

## **Tropes of Displacement, Displacement as Trope: Spaniards in Mexico and Latinos in the USA**

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In early 1938, in the midst of the Spanish Civil War, the Spanish poet Luis Cernuda went on a trip to England to give a series of lectures. Little did he expect he would die twenty-five years later in Mexico, without ever having returned to Spain. What he thought would be a couple of months' journey abroad in fact became a life-long exile. As one might imagine, the involuntary transition from travel to exile constituted a disconcerting switch. When he had first arrived in England, Cernuda felt completely out of place:

[M]oved by nostalgia for my land, I only thought of returning, as if I knew that, little by little, I would be distanced from it until I would be indifferent to returning or not. On the other hand, there are few foreigners, especially from southern countries, who do not experience a certain humiliation in England, a humiliation that stems from their inevitable feeling of inferiority in the face of the control the Englishman has over himself and his surroundings, and in the face of his manners, which are so delicate in a natural way, and which show, by contrast, the roughness, the rudeness of ours. England is the most civilized country I know, the country where the word civilization reached its fullest sense. In the face of that superiority one can only submit oneself and learn from it, or leave.

[M]ovido por la nostalgia de mi tierra, sólo pensaba en volver a ella, como si presintiera que, poco a poco, me iría distanciando hasta llegar a serme indiferente volver o no. De otra parte, pocos extranjeros, sobre

todo de países meridionales, dejan de experimentar en Inglaterra cierta humillación, nacida de la inferioridad inevitable ante el dominio del inglés sobre sí mismo y sobre el contorno, ante sus maneras, naturalmente tan delicadas, que muestran, por contraste, la tosquedad, la rudeza de las nuestras. Inglaterra es el país más civilizado que conozco, aquel donde la palabra civilización alcanzó su sentido pleno. Ante esa superioridad no hay sino someterse, y aprender de ella, o irse.<sup>1</sup>

And leaving is what Cernuda did, at least at first. He traveled to Paris with the idea of going back to Spain as soon as possible. But in France news about the civil war and the fact that Cernuda did not want to return to Spain only to be "an impotent witness to [its] ruin" made him decide to postpone his trip. The period immediately following this decision, he writes, was "one of the most miserable times in my life."<sup>2</sup> Then, however, Cernuda decided to take hold of his destiny. Even though he would never stop feeling "an intense nostalgia" for his homeland, he again crossed the Channel, learned English, and started reading English literature. Writing with hindsight in 1958, Cernuda recognized that this had been a crucial step in his literary development:

If I hadn't returned [to England], to learn English and... to get to know the country, I would lack the most important experience of my adult life. My stay in England corrected and completed some of what in myself and my poetry needed such a correction and completion. I learned a lot from English poetry, and if I had not read and studied it, my poetry would now be different, I'm not sure whether better or worse, but different without a doubt. I think it was Pascal who wrote: 'you would not seek me out if you hadn't found me,' and if I sought that teaching and

<sup>1</sup> Luis Cernuda, *Obra completa. Prosa I*, vol. 2, ed. Derek Harris and Luis Maristany, (Madrid: Siruela, 1994), 644.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

experience of English poetry it was because I had already found it, because I was predisposed toward it.

Si no hubiese regresado [a Inglaterra], aprendiendo la lengua inglesa y...a conocer el país, me faltaría la experiencia más considerable de mis años maduros. La estancia en Inglaterra corrigió y completó algo de lo que en mí y en mis versos requería dicha corrección y compleción. Aprendí mucho de la poesía inglesa, sin cuya lectura y estudio mis versos serían hoy otra cosa, no sé si mejor o peor, pero sin duda otra cosa. Creo que fue Pascal quien escribió: "no me buscarías si no me hubieras encontrado", y si yo busqué aquella enseñanza y experiencia de la poesía inglesa fue porque ya la había encontrado, porque para ella estaba predispuesto.<sup>3</sup>

In this way, by shedding the passive victim hood of his exile in order to turn it into an active acceptance and even embrace of his fate, Cernuda managed partly to convert his exile back into the trip or journey it was meant to be in the first place. Still, however, much of his future work would maintain the tension between the exilic and the journey-like reading of his life. In the poem "Peregrino" (Pilgrim), for instance, written not too long before his death, Cernuda writes:

Returning? Let him return who,  
 After long years, after a long journey,  
 Is tired of the road and eager to see  
 His land, his house, his friends,  
 The love that awaits him faithfully at his homecoming.

