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To cite this article: Daniel Hourigan (05 Jun 2023): Forced Migration Narratives and the Nation-State: 'Out' and 'Go, Went, Gone', Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction, DOI: 10.1080/00111619.2023.2221780

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00111619.2023.2221780>



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Published online: 05 Jun 2023.



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Forced Migration Narratives and the Nation-State: 'Out' and 'Go, Went, Gone'

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ABSTRACT

This article offers a critical comparison of representations of forced migration and law in *Out* (1964) by Christine Brooke-Rose and *Go, Went, Gone* (2015) by Jenny Erpenbeck. The literary value of forced migration themes can be seen in how they act as a pivot point between literary imaginaries, the representation of trauma, and the real-world effects of law and politics on displaced people. Brooke-Rose's *Out* explores the supposed cultural decline of mid-twentieth century Britain through a tension between identity politics and law. By contrast, Erpenbeck's *Go, Went, Gone* [Gehen, ging, gegangen] uses the well-worn postcolonial trope of exile to frame its story of conversion. Where *Out* and other literary works stage a socio-cultural change wrought in the wake of forced migration, *Go, Went, Gone* presents a narrative of contrition for its protagonist. Both Brooke-Rose's and Erpenbeck's narratives hinge on their protagonists negotiating the legal complexities that govern refugees of forced migration. This article will explore how these novels offer a glimpse of the conservation of the modern nation-state that is a real-world site of the legal, cultural, and political circumscription of people displaced by forced migration.

Forced migration often appears as a ground for the deracination of populations and characters in Migrant Literature and its subgenres. Herein forced migration themes act as a pivot point between literary imaginaries, the representation of trauma, and the effects of law and politics on displaced people beyond the text (Friedman and McMann 229). In this article I develop a comparison of the representation of forced migration in Christine Brooke-Rose's *Out* (1964) and Jenny Erpenbeck's *Go, Went, Gone* (2017) to provide an insight into forced migration as a feature of Migrant Literature. Brooke-Rose's novel is an exemplar for how the representation of forced migration may challenge cultural modes and the category of Whiteness. The depiction of refugees of forced migration in *Out* invites readers to consider the deeper complexities of migration in the Global South. When brought into conversation with Erpenbeck's *Go, Went, Gone* by way of a comparison of how they trope forced migration however some important differences emerge. Where *Out* stages a socio-cultural change for the narrator wrought in the wake of their forced migration, *Go, Went, Gone* presents a narrative of personal conversion for its protagonist Richard, set within German/European spaces. Erpenbeck's narrative hinges on Richard not only becoming able to negotiate the legal complexities that govern the refugees of forced migration in the novel but of also becoming convinced by his vision. As I demonstrate below through this comparison of *Out* and *Go, Went, Gone*, Migrant Literature shows us very different perspectives of forced migration within the refugee's gaze and thereby

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undermines the tendency to measure Migrant Literature as a species of testimony for refugees beyond these texts.

The below analysis of forced migration in Migrant Literature begins with an attempt to define forced migration as a socio-political phenomenon. I expand this discussion toward focusing on forced migration as a literary trope, and the ethical challenge that this presents to Migrant Literature's claims to realism. The discussion then turns to the connections between this ethico-literary challenge and the jurisprudence underlying refugee status. Then I turn to a critique of the representation of forced migration in *Go, Went, Gone*, the first of two close readings in this discussion. In this first critique, I chart the connections of forced migration to law and to the characterization of the protagonist Richard. I underscore the novel's elevation of truth-claims about refugees' experiences of a German legal system that proscribes their rights or lack thereof, and the tendency of some reviews to elide the literary quality of the work by emphasizing its function as a testimonial to the injustices wrought upon refugees. Primary among these is the forbidding of the elision of rights-bearing status while not granting substantial rights per se to those legally recognized as refugees. This is a feature of the current regulations of *Dublin III*¹ and its predecessors the *Dublin II*² and the *Dublin Convention*.³ In this legal context, "refugee" is a rights-bearer with significantly limited legal rights who cannot retry a rejected claim to asylum in another jurisdiction of the European Union. Below, I examine how *Go, Went, Gone* highlights this legal gambit.⁴ I then turn to Richard's frequent psychopomping of Lucretius' *De rerum natura*, and his failure to learn the lesson of its physicalism: "without memory, man is nothing more than a bit of flesh on the planet's surface" (Erpenbeck 151). This failure is constitutive of Richard's tendency to project his fantasies onto the refugees that he interviews, exchanging their names with those from Classical works such as Homer's *Odyssey*. I surmise that Erpenbeck's novel is a story of conversion for both Richard and the refugees that invalidates the latter's memories of forced migration. Then the discussion turns to a close reading of Brooke-Rose's *Out*. Here I highlight the interior perspective of the refugee that we encounter in *Out* that stands in contrast to Erpenbeck's novel where readers are positioned by a limited third-person voice that relies on Richard's experiences of the refugees' autobiographies. I also follow Patrick Burley ("Whiteness, Displacement, and the Postimperial Imaginary in Christine Brooke-Rose's *Out*.") in emphasizing the complicated colonial legacies of Whiteness that are being unraveled by the narrative of *Out* (373–375). I show this by engaging with *Out*'s satirical juxtapositions of depictions of the physical world with the granular management of the refugees administered by the Labour Exchange. Going further, I explore the bureaucracy of the Labour Exchange as a key moment of the novel that represses the forced migration event. I show that Brooke-Rose's novel is instructive in how the representation of forced migration, even at the level of allusions created through *chosisme*, may unmoor the Other of Englishness that has been a contingent historical phenomenon and facilitator in the construction of Whiteness in the mid-twentieth century. Then my discussion turns to a critical comparison of the novels' stylizations of forced migration as a trope.

