Languages of Exile

Migration and Multilingualism in
Twentieth-Century Literature

Axel Englund and Anders Olsson (eds)

EXILE STUDIES

Languages of Exile examines the relationship between geographic and linguistic border crossings in twentieth-century literature. Like no period before it, the last century was marked by the experience of expatriation, forcing exiled writers to confront the fact of linguistic difference. Literary writing can be read as the site where that confrontation is played out aesthetically – at the intersection between native and acquired language, between indigenous and alien, between self and other – in a complex multilingual dynamic specific to exile and migration.

The essays collected here explore this dynamic from a comparative perspective, addressing the paragons of modernism as well as less frequently studied authors, from Joseph Conrad and Peter Weiss to Agota Kristof and Malika Mokeddem. The essays are international in their approach; they deal with the junctions and gaps between English, French, German, Hungarian, Romanian, Russian, Spanish, Swedish and other languages. The literary works and practices addressed include modernist poetry and prose, philosophical criticism and autobiography, DADA performance, sound art and experimental music theatre. This volume reveals both the wide range of creative strategies developed in response to the interstitial situation of exile and the crucial role of exile for a renewed understanding of twentieth-century literature.

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AXEL ENGLUND AND ANDERS OLSSON

Introduction: Twentieth-Century Ruptures of Location and Locution

This volume deals with the relation between literature and exile in the twentieth century: it addresses the situation of writing in between languages, and the specificity of the literary works to which that situation has given rise. The experience of expatriation was a defining factor for a vast number of modernist and postmodernist writers and left indelible marks upon the literature of the last century. If the exiled writer must necessarily confront the fact of linguistic difference, literature can be read as the arena where such confrontation is played out aesthetically. Literary writing, in other words, becomes the point of intersection between native and acquired language, between the indigenous and the alien, between self and other, in a complex bi- or multilingual dynamic specific to the situations of exile and migration. To be an expatriate writer is to be constantly faced with a gap in one's language and identity, to exist in a state of in-between, which, as the phenomenon of exile literature has come to prove time and again, is often as aesthetically fertile as it is bewildering and difficult.

The strategies for turning such difficulties into creative potential are many: some writers continue to work in their mother tongue, which is nevertheless altered or influenced by the alien context; others take the leap into another language, in part or completely, and thus bring the experiences of their own language across into a foreign one; others yet mix multiple languages in their work and thus create a literature that resists translation by sprawling across linguistic borders. Each of the essays collected here traces different aspects of this geographical and linguistic dynamic, as it shapes and is shaped by literary works, and together they reveal the nexus of migration and multilingualism as a vibrant epicentre of twentieth-century literature.

The Limits of Modernism: Borders and Breaches

In a volume that argues that the literature of modernity is inseparably connected to the traversing of borders, care should perhaps be taken not to circumscribe the concept of modernism with too rigorous a delimitation. Here it is the century itself, rather than the concept of modernism as an epoch, that serves as the frame of our discussion. Nevertheless, some prefatory remarks about modernism are in order, in particular concerning its correlation with exile and expatriation.

Needless to say, what has most insistently recurred as the defining characteristic of modernism through the years is the notion of novelty, typically imagined in terms of breaches, rifts and ruptures. The vision of modernism as the Making of the New has been a well-known formula since F.T. Marinetti or Ezra Pound, and a widely praised work such as Michael Levenson's recent *Modernism* (2011) still situates it at the core of the study's eponymous concept.[1] In his treatment of this formula, Levenson convincingly emphasizes that the necessity of Making it New strongly entailed strife and performative action. The modernist aesthetic practices are described as violent and conscious breaks with the past, and he stresses that they are often mediated with others in a collective process. However, what is patently lacking in Levenson's account of the epoch, as in those of numerous other critics, is the acknowledgement of a different aspect of rupture, namely that of expatriation. The acknowledgement of the highly diversified impact of voluntary or enforced exile on its many groundbreaking writers is, we would argue, imperative: one might mention James Joyce, Gertrude Stein, Samuel Beckett, Djuna Barnes, Thomas Mann, Witold Gombrowitcz or Paul Celan, as well as Ezra Pound and Bertolt Brecht – the two writers that Levenson posits as paradigmatic examples of the end of modernism.

The necessity of acknowledging the impact of exile on modernism is obvious not only in view of this canonical list of writers, but also as a consequence of well-known developments in the conceptualization of literature

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1   Michael Levenson, *Modernism* (New Haven and London, 2011).

in the last decades of the twentieth century. Both the concept of modernism and the history of modern literature as such have gone through a process of necessary revision, as the postmodernist perspectives of feminist, gender, postcolonial and cultural studies have increasingly challenged the Western, male-oriented paradigm of the humanities. In literary studies, this development has yielded insights not only into the impact of gendered discourse, of cultural exchange, or of technology and intermediality, but also into the existence of a specifically modern literary space: a transnational field that came into being around 1900 and which defined the dynamic between centre and periphery that formed the geopolitical setting of modernism. In the wake of these developments, the much-cherished notion of autonomy in modernist criticism has been questioned, even abandoned, in favour of broader, contextual perspectives.

