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Nicolás Campisi

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THE DISLOCATION OF COSMOPOLITAN IDENTITIES IN EDUARDO HALFON'S *MONASTERIO*

Nicolás Campisi
Brown University

In the opening scene of Eduardo Halfon's *Monasterio* (2014), we encounter the narrator—who shares Halfon's name but both is and isn't Halfon—stuck with his brother at Ben Gurion International Airport in Tel Aviv, an airport that “no longer seemed like an airport” (*Monastery* 11), awaiting his luggage in front of the carousel. Halfon has traveled to Israel for his sister's wedding to an orthodox Jew from Brooklyn, an event that forces him to directly confront his inherited Jewish identity. Simultaneously, Halfon narrates another journey—perhaps even more relevant—to Łódź, Poland, to visit the home where his grandfather was kidnapped before being taken to Auschwitz. The image of the misplaced baggage foreshadows *Monasterio*'s imaginary of a negative cosmopolitanism, which indicates the narrator's state of national, linguistic, and religious precariousness while being lost in the world. In what follows I will read *Monasterio* through two distinct yet interdependent lenses: how the novel enacts the contemporary moment through a cosmopolitanism of loss (Siskind) and / or mourning; and how as the narrator traverses the globe, he sets out on an unresolved task of familial “postmemory” (Hirsch) that reflects the endless drifting and the helpless searches of a generation that has lost most “living connections” to a traumatic history and a distant geography (41-42).

The figure of the misplaced baggage also serves as a metonym for recent Latin American fiction, in particular for a group of contemporary novels that address the cosmopolitan experience of those who lose their culture, language, and nation while being out in the world. If, as Martha Nussbaum points out, the world is composed by a series of “concentric circles” (the self, the family, the neighborhood, the country, and so

on) that frame the experience of the world citizen, then these fictions make a clear attempt at knocking down Nussbaum's well-established categorical boundaries (9). I am thinking, along with Mariano Siskind, of a series of works by João Gilberto Noll, Julián Fuks, Sergio Chejfec, César Aira, Valeria Luiselli, etc., whose globetrotting protagonists embark on journeys that do not lead, as the reader might expect at the beginning, to the discovery of a universal, stable, or emancipated identity, but instead to a state of precarious homelessness or "unhomeliness" (Bhabha) that renders impossible any attempt at representing one's cultural and national affiliations (Siskind 2).

Halfon's *Monasterio* embodies this unhomey impulse in a number of ways. For one, the novel starts in a non-place (an airport) in which any symbolic or material form of belonging becomes utterly impossible. While Halfon travels to Israel to his sister's Jewish wedding, a potential reencounter with or rediscovery of Judaism seems unattainable as the trip thrusts Halfon into a state of perpetual uneasiness (or *zozobra*): he introduces himself as a "judío, a veces" or even declares that he has retired from Judaism ("Ya no soy judío, [...] me jubilé") (58). On his journey to Poland, Halfon also loses his luggage at the airport and wanders through Warsaw wearing a "femenino gabán color rosa" that doesn't belong to him (33). In each journey Halfon visits or encounters a wall (the Wailing Wall in the Old City of Jerusalem, the wall of the Warsaw Ghetto) that speaks to a history marked by collective trauma and by the impossibility of enacting the cosmopolitan task of getting out into the world.

Monasterio's emblematic center is the scene of the grandfather's death and the subsequent mourning rituals. The corpse reminds Halfon of his first encounter as a child with the spectacle of mourning, when the members of the dead person's family lie for seven days straight next to his body praying and chanting the mourner's prayer, or kaddish: "la palabra luto me seguía horrorizando, porque la imagen del luto me seguía horrorizando, porque estaba absolutamente convencido de que, bien escondido bajo alguna de las sábanas blancas, se revoloteaba y sacudía el fantasma del muerto" (79-80). Upon the death of his grandfather, Halfon begins traveling the world as a way of chasing or casting the figure of his grandfather's ghost ("persiguiendo fantasmas") (84). In other words, Halfon's global itinerancy marks a cosmopolitanism of loss and mourning; while mourning the loss of his grandfather *a la intemperie*, out in the world, he faces other kinds of losses: nation, language, and religion (Siskind 1). In this sense Halfon is a figure of the contemporary artist, if we understand "contemporary," like Agamben does, to describe an artist that lives the present but is also able to look at it from a certain distance, perceives not only the lights of his time but also the darkness, not only the immediate but also the archaic (45). The decomposition of Halfon's

identity through his global itinerary is what creates the conditions of possibility for him to become contemporary, to look at his epoch from the outside and glance at the obscurity of the present.

