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## Lampedusa: Migrant Tragedy

John Kerrigan

*Tragedies about the suffering of migrants are not a new phenomenon. So this article quickly turns to texts from classical antiquity by Aeschylus and Euripides. It focuses, however, on poetry written over the last decade. Following the routes taken by asylum seekers from Africa and Asia through such transit points as Lampedusa and across Europe to Calais, it looks at depictions of the suffering associated with travel, disaster, and problematic arrival, and at the interaction in tragic writing between old motifs and conventions (tragedy as understood by Aristotle or Hegel) and current issues and resources. Fresh insights are offered into the work of poets from migrant backgrounds (Warsan Shire, Ribkha Sibhatu) and into a range of modes from lyric (James Byrne) through experiments with translation and performance (Caroline Bergvall) into the late modernism of Geraldine Monk, J. H. Prynne, and Jeff Hilson.*

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We could start with Noah's ark, drifting across the flood. Or with Utnapishtim, his wife and children, craftsmen from his village, gold, silver, animals, and seeds all packed into a huge vessel and traversing the waves in *Gilgamesh*. Or further back again with the version of the story found in the Akkadian epic *Atra-Hasis* (18C BCE). The persistence of this legend speaks to a human instinct for survival, but also to a desire to preserve, or carry with us, what the escape from disaster threatens to take away. It is a reminder that stories of people on the move—whether it is the Maori legend of the seven canoes or the oral histories of the Dogon about their migration to the Bandiagara escarpment—do not in the least have to center on Europe. Yet the post-imperial continent I live in is now for economic reasons a major focus for migration. Which means that, although the Bible and *Gilgamesh* will be touched on in this article, the most significant continuities to be dealt with descend from classical antiquity. For Greek tragedy gives us preshocks of the suffering of migrants from Afghanistan, Syria, East Africa, and other places in trouble, who have for years now been crossing the Mediterranean in overloaded dinghies and fishing boats, and anticipations also of the arguments about asylum that their afflictions have stirred up in host countries in Europe.

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Aeschylus' *The Suppliants*, for example, has as its chorus a group of asylum-seeking women who have sailed to Greece pursued by Egyptian men that they do not want to marry. "Such are the sad sufferings (*toiauta pathea melea*) that I speak and cry of," they lament, "grievous, keening, tear-falling sufferings— / *iē, iē!*"<sup>1</sup> Claiming kinship with the Argives, the people of the Peloponnese whom they hope will give them sanctuary, the Danaids are in that sense asking to be allowed to return home, and, after a debate in the public assembly, they are taken into the city. At the end of the play, however, the soldiers who lead them into Argos "fear punishments" from the Egyptians, "dire suffering and bloody wars" (lines 1043–44), and urge them to accept their suitors. The migrants will remain alien and a source of danger.

The children of Heracles, likewise, in the tragedy by Euripides, ask the Athenians to protect them from Eurystheus of Mycenae. "It is a calamity that brings disgrace on you," says old Ioalus to King Demophon, "if suppliants, wanderers, kinsmen—alas for the pain (*oimoi kakōn*), look at them, look at them!—are dragged off by force."<sup>2</sup> Despite its self-image as an inclusive, generous city, Athens was calculating about its alliances when giving sanctuary and its ability to protect refugees was projected as a measure of power.<sup>3</sup> Euripides is alert to such motives in Demophon's weighing up of options, and the refugees become a problem for him and for Athens when Alcmena, Heracles' mother, insists on the execution of Eurystheus, after he is defeated in battle, despite it being contrary to the law. He accepts death because of a prophecy that his spirit will protect Athens against aggression from the descendants of just those Heracleidae—that is, the Spartans—to whom the city is giving refuge. The prediction that there will be hostility from the descendants of refugees (wherever they end up) is often heard now in Europe.

One sign of the relevance of tragedy to the flow of migrants is the upsurge in revivals not merely of the dramas just mentioned but of such other ancient plays about going into exile as Euripides' *Trojan Women*, with asylum seekers sitting on stage or taking roles.<sup>4</sup> In this article, however, I want to focus on poetry written over the last decade within a larger perception of how tragedy has been associated with the suffering of migrants. For the words *tragedy* and *tragic* have been used to excess and beyond both by journalists, non-governmental organizations, and politicians to elicit sympathy for refugees and by those who prefer hand-wringing neglect.<sup>5</sup> My plan is to take this usage seriously enough

1 Aeschylus, *Suppliants*, lines 112–15, in Aeschylus, *Persians. Seven against Thebes. Suppliants. Prometheus Bound*, ed. and trans. Alan H. Sommerstein, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

2 Euripides, *Children of Heracles*, lines 223–5, in Euripides, *Children of Heracles. Hippolytus. Andromache. Hecuba*, ed. and tr. David Kovacs, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

3 Angeliki Tzanetou, *City of Suppliants: Tragedy and the Athenian Empire* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2012), 1.

4 Peter Sellars' production of *The Children of Heracles* (Cambridge, MA, 2003) had refugees sitting on stage; *Queens of Syria*, an adaptation of *The Trojan Women*, was performed in Amman, Jordan, in 2013, with a cast of Syrian women refugees, and was widely seen internationally; Elfriede Jelinek's *Die Schutzbefohlenen*, an adaptation of Aeschylus' *The Suppliants*, was read to refugees from Lampedusa in St. Pauli Church, Hamburg, where they had been given sanctuary, again in 2013, and the text went on to performances (with or without asylum seekers on the stage) in many theaters in Germany, the Netherlands, Austria, and Switzerland. For the context of such productions see S. E. Wilmer, "Cultural Encounters in Modern Productions of Greek Tragedy," *Nordic Theatre Studies* 28.1 (2016): 15–26.

5 To google *migrant* with *tragedy* is to throw up hundreds of results. Compare Imogen Dobie, "The Essex Lorry Deaths are Not Just "Tragic": They're Political," *The Guardian* November 9, 2019.

to push through it, the more firmly to set out what is indeed tragic in migrant suffering and to show how it can be represented in relation to the conventions of tragedy.

The distinction I've just flagged up between the tragic as a mode of experience and tragedy as mimesis, structure, and concept is useful up to a point; it can help discussion advance through various sorts of complication, yet it cannot be rigorously enforced. The words *tragic* and *tragedy* are entangled; there is an impulse in those who suffer as well as those who look on to find shape and significance in adversity. What can be said more immediately is that from the outset the tragedy of migration has tested and developed the genre. The Greek tragedies that I have cited give a more socially active role to the chorus than we would expect from Aristotle's *Poetics* or Hegel on the *Antigone*. They unleash complaint and persuasion, and generate the displays of *pathos* (pain, suffering) that ancient and Renaissance audiences valued in tragedy<sup>6</sup> but that have been demoted in theory and practice since the rise of the novel. In the verse explored in this article, further challenges to received ideas can be found, with work about migrants putting in doubt "tragic fate," the acquisition of knowledge by protagonists, and the value of suffering.

