The fall of the dream of a national/monological discourse

in the polylinguistic/logical texts of exile literature

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"True voyage is return",
Odo's saying in Ursula Le Guin's
The Dispossessed

As the object of my research-in-progress is an inquiry into the relationship between exile (both temporary and definitive) and writing, my purpose is therefore to question the issues concerning the effects of expatriation, exile and migrancy on literary texts written by "transitional subjects" — be they expatriates, exiles or migrants. As I go deeper into a reading of the works written by exiled writers or books on human geography, psychology of migration, linguistics and literature, it seems clear to me that it is impossible to draw general conclusions about the effects of exile on literature. Above all, the subject I'm dealing with has to do with problems of cultural self-representation which take into account both the place from where the author speaks, and the place from where the reader criticizes. No textual criticism is the result of a disinterested reader speaking in the name of a presumed community of readers.

So, if the reading subject disengages him/herself from the identification with the hegemonic community, let's say the white community (be it the American "wasp" or the European "liberal"), it becomes immediately clear that something like "Americanness" does not exist: it is an artificial

construct built by the colonizers in the name of the dream of a monological discourse, which even in the New Worl tended to repeat the Old World's Logos which saw Europe as the centre. American hegemonic thought has striven to move the centre to the States, completely blind to the fact that the people arriving in the New World came from the margins of other worlds and that the succeeding waves of migration always questioned the centre and the margins. It seems difficult for the still active Eurocentric self-representation of Americanized white people to learn that marginality is not a matter of essence, but one of positionality in a given society.

But also the male-centered societies of both China and Mexico, for example, only when exiled or having migrated to the States, discover the effects of marginalization on their own skin, becoming the victims of the center/margin bifurcation which is a perspective created by the exile experience.[1]

Since in this meeting we have been asked to speak on one of the first forms of American literary exile, expatriation, I'll try for the moment to dismiss all those issues which have to do with contemporary migration and stick to the phenomenon of American artists travelling or living outside the States. Actually, we cannot say that these writers — from the earlier journey of Henry James through the unmatched cultural phenomenon of the 1920s to the later appeal on writers such as James Baldwin, Sylvia Plath, Elisabeth Bishop, Paul and Jane Bowles, Susan Sontag — are exactly exiles, because they were not forced to remain outside their country: they chose to go away because of intellectual needs[2]. The only generalization one can make is a social one: all of them, unlike the exiles going to the States in successive waves or the migrant subjects of today, spoke from a situation of power which was also reflected in the choice of the language they used: it was mainly their native English, although "bastardized" in different ways in the texts of the different writers according to the degree to which each of them let himself/herself be contaminated by the culture-language-thought of the land s/he happened to be living in at that time.

Expatriation, then, is a voluntary move, an exit or departure which allows the traveller to return whenever s/he wants and to go wherever s/he wants. Although the expatriate usually leaves because of a feeling of cultural oppression at home, his/her act is an act of free will and his/her journey, stay, even the option for making the new land his/her permanent residence as is

the case with James Joyce, T.S. Eliot, Gertrude Stein, does not take on the shade of banishment and expulsion which can shatter the exile's life. Martin Tucker suggests, however, that the expatriate "may be viewed as a variant form of exile, if what drives him from his native land to a foreign one is a sense of loneliness, psychic separation, and the despair of nonbelonging."(Tucker, xv)

Moreover, in our age, the exilic condition as well as the expatriate complex undoubtedly activate the psychic states generally known as awareness of loss which involve nostalgia and yearning .

Two exiles from Eastern Europe, a man and a woman, one writing in English from the forties on, the other our contemporary, open their autobiographical works with images of childhood geography bathed in the sea of nostalgia. I'm referring to *Speak, Memory* (1951, revised 1966)[3] by Vladimir Nabokov and *Lost in Translation* (1989) by Eva Hoffman, a Polish emigré who opens her narrative by saying that she suffered her "first severe attack of nostalgia, or *tesknota*[4] — a word that adds to nostalgia the tonalities of sadness and longing" (4) the very day on which, at the age of 13, she left for Canada — the nostalgia was occasioned by her hearing the band on the shore playing the Polish national anthem.

