

and respect that are really worth seeking? They share the same language with their audience, but do they see a gleam of comprehension on the faces of their listeners? Isn't the same tongue just an illusion where uncountable individual languages fill space with a jamming noise? Are your colleagues listened to or read by the public at large, or do they read only each other? Can you even be sure that they read each other? After all, it is possible that you are better off: your exile is legitimized.

"You have always believed that the true goal of writing is to reach all the people of the world and to change their lives. And what if such a goal is unattainable? Does it cease to be valid? Don't you believe that every one of your colleagues here has in his heart remained faithful to that, yes, childish dream? Yet haven't you witnessed their defeat?

"And if you cannot save the world, why should you care whether you have a large or a small audience?"

Language

A writer living among people who speak a language different from his own discovers after a while that he senses his native tongue in a new manner. It is not true that a long stay abroad leads to withering of styles, even though the vivifying influence of everyday speech is lacking. What is true, however, is that new aspects and tonalities of the native tongue are discovered, for they stand out against the background of the language spoken in the new milieu. Thus the narrowing down in some areas (street idioms, slang) is compensated for by a widening in others (purity of vocabulary, rhythmic expressiveness, syntactic balance). Rivalry between two languages is not necessarily typical of literature written in exile. For a couple of centuries in several European countries the literati were bilingual, their vernacular being modified by their Latin and vice versa.

Altogether elsewhere, written in
Exile. Ed. Marc Robinson. Harvard
New York, 1994.

The Philosophy of Travel

George Santayana

HAS ANYONE EVER considered the philosophy of travel? It might be worth while. What is life but a form of motion and a journey through a foreign world? Moreover locomotion—the privilege of animals—is perhaps the key to intelligence. The roots of vegetables (which Aristotle says are their mouths) attach them fatally to the ground, and they are condemned like leeches to suck up whatever sustenance may flow to them at the particular spot where they happen to be stuck. Close by, perhaps, there may be a richer soil or a more sheltered and sunnier nook; but they cannot migrate, nor have they even eyes or imagination by which to picture the enviable neighbouring lot of which chance has deprived them. At best their seed is carried by the wind to that better place, or by some insect intent on its own affairs: vegetables migrate only by dying out in one place and taking root in another. For individual plants it is a question of living where they are or not living at all. Even their limbs can hardly move, unless the wind moves them. They turn very slowly towards the light, lengthening and twisting themselves without change of station. Presumably their slumbering souls are sensitive only to organic variations, to the pervasive influence of heat or moisture, to the blind stress of budding and bursting here, or the luxury of blooming and basking and swaying there in the light. They endure in time and expand vaguely in space, without distinguishing or focussing the influences to which they are subject; having no occasion to notice anything beyond their own bodies, but identifying the universe, like the innocent egoists they are, with their own being. If ever they are forced into a new pose, which might be of permanent advantage to them, they revert to the perpendicular when the force is relaxed; or if the pressure has been brutal, they may remain permanently a little bent, as if cowed and humbled by the tyrant into a life-long obliquity. Often all the trees in a row lean to the prevalent leeward, like a file of soldiers petrified on the march, or a row of statues unanimously pointing at nothing; and perhaps their crookedness may prove merciful to them, and enable them more comfortably to weather the storm, in forgetfulness of perfection. If it were not that the young shoots still tend to grow up straight, I would almost believe that distortion had become their proper ideal and was no longer

tortion but character. Certainly among mankind, when vices become institutional, they turn into worldly virtues; they are sanctioned by pride and tradition, and called picturesque, sturdy, and virile. Yet to a wider view, when their forced origin is considered, they still seem ugly and sad. This is sin, though it be original, and misfortune is misfortune so long as the stunted soul stirs within the crust of custom, tortured by the morality which is supposed to save it.

The shift from the vegetable to the animal is the most complete of revolutions; it literally turns everything upside down. The upper branches, rising over and touching the ground, become fingers and toes; the roots are pulled up and gathered together into a snout, with its tongue and nostrils protruding outwards in search of food; so that besides the up-and-down and inwards-and-outwards known to the plant, the animal now establishes a forward-and-back—a distinction possible only to travellers; the creature is now in perpetual motion, following his own nose, which is itself guided and allured by all sorts of scents and premonitions coming from a distance. Meantime the organs of fertility, which were the flowers, opening themselves wide open and lolling in delicious innocence, are now tucked away obscurely in the hindquarters, to be seen and thought of as little as possible. This disgrace lies heavy upon them, prompting them to hidden discontent and insidious plots and terrible rebellions. Yet their rest is a new incentive to travel, perhaps the most powerful and persistent of all: it lends a great beauty to strangers, and fills remote places and places with an ineffable charm. Plants had no such possibilities; they could not make a chance acquaintance, they could not fall in love, and I am not sure that in their apparent placidity they were really happier. There is nothing dull in the beauty of flowers, something sad in their lasciviousness; they do not crave, they do not pursue, they wait in a prolonged expectation of they know not what, displaying themselves to order like a child decked out for a holiday, vaguely proud, vaguely uncomfortable, vaguely disappointed. The winds are impatient wooers, and a shower of cold-dust is a poor embrace. They fade, thinking they are still virgins; they drop their petals in sadness, and shrink nun-like into a withered stalk; there is an acrid savor in their elderly sweetness: they believe they have missed something which they pretend to despise. Yet they are mistaken; they have altogether fulfilled their function: they are grandmothers without knowing it. They were married long ago, with only a faint sense of being present at their own wedding; they have borne children as is consonant with their nature, painlessly and in quite other places; they have

marched unawares, veiled and honoured as mothers, in the procession of time.

In animals the power of locomotion changes all this pale experience into a life of passion; and it is on passion, although we anaemic philosophers are apt to forget it, that intelligence is grafted. Intelligence is a venture inconceivably daring and wonderfully successful; it is an attempt, and a victorious attempt, to be in two places at once. Sensibility to things at a distance, though it may exist, is useless and unmeaning until there are organs ready to avoid or pursue these things before they are absorbed into the organism; so that it is the possibility of travel that lends a meaning to the images of the eye and the mind, which otherwise would be mere feelings and a dull state of oneself. By tempting the animal to move, these images become signs for something ulterior, something to be seized and enjoyed. They sharpen his attention, and lead him to imagine other aspects which the same thing might afford; so that instead of saying that the possession of hands has given man his superiority, it would go much deeper to say that man, and all other animals, owe their intelligence to their feet. No wonder, then, that a peripatetic philosophy should be the best. Thinking while you sit, or while you kneel with the eyes closed or fixed upon vacancy, the mind lapses into dreams; images of things remote and miscellaneous are merged in the haze of memory, in which facts and fancies roll together almost indistinguishably, and you revert to the vegetative state, voluminous and helpless. Thinking while you walk, on the contrary, keeps you alert; your thoughts, though following some single path through the labyrinth, review real things in their real order; you are keen for discovery, ready for novelties, laughing at every little surprise, even if it is a mishap; you are careful to choose the right road, and if you take the wrong one, you are anxious and able to correct your error. Meantime, the fumes of digestion are dissipated by the fresh air; the head is cleared and kept aloft, where it may survey the scene; attention is stimulated by the novel objects constantly appearing; a thousand hypotheses run to meet them in an amiable competition which the event soon solves without ambiguity; and the scene as a whole is found to change with the changed station of the traveller, revealing to him his separate existence and his always limited scope, together with the distinction (which is all wisdom in a nutshell) between how things look and what they are.

