In her novel *El árbol de la Gitana*, Alicia Dujovne Ortiz makes use of autobiographical and fantastic elements to piece together the story of her voluntary exile in Paris and the rovings of her various ancestors. It is through narrating her own story and re-creating the imagined stories of several of her family members that the author attempts to redefine the family origins of the Dujovnes and the Ortizes, resulting in a reformed vision of what it means to be Argentinean for a particular sector of citizens who, like her, are of Jewish origin.

This essay explores the text by Dujovne Ortiz with the intention of drawing attention to at least three aspects of otherness. First, the condition of exile, of physical distance from the place considered one’s own: this condition detonates into various questions, among them how to define one’s identity and place of membership as an immigrant. Second, ethnic, cultural, and religious fusion: membership in groups that are traditionally antagonistic, in this case Catholics and Jews, is a distinctive element of otherness that creates an ambiguous identity—an identity that disables the identification of a categorical membership and at the same time emulates the history of Argentina. Third, the narration itself: being a feminine piece of writing, it creates distance from the canon to compose an intimate and unique discourse.

*The Condition of Exile*

The creation of this story emerges as a palliative toward the immigrant condition of both author and protagonist. The state of otherness in a new geographical location creates the prevailing necessity to define oneself, instead of simply accepting the adjectives and taxonomies that the ‘hospitable’ society chooses to assign. This process of self-identification takes the protagonist down unforeseen paths. It is through the morality stories that her alter-ego, the Gypsy, tells her that she
discovers the innate destiny she has inherited, since both branches of her family tree are full of characters (leaves) that have led lives in constant motion. The wanderer condition becomes an inescapable pattern. Nonetheless, once the infinite pilgrim condition is assumed, of both predecessors and descendents, the character of Alicia learns to live in her own skin.

As has been noted, this is a novel of autobiographical nuances. Therefore, the reality of its author finds resonance in the fictional narration. In a couple of interviews, Dujovne Ortiz has commented on her perception of her exiled condition, not just outside Argentina but also within it: “Me sentía no perteneciente pero la verdadera no-pertenencia empieza cuando uno se va, y es un renacimiento y es un dolor absoluto. Yo creo que no conocí la experiencia del dolor hasta que no me separé de mi país. Y curiosamente después eso se convirtió en una lección” [I felt as if I did not belong, but the real nonbelonging starts when one leaves, and it is a rebirth and it is an absolute pain. I do not believe I had experienced such pain until I became separated from my country. Curiously, soon after, this turned into a lesson].

Similarly, the character of Alicia realizes her apparent nonmembership in her city of origin when she indicates that since she was the daughter of an immigrant and a Creole, her link to Buenos Aires was a mixture of fixed memories. Two examples are her memories of her maternal grandparents’ home and the unfulfilled dreams of Fata Morgana, her father’s imagined house. In the end, however, both are memories with nonexistent physical conditions: “Mi herencia consistió en esas dos casas ausentes y se enriqueció luego con un departamento perdido. ¿Podía pesar tanto tener bienes raíces en el recuerdo o el futuro? Los acontecimientos se encargarían de demostrar que sí” [My inheritance consisted of those two absent houses and was enriched afterward with a lost apartment. Could it weigh so much to have real

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