But you? Return? You don't plan on going back,

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 645.

But on continuing to go forward, freely,

.....

Go on, continue and don't go back,  
 Faithful until the end of the road and your life,  
 You should not yearn for an easier fate,  
 Your feet treading earth not yet trodden,  
 Your eyes facing what's never been seen before.

¿Volver? Vuelva el que tenga,  
 Tras largos años, tras un largo viaje,  
 Cansancio del camino y la codicia  
 De su tierra, se casa, sus amigos,  
 Del amor que al regreso fiel le espere.

Mas, ¿tú? ¿Volver? Regresar no piensas,  
 Sino seguir libre adelante,

.....

Sigue, sigue adelante y no regreses,  
 Fiel hasta el fin del camino y tu vida,  
 No echés de menos un destino más fácil,  
 Tus pies sobre la tierra antes no hollada,  
 Tus ojos frente a lo antes nunca visto.<sup>4</sup>

• In this last poem, to be sure, it is hard to determine whether Cernuda's exile has not in fact turned into a never-ending journey. Even so, there is a crucial conceptual difference between exile and travel. Both denote displacement and border crossing, but their connotations are radically opposed.

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<sup>4</sup> Cernuda, *Poesía completa*, ed. Derek Harris and Luis Maristany, (Madrid: Siruela, 1993), 530-31.

Travel is generally undertaken at one's own initiative and associated with an active search for development, enrichment, and learning. In this sense, traveling represents progress and growth. Exile, on the other hand, is an inevitable, fate-induced expulsion: a loss or fall that happens to us against our will. While travel is undertaken in order to return to the point of origin with, so to speak, something to show for it – a positive change – exiles also seek to return, but they want to do so *unchanged*. (The immigrant's displacement is different in that the return is possible but not necessarily desired.) What exiles long for is a perfect restoration. This is an impossible desire, of course, not only because they are physically barred from going back, but also because their return home would have to coincide with a return to the past. The mode of exile, then, is essentially one of misery and disgrace; it is the mode of tragedy. The prevailing mode of travel, by contrast, is that of the epic narrative: of *Bildung*, adventure, and self-realization.

It is no coincidence that both travel and exile have proven to be popular existential metaphors, tropes used to represent both an individual's life and humankind's history as a whole. If, in both Bible and myth, the human condition is defined as originating in an exilic fall, an expulsion from Eden, more optimistic and progressive readings have countered this tragic – and, at bottom, reactionary – trope with a representation of life as an exhilarating, if at times difficult, journey toward individual and collective self-fulfillment. Even today, our post-modern West finds itself continually wavering between exilic and travel-inspired readings of history and life. In fact, of course, throughout modernity hopeful notions of improvement and growth have coexisted with anxieties about decadence and degradation: When has the modern aspiration for progress not been accompanied by an exilic nostalgia for what is being lost along the way?

Cernuda, for his part, had chosen to see existence in the tragic key of exile long before his trip to England. Life, for him, had always been a fall from Eden. In his case Eden was embodied by the Seville of his childhood, in

comparison to which even Madrid was a valley of tears. Living in the Spanish capital in his mid-twenties, as a young man without connections and gay to boot, he "could only feel hostility toward that society in which," in his own words, he "lived as a stranger."<sup>5</sup> In 1938, however, when his exile passed from the figurative into the realm of the literal, he was suddenly faced with the question of how to confront his all-too-real uprootedness. This is in fact the quandary that all exiles and refugees have to deal with, in one way or another: How to make sense of a displacement that is characterized, precisely, by its injustice and absurdity, that is, by its senselessness? How to read or represent displacement to oneself?