A naturalist who was also a poet might describe the summer and winter tours of all the animals—worms, reptiles, fishes, birds, insects, and quadrupeds—telling us what different things they travel to see or to smell, and how differently they probably see and smell them. A mere moralist is

more cramped in his sympathies and can imagine only human experience. And yet, when once the biped has learned to stand firmly on his hind legs, the human mind, more agile if less steady than a camera on its tripod, can be carried nimbly to any eminence or *Aussichtsturm*; and if the prospect is unpleasing, it can scamper down again and perhaps change its chance environment for a better one. It is not the eye only that is consulted in surveying the panorama, and choosing some striking feature or hill-top for the end of the journey. The eye knows very well that it is only a scout, a more dignified substitute for the nose; and most of the pleasures it finds are vicarious and a mere promise of other satisfactions, like the scent of game. A search for the picturesque is the last and idlest motive of travel. Ordinarily the tribes of men move on more pressing errands and in some distress.

The most radical form of travel, and the most tragic, is migration. Looking at her birthplace the soul may well recoil; she may find it barren, threatening, or ugly. The very odiousness of the scene may compel her to conceive a negative, a contrast, an ideal: she will dream of El Dorado and the Golden Age, and rather than endure the ills she hath she may fly to anything she knows not of. This hope is not necessarily deceptive: in travel, as in being born, interest may drown the discomfort of finding oneself in a foreign medium: the solitude and liberty of the wide world may prove more stimulating than chilling. Yet migration like birth is heroic: the soul is signing away her safety for a blank cheque. A social animal like man cannot change his habitat without changing his friends, nor his friends without changing his manners and his ideas. An immediate token of all this, when he goes into a foreign country, is the foreign language which he hears there, and which he probably will never be able to speak with ease or with true propriety. The exile, to be happy, must be born again: he must change his moral climate and the inner landscape of his mind. In the greatest migration of our time, that of Europeans to America, I know by observation how easily this may be done, at least in the second generation; but a circumstance that makes the transformation easy is this: there need be no direct conversion of mind or heart, or even of language, but only an insensible exchange of old habits for new, because the new are more economical and soon seem easier. The adaptation, like all the creative adaptations of nature, is imposed by external influences, by compulsory material arrangements, by daily absorption in the prevalent forms of thrift and management, and yet it seems to come from within. The old habits may thus be soon shed completely and without regret. Colonists, who move in masses into lands which they find empty or which they clear of their old inhabi-

tants, have this advantage over straggling immigrants worming their way into an alien society: their transformation can be thorough and hearty, because it obeys their genuine impulses working freely in a new material medium, and involves no mixture of incompatible traditions. America is a vast colony, and it still seems such to people who migrate even into those prosperous parts of it, like the United States or the Argentine, which have long-established constitutions and manners. The newcomers make themselves at home; they adapt themselves easily and gladly to the material environment, and make a moral environment of their own on that solid basis, ignoring or positively condemning the religion and culture of the elder Americans. Perhaps the elder Americans are assimilated in spirit to the new ones more readily than the new Americans to the old. I do not mean that any positively German, Italian, Jewish, or Irish ingredients are incorporated into American traditions: on the contrary, the more recent immigrants are quick—much quicker than the British colonists were—to shed all their memories and start afresh, like Adam in paradise: and for that very reason they stand out as naked Americans, men sharply and solely adapted to the present material conditions of the world: and in this sense their Americanism is louder and bolder than that of the old Yankees or the old Southerners, to whom the merely modern world seems perhaps a little deafening and a little unprincipled.

Compared with the emigrant the explorer is the greater traveller; his ventures are less momentous but more dashing and more prolonged. The idea of migration is often latent in his mind too: if he is so curious to discover new lands, and to describe them, it is partly because he might not be sorry to appropriate them. But the potential conqueror in him is often subdued into a disinterested adventurer and a scientific observer. He may turn into a wanderer. Your true explorer or naturalist sallies forth in the domestic interest; his heart is never uprooted; he goes foraging like a soldier, out in self-defence, or for loot, or for elbow room. Whether the reward hoped for be wealth or knowledge, it is destined to enrich his native possessions, to perfect something already dear: he is the emissary of his home science or home politics. Your Rambler, on the contrary, is out on the loose, innocently idle, or driven by some morbid compulsion; his discoveries, if he makes any, will be lucky chances, to be attributed to sheer restlessness and fishing in troubled waters. The inveterate wanderer is a deluded person, trying like the Flying Dutchman to escape from himself: his instinct is to curl up in a safe nook unobserved, and start prowling again in the morning, without purpose and without profit. He is a voluntary outcast, a tramp. The maladaptation from which he suffers and which

drives him from society may not be his fault: it may be due to the closeness of the home atmosphere, the coldness there, the intolerable ache of discords always repeated and right notes never struck. Or it may express an idiosyncrasy by no means regrettable, a wild atavistic instinct, or a mere need of stretching one's legs, or a young impulse to do something hard and novel. The mountain-climber, the arctic explorer, the passionate hunter or yachtsman, chooses his sport probably for mixed reasons: because he loves nature; because having nothing to do he is in need of exercise and must do something or other; or because custom, vanity, or rivalry has given him that bent; but the chief reason, if he is a genuine traveller for travel's sake, is that the world is too much with us, and we are too much with ourselves. We need sometimes to escape into open solitudes, into aimlessness, into the moral holiday of running some pure hazard, in order to sharpen the edge of life, to taste hardship, and to be compelled to work desperately for a moment at no matter what.

In the wake of the explorer another type of traveller is apt to follow, the most legitimate, constant, and normal of all: I mean the merchant. Nowadays a merchant may sit all his life at a desk in his native town and never join a caravan nor run the risk of drowning; he may never even go down into his shop or to the ship's side to examine or to sell his wares. This is a pity and takes half the humanity and all the poetry out of trade. If a merchant may be sedentary, it should be at least in one of those old mansions in Amsterdam where the ships came up the canal to the master's door, and the bales of merchandise were hoisted into the great lofts at the top of his house by a pulley that, like a curious gargoyle, projected from the gable. There the comforts and good cheer of family life could be enjoyed under the same roof that sheltered your wealth and received your customers. But if the merchant now will not travel, others must travel for him. I know that the commercial traveller is a vulgar man, who eats and drinks too much and loves ribald stories; he, like his superior, has been robbed of his natural dignity and his full art by the division of labor, the telegraph, and the uniformity of modern countries and modern minds; nevertheless I have a certain sympathy with him, and in those provincial inns where he is the ruling spirit, I have found him full of pleasant knowledge, as a traveller should be. But commerce has also its seafaring men, its engineers, its surveyors, its hunters and its trappers: all indefatigable travellers and knowers of the earth. My own parents belonged to the colonial official classes, and China and Manila, although I was never there, were familiar names and images to me in childhood; nor can I ever lose the sense of great distances in this watery globe, of strange amiable nations, and of opposed climates

and ways of living and thinking, all equally human and legitimate. In my own journeys I have been enticed by romantic monuments and depth of historical interest rather than by geographical marvels; and yet what charm is equal to that of ports and ships and the thought of those ceaseless comings and goings, by which our daily needs are supplied? The most prosaic objects, the most common people and incidents, seen as a panorama of ordered motions, of perpetual journeys by night and day, through a hundred storms, over a thousand bridges and tunnels, take on an epic grandeur, and the mechanism moves so nimbly that it seems to live. It has the fascination, to me at least inexhaustible, of prows cleaving the water, wheels turning, planets ascending and descending the skies: things not alive in themselves but friendly to life, promising us security in motion, power in art, novelty in necessity.

