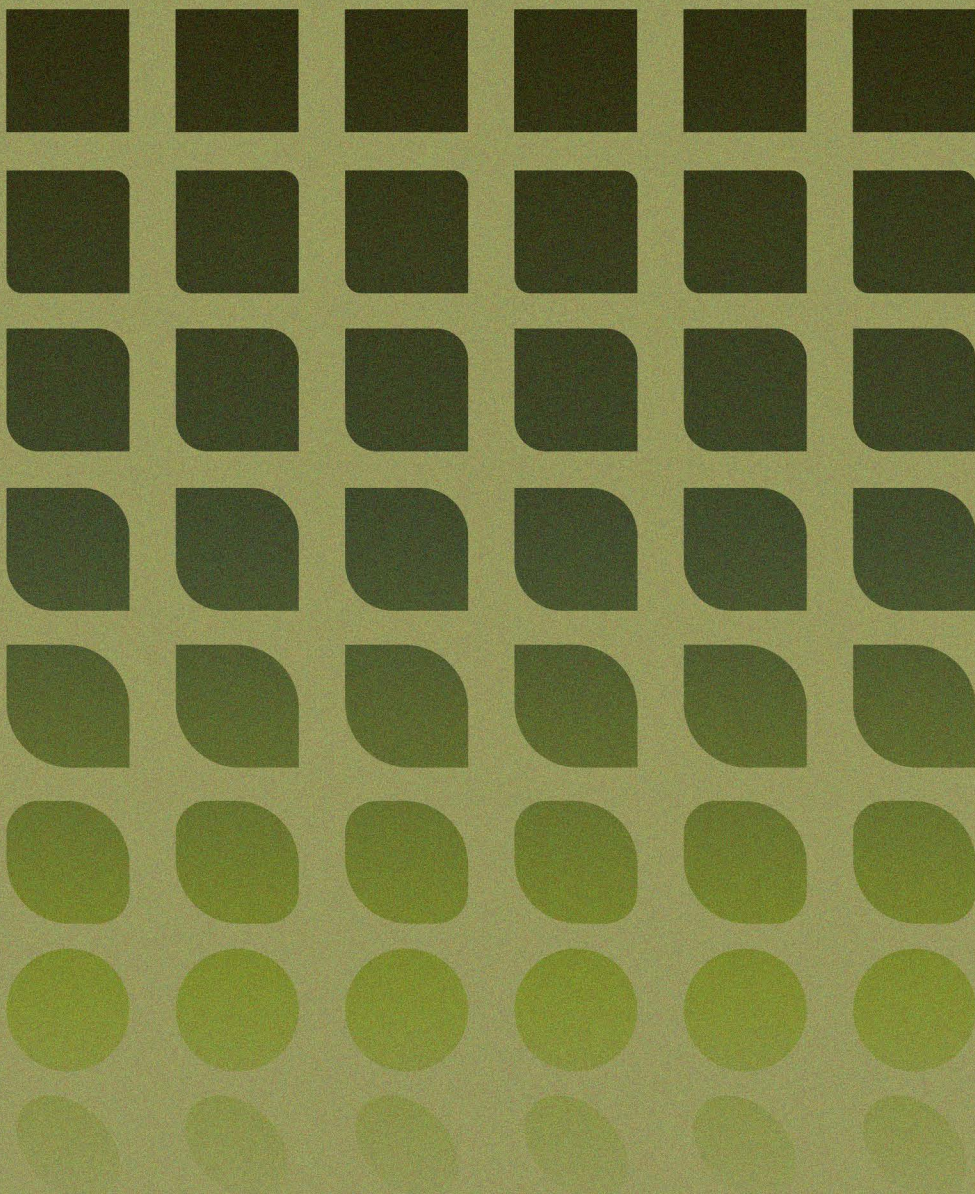


CRAFT CHAPS

Mordecai Martin



**SENSE: ON MADNESS AND
TRANSLATION**

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Madness is inarticulation. Language is abandoned in favor of a scream, sounds that achieve nothing but expressing and inspiring terror. Oh, sometimes we dress it up in copious verbiage, the rantings of a Mad man, the intricately detailed paranoid map of the hostile world, the overflow and abundance of love for complete strangers, and hostility towards all who attempt to care for the Mad. Babble. You make no sense. Something is wrong.

