

WE'LL ALWAYS HAVE

Casablanca

THE LIFE, LEGEND,
AND AFTERLIFE
OF HOLLYWOOD'S
MOST BELOVED MOVIE

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of solidarity with the people of France, and of outrage at the carnage caused by the terrorists." The original song, once the favored anthem of French revolutionaries, reflects this tension. "On the one hand it is a revolutionary tune that extols not just liberty but the values of the new world," explained French historian Michel Vovelle, "while on the other hand it is a war song that expresses, with zeal sometimes deemed 'sanguinary,' the patriotic sentiments of an embattled nation." Thanks to *Casablanca*, the "Marseillaise" may be one of the few national anthems sung by noncitizens, who may not know all its words but know its emotional weight.

Three-quarters of a century after *Casablanca's* initial release, we continue to wrestle with our own variations of the moral dilemmas faced by Rick, that archetypal reluctant hero, seeking resolve not only in its music, but in its message. "It's just a movie," screenwriter Howard Koch admitted already in 1989, "but it's more than that. It's become something that people can't find in values today. And they go back to *Casablanca* as they go back to church, political church, to find something that is gone from our values today."

Chapter 4

SUCH MUCH?

At a small table tucked away beneath the cavernous arches of Rick's Café Américain sit an elderly European couple dressed in what appear to be their best clothes. A portly man with silver hair and round spectacles, outfitted in the typical costume of a Viennese waiter, rushes up to the table. The endearing Carl announces his presence in a string of untranslated, Austrian-accented words: "*Ich bin schon hier, Herr Leuchtag. Ich habe ihnen den feinsten Cognac gebracht. Trinken nur die Angestellten*" ("Here I am, Herr Leuchtag. I brought you the finest cognac. Only the employees drink it."). After pouring a glass of cognac for Frau Leuchtag (Viennese stage and film actress Ilka Grüning) and one for Herr Leuchtag (Austrian-born actor Ludwig Stössel), Carl (the Budapest-born S. Z. Sakall, né Jenő Jacob Gerő, better known to the world

as "Cuddles") joins the conversation, which quickly switches to English.

Herr Leuchtag: Carl, sit down. Have a brandy mit [sic] us.

Frau Leuchtag: To celebrate our leaving for America tomorrow.

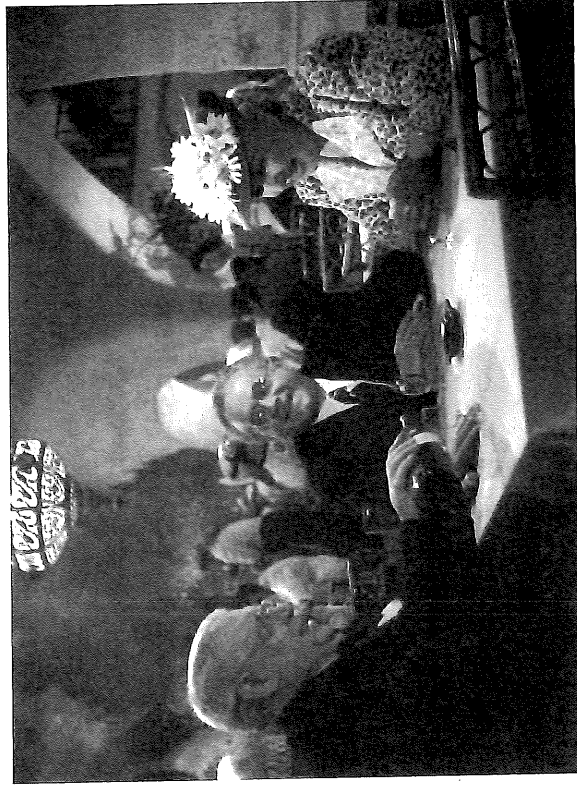
Carl: Thank you very much. I thought you would ask me. So I brought the good brandy and a third glass.

Frau Leuchtag: At last the day has come.

Herr Leuchtag: Frau Leuchtag and I are speaking nothing but English now.

Frau Leuchtag: So we should feel at home when we get to America.

Carl: A very nice idea.



Carl (S. Z. Sakall), Herr Leuchtag (Ludwig Stössel), and Frau Leuchtag (Ilka Grüning) discussing their plans for America.

Herr Leuchtag: (*Raising his glass.*) To America.

(*Frau Leuchtag and Carl repeat, "To America." They clink glasses and drink*)

Herr Leuchtag: Liebchen, uh, sweetness heart, what watch?

Frau Leuchtag: Ten watch.

Herr Leuchtag: Such much?

Carl: Er, you will get along beautifully in America, huh.

This short scene is "unforgettable in its simplicity and beauty," as the late German filmmaker Rainer Werner Fassbinder once remarked, pronouncing it, with just a smidgen of exaggeration, "one of the most beautiful pieces of dialogue in the history of film." It's also an unexpected moment of deep self-awareness, a parody of wooden translation—fumbling for the equivalent English idiom for telling time in German—and greenhorn confusion, which might be taken for the actual experience of newly arrived refugee actors in Hollywood now playing refugees on screen. "The accent," observed a critic for the *New York Mirror* in 1942, "is on accents in *Casablanca*."

The film was made at a moment in history when Los Angeles and its studio fortresses were increasingly flooded with newly arrived German-speaking émigrés. The European Film Fund, established by director Ernst Lubitsch, agent Paul Kohner, and writer Salka Viertel, assisted in bringing refugees to America, providing stipends and securing affidavits for authors and actors, several of them cast and crew members of *Casablanca* (the chief donors to the fund included director Michael Curtiz and actors Paul Henreid, Peter Lorre, and S. Z. Sakall). By the 1940s, more than fifteen hundred film

professionals from Germany and Austria alone had landed on the West Coast, where they began to change the flavor of their adopted city. Just a year before *Casablanca's* release, Janet Flanner published a *New Yorker* profile of Thomas Mann—who went on writing in German long after he relocated to Pacific Palisades—under the provocative title “Goethe in Hollywood,” intimating that the exalted German culture of the pre-Nazi era had now been relocated to Southern California. Around this same time, Austrian-born director and actor Otto Preminger, who was initially considered to play the part of Major Heinrich Strasser, is said to have interrupted an unruly crowd of Hungarian film professionals blathering away in their native tongue with a caustic jab: “Don’t you guys know you’re in Hollywood? Speak German!”

On the set of *Casablanca*, German was frequently spoken between takes among various actors and crew members. If not the official lingua franca, it was the mother tongue of many of the refugees who congregated that summer in Burbank. Even those who hadn’t grown up speaking the language—like the St. Petersburg-born actor Leonid Kinskey, who played Sascha the bartender—found ample opportunity to trot out some of the phrases they had learned back in Europe. As Kin-skey fondly recalled of his regular conversations with fellow actors Henreid, Lorre, and Sakall, “[my] German at the time was still fluent enough to nod at the right moment and throw in an occasional ‘Ach so’ and ‘Ach du lieber’ in a typical Kaf-feeeklatsch manner.”

