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## Fugitive/Narrative: Some Starting Points

By Stephen Clingman · On May 28, 2018

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1. In 1979, in the newspaper *La Stampa*, Primo Levi published a short story entitled “The Fugitive.” Given Levi’s own experience, it was not, as might have been expected, about Auschwitz, or the Holocaust, or his own epic odyssey by way of return to Italy following the war. Rather it was about a poem written by a man who has a “dull, boring office job” (Levi 91), in an insurance agency. The man is Pasquale, a name which invokes Easter (perhaps resurrection) or Passover (liberation from bondage), and it is in his office that one morning in a moment of sublime inspiration he writes the perfect poem, a work which he entitles “Annunciation.” Pasquale is a cautious man, however, and wishing to look at the poem again the following morning, locks it in his desk drawer. When he returns the following day, the poem has moved, to his in-tray, and thus begins its peripatetic life. The day after that he finds the poem stuck to his office wall; it then moves around under his desk pad. He takes it home and locks it in his private drawer, only to find it stuck to the ceiling. The poem itself begins to change, growing little hairs out of certain letters. Eventually Pasquale finds his precious work in tiny crumpled scraps all over his house, completely illegible. At a certain point in this process, he feels different: “he was no longer the same Pasquale, and he never would be again, just as a dead man does not return to life” (93). Though he tries for the rest of his life to reconstruct the poem, he can never do so.

It is the poem that is fugitive, not the person, but the poem has turned the person into a fugitive as well. A wry humor rubs shoulders with dread. The self is not what it was: Pasquale has become unhomed through the fugitive nature of his creation. Levi, who understood so clearly the condition of the fugitive, perhaps the worst experience of the fugitive there has ever been, finds it in the work of writing. If the perfect poem cannot find a home, nor the home the perfect poem, it is fugitive/narrative that tells us this story.

2. What is “fugitive/narrative”? Why the collocation? Why the slash mark that conjoins its two terms? Surely there is something unseemly in linking a matter as monumental as the Holocaust with a brief tale of a poem that goes missing? Yet, we might say, it is Levi who, even subliminally, has done so. The combination deserves further thought, as a point of intersection—

perhaps as the point of the intersection. What is the relation between narrative and the fugitive condition? How, if at all, are they connected? Why, in this particular time and space, do such questions seem relevant? What follows here is a series of starting points in such a contemplation. If the reference is not directly to Erich Auerbach's *Ansatzpunkt*, nonetheless the idea of a point of departure seems appropriate. The fugitive condition always involves a point of departure—but not always of arrival; it is in the space between the two that the condition obtains, and narrative may also inhabit that space. The slash in fugitive/narrative may then be thought of as marking a faultline. Narrative is not simply a fugitive form of expression, nor is fugitive experience simply a narrative. Yet in certain ways the two may intersect, troubling, even interrogating one another as they do so. On the one hand the faultline may mark the angled paths in the journey of the fugitive; on the other, the rifts and breakages involved in telling it. At times it may be the fugitive component that is emphasised; at others, the narrative. Primarily here, fugitive/narrative suggests a topology which may be explored in its different lineages, dimensions and possibilities, running all the way from the experiential to the juridical, the ethical to the existential, the linguistic to the political, the philosophical to the archetypal. This then is our key question: what is the topology of fugitive/narrative?

3. Some of the territory is well marked. But unless one believes in a complete myth of the original, there should be no aversion to the paths others have opened up, especially on a topic such as this which has everything to do with tracks to be followed. Here, for instance, is Georg Lukács, in *The Theory of the Novel*, first published in 1916: “the novel form is, like no other, an expression of this transcendental homelessness” (41). And here is Theodor Adorno, writing in *Minima Moralia*, first published in 1951, in a section entitled “Refuge for the homeless”: “Today we should have to add: it is part of morality not to be at home in one’s home” (*Minima Moralia: Reflections* 39). Normally one would not think of Lukács and Adorno complementing one another; more than forty years later, in a new preface to his book, Lukács described Adorno and other members of the German intelligentsia as having taken up residence in the “Grand Hotel Abyss” (Lukács 22). But there are points of contact between them. There is a semi-accidental one in the invocation of the “hotel”: its implications of hosting, traversing, hospitality and even the abyss are all part of the landscape of fugitive/narrative. But there are historical resonances as well. The Hungarian-Jewish Lukács began his book, so he tells us, prompted by the outbreak of World War I, when any possible outcome seemed equally horrific: the prospect of a German victory was nightmarish; and if the West won, “who was to save us from Western civilisation?” (11). The half-Jewish, German Adorno began his book in exile in 1944, and completed it in 1949: the experience of the Nazi era are resonant on every page. No wonder then that both are concerned with homelessness: Lukács from the home; Adorno in the home

4. When Lukács speaks of the novel being an expression of transcendental homelessness, it is not so much the experience of homelessness he is referring to, but rather the way the novel as a form is “un-homed” by the historical experience of which it is the expression. For Adorno, the key connection is between refuge for the homeless and the question of being at home. “Dwelling,” remarks Adorno, “is now in the proper sense impossible” (*Minima Moralia: Reflections* 38). That is when he offers the famous words: “Today...it is part of morality not to be at home in one’s home.” The original German in which he wrote this is, I think, even more suggestive: “es gehört zur Moral, nicht bei sich selber zu Hause zu sein” (*Minima Moralia: Reflexionen* 43). To my ear the key words are “nicht bei sich selber”: not on one’s own, or not alone, or not for morality itself, or not in and of itself. And so I offer a further translation, or a thought which extends the translation (perhaps drawing on the benefits of mistranslation): “Today, it is impossible in a moral framework to be at home on one’s own.” Or, with some license given the context, even further: “Today it is impossible to be at home in one’s home when others are homeless, or need refuge.