Translation moves from language through the inarticulate and back to language. You must go silent as you translate. You must hem and haw and find words and reject words. You pour over a dictionary, you find the wrong word, you try it and spend half a day mistaken. You are wrong and make no sense. You are right, and sense is restored.

I am a mad man and a translator. I work from Hebrew and Yiddish into English. I speak English and Spanish. Being mad and being a translator could be unrelated processes in my life. The depths of my psychosis and depression, my suicide attempts, the retreat to inpatient care facilities, all that marked/marred/made-up (constituted?) my early twenties. I did not publish my first translations until my mid-thirties. It is conceivable that, in the intervening time, I recovered and began my translation practice as a whole, unbroken mind.

That's not how any of this works.

Once the mind cracks open, once the world is shown to be frighteningly thin/permeable/full of holes/shredded, what hope do we have of containing the soul to one language? Once a second or third or fourth language is gained, how can one feel except insane, balancing perceptions between the words? Is rojo red? It feels a bit brighter. Is pain *ווייט ק*? The latter feels ghostlier, it echoes in the bones. What am I talking about? What am I saying? What language is this?

LATIN

If I am going to talk of madness and translation, as I always do, I must begin with my fundamentally fractured relationship to language acquisition. Nothing characterizes the way I have gained language by so much as the failed attempt, the slinking out of a classroom one day and refusing to go back, the feeling that I have failed, the shame with which I gaze at the textbook with only a handful of exercises filled in, the abandoned notebook.

I chose Latin from Spanish/French/Italian because my sister had taken it, and I loved and admired her hyperfixation on all things ancient. There may be something to be said here about madness in families. There may be something to be said here of my sister's struggles and triumphs, her madness.

I will not translate my sister to this page.

I am picking up and rejecting topics for this essay as I write it. I am allowing you to see this. It is what translation has taught me to do, to make visible the effort, to add the footnote, the parataxis, the paratext. Parataxis is Greek, but paratext is at least half-Latin.

We speak lightly of Latin, the youthful fun we had. Gaius and Marcus and Portia and Livia having their basically grammatical adventures. Mrs. D and Mr. M, our middle and high school Latin teachers and their eccentricities—is madness studied at school? Is madness learned?—have been transformed from human to story, as the language itself is no longer living. There is a sense of joy and play in Latin language learning, because what can it matter? Who is there to stop us, check us, misunderstand us? We are not trying to speak to the living, with their complicated feelings about their language, their fathers who spoke with this accent, their mothers who forbid them to say those words. We are simply spending time with ghostly peers, all the school children sitting in their classrooms for the last two millennia, pouring over charted verbs, noun declensions, trying to pound the concrete fact of Latin into their heads. Bringing Rome back, word by word. Honoring the glorious dead.

Caesar divided Gaul into three parts, Cato demanded that Carthage be destroyed, and Augustus found Rome in brick and clad it in marble. Everything is memorizable and clear. Is this language at all? It feels more like math, or history, or a giant word puzzle. And so Lydia Davis reminds us in her second of “Twenty One Pleasures of Translating, and One Silver Lining”:

In translating, then you are . . . always solving a problem. It may be a word problem, an ingenious, complicated word problem that requires not only a good deal of craft but some art or artfulness in its solution. And yet, though the problem is embedded in a text of great inherent interest, even importance, it always retains some of the same appeal as those problems posed by much simpler or intellectually limited word puzzles in the daily or Sunday paper or in a slim book picked up at a train station—a crossword, a Jumble, a code. (Davis, 7)

I learned from Latin that translation can be finding the exact word in a matrix of expected words. *Navem* because the ship receives the action *navigo*, I am sailing, and is thus the direct object and must be declined as such. Not *navis*, because then the ship would be sailing itself, the verb would have to be *navigat* and where would I go? I disappear, behind the scenes, I move the words around. I am the translator, and I am just here to make sure everything goes smoothly. It’s all going according to plan. Calm, sane, declined, and conjugated. *Amo amas amat*, and all is right with the world. Even writing original works can feel like this. One word after another, each one the natural consequence of the one before and after it. Just as surely as *Jocasta* and *Laius* exposing *Oedipus* on a hillside leads to *Laius*’ death and *Jocasta*’s sin and *Oedipus*’ blindness. Words as the fate of other words.

That way madness lies.

