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## Five Poems in Translation: Original Poems by Ioana Vintilă

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Romanian poet Ioana Vintilă's second collection, *the origami bunker*, was published in 2022. The volume addresses an imaginary land anchored by chemical formulas and miniature dystopias. It echoes the post-rock/metal universe, blending dreamy, tech-savvy, and mundane elements. The title of the collection mirrors the poet's quest to save humankind from the origami bunker. It references a sort of salvation "that is still needed" and begs to be found between the darkness and the promise of light that the poems tackle (Vintilă 76). The dainty architecture of the origami is contrasted with the menacing stance of the bunker which is to be read as both sheltering and an outpost against the crumbling world.

The collection is divided into three sections that are in conversation and vividly express the poet's peculiar style. The first section, *the solar funeral*, is introspective and outlines the poet's voice, both vulnerable and strong. The poems question the poet's place in the world, at times, an accepted failure:

I lived my life with the severity that, willy-nilly  
engineering shuffles down your neck  
and this thing entered like an old dog does in the hole under the apartment building  
tail between his hind legs

(20)

Other times, there is an inner rebellion which mirrors the cold, distant interiority of the poetic voice who is unwilling to give up on the world:

how to thrust roots straight down the cracks  
how to come back home alone  
how to pull the deer from the reptile's belly and clean the juices off  
how to relax the wrists  
how to write in buried letters  
how to calculate the balance of forces  
and how to wrap everything, a bride with poppies embroidered  
on the dress,  
in the warm water he rinses  
softly  
the hair with

(22)

The cold analysis of the first section becomes a consuming fire in the next one, where the poet is willing to burn alongside the dying world:

the body  
an under-pressure reactor  
the metal rods in the brain methodically corroded  
waiting for the decisive trigger  
an implosion with a splendid, blinding  
light

(39)

The humane power resists this apocalypse, despite the violence some of her lines exult. The poems become a test of resilience for the reader who is expected to witness the dissection that the speaker displays in their attempt to reconcile the brutalization of the world and their inner sensitivity. Lately, the language around poetry has become an economic metaphor, yet Ioana Vintilă's lines foster a rich aesthetic challenge. In "Veil", the poet moves from the delicate, frail structure of the May moth to the revelation of the vastness of the world, encased in the tiny structure of the insect:

within its dozens  
eyes I saw the solar night falling like a mandarin  
peel  
over our eyelids

(58)

The last section, *pleading for my father's right hand*, addresses personal loss and pain which "has a measuring unit. It is called *dol* there are/ also instruments to measure the pain threshold – dolometers – or palpometers (newer versions, based/on applying pressure instead of heat as stimulus)". The body is the elastic glue that binds familiar figures – father, sister, grandmother – to the surrounding abuse and disaster, illustrative, once again, of the speaker's need for human connection.

The first three poems are part of the second section, whereas "smoothie" and "shell" belong to the last section. I chose these poems because they differently address the body and the violence inflicted on this body. They also represent the author's characteristic strengths and some typical translation issues. The author has an unadorned lucidity in the way she uses free verse, and her metaphors are layered with compressed meaning. Form wise, she is willing to explore the confined space of the poem and often uses white space to address tone and the required silences. As always, I started by doing a close reading of the original text, paying attention to the quality of words and the way their layered meanings can be preserved in English. In Daniel Hahn's words, "translators are hybrids – a particularly strange kind of reader, with a particularly strange kind of writer" (2). Romanian is more musical and is riper than English which makes the translation process challenging. It always helps to be fortunate enough to be in conversation with the poet to clarify any linguistic or cultural confusions. Ioana is a versatile poet, whose language is both flexible and intriguing, requiring careful attention to the interplay of the scientific, musical, and conversational undertones her verses encapsulate.

My translation strived to convey the poet's unique style and rich imagination, while also preserving the quality of her poetic trope. Her direct style presented me with an initial problem, because the poems seemed easy to translate which instantly led to a literalness of equivalents. For example, in "slug" it was easy to follow the use of the anaphora (the use of "există" four times) in the English translation. There was a musical interplay between the "x" in the "limax" and "există" which could not be identically replicated in English (43). However, the musical touch was preserved in the "g" in the English words: "slug", "rough", "glittering". Another difficulty came from the two questions that also played around anaphora: "ce pot alege & ce se alege". In Romanian, the structures are similar with the only difference in the voice; the first verb is used in the active voice, whereas the second is in the reflexive voice (Romanian has three voices). In order to preserve the use of the anaphora and address this grammar difference between the two languages, I kept the interrogative pronoun "what" and used verbs with prepositions/phrasal verbs: "long for", "come of", "shot at". I also used perspective change, as a solution type as Anthony Pym names them in his book, *Translation Solutions for*

*Many Languages*. I changed the reflexive voice into an active voice, thus changing the sentence focus.

Similar translation decisions were made at the form level and meaning level in the other poems, from literal translation (“one May evening I caught a moth in a glass”) to modulation (“it is not appropriate to talk about illness”) and these reflected not only the necessary small, deft touches but also the very nature of translation as an act of interpretation and imagination. In his article, “How to Read a Translation”, Lawrence Venuti echoes his view on foreignization as the ethical choice for translators to make:

The translator must somehow control the unavoidable release of meanings that work only in the translating language. Apart from threatening to derail the project of imitation, these meanings always risk transforming what is foreign into something too familiar or simply irrelevant. The loss in translation remains invisible to any reader who doesn’t make a careful comparison to the foreign text—i.e., most of us. The gain is everywhere apparent, although only if the reader looks.  
(n.p.)

