

Faculty of English

**Writing Home: Depictions of Forced Displacement in Romantic Era and Contemporary
Poetry**

by

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Declaration

This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my thesis has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee.

Abstract

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In *Romantic Migrations: Local, National, and Transnational Dispositions*, Michael Wiley argues that it was during the Romantic era that ‘the concept of migration acquired the complex semantic and ideological range familiar to the twenty-first century’. This dissertation builds on Wiley’s insight to compare depictions of forced displacement in British Romantic poetry to contemporary poetry written or circulated in the United Kingdom in response to the so-called refugee crisis of 2015-2016. I argue that these two periods can speak to each other meaningfully because the turn of the nineteenth century saw the development or acceleration of three key trends that still influence both displacement and poetry today: the linkage of rights to nation-state citizenship, the impacts of environmental change on ecosystems and communities, and the expansion of new communication technologies that generate(d) anxieties about the reach and purpose of poetry. At the same time, the Romantic period falls before the emergence of contemporary refugee law in the mid-twentieth century and the subsequent divide between asylum seekers and economic migrants that haunts current policy and debates. By focusing on how British writers responded to forced displacement in an earlier era of increased mobility, I hope to think beyond and outside these categories to show how people were falling through the gap between (hu)man and citizen as soon as it was first codified.

The first half of this dissertation focuses on Romantic era poets. I consider how Charlotte Smith and William Wordsworth responded to the displacements prompted by the consolidation of the French and British nation states, how John Clare expressed his own loss of home in the wake of environmental change, and how Lord Byron represented the collective experience of upheaval in *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* and *Don Juan*. The second half of the dissertation moves to the contemporary period to consider how poets responded to the Mediterranean Sea’s contemporary status as the world’s deadliest border through classical allusions reminiscent of Romantic Hellenism. Finally, I examine how contemporary poets have intervened in print and internet culture on behalf of refugees, considering how these interventions may reinforce or subvert the national and legal categories that attempt to determine who may move where, and why.

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Introduction: Crossing Borders

I. Departure Point

This dissertation owes its existence to the fact that I crossed an ocean in September of 2016. It was three months after Brexit won the day on the back of anti-immigrant rhetoric, two months before Trump would win the United States (US) Presidency after promising to build a wall, and one-and-a-half years into what the media referred to as a refugee crisis, as people fled wars in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan and arrived in Europe in historic numbers.¹ I was close to the most privileged category of migrant possible: a US citizen coming legally to pursue a Master's degree in the United Kingdom (UK). But even so, I felt the strangeness of moving between two countries that seemed to be in the process of closing in on themselves at a time when there were more displaced people worldwide than in the aftermath of the Second World War.²

The Brexit campaign created the impression that mobility and displacement were imported problems. An infamous United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) poster circulated during the lead-up to the vote showed a line of refugees curving around the words 'Breaking Point' in bright red, under which was written 'The EU has failed us all'.³ While the official Vote Leave campaign distanced itself from the poster, it did so by proposing internal control of the UK's borders as a solution to anti-immigrant sentiment. The impression left by both official and unofficial messaging was that the UK, once separated from the European Union (EU), would become a place of inherent stability and control.

¹ For the dates of the media popularity of the refugee crisis, as well as very good background on its causes and Europe's response, see Daniel Trilling, 'Five myths about the refugee crisis', *Guardian*, 5 June 2018 <<https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/jun/05/five-myths-about-the-refugee-crisis>> [accessed 15 March 2019], and William Spindler, '2015: The year of Europe's refugee crisis', *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*, 8 December 2015 <<https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/stories/2015/12/56ec1ebde/2015-year-europes-refugee-crisis.html>> [accessed 24 September 2021]. While there are various problems with the use of the word crisis to describe the entrance of refugees into Europe in 2015, as I discuss in depth in Chapter Four, I will use the term throughout because it is the most recognisable and concise way to reference the events I describe.

² Trilling.

³ Heather Stewart and Rowena Mason, 'Nigel Farage's anti-migrant poster reported to police', *Guardian*, 16 June 2016 <<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/16/nigel-farage-defends-ukip-breaking-point-poster-queue-of-migrants>> [accessed 20 January 2020]

This thought gave me pause. Of course, the British Empire had been an agent of displacement abroad, but how comfortable had the country ever been even within its own borders? As a student of English literature who had never before set foot in the UK, my concept of a uniquely British landscape had been informed by reading the Romantic poets as an undergraduate, especially William Wordsworth.⁴ I thought back to *The Prelude* and *Lyrical Ballads*, and realised that, between the streams making ‘ceaseless music’ and the ‘sportive wood run wild’, his landscapes heaved with displaced people: discharged soldiers, mad mothers, female vagrants—Wordsworth’s Britain was not a still and stable one.⁵ I recalled his description of finding inspiration on the road in Book XII of *The Prelude*:

Awed have I been by strolling bedlamites;
From many other uncouth vagrants (passed
In fear) have walked with quicker step—but why
Take note of this? When I began to enquire,
To watch and question those I met, and held
Familiar talk with them, the lonely roads
Were schools to me in which I daily read
With most delight the passions of mankind.⁶

The UKIP poster seemed like a distorted (or aborted) echo of Wordsworth’s description. Wanderers on the road met only and forever with fear. But it would be hard to argue, based on Wordsworth’s account, that desperate travellers were a new and foreign part of British life.

⁴ This association between Wordsworth’s poetry and a kind of British environmental nationalism is not unique to me. See, for example, Katherine Bergren’s account of the relationship between Wordsworth’s *Guide to the Lakes* and the national parks movement in the US and the UK in *The Global Wordsworth: Romanticism Out of Place* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2019).

⁵ Quotes taken from William Wordsworth, ‘Prelude of 1805’ in *The Prelude: The Four Texts (1798, 1799, 1805, 1850)*, ed. by Jonathan Wordsworth (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 50, l. 279 and Wordsworth, ‘Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey, on revisiting the banks of the Wye during a tour, July 13, 1789’ in Samuel T. Coleridge and William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads: 1789 and 1802*, ed. by Fiona Stafford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 87-91 (p. 87), l. 17.

⁶ Wordsworth, ‘Prelude of 1805’ in *The Prelude*, p. 496, XII. 158-165.

At the same time, I was increasingly disturbed by the negative depictions of refugees and migrants on both sides of the Atlantic and surprised to find that the one genre in which I could reliably find positive, or at least sympathetic, depictions was in poetry. Not only that, it seemed the literary form had been appointed in the UK to defend refugees from an otherwise hostile media environment. ‘Poets speak out for refugees’, read one *Guardian* headline for a 2016 profile of five London poets.⁷ Warsan Shire’s poem ‘Home’ was described as a ‘rallying cry’ for refugees by both *Quartz* and *Vox*.⁸ Anthologies like *A Country of Refuge* and its 2018 follow-up *A Country to Call Home*, 2018’s *England: Poems from a School* and the *Refugee Tales* series made explicit or implicit arguments with their compilation and marketing that poetry (and sometimes literature more broadly) were appropriate means of making the UK a more welcoming place.⁹

The notion that poetry should intervene to correct a disordered media landscape struck me as an essentially Romantic one, or at least Romantic-adjacent. I thought again of Wordsworth, in the 1802 ‘Preface’ to *Lyrical Ballads*, justifying his poems as an effort to ‘counteract’ the ‘degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation’ currently being sated by ‘frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse’.¹⁰ Wordsworth was responding to the expansion of print culture and the reading public, while contemporary poets confronted the internet and the tabloid press, but

⁷ Marta Bausells and Maeve Shearlaw, ‘Poets speak out for refugees: “No one leaves home, unless home is the mouth of a shark”’, *Guardian*, 16 September 2015 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/sep/16/poets-speak-out-for-refugees>> [accessed 15 March 2019]

⁸ Lily Kuo, ‘This poem is now the rallying cry for refugees: “No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark”’, *Quartz*, 30 January 2017 <<https://qz.com/africa/897871/warsan-shires-poem-captures-the-reality-of-life-for-refugees-no-one-leaves-home-unless-home-is-the-mouth-of-a-shark/>> [accessed 15 March 2019], and Constance Grady, ‘“Home,” by Beyonce collaborator Warsan Shire, is now a rallying cry against Trump’s refugee ban’, *Vox*, 31 January 2017 <<https://www.vox.com/culture/2017/1/31/14445556/home-warsan-shire-refugee-ban-beyonce-lemonade>> [accessed 15 March 2019]

⁹ *A Country of Refuge: An Anthology of Writing on Asylum Seekers*, ed. by Lucy Popescu (London: Unbound Digital, 2016). Kindle ebook; *A Country to Call Home: An Anthology on the Experiences of Young Refugees and Asylum Seekers*, ed. by Lucy Popescu (London: Unbound, 2018); and *England: Poems from a School*, ed. by Kate Clanchy (London: Picador, 2018). There are currently four books in the *Refugee Tales* series, in which famous authors retell the true stories of people with direct experience of Britain’s immigration policies. See, for example, *Refugee Tales* ed. by David Herd and Anna Pincus (Manchester: Comma Press, 2016).

¹⁰ Wordsworth, ‘Preface’ in *Lyrical Ballads*, pp. 95-115 (pp. 99-100).

both sought to counter what they saw as a proliferation of overwhelming and harmful content with the inoculation of poetry.¹¹ I began to wonder what Romantic poetry dealing with forced displacement and contemporary poetry about the refugee experience might have to say to each other, both in terms of what the poetry described and how it responded to its material.

II. Displacement and the Nation State

The more I researched the comparison, the more generative I found it. The Romantic era, and the poetry it inspired, have much to say to the current moment of global displacement, environmental crisis, and emerging forms of communication.

We are living through a time of unprecedented mobility and unprecedented attempts to contain it. In 2015, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) wrote that there were a record 65.3 million people displaced from their homes.¹² That number was larger than the entire population of the UK at the time.¹³ 2015 was also the start of what European media referred to as a refugee or migrant crisis, as more than a million people crossed EU borders from the Middle East or North Africa.¹⁴ Most of them were fleeing war in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Between 2015 and 2016, a total of nearly three million people sought asylum in the EU.¹⁵ In the spring of 2016, the EU reached an agreement with Turkey that decreased the numbers of new arrivals, and the issue faded from the

¹¹ It is difficult to distinguish neatly between print, television, and digital media in the current age because often television clips or tabloid articles are also shared and experienced online.

¹² UNHCR, *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2015*, 2015 <<https://www.unhcr.org/576408cd7>> [accessed 5 May 2021] (p. 1 and p. 11)

¹³ For the UK figure, see UNHCR, 2015, p. 6. As of 2020, the UK population stood at 67,081,000. See 'United Kingdom population mid-Year estimate', *Office for National Statistics*, 25 June 2021 <<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/timeseries/ukpop/pop>> [accessed 24 September 2021]

¹⁴ 'Migrant crisis: Migration to Europe explained in seven Charts', *BBC News*, 4 March 2016 <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34131911>> [accessed 5 May 2021]

¹⁵ Trilling.

headlines.¹⁶ But the crisis was not so much ended as displaced. According to the UNHCR's most recent report, a global record of 79.5 million people—or one percent of the world's population—was displaced because of war, persecution, or human rights violations by the end of 2019.¹⁷ A total of 6.6 million of those displaced were from Syria, followed by Venezuela, Afghanistan, and South Sudan. However, 85 percent of the world's refugees were being hosted by developing countries, rather than developed ones like the member states of the EU.¹⁸ That is roughly the same percentage of refugees hosted by the developing world as at the height of the so-called refugee crisis.¹⁹ Journalist Patrick Kingsley wrote in 2016 that it would be more accurate to say that Europe at the time was 'waking up' to an existing crisis; now it appears to be hitting the snooze button.²⁰

In fact, global displacement has been a growing phenomenon over the last decade, with the number of displaced people nearly doubling since 2010.²¹ At the same time, 'only a fraction' of these people have found a permanent end to their exodus.²² 'We are witnessing a changed reality in that forced displacement nowadays is not only vastly more widespread but is simply no longer a short-term and temporary phenomenon', UN High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi said in the 2019 UNHCR report.²³

All of this is occurring during the 'most intensive and extensive period of bordering in the history of the world', as Reece Jones and Corey Johnson wrote in a 2016 article.²⁴ Jones and

¹⁶ Trilling, and Patrick Kingsley, 'Prologue', in *The New Odyssey: The Story of Europe's Refugee Crisis* (London: Guardian Books, 2016). Kindle ebook.

¹⁷ UNHCR, *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2019*, 2019 <<https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/statistics/unhcrstats/5ee200e37/unhcr-global-trends-2019.html>> [accessed 5 May 2021] (p. 2)

¹⁸ UNHCR, 2019, pp. 2-3.

¹⁹ In 2015, the percentage of refugees hosted in the developing world was 86 percent. See UNHCR, 2015, p. 2.

²⁰ Kingsley, 'Prologue', *The New Odyssey*.

²¹ UNHCR, 2019, p. 8.

²² UNHCR, 2019, p. 4.

²³ UNHCR, 2019, p. 6.

²⁴ Reece Jones and Corey Johnson, 'Border militarism and the re-articulation of sovereignty', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 41.2 (2016), 187-200 <<http://doi.org/10.1111/tran.12115>> (p. 187)

Johnson examined the cases of the US and the EU to document how borders have become increasingly militarised in recent decades. Not only are there now 70 border walls or fences worldwide, but borders are monitored with military equipment and tactics such as drones, military helicopters, and high-tech surveillance systems. All of this has had real consequences for the people who attempt to cross. Deaths at EU borders have increased every year for more than a decade, Jones and Johnson noted. At the same time, nationalist and populist political movements have arisen on the back of anti-immigrant rhetoric, of which Trumpism and Brexit are only two examples.²⁵

The period spanning the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was also a time of increasing mobility and newly articulated divisions, in ways that at once prefigure and resonate profoundly with the current moment. In *Romantic Migrations: Local, National and Transnational Dispositions*, Michael Wiley points out that it was during the Romantic era that ‘the concept of migration acquired the complex semantic and ideological range familiar to the twenty-first century’.²⁶ The period saw two waves of immigrants arrive in Britain: one following the American Revolution and the abolition of slavery in England in the 1770s and another following the French Revolution in 1789 and the wars that followed. Emigrants also left Britain in greater and greater numbers, beginning at 40,000 in the 1770s, rising to 80,000 in the 1800s, and climbing higher still to reach 200,000 in the 1820s. The language reflected those changes. The first *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) entry for the noun ‘emigrant’ dates to 1754, but it became common enough by the end of the century for Charlotte Smith to use it to title her poem about those fleeing the French Revolution; the word ‘immigrant’ first appeared in print in 1792.²⁷

²⁵ Ronald F. Inglehart and Pippa Norris, ‘Trump, Brexit, and the Rise of Populism: Economic Have Nots and Cultural Backlash’, *Harvard Kennedy School Faculty Research Working Paper Series* (2016) <https://faculty.uml.edu/sgallagher/Trump_Populism_Norris.pdf> [accessed 5 May 2021]

²⁶ Michael Wiley, *Romantic Migrations: Local, National, and Transnational Dispositions* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), p. x.

²⁷ Wiley, p. ix, ‘Emigrant’, *Oxford English Dictionary* [online] <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/61169?redirectedFrom=emigrant&>> [accessed 21 June 2021]. The OED entry also gives a second definition for the word as a noun, referring exclusively to exiled French Royalists following the Revolution. Interestingly, the word appears as an adjective for the first time in two entries from 1796, with one example referring to ‘Emigrant Catholick priests’ and the other to migratory birds. The word refugee is of earlier origin, dating from the 17th century and the flight of the Huguenots from France following religious persecution. See ‘Refuge’, *Oxford English Dictionary* [online] <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/161121?rskey=JgghZq&result=1#eid>> [accessed 20 December 2018]

During this time, emerging nation states both compelled this mobility and sought to put new controls on movement. Enclosure was understood in the eighteenth century to be a force driving rural residents to towns or to foreign countries.²⁸ It had been a source of unrest since at least the sixteenth century, but was now primarily the work of Britain's uniquely sovereign Parliament, which passed a rash of Enclosure Acts between 1755 and 1780 (mostly converting arable land to pasture), and another around 1793 in response to wartime grain shortages.²⁹ Linda Colley has argued that a sense of British national identity emerged during the eighteenth century out of a series of military conflicts with France, as well as through increasing contact with the colonial other during those wars.³⁰ But the war-based process of nation building was displacing for some as the wars and poor harvest increased homelessness and poverty in the 1790s.³¹ From the other side of the Channel, the French Revolution pushed 12,500 refugees into England every year between 1789 and 1802, though many then went on to America or the Netherlands.³² Kirsty Carpenter writes that the surge of escapees following the September Massacres of 1792 was the 'nearest that the eighteenth century came to producing "boat people"'.³³ The British government took steps to control both domestic and foreign wanderers. The 1744 Vagrancy Act was modified to impose harsher penalties for being without home or employment, while the 1793 Aliens Act led to 'unprecedented levels of surveillance and control of the movements of foreign nationals in Britain'.³⁴

²⁸ S. J. Thompson, 'Parliamentary Enclosure, Property, Population, and the Decline of Classical Republicanism in Eighteenth-Century Britain', *The Historical Journal*, 51.3 (2008), 621-42
<<https://www.jstor.org/stable/20175187>> [accessed 22 May 2019] (p. 627)

²⁹ Thompson, pp. 623-4.

³⁰ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (London: Pimlico, 2003), pp. 1-6.

³¹ Ingrid Horrocks, *Women Wanderers and the Writing of Mobility, 1784-1814* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 17.

³² Kirsty Carpenter, *Refugees of the French Revolution: Emigres in London, 1789-1802* (London: Macmillan Press, 1999), p. 40.

³³ Carpenter, p. 29.

³⁴ Horrocks, p. 17.

The Napoleonic Wars that followed the French Revolution were also displacing events on a continental scale. Stuart Curran has said that the twenty-two years of conflict between 1793 and 1815 'eventually grew in dimensions to become a world war' and that, during that period, 'displacement as abiding notion is really the norm rather than the anomaly'.³⁵ Katherine Aaslestad, meanwhile, writes that 'the very concept of migration during the Revolutionary and Napoleonic era is better understood as population displacement and community upheaval'.³⁶ Large numbers of men moved across Europe as part of the various armies, which were also often followed by the soldiers' wives and sweethearts. In addition to the armies, the wartime displaced included deserters, smugglers, and refugees. Of the latter, Aaslestad writes:

The most brutal acts of war evident in Spain, Russia, and southern Italy left depopulated cities and burnt and abandoned villages in their wake. Spared the brutal violence and loss of life characteristic of the siege of Jaffa and Zaragoza, over 22,000 civilians were exiled from the city of Hamburg on Christmas Eve 1813 during its siege. They sought refuge in neighboring Altona, Bremen, Lübeck, and Kiel, leading to overcrowding and food shortage in those towns.³⁷

While Britain did not see a direct invasion, and therefore the type of violent displacement Aaslestad describes, its writers still responded to what was happening across the Channel. Some, like Byron, did travel to the continent and describe Napoleonic battlefields. But, in many ways, the writers that remained at home occupied a similar relationship to the conflict as British writers today to the wars in the Middle East and the people they send across the Mediterranean into Europe—at a geographical remove, but nevertheless implicated by national policy.

³⁵ Stuart Curran, 'Romanticism Displaced and Placeless', *European Romantic Review*, 20 (2009), 637-650 <<https://doi-org.ezp.lib.cam.ac.uk/10.1080/10509580903407761>>

³⁶ Katherine Aaslestad, 'Napoleonic empire and migration', in *The Encyclopaedia of Global Human Migration*, ed. by Immanuel Ness (Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell, 2013), pp. 1-5 <DOI:10.1002/9781444351071.wbeghm382> (p. 1)

³⁷ Aaslestad, p. 2.

Despite the upheavals of the early nineteenth century, it is the mid-twentieth century, and the Second World War in particular, that likely retains the greatest influence on the contemporary Western imaginary of both murderous nationalism and mass displacement. It is this period that both the UNHCR and Curran reference in order to impress their readers with the severity of the moment they describe. It is also the experience that gave rise to contemporary refugee law and inspired influential theories of the refugee category. The literature of the mid-twentieth century might therefore seem a more obvious and fitting comparison to the poetry inspired by contemporary displacements. This is indeed what Lindsey Stonebridge does to great effect in *Placeless People: Writing, Rights, and Refugees*. Stonebridge focuses on how mid-twentieth-century authors like Franz Kafka, Hannah Arendt, and George Orwell understood the experience of placelessness, but brings her analysis up to the current moment with a comparison between W. H. Auden and the Oxford-based Palestinian poet Yousif M. Qasmiyeh. Stonebridge demarcates twentieth-century statelessness as categorically different from what preceded it. ‘There have always been refugees,’ she writes, ‘but the forced mass displacement of people in the twentieth century was something new.’³⁸ What was new about it were the sheer numbers involved, as well as how those masses were viewed. She quotes Hannah Arendt’s 1944 statement that, ‘Everywhere the word “exile” which once had an undertone of almost sacred awe, now provokes the idea of something simultaneously suspicious and unfortunate’.³⁹

At the same time, Stonebridge acknowledges that the mid-twentieth century reference point has not always served the people who were displaced afterwards. It is the ‘cultural and historical baggage’ that informed the legal definition of a refugee as ‘someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war or violence’ and ‘has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group’.⁴⁰ The emphasis on persecution and fear reflected the European experience of fascism and totalitarian communism but not, Stonebridge notes,

³⁸ Lindsey Stonebridge, *Placeless People: Writing, Rights, and Refugees* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 3.

³⁹ Qtd. in Stonebridge, p. 1.

⁴⁰ Stonebridge, p. 17, and ‘What is a Refugee?’, UNHCR <<https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/what-is-a-refugee/>> [accessed 23 September 2019]

‘the agonizing anxiety of having nowhere to go’.⁴¹ It created a new mystique of exile that excluded many people caught up in mass displacements, especially outside of Europe.

The limits of this definition are reflected now in the division between the true refugee and the so-called economic migrant. As Kingsley notes in his book on the twenty-first century refugee crisis, whether someone is fleeing war or poverty, the desperation is the same. ‘They are people who genuinely believe it’s better to die trying to get to Europe than live in poverty at home’, he writes.⁴² Poverty is a cause that forces displacement, but it is not one recognised by the refugee law that emerged out of the experience of the Second World War.

The displaced of the early nineteenth century, however, like the people Kingsley writes about, fell into both categories. The emigrants of the French Revolution, ‘Banish’d for ever and for conscience sake’ in Charlotte Smith’s words, would theoretically qualify for modern refugee protections.⁴³ Wordsworth’s vagrants, displaced by technological change and the erosion of the commons, would not. And yet, in the poems I will discuss in this dissertation, both groups are treated with the suspicion and pity Arendt identifies as unique responses to twentieth-century exiles. Focusing on European accounts of forced displacement that predate European-inspired refugee law can help us to think beyond the categories it enshrines by showing that they were not always taken for granted, even on the continent where they originated.

The Romantic era is also a key point in the process that saw the world transformed into a community of nation states, something that Stonebridge, drawing on Arendt, names as fundamental to twentieth-and twenty-first-century displacement. ‘Hannah Arendt was one of the first to understand that what looked like a refugee crisis in reality was a crisis for the political and moral authority of the European nation state, particularly for its claim to be the

⁴¹ Stonebridge, p. 17.

⁴² Kingsley, ‘The Second Sea’, *The New Odyssey*.

⁴³ Charlotte Smith, ‘The Emigrants’, in *The Poems of Charlotte Smith*, ed. by Stuart Curran, Women Writers in English, 1350-1850 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp.132-63 (p.138), l. 97.

home of the rights of man', Stonebridge writes.⁴⁴ This crisis was not resolved with the international law regime that grew out of the Second World War, because these same laws also recognised the right to national self-determination and therefore maintained a status-quo in which rights depended on citizenship.⁴⁵ From India–Pakistan to Israel–Palestine, 'new borders created new legions of stateless people'.⁴⁶ Reading Romantic-era poets like Wordsworth and Smith reveals that people were falling through the gap between man and citizen as soon as it was first codified. Moreover, by reading how people understood and responded to that gap when it was relatively new can help us to see it as created and flexible rather than inevitable and intractable, and therefore to imagine alternative forms of belonging.

III. Environmental Change

One of the factors that makes twenty-first-century displacement feel so overwhelming is the sense that it can only grow. An estimated 20 million people were displaced by disasters linked to anthropogenic global warming in 2008, and as many as 1.2 billion could be displaced by 2050, primarily because of flooding and drought.⁴⁷ The anticipated crisis of climate displacement is also a crisis of categories. Environmental refugees are not currently protected under international law yet adding such a protection is not straightforward. Climate change is what is known as a 'threat multiplier', which means that it can cause or exacerbate problems like violence or poverty.⁴⁸ Someone who crosses a border because water wars have broken out along ethnic lines or because drought has destroyed their farming business may not pinpoint climate change as the force compelling them to move. Instead, they might list

⁴⁴ Stonebridge, p.4.

⁴⁵ Stonebridge, p. 2.

⁴⁶ Stonebridge, p. 9.

⁴⁷ 'Climate Refugees': *Beyond the Legal Impasse?*, ed. by Simon Behrman and Avidan Kent (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2018), p. 4, and Institute for Economics & Peace, *Ecological Threat Register 2020: Understanding Ecological Threats, Resilience and Peace* (Sydney: September 2020) <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/ETR_2020_web-1.pdf> [accessed 29 September 2020] (p.4)

⁴⁸ 'Climate Refugees', pp. 40-1.

persecution or poverty and be sorted as either a refugee or an economic migrant accordingly. In fact, many of today's asylum seekers may already be climate refugees. Climate-induced drought has been suggested as one cause of the civil war in Syria, as well as the rise in migration from Central America.⁴⁹

Driving all this human mobility is the fact that the non-human environment is also moving. Glaciers are retreating, sea levels are rising, and biomes might even be shifting. A 2018 study found that climate change may already be changing the vegetation of ecosystems around the globe, and it has a greater than sixty-percent chance of doing so on a wide scale if emissions continue to rise.⁵⁰ This means that the physical barriers designed to keep out human migrants are also a problem for the animal populations whose niches will shift north as temperatures rise. A 2021 study found that 696 species of non-flying mammals would be unable to follow their ideal climate over existing barriers by 2070 in a worst-case emissions scenario.⁵¹

However, the link between environmental and human mobility is not new to the current climate emergency. It is also something that was very much a part of the Romantic era. In *Natures in Translation: Romanticism and Colonial Natural History*, Alan Bewell argues that writers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries 'understood a world in which natures were travelling and resettling the globe like never before'.⁵² European plants and animals colonised the globe as surely as the human settlers who transported them, displacing indigenous species as well as human cultures and communities. At the same time, foreign plants and animals travelled back to Britain as live specimens or circulated in the pages of

⁴⁹ Madhuri Karak, 'Climate Change and Syria's Civil War', *JSTOR DAILY*, 12 September 2019 <<https://daily.jstor.org/climate-change-and-syrias-civil-war/>> [accessed 30 September 2019], and Miranda Cady Hallet, 'How climate change is driving emigration from Central America', *The Conversation*, 6 September 2019 <<https://theconversation.com/how-climate-change-is-driving-emigration-from-central-america-121525>> [accessed 30 September 2019]

⁵⁰ Connor Nolan and others, 'Past and future transformation of terrestrial ecosystems under climate change', *Science*, 361.6405 (2018), 920-3 <DOI: 10.1126/science.aan5360>

⁵¹ Mark A. Tittley and others, 'Global Inequities and Political Borders Challenge Nature Conservation Under Climate Change', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 118.7 (2021) <doi:10.1073/pnas.2011204118>

⁵² Alan Bewell, *Natures in Translation: Romanticism and Colonial Natural History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2017), p. xiv.

popular natural histories. Local British natures were not immune from the displacing power of modern commerce. Bewell depicts John Clare as a poet who lost the particular nature of his childhood to enclosure and agricultural modernisation and demonstrates how that loss is rendered in mobile terms.⁵³ 'The bush hath left its hill', Clare writes of a post-enclosure landscape.⁵⁴ Clare has emerged in recent years in both the popular imagination and scholarly literature as a sort of indicator poet of the psychic dislocation that follows environmental change. George Monbiot, for example, called Clare 'the poet of the environmental crisis—200 years ago'.⁵⁵ Mina Gorji and Richard D. Irvine, meanwhile, have proposed that Clare is a particularly useful poet for thinking about the Anthropocene.⁵⁶

The Anthropocene is an emerging concept of environmental crisis that has come to be associated with the Romantic period. Within the scientific community, it is a proposed geological epoch marked by a human influence on the earth so extensive it will be evident in the fossil record.⁵⁷ Currently, the proposed official starting point for the Anthropocene is the mid-twentieth century, with the most likely signal being the artificial radionuclides spread around the world by nuclear bomb tests in the early 1950s.⁵⁸ However, when Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer first proposed the new epoch in 2000, they suggested the late eighteenth century as the starting point, partly because this is when ice core data begins to

⁵³ Bewell, *Natures*, pp.270-95.

⁵⁴ John Clare, 'Remembrances', in *John Clare Major Works*, ed. by Eric Robinson and David Powell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 258-61 (p. 260), l. 61.

⁵⁵ George Monbiot, 'John Clare, the poet of the environmental crisis—200 years ago', *Guardian*, 9 July 2012 <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/jul/09/john-clare-poetry>> [accessed 25 September 2019]

⁵⁶ Richard D.G. Irvine and Mina Gorji, 'John Clare in the Anthropocene', *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology*, 31.1 (2003), 119-32 <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/43610863>> [accessed 24 September 2021]

⁵⁷ Robert Macfarlane, 'Generation Anthropocene: How Humans Have Altered the Planet Forever', *Guardian*, 1 April 2016 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/apr/01/generation-anthropocene-altered-planet-forever>> [accessed 25 September 2019], and 'Working Group on the "Anthropocene"', *Subcommission on Quaternary Stratigraphy*, 21 May 2019 <<http://quaternary.stratigraphy.org/working-groups/anthropocene/>> [accessed 24 September 2021]

⁵⁸ 'Working Group'.

show a rise in atmospheric greenhouse gasses.⁵⁹ The definition by the official Anthropocene Working Group still references the onset of industrialisation as a turning point for the impacts of human activity on the planet.⁶⁰

The conversation around the term and its potential beginning has spread beyond the geological community, and neither its name nor its start is without controversy. Geographer Jason W. Moore, for example, has argued that the epoch should actually be called the Capitalocene, in part because the term Anthropocene falsely assigns to all of humanity the devastation wrought by one system, and in part because it reproduces the divide between Nature and Society that is one of capitalism's most violent innovations.⁶¹ I will be adopting Moore's term for the remainder of this dissertation (except, of course, when referencing other scholars who use Anthropocene) because my project in particular focuses on human individuals and communities who are more victims than agents of climate and ecosystem destruction, and I agree that it makes little sense in this context to lump climate refugees and fossil fuel executives together within the Anthropos. While Moore dates the Capitalocene to the start of the early modern period and the ecological transformation wrought by early capitalism and colonialism, Bewell's text demonstrates that this process was still noticeably underway during the Romantic period. Clare's poetry offers a particularly unique and affecting testament to those changes. While it is important to recognise the full complexity of Clare's body of work and not to fit him too neatly into contemporary narratives, the small geographical scale of the landscape he lost, contrasted with the large scale of the grief and dislocation voiced in his poems, can help us grapple with the full enormity of past and future environmental displacement.

The Romantic era also witnessed the eruption of Mount Tambora in 1815, which 'spawned the most devastating, sustained period of extreme weather seen on our planet in perhaps

⁵⁹ Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer, 'The Anthropocene', *IGBP Newsletter*, 41 (2000), 17-18 <<http://www.igbp.net/download/18.316f18321323470177580001401/1376383088452/NL41.pdf>> [accessed 24 September 2021]

⁶⁰ 'Working Group'.

⁶¹ Jason W. Moore, 'The Capitalocene, Part 1: on the nature and origins of our ecological crisis', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 44.3 (2017), 494-640 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/03066150.2016.1235036>>

thousands of years'.⁶² The spewing of volcanic gasses into the stratosphere upended the global climate for the next three years, leading to flooding, drought, temperature changes, and the infamous 'Year Without a Summer' in 1816.⁶³ In Europe, the disaster coincided with the end of the Napoleonic Wars and compounded their effects with famine and disease that were equally displacing. In Germany, 1816 was known as the 'Year of the Beggar'.⁶⁴ In France, the prefect of Brie described hungry refugees from the country entering a town like 'an invasion or perhaps the migration of an entire nation'.⁶⁵ This catastrophe was deeply influential for the second generation of Romantic writers. Gillen D'arcy Wood argues that the sickness and poor treatment of famine refugees influenced the physical appearance and reception of the monster in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, first conceived in Geneva in 1816.⁶⁶ The dark and stormy summer also inspired Byron's poem 'Darkness', in which the sun is extinguished and 'the habitations of all things which dwell, | Were burnt for beacons'.⁶⁷ And yet, no one, from the beggars to the prefects to the poets, knew why these disasters were unfolding. The connection between the volcanic eruption and the Year Without a Summer was not made until the mid-twentieth century, when meteorological instruments allowed scientists to understand that debris from a volcanic eruption could linger in the atmosphere and alter the climate for up to three years.⁶⁸ The example of Tambora speaks to the current moment not only as a warning about the dangers of unchecked climate change, but also as an example of how difficult it can be to untangle the root causes of displacement in a reality in which human and non-human factors are inextricably linked.

⁶² Gillen D'arcy Wood, *Tambora: The Eruption that Changed the World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), p. 8.

⁶³ Wood, pp. 8-9.

⁶⁴ Wood, p. 64.

⁶⁵ Qtd. in Wood, p. 63.

⁶⁶ Wood, pp. 64-6.

⁶⁷ Wood, pp. 67-9, and Byron, 'Darkness', in *Complete Poetical Works*, ed. by Frederick Page, corrected by John Jump (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 95, ll. 12-13.

⁶⁸ Wood, pp. 3-5.

IV. Changing Communication Technologies

The political and climatological upheavals of the early nineteenth century also took place amidst a profound change in the scope and extent of written communication, another development echoed by today's revolution in information technology. In the current moment, the story of the so-called refugee crisis and the developed world's response is also the story of the internet. The Arab Spring protests that set off Syria's Civil War spread via social media, and refugees who have arrived in Europe use the internet to communicate the details of the journey to those about to depart.⁶⁹ At the same time, ethno-nationalism has also spread online. There is concern that the rise of social-media-spread fake news facilitated the 2016 electoral victory of Donald Trump in the US, though this is hard to prove either way.⁷⁰ In one particularly devastating example, there were many references to right-wing internet subcultures in the manifesto posted by the man who opened fire on two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand in March 2019.⁷¹ In the decade between Tahrir Square and the January 6 attack on the US Capitol, then, social media has gone from being lionised as a tool for democracy to being denounced as an existential threat to the same.⁷²

⁶⁹ There are first person accounts of both in Wendy Pearlman, *We Crossed a Bridge and it Trembled: Voices from Syria* (New York: HarperCollins, 2017). Online resource. In this text, Pearlman collects interviews with those who survived the Syrian Civil War. In one, Shafiq, a graduate in Daraya, said he was working with computers in the Spring of 2011 so 'was on the internet 24/7. The events in Tunisia and Egypt looked so easy. Our path was open before us' (Part III). In another Nabil, a musician from Damascus, said he knew what to expect before leaving because 'People traveled and talked about their experiences in detail on the internet so others could benefit' (Part VII).

⁷⁰ For a good overview of the scholarly debate surrounding the actual impact of fake news, see Danielle Kurtzleben, 'Did Fake News on Facebook Help Elect Trump? Here's What We Know', *NPR*, 11 April 2018 <<https://www.npr.org/2018/04/11/601323233/6-facts-we-know-about-fake-news-in-the-2016-election>> [accessed 1 October 2021]

⁷¹ For an early investigation of this, see Robert Evans, 'Shitposting, Inspirational Terrorism, and the Christchurch Mosque Massacre', *Bellingcat*, 15 March 2019 <<https://www.bellingcat.com/news/rest-of-world/2019/03/15/shitposting-inspirational-terrorism-and-the-christchurch-mosque-massacre/>> [accessed 29 March 2019]

⁷² For a discussion of how the role of social media in the Arab Spring was covered, see Peter Beaumont, 'The Truth about Twitter, Facebook and the uprisings in the Arab world', *Guardian*, 25 February 2011 <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/feb/25/twitter-facebook-uprisings-arab-libya>> [accessed 5 May 2021]. For warnings about Facebook's threat to democracy, see Jeet Heer, 'Facebook Remains a Threat to

Contemporary thinkers are not simply concerned about the internet's impact on society, but also its impact on our minds, though of course the two are connected. In his tenth anniversary introduction to *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains*, Nicholas Carr repeats his warning about the internet and asserts that the past ten years have proved him right:

The brain's capacity is not unlimited. The passageway from perception to understanding is narrow. It takes patience and concentration to evaluate new information—to gauge its accuracy, to weigh its relevance and worth, to put it in context—and the internet, by design, subverts patience and concentration. When the brain is overloaded by stimuli, as it usually is when we're peering into a network-connected computer screen, attention splinters, thinking becomes superficial, and memory suffers. We become less reflective and more impulsive. Far from enhancing human intelligence, I argue, the internet degrades it.⁷³

Carr, notably, opens his book with an epigraph from John Keats's 'Ode to Psyche': 'And in the midst of this wide quietness | A rosy sanctuary will I dress | With the wreathed trellis of a working brain'.⁷⁴ The implication of this choice is that the medium of Keats's reading and writing—a printed book—facilitates the kind of quietness the internet does not, the kind of quietness that enables the brain to work. And, indeed, Carr goes on to argue that the

Democracy', *The Nation*, 24 February 2021 <<https://www.thenation.com/article/society/facebook-regulation-democracy-australia/>> [accessed 5 May 2021]

⁷³ Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2020). Kindle ebook.

⁷⁴ Qtd. in Carr, for original see John Keats, 'Ode to Psyche' in *Keats: Poems Published in 1820*, ed. by M. Robertson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909), p. 117-22, ll. 58-60.

printed book transformed the world by transforming minds, creating a 'literary ethic' of deep reading that encouraged reflection and imagination.⁷⁵

Carr cites the self-knowledge of Wordsworth's *Prelude* as an example of what book reading enables. Wordsworth, however, may not have agreed. While he devotes an entire book of the *Prelude* to his reading life, he was deeply concerned about the sheer quantity of printed material that was published while he was alive. In his 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads*, he argues that

a multitude of causes, unknown to former times, are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and unfitting it for all voluntary exertion to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor. The most effective of these causes are the great national events which are daily taking place, and the encreasing accumulation of men in cities, where the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident, which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies.⁷⁶

Wordsworth's 'savage torpor' does not sound so different from Carr's 'shallows'. Both authors posit that the sheer amount of information supplied by the communication technology of their day is having negative impacts on the mind's ability to think about what it perceives. The difference is that the disturbingly new communication technologies of the Romantic era now feel safe and familiar compared to the newly disturbing communication technologies of today.

⁷⁵ Carr, 'The Deepening Page', in *The Shallows*.

⁷⁶ Wordsworth, 'Preface', in *Lyrical Ballads*, p. 99.

Wordsworth was far from the only Romantic-era thinker to worry about reading and writing. The eighteenth century saw an increase in both the number of texts and the size of the audience who read them. The circulation of newspapers increased by a factor of eight between 1712 and 1757.⁷⁷ The works listed in the English Short Title Catalogue shot up exponentially between 1760 and 1800.⁷⁸ All these new texts meant more people had more access to new reading material, something exacerbated by the fact that schools began to include excerpts of English literature as part of the curriculum during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.⁷⁹ 'The rapid expansion in reading occurred across all strata of society, whether categorised by income, by occupation, by educational attainment, by geographical location, by age, or by gender', writes William St. Clair in *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period*.⁸⁰

The expansion of writing and reading led to both optimism and concern about their effects. On one side, French Revolutionaries carried printing presses in civic processions.⁸¹ On the other, elites were worried that wider reading, especially of historical, philosophical, or imaginative texts, would lead to instability and, indeed, revolution.⁸² Beyond content, several writers of the time were concerned with the sheer volume of material, something Clifford Siskin emphasises in *The Work of Writing: Literature and Social Change in Britain, 1700-1890*. '[To] classify the innumerable warnings against young women reading novels as simply a manifestation of Augustan conservatism is to miss the historical point—the particular attitude toward change was secondary to a primary issue: writing's capacity to

⁷⁷ Clifford Siskin, *The Work of Writing: Literature and Social Change in Britain, 1700-1830* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), p. 3.

⁷⁸ Olaf Simons, 'EST Title Count 1600-1800', *Wikipedia*, 21 January 2009, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_Short_Title_Catalogue#/media/File:ESTC-Title-count-1600-1800.png> [accessed 15 November 2020]

⁷⁹ William St. Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 11.

⁸⁰ St. Clair, p. 11.

⁸¹ Paul Keen, *The Crisis of Literature in the 1790s: Print Culture and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 5.

⁸² St. Clair, p. 12.

produce that change', Siskin notes.⁸³ Siskin argues that the solution to the problem of literary proliferation was more writing, but writing that encouraged narrowness and depth through the emergent forces of disciplinarity, professionalism, and literature, the meaning of which evolved during the eighteenth century from all written material to 'the transcendent output of the human imagination—simply the best'.⁸⁴

By revisiting the history of how literature as a category emerged during the Romantic era, it is possible to read Carr's 'literary ethic' not as an inevitable outcome of the virtues of print technology, but rather as an ideological response to its excesses. As Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* 'Preface' demonstrates, Romantic writers were actively involved in writing this response. Another key text in this effort was 'A Defence of Poetry' by Percy Bysshe Shelley. In this essay, Shelley sought to rescue poetry from Thomas Love Peacock's prediction in *The Four Ages of Poetry* that it would ultimately lose out in the literary marketplace against scientific, political, and philosophical writing. Peacock had warned that

the poetical audience will not only continually diminish in the proportion of its number to that of the rest of the reading public, but will also sink lower and lower in the comparison of intellectual acquirement: when we consider that the poet must still please his audience, and must therefore continue to sink to their level.⁸⁵

Shelley responded by elevating poetry above the competition. It did not need to unseat 'useful art and science', because its purpose was not to make one a better engineer or geologist, but a better human being:

The great secret of morals is love; or a going out of our nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person, not our

⁸³ Siskin, p. 3.

⁸⁴ For an overview of Siskin's argument, see pp. 1-26; for the final quote, see p. 6.

⁸⁵ Thomas Love Peacock, 'The Four Ages of Poetry', in *The Percy Reprints, No. 3: Peacock's Four Ages of Poetry, Shelley's Defence of Poetry, Browning's Essay on Shelley*, ed. by H. F. B. Brett-Smith (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1937), p. 19.

own. A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others, the pains and pleasure of his species must become his own. The great instrument of moral good is the imagination; and poetry administers to the effect by acting upon the cause. Poetry enlarges the circumference of the imagination by replenishing it with thoughts of ever new delight, which have the power of attracting and assimilating to their own nature all other thoughts, and which form new intervals and interstices whose void forever craves fresh food. Poetry strengthens the faculty which is the organ of the moral nature of man, in the same manner as exercise strengthens a limb.⁸⁶

In other words, poetry makes its readers into better people because it enhances their ability to imagine, which then makes it easier for them to imagine living lives other than their own. This, in turn, will improve the condition of the world itself. The 'Defence' ends with its famous last line: 'Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world.'⁸⁷ As James Chandler points out in *England in 1819*, that line was first included in Shelley's earlier 'A Philosophical View of Reform', which dealt specifically with questions of Parliamentary reform in England following the Peterloo massacre.⁸⁸ In its original context, the line comes as Shelley is discussing the current moment in England and arguing that the country must be on the cusp of change because its poetry in recent years has grown in power. Chandler points out that Shelley eventually hoped that parliaments would be dissolved entirely in favour of individual self-government, in which case the poets' role developing the moral nature of individuals would take on even greater legislative implications.⁸⁹ But while Shelley's utopian anarchy was not realised, the place he awarded poetry in the moral hierarchy of print culture more or less was. Siskin argues that, as disciplines and professions emerged to control the increased flow of written knowledge, literature became the

⁸⁶ Shelley, Percy Bysshe, 'Defence of Poetry', in *The Percy Reprints*, No. 3, p. 33.

⁸⁷ Shelley, 'Defence', p. 59.

⁸⁸ James Chandler, *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 49, and Shelley, 'A Philosophical View of reform', *Online Library of Liberty*, (2009) <<https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/shelley-philosophical-view-of-reform-1820>> [accessed 15 March 2019]

⁸⁹ Chandler, p. 29.

‘prerequisite’ field that would, to paraphrase John Stuart Mill, teach men to be ‘men before they are lawyers’.⁹⁰

The argument that literature and poetry can make the reader a better person by exercising their imagination is still very present today and was repeated in the context of the refugee crisis. In an essay that concluded *A Country of Refuge*, originally taken from a speech she had delivered at the European Literature Days in 2015, author A. L. Kennedy spoke in near Shelleyan terms, diagnosing the cruel media responses to refugees as a failure of imagination: ‘Let us, together, imagine the future’, she wrote, addressing fellow writers, ‘if we don’t, it [the future] will happen without us and may kill us along the way.’⁹¹ By understanding how Romantic writers addressed a shifting media landscape by joining it, we can contextualise contemporary anxieties and interventions.

V. Active Romanticisms

This dissertation lies in the borderlands of several recent scholarly developments: a focus on mobility and displacement in the Romantic era, a turn towards examining historic resonances between the Romantic and the contemporary eras, a more direct tracing of the poetic linkages between Romantic and later poetry, and a scholarly and popular emphasis on refugee and migrant literature.

Several scholars have drawn attention to the increased movement of humans and non-humans during the Romantic era and how it influenced its poetry. These texts include Bewell’s *Natures in Translation* and his earlier *Romanticism and Colonial Disease*; Ingrid Horrocks’s *Women Wanderers and the Writing of Mobility, 1784 -1814*; Sarah Houghton-Walker’s *Representations of the Gypsy in the Romantic Period*; Celeste Langan’s *Romantic Vagrancy: Wordsworth and the Simulation of Freedom*; David Simpson’s *Wordsworth, Commodification, and Social Concern: The Poetics of Modernity*; Jane Stabler’s *The Artistry*

⁹⁰ Siskin, p. 7.

⁹¹ A. L. Kennedy, ‘The Migrants’, in *Country of Refuge*, pp. 205-16.

of Exile: Romantic and Victorian Writers in Italy; and Wiley's *Romantic Migrations*.⁹² Some of these texts gesture to twenty- or twenty-first-century comparisons. Bewell, for example, likens Clare's experience of enclosure to exiled Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, who returned to the site of his village to find it gone.⁹³ However, the discussion of Darwish only takes up three pages of a twenty-five-page chapter on Clare, and it serves more to contextualise Clare for contemporary readers than to facilitate an equal exchange between the two poets. 'If Clare had lived in the twentieth century, he would have been able to look to other poets to help understand this condition', Bewell writes, as he then goes on to use Darwish to help us understand Clare's condition.⁹⁴ My aim is different. By putting Romantic and contemporary poets side by side, I hope to allow them to speak to each other in a way that deepens, and perhaps alters, our understanding of both.

At the end of *Romantic Migrations*, Wiley invites further work when he says that he has 'suggested that the language and conceptual horizons of Romantic migration literature have at once contributed to the language and conceptual horizons of late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first century discussions of migration and have provided a means to critique this language and these horizons'.⁹⁵ However, he does not give himself much space to develop this critique. By splitting the body of this dissertation between Romantic and contemporary authors, I hope to examine in more detail how displacement and migration were understood in both eras and how this comparison may either reinforce or dislodge current assumptions.

⁹² Full details for the texts I have not yet cited are as follows: Alan Bewell, *Romanticism and Colonial Disease* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999); Sarah Houghton-Walker, *Representations of the Gypsy in the Romantic Period* (Oxford: Oxford Scholarship Online, 2014); Celeste Langan, *Romantic Vagrancy: Wordsworth and the Simulation of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); David Simpson, *Wordsworth, Commodification, and Social Concern: The Poetics of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); and Jane Stabler, *The Artistry of Exile: Romantic and Victorian Writers in Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁹³ Bewell, *Natures*, pp. 270-1.

⁹⁴ Bewell, *Natures*, p. 270.

⁹⁵ Wiley, p. 148.

I am not the first to point to historic similarities between the Romantic and contemporary eras. Sitting where it does in the history of industrialisation, imperialism, nationalism, and communication technology, the turn of the nineteenth century saw the beginning or acceleration of developments that continue to shape our current reality, and several scholars have turned to the era's literature to help make sense of our own time. This has especially been evident in the recent scholarly focus on the literature inspired by the Tambora eruption and following years of extreme weather. As the climate crisis threatens a world without a winter, scholars have looked back on the Year Without a Summer for guidance. Wood's text, cited earlier, is a global, historical account that nevertheless engages with literary output as part of that history. Other books have emerged that focus more exclusively on Romantic-era writing, among them David Higgins' *British Romanticism, Climate Change, and the Anthropocene: Writing Tambora* and Chris Washington's *Romantic Revelations: Visions of Post-Apocalyptic Life and Hope in the Anthropocene*.⁹⁶

Other accounts have focused on the response of Romantic writers to the Napoleonic Wars as an example of a global conflict communicated to populations at a remove from the physical fighting. These include Jeffrey Cox's *Romanticism in the Shadow of War: Literary Culture in the Napoleonic War Years*, J. R. Watson's *Romanticism and War: A Study of Romantic Period Writers and the Napoleonic Wars* and Mary A. Favret's *War at a Distance: Romanticism and the Making of Modern Wartime*.⁹⁷ Favret's work is the closest to mine methodologically speaking, since she shows how a phenomenon deeply familiar to contemporary readers—processing a seemingly endless war at a physical distance—had its roots in the Romantic era and the cultural response to the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars.⁹⁸ In doing so, she includes close readings of poems from both eras to support her point. Her introduction begins with C. K. Williams's 'The Hearth', which was written in

⁹⁶ David Higgins, *British Romanticism, Climate Change, and the Anthropocene: Writing Tambora* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), and Chris Washington, *Romantic Revelations: Visions of Post-Apocalyptic Life and Hope in the Anthropocene* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019).