I was never expected to be fluent in Latin. Perhaps other teachers, other environments, other times, would have had higher hopes for me. And indeed, when I left the loving embrace of my high school Latin instruction and was dropped into my first attempts at translating Virgil’s *Aeneid* in college, it all went wrong. It was not enough to move through dictionaries and charts. I had to feel something. I mostly felt wrong. Bad. Ashamed. Having fulfilled my

language requirement, I dropped Latin. Having gotten my associate degree, I quietly left college.

There was a strange light in my eyes. I believed I heard the voice of God in all I did and didn't do. I wanted to study Torah, to balance myself with prayer. In the Jewish prayerbooks I grew up with, the English was printed on the right hand leaf, the Hebrew on the left. I wanted to spend more time on the left. I moved to Occupied Palestine that October. Back then, I called it Israel.

HEBREW

How to write the history of the time I was on the wrong side of history? How to be honest about my time as a Zionist? How to avoid gesturing toward innocence, to plead that now I am better? Yes, I believed racist lies about Palestinians. Yes, I allowed fear to govern my politics. Yes, at 19, I briefly considered “עליה,” “Ascending” by moving to Jerusalem and joining the Israeli Army, although when a friend disabused me of my mistaken notion that I would be allowed to choose to be an ambulance driver and not carry a gun, I lost my enthusiasm for such a scheme.

I continue to atone for all that, to try and follow a better path than the horrible one set out for me by elders, rabbis, and Jewish leaders who were supposed to care for me and guide me well. I am not yet redeemed and may never be. But I do my best to show up for Palestinians and Palestine and other peoples attacked by the so-called Jewish state. And I try to atone for this: That I learned the holy language of my people amidst the blood and gore and buried Arab towns and rubble of a cruel kingdom waging war against people whose only crime was to be born in a certain place at a certain time.

At the advice of a rabbi, I had tried to join one of the many, many, many Zionist youth movement trips to Israel, one that would have allowed me to go directly to studying Talmud in a Yeshiva. I barely knew the letters of the alef-bet, could not tell “ט” from “ת” reliably, but I was sure I would love religious study. I entered an interview for the program, and the interviewer asked in modern Hebrew, “זמה שלומך?” “How are you?” I apologized. I did not understand the question. I said I had mentioned in my application that I still had to learn Hebrew. He replied, “I know what you wrote, but not even ‘how are you?’” I did not get into the program. I made my own arrangements to volunteer on a modern Orthodox kibbutz and learn the language. I arrived in the Holy Land free to make my agenda as I saw fit, only vaguely aware of how I fit into other agendas.

Pay attention to voice, to the words used, create a matrix of meaning and then disturb it. “I was sure I would love religious study.” Do we think this narrator

is reliable? Do we think they are right, that they will love religious study? Probably we are searching for ironies. Probably he will be sorely disappointed when confronted with actual knowledge of Hebrew and religious texts. Or perhaps he will be just as naïve as always, taken in by some sort of bad actor? And the narrative will turn against him, he'll be a fool being satirized. But in the first person, how will that work? Can't narrate your life like that, the way my mother narrates her low-level anxiety as she cooks Passover dinner. Okay, so I'm in the section about Hebrew and the years I went insane. How did I go insane? Perhaps I was betrayed by the people I trusted, or by the God in whom I had put my faith.

But I was not. That is not what broke me. The sanctity of my three years in the state of Israel, that's not what broke my mind. I thought it was for a long time. I thought I had grown close to God and then terribly, weakly, foolishly blinked. God, pushed down the walls of my mind like they were paper cards. A holy wind wreaked havoc. That is what I believed, as I cried out to God to heal me in the long years after returning to the United States from the Holy Land. But that's not how I learned Hebrew, and that's not how I went insane. I refuse to perpetuate my own sense of being cursed.

Apophesis, the process of making meaning by refusal, denial. God is not embodied. God is not a human being. God is not limited by space or time. I am not happy. I am not calm. I am not a good person. I am not okay. But why aren't I okay? In what way am I not okay? Was I not okay because I was sitting in a fascist war-loving nation state swinging ever rightward even by its own twisted metrics? Was I not okay because as I sat in that nation state, I learned the history and philosophy of my people in terms of how much they sought peace, loved righteousness, strove to be kind?

The religion I learned in occupied Palestine could not say the word war, despite the country being at war. It could not say that God was a God of victory and bloodshed, despite the apparatus of the country being bent on victory at all costs, glorying in bloodshed. I learned about Avraham אברהם, that our forefather Avraham was entirely representative of Loving Kindness, that strict Justice flowed from our forefather Isaac, that our forefather Jacob, he who God called Israel, is Compassion.