The axis of discussion will go from North Africa through the island of Lampedusa, at the southernmost edge of Europe, now iconic as a landing-station and processing center for migrants, and on to the Jungle near Calais—which brings the story close to what is home, on the whole, for me, since this complex was policed at British expense under the umbrella of border agreements and protocols (rather as the Pale of Calais was once under English rule). I shall notice, most extensively, writing by the Eritrean-born Ribka Sibhatu, the Norwegian-French experimentalist Caroline Bergvall, who has mostly been based in England, and the late modernists Geraldine Monk, J. H. Prynne, and Jeff Hilson, though I shall also pass through drama and a tragic lyric by James Byrne.

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Before I get to these works, I ought to establish coordinates by setting out two sides of the tragic agon. For the voice of the Danaids and the Heracleidae, we can turn to Warsan Shire. She grew up in a British-Somalian community, in which, she has said, "a lot of terrible things ... have happened to people who are really close to me, ... it's in the home and it's even in you, ... Them being able to tell me, and then me writing it, it's cathartic, being able to share their stories, even if it is something really terrible, something really tragic."<sup>7</sup> The tragedy and perhaps the catharsis can be felt in her well-known "Home":

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

And again, in the fourth stanza,

6 Compare Blair Hoxby, *What Was Tragedy? Theory and the Early Modern Canon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

7 Katie Reid, "Q&A: Poet, writer and educator Warsan Shire," June 21, 2013 (<https://africanwords.com/2013/06/21/qa-poet-writer-and-educator-warsan-shire/>).

you have to understand,  
 that no one puts their children in a boat  
 unless the water is safer than the land<sup>8</sup>

The deprivations and assaults of the journey (strip searches, beatings, rape) pile up in a terrible catalogue, but they are repeatedly pulled back to “no one,” both the tragic individual who suffers and that person reduced to nothing. Arrival does not bring a new home. The poem advances—and has been known to end—with the migrants being told:

go home blacks  
 refugees  
 dirty immigrants  
 asylum seekers  
 sucking our country dry

The indiscriminate violence of these insults, as against the speaker’s directness, gives us the measure of the racists.

“Home” may seem mono-vocal for all that it deals with the sufferings of many; in its drive to get out terrible things and see them for what they are lies the potential for catharsis. Yet the writing would be less effective if it did not anticipate resistance from those who need persuasion as well as those who shout abuse. Hence “you have to understand,” reinforced by the rhyme with “land.” We have to understand because empathy is badly needed, but the phrase is also pitched against a discourse in host communities—supported by evidence that is often misused—that asylum seekers are not always fleeing shark-like conditions but looking for opportunity. As why would they not, given the poverty of the global south, used now as in the age of empire to the advantage of the North? So this is the voice of a chorus, set against implied and some actual readers. Which makes it the more painful that by shuttling between lowercase “i” (not a full subject) and “you” (both reader and subject as other), the poem does not feel able to draw on the shared resources of “we.”

It is not hard to find authors who stoke antagonism by sounding like Eurystheus and the Argive soldiers. Though Douglas Murray accepts, in his best-selling *The Strange Death of Europe* (2017), that migrants have “tragedies” to relate,<sup>9</sup> he insists that the North is putting itself in danger by giving sanctuary to its enemies. Anis Amri, for example, who came into Europe via Lampedusa and five years later drove a lorry into crowds of shoppers in Berlin (256). For Murray, the west of Europe is more complacent than the east. After decades of prosperity, it has forgotten “the tragic facts of civilisation” (261), yet, in Poland and Hungary, where memories of Nazi and Soviet occupation are strong, the “tragic dimension of life” is grasped (228, 231) and asylum seekers are

8 See <https://facinghistory.org/standing-up-hatred-intolerance/warshan-shire-home>. Compare “Conversations about Home (At the Deportation Centre),” in *Teaching my Mother to Give Birth* (London: Flipped Eye Publishing, 2011).

9 Douglas Murray, *The Strange Death of Europe: Immigration, Identity, Islam* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 8.

rejected. Murray rests too comfortably on Unamuno's "tragic sense of life."<sup>10</sup> He knows enough history to be aware of the flows of refugees in Europe in the aftermath of World War II and the absorption of so many. The contention that western Europe should embrace the tragic dimension of life means in practice and conveniently letting tragedy fall on migrants.

This article could have been called "Athens" because there are ready continuities between Greek tragedy and the fate of migrants now reaching an increasingly hostile Greece from Turkey. The classicist and poet A. E. Stallings, who works with refugees in Athens,<sup>11</sup> has a sequence of "Aegean Epigrams" that starts with an epigraph from Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*: "We beheld the Aegean blossoming with bodies."<sup>12</sup> Another classicist poet, Ruth Padel, who has written extensively about migration, as a natural and human phenomenon, tied up in poetry with the exilic conscience of the writer, depicts "Orestia." This city near the border with Turkey, named after Orestes, "who knifed his mother and went mad" in however many ancient tragedies, is now as thick with immigration as in Athens it is layered. "In Athens today," she observes, "you see *No Mosques* / and *This is Greece* sprayed over the square / as Albanian vigilantes chase the Afghans out. / People-traffickers from Troy ... asphyxiate stowaways in trucks."<sup>13</sup>

Yet it should be clear why Lampedusa is in my title. This tiny island, close to the Libyan coast, is not just at the frontier of what "Orestia" calls "Fortress Europe," but with its sandy beaches and crystalline waters is the site of scandalous juxtapositions between wealthy sunbathers on their towels and migrants struggling ashore. "No place came to symbolise more," Tony Kushner notes, with an echo of Aristotle, "the intense human tragedy and drama of modern migration, evoking sentiments of pity, shame and fear."<sup>14</sup> The island has repeatedly been represented as a scene of migrant tragedy in journalism, TV coverage, in such films as Gianfranco Rosi's *Fire at Sea* (2016), and in Anders Lustgarten's play *Lampedusa* (2015), which does an effective job of linking the conditions of migrants with the precarity of Italian fishermen and skilled workers (leaving southern Europe to become, themselves, immigrants in the north) and the politics of austerity in England, where lives are cramped and damaged by unfair testing for disability benefits that has an ideologically driven resemblance to the vetting and exclusion of migrants.

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To get to the heart of the topic, let me turn to Ribka Sibhatu's account of a notorious shipwreck that took place off Lampedusa on October 3, 2013—an event that even Murray, rather perfunctorily, calls a "tragedy" (68). Originally written in Sibhatu's acquired Italian but incorporating lines of her native Tigrinya, the poem shifts again, in the version most widely read, into a slightly stiff English that makes something of the

10 Miguel de Unamuno, *The Tragic Sense of Life* (1912), cited by Murray in *The Strange Death of Europe*, 3.

11 See, for example, her "Tales of the Central Athens Irregulars," *Times Literary Supplement*, October 9, 2019.

12 A. E. Stallings, *Like* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2018), 100–02, p. 100.

13 Ruth Padel, *The Mara Crossing* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2012).

14 Tony Kushner, "Lampedusa and the Migrant Crisis: Ethics, Representation and History," *Mobile Culture Studies: The Journal* 2 (2016), 59–92, p. 64. See Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1449b, on catharsis as the purging of pity and fear by rousing such emotions.

inadequacy of translation.<sup>15</sup> Its linguistic condition correlates with the plight of the migrants not just in their moving between cultures but because the death of so many stems from the problem of how to communicate with Europe.