In this respect, there is an obvious tension between the tropological uses of displacement and the "real thing." The trope of exile can be easily evoked for a situation in which there is no geographical displacement at all. This is especially true for the notion of "internal exile," which has been used frequently in relation to the situation of oppositional intellectuals in Franco Spain, although in this context the term is not without controversy.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, one can easily imagine an exiled writer questioning the legitimacy of the figurative claims to exile on the part of a colleague who has never really left the comfort of his home. But in the same way that the trope of exile can be invoked by non-exiles, there is no reason why actual exiles should necessarily read their own displacement through the exilic trope. They might choose to defy fate – or fact – and interpret their tragic experience as a form of travel, that is, as an experience allowing for growth, development, and learning.

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<sup>5</sup> Cernuda, *Obra completa. Prosa I*, 632.

<sup>6</sup> Judith Shklar defines internal exile as the situation of "men and women who have been so completely isolated by the injustice they perceive around them" that they are "morally isolated" and are "reduced to living in accordance with no rule other than [their] private conscience" (*Political thought and political thinkers*, ed. Stanley Hoffmann, [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998], 53, 48). In the context of oppositional intellectuals in Franco Spain, the concept has been rejected by some critics as a euphemism for Francoist repression, or, conversely, a way for the conformist or collaborationist intelligentsia to acquire a form of undeserved heroic patina. See José María Naharro-Calderón, "Des-lindes de exilio," in *El exilio de las Españas de 1939 en las Américas: ¿Adónde fue la canción?*, ed. Naharro-Calderón, (Barcelona: Anthropos, 1991), 33.

In the remainder of this essay I want to briefly focus on two concrete cases of "crossed cultures," Spanish Republicans in Mexico and Latinos in the United States, to investigate how displacement is read tropologically within the binary of exile and travel. I want to investigate why certain tropes are chosen over others, and what the possible consequences of these readings are at the level of ideology.

Cernuda was one of the first Spaniards of his generation to find himself exiled as a result of the war. He would spend fourteen difficult and lonely years in England and the United States, until he moved to Mexico in 1952. By then, around twenty-thousand Spanish Republicans had been living there since the late 1930s. No country sheltered more of them than Mexico: Even before the Republican defeat of April 1939, Mexican President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-40) had generously decided to open the country's doors to an unlimited number of Spanish refugees. For these Spaniards, taking the boat to Latin America had been an awkward experience. Most of them had never been to Latin America, and they hardly knew anything about Mexico. Yet they were well aware of the irony enclosed in the fact that they, as former Spanish colonizers, were now begging one of their former colonies for asylum. Four and a half centuries after 1492, the epic of the Conquest was repeated in the tragic mode of exile. As poet León Felipe wrote in *Español del éxodo y del llanto* [The Spaniard of the Exodus and Tears]:

Today we live in a world in which everything falls apart and in which every attempt to build is in vain. In other times, in periods of ascension or plenitude, dust tends to stick together and to be cooperative, obedient, in both structure and form. Now form and structure fall apart and dust reclaims its freedom and autonomy. No one is capable of organizing anything... No one has anything else in their hands but dust. Dust and tears....

And that is my anguish now: Where do I put my dreams and my tears so that they make sense, so that they be the signs of a language, and form an intelligible and harmonious poem?...

Spain is dead. Dead. After Franco the undertakers will come, and the archeologists. And the vultures and foxes that lurk in the mountain heights. What else do you expect?...An exodus does not return!

Vivimos hoy en un mundo que se deshace y donde todo empeño por construir es vano. En otros tiempos, en épocas de ascensión o plenitud, el polvo tiende a aglutinarse y a cooperar, obediente, en la estructura y en la forma. Ahora la forma y la estructura se desmoronan y el polvo reclama su libertad y autonomía. Nadie puede organizar nada.... Nadie tiene hoy en sus manos más que polvo. Polvo y lágrimas....

