



## Article

# Perpetual Exile: Legacies of a Disrupted Century

Azade Seyhan

Department of German and German Studies, Bryn Mawr College, Bryn Mawr, PA 19010-2899, USA;  
aseyhan@brynmawr.edu

**Abstract:** The transnational configuration of contemporary German literature cannot be detached from its historical continuum, since such a separation would render the archive of histories of exile in and out of Germany inconsistent and incomplete. Bringing literary histories of exile in a dialogue, in this instance, *Exilliteratur*, represented by prominent German authors, who, during the Second World War, immigrated to Southern California (Thomas Mann, Heinrich Mann, Bertolt Brecht, Lion Feuchtwanger, and Franz Werfel, among others), as well as Anna Seghers and Stefan Zweig, who went into exile in Mexico and Brazil, respectively, and the emerging literature of contemporary transnational or so-called hyphenated German (“Bindestrich-Deutsche”) writers would enable an inclusive paradigm that communicates across communities of research. To that end, I briefly review one novel each by Anna Seghers and Lion Feuchtwanger and essays by the Iranian-German poet SAID, which exemplify the two distinctive genres of exile literature: the long-established *Exilliteratur* and what I elsewhere described as transnational literature of writers mostly from the non-Western world, who in the latter part of the twentieth century began immigrating to the West. While I acknowledge the different circumstances and historical imperatives that have dictated the features of the two genres, I foreground the ethical implications and the cautionary tales the respective works of *Exilliteratur* authors and transnational writers share.

**Keywords:** German *Exilliteratur*; transnational writers; Lion Feuchtwanger; Anna Seghers; SAID; exile in translation

Exile teaches you about individual fate with universal implications, because it is eternal and has always been with us. (Breytenbach 1994, p. 182)



**Citation:** Seyhan, Azade. 2023. Perpetual Exile: Legacies of a Disrupted Century. *Humanities* 12: 93. <https://doi.org/10.3390/h12050093>

Received: 31 January 2023

Revised: 21 June 2023

Accepted: 29 August 2023

Published: 7 September 2023



**Copyright:** © 2023 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

## 1. Introduction

In an essayistic story, “mit walt whitman in los angeles”, (SAID 2008, p. 158) the late Iranian poet SAID, who spent his whole adult life in German exile, imagines meeting Walt Whitman in Los Angeles. What is noteworthy about the place from where he writes is not that it is just Los Angeles, but the Villa Aurora in neighboring Pacific Palisades, which was the residence of Lion Feuchtwanger, one of Germany’s leading novelists. The first short paragraph of the essay notes the significance of the setting:

los angeles. pacific palisades. paseo miramar nr: 520: villa aurora. die letzte zuflucht von lion feuchtwanger vor den nazis. (“the last refuge of lion feuchtwanger from the nazis” (SAID 2008))

Feuchtwanger, along with other prominent German writers and artists, such as Thomas Mann, his brother Heinrich Mann, Bertolt Brecht, Alfred Döblin, Franz Werfel, film directors Billy Wilder and Fritz Lang, and composer Arnold Schoenberg, among many others, belonged to a coterie of star-studded Jewish and anti-Nazi Germans, who had fled Hitler’s Germany to what (Bahr 2008) referred to as “Weimar on the Pacific”. Although many émigrés returned to Europe after the war, a few like Feuchtwanger and Heinrich Mann stayed in Los Angeles until the end of their lives. Today, Villa Aurora is a residence for visiting German-based writers, artists, and filmmakers. In memory of the German emigration in the 1930s, Villa Aurora, in cooperation with the University of Southern

California Feuchtwanger Library, offers the annual Feuchtwanger Fellowship to writers and artists, many of whom had been censored and persecuted in their home countries.

It is at the above address, where he was an artist-in-residence, that SAID “salutes” his fellow émigré Feuchtwanger. The inhabitation of the same space three-quarters of a century apart by a writer exiled from Germany and another who went into German exile is not merely an interesting coincidence in literary exile studies. The ever-growing number of refugees to European states in recent decades bears witness to a historical irony, for during most of the last century Europe itself was a site of exodus, embroiled as it was in the inferno of two world wars. Germany, of all European countries, arguably represents the most radical transformation of a geography of emigration into one of immigration within the span of a few decades.

Such transformations, however, bring their own crises and interdictions that necessitate new assessments of exile experience, which cannot simply be inferred from available statistics and surveys. Epistemic paradigm shifts are identified only belatedly in the future anterior, while contemporary theories of exile cultures rely on preexisting concepts. Perhaps in some sense, SAID’s prizewinning work, written in the target language in advance, already a translation from the author’s first language, suggests the future anterior of the *Exilliteratur* of the 1930s and 1940s by the émigré German authors in Los Angeles as well as by Stefan Zweig and Anna Seghers who immigrated to Brazil and Mexico, respectively. In other words, the German exile literature of the Nazi period needs to be reevaluated in the future paradigm, which its own historical conditions had projected into the coming age. It is imperative to stress the importance of historical positions in assessing the adequacy and coherence of contemporary cultural theories.

In *Writing Outside the Nation*, I tested the paradoxes of exilic experience through the competing imperatives of reclaiming lost homes and accepting the inevitability of migration and change. Since cultures are not necessarily rooted in a given place and cultural legacies can survive at multiple sites and transform themselves across zones of time and space, the conceptualization of cultures in transition and translation requires a multitude of complementary interpretive protocols. *Writing Outside the Nation* engages in a broadly based analysis of literary and (auto) biographical works conceived in the interstices of diverse languages, linguistic practices, and cultural heritages. While the diversity of the books included in this study was not easily classifiable and the existing terminology applied to these—immigrant, hybrid, and migrant literature—was problematic, I used the term “transnational literature”, following anthropologist Arjun Appadurai’s notion of the transnational to define the increasing flow of capital, commodity, and media across borders in a rapidly globalizing world. The term is now widely used and variously defined. It has occasionally been taken up by other critics and redefined, refined, edited, and expanded. The late Dubrovka Ugrešić, herself the subject of many studies on transnational women writers, finds “transnational literature” a fitting term of choice for “the new alternative literary zone”, which she inhabits (Ugrešić 2008, p. 149). At the same time, the popularity and the extensive use of the term have erased its specificity, and in some cases “transnational” has unwittingly relapsed into “national”, as in *Transnational American Literature* (Goyal 2017), where the adjective denoting nation slips between “transnational” and “literature”.