The whole book, the most exhaustive artistic treaty I know about growing into a writer in exile, stems from the need to stitch up the wound of nostalgia and the strenuous will not to lose herself in translation, i.e. not to risk silence because, as she acknowledges in the end, when she finally can "trust English to speak at my childhood self as well" (274), "The silence that comes out of inarticulateness is the inchoate and desperate silence of chaos. The silence that comes after words is the fullness from which the truth of our perceptions can crystallize." (276)

The centrality of the nostalgia feeling in the exiles' lives pushes us to ask if it is possible to learn/speak/write in a new language without psychically differentiating oneself from the maternal, if there is any similarity between the feeling of being expelled from the mother's womb and the exile's (and, to a smaller extent, the expatriate's) experience of loss: in both experiences the subject has to deal with the loss of a/the centre, although in my opinion exile has more to do with this because it has to do with the loss of the motherland which always implies severance from the

mother tongue, whereas expatriation has more to do with the father figure: ex-*pater*, ex-father's tongue.[5] It is undeniable that many flights to Europe involved a flight from the father's language, from the father's influence, and especially for the women writers the distance from the States was a weapon to free themselves from the ties of a literature almost entirely built along male lines. It is not by chance that the female Modernist tradition, utterly different from canonical Modernism, was created by women writing abroad.[6]

If each act of writing is born out of the experience of separation, then the exilic writing, the expatriate text, speaks from a wound inflicted by the actual geographical distance between *the here* from where I'm speaking now and *the there* where my language and my symbolic constructions saw the light.

But, recognizes Eva Hoffman, the opening of the wound helps to widen knowledge: the gap becomes

> a window through which I can observe the diversity of the world. The apertures of perception have widened because they were once pried apart. Just as the number "2" implies all the other numbers, so a bivalent consciousness is necessarily a mutivalent consciousness.
>
> Multivalence is no more that the condition of a contemporary awareness, and no more than the contemporary world demands. (274)

And if memory acts as a balm to the severance, the truth remains that the *there* and *then* I will write about is not as it was there and then; rather, my recollections have been transformed by my leaving that place, by my living here. My past has been translated. In exile, desire for home can become a substitute for home; projection repeats past reality into present writing. Michael Seidel says of Fyodor Cherdyntsev, the exiled writer protagonist of Nabokov's novel *The Gift*, that he "comes to understand that recall not only re-creates but supplants" the exile's native land (1985, 230) as testified by his reflections on disruption from one's homeland:

> Ought one not to reject any longing for one's homeleand, for any homeland besides that which is with me, within me, which is stuck like the silver sand of the sea to the skin of my soles, lives in my eyes, my blood, gives depth and distance to the background of life's every hope?

followed by the sudden realization that

Some day, interrupting my writing, I will look through the window and see a Russian autumn.

The power of evocation is given by the spatial hiatus of which, ironically, an imaginative consciousness can blur the boundaries and thus re-map geography: Russia is with him wherever he goes thanks to his evocative power. Nabokov himself speaks of "a kind of delicate meeting place between imagination and knowledge, a point ... that is intrinsically artistic" and in *The Gift,* his partly autobiographical narrator, being a poet, openly states: "I know only that when I reach it [Russia], it will be with pen in hand."

Writing activated by nostalgia reconstructs places and the past. Writing activated by the nostalgic desire of youth — having been young in Russia, he desires that land — recontructs the land and the eros of youth in the figure of Lolita, suggests Seidel (234-7), who also speaks of Nabokov's geographical constructions as an "Amerussian continent" (237) and, perhaps because America is all continents and because a writer's imagination is, after all, all continents, in *Lolita* Humbert Humbert describes the Western mountains of America through an Egyptian imagery strongly connotated by eroticism.

But not even nostalgia can save Nabokov or any other writer from writing in a foreign wor(l)d. Yes, this is possibly another general truth: if the subject is really on the move and has not simply moved, his/hers will always be a foreign language. Even when s/he speaks the native tongue, once s/he is living abroad, s/he will never again have the same sort of mental symbolic emotional perspective s/he had at home. So, the feeling of foreignness has not simply to do with what most works about exile say, that the foreign language makes possible the destruction of the writer because it "may be the ultimate measure of psychic exile, for the exilic sense of separation springs from the fall of communication between foreign writer and local/national community" (Tucker, xxiii). Even when using one's own language one can feel a foreigner because of the internal split between two places — home and abroad - which imply a deeper symbolic split.

The exiled writer is marked at least by duality: two lands, two cultural

perspectives, two value systems, two languages; the first and the now, the *there* and the *here*, but, what is more interesting, the *there* and *then* as they were can never be again, the exilic subject must stitch them seam by seam into a new pattern. If one wants to save one's life, the past must be integrated within the present, the connective tissue born out of the two seams-soils helps the transplanted roots to grow and produce new plants or, to use Nabokov's imagery, the task of the exiled writer proves to be diabolical: the unceasing language re-visions and re-translations are only comparable to the "multiple metamorphosis, familiar to butterflies" (1966, 13).