Forced Migration

Forced migration is a forced displacement of a population that is often represented in personal and social lights in Migrant Literature. Given this genre's tendency toward a realist literary style, populations in this sense are often represented with humanist tropes organized by nation-state jurisdictions. Refugees herein are cast as the ultimate stateless figure displaced from their nation-state (Simoes da Silva 68). More speculative literary genres such as Science Fiction extend this sense of violent displacement to future climate catastrophes such as Paulo Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl* (2009) or non-human tropes such as the black swans in Alexis Wright's *The Swan Book* (2013). In this discussion however we are going to be focusing solely on the novels *Go, Went, Gone* and *Out* for the unique tension that exists between them.

The causes for a displacement of populations vary per the migration events represented in literature and frequently parallel their non-diegetic occurrence in the world beyond the literary work. The

verisimilitude of much of Migrant Literature ensures that the understanding of the causes of forced migration reflect this non-diegetic plurality. Causes may include “war and conflict, but also can be due to political, religious, and other persecution; natural or man-made disasters; development-induced displacement; smuggling and human trafficking; and environmental displacement” (Reed 2). Beyond its literary representation, forced migration is a significant part of all international migration between nation-states, and its recent past shows us that it is increasing. In 2016 forced migrations tallied to 10% of all international migration, some 26 million people globally (Reed 2). The 2016 figure is some two and a half times the reported levels of 2005 that was less than 10 million people (Reed 2). More than half of all global refugees come from Afghanistan, South Sudan, and Syria. According to United Nations accounts from 2017, most of these refugees find themselves hosted by developing regions, “which often may be the least prepared to provide protection and services” (United Nations). Germany was the sixth largest host of asylum seekers and refugees in 2016, with Turkey the largest for that year (United Nations). Therefore, Germany was the only nation-state of the European Union to feature in the top six with Turkey’s accession into the European Union appearing to have stalled since 2016–2021 (European Commission 119). This relative standing of German migration is an important contextualizing factor for the analysis of Jenny Erpenbeck’s *Go, Went, Gone* (2015) below.

The representation of forced migration in Migrant Literature is sometimes dubiously coded as a narrative of exile. While exile may trace a forced displacement in terms of international migration, the intervening moments between the forcing of the migration and the attainment of refugee status are often distinct from what can be derived from a scene of exile (Marfleet 5). The interpretation of these interstitial moments between the forced migration event and the complex legal status of the refugee forms a silenced convention of forced migration’s literary stylization, “without a tellable history” (Said 181). As will be discussed below, although some decades apart, both *Go, Went, Gone* and *Out* deploy this convention to represent the contingent circumstances on which forced migrant characters rest in their respective narratives.

Broadly speaking, the literary representation of forced migration is a complex phenomenon. As a trope forced migration is a part of cultural memory. It is the memory of an event giving rise to a transnational situation, of travel across jurisdictions and nation-state borders. It is also the subjective interpretation of that traversal and its affects in the broadest possible sense. How far the subjective interpretation of the forced migration event can extend depends on the loop of its representation in a variety of contexts that tests the troping of forced migration with its nonliterary representation, legal or otherwise (Eagleton *Exiles and Émigrés*, 15). The loop of representation here is important because forced migration events are traumatic for those who experience them. This traumatic psychological status presents an ethical challenge to the rhetorical strategies of Migrant Literature as an example of *roman-à-lire* as these literary works stand at a crossroads of witness, testimony, and narrativisation by returning to this dark memory of trauma that risks the further traumatization of the narrator/reader.

