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At home in words: Exile, writing and twentieth century literature

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The University of Arizona, 1992

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AT HOME IN WORDS: EXILE, WRITING
AND TWENTIETH-CENTURY LITERATURE

by

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As members of the Final Examination Committee, we certify that we have read the dissertation prepared by Brooke Fredericksen entitled At Home in Words: Exile, Writing, and Twentieth-Century Literature and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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SIGNED: Brooke Frederickson
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ABSTRACT

The twentieth century is a time when the discourse of exile is prevalent in culture and literature as well as in political life. This study explores the nature of exile, its relation to Western culture, politics, and writing through the use of critical theory and specific literary works.

The extended introductory chapter examines how stories of exile function as formative concepts in the Hebrew Bible. Foremost is the story of the flight from Egypt and the wandering in the wilderness as told in the Book of Exodus, but examples of separation as a type of exile are also examined, specifically in the laws in Exodus and Leviticus. The idea of exile as a paradox in Western culture and literature is developed in this chapter. While exile was already known as a punishment, the Hebrew Bible portrays exile as a positive idea that enables the formation of religious and cultural identity.

An examination of exile as a sociopolitical concept also comprises this chapter. The relation of Karl Marx's definition of alienation (entfremdung) to exile is explored, and exile in its negative aspect, as punishment and estrangement from family and self, is discussed. As a counterweight to this negative aspect, the theories of Michel Foucault on power and knowledge are studied, and exile is
proposed as a resistance to power. Finally, the relation of exile to discourses on writing and literature in the twentieth century is examined, specifically in the work of Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes.

The remaining three chapters of the work are devoted to three culturally diverse twentieth century authors. Chapter Two examines the work of Egyptian-born Jewish poet Edmond Jabès, whose poetry and meditations are interwoven with thoughts on Judaism, exile, and writing. Chapter Three takes up the work of Cristina Peri Rossi, an Uruguayan fiction writer and poet, who fled to Spain in 1973. Peri Rossi's work not only creates interesting fictional homes wherein characters and readers alike can dwell, but is also concerned with the issue of feminism and women's particular relation to exile. Finally, the work of Modernist author Gertrude Stein is explored, raising and examining questions of exile in her work.
PREFACE

As a child I read a book entitled The Man Without a Country which affected me in some very curious ways and which has remained buried somewhere in my memory since that time. Written by Edward Everett Hale in 1886, it concerns a fictional character, Lt. Philip Nolan, who, convicted of treason, was sentenced to expulsion from the United States to spend the rest of his life aboard one Navy ship or another, continuously roaming the seas in the most marginal of all existences. The predicament at the heart of this story has fascinated and bothered me all these years since I first read of it. On the one hand, it is a terrible thing to be forced out of one's country, forced to give up one's home, family, possessions, profession, all that is known and familiar. I could certainly sympathize with poor Philip Nolan who, once he came to understand the enormity of his sentence, regretted the outburst that made it reality (at his trial, Nolan swears, "Damn the United States! I wish I may never hear of the United States again!" thus sealing his own fate.¹). How terrible to have to live with the sadness and loss of home; how awful it must be not to have a home.

Yet something else was at work in my mind, the other side of this dilemma. Wouldn't it be liberating, exhilarating, to be freed from a place, from a world where all was known, to be able to roam about at will, looking at
every place with a different perspective, including one's own former home, with the gaze of an outsider? I was angry at Philip Nolan throughout the book, wishing he would escape from his shipboard exile, jump ship in Egypt or one of the Mediterranean countries or South America and create for himself a new home, a new life, the existence of a discoverer, of a wanderer in search of knowledge. Instead, Nolan spends his exilic life creating shrines to his lost country in his various staterooms:

I could not help a glance round, which showed me what a little shrine he had made of the box he was lying in. The stars and stripes were triced up above and around a picture of Washington, and he had painted a majestic eagle, with lightnings blazing from his beak and his foot just clasping the whole globe, which his wings overshadowed. The dear old boy saw my glance, and said, with a sad smile, "Here, you see, I have a country!"2 This struck me as such a waste of time, pining over one's country and building shrines and idols to it in the midst of exile. Why couldn't exile serve instead as the springboard of imagination?

Of course these were the thoughts of a child who was angry at a fictional character. But they remained with me, both sides of what I have begun to recognize as a paradox deeply rooted in Western culture. Is exile wholly negative?
Is it completely positive? If both, if indeed it is a paradox, then how and why?

This thesis is a first step toward addressing these questions, preoccupations, and memories. I do not pretend to solve anything, only to look closely at the paradoxical nature of exile and at the work of some wonderful writers who have taught me, through their words, some possible answers or at least how to better ask the questions. I know that this work will continue for my curiosity has just been piqued, not satiated, and what may have sprung from my own feelings of alienation and isolation in the twentieth century and from E.E. Hale's little book has grown into something that necessitates the attention I have just begun to pay it.

Notes to Preface

1 E.E. Hale, *The Man Without a Country and Other Tales* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1893), 12.

2 Hale, 41.
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Since human beings began to live together in social groups, exile has been a reality. And, as long as people were expelled from their group or society the pain of this expulsion has found expression in some form of art. What this work seeks to do is examine how exile affects some specific writers in the twentieth century and how these literary artists manage to create both a response to the state of exile and a kind of home to inhabit in the work of art itself; that is, in literary language, a home in words.

Any discussion of exile as a concept in Western literature must begin with the Hebrew Bible where an entire people defined themselves as beginning in exile, and indeed have defined themselves as permanent survivors of a wandering, semi-nomadic existence in one form or another ever since. This formation of the Hebrew people is historically unknowable but their own traditions stress that they received their spiritual unity and direction in a state of exile in the wilderness. The Hebrew Bible is therefore a paradigm for the study of exile as an historical and a theoretical concept since its stories tell us of the paradox of exile, that is, exile as negative exercise of authority and as positive power for creating identity and for survival in the world. As a historical concept, exile has lost none of its urgency since
Biblical times. In fact, it has gained in importance due to rapid change in sociopolitical situations and due to increased capacity for mobility in the twentieth century.

The current study goes beyond the Biblical concepts of exile and examines these concepts through theories proposed by Marxism and by French "new" critics who have analyzed the configurations of power/discourse/language, specifically Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Roland Barthes. From this broader discussion of exile, this study narrows its focus to some specific written "voices" that illuminate some of the problematics of the paradox of exile, specifically Egyptian-born Jewish poet Edmond Jabès, Uruguayan writer Cristina Peri Rossi, and Gertrude Stein.

Exile in Biblical stories is not by any means the only experience and interpretation of exile in the world of the twentieth century. Almost every government or state continues to use its power to control people and suppress criticism and questioning of its authority through the use of weapons such as forced expulsion as the Israelis have done recently, ironically, to Palestinian activists. Thus, despite its other possibilities, exile as an exercise of power can and does disrupt discourse and destroy lives. Any discussion of exile must also therefore acknowledge its destructive side, the side that rips people from their
family, their land, from all that is familiar and secure in their lives.

But there is a positive side to exile, that of independence and distance, freedom from repression and the gift of a new perspective. There is the freedom to speak, to write, and to act, no longer silenced by a state or an institution which prohibits discourse. And the benefit of distance is that it gives the gift of new perspective of what is familiar and of the power that deprived one of home. In this positive aspect, writing is one key to the resistance of repressive power and the location of a new understanding of the world, a new "home." Literary language, poetry and fictional prose, with its power to entice, to persuade, to move the heart and mind of both writer and reader, can help the exile to survive and to create a new and different home.

The methodology used to explore this paradox of exile may on the surface seem somewhat eclectic but it is a method born of necessity. To impose any one totalizing system of thought or analysis upon this paradox would be to risk replacing one exercise of power (that of using exile as a weapon) with another (that of imposing totalizing thought upon something that merits consideration from more than one angle). Therefore, this work relies upon methods as diverse as close textual readings of the Hebrew Bible and the works of the authors discussed and analyses of power and of
writing. The work of such thinkers as Karl Marx, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Roland Barthes serves in the exploration of the political consequences and uses of exile as well as in understanding the kinds of "homes" that can be created in language. Finally, I am convinced that beyond sciences and systems, beyond history and power, the writer who can create a home in exile does so because of the powerful combination of imagination and the embracing of uncertainty, wandering, and thus of writing itself. Such a writer sees writing, specifically literary discourse, not as a closure, an end, nor even an answer, but as a continuous motion, an ongoing question, a very different kind of home than the one left behind, and thus perhaps a more suitable one for someone who must face an exilic existence.

A God and a People of Exile

And thou shalt speak and say before the LORD thy God: "A wandering Aramean was my father, and he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there, few in number; and he became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous." (Deut. 26:5)

Biblical archaeology has not been able to find physical evidence that an exodus, such as that portrayed in the book of Exodus, ever occurred in actuality. Yet the story of the
departure of the people of Israel from their slavery in Egypt and their subsequent wandering in the desert is the narrative which constitutes the essence of the Hebrew and later Jewish culture. It is in the midst of this story of exile that the people unite spiritually as a religious and social group, and it is during this wandering that they receive their laws and instructions. Significantly, it is also in the book of Exodus that the name of God, the sacred Tetragrammaton (YHWH), is told to Moses so that he can tell the people:

And Moses said unto God: "Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them: The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me: What is His name? what shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses: "I AM THAT I AM"; and He said "Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel: I AM hath sent me unto you. (Ex.3:13-14)

Even God, YHWH, is a mobile God, not a god of the sun nor of this particular shrine nor of that specific mountain. He is YHWH, I AM, omnipotent Being which will bring the people out of Egypt and travel with them in their movements toward the land which He promises to give them. What is striking about this mobility of the deity is the rejection of autochthonic myth by this group of people who were surround by autochthonous cultures. The God of the Hebrews identifies himself to Moses and thus to the people as YHWH of hosts, as
a name signifying existence, and thus as a name and a God that moves wherever the people move.

Thus the book of Exodus contains these two ideas which are vital to the Judeo-Christian tradition and to Western culture: the formation of a group united by religious beliefs and ethics who see this formation occurring while in exile, and the propounding of the sacred name of a monotheistic god who goes with and fights for the people, a mobile warrior god rather than a deity attached to one place or sacred site. These two ideas help us to understand how exile is such a part of Western culture, not only in its ubiquitous form as punishment but also as something which helps us to define and constitute identity. For it is in exile that the Hebrews set themselves apart from their neighbors' cultures and politics and they always carry their God with them, not by carrying idols or household gods but through the conception of God as being everywhere, as all Being, and therefore able to move with them wherever they go or are forced to move: "I have not dwelt in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling" (2 Samuel 7:6).

There is, then, a paradox of exile in the West: on the one hand, it is a negative exercise of power, a form of punishment to expel a person from his/her society or group, a method of isolating and alienating one's real or perceived
enemies. This negative aspect of exile can deprive one of not only his/her physical roots and familiar surroundings but also of one's identity, since people are often defined by where and among whom they live. On the other hand, the ancient Hebrews take this punishment and turn it into a virtue by envisioning their own beginnings as a people in exile. Thus, their very identity is linked to this separation, this going out and away from those around them. Abraham's righteousness depends upon his willingness to wander where YHWH leads him; in other words, he goes into a kind of exile from his homeland of Ur (Gen. 12:1). Likewise, when YHWH wishes to test Abraham through the sacrifice of Isaac, they must go three days journey where the Lord will lead them (Gen. 22:2-4). This link to exile is what enables the survival of the Hebrews when they are removed from their land, as has occurred throughout history, and ensures that they will not disappear as other cultures did when forced into exile.

It is important to examine the unification of the people of Israel as it occurs in the narrative of the book of Exodus. This narrative and the legal language that also comprises Exodus is significant because this is what allows the Hebrews to survive later exile: they carry their culture and its laws with them wherever they go. The Hebrew Bible is the portable homeland of the people. The narrative in
Exodus is therefore essential for the story it tells and for the fact that this narrative functions as the unifying agent of the people.

According to George Mendenhall in *The Tenth Generation*, we need not look for physical evidence of a large departure of Hebrew slaves from Egypt in order to prove or explain the story we have in Exodus. Rather than one enslaved ethnic group achieving liberation from an oppressor belonging to another race or group, what we read in Exodus may be the political failure of an ideology of power vested in kings ruling over small city-states or village-states. These small kingships eventually fell not because of the failure of their power or their gods (which function as the religious explanation of their right to power) but because life for a majority of people living under their rule became intolerable. As Mendenhall explains it, the gods of these ancient Near Eastern kingships were seen as controlling those forces or elements upon which humans depended for survival but which they could not predict or control, e.g., the humans knew how to plant crops but could not guarantee their growth or the weather conditions and thus we have a fertility goddess, usually visualized as a great mother, and a storm god who controls rainfall, usually the most powerful god in the culture and also connected to the ruling king. The powers of these gods are seen as delegated to the king and
thus "any opposition to the king not only constitutes a political crime: it constitutes also an offense against the gods and endangers the whole system of production." The problem with this system was not any lack of religion or power vested in religion; it was the lack of tolerable living conditions it imposed upon those who kept it going—the small villagers and farmers: "the question was whether that system could operate in a way which was tolerable to the human beings living under it. It is here that it failed—and its gods as well" (Mendenhall, 224).

This intolerability of living conditions led to the formation of a completely different ideology: one based on ethics and obedience where power was vested in YHWH, the monotheistic God, who controlled everything, thus making a king unnecessary. This ideology was what constituted ancient Israel, at least until the time of the monarchies of Saul, David, and Solomon when kingship again became the political system in power, with similar consequences as its earlier Near Eastern counterparts. As the monarchy became more settled and more powerful, once again problems arose, problems which, in the case of the Hebrews, were blamed on the failure to obey YHWH but which had similar results as other Near Eastern kingships: fragmentation of the monarchy and subsequent conquest.
Thus the people of Israel were probably ethnically the very same people who had been living in Canaan under the system of small kingships, as Mendenhall states:

It is a confusion in terminology to speak of the "Israelites" as an ethnic group during the biblical period. Israel is the designation of a religious community, of a large social organization, that constituted the Kingdom of God...The twelve tribes were comprised of those members of the population of Palestine and Transjordan who had accepted the rule of God. This constitutes the only perceptible difference between them and the non-Yahwistic population, which tended to center in the old Canaanite city-states that Israel did not convert to Yahwism and which it had neither the motivation nor the military power to conquer until the reign of David. (Mendenhall, 224)

So why tell this story of flight from a foreign oppressor, Egypt, and a generation of wandering in the Sinai desert that we read in Exodus? The reason is that this narrative is the way in which the Israelites envisioned themselves coming together, being forged as a community in an escape from oppression (which is the way they saw the small kingships they lived under) and in their common bonds of ethics and obedience to their religious beliefs, specifically in their belief in YHWH as the one and only God. They wrote
this narrative in order to cement their alliance, their new faith and ethical code, to celebrate their coming together and to commemorate their freedom from the tyranny of the old political systems under which they had suffered. In writing this narrative they chose the concept of exile: separation from the ruling power (in the narrative this is Egypt which, as the largest, most prosperous, and advanced society in the area, serves as the perfect representative of an oppressive ruling power), fleeing the center of culture and commerce in favor of a semi-nomadic existence in which they are given their laws and the promise of a new land. Thus exile, which had been a punishment for crimes against the king and state, is here envisioned as a triumphant move, a change, the only state in which the new community could be formed.

Exile is always seen as a hardship, a fight for survival. But, after all, that hardship is the price of liberation. Thus, exile, once again, embodies a paradox, that of freedom and its attendant hardships. We must remember that the people are punished by God for their disobedience in connection with the construction of the Golden Calf and are condemned to spend a generation in the desert (Ex. 32; 33:1). Also, early in their journey from Egypt, at the first sign of trouble the people cry out that they would rather serve their oppressors than die in the wilderness (Ex. 14:11-12). What is unique about the
narrative of Exodus (and of Numbers and Deuteronomy as well) is that the ancient Israelites who composed these tales chose
the state of exile to represent their separation. This seems
to be a very radical step, this choice of something that was
typically negative as a trope for the formation of a new
religious and social community. Thus it is this notion of
exile, as a setting apart in order to establish an identity,
that has survived through these biblical stories in Exodus,
Numbers, and in Deuteronomy.⁵

If He is in any sense a god of place, YHWH is the God of
the desert wilderness. Even the places where the words of
God are to be kept, the ark which contains the covenant
writings and the place where the ark rests, are designed to
be mobile, to move with, indeed to precede, the people in
their movements in the wilderness.⁶ Despite the elaborate
nature of the ark and the precisely detailed instructions
given for its construction, finally there is a Tent in which
it is housed, a Tent which is the ultimate sign of mobility
(see Ex.40 and 2 Sam.7:6).

So in the book of Exodus where the Hebrews are called
together to form the people of Israel, we are presented with
an early pattern of exile that will continue throughout not
only the history of Biblical communities but will be woven
into later Western history, thought, and literature as well.
Many scholars trace this pattern of exile (and its companion,
that of return or restoration) to the Babylonian exile after the fall of the southern kingdom of Judah in approximately 586 BC. Jacob Neusner, in fact, asserts that the core of the history of Judaism is the Babylonian exile, the return from that exile, and the promulgation of the narratives of exile which shape the consciousness of the Jews:

The history of Judaism began with the destruction of the Temple and the exile of part of the population to Babylonia in 586 BC, and the return of some of the exiles in 450 BC. These events can be seen as the beginning of the history of Judaism because the experience of those few formed the pattern which Israel chose as its history. This is the lesson they claimed to learn from it: nothing is set and given and all things are a gift, land and life itself. The experience of exile and then restoration marked the group as special, different, and select.

There is no doubt that this historical exile had a profound impact upon the shape of the religious and social life of Israel; nor is there any doubt that much Biblical writing on exile took place during and following this event. In fact, this writing is a mirror of the tradition that is established in Exodus. The source commonly referred to as Priestly or P contributed much material to the Torah, including all (or a very substantial amount) of the book of Leviticus and many of
the laws and codes of Exodus and Numbers. This sixth-century exile is also essential for the connection it makes clear between the written word and the survival of the Israelite culture. Those who were forced into exile by the Babylonians took with them the stories, poetry, and early laws and then elaborated upon them as they gathered them together. This community managed to survive because of the presence and use of this written material; rather than assimilating, they maintained their cultural identity by organizing themselves, keeping their belief system intact, through their own writings. This experience of exile and unification (or solidification) of community in the word becomes an integral part of how the Jews see themselves. Indeed, this pattern is also a part of Christian thought, not only as typology or prophecy-fulfillment but in the notion of setting oneself apart in order to maintain one's identity and then recognizing oneself as part of a community. This is especially true of early Christianity which managed to survive the most strenuous persecutions of the Romans by envisioning itself as a community in Christ.

This concept of exile is, of course, more fundamental in its Jewish manifestation. And this sense of exile can be seen clearly not only in the narratives of the Torah but also in the Mosaic laws and holiness codes in books such as Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Leviticus, for example,
presents its reader with twenty seven chapters of laws and codes dealing with everything from food to disease, from priestly ritual to pregnancy. What ties all of these laws together is their relation to separation as an idea and thus to exile. For example, Leviticus 19:19 contains strict prohibitions on the mixing of any two different kinds of substance: "You shall keep my statutes. You shall not let your cattle breed with a different kind; you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed; nor shall there come upon you a garment of cloth made of two kinds of stuff." These are laws which serve to define the Israelites as a separate cult, different not only in their beliefs but also in their practices from surrounding and previously-existing cultures. As one commentator notes:

In much of the Hebrew Bible, the rhetoric of displacement is presented through the theme of exile. Leviticus is no exception, and exile can fairly be said to be the very basis for the construction of the antinarrative ritual order. To be holy, qadosh, is to be set apart; the root means "separation, withdrawal, dedication." If a metaphoric union with God is no longer possible in a fallen world, the Law can on the other hand, create a life built around a principle of separation which will serve as a metaphor for the transcendental otherness of God.
The text quite clearly makes the connection between holiness and exile as it goes about creating a metaphoric wholeness of God, people, and land through the mechanisms of purity and avoidance. Thus, the P source which gave us the elaborate laws and holy codes was engaged in surviving a state of exile, indeed in creating a community that found its true identity and potential in that state of exile:

The laws are inserted into the story of Sinai not only to give them authority but still more because the Wilderness exemplifies the fullest potential of a life of exile: that the place where everything has been lost can prove to be the place where everything is gained.

Interestingly, Richard Friedman argues that our P source dates from just before the Babylonian exile and that it is an attempt to consolidate the community under Priestly rule in the southern kingdom. He provides elaborate proof for this, including the fact that the prophetic writings of Jeremiah and Ezekiel often quote P (which, if it had been written after the exile in Babylonia, would not yet have existed), and by separating out strands of stories which show vividly their different preoccupations, usually Priestly concerns. Friedman then concludes that it was Ezra, in the days following the restoration from Babylonia, who served as a redactor or R source, the major editor whose hand combined
the other sources and fashioned the Hebrew scriptures (at least the Torah) which we now possess. In this scenario, the P source's preoccupation with separation would speak less of exile than of the priests' desire to see themselves as set apart from the rest of the community. Although Friedman's evidence is quite convincing, this does not seem in any way to detract from the pattern of separation and exile that is such a major part of Hebrew and later Western culture. Even if the Priestly source was settled at the time of composition and was engaged in justifying its own existence and necessity, it still draws upon the idea of cultural separation. In fact, the case seems even stronger for the establishment of this pattern of exile/separation in the story of the exodus from Egypt rather than having its beginnings after the Babylonian exile. For if the material from the P source was not contributed during the Babylonian exile, its elaboration of the laws which all involve holy separation and isolation draws even more heavily upon the stories of exile told about the beginnings of Israelite culture. One way or the other, this pattern seems to be one of the essential roots not only of the narratives of the Bible but also of the laws and holiness codes which comprise the ritual worship of the Hebrews.

If exile is a pattern of life developed through story as well as reinforced by later exilic experiences, then why is
it not considered to be a myth, in the sense of functioning as a clear guide for the culture? It is because exile, both as a concept and a reality, is too ambiguous and thus too anxiety-provoking to be treated as the "cultural glue" which is often the function of myth. By virtue of being so paradoxical, simultaneously negative and positive, exile as a pattern cannot easily guide or reassure people. It is always difficult to live apart from the practices of one's neighbors or to exist as a people who see themselves as separate and different in every aspect of their lives. The books of the Torah, particularly the stories in Exodus and Numbers, are filled with the "murmurings" of the people who are nervous and fearful of their exile and the God that leads them in that exilic existence. This particular pattern of life is one that requires not only faith in the invisible deity and the adherence to the ethics that the belief system demands, but also a measure of patience, understanding, and interpretation of the very concept of exile.

Exile is the major story which represents the Yahwist belief system: it is an ambivalent state, paradoxical, and it demonstrates the necessity of being separate and alienated from other cultures, yet it also involves the desire to settle in one's own land and develop one's own culture. At the end of exile there has to be a Promised Land. Yet Yahwism as a belief system holds that when one reaches the
Promised Land, one must not become too settled for that leads to pride in human achievement and a belief in human self-sufficiency and continuity, thus undermining the precept that all stability and continuity belong to Yahweh alone. This self-critical and self-distancing tendency is what is unique about Yahwism and is also what guaranteed its survival: "Species that adapt too well die off with environmental change: in the alienated tradition, the failure to integrate with nature or to perfect the culture yields long-term success in surviving--the Jews themselves are the most obvious example." Exile is not only the test to which the Yahwists are put in order to survive; exile is the story that best symbolizes the self-critical and alienated tendencies of this belief system that enables that survival.

If exile is the narrative which reminds people of their difference, distance, and alienation, and the narrative which keeps them together during cycles of difficulty, persecution, and actual displacement, then what does it mean to say that writers find a "home" in their writing, in literature? The answer to this is quite complex in that literature is both an exile and perhaps the only possible home that an exiled person can find and/or create. Once again, the central idea of writing as home is, as is exile itself, a paradox.

Writing itself is a kind of exile from nature and one's culture; it is a separation from everyday life and it is a
reminder of human mortality in that the fixed words on the page always have the potential to outlast the human who wrote them. Indeed, in order to write it seems necessary to assume the position of outsider, to focus on worlds other than the one being lived in the moment: "Instead of placing us in a 'normal' stance for social intercourse, the process of writing tempts us to assume a strange, aloof vantage point."  

If writing is an exile in itself, how can it possibly become a home for those who create it? Like the Hebrews who wrote the story of their exile and continued to write it throughout the cycles of their early history, those who are exiled and write manage to create a "place" to inhabit in the writing itself. They can find in the act of writing a life that involves difference, distance, and alienation. And far from being crushed by the separation they are subjected to in exile, they turn that separation into a virtue, the refuge that holds their lives together, just as the Hebrews did with their scriptures.

Writing itself is a wandering and an embracing of exile. It is a way of living in the imagination and a process of continual motion in a world other than the world of everyday political and social interchange. The book or poem one creates is never the end of writing; it is only a pause for rest until the next wandering beings, until the next sojourn
in the imagination is undertaken. The importance of the Promised Land for the Hebrews was that it gave them something to move toward, but it was never to be completely theirs, not in the autochthonous manner of mythological cultures which were rooted to a particular piece of ground. The wandering in the wilderness is the essential movement: only in the wilderness, apart from others, can Yahweh make Himself and His power known (though not contained; this is apparent in the theophany of the burning bush, Ex. 3:1-6); only by moving can His difference from the stationary gods of other cultures be definitively demonstrated. Thus, the book or poem is not the Promised Land for the writer; it is something to reach for, to strive for, important but not the limit or the end to wandering, for the process of writing is itself a wandering. Thus we can reread Jacques Derrida's interpretation of the concepts of "exile" and "play" and understand that what is being called exile in present study more closely resembles Derrida's notion of "play":

There are thus two interpretations of interpretation, of structure, of sign, of play. The one seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign, and which lives the necessity of interpretation as an exile. The other, which is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms play and tries to pass beyond man and humanism, the name
of man being the name of that being who, throughout the history of metaphysics or of ontotheology—in other words, throughout his entire history—has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of play. ¹⁷

What Derrida is envisioning as exile is the nostalgia for the Promised Land, the myth not only of origins and full presence but of teleologies, autochthony, and cosmic order. The definition of play in the above quotation is closer to what the present work discusses as exile: wandering, motion, distance, separation without (false) reassurances of settlement or order. As he notes elsewhere as well, Derrida sees writing itself as separation:

Writing is the moment of the desert as the moment of Separation. As their name indicates—in Aramaic—the Pharisees, those misunderstood men of literality, were also "separated ones." God no longer speaks to us; he has interrupted himself: we must take words upon ourselves. We must be separated from life and communities, and must entrust ourselves to traces, must become men of vision because we have ceased hearing the voice from within the immediate proximity of the garden. ¹⁸

This is the unsettling, ambivalent nature of the process of writing, perhaps a legacy to Western culture from those
writers of the Hebrew Bible who saw themselves as conceived in this exilic state. Thus, we can speak of exile in its negative sense meaning the loss of origins, of place, of the full presence of social interchange, and in its more positive sense, that is, that exile prevents the lapse into cultural complacency and provides the impetus for critique and change. The act of writing encompasses both senses, but it is the positive side that permits certain literary artists to survive separation and alienation, indeed to allow that separation, that exile, to nourish their work rather than cause them to disappear into the mists of history.

The Power to Alienate: Exile as Negative Exercise of Power

When exile is used as a political weapon, a tool in the service of power, it is designed not only to physically oust and isolate the person who is the object of punishment, but also to alienate him/her from what is familiar and important. This is not unlike the early Marxist formulation of estrangement (entfremdung) or alienation, although in the Marxist concept there is no actual exile involved.

In his discussion of estrangement, as contained in the critique of Feuerbach's materialist philosophy presented in The German Ideology, Marx finds that this estrangement begins early in human history with the supposedly "'natural' division of labor." We can leave aside discussions of the
accuracy of Marx's conceptions of history; even if this
division of labor took place over many stages, at different
times, and differently in various cultures, the result is
similar. Humans are subjected to the will of those in power
and forced to perform certain delineated functions in their
society. This division of labor is portrayed as a "natural"
ocurrence in human society but Marx questions the idea that
humans would naturally alienate themselves from certain of
their own actions or labors. The division of labor results
in an "unequal distribution, both quantitative and
qualitative, of labor and its products," and implies that
there is a contradiction "between the interest of the
separate individual or the individual family and the common
interest of all individuals who have intercourse with one
another."19 Thus, this split or division which assigns
certain tasks or labors to certain people leads to the
estrangement of people from the products of their own work
and indeed even to their alienation from their own interests
and ideas. It is the State, claiming to represent the
"common" or "general" interest of the people, that dictates
this division of labor and its consequent state of
estrangement. The result is the same regardless of the
different types of State power: people are relegated to
specific spheres of activity and forced to submit their own
individual labor to the State under the guise of the "common good":

And finally, the division of labour offers us the first example of the fact that, as long as man remains in naturally evolved society, that is, as long as a cleavage exists between the particular and the common interest, as long, therefore, as activity is not voluntarily, but naturally, divided, man's own deed becomes an alien power opposed to him, which enslaves him instead of being controlled by him. For as soon as the division of labour comes into being, each man has a particular exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape.²⁰

This estrangement, this alienation is not unlike exile when that exile is employed as a punishment. Exile then becomes the exercise of power, by whoever wields it, which separates, estranges its object from all that person knows or is: family, physical home, vocation, beliefs, culture, language. Whereas in this Marxist discussion of the division of labor and its consequent estrangement, a person is pushed into a smaller circle of activity (forced to do one particular, limited activity), in exile the person is ousted from the circle altogether. But the reasons and results are similar: it is an exercise of power through the control of a person's actions, labor, and the products of that labor, thus
estranging the person from parts of him/herself. This is the negative end of the exilic paradox, exile as the exercise of power over individuals in order to definitively alienate such persons.

This exercise of power which exiles and alienates those it controls is done, as Marx notes, in the name of the general interest of the people. This, of course, is only nominal; it is in the State's own interest that power is employed using the "common" or "general" good as an excuse. The problem with the analysis at this point is that Marx's solution is a communist society, one in which the common interest of the people is truly represented, where their shared goals and interests are allowed to flourish. Unfortunately, Marx substituted one centralized state for another, the "general" or "common" good having coalesced into just another form of state power to be wielded over individuals. And Marx's critique of state power assumes that this is the only form of power that is exercised over people, that is, the power of government or of a dominant ruling class.

This is where we must turn to Michel Foucault's theories of the operation of power at more localized and individualized levels for a clearer understanding of exile as a tool of such power. For Foucault, power is not automatically linked to such large entities as the state or
the dominant class, nor is it to be equated solely with repression. Power reaches its tentacles out into individual lives, affecting people on a daily basis, and is often linked with the forms of knowledge and expertise in our complex technological society. The challenge is to examine how that power is exercised in order to begin to understand what it is. And the end result is not to replace it with another, different system which supposedly alleviates repression or changes those who exercise power. In the age of post-Soviet Communism and stifling Chinese Communism, we can graphically see the results of replacing one totalizing system with another. Rather, the aim is critique itself, theorizing through questioning, which despite its reputation to the contrary is an action, as Foucault insists, and not merely an intellectual exercise:

In this sense theory does not express, translate, or serve to apply practice: it is practice. But it is local and regional, as you said, and not totalizing. This is a struggle against power, a struggle aimed at revealing and undermining power where it is most invisible and insidious. It is not to "awaken consciousness" that we struggle (the masses have been aware for some time that consciousness is a form of knowledge; and consciousness as the basis of subjectivity is a prerogative of the bourgeoisie), but
to sap power, to take power; it is an activity conducted alongside those who struggle for power, and not their illumination from a safe distance. A "theory" is the regional system of this struggle.

Our civilization has developed the most complex system of knowledge, the most sophisticated structures of power: what has this kind of knowledge, this type of power made of us? In what way are those fundamental experiences of madness, suffering, death, crime, desire, individuality connected, even if we are not aware of it, with knowledge and power? I am sure I'll never get the answer; but that does not mean that we don't have to ask the question.22

Indeed, asking the question is the action necessary for if theorizing through questioning does not continue, we are in danger of what has occurred with regularity in both communist and capitalist societies: the mere substitution of one institution or system with another which leaves all the operations of power intact. The intellectual, therefore, has a responsibility to write, to question, to theorize, to explore those operations of power.