The question for twentieth-century writers was also: which was their native language? English, the language used in the country in which they were born, the country which had already betrayed the mother-land in renegating the native American tongue and the children of that earth?

English, for American born citizens, is the colonizers' language and for American writers was the language of the English literary tradition which didn't endow them with the right of primogeniture; American English was a second-class, second-born production. Can we explain with this feeling the choice of so many artists to come to Europe, mainly to Paris[7], and not simply back to England?

"Paris was where the twentieth century was", says Stein, tracing the interrelatedness between age and place, history and the cities where the history of thought took place. Again, Stein reveals her extraordinary modernistic sensibility in stitching together time and space, in inaugurating border thought, in practising a first form of border art by positing herself on the margins of different countries — New and Old World — different cities — San Francisco and Paris — operating a spatio-temporal conflation thanks to her consciousness of liminality (although she doesn't practice linguistic "metissage" as is the case with contemporary non-wasp literature).

When writing, Stein translates her consciousness of geographical and temporal contiguity in the use of the continuous present, of reiterative opening lines, in the disruption of syntactical rules, in the smoothing of dichotomies, in the conflagration of signifier and signified: the liberation of words from unitary meanings was a consequence of the multiplicity of the twentieth-century experience, of the problematic nature of knowledge.

But it is in the act of moving (eagerly acted out by the subject) and letting oneself be moved (which can't simply be thought of as passive,

because the one who is moved lives the experience still as a subject, not as an object) that the artist going abroad expresses his/her openness to change.

And with this we come to the question whether the desire-capability of expressing oneself in a foreign linguistic system speaks of readiness to change — question which has to be widened to embrace both the author writing in the foreign language when abroad and the writer writing in the native language which will nevertheless be contaminated, babelized, "metissée" by the language of the land where s/he is living. Behind every work of art, behind each piece of creation lies the impulse to change(ment). The art of exile is to be found in the nomadic character of creation: the very act of crossing space, boundaries allows the subjectivity to move between past and present, home and abroad; the continuous pacing of the earth of the journeying subject pushes him/her to think of the roots while continuously dislocating them. Going implies changing, looking at the origin differently and having new starts. New (creative) performances are at the disposal of the subject who frees himself from the fetters of national, cultural, religious, linguistic, familiar ties, of the artist who cuts the bonds of a monological discourse and enters the world of polidiscursivity, creates a polylinguistic literature which inscribes the stigmas of nomadism, of polylogism.

Thus, the very act of expatriating is the performance of the dream of a world, a life, a literature without ties; exile and expatriation are the actualization of a myth, the quest for the unknown — the promised land.

Once abroad, the exile confronts reality and very often s/he moves toward another land, an imaginary universe created by the nostalgia for the native land (Stoiciu, 128). From the feeling of being a foreigner everywhere, from the wound of homelessness the works of art derive their flavour of cosmopolitanism; the unceasing metamorphosis experienced by the exilic subject accounts for the freedom to experiment felt by writers on movement; for the temporal, spatial and linguistic creolization of their works, where *the present* is marked by the signs of the past and the yearning for the future (movement), *the here* is marked by traces of the motherland, but also by the feeling that this is not the ultimate place; *the mother tongue* is no longer pure, it has been contaminated by the seeds of other tongues and appears to be the *graph-ing* of the yearning for a pan-trans-nationalistic language.

In the light of what we are living nowadays — the fashionable nationalistic separations in the name of a presumed undifferentiated group

identity on ethnic, religious, linguistic bases; or the dream of interculturalism as staged by white America, whose benevolence towards the ethnic migrants hides the compulsion to homogenize as one can easily detect by the hyphen with which the national origin is linked to the word "American" — we can say that the expatriate movement was the first form of expression aimed at stripping the expatriate subject of the notion of identity as sameness, one-ness (the urge must have been felt as all the more compulsory because of the double origin of each American citizen — American and Italian or English or Polish, etc. — which became triple if the parents where from different origins). Expatriatism was on the one hand the going back to where one thought one's own origin was — as it was at the beginning with James — on the other it meant the possibility of distancing oneself from the origin as place of birth, home, and acquiring a deeper insight into self and freedom because, says Gertrude Stein in *Paris France*