Hopefully, there is a gain in the way the five poems are carried over from Romanian into English, and it outweighs the losses.

As a poet myself, I had to depart from the boundaries of my own writing, keeping one foot on the shore of linguistic and cultural reality and the other on the shore of creativity. For example, her change of linguistic choices and tone from one section to the next required paying attention to how themes and contents are complemented by forms and the manner in which the Romanian text could be carried on into English, retaining the individual voice of the speaker. To my mind, both poetry and translation are all about slowing down – writing, reading, and using the language in a manner that is equally quiet and intimate. Translation feels at times also a relief and a heaviness, as opposed to the way poetry is primarily interested in preserving an imaginary place. When there is a poetic language to be translated, the process intensifies, since the poem allows the translator to share space with the pace, cohabit and inhabit the poem. Translation thus stands for the metaphor of the limitations of the space and its potential to overflow its own confinement on the page.

As a reader of Ioana Vintilă’s poetry, I was seduced by her use of the senses to unsettle the form and enhance the content. Her poems required an alertness that both puzzled and appealed to me as a translator. The attention she paid to structure and white space, her code-switching and occasional hybridity made the collection a peculiar kind of animal. Reading, understanding, and translating her poetry felt both like taming this wilding, as well as allowing it to run free. Thus, the five poems from Ioana Vintilă’s second collection mirror the volume’s resourceful construction of poetic survival in a mechanical, dehumanized world, seducing the reader with vivid imagery and an almost gothic mood. Hopefully, the English translation of her poems captures the rich cultural and scientific references of her poetry, alongside the lushness of her verse.

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**the origami bunker**  
**Ioana Vintilă**

**the origami bunker**  
**Ioana Vintilă**

**Translated by Clara Burghilea**

limax

slug

există melci fără cochilie,  
așa cum există piele aspră, neatinsă

there are slugs  
same way there is rough, untouched skin

există praf în pânze strălucitoare de păianjen  
& există pietre desfăcute, sângerânde

there is dust in the glittering spiderwebs  
& there are open, bleeding stones

ce pot alege  
& ce se alege de inima asta tânără  
în care se trage cu revolverul pe jumătate  
încărcat

What can I long for?  
& what will come off this young heart  
which is shot at with a half-loaded  
revolver

ca un limax orb  
să mă târăsc  
să mă ghemuiesc  
stadiu anterior  
în pietre  
desfăcute  
sângerânde

like a blind slug  
to crawl  
to crouch  
to a previous stage  
in stones  
open  
bleeding

meltdown

meltdown

în sfârșit durerea asta are un nume

finally there is a name for this pain

dar se cuvine să nu vorbim  
despre boală

but it is not appropriate to talk  
about illness

înăuntru

inside

corpul  
un reactor sub presiune

the body  
an under-pressure reactor

tijele de metal din creier roase metodic

the metal rods in the brain methodically  
corroded

se așteaptă declicul hotărâtor

awaiting for the decisive trigger

o implozie cu o lumină splendidă

an implosion with a splendid, blinding

orbitoare

light

&

&

câmpul gol ce rămâne în urmă

the empty field left behind

văl

veil

într-o seară de mai am prins un fluture de  
noapte într-un  
pahar. piciorușele i se scuturau lovind sticla.  
în zecile lui  
de ochi am văzut cum noaptea solară se așază  
ca o coajă de  
mandarină  
peste pleoapele noastre

one May evening I caught a moth  
in a glass. its little legs were dangling against  
the glass.  
within its dozens  
eyes I saw the solar night falling like a  
mandarin peel  
over our eyelids

smoothie

smoothie

utopiile se măsoară  
în forma distinctă a ochilor unui orb  
licheni & mușchi de inimă în blender  
presărați pe-o plajă unde am stat  
la Marea Nordului  
& în zare se profila un torace gigantic  
deschis  
gata să cuprindă țărmurile

utopias are measured  
in the distinct shape of a blind man's eyes  
lichens & heart muscles in the blender  
sprinkled across a beach we shared  
at The North Sea  
& the silhouette of a giant open thorax  
on the horizon  
ready to swallow the shores

și-am strâns mâna cu nisip ud  
am simțit particule sub unghii  
apoi am plâns încet pentru noi toți

and I clutched my hand filled with wet sand  
felt the particles under my nails  
then softly cried for us all

scoică

shell

am citit că scolioza Luciei Berlin  
i-a perforat un plămân  
și a fost nevoită să care pretutindeni, în ultimii  
ani,  
o butelie cu oxigen

I read Lucia Berlin's scoliosis  
perforated a lung  
and she had to carry everywhere, during her  
last years,  
an oxygen tank

vreau doar să te întreb dacă, atunci când va  
veni timpul,  
o s-o căram împreună în timp ce ne facem  
micul dejun  
în apartamentul de pe coasta de est a spaniei

I just want to ask you if, when the time  
comes,  
we will carry it together while making  
breakfast  
in the apartment on the eastern coast of Spain

și dacă atunci când vom sta pe plajă să citim

and when we lie on the beach reading

o să-ți culci urechea  
să auzi șuieratul sincopat, din ce în ce mai  
slab,  
al scoicii din piept

you will place your ear  
to hear the syncopated, fading  
whizzing  
of the shell in the chest