In more concrete terms, I situate Halfon's *Monasterio* within a series of fictions that inscribe the contemporary moment through displacement and the temporality of transit. What I intend to show is that, for Halfon, being a contemporary means to distrust himself, and the conclusions he arrives at, at all times, and to insistently dwell on the arbitrariness of his cosmopolitan itinerary. In *Monasterio* this is noticeable even at the formal level, as Halfon repeatedly begins his sentences with hesitations ("maybe") and alternative options ("or"). At a moment in history in which the novel is not able to give encompassing responses about reality, *Monasterio* stretches the present in order to examine its multiple constitutive temporalities.¹ The shattered temporality of the novel reveals how the cosmopolitan subject forms constellations with the remains of various times and places, thus challenging the idea of the globalized present as one exclusively consecrated to work, consumption, and the market.² Moreover, a notion that describes Halfon's specific inscription of "the contemporary" is Bhabha's idea of "the unhomely" or "unhomeliness." By this Bhabha means the displacement of the border between the home and the world, the public and the private, and thus "the shock of recognition of the world-in-the-home, the home-in-the-world" (141). In a recent interview, Halfon said, "siempre viajo buscando encontrar una ciudad donde quedarme, echar raíces, colgar una hamaca. Mientras tanto, voy por el mundo dejando páginas escritas detrás de mí en el camino como si fueran migas de pan, acaso para no perderme" (Gordo). This condition of unhomeliness, of a writer who is constantly searching for a stable dwelling without arriving at one, introduces the notion of a new type of cosmopolitanism that does not necessarily provide an emancipated identity—what Siskind calls a cosmopolitanism of loss, sorrow, or non-belonging (5). But it is the image of "breadcrumbs" that brings up associations with the struggle of the concentration camp prisoners, that serves to delineate the contemporary writer as someone who needs to inhabit this unhomely condition, or to lose himself out in the world, in order to obtain invaluable information about the present.

In her landmark essay, "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism," Martha Nussbaum traces the origins of cosmopolitanism in Stoic philosophy and argues for the benefits of a cosmopolitan education. Nussbaum echoes the Stoic division of the world into "concentric circles," and posits that the task of the world citizen is to give special attention to the circle that encompasses humanity as a whole, without necessarily giving up local affiliations (9). Although groundbreaking, Nussbaum's argument takes the risk of conflating humanism with cosmopolitanism, thus rendering

humankind as an all-encompassing, homogeneous concentric circle. In response to her essay, Kwame Anthony Appiah argues for the possibility of a rooted cosmopolitanism, or a “cosmopolitan patriotism,” in which people are able to settle down and establish a rooted dwelling, but are also able to take pleasure in “the presence of other, different, places that are home to other, different, people” (22). It is my contention that Halfon’s cosmopolitanism subscribes to both formulations without embodying either of them. On the one hand, Halfon shares Nussbaum’s impulse of tearing down nationalistic barriers (the emphasis on walls, or *muros*, is no accident) in order to create an affective community of compassion and solidarity with the victims of human struggles, particularly the Holocaust and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. On the other hand, he takes pleasure in recognizing the rich possibilities of putting down roots within and across borders, insofar as these borders do not take the form of confining walls.

Yet, in opposition to the very idea of rootedness, Halfon moves between spaces without social and/or historical density. Marc Augé defines non-places as “spaces in which solitude is experienced as an overburdening or emptying of individuality, in which only the movement of the fleeting images enables the observer to hypothesize the existence of the past and glimpse the possibility of a future” (87). Indeed, the opening scene at the airport emphasizes the dislocation of the cosmopolitan subject when he wanders through non-places. Similarly, the narrator meets Tamara, an Israeli girl, at a Scottish bar in Antigua Guatemala that, as he immediately makes clear, could not be called Scottish: “No era aquél un bar escocés, sino un bar cualquiera en Antigua Guatemala que sólo servía cerveza y que se llamaba (o le decían) el bar escocés” (57). In the novel there is a sense that national affiliations have no empirical grounding, just as there is no reason to call this bar in Antigua Guatemala a Scottish bar other than for its “cerveza oscura” (57). Like the airport, the bar becomes a ground zero of cosmopolitan culture in which any world or worldly encounters are made possible. In the fake Scottish bar of Antigua Guatemala, Halfon meets not only Tamara but also her friend Yael, whose surname (Tenenbaum) is also Halfon’s maternal last name. This random cosmopolitan encounter or accident prompts Halfon to imagine “una novela entera sobre dos hermanos polacos que creían a toda su familia exterminada, pero que de pronto se encontraban, tras sesenta años sin verse, gracias a dos de sus nietos, un escritor guatemalteco y una hippie israelí...” (59). But later in the novel Tamara puts into question the existence of her friend Yael when she says that she was traveling through Guatemala by herself, as if to indicate that Halfon’s delirious cosmopolitanism sometimes draws connecting dots in the world map where there are none. In any case, if

