

A Transcultural Becoming: The Cultural Immigrants in Paris.

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“Transcendence, a properly European disease.”
(Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*)

Artists have formed in Europe a transnational community since the Enlightenment and the Age of Romanticism. Writers and poets have crossed borders, establishing the template of the wandering artist. The circulation of writers across national borders has continued in various guises ever since. Diversity, exchange and interpenetration mark much artistic and literary activity, even *post-mortem*. As a recent example of this, I will quote from David Rieff who, in 2004, took the decision to bury his mother, the writer Susan Sontag, in the Montparnasse Cemetery in Paris.

If you enter through the main gate on the boulevard Edgar Quinet, you will find Simone de Beauvoir’s grave almost directly on your right as you head towards my mother’s burial plot. Whatever remains of Samuel Beckett lies under a plain gray granite slab a hundred meters from the black polished slab that covers the bones and whatever else now remains of the embalmed corpse that was once an American writer named Susan Sontag, 1933-2004.¹

Even though she did not leave any specific request to be buried in Paris, her son recognised that she belonged in death, as in life, in the company of other writers that she loved and that attracted her to Paris when she first set foot in the city as a young American girl of twenty-four in 1957. By its sheer concentration of writers and artists, this cemetery has become a sort of subversive Pantheon,² where the remains of a prestigious profession continue to meet, argue and discuss.

This paper is concerned with imagined communities³ and identities. How did the cultural immigrants that flocked to Paris in the twentieth century and beyond, from Hemingway to Kundera, adopt and challenge assumptions

¹ David Rieff, *Swimming in a Sea of Death, A Son’s Memoir* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2008), p. 171.

² The Pantheon is a church south of the Sorbonne, on the Left Bank, reconverted by 1789 Revolutionaries into a secular hall of fame for famous writers and scientists.

³ Benedict Anderson defines imagined communities as imagined ties binding people of a common origin together. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities, Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, New York: Verso, 1991 [1983]).

about the writing life and the identity of the artist? Exile and intellectual migrations cover a wide variety of experience, but I will concentrate here on the notion of transition and becoming by mapping parts of the itineraries exposed in two semi-autobiographical stories of expatriate artists: Hemingway's *A Moveable Feast*⁴ and Enrique Vila-Matas' *Paris Never Ends*⁵, with references to Susan Sontag's recently published journal, *Reborn*⁶. In these memoirs, the authors try to capture a period of their life when they were aspiring to become "artists living in Paris". Several studies on the representation of the artist⁷ have shown that to become one is a conscious decision that involves a cultural construct aimed at cementing an identity amongst an imagined community. The critic José-Luis Diaz notes that we tend to forget that "a writer" is an imaginary being who presupposes a staging. Each writer casts himself in a role, puts on a costume and chooses its emblems or insignias. The choice of this costume is crucial. It necessitates a series of decisions and actions: "Each 'author' is above all *author of himself*."⁸ Predefined scenarios are opened to him, incarnated by paradigmatic writers and their practices. In her journal, Susan Sontag writes, in Paris, in 1957: "Why is writing important?... Because I want to be that persona, a writer, and not because there is something I must say."⁹ Vila-Matas said that he had to *invent* himself if he really wanted to become a writer. By which he meant, as Bourdieu puts it, "to be recognised and acknowledged by marks of distinction (a way, a style, a specialty, etc.), differential 'écarts' which can be expressively sought and which wrench one from anonymity and insignificance."¹⁰

I want to argue that the "imaginary homeland,"¹¹ as coined by Salman Rushdie, is a product of an assemblage of perceptions not only about transcultural transplantation but also about the displaced self who tries on a writing identity. I suggest that he or she brings into being something which is

⁴ Ernest Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1964).

⁵ Enrique Vila-Matas, *Paris ne finit jamais (Paris Never Ends)* (Paris: Bourgois, 2004). All translations are my own.

⁶ Susan Sontag, *Reborn, Journals and Notebooks, 1947–1963* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Grioux, 2008).

⁷ For example Pierre Bourdieu, 'Mais qui a créé les créateurs?', *Questions de sociologie* (Paris: Minuit, 1980); 'Disposition esthétique et compétence artistique', *Les Temps modernes*, vol. 295 (1971), pp. 1344–1377; 'Champ intellectuel et projet créateur', *Les temps modernes*, vol. 246 (1966), pp. 865–906.