The latest type of traveller, and the most notorious, is the tourist. Having often been one myself, I will throw no stones at him; from the tripper off on a holiday to the eager pilgrim thirsting for facts or for beauty, all tourists are dear to Hermes, the god of travel, who is patron also of amiable curiosity and freedom of mind. There is wisdom in turning as often as possible from the familiar to the unfamiliar: it keeps the mind nimble, it kills prejudice, and it fosters humour. I do not think that frivolity and dissipation of mind and aversion from one's own birthplace, or the aping of foreign manners and arts are serious diseases: they kill, but they do not kill anybody worth saving. There may be in them sometimes a sight of regret for the impossible, a bit of pathetic homage to an ideal one is condemned to miss; but as a rule they spring not from too much familiarity with alien things but from too little: the last thing a man wishes who really tastes the savour of anything and understands its roots is to generalise or to transplant it; and the more arts and manners a good traveller has assimilated, the more depth and pleasantness he will see in the manners and arts of his own home. Ulysses remembered Ithaca. With a light heart and clear mind he would have admitted that Troy was unrivalled in grandeur, Phaeacia in charm, and Calypso in enchantment: that could not make the sound of the waves breaking on his own shores less pleasant to his ears; it could only render more enlightened, more unhesitating, his choice of what was naturally his. The human heart is local and finite, it has roots: and if the intellect radiates from it, according to its strength, to greater and greater distances, the reports, if they are to be gathered up at all, must be gathered up at that centre. A man who knows the world cannot covet the world; and if he were not content with his lot in it (which after all has included that saving knowledge) he would be showing little respect for all those

alien perfections which he professes to admire. They were all local, all finite, all cut off from being anything but what they happened to be; and if such limitation and such arbitrariness were beautiful there, he has but to dig down to the principle of his own life, and clear it of all confusion and indecision, in order to bring it too to perfect expression after its kind: and then wise travellers will come also to his city, and praise its name.

A Guide to Exiles, Expatriates, and Internal Emigrés

Mary McCarthy

FIRST LET ME SAY what I think these terms signify in common speech. An expatriate is different from an exile. In early use an exile was a banished man, a wanderer or roamer: *exsul*. "For I must to the greenwood go, alone, a banished man." In ancient Greek times, a man with a price on his head unable to return home until he had ransomed his blood guilt. The Wandering Jew, I suppose, is the archetypal exile, sentenced to trail about the earth until the Second Coming. Or Dante, a *fuoruscito*, waiting for a Second Coming in the shape of the German emperor who would make it safe for him to return to Florence. Ovid, banished by Augustus and writing his *Tristia*.

The exile is essentially a political figure, though the offense he has committed may have been in the sphere of morals. He has incurred the displeasure of the state by some sort of levity of conduct or looseness of tongue—a political crime in a tyranny, ancient or modern. Or he is an unhealthy element sent to lonely quarantine in some remote spot, like Prometheus on his rock.

Though the term easily lends itself to metaphorical inflation—"I am in exile here, in this unsympathetic environment into which fate has cast me," as Mme Bovary might have sighed to the notary's clerk—it has not lost its primary, political sense. The exile waits for a change of government or the tyrant's death, which will allow him to come home. If he stops waiting and adapts to the new circumstances, then he is not an exile any more. This condition of waiting means that the exile's whole being is concentrated on the land he left behind, in memories and hopes. The more passive type, summed up in the banished poet, lives on memories, while the active type, summed up in the revolutionist, lives on hopes and schemes. There is something of both in every exile, an oscillation between melancholy and euphoria.

More than anybody (except lovers), exiles are dependent on mail. A Greek writer friend in Paris was the only person I knew to suffer real pain during the events of May 1968, when the mail was cut off. In the absence

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We Refugees

Hannah Arendt

IN THE FIRST PLACE, we don't like to be called "refugees." We ourselves call each other "newcomers" or "immigrants." Our newspapers are papers for "Americans of German language"; and, as far as I know, there is not and never was any club founded by Hitler-persecuted people whose name indicated that its members were refugees.

A refugee used to be a person driven to seek refuge because of some act committed or some political opinion held. Well, it is true we have had to seek refuge; but we committed no acts and most of us never dreamt of having any radical opinion. With us the meaning of the term "refugee" has changed. Now "refugees" are those of us who have been so unfortunate as to arrive in a new country without means and have to be helped by Refugee Committees.

Before this war broke out we were even more sensitive about being called refugees. We did our best to prove to other people that we were just ordinary immigrants. We declared that we had departed of our own free will to countries of our choice, and we denied that our situation had anything to do with "so-called Jewish problems." Yes, we were "immigrants" or "newcomers" who had left our country because, one fine day, it no longer suited us to stay, or for purely economic reasons. We wanted to rebuild our lives, that was all. In order to rebuild one's life one has to be strong and an optimist. So we are very optimistic.

Our optimism, indeed, is admirable, even if we say so ourselves. The story of our struggle has finally become known. We lost our home, which means the familiarity of daily life. We lost our occupation, which means the confidence that we are of some use in this world. We lost our language, which means the naturalness of reactions, the simplicity of gestures, the unaffected expression of feelings. We left our relatives in the Polish ghettos and our best friends have been killed in concentration camps, and that means the rupture of our private lives.

Nevertheless, as soon as we were saved—and most of us had to be saved several times—we started our new lives and tried to follow as closely as possible all the good advice our saviors passed on to us. We were told to forget; and we forgot quicker than anybody ever could imagine. In a

friendly way we were reminded that the new country would become a new home; and after four weeks in France or six weeks in America, we pretended to be Frenchmen or Americans. The more optimistic among us would even add that their whole former life had been passed in a kind of unconscious exile and only their new country now taught them what a home really looks like. It is true we sometimes raise objections when we are told to forget about our former work; and our former ideals are usually hard to throw over if our social standard is at stake. With the language, however, we find no difficulties: after a single year optimists are convinced they speak English as well as their mother tongue; and after two years they swear solemnly that they speak English better than any other language—their German is a language they hardly remember.

In order to forget more efficiently we rather avoid any allusion to concentration or internment camps we experienced in nearly all European countries—it might be interpreted as pessimism or lack of confidence in the new homeland. Besides, how often have we been told that nobody likes to listen to all that; hell is no longer a religious belief or a fantasy, but something as real as houses and stones and trees. Apparently nobody wants to know that contemporary history has created a new kind of human beings—the kind that are put in concentration camps by their foes and in internment camps by their friends.

Even among ourselves we don't speak about this past. Instead, we have found our own way of mastering an uncertain future. Since everybody plans and wishes and hopes, so do we. Apart from these general human attitudes, however, we try to clear up the future more scientifically. After so much bad luck we want a course as sure as a gun. Therefore, we leave the earth with all its uncertainties behind and we cast our eyes up to the sky. The stars tell us—rather than the newspapers—when Hitler will be defeated and when we shall become American citizens. We think the stars more reliable advisers than all our friends; we learn from the stars when we should have lunch with our benefactors and on what day we have the best chances of filling out one of these countless questionnaires which accompany our present lives. Sometimes we don't rely even on the stars but rather on the lines of our hand or the signs of our handwriting. Thus we learn less about political events but more about our own dear selves, even though somehow psychoanalysis has gone out of fashion. Those happier times are past when bored ladies and gentlemen of high society conversed about the genial misdemeanors of their early childhood. They don't want ghost-stories any more; it is real experiences that make their flesh creep. There is no longer any need of bewitching the past; it is spellbound

enough in reality. Thus, in spite of our outspoken optimism, we use all sorts of magical tricks to conjure up the spirits of the future.

