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INTRODUCTION

Of course, it's one hell of a way to get from Petersburg to Stockholm; but then for a man of my occupation the notion of a straight line being the shortest distance between two points has lost its attraction a long time ago.

JOSEPH BRODSKY, acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize in Literature

In order to rebuild one's life one has to be strong and an optimist. So we are very optimistic. Our optimism, indeed, is admirable, even if we say so ourselves.

HANNAH ARENDT, "We Refugees"

EMIGRÉS, EXILES, EXPATRIATES, refugees, nomads, cosmopolitans—the meanings of those words vary, as do their connotations. Expatriates can go home any time they like, while exiles cannot. *Cosmopolitan* can be a term of self-affirmation, straight or postmodernly ironic, or else an anti-Semitic slur. Over and above their fine distinctions, however, these words all designate a state of being "not home" (or of being "everywhere at home," the flip side of the same coin), which means, in most cases, at a distance from one's native tongue. Is this distance a falling away from some original wholeness and source of creativity, or is it on the contrary a spur to creativity? Is exile a cause for optimism (celebration, even) or its opposite?

Clearly, there is no simple answer to this question. The irony in Hannah Arendt's description of the "optimistic" refugees among whom she counted herself in 1943 is more bitter than Joseph Brodsky's wry self-characterization as one who can never take the shortest route between two points—and indeed, Brodsky had cause to celebrate when he made that remark in Stockholm in 1987. But wry or bitter, irony indicates a double edge. "Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience," writes Edward Said in a well-known essay. And he goes on to ask: "If true exile is a condition of terminal loss, why has it been

All of the essays in this book, with one exception, first appeared in the special double issue of *Poetics Today*, "Creativity and Exile" (vol. 17, nos. 3–4, 1996), which I edited. Henry Louis Gates's essay first appeared in his book *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Black Man* (New York: Random House, 1997) and is reprinted here (slightly modified) with the permission of the author.

transformed so easily into a potent, even enriching motif of modern culture? . . . Modern Western culture is in large part the work of exiles, émigrés, refugees” (Said 1994: 137). Besides, he concludes, exile has its pleasures, not the least of which is the “particular sense of achievement” one derives from “acting as if one were at home wherever one happens to be” (ibid.: 148).

On this side, on that side, on the one hand, on the other hand: few subjects elicit as much intellectual ambivalence — but also, especially of late, as much intellectual fascination — as the subject of exile. In its narrow sense a political banishment, exile in its broad sense designates every kind of estrangement or displacement, from the physical and geographical to the spiritual. Whence a good part of its fascination for contemporary analysts of culture. Seen in broad terms, exile appears not only as a (or even *the*) major historical phenomenon of our century, affecting millions of people, but as a focal point for theoretical reflections about individual and cultural identity (Bammer 1994), which in turn are intimately bound up with problems of nationalism, racism, and war. Victor Burgin, commenting on the violent racial confrontations in Spike Lee’s film *Do the Right Thing*, notes ironically: “When the sons of émigré Italians confront the descendants of abducted Africans in Sal’s Pizzeria they do so in a Black and Hispanic district with a Dutch name, which was stolen from Native Americans. Most of us know the melancholy tension of separation from our origins” (Burgin 1991: 29).

This book is devoted to exploring that “melancholy tension,” in a variety of moods and modes. Given the diversity of experiences of exile, it would be a misguided attempt to reduce these wide-ranging essays to a single unifying perspective. As editor, I will, however, comment briefly on the shape (and shaping) of the book as a whole.

Signposts, travelers, outsiders, backward glances: the metaphor of the journey imposed itself as a way of organizing these critical forays, many of which venture into little-known territory. They are exploratory but not global, plying only the European-American route, and even so, incomplete. But who would claim completion in this domain? Perhaps a mad encyclopedist lost in the Andes, or a compiler of universal dictionaries in the rainforest? I will not apologize for the absences, the omissions of gender-geography-race-class. Take it as a given, many things are missing.

But many things are not. The variety of perspectives in these essays, in terms of discipline, temporal scope, geographical extension, and rhetori-

cal mode, is remarkable; especially if one considers how many themes recur, over and above (or under, as in a *basso continuo*) the divergent lines of inquiry. As always, the editor's job of orchestrating differences has involved some arbitrary juxtapositions. If they produce a few surprises, or even jarring notes, so much the better.

Signposts: indicators of possible itineraries. Christine Brooke-Rose, a multilingual literary theorist and (to borrow a phrase from her) "poetic" (exploring, rigorous)" novelist, points out some of the diverse meanings and implications of exile and multilingualism in the work of writers from the Romantics to the present. Thomas Pavel, a multilingual intellectual, discusses the general phenomenon of intellectual exile, past and present, before analyzing two specific versions in seventeenth-century French literature. Linda Nochlin introduces a reflection on visual art as one that "loses less in translation," and also introduces a necessary reflection on gender. Hélène Cixous, the whole of whose considerable oeuvre can be placed under the sign of exile, returns here to her twin tutelaries and "significant others," James Joyce and Clarice Lispector, themselves displaced persons writing far from the land of their birth. Denis Hollier, who considers himself neither an exile nor an emigrant (and who is even less a refugee—maybe a part-time expatriate?), reflects wittily, in epistolary form, on the paradoxes of crossing "as many borders as possible" between France and the United States.