⁸ José-Luis Diaz, *L'Ecrivain imaginaire, Scénographies auctoriales à l'époque romantique* (Paris: Champion, 2007), p. 106. All translations are my own.

⁹ Sontag, *Reborn*, p. 166.

¹⁰ Bourdieu, 'Champ intellectuel', p. 882.

¹¹ Salman Rushdie, 'Imaginary Homelands', *Essays and Criticisms, 1981–1991* (London: Granta Books, 1991).

in part in his or her imagination, within the cultural tradition or repertoire, and that the quest is in itself a process of becoming: the construction of an artificial reality called the “writer”, in part defined by the experience abroad. Displacement here is seen as an artistic device in order to *transform*. The chosen texts include artist or writer figures and raise questions concerning aesthetic practices, such as issues of literary genealogy, inheritance, and the right to claim or reject a legacy.¹²

I will make use here of Deleuze and Guattari’s application of the rhizome, a formation of knowledge, thought or culture that serves to overturn and transform rigid, fixed or binary thinking and judgments. Rejecting ideas of hierarchy or fixed centre, the rhizome is a notion of fluid connection between disparate entities: “Individual or group, we are traversed by lines, meridians, geodesics, tropics and zones marching to different beats and differing in nature.”¹³ This is particularly fitting for the text of Vila-Matas which deliberately meanders through influences, experiences, coincidences and anecdotes: “I was wondering when I would dare start writing a novel with this ludic spirit... jumping from frame to frame with the primitive freedom that had, at its beginning, the art of telling.”¹⁴

But all these texts are hybrid in nature (encompassing essays, fiction, journals and autobiographies), turned towards exterior and transversal communications (and not some inner truth). Above all, refusal and challenge of hierarchy and knowledge define their position: “The rhizome is an antigenealogy.”¹⁵ They reveal a twisted relationship between space, creativity and identity. These intricate cross-relations between place, desire and creation constitute a space imprinted in the minds of the young artists: a fundamental desire to catch literature as one catches a disease – or, as Sontag puts it, wants “that innocence to be violated”¹⁶ – in a place where one is most likely to catch the virus or be violated.

The young artist in Paris has become, since Hemingway, since Miller, a cliché of a sort. In *A Moveable Feast*, Hemingway, then a young journalist in 1920, poses the template of such an adventure and establishes an official narrative. It’s not so much the ritual of writing, done as it should be inside a

¹² There are of course differences in the cultural politics of the contexts. One needs to return to the specifics of each text to see how it positions itself but the emphasis on genealogy provides a link between writings from different backgrounds.

¹³ Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, *Mille plateaux (A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia)* (Paris: Minuit, 1980), p. 10. All translations are my own.

¹⁴ Vila-Matas, *Paris ne finit jamais*, p. 169.

¹⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille plateaux*, p. 18.

¹⁶ Sontag, *Reborn, Mille plateaux*, p. 171.

café, with “the air of a man alone in the jungle”¹⁷, that is important than the idea of being impregnated by the atmosphere and the contact of one or two great minds (in his case Gertrude Stein and Scott Fitzgerald) who give not lessons in writing (that point is important as we shall see) but lessons in life.

In 1974, wanting to be Hemingway or nothing, the Spanish writer Enrique Vila-Matas, then twenty-four, decided to do just that: breathe in the air of Paris and rent a place from, of all people, Marguerite Duras. Recording his experiences in *Paris Never Ends* (which is the title of the final chapter of Hemingway’s memoirs: “There is never any end to Paris”), and clearly following the footsteps of the idol of his youth, Vila-Matas produces an ironic paraphrase or “mise en abîme” of Hemingway’s book: “What was I doing in Duras’ mansard? Simply trying to live a writer’s life as the one Hemingway describes in *A Moveable Feast*.”¹⁸

