## Regretted Absences and Insecure Spaces: Voluntary or Enforced Exile in German-Language Writing by Women

## Sarah Colvin University of Edinburgh

Chambers 20th Century Dictionary defines exile as 'enforced or regretted absence from one's country or home [...] to expel from one's country, to banish'. The definition of the verb in particular implies force, even violent force. We tend to imagine violence and force as things that affect us externally: one is expelled and enters exile. But a coinage - for example - like 'Innere Emigration', often used to describe those writers who, although they did not see themselves as supporters of the Nazi regime, chose to stay in Hitler's Germany, suggests that violence need not operate in an immediately visible or tangible way. It also helps us to imagine the move into exile as a retreat inwards as well as (or instead of) an exit. Despite my example, I am not proposing to discuss here the issue of inner versus outbound emigration at the time of the Third Reich. Instead I shall be considering even less tangible problems of presence and absence, pertaining in this case to writers and three different but related spaces (which we might also regard as 'homes' in a social and linguistic sense): bodies, names, and language. I shall begin by explaining why I regard these as 'homes' but also - as my title suggests - as 'insecure spaces', and go on to ask whether the move into exile from such spaces which we find in women's writing is to be regarded as voluntary or enforced. I shall not be arguing that regretted absences or insecure spaces are problems exclusive or essential to women.

Basic to this discussion is the notion that our bodies, names, and language are closely involved with one another. On this point, for the time being, I am going to refer you to The Authorities: Freud (writing on 'the idea of our body' in The Ego and the Id) finds that 'the ego is

39

first and foremost a bodily ego; it is not merely a surface entity, but is in itself the projection of a surface'. Building on this, Lacan contends that 'the name confers legitimacy and duration on the ego (recasting the ego as a subject in language)'; and Butler in her most recent work follows Lacan when she claims that naming is what first constitutes that bodily ego in language: 'it is by being interpellated within the terms of language that a certain social existence of the body first becomes possible'. Bodies, then, are constituted as subjects, or beings in language, when they are named: when, for example, the baby is born and the announcement is made, 'it's a girl'. This last example is commonly used and to some extent illuminating, but it does not make clear that naming is not one fixed event, but a repeated and repetitive process whose effects and significance may vary from situation to situation.

Naming, as Butler has recently suggested with reference to racialist abuse, can be a question of life or death.<sup>5</sup> An Australian I knew in Germany was named 'Türke' (the assumption being that he was a Turkish immigrant) and badly beaten up. Being named Jewish, Black, Communist or gay can have similar or worse consequences. The way we are named has other important consequences, as it profoundly affects our own ability to name: our mastery in language. Toni Morrison spoke of the central position of language in our existence in her 1993 Nobel Lecture in Literature: 'We die. That may be the meaning of life. But we do language. That may be the measure of our lives'.<sup>6</sup> Existence is, then, in some sense existence-in-language.

What I investigate here with reference to women's writing is how insecure those spaces which constitute our bodies' social existence in language can be. I contend that not everyone's space is equally 'theirs' - that some are under constant pressure to relinquish their claims on space and are thus pushed towards exile. I shall argue that some of us, because of the way we are named (which may but does not necessarily mean gendered) do language more proprietorially, that is, with greater mastery and security, than others. That the examples I take are both literary and to varying extents fictional is not, I think, a methodological difficulty, especially as linguisticians have begun to support the value of studying constructed or fictive language.<sup>7</sup>

Women are not generally perceived as authoritative, or even authorised, users of language. At the end of the last decade, Dale Spender published her study The Writing or the Sex? Or why you don't have to read women's writing to know it's no good, in which she collected data for the percentage of time taken up by women in conversation; the percentage of women whose books are published; and the number of books by women taught on university literature courses. Her results suggest that very little is almost invariably perceived as too much. Women lay claim to between 8% and 42% of conversational space; and both men and women perceive an 8% (female) to 92% (male) contribution as a fair division, while a 42% female share is experienced as unfair, because too much. A 20% share of women's books on the literary market is seen with alarm as flooding. There is also the question of authority or rightness that justifies a claim to space; in Spender's study, men and women students attributed higher value to the same text if a male name rather than a female name were attached to it.8

