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And You Are The Wound

By Hanna Wildow

Rosemarie Waldrop 1976

**For I am writing
and you are the
wound.
Have I betrayed
you, Yukel?
I have certainly
betrayed you.**

Edmond Jabés, 1963

**car je suis écriture
et toi blessure
T'ai-je trahi, Yukel?
Je t'ai surement
trahi'**

**därför att det är jag
som skriver
och du som är
såret
har jag svikit dig,
Inga?
jag har säkerligen
svikit dig.**

trans·la·tion

/transˈleɪʃ(ə)n,traːns-, -nz-/

noun: **translation**

1. the process of translating words or text from one language into another.
 - a written or spoken rendering of the meaning of a word, speech, book, or other text, in another language.
 - the conversion of something from one form or medium into another.
2. formal technical
 - the process of moving something from one place to another.

Tracing the etymology of the word *translation*, one finds herself in-between. Two roots trails through Latin: *Trans-* sprawls from the word *for across*, or *over*, and *-latus* means *to carry*, or *to bear*. When one translates, one carries a text over, or bears it across.

The Latin word *translatus* is also the past participle of *transferre*. *-ferre* speaks of carrying; transporting; notions of motion. It also means to endure; to suffer; to bear a mental burden. When one translates; one writhes.

*

a typewriter

a type of writer

a writer

type

My grandmother had a typewriter.

*

In 1959 my grandmother moved to a mountain called Omberg.

Inga Svensson, 2013 Jodå jag kommer komma mycket väl ihåg det. Och jag märkte ju snart att det var en väldigt intressant bygd jag hade kommit till. Den hade liksom allt det som jag tyckte var intressant. Och för övrigt vackert också.
Oh yes, I remember it very well. Before long, I noticed it was a very interesting place to which I had arrived. It had, sort of, everything I was interested in, as well as everything I found to be beautiful.

With her typewriter, my grandmother began to build an archive about her newfound mountain. She became the guide of the mountain. She read, and she wrote.

script

after

script

scriptisascript is a s c r i p t i s a Getrude Stein, 1913 c r i p

*

Rosemarie Waldrop, 1976
**You are the one
who writes.**

**Tu es celui qui écrit
et qui écrit.**

Edmond Jabés, 1963

**Det är du
som skriver.**

In 1983, my grandmother got her second grandchild, her first female descendant. The first time she held the little girl in her arms, her eyes glittered and she said: she will become a writer.

A writer type.

She was.

I am.

*

Rosemarie Waldrop, 1983
**I took you in as the
word.**

**Je te reçus, telle
une parole.**

Edmond Jabés, 1967

**Du tog emot mig
likt ett ord.**

In 2012, I wrote my grandmother a letter:

Dear, grandmother: It is cold and it is getting darker. I imagine the mountain must look very beautiful now. I write to you this time, to ask if you would like to conduct work with me. In my artistic practice, I – as you know – think a lot about stories, written and unwritten. About how some of them are repeated over and over, enough times to eventually be installed as facts, knowledge, history. While others are silenced, forgotten, erased. I am interested in the

latter ones, and in how to locate, articulate and re-write them. How to, through the use of language, argue with, disrupt and dissolve dominating narratives, and thus make space for others. This time, I am interested in your story. Of listening to it, forming a record, taking time. I need to learn your past, my narrative, an-other story. I want to talk to you about your mountain. About the mountain of the strong, proud women, as you named it.

*

In 2013, I spent the 8th of March, International Women's Day, at the mountain with my grandmother and my dog, Judith. We began to collect material during this visit, conducting what would later become our work. By then, I thought it would become a film. Later, I learned it would grow into years of processing loss and gain; tracing through scripts, footnotes, and memories.

I stayed for about a week in my grandmother's little house, that time in March 2013. We read, we wrote, we spoke. We engaged in a lot of *fika*.¹

*

It is hard to translate the meaning of *fika*: As a word that contains activity and material, culture and histories, it swells with meaning. Yet it is a word that somehow gets lost in translation. It does not matter which of all the available English words one chooses – even though English is a language with tens of thousands of words more than Swedish – one can still not find a word sufficient for the meaning of *fika*. Whichever word you might end up using, it will be wrong.

