

‘Travail d’abolition’: Illness and Statelessness in Armen Lubin

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According to Emil Cioran in his essay ‘Avantages de l’exil’, the condition of stateless persons is comparable with that of the modernist writing subject, undertaking to wrest itself away from local or national ties:

S’arracher au monde, quel travail d’abolition! L’apatride, lui, y parvient sans se mettre en frais, par le concours — par l’hostilité — de l’histoire. Point de tourments, de veilles, pour qu’il se dépouille de tout; les événements l’y obligent. En un certain sens, il ressemble au malade, lequel, comme lui, s’installe dans la métaphysique ou la poésie sans mérite personnel, par la force des choses, par les bons offices de la maladie.¹

In passing, the same essay thus also equates the modernist writer and the stateless individual with the invalid, a figure dispossessed of corporeal agency. This article is concerned with the work of Chahnour Kerestedjian (1903–74), an Istanbul-born writer and member of the Armenian diaspora, who emigrated to France in 1922 following the systematic persecution of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, and in whose French-language poet-persona, Armen Lubin, the horizons of all three figures invoked by Cioran — writer, invalid and stateless person — come to intersect. Lubin’s texts frequently work to dramatize situations in which agency is limited or suspended, and where the communicative function of language periodically recedes. While occasionally thematized directly, at a more tacit level the condition of

1. Emil Cioran, *La Tentation d’exister* (Paris: Gallimard, 1956), p. 66. I wish to acknowledge the kind assistance of Arpik Missakian in granting access to the Fonds Lubin at the Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet.

statelessness is inflected in this *oeuvre* in a lingering opacity and ironic deflation, and in the way poetic language figures, and deflects, those disciplinary logics of which the *apatride* finds himself the object.

Schooled in French from a young age, Chahnour Kerestedjian was employed for a time upon his arrival in France in a Parisian photographic agency as a *retoucheur*, making slight alterations or additions to photographic images. It was during this time that he wrote an Armenian-language novel, Նահանջը առանց Երզնի, published in Paris in 1929 under the pen name Շահան Շահնուր (romanized as Chahan Chahnour). The work features prominently in the Armenian canon at this period, but despite the fact that it was composed and published in France, it was not to be translated into French until 2009, under the title *La Retraite sans fanfare*.² The novel is largely based on Kerestedjian's own personal experiences as a refugee in this period, and it chronicles the fortunes of a dissolute group of six young Armenians who have been forced by mass persecution to leave Turkey and relocate to Paris. The tone of the text is bitter and aggressive, and indeed much of this aggression is directed at (and combined with a sense of catastrophic loss in respect of) the Armenian nation, the Armenian Apostolic Church, and older generations of Armenians.³ In 1936, Kerestedjian became chronically infected with tuberculosis of the bones and he began a succession of sojourns in French hospitals and sanatoria, notably at Bidart in the Pyrénées-Atlantiques and at Pessac in the Gironde. At the outbreak of World War II, his condition was compounded by a surgeon's failed attempt to complete a bone graft on unhealed tissue, leading to a serious deterioration of his health, and giving rise to an abiding embitterment towards medical personnel on his part.⁴

2. Շահան Շահնուր, Նահանջը առանց Երզնի (Paris: Haratch, 1933) / Chahan Chahnour, *La Retraite sans fanfare: Histoire illustrée des Arméniens à leur arrivée à Paris suite au génocide*, trans. by Krikor Beledian (Paris: L'Act Mem, 2009).

3. For a discussion of Chahnour/Lubin's work and other literary responses to the Armenian genocide in this period, the reader may refer to Krikor Beledian's excellent history of Armenian-language literature in twentieth-century France: Krikor Beledian, *Cinquante ans de littérature arménienne en France: Du même à l'autre* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2001).