It is worth bearing in mind that, through writing, both women writers and their women characters can aquire, in a fictional context, a degree of authority and speaking space that exceeds what is available to them in a social context. As readers of women's writing we are likely to be exposed to the voice of the female character or narrator or poet for a high percentage of the reading time, and we are likely to empathise with or attribute a level of authority to that voice. But this should not be allowed to obscure the complications that may palpably remain for the writer: such as constituting and defending one's space or social identity within a social/linguistic economy that would edge out the 'wrong' kinds of bodies. 'Wrong' bodies, briefly, are those which do not reflect a dominant (most often white and/or male and/or heterosexual) prototype. They therefore lack interest and value; they are not perceived as 'bodies that matter'.9 Often they are scarcely perceived at all: what is immaterial is also invisible and is not allocated space, not even legislative space, as the remarkable history of homosexuality laws in Britain and Germany illustrates: where male homosexuality was almost invariably a crime, lesbianism was almost invariably not.

Writing, especially by those who are outside various dominant

groups, may be seen as a clawing-back of space, an assertion of one's materiality or social and linguistic existence. It may therefore be inevitable that we find illustrations and investigations of the relation of speech, name and self occuring in literary self-expression. The contemporary Austrian novelist, dramatist and enfant terrible, Elfriede Jelinek, for example, has shown herself intensely aware of the gendered social power play that is language in all her work. The novel that established her reputation, Die Liebhaberinnen (1975; women as lovers, 1994), is a sustained tragicomic parody of a romantic novel. The dismal interaction of her protagonists, Heinz and Brigitte, exposes the socioeconomic circumstances that determine gender relations, while the insidious language of romantic love that supports and perpetuates these circumstances is grotesquely parodied. 10

Jelinek's play Krankheit oder Moderne Frauen, first performed in 1987, 11 is another polarised picture of gender relations which draws much of its satirical energy from the characters' overtly gendered and gendering self-representation on stage and in speech. Two men and two women (both women are also vampires) are the main cast of the piece, divided initially into heterosexual couples: Dr Heidkliff and his assistant Emily (who is a vampire version of Emily Brontë), and Dr Benno Hundekoffer and his wife, Carmilla (who later becomes a vampire, like her namesake in Le Fanu's Gothic novel<sup>12</sup>). In the course of the play the couples split and re-form: Emily and Carmilla establish a lesbian relationship, Heidkliff and Benno ally themselves as sporting companions. The asymmetry in this is not, of course, accidental: when men bond the process takes place within socially predefined boundaries, often involving an approved structure like sport; when women unite that expression of solidarity may be pushed outside social bounds and designated forbidden, subversive, lesbian.

Heidkliff, who as a dentist and gynaecologist is an expert in authoritatively invading other peoples' spaces; asserts both his economic power as a professional man and his licence to speak: 'Ich spreche jetzt [...]. Ich zahle [...]. Ich kaufe etwas. Ich frage nach dem Preis. Es ist mir erlaubt' (193; 'I'm speaking now [...]. I pay [...]. I buy something. I ask after the price. I am allowed to do that'). Within Heidkliff's definition, Emily only has such licence when it is granted to her, in a limited form, by him: 'Ich gewähre dir die Erlaubnis zu

