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Joseph Brodsky and Ágnes Lehóczky

By

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To my children Anna and Filippo

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INTRODUCTION

The Russian-born poet Joseph Brodsky's life and work, the subject of my MA dissertation in Russian literature, have inspired this new line of research, focused on the themes of cultural nomadism and the adoption of English in contemporary literature.

"I have a love affair with the English language," Joseph Brodsky used to say when interviewed about his attitude towards his second language: this sometimes-troubled relationship had started long before his emigration to the United States, his adoptive country since his expulsion from the Soviet Union in 1972.

Joseph Brodsky became internationally known as a poet and essayist when he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1987, and when he was appointed "Poet Laureate" of the United States in 1991. This second achievement proved a major turning point in his work, since, from that moment on, he published almost exclusively in English. If this was undoubtedly a way to avoid the endless corrections he made to the translations of his poems, it also testifies to the accomplishment of a process that led one of the most representative contemporary authors in Russian, "Iosif Brodskiy", to leave his mother tongue and adopt English as his privileged artistic vehicle, and to become "Joseph Brodsky", an honoured professor and lecturer, who travelled extensively in the United States, South America and Europe.

In what can well be defined a "travelling exile", Brodsky showed a special affection for Italy, where he used to go every year. In Rome he saw the representation of classicism and empire, in Florence the embodiment of language and exile, while Venice represented the ideal site to feel the estrangement that he deemed necessary for an artist, besides being a reflection of Leningrad/St. Petersburg, his native town.

Venice was, for Brodsky, a discursive space from which to start analysing all the major themes of his work: home and displacement, culture and transculturation, language and identity. From his early poems in Russian, later translated into English, to the intense prose of the autobiographical essay *Watermark,* Brodsky testifies to the transformation of his lyric-self: from a Russian poet in exile, into an American *"flâneur"* writer. The adoption of English, for both prose and

poetry, as the language *par excellence* of his "nomadic life", undoubtedly contributed to the author's transformation.

Chapter One is dedicated to a brief reflection on the figure of the nomad writer in the contemporary world. Notwithstanding that nomadism has always been part of the essence of culture—the complex relationship between language, consciousness and identity has inspired the debate of philosophers and linguists for centuries—in today's global landscape characterized by people's displacement, we can assert that a new figure, the nomadic intellectual, seems to have emerged, a fact that is further testified to by the successful attempts of intellectuals to wander among disciplines and among many areas of contemporary culture, with ideas about, and approaches to, the most diverse backgrounds. In this sense, cultural nomadism is considered a typical manifestation of what we call "postmodernity".

Departing from the reading of some guiding texts, such as *Nomadic Subjects* by Rosi Braidotti (1994), Stuart Hall's *Modernity–An Introduction to Modern Societies* (1996), *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto* by Stephen Greenblatt (2010), and Zygmunt Bauman's *Culture in a Liquid Modern World* (2011), I have tried to see if this physical and cultural displacement—caused for Brodsky by exile—can be considered nonetheless a "sought-after" status pursued by other authors, as the ultimate possible condition for the contemporary writer.

Focusing the research on the themes of displacement and identity, on the relation between the first and second language, and on the adoption of English as a vehicle for literary creation, I have found a correspondence with the poet and essayist Ágnes Lehóczky, who is emerging on the British literary scene. The Hungarian-born poet Lehóczky has always kept a link with her mother country, and in her poems she scrutinizes the reality which changes around her, seeking to define her identity as a modern nomad intellectual.

Trying not to indulge in a forced comparison between the two authors, I can say that the subtle thread that unites them is first to be found in their full adoption of English: in Brodsky for both prose and poetry, in Lehóczky in the hybrid form of her prose poems. Research has provided me with evidence of the affinities that connect them, further testified by the latest development of Lehóczky's work—an affinity confirmed by the same Lehóczky, whom I met in Sheffield, in summer 2017.

It is as if Brodsky's personal and artistic path has offered me a sort of "epistemological lens[es]" through which to read Lehóczky's work.

Chapter Two of this study will be dedicated to a brief theoretical analysis of Brodsky's transculturation and adoption of English as the epitome of his changed artistic persona.

In Chapter Three, I will examine Lehóczky's three main collections in English, published between 2008 and 2014, as well as three small publications, recently released, these last centred on the theme of water, which will be examined in their semantic and syntactic relationships, focusing the research on the central themes of identity, belonging and language.

The last section concludes with some considerations that have arisen from this study, in part conducted under the supervision of Lehóczky, professor of Creative Writing at Sheffield University, herself.

I will depart from tracing Brodsky's progressive fascination for his second language—I will analyse his last production in English—to come to Lehóczky's work, which will be at the focus of this project, representing the novelty.

Far from simply being a *lingua franca*, then, English becomes a new language, having absorbed the influences of the authors' mother tongues. Enriched by new features, it is more than a language: it is a space "in between" that welcomes and protects the nomadic writers, while allowing them to forge their new identities. The mastery of an acquired language, and the decision to adopt it as a vehicle for their artistic manifestation, offers the bilingual writers new creative opportunities, as well as social recognition—it is not a coincidence that both authors found working opportunities in the academic world of their new host countries.