What is important here is to recognize that the intellectual is not, cannot be, a representative of anyone. The key for Foucault is that those who feel the operations of
power must speak and write for themselves. For when the power of speaking and writing is usurped by anyone, that effectively silences a person. If representation was once a function of those who taught and wrote as well as of those who governed, in Foucault's eyes that has changed radically since the upheavals in the world which occurred in 1968:

In the most recent upheaval, the intellectual discovered that the masses no longer need him to gain knowledge: they know perfectly well, without illusion; they know far better than he and they are certainly capable of expressing themselves.23

What prohibits the speech and ideas of individuals is a system of power that permeates every facet of life. Thus the job for intellectuals is to analyze and criticize these operations as they affect people, indeed, as they affect the intellectual him/herself, but not to claim to speak or write for others:

The intellectual's role is no longer to place himself "somewhat ahead and to the side" in order to express the stifled truth of the collectivity; rather, it is to struggle against the forms of power that transform him into its object and instrument in the sphere of "knowledge," "truth," "consciousness," and "discourse."24
What do these issues of the forms of power, the concept of representation, and the critique afforded by theory have to do with exile? On one level, it is clear that to send someone into exile is certainly an operation of power in its most visible form, power that takes the form of repression which is dispensed by the state, power that operates negatively. At its heart is a denial: the denial of an individual's right to exist in society, the denial of the right to speak and to be heard. Likewise, representation, as Foucault discusses it in his conversation with Gilles Deleuze, prohibits effective speech and action on the part of an individual through the claim by the representative of that power for himself. This is an exercise of power that is positive, power that creates the appearance of allowing people to speak in the guise of their representative but which in actuality denies both individual and true collective action. What is most important about both of these exercises of power, negative and positive, exile and representation, is the interruption of discourse. The person who wishes to speak and to write, to critique and to create, is silenced by being pushed out of the network of social relations or through having his/her voice subsumed under that of a representative. It is clear that the result of both of these operations of power is the cutting off of the flow of discourse. It seems that throughout the history of human
social relations the most effective counter to the exercise of power is not physical force but art, writing, and critique that questions, explores, and challenges those who employ power and the institutions through which power is dispensed.

One has only to look at the events of this century to see that exile in its negative aspect has been and continues to be a destructive reality in the world. It is perhaps most obvious in countries run by military or openly repressive governments such as many of the Central and South American nations during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Argentina during the 1970s, Chile after 1973, Uruguay, and Guatemala come to mind immediately. Many writers and artists had to flee these countries to save their lives as well as their work and their discourse. But this negative exercise of power is not limited to Third World or so-called underdeveloped nations. Even in the United States, in a society where everyone is supposedly "free" to express him/herself, there have been many examples of this type of power. The most obvious example is the era of the Communist witch hunts, the time of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) and the infamous Senator Joseph McCarthy. Writers, filmmakers, artists, actors, civil servants, laborers and union people were forced into silence, obscurity, or exile if they chose to resist the mass hysteria which swept the country.
The counter to both the negative and positive operations of power that interrupt discourse is to envision and act upon a resistance to that power. What is most effective, in the case of exile, is to take that exile and use it as a means of resistance, to discover the positive aspects of exile and to avail oneself of the use of those aspects. In the case of the McCarthy era, one thinks of Herbert Biberman's film "Salt of the Earth," which he was forced to make in Mexico or perhaps of the powerful screenplays of Dalton Trumbo which were seen in this country under assumed names. Both of these men resisted the attempts to silence them and protested through their art, as did many others. Just as the ancient Hebrews envisioned their own beginnings in exile and thus were not only able to survive actual exile but also to create a unique expression of their own culture, one can find the means of protest and resistance in exile and indeed create a new "home" to inhabit.

Mobile Homes: Positive Aspects of Exile

The other side of the paradox of exile is that it can be turned into a virtue, a means of resistance. It is not only the ability to survive in exile but also the expulsion itself which can save a person from repression and death. Exiled artists are often the ones we hear from, the people whose pictures, songs, and words reach us whereas if they had
remained in their homelands, their work might have suffocated under the stifling repression of their governments. Or, worse yet, they might have been permanently silenced. Thus the distance that an exiled person puts between him/herself and his/her country can lend a perspective on that homeland that would not have been possible if they had remained in his/her home. Likewise, this distance is a freedom from oppression and an opportunity for the artist's work to be seen, heard, and read.

One of the keys to understanding the positive aspect of exile, its nature as resistance, is writing: to understand writing itself as a power that resists attempts to silence or repress it. Writing is the "other" of speech that may not have the temporal presence of the spoken word but which possesses a unique power and presence of its own, one that traverses time and space in order to make itself heard and understood, in order to continue the discourse which was disrupted by the exercise of power.

We cannot merely say all writing, or more specifically all literature or art, articulates the revolutionary countermovement to the exercise of power. However, when an artist in exile focuses her or his attention and imagination upon the meaning of their exile and upon the attempt to create an alternative home, this is a reclaiming of the
discourse, a way of being heard, both by oneself and by those who may read one's words.

Michel Foucault claims that literature has been sacralized, along with philosophical discourse, and installed in a privileged position in the university or the academic world in general. This sacralization results in the claim that literature is the only expressive discourse possible. Jacques Derrida, too, attempts to disrupt this process of sacralization of literature by demonstrating the textuality of all discourse, not merely literary discourse. There is a problem here: if literature is something so bound up with university institutions and promulgated by them, if the general public really doesn't read literature, how has it survived? Why do children like stories so much? Why do adolescents in love write poetry (no matter how badly!)? Why do some adults turn to novels or poems to find ways of articulating their imaginative life, whether through writing or reading? It cannot be that the university and perhaps the Church before it merely promulgated and reinforced this idea. If the appearances and operations of power change from culture to culture and vary over time, in Foucault's own explorations and analyses, then how can this thing called "literature" or "literary discourse" have been sacralized in every such culture and time period?
Here it is helpful to read Jean-François Lyotard's essay, The Postmodern Condition, on what he terms "narrative knowledge" and "scientific knowledge." In Lyotard's view, narrative knowledge is a particular kind of discourse, what he calls a "language game," that operates in certain cultures as the essential form of passing on that culture and its knowledge: "They [narratives] thus define what has the right to be said and done in the culture in question, and since they are themselves a part of that culture, they are legitimated by the simple fact that they do what they do." 25 This is in direct contrast to the prevailing discourse of the West which is "scientific knowledge." This type of knowledge involves issues of its own proof and legitimacy; statements must be proved true or false according to a consensus of experts. In fact, this scientific knowledge believes itself superior to narrative knowledge which it views as "primitive" or "backward" precisely because narratives are not concerned with proof or their own legitimacy:

The scientist questions the validity of narrative statements and concludes that they are never subject to argumentation or proof. He classifies them as belonging to a different mentality: savage, primitive, underdeveloped, backward, alienated, composed of opinions, customs, authority, prejudice, ignorance,
ideology. Narratives are fables, myths, legends, fit only for women and children.26

Understanding the problem using Lyotard's terms allows us to see that "literature" is problematic because, on the one hand, it is unmistakably narrative knowledge, yet on the other hand, by virtue of being transmitted in writing, it belongs also to scientific knowledge as it separates its sender from its receiver and because writing itself is something that is, like science, concerned with its own legitimacy. Thus, this "sacralization" that Foucault speaks of is what remains of the narrative function of literature: it is sacralized because it is simply accepted without the need of proof. Whatever the case, literature in its function as narrative knowledge is what makes it possible for a culture to coalesce around a specific story and for writers to find what can be called a "homeland" in narrative. Yet literature continues to be accepted in the West and enshrined in universities as Foucault suggests because of its written, therefore "scientific" nature.

One of the ways in which we can understand writers finding a home in words is to define exile as silence and absence: silence enforced by language differences, barriers to full speech and understanding in a strange place; absence not only of family and land but also of all sense of presence in life, absence of the familiar and the already interpreted,
already understood. In this case, writing may be the only possible home for one who endures this condition. Indeed, on one level writing enabled survival and transmission of tradition when oral or myth-dependent cultures would have perished because their traditions were so completely integrated with the land they inhabited that leaving the land would have caused the demoralization of the people and the destruction of their society. Yet there are other, complex ways in which writing is the only home for the exile.

Writing is where solitude, silence, absence flourish; writing is silence and absence. Not the patient silence of those who wait for God or History to speak and act; not the silence of the oppressed who are forbidden to speak. It is the silence where words exist precisely because speech cannot: because speech is prohibited or not understood. And because when the myth of full presence, absolute immediate Being, is dissipated, dispersed, writing remains. Writing begins where full, natural presence ends. It is in the writing itself, the "work" as Maurice Blanchot says, where we see the "essential solitude":

In the solitude of the work--the work of art, the literary work--we see a more essential solitude. It excludes the self-satisfied isolation of individualism, it is unacquainted with the search for difference;...Nevertheless, the work--the work of art,
the literary work—is neither finished nor unfinished: it is. What it says is exclusively that: that it is—and nothing more. Outside of that, it is nothing. Anyone who tries to make it express more finds nothing, finds that it expresses nothing. Anyone who lives in dependance on the work, whether because he is writing it or reading it, belongs to the solitude of something that expresses only the word being: a word that the language protects by hiding it or that the language causes to appear by disappearing into the silent void of the work.27

It is the word being which exists in the work and it is the existence of the work, of the words themselves, that is the focus here, not some external, supernatural or superlinguistic concept of being. It is the ontology of words, of writing itself.

Far from being a lesser, devalued, degraded or secondary form of presence, writing is what "opens meaning," begins the chain of significations, of "suppléments" as Derrida names them, from which we derive meaning:

There have never been anything but supplements, substitutive significations which could only come forth in a chain of differential references, the "real" supervening, and being added only while taking on meaning from a trace and from an invocation of the
supplement, etc. And thus to infinity, for which we have read, in the text, that the absolute present, Nature, that which words like "real mother" name, have always already escaped, have never existed; that what opens meaning and language is writing as the disappearance of natural presence. 28

These endless chains of signifiers/supplements continuously moving, beginning not from the complete and full perfection of presence, Being, but from its absence, from a "trace" of it, is also the state of the exile who begins her/his exilic wandering with a leaving, a dispossessing from presence and familiarity. In this way the process of writing is similar to the process of exile. They are both dependent upon silence, they flourish in absence, but they are not empty; they are meaningful, they produce meaning in their wandering: "the wandering of the language always richer than knowledge, the language always capable of the movement which takes it further than peaceful and sedentary certitude." 29 Edmond Jabès, too, recognizes this and threads it throughout his poetry and meditations: the necessity and the acknowledgment of silence and absence in exile and in writing, and the constant motion of these states which produces meaning: "Je me lève avec la page que l'on tourne, je me couche avec la page que l'on couche. Pouvoir répondre: «Je suis de la race des mots avec lesquels on batit les demeures», sachant
The desert is one figure of this absence that is an integral part of the Hebrew Bible as well as of Jabès' work; the desert is where absence flourishes, where cities do not exist, where separation, isolation, and emptiness prevail. The desert, like writing, is composed of silence and absence, it is the ultimate figure of separation which is the mode of survival for the ancient Hebrew and for the modern exile. As Derrida notes when he speaks of Jabès' Le Livre des Questions, "Nothing flourishes in sand or between cobblestones if not words...The dwelling built by the poet with his 'swords stolen from angels' is a fragile tent of words erected in the desert where the nomadic Jew is struck with infinity and the letter." And, as André Neher suggests, the Bible itself depends as much upon silence as upon words: "The reading, or rather rereading of the biblical text, caught in its naive spontaneity, proves to be a reading, no longer of the word, but of silence." The silences, for Neher, are where God's meaning is expressed; silence is the place (or perhaps space is a better word) where meaning occurs. This silence is the silence of the desert, the silence of the wilderness in which meaning can flourish because it is a place of exile, of separation, of
absence. Derrida recognizes this absence which is figured by the desert as the setting of Jabès' work: "Absence of locality, first of all...Le livre des questions resolutely keeps itself on the vague estate, in the non-place, between city and desert, for in either the root is equally rejected or sterilized." Without gaps, interruptions, silences there could be no meaning, no writing, as Derrida notes: "But, primarily, the caesura makes meaning emerge. It does not do so alone, of course; but without interruption--between letters, words, sentences, books--no signification could be awakened."

The continuous motion of writing is specifically a moving, shifting flow of meaning. If everything about writing were mobile and ever-changing, then no artist could create a home for it would be as ephemeral and as insecure as the physical country left behind. Yet if we understand Roland Barthes in his early work on structural ideologies of commitment in Writing Degree Zero, then there is something tangible, "hardened," that enables writers to build dwellings:

A whole disorder flows through speech and gives it this self-devouring momentum which keeps it in a perpetually suspended state. Conversely, writing is a hardened language which is self-contained and is in no way meant to deliver to its own duration a mobile series of
approximations. It is on the contrary meant to impose, thanks to the shadow cast by its system of signs, the image of a speech which had a structure even before it came into existence...Writing, on the contrary, is always rooted in something beyond language, it develops like a seed, not like a line, it manifests an essence and holds the threat of a secret, it is an anti-communication, it is intimidating. 

This does not in any way contradict Derrida's contentions that writing consists of endless chains of supplements beginning from the disappearance or trace of some no longer (if ever) discernable origin. In Derrida's discourse, we are examining the realm of meaning; Barthes makes it clear that he is discussing writing, which he separates from such things as language and style: "A language and a style are blind forces; a mode of writing is an act of historical solidarity. A language and a style are objects; a mode of writing is a function: it is the relationship between creation and society, the literary language transformed by its social finality, form considered as a human intention and thus linked to the great crises of History." 

Barthes' conception of writing as something hardened and rooted is essential in order for us to understand how writing can form a home for a writer. For without that sense of solidity and solidarity, no writer could, as does Jabès,
construct a dwelling in words, in their generous shape and their flowing meaning; Peri Rossi could not create places that serve as home, places where art, justice, freedom, and the ability to write prevail over the forces that categorize, classify, and repress them. And Gertrude Stein could not have found a home on that island of the written English language in the midst of France and spoken French.

But exile also pervades the entire discourse of the modern world; there is a sense of exile in the process of writing itself, a disconnection, a breaking of old orders, old networks, old relations in language. As Barthes also notes,

The economy of classical language (Prose and Poetry) is relational, which means that in it words are abstracted as much as possible in the interest of relationships. In it, no word has a density by itself, it is hardly the sign of a thinking but rather the means of conveying a connection. Far from plunging into an inner reality consubstantial to its outer configuration, it extends, as soon as it is uttered, towards other words, so as to form a superficial chain of intentions.37

The modern word disrupts this chain, this relational network and substitutes itself as object. The word becomes more important than what it may relate back or lead onward to and thus the nature of each word is essential; each is "an
individual experience." The classical poet/writer sought to fit into the ancient order, to follow and perhaps to refine the relations and connections between words, in Barthes' view:

The function of the classical poet is not therefore to find new words, with more body or more brilliance, but to follow the order of an ancient ritual, to perfect the symmetry or the conciseness of a relation, to bring a thought exactly within the compass of a metre. Classical conceits involve relations, not words: they belong to an art of expression, not of invention. The words here, do not, as they later do, thanks to a kind of violent and unexpected abruptness, reproduce the depth and singularity of an individual experience; they are spread out to form a surface, according to the exigencies of an elegant or decorative purpose. They delight us because of the formulation which brings them together, not because of their own power or beauty.38 It is not that classical words had no power and beauty; it is that these qualities derived from the whole of the work they belonged to, rather than from the character of each individual word. Often in a modern work, although the whole may seem discordant, individual words may leap at the reader with the power of associations, depth, sound, tone, etc.
The early work of Barthes is quoted at length to demonstrate something essential that he recognizes about modern discourse: that the emphasis has shifted away from stability, security, ritual, and the order that made writing a matter of relations in the classical literatures, and has turned toward disruption and fragmentation and toward the word as an object in itself. The word is an island that may resemble others islands and may exist in proximity to them, but remains separate and above the flow that is the grammar and relations of classical literature:

The Word shines forth above a line of relationships emptied of their content, grammar is bereft of its purpose, it becomes prosody and is no longer anything but an inflexion which lasts only to present the Word...

In classical speech, connections lead the word on, and at once carry it towards a meaning which is an ever-deferred project; in modern poetry, connections are only an extension of the word, it is the Word which is the dwelling place, it is rooted like a fons et origo in the prosody of functions, which are perceived but unreal. Here, connections only fascinate and it is the word which gratifies and fulfills like the sudden revelation of a truth.39

The word indeed becomes a "dwelling place" as Barthes remarks; the writer finds him/herself a home, a place to
create brilliance, shape, density, even duration in the space of a word, freed from the strict rigor of ritual and order. The word is rooted, indeed, but not in a place nor in a prescribed order that dictates acceptable form and content. The word is rooted only in the flow of grammar that carries it along and in the flow of time, carrying with it the associations of past meanings, of past lives.

With this conception of the word as singular, individual, and forceful comes the realization that the world is filled with breaks and absences, that it is set loose from previously reassuring relations and stability. While relations, connections, and order may be repressive, they also provide a security for both writer and reader that is not possible in modern discourse. Barthes sees this modern poetry as open and free, yet simultaneously frightening:

Each poetic word is thus an unexpected object, a Pandora's box from which fly out all the potentialities of language; it is therefore produced and consumed with a peculiar curiosity, a kind of sacred relish. This Hunger of the Word, common to the whole of modern poetry, makes poetic speech terrible and inhuman. It initiates a discourse full of gaps and full of lights, filled with absences and overnourishing signs, without foresight or stability of intention, and thereby so opposed to the social function of language that merely
to have recourse to a discontinuous speech is to open the door to all that stands above Nature. 40

If this modern word, this modern poetry, isolates, alienates, violates and fragments Nature and is, finally, inhuman, then how do writers manage to create anything like a "home" in writing? First of all, we must remember that to see the word as completely isolated, totally autonomous is, even in Barthes' formulation, the idea carried to the extreme by some modern writers. If the word exists as a shining object, a box or a room filled with all its past and future meanings, that does not mean that one must see it as antithetical to what Barthes earlier defined as "writing" ("l'écriture"): writing is the process, the flow, the social connection that links words to the world. Thus, we have another paradox of the modern world: the word has been exiled from its firm moorings of ritual and order in classical literature. Yet it is not without relations so long as we can envision writing as a process, as a social link to the world.

We must also recognize that the modern world is not only a world where the word becomes an object-in-itself; this is also the world when writing begins to see itself as such and to analyze its own operations, to pull back its mask or at least to point to the mask and acknowledge it as such. No longer can writing pretend it is purely transparent, a mere means of expressing what is "real." When writing recognizes
itself as such, when writers and critics alike begin to create and study the nature of writing, then we see another kind of exile, another way in which the discourse of the modern world is exilic: no longer "pure" and "innocent," no longer perfectly mimetic of a "real" world, writing is seen as a process which creates its own reality. It is not secondary to reality or Nature; writing is a form of living, a way of understanding humans and their world. The twentieth century in particular has focused upon the study of writing and meaning; this is the time of exilic discourse because writing has been expelled from its safe, secure place as transparent representative of primary Nature.

Finally, there is the conception of "home" to consider. For if we believe that home always signifies a physical dwelling and the place of one's birth, then no writer can simply re-create that home in exile. But if we understand that "home" is more than a physical place, that it is more than even family and things familiar, then we can see that a writer who understands that writing itself is his/her link to the world and to something inside of him/herself, can create a "home" in words, a space wherein he or she can dwell.

This creation of a home is unique to each person who writes. While all writers tap into the flow of writing, that process which links them to the social world, each writer also draws upon their own particular experiences of exile and
upon their own imaginations in order to build their dwellings in words. In order to better understand these dwellings, the works of Jabès, Peri Rossi, and Stein are examined in the present study. Each of these authors create specific and very different types of dwellings for themselves. Many more artists and writers could have been included but it is personal preference which determined the selection here. One hopes that it is more than personal preference that makes this entire topic important enough to be studied. Perhaps in order to understand our rapidly changing world it is time we looked not to the centers of power but to the margins, to those who are alienated and exiled, to see how they have survived and even thrived in that separation and exile.
Notes to Chapter One

1 The Holy Scriptures (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1955). All Biblical citations will be taken from this edition and referred to by book, chapter, and verse in the body of the work.

2 Of course, after these words YHWH tells the prophet Nathan to instruct David to build the Lord a house of cedar; while YHWH here acknowledges his mobility, he also indicates his readiness to be stationary within the David's kingdom.


5 While one usually thinks of the story of Adam and Eve as the first example of exile, strangely enough it is Cain's story which best exemplifies the paradoxical nature of exile as it is explored in this thesis. From the beginning, Abel is preferred because he is the semi-nomad, the keeper of sheep, while Cain, a farmer, is attached to and dependent upon the ground. Out of jealousy and rejection, Cain kills Abel and Yahweh sentences him to exile as a punishment: "When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a wanderer shalt thou be in the earth" (Gen. 4:12). Yet in this exile, Cain will be protected by a mark or sign of Yahweh. The complexity of this figure grows in the next several verses; Cain becomes a city-builder (Gen. 4:17), once again rooting himself to the ground and becoming like the Egyptians and Mesopotamians who build great cities and monuments, something despised by Yahweh. Yet Cain is also portrayed as the ancestor of Jabal, "the father of such as dwell in tents and have cattle" (Gen. 4:20) and Jubal, "the father of all such as handle the harp and pipe" (Gen. 4:21). At every turn, Cain is both despised and rewarded: sent into exile as a punishment but saved by being in exile with the sign of Yahweh upon him; despised as a builder of cities yet rewarded by being the ancestor of semi-nomads and musicians. This is the paradox of exile that is fully elaborated in connection with the unification and survival of the Israelites throughout their writings.

6 See Berger, "The Lie of the Land."

8 Neusner, 5.


11 Damrosch, "Leviticus," 75.

12 Friedman, 161-206.


14 Schneidau, 39.

15 "Perhaps all writers feel a sense of what Hamlet's mirror entails, even if they reject the beliefs behind it: for literature or any writing can constantly remind us of our own mortality, simply because it can outlast us...the disturbing memento mori function of any writing has to do not with its participation in the realm of nature, but in its severance from it" Schneidau, p. 251.

16 Schneidau, 251.


20 Marx, 53.


24 Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, "Intellectuals and Power," 207-208.

25 Lyotard, 23.

26 Lyotard, 27.


29 Derrida, "Edmond Jabès and the Question of the Book," 73.


32 André Neher, *The Exile of the Word: From the Silence of the Bible to the Silence of Auschwitz*, tr. David Maisel
(Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1981)

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36 Barthes, 14.

37 Barthes, 44.

38 Barthes, 45.

39 Barthes, 46-47.

40 Barthes, 48-49.
Edmond Jabès knew exile intimately. Born in 1912 in Cairo, his official nationality was Italian, his education French, and his heritage Jewish, all of which guaranteed that he did not feel "at home" in Egypt.¹ In 1957 Gamal Abdel Nasser formally expelled all Jews from Egypt and Jabès was forced into physical exile, emigrating to France where he was granted French citizenship in 1967. Although Jabès understood well the Jewish desire for a homeland, he himself would not consider settling in Israel, a place he saw, at best, as a problematic solution to Jewish settlement after the Holocaust. The final irony is that Jabès is buried in the most famous Catholic cemetery in Paris, Père-Lachaise. But perhaps it is not ironic: Jabès's poetry and meditations are clearly concerned less with Judaism as an orthodox belief system than as a universal state of being and understanding the world. So perhaps Jabès's interment in Père-Lachaise is perfectly fitting, as a tribute to the wide recognition of his complex writings, his acceptance in France, and the success of his re-definition of Judaism, at least in its relation to writing.
Edmond Jabès's experiences during his early life and his exile contribute in part to the complicated ideas in his work of "home" and of "exile": "Il y a toujours un rapport direct entre ma vie et mon écriture. Je peux dire, aujourd'hui, que tous mes livres sont autobiographiques." This is particularly important in the later seven volume work, Le Livre des Questions, written following his re-settlement in France. But these preoccupations begin to appear even in the early poetry written before Jabès's departure from Egypt. My examination of Edmond Jabès' work will focus on two tests: Je bâtis ma demeure, a collection of his poetry from 1943 to 1959, and Le Livre des Questions, a seven-volume work of aphorisms, meditations, and poetry. Exile as subject is interwoven throughout most of Jabès' work; however, these two works are particularly preoccupied with exile. Both share a temporal proximity with Jabès' exile, Je bâtis ma demeure written preceding his expulsion from Egypt, and Le Livre des Questions subsequent to this event. The poems collected in Je bâtis ma demeure show the beginnings of Jabès' construction of a dwelling in words (hence the title). This poetry has not been discussed extensively outside of early reviews and articles in France; yet Jabès stated that this book was like a beloved child who has been overlooked by those who wrote about his work. And comparing his first book with the eldest child of royalty, Jabès noted that this first
born is destined either to be king or to be killed by guillotine. Je bâtis ma demeure may not have been crowned as first among Jabès' work, yet it is the first step in his discussions of exile and his constructions of dwellings in words.

Jabès continually returns to certain themes and issues which being in the poems collected in Je bâtis ma demeure. The focus here will concern the words "home," "exile," and "word," all of which take on extraordinary significance, as metaphors and as re-visionings or expansions of metaphor itself. Jabès prefers to use the word vocable, rather than mot, when speaking of the words of his poetry, his use of language. Le vocable is defined as "term," rather than "word." This difference is not merely semantic (indeed, nothing is ever "merely semantic" in the work of Jabès; the life of words are not to be dismissed that easily); it draws our attention to the existence of words as universes-in-themselves and it makes the reader realize that one cannot take even the word "mot" for granted. "Vocable" is a little-used word which Jabès employs to signify that there are more meanings to a word, more dimensions than what is immediately apparently upon seeing a word, than we ordinarily realize. "Mot" is also too tainted with its connotations of Logos, of divine, transcendent Word, while for Jabès vocable is "more neutral, less religious."
This attention applies to the theme of "home" in the Jabesian work as well. Indeed, when Jabès speaks of "home" he uses the word demeure (dwelling) rather than maison. The difference is an important one: "home" is not simply a house, a stable building or place that is the opposite of the outside world. Jabès's poetry undercuts simple contrasts or dualisms such as "inside" and "outside," or even "home" and "exile." Jabès always questions the limits of such classifications; he also questions the ontology of those limits and of writing itself: "Bornes de l'univers: chacune est germe d'infini" ("Érigées Sur Nos Fables," 281). Limits or boundary markers for Jabès are places which contain the seed of the future, the absent, the infinite. Rather than marking an ending, they mark a beginning beyond which the infinite stretches. It is an unknown beyond, but it is not the ending of thought or of writing. And the "home" in the word, in the book, in writing, cannot be read as simply a replacement for the lost country, as an end wherein one escapes exile. One does not merely turn inward, to the imagination, when one is exiled. Turning to the imagination is never simple; it is a metaphor itself, a trope in the specific sense as a turn from one way of living and thinking to another. This other way that Jabès shows us is the way of wandering which is represented by the process of writing. This is Jabès' dwelling in words.
What is fascinating about the poems in *Je bâtis ma demeure* is the recognition that contained in these spaces are Jabès's later works, his later books, much as one can see a building taking shape in its foundation and frame. To read his early poetry gives much resonance to the line from *Le Livre des Questions*, Vol. I:

--Où se situe le livre?  
--Dans le livre.  

This is not a mere rhetorical trick. In Jabès's work, poems grow from other poems, books grow from books, words from other words, like the tree grows from the fruit, or the fruit from the seed or grain of sand: "Je vois, verrai. Confiance / de l'arbre dans le fruit: ("L'eau du puits," 22); "Bornes de l'univers: chacune est germe d'infini" ("Érigées Sur Nos Fables," 281); "Le mot porte en soi le livre, comme l'homme l'univers" ("Les rames et la voile," 304). As Fernandez Zoïla sees, the Jabèsian work is the work of germination, growth, reproduction in writing, a "vitality," a "Dionysiac cult": "Sève pulpeuse, enracinée dans le limon fertile; gestation secrète, germination." Like many other great poetic imaginations, Jabès shows the development of his later work in the promise of his early poetry. But I think there is more. There seems to be a real architectural imagination at work, an imagination which builds worlds within the words of poems and meditations. This architectural imagination
sets the foundation of later dwellings in the poems in Je bâtis ma demeure. Fernandez Zoïla reads the Jabèsian work "genealogically"; not the genealogy of the author but a genealogy of the work itself, the words, poems, books. This reading might also be called a generative process, and a process that moves backward as well as forward, readings of the later works regenerating the earlier ones as much as the earlier work gives birth to the books which follow. Derrida recognized this in his essay on Jabès: "Our rereadings of Je bâtis ma demeure will be better, henceforth" (that is, after having read Le Livre des Questions). By envisioning the Jabèsian work in this way, I am stopping its process by lifting out two large sections: Je bâtis ma demeure and Le Livre des Questions. But one can read these works as alive and generating, even if they are considered apart from the other pieces of the corpus. In this way, even though Jabès will write no more, the work is still alive, still living and generating, as the reader encounters it, reads it, comments upon it.

In his "Postface" to Je bâtis ma demeure, Joseph Guglielmi tells us that perhaps one could entitle his remarks "l'impossible demeure," and that what Jabès creates in his poetry is more correctly the "a-demeure" or anti-dwelling, but it is misleading to name that which Jabès creates an "anti-home." It seems that he takes the very definition of
home and turns it, metaphorically, back toward and into language itself, so that it is in language that one has a home and in language that one understands all that this word "home" might mean. This dwelling in writing is no peaceful alternative to exile. Jabès constantly reminds his readers that writing is itself an exile, a forced wandering in the desert of the blank page. He shows us the demands of writing within the poetry itself, the demands of the wandering of the writer in words and on the page. To write is to risk oneself in language, to risk being used by language, to risk being wounded in language: "Je dois aux mots mon inquiétude" ("Je Vous Écris D'Un Pays Pesant," 204); "J'ai besoin de vous pour aimer, pour être aimé des mots qui m'élisent. J'ai besoin de souffrir de vos griffes afin de survivre aux blessures du poème" (Ibid., 204).

The writer supposedly uses words to express ideas, to address a reader, to make him or herself understood. But Jabès sees beyond this; words also use the writer and they may not always express one idea or any idea, other than their own appearance on the page. The writer risks himself each time he sits down to write because at any moment (or at every moment) the words may mean other than what he wishes. The reader, too, risks him or herself when reading; it is the reader who gives to the poetry his or her own shape: "Le poète donne à l'oeuvre son nom. Le lecteur, son image" ("Le
Sel Noir, "193); it is the reader who can free the image that
the writer has "married" to words: "Docile à la volonté de
l'écrivain, l'image se plie quelquefois à un mariage de
raison. Sa vie durant, elle attendra du lecteur, le divorce"
("Portes de Secours," 167). In Jabès's poetry, there is more
for both writer and reader to do, to take responsibility for;
each lends something of themselves to the words, therefore
risking more of themselves in the process of writing and
reading. This dwelling in words is not simply a matter of
escapism, a quiet place where one sits down to write or read
to escape the world. This written world is a world which
contains as much risk and danger as the "real" world outside
of the poem; in other words, it contains as much meaning, and
there is always the danger of being misunderstood. Exile
does not disappear when one writes or reads; the risk of
exile remains. But by taking this risk, one can dwell for a
time in language, in words.

The demeure, the dwelling in the work of Jabès, is thus
less a place than a process, the flow of words on the page
and the flow of life itself that can be found in words, the
words of the poetry. The word demeure signifies dwelling,
residence, and delay. In its verb form, demeurer means "to
dwell," "to reside," "to live within." Jabès uses demeure to
mean dwelling and delay. It may be possible to dwell within
language, but what does it delay? Perhaps what Maurice
Blanchot writes of, the *desastre*, the disaster that cannot be named, that exists outside of time and presence. The poet, dwelling in the poem, delays the engulfing presence of the outside world, the world in which exile, horror, and homelessness exists. The disaster which is delayed can be any number of historical events, such as the first diaspora of the Jews, or the Holocaust. It is, however, also outside of history: "'Already' or 'always already' marks the disaster, which is outside history, but historically so: before undergoing it, we (who is not included in this we?) will undergo it." It is a disaster which occurs to all mortal beings ("we"), perhaps, one might imagine, death. Yet it seems to me that it is not death itself which is the disaster, in either Blanchot's or Jabès's work; rather, it is the denial of death or the obsession with the denial of death: "Dying is, speaking absolutely, the incessant imminence whereby life lasts, desiring. The imminence of what has already come to pass." Without death, without its "imminence," life itself would be changed, perhaps even meaningless. Without the "other" that is death, there is no "self" or life; each is dependent upon the other for being: "Qui es-tu, sinon, d'abord, celle qui est l'autre?" ("Portes de Secours," 171).