Parallel to and in many ways a precondition for this development is an on-going ambition – from Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane's classical anthology in the 1970s, via Peter Nicholls's book *Modernisms* in the 1990s, to Astraður Eysteinsson's *The Concept of Modernism*, as well as his and Vivian Liska's recent two-volume anthology *Modernism* – to approach modernism as an international phenomenon, without ignoring the variety of competing ways to describe and conceive the concept itself.[2] However, even if considerable progress has been made in expanding and differentiating the concept, one is still struck by the dominance of the English-language sphere in modernist studies, and by the prevailing Anglo-American view that modernism had basically run its course in the 1930s. The most widespread ways of circumscribing modernism exclude a number of small but highly significant languages and literatures, in the context of which modernism had a different time frame. Thus Levenson's account, for instance, culminates in a discussion of the era's end as typified

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2   See Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (eds), *Modernism 1890–1930* (Hammondsworth, 1976); Astraður Eysteinsson, *The Concept of Modernism* (Ithaca and London, 1990); Peter Nicholls, *Modernisms: A Literary Guide* (Houndmills and London, 1995); Astraður Eysteinsson and Vivian Liska (eds), *Modernism* (2 vols, Amsterdam, 2007). See also Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA, 1995).

by the opposite stances of Ezra Pound and Bertolt Brecht, excluding a lot of remarkable modernist poetry written after the 1930s, such as that of Paul Celan or Gunnar Björling. In the last two decades, moreover, an intense debate around the concept of World Literature has made the tendency towards a uniform charting of modern literature from a Western perspective, and in the name of one dominant language, more problematic still. Questions of periodization and 'Eurochronology' have been given new relevance, and recent scholarship has turned notions such as the ununderstood or the untranslatable into political categories.[3]

From an increasingly global, emphatically contingent rather than autonomous perspective, an intensified scholarly interest in connections between literature and exile seems imperative: as new perspectives allow the concept of modernism to be illuminated by political, geographical and biographical contexts, the points of intersection between migratory movements and literary language must become a focal point of attention.

Ruptures of Location: Modernity and Exile

In Walter Benjamin's writings, one finds the argument that modernism since Baudelaire involved a new kind of historical experience, which is marked by a prevailing hesitation between sense and nonsense, and which breaks up homogenous time by eruptive and shocking events. Benjamin's observation of this phenomenon evokes the notion of estrangement. In a fragment, he explicitly proposes that modern urbanity needs to be understood in terms of emigration: he speaks of 'Emigration als Schlüssel der Großstadt' [emigration as key to the metropolis] and conversely the city, which is the site of shock as poetic principle, is described as a 'Schauplatz

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3   See Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (London, 2013).

der Fremde' [venue of the strange].[4] These reflections of Benjamin's suggest that the rupture of modernism cannot be defined in purely linguistic or phenomenological terms: it is also emphatically connected to location. It takes place in a dialectic between modernism and modernity, which implies both a new sense of temporality and a new urban and geopolitical setting in which literature finds itself. While there are many other factors involved in the shaping of what Pascale Casanova has dubbed the 'World Literary Space' of modernity, the transnational movement of exile and migration, very often directed at the very metropolis evoked by Benjamin, is one of the most important conditions for the new, expanded space of letters.[5]

The concept of rupture, then, not only involves temporal disruption (the revolt against a petrified tradition of European history), discursive interruption (the criticism of established ways of cultural production) or phenomenological eruption (the new experience of urban shocks). It needs, to an equal extent, to be understood in terms of location: not only as an immanent part of modernist literary discourse, but as a physical condition for it. Arguably, the disconnection from origins that are perceived as temporally outdated and spatially provincial is a central prerequisite of twentieth-century literature, whether that disconnection is coercive or volitional.

It is no exaggeration to claim that this spatio-temporal rupture is one of the principal characteristics of the transitional phase of modernism around 1900 – in the Nordic countries, it can be seen in writers like Henrik Ibsen, August Strindberg or Knut Hamsun, and soon after it is

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4   'Der Chock als poetisches Prinzip bei Baudelaire: die fantasque escrime der Stadt der tableaux parisiens ist nicht mehr Heimat. Sie ist Schauplatz der Fremde.' [Shock as a poetic principle in Baudelaire: the urban scene traced out by the *fantasque escrime* [fantastical swordplay] of 'Tableaux parisiens' is no longer a homeland. It is a spectacle, a foreign place.] Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire* (Frankfurt am Main, 1974), pp. 167–8; Walter Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire*, trans. Howard Eiland, Edmund Jephcott, Rodney Livingston and Harry Zohn (Cambridge, MA, 2006).