einem oder zwei Worten' (194; 'I give you permission for one or two words'). Overt or even grotesque asymmetry also characterises the linguistic stances of Benno and Carmilla: where the first thing Benno does is aggressively to name himself and thus assert his social/ linguistic space - 'Mein Name ist Benno Hundekoffer. Damit es alle gleich von Anfang an wissen' (200; 'My name in Benno Hundekoffer. Just so everyone knows that right from the start') - Carmilla can scarcely remember her name: 'Wie heiße ich doch gleich? Ich vergesse es immer wieder' (205; 'What am I called again? I keep on forgetting'). It is for Benno to name Carmilla, and to reiterate her naming, and this he promises to do 'immer wieder': again and again, in a performative process that will consolidate his activity and his mastery of language and naming, her passivity and immateriality. Carmilla's is not a body that matters, as the audience will see when she dies on stage during the first act, but - as Jelinek specifies in her stage directions - none of the other characters notice or care. With their speech, the men's bodies assert their agency; the women's bodies on the other hand are mutilated and invaded: Carmilla dangles dead in the gynaecologist's chair while other characters peer into her vagina or reach into her body to extract her organs, and Emily regularly walks on stage with the stakes that are traditionally hammered into the vampire's chest protruding through her nurse's uniform.

The power of the men's speech is shown in its efficacy - Heidkliff's speciality is the speech act: 'Ich schließe die Fenster. *Tut es*' (228; 'I'll shut the window. *He does it.*). Theatre of course lends itself particularly to illustrating the language of the agent, and Jelinek later shows us Heidkliff and Benno practically bursting with their own agency:

Suddenly there is bright, glistering light over the landscape. Heidkliff and Benno Hundekoffer come trotting on in tennis gear and with rackets, bouncing dynamically [...]. They don't hold still for a moment, are bursting with activity. [...] They're so energetic they can scarcely walk.<sup>13</sup>

Interestingly, Jelinek uses this stage direction to render comic the men's claim to agency: the comedy of the scene undermines their mastery at the same time as it is represented. The method is the same one more traditionally used in men's jokes about dominant women.

As vampires - for Emily has meanwhile intervened and redefined the housewife Carmilla with a bite to the neck - the women's exile from the world of 'normal' language and naming is implicit. They have ceased to fit the bill: sucking blood from children instead of suckling them; becoming sexually unavailable to men within their lesbian relationship. But Jelinek makes no attempt to turn this into a utopia of female freedom: in going into exile in this way the women are risking whatever subject status, whatever life within language they had. They are choosing transgressive pleasure, and such a choice is analogous to risking death. Butler has explained with reference to Lacan that desire is

impelled and thwarted by the impossible fantasy of recovering a full pleasure before the advent of the law. This return to that site of phantasmatic abundance cannot take place without risking psychosis. [...] Psychosis appears not only as the prospect of losing the status of a subject and, hence, of life within language, but as the terrorizing spectre of coming under an unbearable censor, a death sentence of sorts. 14

In Jelinek's scenario, the women are not (yet) dead, but un-dead, and inhabit an un-space: a space without potential for linguistic agency, as Emily explains: 'Wir sind die Untoten, Carmilla! Merk dir das endlich! Wir können uns nicht kräftig offenbaren! [...]. Carmilla, versteh doch, wir sind und sind nicht!' (230; 'We are the un-dead, Carmilla! Grasp that, will you! We can't assert our existence powerfully! [...] Carmilla, you must understand, we are and are not!').

I have contended that theatre lends itself particularly well to representing the physical connotations of language. The stage provides a space into which bodies can be interpellated - in this sense it is analogous with language - but it is also a space in which those bodies can demonstrate the extent of their mastery of language, and of their social space within language. Staged bodies may be seen to be 'at home in' or 'in exile from' the space they have been allotted. In Krankheit oder moderne Frauen, Emily and Carmilla inhabit an insecure space, insecure because it is not 'theirs', as Jelinek's visual parody for the opening scene of Act 2 makes clear:

a charming bedroom in the style of the nineteen-fifties, twin marriage beds linked together by a headboard, bedside tables, bedside lamps, a radio, etc. But: instead of the beds there are elegantly finished coffins, filled with earth, in the style of the fifties [...]. On the left in the beds Emily and Carmilla are tucked up cosily, the latter with her hair in curlers.<sup>15</sup>

The bizarre vision brings home to us what Emily and Carmilla are not, that is, secure within the defined and approved social space that is heterosexual marriage. 'Their' space is in-between: between life and death, between desire and heterosex, between speech and silence. None of these things are, metaphorically speaking, their 'home'.