As for the contradiction of being outside of history and simultaneously historical, it seems that this has much to do
with writing itself. The individual is historical by virtue of his/her daily actions, however insignificant: habits, routines, dated events. These are historical. But when he/she writes, it removes them from historical time, places them in the realm of words outside of historical time. The disaster "is the time when the negative falls silent and when in place of men comes the infinite calm (the effervescence) which does not embody itself or make itself intelligible."17 It is not death, then, that is the disaster which is delayed; rather, it is emptiness, a void, which is not death but the cessation of everything, including death. For in Jabès's work, the dead can speak—they rise up, they are with us, they live and die again, they even lie: "J'ai vu les morts mourir une seconde fois / couchés sur le mer / J'ai vu les inventer les ponts" ("L'écran pulverisé," 257); "Les morts mentent," ("L'idole," 226). Jabès's dwelling is a place for the dead as well as the living; writing is where the poet sees his own death and the death of words. Guglielmi says aptly, "La page d'écriture est la page de mort"; "Écrire, c'est donc, froidement, envisager l'expérience de sa propre mort et de la mort du mot."18

Death, as noted above, is, in Blanchot's work and in Jabès's poetry, the "other" of life, an other that the living can know only by thinking. Or by reading. The poem can delay the disaster by writing of it without naming it;
without a "'proper name' (Derrida)," but nonetheless in words. And words become the dwelling which delays the disaster, the dwelling in which the poem resides: the poem lives within the word, which gives it shape and existence. And the words dwell in the ink which makes them visible, to the poet and the reader. "Rendre le mot visible, c'est-à-dire noir" (155). This process of writing is the process of delaying and of dwelling, of recognizing the "other" that is death and of delaying the disaster which is emptiness by dwelling in the words of the poem.

In Jabès's work, not only this process of writing but the words themselves, these vocables, become home. Words which carry with them resonances and memories of their prior uses; words which, nevertheless, are completely open and empty until they are written and read. The word is like an empty room, but a room which one has entered before: the space is familiar, but there is nothing there until one enters and fills it with presence: "Le mot est l'homme, sa mémoire et son devenir" ("Les rames et la voile," 302). This dwelling in language is also a relationship that we humans have with language, an "experience we undergo with language." When we submit to an experience with language, it is then that language speaks of itself, as language, not merely as a tool or vehicle of expression. This is what Jabès seeks to do in his poetry, to allow words to bring
themselves to the page, to the poet, to the reader. The poet is a person who attempts to reveal his/her relations to language in language. Jabès' relationship to language often consists in allowing it full expression, the freedom to bring itself to the pages: "L'art de l'écrivain consiste à amener, petit à petit, les mots à s'intéresser à ses livres" (174); "Les mots élisent le poète" (174).

Poetry is never simple nor does it possess an uncomplicated singularity— that singularity would limit the poet's relationship with language.21 Jabès lets his words vibrate, lets them mean as much as they can. He allows the poetic experience with language to come through. Language may indeed be a dwelling but it is neither a finished nor a vacant structure. Nor is it merely an abode which gives shape to thought. It, too, must be experienced, must speak itself and write itself, must follow its way to itself, a path which Jabès is continually remarking upon, which appears within the poems themselves: "Une demeure est une longue insomnie / sur le chemin encapuchonné des mines" (25). This path, this way, leads through shadow, but not a shadow that obscures. Often, in Jabès' work, it is light that obscures and shadow that reveals: "Creuser, c'est suivre le chemin de l'ombre" ("Le sel noir," 194); "L'ombre susurre à l'ombre le chemin secret du jour" ("Les rames et la voile," 304).

Humans risk everything to undergo an experience with
language; once again, Jabès points out the danger of dwelling in language. The poet risks losing himself, his life, in the words of the poem: "Avec les mots, nous longeons l'abîme. Le premier faux pas peut être fatal" ("Les rames et la voile," 305). The reader, too, must risk her/himself in reading because to read is also to build the dwelling, to be as responsible as the poet for that dwelling. If the reader is not careful and attentive, disaster may result: "L'oeil du lecteur risque, à chaque syllabe, d'allumer un incendie" ("Les rames et la voile," 303).

It is obvious that to have a home within a word, to consider the word a dwelling, implies that home is a metaphor. One must explore the implications of this notion of home that Jabès creates, for Jabès continues throughout his work to use this metaphor as well as to expand the notion of metaphor itself. One of the ways in which Jabès accomplishes this expansion is by using his home in words to question the dualism "exile-home." If home can be a metaphor, if the dwelling in words can function as a home, then exile itself can be neutralized, overcome, by attempting to step out of the constructed contrast entirely. The home in words can be as "real" as the exile the writer (or reader) is forced to endure. If one can define home as something other than the physical residence of the body, then one will find that there are other components that comprise the idea
of home. Metaphor is, of course, a vehicle for finding these other-than-sensory components of home. Language, **words**, are both the way we know these elements, these ideas of home, and, for Jabès, the very place in which one dwells.

Perhaps dwelling is the perfect metaphor (if there can be such a thing as a perfect metaphor, when metaphor itself is a substitution for some other thing). The metaphor of the dwelling has been used to describe the function of metaphor itself, as a kind of meta-metaphor: the metaphor exists in a borrowed house, a dwelling "outside-one's-own-residence, but still in a dwelling, outside its own residence but still in a residence in which one comes back to oneself, recognizes oneself, reassembles oneself or resembles oneself, outside oneself in oneself."²³ What this discussion of metaphor seeks to say is that the metaphor of the dwelling represents the metaphor's own function, that of signifying something by presenting it in a similar, but different form; therefore, it resides in a similar, but different house. Jabès's **demeure** is similar to a house but it is a process as well as a site, the process of writing as well as the product which is the written work.

Jabès expands and explodes metaphor itself within his poems.²⁴ In "Portes de Secours" the poet suggests finding many other senses of words in order to avoid the slavery of words to ideas: "Il s'agit, pour vivre, de trouver d'autres
sens au mot, de lui en proposer mille, les plus étranges, les plus audacieux, afin qu'éblouis, ses feux cessent d'être mortels" ("Portes de Secours," 156). The words, with their thousand other senses, escape being "cloué au sol" (pinned to the ground) and free the poet from being "crucifié...par les ailes" (156). In Jabès' work, metaphors represent more than a single idea or concept; they are freed to mean as many things as possible, no longer the slave of a single concept: "Dans un poème, l'émotion passe d'une image à l'autre comme le papillon à travers champs" ("Les rames et la voile," 305).

Jabès gives the words their freedom, allows them to have a life of their own, "Il arrive que, las de sa position debout, le mot en service commandé s'empare d'une chaise pour s'asseoir, pour fumer. C'est la révolte de l'esclave" ("Soirées de Concert ou Les Mots Étrangers," 287). The word can be enslaved by the idea, the single idea that seeks to impose its dominance upon the word, as sole interpretation: "La page est toujours blanche pour le mot qui s'y risque, esclave ou seigneur" ("Les rames et la voile," 301); Jabès' work is to free words from the ideas which would enslave them, and to re-define the poet's relation to his art: "Le mot est l'ennemi de l'idée, c'est le péché originel. Le besoin de liberté du mot grandit à mesure que l'écrivain prend conscience de son art" ("Soirées de Concert ou Les Mots Étrangers," 291). This freeing of the word is also a freeing
of man, from his body, from his "condition" of existence, from his enslavement to a system of ideas: "Prisonnier des lettres qui le forment--comme l'homme de son corps ou de sa condition" ("Soirées de Concert ou Les Mots Étrangers," 291); "Et c'est aussi un mot qui nous sauve" ("Portes de Secours," 156).

As a prisoner of a particular system of ideas, an ideology, humans are subject to such traumas as exile. By freeing humans in language, Jabès liberates them from certain ideologies as well. At least in language, the poet can show readers the world in play, in ways that may not be sanctioned by official ideology or policy. But while humans may be freed from the enslavement of certain ideas or ideologies, they are never separated from language. Language, for Jabès, is where we reside, where we dwell. Heidegger suggests that humans are enslaved to language: "Man acts as though he were the shaper and master of language, while in fact language remains the master of man." But Jabès shows us that one is not the slave of language; one takes the risk of living in language, with language, in poetry. Even Heidegger recognizes that humans and language determine each other; it is not necessarily the master-slave relation: "It is language that tells us about the essence of a thing, provided that we respect language's own essence."
This freedom also demonstrates a freedom from the earth, from autochthony. To imply that the dwelling is rooted to the earth is to deny the wandering of man and language, of man in language. The dwelling of Jabès has more to do with nomads' tents than with grand temples or mansions, more to do with the wanderers of the ancient Near East than with the Western tradition of the Greeks and Romans who built grand edifices which have lasted until our own time. For indeed, he never felt his roots firmly planted in Egypt, being completely "other" as Italian citizen, French-speaker, Jew, poet. The belief that the word is rooted to the earth is a destructive one, for humans and for words. There are those, like the Jews, who have been forced to wander, exiled from many lands, and whose only home is in words, the words of their Book and their books. If one believed that the word is rooted to a certain site, there would be no language or writing that is not the language or writing of a place. Such a situation would deny the existence of people such as the Jews, and of writers.

The earth does not speak through Jabès' work, even much later when he writes of the Egyptian desert. It is the desert as blank page, as the space of possibility that appears in Le Livre des Questions. But it is writing, the written word which is the root for Jabès, a root which grows out of a wound, not out of a particular country; it is a
wound of the poem which is the poem itself: "J'ai besoin de souffrir de vos griffes afin de survivre aux blessures du poème" (205). This wound from which the poem forms appears in much of Jabès's work and is especially important in Le Livre des Questions. As Derrida has remarked, this wound is the opening from which both the Jew and writing are born, emerge:

A powerful and ancient root is exhumed, and on it is laid bare an ageless wound (for what Jabès teaches us is that roots speak, that words want to grow, and that poetic discourse takes root in a wound).29 The only "home" is in writing, in the word, later in the book; it is not dependent upon the earth, for if it was the Jew, the exile, and the writer would have no home at all, would not be able to speak or write. Jabès frees the word from autochthony and shows us its root in words themselves.

Although many of the early poems seem, on the surface, merely to be concerned with images (some quite strange indeed) and word play, there are no gratuitous words in Jabès' work. Even when he frees the words from their servitude to a single idea, Jabès never suggests that words have no relation to thought: "La pensée permet aux mots d'accéder au pouvoir" ("Spectacle," 175). There are those poems, however, in which both writing itself and the notion of a dwelling in words appear directly, as subjects. In
"Chanson Pour Mon Encre Fidèle" there is the following line, addressed from the poet to his ink: "Mais tu es moi-même et ce sont d'austères chateaux que nous élevons ensemble" (37). Together, the poet and his ink build dwellings in words. And words are the work of both ink and poet who, by the end of the chanson create "des miracles redoutés." Jabès's song imagines the possibilities of his ink in different colors: if green, it would be the tears of a tree; if blue, a portion of the air; if red, the lover of fire, thus relating visual and natural imagery with the possibilities of writing. Many of his chansons show the kinds of dwellings which can be built, in words and of words, dwellings which can be castles, as in "Chanson Pour Mon Encre Fidèle," or dwellings which can be charnel houses ("Chanson De La Porte Étroite," ) or prisons ("Chanson De Dernier Enfant Juif"). Unlike the concentration camps and prisons in these two poems, Jabès' dwellings within the poems are not built of mortar, brick, stone, iron; nor are they meant to house destruction and horror. They are built from imagination and they are "peopled" and "planted" by the poet:


Ici, tu regnes. (213)
It is not only dwellings as containing spaces or houses, but fields, landscapes, entire countries which Jabès constructs in his poems, out of words, "Pages, impatient pays" (213). "Je vous écris d'un pays pesant" is a poem to a lover who may be the poem itself, or words themselves, the reason the poet writes: "Vous êtes, destinatrice prédestinée, ma raison d'écrire (204). The "heavy country" is the land of the poem, the land where words rule, where they are the masters ("ils furent les maîtres," 205), where the poet writes with the flesh of built up words ("Je vous écris avec la chair des mots accourus, haletants et rouges," 205). More than this, the "heaviness" is also due to the pain of the wound, the wound mentioned above out of which poetry grows, the wound in which language takes root.

Of course, a dwelling built in words is insubstantial, impermanent. It exists as a mark on the page which may last as long as the physical ink and the sensory page do, but which truly exists only when the writer or reader is with it, writing or reading the marks: "Le lecteur seul est réel" (159); "Le poète donne à l'oeuvre son nom. La lecteur, son image" ("Le sel noir," 193). Unfortunately, these dwellings can be fragile, weak, constantly on the edge of collapse: "On sent déjà que les «demeures» sont fragiles; «somptueuses» peut-être, mais «érigées sur nos fables» et promues à l'écroulement." But is it collapse? Or is it a purposeful
relocating of the dwelling into elements which are unstable, constantly changing: water, sand, imagination: "Bâtir sur l'eau (toute marge inutile). Bâtir sur le marbre imaginaire" ("Portes des Secours," 163). Once again the risk of language is made apparent: poet and reader risk dwelling in language, building on sand, water, imaginary marble. Sydney Lévy remarks that this dwelling is a temporary one: "The house that he builds is, as it were, a paper house, as temporary as the nomad's, the one whose lot is to be constantly displaced. It is a house made up of writing and poetry." It is indeed a "paper" house, a house made of writing, but the paradox is that it is perhaps more stable than a dwelling made of brick or concrete for that very reason. Indeed, the Jabesian demeure has more to do with sand than with concrete construction. In fact, the desert and the sand which comprises that space are the reflections of the blank page on which writing will appear, on which the dwelling will be built, out of which the dwelling is constructed. As Jabès writes:

On n'a pas assez approfondi, me semble-t-il, la métaphore essentielle que constitue le sable dans la Genèse. C'est seulement dans le désert, dans la poussière de nos paroles, que la parole divine pouvait être révélée. Nudité, transparence d'une parole qu'il
This building, upon sand and upon the blank page, is a transformational process. The process of building a dwelling in words takes on as much importance as the dwelling itself, a dwelling which is then read by others and re-interpreted, re-built one might say. This whole process becomes even more prominent in Le Livre des Questions where the question and the process of questioning are similar to the continuous making, unmaking, and remaking processes of writing and reading. It is constant movement, change, explosion, creation, and recreation which itself requires a new kind of reading, since it is a new kind of writing.

This writing-in-progress (or process) always already contains within itself the seeds of the next book, the new book, the next writing. The energies of change which mark it give birth, in process, to the writing, the books, which will follow. This is the building of the dwelling, not in stone but upon sand, the constantly shifting sand of the desert. Jabès himself has identified *Je bâti ma demeure* as "cet avant, avant, avant-livre," and Fernandez Zolla sees it as "le degré zéro du livre," "l'arrière-livre." It is the book which comes "before": before the next books, yet containing them within itself, generating them out of itself.
The generative, life-giving, and liberated nature of words become the focus of many of the poems, poems which say that they owe their existence to the words which comprise them. Even human creation can be reread as the generating of words as humans and letters and words and poems create and are created simultaneously: "Légende. Le poème est la pomme qu'Ève (la poésie) offrit, un jour, à Adam. (Pour renaitre de lui.)" ("Portes de Secours," 164). In "Soirées de Concert ou Les Mots Étrangers," Adam, Lilith, Ève, the apple, the serpent, and words are interwoven in creation.

Au commencement était le mot, était l'homme.

Anxieux de se connaître, il épela les quatre lettres qui le formaient et, pour la première fois, entendit son nom: Adam.

Comme la solitude lui pesait, il imagina un être plus compliqué que lui, composé de lettres inconnues. Il dessina, avec un doigt, sa forme sur le sable, face à la mer et sa voix révéla Lilith à l'univers.

Il apprit aussi, ave le temps, qu'il pouvait, pour sa joie, créer une compagne de chair et de sang. Et ce fut Ève soumise et menue, aux troi lettres arrachées au vent.

Mais il s'aperçut très vite, l'ayant caressée, qu'elle était la plus rusée. Elle découvrit seule l'Arbre avec lequel il avait en commun sa plus belle
lettre, la Majuscule, qu'il grava la première dans la pierre. Elle lui offrit le fruit que possédait en double la troisième lettre qui l'identifiait, celle que lui avait inspirée la montagne. Adam le croqua et connut la souffrance. Avec Ève et le serpent de sept lettres (pareil aux sept jours de la semaine) il éleva un alphabet d'orgueil à la gloire des poètes futurs. 

Pour sa perte et leur tourment. (289-290)

The words and the first humans share creation, the words are as the living beings. Creation of humans and language occur together; in Jabès' world of poetry they cannot possibly exist apart. Humans know themselves through language; words live through human beings. This is a genesis and a regenerative process of word and human, both breeding, both generating:

Il y a le mot-couple
le mot genèse
Il y a le mot-branches
lettres prédestinées
limpidité biblique (289).

It is as if the poet were the lover of the word and together they bred poetry. Often, Jabès sees the word as a female and, as a male poet, makes love to it in the space of the poem, a process which produces the poem itself as child of that coupling: "J'ai besoin de vous aimer, pour être aimé
des mots qui m'élisent" ("Je vous écris d'un pays pesant,")
205); "Le sexe est toujours une voyelle," ("Spectacle," 173).
The poet seduces the word into forming his poems: "L'art de
l'écrivain consiste à amener, petit à petit, les mots à
s'intéresser à ses livres" ("Spectacle," 174). The poet,
too, is a creation of words, words which elect the poet to
write them, as in "Spectacles": "Les mots élisent le poète"
(174), or which comprise the poem to which the poet belongs,
of which he is flesh:

Le poète est son poème. Il incarne l'aventure
offerte au langage. Il est, dans l'immense coquillage
de l'univers, la tentative absurde et toujours
renouvelée de l'huitre, de perler l'infini. (289)
The generative word, the word as giving birth to other
words, to poems, to poets, also forms a living body of
commentary upon itself. Much like the later commentary upon
the Hebrew Bible, the Talmud, which forms a living, growing,
learning body of knowledge, the words in Jabès' poems comment
upon themselves within the body of the poem.

Can these generative words give birth also to a world?
Would this world also be a dwelling from which humans could
not be exiled, unlike Eden, unlike the Promised Land, unlike
Egypt, unlike Europe, unlike Israel?

Peut-être, en effet, fallait-il l'exode, l'exil, pour
que la parole coupée de toute parole—et dès lors
confrontée au silence—acquière sa véritable dimension.
Parole où plus rien ne parle et qui, pour être
totalement libérée, devient profondément nôtre; comme
nous ne sommes véritablement nous-même qu'au plus aride
de notre solitude.36

It indeed seems that there is a world of words in
Jabès's work, a written world of words which exists in
silence and solitude. Perhaps the most important
recognition is not only of the life of the words themselves
but of the necessity of the spaces and silence in between
them without which they would not exist except as one
endless, meaningless chain of letters.

As an architect of physical structures must be, Jabès is
concerned with the way the elements of his dwellings fit
together. Sounds become important, not just rhyme or meter,
but the way the words roll off of one another or perhaps bump
up against one another when read. And the way the words are
situated on the page takes on an importance that readers
often overlook. For Jabès, the space between the words, like
the mortar between bricks in a proper wall, is as important
as the words themselves. "L'absence de lieu" (1956) takes
this space between words, the whiteness of the page before
being written upon, as its own beginning:

I.
Terrain vague, page obsédée.
Une demeure est une longue insomnie
sur le chemin encapuchonné des mines.

Mes jours sont jours de racines,
sont joug d'amour célébré.

Le ciel est toujours à traverser et
la terrasse à nourrir de nuits nouvelles.

Le deuil de mes démarches forme
enclave dans la clarté opaque des murs.

La terre baigne dans de
vaines visions de voyage. (25). 37

The very pages in Jabès's books are "obsessed" with being
filled, being written upon. And that whiteness helps to give
words their importance, their significance, their shape as
dwellings, dwellings which in this poem are figured as "long
insomnias" on paths from the mines. The figure of the mine
is also important here, for Jabès' work must be treated as if
it were a mine, as if each word held hidden minerals and ores
below its surface and in the spaces in between. This image
is also one that Jabès uses to describe deconstruction38: it
is a process of mining the written words of a text. This
mining is not just search for a sub-soil or buried level of meaning, but the process of sifting through the various possible meanings of words.

The emptiness of the desert and of the blank page, the sand and the whiteness that is always present in Jabès' work, is not there simply to remind us of the hole or lack at the center of modern life, following the incredible horrors witnessed in the twentieth century. This desert is a nexus of complex relations between silence and speech, emptiness and absence, being and presence, the whiteness of the page and the blackness of signs, and between God and human beings. For Jabès, the "fascination of the desert," in Joseph Guglielmi's words, has to do with its possibilities for man—for man's thought and writing—in the absence of the God of traditional formulations. The divinity that limits man's writing and thought by imposing the Divine word, the Logos, must be killed so that man can write. And that writing can only be figured by the desert.

The desert is a place of death and of birth, of the silence of God and the writing of man. While Jabès focuses on the desert specifically in Le Livre des Questions, it is the spaces between words, the silence, that is often a focus in Je bâtis ma demeure. Behind the words, in between them, is a silence which has as much to say as the words. "Il y a un ordre du silence, avec ses saints, ses prêtres et ses
prophètes" ("Portes de Secours," 160). Humans must learn to recognize the signs of this silence, to appreciate silence and understand its messages: "Language withdraws from man its simple and high speech. But its primal call does not thereby become incapable of speech; it merely falls silent. Man, though, fails to heed this silence." Man, and his voice, efface the traces of silence in the sand of the desert, the evidence of the presence of silence: "Il y a des traces de silence sur le sable que l'homme efface" ("Portes de Secours," 162). In French, the spoken language elides each word, "word is indeed linked to word in the continuous flow of a phrase" as the poet Robert Duncan notes in his reading of Jabès.40 Silence then becomes the absence of space between words in voice, only visible on the page, itself a representation of silence when it is empty, blank, waiting to be filled. Jabès, in his poetry, creates a space, a place where silence can exist, as much as the words exist; a place where voice is hushed so that both the blankness of the page and the blackness of the signs can "speak." It is imperative to listen to the silence, to truly hear it, as well as to see and listen to the words in Jabesian poetry. For much dwells in silence as well as in words and if one fails to listen, to see the world of silence, one will face only the void, not the dwelling of language.
One must look for the silence in shadow, not in the glaring daylight. In Jabès's work, the light ("lumière") is what blinds, is what darkens, not illuminates. The light hides while shadows allow silences and humans to speak, to live, to write, to mean: "Une ombre dans le désert est synonyme de vie" ("Le Sel Noir," 193); "L'infini est noir" ("Le Sel Noir, 194). The shadow is the ink of the writer and without the blackness of ink, the words nor poems would exist: "La poésie est fille de la nuit. NOIRE" ("Portes de Secours," 163). Moreover, the light will come to reveal, in later works, words which harm and kill; the headlights in Le Livre des Questions which show on the wall the terrible graffiti: "Mort aux Juifs / Jews Go Home" (I, 52). In Je bâtis ma demeure night and darkness, shadow and silence are spaces which are ennable, places where the poet knows words and can create the poem: "A l'approche du poème, aurore et crépuscule redeviennent la nuit, le commencement et le bout de la nuit. Le poète y jette alors son filet, comme le pêcheur à la mer, afin de saisir tout ce qui évole dans l'invisible, ces myriades d'êtres incolores, sans souffle et sans poids, qui peuplent le silence." ("Portes de Secours," 165).

In Jewish mysticism, particularly the writings of some of the Kabbalists, light and mystery are similar: the light which shines is that of the hidden meanings of the words of
the Torah, not the light of the day: "A striking application of this notion to the Zohar itself is to be found in the work of the famous Kabbalist Hayim Vital (d. 1620). The word zohar means literally radiance. According to him, the radiance of the Torah's divine light is reflected in the mysteries of this book. But when these mysteries are shrouded in the literal meaning, their light is darkened." Interpretation of the Torah is what causes the light to shine; in the poetry of Jabès, it is the various meanings of the words, shrouded in the blackness of ink, that shine in the light of the reader's interpretation. The light which is necessary for Jabès is the light by which one reads or writes, not the bright daylight, but the light of the lamp at the bedside or table, the light which shows the way from the dwelling of words to the dwelling in the book: "Une lampe est sur ma table et la maison est dans le livre" (I, 18). Though the focus of the Jabesian work becomes the book, the words, les vocables, are not forgotten. They are the beginning of the dwelling, the foundation of the house that is the book. And they are the strongest foundation upon which Jabès could build: "La phrase meurt sitôt composée. Les mots lui survivent" ("Portes de Secours," 163).
NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO
"L'imaginaire d'architecture"
I. Les Vocables (Les Mots)


8 Le Livre des Questions, Vol. I (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1963), 15. All quotations will be taken from the seven volume set of this work and will be indicated in the body of the text by the roman numeral corresponding to the particular volume, as listed below:

II. Le Livre de Yukel, Paris: Gallimard, 1964
III. Le Retour au Livre, Paris: Gallimard, 1965
IV. Yaël, Paris: Gallimard, 1967
V. Elva, Paris: Gallimard, 1969
VI. Ely, Paris: Gallimard, 1972

9 Fernandez Zóila, 83.

10 "Dans les page obsédées et rebelles de cette demeure aventureuse, on peut réaffirmer qu'il y a, en germe et en croissance, déjà l'essentiel du projet de Jabès, que s'y dessinent les grandes lignes du système qui va faire de ses livres les instruments par lesquels l'écrivain, envisageant lucidement sa propre perte en tant que sujet, augmente et régénère, cependant, les possibilités de l'expression et en assure, en définitive, l'émancipation." Joseph Guglielmi, "Postface," 333.

11 I owe this term to Professor Ingeborg Kohn, Chair of the Department of Humanities and Associate Professor in the Department of French & Italian at the University of Arizona. It was she who first helped me to characterize my thinking about Jabès' poetry in terms of architecture since I have been so focused on his manner of building dwellings in words.


13 Joseph Guglielmi, "Postface," 325. This essay was later published in La ressemblance impossible: Edmond Jabès, 31-44.


15 Blanchot, 40.

16 Blanchot, 41.

17 Blanchot, 40.
18 Guglielmi, "Postface," 328; 332.

19 Blanchot, 40.

20 Heidegger tells us, "if it is true that man finds the proper abode of his existence in language--whether he is aware of it or not--then an experience we undergo with language will touch the innermost nexus of our existence." And, "In experiences we undergo with language, language itself brings itself to language." Martin Heidegger, "The Nature of Language," *On the Way to Language*, tr. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1971), 57, 59.

21 "We must be careful not to force the vibration of the poetic saying into the rigid groove of a univocal statement, and so destroy it." Heidegger, "The Nature of Language," 64.

22 Almost all literature makes use, in some form or another, of metaphor. Yet Jacques Derrida tells us that metaphoric language is not limited to literature, but is employed in scientific language, and the language of the social sciences. See, e.g., Alan Bass, "'Literature'/Literature," in *Velocities of Change*, ed. Richard Macksey (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974).

23 Jacques Derrida, "White Mythology," *Margins of Philosophy*, tr. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 253. In this particular discussion, Derrida seeks to show how the metaphor of the sun is perhaps the best metaphor for metaphor, although others have used the metaphor of the dwelling in such a manner. It seems to me that Jabès is concerned with all sorts of dwellings, in houses, words, and in the world, and therefore I am more interested in how the dwelling metaphor functions, although Derrida's discussion shines its light in another direction.

24 Fernandez Zoïla uses "l'éclatement" (rupture) as a manner of reading Jabès's work. See especially Chapitre II, "(Les) structures éclatées."


26 Heidegger, "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," 324.
Heidegger believes that language flows from the earth and is rooted in that ground: "But the mouth is not merely a kind of organ of the body understood as an organism—body and mouth are part of the earth's flow and growth in which we mortals flourish, and from which we receive the soundness of our roots. If we lose the earth, of course, we also lose the roots." (emphasis added). This is what permits exile to exist, this attachment to ground, rootedness to the soil of one place, one country. And this is directly in contrast to Jabès' work.

"Il y a quelques années, Emmanuel Levinas reprochait à Heidegger de valoriser à l'excès le thème occidental de la «demeure», le «manoir» édifié sur un bien-fonds, la maison paysanne plantée au milieu des terres où la récolte manifeste la fécondité de la Physis. C'est là une idée sortie de la rusticité romaine et de l'apollinisme grec constructeur de temples. Mais le désert, excluant la demeure, ouvre l'infini de l'ailleurs à l'errance fondamentale de l'homme." Gabriel Bounoure, "Edmond Jabès, la demeure et le livre," *Mercure de France* (Janvier 1965), 116. I believe that indeed Jabès' poetry sets itself apart from the Greek and Roman tradition of temple-building, opting instead to wander in the words as the bedouin wander in the Eastern deserts.

Derrida, "Edmond Jabès and the Question of the Book," 64.

Fernandez Zoïla, 67.


"Nouvelle musique, nouvelle écoute," John Cage, cited in Fernandez Zoïla, 44.

Fernandez Zoïla, p. 52.


"Vague ground, obsessed page" (AT).

39 Heidegger, "Building, Dwelling, Thinking," 326.


II. Le Livre

Le Livre des questions est le point de départ d'une entreprise audacieuse: assimiler l'errance juive, la traversée du désert; donner au juif éternellement errant une patrie: le Livre.¹

--Une lampe est sur ma table et la maison est dans le livre.²

From the word we move to another dwelling, that of the book. Not necessarily a larger, grander, nor more important dwelling, but one which has built its foundation in the word. Jabès moves into this dwelling in his seven volume work, Le Livre des Questions: "J'habiterai enfin la maison" (I, 18). One of the most important ideas to grasp in reading Jabès' extended aphoristic meditations in this collection is that, indeed, it is not a "book" but "books." We cannot mistake a Jabèsian book for a novel nor for a non-fiction expository essay.

Le Livre des Questions is a seven-volume set yet it can be organized, grouped, read, in different ways. First, it is a triptych. The first three volumes, Le Livre des Questions, Le Livre de Yukel, and Le Retour au Livre comprise one part of Jabès' project. They seem to follow several of the same lines of thought, culminating in the return to the book, both to the original book (Volume I, Le Livre des Questions), and the continual return to focus on books themselves (hence the title of Volume III, Le Retour au Livre). Yet this triptych then extends itself to Yaël, Elya, and Aely, three volumes
which tell us of three amorphous characters and their three transformative names, anagrams of each other. While these three volumes appear to exist outside the circle of the first three volumes, Jabès cites himself, his own words, and the words of his rabbis contained in that first triptych, repeatedly in these three volumes. They are intertwined, two concentric circles but also two overlapping circles. Finally, the last three volumes (and the entire seven volume series) ends in a large punctuation mark, the "." which is the formal title of the Volume VII. This is subtitled El, ou le dernier livre. Yaël, Elya, and Aely all lead to one of the names of God, El, a name which is contained within their names, and the entire series culminates in a final period. Yet perhaps the period here is only a provisional ending; the more suitable mark and the one the reader feels most deeply after reading these volumes is the question mark. For Le Livre des Questions is indeed a questioning: of writing, of reading, of Judaism, and of home and exile as expressed in the very writing and reading of the works.

Questioning runs throughout the seven volumes, binding them together, and binding the reader to the texts as well. But if a reader (or an exile) is searching for answers, Jabès' text-world is not the place to look. Jabès tells us that every question bears within it, in its very structure, its own answer: "La réponse porte le poids de la question
qu'elle repousse ou prolonge. En fait, la réponse est dans la question qui l'ignore" (VI, 43). And this answer, for Jabès, is another question, a question always giving birth to another question: Wisdom and freedom are contained in the act of questioning, the process of asking questions; the reader as well as the writer can move beyond him/herself by questioning. One critic has noted, "The question mark is graphically shaped: it resembles an ear." This "ear" demands that readers "listen" to it by immersing themselves in the process of questioning. This is the essential involvement that Jabès demands of his readers: to always question the text, oneself, the writer, the world, God. Moreover, the legacy of Judaism is one of the questions running throughout the books. Jabès' imaginary rabbis tell us much of questioning in Le Livre des Questions:

A toute question, le Juif répond par une question.

Reb Léma.

Être juif, c'est donc être au centre d'une essentielle interrogation. (VI, 127)

Ma nom est une question et ma liberté, dans mon penchant pour les questions.

Reb Eglal. (I, 125)

« Dialogue, en moi-même, avec l'autre. Réflexion. Toute pensée est quête d'une question. »

Reb Ivel. (II, 56)
--Savoir, c'est questionner, répondit Reb Mendel.
--Que tirerons-nous de ces questions? Que tirerons-nous de toute les réponses qui nous entraîneront à poser d'autres questions, puisque toute question ne peut naître que d'une réponse insatisfaisante? dit le second disciple.
--La promesse d'une nouvelle question, répondit Reb Mendel.
--Il arrivera bien un moment, reprit le plus ancien disciple, où il nous faudra cesser d'interroger, soit parce qu'à notre question il ne pourra être donné aucune réponse, soit parce que nous ne saurons plus formuler nos questions, alors à quoi bon commencer?
--Tu vois, dit Reb Mendel, au bout du raisonnement, il y a toujours, en suspens, une question décisive.
--Questionner, reprit le second disciple, c'est s'engager dans la voie du désespoir puisque jamais nous ne saurons ce que nous cherchons à apprendre.
--La véritable connaissance, c'est de savoir chaque jour que l'on n'apprendra, en fin de compte, rien; car le Rien est aussi connaissance étant l'envers du Tout, comme l'air est l'envers de l'aile.
--Notre espoir est l'aile du désespoir car, autrement, comment avancerions-nous? répondit Reb Mendel.
--L'intelligence, dit le troisième disciple, est plus dangereuse que le cœur qui ne s'appuie que sur ses propres battements. Qui, d'entre nous, peut affirmer qu'il est dans le vrai?