I don't know which memories and which thoughts nightly dwell in our dreams. I dare not ask for information, since I, too, had rather be an optimist. But sometimes I imagine that at least nightly we think of our dead or we remember the poems we once loved. I could even understand how our friends of the West coast, during the curfew, should have had such curious notions as to believe that we are not only "prospective citizens" but present "enemy aliens." In daylight, of course, we become only "technically" enemy aliens—all refugees know this. But when technical reasons prevented you from leaving your home during the dark hours, it certainly was not easy to avoid some dark speculations about the relation between technicality and reality.

No, there is something wrong with our optimism. There are those odd optimists among us who, having made a lot of optimistic speeches, go home and turn on the gas or make use of a skyscraper in quite an unexpected way. They seem to prove that our proclaimed cheerfulness is based on a dangerous readiness for death. Brought up in the conviction that life is the highest good and death the greatest dismay, we became witnesses and victims of worse terrors than death—without having been able to discover a higher ideal than life. Thus, although death lost its horror for us, we became neither willing nor capable to risk our lives for a cause. Instead of fighting—or thinking about how to become able to fight back—refugees have got used to wishing death to friends or relatives; if somebody dies, we cheerfully imagine all the trouble he has been saved. Finally many of us end by wishing that we, too, could be saved some trouble, and act accordingly.

Since 1938—since Hitler's invasion of Austria—we have seen how quickly eloquent optimism could change to speechless pessimism. As time went on, we got worse—even more optimistic and even more inclined to suicide. Austrian Jews under Schuschnigg were such a cheerful people—all impartial observers admired them. It was quite wonderful how deeply convinced they were that nothing could happen to them. But when German troops invaded the country and Gentile neighbors started riots at Jewish homes, Austrian Jews began to commit suicide.

Unlike other suicides, our friends leave no explanation of their deed, no indictment, no charge against a world that had forced a desperate man to talk and to behave cheerfully to his very last day. Letters left by them are conventional, meaningless documents. Thus, funeral orations we make at

their open graves are brief, embarrassed and very hopeful. Nobody cares about motives, they seem to be clear to all of us.

I speak of unpopular facts; and it makes things worse that in order to prove my point I do not even dispose of the sole arguments which impress modern people—figures. Even those Jews who furiously deny the existence of the Jewish people give us a fair chance of survival as far as figures are concerned—how else could they prove that only a few Jews are criminals and that many Jews are being killed as good patriots in wartime? Through their effort to save the statistical life of the Jewish people we know that Jews had the lowest suicide rate among all civilized nations. I am quite sure those figures are no longer correct, but I cannot prove it with new figures, though I can certainly with new experiences. This might be sufficient for those skeptical souls who never were quite convinced that the measure of one's skull gives the exact idea of its content, or that statistics of crime show the exact level of national ethics. Anyhow, wherever European Jews are living today, they no longer behave according to statistical laws. Suicides occur not only among the panic-stricken people in Berlin and Vienna, in Bucharest or Paris, but in New York and Los Angeles, in Buenos Aires and Montevideo.

On the other hand, there has been little reported about suicides in the ghettos and concentration camps themselves. True, we had very few reports at all from Poland, but we have been fairly well informed about German and French concentration camps.

At the camp of Gurs, for instance, where I had the opportunity of spending some time, I heard only once about suicide, and that was the suggestion of a collective action, apparently a kind of protest in order to vex the French. When some of us remarked that we had been shipped there "*pour crever*" in any case, the general mood turned suddenly into a violent courage of life. The general opinion held that one had to be abnormally asocial and unconcerned about general events if one was still able to interpret the whole accident as personal and individual bad luck and, accordingly, ended one's life personally and individually. But the same people, as soon as they returned to their own individual lives, being faced with seemingly individual problems, changed once more to this insane optimism which is next door to despair.

We are the first non-religious Jews persecuted—and we are the first ones who, not only *in extremis*, answer with suicide. Perhaps the philosophers are right who teach that suicide is the last and supreme guarantee of human freedom: not being free to create our lives or the world in which we

live, we nevertheless are free to throw life away and to leave the world. Pious Jews, certainly, cannot realize this negative liberty; they perceive murder in suicide, that is, destruction of what man never is able to make, interference with the rights of the Creator. *Adonai nathan veadonai lakach* ("The Lord hath given and the Lord hath taken away"); and they would add: *baruch shem adonai* ("blessed be the name of the Lord"). For them suicide, like murder, means a blasphemous attack on creation as a whole. The man who kills himself asserts that life is not worth living and the world not worth sheltering him.

Yet our suicides are no mad rebels who hurl defiance at life and the world, who try to kill in themselves the whole universe. Theirs is a quiet and modest way of vanishing; they seem to apologize for the violent solution they have found for their personal problems. In their opinion, generally, political events had nothing to do with their individual fate; in good or bad times they would believe solely in their personality. Now they find some mysterious shortcomings in themselves which prevent them from getting along. Having felt entitled from their earliest childhood to a certain social standard, they are failures in their own eyes if this standard cannot be kept any longer. Their optimism is the vain attempt to keep head above water. Behind this front of cheerfulness, they constantly struggle with despair of themselves. Finally, they die of a kind of selfishness.

If we are saved we feel humiliated, and if we are helped we feel degraded. We fight like madmen for private existences with individual destinies, since we are afraid of becoming part of that miserable lot of *schnorrers* whom we, many of us former philanthropists, remember only too well. Just as once we failed to understand that the so-called *schnorrer* was a symbol of Jewish destiny and not a *shlemihl*, so today we don't feel entitled to Jewish solidarity; we cannot realize that we by ourselves are not so much concerned as the whole Jewish people. Sometimes this lack of comprehension has been strongly supported by our protectors. Thus, I remember a director of a great charity concern in Paris who, whenever he received the card of a German-Jewish intellectual with the inevitable "Dr." on it, used to exclaim at the top of his voice, "Herr Doktor, Herr Doktor, Herr Schnorrer, Herr Schnorrer!"

The conclusion we drew from such unpleasant experiences was simple enough. To be a doctor of philosophy no longer satisfied us; and we learnt that in order to build a new life, one has first to improve on the old one. A nice little fairy-tale has been invented to describe our behavior; a forlorn émigré dachshund, in his grief, begins to speak: "Once, when I was a St. Bernard . . ."

Our new friends, rather overwhelmed by so many stars and famous men, hardly understand that at the basis of all our descriptions of past splendors lies one human truth: once we were somebodies about whom people cared, we were loved by friends, and even known by landlords as paying our rent regularly. Once we could buy our food and ride in the subway without being told we were undesirable. We have become a little hysterical since newspapermen started detecting us and telling us publicly to stop being disagreeable when shopping for milk and bread. We wonder how it can be done; we already are so damnably careful in every moment of our daily lives to avoid anybody guessing who we are, what kind of passport we have, where our birth certificates were filled out—and that Hitler didn't like us. We try the best we can to fit into a world where you have to be sort of politically minded when you buy your food.

Under such circumstances, St. Bernard grows bigger and bigger. I never can forget that young man who, when expected to accept a certain kind of work, sighed out, "You don't know to whom you speak; I was Section-manager in Karstadt's [A great department store in Berlin]." But there is also the deep despair of that middle-aged man who, going through countless shifts of different committees in order to be saved, finally exclaimed, "And nobody here knows who I am!" Since nobody would treat him as a dignified human being, he began sending cables to great personalities and his big relations. He learnt quickly that in this mad world it is much easier to be accepted as a "great man" than as a human being.