In his widely read “Hollywood Calling” column, published in

the German-language émigré newspaper *Aufbau*, Hans Kafka (no relation to Franz) reported in January 1942, “Efficiency is still the only thing that counts. Thus far, there have been no signs of discrimination against immigrant collaborators in the picture business. Continuing their directorial duties are Fritz Lang, Robert Siodmak, Anatole Litvak at Fox, Charles Vidor at RKO, Michael Curtiz at Warners.” The state of affairs regarding the actors, even if they were often limited to secondary parts, quite a few of which required donning a Nazi uniform, was not terribly different. As Kafka put it in a subsequent column, “it’s a grotesque, almost freakish situation; Hitler’s gangsters, trying to annihilate all those [European-born émigré] actors finally succeeded to weld them to an almost perfect ensemble and give them the chance of their lives, artistically as well as financially.”

Nearly all of the some seventy-five actors and actresses cast in *Casablanca* were immigrants. Among the fourteen who earned a screen credit, only three were born in the United States: Humphrey Bogart, Dooley Wilson, and Joy Page, Jack Warner’s stepdaughter, who plays the Bulgarian refugee Annina Brandel. At the studio, Stage 8, where Rick’s Café was assembled, was known as International House—the Warner Bros. press kit sent out to exhibitors included a slightly exaggerated gloss on this aspect: “The cast and crew of the production represent so many different nationalities that the set is the most cosmopolitan spot in Southern California.” As the headline of a contemporary review in the *Philadelphia Record* announced, “Foreign Stars Enjoy a Boom in

Hollywood." Hailing from more than thirty different nations, the majority of refugee actors in the film served merely as day players, performing small parts—generally either as Nazis or as refugees fleeing the Nazis—most without significant dialogue. Among them, however, were many distinguished European artists with illustrious pasts on stage and screen.

Peter Lorre had arrived in Hollywood only a few years before—initially sharing a single room with a similarly destitute refugee named Billy Wilder—and Conrad Veidt was still relatively fresh off the boat. Lotte Palfi, a former star of the German stage who played one of the many refugees on-screen and lived the life of one off of it, has just a single line of dialogue, whereas Trude Berliner, a onetime cabaret performer in Berlin, plays the lonely woman who asks Rick to join her for a drink. Curt Bois, the shifty pickpocket (or the "Dark European," as he's called in the script), had been a child star in Berlin who became a renowned theater and cabaret actor and a devoted disciple of theater impresario Max Reinhardt. His unusually poignant line, "This place is full of vultures, vultures everywhere," is perhaps not merely a thumbnail description of the dicey North African outpost but also a sly inside joke aimed at the recently arrived émigrés in Hollywood.

Film critic Pauline Kael, who otherwise held back praise for the picture—skewering its "special appealingly schlocky romanticism"—showed genuine affection for its large émigré cast. "If you think of *Casablanca* and think of those small roles being played by Hollywood actors faking the accents," she later remarked, "the picture wouldn't have had anything like the color and tone it had." Nor would it have had the same

emotional force. The American-born bit actor Dan Seymour, who played the doorman Abdul at Rick's, noticed streams of tears flowing from the eyes of his fellow actors—most prominently, Madeleine Lebeau, who plays Rick's on-again-off-again paramour Yvonne—during the singing of the "Marseillaise." "I suddenly realized," he recalled many years later, "that they were all real refugees."

Lebeau and her then-husband, Marcel Dalio (né Israel Moshe Blauschild), who plays Emil the croupier, had in fact fled Vichy France via Lisbon, the same destination that scores of languishing refugees in the film dream of reaching. Using forged Chilean visas, they managed to gain a spot on a Portuguese cargo ship transporting European refugees to the New World; they made it to Mexico, and crossed the border into California using Canadian visas. Likewise, the film's technical advisor, Robert Aisner, a former lieutenant in the French army, managed to escape from a Nazi concentration camp and follow the refugee trail to Casablanca en route to America. As Anthony Heilbut, author of *Exiled in Paradise*, the most authoritative guide to the German-speaking migration to America during the 1930s and '40s, once remarked, "It would be exciting to think of *Casablanca* as helping to translate the émigré sensibility to an American audience." If we pay closer attention to the many accents, gestures, and intimations captured on screen, it's even more so.

Already present in the film's prologue, the refugee theme—even if ultimately eclipsed by the love story between Rick and Ilsa and the final enactment of Rick's conversion from self-avowed isolationist to a committed partisan—stands at the



Production still of Paris train station from *Casablanca*. (For CASABLANCA [1942] ™ & © Turner Entertainment [s16])

center of the plot, as its very point of departure and the backdrop against which everything else plays out. Immediately after the opening credits fade from the screen, and after a few recognizable bars from the “Marseillaise” that Viennese-born film composer Max Steiner managed to work into the score—he even wrote a short composition that he called “Refuge” to be played, *molto moderato*, in the prologue—the historical narration begins:

With the coming of the Second World War, many eyes in imprisoned Europe turned hopefully, or desperately, toward the freedom of the Americas. Lisbon became the great embarkation point. But not everybody could get to

Lisbon directly, and so, a tortuous, roundabout refugee trail sprang up. Paris to Marseilles, across the Mediterranean to Oran, then by train, or auto, or foot, across the rim of Africa to Casablanca in French Morocco. Here, the fortunate ones, through money, or influence, or luck, might obtain exit visas and scurry to Lisbon, and from Lisbon to the New World. But the others wait in Casablanca—and wait—and wait—and wait.

The miniature globe, spinning like a roulette wheel, quickly dissolves to a map insert tracing the routes of passage, the same routes that Murray Burnett had learned about in Europe four summers earlier. This is followed by a montage of stock shots, a kind of visual shorthand, with throngs of refugees on foot, in horse-drawn carriages, on steamships, on bicycles, and in automobiles. The camera finally guides us to a rather stifling, crowded North African street—filmed on the Warner back lot in Burbank—and to the palpable chaos of that world.

The entire prologue was designed by budding filmmaker Don Siegel, then head of the montage department at Warners, who would go on to direct *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* in the mid-1950s. On August 1, 1942, Wallis wrote a memo to Siegel, copying director Curtiz, in which the producer explained the significance of Siegel's assignment, and in particular, the focus on the globe. “For the opening of the picture, immediately preceding the montage of the refugees,” Wallis wrote, “we would like to have a spinning globe—an unusual, interesting shot, sketchily lighted. As the globe's spinning slackens and stops,



Abraham Pisarek's photomontage "Wohin?" ("Where To?") from 1935 (left). The globe insert designed for the prologue of *Casablanca* by Don Siegel (right).

the camera zooms up to the general vicinity of our locale, and at that point you can dissolve to your montage."