--Seul l'espoir d'être dans le vrai est réel. La vérité, c'est le vide, répondit Reb Mendel.

--Si la vérité qui est dans l'homme est le vide, reprit le plus ancien disciple, nous ne sommes que le néant dans un corps de chair et de peau. Dieu qui est notre vérité est donc aussi le néant?

--Dieu est une question, répondit Reb Mendel, une question qui nous conduit à Lui qui est Lumière par nous, pour nous qui ne sommes rien. (I, 125-126)

What this exchange between rabbi and student illustrates is Jabès' views on questioning, found throughout Le Livre des Questions, and demonstrates how he often makes use of Judaic traditions of scholarship. Questions are the way in which Jews find knowledge; questions form the way in which Jews know God (since they are prohibited from knowing Him visually or by speaking His divine name in vain); questions are the way in which they define themselves.

The question itself is a deconstructive process, not an end nor a closure as an answer would be. No closure is permitted when one question continually opens onto another, as flowers bloom from the root and seed, which is an image we
find in *Je bâtis ma demeure* and one to which Jabès returns often. And as the questions always leads to another question, the book always leads to another book and is never completed; "Aucun livre n'est achevé" (III, 40); "Derrière le livre, il y a l'arrière-livre; derrière l'arrière-livre, il y a l'espace immense et, enfoui dans cet immense space, il y a le livre que nous allons écrire dans son énigmatique enchaînement" (V, 9). As Mary Ann Caws has noted: "I think I have finished, the book if not the questions, and then am carried further." Any "real" reading of Jabès must carry the reader further; to stop would be to stagnate, to die. Though the title of the third volume in the series, *Le Retour au Livre*, seems to undermine this assertion, the return which is spoken of is not a return to an original position or book, but a circling around to look and to read again. It is to reread, to re-vision, to grow again out of the same root, the same seed, the same sap: "Le retour au livre est le retour à la sève et au serment" (III, 17). Writing means to have the "passion" for the origin: of the book, of man, of God, of the world; all of these are the concerns of the writer, the exile, of Jabès. There is always a desire to know the beginnings of life and of the book. Yet this does not mean that there is a simple circling back to that origin where the book, knowledge, or questioning stops:
Écrire, c'est avoir la passion de l'origine; c'est essayer d'atteindre le fond. Le fond est toujours le commencement... de sorte qu'écrire ne signifie pas s'arrêter au but, mais le dépasser sans cesse. (III, 22)

Nor does the writing or questioning cease at the end of the seven volumes of *Le Livre des Questions*. The last words of *El* tell us that what is essential is to preserve the question, to continue the questioning: "L'essentiel pour nous aura été, au paroxysme de la crise, de préserver la question" (VII, 123). Jabès' English translator, Rosmarie Waldrop, understands his version of the question: not something which can be pinned down, not something that produces the definitive answer. Jabès' questions are far more fluid:

The questions in these books do not engender the answers they intend and pretend to engender. They only perpetuate their own form. The questions, too, face mirrors, are mirrors, even though the question as such is not a paradoxical form. There are no answers.5

Waldrop recognizes the essential idea behind Jabès' questions, that is, they do not give answers. I believe that they do not even "intend and pretend to engender" answers as Waldrop suggests in the above quote. Rather, the Jabèsian questions exist as a specific form, a space which writer,
word, and reader can inhabit; a space which was never intended to provide any answers.

In a fundamental way, Jabès' writing cannot be approached except through questioning. The author of a recent critical work on Jabès makes this explicit not only in the title of the book, Questioning Edmond Jabès, but in his preface to the volume: "For how can one legitimately approach this extraordinary writing if not through a process of questioning?" But questioning is not solely a reading strategy, a parlor trick to help one read or study Jabès. In the Judaic tradition, the wisdom and writings on the law are contained in Talmud, the centuries of commentary on the law. Talmud is complex, interwoven writing that is studied by debate, dialogue, argument between students as they read and interpret. One does not read Talmud as much as one argues with it, questions it, or questions others and oneself about its meanings. Just as a student cannot read Talmud without question and debate, a reader must understand that questioning is process, subject, and object within Jabès' work. And by questioning his own writing, Jabès sets himself and writing into a world that can be examined, that can be questioned. To question something makes room for its existence; rather than imposing definitions or answers, authoritative statements which risk obliterating the work and
The author, inquiry allows it to breathe, to survive, to flourish and grow.

Jabès' writing has been referred to as "nomadic writing": writing which is not static, writing which wanders, which continually turns back upon itself, which leaps over the spaces between words and then considers them in its leap, which bridges (ponts/pontificates) different topics, different times, different spaces; writing which is formed from aphorisms and fragments. Nomadic writing is the writing of questions, writing which is not static because it is constantly asking questions: of itself, of its reader, of God, and of life. This questioning writing is perhaps the most appropriate dwelling for the exile: it is fluid, it wanders, its home is the space opened by the question. Jabès tells us this when he speaks of aphorisms: "c'est pourquoi la forme aphoristique est l'expression profonde du livre, car elle permet aux marges de respirer, car elle porte en soi la respiration due livre et exprime l'univers en une fois" (IV, 51). The aphorism allows a measure of freedom to the writer, the reader, and to the book itself.

The nomadic word does not claim authority; it questions itself. It cannot be repressed since it does not make claims to power, thereby stepping outside of certain power relations. And it cannot be exiled because it already wanders. This is the writing that Jabès creates in his book.
of questions: "« Je suis de la race des mots avec lesquels on bâtît les demeures », sachant pertinemment que cette réponse est encore une question, que cette demeure est menacée sans cesse" (I, 32). The writer and the reader are continuously involved in making and re-making the books: "J'évoquerais le livre et provoquerai les questions" (I, 32). There can be no passive reading of Jabès' work—it demands an attention and a participation on the part of the reader who must not only read the questions but question her/himself in order to read the book. While writing and questioning may be a discourse of exile and may always go beyond what exists in the present and what existed in the beginning, and may create an inhabitable creative and critical space, this does not mean it is bound to nothing. There is a root out of which both speech and writing grow and that root is indeed bound to something, a Promised Land perhaps, which is not a terrestrial place, not a "site, an enclosure, a place of exclusion, a province or a ghetto... For this site, this land, calling to us from beyond memory, is always elsewhere. The site is not the empirical and national Here of a territory. It is immemorial and thus also a future." Derrida understands this Promised Land to be a state of mind rather than any territorial state. It is neither a goal nor an end in the work of Derrida nor in that of Jabès. It is the space where humans make meaning of the world: for Derrida and for Jabès that space is writing. The
only way to reach the elsewhere of this Promised Land, this future, is through writing, reading, and questioning, through the process of interpretation which is questioning. This questioning itself becomes the homeland of the Jew and the writer: "L'interpretation est notre lot dans un monde indéchiffrable" (IV, 116). It is a Promised Land contained within the heart and mind of the interpreter, whether they are writer or Jew: "mais la terre promise n'est pas essentiellement un pays, c'est vous aussi et ceux qui vous ressemblent par le coeur et l'esprit" (II, 141). Questioning creates this space where meaning will occur, where meaning will reside if it is to "reside" anywhere: the question asks for knowledge, for attention, for intuition, for reading. And the space which is created is within the book. Questioning, for Jabès and for his reader, creates the kind of unrepressed space where the book can grow and where humans can find a dwelling: "Pouvoir declarer: «Je suis dans le livre. Le livre est mon univers, mon pays, mon toit et mon énigme. Le livre est ma respiration et mon repos.»" (I, 32).

To call questioning a mode of deconstruction and to thereby evoke the presence of Derrida constitutes a stance which is alternately praised and condemned, hailed as liberating and ridiculed as devoid of connection with meaning by critics, scholars, and artists. But when writing of Jabès, his questioning, his writing, his poetics, and his re-
definition of Judaism, it is a necessity to understand deconstruction. Jabès' own work refers to this way of reading and thinking of texts:

Le livre ne se construit pas, mais se déconstruit.

Cette déconstruction est retour à la parole initiale. (VI, 26) When Jabès tells us that this deconstruction constitutes a return to an initial language or speech, what is important is the exploration itself: the journey in the book to discover not only what it contains but what it is. The book, in Jabès' work, always deconstructs itself, always examines itself, sifts through its own meanings because the subject of the book is always the writing of the book itself.

The link between Derrida and Jabès exists in their common focus upon writing, specifically upon writing as shifting process not as static end. When Derrida reads Jabès, he is particularly interested in Jabès' envisioning of Judaism as based in the written word and in Jabès' continued focus on the function of words themselves, both in the life of the writer and in the world. When Jabès reads Derrida, he finds the latter's emphasis on shifting meaning within words.

It must be understood that deconstruction is not merely the dismantling of a text, as a child takes apart a favorite toy to see how it works (though this taking apart is certainly part of the deconstructive process). It is to be attentive to, observant of, the shifts in meaning, the
fluidity of the words of the text, to watch the spaces and abysses as well as the marks on the page. It is to take the text apart by looking carefully at its language; it is to focus on language and on what lies beyond language, that is, the spaces on the page, between the words, underneath them, waiting to be looked at, to be "mined." ¹⁰ And how better to reach this mine, to explore this subsoil of the text than by questioning? Jabès reaches into the Judaic tradition of rabbinic commentary and returns to the present with the question, which is both the means and the inhabitable process of reading. The Jabèsian « demeure » after all, is always built on sand: shifting, wandering, blowing sand. The sand of the desert and the shifting which is questioning: « _Tu peux construire ta maison avec les matériaux les plus solides, écrivait Reb Alkem, elle reposera toujours sur le sable_ » (II, 108). The image of the shifting sand not only evokes the desert (which will be discussed later) but also the notion of absence: absence of plants, absence of roots, of soil, and absence of stability, of solidity.

In "The Question of Absence," Sydney Lévy talks about what is absent in Jabès' writing: the book itself. There is not a completed book; in fact, if the writer finished the book, he would no longer be a writer, just as if the Jew ever truly found the Promised Land and managed to settle there permanently, he would no longer be Jewish: "Avoir un lieu,
pour le juif, c'est achever le livre. Le livre inachevé fut notre survie" (VI, 139). Exile is what makes the Jew who he is; the absent book, the book always still to be written makes the writer who he is. This comes together in the Hebrew Bible. Although it was formally canonized, the Bible never truly ceased to expand and to change, through the discussions of its laws and stories from Midrash and Talmud to medieval mysticism as seen in Kabbalah, indeed to the current day debates. For Jews, the Hebrew Bible is the model of the unfinished book. And for literary scholars in the West, this aspect of the Hebrew Bible is often the model for all later literature. Both Jew and writer, in the world of Jabès, share common aspects of life and meaning: exile and the book. The writer is always in "exile" because he/she is always in the book, living and breathing and working within the written world we call the book. And the true homeland of the Jew is always in the book, the Torah. It is in books that the Jew and the writer find meaning, live their existence, find a "home": "Gens du livre, nous n'aurons jamais de demeure. Nous mourrons dans les mots" (V, 44); "...d'un certain judaisme qui prend force et figure avec le vocable et qui est contemporain du livre " (V, 40); "car être juif c'est, à la fois, s'exiler dans la parole et pleurer son exil" (V, 41); "«Nous avions une terre et un livre. Notre terre est dans le livre .» Reb Riel." (II, 93). This is the
Promised Land of which Derrida speaks in his writing on Jabès: the space where meaning is made, the space which is writing, which enables the creation of the book.

If questions create the kind of open space that the book requires, they also create gaps, interruptions, abysses, and they make the reader aware not only of that reader's responsibility to interpret, but also of the space in between questions and words. Jabès' work relies as much on the spaces as on the words themselves. In fact, without spaces, the book would not exist. These are gaps which are not bridged by words. They are the necessary spaces of writing; they are what allows writing to be legible. Questioning can exist across abysses: voids both of time and of space. Jabès can question his own writing across centuries, through the voices of imaginary rabbis, through the books he writes, through writing itself which, as Derrida has noted, is always already "différence" (both different and deferred from its object and from itself). The legibility of Jabès' writing depends upon the spaces, the abysses: abysses between words and between books, but not only legibility. Meaning arises in spaces, in voids, in the abyss, and especially on the blank page.

There are many examples of Jabès' use of and confrontation with blank spaces in Le Livre des Questions. Visually, reading would be impossible without spaces between
the words. This is the most elementary sense of blank spaces or voids within Jabès' work. Nonetheless, he calls the reader's attention to them both by the setting of the marks on the page and within the discourse itself. In the same spatial/visual mode, the blank page is a network of endless possibilities, of limitlessness, before being covered with signs. Before, that is, one chooses a particular path on that page: "Une feuille blanche est remplie de chemins" (I, 55). Yet, even though Jabès writes on the blankness, does indeed cover it with signs, his work continually reminds us of the spaces as well as the signs, continually tells the reader that there are other possibilities, other paths that the page holds/could have held/did at one time hold.

While space is made apparent throughout Jabès' work, time is collapsed so that imaginary rabbis speak across centuries: "«Il suffit d'une minute pour prendre conscience d'un siècle.» Reb Kelat" (I, 19). There are other examples of this blending of time throughout Le Livre des Questions. Sarah's journal speaks for her after she has gone mad; Yukel Serafi commits suicide and remains a narrator, a character, and the witness to his own book; and Elya, Yaël's stillborn child, has a strange life in words, although he never had human life at all and in fact had existence only as a word, a name. With time collapsed, questioning can take place across the centuries, across the millennia, between man and
creation itself, between the broken tablets of the law and the human commentary they inspire. But although different times can come together, spatial distance is often reinforced in the book. There are spaces, gaps, interruptions, abysses, absences. And these gaps and absences take on the burden of making meaning in *Le Livre des Questions*, as much as the questions, the words themselves. Blanchot has written of a certain kind of interruption in speaking and in writing, an interruption which "introduces waiting, which measures the distance between two speakers, and not the reducible distance, but the irreducible."\(^{12}\) This waiting, this distance is not to be bridged by relations, but is to be recognized as an "otherness," an "infinite distance."\(^{13}\) Blanchot has also recognized the necessity of this particular interruption in Jabès' works, works which know this interruption, this waiting, which focus on it and embrace it as necessary both to the writer and to the Jew: "In the totality of fragments, thoughts, dialogues, invocations, narrative movements, and scattered words that make up the detour of a single poem, I find the powers of interruption at work, so that the writing, and what is proposed to writing (the uninterrupted murmur, what does not stop), must be accomplished in the act of interrupting itself."\(^{14}\) Without this interruption Jabès' work could not tell the reader about its subjects which are life, death, exile, Judaism, and writing. These cannot be grasped
except through writing which embraces fragments and interruptions.

But what is the relation of the gap, the absence, to Judaism? Perhaps most important here is the connection of Judaism to the notion of rupture. Or we might say Judaism, writing, and rupture, since it is the Book of the Jews which began from a "wound," from a "rupture," from a breaking of the tablets on which the law was given, a breaking which occurred even before they were read by humans, and which necessitated the second set of tablets, the second word, one might say, where the first or original word was already gone, non-existent. Judaism was born from this break: "Le salut du peuple juif est dans la rupture, dans la solidarité au sein de la rupture" (I, 108). The homeland of the Jew is a written place, the book which is a world: "Ainsi le pays de Juif est à la taille de leur univers, car il est un livre" (I, 109). Forced repeatedly throughout history to leave whatever land they inhabited, the Jews have always depended upon their Book to keep them together. This book grows from the wound, from the gap of the broken law: "Dieu parla dans les fissures de la pierre et Son peuple sut, désormais, que chacune de ses blessures était écrite" (VI, 134). This breaking of the tablets of the law, depriving us of the "original" divine words, shows that the law we have, the writing on the second set of tablets, is the trace or
remainder of an original absence. As in Derrida's work, this trace is how we see writing, how writing comes into existence. And in Jabès' work, the fact that there is an original absence, a breaking, a wound from which writing emerges, becomes all important in any attempt to read his books.

These gaps, the abysses and spaces in the Jabèsian book also lead us to reconsider the "center" of the text and of the world:

O soleil, cercle incendié dans le refus du cercle.

Le centre est-ce, alors, la négation du centre (VI, 89). Jabès often writes of the center, but that center is a "cri," a scream which echoes not only from book to book but throughout the centuries, the histories of Jews, writers, and characters: "Le centre est le cri, la blessure vive, la clé" (III, 57). The function of this scream at the center is twofold: it decenters the text and releases it from control (the control of God, of the author, of structure, even of the reader's expectations), so that like the Jew, the text wanders: "Le centre est, peut-être, le déplacement de la question. Point de centre où le cercle est impossible" (III, 57). And, this decentering is Jabès' way of writing after the Holocaust, his reply to Adorno's famous pronouncement on the possibility of writing poetry after the Nazi genocide: "À l'affirmation d'Adorno: « On ne peut plus écrire de poésie
après Auschwitz » qui nous invite à une remise en cause
globale de notre culture, je serais tenté de répondre: oui,
on le peut. Et, même, on le doit. Il faut écrire à partir
de cette cassure, de cette blessure sans cesse ravivée."16 If
we recall Adorno's words regarding writing and art after the
Holocaust, we will recognize why it is impossible for this
art to be a purely mimetic attempt;17 how can one possibly
represent genocide and wouldn't any such representation be
but a poor copy which cannot evoke the truth of the event?

One solution, of course, is to evoke horror. But Jabès
chooses to write of writing, to focus on the meaning that
humans make of the world in signs, in texts. And to show
that the horror of genocide, in at least one of its
appearances, that of the slaughter of European Jewry, has no
fixed center. Rather, there is a scream: a scream of
horror, to be sure, but also a scream of pain, and a primal
scream signifying life, signifying more (and less) than one
fixed center could.

The decentering which occurs in Jabès' work, a
decentering of page and of book, allows the "play" of the
chain of supplements to occur.18 No longer is there one
center of the text, nor one God or authority at the center of
the world. As there is an absent origin of the word, the
missing first tablets, there is an absence of authority in
the Jabèsian book, a lack of central authority, be that
divine (God) or human (the author). Jabès has told us that his words and books make him, or make themselves through him, rather than his exercising mastery or authority over them: "Le livre n'a pas besoin de l'homme pour se faire; il se fait à travers lui" (IV, 160). When the center is displaced or absent no authority can control it. The cry, the scream are not enslaved by an authority: "Nulle institution, nul gouvernement n'a le monopole du cri" (I, 51). There is a subversiveness where contradictions, doubt, and questions exist.

To decenter the book also helps us understand how Jabès' books give birth to other books, how they can contain within themselves the next book, or even the "before-book" (l'avant-livre); the absent center is only the beginning of another book: "Le centre est le seuil" (III, 58). There is no one original word, no one original book (or Book); there is always a book coming after, a book before: "Le livre est toujours ouvert" (V, 72). Again, to rely on Derrida's notions of "play" and "supplementarity," this decentering of the text removes limits, removes fixity and stasis which tend to bury the work by fixing it. Instead, there can be endless possibility rather than the limited impossibility: "In the short run, the impossible is a failure to go beyond. Refusing this failure means perhaps transforming the impossible into an adventurous possibility."[19] As Derrida
notes, the supplement is that which adds itself to what is already there, and also that which replaces what exists. In both senses of the word (as Derrida insists it must be understood), Jabès' books are supplements: "Comme le main, à l'aurore, prend la relève de la main, Le Livre de Yukel prolonge et se substitue au Livre des Questions" (II, 11). The supplement, in Derrida's discussion of Rousseau, is writing, the written word which adds itself to the spoken word and simultaneously replaces it. That supplement has been considered inferior, secondary, somehow derivative from a "real presence," a transcendent signified to which writing makes reference. What is radical is Derrida's contention that this "real presence" is only one of a chain of supplements, since it names, in language, a presence which has already disappeared as soon as it is named; that is, it receives meaning from a trace, it is a supplement for an "Absolute Presence" which can be named, made meaningful only in words and is no longer absolutely present as soon as that occurs. 20 For Jabès, as for Derrida, the book as supplement is not secondary or degraded; on the contrary, for the Jew and the writer it is the origin of their identities and existences.

Perhaps most importantly, questioning, decentering, and the focus on abysses and gaps provoke a kind of vertige, a dizziness or vertigo which is not unlike the state of exile
in that the exiled person is without an anchoring place, forced to wander in a kind of perpetual motion. The reader, thrust by Jabès' writing into this vertigo, must learn how to read, how to breathe, how to live in the dizzying heights (or depths) of the void. Deprived of one anchoring site, a sacred ground, the exile wanders about, looking for a replacement for the lost home. Writing, deprived of "presence," of metaphysical Being (that full presence which speech supposedly possesses, and which writing, with its originary violence, supposedly tears away), also wanders in this vertige. But far from being negative, this is a dizziness, a fall which permits other ways of living, of being, of seeing, of writing:

L'épi fait la beauté du champ et nourrit l'homme; mais le cri, la déchirure occasionés par toute naissance, appartiennent au vide, au triomphe et à la chute spectaculaire dans le néant où l'univers interroge ses lumineux fragments après sa soudaine et interne explosion. Chute qui succède au triomphe présomptueux de toute présence au monde et que décrit, dans son intensité diffuse, chaque rayon de l'astre recherché de l'ombre et de l'heure; chute du jour et du soir constellé qui ne mettent pas en cause l'existence de l'astre, mais notre faculté à le capter. (VI, 120)
This is writing which is not bound within limits; writing which not only concerns characters in a story, but actually becomes those characters: Elya, the stillborn child of Yaël, Aely who is perhaps only a word, only writing; Yaël, who is woman or perhaps herself only writing: "Mon oeuvre—ainsi désignais tu, Yaël, la lourde chaîne brisée de mes écrits" (VI, 175); "«Je ne m'appelle pas Aely. Nul ne m'a gratifié de ce nom. Ce nom est celui d'un livre. Suis-je ce livre? Je ne pus l'être que dans la mesure où il n'est que le silence décripté d'un nom»" (VI, 60); "Elya, marge pour deux regards" (VI, 83).

Not only the pushing back of limits, but also the confrontation with nothing, "rien," occurs over and over in Jabès' work. "Vide," "néant," "rien" are not purely negative concepts in Le Livre des Questions. There is as much to be learned of and within the void as there is in the "All." In fact, since "Rien" is only the opposite side of "Tout," one cannot know something without knowing nothing:

--La véritable connaissance, c'est de savoir chaque jour que l'on n'apprendra, en fin de compte, rien; car le Rien est aussi connaissance étant l'envers du Tout, comme l'air est l'envers de l'aile. (I, 126)

But perhaps most importantly, it is out of nothing that everything is born: the world, the Jew, the law, writing. Not only the law and the Jew, but the world itself is held to be
created out of nothing. And not only nothing, creatio ex nihilo, but out of the tangible absence of God, the withdrawal of God from a space in the universe in order to create man and the world.

God is at once All and Nothing. Gershom Scholem makes this clear in his descriptions of Jewish mysticism: "This Nothing from which everything has sprung is by no means a mere negation; only to us does it present no attributes because it is beyond the reach of intellectual knowledge. In truth, however, this Nothing--to quote one of the Kabbalists--is infinitely more real than all other reality."21 This idea, found in the Lurianic Kabbalah, permeates Jabès' work, not in any traditional (or, more correctly, traditional mystical) sense, but as a demonstration of the importance of the void, to both Jew and to the writer. The work of Isaac Luria and his disciples and successors had much to do with the void of space where creation of the world and of humans occurred. The main problem for these mystical philosophers was how to reconcile the idea that God is everywhere and, at the same time, that the word was created and it is not, technically speaking, God. The solution was to understand that God withdrew and left a space, a void, a "nothing" where the world could be created. Hence, the idea of the void becomes extremely important in Kabbalistic thinking, something which attracts Jabès in his own work.
In the Bible, in Jewish tradition, and in the work of Jabès this void is often the desert. And the desert figures prominently in Jabès' work, as privileged space and trope. The desert is privileged because it is the place where the Hebrews, as a people, traditionally were formed. The Sinai is more than the hot, barren, mountainous background for the Bible stories in Genesis, Exodus, and Numbers. It is the space where the Hebrews escaped the Egyptians; it is the place where God gave the laws to the people; and it is the space within which that God can exist, unseen but written. The desert is the space where questioning can best be perceived, in Jewish tradition as well as in Jabès' Le Livre des Questions. The desert, an open, empty expanse, a place of absence, is where the law was given; it is where God spoke to Moses, but where He withdrew as well. And it is where the people withdrew from the cities and from surrounding cultures in order to define themselves in opposition to those cultures. The desert is the space where God can be heard but not contained:

Désert. Toute écriture est d'abord blessure de sable. Aussi a-t-il fallu au peuple hébreu quarante années dans le Sinaï pour s'identifier au Livre. Le désert a écrit le juif et le juif se lit dans le désert (VI, 130).
The desert is a trope because it is both a metaphor for the blank page in Jabès' writing and because it represents a turning away from other cultures and religions, and in Jabès' work a turning toward a focus on writing. In the Hebrew Bible, YHWH leads his people out into the desert in order to consolidate them as a people. The emptiness of the wilderness insures that the focus is on the word of God, not faced with distractions such as those offered by the cities of surrounding cultures. The desert was the place that YHWH could make himself heard.

It is also the place where He could disappear and where the people could speak, write, form themselves into a people through their words. God will only speak to Moses at the top of a mountain, secluded from the people waiting for His words in the desert. Jabès plays on these ideas of the desert; the sand as blank page, blank space where one's words can be read and the wilderness as the place where one can be separated, apart from others who would impose their cultures upon one. But while the desert is both a privileged space and a trope, it is not idealized nor romanticized. The desert as a place where writing can exist, where words can be formed and made visible in the sand (as it represents the blank page) is also the space where shifting sands erase those words as easily as they are formed. And it can erase humans as well.22
There are many indications that the sojourn of the Hebrews in the desert was a fiction, a symbol of separation from the cultures around them. Yet the desert is a real presence in the geography of the Near East. Jabès focuses on the desert throughout *Le Livre des Questions*; it is a constant presence in his writing and, as he sees it, in all writing because it is the place where writing can occur (a vast expanse of emptiness invites the written word as the blank white page invites black signs). In one memorable section of Volume I, an unnamed narrator takes a journey into the Egyptian desert near his Cairo home. After his car becomes useless when clogged with sand, he attempts to walk out of the desert. He loses his way, but finds that the desert is full of presence and possibility:

"Il s'était aventuré un après-midi dans le désert qui s'étend à l'Est, au-delà des frontières de ce pays du Moyen-Orient où ses parents s' étaient installés. Il avait besoin d'un paysage pour sa solitude. Il s'était engagé, avec sa voiture, dans diverses directions. Il s'était enfoncé jusqu' au bout du salut. Une nuit tiède était, autour de lui, ses bracelets, ses colliers. --Le plus fascinant était rose. --Il s'étonnait qu'elle pût apparaître et disparaître, se multiplier et devenir, tout à coup, si menue qu'il pouvait l'étreindre. Il
admirait qu'elle pût être femme et univers féminin, qu'elle pût être nue et vêtue d'astres.

Il s'était retrouvé, à midi, face à l'infini, à la page blanche. Toute trace de pas, la piste avaient disparu.

Il devait être à quelques dizaines de kilomètres du lieu de son départ; mais il l'ignorait. Et pouvait-on, ici, parler de départ ou d'arrivée? Partout, l'oubli, le lit défait de l'absence, l'errant royaume pulvérisé.

Le salut, pour l'homme, c'est ce que a, comme lui, un commencement et une fin, c'est ce qui recommence. Le salut, c'est l'eau que éteanche la soif pour être à nouveau réclamée; c'est le pain qui apaise la faim et l'entretient, c'est ce que germe, gouverne, mûrit pour l'homme et avec lui. L'infini, l'éternité sont les ennemis de la pulpe et de l'écorce. Quand il n'y aura plus rien, il y aura encore du sable, il y aura le désert pour conjuguer le rien. (I, 56-57)

Though the desert is a landscape for solitude, it is precisely in that solitude and silence that writing occurs. This is what Blanchot names the "essential solitude"; that is, the solitude of writing, where even the author disappears, where only the work exists.24 While the unnamed Jabèsian narrator is lost, stuck in the sand of the Egyptian desert, it is that desert which is the "blank page" that
allows Jabès to write. It is precisely the fact that there is no beginning and no end, that the desert is infinite or at least represents infinity to humans who cannot control this space, cannot find their way in it, that makes it Jabès' choice to represent writing. Humans are lost in writing; they try to control it but discover finally that writing is a process of meaning that controls itself:

Mais le verbe est le semeur régnant. L'aube, le crépuscule sont écrits comme la race. Lorsqu'il retrouva son quartier et sa demeure--un nomade l'avait conduit à dos de chameau jusqu'au poste de contrôle le plus proche où il prit place dans un camion militaire qui se dirigeait vers la ville--, tant de vocable le sollicitaient. Il s'obstina, cependant, à les éviter car ils étaient encore trop épris d'espace pour qu'il songeât à les fixer. (I, 59)

When this lost man returns from the desert (on suitable transportation for both the world apart from civilization that the desert embodies--the camel--and the world of aggression that the city represents--the military bus), he still stubbornly wishes to fix, to fasten words to meanings, still attempts to control them. He fails to recognize that indeed the words are "too much in love with space," with the infinity and eternity represented by the sand of the desert, to be controlled by humans. The writer must realize that
he/she only allows the words to be written through him or herself. Once on the page, they form a world of meaning that humans, writers and readers, must try to understand but which we can never control. This is at least a part of what the desert comes to mean in Jabès' work.

The question, the lack of a stable center, the void, and the desert all contribute to Jabès' redefinition of Judaism and its association, in his work, with writing. To be Jewish means to be different, to be separated from others spatially as well as religiously, to embrace absence, and to be in exile:

«Le peuple élu selon Dieu, disait-il, ne pouvait être qu'exclu; comme Dieu le fut par son Nom.

Dans cette exclusion réside notre identité. Toute lecture de notre spécificité est poignante lecture de notre étrangeté.» (VI, 131).

«Soyez saints puisque Moi je le suis», dit Yahvé; c'est-à-dire: Par amour de Moi devenez Moi-même dans la sainteté. Par ailleurs, n'a-t-il pas dit aussi: «Soyez différents des autres peuples de même que Moi je suis différent des autres dieux»?

Ainsi, à travers Dieu, là où Il s'impose comme un Dieu seul, sainteté et séparation, sainteté et distinction sont synonymes. (VI, 117-118)

Je le répète. Le signe est juif.
Le vocable est juif.  
Le livre est juif.  
Le livre est fait de juifs;  
car le juif, depuis des millénaires, s'est voulu signe, vocable, livre. Son écriture est errance, méfiance, attente, confluence, blessure, exode, exil, exil, exil. (VI, 114) 

But rather than consider these as negative states, let us consider them in the light of Blanchot's important essay "Être Juif."

To do so is to understand that the people who embrace wandering and spatial separation, who recognize "foreignness" and "difference" have established a certain relation to their origins where those origins are no longer rooted, buried in one sacred place.

"Le Juif est l'homme des origines, qui se rapporte à la origine, non pas en demeurant, mais en s'éloignant, disant ainsi que la vérité du commencement est dans la separation."

It also signifies a different relation to truth, where that truth is no longer static:

S'il faut se mettre en route et errer, est-ce parce qu'exclus de la vérité, nous sommes condamnés à l'exclusion qui interdit toute demeure? N'est-ce pas plutôt que cette errance signifie un rapport nouveau avec le «vrai»?
Blanchot scoffs at the idea that truth itself must be fixed, stationary, static: "Comme si la vérité elle-même était nécessairement sédentaire!" But what does this really mean, in philosophical and literary terms? Is it relativism in a different guise, a way of suggesting that there is nothing absolute about truth, about Judaism, and about writing? This seems simply to be another way of looking at the issue negatively, pejoratively. Actually, the notions of separation, difference, and wandering are liberating ideas. They free a people (and writing) from constraints that would suppress truth, but they do not erase the concept of the existence of truth. There is a truth, but it wanders. This relation to wandering, separation, and exile, is also, in Blanchot's thought, connected with a desire for freedom and a desire for justice:

Si le judaïsme est destiné à prendre un sens pour nous, c'est bien en nous montrant qu'il faut, en tout temps, être prêt à se mettre en route, parce que sortir (aller au dehors) est l'exigence à laquelle l'on ne peut se soustraire si l'on veut maintenir la possibilité d'un rapport de justice.

As a result of this relationship to justice and the desire for liberation, exile--enforced wandering--becomes the necessary way of life. What is important, for Blanchot as well as for Jabès, is to understand this exile not as
something horrific, not as something that will ruin life, but
to see that it can allow survival and a particular kind of
life to exist. That is, the life of the Jew, in his/her
separation and difference, and in the suffering for that
difference:

La fidélité à Dieu est fidélité à l'homme dans sa quête
de vérité. Traces dans la Trace ensellée. Nos
différences nous stimulent. Dieu es la totalité de nos
différences. (VI, 123)

To write is also a means of separating oneself, of creating a
distance by inhabiting the absence of the written word. And
this exile, for Jabès, is also the lot of the writer, because
of his/her relation to the word and to the book. This is
perhaps a method developed over the millenia to deal with the
suffering that is provoked by continuous exile in a world
which values the ground, the roots, that which is stationary.
And perhaps similarly a strategy developed by the writer
whose work, the written word, has been viewed as secondary or
degraded.

