

CROSSINGS

Migrant Knowledges,
Migrant Forms

Edited by Natalya Din-Kariuki,
Subha Mukherji,
and Rowan Williams



বাংলাদেশের শেষ জীবন
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Fig. 1. Detail from Hieronymus Bosch, *Ship of Fools* (1490–1500)

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Contents

PART I: INTRODUCTION

- Crossings: Life and Art 19
Subha Mukherji

PART II: THE LIBRARY OF EXILE

- Towards the Library of Exile 93
Edmund de Waal
- Response to Edmund de Waal 117
Gillian Beer

PART III: ESSAYS

- Travel Writing, Poetics, and the Early Modern Knowledge
Economy 123
Natalya Din-Kariuki
- “Loitering Lusks and Lazy Lorels”: Poverty, Vagrancy, and
the Invention of Roguery 135
Anupam Basu
- Travel Testimonies: Migrant Women’s Mobilities in London
Consistory Records, c. 1560–1600 147
John Gallagher

Fickle Turbans and Mercurial Fashions: Blurring the Boundaries of Identities between Europe and the Ottoman Empire <i>Rosita D'Amora</i>	163
Migrant Unknowledge: A Vision of the Virgin in Fifteenth-Century Kozhikode <i>Jonathan Gil Harris</i>	177
Knowledge in Translation: Between the Local and the Universal <i>Annabel Brett</i>	187
Internal Migration: The Letters and Adages of Erasmus <i>Brian Cummings</i>	199
Out of Place: Migration, Knowledge, and What Remains <i>Supriya Chaudhuri</i>	213
One and Three Knowledges: Displacement, Art, and Anthropology <i>Olga Demetriou, Efi Savvides, and Akid Hassan</i>	231
Migrants' Narratives: Challenging the Border Logic of the United States <i>Valerie Forman</i>	243
"You're Back in the Room": Theatrical Borders in a Post-COVID-19 World <i>Pip Williams</i>	255

PART IV: CONVERSATIONS

Communities and Stages: Conversation with Good Chance Theatre <i>Mohamed Sarrar, Joe Murphy, and Joe Robertson</i>	265
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Stories in Transit <i>Dine Diallo and Clelia Bartoli in conversation with Marina Warner, transcribed and translated by Valentina Castagna</i>	275
“Sea of Hope”: The Poetry Circle of Melissa Network’s Women <i>Nadina Christopoulou and A.E. Stallings</i>	291
Curating Migration: A Conversation with The Migration Museum <i>Aditi Anand and Sue McAlpine</i>	303
Response to The Migration Museum <i>Clair Wills</i>	317
“Don’t Wash Your Hands” <i>Issam Kourbaj in conversation with Simon Goldhill, curated by Subha Mukherji</i>	325
“Loving Justice” <i>Regina M. Schwartz</i>	337
Response to Regina M. Schwartz <i>Rowan Williams</i>	349
PART V: INTERLUDE	
In the Fertile Land <i>Gabriel Josipovici</i>	359
PART VI: SOUND CROSSINGS	
Sound Crossings: A Poetry Reading <i>Angela Leighton and A.E. Stallings</i>	363

Oltre Mare (after Baxendall and St Clair) 387
Rachel Spence

After an Unspeaking 391
Anthony Vahni Capildeo

A Swelling Is Time 397
Yousif M. Qasmiyeh

Poem for the One Who Has Just Arrived 401
Bhanu Kapil

Mishearing: A Traversal 405
Amit Chaudhuri in conversation with Subha Mukherji

A Lot of Dirt 417
T.M. Krishna in conversation with Subha Mukherji

PART VII: GAZING ACROSS BORDERS

The Lost Country 435
Dragana Jurišić

Trade Winds 453
Susan Stockwell, with a response from Carla Suthren

PART VIII: REFUGE AND REFUGEES, HUMAN AND OTHER

Kudzu in the Patchy Anthropocene 461
Yota Batsaki

Small Things, Strange Shores: Poems 475
Mina Gorji

PART IX: MIGRANT FOOD

Exile and Food	481
<i>Claudia Roden in conversation with Subha Mukherji</i>	
A Journey in Taste	493
<i>Faraj Alnasser in conversation with Subha Mukherji</i>	

PART X: MOVING THINGS

<i>Faraj Alnasser</i>	507
<i>Dragana Jurišić</i>	509
<i>Subha Mukherji</i>	513
<i>Jonathan Gil Harris</i>	517
<i>Yousif M. Qasmiyeh</i>	519
<i>Issam Kourbaj</i>	523
<i>Natalya Din-Kariuki</i>	527
<i>Dine Diallo</i>	529
Afterword	531
<i>Rowan Williams</i>	
Contributors	543

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tion — through their imaginative engagement at various points of time. It has been a truly collective effort. Any oversights or imperfections that remain are our own.

N.D.K., S.M., and R.W.

I.

Introduction



Fig. 1.1. Background to the migrant Durga idol in Bhaager Maa (“Mother, divided,” or “Mother of Partition”), installation by Rintu Das and Pallab Bhowmick, Barisha Club, October 2021. Source: Rintu Das.

Crossings: Life and Art¹

Subha Mukherji

A border between two nations, marked by barbed wire, photos of missing people, and a cautionary signpost proclaiming, “End of India. Crossing Prohibited”: who would have thought this image (fig. 1.1) could be from the religious festival of Durga Puja in Kolkata? Durga Puja — “the worship of Durga” — is one of the biggest Hindu festivals of India, an annual event most widely and exuberantly celebrated in and around Kolkata. The civic space turns into a giant party, with pandals or pavilions at every street corner, housing idol-clusters of increasingly aesthetic, and arguably secular, interest. The conventional setting has been majestic, and arranged like a proscenium stage, with the deities on a raised platform at a suitable remove from awe-struck mortal spectators.

1 Yota Batsaki’s intellectual companionship and input at various stages of my writing of this essay have gone beyond the call of her duty or my claim. In both gratitude and pleasure, I am happy to remain her debtor. I am thankful, too, to Daniel Dombey whose intellectual engagement during the fraught years over which the realities of migration and my thinking about it developed felt like a gift and a grace.



Fig. 1.2. Bhaager Maa (“Mother, divided,” or “Mother of Partition”), migrant Durga. Source: Rintu Das.

Durga is traditionally represented as a triumphant mother Goddess vanquishing evil (in the form of a demon), riding a tiger, visiting the earth—her parental home—every autumn with her divine children in tow, each embodying a particular talent and power. But the image in figures 1.2 and 1.3 was part of the scenography of the Barisha Club pavilion in October 2021, which signaled a radical iconographic departure. Here, the el-



Fig. 1.3. Bhaager Maa (“Mother, divided,” or “Mother of Partition”), migrant Durga. Source: Rintu Das.

evated dais is a barbed cage in the limbo of a detention center at the checkpoint between India and Bangladesh.²

This Durga (made by artist Rintu Das with sculptors Debayan Pramanik, Pratap Majumdar, and Sumit Biswas) is an uprooted, disoriented refugee, sitting terrified with her four children, clutching on to their “poor luggage,” in a no-man’s

² The cover image of this book is of the same installation, from another angle.

land—a border now freshly charged with hatred, fear, and peril.³ The Goddess has a disarmingly human face. It is a face caught in the headlights sinisterly focused on the “prohibited” crossing-point, but is also in the shadow—the near shadow of newly minted edicts, and the longer shadow of the Bengal partition.⁴ Curiously, she holds a precious and symbolic possession on her lap: a little brass statue of the Dhakeshwari Durga, the adopted Durga of Dhaka who was smuggled out of Bangladesh during the Partition of Bengal and rehomed lovingly in Kumortuli (the potters’ quarters) in Kolkata, on the verge of being dislocated again. In a proleptic telescoping of roles, Das’s own clayey Durga, originating in Kumortuli, is at once a devotee of Dhakeshwari who clings to her idol as she sits in a stateless interspace, and a reincarnation—a Goddess who crossed over once and never thought she would have to cross back, or that she would be reduced to a portable relic.

This new aesthetic of the Puja comes out of the heart of specific contextual knowledges, speaks to them, and often carries uncertainties and intimations which were, at the point of creation, unquantifiable, undocumentable, and, for many, unspeakable. It also suggests the inaccessibility of certain knowledges in the state of migrancy: the unknowability of the other, and the obscurity of what awaits across the border. In the very act of putting the spotlight on the difficulties of territorial crossings, it crosses representational boundaries with simultaneous vulnerability and defiance. The formal watershed in this tradition came around 2020, in the wake of two new laws implemented by the Indian Government. December 2019 saw the passing of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), and its twin proposal, the National Register of Citizens (NRC). Packaged as positive legis-

3 Anthony Munday et al., *Sir Thomas More* (Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2013), scene 6, l. 86.

4 For a more detailed discussion of the politics and aesthetics of this Puja installation, see Subha Mukherji, “Footfalls Echo in the Memory: Displaced Durgas and Migrant Forms,” *Humanities Underground*, October 2021, <https://humanitiesunderground.org/2022/02/22/footfalls-echo-in-the-memory-displaced-durgas-and-migrant-forms/>.

lation, the CAA amended the Citizenship Act of 1955 to accept “illegal” migrants who came to India after India’s independence, up until 2014, fleeing from religious persecution in their home states in neighboring Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, but conspicuously excluded Muslims — the largest majority in those countries — alongside other Indic-origin religious minorities like the Rohingyas. The NRC — which originally (as of 1951) applied only in Assam, a state largely shaped by migration — was suddenly reactivated and updated in 2019, designed in tandem with the CAA to identify “citizens” and exclude “illegal” immigrants from all of India on the basis of documents going back to 1971. While primarily targeted at Muslims who have lived in India for years, including those born in the country, this count also included many Hindus whose ancestry went back to Pakistan or Afghanistan or Bangladesh. Amidst the proliferation of obscurantist Acts and Bills, the precise targets of these new rules were not distinguishable to all, and still are not. Anyone who has had to leave one of these neighboring countries for India, and any member of a long-settled religious minority in India, was susceptible to the consequent miasma of despair. There are many families still frantically looking for documents they will never find. Memories of the bloody Partition of Bengal in 1947 into Hindu-majority West Bengal (part of India) and Muslim-majority East Pakistan (which was to become independent Bangladesh in 1971) have been stirred all over again by these exclusionary laws drafted to deny people dignity and identity.

The blue-grey screen visible on the far-left corner in the background of the refugee Durga installation plays a video showing a muddy patch quivering with footprints hastily left by stealthy feet, big and small, as they fall at night. The footage is uncannily similar to the BBC’s YouTube video report of October 12, 2021, which shows Afghan refugees leaving foot-marks on the rough ground while frantically fleeing the Taliban across the Iran-Turkey border, as Turkey tightened controls. The muddy feet in Durga’s back-screen — pattering to a soundtrack of howling guard dogs and panicked human cacophony — are counterpointed with exquisite prints of the Goddess’s feet in the long



Fig. 1.4. *Bhaager Maa* (“Mother, divided” or “Mother of Partition”), migrant Durga. Source: Rintu Das.

foreground, dyed crimson in the traditionally auspicious foot-paint called *aalta*, leading up to what might have been the altar (figs. 1.4 and 1.5).

Das had been playing with the idea for a long time, and had a team of three clay artists working on it since long before the BBC footage was aired. The fortuitous co-appearance of the idol and the news clip in the same week signals a terrible convergence: The barbed wire and walls rising around the world, the governments excluding people — whether citizens or aliens — and the fascist demagogues whipping up majoritarian hatred, are distinct in particulars but identical in essence. Artistic representations of a whole new kind are registering this and speaking across borders, inducing a dialogue as only tribes of artworks can do. And as the anthropologist Alfred Gell intuited, artworks do have a way of forming tribes.⁵ Just such an ecology is sur-

5 Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford University Press, 1998).



Fig. 1.5. *Bhaager Maa* (“Mother, divided,” or “Mother of Partition”), migrant Durga. Source: Rintu Das.

facing spontaneously not only across Kolkata,⁶ but as part of a wider emergent phenomenon of “migrant forms”: forms that respond to the imaginative and ethical demands of the unknowable reality of mass displacement in a way that governments, institutions, and public discourse have calamitously failed to do.

As the crisis of statelessness has revealed itself to be global, continuous, and continually evolving, such moves as the CAA have exposed the fantasy that citizenship is a guarantee of refuge or a repository of rights.⁷ The legacy of this postwar Eurocentric

6 To mention just one example, witness Bhabatosh Sutar and Pradip Das’s work *Chol Chitra* at Naktala Udayan Sangha’s *Puja* in 2021, which framed the pandal with an ominously empty train stuck on a border with bags and baggage spilling out, and signposts marking the distance to various cities-turned-checkpoints in Bangladesh. The work alludes to both Khushwant Singh’s novel *Train to Pakistan* (1956) and Atin Bandyopadhyay’s tetralogy *Nilkontho Pakhir Khonje* (1960) to relate the plight of newly displaced people to the Partition of India as well as the Bengal Partition. See figs. 11.3 and 11.4 in Supriya Chaudhuri’s essay in this volume for telling images.

7 See Gerald Daniel Cohen, *In War’s Wake: Europe’s Displaced Persons in the Postwar Order* (Oxford University Press, 2011), esp. chap. 4, “Displaced

humanism still haunts discourses of displacement.⁸ Decentering it brings a clarity now urgent. In a world as radically vulnerable to deracination as ours, citizenship itself is a precarious and manipulable thing — both for refugees and for those who thought they belonged but are lost in the maze of newly forged bureaucratic categories. Like citizenship, humanitarianism has also ceased to be unambiguously a part, and a mark, of a benign history. As Stephen Hopgood predicted in 2013, the moral project of human rights was always already about to face its “endtime” unless the West loosened its ownership of it and forged solidarity with local activism across the world.⁹ Creative responses are making us think again, and think hard, about the meaning of belonging and its complexities. The role of the arts to step in and step up to the tasks of creating imaginative communities, recalibrating our understanding of human rights, and forging possible forms of life that law and politics are failing to deliver, has never been more critical. But their work is transnational and plural, and we must find interpretive structures for grasping their “understood relations.”¹⁰

Imaginative engagements do not only bring into view the interconnection of the local with the global, but cross-temporal continuities too. From the women who flee from their Egyptian suitors and seek asylum in the Peloponnese in Aeschylus’s *The Suppliants*, to those who explore the loss of home amidst war crimes in Euripides’s *The Trojan Women*, Greek tragedy is eloquently aware of the affective precarities of refuge.¹¹ William

Persons in the ‘Human Rights’ Revolution,” 79–99.

- 8 On writing about exile and “modernist cosmopolitanism,” see Lyndsey Stonebridge’s introduction to her illuminating and impassioned book, *Placeless People: Writing, Rights, and Refugees* (Oxford University Press, 2018), 8–9.
- 9 Stephen Hopgood, *The Endtimes of Human Rights* (Cornell University Press, 2013).
- 10 William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. A.R. Braunmuller (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 3.4.124.
- 11 On how Greek tragedy offers “preshocks of the suffering of migrants from Afghanistan, Syria, East Africa, and other places in trouble,” but also for a sensitive reading of contemporary poetry and lyric exploring migrant

Shakespeare's Othello, honored and needed as a serving general, thought he belonged to the multicultural fabric of early modern Venice, until crossing the race bar on the sexual axis plunges him into the disorienting discovery that he has always been a vagrant in Venice: "an extravagant and wheeling stranger / Of here and everywhere."¹² Even in Shakespeare's less deceptively diverse England, wanderers from outside (the etymological meaning of "extravagant") were perceived to be threats. A draft proclamation from 1601 cited "these hard times of dearth" amongst its reasons for urging the deportation of "Negroes and Blackamoors."¹³ This was really the work of Caspar van Senden, a merchant from Lübeck, and Thomas Sherley, a minor courtier, seeking to forcibly transport African prisoners of war from England to Spain and Portugal in a money-making plan which came to nothing, but nonetheless suggests a certain xenophobic mindset they were playing to. After all, a 1596 letter written on Queen Elizabeth's behalf to the Lord Mayor had complained in a similar vein of the importation of "to manie" "Blackmoores" who were bleeding resources away from her "natural subjects."¹⁴ The surge of dislocation, forced relocation, and economic migration are at a statistically unprecedented high in our times. But it is not an anomaly — just the end wanting to forget its beginning. It is the particulars, and the scale (which Edward Said identified as the differentia of the late twentieth century as an "age of the refugee"), that are distinct to specific historical junctures and discrete calamities.¹⁵ Migration has challenged humans, and hu-

tragedy, see John Kerrigan, "Lampedusa: Migrant Tragedy," *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry* 8, no. 2 (2021): 138.

- 12 William Shakespeare, *Othello*, ed. Norman Sanders (Cambridge University Press, 2018), 1.1.136–37.
- 13 "Licensing Casper van Senden to Deport Negroes [draft]," in *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, vol. 3: *The Later Tudors, 1588–1603*, ed. Paul L. Hughes and James F. Larkin (Yale University Press, 1969), 221–22.
- 14 Queen Elizabeth to the Lord Mayor et al., July 11, 1596, referred to in John Roche Dasent, ed., *Acts of the Privy Council of England: New Series, 1542–1631*, vol. 26: 1596–1597 (Mackie, 1902), 16–17.
- 15 Edward Said, "Reflections on Exile," in *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (Granta, 2012), 174. Said wrote this essay in the

manitarianism, for a very long time. The phrase “poor luggage,” which the Barisha Club installation immediately brought to my mind, is from the extraordinary speech with which Sir Thomas More addresses—and disarms—a xenophobic London mob of 1517, rioting against European immigrants, in *The Boke of Sir Thomas More*, a collaborative play from the turn of the sixteenth century (c. 1592–1601), in a scene almost certainly written by Shakespeare:

Grant them removed, and grant that this your noise
 Hath chid down all the majesty of England.
 Imagine that you see the wretched strangers,
 Their babies at their backs, with their poor luggage,
 Plodding to th’ ports and coasts for transportation,
 And that you sit as kings in your desires,
 Authority quite silenced by your brawl,
 And you in ruff of your opinions clothed:
 What had you got? I’ll tell you:
 [...]
 You’ll put down strangers,
 Kill them, cut their throats, possess their houses
 And lead the majesty of law in lym
 To slip him like a hound. Alas, Alas! Say now the King,
 [...]
 Should so much come too short of your great trespass
 As but to banish you: whither would you go?
 What country, by the nature of your error,
 Should give you harbour? Go you to France or Flanders,
 To any German province, Spain or Portugal,
 Nay, anywhere that not adheres to England:
 Why, you must needs be strangers. Would you be pleased
 To find a nation of such barbarous temper
 That, breaking out in hideous violence,
 Would not afford you an abode on earth,

wake of the 1983 massacre of (mostly) Palestinian refugees in Sabra and Shatila in Beirut.

Whet their detested knives against your throats,
 Spurn you like dogs, and like as if that God
 Owed not nor made not you, nor that the elements
 Were not all appropriate to your comforts
 But chartered unto them? What would you think
 To be thus used? This is the strangers' case,
 And this your mountainish inhumanity.¹⁶

The past is gut-wrenchingly present. More's haunting portrayal of "wretched strangers" is more vivid than ever in our historical moment. The figure of the stranger arriving at shores unknown with their frayed luggage and terrified children is increasingly familiar, and one that crosses over from life to art — or forms of representation which have taken on the function of art in a more visible and urgent way than before. In a new age of censorship under ethno-nationalist governments, photojournalism has emerged as one of these forms — unstoppably mobile itself, and wordlessly getting around the censorship that the verbal arts are immediately vulnerable to.¹⁷ Along with other crises, it has crystallized lived moments of forced passage into indelible depiction. In India, a context close to me, a draconian lockdown was imposed at four hours' notice on March 24, 2020, straight after an orgy of super-spreader election rallies by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah, and the disastrous launch of the Hindu pilgrimage-festival of Kumbh Mela which the government not only refused to cancel but ad-

16 Munday et al., *Sir Thomas More*, 6.83–156. This speech appears in the addition by Hand D, which has been credibly ascribed to Shakespeare. See Alfred W. Pollard et al., *Shakespeare's Hand in the Play of Sir Thomas More*, ed. W.W. Greg (Cambridge University Press, 1923).

17 The late Danish Siddiqui, chronicler of iniquity and disaster, put out photos of mass cremations in Delhi in 2021 that silently exposed the government's false statistics about COVID-19 deaths. See, for example, Danish Siddiqui, "Mass Cremations Begin as India's Capital Faces Deluge of COVID-19 Deaths," *Reuters*, April 22, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/news/picture/mass-cremations-begin-as-indias-capital-idUSKBN2CA049>.



Fig. 1.6. Migrant laborers queuing at the border between Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh to return home. Photo by Indian Express Archive / Bhupendra Rana.

vertised on March 21 as being “safe” to attend.¹⁸ Overnight, this lockdown turned millions of laborers into uprooted refugees, trudging miles with their “poor luggage” and their babies to cross borders between states to get home to their villages, some dropping dead from heat or exhaustion or hunger.

Images such as Bhupendra Rana’s (fig. 1.6), broadcast country-wide in the media, crossed the understood limits of representation to burn into the nation’s collective psyche and change our visual imaginary forever. Indeed, Durga herself had migrated as the world locked, unlocked, disinfected, and reinfected itself, and as the double plague of populist authoritarianism and its criminal negligence of COVID-19 ravaged India. For Das and his team’s idol of 2021 was a sequel to his Durga as a migrant-mother the previous autumn (2020), in collaboration with ceramicist Pallab Bhowmick, which had distilled the despair of

18 Hannah Ellis-Petersen, Aakash Hassan, and Manoj Chaurasia, “Kumbh Mela: How a Superspreader Festival Seeded Covid Across India,” *The Guardian*, May 29, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/may/30/kumbh-mela-how-a-superspreader-festival-seeded-covid-across-india>.



Fig. 1.7. Mural of migrant laborers, Behala Art Festival, Kolkata, by Sanatan Dinda. Photo by Panchali Banerjee.

a whole new class of internally displaced people created by the government-imposed three-week curfew: “[T]hose images that yet / Fresh images beget.”¹⁹ The Behala Art Fest, which started in Kolkata in 2020, featured spontaneous murals on the theme in 2021, around the time the migrant Durgas appeared with the same makeshift luggages and bewildered babies (fig. 1.7). A repository of images began to form, which captured this new, avoidable precarity produced by the combined forces of nationalist myth and pandemic hypocrisy.

The 2020 reimagining of Durga as Annapurna (the Goddess of grains or bounty), herself a displaced mother but one who gives out “traan” (sacks of aid), had stunned and shocked viewers, defying any culturally endorsed response that this art form might normally invite, not to speak of conventional aesthetic criteria (fig. 1.8). Some alleged that it was a rehash of *Dar-*

19 From Yeats’s poem “Byzantium.” Cf. W.B. Yeats, *Selected Poetry* (Penguin, 1991), 174.



Fig. 1.8. “Maarir deshe, traaner beshe / Annapurna bhyalay bheshe” (“In the land of plague, in the form of aid / Comes Annapurna adrift on a raft”): Displaced Durga by Rintu Das with Debayan Pramanik, Pratap Majumdar, and Sumit Biswas, October 2020. Photo by Subha Mukherji.

pamoyee, one of Bikash Bhattacharya’s famous *Durga* series of oil paintings (1989), where a coarsely clad laborer with a child in her arms, standing in a muddy field against a rivulet, turns around to look out of the painting at the viewer with piercing eyes, with a third eye on her forehead uncovering the divine in ordinary womanhood. But to charge the work with derivative-ness is to miss the point about adaptation and intertextuality. It is also to ignore the fact that Bhattacharya’s paintings — notwithstanding their democratizing of exalted figures — reside in

elite galleries and sell at museum prices, while Barisha Club's Durga inhabited the different world of popular, proletarian art in easily accessible public places, claimed a new symbolism and forged a distinct semiotic from the margins. Das and Bhowmick are not the natural inheritors of artists such as Bhattacharya. Others — including myself — found the assemblage too busy, and the genres too uneasily mixed. But the ongoing negotiation between the festive, sensuous plenitude of the show and the desolate destitution inscribed in its heart conveyed a sense of *seeking* form. What overwhelmed me at first proved moving as a sense of process became palpable: the rawness of a mimetic mode emerging out of the heart of an experience from which it had not gained enough distance to settle into aesthetic selection, assured shape, or defined affect. Others yet have questioned this new aesthetics of idol-making, which flies in the face of a long iconography that has been “sacred,” metamorphic, and increasingly polished. Is this art at all? David Freedberg, writing about the power of images in 1989, was struck by how well we have “to turn the troubling image into something we can safely call art.”²⁰ In our age of displacement, artistic agency is manifesting itself in the reverse process, in crossing the fence that keeps “art” safe.

An unlikely partner of the migrant Durga is “Little Amal,” the giant puppet of a Syrian girl aged nine who fled home because of war and walked through Europe, crossing many borders, looking for her mother, and a home (fig. 1.9). She arrived in London in October 2021. The Good Chance Theatre (featured in our book) arranged her big walk.

Instead of moving into a gallery, Amal came to the South Bank, where the grown-ups saw her sad face and sang to welcome her. But when the children reached out and touched her — as they can't touch a statue in a museum — she turned her face, her eyes grew bright, and she seemed to smile, as artworks in museums don't. The children were full of wonder at a figure so like them and yet so other. She has an amazing story to

20 David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (University of Chicago Press, 1989), 425.



Fig. 1.9. Little Amal on the Southbank, London, 2021. Photo by Faraj Alnasser.

tell, with no ending yet. Everywhere she goes, her story changes and grows—like her journey. It started in Arabic but now it is braided like her hair: in many tongues and many colors, in words and songs and drums, in the rustle of the leaves and the whistle of the winds. In so many things too: straw, and wire, and woodchips, and paper, and cables. Her parts fray when the weather is rough. Amal travels light, for she has no things. But if you picked up her story, how much would it weigh? London made her a little home. She went on to Lviv afterwards, and then New York.

Amal's crossings—from Aleppo through Gaziantep to New York—were risky but full of hope, and her arrivals, while none of them permanent, have ended up joyful, as life has met art un-

der the open skies. But what of the desperate passages across the wine-dark sea? Among the most powerful images of our time are not only walls and luggage, but boats, ships, and beaches. These have a long imaginative history: associations of childhood, play, holidays, maritime adventures, and odysseys. T.S. Eliot's coastal lines in "Marina," going back to Shakespeare's *Pericles*, haunt us with their moving distillation of the wonder and grace of restoration, whether at home or abroad, on sea or land, or in the heart:

What seas what shores what grey rocks and what islands
 What water lapping the bow
 And scent of pine and the woodthrush singing through the
 fog
 What images return.²¹

In Shakespeare's last plays, the sea does not just take away but gives back — like the cycles of nature, it is tragicomic in its curative movements. That very sea, and lines such as Eliot's, have acquired entirely different associations in recent years, as water has overwhelmed fragile bows of inflatable dinghies, and the imagined scent of hospitable foreign pines has been usurped by the dark salt of an indifferent ocean — with a little help, of course, from unscrupulous human agents capitalizing on the deepening migration crisis, as well as other, more insidious, and ostensibly benevolent agents. The genre of the marine plot has turned. The figure of the lost child on a human shore has transited from being an image of hope and faith, to one of incurable pain, unfathomable loss, and irredeemable separation. In 2015, Nilüfer Demir's searing photo of two-year-old Alan Kurdi, washed ashore in Bodrum where the plastic boat from Damascus in which his family was fleeing war capsized, etched itself on the conscience of Europe. And yet, the same year, EU nations continued to oppose search-and-rescue operations to reduce the EU's "pull-factor" — ostensibly in a drive to check

21 T.S. Eliot, *Collected Poems, 1909–1962* (Faber and Faber, 1974), 115.



Fig. 1.10. Exhausted Rohingya refugee touches the shore in Bangladesh after the long crossing of the Bay of Bengal from Myanmar. Photo by Reuters / Danish Siddiqui.

trafficking but problematically entangled with a dehumanizing rhetoric, such as David Cameron’s description of immigrants as “swarms” (continued most recently by Suella Braverman as she warned of “an invasion on the southern coasts”).²² Refugees in boat after rescue boat have been “snubbed at sea,” to borrow the cosmopolitan refugee-poet W.H. Auden’s words, as they waited off the shore of Italy in worsening conditions while the far-right interior minister Matteo Salvini refused to allow them to embark — a tradition now kept in health by Georgia Meloni.²³

22 Braverman infamously used this phrase in her Commons statement on October, 31, 2022. See, among many other online reports and recordings, *The Independent*, “Suella Braverman Calls ‘Broken’ Immigration System an ‘Invasion on South Coast,’” *YouTube*, October 31, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hG-E8GwWjYc>.

23 W.H. Auden, *The Age of Anxiety: A Baroque Eclogue* (Faber and Faber, 1949), 115. Auden was haunted by the plight of refugees, not least those unlike him, with less choice and fewer rights in their placelessness. See his extraordinary, despair-filled poem, “Refugee Blues,” about Jewish refugees

As thirty-two desperate asylum seekers including a pregnant woman and three children drowned while crossing over from the French coast to Britain for refuge in November 2021, the then Home Secretary of the UK, Priti Patel, advocated a policy of “push-back”: pushing small boats back into the sea, exposing them actively to danger, rather than offering desperate people safe routes as an alternative to human smuggling. Patel’s response was only a sequel to the anxious debate in August 2020 over rendering the English Channel “unviable” for crossing, with the UK’s then minister for immigration declaring his resolve to “make” it unsafe. The logic of this comeback focused the moral vacuity of the discourse of risk. Meanwhile, look at how artists have responded to such crossings. Danish Siddiqui’s shot of an exhausted Rohingya refugee reaching and touching the shore of Bangladesh after crossing the Myanmar–Bangladesh border by boat (2017) distills the affective realities underlying the risk taken by those who have no choice (fig. 1.10). It captures the desolation, disbelief and hope of innumerable crossings of this age and the desperate longing for solidity across liquid graves. As Said wrote, “The pathos of exile is in the lack of contact with the solidity and the satisfaction of earth.”²⁴

As people have been trying to cross borders for some sort of solidity, and governments and institutions have been anxiously resisting, repelling, or negotiating these attempts, creative engagements — whether through images or words, music or movement, dancing or cooking — are traversing in the opposite direction, in a chiasmic relation to the crossings of life. Even as Israel orders foreign visitors to the West Bank to declare to the defense ministry if they fall in love with a Palestinian (while dual nationals, volunteers, and academics struggle to find a way to continue with their lives), love and food and graffiti on the separation wall continue to spill over and find knowing forms. Yotam Ottolenghi and Sami Tamimi’s book *Jerusalem* (2012),

from Nazi Germany in the 1930s: W.H. Auden, *Selected Poems*, ed. Edward Mendelson (Faber and Faber, 1979), 83–84.