⁹⁷ Jeffrey Cox, *Romanticism in the Shadow of War: Literary Culture in the Napoleonic War Years* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); J.R. Watson, *Romanticism and War: A Study of Romantic Period Writers and the Napoleonic Wars* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); and Mary A. Favret, *War at a Distance: Romanticism and the Making of Modern Wartime* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

⁹⁸ Favret, p. 9.

response to the buildup to the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, and shows how Williams's device, observing the hearth fire while thinking of foreign conflict, echoes Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 'Frost at Midnight' and William Cowper's 'Winter Evening' from *The Task*.⁹⁹ The theme I chose to explore across both temporalities is distinct from, but complementary with, Favret's. Both then and now, the story of the refugee experience is also the story of how the war tries, or fails, to come home.

Other authors have focused less on the historical in favour of more directly literary linkages between the Romantic and twentieth- or twenty-first centuries. One exemplary recent instance is Michael O'Neill's *All Sustaining Air: Romantic Legacies and Renewals in British, American, and Irish Poetry since 1900*, which focuses on the aesthetic relationships between Romantic and later poets like W. B. Yeats, T.S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, Stephen Spender, and Seamus Heaney.¹⁰⁰ Another is Stephanie Kuduk Weiner's *Clare's Lyric: John Clare and Three Modern Poets*, which begins with a close reading of Clare himself and then examines his influence on Arthur Symonds, Edmund Blunden, and John Ashbery.¹⁰¹ O'Neill's and Weiner's projects are very different from mine, in that I am more concerned with tracing historic or thematic resonances than concrete influences. The contemporary poets I study are not necessarily quoting or referencing the Romantic response to forced migration. Rather, I am interested in how both sets of poets evoke the displacements of self and other that they observed in their respective times.

In this, my project is closer to that of Julie Carr and Jeffrey Robinson in *Active Romanticism: The Radical Impulse in Nineteenth Century and Contemporary Poetic Practice*.¹⁰² In the introduction to this collection, Carr and Robinson seek to define Romantic poetry not as a particular canon defined by era and geography but rather as a particular way of doing poetry

⁹⁹ Favret, pp. 1-6.

¹⁰⁰ Michael O'Neill, *All Sustaining Air: Romantic Legacies and Renewals in British, American, and Irish Poetry since 1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

¹⁰¹ Stephanie Kuduk Weiner, *Clare's Lyric: John Clare and Three Modern Poets* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

¹⁰² *Active Romanticism: The Radical Impulse in Nineteenth Century and Contemporary Poetic Practice*, ed. by Julie Carr and Jeffrey C. Robinson (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2015).

that combines formal and political radicalism, which they say originated around the time of the French Revolution. For them, a contemporary poem can be Romantic without necessarily alluding to Wordsworth or Byron. ‘Active Romanticism’ is instead defined as ‘a poetic response, either direct or indirect, to a “social antagonism” (Marx, Adorno), an attempt to lift a repression that, at its core, keeps democratic pluralism in check’.¹⁰³ Some of the contemporary poems I examine in this study could meet Carr and Robinson’s definition of an actively Romantic poem, in so far as they respond to the ‘social antagonism’ of migration status, which, as the link between anti-migrant sentiment and rising authoritarianism shows, certainly is opposed to democratic pluralism. However, not all of the poems I study are either formally or politically radical in the tradition Carr and Robinson hold up. I also argue that the relationship between Romantic poetry, contemporary poetry, and the social antagonism of displaced/settled or citizen/non-citizen is not always clearly liberatory. What I do take from Carr and Robinson is the idea that the political motivation or impact of a poem, in addition to its formal or linguistic devices, can be a useful point of comparison across time.

My work also responds to the fact that this particular ‘social antagonism’ has received increased popular and scholarly attention in recent years. On the scholarly front, the most thorough and thought-provoking recent critical account is Stonebridge’s *Placeless People*, which, as detailed earlier, analyses the ways in which mid-twentieth-century authors responded to the phenomenon of statelessness. Popularly, the publication in 2019 of the *Penguin Book of Migration Literature*, the first such collection not to focus on a specific diaspora, route, or destination, shows that there is a growing interest in understanding how literature engages with the fact of human movement, at a time when more and more people are on the move, yet borders are more and more difficult to cross.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Carr and Robinson, ‘Introduction’, in *Active Romanticism*, pp. 1-17 (pp. 1-2). ‘Social antagonism’ is Carr and Robinson’s paraphrase of Marx and Adorno, and the quotation marks are preserved from Carr and Robinson’s text. They provide no reference note.

¹⁰⁴ Dohra Ahmad, ‘Introduction’, in *The Penguin Book of Migration Literature*, ed. by Dohra Ahmad (New York: Penguin, 2019), p. xv. Ahmad says her collection is the first ‘to offer a global, comparative scope’ of migration literature’.

In looking to deepen this understanding, I do not stand on neutral ground. On the one hand, the entire impetus for this project was born of a conviction that both a place to call home and the chance to seek out a new one are not things that should be restricted based on an accident of birth. I follow Achille Mbembe in believing in both the 'right to abode' and the right to move freely across international divisions.¹⁰⁵ My interest in selecting the comparison between Romantic and contemporary poetry was explicitly to call attention to how the UK and Europe were attempting to shut out the realities of mobility and displacement that had in fact informed their own cultures. As the climate crisis looks likely to force even more people from their homes, it grows increasingly urgent to choose active welcoming over either passive humanitarianism or hostile eco-fascism.

On the other hand, this project was enabled by the unequal systems of bordering it ostensibly opposes. As a white, US woman from a middle-class background, I had a relatively simple time obtaining a Tier 4 Visa to complete this project at a UK university. The British university system has not been so welcoming for everyone. There is a problem of visiting scholars from the Global South being denied visas to attend academic conferences.¹⁰⁶ In recent years, there have been cases of researchers already in the UK having their visas denied, being threatened with deportation, and being denied the right to bring their children to live with them.¹⁰⁷ In this context, there is a risk that the academic study of migration might merely profit from the injustices it analyses and publishes on but does not change on a structural level. In *Illegality Inc.*, Ruben Anderson argues that a whole industry has sprung up around the clandestine entry of migrants into Europe. While his account looks at border guards and government workers, it also implicates aid workers, activists, journalists, and academics like himself; in the

¹⁰⁵ Achille Mbembe, 'The Idea of a Borderless World', *Chimurenga*, 16 October 2018 <<https://chimurengachronic.co.za/the-idea-of-a-borderless-world/>> [accessed 9 February 2019]

¹⁰⁶ Anna Fazackerley, 'University conferences at risk as academic speakers refused UK visas', *Guardian*, 26 September 2017 <<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2017/sep/26/university-academic-refused-uk-visas-nigerian>> [accessed 5 May 2021]

¹⁰⁷ Fazackerley, 'UK to deport academic to Democratic Republic of Congo—which she has never visited', *Guardian*, 15 October 2019 <<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/oct/15/uk-deport-academic-to-democratic-republic-of-congo-never-visited-sexual-violence>> [accessed 5 May 2021], and Fazackerley, "'Xenophobia in the system": university staff launch fightback against hostile environment', *Guardian*, 26 November 2019 <<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2019/nov/26/university-staff-launch-fightback-against-hostile-environment>> [accessed 5 May 2021]

field of studying illegal immigration, ‘careers are now made, networks created, knowledge and imagery circulated, and money channelled in increasing amounts’, he writes.¹⁰⁸ If this was the case for ‘illegal’ immigration in 2014, when Anderson’s account was published, it could equally be said to apply to the articles and books that sprang up after the 2015 refugee crisis, including many of the works I study and this dissertation itself.

One of Anderson’s key arguments is that the industry surrounding ‘illegal immigration’ in fact creates more of the same, repackaging diverse migrant experiences into the product of the illegal traveller who must be studied and contained as such.¹⁰⁹ In this, he follows Nicholas de Genova and Michel Agier, who have made similar claims about migrants generally and refugees respectively.¹¹⁰ My hope with this work is that, by comparing the cultural responses to displacement that precede the legal refugee category with cultural responses that follow it, I can undermine rather than reify its production. That said, I am aware that this dissertation is by necessity made on the same assembly lines as the constructs it argues against. The point is to change the world, but to do so we must first understand it. The contradiction of conducting scholarship under capitalism is that such work requires time and resources, which are currently divided unequally, and so that scholarship will always be somewhat complicit in the system(s) it critiques. I can only offer this dissertation in the hope that it may provide some small insight into dismantling the structures that enabled it.¹¹¹

VI. Boundary Lines

¹⁰⁸ Ruben Anderson, *Illegality, Inc.: Clandestine Migration and the Business of Bordering Europe* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014), p. xxxvii.

¹⁰⁹ Anderson, *Illegality, Inc.*, p. xxxiii.

¹¹⁰ Anderson, *Illegality, Inc.*, p. xxxvii.

¹¹¹ This gesture is inspired by a similar position articulated by Andrea Brady with regards to the relationship between academic scholarship and the prison industrial complex in ‘Hours of Lead: Poetry, Segregation and Solidarity in the U. S. Supermax’, a paper presented to the Theory, Criticism, and Culture Seminar, Faculty of English, University of Cambridge (3 March 2021). See Brady, *Poetry and Confinement* (Cambridge University Press: Forthcoming).

While this dissertation looks forward to a world without national borders, it is by necessity bounded. I have chosen to focus on two discrete time periods: the Romantic era and the contemporary. My chosen timeline for the Romantic material is roughly the traditional timeframe of the 1780s to mid-1830s, though some of the Clare poems I analyse were completed between this cut-off point and his death in 1864.¹¹² For contemporary poetry, I restrict myself to the twenty-first century, with a special focus on poetry that was either written or circulated in response to the 2015-to-2016 influx of refugees into Europe. To make my comparison as meaningful as possible, I am focusing on Anglophone poetry in both eras that circulated in Britain's print or media culture in some way.

The poems I discuss deal with forced displacement, by which I mean they are by or about people who have been compelled to move, by poverty or violence or some other factor outside of their control. The poems may depict people who would today qualify for refugee status, but they may also depict people like Clare or Wordsworth's Female Vagrant, who would today be closer to economic migrants. Part of my interest in this comparison is tracking how a previously mobile intra-British population came to be established as a settled 'self' to the contemporary refugee or migrant other. Because of this, not every poem will actually deal with movement across an international border. Finally, I am interested in movement that is ultimately chosen, even if the alternative to movement is unthinkable. So much of the contemporary discourse around refugees and migrants is concerned with who and how many should be allowed to move, and where. The refugee or migrant's agency, such as it is, their decision not to wait for permission to move, is ultimately what makes them so threatening to a Europe that wants to retain its cosmopolitan and democratic image while continuing to benefit from the unequal enforcement of violence and distribution of resources between former colonies and former colonisers. Because of this, I have chosen not to include eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature around slavery. Ahmad selects works from Olaudah Equiano and Phillis Wheatley in *The Penguin Book of Migration Literature* and refers to the Atlantic slave trade as a 'massive forced migration', while Wiley also includes slave

¹¹² For the traditional Romantic timeline see, for example, Jerrold E. Hogle, 'Romanticism and the "Schools" of Criticism and Theory', in *The Cambridge Companion to British Romanticism*, ed. by Stuart Curran (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp.1-33 (p. 1).

narratives in *Romantic Migrations*.¹¹³ However, I feel the experience of being physically stolen from one home and brought to another is drastically different from the experience of running under duress, and the relationship to the country of destination, its institutions and power structures, is distinct for people brought there by force when compared with people it is attempting to force out. That said, I will certainly examine how the legacies of racism and colonialism interact with depictions of forced migration in both the Romantic period and today.

Each chapter in the dissertation that follows will focus on a particular poet or set of poets and how they may help us think through the causes of, experiences of, and responses to forced displacement. Chapter One links the unique vulnerability and futurity of the refugee as theorised by Hannah Arendt and Giorgio Agamben to the spectral depictions of refugees and displaced persons in the poetry of William Wordsworth and Charlotte Smith. Chapter Two builds on Clare criticism to explore how his 'sense of place' became an intimate 'sense of displacement' and how his relationship to the un-enclosed fen landscape enabled him to articulate the interdependency between freedom of movement and a right to abode. Chapter Three looks at the relationship between the exiled Byronic hero and the collectivised figure of the refugee as theorised by Edward Said. It explores how Byron addresses the difficulties of transforming collective experience into literature in both *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and *Don Juan*.

Chapter Four moves to the contemporary period to consider how poets including Ed Luker, Ruth Padel, Carolyn Forché, and A. E. Stallings respond to the Mediterranean Sea's contemporary status as the world's deadliest border. It compares their reliance on classical references to Romantic Hellenism and explores how both sets of poets ahistorically reinforce the imagined community of Europe against an Eastern 'other'. However, it further engages with the emerging discipline of border aesthetics to examine how these references can work to 're-scape' the border by calling attention to its status as a relatively recent human construct. Finally, Chapter Five looks at how contemporary poets like Warsan Shire,

¹¹³ Ahmad, p. xvi.

the teachers and students of *England: Poems from a School*, Yousif M. Qasmiyeh, and Amir Darwish intervene in print and internet culture on behalf of refugees. It examines how these interventions may reinforce or subvert the national and legal categories that attempt to determine who may move where, and why.

1. 'Outcasts of the World': Spectres of Mobility in Charlotte Smith and William Wordsworth

I. Hostile Environments

In 2012, then Home Secretary Theresa May announced plans to 'create here in Britain a really hostile environment for illegal migration'.¹ The policy recruited everyone from landlords to doctors to employers to university administrators to act as immigration enforcers, making it as hard as possible for anyone without proper documentation to access shelter, healthcare, and income. The intent was to make remaining in Britain so difficult that the migrants would choose to move on, again.

Writing more than two hundred years earlier, William Wordsworth described a similar strategy of displacement in the 1798 version of 'The Female Vagrant'.² When the speaker's father refuses to sell his cottage to a new, wealthy neighbour, that neighbour uses his 'sway' to make the family's life at home impossible:

But, when he had refused the proffered gold,

To cruel injuries he became a prey,

Sore traversed in whate'er he bought and sold:

¹ Jamie Grierson, 'Hostile environment: anatomy of a policy disaster', *Guardian*, 27 August 2018 <<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/aug/27/hostile-environment-anatomy-of-a-policy-disaster>> [accessed 29 September 2021]

² Wordsworth, 'The Female Vagrant', in *Lyrical Ballads*, pp. 32-9. From the rest of this chapter, all references to poems from *Lyrical Ballads* will be given as line numbers in parenthetical citations. I have used the 1798 text of 'The Female Vagrant' because its description of the family's ouster is more vivid and specific. I will discuss the changes made to the poem over time later in this chapter.

His troubles grew upon him day by day,
Till all his substance fell into decay.
His little range of water was denied;
All but the bed where his old body lay,
All, all was seized, and weeping, side by side,
We sought a home where we uninjured might abide. (ll. 46-54)

In Wordsworth's account, and in the design of the hostile environment policy, the process of displacement is a process of spectralisation. The target remains in the environment as a perceptible presence but is deprived of the ability to gain sustenance from it, or to physically impact it. First, the father is 'traversed' in his economic transactions. Presumably, the wealthy landlord is able to exert enough pressure that the father's former partners now refuse to do business with him. Traverse is an interesting word choice in this context because it conveys the dual meaning of 'cross' as in 'thwart' and 'cross' as in 'pass through'.³ The father is thwarted in such a way that the economic life of his community passes through him as if he were no longer there. Further, the father is denied his 'range of water'. A note on the text explains that lakes in the North of England were 'let out to different Fisherman, in parcels marked out by imaginary lines'.⁴ As Celeste Langan has shown, the denial of the father's rights to fish the lake dramatises the process by which English law came to deny easement rights in favour of absolute property rights during the nineteenth century.⁵ As Acts of Enclosure displaced rural populations from their neighbourhoods, it was no longer possible to argue for easement rights based on the principles of custom and usufruct, the right of independent cottage-dwellers to glean a livelihood from neighbouring properties. Once these cottage dwellers lost their rights to a place, they also lost the rights to its fruits, because those rights could no longer be defended based on habit and proximity. The Female

³ 'Traverse', *Oxford English Dictionary* [online]
<<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/205281?rkey=FJUjg4&result=3#eid>> [accessed 2 June 2019]

⁴ Wordsworth, 'The Female Vagrant', *Lyrical Ballads*, p. 33.

⁵ Langan, pp. 76-81.

Vagrant's family is therefore victimised by a type of internal colonialism, defined by Tim Ingold as 'the imposition of one kind of line on another'.⁶ For Ingold, colonialism 'proceeds first by converting the paths along which life is lived into boundaries in which it is contained'.⁷ The lines that fed the family are transformed by a new legal code into lines that block them from food. But both lines are equally imaginary. The lake and the fish are still there, though the family may no longer access them. The forces prompting their displacement have therefore a super-, because beyond, natural component to them.

The change in the meaning of the imaginary lines has bodily and material consequences for the Female Vagrant's father, as Wordsworth makes clear with a play on the word 'substance'. The *OED* actually gives the line 'all his substance fell into decay' as one of its examples of 'substance' defined as 'One's material possessions or the value assigned to these'; however, since the fourteenth century, substance has also meant 'material of which a body is formed'.⁸ The poem makes full use of the two meanings: the father's decaying substance decays his substance. The relationship between the two is reinforced by the rhyme of 'decay' and 'lay', which sonically links the father's dwindling possessions to his body ailing in bed. The reference to his body is uncanny, too. It is described as something that is his, not someone that he is. He doesn't lie in bed; his body lies in bed. It is as if it is already dead, inert. But clearly the father does live on as part of the 'we' that is 'weeping'. The process of displacement is figured as a kind of living death.

As the poem continues, the family tries and fails to find a place to abide uninjured. They go to live with the Female Vagrant's sweetheart until economic need forces him to volunteer to fight in the American Revolution. The Female Vagrant then accompanies him with their children and loses them all to war and disease. When she returns to England, the imaginary lines of absolute property rights impact her in the same way the denial of fishing rights did

⁶ Tim Ingold, *Lines: A Brief History* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), p. 2.

⁷ Ingold, p. 2.

⁸ 'Substance', *Oxford English Dictionary* [online]
<<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/193042?redirectedFrom=substance#eid>> [accessed 5 May 2019]

her father. She describes herself as unable to gain sustenance from the landscape: 'And homeless near a thousand homes I stood, | And near a thousand tables pined, and wanted food' (ll. 179-80). The use of repetition to contrast excess and lack in these lines recalls the explicitly supernatural 'Rime of the Ancyent Marinere', in which the speaker finds himself cursed for killing the albatross with banishment to the doldrums: 'Water, water every where, | Ne any drop to drink' (Coleridge, ll. 117-18). However, in one respect, Wordsworth's depiction is even more supernatural than Coleridge's. There may be more than natural forces driving the marinere to his fate, but that fate is one that any other human being would struggle to survive for entirely natural reasons: humans cannot drink salt water. The Female Vagrant, on the other hand, wanders hungry in a natural landscape that has the capacity to feed and shelter human life. In the poem, forced displacement is a curse that renders its subjects unable to survive in an environment that continues to nourish others.

The family of the Female Vagrant and the immigrants targeted by the hostile environment policy are separated by time and country of origin, but they both reveal what happens to a person when the laws of the state they are residing in cease to protect them, and they are subject only to the force that underwrites those laws. They are therefore like the figure of *homo sacer* as theorised by Giorgio Agamben.⁹ In archaic Roman law, *homo sacer* could be killed, but not sacrificed, and was accounted for in law only by being excluded from it. Agamben updates this figure to describe the precarious legal situation faced first by the masses of refugees displaced within Europe during the First and Second World Wars, and then by the growing numbers of immigrants residing there illegally during the latter quarter of the twentieth century, which is still the situation of those the hostile environment policy was designed to force out. But Agamben, and Hannah Arendt, who he draws upon, also link the particular vulnerabilities of refugees back to the era in which Wordsworth was writing. For Agamben and Arendt, the refugee reveals the limits of a system that links human rights

⁹ For the following discussion see Giorgio Agamben, 'We Refugees', in *Symposium*, 49.2 (1995), 114-19 <<https://thehubedu-production.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/1836/1e788430-c11e-4036-8251-5406847cd504/AgambenWeRefugees.pdf>> [accessed 31 December 2018] (p. 117), and *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 12.

to nation state citizenship. And both date the formation of that system, and the contradictions inherent in it, to the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen.¹⁰ Arendt says the declaration marked the point at which the human being began to be protected by the political, rather than the religious or social order; rights were what would protect them from the 'new sovereignty of the state and the new arbitrariness of society'.¹¹ But, as Agamben argues, the title itself revealed the crack in its premise: 'Rights [...] are attributable to man only in the degree to which he is the immediately vanishing presupposition (indeed, he must never appear as man) of a citizen.'¹²

For Arendt and Agamben, the flaws in that system were only made fully apparent by the mass movements of peoples during the World Wars, but reading their theories alongside the poetry of Wordsworth, as well as his contemporary and influencer Charlotte Smith, suggests that people were living in the vanishing space between 'man' and 'citizen' from the start.¹³ Both the theories of Arendt and Agamben and the poetry of Smith and Wordsworth portray the displaced as spectral figures, at once marked for death and promising new forms

¹⁰ Arendt does also reference the US in her discussion of how nation states and human rights co-developed but focuses her analysis on the French declaration. See Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1973), p. 250 and p. 253. The importance of the French and American Revolutions are well recognised in the literature on nation-state formation. Andreas Wimmer and Yuval Feinstein, for example, site the two events as giving 'birth to the ideal of the modern nation-state—an independent state with a written constitution, ruled in the name of a nation of equal citizens'. See Wilmer and Feinstein, 'The Rise of the Nation State across the World, 1815-2001', in *American Sociological Review*, 75.5 (2010), 764-90 <<http://www.columbia.edu/~aw2951/WimmerFeinstein.pdf>> [accessed 31 December 2018] (p. 764). Timothy Baycroft and Mark Hewitson take 1789 and The French Revolution as their starting point for the development of European nationalism in their survey of the topic. See Baycroft and Hewitson, 'Introduction', in *What is a Nation? Europe 1789-1914*, ed. by Timothy Baycroft and Mark Hewitson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 1-13 (p. 2). Arendt and Agamben do not speak about Great Britain, but Wilmer and Feinstein say it perhaps predated the US and France as a modern nation-state (p. 767). Scotland, England and Wales had been united as a constitutional monarchy since 1707, and, compared to continental Europe, Britain had a uniquely empowered parliament in the eighteenth century, with most parts of the UK sending representatives to the Houses of Lords and / or Commons following 1707. Members of Parliament were immensely proud of its sovereignty, and even those who could not vote were encouraged to believe Parliament had a duty to them and acted on that belief with frequent petitions. See Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (London: Pimlico, 2003), pp. 49-52.

¹¹ Arendt, *Origins*, p. 247.

¹² Agamben, 'We Refugees', p. 117.

¹³ Wordsworth read Smith as a schoolboy, met her once in 1791, and later acknowledged her as an important but under-acknowledged contributor to the development of 'English verse'; see Jacqueline Labbe, *Writing Romanticism: Charlotte Smith and William Wordsworth, 1784-1807* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 3-5.

of life. Smith and Wordsworth write of emigrants and vagrants to express anxieties about the 'new sovereignty of the state and the new arbitrariness of society'.¹⁴ But the two poets, writing in the aftermath of the French Revolution and the nation-building wars that followed, also mobilise their displaced characters to imagine alternative forms of community. This in turn belies the inevitability of the nation-state system to contemporary readers and invites us to engage in our own cross-border imaginings.

The rest of this opening chapter section will give an overview of the spectral quality of the refugee figure in Arendt and Agamben's theories, in order to ground the discussion of Smith and Wordsworth that follows. The next section then looks at Smith's long poems 'The Emigrants' and 'Beachy Head', arguing that the spectral figures of the border-crossing refugees in the first poem offer the possibility of reform to an international community of non- or passive citizens, a possibility seemingly ruptured by the harsher, war-time border of 'Beachy Head'. I will then turn to *Lyrical Ballads* and sequences of *The Prelude* to show how displaced figures haunted Wordsworth's poetic project, inspiring him to memorialise both a dying way of life and a dying dream of the future. One important distinction between the displaced figures described by Smith and Wordsworth and the refugees and migrants entering Britain today is that the former would now be considered white and the latter are largely depicted as racial others relative to a majority-white citizenry. I conclude, therefore, with a brief discussion of how both poets do depict racialised characters in their poems and how this complicates their visions of solidarity.

Refugees as theorised by Arendt and Agamben have two of the characteristics Jacques Derrida attributes to spectres in *Spectres of Marx*: they are associated with mourning, the attempt to 'ontologize remains', but also with transformation. For Derrida, the spectre is a thing that 'works', that 'transforms or transforms itself'.¹⁵ In the first instance, refugees are spectral for Arendt and Agamben because their total loss of rights brings them closer to the

¹⁴ Arendt, *Origins*, p. 247.

¹⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 2012), p. 9.

risk of death. It is in this context that Agamben links refugees to the figure of *homo sacer*. Arendt, meanwhile, notes that Nazi Germany did not begin to exterminate the Jews outright until they had legally stripped them of all citizenship rights.¹⁶

But if the spectrality of refugees renders them individually powerless, it also gives them a sort of collective power. If they sit at the border between life and death, they also sit at the border between life and the life to come. Those who find themselves displaced beyond the borders of their rights reveal the need for, and therefore the promise of, an alternative kind of community. ‘Refugees driven from country to country represent the vanguard of their peoples’, Arendt wrote in 1943, in ‘We Refugees’.¹⁷ A half-century later, Agamben thought the sentiment held true: ‘At least until the process of the dissolution of the nation-state and its sovereignty has come to an end, the refugee is the sole category in which it is possible today to perceive the forms and limits of a political community to come’, he wrote.¹⁸ They haunt the present both as a visible reminder of its own horrors, and as a promise of a better future.

The displaced are similarly spectral for Wordsworth and Smith, as other scholars have observed. In *Wordsworth, Commodification and Social Concern*, David Simpson compellingly illuminates how ‘the chosen vales of Wordsworth’s rural dwellers are haunted by spectral personifications of Britain’s expanding military-industrial complex’.¹⁹ He links the spectral quality of solitary wanderers like the titular figure in ‘The Old Cumberland Beggar’ to Agamben’s theories of ‘bare life’ and the spectrality of the emerging commodity form itself.²⁰ Simpson also connects the spectrality of the commodity form to the idea of

¹⁶ Arendt, *Origins*, p. 251.

¹⁷ Arendt, ‘We Refugees’, in *Altogether Elsewhere: Writers on Exile*, ed. by Marc Robinson (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1994), pp. 110-19 (p. 119).

¹⁸ Agamben, ‘We Refugees’, p. 114.

¹⁹ Simpson, *Wordsworth*, pp. 1-2.

²⁰ Simpson, *Wordsworth*, pp. 3-4; ‘bare life’ is, for Agamben, the life of *homo sacer*, vulnerable, unqualified human existence. He opposes it to *zoe*, or political life. And he cites the 1789 *Declaration* as the moment when

'*substitutability*' he reads in the encounters between Wordsworth's poet-speakers and vagrant characters—the anxiety that 'each of us could be in the place of the other without doing anything at all to assist in the exchange'.²¹ In *Women Wanderers and the Writing of Mobility, 1784–1814*, Ingrid Horrocks reads that same '*substitutability*' in the interactions between Smith's poet-speaker and the titular characters of 'The Emigrants' as Smith helps develop the speaker of the long poem from an observer-on-a-prospect to an immersed wanderer in response to the anxieties of the latter part of the eighteenth century.²² For both Simpson and Horrocks, Wordsworth and Smith are haunted by what an emerging modernity may do to them, or to anyone, and the ghost-like quality of their wandering characters reflects this fear.

While Simpson and Horrocks focus on the disruptions caused by capitalism and modernity generally, Wordsworth and Smith were also responding specifically to the displacements associated with increased nation building. As outlined in the Introduction, the period of warfare between Britain and France at the turn of the nineteenth century and the policies enacted in response at once solidified a sense of British national identity and unsettled some of its most vulnerable residents. This is exemplified by the history of the Female Vagrant, as discussed, who is displaced first by enclosure and then by war. War is also the force mobilising 'The Old Man Travelling' (in the 1798 version) and the discharged soldier of *The Prelude*, along with being the reason that the family in 'The Ruined Cottage' dissolves.²³ Across the Channel, the French Revolution and subsequent wars also forced people to flee their homes, tens of thousands of them to England. Smith focuses on this specifically in 'The Emigrants', which takes up the cause of those who left Revolutionary France for England in the early 1790s and imagines in vivid and violent detail what it might be like to lose home

it 'takes center stage in the state's concerns'. See Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p. 12 and Agamben, 'We Refugees', p. 116.

²¹ Simpson, *Wordsworth*, p. 22.

²² Horrocks, p. 76.

²³ See Wordsworth, 'Old Man Travelling; Animal Tranquillity and Decay, a Sketch', in *Lyrical Ballads*, pp. 82-3, 'Prelude of 1805', IV. 400-504, and 'The Ruined Cottage', in *Poems of William Wordsworth, Volume 1: Collected Reading Texts from the Cornell Wordsworth*, ed. by Jared Curtis (Tirril, Pernith: Humanities-Ebooks, LLP, 2009), pp. 270-85.

and family to civil strife. In different ways, Wordsworth and Smith both prioritised in their poetry some of those most vulnerable to the machinations of the strengthening British and French states. That focus gives their poetry unique insight into what was at stake as national power grew and how it registered on the level of individual consciousness for at least two uniquely perceptive observers.

II. 'Live But to Swell Affliction's Countless Tribes'

Of the two poets' work, Smith's 'The Emigrants' is both the most explicit warning about the dangers of sabre-rattling nationalism and the most articulate call for a different type of international community. The first book of the long poem opens in November 1792, at the height of the first influx of French refugees to England, two months after the September Massacres and a month after death was first declared for any emigrants who returned to France. The second book was dated in April of 1793 and completed in May, as the laws declaring the emigrants 'civilly dead' were codified in France, three months after the passage of the Alien Act and two months after England had declared war against France.²⁴ Smith's emigrants are both transformed and transforming figures. Having been stripped of their privileged positions in the *ancien régime*, they enter England as emblems of 'bare natural life'²⁵. But their presence does work for Smith, enabling her to make connections between the disenfranchised of both nations and to call for changes in both countries that would lead to full citizenship rights for all.

The community of suffering Smith organises in the poem is personified in its opening lines:

²⁴ Death as punishment for leaving France was first introduced 23 October of 1792, see Carpenter, p. 186. In a further series of laws codified between March 28 and April 5 of 1793, the refugees were stripped of citizenship and property and threatened with death if they returned; see Carpenter, pp. 11-12.

²⁵ Agamben, 'We Refugees', p. 116.

Slow in the Wintry Morn, the struggling light
Throws a faint gleam upon the troubled waves;
Their foaming tops, as they approach the shore
And the broad surf that never ceasing breaks
On the innumerable pebbles, catch the beams
Of the pale sun.²⁶

This isn't a happy meeting: the light is 'struggling' and the waves are 'troubled'. But it is a mutual exchange. The foam 'catches' the beams that the sun 'throws' as a gleam. The rhyme of the words further connects the actions. And the result is illumination.

The encounter between light and waves serves as a metaphor for the encounter between the emigrant French and their English hosts staged in the rest of the poem. As part of her rhetorical strategy, Smith brings herself as speaker into the text. Readers would have been familiar with her financial struggles from the prefaces to successive editions of her *Elegiac Sonnets*: she was a woman separated from her feckless husband who wrote to support her children while their inheritance was tied up in a lawsuit that would later inspire Jarndyce and Jarndyce in *Bleak House*.²⁷ She could therefore trust her readers to recognise the vulnerability of her speaker-persona when she writes:

How often, when my weary soul recoils

²⁶ Smith, 'The Emigrants', in *The Poems of Charlotte Smith*, I.1-6. Future references to this poem in this chapter will be given as line numbers in parenthetical citations.

²⁷ For a discussion of readers' familiarity with Smith's financial and legal situation see Horrocks, p. 71, and Theresa Kelley, 'Romantic Histories', *Nineteenth Century Literature*, 59.3 (2004), 281-314 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/ncl.2004.59.3.281?seq=3#metadata_info_tab_contents> (pp. 282-3). The biographical summary is given in Kelley. For a more detailed account, see Loraine Fletcher, *Charlotte Smith: A Critical Biography* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

From proud oppression, and from legal crimes .
(For such are in this Land, where the vain boast
Of equal Law is mockery, while the cost
Of seeking for redress is sure to plunge
Th' already injur'd to more certain ruin
And the wretch starves, before his Counsel pleads)
How often do I half abjure Society,
And sigh for some lone Cottage. (l. 35-43)

Smith uses linguistic cues to associate her situation with the emigrants' exile. Curran, glossing the repeated use of the word 'wretches' to refer to the emigrants later in the poem, argues that Smith must have been aware of its derivation from the Old English 'wrecca' for exile or banished man.²⁸ That Smith first uses the word to refer to someone in her perilous legal situation reinforces the idea that the speaker is also a type of exile. In another link, the precarious experience of an English lawsuit is rendered in oceanic imagery. The half-rhyme of 'boast' and 'cost' suggests coast; the following line endings of 'plunge' and 'ruin' therefore evoke a lawsuit as a shipwreck. The speaker's experience of riding the British 'ship of state' is not the stable course charted between extremes that James Gillray promoted in a cartoon published a month before the poem was published, in which William Pitt the Younger steers a ship titled the Constitution between the Scylla of radical democracy associated with revolutionary France and the Charybdis of absolute monarchy.²⁹ Instead, for Smith, England is almost as destabilising to the speaker as France is to the emigrants.

²⁸ Curran, p. 643.

²⁹ James Gillray, *Britannia between Scylla and Charybdis or –The Vessel of the Constitution steered clear of the Rock of Democracy, and the Whirlpool of Arbitrary-Power*, 1793, print of colour engraving <<https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/94509857/>> [accessed 19 May 2019]

Horrocks shows how, in the eighteenth century, the speaker of the long poem evolved from a disinterested observer addressing the world from a prospect view to a wanderer in the landscape whose vulnerability is the basis for community.³⁰ Part of the reason for this shift, Horrocks argues, is that a surveying gaze symbolic of 'British liberty' and imperial expansion in the first half of the century came to be associated negatively with oppression in the second half, following the Enclosure Acts and increasing critiques of imperialism.³¹ Smith made a significant contribution to this development in 'The Emigrants' by enhancing the vulnerability of the speaker-wanderer and putting her in closer proximity to wandering others, whom she both speaks to and meets face to face.³² Horrocks shows how Smith was inspired by William Cowper's *The Task*, which also considered the displaced and advocated community through shared loss. But Smith rejects Cowper's notion that the speaker should and could best understand wandering others from the safety and perspective of domestic retreat.³³ The speaker's 'sigh' for a 'lone cottage' is revealed to be futile.

As Smith demonstrates the impossibility of retreat, she continues her seaside imagery. Smith's speaker doesn't desire to escape her own injuries, but rather thinks she could bear them better if not reminded of the sufferings of others, who, like her 'Live but to swell affliction's countless tribes!' (l. 64). The afflicted swell, wave-like, and Smith deepens her identification with them by comparing her quest for peace to 'the baffled wave, | Which yon rough beach repulses, that returns | With the next breath of wind, to fail again.—' (l. 71-3). She finally decides that no retreat 'Can shut out for an hour the spectre Care' (l. 90). Four lines later, the refugees appear 'in witness of this mournful truth' (l. 94) as if they were themselves the spectres.

³⁰ Horrocks, pp. 39-40.

³¹ Horrocks, pp. 49-50.

³² Horrocks, pp. 74-5; On p. 74 Horrocks notes that 'The Emigrants' is one of the first poems of the 1790s in which wanderers tell their stories within a larger verse narrative.

³³ Horrocks, pp. 71-3.

Smith's introduction of the emigrants at once portrays them as supernaturally cursed and welcomes them into the troubled coastal ecosystem of the poem. She first describes them as

Banish'd for ever and for conscience sake
From their distracted Country, whence the name
Of Freedom misapplied, and much abus'd
By lawless Anarchy, has driven them far
To wander. (l. 97-101)

The original meaning of 'distract' as 'to draw asunder or apart' suggests the emigrants are also the victims of another wrecked ship of state.³⁴ The use of 'for ever' and 'wander' evokes an eternal, supernatural punishment, as if their banishment would last beyond even death. Recalling Arendt and Agamben, the cursed nature of their wanderings could refer to their status as uniquely rightless. Laws marking them for death in France meant they were a class to which the new Declaration of Rights explicitly did not apply, and, in Britain, the Aliens Act was understood by both supporters and opponents as a breach of the emigrants' basic rights.³⁵ Yet, as with the refugee figures in Arendt's and Agamben's theories, their enduring misery is paradoxically enlightening. In a repetition of the poem's opening encounter between light and water, their 'struggling' 'witness' meets the speaker's 'troubled' wave-like quest for peace and reveals the truth of its futility, at least within the world as it currently is. Their presence also reveals the failure of both England's constitutional monarchy and France's new republic to live up to the ideals of the French

³⁴ 'Distract', *Oxford English Dictionary* [online] <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/55719#eid6508656>> [accessed 19 May 2019]

³⁵ Charles James Fox opposed the bill on these grounds, and its sponsor called it 'a bill for suspending the Habeas Corpus Act, as far as it should relate to the persons of foreigners'; see Paul Delaney Halliday, *Habeas Corpus: From England to Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), p. 255. Horrocks (p. 68) suggests Smith was aware of these debates because she alludes to Fox's speeches in the poem's preface.

Revolution. *Égalité* is mocked by English law, *liberté*, or freedom, is 'abused' in France, and the only *fraternité* possible is between the victims of those failures.

The *fraternité* Smith assembles is a siblinghood of those who do not or would not have full citizenship rights in either country. The French Constitution of 1791 separated 'active' from 'passive' citizens. 'Active' citizens were French men above the age of twenty-five who had lived in a certain area for a specified amount of time, paid the equivalent of three days labour in taxes, and were not domestic servants. Only they could choose electors for the National Legislative Assembly.³⁶ In England and Wales, only propertied men, less than three percent of the population in the 1780s, could vote.³⁷ All of the protagonists of Smith's poem are 'passive' citizens at best. The emigrants have had their citizenship rights stripped in France and are now foreigners in England. Smith's self-referential speaker is a woman subject through her suit to laws she had no hand in making. Then, later in the poem, Smith evokes a third category: those too poor for property or stable residence.

This third group is introduced after Smith recounts the stories of individual emigrants, then offers up their sufferings as a sort of bitter consolation to the domestic homeless, whom she apostrophises as

Poor wand'ring wretches! whosoe'er ye are,
That hopeless, houseless, friendless, travel wide
O'er these bleak russet downs; where, dimly seen,
The solitary Shepherd shiv'ring tends

³⁶ 'French Constitution of 1791', in *The Constitutions and Other Select Documents Illustrative of the History of France, 1789–1907*, 2nd ed. by Frank Maloy Anderson (Minneapolis: H. W. Wilson Company, 1908)
<https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/French_Constitution_of_1791> [accessed 20 December 2018]

³⁷ 'The Struggle for Democracy: Getting the Vote', *Citizenship*, The National Archives
<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/citizenship/struggle_democracy/getting_vote.htm> [accessed 20 December 2018]

His dun discolour'd flock (Shepherd, unlike
Him, whom in song the Poet's fancy crowns
With garlands, and his crook with vi'lets binds);
Poor vagrant wretches! outcasts of the world!
Whom no abode receives, no parish owns;
Roving, like Nature's commoners, the land
That boasts such general plenty. (l. 296-306)

The sequence forges an intimate link between privation and dispossession. Not only is the term 'wretches', with its etymology in exile, repeated, but the second line is structured so that the vagrants' lack of hope and house and friends propels them forward, their emptiness dispersing them to fill the national landscape. The wanderers' plight, existing as 'less' amidst plenty, is similar to that of Wordsworth's Female Vagrant, wandering near a thousand homes and hungry near a thousand tables. In both cases, the 'imaginary lines' of property, not the material fact of drought or famine, are what deprive the wanderers of substance. Yet, at the same time, Smith's allusion to the 'Poet's fancy' brings in different imaginary lines—the idealised verses of a national-pastoral tradition of the British countryside haunted by the reality of the country's rural poor. The vagrants are exiled from that fantasy, and, by implication, from the nation itself.

Indeed, within the broader context of Smith's work, the passage implies that the French emigrants and British poor are equally nation-less, because equally homeless. Loraine Fletcher has shown that Smith developed in her novels a trope of using a house as a symbol for England, which was carried forward by subsequent novelists from Jane Austen to E. M. Forster. This symbolism, Fletcher argues, was developed in response to Edmund Burke's extended metaphor of the state as a castle in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*.³⁸

³⁸ Fletcher, p. 1, pp. 133-5, and p. 164.

For Smith to portray the French exiles and British commoners as roofless wanderers implies that Britain has essentially failed to exist for its most vulnerable subjects.

But while the passage depicts collective suffering, it is haunted by a sort of hope, which is reflected through another reference to the British poetic tradition. Susan J. Wolfson sees in the repetition of 'poor' and 'wretches' an allusion to *King Lear*, when the titular character is humbled by fate and must wander like other 'poor naked wretches' in the storm.³⁹ While, a few lines down, Smith does write that the exiled nobles have a more pitiable fate than the poor, who are used to 'Rigid Adversity's depressing breath' (l. 314), the comparison still 'plays double', in Wolfson's wording.⁴⁰ The fall from nobility is only so devastating for the emigrants because the conditions of the poor are so inhumane. At the same time, the allusion to Lear's fall suggests that true levelling is possible, that high and low might meet as commoners with natural rights and share the 'general plenty'. This hope is made even more explicit when Smith's speaker pivots to address the privileged in England— 'Fortune's worthless favourites! | Who feed on England's vitals' (l. 335-6)— exhorting them to consider the French emigrants and 'study a lesson that concerns ye much' (l. 352). The refugees, who are spectres of the Revolution's failure or excesses in France, are also spectres of its potential outbreak in England: They serve as a warning to England's elite of what they could become if they continue to abuse their power. The address signals what Smith hopes to achieve by congregating her tribe of affliction. The poem contains the hope that, by showing clearly who is failed by existing systems and how, the emigrants may instigate a transformation of both England and France.

This is a goal that Michael Wiley discerns in *Romantic Migrations*. He points out that when Smith provides a map of her setting towards the end of the poem, she subverts institutional

³⁹ Susan J. Wolfson, 'Charlotte Smith's "Emigrants": Forging Connections at the Borders of a Female Tradition', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 63.4 (2000), 509-546 <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3817615>> [accessed 20 December 2018] (pp. 532-3)

⁴⁰ Wolfson, p. 533.

practices of cartography by writing of 'fields' as 'divided here by woods | And there by commons rude' (ll. 393-5).⁴¹ The commonly owned and natural landscapes define private property, and not the other way around. Her mapping, Wiley argues, counters the mapping taking place in Sussex during 1792 and 1793 as part of the first national ordnance survey, mapping that 'would inscribe England with the lines of a militarized nation state'.⁴² Similarly, Smith's depiction of the emigrants writes against the realities of the Aliens Act, which turned the physical barrier of the Channel into a bureaucratic border.⁴³ The act mandated that new arrivals register and obtain a passport when they disembarked and inform authorities of their destination. But the emigrants in Smith's poem inhabit the border landscape as if they were a natural part of its environment. They are described in terms similar to waves or seaweed: they 'hang | Upon the barrier of the rock and seem | To murmur' (l. 108-9). Later in the poem, a cliff-hollow is 'strewn' (l. 201) with seaweed and billows have 'murmurs low' (l. 214). Smith's counter-mapping and counter-bordering visualise her internationalist aspirations. Instead of further separating into warring nations, Smith hopes that France and England can maintain a fluid border of mutual reform.

This hope is translated from metaphor to policy suggestion in a moment the poem's second book flagged, when Smith promotes the compromise of a constitutional monarchy for France maintained by 'Freemen, such | As England's self might boast' (ll. 107-108).⁴⁴ For Wiley, the 'might' suggests that England cannot yet provide a model for France until it first internalises the lesson of the French Revolution and reforms itself in line with its own ideals, at which point it can offer France a more peaceful way forward: The poem ends with the

⁴¹ Wiley, pp. 12-13.

⁴² Wiley, pp. 13-14; the first Ordnance Survey map was commissioned by the Master General of the Army's Board of Ordnance in 1791 and the surveys 'emerged largely from a long history of military mapmaking'; see Rachel Hewitt, *Map of a Nation: A Biography of the Ordnance Survey* (London: Granta Books, 2011), pp. xxv-xxvi.

⁴³ It was common during the Romantic era for poets to depict the Channel predominantly as a barrier, and this is the approach taken by Smith herself later in 'Beachy Head'. See Dominic Rainsford, *Literature, Identity and the English Channel: Narrow Seas Expanded* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), p. 17 and p. 27.

⁴⁴ Wiley, pp. 22-3.

hope that the emigrants will return to their home country under ‘the reign of Reason, Liberty and Peace’ (II. 444). Smith therefore ‘maps a large-scale reformist critique that both the British and the French must subscribe to’, Wiley writes.⁴⁵

As Wiley’s argument suggests, Smith’s reformist vision is inherently an international one, and the border-crossing figures of the emigrants are essential instigators. They are the proof that no nation’s politics can stay within its geographical boundaries. In her dedication to Cowper, which opens ‘The Emigrants’, Smith expresses hope that the emigrants’ presence in England ‘may finally lead to the extirpation of that reciprocal hatred so unworthy of great and enlightened nations; that it may tend to humanize both countries, by convincing each, that good qualities exist in the other; and at length annihilate the prejudices that have so long existed to the injury of both’.⁴⁶ In order to highlight the failings of either country individually, Smith could have focused on the plight of women specifically, or on those without property. But using the emigrants as her starting point allows her also to castigate a nationalism that thinks ‘humanity’ stops at its borders. Book II, dated after war broke out between France and England and concerned with describing the horrors of war within France, also denounces war itself as a force that nations use to ‘injure’ their own and the others’ citizens:

Teach the hard hearts

Of rulers, that the poorest hind, who dies

For their unrighteous quarrels, in thy sight

Is equal to the imperious Lord, that leads

His disciplin’d destroyers to the field. (II. 426-30)

⁴⁵ Wiley, p. 25.

⁴⁶ Smith, ‘The Emigrants’, in *The Poems of Charlotte Smith*, p. 133.

War between nations is presented as something that does not benefit the ordinary members of those nations. When conflated with military glory, national glory strips war's victims of what should be their equal right to life. Smith does not envision a replacement for the nation-state system itself, since the poem ends with the hope the refugees may return to the country that is depicted as their preferred home. But what she does do is present an early and compelling picture of the vulnerabilities of those who lose the protection of its laws or end up crushed between its armies.

In *Literature, Identity and the English Channel*, Dominic Rainsford calls 'The Emigrants' 'a generous exercise in Channel Bridging, the like of which stood little chance in the following years of international conflict'.⁴⁷ Smith seems to resign her international vision to the reality of that conflict in 'Beachy Head', her next and last long poem, also set on the English coast but written in 1806 after France and England had been fighting for most of the previous thirteen years. If 'The Emigrants' starts with a meeting, 'Beachy Head' begins with a rupture. The speaker imagines reclining on Beachy Head and observing

the strange and awful hour
Of vast concussion; when the Omnipotent
Stretched forth his arm, and rent the solid hills,
Bidding the impetuous main flood rush between
The rifted shores, and from the continent
Eternally divided this green isle.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Rainsford, p. 27.

⁴⁸ Smith, 'Beach Head', in *The Poems of Charlotte Smith*, pp. 217-47 (p. 217), ll. 5-10. From the rest of this chapter, references to this poem will be given as line numbers in parenthetical citations.

Rainsford argues that Smith makes the rupture ‘as abrasive as possible’ through the repeated ‘r’ sounds of ‘rent’, ‘rush’ and ‘rifted’.⁴⁹ ‘Concussion’ and ‘divided’ are also words that make their meaning felt with repeated hard consonants. The speaker is no longer part of a community of wanderers but isolated on the cliff-top in a move that seems to reverse the path away from the prospect-view poem traced by Horrocks. However, rather than connoting security and authority, the speaker’s position has troubling implications. Rainsford associates the speaker’s desire to be present at the moment of rupture with Beachy Head’s dubious honour of being ‘Britain’s favourite site for suicide’.⁵⁰ There is a sense of inevitability and despair pervading the poem that is enhanced by the border’s depiction as a final break rather than a porous, mutually constructive coast.

In ‘Beachy Head’, interactions that do cross the border are only harmful, either to England or to others. Theresa Kelley glosses two in her article ‘Romantic Histories’. First, a ‘ship of commerce’ (l. 42) on its way to gather pearls dived for by slaves in India is described in language similar to Milton’s image of Satan as a ship in *Paradise Lost*, suggesting that Britain’s colonial endeavours are satanic.⁵¹ Then, the poem describes the smuggling of untaxed goods that coastal farmers and shepherds engaged in to supplement their income as a ‘commerce of destruction’ (l. 190). Kelley notes the smuggling described by Smith would have been more dangerous following an 1806 blockade on French goods.⁵²

‘The Emigrants’ depicts the sufferings of war and conquest in more gruesome detail, but it ends with the hope that they will end. ‘Beachy Head’ offers no such promise of national or international transformation. While the earlier poem clung to the ideals of the French Revolution but lamented their execution, ‘Beachy Head’ seems to abandon hope entirely in

⁴⁹ Rainsford, p. 18.

⁵⁰ Rainsford, p. 19. This is an association Smith would have been familiar with. Fletcher dates Beachy Head’s connection to suicide back to the seventh century and points out that Beachy Head was Gloucester’s destination in *King Lear*, which was a play that greatly inspired Smith, as the references in ‘The Emigrants’ discussed earlier indicate. See Fletcher, p. 330.

⁵¹ See Kelley, p. 303 for the connection to Milton.

⁵² Kelley, p. 290.

the transnational eighteenth-century Revolutionary project. 'Ah! Who *is* happy?' the speaker laments at one point. 'Happiness! a word | That like false fire from marsh effluvia born, | Misleads the wanderer' (ll. 255-7). The line echoes the language of the American Declaration of Independence and its right to the pursuit of happiness, only to question the meaning of such a right, since happiness is impossible despite its pursuit.

