Translating Exile in Panait Istrati's "Mes Departs", Samuel Beckett's "Fin De Partie" and Selected Poems by Paul Celan.

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TRANSLATING EXILE IN PANAÏT ISTRATI'S MES DÉPARTS, SAMUEL BECKETT'S FIN DE PARTIE AND SELECTED POEMS BY PAUL CELAN

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor in Philosophy in

The Department of French Studies

by

Ina Alice Pfitzner
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ABSTRACT

Translation and exile are two phenomena that marked life in the twentieth century, especially in Europe, and have therefore left their traces in French literature as well. Translation from one language to another is a heightened form of the translation process inherent in any writing. Exile in a foreign country, linguistic exile, is an aggravated form of the exile every human being experiences at some point. Parting from Lucian Blaga's concept of "mioritic space," which is based on the Romanian myth of Mioritza, as well as Walter Benjamin's essay "Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers" [The Task of the Translator], this study focuses on the translational quality of texts written in exile, namely Mes départs, Fin de partie, and the poems by Paul Celan. Exile texts are like translations because both are rooted elsewhere than in the language in which they are composed: in (an)other language(s) or in the intermediary space between them. This is evident in the texts examined in this study. In Panait Istrati's account the French language is interspersed with terms from his native Romanian, from Greek, Italian and other languages as well as song lyrics and a musical score. In Samuel Beckett's play the French language is natural and idiomatic but meaningless and disparate with reality, with what is happening on the stage. In Paul Celan's poetry his native German is recast as poetic language, condensed and reworked to the utmost, so that it is foreign even to a native speaker. The exile inscribed in the language of these different texts reinforces the exile described in them. Translations of different kinds help to elucidate the meaning of these works: translations by various translators in the case of Paul Celan; self-translation and collaboration on a translation in the case of Samuel Beckett, and a contemporary German translation as well as my own English translation in the case of Panait Istrati.
1. INTRODUCTION.

Prologue

"One August evening in 1956, when I was ten years old, I heard a thousand-year-old shepherd wrapped in a cloak of smoke tell a story around a Carpathian campfire. He said that a long time ago, when time was an idea whose time hadn’t come, when the pear trees made peaches, and when fleas jumped into the sky wearing iron shoes weighing ninety-nine pounds each, there lived in these parts a sheep called Mioritza.

The flock to which Mioritza belongs is owned by three brothers. One night, Mioritza overhears the older brothers plotting to kill the youngest in the morning, in order to steal his sheep. The younger brother is a dreamer, whose ‘head is always in the stars.’ Mioritza nestles in his arms, and warns the boy about the evil doings soon to unfold, and begs him to run away. But, in tones as lyrical as they are tragic, the young poet-shepherd tells his beloved Mioritza to go see his mother after he is killed, and to tell her that he didn’t really die, that he married the moon instead, and that all the stars were at the wedding. The boy then tells Mioritza the name of each star, where it came from, and what its job is, just in case the mother, who is not easily fooled, wants to know names and faces. Before morning, the older brothers murder the young shepherd, as planned. There is no attempt to resist, no counterplot, no new deviousness. Fate unfolds as foretold. The moon has a new husband, and the story must be known.

Mioritza wanders, looking for the boy’s mother. But she tells everyone along the way the story as well. The murder was really a wedding, the boy married the moon, and all the stars were present. She names each star and explains where it came from. The Pleiades are bad girls who swept dust into the eyes of the sun. The Little Dipper feeds kind milk to the poor because it had once been an evil Titan who wasted his gold. Venus was once a vain queen who loved an evil angel. The circle of Orion is made of girls who can’t stop dancing. There are carpenters, witches, and smiths up there, worlds of people transformed and made forever exemplary. Mioritza knows everyone in the sky. She never tires of the story. She laments the death of her beloved with stories of the origin of the worlds.

Her wandering takes her across the rivers of the Carpathian mountains to the Black Sea, a path that describes the natural border of Romania. Her migration defines the space of the people, a space the Romanian poet Lucian Blaga called ‘mioritic.’ Mioritza herself is the moving border of the nation, a storytelling border whose story is borderless and cosmic. She calls into being a place and a people that she circumscribes with narrative. She causes biography to spring from myth, she contains within her space-bound body the infinity of the cosmos” Andrei Codrescu, The Disappearance of the Outside.

Exposition

Andrei Codrescu’s account is a slightly modified version of the traditional Romanian myth of Mioritza, ‘Romania’s most enduring cultural text’ (Collins), a story of loss and crime. This myth puts forth an interpretation for yet another expulsion from
Paradise, yet another original sin. The brother's violent murder serves as a virtual big bang, which calls into existence: time, societal order, and also the Romanian culture as a subtext to the larger universal cultural text. Mioritza's wandering, as poet Lucian Blaga proposed, defines "mioritic space," which is Romania, or in Richard Collins' words, "a geography of the Romanian poetic imagination."

This account emblematizes a mise en abîme: the tale is that of Codrescu is that of the old shepherd is that of Mioritza is that of the brother. It is the condition of all literature, which is always another telling of something already told before, another story of love, of betrayal and loss. But as in the game of Chinese whispers, the legend gets altered on the way, and in the end it has become something completely different altogether. In every retelling something is added and something omitted. Language is in itself a great mystifier because it hides more than it reveals, it constructs more than it actually tells. A text is always a translation of something else and is always only a representation, a version of the real thing, never the thing itself.

The author does not explain why Mioritza is not supposed to tell the mother the truth; it might be to not upset the mother, and to avoid bitterness and revenge. So she tells an invented, fictitious story, one that seems plausible enough. Even if she had told what really happened, it would have been just as true as her version. As she roams, Mioritza names the stars, just as the younger brother had named them. Naming them affirms their existence, creates them in our consciousness:

Inside the shepherd's story there prevailed an order different from the one in the 'real' world. The journey we undertook with Mioritza was magical and complicated. We were always lost and always home. The images she showed us found homes in us as if there had been holes already there for them to fit in. The stars were already in us. She called them into being by naming them (Codrescu 4).
The more often she tells her story, the more she starts believing it herself. With every retelling, it becomes better, more elaborate, richer. The details become more detailed, the facts more factual. It is because of Mioritza that the truth will never be known, and it is because of Mioritza that something is known at all, something that could very well be the truth. The ewe translates life into a narrative.

The death of her shepherd-friend marks the beginning of Mioritza's exile, the loss of innocence, the beginning of repression and sublimation. Leaving, actual exile, is compulsive, she could not possibly stay. Also, she must tell her story. The repression of the original crime becomes collective, for Mioritza shares her tale with everyone she meets.

Her wandering takes her across the rivers of the Carpathian mountains to the Black Sea, a path that describes the natural border of Romania. Her migration defines the space of the people [...]. She calls into being a place and a people that she circumscribes with narrative (2).

Her telling of the story establishes Romania as a linguistic, cultural and historical space, "the original ontological why had been resolved" (5). As she wanders and draws an invisible border she delineates Romania, a cultural text inscribed by the Romanian language. Mioritza finds comfort in her storytelling, feels at home in the order created by language. So wherever she goes, she makes a home for herself by telling her story, by naming the stars once more. While she calls Romania into being, she most of all determines her new home.

Theory

In his landmark essay, "The Task of the Translator," Walter Benjamin uses the example of the translator to propose general statements about languages and literature. Benjamin argues that all languages are related in what they want to say, and that they complement one another in their intentions.
Worin kann die Verwandtschaft zweier Sprachen, abgesehen von einer historischen, gesucht werden? In der Ähnlichkeit zweier Dichtungen jedenfalls ebenso wie in derjenigen ihrer Worte. Vielmehr beruht alle überhistorische Verwandtschaft der Sprachen darin, daß in ihrer jeder als ganzer jeweils eines und zwar dasselbe gemeint ist, das dennoch keiner einzelnen von ihnen, sondern nur der Allheit ihrer einander ergänzenden Intentionen erreichbar ist: die reine Sprache (54).

[Where can this relatedness of two languages be found, apart from a historical one? Just as little in the similarity between two works of literature as in that of their words. Rather all suprahistoric relatedness of languages consists in the fact that in each one of them as a whole, only one thing and that is the exact same thing, is intended, which nonetheless is not achievable in any one of them but only in the totality of their intentions complementing one another: the pure language.]

The pure language underlies communication in any language. While it is inherent in each one of them it is also unachievable in each one by itself. Pure language then can be approximated when an author writes from outside the context of the particular language he is using, as a writer who is in exile in a foreign language, or a translator. For, if all languages together create pure language, then a text written in a foreign language, which is always held in check by the first language, is already purer than a text whose language is not under such pressure. Or to put it another way, exile writing is like a translation, in a more literal way then in a normal composition.

What exactly is the pure language? In Paul de Man's reading of Benjamin, pure language is that which would not have to signify, "a language that would be entirely freed of the illusion of meaning" (24). It is language in a virginal state, language that doesn't associate, imply, suggest anything but itself, language that just is. Or as Kabbalistic speculation has it, "words will shake off 'the burden of having to mean' and will be only themselves, blank and replete as stone" (Steiner 313). Pure language does not represent reality but is a reality in itself. "In de Man's reading," says Jeff Humphries, "'pure language' is the phenomenon of intralinguism devoid of even the pretence to grounding in some extralingual referent" (492).
Thesis

"Die Erforschung der Exilliteratur ist selbst eine Art Exilposition" Guy Stern.

The two most influential literary modes of the twentieth century, translation and exile, have triggered change and new literary movements. They are exemplary for literature of our times, reflecting the human condition and the growing intercultural exchange on all levels. Translation and (linguistic) exile are related poetic practices, and many exiles have also worked as translators. In both cases the writer creates a new text, on the basis of a concrete or imaginary subtext. Both techniques involve a certain dépaysement of the writer and also that of the reader. This detachment and displacement is the normal state of being for a writer in exile. At the same time this is becoming common condition of our times.

Any kind of exile, but especially linguistic exile and exile in a foreign country, manifests itself in the written text. In fact this kind of writing is like translating. An original text written in exile, is already a translation. But translating is also a critical mode that to some extent explicates and interprets the original text. Translations of such a text already in translation show off the exile inscribed into the text. Hence the translation of such an exile text would be the translation of a translation and therefore, in Benjamin's terms, impossible. However, it is precisely the difference between the translation from a material source text, as in a simple translation, and from a virtual source text, as in exile writing, that allows for the translation of a text written in exile and that seeks it more than any other text. If only all the translations of a particular text can actualize that text, then the text of exile can only be told and read if all its translations are read with it.

In this dissertation, translation serves as a method of investigation, as the tool for reading the original text. Translations elucidate the meaning of a work of literature,
and are therefore means of criticism. The reason for examining texts written in literary and linguistic exile is that exile writing has a special status: it is situated on a continuum between the native language and culture of the writer and the language and culture within the context of which and for which the writer is writing. Compared to a translation, it may be the ideal, interlinear translation of a text with the truest essence, as Benjamin suggested. A text that floats in a vacuum, the space between the fixed linguistic and cultural systems of the two poles.

Exegesis

Panait Istrati, Samuel Beckett, Paul Celan, who were all in exile in France, represent different epochs, genres and native cultures; they also enact fundamentally different modes in their texts. They also exemplify different kinds of exile: Panait Istrati's wandered across Europe and the Mediterranean for decades, motivated by his dissatisfaction with the social and political conditions in his country. His nomadic exile was a restless search for humanity, as found, partially, in literature. Samuel Beckett deliberately chose to exile himself from his language and culture. Aware of the general exile of humans in the world, he translated the exile felt within his own language as well. Translating his own texts, he translated homelessness into the language that for him meant home. Paul Celan, on the other hand, experienced political upheaval and violence as a Jew under Nazi domination, creating a first exile. Leaving the home that had ceased to be home while he was still there, Celan continued to write in German. He did so outside the cultural and physical context of that language, in Paris, and transformed it into a poetic idiom exiled from the mother tongue.

All of the three authors studied here were exiled in France, exiled from their native cultures and languages. As much as they have in common they differ too:
Panait Istrati was only successful when he wrote in French, and when he translated his own works into his native tongue he floundered. Samuel Beckett went back and forth between writing in English and French, and translating himself. Paul Celan discovered that he could only write in his mother tongue, although he mastered a few other languages perfectly well. While Istrati was an non-literary writer and reader, Beckett and Celan were erudite intellectuals and polyglots, who situated themselves with regard to the literary tradition. Beckett and Celan came from middle-class families, Istrati was at best from a blue-collar background. For Beckett and Celan translating was part of their literary work. While Istrati's works are to some degree political, Beckett's and Celan's are not overtly so. Beckett and Celan are today considered canonical and influential, while Istrati is usually appreciated by readers seeking entertainment rather than by poets and literary scholars. Paul Celan and Panait Istrati are both geographically from Romania, while Beckett is from the very West of the continent. What unites all three authors is the drivenness, the passion and commitment with which they work in spite of and because of a very profound disillusionment.

The texts belong to different epochs and genres, allowing to study exile over time and in different forms: *Mes départs* is an autobiographical text, written in 1928, *Fin de partie* is a theater play, from 1956, and Paul Celan’s poems from his volumes *Von Schwelle zu Schwelle [From Threshold to Threshold]* and *Atemwende [Breathturn]* were published in 1956 and 1967 respectively. The exile status pervades these works in various ways, just as the acute awareness of the functioning of language and of different languages is evident in these texts. While this was apparently a major stimulus for writing, it also became a stylistic means. The works
chosen stem from the middle period of their creative lives, when all three authors had established their particular voice and had also established themselves in exile.

I will view these texts with the gaze of a translator and of an exile, for I am both myself, a reader inhabiting the same intermediary, outside space as these exile authors. If exile literature and translations are located in this space, then the translations of these texts will testify how exile pervades the language of the text as well as the translation. They will bear witness to the commonness of this experience and will articulate it just as apt/inapt as the original text. Exile, immanent when translating and itself a translation, is utterly translatable.

The chapter entitled "Translation" summarizes various approaches to translation and combines them with reflections on the significance of translations for questions of identity and literature. Translation is a literary form that has asserted its place within literature more and more. At the same time it has served an invaluable means of literary analysis. The following chapter, "Exile," surveys previous studies and gives examples for various kinds of exile. The question is raised why France has been such a popular place for refugees. All writers are in exile, just as translators are: the stance of the translator is related to that of an exile writer, translating is always a kind of exile. Exile can have a silencing effect but is often also experienced as boosting creativity. The solution to exile is writing. The subsequent chapter focuses on the analysis of Panait Istrati’s (1884-1935) autobiographical text Mes départs, written in 1928. The author was a Romanian vagabond and an autodidact, who didn’t study French until his early thirties. His great success in France was due to his "exotic" style and subjects, accounts about the Romania of the late nineteenth century and of the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Istrati’s language is heavily tinged with Romanian syntax and expressions as well as literally cited foreign words. This author was in exile
as a politically activist, as someone who grew up without his Greek father, as
someone who fears the stagnant comfort of home. In the next chapter Samuel
Beckett’s (1906-1989) play *Fin de partie* (1956) will serve to demonstrate that author’s
exile as it is written into the text. Beckett composed his works alternately in French
and English and then translated them in the other language. This play is one example
of texts he translated into his native English and of which he oversaw the German
translation. For Beckett translation was not simply a way of making his text available
to an audience in a different language; translation helped him in his quest towards the
ever more succinct meaning. In the last chapter Paul Celan’s early poem “Todesfuge”
(1946) as well as three shorter, later poems “Flügelnacht” [Wing-Night], “Der mit
Himmel geheizte” [The sky-fueled] and “Erblinde schon heut:” [Go blind today
already:] will be studied in conjunction with their translations to analyze how exile is
engraved into those texts. Paul Celan wrote in his mother tongue, German, with which
he had a problematic relationship: never having lived in a German-speaking country,
surrounded by the language of another great literary tradition—French, he wrote in the
language of his parents’ murderers. The Conclusion summarizes the results of this
study.

Technicalities

The body of the dissertation will be followed by two appendices. Appendix I
includes my own English translation of Istrati’s text *Mes départs* [My Farewells], which
I prepared for this study. Appendix II comprises typed versions of the translations into
English and French of the Celan poems examined here. The translations are
analyzed individually, regardless of the particular context in which they were
published. All quotations in French or German are followed by English translations in
brackets, and all translations are my own, except for the title of the published
translations. Romanian names and words are adapted to English spelling norms. In order to avoid privileging either gender in impersonal, general statements, I will alternate “she” and “he,” “her” and “his,” etc., at random. The lists of works cited appears at the very end of the dissertation.

Notes

1 Walter Benjamin discussed this aspect of pure language in more detail in his essay “Über die Sprache überhaupt und über die Sprache des Menschen” [About Language in General and about Human Language]. The ineffable, unprovable quality of this idea, which may be viewed as problematic, is derived from the mystical (Kabbalistic) tradition and is an apt description of the ineffable reality of language and languages.
2. TRANSLATION.

Mioritza, the wandering sheep of the Romanian legend, delineates the borders of her native Romania by traveling and telling her Ur-story of loss and crime. She ascribes what Romanian poet Lucian Blaga has called ‘mioritic space,’ which is Romania, a geographical and cultural territory defined by Mioritza’s tale. Knowing this myth of original crime and loss and telling it characterizes someone as a Romanian. Andrei Codrescu’s version therefore exposes him as a Romanian, although he has lived in America for most of his life. Codrescu not only tells Mioritza’s tale, he translates it, into English, into his late twentieth century American prose. Translation however is the quintessential European practice, one that has been central to the continental mindset and its manifestations in language, art, politics and other spheres. In a Mioritic way, translation has demarcated Europe as a continent, as an abstract cultural entity. So while Andrei Codrescu considers himself a Romanian-born American writer, he is a European, too. A translator, poet, essayist, Codrescu has brought Europe with him, has extended Europe’s borders across the Atlantic. Anyone who translates is ultimately a European... A European Thing

"Europe est fondée sur les traductions" Henri Meschonnic.

The term Europe designates a geographical and historical space; the space from which the languages used by Panait Istrati, Samuel Beckett, and Paul Celan—French, English, and German—originated. The literatures and cultures based on these languages have been marked by exchange, cross-referencing, borrowing—and a penchant for translation. Translation generates, as much as it accentuates, cohesion and difference, connectedness and separation. It has enabled the coexistence of many different traditions in Europe, their commerce and exchange, their survival.
For many Europeans, in particular the French, Europe today stands for the European Union, which evolved from a mainly economic organization into a political body. At this time, the European Union comprises fifteen member states, and keeps expanding. EU bodies transcend the traditional nation state without abolishing it; cooperation and coordination are organized on the basis of uniquely European political, economic and social premises. The principle of translation is one of them: the equality of all member countries, regardless of their geographical size, economical and political status or number of inhabitants, makes for a multilingual entity, and an excellent platform for discussing, confronting and negotiating issues of language, identity and translation. The endorsement of the official language(s) of each member intimates the understanding that any language is a significant carrier of identity and culture. Nevertheless many Europeans fear that they will lose their cultural peculiarities, a fear, which time and again bubbles up in disputes over purity laws for beer or pasteurizing cheeses or standardizing toilet bowl shapes. If unmediated by translation, past and current conflicts have shown, such contact may escalate into hatred and violence.

Translation within the European Union turns this contact into communication, expressly and explicitly. The equality of all members, which is reaffirmed in every single meeting by the presence of simultaneous interpreters sitting in their booths and by translated documents in front of each deputy, represents a commitment to avoid the mistakes which have marked Europe's conflictual history, whose devastating effects have been felt everywhere on the continent; translation implies a commitment to communication and peace. Hence, the European Union officially privileges no one language but pursues a 'policy of nine originals' (Wilms 499), a number that has now increased to eleven.
While this underscores the equality of all languages, it is really impossible to put into practice; translations of original documents are prepared that then serve as originals themselves.\footnote{The European Union employs an army of full-time translators, supplemented by free-lance translators in their respective countries. The Translation Service of the European Commission is the biggest one in Europe, using about half of its budget (Loffler-Laurian 145), a costly and slow machinery. Translations are often based on faulty or unintelligible source-texts, which include invented words or are inconsistent in their usage of terms. Such inconsistencies happen when several authors work independently on the same text, insert parts of other texts without reference, write in a language other than their native one, when there is time pressure, or no reference material (Wilms 499). It can be a futile and frustrating endeavor when translators sometimes edit the original text to (re)produce an intelligible target text. Such procedure, according to EU translator Franz-Josef Wilms, is a translation of a translation: the translation of a text written in linguistic exile (504).} Inefficiency and costs are common arguments against multilingualism within the European Union. Others worry that the current policy may intensify diversity and difference and divide Europe more than it unites it; one official language would allow a European public opinion to develop and for Europeans to actually take part in EU policies and politics (Stratenschulte 13). But which language should take that place? Would that not cement the internationally privileged role of English, and thereby advantage one member country, which, in the words of Bernard Cerquiglini, "is the least European" of them all? Others postulate that all Europeans should study English in elementary school besides their native language, so that further foreign language instruction would be unnecessary because English would serve as the common language for all institutions and the military. But it is not only pragmatism that is at the
heart of this endeavor—international understanding and cooperation are, and so is translation.

With its policy of translation, the European Union continues a specifically Old World tradition with a new slant, stipulates 'Europe's natural vocation,' which is to foster a culture of translation (Nouss 248). As time has shown, exposure to cultural difference on an equal footing really affirms one's own identity, for, as translation critic Henri Meschonnic posits, "l'identité advient par l'altérité au lieu de s'y opposer" [identity comes from otherness instead of being opposed to it] (Importance 6). Identity then becomes flexible and relative, arises from and is reinforced in contact rather than in separation. The coexistence of a multitude of cultures and subcultures, languages and dialects on a relatively small continent, commercial, cultural and political interaction have made us Europeans who we are. For Umberto Eco, it is not necessary that everyone learn one another's languages. Rather, he favors a multicultural, though unified vision of Europe's future:

Le problème de la culture européenne de l'avenir ne réside certainement pas dans le triomphe du polyglottisme total [. . .], mais dans une communauté de personnes qui peuvent saisir l'esprit, le parfum, l'atmosphère d'une parole différente. Une Europe de polyglottes n'est pas une Europe de personnes qui parlent couramment beaucoup de langues, mais, dans la meilleure des hypothèses, de personnes qui peuvent se rencontrer en parlant chacune sa propre langue et en comprenant celle de l'autre, mais qui, ne sachant pourtant pas parler celle-ci de façon courante, en la comprenant, même péniblement, comprendraient le 'génie,' l'univers culturel que chacun exprime en parlant la langue de ses ancêtres et de sa tradition (395).

[The problem of the European culture of the future lies certainly not in the triumph of total polyglottism ( . . . ), but in a community of people who can grasp the spirit, the flavor, the atmosphere of a different language. A Europe of polyglots is not a Europe of people who can fluently speak many languages but, in the best hypothesis, people who can meet and each speak their own language and understand that of the other, but who, without knowing how to speak that language in a fluent manner, would, by understanding it, even if with difficulty, understand the]
Umberto Eco postulates the study of languages for their passive use, not necessarily its active command and application. When he says that these Europeans would understand one another's culture, 'genius' and tradition, he implies that one learns this ideally with the acquisition of a new language. Eco's idea of Europeanism proposes an open-minded, educated citizen, the ideal European in a way, which would be the exact opposite of the "ugly American." The self-confidence and acceptance he presupposes are illusory, of course, as recent conflicts in some parts of the continent have shown. Even within the European Union issues of language and identity resurface periodically, such as recently when German chancellor Gerhard Schröder's proposal to appoint German as one of the official languages during a conference was met with apprehension and anger.

Meanwhile some speakers of 'smaller' languages already use English within EU bodies. Without the mediation by an interpreter, they establish direct contact with the number of speakers of English as a second language, among them most likely fellow deputies from their own country. While in other parts of the world the intermediary language is often the only mutual means of communication, those European Union speakers simply choose directness and immediacy over perfection. Several factors come into play: in countries with such 'smaller' cultures, intellectuals and educated people usually master a 'greater' second language perfectly well. It may also be that their own language, at least in an international context, has somewhat the stigma of provinciality, whereas English is a sign of worldliness and cosmopolitanism, an asset. In other, often poorer, parts of the world, where many more languages cohabit a small area, it would be out of the question to budget translations. This trend towards English within the European Union is the more interesting since it is not due
to budgetary restraints or pragmatic necessity. The European Union, representing one
of the most prosperous regions of the world, can afford and makes a point of
affording translations.

Reality Check

“I had nothing to do with choosing the texts. The publishers would tell me that they
needed a translation of such and such a book, and I would do it. It was very draining
work and it had nothing to do with literature or my own writing. History books,
anthropology books, art books. You grind out so many pages a day, and it puts bread
on the table. Eventually, I stopped doing it to save my sanity” Paul Auster.

In our market economies, translators work free-lance or for agencies, few of
them are full-time employees. In most cases they work under time constraints and for
little money, and the difficulty of their work is generally not appreciated. Lawrence
Venuti has written a book about *The Translator’s Invisibility*, and Johanna Borek has
argued from a feminist perspective that translators are always ‘female’ and therefore
invisible, taking a back seat just as the ‘duplicate’ woman does in relation to the
‘original’ man (32). (This, naturally, also applies to male translators.) Translation is
often viewed as a lesser art. Paul de Man has expressed the unrewarding status of
translation and translators quite succinctly:

Any translation is always second in relation to the original, and the translator
as such is lost from the very beginning. He is per definition underpaid, he is
per definition overworked, he is per definition the one history will not really
retain as an equal, unless he also happens to be a poet, but that is not always
the case (20).

According to estimates by translators’ and interpreters’ associations, the more
glamorous work of the literary translator makes up only five to ten percent of all
translations. Therefore it occupies a minor role in the training of translators, but is
dealt with disproportionately in theoretical treatises. This has to do with the fact that
the usage of language to create a literary effect has had a considerably longer
tradition than the use of technical language as a tool of communication (Bühler 282)
and that it enjoys a higher social appreciation. In other words, literature is held in higher esteem than other forms of communication because of its special role in representing and shaping human existence. This translates into the domain of translation where literary translation occupies a unique place.

The difference between literary and other texts, according to Henri Meschonnic, is not so much that they require different kinds of translations, but rather that the texts themselves “ne sont pas dans le langage de la même manière” [are not in the language in the same way] (Traduire 82). It is this ‘different being in the language,’ this different quality of capturing and expressing what it means to be human, this discourse about language itself (83) that gives literature its significance in human life and activity. For the purposes of this study, translation means literary translation. Abstracting from reality, I am supposing the ideal translating situation, in which the ideal translator, one who has a near-native and dynamic command of the other language, and also a knack for literature, can work without pressing deadlines, with access to all possible resources, and can allow enough revisions to produce the best possible rendition of a great literary work.

The Politics of Translation

Translation primarily aims at making a text accessible that would otherwise be indecipherable for a specific groups of readers. One of the first texts to be translated, the Bible, therefore promised the communication with the putative author—God. The more translations were done, Greek, then Latin, then English and German and French, the bigger became the once elite minority to presumably have ‘direct’ access to God. Translating the Bible into the vernacular was a highly political and revolutionary deed, for it gave everyone the opportunity to establish their own relationship with God. Until the Reformation, many a Bible translator was forced into
exile, and others lost their lives, e.g. Jean Calvin and Jan Hus respectively (Delisle 52). Martin Luther, whom Wolf Biemann called "Gottesdolmetsch" ['God's interpreter'], based his translation of the Bible on the way people actually spoke, incorporated dialectal and regional terms and created new ones. A by-product of Luther's Bible was a national language, a German all Germans could understand. Besides bringing God to the individual, and asserting the individual against the Catholic Church, multiple translations of the Bible have contributed to the development and recognition of new vernacular languages (Delisle 170).

Translation has a humanistic intent, enabling understanding and communication among different nations and cultures. The founder and first president of the International Translators' Federation, Pierre-François Caillé, summarized his credo as "Faire du livre un instrument d'humanisme, de paix et de progrès—telle est notre noble tâche" (qtd. in Delisle 13) [To make the book an instrument of humanism, peace and progress—that is our noble task]. Today's officials have made the following claim:

Depuis l'invention de l'écriture, les traducteurs jettent des ponts entre les nations, les races, les cultures, les époques, les continents. Entre le passé et le présent aussi (Delisle 13).

[Since the invention of writing, translators have built bridges between nations, races, cultures, epochs, continents. Between the past and the present too.]

European history in particular has made it obvious that this was often not successful. In fact, during Nazism and the Second World War, says Alexis Nouss, Europe failed in its mission, betrayed its essence, which is to foster a culture of translation. And, he asks, what does this imply for the truth or authenticity of a translational dimension (Nouss 248)? There is no easy answer to this question; but it is good to ask it. As we will see later on, it is a question that pervades the post-war works studied here.
The status translation achieves within a country is an indicator for a 'cultural' hierarchy, or a hierarchy of translations. Some countries translate more than others, and some languages are translated more than others. Those who translate more acknowledge the hegemony of other literatures and arts but also contribute to it. Romul Munteanu has compared a language and its culture to a currency in the market, where the currency of the 'smaller languages' is less valuable (35). For someone who writes in Romanian or Dutch for example, it is harder to achieve recognition on an international level than for a Anglophone writer. On the other hand, such countries often have a tradition of absorbing and incorporating foreign literature into their canon; translations are part of their own culture and tradition. Germany too has had a long tradition of translating from foreign cultures, although her literary currency is 'worth' more than that of others. Even today translations are a major part of German book production, part of the literary canon.3 France, whose literature has been one of the major currencies in the market, has seen "un certain retard" [a certain lag] when it comes to translations (Ladmiral 13). Also, translated works don’t mix with French literature (Berman Critique 58): foreign literature is usually shelved separately in French book stores. Yet, as is obvious when browsing in a librairie, translations have become a larger part of French culture in recent years. In Paris, the Centre Georges Pompidou, the Maison des écrivains, the English-language bookstore Village Voice and many other institutions organize readings of originals and translations, as well as discussions with authors and their translators. According to Jean-Pierre Lefebvre, the Centre National des Lettres subsidizes translations for up to sixty percent of the costs. In France and Germany, most translations are from US American publications, and not always of high quality literature. In contrast, translations in the United States are the exception in the book market, and rarely are they successful.4

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The situation is similar when it comes to synchronizing feature films: traditionally, France and Germany show foreign films in their dubbed (translated) version. In the synchronization, the film is naturalized and some of its foreignness undone. In other cultures, those used to being marginal and smaller, the foreign remains foreign; subtitles—in Belgium in both Flemish and French—leave no doubt about that. Through their conciseness and time delay, subtitles are very obviously only an aid to understanding, and challenge the viewer to fill in the blanks. In many European countries, there is a trend to more and more screenings in the original (English) language, without subtitles, and as Michel Deguy pointed out, foreign films are now often advertised with their English titles. The United States take the other extreme: some foreign films, such as Nikita or Three Men and a Baby, are completely remade. With regard to the annual Academy Awards, Time critic Richard Corliss has observed that all non-American films are limited to run in the “foreign language ghetto,” “that dank, cramped cellar of the Academy mansion where the rest of the movie world must huddle like illegal immigrants” (50). Also, foreign actors have to speak perfectly idiomatic American English to be considered for an Oscar:

Hollywood’s message to the world’s actors is clear: We’ll let you in, and perhaps give you prizes but you have to be just like us. That goes for directors as well. [...] The message on the screens is just as clear to audiences in every foreign country. See American; be American. Because our movies, our stories, our people matter. And yours don’t (48).

Accordingly, American publishers impose the greatest changes to foreign works in translation. Howard Curtis, translator of several Simenon novels into English, has reported that publishers in the United States tend to override the concept of fidelity and demand that the text be adapted for the American public. This includes factual corrections or the adjustment of, for the US reality, politically unacceptable statements (69). Protectionism of American culture implies a rejection of anything
foreign, which, although not ordained by law or cultural policy, is based on economic
calculation. Offering the greatest and most dynamic market of the world is enough
reason to justify media imperialism. The ‘exchange rates’ of cultural and literary
‘currencies’ have fluctuated due to changes in political and economic power positions,
to their history and to the natural distribution of their language. Since the twentieth
century, the United States have prevailed on many levels: economy, technology,
science, and pop culture. Due to this dominance and the fact that English is spoken in
many former colonies it has achieved the status of a lingua franca and, on a world­
wide scale, outrun other languages. This means, as George Steiner noted, that now
"88% of scientific and technical literature is either published in English initially or
translated into English shortly after its appearance." He views “English translation as
the window on the world” (492). English has also become a major literary language
with writers all over the world writing in English. In a recent millenium survey of the
PMLA, a university scholar voiced the following observation:

> English is less a national language now than a semiotic soup of langue and
> parole, a global currency in speech, writing, and e-mail as the sun never sets.
> It may still open Shakespeare and Dickens, Conrad and Joyce, but it also
> opens Pietro Di Donato, Judith Ortiz Cofer, Africa, the Pacific Rim (Alaya
> 2070).

In some cases, similar to English speaking orators at the meetings of the European
Commission, writers deliberately choose English over their native language. Such is
the case of Indian bestseller author Arundhati Roy, author of The God of Small
Things, whose native language is Malayam; indeed her novel may have been too
universal and too modern for a regional audience. This worldwide movement towards
English eliminates the need for translation from one language to another. But
translating into a different language is only a symbol for the different ways in which
everyone translates, and writing, no matter in which language, is one of them.
Writing as Translation

"Le devoir et la tâche d'un écrivain sont ceux d'un traducteur" Marcel Proust.

Every text is an attempt, in one way or another, to translate the world, reality, life, thought, something, into language. It is an attempt to grasp it and make sense of it, but also to delimit and describe it, to give it definition and shape. It frames and displays it like a gemstone, an image evoked in the German expression 'die Wirklichkeit in Sprache fassen,' and which the English, 'to capture reality in language' or the French, 'saisir la réalité,' render with their own possessive connotations.

Throughout his oeuvre, Marcel Proust has dealt with this problem; his monumental novel *A la recherche du temps perdu* (1913-1927) documents the quest for the past, for only if it is written down does it seem real. This process, naturally, always remains incomplete and approximate, and even writing three thousand pages cannot recall reality the way a taste of *madeleine* dipped in linden tea can. Writing then is a translation of life into text.

Any molding into language is a translation into an existing, relatively inflexible system—the specific language—and therefore into a logic and a culture shaped by that language. Language structures the way we think, and the way we think structures language; language at once represents and forms thought. Grammatical structures and word formation patterns, homonyms, etc. mark the language very profoundly. The French *subjonctif* or *passé simple*, or the German predicate bracket, or the English Present Perfect are bound to condition thought, to influence the way speakers of a certain language perceive the world. For this reason, two linguistic systems are never exactly parallel and translate life into language differently. In fact, says George Steiner, "To a greater or lesser degree, every language offers its own reading of life" (498). Translator Georges-Arthur Goldschmidt agrees: "Le regard des langues n'est
pas le même et c'est pourtant les mêmes choses qu'elles voient" [The gaze of the
different languages is not the same, and yet, they do see the same things]
(Goldschmidt 160).

Sometimes though, they do not see exactly the same thing: Walter Benjamin’s
famous example of the words “pain” and “Brot” illustrates this (55). For Benjamin, they
signify differently due to the way they are spelled, pronounced and declined. But also
“pain” may make a French person think of a fresh, crusty baguette, which he will eat
with his copious lunch, whereas “Brot” for the German person most likely evokes a
rich, dark loaf of bread, which she can slice up and turn into open-face sandwiches for
supper. Such palpable differences have incited some translators and critics to
general, almost philosophical characterizations of the different languages. Simenon
translator Howard Curtis views the difference between French and English as follows:

French, with its relatively restricted vocabulary and tight sentence structure
lends itself particularly well to a concise, pared-down prose style [. . .] English,
on the other hand, with its much wider vocabulary, looser sentence structure,
and tendency to discursiveness, is not usually so laconic (68).

Another translator of Simenon, Nigel Ryan, holds that French has fewer words, which
are used with more precision than the richer English vocabulary (63). Jean-Louis
Curtis finds the English language:

plus riche, et aussi plus souple, plus libre que la langue française. En anglais,
on dispose de plus de mots et on est gêné par moins de règles qu’en français”
(27).
[richer, and also more supple, freer than the French language. In English, one
has more words at one’s disposal and is hindered by fewer rules than in
French.]

For him English has a “génie concret, qui va tout droit à l’action” [a concrete genius
that goes straight to action], in contrast to the French’s ‘more abstract genius’ (27).8

Comparing German and French, Grass’ translator Bernard Lortholary states that

"l’allemand est une langue beaucoup plus concrète que le français" [the German is a
much more concrete language than the French] (Busnel 58). Owing to its transparency and precision, Celan translator Jean-Pierre Lefebvre has described German as ‘an anxious language.’

Despite these idiosyncrasies, all languages, according to Walter Benjamin, complement one another in their intentions. While the way they signify is different, what they intend to signify is not:

> Während nämlich alle einzelnen Elemente, die Wörter, Sätze, Zusammenhänge von fremden Sprachen sich ausschließen, ergänzen diese Sprachen sich in ihren Intentionen selbst. Dieses Gesetz, eines der grundlegenden der Sprachphilosophie, genau zu fassen, ist in der Intention vom Gemeinten die Art des Meinens zu unterscheiden (53).

[While all the individual elements in foreign languages, words, sentences, references exclude one another, these languages complement each other in their intentions. In order to exactly grasp this law, one of the basic ones in language philosophy, one has to distinguish in the intention the signification from the way of signifying.]

At the bottom of it all is what Benjamin calls “die reine Sprache” [the pure language]. This “pure language” is inherent in each language and culture, inherent to humanity in general. It makes translation possible.

Anyone who translates unwittingly assumes the existence of such pure language in any language. In other words a translator parts from the relative stability of the sign, infers that one or more signifiers refer to a signified. Only if a text can be deciphered and made to signify can it be translated. The text normally takes on its signification in the reading; it comes to life, is disambiguated through interpretation. Readers interpret the text, as informed by their psychological, social, cultural context, and thereby imbue it with meaning. Therefore, a text has no one meaning. As multiple interpretations are possible, there is an infinite number of possible translations. The translator can only give her reading, interpretation, translation of that text, one of many possible ones. A translator is first of all a reader (De Man 33). In addition to the
initial reading, any translation is based on a number of interpretations: the
interpretation of 1) the linguistic properties of the language shared by the author and
the presumed reader of the original text (which the author had originally interpreted
himself), 2) the cultural specifics in which language and the text are grounded, 3) the
reality, story, plot, meanings, etc.; the text itself, 4) the linguistic properties of the
language of the translation, 5) the cultural specifics of which language and the
translation are part.

The act of translating endorses a text and its truth. The translation undertakes
to reproduce the first attempt at truth, to transpose it into another language.
Translation suggests understanding, and so in front of a foreign text even a proficient
reader might translate rather than read. This is what Paul Auster’s did when he was a
student:

I couldn’t imagine a linguistic reality other than English, and I was driven by a
need to appropriate these works, to make them part of my own world. […] it
was only by trying to put them into English that I began to penetrate them
(Translation 253).

Reality just seems more real when it can be translated into our own language.
Therefore, translation has been a (somewhat dated) teaching method in the
classroom, or a means of testing the linguistic competence of the learner. But it is
more—for many students of a foreign language establishing an equivalent in their
mother tongue is simply reassuring. Thinking, saying or writing IT in their language
makes it truer, almost material, something to hold onto, real. Especially beginning
language learners do not fathom the lapse between languages that makes direct
equivalence impossible. This unsettling and invaluable insight is the inevitable effect
of learning a foreign language, and a metaphor for language/writing per se. The lack
of parallelism between two languages compares to literary representation in general:
reality is discernible but reduced and abstracted, flattened out. In fact, the text becomes constructed through its specific language.

Translation as Poetry

"[T]raduire un poème est écrire un poème, et doit être cela d’abord" Henri Meschonnic.

Since any act of writing is subjective and individual, no two texts are alike; each one of them bears the signature of its author, in itself but also explicitly.

Although Walter Benjamin posits that one writes without a particular reader in mind (50), the choice of the language alone determines the potential readership, more than any other factors such as genre, subject, plot, style, price of the book, etc. The language presupposes a reader of the same language, which in most cases will be their mother tongue. A translation is the rewriting of a text in a different language, addressing a different reader than the original. Using a different medium, i.e. a different language, the translator is an author, too. Therefore a translation, where another author communicates with another presumed reader in another language, is always a new text, though one created on the basis of a source text.

However, paradoxically, a good translation should not really elucidate or clarify the original. While it should spring from an understanding of the text, it should not undo or disentangle it but render ambiguities, puns, connotations—the poetry of the original—as much as possible. According to translation critic and poet Henri Meschonnic, Guillevic’s paradoxical maxim for translation that ‘traduire n’est pas interpréter’ [translating is not interpreting] is also his strongest one:

Car, si traduire doit être autant qu’écrire, le poème résultant doit être le porteur des interprétations, et non porté par elles. Le poème se fait dans des signifiants. Sa traduction ne doit pas se faire dans des signifiés (Traduire 310).
[For, if translating is to be as much as writing, the resulting poem should be carrier of interpretations and not carried by them. The poem is done within the signifiers. Its translation should not be done in the signifieds.]

To reproduce a text, to translate then is to re-write it. The translator must write poetry herself to re-establish the text in the other language. In fact it is the poetry of a text that makes it worth translating in the first place and it is something "[d]as der Übersetzer nur wiedergeben kann, indem er—auch dichtet" [which the translator can only render if he writes—poetry—himself] (Benjamin 50). The translator therefore must be a poet, novelist, fiction writer herself, but one who subordinates her skills to the text some other poet, novelist, fiction writer has created.

Still, readers and publishers alike often seem to forget that it is the translator’s voice they are hearing/reading rather than that of the original author; frequently the translator’s name is omitted altogether. In a way, the translator almost effaces himself behind the original author and subordinates his voice more or less to that of the original author, often depending on whether he himself is an established writer. While the identity of the translator is often lost behind that of the author, the quality of his translation as a literary text is the reason for an author’s success in a foreign literature. On the other hand the case of Salman Rushdie and his translators has illustrated that translators may be held responsible for their work just as much as the original author. This goes to show that the appreciation of the translator’s effort is quite arbitrary.

Julio César Santoyo, a translator himself, alleges that a translation is: "[a] task, then, recognized as more difficult and simultaneously far less gratifying than that of creation, since the translator never attains the glory of authorship" (96). Translators have found interesting metaphors for their relation to the text and its author: the "porte-parole’ de l’auteur” [the author’s ‘spokesperson’] (Lortholary 186), a performer,
like a musician or an actor (Dirda 35). Nigel Ryan found a rather wistful metaphor: "The translator is like a Nanny given temporary custody of someone else's children—and trouble famously starts when Nanny becomes too maternal" (65).

It requires a certain skill then to find the right balance of involvement and detachment, of poetic creativity versus intellectual analysis. Poets and writers often have an instinctual, empirical and not so analytical awareness of the functioning of language and texts. Henri Meschonnic for example emphasizes the role of poetics for translation over that of linguistics and translation theory. Yet, comparative linguistics and Obersetzungswissenschaft (translation studies) have established valuable theories, which provide an excellent tool for translation. Understanding the regularities, unmarked syntax or the regular structure of a particular language lays the background against which to evaluate the specific artistic means and the particular style of a writer (Doherty 101). Although linguistics cannot create a model for literary translation nor view its role in literature and in the world, it contributes to a solid craft, which is the foundation of any art, and a basis for the re-creation of a work of literature.

The mold into which the translation must be cast is of course a constraint, so that translating could be viewed as an operation "carried out in shackles," where the translator is "chained, like Prometheus, to the rock of someone else's original" (Santoyo 96). For this same reason translating can be an excellent apprenticeship for a budding writer because he is guided by "someone necessarily more accomplished than you are," says Paul Auster (Translation 254), i.e. the author of the original. The original provides a structure within which to work, and for once it is permissible to imitate someone else's text. Auster has explained this:

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Translation allows you to work on the nuts and bolts of your craft, to learn how to live intimately with words, to see more clearly what you are actually doing. At the same time one doesn’t have to do all the work because translating “removes the pressure of composition” (Translation 253). Translation hence is writing, albeit with safety lines, but a literary, creative act nonetheless.

Translation always bears in itself poetic potential since the original, the fact that there is an original, conditions the translation just like a particular genre or poetic form conditions a text. The original functions like a tight, yet shapely ‘corset’ that helps the translation along and brings out unexpected associations and imagery, poetry, in the other language. This is similar to the form dictated by the omission of all words containing the letter ‘e’ in Georges Perec’s text Disparition, for which Eugen Helmlé remarked:

dieses Sprachkorsett, das ein Auswuchem in mehrere Richtungen nicht mehr zulässt, bedeutet nicht nur Einengung sondern auch Stütze. [. . .] Die Story entwickelt sich nämlich aus der Sprache heraus, nicht mehr der Autor erzählt, sondern die Sprache (102).

[this linguistic corset, which does not allow for proliferation into different directions anymore, does not only mean restriction but also support. (. . .) For the story develops out of the language, it is no longer the author who is telling it but it is the language.]

A corset, therefore, that may not be all that comfortable but accentuates the figure in particular areas. The same corset will look different on a different body, and the same body will look different in a different corset; i.e. every text in the same language is different and the same text is different in a different language. In other words the original transposed into that other language informs the translation, but the underpinnings of the target language imbue the text just as well. Working with the form provided by the original, another ‘original’ poem is written. Conditioned and controlled but also inspired and impelled by its shape and texture, translation is a form
of poetry. Just as a specific form (sonnet, villanelle, etc.) marks and models a poem, the original text provides the form within which the translated text must be worked.

This implies, according to Henri Meschonnic, "un travail dans les ressources de la langue, par le décentrement vers l'autre" [working within the resources of the language, through the decentering toward the other one] (Poétique 355). In fact, this decentering is twofold: the target language is moved closer to the original and is thereby decentered, whereas the text in the new language itself is decentered too. This decentering is due to the particular etymology, history, cultural implications, the quite different context in which the other language is embedded and which play into the creation as well as the reading of the translation.

That said, it is natural that certain specifics of the language will always be lost in translation. When, in his sonnets, Shakespeare capitalized a noun for emphasis or as a personification, that effect will be lost in the German translation where all nouns are capitalized. When, in turn, German poet Stefan George wrote his poetry without using capital letters, which is quite radical in German, that startling moment will be lost when translated. French accents, German umlauts and diacritic signs which add to the being on the page, being in literature, will invariably be missing in the translation. Punctuation is another aspect used quite differently in the languages. In a French prose text, dialogues are set off by dashes and always start a new line for a new speaker, French books also use a lot more paragraphs than English or German—for this reason French text lends itself better to smaller formats. Besides these formal aspects, Boris Vian's colloquialisms and neologisms, Raymond Queneau's Argot and Robert Desnos's plays on homonyms are untranslatable. So is Irvine Welsh's literal transcription of his Scottish vernacular. Or is it? The cover of the French version of Welsh's bestseller reads:
Fidèle à la langue de la banlieue d'Edimbourg, dont il restitue la gouaille, *Trainspotting* est un roman à lire à voix haute, avec l'accent.

[True to the language of the suburbs of Edinburgh, of which he restitutes the raillery, *Trainspotting* is a novel to be read aloud, with the accent.]

As much as the French translator may substitute Argot for the Scottish dialect, and add footnotes, the regionally and socially marked, oral style cannot be adequately evoked in the translation. This is why it is such a truism that “the translator, per [sic] definition, fails. The translation can never do what the original text did” (De Man 33). This is still not a reason not to do it, says George Steiner:

Translation is ‘impossible.’ [...] But so is all absolute concordance between thought and speech. Somehow the ‘impossible’ is overcome at every moment in human affairs (264).

So while translation meets many obstacles, not enough recognition and is almost always a little unsatisfactory, it is being done all the time. In fact, the best translator is perhaps someone who is aware of these difficulties and forges ahead nonetheless. A translator who tells himself: “Shakespeare est intraduisible. Mais il faut traduire Shakespeare” [Shakespeare is untranslatable. But Shakespeare must be translated] (Jean-Louis Curtis 31).

Futility of Translation?

“Then why does anyone bother to translate? Out of love, usually. From a desire to bring a favorite writer’s work into English, or sometimes as a self-imposed artistic challenge: How close can I come to recreating this wonderful Mandelstam or Montale poem in my own language?” Michael Dirda.

Affinity for a work of literature or an author is a powerful impetus to translate. As much as an appropriation, translating is also an offering, a gift. Trying on the author’s shoes, becoming her foreign, her outlandish alter ego is a challenge that may or may not prove fruitful. Translators of literature tend to develop a special relationship and identify with the author and the text (Bühler 283). Wolf Biermann for example has
translated the poets who influenced him most, such as François Villon, and Bulat Okudshawa. More than with their writing, he seems to identify with their rebellious stance—as a bard, an outcast, a plebeian. Successful translations grow from a true propinquity of viewing and expressing the world, a community of intention. Poets André du Bouchet and Paul Celan, collaborators for L’Éphémère, affirmed their poetic kinship by translating each others works. Nonetheless, Henri Meschonnic wrote a scathing essay entitled “On appelle cela traduire Celan” [They call this translating Celan], in which he accused du Bouchet and his circle of the magazine L’Éphémère of annexing Celan and abusing him for their own poetic purposes. So while the author’s collaboration seemed to give the translation a stamp of approval, this is no guarantee that one will not be held to it.

This is why, when it comes to poetry especially, translators find less obliging synonyms for the term “translation,” for example concerning Shakespeare (who wants to be found guilty of thinking that Shakespeare can in fact be translated? That any translation could measure up to the original?). Pierre Jean Jouve created a “Version française” [French version], other’s named theirs “Umdichtung” [Rewriting of poetry], “Nachdichtung” [Imitative writing of poetry], “Übertragung” [rendition by], Paul Celan simply “Deutsch von Paul Celan” (Stamm 21/22). Robert Lowell is famous for his “imitations.” Wolf Biermann also has attempted “Shakespeares Sonette in mein Deutsch zu bringen” [to bring Shakespeare’s sonnets into my German], a cautious and humble formula underlining the subjectivity of the task. Similarly, Luther’s bible translation has been referred to as “Bibelverdeutschung” [Germanization of the bible] (Delisle 305). In Andrei Codrescu’s Cypercorpse two translators “English” [sic] Romanian author Mircea Dinescu.
More than a protection against potential attacks, these bylines insinuate the translators' particular approaches to the task as well as their general philosophy and praxis of translation. The translator situates herself on a continuum between two poles: the literal transposition of the original and complete homage to the original language with little regard paid to the target language constitute one pole, and a relatively free adaptation to the idiomatic flow of the target language and to the translator's poetics is the other pole. The rarest of all and perhaps the unachievable is a balance between the two, a happy medium. To describe these two polar approaches, Jean-René Ladmiral has coined the terms "sourciers" [sourcers] and "ciblistes" [targeters], with

les premiers tendant à privilégier le signifiant de la langue du texte-source, alors que les seconds préfèrent se mettre à l'écoute du signifié (ou plutôt du sens, des 'effets' sémantiques et littéraires) d'une parole qui doit advenir dans la langue-cible (8/7).

[the first tending to privilege the signifier of the language of the source-text whereas the latter prefer to listen to the signified (or rather the sense, the semantic and literary 'effects') of an utterance that is supposed to be brought into the target-language.]

Lawrence Venuti's distinction between "foreignizing" and "domesticating" translation follows a similar rationale, and considers the choice between these methods as highly political. 'Domestication,' which is the dominant approach in Anglo-American literary culture, does "ethnocentric violence" to a foreign text and reasserts the political, economical and cultural hegemony of these countries. Venuti argues for a foreignizing translation which "signifies the difference of the foreign text, yet only by disrupting the cultural codes that prevail in the target language" (20).

Willis Barnstone has made a case for such translating, where the original language shines through and enriches the language and literature of the target text:
The translated poem should be read as a poem written in the language of the adopted literature, even if it differs because of its origin from any poem ever written in its new tongue. Fray Luis de León wrote that translated poems should not appear foreign but as ‘nacidas en él y naturales’ (as if born and natural in the language). Yet why not some flagrant unnaturality? Why not shake up English poetry with the sudden arrogant figure of Vladimir Mayakovsky, standing tall in his coalminer’s cap, shouting his syllables out to the sky from the Brooklyn Bridge? Why not the ghost of the ‘disappeared’ Osip Mandelstam, reading his alchemic lyrics about Stalin’s mustache or his exile poems from the snows and ice graves of Voronezh?

Lexical shock renews weary language bones. It is good to drink Turkish coffee in the pampas of the American Midwest (266).

Bamstone intimates that the English language is capable of absorbing “foreignizing” tendencies and would actually benefit from them. At the same time the American reader would be able to understand it but would also find it a refreshing experience. If the plains in the Midwest can be called pampas, then foreign stories in their greatest foreignness can reach Americans.

There is also no reason to accommodate the reader of a translation too much especially if major ingredients of the original text would get lost. So Peter Newmark for example insists that Shakespeare’s “Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?” must be translated as a summer’s day even in South Africa. After all, he argues “it is the reader’s job to do the necessary homework” (Newmark 25). In the same vein, Jürgen Stackelberg agrees that a translation should not recreate a text in archaic language or use other artificial means to situate the text in its context.

Wie wir als Leser in der Lage sind, uns vorzustellen, was wir in deutscher Übersetzung lesen, sei eigentlich italienisch oder französisch oder englisch zu denken, so können wir uns auch vorstellen, es handle sich um Texte des Mittelalters oder der Antike, die wir in der Sprache unserer Zeit lesen. Kleine Signale reichen im einen wie im anderen Falle aus: heisst einer Jean, wissen wir, er ist Franzose, auch wenn wir ihn auf deutsch lesen (26).

Just as we are able as readers to imagine that what we read in German translation must actually be thought as Italian or French or
English, we can also imagine that these are texts from the Middle Ages or from Antiquity, which we are reading in the language of our times. Small signals suffice in the one as in the other case: if someone’s name is Jean, we know he is French even if we are reading him in German.

From the targeter’s point of view, Louis Aragon has postulated that

pour traduire, ce n’est pas la connaissance de la langue qui importe: il suffit d’être poète (qtd. in Oseki-Dépré 84).

[to translate, it’s not the knowledge of the language which is important: it’s enough to be a poet.]

Wolf Biermann agrees that it is unnecessary for a translator to know the other language because he can enlist help for meanings, interpretations, and associations. He urges the translator to improve on the original, to do at least better than the original (Biermann 167). But should that really be the goal of a translation? Would the corrected text still be a translation? Sometimes, this happens accidentally: Paul Celan’s translation of Apollinaire’s “Salomé” is an improvement and a correction of the original author, which George Steiner views as an ethical problem (Steiner 318).

Another more commonly known example is the great success of Albert Camus’ *The Stranger* (*L’Etranger*) in the United States largely due to Stuart Gilbert’s translation. Gilbert turned the “sober and deadpan” original into a lively, clever story which consistently uses colloquial language. By “translating Camus’ ‘Il faisait beau’ as ‘It was a blazing hot summer afternoon’” (Newmark 30), the protagonist Meursault became a sort of French Holden Caulfield. These above-mentioned are all examples of targeters’ approaches.

On the other hand, translation critic, scholar, and poet Henri Meschonnic is definitely a ‘sourcer;’ his translations from the Bible prove that the more literal is often the more poetic too. However, in his translations from the German he tends to ‘overtranslate,’ to render elements literally that in the original have a reinforcing,
structuring function, and little meaning by themselves. While this is a mistake originating perhaps from insufficient knowledge of the language, others might consider this the ultimate sourcer’s strategy—imitating the grammar of the original language in the translated language. Some translator-poets have tested this to the extreme and used word-for-word translation as the basis for literary composition. Dadaist Tristan Tzara for example translated literally into the French and used French with a German syntax. In keeping with Dadaist strategy, he shattered the very structure of the language, exposed its hollowness and fragility, and created an idiom that can hardly be considered French. Experimental Austrian poet Ernst Jandl undertook phonetic translations that he called “Oberflächenübersetzung” [superficial translation]: rather than a literal transcription the author sought to exploit the foreign language for aural and contextual associations. His translation of a Wordsworth poem records the closest phonetic equivalents in German and trusts the poetry of the result:

My heart leaps up when I behold  
a rainbow in the sky

mai hart lieb zapfen eibe hold  
er renn bohr in sees kai (Fetz 83)

The German reads like an English poem transcribed with an Austrian accent. At best, Jandl may be commended for finding so many phonemes from so few semantic fields but his translation resulted in nothing more than a meaningless sequence of German words. The poet subverted translation for another one of his charming experiments but did the original a disservice; William Wordsworth’s poem is hardly recognizable. Paradoxically, Jandl here may be categorized at once as an extreme sourcer and an extreme targeter. Although his technique recognizes the poetic potential of translation, this proved to be a dead-end.
Generally, translators should not really have one fixed schema that they apply to all their translations. Rather it seems to me that different texts require different approaches. The translator should 'listen' to the tone of the text, to the relation between form and content, to its humor or pathos. If a text is comfortably set within the original language, culture and literature, it should find its fluid equivalent in the translation. But if a text probes the language itself, bends and stretches it, then the translation should try to produce a similar effect with similar means—translators must write their own text, and make it sing, speak, whisper, and shout just like the original.

Regardless of the philosophy, a translation is never quite finished but just abandoned. According to Armin Paul Frank submitting a translation represents a performative act. By writing or thinking "end", the translator declares that the translation is as far along as he could get under the existing circumstances (497). It is performative in another way too: the translation also states: ‘this is what I think this text means,' ‘this is my reading, my understanding, my interpretation of this text.' And most of all it says: 'This how I think this text must be translated.' Due to this constant reference to the original and to already existing translations, the translation bears in itself a greater instability than the original text, a greater self-consciousness.

It is a truism that every epoch demands a new translation into the contemporary language because translations age as originals do not. Henri Meschonnic counters this belief by saying that translations, just as originals, may age, that aging, like a wine, is desirable.

Les œuvres vraies vieillissent, au sens que leur état de langue ne les enferme pas dans un passé qu'on ne lit plus. Et les traductions-œuvres en font autant. Ce qu'on ne lit plus, c'est ce qui ne vieillit pas, les œuvres dites originales tout comme les traductions. Le déchet de l'époque (Traduire 120).
[True works of art age, in the sense that their linguistic state does not enclose them in a past which no one reads anymore. And it is the same for translation works. That which one doesn't read anymore, that is what doesn't age, for so-called originals just as for translations. The refuse of the epoch.]

The refuse of the epoch then are those translations that serve as reference and starting point for re-translations. While Jean-Pierre Lefebvre has called it a great privilege to be the first translator, first translations often appear to have a different mission than re-translations. A first translation attempts to acquaint a foreign readership with an author in a different language and a work that has never seen the light of that language before. First translations tend to ease the reader into a new foreign text, ‘domesticate’ the text more, focus on transposing content rather than form.

Translations that are works of art, says Jürgen Stackelberg, will stand the test of time best. But what makes them art? When they are composed in a way that form and content go together, when, from the point of view of the reception, they speak to us again and again and when they call for ever new, equally legitimate interpretations. Translations should not be clearer, but most of all not less meaningful than the originals (Stackelberg 19). Some translations have achieved this to the point that they have become canonical and remained unchallenged, such as Baudelaire’s Poe, Luther’s Bible or Schlegel’s Shakespeare. If translators still undertake new translations the stakes are higher—of course, every re-translation is an implicit critique of previous translation to begin with (and, as Jean-Pierre Lefebvre has remarked, is psychologically different for the translator). Retranslating Poe after Baudelaire did is sort of like re-writing Shakespeare, or Baudelaire.