5   Pascale Casanova, *The World Republic of Letters*, trans. M.B. DeBevoise (Cambridge, MA, 2004).

further focused and radicalized in the careers of Joseph Conrad, James Joyce and Samuel Beckett. This decisive historical rupture, rather than any sharply delineated definition of exile as a concept, serves as a guarantor of coherence in the present volume. During the tumultuous epoch of the last century, exile becomes ripe with new significances. As a consequence of technological and political developments, such as new transportation and communication systems and increased mobility across national borders, exile and expatriation become qualitatively different from earlier epochs. Distances are diminished and modernity gives rise to a more globalized world. As with Classical exile, twentieth-century exile is often a question of escape and expulsion, particularly after wars and the establishment of totalitarian regimes. Even then, however, it takes place in a world that is very different from archaic or early modern times. The trend of increased mobility and availability has continued throughout up until today, and the intensified process of globalization during the twentieth century has been one of the chief characteristics of late modernity. As a result, notions like 'exile', 'expatriation' or 'migration' are rendered fleeting or fluid. At the turn of the millennium, one could question if the notion of exile is even applicable in a Europe where, in the words of the late writer W.G. Sebald, who lived in English expatriation, 'one is always in Düsseldorf right away'.[6] While the exact meaning of exile is handed over to each contributor to this anthology, the essays do however have one fundamental presupposition in common: they all take as their starting point the hard fact of territorial and linguistic rupture, rather than the oft-debated psychological or meta-phorical meanings of 'exile'.

Since the end of the nineteenth century, a structurally specific form of migration in modern literature has been the open, volitional kind, radically distinguished from the Classical exile of banishment. This is not to say, of course, that exile as punishment ceases to exist in modernity. However, the possibility of transforming the alienating experience of exilic loss into a

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6   In an interview with Sigrid Löffler, quoted in Martin Klebes, 'No Exile: Crossing the Border with Sebald and Améry', in Gerhard Fischer (ed.), *W.G. Sebald: Schreiben Ex Patria* (Amsterdam, 2009), p. 74.

paradoxical homecoming, articulated by Joseph Brodsky in a well-known essay, is altogether foreign to Classical exile writing, and is thus another strong marker of the historicity of modern exile literature with which this volume is concerned.[7] This historicity is determined by the internationalization of modern literature and the above-mentioned 'World Literary Space', which depends, on the one hand, on a postulated autonomy vis-à-vis political institutions, and, on the other hand, universal value claims. While concepts like autonomy and universality can be (or indeed, from a theoretical position informed by postmodern thought, must be) deconstructed as projections, the literary effects of these projections have been massive in terms of creative production, global distribution and translation, reception and recognition.

Ruptures of Locution: Modernity and Multilingualism

In the massive escalation of migration that co-defines modernity, the expatriate individual is necessarily faced with a multitude of languages, and the notion of twentieth-century rupture must include the linguistic fractures and refractions that result from the itineraries of exile.[8] While the observation of linguistic difference is, of course, an ancient one, it did nevertheless begin to take on an altogether different centrality in the last century. With this observation in mind, the story of the Tower of Babel, which constitutes the oldest and most well-known image of multilingualism, can be given a compelling if anachronistic reading as an allegory of modernity

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7   Joseph Brodsky, 'The Condition We Call Exile, or Acorns Aweigh', in *On Grief and Reason: Essays* (New York, 1995), pp. 22–34.

8   Two recent studies deal with matters of multilingualism: Manfred Schmeling and Monika Schmitz-Emans (eds), *Multilinguale Literatur im 20. Jahrhundert* (Würzburg, 2002); K. Alfons Knauth (ed.), *Translation & Multilingual Literature / Traduction & Littérature Multilingue* (Berlin, Münster, etc., 2011). The second section of the former contains essays that take an interest in the connection to migration.

and language. Babel, one may note, is not only the site of primary linguistic rupture. It is also the point of intersection between humanity's disregard for divine authority and the technological development that makes possible the construction of metropolis, both of which are emblematic markers of modernity, and both of which coincide with a linguistic dispersion that appears to threaten the very possibility of communication.

Moreover, since Babel tells of the sudden, radical realization of linguistic multiplicity, it is also a mythical manifestation of the notion of semiotic arbitrariness that has come to dominate the conception of language after Ferdinand de Saussure: the more palpable the experience of multilingualism, the more emphatically independent of each other the signifier and the signified appear. Finally, the philosophical and psychological perspectives of high and late modernity, which tend to undermine notions of a singular truth and a unified subject, are entrenched in the experience of being confronted with a plurality of languages, no single one of which has any absolute claims to primacy.[9] In other words, the image that the myth of Babel gives of the eradication of the Adamic language – a unified, God-given idiom, calling all things in the world by their 'right' name – mirrors the insight, fundamental to modern thought from Friedrich Nietzsche to Jacques Derrida and Luce Irigaray, into the futility of claims of absolute truth in the face of radical linguistic contingency.