AT LAMPEDUSA

On the third of October  
a boat arrived at Lampedusa  
carrying 518 people....

in the dead of night, from that big raft  
they saw the lights of the promised land.

And thinking their suffering was over,  
they raised a full chorus in praise of the Virgin.

References to “the promised land” and “the Virgin” put us into a Christian framework, but “full chorus” owes more to opera, and behind that are the conventions of classical tragedy, out of which opera grew during the Italian Renaissance. This is a migrant chorus, like the Danaids and Heracleidae. Yet their cry of gratitude for getting to an Italian island—as it is registered in Ge’ez script—anticipates difficulties to come, which are made paradoxically clearer by the provision within the poem of a parallel-text translation. What they take to be a happy ending becomes another sort of catastrophe. Water slops into the vessel; they flash red headlights to raise the alarm, but the message is not received on shore, or it gets no response. As another “urgent signal,” a sheet of cloth is set on fire. Panic ensues, the boat capsizes, and many drown, “leaving messages / to be sent back home,” or just their names.

The most ghastly, true, but symbolic piece of suffering comes in the birth of a child in the water, who dies before he can live. Sibhatu gives a heart-rending account of the mother Yohanna’s struggle, as her husband calls for her among the waves, then adds:

A woman has died giving birth!  
368 people have died! 357 Eritreans have died!

On October 3rd 2013,  
in the heart of the Mediterranean,  
800 yards away from landfall!  
A tragedy of the people  
of Eritrea was consumed;  
one of the tragedies of the people of Eritrea.

15 See <https://www.eurolitnetwork.com/at-lampedusa-by-ribka-sibhatu-translated-by-cristina-viti/>, with the Italian text. For an alternative, see “In Lampedusa,” trans. André Naffis-Sahely, *Modern Poetry in Translation* 1 (2016).

It was a bold decision to play the numbers game so often deployed by officialdom and potentially diluting of tragedy. Because she so vividly renders the deaths of Yohanna and her baby—as they turn into statistics—Sibhatu can defy the anonymity of numbers by showing, in their bareness, the reduction of the migrants, and that so many times over.

That this is “A tragedy of the people / of Eritrea” subconsciously prepares us, with its indefinite article, for the final return to number: “one of the tragedies.” “Una tragedia ... una delle tragedie.” A Greek tragedy can enact a series of tragedies, one atrocity and grief response after another, as in *The Trojan Women*. More largely there is nothing in such plays as the *Antigone* to say that the tragedy is unrepeatable. For as long as loyalties are divided between city or state and family, the events of the play can recur—which is why it is so often revived. Yet Sibhatu’s poem does push beyond the expectations that descend in the West from Aristotle, that every tragedy represents a particular chain of events and centers on individual suffering. A tragedy can be one-of rather than one-off. Migrant tragedy may turn almost classically on *hamartia*, that is, such errors as setting light to a sheet, but it has a plentiful supply of victims, who act or go under as groups. The adverse chances of precarity are not dispersed by statistics; the weighty accumulation of them makes disaster the more inevitable. Until conditions change, the idea that “A tragedy ... was consumed”—or better, though awkwardly, in the telling slippage of translation, “consummated” (the Italian is “si è consumata”)—will be inadequate, and tragedy will be replaced by “tragedies.” Only eight days after the events described by Sibhatu, another migrant boat sank off the coast of Lampedusa at the cost of at least thirty-four lives.

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We can pursue the question of how far the suffering of migrants ought to change old assumptions about tragedy by turning to Caroline Bergvall’s *Drift*. It starts with lines across the page that figure both waves on the sea and poetry, an interplay between the abstract and the textual that grows out of Bergvall’s practice as a visual and performance artist as well as a writer. There are many pages of such lines set out in poemlike blocks, both regular and irregular, dragged with smears, swirling, scored out, and scored in another sense with what could be notes or traces of letters. The reader looks into and across them, as though adrift, until a new section begins with lines of verse that paraphrase the Old English poem *The Seafarer*: “Let me speak my true journeys own true songs...”<sup>16</sup> From this lost, cold voyaging, Bergvall moves on to the *Vinland Sagas* scrambled with other material. The singular becomes collective, while remaining arduous and northward bound.

At the core or hinge of the volume is another journey north, from the coast of Libya. A section called “Report” sets out the “tragedy,” as it is called elsewhere in the book, of seventy-two African migrants who embarked for Lampedusa on March 27, 2011, and were left to drift, suffer, and die. The tragic aspects of the episode are tested by extrapolation and analogy, by shifting scales and frames of reference, and by forensic interconnection. They are not so much amplified as supplemented by material later in the volume: translations from the *Elder Edda*; clusters of th-signifying thorns that look like Viking boats full of warriors, or closely packed refugees; a “Log” that records the

16 Caroline Bergvall, *Drift* (Brooklyn and Callicoon, NY: Nightboat Books, 2014), 25.

making of *Drift* as performance piece and text along with an account of the author's travails as a relationship breaks up and she takes another direction and loses home space like a refugee. Further exercises with thorns and an account of the exhumation of the skeleton of Richard III are followed by a couple of black pages and notes. The articulation is always precise, but there is an overall sense of drift.

Bergvall was led to her subject by an article in *The Guardian* headed "Migrant boat tragedy: UK crew may have seen doomed vessel" (132). *Drift* draws not just on this piece but on the dossier that lies behind it, put together by a team called Forensic Oceanography and called *Report on the "Left-to-Die Boat"* (2012). The result is a terse, lightly contrapuntal narrative which has some of the features of tragedy. Aristotle would approve of its simplicity, though not of its episodic lack of economy. We hear the voices of the migrants, presented as a group like a chorus and sandwiched to dramatic effect between slices of information. As in Sibhatu's poem, what happens depends, like the text itself, on signs. *Drift's* use of archaic thorns and jumbled prose (as letters shift between words, then split into repetition) recalls the "meddle English" in other pieces by Bergvall,<sup>17</sup> but it chimes also with the "transmission errors" (28) that leave the migrants abandoned.

Yet failures in communication—which become acute after the captain of the dinghy throws his satellite phone overboard, to avoid prosecution for people-smuggling—blend into denial, with Fortress Europe (as in Sibhatu) not wanting to notice. Early on, "Rome MRCC sent several distress signals, the first an Enhanced group Call (EGC) broadcast to all ships transiting in the Sicily Channel at 18:54 GMT via the Immarsat C system" (74), but this and similar contacts led to further surveillance not rescue. When a NATO (probably British) helicopter arrives, the migrants are reported as reporting:

*It circled around 4–5 times and came closer. It came very close to us down, we showed them our babies, we showed them we finished oil, we tell them please help us.*

*I think I saw them take pictures. I think I saw a photo camera or something like that.*

This description is consistent with protocols for vessel identification missions.