In 1806, as Britain's colonial and national project consolidated and Napoleonic France was seen even by dissenters as fighting purely for conquest, Smith can no longer imagine transnational change.⁵³ Any liberation has to occur within the tightening borders, not beyond them. The poem's final act of border crossing bears this out to its bleakest conclusion. 'Beachy Head' ends with the local history of a hermit who lived in a cave beneath the cliff and would rescue shipwreck victims during storms. Eventually, he dies in one such attempt. The poem concludes

Those who read

Chisel'd within the rock, these mournful lines,
Memorials of his sufferings, did not grieve,
That dying in the cause of charity
His spirit, from its earthly bondage freed,
Had to some better region fled for ever. (ll. 726-31)

The hermit is decidedly a spectral figure, but the transformation he heralds contrasts directly with the utopian last vision of 'The Emigrants'. The Kingdom of Heaven is back in the sky and no longer realisable on earth. The hermit's death returns us to Beachy Head's association with suicide. In trying to understand what draws people to the spot, Rainsford

⁵³ For British attitudes to Napoleon's France see Colley, p. 312.

reflects that 'the sufferer must feel [...] that he or she is leaving England as well as life'.⁵⁴ The hermit does not commit suicide, of course, but his ending implies that death is the only ultimate means of crossing a border hardened by conflict and escaping a country made cruel by its colonial endeavours, the only transport to a 'better region'.

Formally the poem does offer one other solution, intentionally or not. The hermit's epitaph is not actually written. Smith's first editors wrote that this was because she died before she could finish the poem, but Kelley has argued that there is no evidence from Smith's own notes that this was true.⁵⁵ In either case, the placement of the unwritten last lines on the cliff face itself means they would be invisible to someone standing at its top looking out but could be read by someone approaching England from France. The poem therefore leaves open the possibility that an approaching stranger in a friendlier moment could complete it, thereby bridging the 'vast concussion' with which it began.

III. 'Of These Will Be My Song'

While Smith foregrounds a commonality between her wandering poet-speaker and the literally displaced in order to imagine an alternative international community of reform, Wordsworth, both in *Lyrical Ballads* and in the story that he tells about his own development in *The Prelude*, unites his poet-speaker with those uprooted by Britain's military and economic policies. Both the membership of Wordsworth's community and his motives for assembling it are less explicit in his poetry than are Smith's in 'The Emigrants', and its formation is complicated in important ways by the real power difference between Wordsworth and his subjects. But Wordsworth's poetic community, like Smith's, reflects the poet's sense that something about the world too much with us is wrong, and that some other way of life would be better. Though Wordsworth vacillates between locating that

⁵⁴ Rainsford, p. 21.

⁵⁵ Kelley, p. 296.

ideal in an increasingly unreachable future and a quickly vanishing past, the displaced consistently haunt his poetry as spectres of both.

Wordsworth's linkage between himself and his displaced subjects is less explicit in part because Wordsworth works to obscure the historical circumstances behind his poems both in many of the poems themselves and in his public statements about them. That act of obscuring is explored by Marjorie Levinson, among others, who wrote in the introduction to her seminal *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems* that she was driven to her analysis by 'the persistent feeling that Wordsworth's most generalised representations owed their pronounced ideality to some disturbing particular and the need to efface or elide it'.⁵⁶ This tension between the ideal and the 'disturbing particular' is present in the contrast between the subjects of many of Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* and the story he tells about them. In the 'Preface' to the 1802 edition, he defines the goal of his poems as follows:

The principal object, then, which I proposed to myself in these Poems was to chuse incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible, in a selection of language really used by men; and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way; and, further, and above all, to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature: chiefly, as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement. Low and rustic life was generally chosen, because in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that condition of life our elementary feelings co-exist in a state of greater simplicity, and, consequently, may be more accurately contemplated, and more forcibly communicated; because the manners of rural life germinate from those elementary

⁵⁶ Marjorie Levinson, *Wordsworth's Great Period Poems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 1-2.

feelings; and, from the necessary character of rural occupations, are more easily comprehended, and are more durable; and lastly, because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature.⁵⁷

Wordsworth writes about rural life as if it were solid enough a foundation from which to derive the 'primary laws' of human nature. It is lived amidst 'permanent forms' and encourages 'durable feelings'. And yet, a look at many of the characters featured in both the 1798 and 1802 *Lyrical Ballads* reveals that, even if the forms of nature they interact with are fixed, their relationship to them is consistently destabilised by contemporary forces.⁵⁸ The Female Vagrant, as discussed, is uprooted first by changing understandings of property and then by joining her husband's fight in the American Revolution.⁵⁹ 'Goody Blake and Harry Gill', in Langan's reading, dramatises the conflict between the 'exclusionary *principle* of property' and the 'superseded economy' of the commons, 'which determined property in relation to use value'.⁶⁰ In 'The Last of the Flock' it is the artificial requirements of poor relief laws and not eternal nature that deprives the shepherd of his sheep; the so-called 'pastoral' of 'Michael' is destabilised and ultimately destroyed when one member of the family unit is forced by economic necessity to seek employment elsewhere, and a similar fate afflicts 'Poor Susan' and one of the pair in 'The Brothers'.⁶¹ In *Romanticism and Colonial Disease*, Alan Bewell reads the latter as reflecting Romantic-era anxieties about the spread of tropical pathogens as more Britons participated in the colonial project; when the brother who stays dies by sleepwalking, it is as if he has caught his departed sibling's mobility.⁶²

⁵⁷ Wordsworth, 'Preface' in *Lyrical Ballads*, pp. 96-7.

⁵⁸ For the way the poems in *Lyrical Ballads* relate to debates on poor laws at the time, see Stephen Gill, *William Wordsworth: A Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p.140.

⁵⁹ For Wordsworth's inspiration for 'The Female Vagrant', see Gill, *William Wordsworth*, p. 76.

⁶⁰ Langan, p. 116 and p. 114. For the poem see Wordsworth, 'Goody Blake and Harry Gill', in *Lyrical Ballads*, pp. 39-42.

⁶¹ Wordsworth, 'The Last of the Flock', in *Lyrical Ballads*, pp. 59-62, 'Michael, a Pastoral Poem', in *Lyrical Ballads*, pp. 285-97, 'Poor Susan', in *Lyrical Ballads*, pp. 238-9, and 'The Brothers, a Pastoral Poem', in *Lyrical Ballads*, pp. 209-21.

⁶² Bewell, *Romanticism*, pp. 58-60.

Wordsworth was not unaware of the particular circumstances behind his poetry. He sent a copy of the 1800 edition of *Lyrical Ballads* to the statesman Charles Fox with the express hope that 'Michael' and 'The Brothers' would encourage policy makers to reject certain 'measures which have lately been pursued in this country' such as industrialisation and workhouses that were causing 'a rapid decay of the domestic affections among the lower orders of society', in part by causing the disappearance of 'small independent *proprietors*', whose 'little tract[s] of land' anchored them to place and family.⁶³ But when he explains the poems to the public, he does so as if the rural world he describes is not in flux. He takes an imperilled way of life and inscribes it as eternal, therefore both killing it by rendering it static and giving it unending life. *Lyrical Ballads* is a haunted text.

Of course, there are other characters in *Lyrical Ballads* too. It is not the explicit community of suffering that Smith created in 'The Emigrants', but that is only because Wordsworth works to hide his poet-speaker's vulnerabilities while Smith exploits hers. The speakers in 'Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye During a Tour, July 13, 1798' or 'Lines Written Near Richmond, Upon the Thames, at Evening' are less obviously the victims of historic forces, but Levinson and David Bromwich have read 'Tintern Abbey' especially as Wordsworth's response to his own displacement.⁶⁴ Levinson points to the theory that Wordsworth and Coleridge travelled to Germany in 1798 as a draft dodge, meaning when Wordsworth visited the Wye Valley before leaving, he could not have known how long he would be gone. He might therefore have experienced the tour 'as a significant leavetaking, a valediction to Nature and to England'.⁶⁵ Ultimately, for Levinson, the poem 'represents mind, and specifically memory, not as energy—a subtle psychic ongoingness—but as a barricade to resist the violence of historical change and

⁶³ Wordsworth, 'APPENDIX 2: WORDSWORTH'S LETTER TO CHARLES JAMES FOX', in *Lyrical Ballads*, pp. 306-9 (pp.307-8).

⁶⁴ For the full text of these poems, see Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads*, pp. 87-91, and pp. 79-80.

⁶⁵ Levinson, pp. 21-2.

contradiction'.⁶⁶ Bromwich, meanwhile, reads it as Wordsworth's response to his experience with the French Revolution, arguing that 'it is a poem about the peace and rest that one can only know by a sublimation of remembered terror'.⁶⁷ Bromwich argues that Wordsworth was drawn to figures like the vagrants of *Lyrical Ballads* because, after leaving a wife, child, and self-betraying cause behind in France, he was 'isolated and bewildered' and therefore 'drawn to sympathize with the isolated and bewildered, and to make his feeling for them a primary index of humanity'.⁶⁸ For Bromwich, the speaker of 'Tintern Abbey' is not distinct from the beggars and drifters in the rest of the collection: 'He is one of them'.⁶⁹

Especially if his trip to Germany is treated as a draft dodge, but even if one only considers his movements to and from France, Wordsworth shared with his protagonists of the 1790s the experience of being displaced by his nation's military policies. This is described psychically with great force in *The Prelude*, and is worth quoting at length. After England declares war on Revolutionary France, he writes:

No shock

Given to my moral nature had I known

Down to that very moment—neither lapse

Nor turn of sentiment that might be named

A revolution, save at this one time.

All else was progress on the self-same path

⁶⁶ Levinson, pp. 53.

⁶⁷ David Bromwich, *Disowned by Memory: Wordsworth's Poetry of the 1790s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 73.

⁶⁸ Bromwich, p. 15.

⁶⁹ Bromwich, p. 1.

On which, with a diversity of pace,
I had been travelling: this a stride at once
Into another region. [...]
[...] I who with the breeze
Had played, a green leaf on the blessed tree
Of my beloved country—nor had wished
For happier fortune than to wither there—
Now from my pleasant station was cut off
And tossed about in whirlwinds. I rejoiced,
Yea, afterwards (truth painful to record)
Exulted in the triumph of my soul,
When Englishmen by thousands were o’erthrown,
Left without glory on the field, or driven,
Brave hearts, to shameful flight. It was a grief—
Grief call it not, ’twas anything but that—
A conflict of sensations without name,
Of which he only who may love the sight
Of a village steeple as I do can judge,
When in the congregation bending all
To their great Father, prayers were offered up,
Or praises for our country’s victories;
And, mid the simple worshippers, perchance
I only, like an uninvited guest

Whom no one owned, sat silent—shall I add,
Fed on the day of vengeance yet to come.⁷⁰

Wordsworth describes disagreeing with his country's actions as an instant and physical exile, a 'stride into another region'. It is a speed and violence of movement he cannot accurately render with any mode of transportation available to him. Rather, he must shrink himself down to a leaf that can be 'cut off | And tossed' by a whirlwind. The 'c', 't', and 'f' sounds emphasise the rupture, as does Wordsworth's decision to split the line at 'cut off'. Continuing the next line with 'And tossed' then reinforces the sense of abrupt and violent movement. It is a killing journey, since Wordsworth describes himself afterwards in spectral terms.⁷¹ Physically, he has remained in England throughout the sequence, but he writes of himself as if he had really left and returned a stranger. He is an 'uninvited guest', but his strangeness is supernatural, even demonic. He sits in a church feeding on vengeance.

In *Romantics, Rebels, and Reactionaries*, Marilyn Butler points out that *Lyrical Ballads* was influenced by an Enlightenment culture that valued simplicity, universality, and direct appeals to the people.⁷² This culture was seen as suspect following the French Revolution and replaced by a nationalism that prioritised the domestic: 'hearth and home, the English plot of ground'.⁷³ *Lyrical Ballads* was criticised at the time of its writing because contemporary reviewers recognised its Enlightenment influence and thought it subversive. Wordsworth eventually became a champion of this domestic nationalism, Butler argues, but when he recalls the experience of the 1790s, what seems to lurk behind his sense of dislocation is the fact that the domestic and the national should have anything to do with

⁷⁰ Wordsworth, 'The Thirteen Book Prelude of 1805' in *The Prelude*, pp. 412-14, X. 233-41 and 253-74. All subsequent references to this poem in this chapter will be given as line numbers in parenthetical citations.

⁷¹ The 'other region' recalls the 'better region' that the hermit's soul flees to 'Beachy Head', though, since the phrase also appears in the 1805 Prelude, predating Smith's poem, and Smith could not have read Wordsworth's draft, the similarity is a coincidence.

⁷² Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and its Background, 1760-1830* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp.56-68.

⁷³ Butler, p. 65.

each other. Britain's war against Revolutionary France pains him because he loves his 'village steeple' and now feels he has betrayed the thing he loves by holding ideals that contradict the national interest. But why should a decision out of Westminster affect one's feelings in a country church? In this line, Wordsworth both accepts the linkage between village and nation and foregrounds its strangeness. Like his characters physically uprooted from their villages or cottages by enclosure, industrial policy, and war, he is himself psychologically uprooted by the mobilisation of the local in the name of the national interest.

There is a further literary-biographical link between Wordsworth in this moment of newly declared war and his vagrant characters. As Stephen Gill has demonstrated, this was Wordsworth's state of mind in the summer of 1793 when an accident forced him to travel by foot over Salisbury Plain, an experience that 'released these feelings and made them available to the poet's creating imagination'.⁷⁴ Those feelings produced *Salisbury Plain*, the poem in which the first draft of 'The Female Vagrant' appears. Psychically uprooted by England's war with France, Wordsworth imagined a woman literally uprooted by the war with America decades earlier.

That said, it is important here to acknowledge the work of Saree Makdisi, who offers a point of caution about over-identifying Wordsworth with his subjects. In *Making England Western*, Makdisi argues that it was during the Romantic era that England was Occidentalised, that is unified as a Western 'we' that could then be clearly defined against the colonial other. For example, he mentions how segments of the London poor were referred to as 'City Arabs' during the nineteenth century and eventually displaced as London was redesigned in a process of internal civilisation that paralleled external colonialism.⁷⁵ Makdisi argues that *Lyrical Ballads* was part of that civilising, settling process. In the 1790s,

⁷⁴ Gill, 'Introduction', in *The Salisbury Plain Poems of William Wordsworth*, ed. by Stephen Gill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975), p. 4.

⁷⁵ Saree Makdisi, *Making England Western: Occidentalism, Race and Imperial Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), pp. xiv-xvi.

he writes, the ‘wanderers, vagrants, and nomads’ Wordsworth wrote about were coming to be seen as ‘racially distinct from England’s settled population’.⁷⁶ This ‘swinish multitude’ was associated with a radical, communalist ballad tradition that was increasingly seen as a threat by the emerging Occidentalist political imagination, which was based around the ‘highly regulated rights of the individual subject’.⁷⁷ Occidentalism, then, had to ‘contain the threat’ posed by this more internationalist and communalist tradition by ‘actively seeking to limit the scope of rights to self-regulating individuals [...] and to further refine the logic of such rights so that they would come to be seen as appropriate only to individuals from certain racial or civilizational configurations’.⁷⁸ For Makdisi, Wordsworth is participating in this process by lyricising the ballad, taking a lower class art form and translating it into highbrow literature: ‘the lyrical ballad can be thought of as an attempt to Occidentalise and settle the restless, itinerant, and nomadic in a generic form appropriate to modernity and a new Occidental subject’.⁷⁹ In this line of thinking, Wordsworth displaces his vagrants narratively and linguistically by stripping them both of their regional homes and their regional dialects—their language ‘purified indeed from what appear to be its real defects’—and resettling them in the realm of the universal individual.⁸⁰

Makdisi is especially astute regarding the power differential between Wordsworth and his subjects. Wordsworth drew from a lower class, radical ballad tradition and told the stories of vagrants and beggars, but he was not writing for the original ballad writers or the wanderers who inspired him. Instead, he wrote for a bourgeois audience, and his efforts have the taint of appropriation.⁸¹ These power dynamics are evident in Wordsworth’s letter to Fox. His defence of the propertied poor comes as much from a fetishisation of their lifestyle as a response to their own expressed concerns; he argues that property-owning

⁷⁶ Makdisi, p. 90.

⁷⁷ Makdisi, p. 99.

⁷⁸ Makdisi, p. 100.

⁷⁹ Makdisi, p. 129.

⁸⁰ Wordsworth, ‘Preface’, in *Lyrical Ballads*, p. 97.

⁸¹ For Wordsworth’s intended audience see Makdisi, pp. 126-9.

fosters domestic affections and independence of spirit, and he sees these values as preferable to those he observes among wage labourers. He also volunteers to speak for people presumably capable of speaking for themselves (he describes them as respectably educated), arguing that his poetry, and not actual dialogue with the small-holders in question, is what will 'shew that men who do not wear fine clothes can feel deeply'.⁸² Any community Wordsworth makes with the less fortunate therefore occurs entirely on the page; the people who inspired him do not have the chance to write or speak back to the world beyond it.

This appropriative, civilising process can be seen in the publication history of the Female Vagrant's tale. It first appears in the 1793-1794 *Salisbury Plain*, which Gill describes as an 'identikit protest polemic of the early 1790s'—the impoverished war widow was a common archetype of radical poetry in those years, and the poem ends with a call to collective action: 'Heroes of truth pursue your march, uprear | Th'Oppressor's dungeon from its deepest base'.⁸³ In the 1795 revision, *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*, Wordsworth edited out the explicit marching orders and fleshed out the narrative to include a former soldier turned murderer and fugitive to whom the widow speaks, but the poem was still intended, in Wordsworth's words, to 'expose [...] the calamities of war as they affect individuals'.⁸⁴ In both drafts, the Female Vagrant tells her story to another impoverished wanderer and remains embedded, like Smith's emigrants and wretches, in 'affliction's countless tribes'.

By removing the Female Vagrant from both the collective narrative of the *Salisbury Plain* drafts and the traditions of protest poetry they represent, Wordsworth therefore displaces her yet again. Makdisi notes that, in all versions of her story, the Female Vagrant speaks in Spenserian stanzas and in language acceptable to a middle-class reading audience—in all

⁸² Wordsworth, 'LETTER TO CHARLES JAMES FOX', in *Lyrical Ballads*, p. 308.

⁸³ Gill, *Wordsworth's Revisitings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 191-2, and Wordsworth, 'Salisbury Plain', in *Salisbury Plain Poems*, ll. 541-2.

⁸⁴ Qtd. in Gill, *Revisitings*, p. 195.

versions, plebian experience is 'translated into more familiar, more refined terms'.⁸⁵ But I would argue that Wordsworth's act of removing the Female Vagrant from her collective context, in which she speaks to her equals in suffering, to isolate her in a context in which she can only be speaking to the presumably more privileged reader, bolsters Makdisi's point about the appropriative violence of the *Lyrical Ballads* project. Further, as Wordsworth continued to revise the Female Vagrant's tale, he repeatedly excised her story from its narrative and historical-political context. In the version published in the 1802 *Lyrical Ballads*, he cuts out the first introductory stanza in which a separate speaker alerts the reader to the fact that the Female Vagrant is telling a tale.⁸⁶ The line about the father's 'range of water' and its explanatory footnote is also replaced, so the exact mechanisms behind the family's expulsion become less clear.⁸⁷ This process is continued in 1842's *Guilt and Sorrow*, which restores the Female Vagrant to the collective narrative of the *Salisbury Plain* poems, but also softens the references to institutional injustice and removes any specifics about why her family had to leave their original home.⁸⁸ In both her poetic narrative and her revision history, the Female Vagrant is unsettled from her original community and set adrift as an isolated individual.

On the other hand, as an act of settling, 'The Female Vagrant' in all of its revisions, and the *Lyrical Ballads* project in general, are aesthetically failures. That is to say, the wandering poor in Wordsworth's poems resist that settling process because they are themselves so unsettling. Even in her depoliticised *Guilt and Sorrow* iteration, the Female Vagrant still wanders 'homeless near a thousand homes'.⁸⁹ She and other figures in both editions of *Lyrical Ballads* may indeed be removed from their collective context, but the individual life they have been placed in looks like a walking death. 'Many of Wordsworth's impoverished

⁸⁵ Makdisi, p. 119.

⁸⁶ Wordsworth, 'The Female Vagrant', in *Lyrical Ballads, With Pastoral and Other Poems, 1802*, in *Lyrical Ballads*, pp. 142-9 (p. 142).

⁸⁷ Wordsworth, 'The Female Vagrant', in *Lyrical Ballads 1802*, p. 143, ll. 24-5.

⁸⁸ See Gill, *Revisitings*, pp. 205-6, and Wordsworth, 'Guilt and Sorrow' in *Salisbury Plain Poems*, ll. 226-34.

⁸⁹ Wordsworth, 'Guilt and Sorrow', in *Salisbury Plain Poems*, ll. 368-9.

characters', Langan writes, have an 'other-worldliness' because 'they have no place'.⁹⁰ If Wordsworth is trying to turn figures like the Female Vagrant into Occidentalised, individual subjects by lyricising their experiences as individuals alongside that of the more privileged speaker in 'Tintern Abbey', he also makes that subjecthood look entirely unappealing.

Ultimately, the story Wordsworth himself tells of his own poetic development in *The Prelude* suggests it is these placeless figures who succeeded in unsettling him. They haunt his thinking, inspiring both his youthful commitment to politics and restoring his final commitment to poetry. In France, he and his revolutionary guide encounter

a hunger-bitten girl

Who crept along fitting her languid self

Unto a heifer's motion—by a cord

Tied to her arm, and picking thus from the lane

Its sustenance, while the girl with her two hands

Was busy knitting in a heartless mood

Of solitude—and at the sight my friend

In agitation said 'Tis against *that*

Which we are fighting!' ('Prelude of 1805', IX. 512-20)

Simpson has written on the ambiguity of the italicised '*that*'. Are they fighting aristocratic power, which produces such poverty, the girl herself as a spectre of proletarian revolt that might challenge the recently victorious bourgeois revolution, or the mechanisation of labour symbolised by her 'heartless' knitting?⁹¹ Simpson argues that the idea of democratic

⁹⁰ Langan, p. 118.

⁹¹ Simpson, *Wordsworth*, p. 21.

equality relies on 'a world where modern capitalist production has already implanted a sense of the equivalence of everything to everything else'.⁹² Revolutions like the French will be unable to alleviate the economic inequality she represents. She is a particularly potent figure in the narrative of *The Prelude*, then, because she prefigures the wanderers Wordsworth will take as inspiration once he has returned to poetry from politics. She is encountered on the road, and nothing about her signifies her as being particularly French. There are no local details in the scene that distinguish the path she creeps along from another. Her description also displaces typically domestic activities and renders them mobile. Her heifer is taking 'sustenance' from the roadway, and not from a farmyard; she is knitting as she travels, not at home. The abjectness of her poverty is indicated to the reader by the fact that her heifer must eat, and she must work, while on the go. They have no plot of land to subsist on, one assumes, or they would not have to subsist in public. She is also a ghostly presence. Her motions, creeping and 'languid', suggest a figure making as little impression as possible on the landscape she treads. Following this description, it would not be too surprising if the poem took a gothic turn and her 'heartlessness' were revealed as a literal condition.

The encounter is frightening enough that Wordsworth rhetorically flees from it, going on to rhapsodise about the coming future in which poverty like this will be eradicated by 'the people having a strong hand | In making their own laws' (IX. 532-3). In his pro-Revolutionary 'Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff', Wordsworth also wrote of ending poverty in terms that share the disturbing ambiguity of the '*that*' in his response to the 'hunger bitten girl', expressing the hope that the 'class of wretches called mendicants will not much longer shock the feelings of humanity'.⁹³ It is telling, then, that after Wordsworth's political disillusionment, he is returned to himself, and to his vocation as a poet, in part by ceasing to 'pass in fear' ('Prelude of 1805', XII. 159-60) the 'strolling Bedlamites' (XII. 158) and 'uncouth vagrants' (XII. 159). He begins to speak with the figures he encounters and says the roads

⁹² Simpson, *Wordsworth*, p. 22.

⁹³ Wordsworth, 'A Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff', in *Selected Prose*, ed. by John O. Hayden (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1988), p. 153.

become schools 'in which I daily read | With most delight the passions of mankind | There saw into the depths of human souls—' (XII. 163-6). He goes on to declare, 'Of these [...] shall be my song' (XII. 231).

This could be read as an acceptance of poverty now that Wordsworth has given up trying to remake society, and an attempt to settle it as a comfortable part of the Western landscape. Certainly, his reading of the vagrants as representing universal human passions and souls supports this view. But the settling also works backwards and becomes an unsettling. If these wanderers represent the typically human, then any typical human could be similarly displaced. Placing them within the rhetoric of the universal does the work of haunting the reader with his or her own vulnerability in a world in which everything is equivalent to everything else.

Wordsworth's description of his subject matter in *The Prelude* also works to reanimate three related groups: the 'class of mendicants' he once wished away, but also the 'small independent proprietors' whose decline he protested in the letter to Fox, and his own lost dream of an ideal Republic.⁹⁴ In reference to the second category, Wordsworth's description of the characters he will write about in *The Prelude* recalls the childhood of the Female Vagrant: both she and his ideal figures start out living

Not unexalted by religious hope,

Not uninformed by books (good books, though few)

In nature's presence. ('Prelude of 1805', XII. 242-4)

⁹⁴ Simpson has also argued that Wordsworth's ideal society was a 'subsistence economy composed of owner-occupiers'. See David Simpson, *Wordsworth's Historical Imagination: The Poetry of Displacement* (New York: Methuen, 1987), p. 56.

In the first two stanzas of the 1798 'Female Vagrant', similarly, a scene is set of a home in nature— 'By Derwent's side' (l. 1)—where her father teaches her both to pray and to read. But the reference also echoes Wordsworth's defence of the idea that 'peasants and mechanics' would be knowledgeable enough to vote in his 'Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff'; in that letter, Wordsworth also holds up the democratic cantons of Switzerland, where any visitor 'must have seen the herdsman with the staff in one hand and the book in the other'.⁹⁵ Wordsworth therefore dedicates his poetic project to memorialising both displaced smallholders and the vagrants they became, as well as his own dream of the Republic they might have made instead. In his verse, at least, they exist in a different ideal community. It is no accident that Wordsworth's requirements for a good epitaph— 'that it should speak, in a tone which shall sink into the heart, the general language of humanity as connected with the subject of death'—is so close to his stated goal for his own poetry in the 1802 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads*.⁹⁶ Wordsworth's songs are funeral dirges.

IV. Haunted Man

That there is something deathly about the Western concept of humanity Wordsworth and other Romantics advance is a critique that has increasingly been articulated within the field of Black Studies. As Alexander Weheliye explains in *Habeus Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human*

If racialization is understood not as a biological or cultural descriptor but as a conglomerate of sociopolitical relations that discipline humanity into full humans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans, then blackness designates a changing system of

⁹⁵ Wordsworth, 'Llandaff', *Selected Prose*, p. 148.

⁹⁶ Wordsworth, 'Essays Upon Epitaphs', *Selected Prose*, p. 331.

unequal power structures that apportion and delimit which humans can lay claim to full human status and which humans cannot.⁹⁷

This categorisation can occur along other than racial lines as well, Weheliye notes, including class, gender, and national origin, but the insight of Black Studies is that the very existence of this human/non-human sorting implicates the idea of Man as a supposedly universal category and demands its abolition.⁹⁸ Weheliye builds on the work of Sylvia Wynter, who defines Man as a specifically Western, bourgeois ethnoclass that ‘overrepresents itself as if it were the human itself’ and must be ‘unsettled’ in order to assure ‘the well-being, and therefore the full cognitive and behavioral autonomy of the human species itself’.⁹⁹

This is relevant to my argument because today’s refugees are evidently excluded from Man as ethnoclass, and largely along racial as well as national lines.¹⁰⁰ There is a certain sympathy between Wynter’s concept of Man—summarised by Paul Youngquist in ‘Black Romanticism: A Manifesto’ as both the subject of a nation state and as the ‘norm of humanity’—and Arendt’s analysis of the relationship between the nation and the Rights of Man.¹⁰¹ Because the West has arranged itself so that these rights are bound up with membership in a particular national community, losing that membership also excludes the stateless from the category of

⁹⁷ Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeus Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), p. 3.

⁹⁸ Weheliye, p. 3.

⁹⁹ Sylvia Wynter, ‘Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument’, *CR: The New Centennial Review*, 3.3 (2003), 257-337
<<https://www.jstor.org/stable/41949874>> [accessed 29 June 2021] (p. 260)

¹⁰⁰ Among those excluded from ‘Man’ today, Wynter includes ‘refugee/economic migrants stranded outside the gates of the rich countries’, p. 61. For an example of the racialised treatment of refugees by the British press, see Harriet Gray and Anja K. Franck, ‘Refugees as/at risk: The gendered and racialized underpinnings of securitization in British media narratives’, *Security Dialogue*, 50.3 (2019), 275-291
<<https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010619830590>>

¹⁰¹ Paul Youngquist, ‘Black Romanticism: A Manifesto’, *Studies in Romanticism*, 56.1 (2017), 3-14
<<https://www.proquest.com/docview/1906364898/abstract/F8E379F1B15D4895PQ/1?accountid=9851>>
[accessed 29 June 2021] (p.5)

Man itself: 'It seems that a man who is nothing but a man has lost the very qualities which make it possible for other people to treat him as a fellow man', Arendt writes.¹⁰² Any comparison, therefore, between Smith's and Wordsworth's displaced characters and contemporary refugees and migrants must acknowledge that, as Younquist has articulated, both Romanticism in general and Wordsworth in particular are complicit in 'promulgat[ing] a poetics of Man in Wynter's sense'.¹⁰³ Younquist's point is consistent with Makdisi's critique of Wordsworth's decision to uproot his vagrant characters from their collective, differently racialised vernacular and resettle them into the 'language really used by men'. Wynter and Weheliye's insight into the work done by the concept 'Man' can in fact elucidate the gap in popular understanding between today's racialised refugees and migrants and the itinerants who populate *Lyrical Ballads*. While Britain's actual vagrants might have been differently racialised in the 1790s, Wordsworth's literary vagrants have been admitted into the category of Man through his own recontextualisation of their experience in *Lyrical Ballads* and that text's subsequent canonisation. This is the key to the dichotomy I noted in the Introduction to this dissertation—why a photograph of contemporary refugees simply walking can be framed as a threat to British national identity while Wordsworth's wanderers can be absorbed into British national literature.

By seeking to reveal the ways in which particular sufferings continue to haunt Wordsworth's universalised figures, I do not mean to deny Wordsworth's complicity in 'disciplining humanity' into different categories of human and nonhuman. It is important here to acknowledge that Wordsworth did write about people who would be racialised in roughly the same way today as they were when he wrote of them, and the difference is telling. Youngquist notes how, in the sonnet Wordsworth dedicated to Toussaint L'Ouverture, he apostrophises Louverture as a 'miserable Chieftain', undermining his stated admiration for Louverture by

¹⁰² Arendt, *Origins*, p. 255. Arendt further links Man as nation-state subject and Man as racialising norm when she notes that many political communities prefer ethnic homogenisation in order to foster a sense of equality unencumbered by human variety. See *Origins*, p. 256.

¹⁰³ Youngquist, p. 5.

interpreting the accomplished revolutionary figure with 'the valence of the primitive, which marks Toussaint as something lesser vis-à-vis the fully human'.¹⁰⁴

Smith is guilty of similar sorting. 'Beachy Head' makes clear that she is both aware and critical of Britain's colonial violence, yet its racialised victims are not included within her community of passive citizens in 'The Emigrants'. Because that poem focused on the relationship between Britain and France within and between their European borders specifically, this oversight might be excused. However, when Smith does directly address the Black victims of slavery in another poem, she is at once sympathetic and dehumanising. In 'To the fire-fly of Jamaica, seen in a collection', she lists what the captured firefly will no longer be able to do, including frighten escaped slaves or comfort resting ones.¹⁰⁵ The poem includes explanatory footnotes in which Smith describes the habits of Jamaican slaves in uncomfortably similar ways to the behaviour of the island's plant and animal life. In a note on line 22, in which she describes a mountain cavern, she writes, 'The wretched Negro, fearing punishment, or driven to despair by continual labour, often secretes himself in these obscure recesses, and preys in his turn on his oppressors at the hazard of his life'.¹⁰⁶ The very next note glosses 'the giant bat' with the fact that 'Bats bigger than crows are found in the gullies and caverns among the woods of Jamaica. And monkeys hide there, sallying forth in numbers to prey on the canes and fruit'.¹⁰⁷ The footnotes render the slaves Smith writes about as more animal than human. Their movements are predictable enough to be explained like facts of natural history. They are hiding with the monkeys and the bats in the same cavern, and both they and the monkeys are described as preying. Smith's linkage between human slavery and the transformation of the firefly into a specimen might be read as a proto-ecological critique of how colonialism and capitalism turn both human and non-human others into commodities. Yet it is telling that

¹⁰⁴ Youngquist, p. 9, and Wordsworth, 'To Toussaint L'Ouverture', in *Poems of William Wordsworth*, p. 643, l. 5.

¹⁰⁵ Smith, 'To the fire-fly of Jamaica, seen in a collection', in *The Poems of Charlotte Smith*, pp. 204-7. See lines 17-32 for the passages described.

¹⁰⁶ Smith, 'Fire-fly', *The Poems of Charlotte Smith*, p. 205.

¹⁰⁷ Smith, 'Fire-fly', *The Poems of Charlotte Smith*, p. 205.

Smith is willing to put herself, the French emigrants, and the British vagrants in solidarity together, but the non-white victims of the British state are placed in community with animals.

Here it is also important to acknowledge Weheliye's critique of Agamben's theory of bare life itself, which I earlier connected to the spectral quality of Wordsworth's and Smith's displaced. Weheliye argues that the discourse of bare life 'misconstrues how profoundly race and racism shape the modern idea of the human'.¹⁰⁸ For example, Agamben focuses on the figure of the Muselmann—Nazi Concentration Camp inmates so malnourished they resembled living corpses—as an example of how bare life transcends race by erasing all markers of differentiation. Yet Weheliye points out that this cannot really be the case, since the very name for this figure emerges from a German slur for Muslims and therefore is implicated in dehumanisation along religious and racial lines.¹⁰⁹ By drawing on Agamben's theory of bare life in my analysis of Wordsworth and Smith, then, I do not mean to deny the role race has played in disciplining the category of human, something both poets are complicit in. Rather, I simply mean to show that the anxieties driving Agamben's response to the power and atrocities of the twentieth-century nation-state were similarly expressed in Wordsworth's and Smith's response to the emerging nation-states of their time.

The rights-based nation-state system—as observed by Smith and Wordsworth in its infancy and Arendt and Agamben in a moment of crisis—creates a scenario in which certain humans can be kept out of a supposed universal based on that most particular of circumstances—an accident of birth. The fact that certain categories of people are more likely to be barred than others does not contradict the truth that the possibility of exile for anyone creates a gap through which everyone could disappear. That Wordsworth and Smith could articulate this substitutability does not erase the fact that they held distinct positions in the racial, gendered, national, and class-based hierarchies in which they lived. That they could imagine alternative communities outside of some imaginary lines does not absolve them of the borders they did not cross. Rather, a close reading of their work—in both its insights and its

¹⁰⁸ Weheliye, p. 4.

¹⁰⁹ Weheliye, pp. 53-5.

failings—reveals that the Western concepts of Man and Citizen have from the start been haunted by their exclusions.

2. 'The Bush Hath Left Its Hill': John Clare and Environmental Displacement

I. John Clare's Sense of Displacement

While the spectral figures of Smith's and Wordsworth's poetry demonstrate how the emerging nation state was always already haunted by the lives outside its lines, the work of John Clare can help illuminate the relationship between environmental change and both physical and psychic dislocation. Both during his life and after, John Clare was celebrated as a poet of local experience.¹ But recent scholarship by Alan Bewell, Sara Guyer and others has also begun to read Clare as a poet of exile. While Clare never crossed an international border and lived for much of thirty-nine years in the cottage in Helpston, near Peterborough, in which he was born, he experienced what Guyer calls 'two forms of displacement'.² First, he witnessed the enclosure of Helpston between 1809 and 1820, which transformed his native landscape while he remained in place.³ Then, he himself physically relocated, first by moving to a cottage in Northborough in 1832 and later when he was confined in two asylums in Epping Forest and Northampton.⁴

The readings of Clare as a poet of a particular location and a feeling of exile are not contradictory. What John Barrell calls Clare's 'sense of place'—his poetic expression that

¹ For a thorough summary of how Clare has been framed and read as a poet of place, both in his time and after, see Simon Kövesi, *John Clare: Nature, Criticism and History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp.1-3. Kövesi offers a useful complication of this association between Clare and place, which I will address later in this chapter.

² For biographical details, see John Barrell, *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place 1730-1840: An Approach to the Poetry of John Clare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), p. 98, and Jonathan Bate, *John Clare* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003). Kindle ebook. For the two forms of displacement, see Sara Guyer, *Reading with John Clare: Biopoetics, Sovereignty, Romanticism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), p. 81.

³ For details of the enclosure dates see Barrell, p. 106 and Bate pp. 46-50.

⁴ For the move to Northborough see Bate, pp. 360-3, and for the move to the asylum see Bate, pp. 406-16.

‘this is how it is *here*’—is deeply bound up with his sense of displacement.⁵ Barrell notes that Clare’s poetry more successfully recreated this sense of place around the time that enclosure was being completed. While Barrell does not suggest a causal relationship between the two factors, he does say that this attention to local detail was ‘inevitably opposed to the ideology of enclosure’, which sought to make one place more or less like every other.⁶ Guyer further argues that Clare’s move to Northborough, a journey of only three miles, was only so displacing because his sense of ‘belonging relie[d] on a meaning and level of precision imperceptible using common measures so that small moves have an apparently disproportionate effect’.⁷

This chapter focuses on the uniqueness of how Clare articulated a sense of displacement and how that can speak to broader themes of migration and exile. It begins by discussing how the unmeasurable quality of his writing subverts attempts to neatly categorise any experience of displacement, especially in the context of environmental change. It then looks at how the distinct openness of the environment Clare lost meant that his defence of his home was able to double as a powerful defence of freedom of movement. Finally, it considers how Clare created a poetic identity both with and against Helpston. It compares the opportunities and pressures of the ‘peasant poet’ label he adopted with those faced by contemporary refugee poets and looks at how he moved beyond that label in his asylum poetry of ‘non-identity’.

Before I proceed, however, I would like to address two risks inherent in reading Clare both through place and displacement and through the anxieties generated by contemporary

⁵ Barrell, p. 131. Kövesi traces the more recent critical repetition of this claim to Tom Paulin and Elizabeth Helsinger, p. 3. Paulin calls Clare ‘both the poet of place and displacement’ in ‘John Clare: A Bicentennial Celebration’, in *John Clare: A Bicentenary Celebration*, ed. by Richard Foulkes (Northampton: University of Leicester, Department of Adult Education, 1994), pp. 69-78 (p. 74). Helsinger, meanwhile, labels Clare ‘one of England’s best poets of place’ and says that he writes both of a ‘profound attachment to a particular locality’ and ‘of the pain of displacement, attributed to and figured as enclosure’ in Elizabeth Helsinger, ‘Clare and the Place of the Peasant Poet’, *Critical Inquiry*, 13.3 (Spring, 1987), 509-31 <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/1343511>> [accessed 7 July 2021] (p. 509)

⁶ Barrell, pp. 119-20.

⁷ Guyer, p. 81.

environmental change. Recent scholarship has warned that confining Clare too closely to his locality and its loss risks reproducing the limitations imposed on him by the class hierarchy within which he lived and wrote. Simon Kövesi points out that this ongoing critical emphasis is uncomfortably consistent with the original marketing of Clare as the 'Northamptonshire peasant' poet, and, indeed, the marketing of previous labouring class poets like Ann Yearsley, the 'Bristol milkwoman', and Robert Bloomfield, the Suffolk 'farmer's boy'.⁸ The worry is that to place Clare topographically is also to put him in his place socio-economically, and, therefore, to place a 'restraint on what critics allow for his poetic ambition'.⁹ Mina Gorji, similarly, writes that in Clare scholarship 'too much attention has been focused on his social circumstances in ways that risk occluding his literary achievements'.¹⁰ Focusing on Clare as a poet of displacement adds a further dimension to these concerns. Since the process of seeking asylum means that refugees are legally defined as people who suffer in specific ways, reading Clare in the context of contemporary displacement therefore risks valuing his work for his sufferings and not his art.

This problem is related to the problems Kövesi articulates with some eco-critical readings of Clare, which make him into too perfect and contemporary an ecowarrior instead of a 'messy, complex, paradoxical, anxious, changeable and context-dependent person'.¹¹ In particular, Kövesi offers the complication of Clare's work on enclosure gangs, which Clare writes about in his autobiography not as a tragic necessity but as a source of temptation to engage in the drinking habits of his fellow labourers.¹² Kövesi notes that enclosing work was good money that Clare surely needed, and that there is no 'ethical paradox' in his taking work as a young man then later protesting its effects in poetry as he came to understand

⁸ Kövesi, p. 2.

⁹ Kövesi, p. 3.

¹⁰ Gorji, *John Clare and the Place of Poetry* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), p. 7.

¹¹ Kövesi, p. 17. Similar criticisms have been offered of the mobilisation of Indigenous poetry for eco-critical ends while ignoring that some Indigenous people rely on and even support extractive industries. See Jaimie Hamilton Faris, 'Sisters of Ocean and Ice: On the Hydro-Feminism of Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner and *Aka Niviana's Rise: From One Island to Another*', *Shima*, 13.2 (2019) <<https://shimajournal.org/issues/v13n2/08.-Faris-Shima-v13n2.pdf>> [accessed 24 September 2021]

¹² Kövesi, p. 16.

them more fully.¹³ However, ignoring the class realities that prompted Clare to participate in enclosure for income denies the complexities of his position within both his local ecosystem and social context.

These concerns acknowledged, I would argue that Clare's relevance to discussions of displacement and environmental change has less to do with the facts of his biography than with his aesthetic achievement in dramatising these experiences. In fact, given Clare's participation in the work of enclosure itself, it is only his creative output that gives readers, biographers, or critics a sense of any negative response to the transformation of his native landscape. That means we perceive it as a displacing experience because Clare chose to represent it that way in verse. Barrell has noted that the tropes of Clare's enclosure poems owe much to a pre-existing tradition of rural protest poetry, so Clare is drawing on literary tradition as much as personal experience.¹⁴ My analysis of Clare's sense of place and displacement is therefore an analysis of words he artfully ordered (primarily in poems but sometimes in autobiography or letters). This is not to say that Clare only wrote of place and its loss, or to limit his work exclusively to these themes.¹⁵ Rather, when he did write about them, he did so with a precision and singularity of expression that continues to resonate, and, by focusing on these elements of his work, I intend to acknowledge his poetic skill in depicting them rather than confine him to narrow identity markers.

Furthermore, I focus on these aspects of Clare's work not because of the bare facts of correspondence. It is not merely that Clare's landscape was transformed and then he moved. It is rather that his aesthetic response to these experiences engages in meaningful ways with two themes that remain central to environmental displacement: scalability and solastalgia.

¹³ Kövesi, p. 17.

¹⁴ Barrell, pp. 201-2.

¹⁵ Kövesi points out that Clare's most successful poem during the first half the nineteenth century was 'The Meeting', a love poem taking place in an entirely literary landscape that spread around the world after it was adapted to music. See pp. 53-61.

‘Scalability’ is a term coined by Anna Tsing in *The Mushroom at the End of the World* to mean ‘an ability to make projects expand without changing their framing assumptions’.¹⁶ She argues that scalability is intrinsic to the idea of progress she associates with modern capitalism, the beginning of which she argues is the ‘most convincing’ start date for what she refers to as the Anthropocene.¹⁷ As an example of scalability, she offers the European colonial plantation.¹⁸ But enclosure as Barrell describes it—‘a structure that could be and was applied in some form or another to all open-field parishes’—fits her definition.¹⁹

For Tsing, the danger of scalability is that it ‘banishes meaningful diversity, that is, diversity that might change things’.²⁰ Barrell argues that Clare’s achievement was to find a new way of describing landscape that eschewed eighteenth-century conventions fitting any particular place into an idealised prospect view and instead emphasised, linguistically and syntactically, a tension between multiplicity and particularity that was of Helpston and nowhere else.²¹ This is what Barrell means by Clare’s ‘sense of place’, and he argues that it is the underlying content of Clare’s descriptive poems. They are about the diversity that changes everything, and therefore offer aesthetic resistance to the logic of enclosure and the capitalist exploitation of nature more broadly.

¹⁶ Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), p. 38.

¹⁷ Tsing, p. 19. Tsing’s preferred start date and description of scalability mirror the arguments of Moore in ‘Capitalocene, Part 1’, discussed in the Introduction, who writes that ‘Capitalism’s governing conceit is that it may do with Nature as it pleases, that Nature is external and may be fragmented, quantified and rationalized to serve economic growth, social development or some other higher good’.

¹⁸ Tsing, pp. 38-9. Moore also uses sugar plantations as an example of how capitalism created its first monocultures.

¹⁹ Barrell, p. 96.

²⁰ Tsing, p. 38.

²¹ Barrell, pp. 98-161.

Similarly, Clare's sense of displacement also confounds attempts to make or expand a certain type of displacement narrative to fit a wide group of people, as contemporary refugee law and attempts to cleanly separate political asylum seekers, climate refugees, and economic migrants now do. Guyer describes Clare's displacement as 'a form of uncounted experience, that is, an experience that exceeds or disorients representation'.²² In Clare's work, this disorientation occurs even before his adult experiences with enclosure and physical leave-taking. Guyer points to a passage in Clare's autobiographical writings in which he remembers wandering off on the heath as a child and getting lost. He finds his way back, but 'when I got into my own fields I did not know them everything seemed so different'.²³ Guyer links this experience to Freud's account of the uncanny or *unheimlich*, literally the unhomely.²⁴ If even getting lost as a child can make home strange, then how does one contain any experience of displacement within neat categories? This is one place where the facts of Clare's biography in relationship to his work also become useful. The 'messy, complex' reality of his participation in enclosure gangs held out against the grief and rage articulated in his enclosure poems offers a caution against requiring today's refugees (climate or otherwise) to be perfect victims.²⁵

²² Guyer, p. 81. Guyer attributes the term 'uncounted experience' to Anne-Lise François, who coined it in *Open Secrets: The Literature of Uncounted Experience* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008). However, Guyer's and François's uses of the term have important differences. For François, 'uncounted' refers less to an absence of narration or failure to acknowledge than to an action of "uncounting" (even "dis-counting"—making light of, depositing to leave unclaimed—if this could be taken non-pejoratively) comparable to the Penelope-like work of undoing, unthreading, unravelling with which narrative itself has come to be identified' (p. 13). For Guyer, uncounted experience seems to refer to experience that is out of scale with typical methods of counting, such as Clare's radical dislocation following a walk of mere miles. For François, on the other hand, it refers rather to a light refusal of the secular, capitalist imperative to make experience count as profit or improvement. There is an element of François's use of the term in Clare's defence of the un-improved, pre-enclosure landscape, as well as in the lack of narrative imposed on some of his descriptive poems, but her coinage is distinct to me from the distortion Guyer locates in Clare's account of his childhood walk.

²³ Clare, *John Clare's Autobiographical Writings*, ed. by Eric Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 34.

²⁴ Guyer, p. 87.

²⁵ For a contemporary articulation of this pressure, see Ece Temelkuran, 'We Want Our Refugees and Exiles to be Victims', *Literary Hub*, 27 July 2017 <<https://lithub.com/we-want-our-refugees-and-exiles-to-be-victims/>> [accessed 7 August 2021]

Another aesthetic quality of Clare's work relevant to environmental displacement is his skill at evoking grief and loss. Kövesi, in fact, names Clare as 'the rootless poet of loss – loss of place, loss of natural landscape, loss of locatable meaning', and argues that the attention to detail highlighted by Barrell exists in a dialectic with an awareness that every natural element and person encountered will ultimately disappear.²⁶ For Kövesi, this sense of loss extends beyond the erasures of enclosure to include intangibles like love. But this grounding in loss makes Clare's poetry that does focus on landscape a powerful articulation of what philosopher Glenn Albrecht defines as solastalgia. Albrecht coined this term based on his observations of communities in New South Wales living through the destruction of their natural environment due to mining and drought. In his words:

solastalgia refers to the pain or distress caused by the loss of, or inability to derive, solace connected to the negatively perceived state of one's home environment. Solastalgia exists when there is the lived experience of the physical desolation of home.²⁷

I am not the first to connect Clare's work to the term; Robert Macfarlane has also argued that Clare is a 'solastalgic poet'.²⁸ However, I believe focusing on how Clare renders both the disorientation of unscalable dislocation and the grief of solastalgia can shed light on the aesthetics of displacement literature more broadly.

Clare achieves these results in his enclosure poems by depicting his native landscape itself as mobile, an effect that enables Alan Bewell's insight in *Natures in Translation* that enclosure meant Clare was 'exiled not by having left his country but by having witnessed it

²⁶ Kövesi, pp. 51-2.

²⁷ Glen Albrecht and others, 'Solastalgia: The Distress Caused by Environmental Change', *Australasian Psychiatry*, 15.1 (2007), 595-598 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/10398560701701288>> (p. 596)

²⁸ Macfarlane, 'Generation Anthropocene'.

leave him'.²⁹ This effect underscores the unmeasurability of Clare's loss because it cannot be depicted in realistic terms, and it emphasises grief because it establishes Clare and his landscape as partners in a relationship that the landscape can actively depart as might a friend or lover. In 'Remembrances', for example, Clare describes enclosure as an invader forcing the native populace to flee, except that for Clare that populace is made up of bushes and trees and hills:

By Langley bush I roam but the bush hath left its hill
On cowper green I stray tis a desert strange and chill
And spreading lea close oak ere decay had penned its will
To the axe of the spoiler and self interest fell a prey
And cross berry way and old round oaks narrow lane
With its hollow trees like pulpits I shall never see again
Inclosure like a Buonaparte let not a thing remain.³⁰

Clare's comparison of the violence of enclosure to that of Napoleon is an example of how Clare's loss distorts conventional measurements. By any reasonable scale, the devastation of a continent-spanning war cannot be meaningfully compared to a local tree felling, and yet Clare makes the comparison meaningful by emphasising both the oddness and loneliness of the experience. That oddness is clear in the first two lines of the stanza with the almost supernatural claim that the bush has left its hill followed by the description of a familiar location as 'strange'. The bush's departure has not only altered Clare's home but also his relationship to it. The choice of 'stray' to describe his wanderings over the transformed cowper green is telling. The verb assonates with 'strange', linking Clare sonically with the altered landscape. Further, 'stray' carries the dual connotations of

²⁹ Bewell, *Natures*, p. 295.