*

In the text *Wrong Love*, American writer and art writing professor

¹ Fika is a social institution in Sweden; it means having a break, most often a coffee break, with one's colleagues, friends, date or family. The word "fika" can serve as both a verb and a noun. Swedes consider having a coffee an important part of the culture. This practice of taking a break, typically with a cinnamon roll or some biscuits or cookies, or sometimes a smörgås or a fruit on the side, is central to Swedish life, and is regularly enjoyed even by government employees. Fika performs an important social function as the "non-date date", i.e. while going on a date can be perceived as a big deal, ta en fika ("Take a fika") is a very low-pressure and informal situation, and doesn't in itself imply any romantic context ["Fika (Sweden)," last modified June 5, 2016, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fika_\(culture\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fika_(culture))].

Litia Perta writes about the relationship between loving and writing, both being what she calls **creative ventures to the experience of failure**. Tracing the etymology of the word writing, she finds it means literally to draw a figure of something by carving it out, to form an outline by cutting into the surface, to make an incision.

Litia Perta, 2011.

To carve, to cut, to incise. Litia Perta, 2011.

Karva, skära, öppna upp.

Her mind of loving provides a similar account – **an experience that also carves itself into being, making a mark that cuts deeply so it may seem, at first, indelible.**

Litia Perta, 2011.

She finds herself wandering through the many skins of meaning that wrong love can provide. Being wrong seems the only path toward learning. **Even wrong love, perhaps only wrong love, can lead to knowing.** Litia Perta, 2011.

If to write is to carve, to cut, to incise, then to translate might be to chew. To chew something that cannot be swallowed. It grows in your mouth, it forms friction, it becomes a conflict; a struggle of that space in one's mouth and throat where words should be shaped. Hesitations arrive, you might cough, your voice stutters. Where words with meaning once were, gaps appear. A space of articulation turns into breaks of strangeness, exile, loss.

*

Edmond Jabés, 1963

**in the beginning
the wound
is invisible**

**la blessure est
invisible à son
commencement**

**i början var
mitt sår
osynligt**

Rosmarie Waldrop, 1976

In October 2013, I was supposed to spend a weekend with my grandmother to collect the final material for our work. She was excited, and so was I. But my grandmother caught a bad cold, the result of visiting Stockholm for the first time in 40 years, to attend my brother's wedding a few weeks earlier. I needed video from the

mountain before the leaves fell, and so I went anyway and stayed at a hostel on the mountain.

I remember calling my grandmother from the top of the mountain, a gazebo called Hjässan, meaning the top of the head.

Grandmother, I'm standing here at the top of the mountain and it is so beautiful.
 Farmor, jag står här på bergets hjassa och det är så vackert.

Yes, they feed me properly at the hostel; the food is really good.
 Jada, de ger mig tillräckligt med mat på vandrarhemmet, maten är jättegod.

I know, I had been looking forward to visiting you so much too.
 Jag vet, jag hade också sett fram till jättemycket emot att hälsa på dig.

But don't worry grandmother, I will be back soon.
 Men oroa dig inte farmor, jag kommer snart tillbaka snart.

Later, my brother's newly wedded wife left him, just a few days before my girlfriend left me. My grandmother knows neither of these details, because on December 6, she passed away as the result of a stroke.

Inga Svensson, 2013 **Man ska ändå träffa någon som man tror att det är möjligt, möjligt att leva med, det räcker faktiskt inte med att bara vara förälskad, det gör det inte.**
 One shall still meet someone who one thinks it is possible, possible to live with, it is actually not enough to just be in love, it is not sufficient.

When writing this, my pen itches, the buttons on my keyboard run away. How shall I ever know how to translate my grandmother's story? She survived world wars, epidemics, deaths of her life partners. With skin as contours of time, dense and rich in experiences, she lived on borrowed days. I knew that time was drifting and, with it, my grandmother, as well. Yet I never got to hear her out. By the time I returned to the mountain, soon as I had promised, it was to see my grandmother for the last time. By then she had lost her language and approached the end wordless. And, paradoxically as always, in the end there are so many things to be said but none to be heard. In the end, some stories always remain unwritten.

*

Unknown

While I write I can die.

Enquanto escrevo posso morrer.

När jag skriver kan du dö.

