

The Privilege of Pain: The Exile as Ethical Model in Max Aub, Francisco Ayala, and Edward Said

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ABSTRACT

Is there something so virtuous or beneficial about exile that those who suffer it can serve as an ethical example for all intellectuals, exiled or not? The work of Max Aub, Francisco Ayala, and Edward Said seems, in different ways, to suggest so. The main purpose of this paper is to point out the tensions, contradictions, and dangers of this figurative use of exile as an ethical model, arguing that it minimizes the concessions, negotiations and struggle for legitimacy that generally mark the exile's existence.

Introduction

Let me begin with a guilty confession: I love exile. This is an awful thing to say, because exile is an awful thing. I mean, of course, that I adore exile as a topic. I love to teach it and write about it. But even this sounds strange, almost unethical. If, as Edward Said states, exile is a terrible form of mutilation, then who am I to say I like it? It would be like saying I am fond of torture. I will come back to this dilemma of exile's guilty pleasures below. For now, let me stick to the uneasy notion that exile is a lovely subject to work on. Even though the exile *experience* is marked by expulsion and exclusion, exile studies as a scholarly field – the interdisciplinary domain that deals with the social, cultural, and political dynamics of forced displacement – is remarkably hospitable to people of all backgrounds and theoretical persuasions. The topic is rewarding, too. Exile evokes sympathy and appeals to the imagination. To many people exiles are fascinating, romantically heroic figures. Their lot, moreover, can be fruitfully cast in an epic, dramatic, or tragic mode, depending on one's particular need or preference. And exile lends itself to sweeping, melodramatic generalizations about the importance of home, the pain of loss, and the illusory consolations of nostalgia. As an object of scholarship it is especially inviting, of course, to those of us interested in comparative work: Isn't exile of all times and all places?

For literary studies in particular exile has long been a boon. Not only because writers tend to be susceptible to expulsion, but because displacement drives many non-writers to pick up the pen. The field includes many of the great

literary classics – Ovid, Dante, Conrad, Nabokov – but also an inexhaustible trove of unexplored, marginal authors and works. More concretely, exile studies offer all the elements that the Humanities and Social Sciences thrive on these days: marginality, border crossing, identity conflicts, hybridity, transnationalism, and a seemingly organic articulation of cultural production with politics (Buruma 2001: 33). It shouldn't surprise us, then, that the number of studies dealing with exile is astronomical. WorldCat gives 13,000 book titles, and the bibliography of the Modern Language Association, covering the past four decades, includes almost 5,000 entries on the topic, not including the 1,500 or so on "diaspora," the almost 1,000 on "migration," and the more than 500 on "displacement."

As a result, though, this potentially rich comparative field has become completely unmanageable. Its actual scholarly results, moreover, are quite uneven. Exile studies as such does not seem to have made very clear advances toward a better understanding of the exile experience. There are interesting case studies by the thousands, but when it comes to more general conclusions, rigor is hard to come by and shallowness abounds. Thinking about it, this, too, is no surprise. The field's apparent hospitality is deceptive; in reality it is rife with problems and pitfalls that make it difficult to do solid comparative scholarship.

Of these problems and pitfalls, I would highlight three. First, there is the issue of delimitation: What, really, is the field's scope? Should we attempt a careful definition of exile and, if so, what would that be? How do you determine who qualifies to be considered an exile and who doesn't? Do you exclude economic immigrants or refugees? And how about expatriates like Hemingway? Is the *cause* of the displacement – politics, economics, personal preference – what matters most, or its *effects*? Second, there is the danger of reductionism, that is, the temptation to explain everything exiles do and produce as a direct result of their displacement. Connected with this problem is the tendency to overgeneralize, to lose track of the historical specificity of each exile experience. The concept of 'exile literature,' for instance, encourages both reductionism and overgeneralization, at least if one defines it as all literature written in exile. In reality, of course, the notion is much more slippery; one could just as easily say that it encompasses all literature *about* exile, regardless of the circumstances of its production.

In fact, it is entirely unclear whether an overarching concept like 'exile literature' has any legitimacy at all. To state that exile has an impact on an author's work is a truism, but that does not make exile literature into a category clearly distinguishable from non-exilic works. Many attempts have been made to define the 'exilic-ness' of texts written in situations of displacement, but the arguments proposed have been either too obvious or too stretched. Let me give

some examples from my field, twentieth-century Spanish literature. Paul Ilie, in a book about Spanish literature written after the Civil War, identifies in some of these texts an “exilic sensibility,” defined as a “mental condition” characterized by “set of feelings or beliefs” separating one or more individuals from their community (1980: 2). Gareth Thomas’s book on the Spanish Civil War novel detects a difference between texts written in Spain and those written in displacement: Some of the latter display “exilic symptoms,” including characters’ “feeling cut off from others, failing to communicate with others, ... not knowing where to go or what to do” (1990: 156). For Michael Ugarte exile tends to foster a specific kind of metatextual awareness, as it “leads the writer ... into a dialogue with him or herself on the very nature of writing and on the problems that arise from an attempt to record reality” (1989: 19–20). I myself have argued that, in the case of Max Aub, exile made it impossible to represent the Spanish Civil War in the shape of a neatly composed historical narrative. Instead, Aub wrote chaotic, all-inclusive war chronicles, examples of what I have called a “realism of aporia” (Faber 2002: 237–44).

The problem with identifying these kinds of specific formal and thematic traits is that they are not in any way defining of exile literature: It is true that they appear in some exile texts, but they also figure in texts by authors who were never forced to leave their home. Ilie realizes this, but instead of dropping the notion of exile literature he expands it to include texts by non-displaced authors. For this purpose he introduces the concept of “inner exile.” Some of the Spanish authors writing in Franco Spain, he argues, were so isolated that their texts, too, manifest an exilic sensibility (1980: 2–4). There is some merit to the idea of inner exile, but it makes it even more difficult to reach any clear-cut definition. What use is defining exile if you don’t even have to leave your home, let alone your country, to become one?