In the wake of wars great and small, the dynamic of multilingualism and migration is given a traumatic urgency unlike any previous moment in history. Little wonder, then, that it becomes a central preoccupation for the twentieth-century expatriate of letters: it is at this nexus of location and locution, both equally run through by the rifts of modernity, that the authors addressed in the following essays find themselves. Much as the often traumatic experience of exile itself has been shown to harbour a creative potential, so the specific situations of bi- and multilingual interactions have been a source of aesthetic developments in the literature of the last century, thus supplementing the destructive image of Babelian confusion

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9   Cf. Manfred Schmeling and Monika Schmitz-Emans, 'Einleitung', in Schmeling and Schmitz-Emans (eds), *Multilinguale Literatur*, p. 8.

with a productive potential. The most obvious examples of this potential perhaps come from multilingual literature in the most literal sense of the word: works that indulge in poetic polyglossia, represented in this volume by various works of sound poetry and Dada, but also by the textual substrate of a musical composition by Mauricio Kagel and a little-known poem by W.G. Sebald. In these works, patterns of migration are realized textually as the authors move back and forth between different languages in a mutual mirroring of location and locution. A more definitive traversing of linguistic borders is found in the authors who switch to writing in an acquired language. As illustrated by the essays on Joseph Conrad, Vladimir Nabokov, Aleksandar Hemon, Emil Cioran or Agota Kristof and others, such a language shift typically carries with it subtle shifts in perspectives, style or patterns of thought, as well as an inclination for critical reflection on matters of identity and language. But even in the authors who, in states of exile or expatriation, stubbornly keep writing in their mother tongue – exemplified here by writers like Julio Cortázar, Nelly Sachs and Peter Weiss, as well as by W.G. Sebald the prose writer – the dynamics of multilingualism are traceable: the foreign-language environment surrounding these works seeps into their native-language writing, affecting in subtle ways their view and their cognitive, poetic and narrative structures.

Metropolis, Media and Memory

It is our hope that the fourteen essays of this volume can contribute not only to a more differentiated account of the literature of the past century, but also make us more profoundly aware of the formative dynamics of the epoch. These two aspects belong together: reading is part of history and history is part of reading. Consequently, the significance of twentieth-century rupture must be understood in wide terms, as a radical breach in both location and locution, which gives rise to the new identities and new modes of thought and writing that are discussed in the first and second

parts of this volume. Exile can be viewed, to borrow the words of Frank Ankersmit, as a concrete case of 'the experience of rupture, leading to a new historical consciousness'.[10] Ankersmit addresses this experience on a grand scale of what he calls the emergence of Western historical consciousness, but his description of a civilization that 'discards a former identity while defining its new identity precisely in terms of what has been discarded or surrendered' is just as applicable on the individual level of the expatriate writer.[11]

As we shall see, however, the rupture of the twentieth century does not necessarily imply a violent discarding of the past, as the myths of modernism have long had us believe. Modern exile writers build a new identity in terms of both past and future, and the problems of language with which they are so emphatically confronted. Even if the exile is doomed to a certain isolation, as Brodsky maintains in his essay, interaction has never been so decisive for artistic careers as in the modern metropolis. Closely connected to this exchange are new forms of mediality, co-determined by the inter-art inclinations of modernism and by the technological revolutions of the age. As the essays in the third part of this volume show, the shaping forces of new means of communication, as well as the crossing of the borders between historically established media, can be read together with the aesthetic fertility of exile that potentially inverts it into the paradoxical 'counter-exile' of which Claudio Guillén once spoke in a memorable essay.[12]

A more specific form of the experience of rupture, finally, is to be found in the notion of memory as historical self-consciousness, which has gained in importance after the experiences of war, the Holocaust and the other traumatic events of the century. One might even attempt to sketch a diachrony of modern letters in three phases with the shifting phases of

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10   Frank Ankersmit, *Sublime Historical Experience* (Stanford, 2005), p. 13. Ankersmit does not speak specifically about exile, but about a collective historical experience, which involves trauma and therefore motivates the unspeakable dimensions of 'the sublime'.