5. For Adorno too there is a connection between homelessness and writing. This is the way he puts it elsewhere in *Minima Moralia*: “For a man who no longer has a homeland, writing becomes a place to live” (*Minima Moralia: Reflections* 87). However, this would not be Adorno if there were not some dialectical reversal. In the same passage he goes on to observe that the very challenges and demands of writing “unhome” the writer: “In the end, the writer is not even allowed to live<sub>2</sub> in his

writing.” Note here that this is not necessarily the exiled writer, but any writer. The home and the unhomely seem then not to be opposites, but connected, linked in some intrinsic way, revealed in the home of writing. In circumstances of the fugitive condition—a condition of totality, Adorno might have thought in the wake of the Second World War, without refuge—we can put it this way. The unhomely is the uncanny residence of the home, and writing is its disclosure. This is a formulation with a somewhat different resonance than Freud’s original version of the uncanny, even though for Freud the home is central.

6. The question arises: how do things look now in the light of these issues, particularly in light of the massive number of refugees around the world? Where does the literary or writing stand in relation to the looming question of home and homelessness? As always, others have gone before along this path, and the footsteps most clearly marked are surely those of Edward Said. In his iconic essay, “Reflections on Exile,” Said too draws on Lukács’s transcendental homelessness, and on Adorno’s sense that it is part of morality not to be at home in one’s home. He draws on George Steiner’s notion of “extraterritoriality,” which proposes an equation between homelessness and the exilic condition of twentieth-century Western literature:

It seems proper that those who create art in a civilization of quasi-barbarism, which has made so many homeless, should themselves be poets unhoused and wanderers across language. (Qtd, Said 174)

Note here the nature of the equation: that language itself becomes the environment of homelessness, the terrain across which writers wander. Said, however, warns against a possible inference in such a view when set against the reality and scale of modern displacement. “Is it not true,” he asks

that the views of exile in literature and, moreover, in religion obscure what is truly horrendous: that exile is irremediably secular and unbearably historical; that it is produced by human beings for other beings; and that, like death but without death’s ultimate mercy, it has torn millions of people from the nourishment of tradition, family and geography? (Said 174)

In the face of this reality, Said remarks, “exile cannot be made to serve notions of humanism” (174).

7. Said’s essay is a meditation on the condition of exile, its pains and paradoxes, not least, for Palestinians, in having been “exiled by exiles” (178). In exemplary fashion, Said turns to biography in the life-histories of people he knows or has met, to let their individual stories illuminate what would otherwise be analysis only on the anonymous scale. He draws distinctions, between exiles, emigrés, expatriates and refugees—experiences not to be equated. There are writers to consider—Conrad; Dante; Joyce—and there we get an inkling that Said himself does not follow up: that the dynamics in the fugitive/narrative dyad might serve not humanism but some grounded philosophical and ontological relation. Yet in his own way Said follows as well as leads—in this case in the footsteps of the archetypal exiled scholar, Erich Auerbach, who cites Hugo of St Victor, a twelfth-century monk from Saxony: “he is perfect to whom the entire world is a foreign land” (qtd, Said 185).

To follow in the footsteps of Said is daunting, but he himself was a follower of those who followed others. The original chapter in St Hugo is headed *De exilio*; when Auerbach wrote his great work, *Mimesis*, he was an exile in Istanbul, a place of precarious refuge from the same war that prompted Adorno in *Minima Moralia*.<sup>[1]</sup> The process is an associative and syntactic one, across time and space, an enactment as well as tracing of fugitive/narrative in the critical as well as literary lineages.

8. My own considerations are focused not on Said’s categories of the exile, the emigré, the expatriate, or the refugee, but on the fugitive. It is a term that relates to them all, but it adds elements of the unstable and elusive that may be relevant for our times. In drawing out some of its implications, I would like to invoke three concepts, though not necessarily in the customary versions: navigation, the boundary, and the route.<sup>[2]</sup> Navigation, in one of its archetypal human forms, suggests the oceanic, a way of crossing the unknown to further shores. In that guise, it suggests something crucial to the condition of the fugitive—that

it, or he, or she exists insistently in the space of crossing. This has become literalized in the Mediterranean, emblematic in our era as a site of fugitive journey. This spatialized version is in turn vital for a conception of the boundary. Certainly, the fugitive—especially in the form of the refugee—is concerned directly with boundaries: border controls, visas, passports, recognitions or refusals at ports of entry or checkpoints. But simultaneously, and perhaps because of this, the fugitive is always in the boundary as a space—the distance between here and there, the difference between here and there, the precarity of the difference between here and there. Even on arrival there may be a lack of papers, identity, or recognition: still a habitation to be navigated. The boundary then is not only the wall or limit, but in some profound sense the space before the wall, before the gate. It is a space of horizontal dimensions but also of vertical: of hazards, encounters, the dramatic enacting of differences in authority and power. It is a location of non-location, the interval that feels permanent, at once physical, emotional, psychological, symbolic.

