

**THE DEMOCRATIC LANGUAGES OF EXILE: READING EUGENE JOLAS AND
YVAN GOLL'S AMERICAN POETRY WITH JACQUES DERRIDA AND HANNAH
ARENDT**

DELPHINE GRASS

In most European nations, two visions of language are superimposed: whereas a national language is a construct which is thought to maintain social and cultural cohesion, democracies are made of individual speech acts and interventions while not being limited to a single language. The aim of this article is to argue that in order to have a healthy public sphere, democracies need to challenge the monolingual paradigm maintained by nationalisms. Firstly, this paper will explore the conflicted role of language within democratic nation states by exploring the place given to the concept of mother tongue in defining citizenship after the Second World War. To do so, I will analyse the works of two philosophers, Hannah Arendt and Jacques Derrida, who have defended the rights of refugees and migrants to participate in democratic life while maintaining opposite positions on the politically emancipatory potential of the mother tongue within the public sphere. Secondly, I will problematize both Arendt and Derrida's positions by examining the works of two poets from the Alsace-Lorraine borderland, Yvan Goll and Eugene Jolas, who were both marginal in what Yasemin Yildiz defines as the 'monolingual paradigm' since both grew up in a borderland area between Germany and France where multilingualism, rather than monolingualism, was the unofficial linguistic norm.¹ Written in English, the adopted language of their exile, the poems chosen for analysis explore the possibility of salvaging a new democratic consciousness from the statelessness of their multilingual condition, which they saw reflected in the multilingual crowds of immigrants in New York. The poems are interesting for two reasons: firstly, Jolas' poem 'Migration' politicises multilingualism by

symbolising the plights of New York immigrant workers in their different languages. Secondly, Goll's *Fruit from Saturn*, written in a language he had acquired as a refugee, explores the power of un-naming and deterritorialising spaces through an unidiomatic use of English.² My analysis of their poems will finally show how both works bypass any simplistic dichotomy between monolingualism and multilingualism by engaging with the emancipatory potential of exile within language itself.

Owning a language: Arendt and Derrida on the significance of the mother tongue in the public sphere

In a televised interview for German television on 28 October 1964, Günter Gaus asked Hannah Arendt: 'Do you miss the Europe that existed before Hitler? [...] What has remained and what has been lost forever?' She replied: 'What remains? The language remains.' Conceding that it is possible to lose one's mother tongue, she added: 'I have always consciously refused to lose my mother tongue. [...] What is one to do? It wasn't the German language that went crazy. And, second, there is no substitution for the mother tongue.'³ More than nostalgia for her native country, Arendt, who was exiled in America since 1941, saw her mother tongue as a place of refuge guaranteeing an autonomy of thought at the root of all democratic communities. In *Le Monolinguisme de l'autre*, Derrida showed that assigning privilege to the mother tongue in this way had profound political implications in defining who could participate and who was excluded from the democratic public sphere. In a long footnote dedicated to analysing Arendt's statement, he focused particularly on her claim that a language could not go mad.⁴ As we shall see, the question of language is, for both, intimately connected to the question of exile and the opportunity for political participation in the democratic sense. How does the monolingualism of nation states affect the inclusiveness

of the democratic process? What would it mean for democracies to be more open to the languages of others?

Arguing that democracies depend on the power of speech of their participants, Arendt makes several references to the importance of mastering language in her works on political philosophy. Quoting Shelley in *The Life of the Mind*, she explains that the task for thinking, like poetry, is made possible by our capacity to use metaphors: ‘Shelley says, the poet’s language is “vitaly metaphorical”, it is so to the extent that “it marks the before unapprehended *relations* of things and perpetuates their apprehension”’ (italics added by Arendt).⁵ This capacity to create new metaphors in order to see and communicate what may otherwise remain unseeable in our thinking is perhaps what makes the ease with which one uses mother tongues so indispensable to the thinking process according to Arendt. The plasticity with which one uses one’s mother tongue could guarantee access to a special kind of alterity of thought and therefore form the basis of intellectual autonomy necessary to reason independently.

Arendt’s writings on Eichmann’s use of language indeed point to the intellectual roots behind her preference for thinking within her own mother tongue, an intellectually motivated choice which also rests on her understanding of the role played by language in totalitarianism. On her observations of Eichmann’s use of language, she writes:

when Eichmann was sent to show the Theresienstadt ghetto to International Red Cross representatives from Switzerland – he received, together with his orders, his ‘language rule,’ which in this instance consisted of a lie about a nonexistent typhus epidemic in the concentration camp of Bergen-Belsen, which the gentlemen also wished to visit. The net effect of this language system was not to keep these people ignorant of what they were doing, but to prevent them from equating it with their old, ‘normal’ knowledge of murder and lies. Eichmann’s great susceptibility to catch words and stock phrases, combined with his incapacity for ordinary speech, made him, of course, an ideal subject for ‘language rules’.⁶

The new language, or ‘language rules’, uncritically absorbed by Eichmann is described as a system of prefabricated metaphors or ‘stock phrases’ far removed from the everyday use of

German. This new language acts as a barrier between him and the reality of his actions – as if the imposition of certain turns of phrases prevented him from having a meaningful dialogue with himself on the ethical nature of his actions.