As it turns out, the evocative image of a globe, used as a symbol of desperate flight, was not unique to high-gloss fantasies hatched in Hollywood. In a series of lectures delivered at the University of Graz, in Austria, scholar Joachim Schlör cited an earlier, lesser-known example taken from the visual arts. In 1935, the Polish-born photographer Abraham Pisarek completed a photomontage entitled "Wohin?" ("Where To?"), in which the actors Cläre Anstein and Heinz Heilborn—both of whom perished in concentration camps—stare longingly at a globe enshrouded in storm clouds. It's almost uncanny how much Pisarek's photomontage anticipates the globe that Siegel was asked to design seven years later, both instances underscoring the peril refugees faced in Nazi-engulfed Europe. In comparing the two images, and placing *Casablanca* within the wider context of anti-Nazi films, Schlör draws a critical distinction: "It's important to note that the film [*Casablanca*] does not broach the issue of Jewish persecution in

Europe directly—opposite the Nazis are, on the one hand, the oppressed people ('We come from Bulgaria. Things are very bad there, Monsieur. The devil's got the people by the throat.'). and on the other, the individuals, the *refugees*, whom we get to know as stand-ins for the thousands."

Informing all facets of this larger backdrop is the profound and stirring encounter with the refugee trail as experienced by Murray Burnett during his fateful trip to Europe in the summer of 1938. "I felt at the time and I still feel that no one can remain neutral in a world like that," Burnett remarked in a 1983 interview. "You had to take sides, no matter how cynical you might have been, no matter how much you wanted to be uninvolved. You had to side with the refugees. You had to." But to tell the story on the Hollywood screen in 1942, these refugees would have to be stripped of any obvious ethnic or religious affiliations. They would simply have to be "refugees," congregating at Rick's Café, all of them in the shared predicament—not specific to any one group, as the film has it—of waiting to secure a prized exit visa. "There is a structural absence of the Jewish question," André Aciman, author of *Out of Egypt* and editor of *Letters of Transit: Reflections of Exile, Identity, Language and Loss*, observes. "All these Jews are on screen and yet they cannot address it explicitly. It's all over the screen, but not in the movie."

We first enter the interior of Rick's Café after a quick show of military pageantry surrounding the arrival of Major Strasser and his entourage, and the promise of an arrest of the murderer responsible for killing two German couriers. To heighten the audience's anticipation, Captain Renault, who assures

Major Strasser that he's rounded up "twice the usual number of suspects," insists matter-of-factly, "Everybody comes to Rick's"—which prompts a transition, by way of dissolve, to the café's façade and its glimmering neon sign. Once inside, the camera pans gently across the tables overflowing with patrons to Sam, tapping away at the keys of his piano and singing a medley of jazz standards, and then rests on a few tables, where we catch a few snatches of conversation. "Waiting, waiting, waiting. I'll never get out of here," says one man with a look of total resignation. "I'll die in Casablanca." Next comes a woman trying to offload her diamonds, branded a "drug on the market" by the local merchant dressed in a caftan and wearing a fez ("Everybody sells diamonds. There are diamonds everywhere"), presumably to finance the purchase of exit visas; then a conversation between two men plotting resistance of some kind that is interrupted by a pair of boisterous German officers walking past the table, a trail of ominous words following them: and another table rehearsing an elaborate escape plan ("It's the fishing smack *Santiago*. It leaves at one tomorrow night from the end of the medina, third boat. And bring fifteen thousand francs in cash. Remember: *in cash*.")

We also hear a table conversing in Chinese, juxtaposed with Sascha's toast "*nostrouje*" and the British response ("cheerio"), a cheeky German address of respect ("Yes, Herr Professor"), an Italian thank you ("*mille grazie, signore*"), and finally the French spoken by the croupier at the roulette table ("*Madames et monsieurs*"). At the time of the production, there was no shortage of foreign-born extras available through central cast-

ing. "The [Warner Bros.] commissary at lunch, with its mix of nationalities and accents," writes David Denby in a reappraisal of the film in *The New Yorker*, "may not have been all that different from Rick's Café. The people there are all desperate for work, desperate to find a home, yet happy to be alive and stuck in an absurdly sunshiny place and a naïvely optimistic country. The combination of European bitterness and American joy made *Casablanca* possible."

In that same first scene inside Rick's, at the baccarat table, seated next to an elegant Asian woman dressed in a traditional-looking silk-and-sequin costume, a woman with a German accent (Trude Berliner), wearing only one glove, to better grip the cards in her bare left hand, and an elaborate head scarf, asks Carl the waiter if Rick will join them for a drink. Carl's response, asserting one of Rick's cardinal rules—he never drinks with customers—serves as a setup for a variation on a well-worn émigré joke. A man at the same baccarat table proposes that Rick might drink with them if he knew that he ran the second largest bank in Amsterdam, at which point Carl quips, "The second largest? That wouldn't impress Rick. The leading banker in Amsterdam is now the pastry chef in our kitchen. [. . .] And his father is the bellboy." The punch line, of course, is that despite whatever venerated job one may—or may not—have had in the Old Country, and whatever respect may have come with it, the rules no longer apply.

A little less than three months before the world premiere of *Casablanca*, the Austrian-born writer and critic Alfred Polgar, who had been brought to Hollywood with the aid of

the European Film Fund in 1938, was asked to contribute an essay to the *Aufbau* newspaper. What he wrote in "Life on the Pacific" contains much of the same irony and wit, not to mention the unabashed sarcasm, as the writings of the Viennese coffeehouse crowd to which he had once belonged:

I can assure you that life here—if one is in good health, if one's heart isn't troubled by worry about the fate of one's family, friends, and distant acquaintances, if the general and particular reasons to be worried, disappointed, or disheartened aren't overwhelming, if one has enough work, if hope has half-paralyzed the despair about what is happening and about what is not happening, if there's enough money at home and most probably will be there tomorrow—under these conditions life on the Pacific is altogether tolerable, even pleasant.

Throughout the essay, he draws attention to the warm climate and lush vegetation enjoyed by the "Pacifists," as he calls his fellow inhabitants of the West Coast—"roses bloom several times a year"—before talking about daily life in this company town in which hyperbole is so rampant in work-related conversation. "If for instance someone has done something that is common practice on the Pacific, such as writing the story for a film, everyone—family, friends, agents, and people at all levels of the film studio—are sure to find it 'fantastic.' The only one who doesn't think it's fantastic is the author, whose fantastic stories no one knows what to do with."

As the exiled playwright and ill-fated Hollywood screen-

writer Bertolt Brecht wrote in his 1942 poem "Der Sumpf" ("The Swamp"), one of the "Hollywood Elegies" cycle he completed while living in Santa Monica that was later discovered among Peter Lorre's private papers: "I saw many friends, and among them the friend I loved most / Helplessly sink into the swamp / I pass daily." Within that same cycle, Brecht composed a short poem titled simply "Hollywood." Its single stanza further amplifies a bitter sentiment about what he must have thought of as the capitalist "means of production" in the dream factories: "Every day, to earn my daily bread / I go to the market where lies are bought / Hopefully / I take my place among the sellers." Brecht's past glories as one of Weimar Germany's greatest dramatists were often summarily forgotten or ignored in Southern California ("Wherever I go," he wrote in "Sonnet in Emigration," another exile poem of his, "they ask me, 'Spell your name!'", something he shared with the bit actors and the characters they played in *Casablanca*).

