

## NARRATIVES OF EXILE: COSMOPOLITANISM BEYOND THE LIBERAL IMAGINATION

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This paper is prompted by the need to locate a methodological tool that would assist us in addressing the open wounds of transition, the ruptures and apertures of difference channelled through the experiences of border-crossing.<sup>1</sup> Equally, I should like to talk about exile as creativity, not just suffering. On either occasion, however, my ultimate goal is to ask why exile came to be so firmly associated with these two experiential fields, different as they might be at first sight, and to see whether this lasting inscription in narratives of suffering and creativity is not hampering attempts to rethink the concept of exile and re-examine its use value for our age. For my purposes, it is necessary here to confine myself to ‘exile’ and leave aside cognate designations, such as ‘refugee’, all the more so since within the pervasive twin discourse of suffering and creativity these two appellations have often been used synonymously (witness, e.g., Hannah Arendt’s powerful 1943 essay, “We Refugees”, as an instance of such interchangeable use<sup>2</sup>). At the same time, I want to probe deeper into the resilient notion that exile somehow produces cosmopolitan attitudes. The problematic aspects of ‘enforced cosmopolitanism’, which I look at briefly in the final part, have been enshrined in the powerful liberal consensus that first came to prominence in the social sciences during the 1980s–1990s. According to this consensus the cross-border experience of migrant workers, worshippers, or writers is always a source of cultural enrichment and a display of personal energy and endurance that glosses over – or simply fails to see and acknowledge – the attendant manifestations of inequality and disempowerment. Exile, on this reading, is a dependable machine for churning out cosmopolitans who emerge from the exilic experience as reliably enriched, unfailingly energized, and dependably cultivated and tolerant citizens. By adding to the arguments that interrogate this consensus, I seek to address the multiple, and often contradictory, inscriptions of exile in current debates on cosmopolitanism. Exile captures the bifurcating moment of expanding and narrowing one’s

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<sup>1</sup> I wish to thank my former RICC colleagues at Manchester for many good discussions.

<sup>2</sup> Arendt (2007: 264–74).

life-world (*Lebenswelt*). Conceiving of exile solely as an engine for the production of cosmopolitan attitudes can, and often does, leave out its other essential aspects: the need to circumscribe one's experience in the constraints of a new cultural framework, the imperative to begin to translate that experience in languages that are often not yet one's own, and to grope one's way through the loss and trauma intrinsic in this process of transition. When this work of translating and accommodating one's experience and life-world fails, when the participation in a new polis proves beyond reach, the spectre of rupture, deprivation, and disfranchisement makes a numbing appearance.

These tensions are at the heart of my analysis; by considering them I wish to offer arguments that would help the ongoing work of questioning the liberal consensus that still shapes the way we think about exile today. Rather than imagining exile on the plane of individual creativity or suffering, victory or failure, and thus also binding cosmopolitanism as a project to this notion of individual accomplishment (or the lack thereof), I wish to urge the possibility of contemplating a cosmopolitanism that breaks the spell of the liberal imagination and goes beyond the idea of fixed attainment.

My three specific reference points (and also sections) in this essay are: a) the history of modern literary theory and comparative literature as disciplines and the significance of exile in their rise in the interwar decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; b) what I term the 'East-East exilic experience', i.e. the exile of Left Central- and East-European intellectuals in Stalin's Moscow in the same period (1930s–1940s); and c) the Romanticisation of exile and the consequent need to de-romanticise and de-liberalise it; hence also the brief reflection, in this final section, on the recent notion of 'enforced cosmopolitanism' and the framework of transnationalism in their relation to exile. The first reference point enables us to appreciate the creative energies of exile (much insisted upon by the liberal consensus that I am interrogating), and to project exile as an ally of cosmopolitanism; the second reference point offers a counter-perspective: exile as the generator of undesirables that the liberal imagination tends to suppress or attempts to think away; exile is here considered a site of suffering and anguish, and an enemy of cosmopolitanism. In these two sections I draw in part on my previous research; the first section, in particular, is also a self-reflective, and, in the fullness of my present argument, qualified return to my earlier fascination with the creative energies of exile. The third (final and longest) section carries a wider methodological significance in that it seeks to identify these seemingly divergent scenarios – exile as creativity and exile as suffering – as the two sides of a deeper foundational narrative of transgression and border-crossing.

I must conclude this introduction with a more general question: what does it mean to be in exile? Philosophically, this is a pointer to ambivalence revealed in questions that do not necessarily envisage the specific condition of exile but can, rather, be put in relation to a range of basic human acts. Thus, when Hannah Arendt asks, "Where are we when we think?" (Arendt 1978: 197), this is a question that articulates the duality of our position as thinking beings: our