non-places are not “concerned with identity,” Halfon makes the search for an identity the center of his cosmopolitan literary task (Augé 78). However, it is only in these ahistorical places where he comes across something that nearly resembles an actual solution—paradoxically, the impossibility of easy solutions, stable belongings, and fixed identities.

In this way, another literary tradition in which Halfon’s novel should be inscribed is that of the contemporary *flâneur*.³ The obvious tutelary figure here is W.G. Sebald, whose oeuvre is composed around the cosmopolitan *flâneur* who weaves together or reconstructs the stories of emigrants and displaced subjects in the ruinous landscape of Europe after the Second World War. But if we were to put Halfon’s cosmopolitan novel in dialogue with more recent reenactments of this tradition, an obvious reference point would be the oeuvre of his Nigerian-American contemporary Teju Cole. Suffice it to say that in Cole’s *Open City* (2012) the first-person protagonist, Julius, shares with Halfon’s the cosmopolitan origins and the outsider perspective that allows him to perceive and closely examine the rubble of the modern metropolis. In fact, Julius is also a figure of the dislocated walker who interrogates the very ground on which he is stepping, as when he realizes that the streets of Manhattan that he routinely traverses were once a burial ground for slaves from Africa. His intellectual background, moreover, allows him to establish connections with the work of writers, musicians, and philosophers—at one point, for instance, he sends someone a copy of Appiah’s *Cosmopolitanism*—in order to read the city as palimpsest and illuminate (or co-construct) its layers of erasure. In *Monasterio* Halfon also trains his eye to uncover the hidden or forgotten histories of cities, thus challenging the logic of urban oblivion and indifference. Like Cole’s protagonist, Halfon’s contemporary *flâneur* displays an archeological gaze that expands the limits of the present and the experience of the urban world.

As a result of the narrator’s cultural dislocations, his name mutates into an ungraspable entity—Eduardo Halfon becomes a different name in each country he visits. For instance, when he reencounters Tamara at Ben Gurion International Airport, she pronounces his name in a way that makes it almost illegible: “¿De acuerdo, Eduardo?, pronunciando mi nombre como si no fuera mi nombre o como si fuera una versión de mi nombre sólo para ella...” (21).⁴ Instead of condemning this mispronunciation, the narrator takes pleasure when his name is rendered estranged in the lips of others. In *Signor Hoffman* (2015), his latest short story collection, Halfon dramatizes the loss of one’s own name to the point that it becomes a leitmotif in the book. In the first story, “Signor Hoffman,” Halfon is somewhat disturbed when he is about to give a presentation at an Italian concentration camp and the director introduces him as Hoffman. But the opposite occurs in the last story, “Oh gueto mi

amor," which fills in the gaps of Halfon's trip to the Warsaw ghetto. In the story, the elevator attendant who works in the hotel is not able to grasp Halfon's name; thus, the narrator assumes with pride the existence of his more legible *nom de plume*, Hoffman. Coincidentally, Halfon's guide later informs him that E.T.A. Hoffmann, the Prussian writer, lived in Poland and was in charge of assigning last names to Polish Jews—names that he invented depending on his mood. In this scene, Halfon seeks to restore the invented nature of names—in opposition to racist and nativist ideas that drove countless genocides—and the ways in which these designated names are sometimes instrumental to one's survival.