Clarice Lispector, 1978

Clarice Lispector wrote her novel *A Breath of Life* while dying. The novel is about an author who sculpts a female character, into whom

Lispector breathes life while her own is about to disappear. The character is the result of a transcription, of something like a dream or a thought. **I want to find language that makes spirals in the air. What I know, I cannot translate. I express myself better through silence.**

Clarice Lispector, 1978

I think about Lispector's novel when I reflect on the turn our work took when my grandmother lost her speech, and eventually her life. I started writing my grandmother's story while sitting by her side at the hospital; a history as occupied with utterings as with quietness.

What can it mean, that these last three weeks together would bear so much silence, creatures of language that we are? I cannot help but wonder if my grandmother somehow knew all along that this situation, this silent space we shared, would be our script for the last phase of our mutual writing. Did she want to find a language that makes spirals in the air? Did she know that, for my fingers to press down the keys, her silence was needed? Did she breathe life into a character that was the result of a transcription, of which I had to be the author? Did she carry a story that could not be translated, unless she carried it over to me, for me to bear it across further?

*

**We can only write
what we have been
given to read.**

Rosmarie Waldrop, 1976

**Nous n'écrivons
que ce qu'il nous a
été accordé de lire.**

Edmond Jabès, 1963

**Jag kan skriva
endast för att du
gav mig ditt språk.**

If one can say there is a certain relationship between writing and loving, then there is certainly one between translating and mourning. The American poet and translator Rosmarie Waldrop makes this connection tangible in her book *Lavish Absence*, in which she recalls and rereads the Jewish poet Edmond Jabès, whose writing she has translated into English. The piece lingers between Waldrop's own writing, her compassion and love for Jabès the person and Jabès the writer, and reflections upon her process of translation. What genre the book belongs to, or how it should be classified, remains unclear. But it is one that seizes you, one that latches onto you in the very

same way as Edmond Jabès once latched onto Rosemarie Waldrop. It is one that makes me weep as I read.

Edmond Jabès once wrote *the word can only live within death*, and he himself died while reading a book. *Our decision to write springs from a lack*, he spoke in an interview at another time, making loss the constant companion of the writer. In a moving preface to *Lavish Absence*, Richard Stamelman writes:

Richard Stamelman, 2002

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.

Det som går vilse i översättning tappas tvefaldigt bort, då originaltexten redan har internaliserat den förlust som den varit tvungen att konfrontera för att kunna tala, den tystnad den varit tvungen att absorbera för att kunna bli till, den frånvaro den varit tvungen att gå till mötes för att göra sig själv närvarande, och den död den har varit tvungen att genomgå för att kunna leva.

lost

vilse

förlust

Rebecca Solnit, 2005

Lost really has two disparate meanings. Losing things is about the familiar falling away, getting lost is about the unfamiliar appearing. Either way, it is an experience of losing control. Rebecca Solnit teaches me that finding oneself can only be achieved by losing oneself. *The art is not one of forgetting but of letting go.*

The art is not one of forgetting
but of letting

And in the place called lost, strange things can be found.

*

It is in the loss of Edmond Jabès' face that Rosemarie Waldrop begins and ends her book.

Before leaving us, the readers, alone with only the memory of reading this book, Waldrop tells about a Chinese tradition of mourning for one year. She recognizes the wisdom, but writes:

Självt har jag en mer tilltrasslad upplevelse av sorgearbete, nämligen att det kanske
 I myself have a messier sense of mourning, that it is perhaps
 aldrig kommer att upphöra, nämligen att, det är en fördröjd känsla
 never done altogether, that it is, a delayed motion
 som fortgår i själen.
 that continues to exist in the soul. Rosemarie Waldrop, 2002

Mourning, just like writing, reading, and translating, is an open-ended process – one that cannot be completed. When loving someone, we write a story with that someone, a story that will, for certain, end. Until death do us part. Or war. Or sometimes, an endless silence. When writing that story, there will always be stories unwritten. In the beginning as well as in the end, there will always be roads not taken, words not chosen, sentences not found, meaning lost on the other side of language. Books will remain unwritten; some things will always stay off the page. Drifting back and forth between nostalgic memories and an uncomfortable itching wound of what could have been.

There are no words for adieu Edmond Jabès wrote at a time before I was even born. Just as the lack of a certain word sometimes evokes an infinite chain of others, just as the loss of a certain person brings a relentless stream of tears. Absence is lavish – generous and wasteful at one and the same time.