9. This then produces a reading of my third term, the route—the very emblem and motif of navigation. But the route is by no means simply the pathway one follows, or that somehow opens up. Here etymology, as it often does, reveals something crucial. For the origin of the “route,” so the OED tells us, is the *via rupta*, the broken way, or broken road (“route n.1”). The Latin range of *rupta* goes further: it is to break, burst, tear, rend, rive, rupture, break asunder, burst in pieces, force open (“rumpo”). The route, in other words, is one that fugitives may well have to force open as they navigate; but it is also one that is burst in pieces, riven as they go. [3] In all these senses, the route of the fugitive is the broken road. It is a condition as well as pathway. The etymology corresponds to the reality we can see everywhere.

10. It is not the task of the fugitive to become a metaphor. This was what Said was alluding to when he remarked that “exile cannot be made to serve notions of humanism.” To this we might add the words of Emmanuel Levinas: “Humanism must be denounced only because it is not sufficiently human” (Totality 213). How are we to deal with this in our time? One starting point is not to conflate textual matters with the sheer enormity of what actual fugitives or refugees undergo. The array and the extent are all but overwhelming. South Africa has seen disturbing phases of violence against *makwerekwe*—migrants from other African countries. Israel threatens to deport Africans its Prime Minister refers to as “infiltrators.” Australia keeps its refugees incarcerated interminably on offshore islands. In the USA the breakup of families, the so-called border wall with Mexico, and the targeting of “dreamers” have suffused the dominant governmental ethos, while elections ranging from Germany, to Austria, to Hungary, to Poland have seen a right-wing backlash against safe haven for refugees. In Syria, Aleppo has become a lasting emblem of atrocity. By 2018 in Bangladesh there were some 655,000 Rohingya refugees from Myanmar, of whom around 380,000 were minors; at least 30% of the refugee population were younger than five years old (Beech). According to the UNHCR’s 2016 Global Trends report, by the end of 2015 there were 65.3 million displaced people across the globe. Of the world’s population, one in 113 was either an asylum seeker, a displaced person, or a refugee—an unprecedented number; globally, about half of refugees were children (Edwards; UNHCR).

There are other dimensions to the crisis as well, including the environmental. Refugees from various countries in Africa passed through Agadez in Niger before crossing the Sahara Desert, driven by climate change as much as by poverty, insurgencies, and dictatorships (Sengupta). Nor are humans the only kind of refugees: the bears that proliferated in the village of Kaktovik on Barter Island off the north coast of Alaska were, reported the New York Times, “climate refugees, on land because the sea ice they rely on for hunting seals is receding” (Goode). For the first time, scientific researchers have been able to tie asylum applications to weather variations; the prediction is for an accelerated increase under future global warming (Missirian and Schlenker). These are among the many ways in which, as Dipesh Chakrabarty summarizes, “[t]he geologic now of the Anthropocene has become entangled with the now of human history” (212). A new word, “solastalgia,” has been coined to evoke the distress caused by climate change. It means “the homesickness you have when you are still at home” (Albrecht).

11. In these circumstances, it is reasonable to ask: what is the relevance of fugitive/narrative? Every single one of those 65.3 million displaced people will have an individual as well as collective story, the vast majority of which will never be heard. A work of fiction is at best a single story, and even if some works deal directly with the circumstances described above, they cannot in any meaningful sense do those circumstances justice. One measures words carefully in relation to this reality, and it is therefore with some provisionality that I offer the following. It is because no narrative—whether juridical, political, or fictional—can do these circumstances justice that we must consider the fugitive aspects of narrative: the ways in which a story both tells and does not tell, the ways in which it is both a home and away for stories such as these. Is it the case that every narrative is fugitive, in the sense that its meaning is always displaced? That is an imponderable, an abstraction that risks turning the fugitive merely into metaphor. But perhaps there are works that invoke the condition of the fugitive/narrative as both text and topic, which allow us to explore its contours in various ways. In such narratives we may see some of the characteristics in which the human mind constructs the ontology, contingency and experience of the fugitive/narrative: the ways in which we organize it as both fate and the space of existence, the ways in which we navigate its meaning. In such circumstances we can contemplate a taxonomy as well as protocols for reading—what issues and dimensions are involved. Fugitive/narrative, in other words, can become the place for asking questions such as these. Even to see its insistent repetition and variation across time and setting may be of value. It becomes a form of telling, a lens or frame, a way of seeing that in effect creates the topic it addresses, a topic that is also a topology.

12. If we are thinking of starting points, the great founding narratives of the Abrahamic tradition involve key fugitive moments and figures: Abraham leaving the city of Ur via Haran to Canaan; Joseph sold into slavery in Egypt; Moses leading the way out of slavery through the wilderness; Jesus under threat of death, also in flight with his family to Egypt; Muhammad in flight from Mecca to Medina. Other traditions have their equivalents. The Buddha was not exactly a fugitive, but travelled the regions of the Gangetic plain for forty-five years disseminating his teachings. Sometimes it is the texts themselves that are fugitive, as in the story of the sacrifice of Isaac (or, in the Islamic tradition, Ishmael). Here, as Auerbach shows in the first chapter of *Mimesis*, there is a journey with an unknown end, a road which is also a way of telling, spare, broken and fleeting in the spaces between earth, heaven and the human heart.

