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STRANGERS TO OURSELVES

Julia Kristeva

TRANSLATED BY

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Columbia University Press
New York

Columbia University Press wishes to express its appreciation of assistance given by the government of France through Le Ministère de la Culture in the preparation of the translation.

Columbia University Press
New York Chichester, West Sussex

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Kristeva, Julia
[Etrangers à nous-mêmes. English]
Strangers to ourselves / Julis Kristeva ; translated by Leon Roudiez.
p. cm. — (European perspectives)
Translation of: Etrangers à nous-mêmes.
Includes index.
ISBN 0-231-07156-6
ISBN 0-231-07157-4 (pbk.)
1. Alienation (Social psychology) in literature. 2. Psychoanalysis and literature. 3. Assimilation (Sociology) in literature. 4. Alienation (Social psychology) 5. Assimilation (Sociology) I. Title. II. Series.
PN56.A45K7513 1991
809'.93353—dc20 90-22990
CIP

Casebound editions of Columbia University Press books are printed on permanent and durable acid-free paper.

Printed in the United States of America

c 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2
p 10 9

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Foreigner: a choked up rage deep down in my throat, a black angel clouding transparency, opaque, unfathomable spur. The image of hatred and of the other, a foreigner is neither the romantic victim of our clannish indolence nor the intruder responsible for all the ills of the polis. Neither the apocalypse on the move nor the instant adversary to be eliminated for the sake of appeasing the group. Strangely, the foreigner lives within us: he is the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding and affinity founder. By recognizing him within ourselves, we are spared detesting him in himself. A symptom that precisely turns "we" into a problem, perhaps makes it impossible, The foreigner comes in when the consciousness of my difference arises, and he disappears when we all acknowledge ourselves as foreigners, unamenable to bonds and communities.

Can the "foreigner," who was the "enemy" in primitive societies, disappear from modern societies? Let us recall a few moments in Western history when foreigners were conceived, welcomed, or rejected, but when the possibility of a society without foreigners could also have been imagined on the horizon of a religion or an ethics. As a still and perhaps ever utopic matter, the question is again before us today as we confront an economic

and political integration on the scale of the planet: shall we be, intimately and subjectively, able to live with the others, to live *as others,* without ostracism but also without leveling? The modification in the status of foreigners that is imperative today leads one to reflect on our ability to accept new modalities of otherness. No "Nationality Code" would be practicable without having that question slowly mature within each of us and for each of us.

While in the most savage human groups the foreigner was an enemy to be destroyed, he has become, within the scope of religious and ethical constructs, a different human being who, provided he espouses them, may be assimilated into the fraternities of the "wise," the "just," or the "native." In Stoicism, Judaism, Christianity, and even in the humanism of the Enlightenment, the patterns of such acceptance varied, but in spite of its limitations and shortcomings, it remained a genuine rampart against xenophobia. The violence of the problem set by the foreigner today is probably due to the crises undergone by religious and ethical constructs. This is especially so as the absorption of otherness proposed by our societies turns out to be inacceptable by the contemporary individual, jealous of his difference—one that is not only national and ethical but essentially subjective, unsurmountable. Stemming from the bourgeois revolution, nationalism has become a symptom—romantic at first, then totalitarian—of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Now, while it does go against universalist tendencies (be they religious or rationalist) and tends to isolate or even hunt down the foreigner, nationalism nevertheless ends up, on the other hand, with the particularistic, demanding individualism of contemporary man. But it is perhaps on the basis of that contemporary individualism's subversion, beginning with the moment when the citizen-individual ceases to consider himself as unitary and glorious but discovers his incoherences and abysses, in short his "strangenesses"—that the question arises again: no longer that of welcoming the foreigner within a system that obliterates him but of

promoting the togetherness of those foreigners that we all recognize ourselves to be.

Let us not seek to solidify, to turn the otherness of the foreigner into a thing. Let us merely touch it, brush by it, without giving it a permanent structure. Simply sketching out its perpetual motion through some of its variegated aspects spread out before our eyes today, through some of its former, changing representations scattered throughout history. Let us also lighten that otherness by constantly coming back to it—but more and more swiftly. Let us escape its hatred, its burden, fleeing them not through leveling and forgetting, but through the *harmonious* repetition of the differences it implies and spreads. *Toccatas and Fugues:* Bach's compositions evoke to my ears the meaning of an acknowledged and harrowing otherness that I should like to be contemporary, *because* it has been brought up, relieved, disseminated, inscribed in an original play being developed, without goal, without boundary, without end. An otherness barely touched upon and that already moves away.

Scorched Happiness

Are there any happy foreigners?

The foreigner's face burns with happiness.

At first, one is struck by his peculiarity—those eyes, those lips, those cheek bones, that skin unlike others, all that distinguishes him and reminds one that there is *someone* there. The difference in that face reveals in paroxystic fashion what any face should reveal to a careful glance: the nonexistence of banality in human beings. Nevertheless, it is precisely the commonplace that constitutes a commonality for our daily habits. But this grasping the foreigner's features, one that captivates us, beckons and rejects at the same time. "I am at least as remarkable, and therefore I love him," the observer thinks; "now I prefer my own peculiarity, and therefore I kill him," he might conclude. From heart pangs to first jabs, the foreigner's face forces us to display the

secret manner in which we face the world, stare into all our faces, even in the most familial, the most tightly knit communities.

Furthermore, the face that is so *other* bears the mark of a crossed threshold that irremediably imprints itself as peacefulness or anxiety. Whether perturbed or joyful, the foreigner's appearance signals that he is "in addition." The presence of such a border, internal to all that is displayed, awakens our most archaic senses through a burning sensation. Vivid concern or delight, set there in these other features, without forgetfulness, without ostentation, like a standing invitation to some inaccessible, irritating journey, whose code the foreigner does not have but whose mute, physical, visible memory he keeps. This does not mean the foreigner necessarily appears absent, absent-minded, or distraught. But the insistent presence of a lining—good or evil, pleasing or death-bearing—disrupts the never regular image of his face and imprints upon it the ambiguous mark of a scar—his very own well-being.

For, curiously, beyond unease, such a doubling imposes upon the other, the observer, the feeling that there is a special, somewhat insolent happiness in the foreigner. Happiness seems to prevail, *in spite of everything*, because something has definitely been exceeded: it is the happiness of tearing away, of racing, the space of a promised infinite. Such happiness is, however, constrained, apprehensively discreet, in spite of its piercing intrusion, since the foreigner keeps feeling threatened by his former territory, caught up in the memory of a happiness or a disaster —both always excessive.

Can one be a foreigner and happy? The foreigner calls forth a new idea of happiness. Between the fugue and the origin: a fragile limit, a temporary homeostasis. Posited, present, sometimes certain, that happiness knows nevertheless that it is passing by, like fire that shines only because it consumes. The strange happiness of the foreigner consists in maintaining that fleeing eternity or that perpetual transience.

The Loss and the Challenge

A secret wound, often unknown to himself, drives the foreigner to wandering. Poorly loved, however, he does not acknowledge it: with him, the challenge silences the complaint. It is a rare person who, like some Greeks (such as Aeschylus' *Suppliants*), the Jews (the faithful at the wall of lamentations), or psychoanalysts, leads the foreigner to avow a humbled entreaty. He is dauntless: "You have caused me no harm," he disclaims, fiercely, "It is I who chose to leave"; always further along, always inaccessible to all. As far back as his memory can reach, it is delightfully bruised: misunderstood by a loved and yet absent-minded, discreet, or worried mother, the exile is a stranger to his mother. He does not call her, he asks nothing of her. Arrogant, he proudly holds on to what he lacks, to absence, to some symbol or other. The foreigner would be the son of a father whose existence is subject to no doubt whatsoever, but whose presence does not detain him. Rejection on the one hand, inaccessibility on the other: if one has the strength not to give in, there remains a path to be discovered. Riveted to an elsewhere as certain as it is inaccessible, the foreigner is ready to flee. No obstacle stops him, and all suffering, all insults, all rejections are indifferent to him as he seeks that invisible and promised territory, that country that does not exist but that he bears in his dreams, and that must indeed be called a beyond.

The foreigner, thus, has lost his mother. Camus understood it well: his Stranger reveals himself at the time of his mother's death. One has not much noticed that this cold orphan, whose indifference can become criminal, is a fanatic of absence. He is a devotee of solitude, even in the midst of a crowd, because he is faithful to a shadow: bewitching secret, paternal ideal, inaccessible ambition. Meursault is dead unto himself but keyed up with an insipid intoxication that takes the place of passion. Likewise, his father, who started vomiting while watching an execution, understood that being sentenced to death is the only thing a man might truly consider worth bothering with.

Suffering, Ebullience, and Mask

The difficulties the foreigner will necessarily encounter—one mouth too many, incomprehensible speech, inappropriate behavior—wound him severely, but by flashes. They make him turn gray, imperceptibly, he becomes smooth and hard as a pebble, always ready to resume his infinite journey, farther, elsewhere. The (professional, intellectual, affective) aim that some set for themselves in such an unrestrained fugue is already a betrayal of strangeness, for as he chooses a program he allows himself a respite or a residence. On the contrary, according to the utmost logic of exile, all aims should waste away and self-destruct in the wanderer's insane stride toward an elsewhere that is always pushed back, unfulfilled, out of reach. The pleasure of suffering is a necessary lot in such a demented whirl, and amateur *proxeni* know it unconsciously as they choose foreign partners on whom to inflict the torture of their own contempt, their condescension, or, more deceitfully, their heavy-handed charity.

