

Parallax

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I was born in Alexandria, Egypt. But I am not Egyptian. I was born into a Turkish family but I am not Turkish. I was sent to British schools in Egypt but I was not British. My family became Italian citizens and I learned to speak Italian but my mother tongue is French. For years as a child I was under the misguided notion that I was a French boy who, like everyone else I knew in Egypt, would soon be moving back to France. “Back” to France was already a paradox since virtually no one in my immediate family was French or had ever even been to France. But France—and Paris—was my soul home, my imaginary home, and will remain so all my life, even if, after three days in France, I cannot wait to get out. Not a single ounce of me is French.

I am African by birth, everyone in my family is from Asia Minor, and I live in America.

I came to Europe the first time more than forty years ago. The last time I lived in Europe was almost forty years ago. All in all, I’ve lived in Europe for three years only.

Yet, as absurd as it might seem, I consider myself profoundly, ineradicably European—the way I remain profoundly, ineradicably Jewish, though I have no faith in God, know not one Jewish ritual, and have gone to more churches in a year than I’ve gone to synagogues in a decade. Unlike my ancestors the Marranos who were Jews claiming to be Christians, I enjoy being a Jew among Christians so long as I can pass for a Christian among Jews.

I am an unreal Jew, the way I am an imaginary European. An Imaginary European many times over.

I spent the first fourteen years of my life in Egypt dreaming and fantasizing about living in Europe. I belonged in Europe; Egypt as far as I was concerned was simply a mistake that needed to be corrected. I had no love for Egypt and couldn't wait to leave; it had no love for me and did, in the end, ask me to leave. The beauty of Alexandria, of the Mediterranean, of being in a place that history had labored centuries to set in place meant nothing to me. Even the beach couldn't seduce me. If on a November day the totally deserted beaches of Alexandria seemed to belong to me and to no one else on this planet, and if the sea on those magnificently limpid mornings wasn't capable of raising a single ripple, then all I needed in order to seize the magic of the moment was one illusion: the illusion that this beach was not in Egypt but in Europe, and preferably in Greece. Indeed, whenever I saw a beautiful Greek or Roman statue in Egypt, I would automatically think of Greece, not of a Greek statue in Egypt. A Greek statue in Egypt was simply waiting to be taken back to its rightful place in Athens, even if the rightful place for a Hellenistic statue was in fact, not Athens, but Alexandria. A beautiful Mediterranean mansion on the Pacific Ocean is basically asking you to imagine it is—and by extension that you are—in Italy not in Beverly Hills. If a beach in Egypt reminded me of pictures I had seen of Capri, or if a narrow cobble lane made me think of tiny provincial towns in Provence, the impulse was not to enjoy either spot for what it was—a beautiful place—but as a *simulacrum* desperately yearning to be *repatriated*, *i.e.* and brought back to Europe. *Ah, to be in Capri instead, ah, to walk the narrow lanes of Saint-Remy, the beach walks of the Riviera....*

This *circuit*, this kind of distortion and dislocation allowed me to live in Egypt.

When I remember Alexandria it's *not only* Alexandria I remember. When I remember Alexandria I remember a place from which I liked to imagine being already elsewhere. To remember Alexandria without remembering myself in Alexandria longing for Paris is to remember wrongly.

Being in Egypt was an endless process of pretending I was already out of Egypt.

Not to see this fundamental distortion is to distort memory.

Not to see the need for it is to forget that I can no longer see anything unless I am able to manufacture or extract similar distortions. Art is nothing more than an exalted way of stylizing distortions that have become unbearable.

One of my most illuminating and intimate moments in Egypt came with a very old aunt. One evening, as I stepped into her bedroom, I caught her staring at the sea. She didn't turn around but simply made room for me at the window and together we stared at the dark, quiet sea. "This," she said pointing to the sea, "reminds me of La Seine."