Even Carl (not to mention S. Z. Sakall, the actor who plays him) appears to have had a distinguished past, intimated when Abdul calls him "Herr Professor," as if to suggest that perhaps the jovial waiter had once been a famous scientist or maybe a philosopher before he landed in Casablanca. One of the favorite in-jokes told among German-speaking refugees in the United States concerned two émigré dachshunds that meet in the street: one asks the other, "Were you also once a St. Bernard?" Sakall picked up on this theme in his memoir, *The Story of Cuddles*: "The poor refugees had a hard time settling down. They roamed the streets like masterless dogs. The only joy in their tragic situation was the same innocent little lie.



Lotte Palfi as a refugee desperate to sell her diamonds.

They told the Americans and each other that in the old country they had been prosperous and had held jobs of authority and importance. It was about them that the very, very sad song had been written: *'Ich war einmal ein grosser Bernhardiner'* ['I was once a Big St. Bernard']."

Finding work, it turns out, wasn't quite as easy as some had imagined. "I told myself, America is a 'melting pot,'" writes Lotte Palfi in her *Memoirs of an Unknown Actress: Or, I Never Was a Genuine St. Bernard*. "With all the nationalities that came together there, speaking different variants of English, I was certain my accent would not stand in my way. Never, never had I been more wrong. True, I did get tiny parts now and then, but only when they needed someone to play a German. Months and often years went by between jobs." She adds later

in her account, describing her bit parts mostly in anti-Nazi pictures: "I would work a day or two, rarely three, and then sit around for months taking an undeserved vacation." The one and only line she has in *Casablanca*, uttered while trying to sell her diamonds ("But can't you make it just a little more, please?"), seems to underscore her offscreen predicament as well, searching in vain for more fully developed film roles and a steadier source of income. (Alfred Polgar, in his "Life on the Pacific," pointed to the dark irony that the great biblical saga of human suffering was known to the English-speaking world as the Book of Job.)

The jowl-wiggling Sakall, who went by the name of Yani before he became Cuddles, began his life in Budapest, in 1883, under the reign of Habsburg emperor Franz Joseph—the subtitle of his memoir, fittingly enough, is *My Life Under the Emperor Francis Joseph, Adolf Hitler, and the Warner Brothers*—where he very quickly became part of the city's theater and cabaret scene. Like many other ambitious Hungarian Jews of his generation, including director Michael Curtiz (three years Sakall's junior), he moved to Vienna in the 1920s, becoming a regular member of the Leopoldi-Wiesenthal cabaret troupe as well as a beloved comedy actor in Austria's nascent film industry. Later, while in Germany, or what he more playfully called the "Hungarian colony in Berlin," Sakall trained with such theater giants as Max Reinhardt and Erwin Piscator. He also tried his hand as a screenwriter and producer, acting in several silent features and in one of the earliest German sound films, *Zwei Herzen im Dreiviertel Takt* (*Two Hearts in Waltz Time*; 1930), before returning to Hungary in 1933. He continued to



Everybody comes to Rick's: the émigré actors S. Z. Sakall (as headwaiter Carl), Marcel De La Brosse (as a German officer), and Leonid Kinskey (as bartender Sascha).

act in dozens of Hungarian films until 1939, when he narrowly escaped to New York on a ship sailing from Rotterdam.

Upon arriving, the linguistically challenged actor went with his wife, Anna (or "Boszi") for breakfast, in uncanny anticipation of Herr und Frau Leuchtag. Wanting to order scrambled eggs, a favorite of his, he implored the waiter at the hotel restaurant, "Eier!" Not quite sure what to make of this Teutonic utterance, the waiter looked askance. "Somehow he realized I was speaking Goethe's language," Sakall recounts sardonically, "and he replied politely: 'Nix German!'" After an ensuing series of comic miscommunications with the manager—including an effort to draw the shape of an egg and

being accused of mocking the manager's bald head—Sakall's wife recommended in vain that her husband might want to attend English classes at night school. While still at the New York hotel, Sakall received a telegram from émigré producer Joe Pasternak in Hollywood: "MR. YANI SAKALL, FILM STAR, NEW YORK. STAY THERE THREE MORE WEEKS AND PICK UP ENGLISH LANGUAGE." Sakall promptly replied: "MR. JOE PASTERNAK, OPTIMIST, BEVERLY HILLS." The need to master English quickly subsided for the Hungarian actor. "Once I arrived in Hollywood," he writes, "my language troubles were over. There I found Laszlo Kardos, Laszlo Fodor, Laszlo Vadnay, Aladar Laszlo and about another ten or fifteen Laszlos—all Hungarians and all potential and helpful interpreters."

Director Michael Curtiz's struggles with the English language were legendary. "So many times I have a speech ready, but no dice," he famously quipped in 1944 upon receiving the Oscar for best director for *Casablanca*. "Always a bridesmaid, never a mother. Now I win, I have no speech." During the shoot, Curtiz had frequently reassured producer Hal Wallis, who was worried about various unfinished patches in the script, "Don't worry vat is rough—I make it go so fast no one vill notice." He once referred to a group of extras as "separate together in a bunch," and Leonid Kinskey tells of a moment on the set when Curtiz became increasingly impatient after an assistant took too long to fetch new pages. "The next time I have to send a silly fool," he purportedly said, "I'll go myself!" A childhood friend of Curtiz, Sakall had worked with the director while still in Vienna, and spent long stretches of time with him at Warners. "Those who tell tales here in America about Mike's

exotic English," Sakall notes in his memoir, "should have heard him speak German."

Not everything in Hollywood was easy for actors like Sakall. While he had been quite a star on the other side of the Atlantic, here he was essentially unknown, a dachshund. "On the whole, my Yani is very depressed," wrote his wife, Boszi, in a letter of June 6, 1939, to their family in Hungary. "In Europe he was always used to being fêted, applauded, celebrated, and he misses it here. We roamed the streets for days and no one paid the slightest attention to us. [. . .] Thank God, the doctor whom we called found nothing wrong with him. 'This is a psychological symptom,' he said with a smile: 'He is a 'ham'—that's all.'" Less than a year later, people began to recognize Sakall, even to ask for an occasional autograph, and all was better—well, apart from being mistaken by a Hollywood police officer for Sidney Greenstreet. Some of Boszi's letters home almost read like vaudeville comedy sketches: "Yesterday we went to a cinema where you could drive in with your car. Yani likes it very much. In Europe he drove *only once* into a cinema with his car, and they took away his license."