The foreigner is hypersensitive beneath his armor as activist or tireless "immigrant worker." He bleeds body and soul, humiliated in a position where, even with the better couples, he or she assumes the part of a domestic, of the one who is a bother when he or she becomes ill, who embodies the enemy, the traitor, the victim. Masochistic pleasure accounts for his or her submissiveness only in part. The latter, in fact, strengthens the foreigner's mask—a second, impassive personality, an anesthetized skin he wraps himself in, providing a hiding place where he enjoys scorning his tyrant's hysterical weaknesses. Is this the dialectic of master and slave?

The animosity, or at least the annoyance aroused by the foreigner ("What are you doing here, Mac, this is not where you belong!"), hardly surprises him. He readily bears a kind of admiration for those who have welcomed him, for he rates them more often than not above himself, be it financially, politically, or socially. At the same time he is quite ready to consider them somewhat narrow-minded, blind. For his scornful hosts lack the

perspective he himself has in order to see himself and to see them. The foreigner feels strengthened by the distance that detaches him from the others as it does from himself and gives him the lofty sense not so much of holding the truth but of making it and himself relative while others fall victim to the ruts of monovalency. For they are perhaps owners of things, but the foreigner tends to think he is the only one to have a biography, that is, a life made up of ordeals—neither catastrophes nor adventures (although these might equally happen), but simply a life in which acts constitute events because they imply choice, surprises, breaks, adaptations, or cunning, but neither routine nor rest. In the eyes of the foreigner those who are not foreign have no life at all: barely do they exist, haughty or mediocre, but out of the running and thus almost already cadaverized.

Aloofness

Indifference is the foreigner's shield. Insensitive, aloof, he seems, deep down, beyond the reach of attacks and rejections that he nevertheless experiences with the vulnerability of a medusa. This is because his being kept apart corresponds to his remaining aloof, as he pulls back into the painless core of what is called a soul the humbleness that, when all is said and done, amounts to plain brutality. There, soured of mawkishness, but of sensitivity as well, he takes pride in holding a truth that is perhaps simply a certainty—the ability to reveal the crudest aspects of human relationships when seduction fades out and proprieties give way before the results of confrontations: a clash of bodies and tempers. For the foreigner, from the height of an autonomy that he is the only one to have chosen when the others prudently remain "between themselves," paradoxically confronts everyone with an asymbolia that rejects civility and returns to a violence laid bare. The brutes' encounter.

Not belonging to any place, any time, any love. A lost origin, the impossibility to take root, a rummaging memory, the present in abeyance. The space of the foreigner is a moving train, a plane

in flight, the very transition that precludes stopping. As to landmarks, there are none. His time? The time of a resurrection that remembers death and what happened before, but misses the glory of being beyond: merely the feeling of a reprieve, of having gotten away.

Confidence

There remains, however, the self-confidence of being, of being able to settle within the self with a smooth, opaque certainty—an oyster shut under the flooding tide or the expressionless joy of warm stones. Between the two pathetic shores of courage and humiliation, against which he is tossed by the clashes of others, the foreigner persists, anchored in himself, strengthened by such a secret working-out, his neutral wisdom, a pleasure that has been numbed by an unattainable solitude.

Deep-seated narcissism? Blank psychosis beneath the swirl of existential conflicts? In crossing a border (. . . or two) the foreigner has changed his discomforts into a base of resistance, a citadel of life. Moreover, had he stayed home, he might perhaps have become a dropout, an invalid, an outlaw . . . Without a home, he disseminates on the contrary the actor's paradox: multiplying masks and "false selves" he is never completely true nor completely false, as he is able to tune in to loves and aversions the superficial antennae of a basaltic heart. A headstrong will, but unaware of itself, unconscious, distraught. The breed of the tough guys who know how to be weak.

This means that, settled within himself, the foreigner has no self. Barely an empty confidence, valueless, which focuses his possibilities of being constantly other, according to others' wishes and to circumstances. I do what *they* want *me* to, but it is not "me"—"me" is elsewhere, "me" belongs to no one, "me" does not belong to "me," . . . does "me" exist?

Parceling

Nevertheless, such hardness in a state of weightlessness is an absolute that does not last. The traitor betrays himself. Whether a Maghrebian street sweeper riveted to his broom or an Asiatic princess writing her memoirs in a borrowed tongue, as soon as foreigners have an action or a passion, they take root. Temporarily, to be sure, but intensely. For the foreigner's aloofness is only the resistance with which he succeeds in fighting his matricidal anguish. His hardness appears as the metamorphosis of an archaic or potential parceling that runs the risk of bringing his thought and speech down to chaos. Thus does he value that aloofness, his hardness—let us leave it alone.

The flame that betrays his latent fanaticism shows only when he becomes attached—to a cause, to a job, to a person. What he finds there is more than a country; it is a fusion, in which there are not two beings, there is but a single one who is consumed, complete, annihilated.

Social standing or personal talent obviously stamps such a vocation with appreciable variations. Whatever their differences, however, all foreigners who have made a *choice* add to their passion for indifference a fervent extremism that reveals the origin of their exile. For it is on account of having *no one* at home against whom to vent their fury, their conflagration of love and hatred, and of finding the strength not to give in to it, that they wander about the world, neutral but solaced for having developed an interior distance from the fire and ice that had seared them in the past.

A Melancholia

Hard-hearted indifference is perhaps no more than the respectable aspect of nostalgia. We all know the foreigner who survives with a tearful face turned toward the lost homeland. Melancholy lover of a vanished space, he cannot, in fact, get over his having abandoned a period of time. The lost paradise is a mirage of the

past that he will never be able to recover. He knows it with a distressed knowledge that turns his rage involving others (for there is always an other, miserable cause of my exile) against himself: "How could I have abandoned them?—I have abandoned myself." And even he who, seemingly, flees the slimy poison of depression, does not hold back, as he lies in bed, during those glaucus moments between waking and sleeping. For in the intervening period of nostalgia, saturated with fragrances and sounds to which he no longer belongs and which, because of that, wound him less than those of the here and now, the foreigner is a dreamer making love with absence, one exquisitely depressed. Happy?

Ironists and Believers

Yet, he is never simply torn between here and elsewhere, now and before. Those who believe they are crucified in such a fashion forget that nothing ties them there anymore, and, so far, nothing binds them here. Always elsewhere, the foreigner belongs nowhere. But let there be no mistake about it: there are, in the way one lives this attachment to a lost space, two kinds of foreigners, and this separates uprooted people of all countries, occupations, social standing, sexes . . . into two irreconcilable categories. On the one hand, there are those who waste away in an agonizing struggle between what no longer is and what will never be—the followers of neutrality, the advocates of emptiness; they are not necessarily defeatists, they often become the best of ironists. On the other hand, there are those who transcend: living neither before nor now but beyond, they are bent with a passion that, although tenacious, will remain forever unsatisfied. It is a passion for another land, always a promised one, that of an occupation, a love, a child, a glory. They are believers, and they sometimes ripen into skeptics.

Meeting

Meeting balances wandering. A crossroad of two othernesses, it welcomes the foreigner without tying him down, opening the host to his visitor without committing him. A mutual recognition, the meeting owes its success to its temporary nature, and it would be torn by conflicts if it were to be extended. The foreign believer is incorrigibly curious, eager for meetings: he is nourished by them, makes his way through them, forever unsatisfied, forever the party-goer, too. Always going toward others, always going farther. Invited, he is able to invite himself, and his life is a succession of desired parties, but short-lived, the brilliance of which he learns to tarnish immediately, for he knows that they are of no consequence. "They welcome me, but that does not matter . . . Next . . . It was only an expenditure that guarantees a clear conscience . . ." A clear conscience for the host as well as the foreigner. The cynic is even more suited for a meeting: he does not even seek it, he expects nothing from it, but he slips in nevertheless, convinced that even though everything melts away, it is better to be with "it." He does not long for meetings, they draw him in. He experiences them as in a fit of dizziness when, distraught, he no longer knows whom he has seen nor who he is.

The meeting often begins with a food fest: bread, salt, and wine. A meal, a nutritive communion. The one confesses he is a famished baby, the other welcomes the greedy child; for an instant, they merge within the hospitality ritual. But this table corner, where they gulp with such pleasure, is covered with the paths of memory: one remembers, makes plans, recites, sings. The nourishing and initially somewhat animal banquet rises to the vaporous levels of dreams and ideas: the hospitality merrymakers also become united for a while through the spirit. A miracle of flesh and thought, the banquet of hospitality is the foreigners' utopia—the cosmopolitanism of a moment, the brotherhood of guests who soothe and forget their differences, the banquet is outside of time. It imagines itself eternal in the

intoxication of those who are nevertheless aware of its temporary frailty.

Sole Liberty

Free of ties with his own people, the foreigner feels "completely free." Nevertheless, the consummate name of such a freedom is solitude. Useless or limitless, it amounts to boredom or supreme availability. Deprived of others, free solitude, like the astronauts' weightless state, dilapidates muscles, bones, and blood. Available, freed of everything, the foreigner has nothing, he is nothing. But he is ready for the absolute, if an absolute could choose him. "Solitude" is perhaps the only word that has no meaning. Without other, without guidepost, it cannot bear the difference that, alone, discriminates and makes sense. No one better than the foreigner knows the passion for solitude. He believes he has chosen it for its enjoyment, or been subjected to it to suffer on account of it, and there he is languishing in a passion for indifference that, although occasionally intoxicating, is irreparably without an accomplice. The paradox is that the foreigner wishes to be alone but with partners, and yet none is willing to join him in the torrid space of his uniqueness. The only possible companions would be the members of an affiliation whose uniformity and readiness discourage him, whereas, on the contrary, the lack of accordance on the part of distinguished persons helplessly sends him back to his own distress. Accordance is the foreigner's mirage. More grueling when lacking, it is his only connection—utopic or abortive as it may be. If it appears under the self-satisfying guise of charity or any other right-thinking humanism, he accepts it of course, but in a hard-hearted, unbelieving, indifferent manner. The foreigner longs for affiliation, the better to experience, through a refusal, its untouchability.