Thus the journey is like a silent progress through the indeterminate and the contingent, a holding of the breath, a process which has no present, which is inserted, like a blank duration, between what has passed and what lies ahead...  
(Auerbach 10).

As much as anything could, this gives perfectly one aspect of the fugitive condition.

13. Auerbach draws a distinction between the story of Isaac and that of Odysseus in the *Odyssey*; the respective ways of telling in the two texts encode the cultures from which they come. And yet the *Odyssey* too is a fugitive narrative, charting other aspects of the topology. It is the postwar story of a ten-year journey, driven by the gods across the Mediterranean. It takes its place as part of a genre of *nostoi*—stories of the return home to Greece after Troy—and what it embeds is the dialectical relationship between the fugitive and the home: the dispersal away, the longing to be homed, the home in the away, the away in the home. So too it encodes the ethic of the fugitive text, in which hospitality—the duty owed by the *hospes* (host) to the *hostis* (stranger; in other usage, as we will see, the enemy)—is ranged against its opposite. Along his journey Odysseus is taken in by a number of hosts who feed him, clothe him, provide him with a ship across the sea. Nausikaa takes him in as a refugee, and schools him in not appearing a dangerous outsider to the Phaiakians. But Odysseus can also be trapped by a host: Kalypso, Polyphemus, Circe. These are the polarities of the journey, and against them the fugitive must be what Odysseus is, the “resourceful Odysseus,” sometimes, as he is to the one-eyed Polyphemus, “Nobody.” But the polarities apply also to the home. The suitors, plying their case to Penelope, have abused her hospitality, making both her and Telemachos fugitives if not hostages in their own place. When Odysseus finally returns, he does so as a beggar, and is taken in by the

swineherd Eumaios, who, against the pretensions of the palace, announces the simple ethic of the road: “All vagabonds/ and strangers are under Zeus” (Homer 14, 56-57). The Odyssey offers what we might think of as Fugitive Law, or a fugitive law: that hospitality denied or abused will result in peril. The home must be opened by, and open to, those who understand what it is to be away. These are the codes that inform the Odyssey as much as its story. It is narrative as the path of the fugitive. There might be many on the broken roads of the present who could see themselves in its challenges, stratagems and responses.

14. The Aeneid also follows the Odyssean curriculum—in this case the flight of Aeneas after the fall of Troy through the perils of the Mediterranean. Depending on which translation one reads, right away he is announced as a fugitive, *fato profugus*, driven by fate. In Robert Fitzgerald’s version it reads this way: “A fugitive, this captain, buffeted/ Cruelly on land as on the sea.”<sup>[4]</sup> Again in the code of the way there is hospitality, offered preeminently by Dido, herself a refugee from Phoenicia, who takes Aeneas in at Carthage: “The city I build is yours” (1, 778). Yet the line between *hospes* and *hostis* is a narrow one: Aeneas, the man of destiny, must leave for Italy in order to found his own new city, of Rome; the result will be lasting enmity between Rome and Carthage. In one sense his journey is a return to an old home: Rome and Troy share a common ancestor, Dardanus, and so the reciprocal pairing of home/away is renewed. But once the (re)colonizers have landed in Italy, the Aeneid itself takes a turn, to broken alliances, war and conquest in the interests of *imperium*. As Aeneas battles the duplicitous Turnus what follows is little short of extended carnage, enacted in Virgil’s lithe syntax yet adamant (one might even say imperious) meter. If this is something of an iron turn, it is partly because of the doubled temporality of the Aeneid: the future it foretells has already been fulfilled in the past and present it is the task of the poem to glorify. Home/away, past/future, all are one in the new empire; time is the enactment of prophecy. In this reanimation of the *topos*, fugitive multiplicity has devolved to singularity. This is the other side of fugitive/narrative: how in time it can become a story of empire.

15. How different to read another poet of the Augustan empire, yet one who came to be banished by Augustus, possibly because his *Ars Amatoria* offended.<sup>[5]</sup> In the *Metamorphoses*, as if writing *de exsilio* before the fact, Ovid is the poet not of singularity or time foretold but of ephemerality and transformation. Here the requisite praise of Julius Caesar and Augustus is exceeded at the end of the poem by the apotheosis of the poet, and the central philosophy of the poem is given to Pythagoras, himself an exile:

In all creation  
Nothing endures  
Each wandering shape a pilgrim passing by.<sup>[6]</sup>

It is this vision that, in a different era, Salman Rushdie was drawn to in *The Satanic Verses*, in the voice of the philosopher-restaurateur, Mohammad Sufyan, trying to encourage Saladin Chamcha, who has undergone his own metamorphosis into a goat. Sufyan quotes Ovid on the matter:

As yielding wax is stamped with new designs  
And changes shape and seems not still the same,  
Yet is indeed the same, even so our souls  
Are still the same for ever, but adopt  
In their migrations ever-varying forms.<sup>[7]</sup>

*The Satanic Verses* was in part a meditation on a version of the history of the prophet Muhammad and the potentially fugitive nature of a text which, in religious terms, is taken to be singular. As Rushdie puts it in that novel, the opposite of faith is not disbelief—which is “[t]oo final, certain, closed. Itself a kind of belief”—but rather, “doubt” (94). Doubt is one definition of the

doubled narrative, both the yes and the no, and for that translation Rushdie was sentenced to death, and became a fugitive under the name Joseph Anton—itsself a metamorphosis of the two writers Joseph Conrad and Anton Chekhov. In this fugitive/narrative it was as if Rushdie's life had entered into, by conjuring up, one of his own fictions.