The helicopter left without providing assistance. (76)

This is one of several episodes in which observation of the disaster replaces action, or boats simply sail away.

The precise approximation of "4–5 times" is characteristic. Bergvall's exacting creativity is drawn to the ability of numbers to be responsible in their accuracy to the seriousness of what happened yet also to turn those events into objects of analysis, features of the digital horizon. As in Sibhatu's poem, numbers can work for tragedy, but *pathos* is drawn out rather than piled up into a mass: "After 2–3 days of this weather people started to die. The number of people increased daily. First two, then four, then five or six people died everyday" (79). Eventually, the narrative goes beyond any sort of catastrophe that could offer catharsis. Tragedy does not end with the journey. After the dinghy drifted back to the Libyan coast, soldiers took survivors to prison. "One more of our brothers died there because of lack of food" (81). "One ... of," as in Sibhatu, is tragic

17 Caroline Bergvall, *Meddle English: New and Selected Texts* (Callicoon, NY: Nightboat Books, 2011).



despite and because there is nothing unique in the death, least of all in the individual failing to become a protagonist.

Was this vessel “doomed” as *The Guardian* puts it? Most tragic actions in Western tradition look inevitable once the die is cast, and many heroes invoke fatality. Drawing on this legacy—though its official aims are investigative—the *Report on the “Left-to-Die-Boat”* uses the phrase “tragic fate” several times.<sup>18</sup> These words need sifting. Ato Quayson has rightly observed that “there are at least three central elements to suffering that are pertinent to tragic representation: the question of choice, the conditions of possibility that underpin choice-making, and the unpredictable consequences that derive from such choices once they are made.”<sup>19</sup> Choice, like its offspring, error, does not modulate without difficulty and design into what looks like “tragic fate,” and modernity has put fate more in doubt than choice—which may even have protected status because capitalism wants us to believe that choice is liberty. In *Drift* the migrants “contested being forced to travel” in their too-small dinghy but “With little choice, they embarked” (71). If this is a tragic error, it is constrained by the “conditions of possibility.” As strikingly, in terms of tragedy, the error is not final (it is not fatal) because the migrants could still have been rescued.

The Aristotelian notion that tragedy is precipitated by a single error (*hamartia*)<sup>20</sup>—Oedipus at the crossroads—does not readily square with how the peoples of Europe, the Maghreb, and near East usually think about mistakes, nor with the incidence of error in plays and novels, where bad choices can be extraneous or compulsive (Shakespeare, Hardy, Freud). When Bergvall tells us that the migrants set sail with too little fuel, and no food or drink, she gives us a mesh of conditions that leads her to think forensically and to quote “tragedy” from *The Guardian* rather than use the word herself. The captain threw his GPS and compass into the sea, but the GPS batteries were in any case run down. Can tragic action turn on omission? Is a technical fault a human error?

Bergvall writes of the “harrowing drift” (134) of the dinghy. The phrase is keenly pitched to bring out the effect on readers, as well as more horribly the migrants, of their helplessness. They are taken to their deaths, but not to a cathartic disaster—dying, as the survivors report, little by little. The less action, you could say, the more tragic. Yet you could also deal with the doubts that are cast by drifting migrants on the idea that tragedy is, as Aristotle puts it, the imitation of an action (*Poetics*, 1449b) by giving action a wider definition. When Yeats wrote “passive suffering is not a theme for poetry. In all the great tragedies, tragedy is a joy to the man who dies,”<sup>21</sup> he was overdosing on Nietzsche, forgetting what suffering is and what the word means. It has always had—from its roots in Latin (*sub* “under” + *ferre* “to bear”)—an active aspect. To *suffer*, the *OED* reminds us, can be to *endure*, *stand*, even *resist* or *consent*. The verb can be transitive as well as

18 Bergvall, *Drift*, 25. Charles Heller, Lorenzo Pezzani, and Situ Studio, *Forensic Oceanography: “Left-to-Die Boat” Case* (London: Centre for Research Architecture, Goldsmiths, University of London, n.d.), 11, 25, 41, 47, 48.

19 Ato Quayson, “On Worlding Tragedy,” in Ben Etherington and Jarad Zimble, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to World Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 149–63, p. 154.

20 Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1453a.

21 “Introduction” to *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, ed. W. B. Yeats (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), xxxiv.

intransitive. Suffering is born out of the responses of the sufferer to what they are put under, worked with and against, and “passive suffering” is almost a contradiction.

A third, less obvious element in the *Guardian* report has a particular bearing on this: “UK crew may have seen.” The migrants were not so much fated as known about and unhelped. Visited by a spotter plane, the helicopter that photographed them, another that dropped packets of biscuits and bottled water, engaged and monitored by ships, it is their wilful neglect that is shocking. Turned into representations of suffering, like characters in a drama, when watched through binoculars or observed on screen, they were left to what would be, while their tragedy was intensified because they saw themselves (seen) suffering and knew where it would end. This is something that tragic theory has made little of, that suffering is heightened for being seen when it could be mitigated. Suffering can be compounded in this way even when it is shut into a representational envelope and cannot in that sense be helped.

“Report” is printed in white letters on black pages that have the effect of making words stand out as signs that are being transmitted while saturating the reading experience with tragic associations. The same scheme is adopted in the sections that precede and follow it. “Sighting” begins with a low-resolution surveillance photograph of the migrants that is enlarged over several pages to blur and disperse the human forms that could engage our sympathy. We go in too close for tragedy, or look through it. “Report” is followed by a series of “Maps.” The first of them uses white dots on black to mark out the drift of the migrants. We are then presented, however, with such isomorphic and tangential dot clusters as the stations on the Northern Line of the London underground (well-known to the author), stars in the Zodiac (the migrants were put into a “zodiac” dinghy), and the outline of Hokusai’s *Great Wave off Kanagawa* (they went through heavy seas). If “Sighting” takes us too close for tragedy, “Maps” does the opposite. It carries to an extreme the detachment of NATO surveillance in a version of the pattern-making that so often and troublingly counterpoints suffering in tragic form.

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That *Drift* is committed to “The forensic principle: that every action or contact leaves a trace” (134) partly justifies the adhesion of so many elements—autobiographical, philological, art historical—to the story in “Report.” Yet as Bergvall goes on to explain how she thinks of her work being put into performance, she elaborates the forensic in ways that lead to an unwelcome appropriation of suffering and danger of dispersal:

To register the event by recitation. Letting the recitation become a resonating chamber, a ripple effect. Insistent methods in art are intimately connected to processes of receiving and of following. One loads one’s vessel for dream-travel and one follows it into hell. A reciting voice remains simultaneously input and output. Resonance is contact ripple. Everything is connected in the vast chamber of the world, beyond the callous, brutal politics. Everything ripples at contact. (134–35)

The model is beautifully thought through, but its distance from the horror and ethical demand of “the event” is betrayed by the sudden bluntness of the reference to “callous, brutal politics,” which, if we take “beyond” one way need not be connected to everything after all. The limitations of extrapolation and linkage are obvious, and not by intent.

