

# MODERN MUSIC

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## THE DESTINY OF EXILE

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IT is wonderfully affecting, catching in a letter of Henry James's the cry "What is the meaning of this destiny of desolate exile—this dreary necessity of having month after month to do without our friends for the sake of this arrogant old Europe which so little befriends us?" A more than personal expression is eloquent in these rueful phrases. The paradoxical condition of apparently involuntary and none the less automatic expatriation itself seems to speak in them through the most illustrious of its American protagonists; in all the importance given it by his own large figure and those of the multitude of his fellow actors. The experience of banishment at the hands of an invisible Fate; the dark repulsiveness of that which is germane, intimate and malleable; the equally strange attractiveness of that which is unassimilable, unnegotiable, eternally exclusive, are suddenly substantial about us, whatever our situation. Maladjustment, incomplete accommodation to the world, of which a "desolate exile" in foreign parts is but a form, dogs us all today; affecting a mass of general experience. And effective expatriation, deflection of the struggle for accommodation to a sharply alien environment, is but one particularly desperate and ill-starred solution of the almost general dilemma.

Other periods have had such quandaries; and other periods have had their responses to it in the form of deflection into exile. The famous habits of Byronism, Gauguinism, Turgueniev's thin cosmopolitanism, were all shapes of expatriation. At present, however, they seem to spring about us, particularly in the careers of Americans. In fact, most of the present "exiles" appear to be

Americans; possibly because the material means to realize the condition are still theirs. In any case, one finds compatriots in Paris and London, Florence and Rapallo, very comically and tragically inhabiting social climates unnatural to them; chained to the attitudes of lookers-on; "strangers and sojourners feeding on the picturesque surfaces of things;" like James himself, as his editor saw him, "never quite able to work their lives into the texture of their surroundings." The many lamentations over Waste Lands and proclamations of an Age of Hate filling contemporary American literature, declare their numbers; expressive as these are of the egoistic incapacity for contact, sympathy and compassion typical of rootless men. So, too, the freakish conversions to "royalism, classicism, anglo-catholicism" and similar barren efforts to touch the living principle of acutely alien societies through assimilations of their intellectual forms.

Ironically significant of the depth of this deflective tendency in the contemporary American psyche, is the existence of a machinery for the creation of exiles. Not all the desolate "destinies" scattering disgruntled Americans over Europe are subjective in origin, automatic, and attributed by their victims to "conditions" and "environments." A number of the expatriations are directly brought about by the action of the foundations controlling funds destined to the advancement of the arts. Those of us concerned with the development of music are familiar with the cases of composers who prefer practising their crafts in this country, but are forced abroad by the terms of awards closed to resident Americans; and their lots have many parallels among workers in the other mediums. It is a little as though where it could not be caused with inner consent something in the American nature insisted on forcing the banishment.

Whatever the source, it is scarce lighter than when James first questioned it. It is a "destiny" still, unanalyzed and uncontrolled. In all his greatness, James himself never found the motive of his own conduct, for himself or for his fellows. Half his work from *The Jolly Corner* to *The Ambassadors* deals with it as a subject. But the reading of the riddle as the blind impulsion of American nature to sanctify the senses, embrace the flesh and harmonize the appetites in beauty through association with the civilizations

which had sanctified, embraced and harmonized them, did not reconcile him with his situation and fate, and end the crosspull and the sense of exile. Yearnings to quit England and come home were spasmodic in him to the end; it is peculiarly ironical to hear that after his death his ashes actually found their way westward. Scarcely more adequate is the ingenious explanation original with Van Wyck Brooks, the inference of an external social condition frustrating the artist in America, permitting him adjustment to it only at the price of his integrity and a compromise of his genius; deceptively offering him the alternative of a flight actually as ruinous as surrender itself. We are the benefactors of work done in America in too great a quantity to permit us to hold any general condition responsible for the frustration of genius, and to suppose the esthetic climate actually unfavorable; forbidding as it may periodically appear.

Naturally the foundations have their good reasons for their policy of banishment. In sending young composers to Rome, one of them acknowledges the musical backwardness of the capital, while attributing immense powers of general stimulation to it. Another declares that it sends its scholars abroad for the purpose of guarding itself against exploitation; the willingness of the applicant to leave his home and sacrifice its ties appearing to it a guarantee of seriousness! A third contents itself with the excuse that since living costs are lower abroad, expatriation increases the efficacy of the prize-money. It is impossible not to perceive the speciousness of these explanations. The Roman environment is stimulating to almost no one occupied in doing anything besides making classical measurements. It is infinitely relaxing. Italians themselves will tell you they find it so; one does not have to read Debussy's account of the emptiness of his years at the Villa Medici to be sure of it. Even if it were bracing, it might prove far less so to budding talent than some less pompous but spontaneously elected milieu. In the meantime, the young artist is deprived of the opportunity of learning to draw stimulation from his native environment and thereby enriching it as well as himself. . . . Readiness to sacrifice native ties for the sake of art is no infallible criterion of character and talent. There are other less fallible tests of them. . . . As for the economic argument, it too tastes



of the rationalization. While the dollar may be of greater value in France than in America, the benefit of the exchange to the artist is illusory. His greatest capital lies in social contacts, in the very large sense of the words. And while prize-money spent in the French provinces may provide him with six months more living than in America, it may also accustom him to a kind of existence without bearing on his vital problem, meanwhile depriving him of opportunities for forming relationships capable of insuring his future.