In addition, Arendt saw the acquisition of a new language through exile as potentially undermining the political status of refugees. In ‘We Refugees’, she exemplifies her critique of assimilationism by using the example of German Jews in America who decided to only speak English for fear of being identified as Jewish refugees.⁷ According to Arendt, this wilful renunciation of one’s linguistic identity acts differently as a barrier to reality by preventing Jews from coming to terms with the political reality of their condition. In exchange for their assimilation, Jewish refugees in America lose the possibility of speaking on behalf of the political condition that beholds them. In these texts, Arendt portrays the natural relationship between the mother tongue and the self as a political weapon against totalitarian thinking, seeing the free use of the mother tongue as a touchstone of subjective freedom. As noted by Jennifer Gaffney in her analysis of Arendt and Derrida’s stances, ‘when taken together with her analysis of Eichmann’s empty talk, Arendt’s remarks in the interview suggest that just as our radical singularity arises from our thrownness in language, so too does our responsibility for the world or the nexus of relations that grant us this singularity’.⁸ Arguing that Derrida ‘overlooks the political concerns at work in Arendt’s commitment to her mother tongue’, Gaffney rightfully sees in Arendt’s position a reification of singularity which Nazi totalitarianism tried to annul.⁹ We may add that while Arendt is speaking from the position of someone who has been forced into exile from what she considered to be her home, Derrida’s experience and perspective on colonialism renders his relationship to home and to his first language more problematic.

In his commentary on her declaration on the mother tongue in 'Language Remains', Derrida argues that Arendt's interpretation of the role of the mother tongue can lead to the very blindness which Arendt disparaged in her analysis of totalitarian language. He writes:

Quand une mère perd la raison et le sens commun, l'expérience en est aussi effrayante que quand le roi devient fou. Dans les deux cas, ce qui devient fou, c'est quelque chose comme la loi ou l'origine du sens (le père, le roi, la reine, la mère). Or cela peut parfois arriver comme un événement, sans doute, et menacer un jour, une fois, dans l'histoire de la maison ou de la lignée, l'ordre même du *chez-soi*, de la *casa*, du *chez*.¹⁰

Here Derrida notes that the loss of sense, when it happens within the familiarity of one's language, is more alienating than the experience of learning a new language. What if our acceptance of the mother tongue could make us more susceptible to accept any folly disguised within it? After all, and in spite of Arendt's claims, did not Eichmann accept orders within his own idiom? In *Le Monolinguisme de l'autre*, Derrida not only questions our tendency to universalise the experience of the mother tongue but also the privileged position of the mother tongue within nationalism's cultural framework for citizenship.

The primacy of the voice over writing, which Derrida deconstruct in his early work *De la grammatologie*, can be read as an early attempt to wrestle cultural essentialism from citizenship. For Derrida indeed, no voice is ever entirely the mirror of one's individuality or group identity. Derrida asserts that the notion of sign 'reste [...] dans la descendance de ce logocentrisme qui est aussi un phonocentrisme: proximité absolue de la voix et de l'être [...]. Hegel montre très bien l'étrange privilège du son dans l'idéalisation, la production du concept et la présence à soi du sujet.'¹¹ While Arendt tried to reinstate the political status of singular voices in totalitarian contexts, Derrida's critique of monolingualism gets to the root of reciprocity between nation and subjectivity. Deconstruction reveals that the polyvocality of languages does not only reside externally to a single language, it is inherent to our singular and individual ways of speaking languages. At all times, we are speaking a language that is

both ours and that of others, that is both familiar and foreign: ‘Je n’ai qu’une langue, ce n’est pas la mienne.’¹² Placing his thinking in the context of the colonialism he experienced in Algeria by learning French, the mother tongue for Derrida shapes a particular understanding of subjectivity which serves to hierarchize individuals’ roles within a community. The natural ownership of a mother tongue (or ‘idiom’, as is Derrida’s choice of word in *Le Monolinguisme de l’autre*) is what insures the patrimonial sovereignty of a language as private property.

The different political meanings attributed to the mother tongue by Arendt and Derrida can be further explicated by analysing their views on the relationship between private property and democracy. In *The Human Condition*, Arendt writes that the rise of the city-state meant that the political participation of the male citizen relied on ‘a sharp distinction in his life between what is his own (idion) and what is communal (koinon)’. A private life, or private ownership of life in the form of slaves, wife and territory, was a condition of one’s participation in the public sphere of politics by virtue of its transparency, or invisibility. Arendt writes: ‘The realm of the polis [...] was the sphere of freedom, and if there was a relationship between these two spheres, it was a matter of course that the mastering of the necessities of life in the household was the condition for freedom of the polis.’¹³ In Arendt’s views, the mother tongue is the democratised sublimation of this logic of private property within language. While the realm of the private ‘idion’ (‘what is one’s own’) is the guarantee of an individuality necessary for autonomous participation within ancient Greek democracy, one’s idiom, or mother tongue, allows a similar intellectual retreat from communal life. For Arendt, this retreat within the realm of private thought and language is what paradoxically safeguards the democratic public life of language, for it guarantees the biological existence of the free-thinking subject. The difference between Derrida and Arendt’s thought on the subject is that Arendt seems to dismiss the machinery of exclusion at the root of which belonging to a

language is belonging to a people: the Romantic tradition of thought which attaches a person to a community via the language spoken rather than the nature of one's participation within it.¹⁴