The concept of inner exile turns exile into a psychological condition – a first step down the slippery slope that ends up transforming exile into an existential metaphor. I would say that this ‘temptation of the trope’ is the third main pitfall for those of us working in exile studies: Once we allow ourselves to think of exile in existential or figurative terms, there is little that would automatically fall outside of the field’s scope. Don’t all writers, in some sense, live in exile? And why stop with writers? Who isn’t an exile of sorts? Isn’t life itself, especially modern or postmodern life, a quintessentially exilic experience?

This move to metaphor has a paradoxical effect. On the one hand, it grants the real, physically displaced exile a special status insofar as her state becomes a more literal and intense version of an ailment affecting all of humanity. On the other hand, though, it takes away from the specificity of exiles’ experience, and thus *reduces* their status. For this and other reasons, some scholars have argued

strongly against any metaphoric or symbolic notion of exile, which in their eyes trivializes the terrible reality and the material circumstances of real displacement, as well as the political struggles connected to it (Kettler 2005; Buruma 2001; McClennen 2004; Naharro-Calderón 1991; Kaplan 1996).

The Exile as Ethical Model

Here I wish to focus on a particular figurative use of exile: the construction of the exile experience as a model for an intellectual ethics. In this case, the social, psychological, and political consequences of physical displacement are reconceived as desirable, even exemplary assets for *all* intellectuals, exiles or not. In what follows I will reflect on the problematic nature of this notion by analyzing its different manifestations in the work of three distinguished intellectual exiles: Max Aub, Francisco Ayala, and Edward Said.¹

Said (1935–2003), as is well known, was an exiled Palestinian who lived and worked most of his life in the United States. Ayala and Aub left Spain after the defeat of the Republic in the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939). Aub (1903–1972) was an agnostic Jew who was born in Paris but moved to Spain when he was eleven and began publishing there in the 1920s. Following the proclamation of the Second Spanish Republic in 1931 he became increasingly politicized; he joined the Socialist Party, worked for the Republic during the Civil War, and felt compelled to leave the country when Franco won. After spending the first three years of World War II in prisons and concentration or forced-labor camps in France and North Africa he managed to make it to Mexico, where he lived until his death in 1972. Ayala, born in 1906 in Granada, was of the same literary generation as Aub. Although less politicized, he too thought it impossible to live under Franco. He first moved to Argentina, then to Puerto Rico and the United States. From the 1960s on he returned to Spain on a regular basis, moving back permanently after Franco's death.

Aub, Ayala, and Said were all singularly productive in exile; and all three dedicated an important part of their work to reflections on exile as a particular state of being. All three recognized the many difficulties that come with forced displacement; but they also construed the exile experience as an opportunity for the intellectual to reach a new level of ethical awareness and virtue. As a result, they ended up constructing an ethics of exile that not only formulated a code of conduct for life in displacement, but aspired to a more general validity for all

¹ For some of the arguments and examples of this essay I am partly drawing on previous work, notably my book *Exile and Cultural Hegemony* (2002), and my articles “Max Aub, conciencia del exilio” (2003–2004) and “The exile's dilemma: writing the Civil War from elsewhere” (forthcoming).

intellectuals. My main purpose here is to point out the tensions and contradictions in this particular symbolic use of displacement – specifically, the ways in which it minimizes or masks the extent to which exile involves concessions, contaminations, complicities, negotiations and, in general, institutional dependency. Intellectual life, from a Darwinian standpoint, is less a struggle for survival than a struggle for legitimacy within a set of given institutional structures. This struggle is all the more obvious – and difficult – for intellectuals in exile.

It is important to note from the outset that although Aub, Ayala, and Said all end up deriving an ethics from exile, they do not go about it in the same way. Aub's exiled intellectual derives his strength and legitimacy from his unwavering affiliation with a political collective. For him the exile faces three main ethical imperatives: commitment to the political cause, loyalty to the exile community that embodies that commitment, and fidelity to his friends. For Ayala, by contrast, the ethics of exile forbid any lasting affiliation with collectives or political causes. In Ayala's model, the displaced intellectual cherishes his exilic rootlessness, striving to be detached, independent, and strictly cosmopolitan. Said occupies an ambivalent position in between these two extremes. On the one hand, he, too, advocates radical intellectual independence. On the other, he rejects the idea that the intellectual can or should stay out of politics. Still, for Said the intellectual's affiliations to particular collectives are always provisional and can never impose on his fundamental duty of dissent – a dissent that, in the end, is always strictly individual. If Aub grounds his ethics in the political *motivation* of displacement conceived in collective terms, then, one could say that Ayala and Said emphasize its salutary, liberating *effects* on the intellectual as individual thinker.

Max Aub: An Ethics of Aporia

Aub started writing about the Civil War even before he left Spain; and the centerpiece of his extensive production in exile – which spans narrative fiction, drama, essay, memoir, and poetry – is *El laberinto mágico*, a literary tapestry of the war consisting of five novels, one film script, and some forty short stories. Although Aub was raised, literarily speaking, in the 'dehumanized,' anti-realist art of the Spanish avant-garde, his gradual politicization in the 1930s and especially his experience of war and exile convinced him of the need for literary realism. Given what was happening in the world, Aub felt that the writer's first duty was to report on the times in as faithful a manner as possible. This also implied an explicitly political art – though Aub never subscribed to Zhdanov-style socialist realism and was always careful to emphasize his independence from party lines. Intellectuals, for Aub, should be interested in politics, address it, and take positions; but what distinguishes them from politicians is that they

see political issues primarily in *moral* terms (Aub 2000: 169; Villacañas Berlanga 2004: 27). For Aub, life in exile is the lived expression of an explicit commitment to the political struggle that motivated him to leave his country – in this case, the antifascist cause of the Spanish Republic. The exile’s sole *raison d’être* is to honor this commitment, regardless of the immediate viability of the political project in question. Aub’s ethics of exile, therefore, imply a full acceptance of exilic fate as a collective, potentially tragic condition.