Y ésta es mi angustia ahora: ¿Dónde coloco yo mis sueños y mi llanto para que aparezcan con sentido, sean los signos de un lenguaje y formen un poema inteligible y armonioso?...

Este libro no es más que llanto —¿qué otra cosa puede producir hoy un español? ¿Qué otra cosa puede producir hoy el hombre?—....

España está muerta. Muerta. Detrás de Franco vendrán los enterradores y los arqueólogos. Y los buitres y las zorras que acechan en las cumbres. ¿Qué otra cosa esperaréis? ¡Los éxodos no vuelven!<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless, for León Felipe the tragedy of the exodus is in the end a fruitful one: "a people, a homeland, are only a man's cradle. One leaves the earth that gave birth to us behind like one leaves behind diapers. And one day you are a man before being a Spaniard" [un pueblo, una patria, no es más que la cuna de un hombre. Se deja la tierra que nos parió como se dejan los pañales. Y un día se es hombre antes que español].

<sup>7</sup> León Felipe, *Obras completas*, ed. Adolfo Ballano Bueno and Andrés Ramón Vázquez, (Buenos Aires: Losada, 1963), 116-17, 121, 123.



And perhaps this which now seems so terrible to some of us Spaniards of the exodus is, when all is said and done, no more than the destiny of man. Because that which man has always sought to attain through politics, through dogma, through workers' internationals, won't that be delivered to us through tears?...

Spaniard of the exodus, listen to me calmly.

In our exodus there is no pride like in that of the Hebrews. Who comes here is not the chosen man, but man...

Spaniards:

...

A people has died,

But man hasn't.

Because tears still exist,

Man is here, still standing,

...

All the light of the Earth

Man will see one day

Through the window of a tear...

Spaniards,

Spaniards of the exodus and tears:

Raise your heads,

And don't frown on me,

Because I'm not the one who sings the praise of destruction,

But of hope.

Y tal vez esto, que nos parece ahora tan terrible a algunos españoles del éxodo, no sea en fin de cuentas más que el destino del hombre. Porque lo

que el hombre ha buscado siempre por la política, por el dogma, por las internacionales obreras ¿no nos lo traerá el llanto?...

Español del éxodo y del llanto, escúchame sereno.

En nuestro éxodo no hay orgullo como en el hebreo. Aquí no viene el hombre elegido, sino el hombre....

Españoles:

...

Se ha muerto un pueblo  
pero no se ha muerto el hombre.  
Porque aún existe el llanto,  
el hombre está aquí de pie,

...

Toda la luz de la Tierra  
la verá un día el hombre  
por la ventana de una lágrima...

Españoles,  
españoles del éxodo y del llanto:  
levantad la cabeza  
y no me miréis con ceño,  
porque yo no soy el que canta la destrucción  
sino la esperanza.<sup>8</sup>

It is clear that León Felipe immediately makes the connection between the Republicans' displacement and the literary legacy of exile, most importantly that of the Jews. But it is also clear that he resists the fatalism of the exilic condition: For him, the tears of exile will be fertile and give rise to something new.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 123-25.

For both Cernuda and León Felipe, then, the tragedy of exile, when embraced as such, turns out to be fruitful, in both a literary and existential sense. Other Spanish Civil War exiles opted for a less dialectic view of their fate, however, rejecting the pessimism of the tragic trope altogether. Instead, they went in search of a way to remove the ironic sting from their displacement and simply interpret it as a second epic journey – or even a homecoming of sorts. Writer Paulino Masip claimed, for instance, that his forced displacement to Latin America in fact turned out to be the realization of a long-held desire. In his *Cartas a un español emigrado*, published immediately after his arrival in Mexico in 1939, he claimed he had always known that, as a writer, he would be lacking something important unless he got in touch with the Spanish-speaking world across the Atlantic:

I became sincerely convinced that a Spanish writer could not be whole and complete as long as he lacked... direct contact... with the other half of the soul of his language, which has been spread throughout the countries of Spanish America. When it was time to go, I embarked on the journey with the enormous hope of realizing my destiny as a writer, a destiny that otherwise would have remained crippled.

llegué al convencimiento sincero que un escritor español no podía serlo redondo y completo mientras le faltara...el contacto directo...con la otra mitad del alma de su idioma que reside esparcida por los países de la América hispana. Cuando me llegó la hora del viaje lo emprendí con la enorme esperanza de realizar mi destino de escritor que amenazaba quedarse manco.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Paulino Masip, *Cartas a un español emigrado*, (México, D.F.: Junta de Cultura Española, 1939), 67.