11   Ibid.

12   Claudio Guillén, 'On the Literature of Exile and Counter-Exile', *Books Abroad* 50 (1976), pp. 271–80.

exilic rupture as a point of departure. First, during the emergent phase of modernism at the end of the nineteenth century, one can see how a recurring, nostalgic return to the past accompanies attempts to transgress and break up national bonds. Involuntary memory of a personal kind or regression to lost origins are instances of such relapse. The temptations of nostalgia will always be present in exile, but perhaps they will never again be as explicit as in the earliest exponents of modernism. In the second phase, during the international breakthrough of modernism around and after 1910, one is struck by the heroic gesture of the New in violent negations of the past, shunning all nostalgic yearning desires. This is not to say that the historical dimension is lost: in the writings of expatriate modernists like Pound, T.S. Eliot or Joyce, personal memory is generalized into a collective yet fragmentary memory. With myth as its substrate, historical consciousness is interpreted as a way of overcoming the irreducible separation that the experience of rupture has created. In a third phase, such synthetic ambitions seem increasingly futile after the terror, brutal expulsion and persecution during and after the world wars. Instead, one can observe attempts to cope with the pain and violence of the recent past not primarily by way of nostalgia or mythic totality, but under the aegis of testimony and active memory. In this phase, rupture becomes the driving force behind a re-appropriation of language and history from the traumas of the past – not least within a German context, which is the focus of the fourth and last part of this volume.

Part I. Identity and Ethics: Three Anglo-Slavic Prose Virtuosi

The first part of the book deals with geographical and linguistic migrations from the Slavic to the Anglo-American sphere. It addresses a trio of stylistic geniuses repeatedly lauded for their uncanny command and original treatment of the English language, typically ascribed to the exile's estranged yet intense encounter with an acquired idiom: Joseph Conrad, Vladimir

Nabokov and Aleksandar Hemon. The work of these three writers, a lit-
erary sequence that encompasses clashes between the East and the West
throughout the twentieth century, shares a central concern not only with
linguistic disruption and cultural confrontation, but also with the ethical
implications of linguistic identity.

In 'Evil Freedom: Linguistic Confusion and Convention in Joseph
Conrad's *The Secret Agent*', Ulf Olsson addresses Conrad's 1907 novel,
which acquaints us with a group of expatriate anarchists in London and
portrays their experience of displacement as marked by a profound linguistic
disorientation. The lack of a shared labour and language appears to throw
the protagonists into a state of moral collapse. This lack of absolute values,
Olsson argues, engenders a desire for an absolute symbol, a sign whose
trustworthiness – although ultimately fictitious – can hold up even in the
face of linguistic chaos. In Conrad's novel such a symbol, the function of
which is taken on by a variety of signs, characters and actions, constitutes
the sole possibility of re-establishing morals, meaning and identity in the
exiles' disrupted existence.

A different kind of moral collapse, yet just as entrenched in the mode
of multilingualism, is portrayed in Nabokov's *Lolita*. Maria Kager's essay
'To "Fondle in Humbertish": Vladimir Nabokov's Linguistic Exile' dem-
onstrates how the unsettling relationship between the depraved expatriate
Humbert Humbert and twelve-year-old Lolita Haze also constitutes an
inter-linguistic love affair, an intercourse implicitly endowed with the same
ethical problems as that of Humbert and Lolita: it is a confrontation of
what the novel construes as old Europe and youthful America, played out
in the exchanges between his pretentious Gallicisms and her chewing-gum
jargon. Kager reveals that whereas Nabokov's Russian writings strove to
retain linguistic purity, his exile novels in English are permeated by multi-
lingual play, transgressing to an equal extent the boundaries of geographic,
natural language and moral convention.

In the third essay of this part, entitled '"What's Difference?": On
Language and Identity in the Writings of Aleksandar Hemon', Ljubica
Miočević approaches the work of the Bosnian-American novelist Hemon,
in whose English texts Bosnian words lie scattered as untranslatable shards
of memory. His books tell of the everyday problems of immigrant life in

the US, of the exile's painful memory and broken language, and of confrontations between American and Bosnian conceptions of storytelling. Miočević shows that in Hemon's work, marked by a postmodern ethos, by the traumatic experience of the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s and by his American exile, the idea of ethnic, cultural or linguistic purity has become deeply suspect. Instead, the ethical subtext that underlies the structure, style and story of Hemon's narratives strongly advocates the acknowledgement of a fundamental impurity as an intrinsic part of any linguistic identity.

Part II.   Shifting Language, Shifting Thought: Philosophical and Stylistic Effects of Migration

Exile is always painful and often entails the traumatic loss of roots and cultural identity. However, geographical and linguistic shifts can also function as a liberating force, which enables the writer to creatively work through and take leave of enslaving and repressive conditions. The four contributions in this part manifest how productive the distance and the new language of exile can be, engendering not only new kinds of writing but also new ways of thinking.

Tobias Dahlkvist shows in his essay, 'Exile as a School of Scepticism: Emil Cioran', how the exile and language shift of Romanian-born writer Emil Cioran not only gives rise to a stylistic change in the author's œuvre, but also exerts a forceful leverage on his thought system. In addition to a significant re-evaluation of the status of language and the phenomenon of decadence, the caesura of the language shift entails a radical break with the nationalist philosophy of history that is a prominent feature of Cioran's early thought.

