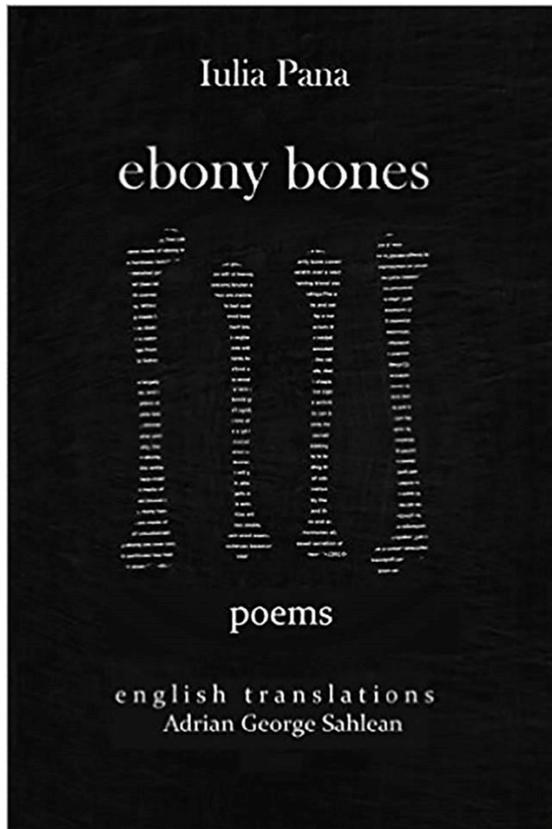


Ebony Bones (2014) by Iulia Pană,¹ transl. by Adrian G. Sahlean²
Reviewed by Catalina Florina Florescu, PhD



In this anthology, one discovers a female poet who is not afraid to disclose her most intimate fears, regrets, and desires. Iulia is asking us to come to meet her provided we, too, are not afraid to open up and dig deep, even if we may not like what we may discover. Her approach to poetry is inviting and liberating. In “Dots ... red-reflecting,” she hyphenates *love* and *exist*, a double verb for our ontology. It is a suave poem about that tiny dot that was once inside her womb, now an adult, and all these moments are caught in the (too) rapid twisting “on a spindle.”

With that, we go to meet Iulia’s other story-poems. In “Late at night,” the poet works on developing her desires while courageously breaking the stereotypes of lovemaking. The lover’s fingers are “painful hooks” and, amid the sensual encounter, *the* question returns –always hinged on our enveloping skin: “where have you been, I ask,/where have you been, you ask.../it is cold out, in life/ the sharp air/splits my sex/and I learn what I am...” There is a sense of regret, of words that could have been

uttered or whispered, and yet the poet does not know for sure, and, in return, we cannot know either for love(making) is somewhat unmade in our minds once the physical act is consumed: “I’ve longed to tell you/I am newly born ... now I feel you/ how do I know the words?” In “My heart—a white tea-cup,” Iulia visualizes her heart as a household object, maybe because she has decided to release or leave behind the burdens of one’s physicality. The vital organ is repurposed – an *objet trouvé* of sorts – the heart is the hearth of the house, attracting others to its core in subtle ways. There, in the center, the woman-heart, the woman-house radiates her love. But Iulia is more than that. In “Poems stomp their feet demanding to be written,” she reflects on her role as a poet: “I woke up this morning/full of remorse/what did I write what did I prove/poems stomp their feet/demanding to be written/like so/if that is correct or not, I no longer know.” To *un-know* is typical of all those who cannot and/or do not want to define because, once something has been defined, it becomes immune to change, desire, and regret. Iulia prefers things to unfold otherwise even if that pains more deeply/longer.

Furthermore, as a woman, she adds the gender discussion in her profession. In old times, men were writing us; they were dictating how we felt as if they were inside of us, not sexually, but emotionally and cognitively. They were stomping on our identity weaving it with holes, as *they* would have pleased. Iulia realizes that to write oneself comes at the cost of self-emptying: “I have nothing more to write/letters stop as if at the edge/of a waterfall.” In “I sleep in a cocoon-