The most elaborate re-troting of the Spaniards' exile experience was undertaken by philosopher José Gaos, who even invented a neologism to that effect, proposing to replace the concept of *destierro* (uprootedness or displacement) with that of *transtierro* (transplantation or "transplacement"). Gaos initially coined his concept of *transtierro* to express what he considered to be the extraordinary integration of the Spaniards in Mexico, which he attributed to the Spaniards' cultural, historical and ideological bonds with the host country and its revolutionary regime. Gaos maintained that the Spaniards' exile experience in Mexico was therefore more blissful than traumatic.

Gaos, a disciple of the Madrid philosopher José Ortega y Gasset, was Ortega's main representative in Mexico, and the concept of *transtierro* has an obvious Orteguian ring to it. To use Ortega's famous phrase, Gaos's coining of *transtierro* expresses a desire to "save the circumstances" – those of exile in Mexico – and to actively embrace the existential condition as a vocation: what Ortega called a destiny or life project. As Gaos explains in *En torno a la filosofía mexicana*, his own exile experience in fact led him to rethink the idea of national belonging. Instead of a passive acceptance of the fatherland as a natural given, Gaos proposes a more active recognition or appropriation of it along Orteguian lines. One should be able, he says, to *choose* one's nation based on a sense of compatibility. This new notion of nationality can be best explained by comparing one's love for the fatherland with one's love for a woman. The first, given relation of individuals with their fatherland is one of "natural community," a relation which justifies the expression *madre patria* (motherland). But Gaos believes that this form of community needs to be followed by a conscious choice for that fatherland, so that the relation of community can turn into one of *society*. This new, social relation would justify expressions such as *esposa patria* (spouse land) or *amante patria* (lover land). Even better, according to Gaos, would be the phrase *hija patria* (daughter land) because the father-daughter relationship expresses "a peculiar, mixed relationship of community founded in society" [una peculiar relación mixta de

comunidad fundada en sociedad]: In the same way that a father “makes” a daughter, individuals have to work to “make” a country into their fatherland.<sup>10</sup>

As noted, here it is not hard to recognize Ortega’s idea of life as a *quehacer*, a project to be fashioned. One’s true fatherland, Gaos concludes, is not so much “one from where one comes as from a past that is already fashioned” [aquella de donde viene como de un pasado hecho] but rather “one toward which one goes as toward a future still to be fashioned” [aquella adonde va como a un futuro que hacer].<sup>11</sup> In other words, if the Spanish Republicans integrated in Mexico better than in Spain itself – which is what Gaos claims – it is because Mexico was very similar to the utopian nation they had tried but were not able to install in Spain: a liberal nation that would promote general well-being and social justice.<sup>12</sup> For Gaos, in other words, the most important factor for the Spaniards to “adapt” so well to their host country was the affinity between revolutionary Mexico and the Spanish Republic.<sup>13</sup> There is, then, no trace of the tragic left in Gaos’s reading of the Spaniards’ displacement.

In the case of the Spanish Republicans, their reading of their own exile experience in the mode of travel or even home-coming tended to borrow heavily from the Pan-Hispanist tradition. The Pan-Hispanist assumption that Mexico, in spite of its independence and decolonization, was still culturally at one with Spain, allowed them to represent their displacement not as uprooting but as a form of “getting to know their other half.” As I have argued elsewhere, this anti-exilic reading of the Republican experience in Mexico was partly driven by a specific political motivation: It was an interpretation that proved politically beneficial to both the exiles and their host regime.<sup>14</sup> Gaos’s claim that the Mexican revolutionary party had in fact succeeded in building the society the

<sup>10</sup> José Gaos, *En torno a la filosofía mexicana*, México, D.F.: Alianza Ed. (Mexicana, 1980), 130.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 127-130.

