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Speaking in another language is quite simply the minimum and primary condition for being alive.

Julia Kristeva, Intimate Revolt

The Naked Self in the Mirrors of Translation

Writing is the continuous struggle to subsist in the constant state of exile. On the verge of each new work, the writer is clad in the insecure skin of a discoverer who explores the virgin land of paper by oaring the pen in the depths of the unconscious that runs still within the realms of reality. To write is to claim the borders of the page as the temporary house of meaning built through shifting the bricks of words and replacing them in that particular order which is unique to the constructive structure of a particular text.

All artistic activities depend on some kind of exile. To engage in the creation of an artwork is to declare separation of intellectual and emotional territories that later, in the process of perception through its perceivers may or may not become a part of their cognitive map. It is through this separation that the artist creates *her* own world which can only be perceived in comparison to others (the world of the *Other*) This initial separation, which may end in an ultimately consequential unison with its surrounding world(s), is crucial to the exclusive identity of the artist and expression of individuality that is peculiar to her work of art.

Also, every piece of writing is a declaration of authority. A sentence is an existential extract of the author's world which she extends into the already existing lexical world about her, thus integrating herself whether consciously or unconsciously into that world and announcing a presence that is informative of its potential and later (when it is read) actual existence. Even a simple note on the fridge for one's husband utters a necessity and compulsion that enforces an autonomous existence of its writer and a restricted enticement to its reader. The reader of the note is as much summarized into the lexical world in the summoning of the writer as the writer herself is extended into the reader's perception in his response to the text.

Therefore, one could venture to say that to write is also to have an authentic hand in the act of exile. Writing is to banish all entities and units of meaning other than what is incorporated within the boundary of the page. The page is exclusive of all that it does not include. In other words, while the writer attempts to take refuge in the papery land of the text and fortifies it with the solidarity of meaning, in the process of building her own semantic territory, she denounces that of others and banishes all that is not hers from her queendom.

Writing is founded on the fundamental premise of this kind of alienation. The first painful pangs of separation are experienced with the cutting of the umbilical cord. This archaic parting is the essential step to the emergence of one's identity. The ambiguous state of mother-fetus is destabilized and the infant begins to exist in what will later on mature to be the "recognition of the radical difference and value of the *Other*" (Julia Kristeva) It is only through this distinction from the Other that recognition of one's individuality is pronounced.

Mother tongue is the warm blood of wakefulness blended into the womb of awareness. It is the flesh of familiarity on the unfamiliar bones of ignorance. It is the defensive skin that eventually the child grows into when the ambiguous realm of relativity grows on her. To write in one's mother tongue is to go through the painful ritual of shedding this blood, flesh and skin. Writing in mother tongue does not provide the immediate required psychological and emotional distance that is essential to any solid self exploratory piece of writing.

Of course, this does not necessarily mean that writers who write in their mother tongue are incapable of delving effectively into the depths of the self; however, neither does it imply any sort of critical incompetence in ultimately drawing out a substantial semantic thread through the labyrinths of the self. Writing comes as a result of distancing oneself from other selves and then perhaps finally to bridge the gap between the self and the *Other*. For it is in separation from this *other* that one can finally reunite with it in a meaningful way.

My wild assumption is that for a writer who writes in her mother tongue, creating this distance calls for the exertion of a greater effort, compared to a writer who having decided to write in a language other than her mother tongue has already provided herself with the needed emotional detachment that is central to the outmost expression of sentiments. In this way writing in a language other than one's mother tongue would place the writer in the position of a spectator of her own emotions and thus make her less vulnerable.

On the other hand, to become one's own spectator somehow connotes the unconscious desire to watch one's body from a three dimensional view. The mirror is the one of the few miserable attempts to see oneself through an omniscient perspective, a wish gratified (hopefully) only with death.

He lived at a little distance from his body, regarding his own acts with doubtful side-glasses. He had an odd autobiographical habit which led him to compose in his mind from time to time a short sentence about himself containing a subject in the third person and a predicate in the past tense

(Mr. Duffy in A Painful Case by James Joyce)

Writing in another language is not denouncing one's mother tongue but claiming one's identity and intellectual/emotional territory in relation to it. It is displacing the semantic stones of the lexical structure and relocating them in a distance. It is a way of translating one's mother's tongue and molting that other skin which is indispensable to live in, a method of filtering the mother tongue from the paternal dregs and sifting the self off them.

Self-translation releases revelatory energies through which the self can be reintroduced to the *Other*. Translating oneself brings about a diabolic situation. On the one hand, to literally translate oneself (one's own writing) from or to the mother tongue is equivalent to betraying what one has already written (when the writer plays Judas to herself). However, it could also give one an impish delight to interfere in one's past and to rewrite the text in a new way. It is the chance to mend mistakes and to relive the same experience in a different way; to redo the past within the frameworks of the present. This is only possible when the writer recognizes separation and exile from *Other* (the origin of her emotional /intellectual blood, flesh and skin) as the fundamental ground of her writing. It is in this way that self translation becomes coincidental with self-exile.

Also, one does not need to literally reside in a foreign land in order to be in exile. Patriarchal standards have ironically made it possible for a woman to be in exile almost anywhere in this world. As Kristeva notes in one of her many essays on language and women, alienation of women by a masculine language and culture has made it inevitable that the feminine should be acknowledged only in relation to and its deviation from the masculine norm.

Moreover, mother tongue is the comfortable armchair where the self can easily extend itself. This comfort is lethal to writing and makes one's words take on a lethargic look. The comfort of my mother tongue has normally stopped me from exploring unknown lands of meanings, from experimenting and shifting the brick of new words in an old way or arraying old words with the cement of new expressions.

One of the reasons that I write in English is because it is an uncomfortable language to me. When you write in a language that you are not fully aware of all of its capabilities, along with thirst for unknown lands, you can venture to walk, run and even to leap infinitely on its most dangerous paths again and again. To me, writing in such a language is a challenge, a vital factor to writing.

It is only in writing in a second language that I can give (my) self a second chance to relive whatever I experience in my mother tongue. It is this second language that stops me from walking on the secondary roads of first impressions of words; it is in writing in a language other than my mother tongue that I can distance myself from my feelings and emotions and distinguish myself from the *other*.

For I believe that it is the task of the poet to converse (con: bring together, verse: lines in a poem) the reunion of the self and the *other*. To clad the self as the poet in the protection of that other skin and to shed it off only after having made it out of the chaotic labyrinth by holding on to the semantic thread of words, after getting rid of the half man, the half animal (the Minotaur of meaning) and walking out as a whole new entity.

If we read between the lines, the poem is the resort where we can see the poet as she catches the first glimpse of her exposed self and discovers it stripped off all unfamiliarity in the reflective mirrors of familiarity. And if we do read to the end, we can hear the darkest streets of ignorance light up to the joyful screams of her eureka! For the Archimedes inside knows that the truth, whatever that may be, calls for the nudity of the self. The soul (of the poet) is found naked as it was born.

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