In the volume's second essay on Cioran, 'Insomnia and Exile: Cioran's Separate Man', Arthur Rose investigates the creative force of insomnia in exile. The analogy between insomnia and exile lies in the fact that the sufferer is left nowhere in particular. Cioran finds the solution to this

problem in the work of his friend Samuel Beckett: to accept that we no longer have an origin and instead stand fast in exile. Rose analyses an example of this intransigence, given by Cioran: the task of translating 'lessness' into French, a language he considers incapable of expressing 'pure absence'. Cioran tells Beckett that he will 'not go to bed before finding an honourable equivalent for it in French', thus assigning to himself the impossible task of exilic insomnia.

Gabriela Seccardini's essay 'Exile in the French Language: Assia Djebar and Malika Mokeddem' shows the potential force of language shifts and cultural distances in a postcolonial context, treating two exiled women writers from Maghreb. In the case of Djebar and Mokeddem the choice of writing in French is determined by their specific political and religious origins. The new language, Seccardini argues, becomes their path to liberation: a means of breaking the laws of female silence in their cultural background.

Concluding this part, Katharina Birngruber's essay 'Language Shift and the Experience of Exile: Agota Kristof's Prose in the Context of Migration' deals with the essential role of the language shift in the work of the exile writer Agota Kristof, who died in 2011. Born in Hungary in 1935, Kristof fled to Switzerland in 1956 and adopted French as her literary language. Birngruber demonstrates that the effects of this shift involve both more penetrating patterns of thought and a stylistic predilection for simplicity and refinement, the combination of which constitutes the highly personal mark of Kristof's French prose.

Part III. Mediality and Multilingualism: Decentralizing Patterns of Western Thought and Aesthetics

The book's third part continues to focus on language and interaction, but this time on aspects of media technology and intermediality as channels through which the practice of multilingualism may serve to challenge

established notions of centre and periphery, meaning and materiality, or self and other. In a world increasingly marked by global migrations, the media of prose, poetry and music are repeatedly deployed to decentralize traditional modes of Western thought and recast thinking, reading and writing as performances of linguistic flux.

In 'Exile Writing and the Medium of the Book: Julio Cortázar's *Rayuela*', Adam Wickberg Månsson addresses Cortázar's radical treatment of the book medium in the light of themes of exile, transnationalism and multilingualism. While the Argentinian author migrated to Paris, thus repeating the same movement to a literary centre that a host of other writers had made before him, his novel *Rayuela* (1963; *Hopscotch*, 1966) is an attempt to do away with the very idea of a literary centre. Telling of expatriate intellectuals in Paris, the narrative contains, in addition to its 'native' Spanish, elements of French, German, English, Italian and the made-up language Gliglico. The novel is constructed as a literary hopscotch, and the reader is encouraged to move in different patterns through passages that originate from and depict a variety of linguistic and geographical contexts. The linear unity of the Western codex is thus replaced by a kind of hypertext *avant la lettre*, in which hierarchical relations between languages, dialects and cultures are deconstructed together with the very notions of nationhood and rootedness.

Jesper Olsson's 'Speech Rumblings: Exile, Transnationalism and the Multilingual Space of Sound Poetry' examines three historical plateaux of sound-centred poetry and their relation to international and globalized culture. First, the performances of the Dada movement, which aimed at breaking inherited boundaries not only of aesthetic evaluation, but also of cultural communities and national languages. Second, the post-war neo-avant-garde, where the preoccupation with nations and borders had been renewed by the confrontations of the Second World War and its aftermath, while new technology like the tape recorder made possible a poetry in which multiple sounds and languages were superimposed to create transnational spaces. Third, a contemporary poetry marked by recent stages of globalization, digitalization and information technology, where the nexus of internationalism and multilingualism has become a core problem. On each of these plateaux, Olsson argues, the polyglot sound poem constitutes

an aesthetic probe in the process of internationalization, an arena where ideas of cultural and linguistic boundaries are played out and deconstructed.

In his essay 'Language and Alternate History in Mauricio Kagel's *Mare Nostrum*', W.C. Bamberger addresses a work of musical theatre by the expatriate Argentinian composer Mauricio Kagel. In this piece, an expedition from Brazil travels to Europe to explore and conquer parts of the Mediterranean. Kagel's composition thus overthrows colonial conceptions of Europe as the centre of civilization, from which peripheral and primitive cultures can be discovered. Kagel's libretto is a polyglot mixture: some of it is in German, some in what Kagel labels 'pseudo-Portuguese', some in Nangatú (an Indian language of the northeast Amazon), and some in portmanteau words of Kagel's own invention, mirrored by a musical language full of quotations from different cultural contexts. Playfully reversing the historical roles of Europe and Latin America, and their respective narratives, Kagel's intermedial theatre makes a strong case for cultural relativity and the power of language to determine the shape of history.