4. Kerestedjian's deteriorating health and uncertain civil status is charted in detail in Krikor

While Kerestedjian's physical health wavered for the remainder of his life, his civil status following the effective loss of his nationality after his departure from Istanbul also remained unresolved and, over time, was the focus of terminological slippage:

Avant, il était écrit sur mes papiers: *réfugié d'origine arménienne*, alors que maintenant (il y est inscrit) *ex-arménien*. Bien, bien! Dans le passé j'étais arménien; mais qui suis-je maintenant? À quelle nation j'appartiens? Mes inénarrables papiers n'en disent rien.⁵

By the mid-1930s, Kerestedjian had already begun to compose poetry in French under the name Armen Lubin and he produced a number of collections, bearing titles such as *Le Passager clandestin* (1946) and *Sainte patience* (1951)⁶ which point to the acute persistence of themes of non-belonging and physical suffering in his work.⁷ By contrast with

Chahinian, 'Drame et poésie de l'exil dans l'œuvre d'Armen Lubin en particulier et d'écrivains arméniens en France en général' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1979). Kerestedjian's unhappy condition can be compared to that of the Romanian Jewish writer and fellow tuberculosis-sufferer Max Blecher.

5. Quoted in Krikor Chahinian, 'Écartèlement', *Cahiers bleus*, 33 (1984), 15–28 (p. 16). On his arrival in Paris in 1922, it is likely that Lubin, like other Armenian refugees, was not in possession of valid travel documentation and there is a further possibility that the first set of 'papiers' to which he refers here was a travel document known as a Nansen Passport. Named after the Norwegian diplomat and explorer Fritjof Nansen, who was appointed by the League of Nations to aid in the resettlement of stateless persons displaced by the Russian Revolution across Europe, the document afforded the holder a limited degree of state protection. The Nansen scheme was additionally opened to refugees displaced by the Armenian genocide in 1924, prior to which Armenian refugees in France had no valid entitlement to stay in the country. For more on issues around Armenian asylum in France at this period, see: Maud S. Mandel, *In the Aftermath of Genocide: Armenians and Jews in Twentieth-Century France* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 32 and Greg Burgess, *Refuge in the Land of Liberty: A History of Asylum and Refugee Protection in France since the Revolution* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 47–48.
6. The works were published separately but are collected in the following volume, which is the most complete anthology of Lubin's work: *Armen Lubin, Le Passager clandestin. Sainte patience. Les Hautes Terrasses et autres poèmes*, pref. by Jacques Réda (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), hereafter PC in the text.
7. During his lifetime Lubin corresponded with a range of writers and poets, including Jean Follain, Philippe Jaccottet, Jean Paulhan and Henri Thomas.

his Armenian-language novel, there is limited specific reference to the traumas of genocide and Armenian exile in Lubin's work. Yet this is a poetry which remains centrally engaged with the legacy of such traumas to a writing subject struggling to reconcile his presence within a new cultural order with the institutional reality that he does not possess the minimum entitlements to validate meaningful participation within that order. Throughout the poetry of Lubin, there is an underlying sense of the writing subject as a 'world-poor' individual, insofar as the world of phenomena extends itself to him in a mode that is contingent on neither possession nor belonging,⁸ but rather is experienced as that 'primary severity' alluded to in the poem 'Aventures':

Rien que la terre, rien que cette sévérité première,
 Refus, défense, interdit
 Qui s'opposent à toute concession (PC 218)

Indeed, another text, 'Le Même Mot dur', serves to underscore the centrality of a certain resistance of language to this experience of world-poorness: 'Le même mot dur, toujours autre, encore autre, / L'océan le roule, le déroule et le lance' (PC 244). Consistent with this (customary) perception of a fundamental resistance of the world to assimilation is a sense that the subject becomes consigned to various *non-lieux* with which Kerestedjian was himself familiar: these included the shady Montparnasse hotels of his early years in Paris. Occupied by prostitutes and fellow refugees, these establishments were 'tous bâtis sur des terres plus ou moins légales' in the terms of the poem 'Les Logis provisoires' (PC 43). A similar space, in the poem 'Monsieur Arnaud, bachelier', is that of the *hôtel borgne*, occupied by a group of refugees, with the word 'borgne' engendering a subtle play of meanings around images

8. 'Tout est d'abord obstacle dans la poésie de Lubin, depuis les choses les plus lointaines, l'océan déchiqueté comme un poumon qui vomit le cœur en avant de ses remparts, les pins qui montrent leurs cicatrices, la voûte du ciel qui s'ouvre mais ne tient jamais ses promesses, jusqu'à l'environnement immédiat (sana ou hôpital à la dérive) et aux objets les plus proches, veilleuse, fiole, broche réduite entre les doigts de la main.' Patrick Reumaux, 'Une poésie sans rien autour', *Études* (May 1975), 719–21 (pp. 719–20).

of clandestine migration, criminality, and the diseased body, which, together, constitute a conspicuous object of surveillance:

Hôtel borgne dont l'œil valide s'infecte,
 Hôtel où les réfugiés et leurs dialectes
 Se glissent par une vieille porte noircie,
 La police reconnaît en elle l'objet de ses soucis. (*PC* 171)

However, such non-specific spaces also extend to the hospital wards, and the sand dunes and maritime landscapes which were the most abiding after-images of Kerestedjian's regular perambulation of the grounds of the sanatorium at Bidart along the Atlantic coastline.⁹

During his lifetime, it was the prose work *Transfert nocturne* for which Lubin was arguably most noted and for which he was awarded the Prix Rivarol in 1955.¹⁰ The work is composed of a series of long meditations on the nature of physical suffering and contains candid descriptions of the daily occurrences on a hospital ward. Amidst scatological asides on daily rituals such as that surrounding the changing of bedpans, Lubin reflects on the effectively diminished existence of the gravely ill fellow patients with whom he shared the common space of the ward. Thrown back by the force of their suffering on the givenness of their physical condition, these individuals are described as follows:

Ceux d'entre qui avait conscience de leur déchéance, ceux-là vivaient une tragédie, puisqu'ils se trouvaient dans l'obligation de changer de race, à leur corps défendant. De Français qu'ils étaient, ils devenaient des Arméniens promis à tous les massacres. Pis encore: Arménien de l'espèce 'apatride'. Ces malades-là

9. Lubin's verse, often centring almost wholly on the lingering visual impressions gathered on these walks, has often led to characterizations of his poetry in terms of its 'slightness'; as André Dhôtel writes, 'Lubin n'écrit rien qui ne vienne d'une expérience immédiate. Ni idée générale, ni sentiment, ni croyance. De simples notations concernant des objets, prises dans la vie au jour le jour.' Jacques de Bourbon-Busset, André Dhôtel, Jean Follain, Jean Mambrino and Patrick Reumeaux, 'Entretiens du Polyèdre: Armen Lubin, l'étranger', *Cahiers bleus*, 32 (Summer/Autumn 1984), 12–27 (p. 14).

10. Armen Lubin, *Transfert nocturne* (Paris: Gallimard, 1955), hereafter *TN* in the text.

n'avaient plus qu'une seule patrie: la douleur. Dans cette patrie aussi vaste qu'inhumaine, les gens formaient une race à part, avec leur propre mentalité, leurs mœurs et leurs coutumes. Bien entendu, leur langage aussi se transformait, pour se réduire à un idiome quasi incompréhensible et incommunicable. Le malade devenu 'personne déplacée' dans sa propre patrie se trouvait exclu du monde sans que son isolement fût possible. Car plus il s'isolait et se renfermait, plus il exposait des crevasses, des fentes et des fêlures en nombre croissant. À travers tous ces trous grandissait sa vulnérabilité. (TN 72–73)

It is in the sense set out above that the effective dehumanization of the sufferer is staged in *Transfert nocturne* as a kind of becoming stateless, through the suspension of any relation of belonging. In this analogy, the invalid, like the stateless person, undergoes a painful and debilitating withdrawal from a world held in common. Both figures find themselves the object of a force of expropriation or perceive the effective effacement of their individuality, at least in terms of how that individuality may be underwritten by the State, by norms of health or by the ability to participate in a common language. Nonetheless, as is suggested by the paradox of 'exclusion without isolation', in spite of the totalizing movement of expropriation, the body — construed by Lubin in terms of a lingering vulnerability — remains as testimony to a human presence through the emphasis placed on that human's suffering.

Now, the posited equivalence of *apatridie* and diminished human existence in the above passage is one which is also elaborated in political philosophy from the mid-twentieth century onwards. It is useful, therefore, to make a brief detour through two treatments of this theme for, like this passage from *Transfert nocturne*, they are concerned with the speech of the stateless, and the accounts which are made of it. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt describes the emergence in the early decades of the twentieth century of a new class of individuals on the margins of European nation states. These are the stateless: typically Jewish, Russian or, like Kerestedjian, Armenian political refugees displaced by mass persecution or revolution, and

existing beyond the legal protection of any polity. Arendt sees their emergence as of particular significance for the political framework of nation states since the individuals concerned become deprived of ‘a place in the world which makes opinions significant and actions effective’.¹¹ Underlying her account is an understanding, itself derived from Aristotle, of political man as an animal endowed with the faculty of speech. In *The Human Condition*, she writes that a life deprived of the exercise of speech within the public sphere has ‘ceased to be a human life’ because it is not lived out among other human beings whose lives are similarly invested in that public realm.¹² The diminished political existence of stateless individuals effectively renders them speechless, according to Arendt, for it sunders the close articulation of subjectivity, action and language on which, she says, political existence is grounded. Arendt thus bleakly characterizes these individuals as regressing to a ‘State of nature’;¹³ theirs is ‘unqualified, mere existence’,¹⁴ manifesting itself as ‘mere differentiation’.¹⁵