Travelers, Outsiders: All travelers are outsiders somewhere (some may be so everywhere), but not all outsiders are travelers. Travelers can go home, by definition, though they may choose not to; but one can be an outsider in one's own home town, as members of minority groups know. I have chosen these rather large, vague terms because they accommodate a wide range of possibilities, and because I'm less interested in classifications than in suggestive cases. All of the essays in these sections deal, in varying degrees of detail, with individuals in specific circumstances.

In the first group, Doris Sommer follows the travels, both literal and textual, of a Renaissance man whose "very name is an oxymoron," the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega. Alicia Borinsky follows those of a twentieth-century Polish writer caught by war in Buenos Aires, who decides to stay for a while (more than two decades) before crossing the Atlantic again. Jacqueline Chénieux-Gendron traces some Surrealist journeys to

the New World at a time of historical collapse. Janet Bergstrom follows Jean Renoir's career from Paris to Hollywood and back, to conclude startlingly that only after his return to Paris did Renoir make his most Hollywood-like film. Ernst van Alphen looks at the work of his older fellow Dutchman Armando, whose obsession with the "past of the Second World War" (which is also the time of Armando's childhood) leads him to Germany and the condition of self-imposed exile.

In the second group, Svetlana Boym studies two types of homesickness in the autobiographies of Victor Shklovsky—who in my terms was a traveler, returning home—and Joseph Brodsky, who moved from the condition of notorious outlaw in Leningrad (as it was called then) to that of eminent outsider in New York. (Boym herself moved from Leningrad to New York and Boston, and from the status of Soviet refugee to that of American professor). John Neubauer, a Hungarian living and teaching in Amsterdam, studies two very different versions of "home" and of the novel in the works of Lukács and Bakhtin. Nancy Huston, an Anglophone Canadian writing in French in Paris, reflects on the life and work of the ever elusive Polish-Russian-French insider/outsider Romain Gary, whose split personalities included two best-selling novelists, a diplomat, a war hero, and a suicide.

Henry Louis Gates Jr., a famous African-American intellectual, reflects on his first meeting with the famous African-American intellectual James Baldwin in the south of France, and on the costs as well as the benefits of Baldwin's exile from the American scene during a crucial period of race relations in this country. Zygmunt Bauman, a Polish-Jewish sociologist and cultural critic living in Leeds, discusses the whole history of Jewish assimilation in the West before moving to his true subject, the place of eminent Jewish writers in a postwar Poland from which Jews have all but disappeared. Finally, we encounter in this group Tibor Dessewffy's reflections on strangerhood, as exemplified by (among others) the sociologist Alfred Schütz, who emigrated from Vienna to New York, and the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa, who remained at home but discovered several strangers, other poets, living in his own body. (Dessewffy is a Hungarian sociologist with a doctorate from Amsterdam.)

It is doubtless not an accident (though it was not planned from the start) that so many of these essays confront, more or less directly, the figure of the Jew. Even where one would least expect to find him—for example, in the work of the Inca Garcilaso, the 16th-century Spanish-Peruvian *mestizo*—the figure of the Jew turns up: as Doris Sommer

shows, the inspiration for Garcilaso's first book was none other than a work by the expelled Spanish Jewish writer, León Hebreo, which Garcilaso translated from Italian. It would appear that in the European-American perspective, at least, the Jew as an emblematic figure of displacement is unavoidable, and not only in the twentieth century. In our century, of course, we are used to this: the Jew has been a long-standing figure embodying modern restlessness and uprootedness. Joyce intimated this idea in his choice of the urban walker Leopold Bloom as his everyman; Maurice Blanchot reiterated it in his notion of "être-Juif," "being-Jewish," a synonym for nomadic movement (Blanchot 1969: 183). Zygmunt Bauman—who may appear more entitled to speak about this, being himself a Jewish exile—has called the Jew in Kafka's works the "universal stranger," at whose experience "strangers of all walks of life could look . . . as a mirror and see the blurred and vaguely conveyed details of their own likeness" (Bauman 1988–89: 27).

Backward glances: Those who leave home with no thought of return and succeed, well or badly, in settling elsewhere, occasionally cast backward glances at what they left behind. Interestingly, so do their children, who may never have seen the left-behind place at all, except through the words—or the silences—of their parents. The last three essays take varying looks at such backward glances. Leo Spitzer, a historian whose parents, Jewish refugees, sailed from Europe in 1939 to settle (temporarily, it would turn out) in Bolivia, studies the Austrian refugee community in La Paz, where he grew up. Marianne Hirsch, the daughter of Rumanian refugees from the Bukovina, discusses work by artists and writers who, like herself, know their parents' native region only by hearsay or fantasy. My own essay, written by a transplanted Hungarian Jew, studies the war memoirs of . . . transplanted Hungarian Jews.

As I have tried, perhaps all too insistently, to suggest in the preceding pages, one of the most striking aspects of this scholarly examination of creativity and exile is that it is in large part the work of individuals who qualify, in a broad or narrow sense, as exiles. The element of autobiography in many of these learned essays bears out once more the power of the personal voice in criticism. Nor, one might say, should it be otherwise, especially when it comes to the subject of exile. Do those who have known it from inside out write with added urgency about the "melancholy tension of separation from our origins"? Perhaps; but I would not want to overstate the case. To the degree that exile is a matter not only

of physical displacement but of interior experience, we may all, independently of our actual religion, nationality, or place of birth, be (as the walls of the Sorbonne proclaimed in 1968) “German Jews.”

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