There is also an unmaking of proper names throughout Le
Livre des Questions, an unmaking which permits writing to
flourish, which allows inhabitation within the book: "Nous
avons vu, dans l'ordre, se défaire nos noms propres. Ainsi,
de frontière en frontière, se sont défaits les noms de Sarah,
de Yukel, de Yaël, d'Elya puis d'Aely" (VI, 171). This
unmaking of proper names effaces proprietary relations of presence between name and person, setting these names free to wander, unattached to one signified (i.e., Yukel Serafi is character, witness, narrator, and ghost following his suicide in Le Livre de Yukel). This "deconstructive" move allows Jabès to free writing, to free the book from what he views as the violence of limitations such as we find in modern novels.\textsuperscript{31} Even more importantly, this unmaking of proper names allows a naming of the "unpronounceable" divine name: the Tetragrammaton, the four letters which designate the one God of the Hebrews: YHWH. Traditionally, one is prohibited from speaking God's name. By freeing proper names, by separating them from some metaphysical idea of full presence, Jabès can also name the unnameable without destroying it. The name of God becomes the name of the writer: "L'homme d'écriture est l'homme des quatre lettres qui forment le Nom imprononçable. Dieu est absent par son nom" (VI, 60). Because there is a prohibition against idols, images, or any visual representations of God (the second commandment), He is only knowable through words: "Comment peut-on entendre Dieu hors de l'écriture?" (VI, 100). And further, the divine name has prohibitions against being spoken; thus, we are faced with the Hebrew God's invisibility and the unpronounceability of his name. Where else but in writing, in the book, can He be? Absent from speech, absent from vision, prohibited from
being represented, writing is the only human habitation He can occupy. For the Jew, therefore, as for the writer, the key is in the book: "Le Temple fut bâti dans le Livre. Ainsi Dieu a renoncé au corps pour le Livre, pour chaque lettre" (VI, 121). There is a silence in the book, an absence of speech and sound, an absence of presence, which allows writing to exist, to become eternal, which refuses to be pronounced in order to remain both a divine and a human place:

Ce silence effrayant, écrasant qui, à son plus haut moment, pour s'adresser à lui-même se dédouble et définit, lorsque Dieu en appela à Son peuple, silence divin et silence de la créature, le Tables brisées de la Loi les proposent à notre méditation. Double silence que la pierre écrite, à sa seconde naissance, perpétuera. Silence du vocable et silence de l'instant clos à jamais sur sa faim, dans sa défunte durée.

La langue de Dieu--qui est langue de l'absence, langue d'une langue qui a résisté au feu et au gel du marbre--est immuable, comme épelée de la mort. Formée de signes éternels, elle refuse la vie à tout accent.

Ainsi, parce qu'il ne peut être entendu, le nom de Dieu s'est voulu inarticulable, stérilisant la lettre au faîte de sa signification. (VI, 128)

Je dis que cette loi du livre est juive.
Je dis que cette loi de Dieu, dans le livre, est juive. Je dis que cette loi de l'homme, dans le livre, est juive, car toute lettre du livre est le squelette d'un juif. (VI, 23).

Writing is the place where divine and human meet in Jewish tradition. And it is the space allowed to writer and exile when all other places are denied to them. This absence is also the void of which Jabès has spoken, the emptiness between words, between books, the void one must risk if one wants to write or read. One must undertake the way of the Jew, the way of difference, the way of wandering and exile.

What is this difference of the Jew and the writer? Historically, it has been seen as the belief in the one God that set the Hebrews apart from others. And later, the nature of that God and the Jews' relation to Him set them apart from Christianity and from Islam, both of which are indeed forms of monotheism but whose conceptions of God and relations with Him are vastly different from that of the Jew.

But what can it mean in a world where that one God is absent, in a book that is not the sacred Book, and when the relation is also applied to the writer and, in fact, to writing itself? Jabès' most interesting definition of Judaism and his use of it to help define writing and understand exile comes from his blending of what had hitherto seemed quite distinct traditions: Jewish mysticism as it exists in
Kabbalah and the teaching and customs of the scholarly or rabbinic tradition. These are really not as separate as they may have seemed at other times. Gershom Scholem, in his brilliant and exhaustive studies of Kabbalah, has shown us how ingrained Kabbalah and mystical teachings have become in normative Judaism, as well as what they have in common with rabbinic tradition. And through the work of Scholem and others, we know that Jewish mysticism, unlike visionary mysticism of other belief systems such as Christianity or Islam, is very closely linked to history. In fact, while Kabbalah is visionary and esoteric it is also a complex representation of Jewish life, particularly of exile, and often presents strategies for dealing with a history and a present of suffering and exile; as Harold Bloom has noted, "Kabbalah differs finally from Christian or Eastern mysticism in being more a mode of intellectual speculation than a way of union with God." And Scholem has told us that in Kabbalah "the spiritual experience of the mystics was almost inextricably intertwined with the historical experience of the Jewish people." Even if Kabbalah and rabbinic Judaism share more in common than perhaps either is willing to acknowledge, why does Jabès choose to interweave them in his work? The answer may be found in Scholem's definition of a "revolutionary mystic" as well as clues Jabès himself has given. Scholem finds that in addition to mystics who, by
reason of rediscovering the strengths of their religious tradition, function to conserve that tradition, there are those whose mystical experiences may lead to a challenge to religious authority:

For the same experience, which in one case makes for a conservative attitude, can in another case foster a diametrically opposite attitude. A mystic may substitute his own opinion for that prescribed by authority, precisely because his opinion seems to stem from the very same authority.34

This same principle lies behind Jabès' use of words which may no longer be commonly found in speech or writing. Often he will attempt to add life to contemporary writing by including what others might call "archaic" words, as well as to revive the meanings of those words:

Ces mots oubliés sont, pour moi, un « Sésame ouvre-toi ». Ils sont un passage dan l'oubli, vers la mémoire reconstituée. Lier ces mots aux mots de notre temps, c'est ne pas laisser s'estomper définitivement le passé...Ce que m'intéresse, en fait, c'est justement ce dépaysement du mot vieilli dans un contexte que n'est pas le sien. J'éprouve une émotion, une jouissance même à me sentir responsable de sa réintégration...Dans ce cas précis, l'intrusion du passé crée en quelque sorte la modernité."35
Jabès' use of Kabbalah, therefore, revives aspects of that long disdained mystical tradition as well as adding new life to the scholarly traditions it is combined with in his texts. And Jabès' blending of Kabbalah and rabbinic Judaism relies upon two major ideas, that of exile and that of the power of the written word to function as a specific place or home in a human world where is exile is a fact of life.

Exile, of course, runs throughout both branches of Jewish tradition. From the earliest conception of themselves as a "people" (see, of course, the Biblical book of Exodus) to the turn-of-the-twentieth-century exodus of European Jewry, exile has been a defining factor in normative Judaism and in the learned scholarly tradition. And it is especially prominent in Lurianic Kabbalah whose ideas were shaped following the exile of the Jews from Spain. In fact, in Lurianic Kabbalah there is a concerted attempt to understand and to represent exile and its attendant suffering.

How is this notion of exile represented in Judaism and how can Jabès relate it to the experience of the writer? As others have noted,³⁶ Jabès incorporates specific ideas from the Jewish mystical tradition into his wandering books of aphorisms and questions, especially the notion of what is called tsimtsum from Lurianic Kabbalah. Tsimtsum is the withdrawal of God from a space in the universe so that the world and humans could be created, since if God was believed
to be everywhere, there would have been no possibility of creating the human. For Luria and his followers, this problem was solved by understanding that in order to create the world, God withdrew into Himself and created in the space or void that was left behind. This becomes a powerful representation of exile for the Jewish people: "One is tempted to interpret this withdrawal of God into his own Being in terms of Exile, of banishing Himself from His totality into profound seclusion. Regarded this way, the idea of Tsimtsum is the deepest symbol of Exile that could be thought of." For Jabès as well, this becomes a metaphor for the condition of both the exile and the writer, perhaps one of the most important metaphors in Le Livre des Questions. The idea that God exiled Himself in order to create is a particularly powerful one, especially for people who are themselves forced into exile. To understand their own situation as similar to that of their God makes the difficulties, the suffering of that situation if not more bearable, then at least somewhat comprehensible.

In addition, there is a looked-for, hoped-for doctrine of reconciliation and end to exile within Lurianic Kabbalah, the doctrine known as tikkun. The basic ideas behind tikkun stem from what is known as "the breaking of the vessels": the sefirot or manifestations of God are so powerful that the upper ones, those closest to God, broke those lower down.
But there are sparks of divinity in what remains and, when the time has come, all the lights will again be gathered together, humans will again be in harmony with God, and perfection will reign. This is the reconciliation, *tikkun*.

One of the most important elements in this doctrine involves the Torah. The Torah, the sacred stories and laws from God, is also not perfect. There is another Torah, an unwritten or oral Torah, which cannot be seen or read by humans since the breaking of the vessels and the imperfection of humanity and the world. This oral Torah, the perfect book which God had "written" but which no longer exists, is the Torah which preceded the one that is now in the world and which will once again be "readable" when harmony is restored to the world. Some have held that there is a missing twenty-third letter (the Hebrew alphabet has twenty-two letters) that would allow all of the Torah to be read. At the time of reconciliation, however, the oral Torah, the perfect Torah, will again be legible and understood by men.

Jabès plays with this concept, linking it to human identity rather than knowledge of God or of Torah: "Une lettre se détache de notre nom et nous ne sommes déjà plus" (VI, 55). The missing letter changes the name, therefore the identity, of the person. There is something that is no longer legible. And this is one of the keys to understanding Jabès' fascination with the absences, the spaces between
words. The Kabbalists hold that the Torah is written in black fire upon white fire and both the black and the white are necessary, must be read. For Jabès, the white fire and the unseen oral Torah become as important for the writer as for the mystic Jewish visionaries.

In Jabès' meditations and poetry, the relation between Jewishness and writing is integral, undeniable: "car le judaïsme et l'écriture ne sont qu'une même attente, un même espoir, une même usure" (I, 132); "«J'ai cru d'abord que j'étais un écrivain, puis je me suis rendu compte que j'étais juif, puis ne n'ai plus distingué en moi l'écrivain du juif, car l'un et l'autre ne sont que le tourment d'une antique parole» (Cahier de Yukel)" (III, 60). Judaism, in the Jabèsian œuvre, rather than a religion is a way of living and a way of difference, of separation. It is a life lived as "otherness," as a stranger among other people, a feeling of being different and an understanding of the necessity of this difference, of separation, of absence, in order to live and to create:

The relation to Jewishness, to writing, is a relation to strangeness in its primitive sense and the one it has acquired since. It can turn us, at the heart of our uncondition, into a stranger among strangers.40 These ways of living, Judaism and writing, these recognitions of separation, of difference, absence, strangeness, are
difficult, perhaps nearly impossible in the face of a world which distrusts and which often strives to exterminate difference; yet what else can one do but choose to survive: "Face à l'impossibilité d'écrire qui paralyse tout écrivain et à l'impossibilité d'être Juif qui, depuis deux mille ans, déchire le peuple de ce nom l'écrivain choisit d'écrire et le Juif de survive» (II, 59-60).

Both Judaism and writing have their roots in the written word, as has been noted many times in discussions of Jabès' work. Jabès himself often affirmed it, in many ways: "The Jew and the writer experience the same perpetual beginning--which is not a rebeginning--the same amazement at what is written, the same faith in what is still to be read and said. God is His word, and this living Word must forever be rewritten. The believing Jew cannot go toward God except through the Book, but the commentary on the original Text is not a commentary on the divine Word. Only on the human word dazzled by the latter like a moth by the lamp." The same "perpetual beginning--which is not a rebeginning"; these words tell us that Judaism and writing are always moving, always beginning, always being written and read. In fact, their existences depend upon that beginning and upon writing and reading. Not upon resurrection, but on the understanding that the roots of Judaism and of writing are always starting. And those roots are words on the blank page, the Kabbalistic
"black fire" on "white fire" which leads both Jews and writers to live their perpetual lives of exile and strangeness in the one place that they can: the book.

The Jew and the writer are "other," different, because they live in and for writing, the word. For others, full presence as evidenced by speech (which is supposed to represent thought without mediation, or at least without a doubly removed mediation such as writing), is the cornerstone of their belief, their lives. God, life--these are present, alive in speech which is seen as a natural human function. But for Jews and writers the "absence" in writing is the only real indication of presence. The Hebrew God cannot be represented visually and there are prohibitions against pronouncing the divine name. Where else could He be, but in the Book? There is a Kabbalistic teaching that the Torah is God's name, the divine unpronounceable name forms every letter of the Torah. And yet it cannot be easily apprehended by man. It is a powerful representation of the idea that God is in the Book but cannot be contained by it. And by virtue of requiring interpretation and commentary by men, the Book is the site where the divine word meets the human word. *Le Livre des Questions* is a book of this sort (if one can choose to limit oneself to simply one definition, one way of looking at this series of books); it is the ground where the unpronounceable Name meets human commentaries on the
name and the book. Jabès, however, changes the emphasis of the sacred: God is no longer a religious figure; His presence is not what is required. In fact, God must disappear, withdraw, in Jabès' books in order for the human word to exist and in order for humans to create: "La mort de Dieu dans le livre a donné naissance à l'homme" (II, 62). In Paradise, in a perfect, divine garden, speech was the mode which prevailed, a speech full of God's Being; in the desert, writing is the only thing that can exist: "Le jardin est paroles; le désert, écriture. Dans chaque grain de sable, un signe surprend" (I, 164). The desert is the place that the human word can be born; it is the place where God withdrew in order to be present in His absence, at Sinai in the tablets of the Law, and again in Jabès' work. The idea of God withdrawing, in the Jabèsian book, is the effort to show that meaning does not lie in an ultimate origin, an omnipotent and "present" Being. What becomes important is the supplément (to use Derrida's word), the chain of significations, of meanings, that is best seen in writing itself. Origins are an illusion and rather than seek for that illusory beginning, we must concentrate on that "perpetual beginning" that informs Jabès' work. Writing, the book, is that perpetual beginning. That is perhaps how we can see it as the best (the only?) "home" for the exile. And that exile is also someone who no longer can delude him/herself about origins
since they are always forced to wander—the wandering itself becomes their survival: "Tu appelles la chute, un exil. Ainsi, tu survis." Reb Tadie" (III, 30).

The notion of the Jewish people as "other" stems not only from their association with writing and the written word, but also from being visualized as different by groups who project their own failures and frustrations onto the Jews as a group. But we cannot define Judaism as simple "otherness," difference from pagan and animistic religions, difference from Christianity. That would be to indulge in the negative side of an opposition which is itself too simplistic to allow a clear sight of what Judaism signifies. It would be to accept that because the Jews have suffered and have been despised that this is their lot, their fate, indeed their meaning in life. It is certainly true that the Jews have been oppressed and despised and that this must be stated and understood: "Le Juif, à travers les temps, est l'opprimé et l'accusé. Il est, il a été l'opprimé de toute société. Toute société, et particulièrement la société chrétienne, a eu son Juif, afin de s'affirmer contre lui dans un rapport d'oppression général." But let us not mistake effect for cause. Can Judaism be only this negativity, this difference, this what-we-are-not? Obviously not. Certainly Judaism is a culture and a religion, a belief system rich with heritage and custom. But this does not explain the antagonism and
oppression of the millenia. To see Judaism as pure
negativity would be to succumb to that construction of
oppositions which allows the negative to exist, which also
makes oppression possible. Blanchot refuses to see this as
the only definition of the Jew. And where he locates the
importance of Judaism helps us to understand the importance
and connection of Judaism and writing in Jabès' work. It is
in the very separation, the abyss, the difference of the Jew,
but the abyss which is preserved by the word, not the
concentration on the opposing sides. It is to focus on the
abyss itself and the written tradition which preserves that
separation, a separation which is symbolized by exile. 46
Jabès recognizes that this difference is more complex than
"simple" oppositions:

Si le juif est « l'autre », c'est parce qu'en cherchant,
à tout prix, à être soi-même il est, chaque fois en
plus, un être de nulle part. Là s'inscrivent sa
différence et la distance où il se tient.
Je dirais même que ce plus--qui est, en fait, un moins
puisqu'il est un vide toujours à combler--est sa seule
différence. Ce manque est la source de son
questionnement. 47

It is to examine the abyss, not to lay blame upon and to
despise an entire people because of it. And to examine the
abyss is to step out of the opposition of positive and
negative, praise and blame. This is the journey Jabès seeks to show his readers in *Le Livre des Questions*.

Part of the "otherness" of Jews comes from their nomadic history. When nomadism confronts cultures which are tied to the soil, which depend upon a piece of ground for sustenance, survival, and cultural definition, the result is suspicion and prejudice. The Jew has often been in this position, traceable not only to the first Diaspora nor again to the exile from Spain, but to the very conception of the people as being formed in the crucible of exile. Adorno has made use of this notion in his attempts to understand antisemitism:

The pre-Diaspora Jews, he argued, had been a nomadic, wandering people, "the secret gypsies of history." The Western concepts of work and repression were intertwined with the postnomadic attachment of man to the soil. A subterranean memory of the wandering Jew, however, persisted in Western culture. This image of the Jew, Adorno held, "represents a condition of mankind which did not know labor, and all later attacks against the parasitic, consumptive character of the Jews are simply rationalizations."48

Nomadism, wandering is the ultimate form of "other" to settled society. The nomad has no attachment to the soil, no responsibility to work the land in order to produce a living. The Jew, as nomadic wanderer, was reviled and, as Adorno
points out, even secretly (though, of course, erroneously) envied by the bourgeois capitalists in Europe. Adorno notes that even when Jews had the chance of becoming settled, as in the case of the European Jews, they were denied that opportunity by those who continued to see them as wanderers: "No matter how many great achievements the Jews were responsible for, they could not be absorbed into the European nations; they were not allowed to put down roots and so they were dismissed as rootless." Rootless people, continuously seen as "other," seem to hold a mirror up to the societies they inhabit (no matter how temporarily); often what these societies see they dislike and consequently turn their animosity toward those who made them see it. Thus exile, in the case of the Jews, becomes reinforced, repeated over and over again. Jabès seeks to reproduce this nomadism, this otherness, by writing of it. And the writing itself is other, nomadic, the exile from presence, from speech, from the writer himself, and from conventions.

This subversive sense of the exile as nomadic other permeates Jabès' conception of Judaism and writing. The Jew, forced to wander, has created a culture of the Book and managed to survive in exile; the writer creates a book (or is created/defined by a book) and wanders in it, in a world of writing, where he/she survives. Here, Jabès' "nomadic writing" provides the only possible vehicle for the wandering
other, an other that has the attributes of both Jew and writer.

But what kind of book are we discussing? After all, the Torah and a book of Jabèsian meditations are not the same. Or are they? One must not make assumptions based upon religion or the sacred nature of the Bible. Those are precisely the kind of assumptions that any reading of Jabès' work requires one to put aside. What becomes sacred are the books which give birth continually to other books. And this is the similarity with the Bible; this ever-changing, growing book has survived and continuously begun again through reading, commentary, teaching, mystical vision, and writing: "Le livre est l'oeuvre du livre" (I, 33); "Le livre multiplie le livre" (I, 33). While sacred is perhaps a strange word to use, implying divinity and fixity, the emphasis on this word, too, is altered in the context of Jabès' work. Books, including the Bible, are sacred not because of God's divine, fixed word, but because of the human words which make up the book. And those words, those books, are always being written, read, and written again by humans. What is sacred is that which changes, that which wanders in search of knowledge and truth. Jabès is always acutely aware of the infinite number of books awaiting birth even while he is engaged in writing: "En fait, je me trouve, au moment de commencer un livre--et sans doute ne suis-je pas le seul--,
littéralement submergé par sa matière. C'est un peu comme si une multitude de livres possibles attendaient de voir le jour."

Jabès has found a 'home' in writing as an answer to exile. Yet, it is in the acceptance not only of the fact of exile, but also of exile as a condition of possibility, a possibility to go beyond the settled and stagnant in human life, that allows him to show writing as possibility as well. Speaking of his acceptance of his own exile, Jabès reveals this facet of exile to the reader: "Il y a, certes, blessure; mais étrangeté aussi diminution d'angoisse face à tout ce que, désormais, est devenu possible et contre quoi nous sommes sans défense; parce que l'événement nous dépasse et, aussi, les conséquences qui peuvent en découler." And truly, writing is not an "answer"; it is another question, another way of questioning, which Jabès sees as the truth of existence, as the way through life.

Exile, for Jabès, is indeed "real" yet it is also the process one lives in order to survive. It is a state of being that is subversive, that allows escape from authority in the name of Law and Truth, and it helps explain suffering, even though pain and suffering is a part of that way of life. Exile is the process of living for both Jew and writer (who are indeed so defined, as Jew and writer, because they live an exile; a tautology but perhaps one that needs to be
stressed); this process allows creativity and imagination to flourish. To deny this, to attempt to root oneself in a world where roots have been denied to the exile, is to try to live a lie. For Jabès, the state of Israel was a fiction, and rather bad fiction at that, not because Jews should be forever condemned to wander without a homeland, but because the government of Israel chose land-based power politics as the governing philosophy of that state. This land-based power denied and tried to obliterate the rich legacy of wandering which helped to form not only the Jews as a people but Western culture in general through their writing in the Bible. "J'appartiens à ce peuple persévérant qui fit de son errance un chant et, de ses assises, un livre; mais peut-être fallait-il qu'un jour ill cessât de marcher et enterrât ses feuilllets" (VI, 144). Perhaps it is necessary to have Israel in its current incarnation in the modern world, but for Jabès this is not desirable.

The lesson Jabès' books give their readers is a lesson of survival, creativity, spirituality, imagination within this process of life called "exile." The book becomes the universe of the exile: "Le livre est à l'exilé ce que l'univers est à Dieu. Dieu a donc pour lieu tout livre d'exil" (V, 19), the only place where existence has meaning: "L'homme n'existe pas. Dieu n'existe pas. Seul existe le monde à travers Dieu et l'homme dans le livre ouvert" (III,
100). And they teach us that there are no answers to the questions which fuel our lives, and that the only possible dwelling is a written home, which is tenuous but above all is human.
Notes to Chapter Two
"L'imaginaire d'architecture"

II. Le Livre

1 Fernandez Zoïla, 73.

2 Edmond Jabès, Le Livre des Questions (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1963), 18. All quotations will be taken from the seven volume set of this work and will be indicated in the text by the roman numeral corresponding to the particular volume, as listed below:
   II. Le Livre de Yukel, Paris: Gallimard, 1964
   III. Le Retour au Livre, Paris: Gallimard, 1965
   IV. Yaël, Paris: Gallimard, 1967
   V. Élya, Paris: Gallimard, 1969
   VI. Aely, Paris: Gallimard, 1972


6 Warren F. Motte, Questioning Edmond Jabès (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), "Preface."

7 "Decentered and discontinuous, its meanings effaced by the perpetual mobility of the writing, the poem is the tenuous expression by a poet compelled, in the words of Edmond Jabès, 'to roam nomadically in the infinite expanse of the word.' Diaspora is the condition of all writing." Richard Stamelman, "Nomadic Writing: The Poetics of Exile," The Sin of the Book, 93.


10 In fact, it is this "mining" of words, of language, that Jabès understands as the synonym for Derrida's «différence»: "Ce mot «différence», ici, est synonyme de mine. Mine, bâton de graphite pour la trace; mine, richesse du sous-sol; mine, explosif. "Edmond Jabès, "Sur la question du livre," 63.


13 Blanchot, "Interruptions," 45.


15 See Exodus 32:15-19; for the second tablets of the law, see Exodus 34.


17 "I have no wish to soften the saying that to write lyric poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric; it expresses in negative form the impulse which inspires committed literature...Yet this suffering, what Hegel called consciousness of adversity, also demands the continued existence of art while it prohibits it; it is now virtually in art alone that suffering can still find its own voice, consolation, without immediately being betrayed by it." Theodor W. Adorno, "Commitment," *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, ed. Andrew Arato & Eike Gebhardt (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1987), 312.


22 See especially the section in I, 56-59.

23 See especially Schneidau, Sacred Discontent, Chapter Three, sections entitled "The Desert as 'Other'" and "Literary Pastoralism."


26 For more discussion of this issue, see Herbert N. Schneidau, Sacred Discontent: The Bible and Western Tradition (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976), esp. "Three: The Hebrews Against the High Cultures: Pastoral Motifs," 104-173.


29 Blanchot, "Être Juif," 186.

30 Blanchot, "Être Juif," 183.

31 "The novelist's high-handed appropriation of the book has always been unbearable to me. What makes me uneasy is his pretense of making the space of the book the space of the story he tells--making the subject of his novel the subject of the book.

To me this feels like a sort of assassination. The book's own voice, its unfolding, its excrescences--its very muteness, its own time--are strangled.

Maybe I have to explain this somewhat further. What makes me turn away from the novel--even from experimental works that are at times very interesting in themselves--is
first of all a certain idea I have already mentioned and which concerns the risk involved in writing. Novelistic fiction, even when innovative, does not, from my point of view, take charge of the totality of this risk. The book loses its autonomy. It is only the place of a story, the mute space where it begins and ends. It is as if the author, sole master of the rules of the game, occulted the book in favor of his characters. A stranger to the book, to its breath, its rhythm, the novelist imposes an exterior, exclusive speech: a life and a death, invented in the course of the story. For him the book is only a tool. At no moment does the novelist listen to the page, to its whiteness and silence." Jabès, From the Desert to the Book, 101; Du Désert au Livre, 141-142.


35 Jabès, Du Désert au Livre, 72-74.


37 "According to Luria, God was compelled to make room for the world by, as it were, abandoning a region within Himself, a kind of mystical primordial space from which He withdrew in order to return to it in the act of creation and revelation." Gershom Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, esp. "Seventh Lecture: Isaac Luria and His School," 261; see also Scholem, On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism.

38 Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, 261.

39 For this discussion of the Kabbalistic notion of "oral" Torah, see especially Gershom Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism and Gershom Scholem, On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism, as well as Harold Bloom, Kabbalah and Criticism.

40 Edmond Jabès, "There is such a thing as Jewish writing," 30.
41 Edmond Jabès, "There is such a thing as Jewish writing," 28-29.

42 See Jacques Derrida, "...That Dangerous Supplement...," Of Grammatology, 141-164.

43 For a full discussion of this issue, see Scholem, On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism, chapter 2 "The Meaning of the Torah in Jewish Mysticism."


46 "c'est que s'il y a en effet séparation infinie, il revient à la parole d'en faire le lieu de l'entente, et s'il y a un insurmontable abîme, la parole traverse l'abîme. La distance n'est pas abolie, elle n'est même pas diminuée, elle est au contraire maintenue préservée et pure par la rigueur de la parole qui soutient l'absolu de la différence. Admettons que la pensée juive ignore ou refuse la médiation et la parole comme médiatrice." Blanchot, "Être Juif," 187.

47 Jabès, Du Désert au Livre, 91.


49 "The Jews were hated, Horkheimer and Adorno argued, because they were secretly envied. Having lost even their economic function as middlemen, they seemed to embody such enviable qualities as wealth without work, luck without power, a home without boundaries, and religion without a myth." Jay, The Dialectical Imagination, 232.


51 For a much more rigorous and informed discussion of this idea, see Horkheimer and Adorno, "Elements of Anti-Semitism," particularly the thesis on false projection, VI, 187-200.
52 Jabès, Du Désert au Livre, 69.

53 Jabès, Du Désert au Livre, 48.
Todos somos exiliados de algo o de alguien...En realidad, ésa es la verdadera condición del hombre.¹

I have understood in a very dramatic way that exile is something more than leaving one's country, being torn away from the place of one's birth. It is a great metaphor of the human condition...Above all for me to be exiled symbolizes that space in which writers, those who interest me anyway, write.²

For Uruguayan writer Cristina Peri Rossi, the state of madness, the situation of women, and the state of being in exile are all forms of existence in the margins or outside the centers of power as they exist in the world. Throughout her fiction and poetry, there is a dense, complex interweaving of all of these marginal states of existence. This interweaving functions as a critique of society and its institutional power as well as providing a written "home" for the author, herself an exile from Uruguay.

In discussing Peri Rossi's work, I am concentrating primarily on her novel La nave de los locos written in 1984 and a collection of short stories entitled El museo de los esfuerzos inútiles, published in 1983. These two works not only address the issue of exile but are also fine examples of Peri Rossi's literary art. La nave de los locos concerns the travels of a character called simply "Equis" ("x"), the unknown exile-traveler, as he wanders from city to city, and several other people whose lives intersect his in various
ways. The novel is, in effect, a novel of wanderings and exiles. It is also a novel of madness, politics, feminism, sensuality, and humanity. In this sense, the novel is an allegory of the human condition in the modern world and serves both as a chronicle and a written homeland for those who have been forced into wandering. The exile is the "extranjero," the person who is always the stranger, the outsider, the foreigner in every land. This situation reflects the general state of the reader in any encounter with a book. As much as a reader may identify with characters in a novel, he or she still exists in a world outside of the fictional world of the book. In this sense the reader, like the exile, always remains an outsider, someone who may feel as though he or she participates in the world of the novel yet recognizes that he or she belongs to a world other than the textual one. The reader, always the outsider to the book, can identify with Equis who is always the foreigner in his incessant travels. He may be seen as mad or merely strange by the people he encounters, but the reader sees the very human side of Equis who is more understanding, more human than those who view him as an outsider. Equis, the unknown, is marginal to every place he goes, yet it is he who sees more clearly than those whose eyes are clouded by virtue of being so tied to their cultures, so subject to their societies. Equis reminds us,
as he tells a young woman at a café, that at any moment she, and we, might be exiles:

--¿Es usted extranjero? --le preguntó la mujer, como si eso tuviera mucha importancia. Equis se fastidió.
--Sólo en algunos países --le contestó-- y posiblemente no lo seré durante toda la vida.
Ella lo miró con cierta sorpresa.
--No nací extranjero --le informó--. Es una condición que he adquirido con el tiempo y no por voluntad propia. Usted misma podría llegar a serlo, si se lo propusiera, aunque no se lo aconsejo. Por lo menos, no de una manera definitiva.4

Despite the problems of this exile, there are positive qualities in the life that it brings. Julio Cortazar, in a paper on exile and Latin American literature, discusses the possibilities for the creation of something positive by artists from their experience of exile: "Je crois qu'il est plus que jamais nécessaire de transformer la négativité de l'exil--qui en tant que telle assure le triomphe de l'ennemi--en une nouvelle prise de réalité."5 This can be discerned in Peri Rossi's work, particularly in the traveling of Equis. What could be dismissed merely as madness is recuperated by Peri Rossi into examples of open-mindedness, justice, tenderness, humanity. We see Equis, throughout the novel, befriending other stranges and exiles, such as Gordón the
astronaut, Graciela, Morris, and Lucia. Equis is one representation of human feelings in the novel; he cares for those he encounters, wherever he finds them in his various voyages.

The stories in *El museo de los esfuerzos inútiles* also concern exile and wandering. Several stories show the feelings of exiled people, always facing a space which is not theirs, a place in which they are the foreigner, the stranger. Other stories deal with ambiguous space itself, representing it as a museum, an airport, a dream state. An ambiguous space in Peri Rossi's work is a place which provides an alternative to the repression and categorization of societies in the everyday world. It is often a space that no one inhabits, such as a museum; it is a space where governments have either limited or no power over human actions. Ambiguous space may or may not exist in reality, such as a dream state, but it is always a space in which individual freedoms are allowed to flourish. I believe Peri Rossi creates ambiguous spaces in her fiction to allow humans to escape oppression. In actual life, even if these physical spaces cannot be found, there is the possibility that one can create such places in the imagination. Peri Rossi's collection of stories is itself a kind of museum and therefore functions as a "home" for the exile who wrote (and those who read) this collection. These themes of madness, of
wandering, of ambiguous spaces and ambiguous sexuality can be found throughout Peri Rossi's work, poetry as well as fiction. I also cite examples from stories collected in *Una pasión prohibida* and poetry from *Diáspora* and *Evohé* to discuss these themes.

Peri Rossi also uses exile to discuss politics and the political situations that create exiles, specifically repressive political regimes that expel, confine, or execute their own people. These regimes control the institutions of society and regulate that society by force. In Peri Rossi's fiction, these repressive regimes are seen as the ones who are truly mad and inhuman, rather than those they condemn as "mad," "criminals" or "enemies of the state." As Cortazar notes, one cannot forget the politics that result in exile; that too must form a part of an exiled writer's work, though not to the exclusion of all else. For the writer is a writer first and an exile second.⁶

Madness and eccentricity often form the subjects of Peri Rossi's fiction and, in fact, seem to be an important metaphor for the state of the exile. If, as Michel Foucault has painstakingly traced out in *Madness and Civilization* and has clearly explained in "Two Lectures," the expulsion of madmen from society and their internment in prisons and hospitals was geared less to the cure of the mad person and more toward developing effective methods of social control,
then we begin to be able to read more effectively Peri Rossi's use of madness as a theme. One of the most important reasons to first expel and then intern madmen, in both Foucault's analysis and in Peri Rossi's fiction, was to unify a society, the remaining members feeling a solidarity by being "not-mad." This is a defining of the self (or the community) in opposition to a construction of an "other," the madman seen as this alter ego or other self.