³⁰ Clare, 'Remembrances', in *John Clare Major Works*, p. 260, ll. 61-70. All future references to Clare's poems in this chapter will be given as line numbers in parenthetical citations and come from this same anthology.

physical and moral wandering.³¹ The enclosure of Helpston alters Clare's home so radically that a familiar stroll becomes an act both of exploration and of trespass. He is a stranger because he is now in a strange land without his former arboreal companions, even though he himself has not moved. It is a poem of a loss great enough to render its speaker himself lost.

Looking at poems of more traditional narratives of forced displacement through the lens of Clare's device clarifies the inciting incident they share: in order for one to be forced from home, home first has to become un-homelike. 'Well, I think home spit me out', the speaker begins in Warsan Shire's 'Conversations About Home (at the Deportation Centre)'.³² Home is the first to act in this account. The first image evoked by the poem is the working of the mouth to expel, not the tensing of the legs to run. In William Wordsworth's 'The Female Vagrant', as we have seen, the family is denied the ability to sustain itself in its former neighbourhood, an experience described in uncanny terms that turn the speaker's father into a spectre haunting his own home. In Charlotte Smith's 'The Emigrants', the war that forces the refugees to flee also upends natural cycles so that 'the ground, | Stripp'd of its unripe produce, was thick strewn | With various Death'.³³ A few lines down, Smith describes civil war as a force that 'makes | Man lose his nature', making him fiercer than wild animals.³⁴ The comparison to beasts suggests she means this psychologically, but the poem shows that it is also true in an ecological sense. The environmental and mental costs of war are linked. For Clare, too, a loss of nature may have facilitated a loss of nature. Barrell suggests that part of Clare's identity confusion during his asylum years could be related to the loss of the place with which he so strongly identified, while Bewell takes his asylum

³¹ 'Stray', *Oxford English Dictionary* [online]
<<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/191380?rskey=1WX8NS&result=4#eid>> [accessed 23 September 2019]

³² Warsan Shire, 'Conversations About Home (at the Deportation Centre)' in 'Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth', *The Mouthmark Book of Poetry*, ed. by Jacob Sam-La Rose, Nii Ayikwei Parkes and Niall O'Sullivan (flipped eye publishing, 2013), pp. 294-7 (p. 294).

³³ Smith, 'The Emigrants', in *The Poems of Charlotte Smith*, p. 156, ll. 218-219.

³⁴ Smith, 'The Emigrants', in *The Poems of Charlotte Smith*, p. 157, ll. 236-237.

belief that he was Byron, in particular, as a sign of his feeling of exile.³⁵ That said, it is important to note that there were many potential factors involved in Clare's mental illness and eventual confinement to an asylum. Bate lists several in his biography, including diet, alcohol, exposure to mosquito-borne diseases, financial stress, both witnessing and experiencing a fall as a young man, hereditary factors, and possibly bipolar disorder, though Bate is rightly cautious about posthumous diagnosis.³⁶ However, when Clare uses words like 'stray', which implies spiritual as well as physical deviation, to describe walking over post-enclosure Helpston, he is himself choosing to render loss of home as a threat to sense of self. This is supported by the fact that he spent his asylum years, when he was truly separated from the nature of his youth, crafting a poetics of non-identity, as I will discuss later.

There are of course important differences between how Clare, Shire, Wordsworth, and Smith narrate the process of displacement. Clare paints his home as leaving him behind, while Shire, Wordsworth, and Smith describe homes that push their protagonists out. But in each case, the exile begins not when the speaker leaves home, but when home transforms. Such an insight might shift the impetus for forced displacement from the 'well-founded fear' of current refugee law to the grief of solastalgia, a grief we are all more likely to encounter as wildfire smoke clouds summer skies and sudden rainstorms wash away whole neighbourhoods.

II. Between Solastalgia and Nostalgia: 'Remembrances' and 'The Flitting'

While the displacement of enclosure did not require Clare to move at all, he did eventually leave Helpston. The relationship between these two displacements can be traced in two poems he wrote around the time of his 1832 move to Northborough: 'Remembrances',

³⁵ Barrell, p. 180, and Bewell, *Natures*, p. 271.

³⁶ Bate, pp. 408-17.

which, as discussed briefly above, dealt with enclosure, and 'The Flitting', which focused specifically on his move. Looking in more depth at these poems can clarify the relationship between the two types of displacement Clare depicted, which is also the relationship between solastalgia and nostalgia. Considering the ambiguities of this relationship as expressed by Clare underscores the difficulties of neatly defining displacement in the context of environmental destruction.

In defining solastalgia, Albrecht also addresses nostalgia, which, he writes, 'was once conceptualised as a diagnosable illness associated with melancholia and experienced by people who were distant from their home and wanted to return'.³⁷ While his discussion of the term is rooted in history, he also sees nostalgia as a condition of the future: 'War, overpopulation and climate change are likely to be drivers of nostalgia as a serious form of psychoterratic illness in the twenty-first century', he predicts.³⁸ The insight gleaned from Clare's poetry of displacement is that the two can be intimately connected, that the forces that cause home to transform underfoot may also force the feet from home.

Clare's writing around the time of his move emphasises the pain of both displacements by focusing on his relationship with his native landscape as a two-sided encounter that he cannot help but lose and by depicting the loss as unnatural and eternal rather than natural and cyclical. That sense of relationship is partly enabled by Clare's choice to make aspects of his native landscape the active subjects in his constructions. Beyond the poems, this is evident in two letters he wrote at the time of his move. In one, he told his publisher John Taylor that he would not mind leaving Helpston so much because 'all the old associations are going before me'.³⁹ This is the attitude reflected in 'Remembrances', as we have seen, in which he stays in a home that has abandoned, or been forced to abandon, him. In the letter,

³⁷ Albrecht and others, p. 596.

³⁸ Albrecht and others, p. 596; a 'psychoterratic illness' is defined by the authors as an 'earth-related mental illness where people's mental wellbeing (psyche) is threatened by the severing of "healthy" links between themselves and their home/territory', p. 595.

³⁹ Qtd. in Barrell, p. 174.

the natural 'associations' are described as one might human neighbours that had relocated. However, in another letter, never sent, he indicated that the move itself was not free of pain: 'I have had some difficulties to leave the woods & heaths & favourite spots that have known me so long', he wrote, suggesting that some of his favourite spots remained after enclosure.⁴⁰ The phrasing of the second letter also turns natural features into the agents of the encounter—they have known him as opposed to the other way around.

The sense that Clare has removed to a place that does not know him is also reflected in 'The Flitting', the poem he wrote about his move. In it, he describes his new home with the lines:

Here every tree is strange to me
All foreign things where ere I go
Theres none where boyhood made a swee
Or clambered up to rob a crow. (ll. 97-100)

That both the published poem and the private letter depict the trees and haunts of his new and former homes as either 'foreign things' or familiars that have known him creates a sense of the move as primarily defined by the loss of a relationship in which the former home was at least as active a participant as the poet. Reading 'Remembrances' and 'The Flitting' side by side therefore reveals a speaker faced with two painful alternatives: staying in a place where the remembered trees and bushes have left, or moving to a place where the trees stand, but are not connected to any memories. Both are poems about environments empty of associations, in 'Remembrances' because their markers have been physically removed and in 'The Flitting' because they have not had time to form.

⁴⁰ Qtd. in Barrell, p. 174.

The stakes of the loss are equally severe in both poems, as indicated by the fact that both evoke an unnatural sense of disruption in the way they use seasonal imagery. In the first stanza of 'Remembrances', Clare writes as if the enclosure has ended seasonality altogether:

Summer visions they are gone like to visions every one
And the cloudy days of autumn and of winter cometh on
I tried to call them back but unbidden they are gone
Far away from heart and eye and forever far away
Dear heart and can it be that such raptures meet decay
I thought them all eternal when by Langley Bush I lay
I thought them joys eternal when I used to shout and play
On its bank at 'clink and bandy' 'chock' and 'taw' and ducking stone
Where silence siteth now on the wild heath as her own
Like a ruin of the past all alone. (ll. 1-10)

The language immediately gives the impression of an imposed sameness. The repetition of the short 'o' sound, not just at the end of the first three lines, but beginning halfway through the first and third lines with 'gone' and 'autumn', sets a monotonous, dirge-like tone. This repeated assonance is followed with repetitions of words and phrases like 'they are gone', 'far away', and 'eternal'. The most notable break in vocabulary comes with the recollection of the games: 'clink and bandy', 'chock', 'taw', and 'ducking stone' introduce both new words and new sounds into the poem. Their specificity contrasts with the more general lament of the rest of the stanza, and therefore exemplifies what has been lost. The enclosed environment can no longer support the natural and cultural diversity that made it one place and not another and can now only be described in the general language of absence. The fact that the loss of natural elements and human culture are so intertwined in Clare's depiction of enclosure is another example of how Clare understood and expressed

the full extent of environmental displacement. Gorji and Richard Irvine, for example, argue that Clare is a particularly useful poet for thinking about the Anthropocene—for considering human systems as geological agents—because he combined natural and social history in his own writings.⁴¹ That is what he is doing here in tallying the games played on the commons among the losses of enclosure, along with the bushes and trees that were felled.

The mournfulness of this passage is exacerbated by the fact that the shift from summer to winter is described in the poem as irreversible. Summer visions are ‘forever far away’, and this is the second repetition of ‘far away’, suggesting the monotony will never end. Barrell argues that in early Clare there is a confusion between nostalgia for childhood and nostalgia for a pre-enclosure landscape, and that in ‘Remembrances’ the themes are confused ‘more knowingly’ so that ‘the effect is to make enclosure seem to have been as inevitable as is the loss of childhood’.⁴² It is true that the ‘forever’ departure of summer could be read as a metaphor for the passage from youth to old age and death in an individual life, while the cycle of the seasons, of life and death and life, is expected to continue for others. But imagery later in the poem implies a more violent, universal, and final disruption to the natural order. ‘A winter’ is said to have come ‘at last’ (l. 55) and to have ‘fought her battle strife and won’ (l. 60). This martial imagery is followed by the passage cited earlier, which compares enclosure to ‘a Buonaparte’. The violation of winter triumphing forever over summer is echoed by the metaphorical victory of England’s recently defeated enemy on English soil. Using the word ‘conqueror’, which also would have scanned, might have supported a more generalised depiction of the violence of time, but the reference to a recent war also gives the enclosure a historical, rather than cyclical, valence. Moreover, Ross Wilson argues that the reference ‘draws its strength not from the general comparison of enclosure to a stock villain in the imaginary of the early nineteenth-century little Englander, but rather from the specific association of enclosure with a figure characterised by his tyrannical zeal for the conquest of ever more land’.⁴³ The metaphor is specific and time-

⁴¹ Irvine and Gorji, ‘John Clare in the Anthropocene’.

⁴² Barrell, p. 175.

⁴³ Ross Wilson, ‘Clare’s Indistinct Array’, *Romanticism*, 17.2 (2011), 148-159 <DOI: 10.3366/rom.2011.0020> (p. 152)

bounded rather than generic and timeless. It is therefore a stand-in not for the inevitable cycle of loss and renewal, but an interruption of it. The poem is precisely about the removal of the multiplicity and particularity that made up Clare's 'sense of place', and this is expressed as a temporal and spatial flattening. Wilson further argues that Clare sought to separate a positive 'plenitudinous natural indistinctness' from a 'barren blankness' that was the result of human activity generally and enclosure in particular.⁴⁴ This latter blankness is reflected in 'Remembrances'. Time is now only winter and the green is only a desert. While the brook still runs, 'it runs a naked brook cold and chill', again suggesting eternal motion through a never-ending January (l. 70).

In 'The Flitting', the sense of loss is also reflected through seasonal language. The loss, however, is different. Instead of a landscape rendered blank by human intervention, the speaker encounters a landscape that is blank to him because he does not have the knowledge to properly perceive it. The poem announces its theme with its title, which is one word for 'the action of removing from one abode to another'.⁴⁵ The description of the move begins:

I've left my own old home of homes
Green fields and every pleasant place
The summer like a stranger comes
I pause and hardly know her face. (ll. 1-4)

Summer is here, but the speaker cannot recognise her because she is not summer as he experiences it in Helpston. The problem is internal, rather than external, but the effect is the same. Summer has been banished from the speaker's home because the particularities he

⁴⁴ Wilson, p. 148.

⁴⁵ 'Flitting', *Oxford English Dictionary* [online]
<<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/71721?rskey=bOewqo&result=2#eid>> [accessed 29 October 2019]

associated with her have left his native landscape, and yet he cannot experience her in a new place because he lacks the memories of what summer is in fact like there.

Barrell rightly links 'The Flitting' to the same passage in Clare's autobiography cited by Guyer in relation to the uncanny. Before returning home disoriented, Clare headed out in search of the end of the world.⁴⁶ He wandered

until I got out of my knowledge when the very wild flowers and birds seemd to forget me and I imagind they were the inhabitants of new countrys the very sun seemd to be a new one and shining in a different quarter of the sky.⁴⁷

By 'out of my knowledge', Barrell argues that Clare means more than just 'out of the place I knew', but actually 'out of *everything* I knew', because everything he knew was based on his lived experience in Helpston.⁴⁸ 'The Flitting' is therefore a poem about someone moving 'out of their knowledge' so that summer is no longer recognisable as summer. In the poem, Clare even repeats the line about the sun from his childhood recollection, but with a difference: 'The sun e'en seems to lose its way | nor knows the quarter it is in' (ll. 54-5). In both the passage and the poem, the sun changes quarter, but it is clear that it is actually the speaker who is lost. However, in the memory of the childhood walk, there is a sense of excitement and discovery to the speaker's altered perception. The sun is 'new' and 'shining' and the passage continues with the assurance 'still I felt no fear my wonder seeking happiness had no room for it'.⁴⁹ In 'The Flitting', the change is purely disorienting. The sun is not new, but lost, so much so that it hasn't changed its place, but rather lost the ability to be in any place. If the sun itself does not know where it is, there is no hope that the speaker

⁴⁶ Barrell, pp. 174-6.

⁴⁷ Clare, *Autobiographical Writings*, p. 34.

⁴⁸ Barrell, p. 121.

⁴⁹ Clare, *Autobiographical Writings*, p. 34.

can learn to orient himself by its new direction. There is no wonder, only confusion. What changed?

It is crucial that Clare's childhood memory was of a chosen journey, from safety into the unknown. The account begins: 'It was in summer and I started off in the morning to get rotten sticks from the woods but I had a feeling to wander about the fields and I indulged it'.⁵⁰ He sets off with a specific, local task in mind, part of his knowledge, and because that task bookends his 'feeling to wander' he can indulge it, venturing off to see the end of his world in the trust that his world will still be behind him. The fact that he does find his world altered upon his return does not change the fact that he sets out from a place of confidence.

The move to Northborough was theoretically chosen too, but the circumstances were different. As Barrell notes, by destroying the old landscape of Helpston, the enclosure also 'destroyed' part of Clare's knowledge.⁵¹ Reading 'Remembrances' and 'The Flitting' together paints a picture of Clare as someone coming to understand that he has no choice but to be 'out of his knowledge'. No matter where he stays or goes, he cannot be at home.

The slippage between solastalgia and nostalgia in these poems provides a reference for the ambiguous displacements of the Capitalocene, especially with the escalation of climate change. There will be no scalable narrative of climate migration that fits neatly into the international rights framework. Each individual's experience will be as particular as the ecosystem they are leaving, which has perhaps already left them. Holding up Clare's work in this context can serve as a reminder of the 'meaningful diversity' of both place and displacement, and of what is lost when that diversity is banished for the sake of scalability.

⁵⁰ Clare, *Autobiographical Writings*, p. 35.

⁵¹ Barrell, p. 122. Guyer, interestingly, locates a passage in Rob Nixon's *Slow Violence*, which describes the 'displacement in place' of contemporary communities impacted by development schemes relatively analogous to enclosure. The passages says these communities are 'involuntarily moved out of their knowledge'. See Guyer, p. 83.

Clare's poetry of enclosure and leave-taking suggests that every place and person is worthy of protection not because they fit within a preordained structure of value or suffering, but because they cannot.

III. The Right to Roam and the Right to Abode

In his account of Clare's sense of place, Barrell explains the difference between the pre-enclosure, open-field system Clare grew up with and the post-enclosure agricultural grid that replaced it. The first was circular, with the village at the centre and the horizon as its circumference.⁵² Villagers wandered, primarily within this circle, on roads that outsiders found maze-like. The enclosure system was more linear and encouraged movement between villages that came to resemble each other in their design. But while enclosed villages were designed to practically open themselves out to others, and to the national economy, the open field topography visually encouraged an imagination of mobility. That is because 'there were few if any permanent fences to obstruct the view across the fields'.⁵³ This is the sort of view that makes Clare's childhood fantasy of walking to the end of the world possible, because that is how it would feel to walk out on a moor or heath stretching in all directions, with nothing between the walker and the horizon. Clare's unique sense of place, therefore, encouraged a unique sense of mobility, which enabled Clare's defence of his particular home to sometimes double as a defence of freedom of movement.

This double defence is most strongly expressed in 'The Mores', which Clare wrote in the 1820s, originally as part of 'October' in *The Shepherd's Calendar*, though he never sent that draft to his publishers. It was not published until the twentieth century, though Bate calls it 'one of the great poems of the nineteenth'.⁵⁴ The poem's sense of expansiveness is first

⁵² For the description of the difference between the open-field and enclosure landscapes, see Barrell, pp. 87-96.

⁵³ Barrell, p. 104.

⁵⁴ For this quote, as well as the composition and publishing history of 'The Mores', see Bate, p. 315.

hinted at in the relationship between the title and the first line. The title spells moors like 'mores', signifying excess. While this might just be an example of Clare's characteristically non-standard spelling, the poem's first line opens up the possibility that this mistake was intentional. 'Far spread the moorey ground a level scene | Bespread the rush and one eternal green', the poem begins (ll. 1-2). The fact that Clare uses the two different spellings so closely together suggests that this was indeed a play on words.⁵⁵ Even if it were not, however, the profusion of spellings introduce the 'moory mores' as an environment that cannot be easily contained. The rest of the language in the first lines reinforces the theme of limitlessness. The ground spreads 'far' and the green is 'eternal'. The poem thus begins by surpassing bounds on volume, space, and time.

It then continues to describe a scene that echoes the sense of wonder expressed in Clare's account of his childhood adventure:

Unbounded freedom ruled the wandering scene
Nor fense of ownership crept in between
To hide the prospect of the following eye
Its only bondage was the circling sky
One mighty flat undwarfed by bush and tree
Spread its faint shadow of immensity
And lost itself which seemed to eke its bounds
In the blue mist the orisons edge surrounds. (ll. 7-14)

⁵⁵ Robinson and Powell have preserved most of Clare's original spelling in the edition I am quoting from. I am also indebted for this insight to my supervisor Dr. Ross Wilson.

The passage reflects the characteristics of an open field system as Barrell describes it. The topography is circular, uninterrupted, ends only at the horizon, and encourages 'wandering'. Clare seems to write his own memory of wandering into the landscape. In this account, the scene itself wanders until it gets lost at the horizon. But instead of sowing confusion, as in the passage about the lost sun in 'Flitting', this ability of the land to lose itself is positively associated with 'unbounded freedom' and with a sense of imagination and possibility. It loses itself in a mist that seems to eke, or increase, the distance, that is, in a sort of visual hallucination. The moors both encourage dreams and dream themselves.

The association with dreaming and imagination is strengthened in the next passage:

Now this sweet vision of my boyish hours
Free as spring clouds and wild as summer flowers
Is faded all—a hope that blossomed free
And hath been once no more shall ever be. (ll. 15-18)

The scene which once tested the bounds of space and time, a scene that both produced and experienced visions, has now itself been enclosed, both literally and within the speaker's mind. After describing the enclosure, Clare writes, 'And memory's pride ere went to wealth did bow | Is both the shadow and the substance now' (ll. 21-2). A scene that once fostered imagination, that once created its own 'shadows' and 'mists', has now been so altered that it can only exist as a shadow in the imagination of the speaker.

Barrell argues that the moors for Clare combine two ideas of freedom: openness, as defined by a lack of fences, and limitlessness, because they 'expressed the idea of distance without limitation'. He continues

Thus when the moors are thought of as open, they are emblematic of the freedom of the villagers before the enclosure; when they are thought of as boundless, they express the possibility of a movement *towards* freedom, and out of the 'crampt circle' of life in Helpston, whether before the enclosure or after it.⁵⁶

In other words, the pre-enclosure moors provide Clare with a chance both to wander around his home and to imagine wandering away from it. By depriving Clare of his home as he recognises it, enclosure also deprives him of the ability to imagine leaving on his own terms. This insight is another way in which Clare's experience can speak to contemporary debates about migration. In 'The Idea of the Borderless World', Achille Mbembe argues for both a right to free movement and a 'right to abode' as connected freedoms.⁵⁷ Mbembe draws the concept of the right to abode from the constitution of Ghana and says it is one he has 'not found anywhere else'. In both cases, the conditions of a certain place give rise to an important insight about the human relationship to place. The rootedness of the concept gives it an added force because it is in itself an illustration of what an 'abode' enables someone to conceive. At the same time, the spatial and temporal distance between Clare and Mbembe's insights speaks to a common experience of Capitalocene displacement that is given poignancy by its impact on a particular peoples or person's relationship with a particular place.

For readers of Clare, that poignancy is delivered through his poetic evocation of a unique vista that at once characterised the specific 'abode' he lost and enabled him to imagine beyond it. When it was enclosed, the poet was, in a sense, enclosed with it. In describing the moors as they once were, Clare speaks in universal terms that enhance the sense of boundlessness. He references not his own eye, but a general 'following eye' that could belong to anyone and everyone encountering the landscape. It is only when that landscape is destroyed that the first person emerges to claim it as his, and the reader becomes aware

⁵⁶ Barrell, p. 144.

⁵⁷ Mbembe, 'Borderless World'.

of the moors not as an eternal image of freedom, but as a vulnerable home. Before the enclosure, Clare's speaker is able to exist in a relationship with his native landscape that fosters his imagination of other things. Afterwards, that landscape only exists in his imagination. Its departure essentially traps him within himself.

The speaker does move outside of himself again later in the poem in order to highlight how the enclosure has stopped the freedom of other living beings as well. He mentions the free movement of cows and sheep, birds and children, and, in lines towards the end, connects the intimate loss of home with the disruption of even natural migrations:

On paths to freedom and to childhood dear
A board sticks up to notice 'no road here'
And on the tree with ivy overhung
The hated sign by vulgar taste is hung
As tho the very birds should learn to know
When they go there they must no further go. (ll. 69-74)

Clare in this passage connects his right to follow the paths of his childhood with the ability of birds to fly, suggesting that enclosure is attempting to impose boundaries that should be impossible to impose, what he refers to in the poem as 'lawless laws' because they contradict the laws of nature (l. 78). By invoking the birds, Clare figures both movement and access to his childhood home as natural rights.

While Clare describes the freedom of a distance-evoking landscape in both his prose narrative of his childhood wandering and 'The Mores', poetry is especially well-suited to represent his dual commitment to movement and dwelling. In her account of Clare's mimetic techniques, Stephanie Kuduk Weiner discusses how Clare's middle period sonnets

‘experiment with unboundedness’ because it is not always clear where one poem should end and another begin; they deal with similar themes and imagery and sometimes conclude in deliberately arbitrary ways.⁵⁸ One particular strategy Clare uses to test the boundaries of endings is to have birds or other animals fly or move away in the last lines. For Weiner, these strategies are an attempt to accurately depict the world, which continues to exist and move beyond any one moment captured in verse: ‘By gesturing outside the frame of the poem,’ she writes, ‘Clare’s unbounded sonnets justify their unboundedness as a function of structural mimesis.’⁵⁹ But Clare’s sonnets, or, indeed, any of his poems, can only have this effect because they are poems. They call attention to their structure, which the poet must necessarily both choose and test. A prose description may run on as long as the writer likes. The bounds of each line are imposed by the notebook or printing press, not a combination of literary tradition and individual choice. The poem, in other words, is something like a home, but it is also a home that encourages movement line to line.⁶⁰ Readers can both see it as a structure on the page and follow its meaning like a path.

Thematically, the poems of Clare’s that most reflect the relationship between movement and abode are his poems about birds and their nests. The focus on nests is unique to Clare. While for other Romantics like Keats and Shelley, birds are objects of mystery and transcendence, Clare knows exactly where his larks and nightingales are singing from.⁶¹ The poems themselves are like nests, in that they are carefully constructed of materials gleaned from the natural (and, in the poet’s case, cultural) world and provide a space from which imagination can take wing.⁶² This relationship between flight and nest is perhaps most

⁵⁸ Weiner, p. 50.

⁵⁹ Weiner, p. 71.

⁶⁰ It is evocative that ‘stanza’ comes from the Italian for both room and standing, which is also the origin of ‘stance’. A poem is therefore, in one sense, a progression of stances—a walk, in other words, but a walk from and to somewhere. See ‘Stanza’, *Oxford English Dictionary* [online] <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/189041?rskey=R4R944&result=1#eid>> [accessed 10 July 2021]

⁶¹ See, for example, Keats, ‘Ode to a Nightingale’, in *Keats*, pp. 107-12, and Shelley, ‘To a Skylark’, in *The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. by Thomas Hutchinson (Oxford: Oxford Edition, 1914). Project Gutenberg ebook.

⁶² Gorji compares poetry and nests in her reading of ‘The Nightingale’s Nest’, though she focuses on the humble nature of both the nest and Clare’s poetry. See Gorji, *John Clare*, p. 4.

eloquently expressed in 'The Sky Lark', in which the bird's soaring flight—celebrated by Shelley in 'To a Skylark'—is revealed to be a feint to protect its home.

In the poem, boys searching for buttercups startle a skylark, and its flight sends them on a flight of fancy. They imagine that they would build their nests on clouds

And sail about the world to scenes unheard
Of seen and unseen—O were they but a bird
So think they while they listen to its song
And smile and fancy and so pass along
While its low nest moist with the dews of morn
Lye safely with the leveret in the corn. (ll. 25-30)

The poem is essentially a punchline at the boys' expense. By being so caught up in the bird's flight, they miss what it is protecting. Clare suggests that those who focus purely on the bird's flight are excluding an essential part of the bird's life. And yet the flight is still vitally important. It allows the bird to protect its nest from the boys who would otherwise surely raid it. The flight protects the home, and the home inspires the flight. That protective flight, also, enables the boys to imaginatively escape the bounds of their own home. While Clare does subtly mock the boys, the structure of the couplet detailing their mental wanderings empathises with their moment of transport. The miniature adventure is told in a heroic couplet that strains at its own bounds with an extra syllable in the second line. The phrase 'to scenes unheard of' flees sense by ecstatically running over the line break, while 'seen and unseen' suggests the limitlessness of imagination, a limitlessness that immediately runs up against the constraints of reality with the mournful conclusion: 'O were they but a bird'. The boys, in other words, are poets of a sort, they 'fancy', and Clare shows how their fancy, and, by extension, his own, are rooted in the ground even as they look to the sky. Abode and movement are interdependent.

This interdependence is also expressed in a more complicated way in 'On Seeing Two Swallows Late in October'. This poem also allows us to assess Clare's response to the question of hirundine migration, a question that was a matter of some controversy for the generation of nature writers and poets before him, such as Gilbert White and Charlotte Smith, both of whose writings inspired his own.⁶³ Until technology made it possible to track birds with leg bands or radio collars in the twentieth century, there was debate in the scientific community of the Northern hemisphere as to where swallows and other hirundines went in the winter; some thought they migrated, but others thought they hibernated, perhaps even underwater.⁶⁴ White recorded evidence for both theories, but, while his observations were weighted in favour of the former, he clearly preferred the latter and went out looking to verify it, as Anne K. Mellor points out.⁶⁵ Mellor argues that his motives were nationalistic, rather than scientific:

For Gilbert White, the swallow represented all that was best in English country life. Further, the swallow was the essence of an idealized English national identity: domestic, devoted to family values, hard-working, loyal to the community, a powerful protector against foreign invasions, and aesthetically pleasing. This was why he could not bear to think of them as annually abandoning his precious English countryside.⁶⁶

⁶³ For Clare's admiration for Smith, whose sonnets inspired him to try the form, see Bate, p. 119. For his reading of White, whose *Natural History of Selborne* was the model for his unfinished 'Natural History of Helpstone', see Bate, pp. 276-7.

⁶⁴ Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook, 'Charlotte Smith and "The Swallow": Migration and Romantic Authorship', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 72.1 (2009), 48-67 <DOI: 10.1525/hlq.2009.72.1.48> (p. 56)

⁶⁵ Anne K. Mellor, 'The Baffling Swallow: Gilbert White, Charlotte Smith and the Limits of Natural History', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 31.4 (2009), 299-399 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/08905490903445478>> {pp. 301-5)

⁶⁶ Mellor, p. 305.

For White, the swallow could not be both domestic and foreign, and so he tried to find proof that it did not quit England for part of the year. For him, abiding and journeying were mutually incompatible.

Charlotte Smith took a very different approach to swallow migration in her poem 'The Swallow'.⁶⁷ While the poem concludes with a statement that the speaker can never know the truth about the swallow, the possibility of migration is presented as exciting. It is, like Clare's 'mores', a springboard from which the rooted imagination can soar:

I would a little while restrain
Your rapid wing, that I might hear
Whether on clouds that bring the rain,
You sail'd above the western main,
The wind your charioteer. (ll. 26-30)

Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook argues that the swallow, for Smith, was 'an ideal emblem of the Romantic female poet'.⁶⁸ Because it both nested in cottage roofs and (potentially) migrated long distances, it could stand for both domesticity and vision. It had 'an escape' and gave Smith permission to be both a woman at home and a poet engaging in (mental) flights of fancy.

Clare's response to swallow migration provides a revealing contrast to both White's and Smith's. Unlike them, Clare accepts migration as established fact, but in this poem the thought of the swallow's journey does not fill him with wonder. His sentiments read as

⁶⁷ See Smith, 'The Swallow', in *The Poems of Charlotte Smith*, pp. 273-6.

⁶⁸ Cook, p. 63.

closer to White's, in that he treats the birds' departure as a sort of betrayal. On seeing two swallows who have not yet left, he describes their 'fellow tribes', who have departed, as treacherous and mercenary (l. 3). They are 'careless of old affections' (l. 5) in their migration, which he describes:

Forsaking all like untamed winds they roam

And make with summers an unsettled home

Following their favors to the farthest lands. (ll. 9-11)

The swallows are untrustworthy because they have chosen summer itself for their home. They do not have sufficient loyalty to England to stay with it through winter as well as summer.

The lingering swallows, in contrast, are described as loyal and courageous. They are 'haply thus to brave the chilly air' (l. 16) because fond memories of their summer homes make them 'haply wishing to abide | in your old dwellings through the changing year' (ll. 22-3).

Yet the last lines of the poem reveal subtly that the speaker's sympathies would amount to a disruption of the natural order not dissimilar to enclosure. The poem concludes

I wish ye well to find a dwelling here

For in the unsocial weather ye would fling

Gleamings of comfort through the winter wide

Twittering as wont above the old fireside

And cheat the surly winter into spring. (ll. 24-5)

The speaker's wish amounts to a paradox: he wants the swallows to stay because they will remind him of summer, but they are only associated with summer because they leave in the winter. While the speaker accuses the migrating swallows of choosing the easier path in following summer south, he is himself wishing for a 'cheat', for summer to unsettle his home and interrupt the normal cycle of the seasons, as enclosure does in 'Remembrances' and permanent departure does in 'The Flitting'. The swallows' leaving and returning, their roaming and abiding, are both essential to making his home what it is.

IV. Sense of Place/Sense of Self

Despite his defence of both the right to roam and the right to abide, Clare had a fraught relationship with the home he loved and his occasional desire to escape it, as picked up by Barrell in his analysis of 'The Mores'. This tension is reflected in Clare's attitude towards the local gypsies. He defended them against prejudice in his writings, his wandering habits encouraged his neighbours to associate him with them, and he himself considered joining a local crew.⁶⁹ Further, Sarah Houghton-Walker has illustrated that Clare found them 'particularly useful' figures for criticising enclosure, because he could at once use them as an example of how freedom was being curtailed by the new fences and present their increasingly threatened lifestyle as an alternative.⁷⁰ However, Clare was ultimately dissuaded from actually joining in that alternative by gypsy cooking and the thought of spending winters in an outdoor camp.⁷¹ For Clare, the attraction of wandering was ultimately surpassed by the comforts of home.

And yet home wasn't always comfortable. His poetic tendencies could alienate him from his neighbours. As David Higgins writes of Clare in *Romantic Englishness*, 'to read and write and to wander the fields without any apparent purpose or errand, was to be marked out as

⁶⁹ Bate, pp. 93-7.

⁷⁰ Houghton-Walker, p. 97.

⁷¹ Bate, pp. 93-7.

different; it was, in fact, to be out of place'.⁷² Sometimes it was his very attachment to local details that set him apart. In one of his autobiographical accounts, he writes

I have spent whole days (Sundays) in Searching Curious wild Flowers of which I was very fond and I often wondered when in Company with others that they never noticed them and that they never in the least noticed my remarks on such and such beauties when I have stopped down and cropped the flower to explain my Ideas in vain.⁷³

In this anecdote, it is precisely Clare's sense of place that renders him out of place in company. Of course, it is important not to take Clare entirely at his word when he claims to be the only person in his community interested in local flora. Robert Heyes, for example, attributes part of Clare's education as a naturalist to his friendship with Edmund Artis and Joseph Henderson, the steward and head gardener respectively of nearby Milton Hall. Beyond practical instruction, Heyes posits that this friendship empowered Clare in his interests by 'showing him that study of the natural world was a legitimate area of intellectual activity'.⁷⁴ However, this biographical fragment demonstrates how Clare used some early experiences of difference and alienation to craft a poetic identity both with and against Helpston, highlighting his apartness while also positioning himself as a regional representative to the wider national literary community.

This complex identification is clearly expressed by Clare in 'The Lamentations of Round-Oak Waters', another early poem about the enclosure featured in Clare's first published

⁷² David Higgins, *Romantic Englishness: Local, National, and Global Selves, 1780-1850* (Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 87.

⁷³ Clare, *Autobiographical Writings*, p. 27.

⁷⁴ Robert Heyes, 'John Clare's Natural History', in *New Essays on John Clare: Poetry, Culture and Community*, ed. by Simon Kövesi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 169-88 (p. 169).

collection.⁷⁵ In that poem, the despondent speaker goes to cry beside Round-Oak Waters only to awaken the 'genius of the brook', who proceeds to lament its own sorrows brought about by the enclosure, which saw all of the trees that shaded it cut down (l. 45). As part of its lament, the genius says that it observed the speaker's solitude as a child: 'And different feelings thou possest | From any other boy' (ll. 75-6).

But it is precisely the speaker's difference from the rest of the villagers that enables the brook to confide in him:

For to none else could I lament
And mourn to none but thee
Thou art the whole of musing swains
That's now residing here. (ll. 131-4)

The brook then refers to Clare's friend Richard Turnill, who shared his wandering proclivities but died of typhus at 17.⁷⁶ After his friend's death, Clare is unique in his love for the pre-enclosure landscape, and thus unique in his ability to recreate it. The brook instructs him:

So while the thoughtles[s] passes by
Of sence and feelings void
Thine be the Fancy painting Eye
On by'gone scenes employ'd

⁷⁵ Bate, p. 106.

⁷⁶ See the note on p. 488 of Clare, *Major Works*.

Look backward on the days of yore

Upon my injur'd brook

In fancy con its Beauties o'er

How it had us'd to look. (ll. 153-60)

Of course, the brook is not really speaking to Clare. Instead, Clare is speaking to his reader, and what he is imparting is a self-mythologising in which his own displacement within Helpston (his decision, as the brook describes, to leave the games of other boys and sit in solitude) makes him best suited to respond to the displacement of Helpston's pre-enclosure environment. He can 'con its Beauties o'er' because he isolated himself by paying unique attention to them.

In making claims for his unique local expertise, Clare is not speaking to his Helpston neighbours. Instead, he is positioning himself to the national literary community as an expert on his locality. As Bate shows in his biography and Gorji elucidates in *John Clare and the Place of Poetry*, Clare was active in the fashioning and marketing of himself as the 'Northamptonshire peasant' poet. He criticised the first dedication written for his first published collection as 'too Refined' and gave his publisher John Taylor his blessing to include Clare's 'humble Occupation, mean patronage, and scanty Education—or any thing of the like hinted at' in the introduction to his first published book of poems.⁷⁷

The resulting introduction, which accompanied his 1820 *Poems, Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery. By John Clare, a Northamptonshire Peasant*, emphasised the two aspects of identity implied by the 'Northamptonshire Peasant' title: his deprivation and his locality. Taylor wrote that Clare was 'the least favoured by circumstances [...] of any [poet] that ever

⁷⁷ For the first quotation see Gorji, *John Clare*, p. 17; for the second see Bate, p. 127.

existed'.⁷⁸ He also praised him for his use of regional dialect and vernacular, and the book was sold with a glossary.⁷⁹

There are ways in which Clare was presented (and self-presented) in similarly to how refugee poetry is presented in Europe today. First there is the emphasis on suffering, and the idea that the sufferings of the author add interest to the work. Stonebridge, for example, points to the 'Oxford Poets and Refugees Project', in which participants were encouraged to be 'witness writers'.⁸⁰ Second, there is the suggestion that the poetry has value because it adds something to the linguistic diversity of British letters. This is the claim made in the introduction to *England: Poems from a School*, a collection of poems written by migrant or refugee school children at Oxford Spires Academy. The editor, Kate Clanchy, argues that the poems are worthy of attention partly because the writers all have a first language other than English, and 'The shapes of that language show through their English. That is part of their freshness and originality'.⁸¹

In Clare's case, he is not introducing a new language into English, but rather restoring or preserving an English that was being lost. In *Making England Western*, Saree Makdisi argues that it was during the Romantic era that a formal, written English came to dominate and exclude oral and provincial dialects.⁸² But those same disappearing dialects were being sold back to the literary centre as cultural artefacts, and Clare was part of this. Taylor wrote that he voiced the 'unwritten language of England'.⁸³ This claim was not entirely advertising hyperbole: Clare was partly inspired as a poet by the oral traditions of Helpston, such as the

⁷⁸ Qtd. in Bate, p. 147.

⁷⁹ Bate, p. 148.

⁸⁰ Stonebridge, p. 180.

⁸¹ Clancy, 'Introduction', in *England: Poems from a School*, p. xvi. I will discuss this book, and the role of language in refugee poetry, further in Chapter Five.

⁸² Makdisi, pp. 21-2.

⁸³ Bate, p. 148.

drinking ballads sung by his father. Bate describes him as 'caught between an ambition to become a poet of the printed kind' and 'allegiance to that oral tradition'.⁸⁴

He was also, Gorji demonstrates, part of a broader 'cultural nostalgia' in the early nineteenth century for folk traditions that were simultaneously associated with England's literary past, especially through the figure of Edmund Spenser, who was seen as a 'guardian of popular tradition'.⁸⁵ This is partly why Taylor suggested Clare title his third book *The Shepherd's Calendar* after Spenser's sixteenth-century pastoral.⁸⁶

In an early draft of the 'May' section of that poem cited by Gorji, Clare focused on the cultural rather than natural losses caused by enclosure. Gorji explains:

Common land that had been used for village games and local customs was reclassified as out-of-bounds, curtailing individual freedoms (the right to roam) as well as threatening communal activities.⁸⁷

This is reflected in lines of the early draft in which Clare describes May Day's glories as having 'fled & left', much like the trees and bushes in 'Remembrances'.⁸⁸ Because no one celebrates its rights, the day now arrives 'to thy old haunts and homes | unnoticed as a stranger comes'.⁸⁹ But instead of presenting himself as a lonely mourner, Clare empowers his poetic speaker in this draft as the 'only refuge' these old traditions will be able to find. The language of refuge survived into the published poem to close 'December', and,

⁸⁴ Bate, p. 93.

⁸⁵ Gorji, *John Clare*, p. 89.

⁸⁶ Gorji, *John Clare*, p. 77.

⁸⁷ Gorji, *John Clare*, p. 88.

⁸⁸ Qtd. in Gorji, *John Clare*, p. 88.

⁸⁹ Qtd. in Gorji, *John Clare*, p. 88.

therefore, the whole poem. 'December' concludes with praise for 'old customs' and a lament for their passing, ending with the lines: 'And soon the poets song will be | The only refuge they can find'.⁹⁰ By selling Clare as voicing the 'unwritten language of England', Taylor is essentially claiming that Clare's regional and peasant identity brings him closer to a disappearing England reflected both in its older written literature and in its folk traditions. His linguistic and cultural diversity is domesticated into the dominant literary culture in a way that complements that culture without challenging it.

But while Clare was sometimes happy to present himself as a peasant poet, he also strained against the limits of that category, Gorji argues, because it was 'art which was valued, paradoxically, for its lack of art'.⁹¹ Gorji demonstrates how Clare subverted this expectation somewhat in his early work by using literary allusions in order to establish his artlessness. In a poem from his first collection, 'Effusion on Poesy, On receiving a Damp from a Genteel Opinionist on Poetry, of some Sway, as I am Told, in the Literary World', he refers to his own learning and writing as 'plucked in an evil hour', recalling lines both from Milton's *Paradise Lost* referring to Eve's tasting of the apple and lines from fellow vernacular, labouring-class poet Robert Burns that also allude to Milton.⁹² He is therefore placing himself 'both within the peasant tradition and beyond it', describing his own allusions as a transgression, and yet demonstrating that he is capable of using a common literary vocabulary to do so.⁹³

Clare's frustrations are echoed by contemporary refugee poets, who sometimes resent that their identity should be more important than their art. Syrian born-poet Widad Nabi, who was forced to flee to Germany in 2015 over her criticisms of the government of Syrian

⁹⁰ Bate, p. 311, both for the lines themselves and their placement in the final poem.

⁹¹ Gorji, *John Clare*, p. 22.

⁹² Milton writes of Eve in *Paradise Lost*, 'her rash hand in an evil hour | Forth reaching to the fruit, she plucked, she ate'. Before Clare, Robert Burns had alluded to this same line in 'To a Mountain Daisy, on Turning one down, with the plough, in April—1786', writing that the daisy had met him 'in an evil hour' because he is about to crush its stem. Both are qtd. in Gorji, *John Clare*, pp. 23-5.

⁹³ Gorji, *John Clare*, p. 31.

President Bashar al-Assad, spoke to *The Middle East Eye* of a mix of opportunity and limitation Clare might have recognised. While German interest in Syrian poetry allowed her and others to publish their work, much of that interest was based on their experience as asylum seekers, not the merits of the work itself. “I do not express myself as a refugee; I express myself as a poet and a human,” Nabi declared.⁹⁴

One thing, however, that separates Clare’s experience from that of contemporary poets from refugee or immigrant backgrounds is that, once he physically left his rural location and peasant occupation, he wrote less from the ‘Northamptonshire peasant’ poet identity. While he was still living in Helpston and even Northborough, his poetry was a refuge for his home’s disappearing landscape and customs. But once he was himself enclosed in the two asylums, he no longer used his poems to memorialise the unique biological and cultural ecosystems of his childhood, as several scholars have observed. Barrell notes that Clare’s later poetry does not generally attempt ‘to evoke or to describe places or landscape’.⁹⁵ Weiner argues that the asylum poems shift their mimetic focus to ‘representing absence’ itself.⁹⁶ Finally, Bate characterises the voice of the asylum poems as ‘almost disembodied’ and says that, in them, Clare was ‘withdrawing into non-identity’, a term the poet coined in ‘An Invite to Eternity’.⁹⁷

Clare laments this loss in some poems, such as ‘O could I be as I have been’, which explicitly links identity to particular landscapes in the opening two stanzas:

O could I be as I have been

⁹⁴ Asher Kessler, ‘Berlin’s Syrian Poet: ‘More than just a refugee’, *Middle East Eye*, 7 January 2018 <<https://www.middleeasteye.net/features/berlins-syrian-poet-more-just-refugee>> [accessed October 29 2018]

⁹⁵ Barrell, p. 180.

⁹⁶ Weiner, p. 87.

⁹⁷ Bate, p. 494 for quotes, pp. 490-1 for ‘Invite to Eternity’ coinage.

And ne'er can be no more
A harmless thing in meadows green
Or on the wild sea shore

O could I be what I once was
In heaths and valleys green
A dweller in the summer grass
Green fields and places green. (ll. 1-8)

In this poem, the speaker's self is so bound to a lost landscape that losing that landscape means losing the self too. Clare utilises several linguistic strategies to convey that sense of loss. Weiner writes that Clare's asylum poems are 'full of paradoxical definitions, puzzling declarations, and words whose meanings have been estranged from everyday usage'.⁹⁸ This exactly describes statements like 'O could I be as I have been' in which the reader struggles to locate the speaker's present identity in the gap between future conditional and past. That temporal confusion is enhanced by the fact that Northamptonshire does not border the sea, and so Clare never was a harmless thing along its shore. He is therefore missing both who he was and who he has never been and desiring to return to an identity he never possessed. It is therefore as if the confusion of loss has thrown him into a state of non-existence, as illustrated on the page by the repeated 'Os'. The speaker is a zero. Weiner writes that the 'troublesome language of these poems registers the paradoxes involved in trying to represent what is missing'.⁹⁹ This sense of something missing is also conveyed through the repetition of the word 'green', which gives the sense of a speaker struggling to recall a wider vocabulary and being forced to repeat the one descriptive word he does remember. The rhyme with 'been' emphasises the sense of loss. The speaker is trying to describe the places

⁹⁸ Weiner, p. 86.

⁹⁹ Weiner, p. 87.

that made him who he has been and can only come up with one word, along with a vague memory of a place (the sea) that was never part of his original identity formation.

But the poem ends with a sense that all is not as lost as the speaker protests:

I wish I was what I have been

And what I was could be

As when I roved in shadows green

And loved my willow tree

To gaze upon the starry sky

And higher fancies build

And make in solitary joy

Loves temple in the field. (ll. 26-32)

These lines begin with a similar lament, but the rhyme changes. Instead of ending the second to last stanza with the repeating “een” rhyme, Clare opens it out by removing the bounding consonant and ending on ‘ee’. This sense of boundlessness extends into the last stanza, in which the speaker essentially does for the reader what he states is impossible, he builds ‘higher fancies’ by writing them down. What the speaker was can still be on the page.

While there is loss in Clare’s later non-identity, there is also a sense of freedom and play. Bate in his biography looks at the testimony of Clare’s fellow inmate at the Northampton Asylum, William Jerom, who wrote that Clare was ‘personating’ the famous figures, like

Byron and Nelson, he claimed at times to be.¹⁰⁰ In Jerom's account, Clare was not actually delusional, he was just having fun. In this interpretation, the asylum years and poems could be read as a chance for Clare to escape his class and regional identity markers. Certainly, one can see how it might have felt liberating for the peasant poet to put on the persona of aristocratic, cosmopolitan Byron, and prove in his own *Don Juan*, written during his stay in Epping Forest, that he had art enough to imitate the *ottava rima* of the original.¹⁰¹

In *Edge of the Orison*, Iain Sinclair describes Clare in the asylum years as 'Mad to shrug off the poultice of identity, to be everyone. Borderless as an inland sea'.¹⁰² This sense of borderlessness is reflected in two of Clare's most famous asylum poems: 'I am' and 'Sonnet: I am'. These are mournful poems, and yet they also evoke a sense of spaciousness and freedom.

Weiner writes that they are among a group of poems in which 'Clare strives to represent worlds that are defined chiefly by being differentiated from earthly time and space'.¹⁰³ She continues:

In these works, natural features that on earth establish a sense of time and space, marking the horizon and anchoring vision, are transfigured in order to create a sense of timelessness and spacelessness. In 'I Am' Clare simply extracts 'the grass below' and 'the vaulted sky...above' from their place on earth and installs them in an elsewhere in which no suffering or joy has ever occurred.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Bate, p. 476.

¹⁰¹ For the timing and summary of the form of the poem, see Bate, pp. 440-1.

¹⁰² Iain Sinclair, *Edge of Orison: In the Traces of John Clare's 'Journey out of Essex'* (London: Penguin, 2005), p. 1.

¹⁰³ Weiner, p. 90.

¹⁰⁴ Weiner, p. 91.

But Clare's strategy for representing spacelessness and timelessness also recalls his description of a particular space that did itself suggest spacelessness and timelessness: 'The Mores'. The ending of 'I Am' with 'the grass below—above the vaulted sky' (l. 18) recalls the line in the earlier poem reading, 'Its only bondage was the circling sky' (l. 10). In his later poetry, Clare is able to take the particular attributes that most inspired him about his native place and transform them into the characteristics of an imagined 'no-place' that is at once nowhere and everywhere.¹⁰⁵

Similarly, he is able to incorporate that sense of boundlessness into his own poetic identity. This is exemplified in the last lines of 'Sonnet: I Am':

I was a being created in the race
Of men disdaining bounds of place and time:—
A spirit that could travel o'er the space
Of earth and heaven, —like a thought sublime,
Tracing creation, like my maker, free,—
A soul unshackled—like eternity,
Spurning earth's vain and soul debasing thrall
But now I only know I am,—that's all. (ll. 7-14)

In this passage Clare transfers several of the characteristics he ascribed to 'The Mores' to his poetic speaker. He is unbounded, eternal, free to wander, less a corporal presence than a thought or vision, like the mists at the orison. The frequent dashes also suggest a horizon line. This is especially effective at the end. The last two lines enact a literal coming down to earth after the soaring vision of the preceding lines. The 'But' that begins the last line

¹⁰⁵ Weiner, p. 91.

suggests that the speaker can no longer 'spur' earth's thrall. And the fact that 'thrall' and 'all' both rhyme with 'fall' imply that he is no longer the freely travelling spirit. In this reading, 'that's all' is a dismissive conclusion. The self is no longer unbounded, but is rather newly limited and diminished. However, the dash following the last 'I am' undermines that conclusion. It suggests the 'am' does still contain the same orison-like boundlessness as before. In this interpretation, 'that's all' is a definition of the self that includes all things. The poem closes with a paradox. If, as Weiner argues, paradoxes are part of how Clare signalled the difficulty of expressing loss, this poem could be read as a reflection on the loss of external identity. To be only oneself is to be nothing—'that's all'—, and everything—'that's *all*'. It is at once to be limited and limitless.