In “Abgrund” (Abyss), Barthes asks: “Can one – or at least could one ever – begin to write without taking oneself for another?”¹⁹ At the beginning, then, is the “disguise or fancy dress”. The writer represents himself as a writer and tries on a new suit to see if it fits: “one copies a role, then, by metonymy an art: I begin producing by reproducing the person who I want to be,” says Barthes. And the critic Dennis Porter concurs: “the desire to become a writer frequently precedes any clear sense of how and what to write; it less a question of work to be done than a particular kind of life to be lived.”²⁰ Or, as the writer Julien Gracq puts it: “One writes because others before you have written... In this situation, spontaneous mimesis is worth a lot: there would be no writers without an insertion in an uninterrupted chain of writers.”²¹ As Hemingway looked up to Scott Fitzgerald and Gertrude Stein, Vila-Matas looked up to Hemingway and Marguerite Duras, each recreating and reproducing a chain of influences and behaviours: “he was for me a sort of grand-father, *papa* Hemingway, who I never wanted to dethrone completely, the best proof being my persistent belief that I physically resemble him.”²²

Mimesis is closely followed by the search for a cultural home. Several emigrés, such as Edward Said and Julia Kristeva, have made exile the necessary condition of the intellectual: “for a man who no longer has a

¹⁷ Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast*, p. 88.

¹⁸ Vila-Matas, *Paris ne finit jamais*, p. 13.

¹⁹ Roland Barthes, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), p. 99.

²⁰ Dennis Porter, *Rousseau’s Legacy, Emergence and Eclipse of the Writer in France*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 15.

²¹ Julien Gracq, *En lisant, en écrivant, Œuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989), p. 657. My translation.

²² Vila-Matas, *Paris ne finit jamais*, p. 31.

homeland, writing becomes a place to live.”²³ The place may be illusory (and its problematic search features strongly in the novels of Kundera), but it is desired nevertheless. The desire to belong to a clan or corporation forces the integration in a community of like-minded spirits. For instance, Vila-Matas believed that by entering the Café de Flore in the 1970s, he was asking for “literary asylum”: “I had the feeling that to enter this café signified... belonging to a chain of generations of writers who were exiled *here*, specifically *here*... To integrate the Flore meant to adhere to an order of *displaced* writers.”²⁴

But the migrated artists have to negotiate a place within a cultural system that has a strong emotional charge²⁵ and thinking genealogically implies a serial continuity. The request for asylum creates immediately the fear of “not succeeding in being worthy of the writers who had preceded me, because I was aware that I had to write like them, even better than them... Now, it is your turn! said to me Exile.”²⁶ The pretence and the posture appear for what they are, a *surface*: all dressed in black, “elegantly desperate”, he remarks that his “penetrating writer’s gaze could not be more of an imposture.”²⁷

The nightmarish aspect of such a heritage becomes more obvious when the writer amusingly paraphrases the most famous sentence of French literature: “For a long time, I woke up in fright in the middle of the night.”²⁸ In her journal, Susan Sontag notes that “the failed intellectuals (writers, artists, would-be PhDs)”²⁹ also terrify her. The borrowing of a costume, the bohemian lifestyle, and the request for asylum are clearly not enough. There has to be the acquisition of a justification for residency in the cultural home, and above all, a name.

The anxieties about performance are further increased by a resistance on both sides, masters and disciples, to give and receive writing lessons. It is quite important to stress, as Hemingway shows and Vila-Matas tells, that the

²³ Adorno, quoted by Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual, The 1993 Reith Lectures* (London: Vintage, 1994), p. 43.

²⁴ Vila-Matas, *Paris ne finit jamais*, p. 99, his italics.

²⁵ In *Words*, Jean-Paul Sartre recognises in his formation the creative power of a mythology that became so familiar to him that writers became brothers and mentors of a sort: “without that grand illusion I would never have been a writer”; Jean-Paul Sartre, *Les Mots* (*Words*) (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), p. 53.

²⁶ Vila-Matas, *Paris ne finit jamais*, p. 100.

²⁷ Vila-Matas, *Paris ne finit jamais*, p. 90.

²⁸ Vila-Matas, *Paris ne finit jamais*, p. 100. “For a long time, I went to bed early”, Marcel Proust, *The Way by Swann’s* (London: Penguin Books, 2002), p. 7.