The less we are free to decide who we are or to live as we like, the more we try to put up a front, to hide the facts, and to play roles. We were expelled from Germany because we were Jews. But having hardly crossed the French borderline, we were changed into "boches." We were even told that we had to accept this designation if we really were against Hitler's racial theories. During seven years we played the ridiculous role of trying to be Frenchmen—at least, prospective citizens; but at the beginning of the war we were interned as "boches" all the same. In the meantime, however, most of us had indeed become such loyal Frenchmen that we could not even criticize a French governmental order; thus we declared it was all right to be interned. We were the first "*prisonniers volontaires*" history has ever seen. After the Germans invaded the country, the French Government had only to change the name of the firm; having been jailed because we were Germans, we were not freed because we were Jews.

It is the same story all over the world, repeated again and again. In Europe the Nazis confiscated our property; but in Brazil we have to pay

30% of our wealth, like the most loyal member of the *Bund der Auslandsdeutschen*. In Paris we could not leave our homes after eight o'clock because we were Jews; but in Los Angeles we are restricted because we are "enemy aliens." Our identity is changed so frequently that nobody can find out who we actually are.

Unfortunately, things don't look any better when we meet with Jews. French Jewry was absolutely convinced that all Jews coming from beyond the Rhine were what they called *Polaks*—what German Jewry called *Ostjuden*. But those Jews who really came from eastern Europe could not agree with their French brethren and called us *Jaeckes*. The sons of these *Jaecke*-haters—the second generation born in France and already duly assimilated—shared the opinion of the French Jewish upper classes. Thus, in the very same family, you could be called a *Jaecke* by the father and a *Polak* by the son.

Since the outbreak of the war and the catastrophe that has befallen European Jewry, the mere fact of being a refugee has prevented our mingling with native Jewish society, some exceptions only proving the rule. These unwritten social laws, though never publicly admitted, have the great force of public opinion. And such a silent opinion and practice is more important for our daily lives than all official proclamations of hospitality and good will.

Man is a social animal and life is not easy for him when social ties are cut off. Moral standards are much easier kept in the texture of a society. Very few individuals have the strength to conserve their own integrity if their social, political and legal status is completely confused. Lacking the courage to fight for a change of our social and legal status, we have decided instead, so many of us, to try a change of identity. And this curious behavior makes matters much worse. The confusion in which we live is partly our own work.

Some day somebody will write the true story of this Jewish emigration from Germany; and he will have to start with a description of that Mr. Cohn from Berlin who had always been a 150% German, a German super-patriot. In 1933 that Mr. Cohn found refuge in Prague and very quickly became a convinced Czech patriot—as true and as loyal a Czech patriot as he had been a German one. Time went on and about 1937 the Czech Government, already under some Nazi pressure, began to expel its Jewish refugees, disregarding the fact that they felt so strongly as prospective Czech citizens. Our Mr. Cohn then went to Vienna; to adjust oneself there a definite Austrian patriotism was required. The German invasion forced Mr. Cohn out of that country. He arrived in Paris at a bad moment

and he never did receive a regular residence-permit. Having already acquired a great skill in wishful thinking, he refused to take mere administrative measures seriously, convinced that he would spend his future life in France. Therefore, he prepared his adjustment to the French nation by identifying himself with "our" ancestor Vercingetorix. I think I had better not dilate on the further adventures of Mr. Cohn. As long as Mr. Cohn can't make up his mind to be what he actually is, a Jew, nobody can foretell all the mad changes he will still have to go through.

A man who wants to lose his self discovers, indeed, the possibilities of human existence, which are infinite, as infinite as is creation. But the recovering of a new personality is as difficult—and as hopeless—as a new creation of the world. Whatever we do, whatever we pretend to be, we reveal nothing but our insane desire to be changed, not to be Jews. All our activities are directed to attain this aim: we don't want to be refugees, since we don't want to be Jews; we pretend to be English-speaking people, since German-speaking immigrants of recent years are marked as Jews; we don't call ourselves stateless, since the majority of stateless people in the world are Jews; we are willing to become loyal Hottentots, only to hide the fact that we are Jews. We don't succeed and we can't succeed; under the cover of our "optimism" you can easily detect the hopeless sadness of assimilationists.

With us from Germany the word assimilation received a "deep" philosophical meaning. You can hardly realize how serious we were about it. Assimilation did not mean the necessary adjustment to the country where we happened to be born and to the people whose language we happened to speak. We adjust in principle to everything and everybody. This attitude became quite clear to me once by the words of one of my compatriots who, apparently, knew how to express his feelings. Having just arrived in France, he founded one of these societies of adjustment in which German Jews asserted to each other that they were already Frenchmen. In his first speech he said: "We have been good Germans in Germany and therefore we shall be good Frenchmen in France." The public applauded enthusiastically and nobody laughed; we were happy to have learnt how to prove our loyalty.

If patriotism were a matter of routine or practice, we should be the most patriotic people in the world. Let us go back to our Mr. Cohn; he certainly has beaten all records. He is that ideal immigrant who always, and in every country into which a terrible fate has driven him, promptly sees and loves the native mountains. But since patriotism is not yet believed to be a matter of practice, it is hard to convince people of the sincerity of our repeated transformations. This struggle makes our own society so intoler-

ant; we demand full affirmation without our own group because we are not in the position to obtain it from the natives. The natives, confronted with such strange beings as we are, become suspicious; from their point of view, as a rule, only a loyalty to our old countries is understandable. That makes life very bitter for us. We might overcome this suspicion if we would explain that, being Jews, our patriotism in our original countries had rather a peculiar aspect. Though it was indeed sincere and deep-rooted. We wrote big volumes to prove it; paid an entire bureaucracy to explore its antiquity and to explain it statistically. We had scholars write philosophical dissertations on the predestined harmony between Jews and Frenchmen, Jews and Germans, Jews and Hungarians, Jews and . . . Our so frequently suspected loyalty of today has a long history. It is the history of a hundred and fifty years of assimilated Jewry who performed an unprecedented feat: though proving all the time their non-Jewishness, they succeeded in remaining Jews all the same.

The desperate confusion of these Ulysses-wanderers who, unlike their great prototype, don't know who they are is easily explained by their perfect mania for refusing to keep their identity. This mania is much older than the last ten years which revealed the profound absurdity of our existence. We are like people with a fixed idea who can't help trying continually to disguise an imaginary stigma. Thus we are enthusiastically fond of every new possibility which, being new, seems able to work miracles. We are fascinated by every new nationality in the same way as a woman of tidy size is delighted with every new dress which promises to give her the desired waistline. But she likes the new dress only as long as she believes in its miraculous qualities, and she will throw it away as soon as she discovers that it does not change her stature—or, for that matter, her status.

One may be surprised that the apparent uselessness of all our odd disguises has not yet been able to discourage us. If it is true that men seldom learn from history, it is also true that they may learn from personal experiences which, as in our case, are repeated time and again. But before you cast the first stone at us, remember that being a Jew does not give any legal status in this world. If we should start telling the truth that we are nothing but Jews, it would mean that we expose ourselves to the fate of human beings who, unprotected by any specific law or political convention, are nothing but human beings. I can hardly imagine an attitude more dangerous, since we actually live in a world in which human beings as such have ceased to exist for quite a while; since society has discovered discrimination as the great social weapon by which one may kill men without any bloodshed; since passports or birth certificates, and sometimes even income tax

receipts, are no longer formal papers but matters of social distinction. It is true that most of us depend entirely upon social standards; we lose confidence in ourselves if society does not approve us; we are—and always were—ready to pay any price in order to be accepted by society. But it is equally true that the very few among us who have tried to get along without all these tricks and jokes of adjustment and assimilation have paid a much higher price than they could afford: they jeopardized the few chances even outlaws are given in a topsy-turvy world.