In later poems like 'Sonnet: I Am', Clare stopped defining his poetic speaker both with and against Helpston. Instead, he translated the boundlessness of his pre-enclosure native landscape into an image of identity stripped of externally imposed markers like class position and regional affiliation. His sense of place and displacement ultimately transcended its locality into an expression of both the negation and freedom of loss.

3. 'In Every Fragment Multiplies': Lord Byron and Collective Experience

I. Exile, Refugee, Pilgrim

As we have seen, John Clare's poetry helps illuminate one difficulty in depicting displacement—how to represent a loss that may be minute in geographical measurements but is immense in individual experience. The journey poems of George Gordon, Lord Byron introduce another, related problem of scale—how to represent what happens when that individual experience is multiplied by a collective exodus. This may seem a surprising answer to seek in Byron's poetry because he has come to be so strongly identified with the solitary, 'self-exiled' Byronic hero.¹ It is precisely this figure that presents a potential stumbling block to this dissertation: any attempt to consider a link between Romantic-era and twenty-first-century poetry of displacement is going to have to account for the difference between the solitary exiled protagonist of much Romantic poetry, especially Byron's, and the sheer numbers of the displaced that provoke contemporary responses.

The contemporary concern with numbers is expressed succinctly by Edward Said in 'Reflections on Exile', in which he writes that 'the difference between earlier exiles and those of our own time is, it bears stressing, scale'.² Indeed, scale, for Said, is what separates two different words for the figure of the forced migrant: exile and refugee. Refugee, Said claims, has twentieth-century associations and suggests 'large herds of innocent and bewildered people requiring urgent international assistance', while exile is linked to earlier histories of banishment and 'carries with it [...] a touch of solitude and spirituality'.³ To be an exile is to be defined by the fact of being cast off, while to be a refugee is to be defined by those who you are cast off with. (It is interesting that, as I noted earlier, the word 'refugee'

¹ George Gordon, Lord Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (Auckland: The Floating Press, 2009), III. 16. Unless otherwise indicated, all future citations of the poem in this chapter will be given in-text from this edition.

² Edward Said, 'Reflections on Exile' in *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (London: Granta, 2011), p. 174.

³ Said, 'Reflections', p. 181.

enters English in reference to the French Huguenots—its very etymology carrying a sense of collectivity and specificity.)⁴ Further, Said's language indicates that to be part of a large group is inherently dehumanising. Refugees form 'herds', while the exile is elevated by an almost divine apartness. There is also, in Said's definition, the sense that the worst thing one can be is innocent. Banishment carries with it undertones of criminality, of having been banished for something, after all. One would expect innocence to be closer to spirituality, but this is not the case in Said's reflection, and the paradox recalls Hannah Arendt's point that stateless people in the mid-twentieth century often found themselves better off from a legal position if they committed a crime of some kind and were therefore distinguished from the innocent but rightless masses they had fled with.⁵

The prototypical Byronic hero would appear to be very far from Said's blameless but agentless refugees, then, since, in addition to being solitary, he is also often exiled because of some deed or flaw. However, Byron's great journey poems, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* and *Don Juan*, both occur against a backdrop of mass displacements, from war to shipwreck to slavery, which do involve large numbers of blameless people. His work therefore speaks in unique ways to questions of scale and the challenge of representing both the individual exile and the collective they form a part of. This chapter looks especially at the war and battlefield descriptions in Cantos I and III of *Childe Harold* and the sequence covering Don Juan's initial departure, shipwreck, and encounter with Haidée in Canto II of *Don Juan*. This first section of the chapter will look at the relationship between the Byronic hero and the figure of the exile and refugee in the Romantic era and today. It moves from this to consider how, in *Childe Harold*, Byron uses imagery and metaphor to emphasise the difficulty of rendering both individual and collective experience. It then discusses how, by the time of *Don Juan*, he had developed an episodic, digressive style and form that replicate for the reader a sense of being one of many propelled forwards by forces beyond their control. It concludes with a brief discussion of how the current refugee crisis and Byron's poetry

⁴ See 'Refuge', *Oxford English Dictionary* [online].

⁵ Arendt, *Origins*, p. 250. In introducing this point, she writes that twentieth-century refugees 'were and appeared to be nothing but human beings whose very innocence—from every point of view, and especially that of the persecuting government—was their greatest misfortune. Innocence, in the sense of complete lack of responsibility, was the mark of their rightlessness as it was the seal of their loss of political status'.

interact with the discourses of Orientalism and imperialism that emerged during the Romantic era and continue to influence our own.

The fact that reporters and politicians today refer to a 'refugee crisis' and not an 'exile crisis' suggests that Said is more or less correct about the contemporary associations of the terms 'exile' and 'refugee'. Authors in the generations preceding Byron, however, did not use the words in the same way. Childe Harold, who is both 'self-exiled' and a pilgrim, does certainly carry a 'touch of solitude and spirituality', but not all eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century literary exiles are so isolated. The dispossessed peasants forced to migrate from Oliver Goldsmith's 'Deserted Village' are described as 'poor exiles', while Charlotte Smith's titular 'Emigrants' are 'ill-starr'd Exiles'.⁶ Both poets use the word to convey a group experience of displacement that a twentieth- or twenty-first-century author might describe with the word 'refugee' instead. In *The Artistry of Exile*, Jane Stabler notes that Goldsmith's use of the word is the first time in five centuries of English that exile was used to define an identity rather than an externally imposed sentence, at least according to the OED.⁷ When the concept of exile-as-identity first emerged during the early Romantic era, it was as a collective one.

But it is also true that the lone exile became a heroic figure in later Romantic literature, and this crystallised in Byron's protagonists as well as his own literary persona. In his thorough study of the literary origins of the Byronic hero, Peter Thorslev argues that the figure is an amalgam of eighteenth-century and Romantic hero types.⁸ All of the latter—the Noble Outlaw, the Faust figure, Cain and the Wandering Jew, and Satan-Prometheus—are 'individuals outside of society', literal or metaphorical exiles.⁹ Of these, the Cain or Ahasuerus figure is perhaps the most relevant to a discussion of literary exile because he is

⁶ Oliver Goldsmith, 'The Deserted Village', in *Poems and Plays* (London: Everyman, 1993), pp.181-92, l. 365, and Smith, 'The Emigrants', in *The Poems of Charlotte Smith*, l. 354.

⁷ Stabler, p. 2.

⁸ Peter Thorslev, *The Byronic Hero: Types and Prototypes* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962), p. 21.

⁹ Thorslev, pp. 21-2.

defined by 'the characteristics of the wanderer, of the social outcast, of the cursed and "marked" by God'.¹⁰ Thorslev argues that Childe Harold in the first two cantos is 'Byron's first Cain or his Wandering Jew', allusions that are made explicit in the opening canto of the poem.¹¹ He is

...above all a "pilgrim," not in the sense of being a tourist, on the one hand, or a real penitent, on the other, but as marked and cursed of sin, wandering over the face of Europe in an almost helpless search for self-restoration, and fearing that this can never come about, even in death.¹²

Childe Harold is not the only protagonist of the poem that bears his name. Byron's poet-speaker takes up ever more verse time as the poem progresses, and Jerome McGann has effectively demonstrated that the poet-speaker is the dramatic hero of the poem, whose development unfolds before reader and narrator simultaneously.¹³ So Childe Harold is not the only wandering hero of the poem, nor was he understood as such by contemporary readers. In Cantos I and II, McGann argues, Byron 'gives us a mythologised account of how he came to embody the "lonely, weary, wandering traveler" so prevalent in Western literature'—the myth's success is evidenced by the fact that William Blake dedicated his last work 'To LORD BYRON in the Wilderness'.¹⁴

But in McGann's account, eternal wandering is not ultimately a curse. Instead, the poem-speaker comes to understand it as life itself. The poem is ultimately a 'vindication of the act of pilgrimage' as the speaker accepts he will not find fulfilment in any one place, because life 'involves us in constant passage and possibility'.¹⁵ 'The purpose of Byron's journey is not

¹⁰ Thorslev, p. 107.

¹¹ Thorslev, p. 135; Childe has 'curst Cain's unresting doom' written on his brow (l. 83) and compares himself to the Wandering Jew in 'To Inez', p. 65.

¹² Thorslev, p. 135.

¹³ Jerome McGann, *Fiery Dust: Byron's Poetic Development* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968), pp. 31-66.

¹⁴ McGann, *Fiery Dust*, p. 105.

¹⁵ McGann, *Fiery Dust*, pp. 37-8.

cognitive, illuminating, but existential, trying', McGann writes.¹⁶ The poem concludes with the famous apostrophe to the ocean to 'roll on' (IV. 129).

Therefore, the Romantic wanderer and his Byronic incarnation contrast with the contemporary understanding of a refugee as described by Said in two key respects. On the one hand, his wanderings are compelled by his singularity, by some grievous sin in the case of the Cain or Wandering Jew figure or by a fatal flaw in personality. 'But soon he knew himself the most unfit | Of men to herd with man', Byron writes of Childe Harold (III. 11).

The exiled Romantic hero is by definition not part of any herd.¹⁷ At the same time, at least in the case of Childe Harold's poet-speaker, his experiences are universalisable. McGann argues that, for Byron, 'what it means to be a pilgrim' and 'what it means to be a man' are one and the same.¹⁸ Drummond Bone, meanwhile, posits that the concluding canto of *Childe Harold* builds on Byron's revelation in *Manfred* that human beings were responsible for making their own meaning and that 'This mental activity is represented in and by civilisation and culture. Life made meaningful has the form of an artwork'.¹⁹ The poem, therefore, becomes a metaphor for life itself on two fronts: as journey and as creation. This is an extrapolation it would be inconceivable to draw from the kind of twentieth-century exile Said describes as 'unbearably historical'.²⁰ In fact, *Childe Harold* does for exile what Said claims it will not respond to—it 'attempt[s] to understand it as "good for us"'.²¹

There is obviously today a large difference in connotation generally between pilgrimage and exile. The first, as Richard Lansdown puts it in his commentary on *Childe Harold*, is a 'special form of travel' defined by its destination: 'as readers we expect a distinct moral contrast

¹⁶ McGann, *Fiery Dust*, p. 138.

¹⁷ The one exception here might be Smith's speaker in 'The Emigrants', who portrays herself as unjustly wronged and connects herself with the emigrants because she has also experienced 'involuntary exile' (l.156).

¹⁸ McGann, *Fiery Dust*, p. 36.

¹⁹ Drummond Bone, 'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage IV, Don Juan and Beppo', in *The Cambridge Companion to Byron*, ed. by Drummond Bone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 151-70 (p. 151).

²⁰ Said, 'Reflections', p. 174.

²¹ Said, 'Reflections', p. 174.

between the point of departure and the point of arrival. The pilgrim travels from darkness to light, blindness to insight, confusion to order, and from worldly values towards spiritual ones'.²² The latter, on the other hand, generally implies forced departure with no preordained relief (though the *OED* definition does say exile can be either 'endured by force of circumstances or voluntarily undergone for some purpose'), and is defined by the departure point to which the traveller may not return.²³ That said, the distinction between the two was not so clear historically. The *OED* says pilgrimage could, in early use, refer to 'a period of exile', and lists an example to that effect from as late as 1715.²⁴ It seems likely Byron had something like this earlier usage in mind when crafting *Childe Harold*, because the two are blurred throughout the text. In 'To Inez', *Childe Harold* explains the impetus behind his own journey with the line 'What exile from himself can flee?' ('To Inez', p. 66). It is also in this song that Harold compares himself to the Wandering Jew (p. 65). Further, Byron-as-speaker begins Canto III on a ship departing England, lamenting his separation from his young daughter. The reader would then have understood the rest of the speaker's journeys as facilitated by his exile from England following a very public separation scandal that left Byron's reputation in such tatters that his friend and fellow poet Thomas Moore wrote that his departure 'had not even the dignity of appearing voluntary'.²⁵

It is worth pausing here to consider the difference between Byron's evocation of exile, especially after 1816, and those of Goldsmith and Smith. Namely, rather than observing a group of unfortunates separated from himself in some way, he is writing from within a condition he himself is experiencing.²⁶ This is especially the case for Canto III, which was written in the immediate aftermath of his departure and incorporates themes of fame and

²² Richard Lansdown, *The Cambridge Introduction to Byron* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 71.

²³ 'Exile', *Oxford English Dictionary*, [Online]
<<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/66231?rskey=oRIkpM&result=1#eid>> [accessed 30 May 2020]

²⁴ 'Pilgrimage', *Oxford English Dictionary*, [Online]
<<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/143868?rskey=sJeJRW&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>> [accessed 30 May 2020]

²⁵ Qtd. in Mary O'Connell, *Byron and John Murray: A Poet and his Publisher* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), p. 144.

²⁶ While Smith describes herself as a former exile, that experience is in the past, an example of suffering she has overcome in order to better empathise with the present exiles' more immediate distress.

crisis directly influenced by that event.²⁷ In the opening stanzas, he articulates a feeling of vulnerability that echoes the vulnerability Smith assigns to the French emigrants:

Still must I on; for I am as a weed,
Flung from the rock, on Ocean's foam, to sail
Where'er the surge may sweep, the tempest's breath prevail. (III. 2)

The seaweed simile recalls Smith's description, flagged in the first chapter, of the emigrants as 'hang[ing] upon the barrier of the rock' ('The Emigrants', l. 108). But Byron's verses concern the 'weed' in the violence of its removal, before it has found a place to hang. They paint a vision of exile that is entirely unheroic. The speaker is both small and weak compared to the forces that propel him. The words 'rock' and 'sweep'—with their single syllable and hard consonant endings—placed about halfway through the last two lines, contrast with the liquid endings of 'sail' and 'prevail' that conclude the couplet. This contrast imitates the rhythm of waves striking a hard surface and then rolling back out to sea. Both speaker and reader are caught in this wave action. The heroism comes later, when, at the end of Canto IV, the speaker is able to overcome his vulnerability by embracing it. Instead of being 'flung' by the ocean, the speaker can 'mingle with the universe' and, as part of it now, exhort the ocean to 'roll on' (IV. 128-9).²⁸ But this later triumph does not erase the violence of the initial banishment.

The post-departure cantos of *Childe Harold* articulate the pain of exile in other ways, some of which would be familiar to the exiled twentieth-century poets Said considers in his essay. In one sequence, Said recounts sitting in a Beirut restaurant with exiled Pakistani poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz and visiting Pakistani exile Iqbal Ahmad while Faiz recited his poems. This was the only moment when Said observed Faiz 'overcome his sense of constant estrangement' as

²⁷ He left in April, see O'Connell, p. 144, and completed the poem in July, see McGann, *Fiery Dust*, p. 112. O'Connell draws on the work of Andrew Bennett, Jerome Christensen, and Tom Mole to show how the circumstances of Byron's exile influenced the themes of the canto, see pp. 144-7.

²⁸ McGann writes of the ending, 'Besides being drawn into a participation with the wondrous creativity and strength of the Ocean, the poet shares its extreme aloneness', *Fiery Dust*, p. 137. Instead of the ocean driving the poet-speaker's exile, he is now incorporated into the ocean as a fellow exile from human affairs.

he recited verses to his countryman, eventually ceasing to translate for Said from the Urdu.²⁹ Said describes the incident as 'an enactment of a homecoming expressed through defiance and loss'.³⁰ As a poet, the pain of Faiz's exile is enhanced by separation from an audience that can understand him untranslated; regaining this audience is a kind of homecoming. In Canto IV of *Childe Harold*, Byron also expresses anxiety about losing a country where he is readily understood. He says, 'I've taught me other tongues, and in strange eyes | Have made me not a stranger' (IV. 8), but he still pins his hopes for a literary afterlife on English letters and English readers:

and should I lay
My ashes in a soil which is not mine,
My spirit shall resume it—if we may
Unbodied choose a sanctuary. I twine
My hopes of being remembered in my line
With my land's language: if too fond and far
These aspirations in their scope incline,—
If my fame should be, as my fortunes are,
Of hasty growth and blight, and dull Oblivion bar

My name from out the temple where the dead
Are honoured by the nations—let it be—
And light the laurels on a loftier head! (IV. 9-10)

Despite a professed ability to speak other languages, it is only in English that Byron's memory will count. And despite an international life, only an English afterlife will guarantee him immortality in all nations. His memory must reverse his physical travels, or he disdains to be remembered at all—'let it be'. While the speaker's tone in this section is one of acceptance and resignation, there is a sadness and a loneliness underneath it. He may learn

²⁹ Said, 'Reflections', p. 175. It is unclear from the text if Faiz was translating from Urdu into Arabic or English for Said. Faiz was exiled by the military dictator Zia.

³⁰ Said, 'Reflections', p. 175.

other languages, but his hopes are not 'twined' with them. At the same time, the remembrance of his poetry in his native land and language will act as a sort of homecoming, allowing his spirit to 'resume' his native soil even if his body is buried abroad. For Byron as for Faiz, native tongue and native land are twined, and losing or regaining the former either enhances or mitigates the pain of losing the latter.

However, Byron is different from Faiz and the other exiles Said speaks of because he is not part of a collective banished for political affiliation or ethnic identity. Instead, he felt compelled to leave because of a scandal at once private and particular. This allows him to identify himself with the Cain archetype as a wanderer outcast by his own sins or actions. After he resigns his place in the temple of the dead, he writes:

Meantime I seek no sympathies, nor need;
The thorns which I have reaped are of the tree
I planted,—they have torn me, and I bleed:
I should have known what fruit would spring from such a seed. (IV. 10)

He accepts responsibility for, and therefore agency in, his own exile. In fact, he isolates himself as an almost unnatural figure by describing the fruits of his actions as thorns, which are not fruits at all and would not be able to produce seeds of their own. His experience is therefore not reproducible, and he is not an innocent deserving or in need of 'sympathies'. One might forgive Byron for trying to make meaning out of his own particular, partly self-authored exile—to tell a story in which it has been 'good' for him—but the question remains how his experience, and the poetry that came out of it, can speak to displacement on the twentieth- and now twenty-first-century scale.

The answer is that *Childe Harold* is written against the backdrop of historical events of an extremely large scale, which is something other scholars have acknowledged. Lansdown, for example, notes that the poem as a whole is comprised of three pilgrimages that refer to three periods in European history: the contemporary context that starts with the Peninsular War in Spain and Portugal and ends with a diminished, colonised Greece; a reverse history of the French Revolution and Napoleonic Empire that begins at Waterloo and ends in the Swiss Alps;

and a trip back from Renaissance Italy to its classical origins in Rome.³¹ In *Byron and Place*, meanwhile, Stephen Cheeke rejects the dominant psychological reading of the poem, arguing instead that it ‘appears to be written not merely by an English nobleman travelling on the continent, but also by a sequence of places, or rather a sequence of geo-historical spots with pre-existent narratives, spots that in some sense speak for themselves’.³² Those narratives include collective experiences, often of suffering. Cheeke observes that ‘the historically significant sites remembered in [Byron’s] writing are most frequently those authenticated in some sense by violent action, or, alternatively, by miraculous protection from violent destruction’.³³ In the case of *Childe Harold*, this violent action occurred in the distant past visited as ruins, but also in its present or near past on the battlefields of the Napoleonic Wars, and these wars were an important part of the poem’s context: indeed, one of the reasons the poem was so popular was that it allowed British readers to vicariously access some of these spots that the fighting made it hard to visit in person.³⁴ While these wars are not the cause of Harold or the poet-speaker’s displacement, their upheaval runs in parallel to their wanderings. The text is keenly aware of the gap between individual perception and the incomprehensibility of mass experience that the continent-spanning conflict represented.

II. ‘The Giant on the Mountain’: *Childe Harold* and Scale

The problem of scale is emphasised in the sections of Canto I and III that directly address the Napoleonic Wars. The first difficulty emerges when Harold and the narrator pass from Portugal into Spain and consider the border:

Where Lusitania and her Sister meet,
Deem ye what bounds the rival realms divide?
Or e'er the jealous queens of nations greet,

³¹ Lansdown, p. 71.

³² Stephen Cheeke, *Byron and Place: History, Translation, Nostalgia* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 41.

³³ Cheeke, p. 16.

³⁴ Thorslev, pp. 135-6.

Doth Tayo interpose his mighty tide?
Or dark sierras rise in craggy pride?
Or fence of art, like China's vasty wall?—
Ne barrier wall, ne river deep and wide,
Ne horrid crags, nor mountains dark and tall
Rise like the rocks that part Hispania's land from Gaul

But these between a silver streamlet glides,
And scarce a name distinguisheth the brook,
Though rival kingdoms press its verdant sides.
Here leans the idle shepherd on his crook,
And vacant on the rippling waves doth look,
That peaceful still 'twixt bitterest foemen flow:
For proud each peasant as the noblest duke:
Well doth the Spanish hind the difference know
'Twixt him and Lusian slave, the lowest of the low. (III. 32-3)

These two stanzas adjust and readjust the scale that informs their perspective. At first, the poet-speaker guides the reader to the border between Portugal and Spain and asks them if they can perceive it. What follows is a litany of borders whose physical features match their political divisions. The reader is instructed to look for similar features and told they will not find them. Instead, only 'a silver streamlet glides'. The repetition of the 's' sound in 'silver', 'streamlet', and at the end of 'glides' emphasises the softness and slipperiness of the physical border when contrasted with the hard 'K' sound in the 'rocks' and 'dark' mountains that separate Spain and France. The stanzas suggest the border would be imperceptible to the reader without the poet's guidance. Its physical appearance is incongruous with the scale of the rivalry it represents. However, the brook's peacefulness also relies on a distortion. The description of the shepherd leaning on his crook looking vacantly on the brook sets the reader up for a meditation on how national conflicts are irrelevant on the level of rural locality. But that is a perception only possible at an epistemological distance. Conversation with the 'Spanish hind' reveals that he is very much aware of the border's meaning.

This is a different local knowledge of distinction from the kind articulated by Clare, in which an intimate experience of a particular place can be so precise that a day's walk registers enough changes to make it feel like international travel. As far as Byron's verses tell us, the Spanish peasants are not perceiving a physical difference between their side of the border stream and the other that makes it look to practised eyes as dramatic a division as the Pyrenees or China's Great Wall. Instead, the division they perceive is emotional and national against objective, local observation. The emotional aspect is reinforced by the language used to describe the stream's relationship to its border status: the 'rival kingdoms press its verdant sides' and it flows 'twixt bitterest foemen'. The descriptions evoke a river flowing through a deep canyon even though the previous stanza made it clear that the border was not marked by any elevation. The verb 'press' especially connotes a sense of claustrophobia that contrasts with the easy movement of the gliding stream described at the start of the stanza. Byron therefore evokes the strength and extent of the collective experience of national division by using language with an emotional register out of scale with the physical border being described. If Clare used scale to show how a meadow could be its own country, Byron does so to show how countries make their reality felt on the level of the shepherd and the stream.

Another manipulation of scale comes in Byron's description of the Battle of Talavera:

The bale-fires flash on high:—from rock to rock
Each volley tells that thousands cease to breathe:
Death rides upon the sulphury Siroc,
Red Battle stamps his foot, and nations feel the shock.

Lo! where the Giant on the mountain stands,
His blood-red tresses deepening in the sun,
With death-shot glowing in his fiery hands,
And eye that scorcheth all it glares upon;
Restless it rolls, now fixed, and now anon
Flashing afar,—and at his iron feet
Destruction cowers, to mark what deeds are done;
For on this morn three potent nations meet,

To shed before his shrine the blood he deems most sweet. (l. 38-9)

If the border sequence tries to express the impact of collective experience on the local level, the battle description almost immediately gives up the attempt. Byron offers a proportion: each volley equals thousands of deaths. But he does not then try to describe these thousands of deaths on an individual level. Instead, he chooses to personify the battle as a larger than life individual, a 'Giant on the mountain'.

In 'Reflections on Exile', Said writes that 'on the twentieth-century scale, exile is neither aesthetically nor humanistically comprehensible'.³⁵ This statement presents this kind of exile as the experience that disproves the very thesis Bone sets out for *Childe Harold*—that life can be made meaningful in art. Indeed, it lies outside the grasp of both. Later, Said continues to challenge the notion that there could be any artistic or literary accounting for mass devastation. He lists the indignities of the century's various exoduses and asks, 'what do these experiences add up to? Are they not manifestly and by design irrecoverable?'³⁶ In the Battle of Talavera sequence, Byron is concerned with collective death, not collective displacement, but he is still very much grappling with the incomprehensibility and irrecoverability of suffering on a large scale. He acknowledges this incomprehensibility by choosing an image of battle that is physically impossible. It is easier to conceive of a single mythic figure capable of destroying thousands than to conceive of the thousands destroyed. But Byron does partly evoke the individual experience of the battle with its description. With the 'Lo!' opening the thirty-ninth stanza, Byron directs the reader's gaze up towards the giant, including them in the scene. The reader is invited to share in the experience of being overwhelmed by a violent force and placed in the physical position of the 'Destruction' cowering at the giant's feet, waiting upon the narrative of the poem to 'mark' what the poet will describe next. To be one of many in a catastrophe is to be scorched by the glare of a giant.

³⁵ Said, 'Reflections', p. 174.

³⁶ Said, 'Reflections', p. 176.

It is telling from a historical perspective that the same conflict produced another famous image of war as a giant: Goya's 'The Colossus'.³⁷ In that image, there is a sense of mass movement as humans and animals flee through a valley towards the bottom left of the painting while behind them a naked giant stands with his back towards them and his fist raised. The primary inspiration for the image was another poem, the 'Pyrenean Prophecy' by Juan Bautista Arriaza, in which the Spanish people are depicted as a giant rising from the Pyrenees to defeat the Napoleonic invasion.³⁸ However, the painting eschews that many-Davids-turned-Goliath patriotism to craft an image in which the ordinary farmers and shepherds can only flee from the incomprehensible figure of conflict. Goya's painting and Byron's image share a sense of war as a force beyond any side's ability to control it. Byron elsewhere in the canto speaks in more partisan vein of the Spanish cause.³⁹ But when attempting to dramatise the scale of the fighting and its impacts on the participants he, like Goya, represents it as a force beyond the comprehension of human loyalty. The two images were conceived of independently, but were spawned by the same conflict, which had a greater impact on the size of the Spanish population than the Spanish Civil War.⁴⁰ The coincidence shows that the problem of representing the scale of mass experience is not new to the twentieth century, but was already an aesthetic problem for the writers and artists responding to the major conflict of the Romantic era.

While Byron's image of war as a giant does attempt to represent the collective experience of war as an overpowering force, it surrenders before the problem of collective grief. The thousands dead for every volley show up again in the fortieth stanza only to be laughed off: 'By Heaven! it is a splendid sight to see', Byron writes of the battle, '(For one who hath no friend, no brother there)'. Grief is a joke at war's expense, the banana peel that trips up glory.

³⁷ Francisco de Goya y Lucentes, *The Colossus*, oil on canvas, Museo Del Prado <<https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/the-colossus/2a678f69-fbdd-409c-8959-5c873f8feb82>> [accessed 7 June 2020]

³⁸ 'The Colossus (1808-12) by Goya', *Encyclopaedia of Art Education* <<http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/paintings-analysis/colossus-goya.htm>> [accessed 7 June 2020]

³⁹ See for example Byron, *Childe Harold*, I. 37, beginning 'Awake ye sons of Spain! awake! advance!'

⁴⁰ Leandro Prados de la Escosura and Carlos Santiago-Caballero, 'The Napoleonic Wars: A Watershed in Spanish History?', *Working Papers on Economic History. European Historical Economic Society*, 130 (2018) <http://www.ehes.org/EHES_130.pdf> [accessed 24 September 2021] (p. 2)

But the satirical aside also avoids the problem of trying to represent the feelings of the friends and siblings of thousands.

This aesthetic problem is taken up again in the section on Waterloo in Canto III. Byron names just one of the war dead, his guardian's third son the Hon. Frederick Howard.⁴¹ The poet-speaker sees the signs of life and spring returning to the field and refuses to be consoled:

I turned from all she brought to those she could not bring.
I turned to thee, to thousands, of whom each
And one as all a ghastly gap did make
In his own kind and kindred. (III. 35-6)

Here there is an attempt to deal with the scale of mass grief. To turn to Howard is to turn to thousands like him. But the only way to represent that grief is to represent it on the individual level and attempt to multiply it. Thousands of ghastly gaps. Grief on the scale of Waterloo is not comprehensible because grief on an individual scale is not possible to conceive of either, as Byron makes even clearer two stanzas later. He says the hearts of the mourners break

E'en as a broken mirror, which the glass
In every fragment multiplies; and makes
A thousand images of one that was,
The same, and still the more, the more it breaks;
And thus the heart will do which not forsakes,
Living in shattered guise, and still, and cold,
And bloodless, with its sleepless sorrow aches,
Yet withers on till all without is old,
Showing no visible sign, for such things are untold. (III. 33)

⁴¹ See the note for line 254 on p. 221 of Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, ed. by A. Hamilton Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913).

There are thousands dead, but each death leaves behind a thousand images. Even one person's pain is uncountable, it continues to multiply like the reflections in a broken mirror. The fragmented mirror as a metaphor speaks both to the incomprehensibility of loss, but also the difficulty of representing it. The technology that should produce an image can produce only fragments. This failure of representation and communication is picked up in the last line. The broken heart shows 'no visible sign, for such things are untold'. The bereaved do not show their grief and they do not tell it. The slippage in the last line between visual and verbal cues (why does a lack of articulation necessarily mean something is invisible?) further emphasises the breakdown of all communication and representation in the face of loss.

If expressing the incomprehensibility of a single grief paradoxically helps represent the unrepresentability of mass grief, then the strategy offers a clue to how the experiences of the 'self-exiled' Harold and Byron can speak to the broader displacements of the world that surrounds them. Mary O'Connell points out that scholars have read Canto III as an expression of both personal and historical crisis, and Byron was criticised by contemporary reviewers for making the collective suffering of others all about himself.⁴² But the exiled Byronic hero can also serve as a sort of giant on the mountain, a magnification of a singular experience of exile offered with the understanding that every other experience would feel as huge.

III. Bewilder'd on the Deck: Don Juan's Refugee Experience

However, not all of Byron's exiled heroes are in fact 'Byronic'. The titular hero of *Don Juan* is decidedly not; Thorslev writes that he emerges from a different literary tradition, anticipated by figures like Voltaire's *Candide* or Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones*.⁴³ He is often portrayed as both innocent and bewildered; he is even described as the latter when on the boat leaving Spain for the first time.⁴⁴ While he technically bears responsibility for the liaisons that launch him in to exile and adventure, the narrative portrays him as propelled more by circumstance

⁴² O'Connell, pp. 146-7.

⁴³ Thorslev, pp. 12-13.

⁴⁴ Lord Byron, *Don Juan*, ed. by T.G. Steffan, E. Steffan, and W.W. Pratt (London: Penguin, 1982), II. 13. All future citations from *Don Juan* in this chapter will be in text from this edition; Thorslev also notes Juan is defined by 'innocence' and 'passivity', see p. 11.

and accident than some internal curse or flaw. Indeed, his sins, such as they are, are more typical than remarkable. Byron seems to suggest he acts as any young man in his position might act. When accounting for his affair with the married Julia that launches the poem and his wanderings, Byron writes:

I can't say that it puzzles me at all,
If all things be consider'd: first, there was
His lady—mother, mathematical,
A—never mind; his tutor, an old ass;
A pretty woman (that's quite natural,
Or else the thing had hardly come to pass);
A husband rather old, not much in unity
With his young wife—a time, and opportunity. (ll. 3)

All things are considered, that is, besides Don Juan's motivation. Or it is only considered in the statement that it is 'natural' for him to pursue a pretty woman given time and opportunity. Don Juan's lack of singularity fits thematically with the fact that he is often caught up in 'herds' of displaced or displacing others, whether they be his fellow shipwreck victims, other slaves on display in Turkey, or even the soldiers who he joins in sacking Ismael. He passes from victim to victor without losing his fundamental passivity with respect to the force of events, no matter how skilfully he equips himself in battle. Don Juan's narrative passivity has also prompted Betsy Bolton to read the poem as an early reflection on migration and precarity. She describes Juan as 'as hapless a migrant and refugee as one could imagine' and argues that his experiences of shipwreck, slavery, and sexual exploitation make him 'Every Migrant, or perhaps a Migrant for All Seasons'.⁴⁵

Juan's narrative vulnerability and repeated near misses with death or serious injury might make him another *homo sacer* figure, like the wanderers of Smith and William Wordsworth, yet he is also remarkably resilient and never seems to suffer lasting consequences from his

⁴⁵ Betsy Bolton, 'Byron's Ambivalent Modernity: Touring and Forced Migration in *Dun Juan*', in *Migration and Modernities: The State of Being Stateless, 1750-1850*, ed. by JoEllen DeLucia and Juliet Shields (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), pp. 17-50 (p. 28).

(mis)adventures. Bolton therefore argues that he is instead a 'comic (in)version' she defines as *homo beatus*: 'Juan appears blessed with uncanny capacity for thriving through

Adversity'.⁴⁶ While the comic mode may seem disrespectful in the face of the irrecoverable suffering cited by Said, it also offers a version of migrant experience that escapes the fear-based expectations of refugee law and may be closer to how contemporary migrants and refugees tell their own stories. In an epigraph, Bolton recounts conversations with sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco who had been turned back after attempts to cross into Europe: '[M]any migrants see themselves as possessing something very like Juan's magical resilience and fortune – at least as long as they can look forward to an arrival ... elsewhere. Each of the men I speak with sees himself not as a *homo sacer*, but as *homo beatus*.'⁴⁷

Further, Don Juan's resilience does not negate his precarity, and the reader is caught up with him in the vicissitudes of fate. This is partly achieved through the form of the poem. It is told in *ottava rima* stanzas, which follow an *abababcc* rhyme scheme with the final couplet often delivering 'a surprising or comic turn', in Bolton's words.⁴⁸ Robert Southey alleged Byron's use of the verse form was 'capricious', and this, Bolton notes, is also true of the narrative structure of the poem itself, which delights in frequent digressions.⁴⁹ Bolton's 'capriciousness' echoes McGann's analysis of the poem's form in *Don Juan in Context*, in which he argues that the poem's episodic and digressive structure works to create a narrative that is constantly surprising the characters, the reader, and even Byron's narrator himself. Events in *Don Juan*, as in life, never turn out as planned, and Byron replicates this by writing a self-consciously unplanned epic.⁵⁰ The poem's meandering form is essential to its meaning, McGann argues, because the 'whole point' of *Don Juan* was to attack the Romantic idea, most powerfully espoused by Wordsworth and Coleridge, that meaning

⁴⁶ Bolton, p. 28 and p. 29.

⁴⁷ Bolton, p. 45.

⁴⁸ Bolton, p. 40.

⁴⁹ Bolton, p. 40.

⁵⁰ For McGann's discussion of *Don Juan*'s form and its thematic impact, see McGann, *Don Juan in Context* (London: John Murray, 1976), pp. 100-7.

came primarily from the internal Imagination of the individual.⁵¹ The theme of the poem, in other words, requires the world to be constantly intruding on the characters and their plans, and this is expressed formally so that the reader, like the characters, feels they are constantly moving from incident to incident without any sense of where they might go next. This form and theme are intended to replicate and elucidate the human experience generally, for which the various displacements experienced by the characters are only examples. But the sense of human life it evokes is very different from that of *Childe Harold*, because it emphasises relationship over solitude. Instead of using one larger-than-life exile as a stand-in for human suffering and questing, the twisty stanzas, conversational tone, and this-happened-then-that-happened plot of *Don Juan* make the reader feel like one of the poem's many travellers along for the ride.

This effect is exemplified by the poem's literal shipwreck sequence, in which Byron skilfully evokes collective distress:

With twilight it again came on to blow,
But not with violence; the stars shone out,
The boat made way; yet now they were so low,
They knew not where nor what they were about;
Some fancied they saw land, and some said 'No!'
The frequent fog-banks gave them cause to doubt—
Some swore that they heard breakers, others guns,
And all mistook about the latter once.

As morning broke, the light wind died away,
When he who had the watch sung out and swore,
If't was not land that rose with the sun's ray,
He wish'd that land he never might see more;
And the rest rubb'd their eyes and saw a bay,
Or thought they saw, and shaped their course for shore;

⁵¹ McGann, *Don Juan*, p. 156.

For shore it was, and gradually grew
Distinct, and high, and palpable to view. (ll. 96-7)

The passage describes characters in a desperate situation who are trying to make sense of their surroundings, but do not have the means to do so because of external circumstances. The fog banks look too much like land, and they cannot leave their lifeboat to get a better view. The characters all have distinct perceptions and reactions to the same stimuli. Some ‘fancy’ they see land, and some vehemently deny it. But neither response delivers an answer. Only the narrator seems to know the truth. He states definitively that they were all ‘mistook’ about hearing guns. But he does not reveal the truth to the reader until it is clear to the characters and the land grows ‘distinct, and high, and palpable to view’. Until that stanza’s final couplet, however, Byron uses a complicated syntax to make the reader share in the characters’ doubt over whether they have seen land. First, the man assigned to the watch uses a double negative to swear he sees land, forcing the reader to parse his statement to determine its meaning. Then, what appears like a simple statement of fact—that the rest ‘rubb’d their eyes and saw a bay’—is undermined in the next line with ‘Or thought they saw’. Whether their course is really ‘shaped for shore’ is left uncertain at the end of the line. It is only confirmed for the reader in the final couplet, as both reader and characters ride the surprise at the close of the *ottava rima* to their destination.

When the typical Byronic Hero does emerge in *Don Juan*, he is an agent of displacement, rather than an exile himself. McGann argues that the character of Lambro, Haidée’s father who disrupts the young lovers and sells Juan into slavery, fits this archetype.⁵² The poem, then, breaks with Byron’s previous work by focusing on the victims of these larger-than-life sinners, rather than the interior struggles of these characters themselves. This is especially telling in the context of the Napoleonic Wars, because Byron had styled Napoleon himself as a sort of Byronic Hero in previous works.⁵³ *Don Juan* starts off following the conquered rather than the conqueror. However, while Lambro is a devastating, unexpected figure in Don Juan’s

⁵² McGann, *Don Juan*, p. 133.

⁵³ McGann, *Don Juan*, p. 35.

life, McGann points out that Don Juan is an equally disruptive and surprising force for Lambro.⁵⁴ Lambro is not immune from the overall lesson of the poem, for his insistence that 'reality bend to his will' leads to the death of his child and grandchild, and, thus, the ruin 'of the basis of whatever hope in life he possessed'.⁵⁵ Even the type of man who would have ended up a solitary self-exile in an earlier Byronic poem is, in *Don Juan*, part of the bewildered human collective tossed about by the forces of reality.

In 'Reflections on Exile', Said says that 'exiled poets and writers lend dignity to a position legislated to deny dignity—to deny an identity to people'.⁵⁶ He continues:

to concentrate on exile as a contemporary political punishment, you must therefore map territories of experience beyond those mapped by the literature of exile itself. You must first set aside Joyce and Nabokov and think instead of the uncounted masses for whom UN agencies have been created.⁵⁷

The implication here seems to be that something about the scale of collective suffering is inherently undignified because the knowledge of that scale makes individual identities impossible to hold on to and individual griefs impossible to process. Dignity in exile is a kind of literary fiction that requires focusing on one sufferer only and shutting out all the rest. This is an idea that seems to be born up by Byron in *Don Juan* by the way the satiric tone interacts with the emphasis on collective experience. Byron often subtly mocks his protagonist by putting his sufferings in a larger context, but he also suggests that context could offer a solidarity perhaps more valuable than dignity.

One particularly telling example is the moment of Juan's departure. Narratively, it should be a moment of private grief. Juan is leaving his home for the first time, and his lover forever, but there is no indication that anyone else on the ship with him is leaving by force. However,

⁵⁴ McGann, *Don Juan*, p. 101.

⁵⁵ McGann, *Don Juan*, p. 152.

⁵⁶ Said, 'Reflections', p. 175.

⁵⁷ Said, 'Reflections', p. 175.

Byron's narrator-speaker interrupts that privacy with references to his own and other departures:

I can't but say it is an awkward sight
To see one's native land receding through
The growing waters; it unmans one quite,
Especially when life is rather new:
I recollect Great Britain's coast looks white,
But almost every other country 's blue,
When gazing on them, mystified by distance,
We enter on our nautical existence.

So Juan stood, bewilder'd on the deck:
The wind sung, cordage strain'd, and sailors swore,
And the ship creak'd, the town became a speck,
From which away so fair and fast they bore.
The best of remedies is a beef-steak
Against sea-sickness: try it, sir, before
You sneer, and I assure you this is true,
For I have found it answer—so may you.

Don Juan stood, and, gazing from the stern,
Beheld his native Spain receding far:
First partings form a lesson hard to learn,
Even nations feel this when they go to war;
There is a sort of unexpressed concern,
A kind of shock that sets one's heart ajar:
At leaving even the most unpleasant people
And places, one keeps looking at the steeple.

But Juan had got many things to leave,
His mother, and a mistress, and no wife,

So that he had much better cause to grieve
Than many persons more advanced in life;
And if we now and then a sigh must heave
At quitting even those we quit in strife,
No doubt we weep for those the heart endears—
That is, till deeper griefs congeal our tears.

So Juan wept, as wept the captive Jews
By Babel's waters, still remembering Sion:
I'd weep,—but mine is not a weeping Muse,
And such light griefs are not a thing to die on;
Young men should travel, if but to amuse
Themselves; and the next time their servants tie on
Behind their carriages their new portmanteau,
Perhaps it may be lined with this my canto. (ll. 12-16)

The narrator enfolds Juan in several communities of fellow travellers, and the effect is at once undercutting and consoling. First, there is the community between Juan and the narrator, who knows from experience that it is an 'awkward sight' to watch one's homeland recede and can describe the pain of it with an acute empathy—'A kind of shock that sets one's heart ajar' is an effective line that emulates the sudden emotion it describes. The hard 'k' of 'shock' sets the line itself ajar, coming nearly halfway through the line. The sense of split in the line is enhanced by the fact that the 'k' sounds in 'kind' and 'shock' are grouped together on one side, while the internal rhyme of 'heart' and 'ajar' are grouped on the other. At the same time, the narrator's more advanced experience means he is able to put Don Juan's griefs in perspective. They are relatively 'light'.

This dismissal comes after Byron has connected Juan to another exiled group: the Jews in Babylon.⁵⁸ The narrator seems to be making fun of Don Juan with this comparison. Juan may

⁵⁸ This is an exile Byron had referenced previously in *Hebrew Melodies*, particularly in 'By the Rivers of Babylon We Sat Down and Wept' and 'By the Waters of Babylon', see Byron, *The Works of Lord Byron, Vol. 3*, ed. by Ernest Hartley Coleridge (London: John Murray, 1900), pp. 402-4. Project Gutenberg ebook.

feel his griefs equal to theirs, but the narrator shocks the reader out of the seriousness of the connection, first by calling those griefs 'light' and then by saying 'Young men should travel'. The discontinuity in tone between 'exile' and 'travel' humorously undermines Juan's feelings by showing he is closer to a privileged group (young men who can travel) than the true sufferings of exile.

However, the comfort of the passages is not entirely lost because Byron has enfolded his hero in a third community of potential journeyers—the poem's readers. These are the ones who may line their travelling trunks with his canto, but also the recipients of the narrator's recommendation to try a beef-steak for sea sickness. While the practicality and universality of this suggestion work against the sentimentality of Juan's heart break, the advice is also manifestly useful. The narrator emerges as a sort of older brother figure who can empathise with the poignancy of feelings first felt while also teasingly putting them in perspective and offering experience-based advice.

Equally important, however, is the means of delivering this advice—written literature that can connect the narrator and his readers across distance. Taken as a whole, the passage suggests that literature can be a source of alternative community that is not tied to physical presence and can therefore open up new invitations to adventure and learning or provide solace when other connections have failed. This is the case for Juan in the narrative, who draws on stories from the Bible to contextualise his own pain. While Byron makes fun of him for his choice of analogy, he still shows that Juan can use it as an inner resource. Further, Bolton argues that Byron works to obscure the division between two types of travellers: the privileged tourist and the marginalised vagabond. He writes a narrative in which fate can easily transform one into the other. (Juan may be mourning 'light' griefs in this moment, but he is about to fall prey to shipwreck and slavery.) The end result is a 'poetics of precarity' that is at once destabilising and comforting.⁵⁹ If the reader shares in Juan's vulnerability, they are also buoyed up by his resilience, as well as by the comic diversions of the poem's narrative and form.

⁵⁹ Bolton, p. 18. A more in-depth discussion of the tourist and the vagabond in *Don Juan* occurs on pp. 32-6 and again on p. 44.

Byron himself drew on a literary consolation in his own experience of exile when he wrote a sonnet addressed to ‘Rousseau—Voltaire—our Gibbon—and De Staël’ after arriving in Switzerland in the aftermath of his divorce.⁶⁰ All of those figures had also passed periods of exile in Geneva and, by evoking them, Byron was transforming exile ‘into a literary fellowship, a timeless space already inhabited by the four minds he felt he was joining on the shores of Lake Geneva’, as Stabler puts it.⁶¹ Byron was not alone in this gesture, Stabler argues, but rather participating in a Romantic and later Victorian tradition of finding ‘consolation’ for exile in ‘actual or imagined communities of thinkers’.⁶² Stabler focuses on exiled Romantic and Victorian British writers who formed these sorts of communities in Italy specifically. In addition to his literary fellowship, Byron formed an actual one with Percy Bysshe Shelley and the rest of the Pisan circle. Byron and Shelley, in turn, were incorporated into Elizabeth Barrett-Browning’s own genealogy of exiled bards.⁶³ Byron in *Don Juan* has some distance from his earlier angst and can affectionately tease his hero for the self-seriousness of his literary references. Yet *Don Juan* itself, written abroad with an Italian rhyme scheme but still penned in the English language with a commentary on British society, is evidence of a persistent faith in the ability of literature to foster relationship across distance.

If Byron suggests that literature can provide an alternative source of connection for the exiled or merely dispersed, he also suggests that leaving home can be a means of finding other, potentially more meaningful, connections. One of the elements of the particular ‘artistry’ of exile that Stabler foregrounds is how her subjects’ time in Italy changed their English-language poetics. In Byron’s case, she writes:

Byron’s writing from Italy intimates that he has experienced the shock of another culture without reducing that other place to the terms of his own understanding.

⁶⁰ Poem quoted in full in Stabler, pp. 21-2.

⁶¹ Stabler, p. 24; for background on the sonnet see Stabler, pp. 21-2.

⁶² Stabler, p. 23.

⁶³ Stabler, p. 24.

Learning to speak and write in Italian is a significant step, and the subsequent translation of English into Italian forms puts this shift of cultural perspective into artistic practice.⁶⁴

The encounter with the Italian language, and Italian poetics, was particularly fruitful for Byron. In McGann's account, the Italian *ottava rima* style, first adapted by Byron over an extended span for *Beppo*, offered him an 'escape' from the Romantic mannerist style he had grown so weary of that he contemplated quitting poetry in 1817.⁶⁵ But Byron's use of *ottava rima* was not one man's translation from Italian into English. Instead, it was his response to a pre-existing binational literary community. The immediate inspiration for *Beppo* was John Hookham Frere's English 'Whistlecraft', an adaptation of the style of Italian Luigi Pulci. Between *Beppo* and *Don Juan*, Byron studied the Italian *ottava rima* genre in depth, but he also saw in it a kinship with the English satiric style of Alexander Pope, whom he rediscovered during the same period and wanted to defend from his fellow Romantics. The result, in *Don Juan*, was an 'adaptation of an Italian conversational form to an English conversational style' and a 'marriage of English and Italian verse manners'.⁶⁶ Bone observes that *ottava rima* 'always sounds exotic in English', but that Byron went beyond this to enhance the form's 'sense of unnaturalness'.⁶⁷ The poem, therefore, is an example of the potential of exile to create new literary and linguistic relationships.

The generative possibility of exilic encounters is something Byron acknowledges in the text of *Don Juan* itself. This is best represented by the eroticism of language learning for Juan and Haidée. After Juan washes up on her island, the trauma and separation of being sent from Spain and the shipwreck that followed end up making possible a new kind of communion:

And then she had recourse to nods, and signs,

⁶⁴ Stabler, p. 23.

⁶⁵ McGann, *Don Juan*, p. 51.

⁶⁶ McGann, *Don Juan*, pp. 55-6.

⁶⁷ Bone, *Cambridge Companion*, p. 156.

And smiles, and sparkles of the speaking eye,
And read (the only book she could) the lines
Of his fair face, and found, by sympathy,
The answer eloquent, where soul shines
And darts in one quick glance a long reply;
And thus in every look she saw exprest
A world of words, and things at which she guess'd.

And now, by dint of fingers and of eyes,
And words repeated after her, he took
A lesson in her tongue; but by surmise,
No doubt, less of her language than her look:
As he who studies fervently the skies
Turns oftener to the stars than to his book,
Thus Juan learn'd his alpha beta better
From Haidee's glance than any graven letter.

'T is pleasing to be school'd in a strange tongue
By female lips and eyes—that is, I mean,
When both the teacher and the taught are young,
As was the case, at least, where I have been;
They smile so when one 's right, and when one 's wrong
They smile still more, and then there intervene
Pressure of hands, perhaps even a chaste kiss;—
I learn'd the little that I know by this. (ll. 162-4)

The first stanza presents intimacy itself as a process of language learning, in which each participant represents a new language. Haidée's eyes speak, and Juan's looks contain 'a world of words'. The stanza's breathless syntax enhances the feeling of excitement and discovery. 'And' builds upon 'and' in a sentence that lasts the length of the stanza and reflects the giddy speed with which the two lovers are learning to read each other. This physical communication then gives way to a more literal language learning, as Haidée

instructs Juan in Greek. Here, Byron's narrator is once again lightly mocking, both of his hero and himself. He suggests that both men are more interested in a pretty face than in serious linguistic study. But, while the motivation of their studies may be suspect, those studies still deliver results. Juan learns his 'alpha beta better' from Haidée's glance, a pun that reveals Juan really is learning, since it is at once a corruption of the English 'alphabet' to fit the metre and the first two letters in the Greek alphabet. Byron's narrator, too, learned the 'little' that he knows bribed with kisses from young and pretty tutors. But the narrative voice of the poem has already revealed that 'little' to be quite a lot, since the speaker is able to rhyme and pun in multiple languages, as the 'alpha beta' joke attests. Language, after all, is a means of connection; why shouldn't it be charged with all the joy of young love?