Rosemarie Waldrop, 1976

**Defeat is the price
we agreed on.**

**La défaite est le
prix consenti.**

Edmond Jabès, 1963

**Jag trodde vi kom
överens om att
det var du
som skulle förlora.**

When I write this, we are approaching spring. It scares me since my last spring was one of mourning. As for springs, they tend to blow and rain, and when it rains, it pours. The Swedish writer Imri Sandström, someone in whose footsteps I always attempt to walk when writing, dwells in the notion of spring, as well as in speech and writing:

Vår, medan de kalla vindarna fortsätter att blåsa, framhåller den nya årstiden, insisterar framstår det
 Every spring, as the cold winds continue to blow, the new season persists, insists it
 som, nå förändring. Massor av snö och is smälter, de varken försvinner eller förflyktigas, utan blir till
 seems, or change. Masses of snow and ice melt, do not disappear or evaporate,
 kraftens själva materia – flödets kraft. Medan vi talar
 but become the very material of the force – the force of the flood... As we speak
 faller vi in i och ut ur varandras texter – talade och skrivna – fallande in och ut...
 falling in and out of each other's texts – spoken and written – falling in and out...
 Det är så det fyller våra skärmar. Flödet, översvämningar. Så det fyller våra sidor och rum.
 This is how it fills the screen. The flood. How it fills our pages and rooms.

Imri Sandström, 2012

With spring came flood and with flood came words. I have never written as much as I did last spring.

*

When a student asks Rosmarie Waldrop what sustained her in translating so many volumes of Jabès, she points to the pleasure that lies within destruction - an unavoidable part of the act of translation.

Rosmarie Waldrop, 2002

Sound, sense, form, reference will never again stand in the same relation to each other... It is a state in which the finished work is dissolved back into a state of fluidity, of potential, of 'molten lava'. In this state, the translator will be able, with a mix of imagination and understanding, to penetrate into the work and re-create it.

If destruction provides the energy, envy is the provider of impulse. How can I not want to have written it? A work so rich in pleasures, with such scope, such depth that it has fed my own thinking endlessly.

Rosmarie Waldrop, 1976

**You are the shape
moving in the fog...
You are the
toneless utterance
among anecdotal
lies.**

Edmond Jabès, 1963

**Tu es une forme
qui se déplace
dans le brouillard.
... Tue s la parole
éteinte au milieu
des mensonges de
l'anecdote.**

**Du är formen som
rör sig i dimman.
Du är ett tonlöst
yttrande bland
anekdotiska dikter.**

Edmond dies in January 1991. Inga in December 2013. Spring of flooding follows; language origins like earthquakes from far below. Rosmarie Waldrop writes that it takes her until August to resurface in the present. **August, when we prepare to leave for a year in England.** I am still unsure when, or if, I reemerge but it takes me until June for my smiles not to be pure lies. June, when I walk into a sort of beginning in Los Angeles. In Los Angeles, when I purchase the book *Lavish Absence* by Rosmarie Waldrop. When I purchase the book, in a bookstore where I fall in love.

I search for the meaning of the word *surface* when I stumble upon a definition stating it as ‘the outermost level of the land or sea.’ I am both satisfied and dissatisfied with this finding. Dissatisfied because I want for it to relate to *her* face, and for *sur-* to carry its meaning of above, over, superior.

H e r f a c e a b o v e a l l .

Satisfied because if there is any place that could embody *the outermost level of land or sea*, it must be Omberg smashing into the lake Vättern.

Bergets sluttningar kan fortfarande få glimtar av sol när dalen har hunnit mörkna. Rosmarie Waldrop, 2002
The slopes of the mountain can still get some sun when the valley is already dark.

Men det är kallare. Jag återvänder till Inga Svenssons historia, en historia som hennes kropp bär.
But it is less warm. I reread Edmond Jabès's body of work.

Men den riktiga kroppen är inte längre.
But the real body is no more.

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† Hanna Wildow, a native of Sweden, possesses a bachelor's degree in gender studies from Stockholm University as well as a master's in art from Konstfack University of Arts, Crafts and Design. Through explorations of written and unwritten stories, Wildow's practice uses language to contest, disrupt, and dissolve dominant narratives. Her work has exhibited throughout Los Angeles in spaces such as Human Resources and the Charles James Gallery. Wildow's work was also recently included in the London Biennale Pollination in Manila and published through c-along.com and Kritiker.

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