In the same vein, *Monasterio* may be read as an excavation of an entire genealogy of mispronounced names and fake identities. The novel takes its title from the story of an old Polish Jew who survived the Holocaust disguised as a Catholic girl at a monastery outside of Warsaw. Another set of ambivalent walls emerges with this story, because the monastery, described as a series of "muros antiguos y húmedos y oscuros," enables the child to survive the war, only by forcing him to conceal his former identity and become somebody entirely new and uncanny (119). Before dropping him at the monastery, the father had written the boy's Jewish name in the palm of his hand. But his former name soon disappears and he has to abandon Judaism, the Hebrew language, and even his manhood if he is to survive the war. The narrator sees this as the paradigmatic case of how performing one's name, language, religion, and identity allows one to survive even the most adverse of historical periods: "Por supuesto que él perdió a sus padres, [...] y perdió su infancia, y perdió su inocencia, y perdió su nombre, y perdió su religión y su país y hasta su hombría, pero se salvó, disfrazado de niña católica durante años en un monasterio en el bosque" (120).

Insofar as it evaporates once he enters the monastery, the ephemeral name printed in the child's palm contrasts with the everlasting arm tattoos of the Holocaust's concentration camp prisoners. At the center of Halfon's oeuvre lies his grandfather's experience at Auschwitz, in particular the narrator's first impressions upon encountering his grandfather's camp serial number. Published in 2008, *El boxeador polaco* inaugurates a series of hybrid works in which Halfon deals with the legacy of his grandfather's escape from Auschwitz and later flight to Guatemala.⁵ In the title story, the narrator recounts an experience that will serve as the gravitational pole of Halfon's fictions: "69752. Que era su número de teléfono. Que lo tenía tatuado allí, sobre su antebrazo izquierdo, para no olvidarlo. Eso me decía mi abuelo. Y eso creí mientras crecía. En los años setenta, los números telefónicos del país eran de cinco dígitos" (83). Unable to overcome the traumatic legacy of Auschwitz, Halfon's grandfather has mounted a series of fictions that have helped him cope with it, at the

same time concealing it from himself and the subsequent generations. By remaining silenced, the traumatic history of Halfon's grandfather was passed down to him as an empty sign that needs to be reactivated.

In Halfon's oeuvre, the activation of his grandfather's story takes the form of a network of fictions. Each text, which can be read independently or as a fraction of such a network, shares the narrator's struggle to belong to one nation by displacing the traditional boundaries between literary fields. Florencia Garramuño uses the concept of "disbelonging" to read a series of contemporary aesthetic practices that question the idea of specificity and the status of the common by juxtaposing different formal registers (fiction, autobiography, photography, etc.) (253). Rebecca Walkowitz, on the other hand, defines works that use this same kind of formal repertoire through the notion of "comparison literature." Walkowitz posits that "comparison literature" cannot be properly studied through national or comparative methodological approaches, and that it emerged as a result of "the ongoing problem of statelessness and post-Holocaust debates about the treatment of minorities" (568). Indeed, since the publication of *El boxeador polaco*, Halfon's works have begun to blur the lines between fiction, non-fiction, and autobiography. *El boxeador polaco* is difficult to pin down as either a novel or a collection of short stories. Instead, it asks to be read as a series of autofictional mosaics that offer a kaleidoscopic view into Halfon's literary project. In fact, the book provides a number of texts and plotlines that Halfon develops in subsequent works; one of the stories, "Fumata blanca," which narrates Halfon's encounter with Tamara at the Scottish bar in Antigua Guatemala, appears slightly modified as the second chapter of *Monasterio*. In short, Halfon's oeuvre makes dislocation part of the aesthetic form and offers new ways of thinking about questions of belonging in the post-Holocaust political paradigm.

In *Monasterio*, Halfon embarks on a journey to uncover the legacy of *lo tachado*, or the crossed-out history. This terminology derives from a scene at the bathroom of the bar in Antigua Guatemala, where Halfon notices a graffiti-covered wall. Like the wall (*muro*) of the Warsaw Ghetto, in which "un símbolo grabado en la arcilla roja, como en bajorrelieve" still reads, the bathroom wall (*pared*) contains a number of handwritten texts (songs, names, sayings, poems) that serve as testament to the collective imaginary in public spaces (33). Yet the narrator does not observe whatever is accessible to his eyesight, but rather that which is crossed-out, inaccessible, or prohibited: "Mi mirada de inmediato buscó lo tachado, lo prohibido, y recordé los lienzos de Jean-Michel Basquiat, que en ellos escribía y luego tachaba algunas palabras, para que éstas, dijo, se vieran más; el solo hecho de estar vedadas, dijo, obliga a querer leerlas" (61-62). In dialogue with Basquiat, Halfon realizes that the crossed-out text, or *tachadura*, reveals even more than the visible one—and

his grandfather's Auschwitz tattoo, as symbol of his repressed trauma, especially when he speaks of it as being his telephone number, comes to represent the core of his family's crossed-out history.