A Hatred

"Experiencing hatred": that is the way the foreigner often expresses his life, but the double meaning of the phrase escapes him. Constantly feeling the hatred of others, knowing no other environment than that hatred. Like a woman who, accommodating and conniving, abides by her husband's rebuff as soon as she makes the merest suggestion of a word, gesture, or intention. Like a child that hides, fearful and guilty, convinced beforehand that it deserves its parents' anger. In the world of dodges and shams that make up his pseudo-relationships with pseudo-others, hatred provides the foreigner with consistency. Against that wall, painful but certain, and in that sense familiar, he knocks himself in order to assert, to others and to himself, that he is here. Hatred makes him real, authentic so to speak, solid, or simply existing. Even more so, it causes to resound on the *outside* that other hatred, secret and shameful, apologetic to the point of abating, that the foreigner bears *within himself* against everyone, against no one, and which, in the case of flooding, would cause a serious depression. But there, on the border between himself and others, hatred does not threaten him. He lies in wait, reassured each time to discover that it never misses an appointment, bruised on account of always missing love, but almost pleased with the persistence—real or imaginary?—of detestation.

Living with the other, with the foreigner, confronts us with the possibility or not of *being an other*. It is not simply—humanistically—a matter of our being able to accept the other, but of *being in his place*, and this means to imagine and make oneself other for oneself. Rimbaud's *Je est un autre* ["I is an other"] was not only the acknowledgment of the psychotic ghost that haunts poetry. The word foreshadowed the exile, the possibility or necessity to be foreign and to live in a foreign country, thus heralding the art of living of a modern era, the cosmopolitanism of those who have been flayed. Being alienated from myself, as painful as that may be, provides me with that exquisite distance within which perverse pleasure begins, as well as the

possibility of my imagining and thinking, the impetus of my culture. Split identity, kaleidoscope of identities: can we be a saga for ourselves without being considered mad or fake? Without dying of the foreigner's hatred or of hatred for the foreigner?

Detestation tells you that you are an intruder, that you are irritating, and that this will be shown to you frankly and without caution. No one in this country can either defend or avenge you. You do not count for anyone, you should be grateful for being tolerated among us. Civilized people need not be gentle with foreigners. "That's it, and if you don't like it why don't you go back where you came from!" The humiliation that disparages the foreigner endows his master with who knows what petty grandeur. I wonder if Wanda's husband would have dared to act as brazenly like a Don Juan, to discover libertine bents in himself, to flaunt the girlfriends she, alas, did not have the sense of humor to appreciate—if his wife had not come from Poland, that is from nowhere, without the family or friends that constitute, in spite of what people say, a shelter against narcissism and a rampart against paranoid persecutions. I wonder if his in-laws would have so brutally taken his child away from Kwang, at the time of his separation from Jacqueline, if he did not have such an incomprehensible way of pronouncing words and forgetting verbs, what was called an obsequious way of conducting himself and which was just his own way of being polite, and that inability to strike up a friendship with colleagues at a bar, on the occasion of a fishing trip . . . But perhaps Wanda and Kwang are suffering from something more than being foreign, and Marie or Paul might have the same problems if they were a bit different, a bit special, if they did not play the game, if they were like foreigners from within. Or should one recognize that one becomes a foreigner in another country because one is already a foreigner from within?

The Silence of Polyglots

Not speaking one's mother tongue. Living with resonances and reasoning that are cut off from the body's nocturnal memory, from the bittersweet slumber of childhood. Bearing within oneself like a secret vault, or like a handicapped child—cherished and useless—that language of the past that withers without ever leaving you. You improve your ability with another instrument, as one expresses oneself with algebra or the violin. You can become a virtuoso with this new device that moreover gives you a new body, just as artificial and sublimated—some say sublime. You have a feeling that the new language is a resurrection: new skin, new sex. But the illusion bursts when you hear, upon listening to a recording, for instance, that the melody of your voice comes back to you as a peculiar sound, out of nowhere, closer to the old spluttering than to today's code. Your awkwardness has its charm, they say, it is even erotic, according to womanizers, not to be outdone. No one points out your mistakes, so as not to hurt your feelings, and then there are so many, and after all they don't give a damn. One nevertheless lets you know that it is irritating just the same. Occasionally, raising the eyebrows or saying "I beg your pardon?" in quick succession lead you to understand that you will "never be a part of it", that it "is not worth it," that there, at least, one is "not taken in." Being fooled is not what happens to you either. At the most, you are willing to go along, ready for all apprenticeships, at all ages, in order to reach—within that speech of others, imagined as being perfectly assimilated, *some day*—who knows what ideal, beyond the implicit acknowledgment of a disappointment caused by the origin that did not keep its promise.

Thus, between two languages, your realm is silence. By dint of saying things in various ways, one just as trite as the other, just as approximate, one ends up no longer saying them. An internationally known scholar was ironical about his famous polyglotism, saying that he spoke Russian in fifteen languages. As for me I had the feeling that he rejected speech and his slack

silence led him, at times, to sing and give rhythm to chanted poems, just in order to say something.

When Hölderlin became absorbed by Greek (before going back to the sources of German), he dramatically expressed the anesthesia of the person that is snatched up by a foreign language: "A sign, such are we, and of no meaning / Dead to all suffering, and we have almost / Lost our language in a foreign land" *(Mnemosyne)*.

Stuck within that polymorphic mutism, the foreigner can, instead of saying, attempt doing—house-cleaning, playing tennis, soccer, sailing, sewing, horseback riding, jogging, getting pregnant, what have you. It remains an expenditure, it expends, and it propagates silence even more. Who listens to you? At the most, you are being tolerated. Anyway, do you really want to speak?

Why then did you cut off the maternal source of words? What did you dream up concerning those new people you spoke to in an artificial language, a prosthesis? From your standpoint, were they idealized or scorned? Come, now! Silence has not only been forced upon you, it is within you: a refusal to speak, a fitful sleep riven to an anguish that wants to remain mute, the private property of your proud and mortified discretion, that silence is a harsh light. Nothing to say, nothingness, no one on the horizon. An impervious fullness: cold diamond, secret treasury, carefully protected, out of reach. Saying nothing, nothing needs to be said, nothing can be said. At first, it was a cold war with those of the new idiom, desired and rejecting; then the new language covered you as might a slow tide, a neap tide. It is not the silence of anger that jostles words at the edge of the idea and the mouth; rather, it is the silence that empties the mind and fills the brain with despondency, like the gaze of sorrowful women coiled up in some nonexistant eternity.

"The Former Separations From the Body" (Mallarmé, "Cantique de Saint Jean")

To disagree. Constantly, about nothing, with no one. Coping with that with astonishment and curiosity, like an explorer, an ethnologist. Becoming weary of it and walled up in one's tarnished, neutralized disagreement, through lack of having the right to state it. No longer knowing what one truly thinks, except that "this is not it": that the words, the smiles, the manias, the judgments, the tastes of the native are excessive, faltering, or simply unjust and false, and he cannot imagine—proud as he is of being on his own ground—that one might speak, think, or act differently. In that case, why not tell him so, "argue"? But what right do we have? Perhaps we should ourselves assume that right, challenging the natives' assurance?

No. Those who have never lost the slightest root seem to you unable to understand any word liable to temper their point of view. So, when one is oneself uprooted, what is the point of talking to those who think they have their own feet on their own soil? The ear is receptive to conflicts only if the body looses its footing. A certain imbalance is necessary, a swaying over some abyss, for a conflict to be heard. Yet when the foreigner—the speech-denying strategist—does not utter his conflict, he in turn takes root in his own world of a rejected person whom no one is supposed to hear. The rooted one who is deaf to the conflict and the wanderer walled in by his conflict thus stand firmly, facing each other. It is a seemingly peaceful coexistence that hides the abyss: an abysmal world, the end of the world.

Immigrants, Hence Workers

The foreigner is the one who works. While natives of the civilized world, of developed countries, think that work is vulgar and display the aristocratic manners of offhandedness and whim (when they can . . .), you will recognize the foreigner in that he

still considers work as a value. A vital necessity, to be sure, his sole means of survival, on which he does not necessarily place a halo of glory but simply claims as a primary right, the zero degree of dignity. Even though some, once their minimal needs are satisfied, also experience an acute pleasure in asserting themselves in and through work: as if *it* were the chosen soil, the only source of possible success, and above all the personal, steadfast, nontransferable quality, but fit to be moved beyond borders and properties. That the foreigner is a worker would seem like a cheap paradox, inferred from the quite controversial existence of "immigrant workers." I have nevertheless come across, in a French village, ambitious farmers who had come from a different region, more hard-working than others and wanting to "make a niche" for themselves by the sweat of their brows, hated as much for being intruders as for being relentless, and who (the worst of insults during demonstrations) heard themselves called Portuguese and Spaniards. Indeed, as they confided, the others (in this case they meant the Frenchmen who were sure of themselves) are never as persistent in their work; you really have to be without anything and thus, basically, to come from somewhere else, to be attached to it to that extent. Now, were they doing the unpleasant work in that village? No, they were simply always doing something, those "foreigners" who had come from another province.