Some translators have the drive to translate, “Trieb” in the Freudian sense, the desire to translate everything (Berman 74). Michael Hamburger is such an extremely
prolific translator who has tried his hands at many German poets. This drive, to try to be a "poly-or omnitranslator" according to Antoine Berman, may originate from a "problematic, even antagonistic, relation to their mother tongue," provided of course one translates into one's mother tongue. In Hamburger's case I suspect a similar problematic rapport towards his mother tongue although he translates it into English. For this translator, whose family left Nazi Germany when he was a child, translating has always meant 'building bridges,' "zwischen meiner deutschen Vergangenheit und der englischen Gegenwart" [between my German past and my English presence] (Hamburger 110). Translating, like writing, is a highly personal activity.

Translation as Criticism

"You submit yourself to someone else's work [. . . ] and you begin to read more profoundly and intelligently than you ever have before" Paul Auster.

The reading of a translation is influenced by its presentation on the page. Frequently translations are printed on the opposite page to the original, inviting direct comparison between the two versions. Such layout emphasizes that the translation is unstable, that it is a copy, a fragment, a rewriting whereas the original is complete, whole, inviolable. In editions with André du Bouchet's translations of Paul Celan, the entire volume in its French version precedes the appendix containing the originals in their integrality. This type of presentation respects the poem in its relation to the entire volume, its interaction with other poems. The French poetry magazine Po&sie also runs the translations in their sequence, presenting the original in smaller type on the side in the bottom of the page, a compromise between the two practices. Jean-Pierre Lefebvre proposed to present the original poem on the bottom of the page in small print, indicating the verses by slashes. Juxtaposing the two poems in different languages may be preferable for a magazine as well as for a publication destined as
an introduction to the works of a foreign author or really as a gloss; this form is more common for languages that are quite close, such as the languages of Western and Central Europe. Concerning this subject, Franz Wurm, friend of and correspondent with Paul Celan, remarked that translations in bilingual editions were glosses rather than poems (Briefwechsel 11).

In its own way every translation is indeed a gloss because the translator, who is expected to reproduce this text, is a most critical and most inquisitive reader. Translation quickly reveals whether a text has substance or is made only out of words. It is really the ideal case of reading for understanding here takes shape in another text, a text with inherent interpretation whose tendency will be written between the lines (Gellhaus 11). For this reason, Yiddish writer Isaac Bashevis Singer whose work is published in English says about his translators:

My translators are my best critics. [. . .] Translation undresses a literary work, shows it in its true nakedness. [. . .] Translation tells the better truth. Unveils all masks (qtd. in Delisle 7).

The translator not only reads with a relentlessly critical eye. Due to the different logic, "the different reading of the world" the other language offers, the translation brings this different logic to the text, shines a different light on it. The decentering brings to the forefront what was perhaps implied in the original. Tim Parks has demonstrated by the example of translations of Beckett's Murphy into Italian how a translation may also highlight the meaning of a text through absence, through that which is not said in the target language (78).

Henri Meschonnic and John Felstiner have made translation their avenue for analyzing literary texts. Translation serves as a framework for criticism, and tells us something about the text that might otherwise not be known. Translation and translation critique can provide new insights to a text. Says John Felstiner:
Translating Celan—translating any poet, in fact—appropriates all the resources of interpretive criticism. Even more than that: in translating, as in parody, critical and creative activity converge. The fullest reading of a poem gets realized moment by moment in the writing of the poem. So translation presents not merely a paradigm but the utmost case of engaged literary interpretation (Felstiner Ziv 612).

This "engaged literary interpretation" may facilely be read in the Sartrian way, as an interprétation "engagée". For Felstiner in particular but also for Lawrence Venuti and others, translating is a biased activity, an activity based on political and literary presumptions that inform their renditions.

However, I would like to see translation understood as a critical tool in yet another way: the involuntary decentering brings out traits and textures, which may have been present but not obvious in the original. Studying a translation will crystallize meanings, which then become apparent in the original as well. The view of the foreigner (who speaks a second and a third language here, and the native language in exile) will induce fresh readings of known texts. In laying out my philosophy of translation, I have cited mainly critics from France, the United States, and Germany. While there are translator-artists and translator-artisans everywhere, it is apparent from this overview that there are nationally different traditions and approaches to translating. In France a great number of highly erudite poet-scholars also work as translators, such as Martine Broda, Yves Bonnefoy, Michel Deguy, Georges-Arthur Goldschmidt and Henri Meschonnic. These translators often propose a poetics of translation or have studied it to some degree. Most of these poets have undergone a classical formation and have an excellent command of at least one foreign language.

In the United States most translators are first employed as university professors (either in Creative Writing or Foreign Language departments) and then, from an academic point of view, develop an interest in a writer as is the case for John Felstiner, James Lyons, Jerry Glenn, etc. Their work as translators is in addition and
as an extension to their critical work. On the other hand, Marilyn Gaddis-Rose and Lawrence Venuti have specialized in translation, i.e. they work as translators and have published theoretical treatises on translation, often from a practical viewpoint.

Germany is particularly strong in translation theory and in linguistic approaches to translating, such as the articles by Monika Doherty, Hildegard Bühler, and Armin Paul Frank have demonstrated. Therefore most of the critics mentioned here are not famous as translators. Wolf Biermann is an exception to the rule, a poet, singer-songwriter and essayist with a truly populist slant, he opposes any theories and applies his appropriating stance. As is evident from this summary, translation is a dynamic and ever-changing field of literary creation.

Notes

1 This in itself undermines the concept of original and imitation, or translation.

2 An example of such a collaborative text is Delisle, Jean and Judith Woodsworth, eds. Les traducteurs dans l'histoire. Les Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1995. It is the result of a cooperative effort by translators working within the FIT (Fédération Internationale des Traducteurs) and was published in English and French simultaneously. While the text is linguistically correct and informative, it is devoid of any personality and life.

3 According to Mary Snell-Hornsby, Germany has pride of place in UNESCO statistics as far as the quantity of translated books is concerned (433). As an example 12.4 percent of literature in the German market are translations, among which three quarters are translated from English and one tenth from French (Le Naire 134). Spiegel magazine states that almost forty percent of all newly published novels and short stories in Germany are by foreign writers (Spiegel 1999).

4 Lawrence Venuti presents numbers that underline this impression. According to him, Italy translates the most into Italian (25.4%), followed by Germany with 14.4% and France between 8 and 12%. American publishers only put out 2.96% of translated literature (Invisibility 12).

5 I am grateful to John LaRose, Ph. D., for refreshing my memory of quotations in Marcel Proust's extensive work.

6 Language is here used as in langue, and relies on traditional definitions of what is French, what is English, what is German.
This thesis has been discussed by sociolinguists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf. Philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche and philologist Wilhelm von Humboldt have posited this as well.

This is often illustrated by the example of “He swam across the river” as opposed to “Il traversa la rivière à la nage.”

For example, when ordering books on amazon.com, in public poetry readings or in Garrison Keillor’s daily Writer’s Almanach on National Public Radio.

Although Ladmiral never mentions it, the phonetic similarity to “sorcier” (sorcerer) and “cycliste” (cyclist) seems to suggest the work these stances necessitate. The sourcerer must do magic to bring the particular structure of the original into a good target-language text. The targeter must pedal hard to render all the meanings into idiomatic text.

While the catalogue offers the translation cited here, I prefer to render the term as ‘surface translation’ since the terminology in German as well as the approach itself mimic that of Structuralist “surface” and “deep structures.”

3. EXILE.

While German exile has been studied extensively,¹ French exile literature has only recently gained more attention. The journal Poetics Today devoted two special issues to Creativity and Exile: European/American Perspectives in 1996. Edited by Susan Suleiman, articles covered the Surrealists (Jacqueline Chénieux-Gendron), exile in France and elsewhere (Denis Hollier), and Romain Gary/Emile Ajar (Nancy Huston). Commonly exile in the French context has been viewed from a postcolonial perspective, just as the study of Francophone Literature in this country privileges writers from former colonies. This is also the focus in issues 82 and 83 of Yale French Studies on Post/Colonial Conditions: Exiles, Migrations, and Nomadisms as well. In Europe, Jacques Mounier and André Niderst both edited volumes on exile in 1986 and 1996 respectively. Generally, few studies have focussed on the European dimension of exile and even fewer have dealt with exile and translation as related states of being and as related poetic practices.

Defining Exile

The concept of exile in the broadest sense denotes a complex estrangement from one’s environment. Exile presupposes and equates the loss of ‘home’, it is its exact opposite. Synonyms such as ‘expatriation,’ ‘emigration,’ ‘banishment’ or ‘displacement’ imply that the writer leaves his homeland to settle in a foreign country, mostly one where a different language is spoken. As in the notion of “interior exile” exile does not have to mean physical displacement but serves as a metaphor. In this study, the term exile summarizes instances of alienation and distancing from the language that is one’s home, from one’s mother tongue. Geographical, cultural and linguistic displacement is the most obvious and dramatic form of exile and at the same
time an enhanced and aggravated version of all human experience. The authors in this study, Panai't Istrati, Samuel Beckett and Paul Celan, lived multiple exiles.

Whether a country censors, restricts or banishes subversive or rebellious authors, depends on the political system as much as on the status literature has in that country. In the German Democratic Republic for example, the self-proclaimed “Leseland” [country of book readers], author Wolf Biermann was silenced for about a decade before he was expediently expatriated during a concert tour through West Germany in 1977, causing many artists to emigrate to West Germany or West Berlin in his wake. One of them, writer Jurek Becker summarized the situation laconically: “bei Ablehnung muß man im Westen nicht gleich den Staat wechseln” (26) [at least in the West, rejection doesn’t mean that one has to change countries]. Indeed Western societies do not expel writers anymore; rather subversion is contained and conditioned by the demands of the market. In a world swamped with words and images, which, as Andrei Codrescu illustrated in his essay The Disappearance of The Outside, is a kind of exile in itself, authors struggle to carve out an audience for themselves. When it is difficult to make yourself heard or listened to, literature is rarely perceived as a threat to the existing system. In other parts of the world, political banishment is still a reality. Salman Rushdie has been ousted and fiercely persecuted in Islamic countries for his novel The Satanic Verses; Taslima Nasrin chose exile for similar reasons, and Assia Djebar has been unable to return to her native Algeria.

In the long history of French literature, exile has played an important role. Joachim du Bellay, Voltaire, Madame de Staël, Émile Zola, Marguerite Yourcenar, and many other French-born authors spent parts of their lives in exile abroad. The greatest emigration in recent history was occasioned by the Nazi regime and World War Two.¹ For many German exiles the neighbor across the Rhine was the first choice as a host country, but when France and other countries were subsequently occupied, exile
writers had to flee a second time. In some tragic cases this second attempt failed: Walter Benjamin and Carl Einstein committed suicide to escape arrest by the Gestapo. French authors, such as André Breton and Saint-John Perse, were also driven into exile, others, such as Benjamin Fondane and Robert Desnos, were deported and perished in camps. France has also taken in many immigrants; a number of them, such as Max Ernst, Tristan Tzara, Benjamin Fondane, Nathalie Sarraute, Milan Kundera and two most renowned contemporary critics, Julia Kristeva and Tzvetan Todorov, have inscribed themselves into the French tradition. Some of the most influential works of the twentieth century were written by writers not born within the context of French language, culture and literature, a unique phenomenon for a country with such a long-standing and carefully preserved tradition.

Today also France is a first choice for exiles. Romanian writers Paul Goma, Virgil Tanase and Dumitru Tsepeneag have settled in France, so has Czech Milan Kundera. Chinese writer and Nobel Prize 2000 laureate Gao Xingjian has been a political refugee in France since 1987, Canadian-born Nancy Huston has made her life there and American poet Marilyn Hacker lives and writes part of the year in Paris.

Exile in France

"Nulle part on n'est plus étranger qu'en France" Julia Kristeva.

France has attracted artists for centuries, even more so since the French Revolution in 1789. After all, France, its language, literature and culture were practiced and imitated all over Europe, were regarded as the epitome of culture. Nowadays, France still stands for savoir-vivre, luxury and refinement as much as for enlightened ideas and human rights. It is home to delicious wines and cheeses, the Commune of Paris and the 1968 students riots, the Louvre and the Eiffel Tower. Especially in parts of Eastern Europe, this admiration and the longing for France have persisted. Russian-born Jew Romain Gary for example saw his mother affected with "galloping
Francophilia, a Joan-of-Arcism typical of Eastern European Jews in particular* (qtd. in Huston "Gary" 549). Romanians, too, have felt a strong affinity for France, based on their related languages and a history of authors writing in French (Queen Carmen Silva, Princess Marthe Bibesco, Ion Vinea, etc.). According to Panaït Istrati the East has regarded France as

*une amante idéale, —nombre de vagabonds rêveurs se sont éperdument lancés à son appel, bien plus qu’à sa conquête* (Mes départs 129)

[the ideal lover—a number of vagabonding dreamers have ventured recklessly to follow her call, even more than to conquer her]

For contemporary writer Virgil Tanase, France is family:

Pour les Roumains, le centre du monde, c’est Paris. Ce qui nous unit à la France, c’est une même tournure d’esprit, une même forme d’intelligence chameille qui donne de la méthode aux passions (Roumanie 42).

[For Romanians the center of the world is Paris. What unites us with France, is the same mindset, the same form of carnal intelligence which gives passions a purpose.]

Besides this affinity of mentality and temperament, it is especially French literature that has fascinated many writers. Surrealist Benjamin Fondane for example always felt tributary towards French literature, even when he was still living in Romania. France, for him, was “the true cultural homeland” (Carassou 106). Monique Jutrin has compared French literature to a siren, whose luring voice many Eastern European writers have not been able to resist. Although his point of orientation were German letters, Paul Celan must have heard this voice, too. After Bucharest and Vienna, he finally settled in Paris for good, “in dem Land, das Geist und Kultur immer gastlich aufgenommen hat” (Carail 209) [in the country which has always been a good host to intellect and culture].

Besides its long-standing democratic and humanist tradition, France has a high esteem for culture and especially literature. Language and literature are a national matter, officially discussed and regulated by the Académie Française. Despite its rigid
canon and long tradition (or, perhaps, because of it), French literature has attracted and absorbed many "new recruits" (Hollier 380). The French attribute a special status to the writer. French writers have often made a political stance too, Emile Zola for example in the Dreyfus affair. It is in this tradition that Existentialist writer Jean-Paul Sartre posited that all literature is "committed" literature [littérature engagée]. Asked during the 1968 riots whether Sartre should be arrested for inciting unrest, French president Charles de Gaulle reportedly replied: "On n’arrête pas Voltaire" (Goldschmidt 942) [One does not arrest Voltaire]. Writers are asked for involvement in political life and in cultural politics (Michel Deguy under Minister of Culture Jack Lang).

France has been also quite accepting of foreigners, in particular immigrants from former colonies. Nevertheless, Julia Kristeva contends that a foreigner will always remain one in France:

_Même lorsqu’il est légalement et administrativement accepté, l’étranger n’est pas pour autant admis dans les familles. Son usage malencontreux de la langue française le déconsidère profondément—consciemment ou non—aux yeux des autochtones qui s’identifient plus que dans les autres pays à leur parler poli et cheri. Ses habitudes alimentaires ou vestimentaires sont considérées d’emblée comme un manquement impardonnable au goût universel, c’est-à-dire français (58).[

[Even when legally and administratively accepted, the stranger is not admitted into the families. His awkward use of the French language causes him to be—if conscious or not—profoundly discredited in the eyes of the natives who identify more than in other countries with their polite and cherished talk. His eating habits or dress are off the bat considered an unforgivable deficit of universal, that is French, taste.]

Kristeva’s observations concern subtler issues, which testify to a deep-down rejection. Such attitudes, I believe, are not uncommon and certainly not more typical of France than of other countries. Language, eating, dress touch on profound, established ways of living, of being in the world. It is inherent in culture to feel that one does things the right way, and I therefore think that the French are not exceptional in their rejection but rather in their acceptance.
However, Nancy Huston reminds us that France too failed during the last war, that France too did not hold up its tradition of humanity and freedom:

the role France had played in the war had been ambiguous to say the least: unlike any other Western European country, it was at once victim and perpetrator, humiliated and heroic, vanquished and victorious ("Gary" 557).

Few countries have attracted writers as France does and few of them have allowed foreigners into their cherished literature as France has. In France excellence more than nationalism determines whether one is accepted as a French writer.

Exile—Voluntary or Involuntary?

"Toutefois il est le seul à nommer l’exil" Claude Drevet.

Since the term ‘exile’ is used quite prolifically today, critics often distinguish between voluntary and involuntary exile. Exile is voluntary when non-political circumstances led the author to opt for a new place to live, as was the case for the writers of the “Lost Generation” living in Paris during the first half of the twentieth century. Involuntary exile implies an aspect of coercion, for example when authors were forced to leave in order to ensure their survival or their physical safety because of their political or religious views. This commonly made distinction, says Christine Brook-Rose, implies that involuntary exile is "usually political or punitive" whereas voluntary exile is "usually called expatriation, itself for many more personal reasons: social, economic, sexual. . .or simple preference." This difference is also reflected in the individual outlook exiles have on their situation:

Involuntary exiles may tend to be unhappy, poor, bitter, [. . .] nostalgic about the society left behind, self-righteous; voluntary exiles may tend to be happy, comfortable, satiric about the society left behind, self-righteous (291).

However, these attitudes depend on whether exiles accept or resent their situation, whether they view it as an opportunity or as a plight. This personal interpretation is only to some degree conditioned by the actual circumstances. How exactly does one establish whether an artist was really compelled to go into exile? Is exile voluntary
when an author feels unable to publish and to pursue his art? Is it involuntary when the threat of deportation seems imminent? When the cultural and political climate is repressive and art censored? When their family and life as they knew it were annihilated? When the political system has changed to one that the author has contempt for? Who is to say but the exiled themselves?

Even if only unconsciously, voluntary as well as involuntary aspects contribute to most experiences of permanent displacement. As the entry on "exile" in the Encyclopédie indicates, in Ancient Rome for example exile was a choice, albeit the only reasonable choice, to remedy or escape punishment. Exile, for the Romans signifiait une interdiction, ou exclusion de l'eau & du feu, dont la conséquence naturelle étoit, que la personne ainsi condamnée étoit obligée d'aller vivre dans un autre pays.

Hence, exile meant not a factual expulsion but rather a not so subtle suggestion to leave, a practice common in former Eastern Block countries as well. In a figurative sense the lack of water and fire, or the lack of livelihood and support, of artistic encouragement and stimulation, the poisoning or Gleichschaltung of the cultural public or the stifling of initiative and creativity may indeed make it impossible to stay. Even when danger, persecution, or loss of livelihood warrant permanent displacement, exile is a reaction to an existing environment, unlike actual expatriation. Jacques Mounier claims that voluntary exile may simply forestall legal sanctions and condemnation, and may be lived as an injustice although it was technically voluntary (292). Since the individual decision certainly involves both voluntary and involuntary aspects, it seems impossible to determine exact degrees of voluntariness and involuntariness.

Moreover for the study of exile literature from a linguistic premise it seems of little relevance whether authors may be classified as true exiles, expatriates,
emigrants, banished or displaced persons, besides that the criteria would be more or less arbitrary. Authors may change their perception of their situation over time. Whether voluntary or involuntary, exile always results in the (more or less painful) loss of home and in the change of language.

Forms of Exile

Exile may take on different forms and frequently encompasses several kinds of exile. It is possible to feel exiled without ever leaving home, for example when one is unemployed, poor, or when one is born in exile and stays there all one’s life, as Gudbergur Bergsson suggests (56). Jacques Mounier also regards particular social situations as exile:

L’on peut se sentir exilé parce que l’on vit dans un milieu social étranger, parce que l’on n’a plus d’amis, parce que l’on est laid, ou malade, ou chômeur (296).

[One may feel exiled because one lives in strange social milieu, because one doesn’t have friends anymore, because one is ugly, or sick, or unemployed.]

However, exile is not one isolated instance of alienation. In exile one does not belong in several ways, one feels un-at-home because of one’s racial, ethnic, religious, linguistic or spiritual makeup, because of a combination of exiling factors.

Tristan Tzara (1896-1963), alias Samy Rosenstock, left Romania out of “disgust.” Tzara was reared in a small-town Jewish middle-class family, in a country that never quite managed to measure up to the admired greater cultures of the West. He felt compelled to leave because: “My mind grew too big for the Balkans,” said Tzara” (Codrescu 54). So the artist traveled to Zurich, then Paris in search of artistic freedom and of associates in his assault on the arts. Dadaism represented an exile from the arts in itself, and in turn the movement exiled art from the role it had played hitherto. Although opposed to the ongoing war, it was not as much a political movement as a movement to dismantle art in play, “car l’art n’est pas sérieux” [because art is not serious] (Tzara 358). The founding and naming of the Société
Voltaire in Zurich highlighted Dada’s mission. Just as the enlightened philosopher and writer, the movement had set out to enlighten the alienated, war-shaken world about itself and about the role and the functioning of art.

When Tzara adopted his pseudonym he shed his Jewish identity and reinvented himself as a Romanian, while inscribing himself in the context of the French literary tradition. Tristan relates to the legendary Celtic hero of medieval French literature; Tzara is a transliteration of the Romanian word for “land, homeland, fatherland,” which, in the French pronunciation, becomes French. However, his name could also be read as ‘triste pays’ [sad country] and refer to his uneasiness in Bourgeois culture which he attempted to shatter through Dadaism, or it could suggest the Romanian “trist en jara” [sad in his country] (Browning 54). Even more than in his country Tzara felt trapped in Bourgeois culture and arts: his Dada experiments did not involve his native tongue but different media, wild drumming and shouting sessions, which they called “bruitisme,” as well as simultaneous readings in French, German and English (Browning 16).

Tzara’s quest resembles the exile Clarissa Pinkola Estés, author of Women Who Run With The Wolves, has described as an archetypal situation, one into which one might be born. Analyzing Hans Christian Andersen’s tale “The Ugly Duckling” she illustrates that the rejection by the ducks and other animals who do not accept the young swan as one of theirs leads the swan to realize that he does not belong there and that he must keep searching. The exile imposed on him by ‘society’ is only a measure for the exile felt within because, just as Tristan Tzara, one might be born among people who are not “kin.” Therefore one must venture into physical exile and to find kin (home). Since her book may be shelved with the inspirational genre, Estés finds encouraging words for the exile:
If you have attempted to fit whatever mold and failed to do so, you are probably lucky. You may be an exile of some sort, but you have sheltered your soul. There is an odd phenomenon that happens when one keeps trying to fit and fails. Even though the outcast is driven away, she is at the same time driven right into the arms of her psychic and true kin, whether these be a course of study, an art form, or a group of people. It is worse to stay where one does not belong at all than to wander about lost for a while and looking for the psychic and soulful kinship one requires. It is never a mistake to search for what one requires. Never (186).

If one's physical home is a place where one feels alienated, stifled or not recognized, exile may be a necessary choice. The quest in itself is valuable whether one actually finds a new spiritual and creative home or not.

Madame de Staël (1766-1817) spent part of her life in exile in Switzerland because she felt intellectually exiled in the French literature of her time. She felt that it was stagnating, unable to express what she wanted to say and therefore not her ‘home.’ After traveling to Germany several times, she viewed the country as her “patrie d'élection” [adopted homeland] (Henning 141). De Staël’s travel account De l'Allemagne (1813) gave a detailed report of her journeys, during which her stay in Weimar had especially impressed and surprised her. In the book she gave an overview of contemporary literary developments and proposed that French literature should open up to foreign influences such as the German Romantic movement to renew itself. Using what was blamed to be an imperfect ‘Germanic’ style (Henning 55), de Staël’s own text was an example of how the foreign culture can manifest itself in one’s own. In a way, de Staël postulated that French literature seeks exile from itself to find and to become ‘home’ again. De l'Allemagne questioned the superiority and universality of the French language, and encouraged the French to produce and read more translations of foreign works. Since France and Germany were on hostile terms once more at the time, the publication of her travel report and thus her attempt to end exile within French literature prompted yet another period of exile for Madame de Staël.
Voltaire (1694-1778), one of the foremost figures of the French Enlightenment, sojourned at the court of the 'enlightened' King of Prussia, Friedrich II. (Frederick the Great) from 1750 to 1753. The writer was received into a thoroughly French environment, into which he was to import more Gallic culture and literature. Anything French was of course en vogue at European courts at the time, and was the language of the educated. Frederick II did not speak German well, and so French was the only language spoken at his famous ‘tables rondes’, for which ‘the Germans had to check everything German about them at the door’ (Desnoiresterres 2). At the Prussian court, “nous sommes en France: nous retrouvons ses usages, ses modes, son langage, ses beaux esprits, ses savants, ses poètes” (1) [we are in France: we find her habits, her fashions, her language, her wits, her scholars, her poets]. Therefore, Voltaire was not exposed to anything too German but instead found himself transplanted into a mini-version of the French society he had left behind. Not only was he in exile in his own culture, his culture was in exile in Prussia as well. Voltaire’s Prussian intermezzo afforded him an outside view of his own country and a glaring one at that, a Disneyesque reproduction of his home, a stylized, exaggerated and Prussianized version of France. Unable to understand much of what was happening around him, Voltaire picked up on some cultural habits too grotesque for him not to notice. He exposed them in his ‘conte philosophique’ Candide (1759); the "exercise à la Bulgare" (149) [the Bulgar drill] for example, modeled on the drill and cruel punishment for deserters in Prussia. Voltaire also noticed things that were not so very different from home. In fact, his stay at the Prussian court meant only more exile and no "home." The displacement to this foreign version of his own country, the intimate insight into the workings of royalty and their shortcomings, sharpened his political criticism and irony. For someone like him, at his time there could be no home anywhere.
Pléiade poet Joachim Du Bellay (1522-1560) joined his uncle, Cardinal Jean Du Bellay, for a four-year stint in Rome because he wanted to explore the city and its culture, which was the model for French literature then. To his disappointment, Rome was not what it used to be or at least not what he had expected, a disappointment he voiced in his cycle of sonnets Les antiquités de Rome. Although his journey had taken him to the idealized source of his culture, the poet realized how difficult it was to be cut off from one's own culture that had nourished him: “Tu m’as nourri long temps du lait de ta mamelle” (IX, 43) [For a long time, you nourished me with the milk from your breast], and to still produce literature. In another work, Les regrets (1558) the poet recorded how painful it was to be far from home, from France “mere des arts, des armes & loix” (IX, 43) [mother of arts, of arms and of laws]. Experiencing a foreign culture and language changes the individual forever “Et que ce que j’estois, plus estre je ne puis” [And what I was, I cannot be anymore] (XLI, 63). Innocence is lost, and one views one’s own culture in a different light. For Du Bellay, no sophisticated, canonical culture, literature and language can replace home. What was meant as a journey of enrichment and inspiration, instead made the poet realize that he receives those very things from being grounded in his native culture.

Poet Heinrich Heine (1797-1856), a marked man in Prussia, was also isolated from his culture when he settled in Paris in 1831 but contrary to Du Bellay, this did not stunt his creativity. Heine continued to write in German until the end of his life and published most of his works first in Germany, among them Deutschland. Ein Wintermärchen [Germany. A Winter Tale] (1844). Separated from home and viewed in France as a German, the poet still regarded himself as a prophet, a representative of his homeland abroad. Heine managed to become a true mediator between the two cultures, a visionary who transcended the recently emerged German nationalism for a greater European ideal. For the French he was so unlike the stereotypical German that
they could only compare him to their own master of irony and sharp intellect; he was described as a "un rossignol allemand qui a fait son nid dans la peruque de M. de Voltaire" (Revel 930) [a German nightingale who has made his nest in Mister Voltaire's wig]. With the Franco-Prussian War in 1870/1871, which resulted in the proclamation of the German Reich, the French public naturalized Heine as one of their own; even de Gaulle considered him a French author. For France, Heinrich Heine not only represented a different, Romanticist (which he was trying to leave behind!) and cosmopolitan Germany, he also stimulated self-reflection and reflection on the possibilities and problems of French-German relations. Just how visionary and far­sighted his ideas were is apparent now that France and Germany have reconciled and become equal and respectful partners within the larger European context.

Heine's exile in France surely contributed to making him more of the citoyen he already was. In his writings, claims Georges-Arthur Goldschmidt, Germany and France constantly complement and enrich one another. The French language left its imprint on his idiom: "Heine's German, as Adorno has pointed out, is a brilliantly personal, European idiom on which his fluent knowledge of French exercised a constant pressure" (Steiner 151). ⁴ Heine not only continued producing German literature, he became the first modern German lyric poet: "With me the old German lyric school ends; while with me, at the same time, the modern lyric school of Germany begins" (Confessions 290), and a classical one at that. In Germany, he is considered one of the greatest poets of all times, a poet whose verses have achieved almost proverbial quality,⁵ poems, "die so sehr zum Gemeingut der Deutschen gehören, daß oft keiner mehr so recht weiß, wer sie geschrieben hat" (Goldschmidt 938) [which are so much part of the common cultural property of the Germans that oftentimes no one quite remembers who wrote them]. With melancholy and wit, lyricism and irony, piercing analysis and criticism, Heine achieved the impossible: being a proud German who
loved France, leaving his mark in both literary traditions and becoming a poet of extraordinary depth and scope in the country he had left for political reasons. Despite his contempt for German politics he found that his home would never leave him, nor that he was ever able to really leave it.

Other forms of exile are not necessarily related to the change of language or environment. Some writers have emigrated into "inner exile" or "interior exile," i.e. they withdrew from public life, and did not publish anymore. This kind of exile is often a political statement, a manifest refusal to participate in society and fulfill one's expected role as a writer. Most commonly, the idea of "inner exile" is related with the Nazi regime. Elias Canetti, although safe in exile in England, withdrew from writing and publishing during the time of the war and wanted his silence to be understood as "engagiertes Schweigen" [committed silence], a term which resonates with the French postulate for littérature engagée [committed literature]. In France, too, writers preferred 'inner exile' to collaboration; Blaise Cendrars for example lived in silence and reclusion for three years; Samuel Beckett, who was not a very well known writer yet, worked for the Résistance movement against the German occupation.

Poet Arthur Rimbaud's (1854-1891) famous words "Je est un Autre" [I is an Other] for Julia Kristeva already announced exile,

la possibilité ou la nécessité d'être étranger et de vivre à l'étranger, préfigurant ainsi l'art de vivre une ère moderne, le cosmopolitisme des écorchés (25)

[the possibility or the necessity to be a foreigner or to live in a foreign country, prefiguring the way of life of a modern era, the cosmopolitanism of the sensitive].

Rimbaud himself left Europe in 1878 and stopped writing altogether, which for Klaus Mann meant "seine Abdankung als Dichter, die furchtbare Botschaft seines Schweigens" (321) [his abdication as a poet, the horrible message of his silence]. This young and brilliant poet, whose œuvre anticipated modernity, opted for an exile in
silence, an exile without the hope for home, a cynical, self-destructive exile. It is in a case like Rimbaud's that Jacques Mounier's assertion makes sense: "l'exil tragique est celui qui n'aboutit à aucune littérature" (296) [tragic exile is that which results in no literature at all]. After years as an arms dealer and a merchant in the Middle East and Africa, Rimbaud returned to France only to die there. His flight was more than an extension to the common exile of the writer. Rimbaud had left behind everything, his exile became absolute and final.

Exile of the Writer

"Mais l'exil n'est-il pas la condition naturelle de l'écrivain?" Anthony Burgess.

The situation of the writer as exile is a commonplace. Not only is writing a solitary activity, but in order to represent the world the writer must have a reflective distance to it, be in "interior exile." Moreover, says Jacqueline Chénieux-Gendron, the writer is exiled in language because he has to shape his own language within that given, pre-set language: "he creates a space in which he write his own language" (439). Exile, as "the essential characteristic of the modern writer," has become a deliberate choice for some authors; to increase that distance, to exile themselves even more within their own countries by withdrawing into the wilderness (Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Henry Thoreau). Others, such as Gertrude Stein and Paul Bowles took up residence in a foreign country for that reason. In Stein's opinion a twentieth century writer needed two countries because creativity arises from the detachment in foreign language and country (Kennedy 26). Geographical, cultural and linguistic displacement is an enhanced expression of the exile inherent to being a writer. This existential situation makes the poet aware of her state living in visible or invisible exile (Daviau 260).

Any dépaysement questions the poetic self, the status of the writer in relation to literature, language and life. The writer also explores and takes stock of the stranger
within himself, the one, according to Michel Friedman that we always wanted to get to know (Harmsen), or the stranger that we are to ourselves (as the title of Julia Kristeva's essay Étranger à nous-mêmes [Strangers to Ourselves] suggests). When Bertolt Brecht and later Paul Celan independently regarded their poetry as "Flaschenpost" [a message in bottle], this alludes to exile in different ways. Brecht, says Wolfgang Emmerich, was referring to his exile in California, which aggravated the generally monological situation of the poet because his readers were far away and it was impossible to think about publishing his poetry in the US (21). But this is also the general predicament of the writer, who rarely writes for a specific person, who cannot know whom he will reach with his poetry. For Paul Celan a message in a bottle means most of all a communication with an unknown reader, a dialogical process inscribed into the poem (Baumann 287), initiated in utter solitude.

In his poem "Und mit dem Buch aus Tarussa" (Die Niemandsrose 1983), Celan uses Marina Tsvetaeva's verse "Vse poety zhidy" [All poets are Yids] as an epigraph. While the derogatory term for 'Jew' is to be understood ironically (Felstiner 197), it highlights the outsider/outcast nature of the poet. Edmond Jabès also held that writers and Jews share a similar fate because "every writer in some way experiences the Jewish condition, because every writer, every creator, lives in a kind of exile" (qtd. in Stameiman 226). If poets are Jews this means that Jews are exiles, too.

Jewish Exile

"Jews are in Exile everywhere" Isaac Bashevis Singer.

Apart from the particular trauma of the Holocaust, anyone of Jewish decent is already born in exile. Exile is written into the religion and the history of the Jewish people, as well as into the Bible. Julia Kristeva posits that once one is "chosen," one is also a stranger/foreigner.
The alliance with God makes the Jewish people a chosen people (especially since Jacob and the Exodus from Egypt) and, if it constitutes the foundation of a sacral nationalism, it includes nonetheless in its very essence an original inscription of strangeness. Numerous passages in the Bible affirm the chosiness of the Jewish people to the exclusion of others.

This history has found its expression in the image of Ahasverus, the “juif errant,” the “Wandering Jew,” and its German equivalent, “der ewige Jude” [the eternal Jew], which in itself denotes the homelessness as inherent in Judaism’s inheritance. The persecution and banishment experienced over thousands of years have inscribed the tradition of nomadism and exile into the Jewish identity. The latest, ongoing migration is the exodus of the Jewish population from the former Soviet Union to Israel, Germany, and the United States.

What constitutes Jewish identity if one is not religious? Jewishness is not tied to a particular language, for there has been Yiddish, German, Hebrew, etc. George Steiner concludes that it is the fact that Jews are ‘pariahs’ who recognize one another “by the darkness we carry” (141). He maintains that Jewish identity was also determined and imposed by the Nazis, especially for the many assimilated German Jews. Or as Jurek Becker’s father put it:


[If there was no anti-Semitism—do you think I would have felt as a Jew for even a second?]

For non-religious Jews this means that their identity was oftentimes imposed from the outside, which makes the question of identity no less troublesome.

Perhaps we can define ourselves thus: the Jews are a people whom totalitarian barbarism must choose for its hatred (Steiner 148).
A painful, negative definition, which highlights that the Jewish tradition is contrary to the ideals of totalitarian regimes. A definition, which nonetheless leaves room for hope.

The state of Israel is today's official home of the Jewish people. A deliberately constructed homeland, which according to Steiner "is undeniably a part of the legacy of German mass murder" (143). The author doubts that there will ever be a material, geographical home; "a final ‘at homeness’ may elude us, that unconscious, immemorial intimacy which a man has with his native idiom as he does with the rock, earth, and ash of his acre" (Steiner 151). Nonetheless Jewish identity seems to draw on self-awareness, a tradition of reflection and study as well as the strength of community. A Jewish homeland may be immaterial but no less true. Says Steiner:

The Jew has his anchorage not in a place but in time, in his highly developed sense of history as personal context. Six thousand years of self-awareness are a homeland (151).

This is the good news: while being Jewish means being in exile anywhere and everywhere, one can bring one’s home along. It is a virtual, portable home, one that one can carry inside, that resides in a tradition and not so much in a common language. A home that can be translated and which connects one with others across linguistic identities. In these our times of displacement, migration and exile, Jewish people are better equipped to cope with the sense of homelessness and uprootedness so many of us experience.

Exile in Postmemory

In some cases, exile is passed on to the second generation, to the children of immigrants and refugees. Even though they do not necessarily regard their parents' lost home as their own, they inherit the sense of not belonging, the trauma of loss, and the diffuse yearning for home. This postmemory concerns children of Holocaust survivors in particular, where the passed-on memory is fraught with horror and distress.

Postmemory informs Lilly Brett’s autobiographical writings, in which she has related
how difficult it is to come to terms with the loss of a family one never knew, with the
pain one's parents suffered although they do not talk about it. Marianne Hirsch, too,
was born into this condition of post-memory:

The children of exiled survivors, although they have not themselves lived
through the trauma of banishment and forcible separation from home and the
destruction of that home, remain marked by their parents' experiences: always
marginal or exiled, always in the diaspora (Hirsch 243).

A scar is also inherited, a wariness without direct cause. Hirsch underlines that the
trauma for Holocaust survivors is of a different order than that of other war refugees
and emigrants. In addition to the mourning for their lost home, Holocaust survivors and
their children must cope with the monstrous truth that they and their peers were
prosecuted and annihilated for who they are. Some survivors suffer from survivor guilt,
an unfathomable feeling of guilt that one's own life was spared when so many others
died.

French author Patrick Modiano (born 1947) is also influenced by the
postmemory phenomenon. His father, who was Jewish and survived in occupied Paris,
never told his son much about his experience. This is why, the author explains, he has
written so much about that time before his birth.

C'est normal: j'ai toujours eu l'impression d'être le fruit du hasard, d'une
rencontre fortuite. J'ai lié mon angoisse d'identité à ma situation familiale, mon
père juif, ma mère qui ne l'était pas. Je suis un personnage un peu bâtard. Je
me suis intéressé à ma préhistoire comme le font, par réaction, les gens qui
n'ont pas de racines (12).

[It is normal: I have always had the impression to be the fruit of chance, of a
fortuitous encounter. I linked my anguish about my identity to the situation of my
family, my Jewish father, my mother who wasn't. I am a bit of a bastard
character. I became interested in my prehistory like people do as a reaction to
not having roots.]

Modiano, just as many other writers started inventing a history for himself and for his
father in his novels, for example in La place de l'étoile (1988).
Celan translator and poet Martine Broda’s mother was imprisoned in a camp, a memory “sucée dans le lait maternel” (276) [sucked in with the mother’s milk], her own “black milk of dawn.” The memory of German, which Broda spoke as a child until her mother forbade her to, incited her to reimagine it and to use it in translating Paul Celan as well as Nelly Sachs and Walter Benjamin. After a long period of therapy, the translator started composing her own poetry about the Shoah, bilingual poetry in French and German.

Children of survivors have a special perception and compassionate curiosity. Besides their particular burden, which almost weighs doubly since it is not really their own, they also have a particular responsibility. Elie Wiesel advises them to this effect:

N’oubliez pas, n’oubliez rien de ce qui s’est passé, mais débarrassez-vous des fantômes, vivez enfin votre propre vie, ce que, nous, survivants, nous n’avons pu faire... Et ne désespérez pas. Vous étes la mémoire du monde (543).

[Do not forget, do not forget anything of what happened, but do get rid of the phantoms, finally live your own lives, which we, the survivors, were not able to do... And do not despair. You are the memory of the world.]

This advice should go to all those who live in postmemory exile, to those who live with their parent’s memory of home: their stories must be told, lest humanity forgets.

Leaving Childhood, Leaving Home

“Our past is literally a foreign country we can never hope to visit” Marianne Hirsch.

In his study *Imagining Paris* Gerald Kennedy emphasized place as the major determinant for whether one is in exile or at home. However, exile also relates to the dimension of time. If it means that “one can never return” this includes childhood, from which everyone ‘graduates’ at some point in their life. Innocence is lost when the child learns to speak and is initiated into the functioning of society, which is governed by language. This acquisition of language is then synonymous with exile. Leaving childhood, entering into society and finding an illusory home there, one has really once and for all moved into exile. New (Ersatz-) homes may occur but never the original Ur-
Home. In his work *A la recherche du temps perdu*, Marcel Proust fixates on his lost childhood and explores ways to recreate his home in writing the way palpable memories can.

Childhood is a formative experience, and especially so for exiles who draw their identity from it. Nancy Huston emphasizes:

> Le caractère totalement singulier de l’enfance, par exemple, et le fait qu’elle ne vous quitte jamais: difficile pour un expatrié de ne pas en être conscient, alors que les impatriés peuvent se bercer toute leur vie d’une douce illusion de continuité et d’évidence (Huston 19).

[The entirely singular character of childhood for example, and the fact that it never leaves you: it is difficult for an expatriate not to be aware of that whereas impatriates can cherish the sweet illusion of continuity and logic all their lives.]

For many writers and in many literary texts exile coincided with growing up. It is one theme of Panait Istrati’s *Mes départs*, it was true for Samuel Beckett and Paul Celan, for Andrei Codrescu and *Candide*, Arthur Rimbaud and Nathalie Sarraute. Marianne Hirsch as well as author Eva Hoffman experienced exile as a loss of childhood: “If most girls leave their ‘home’ as they move into adolescence, Hoffman and I left two homes—our girlhood and our Europe” (222). The separation from childhood, which is oftentimes a gradual process, turns into a rupture when it is sparked by exile. Home then is a past experience, always, one which one can never retrieve. Physical exile from the place where one was raised hones the writer’s awareness of its inevitable loss and of the importance this home had for shaping the individual self. Because, while we do leave childhood, it never really leaves us.

Marianne Hirsch described how she and her family were planning to visit Czemowitz after the demise of the Soviet Union. It turned out that her parents were hesitant to go back, preferred maintaining their mental image, their memory, to being confronted with the new reality of their hometown.

‘Home’ is always elsewhere, even for those who return to the Vienna, the Berlin, the Paris, or the Cracow their families had to leave, because the cities to which
they can return are no longer the cities in which their parents lived as Jews before the genocide, but the cities where the genocide happened and from which they and their memory have been expelled (Hirsch 243).

Since Jewish life as it was does not exist anymore, the city's legendary cosmopolitanism is irretrievable. Czemowitz is now a Ukrainian town, where even Jewish survivors speak German with Russian inflections. As is obvious from the documentary film Herr Zwilling und Frau Zuckermann [Mr. Zwilling and Mrs. Zuckermann] staying/returning does not guarantee home.

If exiles return to their original countries, they find that the place left behind is not the same nor are they themselves the same people. Returning may, in fact, be another exile. The home one abandons, although physically probably still existent, disappears with the time not lived there, becomes ever less home. Simply returning to one's hometown or the house where one lived as a child does not really mean that one is coming home and one might also be deluded as to how much home it really was.

“When I go back,” says Alastair Reid, “I am always trying on the country to see if it still fits, or fits better than it did. In one sense, the place is as comfortable to me as old clothes; in another, it is a suit that did not fit me easily from the beginning” (21).

The home of childhood can only be retrieved, if at all, in writing, in language. But in which language?

Exile in Language

Since language is a basic determinant of identity, since it is at the root of how one does things, linguistic and cultural exile is the most dramatic and concrete form of exile. When an author changes countries, she changes languages and thereby her primary system of reference. The individual is estranged and alienated from the familiar language, gestures, currency, food, dress, music, vegetation—a myriad of natural and cultural markers that commonly situate her in and guide her through everyday life.
As the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis confirms, exiles who write in a different language have acquired a different way of thinking too, a different way of perceiving and constructing life. The new culture and language do not simply coexist with the old ones but tend to inscribe themselves over the original without ever erasing it. The exile becomes a composite text consisting of different linguistic systems imprinted over one another, just as structures, value systems and concepts will be intermixed. Frequently unable to express something in one of the two languages, he will also perceive and say concepts previously unknown, and therefore unthought. Non-verbal language, gestures, signs and attitudes get confused and one doesn't know anymore which is which. Due to this multiple inscription, an exile may never completely feel at home again, neither in the old nor in the new language and culture. Even if exiles keep acquiring new languages and cultures, they remain societal outsiders; no new language can create home.

The homeland left behind, its culture, language, signs serve as an implicit or explicit frame of reference, be it positive or negative. Memories of home provide the reference for everything to come. What writers experience in a foreign land is perceived with their perspective from home. Even if one did not leave on good terms or perhaps exactly because it was impossible to stay, this often results in a certain nostalgia (ma
du pays, Heimweh) for the land left behind. As Heinrich Heine put it so sarcastically: “So beginnt die deutsche Vaterlandsliebe erst an der deutschen Grenze” [Hence the love for the German fatherland starts only at the German border] (qtd. in Emmerich 45). Distance and exile transfigure ‘home’ and make it easier to become a patriot. Yet there is a distinction between Heine’s “Vaterland” [fatherland] and ‘Heimat’ [homeland]. The first demands political allegiance, the latter doesn’t demand anything, it is just there.
The nostalgia relates to one's mother tongue too, the language of home. It is the immediate language, the language with the most direct access to feelings and unconscious emotions. As psychotherapists have found, in the case of exiles this original language often encloses traumatic experiences and problems that the individual glossed over in the other language (Amati-Mehler 174). Similarly, language is tied to a region, a tradition, a people. Since it is such a deeply engrained mark of identity, and on the other hand language reflects a deeper, more limited cultural substance than for example painting or music (Gsteiger 3), the choice of language has a profound impact on the work of the writer.

Exiles, who commonly master several languages must choose their language of expression consciously, take into account their audience as well as their beliefs about the workings of language. When a writer writes in a language other than his native tongue, he automatically addresses readers of a different language. This means that he forsakes the readers in his native tongue, or as Romanian-born author Dumitru Tsepeneag put it hyperbolically: "il a sacrifié le lecteur roumain sur l'autel de la littérature française" (75) [he sacrificed the Romanian reader on the altar of French literature]. So did Romanian Virgil Tanase who chose exile in France because of "the desire, the temptation, the arrogance to confront the great writers of humanity" (Glad 25). The "altar" of French literature means several things: it highlights the great international renown of the French literary tradition as much as the pride the French take in their literature. It also reveals the sarcastic and slightly bitter self-consciousness "small" cultures feel in front of the bigger ones. 

As with translation, the exile's choice for a language has a political dimension, depending on the aforementioned 'currency' of that language. Frances Bartkowski has made this clear in the terms she uses: 'the traveler' and 'the ethnic'. The traveler, i.e. someone in a position of power,
will speak imperial tongue and others will happily translate for him. Even if he is
found deficient he will not be shamed—it is his hosts who will bear the reversed
humiliation; their language will be found wanting (85).

There are different classes of exiles then. When André Breton was an exile in New
York he was a traveler and he certainly felt as a representative of a ‘greater’ culture.
He resented exile and refused to learn English, relying on translators throughout his
stay. The irritation may have been greater because he perceived of his language and
culture as a “major” currency that he was supposed to trade for another one, at a very
unfavorable exchange rate. Breton must have been unaware that the times were
changing, and that France and her language and literature were not considered the
epitome of refinement anymore, especially not in the New World. Breton’s refusal to
partake in the life of his place of exile may have been a sign of insecurity, where
French served as a barricade against the new and unsettling influences.

Oftentimes, it is the new language that shields the self, offers a psychological
place where the deepest vulnerable self is guarded. For Henry Pachter exile is
a protective fence. It disengages me from other people and their worries in a
way that might be impossible in a country whose most intimate fears and
passions I had absorbed with its nursery rhymes. [ . . . ] I think that for many the
exile situation suspends the need to engage in action (Pfanner 148).

For this reason, the new language, culture and home will never replace the primary
and primal language, the one with which emotions and first experiences are stored.
While the second language becomes a comfortable place in which to live, it is also one
that is a step away, with a delay, subdued and muffled. Nancy Huston illustrates in her
insightful essay Nord perdu how she took up playing the harpsichord instead of the
piano at the same time as she started speaking French rather than her native English.
Indeed the analogy to musical instruments is quite appropriate—while they play the
same piece of music the sound is very different, and the difference too is whether one
sings or plays the guitar.
In his essay *The Disappearance of the Outside*, Andrei Codrescu explains that a writer in exile can never completely assimilate into the new culture and will carry his old language within himself. Codrescu states,

I did not stop being a Romanian poet, when I became an American one. The Romanian language became my covert dimension, a secret engine, like childhood, while American English covered all the aspects of my lived life (46).

Although he claims that over time they fused, I believe that such fusion is impossible. Rather, from reading Codrescu's books, one gets the impression that the Romania of his childhood has become codified, translated into English, a set of stencils, stories and words. While Codrescu's poetic persona, as Richard Collins has indicated, is rooted in his Romanian childhood and in Romanian literature, he has developed "a distinctive American voice and style." Having returned to Romania several times since 1989, his new and old Romania may become fou, where it is no longer clear which is which. Even though that original subtext is ubiquitous and projects itself onto his writing and his being, the true Romania of his childhood—even with temporal, physical and emotional distance—does not speak English and never will.

"Exile as Boon"

"Les exilés, eux, sont riches. Riches de leurs identités accumulées et contradictoires" Nancy Huston.

Joachim Du Bellay, the "exile gémissant" [shivering exile] from the *Regrets*, has also been described as a "mage vaticinant" [prophecizing mage] for his book *Les Antiquités de Rome* (Tucker 46). These are indeed the two most common, almost contradictory aspects of exile. Despite the commonly known difficulties of getting used to a new culture, a new language, of overcoming culture shock and finding a livelihood and possibly a new readership, there are benefits to exile. It has a liberating and inspiring effect on writers because it widens the cultural and linguistic horizon. In fact, says Helmut Pfanner: "The exposure to a new linguistic and cultural atmosphere can
help [the writer] to become more profoundly himself” (104). This is due to the fact that exile reinforces the subject’s self-reflective activity, which, in the case of some of the surrealists, meant a voyage of initiation (Chénieux-Gendron 449). When one becomes so radically exposed to otherness, and when oneself is so radically other than everyone else, that usually results in some introspection, but also in observation and curiosity. Exile benefits the development of the individual’s personality. Clarissa Pinkola-Estés affirms:

While exile is not a thing to desire for the fun of it, there is an unexpected gain from it; the gifts of exile are many. It takes out the weakness by the pounding. It removes whininess, enables acute insight, heightens intuition, grants the power of keen observation and perspective that the ‘insider’ can never achieve (186).

The complete change of everything one was used to, the shock that comes with that, can be an enormous impulse. In fact the trauma of exile may act as a positive stimulus, may incite people to write who never wrote before, Czech-born German writer Libuše Moniková for example. This was also the case of Fred Uhlmann, a Jewish writer who fled to England during World War II. What started out as ‘involuntary’ exile turned into a beneficial experience:

It is an extraordinary statement, but I believe true, that I owe more to Hitler than anybody else in my life. If he had not forced me to go, I doubt if I should have had the initiative to go (qtd. in Amati-Mehler 184).

Where exactly does the stimulation come from? Displacement, and foreignness afford the writer a gaze from the outside, both onto their native and their new cultures. This new gaze inspires new ways of perceiving and expressing, too. Inevitably, exile writers are more conscious of the functioning of language per se and of their languages. Discovering that different languages have different ways of saying things, that theirs is only one truth and that there are many more, their perspective is richer, more clairvoyant. As every exile, writers must redefine their identity, their deep inner self. Living in and with another language they can explore and develop other aspects of
their being. In their writing, exiles will be more self-conscious. Their new language allows them to free themselves from clichés, received notions and meanings, to create more freely and more consciously. At the same time, their original culture and language informs their writing: an exile text is written over the (yet irretrievable) dimension of a complete (unwritten) text of the home lived in a foreign language. The exile has to some degree moved outside languages, outside his own and always outside the new one. She becomes aware of the limitations and fictions inherent in any language, she may lose a linguistic innocence. The exile’s unique outside view yields insights into the workings of things. An exile is also confronted with problems of translation, translating thought, translating reality into the new present situation.

Translation and Exile

"L’étranger est essentiellement un traducteur" Julia Kristeva.

When someone acquires a foreign language, she has set out to never be the same again. The new language with its new grammatical and metaphorical patterns, upsets any old securities about language in general, but also about her own language:

Celui qui apprend une langue étrangère n’est plus même qu’auparavant, il n’envisage plus sa langue de la même manière (Ballard 20).

[Who studies a foreign language is not the same as before, he doesn’t view his language the same way anymore.]

It not only changes the individual’s view of her native language but it will move her away from it, make her aware of the arbitrariness and imperfection of any language, even her own. This move away from the certainty of one’s native language leads to a certain destabilization. French-Chinese author François Cheng has experienced this:

Quand on embrasse une autre langue que la sienne, non point en passant, ni en dilettante, mais pour en faire une possibilité d’être, ou une raison de vivre, on devient la fragilité même; on se heurte à une ingratitude foncière, pareil à celui qui est pris au piège de l’amour (Textuel 11).

[When one embraces another language than one’s own, certainly not in passing, nor as a dilettante but to make it a possibility of being, or a reason to
live, one becomes fragility itself; one encounters a very basic ingratitude, similar to someone who is caught in love's trap.]

The change of language leads to a very basic unsettlement, where one feels inapt in the new language, unnatural, like an actor. Naturalness is lost in the other language, says Julia Kristeva, or at least it must be translated (157). But with time a new, 'foreign' naturalness will develop in that other language, just as a new, foreign self, or another part of oneself comes into its own. These two parts do not match, as translator Georges-Arthur Goldschmidt explains:

Il n'est peut-être pas de situation plus intense que celle de cet entre-deux : je ne peux jamais éprouver dans une autre langue ce que je sens dans l'autre, bien au contraire, plus c'est éclatant et évident dans une langue, moins cela paraît passer dans l'autre, comme si l'essence des langues était de se dérober aux autres (Écriture 159).

[There is probably no situation more intense than that of this in-between: I can never experience in another language what I feel in the other, on the contrary, the more it is striking and obvious in one language the less this seems to pass into the other, as if the essence of languages was to elude the other ones.]

This in-between is an intermediary space between the two languages, cultures and experiences, in which the translator lives and works as much as the exile. Critics and writers have found different terms for this space: the 'Bilingue' (in Khatibi), "the inter-liminal, or in-between, or midworld" (Rose 312), the "entre-deux-langues" (Djebar 30) or 'the no man's land between languages' (lain Chrichton Smith qtd. in Galbraith 97).

The exile writer as well as the translator operate within the gap between two linguistic and cultural systems, oscillating between the two, carrying meaning back and forth.

Some, like Marianne Hirsch or George Stainer, who already grew up in more than one language, have always lived in this world between worlds, that is, in exile.

Both translator and exile writer work on the basis of an underlying text: in the case of a translation an actual, material text, one that was composed and is present in the written form. In the case of the exile text this is a virtual, indefinite, mental, and cultural subtext, more or less corrupted by the new language. Just as a translation is
located on a continuum between the two languages, either closer to the source or the
target language, a text written in exile also belongs to an intermediary space. Some
writers in exile published their works first in translation in their adopted countries, and
only in translation did they first receive recognition. Such was the case for Milan
Kundera's early works as well as for a number of Romanian writers of the post-war
period living in France. Dumitru Tsepeneag's text Le mot sablier [The Word Hourglass],
published in 1984, was his last translated publication before he started writing directly
in French. Le mot sablier reflects on the process of changing languages and
anticipates the translator's (Alain Paruit) work in form of the character Alain: "Alain se
tait et traduit en tapant à cinq doigts ces deux lignes qui viennent d'ouvrir encore un
chapitre" (49) [Alain falls silent and translates as he types with five fingers these two
lines that have just ended another chapter]. The account was written mostly in
Romanian and partly in French, which is indicated in italics. Since the text appears in
its translated French version, the italics are the only indicator that there were originally
two different languages used. Towards the end of the volume, the text has completely
moved to French whereby only the italicized typeset echoes the strange otherness of
the French in the original text. The image of the hourglass suggests that shifting from
one language to another is a gradual process, although one with spurts and starts.
Most of all Tsepeneag writes the ordinarily invisible translator into the text.

The title of Polish immigrant Eva Hoffman's novel, Lost in Translation: A Life in
a New Language (1989), insinuates the 'translated' nature of living and writing in exile.
Susan Suleiman has also ascertained that exiles "are in translation" from the start, with
no original" (843). The paradox is that there is an original, which is the writer when she
was in the home of her birth but that original cannot be translated. Rather the absence
of an "original" suggests that the exile lives a sort of virtual life, that her experience,
although disjointed from reality or from real life, is the only experience there is. That
while she cannot translate her original self, she translates her new, exile existence. Exile is translation, i.e. shifting from one language to another but also the translation of experience, culture, and thought.

Another distinction must be made: while any bilingual person grows into the same intermediate linguistic space as a translator, and any translator, ideally, is at least bilingual, just being bilingual is not enough to be a translator. It is for this reason that Michel Deguy denied the existence of such intermediate space and called translation a "saut" [leap]. Indeed, one becomes a translator when one learns to draw a very clear line between the two languages, when one leaps from one bank of the chasm to the other. Or when the middle line, the spine of the book that represents the difference between the original text on the left and the translation on the right becomes a mental line too. So leap it is indeed, and most of all a leap of faith, in both cases. It is a leap of faith to know about the inadequacies and shortcomings of language and to entrust a text to a different language and one's livelihood and vocation to this endeavor.

Home?

"Immer suchen ist nicht schön. Man möchte auch mal nach Hause" Kurt Tucholsky.

The natural impulse for humans, it seems, is to find home, or to make themselves home, make themselves a home. Some kinds of exile spring from a search for home, for a true spiritual home. By definition exile is not home, i.e. exile and home are mutually exclusive. This means that exile and home take on their meaning in relation to each other. Where exile begins, home ends; the traditional notion of home is crushed when exile occurs: in a new language, through displacement, the dramatic change of political and social environment, or when one becomes aware of pre-existing, innate exile. But what exactly does home mean? Is there no remedy to exile? Does it never end?
It does, it may fade, it may go away. Denis Hollier, an exile himself, experienced this:

if the return to one’s native country is the ultimate test of exile, or rather if one is equally, indifferently exiled on both sides of the border, then there is no longer a difference between exile and its contrary, between exile and anything at all (378).

When there is no difference between exile and anything at all, then the concepts of exile and home do not apply any longer, then one is completely in exile everywhere or one is at home wherever one decides to be. ‘Home’ as much as exile, or even more so, is a matter of perception and of attitude, is named by the individual.