Part IV. Re-appropriating Language and History from the Traumas of the Past

The traumas of the Second World War and the Holocaust were among the defining events of twentieth-century history, and a major factor in midcentury migratory movements. Exile literature, not least in the German language, is marked by the need to confront the past, to testify to the experience of terror and to speak for the victims whose voices have been lost. As the essays of this fourth and last part show, this task gives exilic rupture another meaning than that of heroic modernism, involving memory and the notion of truthful testimony, which disturb not only the idea of aesthetic purity but the very order of literary representation, thereby inciting innovative kinds of writing that redefine the concept of literature.

In his essay 'Aching Through: Nelly Sachs's Poetics of Exile', Anders Olsson stresses the effects of persecution and forced exile on Sachs's poetry and thinking in the foreign land. The German-Jewish poet, having found asylum in Stockholm after escaping Berlin in 1940, invents a language of *prosopopoeia* that enables her to speak for the victims of the Holocaust. In so doing, she seeks both to re-appropriate her Jewish heritage and give voice to historical truth. The passive, late Romantic melancholia of Sachs's pre-exile poetry is transformed into an active, ontological stance of 'Durchschmerzen' [aching through] as her writings become permeated by historicity and urgent memory under the pressure of the information about the Holocaust that emerged in 1942. Furthermore, her new poetic language in exile can only be understood as the effect of her simultaneously discovering and translating the modernist poetry of her Swedish contemporaries.

Peter Weiss, too, took refuge in Sweden during and after the war. Markus Huss's essay 'The Linguistic Outlaw: Peter Weiss's Return to German as Literary Language' takes as its point of departure a linguistic crisis that befell Weiss in 1948. Already an acclaimed writer in Swedish, he sees his acquired literary language come to a full stop. As he tries instead to establish himself as a writer in German, the experience of exile and the memories associated with his native tongue put the latter in an estranged and unsettling light. Addressing the novel manuscript 'Der Vogelfreie' [The Outlaw] and Weiss's 1958 filmic adaptation of it, Huss argues that the exploration of the border between semantics and sound constitutes a transmedial enactment of the specific linguistic and cultural problems of European post-war modernity.

Axel Englund's essay 'Bleston Babel: Migration, Multilingualism and Intertextuality in W.G. Sebald's Mancunian Cantical' addresses the problem of borders in Sebald by way of a five-section poem written in Manchester in the mid-1960s. The text, written as an intertextual dialogue with French novelist Michel Butor about the state of expatriation, is full of border crossings between languages, involving not only German and English, but also French, Latin and Yiddish. Borders are a central and paradoxical concern of Sebald's. They threaten freedom by restricting mobility and imposing definitive interpretations, yet they are also a prerequisite of meaning: a

boundless text is unreadable, and in a world without borders the specific-
ity of place loses its meaning. Sebald's early poem stages an ambiguous,
sometimes nostalgic, longing for linguistic, cultural and textual borders
that may re-inscribe meaning into the existence of a late twentieth-century
émigré who has been deprived of that solace by the possibility of seemingly
limitless migration.

A later phase of Sebald's writing is addressed by Katarina Båth in
her essay 'The Meaning of a Piece of Silk: On Irony and Animals in
W.G. Sebald's *Die Ringe des Saturn*'. Båth discusses the conflict in Sebald's
narrative between the need to evoke trauma and memory, and the urge to
escape them. In her reading, the rings of Saturn are not only the metaphor
for the exile writer's circling into a labyrinth of post-traumatic depression,
but the text also alludes to the silk-worm as the being of metamorphosis,
thus betokening the idea of exile as transformation. In keeping with this
image, Båth reads the work in the spirit of Gilles Deleuze as a process of
'becoming-animal', which itself is defined by a dialectic of de-territorial-
ization and re-territorialization, and which for Sebald functions as a way
of re-appropriating the past in the face of shattering trauma.

Identity and Ethics: Three Anglo-Slavic Prose Virtuosi

ULF OLSSON

Evil Freedom: Linguistic Confusion and Convention in Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*

'You revolutionists', the anarchist Professor accusingly states, 'are the slaves of the social convention', provoking his fellow activists. 'One must use the current words', the anarchist activist Ossipon counters. The group of anarchists is gathered in Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent: A Simple Tale*, 1907, discussing what the consequences of a recent bombing might be for them.[1] However, their discussion is neither free nor open, but fraught with tensions produced by linguistic corruption. The problem that Ossipon is facing is that he seems to be sharing a conventional view of the bombing – 'it's nothing short of criminal' – and the currency of words is, precisely, a question of convention. But convention, then, is the enemy of anarchism, and should, at least according to the Professor, be refused. This linguistic problem of the relation between language, convention and what must be called political ethics, is a central aspect of the exilic experience represented in the novel.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the United Kingdom was still a liberal society; if not welcoming to political refugees and exiles, the British at least tolerated them: Britain 'saw herself still as a country whose shores were open to the oppressed of all nations', as Norman Sherry put it.[2]