Arendt’s account of the diminished speech of the stateless has itself come to be contested by Jacques Rancière, for whom the taut distinction in Arendt’s theory between public or political speech — the domain of *bios* — on the one hand, and on the other, that of ‘*zoe*’, a private or depoliticized speechlessness, points to a misconstrual of the

11. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1951), p. 293.

12. ‘Speech and action reveal this unique distinctness [of human beings]. Through them, men distinguish themselves instead of being merely distinct; they are the modes in which human beings appear to each other, not indeed as physical objects, but qua men. [...] A life without speech and without action, on the other hand — and this is the only way of life that in earnest has renounced all appearance and all vanity in the biblical sense of the word — is literally dead to the world; it has ceased to be a human life because it is no longer lived among men.’ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 176. This is comparable to the status of slaves and barbarians on the margins of the Greek *polis* who were *aneu logou*, that is, ‘deprived, of course, not of the faculty of speech, but of a way of life in which speech and only speech made sense and where the central concern of all citizens was to talk with each other’ (Arendt, *Human Condition*, p. 27).

13. Arendt, *Origins*, p. 296.

14. Arendt, *Origins*, p. 296.

15. Arendt, *Origins*, p. 297.

object of political action. In his ‘Dix thèses sur la politique’, Rancière explains that underlying Arendt’s theory is a veiled distinction by dint of which political agency is always already assigned to those who are counted as possessing it.¹⁶ Rancière’s analysis suggests that since to designate a party as speechless is to fail to recognize the latter as an interlocutor capable of meaningful discussion, it is the speaking who arrogate the power to *name* the speechless, thereby accomplishing an originary exclusion of the latter from the terrain of signification. For Rancière, this veiled consensus over what does or does not constitute the naturalized usage of speech is so deeply written into the formal distinction on which Arendt relies as to appear self-evident.¹⁷ That distinction nonetheless determines whether or not we are able to hear an articulation of injustice as something more than an opaque expression of pain or suffering; in this perspective, the aim of political action is to ‘rendre audibles comme être parlants ceux qui n’était entendus que comme animaux bruyants’.¹⁸ The distinction between speaking and speechless is thus, for Rancière, not the basis of politics but its very object. In Rancierian terms, it is this *parole muette* which points to an articulate, expressive capacity of actors who are necessarily construed as mute from the point of view of the ‘natural’ use of language.¹⁹

A conception equating to this notion of a *parole muette* is to a certain degree theorized in Lubin’s reflections on the invalid in *Transfert nocturne*. In the previous citation from that book, this is intimated via the suggestion that the gravely ill seek to communicate but have reached a plane of unintelligibility. Elsewhere in the text, Lubin addresses the question of the appropriate literary response to suffering of this nature,

16. ‘On explique, en bref, la politique comme l’accomplissement d’un mode de vie propre à ceux qui lui sont destinés. On pose comme fondement de la politique ce partage qui est en fait son objet.’ Jacques Rancière, *Aux bords du politique* (Paris: Gallimard, 2004), p. 225.

17. Hence those distinctions are understood by Rancière to point to ‘l’admission comme partage originel, fondant la politique, de ce qui est précisément l’objet permanent du litige constituant la politique’. Rancière, *Aux bords*, p. 246.