Since the field of exile studies is expanding and moving in different directions, terminology cannot remain stable. While no critical vocabulary can adequately describe the steadily emerging texts from movements across borders, it behooves the critic to diminish the underrepresentation of writers, often from the Global South, whose experience of persecution, loss, and voluntary or involuntary exile demonstrates unique lessons in the seismic shifts of history, geopolitics, and the inequalities of power among nations and racial-ethnic, or religious collectivities. Such lessons are often lost, as there is little information about these writers and their work. Bringing them in a dialogue across time and geography with writers of renown not only allows their voices to be heard but also enhances our understanding of literary history. Rather than focusing solely on transnational literature as

a product of contemporary culture, we ought to include the pioneering work of historical predecessors in our study of transnational writers/works.

Transnational lives and literature are not only a phenomenon of the present. While the critical gains of postcolonial theory and discourses of identity politics have afforded important insights into modern diasporic experience, representations of other selves, cultures, and beliefs cannot only be abstracted from and analyzed in the immediate present. In the earlier part of the twentieth century, most exiles took their national or cultural-linguistic consciousness with them to the host land. The recent “transnational” experience, on the other hand, marks a state of movement and fluidity across territorial and linguistic borders. In these two instances, the activity of translation and transport take different forms, which, in turn, critically affect acculturation versus cultural alienation and isolation.

My plea for bringing renowned exile writers into a dialogue with today’s underrepresented transnational writers, which would reciprocally enhance our understanding of their respective works, also concerns the need to balance the research archive, where the well-established works by far outweigh those of the contemporary exilic situation. However, balancing the archive should not simply be understood as an academic exercise. It involves the rehabilitation of important works lost in the violent shuffle of histories of war and migration. In “Finding Odysseus’s Scars Again: Hyperlinked Literary Histories in the Age of Refugees”, Venkat Mani argues that providing historical literary context is a condition of understanding the configurations of modern exilic experience (Mani 2022, pp. 13–35). With every age, the reality and perceptions of exile, banishment, and displacement change, and such changes necessitate paradigm shifts in narrating them.

Along the lines of interlinked literary histories, my critical interest has focused on the historical shifts that both connect and separate the early twentieth-century mass exodus out of Europe and the current flight of large populations from Africa and the Middle East to Europe. The transnational configuration of contemporary German literature should not be detached from its historical continuum, which would render the archive of histories of exile in and out of Germany inconsistent and incomplete. “Hyperlinking” literary histories of exile, in this instance, *Exilliteratur* and the emerging literature of the so-called hyphenated writers of Germany would enable an inclusive paradigm that communicates across communities of research. To that end, I review one novel each by Anna Seghers and Feuchtwanger and essays by the Iranian-German poet SAID, which, respectively, exemplify the two distinctive genres of exile literature: the long-established *Exilliteratur* and what I describe as transnational literature of writers mostly from the non-Western world, who in the latter part of the twentieth century began immigrating to the West (Seyhan 2001). Furthermore, the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the USSR led to a remapping of several national borders, thereby also displacing writers from Central and Eastern Europe, many of whom have settled in Germany.

Even though in the manner of SAID, who imagines having a chat with a sprightly Walt Whitman in Los Angeles, I conjure up an imagined encounter between Feuchtwanger and SAID at Villa Aurora, my interest lies rather in their experience of exile in different historical contexts. Their fictionalized accounts of documentary value foreground the role cultural inheritance, language, and translation play in exile writing and its afterlife. Furthermore, the prescience of their writing implies that the exiled writer, more than other writers, is often endowed with a Cassandra-like premonition of catastrophes to come. While a writer is metaphorically described as writing from a foreign place and considered somewhat of a visionary, Feuchtwanger and SAID write from an actual foreign place in real time but also predict in chilling minute detail the coming age of terror in Nazi Germany and in the Ayatollahs’ Iran, respectively. The barbarity of the Iranian clerics SAID disclosed a quarter of a century ago while hiding from the censors in Germany has since continuously accelerated, as shown in a human rights group’s statement that Iran has hanged at least 354 people in the first six months of 2023. Although written at different times and under dissimilar circumstances, the respective works of Feuchtwanger and SAID hold relevant lessons for our troubled present, which is witnessing the realization of their premonitions.

## 2. Chronicle of a Refugee Crisis Foretold: Anna Seghers's *Transit*

Literary, artistic, and autobiographical works, transported and translated in and out of German, reveal continuities in exile writing as well as writing under erasure and censorship. They enable a renewed understanding of censorship-defying aesthetics, of translation and translatability as the afterlife of works, and of the instability inherent in any paradigmatic norm in exile writing. This instability, however, enables the entry of once obscured texts into the archive as well as a revaluation of established existing works. We can test this hypothesis in the example of Anna Seghers's recently translated and reissued books (Seghers 2013, 2018, 2021) by the New York Review of Books that republishes the works of enduring relevance by writers from around the world for contemporary readers.

Seghers's *Transit* (Seghers 1944, [2011] 2018, 2018) chronicles the desperation of armies of refugees trying to escape a continent terrorized by Hitler's armies. Holed up and held up in Vichy Marseille, they try to get out of the Nazi-occupied port city at any cost. The novel paints a masterly panorama of Marseille, a tiny outlet through which the flood of Europe's fleeing thousands sought to pour. Although that heart-tearing picture has been drawn before, both in factual reports and in fiction, the plight of people caught in the web of such historical trauma is perhaps most poignantly memorialized in the work of a distinguished German writer, whose own experience of exile lends critical force to her semi-autobiographical novel. *Transit* is an uncanny premonition of the 2015 refugee crisis when thousands of families fleeing war-torn Iraq and Syria were risking their lives to cross the Aegean to Greek islands, the first European safe harbor, on rickety boats. The curtain falls on *Transit* in a scene reminiscent of the tragic end of today's many refugees. Passengers lucky enough to secure visas and immigration permits to board the ship to the United States drown in the Atlantic in the sinking vessel.