The problem is not so much the forensic—which can be vital in the writing of disaster—as the lure of resemblance. There is a reason why Shakespeare’s tragedies are for the most part not double-plotted. In *Drift* too many actions end up looking like imitations of other actions. When Auden writes, with provocative insouciance,

About suffering they were never wrong,  
The Old Masters: how well they understood  
Its human position; how it takes place  
While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along;<sup>22</sup>

he has a point, that suffering needs disconnection if it is to be respected in its agony and the smallness of its scale in the big picture of the world. Yet disconnection does not exclude—it might encourage—collocation within a modernist poetic. The effectiveness of such an approach can be seen from Geraldine Monk’s *They Who Saw the Deep*, which was written shortly after *Drift* (in 2014–2015) and provides a corrective to its emotionally disabling design features.

The title sequence of this collection starts with an epigraph from the Old English elegy *The Wanderer*, much as *Drift* begins with *The Seafarer*. Though it was prompted by “a boat trip on the Libyan sea in 2014”—which was “stunningly beautiful but tainted with the inescapable knowledge of the daily death toll of migrants and refugees being lost to its waters”<sup>23</sup>—it is drawn back to the cold waves of the north. Snapshots of home life in Yorkshire include weather forecasts for the still-dangerous seas dealt with in Old English poetry. Here is the opening of “Faroes. Southeast Iceland”:

Westerly 3 or 4, backing northerly 6 to  
gale 8. Very rough or high. Snow showers.  
Good, occasionally poor.

Colossal displacements of cloud clusters.  
The fearful & forsook set sail on death  
ships. Nightly ebb and flow of nascent  
diasporas listing in the wake of good ship  
Tye the Triton from Iceland patrolling this “*pig of a sea*.”

The dinghies of the migrants break into the writing by an association with drifting clouds that links them with ebbs and flows but does not create a “ripple effect.” Idiomatic shifts between accurately indefinite numbers, grand gesture, alliterative formula, and seafaring parody (“good ship / Tye”) disrupt the homogenizing tendency of a large outlook.

The Icelandic ship apparently engaged on patrols in the Mediterranean—to repel the migrants by purporting to help them—carries the name of the operation (Triton) that in 2014 replaced the more hospitable Operation Mare Nostrum:

22 “Musée des Beaux Arts,” dated December 1938, in *The English Auden: Poems, Essays and Dramatic Writings 1927–1939*, ed. Edward Mendelson (London: Faber, 1977).

23 Geraldine Monk, “Author’s Note,” in *They Who Saw the Deep* (Anderson, SC: Parlor Press, 2016).

It's very low key this World War Three.  
 Not declared just accumulated conflicts.  
 Pathological structural remodelling of hearts  
 traverse the Mare Nostrum from Syria. Afghanistan.  
 Libya. Bangladesh. Nigeria. Mali. Somalia. Eritrea. Et ...

Monk has said that she loves technical manuals, specialist maps, and place names.<sup>24</sup> The names in this case sketch out a map of the world centered on the middle sea, which is designated Nostrum for all.

Many arrive in new shoes. If they arrive. Survive  
 abandonment. Junk freights. Animal folds.  
 Scuttlings. Two-faced faceless crews. Masked  
 amputations. Dehydration. Desponds. Exposure.  
 Hungry waves. Requiem sharks.

*After ten leagues the darkness was  
 thick and there was no  
 light. You could see nothing  
 ahead and nothing  
 behind.*

Seabed sunken cities tenderly catch the daily  
 fall of new inhabitants. Lampedusa awaits its  
 loggerhead turtles. Deeply meandering jet  
 stream. An inconsolable fog of steam rises  
 from the almost-ready Sunday lunch.

Old Saharan air. A Spanish Plume rents  
 asunder. Severe atmospheric underbellies.  
 Doves have had enough. They perform a no show.  
 That's it. Dishing up.

In this polyphonic writing, glances at Noah's ark (the animal folds, which are also migrant pens) and *Gilgamesh* (in italics, and recurring in the sequence) go with abrupt denotation of the tragic experience of refugees, sharp-edged allusions to slave ships, the migration of turtles like dinghies, weather systems that join Africa and Europe at a time of climate change, and cooking lunch at home while the radio takes you to sea. Technically, it all contrasts with Bergvall's more totalizing procedure in which she offers as a truth, "Everything passes into everything" (59).

As for resemblance, it has its place in the marvelous pages throughout the book that quote different translations of single verses from the Old Testament, as in the "Coda" to the title-poem: "If I rise on the wings of dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea. / If I ride the wings of morning, if I dwell by the farthest oceans," and so on. Running down the page like waves these verses give depth and sweep and something like sublimity to the

24 "The Wolf Interview: Geraldine Monk," *The Wolf* 35 (2017): 57–65, p. 59.

venture, so different from the scored lines and calculated randomness that are symptomatic in *Drift* of Bergvall's focus on her own craft. The verses both resemble and dignify the passage of the asylum seekers who follow the flow of the waters. Or as Monk put it in interview, "the main players are the constantly ebbing and flowing mass of humanity against the ebbing and flowing mass of water."<sup>25</sup>

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The title of J. H. Prynne's *Of the Abyss* (2017) comes from Jack London's *The People of the Abyss*, his 1903 account of the "waves" of the destitute who were sweeping into the East End.<sup>26</sup> "The city poor folk are a nomadic breed," London writes, "so they migrate eastward, wave upon wave" (26). The migrants who, at the end of Prynne's sequence, founder in the sea, are as shockingly visible to us, who do so little for them, as were the migrating poor in Victorian London. For Prynne, they are as abandoned and wrecked by capitalism as the underfed hop-picker William Buggies whose plight Jack London calls a "tragedy" (173). In *People of the Abyss*, London repeatedly sets out the "tragedy" of destitute individuals and extends the term to thousands. Although he is steeped in the legacies of high literary composition, Prynne avoids not just the word but the aesthetic means that isolate, give shape and a perverse, fated purpose to suffering. Driving language into dialectical activity by turns of syntax, line breaks, slant doublets, and other dissonance ("Billow under below," "for sure, for shore," "bleat bloated / a stricken boatload"),<sup>27</sup> and interfacing with such works about shipwreck as Cowper's "The Cast-Away"<sup>28</sup> and Milton's "Lycidas"<sup>29</sup> in order to contest their worldview, he reworks the materials of tragedy without pattern or grim satisfaction.