With the second generation, it is true, it happens that these demons for work slacken. As a defiance of industrious parents, or an inevitably excessive aping of native behavior, the children of foreigners are often and from the very start within the code of *dolce vita*, slovenliness, and even delinquency. Many "reasons" are given for that, of course.

But as far as the immigrant is concerned, he has not come here just to waste his time away. Possessed with driving ambition, a pusher, or merely crafty, he takes on all jobs and tries to be tops in those that are scarcest. In those that nobody wants but also in those that nobody has thought of. Man or woman for odd jobs,

but also a pioneer in the most up-to-date disciplines, off-the-cuff specialist in unusual or leading occupations, the foreigner devotes himself and exerts himself. If it be true that, in the process, like everyone else he aims at profits and savings for later and for his family, his planning supposes (in order to achieve that aim, and more than with others) an extravagant expenditure of energy and means. Since he has nothing, since he is nothing, he can sacrifice everything. And sacrifice begins with work: the only property that can be exported duty free, a universally tried and tested stock for the wanderer's use. What bitterness then, what disaster it is when one does not obtain one's green card.

Slaves and Masters

Dialectics of master and slave? The amount of strength changes the very balance of power. The weight of foreigners is measured not only in terms of greater numbers—from that standpoint did not slaves always constitute an overwhelming majority?—but is also determined by the consciousness of being somewhat foreign as well. On the one hand, because everyone is, in a world that is more open than ever, liable to become a foreigner for a while as tourist or employee of a multinational concern. On the other hand, because the once solid barrier between "master" and "slave" has today been abolished, if not in people's unconscious at least in our ideologies and aspirations. Every native feels himself to be more or less a "foreigner" in his "own and proper" place, and that metaphorical value of the word "foreigner" first leads the citizen to a feeling of discomfort as to his sexual, national, political, professional identity. Next it impels him to identify—sporadically, to be sure, but nonetheless intensely—with the other. Within this motion guilt obviously has its part but it also fades away to the advantage of a kind of underhanded glory of being a little like those other "gooks" *[métèques]*, concerning which we now know that, disadvantaged as they may be, they are running before the wind. A wind that jostles and ruffles but bears us toward our own unknown and who knows what

future. There is thus set up between the new "masters" and the new "slaves" a secret collusion, which does not necessarily entail practical consequences in politics or the courts (even if they, too, feel its effects progressively, slowly) but, especially with the native, arouses a feeling of suspicion: am I really at home? am I myself? are *they* not masters of the "future"?

Such a habit for suspicion prompts some to reflect, rarely causes humbleness, and even more rarely generosity. But it also provokes regressive and protectionist rage in others: must we not stick together, remain among ourselves, expel the intruder, or at least, keep him in "his" place? The "master" then changes into a slave hounding his conqueror. For the foreigner perceived as an invader reveals a buried passion within those who are entrenched: the passion to kill the *other*, who had first been feared or despised, then promoted from the ranks of dregs to the status of powerful persecutor against whom a "we" solidifies in order to take revenge.

Void or Baroque Speech

To be of no account to others. No one listens to you, you never have the floor, or else, when you have the courage to seize it, your speech is quickly erased by the more garrulous and fully relaxed talk of the community. Your speech has no past and will have no power over the future of the group: why should one listen to it? You do not have enough status—"no social standing"—to make your speech useful. It may be desirable, to be sure, surprising, too, bizarre or attractive, if you wish. But such lures are of little consequence when set against the *interest*—which is precisely lacking—of those you are speaking to. Interest is self-seeking, it wants to be able to use your words, counting on your influence, which, like any influence, is anchored in social connections. Now, to be precise, you have none. Your speech, fascinating as it might be on account of its very strangeness, will be of no consequence, will have no effect, will cause no improvement in the image or reputation of those you are conversing with. One

will listen to you only in absent-minded, amused fashion, and one will forget you in order to go on with serious matters. The foreigner's speech can bank only on its bare rhetorical strength, and the inherent desires he or she has invested in it. But it is deprived of any support in outside reality, since the foreigner is precisely kept out of it. Under such conditions, if it does not founder into silence, it becomes absolute in its formalism, excessive in its sophistication—rhetoric is dominant, the foreigner is a baroque person. Baltasar Gracián and James Joyce had to be foreigners.

Orphans

To be deprived of parents—is that where freedom starts? Certainly foreigners become intoxicated with that independence, and undoubtedly their very exile is at first no more than a challenge to parental overbearance. Those who have not experienced the near-hallucinatory daring of imagining themselves without parents—free of debt and duties—cannot understand the foreigners' folly, what it provides in the way of pleasure ("I am my sole master"), what it comprises in the way of angry homicide ("Neither father nor mother, neither God nor master . . .").

Eventually, though, the time of orphanhood comes about. Like any bitter consciousness, this one has its source in others. When others convey to you that you are of no account because your parents are of no account, that, as they are invisible, they do not exist, you are suddenly aware thet you are an orphan, and, sometimes, accountable for being so. A strange light then shines on that obscurity that was in you, both joyful and guilty, the darkness of the original dependency, and transforms it into a solidarity with close relatives of earlier days, henceforth forfeited. How could it possibly not have been understood that you were always with them, dependent on a past that only parents know, on the precious, exquisite pain that you will share with no one else? How is it that they, the others, do not know that your

parents are still at your side, unseen witnesses to your problems with the natives? Well, no! They do not, they do not want to know it. They thus reveal your own rejection far from those you have abandoned without really doing so—"I know, but just the same . . .". They thus also reveal your own underhanded perversion. You then experience as murderous those natives who never speak of your close relatives—sure, they were close in the past and elsewhere, unmentionable, buried in another language. Or else they allude to them in such absent-minded way, with such offhanded scorn that you end up wondering if those parents truly exist, and in what ghostly world of an underground hell. The pain you feel facing those empty eyes that have never seen *them*. Loss of self in the presence of those distant mouths that do not weigh the artifice of the speech that evokes *them*.

But, by the way, who is the murderer? The one who does not know my relatives, or myself, as I erect my new life like a fragile mausoleum where their shadowy figure is integrated, like a corpse, at the source of my wandering? The indifference of others with respect to my kin makes them at once mine again. The community of my own—translucent, slackened by thousands of kilometers and a near-permanent daytime forgetfulness—is thus created by the scornful absent-mindedness of others. In the face of that injustice of which I am both source and victim, a "we" emerges. Certainly not, I do not idealize them! I do not use the indifference of others in order to enhance their merit. I know only too well their insignificancy, and my own . . . And yet there is a fondness that binds to the grave what is beyond the grave, the survivor that I am to my forebears. I hear the sound of bells, a fragrance of warm milk fills my throat: they, the parents from abroad, are those who come to life again in my senses, under the blind stare of scornful paternalism.

And nevertheless, no, I have nothing to say to them, to my parents. Nothing. Nothing and everything, as always. If I tried —out of boldness, through luck, or in distress—to share with them some of the violence that causes me to be so totally on my

own, they would not know where I am, who I am, what it is, in others, that rubs me the wrong way. I am henceforth foreign to them. They are my children who do not follow me, sometimes admiring, sometimes fearful, but already bruised, reconciled to being alone in their turn, and doomed not to understand. I must come to terms with it and, with that unassuaged sense of hunger in the body, after having spoken to them, must accept the idea that our "we" is a stirring mirage to be maintained at the heart of disarray, although illusive and lacking real strength. Unless it be precisely the strength of illusion that, perhaps, all communities depend on, and of which the foreigner constantly experiences the necessary, aberrant unreality.

Do You Have Any Friends?

The foreigner's friends, aside from bleeding hearts who feel obliged to do good, could only be those who feel foreign to themselves. Other than that, there are of course paternalists, paranoid and perverse people, who each have the foreigner of their choice, to the extent that they would invent him if he did not exist.

Paternalists: how they understand us, how they commiserate, how they appreciate our talents, provided they can show that they have "more"—more pain, more knowledge, more power, including that of helping us to survive . . .

Paranoid persons: no one is more excluded than they are and, in order to demonstrate that fact, they choose as backdrop to their delirium a basic outcast, the ordinary foreigner, who will be the chosen confidant of the persecutions they themselves suffer even more than he does—until they "discover" in this foreigner in the proper sense of the term a usurper and one of the causes of their misfortune, for if the world does not understand them it is precisely because "foreigners now monopolize public opinion's concern" . . .

Perverse people: their jouissance is secret and shameful and, hidden in their shell, they would gladly put up a foreigner within

it, who presumably would be happy thus to have a home, even though it might be at the cost of sexual or moral slavery, which is proffered lecherously, innocently . . .

In that case, all that would be left for foreigners would be to join together? Foreigners of the world, unite? Things are not so simple. For one must take into consideration the domination/exclusion fantasy characteristic of everyone: just because one is a foreigner does not mean one is without one's own foreigner, and the faith that abated at the source is suddenly rekindled at the journey's end in order to make up from whole cloth an identity the more exclusive as it had once been lost. In France, Italians call the Spaniards foreigners, the Spaniards take it out on the Portuguese, the Portuguese on the Arabs or the Jews, the Arabs on the blacks, and so forth and vice versa . . . And even if there are links between one another (are they not on the same side as opposed to the natives?), these unfailingly snap when fanatical bonds fuse together again communities cemented by pure, hard fantasies. Here, on foreign soil, the religion of the abandoned forebears is set up in its essential purity and one imagines that one preserves it better than do the parents who have stayed "back home." As enclave of the other within the other, otherness becomes crystallized as pure ostracism: the foreigner excludes before being excluded, even more than he is being excluded. Fundamentalists are more fundamental when they have lost all material ties, inventing for themselves a "we" that is purely symbolic; lacking a soil it becomes rooted in ritual until it reaches its essence, which is sacrifice.