> After all everybody, that is, everybody who writes is interested in living inside themselves in order to tell what is inside themselves. That is why writers have to have two countries, the one where they belong and the one in which they live really. The second one is romantic, it is separate from themselves, it is not real but it is really there.
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> The English Victorians were like that about Italy, the early nineteenth century Americans were like that about Spain ... my generation the end of nineteenth century American generation was like that about France.
>
> ... but in general that other country that you need to be free is the other country not the country where you really belong.(2-3)

For writers such as Hemingway and Stein "displacement" helped to produce new perspectives, provoked changes both in self-perception and in writing: it was as if the dramatic crisis of the times required a spatial crisis — a crisis of the feeling of being at home, inside, grounded in one's place, one's identity. The experience of ungrounding reveals a foreign, at least alternate self, but also helps to see revealing features both of the native culture and of the foreign country: Stein observed in *Paris France* that writers needed two countries because their creativity depended upon transplantation.

Expatriatism was the first step towards the metropolis as the place in which to utter "the words censored in that other space" (Spivak 1992, 788),

because in the new language, in the large metropolis in which the threat of anonimity undoes the laces of the identity corsage, it is easier to read what was repressed, censored in the first language/place and to translate re-pression into re-motion, new movement, new words, new meanings.

The tension between home and exile, familiarity and strangeness can be positive, productive: "Only the exiled individual can gain enough distance from society to be truly creative, to envision alternatives. The figure of the expatriate introduces a dynamic factor" (1992, 107), says Frank Dietz in speaking of Ursula Le Guin's novels, "exile also opens new perspectives and insights" (109); even when going back home, the expatriate will never be the same again: the exile experience has changed him profoundly, and home will be contaminated by the germs of movement, flux, cultural diversity experienced abroad.

If we have to stick to the first waves of cultural migration, let's say to the 1920-30's, I think we can't speak of border art, as is the case with contemporary Chicana, Nuyorican art, nor of nomadic subjects in the sense in which we use it with contemporary artists always in transit between borders, most of them women; although I think the prototypes for this sort of figures were Djuna Barnes's women.[8] But, nonetheless, even when the result of the expatriate texts was to re-name and re-state the origin, the very fact that, in order to do so, they had to put a distance between the speaking subject and the place of origin, betrays that that distance was needed in order to loosen the tongue, in order to see and name what at home was so oppressive as to reduce one to silence.

Often, it is the silence at home that accounts for the wish to narrate stories never told. But, again, this becomes more evident in the works of later forms of exile: to rescue the silence imposed on their parents by the ignorance of the foreign speech, to supply the stories of the original land the parents are too shy to recount to their "American children", the mouths and the pens of the second-generation emigrants very often utter stories re-invented through imagination. If their parents have been de-humanized, objectified, marginalized, sickened because deprived of the power of speech — *deslenguadas* — the mestizo/mestiza child — through literatur — will repair, will restore them the voice, the past, some sort of identity which is not sameness, but the feeling of belonging to a community devaluated by the act of emigration:

Until I am free to write bilingually and to switch codes without having always to translate, while I still have to speak English or Spanish when I would rather speak Spanglish, and as long as I have to accomodate the English speakers rather than having them accomodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate. (Anzaldùa, 59)

Looking at contemporary literature by hyphenated writers, it may be that they, like the previous expatriates, are exiles in that, to paraphrase Michael Seidel's words, they "inhabit one place and remember or project the reality of another" (1986, ix); yet, more significantly, they invent their parents' native country: the land they write about, the land which is their text exists vividly only in their imagination. China is the intertext of Maxine Kingston's first book, *The Woman Warrior* (1981); the China she has not yet visited when writing the book, is the intertext lurking inside the American reality she is living in. In her case, as in the expatriate case, "the exile experience stimulates the desire to invoke a different reality" (Shih, 66), and so she refers back to her past. The basic difference between this type of contemporary exilic imagination and the expatriate imagination of, let's say a Joyce or a Fitzgerald, is that the latter's imaginations owe their richness and intensity to the act of looking back to a past and a land really experienced, although modified by distance and desire. Kingston's imagination — as much of today's multicultural writing — owes its richness to an exilic feeling for a past time and a native land (never experienced) which urges her to create the other world by a sheer act of willful nostalgia.[9]

The issue, when analysing the phenomenon of expatriation, is again one which has to do with the question of identity, the study of which crosses a number of disciplines — philosophy, psychology, semantics, etc. — and addresses issues which are at the intersection between race, class, gender and is interrelated with studies in the ethnic area — colonialism, postcolonialism, de-colonialization, nationalism, etc.