In *Monasterio*, the moment of intergenerational memory transmission occurs when Halfon's grandfather, lying in bed on the brink of hallucination, realizes the imminence of death and finally relates his story. According to Marianne Hirsch, the second and third generations of postmemory feel the individual and social responsibility of reenacting the traumatic past to make it an inherent part of the present–postmemorial work, she says, “strives to *reactivate* and *re-embody* more distant political and cultural memorial structures by reinvesting them with resonant individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression” (33). Up until that moment, Halfon's grandfather had strongly opposed his grandson's idea of traveling to Poland, and even refused to reveal the address in Łódź where he was living at the time the Nazi soldiers took him as prisoner. However, when he starts to talk about his Auschwitz memories, his grandfather writes down the address of his former home in Łódź, which Halfon interprets as the final, albeit belated, act of inheritance of his family's crossed-out history: “Era un mandato. Una orden. Un dictamen. Un itinerario. Una guía de viaje. Unas coordenadas en el oculto y accidentado mapa familiar. Era, en fin, una plegaria. Su última plegaria” (108). Curiously, Halfon's cosmopolitan imagination pictures his grandfather's final testimony in the form of a map, or a geographical itinerary, that he needs to traverse in order to fulfill his individual quest for postmemory.

While writing his account of familial postmemory, Halfon situates himself within a tradition of *artistas de la pérdida* (artists of loss, or artists of the missing). In the novel this becomes apparent when Halfon obsesses over a series of photographs that he finds in Tamara's car while driving through Jerusalem; the images depict the facial features (a nose, a mouth, a neck) of Palestinian children, and they were taken by a blind Jewish photographer. The case of the blind photographer reminds Halfon of a genealogy of artists who were able to conceive an artistic project in spite of adverse physical conditions. In particular, Halfon mentions the case of Paul Wittgenstein, Ludwig's brother, who lost his right arm during the First World War, learned to play the piano with one hand, and commissioned concerti from great composers (Prokofiev, Strauss, Ravel) for his left hand alone (94). Halfon also echoes Thelonious Monk's assertion that “un genio es aquel que más se asemeja a sí mismo” for arguing that great artists turn their own disabilities into indispensable parts of their projects (95). In Halfon's oeuvre, *pérdida* (loss) becomes a multivalent word that designates the mourning of his grandfather's death, the loss of a stable national dwelling, and the aesthetic meditation of a

writer who conceives each new work through literary impossibility and self-destruction.⁶ In fact, Halfon's aesthetic production takes the form of a *rayuela* (hopscotch) of fictions, each one destroying itself and beginning his postmemorial project anew.⁷ Although the sum of Halfon's oeuvre gives the idea of an endless novel, each separate novella or short story collection represents a very self-conscious act of *tartamudeo*, or stuttering, which brings his art closer to that of the other *artistas de la pérdida*.⁸

Whereas at the beginning of *Monasterio* the misplaced baggage serves as a metonym for the narrator's unhomely moment, at the end he recognizes himself in the figure of two little girls walking upside down on the streets of Jerusalem. The virtuoso performance of the girls eloquently evokes Halfon's own performative *piruetas* (pirouettes) of identity: how to be a Jew or a Guatemalan when he isn't able to demonstrate either form of belonging through concrete, empirical actions.⁹ This image also inspires Halfon to think about Banksy's famous figure of a girl with black balloons that float upwards outside or above the wall on which she is painted. According to Halfon, in Banksy's work a creative act of transgression is enough for showing the futility of segregating walls: "Un muro nunca es más grande que el espíritu del hombre que éste encierra. Pues el otro sigue allí. El otro no desaparece. El otro nunca desaparece. El otro del otro soy yo. Yo, y mi espíritu. Yo, y mi imaginación. Yo, y mi racimo de globos negros" (100). Like Banksy's girl with the black balloons, Halfon offers his art of the *tartamudeo* to the dictum of bringing down the walls of political conflicts, stable national markers and affiliations, and pure forms of literary representation.