situatedness in the moment of time and the particular environment in which the thinking occurs, but also our being-not-there, being-else-where because of our abandonment to the act of thinking. Because of the act of thinking, to put it somewhat differently, we reside in a mode of concentration that removes us from the world around and invites us to contemplate, in Arendt's words, "universals", "invisible essences"; as we move amongst these invisible essences, we are spatially "nowhere", "homeless in an emphatic sense" (Arendt 1978: 199). What is more, we enter a form of authenticity: "the flight of one alone into one", in Plotinus' words.<sup>3</sup> Exile draws on this ambivalence of situatedness and non-situatedness at once, of living here and elsewhere in the same breath, or, in different terms, of being "nowhere", a no-where-ness conceived positively as a cognitively enabling "Void" (Arendt 1978: 200), or negatively as a cultural and existential gap. Similarly, Paul Virilio's question, "Where are we when we travel?" (Virilio 1978: 19), articulates uncertainty vis-à-vis space and mobility; it points to the likelihood of finding ourselves located not in this or some other territory, but in what Virilio calls "the land of speed". Exile, then, is more than an indicator of shifting experiential perspectives. It is a condition of deterritorialisation where presence and absence are negotiable valences; it is a withdrawal that harbours a trace from that which has been withdrawn, contemplation whose intentionality, to speak phenomenologically, is retrospective before it becomes prospective. These momentous ambivalences of exile are also reflected in the twin narratives of creativity and suffering, which I will discuss in the next two sections.

## 1. Exile as a Site of Creativity

In an article written some years ago, I set forth a working hypothesis essaying to explain the birth of modern literary theory in the twentieth century (cf. Tihanov 2004). Exile, rather than acting as an impeding factor, was right at the heart of salutary developments that promoted the growth of literary theory in the interwar period. The picture I painted then, and which I still think to be largely true, saw exile as part and parcel of a renewed cultural cosmopolitanism that transcended local encapsulation and monoglossia. For a number of years the activities of the Russian formalists were taking place in a climate of enhanced mobility and exchange of ideas between the metropolitan and émigré streams of Russian culture. The most gifted ambassadors of the formalists abroad were Viktor Shklovsky, during the time he spent as an émigré in Berlin, and Roman Jakobson, while in Czechoslovakia (where he arrived as a Soviet citizen, deciding eventually not to return to Moscow). Jakobson is a particularly important example. His subsequent cooperation with Pyotr Bogatyrev (another Soviet scholar who

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<sup>3</sup> On mental concentration as a form of exile, see Bartoloni (2008: 80–81); Plotinus' words are quoted there on p. 80.

resided in Prague for nearly two decades—and for about two years also in Münster—but remained a Soviet citizen, maintaining close cooperation with his colleagues in the Soviet Union and returning in the end to Moscow in December 1938), with Nikolai Trubetzkoy, a Vienna-based émigré scholar, and with Yuri Tynianov (who stayed in Russia but was involved in the work of his Prague colleagues), were all crucial in attempts to revive the Society for the Study of Poetic Language (Opoyaz) in the Soviet Union. These attempts, while unsuccessful, yielded an important document in the history of literary theory, a brief set of theses titled “Problemy izucheniia literatury i iazyka” (‘Problems in the Study of Literature and Language’), written in Prague jointly by Jakobson and Tynianov. The Theses signalled the urgent need to revise the supremacy of “pure synchronism” and promoted attention to the “correlation between the literary series and other historical series.”<sup>4</sup> Thus the work of Russian Formalism in its concluding stages, and later the formation and flourishing of the Prague Linguistic Circle, became possible through intellectual exchanges that benefited from the crossing of national boundaries, often under the duress of exile. The work of the Prague Linguistic Circle, in particular, proceeded in the situation of a veritable polyglossia, which rendered narrow nationalistic concerns anachronistic. Jakobson, Trubetzkoy, and Bogatyrev were each writing in at least two or three languages (Russian, German, Czech); their careers invite us to consider the enormous importance of exile and emigration for the birth of modern literary theory in Eastern and Central Europe. Exile and emigration were the extreme embodiment of heterotopia triggered by drastic historical changes that brought about the traumas of dislocation but also, as part of this, the productive insecurity of having to face and make use of more than one language and culture. The work of Jakobson, Trubetzkoy, and Bogatyrev came to embody the potential of what Edward Said was to term later “travelling theory”: “The point of theory is... to travel, always to move beyond its confinements, to emigrate, to remain in a sense in exile” (Said 1994: 264). The possibility to “estrangle” (to borrow Shklovsky’s telling word) the sanctified naturalness of one’s own literature by analyzing it in another language, or by refracting it through the prism of another culture, seems to have been a factor of paramount significance not just in the evolution of Russian Formalism and its continuation and modification in the structuralist functionalism of the Prague Linguistic Circle, but -more importantly - for the emergence of modern literary theory in the interwar period as a whole. Appropriating literature theoretically meant after all being able to transcend its (and one’s own) national embeddedness by electing to position oneself as an outsider contemplating the validity of its laws beyond a merely national framework. In Prague, in particular, one could observe in a nutshell the stupendous diversity of approaches marking émigré literary theory and scholarship between the world wars. Along with Jakobson’s post-formalism and Bogatyrev’s

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<sup>4</sup> Quoted here from the English translation (Tynyanov and Jakobson 1977: 49); written in December 1928 and first published in Russian in *Novyi Lef* 12 (1928) – actually in early 1929.