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1   Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent: A Simple Tale*, ed. Bruce Harkness and S.W. Reid, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Joseph Conrad (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 57 and 59. Further references to the novel will be given in brackets, after the quote. On the background to the novel, see Norman Sherry, *Conrad's Western World* (Cambridge, 1971), and Ian Watt, *Essays on Conrad* (Cambridge, 2000), chapter six, 'The Political and Social Background of *The Secret Agent*'.
2   Sherry, *Conrad's Western World*, p. 246.

London housed many exiled anarchist activists, mainly from France and Italy, and the culture of exile that these groups established forms the backdrop to Conrad's novel. But the presence of these 'foreign elements' in the city also helped in the expansion of a system and a culture of surveillance that is of importance for any reading of Conrad's novel. In the stories that deal more or less directly with exile – and these are the short story 'Amy Foster', *The Secret Agent* and *Under Western Eyes*[3] – Conrad elaborates a sort of logic that feeds his vision of exile, and it is this logic that I would like to study in *The Secret Agent*. This logic could perhaps be summarized as a lack of linguistic communication, in combination with an absence of labour, leading to moral corruption or anomie. *The Secret Agent*, then, takes the form of an analysis of exilic conditions through the story of a group of exiles, whose members, if not living in actual exile, all are marked by a deep alienation from the society surrounding them.

Perhaps it goes without saying that Conrad's London in the novel is depicted not only as the real or historical city, but also as a symbolic space, which shares typical aspects with other novels from the same era. In the modern city, the individual constantly risks getting lost: novels like August Strindberg's *Inferno*, 1898, another in which anarchist activism plays a crucial role, and others, depict modern urban dwellings as mysterious places, dark and confusing, labyrinthic and threatening, and with a life of their own. The late nineteenth-century European city, in its rapid expansion and growth, seems to be beyond human control. In *The Secret Agent*, London is represented as such a place: even if people are, like the novel's protagonist, Verloc, 'thoroughly domesticated' (11), they might not be able to find their way home. The city's labyrinthine character emerges from the sense of being walled in: everywhere in *The Secret Agent*, walls or railings surround buildings or sites, protecting and imprisoning at the same time – the 'town's opulence and luxury ... had to be protected' (15). The importance of this is emphasized by Conrad repeating the phrase 'had to

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3   I am aware that almost every work by Conrad deals with forms of exile, more or less directly – but these three stand out in his œuvre in their more direct focus on exile, and the factors that determine the conditions of exile.

be protected' several times. London is, Conrad writes in his 'Author's Note' added to the novel in 1920, a 'monstrous town [with] darkness enough to bury five million lives' (6). And his emphasis on the lack of light is to the point: *The Secret Agent* is a novel about darkness falling.

Exile might be seen as an expansion, allowing for what Edward Said has called a 'contrapuntal' awareness.[4] But in Conrad's works exile never holds such privileges: instead, it diminishes the world of the subject, it imprisons and deracinates the subject, with fatal consequences. Even so, maybe Conrad's own authorship in exile can be seen as exemplifying a 'contrapuntal' writing, or, as George Gasyna writes about Conrad, exile can be seen as a 'potential opportunity, as a paradoxically privileged existential condition which allows one to seek out new creative spaces and thus transcend or sidestep the limitations of monological, that is, monolingual and monocultural, discourses'.[5] It is true that Conrad became a writer not in spite of exile, but through exile, or, as Michael Greaney writes, 'Conrad's sense of estrangement from his adoptive tongue was the very enabling condition of his fiction'.[6] And it is this estrangement, rather than any form of contrapuntal perspective, that Conrad seems to work from in his negative depictions of exilic conditions: London here becomes, as Greaney writes, 'a veritable graveyard of authentic language'.[7]

The simple image of someone having difficulties orienting themselves in the city is also an image of the central theme in *The Secret Agent*: that of *displacement*. Conrad introduces this theme systematically throughout his story. The novel is about a group of men who, as if by chance, have gathered in London. But this novelistic theme was also supported by a reality, in which both exile and mass emigration served to displace people as well as politics. Displacement: next to nothing in this novel seems to be in its right place, as Stephen Ross suggests,

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4   Edward W. Said, 'Reflections on Exile', in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge MA, 2000), p. 186.
5   George A. Gasyna, *Polish, Hybrid, and Otherwise: Exile Discourse in Joseph Conrad and Witold Gombrowicz* (New York and London, 2011), p. 21.
6   Michael Greaney, *Conrad, Language, and Narrative* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 1.
7   Greaney, *Conrad, Language, and Narrative*, p. 136.