²⁴ Said, “Exile,” 179.

charting a love story across prohibited political and sexual boundaries through the art of food, was a vanguard that now demands sequels. In Pingla, a little village in Bengal inhabited entirely by Muslims, everyone shares the same surname: *chitra-kar*, meaning “image-maker”; their artisanal identity trumps their religious one. They have, for generations, had only one occupation: making scroll paintings on mythical, historical, and, increasingly, contemporary subjects. One of their most abiding themes is Hindu mythology. This crossover has happened for a long time with an ease and a pleasure that come out of the cultural braid that is India. But it has become a political act of defiance since the country took a turn towards a *Hindutva* that separates out the strands and reduces the richness of the immemorial mix.²⁵ The irrepressible continuity of the artistic practice of Pingla is a minor miracle—perhaps slipping under the radar because of its “marginal” location—against the backdrop of the ideological project of communalizing art. The Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP)’s calculated attack on the famous painter M.F. Husain’s lyrical, stylized drawing of *Saraswati* (1976), the Goddess of learning and the arts, some twenty years later, to denounce a Muslim artist’s depiction of a Hindu Goddess naked—as if the Hindu pantheon is a stranger to nudity—at a delicate political moment, was a dispiriting case in point. It resulted in a spate of ultra-right Hindu-nationalist vandalism across Indian states, including the burning of sixteen of Husain’s works in an Ahmedabad gallery. Art’s crossings do not always succeed, their risk can misfire, and they can be vulnerable to retrospective distortion. But they do interrogate the responsibilities of response, and have the power to change the public discourse about migration. Migrant forms effect a generic turn and a reversal of agencies between life and art, between experience and expression, between physical action and events in the

25 *Hindutva*, literally “Hindu-ness,” is a term to denote a strident Hinduism as cultural identity, originating in an ideology (usually traced back to V.D. Savarkar) formulated to connect Indian nationalism and culture with the religion of Hinduism.

mind and the cultural psyche. They cross various invisible and prohibited borders—formal, political, and social. They do not cross to cross back. This book takes its place in this emergent ecology, both speaking to it and participating in it.

Our Place in the Field

As a work of critical mediation, this volume enters the field of migration studies, which has been developing rapidly in recent times in response to the world we inhabit and the increasing precarity of habitation within it. Emma Cox, Sam Durrant, David Farrier, Lyndsey Stonebridge, and Agnes Woolley’s compendial and visionary *Refugee Imaginaries* radically re-maps refugee experience, placing it at the core rather than the margins of modernity.²⁶ With this volume, we share an interdisciplinary approach, an engagement with “narrative as a knowledge base,”²⁷ and a commitment to foregrounding the work the humanities can do in imagining and rehumanizing forced migration. With Lyndsey Stonebridge’s committed, passionate, and moving *Writing and Righting* (2021), it hopes to take on, in a small way, the challenge of registering and understanding inequity and trying to effect change.²⁸ Her earlier book, *Placeless People* (2018), has been inspirational in blending law, moral philosophy, politics, and literature in its exploration of the writing of displacement after the Second World War. But while she traces a line from European Jewish emigration to Palestinian refugee experience, our book widens the remit to find place for many other refugee groups and experiences, as well as migrations that are cognate in some ways but distinct in others. Clair Wills’s exploration of what V.S. Naipaul calls “the human story” of strangeness in postwar Britain, *Lovers and Strangers* (2017), has been a model for how to combine a revelatory range of sources (including “new urban

26 Emma Cox et al., eds., *Refugee Imaginaries: Research Across the Humanities* (Edinburgh University Press, 2020).

27 *Ibid.*, 4.

28 Lyndsey Stonebridge, *Writing and Righting: Literature in the Age of Human Rights* (Oxford University Press, 2021).

art forms”) as historical evidence, and how to unpack the entangled histories of white and non-white immigration.²⁹ *Travelling While Black* (2020), a powerful collection of essays written by Nanjala Nyabola as an advocate for refugees as well as a person on the move, probes the tensions between mobility and belonging in eye-opening ways; there are synergies with our book but our foci are specific.³⁰ Sam Durrant and Catherine Lord’s *Essays in Migratory Aesthetics* (2007) has shown the way by addressing the impact of human movement on aesthetic practice: a preoccupation that we take forward and develop at a different stage in the history of cultural aesthetics.³¹ Josephine McDonagh’s capacious exploration of the shaping of nineteenth-century British fiction by mass emigration in her *Literature in a Time of Migration* (2021), and her intuition of an analogy between the crossing of print genres and the dynamics of borders, are methodologically contiguous to our interest in the entwinement of migration, knowledge, and form, though our range and remit — both formal and temporal — are distinct.³² The vanguard volume edited by Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, Gil Loescher, Katy Long, and Nando Sigona, *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies* (2014), is nothing short of foundational, being arguably the first comprehensive survey of the still-emergent field of refugee studies. The subsequent expansion of the field meets those pioneering editors’ invitation and challenge to new researchers to build “a sense of common purpose.”³³ Thanks to

29 Clair Wills, *Lovers and Strangers: An Immigrant History of Post-War Britain* (Allen Lane, 2017), xxii. “Human story” is a phrase from V.S. Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival: A Novel* (Penguin, 1987), 109.

30 Nanjala Nyabola, *Travelling While Black: Essays Inspired by a Life on the Move* (Hurst & Co., 2020).

31 Sam Durrant and Catherine M. Lord, eds., *Essays in Migratory Aesthetics: Cultural Practices between Migration and Art-Making* (Rodopi, 2007).

32 Josephine McDonagh, *Literature in a Time of Migration: British Fiction and the Movement of People, 1815–1876* (Oxford University Press, 2021). See also Josephine McDonagh and Jonathan Sachs, “Introduction: Literature and Migration,” *Modern Philology* 118, no. 2 (2020): 204–12.

33 Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al., “Introduction: Refugee and Forced Migration Studies in Transition,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced*

their correction of the bias in the field towards current practices and policy development at the cost of history and lived experience, we no longer need to make a case for either a historical enquiry or a study that sets up “from below.”³⁴

While we are privileged to have the ground to build on, and a common place to speak from, our intervention is particular, using knowledge and form as its entry points. Questions of law, institutions, human rights, refugee protection, and policy are practical realities of forced migration that inevitably underpin many of the pieces in this book. But its dwelling is the interspace between encounter and ecology, where new conditions of knowing and unknowing come into play and new modes of expression are born; where the voices of migrants touch and change the voices of those who meet them; where a ruthlessly singular condition of being demands and exacts radical representation.

We attempt and enact more than we theorize. As we forge our own discursive modes, we consider the many meanings and operations of both migrancy and knowledge, including their imaginative remit, and explore pain and privation as well as joy and liberation. This confronts us with the knotty relation between ethics and aesthetics that such an approach entails as well as illuminates: We embrace the dilemmas that come with the territory to deepen our understanding of the stakes, even if we do not always find the perfect solution or register or mean. Our book is unusual in the methods it deploys in considering the past to understand the present and imagine a future. We make a start, albeit in an indicative and preliminary way, with bringing human and non-human migration into dialogue through considerations of elusive knowledge and singular forms. But all of this we do with a wide readership in mind — not just scholars and academics, but anyone interested in the subject, including those whose lives it is often about, some of whom feature in the

Migration Studies, ed. Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al. (Oxford University Press, 2014), 17.

34 Jérôme Elie, “Histories of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies*, ed. Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al., 30–31.

book. To this end, we have aimed to keep it readable and light on citation, while nevertheless providing sufficient mooring for readers to orient themselves.

Migrant Knowledge, Migrant Forms: The Collection

People, things, ideas, and languages have crossed borders since the earliest of times. Such passages have entailed epistemic shifts and encounters, transactions, and transformations. The knowledge that migrants carry with them is one manifestation of “migrant knowledge”—gained in the act of crossing. But it permeates receiving cultures too. Encounters with the strange disrupt our normal experiences of knowledge—because the other is unknowable, un-ownable, and disorienting. Such meetings demand and produce knowledges we are not accustomed to, about the self as well as the other. Then there is the inbuilt migrancy of knowledge which forms alchemies with particular experiences of mobility. But there is also the recalibration of “knowing” itself: when factual knowledge and its rationalizations become the preserve of a regime, an attunement or a quality of attention emerges as an alternative episteme. This book taps into these interconnected operations of mobile knowledge, thinking about migration and what it does with, and to, knowledge. Epistemic experiences that elude existing paradigms often come into play—such as knowingness, disknowledge, or the “migrant unknowledge” explored by Jonathan Gil Harris here—produced by “seeming familiarity” in unfamiliar terrain and casting light on the desires and fantasies at the heart of human knowledge projects. In its plural dimensions and functions, migrant knowledge is characterized by the connections it is at once formed by and mobilizes across disciplines, experiences, and practices, as Olga Demetriou, Efi Savvides, and Akid Hassan’s collaborative essay demonstrates: the “common space of authorship” it examines is almost metonymic of the assemblage the book as a whole both embodies and probes.

But our volume offers more than critique: it is a creative intervention too. The deeper we explored migrant knowledge, the

clearer it became that it has an intimate relation to form; seeking a commensurate expressive medium, it focuses a process and perhaps a habitus that are particular to the condition of migrancy. The book mines this interrelation, revealing and enacting this search, and at times finding or forging forms that are “migrant” in one of several senses. Certain art forms — say, stories or music — have an inherent migrancy; however stringently the borders are policed, they slip through. These speak naturally to the variously composite realities of migration in our lives. Others are generated by the condition of migration itself. Some of these have recognizable artistic contours (a sculpture responding to it, for example, or paintings from the frontline) — from Lili Andreiux’s depictions of the Gurs transit camp in 1940 to the migrant Durgas of Kolkata. Others — from Christoph Büchel’s *Barca Nostra* to mobile photos by migrants of relics of their abandoned lives — can be shaped into artifacts to mobilize their potential for cultural and political work. “Migrant” forms encompass both, along with the multiple agencies possible. It is this larger category that our volume posits, develops, and puts to work — arising out of the reality of contemporary migration and in response to the representational crisis it has created, the extreme discursive inadequacy it has presented us with. Simultaneously, the book tries to understand the dynamic between these forms and the knowledges they negotiate. The essays and artworks here — some of them discursive interventions that acquire aesthetic shape — are part of that larger community forming around the world, but as yet lacking a name. “Migrant form” brings into view an emergent generic formation, which cuts across established paradigms. Our book is a collective exploration of this possibility.

One of the questions the volume asks through practice is whether forms of art — writing, sculpting, photography, drawing, making of any kind — can provide radical, resistant alternatives which wrest forms of life from what Giorgio Agamben

called forms of law.³⁵ Could they even provide a kind of asylum that does not need to be asked for? “An economy of the unlost,” shorn of superfluties, whose contours develop out of absence and sparseness?³⁶ Could a sense of identity and belonging slowly take *form* out of the matter of estrangement and exclusion from known categories? Can a claim to rights emerge from a state of rightlessness? “Mysteries in the clarity of mind / Clear, sometimes, in their absence,” to borrow the words of Yousif M. Qasmiyeh, as he writes the camp — writing out of his childhood in the Baddawi refugee camp at the northern border of Lebanon, finding space for hope in dislocation, a shape of the self in fragments, and a kind of home in writing at the crossing-point between atopia, dystopia, and utopia.³⁷ The poetry of the camp becomes a kind of negative image, as Yousif’s prose-poem in this book intimates: “When we say the camp, we say what it is that is not a camp.”

In tune with its subject, then, the volume dares its own crossings: across geographical as well as disciplinary boundaries, discursive worlds and genres, the scholarly and the personal. Its unorthodox shape pushes us to the limits of the habitual practice of making a book; somehow it both challenges and enables us to be true to the texture of lives in transit, and to the difficulty of assembling a collection on migrant knowledge and migrant forms. It is divided into sections, which feature — and mark — a variety of formats, clustered according to the preliminary principles of theme (such as human and non-human refuge), genre or medium (such as essays, poems, meditations, conversations and dialogues, interviews, multi-media memoirs), and embodied recollections or interventions (visual, verbal, aural, or mate-

35 See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford University Press, 1998), chap. 4 “Forms of Law,” 49–62, and Giorgio Agamben, *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life*, trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford University Press, 2013).

36 The phrase is from Anne Carson’s *Economy of the Unlost: Reading Simonides of Keos with Paul Celan* (Princeton University Press, 2002).

37 Yousif M. Qasmiyeh, “‘Time’: Part VI,” in *Writing the Camp* (Broken Sleep Books, 2021), 56.

rial, or, as with the migrant art of food, multisensory). But the larger structure allows resonances and synergies to spill over and across the thresholds, as they must, pointing up the fragility of boundaries even as it acknowledges our need for them: a duality that cuts to the experiential reality of migrancy. As Valerie Forman shows in her account of crossings at the southern borders of the us, migrants challenge border logic even while they appeal to it.

The origins of this book lie in a public event that we organized in Cambridge in late 2019: *Migrant Knowledge, Early Modern and Beyond*. This gathering—of talks, poetry readings, conversations, an exhibition, a game, a story-weaving workshop, and, unexpectedly, impromptu singing and dancing—not only grappled with the imaginative and ethical impact of encountering the other but also with the polysemy of “migrant knowledge” and its provenance, beginning in the early modern world and moving freely across periods to dwell on its urgencies in our own times. In the end almost an anti-conference in the unconventionality and spontaneity of its conversation, the occasion generated a field of energy that we wanted to channel into a book that translates and further activates that sense of community and possibility.

One of our ventures was to bring together artists, activists, and scholars responding to the reality of mass migration that touches all our lives, and refugees and migrants who are actually leaving, crossing, arriving, and negotiating a new reality with its human as well as legal demands. There were resistances and dilemmas to overcome. Well-meaning but pious compassion was one of them, as though the plight of poor, endangered, disenfranchised people braving the waves in places remote from us only served to measure our incommunicable difference from them; an over-wary reason for comfortable, middle-class respondents not to tune in, not to share a platform; an emotional palliative that ends up preserving the safety of the status quo. The risk we wanted to avoid was, instead, that of reinforcing division and precluding dialogue by insisting on radical difference. The payoffs—intellectual, human, and ethical—were im-

mense. This book is committed to keeping that interspace open and dynamic, and not turning bridges into walls through sincere but ultimately facile benevolence.

Drowning the dykes between people-in-transit, asylum-seekers, refugees, economic migrants, settled migrants, artists, activists, and scholars, this collection does not stop at aesthetic humanitarianism — already available — but aims at a more radical intervention. It demonstrates the capacity of migrant knowledge and expressions to generate an impassioned reimagining of both the experience of migrancy and the possibility of creative, efficacious, and honest response. No wonder we resonated with the work of the Migration Museum — represented in the book by curators Aditi Anand and Sue McAlpine (with a response by Clair) — who invited a mixed cast of migrants to contribute to their exhibition, in order to rebelliously reconceptualize migration as a shared heritage while allowing space for individual or distinct experiences of it. The capaciousness of our concept of migrancy may seem to risk slippage between categories. But the available differentiations often map onto more dubious distinctions between deserving or forced refugees and undeserving or voluntary migrants, between “illegal” and “unauthorized,” or “aliens” and “immigrants,” or (à la Meloni) “migrants” and “shipwrecked people”: distinctions currently subjected to an unconscionable and strategic twist in Britain’s governmental rhetoric which labels refugees as “migrants” to deny them humanitarian protection.³⁸ How legible are the particulars of precarity to the taxonomic gaze? Faraj Alnasser, one of our interlocutors, who came from Syria and sought asylum in the UK, was fleeing a war-ravaged country. But he was also fleeing the specter of a sexual persecution that would inevitably thwart authenticity, identity, and self-expression, driven not

38 See asylum law specialist David Neale’s article on the UK government’s denial of asylum-seeking Albanian boys and men of the status of “real victims.” David Neale, “Albanian Children Come to Britain for Safety. Instead, They Get Home Office Cruelty,” *The Guardian*, February 8, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/feb/08/albanian-children-britain-home-office-asylum-seekers>.

just by political exigency but bodily knowledge too.³⁹ Our use of “migrants” or “migration” is inevitably laced with the vexation around terminology, its contestability and manipulability. But it is not intended to be a homogenizing gesture, reducing difference to sameness; instead, it is a refusal to be complicit in the regimes of categorization, and to be alert to continuities as well as distinctions between different kinds of liminal experience, as also to the complexities of choice and enforcement.

“The Antinomies of Exile” and the Dilemmas of Response

Borders are fraught sites, places of paradox. Porous and rigid at once, they invite and resist crossings, conjoin home with un-home, and elicit unwonted kindness as much as they draw out ruthlessness of both predictable and unsuspected kinds. Governments strenuously shore them up, while for individuals and communities, they can be plots of invitation. As the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine has unfolded, Europe has seen spontaneous hospitality and warmth at several of its borders. In Poland, Ukrainian refugees have been received with compassion and open arms. Yet the same border force had violently pushed Kurdish, Syrian, and Afghan refugees back into Belarus in November 2021.⁴⁰ Non-white students (from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East) also fleeing the war have not only been repelled at

39 I mention this with Faraj’s permission. One might compare the new demography of climate refugees who, although their numbers will no doubt expand exponentially in the near future, are nevertheless not currently covered by the UN’s framework for deciding on refugee status (according to the categorization criteria of the UN Convention of 1951). On gender and employment migration, see Martin F. Manalansan IV, “Queer Intersections: Sexuality and Gender in Migration Studies,” *The International Migration Review* 40, no. 1 (2006): 224–49, and on gendered bodies via-à-vis refugee law, see Sudeep Dasgupta, “Sexual and Gender-Based Asylum and the Queering of Global Space: Reading Desire, Writing Identity and the Unconventionality of the Law,” in *Refugee Imaginaries*, ed. Cox et al.

40 See Lorenzo Tondo’s moving coverage of what Europe would rather not look in the face: Lorenzo Tondo, “Embraced or Pushed Back: On the Polish Border, Sadly, Not All Refugees Are Welcome,” *The Guardian*, March 4, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/commentis->

borders such as Przemyśl, but deprioritized and sometimes left behind even by Ukraine's own evacuation efforts. Romani refugees from Ukraine have faced discrimination at every step of their journey: from the train station in Lviv to reception points at the Polish border and buses, cars, employers, and landlords in Kraków.⁴¹ In the same week as Spain introduced an express system to take in refugees from Ukraine, we had to struggle not to blink as we watched the video of a young African man fearfully climbing down a border-fence from Morocco into the Spanish enclave of Melilla to be pepper-sprayed and beaten brutally to the ground by at least six armed policemen. The interior minister of Spain defended this act as "proportionate" to the aggression of border breaches: the video shows a bedraggled, defenseless Black youth being viciously thrashed by a gang of white men even before he lands on Spanish ground.⁴² The rhetoric of those refugees who are like us versus those too different to count has hung like a cloud on borderlands otherwise made permeable by humanity and hospitality. Meanwhile, thousands of Ukrainian refugees have been stuck at airports in Iași, Warsaw, and elsewhere in Europe, waiting for the UK Home Office to reply to their applications. Problems and delays continue to trouble the official stance of open welcome.

As Regina Schwartz reminds us, with Rowan Williams's response, the economy of abundance that the "love command" of the Bible offers could be an alternative model to the policy of nation-states, and turn our encounter with strangers into a confrontation with our own vulnerabilities. It is just such a

free/2022/mar/04/embraced-or-pushed-back-on-the-polish-border-sadly-not-all-refugees-are-welcome.

- 41 As late as May 10, 2022, eighty Roma women and children from Ukraine were stuck in a hostel in Kraków. See Weronika Strzyżyńska, "Meet Us Before You Reject Us': Ukraine's Roma Refugees Face Closed Doors in Poland," *The Guardian*, May 10, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/may/10/ukraine-roma-refugees-poland>.
- 42 Sam Jones, "Spanish Minister Defends Police Accused of Brutality at Melilla Border," *The Guardian*, March 6, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/06/spanish-minister-defends-police-accused-brutality-melilla-border>.

challenge that we saw Thomas More facing his early modern Brexiteers with. But when resources are desperately stretched, love is a difficult gift. The unspeakable conditions at Manston asylum center, described in despicably agricultural terms as a “holding,” nevertheless speak of the exhaustion of human and material supplies, even as it puts under a spotlight the gap between the anxiety and the facts, between perceived and real (and falling) numbers of asylum-seekers, between the institutional rhetoric and increasing processing delay of asylum-applications in Britain. There is indeed a long tradition behind the exaggeration of the limits to resources, going back to Elizabeth I’s draft proclamation which has come under scrutiny lately. But the fear from which these distortions proceed is real, as is the perception of threat. Real strain can be politically manipulated by turning migrants into pawns: New York declared an emergency on October 8, 2022, when the number of migrants sent there by Republican states pushed the city to breaking point. One of the challenges facing the humanities, as well as the arts more specifically, is to accommodate difficult, unpleasant affects such as domestic insecurity, fear, and resentment, and to be unsentimentally attentive, if only to effect social change. Nor is this limited to current affairs. Even ancient Athens, known as the great hegemonic city, had carefully in-built transaction, calculation, and political interest at the heart of its hospitality and protection, as Euripides’s *Heracleidae* shows, and the fear of refugees is never far from the asylum the *polis* offers.⁴³ Palermo, the Sicilian city which has committedly remained open to strangers as Italy has increasingly swerved right in our times, the liminal place which has been so conducive to plurality and mutual aid, has this statue ensconced in a central piazza (fig. 1.11): the Genio di Palermo, the protective deity of Palermo, a bearded old man with a serpent, embodying the alien in local lore, coiled round him and nursing at his breast.

43 See Angeliki Tzanetou, *City of Suppliants: Tragedy and the Athenian Empire* (University of Texas Press, 2012), esp. chap. 3.



Fig. 1.11. *Genio di Palermo*, Palazzo Pretorio. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

It is a fascinating emblem for a city which has for centuries been hospitable to foreigners, whether as traders, invaders, conquerors, travelers, or refugees. But welcoming the other has always been inseparable from anxieties about opening the self up to consumption. Several of the seven versions in the city have a motto wrapped around the figure of the Genio — a tough one: “Panormus conca aurea suos devorat alienos nutrit” (“Palermo [all port], golden basin, devours its own and nourishes the foreigner”). So this symbol of benevolent hybridity has an unassimilable adage, resonant of the tangle of feelings that encoun-

tering the other throws at us. This, too, is an artistic response to migration: take that.

Migrant forms that must counter such resistance have to enter dialogue with it. We cannot yet offer all the answers to this in the realm of art, but we can begin by registering the need to grapple with the irresolubles facing any responsible project of response. I saw a moving example in action at a public workshop arranged by Stories in Transit—an organization in Palermo which is committed to creating a space for cultural expression for young migrants—where teenagers from many places, speaking diverse languages, took up a local story embedded in Palermo’s history and passed it round, each adding a line to it that brought in their own, foreign story, and history, grafting it onto the root. In the end it produced an interwoven narrative that was sung to drums and guitars, and then played by puppets, with a joy that was both disruptive and reparative in its performative crossing of cultural, national, and ethnic barriers. Valentina Castagna and Marina Warner, who founded Stories in Transit, converse in our volume with Saïfoudiny Diallo and Clelia Bartoli about their consortium, Giocherenda, and give us insights into the “relational aesthetics” through which they negotiate belonging and indeed citizenship.⁴⁴ *Trade Winds*, the open-ended installation created by Susan Stockwell for our event in St. Peter’s Church—part of Kettle’s Yard, an art gallery in Cambridge—also created an environment where material and product were in service of encounter, as Carla Suthren’s response here suggests, generating a collaborative questioning of the paradoxical symbiosis between money and movement, trade and tide, shore and sea, and containment and freedom. It consisted of a flotilla of boats made of paper currency and travel tickets from countries from which the bulk of the migration to

44 A term coined by Nicholas Bourriaud to describe art that works through encounter, inter-subjectivity, and social context, in Nicholas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Simone Pleasance, Fronza Woods, and Mathieu Copeland (Les presses du réel, 2002).

Europe has taken place, crossing a sea made out of copper coins. As Derek Walcott wrote, “the Sea is History.”⁴⁵

The paradox of borders and border-crossings extends to our epistemic experience and manifests in our expressive practices. There is an undeniable imaginative yield in unsettled knowledge, caught in the act of passage; in living and thinking in multiple languages and time-zones; even in radical insecurity. In her part of her collaborative meditation with A.E. (Alicia) Stallings, Angela Leighton explores the inherent diaspora of language and the flow of art forms into one another, through the sound-crossings that map the “perpetual migrations” of poetry. What Amit Chaudhuri calls “mishearing” is a migrant form born out of the imaginative freedom, unique pleasure, even privilege, of being out of place, the aural counterpart of “a plurality of visions” that Said — significantly borrowing a term from music — calls “contrapuntal.”⁴⁶ Amit suggests that when we hear a tune in a place where we have arrived, we remake a familiar tune from home, filtered and transformed by different notes from a new world of sounds. This is not fusion but a new form where both the original and the subsequently encountered retain their essence but interact to form a found music: produced by a sudden moment of contact and a conceptual crossing, revealing an unforeseen relation. What kind of knowingness and unknowing does this “form” comprise, and how does it inflect the temporality of the musical experience at both the artist’s and the hearer’s ends? Sound — like form, as form — is bound up in place and environment. After all, as the Anglophone Caribbean poet Kamau Braithwaite said, reflecting on “nation language,” “the hurricane does not roar in pentameters.”⁴⁷ Yet we might also remember Naipaul’s response to Wiltshire through the lens of the colonial education in Trinidad that taught him Wordsworth in third grade, seeing an “immense Lake District solitude” in the

45 Derek Walcott, *The Star-Apple Kingdom* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979), 25.

46 Said, “Exile,” 186.

47 Kamau Braithwaite, *History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry* (New Beacon Books, 1984), 10.

bent figure of an old farmer in Salisbury — “a figure of literature in that ancient landscape.”⁴⁸ Is this culpably apolitical, as Salman Rushdie and Derek Walcott thought, or the deep politics of migrant double-seeing which complicates the relation between privilege and privation, owning and owing?

Migration as an act that straddles mind and body — and exile as a crossing of barriers not only of territory but of thought — has implications for spatial relations, exchanges, and movements in a variety of contexts. The theater is a particular one. As Pip Williams, dramaturg, director, and actor, shows, it demands that we migrate into the post-COVID-19 worlds with reimagined contracts and a recalibrated understanding of the porous borders between artist and participant, and between times, places, and spaces in the performance space. Angela ponders how poetry itself is a crossing in sounds — “from word to word [...], mouth to ear, ear to memory.” At times, even the boundary between matter and mind proves porous in the migrant condition: the “object” that Dine (Saïfoudiny) — crossing over physically and hazardously from Guinea to Palermo — brought with him and presents to us in this book is a story; as Naipaul said about the drifters in 1950s London: “[their] principal possessions were their stories. And their stories spilled easily out of them.”⁴⁹ Gabriel Josipovici’s reverie takes us into a deeper blur: the inherent porosity of boundaries in the mind. The threshold between known and unknown, self and other, home and un-home, abundance and scarcity, is permeable, like narrative itself. We try to keep both the intransigence of borders and their penetrability in view.

But the sublimations of metaphor can be a treacherous shore. For, as Said wrote, “exile is compelling to think about, but terrible to experience.”⁵⁰ The moment we acknowledge the poetic life of crossings, of what W.S. Graham calls “speaking withershins,” “[so] that somehow something may move across / The caught

48 Naipaul, *The Enigma of Arrival*, 15.

49 *Ibid.*, 155.

50 Said, “Exile,” 173.

habits of language,” we are caught between the human indignity of forced uprooting and the lure of migrancy as a resonant place in the mind (with the exhilarating risk of dwelling on thresholds, the pleasure and play it can entail).⁵¹ The inverse relation we noted between the harrowing of crossings in life and the representational power and even joy of crossings in art has the potential to be freeing, because borders and barriers not only keep us out but hem us in too — safe enclosures can tip over into prisons. But it can also incur the risk that Said warned us to resist: the temptation to make exile a poetic condition or aesthetic capital, transforming and transvaluing its irredeemable estrangement into “a potent, even enriching motif of modern culture”; to “banalise its mutilations” by thinking of the content of exile literature as “beneficially humanistic.” Our book looks this risk in the face and negotiates it by grappling with, rather than evading, the dilemmas and dualities of both the migrant condition and the act of expressing or registering it in the media available to us. It engages with what Said calls the “antinomies of exile.”⁵² But from where we stand, now, it approaches a middle ground between his stark alternatives. For Said, the experience of exile is “almost by design irrecoverable” between “the modest refuge provided by subjectivity” and “the abstractions of mass politics.”⁵³ The interventions in this book, in their distinct ways, either present or intimate new ways of responding to forced migration, refugeedom, exile, emigration, and other kinds of movement that are scrupulously true to the experience itself; new registers that stake a place between obscuring impersonality and impotent or alienated subjectivity; and artifacts that situate themselves at the interface between the private and the collective, initiating a dialogue between the two. Indeed, the book dares, and is designed, to be an attempt at recovery.