early functionalist structuralism, we can also see the unfolding of fruitful historico-philological research (centred around the Dostoevsky Seminar, 1925–1933, founded by Alfred Bem) and psychoanalytic literary scholarship, the main exponent of which was Nikolai Osipov (1877–1934) who had made Freud’s acquaintance in Vienna in 1910 and had propagated his ideas in Russia before arriving in Czechoslovakia as an émigré in 1921. To this one should add the Prague wing of Eurasianism (a Russian interwar cultural and political movement which evolved entirely in exile), led by Pyotr Savitsky who had set himself the task of establishing “Eurasian literary studies” (*evraziiskoe literaturovedenie*), in which Russian literary history, both before and after 1917, was to be re-examined from the point of view of its potential to assert Russia’s special geopolitical and cultural status. Savitsky acknowledged his failure in this task, but he did succeed in persuading a number of followers in Prague (Konstantin Chkheidze, Leontii Kopetskii, G. I. Rubanov) to embrace Eurasianism as an interpretative prism through which to follow the Soviet literary scene of the 1920s–1930s. Importantly, Prague was a place where some of these currents intersected, most noticeably in Jakobson’s attempt to lend legitimacy to Eurasian linguistics (encouraged in part by Savitsky), in Savitsky’s efforts to found a linguistic geography with structuralist ambitions, but also in Bogatyrev’s (later abandoned) idea of a specifically Eurasian Russian folkloristics.<sup>5</sup>

This interpretation of exile as an enabling factor that unlocks creativity can be reinforced and extended by examining the birth of a related discipline in the interwar decade. In equal measure, one could argue, modern comparative literature begins life in exile, with the Istanbul works of Auerbach and Spitzer and their post-war continuation in the United States.<sup>6</sup> The qualifier “modern” is not trivial here: I mean by this a comparative literature that had moved beyond the nineteenth-century model of examining cultural bilateralisms and exchanges between nations<sup>7</sup> and had instead embraced a wider perspective that focuses on larger supranational patterns: mimesis, style, genre, etc. Auerbach and Spitzer behaved, of course, differently in Istanbul; Spitzer was eager to learn Turkish and to immerse himself in the local culture; Auerbach hardly looked further than German and French in his communication with colleagues and his teaching. But despite that he wasn’t a total stranger either (contrary to the propensity to portray him, in the Romantic vein, as an example of creative solitude). In contradistinction to Said’s apparent emphasis on the Orient as an environment shaped by Western cultural ideologies, recent research has emphasised Atatürk’s indigenous – and rather proactive – revival of humanist values that marked the scene at the time of Auerbach’s work in the city.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> More on the Prague scene of exilic literary theory and criticism see in Tihanov (2011).

<sup>6</sup> The literature on Auerbach and Spitzer has grown substantially over the last twenty years. For a very good overview, especially with reference to the role of exile in their work, see Apter (2006: Ch. 3); specifically on Auerbach, see also Damrosch (1995) and Konuk (2010).

<sup>7</sup> On this nineteenth-century model, see Tihanov (2011a: 143–44).

<sup>8</sup> See, in particular, Konuk (2010).

Be that as it may, in both cases – the birth of modern literary theory and of modern comparative literature – we witness a narrative of exile that foregrounds, and for good reasons, creativity, seminality, and the desirability of cosmopolitan attitudes fostered by denaturalising one’s own cultural inheritance.<sup>9</sup>

## 2. Exile as Affliction and Distress

Let me now dwell in more detail on the other foundational narrative of exile: that of suffering, anguish, and distress – a narrative that captures exile as affliction and an incapacitating reality. To lend added persuasiveness to my argument I will once again look at the interwar decade from which my previous narrative of exile as promoter of creativity was drawn; cosmopolitanism will once again loom large in my exposition, this time as a painfully receding, and ultimately failing, desideratum.

By now we possess considerable knowledge about emigration and exile from Eastern and Central Europe to the West, or from Soviet Russia to Central Europe, in the 1920s-1930s. Yet we have tended to under-research and under-conceptualise the alternative destination. Seemingly less glamorous and lastingly tainted by the open glorification or silent acquiescence to Stalin and the purges, Moscow as a place of emigration and exile of Left East-Central European intellectuals in the 1930s presents a uniquely important trajectory.

My protagonists in this section are a host of Hungarian and Polish Left intellectuals and literati (Georg Lukács, Belá Balázs, Ervin Sinkó, Gyula Háy, Aleksander Wat, and Bruno Jasiński), all of whom found themselves in the Soviet Union at the end of the 1920s or in the 1930s. The “East-East exilic experience”, as I term the complex texture of events, actions, beliefs, and dispositions exhibited during the long enforced stays of Left intellectuals from Eastern and Central Europe in the Soviet Union during the 1930s, carried the deeper meaning of a tirelessly pursued, yet culturally and politically frustrated cosmopolitanism. In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels had famously asserted the spirit of a proletarian cosmopolitanism that should envelop the awakening working class and lend its emancipatory ambitions a truly global scale. Proletarian solidarity was envisaged as a world-wide network that defeats the supremacy of a bourgeoisie profiting from an equally globalised mode of production. But by the mid-1930s cosmopolitanism was becoming a word of denunciation in Moscow; it was employed to stigmatise the enemy – without and within the Party,

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<sup>9</sup> I am far from alone in drawing on this narrative of exile as creativity; see e.g. Edward Said’s well-known essay “Reflections on Exile”, or Leszek Kolakowski’s “In Praise of Exile” (Kolakowski 1985: “the position of an outsider offers a cognitive privilege”; it arises “from insecurity, from an exile of a sort, from the experience of homelessness”).