As for the American expatriates of Modernism, things were simpler: displaced from the native land, though they developed attachments to the place of arrival — usually Paris — none of them, recognizes Gerald Kennedy, "became completely assimilated; none lost altogether that residual habit of mind which, for want of a more precise term, might be called 'American'(241). Compelled by the exile condition to perceive the

differences between Paris and America, Hemingway, Barnes, Stein, Miller had to explore what being American meant, how being born in the new land affected their readings of place. Was home here, in Paris, or there, in their native American cities? And were their identities entirely modelled by the native place inscribed in them as a powerful psychospatial image, or were those images only the departing points for orienting themselves in other places, along other paths? The constant tension between place and identity which occurs on the journey must have moved the writers to transcribe the constant process of orienting oneself in space, which means calling into question one's identity, tracing maps of one's spatial, cultural and psychic journey. In this sense, Modernist works by expatriate writers who contemplate the relation between place and identity because of the act of inscribing movement, necessarily make use of a kinetic style.

If one agrees with Stanislaw Baranczack's idea that in literary discourse "a new thought cannot emerge but from a new way of speaking: in order to say anything relevant, you must break a norm" (438), one must draw the conclusion that language violations, novel ways of speaking, foreign turns of phrase which are most likely to be traced in the exiles' work cannot naively be defined as malapropisms or ascribed to real or internal (imperfect) bilinguism: all these features are the results of a subjectivity "on the move" that is consequently able to translate the vision arising from the rupture of linguistic, national, cultural bonds only through a breaking of codified linguistic and aesthetic norms. As Gloria Anzaldùa, our contemporary *mestiza* born in Texas, recognizes, the ambivalence coming from the clash of voices, when not acted upon, can result in "mental and emotional states of perplexity. ... The mestiza's dual or multiple personality is plagued by psychic restlessness" (78). She undergoes an inner war, until she learns that "she can't hold concepts or ideas in rigid boundaries", that she has to shift to "divergent thinking", to accept her plural personality, to achieve a "mestiza consciousness" whose "energy comes from continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm", "the subject-object duality" (79- 80).

Of course this way of thinking and being pertains to contemporary subjectivity living in a world speedily becoming more and more "mestizayed": our élitist predecessors , the expatriates, were, after all, more American than European, although all of them had to experience literal and

psychic movement from departure, through transit to return, although the sign of transition was forever graphed in their text: it is not a chance that Djuna Barnes entitles one of her short stories "Áller et Retour".

"There was process: process was all. You could go in a promising direction or you could go wrong, but you did not set out with the expectation of ever stopping anywhere" (U. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*)

Note, Notes, Anmerkungen

1) In this sense, the works of Third-World women writers very often perform a double-edged criticism, one eye focusing on racism in the States, the other unveiling sexism at home.
2) Almost all texts on exile and literature underline the difference between exile and expatriatism, which Martin Tucker defines as "a voluntary and transient form of exile", although "on occasion an expatriate opts for migrant status or permanent residence in a new land" (p. 9).Tucker identifies this movement with the American cultural migration to Europe in the 1920s and the Latin American intellectual Grand Tour.
A useful distinction was made by Mary McCarthy in 1971 between expatriates (defined as "edonistic" and identified with Henry James and the American community in Paris in the Twenties) and exiles (those forced to migrate either for political reasons or because culturally unwelcomed at home and who, like Joyce, Mansfield, Naipaul, didn't write expatriate cosmopolitan fiction, but were obsessed with their native province or colony).
3) In the oscillation between Russian and English which started with Nabokov's exile in the States, this final uncompleted autobiography was an expansion of a first American version published in 1951 with the title of *Conclusive Evidence* (New York: Harper and Brothers; but, in the same year, Gollancz published the book as *Speak, Memory*) which was eventually expanded and translated into Russian by the author with the title *Drugie*