51 W.S. Graham, “The Constructed Space,” in *New Collected Poems*, ed. Matthew Francis (Faber and Faber, 2004), 162.

52 Said, “Exile,” 173–74.

53 *Ibid.*, 176.



Fig. 1.12. *Barca Nostra* by Christoph Büchel, Venice Biennale 2019. Photo by Subha Mukherji.

Acts of salvage as a way of inscribing and animating disaster are, of course, fraught with ethical risk. But could the alternative slip into what Maurice Blanchot calls the disaster of passivity with respect to the disaster?⁵⁴ Büchel's quickly controversial *Barca Nostra* is a case in point (figs. 1.12 and 1.13). It was the hulk of a huge boat which sank between Libya and Lampedusa in April 2015, taking with it 1100 migrants on board, with only twenty-eight surviving, displayed on the lagoon in the Venice Biennale 2019. It landed badly in many quarters: there was an understandable unease and a suspicion of the opportunism of art feeding off other people's disasters. Is this a living thing being turned into a woven thing?⁵⁵ Ironically, conscientious objectors to the installation found themselves on the wrong side of his-

54 Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, trans. Ann Smock (University of Nebraska Press, 1995).

55 Categories used by Erasmus. See Desiderius Erasmus, *On Copia of Words and Ideas*, trans. Donald B. King and H. David Rix (Marquette University Press, 2012), 50.



Fig. 1.13. *Barca Nostra* by Christoph Büchel, Venice Biennale 2019. Photo by Subha Mukherji.

tory, with the hard-right, anti-immigration Salvini condemning the display — the very man who refused, that same summer, to let a rescue boat with 150 migrants stranded for eighteen days in perilous conditions off Lampedusa to dock, a boat which Spain eventually took in on humanitarian grounds.⁵⁶ On visiting the *Barca Nostra*, I found it strangely moving. The marks of battery and violence on its body were vivid. It was not framed as art,

⁵⁶ See Daniel Dombey, “Spain Offers to Take Refugee Boat Turned Away by Italy,” *Financial Times*, August 19, 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/0b7a0aae-c1ab-11e9-a8e9-296ca66511c9>. For supplementary details, see Angela Barnes, “Spain to Allow Open Arms Migrants to Disembark in Mallorca,” *Euronews*, August 18, 2019, <https://www.euronews.com/2019/08/18/open-arms-migrant-rescue-boat-rejects-spanish-offer-of-safe-haven>.

or perhaps framed as not-art. Parked in a remote corner of the lagoon, forlorn, open to the elements, it had been allowed to rust — and was hard to find. We took several boats and got lost many times. So it felt like something we had stumbled on, more found than made. Not so much parasitic as a fossil of experience, poised between a relic and an artifact, it stood there like a huge living presence that was at once an accusatory witness and a meditative object. Of course, those who were in the ship are not there — but they are the ones who haunt, animate, and confer meaning on it. And those are not pearls that were *their* eyes — the barge refuses the kind of sea-change that the invisible Ariel sings to Ferdinand, washed ashore alive, in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*: a song that both describes and effects an aesthetic transformation of the macabre into the exquisite as he sings of Ferdinand's father, supposedly drowned in a shipwreck.⁵⁷ It is, rather, a rich and strange *exuvia*, to use Gell's term for the traces and leavings harvested from a living body, which preserve personhood and even presence in a distributed form.⁵⁸ Such an uncanny remnant confounds our ways of knowing or making sense. So, divisive as it is — as it must be — it provokes us to ask what new vulnerabilities and confessions, and indeed what new deceptions of art, such formal negotiations of the precarious crossings of our time, make available. And, crucially, it raises questions about agency.

In this volume, forms that come out of the experience of crossings meet those that emerge from our encounters with it. But they are bound by a shared awareness, a responsibility. For it is not just critical or historical engagement that is answerable. Aesthetic practice itself needs to be repositioned if it is to rise to the political and human challenges of migration. “Migrant forms” are the vehicles and the means of this imaginative reorientation — or an “alter-aesthetics,” to use Supriya Chaudhuri's term — variously presented or posited here. In

57 See William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Houghton Mifflin, 1974), I.ii.397–402.

58 Gell, *Art and Agency*, 11–15, 116, and 146n.

Brian Cummings's reading of Erasmus, metaphor, or, in a larger sense, literary form itself, becomes a home away from home, a space of migrant domicile. So, the specifically excursive and discontinuous shape of the adages provides the perfect form for the ambiguity of home for Erasmus: the everywhere — and elsewhere — of the one little room into which he can disappear. It is no accident that in so many of our critical offerings, form becomes the very subject of contemplation, while in the creative negotiations, it either fractures or realigns into new shapes. The question of form, it seems, has always been inseparable from the experience of migrancy. Anupam Basu shows us in his historical essay how the mobility of early modern vagrants leaks into the narrative form of rogue pamphlets which become the vehicle for an emergent “unsettled subjectivity” and position themselves against the containing structure and fixing imperative of poor laws. In our own time, Alicia wrestles to find a literary form in which to write without exploitation about the Aegean Sea and its tragic load from a place of safety, and alights on the epigram and the epitaph, on lists, and finally on myth and music, to ponder and process both distance and closeness. Angela's complementary piece, even as it sails poetically across forms and languages, is brought up short against her knowledge of the bitterness of Luigi Pirandello's African sea and rests in the end on the precarious boundary between sound and muteness, with its own end-stopped poetic. Rachel Spence, encountering the great city of crossings, is moved to layer and blend image, poetry, and prose to meditate on the ultramarine beyond the sea that travels to Venice from far away to blend with its own blue. To capture the migrations that underwrite Venice even as they are erased, that make it a place vivid with absent elsewheres, no settled shape would do, but a splintered, refractive palimpsest. These experiments may seem, but are not, a world apart from the *non-finito* of the migrant Durga, its tentative, interim style

blending modes that have not mixed before, miming search rather than arrival.⁵⁹

And how do those who are speaking from the heart of the experience negotiate the wholeness and comfort of received form? Anthony Vahni Capildeo's multi-form poem in this book plays and twists and turns to trace the shape of "crossing time" along the "whaleroad swanroad path of exile" to disintegrate and find truth and collaboration, finally, in the understood loss of form, broken across blank space: "Just look how / I've lost form." Mina Gorji's fugitive forms forge a provisional home for the creatures in flight who are her subjects, evoking homes lost but stirring still in new, half-formed shelters, but her subject is also, perhaps, her own migrant subjectivity. Yousif's formally hybrid piece in the book is an irregular traversal, splicing time present and time past with a "future subject to many pasts," to capture the radical temporality of the camp. More immediately tied to the exigencies of asylum is the resistant form of Kurdish Iranian writer, journalist, and film-maker Behrouz Boochani's memoir, *No Friend But the Mountains* (2019). Tapped out on his mobile phone as a series of WhatsApp messages in Farsi during his five-year incarceration (without charge or trial) in Australia's offshore detention center on Manus Island for arriving by boat as a refugee, it compounds its obligatory position as outsider to both institutional law and the law of genre with a defiant mixture of formal fragments.⁶⁰ His very mode of mimesis is a refusal of ordinary realism, an estrangement from familiar reference, because in Manus, nothing is but what is not: Corridor M is "Little Kurdistan," the prisoner Reza is the Gentle Giant, and the magnificent mango tree is both of the island and of the author's

59 *Non-finito* is an Italian term of art, referring to an aesthetic of the unfinished, especially in sculpture.

60 Behrouz Boochani, *No Friend but the Mountains: Writing from Manus Prison*, trans. Omid Tofighian (Picador, 2019). His film *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* was likewise shot on a mobile phone inside the Manus prison; it was a form of counter-reportage when the Australian authorities were denying journalists access to Manus Island, denying the refugees held there any means of expression, and actively suppressing refugee history.

Kurdish hometown, as are Maysam The Whore and The Cunning Young Man—a sense of the uncanny that his translator Omid Tafighian calls “horrific surrealism” in his “list of guiding principles” for “a situated schema for reading” the work, as if it challenges reading itself to find new bearings.⁶¹ Bertolt Brecht, a refugee writer who ceaselessly experimented with satire, diary entries, and autobiographical stories, and was hugely influenced by episodic travelers’ tales and conversational forms, sat on his material for *Refugee Conversations*, waiting for a suitable form to emerge. Written in exile and never wholly finished, it was published posthumously as a weave of loose fragments with dialogues between two refugees from Nazi Germany in that most iconic of transitory spaces for fleeting encounters—a railway station café-cum-waiting-room.⁶² Naipaul, writing out of his dislocated, fractured self, long wrestled with the received apparatus of the novel, exploded linearity because it felt false to his migrant trajectory, and created his own form—blurring the lines between autobiography, fiction, cultural commentary, reportage, and elegy: witness *In a Free State* (1971), *The Enigma of Arrival* (1987), or *A Turn in the South* (1989). “I have arrived at this form slowly,” he said in an interview, “Because of my background and the nature of my life, because I was not given knowledge of where I came from.”⁶³ It is as if prefabricated forms are like the ready-made homes in Theodor Adorno’s *Minima Moralia*, written in exile in 1951, where “the house is past,” like language.⁶⁴ To find a home in writing, refugees and emigrés—and perhaps travelers too—need to reject the com-

61 Ibid., 240–43, and Omid Tafighian, “No Friend but the Mountains: Translator’s Reflections,” in *ibid.*, 366.

62 The book was written mostly in Helsinki and partly in the US, c. 1940–1941, and first published in German in 1961. The first English translation appeared in 2020; see Bertolt Brecht, *Bertolt Brecht’s Refugee Conversations*, ed. Tom Kuhn, trans. Romy Fursland (Bloomsbury/Methuen Drama, 2020).

63 See Jason Cowley, “vs Naipaul,” *Prospect Magazine*, June 19, 1998, <https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/vsnaipaul>.

64 Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. Edmund F.N. Jephcott (Verso, 2020), 42.

modification of subjectivity of off-the-rack genres. So Natalya Din-Kariuki unpacks the function of early modern travel writing as a migrant genre — “extravagant,” might we say? — that engages and transforms established paradigms of literary form, and indeed canon. John Gallagher, on the other hand, unearths an alternative zone of migrant knowledge and articulation to the predominantly male culture of printed travel literature: the incomplete, fragmented accounts of migrant women in early modern London — in testimonial, legal, or ecclesiastical documents — are shown to emerge as a form that registers and enacts migrancy and its distinctive, gendered knowledges. This book brings into view the prehistory of “the archive of statelessness” that Cox and others identify as taking shape in the middle of the twentieth century, as well as opening up its evolving and continually innovative formal range in our times.⁶⁵ Yousif asks elsewhere who writes the archives — a question that the reality of migration has thrown in the face of the world. His poetic answer suggests a continual process in a scene of writing: “Only refugees can forever write the archive. / The camp owns the archive, not God.”⁶⁶

But art about migration does not only need to assert its own experiential truth against what Adorno calls the “administered world.”⁶⁷ It also needs to negotiate the points of friction between its own predilections and the matter of migration. The intersec-

65 Emma Cox et al., “Introduction,” in *Refugee Imaginaries*, ed. Cox et al., 3.

66 Yousif M. Qasmiyeh, “Writing the Camp,” in *Refugee Imaginaries*, ed. Cox et al., 323. But the essay also opens up the paradox and the spectrality of the camp as a scene of writing. It is interesting to read it against Urvashi Butalia’s *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (Duke University Press, 2000), which rewrites the archive by replacing the written word with the unwritten, weaving her history of the Partition entirely out of oral sources.

67 Cf. Theodor Adorno, *Dissonanzen: Musik in der verwalteten Welt* [Dissonances: music in the administered world] (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956). Adorno first used the term in a radio conversation with Max Horkheimer and Eugen Kogon in 1950, printed as “The Administered World, or the Crisis of the Individual,” in Max Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 13: *Nachgelassene Schriften 1949–1972* (Fischer, 1989), 121–42.

tion between the monumental and the evanescent in aesthetic engagements with migration illuminates a paradox at the heart of the migrant condition itself—wanting to belong, to settle, to become permanent residents on arrival, yet also being inextricably mobile and irreducibly transitory, dependent on appliances and media that allow a fugitive status and its facilities. As Supriya reminds us, migrant experience takes place not just across but along boundaries. Using a range of images, installations, and records across time, she taps into the duality between mobility and stasis in migrant life: remember how our migrant Goddess and her family are portrayed as they wait, trapped out of place. The irresolution is political, and migrant forms are art’s answers to this challenge—tuning into the representational impulses of selves in transit by holding this tension, negotiating it, and using it as a built-in ethical barometer. In a world full of “placeless people” (Stonebridge), they offer an alternative habitus for art which finds itself out of place in its traditional habitats. Yet in another sense, they also resist fixed habitation, whether deliberately or subliminally, remaining “unattached as tumbleweed” like Auden’s Jewish exile Rosetta.⁶⁸ Banksy, who may seem to have crossed back over into institutional artspace, drew a mural, in 2019, of a migrant child in a lifejacket holding a pink neon flame on a rotting Venetian wall which was already fading within weeks as the lagoon lapped away at it. Bhanu Kapil’s poetic translation of the ambivalence of home and the enigma of arrival is one of the voices in our book which tune into this provisionality. Issam Kourbaj, a Cambridge-based artist from Syria, has turned an Aleppo soap into an artifact—entitled *Don’t Wash Your Hands*—inscribing in his artwork an urge to dissolve itself. And he has made palm-sized boats out of recycled bicycle mudguards and packed them with matchsticks held by watery resin, evoking the little leaden boats that sail out of Syria with huddling refugees, which he sets on fire again and again in a repeated performance of precarity (fig. 1.14). A small fleet of these, crowded with spent matches, now nestles in the

68 Auden, *The Age of Anxiety*, 45.



Fig. 1.14. A boat from *Dark Water, Burning World* by Issam Kourbaj being passed around at the Migrant Knowledge event, Cambridge 2019. Photo by Subha Mukherji.

Gallery of the Islamic World in the British Museum.⁶⁹ Miniature and fragile, they are a defiantly anti-monumental response to both the scale of the crisis, and the traditional aesthetic impulse towards the immense and enduring. Meanwhile, their reused, discarded materials—cheap and adaptable, with scars and dents from their past lives—offer a migrant provocation in the face of the surrounding display of precious textiles and gems, glazed ceramics and tiles, metal filigree and opulent marble. They also interrogate the emblems of power from the Sutton Hoo ship burial in the room that leads to this gallery.

⁶⁹ Seven boats from Issam Kourbaj's series, *Dark Water, Burning World*, are in the Albukhary Foundation Gallery of the Islamic world, British Museum.



Fig. 1.15. *Precarious Passage* by Issam Kourbaj. Photo by Subha Mukherji.

Simon Goldhill’s conversation with Issam in our book explores the dynamic between geography and artistic identity, assertion and transformation, in his work—the tension at its core between privilege and curse, settlement and exile, building and destruction, longing and belonging. Together, they probe the place of politics, loss, and repurposing in the material of migrant art, and the knowledges such art might carry, or bury.

Occasionally, the dissolution is turned outwards; indeed at times it turns on history, and the narratives of migration. Issam has just created a new work, “*Precarious Passage*,” and donated it to the British Museum for Refugee Week (2023) (fig. 1.15). Here, one of his little boats perches on a hole burnt through the seven hundred pages of *A History of the World in 100 Objects* by Neil MacGregor.⁷⁰ Chosen as the 101st object in the updated

⁷⁰ Neil MacGregor, *A History of the World in 100 Objects* (Allen Lane, 2011).

2020 edition of MacGregor's 2010 British Museum/BBC Radio 4 series of the same name, the signature boat is at once delicately placed in the burnt out hole, and enacts a violent disruption of the textual history of humankind (embodied here by the elegant blue cover of the book), as well as, perhaps, of museum practice. MacGregor was, after all, Director of the British Museum from 2002 to 2015. While the singed edges of the cavity are caused by the heat of the drilling, given the role of the boats in Issam's artistic practice, they play on a certain knowingness about traversals — as though the pages were scorched by the matches heaped into the boat, in the process of being extinguished in the prehistory of the artwork. "Precarious Passage" resonates intimately with us as we wrap up this almost anti-book with its own disruptive moves.

Courting dispossession to decline the sublimations and translations of aesthetics may be one of the ways migrant forms find their home. The Durga idol is a fascinating example of this, in its inherently dissoluble, clayey form. At the end of the week in October when Durga and her companions visit the earth, the idols are immersed ceremonially in the river Ganges, in a ritual that keeps alive the sense of transience at the heart of art and its living material. It has impermanence and unpossessability built into its very conception: thus, it offers a perfect vehicle for "migrant" artifacts. But in 2020, the Chief Minister of West Bengal, a secularist, declared that the migrant Durga would be saved from being dissolved and preserved in a protected space. The artist did not yet know which museum or space. Is "saving" an act of safe-making that is out of tune with migrant aesthetic? Or is it a necessary act of political co-option? The Behala Art Fest (from which fig. 1.7, the migrant mural featuring earlier in this piece, came) was begun with the governing principle of placing this new imaginary in the open street rather than the enclosed gallery. The inner process began when, some eight years prior to that, the convenor, Sanatan Dinda, an acclaimed artist, stopped doing gallery shows as he was overcome by the urgency of making art that not only speaks to a common reality but remakes it. As Leon Trotsky said (though the saying is often mistakenly

attributed to Bertolt Brecht or to Vladimir Mayakovsky), art is not just a mirror which reflects but “a hammer which shapes.”⁷¹ When I went to see the wall with the migrant laborers in April 2022, the murals had been wiped out for new work for the next festival. Disappointed as I was, this felt peculiarly right and poignant. Similarly, The Good Chance’s “Theatres of Hope” — so central to the artistic encounters and inventive forms they generated — were temporary geodesic domes built in areas of high refugee population. The Migration Museum had temporary spaces and a mobile life when they took part in our event — but then they acquired a semi-permanent venue, and are currently looking for a permanent one. What these necessary — and in many ways hopeful — moves augur about the mobile dynamic between agencies, ownership, and migrant art may only become clearer in time. Will Amal move into a gallery one day, and if so, would it feel like the home she is looking for?

Leaving Home, Moving Things

Art as a home for the homeless and narratives as possessions are almost truisms. But what happens to our belongings when we move? What material for migrant forms can bare life supply? What are the few things that are inalienably ours, which we carry with us and hold on to? Wider reflections on the role of mobile objects that accompany us on our journeys, or survive our departures and relocations, or act as formal exemplars of fragmentary lives, appear in and thread through several contributions to this volume. Rosita D’Amora, for instance, shows how nimbly the Turkish turban as a mobile fashion-object crosses borders in early modern Europe to act as an agent at once of othering and of domesticating foreignness, unmooring identities even when they are meant to fix them. But it is in our “Moving Things” section that the singular role of objects in our passages is distilled.

71 Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, ed. William Keach, trans. Rose Strunsky (Haymarket Books, 2005), 120.



Fig. 1.16. Bhaager Ma: migrant Durga, stuck at the border with moving things. Photo by Rintu Das.

Here is a glimpse (figs. 1.16 and 1.17) of the suitcase that the 2021 Durga carries with her as she sits in limbo at the border, packed and ready to move—to a destination unknown. There are a few intensely personal objects that the opened lid reveals: Durga's red wedding saree spilling out of the case, a much-used utensil, and the children's early photos snatched from the chaos of eviction and stuffed into the box with desperate love. And here is little Lakshmi, goddess of wealth represented as a destitute little girl clutching on to her owl—her divine carrier in traditional iconography, appearing as the favorite toy that she had time to quickly grab (fig. 1.18). Art and life enter uncanny



Fig. 1.17. Bhaager Ma: migrant Durga, stuck at the border with moving things. Photo by Rintu Das.

dialogue across multiple borders and trigger a double-seeing in viewers, migrant or not, when we look at Quique Kierszenbaum's photo of little Zaynab Ayoub playing with what remains of home — two rescued toys — next to the rubble of her demolished home in the Palestinian village of Fahit (2022) (fig. 1.19).

The stripping of possessions is especially stark in forced displacement. Even other kinds of migration — professional and circumstantial included — entail shedding, losing, learning to do without. When we are lucky, such departures allow for meagre choosing too, or snatching fragments from erasure. “Mov-



Fig. 1.18. Lakshmi in the making: from *Maarir deshe*. Photo by Pallab Bhowmick.

ing Things” is a sample photo-journal, consisting of a selection of photos of single objects that some of the migrants who are part of this book have carried with them from their old place to their new habitation. Whether shards or gleanings, these are neither perfect memorial synecdoches nor emblems of recognition; rather, they are tokens of the process of people discovering what they want to hold on to. Sometimes they make sense to the agents—in the moment or retrospectively. At other times we never understand why we snatched at a particular thing while leaving and losing. Exile and photo-artist Dragana Jurišić grabbed a huge leather-bound Bible and a pair of scissors when her family home in the former Yugoslavia was burnt down in



Fig. 1.19. Zaynab Mohammed Ayoub outside her demolished home in Palestine. Photo by Quique Kierszenbaum / *The Guardian*.

September 1991 after being taken over as a Croatian sniper nest. She says she still does not know why she clutched the heavy Bible: she was sixteen, and ungodly! But on being asked if she was a seamstress, she suddenly remembered that she had been going to a textile high school at the time: “[N]ever thought of that,” she exclaimed. Who knows what matter in our daily lives matters, or constitutes us? And what knowledges the act of crossing itself bears, often unregistered? The things we carry are perhaps, above all, testimonies to an interruption, with all the significance and all the unassimilability of that moment of trauma in an ongoing life. They remain as witnesses to a history that resists assimilation even when we want, or need, to integrate to a new world. They carry the promise of stories about them, untold narratives waiting to leap into life when we touch such an object, or suddenly find it in an alcove or under our bed. Even where we keep them, how private or public we make them, tells us something about knowledges and memories we are able to own, and what of these we cannot bear or acknowledge ours. They are imbued with affects that find it hard to make their way into con-

ventional critical discourse — such as embarrassment or secrecy, intimate pride, or half-owned longing. We want to give them a little space, and the power, to move, in our collection. And we want this space to make the range of our migrant voices and worlds vivid: stretching across, and connecting, Britain, Guinea, India, Israel, Italy, Kenya, Lebanon, Palestine, Poland, Syria, and the former Yugoslavia. This section provokes thinking not only about what objects do when we migrate, but what photography as a medium does to and for our memory, and what the act of photographing does for us when our worlds seem unpredictable and out of control. In turn, what knowledges and shapes does writing about photographs — a migrant form? — bring to the preserved or salvaged pieces of our lives that move with us?

If the “Moving Things” section is a miniature home, made out of things gathered and carried to shore against the “fallings from us, vanishings,” as we cross borders,⁷² Edmund de Waal’s extraordinary installation, *library of exile*, is another kind of home for the unhoused. Founded on obliteration and contingency, it houses portable, fragile books and pots in a form that reaches towards permanence. It is in some senses almost emblematic of our book which itself is trying to find a home for particular encounters and transitory conversations, without closing the door to history, to memory, and to the future. Edmund’s essay on his *library* begins by charting the journey of a collection of *netsuke* to meditate on home and homelessness.⁷³ Collecting itself emerges as an act of finding form and pattern in a chaotic and disintegrating world. These small Japanese ivory pieces, family possessions that carry knowledges about, and reanimate, his family’s history of exile and dispossession as they migrate through worlds and times, lead Edmund to reflect on the genesis of his *library*, which began its life in Venice as part of the duet that formed the exhibition *psalm* (2019), stretch-

72 From “Ode: Intimations of Immortality,” in William Wordsworth, *The Poems*, vol. 1, ed. John O. Hayden (Yale University Press, 1981), 528.

73 *Netsuke* are miniature sculptural objects developed in Japan from the seventeenth century onwards, often made of ivory or wood, used as ornamental toggles for personal items.

ing across the Venice Ghetto, a place of exile, and the Ateneo Veneto, a place of debate (but in times past also a liminal sanctuary for the condemned). Bringing together porcelain and poetry, Edmund layers erasure with inscription, archiving loss at the same time as he salvages, re-members, and preserves. The exterior of the *library*, first set up in the Ateneo, is porcelain layered over with gold leaves, written over with the names and histories of lost libraries, smudged in turn or brushed over with liquid porcelain. Inside, the migratory materials of his vitrines (gold, marble, and clay) are placed in dialogue with text—both the Talmud and three thousand books written by exiled writers from Ovid to the present, in seventy languages, from destroyed libraries across the world. Like its contents, the library itself has crossed many borders to Dresden, and will later move to Mosul, where the Babylonian Talmud was composed: exile and homecoming will touch each other. A Babel of longing, it enfolds absence at its heart—like Büchel's bark—but is alive and present as a space for translation and renewed inscription, inviting viewers to encounter, contemplate, and write into the books, extending the work of the writers and the artist. Lament is activated into agency, intimating the affective crossings and generic transformations that migrant forms can perform.

Translation: A Migrant Form

It is no surprise that translation should find its way to the heart of creative practice marked by migratory experience, as it does in Edmund's polyglot library. Translation, like migration, entails a form of mobility. While migration is mainly thought of as the movement of people—or, as we have seen, things—across boundaries, translation is usually conceptualized as the movement of texts across linguistic borders. But where borders are permeable to displaced people, languages, and texts, they are also open to the movement of cultures, sentiments, and structures of feeling and faith. No wonder, then, that points of overlap between human movement and the proliferation of hybridity through language practices have become anxious sites of

state control and containment, as Loredana Polezzi succinctly summarizes (via Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, and Cecilia Wadensjö).⁷⁴ So when the Carnatic singer and activist T.M. Krishna sang a patriotic, much loved Bengali song about the beauty of our land — “Dhana dhanyo pushpo bhora” — right after the Hindu-nationalist revocation of Article 370, which had long granted Muslim-majority Kashmir special status, it was a political act as well as an act of love. He got the declensions “wrong,” often ignored the precise notation and the conventional *gayaki* (style) familiar to Bengal, yet dived into the emotional core of the song. The defiant anti-grammar of his rendering was a knowing musical translation across boundaries of language, state, style, politics, and religion: a sound-crossing that combined frisson, caress, and resistance, and used aesthetic estrangement to show up the homogeneity of national language as an ideological myth in plurilingual India. Later, at the anti-CAA protests by women in the working-class Muslim neighborhood of Shaheen Bagh in Delhi in 2020, he sang “Hum Dekhenge” in four different Indian languages — Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada, and Urdu (associated with Muslim native-speakers) — to the chagrin of the state. Originally a poem of resistance written by the great Urdu poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz in 1979 against Zia-ul-Haq’s oppressive regime in Pakistan, subjected to a ban, and sung by Iqbal Bano in 1986 in defiance of the ban, it was adapted by T.M.’s many-tongued rendering as an agent of democracy. The same year, the launch of his book, *Sebastian & Sons*, was cancelled by the government-backed Kalakshetra Centre in Chennai, because it explores the history of making the *mrdangam*, a key percussion instrument in Carnatic music, and mines the inherent hybridity of the tradition. The *mrdangam* is made with cow-hide, and skin-work was the province of Dalit or “untouchable” Hindus, many of whom converted to Christianity — people on the fringes of the Carnatic community. Foregrounding a craft that involved a translation of musical concepts into a ma-

74 On the nexus between translation and migration, see Loredana Polezzi, “Translation and Migration,” *Translation Studies* 5, no. 3 (2012): 345–56.

terial object made of a part of *Hindutva*'s sacred animal, and exposing the ironies of caste-hierarchy in the arts, the book was an inevitable target of state intervention. T.M. is also the artist who, in 2018, had been accused of defiling the purity of Carnatic music in using it to compose a hymn to Christ. Homogenization of culture is naturally resistant of translation except when it can be used for control, exclusion or ideological reduction. In conversation with me in this book, T.M. asserts the inseparability of his music from his activism, and the worlds of political possibility that musical and linguistic translations hold. We reflect on the defiant impurity of T.M.'s own understanding and practice of music: a refusal of cleanness that is a precise way of tapping into the inextricable entwinement that is the Indian aesthetic legacy, of tracing aesthetic pleasure and beauty to the messy material conditions of their production, and of mobilizing an inherent synergy between the condition of migrancy and the life of art.

It is translation in this wider sense that Giocherenda and *Stories in Transit* activate to create a space where their diverse community of *minorenni* (people who are under eighteen) can play, imagine, and be human, rather than simply being asylum-seekers trying to work out visas, employment, and subsistence. Their storytelling workshops use forms that are nonlinguistic, or have other elements to fill the gap, in the absence of a common language: song, puppetry, gesture, photographs, animation, and masking. Playwrights Joe Murphy and Joe Robertson, and Mohamed Sarrar, a refugee from Sudan, come together in this book to recount and reenact similar translations in the Calais Jungle refugee camp where they used drama and music to cross borders of language—an experience on which they founded the Good Chance Theatre (who made, or found, *Amal*). At a poignant and joyful moment in our event, Mohammad burst into a Sudanese song that most of us in the audience did not understand literally, but which brought us home to a shared place of encounter, of “something understood.”⁷⁵ Nadina Christopou-

75 George Herbert uses this phrase to sum up the nature of prayer in his famous poem “Prayer I.” See, e.g., George Herbert, *The Complete Poems*

lou and Alicia reflect, in their conversation about their creative community-building at the Melissa Network for Migrant and Refugee Women in Athens, on how translation is crucial but thorny, not least because the mother tongue is carried across borders in everyone's heads. Similarly, Angela recognizes, as she translates Pirandello, that it is a task that is "endless, impossible, yet necessary."