18. Jacques Rancière, *Politique de la littérature* (Paris: Galilée, 2007), p. 12.

19. Jacques Rancière, *La Parole muette: Essai sur les contradictions de la littérature* (Paris: Hachette Pluriel 2011).

and he dismisses both an attachment to an ideal of stoicism present in a poetic couplet by Alfred de Vigny as well as a preference for extravagant romantic sighs²⁰ which he attributes to André Gide:

En effet, si Gide avait cette coutume-là (assurément excellente), c'est que ses souffrances étaient, elles aussi, d'excellente qualité: des souffrances obéissantes qui se laissaient envelopper. Mais au-delà du fait qu'un mal particulier peut très bien bâillonner l'homme et rendre impossible les gros soupirs adoucissants [...] quel parti doit-on prendre lorsque la douleur inhumaine dépasse de loin notre cri et se refuse aux enveloppements? [...] Tant que la vie coulait sans souffrance physique, l'homme faisait-il autre chose que justifier l'axiome avec plus ou moins de 'bonheur': *Homo homini lupus*? Désormais isolé de ses semblables et resté seul avec son loup personnel, ne sera-t-il pas obligé de lui jeter en pâture sa propre personne intérieure? (TN 94)

Noteworthy here is how the customary animalistic aggression of the physically able towards their fellow humans becomes altered fundamentally in the life of the invalid. For those who experience physical suffering, such aggression — which is supposedly fundamental to the social constitution of the self — instead deflects back upon the invalid's intimate life, which becomes the object of contestation. Earlier, the text alludes to 'cette lamentation qui n'ose pas prendre de l'ampleur, toute cette plainte qui n'ose pas s'élever et s'affirmer' (TN 90), but although the reader might thereby be given to conceive of the muted speech of the invalid as subdued in quality, it is formulated throughout

20. A comparable avoidance of such Romantic posturing is suggested in the early poem 'L'Ô', in which a prostitute who occupies the same hotel as the poet is observed as she returns from her night's work; on her arrival she retrieves from the street the letter 'ô' which has fallen from the hotel's signage: 'Des égards à celle-là qui est toujours battue, / Qui paye régulièrement sa chambre contre reçu, / Qui cherche la confiance, cherche la sympathie / Et rentrant à l'aube, elle rapporte / L'Ô de l'HÔTEL tombée dans la rue.' With its symbolic casting off of the 'Ô', this image would seem to signal a posture characteristic of Lubin's *œuvre* more generally: the determined rejection of a certain variety of poetic hyperbole in favour of an aesthetic of ironic detachment and understatement.

Lubin's *œuvre* as a violent internalized contestation which takes the subject position as its terrain, fragmenting it and setting it against itself. As we read in the poem 'L'Ombre à deux couleurs':

Du haut en bas une ligne axiale me divise,
 Me divise sans disjoindre les deux volets
 De l'échelle double et de la double identité,
 L'homme qui se divise s'enténébre cependant. (PC 222)

Here, the invasive effects of the surgeon's scalpel are assimilated to an expropriating force. However, in a manner similar to the characterization of the invalid offered in the earlier citation from *Transfert nocturne*, in this image of 'division without separation' the poem suggests the fundamental incompleteness of the surgical action through the persistence of a consciousness of the violence of that action in the body of the patient. This, therefore, is a self which articulates an acute sensibility of its own dividedness. In this respect, though his poetry follows squarely in the wake of the Rimboldian 'je est un autre', in Lubin's case, the reader is presented with, as Pierre Brunel writes, 'un je qui n'ose plus se dire que comme objet, et comme victime d'une agression'...²¹ In 'Minuit', nightmare and nocturnal angst seem to merge in the surreal image of removal men carrying furniture out of the hospital at night:

Le vent bouscule les plus gros déménageurs
 Dont les meubles sortent en tumulte de la forêt.
 À l'hôpital le silence s'étale plus qu'ailleurs
 Quand l'homme se démeuble au dernier degré.
 L'arrière-pays n'est plus pour l'homme,
 Pour l'homme étalé. [...] (PC 127)

Lubin's self-styled *homme étalé* exists bereft of any hinterland and is

21. Pierre Brunel, 'Le Double Langage d'Armen Lubin', *Francofonía*, 5 (Autumn 1983), 21–26 (p. 24).

construed here in terms of the very impossibility of possession and appurtenance. It is this abiding sense of the invalid body as a kind of matter for exploitation and of the consequent loss of any holistic conception of the individual which perhaps emerges most strongly from much of Lubin's work.