Erika Mann said about her father, German writer Thomas Mann:

Zuhause, obwohl im Exil—ja wir sind zuhause, einmal mehr zuhause [. . .] wo wir sind, da ist Deutschland, und wir sind da zuhause, wo der Schreibtisch steht (261).

[At home, although in exile—yes we are at home, once more at home [. . .] where we are is Germany and we are at home where our desk is.]

If home cannot be found, one has to make one’s own home. For the writer there is an obvious solution: writing is always a way and an attempt to achieve home. While the text speaks of exile it becomes in itself a home. The creative approach works for lay people too.

Do as the duckling does. Go ahead, struggle through it. Pick up the pen already and put it to the page and stop whining. Write. Pick up the brush and be mean to yourself for a change, paint. Dancers, put on the loose chemise, tie the ribbons in your hair, at your waist, or on your ankles and tell the body to take it from there. Dance. Actress, playwright, poet, musician, or any other. [. . .] Do your art. Generally, a thing cannot freeze if it is moving. So move. Keep moving (Pinkola-Estés 185).

After all his wandering and his adventures, the cruelties he saw and the disillusionment of romantic attraction he experienced, Voltaire’s protagonist Candide, the anti-optimist, came to a similar conclusion: “il faut cultiver notre jardin” (234) [we must cultivate our garden].
Notes


2 Emigration from Germany after 1933 amounted to 390,000 to 400,000 people, about 50,000 of which were actual exiles (Walter Akzente 489).

3 The Swedish Academy cites Xingjian as a Chinese writer from France. Conventional categories for writers’ nationalities do not apply anymore. When does one stop being a Chinese writer and becomes a French writer? What exactly does it take to become a French writer? The French especially do not hesitate to ‘naturalize’ a great foreign writer if he lives in France, see Paul Celan, Heinrich Heine, Tristan Tzara, etc.

4 Steiner attributes this to Heine’s Jewishness. I will comment on Jewish exile further on.

5 I am thinking of “Denk’ ich an Deutschland in der Nacht/dann bin ich um den Schlafl gebracht” [When I think of Germany at night/ I cannot sleep anymore]. Or “Ich weiß nicht, was soll es bedeuten/ daß ich so traurig bin/ ein Märchen aus uralten Zeiten/das geht mir nicht aus dem Sinn. [What it means I don’t know/ that I am so sad /a tale from times yore/ I can’t get it out of my mind] Or “Ich kenne die Worte, ich kenne den Text/ ich kenne auch die Herren Verfasser/ich weiß, sie tranken heimlich Wein/ und predigten öffentlich Wasser” [I know the words, I know the lines/ And I know the gentlemen authors/ I know they were secretly drinking wine/ and publicly preaching water].

6 Not entirely deprecative in itself the term is contaminated since it was the title of a Nazi propaganda film.

7 This phenomenon applies to exile in the second generation of any kind. However the term postmemory is reserved for the children of Holocaust survivors.

8 Some Romanian critics have felt that way about Celan. They argue that literature written in a language that is not a “world language” unfairly is not as famous as literature from other countries. Caraiion said about Celan for example: “Die rumänische Literatur aber hat damals einen Lyriker verloren” (209-10) [But Romanian literature lost a poet then].

9 I have borrowed this heading from Clarissa Pinkola Estés’s book *Women Who Run With the Wolves.*
I would argue that this is where the perception of one's condition as either voluntary or involuntary exile comes into play. For the writer who embraces exile as an opportunity, it will be stimulating. The attitude towards exile depends on whether one comes from a "great" or a "small" culture; when one comes from a smaller culture and language exile is often viewed as a chance. Writers from Romania, for example, tend to be humbler, used to having to switch languages to make themselves understood, aware of the supposed "inferiority" of their culture.
4. PANAĬT ISTRATI: MES DÉPARTS.

"Départs
Assez vu. La vision s'est rencontrée à tous les airs.
Assez connu. Les arrêts de la vie.—Ô Rumeurs et Visions!
Départ dans l'affection et le bruit neufs!" Arthur Rimbaud.

For his political views and his opinionated writing, Panaĭt Istrati has been considered a controversial writer. Some critics do not deem his work "literature" at all, which certainly would have been a delight for him: paradoxically, this author, who had an unquenchable thirst for knowledge, did he by no means want to be viewed as a "writer" because he wrote for the oppressed, for those who do not read much. He said:

Le style est affaire de tempérament. Dans le monde c'est l'inquiétude, le tourment, les passions qui règnent, la preuve c'est que nous ne rencontrons qu'un seul homme véritablement serein, pour mille agités. Et à ceux-là ce n'est pas Voltaire qu'il leur faut, c'est Schéhérazade (Oprea 299).

[Style is a matter of temperament. In the world it is worry, torment, and passions that reign, the proof is that we don't meet one single verily serene person in a thousand upset ones. And those don't need Voltaire, they need Sheherazade.]

Istrati's contemporary André Gide compared him indeed to the storyteller of Thousand and One Nights, but critic Georges Barthouil regarded him precisely as "un 'moraliste' (du type de Voltaire)" [a moralist (of the Voltaire type)] (106). His discoverer and mentor Roman Rolland advertised Istrati as the "Gorky of the Balkans" (9), and Edouard Raydon titled him a "vagabond de génie" [genius vagabond]. Istrati did not aspire to be any more than a "Plebejer-Künstler" [plebian artist] (Befreiung 17). All of those labels are true to some extent: Istrati was a powerful, realist chronicler of the life of the masses in the Balkans of his time. His passionate, folkloristic accounts of Romania and of his wanderings across Europe and the Mediterranean trace the author's quest for a socially just society. Still today, they provide interesting historical documents but also engaging reading.
Istrati achieved instant fame in France when his first novel Kyra Kyralina was published in 1924. In the following seven years he put out about a dozen more short stories and novels. His great success is often attributed to the exoticism of his work. Shortly after his initial acclaim, Istrati was also published in Germany, where he has been a classic ever since. Heinrich Stiehler has worked extensively on Istrati and reedited his collected works in the late 1980’s. In France, Istrati’s complete oeuvre was re-edited starting in 1988, and, according to Stiehler, seemed to breathe the spirit of the May demonstrations, a libertarian spontaneity imbued with moral qualities (Récit 105). Translated into 20 languages, Istrati’s novels have had their greatest success in Greece and Turkey, where his exoticism is not much more than realism (Barthouil-lonesco 69). Reception in the English-speaking world has been negligible: in the United Kingdom three volume were translated and published between 1930 and 1931; in the United States five novels were published in translation between 1926 and 1931. In 1984 the Times Literary Supplement printed a disparaging article about the writer (in the guise of a book review of the re-edition of A. Talex’s biography Le Pèlerin du coeur [Pilgrim of the Heart] , in which the critic described his “pathetic career” (Nemoianu 1133). Romania has rediscovered Istrati as another one of their literary exports, and studies have been published there as well as in France, such as special issues of Rumänische Rundschau, L’Arc, and the Cahiers roumains d’études littéraires.

The Vagabond-Writer

Panait Istrati was born as the illegitimate son of a Greek tobacco smuggler and a Romanian washerwoman in 1884. He grew up in Braila, the second Romanian port city situated on the Danube, a city that to this day evokes mysterious, wistful smiles in Romanians.

Und das alte Braila, das Braila von Panait Istrati und das Braila meiner Jugend, Myrrhe, Weihrauch, Gebißstangen, Manilahanf, Fuhrleute, Feigen, Messerschmiede, Speckschwarten. Die aus der Kufe getrunkene Donau, auf
Istrati left school at age thirteen, and took on a variety of odd jobs. From the year 1900, Istrati traveled through most of the Mediterranean countries and the Middle East; during his returns he worked as a political journalist. In 1913, he went to France for the first time, driven by his "nostalgia" for the French language (Lefevre 150). In 1916, while in Switzerland he made a dream come true: for four months he locked himself in with a dictionary and some thirty volumes of classics—Voltaire, Rousseau, Montaigne, Montesquieu, Mme. de Staël, etc. When he emerged he had accomplished a "double conquête" [double conquest]: that of the French language and its literature (151). In 1921 he was found after a suicide attempt; in his pocket he had a letter to Romain Rolland, which he had never sent. The letter was forwarded, and Rolland encouraged Istrati to take up writing. His career as a French writer started off with Kyra Kyralina, and continued volume after volume: Oncle Anghel [Uncle Anghel], Présentation des Haidoucs [The Bandits], etc. Meanwhile, he was still composing works in Romanian,
which he then translated into French, *Le pêcheur des éponges* [The Sponge Fisher] for example. From 1927 until 1929 he spent sixteen months in the Soviet Union; upon his return he wrote his report *Vers l'autre flamme* [Toward the Other Flame]. In this volume he denounced the Communist system at a time when most Western writers were still enthusiastic about the Russian revolution. The book caused a great scandal; worse than this adversity was his great disappointment and disillusionment:

Je suis un homme perdu. Tout est fini pour moi. Je ne crois plus en rien (qtd. in Jutrin-Klener 88).

[I am a lost man. Everything is finished for me. I don't believe in anything anymore.]

In 1931, Istrati returned to live in Romania and died there from tuberculosis in 1935. He had translated some of his own books into Romanian, however they were not very successful.¹

Panaît Istrati's autobiographical text *Mes départs* [My Farewells], published in 1928, is subtitled "pages autobiographiques" [autobiographical pages]. In the 1968 edition, this subheading was omitted, and the text was combined with others under the title *La jeunesse d'Adrien Zograffi* [Adrien Zograffi's Youth]. This character Adrien Zograffi corresponds, naturally, to the author himself:

Car Istrati, entremêlant fiction et témoignage vécu, renvoyant, dans ses récits, d'un genre à l'autre, parvient à me faire croire à l'authenticité de ce qu'il raconte, Adrien n'étant que le visage roumain de l'écrivain Istrati (Béhar 16).

[For Istrati, intermixing fiction and lived testimony, referring from one genre to another, arrives at making me believe in the authenticity of that which he is telling, Adrien only being the Romanian face of the writer Istrati.]

The Romanian face of the writer is of course only one of them, or only part of his real face. While the character of Adrien Zograffi my provide a certain distance, a certain freedom to write, the texts themselves convey the impression that this is the real story. There is really no difference between the author and Adrien, besides the name, and so the decision of his editors to republish *Mes départs* as part of the Zograffi cycle, is
justified. When reading this text, it is not until page 79 (in the 1928 edition), that the narrator is addressed for the first time by a nickname: "Panagaki." In Marcel Proust’s work *À la recherche du temps perdu*, it is not until the volume *La prisonnière* (written in 1924) that the narrator is identified as having the same name as the author, and therefore as possibly being identical with him. Unlike Proust, Istrati is not at all secretive about the identity of the narrator and the author. Still, when reading this book as part of the Zograffi cycle, as in the 1968 French edition and the German re-edition from 1986, it is a surprise that the name of the narrator is not the same as that of the protagonist mentioned in the title. In *Mes départs* the narrator is addressed as "Panagaki," or "Panaitotaki," or "Panaghi," or even "Panait." While all of Istrati's works are autobiographical, this one is explicitly so. Its authenticity is underlined in various ways. There are no fantastic episodes and the chronology of events is interrupted by indignant tirades about society’s abuse of children and societal injustices. It chronicles the life of the author in a detailed manner, and it is especially the language that contributes to the immediate and authentic feel of the text. The expressive declaration of this text as autobiographical explains for its immediacy and heterogeneity.

**Exile**

*Mes départs* is a quintessential exile text, documenting different layers of exile. The first two parts "La Taverne de Kir Léonida" [Kir Leonida’s Tavern] and "Capitaine Mavromati" [Captain Mavromati] are subsumed as "Fin d’enfance. Premiers pas dans la vie" [End of Childhood. First Steps into Life]; the third part is entitled "Pour atteindre la France" [To Get to France] and subtitled *Direttissimo*. The volume is therefore factually split into two parts, of which the first one is set in Istrati’s hometown Braila, and the second one describes his attempt to travel to France. Although the two segments focus on very different phases in the narrator’s life, which, with regard to the author’s vita, were more than ten years apart, they are united in their underlying theme:
leaving and saying farewell, exile. The French title *Mes départs* of the volume has several meanings that fittingly describe this text: the act of leaving itself, the place from which one leaves, the departure into something new, the new beginning in a figurative sense. The Romanian title was literally *Mes évasions* [My Evasions] (Barthouill 107), a blunt and almost spiteful admission of defection from his native land. This title emphasizes that the desire to leave is stronger than that to get to a specific place. The English *My Farewells*, which I chose rather than *Leaving*, covers both the notion of willful leaving and that of nostalgia. A farewell is a definite goodbye; and indeed the narrator will never return as the same person. The more sedentary and placid approach of the German version is already indicated in the title: *Tage der Jugend* [Days of Youth]. Rather than reliving his adventures and humiliations as a boy and as an adolescent, the German title evokes a sentimental reminiscence from the distant perspective of a grown-up. This title emphasizes the great time lapse between then and now and highlights the longing for the past.

Istrati does not accept that kind of exile; he finds comfort exactly in delving into life headfirst, and so he delves into his memories too. Although the writer eventually did go back to living in Braila, the place in itself could not offer home anymore—in particular after having traveled the Balkans, the Mediterranean and the Soviet Union and after having been a renowned writer in France. In the text the narrator says farewell to his childhood, to his mother, to Captain Mavromati, to his hometown, to his best friend Mikhail as well as to his own parochial ignorance. The title of this story of departure almost calls for sequel entitled *Arrivals*. Istrati never wrote such a volume, for good reason: although most departures are followed by arrivals, there is never an ultimate arrival. Exile doesn't know arrival, home cannot be found but must be conquered and created.
When Istrati decided to be a vagabond, abandoning life in his familiar cultural context, he decided to live the exile he had already felt at home. His wandering the continent in search for a dignified life may be viewed as metaphor for the working class, but also for all of humanity. In his books the author gave the powerless and poor a face and a name, gave them dignity, and described their joys and concerns. The protagonists rebel against society in their own ways and try to retain their humanity. All too often it was Istrati himself who was at the center of his tales, and with whom he commiserated. But he did so in a language of the Occident, in French, addressing a foreign public. For the French reader his texts displayed an exotic world, "un monde peuplé de haïdoucs, de Turcs cruels, de vagabonds" [a world inhabited by haiducks, cruel Turks, vagabonds] (Jutrin-Klener 257). Monique Jutrin-Klener has seen this as a misunderstanding, for Istrati intended to rouse his readers against social injustice (258).

The exile in this work is much more explicit than in Istrati's recounts of Romanian folktales or of Romanian myths. Exile is inherent in the settings of the two epochs of the narrator's life: Braila, Piraeus, Naples, Alexandria are all ports, so is the original yet unattained destination, Marseilles. Ports in themselves are ambivalent places for they promise home and are places of exile par excellence. In the first part "Fin d'enfance. Premiers pas dans la vie," it becomes obvious that exile and home are not necessarily mutually exclusive but that they may converge or coexist. In Mes départs these two concepts coincide, exile becomes home, and home is exile too. Ports, as places of arrival and departure, emigration and immigration, incarnate the coexistence and the tension between exile and home. Besides the vitality of the different cultures in Braila and their rootedness in the town, the narrator even as a young boy is aware how difficult it is to lose one's home. He feels for the immigrants,
The narrative realizes that what for him is home is exile for the immigrants, and he becomes aware that there is no end to exile, not even in death. He himself was already in exile when he was still home, the lost father and his unknown culture had implanted exile in the boy; his beloved Danube, the unfamiliar land of his father and the whole wide world beckon him. The desire for home, which always sets in eventually, finds its expression in writing. It allows the writer in exile to carry his home within himself. Writing literature is an attempt to create home, an attempt that is doomed to fail and doomed to succeed, and which must therefore be constantly repeated.

Istrati's vagabondage, it turns out, is also the search for literature. Already as a teenager, he finds employment in a Greek tavern because he wants to learn Greek. While he is initiated to the world of the adults, he also becomes fascinated with language and literature. He realizes that he does not even know his own language very well. A customer, Captain Mavromati, whom he befriends, gives him a dictionary (“the Bible”) of the Romanian language:

> Un homme brisé venait de me mettre entre les mains un trésor: chaque page contenait un monde de connaissances; chaque mot m’ouvrait des horizons dont je ne me doutais guère (88)

[A ruined man had put a treasure into my hands: each page contained a world of knowledge; each word opened up horizons I had barely known existed].

Language and literature introduce him to a world of humanism and beauty, where he saw only brutality and crudeness in his daily life. Istrati undergoes a coming of age: language and literature replace the mother, who can no longer give comfort and protection. His dictionary gives him guidance for his life and makes him discover the
world: "je changeais d’univers toutes les minutes" [I changed universes every minute] (334). Reading enriches his mind and his health, the boy puts on weight. Having longed for sleep in the beginning of the tale, he now uses every free minute for reading, preferring the state of awakenness to that of sleep. If he does fall asleep, it is while reading: “Je m’endormais, la tête sur mon dictionnaire, comme autrefois sur les genoux de ma mère” [I would fall asleep, with my head on the dictionary, as I used to on the knees of my mother] (334). Literature provides the comfort his mother can no longer give him.

The narrator studies his ‘father’ tongue, Greek, (which was indeed the language of his unknown father) and consequently enters into a new, masculine, more reflective world. This new world and his increasing knowledge of language and literature also prepare him for his departure from home. On the day of Captain Mavromati’s funeral, Istrati embarks on his journey into adulthood, into exile. “Adieu, mavra matia! Adieu, mon enfance!” [Good-bye, mavra matia! Good-bye, my childhood!] (350) “Adieu, mavra matia!” are the words with which Captain Mavromati had ended his account of his failed life a few pages before. There Istrati added a footnote to explain “En grec: noirs yeux” [In Greek: black eyes]. However, while seemingly playing on Captain Mavromati’s name (and perhaps the color of his eyes), the reference remains enigmatic and escapes the not so linguistically inclined reader. This departure, which had started with his studying, is now complete and finds its expression in the narrator’s physical departure from this quasi-exile place he and Capitaine Mavromati had shared and in which they had made themselves at home.

The third part, "Direttissimo," bears the title "Pour atteindre la France" [In order to get to France] and the dedication:

A CHARLIE CHAPLIN,—l’humain «Charlot», que je ne connais que par ses films, je dédie ce film de ma vie (127).
[To Charlie Chaplin,—the human 'little tramp,' whom I only know from his
movies, I dedicate this film of my life]

The dedication underlies the experiences documented in this chapter just as the tramp
Panait experiences unlikely adventures, which, if viewed from that angle, are quite
grotesque. Like Chaplin, Istrati always took the side of the underdog, the poor man.
Chaplin portrayed their aimless wandering in films such as The Immigrant (1917). The
film opens with a scene on a ship full of immigrants on its way to the United States,
similar to the scene described in the text. In Istrati's lifetime, film was still a silent
medium, making it all the more international, communicating across borders and
languages. Chaplin and Istrati also share their "love for living creatures," as well as a
"particular kind of tenderness, of sensual or sentimental affection," which André Bazin
has discerned in Chaplin's films.

The novelist in his relations to his characters needs intelligence more than love;
understanding is his form of loving. If the art of Chaplin were transposed into
literature, it would tend to lapse into sentimentality (Bazin 209).

Although Istrati is such a novelist, he does digress into sentimental outpourings of
indignation about injustice or about the value of friendship. However this is not
necessarily a weakness but adds to the documentary character of his pieces because
it heightens the immediacy and involvement of the text. While Chaplin's international
experience was in silent films and therefore universal without difficulties of translation,
Istrati documents the problems of translation in this text.

The dedication suggests a modern media, but this 'film of Istrati's life' recounts
his adventures on his way to France lived in a foreign and seemingly outdated world. A
vagabond, his few possessions include Vie de Socrate [The Life of Socrates] and
Poésies d'Eminesco [Eminesco's Poetry]. These two books, between which he stores
a loaf of bread and a pound of Greek cheese, point to Istrati's Greek and Romanian
heritage. At the same time, they testify to his spiritual nourishment: books.
The narrator wanders through different southern European countries and
witnesses the meddling of cultures taking place in Europe but also among the
emigrants on their way to the United States. Condemned to a life without shelter and
food, being served cat meat for dinner in Naples, he poses the question of the
humanity of a culture, and of the East versus the West. Exile for him is a journey to find
a more humane society, the search for a better life. France, which he knows through
her literature seems promising, but in this story remains out of reach. However, a
"happy ending" is implied, after all this text was written in French and the author was
already a popular author in that country.

As an autobiographical account, Mes départs claims authenticity, engaging the
reader to relive Istrati's journeys with him. An exile from Romania writing in French,
Istrati chronicles his 'departures' from home. Starting with the discovery of language
and literature, he subsequently departs to travel to the country of his dreams—France.
French culture and literature for Istrati represent humanism and culture. The text
incorporates foreign words, unusual markers to set off different parts of the account,
but also of songs and a short musical score3, which disrupt yet also enhance the
realism of the story. The foreign words used (Romanian, Greek, Italian, etc.) increase
in number and are repeated as the text progresses. Sometimes translated or
paraphrased in the text itself, in parentheses or in footnotes, they are left untranslated
in some cases. Often the meaning of these concepts is not clear, nor is it clear to which
language they belong and what is being said. They add flavor to the text, underlining its
restless, exiled tenor. This 'automatic' insertion of foreign words and phrases is
reminiscent of a sort of surrealist method, where the writing is an attempt at
uncensored reflection of experience. It is not clear what it is, but it all must be said.
Almost all of the foreign terms and phrases used are transliterated for the French
reader, integrating them into the phonetic flow of the text. Although the 'otherness' of

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these words is graphically highlighted through italics or quotation marks, this transcription allows the reader to attempt to pronounce the word and emphasizes the aural aspect of the account (for example: *hroube*). This procedure is in line with the oral story-telling tradition of Romania, the author's primary reference and subtext. Istrati also switches between levels of styles, using colloquialisms and archaisms as well as received, sometimes stilted language.

In other cases, as when he is working in the Greek tavern, as during his stay in Naples, the phonetic representation reproduces the merely aural experience of the narrator. Unfamiliar with the language, i.e. Greek or Italian, the narrator only heard those words and was not able to identify the actual word. Here he finds himself in the same situation as the reader: surrounded by a language he doesn't speak, he derives the meaning of words from the context or from their etymological affinity to his native Romanian. In one instance, he errs: seeing the term "Latteria Romana", he interprets it as "Laiterie romaine" (166) [Romanian dairy shop]. Hoping to secure a job with compatriots there, he finds out that it did not mean what he thought, without ever clarifying what it did mean. Istrati reflects this event in French, which he did not speak at that time and thereby translates experience and thought between different languages. As a Romanian, who speaks Greek, he misinterprets Italian and now relates this event to a French audience. This instance not only clearly points to the parallelism of languages or the lack thereof, it also suggests the pretension of any language that things could be said and understood where they really can’t be.

The graphic setting off of foreign inserts through italics, quotes and footnotes gives the text the semblance of a reading in a school text book or of a scholarly text. Indeed, Istrati’s text teaches the reader new words and concepts and thereby makes him or her an exile. *Mes départs* may be read as an introduction to the condition of exile; a text book for Exile 1001. Tellingly, the opening scene of the autobiography

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takes place in Istrati's middle school, which he leaves soon afterwards. School cannot teach him as much about life as his exile experience can. Istrati's texts represent a sort of inverse linguistic exile: rather than spicing up his own language with words (and concepts) adopted from other languages, he infuses the text in the foreign language with words from his first but then also from other languages. Through this practice the language is expanded beyond its limits, as when foreign words or loanwords are assimilated. Although through this 'occasional' usage these words will not become part of the linguistic system, the repetition of some of them throughout the text presupposes a certain learning on the part of the reader. After the first explanation the reader is expected to have memorized the meaning of the term or will be startled and alienated over and over. The average reader will have to turn back to where the word was first used and will then internalize it through its repetition in different contexts. In this process, he or she learns about exile as a linguistically induced state but also as a concrete experience because of what these words represent. Enlarging her vocabulary the reader also experiences the limits of the French language or of language per se, hence exile. The foreign words used in the text fulfill different functions: they represent names of localities or people, of concepts and things that do not exist in the other cultural context. While in some cases equivalents exist, these foreign words serve as reminders, mnemonic devices to conjure up the past. In the case of Romanian words they seem to work like the madeleine for Proust: on Istrati's tongue or under his pen these words evoke memories of home or of home lost.

The word "ghéba" relates to such a rich concept from Istrati's childhood.

The rest of this summer, I used to pass, like usual, at Baldovinesti, among my uncles Anghie and Dimi. With the first, I did the apprenticeship of boy cabaretier. With the second, I was charmed by the last moment of a Kertia who was going to pass into the domain of memories that one forgets never. In the morning, at the fresh, Uncle Dimi went with his rifle to shoot the grives that ate raisin. I followed slyly, like a dog that fears to be sent back to the house. In the evening, I grilled the ears of young corn, I chewed it, I listened to...
concert des cigales, l'appel des grenouilles et l'aboiement des chiens. Après le dîner, si la nuit était belle, j'accompagnais l'oncle au pâturage, où, veillant les chevaux qui broutaient autour de nous, il fumait sans arrêt, causait avec d'autres paysans et consultait l'heure à la position des étoiles, pendant que je dormais, enveloppé dans sa ghéba (15-16).

[The rest of that summer I spent with my uncles Anghel and Dimi in Baldovinesti, as usual. With the one I learned to be a bar waiter. With the other I got drunk on the last glimmers of a freedom that was to fade to unforgettable memories. In the mornings when it was still cool out, Uncle Dimi would leave with his rifle to shoot the thrushes that were eating up his grapes. I would follow him furtively, like a dog afraid to be sent back home. In the evenings I would grill ears of green com, listen to the concert of the crickets, the call of the frogs and the barking dogs. After dinner, if it was a pleasant night, I would accompany my uncle to the pastures where, watching the horses graze around us, he would smoke without stopping, chat with the other peasants and tell the hour by the position of the stars, while I lay sleeping wrapped in his ghéba].

This anecdote resonates with the setting of "Mioritza"—an idyllic pastoral of the innocence and splendor of childhood. No murder, and no sheep, but the uncle and his mysterious ghéba. Where the German translator explains the meaning ("in seinen groben Mantel, die ghéba, eingewickelt" (152) [wrapped into his rough overcoat, the ghéba]), the French infers some kind of garment, but it might also denote the uncle's aura or his lulling talk. At any rate, the ghéba, which is often made from sheepskin (1), represents protection and affection, provides warmth and safety and an extraordinary, profound moment of home. A home the child was used to, a common experience.

While Panait would sleep, his uncle and the other peasants would talk, perhaps tell stories, perhaps even Mioritza's tale. But home is lost with a start too. The narrator's uncle knows that the boy must learn exile before he can find home again:

Il n'y a que chez les étrangers que l'on apprenne à devenir homme (16).

[Only among strangers does one learn how to become a man.]

So he sends him away, proposes he find employment. That for Istrati was his own Ur-experience of violence. The job he finds, the beatings and abuses he suffers there, alert him to the injustice in his world, make him a politically aware person. For Istrati's agenda is political, not exotic, not entertaining.
In Codrescu's version, Mioritza says: "Now you heard my tale, go and always tell it!" (3). Istrati too has interiorized Mioritza's mission, and just a year or so later he becomes the sheep himself, the storytelling, wandering sheep. He incessantly tells the same story, his story, the story of his childhood, of injustices and violence he saw in his and other countries. It was not until much later that he began to translate his stories into writing, into text and into a language that wasn't his own—French.

Another one of these words is the Romanian "hrouba." Its frequent occurrence almost suggests an obsession with the term. This is how the narrator describes his job at the tavern:

A part la répugnante vaisselle, et le fait que la boutique ne fermaît pas le soir, mais à minuit et parfois même à l'aube, il y avait la terrible hrouba, labyrinthe suintant et sans air, creusé «au fond de la terre», épouvante du pauvre gamin forcé d'y descendre cent fois par jour pour un simple verre de vin «couvert de buée», qu'un ivrogne, le sou à la main, lui réclamait sous les yeux du patron. On prétendait que vers minuit, les hrouba sont peuplées de fantômes qui se cachent parmi les tonneaux, éteignent la bougie du garçon et lui sautent sur le dos. Nombre de malheureux s'évanouissent. Certains sont morts d'effroi (20-21).

[Besides the disgusting dishes and the fact that the store didn't close in the evening until midnight—and sometimes even dawn—there was the terrible hrouba, this dank maze without air, dug "at the bottom of the earth," much dreaded by the poor kid forced to go down there a hundred times a day for a simple glass of wine "covered with mist," which some drunkard, penny in hand, had ordered from him in front of the boss. Some people maintained that around midnight the hrouba was inhabited by ghosts, who hid among the barrels, blew out the waiter's candle and jumped him on the back. Many of those poor fellows faint. Some died of fright].

The hrouba represents an unknown realm beyond reality, a horrifying sphere. Sending the child down there is part of his initiation into life. Although his Uncle Anghel explains to him that the candle goes out from lack of air and tells him a few tricks of the trade, the hrouba is still frightening and must be faced again:

En dehors de mon noviciat au lavage des vaisselles, la tâche m'incombait de m'initier entre temps au contenu de deux cents tonneaux de vin, d'eau-de-vie, de liqueurs et même d'huile et de vinaigre; d’apprendre la hrouba, ce labyrinthe souterrain; de me familiariser avec les dizaines de qualités de vins et
de boissons spiritueuses, afin de les reconnaître plus tard à leur couleur et leur parfum.

Je n’oublierai jamais la sauvagerie du caissier qui me bousculait tout le long des quatre-vingts marches humides et estropiées de la petite cave et de l’immense hrouba, alors que je téttonnais à l’aveugle, craignant à chaque seconde de me casser le cou (44).

[Apart from my novitiate at dishwashing, it was my task to teach myself the contents of two hundred casks of wine, spirits, liqueurs and even oil and vinegar; to ‘learn the hrouba,’ this subterranean maze; to become familiar with dozens of different kinds of wines and alcoholic beverages so that I could recognize them later by their color and their aroma.

I will never forget the savageness of the cashier who pushed me down all those eighty humid and mutilated steps to the little cellar and the immense hrouba, so that I wandered in the dark, afraid of breaking my neck any second.]

The hrouba recurs with regularity throughout the first two chapters and it never loses its horror; as the narrator finds out later, it carries health risks too.

La chemise toute trempée, je descendais dans la hrouba glaciale pour satisfaire des clients sans cœur et préparer le terrain à cette tuberculose qui nous attendait vers notre vingtième année (113).

My shirt all drenched, I would go down to the icy hrouba to satisfy the needs of heartless customers and pave the way for the tuberculosis that awaited us all toward our twentieth year.

Its recurring use takes the narrator back to his childhood. The hrouba symbolizes the trauma of having to leave the home where his mother took care of him. The fact that the narrator dwells on this word emphasizes that there may not be a direct French equivalent for hrouba but also underlines the horror the word associated for the narrator as a child and still recalls as an adult. The hrouba is therefore the exact opposite of gheba. It is frightening to go back there and yet unavoidable. While gheba, the epitome of home, is mentioned only once, hrouba occurs eight times. In the last chapter “Pour atteindre la France” the word is not brought up again. Instead something else takes its place a little more than halfway through the chapter: “la salade” [the lettuce], which here means the vegetable but also the field of lettuce, on which the narrator subsisted during the last week of his stay in Naples. This word is a French word, one that has direct equivalents in other languages and can easily be translated.
It signifies the famine the narrator experienced during his involuntary sojourn, his inability to secure a job and to feed himself. Naples, being served cat meat and sent away from authorities to whom the albergatore turns for help, implants a deep-seated doubt in the narrator, a doubt about the humanity of the Western world. While the hrouba is a specific, untranslatable Romanian horror, the poverty and hunger signified by the lettuce are universal.

The word ‘safféa’ seems to function more on a level with the Greek terms that mark the narrator’s transition to adulthood, a more reflective, detached stage. Not only does it introduce a concept so utterly foreign that it needs more explanation than others, it also takes on a life of its own, driving the story ahead. "Safféa,” which Romanians consider a Turkish word, describes a particular superstition or practice, where the first coin spent by the first customer determines the business for the rest of the day. Through this we learn about the fatalistic outlook of people, about the sort of camaraderie between customer and patron, about the camaraderie of adults versus the children. The “safféa” appears in different contexts, as the characters in the passage play with the term and are therefore aware of its unique and constructed nature. Later in the passage, the word is assumed to be assimilated, if not into the French language, into the reader’s knowledge and system of reference: the narrator presupposes the knowledge of this idea when he uses it in a compound noun, a composite of French and Romanian (‘sou-safféa’). He then quickly introduces the next Romanian term (‘sacadjj’). Spilling Romanian words and concepts, the narrator reproduces his exile, emphasizing the fundamental difference between himself and his reader. Yet, he also takes his readers with him into exile, forcing them to step back from their own language which they take for granted and to reflect on its failure to communicate.

In another instance, the narrator uses the term "bank-notes" as if it was a French word, even in a sort of metaphorical context:
Il manipulait les marmites, comme le banquier les bank-notes, et ne m'honora que d'un coup d'œil bref, mais suffisant (26).

[He handled the pots like a banker the bills and only gave me a brief but sufficient look].

In this unconscious slip of the tongue (pen) the Romanian word 'bancnota' finds its way into the language of exile. This term itself is derived originally from either the Italian or the German term and is a loan word in the Romanian. Denoting a real object, a bill, which differs from country to country and from culture to culture, this intruder into the French highlights once again the foreignness of the narrator and of his experience. The word banknote also manifests the exchange of cultures and globalization that has taken place. If read as an English word, "bank-note" would designate English as the language of capitalism; an impression supported by the reference in English to the travel agency Thos. Cook and Son (170), to the English (or Americans?),

ces éternels chercheurs de bonnes occasions à travers tous les continents (191).

[who are continuously on the lookout for bargains across all continents.]

America is also the promised land, to which all the other emigrants are traveling. The different languages in this text have very clear functions. Romanian is the intimate language of home, Greek the language of the father, of the masculine world. French is the language of literature and humanity, which is unreachable in this text, although it is written in French itself. Italian designates utmost poverty and inhumanity. Even the French language does not seem fit, "not big enough," to express everything that there is to be said.

The text abounds with words in other languages: Romanian, Greek, Italian, and, occasionally, German and English. The ease and yet uneasiness with which the narrator moves between languages documents Istrati's in-between state of mind, that of an exile, where cultures, ways of perceiving, words and thoughts are intermixed. The
spaces he fills with foreign words or expressions translated from a foreign language indicate the spaces between languages; but also the spaces inherent in language per se: incomprehensible words point to that which cannot be said. Self-conscious of its language, *Mes départs* refers to an unknown and mysterious subtext, the Romanian culture of the author. Emphasizing that this life was not lived with a French mind, Istrati inscribes his own foreignness, his exile into the text, reminding the reader of his or her own foreignness to the text. The text underscores the fundamental difference between the author and his reader. Exile is also experienced on another level: the narrator leaves home by exploring the world of language and literature. Even if returning may be possible, home is lost forever. Only writing can create a sort of Ersatz-home, one that consists of all the exiles and languages constituting a life.

The song lyrics strewn into the text suggest the cultural mix and underline the authenticity of what is being said. This music points to the humanness of the experience but also to the humaneness of the actors, a humanity that the narrator seeks and finds in songs. Ultimately, a musical score is cited with a phonetic reproduction of the lyrics, which are “grafted” into the narrator’s mind without knowing what these words mean (nor what language they are in) (*Mes départs* 177). This leaves only one conclusion: When language fails, music can perhaps express human experience. When words are unsuited and when some things cannot be said, only music can speak. Exile hence is experienced double-fold: it is the condition of all humans and of all writers in the world but it is more pronounced and obvious in actual exile. Through the usage of foreign words the narrator inscribes his own foreignness into the text but he also reminds the reader of his or her own foreignness toward that which is being described. Exile becomes palpable for the reader. It opens up a whole unfathomable, unspeakable world.
For this study, I have considered the original edition of *Mes départs* from 1928 as well as the re-edition from 1968, which differs slightly in layout and paragraphing. The German version *Tage der Jugend* was originally translated by Karl Kransky in 1931 and re-edited by Heinrich Stiehler in 1986, where the book was included in volume six, subsumed under the title *Die Schwammfischer* [The Sponge Fishermen].

This German, as indicated by the different title, sets a different tone than the original. In the original, the narrator’s oral style finds its expression in the phonetic transcription of foreign terms with French spelling, which corresponds to the French custom to pronounce foreign words the French way. At the same time the original renders in phonetic French what the reader has to imagine in Romanian with a foreign accent. In the German version, syntax errors and Romanian interferences from the French are corrected and the correct Romanian or Italian spelling is used. In so doing, the text becomes more foreign to the German reader than if the translator had tried to adapt the spelling to German usage. This is in line with German norm though. The German translator includes a list of pronunciation tips for the Romanian terms as well as the declaration that Istrati’s imitation of the Romanian pronunciation with the help of French spelling was not adopted for the translation but rather that contemporary Romanian spelling was used. The German translation is odd as a literary text because it uses regional and archaic expressions and it disenchants and demystifies the text. It is a thoroughly researched annotated text, an almost scholarly study. It has therefore been extremely helpful to prepare the English translation, even if in some cases only to disagree with its interpretation. By reinserting the foreign words into their foreign linguistic states of being the translator complies with the foreignizing tradition in the German. He therefore normalizes the text by foreignizing it.
In my own translation (see appendix) I have made the effort to maintain the particular foreign flavor of the text and have only translated the foreign terms when the original did. I would describe my strategy for the English translation as foreignizing too, yet in a more radical sense: I have imitated the original text in the impression it produces on a French reader, which is exactly phoneticizing the foreign words with the English spelling. I have rendered the text into idiomatic English unless the original is marked by archaic or colloquial terms or by literal renditions of Romanian expressions. I have not added any more footnotes because that would violate the integrity of the text, and because so much of it is obvious from the context. Phonetic renditions of Mavromati's broken French/Romanian I have decided to render in standard English without imitating a Greek accent.

This text is not only very dearly a text written about exile, it is written in exile and therefore written with the mind of a translator. That means that everything Istrati wrote was a translation, although the text very obviously points out that not everything can be translated because some terms remain in the original and are used in their original meaning. Exile writing, as I have demonstrated above, is like a translation. It is therefore interesting to note that the first two chapters in the book “Fin d’enfance. Premiers pas dans la vie” and “Capitaine Mavromati” are actual translations from the Romanian. As Monique Jutrin-Kiener has noted these two parts were first published in Trecut și Viitor (1925) [Past and Future ] (268). While Istrati translated some of his works from the original French into Romanian, he translated this from Romanian into French. Yet there is no textual or stylistic difference between the different chapters. The first two parts are grounded more in the Romanian language because they are set in a Romanian milieu. But that fact that there is no difference between the modes of the two parts this confirms the idea that writing in exile is translating.
Istrati translated in several ways: foreign words into French spelling, oral language into written phoneticizing French, from the oral mode of a born storyteller into the written mode of a "prosateur français." Heinrich Stiehler has characterized Istrati's aesthetic as follows:


[Panait's literary prose grows from the confrontation of association and foreign language, written language. The French bridles his spontaneity, forces him to self-control. But we are missing criteria to evaluate where he distorts and where he improves. Later he is going to be reproached that his translations of his own works into Romanian lack “the magic of poetry”, because translating is adverse to his eruptive writing. Yet for the moment his French text have not been anything else: a transfer word by word, form by form; without a fixed shore, which is to be reached nonetheless].

Istrati declared himself to be a cosmopolitan, someone who wanted to speak all languages and who treated all humans alike. His explicit Romanianness manifest in his texts but also in his persona, is not a contradiction of terms at all. Rather, as in the case of Heine, the two modes enable and reinforce each other.

Analysis

Entering the world of language and literature also means a maturation; the boy not only leaves his physical home but, although still in his hometown, goes to a foreign land. That exile is that of another language and culture the seed of which was already planted just by knowing about his father; it is also the general exile of those “in the know” in general, those who have recognized the limitations of language and what it can express. It is also the exile of every writer. However, little Panaît wanted to learn the language among Greeks exactly to overcome his exile of portending but not
knowing, to get to his roots, i.e. home. This process does result in a new home among the Greek immigrants, yet at the same time a new exile—the exile that those in the know feel in a world of ignorance and which separates the boy from his Romanian peers.

In fact it is exactly this wonder in front of the language that is at the heart of that of the text. Learning Greek, the boy realizes that he does not know his own language that well.

—Capitaine Mavromati, qu’est-ce que cela pourrait bien vouloir dire: *intrinsèque*? demandai-je un après-midi, en lui montrant le journal (84-85).

['Captain Mavromati, what do you think this could mean: *intrinsic*? I asked one afternoon, showing him the paper.]

The narrator introduces the dictionary that Mavromati gives him as “la bible” [the Bible] of the Romanian language. This is a factual mistake: the Greek *vivlio*, which means book, and *vivlos*, which means Bible, are confused and merged into one. In his contorted French proposition, Mavromati used the word *vivlio* correctly as meaning “book.”

*Ma ézista oon ‘vivlio’ qui sait toute la lingua roumana (85).*

*[But there is a ‘biblio’ that knows the entire Romanian language.]*

The contrast between the correct transcription in Mavromati’s enunciation and the persistent use of the word “bible” suggests that this is a mistake the narrator made as a young boy, who had just barely learned Greek. It also underlines the importance of this dictionary, which is the “Bible” of the Romanian Language and became the “Bible” of Istrati’s youth.⁴

*Dorénavant, la sainte ‘bible’ de mon adolescence,—le livre d’heures que je n’ai plus lâché dix ans durant et que j’ai sauvé de toutes les catastrophes,—devait m’accompagner sur tous mes sanglants chemins et devenir, souvent, dans une existence d’enfant tourmenté, mon unique source de bonheur spirituel (87)*

*[From then on, this sacred ‘Bible’ of my youth—the prayer book I held on to for ten years and which I saved through all disasters—was to accompany me on all*
my bloodied paths and often was to become, during the existence of this
tormented child, my only source of spiritual happiness."

This "Bible" then fulfills all the functions scripture has in the lives of the religious, it
provides solace and guidance. The confusion of the two Greek terms is methodological
and must therefore be translated this way too. The German translator decided to
correct this error:

Aber es gibt ein biblion, das kann die ganze rumänische Sprache (193).

[But there is a biblion which knows the entire Romanian language.]

He uses biblion the first three times and then switches to "Bibel." While the German
pronunciation of biblion resonates with the term "Bibel," it remains an enigmatic object.
The translator's insistence on the correct Greek term and the then abrupt shift to
"Bibel" suggests that biblion does indeed mean Bible. The narrator's identification with
the young boy's state of mind, his misunderstanding and wondering, is an effective way
to invite the reader on this journey from not-knowing into knowing. The German
translator's impulse to correct the original changes the persona of the narrator and the
tone of the text. In the original the narrator is not omniscient, but rather grows up with
the boy, lets the reader grow up with him. In addition, the correct meaning of vivlio in
this case is not relevant for the text, and the German translation does not even
succeed in imparting that either.

In Greek Captain Mavromati is overdetermined by the use of the Greek word for
"black." His name being "Mavromati" the narrator calls him "mavri matias" [black eyes]
in playing on his name. Mavromati's ship, which he lost in bankruptcy, was called Mavri
Thalassa. The narrator does not translate this term, but "mavri" means "black" and
"thalassa" means "sea." Leaving that name in the original adds another moment of
exoticness. When Mavromati dies: "far from his tumultuous Thalassa," the term is
equivocal; it refers to the Captain's old ship since it is printed in italics but it also means sea and so the captain died far from his sea.

Istrati mixes different levels, such as formal and colloquial language, archaic terms, literal translations of idiomatic expressions and dictums from Romania.

De lui, je n'ai encaissé, en seize mois de service, qu'une seule taloche, pas bien lourde, en des circonstances amusantes que je vais narrer toute à l'heure (41-42).

[I didn't catch but one rap in the head from him in sixteen months, it wasn't a very bad one either, under quite funny circumstances that I will narrate shortly].

Another stylistic means is the usage of metaphors and clichés that are slightly different than the common clichés in the French language. This is due to Romanian interferences, which spice up the narrative and make it more vivid. Yet the differences do not impair comprehension. Such Romanian structures are evident in most expressions with "nez" [nose] instead of "face": "jeter à son nez" (125) [I took off my apron, rolled it into a ball and tossed it as high as I could under his nose]. The locution "son nez dans le mien" (140) [literally: his nose in mine] I have rendered as "his nose close to mine" because I felt that here the exact equivalent of the Romanian would be too awkward and would interfere with comprehension. The German translator explicating the original by saying "und starrte mir ins Gesicht" (225) [was staring in my face]. This fact slightly changed the cultural implication; where in Romania and other Latin countries people tend to interact more physically with one another (therefore the expression "nose in nose," which must be with their faces close together), the German translator translated the situation into his own cultural context. Similar expressions are used several times, for example "un jeune émigrant me lance dans le nez" (145) [a young emigrant launches in my face] (again neutralized in the German "fragt mich mit einem Male" (228) [asks me suddenly]), etc.
When Panait is promoted to become the cashier, his mother is "au neuvième ciel" (121) [literally: in the ninth heaven], again an interference from the Romanian because the French locution goes "au septième ciel" [in the seventh heaven]. In my translation the Romanian number "9" coincides with the English usage [on cloud nine]. In this case the German translator has preserved the foreignizing element by translating "im neunten Himmel" [literally: in the ninth heaven] instead of the seventh according to the German linguistic cliché. Another example of Istrati’s uncommon usage of language is "la forêt de saules tout endeuillée" (Mes départs 28), which I have translated quite literally as "the forest of willows all in mourning;" the standard French expression to suggest weeping willows is "saule pleureur" as translated in the German version directly as "der Wald der Trauerweiden" (Tage der Jugend 159) [a forest of weeping willows]. Heinrich Stiehler has pointed out that Istrati tends to employ words which are relics of agricultural work (56) such as "éventrer les mers" (Mes départs 108) [to rip through the sea], which in my view is an interference from the Romanian.

Problems for the translation occurred for example in the use of the word "Manant" as a nickname for the cruel, choleric cashier. The word "manant" is an old French word with connotations of peasantry and backwardness that date to feudal times. The German "Lümmel" does not render any of those connotations because it is simply a facetious way of saying "guy," an ironic term to scold a young man. For the English I have opted for "Hick" because it seemed to be the least specific to region and era and also not as heavily politically connoted as for example "redneck." "Hick" lacks the historic dimension of the French term, the particular innuendo of class that runs deep in Europe and that may account for the vengeful attitude of the "Manant."

Interjections are often left in the original: "Deh!" "Mba!" "Eh," etc. In the case of the word "kouglof" I have decided to normalize the term to "gugelhupf," which is the normal Swiss/Alsatian term. It is ironic that Istrati includes a disclaimer in a footnote.
that he offers no guarantee for the spelling of the name Saghalien, where for everything else he pays not attention to the correct spelling. When he is found aboard without a ticket, Istrati's voyage stops in Naples. There, all attempts at earning money to continue his journey fail; the narrator lives in utter poverty. Finally, he travels aboard the "Hohenzollem" to Alexandria, Egypt, instead, again as a stowaway and this time helped by other emigrants.

The locution "faire la diligence", which the German translator rendered as "Eilpost," is a locally idiosyncratic expression or one that was common at Istrati's time, it may also be an expression coined and used only at the tavern. In trying to preserve the double meaning of diligence, I have rendered this expression literally as "to do the diligence." The name for the boy's first friend Moche Cazatoura, which is explained as père ruine [Father Ruin], the German translates literally as "Väterchen Wrack" [little father wreck].

Another central term in the third part of the book is the term "palikaraki." When it is first used, the narrator explains it in parentheses as "petit vaillant" (140) [little brave one]; however the German text says "alles auf eine Karte setzen" [to put one's stakes on one card, fig. to put all one's eggs in one basket] (225). The word takes on its own life, employed by the narrator to designate any kind of vagabond or vagrant, any with a lot of pleasure to himself. It seems that the narrator has made up his own meaning for the word and uses it at will. What happens is that indeed the text is taken out of the French language—instead a new poetic idiom is fashioned out of all available languages together. In a way, this strategy follows suit with Walter Benjamin's idea of 'pure language.' He forges a language, not unlike Celan as we will later see, by creating his own personal idiom, which in Istrati's case is his own Esperanto.
Context

Istrati’s procedure to integrate words from foreign languages into the text inverses and subverts a not uncommon praxis: after all some of the great Russian writers would cite French in their texts. L. Tolstoy for example in his Volna i Mir [War and Peace] has his characters say entire phrases in French, which are then translated in footnotes. In the Russian, with its Cyrillic alphabet, the effect is the more startling because the French phrases stand out at first glance, an effect Istrati imitates by italicizing most of his foreign words and phrases. Vladimir Nabokov also frequently cited French or German phrases in his English texts, signs of his character’s erudition and sophistication, a nonchalant way of showing off. Istrati’s role model Romain Rolland himself inserted German phrases and text fragments into his Jean-Christophe (1904-1912) to illustrate his theory about national characters, and to make the text more authentic. However, usually these insertions are extracted from a language that is considered a cultural and cultured language—like French. In Rolland’s case this method is already used for a language (and a culture), that at least at the time, was considered slightly inferior to French, German. In Istrati’s texts this is more radical: not only are these insertions mainly from a language that internationally has had no high currency at all—Romanian—but he does so in basically agrammatical form. In addition one often cannot know what language the author relates. The words he uses do not exist that way in any language because they are adapted to a phonetic French spelling. Istrati’s style has therefore a political dimension too—he overthrows common notions about the value of languages and cultures and again takes the side of the underrepresented. In italics or inverted commas he highlights foreign language expressions as he heard them in the streets of Braila or Naples.

Istrati’s style is influenced by Jean Christophe as well as his technique of the roman fleuve is inspired by Rolland. Romain Rolland compared Panait Istrati to the...
Danube, to its numerous curves and loops (77). Yet rather than the author it is his work that is much driven by the river. In *Mes départs* for example the narrator goes to the Danube for solace and contemplation: his choice for that particular Greek tavern was influenced by its closeness to the river. The river is also a place to say goodbye— to his childhood, to Captain Mavromati, and although it is not explicit in the text, the narrator probably left Braila from the port to start his years of nomadic wandering. The river also has a symbolic function for the boy, "le Danube éternel des enfances millénaires!" (105) [the eternal Danube of thousands of years of childhood!]. Describing the river as being in "en révolte titanique" (103) [in a gigantic revolt!], as an "cet implacable révolutionnaire!" (123) [this inexorable revolutionary!] the narrator associates constancy and strength with the Danube. The river in a way serves as a character model for Istrati, he strives to be as forceful and ardent, as unwavering and true to himself as this river. The form of this autobiographical cycle itself has been noted to be a roman fleuve, and as the river the text weaves and meanders its way through Istrati’s life, digresses a bit to a particular Romanian word or custom or an instance of social injustice the narrator wishes to highlight. The Danube, as a river that crosses many countries in Central and Southeastern Europe, is the symbolic European river. The countries this river connects are represented in some way in the text, which takes on a very pan-European aspect. The gigantic Danube described is reminiscent of the journey undertaken in Apollinaire’s poem "Vendémiaire" from the volume *Alcools. *While the narrator in *Mes départs* declares himself to be a "cosmopolitan" this refers mostly to Europe and Northern Africa, attainable places at the time. His writing style however may be influenced by what Lucian Blaga called "mioritic space."

Le rythme montant ou bien les notes suraiguës et chaotiques, lui suggèrent une mer houleuse avec ses alternances de montées et d’abîmes. Sur un plan spirituel on retrouve le thème du mouvement ondulatoire qui accompagne la rêverie. Ce thème, pourrait-il être considéré comme une dimension de la
spiritualité roumaine, mioritique dans le sens conféré par Blaga? (Dolinescu 81).

[The rising rhythm, or just as well the overly shrill or chaotic notes, suggest a rough sea with its changes of rising and falling. On a spiritual level one finds the theme of an undulating movement which accompanies daydreams. Could this theme be considered a dimension of Romanian, mioritic spirituality in the sense ascribed by Blaga?]

The political intention of the author is evident in certain allusions, for example the Dreyfus affair (77), the three Jewish professors who edited the dictionary and who had to go into exile. Georges Barthouil has put forth that Istrati’s political ardency was inconsistent and had to do with his “instable, nervous character.” Indeed, Istrati could be called an anarchist because while he denounces injustice and abuse he does not promote a clear political agenda. However, in terms of literature that is a strength rather than a weakness. Directly propagandistic literature is at best short-lived, and already Istrati walks a fine line with his emotional tirades interrupting the text. Toward the end of the book, as the narrator’s energy wanes from starvation these overbearing outpourings disappear too. The text therefore mimics its contents.

Auto-references in his text point to Istrati’s other texts, suggesting that really all of his texts must be read together to understand what the author meant to say. In all of Istrati’s texts physical exile replaces exile at home, it becomes a wandering without arrival but with the constant hope for it. Istrati attempts to recreate home in the new language—a foreign country, doubly foreign for it does not exist anymore.

Notes

1 According to Romanian readers, the Romanian versions sound flat and dull. The magic and unusual texture of the French cannot be translated back. This then confirms Walter Benjamin’s statement that translations cannot be translated again; at least not into the language from which they were translated in the first place.

2 The unusual syntax of the French, normally “yeux noirs”, warrants a translation along the lines of “eyes black.”

3 This two-line score is accompanied by words in an unknown language, “musique exacte et paroles incompréhensibles” [exact music and incomprehensible lyrics]. Istrati
claims that he does this for himself but also to soften people who may have known mostly cruel songs. For the music-literate reader, this is a very immediate and sensorily appealing way to convey culture, and therefore exile. Where words fail, there is music in order to communicate.

4 The German standard dictionary which records usage and establishes norms is entitled the *Duden*, after its founder. When this author was a young child, she actually thought that the *Bibel* and the *Duden* were both named after their authors, an inference from their similar functions too.

5 Named after a German dynasty, from which all Romanian kings after 1866 descended.
5. SAMUEL BECKETT: FIN DE PARTIE.

Considered a French as much as an Irish author, Samuel Beckett was a bilingual writer but also a translator. Translating his own texts into the respective other language, he utilized translation, self-translation, as a major creative tool. Taking control over this process of translation and its results, Beckett challenged and voided received notions of what is an original and what a translation, as well as traditional notions of the role of the writer or of the translator. He also proved that auto-translation is possible. As a matter of fact, his dual-language works are often both considered originals.

Biography and Theater

Born into a protestant family in the suburbs of Dublin in 1906, Beckett attended prestigious Trinity College there. From 1928 until 1930 he was Lector for English at the École Normale Supérieure in the Rue d'Ulm in Paris. It was during this time that he became close to James Joyce and his family and worked with the novelist as his assistant. In 1930 Beckett accepted a post as a Lecturer at his Dublin alma mater but soon decided to quit his academic career. He traveled through Germany for several months before he settled in France in 1937. During the German occupation the writer became active in the Résistance movement and later moved to the non-occupied zone to avoid arrest. The end of the war led to stints with the Irish Red Cross and as a translator in a French military hospital. In 1945 Beckett took up residence in Paris again, this time for good. His first novel Murphy (1938) as well as some essays were written in English. His first French novel Mercier et Camembert (1946) remained unpublished until 1970, but the subsequent trilogy Molloy (1951), Malone meurt [Malone Dies] (1951) and L’Innommable [The Unnamable] (1953) was only outdone by the success of his play En attendant Godot [Waiting for Godot], which premiered in
1953. The following plays, radioplays, and novels, Watt (1953), All That Fall [Tous ceux qui tombent] (1956), Fin de partie [Endgame] (1956), La dernière bande [Krapp’s Last Tape] (1958), Happy Days [Oh les beaux jours] (1961), etc. made him world-famous. Beckett was awarded the Nobel Prize of Literature in 1969. He became involved in stage productions of his works in the 1960’s and directed several performances himself. In 1961 the writer married his lifelong partner Suzanne Deschevaux-Dumesnil. The writer continued to be a prolific novelist, playwright and translator in both languages until his death in 1989.

With his plays En attendant Godot (1953) and Fin de partie (1957), Beckett wrote himself into the Théâtre de l’Absurde [Theater of the Absurd], which is said to have been initiated by the premiere of Eugène Ionesco’s La cantatrice chauve [The Bald Soprano] (1950). Although Martin Esslin coined the name for this way of doing theater, the various playwrights never intended to form a movement or a school. In retrospect Jean Genet’s Les Bonnes (1947) has also been included under this term. Other examples often cited are Arthur Adamov’s L’invasion [The Invasion], Boris Vian’s Les bâtisseurs de l’Empire [The Builders of the Empire State], other Ionesco plays such as La leçon [The Lesson], Rhinocéros and Genet’s Les nègres [The Blacks] are often mentioned. While these authors have different styles and approaches, they have in common that

the theater of the absurd depicts the absurd with absurd means [. . .] In the antirealistic new theater, it is not so much a matter of what happens (even if often very unexpected things happen), but rather the possible meaning of what is happening. The progression of events is not logical and sequential, but arbitrary and beyond the realm of causality. The author deliberately keeps the audience on the outside, disoriented, incapable of identifying with characters who cannot be placed in a ‘situation’ (Bishop 1011).

This avantgarde movement soon became accepted into the mainstream, and to this day the plays have been performed with remarkable success.
It is only mildly surprising that most of these playwrights were in linguistic exile in France and in the French language or, even if native French, they were in exile in some way or other. 1 Exile is a crucial element in Absurd Theater, where the exile of humans in the world is shown on stage. With their sensibility for the foreign language, these authors expose the language for its prefabricated character. Dialogue no longer serves communication. Absurd theater uses a traditional medium (theater) and traditional (grammatically correct) language to produce an alienation effect. These works play with death and mutilation, and language itself has become play.

Especially exile in a foreign language, as demonstrated earlier, offers a new perspective, a destabilization of one's assuredness and comfort within one's own native tongue as well as one's being. What can be more absurd for an individual than having her language fail her? Or rather, what can be more absurd than perceiving everyone around not realizing how they are being failed? In Ionesco's Cantatrice chauve [Bald Soprano], the characters perform meaningless dialogues ad nauseam, caught in stock phrases. While conversing incessantly, they are unable to communicate. And what can be more absurd than viewing as an outsider how individuals suffer from but also conspire in the status quo? In Jean Genet's Les Bonnes [The Maids] for example, the maids act out their resentment towards their mistress, their resentment about the fact that she is the mistress and they are the maids. In role plays they imitate the respective other person by emulating her speech; yet although the roles are switched and they could stage whichever scenario they would wish, they enact the power structure experienced in real life to death, literally, for one of the maids is killed. Beckett's agenda is indeed similar. The breakdown of communication, which is really just a symptom of the inability to relate, to empathize—in short to be human(e), is evident in the constant babble. The author shows off pairs of individuals who vaguely
search for meaning in their life, or simply put up with the meaninglessness of it all. Since these plays are absurd, they are not in a realist tradition.