As I will show, in Lehóczky's "post-avantgarde" poems—a definition that she likes—the environment, mainly in its urban form, is the privileged space for contemporary poetic experimentation, and it is described through the eyes of the tourist, the immigrant and the new citizen. Lehóczky's poems offer new visions of the urban space, in the criss-cross of technologized cities, whose global relationships and the cohabitation of languages cannot ignore connections with history. It is a vision that, while recognizing the mobility of contemporary man, searches for traces in the past to explain the present.

Lehóczky's view of the world could be described as "holistic" and at the same time "palimpsestic", in which aspects of reality are linked to many others to create a greater picture. As our life moves on multiple parallel or intersecting levels, any aspect of experience hides under its appearance unseen layers, which must be unveiled by the scrutinizing eyes of the lyric observer. In her poems, indeed, Lehóczky offers

continuous changes of perspective, mainly in verticality—from the panorama, for instance, offered from the top of a hill in Budapest, to the catacombs of an English cathedral—adopting what is defined as a "psychogeographical" approach. This method of discovering the city is drawn from the Situationists and can also be found in Brodsky's *Watermark*.

In Lehóczky's prose poems, the categories that play the main role are space, time and language, and will be examined in their conceptual and stylistic relations, through the filters offered by the Social Sciences and Humanities.

The nomadic authors seek to define new conceptions of their selves by going beyond the traditional assumptions of identity, culture and homeland. Either from a strictly personal view—which nevertheless opens to concerns on the surrounding American cultural environment, for Brodsky—or underlining the common historical features of European cities, for Lehóczky, the two authors express their quest through their unique writings in English, the medium which has allowed the creation of their personal and artistic identities.

Striving to "locate" language and identity, these authors face the limits of doing so, due to the fluid and nomadic nature of language itself: if not answers, they propose new ways of expression which extend the boundaries of conventional language. Brodsky and Lehóczky seem to embrace the multiple cultural forms of our time, to reach an individuality which is increasingly difficult to attain in a globalized world.

With their texts, interspersed by innumerable references, they go beyond language and culture, thus suggesting a common ground from which to draw the language of our future.

CHAPTER ONE

A FEW THEORETICAL REFLECTIONS ON CULTURAL NOMADISM

1.1. Introduction

> There is an urgent need to rethink fundamental assumptions about the fate of culture in an age of global mobility, a need to formulate, both for scholars and for the larger public, new ways to understand the vitally important dialectic of cultural persistence and change (Greenblatt 2010: 1-2).

These words taken from Steven Greenblatt's *Cultural Mobility: A Manifesto* (2010) offer us a hint to begin a discussion focussing on topics related to cultural mobility—or "cultural nomadism"—an aspect underlying Joseph Brodsky and Ágnes Lehóczky's works.

Culture must today reflect the new characteristics of a society defined as "liquid"—an issue called into question by many scholars, amongst whom is Pierre Joris, with his famous work *A Nomad Poetics: Essays*. Joris provocatively invokes an international "nomadic poetics", which "will cross languages, not just translate, but write in all or any of them […] in a material flux of language matter" (2003: 5). Joris refers to what can be called "a protosemantic" nucleus, from which all languages have derived, and to which all languages must return. This concept is related to people's nomadism, a phenomenon which has always existed and which is the point of arrival, or departure, of Lehóczky's poetry.

In this chapter, I will address the theme of cultural mobility, mainly related to a second language, finding support in some guiding texts, which have become touchstones for the study of today's cultural phenomena. All this is done in the awareness of the vastness of the subjects approached, which makes the discourse difficult to synopsize.

Themes range from people's displacement, cultural mobility, intercultural communication, bilingualism and the adoption of a second language, and I am conscious that all of them would require extensive separate arguments. The discourse has no claim, then, to be exhaustive, but simply aims at contextualizing essential aspects of the work of our two "nomadic" authors.

1.2. Liquid Society

"Liquid Society" has now become a sort of label for our world, in which there are no more fixed points of reference, and where the certainties of the past seem to have disappeared to be replaced by uncertainties and fears for the future, in what is called a general "crisis of values". The coinage, "Liquid Society", which is an effective metaphor for the nature of our society, is among the luckiest and most popular of recent years, and is owed to the Polish philologist and sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, who in his books extensively explores aspects of contemporaneity, analysed in the multiple nuances of its "fluidity". As well as in his famous book *Liquid Life* (2005), Bauman discusses issues related to contemporary forms of culture in *Culture in a Liquid Modern World*, from which the following passage is taken, and which offers us an interesting synthesis of the concept of "liquid modernity":

> I use the term "liquid modernity" here for the currently existing shape of the modern condition, described by other authors as "postmodernity", "late modernity," and "second" or "hyper" modernity. What makes modernity "liquid," and thus justifies the choice of name, is its self-propelling, self-intensifying, compulsive and obsessive "modernization", as a result of which, like liquid, none of the consecutive forms of social life is able to maintain its shape for long (Bauman 2011: 11-12).