berega (Other Shores), New York: Chekhov Publishing House, 1954.
In the "Foreword" to the Putnam's edition of 1966, Nabokov says that the initial nucleus was an essay written in French under the title of "Mademoiselle O" which was published in the second issue of *Mesures*, 1936. When he migrated to America in 1940, this essay was translated by Hilda Ward into English and published in *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1943. From 1948 to 1950 *The New Yorker* published eleven pieces which were later to become eleven chapters; of the remaining three chapters, two appeared in the *Partisan Review* and one in *Harper's Magazine*.
Thus, for the final 1966 edition of *Speak, Memory*, the author himself says that he "not only introduced basic changes and copious additions into the initial English texts, but have availed myself of the corrections I made while turning it into Russian. This re-Englishing of a Russian re-vision of what had been an English re-telling of Russian memories in the first place, proved to be a diabolical task," ("Foreword", 12).
4) The word "nostalgia" will be written directly in English only towards the end of the text, when E(w)va has succeeded in translating herself into the new land, the new language.
5) Derrida (*Of Grammatology*, 170) makes a suggestive link between writing and expatriation in reading the Oedipus myth: written discourse was "born out of a primary gap and a primary *expatriation*, condemning it to wandering and blindness, to mourning". Writing is compared by Derrida in *Dissémination* to the figure of Oedipus, whose story has to do with the question of exile: Oedipus is first banished by his own family — actually by the father — and, after learning of his crimes — parricide and incest — chooses self-imposed exile.
Taking Derrida's words as a starting point, I can infer that incest, parricide, exile, writing all have to do with the flight from the father, with the severance from the father's laws, with reversal, i.e. making affirmative the father's negations: (do not) make love to the mother; (do not) kill the father; (do not) leave the father's house; (do not) subvert the father's word. Writing, thus, is subversion in that it re-traces the mother's voice, in that it substitutes the world of things — objects — with the world of signs — graphs which evoke other worlds (as exile does!).
6) I have to make it clear that my initial assumption when speaking of literature and culture in general, is that "men and women occupy different

positions in the making of culture" (Spivak, 1992, p. 775), and that in reading texts written by women and men I always posit myself as a gendered reader, that is a woman.

On expatriation and women's literature, the seminal work was S. Benstock's, *Women of the Left Bank: Paris 1900-1940*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986.

As for a gendered reading of Modernism, I will quote here just a few of the by now numerous texts written on the subject: A. Jardine, *Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity*, Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1985; R. Blau DuPlessis, *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers*, Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1985 ; S. Gilbert e S. Gubar, *The War of Words*, vol. I of *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century*, New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1987; Ellen G. Friedman and M. Fuchs eds., *Breaking the Sequence: Women's Experimental Fiction*, Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1989; Bonnie Kime Scott ed., *The Gender of Modernism*, Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1990; S. Rubin Suleiman, *Subversive Intent: Gender Politics and the Avant-Garde*, Cambridge: Univ. of Harvard Press, 1990; E. G. Friedman, "Where are the Missing Contents? (Post)Modernism, Gender, and the Canon", PMLA, March 1993, vol. 108, 2, pp. 240-52.

In 1993 I've written two essays on Charlotte Perkins Gilman's contribution to Modernism: "The writing room", *Lectora. Revista de dones i textualitat*, Barcelona, 1995, 51-62; and "(Dis)veling the origins of female literay tradition: *The jellow Wallpaper* by Ch. Perkins Gilman" (forthcoming).

7) Even Henry James, who spent only one year in Paris (1875-76) before retreating to England, retained throughout his life and works a preoccupation with Paris and France, i. e. with French culture, life and language.

8) I have already stated this in my study on the polymorphic city , the polyglot women and the meteque word in D. Barnes's *Nightwood* and *Spillaway* (see Zaccaria 1989 and '93).

9) In the study on "Exile and Intertextuality in Makine Hong Kingston's China Men", Shu-mei Shih stresses the fundemental issue that there is a tight link between the exile 's desire for another reality, for the past, and the practice of intertextuality, where the new text looks back to a previous one. The exilic writing very often is also intertextual writing in that it refers back

to fables, fictions of the ancestors' country while intermingling them with the American experience and fiction.
I find that this is still another kind of polyglot or heteroglot intertextuality which accounts for the extreme interest these works generate in my consciousness as a western woman reader who strenuously tries to listen to strange, different voices: although I will never be able to understand fully the Chinese intertexts and hypotexts behind Kingston's works, my willingness to move towards her world without wanting to assimilate it or to be assimilated by it, the charm of that world will never destroy the differences between our cultures but, nonethless, my reading, as her writing, does not set up boundaries between two cultures, two worlds. She invites me to enter the threshold of her home, of her imagination; I accept the invitation and, stripping myself of the cultural constructions of my identity, I remain in front of her, of her text with the aim of making my so-called First World ethnic identity interact with hers: "This is the kind of stripping that must be undertaken together if ethnic identies ... are to become culturally and politically productive", says Spivak (785). This is the kind of stripping the reader has to undertake in order "to learn otherwise".

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