A Western European through and through, Irish-French Beckett must have been especially alienated. At the same time he was privileged: he could always return home. His move to France was a conscious decision for a new environment and language, a reaction to a "disgust" with his own language and culture: 'I preferred France during the war to Ireland in peace,' he said (qtd. in Beausang 563). He left home because its peace and coziness were deceptive and stifling. As a disciple of James Joyce he started writing his first works in English before he became a French writer. Whereas exiles as a rule turn to a language more widely spoken than their own, Beckett left English, "the lingua franca of the 20th century" (Astro 978) to turn to French. As an Irishman, his rapport with the English language was ambivalent, and the French, with only one standard, had the strictly regulated form necessary to show off the hollowness of any language. He opted for French because he would have to be more disciplined and self-conscious, because it had the right ‘weakening’ effect (978). Attracted by its cultural prestige and heritage, Beckett, however, used French in a way it had not been used in literature before. His French is simple and idiomatic, but alienated and exiled within the French language, a practice he later applied to English, too. His driving force was the desire to express that which cannot be expressed. Like Tzara, Beckett corrupted the language and made its emptiness known but he does so without undoing its structures. It is the play itself that is absurd and when and how language is functions in it. Beckett's writing concerns itself with the repetitiousness and therefore the routine of human existence, where words and actions become devoid of meaning.

Throughout his life, he wrote in both French and English and translated his texts from one language to another, sometimes with the help of collaborators. His most
famous texts, including *Fin de partie* (1956), were composed in French. The German translation was completed in collaboration with Elmar Tophoven, published in 1957, and served partially for the translation into his native English. This translation was challenging, to the point that he stated in that same year: "My feeling, strong, at the moment, is to leave it in French for at least a year" (*Disjectae* 107). George Steiner commended this translation:

> The transfer is flawless (except for the enigmatic addition or omission, depending on which text came first, of the engraver). Yet the differences in cadence, in tone, in association are considerable. The English slopes to a dying fall via long o sounds; the French spirals to a final nervous pitch. Set the two passages side by side, and a curious effect follows. Their claustral bleakness remains, but the measure of distance between them is sufficient to create a sense of liberation, of almost irresponsible alternative (499).

Due to organizational problems the play was first performed in its French original in London. The English *Endgame* premiered in 1958.

Self-Translation

"Es ist ein Zeichen von Unglück, sagt der Kosmopolit, wenn man sich selbst übersetzen muß" Ursula Kardorff about Manès Sperber.

> What is at stake in self-translation? If an author translates his own text, this translation is mostly a reinterpretation of the original text. Since the different languages carry different affective values and symbolic factors for the individual, a self-translation is, according to Robert Tanzmeister, a "ré-écriture," a Re-Konstruktion" [a 'ré-écriture,' a re-construction] (6). Naturally, every translation is a rewriting, but in the case of a self-translation the translator does not feel obligated to the original, to its wording. The improvement upon the original text, which is problematic in translation, is almost inevitable when an author translates himself. Robert Lafont, who writes in Breton, deems auto-translation impossible because "Il faut une vie pour se faire écrivain en une seule langue" (63) [It takes one life to become a writer in just one language.] He proposes the equation "auto-traduction=auto-trahision" [self-
translating= self-betrayal] (65), which plays on the commonplace Italian expression 

tradittore tradittore [translator traitor]. French writer and translator Georges-Arthur
Goldsmith, who writes some of his manuscripts in German before elaborating the
final French version, also contends that self-translation is impossible, unless, he says,
one writes like Joseph Breitbach,

> aber der schreibt eine fleischlose Sprache, da kann er sich das leisten, die ist
> so präzise, so genau, er hat es im Deutschen schon aus dem Französischen
> geschrieben, da geht das (39).

[but he writes such a meatless language, so he can afford this, it is so precise,
so exact, he already wrote it out of the French language in German, so it
works.]

In Beckett's case it worked too, and that is partially due to his meatless, lean style,
which developed out of his distance to the French as a non-native writer.

On another occasion, Beckett suggested that, for him, English was overloaded
with associations and allusions; his work in English throughout the 1930's bristled with
erudite and literary allusions and what he called "Anglo-Irish exuberance and
automatisms" (Knowlson 323). Marjorie Perloff has put forth that the often discussed
"right weakening effect" in French was also promising because his writing in English
was charged with references to canonical English literature, which he had memorized
as a schoolboy, such as Keats, Tennyson, Coleridge (36). Writing without style then
means, writing without instant recourse and inklings of traditional literature. Beckett
was of course also well-read in French but the distance was greater there. As an
Anglo-Irish writer, who was neither completely English nor completely Irish, exiling
himself in France was a natural consequence (Perloff 36).

Helen Astbury has attempted to demonstrate that the very linguistic structure of
the French enabled Beckett to find his taut, reduced style in either language. However
this alone is not a convincing argument because there are just as many examples
where the French needs more explicitness. Samuel Beckett chose to write in French

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and later in English because of the distance his exile perspective allowed him, the 
rationality and consciousness with which he needed to tackle his work. Whenever he 
felt he was getting too comfortable in the one language, he switched to the other one. 
Although the author declared that he opted for French because "I just felt like it."
(Fletcher 202) this was an operation with its halts and bumps too, where he had to 
learn to clearly separate the two. John Fletcher has noticed "gallicismes" in Beckett's 
early English prose texts, which the author later corrected, and vice versa he also 
noticed anglicisms in Beckett's French.

Critics, such as Brian Fitch, have noted that his translations often turned into 
revisions rather than mere translations. According to Fitch, Beckett translates his texts 
to further alienate himself from his own texts, and the texts from themselves. He 
considers Beckett therefore a bilingual writer, who writes in two languages (238). A 
bilingual writer he is, for he occasionally switched back to composition in English, yet 
his translations are first of all just that: translations. Since the new text is based on the 
original one and worked in the target-language, it is still primarily a translation and 
functions as one. Rather than revisions, Lance Butler has viewed the new versions 
only as translations. He sees a reason for the incommensurability of the two versions 
in the incommensurability of the two languages (Butler 127). Any omissions or 
deletions do not stem from the "internal imperative to revise earlier work," says Butler, 
but are due to external requirements of language, culture and self-consistency (127). 
Beckett was aware of the simultaneous possibility and impossibility of translation, of 
the habits and patterns in different languages, which warrant a profoundly different 
structure of the text. The knowledge of and involvement in his mother tongue were 
obstacles in this process. Beckett feared that the translation "will inevitably be a poor 
substitute for the original (the loss will be much greater than from the French to the 
English 'Godot")" (Disjecta 107).
Since Beckett was author and translator of the same text, he was able to take more liberties than any other translator could have. Self-translation is motivated by the intent of the author, whereas an ordinary translator can only interpret, assume and infer the intent of the author. He was able to find alternative ways of translating a particular expression, to omit or add details if he deemed them dispensable or appropriate to make his point. The author-translator in this case is psychologically much better off than any other translator; there is never any doubt for him about the basic intent of the text, and if there is he never feels accountable to anyone but himself. Beckett had been a published translator long before he started translating his own works. While his self-translating was born out of necessity and out of the desire to control his work, he also recognized the creative potential inherent in this procedure and utilized it for his art. In Ruby Cohn's words, to translate was "Beckett's method of improving his own artisanal" (613). Self-translation symbolically erases the original as an original, from which a translation into that language could be made. In a way, the new English version obliterates the French as an original for another English translation. It is most likely that no one else will ever undertake to translate that text into English again, for this version implicitly bears the author's stamp of approval even more radically than an authorized translation. It creates two originals that are commonly considered equal, and many speakers of English regard the English version *Endgame* as an original rather than a translation.

Beckett's constant elaboration of his own texts, his supervision of the German translation and then subsequent English translation affects the finality of his own work. The conclusive performative act inherent in writing and translation, the one with which the author/translator says "This is it!" does not occur. Or rather while it does occur, it is never quite final. Instead Beckett kept honing and fine-tuning his texts. He thereby prolonged the process inherent in theater, where each staging and even each
performance, founded on the readings and interpretations of many individuals, is an explicit reenactment of the text.

The translation is a twofold challenge 1) The translation (including puns, alliterations, etc.) into a different language per se, 2) the translation into the mother tongue, which will evoke more emotional and intimate level than the other language.

According to Antoine Berman Beckett’s texts in French all sound like translations:

This foreign French has a close relation with the French in translation. In the one case, there are foreigners writing in French and thus imprinting our language with the seal of strangeness; in the other, there are foreign works rewritten in French, inhabiting our language and thereby also marking our language with their strangeness. Beckett is the most striking example of the proximity of these two kinds of French, since he has written some of his works in French and himself translated others from English. In a good deal of these cases, these works belong to a bilingual or multilingual space, in which French occupies a peculiar place: that of a minority language, either dominated or dominant, and confronted in any case with other languages (193).

In comparison with his English, John Banville finds Beckett’s French style formally correct and elegant but also strangely flat, almost boring. His English-Irish style on the other hand is always biting, cutting and vigorous (24). But this is exactly the reason for which Beckett said he wanted to write in French, because “c'était ma chance d'être plus pauvre” [this was my chance to be poorer] (Janvier 36).

Le choix du français a correspondu au désir de se rapprocher du presque rien, éviter les privilèges et les prestiges du beau parleur, cesser d’être poète, ne plus poser dans la langue, refuser cet exhibitionnisme inévitable du grand écrivain (Claudel en français, Rilke en allemand, ou Joyce en anglais). C’était pour abandonner toute arrogance, pour être le plus simple, le plus démuni en somme qu’il s’est transporté avec armes et bagages dans le rythme, dans la vocalité et dans l’un peu teme—par rapport à son anglais—du français (Janvier 36).

[The choice of French corresponded to the desire to approach the almost nothing, to avoid the privileges and the prestiges of the nice talker, to quit being a poet, to not pose in the language anymore, to refuse the exhibitionism of the great writer (Claudel in French, Rilke in German, or Joyce in English). In order to abandon all arrogance, to be the simplest, the most disarmed overall, he transported himself with bag and bagage into the rhythm, the vocality and the somewhat dull—compared to his English—of the French.]
Michael Edwards thinks it is significant that Beckett chose French as his language of expression, rather than German or Italian.

Une des réponses qu'il donna à la sempiternelle question, « Pourquoi avez-vous décidé d'écrire en français ? » fut : « Pour faire remarquer moi. » ... il voulait indiquer, à sa manière, que le français écrit par un étranger, serait-il d'une correction parfaite, n'est pas la même chose que le français écrit par un Français. Les mots changent de sens, sans bouger le moins du monde. Autrement dit, le français de Beckett n'est pas, de façon simple et évidente, du français : il y a un écart, un trouble. On se retrouve, après avoir suivi un chemin inattendu, à Babel (Edwards 9-10).

[One response he gave to the perpetual question: 'Why have you decided to write in French?' was: 'To make noticed myself.' He wanted to indicate in his way that the French written by a stranger, even if correctly, is not the same thing as the French written by the French. The words change meaning without budging one bit. In other words, Beckett's French is not, in a simple and obvious way, French: there is a gap, a blur. On finds oneself, after having followed an unexpected path, at Babel.]

Although Beckett lived in French exile most of his life, he always stayed a little bit in Ireland, says Banville (20). Beckett actor Bill Irwin placed the landscapes described in many plays in Ireland. Ludovic Janvier detected "irlandismes" [Irishisms] in all of Beckett's works:

Mais c'est une Irlande lointaine, intérieure, une Irlande exilée, une Irlande qui n'est plus l'Irlande, c'est le paysage d'où il a fallu se détacher pour se trouver (36)

[But it is a distant, interior Ireland, an exiled Ireland, an Ireland that isn't Ireland anymore, it is the landscape from where he had to detach himself in order to find himself.]

In the English Endgame, Beckett's language is in places regionally marked and deviates from the standard. This enhances the humor of the text; the language is richer and more concrete. The hands-on, vaudeville quality of the English reinforces the absurdity because life as enacted in this play is still meaningless and void of emotions.

The German translation is quite inconsistent and moves between style levels frequently, while mostly staying in a stilted and unnatural mode; in its changes and mixing of linguistic levels, the German sounds more absurd and more grotesque than
the original. The German translator Elmar Tophoven frequently documented the translation process and the rationale for certain decision. The two started their collaboration in 1952 with *Warten auf Godot*. Tophoven explains how Beckett insisted on echoes and repetitions of words and phrases as leitmotifs throughout the play. For some translations Tophoven worked from both the French and the English versions. "I have to deal with a kind of 'authorized interpretation' which he wants taken into account in the German version" (319). The translator also showed how Beckett drew from words in the other language. Tophoven was the founder of the translators' college in Straelen and initiator of the method of "transparent translating." Translating theater needs a particular sensibility for needs of the theater too, for this oral/aural and of course visual medium.

Indeed the three versions of *Fin de partie* communicate absurdity and alienation each in their own way. "More importantly, each text exists in its own right, providing significant linguistic and stylistic variants" (Garforth 63). Even the stage directions factually differ from the French, and are more explicit and colorful in the English, whereas the German is an almost exact copy of the French. In the scene concerning the tailor joke Hamm is telling Nagg, Beckett has consistently made the English more vulgar:

*voici Pâques Fleuries et il loupe les boutonnières* (34)

["the bluebells are blowing and he ballockses the buttonholes"]

Clearly, no single text consistently provides the most efficient version (Garforth 62-63). As Julian Garforth has demonstrated the German version not only clarified certain details, it even managed to make its own statement like the original. During his directing visit in Berlin, he revised the German version Elmar Tophoven had prepared with his aid and he adapted it more to his own English version, which he apparently ended up preferring (Garforth 53). In this process Beckett also explored and exploited
the possibilities of the German for his dramatic ends. The author, having switched
between languages himself, demonstrates how humans are alienated in any language,
captured up in stereotypical phrases and clichés. The play describes exile in the world
and in language.

Ffn de partie/Endgame/Endspiel

The plot of the play is rather static: the characters are absurd stencils, ridiculous
and emotionless. Human relationships such as master and servant, marriage, etc. are
revealed as arbitrary conventions. Death and physical disablement are the only
changing instances in this play. It is not clear what game is being played, but the
characters are aware that it is a game: "À. . .bâillements. . .à moi. Un temps. De jouer"
(10) [Me. . .he yawns. . .to play] ["Ah. . .Ich bin dran. Jetzt spiele ich!"]]. These words
introduce a meta-literary level or a meta-theoretical level, in which the characters
comment on the play itself. The three versions immediately set a different tone. The
English especially sounds rather rudimentary, since it is not a complete sentence. The
German with its exclamation point seems more assertive than the relaxed French.
Then the play itself (or is it the game?) is called a "comédie" ["farce," "Komödie"]; The
characteristics of a theater play are enhanced in the English version, such as in "after
the audition" for which the other two versions indicate a simple listening: "après
l’écoute" (70), ("Nach dem Zuhören"). The level of the meta-play recurs throughout. Not
only does this plane put the negativity and hopelessness of the situation in perspective,
it also exiles the play from itself, takes the defamiliarization even further by adding this
reflective level.

The French and English titles suggest a game of chess, an intellectual and
strategic game, in which the psychological disposition of the players is of utmost
importance. Chess is a slow game with long breaks for reflection and strategizing,
reinforced in the play by the frequent pauses (Un temps). However, the German title
Endspiel emphasizes the athletic aspect of the game, like a final in a more physical sport, such as a soccer match. Beckett chose the English title Endgame, according to Tophoven, in imitation of the German title of the translation, although in English it refers to a game of chess. The mindgames and rituals enacted by the characters are more reminiscent of a contemplated and strategically played game of chess than the immediacy and relative spontaneity of a soccer game.

Since the game played is that of language, little actually happens on the stage. The characters speak French (or English or German), yet the play takes place in an unknown land. Their names (Hamm, Clov, Nell, Nagg) suggest corrupted English words (ham, clove, knell, to nag), which a French spectator cannot infer, and reinforce the vacuum in which the plot develops. To the actor Ernst Schröder, Beckett himself explained that Hamm is short for the English or German "Hammer," Clov is for the French word "clou" [nail], Nagg for "Nagel" [nail], and Nell for "nail" (112). Other critics have seen Hamm as a reference to Hamlet or to a ham actor. Theodor Adorno has traced the named Nell to Dickens, and sees a relation between Nagg and the German word "nagen" [to gnaw], which is what Nagg does with his biscuit. The fact that Beckett himself traced these names to the three different languages, in which he worked—in German at least to some degree, inscribes these three languages into the play and the play into these languages. The names then reinforce the vacuum, in which the plot develops. The French used is abstract and emotionless, and moves between different registers. Puns abound and reveal and break the habits of language.

The characters catch themselves and one another in set phrases and clichés that have become meaningless: "On n'est pas en train de...de...signifier quelque chose?" (248) [We're not beginning to...to...mean something?] asks Hamm warily, but Clov assures him not to worry. The characters as well as what they say do not mean anything in the play. Says Clov:
J'emploie les mots que tu m'as appris. S'ils ne veulent plus rien dire, apprends m'en d'autres. Ou laisse-moi me taire (262).

[I use the words you taught me. If they don't mean anything any more, teach me others. Or let me be silent.]

But Clov cannot be silent, although nothing is left to say: Language becomes play; where there should be silence there is only babble. Beckett transposes the exile he had experienced at home, in his language, into his plays (Beausang 562). His works, consequently, deal with expulsion or imprisonment (564): Nagg and Nell in *Fin de partie* live in garbage cans, and none of the characters can ever leave the space delineated by the stage—the space staked out by language and the human existence it defines. The play unfolds on several levels. Outside the limited space on stage, there is a barren landscape, which in other places is described as the sea. The world Clov depicts, for its only from his words that we know about it at all, is that after a nuclear catastrophe, or after a war's looting and pillage. It also sounds like an environmental disaster, where the poles have melted and flooded territories.

For the translation just as for the text itself the fact that it is theater requires particular care for the idiomatic quality of speech. Although Beckett put forth writing without style as the principle he wanted to achieve by writing in French, he deliberately treads the beaten paths of language. Language loses all meaning when it becomes self-driven, when it has no relationship with reality. The text becomes a *mise en abime*, Beckett demonstrates that attempts at communicating through language are futile. That therefore his own work is really futile, that human existence is futile. While Beckett's language remains caught in old forms and played with excessively, it is applied to an alien, inhumane setting. The play demonstrates very clearly that this hell is self-inflicted, and yet there is no way out—no exit. Theodor Adorno saw parallels to existentialism in *Fin de partie*, and indeed the play may be viewed as an extension, a sequel to Jean-Paul Sartre's *Huis clos* [No Exit] (1945) (although in Sartre's text the
protagonists are already dead). Interestingly enough this kind of setup where people are enclosed together in some extreme, confined situation has become a theme in pop culture too; TV programs like Big Brother and others are based on that very principle. The famous conclusion in Sartre's play is "l'enfer, c'est les Autres" (91) [Hell, that's the other ones]. In Beckett's text the line is "Au-delà c'est... l'autre enfer" (40) [Beyond is... the other hell]. Everywhere is hell, and hell is everywhere.

In Beckett's play the characters are not really in hell yet but it does seem like it. The play shows off the hopelessness and torment of being human, and how easy it is to be inhumane. Therefore the updated version of Descartes' dictum "Cogito ergo sum" ("Je pense donc je suis") ['I think therefore I am;" Ich denke, also bin ich'] goes:

CLOV Il pleure.  CLOV Er weint.
Clov rabat le couvercle, se redresse.  Clov klappt den Deckel zu und richtet sich auf.
HAMM Donc il vit (88).  HAMM Also lebt er.

Moreover, this statement derives from the conspiracy of the two characters, a conspiracy in suffering as well as in tormenting. The torment they impose on one another is a requital for their own humiliations. The English translation has handled this sequence differently, possibly because the imitation of the Descartes dictum would sound very stilted in a dialogue.

CLOV He's crying.  He closes lid, straightens up.
HAMM Then he's living.

The humor of the English passage lies in exactly the verb tense (Present Progressive) that makes it impossible to translate it in Cartesian terms.

Another inherent difference in the translation is obvious when Hamm praises the beauty of his own language. Unlike in other plays where it would make sense to translate the phrase: "Ça c'est du français!" (74) as "Now, that's French for you!", in a play very apparently set in France for example, the nationalities, culture, landscape in
*Fin de partie* are deliberately indistinct. The play is an abstraction from real life, and so are the characters and their names. Therefore the English "There's English for you" (74) and the German "Ja, das ist gutes Deutsch!" are adequate and appropriate. This simple phrase illustrates not only the different linguistic systems but also the different habits and traditions; a literal translation from any of these languages into the other would be a mistranslation. This comment in either of the versions is also a meta-commentary on the text itself. It is indeed written in idiomatic French and mostly so in the anecdote with the tailor.

*Endgame*, rather than simply exiling language in itself, proceeds in a fundamentally different way: the text grinds clichés even more into its molds and displays the obvious pleasure the characters take in idiomatic expressions and habitual language. The exile in this play develops from the discrepancy between language and action, the disparate meaning of discourse and plot. The characters themselves treat language as if they were in exile—like someone living in a foreign country who occasionally rediscovers a certain locution and revels in the moment of recognition, or from the distance of exile marvels at the beauty of her own language. Exile in this play then is enclosed in the language by its being so very idiomatic, so grounded in the language rather than its strangeness. It is what the characters say and the situations in which they say it that testifies to their exile. The meta-referentiality adds to this impression.

On the other hand, at different times all of the characters desire silence, real silence. Silence has been identified as a major theme in Beckett's plays. It appears in different forms: in the pauses, in the long scenes without dialogue in the beginning and the end, and in the dialogue itself. Yet once the game is on there is no stopping it, the characters act compulsively. "Assez!" (36) "Silence!" "Ruhe!" shouts Hamm at his old chatting parents. Later Clov complains to him that Hamm should teach him other
words: “Ou laisse-moi me taisir” (62) [Or let me be silent] [Oder laß mich schweigen].

The dissimilar way in which these three languages express the simple instance of not speaking is quite telling. The reflexive French verb “se taire” implies an action one does to oneself, as if it takes an act of will to finish talking and make oneself be quiet (this is reinforced by the clipped sound of the word). The English “to be silent, to stay silent” on the contrary invokes an aspect of passivity, a not speaking. Being silent means not communicating. The German verb “schweigen” is grammatically an active verb and expresses not-speaking as a way of communication, as part of discourse. By the sound of the verb and its connotation from uses in literature, “schweigen” is a powerful, non-aggressive, silent act of communication. “Schweigen” is not the interruption of speech, it does not grow out of speech. “Schweigen” is an act of speaking. Therefore in the play, Hamm’s pleading “Mais taisez-vous, taisez-vous” (30) [Quiet, quiet] is translated as “Seid doch still, seid still” [Be quiet, be quiet] in the German. The silence that everyone in the play desires but does not dare hope to achieve is the meaningful, active silence. When language cannot mean anything, perhaps silence could.

Critics, such as Theodor Adorno, have pointed to the master-slave relationship impersonated by Hamm and Clov. Hamm and Clov also personify the relationship between an original text and its translation, especially the relationship between this original text and its translation. The two progenitors (author and translator?) Nell and Nagg are stashed safely in their garbage cans because their job is done. The relationship of the two is a codependent one; there is a difficult rapport of giving and taking, of not being able to be without one another. Although Hamm (the original) is the dominant character, the central figure around whom the whole play develops, he would be helpless without Clov. For as Walter Benjamin posited in his *Task of the Translator*, the “Nachreife” [afterripening, late maturation] of the original reflects in the translation. Furthermore,
If Hamm is the original and Clov the translation, it becomes clear that even the king in this game of chess, Hamm, would not be who he is without Clov, or without a servant at all. Hamm asks Clov for reassurance that everything is going as before, that things are not changing. In the case of Beckett's own play the inverted dependency is even greater because the author treats his translations as revisions of his text. Interestingly the author and translator (represented by Nell and Nagg) are more or less insignificant in this interplay between original and translation; although they try to interfere they are disabled. They are silenced, and Nell even dies. Beckett himself, while trying to control every aspect of the performance of the text, gave up responsibility for the text. In the course of rehearsals for a production in London in 1964, Beckett would respond when the actors asked him for interpretations “Ich weiß nur, was dasteht” (Sigal 12) [I only know what it says in the text]. For Beckett, the absolute control over his text, which continued with his endorsement of actors and directors, and eventually led him to direct his own plays, was not born out of a general desire to control. Rather it was part of the process of elaborating the meaning of the text, which he himself was always still exploring.

The reference to the bicycle accident in the Ardennes is of course highly absurd. This mountain range is only etched into European minds as a decisive battle site of World War Two. The irony is that Nell and Nagg supposedly lost their legs in a tandem accident while bicycling there. It also shows off the ignorance or indifference of the couple toward these historical events. At the same time it makes clear how marked Europe is by its two devastating World Wars, the Ardennes cannot be mentioned these
days without the notion of the war popping up in memory, just as neither Verdun nor Auschwitz are just names for any normal city in the near future. The Ardennes then are a geographical reference that could situate the play—although they belong to three different countries. Instead, the Ardennes have become an abstract location. The city of Sedan, which is also mentioned in this episode, is suggestive of two European conflicts: the defeat of Napoleon III in the Franco-Prussian war in 1870 and the for the German victorious battle in their French campaign in 1940. This reference, although seemingly incidental, an aside, does make this a European play. The Ardennes date the play and underscore the translational, conflictual history of Europe, which has directly informed every European and therefore informs the text.

The set of the play is reminiscent of Jurek Becker’s novel The Boxer, in which a Holocaust survivor, described from his son’s perspective, cannot find meaning in life anymore and is unable to establish a close relationship with his own son. In Fin de partie Hamm is a despot but he is also despondent and depressed. In this vein, Alan Rosenfeld has included Beckett’s texts under Holocaust literature:

Samuel Beckett, himself not a direct survivor of the death camps but someone whose imagination has absorbed more than a little of their impact, has formulated this issue as well as anyone has, and his words can be taken as implicitly part of the vocation of all Holocaust authors: ‘There is nothing to express, no power to express...together with the obligation to express’ (7-8).

The set might also be interpreted as a bunker, in which the characters survived a military conflict and where

\[
\text{tous les conflits d’après Auschwitz–le Liban, la guerre du Golfe...avaient imprimé de nouvelles dégradations (Jouanneau 45).}
\]

[all conflicts after Auschwitz–Lebanon, the Gulf War...had imprinted new degradations.]

Death is one of the themes in this play, death as the ultimate silence. The reference to death, the eradication of the rat, or the flea, or possibly the little boy, is reinforced in the German rendition of “insecticide” (50) as “Insektentod,” which makes the desired death
explicit. Another such reinforcement is the German choice of “totlachen” [literally to laugh oneself to death] for “to guffaw” or “pouffer.” The play is also about power and oppression and everyone in *Fin de partie* is at once “bourreau et victime” [hangman and victim] (Simon 60). Although the king (Hamm) may be dead in the end because according to Alfred Simon “checkmate” means “The King is Dead,” nothing much has happened (51).

Instead life goes on, “même jeu,” “das gleiche Spiel” [same thing] is played, and also the same old questions are asked; Hamm says:

> J’aime les vieilles questions. Avec élan: Ah, les vieilles questions, les vieilles réponses, il n’y a que ça! (58).

[**I love the old questions. With fervour:** Ah, the old questions, the old answers, there’s nothing like them!]

While Clov has dressed up and is ready to leave, for good as he threatened all along, he will probably not leave. How could he?

> Il n’y a pas d’autre place (14-15).

**There’s nowhere else.**

In *Fin de partie* Samuel Beckett has created a text that defies expectations on many levels. In all three versions these are very viable plays, which have been successfully staged for decades. In both English and French the language is idiomatic and natural although that what it says is not. This language, this play is translatable, and in each language it exposes exile in a different way. In the French, it is in the clipped, dull words of the characters, in English it is more in the humor, and in the German exile arises from the mixture of stylistic levels and regionalisms. Nell says: “Rien n’est plus drôle que le malheur” (30) [Nothing is funnier than unhappiness], and she is right. But humor is also a great way to handle exile and other hardships in life. It is Beckett’s way of describing exile: a tragi-comedy with an open end. Anything could happen, there could be a way out.
Notes

1 Arthur Adamov was of Armenian origin; Eugène Ionesco was born and raised in Romania. Jean Genet was a social outcast, a homosexual, and a convicted thief before Sartre obtained his release from prison. Boris Vian had exiled himself into American culture, which he explored with the GI's he met in Paris. His shocking pseudo-translations (e.g. J'irai cracher sur vos tombes [I Shall Spit On Your Graves]) scandalized the French public.

2 In this entire chapter I am using Beckett's own translations into English and Tophoven's into German.

3 In Beckett's translation this repetitive stage direction reads: "Clov moves chair slightly."
6. PAUL CELAN: SELECTED POEMS.

Poets and critics tend to speak of Paul Celan in superlatives: he is "almost certainly the major European poet of the period after 1945," says George Steiner (Babel 191), "the finest post-War poet in any language," maintains Paul Auster (Translation 257), and for Michel Deguy "une des figures majeures de la poésie occidentale du XXe siècle" [one of the major figures of Western poetry of the 20th century] (Deguy 2). According to James Lyon, he is "probably the only recent German language poet who influenced American verse" (40). Indeed, Celan has achieved international acclaim to the degree Rilke, Kafka, and Brecht have, and he is certainly one of the most widely translated German language poets.

Life and poetry 1:1

"Gesang ist Dasein" (R. M. Rilke).

Paul Celan's art sprang directly from his tormented biography, "Cent pour cent" [One hundred percent], claimed his widow, Gisèle Celan-Lestrange (Feistiner Poems xxiv). Most of his poems are dated and can be traced to concrete events. Jean Bollack, Israel Chalfen, and other authors have offered such detailed, biographical readings of Celan's work. So has John Feistiner in his biography Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew (1995), on which I will be drawing frequently. Yet since poetry is a highly personal, almost intimate discourse, the poet's life may indeed be more significant than for other genres. When poems bear a date, as Celan's do, they become a diary, a log of the poet's life and work. The meaning, however, is lodged in the poem itself, in its language and its form; it unfolds independently of an author's persona or vita. Therefore, I will limit myself to a cursory overview of Celan's life.

Paul Antschel was born in Czemovitz¹ in 1920, the chief city of the Bukovina, which in 1918 had left the Austro-Hungarian Empire to be joined to Romania. The
Antschei were religious Jews; father Antschei was an ardent Zionist, and saw to it that his son received a sound education in the Hebrew language and Zionist ideas. After his graduation from high school, Antschei left for Tours, France in November 1938 to take premedical courses at the university since Romanian medical schools had quotas for Jews. On his train ride, which took him through Berlin, he glimpsed the ill-famed ‘Kristallnacht’ [crystal night], “the first Nazi-fomented pogrom” (Poet 10). Due to the imminent war, he returned home in the summer of 1939. John Felstiner characterized Celan’s subsequent, harrowing experience of World War II acerbically as a “typical East European education”:

Romanian Iron Guard anti-Semitism, Russian occupation, SS Einsatzkommando 10B, overnight loss of both parents, nineteen months at forced labor, Soviet takeover, and then exile with literally nothing left but a mother tongue that had turned into the murderer’s tongue, passing through what he called ‘the thousand darknesses of deathbringer speech’ (Translating 167).

The Soviets had occupied his hometown in 1940 as a result of the Hitler-Stalin nonagression pact, succeeded by Romanian, then German troops in the following year.

The Jewish community in Czemowitz, over six hundred years old, was now threatened with extinction. Three thousand Jews, including many of the community’s leaders, were murdered in the first twenty-four hours of the German occupation. Tens of thousands were deported. A ghetto was home to the Celans for about seven weeks (Brusin 51).

One day, as Celan was seeking refuge at a friend’s house, his parents were deported to a concentration camp in Transnistria. His father soon perished from typhus; his mother was shot as unfit for work shortly afterwards. Celan himself was taken to a forced labor camp, where he spent 19 months. When the war was over, his hometown became part of the Soviet Union. Celan moved to Bucharest where he worked for a literary magazine, wrote poetry and translated.

It was during his time in Bucharest that Antschei (or Anczel in Romanian) followed the suggestion of Alfred Margul-Sperber’s wife to take on the pseudonym
‘Celan,’ which is an anagramm of his original last name. While John Felstiner believes that the name change became necessary because "for a modern writer, 'Antschel' smacked of the Old World" (Poet 46), I do not see this as a convincing motivation. Paul Celan stayed very much an Old World writer, a modern one at that, who translated and studied the European tradition profusely. In fact it is precisely the chaos and disaster, destruction and pain caused and suffered by the Old World that was to inspire the work of this modern, Old World poet.

In her as of yet unpublished doctoral thesis on André du Bouchet, Ossip Mandelshtam and Paul Celan, Yasmine Getz has offered an intriguing interpretation:

Avec le changement de son nom s'est inauguré un changement de destin: Paul Anczel est devenu Paul Celan. Le jeune Paul Pessach Anczel est mort en même temps que sa mère, son père et six millions de ses frères et sœurs, pour renaître sous son nom de Celan et accomplir sa propre destinée. [..] Le premier nom, Anczel, recèle la destinée d'un Juif d'Europe — qui fut la destruction —, le second, Celan, scelle le destin de qui fut aussi un poète (Getz 238).

[With the change of his name began a change of destiny: Paul Anczel became Paul Celan. The young Paul Pessach Anczel died at the same time as his mother, his father and six million of his brothers and sisters to be reborn under the name Celan and fulfil his own destiny. [..] The first name, Anczel, enshrmonds the destiny of a European Jew— which was the destruction—, the second one, Celan, seals the destiny of the one who was also a poet.]

In her reading, Getz suggests that the name Celan carries in it a manifesto, a poetic mission. Martine Broda has also argued that the anagram of Celan's name already indicates a "retourlement" [sea change], which is reflected in his language. Indeed, this name, cannot be traced to a specific language or culture but sounds at once foreign and indigenous in most of them. In fact, the French pronounce 'Celan' as if it were a French name, and most uninitiated Germans, assuming that the name is of French origin, also stress the last syllable. Celan himself averred that he didn't pronounce his name the French way but rather 'T s e l a n,' "also ohne Nasallaut am Ende und mit Betonung auf der ersten Silbe" [that is without nasal at the end and with
stress on the first syllable] (Wiedemann 431), in a way 'Germanizing' it by putting the stress as in "Schiller," "Schröder," "Pfitzner" or any other German name. This name, which is foreign everywhere and which he insists on pronouncing the German way, situates the poet between and yet beyond, outside a specific language and culture, in exile. Thus the name Celan stands for an aesthetic agenda, which anticipates his poetics. For although he would continue to write in his mother tongue, he would twist it around, dissemble and reassemble it, defamiliarize and foreignize it almost beyond recognition.

In 1947 Celan fled to Vienna, which the German-speaking community of his hometown had always looked to as their cultural home. In Vienna he made fruitful contacts with poets and writers, among them Ingeborg Bachmann, and was working on the publication of his first volume of poetry. However, in light of the grim political and economical situation in the divided Austrian capital, as well as the conclusion of the only "mild denazification process," which resulted in "absolution for all minor offenders" (Poet 55), Celan decided to move farther west—to Paris. There he adopted French citizenship, married the French graphic artist Gisèle Lestrang in 1952 and had a son, Eric, with her in 1955. After completing his studies and odd jobs he became a lector at the prestigious École Normale Supérieure. In the meantime, he had become involved in Germany's literary scene. He traveled frequently to meet with writer-friends, give live readings and record programs for the radio. In 1958, Celan received the Literary Prize of the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen which was the occasion for his famous acceptance speech, "Celan's first full profession of poetic doubt and faith" (Poet 117). In 1960, he was also awarded the Georg Büchner Prize. His acceptance speech there, "The Meridian," has been viewed as a statement of his poetics. Further travels and lectures culminated in his 1969 visit to Israel where he spoke before the Hebrew Writers Association. Increasingly suffering from mental problems and depression,
which required repeated and lengthy psychiatric treatments, he committed suicide in the Seine river in April of 1970.

Language

“Paul Celan was a poet of exile, an outsider even to the language of his own poems” Paul Auster.”

Paul Celan grew up in a city where Romanian, German, Yiddish, Ukranian, Polish, and some other languages were spoken, a city of translators and translations (Wiedemann 109). Czamowitzers were used to switching languages, to translating, since everyday life necessitated mediation between them. Still Vienna remained the cultural capital for the German speakers of Czamowitz, who upheld the educational tradition of the Hapsburg Empire (Stiehler 12). In this environment, this gifted young man learned languages rapidly and avidly. Besides German, he spoke Hebrew and Romanian as a teenager, studied French and English, became fluent in Russian during the Soviet occupation. While in Bucharest, he translated from Russian into Romanian and wrote poetry in German and Romanian. This was the only time when Celan ever considered not writing in German, but decided to opt for his mother tongue. Although he was to spend most of his adult life in Paris, speaking French, the German language and literature provided orientation, refuge and home (Lehmann 114).

Celan’s mother had introduced the boy to German literature and insisted that a literary German be spoken in the family. German was, literally and literarily, his mother tongue, a language without regional peculiarities, a bookish language, one in exile from the everyday workings. The German spoken outside the Antschel home was certainly different than theirs in this eastern European city of Czamowitz—a dialect with Austrian inflections (Celan himself uses the Austrian ‘Jänner’ instead of the standard German ‘Januar’ for ‘January’) and, as evident in the documentary film Herr Zwilling und Frau Zuckermann, an idiom with Slavic interferences in grammar and pronunciation.2

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Celan’s ‘home’ then was not an intimate vernacular shared with close friends and family and marked by regional particularities, a language that, like Proust’s madeleine, can bring back a taste of home even when one is far away. For Celan, it was the language of Goethe, Schiller, Heine, and most other great German writers, which provided a spacious, magnificent, abstract, but not very cozy, home.

Therefore, it seems only natural that Paul Celan stayed with his native language for his art. Other exiles, like myself, own a personal, regional discourse and can phone or travel home any time to be reconnected to it. Celan was unable to ‘phone home’ not to mention to return home, for there was no home anymore; the life circumstances of his childhood were erased and he would certainly have been unwanted for political reasons, too. Moreover, Heine and Rilke and all those other writers were his ‘relatives’ in a way, they were the ones who spoke/wrote his language and who offered what was closest to an Ersatz-home. Celan must also have felt a responsibility towards his parents and other Eastern European, German-speaking Jews who were killed in the camps; a responsibility to give testimony, to exhort: ‘Perhaps I am one of the last who must live out to the end the destiny of the Jewish spirit in Europe,’ Celan wrote to his Israeli relatives…” (Poet 57). On another occasion he explained:

Nur in der Muttersprache kann man die eigene Wahrheit aussagen, in der Fremdsprache lügt der Dichter (Chalfen 148).

[Only in one’s mother tongue can one speak one’s own truth, in a foreign tongue the poet lies.]

This very absolute statement was certainly true for Celan and may be true for anyone who grew up in an environment where his language was not the major tongue, where speaking it meant asserting and confirming one’s identity every single time.

It may have been exactly this convergence of personal and literary language which, as for the writers of German tongue from Prague (Kafka, Rilke), made it
possible that literature of universal value emerged at the very borders of the German-speaking world:

Wei ßer also nicht in der Dualität zwischen Dialekt und literarischer Sprache lebte, die manchmal in Randsituationen die Entwicklungsmöglichkeiten der literarischen Sprache einbringt, die Kanäle des Dialekts, die die literarische Sprache auffüllen, verstopft (Szász 28).

[Because he didn’t live in the duality between dialect and literary language, which sometimes freezes the development of literary language in borderline locations, clogs up the channels of dialect replenishing literary language.]

More importantly though, Celan’s (just as Rilke's or Kafka's) German was almost always exposed to the impact of other, surrounding languages; in Czemowitz, Bucharest, and Paris. Isolated from the mainstream of that language, one develops a greater reflective distance to it, or as Spanish writer Nuria Amat recently put it: “to write from the outskirts of a language is to look always for the original root of things” (193). That is, if one is always immersed in a vivid, living language one cannot put it in perspective, whereas someone at the periphery is exposed to other influences and has more of a rational distance, the view of an exile.

Celan left Vienna, the only German-speaking city he ever inhabited, to settle in Paris, where so many other German, Jewish, and Romanian writers had found exile. Paris in France: the endpoint of his personal meridian which took him from the eastern edge of the continent to the western one, a meridian that began in a city with one Romance language and ended in another one. Celan needed exile to write in his mother tongue; linguistic isolation was conducive to the elaboration of his poetic discourse (Szász 27). In addition, Celan sought the inspiration of other languages, reading and translating prolifically.

Writing in German was problematic in several ways. After all, German was also the language of his parents' murderers and of the Final solution. It was a language
that, as George Steiner has posited in his essay “The Hollow Miracle” from *Language and Silence*, “was not innocent of the horrors of Nazism”:

Nazism found in the language precisely what it needed to give voice to its savagery. Hitler heard inside his native tongue the latent hysteria, the confusion, the quality of hypnotic trance (*Language* 99).

Did Celan hear that in his native language, too? Is it true that German had that potential more than other languages? Or wasn't it rather that it had been abused and contaminated? That the Nazi regime had irreparably soiled and tarnished the language, by utilizing it for their atrocious and inhuman goals? As early as 1946, the philologist Victor Klemperer gave proof of the indisputable deformation German had suffered during the Third Reich. His book *LTI. Notizbuch eines Philologen* (1946) [Lingua Tertii Imperii. Notebook of a Philologist] documented language use in connection with politics and personal experience during the Nazi period. He shed light on how the political system had affected the official and personal discourse. This abuse led some writers, among them Hermann Broch, to abandon their language because they regarded their language as doomed:

Because their language had served at Belsen, because words could be found for all those things and men were not struck dumb for using them, a number of German writers who had gone into exile or survived Nazism, despaired of their instrument (*Language* 51).

Reading *LTI* today, it is obvious that some of the euphemisms and expressions Klemperer had noted are still being used unreflectedly, that the damage persists.

Still, the particularly tormented relationship Celan has toward his mother tongue is his very personal dilemma. As Siegfried Mandel has pointed out some writers, such as Arthur Koestler and Jakov Lind, abandoned the German language and wrote in English (274). Other intellectuals have not regarded the question of language as that problematic. Late German writer Jurek Becker related how his father, a Polish Jew and camp survivor, chose to live in the German Democratic Republic after the war, and
gave up his own language, Polish, for good. His rationale was that in his former home in Poland antisemitism didn’t suddenly emerge with the appearance of the Germans. He argued: “Schließlich sind es ja nicht die polnischen Antisemiten, die den Krieg verloren haben” [After all, it’s not the Polish Antisemites who lost the war], hoping that in the place where Antisemitic discrimination had taken on its worst forms it would be eradicated the most profoundly (Becker 50).

German critic Marcel Reich-Ranicki, host of the popular TV program *Literarisches Quartett [Literary Quartet]*, moved to Germany after the war although he had lost his family in the death camps, and despite his personal memories of the Warsaw ghetto. For him too, it was his love of German letters and the German language, which he had learned to appreciate as a young boy in Berlin, that drew him to Germany. In a recent reading and discussion of his memoir *Mein Leben [My Life]*, he declared that for him Nazi jargon and the language of a great humanistic tradition are two quite different things. A particular incident confirmed his decision: in December 1970 then Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, Willi Brandt, a former resistance fighter himself, spontaneously fell to his knees at the memorial for the heroes of the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto. Reich-Ranicki reflects:


[I know very well what I thought to myself in 1970 when I saw the picture of the German Federal Chancellor on his knees: I thought to myself that my decision to return to Germany in 1958 and to settle in the Federal Republic of Germany was not wrong, was right after all.]

Paul Celan did not live to see this gesture of repentance and remorse. Instead he sensed anti-Semitism throughout his life, and especially in Germany. The poet was often frustrated and disconcerted by the reception of his works there, felt misunderstood or discriminated against. By writing in German Celan, naturally,
addressed readers in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. If his poetry speaks of the
Holocaust, it is directed at those who were, if it all, barely beginning to come to terms
with their personal guilt and with the pain and devastation inflicted in their name. It is
ture that there might have been an aspect of revenge in his poetry, as Cid Corman saw
it, a desire to play "the avenging angel" (Corman 117). Addressing his reader in his
mother tongue, his poetry bespoke the fundamental difference between himself and
them.

Celan continued writing in German throughout his life, all the while living in
Paris. His task is at once a mnemonic and an exhortatory one. In his and their mother
tongue, his poems memorialize the myriad of eradicated Eastern European Jews and
their culture. In so doing, he did not turn away from German but rather faced it head-
on, a painful but for him unavoidable choice. Celan set out to fashion his own German,
a language that would say exactly what he wanted it to say. At the same time, the
German language represents the grille, the net, the form into which he inscribes his
own identity, into which he carves his place.

Poetry After Auschwitz

"[T]he addition to our vocabulary of the very word Auschwitz means that today we
know things that before could not even be imagined" (Rosenfeld 13).

The question of language is tied to that of writing after Auschwitz. Celan's poem
"Todesfuge" reportedly triggered Theodor Adorno's famous assertion that writing
poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. Although Adorno later revised the absoluteness of
his dictum, it became a warning and a challenge for German writers and writers
elsewhere. Writing had to take into account Adorno's words. Günter Grass devoted a
series of lectures to the topic of Schreiben nach Auschwitz [Writing after Auschwitz].
According to Grass, Adorno's statement provoked self-reflection and awareness.

Wir alle, die damals jungen Lyriker der fünfziger Jahre [. . .] waren uns deutlich
bis verschwommen bewußt, daß wir zwar nicht als Täter, doch im Lager der
Täter zur Auschwitz-Generation gehörten, daß also unserer Biographie, inmitten der üblichen Daten, das Datum der Wannsee-Konferenz eingeschrieben war; aber auch soviel war uns gewiß, daß das Adorno-Gebot—wenn überhaupt—nur schreibend zu widerlegen war (Grass 17-18).

[All of us, the then young poets of the fifties ( . . . ), were clearly to blumily aware that we belonged, although not as perpetrators but within the camp of the perpetrators, to the Auschwitz generation, that our biography, among all the common dates, bore the date of the Wannsee conference; but one thing we were positive about was that Adorno’s precept could only—if at all—be disproven by writing.]

It seems that this task stimulated rather than stifled the desire to write. As Günter Grass states in his acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize in Literature 1999:

Schweigen wollte, konnte keiner. Ging es doch darum, die deutsche Sprache aus dem Gleichschritt zu bringen, sie aus Idyllen und blautäuschiger Innerlichkeit herauszulocken.

[To stay silent? No one wanted, was able to. Since what was at stake was to get the German language out of step, to lure it out of its idyls and blue-tinted inferiority.]

For Celan, the question of art after the Second World War and the Holocaust was essential and vital. It took into account three aspects: if and how to write poetry after Auschwitz (for it must be done without a doubt), how to write it in any given language and how in particular to write it in the language that was also that of the Nazis? Not to write at all was not a solution for him; instead art and language had to be reformed.

Celan viewed art as a goal in itself that did not need legitimization. Art was a process of approaching reality, a search for reality (Bruckschlegel 349), because says Celan:

Wirklichkeit ist nicht, Wirklichkeit will gesucht und gewonnen sein ("Antwort" 168).

[Reality is not, reality must be searched and extracted.]

This means then, just as for his poet-friends of the revue L’Éphémère, that the poetic text renounces its mimetic function in order to propose itself as reality. The ephemeral, whence the title of the magazine, is the moment in which existence concentrates with a
fleeting intensity, a principle that becomes a praxis of life (Bruckschlegel 110). "The poem, then, is not a transcription of an already existing world, but a process of discovery, and the act of writing for Celan is one that demands personal risks" (Auster 105). In this kind of art, language itself is a process too, "ein Prozeß, mit dem man unterwegs ist und der auf etwas hinzielt" [a process with which one moves and which aims at something] (Alleman 10).

In his poem “Sprachgitter” [Speech Grille], Celan addressed the problem of reality “grilled” by conventional language (Bruckschlegel 208). Apparently the term “Sprachgitter” refers to a true grill through which Celan and his wife spoke with his mother-in-law when they visited her at a convent. This term also evokes an abstract language grid, i.e. the set linguistic system, which as soon as one speaks casts shadows, creates lacunae, deforms reality, imposes clichés and received notions which impair perception. Therefore a conventional poetic style, which inscribes itself in the tradition and uses its cornerstones, equals political domination, and conspires in the social annihilation of human lives.

Consequently, Celan demanded that the work of art oppose its own principle of style and suppress it. Language can only be humane, and express itself in favor of human dignity, when it falls into the absurd. His poem Tübingen, Jänner [Tübingen, January] (about Hölderlin) ends in what Marlies Janz called a “Wahnwort” [delirious word] (140), "Pallaksch," which for Bernhard Böschenstein is indicative of the poet's poetics. The poet, he says, situates himself


[In an intermediary space where the word Celan borrowed from insane Hölderlin is valid, which is ‘Pallaksch. Pallaksch.’ and means ‘Yes. No.’]

Poetry/language must say “Yes” and “No” at once to project reality. If a poem says yes and no, it asks questions and does not give answers, it represents the world like it is,
full of questions instead of answers. To which intermediary space is Böschenstein referring exactly? The language in this intermediary space is one that is reshaped, stripped of and refurnished with imagery and associations. It is a language in exile.

As an exile himself, the poet was obliged but also capable of reevaluating the language, constantly approaching and taking distance from it. “Radically dispossessed of any other reality he set about to create his own language—a language as absolutely exiled as himself” (Joris 43).

The poet reinvented and refashioned his poetic language at once with the intimate knowledge of the native speaker but also with the cold, unemotional eye of the foreigner, the one who comes to it from the outside. Paul Celan combined two ways of refashioning poetic language: he revolutionized his mother tongue from within, as a speaker of that tongue, as someone familiar with its literary tradition and contemporary usage like an avantgarde writer does. He also approached that language from outside, exiled from it physically, mentally and emotionally. As an exile, Celan sojourned in the no man’s land of translators and exiles, an intermediary space just as the one Böschenstein described.

For his aesthetics, the poet invented what has been called “a Celanesque meta-German” (Meyerhofer 9) or “une contre-langue dans la langue” [a counter-language within the language] (Meschonnic 375). This meta-German, this German about German, is constructed by subjecting the language to the strain of foreign idioms and special jargons. As a polyglot and translator he also sought the inspiration of other languages. It is the language of an exile: his poems are out of time and space, airy and synthetic, larger than life. They float in a vacuum, detached from the everyday context in which that language is spoken. They interweave vocabulary from foreign languages, botany, geology, crystallography, technology and other fields as well as archaic and regional terms. The words and verses are interlocked and compounded, fractured and
strained to bespeak "that which happened" no less than the act of writing itself. He stretches the possibilities of the language to the extreme. Paul Celan's approach undoes the profound "earthiness" of the German language and imbues his poetry with an airy, clean, impersonal, intellectual texture, somewhat cold to the touch, poems like marbles or pebbles, compact, silent, and intimate. Later in life, Paul Celan's poetry became more and more hermetic, more and more telescopic and tight. Often this has been discussed as a movement toward silence.

Reception and Translation

John Felstiner, Pierre Joris, and others have documented the labors of translating Celan's poetry. However, two Celan translators, Michael Hamburger and Jean-Pierre Lefebvre, have independently affirmed that Celan's poems are utterly translatable, more so than Joseph von Eichendorff's poetry for example, whose poetry thrives on the sounds and received imagery of the language. But the translator has to find solutions for creating a Celan effect in a different language, i.e. a new, often jarring, self-conscious poetics.

Celan's friend and correspondent Franz Wurm once wrote:

Wir--sie und ich--kennen Ihre Gedichte als die einzig wirkliche, die reine Sprache, die so genau ist wie die Gewissheit des Schmerzes und aus sich in keine andre mehr 'Übersetzbar' (Briefwechsel 32).

[We--you and I--know your poems as the only true, the pure language, which is as precise as the certainty of pain and from itself not 'translatable' into another one.]

If we understand "pure language" here in the terms Walter Benjamin put forth in his essay "The Task of the Translator," i.e. the language inherent in all languages and which they have in common, and/or language that is freed from the burden of meaning, then Wurm is saying two disparate things. Both of them apply to Celan's poetry. By working the language, his poetry approaches pure language, and is therefore translatable. At the same time, says George Steiner "All of Celan's own poetry is
translated into German” (409) so that these poems are already in translation from the start. It is their organic state of being, and according to Benjamin, they cannot be translated anymore because they are already in translation.

Yet, Celan has been translated more than any other German language poet of the postwar period. Interestingly, reception in the English-speaking world has been constant, whereas in France it has been a slow process. The first translation into French was that of “Todesfuge” by Alain Bosquet in 1952, followed by translations of other poems by Jean-Pierre Wilhelm in 1956. As a coeditor of L'Éphémère Celan collaborated on the André du Bouchet’s first few French translations of his works in the late sixties, which led to Henri Meschonnic’s fiercely critical essay “On appelle cela traduire Celan.” Nouvelle Revue Française ran some of Jean-Claude Schneider’s translations in 1966. In 1970, the year of the poet’s death, Hubert Juin remarked:

Chez les Allemands, c’est un grand poète. A Bucarest, on me demande de parler de lui, quelques-uns! En France, il est inconnu (5).

[In Germany, he is a great poet. In Bucharest, they ask me to talk about him, some do! In France, he is unknown.]

This of course changed. Celan’s direct influence in France is noticeable in philosophy; Jacques Derrida, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean Bollack each have written studies about this poet. As for poetry, Martine Broda cites Philippe Denis, whom she calls “un clone du Celan tardif” [a clone of the late Celan] and not a very good poet (275). Other than that, says Michel Deguy, it is a slow and thorough reception, which will take time. Today Paul Celan is a household name in France, appreciated and reverred by poets and laypersons. The French do not hesitate to name Celan a French poet of German language, and to take some credit for his great achievements. Yves Bonnefoy reported that Celan once said:

Vous (il s’agissait des poètes français, occidentaux) êtes chez vous, dans votre langue, vos références, parmi les livres, les œuvres que vous aimez. Moi, je suis dehors (93).
You (we were talking about French, Western poets) you are at home, in your language, your references, among the books, the works that you love. But as for me, I am on the outside.

Celan was used to being outside, and he probably needed the solitude of the exile to produce his extraordinary work. Also he was at home in Paris, although he lamented the greyness of the city in the winter. He had friends, contacts with poets. Summarizes Claude David:

Mais on n'oubiera pas cependant que Paul Celan était Français. Il avait librement choisi la France comme asile et comme séjour; il y avait vécu de longues années d'obscurité et presque de misère; puis, il y avait trouvé une sorte de bonheur. Pour la première fois, il jetait l'ancre; il foulait aux pieds un morceau de terre qui lui appartenait. Les lyriques français avaient, plus que d'autres, contribué à le former: ceux qu'il n'a pas connus—Valéry ou Rimbaud—ceux dont il a partagé l'amitié, Henri Michaux, Yves Bonnefoy et beaucoup d'autres. 
Paris était son foyer (239).

[However, one shouldn't forget that Paul Celan was French. He had freely chosen France as asylum and to stay; he had lived long years of obscurity and almost misery; then he found a kind of happiness here. For the first time, he settled down; he tread a piece of earth with his feet that belonged to him. French poets had, more than others, contributed to forming him: those he didn't know—Valéry or Rimbaud—those whose friendship he shared, Henri Michaux, Yves Bonnefoy and many others. Paris was his hearth.]

Reception in France, according to Martine Broda, really didn't start until she published her translation of the volume Die Niemandsrose (La Rose de Personne) [The No-One's-Rose] in 1979 and organized a Conference at Cerisy a few years later. Today, the much-coveted translation rights granted by his son Eric and the different translations and strategies are so contested that French Celan translators are split into hostile camps. Poet and scholar Martine Broda is her very own camp and she claims to be "the best" [translator]. Other contemporary translators into French include André du Bouchet, Bernard Badiou, Jean-Pierre Lefebvre, Jean-Claude Schneider, Jean Daive, John Jackson, Jean Bollack and Valérie Briet.
Translating Celan into English has a more benevolent history. Several English versions of “Todesfuge” were published as early as the fifties, i.e. shortly after its reception in Germany. Since then Michael Hamburger’s and Joachim Neugroschel’s volumes of English translations have become fairly canonical; their greatest merit is having been the first to make these poems accessible to readers in English. Other volumes of collected poetry are by Kathrine Washburn, Brian Lynch. Pierre Joris was the first to translate an entire cycle, Breathturn, in 1995, followed by Threadsuns in 2000. A recent wave of new Celan translations has included John Felstiner’s Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan as well as Heather McHugh’s and Nikolai Popov’s volume entitled Glottal stop.

“Todesfuge” has been translated into English much more than into French; John Felstiner mentions fifteen translations into English, whereas there are only four translations into French. For the other three poems “Flügelnacht,” “Der mit Himmel geheizte,” and “Erblinde,” which were first published in L’Éphémère in 1968, the situation is reversed. “Flügelnacht” has four different versions in French and only one English, “Der mit Himmel geheizte” has been translated by two different French translators and only once into English, and “Erblinde” boasts two different French versions by André du Bouchet and three English translations.

My analysis will focus on Celan’s first successful poem “Todesfuge,” as well as three other, shorter poems first published in translation in the literary magazine L’Éphémère, which were written while Celan was living in France and which influenced French literature through the poets of that magazine.

Todesfuge

Paul Celan’s poem “Todesfuge” was his Blechtrommel, his “Tin Drum,” his moving and powerful masterpiece that announced this new and unique voice. Celan’s most famous poem secured him entry into literary histories and has been translated
into many languages. In Germany "Todesfuge" has been widely anthologized, it is
taught in school textbooks and is the object of numerous studies—in short, it has
become canonical. But like Nobel Prize 1999 laureate Günter Grass with regard to his
novel The Tin Drum, Celan later distanced himself from his work of youth, found it too
explicit. However, Celan never revoked his poem; to Hans Mayer, who labelled his
later poem "Engführung" [Stretto] a retraction of "Todesfuge," he replied: "Ich nehme
nie ein Gedicht zurück, lieber Hans Mayer" [I never take back a poem, my dear Hans
Mayer] (Konietzny 37).

In 1947 the Bucharest journal Contemporaneul first published the poem
(composed in 1945) in its Romanian translation by Petre Solomon so that, for John
Felstiner, Celan's "premier piece of writing can be said to reach us under the sign of
translation" (Poet 32). The original German "Todesfuge" appeared first in a volume
entitled Der Sand der Umen (The Sand of the Urns), which was withdrawn
immediately. It then found its place within the collection of poetry Mohn und Gedächtnis
(Poppy and Remembrance) from 1952. "Todesfuge" constitutes the second cycle of
that volume, within which the poem—which is technically without a title—stands by itself.
Therefore the poem is usually known by the title of the cycle, "Todesfuge."

Numerous translations have imported this poem into the traditions and the
memory of other cultures. A first French translation dates as early as 1952, followed by
Henri Deluy’s version in Action poétique in 1964. Later French versions are by Valérie
Briet (1987) and Jean-Pierre Lefebvre (1998) respectively. The first English translation
of the "Fugue" is from 1955.® For my analysis I have considered the following
translations: "Fugue of Death" by Michael Bullock in Jewish Quarterly (1955), "Death
Fugue" by Clement Greenberg (1957), "Fugue of Death" by Gertrude Clorus
Schwebel (1964), "Fugue of Death" by Donald White (1966), "Death Fugue" by
Joachim Neugroshel (1971), "Fugue of Death" by Christopher Middleton (1972),

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"Death Fugue" by Michael Hamburger (1980), "Death Fugue" by Clarise Samuels (1993), and "Deathfugue" by John Felstiner (1984/1995/2000). French translations included "Fugue de la mort" by Henri Deluy (1964), "Fugue de Mort" by Valérie Brest (1986) and "Fugue de la Mort" by Jean-Pierre Lefebvre (1993/1998). Only some of these versions proved fruitful for my analysis and will be discussed in detail.