In his studies, Bauman emphasizes that today the individual is often "overwhelmed" by stimuli and cultural offers—people can correspond in real time with any part of the world, but they may be, at the same time, deprived of the necessary cultural and linguistic background to communicate effectively. Individualism seems to play the main role in an over-connected world, and Bauman stresses that anyone is left alone in his/her choice of culture:

> It can be said that in liquid modern times, culture (and most particularly, though not exclusively, its artistic sphere) is

fashioned to fit individual freedom of choice and individual responsibility for that choice; and that its function is to ensure that the choice should be and will always remain a necessity and unavoidable duty of life, while the responsibility for the choice and its consequences remains where it has been placed by the liquid modern human condition—on the shoulders of the individual, now appointed to the position of chief manager of "life politics" and its sole executive (2011: 12).

The theme of culture in post-modern society has been studied by many scholars, eminent amongst whom is Stuart Hall, whose works cover notions of cultural, ethnical and diasporic identities. Hall believes that identity is the product of multiple historical and cultural factors. Therefore, identity today cannot but be fragmentary and unsettled, as he writes, a "moveable feast": formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural system which surround us" (Hall 1992: 277). Throughout history, culture has expanded beyond the borders of nations—with phenomena of cross-fertilizations between cultures—and thanks to technology today it has become potentially available to anyone, in a sort of global "cultural supermarket" (Hall 1996: 622), dominated by consumerism. Hall writes:

> Within the discourse of global consumerism, differences and cultural distinctions which hitherto defined identity become reducible to a sort of international lingua franca or global currency into which all specific traditions and distinct identities can be translated. This phenomenon is known as "cultural homogenization" (1996: 622).

Culture thus seems to have lost its "social function" and become dominated by market logic—a concept also expressed by Fredrick Jameson, in his seminal essay *Postmodernism: Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991).

The need for a society to become more "multicultural" to survive—and succeed—in the interconnected global world is further emphasised in the works of the American sociologist Milton Bennet, who makes a reflection on the fact that "Just a few decades ago, this question was one faced mainly by diplomats, expatriates and the occasional international traveler." We now live, Bennet asserts, in a "pluralistic society" that needs to raise the question about what kind of communication must be implemented "to be both cultural diverse and unified in common goals" (2013: 3). He thinks that:

> By definition, members of different cultures experience different organizations of reality, and thus the use of one's self as predictor of how others will respond to messages is unlikely to be successful. Approaches to communication in cross-cultural situations must guard against inappropriate assumptions of similarity and encourage the consideration of difference. For this reason, intercultural communication is *difference-based* (Bennet 2013: 3).

Preserving cultural differences is then of utmost importance, and the following, slightly polemical, assertion by Bauman, prompts a further reflection on this topic: "The new indifference to difference presents itself in theory as an approval of 'cultural pluralism': the political practice formed and supported by this theory is defined by the term 'multiculturalism'" (Bauman 2011: 46).

"Multiculturalism" is therefore a difficult goal to achieve, in trying to reach a balance between preserving the differences still existing amongst individuals and the needs of a pluralistic society.

That said, I consider it necessary to first clarify the meaning of some terms, pertaining the issues we are discussing, which are often used confusingly. I will refer again to Bennet, in his *Basic Concepts of Intercultural Communication: Paradigms, Principles and Practices*. He asserts that:

> The term "multicultural identity" commonly refers to people with primary socialization or strong socialization in more than one culture who identify with reference groups in multiple cultural contexts. People with multicultural identity are generally not confused by their multiple cultural affiliations any more than multilingual people are confused by switching from one language to another (Adler 1998). The term "cross-cultural" refers to a particular kind of contact among people, one in which the people are from two or more different cultures. The term "intercultural" refers to a particular kind of interaction or communication among people, one in which differences in cultures play a role in the creation of meaning. […] The term "intercultural" may also refer to the kind of skills necessary to deal to cross-cultural contact (Bennet 2013: 10).

One term missing from the above list, a term recently used in socio-linguistic analysis, and which, in my opinion, best suits Brodsky and Lehóczky's features, is "transnational", which identifies people who enjoy "regular and sustained" cross-cultural contacts (Garrett 2011: 18).

To "transnational", we may add a further definition, "nomadic", as I will try to demonstrate in the next section.

1.3. Cultural Nomadism: "From Roots to Routes"

Rita Wilson, who coined the effective definition I quoted in the title, "From Roots to Routes", discusses the history of transnationalism, asserting that it became a topic of cultural analysis in the second half of the 1990s "under the impact of the communication revolution and in close relation with the immense interest in globalization as a new kind of phenomenon that has already started to radically change our world" (Wilson 2011: 247). Political science, Wilson argues, is concerned with international relations and the effects caused by transnationalism, while sociology is focused on the creation of "transnational identities", and how they act in social relations. "The humanities, in their turn, stress the idea of 'border' and use the term 'transnational' in a much broader sense 'to signal the fluidity with which ideas, objects, capital, and people now move across borders and boundaries" (Wilson 2011: 247).[1]

The concepts of translated identities and literature have been addressed by numerous theorists in postcolonial cultural studies, amongst whom is Katharine Harrington. In her essay "Writing the Nomadic Experience in Contemporary Francophone Literature", she introduces the concept of "nomadism" related to culture. She starts her discourse by saying that "to accommodate these global changes and their effects on the literary world, a number of subcategories have emerged over the years, such as immigrant and second-generation immigrant writers, exiled and diasporic writers" (Harrington 2013: 1). Nevertheless, these definitions are not enough, since, she argues,

> For an increasing number of individuals around the world, it is the experience of nomadism that most accurately reflects their situation. In our modern world, it is possible to speak about nomadism in both literal and figurative terms, whether referring to the reality of a plethora of individuals in transit around the world or a philosophical mindset and aesthetics based on the experiences of nomadic peoples (Harrington 2013: 1-2).