Lotte Palfi and Sakall surely were not alone in their experiences. Marcel Dalio had been something of a national celebrity in his native France before fleeing the Nazi occupation for America. Like his countryman Jean Renoir, who also left for Hollywood—or what he called "a club for disenchanted Europeans"—after the fall of France, he had to reinvent himself. While previously Dalio had starred opposite Jean Gabin and Erich von Stroheim as the Jewish soldier Rosenthal in Renoir's *La Grande Illusion* (1937) and played

the charming marquis in *La Règle du jeu* (*The Rules of the Game*; 1939), in Hollywood he was resigned mainly to minor roles. When images taken from Dalio's earlier screen roles were used to depict the stereotypical Jew on Vichy propaganda placards, Dalio recalled in his memoirs, "at least I had star billing on the poster." "There he is with this bit part in *Casablanca*," screenwriter Philip Epstein's son, the novelist Leslie Epstein, told me, "it's amazing. In fact, *Casablanca* has a roll call of so many of these refugees that—maybe that's, subliminally, part of its appeal, that Europeans see themselves." The many instances in which refugees almost seem to be enacting their true-life destinies on screen also brought a few instances in which these same actors reenacted their fictional roles off the set. As Aljean Harmetz explains it, on June 22, 1942, while Madeleine Lebeau filmed the scene in which she returns to Rick's Café arm in arm with a Nazi officer (played by fellow refugee Hans Heinrich von Twardowski), Dalio had his day in court to file for divorce alleging Lebeau's infidelity.

As for Twardowski, who began his film career playing a supporting role in *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* and who fled the Nazis to avoid persecution as a homosexual, he was forever limited to playing Nazis in Hollywood. After being cast as S.S. chief Reinhard Heydrich in Fritz Lang's *Hangmen Also Die!*, less than a year after *Casablanca*, he sent an urgent telegram to his dear friend the theater actress Eleonora von Mendelssohn in New York. "I'M VERY MISERABLE AND UNHAPPY AND I WANT TO RETURN TO NEW YORK. I PLAYED IN FRITZ LANG'S PICTURE THE ROLE OF HEINRICH [sic] HEYDRICH," he began. "PLEASE ASK BRECHT HOW I DID IT AND TRY TO RECOMMEND ME TO BERGNER," he continued,

referring to the famous Viennese actress Elisabeth Bergner, then preparing to star in *The Two Mrs. Carrrolls* on Broadway, "FOR THE ROLE THEY OFFERED TO STROHEIM WHO CANNOT DO IT ON ACCOUNT OF A MOVIE ENGAGEMENT. TALK TO BERGNER ABOUT ME, PLEASE." Like many other of the émigré actors confined to brutal typecasting in a cycle of war pictures at Warners and elsewhere, Twardowski, who became a naturalized American citizen in July 1943, dreamed of a return to the stage. "I am ready to come to New York at a moment's notice," he wrote Mendelssohn.

Some of the bit parts that émigré actors played in *Casablanca* were so minor that they soon drifted from memory. "Paul Panzer, born in Würzburg, serves coffee and cocktails," remark the Austrian film scholars Brigitte Mayr and Michael Omasta. "Lutz Altschul, from Baden near Vienna, now calling himself Louis Victo Arco, has a walk-on part as a refugee, as he had done in the anti-Nazi films *Underground*, *Berlin Correspondent*, and *All Through the Night*." Trying to recall the supporting role he had played in *Casablanca*, in a phone interview from Berlin nearly half a century after the production, Curt Bois commented modestly: "I have such a small part. If one of the audience coughed while I was stealing from a man his money and then he stopped coughing, he didn't see me any more. It was such a small part. It was no part at all." In truth, the pickpocket is not terribly essential to the main story of the film, and yet the part contains its own share of psychological complexity and its deeper bearing on the subplot concerning the nameless refugees.

Moments before Bois appears on screen as the "Dark Euro-

pean" with his crafty hands, the "usual suspects" are rounded up and loaded into a wagon by the Vichy police. We witness clear expressions of anxiety, panic, crushed dreams, and a failed escape attempt—captured in a string of reaction shots amid the chaos—that Bois, playing the pickpocket, is soon asked to translate for the naïve English couple. "Two German couriers were found murdered in the desert," he recounts, "the *unoccupied* desert. This is the customary roundup of refugees, liberals, and uh, of course, a beautiful young girl for Monsieur Renault, the prefect of police." For this short moment, Bois serves as a storyteller of sorts—talents that would be put to use years later when coaxed out of retirement to play Homer in Wim Wenders's *Der Himmel über Berlin* (*Wings of Desire*; 1987)—explaining to the English couple, and to the audience, the subplot of the film. Before proceeding to swipe the Englishman's wallet, he notes, once more underscoring the plight of the dispossessed: "Unfortunately, along with these unhappy refugees the scum of Europe has gravitated to Casablanca. Some of them have been waiting years for a visa." Bois himself became a naturalized U.S. citizen before returning, thoroughly disenchanted with Hollywood, to East Berlin after the war.

The many fleeting glimpses of individuals left stranded in *Casablanca* highlight what novelist Erich Maria Remarque, in *Die Nacht von Lissabon* (*The Night in Lisbon*; 1962), calls "the refugee glance—an imperceptible lifting of the eyelids, followed by a look of blank indifference, as if we couldn't care less." As Remarque further observes, "The refugee glance is different from the German glance under Hitler—that cautious peering around in all directions, followed by a hurried

exchange of whispers—but both, like the forced migration of innumerable Schwarzes [Jewish families] from Germany and the displacement of whole populations in Russia, are part of twentieth-century civilization.”

Although history was fictionalized in the film, the real-life events often had a tangible connection to members of the production. “Curtiz’s recent problems with getting some of his family out of Hungary had brought home to him the refugee situation,” remarked film programmer Ronald Haver in an essay from 1976. “He asked the Epsteins to work in some vignettes which would point out the plight of refugees and allow him to make good use of Rick’s café.” Innumerable members of the cast either had, like Curtiz, relatives still stranded in Europe or had themselves experienced the horrors of Nazi Germany directly. Quite a few of them, including Sakall, Dalio, and Palfi, would lose family in the camps. When shooting the Paris flashback scene of Rick and Ilsa at the French sidewalk café, in which the pair asks themselves how long it will be until the Germans storm the capital, one of the female extras burst into inconsolable tears. Curtiz had to halt the production temporarily. A small bearded man, another extra on the set, purportedly walked over to the director and tapped him on the shoulder. “I am very sorry, sir,” he said to Curtiz. “But that is my wife. Please pardon her. You see, our home was in Paris. And we went through that awful day.”

Even an actor like Conrad Veidt, who left Germany of his own accord in 1933 (the same year he married the Jewish-Hungarian Lily Prager), was essentially a refugee by the time of the production. To express his opposition to the regime, the

non-Jewish actor is said to have listed “JEW” in large block letters for his religion on a form he was required to submit with National Socialist authorities. The Nazis responded in kind, keeping his films from being shown anywhere in the Third Reich. “When I went back to Germany from Hollywood in 1929,” commented Veidt with startling prescience, “I felt a strangeness in the air. It was like the agitation before a terrible storm.” By 1941, after spending his initial exile years in England, Veidt found himself living comfortably with his wife as new transplants in Beverly Hills. Even if he was repeatedly expected to play one on screen, he enjoyed the distance from the real Nazi officials that had previously threatened his existence.