In this sense, Elfriede Jelinek's drama of language and sex in insecure spaces has parallels with a piece by another Austrian writer: Ingeborg Bachmann's short story 'Ein Schritt nach Gomorrah' ('A Step Towards Gomorrah'). The story was first published in 1961 and is not only unusual for its time, in that it deals fairly openly with lesbian desire, but also unusual within the collection of short stories in which it is published, Das dreißigste Jahr (The Thirtieth Year, 1987): of the seven stories, 'Ein Schritt nach Gomorrah' is one of only two that present the reader with an overtly female narrative perspective (the other one being 'Undine geht'; 'Undine goes'). It describes the encounter between two women, one the hostess and the other a younger guest, that takes place in the night after a party.

In Bachmann's story, both the female protagonist, Charlotte, and the young woman who is pursuing her, Mara, are shown to be on the edges of social spaces that are not properly theirs. Mara, the instigator of the encounter, is marked by her name as an outsider: she is 'eine Slowenin, halbe Slowenin, von der Grenze [...] der Name klingt auch danach' (111; 'a Slovenian, or half Slovenian, from the border [...] and her name sounds like it'). The first place Mara takes Charlotte is 'draußen' (112) - outside the flat which the latter usually shares with her husband - and on the way out both women are overcome by the need to run, like schoolgirls, as if someone or something were pursuing them. For Charlotte, leaving her normal sphere of existence becomes a kind of escape. It later transpires that that space was not, anyway, 'hers', but primarily her husband's, and that this is not coincidental,

but part of an inevitable pattern: 'Es war gar nicht daran zu denken, daß jemals etwas mit ihr zu tun haben würde in einer Wohnung, solang sie mit einem Mann lebte' (123; 'it was inconceivable that anything would ever have to do with her in an apartment as long as she lived with a man'). And it is not until Mara begins physically to destroy the contents of the flat that Charlotte acquires a sense of freedom, a will to search for a new form of existence.

Where Jelinek's Emily redefines the housewife Carmilla as a vampire and introduces her into the in-between space of the un-dead, Bachmann's Mara renames Charlotte, calling her 'Liebes, liebes Schönes' (118; 'dear, beautiful one'), and she, too, takes the other woman into spaces outside of normal social existence. Having led Charlotte outside, Mara is the one who opens the door to a different kind of inside, into the overwhelmingly red night-club, 'höllenrot' ('red as hell'), with its overtones of damnation, transgression, internal passages. Images of water and the depths fill this space: bodies flow and swell as if they were going down with a ship, everything is moved by an impulse 'in die Tiefe' (114; 'into the depths'); when Mara dances she seems to be swimming, and her return from the dance floor to Charlotte is a watery homecoming: '[sie] tauchte, heimkehrend, mit ihren Händen unter Charlottes Hände' (115; 'returning home, she dived with her hands under Charlotte's hands'). For Mara - who is a redhead in a red skirt with red lipstick - the female corporeality of the nightclub is a space in which she can 'come home'; Charlotte by contrast rejects its appeal - she insistently describes the ambience as 'lustlos' (113 f.; literally, 'without desire') - and preserves her exteriority in this alternative space even after she has taken leave of her old, conventional home. We must assume that, like Jelinek's 'heroines', she is somewhere in-between. It is certainly for the in-between that she expresses utopian longing, for a liberating sleeping beauty-style slumber that shakes off the gendered connotations of the fairy-tale: 'Komm, Schlaf, komm, tausend Jahre, damit ich geweckt werde von einer anderen Hand. Komm, daß ich erwache, wenn dies nicht mehr gilt - Mann und Frau. Wenn dies einmal zu Ende ist!' (125; 'come sleep, come upon me for a thousand years, so that I can be awoken by a different hand. Come, so that I awake when 'man' and 'woman' are no longer valid terms. When all this has finally come to an end!').