Thus far I have referred to how most of Halfon's fictions begin with or involve journeys and/or geographical displacements, and how their aesthetic format mimics the narrator's biography of disbelonging. But interestingly enough, the translations of Halfon's books also adapt to their geographical dislocations: the Spanish edition of *El boxeador polaco* contains six short stories, whereas the French translation *Le boxeur polonaise* is structured as a nouvelle and includes photographs of Halfon's grandfather. *Signor Hoffman* appeared in French before appearing in Spanish, thus adhering to Rebecca Walkowitz's thesis that "born-translated" contemporary novels start as works of world literature (2). *Monasterio* and the rest of Halfon's novels are fictions of circulation (as they begin with journeys to other countries and often take place in other languages, i.e. *Monasterio*'s characters speak English and Hebrew) as well as circulating fictions in their original and translated versions. In this way, Halfon's novels also enact the way in which Latin American cosmopolitan fictions inscribe the contemporary moment-making translation and circulation part of their form, they are meant to be written and thus read, even simultaneously, in more than just one language.

NOTES

- 1 For an in-depth analysis of how contemporary Latin American fiction and art are expanding constricted notions of the present, see Speranza.
- 2 I am thinking specifically of Jonathan Crary's concept of the present as a "time that no longer passes, beyond clock time," in which our routines are defined by "continuous functioning" and the reduction of sleeping time (8).
- 3 For an analysis of the figure of the urban walker in *Monasterio*, see Oliver.
- 4 The question of the estranged name appears throughout Halfon's works. In the first short story of *El boxeador polaco*, "Lejano," a student of indigenous origins, Juan Kalel, pronounces Halfon's name in a way that catches the narrator's attention: "¿Tiene un minuto, Halfon?, me dijo, pronunciando mi apellido de una manera muy peculiar, como si éste tuviese acento en ambas sílabas o algo así" (16).
- 5 In an interview, Halfon points to the spontaneity of his literary project when he says, "No tengo ni idea de qué es todo esto. Se está armando ante mí de una manera muy espontánea, sin una arquitectura previa. Podría decirte que no lo estoy gestando yo sino que se está gestando ante mí" (Chiaravalloti). At the same time, Halfon often cites his background as an engineer to refer to the crafted or kaleidoscopic nature of his literary oeuvre. This tension between craftsmanship and spontaneity seems to be at the core of Halfon's project.
- 6 Perhaps the best definition of Halfon's gesture of literary self-destruction appears in the last short story of *El boxeador polaco*, "Discurso de Póvoa," in which he is invited to a conference titled "La literatura rasga la realidad" and declares, "La literatura no es más que un buen truco, como el de un mago o un brujo, que hace a la realidad parecer entera, que crea la ilusión de que la realidad es una. O tal vez la literatura necesita construir una realidad destruyendo otra –algo que, de un modo muy intuitivo, ya sabía mi abuelo–, es decir, destruyéndose a sí misma y luego construyéndose de nuevo a partir de sus propios escombros. O tal vez la literatura, como sostenía un viejo amigo de Brooklyn, no es más que el discurso atropellado y zigzagueante de un tartamudo" (103).
- 7 Indeed, Halfon establishes an analogy between his literary project and the figure of the *rayuela*: "Creo que estoy haciendo una especie de rayuela. Que, para mí, es una de las analogías más claras de mi proyecto, porque puedes brincar para aquí, después retroceder para allá..." (Chiaravalloti).
- 8 The *tartamudeo*, or speech impediment, becomes the central figure in *Elocuencias de un tartamudo* (2012), where he compiles an oral history of "historias verdaderas que parecieran ficción" (11). Moreover, each new story forms a map of Halfon's geographical dislocations: "Buscar y contar historias de otros, historias que yo iba recogiendo –en Guatemala, en México, en Iowa City, en La Habana, en La Rioja, en Ginebra– de la misma manera en que alguien, medio perdido, recoge piedras o pétalos o migas de pan" (12-13). It is worth noting how Halfon refers again to the image of "breadcrumbs" to characterize the role of the cosmopolitan writer.

9 The *pirueta* is another recurrent literary figure in Halfon's works. In this scene, the narrator reflects on how "las piruetas de la gente son siempre incomprensibles" (96). In *La pirueta* (2010), Halfon develops yet another short story from *El boxeador polaco*, "Epístrofe," into a novel.

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