She told me that she'd once lived very near the Seine. She missed the Seine. She missed Paris. Alexandria had never really been her home. But neither, for that matter, had Paris. Her view of things confirmed my own feelings. Ours was merely the copy of an original that awaited us in Europe. Anything Alexandrian was a simulated version of something pristine and authentic in Europe.

By a curious distortion, however, no sooner had I associated our Alexandrian beach to the Seine than I instantly learned to be a bit more forgiving of our beaches in Egypt and ultimately perhaps to allow myself to nurse some love for Alexandria because it refracted

something irreducibly European. Like my aunt, I needed this detour out to an imaginary Seine and back to a derealized Alexandria to begin to see what stood before my very eyes.

This detour is simply an ancillary version of the distortion I mentioned above. What you see before you summons an imaginary elsewhere. But it is through the medium of this imaginary elsewhere that you begin to see what's right before you. This kind of detour and distortion simply plays out an inability to connect with or to consummate experience.

Some of us approach experience, love, life itself, through similar detours. We need to *derealize* what's before us before we see what is *really* before us. Like Proust's Swann who falls in love with a woman who inspires scorn at first but whose looks are rehabilitated as soon as they remind him of a face in Botticelli, we need to reroute contempt before realizing that what we may have in our hearts is no contempt at all.

This and many variations of this is what I will call parallax. Not only are the things before us unstable, but our point of observation is no less unstable. Because observation itself, like memory, like thinking, like writing, like identity, and ultimately like desire itself are all unstable gestures, unstable moves. We snap a picture, hoping to gather one picture, when in fact, the real picture is an infinite imbrication of unstable images.

Once my family was expelled from Egypt and settled in Europe, we were of course surprised to see that the Europe we mistook for home was no home at all. The alleged *repatriation* took us to a land that turned out to be more foreign and unfamiliar than what had stood before our very noses for decades in Egypt. Suddenly, and nostalgia is itself a source of many distortions, we became homesick for Alexandria. We grew attached to anything in Europe that reminded us of Alexandria—i.e. we looked for certain spots, for

certain moments, inflections of sunlight, vague scents of seawater in Europe that would help evoke our long-lost Egypt. The detour, so to speak, had come full circle and was about to spiral onto a second remove

What in Africa had seemed a poor copy of something authentically European became like a sacred original; copies could be found everywhere in Europe, but the original was forever lost. By a curious distortion, going to Capri or to Saint-Rémy was not only an attempt to recapture Egypt and, through this detour once again, to grow to accept and at best to like what, for better or for worse, was going to be our new home; it was also an attempt to bring ourselves to cherish the fact that the long-yearned-for repatriation had indeed finally taken place. It was like visiting my aunt's home in Paris and standing at her window and saying to her, "Remember when we stood this way before the sea one evening and dreamed of being in Paris? Well, we're finally in Paris now."

Except that Paris had no value whatsoever unless you invoked—*parallactically*—its shadow partner, Alexandria.

What we missed was not just Egypt. More than Egypt, what we missed was dreaming Europe in Egypt—what we missed was the Egypt where we'd dreamed of Europe.

Let me add a further twist to an already complicated loop.

The situation I've been describing gets infinitely more tangled no sooner I left Europe and moved to America. It's not that Alexandria took a second seat in my mind—it did not; it remained and would always remain, in Lawrence Durrell's words, "the capital of memory." It was just that, as soon as I lost Europe, Europe once again began to exert its pull on my mind, and all the more forcefully now as my *once-imagined Europe* in Egypt

doubled into a *now-remembered-Europe* in America. In fact, longing and recollection, yearning and nostalgia have been confusing their signals so much over the years that I am by now perfectly willing to accept that memory and imagination are twins who live along an artificial border that allows them to lead double lives and smuggle coded messages back and forth.