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[1] Wilson is here quoting *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States*, by Linda Green Basch, Nina Glick Schiller and Cristina Szanton Blanc (London: Routledge, 1994).

I think this last description of nomadism as a "philosophical mindset" and "aesthetics" could well describe Brodsky and Lehóczky's lifestyles and works: it is a trait that significantly influences the form and content of their writings. Harrington writes that it is indeed nomadism, in a "metaphorical" sense, that "serves as a postmodern way of thinking about place and identity," and makes us think "beyond traditional notions of borders" (2013: 4).

Brodsky and Lehóczky's lives seemed doomed to succeed abroad: more than a fall-back consequence, their "nomadism" could be seen as the natural response to their thirst for knowledge, which probably could not have been confined within national borders.

Harrington introduces a fundamental element which characterizes the work of the authors we are considering: nomadism as a source of inspiration. The nomadic author's point of view offers a detached perspective, coming from someone from "elsewhere". On this point, Harrington writes:

> The experience of nomadism lends itself well to the act of writing due to the outsider perspective that the nomad inevitably develops and adopts. The nomad, on the other hand, is able to maintain an even more consistent distance since he or she resists "membership" to any nationality or group altogether and therefore occupies an advantageous position for observing and commenting on societal practices and beliefs from both the country of origin as well as the host country. The viewpoint made possible by a nomadic experience also allows one to see one's own past and identity in a new and often revealing light (Harrington 2013: 8).

This topic will be addressed further in this study, referring to Brodsky, who was famous for expressing his unconventional opinions on many themes, aware of his condition of "outsider", which allowed him to have a detached and critical point of view.

A noun which recurs in the nomadic authors' writing—in Lehóczky's verses, as well as in Brodsky's works—is "map", whose frequent use seems to be an answer to the "situational need" of the poets. This aspect is present also in Braidotti's works, where we read:

> I think that many of the things I write are cartographies, that is to say a sort of intellectual landscape gardening that gives me a horizon, a frame of reference within which I can take my bearing, move about, and set up my own theoretical tent. It is not by chance, therefore, that the image of the map, or of-map

> making, is so often present in my texts. The frequency of the
> spatial metaphor expresses the simultaneity of the nomadic
> status and of the need to draw maps, each text is like a camping
> site: it traces places where I have been, in the shifting landscape
> of my singularity (Braidotti 2014: 16-17).

Harrington asserts that the nomadic writers enjoy a complex relationship
with writing, an act that allows them to "locate," but which, at the same
time, limits them, since they cannot but speak of their being "dislocated."
Writing becomes then a vital need for the nomadic writers, a need so
strong to ultimately turn into a "place of being," as testified by Brodsky
and Lehóczky. On this subject, Harrington asserts that:

> Consequently, the act of writing often emerges as a necessity for
> nomadic individuals as a means of fulfilling an inherent desire
> to situate oneself somewhere. Perpetually ill or at ease in anyone
> designated category, these authors conceive of writing as a
> necessary tool in opening up a space for exploring and
> negotiating the uncertain position they occupy (2013: 8).

1.4. The Nomadic Writer

In the émigré writers' literary path, a fundamental role is played by
language, the necessary means that accompanies their innumerable
journeys—a topic investigated, among others, by the Italian-Canadian
poet, scholar and émigré Pasquale Verdicchio,[2] who theorises his
conception of "Nomadic Poetry". With regard to this is the idea of
language as a "movement" which effectively expresses the emotional,
cultural and linguistic exchanges between the poet and the reader, but
also which speaks of the nomadic "movements" of departures and
arrivals. In this excerpt taken from the back-cover of Verdicchio's
collection *Nomadic Trajectory,* we read:

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[2] A biographical note: Pasquale Verdicchio was born in Naples in 1954; he later
moved with his family to Vancouver, and then to California, where he currently
teaches Italian and Comparative Literature and Film at the University of
California-San Diego. Valerio Viale wrote about him: "Being an immigrant
himself and, thereby, able to identify with surges of expatriates who never stop
feeling somehow marginal to their host countries, Pasquale Verdicchio has
penned over the years a wealth of books and publications exploring the Italian
diaspora" (2017).

> There is always distance in language. Readers and writers move
> in this distance, between the innumerable points that define their
> positions. The poems of NOMADIC TRAJECTORY are but
> notations of absence and displacement. A nomad reads the
> landscape s/he travels, considering all the changes that may have
> taken place since the last passage. Language unveils its
> possibilities seductively; all that is needed is the first step toward
> it. Travelers in the world thus become travelers between worlds
> (Verdicchio: 1990).