<sup>12</sup> Gaos, “La adaptación de un español a la sociedad hispanoamericana,” *Revista de Occidente* 4 (1966), 173.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>14</sup> See Sebastiaan Faber, *Exile and Cultural Hegemony: Spanish Intellectuals in Mexico, 1939-1975*, (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2002).

Spaniards had tried to build in Spain, for instance, in fact legitimized decades of authoritarian rule. In the same way the Spaniards' sense of politeness and gratitude, as well as the fact that they were explicitly barred from taking active part in Mexican politics, discouraged them from pointing out the painful or frustrating aspects of their exile experience. Starting in the 1970s, however, oral history revealed the more negative sides of the Spaniards' displacement.<sup>15</sup>

The same wavering between epic and tragedy, between conquest and alienation, or between being lost and coming home, is found in the different readings of the Latino experience in the United States. While, on the one hand, Latinos are regularly represented as lost in a hostile Anglo world, on the other hand there is the notion of the Latino displacement to the North as the "reconquest" of a lost homeland. In this latter case, exile is turned from a senseless act of injustice into a form of justice finally done. Here I will limit myself to just a couple of recent examples: that of Ilan Stavans, currently one of the most important brokers of Latino culture in the U.S., and Richard Rodriguez, a prominent, albeit controversial, Latino author and public intellectual.

In *The Hispanic Condition*, whose revised edition was published in 2001, Stavans emphatically represented the Latino experience in the exilic mode. Interestingly enough, he used the exilic trope not only to characterize the Latino experience in the United States, but as a *general* characteristic of Latino or Hispanic cultural identity as a whole. (Stavans employs the terms Latino and Hispanic interchangeably, and at times uses them to refer to the whole of the Spanish-speaking world, including Spain and Latin America.) Stavans's debt to Octavio Paz is evident. For Stavans, the Hispanic or Latino "psyche" should be associated with the labyrinth or the maze; its most salient representatives are tortured characters such as schizophrenic painter Martín Ramírez, stranded

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<sup>15</sup> This is clear, for instance, in the extensive oral history project undertaken by the Mexican Instituto Nacional de Historia y Antropología (INAH), the transcripts of which can be found at the Archivo General de la Guerra Civil in Salamanca, Spain.

conquistador Cabeza de Vaca, and, of course, Don Quijote.<sup>16</sup> “Displacement, as a struggle, as a way of life, as a condition,” Stavans writes, “is, and will remain, a Hispanic signature.... To be expelled from home, to wander through geographic and linguistic diasporas, is essential to our nature.”<sup>17</sup>

*The Hispanic Condition* is a problematic book, because Stavans’ reading of Hispanic culture as an essentially exilic – that is, lost or fallen – culture leads him at some moments to describe it in very negative, even pathological terms. (Here, too, his debt to Paz is evident.) To give just a handful of examples: Latinos, Stavans writes, “are not comfortable with democratic dialogue.” “Intolerance,” he states, “is an important trademark of the Hispanic soul”; “Hispanics suffer from a frightening absence of critical thinking”; “[We have] a long-standing, rampant racism running through our blood”; Latinos have a “dogmatic, villainous approach to sex”; “Courting women with serenades and flowers, getting them into bed, undressing them, fucking them...only to throw them out the door, that’s every Hispanic male’s hidden dream....”; “Incest and promiscuity are recurring phenomena, and extramarital affairs... are also pervasive,” and so on.<sup>18</sup>

Curiously, however, in the same year that the revised *Hispanic Condition* came out, Stavans also published a memoir, *On Borrowed Words*, in which he represents his own personal experience as a displaced Latino in the United States in the epic, triumphant mode of the journey. As a member of the Jewish immigrant community, Stavans confessed he had never felt at home in Mexico City, where he was born and raised. By contrast, he experienced his move to New York to attend graduate school as an immense liberation. When first arriving in New York with a full-ride scholarship for the Jewish Theological Seminary, Stavans writes, he “felt like an immigrant dreaming of a

<sup>16</sup> Ilan Stavans, *The Hispanic Condition: The Power of a People*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed., (New York, Rayo, 2001), 108-109.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 140, 223, 123, 133, 136, 140.