Parallax is not just a disturbance in vision. It's a *derealizing* and paralyzing disturbance in the soul—cognitive, metaphysical, intellectual, and ultimately aesthetic. It is not just about displacement, or of feeling adrift *both* in time and space, it is a fundamental misalignment between who we are, might have been, could still be, can't accept we've become, and may never be. You assume you are not quite like others and that to understand others, to be with others, to love others and be loved by them, you need to think *other* thoughts than the ones that come naturally. To be with others you must be the opposite of who you are; to read others, you must read the opposite of what you see. This is the *irrealis* mood. You feel, you imagine, you think, and ultimately write counterfactually. Because writing both speaks this disturbance and because writing perpetuates it, consolidates it.

The recently deceased German writer W. G. Sebald frequently writes about people whose lives are shattered and who are trapped in a state of numbness, stagnation, and stunned sterility. Given a few displacements, which occurred either by mistake or through some whim of history, they end up living the wrong life. The past interferes and contaminates the present, while the present looks back and distorts the past.

Sebald's characters see displacements everywhere, not just all around them but within themselves as well. Sebald himself cannot think, cannot see, cannot remember, and, I would like to argue, cannot write without positing displacement as a foundational metaphor.

In order to write you either retrieve a displacement or you invent it. Gregor von Rezzori could not write without seeing, without invoking what he called *erstwhileness* around him.

It doesn't matter whether this displacement is recollected or imagined or anticipated. That you can't tell them apart may not just be a symptom of the disturbance; it is the cause of it as well.

You need displacement in order to be, because identity is in question, because your origin is in question, because integrity is in question.

A displaced person is not only in the wrong place, but he leads or feels he leads the wrong life. This doesn't mean, however, that because he leads the wrong life, or lives in the wrong place, or has acquired a new name, or speaks or writes in a new language that there is out there a real life, or a real home or a true language. Exile disappears the very notion of a home, of a name, or of a tongue.

What I am trying to examine right now is how does a displaced person feel? Well you don't have to take a guess. From what I've been saying it should be pretty obvious. But the question I am really asking is *how* does a displaced person think. Not *what* does he think, but how does he think? What kind of things does a displaced person look for, how does he organize facts, impressions, feelings in order to put two and two together to come up with a narrative that may explain his life to him? How does he organize words, how does he

write—how can he write when the very act of writing brings him no closer to the truth he never had, inasmuch as the language in which he writes may never even be or become his own.

I don't promise to answer this question. I can only provide parables.

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In thinking of parallax, there is a “move”—and I think the word “move” will do for right now—that has become a standing source of humor among my friends. With my friend A, when I go to have dinner at his house on Riverside Drive in Manhattan, it goes something like this. At some point in the evening as we watch the sun set and cast the most luminous shades of orange on the clear waters of the Hudson, a lit barge or Circle Line boat will eventually come into view, which is when A. will unavoidably say, to mock me, , “Ah, yes, a *bateau mouche*. We must be in Paris.”

He's hit home, and I know he knows it, just as he knows I know he knows it. It doesn't matter whether I'm imagining being in Paris or whether I'm remembering Paris—as far as this *move* is concerned, memory and imagination are interchangeable. You're here, the mind is elsewhere. Or let me put it somewhat darker terms: *You're not here. But everything else is.*

Or to put it in more alarming terms yet—and this ties directly to a vision of identity that a Holocaust survivor once shared with me—*Part of me*, he said, *never came with me. It never took the ship. It simply got left behind.*

I don't know what this means. But it made an impression on me, and the more I think of it, the more it rings uncannily true: *part of me didn't come with me. Part of me isn't*

with me, is never with me. The French philosopher Merleau-Ponty was fond of evoking the phenomenon of amputees who feel excruciating pain in a limb that no longer exists—called the Phantom limb syndrome. Memory can sometimes bring to the senses things that the senses should realistically no longer be able to feel. But suddenly, because of this mnemonic parallax, of this shadow partner distorting everything, we're reminded of how we are torn in two. Torn from our past, from a home, from ourselves.