Said recounts in "Exile" how, one night in a Beirut restaurant, he sat with Faiz, exiled from Pakistan, and Eqbal Ahmad, a fellow exile, reciting poems, till they stopped translating for Said at some point, but how "as the night wore on, it did not matter." The refusal of translation, or perhaps its shedding, was, to Said, "an enactment of a homecoming."⁷⁶ Yet in the same essay, Said finds a paradigmatic exploration of what for Hannah Arendt is the unbearable of strangers⁷⁷ in the failure of translation in Joseph Conrad's "Amy Foster" — a short story about Yanko Goorall, a poor central European emigrant washed up on the shore of Eastbay.⁷⁸ When, in his new life, he sits crooning to his little boy in his own language, he "sounded so disturbing, so passionate, and so bizarre" that Amy — the one person who had loved and pitied him enough to marry him — snatches the child from his arms; when, in the grip of a fever, he mutters in a language she "can't understand" — "though he may have thought he was speaking in English" — she feels nothing but "fear of that strange man," abandons him, and runs away with their child.⁷⁹

(London, 1991), 45–46.

76 Said, "Exile," 175.

77 See Hannah Arendt, "Understanding and Politics (the Difficulties of Understanding)," in *Essays in Understanding, 1930–1954*, ed. Jerome Kohn (Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1994); Hannah Arendt, "Reflections on Little Rock," *Dissent* 6, no. 1 (1959), 45–56; and Hannah Arendt, "On Humanity in Dark Times: Thoughts about Lessing," in *Men in Dark Times*, ed. Hannah Arendt (Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968). See also Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Meridian Books, 1958), on the creation of unbearable strangers in Nazi Germany.

78 Joseph Conrad, "Amy Foster," in *"Typhoon" and Other Tales* (Oxford University Press, 2008).

79 *Ibid.*, 172–74.

It is a stark story about the abyss of unknowing that a stranger can be plunged into, the knowledges they cannot communicate, and the effects of a foreign tongue without the facility of verbal translation. For translation can be a space of freedom, play, exchange, welcome, intercession, or intimacy, even while it feels, at times, like the measure of miles from home.

Annabel Brett captures the vexed if airy interspace of translation. Reading the fifteenth-century debate between Leonardo Bruni and Alonso de Cartagena over the dynamic between the local and the universal in the act of translation in tandem with the distinct approaches to it by Umberto Eco and Gayatri Spivak in our own times, Annabel shows how translation models the encounter between the familiar and the strange in our civic and political lives, stretched between erotics and ethics, surrender and agency, visceral and logical, and domination and negotiation. An intertextual migration of language, meaning and hermeneutics, translation is posited as an event in the world that at once mediates between the specific and the general, and constitutes those very categories in the process. It is shown, thus, to be an act of reading and a function of history which reveals history itself to be a migrant knowledge, and indeed a migrant form. The chronological and geographical thresholds inhabited and traversed in translation beget yet more thresholds, as Annabel's own "migratory reading" suggests. Do critical forms and historical agents have the capacity to embrace and extend the fraying of texts and selves that seems to be a function of the transactions of translation? Do they in fact have the responsibility of interposition, even as they must look its limits in the face?

Food from Home: Cooking Across the Border

Dante Alighieri, forced out of his beloved Florence in 1302, was in many senses a privileged exile. But the peculiar pain of banishment is vivid in the *Paradiso*, perhaps most minutely and viscerally when expressed in terms of an exile from the food of his motherland. The soul of his ancestor, Cacciaguida, prophesies how Dante will suffer when he "must depart from Florence":

*Tu lascerai ogne cosa diletta
più caramente; e questo è quello strale
che l'arco de lo essilio pria saetta.
Tu proverai sì come sa di sale
lo pane altrui...* (*Paradiso*, XVII, ll. 48; 55–56)⁸⁰

Pane sciocco, the bread of Florence and indeed Tuscany, famously lacked salt—it still does. So, while there may also be, in *sale*, a shade of the sense of “costly” or “rare” or “hard to come by” that is implicit in *salato*, that sense of bitterness about the exile’s hard-earned bread is pinned to a deprivation more immediate and sensory. Even the understood metaphor for freedom—Florence’s decision to abjure salt was part of her self-freeing from Pisa’s twelfth-century block on salt shipment down the river Arno—feels secondary here to taste and smell, among the most evocative sensations when one leaves home, or the homeland.

When Faraj, now a unique food entrepreneur and chef, crossed over to the UK as a refugee—by an “extravagant and wheeling” course from Syria through Egypt, Turkey, Macedonia, Serbia, Hungary, Austria, Germany, and France—he found himself in a temporary asylum in Huddersfield. One day he felt an urge to cook *mujaddara*. And so he reconstructed a dish he had never cooked, tracing a memory of taste and smell back to his grandma’s kitchen. That is when, he says, he realized that he could create a sense of home anywhere. Food is what had brought the world home to Faraj as he grew up in Aleppo. But now, it was his vehicle for carrying a piece of home to the world. An aspect of our lives that we take with us when we cross boundaries, which no one can take away from us, is our sensory apparatus, which holds our memory of food and our knowledge of its material ingredients and production. Yet the body is a culturally coded thing. The experience of migration demands a

80 “You will leave behind every thing you loved most dearly; and this is the first arrow shot from the bow of exile. You will experience how salty is the taste of other people’s bread.” Translation mine.

recoding on both sides of the encounter. Migrants' relationship with food, and society's relationship with their culinary cultures, are embodied negotiations of mobility. Faraj's conversation with me here asks what psychic and cultural realities come into view if we treat cooking—and recipes—as migrant art forms. As he started translating his memories into practice at the adventurous London restaurant, Honey & Co., his cuisine began to unsettle the gastronomic landscape of bourgeois London. His story—which, like Othello's, is also his history—shows how food is uncanny, both homely and unhomely, and how it is often the site of our first encounter with the strange. Our conversation probes these culinary passages, and re-embeds food in its stories in the context of human dislocation and relocation.

Faraj's journey shadows, in a geographical sense, the earlier journey of Claudia Roden, though hers was a privileged trajectory. My conversation with her in this book offers Claudia's account of the role of food in her childhood in Cairo, where her family were wealthy merchant-immigrants from Aleppo. It traces her journey from the cosmopolitan part of a culturally divided Cairo to Britain, and her transformative role in the British food culture of the fifties, introducing Middle-Eastern, Egyptian, and Jewish traditions at a time when available ingredients were far from cosmopolitan, and going on to write books that were at once cooking manuals, anthropology, personal memoirs, and histories of mentality. We go behind the gastronomic revolution she effected in her country of residence as an adult, and explore the relation between authenticity and innovation, the mobile and the immutable, in her experience of the evolution of migrant food and its recipes.

The enrichment of the culinary culture of a country by migration is a thing of joy and celebration. Yet Faraj still brings me apricot jam and muhammarra made by his mother in Cairo, with fruits and nuts ripened by a different sun. I still feel the thrill of buying and bringing *amshattva* (sun-dried mango pulp), *bori* (dried lentil croutons), and *nolen-gurer sandesh* (ricotta sweets with new-season molasses) from Kolkata every time I come back to Britain. We somehow want these items to remain inalienable

from “home” and inaccessible elsewhere — for not everything is yet available everywhere, and I for one would feel a pang if they were. Nor do I believe that “ricotta sweets” transport half the complexity of sense, memory, and context that the very sound of “sandesh” evokes to a Bengali. Perhaps, like the *hüzün* Orhan Pamuk writes about in relation to his Istanbul, this is an intimate but collective longing we want to preserve — a “want” that we want, an ache that not only affirms but creates community.⁸¹ Food, like other aspects of migrant experience, carries the duality between wanting to settle and needing to retain an element of unsettledness, to be true to the kindred points of both there and here. The paradox of migrant cooking may not be so different after all from the paradox of translation: home hovers between its practice and its occasional refusal.

Beyond the Bounds of the Human

Neither migration nor refuge is peculiar to the human species. Plant life holds its own intuition of seed, root, and movement; of both the opportunity and the cost of migration; and of what happens to knowledge at the edge of extinction when we tune into what Bruno Latour calls the “earthbound.”⁸² The journey of the kudzu, as Yota Batsaki uncovers in this book, is a fascinating example of how our designation of an “invasive species” is based on disknowledge. She shows how aesthetic intervention retunes us to find “ethical and ecological promise” in the very resistance of vibrant alien matter to the erasure of historical and political knowledges of oppression, its recalcitrance to facile epistemes. Form and knowledge dance around each other as the “migrant form” of William Christenberry’s haunting photograph is shown to recover, enshrine, and make visible a migrant form of nature. The abjection ascribed to the unwanted invasive

81 Orhan Pamuk, *Istanbul: Memories and the City*, trans. Maureen Freely (Faber and Faber, 2005), esp. chaps. 9 and 11, and chap. 26.

82 Cf. Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime*, trans. Catherine Porter (Polity, 2017).

belies its uncanny power to evoke the human trauma buried in the depleted land under it and the human communities which have been forced to leave — so that the strange stirs at the heart of home, challenging to be known, acknowledged, and, indeed, represented. The small critters in Mina's poems have, like the kudzu, also made their way to strange shores by chance or human design. Mina imagines what emerging from containers into an alien environment might feel like, to these minute, non-human life-forms — parakeet or hall-wasp or ragwort, insect, plant, or animal — undesired or instrumental in their new habitats. The rhetoric of alienation and invasion, of course, crosses over from the human world to nonhumans we consider out of place, not least in the age of globalization — remember Cameron's "swarms."⁸³ As the Anthropocene undoes our inherited antinomies, opening us up to mutually constitutive entanglements, how might we cross the now perceptibly permeable border between nature and culture to carry knowledges over? How does it feel to be humans enclosed within bounds built for safety and for the preservation of the local?

Cornelia Parker's installation *Island*, on show at Tate Britain (2022), encapsulates a fragility that mirrors from inland the experience of these uncertain arrivals: a delicate, meshy, isolated greenhouse looking inwards, teetering to be "entire of itself" as the tides encroach and coastlines blur, with a bulb struggling to stay alight inside (figs. 1.20 and 1.21).⁸⁴ Built on reclaimed 1850s floor tiles from Augustus Pugin's House of Commons, but covered with countless tiny dots of chalk from the white cliffs of Dover, it embodies both the precarity and preciousness of refuge, and indeed of home — not just in the human world but

83 Cf. Banu Subramaniam, "The Aliens Have Landed! Reflections on the Rhetoric of Biological Invasions," *Meridians* 2, no. 1 (2001): 26–40.

84 Consider John Donne's famous phrase from his *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*: "No man is an island entire of itself." Cf. "Meditation 17," in John Donne, *Selected Prose*, ed. Neil Rhodes (Penguin, 1987), 126. I cannot believe that Parker did not have it in mind when naming the work.



Fig. 1.20. Cornelia Parker, *Island*, 2022 installation view, Tate Britain. Photo by Matt Greenwood.

across scales and orders of being, not just in post-Brexit Britain but in the “darkling plain” of a near-apocalyptic world.⁸⁵

Prabhakar Pachpute’s *Asylum Seeker*, on exhibition at the Frieze Art Fair 2022, is a poignantly postapocalyptic migrant form — one of his charcoal-on-plywood “travellers.” It is a skin-and-bones farm animal with a machine inside it and an excavator for its head, trudging doggedly forward on exhausted soil estranged from labor, in search of a new home — its giant, glistening eye still as human as a cow’s (fig. 1.22). A digger consists, after all, of various mechanical parts stuck to a rotating platform called “house”: the conceit stretches outside-in as the engine that has infiltrated the “bull” includes a housetop, and loss and evacuation carry in their bowels a dream of home.

85 The phrase is from Arnold’s poem “Dover Beach.” Cf. Matthew Arnold, *Selected Writings*, ed. Seamus Perry (Oxford University Press, 2020), 437.



Fig. 1.21. Detail from Cornelia Parker, *Island*, 2022 installation view, Tate Britain. Photo by Matt Greenwood.

As Donna Haraway memorably put it, “right now, the earth is full of refugees, human and not, without refuge.”⁸⁶ Can art help make the “shock of the Anthropocene” a bridge rather than a wall, and come up with a remedy that Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz do not quite get to?⁸⁷ Can it tap into

86 Donna Haraway, “Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin,” *Environmental Humanities* 6, no. 1 (2015): 160.

87 The title of Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz’s uncompromising book, *The Shock of the Anthropocene: The Earth, History and Us*, trans. David Fernbach (Verso, 2017).



Fig. 1.22. Prabhakar Pachpute, *Asylum-Seeker*, 2020. Photo by JUD-DartINDEX/Andrew Judd.

a turn in the ecological plot which embraces tentacular knowledge and leads to a reimagining of kinship that can “replenish refuge” and imagine a new ecology of creaturehood?⁸⁸ Imagining goes hand in hand with representation. Will the varieties of artworks emerging from, and in response to, migration come together into a tribe? Could a book like ours play a role in clearing a space for such an assemblage? And in bringing together the seemingly loose web of art, environmental humanities, and migration studies under the umbrella of migrant forms, can we posit a new disciplinary formation, replacing traditional filiations with affiliations that are already functional but call out to be made knowable?

⁸⁸ Haraway, “Anthropocene,” 140.

In Conclusion

We have tried here to present our co-thinking as process, with truthfulness and rigor, but in an accessible way. We offer a collective meditation on an urgent theme, as well as a call for a larger life lived together, harnessing the imaginative yield of speaking, thinking, and moving across boundaries but doing so with ethical lucidity, in response to the new hybrid reality that we are all part of. Connecting our historical knowledge with the social, economic, and moral challenges of the contemporary world, this gathering of scattered selves and fledgling forms is both personal and political, an act of hope, and perhaps something of a tool for living. But it does not, and must not, expunge lament.

— June 2023

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II.

The Library of Exile

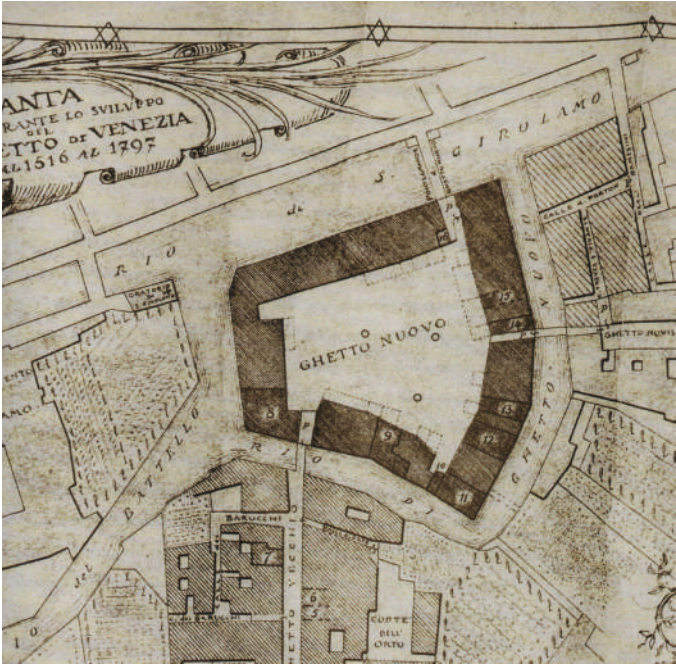


Fig. 2.1. Map of the Venetian Ghetto, 1797. Source: Art Critique.

Towards the Library of Exile

Edmund de Waal

I'll be talking about homecoming and homelessness. I start with an image of the ghetto in Venice (fig. 2.1), which is where we will end. But I want to take you on a different kind of journey about how I got to make a library and how I got to be in a ghetto.

This journey starts in West Norwood, a rather grotty but much-loved suburb of South London. When I go into my studio every day, there are two staircases I can take. One takes me up to a small and slightly monastic space, where I have my potter's wheel and a very uncomfortable bench which I have had since I was apprenticed almost forty years ago. I sit at this wheel, pick up one ball of white clay one after another, and make porcelain vessels. My clay comes from far away. It is migratory clay. It comes from Limoges. But porcelain clay is a different kind of long story, a different kind of migration, coming of course from China. It is a story of longing and belonging in itself. And I sit and iteratively make one vessel after another, often with the dog at my feet.

The other space that I go up to is a room full of books: piles of read, unread, to-be-read, re-read books, archival notes from all the way round the world from my travels, and shelves of shards, broken pieces of porcelain from my travels, things that I have

stooped to pick up from the earth. Bits of clay, porcelain from Jingdezhen, from the Chinese mountains where porcelain was invented; broken shards of Meissen porcelain from Dresden; shards from the Cornish hillsides; shards that have been given to me; shards that I have found on my journey and other objects. In this shelf of stories in my studio are these small, tactile, hard, complicated, funny, erotic, beautiful ivory and wooden objects called *netsuke*: small Japanese sculptures made for the hands, made for touching, made for passing round, made for storytelling.

I was given this collection of tiny objects — “a very large collection of very small objects,” as I put it in my book *The Hare with Amber Eyes* — by a beloved great-uncle in Japan, a Jewish Austro-Hungarian baron living in a flat in Tokyo. I inherited this collection of beautiful things twenty years ago, and I brought them back to London, and they sat in a vitrine in our flat in Camberwell in South London. And I realized that I had a choice to make: a choice whether to weave these objects from this beloved relative into anecdotes, or to try and work out what migratory story was embedded and en-storied in these objects. I talked to my wife Sue, and she said yes. I said it would take three months away from pottery to do the research.... It took me seven, biblical years. It was a story of how things get passed on.

This is a story of a Japanese collection, which begins in Odessa, with a Jewish family that was enormously, ridiculously, oligarchically, obscenely rich — who had cornered the market in grain in the nineteenth century — the Ephrussi family, my father’s family. And like all good oligarchical dynastic Jewish families, they send their children out — in the middle of the nineteenth century — to conquer Europe, and to marry good Jewish girls. And half the family are sent to Paris, where they build a beautiful house in the Rue de Monceau, amongst other diasporic Jewish families. And the other half are sent to Vienna. And in the Paris house, there are children who become bankers. There’s another son who becomes a lover of beautiful things and a lover of art, who collects extraordinary pictures by the Impressionists, is painted by Pierre-August Renoir, becomes friends

with Marcel Proust, and collects small Japanese *netsuke*, to pass around in his salons. But he gets bored of this collection, and, in 1899, sends it as a wedding present to my great-grandfather, who is getting married in Vienna in a suitably grand house on the Ringstrasse. This is the house my father grows up in. It is a Ringstrasse Palais in Vienna 1899, gold encrusted ceilings, more naked nymphs on ceilings than you could believe possible. A house for a family of assimilated Jews who collect art, have an extraordinary collection and an enormous library, and are living in the greatest city in Europe, at the greatest moment there could possibly be. Every language is spoken in this house.

The four children grow up with English, French, German, they grow up with Spanish and they grow up with the classics. And they have the *netsuke* in a room in the Palais Ephrussi to play with, while their mother dresses to go out to balls. And the children run away, as children *should* run away. One gets married to a good Spanish banker, another runs away to America. My great-uncle Iggie doesn't want to become a banker. He's gay, and a fashion designer. He runs to America too, and my grandmother Elizabeth — literate, a friend of Rainer Marie Rilke — runs away to university, becomes a novelist, and marries and runs from Vienna. And you know what happens next, you know about the Anschluss, you know about the welcome given to the Nazis, the diaspora that happens, the destruction of the Jewish communities of Vienna. The house is broken into by the neighbors, one day after the Anschluss.

The Gestapo come the next day. The Kunsthistorisches Museum come the day after, and start cataloguing and dispossessing the family of their art collections. My great-grandfather Viktor — the great scholar in the family — sees his family's collection of books put on a truck, driven out from the Palais down the Ringstrasse, and disappear. My great-grandmother Emmy, seventy-five, is beaten up. My great-grandfather is arrested, and thrown into prison and threatened with Dachau. He signs away everything. And then begins the dispossession, the search for ways to exile and escape. Viktor finally makes it across the bor-



Fig. 2.2. Jewish boy is forced to write “Jew” on building’s wall after the annexation of Austria by Nazi Germany, 1938. Source: Süddeutsche Zeitung Photo/Alamy Stock Photo.

der to Czechoslovakia with my great-grandmother — who commits suicide — and finally, finally, finally, this passport (fig. 2.3).

People become the documents of their longing. My great-grandfather, my grandmother, and my father arrive in England in May 1939: refugees with one suitcase. Viktor reads in front of a fire in Tunbridge Wells in their house and he recites *Lacrimae Rerum* — the great poems of Virgil — to my father. And he dies in Tunbridge Wells. Born in Odessa, childhood in Odessa, a student in Paris, becomes a citizen of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. A man who sees his wife die in Czechoslovakia, and he dies, and is buried in the crematorium outside Tunbridge Wells.

And after the war my grandmother goes back to Vienna, to a destroyed city, goes back to her house in the Palais on the Ringstrasse. And there is nothing there. There are no books. But she meets, there, her mother’s maid Anna, who gives her back two hundred and sixty-four *netsuke*, which she hid away



Fig. 2.3. Viktor de Waal's passport. Source: Edmund de Waal.

as the Gestapo ransacked the house. She has kept them secret from the art historians of the Kunsthistorisches Museum, who catalogued the rest of the collection, and sent it to Berlin, and to Goering; and she gives them back.

A small attaché case of stories, of objects, is brought back to England. And my great-uncle Iggie sees them on the kitchen table and says "I know what I'll do with them: I'll take them home." A man who could have lived anywhere looks at objects, and decides that the objects will take him home.

So in 1947, my great-uncle Iggie takes this *netsuke* collection and goes to Tokyo. There, he builds a house, and a vitrine, like the vitrine he remembers in Vienna.

And he meets his partner, Jiro, and they live together, and have very good dinner parties. And they open up their vitrines of *netsuke*. And there are storytellings like there were in Paris, in Rue de Monceau, and in the Ringstrasse. And when I arrive as a seventeen-year-old — having run away from school to become a potter — in Japan, because Japan is the potter's country, I end up on my great-uncle Iggie's doorstep. Jiro and Iggie open the door,



Fig. 2.4. Netsuke collection in Iggie de Waal's apartment. Source: Edmund de Waal.

and I'm given a huge hug, and a kiss, and a whisky sour. Iggie waves his hand at this vitrine, and says, "There's a story here...." Twenty years later, when I go and bury Jiro in the grave that he and Iggie had made for themselves in a Buddhist temple in Tokyo, and the Buddhist abbot recites the whole service of farewell, I say Kaddish for Iggie and for Jiro. Then I find that I have this whole suitcase to take home to London. So I write a book. And the book is about how you work out where you belong in the world; a book to try and connect storytelling, between one generation and another.

It's a book I write for my father, my father who is getting older. My father — who is a clergyman in the Church of England, who speaks with a strong Viennese accent, is Dean of Canterbury, but is Jewish — has never told us anything about Vienna. I decide that the only way that I can get my father to talk about what happened, and to talk to my children who are growing up, is to write a book and give it to him, and then tell him that he has the agency to say whether the book should be published or not. It's a very risky strategy, which I don't recommend to any of



Fig. 2.5. Iggie's apartment, Tokyo. Source: Edmund de Waal.

you! So I give Victor, my dad, this manuscript, and I don't hear from him for three days. Very long days. And then he rings me up, and he says, "it's OK," which is a big word.

So, you write a book, and it goes out into the world, and extraordinary things happen. Lots of connections and synapses in the world start to fire. And slowly, a diasporic family starts to talk. I get a phone call from Vienna. They have a temple, the Theseus Temple and it's on the Ringstrasse in Heldenplatz. Heldenplatz is a complicated place for anyone who has any Jewish ancestry. But it's a beautiful temple, and they do contemporary art installations, and it's my turn, they say. "Come and do something in Heldenplatz." So what I do is make an installation. I take a poem of Paul Celan called *Lichtzwang* (Light duress) — and I make two huge vitrines, with two hundred and sixty-four very small white vessels (fig. 2.6).

Celan haunts me. Celan has been part of my life since I sat having a conversation with Geoffrey Hill in 1983 about poetry, in his rooms in Emmanuel. He was a very wonderful man, and a very alarming man too. And he said "Why, Mr. de Waal, have you not read Paul Celan?" Celan is the great Romanian poet of



Fig. 2.6. *Lichtzwang*, installation view, 2014. © Edmund de Waal. Photo by Mike Bruce.

the German language, the great poet of the color white, the poet who breaks apart language, and puts it back together again, for whom poetry is exhortation and exhalation, who writes about white as the color of his mother's hair he will never see, and homecoming, and *Lichtzwang*. And so I write the poem up on the walls, and for six months this is my way of being in Vienna. And then I go back and I make its pendant piece. Black porcelain, remembering the great black poem of Celan: *Todesfuge* (Death fugue). And then I get another phone call from Vienna. And this one is from the Kunsthistorisches Museum. So in these hallowed halls, what will I do in Vienna? I can't possibly choose my favorite things from these beautiful collections. It's a place haunted, haunted as the great epicenter for the looting and dispossession of the families of Vienna. And then I find this extraordinary watercolor by Dürer. It's an extraordinary picture

of a nightmare. He writes during the night, “I was woken up between three and four, seeing the end of the world. I was utterly alone. I had no power. I saw the waters coming down. The waters rushing over me and I knew I had no power, no power in the world at all.”¹ And when I saw this, I knew I had the centerpiece for my exhibition at the Kunsthistorisches Museum.

The exhibition was about nighttime in Vienna: I made an installation and called it *During the Night* and I chose all the objects in the museum that made me anxious. I chose images of shadows. I chose things from the Schatzkammer Corals, “Armedusa’s Hair” in Renaissance early modern collecting. I chose images of “being looked at hard” and “things that keep poison away from you.” I displayed them in almost total darkness and the critics hated my installation. But what I decided to do was to reconstitute anxiety back to Vienna. Because, actually, that’s what objects can do. Objects aren’t necessarily for your solace. Objects aren’t necessarily just for the handing on of one benevolent story to another. They are also a way of re-energizing the force-field of history, and complicating it.

So I leave my exhibition there, in the Kunsthistorisches Museum.

And then I have one final demand from the museum—to close during the day, and open all night. Which we do. And in the watches of the night, all kinds of things happen. There are very strange liminal conversations that happen between objects, between memories, and between people. So I make an exhibition, which of course remembers all those difficult nights in Vienna. And in 2019 I sat with my family, my father and my children, and we decide there is one final act of restitution. We’re not waiting for things to be given back to us; we’re talking about restituting stories ourselves, taking stories back—which is what storytelling does. But with this beautiful and beloved collection, we’re going to do two things. It is our inheritance—one hundred and forty-five years in the family. But we decide to sell part

1 Albrecht Dürer, *Traumgesicht* [Dream vision], 1525, Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien.



Fig. 2.7. *psalm*, The Jewish Museum, Venice, 2019 © Edmund de Waal.
Source: Edmund de Waal.

of this collection to raise money for unaccompanied minors in refugee camps. Some people write me letters saying, “How could you possibly, possibly do that?” And my answer is, “It’s the right thing to do.” But actually, collections are about passing things on, and making things happen. And so the other thing we do is to put the rest of the collection back in a briefcase, and take it to the Jewish Museum in Vienna.

That’s how you work with a collection. And this takes me to the ghetto. Because for five years, I’ve been in conversation in this extraordinary, storied place. 1516 saw the establishment of the first ghetto: the walling up of the windows, the policing of the canals around the ghetto by Christian boats, the curfew bell, and then this extraordinary story of one community after another, a plural community from all over the Levant from North Africa, from all over Europe, being forced to live in this tiny space. I’ve been coming and going, and coming and going to

the ghetto. Listening to its sonic atmosphere; trying to tune in to this particular place, and trying to work out what the ghetto means. My friends in the Jewish community in Venice don't talk about melancholy, don't talk about just stories of dispossession, but talk about the plurality of language, of literature, of music, of culture in this place. And so I ask, gently, whether or not I would be allowed to make a piece of work for them, for the synagogues in the ghetto. After five years of delicate, complicated, byzantine negotiation I start my project during the 58th Biennale, and it's called *psalm* (fig. 2.7).

The Psalms: because I've lived with the Psalms throughout my long Christian upbringing in cathedrals. The Psalms: because the Psalms are, and form, songs of exile, *Super flumina Babylonis*: "By the rivers of Babylon we sat down and wept." They travel with you wherever you go. All the Abrahamic religions have the Psalms.

So what I do is to make a series of installations in porcelain (try bringing porcelain to Venice, it's very complicated) and I make a project in two parts. You come in, go up these extraordinary dense staircases, and find a piece called *Adonai*, high up on a wall. *Adonai, Adonai, Adonai* — Lord, Lord, Lord. It's a tiny vitrine, with three things in it. A porcelain vessel: porcelain vessels are what I do. A piece of gold: gold is aura, and gold threads its way through the Psalms, and threads its way through the ghetto. And a piece of marble: because marble wasn't allowed in the synagogues. You could be Jewish, you could make your place of worship, but you could use no marble. I bring these three materials together into one, and call it *Adonai*. And then you turn the stair, and there's this piece which is based on an extraordinary poem — one of the extraordinary sonnets of Rilke. It's about waiting for God, waiting for the breath of God. It's a beautiful poem I've been living with all my life. And it's a series, you can just see it, on tiny slivers of porcelain, I've written "It's enough. It's enough. It's enough," in German. Bits of Rilke, fragments amongst the porcelain. And the light changes, and then you go up further into the gallery, just before you come into the canton Synagogue, which is five hundred years old. And here is



Fig. 2.8. tehillim, 2018. © Edmund de Waal. Photo by Mike Bruce.



Fig. 2.9. a table for Sara Copio Sullam, 2019. © Edmund de Waal. Photo by Mike Bruce.

my piece, *tehillim* (psalm) (fig. 2.8). It's pieces of porcelain and pieces of gold, eleven vitrines one after another, after another.