Any displacement can be considered in a sense an "exile", as Magda
Stroińska highlights in her essay "The role of language in the
reconstruction of identity in exile":

> There is no one simple and universal scenario for *exile.* It may
> be understood as any kind of displacement, voluntary departure
> or compulsory expulsion from one's native land, expatriation,
> or simply finding oneself outside the borders of one's native
> country, not because one has moved abroad but because the
> borders were moved (2003: 95).

At the same time, we have to keep in mind that the experience of exile
is strictly individual, as "The broad notion of exile applies to millions of
people world-wide, and yet not two experiences of exile are similar
enough to warrant the creation of a prototype of exile or of an expatriated
individual" (Stroińska 2003: 95). If exile was a fact for Brodsky, it could
be said that Lehóczky similarly experiences this feeling of "estrangement",
implicit in her displacement, and tries to cope with it through recounting
her many travels, mostly to her home country, in what seems a
confirmation of Stroińska's statement that "every exile faces the dilemma
whether to adopt a new identity or whether to adapt to the new
environment, trying to hold on to one's old self" (2003: 97).

A further common feature of the nomadic writers is that they are
essentially lonely travellers and this loneliness is reflected in their
writings. It is a sought-after solitude, longing for an existence "Far from
the Madding Crowd", (1994: 16) regarding which Braidotti writes:

> Nomadic writing longs […] for the desert: areas of silence, in
> between the official cacophonies, in a flirt with radical
> nonbelonging and outsidedness. Colette, in *La Vagabonde*,

caught it once and for all, "Personne ne m'attend, moi, sur une route qui ne mène ni à la gloire ni a la richesse, ni à l'amour".[3]

This last assumption reminds me of Brodsky's solitary tours in Venice, as well as of Lehóczky's explorations of the city of Sheffield. Having said that, it is perhaps now worth moving the focus on to the definition of "translingual literature", neatly summarized in the following passage by Rita Wilson:

> Marked by those "multiple deterritorializations of language" that Deleuze and Guattari find in "minor literatures" (1986: 19), translingual narratives transform literary and cultural discourse, not only by relocating it on cultural margins, and by foregrounding intercultural dialogue and translation, but also by drawing discrete literary traditions into contact (2011: 236-237).

In her essay "The Salvage from Postmodernism: Nomadic Subjectivity in Contemporary Women's Poetry in the British Isles", Carmen Zamorano Llena examines the cases of three contemporary Anglophone poets— Fleur Adcock, Eavan Boland, and Carol Rumens—and the notion of "nomadism," related to literature. For the three writers, nomadism is seen as the necessary, contemporary means to express their subjectivity, a concept Zamorano Llena explains in these terms:

> As Probyn notes, the nomad or the tourist are figures that have recently become more present as models of the Western construction of the postmodern subjectivity, in which the individuals constitute their sense of identity out of their interaction with the various locations they pass through in their wanderings. According to Lawrence Grossberg, in this "nomadic subjectivity", "individuality functions as, and is articulated out of, a nomadic wandering through ever-changing positions and apparatuses". (38) The mutability of these locales and locations or systems of "how to know about the world" also determines the instability of the individual sense of identity and the construction of a "nomadic subjectivity", defined by Braidotti as the site where various axes of differentiation "intersect and interact with each other in the constitution of subjectivity" (2004: 12).

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[3] Braidotti is citing the French novelist Sidonie-Gabrielle Colette's *La Vagabonde* (1983: 26).

Zamorano Llena focuses on Carol Rumens's poetry and, emphasising her nomadism, she defines her as "an epitome of Braidotti's figuration of postmodern feminist subjectivity". Zamorano Llena writes: "Through her poetry, Rumens maps her own subjectivity, outlined by her experiences in her numerous temporary homes and by her reflections about the private and the public and their interconnectivity evoked by the locales she has passed through" (2004: 19).

Furthermore, Zamorano Llena (2004: 15) recalls Braidotti's figurative meaning of nomadism, in addition to its meaning of "physical travelling":

> Though the image of "nomadic subjects" is inspired by the experience of peoples or cultures that are literally nomadic, the nomadism in question here refers to the kind of critical consciousness that resists settling into socially coded modes of thought and behavior. Not all nomads are world travelers; some of the greatest trips can take place without physically moving from one's habitat. It is the subversion of set conventions that defines the nomadic state, not the literal act of traveling (1994: 5).

Zamorano Llena (2004: 25) concludes her paper by writing that Adcock, Boland and Rumens

> [H]ave become lifelong nomadic subjects that construct their own subjectivity through their revisitations of literary and geographical locales, public and private (hi)stories, myths and legends, nomadic wanderers for whom what is important is not to arrive, but as Tennyson states in "Ulysses", a poem on the experience of probably one of the best-known forceful nomads of all times, "to strive, to seek and not to yield".

These three examples of British "nomadic writers" may help us approach Lehóczky's "nomadic" work, keeping in mind that precisely for this reason any strictly national classification is useless (we know that Lehóczky still publishes in Hungarian).

We may say that in the act of travelling the nomadic author is looking for—or escaping from—a home, as a response to his actual being homeless, or better, as Braidotti (1994: 16) suggests: "As an intellectual style, nomadism consists not so much in being homeless, as in being capable of recreating your home everywhere", and Brodsky and Lehóczky offer their personal answer for a place to call "home".