Where Mara's desire is focused on the possession of another body, Charlotte desires language and mastery. At first the two seem inextricably linked: in seizing control of language or naming, Charlotte fantasises mastery as the subjugation of Mara. Within this fantasised existence in language, Charlotte would be at home, in her own home, a secure space; an idea which is expressed in precisely those terms: 'Wenn sie Mara lieben könnte, wäre sie nicht mehr in dieser Stadt, in dem Land, bei einem Mann, in einer Sprache zu Hause, sondern bei sich - und dem Mädchen würde sie das Haus richten. Ein neues Haus. (128; 'if she could love Mara, she would no longer be at home in this town, in the country, in a man's house or in a language, but in her own home - and she would arrange that house for the girl. A new house.')

The house, as Mererid Puw Davies has recently argued, is not only 'a symbol of masculine power' and a 'fantasy of security', but also central to interpretations of the Bluebeard story, 17 which structures Charlotte's next fantasy scenario: a secret room containing the dead bodies of seven male lovers. Charlotte does not feature in this scenario in the woman's role of the threatened wife, but as the controlling Bluebeard figure who has condemned himself to kill what he loves and lock it away, in order to preserve the purity or security of his house. It is Mara who is subjected to Charlotte's performative reiteration of patriarchal control: 'Mara würde [...] nie erfahren dürfen, was ein Zimmer mit Toten war und unter welchem Zeichen sie getötet worden waren. [...] Nie sollte Mara fragen dürfen danach, oder auch sie würde unter den Toten sein' (135; 'Mara would [...] never be allowed to find out what a room full of dead bodies was and why they had to be killed. [...] Never would Mara be allowed to ask, or else she too would be among the dead').

But even the usurped house of the patriarch does not provide a secure space for Charlotte. Like Emily and Carmilla, both Charlotte and Mara finish up dead, if only metaphorically, in sleep — 'Sie waren beide tot und hatten etwas getötet' (136; 'Both were dead and both had killed something'). The transgression Charlotte fantasises takes place, physically and linguistically, only in her fantasy, assuming that we read the episode in the night-club as a 'real' occurrence rather than as an extended metaphorical description of a sexual encounter. But even fantasised transgression has fatal consequences; figurative

death follows her figurative transgression. As in Jelinek's play, there is no utopian 'home' in-between, in exile from existence within language (unless we understand utopia according to its etymological origins, as an un-space). By the end of the story it is 'too late' (136), and Bachmann evokes a highly feminised image of the two women that signals their return inside the parameters of the licit: 'Sie zogen ihre Kleidung aus und legten sich nebeneinander - zwei schöne Schläferinnen mit weißen Achselspangen und enganliegenden weißen Unterröcken' (136; 'they took off their clothing and lay down next to each other; two beautiful sleepers with white shoulder straps and close-fitting white petticoats').

In Jelinek's and Bachmann's texts, similar sets of related ideas pertain to bodies, selves, language, and homes. In both cases, the exit (or attempted exit) from a normed, named existence-in-language is analogous with lesbian sexuality, and in both cases the transgressive assertion of the self in exile (even though the body gendered female was already to some extent outside the 'home' space) leads through the in-between to the ultimate social exile, death. In this context I think the question must be raised whether self-expulsion from the realm of language, or from self-expression within normed existence, can really be described as voluntary. Does the exile *choose* to leave home, or is this a choice that is not a choice, because pressure or violence is involved? We are back to the question of 'belonging' in language and the ownership of the name: the life-or-death question. I shall pursue it with reference to two writers who have faced cultural or racial as well as gendered naming.