In this vein, a keen perception is maintained throughout *Transfert nocturne* of the hospital or sanatorium as a space wherein a disciplinary gaze is directed unremittingly towards the life of the invalid, radically depriving that individual of agency: 'Le Corps Soignant joue une comédie soigneusement mise au point, dans le seul but d'obtenir la soumission du malade — qu'on appelle justement le *patient*' (TN 89). In biographical terms, there was a very pressing connection between the medical and legal domains for the poet because it was his poor health which rendered him unfit for military service thereby obstructing his attempts to secure naturalization as a French citizen.²² This is a factor which would seem to underscore the extent to which the latter concept is bound up with normalizing strategies directed towards the body.²³

It is in this context, as formulated sporadically throughout the prose pages of *Transfert nocturne*, that the poems begin to intimate a form of experience configured at the intersection of disciplinary gazes, both medical and legal. In the text 'Sous la loupe', an evocation of the light cast by the moon on the darkened forms of the poet's fellow patients

22. As reported by Jacques Brenner in 'Présentation d'Armen Lubin', *Cahiers André Dhôtel*, 6 (2008), 12–16 (p. 13).

23. Indeed, it is interesting to note how the very disease from which the poet suffered itself focalizes the issues of statelessness and naturalization outlined in this analysis, for it points to a problem encountered more broadly by the Armenian community to which the poet belonged: 'In the late 1920s, the French Armenian population was particularly susceptible to contagious diseases such as tuberculosis. The standard French response to the disease was to house those afflicted in a sanatorium, but the government refused to subsidize the same care for foreigners. Fortunately, most of those infected with the disease could return to their own country, where they were eligible for medical care or at least could rely on their own consulate for financial or medical assistance; Armenians could not.' Mandel, *In the Aftermath of Genocide*, p. 34. The situation described by Mandel shows the extent to which naturalization may be considered to be contingent upon normative biological factors as well as on the more obvious formal procedures around citizenship.

as they lie in bed at night serves to enact the imaginary mastery over the infirm body of the medical gaze, figured here as a ‘loupe savante’:

La lune filtrée par des branchages
 Promène des loupes savantes sur les lits,
 Déchiffrant le rêve, fouillant l’agonie
 Et en révélant sur des peaux jaunies
 L’étrange parchemin d’un apocryphe. (*PC* 112)

In a 1949 letter to his correspondent Jean Paulhan, Lubin writes that ‘[m]es dialogues imaginaires [...] restent, surtout la nuit, très décousues, toujours entortillés, ou d’une longueur lassante’.²⁴ Just as it is the *medical* gaze which is enacted in ‘*Sous la loupe*’, in a similar manner, a number of the sanatorium poems which dramatize the poet’s night-time ‘dialogues imaginaires’ are themselves overlaid with *legal* imagery, marking out that space of indistinction between the punitive and the palliative which the poet seems to have believed he had come to occupy. Thus in the following citations from the poems ‘*Partie adverse; souffrance physique*’, ‘*Les Deux Accusés*’ and ‘*Les Hautes Terrasses*’, just as in the title of the text ‘*Le Témoin avancé*’, there is a notable pattern of references to deliberations, opposing sides, defendants and supporting evidence:

Dans la salle où les ombres délibèrent
 La partie adverse obtient la parole.
 (‘*Partie adverse; souffrance physique*’, *PC* 48)

L’accusé du jour était brûlé de fièvre
 Et celle de la nuit saisie par le froid.
 (‘*Les Deux Accusés*’, *PC* 116)

Quel colloque se tenir entre moi et la nuit

24. The poet’s correspondence, manuscripts and personal papers are held at the Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques Doucet, 8 place du Panthéon, 75005 Paris, France.

Quand je suis seul à parler avec preuves à l'appui?
 ('Les Hautes Terrasses', *PC* 195)

Noticeable within each of these couplets is how they designate the harried efforts towards speech of a subject whom a punitive disciplinary logic strives to construe as speechless, senseless or unreliable. What is marked out here then is an enunciating presence, but one whose utterances do not accede to any properly affirmative or declarative quality, being instead marked by hesitation and cancellation.