"Cash and crash" is one of the book's off doublets (in *Abyss*: 2), collapsing the tragic into a phrase. *Of the Abyss* rejects the occlusion of money in what has usually been, since antiquity, the elite milieu of tragedy and brings out the price of migration. To consult the poet's drafts in search of what runs into the published text<sup>30</sup> is to find that the title of the sequence was once "At-Cost," which springs out of Cast-away or At the Coast (where refugee boats are typically wrecked) but which also speaks to the "cost" of travel—with migrants paying traffickers<sup>31</sup> to be carried almost as slaves into the labor markets of Europe—as well as the human "cost" of the journey. The money that the migrants pay is

25 "The Wolf Interview," 58.

26 Jack London, *The People of the Abyss* (London: Ibister, 1903), 7. A copy of London's title page, evidently supplied by the poet, can be found in the folders that hold the drafts of *Of the Abyss* in Cambridge University Library, MS Add. 10144/1648–1649. I am grateful to John Wells for facilitating access to this archive.

27 J. H. Prynne, *Of the Abyss* (Cambridge: Materials, 2017), sections 1, 5. On these linguistic and formal resources see Prynne's lectures, "Poetic Thought," *Textual Practice* 24 (2010): 595–606 and "Mental Ears and Poetic Work," *Chicago Review* 55.4 (Winter 2010): 126–57.

28 A text of this poem is reproduced, along with its major source—in George Anson's *A Voyage Round the World* (1748)—in a teaching exercise lodged in the Cambridge University Library folders dedicated to drafts of *Of the Abyss*.

29 Alluding, for example, to the venal clergy in Milton who neglect the "faithful herdman's art": "Look shall now in cost to count hireling shepherd / sea-blind scoop the light ahead," which leads into a direct quotation from "The Cast-Away," "and yet no light / propitious shone" (*Abyss*: 8)—that is, people smugglers who count the profit when shepherding refugees but not the cost in life.

30 See again Cambridge University Library, MS Add. 10144/1648–1649.

31 "across desert / attending traffic long possible fleet" (*Abyss*: 1).

not even, often enough, cash that their families have, because they borrow in order to get into what Bergvall calls a harrowing drift: “Borrow to harrow burnish any / in reason its ransom glittery pack” (Abyss: 7).

Another discarded, or absorbed, subtitle is “Or Deucalion,” alluding to the Ancient Greek version of the flood in Genesis and Gilgamesh. This led in draft to “Duke” and “Ducalion: lion-duke” as well as “Abyss Price” with “Flood-Over” above a deleted “Price.” Such changes are not of incidental, scholarly interest. Power and ducats, money in power, and paying over the odds to sail over the abyss are integral to the impending catastrophe. What looks like an ark carrying people to safety across the “flood” (Abyss: 1) is a marketed opportunity to risk life and lose it. For we know by *Of the Abyss* section 7 what, in the old language of tragedy, their “tragic fate” will be: “Yes they will drown it’s / commonplace, unbearable look to side-on.” It is so painful to look even side-long at this boat out of which migrants look that we might look to one side. This not aerial surveillance, nor the pattern-making of Bergvall, but a gaze averted by anguish is still of no use to the suffering. An end to such endings would only come if “all / should pay, mandate.” Though *Of the Abyss* resists much in the legacy of tragedy, who looks and who becomes the spectacle remains a key question.

The last of ten sections begins:

Never make it on, scale willing already late  
band sisters punish stream to fate hanging  
by thread hungry to moist bread lucky at that.

*They will never make it* is the stifled cry. Their fate is hanging by a thread, which is that spun or cut in tragedy by the Moirai (Fates) or three sisters,<sup>32</sup> though luck here amounts to soggy bread in the boat, bread cast upon the waters in the hope of recovery.<sup>33</sup> Luck further declines into chance, later than late, at the end of the poem:

But later still the same too,  
telling up to sky-park, slanting rays in shadow  
added unlasting wait the chance riven see true,  
running out cover our eyes spare onwards ex-  
change for broken lift and lost, again.

The impelled syntax puts clashes of meaning to work between words and within them (“telling,” “running out,” “spare”) and uses formal features of the verse not to induce false harmony but “riven” conflict (“ex- / change”) to put the writing beyond paraphrase and set it “working the work that, when fit for purpose, poetry needs to do.”<sup>34</sup>

We can hazard as a way through the passage, though, that the sun is setting on the migrants’ last chance, which looks like the splitting of their boat. This they and we “see true.” Disaster brings clarity, recognition of the inevitable, which is a form of truncated knowledge more bleak than *anagnorisis*. In draft, the last two lines are preceded by a false

32 Compare “the blind Fury with th’abhorred shears,” who “slits the thin-spun life,” in “Lycidas.”

33 Ecclesiastes 11:1.

34 “Mental Ears and Poetic Work,” 141.

start, “spare onwards my conscience exchange for / every open thing,” which is deleted because “conscience” is too bourgeois a moral resource for Prynne the Maoist but also because “my” puts the poet too much into the poem—exactly what is dubious about Cowper’s “The Cast-Away,” which compares the supposedly worse-afflicted poet to the drowning man, and which maybe mars *Drift* also. “My” would prevent the text achieving the impersonality of poetic thought.<sup>35</sup>

When a text is in dialogue with tragedy, how it ends will be peculiarly open to contrivance (as in Beckett’s *Catastrophe*). In draft, *Of the Abyss* section 10 ended “lift and lost, to pass” before “to pass” (as in dying, or finding passage) was changed to “defray” (as ends fray, or get paid off) and “detain,” even “remain.” Close to the final phrasing was “broken life and lost, awry.” Once again composition advances by resisting tragic stasis. Alerted by other intertexts—the death of the Duchess of Malfi, for example, in “cover our eyes”<sup>36</sup>—we can hear in “lost, awry” Charmian’s promise to perfect Cleopatra’s death: “your crown’s awry / I’ll mend it.”<sup>37</sup> While the draft pointedly refuses any gesture of aesthetic repair, the published text goes further and denies a tragic one-off. “Awry” is replaced by “again.” We are back with Ribka Sibhatu’s shift from “A tragedy of the people” to “one of the tragedies of the people.”

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Migrant comes from *migrare*, “to go,” a refugee seeks refuge, from *refugium*, “a recourse,” or asylum, from Greek *asulos*, “sanctuary.” The words imply movement and arrival. Yet to read the testimony of migrants is to be struck by the stop-start processes that frustrate and endanger. The smugglers’ houses, ditches, copses, broken-into lorry parks, handovers in the dark, waiting for forged papers, rape, and mental implosion. Most destinations are insecure and are points of further transit. Subjection to the journey may be counterpointed in memoirs by reminders of what migrants have left behind (villages, families) and of the skills and potential they bring. But the conditions throw migrants together and turn them into victims. The poetry discussed in this article follows this logic and thus remains partial in dealing with what happens to migrants rather than what they could give to the West.

