

stamped on the envelope: "emigrated"
he receives the letter back
from Vienna
from the Red Cross
was it stamped in red too?
or black?

others realize they have been deported
for who emigrates in the middle of a war?
a world war
to where?
from Vienna to where?
yes, a euphemism for deportation.

no more letters
they too will be returned
with that dreaded stamp "emigrated"
But he was the emigre after all
under the nose of the Nazi
this kindertransport
of children of the Reich and the Anschluss
crossing by train the Europe soon to be torn to shreds
to London

But they after all stayed
in Vienna
Julius, Rachel and Litzy.
she too could have left but refused.

how ironic
that the emigre gets this letter with this stamp
"emigrated"
they knew where he was
in Australia, in Tatura
one of the 'Dunera boys'
amongst 2000 Jews behind barbed wire
"Enemy Aliens" Class I or II
classified by the holie-than-thou British
who would later admit the error in Parliament
they knew where he was
he had told them in letters.
But now he would never know their whereabouts.

I ask
"when did you realize?"
"when the letters came back".
he replied

those purloined letters
returned by the Red Cross
as if
they had emigrated, like him
to a safe place
a safe haven
for is that not what they were in fact 'told'?
the lie
that hid behind the Nazi murderous intent.

why does this bother me so
now after so long
those letters?
I saw them once
he had a pile of them.
sacred letters
returned
by the Red Cross.
this insane need to know the exact moment when he
realized?

was it 1942 or after the War? I persist
he says, "we hoped

possibly the Russians had interned them in a camp across
the border
so that they would be at least alive
but nothing"

post war silence
then a note from the Red Cross again
last seen Izhbitz transit camp
after that whereabouts unknown.
the worst to be believed.
how to live with this as a survivor.
how to hold the returned letters
with that stamp 'emigrated'

I too am an emigre
living the stranger's life in another country
in another land
strange soil
strange customs and beliefs.
never again to feel at home
even when I go back
it gets worse each time
a distant remnant of the past here and there

nostalgia filling in the gaps.

I too am condemned to repeat the story of the father and grandfather.

In a far away land

at the end of the railroad

Tatura

in that desert

sand

the letter arrives

he had written weeks earlier

with that fateful word 'emigrated'

his heart jumps, sweat accumulates on his brow

what does this mean?

where have they gone?

it cannot be!

feeling so powerless over this whole mess

this war

too big for all of us

when the demonic is let loose.

that letter

returned

signified the end of his youth
and the end of an era
the glory of Vienna
and its Jews were deported
Vienna as the epicenter of the world was to be no more
would forever defend its reputation
and its war record
and its collaboration
and wallow in its denial.
'emigrated' would now apply to Vienna itself
not merely its Jews.
it would apply to the civilized world as we knew it
its Mozart and its Goethe and Proust
all sullied by that letter
returned with that stamp
and that word
'emigrated'.