As I highlight above, refugee status is often the aftermath of forced migration and forms an important trope and boundary for Migrant Literature examining scenes of forced migration. Beyond its literary representation the refugee exists primarily in politico-legal contexts. The path to permanent residency or citizenship is also a matter of law that finds its way into the representation of forced migration in Migrant Literature. However, in terms of actually-existing legal powers such as the *Asylum Procedure Act 1992* (DEU), the transition of the legal status of personhood requires law to vet the memories of forced migration, to reframe the memory of history as testimony and witness. Erpenbeck’s representation of this process with the scattered extracts of statute in *Go, Went, Gone* reinforces the novel’s claims to literary realism through the reference to this fraught legal dynamic (Erpenbeck 81–82). However, it would be too much to say that the deployment of these extracts in literature amounts to a legal argument because this would romanticize the law and falsify the distance of the literary from the legal.

The transfer of legal personhood between jurisdictions in lieu of a forced migration event is fraught because the law seeks to test, interrupt, and interpret, to change the memory of forced migration into a legal fiction that adheres to the legal rhetoric, principles, and statute of localized jurisdictions and

their attendant legal cultures (Brooks *Yale Journal of Law*, 355). Exactly how the law inflects forced migration depends on the jurisdiction and its legal culture, including its definitions of procedure, process, and policy. Jurisdictions set the rules and empower the legal agents and their attendant tropes, i.e. legal rights, the corporation, the reasonable person, the refugee, etc. The Kantian motif of a formal ground in Germanic civil law jurisprudence is recognized to have created a distinct constellation of value for the refugee when compared to the liberal rights discourse of North American common law jurisprudence for example (Olson 352). Germany's complex recent history with immigration and recent reforms are therefore unique to its jurisdiction (The United Nations Refugee Agency) and are difficult to compare with the treatment of Latin America by the federal jurisdiction of the United States of America in the same period (Wallenfeldt). This has some bearing on the broader context in which *Go, Went, Gone* was received and how we might approach mid-twentieth century narratives of forced migration such as *Out*.

The question thus arises as to how forced migration can be represented in Migrant Literature where the themes and genre concerns center on the experiences of migration. In this discussion we are engaging with two novels, each exemplary for its different approach to the deployment of forced migration with figurative language in a lyrical realist style. The personal conversion undertaken by Erpenbeck's *Go, Went, Gone* always remains exterior to the experiences of the refugees represented in the narrative as the protagonist Richard always has full legal personhood within the world of the novel. By contrast, Brooke-Rose's *Out* represents a subjective experience of refugee status for a post-Imperial British subject whose legal personhood is more precarious. While some decades apart, these novels both approach the literary representation of forced migration as a trope that is a traumatic kernel of characterization. The curious feature of these novels is therefore how they bracket the complex phenomena of a forced migration event in distinction to characterization, often moving away from the encounter with this fragment of history. I will investigate this dynamic for each novel below, beginning with Erpenbeck's *Go, Went, Gone*.

Go, Went, Gone, Humanism, and Forced Migration

Go, Went, Gone is a continuation of Erpenbeck's commitment to a modernist writing praxis that challenges the laissez-faire moral sensibility of contemporary Western societies. Erpenbeck has produced work across various genres, including plays, memoir, novellas, short-stories, newspaper columns, and novels. Since the 1990s, Erpenbeck has paired her writing with her directing by adding a number of novellas and short-story collections to her oeuvre including *Geschichte vom alten Kind* (1999), *Tand* (2001), and *Wörterbuch* (2004). The novels by Erpenbeck appear sometime after these collections and include the celebrated *Heimsuchung* (2008), *Aller Tage Abend* (2012), *Gehen, ging, gegangen* (2015), and *Kairos* (2021). Most of Erpenbeck's prose-form works have been translated into English by Susan Bernofsky for the independent UK publisher Portobello, including the edition of *Go, Went, Gone* that is discussed below. Erpenbeck's prose has garnered numerous prizes and short-listing honors, including the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany in 2017 ("Der Bundespräsident") and the Uwe Johnson Prize in 2022 ("Akademienmitglied Jenny Erpenbeck erhält Uwe-Johnson-Literaturpreis 2022"). *The Guardian* ranked Bernofsky's translation of *Heimsuchung* (*Visitation*) in its list of *100 Best Books of the 21st Century* ("Best Culture"). Like *Visitation*, *Go, Went, Gone* uses a lakeside house as a major setting for the story. Most of Erpenbeck's narratives are invested in developing the worldview of each protagonist rather than dramatize conventional psychologies of good and evil (Faber *The Guardian*).