When it comes to arrival as transit, Lampedusa is a classic instance. Many migrants assume that once they have landed they are safe and in Europe. The safety is uncertain, and the island is only European in an attenuated sense. Geologically, to be pedantic, it sits on the African coastal shelf. The main drag, Via Roma, is a long way from the Spanish steps. It may be a point of arrival, but also of dispersal. Those who come ashore are processed in a facility that was given the name, in an accurate euphemism, the Centre for Temporary Permanence, or CPT. A fine line runs through this installation, where fingerprints are taken, and identities, briefly, established, between succor and criminalization. As Stephanie Malia Hom has shown, Lampedusa’s regime derives from the carceral system of Italy’s colonial past, from concentration camps for the Bedouin in

35 Compare Prynne, “Poetic Thought.”

36 “Cover her face. Mine eyes dazzle. She died young,” *The Duchess of Malfi* (4.2.250), ed. Brian Gibbons, 5th ed. (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2014).

37 William Shakespeare, *Anthony and Cleopatra*, ed. Michael Neill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 5.2.316.

Libya and prisons around the Italian islands. “The CPT,” she writes, “is a localizing dislocation where mobile subjects are immobilized as well as unmade. It is a space of unraveling, of coming undone, and also of recalibration.” Yet, she rightly adds, “No one stays on Lampedusa for very long. All migrants are relocated to other detention centers throughout Italy within roughly one week’s time.”<sup>38</sup>

As she sees it, the migrants on the island are shifting from the fluidities of travel to a rigid scheme of control that includes not just physical detainment but the invigilation of state bureaucracy as a way into the disciplines of the neoliberal labor market. There is obviously some truth in this, and recent poetry has mapped the grimly Kafkaesque systems that filter the immigrant workforce and exclude while granting leave to remain.<sup>39</sup> The notion of fluidity giving way to rigidity, however, owes more to Foucault than experience because there is plenty of evidence of control exercised over migrants by traffickers on the one hand (many of them corrupt and abusive) and police, border guards, and soldiers on the other (many of them corrupt and abusive), and by the importance of cost and profit (the market) at every point. The more one reads about the misadventures of asylum seekers before they get to Europe, the more they look like people taken as much as going.

What happens to those who are released from the CPT, or who evade the authorities on Lampedusa, resembles the outcome for those who slip ashore in Sicily, or in the Greek islands, or through the now-difficult Balkans route, without being detected, fingerprinted, and officially required to seek asylum in their country of arrival. The routine miseries are delineated in Neel Mukherjee’s “The Soldier’s Tale,” about a conscript in the Eritrean-Ethiopian war who makes landfall at Lampedusa. “He has no money, no home, no job, no benefits, no Italian, nothing. For nine months he sleeps on the streets, eats from garbage bins, sifts through rubbish heaps for clothes, a stray dog among humans. He is sick, frequently. He moves from city to city, from Catania to Palermo, Rome, Messina, begging, foraging, homeless, until he fetches up at Milan and manages to board a train to Calais and join the ‘jungle.’”<sup>40</sup> It is a tale of inertia and transitory breakthroughs. Most migrants spend a lot of time stuck, and the tragedy for those not hit by lorries or mortal disease may be that there is no catastrophe, just waiting, detours, and setbacks.

Calais was and is another locus of temporary permanence, for those who squatted in blockhouses (quickly sealed up) in the city, but also for those in the camp, or associated shanty town, loosely known as the Jungle, that, for several years around 2000, 2009, and most conspicuously from early 2015 to 2016, when it was taken apart by the authorities, provided a practical and symbolic focus for those wanting to cross to the United Kingdom and also for those waiting for asylum in France. Such was the complexity of the situation that some were unofficially in transit, others ostensibly so. In their recent, authoritative study, Michel Agier and his collaborators note that the Jungle was not so much the end of the line as part of a sequence, or network, of displacement. As importantly, they observe that it was both contested and maintained by multiple, even

38 Stephanie Malia Hom, *Empire’s Mobius Strip: Historical Echoes in Italy’s Crisis of Migration and Detention* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019), 30.

39 See, for example, Caroline Bergvall, “The Voluntary Returner’s Tale,” in *Refugee Tales*, vol. 2, ed. David Herd and Anna Pincus (Manchester: Comma, 2017), 63–72, p. 64; Caroline Smith, *The Immigration Handbook* (Bridgend: Seren, 2016).

40 Bergvall, *Refugee Tales*, vol. 2, 85–91, p. 89.



competing powers, including the mayor of Calais, the French government, border guards, and police (CRS), and, transnationally, the United Kingdom, which paid for security, as noted, and helped process the migrants. Add in the non-governmental organizations and volunteer helpers from Britain and France, including No Border activists, and you have a zone that was anomalous and the less governable. “The Calais camp,” as Agier and his colleagues put it, “was first and foremost a site of extraterritoriality.”<sup>41</sup>

That said, the migrants ordered themselves along national, or ethnic, lines, with blocs of temporary housing. The constructive energy of the enterprise, helped along by volunteers, is captured in a play that was itself knocked together in an eleven meter geodesic dome in the camp and later performed in London and Paris, and published as *The Jungle*. It depicts, you could almost say, a microcosm of the world being conjured into a multicultural city, with streets, houses, and a restaurant that was reviewed approvingly in *The Sunday Times*. To that extent it answers the question asked in the play by a Syrian called Safi, “When does a place become a place?,” but leaves unanswered what follows, “When does a place become home?”<sup>42</sup> For all the dynamism, divisions emerge, there are difficulties in deciding whether to resist or cooperate with the authorities, and the trauma of migration proves tragically persistent—if *tragedy* is again the word.

One standout framing of that problem comes in an exchange between Beth (an English volunteer) and a seventeen-year-old called Okot, who has come to Calais from Darfur, that is, out of the hands of the Janjaweed militia across the Sahara by truck and in a boat across the Mediterranean. “What do you know of me?” asks Okot, wary of presumptuous sympathy. “You’re from Sudan,” Beth replies, which is already not the right answer. “Where?” “Darfur?”—she has learned to answer with a question.

OKOT What do you know of Darfur?

BETH There are lots of problems in Darfur.

OKOT What problems?

BETH A genocide ... When ... an entire people is ...

OKOT A people?

BETH A race or religion. (75)

The problems of definition are piling up, showing the language of human rights and all the virtue of the West to be in trouble.

When a people is—

OKOT People is your father. People is your mother. What do you know about Mediterranean?

BETH I know about the boats.

*He is silent. She is forced to continue. She is uneasy.*

The boats are tiny. Too many people are put inside. By the smugglers. Lots of the boats sink. It’s obviously really dangerous. Thousands of people try to cross every day. It’s tragic.

41 Michael Agier, et al., *The Jungle: Calais’s Camps and Migrants*, trans. David Fernbach (Cambridge: Polity, 2019), 8.

42 Joe Murphy and Joe Robertson, *The Jungle*, new ed. (London: Faber, 2018), 67.

*Silence.*

It's a tragedy.

*Silence.*

I don't know.