"incorporated" the Americas into "universality," as Spanish exile Juan Larrea stated in 1940.<sup>23</sup>

Both the exilic and the travel-like reading of displacement, then, are prone to slip into ideology. But I would argue that, in the end, the triumphalist, epic mode of the journey is more dangerous in this respect than the tragic mode of exile. Reading displacement as a fulfillment of destiny tends to lead to an obscuring or erasure of suffering and of difference. In this sense, the epic mode of the journey is also the mode of conformism and acceptance of the status quo: In the end, one has to conclude that Rodríguez and Stavans *want* Latino culture to be "mainstream." The exilic mode, on the other hand, undoubtedly holds the danger of a reactionary longing for a better past, and of political paralysis. Ultimately, however, the exilic position is also – as Edward Said has been arguing for a long time – the most self-conscious and critical one.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> "España Peregrina", *España Peregrina*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1940), 6.

<sup>24</sup> See for example Edward W. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual*, (New York: Vintage, 1996).



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Sebastiaan Faber, Professor of Hispanic Studies at Oberlin College, Ohio, is the author and editor of four books, including *Exile and Cultural Hegemony: Spanish Intellectuals in Mexico, 1939-1975* (2002) and *Anglo-American Hispanists and the Spanish Civil War: Hispanophilia, Commitment, and Discipline* (2008), as well as some fifty articles on Spanish and Latin American cultural history. His areas of interest include the Spanish Civil War, political exile, historical memory, the institutional history of Hispanism, contemporary Spanish fiction and film, and the theory of ideology. Born and raised in the Netherlands, he holds degrees from the University of Amsterdam and U.C. Davis. He has been teaching at Oberlin since 1999.

new life."<sup>19</sup> The memoir in fact describes how Stavans managed to "become Anglo" through a disciplined act of willful self-transformation. Central in the book is the moment he becomes an American citizen: "Am I ready to renounce my Mexican citizenship? Sure —why long for a past I felt only accidentally attached to? I have fulfilled by obligations and am ready to become an American.... [The United States] has been good to me — very good indeed."<sup>20</sup> It is clear that Stavans' triumphalist representation of his own journey northward is ultimately driven by a sense of Anglo superiority. Even more than in *The Hispanic Condition*, for instance, in his memoir Stavans tends to speak of American culture and the English language in almost exclusively positive terms, while he has mostly negative things to say about Mexico, Hispanic culture, Spanish and Latin American literature, and even the Spanish language.<sup>21</sup>

In this sense, Stavans's memoir shares much with Richard Rodriguez's celebrated *Hunger for Memory*, first published in 1982. In the prologue to that book Rodriguez proudly stated that he, once a Spanish-speaking immigrant kid from Sacramento, had written the book as "a middle-class American man."<sup>22</sup> Like Stavans's memoir, *Hunger for Memory* is meant to be read as a success

<sup>19</sup> Stavans, *On Borrowed Words: A Memoir of Language*, (New York: Viking, 2001), 10.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 182-84.