The "Meursault Case" or, "We are all like Meursault"

How strange is Camus' Meursault (*The Stranger*, 1942), so anesthetized, lacking emotions, all passion having been eradicated, and not a scratch to show for it. One could easily take him

for a borderline case, or a false self, in short for a quasi-psychotic, rather than for a prototype of the foreigner.

Meursault is indeed a "case," not at all a "typical Frenchman" among Arabs. Obviously, one might think that it is his mother's death that has torn him away from the community of people, as grief often does. And yet, Meursault seems to shoulder an endemic mourning. For how long indeed has he displayed this detachment affecting his bonds, presumably the closest, with his mother precisely, to whom he knows he has nothing to say? For a long time? Forever? His mourning is without melancholia, clear and sharp like the light in Oran, barren, hot, and inescapable. Passion at the highest point of a burn, perhaps, which, for the psyche, amounts to the low point of freezing: white, empty. As far as sex goes, yes: his embraces of Marie are intense and eager, the tang of their mouths in the sea arouses pleasure in the most distant, the most alert reader. A love? Or rather a feeling brought down to a sensation. A peculiar state, at any rate, in which sensation does not dare reflect upon itself. Fear or else lack of time, it is filtered through iridescent skin, overly keen glances, refined nostrils . . . And into words, brief ones, dense, accurate. They capture an experience that claims to enter into speech without passing through the psyche. Until the final bedazzlement: no maliciousness whatsoever, no anger against the Arabs, no trace of sticky fondness for their opponent, Raymond—the stranger has no soul—nothing more than a loss of consciousness, the effect of the heat and of depersonalization under the sweat, and the gun goes off.

One realizes then that Meursault has always lived as though he were in a state of lost consciousness, of transconsciousness as it were, and the dazzled vertigo, which, at the end, changes him into a murderer, was always there, more deceitful and more indistinct, but permanent. He therefore is not surprised by his blackout, it does not shock him—nothing does. He cannot explain what others experience as a shock. Shocks are only for the conscience. His is indifferent. Why? We shall never know.

Probably a disappointment, Camus implies: the young man early lost his faith in humanity, in everything. There is also his father whose only passion, experienced through vomiting, was to attend an execution that outraged him. Therefore, would murderous humanity deserve only indifference? The commonplace would be too clear, too heavy for the colorless light constituted by Meursault's soul. He has no principles, he has no innerness, he slides along and records sensations. Meursault is Bettelheim's "empty fortress" who has turned into . . . a writer. Who, actually, tells this story of a stranger? Camus? Meursault? Unless the two merge into one . . .

The father-confessor alone, who believes that everyone believes, is able to have the narrator fly off the handle. The man without values, the "stranger," would in short hold as his only value, a negative one, his rage against religion. *Ligare*, to bind. A rage against relationships and the servants of relationships. In that sense, he is a typical stranger [foreigner]: without bond and blasphemer of the paroxystic bond constituted by the sacred.

The strangeness of the European begins with his inner exile. Meursault is just as, if not more, distant from his conationals as he is from the Arabs. At whom does he shoot during the imporous hallucination that overcomes him? At shadows, whether French or Maghrebian, it matters little—they displace a condensed and mute anguish in front of him, and it grips him inside. The sexual passion of his friend Raymond, changed into a homosexual quarrel between hostile brothers, jealous of the same woman, serves as the trigger that will lead to the murderous act; this is what Meursault experiences as indifference toward others. The other, stifled within myself, causes me to be a stranger to others and indifferent to everything: Meursault's neutralism is the opposite of the uncanny *[inquiétante étrangeté]*, its negative. While the feeling of the uncanny that I experience when facing the other kills me by inches, on the other hand the anesthetized indifference of the stranger explodes in the murder of an other. Indeed, before being staged on the beach, the murder was there

already, silent and invisible, filling with an empty presence the stranger's senses and thoughts, sharpening them, endowing them with a shrill precision, at once cold in their bent and withered tenderness. Senses and thoughts that are like objects, or even weapons. He uses them, heedless and effective, without allowing images, hesitations, remorse, or worry to interfere. Object-words on the level with objects, harrowing only because they are too *clean:*

> *Today mother died, or perhaps it was yesterday. I don't know. I got a telegram from the home: "Mother passed away. Funeral tomorrow. Sincerely." It doesn't mean anything. Perhaps it was yesterday. [. . .] But after a little while I felt my mouth burning with the salt's bitterness. Marie then caught up with me and pressed her body against mine in the water. She put her mouth against mine. Her tongue cooled my lips and we rolled about in the waves for a moment. [. . .] She then wanted to know if I loved her. I answered as I had already done once that it didn't mean anything but I probably didn't love her. "Why marry me in that case?" she said. I explained that it didn't matter and, if she so wished, we could get married [. . .] But the heat was such that it was also painful to remain without moving under the blinding light that rained down from the sky. To stay here or to leave, it was the same thing. After a moment I went back toward the beach and I started to walk. [. . .] The Arab pulled out his knife, which he displayed for me in the sun. The light splashed against the steel and it was like a long flashing blade that struck me in the forehead. [. . .] That burning sword was consuming my eyelids and scouring my aching eyes. That is when everything reeled. The sea heaved a thick, fiery blast. [. . .] The trigger gave way.*

Metallic in their accuracy, those words are not catching, they do not disturb. They dissociate, they dissolve the possible community of readers. They give us back—with respect to objects and states—that "separate" lucidity the community's function is to erase. Meursault's words bear witness to an interior distance: "I am never *at one* with men, nor with things," is what he seems to say. "No one is akin to me, each word is less the sign of a thing than that of my distrust for them. And if I speak, I do not

speak to someone, I speak to *myself* about things, or even about people as things, being at the same time inside and outside, but for the most part outside. I do not really have an inside. I am the splitting, the tension put into words that defers all action: I do nothing, and if at times I happen to do something, it is as if I had done nothing, for it is outside myself, myself is outside myself. Speaking or doing, it makes no difference, until death inclusively."

Moreover, if the stranger's words describe actions or are themselves actions, it is because they are barely symbols: as they are insignificant, they can be done or spoken only for the purpose of precisely doing or saying nothing . . . They are neutral:

> Salamo's dog was as good as his wife. The small robot woman was as guilty as the Parisian woman Masson had married or Marie who wanted me to marry her. What did it matter if Raymond was my pal as much as Céleste who was his better? What did it matter if Marie offered her lips to a new Meursault?

Murder appears as the ultimate carrying out of that tension without decision, neither choice nor value, that words kept brushing against without managing to eject it. Putting to death instead of putting a mere nothing into words, an other walled in within myself like a mere nothing. Murder, like words, will then be indifferent and, more than words, insignificant.

As in psychotherapy, his anger at the father-confessor alone reveals to Meursault what he finally accepts as his psychic identity: "For the first time I opened up my being to the world's tender indifference. Experiencing it to be so much like myself, in short so brotherly, I felt that I had been happy, and that I still was." The priest has become a psychotherapist in spite of himself on account of the liberating anger he causes in the stranger. Other than that, Meursault remains outside conversation, outside communication, outside action, outside passion. Condemned, he hardly feels the sentence. Does he die? The reader assumes he does, but does not really believe it, so much the Stranger's indifference seems to place him out of death's reach. Because he

has rediscovered hatred, however, Meursault begins to desire: he offers himself in imagination as object of the hateful howls of the spectators at his execution, and the sight of the others' hatred makes him happy, at last. Not without a grating irony: "so that I might feel less alone."

The oddness of this Stranger's condition, which attracted the interest of psychiatrists and esthetes more than that of politicians and lawyers, is nevertheless not foreign to ordinary foreigners. Meursault carries to an extreme the separateness of the uprooted person: his painless grief, his walled in violence against others, his agnosticism, sometimes soothed, sometimes bent on revenge. That strange Stranger further indicates that such strangers, because of the bruised and irreconcilable peculiarity that dwells in them, could not possibly start a new world. They do not constitute a "universe." Brownian motion of microscopic specks, acceleration chambers for atomic particles—one can vary the metaphors: the images must in all instances indicate a split-up group, a fragmentation bomb, the calm, icy distrust of the protagonists for one another creating the only link within this conglomerate of condemned people.

Dark Origins

"And what about your origins? Tell us about them, it must be fascinating!" Blundering fools never fail to ask the question. Their surface kindness hides the sticky clumsiness that so exasperates the foreigner. The foreigner, precisely—like a philosopher at work—does not give the same weight to "origins" as common sense does. He has fled from that origin—family, blood, soil—and, even though it keeps pestering, enriching, hindering, exciting him, or giving him pain, and often all of it at once, the foreigner is its courageous and melancholy betrayer. His origin certainly haunts him, for better and for worse, but it is indeed *elsewhere* that he has set his hopes, that his struggles take place, that his life holds together today. *Elsewhere* versus the origin, and even *nowhere* versus the roots: the motto for daredevils

breeds sterile repressions as well as bold undertakings. How does one distinguish censorship from innovative performance? As long as his eyes remain riveted to the origin, the absconder is an orphan consumed by his love for a lost mother. Does he succeed in transferring the universal need for a shoring-up or support on an elsewhere that, henceforth, would no longer be experienced as hostile or domesticated but as the simple axis of a mobility, like the violin clef or the bass clef in a musical score? He is a foreigner: he is from nowhere, from everywhere, citizen of the world, cosmopolitan. Do not send him back to his origins. If you are dying to ask the question, go put it to your own mother . . .