²⁹ Sontag, *Reborn*, p. 163.

mentors give lessons in anything but writing. With Ezra Pound, Hemingway talked about boxing. He talked about literature with Scott Fitzgerald but cannot remember specifically what about. He noted that he gave him great lessons in drunkenness and paranoia but little else. Similarly, Vila-Matas noted that Marguerite Duras never told him anything remotely useful about writing as a craft. When he complained to her that he had no style because he did not know what “style” was, she told him that she was not surprised because his car had only one light: “In sum, like so many young people, you have a style with only one light”,³⁰ she joked.

Any attempt to obtain a concrete sense of lineage is cut short. Awareness of being imbedded in a seriality with all its implications of continuity, yet “forgetting” or avoiding the experience of this continuity engenders the need to fashion oneself out of other sources. Straightforward lines of descent are replaced by other figures, more spatial this time, even, shall we say, telepathic. Because if the living writers are so sparing with their advice, where else to turn but to the dead?

As Margaret Atwood said, *Negotiating with the Dead* is a crucial part of any initiation. Hemingway, for instance, lived near the Place de la Contrescarpe in Paris, two streets down from the hôtel where Verlaine lived and died. By doing so, he re-enacted the Dialogue with the Dead and was inscribing himself in a string of literary models, searching for a True Certificate of Approval. The nature of writing, its apparent permanence, as Margaret Atwood puts it, “leaves a trail, like a series of fossilized footprints.”³¹ Sontag says that what attracted her in Paris was “the city as labyrinth.”³² What is written down becomes a score or a path that one can follow. All writers looking for signs lying about the place do so in a fetishistic desire to collect atoms of literature: they want to see the essence of the artist, smell it, feel it, in an emotional quest for signs. Descriptions of encounters are sometimes real incantations in order to evoke the magnetic presence of the artist.

An invisible net or set of rules guides the apprentice through initiation. Paris has a long history of literary Academies and Salons and offers the perfect background for a magical insemination. If one wants to draw a circle to conjure up the dead writers, one can do so here because the symbolic topography of the literary cult has been fixed since the seventeenth century. The literary world installed on the Left Bank is the inheritor of the Latin Quarter, which is the place of the bookshops and the University, La Sorbonne, both literary shrines

³⁰ Vila-Matas, *Paris ne finit jamais*, p. 140.

³¹ Margaret Atwood, *Negotiating with the Dead, A Writer on Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 158.

³² Sontag, *Reborn*, p. 173.

of a sort. Nowhere is there more evidence of a grid of literary inheritance. On the Left Bank, the streets are inscribed with literary destinies and the walker is summoned to awake and write at the command of plaques set in building walls that recall that Voltaire, Racine or Wilde “wrote here”. The city “with a hundred thousand novels”³³ is built with an architecture of quotations, with its implied choreography of postures and poses in bars, on street corners and in houses. The “coronation of the writer” as Paul Bénichou puts it³⁴, is inscribed all around. The space can be read as text: the old sacred sites are incorporated into a map, complete with datings, planted here and there, duplicated in books in the windows of bookshops. All memoirs are thus peppered with famous writers’ names as the artist walks through Paris, while carrying in his pocket a rabbit’s foot for luck. Vila-Matas haunts the street in which Gertrude Stein lived in the twenties: “I considered as a possible talisman this ritual which consisted of passing from time to time in front of this house and reading the plaque which... reminded one so well that this place had been one of the world’s centres of literature.”³⁵

A second motif of this quest would be the *flânerie*, a walk which mimics the stages of a legendary voyage through the streets haunted by Balzac, Baudelaire, the Surrealists or Barthes. After all, “intellectuals... are people who are still at work even when, by conventional measures, they’re not working”³⁶ notes Ross Chambers. The “intellectual at leisure”, a famous portrait in Barthes’ *Mythologies*, shows that the intellectual turns his critical powers and his practice of “notation” onto the very cultural sphere in which he also evolves. The *flânerie* in search of ideas, in search of the search, is reminiscent of the activity of the collector of names and places strung together in order to delimitate a perimeter, a magic circle in which to inscribe oneself.³⁷

But the image itself contains strong elements of drifting idleness, procrastination and anti-intellectualism. Walking gives the opportunity to walk

³³ Honoré de Balzac, *Ferragus*, quoted by Pierre Loubier, ‘Balzac et le flâneur’, *L’Année balzacienne*, no. 2 (2001), p. 148.