16. Hospes/hostis/hospitality: the conceptual territory is worth revisiting. Again the etymologies are both revealing and suggestive. In Latin, "guest" is both hospes and hostis, and there is an assumption, remarks Emile Benveniste, that both terms derived from "stranger"—the former a favorable stranger, the latter an unfavorable one, shifting later to the term "enemy." But Benveniste finds no initial sense of stranger or enemy in hostis; rather, it denotes a principle of equivalence, suggesting to compensate, or equalize: a hostis is one who repays a gift by a counter-gift (76). The hostis was in fact the stranger who had equal rights to Roman citizens; the same was true of the Greek *xénos*. But through some unknown process, hostis shifted in the direction of "enemy," and consequently a different term developed, in which hostis persisted, combined with \*pot(i)s, and so we get hospes from \*hostipe/ot-s (Benveniste 78). But whence the suffix -pet-s or -pot-s? The orthodox reading is that it comes from the root \*pot-, meaning "master," or suggesting power (the Latin potestas, power, or potior, to get possession of). Derrida follows this reading in seeing hospes as the "guest-master" (Of Hospitality 5). While Benveniste begins with this, however, ultimately he argues against it. Instead, the -pet-s or -pot-s indicates "precisely (him)self" (Benveniste 73-74); it is related to the Latin *supte*, or even the -pse of *ipse*. The host is someone who epitomises or represents the household as "the incarnation of hospitality" (Benveniste 79). And so we proceed from a seeming antinomy to a metonymic linkage in hostis/hospes; and it is intrinsically connected with hospitality.

17. But is it true that hospes means the "guest-master"? And is there no principle of reversibility in the phrase in which the guest can be master of the host, as well as vice versa? Derrida himself suggests as much (Adieu18). Here I hope I will be allowed a further supposition. In their 1879 compilation, *A Latin Dictionary*, Lewis and Short suggest a different derivation for hostis, from the Sanskrit *ghas-*, to eat, consume, destroy ("hostis"). (This, via the Gothic, is where we get the word "guest" from.) As for the -pet-s in \*hostipe/ot-s, this may come not from a sense of mastery or personification, but rather from -pa, the root of *pasco*, *pascere*, to feed, or to nourish ("pasco"); and hence we have hospes, "he who entertains a stranger" ("hospes"). According to this derivation, *pasco* has its root *pa-* from Sanskrit, as in *gō-pas*, a herdsman; it is related, among other things, to *pastor* (herd, shepherd) and *panis* (bread). Lewis and Short may not be wholly authoritative, but in this version there is the fairly breathtaking suggestion that the one who must be fed is the very same person who might "eat, consume, destroy"—the potentially dangerous guest, in other words, even the enemy. Whichever version we follow, there is a deep sense in the etymologies not of oppositions but profound complexities in our concepts of hospitality.

18. How, and under what obligations or conditions, does one nourish the one who must be fed or welcome the stranger? This too is part of the topology of fugitive/narrative. Adorno's remark was that dwelling in the proper sense is now "impossible." But if the self cannot be at home in the home, how is that self able to host the other? Or is it only by hosting the other that one may be at home? Is Adorno's formulation too static, ignoring the potential interaction between the homed and unhomed, the hospes and hostis?

19. No one has explored this question in greater depth than Emmanuel Levinas, particularly in his extraordinary work, *Totality and Infinity*. For Levinas, the foundation of the ethical response lies in the encounter between the self and Other—the absolute Other, who arrives not only across horizontal space but at, or from, a different height; this is the breakthrough of infinity into our closed systems of totality. In this encounter, the question of welcome is central—how it may be offered, and what its implications are. Levinas describes subjectivity as "welcoming the Other, as hospitality; in it the idea of infinity is consummated" (*Totality* 27). Perhaps it is no accident then that he spends much time discussing the dwelling, but if this connects with Adorno, it is in a different way. In Levinas's account, the dwelling is by no means an implement or possession but a site only of paradox and inversion in the relations of hospitality. Derrida suggests as much in his own reading of the

setting. The guest—the Other—is not someone one welcomes to the home; he/she is already in the home. The possibility of the guest is what opens the invitation to welcome in the first place, even before the welcome or invitation is uttered (Derrida, *Adieu* 24). In that sense the outsider is already inside the dwelling, while the insider is the “guest” of the outsider who opens the provocation of welcome to him. (We might say pro-vocation: the call before the call.) Derrida glosses Levinas: “The hôte as host is a guest” (*Adieu* 41).