Compassion. The feeling of other's suffering. Who felt my suffering? Who understood the OCD-like scrupulosity with which I regarded each mitzvah I felt was commanded heavily upon my Jewish soul? When I asked the rabbi at the Yeshiva in Jerusalem where I learned after mastering the rudiments of Hebrew, the binyanim, the buildings in which each three-letter root of the verbs becomes the stuff of holy language, he could not tell me I was wrong to obsess over details. He said that there is no rabbinic text where my paralyzing neurosis is empathized with, or even mentioned as a problem. Rather, it is praised. Be as careful in small commandments as in serious ones, for you know not the reward of each commandment.

I was trapped in crystalizing structures of holy law, and each commandment allowed me to obscure the moral crisis of the land where I found myself. I could not recall whether I had washed my hands sufficiently after waking to say my morning prayers, and feeling that confusion keenly allowed me to avoid moral clarity on Palestinians' right to movement in their own country. By memorizing the sayings of the sages of Jerusalem, Yavneh, Pumbedita, Sura, I never had to memorize the location of massacres in Deir Yassin, Qibya, Khan Yunis, Rafah.

What does all this have to do with the language I was learning and speaking? With translation? To move between Hebrew and English, the language of the Torah and Talmud to that of Shakespeare and Orwell, between that of Ben Gurion and Balfour, that of the empire I was raised in and the client state that has proven so useful to that empire, I have had to seek out beauty's relationship to violence, law's relationship to poetry.

There is a brevity in Hebrew, concision to the point of austerity. This brevity taught me word play and attention. I learned a language could be learned with passion and awful fear, but practiced with precision. Like a sniper's bullet. When approaching translation, when approaching writing, really think about the words you'll need. Don't use them. Discard most of them. Kill your darlings, kill your neighbors, death to Arabs, kill kill kill. I've written myself into a corner. I have just equated concision with genocidal chants. Chants are brief. What are you writing? Maybe it's longer.

In Yeshiva, the rabbi who taught me Talmud would stop me as I petered off into a discombobulated mush of Hebrew, Aramaic, and English, trying to refer to talmudic arguments in a synecdoche by one- or two-word phrases used in the original. “That’s how they’d say it in Lakewood Yeshivish,” he’d snap, referring to the hyper-specialized vocabulary of Talmud learners in ultraorthodox spaces. “Now say it in the Queen’s English.” So, I would translate again, and again, refining. The same rabbi years later would leave and then delete vitriolic refutations on my Facebook page, where I found myself expressing my disappointment and horror at Israeli military expansion. He still sometimes wishes me happy birthday there.

To translate the Hebrew of the Talmud, we interlard, we add words to create clarity and full sentences where the original language is sparse and cryptic. “An injurer (is) liable (to pay) to him (the injured party) five things (legal categories of the damage that has been done. He will pay) for damage, for pain, for medical costs, for loss of livelihood and for humiliation.” To translate the Hebrew of the Torah, we weigh each English word against the traditional commentaries it makes possible, precipitates, or excludes. Sat or dwell or lived? Which one allows for the ideas of Rashi, but also the ideas of Ramban, but also the way the passage is read in the Talmud, but also how the word appears in later books of the Tanakh?

To translate my experience in Israel into the life I was supposed to live; to take the frightening laughing hollowness I saw in the eyes of young soldiers and make of it a virtue; to contextualize the cruelty and racism of people with the kind way they welcomed me to; to straddle the disconnect between the fire of the sacred texts I learned and the coldness of the world where I was to practice them; to translate Zionism into Judaism and then both back into a life of humanity and conscience, I went mad. It wasn’t far.