But connection in *Don Juan* is always ambiguous, which is how the poem avoids the pitfall of suggesting that exile is 'good' for Juan, or anyone. While it can create the staging ground for new connections, it comes at the expense of old ones, and the new connections are just as likely to break. At least in the first four cantos, every moment of intimacy leads to a new displacement, which then propels the protagonist to new intimacies, which are similarly built on foundations primed to rupture. So Juan's initial liaison with Julia precipitates his departure from Spain, and his dalliance with Haidée is doomed by Lambro's inevitable return, which results in Haidée's death and Juan's enslavement. This pattern perhaps reflects the fact that Byron's own exile was the fallout of a failed marriage, but there is also a risk inherent in connection itself. Cheeke observes that Byron's poems of 1818-1821 (which include the first five cantos of *Don Juan*) are all concerned with 'the strange process of acculturation and translation', a process that he experienced directly through his own translation into the role of a *cavalier servente* to the Italian Countess Teresa Guiccioli.⁶⁸ Cheeke reads in Byron's adoption of an Italian courtship type at once an erotic charge and threat of self-transformation uncomfortably similar to the apostasy Byron criticised in Wordsworth and Southey: Bilingual intercourse can lead to the 'prelapsarian' idyl shared by Juan and Haidée, but it also carries the risk of potentially frightening internal change.⁶⁹ On a poetic level,

⁶⁸ Cheeke, p. 121 for the quote and pp. 116-8 for background on Byron's relationship with the Countess.

⁶⁹ Cheeke, p. 129.

Byron's connection to Italy did change his verse in ways some of his English readers found negative, as Stabler points out. In 1823, for example, *Blackwood's* wrote that he had 'positively lost his ear, not only for the harmony of English verse, but for the very jingle of English rhymes'.⁷⁰

The overall thrust both of *Don Juan's* narrative and the forces that facilitated its composition is that human connection can be the cause of exile and rupture just as much as its balm. This, in turn, is why international movement can be a threat both to those who travel and to those who stay put. The only reference to a bureaucratic border crossing in the continent-spanning narrative comes when the narrator mentions that Juan and his fellow captives are only brought to the slave market in Constantinople after being found 'safe and sound' from the plague (IV. 113). A border-check for disease also appears in *Beppo*, in which the titular character's wife can only watch her husband's ship from the attic while he waits out the forty-day quarantine period.⁷¹ The reference to quarantine in two works that deal with both romantic entanglements and international travel exemplifies the pitfalls and possibilities of human interaction and the ultimate risk of transformation through encounter. The necessity of the measure rests on the assumption that any new arrival could come to be on very intimate terms with any settled inhabitant, but also that such intimacy could be dangerous: it carries the risk of contagion, disease, and death, the ultimate exile.

If exile is a solitary destiny in *Childe Harold*, in *Don Juan* it is manifestly social. Displacement in the poem is a condition that is both experienced and regulated (at least by Ottoman officials) en masse. It at once reflects a failure of relationship and offers the possibility of forging new ones, but these may be equally doomed. Byron's depiction of displacement as a collective experience in *Don Juan* enables him to ask a very collective question: are we good or bad for each other? It is a question the unfinished poem never fully answers.

IV. Byron, Orientalism, and Twenty-First Century Displacements

⁷⁰ Qtd. in Stabler, p. 10.

⁷¹ Byron, 'Beppo', in *Complete Poetical Works*, pp. 624-35, XXV.

One crucial difference between Byron's depiction of forced displacement and contemporary depictions and assumptions about refugees is that, for Byron, vulnerability to displacement is not racialised. The text is, of course, full of Orientalist tropes, but the unequal distribution of suffering is not one of them, as Bolton's 'poetics of precarity' attests.⁷² This is especially evident in the relationship between Juan and Leila, who are set up as parallel survivors of collective tragedy: Juan from the shipwreck and Leila from the siege of Ismael. When the lifeboat Juan is marooned on finally approaches land, he and his fellow survivors are compared to 'Charon's bark of spectres, dull and pale' (II. 101). The metaphor is prophetic; five stanzas later Juan arrives on shore as the sole survivor.

The same haunted vocabulary is used to describe Leila's loss after the battle:

The Moslem orphan went with her protector,
For she was homeless, houseless, helpless; all
Her friends, like the sad family of Hector,
Had perish'd in the field or by the wall:
Her very place of birth was but a spectre
Of what it had been; there the Muezzin's call
To prayer was heard no more!—and Juan wept,
And made a vow to shield her, which he kept. (VIII. 141)

Both Juan and Leila are the only flesh and blood remains of 'spectres'. The repeated word suggests that Juan recalls his own experience in Leila's. That he first weeps at her plight, a mark of emotional vulnerability, and then vows to protect her, furthers the idea that his strength in her defence is born of acknowledging his own past weakness. Their bond recalls the solidarity based on vulnerability Smith posits in 'The Emigrants', as discussed in Chapter One.⁷³ The use of spectral imagery to present displacement as a space between life and death

⁷² For a discussion of specific Orientalist tropes and themes in *Don Juan*, see Emily A. Haddad, Professor Vincent Newey, and Joanne Shattock, *Orientalist Poetics: The Islamic Middle East in Nineteenth-Century English and French Poetry* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016), pp. 74-9.

⁷³ Leila is described in similar terms—'homeless, houseless, helpless'—as the 'hopeless, houseless, friendless' poor in 'The Emigrants' (I. 297).

also recalls Smith, as well as Wordsworth. However, as argued previously, the spectral quality of displaced figures in Smith and Wordsworth partly reflected an anxiety about 'substitutability', or the idea that the speaker could at any moment be in the vagrant's or the migrant's place. In *Don Juan*, too, anything can happen to anyone. If McGann is right that Byron wanted to emphasise the impotence of the individual imagination against external reality, this is partly its point. The wealthy Spanish nobleman and the poor Turkish orphan both find themselves 'homeless, houseless, hopeless' at different points in the narrative, and that is the source of their bond.

Some of today's anti-refugee sentiment, however, is based on the trust that bad things should happen to certain people over there, and not to certain other people over here. The simple act of asserting one's humanity by seeking a way out of war or poverty is seen as an assault on the natural order of things. Take, for example, a *BBC Breakfast* segment recorded the day after a record number of migrants crossed the English Channel on a single day.⁷⁴ In the video, reporter Simon Jones encounters a rubber dinghy filled with around seventeen migrants in orange life vests. He notes that the group includes a pregnant woman and some children. 'Now they tell us they are from Iraq and they want to reach the UK,' he says, 'and they're going to succeed in doing that'. Instead of presenting this as a victory for people in a precarious situation, however, he frames it as a problem for the UK. He mentions that the day before, a record number of people reached the UK by boat and says, 'that is causing a lot of concern'.

The sheer scale of twentieth—and now twenty-first—century displacement highlighted by Said is intersecting with a dynamic he observed in *Orientalism*. In that foundational text, he noted that Western colonial administrators in the Middle East saw themselves as coming from a 'nation of individuals' to oversee 'Orientals' who were 'almost everywhere nearly the same'.⁷⁵ During the colonial period, when Europeans were managing the peoples of the Middle East and Asia directly, the subject peoples were partly defined by their

⁷⁴ *UK immigration: At sea with migrants crossing the Channel*, online video recording, BBC News, 7 August 2020 <<https://www.bbc.com/news/av/uk-53693243>> [accessed 1 September 2020]

⁷⁵ Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), quotes from p. 44 and p. 38.

indistinguishability, along with supposedly immutable traits like immaturity, irrationality, and depravity.⁷⁶ In fact, those other stereotypes would not have been possible had the colonial subjects' group identity not been emphasised over their particular personhoods. They were a 'Platonic essence, which any Orientalist (or ruler of Orientals) might examine, understand, and expose'.⁷⁷ The emphasis on collective identity has been maintained now that the formerly colonised and administered are seeking safety in the countries that once sought to rule them. The Platonic essence to be governed is now seen as a threatening horde bringing their depravity to Europe. The connection between past and present Orientalism was made explicit in an electoral campaign by German far-right party Alternative for Germany, in which a nineteenth-century European painting of an imagined Middle Eastern slave market was displayed with the words 'So that Europe won't become Eurabia'.⁷⁸ However, this attitude is not limited to the far-right. All that mainstream *BBC* journalist Simon Jones has to know about the migrants is their country of origin (Iraq) and their increasing numbers to deem them a 'concern' for his nation of individuals, whose vague worries take priority over the migrants' obvious needs.

It is this dynamic, in which racial or regional prejudice intersects with structural oppression to make life more precarious for some people and not others, that is absent from Byron's depiction of displacement. Vulnerability for him is an existential condition, not a statistical one. However, Byron's emphasis on the unsettling nature of experience could be seen as an implicit critique of the hubris of an emerging imperialism that sought to settle the globe.

Byron as a writer has a complicated relationship with Orientalism and imperialism. Said includes him in a group of European writers who made the Orient 'visible' to other Europeans through their 'images, rhythms and motifs'.⁷⁹ As such, he is part of the Orientalising process by which the European view of the region replaced the real thing, to the benefit of its

⁷⁶ Said, *Orientalism*, p. 40.

⁷⁷ Said, *Orientalism*, p. 38.

⁷⁸ Kirsten Grieshaber, 'US museum condemns use of its art by German far-right party', *Associated Press*, 30 April 2009 <<https://apnews.com/e4a3dca3c7464ca3925e4fe67afda5a6>> [accessed 1 September 2020]

⁷⁹ Said, *Orientalism*, p. 22.

European translators. Nigel Leask highlights the imperialist tone of Byron's exhortation to Thomas Moore to 'stick to the East', comparing him to a 'Levantine or East India merchant who has tapped a lucrative source of raw materials in a newly opened up Orient'.⁸⁰ However, Leask notes that Byron 'regretted imperialism' and reads his *The Island* as an anti-colonial fantasy in which a non-aristocratic European man escapes other Europeans and their society with a Pacific Island woman.⁸¹ Saree Makdisi, whose work I have discussed previously, argues that Byron was an Orientalist, but not an Occidentalist.⁸² That is, his work sought to explore a 'cultural ambiguity' between West and East that would be meaningless without the surrounding Orientalist discourse that defined the two in opposition to each other.⁸³ However, his attraction to the East—or the space between West and East—as a place to play with identity and belonging meant that he opposed the parallel movement of Occidentalism, by which the West, and eventually the world, would be disciplined into normative, rational, disciplined selves against a 'degenerate other'.⁸⁴ 'If the whole world were to be transformed into a kind of global West', Makdisi writes of Byron, 'there would no longer be anywhere to escape to, and culturally ambiguous spaces would be threatened with eradication'.⁸⁵ Makdisi bases his argument on Byron's *Eastern Tales*, with their heroes who are united by their 'lack of belonging, their sense of dislocation, their feeling at home *nowhere*'.⁸⁶ While *Don Juan* focuses less on the internal life of its characters, the narrative itself shows home to be an impossibility and belonging a condition that can be revoked at any moment. It subjects all of its characters to the arbitrariness and violence that typify colonial rule, and, in so doing, perhaps subtly mocks the hubris of an imperial project that would like to subject the unpredictable world to its relentless imagination.

⁸⁰ Nigel Leask, *British Romantic Writers and The East: Anxieties of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 13.

⁸¹ Leask, p. 16 and pp.64-7.

⁸² Makdisi, pp. 151-6.

⁸³ Makdisi, p. 156.

⁸⁴ Makdisi, p. xiii.

⁸⁵ Makdisi, p. 160.

⁸⁶ Makdisi, p. 153.

Byron was also writing as the European imperial project was taking off, but before its winners and losers had solidified. In his writings and his life, he defended Greece against both British and Ottoman acquisitiveness and oppression, condemning Elgin's theft of the Parthenon Marbles and ultimately dying in the cause of Greek independence.⁸⁷ Said dates the particular dynamics between West and East he outlines in *Orientalism* to Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798 and notes that, between 1815 and 1914, Europe expanded its direct control of the globe from thirty-five to about eighty-five percent.⁸⁸ Byron, then, was writing in the earlier years of a process whose maturity contributed both to the contemporary refugee crisis and the discourse that surrounds it. He was writing in an era when it was still possible to consider the Mediterranean as a place where a wealthy European could be shipwrecked and then incarcerated. Now, these risks are run only by the Middle Eastern and African migrants who attempt to cross it. Nevertheless, the migrants' peril at Europe's southern border has brought the reality of war and dislocation back to the region. The next chapter will transition to the current moment to look at how contemporary poets respond to the history and present of the world's deadliest border.

⁸⁷ Byron, 'The Curse of Minerva' in *Complete Poetical Works*, pp. 142-5.

⁸⁸ Said, *Orientalism*, p. 42 and p. 40.

4. 'Heavy Waters': Borderscaping the Mediterranean through Allusion and Metre

I. Romantic Hellenisms

In *Byron and Place*, cited in the previous chapter, Stephen Cheeke also engages with Byron's relationship with ancient and (for him) contemporary Greece. Cheeke argues that Byron's 'philhellenism is a complex phenomenon' in which anti-imperialist sentiment mingles with an uneasy complicity.¹ Cheeke uses the example of Byron's 'The Curse of Minerva'.² On the one hand, the poem argues against the removal of the Elgin Marbles and, by extension, the British imperial policy of supporting the Ottoman Empire's control of Greece as a bulwark against Russia. On the other hand, Byron's claim to have written the poem from 'Athens: Capuchin Convent, March 17, 1811' implicates him as a citizen of an imperial power present at the site of oppression. Athens itself takes on an ambiguous role in this account: it represents Western civilisation, yet suffers as a peripheral victim of colonial theft.

More than 200 years later, another British poet used a pilgrimage to Athens to reflect on the city's strange relationship to the European project. In 2019's *Heavy Waters*, Ed Luker takes a break from considering austerity, fascism, and the plight of refugees in contemporary Greece to sightsee its storied past:

Passing through these zones, the outskirts of the city, I reach the tourist's target, the city centre: ancient Athena. A place that exists in my imagination as much through Keats's ruminations on pots and the fragments sequestered in the British Museum as it does through images of police being bombarded with molotovs in Syntagma Square. [...] All the tourist signs give credence to these ruins as the birthplace of thought. I am boringly peripatetic within the contours of a tourist economy... what I

¹ Cheeke, p. 26.

² For Cheeke's discussion of this poem, see pp.23-7. For the poem itself see Byron, 'The Curse of Minerva' in *Complete Poetical Works*, pp. 142-5.

mean is that I am hungry and I can't find anywhere to piss for free; ah yes, the origins of thinking.³

Like Byron's, Luker's Athens is an ambiguous location. It is both a site of struggle for greater liberty and justice and a place that has been appropriated for imperial mythmaking. Further, Luker, like Byron, portrays himself as both rebellious and complicit. The rest of his book reveals that he stands in sympathy and solidarity with the protestors of Syntagma Square, yet his imagination of the place has still been informed by his ability to access its spoils within perhaps the ultimate cultural monument to British imperialism.⁴ Luker doesn't mention Byron directly, instead referencing his famous contemporaries John Keats and, in the next paragraph, Percy Bysshe Shelley. This is likely because the verse sections of the book, which I will discuss later, are written in a lyric style that owes more to the latter two poets. However, his tone in the prose section is very reminiscent of Byron's later mock-heroic style. It is conversational, cynical yet humanising. Betsy Bolton observes that Byron tends to undermine moments of idealism, philosophy, or heroism in *Don Juan* with the primacy of bodily needs, and Luker does the same here.⁵ His desire for food and a bathroom while touring the 'birthplace of thought' recalls how Juan's shipboard lament for Julia devolves into seasickness. Like Byron's, Luker's text is also dense with references, which he handles with a mix of respect and irreverence.

Whether or not these tonal similarities are intentional, Luker is clear that his own ruminations on classical and contemporary Greece must be routed through the early nineteenth century. By directly referencing Keats and Shelley while touring the acropolis, he implies that it is impossible for him as a poet to encounter the classical past except through

³ Ed Luker, *Heavy Waters* (Sutton, Surrey: the87press, 2019), p. 44. The rest of the references to this text in this chapter will be given as in-text citations.

⁴ Syntagma Square is the central square in Athens. In May of 2011, anti-austerity activists staged an occupation there that came to symbolise the broader anti-austerity and anti-police-brutality movement in Greece. See Alice Mattoni, 'Making the Syntagma Square protests visible: Cultures of participation and activists' communication in Greek anti-austerity protests', *Information, Communication and Society*, 23.12 (2020), 1755-69 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2019.1631376>>

⁵ Bolton, pp. 29-32.

the words of those poets who have grappled with it before him, particularly the second-generation of Romantic poets most closely associated with Romantic Hellenism. In a way, he is acknowledging that the ancient past has been sequestered from its original context and reframed for his consumption just as the poets Keats wrote about.

Indeed, both Byron's and Luker's use of ancient Greece is only possible because of how the idea of European identity shifted during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The modern concept of Europe did not even exist until the former, when it replaced a collective understanding of the region primarily based on its identity as Christian.⁶ During the early nineteenth-century, however, a shared sense of European identity emerged in opposition to an otherised Orient that added an emphasis on classical Greek and Roman heritage to the shared religious affiliation. It is this Romantic-era understanding of classical civilisation that enables poets both then and now to use that history as a gloss on contemporary events. And use it they do. In addition to Luker, a variety of poets have turned to classical allusions to make sense of the Mediterranean's status as the world's deadliest border.⁷ This chapter will consider these allusions and the debt they owe to Romantic Hellenism. The rest of this first section will examine the political and literary context that influenced both Romantic and contemporary responses to the former classical world, and what is at stake when these allusions are made. The chapter will then look specifically at how contemporary poets Ruth Padel, Carolyn Forché, A. E. Stallings and Luker marshal these allusions in the context of Mediterranean migration and to what effect. At its worst, I argue that this reliance on classical references risks repeating the problematic aspects of Romantic Hellenism, in which the current actors in the Mediterranean are interpreted and given pathos through a Western European view of the region's past. However, it also shares Romantic Hellenism's transformative potential—by holding up the region's past, the poets reveal that the present borders are not inevitable. They have been 'scaped' and can be 'scaped' again. Intermingling in the poems with allusions to the region's human history is the figure of the sea itself, a

⁶ *The Borders of Europe: Hegemony, Aesthetics and Border Poetics*, ed. by Helge Vidar Holm, Sissel Lægried, and Torgeir Skorgen (Aarhus, Denmark: Aarhus University Press, 2012), pp. 12-18.

⁷ Phillipe Fargues, *Four Decades of Cross-Mediterranean Undocumented Migration to Europe: A Review of the Evidence* (Geneva: International Organization for Migration, 2017), p. 13.

force at once creative and destructive, connecting and severing. The chapter concludes by considering how particularly Luker and Zeina Hashem Beck connect the movement of the water to the act of writing poetry itself, calling into question the latter's role in the making or unmaking of borders.

As the examples from Byron and Luker make clear, both Romantic-era and contemporary Greece had and have a complicated status as both the centre of European civilisation and the periphery of its political organisation. In the Romantic period, Greece was part of the Ottoman Empire until the War of Independence concluded in 1830, and therefore on the other side of the Western/Eastern political divide. It was also less known to British travellers. The typical Grand Tour only went as far as Italy, and those who did travel on to Greece were exposed to Turkish customs.⁸

In the contemporary context, Greece is politically part of the European Union but perceived as an entry-point for non-European bodies. Refugees and migrants have been crossing the Mediterranean from south to north into Europe since the 1970s, when European countries began to make labour migration more complicated by requiring visas that could be difficult to obtain.⁹ Between 1998 and 2017, at least 2,367,821 people made the journey.¹⁰ Up until 2014, most of them travelled to Italy from Libya, Egypt, and Turkey or to Spain from Morocco or West Africa by way of the Canary Islands. But, beginning in 2014, the numbers started to spike and the route began to shift. Because Syrians fleeing the Civil War in that country could not get to North Africa, they travelled from Turkey to the Greek islands.¹¹ They were also joined by large numbers of war refugees from Iraq and Afghanistan. Of the 1,582,759 people who crossed the Mediterranean into Europe between 2014 and 2016, 66

⁸ See Jennifer Wallace, *Shelley and Greece: Rethinking Romantic Hellenism* (London: Macmillan Press, 1997), pp. 119-47.

⁹ Fargues, p. 8.

¹⁰ Fargues, p. 9.

¹¹ Kingsley, 'Prologue', *The New Odyssey*.

percent of them landed in Greece.¹² ‘Tiny islands that had previously been sleepy holiday hideaways on the fringes of the Aegean Sea were turned overnight into the ground zero of the Middle Eastern refugee crisis’, Patrick Kingsley wrote in his 2016 account of the crossings.¹³

At the same time, Greece was also on the outer end of European prosperity, reeling from its own financial crisis and subsequent austerity imposed by the European Central Bank, with the highest unemployment rate in the EU.¹⁴ Luker’s text reflects this tension. On the one hand, he compares Greece to the UK as ‘another edge of Europe’, but Greece is more than geographically set apart: compared to Britain it is a ‘peripheral economy’ (39). Still, he acknowledges its central cultural role with his reference to the tourist signs declaring the Athenian ruins the ‘birthplace of thought’. His text emphasises the contradictory image of Greece as both a mythic homeland and a literal borderland.

In the contemporary context, Greece was further marginalised within the EU because of the way other countries in the bloc chose to respond to the refugee crisis, which Kingsley pointed out was only really a crisis from the European perspective because of an ineffective

¹² Fargues, p. 11-12.

¹³ Kingsley, ‘Prologue’, *The New Odyssey*. The number of refugees entering Europe via Greece plummeted in March 2016 after the EU and Turkey struck a deal in which Turkey agreed to stop migrants from embarking for Greece, see Fargues, p. 12. However, the numbers of people arriving in Greece began to increase again in 2019: 10,551 arrived in September of that year alone, the most in a single month since the deal. See Helena Smith, ‘Greece says it’s “reached limit” as arrivals of refugees show no sign of slowing’, *Guardian*, 16 December 2019 <<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/dec/16/greece-says-its-reached-limit-as-arrivals-of-refugees-show-no-sign-of-slowing>> [accessed 28 January 2020]. In 2020, the number of new arrivals by both land and sea fell 79 percent compared to the previous year. See ‘2020 Year End Report’, *UNHCR Global Focus: Greece* <<https://reporting.unhcr.org/node/14851?y=2020#year>> [accessed 27 September 2021]. Arrivals fell a further 53 percent compared to 2020 during the first eight months of 2021. See ‘Greece: Illegal Pushbacks Continue as Arrivals Drop Under “Strict but Fair” Immigration Policy – New “Closed Controlled” Camps Faces Massive Criticism’, *European Council for Refugees and Exiles*, 24 September 2021 <<https://ecre.org/greece-illegal-pushbacks-continue-as-arrivals-drop-under-strict-but-fair-immigration-policy-new-closed-controlled-camps-faces-massive-criticism/>> [accessed 27 September 2021]

¹⁴ Daniel Marans, ‘Greece’s Economy is Getting Crushed Between Austerity and the Refugee Crisis’, *HuffPost*, 3 February 2016, updated 25 July 2017 <https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/greece-refugee-crisis-economy_n_56b12f1de4b04f9b57d7b7d4?ri18n=true> [accessed 28 January 2020]

response.¹⁵ (For the refugees themselves, of course, the crisis was what they fled, compounded by the dangers of the journey.) The number of people who arrived was large, but not so large that they couldn't have been reasonably resettled among the EU's nearly 500 million people. But EU governments only agreed to take in 120,000, or one-ninth, of the people who arrived in Greece and Italy in 2015.¹⁶ Lebanon, at the same time, accepted 1.2 million refugees into a population of 4.5 million.¹⁷ It was a crisis, therefore, created by the expectation of stability. Philosopher Thomas Nail argues that the current account of the migrant crisis relies on three false premises: that human societies always have been separate and stable, that they should continue to be so in the future, and that the lack of stability is problematic. 'Mobility, then,' argues Nail, 'is a crisis only if we assume that there was or should be stasis in the first place.'¹⁸ However, the European expectation of stability is not universal. What was breached was not merely a border, but a boundary between the countries expected to deal with the consequences of war and the countries that felt entitled to be exempt from them. The EU created a crisis for its Mediterranean members and the refugees and migrants stuck waiting in those countries because it refused to accept that the bloc as a whole should be subject to mobility.

Of all the EU member states, the UK was perhaps the most insulated from the influx of newcomers. Anyone travelling overland through the EU would have to cross yet another body of water to reach it, and its government opted out of the deal to share 120,000 refugees between non-Mediterranean countries, instead promising to take 20,000 people over five years.¹⁹ Despite this, the country's right-wing press covered the crisis with a 'unique' animus against refugees and migrants compared to five other European countries,

¹⁵ Kingsley, 'Prologue', *The New Odyssey*.

¹⁶ Kingsley, 'Prologue', *The New Odyssey*.

¹⁷ Kingsley, 'prologue', *The New Odyssey*.

¹⁸ Thomas Nail, 'Forum 1: Migrant Climate in the Kinocene', *Mobilities*, 14.3 (2019), 375-80 <DOI: 10.1080/17450101.2019.1609200> (p. 377)

¹⁹ Ian Tramer and Patrick Kingsley, 'EU governments push through divisive deal to share 120,000 refugees', *Guardian*, 22 September 2015 <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/22/eu-governments-divisive-quotas-deal-share-120000-refugees>> [accessed 20 January 2020]

including Italy, which dealt with it more directly.²⁰ One example of this animus is the UKIP poster cited in the Introduction, which used a photograph of refugees entering the EU as an argument for leaving the bloc.²¹ According to the logic of the poster, the EU had ostensibly failed because it had allowed itself to be broken open to the masses of suffering humanity it was supposed to exclude. It could no longer guarantee a stability predicated on stasis, and so now the UK must break itself away to maintain its safety from the needs of others.

In this context, those who were sympathetic to refugees and migrants were under pressure to counteract this messaging by making them seem less foreign and less threatening. That the Mediterranean, and especially the Greek Mediterranean, was the refugees' means of entry facilitated that messaging. The geography of the crisis enabled Kingsley to title his book *The New Odyssey*. In its prologue, he argued that the contemporary refugee journey was 'almost as epic as that of classical heroes such as Aeneas and Odysseus'.²² Both the classical characters and the contemporary refugees fled conflict in the Middle East by sailing across the Aegean, Kingsley argued. He then made it very clear what was at stake by making this comparison: 'Three millennia after their classical forebears created the founding myths of the European continent, today's voyagers are writing a new narrative that will influence Europe, for better or worse, for years to come.'²³ Kingsley wrote that the voyagers were 'writing a new narrative', but in fact what he was doing was writing them into an old one, making them at once familiar and heroic instead of foreign and threatening.

Kingsley's treatment is in some ways not so different from how poets like Byron and Shelley responded to Greece's past and present. Like Kingsley, Byron and Shelley used Greece's status as a source of 'founding myths' to convince both British and European leaders to act

²⁰ Mike Berry, Inaki Garcia-Blanco, and Kerry Moore, 'Press Coverage of the Refugee and Migrant Crisis in the EU: A Content Analysis of Five European Countries', *UNHCR*, December 2015 <<https://www.unhcr.org/56bb369c9.html>> [accessed 15 March 2019] (p. 4)

²¹ Stewart and Mason, 'Nigel Farage's anti-migrant poster'.

²² Kingsley, 'Prologue', *The New Odyssey*.

²³ Kingsley, 'Prologue', *The New Odyssey*.

differently towards the country. In 'The Curse of Minerva', Byron has Athena herself condemn Britain over Lord Elgin's theft. In the poem, the angry goddess implies that, by stealing its material legacy, the country has lost a right to claim a spiritual kinship with democratic ancient Greece. While Britain was once 'First of the mighty, foremost of the free' it is 'Now honoured "less" by all, and "least" by me'.²⁴ In the preface to *Hellas*, meanwhile, Shelley argues that the lack of interest other European rulers showed in the Greek struggle for independence is particularly 'inexplicable' because 'We are all Greeks. Our laws, our literature, our religion, our arts, have their root in Greece'.²⁵

Yet while Romantic poets like Byron and Shelley used Greece's link with Western civilisation as such to make a point, they were also writing in a time when the cultural meaning of classical Greece was in dispute. In *Shelley and Greece*, Jennifer Wallace argues that, for Romantic-era thinkers, the radical potential of classical Greece hinged on whether it was seen as different from, and therefore an alternative to, contemporary society or whether it was seen as the 'bedrock of the British establishment'.²⁶ 'If Greece was represented as a confirmation of Western values, its radical potential, derived specifically from its difference, could be diluted', Wallace writes.²⁷

Shelley in particular hoped to make use of classical texts to challenge authority, not to reinforce it.²⁸ Much of his challenge was related to matters of education. In general, both radical and conservative thinkers saw the rote learning of Greek texts as a means of reinforcing class hierarchies and maintaining the status quo, and argued for or against it according to their political persuasions.²⁹ Some liberal thinkers, however, thought that

²⁴ Byron, 'The Curse of Minerva', in *Poetical Works*, II. 91-2.

²⁵ Shelley, 'Preface to *Hellas*', in *Shelley: Selected Poetry, Prose and Letters*, ed. by A. S. B. Glover (London: Nonesuch Press, 1951), pp. 564-7 (p. 565).

²⁶ Wallace, p. 20.

²⁷ Wallace, p. 31.

²⁸ Wallace, pp. 4-5, and Timothy Webb, 'Introduction', *English Romantic Hellenism: 1700-1824* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 25-7.

²⁹ Wallace, pp. 19-52.

studying the works of a more democratic, less religiously rigid culture could enlarge students' minds by 'reveal[ing] how society could operate differently'.³⁰ Shelley expressed the hope it could have the latter effect, arguing that 'the study of modern history is the study of kings, financiers, statesmen, and priests. The history of ancient Greece is the study of legislators, philosophers, and poets. It is the history of men, compared with the history of titles'.³¹ In the context of the debate surrounding classical education, Keats, whose Greece was more sensual and less political than Shelley's, could also be considered transgressive because he dared to write about it without having studied the language.³²

A similar divide in the cultural meaning of a classical education can be seen in comparing Kinsley's allusions to those of another key figure in British politics during the refugee crisis: current Prime Minister Boris Johnson. Classical knowledge can still be a class marker in Britain, just as it was for the Romantics, and Johnson throughout his career has leveraged his ability to recite Homer in Greek and drop classical references in conversation as a sign of intelligence.³³ Johnson, a prominent supporter of Brexit, worked to distance the official Vote Leave campaign from the overt xenophobia of the UKIP propaganda poster described earlier and claimed to support immigrants.³⁴ However, he has come under fire for actions such as dropping a promise to replace an EU law allowing child refugees to join family members already in the UK after Brexit.³⁵ Johnson's about-face on child refugees came three years

³⁰ Wallace, p. 31.

³¹ Shelley, 'A Discourse on the Manners of the Ancients, Relative to the Subject of Love', in *Selected Poetry*, pp. 1016-23 (p. 1020).

³² For Keats' relative lack of education and aesthetic Hellenism see Wallace, pp. 3-4. For the fact that he was criticised for this, see Webb, p. 27. Carl Woodring also argues that Keats's (and Leigh Hunt's) Hellenism 'belongs in part to a middle class revolt against aristocratic hegemony in Roman morals and law', see Carl Woodring, *Nature into Art: Cultural Transformations in Nineteenth Century Britain* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 54.

³³ Charlotte Higgins, 'Boris Johnson's love of classics is about just one thing: himself', *Guardian*, 6 October 2019 <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/oct/06/boris-johnson-classics-prime-minister-latin-greek>> [accessed 21 January 2020]

³⁴ Stewart and Mason, 'Nigel Farage's anti-migrant poster'.

³⁵ Harriet Grant, 'Brexit: Johnson condemned for dropping pledge to replace family reunion law', *Guardian*, 22 December 2019 <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/dec/22/brexit-johnson-condemned-for-dropping-pledge-to-replace-family-reunion-law>> [accessed 21 January 2020]

after Kingsley published his account of the migrant crisis, and it is doubtful that Kingsley had Johnson in mind specifically when he made his allusion. However, the journalist and the politician exemplify a contemporary split about the use of the classics in relationship to world affairs that mirrors the split also present in the Romantic era. The question remains whether the classics are texts to be seriously engaged with in a way that might alter the student's perception of the world, or whether they are a sort of party trick to be brandished as proof of membership in an elite club.

Still, Kingsley's use of a title like *The New Odyssey* does emphasise a continuity between the present and the classical past, rather than potentially subversive differences. For example, while the ancient Greeks did originate the word Europe, they used it to refer to places that today would include both North Africa and Central Europe. Mythologically, it is also the name of a Phoenician princess.³⁶ By saying Homer and Virgil wrote the 'founding myths of the European continent' to influence the current membership of the European Union, he is putting a post-Romantic gloss on the geographic affiliation of the texts. Considering them instead as texts belonging to the entire ancient Mediterranean world might work to undermine the European exception from mobility that enables the current crisis.

The tendency to read the contemporary Mediterranean through a Westernised ideal of its classical past was also deeply problematic during the Romantic period, and looking closely at that period can help us understand the potential consequences of this filter. Wallace notes that, after Greece won its independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1830, the governing treaty of 1832 was written by representatives from Britain, France, Russia, and Bavaria without any Greek participation, and the new legal system was developed along Western lines. The capital was established in Athens, despite the fact that Nauplio had been the capital during the first three years of independence or the fact that Janina was the largest city, and ancient 'katharevousa' Greek was promoted over the demotic.³⁷ Overall,

³⁶ *The Borders of Europe*, pp. 12-13.

³⁷ Wallace, pp. 205-6.

the new nation's classical heritage was prioritised over its more recent Byzantine culture, which was the larger configuration that most Greeks identified with before the war.³⁸ Wallace argues that this legacy has influenced the idea of Greece up to the present day:

Since the creation of Greece is the peculiar product of Romantic Hellenism, the country has frozen in time the particular expectations and images of the early nineteenth century. The invented nation illustrates, in its constitution and self-perception, the aspiration of the West to re-imagine the past in its own image and to forge links abroad in order to gain a sense of identity.³⁹

The attempts by contemporary poets to use the classical past in order to create sympathy for current traversers of the Mediterranean risks similarly forcing the region's new entrants into its Romantic myth, instead of considering their own needs on their own terms.

II. A Place in the Sun?

Perhaps the clearest example of this type of forcing occurs in *The Mara Crossing*, Ruth Padel's 2012 poetry/prose meditation on all forms of migration, which predates the 2015 crisis. In the collection, Padel both reads the classics through the lens of contemporary immigration debates and reads those same debates through the classics. Her section on migration in history includes a translation of Book Four of Virgil's *Aeneid* in which Aeneas tells Dido why he must leave in very contemporary language: 'You're Asian in a Libyan city: what's wrong with us Trojans | finding a place in the sun—in Europe? Don't we have a right | to kingdom?'⁴⁰ In the original Latin, Virgil uses the word Ausonia, meaning specifically

³⁸ Wallace, pp. 188-9.

³⁹ Wallace, p. 207.

⁴⁰ Ruth Padel, 'The Mission', in *The Mara Crossing* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2012), pp. 136-8 (p. 137).

Lower Italy.⁴¹ By translating that word into the post-eighteenth-century concept of Europe, Padel makes clear that she is interpreting the material with a view to a post-Romantic image of the region, not a purely classical one. Changing Aeneas' destination from a specific region to all of Europe as currently understood transforms a historical intra-Mediterranean migration into a contemporary intercontinental one. It also translates the text into an anachronistic hierarchy. Europe is set apart with the em-dash as 'a place in the sun' to which Aeneas defensively insists he and his people have a 'right'. Padel therefore unsettles a story of settling, recasting Aeneas not as a founding hero, but as an impoverished outsider, seeking, like countless other migrants, a more prosperous European home—a place in the sun.

A Place in the Sun is also the name of a British TV programme about house-hunting, often in southern Europe. If Padel intended this allusion, it would undermine my reading of Aeneas as a European outsider and imply that his move from Troy to Rome is closer to a pre-Brexit move between London and Spain. This would be more accurate to the interconnected Mediterranean of the classical world, but the anachronistic distinction that Padel draws between Asia and Europe supports my first reading. That original reading is further supported by the fact that Padel makes the same comparison in reverse later in the collection, in the section of her book titled 'Children of Storm', which deals with the most fraught contemporary migration routes and border crossings, including the border between the US and Mexico, Australia's Christmas Island, the English Channel, and, of course, the Mediterranean.⁴² 'Like Aeneas sailing from North Africa to Sicily and then Italy, migrants leave Libya in these tiny frail boats (making them is an industry now) and go north', she writes in her prose introduction to the 'Children of Storm' poems (209). The mirror references work to mutually transform their objects: the individual hero from the past is reinterpreted as just another of many Middle Eastern migrants seeking a better life in

⁴¹ Virgil, *Aeneid*, ed. by J.W. Mackail (Oxford: Clarendon, 1930), IV. 349. For the meaning, see 'Ausonian', in *The Oxford English Dictionary* [online] <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/13243?redirectedFrom=ausonian#eid>> [accessed 22 January 2020]

⁴² See Padel 'Children of Storm', in *Mara*, pp. 206-35. The rest of the references to this section will be given as page numbers in in-text citations.

Europe, while the migrants' anonymous journeys are marked with the heroic. The founding father becomes an outsider, while the outsiders are revealed to be returning home.

The stakes of this gesture are made clear in a poem later in the section called 'Orestiada', in which Padel considers two recent waves of migration to Greece (220-221). The poem's speaker first recalls the 'novelty' of markets run by Albanian immigrants in Greece 'twenty years ago' and then returns to the present, when 'In Athens today, you see *No Mosques* | and *This is Greece* sprayed over the square | as Albanian vigilantes chase the Afghans out'.

The line turns on the absurdity of anti-immigrant sentiment. Foreigners who were novel and then absorbed now feel settled enough to chase out newcomers. The poem then moves immediately to link present and ancient history: 'People traffickers from Troy | throw their customers in the Hebros'. The mention of Troy instead of a place in contemporary Turkey recalls the references to Aeneas and suggests that the classical epics and recent migration waves are all part of the same wearying cycle of flight, arrival, and rejection. The last lines describe how people keep coming, despite the risk, 'to hide behind a furniture factory | in the suburbs of Orestiada, the city named | for the boy who knifed his mother and went mad'. The last line at first appears to add to this sense of fatality by referencing a character from the ancient past whose life was similarly marked by a cycle of violence. In the context of the poem, the now-settled Albanians are implicitly compared to the mythological Orestes and accused of knifing their mothers by denying their own origins as migrants when they chase the new arrivals away. Yet the warning extends past the Albanians used as an example in the poem to include anyone who would reject new migrants.

This was made especially transparent when the poem, along with other parts of 'Children of Storm', was excerpted in the 2016 collection *A Country of Refuge*, which was explicitly put together to counter negative media portrayals of asylum seekers in the UK.⁴³ Included in the

⁴³ See Padel, 'Excerpts from Children of Storm', in *Country of Refuge*, pp. 45-52.

excerpt was another passage from the prose introduction to 'Children of Storm', which told the story of the 'first reliably dated event in the history of Athens, a hundred or so years before democracy began'. The event was the betrayal of asylum in 623 B.C., when participants in a failed coup sought asylum in the Temple of Athena. They were persuaded to come out to stand trial but tied a rope connecting themselves to the statue of Athena to keep themselves connected to the physical manifestation of the asylum protection. The rope broke, however, and they were murdered. But afterwards the ruling group who had murdered them were considered cursed. 'This curse was still significant two hundred years later in the democracy, and could be used politically against their descendants', Padel concludes. 'Asylum was a political issue before democracy began and has remained so ever since.'⁴⁴

The choice to place both this excerpt and the 'Orestia' poem in the activist anthology sends a message to readers who would pride themselves on a shared European cultural heritage linked back to classical epics and Athenian democracy. It does so by highlighting the mobility inherent in the legends and portraying the rejection of the vulnerable as a sort of original sin that predates democracy, but which democracy has not yet resolved. But the selection also offers an implicit hope. The poem's closing reference to Orestes leaves out that, at least in Aeschylus, he eventually escaped madness and the cycle of revenge. But a reader who understands the reference will likely be able to fill this in and conclude that they also have the power to break the cycle Padel describes. They can recognise new refugees as just the latest iteration of a recurring pattern, and therefore transcend that pattern by honouring asylum and welcoming them instead of shunning them. They can look to their 'mother', their shared cultural heritage, and choose to learn from her rather than knife her.

Padel is not the only contemporary Anglophone poet to use classical allusions to urge sympathy for the migrants crossing the Mediterranean border. The US-born poet and classicist A. E. Stallings, who has written poetry about her experience volunteering with

⁴⁴ Padel, 'Excerpts', in *Country of Refuge*.

refugees in Greece, titled a small online collection of her poems ‘Aegean Epigrams’ and opened it with a quotation from Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*: ‘We behold the Aegean blossoming with bodies’.⁴⁵ US poet Carolyn Forché, who has spent her career writing a ‘poetry of witness’ following her experiences visiting El Salvador during its civil war in the late 1970s, has also confronted the Mediterranean refugee crisis in verse.⁴⁶ In the 2016 poem ‘Mourning’, she quotes Anacreon, whom she identifies as a ‘refugee of war, who appears | in the writings of Herodotus’.⁴⁷ I will discuss later what separates Stallings and Forché’s projects from Padel’s, but all three do rely on a shared understanding of the meaning of the classical past that poses certain risks.

The danger of welcoming Middle Eastern or African migrants by way of ‘the founding myths of the European continent’ is that it is a Eurocentric greeting. Borders have been interpreted as spaces where it is possible to encounter the other. Drawing on the work of Svend Erik Larsen, Hein Viljoen writes that every boundary has a ‘Janus face: it is both a boundary *between* and a boundary *to*. As such, it confronts any living creature with an interpretation: it must decide whether to regard it as a barrier or as a gate’.⁴⁸ That is, it offers the chance either to reject or to relate. But in their effort to reject rejection, the classical allusions also reject relationship. That is, they risk a sort of narcissism in which the British or US poet looks into the sea and sees their own cultural references reflected back at them, rather than asking what the sea and the crossing might mean to those who experience it. Instead of crossing the gateway, these gestures simply redraw the barrier so that the strangers were always already included.

⁴⁵ A. E. Stallings, ‘Aegean Epigrams’, *The Asses of Parnassus*, 4 February 2016
<http://assesofparnassus.tumblr.com/post/138669345717/aegean-epigrams> [accessed 19 March 2019].
Agamemnon is, of course, the first entry in Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*.

⁴⁶ Lily Meyer, ‘How to Write Poetry About Conflict’, *The Atlantic*, 25 March 2019
<https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2019/03/carolyn-forches-memoir-writing-poetry-about-conflict/585229/> [accessed 24 January 24]

⁴⁷ Carolyn Forché, ‘Mourning’, *Poetry Foundation*, October 2016
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/90645/mourning-57d18c2f7cfb2> [accessed 10 April 2019]

⁴⁸ Hein Viljoen, ‘Introduction’ in *Crossing Borders, Dissolving Boundaries*, ed. by Hein Viljoen (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013) pp. xi–xlvii (p. xv).

The similarity of contemporary migrants to Aeneas or Anacreon can only be an argument for welcoming them into Fortress Europe if those figures are interpreted as part of European culture, not as people of their own time and context traversing a very different Mediterranean. But the comparison also relies on the assumption that the European project is one worth welcoming into, rather than dismantling all together. And maintaining Europe implies a non-Europe that will still remain outside. Making the suffering of migrants familiar in order to create sympathy suggests that sympathy could be denied if that suffering could not be domesticated.

III. Palming Charon's Obol

However, as Romantic poets like Shelley championed the classical past as a challenge to British society, it is also possible today to reference the past in a way that does not reify present hierarchies. Used judiciously, these allusions can do another kind of work. That work can be explained through the emerging interdisciplinary field of border aesthetics, which concerns itself both with how borders are perceived in the physical environment and how they are represented in art and literature, with a view to 'questioning the practices that turn some realities into fictions and some fictions into prescriptions'.⁴⁹ One particularly fruitful concept that has emerged from this field of study is the concept of the 'borderscape', the etymology and evolution of which was traced by anthropologist and geographer Chiara Brambilla in a 2014 essay.⁵⁰ In the essay, Brambilla links the neologism's usefulness to the fact that it is freed from the longer 'border landscape', which is limited by the 'ambivalence' of what landscape has come to mean in English and other European

⁴⁹ Mireille Rosello and Stephen F. Wolfe, 'Introduction' in *Border Aesthetics: Concepts and Intersections*, ed. by Johan Schimanski and Stephen F. Wolfe (New York: Berghahn, 2017), pp. 1-24 (p. 6).

⁵⁰ Chiara Brambilla, 'Exploring the Critical Potential of the Borderscapes Concept', *Geopolitics*, 20.1 (2015), 14-34 <DOI: [10.1080/14650045.2014.884561](https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2014.884561)>. Brambilla explains that she first encountered the term in a 2007 collection edited by Prem Kumar Rajaram and Carl Grundy-Warr, who developed the concept as articulated by contributor Suvendrini Perera who used it to describe the borders of Australia. It was also used in 2006 by border studies scholar Elena Dell'Agnese. It draws on anthropologist Arjun Appadurai's use of the 'scape' suffix to express the 'fluid and uneven form' of cultural flows under globalisation (p. 22).

languages.⁵¹ Through its association with landscape painting, the term has come to stand for both an aesthetic representation of a place viewed from a certain distance and the place itself. We have already seen through Barrell's reading of Clare how a distanced landscape view may not be an accurate rendering of a place itself. But pulling out the 'scape' suffix retains the association with landscape while emphasising its third meaning: the act of shaping or re-shaping land for community use. So the borderscape, for Brambilla, is both a 'visible place' and a 'complex web of conditions of possibility that are not immediately visible'.⁵² 'Thus,' she writes 'borderscapes are constructed spaces that, far from being fixed in space and time, are constantly evolving.'⁵³

For Brambilla, one advantage of the borderscapes concept is that it enables one to see borders as places that have been shaped and reshaped historically. Considering the third meaning of 'landscape' in connection with Clare's enclosure poems is useful here. By remembering and lamenting the open field system, he offers a counter-scaping that demonstrates how the new borders of hedges and no trespassing signs were not inevitable but violently imposed. In the context of the contemporary Mediterranean, references to the past enable the poet to call attention to the ways in which the sea as both a barrier and a gate has been 'scaped' and 're-scaped', and therefore to suggest that its current status as the world's deadliest border is also not fixed. Brambilla's argument about the fluidity of borderscapes echoes Wallace's point about the use of ancient Greece during the Romantic era: if its similarity with contemporary Britain was emphasised, then it was mobilised for conservative ends, whereas if its difference was brought out, then it offered the promise of an alternative way of doing things and had the potential to transform the present. So too, emphasising the similarities between contemporary migrants and classical heroes risks enshrining the exclusionary idea of Europe that gives the comparison its force. However, emphasising the discontinuities between past and present can open up the possibility of a different future.

⁵¹ Brambilla, p. 22.

⁵² Brambilla, p. 23.

⁵³ Brambilla, p. 23.

Forché hovers between foregrounding differences and similarities in 'Mourning'. The poem is interesting to consider as an act of borderscaping, because from the first lines it calls attention to how it is constructing a landscape:

A peacock on an olive branch looks beyond
the grove to the road, beyond the road to the sea,
blank-lit, where a sailboat anchors to a cove.⁵⁴

Starting with the raised gaze of the peacock, the poem at first presents the sea through a traditional landscape view as Brambilla describes it: 'a visual representation that could only be seen from afar, from the outside, when placed at the right distance by the perspective construction'.⁵⁵ But the speaker immediately troubles this perspective by describing things both spatially and temporally that an imagined landscape painter would not be able to see: a man pouring water below the deck of his boat and 'pleasure boats whose lights | hours ago went out'. These details that a viewer could not be aware of emphasise the artificiality of the idyllic morning scene being described. And allusions to the past are presented as part of this artificiality:

for the breath of an hour it is possible
to consider the waters of this sea *wine-dark*, to remember
that there was no word for blue among the ancients.

⁵⁴ Forché, 'Mourning'.

⁵⁵ Brambilla, p. 23.

The present's connection to the ancient world is both constructed and unstable. It is an illusion the speaker can believe in only if she does not allow all of her present knowledge to inform the landscape she is shaping for herself and the reader. 'But there is nothing to hold us there', she admits:

not the quiet of marble nor the luff of sail, fields of thyme,
a vineyard at harvest, and the sea filled with the bones of those
in flight from wars east and south, our wars, their remains.

The introduction of those who have died trying to cross the Mediterranean into Europe is jarring for two reasons. Thematically, it does not fit with the pastoral imagery. But it also involves a trip beneath the waves—introducing yet another element into the landscape that the landscape viewer should not be able to see. Yet while previously the speaker's peeks beyond the possibilities of the landscape view had nevertheless reinforced the illusion of a peaceful 'morning'—a word used twice in the poem's first ten lines—the inclusion of the bones beneath the sea re-scapes the picture into one of 'mourning', as the title suggests. The present reality is one that breaks with the past, and its inclusion is the detail that reveals exactly how constructed the poem's imagery has been so far.

But after the speaker brings the reality of the refugee crisis into the poem's frame, she immediately takes even more direct control of the reader's gaze:

Stand here and look
into the distant haze, there where the holy mountain
with its thousand monks wraps itself in shawls of rain,
then look to the west, where the rubber boats tipped

into the tough waves. Rest your eyes there, remembering the words

of Anacreon, himself a refugee of war, who appears

in the writings of Herodotus:

I love and do not love, I am mad and I am not mad.

Like you he thought himself not better,

nor worse than anyone else.

Before, the speaker has directed the reader's gaze by default, by describing a landscape scene that she then re-scapes with details she should not be able to see. Now, for the first time, the speaker issues a series of direct visual commands, twice to look and once to 'rest your eyes'. It is in this section that the speaker associates past and present war refugees through the figure of Anacreon. However, the connection is ironised with the final lines: 'Like you he thought himself not better, | nor worse than anyone else.' These lines state with certainty what the speaker has no way of knowing: that the reader believes themselves of equal value to everyone else. And in fact the text of the poem further undermines that certainty. The choice of pronouns suggests that the 'you' being addressed is included in 'our' wars, not 'their' remains, indicating that the imagined reader is a relatively comfortable European or American in whose name conflicts in the Middle East are waged, and not one of the refugees risking death to escape them. But this border between 'our wars' and 'their remains' is only possible if in fact 'we' believe that 'we' are better than 'them', that it is acceptable that 'they' should die in 'our' wars. It is an image of the outsourcing of violence that could not be condoned if the lives on both sides were held in equal weight.