Analysis

According to the Romanian translator Petre Solomon, the author himself contributed to and approved the first translation, which was then entitled "Tangoul mortii" [Deathtango]. As "Todestango" is the original title, this rules out that the poem was first composed as a fugue (Martin 203). Although this may be significant for the poem’s genesis, the reception, its analyses and translations depend solely on the original version published in German. The poem has frequently been interpreted in the context of a fugue, which given its structure in addition to the title, almost imposes itself. Both versions of the title, "Todestango" and "Todesfuge," refer to a musical form.

The title "Deathtango" evokes a frenetic, tragic, mortal dance, charged with passion and eroticism, and evokes Latin America (which happened to be the refuge for many former Nazis). "For Celan to call the poem ‘Death Tango’ was to annul the dance that fascinated Europe during his childhood—the essence of life as urbane, graceful, nonchalant" (Poef 28). The tango also refers to the dance tunes within the poem, which was a reality in the camps: prisoners were made to play for entertainment and at executions. The original title also reminds the reader of the ‘dance of death’ ("Totentanz; ‘danse macabre’—literally the ‘dance of the dead’), a Medieval dance in which a personified Death leads people of all origins to death, often represented as an allegorical scene in painting to commemorate a plague epidemic. In this poem, this dance includes only Jews (and other persecuted groups).
The original title suggests that the fugue, a polyphonic instrumental or vocal composition, was not at the origin of the poem, even if its organization and economy, by the repetition and modification of motifs, facilely relates it to a musical fugue. The final title, “Todesfuge,” situates the poem explicitly in the cultural context of Germany. The form of the fugue is most of all associated with the ingenious German composer Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750), who took it to its height in numerous compositions, and whose most famous collection of fugues Die Kunst der Fuge [The Art of the Fugue] remained uncompleted. Just as Bach was the master of the fugue, Germany in this poem was the Master of Death. Just as the fugue was composed virtuously by Bach, the Nazis orchestrated the extermination of the Jews. The modified title undoes the light-hearted, caustic sound suggested by the term “tango” and emphasizes the seriousness of the poem, its drama, the tragedy at its core. At the same time, “Todesfuge” takes into the absurd the original sense of a fugue, whose meaning a musicologist characterized as follows:

Ihr strenges und zugleich phantasievolles Ordnungsprinzip galt als Abbild einer höheren Weltharmonie (Michels 117).

[Its strict and yet imaginative principle of order was considered an image of a higher world harmony.]

The poem does indeed suggest order and organization; the language is clear and precise, and everything seems well-planned, there are no accidents. And yet there is no higher harmony of the world; on the contrary the Holocaust questions humanity itself. This irony and perfidy is emphasized by the German homonym; ‘Fuge’ is also the space between two parts as between a door and its frame, or the mortar between the bricks of a wall. Celan’s poem describes a world which is “aus den Fugen geraten,” a world in chaos and disaster, like a house disheveled by a tornado, a house where doors and windows don’t fit anymore. An empty, uninhabitable house, a world devoid of humanism and truth.
Del Caro mentions a secondary English meaning of a psychological 'fugue:'
"the subject performs certain acts as if he were conscious of them, but has no
recollection of these actions when he regains consciousness" (39). According to this
author, this resembles the situation in post-War Germany, where everyone pretended
not to have been guilty. The French word 'fugue' indicates a temporary flight or
escape (for a minor) under the influence of some morbid impulsion (Robert 981).
Correspondingly this secondary meaning of flight or escape is in French the most
frequent one. The German term is derived from the Latin word for "flight." Therefore
one could argue that a kind of exile is already insinuated in the title.

The poem was printed, read, translated, discussed and reviewed at a time when
the Nuremberg Trials were held and more details about the atrocities in the death
camps became known. "Todesfuge" was created before Adorno's Auschwitz dictum,
and in fact may have occasioned Adorno's observation. With this poem begins Celan's
mnemonic oeuvre, which commemorates those who perished, their lost lives and
cultures. Although the poem is his most explicit, descriptive narrative about the death
camps,

one does discover in this poem elements common to much of Celan's work: the
taut energy of the language, the objectification of private anguish, the unusual
distancing effected between feeling and image (Auster 104).

The poem provides a concrete and explicit matrix from which Celan's subsequent
poetry develops. If Celan's poetry is best studied in its totality, it is also because its
mnemonics unfolds in its meta-reference. This poem introduced a catalogue of
concepts and keywords that reappeared throughout his work. While these terms may
recur in a different poem and in a different cycle, they develop their full meaning
exactly in those different contexts. At the same time, and perhaps unwittingly so, these
terms always refer back to his most explicit early poem.
Among the key concepts introduced in "Todesfuge" is the noun "Auge" [eye], which occurs 27 times in Celan's poetry, as well as the more archaic, poetic form "Aug" (68 times) and the plural "Augen" (53 times) (Nielsen 11-13; 289). Since the archaic form and the plural are poetic variations of "Auge," it is safe to say that it is the most frequent concept in Celan's poetry, leaving only second place to "Wort" [word] (77 times). This goes hand in hand with the poetics outlined above. For Celan the "eye" is privileged over the "word;" visual or other kinds of perception are privileged over language. The poet knows: humans perceive more than language can express.

Language has failed, has become abused, must be re-created.

The personal pronoun "wir" [we] in the poem, which includes the narrator in the first person, is another element recurring with great frequency in Celan's poetry, just as "du" (you). Other such key concepts cited include: "Haar" [hair], "trinken" [to drink], "Erde" [earth, soil], "Tod" [death], "schreiben, Schrift" [to write, writing], "Nacht" [night], "Abend" [evening], "Haus" [house] and "golden" [golden]. What is remarkable about this listing is that all these words, with the exception of "schreiben," are of Germanic origin, which means that although Celan's idiom is the literary language, he wrote this poem in basic and earthy Germanic terms.

The Poem

"Todesfuge" is a poem about the concentration camps during World War Two and the minutely planned extermination of European Jews. The "we" narrator, who is one of the victims, tells us about life in a camp. The word "Juden" [Jews] is mentioned only once in the first stanza and not explicitly related to the "we." The metaphorical phrase of the beginning "Schwarze Milch der Frühe" [Black milk of dawn] alternates with concrete phrases about the actions of the "man," who gives commands and writes, possibly to a beloved woman. The narrator repeats the man's commands and shouts, verbatim it seems, which is painfully cynical. The man has "his Jews" shovel a grave in
the earth, but also a grave in the air. He also orders that music be played and dances be performed while prisoners are being shot to death and cremated.

The poem consists of a set of phrases that are repeated and varied as the poem moves along. There is no punctuation, which makes it difficult to assign the fragments of direct speech to either the "man" or the narrator. The missing punctuation allows the poem to flow smoothly, structured by a stomping rhythm (example: "Ein Mann wohnt im Haus der spielt mit den Schlangen der schreibt") [A man lives in the house he plays with the serpents he writes]. The "we" narrator is never clearly identified although one can easily infer that the narrator represents the victimized Jews. The "we" is opposed by a "he." Klaus Wagenbach has commented on this: "Dem 'Wir' der Opfer steht das 'Er' des Täters gegenüber, nicht ein 'sie'" (87). [The victim's 'we' is opposed to the perpetrator's 'he,' not a 'they.'] This means that the perpetrator is identifiable, he is concrete, he has a face and a name, although it is not mentioned. While it may seem that way, this atrocity was not the work of anonymous evil-doers. The evil has a name, and it is not only 'Hitler.'

Yet the "we" in the poem allows another reading; the narrator includes all Germans or all Europeans, who were all drinking 'black milk' at the time. German actress Hanna Schygulla has expressed this with the following words:

Dans sa Fugue de mort, Paul Celan a parlé du lait noir. Ce lait noir, nous en avons tous bu. Et, cinquante ans après, nous n'avons toujours pas fini d'exorciser (Grassin 27).

[In his 'Deathfugue' Paul Celan spoke of black milk. That black milk, we all drank it. And fifty years later, we still haven't finished exorcising it.]

If the "we" is read this way, then the "black milk" is not only the torments, abuse and fear of death the prisoners were fed but it also means that the atrocities committed in the names of Germans and other races have poisoned their own humanity even if they were not directly involved. It means that they willingly swallowed Nazi propaganda.

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about the superior Aryan race or the explanations given about the relocation of the Jews.

Other references are not completely clear but this is deliberate, as with the "Eisen" [iron rod?, gun?] in the belt, or the serpents with which the man plays.

"Todesfuge" is carefully composed, and a true "classic." This poem was necessary: for humanity, for Celan, for Adorno and everything and everyone who has referred to it ever since its publication.

**John Felstiner’s “Deathfugue”**

John Felstiner has published prolifically on Paul Celan, and authored the very thorough biography/translation critique/study entitled *Poet, Survivor, Jew.* His work on the translation of "Todesfuge" has evolved over the years, so that three slightly different versions are available. The differences are mostly of merely lexical order and occur for the most part from the first to the second versions:

1) 
"we shovel a grave in the sky"
"there you won’t feel too cramped"
"and the stars are all twinkling"
"he orders us strike up and play for the dance"
"you there you others"
"Marguerite"

2) 
"we shovel a grave in the air"
"there you won’t lie too cramped"
"and the stars are all sparkling"
"he commands us play up for the dance"
"you lot there you"
"Margareta"

Lexical changes from the second to third versions are as follows:

2) 
"he whistles his hounds to come close"
"jab this earth deeper"
"jab your spades deeper"

3) 
"he whistles his hounds to stay close"
"dig this earth deeper"
"stick your spades deeper."
As the last two examples, which are both from the same stanza, demonstrate the parallelism of structures which followed that of the original is given up in favor of a more idiomatic English usage. At the same time, "to stick" instead of "to jab" is etymologically close to the original German "stechen."

Another lexical change results in a grammatical change, turning a main clause mimicking the original structure into a dependant adverbial clause:

2) 3)
"a grave in the air there you won't lie too cramped"
"a grave in the air where you won't lie too cramped."

The following change of word order affects the stress in the sentence as well as the rhythm of the poem:

2) 3)
"you'll have a grave then in the air" "you'll then have a grave in the air."

In the final analysis the changes tend to "germanize" the poem more while only marginally altering the meaning. In general, Felstiner's translation stays quite close to the German with cognates such as "midday" for "Mittag," "to shovel" for "schaufeln," "to swing" for "schwingen," etc. Other "Germanic" effects are for example in "deeper" for "tiefer" or "hounds" for "Rüden" (pl.), which clearly points to the German "Hund" [dog]. The latter, "Rüde," poses a real problem for translation because it is most frequently designates a male dog as opposed to a female. It may also indicate a large, very aggressive hound. In addition to the near-rhyme with "Juden," the term is homonymous with the adjective "rüde" which translates "rude" in its sense as in a "rude awakening, a rude reminder." Therefore "hound," which most of the English translators use here, is preferable to "dogs" or "big dogs." French translator Valérie Briet solved the problem by employing "dogue" (rather than "chien" or "grands chiens") which indicates an aggressive, large breed.
Here are the first and last stanzas of John Felstiner's final version:

_Todesfuge_

Black milk of daybreak we drink you at night
we drink you at midday Death is a master aus Deutschland
we drink you at evening and morning we drink and we drink
this Death is ein Meister aus Deutschland his eye it is blue
he shoots you with shot made of lead shoots you level and true
a man lives in the house your goldenes Haar Margareta
he looses his hounds on us grants us a grave in the air
he plays with his vipers and daydreams der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland
dein goldenes Haar Margareta
dein aschenes Haar Sulamith

As John Felstiner explained, his translation was written by ear, listening to a recording
of the poet reading "Todesfuge" himself over and over. One of the translator's greatest
concerns was to render the particular rhythm of the poem with its steadily rising and
falling cadences, which he has interpreted as one of the musical aspects of the poem.

The most striking feature about this translation is the inclusion of original
German text as an integral part of the English. The only non-cognate term cited in the
original form is "Deutschland," for which the translator explains:

Those two syllables grip the rhythm better than 'Germany,' and after all, why
translate Deutschland, drilled into everyone by Nazism's 'Deutschland,
Deutschland über Alles' (Poet 36).

Moreover, for Americans 'Germany' often evokes a rather folkloristic image:

_Lederhosen_ [leather pants], _Bier_ [beer], and yodeling. French translator Jean-Pierre
Lefebvre remarked that for the French, who had three wars with Germany, the connotations of militarism and aggressivity are certainly implicit by the term ‘Allemagne.’ Felstiner’s consistent usage of the word “Deutschland” in lieu of “Germany” throughout the poem points to a text outside the English, points to the original. It gives away that it is only a translation, not an original. The harsh and unexpected intrusion of the German term into the English develops the drama with force.

For the cognates the translator sets in place a learning effect, which he explains at the following example:

The catch phrase der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland appears four times. Let this sentence gradually revert to German. First, so that the reader comprehends, say ‘Death is a master from Deutschland.’ The second time, ‘Death is a master aus Deutschland.’ Then ‘Death is ein Meister aus Deutschland.’ And finally, ‘der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland’—a German contagion of English (Poef 40).

This technique includes other original German terms such as “Haar,” “goldenes,” and “aschenes” as well as the two female names, a procedure very similar to Panait Istrati’s text Mes départs. However Istrati ordinarily emphasized the word as foreign by its graphic representation (italics or inverted commas) and gave an explanation in a footnote or in parentheses the first time it was mentioned. Where Istrati had adapted the spelling to make it pronounceable for the French reader, Felstiner uses traditional English and German spellings and leaps from the one to the other. The emphasis of this English text on the rhythm and “the mind-emptying repetitiveness” (40) of the poem’s structure will probably lead most readers to superimpose the English pronunciation over the German spelling because they don’t know how to pronounce it correctly.

In Felstiner’s translation the English “Shulamith,” which in other English translations is rendered as “Shulamite” or left as in the German, then turns to the
German “Sulamith” at the end. “Sulamith,” who here acts as the Jewish counterpart to the German “Margarete,” is mentioned in the Bible’s “Hohelied Solomons” [“Song of Songs which is Solomon’s” or “Song of Solomon”]. In the authorized “King James” version the passage reads “Return, return, O Shu’lamite; return, return, that we may look upon thee” (6:13—Holy 724).

However, another version says the following:

Again, O Shulamite,
dance again,
that we may watch you dancing! (7:1—Song 99).

Or yet another version:

How you love to gaze on the Shulammite maiden,
as she moves between the lines of dancers! (6:13—New 805).

These latter two translations relate Sulamith’s dance of beauty and seduction to the Jews’ ‘dance of death’ in the camp, to the tango or classical music Jewish orchestras were made to play. In contrast to Margarete, Shulamith represents the Jewish people, her hair is darker, “aschen,” that is ashen blond or turned to ashes.

In the case of “Margarete” Felstiner not only teaches the English reader the German name but also how to pronounce it. The text starts out with “Margareta,” an approximate phonetic transcription for the German pronunciation—similar to “Marienah” for Marlene Dietrich—and is repeated three times before it becomes the original “Margarete.” (This could be seen as simply consistent with the same technique; first English then next step German. But then why not use the more English “Margaret” as Clarise Samuels’ translation does?) Michael Bullock in his more conventional translation also maintains the original German name (again with a pronunciation aid): “Margaretē,” whereas most other English versions opt for the half English/half German “Margareta.” All three available French versions preserve the original German “Margarete” as well. Why does Felstiner’s translation dwell on this particular name and
why do most of the translations undertake a comparable effort to retain some sense of
the original name rather than ‘translating’ it into the equivalent in their language?

“Margarete” is a significant motif. In other works of German literature there are
few characters by that name. Most critics have traced the Margarete of the poem to the
female protagonist in Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s play Faust (1808), the most
reputed, central play by the foremost of the German “Dichter und Denker” (Poets and
Philosophers). If Celan’s Margarete is the one in Goethe’s text then the “master from
Germany” is Faust, the man who has a pact with Mephistopheles, the devil, the man
who adores his girl and betrays her innocence. Goethe’s Margarete is better known
as “Gretchen,” and engraved into collective German culture in the form of “die
Gretchenfrage” [Gretchen’s question]. Originally in the play the question was “Nun sag,
wie hast du’s mit der Religion?” (109) [Now say, what is your stand on religion?], a
crucial question because Gretchen is debating whether she should get involved with
Faust. Nowadays the expression ‘Gretchen’s question’ indicates any very fundamental
ethical or philosophical question. Celan’s poem asks such a question in the context of
the great world literature he invokes, a rhetorical question since the answer is enacted
in the whistles, and the shoveling, and the grave in the air. Goethe’s Margarete also
anticipates Faust’s answer: “Du bist ein herzlich guter Mann, / Allein ich glaub’, du hältst
nicht viel davon” (109) [You are a very good man, / but I feel you don’t think much of it].
Felstiner’s emphasis on “Margarete” connects the poem directly and repeatedly to the
German culture and literature.

As critics have established, intertextual references to canonical German culture
abound in “Todesfuge.” As mentioned above, the title introduces musical overtones to
Bach’s fugues. Bach’s aria “Komm süßer Tod” [Come sweet death] in “spielt süßer
den Tod” [play death more sweetly] (Poet 39), Wagner’s Meistersinger von Nürnberg
are almost overdetermined in “Meister aus Deutschland,” due to the Nuremberg Trials.
Felstiner sees other literary references to Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* as well as his poem "Eriking" because of the rhyme on 'genau.' He relates 'golden hair' to Heine's "Lorelei," but of course Heine's poem was inspired by Clement Brentano's, and in turn certainly contributed to Apollinaire's version in his "Rhénanes." However, 'goldenes Haar' ('cheveux d'or') is also a common cliché in continental fairy-tales. The parallel structure in "wir trinken und trinken" hints at Heine's protest ballad "Die Schlesischen Weber" [The Silesian Weavers] from 1844, where an oft-repeated verse goes "wir weben und weben" [we weave and weave] (Poef 36).

Klaus Wagenbach detected in "Todesfuge" references to Meister (Hans) Sachs, Martin Luther and his translation of the "Song of Songs" as well as to romantic folksongs (88). Further allusions can be noted to expressionist Georg Trakl's (1887-1914) poetry, the use of oxymorons as "black dew" and the colors black, blue, and brown for example (Cf. Menschheitsdämmerung). Wagenbach has viewed Trakl's poetry and life as a paradigm of despair and melancholy over the breakdown of Eastern European 'neighborliness' and neighborhood. Georg Trakl served as a medical assistant in the First World War, where he was in charge of taking care of ninety severely wounded soldiers in Galicia, broke down and died. Inferring Trakl citations into "Todesfuge," Wagenbach imbues it with a larger scope. According to him, Celan calls the entire German tradition to witness (86). This could mean the memory of a better "once upon a time":

Von dem Deutschland, das da den Tod als Meister sendet, bleiben nur ferne, verschwommene Erinnerungen an frühere, bessere Meister (Wagenbach 87).

[That Germany which is sending Death as its master leaves only distant, blurred memories of earlier, better masters.]

Yet, those 'better' masters have always existed, and the bad ones too. Celan's poem does not so much evoke a glorious past turned into a horrible present. Rather the allusion to Trakl or earlier 'masters' shows that the shoah then did not start with
Nazism, or the death camps, or even World War One. It started much earlier, and may still not have ended. The drama is that the two exist simultaneously, culture and humanist ideals and atrocity and murder.

Siegfried Mandel has summarized the intertextuality with German culture as "an undisguised ironic indictment of German lack of cultural and humane values" and he continues: "German pretension to culture and humanity are put on the searing grate of irony" (276). But this is not irony. Rather the poem shows that the contradiction between a great cultural tradition and great barbarity may not be one. On the contrary this murderer was an ordinary person, "ein ganz gewöhnlicher, etwas sentimentaler Deutscher" [a completely ordinary, somewhat sentimental German] (Wagenbach 87). Indeed what the poem illustrates besides the suffering of the Jewish people, is that evil may come in unexpected shapes and contexts. George Steiner has stated this:

> We know now that a man can read Goethe or Rilke in the evening, that he can play Bach and Schubert, and go to his day’s work at Auschwitz in the morning ("Preface." ix).

More important than a certain bitterness and sarcasm in the poem is for me the question underlying these citations: 'Why and How was this possible?' The condensation and accumulation of multiple cultural contextualisations also insinuate that the suffering described here is the epitome of all suffering, that only the pain and woe expressed in all those literary works taken together could do it justice and then still would not.

These cultural references then mark the poem as a very German poem. A poem in German, woven into the cultural tradition of Germany. The German resonances will not translate well because the foreign reader is not familiar with them. John Felstiner has therefore chosen to "germanize" his translation in several ways: by shifting the English more towards its inherent Germanic side and by introducing in a gentle learning process German cognates into the English poem. The German sound
of the poem may be viewed as a foreignizing strategy of the sorcier Felstiner. The translator also reconstructs the poetry through assonance ("shoots," "looses"), alliterations (d, m, s) and other stylistic means. In a few instances the text is slightly more sentimental/theatrical than the original as in "the stars are all sparkling" or "his eyes are so blue" or "he daydreams." Some minor criticisms concern the latter "daydream" for the poetic, archaizing form "triumet" which makes the original more explicit. Also the parallel structure from the end of the first stanza "Erde" [earth] and the beginning of the third stanza "Erdreich" [earth, soil] is lost; however the translator compromises by using "ground," another Germanic word. (Valérie Briet in her French translation rendered "Erdreich" as "Terre;" the capitalized noun indicates the Earth as our planet. The man has the Jews dig a hole in the planet.)

John Felstiner's translation suggests an exact, close and in-depth reading of the original and a mindful and bold rendition. This version does not explicate the original, rather it reproduces the air and the tone. As Felstiner explained, 'foreignizing' "Deathfugue" served "to drive home its motifs as Celan himself does" (Poet 40).

"Home" is the keyword here: Celan's "Todesfuge" is a text written about the ultimate exile, death, and about the exile and death of the Jewish people. As a text it is not in exile, it is right at home. The poem boasts very earthy, very Germanic vocabulary and is nestled profoundly in German culture and literature, but it also drives itself into its flesh like a thorn. This most famous one of Paul Celan's poems may be his most German one, and certainly the one the most explicitly about a German, which is also a universal, matter.

Michael Bullock's "Fugue of Death"

Michael Bullock's translation was the first English version, published in 1955. While the English parallels the missing punctuation from the original, it distinguishes narration from speech, i.e. the sentences said or written by the "man" in direct speech.
are italicized in this version. In so doing, the text becomes more explicit because it assigns the different roles very clearly. In the original the narrator reports everything indifferently: narrative, words of the ‘man’ and the narrator’s own thoughts or words. Bullock turns the poem almost into a script for a play, where the narrative becomes explicit stage directions: “we drink it and drink it,” “he whistles his Jews,” “he writes it and steps out in front of the house” and then the dialogue, which in this case is the ‘man’s’ monologue followed by actions in response. The impression of a modern play is heightened by the prose-like style, which in contrast to Felstiner seems far less concerned with rhythmic and poetic tension. The poem’s rhythm is quite irregular, and turns into an interesting beat in places; e.g. Strike up a dance tune, which in contrast to the harsh German ending in “Tanz” [tunts] ends in a soft, open sound.

Fugue of Death

Black milk of morning we drink it at dusk
we drink it at noon and at dawn we drink it at night
we drink it and drink
we dig a grave in the air there you lie without crowding
A man lives in the house he plays with the snakes he writes
he writes at nightfall to Germany Your golden hair Margaré
he writes it and steps out in front of the house and the stars are afiash and he whistles his hounds
he whistles his Jews and makes them dig a grave in the earth
he commands us Strike up a dance tune

Black milk of morning we drink you at night
we drink you at dawn and at noon we drink you at dusk
we drink and drink
A man lives in the house he plays with the snakes he writes
he writes at nightfall to Germany Your golden hair Margaré
Your ashen hair Shulamith we dig a grave in the air there you lie without crowding.

He calls You there cut deeper the ground—you others sing now and play
he grasps the steel in his belt he brandishes it his eyes are blue
You there thrust deeper the spades—you others go on with the tune

[...]

On the other hand, the translator uses means like assonance (which in some cases may be spontaneous) as in “crowding,” “house,” “hounds,” or “deeper” and
"steel," as well as alliteration "drink," "dusk," "dawn" and "clouds" and "crowding." The word "Death" is capitalized throughout the text so that there is no difference between death as a condition or process and its personification. In all instances "Death" is personified in this poem, so that "Play Death sweeter" underlines the fact that someone is playing Death and has the power to decide about other people's life and death, rather than playing musical "Death." The translation generally emphasizes the narrative of the poem.

It is also clarifies one rather important detail. Bullock translates the verse "Er schreibt wenn es dunkelt nach Deutschland" from the first stanza as "he writes at nightfall to Germany." The temporal clause "wenn es dunkelt" [when it gets dark] is rendered as a nominal clause; therefore with punctuation the line would be: 'he writes, at nightfall, to Germany.' In the German, however, it is not that clear; due to the syntax, which is by all means contorted, the interpretation imposes itself that "he writes, when the night is falling to Germany." The phrase "wenn es dunkelt nach Deutschland" sounds as if it was starting to get dark in Germany; the unusual and unexpected preposition "nach" [to] instead of "in" suggests the process as seen from far away, from the cosmos or as if God could see a dark shadow moving across the globe to Germany. It also resonates with a similar image in another poem, an untitled poem from the volume Lichtzwang (1970), which starts with "WIR LAGEN" [We were lying]. The lyrical "we" was unable to "hinüberdunkeln zu dir" [darken towards you]; "to darken" is used as an active verb in this poem, something that can be done at will by an agent, such as "us." This example and Celan's poetic praxis in general would make it quite likely that the man writes as it is getting dark 'to' Germany. It could also simply mean that the man is writing (a letter) to Germany. This darkness that the man and the narrator can see approaching, happening to Germany, resonates in frequent
metaphors in reference to that time: *La Nuit* (Night) for example was the title of Elie Wiesel's first memoirs of his imprisonment in the concentration camp at Auschwitz.

At the same time that verse does refer to a man writing to Germany as it gets dark, after work. While one could be led to think that the beginning darkness and the writing coincide accidentally, this is not so. This man seeks the "night," seeks its protection, is at ease in it. He waits until it gets dark to start writing, or else causes the darkness by his writing. Donald White's translation for this verse "he writes back home when the dark comes" makes it clear that a letter or a postcard to family is being written here. This version introduces the concept of 'home' into the poem, contrasting it clearly to the "house" in the next verse. Whose home exactly is it though? The man's home, certainly, but also the home of the collective "we" narrator, the Jews and other prisoners. This verse is also an indictment, a lament, for the man can write home, he still has a home—Germany, her literature and culture—"we" don't. The use of 'home' in White's rendition underlines the poem's inscription as a German poem, a poem about Germany, about being almost German and being Jewish too.

As the next verse "er schreibt es" [he writes it] suggests, the man writes *something*, but what exactly? The words mentioned before, "dein goldenes Haar Margarete?" In Jean-Pierre Lefebvre's French version this is explicit in "écrit ces mots" [writes these words]. Is he writing a love letter in the style of a troubador? A letter he is sending to Germany? Perhaps even a poem, which he is contributing to the invoked German tradition? The act of writing as such is an act of knowledge, education and culture. Yet an act of writing can also be an enactment, like a "speech act." It comes to mind that the proceedings and resolutions at the Wannsee Conference in Berlin were put in writing and signed on precisely the "20. Januar" [January 20] Celan often cites, the decision about the *Final Solution of the "Jewish question."* In the context of a
concentration camp, every deportation, every execution, every death sentence was recorded in files and records.14

Donald White's Chagall version

Donald White's translation appeared in the anthology *Modem European Poetry* edited by Willis Barnstone in 1966. Barnstone not only classified Celan under “Germany” (which is a quite common misunderstanding) but also stated that “German poetic surrealism has reached a high point in the work of Paul Celan” (162), a rather astonishing statement seemingly inspired by White's renditions. For indeed White 'surrealizes' the poem in English, or to be more precise, he reproduces the Celan text in the terms of paintings by the Russian/French/Jewish artist Marc Chagall (1887-1985).

Fugue of Death

Coal-black milk of morning we drink it at sundown
we drink it at noon and at dawning we drink it at night
we drink it and drink it
we'll shovel a grave in the heavens there's no crowding there
A man's in the house he plays with his serpents he writes
he writes back home when the dark comes your golden hair Margareta
he writes it and then leaves the house and the stars are atwinkle he whistles his dogs to come near
he whistles his Jews to come here and shovel a grave in the earth
he commands us play sweet now for dancing

Coal-black milk of morning we drink thee at night
we drink thee at dawning at noontime we drink thee at sundown
we drink thee and drink thee
A man's in the house he plays with his serpents he writes
he writes back home when the dark comes your golden hair Margareta
your ashen hair Shulamite we'll shovel a grave in the heavens there's no crowding there
He shouts you there get the earth open deeper you here sing and play for the dance
he grabs at the gun in his belt he lifts it his eyes are bright blue
you there get the earth open faster you others play on now for dancing

[. . .]

He shouts play death very sweet now Death is a proud German master
he shouts make the fiddles sing darker you'll rise as grey smoke in the air
your grave will be high in the clouds there's no crowding there [. . .]

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Chagall's work is a class by itself although it was influenced by cubism, surrealism and other movements. Art critic Carl Einstein, a contemporary, characterized Chagall's paintings in the following laconic words:

Man griff die neuen Formen und erfüllte sie mit russischer oder jüdischer Ethnologie; das simultané des Delaunay wurde episch; gerade mit diesen Mitteln wollte man die Gleichung eines reich bewegten Geschehens finden; der Kubismus wurde ein Mittel, die Anekdote von mehr als einer Seite zu erheilen (Einstein 267).

[So one took up the new forms and filled them with Russian or Jewish ethnology; Delaunay's simultané became epic; exactly with those means one aspired to find the allegory of richly turbulent events; cubism became a means to elucidate the anecdote from more than one angle.]

Apart from the fact that Celan depicts a collective tragedy of universal significance rather than an anecdote and that 'turbulent' does not quite describe it either, this is indeed what is happening in "Todesfuge." The change between description, shouts, thoughts, and reported speech, the lines without punctuation, are juxtaposed and entwined in a Cubist manner.

White's translation intensifies the Chagall aspect of the poem; e.g. adds 'color' to certain images: "coal-black milk," "you'll rise as grey smoke in the air," "his eyes are bright blue". These and expressions such as "big dogs," "us all," and "the stars are atwinkle" give the poem a naïve, child-like tone. As mentioned earlier, this version omits "Germany" in the first stanza, but has the man write "back home" instead. Also, Death is not from Germany but "a proud German master," another example of the naïve tone of the English poem. The already mentioned "bright blue eyes," which appear rather abruptly in the poem, remind us that the narrator is describing an actual person. Blue is the eye color of many Germans and other Nordic people, and in combination with Margarete's "golden hair" typical for the "Aryan race" proclaimed by the Nazis. But blue eyes are also a common cliché for proverbs and idiomatic expressions: someone has "ein blaues Auge" [literally: a blue eye; figuratively: a black..."
eye] after a fight but on the other hand “mit einem blauen Auge davonkommen” [to get
away with a blue eye] means to ‘get off lightly,’ and that was probably true for a number
of war criminals. The adjective “blauäugig” [blue-eyed] in German means that someone
is naïve. These expressions and connotations give a quite revealing psychogram of the
man in the poem, that is of the Nazis but also of the ordinary German.

The verb “schaufeln” in the fourth verse indicates the act of shoveling, a more
or less regular, rhythmic activity with the accent on the tool being used, the shovel. The
relative lightness of the German verb stems from its suffix “-eln,” which evokes a
repeated swinging movement or a light movement. Other such verbs are “lächeln” (to
smile) or even “fiedeln” (to play the fiddle) lead us again to Marc Chagall and his
paintings in the Hassidic tradition. The German verb also relates the locution “sein
eigenes Grab schaufeln” [to dig one's own grave], which in this poem takes on a
hauntingly literal sense. Translator John E. Jackson regarded the Jews' gravedigging
in “Todesfuge” as a “self-destructive act” (Jackson 218). Only one single grave is being
dug, most likely a mass grave. This grave in the ground becomes one with the grave in
the airs, as if the Jews were shoveling the grave in the air. There, finally, they will be
free, there will be no more suffering. The reiteration of that promise “there is no
crowding there” besides the cruelty contains a kernel of truth.

White also enhances the reference to scripture in the poem, using the more
poetic, biblical “thee” instead of “you” (“we drink thee and drink thee”). The man here
plays with “serpents” rather than snakes, which again refers to biblical language. In
certain contexts “serpent” can also mean the devil:

And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan,
and bound him a thousand years (Revelation 20:2—Holy 1289).

Naturally, it was also the serpent who caused Adam and Eve to be expelled from
Paradise. The reference to “heavens” rather than “airs” or “breezes” as in other
translations also points to the deeper religious involvement of this text. Transposing "Geigen" [violins] as "fiddle" definitely brings the Eastern Jewish tradition to the fore, insinuates the fiddlers in Chagall's paintings, the fiddle in Eastern European Jewish music. The German term "Geige" covers a middle ground between "Violine" [violin] and "Fiedel" [fiddle], the orchestral instrument as much as the instrument used in the folk tradition.

What at first glance seem to be inaccuracies, therefore turns out to be strategy: White systematically plays up the Jewish inscription in this text, which is otherwise very much rooted in the German tradition. The allusion to Chagall is justified in several ways: the painter (in exile!) is one of the first and most famous artists to incorporate the traditions of his home into his art, to depict the Hassidic world, which was Celan's too. At the same time, the sweet, somewhat naïve tone of the English clashes effectively with the poem's content, magnifying the shocking, cynical opposition of images in the original. Casting the poem like a Chagall painting ties in with another principle of Celan poetry in general: the doubt whether the "word" can represent what the "eye" sees. In terms of Celan's poem "Und mit dem Buch aus Tarussa," Christine Ivanovic has made a pertinent connection:

Es sind bildliche Assoziationen an die Welt des russisch-jüdischen Malers Chagall, [. . .] Vorgaben an eine bildliche, nicht-sprachliche Perzeption von Welt, die gerade ihre sprachlichen Ausdrucksmöglichkeiten in Frage gestellt sieht (114).

[They are figurative associations to the universe of the Russian-Jewish painter Chagall, ( . . . ) projections to a pictorial, non-linguistic perception of the world, which sees its possibilities of linguistic expression put into question.]

This allusion to the painting and in particular to the art of Marc Chagall, also anticipate the priority of the eye over the word, which was to become a principle in Celan's later works. The poem depicts, exposes, demonstrates, but it doesn't tell, doesn't give an explanation, or a solution. For what could that answer possibly be?
In its Chagall aspect, the White translation moves the poem toward exile, shifts it from its inscription into German literature towards its Jewish tradition.

Simultaneously, the English transfers the poem from language towards its pictorial, descriptive aspect, anticipating a poetic principle in Celan’s later works. Language in this English version evokes painting, a silent art. Nicholas J. Meyerhofer has put this eloquently.

‘Todesfuge’ [...] describes a situation wherein speech is lethal and silence laden with terror. Beyond the thematization of the tension between speaking and not speaking, however, Celan’s poems themselves gradually and progressively come to formalize this ‘double-bind,’ since they begin rather consistently to attest to the fact that experience and reality elude facile comprehensibility, that they are ultimately not quite translatable into language (9).

So this translation, which conjures up another art form, hints at the difficulty of poetry and translation itself.

Gertrude Schwebell’s “Fugue of Death”

Schwebell’s translation betrays a clarifying impulse, a desire to correct the original. The translator leaves spaces between the different clauses, where she misses punctuation, to set them off from one another. In so doing she explicates and interprets the original, and she inscribes rhetorical pauses into the text. Here is an excerpt of her version.

Fugue of Death

Dark milk of dawn we drink it in the evening we drink it at night
we drink it at noon in the morning we drink it at night
we drink and we drink we are digging a grave in the clouds where we will not be crowded
in the house lives a man who plays with vipers who writes who writes when the night falls to Germany your golden hair Margareta
he writes it and steps out of doors the stars glitter there and he calls to his hounds hey come here
he calls to his Jews come here come on dig a grave in the ground he commands us to strike up for a dance

Dark milk of dawn we drink it at night we drink it in the morning at noon we drink it in the evening
we drink and we drink
In the house lives a man who plays with vipers who writes
who writes when the night falls to Germany your golden hair Margareta
Your ashen hair Sulamith we are digging a grave in the clouds where we will
not be crowded

[...]

The English introduces alliterations on "d" (this is why she says "dark" milk
instead of black) as in "dark," "dawn," "drink," "digging" as well as on "g": in "golden,
"glitter," "grave," "ground," "gun," and "c": "clouds," "crowded," "calls," "comes,
"commands," "clutches" but also near-rhymes as in "hounds" and "ground" as well as
"eyes" and "precisely." This explains some of the slight semantic liberties. The most
dramatic changes occur in the syntax; awkward syntax is straightened out. In places
the sentence structure of the translation is made to sound almost more German than
the original: "Ein Mann wohnt im Haus der spielt mit den Schlangen der schreibt" [In
the house lives a man who plays with vipers who writes]. The snakes in this version are
not "the vipers," i.e. where the original suggests that the readers knows about the
snakes, this effect is deleted here. John Felstiner explained his own choice of "vipers"
instead of "snakes" because it fit the rhythm better and tied "vipers" to "writes,
"uncovering something deadly in the act of writing" (Poet 36).

Schwebell converts indirect phrases into direct commands using the imperative:

he calls to his hounds hey come here
he calls to his Jews come here come on dig a grave in the ground,

etc.

The effect of these imperatives in combination with the white spaces is quite startling; a
very vivid image of the place develops in the reader's mind, as if we were at the camp
ourselves, surrounded by a desolate, hopeless landscape, and shouts which echo in
the voids on the page. As if the memories of visits to Buchenwald, where it is always
windy on that hilltop, or of Sachsenhausen or Ravensbrück and other concentration
camps, merge with historic photos and film. It is a black and white landscape, an eerie,
deadly one. This immediacy, this putting us right there, is reinforced by the use of verb tenses: e.g. "we are digging a grave in the clouds where we will not be crowded." While the Present Progress underscores the point in time, the future tense points to a time beyond the now, although the actual event described in the poem happened some fifty years ago. This translation enhances the drama in the poem by setting it as a documentary, creating the impression of real first-hand testimony.

A kind of testimony it is. Although the poet himself was not imprisoned in a concentration camp, he speaks for the victims, those who cannot speak anymore. Most of the imagery in this poem is not metaphor but fact and that is what Alvin Rosenfeld has viewed as the essential characteristic of Holocaust literature. In his study A Double Dying: Reflections on Holocaust Literature he states, that there are no metaphors for Auschwitz, just as Auschwitz is not a metaphor for anything else. Why is that the case? Because the flames were real flames, the ashes only ashes, the smoke always and only smoke. If one wants meaning out of that, it can only be this: at Auschwitz humanity incinerated its own heart (Rosenfeld 27).

Marties Janz has viewed this image of humans rising as smoke into the air as a topos from baroque times; however the metaphor became reality:

Was einst Metapher war, ist Wirfclichkeit geworden, und unter diesem Aspekt scheint Auschwitz einen Teil der kulturellen Überlieferung unrettbar depraviert zu haben (40).

[What used to be a metaphor has become reality, and under this aspect Auschwitz seems to have irretrievably deprived a part of the cultural heritage.]

In this poem the death camps and the smoke are no metaphors. The poem is a dramatization of real events; it describes what happened almost matter-of-factly:

"Genauso ist es gewesen, sentimental, professionell, mechanisch" (Wagenbach 87)

[That is exactly what it was like, sentimental, professional, mechanical]. Besides it documentary character, "Todesfuge" is also an important historical document.
Jean-Pierre Lefebvre's "Fugue de (la) mort"

Prolific translator, former student of Celan's at the ENS and now professor of German there, Jean-Pierre Lefebvre is known for his thorough and linguistically sound work. He has presented two versions of "Todesfuge," which differ only in details:

1) "Fugue de la Mort"  
2) "Fugue de Mort"

"on n'y est pas serré"  
"où l'on n'est pas serré"

"il te tire une balle de plomb"  
"il t'atteint d'une balle de plomb."

The tendency to explicate evident in these examples underlines Lefebvre's general concern for precision. Precision is what Lefebvre views as the main attribute of the German language, and translates it into his French poem. It is insinuated in the poem's line "er trifft dich genau" [he hits you precisely], which Lefebvre has rendered as "il ne te manque pas" [he doesn't miss you], accidentally a slightly less precise translation than for example "shoots you level and true" (Felstiner). Yet precision and perfection are present in other places in the translation, for example in the notes that run through the text from the title onward. Perfectionism characterized the machinery of extermination the Nazis had put in place, and it is also present in the controlled unemotional narrative of the poem itself.

Fugue de Mort

Lait noir de l'aube nous le buvons le soir  
le buvons à midi et le matin nous le buvons la nuit  
nous buvons et buvons

nous creusons dans le ciel une tombe où l'on n'est pas serré  
Un homme habite la maison il joue avec les serpents il écrit  
il écrit quand il va faire noir en Allemagne Margarete tes cheveux d'or  
écrit ces mots s'avance sur le seuil et les étoiles tressaillent il siffle ses grands chiens  
il siffle il fait sortir ses juifs et creuser dans la terre une tombe  
il nous commande allons jouez pour qu'on danse

Lait noir de l'aube nous te buvons la nuit  
te buvons le matin puis à midi nous te buvons le soir  
nous buvons et buvons

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Un homme habite la maison il joue avec les serpents il écrit
il écrit quand il va faire noir en Allemagne Margarete tes cheveux d'or
Tes cheveux cendre Sulamith nous creusons dans le ciel une tombe où l'on n'est pas
serré

Il crie enfbnoez plus vos bêtes dans la terre vous autres et vous chantez jouez
il attrape le fer à sa ceinture il le brandit ses yeux sont bleus
enfonchez plus les bêtes vous autres et vous jouez encore pour qu'on danse

[...]
air] as “votre fumée montera vers le ciel” [your smoke will rise towards the sky] once more makes the poem more explicit, brings out the cruelty being committed: the Jews in this poem are being told that only smoke will be left of them, whereas the original is somewhat less explicit about it.

Lefebvre’s translation therefore emphasizes the violence in the poem, gives it a harsh edge. In my personal conversation with the translator I also had the impression that he shares the poet’s ambivalent rapport towards German, that he too views the language as something to be conquered and executed. Lefebvre favors the aspect of ‘work’ in a poem, which means work for the translator and work for the reader.

Summary

The viewpoint of the narrator oscillates between two poles as well as between two tones: he belongs to the “we” whose actions he describes in order to then focus his attention to the man who probably represents a guard or a commandant of a camp. The tone changes from a witnessing, almost sad tone to a sarcastic tone. This transition is effected by the phrase “da liegt man nicht eng” [one does not lie too tight there]. These two modes alternate everywhere in the poem. The sarcasm is also found in the narrator’s discourse, a sign of macabre humor but perhaps also the demonstration of the Nazi propaganda which had poisoned the language to the point that Paul Celan felt obligated to re-create it.

The poem mimics the cynicism of the Nazis in their words and in their appreciation of music and other arts. At the same time, it expresses their ignorance and that of their sympathizers. The extermination of the Jews and other persecuted groups was undertaken with industrial organization and perfection. The poem underlines that everyone, perpetrators, victims, witnesses, ignorants, were affected by the Shoah, that nothing was as before.
Already in this poem, Celan has radically reworked the system of the German language, even though overall he remains within acceptable bounds. The first phrase, for example, constitutes a "mise en relief," where the object of the sentence is taken up again by the pronoun "sie." The syntactic inversions by Celan seem motivated 1) to situate the poem in a poetic tradition where its inversions, unusual in everyday language, distinguish the poem as poetic language and 2) to break up the natural rhythm of the language and to accentuate it. The force of "Todesfuge" resides in the evocation of painful, provocative images, such as when the Jews are reduced to the level of the dogs, but also in his deprecating and bitter sarcasm, which is painful and uneasy for the reader to read.

The rage, the sadness and the tenderness towards his characters recreated in Celan's poetry are coupled with humiliation and a deep sense of diffuse guilt. Celan's poems do not search for survival, do not represent the search and the demand for his own place in life. Rather they are born from the desire to tell, to tell it, in fact, to write it, to write, let it be known, even if it isn't certain what it is.

The three poems analyzed below were first translated into French by André du Bouchet and published in issue 8 of the magazine L'Éphémère. Since they are part of Celan's "hermetic" body of work, they are not only mentioned much less in secondary literature but they also resist analysis. These poems are not narrative and not descriptive; rather, they project themselves as reality.

Flügelnacht

"Flügelnacht" is part of the volume Von Schwelle zu Schwelle [From Threshold to Threshold] published in 1955. Four different French translations by Jean-Claude Schneider, André du Bouchet, Valérie Briet and Jean-Pierre Lefebvre are available as well as a fragment of a translation by Maurice Blanchot cited in his essay "Le dernier à parler." The only English translation is by Joachim Neugroschel. The question arises
why this poem appealed more to French translators than to English, and whether the
generalization that Celan's poetry lends itself to translation is justified.

Two words in this poem refer back to the key concepts mentioned in
"Todesfuge"—"Nacht" [night] as part of "Flügelnacht" and "Auge" [eye]. These two
words remind us of their concrete context in "Todesfuge," the darkness of Nazism that
descended onto Germany and the cold blue eye(s) of the camp commandant, who
tormented and killed the Jews subject to him. This intertextual reference also remind us
that, as many critics have stated, most of Celan's poetry is about the Holocaust. This of
course is only partially true: the Holocaust is the point of departure, the memory
running through all of Celan's texts. But there is always more to a good poem, and as
Ulrich Baer has remarked it would be unfair to limit Celan's poetry to that one topic.

Flügelnacht

Flügelnacht, weither gekommen und nun
für immer gespannt
über Kreide und Kalk.
Kiesel, abgrundhin rollend.
Schnee. Und mehr noch des Weißen.

Unsichtbar,
was braun schien,
gedankenfarben und wild
überwuchert von Worten.

Kalk ist und Kreide.
Und Kiesel.
Schnee. Und mehr noch des Weißen.

Du, du selbst:
in das fremde
Auge gebettet, das dies
überblickt.

Further words in this poem, which frequently appear in Celan's poetry, are
"Flügel" [wing], "Kreide" [chalk], "Kalk" [lime], "Kiesel" [pebble], "weiß" [white], and
"Schnee" [snow]. The poem is written in mostly short elliptic phrases. The only phrase
close to a real sentence with a finite verb is "Kalk ist und Kreide" [Lime is and chalk]. It
seems descriptive; there are no finite verbs, only participles used as adjectives. The
text sets an elliptic, momentary situation. A pair of clauses is repeated to finish off the
first and third stanza: "Schnee. Und mehr noch des Weißen" [Snow. And more of the
white.] Other parallelisms which structure the poem include: the repetition of the words
"Kreide," "Kalk" and "Kiesel" as well as assonance in the [i:] sound in "Kiesel," "lies,"
the [v] sound in "weither," "Weißen," "was," "wild," "überwuchert," "Worten," and sound
associations in [u:] in "Flügelnacht," "für," "über," "überwuchert," "überblickt." The first
three stanzas seemingly describe a nature scene, but then in the fourth stanza an
unknown "you" is addressed, embedded in the eye of a stranger. All verb forms are in
past tenses except for the rolling pebble, which is a present participle and possibly the
eye scanning/surveillance/overlooking all this.

This night, although reminiscent of the night in "Todesfuge," is nonetheless a
different kind of night: it is a night with wings and so can easily fly away, a lightsome
night. It might also be a night full of wings, where one can feel and hear wings flapping
or brushing. The "whiteness" of the poem, the wings, the night spanning, being pitched
like a tent, associates a soft, warm, pleasant night, a night that is not very dark but
perhaps a night around summer solstice by the Arctic Circle. Yet, there is snow—a
pleasant precipitation to some degree but one that can turn to ice and which becomes
dirty quickly, especially when there is civilization. The German verb "rollend" [rolling] is
almost onomatopoeic, imitating the sound of a pebble rolling towards the abyss. The
white of the night and of the materials is contrasted with the brown in the second
stanza, which is now invisible, the color of thought. The appearance of the second
stanza is opposed by the third stanza where the poem affirms the matters that exist:
chalk, lime, pebble, snow, and more white. For Maurice Blanchot the sterile white of
the snow is "le blanc toujours plus blanc (cristal, cristal), sans augmentation ni
croissance: le blanc qui est au fond de ce qui est sans fond" (175) [the white that is always more white (crystal, crystal), without elevation nor growth: the white that is at the bottom of that which is without bottom]. Otto Pöggeler has viewed the poem as a description of the night falling over a "Totenlandschaft" (281) [dead land]. For Adrian del Caro the poem depicts the painful consequences "of using speech to gain access to remembrance." He offers a striking interpretation for the last stanza:

The poet appears to be split from his self here. A strange, foreign eye ('das fremde Auge') oversees the whiteness of the wing night, but the poet is embedded in that eye. For this image to make sense, there has to be another perspective that is capable of perceiving the strange eye and the poet embedded therein. The eye however, is not sharing anything with the poet, because nothing is discernible but whiteness. The poet's vision is limited just as the strange eye's is limited. Once again Celan merges the near and the far, the familiar and the foreign. In this image of the poet lodged or embedded in the strange eye, we are presented with a kind of blindness; the poet has eyes, and the foreign eye takes in all this whiteness, but nothing is actually seen anymore because words have overgrown everything. Words have caused the 'undoing' of the landscape here (157).

Indeed the "words" seem intrusive in the poem, they have overgrown that which they have now made invisible. The lunar landscape described displays no traces of humanity or civilization nor flora nor fauna. Once something has turned into thought, taken on the color of thought, it becomes overgrown with words and its original color—brown—invisible. The German plural of "words" indicates that these are not words in their grammatical sense, rather they are statements and phrases in the sense of the French parole. Intellectual perception and verbal expression make things invisible.

Yet, chalk and lime and pebbles are real; this is affirmed strongly by the use of the only real verb in the poem "to be." Concerning the snow this is not so certain. "Schnee von gestern" [yesterday's snow] in German means that something is old news, and talking snow means talking nonsense. In this sense, the assertion that chalk and lime are, becomes relative. The "du" [you] is doubly affirmed [you, yourself]. The eye is an unknown, a strange eye, or the eye of a stranger. If the you is embedded in
that eye, it is comfortably surrounded by it, at home in it. The you then sees what that strange eye sees. At the same time the stranger’s eye sees "you" too and makes you by its perception. It is the eye that overlooks all this, that takes in everything by view, that grasps everything. Although visual perception is not entirely unaltered and unimpaired, it embraces everything. Words on the other hand cloud perception, overgrow reality, like moss overgrows an old statue and make its features invisible, or like brush overgrows an unkept cemetery. Thoughts too color everything they touch. In view of Celan’s primary concern, the color brown imposes the idea of Nazism, which is now invisible because of "words."17 The only reality this poem admits is that of the rocks, and that of the "you."

Jean-Claude Schneider’s "Nuit d’ailes" was the first translation of this poem, published in Nouvelle Revue Française (1966). The title "Nuit d’ailes" [Night of Wings] clarifies that this is a night consisting of wings. The word "déployé" is a literary form of "déployer" and is used explicitly for stretched out, unfolded wings, suggesting that the night is a like bird. In French this resonates with a line in Robert Desnos’ poem "La voix de Robert Desnos": "le minuit triomphant déploie ses ailes de satin et se pose sur mon lit" (106) [the triumphant midnight opens its wings of satin and lands on my bed].18 That poem ends in the line "celle que j’aime ne me répond pas" [the one I love doesn’t answer me], and reinforces the intertextual reference. The French language lends itself to this poem because the words "craie" [chalk] and "calcaire" [lime] reproduce the alliteration in "k" of the original. The pebble is rolling into the abyss instead of towards it. The color brown is softened to "brunâtre" [brownish] and intensifies the seemingly nature of the perceived color. Schneider’s "couleur des pensers" intimates thought processes, strategies, rather than just simple thoughts. These are "invaded" by words, almost infested as with plants or animals, an impression intensified by the brutal, ferocious implication of the adverb "sauvagement." The use of "paroles" implies that
these words were spoken. The translation features a parallelism of "voici" [here] (first stanza) and "ici" [here] (third and fourth stanzas). The "you" is curled up in the eye of the stranger, situated there not as permanently as being embedded is. Most importantly, the gaze of the strange eye dominates here. Schneider’s poem omits the assertion of the existence of chalk, lime and pebbles; he simply repeats that they are here. Substituting "voici" and "ici" for other linguistic means emphasizes the here and now of the poem, suggesting that there is something else that is not here.

Jean-Claude Schneider’s version insinuates that there are at least two realities and that the gaze of the stranger is dominant, i.e. the gaze shapes reality. The addressed "you" submits to the foreign eye, accepts its vision. The poem relates a certain violence in words but also in the perception that occurs from outside and imposes the reality here. Schneider’s version almost imbues the poem with a direct, social and historical meaning—a dominant other and a "you" that bends to seek refuge in the eye of that other. Especially in the French context this reading suggests the Nazi occupation. This translation is pleasant and quite close to the meaning of the words in the original. The poem sounds more dynamic than the original, more real.

André du Bouchet’s version from L’Éphémère was reprinted in his edition with Mercure de France in 1986. "Aile la nuit" [Wing the Night] is an unusual title, reminiscent of surnames like Charles le Chauve, etc. Since the adjective in the form of a participle "aillé" means “winged,” it is also conceivable that "aile" in this title is an imperative of a neologist creation of a verbe for “to give wings." Du Bouchet reinforces the coldness of the poem in his stilted and curt French, e.g. with his inverted syntax ("de loin provenue," “ce qui brun apparut”)—which imitates the structure of the German—and the use of the passé simple ("apparut"). His night is "ouverte" [open] like wings or an umbrella, but it does imply that it was closed before. The pebble is "au tréfonds," in the very bottom, rolling there at the bottom. In the third stanza "Calcaire, oui, craie"
reaffirms the kind of materials mentioned rather than their simple existence. The "you" in the fourth stanza is sheltered in the eye of the other. The inversion in "l’œil autre" [the eye other] is reminiscent of Rimbaud's use of "another." This "eye" envelops it; although "it" is not specified, the landscape is reiterated in the third stanza. The perspective of this eye from above is made explicit in "de haut" [from above]. The use of the verb "envelopper" with the adverb "de haut" is quite startling. The enveloping gaze seems to appropriate the scenery, while the "you" seeks refuge in the eye of the other. The poet also translates the dimension of dominance into the poem.

Du Bouchet hence does alienate the language from itself, bends it like Celan does. Since the faculties of the French language for innovation are different than those of German, the poet transposed these changes to different places. The adverb "abgrundhin" is therefore reproduced in a normal grammar but innovative structures appear in other places, which I have pointed out. In his language du Bouchet reproduces the spirit of the original.

Valérie Brie's "Nuit, aile" [Night, Wing], from her translated volume De Seuil en Seuil (1991), is also an interesting rendition of the poem's title. The comma separates the two elements while also connecting them as equal components. In both Brie's and Du Bouchet's version of the title, the homonymy of "aile" [wing] and "elle" [she, it] aids in the meaning of the title, for "elle" would refer to "la nuit" [the night]; it is therefore clear that the night is the determinant part of the compound noun. The temporal adverb "désormais" in the first line renders the original meaning accurately but uses a complex word for the miniature German "nun," which often serves just for purposes of rhythm. "Desormais" also forms a rhyme with "craie" just two lines down. The verb "tendre" [to put up, but also to stretch, to tighten] is a very accurate equivalent and transposes the equivocal significations of the original. In this version the rampant growth of words is overdetermined by "envahi" [invaded] and "une foison" a rare form for an abundance.
Unlike her colleagues, this translator employed the grammatically correct partitive article, which the French uses instead of an indeterminate article: "du calcaire" [lime], "de la craie" [chalk], "des silex" [pebbles], "de la neige" [snow] and "du blanc" [white]. This kind of article always suggests a being only a part of a bigger amount of something. This means that although there is more of the white, that too is only part of all the white there is. The "you" is "couché" [embedded, lying] in the eye of the stranger. Briet's translation is very close to the original but it is not quite as poetic as the translations of her predecessors, for example her enjambments are not convincing. Her version emphasizes the tension, the tautness of this night, and puts it in perspective too. This, our reality, is not the only one there is; our world is only part of the larger cosmos.

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre's translation was published in his volume Choix de poèmes (1998). His title, "Aile-nuit," proposes a compound noun in the English manner with a hyphen. Although this does mimic the German to some degree and assigns equal stress to both components of the word, there is a slight emphasis on "aile" [wing] since French uses the reversed order of noun and adjective. The choice of "chaux" for lime emphasizes the chemical substance rather than a type of landscape. On the other hand "galet" is more accurate for "Kiesel" [pebble] than "silex," which highlights the substance. The last stanza is made explicit and therefore longer than the original. Here the "you" is nesting at the bottom of the eye of the other (au fond de l'oeil autre); the eye therefore resembles the abyss towards which the pebble is rolling. The last verb "embrasser" has a positive connotation, a voluntary embracing almost appraising of all this with the gaze. When the eye of the other is an abyss then it is part of the landscape described in the poem. Perception then cannot separate itself from reality, it is not outside reality.
Joachim Neugroschei's English version is taken from his volume *Speech Grille and Selected Poems* (1971) and is the only available translation in English. The wing-night is "spanned" over chalk and lime, an interesting intransitive usage of this transitive verb. The use of "gravel" highlights that "Kiesel" could indeed be a plural form too. The rest of the poem is very similar to André du Bouchet's interpretation: the shelter in the alien eye, the eye that oversees etc.

"Flügelnacht" evokes the night, which envelops all that is fixed (chalk and lime) like a net. This net could be poetry, covering the world, taking off "what seemed brown", the residue of Nazism. The You is the other, who through poetry starts to see the world with the eyes of the poet. Poetry is the possibility to approach the world.

Der mit Himmeln geheizte...

The poem "Der mit Himmeln geheizte..." is included in the volume *Atemwende*, which was published in 1967. The poem starts in a paradox: the world is ripped in two, separated by a fiery crevice. This fiery crevice is heated with heavens or skies. The word "Feuerriss" itself features such a separation in the middle or at least the border between two unities, emphasized by the double consonant "r". The poem is marked by alliterations in "w": "Welt," "Wer da?," "ewige," "Wanze," "Antwort" as well as in "sch": "Schild," "gespiegelt," "umschnüffelt," "Falsch," "Verstört," "Schleife," "schiffbar."

There is also assonance in "ei": "geheizte," "seinem," "Schleife," "bleibt," and "ungetreidelte."

**DER MIT HIMMELN GEHEIZTE**

*Feuerriss durch die Welt.*

Die Wer da? – Rufe
in seinem Innem:

durch dich hier hindurch
auf den Schild
der Ewigen Wanze gespiegelt,
umschnüffelt von Falsch und Verstört,
die unendliche Schleife ziehend, trotzdem,
die schifffar bleibt für die un-
getreidelte Antwort.