Aub realizes that not all exiles are able to live up to this commitment. In his diaries, he regularly complains about the concessions made by his fellow Spaniards in Mexico, their small and larger acts of betrayal. Some give in to the lure of money and middle-class comfort: “Alardo Prats’s wife, and he himself, have changed so much. He makes money now, owns a car, doesn’t plan to return to Spain, is going to send his eldest daughter to school with the nuns ... The Alardo Prats of his youth. God!” (Aub 2000: 197).² Others, especially the Stalinists, let Party loyalty trump their commitment to Spain and their fidelity to their friends. As soon as Aub publicly disagrees with Communist policy, his Party acquaintances stop talking to him. “Apparently,” he complains, “there is a Communist concept of friendship that does not allow for differences of opinion” (Aub 2000: 213). Against the lack of steadfastness and loyalty he observes in his fellow countrymen, Aub obsessively reassures himself of his own moral constancy. “I am sticking to my own position,” he writes in his diary in 1952; “I am who I was and plan on continue being the same”; “I still am in the place where I was before” (Aub 2000: 211, 216, 226). And fifteen years later: “It’s not that I haven’t changed – I’m not made of stone, and there are plenty of mirrors around – but I don’t think that my transformations go beyond the ripeness of life and the grey hairs of experience” (1967: 9). Aub is aware of the possible, even likely, uselessness of his moral constancy; but to him it is a matter of honor. His ethics of exile is one of stubborn persistence in the face of adverse circumstances – an ethics of *aporia*.

Aub’s obstinate dwelling in the impossible also drives almost his entire literary production in exile. On the one hand, he sees his writings as the clearest expression of his political commitment (“I left Spain in order not to remain silent,” he writes in 1952, “because that is my way of fighting, because I am a writer by profession – and I will not stop speaking my truth” [2000: 216]). At the same time, his work is also a never-ending reflection on the problematic nature of that commitment. What does it mean to declare oneself bound to a set of values that everything indicates have long gone out of fashion? What virtue is there in defending the legitimacy of a government that disappeared thirty years

² All translations are mine.

ago? When do changed circumstances – or the simple passage of time – exonerate someone from an obligation contracted decades earlier? At what point does moral perseverance turn into pigheadedness? To what extent do the circumstances of displacement force an exile to betray his loyalties? Aub's characters – men and women, intellectuals and workers – never cease wondering and disagreeing; but they never hit on a clear answer, either.

Aub is well aware that loyalty and commitment constitute an exile's strongest claim to moral superiority but also her greatest vulnerability. Exiles might see their leaving their country as a major sacrifice and a supreme moral act, but it is easy for those left behind to turn this logic around and brand the exile's departure as a form of betrayal or cowardice. Especially if existence in exile is relatively comfortable in comparison with life back home, the exile can become haunted by feelings of doubt and guilt. Sure, exile can be harsh – but it also dissolves many of the bothersome obligations and limitations that are part and parcel of a normal life back home.

Aub's play *Tránsito* (1944) is about this sense of guilt produced by the inevitable fact that exiles contract new loyalties, betraying their old ones. The main character, Emilio, has left his wife and children behind in Spain, and struck up a relationship with another woman, Tránsito ('transit'). As his wife, Cruz ('cross'), visits him in his dreams, he begins to doubt the ethical soundness of his leaving his homeland. When Cruz's dream figure assures him that his children still love him in spite of it all, he retorts that they surely must resent his departure: "They blame me for having to flee, for having to abandon you all, as if I were a thief. As if I were a foreigner." "You are just imagining all that," his wife replies. "Then why," Emilio retorts, "don't they write me more often?" (Aub 1968: 834). It is also in his dreamed dialogue with his wife that Emilio confesses to have lost faith in his political convictions: "Faced with the past I am overcome with vertigo and dizziness. Was it worth it, so much death, so much distance?" (ibid.: 835). The play's symbolism is obvious: Emilio's doubts and the guilt toward his abandoned family are the 'cross' the exile gets to bear.

Many Spanish Civil War exiles were quick to claim moral supremacy (Faber 2002: 125); but most of Aub's stories about his comrades in Mexico show that these claims are largely based on self-delusion. "La verdadera historia de la muerte de Francisco Franco" (The True Story of the Death of Francisco Franco, 1960), for instance, casts the Spaniards' fate in a sharply ironic mode, making clear that what the exiles themselves see as moral constancy and courage is in reality sheer stubbornness and stagnation. Incapable of doing much more than to sit in a café, fight with each other, and dwell on the past, the Spaniards drive their poor Mexican waiter to a desperate act of murder: Just to get rid of the exiles, he decides to travel to Spain and kill Franco (Aub 1994: 407–28). Similarly,

in the short story “La Merced” (The Merced, 1960) the main character, a Communist, is convinced that he has remained loyal to his political beliefs until one day, fifteen years into his exile, he realizes with a pang that he has become his own political enemy: a *patrón*, or boss (Aub 1994: 401–405). As I have argued elsewhere (Faber 2003–2004), even Aub’s texts that do not explicitly deal with situations of exile can be read as an expression of exilic dilemmas. The last two novels of Aub’s magnum opus on the Spanish Civil War, especially, obsessively reflect on the relative nature of loyalty and the ultimate inevitability of betrayal. In this way, then, Aub’s narrative fiction and drama not only end up undermining the steadfast position that he stakes out for himself in his diaries, but in more general terms raise fundamental questions about the notion of exile as a situation of ethical privilege.

Even in the rare cases that exiles really do manage to remain faithful to their principles, Aub shows their ethical probity to be both suspiciously facile and tragically unproductive, especially when compared to the much more fraught moral trajectory of those who did not leave their country and were forced to find a way to survive under political repression. Aub brings this out very clearly in three plays he wrote in 1947, 1960, and 1964, each entitled *La vuelta* (The Return). All three texts, set in the time they were written, feature protagonists who return to Francoist society after long years in prison or exile. They pride themselves on their purity of political purpose, which they nursed with desperate care throughout their time away, and thus believe they are coming back with their previous hopes and ideals intact. At first they are shocked to find that everyone else’s ideas have changed, and they feel outraged by the concessions their friends and family have made to make do with their lives under Francoism. Soon, though, the returnees are forced to acknowledge that their jealously guarded moral purity – the only thing that sustained them in prison or exile – has become gratuitous and anachronistic.