It's a way of sounding porcelain. It's the thinnest porcelain I've ever made. There are no vessels. I've just taken clay, made it thinner, and thinner, and thinner, till it's "gold to airy thinness beat."²

This is the place where the psalms work, inside and outside of this incredibly beautiful sixteenth-century synagogue. You can sit there, and sit, and air comes in, and you can hear the sounds from the canals outside. And then you go further up, and there is one room where I've made a series of elegies: "Still beside me with your empty hands," poems of Mandelstam. Here are broken pieces of porcelain, because shards *matter*, fragments of poetry matter, you hold them together. And then I've made my first palimpsest. It's a table washed with porcelain. The text of Psalm 139 is written in Hebrew and in Latin, and in English, and then Latin on top, one layer of porcelain over another. *Tehillim*, written across the top. It's a table with gold, a table with porcelain, and it's a table for a wonderful Jewish writer, Sara Copio Sullam, who lived in the seventeenth century (fig. 2.9).

Finally, you go up to the highest room, and that's the sukkah. It's the space for the festival of Sukkot. The place where you celebrate the end of that extraordinary festival of being in transit, of being migratory, and you celebrate briefly this moment of bringing everyone together. And this is the *sukkah*, the highest space in the whole of the ghetto, with the prayers of the Sukkot all around you. And I've made another table, and nine tiny vitrines, which go up. Pieces of porcelain held very, very precariously here. And the light changes, and it is my way of talking about temporary shelter (Fig. 2.10).

And you look out of the window, and you remember that great short story by Rilke, about the elderly man in the ghetto in Venice, who wants to be moved higher and higher, and higher. He wants to see the sea. As he gets older, he's moved from one

2 John Donne, "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning," in *The Complete Poems of John Donne*, ed. Robin Robbins (Routledge, 2010), 258.



Fig. 2.10. *sukkah*, installation view, 2019, The Jewish Museum, Venice.
© Edmund de Waal. Photo by Fulvio Orsenigo.

room to another, and another, until finally, finally he can see the sea: and then he dies. So when you're in this room at the top topmost place, you're in this extraordinary space of looking down into the Campo di Ghetto Nuovo where there are all these kids playing football. And you remember there are all these extraordinary laws in the sixteenth century about not playing football on the Sabbath. And you remember all these extraordinary celebrations, and you hear voices, you hear all the plural languages that came together in the ghetto, not a place only of exclusion, but a place of plural language. You hear it, and that's why I made this piece, where all these things can sit together. And then finally, *psalm* in one place, but *psalm* somewhere else, across town, in the Ateneo Veneto. It's a beautiful sixteenth-century building, which was used as the place where condemned prisoners spent their last week. It's a place of another kind of liminality (fig. 2.11).

And this is where I've made my library — the library I promised you. It's a library of exile (figs. 2.12; 2.13).



Fig. 2.11. Ateneo Veneto, Venice. Photo by Edmund de Waal.



Fig. 2.12. library of exile, installation view, 2019, Ateneo Veneto, Venice. © Edmund de Waal. Photo by Fulvio Orsenigo.



Fig. 2.13. *library of exile*, installation view, 2019, Ateneo Veneto, Venice. © Edmund de Waal. Photo by Fulvio Orsenigo.

You come in, and you see a small building. The walls are covered in porcelain slip — liquid porcelain. Around these walls I’ve written a text — a history of all the lost and destroyed libraries of the world (fig. 2.13).

It begins with Alexandria, but it goes through the lost Mad-rassah libraries, and Rabbinical libraries, the libraries of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. It itemizes and anatomizes the book burnings. It goes through the whole of the twentieth century. Round the corner, I’ve written, “It is personal,” and I’ve inscribed my grandfather’s name for his destroyed, lost, looted, forgotten library in Vienna. I’ve written the haunting words of

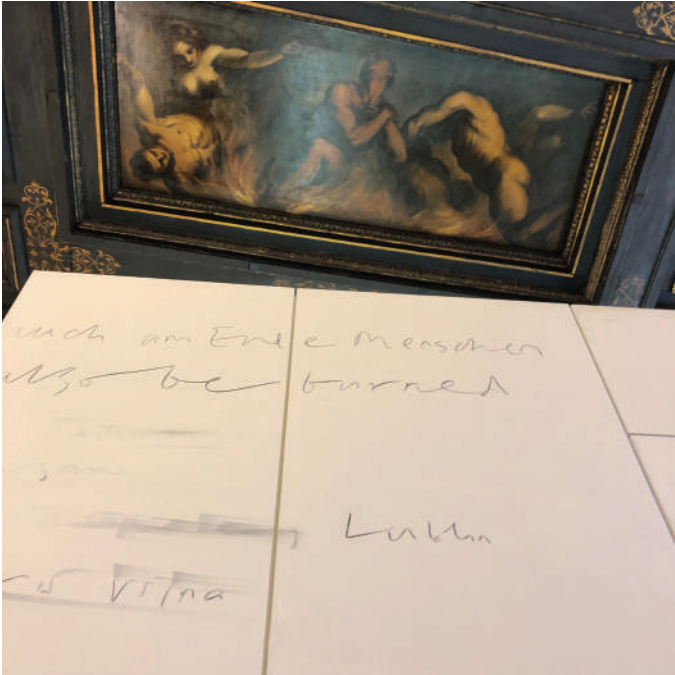


Fig. 2.14. *library of exile*, installation view, 2019, Ateneo Veneto, Venice. © Edmund de Waal. Source: Edmund de Waal.

Heinrich Heine, “*Auch am Ende Menschen*” (“Where there are books burned, in the end, people will also be burned”) (fig. 2.14)³

Looking up after my inscriptions, I see this extraordinary image, unintentionally a conflagration above me. I have written the whole history, this threnody of loss, from Alexandria all the way through Sarajevo, and ending up with Mosul, with the destructions at Timbuktu and Mosul just that handful of years ago.

But you can't live with loss like this. It's not about melancholy, it's never about melancholy: melancholy destroys you, holds you

3 Heinrich Heine, “Almansor,” in *Historisch-kritische Gesamtausgabe der Werke*, vol. 5, ed. Manfred Windfuhr (Hoffman und Campe, 1994), l. 244.

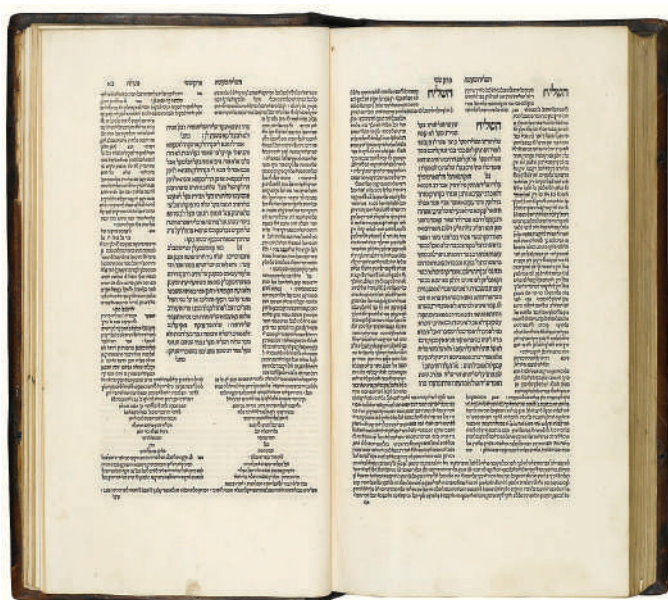


Fig. 2.15. *The Babylonian Talmud*, printed by Daniel Bomberg. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

viselike, and it makes you not work, preventing any agency in the world and leading you to nostalgia, which kills. So you go into the library of exile, and what do you find? You find four installations based on this great early printing by Daniel Bomberg, of the Talmud: the first printing of the Talmud done in Renaissance Venice, just one hundred yards away (fig. 2.15).

So I make four installations called *psalm*, where the holy word is suddenly left behind, and there are just empty spaces and shadows. And porcelain and marble take the place of commentary (figs. 2.16 and 2.17).

And these four installations sit in this space—and then? And then two thousand books, written by writers from Ovid onwards, two thousand years of exilic literature. Two thousand years of people, who have been forced across a border, who have been forced to flee.



Fig. 2.16. *psalm, I*, 2019. © Edmund de Waal. Photo by Mike Bruce.

So that when you go in, there are two thousand books, in eighty languages. And when you sit there, and reach down for a book, and open it up, you find that in every book it says “Ex libris – Library of Exile.”

And you are invited to write your name in a book that matters to you. And I’ve seen so many people in tears, finding a book that matters to them, and being able to write their name, doing the things that you don’t do in libraries: writing in the books. And I found that the book that has the most people claiming it in the whole of the library (we had two hundred people — one ex libris sticker on top of another) is Judith Kerr’s *The Tiger Who Came to Tea* (fig. 2.19). Isn’t that wonderful?

For three long months, we’ve had dozens and dozens of events there. We’ve had wonderful writers. We’ve had choreography, we’ve had music, we’ve had the Psalms day and night. We’ve



Fig. 2.17. *library of exile*, installation view, 2019, Ateneo Veneto, Venice.
© Edmund de Waal. Source: Edmund de Waal.

had extraordinary encounters, we've had people leaving books on the doorstep, and it works. What works is the extraordinary experience of being alone in a library but being surrounded by voices, which is what libraries do. And it's my way of honoring that extraordinary moment, of crossing the threshold of the fact that actually, when we are surrounded by our books, *our* books, we're surrounded by people who have moved, that all language is diasporic, and the suggestions that have come in! There's this great big, wonderful table, where people tell us what we should be buying for the library. I hadn't budgeted for how many books I would have to buy. And it works not only because we have wonderful writers, but for the most marvelous reason of all: that it's not my library anymore. I set it going, and now it belongs elsewhere.

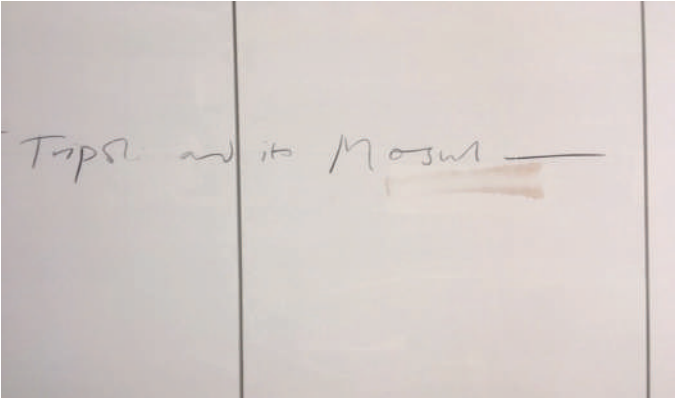


Fig. 2.18. *library of exile*, installation view, 2019, Ateneo Veneto, Venice.
© Edmund de Waal. Source: Subha Mukherji.

So it's moving. From Venice, it moves in the winter to Dresden, it's going to occupy a place in the Japanisches Palais, where there was a great, great library destroyed in February 1945. It's going to Dresden at a difficult time for Dresden — with the toxic growth of the right-wing movement there. It's going to sit alongside a great room from Damascus that was brought in the nineteenth century; it will be near Damascus. Then in the Spring of 2020, it goes to the British Museum. And there's a huge program for writers, for children's groups, working with English PEN and other wonderful organizations. It's wonderful that it should be there. But the most moving thing of all is, that after it finishes, the panels on which I have inscribed the names of the lost libraries are being given to The Warburg Institute in London and the books are being given to Mosul, and are becoming the foundation of the new University Library of Mosul, which was destroyed by ISIS. It goes to the place where the Babylonian Talmud was written three thousand years ago, and it just tells you something about migrant knowledge. It tells you that you can't contain it, and that it goes on.

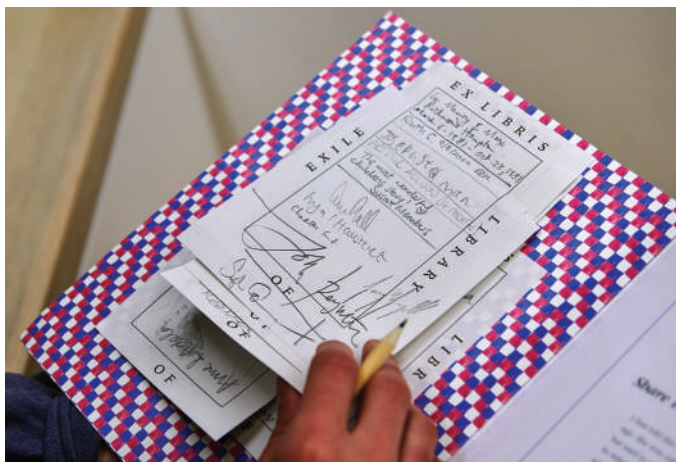


Fig. 2.19. *library of exile*, 2019, Ateneo Veneto, Venice. © Edmund de Waal. Source: Subha Mukherji.

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Response to Edmund de Waal

Gillian Beer

Edmund de Waal is a potter and a writer. One medium produces work that is stationary, its shape often enclosing hidden space; the other is implicitly narrative, sequential, migratory. But that is too simple a contrast between these two ways of being.

In this response to Edmund, I want briefly to connect his practice as a potter and as a writer in order to explore his passionate concern with exile and migration, destruction, and resurgence. Through his artistic practices he knows about loss and imperfection. He relishes shards and palimpsests. He is troubled by the history of porcelain, with its oppression of poor, working people and its association with wealth and dictatorships. The pure whiteness of the object has been produced by many marred lives. Yet he loves it. And we may love it too. His troubled feelings towards libraries are concentrated on their destruction, on the obliteration of past knowledge, the attacks on the experience of others. He is the champion of books and their power to embody lives and to sustain connection. He knows that the individual reader is part of a great unknown company of other readers across time and space.

Some of Edmund's work as a potter has been reserved—set high up in the ceiling at the Victorian and Albert Museum, and

under a pavement vitrine at Sidgwick Avenue, Cambridge, both locations emphasizing the needs of eye and hand by denying their fulfilment. We long to touch pots. They are tactile objects, retaining the impression of human hands even when the maker may be absent or long dead. They are both plastic and immovable. They have no legs. They do not move or migrate. But they can be set in relation to other pots, in clusters or distanced, tracing a kind of narrative, not linear but associative. And that clustering is one of the special features of Edmund's later work. New stories may flicker out from these nests or lines or ellipses.

Edmund has discovered implicit narratives among pots, through grouping and assembling, through spacing and distancing. These are shadow narratives, unstable because reliant on a hand to dispose them, and always capable of being rearranged by other hands into other meanings. This expresses affinity to writing, which is always reliant on being read, and which means anew in changed places and circumstances. The tiny Japanese *netsuke* given to Edmund by his uncle carry generations of family history for him, which he has opened to others of us through his writing and travels.

On the face of it, migration may seem then to be almost the opposite of ceramics. Pots can be carried but they are friable and may be among the first victims of travel. So Edmund's ambition to make a moving library composed of pots as well as books may seem quixotic. Scale may determine what survives. Very small squat objects like the beautiful *netsuke* can safely carry the almost obliterated memories of family members long dead. But their survival depended on human hands, on the housekeeper who hid them from the Nazis. In *The Hare with Amber Eyes* Edmund rediscovered, through travel and archives and writing, the profound and the contingent connections between people alive in the past and in the present, in books and in ceramics. He and his family have now sold half their collection of *netsuke* in aid of refugees, bringing a new phase of migration, and an emphatic real-world outcome, to the current story of these objects.

The event Migrant Knowledge, Early Modern and Beyond and Edmund's contribution to it took place in 2019. Over a long-

er time, his library of exile has moved across the world to lodge briefly at the British Museum and to experience the lockdown. So much has happened in these intervening months: Black Lives Matter, presidential insurrection in the USA, the pandemic which involves us all worldwide. During the current pandemic, Edmund's new ceramics have opened out into platters with low surrounding walls and a dark stripe of an insignia. Instead of a cloistered and inviolable inner space to which access must be denied if the pot is to remain unbroken, we now have work that lays itself bare to the eye. This is the artist's migration: it moves within and alongside events without being simply a commentary on them. It makes new.

III.

Essays

Travel Writing, Poetics, and the Early Modern Knowledge Economy

Natalya Din-Kariuki

The rise of travel and travel writing in early modern England precipitated an epistemological crisis. In presenting, or, at least, claiming to present new knowledge about the world, travelers' writings catalyzed debates about how knowledge should be defined, produced, and disseminated.¹ Fundamental to these debates was a distinction, one made especially explicitly by humanist pedagogues evaluating the educational benefits of foreign travel, between eyewitness "experience" and "book knowledge."² But the language of these debates is misleading: in practice, the distinction between "experience" and "book knowledge" was not quite so clear cut. This is because travelers often set textual witnesses — including the writings of other

1 An important volume on early modern travel and knowledge is Ivo Kamps and Jyotsna G. Singh, eds., *Travel Knowledge: European "Discoveries" in the Early Modern Period* (Palgrave, 2001).

2 For discussions of these debates, see Sara Warneke, *Images of the Educational Traveller in Early Modern England* (E.J. Brill, 1995), 41–104, and Melanie Ord, *Travel and Experience in Early Modern English Literature* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 29–56.

travelers, works of natural philosophy and natural history, poetry, drama, ancient literature, and scripture — alongside their own eyewitness observations.

Early modern travel writing thus offers an especially striking illustration of migrant knowledge: knowledge which begins in one place and ends up in another, crossing geographical, historical, cultural, and textual borders along the way. It is also a migrant form, one produced through processes of textual allusion, citation, revision, and borrowing which transport ancient and vernacular texts across the globe, and, in so doing, transform them.³ In what follows I examine two examples of such migrancy in seventeenth-century English travel writing. Although the travelers I discuss journeyed to different parts of the world and for different purposes, both turned to the affordances of literary form to understand and describe their experiences. By showing that travelers wrote in a self-consciously literary fashion, employing strategies drawn from rhetoric and poetics, I want to demonstrate the reciprocity of empirical and humanist modes of knowing as well as broaden the scope of what we understand early modern “literature” to comprise.

My first example is Henry Blount, author of an account on the Ottoman Empire titled *A Voyage into the Levant* (1636).⁴ The purpose of Blount’s travel is not certain, though it is possible that

3 I borrow the concept of “migrant form” from Subha Mukherji, in private conversation about ongoing work. She also discusses it at further length in the Introduction to this book.

4 For Blount’s biography, see John Aubrey, *Brief Lives: with, An Apparatus for the Lives of our English Mathematical Writers*, ed. Kate Bennett, vol. 1 (Oxford University Press, 2015), 336–39; Nabil Matar, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. “Blount, Sir Henry (1602–1682), traveller,” <https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-2687>; and Gerald MacLean, *The Rise of Oriental Travel: English Visitors to the Ottoman Empire, 1580–1720* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 117–22. The following paragraphs draw on Natalya Din-Kariuki, “Reading the Ottoman Empire: Intertextuality and Experience in Henry Blount’s *Voyage into the Levant* (1636),” *The Review of English Studies*, 74, no. 313 (2023): 47–63.

he was a spy.⁵ He had interests in natural philosophy, and later became a member of the Royal Society.⁶ In his introduction, Blount considered the relative merits of “travell” and “booke knowledge.” He began by noting that “Intellectual Complexions have no desire so strong, as that of *knowledge*,” and claimed that knowledge is best attained through eyewitnessing: because the eye has “the most immediate, and quicke commerce with the soule,” an “eyewitness of things conceives them with an *imagination* more compleat, strong, and intuitive, then he can either apprehend, or deliver by way of relation.” Travelling, and attaining an “ocular view,” thus gives a better “impression” of things than reading accounts by others, which are like “dishes” better suited for “another mans stomacke.” This is because the eye is selective: a traveler observes things that “his owne apprehension affects” and will “digest” these things into “experience” in a way that is most natural to him. By the same token, however, the mind is inclined to error; it tends to rely on existing knowledge, and to use its own, often flawed, perceptions as its main point of reference. Like a “false glasse,” it represents objects in “colours, and proportions untrue,” leaving the eye “dazled.” To mitigate this, the traveler must come to places in a manner “fresh and sincere,” judging other places on their own terms.⁷ Blount ended these remarks by presenting the *Voyage into the Levant* as lines “registred to my selfe,” intended to help him remember his travels in future.⁸

This passage borrows silently, but extensively, from Michel de Montaigne’s essay “Of Experience,” in John Florio’s transla-

5 See MacLean, *The Rise of Oriental Travel*, 120, 128–29, 153, 158–59, 160, and 166.

6 See Esmond Samuel de Beer, “The Earliest Fellows of the Royal Society,” *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London* 7, no. 2 (1950): 190.

7 “Sincere” did not have its stable modern sense in this period. It connoted things that were clean, pure, unadulterated, or, relatedly, individuals lacking in dissimulation or pretense. See *OED*, s.v. “sincere, adj.”

8 Henry Blount, *A Voyage into the Levant* (I.L. for Andrew Crooke, 1636), 3–4.

tion.⁹ The opening of the *Voyage into the Levant* is a paraphrase of the opening of Montaigne's essay, itself a paraphrase of the opening of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*: "There is no desire more naturall, then that of knowledge."¹⁰ Blount shares Montaigne's emphasis on experience, and, like him, understands experience in Aristotelian terms, as an accumulation of memories.¹¹ His commitment to recording his observations for memory parallels Montaigne's conception of his essays as loose "memorialles," a record of past experience, while his use of the language of digestion recalls the earlier writer's presentation of his writing as "digested." The term "register," in Blount's "lines registred to my selfe," is particularly important for Montaigne, who describes his essays both as a register of self-knowledge, and as a mode of coming to it. Blount thus positions the *Voyage* as another kind of essay, in which the traveler's "selfe" is placed under scrutiny.

Nor is this the only borrowing in Blount's introduction. The metaphor of the mind as a "false glasse" is ancient and conventional, but its formulation in the *Voyage into the Levant* is specifically indebted to Francis Bacon's *Advancement of Learning*.¹² Here, Bacon explains that the mind "is farre from the Nature of a cleare and equall glasse, wherein the beames of things should reflect according to their true incidence." Rather, it is "like an

9 Michel de Montaigne, "Of Experience," in *The Essayes or Morall, Politike and Millitarie Discourses*, trans. John Florio (Val. Sims for Edward Blount, 1603), 633.

10 Aristotle, "Metaphysics," trans. W.D. Ross, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, vol. 2, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton University Press, 1995), 980a15–16. For a discussion of Montaigne's engagement with Aristotle in "Of Experience," see Kathryn Murphy, "The Anxiety of Variety: Knowledge and Experience in Montaigne, Burton and Bacon," in *Fictions of Knowledge: Fact, Evidence, Doubt*, ed. Yota Batsaki, Subha Mukherji, and Jan-Melissa Schramm (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

11 Aristotle, "Metaphysics," 981a6–7, 981a13f.

12 For more general discussions of Blount's Baconianism, see MacLean, *The Rise of Oriental Travel*, 120, 123, 130, 134–35, 140, 165, and 176, and Gerald MacLean, *Looking East: English Writing and the Ottoman Empire before 1800* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 180. This language also has important biblical precedents, such as 1 Corinthians 13:12, and James 1:23–25.

enchanted glasse,” predisposed to yield “false appearances.”¹³ Bacon employs this conceit elsewhere, including the *Novum organum*, where he uses it in reference to the “Idols of the Tribe.” One of four “Idols of the Mind,” the categories of error to which the mind is prone, the Idols of the Tribe represent the misguided assumption that human sense is the ultimate “measure of things.” The intellect, Bacon says, is “to the rays of things like an uneven mirror which mingles its own nature with the nature of things, and distorts and stains it”; this unevenness can be attributed largely to the “dullness, inadequacy and unreliability of the senses,” including sight.¹⁴ Bacon’s Idols are designed to help his readers to avoid or diminish the “false notions” which entrap the mind and, in so doing, to get closer to the truth.¹⁵ Blount’s understanding of the mind as false yet salvageable is in sympathy with Bacon’s project.

Blount’s introduction develops a philosophical account of experience and prepares the reader for the travel observations that follow. Yet this account is paradoxical: Blount asserts the necessity of eyewitness in the context of literary borrowing; his argument against “booke knowledge” is constructed through books.¹⁶ The knowledge of the Ottoman Empire that he produces is inflected by his engagements with Aristotelian metaphysics, Florio’s translation of Montaigne, and Baconian natural philosophy. It migrates between ancient Greece and early modern France, England, and the Levant, as well as between forms, crossing from the essay to the aphorism.

My second example comes from the writings of Edward Terry, who served as chaplain to Sir Thomas Roe at the Mughal

13 Francis Bacon, *Advancement of Learning*, in *The Oxford Francis Bacon*, vol. 4, ed. Michael Kiernan (Clarendon Press, 2000), 116.

14 Francis Bacon, *Novum organum*, in *The Oxford Francis Bacon*, vol. 11, ed. Graham Rees with Maria Wakely (Clarendon Press, 2004), 80–81.

15 *Ibid.*, 79.

16 For a relevant discussion of Blount’s engagement with his reading, see Eva Johanna Holmberg, “Avoiding Conflict in the Early Modern Levant: Henry Blount’s Adaptations in Ottoman Lands,” in *Travel and Conflict in the Early Modern World*, ed. Gabór Gelléri and Rachel Willie (Routledge, 2020).

court of Jahangir in 1616–1619.¹⁷ Terry published an account of his experiences in India titled *A Voyage to East-India* (1655). In it, he acknowledged the “very great space of time ’twixt the particulars then observed, and their publication now,” but insisted that “those remote parts,” that is, India, have changed little in the intervening years; the reader should thus “look upon” his observations as if they had “been taken notice of, but immediately before it was here communicated.” However, he added that the “Original Copie” of the account had been revised, and now included lengthy digressions on matters of scripture, “Divine truths that lie scattered up and downe in manie places of this Narrative” intended to capture those “who fly from a sermon, and will not touch sound, wholesome, and excellent treatises in divinity.” As they travel through these pages, Terry says, readers will experience the “passage to East India” and be “brought [...] thither on shore” to “see” and “behold” the “riches and splendour” of Jahangir’s court, as well as unexpected displays of “temperance, justice, and unwearied devotion” by “Pagans and Mahometans” alike, sights that should prompt Christians to “turn their eyes inward” to examine the depth of their own faith. For this reason, he says, he has designed the book “like a well form’d picture, that seems to look stedfastly upon everie beholder, who so looks upon it.”¹⁸

Terry conceives of his writing in visual and topographical terms and relocates his observations from a position of spatial

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- 17 For Terry’s biography, see Michael Strachan, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, s.v. “Terry, Edward (1589/90–1660), travel writer,” <https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-27148>. For Roe’s own account of the embassy, see Thomas Roe, *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to India 1615–19: As Narrated in His Journal and Correspondence*, ed. William Foster (Munshiram Manoharlal, 1990). For a study of Roe’s embassy which discusses Terry, see Nandini Das, “‘Apes of Imitation’: Imitation and Identity in Sir Thomas Roe’s Embassy to India,” in *A Companion to the Global Renaissance: English Literature and Culture in the Era of Expansion*, ed. Jyotsna G. Singh (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).
- 18 Edward Terry, *A Voyage to East-India* (T.W. for J. Martin, and J. Allestrye, 1655), sigs. A2r-A6v (unpaginated).

and temporal alterity to the “here” and “now,” inviting the reader to “see” and “behold” the scenes described. At the same time, he makes it clear that they must carry out the most important part of the journey themselves: the contemplative turn “inward” that translates sight into insight. He thus positions the *Voyage to East-India* as a spiritual exercise that reveals as much about its author as it does about “everie beholder.” Terry’s conception of the travel account as an extension of his ministry is made most explicit in his reference to those “who fly from a sermon.” This phrase is an adaptation of a line in George Herbert’s poem “The Church-porch,” which declares, “A verse may finde him, who a sermon flies, / And turn delight into a sacrifice.”¹⁹ The connection to Herbert is reinforced by Terry’s title page, which, like Herbert’s poem, recalls the Horatian sense of the poet’s duty to profit and delight by noting that the account of the voyage is “Mix’t with some Parallel Observations and inferences upon the storie, to profit as well as delight the *Reader*.” Terry thus makes a claim for travel writing analogous to that which Herbert makes for poetry: namely, that it has the potential to do the work typically performed by a sermon.

As we have seen, Terry claims that his digressions offer “Divine truths.”²⁰ He specifically linked them to “application.” “Application” is a technical term from preaching for the part of the sermon in which the preacher explained the relevance of his chosen scriptural text to the present auditory, helping them to understand how they might apply it to their own lives. As Terry explains in a sermon preached in 1646: “The life of Preaching is

19 George Herbert and Nicholas Ferrar, *The Temple: Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations*. By Mr. George Herbert. (Thom. Buck and Roger Daniel, 1633), 1. These lines were widely quoted and adapted in the 1650s, during a revival of interest and investment in Herbert who represented a version of the English Church for which suppressed Anglicans were nostalgic.