This poem too refers the Celan-literate reader back to "Todesfuge"—the calls
("Rufe") are reminiscent of the man calling or shouting to the Jews "dig deeper." The
verb "umschnüffeln" [sniff around something] indirectly connects to the hounds in
"Todesfuge." "Himmel" [sky, heaven] is implied in Todesfuge’s "Lüften" [airs], and is
another very frequent concept in Celan’s poetry (34 times—Nielsen 289). It occurs in
compound words which subvert the serene, divine idea of sky or heaven, for example:
"Himmelwracks" [heaven’s wrecks, sky’s wrecks], "Himmelssäure" [heaven’s acid,
sky’s acid], "Himmelsbrache" [heaven’s fallow, sky’s fallow], "Himmelsschlucht"
[heaven’s ravine], "himmelswüst" [heaven’s desert, adj.] (Nielsen 108-109). The anti-
word to "Auge" [eye], "Wort" [word], recurs this time in the guise of "Antwort" [answer,
response].

The Who is it? calls inside the crevice are reflected through "you" onto the
shield of the Eternal Bedbug. There personified False and Distraught sniff around.
They are dragging an endless loop, a loop which remains navigable for the untowed
answer. The verb "treideln," which is at the root of the neologism "ungetreidelt," evokes
undoubtedly Arthur Rimbaud’s poem "Le Bateau ivre" [The Drunken Boat].
18 The
French equivalent of this rarely employed word appears in the first two stanzas as
"haleurs" [tow-men]. In 1958, Celan had translated that poem into German and used
the word "Treidler" [tow-men]. In this poem, however, the answer is not towed; rather it
navigates by itself. This poem consists of elliptic phrases, which are tied together in
complex subordinate relations. The poem Der mit Himmeln geheizte ...
(The sky-
heated) recalls an apocalyptic experience, an abyss fueled by the skies, but also
solitude, a sense of loss and of absence.
Andre du Bouchet's translation starts out with a strong accent on the personal pronoun "elle," which anticipates the "déchirure-feu" [almost literally: fire-crevice] through the world. This crevice is heated by "cieux" [heavens]; this form of the plural rather than the unmarked "ciels"—which Lefebvre's translation features—is a poetic usage and often has religious connotations—heavens rather than skies. Thus the religious aspect, which could be implied in the German original, is brought to the fore. The poem's sound structure is quite interesting: the first two stanzas are characterized by inner rhymes and repetitions "elle," "tel," "appels," and "au centre d'elle." The third and fourth stanzas are marked by assonance in "ou" as well as repetitions: "outrê," "outrê," "bouclier," "pour," "boucle" and "ou," as well as an alliteration in "p" as in "portês," "punaise," "percûtes," "pour," "réponse." The word "bouclier" is even richer in meanings and connotations than the German word, besides all the connotations in the English "shield," the French also designates a protective plate on tanks, various technical equipment as well as a psychological shield in a figurative sense. The choice of the verb "flaire" [to scent] rather than "renifler" [to sniff], which Lefebvre uses, omits the noisy, dog-like sniffing that is taking place. The German verb "(um)schnüffeln" is used in a figurative sense for being nosy, spying on someone. This in connection with the "bug" in the line before definitely hints at the surveillance methods of secret services.

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre's translation is in many aspects similar to that by Andre du Bouchet. Some of the changes, for example "écusson" rather than "bouclier" seem to be chosen almost to set off this translation from the previous one. The problem of a later translation is that it should take into account previously existing translations without copying them. Lefebvre's syntax is more within the norms of French than du Bouchet's. The unusual "ungetreidelt" is rendered as "non-tirée par les haleurs" [non-towed by towmen] as opposed to du Bouchet's "que nul ne hale" [which nothing tows];
in so doing Lefebvre makes the reference to Rimbaud’s poem even more obvious because he uses the exact same word. The participle “criés” [screamed, shouted] in Lefebvre’s version resonates with his translation of “Todesfuge,” where he used the same verb. The first phrase in this rendition is on the one hand more precise, by using “à travers le monde” [across the world], and on the other hand more ambiguous, for the word order suggests that this adverb determines the skies rather than the crevice, i.e. “the skies across the world” rather than “the fire crevice across the world.” The image of a crevice, a crack in the world itself, the globe itself, is lost.

Pierre Joris’ English version from his volume Breathtum begins with a phrase that syntactically imitates the German structure. It is Joris’ tendency to stay very close to the original, to imitate word formation patterns, which often transfer well between these two Germanic languages, as well as words of Germanic origin in the English. While the first phrase is a little off-putting, the poem is an almost literal, straightforward rendition, which does the German justice. The neologism “firefissure” is formed after the model of the German and with its doubling in “Ý” and the two “s” represents the meaning in the word’s structure.

So what then does this poem mean? Lielo Pretzer has viewed it as a sarcastic reference to contemporary society, reinforced by an alliteration in “Ý” (umschnüffelt von Falsch und Verstört) (294). For the bedbug is, similar to a wound, related to armed conflicts; the shield which is an arm too serves here for reflection. The “trotzdem” (omitted by du Bouchet, but rendered as “malgré tout” and “nevertheless” by Lefebvre and Joris respectively) signifies here an “Atemwende,” a breathturn, refers thereby to the title of the entire volume. An answer remains possible, it can navigate the loops and the firefissure, and it does not need to be towed. Just as in Rimbaud’s Bateau Ivre a journey of adventure and exploration begins as soon as the tow-men have let go of the boat-narrator and are captured by “Redskins,” the answer in this poem is untowed,

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it travels by itself. An answer for Celan is a navigation, a journey without a visible end
("unendlich"). Although the first three stanzas paint a picture of societal oppression, of
human angst and of being forsaken by divine intervention, the last stanza suggests a
possible solution. The journey, or the process of making art, of writing poetry is the only
response.

ERBLINDE schon heut

The poem is without title but usually goes by its first line "ERBLINDE schon
heut." It is part of the volume Atemwende, which was published in 1967. French poet
André du Bouchet has offered two quite different French translations, the first one "Sois
en ce jour aveugle" in L’Éphémère in 1968 and the other one "Perdre la vue
aujourd’hui" in the volume Poèmes with translations of works by Celan from 1986.
Michael Hamburger’s translation is from his volume published in 1980. Pierre Joris’
version is taken from his translation of the cycle Breathturn into English. Heather
McHugh’s and Nikolai Popov’s translation stems from their recent collection of Celan
translations, entitled Glottal Stop.

ERBLINDE schon heut:
auch die Ewigkeit steht voller Augen —
darin
ertrinkt, was den Bildern hinweghalf
über den Weg, den sie kamen,
darin
erlischt, was auch dich aus der Sprache
fortnahm mit einer Geste,
die du geschehn ließt wie
den Tanz zweier Worte aus lauter
Herbst und Seide und Nichts.

In this poem we find two of the concepts mentioned in "Todesfuge"—"Augen"
(pl.) [eyes], and "Tanz" [dance], and the verb "ertrinken" [to drown] is etymologically
and formally related to "trinken" [to drink]. The poem consists grammatically of only one
phrase, structured through commas, linebreaks, and a dash as well as through word
repetitions. This phrase however is composed of four main clauses. One is an imperative, the second one equals the second line, the third and fourth ones start off with the pronoun "darin" respectively. The syntax is marked.

Celan's poem repeats three different verbs with the prefix "er-," which start off lines 1, 4, and 7. The word "Erblinde" which begins the poem is an imperative form of the verb describing the process of going blind. This verb per se has a passive aspect (as well as a finality), since it is something someone undergoes, something that may happen to that person but not something that can be done. The paradox then is that the imperative suggests that the "thou" in the poem take action, actively undergo the process of going blind. The two other "er-" verbs, "ertrinken" (to drown) and "erlöschen" (to go out, like a flame) share this inherent passive aspect, as does the locution "geschehen lassen." "Erblinden" also corresponds with the nominal form of the verb in the poem (untitled) starting off with "Erhört" in the same volume. The usage of verbs with the prefix "er-," opening the poem (Erblinde) and then repeated every two lines (ertrinkt, erlischt) two more times provides the poem with a certain regular rhythm. This particular prefix ('er-') cannot be assigned a definite meaning for it applies to many different words. In general it describes a process with a final result and a certain passive element to it (erblinden—to go blind; ertrinken—to drown; erlöschen—to expire, to die). Sound patterns structuring the German are assonances in "au" as in: "auch," "Augen," "auch," "aus," "aus," "lauter."

The imagery in this poem is binary: "erblinden" [to go blind], "Augen" [eyes], "Bilder" [pictures, images] on the one hand and "Sprache" [language, speech], "Geste" [gesture], "Worte" [words] on the other. Another binary opposition is noticeable in the use of stationary and motion verbs: in fact the only stationary verb is: "stehen" [to stand] as opposed to "hinweghelfen" [to help across], "kommen" [to come], "fortnehmen" [to take away] as well as the already mentioned verbs designated
processes someone undergoes and which are irreversible. Then there is the noun "Tanz" [dance], which was mentioned in "Todesfuge." "Tanz" does not fit in any of the categories established so far, since it is neither stationary nor is it usually a direct motion verb with a movement from A to B, unless at times in a tango.

André du Bouchet's first French version "Sois en ce jour aveugle" [Be blind on this day] is a poem with a very intellectual tone to it. The repetition of sounds in "s" make the poem sound very quiet. The imperative form of the original is changed into a status "be blind on this day", rather than "devenir aveugle" [become blind] or "perdre la vue" [lose eyesight], a verb that implies finality, and due to the temporal phrase suggests that this would apply only for that particular day. "Du Bouchet uses the very general "là" [there], where "dans" [inside] or "là dans" [inside which] would have been possible, and changes the balance of the third line by adding "s'abîme". The translation overdetermines the drowning in the doubling of the verbs "s'abîmer" [to plunge] and "noyer" [to drown someone]. The secondary, figurative meaning of "s'abîmer" is to go bad, to spoil. "Noyer," if used in its reflexive form, would make more sense because it would be the equivalent of "ertrinken." "Erlöschen" is precisely rendered as "s'étéindre" in French. This verb refers to the dying of a fire or of a candle, or of a life, but may also refer to blind eyes. It is also a legal term [to expire] used in insurance policies.

Du Bouchet's version is marked by multiple alliterations and assonance, including "sois," "noie," "toi," "soie" as well as "aussi," "auront," "aussi," "automne," the latter of which being a graphic reproduction of the assonances in the German original, an "eye rhyme." Involuntarily the French is also structured through the exact phonetic repetition of "sois" (the imperative singular of the verb "être" [to be]) in the beginning of the poem and "soie" [silk] in the last line. This phoneme could also mean "soi" [oneself]
or "soit" [either]. There is also a triple ending in words beginning in "pa-" (passer, paru, parole). There is "yeux" and "deux" and "telle" and "elles."

The second line in the original suggests that eternity is like a stagnant body of water, a pond for example, brimming with eyes. The verb "stehen" not only indicates the stagnancy of the water but also that the water level is quite high. It hints at certain idiomatic expressions in German such as "das Wasser steht mir bis zum Halse," [I am in a precarious, hopeless situation] "das steht mir bis hier" (while indicating with a gesture that one is standing in chin-high water) [I have had it up to here, I am fed up]. The image of the water is then continued in the verb "ertrinken" [to drown]. The poem therefore consists of three locales: a body of water (eternity), a path (across which something helped the images) and language or speech (from which you were taken away). The second line "l'éternité aussi est pleine d'yeux" has lost the aspect of eternity as an imaginable pool or pond. But the expression "d'yeux" is homonymous with "dieu" [God] or "dieux" [gods] in the plural. God, this eternal being, fills this eternity. What drowns there is that which made the images pass such a route where they "will have appeared." The past action of coming becomes a future past in the French "auront paru" (will have appeared). Where there was helping in the original, the French causes someone else to do something (made the images pass). Du Bouchet's rendition situates the text in the future.

The verb "s'étendre" also supports the image of eternity as a pool of liquid. Something took "you" out of the language with a gesture, which could also insinuate the "chansons de geste." The opposition du Bouchet introduces in the translation between "parole" and "mots," for "Sprache" and "Worte," makes the poem more explicit. Sprache in German covers "langue," "langage," and "parole." The plural form "Worte" rather than "Wörter" points to the fact that "Wort" is used in a figurative sense and not a precise grammatical sense. This seems to be in slight contrast with the
number "two." "Worte" just as the English "words" or the French may mean "parole," i.e.
parts of discourse, spoken discourse. The dance of two words is the dialogical principle
Celan proposes for his poetry. But if for du Bouchet the dance is between two "mots"
rather than "paroles" this becomes even more explicit. "Mot" in French also means a
written communication, so that the dance of two "mots" would be the written exchange
and dialogue taking place in poetry. In addition to the precision and tightness of the
words these repetitions structure the poem. André du Bouchet has somewhat
reproduced this effect through the usage of two reflexive verbs (s'abîme; s'éteind),
however at the cost of redundancy and of unbalancing the original format through the
doubling of 's'abîmer' and 'noyer'.

Du Bouchet's later version has a quite different drive and tone. It seems more
concrete, more confident and less intellectual, almost "bavard" [talkative]. Instead of
the imperative he uses an infinitive and thereby introduces the "you" implied in the
imperative later into the poem. "Eternity has eyes, thousands," makes eternity sound
like a strange animal and almost determines that the drowning is happening in the
eyes. This insinuates a German cliché—the drowning in the eyes of the loved one. In
general, the poem is more tentative; the assertive locution "mettre en chemin" [put on
track] is weakened by the passé simple form "put" [could]. The second translation also
adds another lexeme to the binary imagery: "par milliers" [in thousands] underlines the
great number of eyes, which is only implicit in the original. Using the verb "soustraire"
[snatch, seize] instead of "retirer," this poem introduces an aspect of ruse and tricking.
It is disruptive à la Celan with inverted syntax, although this very poem is not so much
in the original. In both poems, (hi Bouchet establishes the precise meaning of parole
and mots by their direct juxtaposition. "Parole" for "Sprache" then does not mean
"langue" or "langage," and "mots" for words in that case cannot mean "parole," it could
mean actual grammatical words or perhaps a written message.
Michael Hamburger simplifies the poem somewhat but with his own means tries to make it poetic through assonance in "now," "drowns," "down," "out," "out," "allowed," as well as in "today," "way," "came," "fades," "made." Hamburger overdetermines the point in time by doubling it—"now, today" and leaving out the subjectively felt idea of 'a little too soon' implied in 'already.' The second line shifts the secondary stress from "eternity" to "also." "Eternity" in German "steht" [stands] full of eyes, an idiomatic way of referring to the height of water or to stagnant water rather than fresh water. This idea cannot be recreated in the English or French and becomes a simple "is." The following pronoun "darin" (therein) could refer to either "eternity" or "eyes." The translator makes it explicit that whatever drowns, does so in the eyes and not in eternity. Both Hamburger and du Bouchet emphasize the fact that this is "made of " autumn etc., an idea more implicit in the original. When Hamburger says "help the images down," does he mean down from heaven? The inverted syntax in the following part of the phrase becomes regular syntax in the translation. The guiding across the path becomes a downward movement for Hamburger, the double emphasis of across as in "hinweghelfen" and "über" is lost in the translation and in the French becomes a mere passing. In general, the translator projects a vertical axis into the poem: "down," "took you out," and then more precisely "lifted you out."

Pierre Joris has rendered the commercial-line aspect of the first line "Erblinde schon heut:," only undone by the poetic "heut" rather than "heute," by adding a subtle irony in "Go blind today already." The process of going blind is more emphasized in the German than in any of the translations (although it is contrasted with a specific point in time); Joris's line ending in "already" has the overtone of "enough already" and is thereby slightly ironic also. The fact that this has taken the "you" away, not only out of the language but also away is omitted in all of the translations. Sound similarities also
structure this translation: in Joris they are reproduced in "today," "too," "took," "too," and "two."

Michael Hamburger and Pierre Joris have translated "Nichts" as "nothingness," the English translation for the concept of "Néant," which Jean-Paul Sartre proposed in his work *L'être et le néant* (1943). Since Celan capitalized his "Nichts," this interpretation may be justified. "Nichts" then as an existentialist concept suggests the personal involvement in "being" and in "nothingness." "Nothingness" is when one is complicit in the nothing.

In all three English translations "helping" is translated literally whereas in French it is omitted altogether. In the French it is in one case the agent of the action, in the other a possibility. The expression "over the pass" is just as ambiguous as the German, it means either "across" or "above." The German verb is very specific and indicates that there is a beyond. Connecting the phrases as Joris does also highlights that the second "wherein" does not forcibly point back to the second line but could also follow suit with the fourth and fifth line—that is the images. The second part of the poem seems somewhat dragged out where one element that could finish off the sentence or the poem leads to another one, which leads to another one.

The version by Popov and McHugh renders the poem in straightforward English syntax and interprets its imagery. The phrase in the beginning "Go blind at once" intensifies the imperative to sound almost like a command. With the syntax the parallel structures gets lost also. The figure of helping the images across the path they came is changed to "overcome their coming." Besides the doubling in "come" this means something different: the images get over the fact that they came, come to terms with it, perhaps disappear. The verb "erlöschen" becomes explicit as "the fire goes out of" but it is less clear where this happens—"there." Yet, the original never says whether there was a fire in the first place. That which took "you" out of language, is here merely a
mental, spiritual operation. The gesture is a mental gesture too, and it is two-
dimensional. By specifying the kind of dance, a waltz, the translators inscribe the poem
into a German context ("waltz" is etymologically derived from the German "Walzer").
The waltz is also a soft, swaying dance, a dance which expresses joie de vivre and
sophistication.

The English and French translation of "Bilder" as "images" refers to a mental
picture, whereas the German can also denote very concrete pictures or paintings,
graphical representations. From "Bild" it is not far to "Bilderstürmer" [iconoclasts].
Indeed, in Bernhard Böschenstein's interpretation, Celan had turned against the cult of
the image in the Goethian tradition of poetry (202). In this poem therefore Celan
opposes images, and proposes blindness as a basis for a different view on the world, a
view as it might appear in dreams, visions, reflections (Böschenstein 201). Dietlind
Meinecke even interpreted being blinded as a reason to live (74).

All of the three poems studied above, address an unknown "you." This "you" is
always related to sight, in Böschenstein's interpretation it is the "eye" itself that is being
addressed. Clayton Eshleman has described the relationship between the narrator and
the "you":

Celan’s contraries were ‘I’ and ‘Thou,’ and in his mature poetry they grow
unbearably close, closer than contraries can to function; one might say that they
gnaw into each other, the living become the dead, the dead the living, and out
of such a conjunction a grand but terrifying vista opens (121).

From the "eye" to the "I" it is only one small step, and so these three poems may well
represent an inner dialogue about poetry and about poetry in the world. As it has
become obvious, even these "hermetic" poems are rich in communication, and the
different interpretations/translations have reflected this. These poems do not move
toward silence, they have silence inscribed in them. Says Henri Meschonnic:

Le silence chez Celan fait partie du langage, il ne va pas vers la mort, il en
vient. Il y va parce que il en vient. [. . .] Alors, on comprend, il n'y a pas à être
clair, et celui qui parle ne cherche pas l'obscur : il en vient. C’est un obscur chaque fois provisoire, car il est une découverte, et non un masque-omement sur du rien (373).

[Silence in Celan’s work is part of the language, it does not move towards death, because it comes from it. He goes there because he comes from it [. . . ] So, one understands, there is no being clear and the one who is speaking does not seek the obscure: he comes from it. It is always a temporary obscure, since it is a discovery, and not an ornament-mask over Nothing.]

Conclusion

The translations have helped clarify the poems through their different readings of the original, have uncovered meanings that were hidden in the original, such as the documentary aspect, the precision, the reference to painting, etc. in “Todesfuge.” At the same time, the poem is a deliberate and vocal claim to the heritage of German literature, and inserts itself into that tradition, successfully, because the poem has achieved canonical status. Exile in “Todesfuge” is inscribed in the Jewish references, which abound in the poem, and in the subject matter itself, the suffering and dying in the death camps. While Celan later resented to be identified mainly with his most famous poem, because he felt he had outgrown it, the poem lays down key concepts, that he treated again and again in his later poetry.

In the poems “Flügelnacht,” “Der mit Himmeln geheizte,” and “Erblinde schon heut;” the language itself is in exile, which is more evident in some translations than in others. Written in exile in France, Celan’s mother tongue is in exile too, a fact he applied for his poetic purposes. Therefore writing itself is the theme of the three poems too, the relationship of poetry to the world, the relationship between "eye" and “word.” In summary, it must be noted that the sheer number of translations is indicative of the poems' linguistic mode. “Todesfuge,” written while still in Czemowitz and shortly afterwards, was translated into English in more than a dozen versions. While the first French version was published as early as 1952, to this day there are only handful of translations into French. On the other hand, the three short poems featured in the
magazine *L'Éphémère* were translated into French more frequently than into English (and two of those were published by native Luxemburger Pierre Joris, who is certainly fluent in both German and French). This discrepancy is due to the different modes in which these poems were written. As demonstrated for "Todesfuge," the poem is a German poem, in its structure, in its words and in its imagery; English as a neighboring Germanic language therefore lends itself more to translating this poem—this is particularly obvious in John Felstiner version. The three other poems, however, are in spirit closer to the French language and were created under the influence of French.

In addition, the two poetic traditions were receptive to different kinds of poems, and the translations themselves have illustrated this too. Celan was not only living in France, he was also familiar with the contemporary poetic movements and even collaborated on the editing board of *L'Éphémère*, with whose members he shared the same artistic vision. Moreover, his wife Gisèle, a graphic artist, introduced him to the French art scene. French poets were experimenting with art in a different way than in the US, where a lot of poetry still today is autobiographical, where poetry has a different sociological status.

In Martine Broda’s opinion, the French "accueille l'allemand de Celan" [welcomes Celan's German]. She has pointed out interferences in his poetry: the invention of the word "Niemandsrose* [no one’s rose], she argues, was influenced by the dual meaning of the French "personne," which means at once a person but may also mean no one. In the same vein, she has traced the use of the German "Neige" [the dregs, the rest of a drink] in the poem "Bei Wein und Verlorenheit" to the French word "neige" [snow]:

**Bei Wein und Verlorenheit, bei**

**beider Neige:**

**ich ritt durch den Schnee, hörst du, [. . .] (1:213)**
[With wine and lostness, with
the dregs of both:

I rode through the snow, do you hear, [. . .] (Feistiner, Selected 139).

While Paul Celan's reception in this country continues, it is in France that his work has actually influenced contemporary poets. French poets and translators are confronting, appropriating, re-reading and translating this difficult poetry. Without hesitation, they call him one of theirs, and not only for his citizenship. For many French scholars Paul Celan is a French poet.

Notes

1 Today, Czemowitz belongs to the Ukraine.

2 Marianne Hirsch, a native of Czemowitz herself, experienced that her kind of German was not even recognized as native by other native speakers when she emigrated to Austria.

3 This problem is still on the agenda. Jean-François Lyotard's Le Differend (1983) for example treats this question.

4 Incidentally the title might also mean Writing to Auschwitz, to the town of Auschwitz itself but mostly to the people who suffered and perished there.

5 Jack Hirschman and John Feistiner mention a version by Jerome Rothenberg from 1959. In a personal conversation, Clayton Eshleman referred to a translation by Cid Corman in Origins. Both translations were unavailable for this study.

6 The image of the black milk has been studied extensively. In a poem by Celan's Czemowitz friend Immanuel Weissglas "ER," which Celan used as a model for his poem, a lot of the imagery of Todesfuge is already laid out, among which the black milk. The image can be found in the Bible's Jeremiah as well as in poetry by Alfred Margul-Sperber and Rose Ausländer (Stiehler 26; 36-37). Klaus Wagenbach has traced this image to Georg Trakl's poetry.


8 It should be noted that if these lines occur several times in the poem they are always identical within one version.

9 There is a certain danger that Feistiner's use of the word here might contribute to cementing prejudices commonly encountered in the United States that make Nazism a particular German issue and therefore every German a potential Nazi.

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Other examples of Margaretes in German literature are Karoline Auguste Fischer's novel *Margarethe* (1812) or the mother of the boy Friedrich Mergel in Annette von Droste-Hülshoff's *Die Judenbuche [The Jew’s Beech]*. Klaus Wagenbach, Alan Rosenfeld, John Felstiner, Clarise Samuels and others, regard Margarete as a definite reference to Goethe's *Faust*. Although the Faust character is mostly known as Gretchen, Goethe does introduce her as Margarete.

I owe this insight to a discussion with both Dr. John Pizer and Dr. Adelaide Russo.

This motif of sentimentality and brutality existing side by side in the German spirit is a cliche too, and not entirely new either. In 1952 Celan published a translation of Apollinaire's poem "Schinderhannes" from the "Rhénanes" cycle in *Alcools* (1913), in which a sentimental, wine-loving brigand prepares to kill and rob a local Jewish merchant.


John Felstiner's translation of the poem is as follows:

WE LAY
deep in the maquis as you
crawled up at last.
Yet we could not
darken over to you:
the law was
Light-compulsion.

Konietzny for example mentions the "Frachtbriefe" ['consignment bills'] for prisoners deported in train wagons (45).

This may be the reason why Barnstone inferred that Celan was German. It is ironic that the author of *The Poetics of Translation. History, Theory, Practice.*., a very useful book, should be tricked to take a translation at face value, as the real text.

The use of the verb in its intransitive form is so unusual that only two instances in literature come to mind: Descartes' "I think, therefore I am" or Shakespeare's *Hamlet* "To be or not to be."

The shirts of members of the Nazi party were brown. In German and in French "braun" and "brun" are frequently references to Nazism.

Professor Russo has pointed out this resonance to me.

The only other instance, in which I have encountered this word is in the title of a famous painting by the Russian painter Ilya Repin "Die Wolgatreidler" [The Volga Towmen].

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7. Conclusion.

If one is stranded on a desert island, a message in a bottle may be the only possible connection to other human beings. It is an effort to communicate, and it always contains a glimmer of hope. A message in a bottle seems an outdated and inefficient medium, but for the exile writers in this study it was a quite meaningful metaphor. When Panait Istrati attempted suicide in Nice in 1921, he was in utter distress. In his pocket two letters addressed to Romain Rolland were found, written a few years before. Henri Béhar declared in view of these circumstances:

Qu’y a-t-il de plus émouvant que ces *Dernières paroles* jetées comme une bouteille à la mer à l’adresse de Romain Rolland (16)

[What can be more moving than these *Last Words* thrown like a message in a bottle addressed to Romain Rolland]

Istrati's message was addressed to a specific person, Rolland, who functioned as a father figure to the writer. The successful expedition of this letter led to Istrati's career as a writer in France. All of his following prose pieces, which made him famous, may be viewed as such messages and the same addressee may be implicit. His novels and stories were also meant to alert readers to the misery still existing in the world, to the lives other people lead, to injustice and exploitation. Fame and recognition were the afterlife to his suicide attempt, turned his exile from a failure into an accomplishment. After his denunciation of the Soviet system, Istrati fell from grace; he decided to go back to his hometown to raise hogs, and to read the accusations against him in the Romanian press. Towards the end of his life he quit writing, felt that he had not been heard, that he had been misunderstood.

Paul Celan explicitly regarded his poems as messages in bottles, messages he launched out into the German-speaking world. His suicide in the Seine river, says Martine Broda, was his last message in a bottle, made himself that message in a
bottle. For years Celan suffered from severe depression but his suicide was the result of his distress in the world. Did anyone receive this, his last message? In his essay "Die Heimsuchung des europäischen Geistes" [The Affliction of the European spirit], composed shortly after World War Two, Klaus Mann appealed to all European writers to commit suicide, as a protest and as a political statement, an idea that he put into practice himself. Paul Celan's own death underscored the urgency of his messages, and his poetry has been read more intensely and more carefully than ever before.

The message in a bottle as an art poétique is not an entirely new concept. In his poem "La bouteille à la mer: conseil à un jeune homme inconnu" (1853) [The Message in a Bottle: Advice to an unknown young man] French poet Alfred de Vigny (1797-1863) laid out his notion of writing as something that ensures that thoughts and ideas will survive. Writing is a duty owed to the nation. According to Vigny this bottle bears the label: "Attrape qui peut" [Pick up who can], which implies the hope and the assumption that it will find its appropriate reader.¹

Did Samuel Beckett send such a message, too? In Fin de partie, Clov repeatedly glances out the window to check on what is happening outside. He reports the appearance of a little boy, who surfaces in that wasteland just as Saint-Exupéry's Little Prince in the desert. Although Clov first offered Hamm to kill the "potential procreator" (110), the play ends with him preparing to leave. Could the boy have come in response to such a message in the bottle? In Endgame's microcosm of despair, the enigmatic little boy who materializes spells hope.

In terms of his personal life, Beckett's messages in a bottle were certainly the most effective ones. His constant reworking of his plays, his repeated involvement in directing, reediting, casting and other communal activities allowed him to live a long, prolific life, in a world that he depicted as bleak and meaningless. For salvation, for creating and finding a new home, a message in a bottle might not be sufficient. The

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remedy of exile as Beckett’s biography has shown, may be to keep seeking and finding kin, to find community with likeminded peers.

Synthesis

Translation and exile are two concrete situations, which have a theoretical dimension to them, and which have served as a common basis on which to identify and analyze the texts in this study. The metaphorical framework from which I approached them was formed by the Mioritza myth as a parable of exile as well as Walter Benjamin’s essay “Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers,” in which he posits “pure language” as a precondition and a goal of translating. Panaït Istrati, Samuel Beckett and Paul Celan applied quite similar strategies to transform their literary language by the means of translation and the interference of other languages. In so doing they move closer to the (of course unattainable) pure language. Istrati’s text is infused with words from foreign languages, which he translates into a French spelling, so that a French reader could pronounce them. That way, the word is not a truly foreign word anymore but it is also not French. Paul Celan uses, apart from the occasional quote in French or Russian, his German language as if it were another language, influenced by the other languages he speaks, especially the French. In Beckett’s play, the language is purely French (or English, or German); the meaning of the text arises from the actual translations taken together with the complete original. Translation into another language served as a way to further elaborate the meaning, and to recreate the exile (even in his native English) evident in the discrepancy between words and the imaginary reality on the stage. When writing by Beckett and Celan has been called as already being in translation, when it is claimed to be more translatable and self-translatable, this is due to the interlinguistic, translational quality of a language.

Poet Rainer Maria Rilke could not quite decide between an Austrian, or Czech or German identity and regarded himself merely as a “good European” (Coetzee 37).

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As we have seen he and also Franz Kafka wrote from the periphery of their languages, created a poetic idiom that reflected this European attitude. Texts written in such a language are universally accessible and lend themselves to an almost word-for-word translation, says Georges-Arthur Goldschmidt, texts such as "ceux de Heine, de Nietzsche ou de Kafka écrits en 'européen'" (162) [those by Heine, by Nietzsche or by Kafka written in 'European']. This "European" language is a language somewhat outside the language as spoken in an everyday vernacular and influenced by another one, a language in translation. Panait Istrati himself claimed to be a "Cosmopolitan" as well, who doesn't favor any particular language.

The struggle with language and expression led all three authors to music—the art that does not need language, that can reach across borders of language and of social status, an art that finds direct access to the deepest emotions of men and women. Istrati insinuated this in the transcriptions of song lyrics and most effectively in a brief musical score, printed with incomprehensible words. Celan's "Todesfuge" claims a musical tradition and shows that even music can be abused for inhumane purposes. But music is also a source for consolation and so Celan's poem may be read as a requiem as well. On the other hand, Beckett orchestrated his performances with a musical ear, insisted on the musicality of the language. Music and language both accompanied the works and lives of these authors.

Studying these texts by exile writers in conjunction with their translations demonstrated how exile is represented in the original text but also how exile can be translated into another language. With their writings these authors have carved out a home for themselves, like Mioritza did. Many critics have seen great affinities between Beckett and Celan, in their movement toward silence, in the economy of their texts. Their messages in bottles, their texts about exile and the (im)possibility of home have reached readers in the twentieth century and they will continue to do so in this century.
as well. They have certainly reached this student, an exile, a translator, who, through them has created and discovered her own home.

Notes

1 American writer Walker Percy has voiced a similar notion in his text *The Message in the Bottle*.

2 While the two men never met, Celan once said with regard to Beckett: "Das ist hier wahrscheinlich der einzige Mensch, mit dem ich mich verstanden hätte" (Wurm 250) [This is probably the only person here with whom I would have gotten along].
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APPENDIX I: TRANSLATION OF *MÈS DÉPARTS.*

**Panait Istrati**

**My Farewells**

**END OF CHILDHOOD**

**FIRST STEPS INTO LIFE**

I

**Kir Leonida's Tavern**

I was twelve or thirteen when, in the 'chancellery' of the primary school No. 3 in Brașa, the headmaster Mr. Moïscesco asked my mother as he was handing her my graduation certificate for the mandatory elementary school: "What are you going to do with this boy?" Exhaling with a long sigh, my poor mother responded: "Oh...Mr. Headmaster...what can I do! He'll learn some kind of trade, or he'll find a job..." His back against the window, my good old headmaster tormented his gray goatee, rubbing it between his fingers for a while; then, staring at the floor, he said as if to himself: "Too bad..." And after a pause: "You couldn't possibly send him to high school?" "No, Mr. Headmaster: I am just a poor widow...A washerwoman for daily hire..." "That's too bad..."

I must admit that I didn't see anything 'too bad' there: on the contrary I was happy to have finally put an end to this drudgery of my childhood.
I didn't like school at all as I was always mediocre at it, except for one subject, *Reading*, where I usually received the highest grade. Mr. Moïsessedco, thanks to whose kindness I completed the first four grades, liked to view me as a promising student and made me read in front of all the school inspectors.

Then again, a good lesson to learn for those who dedicate themselves to the public school system, to this termagant that doesn't understand the soul of a child and makes it march with whiplashes to the beat of the tambourine.

At the time, the elementary school teacher accompanied his class from the first through the fourth grade and left those who had fallen at the final exam to the hands of the next teacher. At seven, I found myself at the mercy of a barbarian, who hit us for nothing. The result: half of the class fled school. We went to the marshes where we played with sleds in the winter. Of course, I had to repeat the class and found myself with a teacher even more insane than the previous one. He pulled our ears out, struck our hands with a cane and slapped us until our noses started bleeding. Often he made us kneel down on grains of dry corn and left us in this position from noon until two, so we had to skip lunch. Almost the entire class deserted in the course of the year.

Finally at the beginning of my third school year—we were still studying the alphabet—it was the headmaster's turn to take us on. I will never forget the change of tactics that occurred before our astonished eyes that day. There were no shouts or threats. Gathering us "recalcitrants" around him, Mr. Moïsessedco said, sitting on a desk in the middle of the classroom: "Well then, is it true that you didn't want to study?"

"No, it's not true, Sir. They hit us!" "Okay, I won't even touch you but I want you to know that if you don't study, the minister is going to fire me... You will make me lose my job... They will say that I'm incompetent as a headmaster. . ." "We'll study, Sir!"
And indeed we did study. We passed from one grade into the next until the fourth, guided by good old Mr. Moïssesco.

May his soul be sitting right next to the Lord! Without him I would probably have ended up in a correctional facility. And the idea of going to high school for seven years, happening upon other terrifying brutes, using my adolescence to aspire to some problematic diploma, which was useless for many who had it, didn't mean anything to me.

On our way home my mother lamented: "My God...Perhaps it is too bad, but what can I do, the poor woman I am!" I comforted her: "Let it be, Mom...You'll see that I'll find an employer to my liking, all by myself!"

And I did find one...All by myself...Maybe not entirely to my liking.

The rest of that summer I spent with my uncles Anghel and Dimi in Baldovinesti, as usual. With the one I learned to be a bar waiter. With the other I got drunk on the last glimmers of a freedom that was to fade to unforgettable memories. In the mornings when it was still cool out, Uncle Dimi would leave with his rifle to shoot the thrushes that were eating up his grapes. I would follow him furtively, like a dog afraid to be sent back home. In the evenings I would grill ears of green com, listen to the concert of the crickets, the call of the frogs and the barking dogs. After dinner, if it was a pleasant night, I would accompany my uncle to the pastures where, watching the horses graze around us, he would smoke without stopping, chat with the other peasants and tell the hour by the position of the stars, while I lay sleeping wrapped in his gheba.

During the day when it was scorching hot, I found refuge in Uncle Anghel's tavern, cool like a cave. I watered, swept, rinsed glasses and learned the art of
opening a tap to draw wine. My uncle watched me and said: "Well, my boy, I would like to keep you because you seem sharp but that wouldn’t be wise: a child who stays with a relative becomes impudent and spoiled. Only among strangers does one learn how to become a man. But you shouldn’t start working for any old bastard. Find a prosperous master. And serve him faithfully! Most of all, don’t get used to pilfering; that’s very bothersome in business and brings bad luck. If you feel like something sweet, go straight to your master, look him right in the eye and tell him: ‘Mister Pierre, I would like to eat a cookie today!’ If he gives you a penny, buy one and eat it, if not, be patient!"

***

One sad October morning, as soon as my mother had left for work, I also left, without her knowing. I made my first steps in the arena where for the poor man the battle is fierce. I was heartsick, for I felt that the splendid years of my carefree childhood had come to an end. Finished was my childhood, which had been joyful despite all the bloodshed I had seen around me, despite all the tears and my mother’s raw suffering. Now I wanted to earn my own living, no longer depend on her and if possible, come back from time to time “to pour my bit into her apron.”

I had been obsessed by this idea for quite some time. When I was still in school, in winter I would often stop to watch the poor boys with their blue faces and chafed hands loitering in front of the stores, tugging customers by their sleeves, advertising their merchandise with desperate shouts. I would speak with them at length when I went grocery shopping, I knew their sufferings and thought them superior to me: “They’re already working,” I said to myself, “their parents must be happy they don’t have to take care of them anymore. Next year I’ll do what they’re doing.”
That year had come. And unaware of the many sobs emerging from their chests under their dirty sackcloth aprons, I ventured bravely, almost proudly, to look for a job, to find one, and bring my mother the good news in the evening.

This was not an adventure. I knew exactly what I wanted, and I had discovered a tavern that seemed agreeable from all points of view. First, it was a Greek tavern. (My uncle Anghel had instructed me to find a job with Greeks, "who are usually more generous than Romanians.") Second, the boss was single. (I was scared of the bosses' wives who beat the waiters and made them wash laundry that reeked of their babies.) Finally, this bar was located right next to my dear Danube!

For nothing in the world would I have accepted a job in one of those factory outlets or one of those groceries, where the boys tear their groins from pulling half of the store's contents onto the sidewalks in the morning only to bring it back inside in the evening, and who during the day, follow the farmers to the middle of the road to filch their skullcaps and thereby obligate them to purchase something.

It is true that the job of a bar boy, which I had chosen, brought other troubles. Besides the disgusting dishes and the fact that the store didn't close in the evening until midnight—and sometimes even dawn—there was the terrible hrouba, this dank maze without air, dug "at the bottom of the earth," much dreaded by the poor kid forced to go down there a hundred times a day for a simple glass of wine "covered with mist," which some drunkard, penny in hand, had ordered from him in front of the boss. Some people maintained that around midnight the hrouba was inhabited by ghosts, who hid among the barrels, blew out the waiter's candle and jumped him on the back. Many of those poor fellows faint. Some died of fright.

I had heard about all those horrors but my uncle Anghel told me: "There are no ghosts! The candle goes out from lack of air. So it is important to keep the vents
open, which get clogged up fairly easily as they are only holes in the ground. As for the ‘mist-covered’ glass, they order that only when it’s hot because then there is ice. To avoid running too much, be smart: keep a big pot of wine with ice at your reach in the cave, a little delay to pretend you’re running to ‘the bottom of the earth;’ some sparkling water to replace the pressure of the barrel, and there is your ‘mist-covered’ glass. But be careful; don’t play this kind of trick on customers who know their way around.”

Thirty years ago Riverside Street—which may have a different name today—was at the end of a corridor which started at Cavalry Avenue and ended above the Danube valley with a perpendicular overhang. Whence the name. A very busy street in the middle of the Karakiooe quarter, populated mostly by Greeks famous for their joyous orgies but not frightening at all, just as the inhabitants of the Comorofca, about whom I talked in Codine.

Karakiooe attracted me because of its peaceful cheer, its cosmopolitan side: I knew it like the back of my hand; when I strolled around there, I imagined myself on the banks of the Bosporus, this fateful Eden that I wanted to get to know so ardently and of which I had forged my own image from photos and prints. Dreamy-eyed and licentious Greeks; Turks with serious faces; young, mournful women, scared for being loved too tyrannically, eternally in love, with their beautiful melancholy eyes under highly arched eyebrows, so lascivious and seductive that one wanted to forget God and adore Hell.

On my Thursdays of frantic freedom I would spend hours roaming among the intriguing fragments of nations, who came to Braila to make their fortune, worn out
from longing for their faraway homelands, and who always end up in our sad cemeteries, twice as sad for those who die in a foreign land.

It was there that, from my childhood on, I took in all those sensuous impressions that later served to compose the setting and atmosphere of Kyra Kyralina. It was to this quarter or to the Chetatzuiah,—which is mostly Turkish—that the Brailan termagant sends every young woman in love who appears too erotic: “To Karakiol and Chetatzuiah with you, strumpet, if you got the itch,” she tells her. Those are the two great reservoirs of fiery love in my city. This is where I wanted to find a job to learn and to understand, without knowing why.

Towards the middle of Riverside Street Kir Leonida’s tavern was perched like an illustrious queen, famous for its wine and cuisine, looking back on forty years of heroic dinners. Founded by Barba Zanetto, Kir Leonida’s father, this Greek “crasma” had watched over the founding of a thousand fortunes and helped in the failure of just as many. Zanetto himself, a great old man with a hump called Ghizourou, only talked about his past. According to him, the present, under his son’s management, was only a poor copy of its former glory.

I was going to witness these last glimpses of glamour, while living there for sixteen months and learning Greek.

It was about eight in the morning. I entered boldly.

Exquisite smell of casserole, the unrivaled Greek casserole, with lots of celery roots and this parsley root unknown in the West. A giant old cook, long white mustache and gaze like a clefis. He handled the pots like a banker the bills and only gave me a brief but sufficient look. Large, clean store. On the chef’s big table, next to
a mountain of vegetables and meat, two boys my age were busy peeling potatoes. By the bar—glittering with its beautiful battery of liquors and brandy—the cashier was reading the newspaper.

Not a single customer. No Kir Leonida, whom I knew by sight.

I said hello. The cashier—our famous cashier who tyrannized the children in his charge—gauged me from above: "Whom are you looking for, young man?" "Kir Leonida." "He is not in. What do you want from him?" "I would like to talk to him." "You can talk to me." "No thanks, Sir. I'll just wait."

The cashier took up his paper again. I left. Had I known what ferocious brute was hiding inside the skin of this heartless peasant, I would have taken to my heels and never come back.

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I walked around for a while, worried: the tavern had two waiters already; that made four employees including the cashier and the owner. "It may very well be that they won't hire me," I said to myself. But this fear was quickly swept aside by another, entirely opposite feeling that made my blood freeze.

I found myself by the edge of the plateau, which was very high here, and the sudden view of my friend the river violently reminded me of the nearing loss of a freedom I was about to sell. The somber sky, the sandy Danube, the forest of willows all in mourning, the ships' sirens: so many sinister cries, the rolling cars in the port: funeral knell. . . A soft rain was starting to fall. . .

I was seized by a relentless funk. Something inside me had snapped. It seemed as if a merciless enemy was preparing to snatch me away from the world, from my mother, from life.

(1) Someone who never sleeps.
Instantly, I forgot my great plan to help out my poor mother, and without further thought I ran down the slope, leaping like an ostrich to the ravine which lead to the port, where the rain forced me to take refuge in an empty freight car. There I noticed that I wasn't alone. A little girl, eight or nine years old, huddled in a corner, was mending a rip in her patched-up dress. She was a grain scavenger. Next to her she was dragging a sack with a handful of grains, a small broom and a dustpan.

My unexpected appearance petrified her. She had stopped sewing, and fixing her eyes on me, she looked at me like a cat cornered by dogs.

As I didn't want to upset her any more and force her out into the rain, I stood by the entrance of the car and didn't pay her any more attention. Also, her presence was nothing unusual: I was living in her milieu and, from this moment on, knew everything about the misery of children with or without a home. Yet once in a while I looked her over furtively. She had taken up her sewing again; strands of blond hair fell into her thin, dust-smeared face. Her whole body was shivering, her fingers numb.

The rain stopped. I had only one thought: to go back home: "Back home, to Mama..."

About to jump off the wagon, I asked the little girl: "Why are you sewing here in the cold? Don't you have anybody?" "I have my mother but she's blind... and I always rip my dress when I pick up the grains in these wagons." Then smiling faintly: "You don't pick up any?" "Uh, yes I do," I said ashamed. And I ran, not "home", not "to Mama", but straight to Kir Leonida's tavern.

The owner was in the store now. Freshly shaven, nicely dressed, provocative mustache, coat thrown over his shoulders; a jovial gallant of about thirty, exuberantly healthy, exuberantly wealthy.
Standing in front of a glass, he was laughing loudly in the company of two friends. Afraid to address him in their presence, I waited outside. Soon he stepped out and noticed me: "So you were looking for me this morning?" "Yes, Mister Leonida." "What do you want?" "I would like to work here." "Work here?" he said, surprised. "And you're coming just like that, by yourself, all by yourself? Have you worked anywhere else before?" "No. I just left school." "Even better: green urchins must be brought here by the hand. How do you want me to discuss everything with you? Don't you have parents?"

Kir Leonida, Barba Zanetto's only treasure, was born in Braila, spoke a pure Romanian and kept a Hellenic pride. Although I was only a child, I sensed in him the arrogance of the Catzaouni, and well if he's Greek, I'm Greek and a half! so I told him that I was born to a Romanian mother but that my father—who died when I was still in my cradle—had been Greek and to be more precise: Cephalonite! "My mother doesn't know I'm here. I want to find a job with a Greek and learn the language."

That I desired to learn Greek was just as true as I would like to learn all the languages of the world today, but as for giving preference to any nationality to the detriment or abasement of another, never at any time of my life, not even in my childhood, have I been guilty of something so contemptible: I was born a Cosmopolitan.

Touched on his soft spot, Kir Leonida puffed himself up like a turkey: "Well, well, my friend, I will take you in and you will learn the language of your father, but I'll discuss the terms only with your mother. Bring her with you tomorrow."

At home my "good news" launched a torrent of tears. "I sacrificed my youth to you, in suffering and widowhood, just to save you from 'the hands of strangers' and
now all this was in vain; I didn't save you! . . . May God not leave mothers like me on this earth! . . ."

The following day, Sunday . . . dismal Sunday. We went to "knock at the stranger's door." My heart was fluttering like a bird held in hand. I felt like I was going to be buried alive. My mother, her face corpselike, seemed ready for the coffin herself.

The explanation lies not only in the love of a mother for her offspring and in the passion of the latter for freedom; there was also this terror that makes us slaves to public opinion and that is called "the voices of the neighborhood."

The voices of the neighborhood demand that a boy be obedient, well-behaved, that he stay where he was put without complaining and not run from one place to the next. He has to endure his master's barbarity and become a barbaric master himself. That's the opinion of the neighborhood, and it even goes so far as to claim that the master's slap in the face makes the servant's cheek grow chubbier.

Crossing the doorstep to Kir Leonida's tavern, my mother and I were aware of the local opinion weighing on our shoulders: once there, I would have to stay at all cost, endure everything and not shame my mother. She shouldn't have to hear about her son what "they" have said about so many others: "He left his employer again!"

Oh those employers! And your slaves who support you in your efforts towards universal slavery!

Generally, parents have no idea about the agony inflicted on the growing child's soul, but he—still free from any prejudice and only listening to his instincts—senses the abyss gaping in front of his first steps into life, revolts and develops a relentless hatred of his employer as well as his own family.

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Every child is a revolutionary. Through him, the laws of Creation are revived and walk all over everything grown-ups have set up against them: morals, prejudices, intrigues, self-interest. The child is the beginning and end of the world; only he understands life because he adapts to it, and I will not believe in a better future until the day the revolution takes place under the flag of childhood. Leaving childhood, Man turns into a monster: he denies life by becoming his own hypocritical double.

Has humanity learned anything from the things Creation has tried to make it hear for thousands of years? Today just as in the Middle Ages and in Antiquity no constituted social body understands life, no legislation protects it; despotism and stupidity reign more than ever.

A fragile creature, vibrant with emotions, thirsty for life, the child is still at the mercy of human beasts, ignorant and overblown with selfishness, who crush his bones as soon as he falls under their power. How would they know, those beastly miens, that a child is the beginning of a life yearning for daylight, the rustling of trees, the splashing of waves, the caressing breeze, the twittering of birds, the freedom of cats and dogs running in the street, the fragrant countryside, the snow that burns him, the sun that amazes him, the horizon that intrigues him, the infinity that floors him. How would they know that childhood is the sweetest of life’s seasons and that only during that season can one lay the foundations for the human structure whose existence is precarious even in happiness? Foundations that should only consist of kindness, and kindness alone if we don’t want the whole structure to tumble down into the abyss!

And how could the basis of human life be such when the majority of humanity spends their childhood being beaten and living in deprivation, in mortification and oppressive fortresses put up by Law? Why this astonishment that the world abounds
with thieves, criminals, crooks, pimps, idlers, and enemies of law and order, when
your "law and order", oh Masters, is founded only on cruelties incompatible with the
laws of nature?

And you make laws—oh you ogres of beautiful childhood! oh you pub owners,
grocers, manufacturers, big landowners, as black as your souls!—and you have
academies, and moral instances, and churches preaching piety to the deafening
sound of bells, and parliaments, and you don’t know what the breast of a child
harbors, just as you don’t know anything about this life, which could be beautiful and
which you mangle.

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“So, mother, he’s your little son?”

Poor Kir Leonida. Poor, you, all the Kir Leonidas of our time. How would you
know what that is—a mother and her little son? Through what miracle would you know
of the worlds vibrating in a sunbeam; of the battles fought in an anthill; of the
tumultuous sobs shaking the soul of a tormented mother and of the infinity sprouting
in the heart of a child who gets employed?

“One hundred Francs per year, a suit, a pair of shoes, a hat, a day off for
Easter and another one for Christmas.”

Nineteen hours a day, of toil, of running errands or standing up (from six in the
morning until an hour after midnight). Barbaric words, obscene curses, sadistic
torments, countless slaps in the face. A torrent of tears, an unexpected commotion,
vanished dreams. The desire to run away.
Is that really everything? Is there no compensation at all? No consolation? No friendly glance? Nothing to make up for this deplorable childhood?

There is too; but how!

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First of all, no injustice: Kir Leonida himself was a kind man. Mediocre, vain, who tolerated a thousand impieties, but was really a good person. I didn’t catch but one rap in the head from him in sixteen months, it wasn’t a very bad one either, under quite funny circumstances that I will narrate shortly.

But it wasn’t the slaps that hurt me most.

To begin with, it was—and that as soon as my mother left, her face buried in her handkerchief—the insurmountable Chinese Wall only my heart could see go up in front of Kir Leonida’s tavern, separating me from the world, from the street, from this strada full of cats and dogs, from my beautiful strada flooded with light, and leaving me there in the unfriendly shop, the apron around my neck, this “master’s apron”, which erased all existence.

A prison is called a prison; those locked up there know that their freedom has been taken. What does he know, the child hired to work for his master? That he is there to serve? No. He must know, and he will learn this all on his own, that besides the fatigue that even adults are spared by law, his sacred right to leave after a day’s work, to walk out into the street, to become one with the night and his own thoughts, is denied him, this avid dreamer of freedom, denied him, the beginner in life.

I watched the workers return to their homes every night, a loaf of bread under their arm, wiped out from fatigue, covered with dust or wading in mud and I said to myself: “Me too, I get up like they do, at six in the morning and I toil not until the
evening, but until late after midnight: don't I, too, have the right to go home, to my
bed, to my mother?"

No. I, we, the bar boys, had to say good-bye to our mothers' loving homes and
work without a break—the equivalent of two "legal" workdays today. And if there was a
break sometimes, in the afternoon or late in the evening, it was not a well-deserved
rest that awaited us but the inevitable dozing while standing, which brought with it
inquisition-style tortures.

Apart from my novitiate at dishwashing, it was my task to teach myself the
contents of two hundred casks of wine, spirits, liqueurs and even oil and vinegar; to
"learn the hrouba", this subterranean maze; to become familiar with dozens of
different kinds of wines and alcoholic beverages so that I could recognize them later
by their color and their aroma.

I will never forget the savageness of the cashier who pushed me down all
those eighty humid and mutilated steps to the little cellar and the immense hrouba, so
that I wandered in the dark, afraid of breaking my neck any second. And every time I
see a boy wearing an apron, I think of the inhuman ways of this vicious upstart, who
thought he was "teaching" me something as he was muttering running among the
casks in complete darkness: "Numbers one, two, five, fourteen, thirty: new wines.
Numbers such and such: wines one year old, two, seven, ten, twenty years old. On
these casks the bungs pop out because of the 'pressure'. This wine has "taste". That
one has 'shirf' or 'bloom'. Watch out, or the devil will come get you! Now, the colors:
these here are the white wines, those the red ones, over there amber, Muscat,
'absinthe-wine'."

(1) In which one soaked some absinthe leaves.
The same perfidy in the spirits storeroom: "Kirsch, Grappa, lees, mint, rum, ordinary brandy, fine brandy, pineapple, ordinary mastica, Chio mastica, etc. Draw this one only when I tell you, but if I wink, don't. Over here are the old liqueurs, those are the new ones. If you mix them up, you're in trouble.

And if I send you to the hrouba or the storage, you have to be back 'in the time it takes a horse to fart'. If you have to pee while you're working, just turn off the faucet."

But the torture of the wine-keeper's apprentice (one day I will describe that of the craftsman's apprentice), this terror rewarded with beatings and tears, may find its justification in the obtuse spirit of unjust people: "This will last until the skill comes in," those people claim.

What, however, is the justification for this useless martyrdom, for this pleasure in tormenting a child staggering from fatigue and sleeplessness?

During the whirlwind of business, when I had to stay on top of a whole avalanche of pots, pans, plates, knives, spoons, forks, fatigue and sleepiness gave way to the agitation and speed necessary to manage to satisfy everyone, if I didn't want to be hit by the boss, by the cashier or by crazy Barba Zanetto. The latter was ready to throw a plate in our faces anytime. But in the afternoon or evening when everything calmed down again, it was the time of pitiless slumbers standing up, when thousands of needles would tingle in our arteries, and our bodies, heavy as lead, were about to collapse. Our masters, however, were allowed to go and lie down or sit down on a chair. But we were not allowed to relax. We were made of steel, wood, stone.
"Smima"! Straight as capital i's we kept our eyes and ears pointed towards the cashier, who only waited for us to make a mistake, and also towards two or three drunkards, "the pillars of the bistro," who could mobilize us for nothing at any time. And too bad for the one of us who closed his lids, heavy with sleep! A blow to the nose as violent as an electric shock would promptly hit the "wrong-doer" and wake him up with a start while those good-for-nothings laughed mercilessly. That was the mildest joke on the part of the "Hick" as my buddies called the cashier. Even though this "teasing" would sometimes make our noses bleed.

Often while we were nodding off, this wretched man would take advantage of the position of a sleeping arm as our bodies happened to lean against a piece of furniture, "to do the diligence", i.e. he would put a slip of paper between our fingers and light it, causing us some severe burns. Or else, watching us teeter on our legs almost falling down, he would help with a brusque blow to the back of the knee. We fell down on the spot. There were also squirts in the face with the siphon-bottle and the famous itching powder on the nape of our necks, which had us peeling our skin off for hours.

All these nerve-wracking barbarities amused the Hick and his onlookers. Kir Leonida didn't see any of this or just looked the other way. And if it so happened that one of us kicked up or started to cry, well, that was even worse: crude curses, slaps in the face, kicks, useless drudgeries hailed down on us. The cashier would suddenly discover that the hrouba, the patio and the warehouse needed sweeping, the latrine needed scrubbing, the windows needed to be washed, the barrels needed to be scalded and transferred, firewood needed to be sawed.
That was our Reward for Labor(1). We squandered our childhood serving entire bands of gluttonous night owls and drunkards; we stumbled around from dawn till after midnight; slaps to wake us up, slaps to send us to bed. There were Sundays and holidays, festive people who were walking around outside, and who came to us to feast at the sound of violins. There existed a world with a sun, with rivers, forests, joys overflowing; we didn't exist for anyone, nothing existed for us. We were something like a drinking glass or a fork: who pays attention to these utensils? Who wonders what becomes of them after use? What eye takes the time to look at the waiter in a tavern?

And yet...

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From the first day on—when I was still nothing more than some dirty boy moaning over a washing tub filthy enough to make one throw up—there was a water carrier, a sacagiau, a ragged fellow, who noticed me right away as he was drinking his daily ten "drops."

"All right!" he said to Kir Leonida, looking me up and down; "you got a recruit?"

And his gaze went straight to my heart, without my knowing why. From then on, I was upset whenever he left; I was glad when he returned. And how I would have loved to serve him his little glass myself, had it not been forbidden.

He was quite seriously called Mosh Cazatoura, which means Father Ruin—not a very flattering name for this estimable, courteous, polite man who barely spoke and who knew a lot. He was really quite respected, but for a special reason. A strange reason. Barba Zanetto and Kir Leonida showered him with niceties, called him "the customer with the lucky hand", the one who "had the best safteya". And the safteya,

(1) Romanian award.
meaning the first penny a customer tosses on the counter when the store opens in the morning, that is a big deal in the East. The return for the entire day depends on this safteya: if the man has "a lucky hand" everything goes well, if not the day is going to be slow. That's why they shout, in verse: "Safteya så nu mai steya", the safteya that doesn't stop. May the pennies roll without stopping.

And the owner takes this lucky penny, rubs it well on his beard, tosses it noisily into the drawer, fills two glasses and drinks to "good safteya" with the customer. "Good luck to everybody!" they shout in unison.

Mosh Cazatoura, arriving first thing early in the morning, always had his first glass for free but he didn't care that much. Gravely, almost solemnly, slightly ridiculous in his tattered clothes, his whip on his arm, he would always ask first if he was really the first customer and, when answered affirmatively, would launch his safteya penny with vigor. He firmly believed in it, valued it and bestowed it upon all the bar owners he found "comme il faut."

Sometimes—in the absence of Barba Zanetto, who was rarely missing—Kir Leonida would make fun of the solemn sacagiou and say to him, exaggerating the effect of the safteya penny: "Listen, Mosh Cazatoura: rub the coin first on the fly of your pants. They say that brings even more luck to the business." "The fly of my pants? That wouldn't be worth it anymore, Kir Leonida. It's all over." This "it's all over" came up often in his brief conversations and sounded sad.

I loved him for that.

I also loved him because he was grieved: in his previous life as a peasant, a blow from the horns of a cow had caved in his nose and altered the timbre of his voice, which was now nasal and movingly heart-rending. This is why he spoke as little
as possible. Always reserved, always ready to step back when someone walked by, he slid like a shadow among the crowd of our boisterous night owls, for whom he was only a sacagiou. And yet, I had heard decent people say that he had once owned property in the country and had even been the mayor of his village. Did his frequent "it’s all over" refer to this past, to this quite real wealth?