This feeling of being cut off from oneself or of being in two places at the same is as though what was left behind were an amputated limb, something was cut away from us, and was not allowed to travel with us—an arm, or a grandparent, a baby brother. Except that the arm did not wither, just as the grandparent or baby brother did not die.

So I am here, across the Atlantic, and this arm is there, beyond Gibraltar. Can I go back and find my arm and put it back where it belongs?

Of course I cannot! But not because the arm wouldn't fit any longer. Or because I've learned to live without it or have acquired a new and even better one. What is scary is the thought that what I am today may not be a body *minus an arm*. It may be the other way around. I am just the arm doing the work of the entire body. The body stayed behind. The arm is all that got away. What took the ship was nothing more than an expendable part of me.

I am elsewhere. This is what we mean by the word alibi. It means elsewhere. Some people have an identity. *I have an alibi. A shadow self.*

No wonder I am thinking *bateau mouche* when I am with my friend A. No wonder that dinner at his house feels sometimes provisional, strained, that contact between us is

ultimately tangential, unfinished, unfulfilled. Most of me is not even with me now. How can I be with him, in the New World, when I'm not even with myself, when part of me is altogether elsewhere?

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With my other friend B, we can give this move an extra twist. As we're walking one Friday evening last spring through a crowded, cobbled main street in Williamsburg, Brooklyn which, as we instantly both sense, feels so much like a narrow festive early-summer crowded square in Aix, or in Portofino or in San Sebastián, my friend B will look at me and instantly say: "*I know*. For you to appreciate this street *at all*, for you to be on this street you need to think you're over there." He is right. Without this transposition, I cannot experience the present. I need this detour, these twists, these alibis, these counter-intuitive moves, I need this screen, this scrim, this deception to stand in the here and now.

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With my friend C, let's add yet a subtler torsion. "For this evening to really touch you, you need to be here thinking you're over there imagining yourself here longing to be over there." Let me explain.

C lives in Paris. A few years ago one September afternoon I felt a terrible longing for Paris—I would have called it homesickness, had Paris really been my home—which, as all my friends know, it's not. I decided to pick up the telephone and call my dear friend C in Paris. After she picked up the receiver, I asked her how was Paris. Her answer did not come as a surprise: "Gray. Paris is always gray these days. It never changes." That of

course is exactly how I remember Paris. “And how is New York?” she asked. She missed New York. I missed Paris.

I was, not where she was, but where she wanted to be; though where I thought I wanted to be was precisely where she was

When, a few months later, time came for me to go to Paris, I called her up again and said that much as I loved Paris I did not enjoy traveling. Besides, I never found Paris relaxing, I would much rather stay in New York and imagine having wonderful dinners in Paris. “Yes, of course,” she agreed, already annoyed. “Since you're going to Paris, you don't want to go to Paris. But if you were staying in New York, you'd want to be in Paris. But since you're not staying, but going, just do me a favor.” Exasperation bristled in her voice. “When you're in Paris, think of yourself in New York longing for Paris, and everything will be fine. “

Clearly, this move can be expanded, augmented *ad infinitum*.

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With my friend D, add a new torsion. We're sitting having dinner on her terrace in Brooklyn. It's a wonderful dinner—music, food, wine, guests, conversation. As it gets darker, I look over the horizon, and there lies a luminous, magnificent view of the Manhattan skyline just after sunset on a midsummer evening. And it occurs to me that here was something strange indeed, one of the oldest riddles nagging the mind of every New Yorker: would I rather live in Brooklyn and have the luxury of such a breathtaking view of Manhattan, or would I rather *be* in beckoning, awe-inspiring Manhattan looking over to Brooklyn but never seeing Manhattan?

And then I do what we all do when we're standing in high places. I strain my eyes and ask: Can I see my home from here? Which is another way of saying: Can I see myself from here? Can I see my other half? Can I call my old phone number and see who answers?

Can I look out from the Seine and see Alexandria? Can I look out from the Seine and see myself looking out from Brooklyn?