Soviet and foreign alike – as a rootless agent who evades Party control and gives the lie to the ever more vociferous propaganda of Russianness.<sup>10</sup> “Cosmopolitan” was often a concealed anti-Semitic qualification, the origins of which should be sought in the revival of the mythology of Russian uniqueness, reinforced by the ongoing fight against Trotskyism. During World War Two this line gathered momentum (in 1943, Fadeev warned in *Pod znamenem marksizma* against the “hypocritical sermons of groundless cosmopolitanism”<sup>11</sup>), culminating after the end of the War in the wide-ranging 1949 campaign against cosmopolitanism.

Instead, the official Party line promoted proletarian internationalism as a discourse reflecting the more desirable world-wide co-operation between various Communist parties and movements under the indisputable leadership of the Soviet Union. Internationalism, unlike cosmopolitanism, did not erase the boundaries between nations; it preserved a core idea of belonging and left intact the assumption of alienness that informed attitudes towards foreign Communists and sympathisers of the Left in the Soviet Union. In Stalin’s hands, internationalism was little more than a smoke-screen slogan concealing the tactics of maximising the benefits of nation-building at a time when the Soviets were still the only country where the revolution had triumphed. The resulting ambiguity – openness towards supporters from without, checked at the same time by a fundamental distrust and concerted policies of control and Russification – shot through and affected profoundly the life worlds of numerous East- and Central-European Left émigrés and exiles in Moscow during the 1930s.

Ervin Sinkó, arrived in 1935 from Paris (and an economically precarious existence) on the recommendations of Romain Rolland, determined to find a publisher for his ill-fated novel *The Optimists*; Béla Balázs set foot in Moscow in 1931, driven by the desire to shoot his best film yet; Gyula Háy (Julius Hay) went there in 1936 from Paris via Prague and Zurich, following an invitation from Lunacharsky (which had reached him after the latter’s death).<sup>12</sup> None of these three intellectuals achieved their immediate goals: Sinkó’s novel remained unpublished until after the Second World War; Balázs’s film *The Tisza Burns*, although finished in 1934, was banned and never shown; Háy scattered his energy in journalism and commissioned work.

Unlike these three literati, others were *forced* into exile. The Polish-Jewish writer Aleksander Wat, in his youth amongst the founders of the Polish Futurist movement, fled Warsaw in 1939. In 1941, in Saratov, he converted to Christianity, referring to himself as “a Jew with a cross around his neck” (Wat 1988: 360). Another Polish-Jewish writer, whose early work shaped Polish Futurism, Bruno

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<sup>10</sup> From the literature on Stalin’s nation-building and the process of Russification in the 1930s, see especially Terry Martin’s article (Martin 1998).

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Ronen (2005: 336); the Russian reads: “khanzheskikh propovedei bespochvennogo kosmopolitizma”.

<sup>12</sup> The individual circumstances are related in more detail in Sinko (1962); Zsuffa (1987); and Hay (1974). On Sinkó, see also Kantorowicz (1977).

Jasiński, was twice expelled from Paris for Left propaganda and found safe haven in Leningrad in 1929, becoming closely involved in Soviet literary and political life and enjoying huge literary success until his arrest in Moscow in 1937 (the precise year of his death in Vladivostok is still unclear).<sup>13</sup> Georg Lukács's Moscow exile, from March 1933 to the end of August 1945 (with a brief spell in Tashkent), was the result of persecution and insecurity; a Communist and a Jew writing in both German and Hungarian, in September 1919, following the defeat of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, he had found refuge in Vienna, returning illegally to Hungary in 1929 and then going to Moscow in 1930 (his first visit there was in 1921 when he attended the Third Congress of the Comintern); in 1931 he was already in Berlin, doing Party work until the political climate forced him to return to Moscow.