For Aub, the three *Vueltas* turned out to be fictional dress rehearsals for his first trip to Spain after thirty years of exile, in 1969. The disillusioned diary of that journey, *La gallina ciega* (Blindman’s Buff, 1971), stages the same tragic confrontation between the exile’s claim to moral constancy and the much more complex position of those left behind. At one point Aub is even forced to admit that his own suffering in exile has been relatively minor compared to the fate of those who were forced to live and write in a dictatorial Spain (1996: 227). So while Aub himself, in his diaries and daily life, adheres to a notion of exile as a model of intellectual ethics, his work ends up indicating that the relative freedom of exile might allow for an extraordinarily faithful adherence to one’s principles, but that such moral constancy, nursed as it is in isolation, is likely to prove sterile.

Francisco Ayala: An Ethics of Detachment

Francisco Ayala's take is different. For him the exile's freedom is both positive and productive, and contrary to Aub's, his vision of exile is pretty much free of conflict, tragedy, and guilt. For Ayala, the inconveniences of exile are outweighed by the advantages and opportunities it provides; and he concluded early on that he and his fellow exiles were far better off than the poor intellectuals who found themselves struggling for survival in the stifling, rancid cultural climate of Francoist Spain. Ayala, therefore, has little patience for exiles who wallow in their misery, and he feels no particular solidarity with them.

Having earned his law degree in 1932, Ayala spent most of his long exile in academic positions, first in Argentina and then in Puerto Rico and the United States. An active publicist from the early 1920s, he also made a name for himself as a literary writer associated with the avant-garde group promoted by José Ortega y Gasset and his *Revista de Occidente*. Like Aub, Ayala supported the Spanish Republic and opposed Franco; in 1937 he became the Republic's ambassador in Czechoslovakia. Unlike Aub, however, Ayala did not break with Ortega's "dehumanized" aesthetics. He also believed in a clear separation between politics and literature. His production in exile is wide and varied, ranging from sociology textbooks and philosophical essays to novels and short stories. Here we will focus on three texts that specifically deal with exile and intellectual ethics: *Razón del mundo* (Reason of the World, 1944), "Para quién escribimos nosotros" (For Whom Do We Write, 1949), and "La cuestionable literatura del exilio" (The Questionable Literature of Exile, 1981).

From the moment he left Spain, Ayala emphatically kept his distance from the rest of the exile community. A liberal in the traditional European sense, he refused out of principle to contract any significant group commitments. In fact, Ayala welcomed his exile insofar as it allowed him to sever his ties to any kind of organic collective. In *Razón del mundo*, his first significant book published abroad, he argued that the intellectual's sole imperative is to remain true to himself, "on a disinterested level, without governmental commitments or duties, without the ties of any temporal interests whatsoever" (1962: 121). He maintained this stance throughout his life: Even when, during his yearly trips to Spain, he would be asked by friends and acquaintances to sign manifestoes against the Franco regime, he always refused. "I have stubbornly resisted [this kind of] 'moral blackmail,'" he writes in his memoir, "with the unfailing response that, given that I'm quite capable of publicly expressing what I think, it is a principle of mine not to subscribe to other people's texts." "I knew," Ayala adds,

that - unfailingly - those who I snubbed would interpret that response as a cowardly excuse, when in reality one needs more courage to face the irritated disapproval of one's peers and friends than to run the possible risks of a punitive reaction from the challenged authorities. However, my response was no subterfuge, but a logical and very congruent consequence of the notion I hold of my duties as an intellectual and of intellectuals' rightful role in public life. (2001: 472)

From this individualist position, Ayala manifested himself early on as a critical observer of the exile community. In "Para quién escribimos nosotros" he scolds his fellow exiles for obsessing too much over Spain: They should get their act together, stop whining, and begin facing the reality of their life abroad. Nor should they any longer write solely for a Spanish audience. True, Ayala admits, exiles face important hurdles, including nationalistic attitudes in their host countries that curb their freedom of expression and access to resources. But nationalism is an evil that stifles intellectuals everywhere, exiled or not. The Spanish Republicans have therefore no particular reason to mourn their fate. In a world that, as Ayala writes, "seems to have eliminated once and for all the moral aspect of all issues" (1971: 150), one could say that, from an intellectual point of view, all writers now live in exile.

Given the way things are in the world, Ayala believes that the only option open to true intellectuals wanting to preserve their moral integrity is to live an isolated existence, seeking solace in each other's company and conversation. Intellectual life must limit itself for the time being to a dialogue among like-minded recluses, "a tacit understanding among the most sophisticated minds" bound by "a solidarity based on shared values." Ayala thus ends up advancing a notion the intelligentsia as a cosmopolitan community of detached anchorites - a "conspiracy of solitary souls, of obstinate and extremely secretive hermits, hidden among the crowds and withdrawn within the middle of the city, waiting to be discovered" - who are engaged in a "spiritual rescue operation" to save the world from impending disaster. This operation will only work, however, if the intellectuals shun "any concern ... unconnected to the proper interests of the mind, of thought, of letters" (1971: 162-64). Politics, in other words, have no place in the intellectual dialogue. For Ayala, then, exile provides an ethical model because the intellectual *should* be a loner with a strictly cosmopolitan position in the world. Ayala's is an ethics of stern detachment.

There is an interesting twist to Ayala's story, though. Paradoxically, his celebration of a de-institutionalized, de-politicized cosmopolitanism ended up facilitating his own individual *reintegration* into his homeland at a moment when most of his fellow exiles, including Aub, scrupulously maintained that a return to Francoist Spain was out of the question. Ayala first went back to Spain in 1960,

and bought an apartment in Madrid three years later. In a letter to Aub, he defended his decision as a purely financial one:

That's what happens with the supercapitalism in which we live. If one has a bit of money left over, there is nowhere in this country [the United States] to invest it, and one has to find a place for it in some underdeveloped country, and what better country to do so than ours? If some time in the future things improve, and it's time to retire, we'll at least have a corner there. (Aub & Ayala 2001: 105)

It is much more likely, though, that buying the apartment was part of a conscious strategy on Ayala's part to gradually reestablish his contact with, and prestige in, his native country. As Villacañas Berlanga writes, Ayala's self-imposed isolation "gave him an ample margin of movement when it came to normalizing his relations with Spain" (2004: 2). From 1963 on he would spend every summer in Madrid; and in 1980, five years after Franco's death and three after Spain's first democratic elections, he moved back permanently.