The in-between is the space evoked by Emine Sevgi Özdamar in her prose piece 'Mutterzunge', from the collection of the same name. 18 Like Jelinek's characters, Özdamar's first-person narrator is a kind of 'Doppelgeschöpf' ('double creature'), in that she is caught in the space between dual cultural and linguistic positions. As a Turk living in Germany, Özdamar herself is an exile in a tangible sense; but in 'Mutterzunge' ('Mother Tongue') she also gives expression to the sense of not-being that is not-being-in-language. As the narrator of this piece, she describes herself in both cultural and linguistic contexts as incompletely present: in speaking German her tongue is twisted because she has 'lost' her mother tongue, Turkish; but when she is in

Turkey her biological mother points out her similarly incomplete linguistic and physical presence there: 'plötzlich springst du über nichtgesagte Wörter' ('suddenly you leap over unsaid words'), and 'Du hast die Hälfte deiner Haare in Alamania gelassen' (7; 'you have left half you hair in Alamania'). At the end of the short piece the narrator is shown trying to make contact in a Berlin police station with a young Turkish man, who has been arrested as the brother of a criminal called Mahir. She offers him her pullover for warmth, saying, 'Bruder, zieh es an' (12; 'brother, put it on'). But Mahir's brother looks at her as if she were speaking a foreign language. It is unclear at this point whether the original words were spoken in German or Turkish: the narrator has already told us that she remembers sentences spoken in Turkish as if they had been German. Although she addresses the man as 'brother', his response to her words, in whichever language they were, makes clear that he is not her brother - he has been taken by the police as Mahir's brother, and that naming threatens violence. He and the narrator do not share a family bond, and they do not seem to share a linguistic bond; her language, unlike that of the male authorities who have arrested him, is ineffective: he does not put the pullover on.

Even though Özdamar's prose piece is not obviously influenced by the gender question, it does remind us of the linguistic power positions that are associated with gender. We are told of a woman in Turkey whose son is arrested at her home, but who is powerless to control the entry of the policemen into her house because she cannot read the search warrant they claim to have. In a literal sense, her home is an insecure space. She is also subject to their naming of her son as an anarchist, a naming which results in his arrest and subsequent hanging. In court, the judges sentence the young man to death, as his mother has anticipated: 'die Richter werden sprechen' (8; 'the judges will speak'). 'Sprechen' here refers to a classic illocutionary speech act: the speaking of the sentence is equivalent to the act of execution. Again, the linguistic mastery of the male authorities is superior both to that of the narrator and of the fatalistic mother. And again, violence and death are associated with subjugation to that mastery.

In her Nobel speech, Toni Morrison maintained that 'oppressive language does more than represent violence; it is violence'. 19 Violent

language forces others into exile, debility, death; oppressive speech oppresses the speech of the other, and its effect is often silence: the other is banished from the linguistic floor. Writing has always been potentially subversive because it resists that banishment - hence the insistence on illiteracy in women where women are most severely oppressed.

One writer who clearly used language to hold a position in the face of pressure towards linguistic exile was May Ayim. Half Ghanaian and half German, Ayim was active in the fight to be a 'Doppelgeschöpf' ('double creature'), that is, to assert dual cultural identity. Ayim chose to name herself, selecting both her own name, May Ayim, and the cultural identifier 'Afro-Deutsch'. Her two poems called 'afro-deutsch' give a sense of the tenacity needed to avoid being pushed out of dual cultural space in two different directions.<sup>20</sup>

`afro-deutsch I' documents pressure to quit the German side of her identity: the (German) speaker in the poem, although superficially friendly and interested, betrays a racist rejection of the Afro-German:

You're afro-german?
... oh, I get it, african and german.
That's an interesting mix!
You know, some people still think
that mulattos can't
achieve as much
as white people<sup>21</sup>

The term 'mulatto' betrays a racist mind-set, as do the speaker's assumptions about Germany: 'Sie haben ja echt Glück, daß Sie/ hier aufgewachsen sind/Bei deutschen Eltern sogar. Schau an!' (18; 'You've really been lucky, to/grow up here/and with German parents, too. How about that!') It is the speaker's expectation that the Afro-German will return to an unspecified home 'im Busch' ('in the bush') to share the advantages of German upbringing with 'her' people - in this, his/her rejection of the Afro-German is apparent.