AN INTERLUDE WITHOUT LANGUAGE; OR SOBBING

“Sorry” no longer means anything. An uninflected word I whisper over and over to lacerate myself as I struggle through a panic attack, a depressive episode, a brief moment in which my whole life is held in judgement and found wanting. It is possible that “sorry” means exactly that, that beautiful phrase: “found wanting.” If that were so, we could invert it, come out the other side of it, we could playfully “find wanting”: find our desires, our wantings, and be creatures unashamed of needing or craving. But no, that is not what sorry means. It is a breath, a hiccough, a catch in the ragged throat that has been crying all day. In modern Hebrew, it is said **אני מצתער**, from the root **צער**, sorrow, affliction, narrowness, a certain airless compressed feeling of pain. In Spanish *lo lamento*, I lament it, *lo siento*, I feel it deeply. In Yiddish, one could use the more Germanic **אָנטשולדיק**, it’s almost genteel, “Pardon.” But with inscrutable wisdom, more often Yiddish invokes rabbinic and liturgical Hebrew, **זייט מיך מוחל**. “Forgive me.” This is the freedom of translating the self. No longer am I pathetically sorry, screaming out my self-condemnation to the world. Instead, forgive me. We are referring by the exhortative form back to you, to the human face, outside of myself, moving from the insularity of one language to the expansiveness of two or more. Forgive me. I was so sorry. Now, I am a translator.

YIDDISH

There is no real chronology in language or madness. We orient ourselves by sensation. Where and when was the epiphany? On which word did I persevere? How did obsession find its way out, and perhaps more revealing, how did it find its way in? In any case, I have always wanted to know Yiddish, and in some sense, have always known it. My ancestors visited me in a dream, as I knew they would, gently kissed me, unsealing the silence the angel had instilled in me at birth, and I was flooded with sweet understanding. In all its pathos, anger, beauty, humor, strangeness, I knew Yiddish, and Yiddish knew me.

Wouldn't that be something?

In the COVID-19 pandemic, I thrived almost as much as the virus did. I felt no crisis I had not felt before, and worse. Isolation? When I shared my home with my wife, Atenea, in our first year of marriage? Not to mention we provided temporary shelter for a friend, Kahn, who did not wish to ride out the first months of the frightening new world by herself. We made a tidy trio until shelter in place was relaxed in late summer and Kahn chose to go back to her apartment. A quartet really if you count the cat. Far from the loneliest I'd ever been. Compared to those grim days of sour stench, hygiene avoidant and hateful of myself, in the long years of recovery before I met Atenea, and was strong enough to accept her love, COVID was a party. As for fear of the disease, well, my old religious instincts kicked in. I took safety precautions and resigned myself to the Judgement of God. When it finally caught me, I was lucky. No long debilitation. Some brain fog and flu symptoms. No hospital.

I began submitting stories, prose poems, essays to literary magazines. The world was ending. Why hide my light under a bushel? Publish AND perish was the idea. I also took classes. Writing workshops. And then, one day, Yiddish.

I had taken Yiddish before, when I was flailing through my time at a Jewish college where their insistence on Zionism in the curriculum slowly turned me bitter and hesitant to trust. I had dropped out of the whole semester, then the school, disgusted. Before the pandemic, I dragged myself to one class at a different Jewish college, but the voyage was so inconvenient, and the class so filled with old Jews asking plaintively for the meaning of words they half remembered hearing from their parents and grandparents, that I gave up quickly.

Something about the Worker's Circle class on Zoom was easier to stick with. But even then, I was growing impatient, when suddenly, Duolingo announced their Yiddish beta version was ready for general play testing. An iPhone is already an addictive device, full of dopamine-releasing lights and bells. When addiction meets obsession in the pursuit of a language, all obstacles and reality fade away. There is just you and the cartoon owl, late at night, speaking the language of your ghosts.

In German, which as the joke goes is a dialect of Yiddish, it's called Sitzfleisch. The ability to return to the stillness of the chair, the sedentary posture, the endurance of study. It is not enough, as the Yiddish writer Lamed Shapiro wrote in his essay, *Der Shrayber Geyt in Heyder*, the writer goes to school, but, in my translation, it is not enough:

to merely put together words like a crow collecting and gathering in her nest pebbles and pieces of glass, although she can, without knowing, also pick up a diamond, because, what does a crow know? Language does not start from the word, but from the sentence, just like music does not begin in the singular note but rather the chord. Only when you have pronounced a complete thought, a proposition or a "statement", you begin to speak.

How do we arrive at a sentence? We sit. And we write it.

There was no way to acquire Yiddish until I acquired it. There was no time to obsess in, no space to explore in, until the world went mad, and everything felt familiar and I gained the language of my family. Family made madness hereditary, they all got a little funny when they stopped speaking Yiddish, or

maybe they were funny before that. The truth is, we could spend all day tracing my madness back to Jewish neuroses, Jewish culture, Jewish history, Jewish trauma. They say trauma lives in the body, they say the body remembers. Certainly, I remember.