No, the whole dark matter must go onto the stocks again for examination. Possibly the time is ripe for understanding. Our growing awareness of the rationalizations in all current readings of the riddle makes it appear so. Let us see what we can ascertain for ourselves, scrutinizing the matter for what it offers to the eye. First, the aspect of apparently involuntary and none the less automatic expatriation, as distinguished from that directly attributable to the action of the foundations. What greets us here is the vision of individuals unable to transfer their interest to materials and free their imaginations under American conditions; frequently haunted by paralyzing social fears; released from these fears among unfamiliar and novel surroundings; and among them able to touch things through the oblique approach of looker-on, stranger, sojourner. This is wholly what we see; this, and the fact which appears through a contrast of the two so differently affecting environments. For their antithesis is not, as the exiles themselves have led us to suppose, the opposition of an environment intrinsically unfriendly to art with one intrinsically inviting to it. We have already disposed of the accusation of America as a place necessarily hostile to the talents which it so generously proliferates. And the mass of the trials endured by European creators laughs down every assumption that Europe is an atmosphere necessarily easy for the innovator. Has not the old world a great roster of failures, frustrations, expatriates? What actually meets our eye is the contrast of an environment arousing associations by virtue of language, manners, tonality, color, with the individual's past experience: childhood, familial, adolescent; and one having no tendency of the sort. The favorableness of the foreign environment prized by the exile is proportionate to its irrelevance to his early experience!



The tendency of things to call to consciousness early sensations, perceptions, feelings, thoughts and volitions as a bar to expression! The picture is sufficiently bizarre! Our reason rejects it; association with childhood commonly figuring as an attraction in things, naturalizing, pre-digesting them, as it were; rendering them readily assimilable, adding relish to their essences. Promptly we wonder: might not this childhood, this early experience, have been bitter; a not unusual circumstance? Still, this does not explain the repulsiveness of the association, since recollection of painful things in many cases becomes a pleasure: the generalization of experience, the vision through them of an abstract, impersonal law frequently removing their intensest sting. No, the exile's paralysis in the face of the tendency of things to recall sensations and feelings which existed along with them or which are similar to them is not to be explained on the grounds of the painfulness of memories. It is to be understood in fact only as the consequence of the tendency of associations with the past to reanimate in certain individuals volitions abhorrent to consciousness and repressed as socially dangerous, forbidden, fatal; their painfulness flowing from their connection with this latency.

A dangerous volition connected with infantile sensations- - - . A forbidden object shrouded among familiar things- - - . Is it possible at this minute to continue refusing to see the figure which has long been revealing its presence behind its dense black veils; now standing obscure and mysterious still, but unequivocal, beautifully accountable? The Freudian concept of "The Mother" is certainly not yet as simple to our understandings as it is bound to be; perhaps not as clear to science itself as the future will make it. But it is sufficiently simple, sufficiently lucid to let us recognize through it the magnetism of an object at once terribly attractive and repulsive to those beneath its spell; and resisted consciously as well as unconsciously by mankind as a whole. This indeed is what we have to face. Its agency in the "destiny of exile" is scarcely to be disputed. Flight from one's country is but the means of combat open to those too much under its spell to confront and meet and check it on its ground. The exile repairs to an environment exempt from its influences, hence favorable to the appetite for contact and experience which their pervasiveness discourages. But he does so at vast expense. In surrendering his

native environment, he surrenders all hope of harmonizing his own impulses through that which, as the product of impulses related to his own, is best fitted to accommodate them and respond to them. He goes to live among people either exiles like himself and equally disabled, or only partially responsive to him because of the complete dissimilarity of their backgrounds and early experiences. Hence his "desolation" in the midst of crowding culture, art, historical atmosphere, duchesses, bull-fights, King William streets, classical monuments and all the rest of the foreign paraphernalia; the saltiness of his bread, the steepness of his stairs; the winds from the Euxine Pontus blowing bitter on him.

That certain external influences may contribute power to this "complex" is not to be questioned. It is possible that America, for instance, develops nourishment for it. Settled by people variously maladjusted; led into the deification of woman by the comparative rarity with which she figured in the early days, the States may actually constitute something of the "unfavorable environment" which the expatriate finds here. But that is problematical; what we do know is that the immediate cause of the "desolate destiny" of involuntary and none the less automatic exile is in the mysterious shape we glimpsed a moment since, "The Mother," and to be understood and finally controlled by unflinching confrontation.

As to the artificial exile encouraged by the foundations, that is largely to be understood as a consequence of the real thing itself. The administrators are doubtless influenced by the rationalization of many generations of "artists" concerning the advantages of Paris and of Rome. Besides, who can be trusted more completely than themselves to feel sterility in the American air? Some of the motives of their attitude toward their scholars, to be sure, may have an even less lovely complexion. But they doubtless make unprofitable study; particularly since one suspects that the general practice of these funds and academies will change once the "destiny of exile" is thoroughly unmasked. For it is no "Fate;" and certainly no tougher than many conditions once thought obligatory and foredoomed, and long since wrested from the hands of chance.