Having arrived in Los Angeles around the same time, Paul Henreid and his wife, Lisl, traveled in social circles composed largely of other successful, well-known émigrés, including Veidt. “It seemed to us that Hollywood, in those days, was a gathering place for some of Europe’s most intriguing people,” Henreid notes in his memoir. “There were the novelists Lion Feuchtwanger, Thomas Mann, and Vicki Baum. There was Bruno Walter, who had conducted and directed the Vienna Opera, and Arturo Toscanini, and Gregor Piatigorsky, the cellist—the list seemed endless, and they were all old friends or friends of old friends.” He also notes his standing get-togethers with the Prague-born actor Francis (Franz) Lederer, who had played opposite Louise Brooks in G. W. Pabst’s *Die Büchse der Pandora* (*Pandora’s Box*; 1929) and who at Warner Bros. earned star billing in *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*, and with Bertolt Brecht, whose Viennese-Jewish wife, Helene Weigel, would bake delicious *Gugelhupf*, a sweet delicacy from the Old

Country, for their regular guests, and even of the occasional pool party with director Fritz Lang and his latest female star.

Although Peter Lorre felt as if he'd changed countries, quoting Brecht, "oftener than our shoes," he shared much of Henneke's enthusiasm for his adopted country. By 1935, he was living on Adelaide Drive in Santa Monica. "I love the water and sunshine and fresh air and flowers," he told a journalist from the *New York Post*. "I am delighted to be here, because I can have a home." Yet both Henneke and Lorre encountered prejudice that they'd hoped to leave behind on the other side of the Atlantic. Henneke writes, for example, of a startling sign he found posted outside a Miami hotel during his 1942 tour to promote *Joan of Paris*: "Jews and Dogs Not Permitted." As he comments further in his memoir, after pondering the hypothetical question of whether what was happening in Germany could ever occur on American shores, "I had never realized there was so much vicious anti-Semitism under the cover of warmth and pleasant smiles." When Lorre had a similar experience, vacationing in a hotel in the White Mountains of New Hampshire, the notorious prankster responded by spilling the ink blotter on the reception counter and sending the hotel, which proudly espoused the same restrictive policies, a three-year subscription to the Jewish newspaper *The Forward*.

An article by the German-born critic and philosopher Hannah Arendt appeared in *The Menorah Journal*, another preeminent Jewish publication of the era, the same month that *Casablanca* went into general release. In "We Refugees," she offers an unvarnished account of what Hollywood could merely allegorize and depict by way of cinematic illusion and ellip-

sis. "In the first place," Arendt declares, using the collective pronoun throughout, "we don't like to be called 'refugees.' We ourselves call each other 'newcomers' or 'immigrants.'" She assigns herself the task of advocate, increasing popular awareness of the émigré's plight—to tell, as she puts it, "the story of our struggle" so that it can "finally become known."

We lost our homes, which means we lost 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.

She goes on to assert, after describing her experiences in Gurs, the French concentration camp in which she was temporarily held, "We were expelled from Germany because we were Jews." Although serious in tone, Arendt's account includes yet another St. Bernard anecdote ("You don't know to whom you speak," one man tells her soon after she arrives in the New World, "I was section-manager in Karstadt's [a great department store in Berlin]"). Like the lucky ones in *Casablanca*, after her internment, Arendt managed to secure passage from Lisbon to America. "Refugees driven from country to country," she concludes in her essay, "represent the vanguard of their peoples."

This does not in any way deny the Hollywood gloss. Sure,

there's the telegenic Bulgarian couple Jan and Annina Brandel—played by Austrian-born actor Helmut Dantine and the Warner family member Joy Page—and their fairy-tale victory as they win the money for the otherwise prohibitive costs of exit visas at the roulette table. There's also Paul Henreid's performance as Victor Laszlo, the concentration camp survivor in the perfectly ironed double-breasted, cream-colored suit, who gives the audience a freedom fighter as European leading man (Hal Wallis expressed his reservations, largely unheard, in a memo about the choice of costumes: "they are refugees, making their way from country to country, and they are not going to Rick's Café for social purposes"). "He is central casting's idea of the kind of refugee you wouldn't mind having in your living room," suggests filmmaker Mark Rappaport. "He's not always complaining about his destroyed life, his devastated country, and the loved ones he's lost."

Despite the artificial nature of the film—it's a fiction, after all—it still somehow speaks with uncommon poignancy to the exile condition, not only during the war years of the 1940s but at later historical moments and in different settings. "The atmosphere of *Casablanca*, specifically the waiting, is so reminiscent of my experience in Egypt, waiting for the exit visas," explains André Aciman, who fled Alexandria with his Jewish family in the mid-1960s. "Everyone among our peers was stuck, waiting to get out of Egypt, trying to get money and property out with them. It is a narrative that speaks to anyone who wants to get out, who is trying to escape, and the refugee cast (Dalio, Lorre, Sakall) speaks to that. They were all exiles themselves." In 1992, for the fiftieth anniversary of *Casa-*

blanca, a group of Moroccan Jews met at Temple Em Habanim in North Hollywood, to discuss the bearing that film's story had on their own experience of flight. "The American forces landed on November 8—just one week before they were to take us all away to Germany," one man commented. "If they had waited two weeks later, we would have all died in concentration camps."

This interpretation of the film, as having real historical, political, and personal implications, was not lost on audiences of its day. On December 4, 1942, just eight days after the film's premiere in New York, *Aufbau*, then edited by Manfred George—himself a Jewish refugee and the former editor of numerous Berlin newspapers—published a trenchant review of the film. "Today more than ever coincidence, fate, intrigue and politics are the agents that dress up a film story," begins the review. "Those in the know—you and me—people from a Europe that has gone to pieces, now have a duty to enlighten those for whom such moments may seem unbelievable from their political or spiritual standpoints." The unnamed reviewer continues:

Can the average American moviegoer imagine the importance of an exit visa? Especially if it's meant for a persecuted Czech who has been hunted by the Gestapo all the way to North Africa, along with his wife, both prominent members of the anti-Nazi underground movement? The scene is the "Café Américain" from an American adventure in Casablanca, where in between roulette and whiskey, Negro jazz and Arabic music, Vichy police and

the Gestapo, a black market for exit visas flourishes—reserved mainly for refugees with money or jewels.

Michael Curtiz has magnificently brought to life the African witches' cauldron: the atmosphere is dense, the story line breathtaking, and many moments—above all, one in which the Czech incites the Café patrons to drown out the clamor of "Die Wacht am Rhein" sung by Nazi officers with the "Marseillaise"—unforgettable.

European émigrés in America, so the review suggested, had an obligation to translate the story of *Casablanca*, especially the exodus thread woven into its plot, to a native-born audience. From their vantage point, the famous and widely prized "Marseillaise" scene was ultimately a celebration of resistance among the many refugees that populate the screen. Rick and his Hollywood-confected oasis in the desert speak for all of them.

AFTER THE WAR—despite the oft-harrowing circumstances of the journey to America, and the challenges the émigrés faced after arriving in Hollywood—many of these *Casablanca* actors were eager to return to Europe. In fact, the poignant review of the film in *Aufbau* almost seems to have anticipated this. "There are so many former German and Austrian actors concentrated in this film," the final lines of the piece have it, "that one can make a prediction: if some day films are to be freely shown again in a Germany that is rid of Nazis, then they will be made in Hollywood. For Hollywood has at its disposal the

elite of German-language actors (and screenwriters and directors)." The prediction was only half right: while Hollywood continued to make films utilizing the refugee talent, within the next decade, quite a few of *Casablanca*'s actors—especially those who were either underutilized or confined to undesirable stereotyping—took the first opportunity they had to return to Europe. They often took with them the bittersweet memories of Hollywood and, over the years, an increased awareness of the storied film production in which they had participated.