Both Derrida's conception of the notion of idiom and Arendt's conception of the realm of 'idion' open interesting avenues for thinking through multilingualism as a space of political intervention. Seeing the mother tongue "idiom" as the necessary "idion", or property 'necessary to master' for effective political intervention prevents Arendt from articulating a politics which could accommodate outsiders in the democratic public sphere. While not being the advocate for multilingual democracies, Derrida, on the other hand, places otherness at the centre of our relationship to language and of his concept of democracy by complicating our understanding of the self-same within language. Whereas multilingualism and exile co-exist in Arendt's thinking as far as exile can be the negative experience of losing one's mother tongue and therefore of losing one's place in the public sphere of politics, Derrida considers everyone, including monolingual speakers, to be the borrowers rather than the owners of their own language.

Reflecting on Adorno's attachment to his mother tongue, Derrida too chooses to frame the ethical challenge of mother-tongue writing within the context of ancient Greek democracy:

comment cultiver la poéticité de l'idiome en général, son chez-soi, son *oikos*, comment sauver la différence linguistique, qu'elle soit régionale ou nationale, comment résister à la fois à l'hégémonie internationale d'une langue de communication (et pour Adorno, c'était déjà l'anglo-américain), comment s'opposer à l'utilitarisme instrumental d'une langue purement fonctionnelle et communicative *sans* pour autant céder au nationalisme, à l'Etat-nationalisme ou au souverainisme Etat-nationaliste, *sans* donner ces vieilles armes rouillées à la réactivité identitaire et à toute la vieille idéologie souverainiste, communautariste et différentialiste?¹⁵

Taking Derrida's broad definition of monolingualism as the language of subjectivity which preserves the univocity of power, I shall ask: what imaginary space does multilingualism

occupy in the political unconscious of nationalism? Can we imagine spaces for thinking the political that are not monolingual? At stake in the dichotomy between multilingualism and monolingualism is not only the normalization of the voice of national citizens above stateless or foreign ones, but the inscription of territoriality on the speaking body, whereby 'to have' and 'to be' a certain nationality becomes interchangeable on the international market of citizenship. What other functionings of democracy can be imagined through the prism of having more than one language? Can an apossessive democratic public space be salvaged from the helpless position of exile? In the next parts of this essay we will look at the works of poets from the multilingual borderland regions of Alsace and Lorraine who, during their time in exile in the United States, mixed translanguagual and multilingual forms of writing in an attempt to stretch democracies beyond the territories of the nation.

Listening to the multilingual crowds of Jolas's 'Migration'

A speaker of French, German, English, and the Lorrainian dialect of his childhood, Jolas left Lorraine for America in 1909 with the dream of learning the language of the country in which he was born but had only lived in for the first two years of his life. Jolas made his multilingual activism the foundation of his entire life as an editor, poet and journalist. A champion of Joyce, creator of the avant-garde journal *transition* and a writer of multilingual poetry which he hoped would inspire a new transatlantic language, Jolas worked throughout his writing career as a journalist in America and in Europe. After World War II, he participated in the effort to denazify the German language by working with newspapers which had propagandic editorial lines. As well as his literary writing, Jolas's memoir *Man from Babel* gives an impressive comparative insight into intellectual life in Germany, France and the United States in the interwar period, an intellectual life which he viewed, we shall see, as being indissociable from the state of each language in their respective country. The

political dimension of what he was trying to achieve, its attempted departure from jingoistic monolingualism, is what I shall examine here in light of the earlier discussion of Derrida and Arendt's understandings of the relationship between politics and language.

Jolas viewed the country of his birth in quasi-utopian terms. America not only symbolized modernity and freedom, it was above all a place where the political conflicts plaguing the European frontier-land could be overcome. Throughout his works, Jolas confronted nationalist ideologies with his condition as a multilingual, borderland writer. In doing so, he also articulated the question of statelessness beyond binary notions of sedentariness or exile. With the disputed, multilingual borderland of Lorraine in its background, Jolas's works constantly try to eschew the dangers of trying to solidify political allegiances based on a people's language skills and cultural identity. Journalism, or to be more precise, the linguistic plurality of the American press, symbolized for him the political freedom which was lacking in Europe:

I believe that if only one phenomenon could be cited to prove America's innate democracy, the permission given to hundreds of newspapers all over the land to appear in the many tongues of Europe, would suffice. New York, Chicago, Saint Louis, Pittsburgh and other cities have a multiplicity of alien newspapers that service a large foreign-born public and express the streams of psychic tendencies of the Neo-Americans. In New York I often sensed a particular excitement in seeing French, Yiddish, German, Slovak, Italian, Hungarian, Syrian and other newspapers exhibited on the news-stands and being bought by Americans with foreign faces and foreign names. Freedom of the press in the United States includes linguistic freedom.¹⁶

Jolas saw the press as a vanguard medium of expression of the new world, a form of post-national public sphere which had the potential to shape a new, cosmopolitan political discourse. In his preface to *Words from the Deluge*, Jolas claims indeed to have discovered a new 'polyglot' language in America: 'I call it *Atlantic*, or *Crucible Language*. It is the result of the inter-racial synthesis that is going on in the United States [...]. Part of this poem is written in *Atlantic Language*.'¹⁷ If the hyperbolic excess of Jolas's claims to have created a

transatlantic language isn't always convincing, the use of journalistic prose in his poems, as well as his critical reflections as a theoretician of multilingualism in literature, is a fruitful terrain of exploration. My aim in this section is to focus on the first part of *Words from the Deluge*. Reading it as socio-historical subtext of the Atlantic Language Jolas claims to have discovered, I will analyse the political dimension of Jolas's ambitions for multilingual literature.

Published in 1941, the first part of Jolas's poem *Words from the Deluge* entitled 'Migration' can be read as a long narrative poem in its own right. 'Migration' represents workers of various nationalities going on strike, which the narrator and speaker of the poem, a city journalist, is in charge of reporting:

I came into the city room and wrote a story
Typewriter whir sounded lazily in my ears
Hello cried the city editor into the telephone
A slugfest among the strikers skidoo he said to me.¹⁸

The I of the poem, who is both journalist and poet, hints at the difficulty of writing his piece. As if to liken the strike to a spectacle, the lazy sound of the typewriter is echoed by the city editor's reductive representation of the events as a 'slugfest'. The difficulty of finding an appropriate language able to translate what he witnesses at the strikers' march thus seems of capital concern throughout the poem.

Throughout the poem indeed, Jolas describes the workers' march and the words he hears as he attempts to report them. Unlike other works by Jolas which tend to idealize their speakers, or build new speakers through the creation of a new international language, this particular poem focuses on the workers as real-life characters:

Ils étaient déjà las at the threshold of the day
Through the streets of the slums went a hunger plaint
Slunk a fatigue wrapped in slatternly dresses
Und in ihren augen there lay a somber weeping

And over them lingered the memory of a kermesse
They remembered autumn festivals in old-world villages¹⁹

The poem jumps from French, to German, to Spanish as the reporter hears and reports the words from the crowd. In effect, the strikers' march is portrayed as an event in search of a new language, and the multilingual crowd as a crowd in search for a new home to replace their 'old-world villages'. The multilingualism of the poem turns every voice into the representation of a particular language and nation, so much so that languages here are mostly relegated to a symbolic, representative status. The performative character of the poem's multilingualism is, more than the individualized words or sentences in various languages, the bearer of the poem's political subtext. The immigrant's plight starts with the pragmatic incommunicability of their stateless predicament to those in power, an incommunicability which cannot be resolved by simply adopting a new language. Although it is a condition which can be shared by all (French, German, South American, Spanish), it is communicable to none in the sphere of political action.

Like Hannah Arendt before him, Jolas thought refugees were at the 'vanguard' of humanity.²⁰ In his memoirs *Man from Babel*, this optimism is often tainted by the reality of totalitarianism. He recalls a dinner among artist friends in Berlin in the early 30s: 'Around a perfectly appointed table, the twenty-odd guests spoke in almost every European language.' Further, Jolas reflects that once Hitler had come to power, 'Exile and death have been the lot of most of those who sat around that table.'²¹ It is in the exile from Europe and nationalist cultures specifically that Jolas bases his hopes for a new internationalist paradigm. To Jolas, this cosmopolitan, multilingual elite represented the antithesis of Nazi parochialism. It is indeed possible to compare the New York crowds of 'Migration' to his description of the crowds listening to Hitler's speech he witnessed in Saarland shortly before Hitler's accession to power. Hitler's words, he tells us, were 'catapulted over the heads of the naïve and already

nazified mob, and they had to me an ungrammatical ring, as if spoken by an illiterate. Then the roar began once more, and this time it seemed like an irrational grunt emitted by one huge throat.’²² The ‘single throat’ of the crowds attending Hitler’s parade stand in stark contrast with the multitude of languages and voices described in ‘Migration’, or at the Berlin dinner table. Hitler’s ‘illiteracy’ and the poverty of his language are, almost certainly, to be interpreted as a sign of ideological parochialism by Jolas – a parochialism which to him directly translated into a wilful incompetence to engage with difference at a cultural and ideological level. Meanwhile, New York’s workers, as well as its multilingual press, typified for Jolas the hopeful future of democracies.