Ayala's individualist, apolitical stance, and the care he had taken not to be politically associated with the Republic, significantly helped bolster his status in post-Franco Spain as well. In the first decades after Franco's death and the transition to democracy, there existed an overwhelming desire to break with the past, on the part of the political elite as well as a large section of the population. As a result, there were few attempts made to reincorporate the cultural legacy of Republican exile, let alone recognize the exiles' political struggle. It also meant that someone like Aub, who had never ceased to identify himself with the Republic, was too politically marked to receive much posthumous attention. Ayala – who incidentally is still alive as of this writing, and about to turn 100 – was a much more acceptable figure. The extent to which Ayala's meticulously independent trajectory paid off is illustrated by the fact that in 1992, the year of the Quincentenary, he received the prestigious Cervantes prize, awarded by the Spanish Crown to authors from Spain or Latin America. Especially striking was the rhetoric employed on that occasion by the King and Ayala himself. As it turned out, Ayala's carefully crafted self-image allowed King Juan Carlos to smooth over two gigantic, uncomfortable rifts in one single sweep: the postcolonial conflict between Spain and its former overseas possessions, and the still very much unsettled tension between the two warring camps in the Spanish Civil War.

Ayala proved himself to be a welcome and powerful symbol of reconciliation. The King, in a cautiously worded speech that managed never once to mention Franco or Francoism, characterized Ayala as "a man radically linked with his time," a time in which "Spanish social and political life underwent decisive changes" (an indirect reference to the Civil War and the dictatorship). Ayala's move to the Americas, however, was a blessing in disguise because it allowed

him to develop his talents “on both shores of the language,” turning him into a truly pan-Hispanic author. The King emphasized that Ayala “never considered his exile as a cultural uprooting”:

For him, his literature written in those years belongs to the whole of Spanish culture, and has in common with the literature that continued to be written within our borders the unifying trait of the shared use of the Spanish language. Ayala has thus emphasized a notion of culture not differentiated by historical events, but enriched by them. The Crown, which by vocation draws together all the ways of feeling Spanish, finds in personalities like that of Francisco Ayala, the clearest example of a Spain that is finally reunited. (de Borbón 1992)

Ayala, in turn, used his acceptance speech to lament the fact that some people still confuse “the literary with the political.” Speaking about his life, he indicated that in the Civil War he did indeed take the Republic’s side, but also emphasized that he did so “as a citizen (but certainly not as a writer).” After twenty years of exile, he went on, “I had the opportunity to reintegrate (strictly speaking, *almost* reintegrate) into Spain” (Ayala 1992).

Although in his speech Ayala referred to his stay in the Americas as an *exilio*, in reality he never fully accepted the label of *exiliado*, and even less that of “exile writer.” Similarly, he always insisted that his displacement should never be used to judge, evaluate, or classify his literary production. He thought the same was true for his fellow Republicans who had spent the better part of their life abroad. In a 1981 essay entitled “La cuestionable literatura del exilio” (The Questionable Literature of Exile), he formulated a detailed argument along these lines that is worth summarizing at some length.

What, Ayala asks, is the so-called ‘exile novel’? Do Spanish novels written in exile have enough traits in common for us to group them together in one single category? No, Ayala says, they don’t. In reality the only characteristics that can be invoked to speak in generic terms of the Spanish exile novel are based on “sheer external circumstances, without a serious repercussion on the content – and even less on the form – of the literary work” (1981: 63). Exile is a life experience, not a literary one. To be sure, the work of writers like Aub, Ramón Sender, or Ayala himself changed after the Civil War, but these changes were more due to general historical circumstances than to their displacement per se. After all, the work of writers who remained in Spain changed, too. This leads Ayala to his most important point:

What is called the ‘exile novel’ is a literary category formed by virtue of socio-political circumstances that only affect the external aspects of literature. Paradoxically, it could be said that this category refers only indirectly to the novelists who were exiled; what it refers to more directly is, rather, the

conditions under which narrative literature was written in the Peninsula since the Civil War. (1981: 65)

For Ayala, it was the writers who *remained* in Spain that were most severely affected by Franco's victory. They suffered at least as much as their exiled counterparts: Given that prewar Spain had disappeared, they, too, had to live with the nagging nostalgia for their absent homeland. More importantly, Francoism, "which accomplished the incredible feat of culturally submitting to catholic integrism a country isolated from the rest of the world," created a highly anomalous situation as far as literary development was concerned. Hence, the work of those writers who went into exile developed much more naturally - more freely, more in touch with the world and their time - than that of those who stayed in Spain (1981: 65).

Ayala's arguments are, in themselves, worthy of serious consideration and point out some of the same pitfalls of exile studies that I identified at the beginning of this essay. Yet in the end his repeated insistence on a clear separation between the political, historical, or sociological, on the one hand, and the strictly literary on the other is self-serving. It allows him to have his cake and eat it too. In the 1960s and 1970s it permitted him to be a liberal while softening the consequences of Francoist cultural politics (the exclusion, persecution, and censorship most other exile writers suffered). Later, it helped him rise to fame in a post-Franco Spain that was not ready to face the conflicts of the past.