³⁴ Paul Bénichou, *Le sacre de l’écrivain, 1750–1830: essai sur l’avènement d’un pouvoir spirituel laïque dans la France moderne* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996).

³⁵ Vila-Matas, *Paris ne finit jamais*, p. 130.

³⁶ Ross Chambers, ‘Pointless Stories, Storyless Points, Roland Barthes Between ‘Soirées de Paris’ and ‘Incidents’’, *Esprit Créateur*, Vol. 34, no. 2 (1994), p. 17.

³⁷ Elizabeth Rechniewski notes that “*Flâneur* conveniently rhymes in French with ‘gleaner’ — the person who gleanes, who gathers up the bits and pieces of material apparently useless to others; like the collector or the connaisseur, he may not know what he is looking for, but he knows when he has found it, how to value it”, Elizabeth Rechniewski, ‘When and Why Did the *Flâneur* Die? A Modern Detective Story’, *Literature and Aesthetics*, vol. 17, no. 2 (2007), pp. 90–91.

away and to refuse to stay in one place for long. The general drift of a career from bohemia to officialisation or marginalisation, as Sontag mentions when talking about the many failures that await the cultural immigrant, helps us notice what happens to the figure of the artist. Talking about her lover, the painter H, “finest flower of American bohemia,”³⁸ Sontag insists on the lack of motivation and distrust for anything intellectual on the part of the artist, who combines at the same time two forms of being: “escaped intellectual, and deeply anti-intellectual”, who “had come to Paris to paint, but now painted very little but still lived in that world.”³⁹ A resistance to the emotional pull, the legacy and the tradition, is registered here in lack of motivation and restlessness. By virtue of living a life according to different norms, the artist can only be captured as a series of discontinued performances and a flux of desires. That forgetting of a mission, similar to the forgetting or the avoidance of the lessons in writing that Hemingway and Vila-Matas, at different periods, note, added to the anxieties of exile, the drifting, become the condition itself: forgetting the identities that drew one there, putting oneself *off-duty*, forgetting the Gidean or Proustian poses. And the need to repress or challenge them is as intense as the desire to inhabit them.

This is where the rhizome as a metaphor of displacement of knowledge becomes a fitting image for this experience. The important ritual of the “hapax” or revelation of the emergence of the writer, which is a well-known *topoi* of literature, is both reactivated and challenged. The most illustrious example in literature is the “illumination of Vincennes” of Rousseau. In October 1749, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, on his way to the Vincennes prison to visit the philosopher Diderot who was incarcerated there, tells that he was sitting under a tree when he was struck by a philosophical question proposed by the Dijon Academy. Suddenly he sees his vocation of philosopher and writer unfold in front of his eyes: “The moment I had read this, I seemed to behold another world, and became a different man.”⁴⁰ He hears a message coming from above, he is invested with a new sociosymbolic identity that floods his life with purpose. Deleuze and Guattari see in the rooted tree under which he is sitting an allegory of the strong unity of classical thought, the main source of knowledge. Nothing is further from the flux of the rhizome than “the tree or the root [which] inspire a sad image of thought that does not cease to

³⁸ Sontag, *Reborn*, p. 162.

³⁹ Sontag, *Reborn*, p. 172.

⁴⁰ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, trans. W. C. Mallory (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1936), p. 540.

present a pseudo-multiplicity derived from a superior unity, a centre or a segment... Arborescent systems are hierarchical systems."⁴¹

Several centuries later, Vila-Matas felt a most powerful stirring when he visited the house of Marguerite Duras in Neauphle-le-Château. While descending the steps leading from the attic where she kept her manuscripts, he suddenly perceived "this need that I had of words and this consciousness of their ability to distance myself from the real world. To be sure, I became a writer on those steps."⁴² Vila-Matas's experience brings to mind Rousseau's while at the same time subverting it. Rousseau can draw from his source of knowledge (a tree) simply by sitting beneath it but Vila-Matas gains knowledge from his source (Duras's attic) only after climbing (up to it then) down from it. Similarly, in Hemingway's memoirs, several artists end up on a roof or up in the air (combining the effect of height and opium) so the theme of flight associated with creation is reactivated and parodied at the same time. The original root of knowledge and inspiration may still be located in high places but it is not descending from above anymore: it is disseminated, subverted, it proceeds by leaps and bounds.