It is perhaps not surprising that the reissuance of new translations and editions of the major works of a writer, not well known outside of Germany, coincided with one of the greatest refugee crises since the Second World War. Although the 2015 refugee crisis was extensively covered in the media, for the reader and the critic it was the novelistic rather than the journalistic medium that drove home the reality of forced exile.

## 3. Lion Feuchtwanger's Tragic Vision: *The Oppermanns*

While Lion Feuchtwanger's works written in his Pacific Palisades home were mostly historical novels that do not specifically bear the imprint of his Southern California exile, *Die Geschwister Oppermann. Roman* (Feuchtwanger [1933] 2013), the second installment of his *Wartesaal* (Waiting Room) Trilogy, matches the novelistic grandeur of *Transit*. The first book of the series *Erfolg* (Success) was published in 1930 and the last one *Exil* came out in 1940. Considered by many critics to be one of the greatest epic novels of German literature, *The Oppermanns* (Feuchtwanger [1933] 2022) conjures the terror Jewish businessmen and intellectuals experienced at the hands of the Nazis, as they were robbed of home, hearth, and all means of survival. In this epic work, Feuchtwanger offers one of the most compelling sociopsychological determinants of fascism, the mentality of its victims, and their resistance to leaving Germany even in the face of certain death. Although Feuchtwanger was writing the novel in 1933, while on a book tour in France before Adolf Hitler's *Machtergreifung*, the book foretells with uncanny prescience the coming systematic persecution of German Jews. In the almost nine decades since Hitler seized power, arguably no single historical or fictional work has more insightfully portrayed the relentless dissolution of German humanism and Nazism's insidious permeation of German society. Even as early as 1983, when the novel was made into a two-part television film in West Germany, a critic for the *New York Times* remarked that the novel was written "with a prescience that would seem like hindsight were it to be written today" (Roffmann 1983, p. 2/31). Feuchtwanger finished the book in six months; within the year, it was translated into nine languages. Upon Hitler's ascent to power, however, Feuchtwanger's friends warned him not to return to Germany, and thus began his lifelong exile.

The timeline of *The Oppermanns* begins in November 1932 on the eve of an election and continues through the chronology of a proud German-Jewish family's fall from a high socioeconomic and cultural position to ruin and extinction. The Oppermann furniture company, founded by Immanuel Oppermann, the grandfather of the clan, who was honored for his services to the army during the Franco-Prussian War, is known for its quality products at reasonable prices and is run by Martin, a successful businessman. One of his brothers, Gustav, is a literary scholar, and the other brother, Edgar, is an ear, nose, and throat specialist, who has gained worldwide fame for developing a surgical procedure. The youngest Oppermann son was killed defending the *Vaterland* in World War I. Their sister Klara is married to a Polish Jewish man, who is an American citizen and whose international business dealings are crucial for the German economy. Between November 1932 and April 1933, members of the family are torn away from a land they have been a part of since time immemorial and hunted and crushed by their fellow Germans who ran to Hitler's call. One of the most heart-wrenching subplots is the harassment of Martin's seventeen-year-old son Berthold by his newly appointed teacher Dr. Vogelsang, an ardent nationalist, whose Nazi sympathies are barely disguised. A sensitive, well-read, and attentive student, Berthold commits suicide, when Vogelsang humiliates and fails him in a paper he painstakingly researched and wrote on a classical work of German literature instead of writing on the assigned topic of a nationalist invective.

We do not know if the recent reissuance of Feuchtwanger's *The Oppermanns* in a new English translation with an introduction by the Pulitzer-winning novelist Joshua Cohen was meant to coincide with the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the ensuing refugee tragedy. Nevertheless, a review by Cohen in the *New York Times*, which characterizes the work as a classic novel that "holds lessons for today" (Cohen 2022) reads like an aide-memoire, lest we forget the brutality of the Nazi regime. The review warns of the impending threat of fascism in American politics. In any case, the reissuance of this novel at the time of the global expansion of authoritarian rule cannot be coincidental.

The implicit link or dialogue between Feuchtwanger's *Oppermanns* and SAID's *Der lange Arm der Mullahs. Notizen aus meinem Exil* (The Long Arm of the Mullahs. Notes from my Exile), a cross-genre of poetry, memoir, lectures, letters, and testimony, is not based on a visceral comparison or the coincidence of SAID gazing at the Pacific surf ("nun liegt der stille ozean zu meinen füßen: so klar, so blau", ("there lies the silent ocean at my feet: so clear, so blue" (SAID 2008, p. 158)) from the same spot where Feuchtwanger had been watching the Pacific Ocean decades ago. While there are other coincidences between the lives of the two writers—both die in exile at 74, Feuchtwanger in Los Angeles and SAID in Feuchtwanger's hometown Munich—their works exemplify very different experiences and cultures of exile. Nevertheless, even though *The Oppermanns* and "The Long Arm of the Mullahs" represent different historical epochs and locales, they stand as powerful testimonies to the betrayal of peoples by their own governments. Their writing is both a warning and a plea for restitution. However, it is important to point out that while Feuchtwanger's warning is remembered, as he was an established European writer, cautionary tales from today's exiled writers like SAID or the Algerian Yasmina Khadra (Mohammed Moulessehoul), who are almost exclusively from non-Western countries, are either forgotten or were not listened to in the first place.

#### 4. Precarities of Transport and Translation

There are significant disparities between the life and career paths of *Exilliteratur* writers and prominent German intellectuals like Hannah Arendt, Theodor Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse, also exiles from Germany at this time, and writers, artists, and academics living in exile today. The former were already well-known and prominent figures in their countries and, for that reason, also visible targets for persecution on religious and political grounds. They were aided in their escape through various stations of exile by international agencies and relief organizations, such as the American Emergency Relief Committee and charitable individuals like the American journalist Varian Fry and the American vice consul Harry



Bingham Jr. in Marseille, who hid Feuchtwanger in his home. Feuchtwangers' flight to Los Angeles was fraught with danger at every turn and replicates, to a certain extent, the fictional Oppermann brothers' multiple displacements over borders.