Living between two languages and two cultures could be a blessing or a burden, as Adib Khan demonstrates in his essays "Diasporic Homes". Nevertheless, the act of writing is not "merely an indulgence in aesthetics or an expression of socio-political concern" but the necessary means which leads the authors to discover new aspects of their selves, as well as a unique possibility to enhance their creative power.

> The creative process itself leads to a search, discovery and an engagement with parts of the missing self, those elusive but crucial segments of one's past which appear to have gone missing and cannot be verified by the empirical reality of the present, but which, nevertheless, live in memory. In the anxiety to discover selfhood as a constant, it is inevitable to find multiple and composite images of identity, thus creating confusion and disappointment about missing the focus on a single vision of selfhood and a lack of anchorage to a specific place and community. Thomas Turino is of the opinion that a human identity evolves as result of a variety of experiences and interaction with the environment over a person's lifetime (Khan 2015: 9). [4]

I cannot but agree with Turino's opinion, deeming that the personal evolution of a "nomad" individual is faster and deeper than that of a "non-nomad".

1.5. Bilingualism: The Role of English

What is here stated makes us reflect on a common, constant feature in the works of the two authors examined: its dialogic nature, resulting from the continuous interaction of their two different cultures, the native and the acquired one. Bilingualism is the means that sparks this dialogue, compelling Brodsky and Lehóczky to interrogate themselves not only on their own identities, but also to "rethink" their artistic expression in their second language. With regard to this, I found Xuemei Xi's assertion in her essay "Souls in Exile: Identities of Bilingual Writers" (2007: 267), remarkable:

> As a result of this migrant status, many bilingual writers write their first cultural stories in their second language. This can be a characteristic symptom of bilingual writers who attempt to

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[4] Khan is quoting Thomas Turino's (2004: 13) essay, "Introduction: Identity and Arts in Diaspora Communities".

mingle nostalgia of the old or lost home with the new world in which they are living; and at the same time attempt to grab the readers in the second culture with the alien or exotic stories of their first culture.

Poetry stands out as the elected literary means for this process, since it expresses the authors' innermost feelings. A recent article by Aneta Pavlenko (2016), "Poetry in a Second Language", examines in detail aspects regarding the additional "pedagogic" functions of translating/writing poetry in a second language. Let us go through an extract from her essay.

The first advantage involves poetry's reliance on melodic, acoustic and metric patterns. These patterns differ across languages which is why we do not always enjoy foreign language verse. Translation and comparisons with existing translations raise awareness of these cross-linguistic differences, while listening to and rehearsing poems gives learners an opportunity to internalize the sounds and rhythms of the new language and memorize words together with stress.

The second benefit of close engagement with poetry is increased awareness of the function of syntactic and semantic structures. Learners asked to fill in the blanks in a poem soon realize that their options are greatly constrained by metric, semantic and syntactic patterns.

The third advantage of poetry involves memorability of poetic lines. Meter, rhythm, rhymes and other features that make traditional poetry aesthetically pleasing, if a tad predictable, have originally emerged as memory aids that allowed bards in the preliterate world to commit to memory large amounts of information. Meter and rhythm help organize the text and place constraints on word choice, while alliteration, assonance and rhymes function as memory cues in the search for the right word. These patterns are equally helpful to language learners interested in enriching their linguistic repertoires and mastering poetic lines that can take them beyond service encounters. […] Last but not least, writing poetry has traditionally been a superb way of playing with, practicing, and appropriating a second language. Reading and writing second language poetry offers learners an incomparable opportunity to unleash their creativity, make new words their own, connect with the new language in an emotional and personally meaningful way, and create a new linguistic self.

Poetry writing is a tool, then, to master a second language; sharing Pavlenko's opinion, the critics agree that Lehóczky and Brodsky undoubtedly benefited from this experience. The relationship between a transnational writer and his/her second language, namely English, is examined in this article "Transnational Writers and the Politics of the English Language" by Nyla Ali Khan, who in her studies extensively addresses themes pertaining to transnationalism. She asserts that the transnational writer appropriates the language of his adoptive country "to define the reality of a different culture". This new medium has a "syncretic character", which "erodes the concept and use of Standard English" (Khan 2017):

> In its evolved form, English challenges the traditional old culture/modern civilization binary by establishing itself as an oppositional discourse that does not unquestioningly accept the dominance of the "norm". The deployment of this oppositional discourse enables the writer to incorporate untranslated words or events of local significance in the text, requiring the reader to delve into the intricacies of a hitherto unknown culture. Typically, the transformations effected by transnational writers involve rebirths and renamings in the realms of language of language and the imagination. As Salman Rushdie articulates, the "migrant" becomes the "midwife" of language itself, "as that language is new delivered", because by making incursions into an alien language, the migrant is required to traverse new territories and discover "new ways of describing himself, new ways of being human" (Imaginary Homelands 24).
>
> Writers create a site on which local thought-patterns, structures, and rhythms are accompanied by the delineation of an alternative social reality. Their writings not only coin neologisms, but also incorporate indigenous languages and dialects that are signifiers of the local as opposed to the universal. The sustained opposition between two opposing discursive systems prevents the transnational text from conforming to a restrictive system of representation.