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With my friend E it takes a far more complicated turn. E hates nostalgia, he doesn't get it.

You've never loved either Paris or New York

You love them both.

Your hate one because you can't have the other.

You love one but wished you loved the other instead.

You love them both.

No, you hate them both.

You don't hate, you don't love, you don't even care, because you can't love, can't hate, wished you cared, wished you didn't, don't know, can't tell. Can there be identity or integrity in dispersal?

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Finally, there is the sixth person in this equation: me.

In my definition of the move I've been describing, it is not cities that beckon us, it's not cities or the time spent in those cities that we long for; rather it is the imagined, unlived

life we've projected on these cities that summons us and exerts such a strong pull on our inner life. The city itself is just a costume, a screen wall, or, as the painter Claude Monet said, an empty envelope. What counts and what never dies is the remembrance of the imagined life we'd once hoped to live.

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One more move, call it Me². When I wanted to buy my eldest son, who is American, his very first history book, I did something that seemed so natural, it almost baffled me: I bought him a book I'd once owned as a child, called *Ma première histoire de France, My First History of France*. When I showed him a richly illustrated scene of the battle of Agincourt, it occurred to me that never once in my life had I decided whose side I was on, the French or the British. On Saint Crispin's day, on whose side was I—a Jew born in Egypt who speaks both French and English with the wrong accent?

In fact, I couldn't even decide how to spell the name of the battle: Agincourt with a G as the English do, or Azincourt, with a Z as the French do?

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Final, final move X³: I don't even know how to pronounce my last name: the Turkish way, the Arabic way, the French way, the Italian way, the American way. Come to think of it, even my first name is a problem: does one call me André the French way, with the accent on the second syllable, or the American way, with the accent on the first? And how do you pronounce the "r"? Is my name Andrea, Andreas, Andareyah, Andrew, Andy, or is it André as spoken by my father, who named me after a scorned aunt to spite his family and who spoke my name with an Turco-Italian accent in a family whose mother tongue was neither

French nor Italian, not Turkish or Arabic, but Spanish—and even then not really Spanish either, but Ladino?

The fact is, I don't know. I may have too many names. I don't have *a name*. I am a disassembled company of shadow selves.

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I tried to give an account of all this in *Out of Egypt* when I described my childhood visits to my two grandmothers, both of whom competed for the kind of attention that often passes for love. As was the custom in my preschool years, every day I was taken to one grandmother in the morning and to the other in the afternoon. This was not a difficult thing to do since both grandmothers lived exactly across the street from each other—which is how my parents met. What was a bit more difficult was to visit one grandmother without ever letting the other know that I would later visit, or had just visited the other. Each was supposed to feel privileged. What thrilled me—correction: what thrilled the adult writer remembering, i.e. imagining, i.e. inventing all this—what thrilled me was the thought that, while visiting the house of one in the morning, I would peek out the window and look at the spot across the street, where I was already anticipating I'd be peeking back later that day. I was in the morning rehearsing what I'd be doing that very afternoon, except that the rehearsal was incomplete unless I could anticipate thinking back on that morning's rehearsal. I was trying to be in both places at one and the same time—like Marcel Proust reading his byline in the newspaper and trying to enjoy both first-person and third-person perspectives. The cunning that had been exercised at first became a precondition for a second form of cunning as well. I was not only disloyal to both grandmothers but I was

ultimately disloyal to and shifty with myself. And what about the writer who pretends to remember this episode but in reality is making it up, and, by admitting he's invented it—or, as he says, *imagined* it—hopes to come clean with this clever loop and access a third-degree alibi?