On the other hand, most contemporary writers of transnational stature emigrated on their own under difficult circumstances and often through several countries that denied them entry. Most began writing in exile. Only a few had made a name for themselves as professional writers in their homelands. They were driven to exile as a result of war, economic hardship, ethnic discrimination, or being censored and persecuted on political and religious grounds. They lacked the economic resources of a Thomas Mann or a Lion Feuchtwanger. They were born into lesser-known and translated languages. Writing in the language of the host land would be their only way to social or cultural solvency and toward what the anthropologist Renato Rosaldo called "cultural citizenship". For them, exile became an act of translation in many senses of the word. The German verb *übersetzen* illustrates the double meaning of the word, depending on whether the verb is separable or inseparable. The separable form *setzen-über* means ferrying over or crossing, usually a body of water, and the inseparable verb means translating. In consecutive order, the two forms of the verb conjure an image of the exiled writer crossing over a water border and thereafter translating.

Since the writing career of most contemporary transnational writers only began in the host land, they adopted its language, thus becoming "hyphenated writers" like the Syrian-German Rafik Schami, Romanian-German Carmen-Francesca Banciu, Bulgarian-German Ilija Trojanow, among many others. While they lacked the "already-famous" status, financial means, and the ready availability of translators and publishers their more famous forebears enjoyed, they had full control over their already translated writing, which integrated them into the cultural fabric of their host society. For many of these writers, the language of the host land provided a welcoming refuge. As SAID put it, "So suchte ich Zuflucht bei der deutschen Sprache/Und sie nahm den Flüchtling auf, so gastlich sie konnte" ("Thus, I sought refuge in the German language, and she received the refugee as hospitably as she could" (SAID 2001, p. 57)). In a similar vein, in his poem, "deutsche sprache" (lower cases in the original), the Turkish-German poet Yüksel Pazarkaya refers to the German language as the language, which he loves unconditionally and which is his second homeland: "die ich vorbehaltlos liebe/die meine zweite heimat ist" (Pazarkaya 1989, p. 7).

For these writers, mastery of the host country's language has proven to be somewhat of an advantage over their better-known predecessors in exile, who depended on translators and publishers. This advantage is more an emotional peace of mind than a practical or financial benefit. Nothing is lost in translation, rather something is gained, since for the translating writer the distance from the source language allows not only self-reflection but also the freedom to say what was formerly repressed or censored. However, for many writers of *Exilliteratur*, the price of their established name, umbilical relationship to their first language, and relatively affluent lives came at a high cost. In an address delivered in California to a Writers' Congress, Feuchtwanger spoke for many famous émigré writers, when he gave voice to the vulnerability of world-renowned writers, who cannot connect to the reading public in the host land:

Very many writers of the highest talent, whose products were in great demand in their own countries, find no markets in foreign lands, either because their chief merit lies in the stylistic qualities of their language, and these qualities cannot be translated, or because their choice of subjects does not interest the foreign reader. Many exiled writers cannot or will not comply with the well-meant suggestions of their publishers to make concessions to the taste of the foreign public. It is surprising how many authors whose accomplishments the entire world has acclaimed, in spite of their most earnest efforts, now stand helpless and without means in the face of this situation. (Feuchtwanger 1994, p. 257)

Later in his speech, Feuchtwanger also says that many writers “preferred suicide to the tragicomedy of such an existence” (ibid.). While Feuchtwanger’s remark may sound like a hyperbole, there is no denying that for writers, especially established ones, whose capital is language and whose fame and fortune rest on it, surrendering their language and style to the vagaries of publishers, public taste, or political and ideological positions would amount to an irrevocable loss.

Like Feuchtwanger, Thomas Mann laments the severance of linguistic, cultural, and spiritual ties with the country of his birth. He maintains that emigration in his time assumed a much more radical form than in the past. He envies Victor Hugo, who, although outcast far from Paris and lived in exile for fifteen years on Guernsey, one of the Channel Islands, could maintain the spiritual ties that bound him to France: “What he wrote was printed in the French press; his books could be bought and read at home”. The loss of the writer’s own idiom exacerbates the pain of physical expulsion: “Our books are outlawed, just as we ourselves are; they exist only in translations, in fact, since the conquest of the European continent by the enemy, they exist only in English”. He then adds that they can, nevertheless, count themselves fortunate, since what they “produce exists at all, for every writer will feel with us what it means to exist only as a literary shadow, to live only a translated and denatured life” (Mann 1994, p. 103). While both Feuchtwanger and Mann delivered the above-quoted addresses in October 1943 at the same Writers’ Congress in California, Mann’s lecture is passionately hopeful about the war’s imminent end and his return to Germany to re-establish the bond with his language and readers.

Unlike Feuchtwanger and Mann, Hannah Arendt and Herbert Marcuse chose to write in English and remained in their chosen exile until the end of their lives. One can assume that as academics rather than creative writers, they considered the language of concepts more universal and unrestricted than the specificity of literary narrative in terms of style, idiom, and tone. As “translators” of an intellectual legacy, they not only transported what had remained of a fractured Western humanism to American academia but were also integrated into the political life of their host country. Arendt interestingly never considered herself and her compatriots in American exile as refugees. “In the first place, we don’t like to be called refugees” (Arendt 1994a, p. 110) she writes in “We Refugees”. A refugee used to be a person, who committed acts or held adverse political opinions. Arendt says they committed no acts and none of them could be accused of harboring radical views. To counter the label “refugee”, she states that they call each other newcomers or immigrants. In contrast to the tone of nostalgia for German that marks the lectures of Mann and Feuchtwanger, Arendt claims that they have no problems with another language, “after a single year optimists are convinced they speak English as well as their mother tongue; and after two years they swear solemnly that they speak English better than any other language—their German is a language they hardly remember” (ibid., p. 111).

Arendt’s statements appear to contradict Mann’s laments about living “a translated and denatured life” by almost celebrating a total assimilation into another language. However, when the prominent journalist Günter Gaus asked her during an interview what, in her impression, remained in Germany after the disaster of the Nazi years, she famously responded “language remained”. When Gaus wanted to know, “Even in the most bitter times?” “It wasn’t the German language that went crazy”, she said (Arendt 1994b, pp. 12–13). However, like Feuchtwanger and Mann, she asserts that there is no substitute for one’s language. All those years, when she was lecturing and publishing in English, she consciously preserved her German.