The attitude of these few whom, following Bernard Lazare, one may call "conscious pariahs," can as little be explained by recent events alone as the attitude of our Mr. Cohn who tried by every means to become an upstart. Both are sons of the nineteenth century which, not knowing legal or political outlaws, knew only too well social pariahs and their counterpart, social parvenus. Modern Jewish history, having started with court Jews and continuing with Jewish millionaires and philanthropists, is apt to forget about this other trend of Jewish tradition—the tradition of Heine, Rahel Varnhagen, Sholom Aleichem, of Bernard Lazare, Franz Kafka or even Charlie Chaplin. It is the tradition of a minority of Jews who have not wanted to become upstarts, who preferred the status of "conscious pariah." All vaunted Jewish qualities—the "Jewish heart," humanity, humor, disinterested intelligence—are pariah qualities. All Jewish shortcomings—tactlessness, political stupidity, inferiority complexes and money-grubbing—are characteristic of upstarts. There have always been Jews who did not think it worth while to change their humane attitude and their natural insight into reality for the narrowness of caste spirit or the essential unreality of financial transactions.

History has forced the status of outlaws upon both, upon pariahs and parvenus alike. The latter have not yet accepted the great wisdom of Balzac's "*On ne parvient pas deux fois*"; thus they don't understand the wild dreams of the former and feel humiliated in sharing their fate. Those few refugees who insist upon telling the truth, even to the point of "indecent," get in exchange for their unpopularity one priceless advantage: history is no longer a closed book to them and politics is no longer the privilege of Gentiles. They know that the outlawing of the Jewish people in Europe has been followed closely by the outlawing of most European nations. Refugees driven from country to country represent the vanguard of their peoples—if they keep their identity. For the first time Jewish history is not separate but tied up with that of all other nations. The comity of European peoples went to pieces when, and because, it allowed its weakest member to be excluded and persecuted.

intolerance because it again implies that others are "Other," people with different aspirations, different values.

The overwhelming majority of people fleeing oppressive regimes, like Syria, the way we did from the Soviets, want what we wanted: freedom, security, peace, quiet, shelter, food, decent work, education, a new language, a new way of seeing things, and hope, hope, hope. There are exceptions, of course: extremists and radical thinkers. But most—almost all—are not bursting to commit crimes. They want a future and are willing, for the most part, to relinquish their past, except for the richness it can add to the fabric of the New World, the new tapestry, illuminated and enriched by them. By us.

- The Displaced - Ed. Viet
 Thanh Nguyen Abrams,
 New York, 2018
13 Ways of Being an Immigrant

POROCHISTA KHAKPOUR

I

The year is 1983 and Cabbage Patch Kids are at the height of popularity. You want one but you know your parents can't afford it. Just a couple years into this country and they keep saying they will go back to Iran soon—that the war will be over, that the revolution will be done, that you will be a refugee and alien no more. But for now, there is no money for things. At school, you know you are one of the few kids with less access to things and you know those others are not from here too. You work with them to get out of ESL and you try to act like kids who belong here, who have money. One way to do this is to have a Cabbage Patch Kid doll but this seems impossible. Still, your mother takes you to Toys"R"Us which seems like the greatest place on earth, second only to Disneyland which you've only heard about at this point, since it costs too much to go. At Toys"R"Us, several aisles are devoted to the Cabbage Patch dolls—if it were a farm, this area would be the Cabbage Patch. Their chubby faces peer at you from behind the plastic of their boxes. You have not considered which one you want because you don't think you will ever get one. Maybe an imitation at some point, one without a signature on the butt, which is how you've heard you know they are real; true Cabbage Patch Kids, the real ones, come with butt tattoos. You are looking at them longingly, when your mother points to a section down the aisle. There is a big sign: SALE. There is a whole section of Cabbage Patch Kids

on sale, it turns out, and your mother is telling you they are in your budget, but she doesn't think they are the right ones for you. You are elated, then confused—why would she think that? And then you look at them, one by one, row after row. What do they have in common? They are black, all of them, the sale ones. You think about it. They could be your adopted child, why not. You are still too young to know how babies are made, so you don't think much deeper. You reach out to a pigtailed black one in a yellow track suit and you tell your mother that this is your daughter. Her name turns out to be Clover Stephanie and you still have her somewhere in storage. Her cheek is a bit scraped and looks white underneath. It bothers you, that fact. It bothers you also that you only have Clover because she was on sale, because she was black, but that was your first lesson about America, so maybe it was worth it.

II

You want to be a good student, the best in fact. One way to do this is to follow directions. In kindergarten, this is a big goal of yours, since English is still new. One rule is that at lunchtime, you must eat your dessert last. Dessert is usually a piece of fruit, but apparently it is hard for the kids to obey this rule. Not you. You always get it right. Your best friend is a blonde girl named Angela, who all the teachers love. She doesn't always play by the rules, but she gets away with it always. One day, she eats her cantaloupe before her spaghetti. This shocks you. You try to tell her to stop it, that she can't do this, but she does it. Without any fear, a smile even. You tell her to stop or you will have to tell on her. She smiles with a mouth full of cantaloupe. She is fearless. You tell her to stop right now, because you are truly about to

tell. She laughs, more cantaloupe on her tongue. You can't take it anymore. You tell on her. The teaching assistant is a big man named Mr. Mondo and he is tough on the rules. He will take care of this. You walk right up to him and as much as it pains you, you point right at her. "Angela is eating her dessert first, Mr. Mondo." At this point, Angela is still, a look of fright on her face. She is not taunting you anymore. Good, you think, this might teach her. Mr. Mondo walks with you to her. He asks her if she did it. She nods, sadly. "Sorry," she says. He says nothing and pauses. Then he turns to you and he looks angry. He says one word: "Snitcher." He walks away and Angela smiles and you begin to cry and—after you learn what that word means, though from the start you know it's bad—once again you learn a lesson about America.

III

Your best friend in second grade lives in the good part of town. So does everyone at your elementary school. You got to that school because your zone was full. You live in the bad part of town. No one you know lives there too. Your dad drives a Pinto while your best friend's dad drives a Rolls-Royce. She hates it. You go to her house which is a mansion in the hills. She has so many expensive toys—numerous Cabbage Patch dolls, all white even though she is Vietnamese. She was born in America, unlike you. Her dad is a truck driver who also flips houses while yours is a professor. Another lesson, you one day realize.

IV

The usual substitute teacher, the one everyone in your grade sees most often, makes funny jokes and one is that he calls

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IV

The usual substitute teacher, the one everyone in your grade sees most often, makes funny jokes and one is that he calls

you "my Iranian sweetheart." You hate this, because you know Americans don't like Iran and you don't want to be singled out and teased—especially not because of being Iranian. But he always does this. Another teacher sticks his thumb in your mouth when he spots you sticking your tongue out at a friend. You don't know what it means, but it feels wrong. Years later, a science teacher offers you massages after class. You decline. A few grades down, a German teacher tells you you are so beautiful—he whispers it to you and you never come near him again. That same year, a librarian tells you about the male and female plugs too eagerly, demonstrating over and over. Another teacher laughs when students say you look like Anne Frank and makes a joke about him looking like a German soldier. You remember his bad breath on your face as he laughs at you, all over you. "Are there Jews still in Iran?" he asks you, but you don't answer. In America, adults are inappropriate, you realize, maybe a lesson for this place but maybe not.