For different reasons, the optimism in the American world order is also tainted in the poem. Here, the mills’ equanimous treatment of the workers’ fates threatens to turn into indifference:

C’était des Euraméricains à l’imagination de feu
Ils portaient en eux les lourdes glèbes ancestrales
Et j’avais une grande pitié pour les immigrants my comrades
[...]
Le paysage prolétarien frissonait toujours
Daily they looked into the insane eyes of their comrades
Who stood watching the dance of the fanatic wheels²³

As a supra-national space, the capitalist metropolis still does not guarantee the rights of the workers it houses. The dreams of the stateless people seem uncompromisingly shattered. The poem articulates the notion that more than simply dreaming of an American way of life, the multicultural workers’ dreams resemble a ‘borderless cosmos of brothers’.²⁴ The dream of belonging, but also of being able to find a home for the multilingual crowd, is predominant in the poem. Moreover, the poem often contains passages where both the memory of Jolas’s Lorraine and the present in the United States seems to merge into one narrative:

In the town of the lonely aliens where once I lived
In the sick town where pain is always guilt

The world here is mutilation the world is pain
The alien workers are still here in slums and mills²⁵

Where is the 'here here' of the poem, if I may grossly paraphrase Gertrude Stein? In the chiasitic structure of these four lines, the here of Jolas's poem is quickly met by a 'still here' of the workers plight in America. The constant threat of statelessness experienced by Jolas in his native frontierland also remains a territory, a frontier, to be conquered in the New World within the context of capitalism. The chiasitic structure of memory in the poem directs us not only to a continuity between Europe and the United States, but to an inverted mirror where the problems of nationality are being re-formed in the crucible of this new economic context.

One particular character, a trope of modernist and particularly cubist meta-language, is revisited in the poem. Words are indeed personified as 'harlequins' in the line: 'Les mots étaient devenus des harlequinades', ('the words had become harlequin pranks').²⁶

Traditionally a servant in Italian Commedia dell'arte, the harlequin trickster figure exemplifies the ambiguity of power relations between subalterns and their masters. Here, the harlequin, an emblem of fragmentation and of the possibilities of expression opened by a revolution of perspective in Cubism, is also a metaphor for the variety of languages spoken by the workers.²⁷ On the one hand, the multiplicity of languages spoken, the polycentric voices of the poems threaten to undermine the univocity of English as the dominant language. But on the other, although the words in the poem seem liberated from the conventions of traditional meaning and history, the workers do not dominate the language which they have opened the way to. The cosmopolitan world which they are building is not yet theirs to mould politically, for they lack a language which would allow them to translate their multilingualism into a common struggle that would also be mindful of their individuality.

Jolas saw himself as a language refugee of a different kind to Arendt: Jolas's multilingualism made him a refugee of nationalism who was made landless by a monolingual

ideology of culture and language. The poem 'Migration', however, is quite singular in his works in its effort to craft a socially aware discourse of representing the displacement and homelessness which he is trying to objectify within himself elsewhere in his autobiographical *Man from Babel*. As well as using national languages symbolically in the poem, 'Migration' reveals the inherent multilingualism of each Indo-European language at use in the poem. Words such as 'villages', 'festivals', 'kermesses' and 'fatigue' are indeed all used in more than one language: French, English, Spanish and German.

Elsewhere in his works Jolas's belief in the power of a transatlantic multilingual idiom to overthrow fascist nationalism does not go very far in engaging a new poetic relationship between territoriality and language. As noted by Kelbert, 'being as he was on a quest for a poetic language based on foreignness turned into a creative principle, Jolas presents his readers with a poetics consciously structured around an essentially translingual ideal'.²⁸ What's more, Jolas's preface reveals that he also has a tendency to reterritorialize multilingualism within a deterministic and racialized vision of history, seeing this as a political solution to the problem of statelessness and migration. Arguably, if his goal of creating a singular idiom out of the 'inter-racial synthesis' of America does not create a new space for foreignness within language, it nevertheless sheds light on the issue of translingual citizenship. In 'Migration' and elsewhere, Jolas shows us how, in a context where public spheres are nationalized, the voices of those adopting and being adopted in this nation's language can be too easily ignored.

A World without proper names: Yvan Goll's Kabbalistic poetry

Yvan Goll, a Lorrainian poet who also fled war torn trilingual Lorraine during the war, turned to writing English during his time in New York. Whereas Jolas had hoped to syncretize his multilingualism within the melting pot of American-English, Goll wrote and published poetry

in distinct idiolects: French, German, and – due to the difficulty of finding translators in America – English.²⁹ In many ways, Goll's statelessness was double, for he was both Lorrainian and Jewish. The problem of accountability and of who listens to the plight of stateless individuals was, in Goll's English works, turned into a quasi-mystical question. During his time in New York, Goll turned to the Kabbalah and wrote poems in a newly acquired English inspired by Jewish mysticism. Goll saw Kabbalah indeed as a philosophy directly related to poetry. Talking of the thirteenth-century Kabbalistic mystic Abraham Abulafia, Goll writes: 'Je considère que cet homme du 13^e siècle est le précurseur direct de ceux qui découvrirent l'“alchimie du verbe” comme Rimbaud, les “mots en liberté” comme Apollinaire, le “mot en soi” comme Mallarmé'.³⁰ Modelled on negative theology, Goll uses Kabbalah to speak of the unspeakable of exile. In the first and second stanza of *Fruit from Saturn*'s opening poem 'Atom Elegy', Goll presents us with a divided planet, or matter:

Thus the promethean spark returns
To its dismantled fount

In pitchblende orchards grew the holy fruit
Sweet atom fissioned in its foetal centre
To fate's twin death-birth.³¹

The location of the poem is imaginary, allegorized as that of being the experience of exile itself. The text immediately confronts us with a fraught beginning: the poem's fatalism lies in the fission, the division of the form of matter presented as the atom, or the planet, which is inscribed in its origin. The title of the collection, *Fruit from Saturn*, reflects both the radical separation and inner exile of which the poem seems to be the fruit. Beyond earthly notions of exile as a marginal state of being, fission and retraction (into a 'foetal centre') are pivotal to the poem's quest for poetic and linguistic renewal.

The opening act of withdrawal in Goll's poem ('Thus the promethean spark returns/To its dismantled fount') can be further illuminated in the context of its Kabbalistic

inspiration. In his *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, Gershom Scholem explains that in Kabbalah, creation happens not through ‘promethean’ expansion but through an act of limitation: ‘According to Luria, God was compelled to make room for the world by, as it were, abandoning a region within himself, a kind of mystical primordial space from which He withdrew in order to return to it in the act of creation and revelation.’³² ‘Tsintsum’, Scholem adds, can thus be considered as God’s ‘exile into Himself’.³³ Similarly, in the exilic context of Goll’s poem, the act of creation conceptualizes space negatively or relationally to the other. The space of creation, in this context, is something that is both limited and borne out of a concern for what is external to one’s self. As we shall see, this vision of space is further problematized in the poem’s relationship to naming and territoriality.

The poem’s shifting images between matter, surface and territory is typical of the Modernist art by Arp, Tanguy and others who have come to illustrate Goll’s works.³⁴ ‘Danger de mort’ by Arp [see figure 1], another Alsatian borderlander and friend of Goll, typifies for me the slipperiness at work in their creative understanding of language as a potentially dangerous form of naming.

In this particular work, identity and territory are dangerously merged: while the lines seem to delimit a face, their shakiness threatens to make this face *disappear* at any moment.³⁵ In fact, the use of pencil reinforces the precarity and ephemerality of its apparition on the page. Like naming, the drawing of the face, the method of its presence, is a mode of appearing which also threatens its very existence. Arp’s distrust of naming of any kind (he used randomly both the German and French version of his first name throughout his life) is reflected in his refusal to choose or settle for either the French or German language elsewhere, such as this extract from ‘Configuration strasbourgeoise’ translated from German into French by Arp and Roland Recht in 1963: ‘je suis né dans la nature, je suis né à strasbourg. je suis né dans un nuage. je suis né dans une pompe. je suis né dans une robe.’³⁶

The poem refuses to localize the 'I's place of birth geopolitically or culturally. As noted by Eric Robertson: 'While [Strasbourg] is foregrounded by its very inclusion of the title and the first line, the fact that it is placed second in a list of five statements, and in lower case, seems to undermine the importance of the geographic locus'.³⁷ Instead, the meaningfulness of origins is questioned through the shifting of an I towards another. Effectively, to be born in Strasbourg is translated into being born in a cloud. The 'I' of the poem is therefore multiple and its proper noun (which like simple nouns are not capitalised either in the German and French versions of the poem) translatable: its shifting from one state into another is its very identity. The 'I' is reflected in a long chain of language, as if it tried to catch itself being an object within language. Through this poem, it is the idea of identity as irrevocable essence, or *identitarianism*, which Arp exorcises: the I identifies with the self-fictions made possible by translation, this infinite possibility to decline itself, to outplay linguistic and cultural contexts. This playful relationship to oneself as other through language is typical of the very idea of configuration which titles this poem as well as a series of art works by Arp.³⁸

Goll's Kabbalistic poetry can be interpreted as a subversion of the act of naming in its own right. The division or scission mentioned in the opening of the poem is related further on to the split of the word of God into different names:

In the beginning there was the word
In the beginning there was the number
The word: Prime essence out of which
Through seven thousand nights of labor
The Kabbalist compounded seventy names of God

The word: the Guide to the Perplexed
Out of the coal of memory³⁹

In Goll's Kabbalistic prophecies, planets, matter and words are initially linked and at the same time tragically split. The possibility of being understood or of understanding the world

through logos is here replaced by the power of foresight: a desire to encompass the perplexing vicissitudes of historical tragedy, but which fail to break the spell of historical repetition imagined in the poem. By inviting the reader to read the words beyond what they traditionally name, that is, beyond their wordly context, the reader is invited to reflect on the nature of language as a naming system capable of obfuscating temporal reality. The world as geopolitical reality, in Goll's poem, has been temporarily abandoned in order to avoid being absorbed in its naming totality.