Go, Went, Gone follows the life of a recently retired professor Richard who specialized in Classics and Philology. As is tradition in modern universities, Richard's retired status is marked by his title of *professor emeritus* which he uses to self-justify and persuade others of the validity of his investigation into refugees living in Berlin. Most of the refugees interviewed by Richard recount autobiographies saturated with forced migration events. Many, in fact, appear to have arrived at their refugee status through the means of forced migration events that, however

portrayed, ring with injustice in social, political, and legal-judicial contexts. For Richard, the autobiographies of the refugees are organized through his “research project” (Erpenbeck 38). Indeed, the novel may be read through this key of Richard’s project humanizing refugees by associating the recounting of forced migration events in the refugees’ autobiographies to his shared experience of their stories. That is, the refugees’ autobiographies become Richard’s objects of inquiry which he finds conditioned and compromised by the discourse of law that gives legal definition to refugee status and regulates its administration (Gully and Itagaki “The States of Memory”, 274). *Go, Went, Gone* heightens a sense of an uneven understanding of forced migration for Berliners through a series of stark moral contrasts as Richard moves between his civil society circles and the enclaves of refugees. Richard eventually tries to bridge this socio-epistemological divide, yet he is constantly frustrated by the function of law that binds refugees as legal objects within an economy of politico-legal exchange, i.e. *Dublin II* and the *Asylum Procedure Act 1992* (DEU).

Testifying for the refugees’ experiences of an oppressive legal system is a key component of Erpenbeck’s *Go, Went, Gone*. Fragments of legal statutes pepper the novel, especially extracts from *Dublin II*. This selective use of legal textuality in the realist world of the narrative constructs a claim to authenticity by reframing the legal fragments as metonyms or stand-ins for the glacier of laws and procedures beyond the auspices of the novel. Reviewing the novel in *The Guardian*, Eileen Battersby hungrily states: “Great fiction doesn’t have to be real, but it does have to be true.” The desire for the review is that Erpenbeck’s reported research of refugees’ lives found a way to be witnessed by the compromises of figurative language, the very medium of its portrayal. Along these lines the minimal distance between the literary representation of refugee characters and refugees beyond the novel inheres in the oppressive categorization of “refugee.” However, while the refugee becomes a trope, the representation of the law and the law itself breaks down as it is sublated by its literary significance for Erpenbeck’s narrative. In short, the law is romanticized in the narrative of *Go, Went, Gone*. Battersby’s emphasis of “true” for Erpenbeck’s novel seems to echo Harold Bloom’s desire of resonance in great works of literature. Where Erpenbeck’s novel is received with approval we often find the meaningfulness of this resonance with a reader brought to the fore (Bloom *The Western Canon*, 10). Perhaps, then, the review offers us some lingering hope for a direct connection between refugees’ memories in the fantasy space of a literary approximation of their experience told in the guise of literary realism. The selective quotation of the law, however, remains co-opted by its literary representation (Manderson “Modernism and the Critique of Law and Literature”, 14).

In the contemporary critical milieu of Literary Studies there are a plethora of paths into a literary work. These vary between the narrow positivism of cognitive stylistics to the subjective pluralities of deconstruction. What these critical modes emphasize in common is the purpose and function of figurative language. Rather than language being limited to words and phrases, figurative language invokes stylization, cultural memory, and, in some cases, transgression. *Go, Went, Gone*, for example, is peppered with extracts from legal documents such as *Dublin II* but resists the urge to engage in statutory interpretation, preferring to emphasize the selective verification of refugee memories through Richard’s interviews (Erpenbeck 60). Erpenbeck’s novel does not provide a legal remedy to the crises of refugees in the discourse of law beyond the novel’s literary remit. Rather the novelization of law in *Go, Went, Gone* reconstructs the law as an elegy, a mourning for what is lost in the realization of refugee narratives in the statutory contexts of the discourse of law. These constant legal interruptions have given some cause to call out the novel as both a collation of research notes that precedes the conventional sense of a novel and at the same time the novel that we need in our present times. Though these views lead away from and toward the generic specificity of *Go, Went, Gone* as an example of migrant literature, the displacement of legality by the figurative language of the novel goes largely unremarked upon.

The memory of forced migration is a substantial aspect of the characterization of refugees in *Go, Went, Gone*. As the protagonist Richard interviews the refugees such as Rashid, Zair, Abdusalam, and Ithemba, they share stories of their individual displacements insofar as they resonate with memories in

the present (Erpenbeck 47–48). The pressure of these forced migration narratives presses Richard toward the edge representation to understand the transition from person to refugee: “Becoming foreign. To yourself and others” (Erpenbeck 63). This motivation underpins much of the latter half of the novel as Richard uses his research into the refugees as a veil to aid them in navigating the law.