Perhaps, when I looked out of one grandmother's home in the morning I was trying to second guess whether I'd be happier across the street later in the afternoon. Or perhaps I was already fearing that I wouldn't be happy there and was thus already sending across the street the comfort I'd need that afternoon. Or perhaps I was afraid that no sooner I would have been taken across than I'd forget the grandmother of the morning and was thus already sending myself a care package containing the picture of the grandmother I'd left behind that day. Or perhaps it was much simpler: fearing that changing places might change who I was, I was in effect consolidating one identity by grafting it onto the other, except that each was no more stable than the other. Suspension bridges must do something similar all the time: in order for tower A to remain in place it needs tower B as a counterweight, but for tower B to be secured, it must rely on tower A. I am sure engineers will disagree with my description—but you get the drift of the metaphor.

Spatially, what was happening with my grandmothers or with my friends A, B, C, D, and E makes easy sense. I am in place X remembering or imagining something about myself in place Y. The feeling is incomplete unless, once in place Y, I can think back to place X where the desire for Y had originally sprung!

Spatially it works—sort of. Temporally, however, it's a mess.

What it amounts to is basically this: You already anticipate remembering something which has yet to occur in the future. I've called this *arbitrage*. Elsewhere, I've called it *temporizing*. To hark back to Merleau-Ponty's example of phantom limbs, you're touching a leg that within hours will no longer belong to you. You touch to see what it will feel like to reach for that limb and find nothing. You exist, as I've been suggesting, on three planes, on three removes. A temporizer forfeits the present because he moves *elsewhere in time*.

The present does not exist. The present does not exist not because—recall my grandmothers here—the boy in the present already foresees the past before the future has even occurred, or because there are essentially two hypothetical homes neither of which is the real home, but because the real inhabited space has now become the traffic between them, the traffic between memory and imagination back to imagination and memory. The loop is the home—the way guilt and disloyalty and the desire to recover from guilt and disloyalty are the primary emotions here, not love. Our intuitions are counter-intuitive, thinking instincts. Instincts with holes in their pockets.

The word traffic or loop captures the bizarre nature of this particular form of dislocation, where the dominant motion is not even one of ambivalence as of perpetual oscillation between alibis. The true home is therefore not a land, or two lands, not even an elsewhere or an esrtwhile, but the interminable shifts and fibrillations between them. It is the traffic between places, and not the places themselves, that eventually becomes the home, the spiritual home, the capital. Displacement becomes the tangible home—displacement *is* the patrimony. It could be traffic between places or traffic between time zones or traffic

between second and third removes, or between memory and imagination, or between French and English—it all amounts to the same thing.

Let me borrow an adjective from Heraclitus to give this looping traffic of multiple *turns* and *returns* a name by calling it *palintropic*. Palintropic means that which “turns again—which keeps turning and returning,” which loops back or “turns back on itself” or is “back-stretched.”

Exile, physical displacement and, temporal dislocation mean nothing unless they induce a corresponding set of intellectual, psychological, and aesthetic displacements and reversals as well. I project these displacements and reversals on everything, not only because such is my experience and vision of life; I project them everywhere because it is in finding displacements on more than one remove that I am able to situate myself in an environment that would otherwise remain thoroughly alien to me. I consolidate my displaced and reversed relationship with the world by redefining the world as a displaced and reversed construct. I consolidate my twisted relationship with thinking, with friendship and love by redefining thinking, friendship and love as displaced and twisted dynamics. I cannot “access” the world and cannot even read, much less teach a text unless I have unearthed its reversed nerve, its reversed moment. I project my displacement on everything around me so as not to feel an outsider, so that other things and other people may reflect me and understand me and find out they are more like me than I could ever have wished.

I project my double vision and call it a vision because if I do not see double, I do not see at all. I take parallax, which is a defect, a misalignment, a disturbance and fool myself into considering it a corrective.

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Home, if I may invoke the Hebraic tradition, is out-of-home. The word for Hebrew in Hebrew is originally *ibhri*, meaning “he who came from across (the river).” You refer to yourself not as a person from a place; but from a place across from that place. You are—and always are—from somewhere else. You and your alibi are one another’s shadow. You are an alibi. Everything is twisted in a cat’s cradle of infinite removes.