OKOT Sahara is more dangerous. (75–76)

Determined not to help her out, Okot talks about the miseries of the desert, what happens in the compounds near the coast—torture, extortion—and of the death of his uncle, or the companion that his mother reassuringly told him was his uncle. It is a corrective by the play of the fond belief in Europe that what is most visible (that is, the boats), and what is readily assimilable to tragedy, as spectacle, is the worst, whereas the worst is often not seen, including ill-treatment in Libya, tacitly encouraged by European governments to deter the migrants.

The wretchedness of the system does not require the amplitude of a play to define it. Compression has its advantages, as in the following lyric by James Byrne, almost seventeenth century in manner, with its alternate half rhymes and classical equipage, though its title is taken from an engraving by Goya, which partly provides the scenario:

*AND STILL THEY DON'T GO!*

Calais wears the snakefoot of Boreas.  
Coldest wind, nebular wind. Temper  
of a falling wall. Calais dehumanises *us*  
from *they*, flesh from flesh. The hunter  
gathers her to go, but where? No Zephyr  
in the West, no water in this jungle.  
The boy inside a shipping container  
holds up a picture of his dead uncle.<sup>43</sup>

Byrne takes us back to the Greeks and their prestigious mythology. There was a tragedy by Aeschylus about Boreas, the god of the north wind, who gathered up the beautiful Oreithyia and snatched her away to be his wife. According to Pausanias, he had snake feet. So this is the hissing winter wind that blasts into Calais from the English Channel, remarked on by many who visited the Jungle, as though coming from outer space (nebular).

Boreas was, in the words of Wikipedia, “depicted as being very strong, with a violent temper to match.”<sup>44</sup> So although “temper” briefly offers the possibility of a sheltering reduction, it really means that the wind is felt in the camp like a wall of cold, sweeping in to oppress. Far from protecting, the wall, like the one in Goya’s picture, threatens to crush those already haunted and damaged by war and poverty. Likewise, “falling,” which might suggest walls coming down across Europe means falling on the people. It may be that “Calais dehumanises *us* / from *they*” is too pious, as well as too obvious across the

43 Ágnes Lehóczky and J. T. Welsch, eds., *Wretched Strangers: Borders, Movement, Homes* (Norwich: Boiler House Press, 2018), 54.

44 Boreas in Wikipedia (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anemoi#Boreas>).

dividing line break, but it also works on us subtly because the sight rhyme “Cal-ais/us” makes Calais a shared site, the unrhymed, distancing “they” less inevitable. “Flesh from flesh” reprises the point with a full, affirmative rhyme. Of course, flesh of my flesh is said of marriage (Genesis 2:23), which is where the hunting Boreas and Oreithya come in, but there is nowhere for them (or the migrants) to go, and no mild incoming west wind in the form of Zephyrus or water except from tanks or standpipes.

What of the final lines, set off in their simplicity from Zephyr in the west and jungle? “The boy inside a shipping container / holds up a picture of his dead uncle.” As the Jungle enlarged, the authorities tried to impose order by installing disused shipping containers. Michel Agier and his collaborators describe the scene:

On a site that was rectangular and entirely fenced, 125 containers, uniformly white, on one or two levels, were strictly aligned along two axes. These ran in a west-north-westerly direction, forming roads that attracted the coldest prevailing winds, even accelerating these in this very exposed seaside zone. Their proximity and orientation meant that the roads were in the shade for the greater part of the day and did not see the sun at all in winter. (72)

So much for order. The authorities made pathways for Boreas, ensuring that those housed had an incentive to leave. “To go,” as the poem says, “but where?” Or as police and government would put it, in Goya’s words, “And still they don’t go!” Pack them into shipping containers ready to be deported.

The containers were chosen, it is said, because of the difficulty of constructing foundations on sandy ground, but emblematically they announced that the Jungle was a transit camp pretending to be a refuge. As human cargo, the migrants were adrift in being stuck. First carried to Lampedusa or Lesbos, then aiming to cross the English Channel. The containers were calculated to remind them that their journey was interrupted, not concluded. Some had hidden in containers on ships to get to Europe. Now their way forward, if they could find it, was again in containers on lorries, going to Dover. As Safi says in *The Jungle*:

I thought this was a place, but it’s not. It’s between places. It doesn’t exist. We’re in burzakh, purgatory, waiting on the Judgement, in perfect view of the motorway, for everyone to see. A warning to the world. Don’t come. Don’t try. Refugees, migrants, whatever we fucking are. But not people, Ali. We’re between people. Drowning in this sea of suffering. (105)

Agier and his colleagues report that the containers were not allowed to be domesticated or personalised. They must retain their functional anonymity, without posters or photos on the walls, owned by the state. This gives more pathos to the boy in the Byrne poem, holding onto his token of family, “the picture of his dead uncle.” The evidence and reminder of connection is also an icon of loss. There were hundreds of unaccompanied minors in the Jungle. Many of them were run over on the motorway, like Norullah in the play, trying to get onto trucks, or were simply lost track of when police broke up the camp. What happens to lost children is not a happy thought.

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The best text to end with is Jeff Hilson's "A Final Poem with Full Stops" (2017), which deals "with the ongoing and ignored tragedy of European migration."<sup>45</sup> This means not just those crossing the Mediterranean or the Aegean and making their way north but the Roma, whose ill-treatment down the centuries testifies to Europe's intolerance of its own inner migrants. The entire long poem should be quoted because the meaning of any part of it depends on its extent, yet any part of it would do if you wanted a summary. There is no catastrophe beyond every sentence, no full stop except all of them. Tragic structure does not crystallize. Form is but minimally available and every trajectory is aborted, while an insidious, addictive quality to the sequence of abrupt deaths half numbs the reader, as though caught in a loop of reporting on TV or radio.

If there is a development, it comes in a shift in the meaning of "reportedly" from what is merely reported to what covers suffering up, or aims to, without deceiving anyone, much as "died or killed" becomes an empty distinction as the losses fall into patterns and are revealed as systematic. Migrant tragedy is in so many instances this, a series of variants on the same, all coming to a full stop:

found dead in a bus shelter. & drowned. reportedly. in a drifting boat & in a dinghy. roma. no name. found dead in a cargo ship. jumped. reportedly. jumped off the bridge and died. died or killed. killed in a factory fire & killed on a freight train ... drowned near kos & drowned giving birth [*you will remember*]. ... hit by a bus. died in a van. died after being left alone. ... drowned in the aegean & drowned near lampedusa. drowned in the channel of otranto. reportedly. reportedly hit by a police boat. & died. died or killed. ... found dead. roma. found dead in the snow. found dead after sixteen days at sea. ignored by NATO [*sounds familiar*]. no name.<sup>46</sup>

Stop anywhere, is the message, but stop.

45 Account of *Latanoprost Variations* (2017) on the Boiler House Press website.

46 Reprinted from *Latanoprost Variations* in Lehóczy and Welsch, eds., *Wretched Strangers*, 125–27.