Lamed Shapiro, who I quoted above, wrote possibly his most famous stories about pogrom violence and how it deranges the Jewish spirit. I don't translate those stories, but I do work with the poems of Baal Khaloymes, the Dreamer, a poet who, under his given name of Sholem Shvartsbord, assassinated the Ukrainian nationalist politician he held responsible for the pogroms that killed 15 members of his family. The poems were written before the murder, but only the murder makes them make sense. Or perhaps the murder makes more sense than the poems.

Sense. Sentence. Sense. The heart of translation and madness, of all writing and all living. What makes sense? Not much. And a little nonsense never hurt anyone. But it hurts the text you are translating. Your parents or the author went to all this trouble to make sense of something, and now here you are muddling it, or making a different sense entirely. Sorry dad. Sorry mom. Sorry author. I had to be me. I had to be you. I had to be both of us, I had to be our ancestors too, I had to be all of us, speaking simultaneously in one line that only I get to write, but which will be read as a reflection on all of us.

That is translating: to say something in my own words, and be heard as someone else, someone older, wiser, farther away. To translate, to write, is to represent something as a form of the truth, and in so doing, to be the wizard behind the curtain, the one operating the levers of reality, and so it is to be one who has no reality, who knows reality is what we make of it. It's to lose your mind and gain the world, word by word. The translator is the fulcrum. When the fulcrum is off kilter, if the fulcrum is a Mad man, what then? The lever tilts, the volta arrives between the 7th and 8th line of the sonnet, we shift focus.

SPANISH

All the languages I learned, I learned for love, and so, in a cheap pun, all of them are Romance languages. In a bit more complicated pun, I am hopelessly nostalgic and brood darkly on every language I learn as a sort of ruin full of melancholy sublimity, and so each language is a Romance language.

There are many ways a gringo can condescend to Spanish; we find it comical (¿Tres leches? En ESTA economía?), sexual (¡Ay Papi!), and commercial (yo quiero los tacos con chorizo, por favor.) Within it, we rarely find language for our experience of the world and ourselves, and we hold suspect those who do. We think they're over enthusiastic tourists, who got too into their trips to Cabo, or worse, as immigrants. People who forgot to be gringos. The gringo is an American in the arrogant sense, a papered citizen of the United States. Strip away the arrogance, and there's not much left to the gringo, culturally speaking. Just someone born in the United States who might want to learn a bit more about Mexico.

This is all by way of preface to the love story between my wife and I, which is itself a preface to the life-changing love I feel for my son, Pascal. Love stories are often quite beautiful, and prefaces are often unnecessary for them. A love story with violence in it is not a love story, it is something horrible and else, something about how looking for love stories leaves us open to monsters who pretend to love us. Real love, while it may be full of grief, is not violent. My love story has no violence in it, but violence precedes it. Love heals many wounds. Wounds like borders. Wounds like diagnoses. Wounds like the ravages of Madness.

Her voice did not lower or seem embarrassed as she asked about a line in my OKCupid profile where I spelled out my madness. "Why do you use the word Mad?" Atenea asks on our first date. "Because using terms like mentally ill, depression, anxiety, those are their words for me. That is how psychiatry defines me. I have had to make my own peace with my lack of peace. I have had to describe myself to myself in so many ways. I am Mad, like a man

chained in an asylum, and like a poet, and like someone who stares at the moon too long and is a lunatic, or like someone my mother steered me away from on the street because he's acting crazy, or like my mother when she panics for no reason and my father gently reminds me to not worry too much about her, "you know how your mom gets." I don't say it like that on our first date. I mumble something about political commitments to my fellow Mad people. I may have mentioned the thing about not being my diagnosis. I forget. She was that beautiful.

But it did come out, how Mad I am, how hard it is, what it means for how kind I have to be. Reader, I never lied. Reader, I told Atenea over and over that I am broken and may never heal. I told my lover, your love makes me stronger, but recovery is a fiction. A sick man is always sick. Reader, she married me.

Walking in the late summer, I said I was hesitant to be a parent with mental illness, of having a child "like me," Atenea asked me if I could find myself in a tradition of Mad parenting, of passing on care that I only understand through years of institutional living, through anxious and annoyance-filled pharmacy visits, through conversations with my beloved schizophrenics and sweet manic depressives and my dear cluster B siblings, through my constant refusal of cruel reality.