Having found himself in Moscow, Lukács, like so many of the other East-Central European exiles, was confronted with a pressing identity problem: was he Hungarian, Soviet, Russian, German, Jewish? Or did all these cultural codes interplay, shaping a multi-layered, flexible, yet vulnerable perspective on the surrounding world? With reference to language, Balázs's answer to these vexing questions was recorded in his Moscow diary in January 1940, "a poet without a people and a homeland who must write in two languages and employ both without the perfection that befits a master" (quoted in Loewy 2003: 380). Often deprived of the opportunity to write in their *Muttersprache* (mother tongue), these literati felt the loss of a more general sense of language comfort: they were bereft, to quote Jean Paul, of a *Sprachmutter* (language mother).<sup>14</sup> Politically, things were not any easier. Attempts to normalise one's precarious situation were not always successful. Balázs arrived on an Austrian passport, applied in 1937 for a Soviet citizenship but was rejected, and became eventually a *displaced person* (cf. Zsuffa 1987: 281). Lukács confronted the Soviet officials with even greater difficulties: a Hungarian by nationality, a Soviet citizen, and for eight out of his twelve years in the Soviet Union a member of the German Communist Party, he was a Hungarian-Jewish intellectual writing mostly in German, a person impossible to pigeonhole. Arousing suspicion all along, he could not escape being taken into custody for two months in 1941.<sup>15</sup>

These East-European exiles thus cut insecure and imperilled figures on the Moscow cultural and political scene. None of them ever reached the inner circles of power; often they were not trusted even within the narrow confines of their

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<sup>13</sup> For an introduction to Jasiński's life and work, see Kolesnikoff (1982); she notes (p. 9 n. 14) that Polish sources give 1939 as the year of Jasiński's death, while Russian sources usually have 1941.

<sup>14</sup> On current debates on multilingualism and the precariousness of the idea of 'mother tongue', see Yildiz (2012).

<sup>15</sup> Lukács became a member of the German Communist Party on 1 July 1931; in April 1941 he was registered in the Hungarian Communist Party (cf. Sziklai 2001: 229–30). He was arrested in Moscow on 29 June 1941 and released on 26 August.

professional environments, where their work was monitored, censured, and publicly attacked, not least by their Soviet peers. Eisenstein kept Balázs at a distance (cf. Loewy 2003: 381); Shklovskii, at the time himself a hostage to the regime, stopped the publication of Lukács's book *The Historical Novel* with a negative internal review.<sup>16</sup> There was a growing sense amongst these exiled intellectuals that they didn't own the project they had subscribed to. They were cosmopolitan in their beliefs and aspirations, yet they had no polis to apply their civic ethos to, excluded as they were from the real political process.

Yet most crippling of all was the political and moral disorientation and loss of identity that followed the signing of the Soviet-German treaty of 23 August 1939 which entailed a full relinquishing of the ideas and values of antifascism. Lukács, along with many others, was severely hit by this radical change in Stalin's foreign policy. The new line taken by the Soviet government was bewildering, offensive, and bitterly disappointing to him and to all those who had fled the Nazi persecution and had found safe haven in Moscow.

Thus neither language, nor cultural inheritance or acquisition, nor indeed their political creed and commitment could lend the exiles an unassailable and self-assured identity. One was haunted by an atmosphere, as Lukács put it in hindsight, "of lasting mutual mistrust, an alertness directed towards everybody... and a sensation of being permanently under siege" (Lukács 1970: 184). In Moscow, "at the heart of the world", Ervin Sinkó was plagued by a sense of "loneliness and uselessness" (Sinkó 1962: 131). His Kafkaesque story of countless encounters with the institutions of Soviet cultural life reveals the frustrations of many Left-minded émigrés who had to reconcile themselves to living in a society where compliance and bureaucracy had ousted the spirit of the Revolution: "here the task of the revolutionary consists in far-reaching conformism... It is not easy to be a revolutionary in the country where the revolution had triumphed".<sup>17</sup> For Sinkó, and for many other communists who shared his itinerary, Moscow in the mid-1930s was a city where reality seemed to be dissolving without hope. Distrust and anonymous opposition stood in their way; "an oppressive, impervious resistance... a resistance so incognito that I cannot seize it", as Balázs wrote in resignation.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> See Tihanov (2000). Shklovskii was a good friend of Gyula Háy's; he helped Háy, Balázs, Fridrich Wolf and others to continue their evacuation journey to Alma-Ata by securing a locomotive from Tashkent (Hay 1974: 248–53). Lukács travelled with the same group from Moscow but went to Tashkent; Shklovskii and Lukács no doubt met on this journey. Aleksander Wat was also helped on several occasions by Shklovskii in Alma-Ata (Wat 1988: 319–21).

<sup>17</sup> Sinkó (1962: 116). Lion Feuchtwanger, writing in response to André Gide's *Back from the U.S.S.R.*, did his best to justify conformism by presenting it as no more than the Soviet people's "general deep love... for their homeland" which elsewhere "is simply called patriotism" (Feuchtwanger 1937: 58).

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Zsuffa (1987: 221). For more on the East-East exilic experience, see Tihanov (2009).