In the poem 'The Magic Circles', the mills of New York described by Jolas in 'Migration' have been replaced by the mill of time:

Caught in the circle of my star
Like a scorpion in the circle of chalk
Turning with the wheel which turns in my heart
And with the mill of universe grinding the time.⁴⁰

The poem describes the spheres of the atom and the sphere of the universe-planet as game players of his heart, the circle of time as the 'croupier of the zodiac'. The universe described here is indeed first and foremost a universe where it is forbidden to name, which makes it a universe without a world. This lack of identity, held open by language, is potentially filled with redemptive qualities:

With worn-out keys I strain to unlock the circle
I cast anchor of alphabet into oblivion
I plant the root of words in the furrows of my forehead
I tend the magic rosery
The rose of wind the rose of sand
[...]
And while I dive into the mirror
A thousand circles scatter to the border of the world⁴¹

Casting the worldiness of language 'into oblivion', the I in the poem seeks to dislodge meaning from the referential language of the present. Words become signs in the divinatory

sense of the term: omens, signals to another constellation of meaning beyond the present reality of the world. The multilingual space of the poem is here created on the basis of multireferentiality rather than linguistic difference: poetry becomes a key or matrice to unlock different worlds within language; the sign itself becomes a bearer of multiplicity. The world, rather than the poet, is here cast into exile.

Arendt's analysis of statelessness in the twentieth century can help us to contextualize the lack of world in Goll's writings even further. Arendt notes that the lack of world in Jewish thought is, contrary to much critique of Judaism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries including Marx's, not a mark of singularization, but the mark of a profound alienation from the division between state and civil society, between human rights and the rights of the citizen of modern nations. In his reading of Arendt's account of statelessness and the Jewish question, Artemy Magun reminds us indeed that: 'stateless people can be helped by a "charity" but they do not have rights. [...] An exceptional singularity precedes a standardized individual unit, but it is equally a result of alienation.'⁴² By forcing him outside of the nation-state paradigm, exile condemns Goll to literally step off the map of the man-made world altogether. There are no laws, no social and political organizations which recognize his rights as a man without citizenship. The worldlessness of Goll's poems are an inner vision of his own alienated condition, where even language as an organizing force is gazed at from the outside. Goll, unlike Jolas, recognizes that this alienation is also, from a certain point of view, a position of privilege: to be cast away from the world is potentially to grasp its language. In the sense that the language of citizenship and rights is not particular to any nation or territoriality, it is a language which belongs to no one. But this realization is perhaps what marks the possibility for this language to become everyone's.

Conclusion

Arendt sees democracy as the place where a proper language, the intimacy between the speaker and mother tongue, can freely take form and be expressed in the public sphere. In this place, the collective political space of democracy both protects and thrives on the sovereignty guaranteed by the proper and by the idea of a certain co-ownership of language by all. For Derrida on the other hand, democracy begins in the conception of democracy as bare space; where the proper, the self-same are put aside in order for another, non-monolingual language to emerge:

C'est le sens propre, le sens même du même (ipse, metipse, metipsissimus, meisme, meme), c'est le soi-même, le même, le proprement même du soi-même qui fait défaut à la démocratie. Il définit la démocratie, et l'idéal même de la démocratie, par ce défaut du propre et du même. Donc seulement par des tours, des tropes et du tropisme. [...] Cela revient à dire, au sens strictement platonicien, qu'il n'y a pas de paradigme absolu, constitutif et constitutionnel, pas d'idée absolument intelligible, pas d'eidos, aucune idée de la démocratie, il n'y a pas non plus, en dernière analyse, d'idéal démocratique.⁴³

What if poetry as a place where language(s) can be remade and reborn held that space open?

It is precisely this question which the poems of Jolas and Goll open the way to. In its unequivocal, that is plurivocal rendering of the crowds of immigrants asking for equality, we are faced with the radical commonality of their demands which nationalities and languages seem only to superficially keep apart. Yet it is only in honouring the multilingualism of the crowd that the poem can divulge their fundamental commonality against nationalism at all – by proving that the idiomatic difference within the crowd makes no difference in building that reciprocity. Jolas's internationalist writing, when it holds back from naming and creating a *new* language from the multitude, authorizes a space for democracy which can only be held open through the reciprocal multiplicity and difference of languages. Goll, on the other hand, uses the language of the Kabbalah to give force to an exilic reality in search of an expression. But unlike Jolas's, Goll's poetic language remains impassively foreign to the world of politics. The use of English in *Fruits from Saturn*, the language of Goll's host as a refugee in

New York, remains undomesticated, devoid of idiomatic characteristics. Reminding me of Arendt's earlier statement on the power of metaphors to express the invisible, *Fruits from Saturn* becomes a space where the power of exile is returned to creation itself through language and thus, to thinking in the Arendtian sense. By using a language of words 'as primal as snow', Yvan Goll invites us to imagine a world beyond the geopolitical borders of proper names, in the hopeful 'desert of reality' that is the reimagined spatial language of his exile.⁴⁴

¹ Yasemin Yildiz, *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012).