In this aspect, Arendt remains close to contemporary writers in exile, who negotiate between languages and cultures and dare to separate literary and cultural currents and memories from entrenched sources of belonging and synthesize them as new forms of cognition and recognition. It seems that this bivalency in the use of language both in everyday speech and literary creation allows the exiled artist the freedom to choose integration into the language of the host land or to return to their first language and cultivate its expressive power through exposure to the other language, as Arendt did.

Theodor Kallifitades is one of those writers, who appreciates the luxury of moving between languages. Born in Greece, he moved to Sweden in 1964 at the age of sixteen and has lived there ever since. After publishing several books in Swedish and receiving numerous awards for his work, he has turned to writing alternately in Greek and Swedish. By his own account, the turn to Greek was an act of love and a triumph over forgetfulness. Although his books have been widely translated, many into English and Spanish, his name seldom comes up in studies of exile literature. Yüksel Pazarkaya, the father of the Turkish-German literary movement, is another poet who writes simultaneously in German and Turkish. He came to Germany at nineteen as a student at the height of the *Gastarbeiter* migration. After obtaining a degree in Chemistry, he earned a PhD in German Literature under the advisership of the renowned Germanist Fritz Martini. He also happens to be a prolific practicing translator and cultural critic. Writers like Kallifitades, Pazarkaya, and Zafer Şenocak do not see themselves as exiles but rather as free agents moving between languages, cultures, and literary and academic circles.

This choice not to commit to a national, ethnic, or even linguistic identity or group is what differentiates the writers I call transnational from, say, the members of the Weimar on the Pacific group, who saw themselves, despite certain differences in opinion, as a closed German community, continuing to write in German, and showing little interest in the culture of their surroundings. Granted, Southern California had little to offer in the cultural riches category. Yet, I wonder if any one of these émigrés read John Steinbeck's 1939 novel *The Grapes of Wrath*, a philosophical epic of deracinated migrants trying to reach California, a story that paralleled their exile in a way. However, in this context, credit is due to Feuchtwanger whose voluminous literary output in Los Angeles was not detached from his fascination with the city. In the title story of his *Venedig (Texas) und vierzehn andere Erzählungen* (Feuchtwanger 1946, Venedig [Texas] and Other Stories), Feuchtwanger juxtaposes the Venice on the Adriatic and the Venice on the Pacific in an amusing tale reminiscent of Heinrich Heine, one of his favorite authors, who also lived and died in exile. He presents a fictional account of the creation of the Angeleno Venice as a commercial enterprise. Feuchtwanger draws on the historical facts surrounding the construction of Los Angeles with his own critique of both modern European and American civilizations (see, Seyhan 2014, p. 228).

Unlike most other writers of Weimar on the Pacific, Feuchtwanger, who settled permanently in America, arguably made the most of his bi-cultural experience. Although the majority of his work completed in California focused on the major figures of European cultural history, such as the Spanish painter Francisco Goya and the Swiss-born philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the events and personages of history are refracted through the experience of the émigrés in the Los Angeles area. A case in point is his *Goya oder Der arge Weg der Erkenntnis* (1951, Goya or the Dark Way of Knowledge), where the Spanish painter Francisco Goya's appearance before the Inquisition clearly evokes the experience of Bertolt Brecht before the House Committee on Un-American Activities in 1947 and the government surveillance of many German émigré authors, including Feuchtwanger (see, Stephan 2000).

While the engagement of the German émigré writers in the coastal enclave of Los Angeles with American literature was practically non-existent (see, Berman 2010), the work of almost every non-German writer of Germany shows an intimate familiarity with the classical works of German literature. Pazarkaya and Özdamar are avid readers of Heinrich Heine. It is not surprising that Heine is frequently quoted in the work of Turkish-German writers, as his experience of censorship, persecution, and exile perhaps most closely parallels theirs. The diverse scales of transnational writing offer the conditions for the realization of a dialogue between exilic voices that are separated in time and space, such as those of Heinrich Heine (1797–1856) with Pazarkaya (1940–), Özdamar (1946–), or SAID (1947–2021), thus mapping ways in which these writers deepen our understanding of the power of language against censorship, persecution, and human mortality.



## 5. SAID, in Memoriam Motherland

Many writers from Islamic countries, who live in chosen or forced exile in Germany or the West, have written about unimaginable suffering and trauma political Islam has caused for themselves and their people. SAID was one of the most eloquent writers in this group and had lived since 1965 in Germany and wrote in German. He was the recipient of numerous literary prizes, president of the German PEN Center in the early 2000s, and his *Landschaften einer fernen Mutter* (SAID 2001) was translated and published by the University of Chicago Press as *Landscapes of a Distant Mother* in 2004, right after it was issued in Germany to great acclaim. Despite the volume of his work and the many literary prizes it has garnered, critical studies of SAID's work are few and far between. This was partly the result of his total rejection of oriental clichés that sell well but also of his criticism of the West despite being on a war footing with the Iranian regime throughout his life in exile. Like many self-reflective exiles, who do not turn a blind eye to the social injustices and political failings in the host country, SAID remained critical of the exclusionary practices, racism, and political simplemindedness in Germany. He was first and foremost a poet whose verses caress the ear with Heinean musicality. However, the unbearable pathos of his double exile from his motherland and his own mother, who was divorced from his father when he was a young child, often surpasses the most elegiac of Heine's verses. Even his rather untimely death from a damaged heart seems like a metaphor for dying of a broken heart in search of a homeland. His last collection of short stories, *flüstern gegen die wölfe* (SAID 2021) was published in March 2021, shortly before he died on 15 May 2021, in Munich, which had been his permanent home in exile.

SAID's "The Long Arm of the Mullahs" is a powerful and poignant montage of poems, conversations, prize acceptance speeches, lectures, letters, news briefs, and autobiographical sketches that narrate both the atrocities of the Ayatollah regime and the agonizing isolation of an exiled poet, who can never go back home. Like Heine, who returns to Germany after a thirteen-year exile in France only to find his homeland even more oppressive than before and hastens back to Paris, SAID returns to Iran after the fall of Shah Reza Pahlavi in 1979 and witnesses the barbarities of a regime much more brutal than the Shah's. He escapes back to Germany, which becomes his permanent exile until the end of his life. SAID's notes "Notizen" from his exile bear witness to his experience of forced exile first from the Shah's and then from Ayatollah Khomeini's Iran.