Curt Bois was among the early ones to return. In 1945, the year that *Casablanca* had its European debut, in Portugal—mentioned fleetingly in the intriguing fictional account "Émigré Hotel" by Argentine writer Edgardo Cozarinsky—he was still playing obscure bit parts in movies like *Saratoga Trunk* for Warner Bros. His final roles in Hollywood were largely offered to him by German-speaking émigré directors like Max Ophüls (*Caught*), Richard Oswald (*The Loveable Cheat*), and Robert Siodmak (*The Great Sinner*), all three pictures from 1949, who still admired his earlier work in German theater and film between the wars. "For thirteen years," writes his German biographer, Gerold Ducke, of Bois's years in American exile, "he subsisted on very small, even the tiniest of film roles. He was often unemployed for weeks or months between roles. No way to live when one is still young and wants to work. But he knew that others were worse off, and often thought about the many who were murdered." Bois had hoped in vain that he would be able to revitalize his theater career in the United States; he was never given the chance to demonstrate the strengths for which he was best known in Germany and

Austria. At the last social gathering he attended before leaving Hollywood, a studio costume party, he is said to have shown up wearing his street clothes with a handmade sign hanging around his neck: "Just a Tourist."

Upon his return to Berlin in 1950, Bois was immediately celebrated by Herbert Jhering, one of the most prominent theater critics from the Weimar era, who, like Bois, would continue to work professionally in the German Democratic Republic. "A Berliner comic has returned from America," announced Jhering from his perch in East Berlin. "He came back from the United States without having enjoyed the enduring impact he deserved, after his early success. For Curt Bois of all people—a true Berliner in essence, in accent, a Berliner in his entire relationship to the world—is anything but a regional comic. His coolness, his perspicuity, his wit are indeed that of a quintessential Berliner [*urberlinisch*], and yet comprehensible to the entire world as articulated through gesture." Jhering goes on to explain that what Bois really needed is not "America's commercial theater or TV series," but rather the "repertory" and "ensemble" theater that was now in the process of rapid redevelopment in East Berlin by the recently returned Bertolt Brecht, who had arrived in the East German capital the year before. "Curt Bois can play Gogol and Goldoni," Jhering concludes, "Lope de Vega, Shakespeare, and Brecht, Glasbrenner and Ostrowski"—in other words, something he was never able to do while living in the United States.

In the unpublished German-language typescript of what later became the memoir of Lotte Palfi, the diamond seller in the film, there is a short epilogue that did not appear in

the published English text. In it, she describes how in 1982, she and her then-husband, Paul Andor (né Wolfgang Zilzer)—who in *Casablanca* played the wily refugee carrying expired papers and Free French pamphlets, the man in the panama hat who fails to elude the Vichy police and is shot dead beneath the massive poster of Marshal Pétain in the first reel—were invited as honorary guests of the Berlin Film Festival. They were to be celebrated along with fellow émigré actors Elisabeth Bergner, Curt Bois, Dolly Haas, Franz Lederer, and Hertha Thiele. "Not only was our joy about this honor immense," she writes, "but we were even more moved by the noble attitude to which the invitation testified: the desire 'to make the crooked straight again.' Of course, one's lost career can never be replaced; we had to resign ourselves to that long ago. But it feels good realizing that, fifty years after Hitler's seizure of power, 'You haven't been forgotten.'" By that point in time, West Germans were becoming increasingly interested in coming to terms with the Nazi past, and part of that process meant recognizing, even honoring, those who had been forced to flee.

The director of the Austrian Film Museum, Alexander Horwath, recently described watching *Casablanca* as a teenager around 1980 at the Burgkino in Vienna and being completely moved. He was far more affected by it than by any of the other Bogart films shown at that same time in their original English versions. "From the very beginning, *Casablanca* was naturally a critical touchstone," he commented. "It's a film that conveys within a popular medium the story of exile and is well suited to do so, because it takes up the fictional story lines and then folds in the biographical truths represented by the émigré cast

and crew. Despite being a perfect Hollywood studio product, it has a true-to-life quality that is otherwise quite rare. Even if one doesn't know the background of these actors, one somehow feels it in their accents and speech." He remarked further how in 1993, when working as the director of the Vienna International Film Festival, he helped to organize a two-month series devoted to the exiled film professionals, many of whom made guest appearances in Vienna. While planning this series, Horwath often returned to *Casablanca* as a key film for understanding that same time period.

Over the years, the film has been shown with considerable frequency in Austria, both in repertory cinema houses (in the original English) and on television (dubbed into German). In 2012, in Vienna's central square, Horwath had a hand in programming a popular outdoor summer screening series, "The Casablanca Connection," devoted to the many detour-laden paths taken by Austrian émigrés that lead to the film. "Michael Curtiz's *Casablanca* serves as a point of departure," observed the series co-organizers Brigitte Mayr and Michael Omasta in their introduction, "for a cinematic journey toward remembering the homeless in exile about whom one otherwise knows so little today."

In West Germany, the initial release of the film in 1952 was a heavily edited, dubbed version (also shown during the early years in postwar Austria), stripped of all scenes that might disturb the delicate, halfhearted process of de-Nazification—Major Strasser is completely cut out, as are all references to the Third Reich, creating a film that's some twenty-five minutes shorter. Gone is the singing of the "Marseillaise"; gone,

too, all anti-Nazi jokes and dialogue. The old Czech partisan Victor Laszlo becomes Victor Larsen, a Norwegian atomic physicist hunted by Interpol. Two decades later, the uncut version became something of a cult film—it played, in English, in art-house theaters and was first shown dubbed in its entirety on German TV in 1975—among those born during and after the war. Journalist Stefan Volk, who has written on postwar German film censorship of Hollywood movies, claims that although the abridged 1952 version earned a lukewarm reception in the German press, by the mid-1970s the full-length, original *Casablanca* had earned an ardent following, and today is regarded by many as "the Hollywood classic par excellence."

In a scene in Peter Härtling's 1979 novel *Hubert oder Die Rückkehr nach Casablanca* (*Hubert, or The Return to Casablanca*), the title character, Hubert Windisch, who is sent to battle during the Third Reich, leaves Germany behind for Paris sometime in the early postwar years. There he has his first chance to watch the film, whose reputation has long preceded it, at a makeshift cinema near Montparnasse. "He'd heard of the legend of this film," writes Härtling, "but until now had not been able to see it. Besides, the warning that the German dubbed version bastardized the plot had acted as a deterrent. Here, however, it was shown in the original." Hubert proceeds to buy himself a ticket and a glass of wine, and he takes a seat in the back row of the dark theater.