The impossible certainty of the last lines, along with the series of direct commands that build to them, reveal the section to be a deliberate and alternative act of borderscaping to that attempted in the first section, where a peaceful landscape with classical associations is divided from the reality beneath the waves. This alternative act attempts to erase the boundaries between past and present, the 'us' of the wars and the 'them' of the bones,

‘love and not love’, ‘mad and not mad’. But it is as much a conscious construction as the first vision. And the fact of the bodies at the bottom of the sea proves that it is not yet a reality. Rather it is one the speaker is trying to will into being, making the effort obvious to the reader so that they might also choose to fight for it.

While Forché is ambiguous about whether the Mediterranean’s ancient past can be meaningfully compared to its present, A. E. Stallings is more confident in linking them. However, the way she marshals her allusions makes it clear that the other she is using them to encounter is not in fact refugees coming into Europe from different continents and cultures, but rather death itself. In *Necropolitics*, Achille Mbembe gives the lie to the ‘official story’ that ‘democratic societies are pacified societies’.⁵⁶ Instead, he argues, the direct brutality of the warrior society was merely displaced onto ‘an internal category of non-fellows’ as in slave-owning America or onto foreign colonies, which were mined to generate pacifying wealth for the metropole.⁵⁷ ‘Civil peace in the West thus depends in large part on inflicting violence far away’, he writes.⁵⁸ The border then becomes the most visible place where the violence of foreign wars crosses into the Western democracies, both because it is the place where the victims of those wars attempt to enter and because it is the place closest to home where the democratic state deals out visible death. Borders, Mbembe writes, ‘are no longer merely a line of demarcation separating distinct sovereign entities. Increasingly, they are the name used to describe the organised violence that underpins both contemporary capitalism and our world order in general’.⁵⁹ Mbembe argues that, instead of imagining borders as distinct entities, one should now speak of ‘borderisation’, a process of making some places unliveable that includes both the violence of actual international borders and detention centres and the bombing campaigns that make people want to cross them in the first place.⁶⁰ However, the sheer numbers who attempted to cross the

⁵⁶ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, trans. by Steven Corcoran (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), p. 16.

⁵⁷ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, p. 17.

⁵⁸ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, p. 18.

⁵⁹ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, p. 99.

⁶⁰ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, pp. 99-100.

Mediterranean around 2015 made the deathliness of the borderisation process undeniable even for Western democratic subjects on its safe side. It is this return of death from periphery to core that Stallings confronts in her 'Aegean Epigrams'.

'Aegean Epigrams' is a series of nine short rhyming poems about death.⁶¹ According to *The Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics*, epigrams are defined by their relative brevity and tend to conclude with a point or turn.⁶² They also have a historic association with death. The *Encyclopaedia* points out that they were first carved on gravestones, statuary, and buildings and gives the poetic epitaph as a subgenre. Further, one of the first example sentences in the *OED* entry for the word points out that epigrams in ancient Greece were 'primarily' funereal.⁶³ By titling her collection 'Aegean Epigrams', then, Stallings is announcing that she is also writing epitaphs. The fact that the last poem in the sequence is titled 'Proposed epitaph for drowned refugee children' further inscribes this connection. Stallings confronts the reader with the discomfort of the slippage between 'epigram' and 'epitaph' in a way that highlights the discrepancy between the refugees' fate and the lightness with which their lives are treated by the powers who could help. The last poem reads: 'Go tell the bureaucrats, passer by, that all is ship-shape, fine. | The stuff that trickles from your eye is only a little brine.'

Stallings, who has lived in Greece since 1999, wrote of what she encountered first-hand volunteering with refugees in the country, and described the experience in an interview as one that blurred the lines between where war could happen and where it could not. When refugees began camping in Athens' Syntagma Square, her children asked, 'Is this war coming

⁶¹ Stallings, 'Aegean Epigrams'.

⁶² 'Epigram', *The Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics, Fourth Edition*, ed. by Clare Cavanagh and others (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), pp.449-50 (p. 449).

⁶³ 'Epigram', in *The Oxford English Dictionary* [online]
<<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/63369?rskey=pHbWaO&result=1#eid>> [accessed 26 January 2020]

here?’⁶⁴ Stallings said she wanted the poems to be ‘sharp’, and sometimes their simplicity and brevity recalls photographs, such as the famous picture of drowned Syrian child Alan Kurdi, which media accounts claimed ‘brought home’ the ‘full horror’ of the refugee crisis when it went viral in September 2015.⁶⁵ ‘From an autopsy report of an unknown drowning victim, Ikaria’ reads, ‘Female. Nine years old. Found wearing a blouse, | And a pair of sweatpants patched with Minnie Mouse.’ The poem mimics a snapshot, in which no information is recorded that couldn’t be gleaned from a moment’s glance. It therefore mirrors the way in which the refugee crisis is most likely to enter the consciousness of those in Europe who are not living or volunteering directly on the border. But it also foregrounds the cruelty of that level of awareness. The girl’s life is reduced to fragments, it is not even given the honour of complete sentences. And visual rhyme between ‘blouse’ and ‘Mouse’ concludes the poem almost too neatly and thereby exposes the absurdity of trying to represent death in any meaningful way. The couplet is not ultimately concerned with the girl’s life itself but with the fact that it has been taken. If it reads as flippant, it also refuses to comfort the reader, to ‘*poetify*’ as Stallings puts it.⁶⁶ Rather, it forces the reader to confront the reason that the speaker can’t know any more about the drowned child than her age, sex, and what she was wearing. That the blouse is decorated with Mickey Mouse rather than any sign of her own individuality highlights the dominance of a Western culture than can mark her clothes but does not bother to spare her life.

Stallings uses her classical allusions to foreground her focus on death. The quote from Aeschylus that begins the sequence speaks of the Aegean ‘blossoming with bodies’. After that introduction, the only one of the epigrams to actually mention the classical past does so through an allusion to the underworld. In ‘Duties’, Stallings writes

⁶⁴ Cynthia Haven, ‘Crossing Borders: A. E. Stallings bears witness to Europe’s refugee crisis’, *Poetry Foundation*, 20 November 2017 <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/144785/crossing-borders>> [accessed 26 January 2020]

⁶⁵ Helena Smith and Agencies, ‘Shocking images of drowned Syrian boy show tragic plight of refugees’, *Guardian*, 2 September 2015 <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/02/shocking-image-of-drowned-syrian-boy-shows-tragic-plight-of-refugees>> [26 January 2020]

⁶⁶ Haven, ‘Crossing Borders’.

Which one seems more chilling:

Copenhagen willing

To confiscate cash and bauble

From Mosul, Homs, and Kabul;

Or smugglers making a killing

Palming Charon's obol?

The first four lines of the poem directly refer to a 2016 law passed by the Danish government allowing police to search asylum seekers and to confiscate from them up to £1,000, ostensibly in order to pay for the costs of caring for them.⁶⁷ However, the flow of cash to a European capital from two Middle Eastern cities that have been the recent sites of Western military intervention recalls the outsourcing of violence for the sake of resources that Mbembe describes as fundamental to modern democracies from their inception.⁶⁸ But at the poem's turn, the movement of the refugees into Europe destabilises the expected flows of resources into Europe and violence out. The smugglers are described as 'palming Charon's obol' from the refugees, who are paying them to enter Europe in unsafe boats. This allusion to Charon, who ferried souls to the underworld in Greek mythology in exchange for a coin, transforms the border being crossed into the border between life and death, and renders Europe itself as the land of the dead.⁶⁹ Stallings's classical allusions work to evoke a time when the European Mediterranean was not part of a supposedly pacified democracy known primarily as a tourist destination. Her references imply that the refugees

⁶⁷ David Crouch and Patrick Kingsley, 'Danish parliament approves plan to seize assets from refugees', *Guardian*, 26 January 2016 <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/26/danish-parliament-approves-plan-to-seize-assets-from-refugees>> [accessed online 26 January 2020]

⁶⁸ Denmark did send military support to the US operations in both Iraq and Afghanistan. See Ewen MacAskill, 'US claims 45 nations in 'coalition of willing'', *Guardian*, 19 March 2003 <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/mar/19/iraq.usa>> [accessed 26 January 2020], and 'The Danish Engagement in Afghanistan', Danish Ministry of Defense, January 8 2020 <<https://fmn.dk/eng/allabout/Pages/TheDanishEngagementinAfghanistan.aspx>> [accessed 26 January 2020]

⁶⁹ As cited last chapter, Byron also compares the shipwrecked vessel in *Don Juan* to Charon's ferry.

bring with them the return of a past in which the region was not shielded from the evidence of 'hand-to-hand struggle', a time when the Aegean 'blossomed with bodies'.⁷⁰

Of course, the refugee crisis does not change who is victimised by Europe's externalised violence. It merely brings that violence closer to home, so that its citizens are not as sheltered from the brutality that underscores their privilege. This is made clear in another Stallings poem about the crisis called 'Empathy'.⁷¹ The poem describes the experience of a refugee crossing the sea as imagined by a comfortable Western speaker. It begins, 'My love, I'm grateful tonight | Our listing bed isn't a raft' and continues through a litany of catastrophes the speaker is 'glad' to be spared, ending with a brutal quatrain:

Empathy isn't generous,
It's selfish. It's not being nice
To say I would pay any price
Not to be those who'd die to be us.

In Stallings's poem, empathy leads to fear, not of the other, but of the other's fate. The anxiety expressed in the poem echoes the fear of 'substitutability' that David Simpson and Ingrid Horrocks locate in the poetry of William Wordsworth and Charlotte Smith respectively.⁷² For Simpson and Horrocks, as previously discussed, the poets' face-to-face encounters with vagrant or emigrant characters reflect the anxieties attendant upon the rise of capitalist exchange and the idea of democratic equality, namely, that anyone could be exchanged for anyone else. Stallings's poem, meanwhile, reflects the anxiety that the death long outsourced by democratic regimes might come home. And it confronts the idea that a

⁷⁰ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, p. 16.

⁷¹ Stallings, 'Empathy', *Literary Matters* <<http://www.literarymatters.org/1-1-empathy/>> [accessed 26 January 2020]

⁷² Simpson, *Wordsworth*, p. 22 and Horrocks, p. 76.

true awareness of the potential equality between the Western citizen and the Eastern refugee will lead not to solidarity, but a panicked clinging to privilege. In this, the poem reflects Mbembe's point about how the war on terror is in fact eroding democracy because every law is seen as breakable to protect a threatened security: 'the norm now is to live by the sword'.⁷³ The speaker in Stallings's poem admits that the 'price' she is willing to pay to maintain the uneven distribution of death is the same as the price refugees are willing to pay to escape it: the lives of the refugees.

Interestingly, however, the speaker in Stallings's poem reaches in panic for the status quo not from a sense of superiority, but from a place of imagined equality. The speaker's anxiety contrasts with the confidence of the speaker in Forché's 'Mourning', a poem also concerned with the discrepancy between 'our wars' and 'their remains'. In that poem, the speaker stands above the sea-as-border looking out and actively shapes it with her narrative, ultimately commanding the reader to empathise. Stallings's poem, on the other hand, places the speaker in the middle of the sea-as-border, with no way to shape it except through denial: she is 'glad that the dark | Above us, is not deeply twinned | Beneath us, and moiled with wind'. The difference between the two poems recalls Horrocks's insight about how the eighteenth century's long poem evolved from the reflections of a speaker overlooking a prospect view to a narrative of a wanderer encountering other wanderers, such as Smith's speaker in 'The Emigrants'. But while Smith uses the fluid borderscape of a Channel beach to propose an ultimately generative meeting of French and English outcasts, Stallings's poem offers no balm of solidarity to ease the anxiety of equality. What it does do is force the reader to be honest about the price of their relative safety and ask themselves if they are willing to continue paying it.

While Forché and Stallings use classical allusions in a more complicated, nuanced manner than Padel, their allusions still presume both a speaker and a reader on the safe side of the citizen/refugee divide. The allusions come in poems that call a relatively privileged reader to

⁷³ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, p. 31.

some form of action. In Forché's case, it is an equalising perspective; Stallings, meanwhile, closes 'Aegean Epigrams' with a link readers can click on to help refugees in Lesbos. Granted, both poets have written works from the perspective of refugee speakers, but these poems eschew the classical references.⁷⁴ It is as if the poets acknowledge that ultimately such references only have an impact on readers who have some attachment to or identification with the idea of Europe or the West as it came to be connected with Greek and Roman civilisation during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Their poems employing classical allusions thus ultimately reinforce the pre-existing power dynamics between Western citizens and foreign refugees by positioning the first as those with the responsibility and agency to help the second, who are not addressed or presented as actors in their own right.

IV. The Sea's Heaving Script

Not all of Stallings' poems embrace a clear power divide between European agency and refugee helplessness. In 'The City', the Syrian protagonist, who was 'working' on an English degree in Damascus and speaks the language fluently, finds himself stuck in a Greece that also has no movement to offer for even its 'native' inhabitants: 'But you can't get to another land, you're never going on. | This is your future, where so many others are unemployed.'⁷⁵ In this poem, the refugee speaker's agency, his 'work', is stymied by European passivity. 'Europe is a dysfunctional disorder', he declares at the poem's midpoint, ironically reversing the kinds of judgements usually made by European commentators about Middle Eastern conflict zones. The continent, instead of offering upward and onward mobility, traps even its

⁷⁴ See Forché, 'The Boatman', *Poetry Foundation*, October 2016 <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/90646/the-boatman>> [accessed 15 April 2019] and Stallings, 'The City, and: Gentleman Crow, and: Champagne: After Cavafy', *Subtropics*, 22 (2016), 120-2 <muse.jhu.edu/article/647235> [accessed 26 January 2020]. Stallings's poem 'The City', from the point of view of a Syrian refugee stuck in Greece, draws on the more recent source of C. P. Cavafy.

⁷⁵ Stallings, 'The City'.

claimed citizens in a deathly stasis that has now ensnared the new arrival: 'Time waiting is time running out, youth spent's forever gone', the poem concludes.

In *Heavy Waters*, Luker also works to blur the lines between privileged Europeans and victimised refugees in order to craft a poetics immersed in joint struggle without denying 'distances', 'distinctions', and 'untranslatables' (39). His vision of contemporary Greece includes both the 'prevalence of suicide' in the families of Greek friends following the desperation of the financial crisis and the 'huge difficulties' faced by non-European migrants stuck in the country (37). He writes not as an outside observer, but as an active participant in political struggles whose attraction to Greece is partly informed by the connections between that country's anti-austerity movement and the protests he has joined in the UK. In this sense, his vision is the closest of the contemporary works I have considered to Smith's in 'The Emigrants', in that it posits a community between groups of differently vulnerable people instigated by an arrival of new refugees. Also like Smith, Luker uses the sea as an extended metaphor for frightening but generative vulnerability.

The first verse sequence in his book, 'Heavy Waters', places both the reader and the speaker in the midst of an ocean formed of words and rhythm, rather than enabling them to consider the various crises the poem addresses from a safe distance. The very first lines read:

Heavy waters,
heavy air,
embrace the ocean's
putrid glare. (1)

The poem places the reader in the ocean, squeezed between the 'heavy waters' and 'heavy air', and by the rhyme scheme. The almost-steady rhythm (the third line has one extra

syllable) and short lines reflect both the regularity and the chaos of waves lapping at the shore, while also echoing ballad metre.

The next lines, on the following page, further enhance the reader's vulnerability:

In the poem
you appear
with wounds open
and mouth closed. (2)

The stanza seems to describe the typical role of the refugee in awareness-raising poetry: to be a victim who appears but does not speak. However, the fact that the person with the open wounds is addressed as 'you' subverts that typical depiction. The reader, instead of being asked to observe or even empathise with suffering from a safe distance, is directly thrown by the poem into the sufferer's role. Further, the fact that the sufferer is addressed directly admits the possibility that they could break the silence by opening their mouth to respond. The apostrophe suggests the possibility of relationship, which is then affirmed in the closing stanza of the verses on the next page:

Every thing,
within this sea,
there is you, then
there is me. (3)

This sense that everything meets in the sea is enhanced throughout the 'Heavy Waters' sequence by the way that Luker foregrounds the oceanic imagery often used to describe

global crises. Phrases and lines like ‘rising temperature’ (9), ‘a rent bubble suspended’ (9), ‘value swelled’ (16), ‘up tides rise to meet the land | as profits wash the open hand’ (17), and ‘stocks pile up and crash in waves, | as graven beds pile up’ (17) portray everyone impacted by global warming or financial precarity—that is, everyone—as metaphorically caught in the same heaving sea. At the same time, the special vulnerability of the actual refugees crossing the sea is not washed out. It is a very different thing for a stock to crash and for bodies to pile up, even if the two are connected through the war economy. Like Smith, Luker uses both the fluidity and violence of oceanic imagery to propose a solidarity through vulnerability that does not deny the suffering that enables it.

In another sense, Luker also comes the closest of the contemporary poets to what Wallace depicts as Shelley’s particular brand of Romantic Hellenism, which was informed by a deep knowledge of and interest in ancient Greek texts as well as a desire to use the past to challenge authority, even its own. Wallace reads *Prometheus Unbound* partly as Shelley’s attempt to wrestle with his ‘mixed reaction of admiration and rebellious rejection’ of the vaunted aesthetic superiority of Greece by rewriting the play by Aeschylus which Schlegel had argued was the ‘essential Greek tragedy’.⁷⁶ Luker’s response to his classical and Romantic inheritance is also both irreverent and admiring. He speaks dismissively of Keats’s ‘pots’ and talks about being hungry and having to piss while wandering the ruins advertised as ‘the birthplace of thought’. But after he has brought Keats and the Athenians back to earth and to the body, he goes on to engage thoughtfully with these same ruins:

Reading about the Temple of Hephaestus, the son of Zeus and Hera, one gets a better sense of our historical condemnations: the temple was built for the God of metalwork, craftsmanship, and fire. It is an emblem of toil as alienation, our original sin. Humans build temples for gods who stand in for the activities of what humans

⁷⁶ Wallace, p. 150 and p. 162.

do anyway (this I think is why Marx and Shelley were enamoured with the figure of Prometheus). (44)

Luker is eager to rebel against historical myths that enable authority, hence his mocking tone towards the Romantic-era idea that ancient Athens is some sort of origin point for Western thought. At the same time, he is eager to engage both the classical ruins and his Romantic predecessors if they will shed light on contemporary oppressions and provide models of resistance. He wants to kick the gods out of the temples to reveal 'what humans do anyway', not to destroy the temples themselves. This passage combined with his earlier protest activity suggests he is inspired by Shelley, Prometheus, and Marx in his desire to transgress against injustice in order to create something new. He also aligns himself with Marx by explicitly claiming the alienation of labour as humanity's original sin.

Further, he implicitly includes refugees and migrants in this tradition of rebellion. His reference to Shelley, Marx, and Prometheus comes immediately before he attempts his own transgressive theft by 'leap[ing] over some fences to see if I can sneak up to the acropolis' without paying (45). That theft is also a failed version of an illegal border crossing:

After triumphantly crossing over a few gates, I realize I have only got closer to nowhere, all limbs and clambering awkwardness. It's the moment where you try and get over the top that really troubles me, suspended over the imminent doom of a blunt pole. The official perimeter is patrolled by private security and the odd motorcycle police officer. Embarrassed, I feebly give up and sort of pry at the acropolis from the distance of the tollgates. (45)

Luker's account is comic and self-deprecating. The initial 'triumph' of his attempt is ironically undercut by his inability to get anywhere and his almost slapstick description of himself as awkward, embarrassed, and feeble. At the same time, given the overall theme of the book in which this passage occurs, it is hard not to see the echoes of the journeys of trans-

Mediterranean migrants in the speaker's attempt on the acropolis. Like the migrants, he confronts both physical barriers and state security (the provision of which is frequently, nowadays, outsourced). Unlike the migrants, he lets those obstacles stop him. He falls short of the transgressive heroism of Prometheus as read through Shelley, but the migrants, by implication, do not. His attempt is the farce that highlights their tragedy.

In this sequence, therefore, he seems to place himself in the tradition of Julie Carr and Jeffrey C. Robinson's 'active Romanticism' cited in the Introduction. For Carr and Robinson, active Romantic poetry is written when an 'awareness of social exclusion, inequity, and repression demands response in the way of critique and challenge'; is written for its time, but can be renewed in similar times; is formally innovative in a way that 'poses a challenge to form and/or language'; and influences later Romanticisms.⁷⁷ While Carr and Robinson's vision may be idealised, it appears to be one that Luker shares. For Robinson, Shelley is an important influence on twentieth- and twenty-first century avant-garde poetry, and he argues that his combination of formal innovation and radical politics 'may turn out to be his greatest contribution to modern experimental poetry'.⁷⁸ By referencing Shelley's admiration for Prometheus right before he attempts to scale a fence, Luker positions himself as a fellow formal and political rebel. Further, he uses that rebellion to challenge the social exclusion of the border. While he physically fails in his attempt, his words succeed in their protest by attacking the legitimacy of both Fortress Europe and the pay-to-play fortress around the supposed birthplaces of European civilisation while forging a link, however self-mocking, between himself and the excluded.

In the 'Heavy Waters' sequence, Luker also uses the sea as a metaphor for how poetry can both tear down and make new. The poem is a work of mimetic innovation, mirroring the ocean's ability to surprise. There are rhyming quatrains of relatively regular metre that echo the sound of waves on a beach, as described. There are also stanzas typed with many gaps

⁷⁷ Carr and Robinson, 'Introduction', in *Active Romanticism*, pp. 4-5.

⁷⁸ Robinson, 'The Influence of Shelley on Twentieth- and Twenty-first Century Avant Garde Poetry: A Survey' in *Active Romanticism*, ed. by Carr and Robinson, p. 182.

between lines and words and ones in which phrases appear off to one side or the other, suggesting the unevenness of waves crashing against rocks or being diverted into eddies.

Luker makes this association between verse and sea explicit towards the end of the sequence:

Cleave a note for a love letter,
between the sea's heaving script,
foreswear: your enemies are mine. (29)

There are two writers here: the sea, and the author of the love letter. The stanza hangs on the dual meaning of 'cleave' as both to cling to and to divide. The context of the line suggests the second meaning: the reader is being instructed to tear out a page to use for a love letter. But the association with love also recalls the Biblical command that a man should 'cleave' to his wife. It is also possible that the speaker is asking the reader to hold on to a note that should be taken for a love letter, and that this note is the message given in the last stanza: 'foreswear: your enemies are mine'. In either case, the focus is on the ability of writing to both unite and to divide. The last line is at once a message of solidarity and a declaration of war. Script is like the sea, then, because it is at once destructive and creative, an obstacle and a conduit. The question, ultimately, is what will be cleaved in two and what will be cleaved to.

This is the question that Luker gestures towards answering in the sequence's final stanza:

O vagrant earth,
we sing it in the fresh dawn.

O stupendous earth,
to any port in a storm, they say.

But if storms abound,
earth over,
as a clatter of waves and thunder,
what then?

O earth, all or none,
the night is closing in. (33)

In this stanza, Luker makes his final call for solidarity based on vulnerability with decidedly Romantic echoes, such as the 'O' apostrophe and the use of the word 'vagrant'. The stanza confronts a world in which 'storms abound', but, while the moment offers threat, it also offers home. If there is no port in the storm, then conversely there is a hope that we might embrace our shared vulnerabilities and, instead of trying to fight for relative safety, make every port a port in the storm. The hope is not secure: 'night is closing in'. But the choice 'all or none' begins with all. The message of the poem recalls Nail's analysis that a migrant crisis is only framed as a crisis because stasis has been embraced as a false norm. If the earth is accepted as 'vagrant', then the crisis dissolves and a new dawn is possible. This thinking also echoes Hannah Arendt and Giorgio Agamben's privileging of the refugee as the foundational figure of a new political community beyond the nation state and Mbembe's argument that the displacement of violence is unsustainable and that 'sanctuarisation can only ever be mutual'.⁷⁹ The role of poetry in this vision is twofold, like the ocean. It reveals the cleavages,

⁷⁹ Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, p. 40.

‘the clatter of waves and thunder’ that shatters the illusion that any port is safe. But the destruction of that illusion can be positively transformative. It can ‘sing in the fresh dawn’.

While Luker’s poetics strive to enmesh reader and speaker—Greek and British anti-austerity activists and newly-arrived refugees— in a sea-like struggle to erode oppressive institutions and shape a new community of vulnerability, they still ultimately come from the perspective of someone who, despite their travels, knows they can return home. Luker acknowledges the pain of death and violence, but his utopia of the vagrant earth has less room for homesickness. This is also the weakness of Nail’s theory—his argument that the solutions to the climate and migrant crises come from embracing the mobility of both earth and people is an effective critique of Global North nation states who want to wall themselves off from reality but offers little to those who have lost or are losing their homes whether to violence or sea level rise. It does not assuage the solastalgia or nostalgia so eloquently rendered by John Clare or address Mbembe’s (through Ghana’s) ‘right of abode’. Clare’s work and Mbembe’s new ‘right’ are important to hold next to Luker and Nail, so that acknowledging the realities and possibilities of movement does not take away the desire for home or the pain of being forced to leave it.

This pain is expressed in a poem called ‘Ghazal: Back Home’ by Zeina Hashem Beck, which uses an extended metaphor between the poem and the sea to present both as a different sort of bridge and barrier.⁸⁰ Beck, who was born in Lebanon and is based in Dubai, inscribes the poem ‘For Syria, 2015’, and its effectiveness draws on her translation of Arabic vocabulary and poetic traditions into English verse. The poem makes use of the fact that the word ‘bahr’ in Arabic can mean both ‘sea’ and ‘metre’. It also uses a traditional Arabic verse form whose metre helps Beck to imitate the rhythm of the sea. A ghazal is a poem comprised of couplets. Each couplet ends with the same phrase, or *radif*, which is

⁸⁰ Zeina Hashem Beck, ‘Ghazal: Back Home’, *The New York Times Magazine*, 8 November 2019
<<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/07/magazine/ghazal-back-home-zeina-hashem-beck-poem.html>>
[accessed 10 November 2019]

proceeded by the same rhyming word, or *qafia*.⁸¹ In Beck's poem, the *radif* is back home, and the *qafia* is the long 'o' sound, which assonates with home. The poem begins:

Tonight a little boy couldn't walk on water or row back home.

The sea turned its old face away. Again, there was a *no, no*, back home.

Bahr is how we were taught to measure poetry,

bahr is how we've stopped trying to measure sorrow, back home.

For Beck as well, the *bahr* of the poem mimics the metre of the *bahr*. The '-o, back home' has the rhythm of waves or oars, an association evoked by the first 'row back home'. The metre therefore links the poem to the sea itself and the attempt to cross it. Both the sea and the poem are chasms and bridges that the speaker and the characters in the poem both do and do not succeed in crossing. The speaker declares that *bahr* is how 'we've stopped trying to measure sorrow', seemingly nullifying the poem. But it continues regardless, enumerating three gulfs that both the sea and the poem can and cannot close.

First is the gulf between life and death:

"All that blue is the sea, and it gives life, gives life," says God to the boy

standing wet at heaven's gate — does he want to return, to go back home?

⁸¹ Ghazal, 'Glossary of Poetic Terms', *Poetry Foundation* <<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/learn/glossary-terms/ghazal>> [accessed 28 January 2020]

The sea, which gives life, also brings the drowned boy to death. However, the reader knows that in reality, the sea cannot offer the boy a return journey. Only the imagination—the poem—can open up this possibility to the reader by immortalising his story.

The next three couplets deal with the gap of distance, as exiles in Europe cook favourite dishes to remind themselves of home, hold their wives' sleeves on the train tracks, or pray to '*Grow, grow back home*'. Again, the sea both connects and separates home and exile, and the poem does the same—bridging the emotional gap while reminding of the physical separation. The last two stanzas deal with the gap of time:

Habibi, I never thought our children would write HELP US on cardboard.

Let's try to remember how we met years ago, back home.

On our honeymoon we kissed by the sea, watched it
rock the lights, the fishing boats to and fro, back home.

The poem, through memory, has restored the past. In one sense, it has achieved its goal of rowing across the gap created by war to end with a home restored in both time and space. On the other hand, that peaceful past now only exists in the poem, and the ending calls up the full sweetness of what has been lost.

Beck's translation of Arabic words and poetic forms into English gives a moving and unique account of the Mediterranean border crossing which centres the people who currently make it. Reading it alongside some of the other poems featured in this chapter reveals the opportunities that are missed when European or US writers continue to scape the border along the contours of a classical tradition claimed as European heritage. While these attempts can illuminate the hypocrisies and injustices of European 'borderisation', they also

risk turning the conversation back on their own societies, so that the refugees or migrants themselves are not engaged except as victims. In this, the contemporary classical allusions echo the ways in which the influence of Romantic Hellenism shaped a modern Greece in the image of Western and Northern ideas of the country without listening to the Greeks themselves. However, the sea itself, which at once unites and separates developed and developing countries—departures and destinations—provides a rich metaphor that poets on both sides have used to represent the possibilities and sorrows of border crossing.

5. A Crisis of Refuge: The Contradictions of Speaking Out for Refugees

I. A Country of Refuge

In the previous chapter, I argued that contemporary and Romantic poems that used classical allusions to influence current opinion and actions both relied on an underlying assumption about the relationship between ancient Greece or Rome and the imagined community of Europe. In this chapter, I turn my attention to another shared assumption that motivates these attempts—namely that it is somehow the job of poetry to influence public opinion on contemporary issues. For the purposes of this thesis, I am concerned with how poets seek to influence opinion and policy on the issues of migrant and refugee rights. Such a motivation is made explicit in the introduction to *A Country of Refuge: Writing on Asylum Seekers*, the anthology discussed in the previous chapter that excerpted some of Ruth Padel's migration poems. The project, which was published in 2016 through the crowdfunded Unbound press, positioned itself as a corrective to public discourse:

Britain has a long history as a country of refuge for those fleeing conflict, poverty, or terror, and this is something we should be proud of. The 1951 Refugee Convention guarantees everybody the right to apply for asylum. It has saved millions of lives. No country has ever withdrawn from it. And yet most of the refugee stories we read about in the media are negative. There is a growing anti-immigrant rhetoric and many politicians fuel these prejudices here in the UK and elsewhere.¹

What is notable about this introduction is that it diagnoses a disordered media landscape and then proposes more media—the following anthology—as cure. The texts will enter the discourse specifically to remind the British reading public of their duties under international law and call them to embody a nobler heritage than a nationalism defined by exclusion.

¹ Popescu, 'Introduction', in *Country of Refuge*, pp. 1-6.

As I noted in my Introduction, *A Country of Refuge* was emblematic of the literary response to negative media coverage of refugees in 2015 and 2016. Further, I discussed how these contemporary interventions echo the interventions of Romantic poets like William Wordsworth and Percy Bysshe Shelley into the accelerating print culture of their day. Both poets argued that poetry (or at least what they considered good poetry) had a unique role to play amidst the mass of new written information. In his 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth offered the collection as a corrective to taste degraded by the quality and quantity of the competition. In his 'Defence of Poetry', meanwhile, Shelley elevated poetry above the many other texts vying for attention by arguing that it could make its readers better people by teaching them to imagine and therefore love. These convictions reflected historical anxieties. At the turn of the nineteenth century, the rise of print capitalism and the expansion of the reading public combined to give new urgency to the question of what works of writing could and should do, either on their own or as part of an increasingly overwhelming quantity of published material. '[T]he conditions that helped to shape Romantic writing are in many ways still with us today', Andrew Franta observes in *Romanticism and the Rise of the Mass Public*.² Today, the concerns over how mass communication may influence opinions and behaviours have been inflamed by the rise of the internet, but it would be a mistake to say contemporary authors are not also still worried about plain old print. The introduction to *Country of Refuge* refers to negative stories 'read' in the media, which could mean either in a tabloid, broadsheet, or online.

This chapter looks at what happens when contemporary poets respond to these anxieties by 'speaking out' for refugees. This is a question that has necessarily haunted this entire dissertation. By focusing on how poets have critiqued or challenged the 'social exclusion' of forced displacement, I am inevitably concerned with whether or not such a challenge from a poet has any real impact or meaning. By using the Romantic period as my point of comparison with contemporary authors, I am choosing a historic reference point during which the broader role of poetry in a changing and expanding media culture was up for debate. I have provided both historical and contemporary examples of poets who used their

² Andrew Franta, *Romanticism and the Rise of the Mass Public* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 14.

work to argue for inclusion and compassion towards refugees, from Charlotte Smith's plea for international cooperation in 'The Emigrants' to A. E. Stallings' fundraising efforts with her 'Aegean Epigrams'.

I now build on the rest of the dissertation to consider the potential implications of these gestures in greater detail. The rest of this first section will look at Brian Bilston's 'Refugees' to explore nuances in the supposed relationship between poetry, imagination, and social change. I will then consider how certain projects like *A Country of Refuge* and *England: Poems from a School* seek to expand the 'imagined community' of Britain to include refugees. Finally, I look at how different poems interact with the legal requirement that migrants prove their suffering in order to gain refugee status. Ultimately, I am concerned with how these poetic interventions either reify or subvert the system of borders and nation-states that produced the refugee crisis in the first place.

In his 'Defence of Poetry', as quoted earlier, Shelley argues that 'A man, to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others, the pains and pleasure of his species must become his own'.³ Poetry, therefore, makes people better by giving them the chance to exercise their imaginations. There were at least two poems written in the context of the refugee crisis that appear, at face value, to be formal representations of this hypothesis. Both Brian Bilston's 2016 'Refugees' and Jason Fotso's 2017 'Refuge' read top to bottom as a recitation of anti-refugee sentiment, then conclude with an instruction to reread the poem from bottom to top, an exercise which transforms the poems into arguments for welcome instead of exclusion.⁴

Bilston's, for example, reads as follows:

³ Shelley, 'Defence', p. 33.

⁴ VR Content Team, 'Run for the Border: our pick of the best refugee poetry', *Verbal Remedy*, 6 November 2016 <<http://www.verbalremedy.co.uk/refugee-poetry/>> [accessed 15 March 2019], and Jason Fotso, 'Refuge', in 'A poem about refugees you need to read' by Lauren Pareter, *UNHCR*, 20 May 2017 <<https://www.unhcr.org/innovation/a-poem-refugees-need-read/>> [accessed 15 March 2019]

They have no need of our help
So do not tell me
These haggard faces could belong to you or me
Should life have dealt a different hand
We need to see them for who they really are
Chancers and scroungers
Layabouts and loungers
With bombs up their sleeves
Cut-throats and thieves
They are not
Welcome here
We should make them
Go back to where they came from
They cannot
Share our food
Share our homes
Share our countries
Instead let us
Build a wall to keep them out
It is not okay to say
These are people just like us
A place should only belong to those who are born there
Do not be so stupid to think that
The world could be looked at another way

*(now read from bottom to top).*⁵

The poem's form serves as an illustration of what it implicitly claims poetry is supposed to be able to do: engage the imagination through close reading, leading the reader to greater empathy for others unlike themselves. The text first reads like a straightforward copy-paste

⁵ Formatting and italics taken from the original: Brian Bilston, 'Refugees', *Brian Bilston's Poetry Laboetry*, 23 March 2016 <<https://brianbilston.com/2016/03/23/refugees/>> [accessed 15 March 2019]

of *Daily Mail* headlines and Donald Trump campaign slogans.⁶ The last official lines seem to order a block on imagination: 'Do not be so stupid to think that | The world could be looked at another way'. But then comes the instruction to re-read the poem from bottom to top, to literally 'look at it another way'. The new poem begins with an invitation to imagination: 'The world could be looked at another way'. And, when it is, the looker can see that 'Should life have dealt a different hand | These haggard faces could belong to you or me'. The poem, then, seems to agree with Shelley's point. Poetry leads to imagination, which expands the capacity to love. The last two lines of the new poem deny the first poem's command not to help.

However, there is a crucial difference between Shelley's claims for poetry in his 'Defence' and the narrow intentionality of a poem like Bilston's. Shelley did not think that poets had to choose certain subjects to make their readers better. He thought any aid in the capacity to imagine would be beneficial. In fact, he argued against the kind of didacticism inherent in Bilston's verse. 'A poet therefore would do ill to embody his own conceptions of right and wrong, which are usually those of his place and time, in his poetical creations, which participate in neither', he wrote.⁷ James Chandler also points out that Shelley's famous line about poets as legislators is often quoted out of context. The lines preceding it suggest that it is the poets, and not necessarily the world, who are unaware of their role.⁸ Poets are 'the words which express what they understand not'.⁹ For Chandler then, the poets may be the ones who do not acknowledge their own power. Bilston's poem, on the other hand, argues directly for its own power by making its desired effect on the reader clear. This is enhanced by the instruction at the end to reverse the line order. In a way, this instruction denies the reader the opportunity to exercise their own imagination, since it tells them explicitly how

⁶ The *UNHCR* study cited in the previous chapter found that right-wing UK papers were more likely than other European papers to paint migrants as both criminals and threats to benefit systems, and Trump had promised to 'build a wall' as early as June 2015, while this poem was posted in 2016. See Berry, p. 8, and Time Staff, 'Here's Donald Trump's Presidential Announcement Speech', *Time*, 16 June 2015 <<http://time.com/3923128/donald-trump-announcement-speech/>> [accessed 15 March 2019]

⁷ Shelley, 'Defence', p. 34.

⁸ Chandler, p. 193 and p. 544.

⁹ Shelley, 'Defence', p. 59.

to read the poem. Further, the poem's vocabulary speaks in one set of clichés only to invert them with a different set, which means it doesn't feed the reader 'thoughts of ever new delight', as Shelley put it. The work of Bilston exemplifies a poetic culture that seeks to make intentional what Shelley argued was inevitable.

The tension I note here does not exemplify a distinction in Romantic and contemporary attitudes towards poetry's political role, but rather a contradiction that poets and thinkers in both eras have grappled with. Shelley's protestations aside, Romantic poets were not above a more direct approach to the moral and political questions of their day. Wordsworth, as discussed in Chapter One, sent copy of *Lyrical Ballads* to Charles Fox with the express purpose that he read 'The Brothers' and 'Michael' and be moved to act to preserve the property of the poor.¹⁰ Charlotte Smith's dedication to William Cowper at the beginning of 'The Emigrants' expresses the hope that the French refugees' presence in England will 'annihilate the prejudices' between the two countries.¹¹ And Shelley himself did bring his own concepts of right and wrong to bear on contemporary politics in poems like 'The Mask of Anarchy' and, as we have seen, *Hellas*.¹²

On the other hand, there is a strain of contemporary criticism that has adopted and expanded Shelley's claim in 'A Defence of Poetry' and emphasised the ways in which a work's formal radicalism can have a transformative effect alongside, or even in spite of, the author's intentions. This is part of the argument articulated by Julie Carr and Jeffrey C. Robinson in *Active Romanticism*, as discussed previously. For them, Wordsworth's decision to use the language of the lower and middle classes in an art identified with an 'aristocratic tradition' speaks louder than his own apostasy from his youthful radicalism, which they do not mention.¹³ Carr and Robinson also draw on the work of Jacques Rancière, who argues similarly that Flaubert's style was inherently democratic in its own historical context

¹⁰ Wordsworth, 'LETTER TO CHARLES JAMES FOX', in *Lyrical Ballads*, pp. 306-9.

¹¹ Smith, 'The Emigrants', in *The Poems of Charlotte Smith*, p. 33.

¹² Shelley, 'The Mask of Anarchy', in *Complete Poetical Works*.

¹³ Carr and Robinson, 'Introduction', in *Active Romanticism*, p. 9.

because it treated objects and people, foreground and background, equally, regardless of Flaubert's intent or commitments.¹⁴ For Rancière, politics occurs when those who should not be able to do or say a certain thing show that they can in fact say or do it. It disrupts the 'sensory self-evidence of the "natural" order that destines specific individuals and groups to occupy positions of rule or of being ruled', creating what Rancière calls 'dissensus'; art, for Rancière, can also create dissensus when it 're-configure[s] the fabric of sensory experience'.¹⁵

Ultimately, both tendencies—towards stated political art and towards championing formal innovation as an instigator of social revolution—rely on the assumption that there is a causal relationship between imaginative art and change. However, there is an inherent contradiction between the idea that art should create that change by inspiring empathy with certain marginalised groups and the idea that art should create that change by transforming perceptions. This is because art has come to be seen precisely as the proper place for empathy, and so there is no shock to the established order when it is found there. This is the problem that haunts the poetic response to the refugee crisis. Can such poetry really transform Britain's relationship to the new arrivals when it reinforces their role as suffering victims whose proper place is the empathy-inducing poem and not the political stage, where they might make active demands?

II. Re-imagined Communities

One way in which contemporary poets intentionally seek to manipulate print culture on behalf of refugees is to use it to expand or reimagine the nation that would include or reject them. The connection between print culture and group, particularly national, identity is made in Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*. For Anderson, the rise of nationalism is linked to the rise of print capitalism because the latter 'made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate to others, in

¹⁴ Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*, ed. and trans. by Steven Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2010), pp. 152-8.

¹⁵ Rancière, pp.139-40.

profoundly new ways'.¹⁶ It did so partly by enabling a new sense of time: novels and newspapers, which both flowered as genres in Europe during the eighteenth century, made it possible to imagine multitudes of otherwise unrelated individuals going about their lives simultaneously.¹⁷ It also did so by fostering the formation of national languages. To tap the non-Latin-reading market, print capitalists began to publish in the various European vernaculars, which helped create national consciousness for three reasons. First, people whose spoken dialects were not mutually comprehensible could now communicate with, and therefore imagine, each other in reading and writing. Second, the written vernaculars became standardised, creating a sense of relative linguistic stability over time. Finally, the dialects closer to the written vernacular acquired a higher status than other dialects, cohering into a dominant national language that could then be exploited to promote national over other group identifications.¹⁸ The nation, for Anderson, is 'a community imagined through language'.¹⁹

This is an assumption implicitly shared by the contemporary writers and editors who seek to write refugees into the national community, and therefore to re-write that community itself. It is inherent in the very titles of the two anthologies mentioned earlier: *A Country of Refuge* and *England: Poems from a School*.

A Country of Refuge was titled in direct opposition to 2016's political reality. Then Home Secretary Theresa May instituted the 'hostile environment' policy as early as 2012, and the term came to serve as descriptor for the general attitude towards migrants in the UK.²⁰ The Vote Leave campaign leading up to the Brexit vote, also held in 2016, inflamed xenophobic fears; 73 percent of people who said they were worried about immigration in a 2017 survey

¹⁶ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), p. 36.

¹⁷ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, pp. 24-36.

¹⁸ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, pp. 44-5.

¹⁹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 17.

²⁰ Grierson, 'Hostile environment'.

ended up voting Leave.²¹ Editor Lucy Popescu, in the introduction cited at the beginning of this chapter, responded to this increasingly xenophobic nationalism not by arguing against British nationalism itself, but by suggesting it take a different form, a form it had taken in the past and of which Britons could feel proud. In her 'country of refuge' formulation, Britain can become more British by welcoming refugees, not rejecting them.

The anthology bolsters this argument in part by mentioning previous migrations, both to and from the British Isles, as well as other parts of Europe. In addition to the Padel poems discussed in Chapter Four, another example is Elaine Feinstein's 'Migrations', which compares the experience of current refugees with her own ancestors' flight from Odessa.²² The poem opens with appeals to migration as both a natural and, in fact, beautiful process:

In late March, birds from the Gambia,
white throat warblers, who wintered in
the branches of a feathery acacia;
Mandelstam's goldfinch; pink foot
geese from the Arctic. All
arrive using the stars, along
flyways old as Homer and Jeremiah.

The sensory pleasures of the language describing the birds and their origins, the 'feathery acacia' and 'pink' feet, contrast with the bleakness connoted by late March in the UK. Their arrivals provide all the interest to the beginning of the poem, as each expands the poem's imaginative reach, first to the Gambia and then to the Arctic, while its speaker remains in one place. The poem connects movement and aesthetic pleasure in another way as well. The references to Osip Mandelstam (who was exiled for his political beliefs and also wrote a poem to a bird with 'My Goldfinch'), Homer, and Jeremiah suggest an association between movement and poetry. The age of Homer and Jeremiah is not so 'old' a date to mark the

²¹ Nafeez Ahmed, 'Brexit was triggered by climate-driven collapse in the Middle East', *Insurgentelligence*, 14 March 2019 <<https://medium.com/insurge-intelligence/brexit-was-triggered-by-climate-driven-collapse-in-the-middle-east-89e50c2dba59?referrer=twitter>> {accessed 19 March 2019}

²² Elaine Feinstein, 'Migrations', in *Country of Refuge*, pp. 13-14.

start of avian flyways from a purely biological perspective. The choice instead suggests that both human and avian movements have inspired human creativity since the composition of some of its best-known early touchstones.

The reader is then immediately asked to imagine a world without that inspiring migration in the first line of the second stanza, which reads 'Avian immigration is down this year'. The choice of the word 'down' suggests how the reader might feel in a birdless spring. Poetry seems to decrease with the birds, as the line breaks with the lyrical tone of the first stanza to replicate more journalistic prose. The next line is phrased to offer a consolation: 'But humans still have reason to move on'. The grammatical structure forces the reader to ask themselves why human migrations are not, in fact, considered with the same wonder and welcome as avian ones, why humans, moving on, are often encouraged to move on again. The 'still' suggests that human migrations are just as natural, as 'old' as avian ones, but, as discussed above, the 'oldness' of the avian migration is established relative to cultural, not natural, history. Feinstein's strategy is similar to other poets discussed in Chapter Four who made use of classical allusions. By dating both avian and human migration using two texts that are both considered foundational to European culture and are greatly concerned with journeying and exile, Feinstein is attempting to write current refugees into England's, and, more broadly, Europe's, imagined community.²³

Later in the poem, Feinstein appeals directly to England's recent history as well:

All my grandparents came from Odessa
a century ago, spoke little English,
and were doubtless suspect as foreigners
—probably anarchist or Bolshevik—
very likely to be dreaming of bombs.

²³ There is certainly a slippage in the anthology between appeals to a shared English past and a shared European past. While the latter is not strictly nationalist, one doesn't have to look further than the British Museum to see how the UK has appropriated the classical tradition into its own national story. At the same time, the references to a broader European tradition in the context of the Brexit debate might be a subtle choice on the editor's part to argue for a British identity that does not need to split from the rest of Europe to maintain itself.

She reminds the reader of the strangeness of past immigrant groups that are now accepted into the national fabric, previous terror scares that have since been dismissed as hysteria, suggesting that hostility to the new immigrants may one day also appear equally unjust. It is a writing of the past as a possible future. The poem's speaker describes herself as 'settled now after all these journeys'. The new arrivals, she implies, could settle as well if given the chance. But the poem does not end on an assurance that all will be well. Instead, it ends with a threat, but a threat from within, not from without. The speaker asks herself why she should 'make common cause' with contemporary refugees, to answer, 'Only because I remember | how easily the civil world turns brutal. | If it does, we shall have the same enemies.' In this last line, Feinstein flips the anti-immigrant narratives that portray the new arrivals as threats to European or English civilisation, arguing instead that those cultures stay 'civil' to the degree they are willing to welcome the strangers and journeyers whose life experiences, after all, are closest to the texts they claim as the origin of the civilisation they would protect.

While *Country of Refuge* appeals to a shared English and European past, *England: Poems from a School* works to create a vision of its future. This anthology, as discussed in Chapter Two, is a collection of poems written by eleven-to-nineteen-year-old students at Oxford Spires Academy who come from migrant or refugee backgrounds. In her introduction to the collection, editor Kate Clanchy, who worked as Writer in Residence at the school, describes it as a 'magical' multi-ethnic, multilingual environment with only twenty percent White British students where students speak more than thirty languages and around fifty dialects.²⁴ Clanchy describes a scene in which students from Sao Paulo and Afghanistan play basketball, a Somali and Polish girl swap prom ideas and girls from Syria and Iran share cherries 'as if neither had ever heard of the Sunni-Shia divide' (xiv). The subtext is clear: for Clanchy's students, this idyll of peace and diversity is England. If the rest of the country would embrace refugees and migrants as the students embrace each other, this could be England for the book's readers, too.

²⁴ Clancy, 'Introduction', in *England*, pp. xiii-xiv. The rest of the references to this book in this chapter will be given as in-text citations.

Clanchy's description of multicultural harmony verges on cliché, but what is more interesting is how the case for welcoming is made through language. The task Clanchy sets herself in the introduction is to explain why the poems contained in the book are so good. And the primary answer is her students' experience with 'language loss and change' (xv). Clanchy argues that her students use language in a unique way for two reasons. The first is that they all learned English late, after they were six, and went through a silent period during which they could not communicate in either their original or new language. 'That locked-down period may be painful, but it feeds the inner voice', Clanchy writes, 'I think it may also account for the musicality of so many of these poems' (xv). The second is the influence of their first language, as I mentioned in Chapter Two, quoting Clanchy's claim that 'The shapes of that language show through their English. That is part of their freshness and originality' (xvi). It is precisely the students' foreign origins, along with their movements between countries and languages, that allow them to write such surprisingly good English poetry. In the published book, they have already made English richer, more beautiful. The implication of the title is that they, and other refugees and migrants like them, can make England richer and more beautiful as well.

The incorporation of words or phrases from their native languages is a poetic device used by a few of the young writers. The poem 'How not to be Korean' by Han Sun Nkumu, for example, consists of a title and three lines written in first English, then Korean characters, then the Korean spelled out in Latin characters (37). The alternating blocks of text give the reader the feeling of standing in an international airport, picking out the familiar from the foreign languages on signs. The reading experience therefore allows the reader to sense something of the speaker's dislocation. The poem's instructions, addressed to a 'you', further put the reader into the speaker's position: 'Live in a country where you are the minority. Where a finger pointing in your direction is as common as a handshake. Where you would be lucky enough to receive a bow.' The language of the poem, coming in a short command and two short fragments, is as blunt as the pointing finger it describes. The reader feels pointed at by the lines themselves. But the effect would not be as powerful if the reader didn't also have to do the visual work of distinguishing the lines they can read from the lines they cannot. The poem leaves the reader feeling at once accused and confused, an

experience it implies is common for new arrivals being judged in a language in which they are not yet fluent.