Each hagiographic text about apprenticeship in Paris, from Hemingway to Edmund White and Vila-Matas, contains an irony which subverts the lesson. This irreverence, even sarcasm, reveals that the temptation of sacrilege is at least as strong as the desire for veneration and humility. In particular, the conventional and theatrical aspects of the literary life are, while reactivated, underlined: "Wyndham Lewis wore a wide hat, like a character in the quarter, and was dressed like someone out of *La Bohème*"⁴³; "Then, I started to walk along the streets, pretending to be someone *interesting*... I sat on the terrace of the Flore... and did everything so that the passers-by noticed me and observed that, with my Sartrian pipe in the mouth, I was reading like a dangerous young French poet."⁴⁴ Parodies, caricatures, imitations, all represent a symbolic murder of the mentor figure.

As Barthes mentions in *Mythologies*: "The singularity of a 'vocation' is never better displayed than when it is contradicted – but not denied, far from it."⁴⁵ The texts present a twisted form of mutual enthronement and rejection, the follower acting like the guardian/destroyer of the mentor. In her journals, Sontag mentions for instance Simone de Beauvoir talking at the Sorbonne.

⁴¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille plateaux*, p. 25.

⁴² Vila-Matas, *Paris ne finit jamais*, p. 126.

⁴³ Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast*, p. 97.

⁴⁴ Vila-Matas, *Paris ne finit jamais*, p. 90.

⁴⁵ Roland Barthes 'The Writer on Holiday', *Mythologies*, trans. by Annette Lavers (London: Jonathan Cape, 1972), p. 31.

Despite noticing that she is “lean and tense and black-haired and very good looking” (“for her age” she adds), she also notes that “her voice is unpleasant, something about the high pitch + nervous speed with which she talks.”⁴⁶ Given that Sontag is struggling at the time to find her own voice as a writer, this observation and this competition (youth versus age, old voice versus young voice) is worth noting.

It is in keeping with the phenomenon of the rejection of the mentor that Hemingway dwells on the physical degradation, alcoholism and hypochondria of Fitzgerald. The process of transformation from great writer to death mask seems to happen like a chemical change in front of his very eyes: “The eyes sank and began to look dead and the lips were drawn tight and the colour left the face so that it was the colour of used candle-wax.”⁴⁷ The critic George Wickes describes *A Moveable Feast* as “a literary boxing match... in which [Hemingway] was trying to knock out every twentieth-century contender, and most particularly F. Scott Fitzgerald.”⁴⁸ These remarks suggest the characteristic strategies by which the young author deals with the legacy of influence and patronage and denies the “Great Author’s” tutorial authority. On one hand, Hemingway becomes the guardian of the memory of Fitzgerald, procuring him immortality by suspending time and also by sharing at times his drunken state; on the other, he is receiving on another plane the power that Fitzgerald is losing. Several years later, Vila-Matas will recognise in a vagrant’s face in Paris the face of Hemingway, who has since become for him a ‘has-been’ that he enjoys at times dethroning, by saying for instance that Hemingway came back to Paris in 1944 just in time to free the Bar at the Ritz. Here the new initiate performs an exorcism and consumes ritualistically the power of the mentor. But sacrilegious inversion in turn contains a twisted form of acknowledgement of the sacred, as Bourdieu notes: “the satisfaction that desacralisation gives prevents one from taking seriously the fact of the sacralisation and the sacred, and hence from acknowledging them.”⁴⁹

Only by remapping the expatriate apprenticeship: first uproot and transplant, then incorporate the landmarks inspiring the artistic formation and dissociate from them, can the artist chart the effect of the city upon the scene of the writing: “All Paris belongs to me, writes Hemingway, and I belong to this notebook and this pencil.”⁵⁰ The spatial dislocation facilitates personal

⁴⁶ Sontag, *Reborn*, p. 194.

⁴⁷ Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast*, p. 131.

⁴⁸ George Wickes, ‘The Right Place at the Right Time’ in *French Connections, Hemingway and Fitzgerald Abroad*, eds J. Gerald Kennedy and Jackson R. Bryer (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1998), p. 249.

⁴⁹ Bourdieu, ‘Mais qui a créé les créateurs?’, p. 221.