Amid the flickering lights and the slightly distorted sounds coming from the theater's shabby old speakers, Hubert experiences a complete transformation. "He encountered himself, found himself in someone else's memory, in one that had never

existed for him before, that had actually never been, that some Misters Epstein and Koch had contrived, a story about somebody, about Rick, not about himself and yet very much about himself—made for him alone.” Hubert suddenly hears himself deliver the voice-over narration, “in English, as if it were his mother tongue”: “With the coming of the Second World War many eyes in imprisoned Europe turned hopefully or desperately toward the freedom of the Americans [sic].” Much like Woody Allen’s character in *Play It Again, Sam* (1972), Hubert abandons reality for the celluloid universe of the film, imagining himself as an omniscient character seated opposite—even mirroring—Rick as he plays chess. Hubert finally leaves the theater, clammy with sweat and almost in a mild narcotic trance, and makes his way to a tiny hole-in-the-wall bar near his hotel, where he imagines a voice bidding farewell to the old Monsieur Windisch, quoting a line from the film uttered by Rick during the Parisian flashback (and which serves as the epigraph to the novel): “Who are you really? And what were you before?”

French anthropologist Marc Augé, in his personal account of the film, *Casablanca: Movies and Memory* (2007), tells the story of first watching it as a young boy with his parents in Paris sometime in the late 1940s, soon after it was first shown on that side of the Atlantic. Although the adults took some issue with the Hollywood depiction of France on the eve of German occupation, they were particularly moved by the “Marseillaise” scene. “My father had told me of another ‘Marseillaise’ in another film, *La Grande Illusion*, and also of the anthem he and his student friends had sung in the reserve

officers’ school at Auvours near Le Mans, where they were taking classes when the announcement came of the Germans’ imminent arrival.” For Augé, who later in life indulged in multiple repeat viewings of the film at Paris’s revival houses in the Latin Quarter, *Casablanca* is bound up with the wartime memories of his childhood, of flight and return.

“The movies give us a child’s vision,” he remarks elsewhere in his book. “To see a film again is to recover a past that retains all the vivacity of the present.” *Casablanca* came out at a time in France when people were still rejoicing the end of the war. Augé recalls approaching American soldiers on the street, hitting them up for chocolate and chewing gum. These memories, the joy of the late 1940s as well as the pain of being forced with his mother to seek shelter in the French provinces during the war, are somehow tied to the memories conjured in the film: “the essential scenes of the film illustrated insistent, recurring, obsessive themes—waiting, menace, or flight—which by dint of the hazards of history, were imposed upon my childhood.” The refugee story, coupled with the story of Nazi and Vichy oppression, struck a profound resonance in Augé, as it no doubt did in other French moviegoers of his generation. The critic André Bazin, for example, called Bogart “the actor/myth of the war and post-war period.”

In postwar Hungary, the country that once served as home to Curtiz and Sakall, *Casablanca* managed to assert its presence as well. It took a bit longer than in France, until sometime in the 1960s, after the Hungarian revolution of 1956, but viewing the film became an annual ritual for many of its citizens. “You know, December 25, Christmas Day, was a holiday and

there was one television channel only and in the afternoon they would broadcast *Casablanca*," explained Hungarian filmmaker Gyula Gazdag. "It became a tradition to screen it, and for people to watch it. I don't remember anything about any national pride [in the director or actors]; it was just the popularity of the film. They just loved watching it. And of course I loved watching. It was dubbed into Hungarian." It didn't much matter that the native actors and actresses who did the dubbing were less than ideal (the woman who provided the voice for Bergman, in Gazdag's recollection, "made the character just, so, so whiny and weepy"), families would gather around the television after Christmas lunch and enjoy the Hollywood fantasy.

"If I think back," Gazdag added, "it was probably more the fact that at that time it was quite rare to be able to see a classical American movie." Hollywood films were not available during the Nazi occupation, nor were they made accessible immediately afterward under Soviet rule. "So in a way, that was something that was very exceptional that it was an American movie, I think that was a big part of it. That it had some connection to Hungary in the 1930s as well. But, there was nothing really written about it, and again probably for that reason: if something had been written in the newspaper, it would become something that all of a sudden the authorities would have seen in a different light and may not have encouraged it anymore." As it was, *Casablanca* managed to fly under the radar. Although some might have considered it contraband, and although the connection to Hungarian culture before the war would go largely unnoticed, the Hungarians continued to replay the film into the late 1980s, after the

country's borders were flooded with refugees in the run-up to the fall of the Berlin Wall.

More recently, in Sweden, where the film was long shown in a truncated, censored version released during the war, *Casablanca* has gained a new prominence in the wake of Stig Björkman's 2015 documentary *Ingrid Bergman in Her Own Words*. Mårten Blomkvist, the film critic for *Dagens Nyheter*, was asked to contribute a piece on *Casablanca* to Swedish national radio while he was in Cannes covering the 2015 festival. At that particular moment, Sweden was engaged in a fiery debate about the Syrian refugee crisis and how to accommodate the enormous number of new immigrants. "Then it struck me, for the first time" Blomkvist remarked, "it's a film about migrants, which is so very timely right now. But you never think of it as a film about migrants, because of the luxurious settings."

Casablanca may now, more than ever, be considered "everyone's favorite émigré film" or even "the best refugee film of the war years," as a critic in the *Wall Street Journal* recently hailed it. It was certainly the all-time favorite film of my Czech-born father-in-law, who survived the war with his family under an assumed name and as a teenager fought alongside his father in the partisan resistance against the Nazis (a plaque of recognition he received from the Czech government hangs in our dining room). He later helped arrange for his family to migrate to Canada after the war, and eventually made his way to New York City. Like many of the players in the film, he had a noticeable accent—in fact, he had one in every language he spoke. And he had a Middle European charm that came out in both manner and speech. Although it would seem to make

most sense that he would harbor a deep personal identification with Victor Laszlo, given their shared partisan commitments and national origins, it was Rick Blaine, and Bogie in particular, who served as his ultimate hero (he wore a trench coat to the end of his life). For him, it was not merely a matter of telling time fluidly—or sketchily, as the film would have it—that would ensure assimilation in America. Rather, it was the ability to cultivate the sartorial habits, the idiom, and the sensibilities of the stars that his newly adopted country also held so dear.

Chapter 5

WE'LL ALWAYS HAVE PARIS

Roughly a third of the way into the picture, while Rick grumbles drunkenly into his whiskey glass, tugging on a cigarette, and Sam reprises “As Time Goes By” after hours in a darkened back room at Rick’s Café, we’re treated to a nine-minute flashback—nowhere to be found in the original *Everybody Comes to Rick’s*—of the long treasured, long repressed Parisian romance between Rick and Ilsa on the eve of Nazi occupation. The room is, quite fittingly, drenched in menacing shadows projected onto the walls by intermittent beams from the airport watchtower. Michael Curtiz has cinematographer Arthur Edeson’s camera dolly in on Rick, as thick swirls of smoke dissolve to a static shot of the Arc de Triomphe, and several bars of the “Marseillaise” fill out the space on the audio track previously occupied by Sam’s piano. Suddenly, Rick is shown with an uncharacteristic smile on his face, seated