<sup>21</sup> "Hispanic civilization," he writes for instance, "is so unconcerned with ideas, so irritable about debate, so unconcerned with systematic inquiries" (7-8). Mexico in particular "has an endemic allergy toward open debate" (27). In Latin American literature, Horacio Quiroga's maxim that a young writer should imitate his masters "has encouraged derivativeness and perhaps even plagiarism." Whereas in New York, "[e]veryone reads," in "my illiterate Mexico... the written word has always felt like an imposition, a foreign import" (18). Stavans, to be sure, claims to "adore" the Spanish language; but his love of English is clearly much greater. *Don Quijote* is a masterpiece, but Cervantes, though a "fabulous storyteller" is "a lousy stylist" (43); his novel reads better in the English translation (223). The same goes for García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and for Borges's entire oeuvre. The fact that Borges's texts are "breath-taking" in English is to Stavans "proof of their transcendence, for English, I now tell myself, is the language of true literature" (42-43). The Spanish language—"among the most intolerant of Western tongues" (203)—is in fact "somewhat undeserving of the literature it has created" (223). While "English is almost mathematical," with rules that "manifest themselves in an iron fashion," the Romance roots of Spanish "make it a free-flowing, imprecise language, with long and uncooperative words" (223). "Spanish, in spite of being the third-most-important language on the globe, after Chinese and English, is peripheral. It is a language that flourishes in the outskirts of culture, more reactive than active" (223).

<sup>22</sup> Richard Rodriguez, *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez*, (New York: Viking, 1982), 3.

story of Americanization: Like Stavans, Richard Rodriguez chose to view his own experience in the U.S. in the epic mode of self-realization. Nevertheless, right below the surface of Rodriguez's triumphalist narrative one easily perceives an undercurrent of exilic loss. His struggle to become a middle-class, English-speaking American alienated him from his Spanish-speaking parents. Rodriguez admits that this process was very painful, but he argues that this pain is inevitable and, in essence, a good thing. The reader, however, is not convinced. It is also important to note that Rodriguez, for all his will to conform, has in the end become an exemplary anti-conformist intellectual – original, controversial, and always unsettling.

If, during the 1960s and 70s, Latino identity was generally constructed in radical opposition to Anglo and European Spanish culture, one could argue that Stavans and Rodriguez represent a new kind of Latino identity construction: Stavans's *Hispanic Condition* explicitly re-includes Spain as part of the "Hispanic soul," and both Stavans and Rodriguez no longer see the Anglo element as alien to the Latino. On the contrary, they claim to have become a successful Latino through a process of Anglification. In this sense, one could say that their life stories belong to the discourse of Pan-Americanism. In the same way that the Spanish exiles in Mexico, in their attempt to turn their displacement from exile into a journey, reverted to the Pan-Hispanist tradition, Stavans and Rodriguez turn to the old Pan-Americanist notion that Anglo and Hispanic culture can overcome their respective flaws by merging, or "marrying," and thus constitute a new, superior kind of civilization. Seen in this light, the apparent contradiction between Stavans's *Hispanic Condition* and his memoir is resolved. For him, Latino culture's exilic condition is in fact a flaw of sorts, a defect that can only be overcome through integration into Anglo culture. Similarly, the Spaniards' pan-Hispanist celebration of their displacement to Mexico sometimes seemed to imply that Mexico *needed* the Spaniards, and that their presence filled a Mexican lack, in the same way that, in 1492, Spain had

**THE FUNCTION  
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Edited by  
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With a Foreword by  
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The Edwin Mellen Press  
Lewiston•Queenston•Lampeter

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

The function of contemporary travel narratives in the French, Anglo and Latin Americas : mixing and expanding cultural identity / edited by Jean-François Côté [;] with a foreword by Roland Walter.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-0-7734-1545-4 (hardcover)

ISBN-10: 0-7734-1545-9 (hardcover)

1. Travelers' writings--History and criticism. 2. America--In literature. 3. Group identity--America. 4. Travel in literature. I. Côté, Jean-François, 1959-

PN56.T7F86 2011

809'.93327--dc22

2011014864

*hors série.*

A CIP catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

Photo credit: Hugo Ferland-Dionne

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The Edwin Mellen Press  
Box 450  
Lewiston, New York  
USA 14092-0450

The Edwin Mellen Press  
Box 67  
Queenston, Ontario  
CANADA L0S 1L0

The Edwin Mellen Press, Ltd.  
Lampeter, Ceredigion, Wales  
UNITED KINGDOM SA48 8LT

Printed in the United States of America

Auburn University Libraries  
Ralph Brown Draughon Library  
231 Mell Street  
Auburn University, AL 36849-5606