Explosion: Sex or Disease

Eventually, the shattering of repression is what leads one to cross a border and find oneself in a foreign country. Tearing oneself away from family, language, and country in order to settle down elsewhere is a daring action accompanied by sexual frenzy: no more prohibition, everything is possible. It matters little whether the crossing of the border is followed by debauchery or, on the contrary, by fearful withdrawal. Exile always involves a shattering of the former body. Today, sexual permissiveness favors erotic experiences and, even with the fear of AIDS, foreigners continue to be those for whom sexual taboos are most easily disregarded, along with linguistic and familial shackles. The eighteenth-century cosmopolitan was a libertine—and today still the foreigner, although without the ostentation, affluence, or luxury of the Enlightenment, remains that insolent person who, secretly or openly, first challenges the morality of his own country and then causes scandalous excesses in the host country. Witness the erotic outburst of Spanish or Moslem women once they have settled in France: the "French model" might have something to do with it, but how easy it is for the Christian facade and even the tyranny of Islam to be swept away by these new perverts who are willing to stop at nothing, admittedly in

order to succeed, but above all in order to joy in their bodies, unto death!

When such an economy of expenditure to the limit cannot be set up (intensive repression, parental prohibitions strongly internalized, and so forth) or else fails, the botched pleasure turns into disease. Nowhere does one find better somatization than among foreigners, so much can linguistic and passional expression find itself inhibited. The disease is all the more serious as sexual liberation was easy but has been suddenly interrupted (abandonment by the partner, separation, unfaithfulness, and so forth). The unbridled drive no longer encounters the check of prohibitions or earlier sublimations but fiercely attacks the body's cells. Eros crosses the threshold of Thanatos. I have known a foreign student, who was a virgin and a strait-laced person when she arrived in Paris, and then threw herself headlong into the "group sex" of the late sixties, impressing her lover with her daring. Now a few months later, after they had broken off, I met up with her again; she was in a welfare institution, suffering from lung disease. Repression hellishly well knows how to fool us! One thinks to have out-smarted it while it is moving around perfidiously, on a lower level, on the borders between soma and psyche, where the sluice gates of jouissance become snagged and unleashed eroticism is obliged to resort to new limits, those of organs, which then falter. The foreigner who imagines himself to be free of borders, by the same token challenges any sexual limit. Often, but not entirely. For a narcissistic wound—insult, betrayal—can disturb his economy of boundless expenditure, which he had thought for a moment to be unshakeable, and invert it into a destruction of psychic and corporeal identity.

But, to begin with, what an incongruous liberation of language! Lacking the reins of the maternal tongue, the foreigner who learns a new language is capable of the most unforeseen audacities when using it—intellectual daring and obscenities as well. Such and such a person who hardly dared to speak in public

and made awkward remarks in his native language, discovers himself to be a dauntless speaker in the other one. Initiation into new abstract fields takes place with unprecedented ease; erotic words, on which familial prohibition weighed heavily, are no longer feared. Nevertheless, the foreign language remains an artificial one—like algebra or musical notations—and it requires the mastery of a genius or an artist to create within it something other than artificial redundancies. For often the loquacious and "liberated" foreigner (in spite of his accent and grammatical lapses that he does not hear) stocks a ghostly world with this second and secondary discourse. As in hallucination, his verbal constructs—learned or shocking—are centered in a void, dissociated from both body and passions, left hostage to the maternal tongue. In that sense, the foreigner does not know what he is saying. His unconscious does not dwell in his thought, consequently he is satisfied brilliantly to reproduce *everything* there is to learn, seldom *innovating*. His language does not bother him, because he keeps silent on his drives: the foreigner can utter all sorts of indecencies without being shaken by any repugnance or even excitement, since his unconscious shelters itself on the other side of the border. Analytic therapy or, more exceptionally, an intense solitary exploration through memory and body, might, however, bring forth the miracle of meditation that welds the original and the acquired into one of those mobile and innovative syntheses that great immigrant scholars or artists are capable of. For since he belongs to nothing the foreigner can feel as appertaining to everything, to the entire tradition, and that weightlessness in the infinity of cultures and legacies gives him the extravagant ease to innovate. De Kooning does not say anything else: "After all, I am a foreigner, I am different because I am interested in art in its totality. I have a greater feeling of belonging to a tradition" (1936).

An Ironic Wandering or the Polymorphous Memory of Sebastian Knight

If wandering feeds even the quest for remembrance, then remembrance is exiled from itself and the polymorphous memory that is freed of it, far from being simply painful, takes on a diaphanous irony. The most pleasant, the most refined category of foreigners enjoys the privilege of experiencing its strangeness as a . . . *Funny Mountain*—a title Nabokov gives to one of the books of his character, the novelist Sebastian Knight.

The Real Life of Sebastian Knight (written in 1938) is probably nothing else than its very scription. Consequently, no one could turn it into a "biography"—not even his half brother—without mutilating or betraying it by projecting oneself into the place of the writer, as is expected from the fierce fondness of all interpreters and readers. In his detective and metaphysical, tragical and comic novel on the elusiveness of the writer, Vladimir Nabokov goes further, and in a more savory fashion, than the "new novelists," by revealing the essential polymorphism of writing itself. If the Russian half brother of the great English writer Sebastian Knight is not able (or willing?) to reconstitute his biography, it is because the "detective" and the "hero" are (perhaps?) only two facets of the same process: "Thus—I am Sebastian Knight. I feel as if I were impersonating him on a lighted stage," is what the half brother, a failed biographer, concludes at the end of the book. For the polyphonic mastery of writing consists in ceaselessly doing and undoing a jigsaw puzzle piece by piece—not the puzzle of a "world" considered by this or that metaphysical artist to be inaccessible, as a result of one knows not what misdeed, but that of an *essential enigma*. "And as the meaning of all things shone through their shapes, many ideas and events which had seemed of the utmost importance dwindled not to insignificance, for nothing could be insignificant now, but to the same size which other ideas and events, once denied any importance, now attained." There is no "final solution" any more than a "final

word": "The asphodel on the other shore remains as obscure as ever," because the scription of the wandering Knight places forms side by side and balances them, and such virtuosity worthy of Cervantes is henceforth carried out with ironic detachment (Knight is the author of *The Prismatic Bezel*—an iridescent mirror?—and, to repeat, *The Funny Mountain*, before being that of *The Doubtful Asphodel*). Like a casual absolute, like an absolute offhandedness.

It is not my intention here to investigate Nabokov's esthetics, his debt toward Russian literature, which is polyphonic to begin with because it is conscious of coming "afterwards," or his modernity, which embodies in an already mediatizing imagination Flaubert's or Joyce's infinite formal concern. I merely wish to emphasize one of the strands of that implacable relativism: the cosmopolitanism, the shuttling back and forth of two idioms (Russian and English), set, in the case of Knight, at the heart of something indiscernible that unbalances a man and replaces him with a language mispronounced into style. One recalls the words the novel ascribes to an old critic on the occasion of Sebastian Knight's premature death: "Poor Knight! He really had two periods, the first—a dull man writing broken English, the second—a broken man writing dull English." Needless to say, the small amount of biography reconstituted by his brother does not at all confirm that sally, in which, nevertheless, many foreigners might recognize themselves.

A foreigner: there is no doubt that Sebastian is one, on account of that fragmented memory—is it his own or his brother's?—which does not succeed in reconstructing a continuous, compact past, for exile has shattered all sense of belonging. "Sebastian's image [. . .] comes to me in a few bright patches, as if he were not a constant member of our family, but some erratic visitor passing across a lighted room and then for a long interval fading into the night." He is nocturnal, this Knight who has eluded the family of observers and leaves others and himself with only tattered memories. A disseminated "oneself."

A foreigner who is nevertheless distanced from his strangeness, he carries it as with pincers and, without ignoring it, mellows it with a soft irony that shares in the coldness of the verb "to be ironical" only if one includes in it a sense of propriety: "No sentimental wanderer will ever be allowed to land on the rock of my unfriendly prose," the novelist writes, as quoted by his brother.

He is a foreigner who is anguished for being confined to his original abode. To his old Cambridge tutor who insists on speaking Russian with him Sebastian asserts that he was born in Sofia, and when the old man intrepidly starts speaking Bulgarian Knight invents a new idiom on the spur of the moment, claiming that this was indeed his "maternal" and "Bulgarian" tongue . . .

He is a foreigner who for a long time had difficulties with English and persisted in keeping his accent ("His 'r's, when beginning a word, rolled and rasped, he made queer mistakes, saying, for instance, 'I have seized a cold' or 'that fellow is sympathetic'—merely meaning that he was a nice chap. He misplaced the accent in such words as 'interesting' or 'laboratory' "), and he is above all a solitary being: "He was aware of his inability to fit into the picture—into any kind of picture. When at last he thoroughly understood this and grimly started to cultivate self-consciousness as if it had been some rare talent or passion, only then did Sebastian derive satisfaction from its rich and monstrous growth, ceasing to worry about his awkward uncongeniality . . ."

From that moment the writer reached a solitude that was accountable only to his borderless culture. Thus is the foreigners' temper achieved, which Knight imposes by disseminating Joyce's exiled smile through a more ordinary and less arid imagination, without the Irishman's austere consecration. Neither rebellious nor provocative, neither nostalgic nor gloomy, neither painful nor anaesthetized, the wandering Knight managed to display that "bright boyish mood" which, even later, "remained as a rainbow across the stormy gloom of his darkest tales." The "dreary tussle

with a foreign idiom," which the critic perhaps rightly imputes to him, is what the biographer brother experiences and confesses. In a final burst of masochism or nostalgia, Sebastian's alter ego, that clear side of his night, even plans to translate into Russian the writer's final masterpiece. The brother's psychology tends toward romanticizing, and he is just a little bit Freudian. Does he not dream, in premonitory fashion, the night before the writer's death, of waiting for Sebastian in a large dim room, "and the whole atmosphere of his arrival seemed so uncanny"!?