package or metaphysics in a nightgown,” we encounter a more mature poet questioning herself/her profession – or having an episode of doubt: “why do I need poetry?” I can fly even without wings.” She seems to have reached a moment when what she has so far offered has not been not compensated, and she is tired: “my nightgown has a valve on the side/where my exhausted batteries drain/then wrapped/in a perfect vacuum/I am ready to put a cocoon to bed.” In “Woman poet,” Iulia is the poem itself, her body is made out of words, cries, and whispers; the physical woman is hard to find, is lost in her words, is a word within a word within another word—a labyrinth whose exit no one (but she) may know: “the woman poet always cries,/writes poem after poem/her lyrics scratched directly/on her body or her organs/writes poems on her children before giving birth/ on her man before choosing him.” A sense of sorrow pervades her “I can no longer see myself.” Iulia seems defeated in this poem and her sincerity is needed to reassure readers that we make and remake our days, and that nothing is yet fully learned, that lessons are added and morals erased, that all is an uninterrupted dance set on pieces of music whose rhythm varies. In “Ebony bones,” the poet reminds the lover/loved one that “love does not wait/it’s the river the world floats on/the blind world ...” Love is like *panta rhei*, the force that moves and along with it we move if we let love be, if we let love *love* – intensified reflexive mood.

Continuing this line, in “Requiem for an artist,” Iulia reflects on art today and the struggles that true artists face when mediocrity and consumerism are served daily to us: “How can one live with the burden of the art of dying?” From requiem, a song with somber tones alluding to the old *memento mori* motif, Iulia goes back in time via her “Words at the door.” This feels like a recollection, a backward trip, with words so clearly defined that they needed to be spelt letter by letter to reload their meaning: “when I left home/[...]/ I decided to run/leaving half my fingers there on the letters/ m, o, m, d, a, d, h, o, m, e, h, o, m, e.” The beauty of this poem is a revelation some may not be ready to face: we leave our childhood home, we close the door, we find our way, but while we have swatches of memories to live and relive, we discover that only in the house of our first cries and steps we are allowed to use our *original* words. Iulia hints here at our usage of copies or words and not originals, which are available and/or can be used only in the house of childhood that we left behind. This is a very visceral reaction to growing up and it also alludes to Plato’s theory of copies. If Iulia is right, then we use *copies* of words and thus, whatever weaker version we may possess, that cannot be as good as the original: “when I left home/I put on my red shoes/abandoned *my* words at the door... “ (emphasis mine).

Iulia says “I am discoverable” in the last poem from this collection, “I am my own remote.” The “I” is recurrent in her poems. If readers cannot digest raw feelings, I’d advise them to wait. But if readers prefer otherwise, if they crave the intensity of a woman who has nothing to hide, then Iulia’s poems will find their way to their heart in an instant. Read them twice (at least). Read the wonderful English translations of Adrian Sahlean in the morning, when nothing is yet formed. Or read them at night, when nothing seems to retain the noise of the day. Read them close to nature, as Iulia finds a lot of inspiration near her beloved water, the Black Sea. One word of advice as I let you discover Iulia for yourselves: do *not* think that just because there is only one “I,” there is a limited view. On the contrary, in Iulia’s “I” there are emotions-threads with which we go on to

spin our feelings and to love-exist in her poetry.



Bio: Iulia Pană (b. 1965, Constanța) is a poet and visual artist, journalist and TV producer. She graduated in Communication at the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration in Bucharest, and later she received a MA in visual arts from “Ovidius” University in Constanța. In 2014 she was selected writer in residence at Ledig House – Omi Art Center NY and participated in the BookExpo of America. Iulia’s experiments with sound, poetry, and colors have brought her to an intriguing artistic manifesto called Phonopictopoesia or Future sound of poetry (painting, performance, installation). <http://iuliapana.ro/bio/>

¹ (Available on www.amazon.com: https://www.amazon.com/Ebony-Bones-Ebonita-Iulia-Pana-ebook/dp/B011D3HVLS/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1497754665&sr=8-1&keywords=iulia+pana)

² *Ebony bones* is an anthology from the following editions published in Romanian: 1.) *Anthology of poetry: Imagine Simplă*, editura Atlas – București România, 1996; 2.) *Statuia zilei de mâine* *XXLove*, editura DUStyle – București România, 1998; 3.) *Noaptea Scorpion*, editura DUStyle – București România, 2003; 4.) *Contrasecunde*, editura Brumar – Timișoara Romania 2008; and 5.) *Rigla de aer*, editura Tracus Arte – București România, 2013.