'afro-deutsch II', on the other hand, exemplifies the denial from those who 'belong' in the German cultural home that *Afro*-German identity is a uniquely meaningful space. The pseudo-liberal speaker again constructs otherness:

it's just terrible
this whole campaign of hatred against foreigners,
do you get affected by that too? [...]
I really think
that black people have kept
such a natural attitude to life.<sup>22</sup>

But while the speaker drives the Afro-German to the edges of 'German' space by characterising her as 'Ausländer' ('foreigner') and 'schwarz' ('black'), at the same time she/he also denies her occupation of a separate, meaningful 'Afro' space: 'Ich finde, man kann nicht alles/ auf die Hautfarbe schieben,/ und als Frau hat man's nirgendwo einfach. [...]/ und so schwarz bist du ja auch gar nicht.' (19; 'In my opinion, you can't just/ put everything down to skin colour,/ and as a woman you don't have an easy time of it anywhere. [...]/ Anyway, you're not all that black.')

As highly sophisticated German-language poems, with elements of Berlin dialect used to humorous effect, these pieces clearly resist pressure from German cultural space at the same time as evoking it. The very comedy of the poems is a form of resistance: there are structural links with Jelinek when Ayim uses language to parody itself, undermining the force or even violence of the stereotype by allowing its ludicrous banality to shine through. She thus asserts a controlling position in language which, within the poem at least, therefore becomes her space or 'home'.

But later in the same collection a poem called 'der käfig hat eine tür' ('the cage has a door') seems to offer us some insight into the situation of a poet for whom language is, nonetheless, an insecure space:

words fail me
for what I want to say [...]
lost
I search
for letters
for points [in German, also 'full stops'] to hold
on to.<sup>23</sup>

Her response to this recognition is to make a choice - the now-familiar voluntary/violent choice of exile: 'es ist mir inzwischen lieber/

ich bin ausgegrenzt/ es ist mir lieber/ ich bin/ nicht eingeschlossen' (51-52; 'I now find I'd rather/ be shut out/ I find I'd rather/ not be shut in')

Ayim thus resists the violence of racist speech and finally turns attempted expulsion into voluntary exile: she 'chooses' absence. In this context the form of words chosen by her publishers, Orlanda Frauenverlag in Berlin, to describe her suicide in 1996 is noteworthy: 'Am 9. August 1996 faßte sie den Entschluß, aus dem Leben zu gehen' ('on 9 August 1996 she took the decision to leave [exit from] life').<sup>24</sup> Perhaps May Ayim's death, too, can be read as both a voluntary and a violent exile.

Speech and silence, like physical space, are hierarchically organised. Children, for example, may (still) be 'seen but not heard'. Women in patriarchal culture have traditionally given up their names when they marry, an act which is also symbolically linked with moving into a physical home that is not theirs. Names and language constitute a space that we either do or do not own. In patriarchy, women's space or existence in language has generally been doled out to them by language's male proprietors; as Heidkliff says to Emily, 'ich gewähre dir die Erlaubnis zu einem oder zwei Worten' ('I give you permission for one or two words'). We might even conceptualise the slow drawl of the landed gentry as a leisured stroll around an extensive property. Hurry or anxiety do not characterise the confident, long-term proprietor, although they may be evident in the manner of the less securely fortunate.

All of the writers I have considered here, including the theorist Judith Butler, have responded to pressures pushing them out of the space that is their linguistic/social identity not with silence, but by struggling to articulate that identity. In writing my article I am to some extent doing the same. As Freud, Lacan and their disciples have authoritatively argued, we are all far from any utopian state in which our bodies, names and language are secure 'homes' to our Selves. But - and this is my point here - some of us are forced into more insecure spaces than others, are constantly closer to regretted and regrettable absences. Home, after all, is where the Norm is.

## NOTES

All translations from the German are by the author.