Other poems incorporate non-English words into the flow of the verse, putting the reader in the language-learner's position of working out the meaning from context clues. The poem 'Iman Dari' by Maah-Noor Ali begins almost like a vocabulary lesson (55-56). A line in italics under the title defines the key term: '*Iman Dari: I don't have it*'. The poem then uses it in an example conversation between the speaker and the speaker's brother: '*Iman Dari* my brother yells: | I haven't seen it, | I didn't take it'. Then, in the last stanza, the use of non-English words suddenly increases, this time without translation:

Iman Dari I can smell the *Nihari*
I can hear the *Azzan*, louder
than the street vendors
Iman Dari I can.
I know it's *Namaz* time
though I can't hear the *Moazin*
It's England.
My ears are ringing.
I'm only hearing the *Azaam* in my mind.

Iman Dari I say, in my heart.

The introduction of the additional foreign words (for a reader that doesn't understand them, that is) coincides with the speaker's confusion, their sudden uncertainty as to which country they are smelling and feeling. While the italicised words are clearly familiar for the speaker, the reader must work harder to guess their meaning in context, just as the speaker is working to orient themselves via the context of their surroundings. But in the middle of the confusion, an interesting thing happens: *Iman Dari* loses its italics. It is no longer a foreign word in the visual language of the poem. The assumption is that the reader is now familiar enough with it that they have incorporated it into their vocabulary and can use it as

well as the other English words to orient themselves in the new stanza. The poet's use of foreign words therefore works in two ways. It puts the reader in the poet's position of having to learn an unfamiliar word, but it then incorporates that foreign word into the reader's English vocabulary.

The printing of these words in new English poems works as a sort of reversal of the process described by Anderson and elaborated in the English context by Saree Makdisi, in which a written, proper form of a language comes to dominate and exclude the oral and provincial dialect.²⁵ The words used by the students may well be the formalised, written vocabularies of their own national languages, but by placing them out of their context side-by-side with proper English words, they insist on their right to transform the printed language of their adopted country, and, with it, the country itself.²⁶

I would be hesitant to call *England* a Romantic project because its stated influences come from elsewhere. The poets referenced by the writers themselves are Rumi and Mahmoud Darwish.²⁷ Clanchy also talks about starting a ghazal club; during the sessions, some students were able to understand songs their mothers had taught them as part of a longstanding poetic tradition (xvi). However, there are resonances between *England* and Carr and Robinson's active Romanticism because both are certainly committed to 'democratic pluralism'; *England* represents an idea of multilingual, multicultural democracy in miniature.²⁸ In their definition of active Romanticism, Carr and Robinson draw on Rancière's argument that avant-garde art from the French Revolution on incorporated elements previously considered 'non-art' as a way 'to represent persons and their world

²⁵ Makdisi, pp. 21-2.

²⁶ This is a process that is occurring beyond just the book's publication. One student included in the anthology, Azfa Awad, went on to win the Tower Poetry Prize, study creative writing at Warwick, and is now a nationally-recognised poet. See *England*, p. 72. Another student, Amineh Abou Kerech, won the 2017 Betjeman Poetry Prize for ten- to thirteen-year-olds. See Killian Fox, 'The 13-year-old Syrian refugee who became a prizewinning poet', *Guardian*, 10 October 2017 <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/oct/01/the-13-year-old-syrian-refugee-prizewinning-poet-amineh-abou-kerech-betjeman-prize>> [accessed 20 March 2019]

²⁷ See Sukria Rezaei, 'A Glass of Tea' in *England*, p. 4, and Einas Hadla, 'I am from there', in *England*, p. 50.

²⁸ Carr and Robinson, 'Introduction', in *Active Romanticism*, pp.1-2.

previously denied representation'.²⁹ It is in this context that Carr and Robinson portray Wordsworth's commitment to using common language in *Lyrical Ballads* as inherently democratic. The same could be said for the inclusion of non-English words in some of the students' poems. It is a way for them to insist on representation of themselves and of the worlds they come from within the very language of the country whose rhetoric would exclude them.

But there is a complication here: in attempting to argue for inclusion based on the benefits of diversity, projects like *England* also risk essentialising their subjects in the public imagination, so they come to be seen as representatives of a culture rather than complex individuals. This is reminiscent of criticisms of Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*. At the same time as Carr and Robinson praise Wordsworth for his democratic poetic praxis, Makdisi, as I explained in Chapter One, argued that by lyricising the ballad and translating plebeian experience into his own, middle-class verse, Wordsworth was actually appropriating and colonising a poetic form, the ballad, associated with oral traditions and radical politics among the lower classes. He was then part of the process of separating a national English from communal vernaculars, the 'language really used by men' from 'what appear to be its real defects', art from 'non-art'.³⁰ It is of course possible for something to work both ways. Wordsworth's language could very well have been both a democratising force on behalf of a middle class making inroads against aristocratic traditions while at the same time participating in the further marginalisation of rural or itinerant populations. But the hope for active Romanticism expressed by Carr and Robinson is certainly that it push against any and all exclusions. Perhaps the question is who is being represented to whom. As a member of the middle class whose family had felt the sting of arbitrary aristocratic power, Wordsworth was well-situated to push for his own political and linguistic place within English culture.³¹ But part of Makdisi's critique of *Lyrical Ballads* is that Wordsworth wrote about the rural

²⁹ Carr and Robinson, 'Introduction', in *Active Romanticism*, p. 8.

³⁰ Wordsworth quotes are from Wordsworth, 'Preface', in *Lyrical Ballads*, pp. 96-7.

³¹ Wordsworth's father was a lawyer for the most powerful man in his district, Lord Lonsdale, and spent his own money on his behalf. When he died, Lord Lonsdale refused to acknowledge the debt and the family had to sue, influencing Wordsworth's early radicalism and opposition to aristocratic power. See the account in Gill, *William Wordsworth*, pp. 34-5.

poor, but not for them.³² And, in Makdisi's account, they were represented to each other already in their own popular ballads and traditional communities, though these were in the process of being disrupted by capitalist modernity. What Wordsworth did was to bring the representation of that disruption into the emerging literature of the culture responsible.³³

This interpretation of Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads* also problematises Clanchy's project. Because who is *England* written for? The poets in the collection are already represented to each other as writers and individuals within the literary community of the school. The narrative frame of the book, however, insists that the most important thing about them is at once their migrant status and their contested Englishness. The appropriation differs in kind from Wordsworth's, of course. The poets in the collection write for themselves. No one translates or refines their language. However, in the contemporary context there can be a pressure on writers from racialised or marginalised groups to perform their difference precisely through the incorporation of their native or other language into Anglophone verse. 'In the strange inversions and contradictions of race, the reverse insistence on bi- or multilingualism can also become racist,' Jahan Ramazani has observed.³⁴ As an example of how poets can reject that pressure, Ramazani offers the biting title of Ada Limón's 'The Contract Says: We'd Like the Conversation to be Bilingual'. However the individual poets in the collection may feel about their language play, they are put in an editorial context that conforms to rather than challenges racialised expectations of migrant poetry. They are also placed within a context that prioritises the feelings of a supposedly more privileged audience, an audience with the power to say, yes, you too can be *England* if you perform an aesthetically-recognisable version of difference. It is an appeal to the powerful, not a mobilisation of the marginalised.

III. Certificates of Trauma

³² Makdisi, p. 107.

³³ Makdisi, p. 120.

³⁴ Jahan Ramazani, 'Poetry and Race, an Introduction', *New Literary History*, 50.4 (2019), vii – xxxiii <<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/747426>> [accessed 1 December 2020] (p. xxi)

One of the reasons that poetic projects centring the migrant or refugee status of their subjects can reinforce existing hierarchies is related to how refugees are legally able to claim asylum and gain entry into European countries. As Lindsey Stonebridge explains in *Placeless People*, they must prove that they face persecution and fear to return home: 'suffering has to be seen to be believed'.³⁵ In France, the document used to authenticate asylum claims is actually called a 'certificate of trauma'.³⁶ Stonebridge's book focuses largely on writers who responded to the plight of refugees in the period around the Second World War, not with the expected 'pathos', but by using displacement to think about 'rights, citizenship, and sovereignty'.³⁷ For Stonebridge, refusing the humanitarian, suffering-based logic that surrounds even the legal response to refugees means insisting, in Hannah Arendt's words, on the 'right to have rights'.³⁸

Stonebridge brings her study forward to the contemporary moment at the end of her book, looking at how the second-generation Palestinian refugee poet Yousif M. Qasmiyeh subtly refuses the call to be a 'witness writer' in a poem called 'Holes' anthologised in the 'Oxford Poets and Refugees Project', mentioned in Chapter Two.³⁹ Qasmiyeh expressed concern about the premise of the project, which subordinated his artistic and professional self to his legal position. When asked to 'think of an image that conveys you', he instead chose to depict 'the blankness that I faced when I was asked [...] to come up with a specific image'.⁴⁰ For Stonebridge, the refusal to witness first works spatially. The poem begins with one stanza aligned right, before the rest align left, beginning the way it would in Arabic: 'the excluded language is experienced as a blank space of white on the page'.⁴¹ That exclusion

³⁵ Stonebridge, p. 18.

³⁶ While it has a less evocative name, the UK asylum process requires refugees to explain 'how you were persecuted in your country' and 'why you're afraid to go back to your country'. See 'Claim Asylum in the UK', Gov.UK <<https://www.gov.uk/claim-asylum/asylum-interview>> [accessed 20 March 2019]

³⁷ Stonebridge, p. 19.

³⁸ This is how Stonebridge describes Qasmiyeh's refusal to 'authenticate his suffering for the benefit of others' in the poem 'Holes' in her summary of her treatment on p. 24.

³⁹ Stonebridge, p. 180.

⁴⁰ Stonebridge, pp. 180-1.

⁴¹ Stonebridge, p. 181.

also denies the reader the expected poetic peppering of bilingualism in exchange for a visual gap that is by its nature impossible to translate or interpret.

The refusal to witness is also accomplished by means of the suspension and liminality in the poem's imagery. It doesn't evoke a lost home so much as stay motionless in the anxiety of exile: 'When is the rain | Going to admit | Its fall?' it asks.⁴² Qasmiyeh resists the refugee category, as well as the requirement to prove he deserves that category, by demonstrating aesthetically how inarticulable the refugee experience actually is.

The emphasis Stonebridge places on resisting the humanitarian framing elucidates why it is so difficult for poetry that 'speaks out for refugees' to achieve what Rancière calls 'dissensus'. Poetry by or about refugees that positions itself as an appeal for inclusion ends up reproducing the asylum process; it puts the refugee speaker in exactly the place the dominant order would expect to find them making exactly the kind of sounds it would expect to hear: performing their suffering in order to gain admittance.⁴³ This also poses a challenge for writers seeking to honestly narrate their own or others' refugee experience. How can one tell the story without re-enacting the requirement to testify, without turning the work of art into a certificate of trauma?

This is a tension alive in the two versions of a Warsan Shire poem that has become perhaps the most famous contemporary poem dealing with the refugee experience and themes of immigration justice: 2009's 'Conversations About Home (at the Deportation Centre)' and the

⁴² Qtd. in Stonebridge, p. 182.

⁴³ Interestingly, Rancière says that many contemporary artworks that do produce dissensus focus on 'matters of space, territories, borders, wastelands and other transient places, matters that are crucial to today's issues of power and community' and he cites a film about the US-Mexican border fence called *De 1 'autre côté* by Chantal Akerman, see pp. 149-51. But this film resists what he sees as the traditional narratives to focus on the aesthetics of the fence itself, and then to talk to communities on either side. The point, for both Rancière and Stonebridge, is that it is more promising to use the refugee or border-crossing experience to actually cross borders, to imagine something new, not to conform to the dominant narratives surrounding the category.

later 'Home', which has spread widely on social media.⁴⁴ The second version of the poem could easily be read as certificate of trauma. It begins:

no one leaves home unless
home is the mouth of a shark
you only run for the border
when you see the whole city running as well.⁴⁵

It then agrees to elaborate the suffering experienced by its speaker, repeating the 'no one' motif to both emphasise the speaker's desperation and to acknowledge the requirement, inherent in the asylum process, that desperation be turned into argument. 'No one leaves home unless home chases you | fire under feet', the third stanza begins. Then, again, in the fourth:

you have to understand,
that no one puts their children in a boat
unless the water is safer than the land
no one burns their palms
under trains
beneath carriages
no one spends days and nights in the stomach of a truck
feeding on newspaper unless the miles travelled
means something more than journey.
no one crawls under fences
no one wants to be beaten
pitied.

⁴⁴ For the two versions see Shire, 'Conversations', 'Teaching My Mother', *Mouthmark Book of Poetry*, and Shire, "Home", *Facing History and Ourselves* <<https://www.facinghistory.org/standing-up-hatred-intolerance/warsan-shire-home>> [accessed February 10, 2019]. Unfortunately, requests through Shire's agent to interview her about the editing process that transformed 'Conversations' into 'Home' were never answered.

⁴⁵ Shire, 'Home'.

In fact, what's notable about the poem is how much of an argument it is. The trauma of the journey is described just as viscerally as the trauma that made the speaker flee. The home chases with 'fire' but the journey 'burns'. The poem insists that no one wants to be pitied, but pity, like flight, is the speaker's only chance at survival, and the text of the poem accepts that binary. It cannot imagine a way out. The sixth stanza recounts a litany of insults— 'go home blacks | refugees | dirty immigrants' —that the speaker accepts because they are 'easier | to swallow | than rubble | than bone'. There is no suggestion that the speaker might challenge their treatment in the country they have fled to, except to insist they have suffered enough to justify the journey. Again, there is a choice between worse or lesser abuse, with no alternative imagined.

The first version of the poem was remarkably different, however. It appeared in Shire's collection *Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth* and was based on time Shire had spent in Rome in 2009 with refugees from Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan, and Congo who were living at the abandoned Somali embassy.⁴⁶ The parentheses around the second half of the title— 'Conversations about Home (at the Deportation Centre)' —creates a sense of enclosure that is reinforced by the text on the page, which is written in four verse paragraphs taking up the top half of four pages of the manuscript. This contrasts with the majority of the other poems in the collection, which flow down the page in typical verse form, and with the version of 'Home' that gained fame. The use of horizontal paragraphs after pages of vertical verse gives the reader a sense of being trapped in the deportation centre along with the speaker. It does create a dissensus compared to what came before in the collection.

The voice of the poem's speaker is also more conversational. They seem to be speaking partly as if trying to understand their own thoughts, rather than presenting a rehearsed argument. 'Well, I think home spat me out, the blackouts and curfews like tongue against loose tooth. God, do you know how difficult it is, to talk about the day your own city

⁴⁶ For the circumstances surrounding the writing of the poem, see Bausells, 'Poets speak out'. For the poem itself see Shire, 'Conversations', 'Teaching My Mother', *Mouthmark Book of Poetry*. The rest of the references to this poem in this chapter will be given as page numbers in in-text citations.

dragged you by the hair' (294). The speaker does narrate their trauma, but they resist their own narration too. It is 'difficult' to talk about. Later, they question the need to tell. 'They ask me *how did you get here?* Can't you see it on my body?' (295). While the logic of the poem requires the speaker eventually explain how they arrived in order for it to continue, the speaker resists this requirement, suggesting that their very presence in this place should be evidence enough of their suffering without having to repeat it.

Further, the speaker expresses desires, even in limbo, to be more than a suffering body. In 'Home', the only thing the speaker says they want is to go home. In the earlier poem, the speaker wants things for their present: 'I want to make love, but my hair smells of war and running and running. I want to lay down, but these countries are like uncles who touch you when you're young and asleep' (295). In the later poem, the injustices of the refugee speaker's treatment in Europe are presented as unfortunate, but manageable compared to what came before. In the earlier version, the indignities of life in Europe are still 'better than the scent of a woman completely on fire' (296), but that treatment does not 'roll off your backs' as it does in the later version. It keeps the speaker up at night, and it is not just 'words' and 'dirty looks' as in 'Home'. It is framed as having the same psychological and physical impact as intimate sexual abuse.

The speaker's response to the litany of insults is also crucially different:

I hear them say, *go home*, I hear them say, *fucking immigrants, fucking refugees*. Are they really this arrogant? Do they not know that stability is like a lover with a sweet mouth upon your body one second and the next you are a tremor lying on the floor covered in rubble and old currency waiting for its return. All I can say is, I was once like you, the apathy, the pity, the ungrateful placement and now my home is the mouth of a shark, now my home is the barrel of a gun. I'll see you on the other side.
(297)

In 'Home', the speaker seems to accept the insults, and the role of refugee-suppliant, as part of the conditions of their movement. The speaker in 'Conversations' does not. They do not appeal to pity, but instead to a sort of hostile solidarity. They break down the border

between the refugee and the settled population by insisting that the roles are not inevitable: the speaker was settled once, and their insulters may one day be unsettled. The poem does similar work to Giorgio Agamben's and Arendt's demonstrations that the refugee shows how unstable the nation-state system of rights really is, since they show what can become of anyone who falls outside of it.⁴⁷ The last line, 'I'll see you on the other side', is ominous. It could mean that the speaker will see their conversation partner once they have made it out of the deportation centre, once they are on the other side of the border regime. On the other hand, it could mean that they will see those who have insulted them on the other side of the citizen/refugee line, when their society's stability has abandoned them, and the two are either both refugees or have switched roles. For Rancière, political dissensus occurs when the excluded 'make what was deemed to be the mere noise of suffering bodies heard as a discourse concerning the "common" of the community'.⁴⁸ That is exactly the turn that the ending of 'Conversations' enacts. The speaker refuses the role of suffering body and addresses the European citizen as an equal, arguing that they could share the same fate. As in Feinstein's 'Migrations', there is also the implicit warning that anti-refugee sentiment in Europe may in fact be the wedge that undermines its democratic stability, a warning ever more relevant.

The original 'Conversations' does still recount trauma, as do many of the other poems in *Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth*, but the context and the impact is different. Shire was born in Nairobi and raised in London, but her family is from Somalia, and she has spoken about growing up 'with a lot of horror in the backdrop' in the form of the things her family remembers doing and having done to them during the ongoing war there.⁴⁹

'Sometimes I'm telling other people's stories to remove stigma and taboo, so that they don't have to feel ashamed; sometimes you use yourself as an example', she has said.⁵⁰ She said

⁴⁷ See Agamben, 'We Refugees', and Arendt, *Origins*, as discussed in Chapter One.

⁴⁸ Rancière, p. 139.

⁴⁹ The biographical details come from Bausells, and the interview from Katie Reid, 'Q&A: Poet, writer and educator Warsan Shire', *Africa in Words*, 21 June 2013 <<https://africainwords.com/2013/06/21/qa-poet-writer-and-educator-warsan-shire/>> [accessed 29 March 2019]

⁵⁰ Reid.

she wrote 'Conversations' for the refugees she had interviewed, 'for my family and for anyone who has experienced or lived around grief and trauma in that way'.⁵¹ Her stated goal is not to perform her communities' trauma for outsiders, but rather to write it back to her community, so that their private griefs can be destigmatised. But when the most quotable evocations of trauma are excised from the block paragraphs of 'Conversations', stripped of the nuances of that speaker's voice, and displaced from the community of poems in the overall collection, that context is lost. With it goes most of the original's challenge to the refugee/citizen binary.

I say 'most' and not 'all' because formally 'Home' is able to do something 'Conversations' cannot. It is able to move. In 'The Idea of the Borderless World', discussed in Chapter Three, Achille Mbembe argues that '[a]s the 21st century unfolds, a global renewed desire from both citizens and their respective states for a tighter control of mobility is evident. Wherever we look, the drive is towards enclosure, or in any case an intensification of the dialectics of territorialisation and deterritorialisation, a dialectics of opening and closure'.⁵² Mbembe further argues that it is usually certain racialised bodies being controlled: 'Because we inherit a history in which the consistent sacrifice of some lives for the betterment of others is the norm [...] racial violence is increasingly encoded in the language of the border and of security.'⁵³ Refugees and migrants challenge the idea that non-white, Global South lives should be 'sacrificed' to the betterment of lives in the Global North by insisting on travelling to the North, despite the risks and prohibitions. Their movement is itself a dissensus because it disrupts ideas of where certain bodies and certain kinds of suffering should remain.

⁵¹ Bausells.

⁵² Mbembe, 'Borderless World'.

⁵³ Mbembe, 'Borderless World'.

‘Home’, despite its content, replicates this formally. Kevin Potter has analysed it as an example of what he calls ‘kinopoetics’, drawing from Thomas Nail’s ‘kinopolitics’.⁵⁴ Kinopolitics seeks to recentre motion rather than placed-base stasis as the driving force of ‘social and political formation’, and so kinopoetics ‘draws out and highlights the primacy of movement that defines and creates the conditions of migrancy and social formation’.⁵⁵ Potter is especially interested in two elements of Nail’s theory of kinopolitics: centrifugal force and pedetic motion. For Nail, centrifugal force is one of four types of kinopower, or ‘forces of social motion’, that operates by pushing people considered undesirable towards the periphery.⁵⁶ But migrants are not passive victims in Nail’s account. They can enact a counterforce to transform society by inclusion instead of exclusion through something he calls pedetic motion, ‘the force of the foot—to walk, to run, to leap, to dance’.⁵⁷ Potter reads ‘Home’ as an illustration of both centrifugal force and pedetic motion. The second line, ‘unless home is the mouth of a shark’, viscerally describes the violence that propels migrants to flee. ‘[T]he home in these lines transfers the migrant body’s energy with the same affective capacity as the mouth of a shark’, Potter writes.⁵⁸ But the speaker’s insistence, towards the end, that ‘I want to go home’ is for Potter an ‘explicit invocation of her pedetic force’ and a ‘form of protest and resistance’, since she insists on her right to a home despite the forces both in her home country and her new country that would deny her this comfort.⁵⁹ In his analysis, Potter argues that the way the racial slurs and insults are represented formally on the page in ‘Home’ undercuts their authority, even if the speaker does not push back against them with her own charge of arrogance as in the first version. The fact that they are not set off by quotation marks or any other ‘bordered stage of their

⁵⁴ Kevin Potter, ‘Centrifugal Force and the Mouth of a Shark: Toward a Movement-Oriented Poetics’, *ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, 50.4 (2019), 51-8 <<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/735708>> [accessed 1 December 2020]

⁵⁵ Potter, p. 53 and p. 60.

⁵⁶ Potter, p. 58.

⁵⁷ Qtd. in Potter, p. 60.

⁵⁸ Potter, p. 65.

⁵⁹ Potter, p. 72.

own' means that the speaker remains the definer of her own experience and motivations.⁶⁰ They attempt to define her narrative, but instead she incorporates them into hers. But by far the most convincing element of Potter's reading is his depiction of how the poem replicates movement. He argues that the use of alliteration and repetition in the stanzas describing the speaker's journey 'linguistically creates a walking rhythm, a patterned mixture of voices and feet walking and moving together; in other words, it creates an affective map'.⁶¹

The sense of motion in the second version of 'Home' is also created by the fact that its short, punchy lines come one after the other as the reader follows them down the page. This has had practical consequences. The second version is much easier to excerpt for tweets and protest signs, and this has literally allowed it to cross borders. It has been tweeted in the British context by Green Member of Parliament Caroline Lucas, read and quoted on signs at US protests against President Donald Trump's ban on immigration from certain Muslim-majority countries, and written on signs by African asylum seekers in Jerusalem protesting a deportation policy that would have sent them back to Africa.⁶²

Importantly, in order to move, 'Home' must leave the book and, in Shire's words, 'float around the strange streets of the internet'.⁶³ Streets is a revealing word choice because it implies both movement and protest (Whose streets? Our streets!). It is the poem's formal ability to walk the streets virtually that allows it to hit the streets on placards, and the internet itself has replaced print in the late twentieth/early twenty-first century as the communication technology linked to both fears and dreams of disruption. The internet has much in common with the forces eroding national sovereignty in the twenty-first century. In her book *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*, Wendy Brown argues that the nation is losing its role as the dominant force in the international order, and is responding by putting up

⁶⁰ Potter, p. 70.

⁶¹ Potter, p. 68.

⁶² Bausells, and Kuo.

⁶³ Bausells.

physical barriers at its borders.⁶⁴ Those borders are not to keep out other states, but rather ‘individuals, groups, movements, organisations, and industries’.⁶⁵ What is undermining state sovereignty for Brown is the ‘growing transnational flows of capital, people, ideas, goods, violence, and political and religious fealty’.⁶⁶ The internet, in enabling most of these flows, is emblematic of that threat.⁶⁷

The way information is spread online is even talked about in the same language used to inspire fear of immigrants: the language of contagion. As an example of anti-immigrant sentiment, Patrick Kingsley quotes Katie Hopkins as saying refugees would turn British towns into ‘festering sores, plagued by swarms of migrants and asylum seekers’.⁶⁸ In a similar vein, if a particular piece of content does well online, it is said to ‘go viral’, but this flips the negative connotation of the word. To go viral is to be a success, to overwhelm any attempt to stop one’s momentum. Given its reach, ‘Home’ can fairly be said to have gone viral. Leif Schenstead-Harris argued that it became a ‘verifiable internet meme’, and its spread motivated Beyonce to incorporate Shire’s poetry into her 2016 visual album *Lemonade*.⁶⁹ ‘Home’s’ virality challenges ‘the control of movement itself and its corollary, speed’, which, as Mbembe argues, ‘migration control policies are all about’.⁷⁰ It insists on doubling and spreading on posts and posters, locating in the cruelty of rhetoric like Hopkins’s a kind of power it can reclaim for refugees: yes, we are viral. Your words and your walls cannot stop us.

⁶⁴ Wendy Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), pp. 7-16. Brown wrote the book in 2010, but the drive to wall-build has only increased since then. One of her examples is a fence on the US-Mexico border. Expanding it into a full wall was a key promise of former US President Donald Trump.

⁶⁵ Brown, p. 21.

⁶⁶ Drawing on Carl Schmitt and others, Brown defines sovereignty as ‘supremacy’, ‘perpetuity’, ‘decisionism’, ‘absoluteness and completeness’, ‘nontransferability’ and ‘specified jurisdiction’, see p. 22.

⁶⁷ In reference to the flow of violence across borders, the fact that even white nationalism has gone transnational via the internet—that, in the case of the Christchurch shooting, an Australian wrote a manifesto about an act in New Zealand intended to spark conflict and potentially race-war in the US—is an indication that the nation-state system is indeed losing its power, since even those who see immigrants as invaders feel the need to bypass it to spread their ideas. See Evans, ‘Shitposting’, as cited in the Introduction.

⁶⁸ Kingsley, ‘The Second Sea’, *The New Odyssey*.

⁶⁹ Potter, p. 73.

⁷⁰ Mbembe, ‘Borderless World’.

One could argue that by taking the most potentially ‘viral’ phrases out of ‘Conversations’ and re-ordering them in ‘Home’, Shire is enacting the sacrifice that refugees must make: giving up community, context, and the right to a self-definition beyond pity in exchange for movement. However, one of the key differences between ‘Conversations’ and ‘Home’ is the latter’s return to a poetic structure based on the movement of the eye from line to line down a page (or screen). This means that ‘Home’ gestures to the possibility of relationship in a way ‘Conversations’ does not. It opens up into poetic lines that connect to each other and invite the reader to follow the speaker’s journey down their length. Its words voice an appeal, but its form is a force.

IV. ‘Transcending Empathy’

The previous sections have detailed the dangers in attempting to use poetry as a ‘rallying cry’ for refugees. On the one hand, the attempt to write refugees into the imagined community of developed countries like Britain can risk prioritising the needs and expectations of the preexisting community and reinforcing the legitimacy of borders that are expanded but not abolished. On the other, writing that foregrounds the suffering of migrants may reproduce the logic of the asylum process in which certain bodies can only travel under extreme duress while others are given free rein. But this is not the only way to write poetry that centres the refugee experience. The poems written by Qasmiyeh for the Refugee Hosts project and Amir Darwish’s work in the collection *Dear Refugee* offer an alternative by, respectively, decentring the Global North perspective and insisting on the right of the displaced to experience pleasure as well as pain.

The Refugee Hosts project reunites Stonebridge and Qasmiyeh along with other scholars and activists for an interdisciplinary research project focusing on nine refugee and host communities in Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon that have been impacted by the arrival of refugees from Syria.⁷¹ The project displaces Europe and Britain from the refugee crisis narrative in two key ways. First, it focuses on the countries that have actually been most

⁷¹ ‘About the Project’, *Refugee Hosts* <<https://refugeehosts.org/>> [accessed 1 December 2020]

impacted by forced displacement from the conflict in Syria. As referenced in the previous chapter, Kingsley pointed out that the term ‘refugee crisis is something of a misnomer’ from the European perspective; ‘There is a crisis, but it’s one caused largely by our response to the refugees, rather than by the refugees themselves.’⁷² By researching and highlighting the experiences of refugee and host communities in frontline countries like Lebanon, the Refugee Hosts project implicitly rejects the narrative that depicts Europe as the primary victim of the refugee crisis.

Further, Refugee Hosts explicitly challenges the notion of refugees as passive victims. Several of the refugee camps where new Syrian arrivals sought refuge were already home to Palestinian and Iraqi refugees, who were able to offer what the researchers call ‘refugee-refugee humanitarianism’.⁷³ ‘In many ways, refugee-led initiatives challenge widely held (although equally widely contested) assumptions that refugees are passive victims in need of care from outsiders’, Qasmiyeh and fellow-researcher Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh wrote.⁷⁴

As part of challenging the ‘passive victim’ narrative, the project also has a stated goal of ‘transcending the rhetoric of empathy towards refugees’.⁷⁵ Partly, this meant rejecting a focus on individual stories of suffering and trauma. This was reflected in the photography taken for the project blog’s ‘Representations of Displacement Series’, which chose to represent ‘Spaces and Places, not Faces’.⁷⁶ However, ‘Spaces and Places, not Faces’ would also be a largely accurate description of the poems Qasmiyeh wrote as the project’s ‘Writer in Residence’. Qasmiyeh’s poems were based on time spent in the Baddawi refugee camp in

⁷² Kingsley, ‘Prologue’, *The New Odyssey*.

⁷³ ‘About the Project’.

⁷⁴ Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Yousif M. Qasmiyeh, ‘Refugee Neighbours and Hospitality’, *The Critique*, 5 June 2017 <<http://www.thecritique.com/articles/refugee-neighbours-hostipitality-2/>> [accessed 1 December 2020]

⁷⁵ Yousif M. Qasmiyeh, ‘Writing the camp, writing the camp archive: The case of Baddawi refugee camp in Lebanon’ in *Refuge in a Moving World: Tracing Refugee and Migrant Journeys Across Disciplines*, ed. by Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh (London: UCL Press, 2020), pp. 52-73 (p. 56).

⁷⁶ Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, ‘Representations of Displacement Series’, *Refugee Hosts*, <<https://refugeehosts.org/representations-of-displacement-series/>> [accessed 1 December 2020]

Lebanon, where he had in fact been born.⁷⁷ While his poems do feature individual characters, they are ultimately focused on attempting to make sense of the camp itself. This is reflected in a series of titles that offer different definitions: 'The Camp is Time'; 'The Camp is the Reject of the Reject Par Excellence'; 'Necessarily, the Camp is the Border'.⁷⁸ The poems themselves are also constantly trying to understand the camp and ending up with paradox and aporia. The fifth stanza of 'The Camp is Time' contradicts the title to insist 'The incinerator of time is the camp'. In 'Refugees are Dialectical Beings: Part One', the speaker declares, 'It is the truth and nothing else that for the camp to survive it must kill itself.'⁷⁹

The paradoxes of Qasmiyeh's camp poems recall the paradoxes of John Clare's asylum poems, as discussed in Chapter Three. In interpreting these poems, as I observed in that chapter, Stephanie Kuduk Weiner reads Clare's paradoxes as a mimesis of absence. Like Clare, Qasmiyeh is writing from a non-place used to house those who no one else wants, and yet what concerns him is less the absence of the world outside the camp than the presence of this 'pending place' that has been in existence long enough to witness deaths and births and house a cemetery.⁸⁰ Qasmiyeh's camp poems reveal that the crisis is not a refugee crisis at all, but a crisis of refuge. Drawing on the definition of 'crisis' as 'a state of affairs in which a decisive change for better or worse is imminent', Qasmiyeh depicts a place in which the 'decisive change' never arrives, in which the camp is at once home and border and cannot make up its mind.⁸¹

In addition to paradox and repetition, Qasmiyeh uses other poetic devices to represent the indeterminacy of camp life. One is how he manipulates the experience of reading poetry on

⁷⁷ Qasmiyeh, 'Writing the camp', *Refuge*, p. 52.

⁷⁸ Qasmiyeh, 'Writing the camp', *Refuge*, p. 61, p. 68, and p. 70.

⁷⁹ Qasmiyeh, 'Refugees are Dialectical Beings: Part One', *Refugee Hosts*, 1 September 2017 <<https://refugeehosts.org/2017/09/01/refugees-are-dialectical-beings-part-one/>> [accessed 1 December 2020]

⁸⁰ Qasmiyeh, 'Refugees'.

⁸¹ 'Crisis', *Oxford English Dictionary* [Online] <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/44539?redirectedFrom=crisis+#eid>> [accessed 1 December 2020]

a website. All of his poems for 'Refugee Hosts' were originally published on the site. The posts on the website often use hyperlinks to direct readers both to outside sources and to other relevant posts on the site itself. This in itself is unremarkable. But what is interesting is that Qasmiyeh (or whoever uploaded his poems) uses a hyperlink inside one of them. 'The Camp is Time' begins with the line 'Who writes the camp'.⁸² This line is highlighted in red, and by clicking on it you are taken to another of his poems on the website called 'Writing the Camp Vis-à-vis or a Camp'.⁸³ The experience replicates a journey, but it is also on one level a journey to nowhere. You have moved from poem to poem but remain within the same website. 'What makes a camp a camp? And what is the beginning of a camp if there is any? And do camps exist in order to die or exist forever?' the poem begins. The act of immediately escaping from one poem about the camp (instead of completing it and navigating away from the page in the traditional way) and landing in another makes the reader feel like perhaps the poems about the camp will exist forever. This sense of the camp as an inescapable location is also reflected in the poems' publication history. Several of the camp poems were first published on the Refugee Hosts website, then in the free UCL Press scholarly anthology *Refuge in a Moving World: Tracing Refugee and Migrant Journeys Across Disciplines*, and finally in a poetry monograph titled *Writing the Camp* published by Broken Sleep Books in 2021.⁸⁴ The transportation of the material across media and contexts acts as a metaphor for the camp itself, as both a permanent temporary home and a stationary journey.

Another way Qasmiyeh reflects this sense of impossible stasis is through the repeated imagery of failed flight. In 'Refugees are Dialectical Beings: Part One', he writes, 'In the solemnity of the place, faces fall like depleted birds.' In 'The Camp is the Reject of the Reject Par Excellence', he writes, 'The camp has its own sky. When people shoot in the air in

⁸² Qasmiyeh, 'The Camp is Time', *Refugee Hosts*, 15 January 2017 <<https://refugeehosts.org/2017/01/15/the-camp-is-time/>> [accessed 1 December 2020]

⁸³ Qasmiyeh, 'Writing the Camp Vis-à-vis or a Camp', *Refugee Hosts*, 30 September 2016 <<https://refugeehosts.org/2016/09/30/writing-the-camp/>> [accessed 1 December 2020]

⁸⁴ Qasmiyeh, *Writing the Camp* (Talgarreg, Wales: Broken Sleep Books, 2021).

happiness and in despair it is to kill the bird that is never there.’⁸⁵ Another poem, about new refugees coming to the camp, is titled ‘In arrival, feet flutter like dying birds’.⁸⁶ Taken together, the lines suggest the camp as a place from which forward motion is impossible. Its sky is birdless, and, when people arrive, they lose the ability to leave again. The line ‘In arrival, feet flutter like dying birds’ has a sonic journey that echoes the physical one it describes. The alliteration of ‘feet’ and ‘flutter’ evokes movement that is stilled with the final, single ‘birds’.

However, the full text of the poem introduces even more complications:

We think, sometimes, that they came from countless directions, from dim-coloured borders, from the raging fire that devoured them in the beginning, from absence... Here they come again, so invite them over to our death.

*

The refugee is the revenant of the face.

*

O refugee, feast upon the other to eat yourself.

*

In arrival, feet flutter like dying birds.

*

⁸⁵ Qasmiyeh, ‘Writing the camp’, *Refuge*, p. 69.

⁸⁶ Qasmiyeh, ‘In arrival, feet flutter like dying birds’, *Refugee Hosts*, 17 May 2017 <<https://refugeehosts.org/2017/05/17/in-arrival-feet-flutter-like-dying-birds/>> [accessed 1 December 2020]

In the camp, time died so it could return home.

The poem presents the speaker as a camp-dweller who is witnessing the latest influx of refugees, inviting them 'to our death'. And yet the origin of the new refugees is just as paradoxical as the living death they are arriving in. They come at once from 'countless directions' and from 'absence'. They arrive in 'death' 'already devoured' by a raging fire. They are at once dying birds coming to rest and the always already walking dead. They are the 'revenant of the face'. While the poem begins with a separation between the invited and the invitee, those divisions are rendered meaningless by the third stanza. There is no difference between eating the other and eating oneself. The poem concludes with a final impossibility: 'In the camp, time died so it could return home.' The line suggests that death is the only way out of the camp, where time does not pass. And yet both the original camp dwellers and the incoming refugees have been described as already dead. Furthermore, if the camp is a place where time can die, it takes on a greater power than time itself, and therefore, than death. This makes it paradoxically a site of resurrection and rebirth. The camp hovers between dystopia and utopia. In one reading, it is the eternal Hell that even time has tried to escape. In another, it is a place where the rejected are invited again and again. Where the divisions between self and other cease.

In discussing the Refugee Hosts project, Qasmiyeh cites Jacques Derrida's essay on 'Hospitality'.⁸⁷ This essay is an obvious influence on Qasmiyeh's poems. In it, Derrida elaborates the contradictions inherent in hospitality. In order to welcome, you must have a home to welcome into, which means that hospitality always contains within it the possibility that it could be denied. 'As a reaffirmation of mastery and being oneself in one's own home, from the outset hospitality limits itself at its very beginning,' Derrida writes.⁸⁸ However, this contradiction does not mean that hospitality is impossible. Rather:

⁸⁷ Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Qasmiyeh, 'Neighbours'.

⁸⁸ Jacques Derrida, 'HOSTIPITALITY', Angelaki: *Journal of Theoretical Humanities*, 5:3 (2000), 3-18 <DOI: 10.1080/09697250020034706> (p. 14)

If there is hospitality, the impossible must be done, this “is” being in order that, beyond hospitality, hospitality may come to pass. Hospitality can only take place beyond hospitality, in deciding to let it come, overcoming the hospitality that paralyzes itself on the threshold which it is.⁸⁹

By focusing on an impossible place where long-term refugees welcome new refugees across a threshold that is both a home and not a home, and by playing up this sense of paradox in his poems, Qasmiyeh seems to be trying to imagine the hospitality that overcomes itself. By focusing on the crisis of refuge that is the camp, Qasmiyeh implicitly asks his readers what true welcome might look like if we at once abolished and extended its borders and treated the whole world as what it in fact is: a place for human beings with nowhere else to go.

If Qasmiyeh and the Refugee Hosts project disrupts the humanitarian narrative of suffering refugees by focusing on ‘Spaces and Places, not Faces’, Amir Darwish does so by insisting on the refugee’s and immigrant’s right to pleasure. Darwish came to the UK as an asylum seeker following the Second Gulf War, and his 2019 collection *Dear Refugee* was marketed as a response to the refugees who came after him, an attempt to ‘rescue refugees from the popular media image as perpetrators or victims’.⁹⁰ The contradiction of the jacket copy notwithstanding (how do you rescue someone from being perceived as a victim without victimising them?), the poems themselves insist on the ability of refugees and migrants to feel the full range of human experiences, including joy.

The first and titular poem, ‘Dear Refugee’, offers more than one reversal and surprise in its depiction. It reads:

Be thankful to the roads,

Their stones as they lie before you

To the sky that generously shows you

⁸⁹ Derrida, ‘HOSTIPITALITY’, p. 14.

⁹⁰ Amir Darwish, *Dear Refugee* (Grewelthorpe, Ripon: Smokestack Books, 2019). See back cover for the promotional material.

The moon dangling its legs in your eyes,
Say thank you to nature, to the rivers who feed
The earth to feed you,
Be thankful to life and earth
When they knock open your heart.⁹¹

The poem's first surprise comes in the opening line. The speaker instructs a refugee, who is by definition forced to flee, to 'Be thankful to the roads'. This is almost the opposite of the thrust of 'Home', in which the journey is one long litany of horrors. And the refugee should not only be thankful to the roads because they allow them to escape. The poem makes no mention of what the addressee has fled from. Instead, the journey is celebrated for its pleasure as well as its utility. This pleasure is reflected in both imagery and sound. The moon is 'dangling its legs' in the refugee's eyes; the stones of the road 'lie before' them. These two images present the world as a lover, not an enemy. The assonance of 'roads', 'stones', and 'shows' as well as 'lie', 'sky', and 'eyes' eases the reader's experience along a path of half-rhyme. But the insistence on pleasure is not the only surprise. The poem concludes with a role-reversal. The refugee is instructed to be thankful to life and earth 'when they knock open your heart'. The figure who is usually depicted as in need of welcome is now empowered to welcome. Since refugee stories are expected to be stories of suffering, the poem produces a dissensus. It forces the reader to consider refugees as people who have a right to enjoy life as well as survive it.

Not every poem in *Dear Refugee* disrupts convention as fully. The poem 'Where I come from' lists the refugee speaker's origins as a number of familiar traumas, including 'From a bullet wound' and 'From a hole in an inflatable boat about to sink'.⁹² However, this is balanced by poems like 'I am an immigrant and I love life' and 'I speak of Teesside', in which

⁹¹ Darwish, p. 9.

⁹² Darwish, p. 11.

the immigrant speaker writes an ode to his new environment and discoveries like 'Osmotherley and the homemade honey | That found its way to my heart'.⁹³ Overall, the collection rejects the idea that travel must be unpleasant to be earned.

Contemporary poetry responding to the refugee experience engages with two related but distinct ideas about how poetry can and should influence society. Both are rooted in the assertion, articulated by Shelley, that poetry can stimulate the imagination. In one, the value of poetry is in its ability to foster empathy for those unlike ourselves, especially disadvantaged groups like refugees or migrants. In another, its value lies in its ability to disrupt the preestablished 'distribution of the sensible' and suggest that another world might indeed be possible. In Toni Cade Bambara's words, it should 'make revolution irresistible'.⁹⁴ Many of the poems discussed in this chapter reflect both motivations in different ways. Projects like *Country of Refuge* and *England: Poems from a School* seek to redefine England as a place that can and should welcome migrants and refugees, but in the process they tend to reinforce the refugee/citizen binary and centre a citizen audience who should be moved to welcoming. Warsan Shire's 'Conversations about Home (at the Deportation Centre)' and 'Home' attempt to engender empathy for a suffering speaker, but they also replicate the force of movement that challenges existing borders. Yousif Qasmiyeh's poetry for Refugee Hosts replicates the experience of the refugee camp in a way that prompts readers to expand their imagination of what true hospitality could look like. And Amir Darwish works to disrupt the idea that suffering is the only basis for empathy between reader and speaker. All of the poets respond to a media landscape in which the proliferation of negative images of refugees and migrants coexists with restrictive border policies and fascist terrorism, inflaming anxieties about the influence of new forms of communication on public opinion and action that have existed since the Romantic era. Like

⁹³ Darwish, p. 37.

⁹⁴ Qtd. in Aishah Shahidah Simmons, 'Rage and Meditation: Celebrating Toni Cade Bambara's 75th Birthday', *The Feminist Wire*, 25 March 2015 <https://thefeministwire.com/2014/03/rage-meditation-celebrating-toni-cade-bambaras-75th-birthday/#_edn1> [accessed 2 December 2020]

the Romantic poets, contemporary authors have responded to these anxieties by adding to the flow of communication in the hopes, perhaps, of redirecting its course.

Conclusion: Writing Home

One theme running through this dissertation has been the use of poetry to create an alternative sense of community in times of upheaval and displacement. Charlotte Smith and William Wordsworth used their verse to gather or memorialise those who were uprooted by the consolidation of the British and French nation states. John Clare's poems created a refuge for the customs and landscapes lost to enclosure. Lord Byron both sought literary belonging in response to his own self-exile and provided it to the readers he brought along on his journey poems.

In the contemporary period, Ruth Padel used classical allusions to write refugees into the imagined community of Europe, while Carolyn Forché and A. E. Stallings employed them to unite the region's present and past. Ed Luker and Zeina Hashem Beck connected the sea with metre as forces that at once forge and bridge impossible divides. Lucy Popescu's *A Country of Refuge* and Kate Clanchy's *England: Poems from a School* acted as metaphors for the editors' ideal versions of Britain or England as welcoming havens of diversity. Warsan Shire's 'Conversations About Home (at the Deportation Centre)' was intended to give her refugee interview subjects a place to recognise themselves. The later 'Home's' persistent mobility allowed it to unite activists around the world in calls for refugee rights. Finally, Yousif M. Qasmiyeh's meditations on the pending place of the refugee camp played host to questions about the paradoxes of hospitality, while Amir Darwish addressed refugees as a community of travellers that could find joy as well as sorrow on the road.

In my chapter on Clare, I observed that a poem is something like a home, and all of the poets in my dissertation do extend hospitality to experiences or communities with nowhere else to rest. But these literary homes are also mobile. They travel with us, on our phones or in books, perhaps in our travelling cases as Byron imagined in *Don Juan*. The poem is both the nest and the bird. A construction capable of flight.

The idea of a poem as a portable gathering place has taken on new poignancy for me in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, which has made face-to-face meetings newly fraught and raised the importance of alternative forms of communication. The beginning of this work was instigated by the refugee crisis and nationalist backlash in 2015 and 2016. It's completion, however, was dogged by the spread of COVID-19 and the new questions it raised about mobility and its restrictions.

As someone with US passport privilege, the pandemic hardened national borders for me in ways I had not previously experienced. A UK-wide lockdown announced in January of 2021 meant I was unable to return to Cambridge for most of the last six months of my PhD. Before the pandemic, the relationship between mobility and contagion had been a racist trope in the mouths of anti-immigrant pundits like Katie Hopkins. Suddenly, it was a real public health concern.

It occurred to me while finishing this dissertation that the new reality of the pandemic might have felt more recognisable to Romantic-era authors than it did to me. I recalled the contagious wandering in Wordsworth's 'The Brothers', flagged by Alan Bewell in *Romanticism and Colonial Disease*, as well as the quarantines in Byron's *Beppo* and *Don Juan*. Living as they did before anti-biotics and most vaccines, the people of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were very familiar with the threat of infectious disease. And yet they still travelled and mingled and made love. After more than a year spent largely alone in a room completing this thesis, I can understand why. The entire experience, for me, has answered the question of, 'Are we good or bad for each other,' with a resounding, 'Yes!' Mobility may pose real risks, but the enclosure of full security is hardly a permanent solution.

While the pandemic has exposed more privileged people to border controls, it has not attacked the underlying inequalities that caused and exacerbated the 2015 refugee crisis. The crowded, impermanent housing conditions faced by many refugees have made them

especially vulnerable to the new disease. When the Moira refugee camp in Greece was destroyed by a fire in September of 2020, 13,000 people were forced to sleep on the streets. When a new camp was built, it was not built in a way to ensure public health, and hundreds tested positive for COVID-19.¹ Refugees and migrants were also less able to access government services than citizens of their host countries. This was an issue for international students at UK universities during the pandemic. A Unis Resist Border Controls (URBC) survey reported that 56 percent of international students found themselves either destitute or nearly destitute during the first national lockdown because Tier 4 students cannot access public funds and the universities themselves did not provide compensatory support.²

At the same time, governments have used the pandemic as an excuse to curtail the movement of refugees and migrants.³ While governments are supposed to still allow asylum applications while closing borders for public health reasons, there is evidence this has not been the case in the US, Europe, and other places. In Hungary, the pandemic was used as an excuse to shut down the country's asylum process all together. In a report on COVID-19 and mobility, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) warned that the pandemic could widen the disparity between 'movers and non-movers': people from wealthier nations are still more able to travel for business, family, or tourism while migrant workers and refugees have been stuck self-funding expensive quarantines.⁴ The situation could become even worse if travel permission is linked to vaccination status. World Health Organisation Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus announced in May of 2021 that the world

¹ Heaven Crawley, 'How COVID-19 became a cover to reduce refugee rights', *The Conversation*, 10 March 2021 <<https://theconversation.com/how-covid-19-became-a-cover-to-reduce-refugee-rights-156247>> [accessed 29 September 2021]

² 'Thoughts from URBC on recent student occupations and fee strikes', *Universities Resist Border Controls*, 28 April 2021 <<https://www.unisresistbordercontrols.org.uk/2021/04/28/thoughts-from-urbc-on-recent-student-occupations-and-fee-strikes/>> [accessed 29 September 2021]

³ The following comes from Crawley.

⁴ Meghan Benton and others, *Covid-19 and the State of Global Mobility in 2020* (Geneva, Switzerland: Migration Policy Institute and International Organization for Migration, 2021), p. 3.

had already entered a ‘vaccine apartheid’ in which wealthier countries have greater access to the life-saving inoculations.⁵

Yet as refugees and migrants face new restrictions, the forces like war and environmental destruction displacing them prior to the pandemic persist. The Taliban’s takeover of Afghanistan in the summer of 2021 prompted thousands to flee, and the UN said their numbers could swell to half a million by the end of the year.⁶ A World Bank report made headlines in September of 2021 for predicting that more than 200 million people could be forced to leave their homes because of the climate crisis if nothing is done to curb emissions.⁷

If anything, the pandemic makes the need for a right to move and a right to an abode even more urgent. The importance of written communication has increased during a time when in-person interactions are restricted or unsafe. The question posed by the rest of this crisis-ridden century is whether the displaced of this earth can find both freedom and rest outside the nest of poetry, whether the alternative communities imagined by poets from Smith to Luker can take form beyond the borders of the page or screen.

⁵ ‘World has entered stage of “vaccine apartheid” – WHO head’, *Reuters*, 17 May 2021 <<https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/world-has-entered-stage-vaccine-apartheid-who-head-2021-05-17/>> [accessed 29 September 2021]

⁶ The Visual Journalism Team, ‘Afghanistan: How many refugees are there and where will they go?’, *BBC News*, 31 August 2021 <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-58283177>> [accessed 29 September 2021]

⁷ Renata Briton, ‘Report: Climate change could see 200 million move by 2050’, *The Associated Press*, 13 September 2021 <<https://apnews.com/article/africa-climate-environment-and-nature-immigration-europe-69cada32a7c13f80914a2a7b48fb5b9c>> [accessed 29 September 2021]

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