⁵⁰ Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast*, p. 12.

transformation by rewriting the self, by calling into question the whole equilibrium, away from the known, the familiar and the acceptable. The mythical adventure is closely linked to the question of the name one carries, which has the power to survive and outlive the person, thus to be imprinted in the wall. Vila-Matas says: "All literature... is a question of name and nothing else. *To have a name*, the expression says it all."⁵¹ And Sontag notes: "I cannot write until I find my ego... To write, I must love my name."⁵² Each writer repeats the path, accesses the *trans*, the crossing of inner borders, to metamorphosis and construction. The dialogue with the elders remains necessary but ironic counter-discourses continue to express the ongoing struggle to find alternative definitions of identity and birth one's name.

Far from their native shores, released from attachment to region or tradition, young artists explored in a different place the possibilities of a life of desire. The ineluctable "hunger" metaphorised by the poverty and quest for sustenance of the young writer. In *A Moveable Feast*, Hemingway goes to an expensive restaurant where Joyce goes to eat and exits the place with the same insatiable hunger. What is at play here is the construction of a genealogy of a cultural formation in which a place is sought, rejected and above all shown to be as imaginary as Hemingway's starvation.⁵³ The fact that Vila-Matas came to Paris to find the ghost of Hemingway but effectively relegates him to the margins, while consciously zigzagging further and further away like the *flâneur*, reveals that he also tries to free himself from an influence he has sought and desired. His book is both anchored in Hemingway and distanced from him. He concludes from this experience: "*I have been in another*."⁵⁴ By this fraternal, and not so fraternal, salute to the mana of the great dead, the young artist acknowledges his place in the chain and fights to detach himself from it.

Today, the template of "being in Paris" is eroded by competing influences, more contemporary visions and spaces. In the texts however, there is a consistent to-ing and fro-ing, like the rhizome, between fixed positions that reinforce stereotypes inherited from the definition of the writer that prevailed

⁵¹ Vila-Matas, *Paris ne finit jamais*, p. 295.

⁵² Sontag, *Reborn*, p. 218. Bourdieu notes: "the acknowledgement of this truth [of the creative project] is enclosed in a project which is always the project to be acknowledged"; Bourdieu, 'Champ intellectuel', p. 874.

⁵³ It is a well-known fact that Hemingway played on this aspect of his Parisian experience while the reality tells another story. However, it has forged the enduring myth of the starving young artist.

⁵⁴ Vila-Matas, *Paris ne finit jamais*, p. 246.

in the nineteenth century and beyond,⁵⁵ as well as from creative encounters, displacements and challenges in these transcultural dialogues.

The writing identity moves back and forth from “territorialisation” to “deterritorialisation”, by transversal movement. As Deleuze and Guattari write: “there is no beginning and no end, but always a milieu, by which it [the rhizome] pushes and overflows.”⁵⁶ By following their own footsteps and imprinting themselves on the pavements of the city, they become inter-beings, ghosts of a sort: “a corpse to whom one would have given permission for some hours [...] to return to the abandoned streets of his youth,”⁵⁷ says Vila-Matas.

If writing demands a territorialisation, it could be in this space between the eternal and the transitory, the sedentary and the nomadic, the lasting name and the passing of youth (or vice versa). It is a truly artistic gesture sketched in moments of literary *flânerie* to write oneself on the pavements of a city like others before you did and to become, as Michel Serres puts it, a *Troubadour of Knowledge*. I see no better definition of the young cultural immigrant than the one that he provides: “I carry in myself, in the most intimate part of me [...] the composite rags of the fabrics that clothe my real and virtual entourage, the rags and tatters in which a thousand mimes are badly juxtaposed, my time has sewn them, then melted them together, tattered rags certainly, but rags become my very flesh, my mixed liquid blood.”⁵⁸

⁵⁵ By the middle of the eighteenth century, the writer came to be defined as original author of original works (Foucault) and “the representation of the writer as independent creator, as autonomous genius, becomes sort of rule”. See Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society, 1780–1950* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), pp. 49–50. The dominant discourse about the author still operates today.

⁵⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille plateaux*, p. 31.

⁵⁷ Vila-Matas, *Paris ne finit jamais*, p. 88.

⁵⁸ Michel Serres, *The Troubadour of Knowledge*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 1997), p. 147.