SAID, cognizant of the unprecedented scale of murders of non-Christians in the twentieth century in the middle of Europe and as a living witness in Iran to executions of thousands of students, intellectuals, and particularly women, who did not abide by the mullahs' religious norms and dictates, cannot foresee anything like the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. However, while his accounts of the tortures and killings carried out by Khomeini and his eager executioners are gripping, he avoids the graphic; his verses are elegiac but not pitying. The experience of trauma requires indirect forms of expression since long-winded depictions take away from the intensity of lived horror. The elliptical and fragmentary forms of lyric writing represent extremity by suggestion rather than by description. SAID's memories rely on the intimacy of shared words and silences with the persecuted. The simultaneously personal, conversational, epistolary, and public nature of his writing marks this remembrance as an exemplary instance of poetic *Trauerarbeit*. "The Long Arm of the Mullahs" brings together SAID's poetic commentaries on exile and the horrors of the two successive dictatorships in Iran in the format of journal entries. Some diary notes do not disguise the horror of the bloody executions of "immoral" men and women, who have "sinned" against the dictates of Islam by their weakness for art and music, and the brutal persecution of the members of Iran's various religious (especially Bahais) and ethnic minorities. In a series of "Confessions (*Beichte*) of Ayatollah Khomeini", SAID lists in parodistic language Khomeini's "teachings" that all start with the salutation "Herr" (Lord): "Herr, ich habe auch alle anderen westlichen Erscheinungsformen des Genusses verbieten lassen: Tanz, Ballett, Theater, Oper die in ihrem Wesen dem Islam nicht entsprechen, ja ihm sogar entgegen sind" ["Lord, I also

had all other Western forms of pleasure banned: dance, ballet, theater, opera, which by their nature do not agree with Islam and are, in fact, opposed to it”] (SAID 2001, p. 45); “Herr, ich habe die Bahais verfolgen und ausrotten lassen. Diese letzten Abtrünnigen vom Islam—und daher die schlimmsten” [“Lord, I had the Bahais persecuted and exterminated. These are the last apostates from Islam and, therefore, the worst”] (ibid., p. 47). The most powerful entries are in verse form and are apostrophes to the dead. Here, SAID provides the reader with censored, erased, or forcefully forgotten events of recent Iranian history and restores, in poetic memory, name and dignity to the victims executed without rhyme or reason.

In an insightful article, Thomas Baginski (2001) emphasizes that the first and foremost concern of SAID’s lyric is not a sense of geographic or existential homelessness but rather the tragedy of being persecuted. In this aspect, he shares the humanistic spirit of writers like Else Lasker-Schüler, Franz Werfel, and Walter Mehring, who emigrated from Nazi Germany, and Oskar Loerke, a leading poet of “inner emigration”. Like these poets of the German language, who precede him in the experience of perpetual exile, SAID focused on the agony of private lives rather than the upheavals of the larger sociopolitical picture. In the manner of his humanist German predecessors, SAID, as a “Chronist des Schreckens wider Willen” (SAID 2001, p. 7) gives lyrical form to his subjective reaction to dehumanizing events. He portrays the experience of exilic existence from the perspective of privation suffered and forlornness (“Verlorenheit”) endured.

Reading SAID’s account of religious fanaticism, which drives a ruthless dictator, his minions, and the revolutionary guards of the Islamic Republic to execute thousands of their own kin, throws light on how rightful revolutionary movements, well-meaning individuals, and communities, and even apparent democratic regimes can pay an enormous price for the lack of political vision and preparedness. The well-educated opponents of the secular but dictatorial Shah Reza Pahlavi allied themselves with the supporters of Ayatollah to overthrow the Shah, only to become the immediate targets of the much bloodier tyrant, who returned triumphantly to Iran after his exile in France. SAID pays tribute to thousands of intellectuals, writers, and students, who were ruthlessly hunted and summarily executed by the so-called revolutionary guards of the Islamic Nation of Khomeini. Seghers’s *Transit* and Feuchtwanger’s *Oppermanns* also depict with deep psychological insight how many Germans and Europeans did not or could not foresee the imminent rise of fascism and the speed with which apparently stable regimes can fall. In a tone as unforgiving as SAID’s, Arendt states that even some German intellectuals coopted and attempted to rationalize Nazism after 1933, “friends ‘co-ordinated’ or got in line” (Arendt 1994b, p. 10), leaving an empty space around her, and she never forgot that. Historical decisions are not for the moment; they have consequences that should not have been unseen.

*The Oppermanns*, *Transit*, or “The Long Arm of the Mullahs” should not simply be considered additions to a curriculum based on exile literature and included in the syllabi of a few college literature, history, or political science courses. *The Oppermanns*, which already in November 1933 was published in several languages, became a most accessible and effective source of information on the conditions in Nazi Germany. When a new translation of *Transit* was issued in 2013 with an Afterword by the German Nobel Laureate Heinrich Böll, critics and readers praised it as a definitive story of displacement and an uncannily perceptive account of refugee mentality. The similarities to the contemporary refugee crises were noticeable enough for the renowned German film director Christian Petzold to translate the novel into a highly acclaimed 2018 film, adapted to be set in the present. “Mullahs”, which could only be written by a persecuted writer, who was witness to the summary executions of thousands, uncovers a historical trauma that no official history or journalistic reporting could have brought to light. An archive of such exilic works should be required reading instead of trendy and artificially propped-up bestsellers that fit in with a trend. As I have said elsewhere a long time ago, stories remember what history forgets.

What are the political, epistemic, and moral challenges that the exile and transnational literature of the disrupted century reveal? Neither the rooted nor the exilic condition is a

stable entity, shuffled as they are by historical and sociopolitical shifts. These shifts also reroute migratory patterns. Seghers returned to a different Germany, to the DDR (or GDR, The German Democratic Republic), which she mistakenly regarded as free of the chains of the past, as did Bertolt Brecht. Thomas Mann returned to what he hoped would be a rehabilitated land. As of this writing, the first-generation Turkish-German writers Özdamar, Pazarkaya, and Şenocak, remain in Germany, even though the conditions that led to their respective exiles have changed; however, their sense of home has also changed.