The unique nature of Brodsky and Lehóczky's writings—in which neologisms and foreign words are frequently found—is characterised by an eclecticism often unknown to monolingual writers. English is the language that allows and spreads new creative opportunities. Brodsky and Lehóczky explore in their writings the possibilities—but at first also the limits—of writing in their second language, while their identities are inevitably being transformed. Braidotti (1994: 15) suggests that "Writing is, for the polyglot, a process of undoing the illusory stability

of fixed identities, bursting open the bubble of ontological security that comes from familiarity with one linguistic site".

Thus, bilingual or multilingual authors seem to enjoy this "enhanced" creative power, a point stressed also by Magda Stroińska (2003: 97), who asserts that:

> The ability to speak several languages, on the other hand, implies access to multiple identities and more than one way of self-presentation, suggesting that a multilingual and a multicultural individual has several *faces* and wears several hats. A more positive way of seeing this is to say that they have a richer repertoire of linguistic and cultural choices and could fine-tune their behaviour to a greater variety of cultural contexts.

Nevertheless, a side-effect of this process—as I will point out in the last chapter of this study—is the inevitable loss of the mother tongue, which is often a less-spoken one. Fiona Doloughan (2016: 3) in her essay "English as a literature in translation" makes reference to Alastair Pennycook, who emphasizes the transnational nature of English, by asserting that "English is a language always in translation":

> [G]lobalizing tendencies that have permitted English to extend its reach, at the same time as increased possibilities for mobility and migration have brought diverse cultures into contact. Technological developments too have meant that it is not always necessary to move physically to another location to experience or partake of different languages or different worlds. This can be done remotely or at a distance. In addition, the fact that English is now used by more people for whom it is one of a number of languages rather than the sole language of communication allows for the possibility of a diversity of meanings as "English is always a language in translation, a language of translingual use" (Pennycook 2008). This "global traffic of meaning" (33) has the potential to open up communicative spaces, as languages operate alongside one another and come into contact, generating new meanings.

1.6. Travel Writing

Eric Leed, in his book *The Mind of the Traveler: From Gilgamesh to Global Tourism* (1992), extensively discusses issues related to travelling in the Western world, including heroic journeys, pilgrimages, scientific

expeditions, and the influence of travel on identity and society. He affirms that:

> The transformations of social being in travel suggest that there is no self without an other; and that, at bottom, identity is done with mirrors. This means that the transformations of the social individual that take place during the journey invariably result from a land of recognitions that moves, which suggests that identities are derived from identification acts (Leed 1991: 264).

We are all aware of the transformative effects that travel has upon us. In the nomadic authors, these effects are amplified and are explicitly used as a source for creativity. Amie Matthews (2014: 157) in her essay "Young Backpackers and the Rite of Passage of Travel: Examining the Transformative Effects of Liminality", contained in the volume *Travel and Transformation*, emphasizes this "transformative power" of travel, which she defines a "fecund space":

> Indeed journeys, touristic and otherwise, are firmly fixed in the cultural consciousness as avenues by which new experience and, by extension, new knowledge, can be sought and found. Correspondingly, as a number of scholars have pointed out (see, for example Bauman 1996, Elsrud 2001, MacCannel 1989), pilgrims, pioneers, explorers, sailors, tramps, hikers, exiles, nomads, tourists and wanderers litter our history, our cultural outputs and our imaginings as symbols of freedom, adventure, progress and discovery.

Travel literature offers a varied repertoire, as found in the odeporic narrative running through the *œuvre* of Joseph Brodsky, who has been compared by some critics to Joseph Conrad or Vladimir Nabokov, each having similar Slavic origins (Conrad was born in Poland, and Nabokov in Russia), each moving to an Anglophone country, and each later gaining fame through his English prose. However, it is not the purpose of this work to look for similarities between them, inasmuch as the three authors have profoundly different expressive registers, albeit that they all wrote travel literature in English.

For the scope of this study, I will limit my analysis to the literature mainly related to the city, which stands out as the privileged place of exploration of modern representations, as the urban site best reflects the changes a society undergoes.

1.7. Exploring the City. The *Flâneur*. Psychogeography

In his *City of Fears, City of Hope,* Bauman (2003: 3) writes:

> Admittedly, cities have been sites of incessant and most rapid change throughout their history; and since it was in cities that the change destined to spill over the rest of society originated, the city-born change caught the living as a rule unawares and unprepared. [...] In the last three-four decades "nearly all the world's major (and minor) metropolitan regions have been experiencing dramatic changes".

Patchworks of complex cultural and social realities, cities reflect positive and negative aspects of the contemporary world, and their potential as a place for intercultural dialogue and social cohesion is enormous, as Bauman points out (2003: 38): "The city is the dumping side for anxieties and apprehensions generated by globally induced uncertainty and insecurity; but the city is as well the training ground where the means to placate and disperse that uncertainty and insecurity can be experimented with, tried out and eventually learned and adopted".

Lehóczky accompanies her readers in exploring the city, at first through her eyes as a tourist and then as a new inhabitant, who in any case never feels "definitely" settled. Through similar wanderings "*à la dérive*", Brodsky discovers the real and the metaphorical space of Venice—a place which epitomizes his personal and artistic change—which he visits mostly in solitude.