### 3. De-Romanticising (and De-Liberalising) Exile

What do these two radically divergent narratives have in common? They seem dramatically, and diametrically, opposed: the first one interprets exile as an enabling factor, a spring of creativity and an enduring materialization of cosmopolitanism as a high-minded attitude of openness to cultures transcending one's immediate background and comfort zone; the second one sees exile as a site of anguish and deprivation, the terrain of an ever receding and failing cosmopolitanism. Beneath the surface, however, these two narratives do intersect and share a substantially common ground through their conjoined origins in the metanarratives of Romanticism. Exile, I argue, is a Romantic cultural construct. The exile supplements a whole series of Romantic protagonists marked by a twofold aberration from the customary: representing either the woefully inadequate or inefficient – the mad, the morbidly impractical (the lover serenely hovering above reality) – associated with the social outcast, or the inordinate potency of the superhero. The latter group, as all readers of poetry and novels dating from the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth century would know, disintegrates into two further groups: the creative genius (a poet, more often than not) and the monster (a Frankenstein, a Dracula).<sup>19</sup> Romanticism is, I submit, the foundational metanarrative of border-crossing and exile in modernity: what is transgressed here is the habitual norm of the everyday; creativity and suffering – given and received – go hand in hand in this spectacle of (both forced and voluntary) removal from reality. The Romantic hero is an outcast, an exile from the logic of the routine.

Romanticism is a Janus-faced discourse that thrives on an exfoliating polarity. In its responses to the defining event of the French Revolution, it is at once forward-looking and retrograde (Marxist literary criticism, notably Gorky and Lukács, thus tends to speak, somewhat crudely but not without a point, of 'progressive' and 'reactionary' Romanticism).<sup>20</sup> In Germany, Romanticism begins with an emphasis on the individual (the 'early Romantics') and ends up accentuating community life and cohesion (the so called 'late Romanticism'). This constitutive dualism is also present in the foundational narrative of exile. Not only does Romanticism furnish the framework in which exile is interpreted as a dramatically private affair, and the exile as an emphatically *individual* embodiment of extraordinary suffering and/or creativity; at the same time, Romanticism also supplies the framework that inscribes the exile in a nation-bound collectivity, without which the very phenomenon of exile becomes incomprehensible. It is

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<sup>19</sup> Exile as a fillip to poetic creativity is a common place in literary studies. For a most telling discourse that casts a bridge between exile and violence/monstrosity (via nostalgia as a mental disorder), see Karl Jasper's dissertation *Heimweh und Verbrechen* (1909; reprinted as Jaspers 1996); on the medicalisation of nostalgia in the 18th and 19th centuries, see Starobinski (1966) and Boym (2001: 3–7).

<sup>20</sup> See, above all, Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre (2001).

precisely in the folds of Romanticism that the nexus between language and nation, and between language and national culture, is discursively produced and reinforced.<sup>21</sup> Fichte's praise of the German language; Central and Eastern European purism; the idea of the poet as enunciator of national values and the prophet of national triumph – these are all phenomena engendered by Romantic ideology and inscribed in the metanarratives of Romanticism. And it is against this powerful and resilient nexus that the figure of the exile assumes its ambivalent prominence: either as a formidable creative genius who manages to safeguard and masterfully employ the national language in the inclement conditions of separation from the nation, or as a detractor, or rather disbeliever, who embraces another culture and language only to wither away – so the verdict of the national majority goes – in sterile suffering, torn away from his roots and his national audience. It is not by chance that the literary canons of a number of Central and Eastern European countries, particularly those who had to fight in the nineteenth century for their independence or unification, rest on works written by Romantics who were also exiles (Poland and Bulgaria are two good examples).

Significantly, the Romantic notion of exile lends wider significance to sentiments that previous epochs had thought of as enjoying but limited articulation and validity. A case in point are the changes reflected in the history of the word 'Heimweh' (nostalgia, pining after one's home place), that quintessential Romantic formula of longing *cum* grief. Friedrich Kluge tells us in an exemplary study that throughout the eighteenth century, and before that, 'Heimweh' was actually a word confined to the Swiss dialects, and largely avoided in written German by poets, journalists, and philosophers. Unsurprisingly, as Kluge demonstrates, it is only in the very late eighteenth century and the first third of the nineteenth, the time of the Romantics, that 'Heimweh' begins to be used in poetry and fiction and gains currency across the German-speaking realm.<sup>22</sup> This migration and generalisation of the word from the scattered Swiss dialects into standard German reflects the momentous transformation and broadening of the very notion of exile: from an evocation of the painful detachment from one's little home place to an indicator that could now point to the expulsion from an entire nation, its language and its culture.

It is only within this larger framework of the Romantic metanarratives of transgression, underpinned by the duality of creativity and suffering, equally excessive, that we can begin to understand the longevity of our post-Romantic attachment to interpreting exile through the seemingly divergent, but essentially convergent, optics of extraordinary resourcefulness and creativeness, on the one hand, and overwhelming anguish, distress, and affliction, on the other.

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<sup>21</sup> While recognising the "essential association" of nationalism with exile, Said's own influential interpretation of exile stubbornly remains within the other framework posited by Romanticism which I have just discussed: that of individual creativity, suffering, and longing; see Said (2001).

<sup>22</sup> See Friedrich Kluge (1902: 246–47).