This is my “home”—home in quotation marks. Unless the palintropic nerve is stimulated, writing cannot happen. Writing that does not force me to displace or reinvent what I believe, what I think, what I like, who I think I am, or where I think I am headed or am writing about—if writing does not unharness me and throw me to the ground, I cannot write.

There are writers who write by avoiding all fault lines. They sidesteps all manner of obstacles, avoid what they do not know, stay away from dark areas, and, wherever possible, end a sentence once they've said all they'd set out to say with it.

Then there are writers like me who position themselves right on the fault line. They start out not even knowing what their subject is; they're writing in the dark, yet they keep writing because writing is how they grope, how they light the darkness around them.

For me to write, I need to work my way back out of one home, consider another, and find the no-man’s-land in between. I need to go to one André, unwrite that André, choose the other André across the way, only then to go looking for the middle-André whose voice will most likely approximate the voice of an André I have never heard before and am eager to meet. I say *approximate a voice*, but what I mean—perhaps—is a voice that will

camouflage all tell-tale signs that English is not my mother tongue, but that neither is French, nor Italian, nor Arabic. The André writing/speaking right now is just the compromise version of another André—which is why my definition of a stylist is someone who crafts the best compromise between the unsayables he believes he wants to say and his understanding of how best to convey these unsayables. Writing must almost have to fail—it must almost not succeed. If it goes well from the start, if I am in the groove, if, as the saying might go, *I come home to writing*, it's not the writing for me. I need to have lost the key and to find no replacement. Writing is not a homecoming. Writing is an alibi. Writing is a perpetual stammer of alibis.

I need to bicker with a language not because language is unsuitable or because I fear I may be unfit for *it*, but because I find myself saying what I think I wanted to say *after*, not before, having said it. Nothing could seem more dislocated. You do not write an outline first and then spill your words on paper; you write because you cannot write an outline.

Parallax writing is what I call shadow writing. You write the way you do because the other kind of writing is unavailable to you. You write unnaturally not only because you do not have a natural language, but because writing and thinking have become unnatural acts, the way looking or, better yet, focusing are unnatural acts.

To parody Michelangelo, you do not chip away at marble in order to bring out a hitherto undisclosed statue; testing the marble, hiding its imperfections, covering up mistaken chisel marks *is* the statue.

You write not after you've thought things through; you write to think things through. You chisel in order to imagine what you might have chiseled with better eyes in a better world.

You turn on yourself, and turning gives you the illusion of having a center.

But turning is all there is. Turning is all you have.

Or to put it in different terms: you do not see things; you see double. Better yet: you see that you see double.

You wish to see one thing: instead, you see parallax.

You want truth; what you reap is paradox.

I turn on myself not only because I don't know enough not to turn on myself; I turn on myself because it is part of being displaced and reversed intellectually to do just that. You don't know whether what you feel is what you feel or what you say you feel, just as you don't know whether saying you feel something is actually a way of saying anything at all about it. You wing it. You hope others believe you. If they believe you, then you might as well imitate them and believe the person they believe.

I could sum up exile by saying that I have made writing my home. I could even go on and say that I've built my home with big words such as *parallax*, *arbitrage* and *counterintuition* and *palintropics*, and *temporizing*. Or that I've built my home, to use Edmond Jabès' words, not even with words and what they mean, but with cadence, just cadence, because cadence is like feeling, and cadence is like breathing, and cadence is desire, and if cadence doesn't reinvent everything we would like our life to have been or to become, then just the act of searching, and probing in that particularly cadenced way

becomes a way of feeling and of being in the world. Cadenced prose, for all its pyrotechnics, is also a way of hiding that I can't write as plain a thing as an ordinary sentence in English.

But I'm quibbling with you and these are just words—and saying they are just words brings me no closer to the sort of truth so many of us repair to at the end of the day, because truth, however unwieldy it is when there's too much of it for anyone to bear or when there's not enough of it to go around, is still something we hope goes by the name of home. And that, in exile, is the first thing you—or they—toss overboard.