V

You became editor-in-chief of your high school paper, your one and only dream in life. For two years, you have this post. You love nothing more. When your advisor is fired—a gay man, most likely fired for being gay in a homophobic school—you are incensed and you walk out and your staff follows. You are now seen as a rebel. This somehow seems very American. Your fearlessness also seems very American. You are blonde Angela with the cantaloupe. You must belong here if you think you can afford to leave.

VI

You go to college in New York—your dream—and you get your first internship at the *Village Voice*. You are a teenager and a scholarship kid and you have no money, and it does not occur to you that students ask their parents for money. You are left wondering how you can make this work so you learn to jump trains. Another scholarship kid teaches you. You get good at this—you go to your internship three times a week, and use some change for dinner: Pop-Tarts from the vending machine. And then you jump the train back. Part of it is you must look well-dressed to do this. You pretend you are dressing up for your internship. But you are doing it because they suspect you less if you look fancy. One time, you get caught. A female conductor. She tells you she's been watching you for months. You have no money to give her so she tells you your luck is up and she's kicking you out. It's midnight and the stop is Mount Vernon, a bad neighborhood. You are let out there and an old man offers you a drive home. You have no other choice. You stop jumping trains but you also stop internships altogether. They must not be for you.

VII

Sometimes you stay out all night. You miss the last train back to college upstate on purpose, knowing the next one is at 6 AM. No worries. The clubs are open all night. You go to them and lose yourself in them. In America, you fit in at clubs more than anywhere else. They are for you. It's there that people accept you the most. Very little matters in the forever night of a club and you learn then to forever trust darkness more than light.

VIII

You go on your year abroad to Oxford. You joke that you are doing it to dry out from drugs and drinking but it's somewhat true. There you find more clubs and more drugs and drinking. They call you "American Express," that group of boys you sleep with. You're just amazed they call you American.

IX

At age nineteen, you are raped. At age twenty, you are raped again. This strikes you as something that happens to American girls, a rite of passage. You tell no one, what American girls seem to do too or not do.

X

When 9/11 happens outside your East Village window, you remember your first nightmares as a recent immigrant in the eighties. It was always the same: men in dark clothing with machine guns and machetes loose on your city streets. They were terrorists and you were the hostages. In your dream, it's always in Iran. In your dream, you are safe in America. But not in reality, you realize, after 9/11. Your old world has now come for you. This is what being an American looks like now, you think, as you take your shoes off in an airport security line for the first time.

XI

You become a published author. An American author. No, an Iranian-American author. Never does the hyphen matter more than when you are an author, it seems.

XII

In your teens, you contemplate suicide. In your twenties, you contemplate suicide. In your thirties, you contemplate suicide. You are now about a hundred days from turning forty and you wonder how many more times you will contemplate suicide. You wonder if you'd been happier in that other life you were meant to live: the one where you stayed in Iran and maybe got married and had kids and maybe never became a writer. Maybe even you would have already died of suicide.

XIII

You are now sixteen years an American—you become an American in November 2001—and you realize you could have had a child in that time. You have no kids, no husband, no home you own, no roots in this country. No real reason to be here. Trump becomes president and your country is on the list of one of the six countries of the "Muslim ban." You are suddenly always a Muslim. Suddenly no one doubts your brownness anymore. You realize every day is a lesson in America, the real America, the violent one that never protected you. You remember blonde Angela with the cantaloupe glistening in her laughing mouth and you think for the first time she was maybe laughing at you. Why would you think you'd get anywhere here? On Facebook, you beg your white friends to do better, you ask them for ideas on where to live, you try to imagine another future they have. You wonder if your Americanness is forever and if you will die an American. You realize it might be just as hard to shake being an American as it was to become one in the first place. You realize with joy you will die an American; you realize with agony

you will die an American; you realize with horror and confusion and fear and disbelief that you will die an American. Somehow it is harder to imagine than dying.

You wonder who has died because of your will to become an American, and you wonder also if they look like you.

Refugees and Exiles

MARINA LEWYCKA

When I used to read the stories of refugees, mothers and children being plucked from leaky boats off the coast of Turkey and Libya, or young people's bodies washed up lifeless on Mediterranean shores, it was all terribly sad, I thought, but nothing to do with me.

After all, I was comfortably settled in the UK, with a state pension, a lifetime as a British taxpayer behind me, and, most important of all, a British passport.

I had got my first British passport when I was twenty-two years old. Until then, I had traveled around Europe as a teenager on an "Alien's Travel Document," blue with two black stripes. My older sister, who was born in Ukraine, had a blue travel document with one black stripe, which meant that she was stateless. My two black stripes meant that my alien nationality was officially "undetermined"—I had been born in a German "displaced persons" camp after the end of World War II. So strictly speaking my family were not even refugees—we were forced laborers who sought refuge in the West rather than going back to Stalin's Soviet Union.

I have a photo of myself in that camp, in an old-fashioned pram with big curly springs. I was a very cute, plump baby, far from the malnourished, stick-thin, vacant-eyed babies we have come to associate with refugees. I don't know how my parents

accepted. Once he escapes control, he confirms his identity as the devil. All day I wondered, has this been true in my own experience? If so, then why all the reverence for the refugees who succeed against the odds, the heartwarming success stories? And that's precisely it—one can go around in this circle forever, because it contains no internal logic. You're not enough until you're too much. You're lazy until you're a greedy interloper.

In many of the classes I've taught, my quietest kids have been Middle Eastern. I'm always surprised by this, since the literature I choose should resonate most with them, since I'm an Iranian teacher, their ally, since the civilized world yearns for their voices now. Still, they bristle at headlines about the refugee crisis that I flash on the screen, hang their heads, and look relieved when the class is finished. Their silence makes me angry, but I understand why they don't want to commit to any point of view. Who knows what their universe looks like outside my classroom, what sentiments they're expected to display in order to be on the inside.

Still, I want to show those kids whose very limbs apologize for the space they occupy, and my own daughter, who has yet to feel any shame or remorse, that a grateful face isn't the one they should assume at times like these. Instead they should tune their voices and polish their stories, because the world is duller without them—even more so if they arrived as refugees. Because a person's life is never a bad investment, and so there are no creditors at the door, no debt to repay. Now there's just the rest of life, the stories left to create, all the messy, greedy, ordinary days that are theirs to squander.

- The Displaced - Ed. Viet
Thanh Nguyen. Abrams,
A Refugee Again New York, 2018

VU TRAN

When I was younger, I never thought of myself as a refugee. In my mind, I was an immigrant. A Vietnamese-American. A permanent foreigner with U.S. citizenship. A *refugee* felt like a thing of the past, a provisional status I once held that suggested vulnerability, inferiority, alienness—everything I wanted to remove from my idea of myself.

I arrived in America at the age of five, too young to appreciate my own perilous journey here. I quickly forgot the six days my mother and sister and I spent at sea, on a fishing boat with ninety people. I quickly forgot the deserted Malaysian island where we lived for four months, in a refugee camp of thousands. And then there was my first time on a plane, headed for Oklahoma, and my first time meeting my father, five years after he was forced to flee Vietnam without us. I only recently remembered how for many years he seemed a stranger to me, how I felt like we were intruders in his life.

Growing up in Oklahoma further clouded this past. I was too immersed in white America to focus on anything but the need to look and act like those around me. I was too cocooned in safety to recognize how far I had come from my prior state of need and trauma, or how close that state would always be to me.