Edward Said: An Ethics of Renunciation

Said occupies a precarious, ambivalent position in between Aub's unwavering commitment and Ayala's attitude of strict detachment. Like Aub, Said believes that it is not possible or desirable for the intellectual to shun politics. At the same time, though, he shares Ayala's fundamental suspicion of any kind of collective affiliation. The notion that exile can serve as a model for an intellectual ethics occupies a central position in Said's work during the last twenty years of his life. The key texts here are a 1984 essay, "Reflections on Exile," and a series of radio lectures given in 1993 and published as *Representations of the Intellectual* (1994).³

"Reflections on exile" is founded on a contradiction. Said begins by warning against any attempt to elevate exile to a figurative level and turn it into a "redemptive motif," but ends up doing exactly that. Exile, for Said, symbolizes intellectual freedom; it provides, he says, "an alternative to the mass institutions that dominate modern life" (2000: 184). Although the exile experience is terrible, there are "things to be learned" from it. Concretely, Said suggests that the

³ My reading of Said's "Reflections" is partly inspired by David Kettler's opening comments in his essay on "Symbolic uses of exile" (Kettler 2005).

suffering and losses of exile can produce a radical form of intellectual enlightenment – an emancipation from the ideology and mystification that come with being and feeling at home somewhere. In *Representations of the Intellectual*, Said goes one step further, associating an intellectual's being at home with forms of accommodation, materialism, co-optation, and self-interest – a corruption and betrayal, in short, of the intellectual's true vocation (1994: 53). In the face of these threats to the intellectual's integrity, exile "is a model for the intellectual who is tempted, and even beset and overwhelmed, by the rewards of accommodation, yea-saying, settling in" (1994: 63).

Exile, then, comes with great advantages. In "Reflections" Said lists five. In the first place, it can provide a more truthful vision of the self, fostering as it does "self-awareness" and a "scrupulous ... subjectivity" (2000: 184). Second, exile promotes a radically secular vision of the world, insofar as it makes one face the fact that history is thoroughly man-made. Third, since exile breaks up habits of thought and perception, it helps provide immunity against "dogma and orthodoxy" (ibid.: 185). Fourth, the exile's multiple frames of reference can foster a "contrapuntal" awareness (ibid.: 186). Finally, exile has specific epistemological advantages as well. Since it turns the familiar strange and the strange familiar, exile makes one see "the whole world as a foreign land" (ibid.: 185). Following Erich Auerbach, Said argues that this is an indispensable disposition for the practice of a truly rigorous, disinterested form of humanistic scholarship. "Only by embracing this attitude," he writes, "can a historian begin to grasp human experience and its written records in their diversity and particularity; otherwise he or she will remain committed more to the exclusions and reactions of prejudice than to the freedom that accompanies knowledge" (ibid.: 185). After repeating many of these same themes in *Representations*, Said argues that the main ethical imperative for all intellectuals, whether they are exiled or not, is to behave and think *as if they were*. And he approvingly quotes Adorno: "It is part of morality not to be at home in one's home" (1994: 57).

As said, this reading of exile as an exemplary state of mind is one of the cornerstones of Said's later work. It is not without problems, though; and it is to Said's merit that in "Reflections" he brings up a couple of important caveats. First, he makes clear that what he identifies as the potentially liberating gains of exile by no means come automatically with displacement or dislocation. To the contrary, exile is just as likely – or even more so – to foster a *closing* of the mind. In order to make his argument work anyway, Said is forced to establish a relatively clear-cut division between "good" and "bad" exiles. Bad exiles are the ones who fall prey to exile's temptations: They engage in "less attractive forms of self-assertion," "sit on the sidelines nursing a wound," tend to be "indulgent," "sulky," and "jealous." By contrast, those whose attitude serves as an ethical

model for the rest of us are the ones who manage to work through these initial, childish stages and finally manage to go without the ideological and psychological consolations of nationalism, dogmatism, exceptionalism, and narcissistic self-pity. Said's intellectual ethics of exile, then, are ultimately an ethics of *renunciation*. His thinking in these matters, much like Adorno's, has a puritan, even ascetic streak.

Said's second caveat has to do with his metaphoric mobilization of exile in the service of an intellectual ethics. Said is well aware that his instrumental use of exile in this way is suspect, precisely from an ethical point of view, because it sublimates, even celebrates, a condition of terrible suffering and pain. In "Reflections" Said is so uncomfortably conscious of this problem that he spends almost half the essay explaining why it is wrong and dangerous to make exile "serve notions of humanism." However, the temptation to go this route anyway is clearly too strong. As if to compensate for ignoring his own warnings, Said resorts to describing exile's terrors in melodramatic hyperbole. Exile, he states, is "like death but without death's ultimate mercy"; "it has torn millions of people from the nourishment of tradition, family, and geography" (2000: 174); it is "the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted. The achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever" (*ibid.*: 173).

What is really at stake here, however, is not so much the tension between the literal and the figurative meaning of exile or between a prescriptive "metaphysical" exile and the reality of political banishment. The tension that remains unresolved in Said's text is the contrast between the relative comfort of exiled intellectuals – including perhaps the essayist himself – and the large-scale suffering of large, anonymous refugee populations.

To be sure, Said tries to accommodate the refugees into his argument as a kind of moral reality check. It is true, he writes, that the didactic or cathartic effects of exile can also benefit onlookers and bystanders: "exiles ... do leaven their environment"; "naturally 'we' concentrate on that enlightening aspect of 'their' presence among us, not their misery or their demands." At the same time, he realizes the parasitical nature of this tendency to celebrate the figure of the exile as a moral example and source of inspiration. But when he tries to point out the dangers of a too complacent consumption of exilic lessons, his normal lucidity eludes him, and he gets lost in empty rhetoric: "looked at from the bleak political perspective of modern mass dislocations, individual exiles force us to recognize the tragic fate of homelessness in a necessarily heartless world" (*ibid.*: 183).

Said ends up in a similar rhetorical dead end when he attempts to signal the dangers of studying exile from a purely literary perspective, without taking into account the large-scale havoc of mass dislocation:

it is apparent that to concentrate on exile as a contemporary political punishment, you must ... map territories of experience beyond those mapped by the literature of exile itself. You must first set aside Joyce and Nabokov and think instead of the uncountable masses for whom UN agencies have been created.... To reflect on [exiles] ... means that you must leave the modest refuge provided by subjectivity and resort instead to the abstractions of mass politics. Negotiations, wars of national liberation, people bundled out of their homes and prodded, bussed or walked to enclaves in other regions: what do these experiences add up to? Are they not manifestly and almost by design irrecoverable? (Said 2000: 175-6)

What strikes one in these passages is not so much the meaninglessness of Said's phrases - "necessarily heartless," "by design irrecoverable" - as the fact that these insistent, repetitive statements about refugee collectives are curiously unconnected to the rest of the text, and remarkably unproductive for Said's general argument. In this sense, I would argue, they are symptomatic of the fact that Said, in his effort to invoke exile in the service of an intellectual ethics, *cannot find a place* for the anonymous masses of refugees. The refugees are obviously there, but he does not know what to do with them. This is why it is not his own troping of exile in the service of ethics that feels abstract to him; rather, it is those very concrete groups of people scattered in camps across the world whom he associates with "the abstractions of mass politics."

