

Abstract: George Steiner coined a concept that has been widely used in Literary Studies: the *extraterritorial* condition. The critic and philosopher developed it in *Extraterritorial: Papers on Literature and the Language Revolution* (1971), a work in which he reflects on notions such as criticism, language and estrangement. The “Language Revolution” in the subtitle refers to the profound crisis of language which occurred in Central Europe in the first third of the 20th century and that was experienced in the arts as the “failure of words”. According to Steiner, the emergence of a linguistic pluralism and the “lack of a homeland” in some writers, such as Beckett, Nabokov or Borges, was part of this language revolution. Beyond the strictly linguistic field, today the extraterritorial category suggests global migratory movements and the constant displacement of the modern subject, in Steiner’s words, as “a strategy of permanent exile”.

In 1937 Samuel Beckett wrote his famous letter to Axel Kaun and also during this decade he was impressed by Fritz Mauthner’s critique of human knowledge and his philosophy of language. In this sense, through these two threads, one can follow Beckett’s tendency towards the “literatur des un-worts” [sic], which will affect not only his works, but also his self-translation and bilingualism. Precisely in this period Beckett began to write in French to guarantee the effect of estrangement and radical insecurity provided by a language that is not one’s own. His writing in French is austere and attenuated, thus assuming a voluntary linguistic exile for, as Beckett himself said, “le besoin d’être mal armé.”

Keywords: Beckett, extraterritorial, Steiner, bilingualism, exile, language, silence