What about Sebastian? He does not stop wandering, and the heart disease that gives a Gogolian touch to the latter part of his life does not shelter him from boyish errors or roamings; they are like rainbows, which his brother, just as Gogolian in his way, reflects in the errors and blunders of his own investigation.

The height of that boyishness with its nevertheless gothic hues is concentrated in what has to do with women. After living with the soothing Clara, with whom the writer thought for a while he had found a haven, Knight suffers from a real regression as he falls for a Russian *femme fatale*. Who is she? There are divergent and muddled trails. There is a fickle woman, who disappears on the Mediterranean coast; a Frenchified Russian who conceals her love affair or else shields a friend . . . The narrator is all confused and so is the reader. Did the resurgence of the dead mother, with which S. K. is overcome at the end of his life, actually take place? Had he been in love? Or was it imagination? The letters written in Russian that he asked to have burned after his death . . . was this a machination? Why does he himself write his last letter to his brother in Russian? The tragedy of nostalgia suddenly comes close to being a most comical subterfuge. But who is laughing? Certainly not the foreigner. The writer perhaps.

The lost woman—lost land, lost language—cannot be found. Far from being solely tragical, this cruel condition lends itself, toward the end of the book, to insolence directed at the writer himself. After having forgotten the address of his dying brother, as he hurries, anxiously, to his bedside, the biographer half-

brother is led to the wrong corpse and, instead of watching over S.K.'s body, he witnesses another's agony. Sebastian thus left no defined memory and, worse yet, his very body evades familial inquiries. Nevertheless, let us remember: when the young Sebastian was looking for the tomb of his own mother, an English woman who died in France, he believed he was meditating in her memory in the garden of her last residence, known as "Les Violettes," in Roquebrune, near Monte-Carlo. A few months later, in London, he learned that his mother died in a town also called Roquebrune, located some distance to the west. And the writer cast that irony of origin and death in his novel *Lost Property* as the premonitory inscription of his own undiscoverable death . . . Like a boomerang, deceit, which had truly speaking uprooted the maternal bond, pulling it up from all soil in order to shelter it only in scription's fleeting memory, affects in the end the image and the body of the writer himself. One will not honor S.K.'s memory, any more than he himself honored his mother's. No, no one blasphemes, neither the son nor the reader. It is simply that, when the mother is disseminated into remembrances and words, when the women that were loved are forgotten-deserted-invented, the very memory that guarantees our identity is shown to be an ongoing metamorphosis, a polymorphy. Let me suggest here, to those who are fond of syntheses, a possible link between Sebastian Knight and Lolita—might it not be the same polymorphism, mnemic on the one hand, sexual on the other?

In contrast to what happened to Camus' Stranger, the casual cosmopolitan Sebastian Knight lost his mother early, did not attend her funeral, links her tomb to no specific place. But, Russian through his father, he assumed her name, that of the English woman. He gave himself a new tongue in choosing English, which, although it was not his maternal language for he did not speak it as a child, was nevertheless that of his nearly unknown mother, the dead language of a dead mother to be brought back to life. He then attempted the return trip toward

the language of his Russian childhood, that of the second mother. And he became lost in the kaleidoscope of his multiple identities and untenable memories, leaving of his accumulated exiles merely a track of words.

One who is happy being a cosmopolitan shelters a shattered origin in the night of his wandering. It irradiates his memories that are made up of ambivalences and divided values. That whirlwind translates into shrill laughter. It dries up at once the tears of exile and, exile following exile, without any stability, transmutes into games what for some is a misfortune and for others an untouchable void. Such a strangeness is undoubtedly an art of living for the happy few or for artists. And for others? I am thinking of the moment when we succeed in viewing ourselves as unessential, simple passers by, retaining of the past only the game . . . A strange way of being happy, or feeling imponderable, ethereal, so light in weight that it would take so little to make us fly away . . .

Enchantment for some other time? Or never?

Why France?

Nowhere is one *more* a foreigner than in France. Having neither the tolerance of Anglo-American Protestants, nor the absorbant ease of Latin Americans, nor the rejecting as well as assimilating curiosity of the Germans or Slavs, the French set a compact social texture and an unbeatable national pride against foreigners. Whatever the efforts—both considerable and effective—made by the state and by various organizations in order to welcome foreigners, the latter, in France more than elsewhere, run up against a barrier. What is involved is the very fabric of civilization, faithful to values that have been elaborated while sheltered from great invasions and intermixing of populations and reinforced by monarchistic absolutism, Gallican autonomy, and republican centralism. Even when they are legally and administratively accepted, they are not for all that received into

families. Their awkward use of the French language discredits them utterly—consciously or not—in the eyes of the natives, who identify more than in other countries with their beloved, polished speech. His eating or dressing habits are at once seen as an unforgiveable breach of universal, that is French, good taste.

Such a state of affairs can give rise to two opposite attitudes on the part of the foreigner. Either he attempts at all costs to merge into that homogeneous texture that knows no other, to identify with it, to vanish into it, to become assimilated; the process is flattering, for the exile valorizes as much as—if not more than—the French themselves the blessings of the civilization where he seeks shelter. Or else he withdraws into his isolation, humiliated and offended, conscious of the handicap of never being able to become a Frenchman.

And yet, one is nowhere *better* as a foreigner than in France. Since you remain uncurably different and unacceptable, you are an object of fascination: one notices you, one talks about you, one hates you or admires you, or both at the same time. But you are not an ordinary, negligible presence, you are not a Mr. or Mrs. Nobody. You are a problem, a desire—positive or negative, never neutral. As a matter of fact, in all the countries of the world, foreigners give rise to economic or political difficulties that are settled administratively as often uncontrollable explosions follow one upon the other. But "SOS-Racisme" exists only in France, as well as an entire national thought configuration, more or less dispassionate, on the "Code of Nationality."

This does not mean that France is more racist, but in France the discussion being immediately ideological and inspired by passion, it reaches the principles of civilization and the borders of the individual psyche. "What is my relation to the other?" "What are the limits and the rights of a group?" "Why should not every man have the rights of a citizen?" In France, pragmatic matters immediately become ethical. The "completely political" aspires to become the "completely human" within that spirit of lay universalism that was necessarily to confront the Nation, which

is universal because it is proud of having invented the "rights of man," with the *very legitimacy of the concept of "foreigner"*. The issue of foreigners comes up for a people when, having gone through the spirit of religion, it again encounters an ethical concern . . . in order not to die of cynicism or of stock market deals. The image of the foreigner comes in the place and stead of the death of God and, with those who are believers, the foreigner is there to bring him back to life.

Finally, when your otherness becomes a cultural exception—if, for instance, you are recognized as a great scientist or a great artist—the entire nation will appropriate your performance, will assimilate it along with its own better accomplishments, and give you recognition better than elsewhere. This will not happen without a twinkling of the eye directed at your oddity, so un-French, but it will all be carried off with great panache and splendor. Such is the case with Ionesco, Cioran, Beckett . . . And even the Spaniard Picasso, who, with Rodin, is the only artist privileged to have a monographic museum in Paris, while the very French Matisse is not. To each his foreigners . . .

2 The Greeks Among Barbarians, Suppliants, and Metics

How can one possibly be a foreigner?

We seldom think of asking such a question, we are so convinced of being naturally citizens, necessary products of the nation-state. Or else, when we allow the topic to cross our minds, we immediately find a niche among those entitled to a nationality and cast out into an unreasonable alienage those who belong to an elsewhere they have been unable to preserve, one that no longer belongs to them, who have expropriated themselves of their identity as citizens. Today the notion of *foreigner* is indeed endowed with a legal meaning: it refers to a person who is not a citizen of the country in which he resides [in the United States, an alien]. Indeed, such a framework is soothing, it allows one to settle by means of laws the prickly passions aroused by the intrusion of the *other* in the homogeneity of a family or a group. It also ignores, without in any way resolving them, the discontents of that singular condition that amounts to claiming a difference at the heart of a set that, by definition, comes into being by excluding the dissimilar. Whether a constraint or a choice, a psychological evolution or a political fate, this position as a *different being* might appear to be the goal of human autonomy (are we not speaking beings only if we distinguish ourselves from others in order to impart to them our personal meaning on the

basis of such a perceived and assumed difference?), and thus as a major illustration of the most intrinsic, most essential part of civilization. Moreover, by explicitly, obviously, ostensibly occupying the place of the difference, the foreigner challenges both the identity of the group and his own—a challenge that few among us are apt to take up. A drastic challenge: "I am not like you." An intrusion: "Behave with me as you would among yourselves." A call for love: "Recognize me." In all that there is a mixture of humility and arrogance, suffering and domination, a feeling of having been wounded and being all-powerful. In short, a rage, an extreme state that Greek myths have related and Aeschylus transmitted, as he reaped the memories of an archaic period, in *The Suppliants*,[1] before philosophers and jurists rationalized them by proposing statutes for foreigners. Let us then for a moment forget the laws and examine the foreigners of ancient tragedy.

