is revealed feels like an accidental slip.

[v] Many scholars feel strongly about Nicolae Iorga's brilliance as a voice of conservative agrarianism in Romanian politics. It is true that Iorga decided to oppose the Iron Guard later in his life, throwing tepid support between King Carol II's National Renaissance Front. After the Iron Guard installed its National Legionary dictatorship, Iorga expressed open opposition to Guardism, though this may have been for personal reasons, including a personal conflict with Corneliu Codreanu that led to Iorga's murder by an Iron Guardist. This story is much longer and more complicated than space permits. For more on the rise of fascism among Romanian intellectuals, see Bejan. Also note that the index to Sebastian's *Journal* does not include Nicolae Iorga, despite his presence in the book and his significance in Romanian intellectual and cultural circles. Sebastian begins using the word 'alien' often when discussing his friends and peers at this point in the journal.

[vi] So much is given in this book's Foreword by Richard Stamelman: 'What is lost in translation is lost twice over, because the original text has already internalized the loss it has had to confront in order to speak, the silence it has had to absorb in order to come into being, the absence it has had to face in order to make itself present, and the death it has had to pass through in order to live.' Waldrop also brings Jabès' emphasis on the word *parole* (see page 63) into her translation of Jean Daive, which creates a sort of posthumous-present dialogue between Jabès and Paul Celan on both silence and language.

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Alina Stefanescu was born in Romania and lives in Birmingham, Alabama with her partner and several intense mammals. Recent books include a creative nonfiction chapbook, *Ribald* (Bull City Press Inch Series, 2020). Her poetry collection, *dor*, won the Wandering Aengus Press Prize and is forthcoming in July 2021. Her first poetry chapbook, *Objects in Vases* (Anchor & Plume Press, 2016) won the 2016 Award for Poetry Book of the Year from ASPS. Her debut fiction collection, *Every Mask I Tried On*, won the Brighthorse Prize and was published in 2018. Alina's writing can be found (or is forthcoming) in diverse journals, including *Prairie Schooner*, *North American Review*, *World Literature Today*, *Pleiades*, *BOMB*, *FLOCK*, *Apofenie*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *Crab Creek Review*, and others. She serves as poetry editor for several journals, and literary critic for others, and Co-Director of PEN America's Birmingham Chapter. [www.alinastefanescuwriter.com](http://www.alinastefanescuwriter.com)

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