In this context, SAID, who chose to remain in Germany permanently, advises his Chilean friend Christian Cortéz, who has decided to return to Chile after thirteen years of exile, to take exile and especially time back with him. In an epistolary entry dated February 1990, SAID expresses with deep philosophical insight that in exile we develop a different sense of time since we feel what happens there does not concern us. The thirteen years Cortéz spent in exile no longer exist in Chile; they perished in his absence. He will now exist in a time he does not know and which does not know him. SAID implores his friend, “Und nimm die Sprache mit, die Dir das Exiland gegeben hat. Denn auch diese wirst Du nötig haben”. He continues, “Anfangs wirst Du Dich begierig auf Deine geliebte Sprache stürzen, doch dann erscheint sie Dir vulgär und verroht.” (“And take the language that the land of exile has given you, because you will need that, too. At first you’ll eagerly throw yourself on to your beloved language, but then it will appear to you vulgar and brutalized”. (SAID 2001, p. 96)). This advice from a permanent exile to another, who hopes to end his exile, drives home the impermanence of exile in its permanence.

Described by the renowned German writer Christoph Hein as not a born German but a learned German (or trained as a German, “Gelernter Deutscher”), SAID leaves a literary legacy without a major work that has defined some other exile writers, such as Milan Kundera’s *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, W. G. Sebald’s *Austerlitz*, E.S. Özdamar’s *Das Leben ist eine Karawanserei* (Life is a Caravanserai) or even his compatriot Shahriar Mandenipour’s *Censoring an Iranian Love Story: A Novel*. Yet the totality of his work constitutes a critical corpus, a compendium of poetic criticism on exile, banishment, loss, longing, and memory that is neither nostalgic nor sentimental. While confrontation with injustice, repression, and censorship strongly inform SAID’s work, its greatest strength lies in his reflections on the power of language as a liberating force. In *In Deutschland leben, ein Gespräch mit Wieland Freund* (Living in Germany, a Conversation with Wieland Freund) is a compilation of interviews with Wieland Freund, correspondent for one of the leading German newspapers *Die Welt*. These “essayistic” conversations reveal SAID’s concepts of language, translation, and linguistic identity in a philosophically grounded idiom. He shows how the addition of a second language not only grants the speaker more freedom but also a “third ear” that becomes an essential component of the poetic craft. In “deutsch als auffanglager ein fremdsprachiger monolog” (German as reception camp a foreign language monolog), he says that many years ago he had written a fairy tale “es war einmal eine blume” (once upon a time, there was a flower). Twenty-two years later that story is published as a book, but not in Persian, “damit übertrat ich eine grenze, eine schwelle. denn meine notizen waren in deutscher sprache geschrieben, nicht auf persisch”. He adds, “ich hatte zuvor gar nicht geschrieben, um mich auszudrücken. und jetzt tat ich es in der fremden sprache, die mir umgab.” (“with that I crossed a border, a threshold, because my notes were written in German, not Persian. Before this, I had never written to express myself, and now I did this in a foreign language that surrounded me”. (SAID 2004, p. 33)). There is a tone of surprise in this revelation, a sense of wonder that the mastery of this other language is the passport that allows the writer to cross the border to freedom. Here, SAID confirms my above statement that almost all contemporary transnational writers became writers in exile and in the language of the host land. While this sentiment of crossing a threshold by mastering the host’s language is often expressed by other writers of exile, SAID’s reflections center on the very act of writing itself and on writing in the second language as writing to the second power.

SAID's contrapuntally composed montages are like memory capsules to pass down to future generations, who are likely to live in a world where exile is the norm. At the same time, they remind us that exiles and refugees should not be seen as a unified body or collectivity by virtue of national or ethnic origin, race, religion, or creed, that is, as Turks, Arabs, Muslims, Vietnamese, or even more specifically as Bahais, because inevitable social, cultural, and ideological divisions exist among all these communities. Both Franz Werfel, the Austrian novelist, who was also a member of the Weimar on the Pacific community, and Arnold Zweig, a German socialist writer, who went into voluntary exile after the Nazis took power and spent time in France with Arendt and Feuchtwanger, were openly critical of Feuchtwanger because of his earlier Stalinist sympathies. His praise of Stalin's regime later delayed his naturalization process in the United States. It was only shortly before his death that Feuchtwanger was granted American citizenship.

SAID further emphasizes how painful isolation can be for exiles, who fall out with their compatriots in exile over partisanship or ideology. In a section titled "Briefe-aber an wen?" (Letters-but to whom?), he writes that whoever knows exile and its laws, knows how hermetic political isolation is among emigrants. When he turned into an active Shah opponent, he was immediately shunned by his compatriots and realized how unbearable such isolation is for a renegade (SAID 2001, p. 54). Because there can be vast ideological differences, even violent disputes among seemingly united groups, transactions between the hosts and émigrés necessitate nuanced cultural translation, that is, insight not only into the specificities of a given culture but also into discordant components of cultures and the ability to interpret these.

In the final analysis, certain works, written under conditions of displacement, political, historical, and personal trauma reemerge at critical points in history with renewed relevance. Walter Benjamin, himself an exile and victim of Nazi persecution, warned in his final essay that the true picture of the past is only recognized at the moment it flashes by. If not seized in that instant, it disappears never to return. For Robespierre, ancient Rome was a past charged with the time of the now that he blasted out of the continuum of history. The French Revolution viewed itself as Rome incarnate (Benjamin 1977, pp. 253, 258). By that logic, writers like SAID detonate the memory of *Exilliteratur* out of the continuum of history. Exile is a universal but also a traumatic experience. Since literature is an institution of memory *par excellence*, it synchronizes the voices of exiled writers across time and geography, making them resonate with the present.