The First Foreigners: Foreign Women (From Io to the Danaïdes)

It is noteworthy that the first foreigners to emerge at the dawn of our civilization are foreign women—the Danaïdes. Those Egyptian natives, who nevertheless claimed a noble although dramatic Greek descent, arrived in Argos. Aeschylus found his inspiration in a primitive legend developed as an epic, *The Danaïd*, which probably dates back to the first half of the sixth century and brings together and organizes the scared narratives *(hiēroi logoi)* involving the Argos shrine. According to legend, the Danaïdes can be traced back to a prestigious ancestor—Iō, the priestess of Hēra in Argos. Beloved by Zeus, she was metamorphosed by his jealous wife, Hēra, into a heifer. This did not discourage Zeus who, changed into a bull, continued to love her. Hēra nevertheless went on with her vengeance by sending a gadfly that drove Iō into a state of frenzy. Iō wandered from Europe to Asia, finally reaching Egypt. That heifer maddened by

a gadfly is quite a disturbing image: like an incestuous daughter punished by her mother's wrath, she saw no solution but to flee continuously, banished from her native home, condemned to wander as if, as the mother's rival, no land could be her own. Her illegitimate passion for Zeus is thus madness. A madness of which the gadfly properly represents animal and (why not?) sexual stimulation. A madness that leads a woman not on a journey back to the self, as with Ulysses (who, in spite of meanderings, came back to his homeland), but toward a land of exile, accursed from the start. It was, however, only outside maternal soil, in Egypt then, that Zeus, who was indeed at the erotic source of her journey, allowed himself to "touch" Iō on the forehead in order to soothe her, give her back a feminine appearance, and permit her to give birth to a son, Epaphus (the "touch" of Zeus).

Would Iō's roaming frenzy be the feminine version of Oedipus' drama? The incestuous man was able to solve the Sphinx's riddles even if he was unaware of his amorous passion for his mother and his murderous rage against his father. Oedipus wanted to know, even though it would cost him plenty, including his eyes. On the other hand the daughter in love with her father was from the very beginning in breach of maternal authority, which was held by Hēra the Argive, goddess of matrimonial rights. Such a conflict triggered her psychosis—the sting of the gadfly, the agent of maternal vengeance, kept driving her wild. And even if Zeus ended up freeing her of her frenzied metamorphosis—but on foreign soil—the mark of violence and anguish would be felt by her descendants.

The son, Epaphus, born of the touched heifer, was to be the ancestor of the Egyptian kings. But Hēra's curse was seemingly visited upon the subsequent generations. The great-grandsons of Epaphus, Danaüs and Aegyptus—who had, respectively, fifty daughters and fifty sons—took up arms against each other, for the sons of Aegyptus wanted to marry forcibly the daughters of Danaüs in order to gain royal rights over Libya. In an attempt to escape the brutality of Aegyptus' fifty sons the Danaïdes fled to

Argos, thus beginning their exile. In what we would today call an unconscious but also inverted memory of their ancestor Iō, the Danaïdes fled their native land; at the same time, however, they were fleeing sexual intercourse. Warlike, cruel virgins, they retained only a cold passion from Iō, which drew them in a different but symmetrical fashion, outside wedlock and outside the law. Unless one deciphers in their very virginity a remainder of the incestuous fate of Iō's stock. Is it not true that virgins,[2] in their father's pantheon, are the daughters that remain faithful and refuse to give him descendants, precisely to preserve the symbolic power of the sole father, to the exclusion of any other man?

Consequently the Danaïdes were foreigners for two reasons: they came from Egypt and were refractory to marriage. Remaining outside the community of the citizens of Argos, they also refused the basic community constituted by the family. That exclusionary process reached its climax when, according to one version of the legend, the Danaïdes murdered the sons of Aegyptus on their own initiative, or, according to another version, in obedience to their father's will. Only two of the fifty sisters did not share in the crime. Let us pause to examine the story of those two exceptional sisters; they open the question of the Danaïdes' ambivalence, murderous to be sure, but also seekers of water, primordial worship officiants (according to Hesiodus and Pausanias), founders of alliances.

An amazon like her sisters, Amymone, in hot pursuit of a doe, missed her target and aroused a half-horse demon, a satyr about to rape her. She was saved by Poseidon, god of deep waters, who spoke to her in soothing rather than desiring terms and proposed marriage: "Your fate is to be wed, and mine to be your husband." Amymone then became hydrophoran and presided over water liturgy as well as wedding rites, under Hēra's supervision. A rebellious Danaïde was thus changed into an accomplice of Hēra's, hence of the social contract based on marriage.

Likewise Hypermnestra refused to strangle her husband, Lynceus, and the wedding—between blood relations who ceased being enemies—gave rise to the royal dynasty from which Heracles, the most celebrated Dorian hero, was issued. Before the court that was to decide whether or not she was right in renouncing vengeance, Hypermnestra was helped by Aphrodite and Hermes who whispered seductive words to her. Found not guilty, she became the first priestess of Hēra.

We now turn to the forty-eight Danaïdes who strangled their husbands during their wedding night. This was the height of criminal outrageousness. Foreignness is carried to forbidden revolt, a hubris giving rise to abjection. Such outrageousness was punished (according to one variant of the legend) by having the Danaïdes and their father put to death, or in more temperate fashion (as Pindar suggests) by having these refractory women renounce their claim to exception—they must marry in their proper order the winners of a race, but without having those weddings give rise to a prestigious lineage. Those who claimed to be beyond the law must submit to the banality of common, uniform regulations. The Greek mind condemned foreignness only when the latter tended to defy the common mean. Amazons and murderous women were disposed of, while foreignness—dissociated from moral outrageousness after having been involved with it—was amenable to the rites and laws of the polis.

The fact remains nonetheless that the Danaïdes pose a problem that is more complex and archaic than that involving the rights of the foreigner. Their story points to an age-old time when an endogamous society became exogamous. Not marrying a blood relation was the first condition, which the Danaïdes, it is true, fulfill brutally by killing their cousins, in order to become wedded to someone foreign to the clan. Such violence against one's kin (brothers and cousins), laden with incestuous passions, must no doubt be undergone if the new alliance is to be founded—the marriage between persons "equal by rights," just as Hēra wished to be Zeus' equal *(isotēlēs)* as well as his concubine.[3] She remained, however, below the surface of the matrimonial institu-

tion, representing its secret aspect. Such is the dark passion between husband and wife who are, after all, strangers to each other, a passion displayed during initiatory rites related to Demētēr's cult and that of her sacred Thesmophoria, supposedly brought to Greece by the Danaïdes. There, women, separated from the polis at its very core, constituted a fearsome gynecocracy that was entitled to spill blood in addition to pouring water into the bottomless cistern they were condemned to fill. By assuming roles as contradictory as that, the Danaïdes appear precisely as the link between "the legal limits of Hēra's domain" and "Demeter's kingdom."[4] As if the legend of the Danaïdes, through the very ambivalence it ascribes to those foreigners, recognized the necessity for the violence of passion (or, on the social plane, the validity of extirpation, or wrenching away, of foreignness itself) as foundation for the basal family alliance.

Strangeness (or foreignness)—the political facet of violence—would underlie elementary civilization, be its necessary lining, perhaps even its font, which no household cistern—not even, to start with, that of the Danaïdes—could permanently harness. Even more so, the foreign aspect of the Danaïdes also raises the problem of antagonism between the sexes themselves in their extramarital alliance, in the amatory and sexual "relation." In short, what is the "relation" between the "population" or "race" of *men* and the "population" or "race" of *women?* The sexual difference, which has been in the course of time either erased or overemphasized in turn, is certainly not destined to be frozen into antagonism. The fact remains that in Greece the bride was thought of as a foreigner, a suppliant. Did that mean a Danaïde? The wedding ritual stipulated that the bride was to be treated neither as a prey nor as a slave but as a "suppliant, placed under protection of the hearth, and taken by the hand to her new abode."[5] A suppliant? What is that exactly?

Suppliants and Proxeni

Aeschylus' restraint, as he did not condemn the Danaïdes, for he clearly believed their outrageous actions to have been in large part a reaction to the brutality of their Egyptian cousins, indeed matches the historical chance that has left us with only that part of the tragedy dealing with the *political acceptance* of the Danaïdes by the Argives. With such a presentation, the foreigners' drama loses some of its passion and presents itself in such a way as to throw light on the ancient Greeks' political, legal, and religious notions concerning foreigners.

According to the text, foreigners were accepted if they were suppliants, if, as symbols of their land, they laid wreaths before the altar of the gods (*The Suppliants*, 506). Danaüs advises his daughters as follows: "Here it is best to act the suppliant, / This rock, this altar of assembled gods, / Stronger than ramparts, a shield impenetrable. / Now quickly prepare white suppliant wreaths, sign of Zeus sacred, held in the left hand; / Mournful, respectful, answer needfully / The strangers; tell distinctly of an exile / Unstained by murder. Let no boldness / Come from respectful eye and modest features. / Not talkative nor a laggard be in speech: / Either would offend them. Remember to yield: / You are an exile, a needy stranger, / And rashness never suits the weaker" (188–203).

The shelter of Zeus' temple, father of the sun, who is also the pure "Apollo, the god, who from heaven once fled" (214), along with ritual gestures and modest behavior will guarantee foreigners a proper welcome. Thus a religious space, before and perhaps in spite of political considerations, secured for the foreigner a place where he was untouchable. For the Argives strongly resented the Danaïdes' foreignness, to which their king's words bore witness: "Whence come these barbarians? / What shall we call you? So outlandishly / Arrayed in the barbaric luxury / Of robes and crowns, and not in Argive fashion / Nor in Greek? But at this I wonder how / Without a herald, without a guide, without patron, / You have yet dared to come" (234–242).