What touched me most of all was this sacagiou’s love for his animal, a poor old mare whose eyes were completely covered with a thick cataract. (I always wanted to stab the barbarian coachmen from Braila who mistreated their animals; and in my youth, I would have gladly become a policeman only to lock up all those—and there were many of them—who beat their horses or simply forgot about them waiting out in front of the bar.)

“She is ruined like me,” said Father Ruin to us, “and blind on top of it. I bought her for twenty Francs. I’m not worth any more than that. But we like each other a lot, my old lady and I.”

This was quite obvious. He only sat on his water barrel when it was empty and only when he was in a hurry. Three quarters of the time, he led his mare by her bridle at a walking pace. When he stopped to fill up or empty his barrel or to drink a glass, he never failed to give her the nosebag with oats, to cover her, rub her eyes and pull her ears, which relaxed the animal. The mare, delighted, happy to feel spoiled in her old age after having been tortured for a long time, nibbled her master like a dog, dried her eyes on his shoulders and searched for him long with her dreadful gaze. Sometimes she would even neigh when she missed him. “I’m coming, here I am!” Mosh Cazatoura would reply tenderly.
The sacagiou’s lucky mare! Only she could have told us how grateful she was to her master, she who certainly thought of her noble congeners ridden by haidoucs, of whom the following folk song speaks, which even the callous West may hear.

“My roan, my little horse,  
Why do you breathe so hard?  
Is it my body that burdens you so?”

“It’s not your body that’s heavy,  
but your inveterate vice;  
there is not one bar on your way  
where you don’t stop!  
You drink there with your lovers,  
while I chomp the bit!  
You caress them in your bed,  
while I am tied up to the fence.”

So it was from this man that I heard my first comforting words. He often saw me cry, my cheeks just slapped by the Hick. One day when we were alone, he said to me stroking my head: “Don’t despair. You are just a child. You have your whole life in front of you. Leave if you are heartsick, go someplace else, change, run around the earth. But always hope for the best. You can still do it. When one can’t hope anymore, well, that’s when it’s all over.

Look at me: I wasn’t always a sacagiou. I used to be a man, too. I would give advice to my peers, let’s not say orders, and they respected me, all of them, from the smallest to the greatest. So everything was going well. But one day, a poor sick animal hit me and made me look hideous to the eyes of others and my own. From that day on, my heart was rotting, I didn’t feel like anything anymore and it was all over!...

Beware of despair. You are just a child.”

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This was a nice gleam of light, the first. A second one was to follow soon.

For three days while I was substituting for the boy who took orders and managed the deliveries in the neighborhood, I had the pleasure of revisiting the
luminous street a little bit, the city, the people, from whom I had been separated, and to run into a passionate soul who showered me with affection. This is a very muddled, almost unreal memory, a mixture of dream and sensuous certainty, like a violent desire.

In a sunny courtyard carpeted with a thick layer of leaves, some Greek women were chatting indolently, meridional cats languid from a generous, magnificent autumn. One of them, tall, young, beautiful figure and quite convivial, got up as I approached and exclaimed: “Ah, there you are. Are you the little unhappy Cephalonite at Kir Leonida's? Well! I'll comfort you. I am a Cephalonite myself. Come here, let me kiss you.”

And without much ado she wrapped herself around me, hugged me, made me sit on her lap and covered me with kisses that burned my face and made me dizzy. The other women came to ask me all at the same time: “Who was your father? Where from? What's his trade? How old? When did he die? From what kind of illness?”

I listened, half asleep. I didn't know what to respond. I was numb, hallucinating. Under my half-closed eyes I saw several hands holding mine, but those of the Cephalonite sliding over my cheeks dazed me. I could barely breathe.

This first day of light and of unknown happiness, I paid for it dearly because I messed up the orders and received a copious thrashing from the Hick.

The next morning, the same caresses, the same torpor, the same hallucination. Even more blunders and even more slaps but that didn't bother me at all: they were beating up a somnambulist. I was happy.

I was happy the third day too and got lost in my beatitude without worrying about anything. And that was it: “This boy is an idiot,” screamed the cashier.
And the trapdoor fell down on me again. I was not to see the street again for long months, only from the doorstep of the shop. I lived on dreams. Singing, carousals, formidable blowouts, all-nighters, a hundred trips to the basement a day, mountains of dirty dishes. All this became habitual, made me dull.

I remember a Greek verse, sung and danced during those days of happy sadness. Since the majority of the Greeks were named Yani, all the Yanis present took each other by the hand and danced a crazy round, singing these first Greek words I registered in my memory:

Saranda pente Yannides
ehnos kokkorou gnosi.
K’ehna poolaki takosseh
pigheh na palavossee.

Which means: forty-five Yanis barely have the brain of a rooster. A little bird which heard about this almost lost her mind from the surprise.

Everybody was laughing. I dared to laugh too with everybody else and was in for another beating.

It was again the dizziness caused by the memory of the Cephalonite’s caresses that earned me the slap in the face from Kir Leonida.

One evening I had just finished serving a young, elegant man, who had chosen one of the private rooms opening toward the courtyard for dinner. That seemed strange to the owner: “Watch out! This guy may slip away through the garden gate without paying his check!” he said to me.

He had told me, true, but I was thinking of the beautiful Cephalonite and the “gentleman in the private room” tricked me: having eaten and drunk well, having asked for cigarettes and the check, he also wanted some change for his pocket. That was the end of the two of us.
The balance was three francs and some pennies. "Bring me change for five francs!" he said gravely without giving me his coin.

I went to find Kir Leonida, who grumbled into his beard and gave me the money but kept lying in wait. I didn't suspect anything. I was elsewhere in my thoughts. "Come quick and bring me a stamp," shouted the trickster when I brought him the change.

So of course I hurried away, but in the dark shade of the courtyard I ran straight into Kir Leonida, and he slapped me.

Ouch! The customers gathered to watch this "performance" laughed a lot that evening; and I cried out of rage at being beaten by my employer, but the "nice gentleman" didn't have anyone laughing on his side either.

After the hoos and the kick in that fellow's buttocks, Kir Leonida shook me firmly: "Are you in love by any chance?" he yelled.

This is when I saw a man come out from among all the people there, put his hand on the shoulder of the owner, saying: "Leonida, you shouldn't act like your cashier."

This man was "Captain" Mavromati, whose story I'm recounting here:
After my first few weeks of anxiety and complaints, I noticed a man—whom I first took for a customer—who would enter the pub when it opened in the morning and wouldn't leave until midnight. During this endless time, eighteen hours, he would sit in his chair quietly, somewhat separately, would sometimes get up to pick up some plates from the table or to fold a tablecloth, stir the embers on the grill, sweep a little here a little there. He did all this slowly, distractedly, like a pastime and would quickly return to his chair as soon as a terrible cough, from which he seemed to suffer, surprised him in the middle of his complacent chores.

He was a man of advanced age, although he didn't really look it, perhaps because he was well-groomed. However, his distress was obvious: shabby overcoat, patched-up shoes and pants, a scruffy scarf to cover up that the button-on collar was missing. But his cap, a handsome Greek sailor’s cap, which he wore proudly and with dignity, redeemed him and made him look striking despite his rumpled looks. He treated it with infinite respect, stroked it affectionately, and prudently put it aside whenever we were cleaning. This proud cap as well as his beautiful, carefully combed gray mustache and beard occupied him the whole time, were the center of his life. He didn't see the rest and thereby obliged everyone else to not pay it any attention either. Under his shaggy eyebrows, a fiery gaze was constantly searching the distance!

I had never seen anyone like him. And what was happening to him was so curious to me that I couldn't take my eyes off him anymore.

At first, judging by his rapport with my employers, I took him for a respectable relative. In fact, on arriving in the morning Barba Zanetto would never fail to go
straight to him, to shake his hand with friendly courteousness and say: “Good morning”, in the plural: “Kalimerassass, Captain Mavromati!”

And all at once, face to face, cigarette in one hand, Turkish coffee in the other, they would fall into a passionate gibberish which lasted for about an hour and of which I didn’t understand a word. I said to myself, seeing the good man catch fire like a palikar: “He was the captain of a ship. . .And his name is Mavromati. What did he do to fall so low, the poor man?”

But soon I noticed that Kir Leonida’s tavern was full with “captains”, on the long haul: “Captain Valsamis”, “Captain Papas”, “Captain Smimiotis”, captains all the time and everywhere. Rarely did two customers shake hands without calling each other “Captain”. I was surprised that there should be so many officers in Kir Leonida’s inn and I tried hard to make out sailors, too, but in vain.

Later I understood, to be called a “captain” in the Karakiot of Braila, it was not at all necessary to command a ship or a tugboat, not even a caique or a barge, but it was enough to reign over a rowboat: any Greek living on the water is a captain.

Those captains, braggarts, spendthrifts, wheedlers recognized one another admirably and appreciated as much as detested one another. The commanders of true ships, who visited us at long intervals, were not very loquacious, and scarce with gestures. To enjoy themselves discreetly, they would lock themselves in the back of the store reserved to VIP customers. And when the string of sauerkraut captains discovered them and attacked them with “professional” questions, a mocking smile would slip across their coppery faces, although they gazed with friendly and kind eyes at their “colleagues” and all their enthusiastic nonsense.

Even before I learned their language and knew what they were saying, I managed to tell them apart, just by the way they behaved towards one another. One
barely heard anything from the real captains even when the barcadjis bored them with "captain" here and "captain" there, and only waited for the first occasion to get rid of the bores.

On the other hand, I never saw them make fun of Captain Mavromati, as inexplicable as that was in my eyes. They eagerly shook his hand, sincerely called him captain, and invited him to their table. The old man was a beautiful sight when this happened. With those people, Mavromati would speak loudly, from equal to equal, he would straighten himself brusquely like a judiciary, he would thunder, curse and gesture, red with anger, but it always ended in suffocating coughs, and with a slam of the door, he would run hastily to his chair, gasping for air, worn out. I didn't understand what was causing these fits. His black eyes would launch fire and flames. His beard would tremble. And exactly in those moments—as if to alleviate their own humiliation—the plethora of boatmen, who had never seen the sea, would scoff at him cruelly: "Again! Tē eeNEH m orchest? (What's up?) Those mean capitanios! They sank your vaporī!"

Reduced to a beggar, Mavromati still remained their superior, and it bothered them. This donkey's kick upset me very much, but the old man didn't mind. His head between his hands he would cough until the end of the attack, then get up with dignity, adjust his cap, comb his mustache and beard and start pacing through the store, hands behind his back, nose up in the air, forehead high, like a captain on the bridge.

The boss served him the meals he pointed at with his finger and the cashier would bring him his bottle of wine. Mavromati would eat and drink in his little corner, all alone, like a poor relative. It was humiliating, but not for him: completely lost in thought, he would gaze out onto the street, into the void, as if he was at sea.
I never saw him take a penny out of his pocket, nor put one there.

I didn’t understand a thing.

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After a month of working in the tavern, I began to see things clearly. The Hick hated poor Mavromati to death and rallied us against him too. He claimed that the captain was the eyes of the owner, who fed him so that he would spy on us. “On me, spy on me?” I said to myself. “And what would he tell him about me? That I do the dishes, run to the basement, trip from fatigue and get beaten?”

That coward, he wanted to ruin life for him, chase him away, not directly but using us.

I didn’t join this conspiracy. Besides, no camaraderie whatsoever linked me to the cashier, not any more than to my two colleagues. They belonged, all three of them, to the same low species of humans, who tattled on each other to please the strongest one and who tattled on me too.

My fault, my weak point was that I would read in secret and draw up sheets covered with Greek words (exactly the same system of sheets I was to take up again in Switzerland twenty years later, to learn French).

On quiet afternoons when there were no tables or floors to scrub, at the hour when flies buzz around and wine evaporates in the glasses, when the Hick wandered off to his lover and my comrades in misery set their wits to works and pitched pepper in the snuff box of the slumbering captain, I myself would pitch dozens of Greek words into my skull and sensuous new ones would come my way via the daily newspaper, which I was beginning to take in my hands for the first time. I was becoming acquainted with a language that held an irresistible attraction for me, the language of my father, and I was discovering a world thanks to a miraculous sheet of
paper, folded in two, which knew everything: it taught me that ministers governed my country; that there were deputies who made laws and argued like our barcadjis; that a certain Filipesco had killed his adversary Lahovary with a saber; that the Greeks were fighting against the Turks, the Boors against the English, and the Spaniards against the Americans; that there was a "Dreyfus affair" and that in this affair a novelist named Zola had set France on fire. I learned that on the entire earth, men were killing one another or committing suicide out of misery or out of passion. And I learned most of all that I didn't know my own language! There were lots of words I didn't know at all, for I had never heard them pronounced or seen them in my schoolbooks.

This revelation exasperated me: how could I not understand a Romanian text? What could I do? Whom could I ask?

I often asked Mavromati to translate, for better or for worse, the Greek words I picked up around me, but to ask him to teach me my mother tongue seemed a shame: he was the foreigner and I was the native, fresh from school!

And there was no one whom I could have asked this favor. Greeks or Romanians, Kir Leonida's customers presented themselves as people without a heart, greedy for a good meal, indifferent to our suffering. Those people were my enemies. I was happy when they didn't show up and I would have gladly sent them to hell, for few were those who would pay attention to the hell this poor devil was in, up on his feet from dawn till midnight.

Only Captain Mavromati, always near by, would often hear me moan. Since I had always been respectful toward him, he took interest in me: "Your legs are hurting, moreh Panagaki! Oh! Kaimeni psychi-mou! The world is a barbarous place!"
Few emotions move the soul as much as compassion. The turbulence and torment I suspected in the heart of the former ship commander brought out pity in me and silenced my own moans.

The life of a dishwasher with chafed hands, of a cellar boy with tired legs; the impossible life of a bar waiter who has to endure all the suffering and receives all the brutalities, this life of a recluse was becoming unbearable for me. And so I directed my eyes and my heart toward the person the riffraff called the pillar of the saloon and the eyes of the master.

From that day on my comrades in misery, following the example of the cashier, would burn his hands with the diligence game, make him snuff pepper, pour water into his pockets or sprinkle itching powder on him, and I, the weakest of them all, took up the defense for this insulted, defeated man, alerted him to the tricks they plotted against him, argued with the other boys and allowed the Hick to beat me up. So we formed two unequal, opposing camps. The cashier was less strict with his flatterers and promised to do everything to see that I was kicked out. All three of them, full-blooded Romanians, called me the “Catzaouni” (derogatory for Greek). And instead of relaxing our bones when we were alone, my own coworkers were always ready for a fight now. Sometimes we would even fist fight.

But fighting is also a sign of vitality if you develop a taste for it. Fighting for an idea, for an emotion, for a passion or a tomfoolery, but believing in something and fighting for it, that’s life. Those who don’t feel the need to fight, don’t live but vegetate.

In the beginning, I had vegetated too. For a few weeks, annihilated by the void the denial of my freedom had carved into my heart, I had only languished and dreamed of disappearing among the bunch of railroad car sweepers, to live freely with a flock of children without a God and without a home. But as soon as I wanted to act

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on this plan, the saintly figure of my mother appeared to me, who would have died of
sorrow upon seeing me descend to the scum of vagabonding children. And so I gave
up on the idea.

This tumult, had it continued, would certainly have driven me to some act of
desperation.

But here comes a newspaper, the kind you find anywhere, it falls into my
hands and tells me unsuspected truths. Thirsty for knowledge I guzzled those news
items down. Neologisms gave me something to chew on. At the same time, the first
fragments of conversation in Greek resounded clearly in my ears. I put them on
paper. The desire to make phrases out of them made me gaze into the eyes of
Captain Mavromati, the pillar of the inn, eyes full of the horizon.

That’s when I realized that this pillar was but a human wreck, tramped down by
the man I detested more than anything: the cashier. Indignation flared up in me.
Mavromati, kindly and peaceable, silently suffered the hostilities of all those rogues.
Why did the Hick resent him? What was the old man spying? Everyone knew that the
cashier entertained, in the face of Kir Leonida, a mistress everyone called “the baker
woman” and with whom he could be seen whenever he had a free minute.

Weren’t there dubious things going on with this woman?

So I started to watch out and surprised him as he was carting old wines and
expensive liquors off to her place at night, roasts, chickens, eggs, and other things.

Now I got him! He wanted to have me kicked out. But I had developed a taste
for staying. I forgot all my sorrows. A pleasant field of activity opened up to me: the
desire for revenge, the thirst to read, the occasion to learn a foreign language, the
need to love someone even less fortunate than I.
I woke up as if from a nightmare. Life started to have meaning. And from one day to another, the way I viewed the tavern had changed!

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"Captain Mavromati, what do you think this could mean: intrinsic?" I asked one afternoon, showing him the paper. "I don't know myself, moreh. But there is a 'biblio' that knows the entire Romanian language."

What is this "Bible" enclosing "the whole Romanian language", I asked myself, intrigued for days, when to my great amazement the captain showed up one morning with the book under his arm and put it into my hands: "Oriste, Panaiotaki! I give it to you as a gift: this knows more than the most 'spoodevmenos' (erudite) dascalos."

I took the "Bible" and read: Dictionar Universal al Limbei Romane, by Lazar Seineanu (the same Seineanu who, besides H. Tiktin and Dr. Gaster, is one of the three Jewish professors to whom Romania owes the foundations of her philology: all three of them were expatriated against their will; all three of them still continue today—the first in Paris, the second in Berlin, the third in London—to gloriously till the soil, until then unappreciated and unknown, of our national folklore in order to present it to the scholarship of the world.)

I didn’t understand at once what the words Universal Dictionary meant; but leafing through it randomly, my cheeks flushed with pleasure: scientific terms and neologisms I had come across in the papers and which I had been sorry to skip over, here they were made clear for me. The few expressions that began to make sense immediately got my intelligence going, brought relief to my brain and joy to my heart.

We were alone. The captain was watching me, his face lit up. Speechless with joy, I took his right hand and kissed it with the appreciation of a son, then ran to my bed and hid the volume under my pillow, well concealed in a stack of linens.
From then on, this sacred “Bible” of my youth—the prayer book I held on to for ten years and which I saved through all disasters—was to accompany me on all my bloodied paths and often was to become, during the existence of this tormented child, my only source of spiritual happiness. How many times, shivering in my bed for hours, did I have to confront the cold and get up to fetch my dictionary from wherever I had negligently left it; I just couldn’t skip over an unknown word anymore!

No more blues! At Kir Leonida’s no fatigue, no brutality, no gloomy thoughts; nothing could change my decision to work and to bear life. A ruined man had put a treasure into my hands: each page contained a world of knowledge; each word opened up horizons I had barely known existed. And then the marvelous discovery I had made all by myself—that the words were organized in strictly alphabetical order, stirring in me the ambition to find the exact location of the word I was looking for, without searching, at the first try! Often the surprises my “Bible” held for me were stronger than the need to find a specific word, and so I would completely forget about the word, about my reading, and the tavern with its infamies and the scarcely measured time, and in a passionate succession I would float from one page to the next, from one science to another science, from one philosophy to another philosophy, from one halfway familiar historical event to another one I had no idea about, from one biography, which left me dumbfounded to another one which moved me to tears, incessantly sent from the beginning of the volume to its end and from the middle to either cover. Curtailing my hours of sleep while my comrades were snoring in their beds, I crammed in all this voluptuous knowledge, a lit candle underneath an open umbrella, which I covered with my clothes to be most careful. Curled up, my nose in front of the little smoky candle, I changed universes every minute, until the
door flung open as if from a gust of wind, and the Hick, pounding me with his fists, destroyed my elaborate installation and threw me to the floor: "Damn the whore who put you on earth! Sleep, damn it! Sleep, you have to work tomorrow!"

But I didn't care! His blows didn't scare me anymore. I had only one concern: hiding my "Bible"! I would fall asleep, with my head on the dictionary, as I used to on the knees of my mother. And the next day, I would start over once again, covering the window as carefully as possible.

This limitless joy had an immediate physical effect: I put on weight! My muscles became hard as rocks, my cheeks flushed with blood. I ate and drank well. Dishes, plates, pots, tables, floors, doors, windows became an easy game for me. My little adversaries, whom I really didn't hate, by the way, couldn't stand up to me anymore, neither in argument nor in fighting. Even better, one day, furious that the Hick had tripped me, I hit him right in the chest with the dustpan I had in my hand, and went to complain to Kir Leonida, who took my side. So I began to elbow my way through, and make room for myself.

On the other hand, my mother was happy about seeing me strong and jolly. She would come every Saturday night to bring me clean laundry and would stay, with the permission of the master, for an hour to chat with me. Sometimes she would discover a bruise on my face; my poor mother would get so upset about it as if I were going to die. "Who hit you like that? Do they beat you here?" "Why no, Mom! I bruised myself in the basement, when I went down without a candle!"

And I called Captain Mavromati, of whom I had told her with enthusiasm. My mother, after eight years of living with my father, spoke Greek fairly well and the last few times never failed to invite the captain into our conversations, thanking him for the sympathy he had for me and talking with him for a long time.
Strange thing: conversing with my mother, Mavromati got all worked up, just as when he talked with the ship commanders; one might have said that he was actually cursing someone. Anxious to know what was going on, I interrupted their conversation. "What is up with the Captain, Mom? With whom is he angry? Why?"

"Oh, sweetie. These are big people's stories! Human miseries! He's telling me about the man he used to be: his home, his wife, his ship. And it seems that his friends put him in this situation."

"Yes, moreh pedakee!" he would scream, his eyes filled with hatred: "I have not always been wretched like this! I was captain on my vaporia for twenty years! And my friends took my wife and vaporia and everything and left me only the shirt on my back! Oh! afitotim! pezevenghis! Khrima more Khrima!"

And standing up, pale, trembling, he would pace the entire room, until his violent coughing put an end to his fit of anger. My mother would leave, shaking her head. I was always melancholy when she left, especially after encounters like this where Mavromati allowed me a glimpse into some of his mysterious past. I went back to my toil and my forbidden pleasures. He returned to his seat and to the Calvary of his unknown torments.

And the months passed... Christmas brought a day of freedom for me—in a temperate and cozy home, meals my mother prepared and caresses she lavished on me—a day as short as the luminous fall of a shooting star on a summer night.

For the Captain, winter brought sufferings, endless inquisitorial tortures: the stuffy tavern, hermetically closed against the cold wind and full of unemployed who took turns tormenting him, using the same old tricks and one newly invented by the relentless Hick: the terrible trick where red pimento was burned on the stove and caused an asphyxiating smoke that made us all run out into the snowstorm.
miscreants themselves coughed while they were chuckling. Good old Mavromati spat out his lungs.

I was going to make the cashier pay dearly for this last ignominy but my time hadn't come yet.

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It seems hard to believe that a servant—even if he was the almighty cashier—but still nothing more than a servant, caught red-handed by us and suspected by the whole neighborhood and the owner himself, could terrorize some subaltern children and a sick old man at his leisure, without any of his victims having the courage to denounce him. And yet, that's how it was: an established authority assumes a limitless power in the eyes of the weak ones, who subordinate to it and put up with it. Hence the inconceivable patience of people toward the heinous crimes committed by tyrants: it is not some particular moral value held by the oppressors that gives them the strength to rule the world but simply the cowardice of the oppressed.

It was the same situation in Kir Leonida's tavern. Our true master was the cashier, a country brute similar to the corporals in the barracks who beat their brothers to death as soon as they see two woolen stripes on their overcoats.

At the time, Kir Leonida had just opened a factory for soda and mineral waters, a few yards away from the inn. And in the neighborhood, brick-layers and other craftsmen worked for him to restore run-down apartment buildings. None of these projects were going well: in the factory the machines were running defectively, injuring workers and causing damage; in the apartment buildings unskilled and poorly paid men without supervision reconstructed the next day what they had built the day before. Kir Leonida and Barba Zanetto, bewildered, ran back and forth between their failing enterprises.
Great times for the Hick, who reigned over the tavern like a pasha, stole a lot, entertained his mistress and martyred the weak ones to make up for the thousand years of servitude he had in his blood, waiting for the day when, with a nice round sum of money, he would open up his own inn, even more beautiful than the one where he had served with faith and honesty for long years!

But there you go... it sometimes so happens that just when one says: that's it! it is not it at all. This was to happen, in spite of us, to the one who made life tough for an old asthmatic and some innocent children.

The Captain had known Demetrius, the cashier, since the day his father had brought him by the hand and introduced him to Barba Zanetto twelve years before. He had seen him arrive, snotty, frowning, dressed in rags, wearing sandals, underhanded, a boy whose head you had to lift up by his chin if you wanted to see his eyes that were constantly fixated on the floor. And it was the same Captain Mavromati who comforted him with his protection, taught him how to use a fork, defended him against other Hicks and taught him the Greek language, which he still completely butchered.

Since then, this eternal Dinu Paturica of universal upstartism had instinctively followed the path the great Romanian writer Nicola Filimon had laid out for his distinctly and immortal prototype a century ago: he licked the hand he couldn't bite and became indispensable, then shedding all timidity, raised his head to look at the world with his viper's eyes and set out to destroy all those he took for obstacles on his path to fortune. For him Captain Mavromati turned from being a benefactor into being the eyes of the owner, and the boys he suspected wanted to stay in the tavern forever and learn Greek to replace him were considered rivals he had to chase away before they could take root: no one could stay longer than a year at Kir Leonida's.
This way Barba Zanetto and later his son willy-nilly had to keep the only servant who knew the customers, the drinks, the customs of the house and the Greek language, which was an absolute must in this neighborhood.

But I was to shake the reign of the Hick to its foundations.

Six months after I had started my employment and thanks to the kindness of the Captain and my own studiousness, I knew Greek much better than our tyrant, which threw him into the most ridiculous fits of fury. Immediately the sympathies of all the serious customers surrounded me, who would only speak Greek with me and ask the owner to have me serve them myself. Kir Leonida agreed and let me come out from the dishes to move me into the restaurant. Farewell scalding dishwater and chafed hands! Farewell, partially, relentless hrouba with your eighty steps!

Properly dressed, my apron as white as snow, nicely combed hair, I was to respond, with a stentorian voice: Amessoss! Erhete! Oriste Kyriel to all our Greek customers, who called me while noisily rapping on tables and plates.

Most of all I had to show the necessary talents: memory, prudence, adroitness, swiftness, circumspection. I tried my best and managed to please everyone, except the Hick of course, who couldn’t believe his eyes.

My new status made Captain Mavromati as happy as if I were has own son, and my mother cried tears of joy.

That wasn’t all. They say that misfortunes never come singly. I believe that luck also gets doubled sometimes; if not, life would be unbearable.

Another of the Hick’s cruelties had changed my situation once more and made it almost ideal: having caught my two comrades as they were drinking liquor, the ferocious cashier had beaten them till they started bleeding. As soon as he let go of them, the unlucky boys fled to never come back; and until their replacements arrived

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and were worked in, I had to do part of the chores the fugitives had abandoned. Naturally they gave me some good ones and some bad ones.

Well—besides the exhaustion caused by the cellar and the heavy basket of supplies which crushed my shoulders when I returned from the market—I experienced the happiness of going out into the city, of living outside again and most of all of wandering around in this Karakiol that overlooked the Danube and which I had yearned to see again just as a convict sighs for his freedom.

From October till April, during six months of reclusion, I had revisited my dear Danube only one single time, at Christmas. And that although in the winter I just loved to give way to my melancholy above this endless white ribbon, turned to stone by the ice or its many floes in a gigantic revolt!

It is easy to imagine the compensations I needed to find in my friendship with the Captain and in the marvelous "Bible" to resist these nostalgic feelings.

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Now, all of a sudden I woke up a free person: a freedom dearly paid for but all the more savory.

In the mornings between nine and ten, I had to run through the quarter with the daily menu and take orders from the regulars; then between eleven and noon, I had to deliver the meals they had ordered. Same thing in the evening. Four hours of roaming a day, four hours of inebriation, for my eyes, my ears, my senses! Acacias, bending under the dazzling weight of their buds; trees trembling with the concert of their singing visitors; streets swept by the wind, washed by the rain, filled with mischievous dogs and cats; large windows opened to the sunlight and decorated with flowerpots; courtyards with women in love, singing or scolding their brats. But most of all the
Danube revealed itself to my eyes from amazing angles I had not seen before—the
eternal Danube of thousands of years of childhood!

And as I kept this job until the end of my employment with Kir Leonida,
oftentimes Captain Mavromati would accompany me on my exhilarating errands and
tell me, in his own language, something or other from his former life. I will relate this
here in one piece as it has stayed in my memory, which is that of the heart only:

"I was born on the water, and I never thought that I could live or die anywhere
else but on the water. My father had his caravel on the Aegean Sea; he kept his
family with him; together we knew the peace and the sorrows of the sailor's life. After
my parents' death, I myself became the commander of the caravel, at the price of
wrongdoings and injustices I heartlessly committed to the detriment of my brother and
my sister, both of them of very young age. Oh well! Perhaps I'm paying for it today! If
in my old age they insult and torment me—if they burn my hands and my nose, if they
pour water into my pockets and if they suffocate me with pimento smoke—it's perhaps
because I have to atone for my injustices from that time.

That's why, as the Romanians say, I swallow it and keep silent. I could have
the cashier thrown into prison anytime because he has stolen and he's still stealing,
not drinks and chickens but thousands of francs! And I still keep silent. Why would I
denounce him? Who doesn't steal? Have I not stolen? Zanetto, has he not stolen?
Everybody steals, everybody who can! No one can build themselves a caravel or a
mineral water plant with their two hands!

And what would I gain if I did my rich friends this favor? To Leonida, I would
still be the same wretched Mavromati. He forgets that he woke up as the heir of a big
fortune largely because of me: it was me who pulled his father out of servitude, and it
was me who gave him the money to open his own inn in Braila, where I came with my
caravel and saw that there was "bread to eat." We left real fortunes in Zanetto's tavern, my friends and I!

Oh I'm telling you, friends. Friendship! I don't curse them but what crimes we are capable of, all while being friends and cherishing friendship!"

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"I was young...Ambitious...I wanted a cargo boat...Enough of the caravel! No more sails...My own ship...To rip through the sea from the Levant to Gibraltar and to the Ocean. A banker from Piraeus, a childhood friend, lent me the amount I was lacking after I had sold my caravel, and there I was, 'commander of my own steamer!'

Well, I lost my head! I thought that I owned the world! Orgies, generosities and bragadocio, which lifted me up to the clouds and made me forget that I had debts to pay off too: 'Bravo, Mavromati!' 'Zito, Mavromati!' 'Hurrah, Mavromati!' 'Na-se-hes-so, Mavromati!

I had a Spanish wife, who didn't want to come onboard the freighter, even less than my mother on the caravel and I found out why: it was easier for her to go to bed with my friend, the banker! There she wasn't afraid of the storm! Oh, one should never have banker friends!

One day we pulled each other's handsome beards out...I pawned the freighter, paid back my debts and took back my wife. I should have just left her with him and not paid anything because I was to lose her later anyway, her and with her the ship!

A woman, moreh Panaghi is like the sun: one mustn't go too far away but one shouldn't get too close to her either. At any rate one can't have a woman and a ship at the same time: one of the two is bound to ground you!
After my double shipwreck, without sincere affection and without my thundering *Mavri Thalassa*, I thought of Zanetto, whom I had made rich. I came to Braila. I still had some money and I proposed to him that since we were friends we might become associates. He responded 'two sabers don't belong into the same sheath,' but he said, 'you can live with me.'

So I turned a blind eye and lived next to him. In the beginning I still had hope for the future and believed in my friends. We ate our meals together, we often feasted. I was appreciated by my colleagues, ship commanders who promised me the Black Sea and Mount Athos.

Days and years passed. One by one my good friends, who still could have saved me, disappeared. In the meantime Zanetto became powerful while I became weak and fell ill. Then, having spent all my savings, I couldn't pay for a good feast anymore and you know, when only one friend pays in a friendship, one loses respect and with it the friendship. Few people are an exception to this rule.

Soon I became ragged and dirty. So nothing remained of the proud Mavromati. Not even my title as a captain, which I was denied and which became a subject of banter for the jocular youth in the saloon. "Captain" Mavromati was now only a legend!

Following the general example, the cashier served me flat wine or diluted it with the siphon and pushed innocent children to make fun of me, then, to torment me.

I didn't complain anymore, nor did I get upset. I said: "Let it go! Captain Mavromati: *kalo taxidí! (Have a good trip)! Adieu mavra mafi!"
Dog days of summer. The bushes in the garden adorned with hops. A streetcar horse's fatigue. Bloody sweat.

My shirt all drenched, I would go down to the icy hrouba to satisfy the needs of heartless customers and pave the way for the tuberculosis that awaited us all toward our twentieth year.

And always curses and blows. Six boys passed through in less than three months. Six times I had to take on their duties.

This inn was not an inn but a purgatory. Legions of gluttons with stomachs like boas. Hecatombs of chickens. Mackerels grilled by the hundreds. Twenty hectoliters of wine emptied a day. At midnight, at one our two in the morning, I threw my ragged self on the bed without taking off my clothes.

Then came autumn, with its new wines and barbecues. Proud, vain, gossipy, Barba Zanetto made his old friends try his "trouble nectars," thirty times a day: "Waiter! Wash two glasses, dry them with an apple peel and fill them up for number 7."

Clinking the glasses and clicking his tongue, the old man would watch for the "connoisseur's" verdict who put on airs and played difficult. "Waiter! Bring a bite of octopus on a fork! Maybe this gentleman has an empty stomach!"

It was autumn. I started my second year of service. New conditions to discuss between the owner and my mother, who didn't discuss at all. "Are you satisfied with him, Kir Leonida?" "Yes, sure, mother Zoiţa, Panagaki is our boy! We'll make him assistant cashier!"

(1) In Greek: Eyes black.
This meant I was allowed to open the cash register, either to return change or to change it when the cashier wasn't there. And at once my salary doubled: two hundred francs a year, plus the extras: a suit, shoes, a hat, a day off for Easter and another one for Christmas.

Finally, here comes the second winter. Fewer errands. More time to relax. Joys and tragedies.

This time the Hick was ready to eat me alive. Not a day went by without beatings for me. "One of us is going to leave here! And be assured, it'll be you!" he screamed.

In order to upset me, in view of my attachment to Mavromati, he increased his meanness and also used his asphyxiation scheme with the pimento again so that the poor man, weakened by his asthma, frequently had to spend long minutes coughing outside in the freezing cold until the shop was completely aired out.

The owners knew, and had more than once happened upon such edifying scenes, but preoccupied with their big business they contented themselves with making a distracted remark. What did they care? The cashier was everything. It was he who ran the inn they almost didn't know anymore.

I was so desperate that without my passionate friendship to Mavromati, I would have left the place as our inquisitor wanted me to.

But my destiny had something else in store for me. It wanted my departure to be preceded by a victory and followed by a defeat, just as my incessant departures and arrivals all over this vast world have been since.

One December day, despite my usual precautions, the Hick surprised me with my dictionary in my hands. This would have been without importance, had I been
dealing with a human being, but as my enemy was only waiting for any pretext to provoke me, he pounced on the book. "What is this big book, all new?" he yelled, snatching the precious volume from me. "How did you get that? You're stealing from the cash register, you thief!"

And with his fist he then dealt such a blow to my nose that I fell to the floor, bleeding. That very moment Kir Leonida came in. He ran to my help and screamed furiously: "What did you do, Demetrius? Are you crazy?"

"He stole from the cash register, Kir Leonida!" retorted the brute. "Look: he bought himself this big book!"

Swallowing mouthfuls of blood, I couldn't reply anything right away; I looked from one to the other and most of all to Captain Mavromati, who had stood up, pale, trembling, to respond in my place but was thrown back into his chair by a terrible coughing fit.

The owner pushed back the dictionary that the cashier had handed him and helped me wash my face. During that time, the other kept repeating: "He is stealing, yes! I've had this suspicion for a long time that he was stealing!" "You are the one who's stealing!" I was finally able to scream at the top of my lungs. "I've seen you carting bottles of corked wine off to the 'baker woman.'"

Faced with this assertion easy enough to confirm, Kir Leonida started like someone bitten by a viper.

The only corked bottles of wine were a stock of a thousand liters, which was rarely sold. This wine, thirty years old, was called the "drug" because of its strengthening qualities, and it was consumed only when there was an illness in the family or else it was graciously offered to rare friends, always as a medicine.
"He's lying, Sir, he's lying to save himself!" the Hick started to scream, deathly pale. "We'll see who's lying," said the owner. "But if he isn't lying, this will be it, even if he did steal from the cash register. Those bottles are counted. And that wine is worth more than its weight in gold." "All the bottles are there!" stammered the culprit.

"Yes," I said, "they are there in their place but about fifty of them in the last row are empty and their necks turned toward the wall! I saw with my own eyes how you emptied them!" Captain Mavromati intervened; he said, visibly disgusted: "I don't know anything about the stolen 'drugs' but I know Demetrius has ten thousand francs in his bank account. I don't think he saved all that on his meager salary! As far as the dictionary is concerned, I gave it to him last year."

The skeleton in the closet was confirmed. They simply asked the Hick to leave, since the owners, being Greek, foreigners, preferred to turn a blind eye to it.

So I became Master-servant over the cash register, the tavern and its mishaps.

My mother was on cloud nine. Our suburbanites didn't stop telling her: "May God keep him alive for you! What a boy!"

***

Yes! "What a boy! May God save him for you!"

Only this is the thing: this boy had suffered everything and had tried so hard—not to become like the "Hick", but rather thanks to a marvelous energy commandeering his complicated mechanism.

One dark winter evening, shortly after the "happy event" this miraculous energy left in pieces: Captain Mavromati succumbed one night. In his hovel, in utter destitution, and all alone; far from his tumultuous Thalassa; far from the friendly hand of his little Panagaki; far from any hand of a friend to squeeze his in the last moments.
and say to him from the heart: "Friend...brother...Let me tell you that I have loved
you, all your life, I have loved you!"

The day of the burial of the man whom I owed the "Bible" of my youth, I went
out to do my tour of the regulars. On my way back, passing close to the ravine, I saw
the Danube! Frozen since December, it had just broken its formidable armor during
the night, this inexorable revolutionary! He had shattered it and now, unruly,
thundering, invincible, he hauled his mass of white coffins.

Yes, coffins! He crushed them, put them upright, laid them flat again, turned
them upside down in all directions, bathed them in his floods and carried them on his
back; carried them far away to Galatz, to Sulina, to the sea, to Captain Mavromati’s
Mavri Thalassa!

I stayed there, riveted, the void at my feet, the void in my heart and I watched
and watched this floating cemetery.

Had I stayed too long? Had an hour passed? Two hours? Was it noon yet?
I don’t know at all, to this day. I only know that this idiot Barba Zanetto had
been looking for me everywhere and...

...And seeing me there, at the bank of the ravine, he approached stealthily
and pushed me into the void! Just like that, out of rage, cashier and all that I was!

Feeling the thrust I closed my eyes without screaming, without conscience and
rolled down like a tree trunk, over the slope covered with a thick layer of snow. I rolled
all the way down to the port. There I stood up and lifted my head to find out at least
who had sent me on this trip.
It was Barba Zanetto. All the way up there he gestured like a chimpanzee, yelling: “Ah! Keratia! That’s what it is, huh? You leave the restaurant and treat yourself to the Danube! And I’ve been looking for you for an hour! Get up here quick, pouslama! We have the house full of customers, lots of customers!”

I listened. When he was finished, I took off my apron, rolled it into a ball and tossed it as high as I could under his nose, screaming: “Maybe you have ‘lots of customers’ in your joint, but you don’t have my Captain Mavromati anymore! Take your apron and stay in your full house!! I’m going to mine!”

A few hours later, walking back up to the house and passing through Cavalry Avenue, I saw the hearse, which carried my friend toward the realm where there are no bankers, no Spanish women, nor “Hicks”, not even good friends.

About ten people were following, bored.

Adieu, mavra matia! Adieu, childhood!
TO GET TO FRANCE

To Charlie CHAPLIN,—the human "little tramp," whom I only know from his movies, I
dedicate this film of my life. P.I.

III

Direttissimo.

To get to France—which the Orient has always regarded as the ideal lover—a
number of vagabonding dreamers have ventured recklessly to follow her call, even to
conquer her but most of them, maybe the best ones, lost their bones before knowing
her, or afterwards, which amounts to the same thing. For there is beauty only in the
illusion. And whether one reaches the goal of one's quest or not, the bitterness tastes
about the same in either case. The end is always worth it. What is important for the
man with excessive desires is the struggle, the battle with his fate while these desires
persist; that's all there is to life, the life of the dreamer.

I am one of those dreamers. And, among other desires, I had always wanted
to reach French soil. Here is one of my failed attempts, the most beautiful one.

***

I was in Piraeus (just about twenty years ago), in the company of the best
traveling companion I have known all my life, the only friend whose soul ever became
completely united with mine. And yet we were going to separate: a visceral sadness,
which had suddenly torn his heart in two, pulled him away from our passionate
friendship and sent him to lock himself up in a monastery on Mount Athos for a while.

For three days after our arrival in Piraeus, we walked around, silently and
melancholy, amidst glorious ruins which increased the distress in our poor souls; then
came the moment where we had to kiss each other to perhaps never meet again. Oh! How sad it is to love someone!

During our last dinner—bread and olives spread out on a newspaper—we barely ate anything. The small hotel room seemed like a mortuary to us. We separated our belongings, shared our joint assets, about sixty drachmas, and cried heart-felt tears.

Since I wanted to leave for France and my friend was against it, he said to me one last time: "Don't go there... Be reasonable... You have a mother who trembles in fear for your life. When we were together, that was okay: I speak several languages and I get around better than you do. But you will suffer much more by yourself. And then in the West, they have night shelters, that makes it tougher for vagabonds than in the East where there aren't any. Forget Marseilles: if you knew how the thought of that city upsets me! Go back home, marry a simple little girl rolling in money, live on a regular job and die in peace. Dreams?... Brood over them by a fireplace, which will cost you less than the one blazing in your heart: once you die, your face will have much fewer scars. Believe me, Panaït... The balance of all lived dreams is as high as the disasters. And it should be like that; otherwise there would only be dreamers. Let's go... Promise me that you're going to take the ship to Constantza tomorrow."

My friend was talking to me as he squeezed my hands, his handsome eyes teary, his handsome brotherly face tenderly false; he didn't believe half of what he was saying; he was lying affectionately.

I lied to him in turn, promised to follow his advice, and he left, convinced that I wouldn't do any of what he had said because it wasn't for nothing that we were cast in the same mold.
As soon as I was alone, the world lost its meaning, people seemed absurd to me. The next day standing on the wharf, my ears humming with the beautiful French rhymes my friend had recited the evening before, I watched the last small boats come alongside the Romanian ship, then the ship itself take off for Constantza.

Two days later, a ship of the Compagnie des Messageries Maritimes, the *Saghalien* \(^{(1)}\) was leaving for Marseilles, via Naples.

I packed my suitcase.

***

What a sad thing to do when you are a vagabond, miserable and without your best friend, but what does the world know about this?

About how much pain a suitcase can hold when the callous hands of a sobbing mother packed it for the first departure from home; about what a good son feels in his heart when an entire suburb raises a hue and cry that he has associated with a “good-for-nothing;” about the desert such “good-for-nothing” can create in the soul of an unruly adolescent when he leaves him “to, maybe, never meet again” after having talked to him desperately, what does the world know about all this?

Does it know, at least, how you pack your suitcase when you know you cannot pay for your journey?

Manifold are the resources life offers our love, and unbending is the courage born from desire.

At the end of January 1907, which followed the disastrous departure of my friend, I could be seen before the piers of Piraeus, quietly sitting on my suitcase and contemplating the steamers’ maneuvers: for two days already I had been studying the
movement of maritime crowds coming and going; I was observing their habits, travelers, sailors and boats.

A great event was going to happen in my new life as a greenhorn vagabond abroad, without money and brusquely expelled from beneath my mentor's protective wing. Also with my heart reduced to the size of a hazelnut, I kept thinking of the piece of gold I had sewn into the flap of my shirt, a half pound sterling, my entire fortune, bought for once and locked away in my suitcase, between the *Life of Socrates* and the *Poetry of Eminesco*, a two kilo loaf of bread and a pound of Greek cheese, the excellent cascavalii. I also thought of my Roskopf watch, a precise and nice little device of oxidized nickel, rich in memories, which I'd taken everywhere for the last four years and was glad that it hadn't strangled me to death. I had slipped that watch into the right pocket of my overcoat, all the way to the bottom, between the cloth and the lining, where I had pierced the pocket. To retrieve it and tell the time, I had to dive in there with my arm up to my shoulder. It constantly reminded me of its existence by tapping against my knee with every step.

So I had, if searching vigorously, only a few drachmas partially intended for the good barcadjee who—at the bottom of his barge where he was stretched out, his arms under his head—had been watching me amicably over the two days I was observing the *Saghalien*, smiling at me with grace and saying to me every time he returned and plopped himself on his back: "Kalosto patrioti (Hi)."

I would give him a frozen look in response, the look of a man who is about to die; but one hour before the departure of "the French lady", I had to give up my bitter disdain: "Yes, kolosto patrioti, tell me, how much would you charge to take me to that ship anchored over there at the entrance of the port?"

(1) I cannot guarantee the spelling of this name.
He leapt up to his seat and looked in the direction I had pointed, where there were two ships. "To Galiko or to Ghermaniko? ("The French one" or "the German")?"

"To Galiko!" The man slapped his thighs, jovial, wheedling. "Eh! Patrioti... You know well enough: thirty pennies... It's quite far, kaîmenî! (poor us!)" "Yes, I said, it's quite far. And also I don't have a ticket..."

The barcadji exulted: "Give me the money, so I can buy one for you," he shouted, jumping on the pier. "You know it's the same price, but I'll earn fifty pennies on it." "How much is it to Marseilles, katastromatos?" "Sixty drachmas." "It would be nice to have that kind of money... Kaîmeni."

This disclosure changed the boatman's tone and attitude. His gaunt face became earnest; he said soberly: "Well, that's another pair of shoes altogether!... Let's go have coffee, right across from here!" And in the coffee shop he crossed his arms on the table, his nose close to mine: "So you want to do the palikaraki (little brave one)?" "Yes, more or less..." "Okay! Give me two drachmas and I will get you aboard!" I gave him the two drachmas. "Now listen, matia-moul! (My eyes!) I'll take you to the large staircase in the first class. There you go up quickly, like a rooster. If they stop you, you say in Greek: I'm just trying to find a friend. Since you're well-dressed, they will let you pass. Most of all don't hide before the departure: they have an eye on that. Meanwhile I'll slip your suitcase among the trunks of the rich people. Inside, you wait till it shows up, grab it without any explanation and... may God protect you, my child."

(1) On deck.
Everything happened as he had said. Having entered without obstacle, I went
to the lower deck and saw my barcadje struggle with his elbows, quarreling with his
comrades; then when he had passed me my suitcase and made sure I had gotten it,
he said to me once more, with a great gesture of relief: “Now may God protect you!
...”

Yes, may God protect you my child... until the ticket-collector catches you.

But until that terrible calamity, one is allowed to hope for a good outcome and
to take part in the life around one. And the life around me on the Saghalien is very
moving: four hundred Greeks, from all over the country, from Anatolia and Macedonia,
are penned up on deck, in a comical, tragic, picturesque jumble, more than theatrical
and almost improbable. All costumes, all dialects, all characters. Young people, old
people, children. Bachelors and couples. Happy ones, melancholy ones, sullen ones,
indifferent ones and wise ones. Some dance or make their children dance. Others
sing, pluck the cords of an instrument or play cards. There are some who debate so
passionately one could almost say they’re disputing, while someone sighs in a comer
and someone else paces the deck, gesturing, the fingers of his hands spread apart
and yelling at the sky: “Oh! Patrida-moul... patrida moul (My homeland! My
homeland!)”

Everyone is eating and drinking. The deck is cluttered with olive pits, herring
heads, onion skins, orange peels. Everywhere it reeks of tziri, that strong cheese, and
all those other things, which is quite considerable.

One tune arises more distinctly from all those groups:

_Eheh, moreh, eheh_
_Tha pamì stìn xantìa!
(We’re leaving to go abroad.)_
And in the middle of this hubbub the siren sounds for the first time and reminds me that I don’t have a ticket. I almost forgot about it, but I am so enmeshed in this crowd that I don’t get too scared; I let the siren howl as much as it wants, and the ship takes off, in the delirium of this roaring mass of people: “Farewell, patria-mou!”

“Farewell, my friends!”

Their “eheh, moreh, eheh” is thundering up to the sky now, in a chorus taken up by four hundred voices:

Everyone is singing,
it’s like that on the ship:
they’re happy, they’re joyous.
Everyone except the Jew.
The Wandering Jew, who isn’t enjoying his trip.

The Saghalien takes off under the shuffle of the sea that sprays us for its own fun. Awnings flap in the wind. The emigrants, huddled next to one another, begin to worry, to worry more and more. Me too and for good reason. Yet I can’t stop daydreaming joyfully about my luck to be in Marseilles in a few days. Oh! I will do anything, anything—docker, dish-washer, beggar—only to get there. I already see myself reading French books in the original just like my friend!

But my heart detaches itself from this dream and becomes all small, beating strongly. Around me, there are katastromatos, restless men, dreaming of dollars. What do we have in common, this herd and I?

With his garlic breath, a young emigrant launches into my face: “I’m going to San Francisco... What about you?” “To Timbuktu!” “Where is that?” In Canada.” “It’s too cold there...” “Leave me alone!”

Fixating the commander, who walks up and down in his Captain’s cage, I wonder if that man will have pity with me in case of the great disaster.
Suddenly, a short phrase, resounding, shouted in Greek, stabs me in the chest: "Hehl Ta sitiri, pedia! (Come on! Your tickets, children!)

The one who launched this calamitous order was the cafedjée, owner of the buffet for the third class, interpreter, and infallibly a Greek, as on all the ships plowing the waters of the Mediterranean.

Next to him stands an officer of the ship, with a severe expression in his face.

Ah! Kalmeni palikan!

***

Benefiting from the commotion around me as well as from the inattention of the ticket-collectors, I take to my heels, I slip away quietly. Where to? Do I know? I wander, I stroll from right to left, my eyes searching for a rat hole, all the while feeling the gold coin sewn into my shirt as my ‘Roskopf’ is tapping my knee.

Should I slip into a life-boat? They are covered with tarpaulin, solidly attached with strings I would have to cut. Go down to the boiler room? I don’t know anyone there: they are French. And here comes a sailor scrutinizing me secretly and smiling. He must have recognized the palikaraki!

Deeming myself lost, I crouch in the little corridors that form a maze around the big chimney. I huddle on top of the grill that protects the boilers. There, among the wind-sails, I feel safe. They won’t discover me here, too complicated. They won’t even bother to search in the thousand corners and recesses of this ship! Maybe—does one ever know?—they don’t know it as well as a vagabond on his first trip, hey, palikarak?

And an eternity, a heavy eternity is passing, flowing by with all its uncertainty, its fine rain starting to fall on my shoulders, the boilers burning me from underneath the grill, the rising ashes suffocating me, the rolling ship jolting me about. . .And my suitcase, left to those pirates, what would become of it with its bread and cheese, on
which I wanted to feast a little bit? . . . Because, damn, I am hungry. But I have to be patient, and I am being patient, my ears all pricked up, my face between my legs. Getting frozen from above, grilled from below, I constantly change from one foot to another like a stork on its rest. My God, how long this is taking!

Not all that long!

The sound of steps approaching, click, clack, on the deck. . . There are two of them. . . They stop! Why are they stopping? There is nothing to do here. I dare a quick look around me to see if there is anything I can do: nothing; just dirt and dusty rubbish.

But the steps, the steps of only one of them now—move closer again, click, clack and then stop again, this time in my little labyrinth! Ah! Marseilles, I can’t see you that well anymore! I see most of all the cap of the cafedjee, who is the interpreter for the ticket-collector, from whom only some air separates me now. Out of distress I stop breathing, but it is useless not to breathe in view of such a catastrophe, for here is one step and the cafedji is looking at me with his toad’s eyes, his bloated front: he doesn’t say anything, but beckons me with his index finger: come here!

Of course I obey him. . . I introduce myself. . .

Palikarakia...

On deck, the Frenchman and the Greek exchange a few words I don’t understand. The first one scrutinizes me calmly. The latter says to me: “Follow us!”

I follow him, like a young bride, thinking affectionately of my half pound sterling and my Roskopf, each of them still in their respective place.

When my dismal convoy arrives at the tarpaulins of the katastromatos, all the emigrants are standing. The most nervous ones surround us. And exclamations:
“What is up?” “What has he done?” “He doesn’t have a ticket?” “Poor guy! Kaimenos!”

I look at all these people, my two judges, the sea, the sky and I quiver at the thought of losing my possessions I wish I had hidden inside the cheese.

And here starts the interrogation, led by the Greek interpreter and listened to indifferently by the French officer, with lively interest from the emigrants: “What are you doing in your hiding place?” “I’m going to Marseilles.” “Mba. And your ticket?” “I don’t have one.” The cafedjee turns red, grabs me by the lapel of my overcoat and shakes me violently: “Kerata! Do you think this is your father’s ship?”

The officer extends his hand and calms the excessive zeal of his underling. A helping voice yells: “Come on, moreh, don’t act like the lehkeh (vile servant). We are Christians!” Other voices: “So what! It’s not your father’s ship either!” “And it won’t be any heavier because of this kaimenos.”

Hostility toward the interpreter arises everywhere. One emigrant pulls a handkerchief out of his pocket, throws a few cents on it, then nervously, continues his collection among the crowd, clinking the coins and clamoring with a metallic voice: “Hey! Brothers! Some good will! Give what your heart allows you to! We are going to collect a few cents for this unlucky chap! For him! Not for the ship! To hell with the ship!”

I look at the fellow and I believe to recognize the one who said he was going to San Francisco and whom I sent to hell.

In view of this activity, the cafedjee looks questioningly at his superior. The latter enunciates a sentence, and the Greek starts to search my pockets diligently. Result: a few pennies. They leave them for me.
Then I hear the officer say: "To the cinders." And he turns his back, but turns back around immediately, looks at my clean clothes and modifies his verdict: "No... Keep an eye on him... Get off in Naples..."

The interpreter throws me into a storage cabin and there he pounces on me and yells in my face: "Vodi! Gaïdour! (Ox! Ass!) Why didn't you come find me before the departure of the ship? For a few drachmas I would have shown you where to hide! Zoo! (Animal!)" "I'll know better next time..." And I did know better and used it passably in my favor.

***

Everything goes well until Messina comes in sight. The emigrants eat and drink: the deck has turned into a veritable pigsty; people are walking on waste now. The singing, which died down during the night, starts again with all force in the morning:

Eheh, moreh eheh!

And the clapping of hands and dancing:

We will eat and drink, and we will dance, eheh, moreh eheh,

when brusquely a storm breaks loose, and there we are, people and things, helter-skelter.

An unexpected gust of wind, heavy, massive like a thousand tons of water, violently hits our tarpaulin, inflates it, tears it loose from its ropes and blows it against the mast, which creaks as if it's the end of the world. Men, women, children, bags, bottles, breads, tziris, onions, oranges, all this is nothing but a shapeless mass, which the ship rolls from port side to starboard, crushing and smashing everything, while the
tempest devastates the deck and the commander screams from his post: “Everybody inside the hold!”

The emigrants have changed their song. Sliding on their hands and buttocks, drenched by water, terror in their eyes, they cling to anything they can grasp and invoke the two Greek patron saints of the seas with loud shrieks: “Aghios Nicolas! Aghios Gherasimos!”

The cafedji, who is overseeing the descent into the bunker and is amused by the spectacle, shouts at the frightened katastromatos, while walking all over them: “Uh oh! We’re going to be shipwrecked! Now try saying: eheh, morah, eheh!”

And throwing them down into there like packages, he cleans all the clutter off the deck. I am the only one who prefers to face the storm rather than going down into the stink and vomit. Wedged between the rail and the kitchen, I shield myself as much as possible against the waves sweeping the deck, and for a moment I really feel like we are sinking. Farewell, mother! You won’t see me again!

The cafedji, who sees me there, shouts at me: “Down, you wretch! A wave is going to wash you away!” “Let it wash me away!” But my script said otherwise.

With a star-covered sky, Naples opens its unique gulf to my misery, hoists the lights of its amphitheater up to the clouds, receives me with an enchantment that makes me forgive destiny for having left my desire to go to France unfulfilled.

I am gotten off in Naples. . .But I love Naples! My heart swells to bursting, while my eyes squint into the dark trying to make out the black mass of Vesuvius.

“You’ll get off here,” the interpreter shouts at me, amidst the deafening noise.

The Saghalien stops, casts anchor. The travelers pile up in boats swarming around the ship. My suitcase on my back, I am stuck in the crowd of emigrants who
get off here and whom a transatlantic ship is going to take to America. And here we are, a veritable herd of sheep, pushed into a barge which a tugboat pulls to the customs pier. At least I don't have to pay for this, I say to myself, thinking of the three liras the boatmen ask from the travelers for the trip from the boat to the pier. And since nobody gives me any notice, I let myself be drawn along. Who knows? A pilfered dinner here, a free night there are not to be scoffed at when you are a palikaraki. Let's play the emigrant then, while it works!

But it doesn't work, and it turns ugly in a completely unexpected way.

We are led into an enormous building where the beds are lined up like graves, and I see the Greeks walk up to the walls to read the inscriptions by old compatriots:

Brothers! Here we were devoured by bedbugs as fat as lentils!

I grab my suitcase and run off swiftly!

There I am in the street now, alone, without a friend, without my mentor, a man from Braïla cast into the world, a man, who doesn't have any idea about the dark days in store for him, a youth bursting with life and happy to be in Naples since there was no way to get to Marseilles. Happy about Naples, of which he yet only knows the poetry, happy about his gold coin sewn into his shirt and his Roskopf in the pocket of his vest again now, and the miserable treasure of about fifteen drachmas in big coins, which the emigrants collected for him.

But he is not very happy about what is happening suddenly, quickly while he is still roaming dreamily: a brigand comes up to him, proposes to bring him to an albergatore, and without waiting for his response, snatches his suitcase and tells him to follow him!
My God! I say to myself, this man must be dying of hunger to go about it like this! I was disembarked in a city more miserable than any Greek one!

And I follow him. Via Duomo, then, an alley: we stop at number four, at the albergatore's. He is young, swarthy, the face of a man who is struggling. The interior seems to be tidy. Cost: 50 cents for the night, 25 cents for a meat dish or fish with vegetables. Very good. I pay the porter, who only asks 30 cents. And I go to sleep, for the house is swaying as if I am still on the high seas.

The owner takes me to my room, opens the door and lets me enter, waits on the doorstep, holds out his hand. I look at his bitter mouth, his eyes like fire and ice, the immobility of his masculine face, and I don't understand a thing. "The 50 cents!" he goes, with a crisp voice that sends a shiver down my back.

I pay him instantly. He closes the door. I stay riveted to the middle of the room, my eyes wander to the filthy bed, the sinister window, to the walls where the wallpaper has marks of bedbugs crushed with a finger. A sorrowful lament arises from this dark, deep, dismal trench called a street, West street, Naples street, where a man pounced on me as if he wanted to rob me, only to earn 30 cents, and led me to this albergatore, who looks like an executioner.