It's only in the past few years that I've begun calling myself a refugee. I suspect my own maturation as a writer has had

something to do with this. You can't write meaningfully or honestly about anything, even things that have nothing to do with your own life, if you haven't yet confronted who you are. My refugee experience does not define who I am, but for better or for worse it has informed how I see myself, how I see how others see me, and how I want to be seen.

So that begs the essential question, What is a refugee? It's here that I get stuck. The American version alone offers a myriad of experiences that differ vastly by country, culture, and conflict of origin; and also by time, personal as well as historical. Ask this question to a Holocaust survivor from New York, and then ask an Iranian teenager who's growing up Muslim in the South. Chances are, their answers cannot be confined to a standard definition, not to their satisfaction. Chances are, they'll tell you a story instead, and even then their stories might only capture literal experience. How do you go beyond facts and memories and get at what continues to shape the refugee long after refuge has been found? I've discovered it's more useful to ask, "What is a refugee *like*—not only to those who see her but to the refugee herself?" To this end, I have an ongoing list.

In many ways, a refugee is like an orphan. She might literally be bereft of parents, and of siblings too, but she is bereft more so of her extended family: not just grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins, but also the familial bonds of her homeland, her native community and culture and customs. Stripped of agency from the moment she fled that homeland and dependent now on those who can protect her, she is frequently seen as childish, no matter how old she actually is. As a result, she is pitied for what she has suffered, whether real or imagined on the part of those pitying her, and the pity will diminish the

heroism of her journey and all the choices she made to survive and complete it. At the same time, as is inevitable in the act of compassion, that same pity can become a form of undue respect and admiration. People will listen to her story and sigh, offering her an exemption from judgment she might not deserve or want at all.

Like an orphan, if she's fortunate, she is adopted into a new family, but that requires an adjustment and perhaps a transformation of who she is. In many instances, in joining this new family and assuming this new identity, she will partly if not entirely forget her old ones. And on the inside, away from the eyes of those who see her only as a refugee and especially if she arrived at this status as a child, she will go on to feel as though she is not whole in some way. Her own narrative of who she is will feel incomplete because she will keep wondering where she came from, what she has lost, and what she would have become if that loss had never befallen her.

But being whole is not the refugee's sole aspiration. Wholeness suggests singularity and consistency, and the imperative of acculturation demands personal fluidity, the ability to be more than one person. Which is why a refugee is also like an actor. She knows she must assimilate in order to earn acceptance, to survive and prosper, but the act of assimilation is inevitably a performance—not of a false or superficial identity necessarily, but of one more legible to her audience. She becomes versions of herself, donning the new clothes and accessories, the new habits and modes of behavior that hew to the various settings of her new life. She must speak a different language as well as adopt a different way of talking and expressing herself. She might even change her name. Often, she is one person at home and another

person at work or at school or simply in public. Her family and her people call her one name while everyone else calls her a wildly different one, though at some point she will have trouble determining which name is her true name. Over time, the new identity bleeds into the original one, or might even subsume it until what she has assimilated becomes the dominant reality of who she is. In other words, she comes to live the role that she was obliged to play, because what she's been doing this entire time is interpreting a script forced on her by the new culture or by members of her own people who already successfully performed it. Her audience will either embrace or reject her, and sometimes they'll do both simultaneously, or they will act like they embrace her while deep inside, perhaps without knowing it, they'll judge the performance insufficient.

For those who can never quite accept her, a refugee is like a ghost. To them, she's come from another world, an obscure and incomprehensible world, and now resides in the shadows of this one—an alien entity, an intruder. She can be invisible even though her presence is felt. If she is seen, she might very well be seen through, a specter both present and distant, both acknowledged and denied. She can be spoken of in whispers but also caricatured in the stories that contain her. She can be feared, even when she is not there, sometimes irrationally so, more significant and sinister than any version of herself that she could have conjured. And in that sense, she can be mythologized. She is seen as a manifestation of the past and as a dark harbinger of the future, though it can be argued that the anxiety she inspires is little more than a projection of the beholder's personal fears, deeply rooted in religious, political, and cultural beliefs that are themselves a mythos. That's all to say that a refugee's outsize

effect on people, on those who cannot accept her, is motivated more often than not by the imagination. What they feel, though, is not imaginary. It is real and consequential. If anything, it is imagined into being. And that space between what is real and imaginary is ultimately where the refugee resides. Like a ghost, her state of being—to others and even to herself—is ambiguous. Her identity, her goals and desires and intentions, her place in the world she now inhabits: they are all as hazy as those memories of the world she was once born into.

These ghost-like contours of the refugee—this is what I didn't recognize until recently. I had moved on from the circumstances that brought me to America and into the life it had given me and continues to give me. But America itself never quite moves on. The country of refuge never does, regularly stirred by new conflicts that remind it of the old ones. It keeps remembering your tragic origins, no matter how successfully you've embraced and achieved the promises it originally offered. On the street, it might no longer recognize the refugee in you, but the tide of American history continually washes new versions of you onto these shores, and their shadow is your shadow too.

But why would you want America to forget? This, I suppose, is the real question I've been asking myself.

Throughout elementary school, I remember things I would say in class that would begin with the phrase, "In my country." I was referring to Vietnam, not America, and I was motivated by an innocent desire to offer my teacher and classmates exotic information. If someone mentioned an argument they'd had with their father, I would say that "in my country" you'd be spanked for talking back to an older sibling, let alone to your parents. If we were discussing the Civil War, I would say that "in

my country" we'd had five or six of our own over the centuries, including the one that brought me here—something my father once told me.

What I was really doing, unknowingly, was preserving my connection to my first homeland and expressing to the class what I had lost. At an even deeper level, my need to express this was my intimation that my family and I had no choice in that loss.

By the time I got to high school, I rarely made such statements in class or anywhere else. That need was no longer there, overtaken no doubt by my successful assimilation into my second homeland. I'd become officially more *American* than *Vietnamese*, a fact my parents still mourn to this day. It wasn't out of ignorance of my Vietnamese heritage or a lack of curiosity or self-identification. It was simply a matter of time and place: I had discovered and cultivated all my desires, aversions, and beliefs here.

But then, at nineteen, I returned to Vietnam for the first time with my family. Peering through the window as our plane flew into Saigon, I felt a sudden familiarity that I found again in the heat and farraginous smells of the city, in the throng of life on the streets, in the people who at once resembled me and behaved nothing like me. For two weeks, it was the shock of recognition amid aliens, over and over.

I remember a conversation during that trip with my aunt, my mother's oldest sister, who had helped her raise me and my sister for the five years we were without our father. When we first left, she feared she would never see us again and didn't know if distance or death would be the reason. Even after our survival was confirmed, she mourned us for years and ended

up naming her first daughter after my sister. She told me how stubborn and preternaturally smart my sister was back then and how people used to mistake me for a girl because of my delicate long hair. She recalled when I was two years old and my uncle—the only boy among five girls—drowned in a swimming accident. He was seventeen. I had been his constant companion, and the day after his funeral, I sat playing on the kitchen floor and sang a song he once taught me. I knew none of these things, except for his death. She recounted it all to me while smiling, a willed and hard-earned nostalgia, born from pain. In her smile, I confronted the most fundamental truth about exile: it is never yours alone. No matter how young or unaware I was when I left, I had had another life in Vietnam, and although I had moved on in America, the people from that life had never moved on from me. Even as I sat there beside my aunt as a nineteen-year-old man, the young boy I once was remained a ghost in her life, and ghosts never die.