20. Levinas writes, “The chosen home is the very opposite of a root. It indicates a disengagement, a wandering [errance] which has made it possible...” (*Totality* 172). If this is the opposite of a root, it may distill the ethics of the route. To be located or on the road is a false opposition. Mutability is built into the nature of the home; to be grounded is to be aware of standing “on earth,” in the midst of transition and change. The earth itself is a host that will welcome us by taking us away. Perhaps it is only the acceptance of these principles that will help us be at peace, both in ourselves and among others.

21. “With the same,” remarks Derrida, “one is never at peace” (*Of Hospitality* 85). For Levinas, peace is not the *pax romana*, the peace of empires, which starts and ends in wars, but an engagement with the Other that can initiate justice (see *Totality* 22-24; also *Time of Nations* 106). In some ways it comes back to the dwelling and what its boundaries mean. Levinas writes, “The possibility for the home to open to the Other is as essential to the essence of the home as closed doors and windows” (*Totality* 173). Derrida glosses further: “The dwelling opens to itself...as a ‘land of asylum or refuge’” (*Adieu* 41-42). If there is a link between the home and the homeland, Levinas is clear on its implications. “To shelter the other in one’s own land or home,” he indicates, is unquestionably “the criterion of humanness” (*Time of Nations* 98). But what of the outsider turned away, or spurned? If the outsider is already in the home, even as a provocation or question, his or her presence then can only become spectral. As Derrida suggests, “There would be no hospitality without the chance of spectrality” (*Adieu* 111-112). In our time we can say this is the ghost haunting Europe, haunting the Rome of the *pax romana*, what Levinas calls “[t]he distant West, a future America” (*Time of Nations* 100). Yet spectrality too can run in more than one direction. One either welcomes the stranger already in the home, or the refusal to do so will turn not only the other into a ghost, but you too, haunting your dwelling without peace in what is now simply your place.

22. Derrida writes of an insoluble antinomy between the law—the absolute and unconditional law of hospitality—and the laws, which are systems of assessment and regulation (*Of Hospitality* 77). Levinas, commenting in the aftermath of the Sabra and Chatila massacres, puts it this way: “A person is more holy than a land, even a holy land, since, faced with an affront made to a person, this holy land appears in its nakedness to be but stone and wood” (“*Ethics and Politics*” 297). Addressing bereaved Israelis and Palestinians at an alternative Memorial Day event in 2018, the novelist David Grossman evoked a key theme: “if the Palestinians don’t have a home, the Israelis won’t have a home either.” How are the law and the laws to be reconciled? What are the topologies around this?

23. We can focus the question through the lens of human rights, because human rights are at the heart of it. If we are thinking about narrative, there are many possible approaches, all the way from seeing the literary as foundational to the evolution of human rights, to seeing it as a structural equivalent of human rights discourse, to seeing that discourse as compromised by the implicit legacy of its imperial history.<sup>[8]</sup> I want to come at this, however, from a particular perspective, placing the fugitive at the center of the narrative question. It must begin with the issue of the refugee, as Hannah Arendt understood many years ago:

If a human being loses his political status, he should, according to the implications of the inborn and inalienable rights of man, come under exactly the situation for which the declarations of such general rights provided. Actually, the opposite is the case. It seems that a man who is nothing but a man has lost the very qualities which make it possible for other people to treat him as a fellow-man. (Arendt *Origins* 300)<sup>[9]</sup>



“A man who is nothing but a man”: this is the condition evoked by Giorgio Agamben as “naked” or “bare life,” the condition of the figure at the heart of his book, *Homo Sacer*, the individual who can be killed without being sacrificed. For Agamben the exemplary setting for this is the camp, and he surely has in mind the concentration camps of the Holocaust, which for him have become universal. As he puts it, the camp has become “the new biopolitical nomos of the planet” (*Homo Sacer* 176). This is the paradigm of the permanent state of exception, where the refugee is no refugee, the fugitive no fugitive, where there is no infinity in this totality, no outside to the inside, kein warum.

24. Jacques Rancière has proffered the obvious objection to this model, that it provides no room for any political practice (301). We might add that it also provides no room for any narrative, which depends on the possibility not of the absolute but of transition. It is intriguing, therefore, that in an alternative account, Agamben has approached the question of rights through the very figure of the refugee. It is the refugee, Agamben has argued, who “unhinges the old trinity of nation-state-territory” (“Beyond Human Rights” 19) thereby overturning normative versions of citizenship, and allowing a new version of identity for the citizen who does have rights. Here, the refugee might provide a kind of mirror, prompting a sense of the “being-in-exodus of the citizen,” and also, for that citizen, an understanding of “the refugee that he or she is” (25-26). This is what allows us to go “beyond human rights”—beyond the discourse of rights and the human that have confined us. But if this might allow a transformed relationship of hospes and hostis, what kind of equation, symmetry or mirroring is this between the citizen and the refugee? Are citizens really refugees in the same way that refugees are? Instead of apocalypse or totality we seem to have version of redemption. So too the liabilities of a model offered by Etienne Balibar, for a new version of citizenship founded on the *civis vagus*, the “citizen of the roads,” which might prompt a notion of “nomadic sovereignty in a global space,” citizenship not “of the world” but “in the world” (221, 224). The vision is appealing, but how are we to get there?