There is no common discourse of ethical conduct toward or among exiles, émigrés, or refugees. Feuchtwanger's epigraphs for the three "books", "Yesterday", "Today", and "Tomorrow" of *The Oppermanns* perhaps best summarize the moral challenges and imperatives of understanding the historical and contemporary conditions and forms of exile. The epigraph to "Tomorrow" from the *Talmud*, "Es ist uns aufgetragen, am Werke zu arbeiten, aber es ist uns nicht gegeben, es zu vollenden". ("You are not obligated to complete the task, but neither are you free to absolve yourself from it". (Feuchtwanger [1933] 2013, p. 232)) is an apostrophe to the writer to remind the reader of the moral imperative not to forget, even if that reminder can never be final. The image of SAID contemplating the Pacific Ocean from the garden of Villa Aurora, where half a century ago Feuchtwanger used to have his breakfast, is a poignant reminder of the perpetuity of exile kept up by bloody regimes and the experience of persecution and terror that drove Feuchtwanger to escape the long arm of the Nazis and SAID the long arm of the mullahs.

Note: All translations from the German are mine.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

## References

- Arendt, Hannah. 1994a. We Refugees. In *Altogether Elsewhere: Writers in Exile*. Edited by Marc Robinson. San Diego, New York and London: Harcourt Brace & Company, pp. 110–19.



- Arendt, Hannah. 1994b. What Remains? The Language Remains. A Conversation with Günter Gaus. In *Essays in Understanding 1930–1954*. Edited by Jerome Kohn. San Diego, New York and London: Harcourt Brace & Company, pp. 1–23.
- Baginski, Thomas. 2001. Von Mullahs und Deutschen: Annäherung an das Werk des iranischen Exillyrikers Said. *German Quarterly* 74: 22–36. [CrossRef]
- Bahr, Ehrhard. 2008. *Weimar on the Pacific: German Exile Culture in Los Angeles and the Crisis of Modernity*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: The University of California Press.
- Benjamin, Walter. 1977. Über den Begriff der Geschichte. In *Illuminationen. Ausgewählte Schriften*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, pp. 151–61.
- Berman, Russell A. 2010. British expatriots and German exiles in 1930s–1940s Los Angeles. In *Literature of Los Angeles*. Edited by Kevin R. McNamara. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 49–47.
- Breytenbach, Breyten. 1994. The Exile as African. In *Altogether Elsewhere: Writers in Exile*. Edited by Marc Robinson. Winchester: Faber and Faber, pp. 179–82.
- Cohen, Joshua. 2022. A Classic Novel of the Nazis' Rise That Holds Power for Today. *New York Times*. Online Edition, 3 October, 2022. Updated 5 October. Available online: <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/03/books/review/lion-feuchtwanger-oppermanns.html> (accessed on 21 January 2023).
- Feuchtwanger, Lion. 1946. *Venedig (Texas) und vier andere Erzählungen*. New York: Aurora Verlag.
- Feuchtwanger, Lion. 1994. The Working Problems of the Writer in Exile. In *Altogether Elsewhere: Writers in Exile*. Edited by Marc Robinson. Winchester: Faber and Faber, pp. 256–60.
- Feuchtwanger, Lion. 2013. *Die Geschwister Oppermann. Roman*, 10th ed. Berlin: Aufbau. First published 1933.
- Feuchtwanger, Lion. 2022. *The Oppermanns. A Novel*. Translated by James Cleugh. Introduction by Joshua Cohen. New York: McNally Editions. First published 1933.
- Goyal, Yogita. 2017. *Transnational American Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mani, B. Venkat. 2022. Finding Odysseus's Scars Again: Hyperlinked Literary Histories in an Age of Refugees. In *Germany from the Outside: Rethinking German Cultural History in an Age of Displacement*. Edited by Laurie Ruth Johnson. New York: Bloomsbury, pp. 13–35.
- Mann, Thomas. 1994. The Exiled Writer's Relationship to His Homeland. In *Altogether Elsewhere: Writers in Exile*. Edited by Marc Robinson. Winchester: Faber and Faber, pp. 100–5.
- Pazarkaya, Yüksel. 1989. Deutsche sprache. In *Der Babylonbus*. Frankfurt am Main: Dağyeli, p. 7.
- Roffmann, Frederick S. 1983. New Life for a Prescient Novel about Nazism. *New York Times*. 15 May: Section 2, p. 31. Available online: <https://www.nytimes.com/1983/05/15/books/new-life-for-a-prescient-novel-about-nazism.html> (accessed on 21 January 2023).
- SAID. 2001. *Der lange Arm der Mullahs. Notizen aus meinem Exil*. München: C.H. Beck.
- SAID. 2004. *In Deutschland leben. Ein Gespräch mit Wieland Freund*. München: C.H. Beck.
- SAID. 2008. Mit Walt Whitman in Los Angeles. In *Der Engel und die Taube*. München: C.H. Beck, pp. 158–60.
- SAID. 2021. *Flüstern Gegen die Wölfe*. Tübingen: Konkursbuch Verlag.
- Seghers, Anna. 1944. *Transit*. Translated by James Austin Galston. Konstanz: Curt Weller Verlag.
- Seghers, Anna. 2013. *Transit*. Translated by Margot Bettauer Dembo. Introduction by Peter Conrad. Afterword by Heinrich Böll. New York: NYRB Classics.
- Seghers, Anna. 2018. *The Seventh Cross*. Translated by Margot Bettauer Dembo. New York: NYRB Classics.
- Seghers, Anna. 2018. *Transit*. Berlin: Aufbau. First published 2011.
- Seghers, Anna. 2021. *The Dead Girls' Class Trip*. Selected Stories. Translated by Margot Bettauer Dembo. Introduction by Ingo Schulze. New York: NYRB Classics.
- Seyhan, Azade. 2001. *Writing Outside the Nation*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Seyhan, Azade. 2014. The Translated City: Immigrants, Minorities, Diasporans, and Cosmopolitans. In *The City in Literature*. Edited by Kevin R. McNamara. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 216–32.
- Stephan, Alexander. 2000. *"Communazis": The Surveillance of German Émigré Writers*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Ugrešić, Dubrovka. 2008. What is European about European Literature? In *Nobody's Home*. Translated by Ellen Elias-Bursac. Rochester: Open Letter, University of Rochester's Nonprofit Literary Translation Press, pp. 139–51.

**Disclaimer/Publisher's Note:** The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.