Peri Rossi's portrayal of madness and the expulsion of mad persons from the "normal" or "real" world functions as a critique of that allegedly "normal" world. The chapter entitled "La nave de los locos" describes a painting of one of the voyages of the mad, the floating prisons of the insane which were known in Europe during the Middle Ages, and then proceeds to relate an anecdotal incident from a book written by a sailor, Artemius Gudröm, who was forced to pilot one of these ships of the insane. The description of the painting shows us the irony of these voyages of no return; the madmen and women are dressed in their finest clothes as they sail off into oblivion:

En el cuadro, la nave de los locos ha iniciado ya la travesía. A bordo, vense hombres vestidos de gala, con sus trajes de noche perfectamente almidonados, los cuellos duros, guantes blancos y brillantes zapates de charol. Es posible que esos hombres pensaran en una
It is not only the ironic situation of the madmen, imprisoned in the midst of the most open space, the sea, that this portrait conveys.\textsuperscript{9} The ship of madmen evokes Equis' own voyages: incessant, infinite, and symbolic of existence in a marginal space, outside of the mainstream of society. On Equis' ship, too, the passengers are dressed for festivities, the difference being that they are paying travelers who will feast and drink and dance and will reach a port, although Equis' distance from them and their festivities seem to make him more akin to the madmen cast adrift.

What is intriguing in the anecdote that follows the portrait is the description of the crew that steers the drifting madhouse; according to Artemius Gudröm the crews were themselves prisoners—debtors, like himself, or common criminals—who were given a choice to man the ships of madmen or finish their sentences in prison. The powers of society found a way to pit one set of outcasts against another, recuperating the prisoners back into the system by having them function as the instruments of the expulsion of the madmen: "en la nave viajaban el propio Artemius y ocho tripulantes, reclusos de distintas cárceles de Sajonia que
habían preferido la condena de navegar con los locos a la cárcel."

Peri Rossi uses the portrait and the anecdote not only to illustrate the institutional power exercised upon these persons but also to show the reader the space madmen were relegated to occupy and to demonstrate how others were (are) dragged into a complicity with authorities. It is this complicity that Peri Rossi's fiction addresses, the complicity of people who look the other way when their fellow citizens "disappear." It is no coincidence that directly following this chapter on the floating ship of insanity Peri Rossi gives us the story of a "disappeared" person, another protagonist of the novel, Vercingetórix. The world which expels madmen is also the world which imprisons people arbitrarily, which causes them to "disappear." This is a world where "disappear" has ceased to be a verb of volition and has become a verb denoting violence and force: "Desaparecer deja entonces de ser un acto voluntario y se convierte en una actitud pasiva; nos desaparecen, decía Vercingetórix, las pocas veces que se refería al hecho." The juxtaposition of these two chapters tells us that governments are still finding ways of expelling people from their midst and still using tactics of complicity, that is, using others in society to realize their plans. The commander of the prison camp where the "disappeared" are
taken and the soldiers under his command reinforce the notion that they are entrusted with the task of ridding the country of its "enemies." The government, in the persons of the commander and soldiers of the camp, also controls, represses, and manipulates language itself so that the "disappeared" are even subjected to interior repression. The commander forces the prisoners to listen to his poetry, even organizing the intellectuals among them to critique and praise his verse. In this way, not only body but mind and soul as well, represented here by literature and criticism, are under the control of the government.13

This juxtaposition of madness and disappearance is not intended to detract from or to dilute the horror of the torture and arrest in Latin America, represented by Vercingetórix's disappearance, but to illuminate both the severity of that situation and its relation to what is seen as "madness." For madness is a questionable state of being in Peri Rossi's work, a state that comments on the world that judges it, the world that singles it out and expels it. Both the chapter on the ship of madmen and that of Vercingetórix's disappearance show the reader the existence of two separate but parallel worlds, a realization most persons cannot have unless they experience one of these "marginal" states of being (madness or disappearance):
[S]entía en su conciencia, todavía despierta, la existencia de dos mundos perfectamente paralelos, distantes y desconocidos entre sí, dos mundos que existían con independencia y autonomía, dos mundos que se bastaban a sí mismos y que podían funcionar sin tener ningún contacto, como dos esferas girando eternamente en el silencio azul del espacio...

Vercingetórix pensó que para no volverse loco, era mejor olvidar que existían ambas plantas, olvidar la lengua común, aceptar Babel.14

The "normal" or everyday world is built upon the silence of the mad person or the disappeared person: their silence allows others to carry on as if nothing bad is occurring around them. Mad people and political prisoners do not speak and if they do, they are not heard. The disappeared person is negated completely, taken out of the everyday life he or she previously led and shut away or executed. The mad person, if he or she speaks, is not listened to. It is the physicians, the psychiatrists, that speak for them, as Foucault notes:

As for a common language, there is no such thing; or rather, there is no such thing any longer; the constitution of madness as a mental illness, at the end of the eighteenth century, affords the evidence of a broken dialogue, posits the separation as already
effected, and thrusts into oblivion all those stammered, imperfect words without fixed syntax in which the exchange between madness and reason was made. The language of psychiatry, which is a monologue of reason about madness, has been established only on the basis of such a silence.15

What Foucault is saying is that individuality and egotism, in the proper senses of these words, are no more than historical-psychological-sociological products which derive their legitimacy not from any natural truths but from the syntax of Western discourse and the economics of the upper middle class, that is, the dominant class that controls language.

The silence of the oppressed is where Peri Rossi's art intervenes: in her world, the literary artist breaks the silence that envelopes the madman and the political prisoner; literature does not speak for them, it allows them to speak. Literature does not necessarily remedy the situation, either of madness or political repression. What it can and does do is to bring the existence of these hidden worlds to light, to make their presence known. Vercingetorix's story is the link between those two separate, parallel worlds; it forces one world to see the other, to acknowledge its existence, or at least it attempts to do so.
It is significant that in Vercingetórix' story people who are "disappeared" are relocated in a camp near a cement factory (whence the chapter derives its name: "La fábrica de cemento"); the dust of the cement floats down and covers everything in a fine gray-yellow powder that suffocates and chokes off growth while it turns everything visibly identical. Trees, plants, people, buildings, even the mountains, are covered in dust which hides their beauty and individuality, mimicking the actions of the government which buries them by interning them. The dust from the cement factory is the visible sign of repression as well as death: the dust that chokes, the dust that humans will return to at the end of their lives. The government tries to hasten that process.

Despite this portrait of exile as a consequence of madness and political repression, not everything about the state of exile is negative in Peri Rossi's fiction. In the anecdote from Artemius Gudróm in the chapter "La nave de los locos" we meet a madman who the crew nicknames "Glaukos." Gudróm suspects that despite his alienation and somewhat strange behavior, Glaukos is not mad, somehow not like the other mad people on board. There seems to be some sort of recognition on Gudróm's part that there is an intelligence at work in Glaukos, something that perhaps makes them akin. Yet this is ironically ended when the crew and Gudróm finally
make their escape from the ship. When the crew leaps over the side of the ship to swim to shore, so does Glaukos, the only one of the mad passengers to listen to the warning to jump and swim. Unfortunately, Glaukos promptly sinks while Gudróm and his fellow ex-prisoners swim to safety. Perhaps Glaukos knows something that even the supposedly "sane" crew does not recognize: that there is more likeness between the mad travelers and the crew hired to haul them away from society than anyone wants to admit: they are all being manipulated, they are all victims of society's power. Yet Glaukos cannot return to that society and, unlike the crew, he finally is not complicitous in its actions.

Madness can possibly be seen as an accumulation of excess knowledge, knowledge that is forbidden. The mad person, like Glaukos, often appears to have a knowledge of things and of the world not available to other "sane" persons, a kind of secret knowledge that does not follow the accepted patterns of logic. Madness is a knowledge of the world that lies beyond, outside of the sanctioned knowledge and ways of knowing. It is a knowledge of the dark side of humans and a knowledge of the passions that are usually hidden behind the mask of reason.

What reinforces this view of madness is that there is no "cure" for it in Peri Rossi's fictional worlds. Psychiatrists have no power over the world of madness; in
fact, they are often as "mad" as their patients. They have
the same problems, the same phobias, the same fears as those
that they would treat. In a story entitled "Sesión," a
psychiatrist calls up his patient to express his upset over
the fact that his wife has taken a second lover. This
disrupts his sense of security, his understanding of his life
and of himself. There is irony in the reversal of roles: the
patient attempts to calm the doctor using the doctor's own
clichés. Yet there is also the sense that "reality" escapes
both of them: while they speak, the patient is engaged in
chasing something around the house, identified as "realidad,"
finally cornering it under the bed as if it were a dustball.
This seemingly silly and ironic story actually points out
something essential about the sense of madness in Peri
Rossi's work: it is not something that can be "worked out"
through psychological jargon nor cured by the analysis
relationship. In this, it comes closer to what Foucault sees
as the literary experience of madness in Shakespeare and
Cervantes, that is, madness is a knowledge of an essence of
life, it can end only in death, if it ends at all:

In Shakespeare and Cervantes, madness still occupies an
extreme place, in that it is beyond appeal. Nothing
ever restores it either to truth or to reason. It leads
only to laceration and thence to death. Madness, in its
vain words, is not vanity; the void that fills it is a
"disease beyond my practice," as the doctor says about Lady Macbeth; it is already the plenitude of death.\textsuperscript{17}

While this has substantially changed throughout time, as theories of madness and its "cures" have changed, there is still a powerful and often threatening connection between madness and art, a connection that hovers on the edge of death. This connection does not imply that madness is art, nor the reverse; that is, where one exists, the other cannot. Madness and art are contemporaries, they exist together, they challenge the world together:

by the madness which interrupts it, a work of art opens a void, a moment of silence, a question without answer, provokes a breach without reconciliation where the world is forced to question itself.\textsuperscript{18}

\textit{where there is a work of art, there is no madness;} and yet madness is contemporary with the work of art, since it inaugurates the time of its truth. The moment when, together, the work of art and madness are born and fulfilled is the beginning of the time when the world finds itself arraigned by that work of art and responsible before it for what it is.\textsuperscript{19}

Peri Rossi's representations of madness seek to provoke this challenge to the world. The chapter "La nave de los locos" and its juxtaposition with "La fábrica de cemento" show us graphically how madness and political repression are
connected; both the madman and the political prisoner are either expelled or confined, both are subjected to the power of the state or government. Yet it is through art, through the words of literature that both can speak, can make themselves heard.

In Foucault's work there is also a discussion of the belief that madness results from a fear of ambiguity. When the symbols of a society become overloaded with significance, they become somewhat less clear, more ambiguous and can produce a fear in those who cannot easily grasp meaning in the ambiguity of the world around them. In Peri Rossi's work, ambiguity is prominent; however, far from producing fear and madness, it is often the solution to the categorization and repression of the "real" or "sane" world of power and institutions. For Peri Rossi, the life of the exiled person is a life lived in ambiguity, and while that ambiguity can be disconcerting, it also signifies freedom, it is liberating.

This ambiguity sometimes assumes the form of sexual ambiguity, the indeterminate sexuality of some character or being in Peri Rossi's fiction, such as the fallen angel in a story of the same name: "En cuanto al sexo, no había dudas: el ángel era asexuado, ni hembra ni varón." This example of asexuality cannot, however, be mistaken for a philosophy of harmony through androgyny. There is no hidden nor overt
Desire in Peri Rossi's work to promote androgyny as a solution to gender conflicts. It is, rather, a sign of the ambiguity that permeates her writing, an ambiguity which can indeed provoke discomfort and uncertainty but which also succeeds in illuminating the limits set upon people by classification and repressive authority. Ambiguity forces both character and reader to interpret, to make decisions about their situations. At the end of this particular story, the angel remains as the symbol of ambiguity and resistance to authority; it alone is left, half dead, still immobile in the position it fell to earth, while the one woman who had come along and spoken directly to it is taken away by the police during an air raid alert. The angel represents an ambiguous being: not human, not god, not male, not female, half dead, half alive.

Indeed, ambiguity in Peri Rossi's work neither simply joins nor splits people and ideas along the limits placed upon them nor along the lines that separate them. What it does accomplish is the illumination of the limit and of the dividing lines. And by that illumination we can search for the knowledge of what is across that line, beyond that limit. This knowledge is what the "sane" or "real" world calls madness in Peri Rossi's fiction. That "real" world fears the transgression of limits and divisions, and those who hold power in society must find ways to stop transgression, ways
such as confinement, murder, disappearance, and exile. Someone who finds positive knowledge in living in exile, someone who celebrates ambiguity, is the ultimate challenge to those authorities.

Ambiguity in Peri Rossi's fiction often involves the creation and/or depiction of ambiguous spaces. What is ambiguous space? How can a physical space be ambiguous? In Peri Rossi's fictional worlds, an ambiguous space is a site where eccentricities are accepted, even encouraged. It is a place where political regimes can't, or at least don't, force people to "disappear" since it is outside of political control. It is a space where creativity, symbolized in various ways by Peri Rossi, can flourish, unimpeded by a world that solely values material goods above artistic creation. Ambiguous space is where people can wander about, free from repression or the necessity to produce material wealth. It is important to recognize that at the root of the word ambiguous is the sense of wandering: derived from the Latin _ambiguus_ and the French _ambigere_, ambiguous means "to wander about," to be in between one pole and another. Ambiguous space is where exiles can find a home because it is fluid, unrepressive space. Peri Rossi's work describes and represents ambiguous spaces and how they relate to and form homes for exiles.
There are two major representations of ambiguous space in the works of Peri Rossi under consideration here: the museum in "El museo de los esfuerzos inútiles" and the island of Pueblo de Dios in La nave de los locos. One, Pueblo de Dios, is more specific, a place where all sorts of eccentricities are tolerated and accepted, while the museum functions as a more generalized metaphor in the work of Peri Rossi, representing a space which is outside of political/social/governmental control.

Pueblo de Dios is a place that attracts all sorts of people, the leftovers, the marginal people in society, the eccentrics, those people others might call "mad." Even its geography speaks to us of isolation and exile: an island, surrounded on all sides by water, cut off from what is always called the "mainland." The people who reside on this island or drift there, including Equis and two of the other main characters in the novel, Morris and Graciela, are all exiles from the "other" worlds such as the world of commerce, science, theater and film, space travel, even the worlds of art and literature. We can see from this collection of drifters, misfits, outcasts, and eccentrics that societies continue to create refugees and exiles, people who will not or indeed cannot fit into its established systems and societies. Some of the people who come to Pueblo de Dios include a famous North American physicist who fears
electricity and electronic appliances and lives his life free from the modern age on the island; an excellent English poet whose works were no longer read and whose one and only novel was filmed for television which made his relatives rich, relatives who never visit him; and a comic actress who fled her elaborately staged wedding (which wedding was to be filmed for television and for which she was forced to return the huge sum of money she had been paid for the rights) and who refuses to even hear the word "matrimony" pronounced in her presence. Perhaps the most important eccentric occupying the island is the former astronaut, Gordon, who had been to the moon and whose only desire in life is to return there. Perhaps Gordon is the ultimate exile: he is the person who can never return to the place he feels most at home.

Gordon's life was forever changed because of his trip to the moon; his life is ruined because he can never go back. When Equis inquires as to the diagnosis of his case of depression and desire, Gordon simply tells him, "psicosis del espacio." Indeed, Equis understands this, for all exiles suffer from space psychosis: the inability to return to the space they desire and the necessity of finding an ambiguous space, a place such as Pueblo de Dios, that will tolerate them.

The issue of power and disenfranchisement also arise in connection with Pueblo de Dios as an ambiguous space, a space outside of the "normal" channels of power and of the world.
Even there, however, the madness of the "real" or "reasonable" world (that is, the world that the eccentric of Pueblo de Dios have fled) is apparent. When Morris notes that wanderers and vagabonds abound "« en épocas de desconcierto y de penuria » como llama Morris a los tiempos actuales," Equis maintains that all of human times are times of hardship for some, the powerless and the poor:

Equis insiste en sostener que todos los tiempos han sido de desconcierto y de penuria para los que no fueron tocados por el privilegio del poder y que nuestras días no se diferencian de los anteriores más que por el número de perseguidores, la sistematización de sus métodos y la fría lógica que aplican cuyo resultado es el delirio.23

Pueblo de Dios may be a refuge for those who are rejected or expelled from the world of power and privilege, yet Morris, Graciela and Equis are all forced to leave it sooner or later, in order to re-enter the world outside. Pueblo de Dios, as other ambiguous spaces, cannot remain completely apart from the rest of the world and therefore, no matter how inviting the refuge is, there is never a sense of Paradise regained. Like Gordon, who can never return to his own private paradise, the surface of the moon, the exile is someone who suffers from "psicosis del espacio," and must
live with the fact that his or her Paradise is lost, even the Paradise of an ambiguous place such as Pueblo de Dios.

Peri Rossi is explicitly telling the reader that there is no possibility of reconstructing a Paradise to which we, as humans, can return. Throughout *La nave de los locos*, interspersed between chapters, are descriptions of "el tapiz de la creación," a medieval tapestry seen by Equis on one of his voyages. This tapestry depicts the creation of humans and the natural world as told in Genesis and in Church teachings; each portion of the tapestry shows a different aspect of creation. Significantly, almost half of the six-foot-long tapestry is missing. But, we are assured, if we concentrate, we should be able to imagine the rest of the scenes. The tapestry tells readers that they are responsible for interpretation, for filling in what is missing and for understanding what is before them, not only in the tapestry of course, but in the novel as well.

The culmination of the story of creation in Genesis is human exile: the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden. In these descriptions of the tapestry, Peri Rossi weaves the first story of exile into her novel of wandering and exile. We see that in the Judeo-Christian tradition, exile is woven into the very beginning, the stories told about how the culture came to be. And we see that the Paradise that humans were expelled from cannot be regained, especially in a
culture that still depends upon exile and which still exercises power to exile its own people.

The other major representation of ambiguous space in Peri Rossi's work is the museum. The museum is a powerful metaphor for a place that no one inhabits, specifically speaking, but which is filled with art and creativity. Museums are strangely specialized yet also marginal spaces. Museums are places where objects are collected; as Walter Benjamin notes in his discussion of the nature of his book collecting, collecting involves "a relationship to objects which does not emphasize their functional, utilitarian value—that is, their usefulness—but [the collector] studies and loves them as the scene, the stage of their fate." Of course Benjamin is referring to private or personal collections; for him, this relationship loses its genuine importance and deep feeling in public collections such as those in museums. But not for Peri Rossi: for the collections in museums are not "owned" as in a private collection: this is what makes museums a kind of in-between space in her work; it belongs to no one in particular to everyone in general. Museums are havens, especially for travelers and exiles, persons without a place of their own; they are drawn to spaces where other objects are collected, as if they were themselves part of the collection, or at least found themselves in that position. "¿Sabe usted que
sólo los extranjeros visitan los museos en cada ciudad?" the narrator rhetorically asks a young woman he meets in a museum café. Like the paintings and sculptures which come from many different artists, many different times and locations, the traveler or exile comes from elsewhere and finds a place in the space where "elsewhere" is collected. The objects collected in a museum become endowed with a certain kind of value, derived from their assemblage in a space which is devoted to displaying them. In between worlds (between the artist who created them and the person who buys them), the object of art inhabits the ambiguous space of the museum.

This is the sense in which the narrator inhabits the museum of "esfuerzos inútiles" in the story of the same name. His own "esfuerzo inútil" is his obsession with the museum itself, his need to inhabit this strange place where other people's stories are collected. His own story is the desire to read others' stories; it is as if his own life was lacking any effort or goal except this one. He can barely get through Mondays when the museum is closed:

Cuando el museo cierra abandono el lugar con melancolía. Al principio me parecía intolerable el tiempo que debía transcurrir hasta el otro día. Pero aprendí a esperar. In the "museo de los esfuerzos inútiles" one never encounters anyone other than the narrator and Virginia, the sole
employee. No one is very interested in the collection of human efforts that apparently failed. Even the museum's location demonstrates the lack of interest in its existence: "El edificio se levanta en la periferia de la ciudad, en un campo baldío, lleno de gatos y de desperdicios, donde todavía se pueden encontrar, sólo un poco más abajo de la superficie del terreno, balas de cañón de una antigua guerra, pomos de espadas enmohecidos, guijadas de burro carcomidas por el tiempo." That "old war" whose cannonballs stud the landscape is still being fought, with the powers of the state and its institutions on one side and those little, eccentric, mad, "useless" human efforts on the other. For this story is concerned with what humans do in the face of the faceless, overwhelming systems and institutions they must live with everyday.

Foucault tells us that one way to look at politics is to see it as a continuation of war by other means. In Peri Rossi's fictional world, the resistance to that "war" occurs in these allegedly "useless" efforts and are collected in this strange museum. While these efforts go unnoticed elsewhere, they can flourish and become known in the space of a museum, a space freed from the grip of power and politics.

What are these useless efforts that the narrator encounters in this strange museum? Everything that human beings do that may seem strange, frivolous, less-than-
profitable, motivated by things other than profit, motivated by obsession, desire, love:

Hay hombres que han hecho largos viajes persiguiendo lugares que no existían, recuerdos irrecuperables, mujeres que habían muerto y amigos desaparecidos. Hay niños que emprendieron tareas imposibles, pero llenas de fervor. Como aquellos que cavaban un pozo que era continuamente cubierto por el agua...

Gente cuyo esfuerzo inútil consistió en intentar reconstruir su árbol genealógico, escarbar la mina en busca de oro, escribir un libro. Otros tuvieron la esperanza de ganar la lotería.

--Prefiero a los viajeros --me dice Virginia.

Hay secciones enteras del museo dedicadas a esos viajes. En las páginas de os libros los reconstruimos. Al cabo de un tiempo de vagar por diferentes mares, atravesar bosques umbriós, conocer ciudades y mercados, cruzar puentes, dormir en los trenes o en los bancos del andén, olvidan cuál era el sentido del viaje y, sin embargo, continúan viajando. Desaparecen un día sin dejar huella ni memoria, perdidos en una inundación, atrapados en un subterráneo o dormidos para siempre en un portal. Nadie los reclama.
These efforts are what make people special, individual. They demonstrate hopes, dreams, ambitions, passions, and desires. This is where Foucault's analyses of power in institutions such as clinics and prisons are helpful in understanding the reactions of individuals and the importance of ambiguous spaces such as museums in the resistance to the various exercises of that power, at least as they appear in Peri Rossi's work. In Marxist analyses, often individual efforts, particularly artistic efforts, are seen as part of a superstructure, finally having their reason for existence in the economic substructure on which the society is based. Although many analyses go far beyond this kind of "vulgar" Marxism that views everything in the rather simplistic base-superstructure dichotomy, these analyses do not often follow out the various operations of power in society, particularly as they affect individuals. In Peri Rossi's fiction, individual efforts constitute another kind of power analysis: a challenge which illuminates the relations of power operative in society as they affect individual lives. And these efforts are accomplished and collected in ambiguous spaces such as this odd museum of useless efforts.

Peri Rossi's "home," her literary solution to exile, obviously differs from that of Edmond Jabès' home in the word. The Judaic tradition of exile helps Jabès formulate a literary life in the wandering of language itself. Peri
Rossi, on the other hand, creates places and spaces of ambiguity where her characters find a life, an existence, a home. Rather than accept the wandering itself, or create a wandering language which continuously deconstructs itself, Peri Rossi opts to create new places. There is, however, a recognition of the wandering of language, a recognition that language itself may not be a pure reflection of objects. For the exile, "home" does not exist in known objects or places; likewise, the language of an exile or a wanderer does not refer to a signified, but back to the person who speaks it.

As Graciela points out to Equis:

---Entonces...es posible de tu --vaciló, para memorizar con exactitud-- « pensamiento desprendido--perdón-- , exonerado del tributo de su circunstancia », sea, también, un pensamiento liberado del yugo de la dependencia del objeto, quiero decir: un reflejo de ti, no de las cosas.30

Yet the focus on ambiguity, wandering about, is more clearly tied to space rather than to language itself in Peri Rossi's fiction.

Ambiguity is also expressed in relation to gender in these works. Throughout Peri Rossi's work we find examples of gender ambiguity, particularly expressed as beings whose gender cannot be determined, as the angel, and, more importantly, through transvestism. There are two very
striking examples of gender ambiguity in Peri Rossi's work: one of the final scenes of *La nave de los locos*, and a story entitled "La ciudad" in *El museo de los esfuerzos inútiles*. Not only do both of these examples involve the blurring of gender lines, but both also involve cross-dressing.

In her article on transvestism in modern literature, Sandra Gilbert discusses the differences of the treatment of cross-dressing in the work of male modernists as compared to female modernist authors. Gilbert believes that while male authors such as James Joyce and T.S. Eliot use transvestism to actually reinforce masculinity and the male-dominated order of the world, female authors often employ cross-dressing as a metaphor which attempts to break down, blur, overturn that order. Peri Rossi's use of transvestism, especially in "La ciudad" but certainly in *La nave de los locos* as well, serves not to reinforce an old order of masculine-feminine division, nor to simply reverse those roles, but rather to create a kind of ambiguous world where male and female are free to express the sentiments and sensations of the other sex. The basic idea in Peri Rossi's work seems to be freedom: freedom from the repressive categorization of socially-taught gender roles which restrict both men and women.

In "La ciudad," the protagonist is an exile, haunted by dreams of a city which is simultaneously known and
unfamiliar, and by a being who is not revealed, a being who follows him throughout the dream city. This being cannot be identified and the narrator, in the hope of finding some key to the meaning of the dream and the identity of the being, consults the two people who might be able to help him: his ex-wife Luisa and his friend Juan. The ambiguity of the being in the dream and its unknown gender is the key to the dream; the protagonist is convinced that only by knowing its identity and gender will he understand the dream itself:

El sueño retornaba, una y otra vez, y en él, una presencia no identificable, alguien de sexo impreciso, cuyo rostro no veía, pero que indudablemente estaba allí... Y siempre el recuerdo—el presentimiento, mejor dicho—de que en el sueño había alguien, cuyo rostro no podía conocer, una presencia misteriosa que poseía la clave del mismo.32

What frustrates and irritates the unnamed narrator is that he cannot finish the dream to the point where the sex of the being becomes known:

Estaba seguro de que una vez, en el sueño, descubrió su sexo; este descubrimiento lo llenó de excitación, mientras dormía, pero con el despertar la certeza desapareció... no pudo traer desde el pozo oscuro de la memoria, no pudo reflotar, no pudo arrimar a la orilla la revelación, sumida otra vez en la ignorancia. (164)
Rather than search for the answer in his dreams, the protagonist decides to look for it in reality, in his daily life, in the people who surround him. He can narrow his investigations down to the two persons who might be or know the answer to this ambiguous being who inhabits his dream: Luisa or Juan.

The notion of ambiguity does not merely reside in the figure of the dream being. The protagonist is convinced that the city in the dream is his native city which he left sixteen years earlier. Yet it too is ambiguous, its details are different from dream to dream. Even the narrator's relationships are ambiguous; when thinking of the period of their marriage, his ex-wife specifically attaches the word "ambiguo" to her mental description:

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y Luisa no supo si se refería a hace unos meses atrás o al período de su matrimonio, ese ambiguo período en que ambos se sintieron flotar como algas, desamparados, escrutándose con miedo, e impotentes, por lo demás, para dedicarse a lo superficial y cotidiano. (168)
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But Luisa, who is decidedly female and completely European, does not understand ambiguity and exile, nor the dream state which represents both of these linked conditions; while they were married, she refused to ever visit her husband's native land, fearing that which existed across the ocean, the "other" side. The narrator cannot make her understand that
he is not dreaming exactly of his native city, for she is not an exile, she cannot know what it means to dream of unknown places because that is what one's life consists of:

--No es esa ciudad, Luisa, entiéndolo. No se trata de volver a ninguna parte. Ni de ir a otra. Quizás, los que no son extranjeros no llevan una ciudad adentro--reflexionó en voz alta--. No sueñan con mapas desconocidos. (170)

When we meet Juan, the issues of gender ambiguity and cross-dressing are raised directly. Juan, who had just returned from a visit to that native city (he and the narrator were both born there), hated to fly. During his return flight the airplane's emergency light came on and, convinced he was about to die, Juan decided to dress as a woman at the next "carnaval." His words to the narrator demonstrate his belief that sexual roles are socially imposed:

--Cualquier precisión sexual, querido mío, me parece escandalosa. Tenemos el sexo que nos imponen; a lo sumo, lo aceptamos. (173)

Juan has always desired to dress as a woman; he recounts the desire and the prohibitions against it:

Pues recordé que, a los cinco años, deseé disfrazarme de dama antigua. Imagínate el escándalo de mi familia. Me dejaron pocas opciones: o elegía un disfraz de militar
francés del siglo XVIII or uno de bombero. ¡Con lo que yo deseaba pasearme bajo una sombrilla lila, con flores blancas y usar manguito de piel! Me era muy difícil comprender la rigidez de la prohibición. La atribuí a alguna de esas absurdas reglas que regían el mundo de los adultos, inexplicables, por lo demás, y completamente arbitrarias. (174)

The "rigid" prohibition against cross-dressing represents the male order of things in society: rigidly defined sexual roles, rigid prohibitions against men discovering the world of female sensations, rigid oppression of women by limiting them to roles defined by patriarchal societies. The use of the word rigid is, of course, no accident: it evokes the erect phallus, the sign of the male, the unified, singular sexual signifier. But, as Luce Irigaray tells us, woman is "the sex which is not one"—not one in the sense that she is not a male, not the one sex by which the other is judged, and not one because her very genitals are plural, more than one.

Juan, in describing his family's reaction to his youthful desire to experience this "not one," the plurality of women, has revealed society's desire to repress women, those who are not male, not one. Peri Rossi herself has stated her belief that all people have this tendency toward multiplicity, a tendency which is repressed by society,
Sex for me is not the simple result of biological elements and of genetic characteristics. These genetic characteristics impose a social role (and this in Latin America is felt in very strong terms), a social role which is almost always an imposition on our sentiments and on our free behaviour. In this sense we don't have the sex we would like to have for in many cases this would be a multiple sex. And in this sense I am convinced that to limit this multiple sex to one sex only involves a limitation of our freedom.33

It is woman, though, who manifests this multiplicity as Peri Rossi acknowledges: "Woman in my poems and in my books is made up of many, not just one."34

This story of ambiguity concludes with the protagonist's departure from Juan's apartment into the space of the dream itself, the ambiguous, unidentified being following him. The story ends in this ambiguity because that is the point—dream and "real" worlds become mixed up, one spills into the other, becomes the other; gender is blurred and the being is never identified, man or woman: "hombre o mujer desconocido, mujer o hombre cuya presencia opresiva lo hundía cada vez más en el lodo de una calle que no reconocía y que acaso ya no era siquiera una calle" (177).

The operative idea in Peri Rossi's strange cuento is not to create some ideal androgynous being that is neither male
nor female and therefore usher in an age of non-sexual differentiation as the answer to socially-imposed sexual roles. The ambiguities of her characters lead the reader to see that gender roles are not rigid, separate, and singular but that they fluid and subject to change. As Hélène Cixous has written in her well-known essay "The Laugh of the Medusa," the key is not to eliminate difference but to accept and embrace it; not to forcefully unify, but to encourage multiplicity. The point Cixous makes is that writing is not limited to male definitions of writing; writing does not necessarily have to eliminate difference in favor of some theoretical conception of correct writing. On the contrary, as Irigary notes in connection with women's sexual pleasure and women's genitals, writing can and should embrace difference, plurality, without practicing forceful exclusion.