25. What may escape in these models is precisely what escapes the formula: the fugitive/narrative that does not render closure, redemption, or mirror image, but a more profound sense of what cannot be easily rendered. What might help is the concept we have already encountered, that of the “route” in the sense I have outlined. For if we understand the route as the “broken road”—often the severely broken road—then we realize the magnitude of the task. Where on this road do we actually find ourselves, or others? What are the spaces we have to cross, not only horizontal but also vertical, given the differential dimensions of power and experience between the refugee and citizen? How on this road do we see each other face-to-face—the Levinasian moment par excellence? What are our definitions of the human if this degree of brokenness has as yet prevented us from fully finding what the human is or should be? In this regard we stand not “beyond human rights” but before human rights. We stand before human rights both in time and in space, and we stand before them as a question. It is a question proposed by fugitive/narrative, and it is one that strictly juridical regimes cannot answer. They have different protocols of proposition and reading. So we have something to expect from a different kind of story.

26. In that light, I want to bring these starting points towards provisional closure by thinking about a recent novel from Germany, titled (in the English translation) *Go, Went, Gone*, by Jenny Erpenbeck. It is a novel that brings many of our concerns to the fore: the fugitive, the refugee, the home, the away, the boundary, the route, the host and hospitality, the “before” of human rights. There are other texts that could have claimed aspects of this space: W. G. Sebald’s *Austerlitz*; Caryl Phillips’s *A Distant Shore* or *The Lost Child*; K. Sello Duiker’s *Thirteen Cents*, or *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*; Bessie Head’s *A Question of Power*; Dambudzo Marechera’s *The House of Hunger* or *Black Sunlight*; Hisham Matar’s *The Return*. The fact that there are so many candidates—many more than I have listed—is a sign of the phenomenon I am talking about. But in recent years, Germany—with its own fugitive, haunted past—has been the destination of many fugitives. How does an exemplary novel deal with this, and what patterns do we see?

27. *Go, Went, Gone* tells the story of Richard, from the former East Berlin, an academic, a director of an institute, as his retirement begins and he considers the shape of his life. His wife has died; he has discovered some time earlier that his lover

had been cheating on him; his world is filled with silence and a musing solitude. The lake near his home has a drowned man in it, victim of a summer accident, whose body has never been recovered. Richard is a classicist, and the novel echoes with some of the resonances. His favorite part of the *Odyssey* is Book 11, telling of the journey to the land of the dead; Richard reflects on how Odysseus called himself Nobody to Polyphemus, blinding him and making himself invisible. There are references to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and to Dante, with some relevance for himself: "Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita... Midway in the journey of our life/ I came to myself in a dark wood/ for the straight way was lost" (130).<sup>[10]</sup> This is a book Richard lends to an African refugee who has made his way through Italy, and who can speak Italian; Richard recognizes the connection. Just as he slowly does in relation to a community of such refugees who have been on hunger strike in Alexanderplatz under the sign, "We become visible" (14). Their struggle is not to be "Nobody."

28. There is a slow exchange of knowledges here. Richard, "at home" in the classics, realizes he knows nothing about Africa. He becomes engaged with the refugees, taking to them to ask questions about their lives, as if they were a new project. But a different kind of project overtakes him as he begins to enter the realities of their world. There are crossings of various kinds in these exchanges, asymmetrical chiasmic structures of reference and experience. Many of the refugees have crossed the Mediterranean by boat, some to see many of their number drown in horrific circumstances. For Richard, there is the backdrop of the drowned man in the lake. He gives the refugees names from his tradition, based on their appearance and affect: Awad is Tristan; a young Tuareg man is Apollo; Rashid is the Thunderbolt-hurler. But he also thinks about the history he comes from: German colonialism, with its own atrocities in Africa. The refugees have faced borders and walls; the novel thinks about the fall of the Berlin Wall, and what it meant for Richard when he did not know his way around, and suddenly became "a citizen of a different country" (81). Richard cannot—or will not—explain Hitler to the refugees, yet the ghosts of the past also have a fugitive presence in Germany: "sometimes he even imagines that all these missing people along with their unborn children and the children of their children are walking beside him on the street..." (221-222).

29. But if Germany's past is fugitive, so too, in a sense, is its present. These new refugees are confronting the law that excludes them: they "are now drowning in rivers and oceans of paper" (251). If rivers, oceans, the sea have an emblematic place in this novel, it is partly because they have revised the notion of the boundary. Europe has exported its boundaries, and the sea is nothing like a wall, at least visible and something to cross. Rather it is an extended space of transition and navigation, a space of crossing, filled with memories of the past, and depths, and hauntings of an unknown future. It has been redefined as a fugitive zone, where space converts into time and vice versa. Arrival has itself become a condition of postponement. Like Schrodinger's thought experiment of the cat, which Richard contemplates, in the regime the refugees now inhabit it is possible to be both alive and dead. Their own presence in Germany is spectral; they are the unknown, unincorporated, at the center.