20 For further discussions of Terry’s digressive style, see Daniel Carey, “Edward Terry’s *A Voyage to East-India* (1655): A Chaplain’s Narrative of the Mughal World,” *Études Anglaises* 70, no. 2 (2017): 200, and Richard Raiswell, “Edward Terry and the Calvinist Geography of India,” *Études Anglaises* 70, no. 2 (2017): 167–86.

application, and the life of Application, is the applying of truths to our particular selves,” “bringing home” the truths heard in the course of the sermon.²¹ Terry first established a connection between application and his experiences in India in a sermon delivered to the merchants of the East India Company at St. Andrewes Undershaft in London in 1649, published the same year under the title *The Merchants and Mariners Preservation and Thanksgiving*. In this sermon, which was occasioned by the safe return of seven ships belonging to the East India Company, Terry applied Psalm 107:30–31 (one verse of which reads, in the King James Version that Terry was drawing on, “Then are they glad because they be quiet; so he brings them to their desired Haven”) to the merchants’ experiences of deliverance from the dangers of the sea, what Terry describes as a “Tempest.” The sermon achieves a conventional preacher’s goal (applicability) through unconventional means, adapting the tropes and conventions of travel writing—specifically, giving the circumstantial details of his journey including distance, climate, as well as reference to a specific person, the diplomat Thomas Roe—to a different generic context.²²

Terry’s sermon to the East India Company, which turns the auditory of a London church into virtual witnesses of India, thus anticipates the strategies he employs in the *Voyage to East-India*. As in the sermon, Terry analogizes his travel experience and the words of scripture. For example, in the section on “Soyl,” Terry moves from a description of India’s agriculture and husbandry to a rather problematic denouncement of the Indians’ pride. Their pride, he says, is the reason that no “*Exhortations, Intreaties, Perswasions,*” not even the “strongest Arguments,” will succeed in saving their souls. Quoting from Psalm 73:6, “*their Pride [...] compasseth them as a Chain,*” he concludes, “I would intreat my *Reader*, when he comes to this digression, to read it

21 Edward Terry, *Pseudeleutheria. Or Lawlesse Liberty* (Thomas Harper, 1646), 26. Emphasis in original.

22 Edward Terry, *The Merchants and Mariners Preservation and Thanksgiving* (Thomas Harper, 1649), 8–9, and 26.

over and over again.”²³ By placing the psalm text within a highly localized passage, on foreign “Soyl” in more senses than one, Terry makes an implicit argument for its global, and eternal, applicability, while the request to the reader to return to this part of the text “over and over again” anticipates a reading experience both contemplative and iterative, analogous to the practice of a listener repeating the “use” of a sermon to themselves at home. Combining the topical approaches of preaching and travel writing, these texts enable his listeners and readers to experience India vicariously, and, by attending to Terry’s digressions on scripture, to come to know God.

As the examples of Blount and Terry show, the opposition of “experience” and “book knowledge” which structured debates about travel in the early modern period does not hold in travel writing itself. Travelers’ eyewitness experience is shaped, both structurally and conceptually, by textual witnesses, and when they journeyed across the world, they took their books in unexpected directions. These literary engagements, which situate works such as Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* and George Herbert’s collection *The Temple* in new geographical, cultural, and generic settings, reveal that travel writing is an inherently migrant genre, one which familiarizes the strange and estranges the familiar, transforming and retheorizing knowledge as it crosses borders.

23 Terry, *A Voyage to East-India*, 108–9. Emphases in original.

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of the Word (Then Student of Christ-Church in Oxford, and Chaplain to the Right Honorable Sr. Thomas Row Knight, Lord Ambassadour to the Great Mogol) Now Rector of the Church at Greenford, in the Country of Middlesex. T.W. for J. Martin, and J. Allestrye, 1655.

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“Loitering Lusks and Lazy Lorels”: Poverty, Vagrancy, and the Invention of Roguery

Anupam Basu

I

Mobility is in many ways one of the defining concerns of the early modern period. The early history of printed social and religious commentary was rife with caveats, trumpet blasts, admonitions, and dire warnings about the imminent and precipitous danger posed by people who are in some way or other *out of place*. In sumptuary laws and courtesy books, in formal church courts and informal networks of gossip, early modern social structures were deeply invested in reifying subjectivity as intimately and intrinsically connected to social position. From social upstarts who aspire for more than is their due, to uppity women who spill over the thresholds of domesticity, forms of dangerous mobility—social, economic, spatial, and semiotic—were imagined to pose a threat to the social fabric and at times the very foundation of the commonwealth. While a wide range of texts and genres including jests, ballads, pamphlets, sermons, and plays articulated concerns about mobility, the

genre of pamphlet literature popularly called the “rogue pamphlets” dealt with migration, vagrancy, and homelessness in its most explicit form.

The genre arose out of the social and economic turmoil of the sixteenth century when a multiplicity of factors converged to cause an unprecedented displacement of people. These factors ranged from the Reformation and the abolition of monasteries, to the enclosure of the commons and agrarian reform, and extended further afield to the rise of exploration, overseas trade, and colonialism. Changing relations to land, new forms of labor, and a gradual desanctification of poverty led to the development of the first English poor laws and the poor relief system, as well as widespread cultural anxiety about vagrants. Significantly, while there was a rise in the number of vagrants, the perceived threat from mobile and homeless people as well as the cultural *fascination* with them was much more than the legal records from the period would justify.¹ Rogue pamphlets purportedly set out to warn readers about the devious ways of vagrants, such as their talent for disguise and their ability to mimic the “deserving poor.” But such cautionary tales frequently ended up as comic capers where the shrewd criminal becomes a sort of anti-hero. Straddling the boundary between the stark objectivity of social documentary and the merry abandon of jests, rogue literature signals the early modern period’s deep discomfort with mobility that coexisted with a fascination for the malleable, versatile figure of the vagrant — slipping in and out of social roles and economic positions as easily as they moved from place to place.

In this essay I want to read one of the most representative and popular pamphlets of the genre, Thomas Harman’s, *A Caveat for Common Cursitors, Vulgarly Called Vagabonds*, to ask what ideological work this fascination with the literary representation of mobility performs. Harman organized the community of rogues and vagabonds into twenty-four categories. He took care to describe what kind of crime each type of rogue spe-

1 A.L. Beier, *Masterless Men: The Vagrancy Problem in England, 1560–1640* (Methuen, 1985), 123–26.

cializes in and their position in a supposed hierarchy of vagrant criminals. Further, he affixed a long list of “The Names of the Upright Men, Rogues and Palliards”² to his book along with a glossary of the “lewd, lousy language of these loitering lusks and lazy lorels,”³ also known as “cant” or “Pedlar’s French.” These features indicate a preoccupation with cataloging and classification that has an affinity with the emergence of the criminal’s body as a site of knowledge that we see in the penal practices of the period as well. However, the categorization of rogues is not specific to Harman’s text but a feature of the genre as a whole. The *Liber vagatorum*, known in English as *The Book of Vagabonds and Beggars*, was one of the earliest works to introduce some of these familiar themes. Its organization exactly foreshadowed Harman’s.

Harman’s project on the other hand was predicated on a radically different notion of vagrancy as not only a physically itinerant condition but also a subjectivity that was inherently mobile and malleable. His text was not an extension of a project of penal semiotics designed to physically mark and control, but in fact presented a deep-seated and sustained critique of such a project. Branding or other physical mutilation — such as having one’s ear cut off, or being scarred by the whip — or the social stigma associated with being “drawn at a cart’s arse,” or being put in the stocks were described in many contemporary laws, impressive not only in their precision but also in their emphasis on the significance or meaning of such punishment. For example, the act of 1572 prescribed for the able-bodied poor who did not seek work, “he or shee shalbe adjudged to bee grevouslye whipped and burnte through the gristle of the right Eare with a hot Yron of the compasse of an Ynche about, manifestinge his or

2 Thomas Harman, “A Caveat or Warning for Common Cursitors, Vulgarly Called Vagabonds,” in *Cony-Catchers and Bawdy Baskets: An Anthology of Elizabethan Low Life*, ed. Gāmini Salgādo (Penguin, 1972), 140.

3 *Ibid.*, 146.

her rogyshe kynde of Lyef.”⁴ The mark in this case becomes an external sign, a manifestation of one’s criminality.

The *Caveat’s* treatment of punishment differs markedly from such penal mechanisms. Unlike his meticulous detailing of the categories, methods, names, and language of vagabonds, Harman made no concerted attempt to describe the punishments that rogues and vagabonds might be subjected to. Punishments are only mentioned in passing, often to point out the failure of penal techniques to control vagabonds. The poem at the end of the pamphlet begins:

A stocks to stay sure, and safely detain
 Lazy lewd loiterers, that laws do offend,
 Impudent persons, thus punished with pain,
 Hardly for all this, do mean to amend.⁵

Furthermore, Harman said of upright-men, one of the highest kinds of rogues in the hierarchy that he describes:

These, not minding to get their living with the sweat of their face, but casting off all pain, will wander, after their wicked manner, through the most shires of this realm, [...] Yea, not without punishment by stocks, whippings, and imprisonment. Yet notwithstanding, they have so good liking in their lewd, lecherous loitering, that full quickly all their punishment is forgotten. And repentance is never thought upon, until they climb three trees with a ladder.⁶

Punishments only attempt to contain or confine vagabonds in particular locations (the stocks or the prison), or mark them (whipping), but were forgotten “full quickly.” Hanging is the only form of punishment that Harman found effective. He went

4 “14 Eliz. c.3,” in *The Statutes of the Realm*, vol. 4: 1547–1624 (Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1965), 591.

5 Harman, “A Caveat or Warning for Common Cursitors,” 151.

6 *Ibid.*, 117.

on to describe the formulaic speeches of repentance at the gallows. Such speeches were often represented in chapbooks and broadsheets and widely circulated, often in a modified and idealized form. The vagabond in the final poem, unaffected by all other forms of punishment, at last goes repenting to his death. An accompanying woodcut shows the execution with the gallows in the distance and a criminal with his hands tied being led towards it by the hangman while a crowd looks on. Harman's limitation of the possibility of repentance only to the absolute case of death by hanging, and his emphasis on its absence from all other forms of punishment, seems to suggest that he saw repentance as a means to an inward or ethical transformation.

This transformation is essentially a mis-recognition of a socioeconomic problem as an ethical one. The conception of vagabondage and poverty as the result of an unfixed, malleable subjectivity and moral corruption produced and conditioned the inattention towards vagabondage and poverty as a social problem. The *Caveat* proposed a notion of moral corruption as the cause of vagrancy in a way that foreclosed its emergence as an economic problem.

II

The case of Nicholas Blunt alias Nicholas Genings illustrates the limits of penal semiotics as an effective form of control, and of its incommensurability with Harman's conception of rogue subjectivity as inherently mobile. It is the most prominent instance in Harman and perhaps in all of the literature of roguery where such punishment is described in great detail. A.L. Beier cites Blunt as an instance of an “authentic rogue” whose existence can be verified from properly historical sources outside the literature of roguery⁷:

7 A.L. Beier, “On the Boundaries of New and Old Historicisms: Thomas Harman and the Literature of Roguery,” *English Literary Renaissance* 33, no. 2 (2003): 194.

Having one's portrait drawn and publicly shown seems novel, rather like F.B.I. Mugshots in the post office. The pamphlets include pictures of Blunt naked, in his real clothing, in his disguise as a false epileptic, being whipped at the cart's tail. Even the whips and manacles used are shown. A more complete recitation of the penal process would be hard to find in early modern literature.⁸

Beier's attribution of a photographic and literal authenticity fails to recognize any significant difference amongst the various portraits of Blunt. However, as he himself notes, they vary significantly — one shows him naked, one in his real clothing, and one in his disguise. We need to ask what in these very crudely executed woodcuts of a rogue in widely different attires produces this certainty of verisimilitude, this photographic correspondence?

Blunt's "authenticity" here seems to lead Beier to draw a neat opposition between the depictions of him in his "real clothing" and as a "false epileptic" — a phrase resonating between the two meanings of "false" as "not real" and "dishonest." This binary of real and false recreates precisely the parameters within which spectacular punishment functioned — it marked the body of the criminal with a "real" identity that negates the false ones he circulates. But does the illustration accompanying Harman's text serve the same function? The woodcut in question depicts Blunt as not one but two people simultaneously — as a well-dressed person claiming to be a hatmaker, Nicholas Blunt, and as shabbily attired Nicholas Genings, a false epileptic begging for money in tattered clothes and complete with blood smirched on his face. As if to emphasize the fact that these are not two pictures but in fact simultaneous depictions of the same person, the two figures both hold the same walking stick. Blunt is in an upright position while Genings's pose is more servile, as if about to bow. Neither figure is "real" in the sense that Beier uses the term, but more importantly, neither can be depicted as simply "false" be-

8 *Ibid.*, 195.

cause any construction of falsehood is posited on the possibility of a bedrock “real” or true self.

Harman’s narrative, too, struggled hard to establish this true self by stripping away the layers of “deep dissimulation” that hide it. Upon Blunt’s first capture as a counterfeit crank he was stripped of his clothes almost as if to emphasize his health: “Then they stripped him stark naked; and as many as saw him said they never saw a handsomer man, with a yellow flaxen beard, and fair-skinned, without any spot or grief.”⁹ On his next capture, “the printer sent his boy that stripped him upon Allhal-low Day at night to view him.”¹⁰ Finally he was also “stripped stark naked” when taken to Bridewell. Nakedness is repeatedly equated in the text to the definitive condition of one’s true self. One can detect a hint of jealousy in Harman’s description of Blunt’s body. However, the end of this episode undermined this trust on the truth of Blunt’s naked self, as he ran away into the night “as naked as ever he was born” after the mistress of the house had let him out, strangely unsuspectful of his falseness. “This crafty crank, espying all gone, requested the goodwife that he might go out on the back-side to make water, and to exonerate his paunch. She bade him draw the latch of the door and go out, neither thinking nor mistrusting he would have gone away naked.”¹¹ The goodwife’s assumption, as well as Beier’s, was undermined by Blunt’s bold striding forth. For, his innate falseness and mobility are not to be deterred or contained even within the stripped down naked truth of an undeformed body. Harman’s fourth edition of *Caveat* added a further woodcut of the naked Genings, in which he is not stripped down to his true self to show the falsity of his disguises, but innately false, escaping by running across the fields.

9 Harman, “A Caveat for Common Cursitors,” 114–15.

10 *Ibid.*, 117.

11 *Ibid.*, 115.

III

Harman's description of certain classes of rogues betrayed a genuine sympathy for their condition at the same time that he struggled to objectify and distance them as fundamentally different and morally corrupt. The chapter on the "doxy" provides a telling example of this struggle. Harman's language in the description of a particular doxy who came to beg at his household betrayed the logic of transformation that produced this uneasy insensibility. Describing the woman, he said that she was "surely a pleasant harlot, and not so pleasant as witty, and not so witty as devoid of all grace."¹² As one skips through the self-conscious rhythm of the sentence, it is hard to miss the movement from the physical beauty of the woman to her intellect and finally to her utter immorality. Each step of the transformation is marked by an incommensurability — "and not so pleasant as [...] not so witty as [...]" — which is nevertheless elided by the relentless movement inwards. The physical aspects of the woman — as the sociological aspects of vagabondage as a problem — disappear, or rather are subsumed under the production of an essential subjectivity or interiority.

In the description that follows, however, Harman seemed to struggle to keep the external and internal, the material and the subjective, separate as binary opposites. His own language betrays a conceptual confusion that is further emphasized by his apparent unease and confusion in the face of the woman's way of rationalizing her experiences. "And before I would grope her mind," Harman said, "I made her both eat and drink well."¹³ The suggestive metaphor seems to constitute interiority as not opposed to but rather as a continuation of the physical.

In the ensuing conversation, Harman pressed her to reveal the names of the upright-men and rogues she has "known and been conversant with,"¹⁴ the insinuation clearly being directed

¹² *Ibid.*, 136.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 137.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 138.

at her moral failings and promiscuity. And although she seems to conveniently oblige, saying she has known “six or seven,” the perspectives and expectations that she brings open up and challenge the logic of moral corruption that Harman was trying to impose. In other words, the doxy’s responses destabilized Harman’s monologic “extraction” of “information” about the rogues, producing instead a complex dialogic encounter with an entirely different set of material conditions and consequently an entirely different spectrum of moral values:

“Then first tell me,” quoth I, “how many upright men and rogues dost thou know, or has known and been conversant with, and what their names be?”

She paused a while, and said, “Why do you ask me, or wherefore?”

“For nothing else,” as I said, “but that I would know them when they came to my gate.”

“Now by my troth,” quoth she, “then are ye never the near, for, all mine acquaintance for the most part are dead.”¹⁵

Harman persisted with the interrogation nevertheless, seemingly sensing an opportunity to underline the dreadful demise that awaits such corrupt lives, and the doxy admitted that they died not for “want of cherishing, or from dreadful diseases” but were in fact hanged.¹⁶ She ignored Harman’s apparent surprise and innuendo that if all her lovers were hanged, how come there are so many rogues about the country, implying of course, that this one single doxy must have taken all vagabonds as lovers. The woman plainly stated though that she had but six or seven lovers and they had been hanged at various times, some years ago and some just a week past. What follows is perhaps the most moving

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

articulation in Harman's text of the possibility of a genuinely alternative framework not only of morality but also of humanity. Hearing of their deaths, Harman expectedly swooped in with his moralizing agenda of sin, evil and repentance:

"Why," quoth I, "did not this sorrowful and fearful sight much grieve thee, and for thy time long and evil spent?"

"I was sorry," quoth she, "by the mass. For some of them were good loving men. For I lacked not when they had it, and they wanted not when I had it, and divers of them I never did forsake until the gallows departed us."

"O merciful God!" quoth I, and began to bless me.

"Why bless ye?" quoth she. "Alas! good gentleman, everyone must have a living."¹⁷

For this vagrant woman the ethical and the economic weren't distinct spheres as they were for Harman. He posit ethics as prior to and in fact as the cause of material suffering whereas she could easily think of both as functions of socioeconomic practices that are intimately interlinked. What was for Harman a question of inherent corruption, only purged by repentance at death, was easily reduced to one of material necessity and causality by the doxy's "everyone must have a living." And yet, the tenderness of her description of these apparently immoral relationships, echoing in places the language of marriage vows, created a disturbing counterpoint to Harman's logic. Harman's immediately following reduction of this episode to the formulaic framework within which he conceptualized and contained all vagrancy underlines both his uneasiness and the inadequacy of his framework to formulate vagrancy as a problem, "Other matters I talked of. But this now may suffice to show the reader,

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 137.

as it were in a glass, the bold beastly life of these doxies.”¹⁸ The connection between the need to make a “living” and vagrancy, while it seemed natural and self-evident to the doxy, as it might to many modern readers, was opaque to Harman. For the woman it was simply an articulation of the practical necessities of survival that the vagrant population must cope with.

Harman’s consistent, willful misreading of migration and vagabondage in the *Caveat* sustained and contributed to the discursive refusal that foreclosed the analysis of poverty as a socioeconomic problem. Presenting the physical displacement of migrants as only an incidental manifestation of a far more dangerous, inherent problem — that of moral corruption — allowed Harman to perform his great sleight of hand, the displacement of the intersubjective and socioeconomic causes of poverty onto a relentlessly moral and essentialized conception of selfhood. Spatial mobility, instead of raising questions about the systemic causes of poverty, was mapped onto a set of semiotic and ethical parameters: the performative slipperiness and inherent moral corruption of the migrant. The displacement of the intersubjective and socioeconomic causes of poverty onto a relentlessly moral and essentialized selfhood preempts any understanding of poverty and mass migration as socioeconomic problems. Harman’s notion of an essential, and essentially mobile, self was for him the central precondition of unsettledness, which did not allow him to conceive or articulate socioeconomic relations as anything but contingent circumstances or effects. It was the mystical shell which covered the irrational kernel of his inverted dialectic.

18 Ibid.

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Travel Testimonies: Migrant Women's Mobilities in London Consistory Records, c. 1560–1600

John Gallagher

In 1577, Lionne Foullon and her daughter were summoned to account for themselves at the French Church on London's Threadneedle Street. The two women had recently traveled to Bruges, a journey which the consistory — the church's governing body — believed to have been undertaken in the company of "scandalous and debauched people." Under questioning, Foullon's daughter told the consistory that she and her mother had gone to Bruges "to make a better living," but that in the end the pair had been forced to return to London. The consistory admonished both of them, but especially Lionne Foullon — as a mother, she was particularly to blame for her bad behavior and for the bad company she had kept during the journey.¹

¹ Anne M. Oakley, ed., *Actes du consistoire de l'église française de Threadneedle Street, Londres*, vol. 2: 1571–1577 (Huguenot Society of London, 1969), 199. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.

Lionne Foullon never wrote down the story of her travels: if she wrote letters or kept a journal describing where she went and what she saw, they have not survived. That she and her daughter undertook the journey to Bruges and back is only known from her answers to the questions of an all-male consistory. But her experience of traveling between England and the European continent was not an unusual one among the women of London's sixteenth- and seventeenth-century migrant communities. The consistory of the Dutch Church at Austin Friars would also hear the story of Mayken de Grave, who had traveled from London to the continent and back again and was suspected of having "fallen into popishness" while abroad.² They would show an interest in the woman who had traveled to London from the Low Countries with Jan Oosterlinck, and who he claimed was his wife.³ And they would urge Janneken Schuttens to take a journey from London to Antwerp in order to "seek her right" in a case before the magistrate there.⁴

The women who migrated to England in the latter half of the sixteenth century were, by definition, travelers—but their experiences of mobility were not preserved in the same way that men's travel narratives in the period commonly were.⁵ This essay argues that the consistory records of London's "stranger

2 A.J. Jelsma and O. Boersma, eds., *Acta van het consistorie van de Nederlandse gemeente te Londen 1569–1585* (Instituut voor Nederlandse Geschiedenis, 1993), 225.

3 *Ibid.*, 391.

4 *Ibid.*, 595.

5 On women as migrants and travelers, see Lotte van de Pol and Erika Kuijpers, "Poor Women's Migration to the City: The Attraction of Amsterdam Health Care and Social Assistance in Early Modern Times," *Journal of Urban History* 32, no. 1 (2005): 44–60; Eva Johanna Holmberg, "Introduction: Renaissance and Early Modern Travel — Practice and Experience, 1500–1700," *Renaissance Studies* 33, no. 4 (2019): 516; Patricia Akhimie, "Gender and Travel Discourse: Richard Lassels's 'The Voyage of Lady Catherine Whetenall from Brussels into Italy' (1650)," in *Travel and Travail: Early Modern Women, English Drama, and the Wider World*, ed. Patricia Akhimie and Bernadette Andrea (University of Nebraska Press, 2019), 124–26; and Amrita Sen, "Traveling Companions: Women, Trade, and the Early East India Company," *Genre* 48, no. 2 (2015): 193–214.

churches,” which played host to the city’s growing foreign Protestant communities from the latter half of the sixteenth century onwards, can be used to reconstruct some aspects of these migrant women’s experiences of mobility: what they did, what they felt, what they knew.⁶ The travel testimonies found in consistory records are often fragmented and incomplete: More often than not, the stranger church consistories whose questioning shaped them were not primarily interested in mobility itself, but sought to investigate rumors, illicit sex, or marital disharmony within their communities and beyond the seas.⁷ The words spoken before the consistories are not transparent: different speakers offered very different versions of events, tensions within the community bubbled over, emotions ran high, and the record that survives is one kept by male scribes serving all-male consistories.⁸ But the women who were summoned to account for themselves before the elders of London’s French, Dutch, and Italian churches — and those who presented themselves in order to state their own cases — frequently told (or had told about them) stories of migration and mobility. Women’s voices are rare in the printed travel literature and manuscript accounts of travel which form the basis for many histories of early modern mobility, but these consistory records can shed light not only on the experience of travel for early modern migrant women, but also

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- 6 There is no space here to summarize the rich historiography of London’s stranger churches and migration to London in the sixteenth century. Key scholarship includes Owe Boersma, “Vluchtig voorbeeld: De Nederlandse, Franse en Italiaanse vluchtelingenkerken in Londen, 1568–1585” (PhD diss., Theologische Universiteit Kampen, 1994), and Andrew Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities in Sixteenth-Century London* (Clarendon Press, 1986).
- 7 On social discipline in the consistories, see Pettegree, *Foreign Protestant Communities*, 182–214. On the archives of the “stranger churches,” see Andrew Spicer, “Migration, assimilation et survie: Les archives des consistoires du Refuge anglais,” *Bulletin de la Société de l’Histoire du Protestantisme Français* 153 (2007): 671–93.
- 8 For an instructive investigation of the relationship between consistory business and the contents of consistory records, see Judith Pollmann, “Off the Record: Problems in the Quantification of Calvinist Church Discipline,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 33, no. 2 (2002): 423–38.

the ways in which networks, reputations, and personal histories could cross borders as they built a new life far from home.⁹

For men or women, journeys back and forth to the continent were physically taxing and fraught with danger, as the Dutch Church consistory recognized when it warned of the “great peril on the way” to the Netherlands.¹⁰ Writing to his wife from Norwich in 1567, Pauwels de Coene told her to sell what she could and come to England. He sent her a barrel of herring with which to finance the journey and urged her to travel as soon as she could, “For the journey, as we understand is everyday becoming more dangerous, and will become [still] more dangerous because the devil will become more furious.”¹¹ Some women undertook journeys to and from England while pregnant. Writing following his excommunication from the London Dutch Church and his “pilgrimage” to Emden, Adriaen van Haemstede wrote how his wife had had triplets — two boys and a girl, of whom the youngest boy had died.¹² In 1579, Tanneken van den Hove appeared before the consistory of London’s Dutch Church, having recently come from overseas and seeking to have her child baptized in the church.¹³ For other women, the journey must have been a substantial physical challenge: the mother of

9 Mary C. Fuller, “Afterword: Looking for the Women in Early Modern Travel Writing,” in *Travel and Travail: Early Modern Women, English Drama, and the Wider World*, ed. Patricia Akhimie and Bernadette Andrea (University of Nebraska Press, 2019), 331.

10 Jelsma and Boersma, *Acta*, 716.

11 Pauwels de Coene to his wife in Ieper, Norwich, August 21, 1567. Alastair Duke, ed., “Private Correspondence Between Flemish Strangers in England and Their Families and Contacts in Flanders, 1566–1573,” *Dutch Revolt*, https://dutchrevolt.library.universiteitileiden.nl/english/sources/english_sources_janssen-correspondence/. See also Alastair Duke, “Eavesdropping on the Correspondence between the Strangers, Chiefly in Norwich, and their Families in the Low Countries, 1567–70,” *Dutch Crossing* 38, no. 2 (2014): 116–31.

12 J.H. Hessels, ed., *Ecclesiae Londino-Batavae Archivum. Tomus Secundus. Epistulae et Tractatus cum Reformationis tum Ecclesiae Londino-Batavae Historiam Illustrantes (1544–1622)*, vol. 2, part 1 (Cambridge University Press, 1889), 146.

13 Jelsma and Boersma, *Acta*, 538.

Jacobus Bucerus arrived in Sandwich in 1562, having renounced Catholicism and traveled to join her son and the stranger Protestant community in that town at the age of 72.¹⁴

Traveling alone was deemed to be risky for women. In 1561, the consistory of the London French Church debated at length how the wife of their minister, Nicolas des Gallars, should travel to England. The minister asked the consistory's advice on the best route, wondering whether it was best for her to travel through France or Germany. After some discussion, it was settled that the deacon Nicolas Binet was to be sent to collect her, since he was already planning to travel and see his parents.¹⁵ Later, the consistory would deal with a mother's desire to go to Geneva in order to fetch her children: at her husband's suggestion, she was to be accompanied by a young man. The consistory demurred, unwilling to allow her to take such a long voyage with a lone man who was not her husband.¹⁶ Some traveled with other family members, with children, or with friends, but even in a group, female travelers could find themselves and their enterprise treated with suspicion, as in the case of Lionne Foullon and her daughter with whom this essay began. The consistory's concerns about solo female travel were not only to do with physical danger, but also perceived threats to chastity and reputation. The suspicion and concern with which the all-male consistories viewed women's travel did not mean that they were implacably opposed to it. In 1596, a meeting of the Colloquy of England's French churches urged the wife of Jean Baudin to return to Holland in order "to prove the incestuous adultery of her husband before the magistrate of the place where he is."¹⁷ In spite of its

14 Hessels, *Epistulae et Tractatus*, 195.

15 Elsie Johnston, ed., *Actes du consistoire de l'église française de Threadneedle Street, Londres*, vol. 1: 1560–1565 (Publications of the Huguenot Society, 1937), 26.

16 *Ibid.*, 55.

17 Adrian Charles Chamier, ed., *Les actes des colloques des églises françaises et des synodes des églises étrangères réfugiées en Angleterre 1581–1654* (Huguenot Society, 1890), 36.

dangers, women's mobility between London and the continent was a feature of the stranger churches' community life.¹⁸

Traveling in company was not necessarily safer for women. One journey where we have a little more information began in Arras in 1571 and took ten days to travel to England. The travelers were a group made up of Jeanne, the wife of Jean du Bois; Robert Bloquet and his wife Cateline Midy; a young man named Pierre, a baggage-carrier; and the group's leader, Jean du Quief. They left Arras on St. Christopher's day, July 25, and headed for the coast, spending the night in Hesdin before reaching Boulogne-sur-Mer, where they stayed for two nights before setting sail for England.¹⁹ The reason we have more detail about this voyage is because of a scandal that emerged some months after the party had arrived in London. In December of that year, the consistory of the French Church first interrogated Jean du Quief about whether he had solicited Jeanne du Bois to engage in adulterous sex or slept with her. Du Quief attempted to stonewall the consistory, but there were more questions to come: Had he told her that she would pay nothing for her voyage if she agreed to sleep with him? Under pressure, he admitted that something had happened between the pair at Sandwich, but denied having initiated matters, claiming that she had told him to come and sleep on her bed.²⁰

Interrogated the next day, Jeanne du Bois offered a rebuttal of du Quief's accusations. She told the consistory "that Jean du Quief had importuned her several times both beyond the sea and in England," describing how at Sandwich he had wheedled

18 Silke Muylaert argues convincingly that the term "exile" in this period "can divert us from the high mobility and socioeconomic opportunities underlying religious migration." Silke Muylaert, *Shaping the Stranger Churches: Migrants in England and the Troubles in the Netherlands, 1547–1585* (Brill, 2021), 17.