What Peri Rossi describes is a kind of bisexuality, the notion of bisexuality that Cixous discusses, a "vatic bisexuality which doesn't annul differences but stirs them up, pursues them, increases their number." Juan desires to be woman, to dress as woman, to experience the world as woman. The ambiguity that is described is, as in the creation of ambiguous spaces, a "wandering about," an experience of the world of the other gender. This is reinforced by Peri Rossi's depiction of an incredible burlesque act between two women in La nave de los locos.
This scene occurs in a chapter entitled "El enigma" (the riddle) near the end of the novel. Equis has had dreams throughout the novel in which he is presented with the question, "¿Cuál es el tributo mayor, el homenaje que un hombre puede hacer a la mujer que ama?" While employed for a company which shuttles women to and from a back-alley abortion clinic, Equis meets Lucia, a young blond woman for whom he manages to find a place on the bus, thus securing her an abortion. Obsessed with her after this encounter, Equis wanders into a club one night where an unusual show takes place. The parody of a burlesque that follows is extraordinary: Lucía dressed as a masculine Marlene Dietrich and a woman playing a robust, dark haired Dolores del Rio. The parody here is doubled: a parody of shows in which nearly nude women perform for men's stimulation, and a parody of men impersonating women. Rather than allowing themselves to be exploited for the benefit of men or being impersonated by men as if they were not fit to "play" themselves, Lucía/Marlene and her Dolores del Rio mock all of these spectacles by playing out their own steamy scenes of sex and love. Women do not need to impersonate men in order to be in control of their lives nor to create an order in their world. Nor do they need men to impersonate them, as if men acting/dressing as women were the only ones who could evoke the sexual truth of women.
The figure of Lucía, dressed as a masculine figure yet not disguising or hiding her female identity, symbolizes the ambiguity of sexual roles. And through that ambiguity perhaps one can begin to re-vision the meaning of sexuality. When he encounters Lucía in her ambiguous dress, Equis feels the presence of two worlds, distinct yet bound to each other:

Vestida de varón, con la mirada azul muy brillante, acentuada por la línea oscura que dibujaba los ojos, las mejillas empolvadas y dos discretos pendientes en las orejas, era un hermoso efebo el que miraba a Equis y se sintió subyugado por la ambigüedad. Descubría y se desarrollaban para él, en todo su esplendor, dos mundos simultáneos, dos llamadas distintas, dos mensajes, dos indumentarias, dos percepciones, dos discursos, pero indisolublemente ligados, de modo que el predominio de uno hubiera provocado la extinción de los dos. Más aún: era consciente de que la belleza de uno aumentaba la del otro, fuera el que fuera. Como si dos pares de ojos lo miraran, cuatro labios murmuraran, dos magníficas cabezas lo envolvieran con su ritmo. La revelación era casi insoportable. Impregnaba todas las cosas. Pero delante de ella, sólo cabía ser humilde. (195)

Rather than feeling the need to unify the two (or more) worlds, the two sexes, the general ambiguity, Peri Rossi demonstrates the need to accept the ambiguity, the plurality,
of the world and learn to interpret within that ambiguity. Lucía has been wounded, sundered by the male world: the man who impregnated her, the men with whom she has to contract in order to get to the abortion clinic, the male doctor who performs the abortion. She swears a feminist vow, so to speak, on the silent return journey from the abortion clinic:


Lucía's "never, never" is the refusal not only of sex with men but also the rejection of oppression, of slavery to the male order of the world. But it is not a rejection of her femaleness. When Equis finds her in the club, performing the bizarre burlesque, she may be dressed as a "varón" but she is still a woman, performing with a woman in a show for women. The recognition by Equis of the "dos mundos" reflected in Lucía is the recognition that she is the "sex which is not one," the sex which is more than one. This is the alternative to the male world, the world which insists on one definition, one truth, all structured by the phallus as the correct sign of singularity.
It is not only Lucia and this burlesque parody that stresses that ambiguity. Equis and his journeys are a continuing reminder of the "wandering about," the ambiguity of life. And Equis recognizes the similarity between the situation of the mad person and the situation of women in the world which is structured according to the male order. He sees how they are both thrust out from society, as is the exile. This equation becomes clear when he reflects on the nature of those abortion clinics to which he helps shuttle women: "Naves de locos. La nave, sustituida por el manicomio. Cárceles hediondas donde encerrar a los transgresores. Clinicas privadas" (176).

When Equis finally learns the answer to the riddle which haunts him, it comes to him following the scene where he finds Lucia in the club. What is the best tribute a man can pay to the woman he loves, what is the best gift he can give her? His manhood, "su virilidad" (196). It is to give up the insistence on extreme masculinity, that is, to give up defining everything, including women, by the phallus, to give up oppressing everything which is not masculine. This is the end of the novel, this is what Equis' journeying, his wandering about, has led to: the recognition of something important about relations between the sexes.

This giving up of phallic definition is also a breaking of the system which uses women as goods to cement relations
between men. As Luce Irigaray has written, when women refuse to be used as goods, as a means of exchange and communication between men, they take themselves off of the market, no longer objects of use but acting subjects. Lucia has taken herself off the market, even while she performs the burlesque in public. She and her Dolores del Rio control the performance which is traditionally either controlled or performed by men. These women use their bodies, display their bodies, yet it is their choice to do so, as an act of defiance and control over their own lives. This burlesque show is a constellation of ideas: it shows us women standing up and refusing to be mere channels or conduits of the relations between men; it shows us the ambiguity of sexual roles and the embracing of that ambiguity as an alternative to repressive categorization which casts women in inferior roles. Finally, this spectacle provides a look at what a woman might construct as a "home" when she has been abused by and thrust out of male society. The contrast is clear: when Equis wanders about after returning from the abortion clinic, he not only realizes that women are repressed and abused in society, but that they also have no public places to go where they can find acceptance and community. Men have bars while women are forced into isolation with only household appliances for company:
Se metió en un bar, donde no había mujeres, y pidió una cerveza. ¿Qué hacían las mujeres cuando estaban tristes? ¿A qué lugares iban? ¿Dónde ventilaban su melancolía? Había pocos lugares públicos para las mujeres: seguramente debían consumir su estado de ánimo en soledad, junto a los trastos y la máquina de lavar.

(177)

Women are exiles; they know the life of an exile. Living in societies which are still constructed on a patriarchal model, women often find themselves in the positions of outsiders, less involved and further away from the centers of power. This strange spectacle of Lucía/Marlene Dietrich and Dolores del Río represents a taking back of power for women, a way of celebrating their own sexuality and claiming control of they manner in which they are presented and represented.

Peri Rossi's feminism seems to me to be linked with all forms of theory and praxis in society: with economics, politics, law, education, and above all, language, and through this link, also to exile. She writes of women's situations as integrally connected with Western societal structures, with Western culture. Her writing deals with the heterosexual, the bisexual, the lesbian; women and their relation to economy; women and their relation to history; women and their relation to language and art. When Graciela, in _La nave de los locos_, takes Equis to her favorite cave in
the cliffs above the sea on Pueblo de Dios, the brief history of the women who saved the island in the past is recounted. The men had been defeated while the women fled to this cave. From there, the women fought off the invaders with minimal arms and managed to create the appearance of a huge defending force. This is buried history, a story that never appears in the pages of textbooks nor is analyzed by the "serious" historian. Like the exiled person, women are banished from acting in society and its history. In order to be active agents in the world, to return from the margins where they have been forced to exist, women must unearth and write the history of their own actions.

Likewise, the nature of women's exile from the institutions of power (not merely from State and Church, but from all exercise of power, positive and negative) can be seen in the manner of interpreting the stories of the creation of Western culture, specifically the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis. In a section entitled "Eva," Peri Rossi includes fragments such as the "confesiones de Eva" which tell how woman is forced to participate in tribal rites, ceremonies, and ways of life transmitted by the male "brujos" and from which there is no escape, except at the risk of "la soledad, la locura, o la muerte" (La nave de los locos, 153). This is a parable for the condition of women in Western society, not just in some "primitive" past but in the
immediate present as well. Most importantly, in this section Peri Rossi gives the reader a sample of children's essays which purport to describe Paradise and the situation of Adam and Eve. Graciela finds herself teaching a class of young children and suggests that they write this essay. Not surprisingly, girls as well as boys blame Eve for everything that occurs in Eden. Taking their cue from a culture which deprecates women, the next generation already possesses the attitudes towards women that hold up the patriarchal structure of society.

Not only has Peri Rossi written these sorts of "homes" into her fiction; she also deals with the relation of women and words directly in her poetry. In her poetry, women and words are almost interchangeable; each compensates for the other's cruelty, for the loss of the other:

En las páginas de un libro que leía, perdí una mujer. En cambio, a la vuelta de la esquina, he hallado una palabra.38

Las mujeres vienen de lejos, a consolar a los poetas de la decepción de las palabras.

Las palabras vienen desde lejos, a consolarnos de la decepción de las mujeres. (Evolché)

Las mujeres, son palabras de una lengua antigua y olvidada.
Las palabras, son mujeres disolutas. (Evolché)

These equations of women and words provide the poet, Peri Rossi, and the poet figure who appears in the poems with a
refuge for the emotional toll that each of these, women and words, exacts from their lives. Yet it is precisely the expression of that emotion that is important: the woman, who is also a poet, can use words, writing, to express women and women's lives. Peri Rossi makes this clear in a reflection upon her 1971 book of poems, *Evohé*.

*Evohé*, as you might know, is a Greek word transferred into Spanish. It is a call of the Bacchantes during Dionysiac ceremonies. I was in fact writing a book which I would describe as dionysiac. It is a book about the pleasure of love, in which I celebrate the joy of the human body. It belongs to my youth, it is an erotic book, in fact its other title is *Erotic Poems*. In it, I compare the pleasure of physical love to the sensual pleasure which the use of words gives to the writer and to the reader of poetry.

Erotic action and the action of writing hold for me something in common which is the ludic element. The element of play. In the same way in which a body has density, colour, light and shape, so words have texture, density, and there are bodies which I love and words which I love in the same way in which there are bodies and words which repel me. Eroticism is very similar to the creating activity.39
Most importantly, the interrelation of women and words provide a home for women (and for poets) in language:

Era ciego, y como la única realidad es el lenguaje, no veía una mujer por ningún lado. (Evohé)

Does this mean that Peri Rossi believes in "l'écriture feminine," women's writing, different from that of man? I believe that she understands that women must write, that woman must write herself, body and soul, into her work, using her own experience as a subject and not relying upon male definitions and theories of writing. But it does not seem to me that anywhere in her work Peri Rossi subscribes to the thought that women need and in fact work from a different language than that of men. Peri Rossi indeed breaks her language away from the system where the phallus serves as the defining form, the ultimate referent for all signifiers; yet she does not advocate either a separatism or a writing which is solely concerned with holes, gaps, margins, etc. She writes of women, of her love for women, and as a woman, but she is not a separatist. Rather, her poetry does not exclude but links, relates, women and words. As her fiction does not separate (which would exacerbate the condition of the exile) but attempts to reconcile female and male, and give the exile a home.

Peri Rossi's language is the language of a poet, an exile, and a woman; words allow her to express her love and
her subjectivity as a woman. Sometimes, in fact, words are the only means of making love:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Si el lenguaje} \\
\text{este modo austero} \\
\text{de convocarte} \\
\text{en medio de frios rascacielos} \\
\text{y ciudades europeas} \\
\text{Fuera} \\
\text{el modo} \\
\text{de hacer amor entre sonidos} \\
\text{o el modo} \\
\text{de meterme entre tu pelo.}^{41}
\end{align*}
\]

Words themselves become the beloved, to be loved, caressed, touched, and then, as women often are by men, thrown away like "putas," used goods:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Leyendo el diccionario} \\
\text{he encontrado una palabra nueva} \\
\text{con gusto, con sarcasmo la pronuncio;} \\
\text{la palpo, la apalabro, la manto, la calco, la pulso,} \\
\text{la digo, la encierro, la lamo, la toco con la yema de los dedos,} \\
\text{le tomo el peso, la mojo, la entibio entre las manos,} \\
\text{la acaricio, le cuento cosas, la cerco, la acorralo,} \\
\text{le clavo un alfiler, la lleno de espuma,} \\
\text{después, como a una puta} \\
\text{la echo de casa.} \quad (\text{Evohé})
\end{align*}
\]

This is a stab at a social-political-cultural system which historically uses women and words as tools, then discards them when they are no longer useful. It is also a system which has traditionally attempted to annul all difference in favor of a unity which, finally, is based upon the male form, particularly the singularity represented by the phallus. But Peri Rossi recognizes that practice of forceful unification as the same system that creates exiles:
forcing people to deny difference, to conform to one code, one theory, one way of life, and one (male) use of language. In the face of this system, in opposition to it, from the margins of it, Peri Rossi, as woman and poet, writes; she writes women into her work, she writes with language that is not the father's tool in her hands, but which is similar to and interchangeable with women.

Peri Rossi uses language to create ambiguous spaces which function as alternatives to the world of repressive governments. She has preserved the sexual differences between woman and man by trying to abolish strict division of gender roles. And through these written ambiguous spaces and critique of gender divisions, Peri Rossi has managed to write a home for women and exiles, both of whom the social-political-cultural-historical systems we call governments and states reject and eject from their midst. Peri Rossi's homes, whether ambiguous places or the language itself, are refuges for those who have been physically forced out of society and for those who feel as though they are foreigners within their own society.
Notes to Chapter Three


6 "Exilés, oui. Point. Maintenant il y a d'autres choses à écrire et à faire; comme écrivains exilés, bien sûr, mais en mettant l'accent sur « écrivains ». Car notre véritable efficacité est de tirer le plus grand parti possible de l'exil, profiter à fond de ces bourses sinistres, ouvrir et enrichir l'horizon mental pour que, lorsqu'il convergera de nouveau sur ce qui nous importe, ce soit avec une lucidité plus grande et une plus grande portée." Cortazar, p. 120.

Histoire de la folie, 1961), Chapter 1; Foucault, "Two Lectures," Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings, 1972-1977, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 78-108. For the purpose of this thesis, I am using Foucault's early work, particularly in Madness and Civilization and his "archaeology" of medical practice and discourse, where he is primarily concerned with the analysis of social institutions.

Peri Rossi's use of the theme of madness and the expulsion of the madman is one representation in a long history which began with Sebastian Brant's Narrenschiff (1494) and included Hieronymus Bosch's painting "Ship of Fools," and which continues in the present with such representations as the film of Katherine Anne Porter's "Ship of Fools" as well as Peri Rossi's novel under discussion here.

8 Peri Rossi, La nave de locos locos, 49.

9 For a complete discussion of the irony of confinement within the sphere of absolute freedom, the sea, see Foucault, Madness and Civilization, chapter 1, especially p. 11.

10 Peri Rossi, La nave de los locos, 50.

11 Vercingetórix' name intentionally evokes the challenger of Caesar whose story appears in Caesar's chronicle of the Gallic Wars. In this novel, Vercingetórix is the challenger of the overwhelming power of authority, although he is truthfully merely trying to lead his life when he is taken off to the prison labor camp.

12 Peri Rossi, La nave de los locos, 55.

13 Others have observed this as well: "La literatura, la crítica, los medios de comunicación, la retórica oficial, se confunden y son manipulados por el poder militar como partes de un mecanismo de sojuzgamiento que trastorna todos los niveles de la vida nacional. El relato expone este proceso de interiorización social del autoritarismo tendiente a naturalizar un nuevo "orden" deshumanizado que se suma, como una extrema inversión de valores, a otras formas de alienación que el texto representa como instancias de un devenir enajenado." Mabel Moraña, "La nave de los locos de Cristina Peri Rossi," 207.

14 Peri Rossi, La nave de los locos, 60.

16 Peri Rossi's novel is filled with references to Homer's Classical epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as well as Biblical references. Glaukos was a warrior fighting on the side of the Trojans in the *Iliad*; in the midst of the conflict, he and Diomedes recognize a previous friendship and refuse to fight each other. In Peri Rossi's novel, there is some sort of recognition between the madman Glaukos and Artemius Gudröm, yet it ends in the ironic death of Glaukos.


20 For an extended discussion of this ambiguity and madness as its result, see Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, Chapter 1, particularly p. 20.

21 Peri Rossi, "El ángel caído," in *Una pasión prohibida* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1986), 10. Interestingly, this is also the title of a chapter in *La nave de los locos*, a chapter in which Equis becomes enchanted with a huge older woman he sees at a cafe, finally going to her hotel room to consummate their union. Equis sees in this woman the features of an angel, asexual in her voluminous body.

22 Peri Rossi, *La nave de los locos*, 110.


25 Peri Rossi, "La condena," *Una pasión prohibida*, 175.


28 Michel Foucault, "Truth and Power," *Power/Knowledge*, 123. This is Foucault's rearrangement of Clausewitz' famous quote that peace is the continuation of war by other means.


30 Peri Rossi, *La nave de los locos*, 90.


32 Peri Rossi, "La ciudad," *El museo de los esfuerzos inútiles*, 160. All further references will be cited by page number in the body of the chapter.

33 Peri Rossi, "Interview with Cristina Peri Rossi," *Unheard Words*, 273.

34 Peri Rossi, "Interview with Cristina Peri Rossi," *Unheard Words*, 274.

35 Peri Rossi, *La nave de los locos*, 195. All further references will be cited in the body of the chapter.


37 Luce Irigaray, "Women on the Market" and "Commodities Among Themselves," *This Sex Which Is Not One*, 170-197.

38 Peri Rossi, *Evolé: poemas eróticos* (Montevideo, Uruguay: Giron Editorial, 1971). No page numbers are included in this text. All further references will be cited in the body of the chapter.

39 Peri Rossi, "Interview with Cristina Peri Rossi," *Unheard Words*, 271.

40 The debate over just what "l'écriture feminine" is and if such a thing exists rages on; some of the most interesting work done in this area has been written by the French
feminists. For further discussion, see, e.g., Xavière Gauthier, "Is There Such a Thing as Women's Writing?"; Julia Kristeva, "Oscillation between Power and Denial"; Chantal Chawaf, "Linguistic Flesh"; and Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa," all in New French Feminisms: An Anthology, ed. Elaine Marks & Isabelle de Courtivron (New York: Schocken Books, 1981).

41 Peri Rossi, Diaspora (Barcelona: Editorial Lumen, 1976), 20.
CHAPTER FOUR
THE OTHER COUNTRY: LANGUAGE, STYLE, AND EXILE
IN THE WRITING OF GERTRUDE STEIN

After all everybody, that is, everybody who writes is interested in living inside themselves in order to tell what is inside themselves. That is why writers have to have two countries, the one where they belong and the one in which they live really. The second one is romantic, it is separate from themselves, it is not real but it is really there.1

For Gertrude Stein, that second or other country, the romantic one inside oneself where all writers must really live, is language itself, in her case, specifically American English. We might say, to use a metaphor that Stein herself would shun—as she shunned all metaphor in general—she moves into the house of American English and then proceeds to radically rearrange all the furniture. Some might call it strangling the life out of rhetoric. But I believe that Stein's use of repetition (what she termed "insistence"), her focus on a search for the elementary articles of grammar, and her radically experimental style breathed new life into language and set the stage for the ways in which we view language in the twentieth century.

Gertrude Stein left the United States permanently in 1903 and settled in France. Although she lived in Europe, her real home, as defined in the epigraph to this chapter, was her language, English. What many critics have, over the years, named her "difficult" style is arguably also what makes Stein's work so important and influential in twentieth-
century literature. And it is precisely that difficult style which shows Stein's concern with vocabulary and grammar and punctuation, that is, with language itself, rather than with an underlying or symbolic meaning in her writing. Stein's work does not attempt to represent a transcendent reality (although I will argue that it is representative). Instead, her writing is mimetic of the process of living, of the rhythms of everyday life, and of the process of writing itself. Although there are endless ways of reading Stein's work, I believe that one of the most important is this reading of Stein as creating a focus on and a "home" in language.

In one sense, any attempt to speak of Stein's work metaphorically is a violation of what that work strove to accomplish. So when one says that Stein found a "home" in language, perhaps this would be clearer if it is understood not as metaphoric. Stein devoted herself to her writing, her encounter with and existence in language, and she attempted to theorize that encounter and existence simultaneously as she lived it. In Women of the Left Bank, Shari Benstock notes that Stein was not a part of the social communities of expatriates in Paris, neither the "high society" nor the lesbian expatriate community, but rather that she withdrew into her world with Alice Toklas and into the world of her writing. Indeed Stein did spend much time in the social
world of Paris, particularly when she first moved there and lived with her brother Leo. The Steins were famous for the informal, intellectual Saturday gatherings at their home. This changed radically, however, after Leo's departure from the household in 1913. Stein and Toklas spent less time entertaining, preferring only close friends. So it is not creating a metaphor to say that Stein lived in and made a home in language. She existed in a world of words, a world of her creation, a world lived and experienced in language.

It is also important to see that living in language is part of the thinking of the twentieth century in general, not merely in Stein's work. It can be seen in the plethora of literary and philosophical writings on language and in the serious consideration of the question of whether or not language determines thought, rather than functioning solely as a tool of expression. In his book, *Gertrude Stein and the Literature of Modern Consciousness*, Norman Weinstein raises this issue and cites the twentieth century American linguists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf regarding this reconsideration of the very nature of language and thought:

Suppose that the way we speak and write of the world determines how and what we see in it?

The American linguists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf have advanced this hypothesis, and raised a considerable storm of controversy that has continued to the present
day. They reason that the way we think is conditioned by the structure of the language we use to think in. This focus on language itself did not begin with Stein and certainly did not end with her; yet her work was an early and an extensive exploration of language as an object in its own right as well as a means of communication. It is in this sense as well that Stein finds a "home" in language.

I will examine some of Stein's own explanations of her writing as found in lectures such as "Composition as Explanation" and the essays in *Lectures in America*, as well as her demonstration of her theories in *How to Write*. I will also read her "experimental" work in *Tender Buttons* to see how Stein, perhaps more than any other literary artist of her time, created a home in language itself.

This chapter will primarily examine Stein's middle period, the writings between 1912 and 1930. It is in the middle period that Stein turns her attention and her creativity toward discovering new ways to use words and new ways to represent people, places, and objects. This is the period of Stein's work that some have called "unintelligible." Particularly interesting and powerful is *Tender Buttons* where Stein brings us the world of objects, food, and rooms in a language that forces readers not only to see objects with new eyes but to feel themselves immersed in a language that is both familiar and new again, a language
where words seem to "mean" in different ways. This middle period is perhaps Stein's most prolific and indicative of her focus on language and the process of writing.

Some critics have said that it is nearly impossible to explain and critique Stein's work or even to paraphrase that writing. I agree that it is extremely difficult to write about Stein's work because that work challenges our traditional notions and ideas of how literature should look and how it should be written, thus challenging our critical faculties as well. And as far as paraphrasing Stein, I also agree that it is nearly useless. But Stein herself reminds us, in the midst of her poetic reveries on food in *Tender Buttons* that we must "consider everything."5 This consideration is a large part of what reading Stein's work entails.

But while we consider everything in Stein, word play as well as word meaning, sound as well as ideas, and "which way the turn is tending," the idea is also to leave behind assumptions, to "claim nothing": "Claiming nothing, not claiming anything, not a claim in everything, collecting claiming, all this makes a harmony, it even makes a succession" (TB, 480). This is imperative in any reading of Stein's work because assumptions based on prior experiences with literature are certain to be thwarted. Interpretation of Stein's writing is a challenge to the reader and the
critic: we must become *aficionados* of language as much as Stein was. We must learn to live and move and exist in a language that attempts to represent that living and moving and existing and often seems impossibly vague or strange because of this attempt. Perhaps it is impossible to leave behind all prior notions and previous experiences. After all, we do have memories, we have learned certain ways of using language. But we must make the attempt in order to engage Stein's work, for that is what it asks of its readers. In reading Stein we become students of language and of Stein herself: "Students, students are merciful and recognized they chew something" (TB, 482).

Interestingly, although Stein's prose and poetry may seem monotonous, repetitious, and extremely difficult to follow with its strings of verbs, adverbs, pronouns, and prepositions, the reader finds her/himself having to pay more attention to each sentence, each paragraph. When one reads traditional prose, one is often lulled into a rhythm that allows for skipping individual words, even whole phrases or clauses. Not so in Stein's prose or poetry. In "Saving the Sentence" and "Sentences and Paragraphs," for example, each sentence stands on its own. They do not follow one another in any "logical" argument or sequence and hence, when one reads, one is forced into a concentration upon each sentence, its words, its motions: "when this you see remember me. This
is a very fine sentence"; "Each sentence has adroitness as
they decide"; "A sentence should be arbitrary it should not
please be better." When reading traditional novelistic or
expositional prose the adverbs, pronouns, and prepositions
are the parts of sentences that are glossed over, elided most
often. Verbs, while essential in understanding the action or
state of being of the subject of the sentence, are not the
focus unless they are dramatic enough to attract attention
(such as "he killed," "she stabbed," etc.). Again, not so in
Steinian prose. One finds a layering of words in Stein's
writing that emphasizes the motion of the sentence rather
than a logical analysis of its content. Look at the
following sentence from "Saving the Sentence": "Yes not being
with remembering that is what is going if it was not looked
at" (HTW, 21). It is the rhythm of the words and their
shifting subject (does it really matter what "it" is, so long
as it keeps going and is looked at?) that attract a reader to
this sentence and others like it in Stein's writing.

What some have seen as Stein's literary arterial
sclerosis, especially in works such as The Making of
Americans, seems to me to be the freeing up of language. Separating words from their bondage to a transcendent ideal
and allowing them free rein to represent the process of
living itself is the effect of Stein's writing. As we read
in Roland Barther's essay, Writing Degree Zero, this is what
sets the modern world apart from classical literature, this separation and uniqueness of the word. The focus of attention is on the words themselves. Here, in Stein's writing, the words are brought sharply into focus by their appearance alongside other words and in sentences where they stand out because of the oddness of arrangement. For what has always been important in Stein's work is her recognition and demonstration that language is an ongoing process, a "continuous present," as she says throughout her writing, which resembles our human lives themselves. Words do not always have to follow a prescribed pattern in order to represent those lives, that process. This is what Stein attempts to reach by jettisoning nouns; nouns are too easy, they are merely names that everyone mistakes for a complete description of an object. Moreover, they are inert: unlike verbs and adverbs they do not move, change or act; unlike prepositions and conjunctions they do not connect or join. Edmund Wilson hit upon what Stein was trying to do, although he overlooked it in a rather blind search for ordinary structures: "We see the ripples expanding in her consciousness, but we are no longer supplied with any clew as to what kind of object has sunk there." We should be looking at the ripples themselves, they are the purpose and meaning of Stein's work. The object is supposed to have sunk out of sight for it has little to do with life or language in
Steinian writing. Stein's work does not try to represent this object but instead is mimetic of all the patterns and processes of life and thought.

It seems that one of the points of reading Stein's work is for the reader to begin to create and live in her/his own particular "home" in language. As Stein always said, she did not write in order to entertain people (although one cannot disregard her humor and wit which certainly can be described as "entertaining"). What she intended was to create a "new narrative reality." Stein herself spent many years writing and living in this linguistic/artistic reality. No reader could ever fully and completely recreate Stein's own experiences, psychological and physical, of objects, food, and rooms just by reading Tender Buttons nor evoke the particular processes of thought and memory involved in The Making of Americans. But that is beside the point, I think. The reader can be inspired by the reality created in language in Stein's works to change his or her own perspective on language and life.

While it is possible to speak of Stein creating a "home" in language by representing thought and life processes, it is more difficult to see Stein as an exile. By most definitions and in most studies of her life and work Stein is seen as an expatriate, someone who freely chose to leave the country of her birth. This is actually quite correct, especially if we
recognize the word "patria" (fatherland) embedded in the word expatriate. Stein indeed left the fatherland of a puritanical, patriarchal United States for more freedom, both sexual and artistic, that Europe, particularly Paris, offered. And she also left the father's writing style behind, choosing instead to focus her literary efforts on a new way of writing.¹⁰

Yet I contend that Stein is indeed an exile, at least artistically. For while she chose freely to settle in France, she was exiled by the general standards of literary critique, by those who found her work ludicrous and unreadable, and by those who refused to publish her writing. At the same time Stein radically set her work apart from accepted norms of writing and indeed became a kind of artistic exile. She separated her literary art from prior incarnations; she changed the very use of English in writing. Separation and exile are essential components of art for Stein. She values the quality of separation that she sees as part of American literature: "Think about all persistent American writing. There is inside it as separation, a separation from what is chosen to what is that from which it has been chosen."¹¹

It is also a physical separation that Stein herself lived. She separated herself from America to settle in France, yet perhaps because she had some distance and
therefore a different perspective on the county of her birth, many of her writings focused on America and Americans. Stein herself insisted upon writing in English although she conducted her daily life in spoken French. She believed that English truly belonged to her if she could exist in it in the midst of another country and language. This is another marker of the exile that seems to be prevalent in the twentieth century: a physical exile, although one that may or may not be enforced by some other entity than the individual, that enables the artist to live and to write more freely often about the very place that one has left. So there is this additional incentive at least to self-exile: when one is already on the margins of one's society (whether sexually, emotionally, artistically, or all three), exile or separation from that society becomes desirable.

One remedy for that exile, at least for the literary artist, is language. Although we should not read The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas as a true map of Gertrude Stein's life, there is a statement that can tell us much about how Stein viewed language as a place of refuge and a place of creativity:

there is for me only one language and that is english. One of the things that I have liked all these years is to be surrounded by people who know no english. It has left me more intensely alone with my eyes and my
english. I do not know if it would have been possible
to have english be so all in all to me otherwise...No, I
like living with so very many people and being all alone
with english and myself.\textsuperscript{13}

Stein's own writings about writing help us to see how
she lives in language and fashions a world in words, less
through her explanations and explications of her own writing
but the practice of her theories in those works.\textsuperscript{14} This world
in language that Stein creates is, as Marianne DeKoven has so
perceptively demonstrated, an open-ended, dense, complex
world where the focus of one's reading is always drawn to the
language itself. Referring to a passage in "The Portrait of
Mabel Dodge at the Villa Curonia," DeKoven says: "Not only
the number of simultaneous images, but their very
irreducibility, their unresolvedness, gives rise to a sudden
sense of an infinite, limitlessly rich, filled, and open
mental, imaginative world, in which we can wander at will
without pressure or destruction."\textsuperscript{15}

Most of Stein's writing on writing reflect her living
within language that is the prominent feature of her
radically experimental middle period. In trying to describe
her thoughts on composition and her theories of the usage of
language and grammar, Stein moves back into those styles of
writing that marked the work of the middle period. She also
shows, I think, how the writer always lives in the world of
language, in that "other country" that represents an exile from the everyday world and the physical country of residence.

When Stein attempts to discuss the modern composition in "Composition as Explanation," one of the most striking features in her construction of the writer is her/his difference from those around her or him. Not that the artist is ahead of his time; for Stein, it is because the artist is the one who, in creating his time, creates it differently from others who then refuse to accept that creation: "No one is ahead of his time, it is only that the particular variety of creating his time is the one that his contemporaries who also are creating their own time refuse to accept."\(^{16}\) This amounts to a kind of artistic isolation for the artist who is engaged in making something new, something reflective of the present "now" in which he or she lives. For these are the two things that Stein understands as changing from generation to generation: composition and time.\(^ {17}\) And these are the two things that society turns its back toward when canonizing its artist: the composing of art, the process, in Stein's case her language, and the present time. Stein sees that when something is new, when it is different, it is seen as "irritating annoying stimulating" and therefore pushed away by a society that prefers stability and predictability. And those who create that "irritating annoying stimulating" work
are similarly relegated to the outer margins of society:
"Those who are creating the modern composition authentically
are naturally only of importance when they are dead because
by that time the modern composition having become past is
classified and the description of it is classical. That is
the reason why the creator of the new composition in the arts
is an outlaw until he is a classic" (CE, 514). It is that
list of qualities of modern (present) art that causes
rejection: "irritating annoying stimulating." A Steinian
list which includes negative and positive ideas side by side,
this is an extremely accurate description of what the modern
artist faces in the reception of his or her work. "Classical
art" in Stein's view means it is considered "beautiful" with
all the notions of stability, immobility, eternity that are
usually attached to beauty. But, as Stein rebukes the world,
"if every one were not so indolent they would realise that
beauty is beauty even when it is irritating and stimulating
not only when it is accepted and classic" (CE, 515). Thus,
for Stein, exile to an "outlaw" status is what awaits those
who try to "begin again," those who attempt to create a
"continuous present," those who write the modern composition.

Why is this composition so irritating and annoying? And
why stimulating? Perhaps because Stein sets out to use
language in ways that challenge classical ideals of beauty in
writing, and perhaps because she focuses as much on the
process as the product of art. In this composition, Stein uses several procedures that she describes as "beginning again and again" and "continuous present," as well as making use of grammatical constructions that are normally relegated to supportive or predicating roles. All of these processes disrupt "normal" or usual patterns of reading, forcing readers and critics to readjust their own processes of making meaning. But that does not mean Stein's work is unreadable. If the experimental artist is exiled to the margins of society, then the reader must look in that direction for understanding.

Stein herself looks to language, to the grammar of English, for new ways of composing and representing the world. In one of the pieces from *Lectures in America*, "Poetry and Grammar," Stein explains her reliance upon the often overlooked elementary components of language. Because verbs and adverbs change form, tense, even their appearance, they are better able to reflect the living of life and the composing of the writer, as well as reflecting the subject of the writing. This is precisely what Ezra Pound came to see as the importance of Ernest Fenollosa's "Essay on the Chinese Written Character," the idea that verbs are the essential units of language. In his discussion of Fenollosa's contribution to Pound's poetics, Herbert Schneidau notes that "Fenollosa professed to believe that verbs underlie all parts
of speech, even pronouns, and that only ossification of
language obscures this," and that "[i]n his view reality is
faithfully described only by transitive verbs, for it
consists entirely of actions and processes." It seems
almost certain that Stein read Imagist poetry and then the
fruits of Pound's Vorticism, both of which benefitted from
what Pound learned from his reading of Fenollosa. Of course,
Stein adds her unique thinking to this conception of language
by telling us that verbs can be "mistaken." Yet, the
persistence of this idea of language as a living, moving
entity best shown in transitive verbs, seems to permeate the
very air of Modernism. It is almost as if these parts of
language were more human than static, unchanging, predictable
nouns and adjectives:

Verbs and adverbs are more interesting. In the first
place they have one very nice quality and that is that
they can be so mistaken. It is wonderful the number of
mistakes a verb can make and that is equally true of its
adverb...