A second unresolved tension in the "Reflections" essay has to do with Said's ambivalent attitude to what one could call the ideology of home, the romantic discourse of belonging. Said, liberal, secular humanist that he is, does not like nationalism and patriotism. He is suspicious of any discourse that exalts collective identity, especially if it is linked to a particular geographical space. The problem is that his outrage about exile as a terrible fate derives its moral force from notions of home and belonging. You can't decry uprooting unless you attach a value to rootedness. Indeed, he approvingly quotes Simone Weil's phrase that "[t]o be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul." This sits uncomfortably with Said's rejection of what he calls the "thumping language of national pride, collective sentiments, group passions" (2000: 177). Said's problem, I would argue, is that he doesn't feel he can deny the anonymous masses of displaced peoples the right to an ideology of rootedness, even though he does demand that exiled *intellectuals* deny themselves that right.

This prescriptive asceticism comes more explicitly to the fore in *Representations of the Intellectual*. If "Reflections" is about the exile as intellectual, *Representations* is about the intellectual as exile. Over the course of his six lectures, Said identifies the true intellectual as a "nay-sayer," a rigorously independent, secular thinker who follows his own "universal and single standard" in criticizing the status quo, fights injustice, speaks "truth to power," sides with the "the weak and unrepresented" - and finds pleasure in this dauntingly lonely task. Exile, for Said, is the condition that most clearly represents this kind of attitude. He admits that not all exiles are nonconformist dissidents - he mentions people like Kissinger, who quickly managed to join the establishment and serve their host authorities - but Said is more interested in "the intellectual who because of exile cannot, or, more to the point, will not make the adjustment, preferring instead to remain outside the mainstream, unaccommodated, unco-opted, resistant ..." (ibid.: 52).

Representations rehearses many of the same points of the "Reflections" essay written ten years before; but it is telling that the refugees have disappeared, and that Said seems to have lost his earlier hesitations about turning exile into a redemptive trope: "while it is an *actual* condition, exile is also for my purposes a *metaphorical* condition. By that I mean that my diagnosis of the intellectual in exile derives from the social and political history of dislocation and migration ... but is not limited to it" (1994: 52). Metaphorical or "metaphysical" exiles are outsiders within their own community. Whereas some intellectuals, who "belong fully to the society as it is, who flourish in it without an overwhelming sense of dissonance or dissent" can be called "yea-sayers," Said's figurative exiles are "nay-sayers," "at odds with their society and therefore outsiders and exiles so far as privileges, power, and honors are concerned." The nay-sayers are like exiles in that they are never "fully adjusted, always feeling outside the chatty, familiar world inhabited by natives" and tend to "avoid and even dislike the trappings of accommodation and national well-being": "Exile for the intellectual in this metaphysical sense is restlessness, movement, constantly being unsettled, and unsettling others" (1994: 52-3).

As Williams points out, the image of the ideal intellectual proposed by Said - a dissenter, amateur, and rigorous individualist - relies heavily on "an essentially literary myth, fashioning the intellectual as a kind of existential hero who stands by her- or himself, alone, warding off power, without any social ties but simply drawn on by truth" (1997: 55). The principal redeeming feature of Said's intellectual, Williams concludes, is a Kantian kind of *disinterestedness*. The exile's position is perceived as clean and pure, free of the messiness of institutional interests, struggles for prominence and power, or personal ambition and self-

promotion. Curiously, then, “Said’s definition of political engagement and the intellectual’s purchase on politics is finally based on *aesthetic* criteria” (ibid.: 57).

The same is true for Ayala. In fact, his rhetoric is at times uncannily similar to Said’s. In *Razón del mundo*, Ayala describes the intellectual’s ideal attitude as one of abnegation, sacrifice, and selfishness: the intellectual “will have to preserve his faculties, isolated and intact, like a little island of vigilant reason” (1962: 125). This, Ayala writes, is a difficult task – “there is no heroism comparable to that of implacable solitude” – and one that requires a kind of courage not likely to garner much public recognition: “Who will recognize in that irritating, obstinate, inveterate lack of solidarity the self-sacrificing dedication to a mission ...?” (1962: 125).

Although Said and Ayala differ with respect to the intellectual’s involvement in politics – anathema for Ayala, imperative for Said – their exile-based intellectual ethics shares one main problem: It is hopelessly idealist. Their construction of life in exile as well as their conception of the intellectual’s existence almost completely ignores the material circumstances of both. They do not address issues of employment, legal status, housing, or access to the means of intellectual production (publishers, media outlets, and the like).⁴ This oversight is problematic: If these crucial preconditions for intellectual work are never a given, they are even less so in situations of displacement. Intellectuals always find themselves struggling for survival and prominence in a particular public and economic sphere. For exiles, that struggle is all the more necessary, all the more difficult, and all the more likely to require complex negotiations in which an intellectual is forced to make concessions. Not the kind of personal sacrifices for the sake of ethical principles that Said and Ayala call for, but sacrifices *of* ethical principles for the sake of survival. As Kettler points out, there is a “fundamental falsity in Said’s evocation of the exile as a post-modern or post-colonial hero”; it fails to “attend to the conjunctions between exile and phenomena of power and legitimacy” (2005: 271).