I am gripped by fear. Gloomy misgivings fill my heart. I feel like crying.

My friend, far away. My mother, far away. And me, what am I doing here? I think of our home, modest but clean, homey. I think of my peers, almost all of them married, everyone in their families, at their jobs. Why this curse of not being able to do things like them, like everyone else? What constantly drives me onto faraway roads, when strangers make their lives in my own country and stay there? What do I want? What am I running after?
Alone. A thousand leagues from every soul who understands me and helps me.

I undress quickly and take out the gold coin, caressing it tenderly: it is going to protect me, this coin and the coins from the katastromatos, which are worth almost as much. Also the Roskopf, as pitiful as it may be, is still worth two or three dollars.

I spread my treasures on the bed: my watch, a pile of copper coins and the little gold button. All this is worth a pound sterling. Well. I have enough to live off for about two weeks, at the rate of 30 cents a day, tobacco included. But starting tomorrow, I will go find a job, no matter what.

This idea soothes me. I go to bed telling myself: I have to make it! I am a man alone in the world!

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Alone in the world? Oh no! Just one night's distress... The next day, at seven in the morning, Naples is out there! Naples, the city without equal, the part of the world about which I heard that one had to see it, then die!

I am not dead, but I have lost my head. For two days I only run around. Everywhere. Museums, Vesuvius, Pompeii, gardens, promenades, monuments, I devour all this at once, a piece of bread in my hand, my Roskopf in the other one.

But the evening of the second day, when I return, there is nothing left of the pile of copper coins the poor emigrants gave me.

So I become afraid. Now, old boy, you have got to work! Watch your money, too! It slips away. We're going to taste the famous meal of the hotel owner, which costs only five cents, meat and vegetables.

It's a mixture of noodles, beans, salted cod with lots of sauce: a mush that seems to have been eaten once before. No good; so we'll leave this mush for
gloomier days, which may never come. For right now, the half sterling is still intact, although already changed. And this time, we'll hurry to find a job.

I am sure to find one! On my strolls, didn't I see shops with signs saying: Letteria Romana? Those are, surely, Romanian...dairy shops! This sign as well as notes on all the houses saying: *si loca un piano*<sup>(1)</sup> made me believe that in Naples all the dairy shops were owned by Romanians and that everyone rents out...pianos! Two different things, but they dance before my eyes as I run after the streetcars and of which the first one makes me happy. No, I am not lost. *Laptaria Româna*, that's what that is, *Letteria Romana*!

Cursed Latin language: that was nice of you! All too sure to find a job with those Romanians who wouldn't let me die of hunger, I postpone the time of my service, for another three days I dash across the sumptuous landscapes surrounding Naples. I run to the port, the piers, the churches. I meet people.

Terrific, people! One of them drags me to a dive one evening where there is dancing to the music of an accordion. Lots of young girls. Joy, sincerity, nothing shady.

Since I don't dance, I drink, I joke, I look around. A little girl goes outside at regular intervals, puts her hands to her mouth like blinkers and shouts with a divine voice to some divinity on the fifth floor: "*Na-a-ani-î!"* A window opens up there in heaven. Another divine voice responds: "*Qué bouoi? (What do you want?)* "*Chendi a basso! Tché oun soldatiello, oun pasquale, que ti bouoli! (Come down. There is a little soldier who wants you!)*"
And the divine thing steps down...way down, into hell on earth, taking her soldatiello there. All this costs only 50 cents.

But that is still too expensive, believe it or not, because at the door to the bar, a "family man" is in serious competition with this heavenly enterprise. Check this out: this father, a whip over his shoulder, grabs the pasquale by the sleeve, shows him his two daughters who are sitting in a wagon with mixed harnessing, donkey and cow, and offers him for one lira, to eat, to drink and...the rest!

A soldatiello gets in. Then another one. I get in too. The father takes the lead. Cow, donkey and business drift into the night. On the road, a regular climbs on the cart in trot says hello, deals out kisses, handshakes and cigarettes.

The suburbs. Country house. Mess. Misery. The mother and a little daughter put bread, cheese, pasta, wine on a big table. People eat, people drink and go into a room to the side with only a curtain instead of a door. Couples go in there in turns. Two kids, five and seven years old, little gnomes, also come and go, both serious, the one brings the hand-wash basin, the other one a pitcher of water.

People are happy. People laugh. People let loose. I stay seated, and I look at the little daughter. She may be twelve, thirteen years old. When is it going to be her turn?

O my, right away; as the mother, thinking that I want her, pushes her with her elbow, points at me: "He va!... (Come on, go!)
"Co digio anda qu non mi chiama!" (How am I supposed to go, if he doesn't call me!), responds the little one, annoyed.

***

Yes, I know Naples.

But it cost me to get there. More, a lot more than Thomas Cook and Son charge to give you a poor tour around the city.
I knew Naples before the first week of my stay was over. And I learned, in fact, that I could die afterwards. For me, Naples provides no salvation, not any more than for a good number of its own children.

Terrified, my three last liras in my pocket, I hit the piers, the wharves, I contemplate all the steamers steering for Marseilles but here there is no Greek barcadjiou who agrees to get the desperate palikaraki, which I have been since Naples, onboard another Saghalien. From morning till evening I watch the ships leaving, without me, for more merciful shores. I still hope to make it there one day.

It is February, the beginning of my second week in the city with the most beautiful gulf in the world. Bravely I call the albergatore, open my suitcase before his eyes: “Look: new suit, new underwear, new boots, plus Socrates and Eminesco. How long mangiare and dormire for all this?” “Oona settimana. (A week.)” Good. Farewell, my suitcase! I keep two shirts and two pairs of underwear on me; a pair of socks, two handkerchiefs, two button-on collars, a towel, a bar of soap, my razor are scattered in my pockets.

And I shouldn’t forget to mention, at this solemn hour that I am writing about this adventure, which amused my friends the most, the most important object I unintentionally saved from disaster: the minuscule book entitled Ombra by Gennevray, the Romanian translation published in one of those popular collections, which nourished and taught an entire generation and whose editor, a Jew without a name in the world, went bankrupt and killed himself.

I dedicate this page of my life to his memory, for all the good the story he published brought me during my long days of famine in Naples.

I forgot what effects my suffering mother had bought and packed in that suitcase, the first one I lost at the beginning of a life of vagabondage that still
continues today. Never will I forget Ombra, the only nourishment and only witness to a soul haunted by distress.

Now that the gold coin and the pile of copper coins are gone, a new life begins, a life which will last a week and for which my suitcase is paying. I forced myself to the "hotchpotch" diet of salted codfish with dried beans and noodles. To be able to keep it down, I chew while holding my nose closed airtight. Do I know, my Lord, that you have days in store for me when I would be happy to have this?

For a job I look only occasionally now, completely in vain by the way. And I use all my time to wander around the port in search for a second Saghalien. They exist but this is it: once bitten twice shy; I don’t want any more Saghaliens that touch on other ports and where you have to get off in another Naples. There aren’t any others, but it’s not forbidden to hope.

Meanwhile I try to avoid a "good deal", which would leave me without two liras, the amount I need to pay the boatman who is to take me to the Saghalien of my dreams. And my Lord, it’s hard! Because I smoke and I spend 30 cents every day just on tobacco! There is already a dent in my two liras but I have a little reserve treasure: my Roskopf, a very nice pocket knife, a pretty leather pocket-book and another pretty wallet. Sacrificed at the right moment, these little things will save me from misery. This is what I put into my head, and I don’t allow myself any more weakness: I know I am a lost man, and for me there is no more God nor soul alive. A man alone in the world, a man more in distress than a stray dog, a man who can only stretch out in the middle of the crowded street and die there!

During this week of codfish, at the price of my suitcase, something came up to provide me with my daily tobacco. A family of Armenians on their way to America are
staying at my albergo and I offer myself as a cicerone, not without keeping an eye on the movement of direct ships. They accept but then, there too, what misery of the human heart! For an entire morning or an afternoon of walking on foot, of enthusiastic explanations and the devotedness of a true tour guide, those skinflints only give me 50 cents! Oh mankind, how ugly you are!

Yet they are well-off people, father, mother and seven children. Half the day they go for walks; the other half they spend in the apartment where they feast on all kinds of sweets, eat, drink, laugh and smoke sumptuous narghiles. They have no idea about codfish, and they don't ask me, me who knows all about it. They give me fifty cents and look at me with jovial and chubby faces, especially the father, a handsome bearded man. He dotes on the last-born, a six year-old boy, who navel dances while "papa" beats the tambourine and sings in a noble, male bass voice. This melody—most of all the refrain—which I remember with precision, and the words, where there may be nothing to understand, have haunted me ever since, like a soft and sad dream of my life. For a long time I couldn't think of them without feeling like I was crumbling under the weight of my memories of Naples, with its beauty, with its atrocity and with the selfish happiness of that family.

I am transcribing here from my memory, with the exact music and incomprehensible words. I am doing it for myself, nothing but for myself. . . .Maybe also to mollify men whose hearts are full of cruel songs and who know the price of unfortunate recollections.

Here is one, grafted into my flesh:

...
The week of codfish, over! The Armenian family, gone! Everything is finished: shelter, food, tobacco! I am in the street, a heart-rending palikaraki!

For two days, I still lurk around my albergo, a piece of dry bread in my stomach. The owner takes pity on me and offers me one last dish of his codfish, which I gorge, then: "Venga con me! (Come with me)!" "Where?" "To the Romanian consulate!" I am baffled: I hadn't thought of that. And this idea doesn't mean anything to me: what could we have in common, my country's consul and I? "He could repatriate you," says the Italian to me, dragging me to the consulate, "and most of all, pay me the fifteen liras you owe me!" I am thinking: "He could also ask me what on earth I'm doing here and most of all, demand to see a passport, which I don't have!" And I say to my albergatore, who is walking anxiously, his handsome eyebrows frowning: "Do you know what a palikaraki is?" "No." "Well! that's a subject consuls don't really like, and that's me!" The man stops, his hands in his pockets, and looks at me, spiteful: "Porco Dio!" For a moment I think he's going to give up his plan. No. "Andiamo sempre! (We're still going.)" And the agony begins.

First to the consul, who is only honorary and doesn't know a word of Romanian: "Here...Sir...This Romanian, who came to me two weeks ago...He's starving to death, and he owes me fifteen liras." "I am here for visas only and I can't do anything." We leave empty-handed. In the street, the Italian is thinking. Then: "Come with me." "Where?" "To the prefecture!" "For heaven's sake! You have my suitcase! Isn't that enough?" "Yes, it is! But I'd rather have my money and return your suitcase!" What an honest man!

At the prefecture. A chief clerk is dozing, his hands folded over his belly. The Neapolitan starts over: "Scuzate...Signore...Questo Rumeno...otto giomi...non pagato...quindici lire..." "Is he a delinquent?" "No but..." "We don't do debts here!"
Outside, I heave a sigh of relief; finally! There is no “finally”: the Neapolitan searches his brain: “Come with me!” “Again! ...Mama!...” “Heck! You should have stayed with Mama! This: Napoli” “Vedi Napoli, poi morti?” “Davvero!” I follow him. This time he’s dragging me to the city hall: “Signore...Guardate...Questo...Rumenò...” The same monologue while I am standing there like a beaten dog. Same result and...In the street, twice rubbing the bottom of his chin with the back of his hand, the albergatore shouts into my face: “Non tche mangiare! Non tche dormire!” And he takes off.

Still an honest man...A man who struggles, who toils and who does his best to stay good. But life mocks all that.

***

Riveted to the sidewalk, I lean against the building and close my eyes to retain the image of this innkeeper walking away, upset, gesturing. I cannot blame him. I don’t blame anyone by the way. I am the one at fault. Have I ever wanted to become established? No. I have always known myself like this. So? It is not for nothing that the Romanian says: “Even the devil cannot do anything about the problems man creates with his own hands.”

Mechanically, I walk in the direction of the port. There they have enormous piles of wood, protected by double-pitched roofs. This will be my nightly shelter starting this day. Oh! My poor clothes, still new! But I’ll be careful...Also the boards seem to be clean; it’s carpenter’s wood.

Clean? Hardly!

I climb on all fours into the dark night, and right away my hands come across a pair of feet, so stinky that you want to throw up. These are comrades, palikarakis like me! The one I touched grumbles amiably and tells me that there is “enough space”.

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I empty my pockets that are stuffed with things, I make a little pillow for myself and stretch out, covering myself with my overcoat. But I can't close an eye all night. It is cold... I'm shivering. And there is something else: my companions generously pass on their lice to me! Lord! It's unbelievable! Ugh! Those certainly don't feed themselves on salted codfish!

Furious, I leave in the morning looking for "no matter what". I do the entire city and the port; I offer myself for derisory salaries, everywhere I see a job to be done, but I realize the futility of my efforts: there are too many Neapolitans themselves and they are starving more than I am. There are ten of them fighting for one job, for an hour of work, for a trunk to carry. When the evening comes, I slip under our roof without having eaten all day, more out of spite because I still have a few "soldi" carefully reserved for tobacco, my only consolation. As I am carrying a bamboo stick in my hand, I figure that they may not take me on because of that and so I leave it on the wood pile, starting out once more after a second night of scratching.

Again I run all over the place, I use my elbows, I claim my part of life, as miserable as it may be. Nothing, nothing, nothing!

So I make my peace with destiny. No point in using up my shoes, no point in running my head against the wall. Peace! Peace with myself!

Weak, famished, my heart void of any emotion, I sink down on a bench. It's a public square at the entrance of the port. In front of me, some tramps crowd around an enormous caldron emitting vapors into the air.

I step closer and I see a cook distributing food from a sort of field kitchen. What is it? Codfish? No. Worse! Pigskins and bread crumbs of all kinds, collected from restaurants. Bread and pigskins boil in about fifty liters of water; the cook picks...
them out as he can, with the ladle or his fingers and pours them into a metal dish
someone just left on the pile.

How much does it cost? A penny a portion! And how much they serve you!
And it's good, for god's sake! It melts in your mouth. But you have to hurry because
the cauldron is going to be empty in just a wink... Also you can't be picky about that
soup, which looks as if all the palikarakis in Naples had washed their feet in it!

No matter, you ask for a second helping, the penny in one hand, the bowl in
the other one and you eat it all with grunts of satisfaction. Then, hands in pocket,
eyes half-closed and indifferent you waddle to the tobacco shop, where you buy a
"pac" for six cents; you roll a cigarette, burp loudly, and smoke it, stretched out in the
sun, the brain non-existent. You adore Naples!...

This is the man who has made his peace with his destiny.

I have made my peace with my destiny and with Naples: I take off the dirty
shirt underneath and put it on top, this way turning two dirty shirts into two clean ones.

To my distress, I have never been able to keep up this inner peace for more
than fifteen minutes, neither by turning off my brain nor by being completely inactive,
despite the many times I promised myself to look at life coldly. The "what's the point"
has never been my friend for longer than a minute of blues. Everything has a "point"
that makes the human machine buzz, even an unforgivable blunder, like the one for
example I commit the day I satiated myself on pigskins for the first time.

My hands in my pockets, savoring my cigarette, I happen upon a peddler who
explains his game: "A dollar for two cents!" The game: over a table, a ball is hanging
on a little chain. In front of it, the pin the ball is supposed to knock down. The rascal
takes the ball: "You see gentlemen: you aim straight and launch it: the pin is knocked
down! You gain one dollar with only two cents. Here, like this!..."
In fact, he does let go and knocks down the pin. Others, probably extras, knock it down too. It’s really easy. I’m going to try my luck!

Yes, but with what money? Since I have only one penny left. Oh well! With the lira the peddler gives me in exchange for my pocket-knife, reserved for hard times!

Ah! I tell myself: if I manage to knock down the pin two or three times, I will gain enough to live on for just as many days! And I grab the ball, I aim, I let go and the stupid ball goes to the left without even touching the pin. There we go, I have just lost my two pennies!

I have to get them back. And that’s for sure, it was just clumsiness because I don’t know the game yet; I didn’t aim right. But the game is simple, I saw it.

I take the ball again, aim, let go: this time it passes on the right and doesn’t touch the pin either. That means four pennies lost! How could I leave it at that?

I go on, aim, let go and the ball always misses, either on the left, either on the right, and with it all my cents, my entire pocket-knife is in the pocket of that cheat!

Defeated, my heart beating as if I had killed someone, I go to my bunk, where sleep, this time very fast, prevents me from sensing the parasites and the consequences of my grave mistake.

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At the end of this first week spent out-of-doors—my third week in Naples—I have only my Roskopf left, intended for a last supreme effort at salvation. Besides it is unsalable in this city where, at every street corner, Neapolitans advertise supposed gold watches that are probably stolen anyway. They offer them to all the strangers, after having rubbed them on their thighs, and they even find gulls who buy them. They are for the most part English, continuously on the lookout for bargains across all continents.
So, almost in spite of myself, my Roskopf is saved thanks to this competition. The rest: pocket-book and wallet, have been sold; the proceeds go into the field kitchen cook's pocket. Pigskins, more pigskins and always pigskins!

Although I have loved pigskins since I was a child, I have never seen or eaten as many in my life! For hours I belch them up, with their odor of grilled soles.

In just a minute, I will belch up something else much less substantial.

By now I have had an empty stomach for two days and I wander around the piers where I run into my old albergatore: "Nothing?" he asks me. "Still nothing."

"Eaten?" "Nope." "Come home with me, I've got something good." At his house I gorge down a meat ragout, which I find excellent: "What is this?" "Rabbit!" he says, sucking on a bone, with a strange smile.

I didn't give it much thought, but irritated by the desperate mewing of a cat inside a sack, I ask, while we're treating ourselves to a good cup of coffee: "Why are you keeping the poor cat in the sack?" "For tomorrow's ragout," he replies, gravely.

And on the spot, he gets up, takes the cat, ties a slip-knot of thick wire around its neck, passes it through a hole in a stool and, stepping on the stool, pulls the wire and strangles the poor animal, which struggles terribly, right under my eye. I thank him and leave. Before I get into the yard, I have thrown up the entire meal.

We are a backward people, but where I am from no one eats cat any more than frog, not even horse.

***

This delicious cat ragout, which I didn't have the guts to digest, was my last meal in Naples. . .and yet, another eight days were to elapse before I could hope for a change.
One day, as I drifted aimlessly by Filippo Santo, my eyes came across a large poster whose big letters nailed me to the spot. Among so many eulogies, it said that

IL MAGNIFICO VAPORE
HOHENZOLLERN

will leave on (such and such day)
DIRETTISSIMO
DA NAPOLI A ALESSANDRIA D'EGITO

This was toward the end of February 1907.

I read and read again this marvelous announcement, and my heart swells with joy in anticipation of the salvation at hand. This Magnifico, this "direttissimo" most of all, that is my ship! It is my salvation! It would have to be that, even if I had to cling to the rudder, even if I had to commit a crime!

And sure of my success, overflowing with hope, I run, almost dance, across the entire Neapolitan landscape, I roll in the grass, I bark, I sing:

Tambour, tambour!
Yavash, Yavash...
Seega, seega, yecacheh
Haï, kyravendi, karaghesleri!

But as I am singing, evening comes around, and I get hungry... I get hungry, poor me, and I know eight days are going to pass before I will be able to have a meal, because I will have that meal on the Magnifico, the "direttissimo", or nowhere else, nowhere!... I am a man who doesn't eat anymore! I have nothing left to sell other
than my Roskopf, but I am thinking of paying the boatman with it, who will have to take me to the Hohenzollern when it is time!

That’s what it’s going to be like, my dear palikarakte, even if you had to chew dust, graze on grass...

And indeed I am in the middle of an enormous field of Romaine lettuce, high up to my knees! I pull one out, and gnaw it down to its heart and... Courage, my friend! You had enough of that codfish. The pigskins nauseated you. The cat, you threw up. Oh well! Eat grass now and run, run afterwards, like geese in the pasture at the beginning of spring!

It was just like that: I gobbled romaine for eight days and I ran like a goose!

Not a piece of bread in my mouth in all of Naples: not a cent to buy any for an entire week! Dipping it in salt, which I pinch from in front of grocery stores, I only eat lettuce, drink water and run! My tobacco, that’s cigarette butts. My residence, still the pile of wood at the port. I have become so ugly that I don’t recognize myself when I see myself in the windows. But “God is great” and everything comes to its end.

Here is the Hohenzollern! It’s the day of its departure. From the pier one can barely see its flag, floating very far away. Nice boats shuttle between it and the shore. Th. Cook is already sending them handsome gentlemen, beautiful ladies and their big fat trunks.

And me? I also only travel with “direttissimos”. Let’s go, palikarakte!

In front of a public washbasin bustling with women, I take off my jacket: soap myself down nicely, and a pocket mirror before my eyes, I shave off my beard. The women are laughing. I am laughing too because it’s the day of my departure on the magnifico!
Once I'm shaved, I adjust my button-on collar and tie my necktie into a nice knot, as I did when I was a man, too. Then with my mustache brush, I proceed to the radical cleaning of my suit and overcoat, I polish my boots. Here I am, a young man in correct attire, respectable!

I run to fetch my cane, which nobody wanted. Farewell, my roof! I have chosen my ship! Now, it's my Roskopf's turn. Whom should I sell it to? Oh my, if not to the albergatore, it's going to be hard!

I leave courageously, and before I go up the stairs, I take out my watch and look at it: "My dear Roskopf! Seven dollars you cost me! I've worn you for four years since! Forgive my treachery and do everything you can so that I get the two liras I need for the boat!"

I step inside. The Italian is drinking his coffee. He looks at me wide-eyed as he sees me this handsome: "Monneda?" "Yes, monneda," I say, but it's to ask you for some! I'm leaving in just a moment because since your last meal, I have only fed myself on lettuce, I am a lettuce-man! Here is my watch: give me two liras, I beg you! And I tell him what I want to do.

The good man listens to me, visibly moved, shakes his head, without unlocking his jaws and gives me three liras instead of two, for this old, unsalable thing. I squeeze his hand and fly toward my salvation!

I ask the boatman–imperial mien, cane in hand and drawing on a cigarette–as if I didn't know: "Where is the Hohenzollem?" "It's over there, sir." "Is it direttissimo?" "Da Napoli to Alessandria!" "How much is it?" "Two liras." "Take me over there!" And I jump on the boat.

Gliding over the emerald mirror, every oar stroke takes me farther away from the known horrors and closer to other, even worse ones because as yet unknown.
The boatman lets me off at the bottom of a staircase, the upper end of which is guarded by a bersaglieri and one of the ship's officers.

Impeccable cleanliness. Nothing but "beautiful people". No katastromatos.

Great luxury. Il Magnifico!

Around the steamer, Neapolitan women dance in boats, to the sound of guitars, mandolins, violins, accordions. It's a deafening hullabaloo. The passengers aboard toss cents into the boats and into the sea swarming with swimmers. Those, their mouths full of coins, watch for the hand that tosses a lira and before the coin has even finished its way, they plunge like an arrow and catch it while it sinks down like a dead leaf. Returning to the surface they show it off between their teeth.

I pay the boatman and get on. .. "like a rooster"... But my gaze already becomes veiled, my legs give way, my breath is cut off; yes, in this moment, I am ready to kill someone!

At the top of the staircase. .. The two men greet me politely. .. One of them asks me: "Your ticket? .. " Forcing myself to a deadly calm, I reply, with a bored expression: "It's just to accompany a friend. .. " "Please go through, sir." I go through, ready to faint.

***

From this moment on and until the departure of the ship, for about an hour, I lived the most atrocious, the most deadly seconds of my life! I don't know anything like this torture, I don't know anything bloodier—not hunger, not prison, not the worst injury. Only the torment of un consummated carnal love can be compared to this excruciating pain inside a human's poor entrails.

Because that's what it is: bits of life detach themselves from you, burn like meteors although you didn't want that and disappear into infinity, taking the best of
you with them: the joy of life. After which, you’re nothing more than a bundle of bones, a grinning skeleton, whimpering and called the poor man.

I immediately throw what is left of me over the portside rail and lean my feverish head on a pillar. From there I can see the stairs, because all my life depends on these stairs now, which frightens me as long as they are not pulled up yet, as long as someone can grab me by the collar and throw me, where? Into a police boat? Into a city of misery? No, no, into the lettuce!

It’s not about misery, which is something I can handle and that I’m familiar with and which doesn’t scare me, but it’s about the lettuce. Eight days of lettuce, after eight days of pigskins, which followed eight days of salted codfish! That’s not misery, that: I am a young man stuffed with grass, who risks being sent back to the pasture any second! And the most terrible thing is that I don’t feel at all like throwing myself into the sea below me, I don’t think of death at all: I want to live, I like life, and Naples, and this idiotic humanity. It’s only the lettuce that I don’t like anymore!

And every white shirt passing behind me, every kepi, every movement near my neck—be it to give an order, to toss a coin into the water, even just to spit over the rail—all those are hands grabbing me to take me to this cursed staircase and fling me back into the lettuce.

I feel my flesh melt like wax which is held close to a fire. For me life has stopped, the sun doesn’t move anymore, as this staircase doesn’t.

In order to keep my countenance, I take Ombra out of my pocket, which I know by heart and I pretend to read, but I can’t see a single line; I only see the staircase fixed in its position, the arms of a man brushing me in passing and...the lettuce. That’s all my eyes can see.
But I try to focus my eyes on something else, something like a dream: I lean my forehead against the pillar, I make the Vesuvius my target and I wait for the moment when the mountain will start moving, first very slowly, then quickly, quickly, away from these shores.

I wait. And nothing is moving. The mountain, my pillar, these steps with their shining copper blades, which lead directly to the lettuce, everything is struck immobile. Only I am moving, my heart is vibrating with all the terrors of the universe, only I can be displaced as one pleases and quickly be sent to the lettuce fields, where I will have to live henceforth as a herbivore, just like a goose, feeding myself a hundred times a day and emptying myself just as many times.

The pillar in my arms, my eyes fixed on the Vesuvius, I remember that I have Ombra in my hands, Ombra, my only travel companion, my confidant and friend during those endless days and I ask myself why people write moving Ombras, touching Ombras, at a time when the world is only an enormous lettuce field, into which we may drop to never get out again?

A formidable Boo-oo-oo shakes the sky and the sea and throws me with my teeth against the pillar.

Now I am a palikaraki so light that one could pick me up with two fingers and put me wherever one wanted: into the caldron of pigskins or into the Neapolitan landscape. I am not breathing anymore, I am clinging to the rail and I implore the staircase to come up before I am transformed into a feather that the wind will blow away. I don’t know if I should rejoice. The eternity between the first and the third Boo-oo! is so cruel that one could, with a light breath and a thousand times in a minute, sweep me away from this disheartening diretissimo of my salvation.
And here we go: a double siren signal, then a triple one, and I see strong arms pull up the evil staircase and fold it. The ship is leaving, majestically, making the world turn around it. At the mouth of the port, it stops, the pilot gets into his sloop. A brief Boo!—a civilized good-bye for the pilot from Naples and his lettuce—and we gain speed, head into the open sea, while the structure trembles under all its power, while the wind blows in the cordage and the travelers put up the collars of their coats.

So I say to myself, loudly: “That’s my direttissimo!”

And thrusting out my chest, — cigarette in my trap, hands in my pockets, the cane over my shoulder—I stroll, swank, underneath the commander’s bridge, to whom I would like to shout: “Hey, my friend!...How is it going, your health up there?”

***

It is night. A beautiful meridional night. The steamer slows down...Just like that, all of a sudden!...In the middle of the sea...“What’s up?”

Salons and cabins are vacated. Everyone is on deck, each class on their deck, those who have eaten and those who haven’t eaten, be it for indisposition or because no one invites them to. “What’s up?”

It’s Stromboli! And my friend the commander, who is a smooth fellow, has slowed down the Magnifico so that we can regard this eternal firespitter at our leisure. Look at it! It is only two steps away from us. At its summit, the rhythmic spouting of the incandescent lava brightens the night at short intervals. Its fire road, red on the higher slopes, descends in a zigzag, frequently cut off, fades bit by bit and disappears at the foot of the mountain, where a gigantic ebullition rumbles through the nocturnal silence. A unique spectacle, unforgettable. The ship resumes its impetuous speed.
I sit down and smoke in the calm night. I think of the ticket-collector, who will pass through, but... For heaven's sake! He will see how I will receive him! Am I on a _direttissimo_ or what? So? What are you bothering me for? No more fear! It's moving now, and it will stop only where I have Father Binder, and so I don't care! You're sending me to the coals: fine! As if I ever said that I would refuse to pull my part of the coal from the mine! Yes, I am ready to grab the handles of that wheelbarrow! Yes, I am ready to pay for my trip through no matter which job, the most dirty one, the most humble one, but in the name of the lord be human, let me get out of the lettuce; I am entitled to a piece of bread, too!

And as I am smoking and thinking about what is going to happen to me on this _Magnifico_, a stout gentleman is also smoking a cigar, just across from me, his back on the parapet. He hasn't stopped looking at me for a while, but I don't care!

What does he want of me, this one, with the face of a decent man, his cap on his nose, his raincoat and his cigar shining in the night? He doesn't want anything of me. He is Austrian; I already heard him speak Viennese with other travelers. Suddenly, he interrogates me, in Italian, while we are alone on the third class deck:

"Which cabin are you in?" "I don't have a cabin." "What do you mean? Everybody has a cabin here. Look at the number on your key." "I don't have a key." He seems astonished at first, then understanding, he smiles and sits down next to me: "Are you by chance a...?" "...Yes, a _palikaraki_!" "And you certainly haven't eaten?..." "Yes, I did! Lettuce..." "Come with me!" In his cabin, moving like a feverish bull-dog, he opens his suitcase, takes out sandwiches, slices of bread, bananas, oranges, Malaga, stuffs me, gorges me, pours me drinks, again and again. Then, beautiful cigars, beautiful cigarettes.
Ah! Palikarakis! Everything comes around on this earth, the good as well as the bad.

"You have nothing to fear!" the good Viennese says to me. "This is a luxury steamer. No ticket check on the way! They take your ticket as you get on board and give you the key to your cabin. That's all. . .But how on earth did you get on here?"

"It's because. . .there was that lettuce!"

***

Now I need a place to sleep. Where to find it? Anywhere!

I simply stretch out on the great square roof which is covering the third class dining hall and go to sleep. I sleep like a log until the morning, when a hand shakes me. I lift my head, a little annoyed: a white shirt, a young, fresh face bends over me: "Fokistat ier? (Are you a stoker?)" "Fokista. . ." And I cover my head, and go back to sleep. A little later, the same hand, the same face come back to tackle me: "Passagier ier?" "Passagier!" The boy starts laughing: "Ha! Ha! You're neither stoker nor passenger, you are a vagabond! Come with me!"

Blast! What is he going to do to me? Ticket-collector? Coal? Bye Malaga, sandwiches, cigars!

No! Not at all. . .On the contrary: my lucky phase has started, after the bad one! Such is life.

He takes me to the dining hall, on top of which I had slept. There, breakfast. The travelers are gone and of three place settings, two are still untouched. "They are seasick! You are not! Go for it!" Like a wolf in a herd of sheep I pounce on the butter, the jam, the rolls still hot, the good milk, the exquisite coffee and I send all that to repair my poor guts cleaned out by all the lettuce. The steward watches me, his arms
crossed, his face cheerful: "Don't hurry! It's allowed! All this is going into the sea, for the sharks! . . . And the roast big like that! . . . And gugelhupf, like that! To the sea! . . ."

Into the sea . . . For the sharks. . . . And I and millions like me: lettuce, porkskins, diarrhea!

Poor humanity! How stupid you are. . . . More stupid than mean. . .

Three days, sea and sky. . . . The joyous Mediterranean, sometimes peevish. Generous firmament, sometimes sullen.

From the galley for the third classes,—where planted on two solid legs, my sleeves roiled up, my arms juggle the dishes—I watch through the porthole the sea and the sky, which move around in all directions, and I sing at the top of my lungs:

_Tambour, tambour!_  
_Yavash, yavash. . ._

Suddenly, on the raging sea, the _Magnifico_ stops! What's up? Everyone pours out onto the decks.

It's a poor Greek freighter in distress. It is completely empty and is rolling around aimlessly, the rudder broken. The _Hohenzollern_ tries to approach it carefully. They communicate via megaphones: "All we can do is to take you onboard!" our people scream, in Italian. "Can't you tow us?" the Greeks ask. "Impossible! We are a postal liner!" I scream also: "Impossible! We are a direttissimo!" And my friend the captain signals to the machinists: _drin! . . . drin! . . . full speed ahead! . . ._

Let's go! . . . To each his fate. . .

And here we are! . . . On a radiant morning: _Boo! . . . Boo! Hey, there, pilot! We are landing in Alexandria._
I squeeze the hands of the Austrian, then those of the good waiter. The latter says to me: "Give me your bamboo cane as a souvenir!" Here you go!...Farewell!...

...Hey, France!...Couldn't do it in 1907! So it's going to be ten years later and...through a different entrance!...

I'm flying towards my old Father Binder...

_Saint-Raphael, March 1927_
APPENDIX II: POEMS BY PAUL CELAN AND TRANSLATIONS.

A. TODESFUßE

B. FLÜGELNACHT

C. DER MIT HIMMELN GEHEIZTE...

D. ERBLINDE SCHON HEUT:
A. TODESFUGE

1.

Paul Celan

Todesfuge

Schwarze Milch der Frühe wir trinken sie abends
wir trinken sie mittags und morgens wir trinken sie nachts
wir trinken und trinken
wir schaufeln ein Grab in den Lüften da liegt man nicht eng
Ein Mann wohnt im Haus der spielt mit den Schlangen der schreibt
der schreibt wenn es dunkelt nach Deutschland dein goldenes Haar Margarete
er schreibt es und tritt vor das Haus und es blitzt die Sterne er pfeift seine Rüden herbei
er pfeift seine Juden hervor lässt schaufeln ein Grab in der Erde
er befiehlt uns spielt auf nun zum Tanz

Schwarze Milch der Frühe wir trinken dich nachts
wir trinken dich morgens und mittags wir trinken dich abends
wir trinken und trinken
Ein Mann wohnt im Haus dein goldenes Haar Margarete
Dein aschenes Haar Sulamith wir schaufeln ein Grab in den Lüften da liegt man nicht eng

Er ruft stecht tiefer ins Erdreich ihr einen ihr andem singet und spielt
er greift nach dem Elsen im Gurt er schwingts seine Augen sind blau
stecht tiefer die Spaten ihr einen ihr andem spielt weiter zum Tanz auf

Schwarze Milch der Frühe wir trinken dich nachts
wir trinken dich mittags und morgens wir trinken dich abends
wir trinken und trinken
ein Mann wohnt im Haus dein goldenes Haar Margarete
dein aschenes Haar Sulamith er spielt mit den Schlangen

Er ruft spielt süßer den Tod der Tod ist ein meister aus Deutschland
er ruft streicht dunkler die Geigen dann steigt ihr als Rauch in die Luft
dann habt ihr ein Grab in den Wolken da liegt man nicht eng

Schwarze Milch der Frühe wir trinken dich nachts
wir trinken dich mittags der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland
wir trinken dich abends und morgens wir trinken und trinken
der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland sein Aug ist blau
er trifft dich mit bleierner Kugel er trifft dich genau
ein Mann wohnt im Haus dein goldenes Haar Margarete
er hetzt seine Rüden auf uns er schenkt uns ein Grab in der Luft
er spielt mit den Schlangen und träumet der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland

dein goldenes Haar Margarete
dein aschenes Haar Sulamith

2.
(Michael Bullock)

Fugue of Death

Black milk of morning we drink it at dusk
we drink it at noon and at dawn we drink it at night
we drink it and drink
we dig a grave in the air there you lie without crowding
A man lives in the house he plays with the snakes he writes
he writes at nightfall to Germany Your golden hair Margaré
he writes it and steps out in front of the house and the stars are aflame and he whistles his hounds
he whistles his Jews and makes them dig a grave in the earth
he commands us Strike up a dance tune

Black milk of morning we drink you at night
we drink you at dawn and at noon we drink you at dusk
we drink and drink
A man lives in the house he plays with the snakes he writes
he writes at nightfall to Germany Your golden hair Margaré
Your ashen hair Shulamith we dig a grave in the air there you lie without crowding.

He calls You there cut deeper the ground—you others sing now and play
he grasps the steel in his belt he brandishes it his eyes are blue
You there thrust deeper the spades—you others go on with the tune

Black milk of morning we drink you at night
we drink you at noon and at dawn we drink you at dusk
we drink and we drink
a man lives in the house Your golden hair Margaré
your ashen hair Shulamith he plays with the snakes

He calls Play Death sweeter Death is a master from Germany
he calls Pitch darker the strings then you rise as smoke in the air
then you have a grave in the clouds there you lie without crowding

Black milk of morning we drink you at night
we drink you at noon Death is a master from Germany
we drink you at dusk and at dawn we drink and drink
Death is a master from Germany his eye is blue
he hits you with a leaden bullet he hits you true
a man lives in the house Your golden hair Margaré
he sets his hounds on us and gives us a grave in the air
he plays with the snakes and dreams Death is a master from Germany

Your golden hair Margaré
your ashen hair Shulamith

3.
(Gertrude Clorius Schwebell)

Fugue of Death

Dark milk of dawn we drink it in the evening we drink it at night
we drink it at noon in the morning we drink it at night
we drink and we drink
we are digging a grave in the clouds where we will not be crowded
In the house lives a man who plays with vipers who writes
who writes when the night falls to Germany your golden hair Margareta
he writes it and steps out of doors the stars glitter there and he calls to his hounds hey come here
he calls to his Jews come here come on dig a grave in the ground
he commands us to strike up for a dance

Dark milk of dawn we drink it at night we drink it in the morning at noon we drink it in the evening
we drink and we drink
In the house lives a man who plays with vipers who writes
who writes when the night falls to Germany your golden hair Margareta
Your ashen hair Sulamith we are digging a grave in the clouds where we will not be crowded

He calls dig the ground deeper you here and you there play the fiddle and sing
he clutches the gun in his belt he waves it how blue are his eyes
drive the spade deeper you here and you there strike up for a dance

Dark milk of dawn we drink it at night we drink it at noon in the morning we drink it in the evening
we drink and we drink
in the house lives a man your golden hair Margareta
your ashen hair Sulamith he plays with vipers

He calls play the death tune sweeter for death is a master from Germany
he calls play the fiddles darker then you'll rise as smoke to the sky
then you'll have a grave in the clouds where you won't be so crowded

Dark milk of dawn we drink it at night we drink it at noon death is a master from Germany
we drink it at dusk and at dawn we drink and we drink
death is a master from Germany blue are his eyes
he hits with a leaden bullet he hits you precisely
in the house lives a man your golden hair Margareta
he sets his lean hounds on us he gives us a grave in the clouds
he plays with vipers and dreams that death is a master from Germany

your golden hair Margareta
your ashen hair Sulamith


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4.  
(Donald White)  

Fugue of Death  

Coal-black milk of morning we drink it at sundown  
we drink it at noon and at dawning we drink it at night  
we drink it and drink it  
we'll shovel a grave in the heavens there's no crowding there  
A man's in the house he plays with his serpents he writes  
he writes back home when the dark comes your golden hair Margareta  
he writes it and then leaves the house and the stars are atwinkle he whistles his dogs to come near  
he whistles his Jews to come here and shovel a grave in the earth  

he commands us play sweet now for dancing  

Coal-black milk of morning we drink thee at night  
we drink thee at dawning at noontime we drink thee at sundown  
we drink thee and drink thee  

A man's in the house he plays with his serpents he writes  
he writes back home when the dark comes your golden hair Margareta  
your ashen hair Shulamite we'll shovel a grave in the heavens there's no crowding there  
He shouts you there get the earth open deeper you here sing and play for the dance  
he grabs at the gun in his belt he lifts it his eyes are bright blue  
you there get the earth open faster you others play on now for dancing  

Coal-black milk of morning we drink thee at night  
we drink thee at noon and at dawning we drink thee at sundown  
we drink thee and drink thee  
a man's in the house your golden hair Margareta  
your ashen hair Shulamite he plays with his serpents  

He shouts play death very sweet now Death is a proud German master  
he shouts make the fiddles sing darker you'll rise as grey smoke in the air  
your grave will be high in the clouds there's no crowding there  

Coal-black milk of morning we drink thee at night  
we drink thee at noontime and Death is a proud German master  
we drink thee at dawning and sundown we drink thee and drink thee  
and Death is a proud German master his eyes are bright blue  
he'll get you with missile of lead he will pierce you right through  
a man's in the house your golden hair Margareta  
he'll sic his big dogs on us all he'll give us a grave in the sky  
he plays with his snakes he dreams nightly and Death is a proud German master  

your golden hair Margareta  
your ashen hair Shulamite  

5. (John Felstiner)

Deathfugue

Black milk of daybreak we drink it at evening
we drink it at midday and morning we drink it at night
we drink and we drink
we shovel a grave in the sky there you won't feel too cramped
A man lives in the house he plays with his vipers he writes
he writes when it grows dark to Deutschland your golden hair Marguerite
he writes it and steps out of doors and the stars are all twinkling he whistles his hounds to come close
he whistles his Jews into rows has them shovel a grave in the ground
he orders us strike up and play for the dance

Black milk of daybreak we drink you at night
we drink you at morning and midday we drink you at evening
we drink and we drink
A man lives in the house he plays with his vipers he writes
he writes when it grows dark to Deutschland your golden hair Marguerite
Your ashen hair Shulamith we shovel a grave in the sky there you won't feel too cramped

He shouts jab this earth deeper you there you others sing up and play
he grabs for the rod in his belt he swings it his eyes are so blue
jab your spades deeper you there you others play on for the dance

Black milk of daybreak we drink you at night
we drink you at midday and morning we drink you at evening
we drink and we drink
A man lives in the house your goldenes Haar Marguerite
your aschenes Haar Shulamith he plays with his vipers

He shouts play death more sweetly this Death is a master from Deutschland
he shouts scrape your strings darker you'll rise then in smoke to the sky
you'll have a grave then in the clouds there you won't feel too cramped

Black milk of daybreak we drink you at night
we drink you at midday Death is a master aus Deutschland
we drink you at evening and morning we drink and we drink
this Death is ein Meister aus Deutschland his eye is blue
he shoots you with shot made of lead shoots you level and true
a man lives in the house your goldenes Haar Margarete
he looses his hounds on us grants us a grave in the air
he plays with his vipers and daydreams der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland

dein goldenes Haar Margarete
dein aschenes Haar Sulamith

6.
(Jean-Pierre Lefebvre)

Fugue de la mort

Lait noir de l’aube nous le buvons le soir
le buvons à midi et le matin nous le buvons la nuit
nous buvons et buvons
nous creusons dans le ciel une tombe on n’y est pas serré
Un homme habite la maison il joue avec les serpents il écrit
il écrit quand il va faire noir en Allemagne Margarete tes cheveux d’or
écrit ces mots s’avance sur le seuil et les étoiles tressaillent il siffle ses grands chiens1
il siffle il fait sortir ses juifs et creuser dans la terre une tombe
il nous commande allons jouez pour qu’on danse

Lait noir de l’aube nous te buvons la nuit
te buvons le matin puis à midi nous te buvons le soir
nous buvons et buvons
Un homme habite la maison il joue avec les serpents il écrit
il écrit quand il va faire noir en Allemagne Margarete tes cheveux d’or
Tes cheveux cendre Sulamith nous creusons dans le ciel une tombe on n’y est pas serré

Il crie enfoncez plus vos bêches dans l’humus vous autres et vous chantez jouez
il attrape le fer à sa ceinture il le brandit ses yeux sont bleus
enfoncez plus les bêches vous autres et vous jouez encore pour qu’on danse

Lait noir de l’aube nous te buvons la nuit
te buvons le matin puis à midi nous te buvons le soir
nous buvons et buvons
un homme habite la maison Margarete tes cheveux d’or
tes cheveux cendre Sulamith il joue avec les serpents

Il crie jouez plus douce la mort la mort est un maître d’Allemagne
il crie plus sombres les archets et votre fumée montera vers le ciel
vous aurez une tombe alors dans les nuages on n’y est pas serré

Lait noir de l’aube nous te buvons la nuit
te buvons à midi la mort est un maître d’Allemagne
nous te buvons le soir et le matin nous buvons et buvons
la mort est un maître d’Allemagne son œil est bleu
il te tire une balle de plomb il ne te manque pas
un homme habite la maison Margarete tes cheveux d’or
il lance ses grands chiens sur nous il nous offre une tombe dans le ciel
il joue avec les serpents et rêve la mort est un maître d’Allemagne

Margarete tes cheveux d’or
tes cheveux cendre Sulamith


1 Der Rüde désigne en général le grand chien mâle, ou matin.
Deathfugue

Black milk of daybreak we drink it at evening
we drink it at midday and morning we drink it at night
we drink and we drink
we shovel a grave in the air there you won’t lie too cramped
A man lives in the house he plays with his vipers he writes
he writes when it grows dark to Deutschland your golden hair Margareta
he writes it and steps out of doors and the stars are all sparkling he whistles his hounds to come close
he whistles his Jews into rows has them shovel a grave in the ground
he commands us play up for the dance

Black milk of daybreak we drink you at night
we drink you at morning and midday we drink you at evening
we drink and we drink
A man lives in the house he plays with his vipers he writes
he writes when it grows dark to Deutschland your golden hair Margareta
Your ashen hair Shulamith we shovel a grave in the air there you won’t lie too cramped
He shouts jab this earth deeper you lot there you sing up and play
he grabs for the rod in his belt he swings it his eyes are so blue
jab your spades deeper you lot there you others play on for the dancing

Black milk of daybreak we drink you at night
we drink you at midday and morning we drink you at evening
we drink and we drink
a man lives in the house your goldenes Haar Margareta
your aschenees Haar Shulamith he plays with his vipers

He shouts play death more sweetly this Death is a master from Deutschland
he shouts scrape your strings darker you'll rise then as smoke to the sky
you'll have a grave then in the clouds there you won’t lie too cramped

Black milk of daybreak we drink you at night
we drink you at midday Death is a master aus Deutschland
we drink you at evening and morning we drink and we drink
this Death is ein Meister aus Deutschland his eye it is blue
he shoots you with shot made of lead shoots you level and true
a man lives in the house your goldenes Haar Margarete
he looses his hounds on us grants us a grave in the air
he plays with his vipers and daydreams der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland

dein goldenes Haar Margarete
dein aschenees Haar Sulamith

Fugue de mort

Lait noir de l’aube nous le buvons le soir
le buvons à midi et le matin nous le buvons la nuit
nous buvons et buvons
nous creusons dans le ciel une tombe où l’on n’est pas serré
Un homme habite la maison il joue avec les serpents il écrit
il écrit quand il va faire noir en Allemagne Margarete tes cheveux d’or
écrit ces mots s’avance sur le seuil et les étoiles tressaillent il siffle ses grands chiens il
siffle il fait sortir ses juifs et creuser dans la terre une tombe
il nous commande allons jouer pour qu’on danse

Il crie enoncez plus vos bêches dans la terre vous autres et vous chantez jouez
il attrape le fer à sa ceinture il le brandit ses yeux sont bleus
enoncez plus les bêches vous autres et vous jouez encore pour qu’on danse

Un homme habite la maison il joue avec les serpents il écrit
il écrit quand il va faire noir en Allemagne Margarete tes cheveux d’or
Tes cheveux cendre Sulamith nous creusons dans le ciel une tombe où l’on n’est pas serré

Il crie jouez plus douce la mort la mort est un maître d’Allemagne
il crie plus sombres les archets et votre fumée montera vers le ciel
vous aurez une tombe alors dans les nuages où l’on n’est pas serré

Un homme habite la maison Margarete tes cheveux d’or
il t’atteint d’une balle de plomb il ne te manque pas
un homme habite la maison Margarete tes cheveux d’or
il lance ses grands chiens sur nous il nous offre une tombe dans le ciel
il joue avec les serpents et rêve la mort est un maître d’Allemagne

tes cheveux d’or Margarete
tes cheveux cendre Sulamith


1 Daté par Paul Celan de 1945. D’abord paru dans une traduction roumaine de Petre Solomon, sous le titre Tangoul mortii. La composition du terme Todesfuge suggère une sorte de genre musical funèbre.
2 Schaufeln : littéralement, pelleter, travailler à la pelle, connote, entre autres, die Milchschwester Schaufel, la soeur de lait pelle, toujours associée par Celan au travail forcé dans le camp de Tabarestan.

3 Der Rüde désigne un grand chien, mâle, de guerre ou de chasse : on songe aux « dogues allemands » (der Bluthund) de la SS, ou d'autres molosses employés dans les camps.

4 Das Erdreich : ce terme technique désigne la couche d'humus ou de terre végétale. Le mot évoque par ailleurs, sans en avoir le sens, le « royaume terrestre ».

5 On notera la rime (unique) de blau et genau.
(John Felstiner)

Deathfugue

Black milk of daybreak we drink it at evening
we drink it at midday and morning we drink it at night
we drink and we drink
we shovel a grave in the air where you won't lie too cramped
A man lives in the house he plays with his vipers he writes
he writes when it grows dark to Deutschland your golden hair Margareta
he writes it and steps out of doors and the stars are all sparkling he whistles his hounds to stay
close
he whistles his Jews into rows has them shovel a grave in the ground
he commands us play up for the dance

Black milk of daybreak we drink you at night
we drink you at morning and midday we drink you at evening
we drink and we drink
A man lives in the house he plays with his vipers he writes
he writes when it grows dark to Deutschland your golden hair Margareta
Your ashen hair Shulamith we shovel a grave in the air where you won't lie too cramped

He shouts dig this earth deeper you lot there you others sing up and play
he grabs for the rod in his belt he swings it his eyes are so blue
stick your spades deeper you lot there you others play on for the dancing

Black milk of daybreak we drink you at night
we drink you at midday and morning we drink you at evening
we drink and we drink
a man lives in the house your goldenes Haar Margareta
your aschenes Haar Shulamith he plays with his vipers

He shouts play death more sweetly this Death is a master from Deutschland
he shouts scrape your strings darker you'll rise up as smoke to the sky
you'll then have a grave in the clouds where you won't lie too cramped

Black milk of daybreak we drink you at night
we drink you at midday Death is a master aus Deutschland
we drink you at evening and morning we drink and we drink
this Death is ein Meister aus Deutschland his eye it is blue
he shoots you with shot made of lead shoots you level and true
a man lives in the house your goldenes Haar Margarete
he looses his hounds on us grants us a grave in the air
he plays with his vipers and daydreams der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland

dein goldenes Haar Margarete
dein aschenes Haar Sulamith

B. FLÜGELNACHT

1.
Paul Celan

Flügelnacht

Flügelnacht, weither gekommen und nun
für immer gespannt
über Kreide und Kalk.
Kiesel, abgrundhin rollend.
Schnee. Und mehr noch des Weißen.

Unsichtbar,
was braun schien,
gedankenfarben und wild
überwuchert von Worten.

Kalk ist und Kreide.
Und Kiesel.
Schnee. Und mehr noch des Weißen.

Du, du selbst:
in das fremde
Auge gebettet, das dies
überblickt.

128.
2.
(Jean Claude Schneider)

**Nuit d’ailes**

Nuit d’ailes, venue de loin et que voici
à jamais éploisée
par dessus craie et calcaire.
Silex, roulant dans l’abîme.
Neige. D’autres blancs encore.

_Invisible_
ce qui semblait brunâtre,
couleur des pensers, sauvagement
envahie de paroles.

Calcaire, ici, et craie.
Et silex.
Neige. D’autres blancs encore.

Toi, toi-même:
lové dans l’œil
étranger dont le regard
ici domine.

3.
(Joachim Neugroschel)

Wing-Night

Wing-night, come from afar and now
spanned for ever
over chalk and lime.
Gravel, rolling gulfwards.
Snow. And still more of the white.

Invisible
what seemed brown,
thought-colored and rankly
overrun with words.

Lime, yes, and chalk.
And gravel.
Snow. And still more of the white.

You, yourself:
sheltered in the
alien eye that oversees
all this.

AILE LA NUIT

Aile la nuit, de loin provenue, que voici
ouverte pour jamais
sur calcaire et craie.
Le silex, au tréfonds, qui roule.
Neige. Puis, encore de ce blanc.

Non visible,
Ce qui brun apparut,
couleur de la pensée, et sauvagement
envahi de mots.

Calcaire, oui, craie.
Et le silex.
Neige. Puis encore de ce blanc.

Toi, toi-même :
en l’œil
autre gîte, qui
l’enveloppe de haut.

5.
(Valérie Briet)

Nuit, aile

Nuit, aile venue de loin et désormais
pour toujours tendue
par-dessus calcaire et craie.
Silex, roulant à l'abîme.
Neige. Et encore du blanc.

Invisible,
ce qui parut brun,
couleur de pensée et sauvagement envahi
d'une foison de mots.

Il y a du calcaire et de la craie.
Et des silex.
De la neige. Et encore du blanc.

Toi, toi-même :
couché
dans l'œil étranger
qui voit tout cela.

6.
(Jean-Pierre Lefebvre)

AILE-NUIT

Aile-nuit de très loin venue et maintenant
à jamais tendue
sur la craie et sur la chaux.
Galet, roulant à l'abîme.
Neige. Et de blanc plus encore.

Invisible
ce qui paraissait brun,
couleur de pensée et foisonnant
de mots.

La chaux existe, et la craie aussi existe.
Et le galet.
La neige. Et de blanc davantage encore.

Et toi, toi-même :
niché au fond de l'œil
autre, qui embrasse
tout ça d'un regard.

C. DER MIT HIMMELN GEHEIZTE... 

1. 
Paul Celan

DER MIT HIMMELN GEHEIZTE
Feuerriss durch die Welt.

Die Wer da?–Rufe
in seinem Innern:

durch dich hier hindurch
auf den Schild
der Ewigen Wanze gaspiegelt,
umschnüffelt von Falsch und Verstört,

die unendliche Schleife ziehend, trotzdem,
die schiffbar bleibt für die un-
getreidelte Antwort.


2. 
(André du Bouchet)

ELLE, DE TELS CIEUX CHAUFFEE,
la déchirure-feu par le monde.

Le Qui va là? – appels
au centre d’elle :

outre toi ici portés outre,
sur le bouclier
de la punaise éternelle percutés,
que le faux, et le hagard, flaire,

mais pour tirer, jamais finie, le trait de cette boucle
où cingle réponse que nul
ne hale.

3.
(Jean-Pierre Lefebvre)

LA DÉCHIRURE DE FEU CHAUFFÉE
avec des flèches à travers le monde.

Les Qui est-là?
crîes à l'intérieur d'elle:

reflétés ici à travers toi
sur l'écusson
de la Punaise Éternelle,
partout renflés par Faux et Détraqué,

tirant la boucle\(^2\) infinie, malgré tout,
qui demeure navigable pour la réponse non-
tirée par les haleurs.

Celan, Paul. "La déchirure de feu chauffée..." Choix de poèmes. Trans. Jean-Pierre

4.
(Pierre Joris)

THE WITH HEAVENS HEATED
firefissure through the world.

The Who's there ?-calls
inside it :

mirror-cast through you here
onto the shield
of the Eternal Bug,
sniffed around by False and Bewildered,

looping the unending loop, nevertheless,
which stays navigable for the un-
towed answer.


\(^1\) Plusieurs manuscrits et deux dactylogrammes datés des 15-17 juillet 1965.
\(^2\) Die Schleife désigne toute espèce de boucle, y compris celle d'une route ou d'un
fleuve. Dans ce poème poétologique, le terme connoté aussi l'écriture.
D. ERBLINDE SCHON HEUT:

1.
Paul Celan

ERBLINDE schon heut:
auch die Ewigkeit steht voller Augen-
darin
ertrinkt, was den Bildem hinweghalf
über den Weg, den sie kamen,
darin
erlischt, was auch dich aus der Sprache
fortnahm mit einer Geste,
die du geschehn ließt wie
den Tanz zweier Worte aus lauter
Herbst und Seide und Nichts.


2.
(André du Bouchet)

Sois en ce jour aveugle :
l'etemité aussi est pleine d'yeux —
là s'abîme,
et noie, ce qui fit aux images passer
telle route, où elles auront paru
là
s'étant ce qui à la parole
d'un geste toi aussi t'a retiré
que tu laissas venir comme
danse de deux mots faits
d'automne et de soie et rien.

3.
(Michael Hamburger)

GO BLIND now, today:
eternity also is full of eyes—
in them
drowns what helped images down
the way they came,
in them
fades what took you out of language
lifted you out with a gesture
which you allowed to happen like
the dance of the words made of
autumn and silk and nothingness.


4.
(André du Bouchet)

Perdre, et aujourd'hui, la vue :
l'éternité a des yeux, elle aussi, par milliers —
là
se noie ce qui put mettre les images
en chemin, qu'elles auront pris,
là
s'èteint ce qui toi-même à la parole
d'un geste t'a soustrait,
que tu laissas faire comme
danse de deux mots nés
d'automne et de soie et de rien

5.
(Pierre Joris)

Go blind today already:
eternity too is full of eyes—
wherein
drowns, what helped the images
over the path they came,
wherein
expires, what took you too out of
language with a gesture
that you let happen like
the dance of two words of just
autumn and silk and nothingness.


6.
(Heather McHugh and Nikolai Popov)

Go blind at once, today:
eternity too is full of eyes—
what helped the images
overcome their coming
drowns there;
there the fire goes out of
what spirited you away from language
with a gesture you let happen
like the waltz of two words
made of pure fall, silk, and nothing.

VITA

Ina Alice Pfitzner was born in Ludwigsfelde, near Berlin, in what was then the German Democratic Republic on September 26, 1965. Since September 1972, when she began school, at which she excelled, her forte and her passion have always been foreign languages, the first of which, Russian, she started as a mandatory subject in fifth grade. In 1980 she entered the preparatory school, which she completed in 1984. She worked as a factory worker from 1984 until 1985. In September 1985, Ina Pfitzner enrolled at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, in the discipline Diplom-Sprachmittler Englisch/Französisch [Translator/Interpreter English and French], which she concluded with her thesis on Die Darstellung des Krieges im Romanschaffen von Martine Monod [The Representation of War in the novels of Martine Monod]. Incidentally her start into professional life coincided with the Fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989. Employed as a tour guide by Reisebüro der DDR, she attended a post-graduate program in International Tourism at Verkehrshochschule "Friedrich List" in Dresden. Upon return from a six-months stay in the US, she enrolled at Humboldt-Universität for a post-graduate program in Deutsch als Fremdsprache (DaF) [German as a foreign language], which she completed in the summer of 1992. Subsequently, she served as a Teaching Assistant in German at Antioch College, Yellow Springs, Ohio within the framework of the Pädagogischer Austauschdienst [Pedagogical Exchange Service]. She also served as an Assistant at Antioch's European Program in Germany and Poland. She then worked as a free-lance translator, interpreter, tour guide and teacher of German to foreigners. In August 1995, Ina Pfitzner joined LSU's doctoral program in French. She spent the 1999/2000 academic year at the École Normale Supérieure in St. Cloud/Fontenay. She is recipient of the Edouard Morot-Sir Fellowship of the Institut Français de Washington in 2001.
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