To make exile a concept fit for purpose in the twenty-first century we thus must begin to de-romanticise it, to peel away the resilient crust of Romantic ideology that still sticks to it. That is to say, we need to relax the bond between language, literature, and national culture, and we need to look beyond the paradigm that captures exile as aberration – creative or destructive – from a presumed norm. Writers do not need to switch language to relax that bond (some did, perhaps most instructively Nabokov). Witold Gombrowicz, the Polish modernist in Argentine exile, continued to write in Polish, while at the same time claiming (envisaging another Polish exile, the Romantic poet Mickiewicz who was born in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and whose *Pan Tadeusz* became a foundational text of the Polish canon): “A hundred years ago, a Lithuanian poet forged the shape of the Polish spirit and today, I, like Moses, am leading the Poles out of the slavery of that form. I am leading the Pole out of himself” (Gombrowicz 1988: 36). Form, language and spirit constitute the (un)holy trinity that exilic writing here seeks to rethink and interrogate, denaturalising it and looking for a way out of it.

But above all we need to de-romanticise exile by removing the layers of exceptionality with which Romanticism has endowed it. Speaking of the “universality of rootlessness”, Zygmunt Bauman dwells on the figure of the “universal stranger”; exile is no more, Bauman avers, because we are all now exiles in the wider sense of not fully belonging in any one subsystem of social life, according to a diagnosis of social displacement formulated by Luhmann (whom Bauman cites). Even as he keeps as his baseline the Romantic notion of belonging – and its gradual frustration in late modernity – Bauman moves beyond this baseline to invest in exile a historical rather than timeless significance. For him, exile is a meaningful category when related to our experiences in, and of, what he calls ‘solid’ modernity; in ‘liquid’ modernity (postmodernity), “it has lost its particularity as human condition; with that loss, it has lost the once rebellious, potentially revolutionary, edge” (Bauman 1991: 95). In other words, it has also lost its privileged status of an exceptional experience that embodies suffering or creativity of supposedly unique intensity. Here a case in point might be the semantic history of “diaspora”, from a shorthand for the singular experience of Jewish life in (at first a voluntary) dispersal, with a gradually coalescing, later dominant, tenor of suffering and loss, to a more recent, now freely proliferating and largely de-semanticised, appellation of any globally scattered communities, to which distress and affliction no longer necessarily apply as markers of their existence.<sup>23</sup> This transformation away from the value-laden language of exile towards the descriptive, non-evaluative, ‘value-free’ vocabulary of transnationalism is one of the most significant changes attending the waning of exile as a privileged methodological prism through which to conceptualise experiences of (enforced) border-crossing.

I have used brackets in the sentence above, for exile has persistently been interpreted as an enforced experience. This is very much consonant with the

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<sup>23</sup> On this, see more in Vertovec (2009: 128–31).

notion of exile as the repository of unique distress and anguish or of equally unique creative/destructive energies: imminent obstacles, insurmountable difficulties, unliftable barriers are all part and parcel of the semantic palette of change under duress that elicits responses of suffering and creativity beyond the customary. Indeed, the insuperable nature of these obstacles, and the enduring sense of duress and blockage that ensues – but also the colossal energy generated by the efforts to deal with these impediments – are amongst the formative components of the Romantic mythology of exile as an experience of heroic transgression. The state has been assigned the role of the arch-villain in this scenario, a reputation strengthened particularly during the Cold War era of political exile that continues to cast a long shadow on how we think of exile long after the Iron Curtain had been raised. In fact, exile had been very much a case of negotiation between the state and the individual rather than a unilateral application of force by the state. Significantly, studying the history of banishment in Roman antiquity would reveal that the discourse of exile begins as a discourse of rights, not of punishment as such. Gordon Kelly draws attention to the fact that exile, in Cicero's speech "Pro Caecina", is a "refuge from punishment", a "harbour" that shelters one from (capital) punishment.<sup>24</sup> How should one gauge the position of the state in this negotiation over its own and the individual's rights has in turn been a matter of dispute and negotiation. Kojève went perhaps too far by suggesting that exile was a practice exposing the state as fundamentally weak (cf. his argument in Kojève 2000); unable to deal resolutely with its enemies (physically destroying them); it preferred the second-best option (expulsion). Historians have tended to offer more nuanced answers: Richard Bauman emphasises the moment of choice and sees exile as evolving from the Roman notion of *humanitas* (cf. Bauman 1996), while Gordon Kelly, in his book mentioned above, derives the practice of exile from the principle of *concordia* that allows for a reconfiguration of the political landscape to take place without explicit violence (Kelly 2006: 13). Exile rests on the soft techniques of an often metaphorically inscribed power that works not through direct removal but through a *pars pro toto* prohibition: *aqua et ignis interdictus* (the prohibition to use water and fire).<sup>25</sup>

It is this moment of exile as a process of negotiation involving the application of indirect force on the part of the state that had been obscured and left out of active consideration, especially as a result of the prevalent patterns of exile imposed by the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century. De-romanticising exile entails acknowledging this moment of negotiation, of complex mediation and give-and-take between the state and the citizen that often flows through the channels of a less than manifest coercion. In the figure of the exile, the clash of the individual and the state has been recast from a constant feature of political life

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<sup>24</sup> The quote is from Agamben (1998: 110); for the historical background to exile as right, only later evolving into a doctrine of punishment, see Kelly (2006).