Said’s depiction of the intellectual’s ethical position as a matter of a “set of concrete choices” (1994: xv) – insider or outsider, yea-sayer or nay-sayer – is therefore misleading. So is the opposition he sets up between co-optation, accommodation, and self-interest on the one hand, and exile, autonomy, and disinterestedness on the other. In fact, if we have to stick to binarisms, it would make much more sense to turn Said’s model around: Real-life intellectual exiles, having lost their normal economic support network, including their audiences

⁴ “Said,” Williams observes, “ascribes a free-floating quality to an intellectual who by his definition speaks to a public sphere, but he fails to account for the channels through which one might gain access to that public sphere” (1997: 56).

and media access, are much more vulnerable to co-optation and institutional dependency.⁵

It is entirely unclear how Ayala's and Said's intellectual, exiled or not, is supposed to put bread on the table, or get his voice heard. This lacuna is all the more poignant given the clear, though largely unacknowledged, autobiographical dimension of their texts. If, as Williams argues, *Representations* can be read as a form of self-legitimation, "an apologia, offering an explanation for Said's career" (1997: 57-58), the same can be said of Ayala's prescriptions. Both, however, fail to indicate how their calls for discipline, renunciation, and self-imposed marginality relate to their own institutional positions as well-paid, tenured, prestigious academics with ready access to the media. If intellectual exile is about a struggle for legitimacy, for symbolic capital, both Said and Ayala can be said to have been extremely successful. As Williams writes of Said, "his career has been marked by all the signposts of prominence and recognized by plethora of elite 'legitimizing bodies,'" signalling the "consecration of his position within the academic-intellectual field" (1997: 50). Said does purport to talk about intellectuals' relation to institutions and authorities, but the rhetorical register of his texts exonerates him from having to go into the nitty-gritty details of daily life.

Max Aub does go into those details. From a material and institutional point of view, he is in fact the only truly marginalized intellectual of the three, and therefore the most clearly exilic in Said's sense. Interestingly, this position allows him to be both more principled *and* realistic than Said and Ayala. Unlike Said, for instance, Aub has no trouble squaring the fate of the anonymous masses of refugees with his own, for the simple reason that, as a former concentration camp inmate and forced laborer, he has been one of them. And if Said can find no place for the refugees in his reflections on exile, they find a meaningful home, as characters, in Aub's literary work.⁶ Aub was also more truly exilic than Said and Ayala in that he could not afford to be picky about the kind of work he accepted, including government assignments: He had a family to feed. Moreover, he was forced to come up with the printing costs for many of his own works, which were written for a Spanish audience (that had no access to them) and did not easily appeal to Mexican readers.

⁵ My book *Exile and Cultural Hegemony* argues that this was indeed the case for some of the Spanish Republicans who were exiled to Mexico after the Spanish Civil War.

⁶ Political refugees are prominently featured in *Campo francés* (1965), a screenplay about repression and concentration camps in prewar France; *San Juan*, a tragedy set on a boat with Jewish refugees; and *No*, a play about refugees on the East/West German border in the early postwar period.

Given these experiences, Aub's view of life in exile is rather disenchanting. Even though he likes to think of himself as an example of moral constancy and rectitude, he knows that exile does not automatically imply an exemplary ethical life, free of compromising attachments – to the contrary. Aub also knows that there is something sadly facile about the exile's claim to ethical purity, much in the same way that, for Orwell, Gandhi's asceticism smacked of vanity and laziness (Orwell 2002: 1353–4).

As we have seen, for Ayala and Said intellectual independence precludes any visceral sense of group solidarity. Ayala prefers never to align himself with any collective at all; Said only does so with much caution and reservation, guided by the motto "Never solidarity before criticism" (1994: 32). Aub, by contrast, advocates – and lives – a conscious affiliation with a political collective, whose identity is based on a shared trauma – banishment – and a shared ideal: a return to a Spain free of Franco. For Aub, then, the relationship of exiled intellectual to the larger community of the displaced is one of solidarity and representation.

Correspondingly, Aub, Ayala and Said also differ fundamentally in their ethical vision of exile. For Said and Ayala exile provides a refuge of subjectivity, and they conceive of exile as a condition of almost utopian freedom and enlightenment. Ayala's repeated comparison of the exiled intellectual to a hermit is appropriate: His ideal intellectual is a saintly figure, detached from the world. Curiously, something similar is true for Said, despite his repeated calls for "worldliness." In the end, Said's mobilization of exile for an ascetic intellectual ethics of renunciation also turns the intellectual into an unworldly hermit of sorts, someone who is able to go without the ideological consolations that the displaced masses need to survive. Said and Ayala associate collective commitments with corruption, self-interest and subservience, but it is legitimate to wonder whether the individualism they promote is really free of those negative aspects. Looking at Ayala's career path, the self-interest and ambition – not to say opportunism – are pretty obvious. In Said's case, there is a similar dissonance, bordering on bad faith, between his insistence on the need to resist the temptation of public recognition and the large amounts of it that he garnered in the course of his career. Speaking of the rhetorical excesses that characterize some types of exile writing, Ugarte mentions "the linguistic overcompensation of the exile who has not only an ax to grind but a life to vindicate." Indeed, if there is any overarching neuroticism to exile writing, it might well be the pervasive need for self-justification. In that sense, Ayala's and Said's texts *can* be called *exilic*.

Max Aub's political position, as said, was steadfast. At the same time, most of his literary work is about the impossibility of true steadfastness. It shows that exile is never pure, irremediably worldly, always a matter of negotiation and

therefore, inevitably, some form of betrayal.⁷ The ethics of exile as formulated by Said and Ayala, enamored as they are by notions of asceticism, autonomy, and disinterestedness, prefer to ignore this messy reality. Said's ethics of dissent is admirable and necessary; but, in the end, I don't think one need invoke exile in order to formulate it. In fact, I would strongly caution against any effort to derive an ethical example from any type of suffering. Exile destroys much more than it enables, and one should think twice before celebrating or romanticizing it in any way.

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⁷ Sophia McClennen, in her analysis of the exile writers Juan Goytisolo, Ariel Dorfman, and Cristina Peri Rossi, reaches a similar conclusion: "At a time when the exile was often heralded as a metaphor for a free-floating, deterritorialized, unfettered existence, these exiles wrote texts that challenged the notion that writers working on the margins can ever be free of social constraints, exposing such critical positions as naïve and untenable.... For these writers, free-floating transnational existence is illusory, because the exile, by definition, is grounded in a historical, political world that caused the conditions of his or her exile" (2004: 223).

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