30. Is it possible to be at home in one's home? As Richard engages with the refugees it is partly as, and because, he is becoming unhomed. The fall of the Berlin Wall gave him new citizenship, but also turned him into a different kind of foreigner. At night he strolls through his house in the dark as if in a museum, "as if he himself no longer belonged to it"; he begins sobbing "like a man condemned to exile" (91). There is a danger here, that Richard's life will become the story, at the expense of the refugees, yet that is not what occurs. To a significant extent this is because of the form the narrative takes, which becomes its own kind of content. The novel takes shape mainly through a free indirect style, located both in Richard's mind and outside it. This is inevitably a mode of contemplation, of procession, and sometimes it seems to take on a doubled aspect, as Richard seems to imagine (a doubled seeming here) the thoughts of his refugee interlocutors. Such a narrative also makes the novel walk a line connecting the fictive and non-fictive: history as it is processed through the lives and minds of its characters. In this form the novel offers not a version simply of knowledge, but rather is in-formed by what it encounters, both the process of its knowledge and where this shades into the unknown. Did one of Richard's refugee guests rob him? Can he still associate with German friends who make jokes about the refugees? What does he really know about the people he is

engaging with? Just as Richard is unhomed, so too he confronts his unknowing. Like J. M. Coetzee's *Foe*, the novel avoids the possibility of a re-enacted colonization through knowledge. Equally, there is no easy mirroring in these encounters, no easy recognition of self or other. Knowledge in the aftermath of German history and the reality of its present is fugitive.

31. There are further exchanges. Richard, unsettled in his own life and place, pays for land in Ghana for one of the refugees. He opens up his home to some of the refugees, now under threat of deportation, who come to live with him. Is he host or guest in his home; "guest-master," "guest-servant"—or something else? Has the conundrum of hospitality entered into his life? Are the members of his new community strangers or friends? Levinas, who talks of the self as both host and hostage, the "responsibility of being-in-question," would have much to say here (Totality 299; "Substitution" 101). So too on the question of the "third," which for Levinas interrupts any merely hermetic or ecstatic relation between the self and Other. There are always many "others," in this case a lateral chain of refugees both known and unknown implicitly present in every encounter. For Levinas this is the insistent question of justice.<sup>[11]</sup>

32. At the heart of the book is a grammar lesson, as the Africans learn German—a German in a sense they already know, just as the outsider is already inside the home. "Go, went, gone": gehen, ging, gegangen; the law, as it were, of fugitive Germany. The verb is irregular, as a fugitive grammar must be. If read not as grammar but condensed narrative, it is so quick in its transitions, so fated in its trajectory, so final in its conclusion. These are the modalities of fugitive life for everyone, not only refugees, to contemplate. At the back of it all is death, the ultimate crossing, the precariousness of life, the drowned man in the lake, the refugees lost in the crossings, the wife who died, and everything that should follow. Thinking about his wife's death, and his own submerged sense of guilt, Richard remarks to his friend Detlef at the end, "the things I can endure are only just the surface of what I can't possibly endure." The refugee Khalil, with his experience behind him, asks, "Like the surface of the sea?" And the thought in Richard's mind—voiced, unvoiced?—is, "Actually, yes, exactly like the surface of the sea" (283). The dialogue has more than two people in it. The third is present. Richard has been displaced from the classical universe; this is a new space of crossing.

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## Notes

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[1] For Erich Auerbach's reference to Victor of St Hugo, see Auerbach et al. (17). As part of this chain of transmission, Auerbach's essay is translated by Maire Said and Edward Said, but not the passage from Hugo of St Victor, which is left, like other passages in Auerbach's work, in the original. For the translation, see Hugh of Saint-Victor (ch. 19, 101). For the original see Hugo of St Victor (Lib. 3, cap. 19).

[2] For this discussion I am drawing on my book, *The Grammar of Identity*.

[3] Jacques Derrida also draws attention to the *rupta via*, but to a different end than my reading here: *Monolingualism* (58).

[4] For the *fato profugus*: Virgil, *Aeneid* 1-6 (1, 2). For Fitzgerald's rendition: Virgil, *The Aeneid* (1, 5-6). Further references are to Fitzgerald's translation.

[5] As David Malouf puts it aptly, the *Ars Amatoria's* subversion lies in the fact that it "establishes the lover/poet as the emperor of an alternative and privately constituted state" (xii). Technically, pace my following sentence, Ovid was subject not to *exsilium* but to *relegatio*, which meant he could retain his civic rights and property: *Translator's Preface*, Ovid, *Art of Love*(xxii).

[6] Ovid, *Metamorphoses* (15, 357); numbers, in this edn, are to pages rather than lines. As E. J. Kenney notes in the Introduction to the Melville translation, Ovid "allows the reader to infer that in the end Rome too must bow to the inevitable laws of change" (xvi). The last word of the *Metamorphoses* is *vivam* (I shall live). As the notes to the volume point out, Pythagoras fled from Samos to Crotona (460).

[7] Rushdie, *Satanic Verses* (285); Rushdie cites without line breaks the original in Ovid, *Metamorphoses* (15, 357).

[8] For some examples respectively, see Hunt; Slaughter; Ibhawoh. For further discussion on some of these issues, see Clingman, "Rights, Routes and Refugees."

[9] See also Arendt, "We Refugees" (273).

[10] For preference here I have chosen the Hollanders' translation of the *Inferno*.

[11] Levinas writes: "The third party looks at me in the eyes of the Other—language is justice" (*Totality* 213).



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