² Yvan Goll, *Fruits from Saturn* (New York: Hemisphere Editions, 1946). Eugene Jolas, 'Migration', in *Words from the Deluge* (New York: Gotham Bookmart, 1941), pp. 4–15. Both publications are currently out of print.

³ Hannah Arendt, "'What Remains? The Language Remains": A Conversation with Günter Gaus', in *The Portable Hannah Arendt* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), pp. 3–22 (pp. 12–13).

⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Le Monolinguisme de l'autre* (Paris: Galilée, 1996), pp. 100–9.

⁵ Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (San Diego: Harvest Book, 1978), p. 102.

⁶ Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem, A Report on the Banality of Evil* (London: Penguin, 2006), pp. 85–6.

⁷ Hannah Arendt, 'We Refugees', in *The Jew as Pariah* (New York: Grove Press, 1982), pp. 55–65.

⁸ Jennifer Gaffney, 'Can a Language Go Mad? Arendt, Derrida, and the Political Significance of the Mother Tongue', *Philosophy Today*, 2015, Vol.59 (3), (523-539), pp. 529-530.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹⁰ Derrida, *Le Monolinguisme de l'Autre*, p. 106.

¹¹ Jacques Derrida, *De la grammatologie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), p. 23.

¹² Derrida, *Le Monolinguisme de l'autre*, p. 13.

¹³ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 30–1.

¹⁴ See for example Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Addresses to the German Nation*, ed. by George Armstrong Kelly (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1968), pp. 119–120, and Johan Gottfried Herder, ‘Treatise on the Origin of Language’, in *Philosophical Writings*, ed. and transl. by Michael N. Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 65–164. Both legitimize nation-state sovereignty through the idea of a common language.

¹⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Fichus, Discours de Francfort* (Paris: Galilée, 2002), p. 25.

¹⁶ This extract of Eugene Jolas’s journal can be found in ‘Eugene and Maria Jolas Papers’, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, New Haven, CT. Box 11, Folder 214, p. 139.

¹⁷ Jolas, *Words from the Deluge*, preface.

¹⁸ Jolas, ‘Migration’, *Words from the Deluge*, p. 6.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

²⁰ See Arendt in ‘We Refugees’.

²¹ Jolas, *Man from Babel*, p. 126.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 138.

²³ Jolas, ‘Migration’, *Words from the Deluge*, pp. 9–10.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

²⁷ For an analysis of the role of Harlequins in Picasso’s Cubist paintings, see Timothy Mathews, *Literature and the Pursuit of Decay in Twentieth-Century France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 29–32.

²⁸ Eugenia Kelbert, ‘Eugene Jolas: A Poet of Multilingualism’, *L2 Journal*, 7 (2015), 49–67 (p. 50).

²⁹ See James Philips, *Yvan Goll and Bilingual Poetry* (Stuttgart: Akademischer Verlag Hanz-Dieter Heinz, 1984), p. 239.

³⁰ Goll, ‘Dialogue sur le verbe’, *Manuscript*, p. 178. Citation found in Sami Sjöberg, ‘Remaking the Present Through Language: Messianic Time in the Works of Yvan Goll and Isidore Isou *contra* Benjamin and Agamben’, *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*, 14:1 (2015), 199–216 (pp. 2–3).

³¹ Goll, *Fruit from Saturn*, p. 11.

³² Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), p. 261

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ See Yvan Goll, *Four Poems of the Occult*, illustrated by Fernand Léger, Pablo Picasso, Yves Tanguy and Jean Arp (Kentfield, CA: Lewis Allen Press, 1962).

³⁵ Hans/Jean Arp, *Danger de mort*, 1954, Pencil on laid paper 322 × 257 (12 5/8 × 10 1/8).

³⁶ Arp, *Jours effeuillés* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), pp. 75–6. A detailed analysis of the translation into French can be found in Eric Robertson, *Arp: Painter, Poet, Sculptor* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 198.

³⁷ Robertson, *Arp*, p. 198.

³⁸ For an analysis of Arp's artistic and literary configurations, see Robertson, 'Hans Jean Arp: Text and Image', in *New Readings*, 2 (1996), 37–52 (pp. 41–5).

³⁹ Goll, *Fruit from Saturn*, p. 11.

⁴⁰ Goll, *Rings of Saturn*, p. 23.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 26.

⁴² Artemy Magun, 'Karl Marx and Hannah Arendt on the Jewish Question: Political Theology as a Critique', in *Continental Philosophy Review*, 45:4 (December 2012), 545–68 (p. 559).

⁴³ Jacques Derrida, *Voyou: deux essais sur la raison* (Paris: Galilé, 2003), pp. 61–2.

⁴⁴ Goll, *Fruit from Saturn*, pp. 35–6.