Go, Went, Gone often emphasizes moral personhood to heighten the contrast with the doppelgänger of legal personhood. The importance of language is pivotal in this bureaucratization of the law over the dignity of moral personhood: “the law made a shift from physical reality to the realm of language” (Erpenbeck 68). *Go, Went, Gone* captures this bureaucratic sense of modern law most poignantly in its narrativisation of the certificate of fiction (*Fiktionsbescheinigung*) that marks the emergence of refugee status under the *Asylum Procedure Act* (DEU). This certificate bureaucratizes the legal recognition of a subject-of-language, one who is able to speak of their experience of forced migration, although it does not provide any rights to legal representation where this voice might be heard: “a confirmation that this person existed who had not yet been granted the right to call himself a *refugee*. But the certificate itself didn’t entitle its holder to any rights” (Erpenbeck 81–82). The legal recognition of forced migration, of the displacement of peoples, is thereby conflated with the statelessness of the refugee in *Go, Went, Gone*. Richard’s research reinforces this sense of refugees’ alienation with reference to the “bureaucratic geometry” (Erpenbeck 49) that saturates colonized peoples with administrative procedures of such complexity and linguistic alterity that they are effectively barred from taking political action. Ironically, in the same paragraph in which this appears we find Richard anxiously awaiting his chance to interview the refugees while thinking to himself “*vse v poriadke*”—everything is all right (Erpenbeck 49).

Erpenbeck writes curiosity into Richard’s engagement with the refugees at the Oranienplatz in such a way that his actions cleave to and from the overdetermination that forced migration has for the refugees of the novel. Initially, Richard is characterized as a professor emeritus or recently retired academic. This characterization creates a halcyon time before the present moment of Richard’s narration from which he feels increasingly estranged: he publishes books that are required reading for his students, his lectures regularly fill up, he is the head of a research institute, etc (Erpenbeck 3). This condensation of imagery conjures a myth of the ivory tower of academia. In material terms, we might suspect that Richard is being nostalgic rather than recalling that his students did not read or otherwise resisted the set texts, maybe they sold them off to incoming students secondhand after the class was over, spent his lectures reading social media and annotating prepackaged slideshows rather than making their own extensive notes, or that his duties as director of a research institute largely involved management and administration rather than active research. Indeed, the self-indulgent quality of Richard’s reflection on the past from which he is now estranged is reinforced throughout the opening pages of *Go, Went, Gone*, with images of a violent owl (of Minerva) shredding his dream-image of Lucretius’ *De rerum natura* (Erpenbeck 4). The inclusion of Lucretius’ seminal work is curious here as it is an important source for contemporary understandings of Epicurean physics beyond the novel that make up the social background of Richard’s profession. The key element here is that Lucretius does not appeal to the gods for certainty. Lucretius’ Epicurean philosophy is instead materialist in its approach to nature and death. Throughout the novel, Richard resists this nostalgia for Epicurean materialism: “without memory, man is nothing more than a bit of flesh on the planet’s surface” (Erpenbeck 151). But we must then ask: where does the oneiric sundering of Lucretius’ text lead Richard?

Within the *De rerum natura* of Lucretius cited for Richard’s characterization, Book 3 contains an important critique of the fear of death that has come to stand for the broader disposition of Epicurean physics toward mortality.⁵ The regard for death is likewise an ambivalent thing for Richard, whose lakeside abode is haunted by the scene of a recent drowning (Erpenbeck 5, 18, and 19). Richard fantasizes about the scene of the drowning, imagining row boats ignoring a man struggling in the water: “no one knows who was in the rowboats” (5). This depiction of the drowning is later transformed into a generalized anxiety for Richard: “Today alone, six people died in swimming accidents in the greater Berlin area [...] Six people just like that man still at the bottom of the lake”

(Erpenbeck 19). The narrative development of Richard's anxiety about visibility-through-death occurs as the storytelling fragments into increasingly rapid sequences of different images. Indeed, Richard himself wonders, "What stories lay behind all the random images constantly placed before us? Or was it no longer a matter of storytelling?" (Erpenbeck 19). This fragmentation allows Richard the space to traverse his fantasies about death by metaphorically shifting the encounters with refugees to names and imagery from Classical works such as Odysseus and the Cyclops for the protesting refugees who will not give their names and Tristan and Apollo for the names of refugees that he interviews (Erpenbeck 22 and 66). As Richard's purported expertise is in Classics, it seems both fitting and disingenuous for him to do this as it overestimates his genuine interest in the refugees' biographies: "Richard spends the next two weeks reading several books on the subject of the refugees and drawing up a catalog of questions for the conversations he wants to have with them" (Erpenbeck 38). The tension here is thus between the function of metaphor and metonymy, between merely exchanging one signifier for another (potentially endlessly) and accepting the dignity of the person who tells their traumatic story of forced migration in themselves and for another. Richard is at times unsympathetic, yet it is his academic practice that is distinctly immoral (in Kantian terms). By working against its purported purpose to make the refugees visible at a textual level and therefore worthy of the concern of others, Richard's research subverts their stories of forced migration (Erpenbeck 23).