Beside being able to be mistaken and to make mistakes
verbs can change to look like themselves or to look like
something else, they are, so to speak on the move and
adverbs move with them and each of them find themselves
not at all annoying but very often very much mistaken.
(LIA, 211-212)
Of articles, those powerfully functional but little regarded grammatical units, Stein says, "any one who wants to write with articles and knows how to use them will always have the pleasure that using something that is varied and alive can give" (LIA, 213). By paying attention to and using in unusual ways these parts of grammar Stein makes language come alive for the reader who can no longer simply disregard or elide even the most seemingly insignificant unit of language such as "the" or "a."

For Stein, although the artist always resides in the "other country," and is always in a kind of exile, the artist does reflect his or her time. The novel, particularly the nineteenth century novel, was indeed "soothing" for Stein, but had little or nothing to do with existence in the beginning of the twentieth century:

When I first began writing although I felt very strongly that something that made that some one be some one was something that I must use as being them, I naturally began to describe them as they were doing anything. In short I wrote a story as a story, that is the way I began, and slowly I realized this confusion, a real confusion, that in writing a story one had to be remembering, and that novels are soothing because so many people one may say everybody can remember almost anything. It is this element of remembering that makes
novels so soothing. But and that was the thing that I was gradually finding out listening and talking at the same time that is realizing the existence of living being actually existing did not have in it any element of remembering and so the time of existing was not the same as in the novels that were soothing. As I say all novels are soothing because they make anything happen as they can happen that is by remembering anything. But and I kept wondering as I talked and listened all at once, I wondered is there any way of making what I know come out as I know it, come out not as remembering. I found this very exciting. And I began to make portraits.

We in this period have not lived in remembering, we have living in moving being necessarily so intense that existing is indeed something. (LIA, 181, 182)

Rather than memory and the order that is imposed upon experience, Stein's experimental writing taps into the present flow of thought and experience and represented it as moving, living discourse. This was also the period where other authors began to play with what is referred to as "stream of consciousness," yet Stein is usually singled out as the most extreme example and ridiculed for her attempts. This is because her efforts are more radical than many of her
contemporaries and her successors and consequently call for more extreme efforts at reading.

These extreme efforts are called for when one attempts to read another of Stein's famous theories on writing. *How to Write* is less a theoretical exposition than a demonstration of Stein's experimental writing. Yet in the shorter pieces in this book Stein does make some intriguing theoretical statements about writing and grammar. The famous epigraph to "Sentences and Paragraphs" reads: "A Sentence is not emotional a paragraph is"; here Stein tells us that her focus is on the feelings of language itself. Not the feelings that language brings about by way of representing something beyond itself, but the emotions of language itself, the sound, look, texture of words, sentences, paragraphs.

For example, this paragraph:

> A repetition of sweetness makes it not repeating but attractive and making soup and dreaming coincidences. The sentence will be saved. He raises his head and lifts it. A sentence is not whether it is beautiful. Beautiful is not thought without asking as if they are well able to be forgiving. (HTW, 25)

Here, the paragraph consists of sentences with the middle formed by "the sentence will be saved," an affirmation that this paragraph has helped succeed in savings sentences such as Stein wrote. Words such as "sweetness" and "soup" lend
credence to the idea of a texture and taste of language. And the importance of the sentence is not whether it is "beautiful" in that classical sense mentioned by Stein in "Composition as Explanation." It is moving and feeling and contributing to the emotion of the paragraph. Paragraphs are indeed whole, even if they do not linearly express one clear, grammatically logical thought. Once again, the focus is upon the freshness and newness, the experimental nature of Stein's language.22

What Stein succeeds in doing in her experimental work, be it portraits, plays, poetry, or supposed "explanations" such as How to Write, is to focus attention nearly simultaneously upon language as sign and language as signifying meaning. As Wendy Steiner demonstrates, Stein often "juxtaposed words as things to words as signifiers of things" such as in this sentence from How to Write: "There can be no grammar without and and if if you are prevailed upon to be very well and thank you" (HTW, 73).23 "And" and "if" each fulfill more than one role, acting both as objects and as mediums of the message, and this is very characteristic of Stein's use of language. While this usage certainly makes reading more arduous, it nonetheless does open the reader's attention to the polysemic nature of these units of language, which is always at least part of what Stein is trying to accomplish.
If the discourse of the twentieth century is one of exile, as I believe it is, then the only possible home that can be constructed is in language, for this exile is one that is a part of language itself. The exile under consideration here is the exile of the experimental artist to the margins of society, as discussed above. The language that is being written is itself a kind of alienated language, different from mainstream writing and art. One way to survive exile, isolation, and alienation is to take refuge in one's language. There must be a re-examination of language, a focus of attention onto language in order to reclaim it. In "What is English Literature" Stein demonstrates how each century throughout English literary history had its own style and its own relation to language which was integrally connected to the content of the times. And the content of literature, particularly American literature, which Stein saw as reflective of the twentieth century was that "separation," as noted above. It is a separation both from what had preceded it in the history of literature and a representation of the split between the signifier and the signified with the focus shifted onto the signifier, in other words, onto language itself. This split is where we can observe Stein's writing, this is the modern composition where "the disembodied way of disconnecting something from anything and anything from something was the American one." (LIA, 53)
Reading Gertrude Stein's long prose poem *Tender Buttons* is an exercise in rediscovering the world, not only the world around us of Objects, Food, and Rooms (the subtitles of the three sections of the work), but also the world of language. *Tender Buttons* is Stein's attempt to represent the things of the world without resorting to the use of their commonly accepted names, in order to encourage new ways of seeing, thinking, and understanding these things and the language used to describe them. Richard Bridgman states that *Tender Buttons* must be read as a whole, that it contains themes and ideas which run throughout each section making it a cohesive work although the temptation upon first reading it is to assume the opposite, to focus on its strange, often fragmentary nature. Stein, following the thought of her former teacher William James and possibly the work of Henri Bergson, focuses not on the separate and prominent features of objects or consciousness nor uses the socially agreed upon shorthand of common nouns/names. Instead, she seeks to make our perceptions of the objects new by using language not usually associated with the thing she is attempting to represent. For example, in the section entitled "Apple," we are presented with the following:

Apple plum, carpet steak, seed clam, colored wine, calm seen, cold cream, best shake, potato, potato and no no gold work with pet, a green seen is called bake and
change sweet is bready, a little piece a little piece please.

A little piece please. Cane again to the presupposed and ready eucalyptus tree, count out sherry and ripe plates and little corners of a kind of ham. This is use. (TB, 488)

What we end up with after reading this passage is an impressionistic view of an apple covering features such as color ("plum," "wine," "gold," "green"), parts of the fruit ("seed"), its state ("ripe"), taste ("sweet," "cold," "bready"), and what can be done with it ("bake," "a little piece," "this is use"). Yet what is being portrayed is not easily recognizable. There are arrangements of words not seen before: "carpet steak," "a green seen" "calm seen," "best shake." What Stein seeks is not only to renew perceptions of objects but also to awaken a language that seemed to have fallen asleep during the nineteenth century. By representing an apple so strangely yet with familiar English words, Stein has forced the reader to reexamine all those features and concepts that are, for her, too easily assumed when the simple noun "apple" is used.

Interestingly enough, the more one reads Tender Buttons, the more one finds things that seemed not to be there upon earlier readings. And the more critical work one reads about Tender Buttons, the more one can see that Stein has created a
work that truly opens up words to many perceptions of meaning. One critic will read dirt as a tarnishing, negative substance; another will see it as positive. Both are right; both must read *Tender Buttons* with their own views as well as trying to find Stein's viewpoint. And this is essential: for Stein has created a world of objects, a "real" world where language is fluid, where it "means" what it suggests, but what it suggests may depend upon the reader as well as upon the author who uses that language.

It is not that Stein completely diverges from any objective reality. If that were true, if her work, at least in *Tender Buttons*, was completely subjective, none of us would ever be able to understand or recognize any of the objects she describes. This is the mistake that many of her early critics and detractors made by assuming that her work was "unreadable." There is an underlying objective reality, including socially agreed upon characteristics of certain objects, food, and rooms. What Stein does is to reject the commonly accepted names or nouns that we generally use for these objects, finding that those nouns do nothing to tell us about the reality of the thing: "but generally speaking, things once they are named the name does not go on doing anything to them and so why write in nouns. Nouns are the name of anything and just naming names is alright when you want to call a roll but is it any good for anything else"
Instead, she incorporates those characteristics that are external and observable by anyone into her descriptions which are focused more upon feelings received when observing such objects. And it seems to me that she is always conscious of the process of linguistically representing these focused-upon objects.

Language, especially now at the end of the twentieth century, is seen as a living entity, not necessarily a mere tool that can be manipulated to represent a transcendent reality. Language is a reality on its own and something which, in fact, helps us to create (not just to point to) the reality that we know. Stein, it seems, always knew this.

William Gass recognizes that Stein was creating a world within her language in *Tender Buttons*. Indeed, what she was creating was a world in language. Gass uses the metaphor of a home and its related experiences to describe what Stein does:

"words can be moved about like furniture in their sentences; they can be diced like carrots (Stein cuts up a good number); they can be used in several different ways simultaneously, like wine; they can be brushed off, cleaned and polished; they can be ingeniously joined, like groom and bed, anxiety and bride. Every sentence is a syntactical space (a room) in which words (things, people) act (cook, clean, eat, or excrete) in order to
produce quite special and very valuable qualities of feeling. 27

This seems to fit right into what I am claiming: that Stein forms a world with her language and moves into it, domesticates it as one does in moving into a room or apartment, and that this use of language is a particularly twentieth century phenomenon, part of the exilic discourse of this century. Yet Gass' metaphor is a bit too easy and too domestically female. All of Gass' metaphors seem to say that Stein inhabited the female house of language, a house where nouns of cooking, cleaning, eating, and sleeping prevail. 28 Yet it is a more complex use of language that creates a world in Stein's work. It represents the objects of the world not by metaphor, the substitution of one noun for another. Stein was trying to change poetry, which she recognized depends upon nouns, by describing things without calling them by the names that people have agreed upon:

So then in Tender Buttons I was making poetry but and it seriously troubled me, dimly I knew that nouns made poetry but in prose I no longer needed the help of nouns and in poetry did I need the help of nouns. Was there not a way of naming things that would not invent names, but mean names without naming them. (LIA, 236)

So Stein went about creating the Tender Buttons of language, the play of joining, separating, arranging, rearranging, and
disarranging words to represent things that she saw around her and feelings that she felt within her. Gass astutely sees Stein's purposes in her play with language:

Words, of course, were tender buttons, to be sorted and played with, admired and arranged, and she felt that language in English literature had become increasingly stiff and resistant, and that words had to be pried out of their formulas, freed, and allowed to regain their former Elizabethan fluidity, but it is now evident, I think, that she had other motives, indeed the same ones which had driven her into writing in the first place: the search for and discovery of Gertrude Stein, and the recording of her daily life, her thoughts, her passion. 29

There is no doubt, it seems to me, that Stein was always concerned with identity, specifically her own, as well as with language, and that she sought, in language, to present identity, self, feelings. This is not an attempt to imitate these things, but to re-create them in language. And one cannot accomplish this by relying upon accepted names for things and feelings, nor by proposing new names or supplements (metaphors). Stein does not invent language nor use it to imitate; she lives in it:

Language as a real thing is not imitation either of sounds or colors or emotions it is an intellectual
recreation and there is no possible doubt about it and it is going to go on being that as long as humanity is anything. So everyone must stay with the language their language that has come to be spoken and written and which has in it all the history of its intellectual recreation. (LIA, 238)

So, Stein's language, especially in Tender Buttons, manages to recreate, in the mind of the reader, the thing-food-room being described as well as the processes in which Stein the writer was immersed, her identity, emotions, internal reactions/associations.

This is not to say that Tender Buttons is no more than a combination of Stein's hermetic psychological ruminations and an attempt to represent the process of language disconnected from any referent whatsoever. There are referents throughout Tender Buttons as well as the recognition from the outset that there is a system; that is, language is a system albeit one that needs to be shaken up, made new. The first entry in the Steinian category of the section entitled "Objects" reads as follows:

A Carafe, That is a Blind Glass
A kind in glass and a cousin, a spectacle and nothing strange a single hurt color and an arrangement in a system to pointing. All this and not ordinary, not
 unordered in not resembling. The difference is spreading. (TB, 461)

Others have discussed and dissected this object-paragraph at length; my interest in it revolves around its function as the opening to what will follow in the rest of the book. 

Although _Tender Buttons_ appears to be a diffuse, odd, disconnected collection of non-sequiturs, actually, as this opening tells us, it is "not unordered in not resembling."

There is in _Tender Buttons_ "an arrangement in a system to pointing." That arrangement is the arrangement of words and ideas in the system which is language and it serves to point out to us new ways of both viewing the world and representing it in art. In fact, that "not unordered" system is the world that Stein creates, the world of language in the twentieth century which she knew had to be different from what preceded it:

> And toward the end of the nineteenth century there was bound to be a change because after all nothing goes on longer than it can. (LIA, 45)

> As I say then each century has its own way. (LIA, 27)

> Every one but one may say every one became consciously became aware of the existence of the authenticity of the modern composition. This then the contemporary recognition, because of the academic thing known as war having been forced to become contemporary made every one
not only contemporary in act not only contemporary in thought but contemporary in self-consciousness made every one contemporary with the modern composition. (CE, 521)

As out of a new state of affairs in the world comes a new way of thinking and a new use of language, indeed a new philosophy of language and creation with language, Stein's section entitled "A Box" lets loose this new way of using language and making meaning:

Out of kindness comes redness and out of rudeness comes rapid same question, out of an eye comes research, out of selection comes painful cattle. So then the order is that a white way of being round is something suggesting a pin and is it disappointing, it is not, it is so rudimentary to be analysed and see a fine substance strangely, it is so earnest to have a green point not to red but to point again. (TB, 463)

The series of "out of...out of" that begins A Box reminds one of the genealogical lists of the Old Testament or of the riddle that Samson put to the Philistines in Judges 14:14, but also of something like a renewal; that is, out of something old grows something else, something different. If we consider that language has usually been seen as a container, one which holds ideas, meaning, fullness, we can begin to read A Box as an emergence of new language. But it
is also important to recognize that there are many, many other things that are suggested by a box. Any one reading is bound to be a partial reading, which is an important characteristic of Stein's writing during this period. Paradoxically, this new language in which the box is portrayed seeks to change our ideas of the object and of the container. The "order" that is being proposed by example is questioned: "is it disappointing" and then affirmed "it is not." What it is, is a return to beginnings, to roots (of words and of meanings): "it is so rudimentary to be analysed" and what occurs is a new vision of the world: "see a fine substance strangely." Finally, language as representative of itself, language as a focus in and of itself, is at least partially what is stressed at the end of this Box: "it is so earnest to have a green point not to red but to point again." The word green does not automatically mean a green thing nor the color green which is often linked with the color red. It "points" simply "to point again"; in other words, language for the sake of language, pointing to itself as well as pointing for the sake of pointing.

All of this disturbs the generally accepted ideas of language and writing, shakes up the supposedly "normal" relations between meaning and language. The final entry in the subsection Food is entitled "A Centre in a Table" which tells us "It was a way a day, this made some sum." There is
some addition, some end, and this involves reading: "next to me next to a folder, next to a folder some waiter, next to a foldersome waiter and re letter and read her. Read her with her for less." The "next to...next to" keeps spatially pushing the eye and the mind onward to "re letter and read her." This spatial movement functions to de-center the writing, to push Stein's language into play rather than leaving it to function merely as a container for one particular idea. And indeed, the very next page of Tender Buttons, the beginning of the section entitled Rooms, tells the reader, "Act so that there is no use in a centre" (TB, 498). Rooms are spaces which enclose or contain, just as language can be an enclosure or container. Yet Stein, in the first line of this section, de-centers both rooms and language. It is not that Stein denies that language can contain thoughts and ideas nor does she attempt to sunder these from each other. She does recognize, however, that language and rooms can become inescapable prisons, including her own uses of language: "A sentence of a vagueness that is violence is authority and a mission and stumbling and also certain also a prison" (TB, 581).

This de-centering and this restless pushing and motion of language are also effects of what has been called Stein's literary Cubism. As Wendy Steiner has discussed in depth in her work on Stein's literary portraits, there are many
similarities between Stein's work and the work of the Cubists, even if her translation of Cubist ideas into writing often failed. Stein herself drew the comparison between her work and Cubism, as Steiner tells us:

Stein draws explicit parallels between cubist painting and her own writing. She claims that Three Lives was written under the influence of a portrait by Cézanne, she compares the "elemental abstraction" of her own and Picasso's art, and in one much-disputed quotation she even speaks of Picasso and herself as doing the same thing in their respective media.\textsuperscript{34}

Steiner agrees with Stein's assessment of her own work as Cubist, even if that term has been applied uncritically much of the time: "In fact, there are some remarkable similarities between Stein's and the cubists' work, both in their assessments of the general problems of their arts and in the specific technical devices they invented to deal with these problems."\textsuperscript{35} Regarding interpretation and Cubism, E.H. Gombrich notes:

It is a point of cubism, I believe, that we are constantly teased and tempted into doing this [trying out various interpretations until one fits completely, integrating all parts of the work into a coherent whole] but that each hypothesis we assume will be knocked out by a contradiction elsewhere, so that our interpretation
can never come to rest and our "imitative faculty" will be kept busy as long as we join in the game.\textsuperscript{36} It is important to use the word "game" for language is a game in which we all must join in order to communicate. And it is precisely the idea of play that is involved in a game that becomes the focus and residence of Stein's work. When looking at the concept of structure in the study of what he calls the human sciences, Derrida sees the ever-changing centers of those structures, the continual substitution of one central presence for another. This absence of a fixed idea at the center of a structure permits what he calls the "play of signification" to occur indefinitely. Like Derrida's theorizing upon the idea of living in and accepting the "play" of language, Stein turns her energies to creating that play, rather than toward the creation of what Gombrich would call a coherent illusion.\textsuperscript{37} Our interpretation of Stein cannot "come to rest" either, as it is impossible to find some safe, static vantage point from which to observe her language. The reader's eye is constantly moving, the reader's mind is constantly making associations then losing them again when any attempt at a totalizing interpretation is made.

What Stein does succeed in doing by acting "so that there is no use in a centre" is opening up her rooms and her language, making them habitable for an artist of the
twentieth century. No longer are words centered on one idea; grammar and meaning are opened up to new ways of expressing and reflecting each other. But Stein does not set language completely free from structure and convention, recognizing that older uses of language can still be useful: "What is ancient is practical" (TB, 508). She does not dispense with the center completely: "If the center has the place then there is distribution. That is natural. There is a contradiction and naturally returning there comes to be both sides and the centre. That can be seen there from the description" (TB, 499). Stein's experimental poetry attempts to move or shift the center so that the reader can see things (objects, food, rooms; in a word: life) from a different angle: "The end of which is that there is a suggestion, a suggestion that there can be a different whiteness to a wall. This was thought" (TB, 499). Stein indeed wishes to suggest things without naming them, placing responsibility for recognition and understanding upon the reader as much as upon the art and ability of the author.

I had always been very impressed from the time that I was very young by having had it told me and then afterwards feeling it myself that Shakespeare in the forest of Arden had created a forest without mentioning the things that make a forest. You feel it all but he does not name its names. (LIA, 236)
"Question" and "suggestion" become new ways of approaching ideas in language: "A fact is that when the place was replaced all was left that was stored and all was retained that would not satisfy more than another. The question is this, is it possible to suggest more to replace that thing. This question and this perfect denial does make the time change all the time" (TB, 499).

Stein's room are large enough to contain questions and suggestions and replacements and changes in language:

Why is the name changed The name is changed because in the little space there is a tree, in some space there are no trees, in every space there is a hint of more, all this causes the decision. (TB, 505)

This which is mastered has so thin a space to build it all that there is plenty of room and yet is it quarreling, it is not and the insistence is marked. A change is in a current and there is no habitable exercise. (TB, 505)

Should the resemblance be so that any little cover is copied, should it be so that yards are measured, should it be so and there be a sin, should it be so then certainly a room is big enough when it is so empty and the corners are gathered together. (TB, 506)

Stein's language succeeds in walking around the rooms ("should" and "should it be so" are repeated four times as if
for the four corners of the room that Stein then gathers together) that she creates in language. Stein is not seeking to represent a transcendent reality beyond both the poem and the everyday world; she tries to make the objects and the language new again through her use of words, focusing on those objects and words themselves. As Allegra Stewart noted, "The modern world, overmechanized and overorganized, is an empty world, a world in which few have an individual feeling, because it has lost the sense of strangeness and mystery. To restore to it the feeling of life, the writer must achieve a direct vision of the world." That is precisely what Stein's "suggesting" rather than naming achieves: a direct vision that is completely different, changed from prior envisionings of the objects of the world. Her final words in Tender Buttons reinforce both the fact that she took great care in her use and exploration of language and that the poem achieved a kind of burst of new energy in that language:

The care with which there is incredible justice and likeness, all this make a magnificent asparagus, and also a fountain. (TB, 509)

Stein's language takes the reader into a world that is seen and told and felt anew, where commonplace articles are turned around and shown from new angles. It is this renewed energy in language that can represent "real" objects in the world
"all this makes a magnificent asparagus"). And this energy also is language itself, shooting up from the mind and the pen to show itself to the world ("a fountain").

*Tender Buttons* may indeed be difficult to read but with some care and attention we can find in it a world held out to us, a place to inhabit with a language itself which is rich and exciting as well as comfortable. Stein chooses not to invent new words but to take old names and change them, to inhabit them with new energy and focus.

As Wendy Steiner asserts in relation to the literary portraiture of Stein, Gertrude Stein developed sophisticated theories of writing and then worked them out by demonstration throughout her literary career. Stein seemed always to be as concerned with theorizing and conceptualizing her work, not only after the fact but before and in the midst of writing. And these theories and conceptualizations seem also to point toward the relevance of Stein's work to the twentieth century, a time when the focus has shifted onto languages and ways of knowing.

But perhaps what finally makes Stein and her work so important is its relation to exile and language. The twentieth century, early on, was one of disruption, violence, and disillusion. The Great War and the Second World War disrupted the entire world economically and physically; the rapid advances in technology made nations acknowledge their
links probably well before they knew how to get along with each other; and there is no doubt that art, particularly literary art with its reliance upon sign function, representation, and communication, had to rise to the challenge of representing this rapidly shifting world. Stein's literary art attempts to do so; it attempts to provide a "home" in its focus on language itself, for Stein and for the reader, for those who felt "exiled," whether it was physically ousted from a place or alienated from the center of one's society.
Notes to Chapter Four


3 Stein herself suggested three periods as a way of viewing her work. See, for example, "Portraits and Repetition," in *Lectures in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985; originally published 1935), 165-208. Carolyn Faunce Copeland divides her very informative study on narrative and time in Stein's work along the same lines. See, Carolyn Faunce Copeland, *Language and Time and Gertrude Stein* (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1975). I believe the division is important because Stein's focus, style, language, even subject matter changes throughout her forty-two year career and the division into early, middle, and late periods aids any interpretation of that work.

4 See any number of critics' writing on Stein's work. Carolyn Copeland cites Wyndham Lewis's preface to *Time and Western Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957) as a particularly sharp example of the negative attitude toward Stein's work, particularly the experimental work of the middle period. See also Edmund Wilson's chapter on Stein in *Axel's Castle* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931) where he acknowledges Stein's importance not for her own work but for the influence she had on other (male) writers.

5 "Considering the circumstances there is no occasion for a reduction, considering that there is no pealing there is no occasion for an obligation, considering that there is no outrage there is no necessity for any reparation, considering that there is no particle sodden there is no occasion for deliberation. Considering everything and which way the turn is tending, considering everything why is there no restraint, considering everything what makes the place settle and the plate distinguish some specialities. The whole thing is not understood and this is not strange considering that there is no education, this is not strange because having that certainty does not show the difference in cutting, it shows that when there is turning there is no distress." Gertrude Stein, "Tender Buttons," in *The Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein*, ed. Carl Van Vechten (New York: Random House, Inc., 1945, 1946, 1962), 478. All further quotations are taken from this edition and will be cited by TB and page number in the body of the chapter.
6 Stein, *How to Write* (Vermont: Something Else Press, Inc., 1973; first published in France, 1931), 17. All further references to this work will be cited as HTW and will appear in the body of the chapter.

7 Edmund Wilson called Stein's work "fatty degeneration": But already some ruminative self-hypnosis, some progressive slowing-up of the mind, has begun to show itself in Miss Stein's work as a sort of fatty degeneration of her imagination and style." "Gertrude Stein," *Axel's Castle*, 239.

8 Wilson, "Gertrude Stein," *Axel's Castle*, 243-44.


10 In the last ten years there have been numerous studies and articles on Gertrude Stein's language and its relation to feminism or at least its difference from male Modernist writers such as Joyce and Pound. One of the most interesting studies is Marianne DeKoven, *A Different Language: Gertrude Stein's Experimental Writing* (Madison, Wis.: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1983). DeKoven considers Stein's language in light of Julia Kristeva's and Jacques Derrida's theories of language and writing.

11 Gertrude Stein, "What is English Literature," *Lectures in America*, 51. All further references to essay contained in this volume will be cited as LIA and page number in the body of the chapter.

12 Shari Benstock has opined that Stein, as many others of her time, left the United States for sexual and emotional freedom as well as artistic independence, that is, freedom from the Puritanical culture of America at the turn of the twentieth century. Shari Benstock, *Women of the Left Bank* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 14.


14 *How to Write* is perhaps the best example of Stein's praxis, but one can see both theory and use at work in the essays in *Lectures in America* and "Composition as Explanation."
15 DeKoven, 15.

16 Gertrude Stein, "Composition as Explanation," in Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein, 514. All further quotations will be referred to as CE and will be cited in the body of the chapter.

17 Composition, of course, is the process of composing in both painting and writing.

18 Stein is drawing on the realities of French art history, particularly of the nineteenth century, and the experiences of such artists as Matisse and Picasso in her own time.

19 "The unifying feature of experimental writing is...the obstruction of normal reading. It prevents us from interpreting the writing to form coherent, single, whole, closed, ordered, finite, sensible meanings." DeKoven, 5. DeKoven's book is an excellent theoretical discussion of the process of Stein's language and its relation to deconstruction and psychoanalytic theories of literature and political ramifications of experimental writing. My focus is somewhat different from DeKoven's in that I seek to discuss the ideas of exile and home as part of both content and process of Stein's writing.


22 Interestingly, Stein links the scientific exploration of language with women, or least she genders the word "analysis" as female: "Analysis is a womanly word. It means that they discover there are laws" (HTW, 32). Benstock, Catharine Stimpson, Marianne DeKoven, and others have discussed the links between Stein's lesbianism and her use of language. Benstock and DeKoven especially refer to Stein as taking the patriarchal tool that is language and turning it into an expression of its own (and her own) autonomy. See especially DeKoven, pp. 19-23; Benstock, pp. 187-190. Much of the interesting criticism of Stein's work in the recent past has focused on her lesbianism and its connections to and expressions in her writing. See, for example, Catharine Stimpson, "The Mind, the Body and Gertrude Stein," in Modern

23 See Steiner, 157.

24 Richard Bridgman, Gertrude Stein in Pieces (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 125. This book remains one of the most extensive, coherent readings of Stein's work and is cited extensively in almost all subsequent critical writings on Stein.

25 See Bridgman, 133-34 for a discussion of Stein's possible influences in this regard.

26 For a sample of these perspectives see William Gass and Catharine Stimpson.


28 Gass is certainly not the only one to fall into this easy way of metaphorically describing Stein's work. See, for example, Sherwood Anderson's comments in "An American Impression," in Modern Critical Views: Gertrude Stein: "In the great kitchen of my fanciful world in which, ever since that morning, I have seen Miss Stein standing there is a most sweet and gracious aroma. Along the walls are many shining pots and pans, and there are innumerable jars of fruits, jellies and preserves. Something is going on in that great room, for Miss Stein is a worker in words with the same loving touch in her strong fingers that was characteristic of the women of the kitchens of the brick houses in the town of my boyhood. She is an American woman of the old sort, one who cares for the handmade goodies and who scorns the factory-made foods, and in her own great kitchen she is making something with her materials, something sweet to the tongue and fragrant to the nostrils." (8) As intriguing as this metaphor is, it manages to place Stein squarely into a world of domesticity, a woman's world, which somehow tames the work she is doing.

29 Gass, 158.
30 See, for example, Bridgman, 127 and Gass, 148-49 for two examples.


32 Carolyn Copeland finds that Stein uses spatial metaphors to represent time: "We will see that the works of Gertrude Stein's middle period are marked by what appears to be the absence of any conventional representation of time. However, the absence is not the element of time or duration in the Bergsonian sense, but rather of the representation of time through the metaphors of space." Copeland, 76. Here, I am arguing that Stein also uses words to move the reader's eye along while calling attention to that act of moving. One idea does not preclude the other, Copeland's reading being as correct and enlightening as the one I am trying to elucidate.

33 Perhaps the most definitive chapter written on this aspect of Stein's work appears in Wendy Steiner's book, Exact Resemblance to Exact Resemblance, that is, the chapter entitled "Literary Cubism: The Limits of the Analogy." In this chapter, Steiner compares the different phases that cubist painting passed through to the various stages of Stein's portraiture, and discusses at length the similarities and the limits of these similarities of Stein's literary art to cubism.

34 Wendy Steiner, 131-132.

35 Wendy Steiner, 132.


37 I am thinking of Derrida's statement in his essay, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences": "There are thus two interpretations of interpretation, of structure, of sign, of play. The one seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign, and which lives the necessity of interpretation as an exile. The other, which is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms play." This essay appears in Writing and Difference, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 292.
This technique of placing words in strange and disrupting combinations to make them "new" again is much like the Russian Formalist technique of "defamiliarization" which is intended to awaken the perception of the observer or reader to the aesthetic complexities of the work of art or the text and to excite the experience of living. In the words of Victor Shklovsky, "The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar,' to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged." Victor Shklovsky, "Art as Technique," Russian Formalist Criticism, trans. Lee T. Lemon & Marion J. Reis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 12.
CONCLUSION

In the first chapter of this work, exile is presented as a paradox: simultaneously negative and positive, destructive and productive, an act of power and a means of resistance to that power. The world of the twentieth century, too, is a world of exilic discourse, a world where writing has ceased to be taken for granted as a secondary representation of the world and is studied for its own sake, recognized for its power to create worlds that are themselves textual. And, in this world, it is possible to create a home or a dwelling in writing. The work of the three authors which was explored in this study provided us with three very different models of the dwellings which artists create to counter the negative sense of exile, the isolation, alienation, and physical expulsion from everything familiar that constitutes one pole of the paradox. These writers' works also show how writing itself forms a dwelling, a resistance to actual physical exile.

There is, of course, much more to be said on this topic. What of those writers who did not physically leave their places of residence but nevertheless endured a repression at home which forced them to the margins of their society; in other words, an internal exile? And what of the issue of language? This is inextricably linked with exile, for if we speak and write in one language and are pushed out of it into
another, unfamiliar tongue, not only our language but our entire world has changed. We know our world through language and this is even truer for a writer: words are her/his love, work, life. The writers discussed in this work do not suffer from this problem as they fled to places where their native tongue was spoken. Edmond Jabès settled in France since he had been educated in French schools and write in French all of his life; and Cristina Peri Rossi fled to Spain from her native Uruguay, Spanish being the language of both countries. Only Gertrude Stein, who among those authors studied here, is the only one who freely chose her exile without political compulsion, settled in a country where her native English was not spoken. Yet it was precisely this fact that helped her to create a home in language, a refuge in written English as if on an island in the midst of a sea of spoken French.

And finally, do all artists, in one form or another, have to undergo at least a psychological process of exile in order to set their imaginations free from the confines of a world which would stifle, repress those imaginations? These are all questions which are truly beyond the scope of this study, the first expanding it horizontally, outward to encompass many more writers than can be discussed in one volume, the second and third questions expanding it vertically, toward different theoretical/critical fields of investigation such as language theory and psychoanalytic
theories. But these questions do serve to demonstrate the extent to which exile is a part of our world, our thought, and our writing. It is interwoven into the texture and textuality of at least Western culture in the twentieth century and if that can be discerned from this study, then it has done its job.
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