19 Oakley, *Actes*, 46. The du Quief case is considered by Susan Broomhall, "Authority in the French Church in Later Sixteenth-Century London," in *Authority, Gender and Emotions in Late Medieval and Early Modern England*, ed. Susan Broomhall (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 137–40.

20 Oakley, *Actes*, 41–42.

his way into her bed, promising not to do anything, but — when she eventually agreed — changing his manner and telling her that she would have to tell people she was his wife, and that if she said anything she would be thrown in prison.²¹ When du Quief denied his actions, Jeanne du Bois fervently affirmed her words, saying “everything I’ve said is true, on the damnation of my soul.”²² Their companions in the voyage were called to give testimonies, which attest to the cramped, emotionally intense, and potentially dangerous experience of cross-Channel travel. On the first night of their journey, Cateline Midy recalled how du Quief hadn’t dared to sleep “since someone had told the sergeant of the place that they were going to England.”²³ The company often slept in close quarters, where Robert Bloquet could hear “the bed creaking loudly.” Bloquet attested to having risen from bed with his dagger in his hand, “not wanting to permit such villainy in his company,” before being talked down by his wife.²⁴ The witnesses attempted to speculate about Jeanne’s motives and culpability and challenged both her narrative and du Quief’s, but what emerges most clearly from the consistory’s investigations into the case is that travel, for a woman like Jeanne du Bois, carried risks of pursuit by the authorities, physical and sexual violence or assault, and damage to reputation.

While the fear of physical assault colors some men’s accounts of travel in this period, for women, the threat of sexual violence could loom large. The case of the fifteen- or sixteen-year-old Janneken Maldron was brought to the consistory of the Dutch Church in 1585.²⁵ Jan de Backer brought a written statement by Maldron which alleged that on the road between Oudenaarde and Tournai, Geeraert Truyen had “pushed his manhood into

21 Ibid., 43–44.

22 Ibid., 44.

23 Ibid., 46.

24 Ibid., 45.

25 Jelsma and Boersma, *Acta*, 756–57. On sexual violence and rape in early modern English sources, see Garthine Walker, “Rereading Rape and Sexual Violence in Early Modern England,” *Gender & History* 10, no. 1 (1998): 1–25.

her hand and sought to have intercourse with her.”²⁶ In the Green Lion in Tournai, Truyen had come naked to Maldron’s bed while she slept and lain at her feet, pulling at her clothes and seeking the same. When she refused, Maldron said that Truyen had asked “why you wouldn’t let me, you let the soldiers do it,” a remark which, while not expanded upon in the hearing of the consistory, suggests the risks of sexual violence which came with the surveillance and policing of migrant routes in war-time.²⁷ On the road between Dover and Canterbury, Maldron had told the wife of Jan de Backer (with whom she would lodge in London) everything that had happened.²⁸ Janneken Maldron was not the only woman to report behavior of this kind on the road: Susanne, the widow of Phillips Janssen, was summoned before the Dutch consistory for her “immodest going overseas with Hans Walckneel,” and because “people say that she has committed dishonorable acts with him.”²⁹ Susanne countered by arguing that she had done nothing wrong, neither on the road nor in Antwerp, but recounted that Walckneel had come to her bed while drunk in her cousin’s house, but that she had called out to her cousin and he had called the watch.³⁰ The consistories’ concern with illicit sex meant that their records asked questions which other records of early modern travel did not, and may have ensured the survival of more information about sexual activity, sexual violence, and gendered experiences of travel than the more canonical accounts of elite male travelers.

Discussing one member who had spent time overseas, the Dutch consistory asked for witnesses to his good behavior, musing that while abroad he had been “out of our and the whole community’s sight.”³¹ Susan Broomhall writes that overseas travel by members of the French Church “often separated husbands and wives, and youths from supervizing elders [...] and

26 Jelsma and Boersma, *Acta*, 756.

27 *Ibid.* For Maldron’s further testimony, see *ibid.*, 770.

28 *Ibid.*, 757.

29 *Ibid.*, 643.

30 *Ibid.*, 643–44.

31 *Ibid.*, 692.

left individuals freer (and more at risk) to apply their own moral codes.”³² Both consistory and community were intensely aware that when individuals traveled, so too did rumors and reputations, in spite of the efforts made by some migrants to leave their past lives behind them. In 1571, the Dutch consistory heard how Ebe, the widow of Rems Juyt, had promised to bring a document attesting to the life she had led while abroad. On reading the document, the consistory murmured about the “public shame” that attached to her by reason of some wicked deeds.³³ The power of a story that could follow a woman from beyond the seas is also seen in the case of Catherine de le Deulle, who first came to the attention of the French consistory in September of 1571 when the man to whom she was betrothed asked to be released from his promise of marriage, as he had learned that his fiancée had killed a man in Lille some years before. The consistory called a number of witnesses in order to investigate this shocking accusation.³⁴ But those who knew the story put a different spin on it, explaining that le Deulle had been the victim of aggression, and that her blow against her assailant had not caused instant death — in fact, some said that her assailant (a man, they said, of bad character) had been seen going around the town before he died some weeks later.³⁵ His family had not pursued le Deulle; in fact, when she was questioned by the consistory, she admitted having injured the man as described by the witnesses. She had been five years at Lille without being asked about the case, she said, and it was only since she had arrived in London that she had heard it spoken of.³⁶ The consistory’s investigations offer some sense of the mobility of these rumors in London. Jan le Brun was admonished for having spread the story around the city, while Martin de Buisson told Jeanne le Cat that le Deulle was a murderer.³⁷ The next spring — after le

32 Broomhall, “Authority in the French Church,” 137.

33 Jelsma and Boersma, *Acta*, 176.

34 Oakley, *Actes*, 16. See also Boersma, “Vluchtig voorbeeld,” 151.

35 Oakley, *Actes*, 16–18, 56.

36 *Ibid.*, 18.

37 *Ibid.*, 33, 64.

Deulle's fiancé had sought to marry another woman in secret before himself dying of the plague — de Buisson would be admonished by the consistory for, among other offences, spreading rumors about the case “in houses and in the streets.”³⁸ But by that time, le Deulle would be gone, having left London and headed for the Low Countries — whether still pursued by this mobile story, these sources do not show.³⁹

The dislocation of migration could break relationships or offer an opportunity to start anew. For some women, this meant forging new relationships and seeking to marry, even though they might have a husband still living abroad.⁴⁰ The consistory concerned itself closely with investigating women's claims of the deaths of their previous partners.⁴¹ Sara Ravets found herself in trouble for having been secretly married in an English church to a man “of reckless life” when it was not even clear that her first husband was dead.⁴² A male member of the congregation was accused of living in “whoredom” with Eyken van Erckendale when, the consistory thundered, “a strong suspicion and rumor circulated that [her husband] was still alive.”⁴³ Judith Janssens brought a man and a woman from 's-Hertogenbosch to attest to her husband's being eight years dead: the next year, she would remarry in London.⁴⁴ Cathelene Verhamme made her case for being allowed to remarry with the aid of a document signed by a notary in Middelburg stating that her first husband was dead.⁴⁵ In cases where reputation was at stake, words “out of the mouth

38 Ibid., 76–77.

39 Ibid., 76. Susan Broomhall considers the mobility of information in the French Church in “Authority in the French Church,” 137.

40 On strangers' letters and separations among spouses and families in the migration context, see Duke, “Eavesdropping on the Correspondence between the Strangers,” 118.

41 Jesse Spohnholz, “Instability and Insecurity: Dutch Women Refugees in Germany and England, 1550–1600,” in *Exile and Religious Identity, 1500–1800*, ed. Jesse Spohnholz and Gary K. Waite (Routledge, 2015), 111–25.

42 Jelsma and Boersma, *Acta*, 135.

43 Ibid., 62–63, 72–73.

44 Ibid., 517.

45 Ibid., 497.

of a woman who had come from overseas” could be central to the consistory’s deliberations. When these female migrants traveled, so too did knowledge—or speculation—about their pasts.⁴⁶

For other women, time and distance meant that bonds had been broken, and some claimed not to know about the partners they had left behind. Janneken Cocq’s husband had been absent for ten years and she purported not to know whether he was dead or alive. Her life had continued in his absence: she had become pregnant by Denys Denisschen but, the consistory was told, she had lost the child.⁴⁷ In August of 1581, Janneken Kramers was admonished for her dealings with her husband, who remained overseas. The Dutch consistory noted that “with many words” she had explained how she had tracked down her husband but that he had deceived her—it seems from her testimony that he was shacked up with a woman described in the consistory record (possibly by Kramers) as “the whore”—so she had returned to London. There, she found herself at odds with the consistory, who sought to urge her to return to her husband. She demurred, saying that she was not minded to follow their advice, at least before the winter. She declared her willingness to reunite with her husband, if he would leave the woman with whom he was involved, but she would not travel before the next summer.⁴⁸

While consistory records can give some sense of the actions of some migrant women in early modern London, it is much more difficult to get a sense of their inner lives, and the impact that their experiences of migration had on them. Some moments of intense psychological distress stand out in the consistory records: a laconic mention in the records of the French church of a woman named Denette or Druette Barde, who “thought to throw herself in the river twice or three times,” and was sum-

46 *Ibid.*, 398.

47 *Ibid.*, 399.

48 *Ibid.*, 602–3.

moned to be admonished by the consistory.⁴⁹ Another member of the French congregation had not left her house for several years, “due to some trouble she has in her mind,” and had not been seen at the church’s services, even though she had shown herself “by her piety and charity to be a Christian woman.”⁵⁰

In September of 1567, Clement Baet wrote to his wife to tell her of the opportunities for them in Norwich, where he had settled, and urged her to set out for England to join him. She was to bring clothes for herself and her daughter, “for people go about decently dressed,” as well as some furniture. Once she was ready to make the journey, her husband told her to “bring all this to the Nieuwe Dam and go to Nieuwpoort, to the Halve Maan: the woman there will help you.”⁵¹ Clement Baet’s letter gave no further information on the identity or activities of the woman who could be found at the sign of the Half Moon, likely an inn, but the question of what kind of help she could offer remains tantalizing. She may have been a source of information, advice, or practical help for the onward journey, a moneylender, or an early modern migration broker. But while the exact nature of the “migrant knowledge” possessed by the woman at the Halve Maan is impossible to access, the travel testimonies found amongst the disciplinary records of London’s stranger churches — however fragmented and contested their accounts of women’s mobilities — trace what migrant women knew from experience in early modern Europe.

49 Oakley, *Actes*, 57.

50 *Ibid.*, 17.

51 Clement Baet to his wife, Norwich, September 5, 1567, in Duke, “Private Correspondence Between Flemish Strangers.”

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Fickle Turbans and Mercurial Fashions: Blurring the Boundaries of Identities between Europe and the Ottoman Empire

Rosita D'Amora

In January 1479 the Republic of Venice and the Ottoman Porte signed a peace treaty ending a sixteen-year war. That August, a Jew named Simone arrived in Venice as special envoy of Mehmed II (1432–1481), the Sultan who, in 1453, had conquered Constantinople, the impregnable capital of the Byzantine Empire. Bearing letters from the Sultan, the envoy expressed the Sultan's wish for an artist to be sent to his court. This request was promptly met by La Serenissima who agreed to dispatch Gentile Bellini (c. 1429–1507), who was then, with his father Jacopo and his brother Giovanni, among the leading painters in Venice. Bellini travelled to the court of Mehmed II in September the same year and probably stayed in Constantinople until January 1481. During his residence, Bellini was commissioned to produce several works of art, of which only a few survive. These include a celebrated portrait of Mehmed II, now in the National Gallery in London, that is still considered one of the most iconic



Fig. 7.1. Gentile Bellini, *The Sultan Mehmet II*, 1480. Source: The National Gallery, London.

images of a Turk migrated to the West, and represents an equally famous turban.¹

Bellini's Turban

It is generally assumed that this portrait preserved the likeness of Mehmed II's face that reappears in many other con-

1 On Bellini's stay at the Ottoman court and the wider patronage of Italianate art promoted by Mehmed II, see Caroline Campbell and Alan Chong, eds., *Bellini and the East*, exh. cat. (Yale University Press, 1988); Gülru Necipoğlu, "Visual Cosmopolitanism and Creative Translation: Artistic Conversations with Renaissance Italy in Mehmed II's Constantinople," *Muqarnas* 29 (2012): 1–81; and Antonia Gatward Cevizli, "Bellini, Bronze and Bombards: Sultan Mehmed II's Requests Reconsidered," *Renaissance Studies* 28, no. 5 (2014): 748–65.

temporary visual representations — both medallic and painted portraits — and also finds a strict correspondence in written sources.² Giovanni Maria Angiolello (c. 1451–1525), a traveler from Vicenza who, having been captured by the Ottomans, was in the service of the Ottoman court during Bellini's visit, describes some of Mehmed II's physical characteristics that can be also found in the painting: his prominent *naso aquilino* (aquiline nose), his *occhi gossi* (big eyes), and his *collo curto, e grosso* (squat neck).³ The sultan's headgear, similarly, seems to be a faithful reproduction of a real turban. One of the earliest Ottoman chronicles, the *Tevârih-i Âl-i Osman* (The chronicles of the house of Osman) compiled by the Ottoman historian 'Âşîkpâşâzâde during the reign of Mehmed II, ascribes the introduction of a distinctive headgear to the reign of Orhan (1281–1362), the second Ottoman sultan, describing it as a *mu'akḳad bürma dülbend* (knotted turban with thick coils) that lords were required to wear when going to the imperial council. This description seems to correspond to the bulbous turban appearing in all the contemporary visual representations of Mehmed II.⁴ Besides the correspondence between these sources, there is another element showing that Bellini had a clear understanding of the sultan's headgear. On the upper right and left corners of his painting, as well as on the reverse of the medal he designed, the

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- 2 During his stay at the Ottoman court, Bellini also designed a medallic portrait of Mehmed II. Other medals were cast almost immediately before and after Bellini's arrival in Constantinople. See Julian Raby, "Pride and Prejudice: Mehmed the Conqueror and the Italian Portrait Medal," *Studies in the History of Art* 21 (1987): 171–94.
 - 3 Angiolello's text, whose authorship was ascribed to Donado da Lezze, is reproduced in Donado da Lezze, *Historia Turchesca 1300–1514* (Carol Göbl, 1909), 122–23. The "truthfulness" of Bellini's portrait is discussed in Elizabeth Rodini, "The Sultan's True Face? Gentile Bellini, Mehmed II, and the Values of Verisimilitude," in *The Turk and Islam in the Western Eye, 1450–1750: Visual Imagery before Orientalism*, ed. James G. Harper (Ashgate, 2011).
 - 4 Rosita D'Amora, "Alcune considerazioni sul valore simbolico del copricapo in ambito turco-ottomano," in *Scritti in onore di Giovanni M. D'Erme*, vol. 1, ed. Michele Bernardini and Natalia L. Tornesello (Università degli Studi di Napoli "L'Orientale," 2005), 344–45.

Venetian painter inserted a triple crown that has been regarded as a heraldic device which conveys the sultan's royal status.⁵ This seems to indicate that the artist knew that the turban did not have the status of a crown. The turban did not attain this status in later periods either, though it gradually became understood as a politically significant object.

The connections between the visual and textual evidence from coeval Western and Ottoman sources seem to suggest that this turban, its shape and form, was not a product of the artistic imagination, but rather a faithful reproduction based on the direct observations of the real turban Mehmed II actually wore, or, at least, of a type of turban in use during his time. Bellini's, therefore, was a realistic and credible depiction which did not simply use a turban as shorthand for a "Turk" or to convey religious otherness. Bellini provided other contemporary artists with a reproducible and accurate model of a turban in a context in which, since the late Middle Ages, turban-like headgear was used as a device to represent not only Muslims but also Jews, Pagans, and Protestants, visually connecting them to Islam's presumed heresies.⁶ The visit of Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528) to the workshop of Giovanni and Gentile Bellini during his first journey to Italy in 1494–1495, for example, while contributing more generally to the elaboration of Dürer's specific iconography of the Turk, allowed the German artist to borrow from Bellini the distinctive form of the Ottoman turban that he later used not only to represent Turks as Turks, but also to denote an anachronistically non-Christian other as an "extra-historical symbol of evil."⁷

5 Necipoğlu, "Visual Cosmopolitanism," 34.

6 Ruth Mellinkoff, *Outcasts: Signs of Otherness in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages*, vol. 1 (University of California Press, 1993), 60–61, 73–74.

7 Heather Madar, "Dürer's Depictions of the Ottoman Turks: A Case of Early Modern Orientalism?," in *The Turk and Islam in the Western Eye, 1450–1750: Visual Imagery before Orientalism*, ed. James G. Harper (Ashgate, 2011), 159–61, 165. Madar shows how Dürer's use of turbaned figures delivers a message on the impending danger of the rapid westward

Migration to the West

To the fifteenth-century viewer, the turban was already presented as a complex object loaded with connotations. A proper knowledge of the turban, though, had not yet migrated to the West. A hint of this comes from the small Italian city-state of Mantua through an epistolary exchange, at the beginning of 1492, between the Marquis of Mantua, Francesco II Gonzaga (1466–1529), and one of his agents, Giorgio Brognolo.⁸ On February 16 Francesco II, who was fascinated with Ottoman culture and had established friendly diplomatic relationships with the Sultan Beyazid II (1447–1512), ordered Brognolo to find for him in Venice a turban *a la turchesca, et bello* (in the Turkish style, and beautiful).⁹ The reason for the request remains unclear, but, interestingly, Brognolo met the Marquis's demand with equivocation, sending him a "tulimano" (inner robe)¹⁰ and pointing out how, despite his "diligent investigation," none of the people he had consulted in Venice, including some Turks and "stradioti,"¹¹ knew what a "turbante" was. In a subsequent letter the Marquis would specify that the turban is a *capello aguzo che usano [i] turchi* (pointed hat used by the Turks) made of cloth wrapped around the head, of which he heard there were many beautiful examples in Venice.¹² Once the agent understood what

advance of the Ottoman Empire. See also Julian Raby, *Venice, Dürer and the Oriental Mode* (Islamic Art Publications, 1982).

- 8 Molly Bourne, "The Turban'd Turk in Renaissance Mantua: Francesco II Gonzaga's Interest in Ottoman Fashion," in *Mantova e il Rinascimento Italiano: Studi in onore di David S. Chambers*, ed. Philippa Jackson and Guido Rebecchini (Sometti Editoriale, 2011).
- 9 Ibid., 62. On Francesco II Gonzaga's passion for turbans, see also Antonia Gatward Cevizli, "Portraits, Turbans and Cuirasses: Material Exchange between Mantua and the Ottomans at the End of the Fifteenth Century," in *Global Gifts: The Material Culture of Diplomacy in Early Modern Eurasia*, ed. Zoltán Biedermann, Anne Gerritsen, and Giorgio Riello (Cambridge University Press, 2018).
- 10 "Inner robe," from the Turkish word "dolaman."
- 11 Mercenary units from the Balkans in the service of Venice and other central and southern European states.
- 12 Bourne, "The Turban'd Turk," 63.

a turban was, he seems not to have had any trouble fulfilling the Marquis's desire.

Although Brognolo's bewilderment may seem odd in the context of cosmopolitan Venice, there are similar examples of European writing on the Ottoman Empire which does not always assume readers' familiarity with the turban. Theodore Spandounes (d. after 1538), belonging to a Byzantine refugee family that had settled in Venice after the conquest of Constantinople, refers to the Turkish turban as a headgear that has been seen in Italy in his account of the rise of the Ottoman Empire (published in three different editions between 1509 and 1538), but nonetheless describes what it looked like in detail.¹³ In later periods, though the Western public had acquired greater familiarity with the turban, European travelers' attention would still be caught by the variety of headgear in use within the multi-ethnic and multireligious Ottoman society. In particular, they continued to be intrigued by turbans: their often voluminous proportions, distinctive shapes, and different models that could immediately reveal, to those who knew how to interpret the taxonomy, the role and position each individual had within the community.

These descriptions become a trope in travel narratives even after Mahmud II's (1785–1839) 1829 clothing law imposing the fez as the official headgear of the empire.¹⁴ Significantly, the Italian author Edmondo De Amicis (1846–1908), who visited Istanbul in 1874, would still nostalgically lament the lack of turbans in his widely translated travel account *Constantinople* (1877–1878), noting how the “old enormous turbans of the age of Suleiman [the Magnificent] shaped as the dome of a mosque” could then

13 Spandounes's work entitled *Discorso di Teodoro Spandugino Cantacusino Gentil' homo Costantinopolitano Dall'origine de' Principi Turchi*, originally written in Italian, is also available in English: Theodore Spandounes, *On the Origin of the Ottoman Emperors*, trans. and ed. Donald M. Nicol (Cambridge University Press, 1997).

14 On how the fez came to be the prevalent headgear in the Ottoman Empire, see Youssef Ben Ismail, “A History of Ottoman Fez before Mahmud II (ca. 1600–1800),” *Muqarnas* 38, no. 1 (2021): 155–83.

only be admired “on the head of decrepit men in the darkest little shops of the most secluded narrow alley of the Gran Bazar.”¹⁵ It is clear in his travelogue that an attentive observer could still gather information about people’s social position from the vast array of dress and headgear in use. However, after Mahmud II’s reforms, the age of the Ottoman turban was clearly coming to an end.

Marking Identity and Status

The Ottoman Empire had clear norms regarding clothing whose use was often regulated by the issue of different sumptuary laws.¹⁶ Dress was for the Ottomans an essential part of the presentation of the self as well as of the perception of the other. In this act of mutual recognition, turbans had particular roles and multiple symbolic values. Since it was considered a symbol of Islam, its use was mainly reserved for the Muslim population of the empire; its different colors, shapes, and dimensions stated a person’s social status, their ethnicity, profession, or affiliation to a particular Sufi order. Among the elite, one’s rank and position within the court hierarchy was also shown by the particular model of turban they wore. Until the issue of Mahmud II’s clothing law relegating the use of turbans only to clergymen, their characteristics were visible markers of identity, social position, and ethnic or religious affiliations. Each model of turban had its own category of wearers, specific contexts of use and particular proper names, such as *mücevezze*, *selîmî*, *kallâvi*, *perîşânî*, *kâtîbî*, or *örfî*.

The turban was an important marker of identity and status not only in life but also in death. Ostentation in gravestones and funerary monuments was considered reprehensible in Islam. Death was supposed to level human beings in the face of God.

15 Edmondo De Amicis, *Costantinopoli* (Touring Club italiano, 1997), 76.

16 On Ottoman sumptuary laws, see Donald Quataert, “Clothing Laws, State, and Society in the Ottoman Empire, 1720–1829,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29, no. 3 (1997): 403–25.

Yet turbans were used on tombstones, becoming a central element of a peculiar Ottoman funerary tradition that emerged in the sixteenth century and continued well into the nineteenth. This clearly signified a desire to inscribe a visual clue of the deceased's status in life. However, these markers were unstable: the conventional boundaries delineating who could wear the different types of turban were constantly crossed, especially at the borders between different socio-economic and cultural groups, or when the different meanings the turban could convey were translated or migrated elsewhere.

To Put on a Turban

Although wearing the turban has always been a shared practice among different cultures and religions, in the Christian West the turban was, and to an extent still is, perceived as having strong religious connotations and almost exclusively associated with Islam.¹⁷ Indeed, many early modern European languages used the expression “to put on the turban” to mean embracing Islam, “to turn Turk.” With a few noticeable exceptions — such as Bellini's portrait of Mehmed II — the turban became the main visual device through which the Muslim other was depicted either as a fearsome infidel or a defeated enemy.

A good example of this is a late work of Titian (c. 1488/1490–1576) entitled *Philip II Offering the Infante Fernando to Victory*. Painted between 1573 and 1575, it was commissioned by Philip II, King of Spain. It was conceived as an ex-voto to commemorate

17 In the aftermath of the 9/11 Twin Towers bombing, a Sikh–American entrepreneur, Balbir Singh Sodhi, was murdered because he was mistakenly believed to be a Muslim. According to a report by The Sikh Coalition, founded in response to the violence emerging in the us after 9/11, thousands of Sikhs were victims of hate crimes, workplace discrimination, school bullying, and racial and religious profiling, especially in airports. The Sikh Coalition, “Fact Sheet on Post-9/11 Discrimination and Violence Against Sikh Americans,” <https://www.sikhcoalition.org/images/documents/fact%20sheet%20on%20hate%20against%20sikhs%20in%20america%20post%209-11%201.pdf>.



Fig. 7.2. Tiziano Vecellio, *Philip II offering the Infante Fernando to Victory*, 1573–1575. Source: Museo del Prado, Madrid.

the Christian victory over the Turks at Lepanto on October 7, 1571, and the birth of Philip's son Fernando on December 5 of the same year, two events that were viewed as gifts from heaven. The Battle of Lepanto is in the background, while in the foreground the King raises his newborn son towards an angel who holds a palm and the inscription *Maiora Tibi* (More triumphs awaiting you) in one hand, and a laurel — symbol of victory — on the other. By contrast, the Ottoman defeat is represented by a Turk seated half-naked and in chains, deprived of his weapons and military insignia, and with his head bowed, looking in dismay at his turban lying on the floor, right at the center of the painting. In a context in which Ottoman expansionism and military might seemed unstoppable, the turban knocked off of the Turkish soldier's head embodies most vividly the severe blow dealt by the Christians to the Ottoman fleet.¹⁸

¹⁸ Also in the famous painting *Pala Pesaro*, realized between 1519 and 1526, Titian resorts to the representation of a head-bowed Turk wearing a white

Blurring the Boundaries

Despite its strong symbolic values both in the Ottoman Empire and in Europe, the turban is an object over which many different meanings were constantly negotiated *de facto*. This is evident, for instance, where the use of the turban is associated with liminal personas shifting, voluntarily or involuntarily, between Islam and Christianity: travelers, merchants, or slaves returning to Christian territories after having been in contact with the Turks.

Many travelers noted that it was considered wise to dress as an Ottoman when in Ottoman lands and this, sometimes, included using turbans. Between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries there are many instances in which the Ottoman state issued dress concessions allowing non-Muslim merchants to bear arms and to wear Muslim clothes for additional safety when they were passing through dangerous areas. These concessions would include the possibility of wearing a white turban, whose use was customarily restricted to Muslims. Thus, a symbol perceived and employed to mark the differences between Muslims and non-Muslims was used instead to conceal such differences and blur boundaries of identity and religion.¹⁹

In a different but equally liminal context, the turban often appears in paintings of Christian prisoners of the Turks. They are represented in distress, shabbily dressed, bound in shackles and chains, and waiting to be freed, wearing a turban-like headgear hinting at their dangerous proximity to Islam. Analogously, the turban was also associated with manumitted Christian slaves. The fear that close contact with the infidels could have left some indelible traces on the freed slave's morals and religious integrity

turban to represent the victorious battle against the Ottomans at Santa Maura in 1503.

19 Charlotte Jirousek, "More than Oriental Splendor: European and Ottoman Headgear, 1380–1580," *Dress* 22, no. 1 (1995): 25, and Matthew Elliot, "Dress Codes in the Ottoman Empire: The Case of the Franks," in *Ottoman Costumes: From Textile to Identity*, ed. Suraiya Faroqhi and Christoph K. Neumann (Eren, 2004).

was a constant concern for the community to which the slave returned. The impending danger of conversion to Islam, which according to Christian propaganda all slaves experienced during their captivity, and the suspicion that these conversions might have actually happened, was unremitting. When the Italian polymath Count Luigi Ferdinando Marsili (1658–1730) returned in 1684 to his hometown of Bologna after almost a year as a slave of the Turks, malicious gossip spread. In particular, rumor had it that he had embraced the “Alcorano” and converted to Islam. This accusation of apostasy was accompanied by the circulation of anonymous portraits depicting Marsili dressed “alaturca” and wearing, of course, a turban.

The turban, then, can offer a valuable point of entry into the complex and multilayered migration and circulation of knowledge between Europe and the Ottoman Empire. Although the turban could be perceived, understood, and represented as an unambiguous marker of identity and status within Ottoman society, and would become one of the most powerful visual tools in Europe to represent the other, it was also in fact a source of potential ambiguities. The meanings and symbolic values the turban assumed would constantly change over time and according to the place, identity, and expectations of the user, as well as the interpretations of the public. Thus, it should be approached as a negotiable object rather than a symbol, almost intrinsically inclined to continuous redefinitions and new forms of use, able to represent at once a visual and tangible divide between opposing worlds and a domestication of antagonistic foreignness.

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Migrant Unknowledge: A Vision of the Virgin in Fifteenth-Century Kozhikode

Jonathan Gil Harris

Let me go out on a limb and make a claim that I will put to the test here. One of our most significant experiences of time is a time beyond linear time: an everyday experience of what I can only characterize as timeless time. Despite the fact that the world changes, and time's arrow moves forward, we are often confident that, as sure as the sun will rise tomorrow, X or Y or Z is the way of the world, time and time again. Please note I'm not making any truth claim about this time actually existing outside our experience of it. But it is an experience common to many people across history and cultures. We could call this time metaphysical time, holy time, or (as I have done) timeless time. But whatever we call it, it is a time that usually provides a measure of existential comfort, by promising a meaningful world that operates according to certain transcendent principles and laws that abide across time.

What interests me is how this sense of timeless time is formed. Even though it gestures to a realm of truth beyond the protean material world, it is often shaped through the ritual repetition

of embodied practices within it. No matter how metaphysical this time may often seem to be, its effect is paradoxically produced through physical engagement with matter that serves a mnemonic function, creating the recursive impression that this is how things are, this is how things have been, and this is how things will be, all the time. Sensuous interaction with matter is thus the gateway to a meta-temporality, a time that emerges in time yet supposedly exists beyond time.