Out, Chosisme, and Forced Migration

Despite being some decades earlier than Erpenbeck's *Go, Went, Gone*, Brooke-Rose's *Out* (1964) couples a forced migration narrative within an experimental realist style in the line of other *nouveaux romancier* writers of the mid-twentieth century such as Alain Robbe-Grillet (Guy 158). The narrative of *Out* hinges on the tension between identity politics and the law through the prism of an ironic paranoia that is constantly undone by Brooke-Rose's use of microscopy as a trope. More generally, Brooke-Rose's novel is an exemplar for how the representation of forced migration may challenge cultural modes and the category of Whiteness. The forced migration event, "the displacement" (Brooke-Rose 21) of the novel, is beyond the present time of the narrative yet is nonetheless continually referenced through an array of allusions that vary from the cultural to the scientific. Microscopy in particular serves as a trope put to the task of undermining the construction of characters with the revelation, however fantasized, of the micro-material world revealed by a figurative microscope. This playful language-game of switching between macro and micro perspectives offers a glimpse into the unmooring of the Other of Englishness in the novel through a marked sense of loss. Indeed, the promised microscopic world is not given body in the novel by the narrator using a microscope, only the stylized fantasy of what might be viewed with the aid of one. This fantasized microscopic world allegorizes the lost ground of British identity for the narrator. As Burley notes, the Englishness repressed in the novel has been a historically contingent rather than stable cultural constellation and stands as a dead letter to which the narrator is tethered (373–375). The forced migration depicted in *Out* invites readers to consider the deeper complexities of migration narratives through an inversion of the dominant international political landscape of the mid-twentieth century where the British Empire was superseded by the British Commonwealth, a period of decline in colonial powers.

Out marks a turning point of style and substance in Brooke-Rose's *oeuvre* and her strident commitment to language-games. Her first four novels—*The Languages of Love* (1957), *The Sycamore Tree* (1958), *The Dear Deceit* (1960), and *The Middlemen: A Satire* (1961) – were comedies-of-manners works. This comedic genre was of its moment, ingratiated to the literary orthodoxy of the postwar British literature that Brooke-Rose then called home (Darlington *Christine Brooke-Rose and Post-War Literature*, 33). The science fiction estrangements of *Out* distance the novel from these comedy-of-manners novels in terms of literary style and narrative substance. Frequent depictions of microscopic worlds override the primary of humanist understandings of reality. Indeed, with *Out* we find something in the style of the *nouveaux romancier* genre as with Robbe-Grillet's phenomenological

novels such as *Le Voyeur* (1955), *La Jalousie* (1957) and *Dans le Labyrinthe* (1959), the latter of which Brooke-Rose translated from French to English. *Out* explicitly negotiates language in a way that echoes Robbe-Grillet's phenomenological realism or *chosisme*, a camera lens view that de-emphasizes plot and characterization. This *nouveaux romancier* realism supplants psychological interiority with often repetitive realist descriptions of objects. In *Out*, Brooke-Rose uses this figurative style to grapple with the end of empire, often through allusions to microscopy and the molecular world invisible to naïve empirical description (Guy 160). The novels that follow *Out* in *The Christine Brooke-Rose Omnibus* (1986)—*Such* (1966), *Between* (1968), and *Thru* (1975) – do not entangle themselves with matters beyond the scope of literary realism as *Out* does however. Therefore, *Out* is a novel that breaks with the literary modernism of postwar British literature and at the same time presents an existential challenge to the language of migration narratives.

Unlike the narrative of personal conversion in *Go, Went, Gone*, *Out* emphasizes the waning efficacy of a socio-cultural background wrought in the wake of forced migration and faded British imperialism. The *nouveaux romancier* tone of the work achieves this through camera-like depictions of scenes involving people and objects. This is intensified by the use of microscopy and scientific language as metaphors for the material world underlying the political distortions of identity politics. *Out* opens with a premiere example of this varying sense of scale through the characterization of flies.

Out's early scene juxtaposes the flies' behavior to the interaction of the narrator with her benefactor Mrs. Mgulu. "A microscope might perhaps reveal animal ecstasy among the innumerable white globules in the circle of gruel, but only to the human mind behind the microscope" (Brooke-Rose 15) concisely enumerates this juxtaposition by using the microscope as a trope and then highlighting its function as a human tool. Brooke-Rose's revelation of the microscope's image, "animal ecstasy" (15), thus becomes a projection of the narrator who is humanized by the inference "the human mind" (15). This is inferred as the narrator maintains an objective distance to the flies' activities but nonetheless deploys a privation of human interiority to activate the comparison.