- <sup>1.</sup> Chambers 20th Century Dictionary, ed. by E. M. Kirkpatrick (Edinburgh, 1983).
- <sup>2</sup> Sigmund Freud, <u>The Essentials of Psycho-Analysis</u>, ed. by Anna Freud, transl. by James Strachey (London, Penguin, 1991), p.451.
- <sup>3.</sup> Judith Butler, <u>Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex</u> (New York, Routledge, 1993), p.209.
- <sup>4</sup> Judith Butler, Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative (New York, Routledge 1997), p.5.
- 5. Thid.
- <sup>6.</sup> Cited in ibid., p.7.
- <sup>7.</sup> e.g. Deborah Tannen, <u>Gender and Discourse</u> (New York, Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 139.
- <sup>8</sup> Dale Spender, <u>The Writing or the Sex? or why you don't have to read women's writing to know it's no good</u> (New York, Pergamon, 1989).
- <sup>9</sup> See Butler, <u>Bodies That Matter</u>.
- <sup>10.</sup> Elfriede Jelinek, <u>Die Liebhaberinnen</u> (Reinbek, Rowohlt, 1975) [Translated by Martin Chalmers as <u>women as lovers</u>, London, Serpent's Tail, 1994].
- <sup>11.</sup> Published in Elfriede Jelinek, <u>Theaterstücke</u>, ed. by Ute Nyssen (Reinbek, Rowohlt, 1992).
- <sup>12</sup> Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, <u>Carmilla</u>, from <u>In a Glass Darkly</u> (London, Bentley 1884 [1872]).
- <sup>13.</sup> 'Plötzlich helles, gleißendes Licht über der Landschaft. Heidkliff und Benno Hundekoffer kommen im Tennisdress und mit Tennisschlägern dynamisch-federnd herbeigetrabt [...]. Sie halten keinen Moment still, bersten vor Aktivität. [...] Vor Kraft können sie kaum gehen.' (Krankheit oder Moderne Frauen, p.236)
- 14. Butler, Bodies That Matter, p.98.
- 15. [E] in reizendes Schlafzimmer im Stil der fünfziger Jahre, Ehebetten, miteinander durch eine Rückwand verbunden, Nachtkästchen, Lämpchen, ein Radio, etc. Nur: Statt der Betten stehen elegant gefertigte, mit Erde gefüllte Särge im Stil dieser Fünfziger da. [...] Links in den Ehebetten liegen gemütlich Emily und Carmilla, letztere mit Lockenwicklern. (Krankheit, p.229)

```
<sup>16</sup> In Bachmann, <u>Das dreißigste Jahr</u>; <u>Erzählungen</u> (Munich, Piper, 1993 [1978]) [Translated by Michael Bullock as <u>The Thirtieth Year</u>, New York, Holmes & Meier, 1987], pp.110-137.
```

... ah, ich verstehe: afrikanisch und deutsch.

Ist ja 'ne interessante Mischung!

Wissen Sie, manche, die denken ja immer noch,

die Mulatten, die würden's nicht

so weit bringen

wie die Weißen (blues in schwarz weiss, p.18)

<sup>22</sup>ist ja entsetzlich

diese ganze Ausländerhetze,

kriegst denn davon auch manchmal was ab? [...]

Ich finde überhaupt,

daß die Schwarzen sich noch so 'ne natürliche

Lebenseinstellung bewahrt haben. (Ibid., p.19)

<sup>23.</sup> es fehlt mir das wort

für das was ich sagen will [...]

verloren

fahnde ich

vor buch-staben

nach anhalts-punkten [...] (Ibid., p.25)

<sup>24.</sup> Commemorative brochure distributed with <u>blues in schwarz weiss</u> in September 1996.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17.</sup> Mererid Puw Davies, "In Blaubarts Schatten": Murder, Märchen and Memory', in <u>Gendering German Studies</u>, ed. by Margaret Littler (Oxford, Blackwell, 1997), pp.113-129 (126).

<sup>18.</sup> In Mutterzunge (Berlin, Rotbuch, 1990), pp.7-12.

<sup>19.</sup> Cited in Butler, Excitable Speech, p.6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20.</sup> In May Ayim, blues in schwarz weiss (Berlin, Orlanda, 1995), pp.18-19 and p.25.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21.</sup>Sie sind afro-deutsch?