The urban environment of Sheffield, as well as other European cities, is discovered in Lehóczky's works through what is defined a *flâneuristic* approach, inspired by the theories of Walter Benjamin, Guy Debord, and the Situationists. *Flâneurism* has since developed into a theorised science, "psychogeography", whose origins are very well described in the following passage by Merlin Coverley (2010: 9-10):

> The origin of the term [psychogeography, A/N] […] can be traced back to Paris in the 1950s and the Lettrist Group, a forerunner of the Situationist International. Under the stewardship of Guy Debord, psychogeography became a tool in an attempt to transform urban life, first for aesthetic purposes but later for increasingly political ends. Debord's oft-repeated "definition" of psychogeography describes "the study of the specific effect of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals".

> And in broad terms, psychogeography is, as the name suggests,
> the point at which psychology and geography collide, a means
> of exploring the behavioural impact of urban place.

In his pivotal work *Psychogeography*, first published in 2006, Coverley explores the close relationship between the city and its inhabitants, initially through its literary aspects, then through walking in the city. Extending his analysis to English literature, Coverley uncovers traces of psychogeography in Daniel Defoe and "the Re-Imagining of London", William Blake and his "Visionary Tradition", Robert Louis Stevenson and the "Urban Gothic", Arthur Machen and the "Art of Wondering", and Alfred Watkins and the "Theory of Ley Lines".

He continues by analysing the birth and rise of the *flâneur*, in France, with Guy Debord and the Situationists, to conclude with some protagonists of contemporary forms of psychogeography, literary and non-literary: J.G. Ballard and the "Death of Affect", Ian Sinclair and his "Rebranding of Psychogeography", Peter Ackroyd and the "New Antiquarianism", Stewart Home and the London Psychogeographical Association, and Patrick Keiller and the "Return of Robinson". All these authors develop new and interesting ideas about psychogeography.

Looking for other examples of *flâneurism* in English literature, some "unaware flâneurs" can be found in the characters of Dickens' novels, in James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), and in Virginia Woolf's *Street Haunting: A London Adventure* (1930).

Moving across the ocean, I will just cite here Paul Auster and his famous work, *The New York Trilogy* (1985), of which *City of Glass* is particularly significant for this topic. In Italian literature, I am reminded of Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities* (1974), a book which has inspired Ágnes Lehóczky's prose poems.

Lehóczky may embody an unconventional, contemporary *flâneuse*, a mediated figure, we could say, "something of the quality of oral tradition and bizarre urban myth" (Shield 94: 63), who discovers the city of Sheffield through its recreated past and, furthermore, through the recollected memories of her native Budapest. She is unconventional, inasmuch as she is a woman, as Kevin Milburn notices, since the *flâneur* has traditionally been a man, due to historical social constraints which prevented women from "indulgent practices such as late night urban strolling" (2009: 5). Therefore, "When they [the women, A/N] were in cities it was for function rather than leisure" (Milburn 2009:6).

Flâneurism today primarily serves as "a way of reading urban texts, a methodology for uncovering the traces of social meaning embedded in the layered fabric of the city" and secondly, "[A]s a

standpoint that helps to survive the shock and discontinuity experienced
in the modern city" (Featherstone 1998: 910). Milburn (2009: 10-11)
summarises this point, introducing the newest figure of the "cyber
flâneur":[5]

> [T]he impulse for flânerie shows no sign of receding; we now
> just encounter it in new ways, as highlighted by those involved
> in studies of the cyber flâneur a figure who, it has been claimed,
> is free "in the mode of Baudelaire in 19th century Paris, to
> wander freely through the spaces of the cyber city listening in to
> other people's conversation, perhaps choosing to participate,
> maybe opting simply to observe," an activity that begets the
> unsettling term "lurking", that transports us to the shadows of
> 1850s Parisian arcades; and to being a part of, but forever apart
> from, the crowd.

In our "shrinking" world, where global connectivity goes hand in hand
with the increasing isolation of the individual, the latest development of
the *flâneur* may be found in "modern technologies [which, A/N] allow
people to travel virtually and be a 'digital nomad' from the comfort of
their own home" (Harrington 2013: 7).

   We are all explorers then, "cyber-flaneurs" of virtual internet
cities: the real ones being reproduced in three-dimensional maps, or the
fictional ones, found, for instance, in science fiction videogames—a
theme also hinted at in Lehóczky's works.

1.8. The "Global Soul"

Before concluding this chapter, I must take the opportunity to mention
a voice that stands out from the crowd of scholars who praise the
"multicultural person", that of Isabelle de Courtivron, who in her
collection of essays (2003: 2) *Lives in Translation: Bilingual Writers on
Identity and Creativity* examines the work of some "nomadic writers".
She writes:

> Despite the fashionable postmodern emphasis on displacement
> and dislocation; despite the celebration of diversity and "more-
> than-ones", despite the intellectual persuasion that trying to find
> wholeness in our lives is a somewhat obsolete ideal, the anxiety
> about fragmentation and the search for existential coherence

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[5] The "cyber-flâneur" calls to mind Braidotti and Haraway's "cyborg" and "post-
human" characters.