Flies consistently recur as a trope throughout *Out*. However, this condensation of meaning in the image of the fly is not a flat phenomenon. In the first part of the novel, flies function as a nexus for the sense of differing scale revealed by microscopy, a backdrop for human affairs, and a parallel of the human-as-animal. The ethology of the flies is an anchor for the expansive discussion of human concerns and frames the self-abnegation of the narrator's eclipsed Whiteness: "Mrs Mgulu does not choose to be touched by sickly Colourless hands" (Brooke-Rose 25). Despite this negation of White identity, White femininity is objectified through a fetishization of legs: "Her legs are thin and very white, which, in a black man's world, has more than adulterous appeal" (Brooke-Rose 30). It is important to note here that it is the visibility of race that signals Whiteness to us in this passage, rather than the color per se. This objectification of White, racialized femininity is a direct parallel of the flies' behavior in the opening pages, suggesting that there's something dipterian (fly-like) about humanity despite these species' mutually exclusive morphology. Brooke-Rose's initial dipterian satire of humanity is further inverted as scientific language sweeps away any alluded to kinship:

The head gardener is shocking pink, almost red, under a wide-brimmed hat. He looks ill, too, not like a gardener at all. Perhaps he only ordains the gardening. Quite clearly it is not radiation, or even kidney trouble, it must be his heart. As a dark pink man he is employable (35–36).

The realism of *Out* here revels in a political subtext revealed through the contrast of dipterian characterization and scientific knowledge to establish racial identities. But what of the milieu in which Brooke-Rose wrote, in which these identities stewed?

Out is a novel about the tensions between identity politics and the law as bureaucracy. Nowhere is this clearer than in the central role that the Labour Exchange plays in the fate of the narrator. In the world of the novel, the Labour Exchange functions as a redistribution of migrants displaced by forced migration and other flows of migration. The forced migration event itself is hidden, papered over by official records so that it appears no more distinct than other migrations: "We

have you down as a philosopher” (Brooke-Rose 50). The semiotic residue of the forced migration event is leveraged by the racialized paranoia about the supposed cultural decline of Britain in the diaspora: “I have to report to you that your head gardener is still governed by reactionary prejudice” (Brooke-Rose 44). We should be careful here as this type of content-level analysis tends to analogize the identities on show in the literary work with identities beyond the scope of the text. As Burley notes, Brooke-Rose herself resisted this type of analogy as a valid mode of criticism (386). *Out*’s identity politics of a Britain in decline, a referent for forced migration in the world of the novel, therefore may be read as privileging “avowal over ascription” (Burley 387). The novel uses a quasi-Kantian approach to establish an origin within the character that is subjected to racialization but is only accessed through this matrix of racial identity politics. The deracination of Brooke-Rose’s narrator therefore requires an effacing of racial constructs and historical legacies by the apprehension of *noumena* (identity-in-itself, beyond Englishness). Yet the kerneling of identity in dipterid metaphors in the first part of the novel seems to suggest an un-Kantian assumption of a shared feeling amongst those displaced by forced migration. This quasi-Kantian approach connects *Out* to the broader social discourse of Whiteness, despite Brooke-Rose’s self-criticism of her technique providing a sharp delineation of her narrative voice from the social background through which it was focalized (Burley 389). Brooke-Rose’s novel is instructive in how the representation of forced migration, even at the level of allusions created through *chosisme*, may challenge cultural modes and the category of Whiteness. *Out* also offers a glimpse into the unmooring of the Other of Englishness that has been a contingent historical phenomenon. Brooke-Rose’s troping of forced migration in *Out* invites readers to consider the deeper complexities of migration.

Forced Migration as a Trope

As both *Go, Went, Gone* and *Out* attest to, forced migration is a displacement of person and identity under the law. This displacement unmoors the politico-legal figure of the refugee even before they can be sublated (*Aufgehoben*) as a labor force by symbolic relations of exchange. The perspective on those under the duress of this displacement is the majority view in sovereign nation-states where those deciding the fates of stateless figures are not required to empathize or dignify their shared humanity by the strictures of the legal discourses that give weight to refugee status. After all, the jurisprudence of modern law, what makes it “modern,” is not that it is one order among many others, ecclesiastical, customary, etc, but that it sets its sights upon order-for-itself. To be counted by these systems of modern law in Germany and beyond, the refugees are given the impossible task of accounting for that which forced them into a stateless status by the means of migration that came unbidden for many.

Out is the more successful novel when we use forced migration as our frame of reference. Brooke-Rose’s novel succeeds because the narrative is interior to a refugee’s perspective. The refugee is here psychologized, given a characterization that highlights the eclipse of human spirit as a sufficient ground for a *raison d’être*. Although *Out* is largely a story of being in exile, the glimpses of the forced migration event show people being driven from the United Kingdom to the various nations of Africa. This event casts a long shadow over the subverted legacy of British colonialism that inhibits the perspective on the alien landscape as it is depicted with a phenomenological realism.