Our child was born the next summer.

It's fun to flirt in Spanish. "Me gusta," giggled as the hand runs over the nape of my neck. "Besame," and then I do. "Te quiero" deepening to a breathy "te amo" in a darkened, passion-soaked room. But as I hold my child's small hands, are they *los* or *las* manos? I haven't come far enough fast enough. Eleven years of being together, seven of marriage, three of parenting, and I'm still struggling with most verbs' future tenses. Better to use *ir mas el infinitivo*. I am at a level now with Spanish much like the level I attained in Hebrew and Yiddish that has opened my world to the literatures of my people. I could read, could understand, could render into English given enough time and a dictionary in front of me. My child needs attention now, the backpack is full of diapers, no room for dictionaries, no time.

Is Spanish my literature to translate? In Latin, we are all joyous Anne Carsons, splashing merrily in a thoroughly pissed-in pool. Carson's experimental approaches to Greek and Latin classics invite us, instead of forbidding us: Why not translate Latin? You won't hurt it, it's been around forever, been worked over and over, do something bold, do something new, translate the Aeneid into a hip hopera. Get funky. Hebrew is in parts as ancient and explored, and better still, it is in some way mine, as is Yiddish. Ancestors demand I speak for them. Or I steal the words of my fellow Jews. An old Yiddish expression: גנב'ט נאָר אַ ביכע ראָ. יידישער גנב. A Jewish thief steals only books. And as the Talmudic tractate Bava Kama says, a Jew should despair of retrieving his property from a Jewish thief. For the only recourse is the Rabbinic courts, and they talk and talk and nothing comes out of it. I talk in Spanish, but nothing much happens. I get quizzical looks. Friendly nods. Double takes. Mande? Come again?

I will translate Spanish when I am asked to, when someone believes in our future together. I am waiting to be invited, as I was invited to live in Spanish by Atenea. What has Spanish taught me? It's not enough to have ancestors, you must have a child. You have to write in future tense, you can't be confused by it. You can write it simply but write it. Literature, translation, writing, living, it needs to be about now, right now, you have to say it like you'd say it today. And today has a foot in tomorrow.

Again, what is madness? What is translation? Bring it in for a landing. Give us something solid to hold onto. Say concretely, this word means that word. Traducir is to translate. But that ignores the relationship between Spanish's traducir, Latin trans + ducere, and the English word "translation's" relationship with Latin trans+ferre (past participle latus)! Or what ABOUT Madness? From the Old English lost verb gemædan, "to drive insane or make foolish", which in turn comes from the same proto-Indo-European root that gives us Latin mutare, "to change, to move" and in Spanish locura, possibly from the Arabic alwaq, "Foolish!" We've ignored it all, for what? A bilingual dictionary entry! Is that any kind of ending, just because it says something definitively? Did that carry you anywhere? Were you changed? Was language changed? No!

Mean the words in all their senses. Capture them all, use them all. A word will hold everything you give it, a sentence will hold even more. But the sentence is cold. That is why we continue. As Gertrude Stein teaches, "a sentence is not emotional, a paragraph is." Sense has no emotion in it, and you can't have an emotion until you make sense several times over. Make sense in many languages. Translate between them. Build your paragraphs. Form the story.

Let's go Mad together. Let's write something. Let's translate something. Because we have encountered language that is so strange, so otherworldly, so beautiful, so rare, that in some sense, the only way to move on is to become part of it. Breathe it in as a reader, breathe it out as a writer. Language is so malleable, that when we make it part of ourselves, and make ourselves part of it, it stretches us, transforms us, maddens us. We are lost in the words. We are making sense as best we can. It is not good enough. It will have to do.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Mordecai Martin is a bisexual psychiatric survivor, a 5th generation New York Jew, a translator of Hebrew and Yiddish poetry and prose, and a writer. He would like to take this space to draw attention to the ongoing genocidal attacks on Palestine and the Palestinian people by the Zionist occupation, and ask that the reader do everything in their power to bring these attacks to an end and to bring about a free Palestine. His translations and original work have been published in *Asymptote*, *Exchanges*, *Turkoslavia*, *Honey Literary*, *Timber Journal* and the *tiny magazine*, among other literary publications. He is a 2026 - 2027 Yiddish Book Center Translation Fellow, and he lives in Mexico City with his wife, child and Pharaoh-Let-My-People-Go the cat.