But matter can also disrupt, or obstruct, this meta-temporalizing maneuver. It becomes *migrant* matter — at least in the instances I will examine — because of its power to move us away from symbolization and the reassurance of meaning. I could get Lacanian or Žižekian and call the effect of this movement “The Real.” But I will allow migrant matter to speak to us in its own unsettling terms, in a space of cultural encounter where what we think we know tends to fall apart as we interact with objects that we’d assumed would orient us towards the familiar and the understandable. And there, in a space where we meet objects from worlds new to us, matter all too often resists our attempts to orient ourselves towards timeless time. It produces what we might call migrant un-knowledge.

* * *

In the summer of 1498, the first Portuguese fleet of Vasco da Gama landed in southern India at what Westerners call Calicut, and its residents call Kozhikode. The local ruler welcomed da Gama and his men in hospitable fashion, dazzling him with a procession of three thousand armed Nair warriors. The Indians asked the Portuguese what they had come to Kozhikode for; one of the general’s men is said to have replied, “Christians and spices.”¹ Vasco da Gama’s search for spices is well known; it prompted the aggressive Portuguese takeover of Indian Ocean trade routes previously controlled by Malayalis, Gujaratis, and

1 See Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Career and Legend of Vasco da Gama* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 129.

Arabs, which led in turn to the formation of the Portuguese Estado da Índia and its various Indian and Indonesian colonies. But da Gama's search for Christians has been bypassed by straightforwardly economic and political histories of early modern Portuguese colonial expansion.

Vasco da Gama had certainly been lured around the Cape of Good Hope and the Horn of Africa to India in search of the wealth associated with the lucrative spice trade. But he was also on a mission to find potential allies who might assist the Portuguese in their ongoing battles with Islam following the Christian *reconquista* of the Iberian Peninsula. Marco Polo had written of the Christians of South India who had been converted long ago by St. Thomas — a story reiterated by Sir John Mandeville.² Mandeville also added credence to the legend of Prester John, an Indian Christian king who ruled over seventy-two provinces and seven tributary kings. Europeans had long dreamed that Prester John's wealth and power might prove invaluable assets in the war against Islam. It was precisely the dream of Prester John that prompted da Gama to insist on meeting with the "king of Calicut," despite his counsellors advising against it. And his conviction of the Christianity of the locals led him to accept an invitation to visit, along with eleven other Portuguese, a place of worship near Kozhikode.

Some fifty years later, the sixteenth-century Portuguese chronicler Fernão Lopes de Castanedha recounted da Gama's visit.³ According to Castanedha, the building was an impressive one: Its exterior boasted a bell-tower with seven bells, and its

2 See Marco Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo*, trans. R.E. Latham (Penguin, 1958), 274–76, and John Mandeville, *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, trans. Charles Moseley (Penguin, 1983), 124–25.

3 All references to Castanedha's report, *História do descobrimento e conquista da Índia pelos Portugueses*, are from Shankar Raman, ed., "Fernão Lopes de Castanedha — Excerpts from História do descobrimento e conquista da Índia pelos Portugueses. 1582. English Translation by Nicholas Lichfield, published as *The First Book of the Historie of the Discoverie and Conquest of the East Indias*," in *Travel Knowledge: European "Discoveries" in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Ivo Kamps and Jyotsna G. Singh (Palgrave Macmillan, 2001).

ornate exterior was complemented by a dazzling interior festooned with holy icons. Priests, wearing petticoats and threads that reminded the Portuguese visitors of the attire of monastic orders in Europe, welcomed them by burning incense and sprinkling holy water. The building's most revered icon was a portrait of the Virgin, aloft in the nave near the bells, and the Portuguese clambered upstairs to be in her presence. Amidst the smell of incense, the sound of bells, the cooling sensation of holy water, and the sight of the Virgin, the Portuguese settled happily into the task of performing their ritual worship of God.

But something about this church wasn't quite right. Castanedha tells us that one of the Portuguese, João de Sala, realized that the figures depicted on its walls didn't look like the religious icons he was used to back home. The figures had wide open mouths with long teeth. Even more strangely, several of them had multiple arms. Slowly panic overtook de Sala. And he began to wonder about the identity of the "Virgin" icon. Fearing this church was, in fact, a satanic perversion of a house of God, de Sala fell to his knees, shouting, "If this be the devil, I worship the true God!"⁴ Da Gama started laughing — perhaps a little nervously — at de Sala's panic. Yet he continued to pray. His decision was sneeringly glossed in Nicholas Lichfield's 1582 English translation of Castanedha's narrative: "the General, deceived, committed Idolatry with the devil."⁵ For, as you may have gathered by now, this was not a Christian church at all: it was what we would now call a Hindu temple, presided over by Brahmin priests.

In the case of the Protestant Lichfield, the story was a pretext for deriding the devilish idolatry of a Roman Catholic too beholden to matter that he could no longer tell the difference between true religion and paganism. But for the Catholic Castanedha, writing in the 1540s long after da Gama's visit, it was a story of how the Hindu residents of the Malabar coast were not

4 Ibid., 129.

5 See Marco Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo*, trans. R.E. Latham (Penguin, 1958), 274–76, and Mandeville, *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, 124–25.

the trustworthy Christian allies da Gama had hoped they would be. João de Sala emerges as the true Christian hero of Castaneda's account: he had been right about the temple's non-Christian objects. The matter of the "church" included the typical appurtenances of a Malabar Hindu ambalam or temple. Its priests were Brahmins wearing sacred threads; its bells were rung as part of pujas in which incense was burned; its holy water was sprinkled to purify the temple devotees as well as given to them to drink; and the figures with long teeth and multiple arms were certainly icons associated with Bhagavathi, one of the female deities worshipped in south Indian Hindu temples, especially in what is now the state of Kerala. Although the Goddess is sometimes worshipped as an un-representable presence — the Pisharikavu temple in Kozhikode district, for instance, depicts her obliquely through the figure of a sword — she is often embodied as a large multi-armed female icon in a sanctum sanctorum. The honored "Virgin" worshipped by da Gama and his men was probably one such icon.

I am interested, though, less in correcting the error of da Gama and his men — an impulse shared by the Protestant Lichfield and modern cultural historians alike — than in understanding the emotional response of de Sala. It isn't too much of a stretch, I think, to call his response a breakdown. It isn't simply that he feared he was in the presence of the Devil. A physical object that had at first seemed familiar to him had now become fundamentally unfamiliar, confusing him so profoundly that it rent apart his sense of the world. De Sala had been confronted by strange matter — a strange Mater — that deeply disrupted his sense of holy time, a time that promised the comforting reassurance of communion not just with God but also an entire realm of meaning.

There were probably many reasons why da Gama and his men were so susceptible to believing they were in a church. They were already happily inhabiting a narrative of a Christian India. But the Portuguese visitors' belief that this was a Christian church must have been fortified further by their sensory experiences inside the ambalam. Walking into a church was, for da

Gama, not just about moving into a physical space. It was also about moving into an experience of time — a sense of holy time that transcends the vanities of the everyday. It was founded in the illusion of a fullness of meaning, or rather, in a guarantee that meaning is *here*. Entry into the church is also entry into the time of God, the time of logos, the time of that which is and always will be.

For a Portuguese Christian in the fifteenth century, this sense of time was no disembodied abstraction. It was pointedly produced through repetitious material practices. Some of these practices were trained ritual movements on the part of the church-goer, such as kneeling, singing, folding hands in prayer, and crossing oneself. Many more were sensuously involuntary — smelling incense, feeling and tasting holy water, hearing bells, and seeing holy icons. It is hard to underestimate the effect of these embodied experiences in creating the sense of holy time. We might describe the space of the church as a memory machine driven by the body's sensuous interaction with material elements during ritual practices. These practices could produce aches, pains, and other embodied annoyances like creaky knees, stuffed noses, or ringing eardrums. But they also transported the body out of linear time and into an experience of timeless communion with God. It was precisely this experience of time that must have been activated in the encounter of the Portuguese men with the matter of the ambalam. Its bells, water, incense, and icons were all spurs to embodied memory, spurs to the performance of practices remembered as much through muscle memory as through conscious recollection.

Yet it was the matter of the ambalam that also punctured that assurance. Da Gama's experience confirms that, in a strange place, one will see (and smell and hear and feel and taste) what one expects to find. But the unfamiliar matter of the temple also resisted the projections of familiarity performed on it. Indeed, what seems to have prompted de Sala's collapse was precisely his intuition that the Virgin — Mother Mary, *Mater Dei*, maternal figure of comfort — had suddenly morphed into something unfamiliar, something unfamiliar. De Sala's term for the agent

of this transformation was the Devil. But adding to his panic was surely his multisensory experience of the sound of bells, the feel of holy water, and the smell of incense. All these were no doubt initially reassuring: they must have sounded and felt and smelled, quite literally, like home. But as the “Virgin” resolved into a demonically unfamiliar apparition, de Sala’s sensory overload became literally unbearable, to the point where he could no longer trust the evidence of his eyes, ears, and nose. Here we see how strange matter functions unpredictably in the cultural contact zone, both as *aide-mémoire* of home and as physically overpowering irruption of the foreign and unexplainable.

If this sounds like a version of the uncanny, so be it. But the uncanniness here is not confined to the simultaneous familiarity and unfamiliarity of the Virgin mother, or to the realization that the good-breasted maternal nurturer is equally a bad-breasted demonic denier. The Freudian or Kleinian family romance narratives may capture something of the emotional crisis de Sala felt. But they cannot capture the deeply embodied dimension of de Sala’s experience. This dimension points to the uncanny power of matter as the ground of holy time. De Sala’s breakdown is a reminder that, at home as much as abroad, what seems to guarantee one’s unmediated access to metaphysical or holy time is physical matter. And this matter is always fraught with the risk that it might not successfully signify its metaphysical referent. The cognitive maps that we produce of the spiritual, the holy, the transcendent unravel without warning. No matter how many times we deploy familiar matter to perform our repetitive rituals of devotion, matter keeps estranging our attempts to subordinate it to the spaceless space of signification, to the timeless time of logos. It keeps producing migrant un-knowledge.

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Let me now situate a little my reading of de Sala’s response to the Virgin who wasn’t, to the familiar Mater who became unfamiliar matter. I am writing as a recent immigrant to India. And amongst the many experiences of disorientation I have suffered

there, perhaps chief among them concerns my relation to matter.

As someone who grew up in mountainous New Zealand, and then spent thirteen years living in the rugged Finger Lakes district of upstate New York, I often navigate using hills. These are not just spatial markers. They are temporal markers too. I can usually make out how far away I am from somewhere I am travelling based on the blueness of a hill on the horizon: the bluer it is, the further away it is, and so I can track my anticipated progress from here to there accordingly. That may seem like a very linear conception of time. But the sense of comfort I derive from being able to measure distance belongs to a different order of temporality, one founded in repetition. I know my way through space, and I know the time it takes to get from A to B, because I have over time repeatedly navigated this way, positioning my body in relation to hills, internalizing them within a cognitive mind-map that has been re-externalized in my movements on foot or behind a steering wheel. This may not be the holy time craved by the Christian visitors to Kozhikode. But it is, like that time, a mode of temporality produced through the ritual repetition of orientations towards objects. And it again offers a great sense of comfort. Growing up in mountain-dotted Auckland, my pantheon of saints weren't religious but volcanic, cones that reassured me where I stood in the larger scheme of things.

In Delhi, which is completely flat, I have lost this sense of time. And that has been terribly disorienting for me. Often I simply feel lost in the city, as I have no visible compass points to navigate by. So imagine my joy one day when, driving north of Delhi, I saw a misty blue hill on the horizon. Something in my heart soared. And it looked like a huge hill, far in the distance, because it was a particularly hazy blue. Without consciously realizing it, I placed it around ten kilometers—twenty minutes away in Delhi traffic—by car. But I reached it much more quickly, in about two minutes. My sense of disorientation was compounded at that point. Because the hill turned out not to be something made of rock and soil. It was a 200-foot-high mound of trash. And it was misty because the members of the human

scavenger caste who live on top of it are perpetually burning the day's newly dumped trash, in search of metals they can sell at the local markets. The mistiness of the hill, in other words, was not the mistiness of distance but of smoke and human activity. But I was to find all that out only much later. For now, I was in a state of utter disorientation.

This disorientation had nothing to do with linear time being disrupted. If anything, there can be something deeply consoling about the disruption of linear time. That consolation is a feature of Shakespearean romances like *The Winter's Tale* or *The Tempest*, in which familiar yet strange matter — a statue, a storm — allows us to go back in time and repossess what we have lost. Death is not our only destination, romance assures us, because we can move back as well as forward, at least in fantasy. But the disruption of our orientations to space and time in a zone of cultural contact bring us face to face with another kind of death: the death of mastery, of sense, of knowing. We who know that the Strange Mater of Kozhikode was probably the Goddess Bhagavathi can laugh at the panic of the horror-stricken João de Sala and the devotion of the worshipful Vasco da Gama. But we laugh from a position of knowledge. And that's the problem. Perhaps we should also sympathize a little with de Sala's experience of time disintegrating into horrifying inexplicability. We might recognize ourselves in him, and recognize in particular the misrecognitions prompted by the seemingly familiar matter he interacted with. For familiar matter has the power to become strange when it refuses to do what we expect it to do, when it punctures our sense of a world that abides through time, and when we find ourselves, and our bodies, in a state of migrant un-knowingness.

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Knowledge in Translation: Between the Local and the Universal

Annabel Brett

In the early years of the fifteenth century, a heated debate over the correct principles of translation blew up between the celebrated Italian humanist Leonardo Bruni and the Spanish bishop of Burgos, Alonso de Cartagena. This famous episode is of more than purely antiquarian interest. It resonates with all the perplexities we encounter today, as translators, historians, and citizens, as we try to create pathways of comprehension between what is familiar and what is different with tools of reasoning that threaten to collapse that difference the moment we pick them up.

My title is prompted by the opposing starting-points taken by the two protagonists — on the one hand, that correct translation depends on a specific knowledge of language comparable to a local knowledge of place, and on the other, that correct translation depends instead on universal reasoning capacities, universal in the sense of “common to all nations.” I think that these two poles say something about translation more generally. Translation can be seen as a movement from one kind of local to another kind of local — from Italian to Spanish, say. But transla-

tion is not centrally from language to language, as Umberto Eco insists in his own writing on translation, *Mouse or Rat? Translation as Negotiation*. Rather, it is from text to text.¹ As such, translation involves interpretation, a creative act of making sense of a particular text in and through another. In order to *make sense*, we have to move out of the local entirely in some way, drawing not only upon specific knowledge but also more general tools of reasoning such as analogy and comparison, which in turn involve our more general human experience.

That movement out of the local into whatever it is that is not local — that is the kind of migration I am interested in here. It's a movement that is compromised in the sense that the local and the nonlocal do not stably preexist our translation, but are constructed in, and on, the very path that we choose between them. This makes translation a kind of migrant knowledge — not a knowledge that preexists the pathway, knowledge *of* the way, but knowledge *in* and *on* the way. Knowledge *of*, with its apparently stable coordinates between the local and the universal, bends to knowledge *in* as we traverse what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her essay on the politics of translation calls “the spacy emptiness between two named historical languages.”² What I am essaying is a migrant reading, in this sense, of the Renaissance debate between Bruni and Cartagena.

In 1416/1417 the renowned humanist scholar Leonardo Bruni published a new translation of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. It includes a preface in which he systematically rubbished the old one. He did not know the identity of the old translator, but we know him as Robert Grosseteste, the great thirteenth-century Oxford scholar. Perhaps the anonymity helped Bruni with his invective against “the man of iron” who massacred Aristotle's

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- 1 Umberto Eco, *Mouse or Rat? Translation as Negotiation* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2003), 25–26.
 - 2 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “The Politics of Translation,” in *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates*, ed. Michèle Barrett and Anne Phillips (Polity, 1992), 178.

text.³ Bruni developed his polemic in a later work, written between 1424 and 1426, on how to translate properly, *De interpretatione recta*. Here he extended his criticism to an old translation of Aristotle's *Politics*, the author of which was, as we now know, William of Moerbeke rather than Grosseteste. In both cases, Bruni compares the medieval translation to the defacement of a picture: like someone throwing feces at a painting by Giotto, as he later put it.⁴ There's no doubt Bruni felt very strongly. But his new translation of the *Ethics*, together with its preface, provoked equally strong feelings on the part of Alfonso de Cartagena, the Bishop of Burgos. For Cartagena, Bruni's crime was not merely to have denounced the old translation in too vehement and unseemly a manner. It was to have denounced it as *not a translation at all*, but rather an annihilation of the old.⁵ Cartagena's defense of the old translation came, in turn, into the hands of Bruni. He wrote two letters to Francesco Pizolpasso, Archbishop of Milan, expostulating against this man who claimed to be able to judge between his new translation and the old *without knowing any Greek*.

The outlines of this controversy are fairly well-known.⁶ Bruni argues from a position that all but the most recondite vocabu-

3 Leonardo Bruni, "Praemissio quaedam ad evidentiam novae translationis Ethicorum Aristotelis," in *Leonardo Bruni Aretino: Humanistisch-philosophische Schriften mit einer Chronologie seiner Werke und Briefe*, ed. Hans Baron (Teubner, 1928), 78–79.

4 Leonardo Bruni, "De interpretatione recta" [On correct translation], in *Leonardo Bruni Aretino: Humanistisch-philosophische Schriften mit einer Chronologie seiner Werke und Briefe*, ed. Hans Baron (Teubner, 1928), 83, and Leonardo Bruni, "Leonardus archiepiscopo Mediolanensi salutem" [First letter to Francesco Pizolpasso, 1436], in *Humanismo y teoría de la traducción en España y Italia en la primera mitad del siglo XV*, ed. T. González Rolán, A. Moreno Hernández, and P. Saquero Suárez-Somonte (Ediciones Clásicas, 2000), 284.

5 Alfonso de Cartagena, "Liber Alphonsi episcopi Burgensis," in *Humanismo y teoría de la traducción en España y Italia en la primera mitad del siglo XV*, ed. González Rolán, Moreno Hernández, and Saquero Suárez-Somonte, 202.

6 For further details, see chapter 6 in Eckart Schütrumpf, *The Earliest Translations of Aristotle's Politics and the Creation of Political Terminology*

lary can be translated from Greek into Latin. It is not clear that this is a thesis that will hold for any two languages, since Bruni's defense of the possibility of translating into Latin is premised upon the riches, the opulence, of the Latin language. Given this wealth, though, there is no excuse whatsoever for leaving Greek words in the original, as the medieval translators frequently did; and still less for making up new Latin words — that's "Latin" words — that have no meaning in any language. As for knowledge of the original language, Bruni argues that it can only come through reading widely in its literature. You have to come to know in precise detail the way that people talk, including figurative usage and idiomatic expressions. Once you have the requisite knowledge of both languages, however, there is such a thing as *interpretatio recta* (correct translation), in which both sense and style are translated precisely from one language into another.⁷

Cartagena, for his part, frankly confesses that he doesn't know any Greek, so he isn't going to argue on those grounds. That would give Bruni an unfair advantage! He insists, however, that reason is common to all nations, however they speak.⁸ Thus, in translation as an act of interpretation, or making sense, what we are doing is using our reason to reconstruct the reasoning of the original, on the presumption that the original is reasonable in the same way as we are. You wouldn't even try to translate a text that you did not think was rational — why would you bother? You couldn't learn anything from it. For Cartagena, the peculiarities of one historical language versus another are incidental to this process of understanding which takes place between one person's reason and another's. And, if historical language actually gets in the way — say there's no equivalent word in one or other of them — well, then, by all means make up a new word. The reader, who is also rational, will understand that new word.

(Wilhelm Fink, 2014).

7 Bruni, "De interpretatione," 83; cf. 78, where he cites as evidence for his position the possibility of translating comedy accurately, as the Latin playwright Terence shows with his translations of Attic new comedy.

8 Cartagena, "Liber Alphonsi," 204.

In short, when we translate, we translate the thought, not the words, and we access the thought through universal reason, common to all three parties: author, translator, and reader.

Two very, very different conceptions of translation, then. Later Renaissance translators of Aristotle, despite their humanist allegiances, would have some sympathy with Cartagena — believing that when you translate philosophy, you have to translate the philosophy, precisely — and they criticized Bruni for his rhetorical translation that blurs the philosophical sense of the Greek original. They did at least know their Greek, however. Cartagena's understanding of the philosophical sense of the text is entirely from the Latin text itself, supplemented by what is effectively *his own* reasoning. No wonder Bruni accuses him of some mystical practice of divination, and ridicules his appeal to *reasonable conjecture* in the establishment of meaning.⁹ It's as if, he says, I were to go to France or Spain and tell some people I meet that a certain church is on a hill overlooking Bologna.¹⁰ They've never been there, don't know the place at all; but they don't think that's likely, since it would be risky to build a church on top of a hill. It's a much more *reasonable conjecture* that the church is at the bottom of the hill. But, says Bruni, I've been there and I *know* it's on top of the hill. Why are we even having this conversation??!!

I think we are all familiar, from our own experiences, with the peculiar mix of arrogance and defensiveness that characterizes both positions. On the one hand: I have the local knowledge, you don't, so you can't understand anything and have to defer to my interpretation. On the other: I don't need any local knowledge, it's all to do with being rational, so your local understanding is just that — small and pedantic. But translation is, in fact, impossible on either assumption. And indeed, when we get

9 Bruni, "Leonardus archiepiscopo Mediolanensi salutem," 274, and Leonardo Bruni, "Leonardus archiepiscopo Mediolanensi salutem plurimam dicit" [Second letter to Francesco Pizolpasso], in *Humanismo y teoría de la traducción en España y Italia en la primera mitad del siglo XV*, ed. González Rolán, Moreno Hernández, and Saquero Suárez-Somonte, 290.

10 *Ibid.*, 314.

into the more detailed texture of the argument between Bruni and Cartagena, we see both of their positions beginning to slip and morph into something much more flexible.

One of Bruni's examples of making words up is Moerbeke's *honorabilitas* for the Greek *timēma*.¹¹ The correct Latin translation, he writes, is instead *census*. But his marginal note defends this translation by comparing political organization in Greece and Rome. Here, then, the knowledge is not purely local, but involves an understanding of the relationship between two historical cultures. Behind that note lies Bruni's first exposure both to history and to translation through the *Parallel Lives* of the Greco-Roman author Plutarch. This text was introduced to him by the Byzantine scholar Manuel Chrysoloras, whom Coluccio Salutati had invited to Florence in 1397. Chrysoloras promoted Plutarch's *Lives* because of the commonality it posited between Greek and Italian cultures. So one of Bruni's principles for translating Greek into Latin was a function of a moment of encounter, of migration, between Byzantium and early Renaissance Italy. In the hands of Chrysoloras, that encounter involved a specific politics of cultural rapprochement that in turn inflected Bruni's politics of translation, providing the poles within which his comparison operates.¹²

Just as Bruni does not, in practice, appeal to local knowledge alone, neither does Cartagena, in fact, appeal to universal reason alone. He too uses history to make sense. But his is a very different history. Instead of there being two different languages, two different cultures, that can be known historically, Cartagena starts with a historical understanding of languages as mixed rather than pure. Again, it's not clear that this is universal proposition, but it's certainly true for Europe, in which not only is Greek mixed in with Latin — and was so even in

11 Bruni, "De interpretatione," 94.

12 See Paul Botley, *Latin Translation in the Renaissance: The Theory and Practice of Leonardo Bruni, Giannozzo Manetti, and Desiderius Erasmus* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 15, and Marianne Pade, *The Reception of Plutarch's Lives in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, vol. 1 (Museum Tusulanum Press, 2007), 89–100.

antiquity — but both languages sit alongside the vernaculars into which they have also seeped.¹³ Take “philosophy” itself as an example. Is that a Greek word? A Latin word? A Spanish word — or, we might add, an English word? Translation takes place, not between one pure language and another, but inside this mix within which the two poles cannot be fully distinguished from one another. That mix is a function of history, as languages leak out of chronological as well as geographical boundaries. Unlike Bruni’s, Cartagena’s history is not something past, of which you have historical knowledge like the geographical knowledge you might have of something over there. Rather, Cartagena’s history is continuous with the present. And this is the frame in which he makes his own comparative moves.

Let me illustrate that with one of the more fun episodes in the debate. A passage of Grosseteste’s *Ethics* translation that aroused Bruni’s particular ire was the straight transliteration whereby Aristotle is made to say that the virtuous mean in conversational wit or humor is “eutrapely,” the excessive vice “bomolochy,” and the negative vice “agrichy.” (I have anglicized the form so you get the picture.) “O iron man!” cries Bruni. “You call that *translation*??” A *bomolochus*, he says, is in fact a Latin *scurra*, which means a kind of comic parasite, so Latin has the perfect word for the excessive vice: *scurrilitas*.¹⁴ No, says Cartagena. A *bomolochus* is not a *scurra*, because a *bomolochus* is not a parasite, making obscene jokes for money. That kind of person is called in Spanish an *alvardano*. But, he says, warming to his theme, I’ve known quite well-off and prominent men who display this vice of excess in humor, so it can’t be something peculiar to scroungers. In view of the fact, then, that Latin does not have a word for *bomolochus*, Grosseteste was quite right to leave it in the original — but actually it’s precisely not in the original: it has been written in Latin as *bomolochus*, and declined in that form, so now it *is* Latin, and we all know what it means.¹⁵

13 Cartagena, “Liber Alphonsi,” 208–10.

14 Bruni, “Praemissio,” 78–79.

15 Cartagena, “Liber Alphonsi,” 216–18; cf. 212.

Cartagena's willingness to dip into vernacular language and present-day culture to make sense is in the sharpest possible contrast to Bruni, who calls the vernaculars "barbarian" in the same sense as did the Greeks and the Romans, and rejects the mixing of languages not only as a chaos, but also as a kind of impurity or defilement.¹⁶ The difference between the two positions is reflected in the figurative expressions each chooses for the Latin language. Bruni uses a metaphor of money, and, with that, of social hierarchy. As we've seen, Latin for him is a wealthy language. But the old translator does not own that wealth. Rather, he's a beggar, scrounging or at the very least borrowing scraps of Greek vocabulary even in the midst of linguistic opulence.¹⁷ Cartagena's similes are quite different. Moral philosophy in Latin, he writes, is like a noble maiden marrying in a far-off land, who brings some of her handmaidens with her — Greek words, which she keeps with her "among Latin men" as a comfort and to remind her of her origins. Will Bruni, he asks, force her to deport them out of her borders? Moreover, the fact that Latin continually accepts words from Greek and also from other foreign languages is not, for Cartagena, an index of poverty. Rather, it represents the peculiar preeminence of Latin as a "space without borders." It brings alien words into its domain as if captured from the enemy under the law of nations.¹⁸ Cartagena's similes evoke a social and linguistic inclusivity that may seem appealing to us in contrast to Bruni's aversion to mixing as defilement. But they nevertheless invoke the very real violence involved in the migration of Latin through Europe and beyond: the violence of war and the gendered violence of intermarriage, in which the young girl is a commodity in the transaction.

Such thoughts take us back to our starting point, to our two modern translators, Gayatri Spivak and Umberto Eco, and to our underlying question of movement between the local and

16 Bruni, "Leonardus archiepiscopo Mediolanensi salutem," 280, and Bruni, "Leonardus archiepiscopo Mediolanensi salutem plurimam dicit," 326.

17 Bruni, "Praemissio," 77; cf. Bruni, "De interpretatione," 85.

18 Cartagena, "Liber Alphonsi," 210.

whatever it is that is not local. Not surprisingly, neither Spivak nor Eco thinks of translation in the same way as either Cartagena or Bruni. But it is nonetheless suggestive to read their differences within this longer history of difference between translators. Eco's conception of translation as negotiation reminds us in some respects of the transactional elements in Cartagena. For Eco, however, the translator as negotiator is a non-violent figure, brokering a fair exchange between the integrity of the original and the legitimate expectations of the reader. A shared space does not preexist the transaction, but is created as a new place in which the original and the reader can meet, even if neither party can do so entirely on its own terms. In this process, both the agency and the ethics of the translator are central to building a viable bridge of sense between the two parties.

Spivak, by contrast, thinking about translation from a post-colonial perspective, writes of a kind of surrender of translator to text, a position more erotic than ethical. In this we are reminded of Bruni, for whom the translator is "carried away by very force" into the style of the original, and must bend and turn himself rather than the text.¹⁹ For Spivak, the process of translation needs to hold both the agency of the translator, and the expectations of the audience, at bay. It is only through this surrender that one can translate for rhetoricity, the specific voice of the text, rather than for verbal logic. To use logic as a crowbar to engineer intelligibility *to* others is only to perpetuate, in translation, a logic—and a history—of the domination and suppression *of* others. In translating for rhetoricity, by contrast, the translator instead "frays" the edges on both sides, a fraying of language that also, implicitly, frays the self of both translator and reader.

For all our translators, for all their differences, history runs through language just as language runs through history. The very possibility of translation is embedded in that nexus, which is why we cannot translate, nor can we write history, without challenging our own complicity within that process. But it

19 Bruni, "De interpretatione," 87.

would be a false move both in language and in history to force a choice, to insist on one universal theory of translation or one universal way of writing history. As historians we juggle our alignment with our sources and with our audience, caught between intimacy and ethics. We are conscious of fraying the edges of past and present on the “spacy emptiness” between them, and of the fraying of identity that comes with that. We do not want to engineer intelligibility at the cost of perpetuating the suppressions of the past. We want to be alive to the silence that Spivak identifies as the unspoken heart of rhetoricity. But at the same time we must accept that we are agents, bridge-builders, and negotiators, with a responsibility towards both our sources and our audience that we cannot shrug off. We have so much to learn from migrants, who know more about the fraying, more about the silence, more about the spacy emptiness, than anyone else, but who, at the same time, find a new agency, and a new position of bridge-building, in a new commons that does not preexist but is instead created by their own migration. For it is in just this sense that history itself is a kind of migrant knowledge.

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