By contrast, *Go, Went, Gone* is a timely literary work for its substantial themes of occupation, migration, and law. Unlike *Out*, the narrative of refugees is presented to us from outside refugee status. The motivations of the refugees are the trace of some shared humanity that Richard employs in his research project. The over-estimation of Richard’s redeeming features, his successes as a professor for example, are what enable his character to undergo a quasi-religious conversion. Richard’s journey to understanding the refugees requires not that he change tact or seek qualified assistance but that he transcribes the refugees into the fantasy-space of his research practice, his sacred texts and icons. This manifests where Richard substitutes the names and plights of refugees with figures from Classical works for example. Here Richard is extending his personal fantasized narrative to an imaginary field of

the globalized lie that refugee status is more than legal status alone and simultaneously less than what elevated the heroes of Classical works who were also, in a way, refugees, i.e. Richard's retelling of Odysseus announcing himself as "Nobody" to escape the Cyclops for example (Erpenbeck 22).

If the measure of success for these novels is how they attest to forced migration, then we are relying on the function of testimony. This is only able to succeed if we have a way to listen to how forced migration is being portrayed in the texts. That is, the issue is not whether the testimony is calculated to be true or false, but that its granular expression can be apprehended in a literary rather than a legal dialogue. Even if Richard is shown to be insincere by his fetishism for Classics when dealing with the well-being of the most vulnerable people who do not share his passion, "I've studied now Philosophy and Jurisprudence, Medicine – and even, alas! Theology – from end to end with labor keen" (Erpenbeck 26), his rational skepticism is supplanted by a *bona fide* interest in his interviews with the refugees. By contrast, a similar sort of conversation in *Out* shows not active differences of past action or passive differences of inherent biological features, but pure difference as a principle that organizes the symbolic worlds of those at the Labour Exchange and the Exchange itself (Brooke-Rose 49–50). The trouble with *Go, Went, Gone* is therefore that Richard is a mirror for the legal codification of refugees who are fetishized through legal language and judicial processes like the *Fiktionsbescheinigung* (Erpenbeck 81–82). In *Out*, however, there is an increasingly granular representation of objects as signs of other signs – the rules of the Labour Exchange are as much a part of the functionalities as what is spoken. Although Brooke-Rose sometimes puts contentious parallels into play, the play of scientific tropes function as deracinated metaphors (47–48). The recounting of forced migration, events of displacement, are foregrounded by these distinct assemblies in each of the novels.

Conclusion

Forced migration presents Migrant Literature with a challenge to speak for refugees by addressing what is silenced by modern law and bureaucracy. Therefore, it can be helpful to navigate this growing genre with a respect for the tensions that are unique to the narratives of displacement when narrated through a perspective of one who undergoes these trials or one who stands apart from the experience. I selected *Go, Went, Gone* and *Out* to demonstrate these inner and outer perspectives on forced migration to underscore how its representation in literature may be leveraged for narrative resonance with a reader. Brought together as they are above, these two novels show several reasons why encountering refugees is what philosophers call a "hard" problem: the encounter with refugee status confronts us with our own uncertainties about security offered by the current configurations of nation-states. Those who need legal rights the most, the vulnerable, the disenfranchised, the stateless, are precisely those who modern law fails by struggling to represent these figures in a way that gives them a voice that would enable a hospitable sharing of the events of forced migration. Refugees' legal status is an operative collusion of modern law with the displacement of people because it keeps these migrants at a distance by demanding they first register themselves as legal actors; a matter quite aside from being able to speak in a legal discourse. The representation of forced migration in these novels presents a political riposte to the configuration of the modern nation-state and its jurisdictions.

Notes

1. Council of the European Union, "Regulation (EU) No 604/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2013 establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an application for international protection lodged in one of the Member States by a third-country national or a stateless person (recast)." 29 June 2013, OJ L. 180/31–180/59; 29.6.2013, (EU)No 604/2013 (hereafter "Dublin III").
2. European Union: Council of the European Union, Council Regulation (EC) No 343/2003 of 18 February 2003 establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the Member State responsible for examining an asylum application lodged in one of the Member States by a third-country national, 18 February 2003, OJ L. 50/1–50/10; 25.2.2003, (EC)No 343/2003 (hereafter "Dublin II").

3. European Union, Convention Determining the State Responsible for Examining Applications for Asylum lodged in one of the Member States of the European Communities, 15 June 1990, Official Journal C 254, 19/08/1997 p. 0001–0012 (hereafter “Dublin Convention”).
4. Human rights obligations by Greek and Belgian jurisdictions have been found wanting under this regime, as in *M. S. S. v. Belgium and Greece* [GC], Application No. 30696/09.
5. For an overview of Lucretius’ philosophy see Sedley, David. “Lucretius.” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2018, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/lucretius/>

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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