<sup>25</sup> On the metaphoricity of exile, see also Zoric (2006: 30–32).

in modernity to an embodiment of extremity: a Romantic hero or a monster, both appealing and grotesque beyond the ordinary (think of Hugo's Quasimodo or of Agamben's wolf-man), the exile stands for a regularity re-styled as exception. In the footsteps of Romanticism, the exile has been turned into an emblem of solitary existence, allegedly beyond networks and beyond negotiation with the state (despite the fact that Romanticism itself had elaborate networks of sociability), with the nation often serving as his only point of reference.

The final act that brings this process of de-romanticisation to its logical conclusion should thus be the *de-liberalisation* of exile. The idea that the exile is a fully formed, autonomous social actor is a projection of the principle of "methodological individualism", inviting us to see and explain social phenomena as shaped solely by the aspirations of individuals who set out to do better for themselves in a new environment (or, "field of competition", to use the liberal language). "Methodological individualism" is here only the reverse of the pervasive logic of "methodological nationalism", the notion that the nation and the nation-state are the only appropriate prism and unit of analysis through which to spectate and interpret social occurrences. The latter is no doubt a deeply misguided premise (and it has, for that reason, been criticised by many<sup>26</sup>), but going into the other extreme seems to me to be fraught with problems that are no less significant. "Methodological individualism", while endeavouring to de-romanticise the social world by exploding the centrality of the nation and the nation-state, seemingly also destroys the framework that makes exile possible in the first place: it seeks to send into oblivion the exile who becomes an exile only to the extent to which s/he internalises this centrality and experiences its loss as tragic. Yet, as most extreme reactions, methodological individualism, too, carries the birthmarks of the body it sets out to outgrow: as it sheds the Romantic overtones of a nation-bound existence, methodological individualism smuggles in the Romantic focus on the individual, the Romantic preoccupation with solitary vigour, now recognisable in the new guise of the skilful and resourceful (but often illegal) migrant labourer who – in a context confronting him with threat, humiliation, and harassment – miraculously develops the toolkit of a cosmopolitan. His survival is no longer 'heroic', but it is at least as much a celebration of individual strength and prowess as is any other lonely act of endurance (not to mention "victory" in the newly formed "market place", in which these border-crossers find themselves).

This bizarre extolment of inequality masked by the proliferating (especially in social anthropology and mobility studies) myth of enhanced adaptability and "enforced cosmopolitanism"<sup>27</sup> is indeed a post-Romantic continuation of the faith

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<sup>26</sup> See, e.g. Beck (2002); and for a critique of critiques of "methodological nationalism", not least Beck's own: Chernilo (2006) and Fine (2007: 9–14).

<sup>27</sup> Ulrich Beck speaks of these effects of cosmopolitanism, from below and almost by serendipity, when praising the "transportation workers, doormen, janitors and cleaners who can successfully communicate in more languages than the graduates of the average German or French high school or American college" (Beck 2006: 104); see also Beck (2006a: 340–41), where he evokes the spirit of an "enforced cosmopolitanism" induced by the new world risks.

in the inexhaustible significance of the individual, this time through the philosophical and cultural resources of liberalism. De-liberalising exile means ending this belief in man as an accomplished social agent, it means giving preference to the cold transnational logic of networks,<sup>28</sup> dependencies, and, yes, also creativities that are conditioned and channelled through mediated solidarities (those of long-distance belonging, those of Internet communities, etc.). It means re-inscribing the individual into collectivities that are no longer necessarily nation-bound, and, as such, produce a different border-crosser: no longer an exile (or even a refugee), nor, for that matter, a consummately proficient individual doer and getter. How this re-inscription would bear on the way we think about cosmopolitanism – a cosmopolitanism extricated from the grip of the liberal imagination – is a question that rings with unmistakable urgency. This new cosmopolitanism would not be exclusively centred on individual agency and a humanistic recognition of uniqueness; it might even be that the new cosmopolitans, going as they do beyond the framework posited by the liberal imagination, would reject the very notion of exile, to the extent to which it rests on the liberal assumption of core experiential modes (such as self-sufficient creativity, or its negative version: individual suffering).<sup>29</sup> Crucially, this new cosmopolitanism would not be norm-orientated, nor will it be beholden to an imposing roster of context-insensitive values. Rather, I should like to imagine a cosmopolitanism that is an open-ended, reversible condition, not a normative category or fixed attainment. Its legitimations are perhaps best sought in a range of “rooted” manifestations, collective or individual,<sup>30</sup> that tend to retain the intensity, the colour, and the often controversial charge of the historical moment in which they originate.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> On the transnational optic to migration, see Nina Glick Schiller’s recent work (Glick Schiller 2010; Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003), as well as Amelina (2012).

<sup>29</sup> Timothy Brennan has written about the rejection of the assumption that exile and cosmopolitanism are intimately linked; he was already diagnosing the imminent decline of exile as a “dominant theoretical category of twentieth-century fiction” – and of philosophy and the social sciences, I now add (see Brennan 1997: 38).

<sup>30</sup> On ‘rooted cosmopolitanism’, see Anthony Appiah (2005: Ch. 6).

<sup>31</sup> See also my argument in Tihanov (2011a).

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