In 'J'ai un couple d'amis', the poet walks along the edge of a wood bordering the sanatorium at sunrise, next to a row of pine trees which obscure the light of dawn. In this poem, the posture of hesitation is staged as a rather opaque — and, to a certain extent, self-pitying — dialogue with the self (here, in the rejoinder 'si, la femelle, je le sais'):

À moi qui ne dispose que du mauvais versant
 D'impénétrables barreaux: rien que des mots,
 Rien que mes syllabes plus ou moins parés,
 L'envers d'une haie d'honneur, presque ses regrets
 Et pas d'issue! Si, la femelle, je le sais. (*PC* 210)

The puncturing, dilatory effects produced by this example can be considered an instance of what André Dhôtel identifies in Lubin's poetry as 'une parole prolongée, se perdant parfois, se repliant avec de soudaines détentes'.²⁵ In these lines, the image of a 'mantle' of words

25. 'Dans ses écrits Armen Lubin ne fait jamais que des remarques en passant. [...] Rien que des détails notés et puis considérés à l'endroit, à l'envers, en diagonale. Cela fait des poèmes qui ne sont pas des chants ni des compositions, mais une parole prolongée, se perdant parfois, se repliant avec de soudaines détentes.' André Dhôtel, 'L'Œuvre d'Armen Lubin', *Cahiers bleus*, 33 (1984), 9–13 (p. 9). These vacillatory qualities of Lubin's writings may additionally be considered a mark of their *littérarité*, in the sense of that term as developed by Rancière: 'N'étant pas guidée par un père qui la porte, selon un protocole légitime, vers le lieu où elle peut fructifier, la parole écrite s'en va rouler au hasard, de droite et de gauche. Elle s'en va parler, à sa manière muette, à n'importe qui, sans pouvoir distinguer ceux auxquels il convient de parler et ceux à qui cela ne convient pas.' Rancière, *Parole muette*, pp. 81–82.

is intended not so much to suggest a guard of honour through which a poetic subject might be borne along — intact — towards his triumphant revelation beyond the physical barriers separating him from the world, but to figure a subjectivity in suspension, and the illusory compensations of his command of language. Despite a venturesome enjambment, this remains a walled-in consciousness ('pas d'issue'), albeit one which advertises its condition eloquently in presenting a kind of speech which seems to have become neglectful of its addressee and is instead directed back towards itself.

In the work of other 'poètes apatrides' writing in the French language, many of the characteristics outlined here in the work of Lubin undergo an undeniably more radical formulation than in his poems. For instance, the work of Gherasim Luca engages in what is effectively a stuttering denudation and suspension of syntax in the host language.²⁶ Similarly, in the fragmentary compositions of Edmond Jabès's *Livre des questions*, a form of poetic discourse develops in which the very possibility of affirmation is periodically deferred, pushing beyond speech into the white borders of the page.²⁷ Yet, despite its rather conventional formal character, it remains that Lubin's poetry offers a compelling insight into how statelessness can be figured as a diminished kind of participation in a language and a world held in common. Tentatively emerging from these texts is a sense of the inadequacy of medicalized or national-juridical conceptions of the individual in accounting for that diminished, yet irreducible life. Where the formal logics of medicine or the law function inadvertently to silence their disciplinary objects, a finite enunciating presence, or at least a trace thereof, nonetheless makes itself heard in their wake.²⁸ The task which falls to Lubin in

26. On this theme, see: Michael G. Kelly, 'Poetic Utterance and the Cosmopolitan Indisposition: On Ghérasim Luca', *The Cause of Cosmopolitanism. Dispositions, Models, Transformations*, ed. by Patrick O'Donovan and Laura Rascaroli (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), pp. 271–91.

27. Edmond Jabès, *Le Livre des questions, I: Le Livre des questions; Le Livre de Yukel; Le Retour au livre* (Paris: Gallimard, 2010).

28. That diminished form of existence is perhaps best conceived of as a supplementary, residual quality of the *homme étalé*, to whom the security of possession or belonging is denied. The condition of exposure peculiar to this figure might be further illuminated

this equation is, to borrow an expression from the earlier citation by Cioran, a ‘travail d’abolition’, that is, the momentary elicitation of this residual enunciating presence operative at a level below the affirmative structures of the host language, even if this labour marks the elegiac loss of the security and integrity of the subject of enunciation.

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by what Martin Crowley in a recent work terms the ‘proposition of finitude’: ‘Enlevez, supprimez tout ce que vous voudrez: vous ne viendrez pas à bout de l’exposition commune. Car, de par la soustraction que celle-ci y introduit, l’humain persiste comme trace ou vestige de son propre passage: ce rien qui en reste par impossible lorsque tout lui a été enlevé. Finissant, évanouissant — à jamais.’ Martin Crowley, *L’Homme sans: Politiques de la finitude* (Fécamp: Nouvelles éditions Lignes, 2009), p. 27.